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Three Easy Pieces: Tolstoy, Khlebnikov, Platonov and the Fragile Absolute of Russian Modernity

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
Slavic Languages and Literatures

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

January 2017

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Abstract

This dissertation shows how three Russian authors estranged and challenged the notion of human freedom as self-determination—the idea that meaningful self-authorship is possible in view of the finitude that every human being embodies under different aspects of his existence, such as the individual and collective awareness of the inevitability of death, as well as the narrative inclusion of any existential project within multiple contexts of history, culture, and language, all of which are always given already. At first glance to be free is to transcend these multiple limits. But this transcendence can only be absolute if it sees infinity as a creative modification of meaning, whose foundational limits are eradicable. Freedom as absolute transcendence has to be fundamentally suspicious of all totalizing claims, especially those stressing their productive inclusion of unfinalizability as their ultimate source of legitimation. This fundamental suspicion is the aegis under which Leo Tolstoy, Velimir Khlebnikov, and Andrei Platonov approach the legacy of creative transcendence bequeathed by European modernity.

The two theoretical accounts of human freedom this dissertation uses are G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1806/1807) and Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927).

Chapter I explores Leo Tolstoy's response to the cultural legacy of European modernity and its absolutization of the individual project on the example of his novella the *Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886), whose narrative structure provides a key to its philosophical argument, namely that the privatization of God via secular self-authorship is metaphysically unwarranted. Chapter II is a comparative reading of Velimir Khlebnikov's *Zangezi* (1922) and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Khlebnikov polemically estranges Hegel's account, positing the triumph of the poetic word as a historical standpoint of the human triumph over death, evident in the interplanetary brotherhood of artists for whom cultural, political,

historical and economical boundaries become only a means to provisionally define multiple sites of future creation. Chapter III examines the philosophical significance of the formal and thematic peculiarity of Andrei Platonov's prose in the *Foundation Pit (Kotlovan)* (1930). Platonov's unique philosophical vision is in his understanding of Soviet dialectics as half philosophical theogony and half Christological ontology.

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Acknowledgements (or on the Good)

Writing a dissertation is a careful balance of individual endeavor and collective help. The only adequate way to acknowledge the debt, admiration, and gratitude I owe to everyone who has made possible the very special world in which the "'I' of 'mine'" continues to exist, would be to dispense altogether with the faceless, meaningless, empty pronoun "I" and mention these people every time the "I" talks about any aspect of the work "it" sees as largely brought about on the account of itself. But because the 'in what way' is as important as the "who," "I" am very happy I can begin my ascent from abstract to concrete.

From my academic father, Professor William Mills Todd III, Uil'iam Uil'iamovich, Bill, I learned good morals, government of my temper, and how to be generous in all things; from Professor George Grabowicz not to busy myself with trifling things and to become intimate with philosophy; from Professor Justin McCabe Weir, Justin, not to be led aside by anything and cheerfulness in all circumstances. They have always been light for my soul; theirs was the best gift parents can give: unconditional love and unconditional trust. If at times I wondered whether finishing my dissertation made sense at all, it was only because I kept forgetting that there is no dialectical ascent without descent. Their care and gentleness always reminded me that the Soul needs time to readjust to the darkness of the cave, no matter how bright the sun may have been outside. In my life, I have never been happier, learning everything I did learn during the eight years I spent as a graduate student at the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Harvard University. Most importantly, I have learned what education truly is. Help, encouragement, advice, scholarship, mentoring, inspiration, support—no list will ever grasp the extent of my gratitude. My debt is infinite.

To Professor Leonid Iosifovich Livak, under whose guidance I cut my teeth as a literary critic during a seminar on Nabokov in which I enrolled in the spring of 2003, while also attending a seminar on Dostoevsky with Professor Kenneth Lantz, I owe special thanks. He taught me 'slow reading' but also that anything could be taught in a way that the only time a student looks at the clock is only to confirm the premonition of the end, first announced by an impatient herald rushing inside the classroom to announce the arrival of another intellectual space itself. To Donna Orwin I owe a debt equally great, for it was during her two seminars, one on Dostoevsky and another on the Russian short story, in the fall 2007, that I discovered in a truly dialogical form that my interest in Russian literature was inseparable from a set of metaphysical inquiries known to humanity since the time of its earliest liturgical consciousness. To Professor Christopher John Barnes goes my gratitude for teaching me to withstand the intensity of biographical research. To Taras Volodymyrovych Koznarsky I owe my initiation into the culture of European modernism as well the excitement over the truly nomadic cultural recollection of my Ukrainian heritage. As my academic mentor he has always been to me what Razumikhin was to Raskolnikov.

While a graduate student at Harvard I was also fortunate to learn from Professors Svetlana Boym, John Malmstad, Joanna Niżyńska, and Stephanie Sandler. Svetlana showed me how to do things with Plato's *Phaedrus* which I have never seen done in academic prose. Knowing how to write playfully, to write for amusement's sake (παιδιάς χάριν) I owe to her together with the plan of the grand nomadic symphony, the latter created spontaneously during the one and only time we talked about my dissertation. To Professor John Malmstad I learned the well-kept secret of all great scholarship, namely, that it is time-sacrifice first and foremost and has always been that. From Joanna I learned dialectical thinking and the inventory spanning the

axiomatic base of the post-structural theoretical moves. To her I owe a true miracle of learning and understanding Plato through Deleuze and Guatarri and Hegel through Lacan. Before I spend a semester reading poetry with Stephanie I never encountered the true infinity that dwells in an act of reading, one best captured with the two lines from the estranged quote from Shiller's "Friendship" ("Die Freundschaft," 1782) with which Hegel's *Phenomenology* ends: "aus dem Kelche dieses Geisterreiches / schäumt ihm seine Unedlichkeit" (from out of the chalice of the whole realm of the soul/Foams for him infinity).

Because everything solid melts in the air, I must thank my virtual teachers. To Professor Hubert Dreyfus's I owe my initiation into Martin Heidegger that changed my world forever. From Professor Jay Bernstein, I learned W.F.G. Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Immanuel Kant's *First* and *Third Critiques* in the same manner they were taught—orgiastically. From Professor Richard Dien Winfield I learned to have the courage one needs to encounter Hegel's texts on their own terms, as well as to accept that this is only possible if one learns to live happily while always being in the state of full intellectual exhaustion. Vadim Valer'evich Vasil'ev's lectures on the history of Western philosophy kindled my interest in philosophy and Aleksandr L'vovich Dobrokhotov's lectures on the ontology of European culture turned this interest into a passion. Fedor Ivanovich Girenok taught me the beauty of the minimalist approach to philosophy as well as the language in which Russian philosophy must speak to stop being a term without a referent. Filosofskii Shturm and its immortals (Aleksandr Bronza; Aleksandr Boldachev; Bulat Hidiatulin; Igor' Danilkin; Anton Prozorov) are best described by Socrates in Plato's *Sophist*. As all true philosophers they "show up in all sorts of apparitions and haunt cities, looking down from on high on the life of those below. And in the opinion of some they are worth nothing and of some everything, and at times they take on the apparitions of statement, and at times of sophists, and

there are times when they might give some the impression that they are altogether crazy." To Vladimir Viktorovich Molchanov I owe my understanding of phenomenology as a rigorous science; to Petr Rezvykh a realization that the entire tradition we know as German Idealism cannot be approached without first having been possessed by the state of the soul known as fervent ardor; and to Aleksandr Smulianskii that contemporary continental philosophy can only be delivered at the agora.

A debt equally great I owe to my other family, the other Veritas monastic order I served since 2008, namely, all the people together with whom I explored the laws of categorical determination in information science. I am lucky to have done some serious unpacking together with Danielle Adams, Stockton Andrews, Murray Barsky, Michelle Durocher, Shawn Hill, Delana Hirschy, Charles Jones, Marie-Luce Kaufman, Lars Klint, Marie Kurfirtova, Jamie MacAllister-Grande, Zuzana Nagy, Susan Radovsky, Stephen Real, Sally Ricci, Emily Scudder, Gwen Speeth, Craig Thomas, Bruce Trumble, Janet Trumble, Jane Skoric, Colin Van Alstine, Sandra Wamsley, Cynthia Winters, Allan Wright. To say that I was lucky to have them as colleagues, interlocutors, and friends is not say enough: my experience of being with them was one continuous intellectual improvisation, experience of living out the syncopated rhythm of thinking as it is. It is only with their help that I experienced musicality of the new artistic ontology under whose aegis the most daring experiments in the twentieth century art had unfolded.

Special thanks go to my friends and colleagues from different Veritas temples for allowing my soul to rejoice through perfecting its vision of the true in a conversation: Michael Allen, Olga Breininger-Umetayeva, Elena Fratto, Carlos Varon-Gonzalez, Björn Kühnicke, Jonathan Mijs,Bharath Palle, Nadav Orian Peer, Michael Adolfo Ramos Gamez, Gustavo

Ribeiro, Juliane Steffens, Zach Smith, Pieter-Augustijn Van Malleghem, Ezer Vierba. David Arthur Owen, apart from being a great friend, has always inspired me by personal example to be pushing the linguistic, philosophical, and intellectual boundaries of what I always thought outside my reach: be it sight-reading Plato and Aristotle in Greek, knowing how to disentangle the syntax of a Vedic hymn, or engage in a translation of early Bedouin poetry. If I understand the meaning of the expression "The citadel within," it is only because I have known him. To Daniel Green and Sarah Vitali, I owe, among other things, my understanding of the fact that I cannot have been writing English prose without knowing that I always used to could. Ilya Andreevich Kovalev I thank for the microscope, AK-47, and showing me what a philosophical pulse is. Kevin O'Donnell, the best neighbor I had in any country, I thank for teaching me true hospitality.

Because of what my parents Victor Aleksadrovich and Olga Mikhailovna Gonchar have given me, I can say one thing with certainty: I could not have been raised a happier human being more free. Having become a husband and father myself, looking at my wife Alena and my daughter Ariana, I think that all that truly is in this world, is only possible because of the divine asymmetry of love.

To Alena and Ariana

Introduction: Russian Modernity and the Hermeneutics of Liminal Suspicion [1]

Entitled *Three Easy Pieces: Tolstoy, Khlebnikov, Platonov and the Fragile Absolute of Russian Modernity*, this dissertation argues that the three Russian authors—Tolstoy, Khlebnikov, and Platonov—confronted in their works one of the most paradoxical and contested notions there are, that of human freedom. As I will show, they argued that just as there can be no freedom without the questioning of the cultural, artistic, political, and historical limits society might conceive as foundational to its institutions and practices, freedom is equally unthinkable if there is no questioning of the paradigm according to which the hermeneutics of suspicion is carried out so that its metaphysical, epistemological, political, ethical, and aesthetic limitations remain unexamined.

Freedom from or freedom to? Freedom when? Freedom where? Freedom how? Whose freedom? What is freedom? Why freedom and what does it have to do with finitude? Before considering in more detail how three Russian authors estranged, challenged, and redefined the notion of human freedom as self-determination and its relation to the notion of finitude, a quick word is in order on how creative infinity in self-authorship is to be understood in relation to the notion of limit as a condition of possibility for self-identity without which the world we live in would lack intelligibility and determinacy. Fortunately for me, there already exist in history of world literature two masterly narratives on the difficulties with which the concept of human freedom is fraught. The first is Fyodor Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor chapter in his last novel

[1] I am extremely happy to express my gratitude to Professors Samuel Moyn and Roberto Mangabeira Unger who in the spring of 2016 invited me to their seminar "Time, History, and Creation of the New" where I explored many of the ideas presented here together with my Magnificent Seven: Dominic Akandwanaho, Audrey Effenberger, Sarah Grammar, Sylvia Rosenberg, Alec Villalpando, Crystal Yen, and Jonathan Young.

the *Brothers Karamazov* (1879/80) and the second is the excerpt that features Joseph K.'s execution in Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1927).[2]

The Grand Inquisitor's fictional conversation with Christ in the sixteenth century Spain is well known. Head of the Inquisition thinks it impossible, in view of the well-functioning institution of the Roman Catholic Church, the presence and acting of the author of its original doctrine, one of the most radical approaches to self-construction the world has ever seen. The philosophical argumentation Head of Inquisition gives emphasizes that the account of freedom Jesus leaves behind is too empirically thin to be a viable model of human conduct. Human freedom as Jesus teaches it, according to the Grand Inquisitor, is one that makes of the person practicing it two super-human requirements: a) to view any set of situational constraints as provisional and thus as capable of being overcome; b) to ignore causal regularities of the world as having ultimate explanatory power, opening oneself to the world through faith as a place of infinite possibilities into whose order of actualization scientific facts should be seen contributing only an intuition, a heuristic device.

To believe that something represents an objectively existing situational constraint which cannot be removed given the limited situational resources at hand, is, according to Jesus, not to be free, but to always depend on the existing instances of experimental confirmation of what one should simply approach intuitively. Conversely, to believe in God if and only if miracles of various kinds present themselves in the world is not to believe in God but not to be able to explain a certain physical occurrence and to worship this inscrutability. Jesus, according to this conventional interpretation, is not someone urging people to completely disregard what is in the

[2] My profound gratitude goes to Professor Philip Fisher and his course "The Classic Phase of the Novel" during the discussion sections of which I in the fall of 2016 was lucky to see this connection in conversation with my brilliant students: Kieran Austin, Peter Bermant, Mary Brooks, Ramon Galvan, Ben Garber, Robin Gewehr, Lucas Giveen, Erik Godard, Andy Gordon, Ian Grant, Christina Kerner, Jessica Lin, Connor McCrosskey, Christopher McKenna, Marissa Rodriguez, Graham Seagroves, Danielle Strasburger, Yoko Sudo, Sue Wang.

collective knowledge base, and to thus liberate themselves entirely from the constraints imposed on them through the partaking of the physical, chemical, and biological regularities constitutive of how they are, but someone who is urging them to accept that these processes are only an aspect of some bigger whole whose way of relating to other aspects should always have enough room for paradox. An all-embracing system of knowledge is neither possible, nor should be pursued. This is too vague, the Grand Inquisitor argues, and not to be a fiction, a certain functional minimum has to be determined and institutionally provided before human flourishing, happiness, and freedom are even mentioned as a social project.

The problem with this view, Jesus seems to counter, is that once the notion of the functional minimum is introduced it is possible to extend its range so that personal freedom becomes reduced to a limited number of energy configurations in which an "organism" can exist without overstraining itself. While no one would dispute that life is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for human freedom, many would disagree over exactly what kind of life is required so that a sufficient condition for human freedom is met. Jesus thinks that it has to be a conduct of life that rejects all kinds of dogmatism in favor of innovation. The Grand Inquisitor wants a compromise that he sees in the turning of Jesus' radical doubt into the institutional code of the Roman Catholic Church. This compromise is based on the idea that the three temptations Jesus withstands in the desert, and through whose rejection God actualizes his true infinity as inclusive of human finitude, can be sacrificed for the sake of an institutional integrity only from within which a personal ascent to Jesus' doctrine of human freedom is possible. The Grand Inquisitor, then, suggests that Christianity can only persist if the original teaching appears, for the most part, in a "blunted" form, oriented more toward the functional stability of a society than the radical unsettledness of an individual life story.

The Grand Inquisitor is said by Alyosha Karamazov not to believe in God. If he did, he would not be able to keep the unwritten doctrine secret. His doing so can mean only one thing—he thinks he knows how people actually are, and he thinks that the way they are is such that if the doctrine of radical doubt were taught to them in the absence of the grounding effect of the church as an institution, Christian community would have died long ago because people would prove unable to bear the burden this experiment in radical indeterminacy requires of them. And to avoid thus risking to entirely lose a possibility of access to freedom as actually revealed by God through Jesus is to invest one's descriptive account of what a human being is with the ultimate explanatory power. And this, Jesus taught, is exactly what must never be done with anything we might learn in the empirical world. To understand how what happens in the desert reveals to us the connection between freedom and finitude we must now look at what is asked of Jesus.

The reason the Inquisitor thinks the three requests in the desert are the most profound philosophic insights of all time must lie in the fact that Jesus as God rejects as a free agent some radical ideas about the qualities of the true absolute. Is absolute freedom a freedom in the sense of one's total independence from every possible form of determinate being? Is it a freedom in the sense of being free from conceiving infinity as an uninterrupted process of spatial extension or of the extension of a mathematical set? Is absolute freedom a freedom in the sense of being able to conceiving infinity as inclusive of finitude, limit, and determinacy? The problem with Jesus' refusal to altogether remove the three sets of limits by resorting to the power of miracle, mystery, and authority—his very temptation to do which suggest that God appears as a finite human subjectivity—is that this temporary suspension of finitude would contradict God's acceptance of infinity as inclusive of finitude. Any violation of this inclusion of finitude would mean a possibility of finding a pretext for making any of the three limits a part of the functional

institutional minimum without which there can be no human freedom. But to do so would be to worship the empirical.

Perhaps, then, the true significance of Jesus' refusal to even temporarily lift the restrictions of finitude to which he too is subject lies in his choosing to let finitude be and thus in his relinquishing of the absolute as an exclusive notion? But God's voluntarily willing for something less than himself to come into existence is the primary act of creation, God's act of self-sacrifice through which the world comes to be. In human history this is mirrored by God's recognition of himself in Jesus' choice to let something less than he is, be. But this also means that God must give everyone opportunity to doubt his existence as is evident from the fact that a world without God is in principle conceivable in human imagination. And because it is God's will that is involved, and to be what it is this will must be able to choose to let something less than it be, we are left with the position of radical doubt. This latter, while acknowledging a possibility of a more perfect level of being associated with its source that lets doubt itself be—more particularly this is evident in the very generosity of excess without which there would be no doubt—cannot take itself to be the ultimate proof of there not being only an evil demon. The silent kiss of Jesus, then, acts as reminder of God's will that lies beyond all of its physical manifestations, yet at the same time points to itself as a beyond of that beyond. Thus, it is the voluntary letting be, through the act of love, of what is less than it. It is the silence of the radical indeterminacy which the believer voluntarily embraces. It is the originary self-sacrifice of God who chooses to exist as human history in which he encounters himself in the form of his ultimate Otherness.

Dostoevsky's account of the main paradox of faith as highest degree of human freedom is thus as follows: to be free is neither to depend on the fact of stability or intelligibility of the

world, attributing them to some extra-systemic entity, nor is it to seek a complete independence from the objective mode of our consciousness which is eradicable from our experience of the world. This is so because any absolute affirmation of this kind would still depend on what is being negated. Freedom as Christ sees it, according to Dostoevsky, is one's openness to the world of experience that does not see as its only two options blind conformism to the background practices of culture or the unbridled individualism turning the world into a mere contest of wills.

The only artist to have captured the power of the false dichotomy the Grand Inquisitor uses to explain to Christ why man has to be made happy is Franz Kafka:

> After a brief polite exchange about who was responsible for the first of the tasks to come- the men seemed to have received their assignment without any specific division of labor-one of them when to K. and removed his jacket, his vest, and finally his shirt. K. shivered involuntarily, whereupon the man gave him a gentle reassuring pat on the back. Then he folded the clothes carefully, as if they would be needed again, though not in the immediate future. In order not to leave K. standing motionless, exposed to the rather chilly night air, he took him by the arm and walked back and forth with him a little, while the other man searched for some suitable spot in the quarry. When he had found it, he waved, and the other gentlemen led K. over to it. It was near the quarry wall, where a loose block of stone was lying. The men sat K. down on the ground, propped his m against the stone and laid his head down on it. In spite of all their efforts, and in spite of the cooperation K. gave them, his posture was still quite forced and implausible. So one of the men asked the other to let him work on positioning K. on his own for a while, but that didn't improve things either. Finally they left K. in a position that wasn't even the best of those they had already tried. Then one man opened his frock coat and, from a sheath on a belt that encircled his vest, drew forth a long, thin, double-edged butcher knife, held it up, and tested its sharpness in the light. Once more the nauseating courtesies began, one of them passed the knife across K. to the other, who passed it back over K. K. knew clearly now it was his duty to seize the knife as it floated from hand to hand above him and plunge it into himself. But he didn't do so; instead he twisted his still-free neck and looked about him. He could not rise entirely to the occasion, he could not relieve the authorities of all their work; the responsibility for this final failure lay with whoever and denied him the remnant of strength necessary to do so. His gaze fell upon the top story of the building adjoining the quarry. Like a light flicking on, the casements of a window flew open, a human figure, faint and insubstantial at the distance and height, leaned far out abruptly, and stretched both arms out even further. Who was it? A friend? A good person? Someone who cared? Someone who wanted to help? Was it just one person? Was it everyone? Was there still help? Where there objections that had been forgotten? Of course there were. Logic is no doubt unshakable, but it can't with stand a person who wants to live. Where was the judge he'd never seen? Where was the high court he'd never reached? He raised his hands and spread out all his fingers.
> But the hands of one man were right at K.'s throat, while the other thrust the knife into his heart and turned it there twice. With failing sight K. saw how the men drew near his face, leaning

> cheek-to-cheek to observe the verdict. "Like a dog!" he said; it seemed as though the shame was to outlive him.[3]

Described is Joseph K., a respectable bank officer, who is executed, on the eve of his thirty-first birthday, for the crime no information about which he can get after his sudden arrest. The description of the evening of his death is shocking. This effect is due to the precision with which Kafka reconstructs the problem of being able to live an individual life authentically in a modern world. Kafka deepens the argument Dostoevsky presents in the Grand Inquisitor. While self-consciousness does imply a necessary awareness of self-negation through self-instrumentalization for the sake of the other, it does not imply an awareness that subjectivation, as the foundation of the social, may not have any ultimate metaphysical or theological justification. The two executioners end up winding K.'s heart so that the immediacy of existing without either surrendering to the average everydayness or seeking to distinguish oneself against those who do, is made light enough to bear. These limits through their connection with the ritualistic taking away of K.'s life reveal how the possibility of authentic existence is estranged in the world of human culture, one of whose most powerful institutions organized religion does remain. K's ritualistic undressing in the quarry and his expected interception of the killing weapon, upon which his voluntary termination of his own life must take place, both replay in reverse the initiation into the social through enculturation. They also show the extent to which people are forced to partake of the seemingly voluntary self-imposed categorial reduction of one's potential ability-to-be to the rigid framework of institutionally available roles and instrumental scripts. By learning to always appear in an actor's mask and reduce the repertoire of emotions, thoughts, and actions to the range a particular role might suggest, man becomes a subject position. He is a disembodied and distant average person, a random instantiation of

[3] Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Breon Mitchell (New York: Schoken Books, 1999), 229-231.

background practices, one of whom K. sees in the window of the building facing the quarry. Man becomes a person the narrative of whose voluntary double sacrifice (first of his power and then of his life) in the distant past is now rewritten to enable an effectively functioning community of distant individuals.

Kafka's take on the problem of individual freedom in the social world is as follows: so heavy is the weight of the indeterminacy and uncertainty our existential flexibility brings to our awareness through our sheer ability to partake in multiple activities, achieving myriad short- and long-term goals, that this burden requires a degree of narrative estrangement. Perpetual self-construction at the highest level of artistic tension is impossible. It is only one of many possible ways to be. And because this uninterrupted creativity is impossible, most intense spells of self-creation are broken by the multiple acts of finitude acceptance. Yet these acts are estranged. One can call a friend to talk about life, or get that long lonely load of liquor just to lose oneself for not too long. One can have a personal ritual or an emergency plan to bring oneself back to life when things get tough. Yet these ways of conduct have a degree of narrative concealment of the extent to which persons and agents actually depend on one another. We all know that there is that special kind of call to which one is now and then entitled. We all know that the emergency drink is not just any drink in the bar. We all know the miraculous comeback scenario. We all know there is something suspicious about how finitude is covered up in these narratives.

Coded as belonging to another, the creative infinity of the limited "me" appears as guilt, as the principle possibility of the narrative self. My understanding that "I" "am" guilty of such and such means that I understand the compatibility between the narrative of my life and the actions of which I can think myself to be guilty. But by virtue of these actions being able to appear as capable of belonging to me, the "me" in question appears as a narrative totality of

differently appraised actions and cognitive acts accompanying them. Because the self-grounding character of the self as a self-moving form lacks a visible connection with the world of things, it must be created. That is, while I can only live out the narrative of my life by constantly instrumentalizing a variety of "stage props," a category under which social roles, skills, and equipment can be placed, it is impossible to imagine myself as some assembled thing capable of spatial movement by virtue of being embodied, as well as of freely removing or adding details to its current assemblage. I am the space-time of what I have envisioned for myself and where I am currently living myself out. My "executive center" is not a thing, not a what. And because there is hardly anything like it in our everyday life, we want to think of it as something external, something object-like, something deriving from an external source of authority.

The mystification of authority in culture sheds some light on this self-imposed narrative estrangement. It often appears in the form of a telling of a distant sacrifice someone else had voluntarily chosen. Silenced is the fact that the now distant sacrifice involves much more than the joy of being one with the world. K's executioners do not simply kill him. The execution is a staged performance running according to a script. But this performative estrangement of utility is suspect. It suggests a degree of interpretative aberration inseparable from the ostensibly immutable laws foundational to culture's background practices. But the imposition of design on the eradicable narrativity of culture seeks to conceal this aspect of interpretative aberration. What we see, then, is that while the very principle of one's unconditional reliance on any externally given objective criterion in forming a judgment is also "sacrificed," the necessity of categorial determination is not. An intentional misinterpretation of cultural commandments is always possible; what is not possible is to avoid some kind of interpretation altogether. To be is always to be something. But being itself is not a what. The very act by virtue of which this something

comes to be may be of a nature wholly different than what is intelligible in the "what" of anything. In bringing the two together, K's execution, and the archetype of the foundational sacrificial event seek to reconcile the "narrative break" between the singling out of a hero for mortification and the act of execution itself. And yet this reconciliation is a narrative covering up the inscrutability of how being and existence stand in relation to one another. In its appeal to a systematic formalization as a source of its legitimacy, this reconciliatory narrative admits of the radical break between determinacy and existence.

In the case of K., the narrative trajectory of his execution is readjusted through the superaddition of multiple events that have to come to pass before the hero can die. This technique serves to implicitly contain the act of rejection of an externally imposed criterion as well as the rejection of a possibility to ever do away with the objective mode eradicable from our experience of the world. Nothing can be truly external to the determinations of the human mind, yet it experiences itself in such a way that what it as a knowing confronts is seen independent and separate from it. The sequential presentation of multiple events in K's execution reveals one of the most important mechanisms in the functioning of the narrative self. This narrative multiplicity suggests that there is always a possibility of more important events to come, that what is happening now may not therefore be as crucially important for the narrative totality.

But this double interpretation creates ambiguity. The narrative multiplicity itself can either be read as a confirmation of the importance of the subject it presents via this metonymic abundance, or as a confirmation of the impermanence and insignificance of this very subject since it is expected to be superseded by other event multiplicities. This means that concealed is the truth-making power of various cultural performatives and individual agents actualizing them, both of which, appearing in the form of a narrative excess, provide legitimacy to cultural

background practices. The metonymic dispersal, in a narrative, of the performative function is only possible when multiple frames of intelligibility are articulated as pertaining to the human world, including its physicality and materiality. Articulated again and again, these background cultural intelligibles become seen as legitimate.

The winding of Jacob K.'s heart is the social construction of multiple categories of otherness, whose envisioned overcoming in the distant future helps to establish multiple axes of human temporality. One of the main paradoxes of human freedom according to Kafka, then, lies in the fact that while each of the sacred centers of the multiple temporalities of human culture involves a foundational narrative featuring an individual life, to remain sacred, these axes must remain ultimately "other." This can be accomplished either by deeming one's life unworthy of the ancestral fame through comparison, or by simply getting rid of the people who dare suggest, while alive, that their life-project is one such sacred axis of temporality. As an organized form of religion, then, Christianity, has long ago, according to Kafka, become a system of repression that started to see itself as sanctioned by the Scripture. Repressed now is the very state of the soul Jesus thought one must have to be free.

For a human being to be finite means to be subject to a number of limits imposed on our experience of living in this world. While some of these limits like time, space, self, life, inter-subjectivity may be constitutive of our experience in in a more fundamental way than others, like what we see as minor social roles and equipmental skills, when we think of freedom we tend to approach infinity as something that opens up once one or more limits are removed altogether. This invites an analogy of some physical region of space opening up, in which, now, in the absence of the solid mass that prevented a movement of anything in the past, one can finally move. It is free space. This analogy is treacherous. We want an infinity that excludes finitude yet

we forget that an infinity of this kind depends on what it excludes. A more accurate analogy with physical space would suggest that the real infinity is the very power of imagination that unlocks the meaning of movement every time it faces the dark unknown in the face of which there seems to be little space for maneuvering. The only way to remove the mass is to reinvent what it means to move.

Jesus' radical rejection of all absolute standpoints other than his unconditional orientation toward radical innovation and interpretative flexibility of the situation at hand is countered by the Grand Inquisitor and his vision of the Church. While all social institutions are indeed inseparable from human imagination and various categories this imagination has been creating throughout history, the institution of radical innovation, whose key idea is the flexibility of conceptual determination itself, may be just another institution claiming ontological and political primacy. As such it is merely a competing ideology, which deprives the physical world of its full reality, seeking investing with unlimited power one's mental and psychic awareness. True, life, as a necessary condition for freedom, should not be equated with its being a sufficient condition. But the decision of fixing life as a necessary condition for freedom at the level of "being minimally alive to be thinking and feeling to create"—and this only not to develop an attachment to finite things— does seem to involve an externally imposed criterion. After all, "being minimally aware to be thinking and feeling to create" implies a radical act of abstraction from many aspects of human daily experience of being in the world. And if this criterion is only meant as a provisional one, it is possible that the institutional falling of the original teaching into the untrue is nothing else then the next provisional formulation of a solution to the same problem. In other words, the Grand Inquisitor argues that if history is the ultimate judge of what's right, then the original

teaching has not survived its test, making the ideology of radical indeterminacy obsolete, this failure legitimating the imperfect institutional approximation of the original doctrine.

The slaying of K. foregrounds another important aspect of individual freedom as it is experienced within a finite world. K. is killed by two executioners. This means that K. is self-conscious. The first Other depriving him of his individuality through the ritualistic disrobing and mechanization of the heart is he himself trying to grasp his own being as connected to the position of subjectivity in a self-contained philosophical system, fully autonomous from other spheres of human life and systems of knowledge. The second Other is the narrative distance that covers up the true origin of this unbearable authorship. This duplication of the "other than me" figure points to the felt necessity to emphasize its otherness as true, authentic, real. All of the said aspects of finitude and its relation to freedom, as well as the nature of how they are connected with one another, are put to a vigorous test in the works of Tolstoy, Khlebnikov, and Platonov.

Chapter I "To See Life as Ekphrasis: Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*" looks at the narrative disconnect between the novella's first chapter, where the protagonist's death has just been announced, and the rest of text where his life is reconstructed chronologically as a narrative of moral corruption within the range of normal and socially accepted behavior. I show that while Tolstoy, like Heidegger, believes in the creative freedom of human life, he thinks that the radical unsettledness required for life to be experienced as an authentic self-creation in the now, has to be enclosed within the horizon of Christian values. The seemingly absent party in Tolstoy's polemics with the celebration of human freedom as self-determination is Søren Kierkegaard, whose insistence on the unique ontological position of one's experiential singularity, that is, *existence*, and its relation to God, has led to an understanding of freedom as unbridled existential

individualism and a notion of cultural time being a multiplicity of temporalities each capable of erupting in the estranged now of the human world. Heidegger explores the creative potential of human incompleteness understood positively, and thus sees individual freedom possible only in view of human access to the constantly changing personal interpretation of what it means to be, the shaping of which is permeated with care—a hierarchy of meaning and significance foundational to the existential project every one of us calls "me"—and cannot be completed while the person is alive.

Tolstoy and Heidegger both agree that there exists a horizon of intelligibility acting as a condition of possibility for a meaningful world inside which a thriving personal project of existing can take place. Yet for Tolstoy the sheer fact that the world we live in appears in our experience as a unified but changing topography of meaning and significance does not mean that the origin of these multiple interacting hierarchies of values is some obscure philosophical deity named World-Time and not the God of Christian scripture. To think so is to repeat the Protestant privatization of Christian God in relation to Chronos of the Greeks now seen as the Primary God of the modern world. For Heidegger the individual privatization of the World-Time in a philosophical revelation is the only way to freedom understood as self-creation. For Tolstoy freedom is unthinkable without admitting a limit to all kinds of knowledge and all systems of knowledge formalization. This limit is real and it points to God.

My thesis in this opening chapter, then, is that the famous problem of chapter one is Tolstoy's *Ivan Ilyich* is Tolstoy's articulation of the fundamental divide separating existence, as what is given to all of us as the flow within an experiential singularity of our life-story, from any attempt to deduce it as a philosophically category or otherwise formalize it. Existence to Tolstoy is what the Good is to Plato. It transcends being in every respect. It infinitely exceeds the world

in its glory. Existence is not a gift of World-Time. It is God's grace and it may cease at any time. Human freedom requires humility before the face of God. At the level of philosophical ideas this means accepting the radical discontinuity between essence and existence. To argue that existence is not an empty philosophical abstraction, which appears only when we remove all of the layers of concrete determination structuring our understanding of the multitude of things that surround us in the world, Tolstoy employs a narrative ruse. At the thematic level he suggests the radical discontinuity between one's life and others' access to it, and at the formal the incongruence of both of these viewpoints when taken in isolation. The principally different way in which these two types of discontinuity appear in the same narrative serves to establish a reference to an entity beyond the world which is as different from it as the two types of discontinuity are from each other.

Chapter II "*Zangezi* and the Odyssey of the Russian Poetic Spirit" looks at the twenty-one planes in Velimir Khlebnikov's poem *Zangezi*. Appearing each as a separate section in a chronicle that captures the becoming of the Russian Poetic Spirit as its history from the time of the gods to the time when art becomes a new universal religion, whose dominant practice is world-creation and self-authoring, these planes put human finitude in a new perspective. They do so not only by claiming to have conquered death through the discovery that reality can be written as text and that text can become reality. Khlebnikov's poem as if supplies twenty-one out of twenty-four film frames needed to experience his poem as a "cinematic" whole, always converging in a different unique "now" that a singular personality experiences through the act of reading. He reserves the twenty-second frame to situate the objective composite effect of the heterogeneous material presented in the twenty-one frames of *Zangezi*, the twenty-third one to contain the viewer's unique interpretation as the latest event in the appearance of the Russian

Poetic Spirit, and the last, twenty-fourth, to feature the individual experience as a dialogical space between what one might think the Russian Poetic Spirit is and everything that has happened during its odyssey, according to Zangezi, until the here and now of the reader.

My thesis in this chapter is that *Zangezi*'s main addressee is Hegel's *Phenomenology* understood as an account of logically necessitated historical events propelling humankind's institutional march to freedom. Among Khlebnikov's primary intentions is to expose the aspect of narrative imagination every philosophical system is trying to suppress. Rebelling against Hegel's vision of progressive history as an account of which the *Phenomenology* is often understood, Khlebnikov playfully subverts the seriousness of Hegel's account, selectively appropriating some of its narrative strategies, including a presentation of historical individuals as embodying a particular shape of thought, as well as a way of relating to the world and its multiple sources of meaning. I also show that Khlebnikov chooses the poetic persona of Marina Tsvetaeva as a narrative equivalent to the shape of consciousness Hegel refers to as Unhappy Consciousness. Appearing as a culmination of the Russian poetic tradition, Tsvetaeva becomes for Khlebnikov a symbol of a poet who through her dependence on a metaphysical beyond remains under the spell of European Romantic inheritance, if under such a modified form of it as the Symbolist practice of *zhiznetvorchestvo* (conflation of art and life). An absolute leader at the level of formal innovations in twentieth-century Russian poetry, Tsvetaeva's verse is thus seen as the culmination of the poetic religion of transcendental dualism that must be overcome in a new poetic religion of *zhiznestroitel'stvo*, which assumes one's creative identity with the world, and thus a full control over reality, a kind of control that transcends all aspects of human finitude, including death.

Chapter III "Engineering Red Existence" looks at Andrei Platonov's *Foundation Pit* (*Kotlovan)*. This novella describes the hallucinatory reality of the first five-year plan in the USSR, depicting this period as a historical actualization of the Russian Absolute as a self-sustained totality that comes to grips with its own subject-dimension, whose various forms it extracts from the narrative depths of world history.

I first consider such staple features of Platonov's style (excess, localization of the mental in the physical, fusion of subjective and objective) and then argue that they are best understood in light of Marx's theory of surplus-value production and Hegel's idea of the speculative proposition [*Gesagte*] (e.g. God is being) which is entirely different from the discursive propositions we routinely use (e.g. this coffee is cold). Yet Platonov, as I argue, goes much further than showing that in the void of the foundation pit, the working class discovers the actualization of the philosophical theory on which the Russian intelligentsia has always been so keen. Discovered in the foundation pit is the emptiness of self-determination as a philosophical category lacking existence. The Russian intelligentsia's two ideals, *bespochvennost'* "uprootedness" and *ideinost'* "idea-boundedness" appear, true to the spirit of a genuine dialectical reversal, to the workers in the form of their absolute otherness. This absolute otherness is the void of the foundation pit. This otherness is nothingness because it is the absolute other of the cognitive power of abstraction, which is understood by the new ideologues too abstractly, understood in disconnect from its positive function.

Platonov is far from suggesting that transplanted to the Russian soil, Western philosophical import can only bring about annihilation of tradition in the Revolutionary carnage. He is attuned to the hidden dimension of the Christian narrative strategies Hegel tries to purify and to reinscribe into his philosophical system. This means that Platonov sees in various

accounts of dialectical and historical materialisms instances of the crucifixion-resurrection trope as the fundamental operation empowering the dialectical leap in German idealist philosophy after Kant. Dialectical science is a modified theogony in which the immanent logical connection between categories is a narratively estranged familial connection between gods and heroes, but now with a new ontological term "emergence." Platonov's intuition, then, is that Jesus' crucifixion and consequent resurrection provide a narrative analogy according to which an ontological operator like "emergence" appears as a possibility for smaller or more "abstract" entities, through interaction with one another, to generate larger or more "concrete" ones which retain the qualities of their "abstract" precursors yet developing some new ones which these precursors do not have. In other words, Platonov suggests that the famous Hegelian "sublation" [*Aufheben*] is an ontological correlate of "redemption" which first involves an articulation of human limit through death (crucifixion) and then the transcendence of it (resurrection).

Platonov's answer to the question whether the elements of the Christian religious narrative can be removed from the cultural fabrics of the new Soviet state is a resounding, no, for he sees the project of the first five-year plan as permeated with Christian religious fervor, which is made all the more strong through the presence of the religion of the dialectical science claiming to be the only true system way of knowledge. This fact suggests for Platonov that new forms of collective existence may feature only a cultural recoding of the old content into new tenors. The foundation pit becomes a place, where, applied to the realities of Russian history, Hegel's narrative progression of institutionally determined subjectivities reverses itself, becoming a self-devouring carnival of matter that lacks historicity.

First: Life as Ekphrasis: Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

I.0. Death and Dying in Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich*

This chapter[4] will focus on the ontological analysis of the narrative peculiarity of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886) dubbed by Gary Jahn as the "problem of chapter one."[5] I will inquire into the ontological significance of the narrative break that sets chapter one apart from the account of Ivan Ilyich's life put in a chronological perspective in the chapters following it in the novella. With an eye on the story's temporal weave, I will look at human finitude in relation to its possible status as narrativity's condition of possibility. I first show that Tolstoy's choice of the narrative break is grounded in his view of the individualizing power of human finitude.[6] I then proceed to argue that this power is most strikingly revealed in the very *terminability* of any human life understood as a possibility of being in the world, of existing as a narrative project of self-writing. Using Martin Heidegger's theoretical account of the structure of human finitude in *Being and Time* (1927), I consider death as an outmost limit of human

[4] I wish to thank wholeheartedly Professor Justin Weir as well as my fellow students Tatyana Gershkovich and Irina Ikonsky, together with whom I spent a whole semester reading Tolstoy and applying a wide range of theoretical texts to his work, for helping me develop my grasp of Heidegger's ontology of death in relation to *Ivan Ilyich*'s narrative peculiarity. Their probing questions about the exact nature of the relation between death as an ontological structure of Dasein and the formal structure of Tolstoy's text and its significance made me realize the difficulty of Heidegger's text as well as the immense potential for its application to literary criticism, all of which spurred my curiosity and lead me to discover Hegel whose profound trace, even if contaminated by Kant and Aristotle, is all over *Being and Time*. I hope that, now, six years later, I can finally make my story clear.

[5] See Gary Jahn's *The Death of Ivan Ilich: An Interpretation* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993).

[6] For a general discussion on Tolstoy's artistic renderings of the problem of the self see Irina Paperno's ""Who, What is I?": Tolstoy in his Diaries," *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, 11, (1999): 32-60 and her most recent book *"Who, What Am I?": Tolstoy's Struggles to Narrate the Self* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014). My study of finitude in *Ivan Ilyich* seeks to complement Paperno's findings about Tolstoy's artistic structuration of the self by looking at the ontological dimension in Tolstoy's investigation. As will become clear, I am after the ontological structure of human self as an embodied temporal project and how it shows itself in the narrative fabric of this novella, both of which can be said to be ontologically prior to the anthropological material Paperno uses in her investigation of Tolstoy's writing of the self.

experience, which points to the individuating force of the meaningful convergence of the events in the narrative project people refer to as "my life." I conclude by approaching the problem of chapter one from the point of view of Tolstoy's moral take on the responsibility one has to himself of leading an authentic life. The narrative break in Ivan Ilyich suggests that while one can never directly experience death as a fact of life, it casts a shadow on what one does in life, appearing as an ultimate promise of meaning which, among other things, sanctions to postpone into some "remote future"[7] the doing of what one should be doing in the here and now to exist authentically[8]. What Tolstoy suggests is that one's existential awakening to such a state of affairs and active self-authorship following it are equally problematic, because the metaphysical justification for an unbridled assertion of one's individual project as it appears in the privatization of God that takes place under the auspices of modernity is philosophically unsound. All such an existential awakening can do is turn the world into a place where people, who think they are gods, engage into a contest of wills.

[7] I highlight remote future not because I deny human temporality but because of the particular way in which this temporality is experienced and is referred to, namely as a remaining volume inside a solid.

[8] As will be shown what is meant by authenticity is not so much one's sticking to one's beliefs and persevering, but rather existing under the auspice of temporality that knows past and future as repositories of ideas that in a productive interpretation ex-i[s]t into the present as the only actual reality we can experience. To be existing authentically, then, means not to go into an intoxication of the Sartrean "existence precedes being," but by rediscovering another temporality, one of life as a totality of the unfolding quantum-forms, e.g. multiple activity channels like me becoming this very writing that "creates" a different "me" and this "footnote," that our projects are. I say quantum-forms to leave open the question whether all there is *is* a multiplicity of acts that in a physical world each have a "duration" or movement of forms where change is the succession of different assemblages each involving a number of self-identical atomic units that are intelligible. So I could either think of myself as existing in durations of various activities secondary to which is the equipment I use, or I could think of myself as the self-moving equipmental reassembly whose most minute change in the number of intelligibles used in assembly in which I partake (now typing) is technically an act and no activity channel is given a special status like a block of typing.

I.1. Some Phenomenological Common Places

Human "access" to death is fraught with ambiguity. We all know that we are going to die. But what do we know? That there will be an end to something like our still being able to do another thing after this one? How will this end be experienced and by whom? It is certainly unlike losing some physical object. Can it be a psychic object? We have all lost some people we loved. But in what sense did we lose them and in what sense can we be said to still "have" the people who are alive and well? In the sense that we know that our experience of them cannot any longer involve the complexity like that of talking with them while both of us are still embodied? In the sense that this kind of communication is still possible? While it is clear that death signifies some kind of limit to our experience of the world, it is far from clear what that limit is, and how, if at all, our awareness of our mortality should affect our life conduct.

Could it be that death is something in the face of which it is worthwhile to exist as a project? In other words, while finitude under a guise of death suggests that the true infinity is one of creative narrative estrangement of the limits without which our experience would not be possible, it also invites a possibility of thinking about infinity as something opposing finitude. This latter model invites spatial and numeric metaphors. Life is now seen either as an enclosed volume or a number of units on a number line that can still be traversed while we are alive. The game we all play is to change the relative rate with which this or that event from our life moves us to the boundary or point we cannot imagine.

The ontological status of death is one's *ownmost ability* to be to which no one else has access. It is so because no one can do another person's dying for them. It is something one knows is uniquely hers. It is unique because the closing of further ways to be oneself will not

happen as yet another event in one's life. However else it also be experienced, this narrative closing will, as a narrative totality, fix the meaning of individual events, whose interpretation has not yet been fixed.

Dying, in other words, is an estranging experience of meaning negotiation, one in which human life as an act of self-interpretation appears in its sheer otherness as a multiplicity of events whose meaning can no longer be changed. The verb becomes the noun. Self-creation becomes a finalized totality, whose every term is now known. But because in this form one's life cannot be seen by anyone who is still alive, dying should, more precisely, be defined as a personal experience of the formalization of the ontological structure of the self. This structure is "existence," meaning that wherever I happen to be and whatever I happen to be doing, I live for the sake of some "future me." Any "present" setup is yet another step helping me to get to this "future me." And yet, if dying is simply a moment of vision we all have, in which we understand what it means to be a person, and there is, therefore, little reason not to experience life with the screaming intensity of a Dostoevskian hero, surprisingly few people actually exist in this way "proximally and for the most part." That is, very few people live like they understand that their every action is an act of the renegotiation of the significance of the past in view of the anticipated future. There must be, then, an ontological structure obscuring the immediate access to the simple realization that "because I am mortal, only I can decide how and what will have significance in the project of my continuous transcendence of myself that I call being me." It is so because the way this transcendence of self-rewriting happens presupposes an extended web of dynamic relations connected to the environment I call "my world" so that the mere impulse toward self-assertion is by itself insufficient to open up access to individual freedom and authentic existence.

For one thing, this is because as a social being I exist in an environment whose background practices to be intelligible and familiar must be constantly reenacted with a restricted degree of innovation. This gravity of the average understanding of how one does such and such are in everything we do and are the source of the discomfort we feel under the scrutiny of the vigilant eye of the invisible other, who is as if evaluating how well our particular solution relates to some universal standard. Experienced as one's voice of conscience, this internalized "objective" point of view, this invisible judging other also has as if another function – to cover up the real absence of any such authority. Conscience is not the noble assembly that tells you how far you have strayed from what the right thing to do was in this particular situation. Rather, the voice of conscience is your own voice telling you what one would do in a situation like this. Why is it there? To cover up the fact that in every situation the range of actions is never fully fixed and that the ultimate choice of what to do lies with the person deciding. You are what you will now make yourself to be by acting in such and such a way. To have a voice of conscience is to know that the situation you're facing isn't really that unusual. But it *is* that unusual because the narrative project in question is one's *own*. The disquietude one feels while listening to the voice of conscience is the disquietude of a double knowing. It is an attempt to substitute one's realization that the unique solution to a problem will have to be found through a rearrangement of available limit-tools, each serving a general function, for a vision of the situation having already been solved in this particular way, and solved differently from how you solved it. The fugue of conscience, in suggesting different ways to do or have done something articulates only that the instruments of situational influence have general functions. This list of general functions, useless in view of the unique situational challenges, acts more like a self-directed incantation,

which is as if asking for a unique solution to appear from the midst of the "shuffling" of some very general instances, mere examples of semantic correspondences.

What Tolstoy's story shows convincingly is that it is not outright clear whether the discomfort comes from the judging eye that somehow tells one what the right thing to do *really is*. Rather, it comes from the fact that I each time feel that it is me, and me only, who, in the inimitable individuality of my project, always faces radical indeterminacy and possibility of failure, having to carry the burden of responsibility. Conscience, then, may very well be one's own terrified scream, if silenced through the worship of the physical that happens when she entrusts herself to the stability of institutional conformism, over there being no real authority for a correct narrative interpretation of general principles in a given situation. Because the authenticity of one's mode of existence is always relative to the particular existential project, to be existing authentically, whenever this mode is available, would require such a psychological intensity only few people would be able to survive.

Another obstacle to such an existential awakening is how we think about the space and time of the human world as it is given to us in experience. Because consciousness is directed at its object in a way principally different from that of how physical bodies standing side by side may be, and because the character of our being in the world employs a dynamic relational network that cannot be analogically represented as a sequence of frames depicting the physical body of the life-experiencing agent amidst other physical bodies, we are most confused about how human temporality structures our experience of ourselves. Our life-long exposure to multiple physical objects with stable boundaries much too often implant in our minds a metaphor of the "life-time still left" being the "volume still left for stuff to do," "the volume of stuff done constantly expanding and closing on the total volume of the life-container."

Death as finitude,[9] on the other hand, is not the "time is up" moment inherent in an individual life. It is something completely different. It is *that on the basis of which* an individual interpretation of the baggage of the past in view of the anticipated future creates the always immediate present. It is the eternal present "'in' which" we all live, and which we experience as always already differentiated into multiple hierarchical systems of meaning and significance. And it is so because while the power to relate past and future is mine in view of my inherent temporality, death appears as the outmost boundary of the narrative substratum of the present of the individual stretchedness as a project in which the past and the future are negotiated.[10]While a discussion of how some critical literature approaches narrativity from multiple perspectives of

[9] What I have in mind is radically different from the psychologization of the narrative grammar, or, more precisely, from the unconscious ontologization of the psychological. Consider Peter Brooks who says that "there can be a psychoanalytic criticism of the text itself that does not become—as has usually been the case—a study of the psychogenesis of the text (the author's unconscious), the dynamics of literary response (the reader's unconscious), or the occult motivations of the characters (postulating an 'unconscious' for them)," in his *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intenstion in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 112. What would it look like? It has to do with Freud's "universal attribute of instinct and perhaps of organic life in general," namely, "an instinct [that] is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things," in Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 102. It is rather clear that Brooks has little to defend his choice of ontological principles other than his first borrowing Freud's structure and then suggesting an analogy between life and narrative. Why not Plato? Why not Hegel? For as long as literary studies will continue to churn out fundamental ontological binaries like sjuzhet/fabula; metaphor/metonymy, or argue about whether first principles are three (de Man), four (Kenneth Burke), or six (Harold Bloom) the field will remain at the level of intuitive knowledge. The issue I take with most works in narrative studies is that their descriptive vigor is rarely matched by the depth of a systematic analysis. Thus, more often than not we have a motley of random observations, the pattern of whose connections and classification is as rarely justified as the first principle chosen, e.g. "desire" is to account for such physical and metaphysical concepts as "duration," "change," "identity," "difference," etc. It is rather obvious that virtually all such "metaphysics" will not withstand serious philosophical scrutiny and will be quickly relegated to a series of similes, metaphors, and analogies. This is not to say that an ontologically rigorous account of narrative is impossible.

[10] I am aware of the vast literature on narrativity and death. This dissertation complements the findings of my colleagues working under the aegis of what we might call "psychological ontology" in that I approach death as a guise under which the absolute negativity of thinking appears to consciousness as its own limit without which no freedom of narrative concretion would be possible. The unique ontological perspective Tolstoy gives on death in Ivan Ilyich is such that the divinity of the fragile absolute of Christianity, when understood as a universal license to purvey one's technology of the self worldwide, while treating the Bible as an imperfect approximation to a system of speculative philosophy, can only lead to the Kingdom of the boor (царство хама). The peculiarity of the triumph of the average in Tolstoy's story, then, lies primarily in its ontological stressing of the fact that the liberated self of Modernity does not as Hegel shows in the *Phenomenology* reach a point when it understands the objective mode of consciousness as an aspect of a subjectivity relating to itself and now sees the world as a totality of interconnected narratives, but rather as something that sees itself as an entity that can now direct its will in its entirety to the worship of the physical.

duration and temporality, say that of desire, seems in order, the ontological direction of our investigation, as has already been stated, obviates the necessity of so doing. It is so because we are already investigating a possible connection of narrativity with the set of "eternal" categories, without trying to locate the power for continuous discernment of lasting episodes "in" the subject or posit this power as a derivative function of human nervous system.

It is also the inner "palpability" of the throbbing perspective one has on the world that makes every individual narrative meaningful even when this meaningfulness is explicitly denied. If human essence does exist, it does so by existing as an explicit interpretation what each of us understands by being. We are always doing something already, trying to get something done. Existing can be said to be a continuous self-exiting into what we do. We all—projects, selves, narratives—are the very differentiating differentiation, the peeling away of something that once done becomes final reality, and is no-longer an on-going process of potentiality conversion, from the perspective of some ultimate "that for the sake of which" that cannot be fulfilled. There is not one thing you can do to become yourself. It is the on-going recognition of oneself as a sequence of realized aims in multiple contexts constituting one's environment.

No one has dealt with the ontological significance of death for the human project at the level of detail found in Martin Heidegger's treatment of the subject in *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit)* (1927). Its key concepts will cast light on our investigation of the ontological significance of the estrangement of narrative perspective in *Ivan Ilyich*, allowing to put in a dialogical perspective the ultimate foundations behind Tolstoy and Heidegger's ultimate stance on how human freedom is experienced and what counts as a life worth living.[11] For Heidegger temporality acts as the ultimate horizon of intelligibility of being, which at the level of individual

[11] I review critical works on Heidegger and Tolstoy in I.4. "*Ivan Ilyich* and Some Philosophically-minded Critics".

life-project means that the world as experienced space always has a curvature (*Care*) which individual consciousness as if creates out of the multiple action-regions it has been experiencing since its very birth.

Let us give a detailed example that will help to put this into a perspective of our everyday life. As I look at the computer screen typing these lines, I simultaneously differentiate at least three different classes of objects. First, sense perception allows me to see, here, touch, smell, taste various "coagulated places," each separate from me. We might call these places world's aesthetic pixels. At the same time, I notice a certain asymmetry of how I am oriented toward this aesthetic multitude. Each and every pixel is at a different distance from my body and its sense organs, yet despite this I know and understand all these pixels just the same. In that sense, the blackness of the keyboard resting on my knees is exactly in the same "where" and "when" of the whiteness of the wall or the ceiling that I at the same time am experiencing through sight.

Aesthetic pixels are co-presents with functional regions: I don't see the multiple stacks of books as one object; I do not see the red of the pillow and of the book right before me as belonging to one object, and yet I see both the floor and the ceiling as parts of this room. The problem with these functional regions-pixels is that they only "overlap" with aesthetic pixels to a certain degree. Moreover, the way I experience them requires a very different analogy. Aesthetic pixels are like random points scattered around the conscious center that knows what they are. Functional pixels are "contained" within the center around which aesthetic pixels are scattered. Another way to think about them is to see them all located at the same distance from this very center.

And then there is a third class of objects that coexists with aesthetic and functional pixels. This class is based on a hierarchy of meaning and significance I attribute to different social roles,

skills, and spaces. I am not merely seating in my room typing. Out of many possible configurations of my "here and now" I choose one particular "assemblage" that can be called "to type a few more pages in order to finish this dissertation." I do this because I see this activity as important and meaningful. And whatever I do and whenever I do it, I have always already differentiated the salience of various multitudes of aesthetic and functional pixel clusters according to what my topmost priorities are. This means that the third pixel order is one of significance, and it affects how the orders of aesthetic and functional pixels are both experienced.

While it is common to see the world of things (referents of aesthetic pixels) as subsuming the world of meanings (referents of functional pixels) and the world of psychological states (referents of significance pixels), it is equally possible to see the world of psychological states as primary to that of meanings and things. In other words, any multitude of an individual body and function units I may discern in any one place are always seen from within a perspective of project significance. Most importantly, this perspective implies that even before I get to the "content" of aesthetic and functional pixels surrounding me, I have already differentiated them into multiple perspectives of project significance. If I get hungry or too tired and can no longer type a line, other regions of being will be freed up. An example of this would be my "eating at the kitchen table" or "taking a quick nap on the futon" yet the way it will happen cannot be more different than if it were to happen now when I am neither hungry nor tired. This ever-shifting invisible topography of importance ontologically prior to the world of physical and logical objects *is* what Heidegger calls *Care*. To exist, then, is to always be mediating among the demands of multiple cultural temporalities that are always experienced as forming a hierarchy of one kind or another. What is to exist authentically?

Heidegger sees living, or existing, authentically as possible only in view of a fully internalized life maxim that one's life narrative consists not in *rearranging* the inherited perspectives, but in *recreating them* in a unique way, the scale and exigencies of personal life project serving as the only criterion. To exist authentically is to act in the here and now, to act in the face of any possible discomfort that may arise over the absence of hard and universally recognized rules according to which one is supposed to act. Because only she can exist authentically who has understood that she herself is the ultimate source of the temporal priorities framing her access to various structures of the world, the problem of traditional values and their relation to the freedom of self-creation, in view of one's vision of her possible self, immediately arises.

I.2. Heidegger and Death as Narrativity

The place of the sacred, though he himself never uses this term, is in Heidegger's ontology equated with the differential curvature of Care, whose pull every individual subject feels early on in life. Care, then, is akin to the very enclosability of one's self-project. Its multiple sites of self-worship the body allows to access as an intermediary for self-exiting into the world. What does this mean in terms of how we are in our average everydayness? I am what I do. But much of what I do depends on a changing set of priorities I set for myself. Many of these priorities are affected, in terms of the "stage time" they get, by my personal history of prioritization. The most counterintuitive aspect of this self-narrative is that despite all prioritization actually happening in the here and now, in the very choice of activity as which to exist, choosing to fix a set of anticipated priorities under the rubric of the "future me," or

remembered ones, under the rubric of the "me of the past," creates a sense of movement along the number scale of cosmic time. In this movement the "me of present" occupies one of the "now" windows in between the two "now" windows already occupied by the "future me" and "me of the past." This is an illusion. I always exist in the now of the form of the activity my body allows me to enter through offering itself as part of the equipment necessary for this or that assemblage of my project in the world, an assemblage we might want call an "exit." When we say "exit" we mean an exit from a purely ideational state. If my existing is a continuous self-exiting or a change in the choice of the activity forms through which I continue to write myself "out," it is clear that, strictly speaking, my (i) "future" and my (ii) "past" are just the two categories under which I put what I (i) desire to experience and (ii) have a more or less distinct impression of experiencing. Equally counterintuitive is the fact that every relational act involving items from these two domains, when happening in the now, changes the range of what will be available for my choosing during the next act. My acting in the now to bring closer an anticipated state of events may change that number of relevant elements and connection among them, linking what I "have an experience of" with that of which I "do not yet have any experience." Yet if the renegotiation of the "past" is not drastic enough, it may equally break all rigid images of her "future" self a person might have. In other words, according to Heidegger, we are all children of Chronos. We are also oblivious of the fact that every single one of us is time as an ability to be through various personal acts in which we worship ourselves through our bodies and the multiple institutional "temples" of which we see many every day. The invisible topography of meaning behind everything is the gift of a god whose name is Time and who has sacrificed himself to appear as a finite being that exists in the form of a personal project. But if this is so, anything sacred in culture is nothing other the hypostatization of what every one of us already understands.

There are multiple temporalities; to say that they are experienced as an explicit hierarchy is to say that the articulation of the fact of this horizontal differentiation cannot itself take the form of one of these temporalities. Vertical differentiation can thus be seen as an act in which horizontal differentiation is formalized.

Suggesting that interpretative differentiation should be subdivided into the categories of sacred and profane is for Heidegger is the originary act of investing the on-going differentiation of the world with transcendental meaning. The detailed instructions on how to build a meeting tent and the arc that Moses receives from God posit the site where the divine and the human interact as that which is most distinguished from all other artifacts that than existed. Another example of this differentiation of the differentiation is the highly specific and extremely nuanced aspects of his laws that God reveals in *Leviticus* as well as in the incredibly large amount of data he requests his people to take in describing their world in *Numbers*. But the divine in the *Tanakh* as that in whose name the most complicated descriptive differentiation is undertaken is very different from the divine residing in the infinite differentiation of the interpretative freedom embodied in the figure of an individual ethical agent like Jesus.

Whatever way Heidegger truly felt about his Protestant background we do not know. Just as little do we know about whether in his turning to the pre-Socratic understanding truth as un-veiling (*ἀλήθεια*) as the unique perspective on being destroyed by the over two-thousand-year history of Western metaphysics he still felt a longing for the Christian values as they existed before gradually losing their originary meaning through their wide cultural acceptance in the Catholic and Protestant world alike. One thing was for certain: *Being and Time* makes it clear that he thought creative freedom of differentiation to be as much a human as a divine attribute.

Recognizing the sacred as a privileged cultural form of narrative differentiation meant overlooking one's full freedom for self-creation.

Thus, the curvature of the topological map of the cultural practices that the world always is becomes possible only in view of the human originary intentionality understood as the power to creatively juxtapose one's anticipatory future with one's remembered past. Paradoxically, experienced individually not as an acting background against which one unconsciously acts, but as the authoring structuring of one's self of which it is possible to take hold, Care becomes capable of displacing the sacred, whether in traditional religious or contemporary secular forms. Life as a series of unconscious attempts to cover up the unsettledness of how a human being truly is and how a self-determining agent *should* be, if authenticity is the chosen mode of existence, must, according to Heidegger, be rewritten so that the only intermediary providing counsel is the very person living in the here and now.

For Tolstoy, who would just as Heidegger deny one's blind conformity to the faceless matrix of normativity as a life worth living, the sacred was never an externalized form of man's ontological structure of significance. The sacred would not be what it is had it been merely a matter of perspective. The authenticity of one's life could never be beyond "good and evil," the horizon of the sacred receiving its legitimization from God and God alone. It is through God's command and benevolence that the temporality of the world can exist as a diversity of cultural practices. The narrativity of human life as an individualizing force is thus not something that simply belongs to man in view of his mortality—thus a structural ontological peculiarity whatever else it might be founded on—but only in view of all finite entities in this world taking origin in and returning to God. If Heidegger equates human essence with human existence, suggesting implicitly that man's access to the divine is obscured, and everydayness conceals the

possibility of his existing as the truly divine differentiating difference, Tolstoy sees the coincidence of essence and existence possible only in God. And God's benevolence is such that by embracing all there is he is the cohesive force behind the narrativity without which no individual life story could or would be possible.

I.3. *Ivan Ilyich* and Some Literary Critics

A study of the "narrative metaphysics" that traces how the structures of our everyday intelligibility of the world map onto narrative events and *tellability* (a set of qualities an event must have to appear as worthy of being told) is to be written. The primary aim of the present project, however, is much more modest. Choosing finitude as a point of access to the ontological structure of the human subject or *Dasein* (the human subject whose epistemological and ontological descriptions are informed by anthropological and psychological observations of how people experience the world), in this chapter, I limit the scope of my investigation of human finitude *qua* the phenomenon of death as it appears it Tolstoy's story the *Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Its existing toward death allows *Dasein* to comport "itself towards itself as a distinctive ability to be."[12] One's being-towards-death presupposes that ex-istence[13] (taking a stand on one's being through what one does), facticity (a background of cultural practices against which one's life situation always has an interpretation), and falling (*Dasein*'s absorption in the world of publicness) are constitutive to the existential conception of death. My search for the ontical confirmation (concrete, everyday categories of human being like small talk, whose totality

[12] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 296.

[13] I choose to typographically estrange "existence" as an ontological concept in order to emphasize the strange and uncanny co-presence of the past (ex-) in the present (ist-) as well as their mutual "rewriting" through the series of pro-jected states we associate with the anticipated future.

comprise one's subjective orientation as opposed to the twelve categories of the minimal self, one example of which would be quantity) of the ontological structure of *Dasein*—an entity whose essence is to understand itself "in terms of a possibility of itself"[14]—finds in *Ivan Ilyich* ample material to elucidate how Tolstoy's use of death to present his take on crucial metaphysical concerns compares and contrasts with Heidegger's vision of death.

We will approach death as "the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all"[15] and see if it can shed some light on the problem of the chapter one. At the same time we will try to understand Heidegger's account in the light of what Tolstoy may teach us about death and dying. It is time to look at what the critical responses to the story have been focusing on.

The reading of Ivan Ilyich that is centered on its ethical message—a life wrongly lived—remains influential in Tolstoy scholarship,[16] the protagonist's self-imposed spiritual blindness precluding a possibility of a genuine spiritual reality and authentic existence.[17] While some

[14] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 33.

[15] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 307.

[16] See, for example, Charles Glicksberg, "Tosltoy and The Death of Ivan Ilyich," in his *The Ironic Vision on Modern Literature* (Hague:Nijhoff, 1969), 81-86; George Gutsche, *Moral Apostasy in Russian Literature* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986); Philip Ravh, "The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Joseph K," in *Image and Idea: Twenty Essays on Literary Themes* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1957), 121-40; Boris Sorokin, "Ivan Il'ich as Johan: A Cruel Joke," *Canadian Slavic Studies* 5 (1971): 376-79.

[17] See, for example, Geoffrey Clive, "Tolstoy and the Varieties of the Inauthentic," in *The Broken Icon: Intuitive Existentialism in Classical Russian Fiction* (New York: Macmillian, 1970), 191-198; James Olney, "Experience, Metaphor, and Meaning: The Death of Ivan Ilyich," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (1972): 101-14. For a more recent and productive take on Tolstoy's authorial strategies of asserting the authenticity of his own life and fiction see Justin Weir's *Leo Tolstoy & the Alibi of Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). Particularly enticing and original is Weir's application to Tolstoy of the Nietzsche-Derrida philosophical line of suspicion-symptomatology, which has immense potential for literary criticism and questions of authorship. See also Sean Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), as well as in *The Ethics of Writing: Authorship and Legacy in Plato and Nietzsche* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) and *Authorship: from Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

scholars[18] have examined the human world as a space of significance from which Ivan becomes alienated, losing his I-self to the faceless matrix of the one [*das Man*],[19] Gustafson considers Ivan's suffering to be what makes his self-understanding possible, his illness a misapprehension of the nature of human life as sin.[20] And yet, these readings have not yet attempted a detailed phenomenological description of the experience of one's awareness of death and the inescapability of dying as a fundamental ontological structure. So doing, I believe, could show that the awareness of death may reveal to oneself one's power to live authentically in view of not only being finite but also having a power to creatively rearrange various aspects of finitude.

Apart from considering death as what allows one to see *Dasein*'s essence as an ability to be, it must be also examined from the point of view of inter-subjectivity as another dimension of human finitude that allows individual freedom to emerge in light of the individual's realization of his radical dependency on the other. Exactly how the formal peculiarity relates to the pure negativity of thought a human self must possess to be a self-determining entity remains to be elucidated. What must be made clear, then, is whether it is primordial narrativity itself that appears as an awareness of the difference between the perishing of the other as a physical body and the perishing of the other as an event-embodiment of the view of the self as the sheer self-imposed narrative change. That is, we are asking whether primordial narrativity appears as a process irreducible to the realm of the objective, and as a threat of the world collapse that one

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[18] See, for example, William Barret, "Existentialism as a Symptom of Man's Contemporary Crisis," in *Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature,* ed. Stanley Hopper (New York: Harper, 1952), 139-52; Lev Shestov, *The Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Preaching* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969), and Irving Halpern, "The Structural Integrity of The Death of Ivan Il'ich," *Slavic and East European Journal* 5 (1961): 334-40.

[19] Das Man is the default gravity of the world's social and cultural dimensions of recurrent intelligibility of the multiple "algorithms" run in it.

[20] Richard Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 155-160.

feels, when venturing into a new territory where risk has to be taken and the possibility of comfort in conformity is stripped away, so that one experiences isolation from the world and finds himself in the realm of indeterminacy itself.

One of the first to ask "Why is this chapter there at all, and why is it placed at the beginning of the story rather than in the end?" C.J.G. Turner sees chapter one not merely as a dysfunctional vestige of the older narrative system that was discarded as Tolstoy kept working on the story. The critic sees the first chapter as functional because:

> The chronological displacement of this chapter enables it to suggest, by its structural position in the beginning of the story, the social milieu in which Ivan Ilyich was to make his career and at the same time, by its chronological position at the end of the story, the fact that milieu was unchanged when his career came to an end.[21]

Unlike Turner, whose solution to the problem of chapter one connects its formal peculiarity with the influence of Ivan Ilyich's milieu over the trajectories of his life project, Gunter Schaarschmidt offers a complex linguistic model that allows for a dialectical discovery that begins with "awareness to habit" and moves to "habit to awareness." The chronological disjunction that the peculiar positioning of chapter one thus creates can then be seen as a formal solution directed to more adequately contain the contradiction of a knowing that breaks off its dependence on the given. Placing chapter one where it would normally belong cannot be done, for so doing would eliminate "a narrative hiatus between the end of chapter twelve and the beginning of chapter one, and the required adjustments would change the meaning of the story."[22]Gary R. Jahn questions Schaarschmidt's account on the grounds that it is made to fit the phenomenon it seeks to explain, offering his version:

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[21] C.J. G. Turner, "The Language of Fiction: Word Cluster in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich,*" *Modern Language Review* 65 (1970): 121.

[22] Gunter Schaarschmidt, "Theme and Discourse Structure in *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 21 (1979): 365-366.

> Regarding it as an introduction that, besides affording an opportunity for the traditional presentation of the central characters and situation, is rich in implications for the theme, structure, and dominant images of the subsequent text. Thematically, it establishes the contrasting postures of decorous indifferences and spiritual unease as irreducible polarities in an implied debate about the appropriate attitude to the protagonist's death. Structurally, it creates an expectation of the more complete portrait of Ivan and his life, which is supplied in chapters 2 through 12. In accomplishing this, it incorporates one of the story's central images: that of the enclosing or bordering effect of the black frame of Ivan's death notice and the edge of his coffin. These early expressions of the force that confine and crush the protagonist are extensively developed in chapters 2 through 12 and are ultimately reincarnated in the image of the black bag in chapter 9 and echoed again in chapter 12 when "what had been oppressing him and would not leave him was all dropping away at once, from two sides, from ten sides, from all sides[…]Finally, it may be suggested that chapter 1 performs the hortatory function of inviting the reader to assume the role of observer and judge so conveniently abandoned at the very end of the chapter by Peter Ivanovich's hasty departure for an evening of cards. Thus, the reader is subtly instructed as to the approach to be adopted towards what follows; deciding the significance of the death of Ivan Ilyich has become the duty of the reader.[23]

Jahn's nuanced treatment of the problem of chapter one suggests many a fruitful direction for analysis. I should supplement Jahn's account with my reading of how the narrative form Tolstoy is using does relate to his exposition of the phenomenological experience of death and dying as connected to human individuality, itself an unfolding project embedded in culture, history, language.

Tolstoy's decision to place the content of chapter one, that is, his phenomenological description of the reception by Ivan Ilyich's colleagues of the news of his death, in the beginning of his narrative serves to capture and present death under the aspect of how it appears in everyday life. The unifying theme of chapter one, then, is, in Tolstoy's rendering death as the death of nobody, that of a phenomenon belonging to no one in particular. That is, while everyone registers a state of affairs under which no communication is possible with the human project known under the name of Ivan Ilyich, the latter appears only in the form of anticipated changes each of the people present during the conversation projects for himself. The individualizing

[23] Gary Jahn, *The Death of Ivan Ilich: an Interpretation* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993), 38-39.

narrative weave of Ivan Ilyich's life is altogether absent from this collective reflection. Via the juxtaposition the opening chapter where the death of Ivan Ilyich appears as if a composite perception, an intersection of the points of view on this event by the people who knew him, with the following chapters, where the linear narrative of Ivan Ilyich's life is presented, formally, Tolstoy captures the most widespread unconscious reaction to mortality. He shows people's fleeing from death. He thus captures one of the guises under which culturally coded is the negativity of the here-and now, the transience of the human self constantly recreating itself and in so doing fleeing by way of busying itself with the trifles of the everyday.

At the same time Tolstoy shows that the death of the other can only be imagined. It is always someone's project coming to an end, and never as one's own, even though death as coming to the end of writing of oneself cannot belong to anyone else, for it is always one's own. If the first chapter of the story shows the death of Ivan Ilyich as that which belongs to someone else, the remaining chapters present a highly personal, most individuated account of Ivan Ilyich's being as dying. This is accomplished through a narrative of a progressive actualization of the power to be the origin of one's self as a self-created narrative. And this is an actualization behind which a realization that the power to self-project, while connected with the world of things cannot itself be externalized, never appears. By thus presenting two very different takes on death within the narrative boundaries of a single story, Tolstoy shows the paradoxical doubling that defines death as a constituent of human being-in-the-world that Heidegger calls being-towards-death.

Examining how being-towards-death manifests itself in the everyday, the philosopher observes that:

> In the publicness with which we are with one another in our everyday manner, death is 'known' as a mishap which is constantly occurring – as a "case of death." Someone or other "dies," be he neighbor or stranger. People who are no acquaintances of ours are "dying" daily and hourly.

> "Death" is encountered as a well-known event occurring within-the-world. As such it remains in the inconspicuousness characteristic of what is encountered in an everyday fashion. The "they" has already stowed away [*gesichert*] an interpretation for this event. It talks of it in a fugitive manner, either expressly or else in a way which is mostly inhibited, as if to say, "One of these days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us."[24]

The above excerpt accurately illustrates Tolstoy's vision of death as presented in chapter one, particularly by the narrative discord it forms with the linear narrative other chapters form. For what is chapter one if not a "case of death" resonating "in the publicness with which we are with one another?" Who is Ivan Ilyich if not that 'someone' whose death is the best corollary that as long as one lives death remains understood "as an indefinite something, which, above all, must duly arrive from somewhere or other, but which is proximally not yet present-at-hand for oneself, and is therefore no threat?"

The narrative estrangement in the first chapter presents a vision of death as a phenomenon of the everyday, as a perspectival plurality accompanying death in the public sphere. Tolstoy's depiction of dying as an ontological limit pointing to a possibility of an authentic existence that remains covered up until the human project runs to its completion is so convincing exactly because of the formal containment of various aspects of this phenomenon. It is never me, so not here and not now. But it is me. It is me, but not me, the "I" of the here and now, but another me, the "I" of the there and then. Because that other me, while fully real, hasn't happened yet, the necessity of acting in the here and now as the only truly real me can be postponed indefinitely. By virtue of its inevitability, death as a limit of consciousness is connected with the immediacy of one's "self-moving" present. The pure negativity of thought, among other things, conceives its power of negation as an event happening to a physical body. It does so without registering that it itself is its own moving limit, meaning that consciousness

[24] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 296-297.

while irreducible to pure thinking alone sees its sense-certainty (my immediate awareness of the heterogeneous sensory fields right now with no further elaboration) as a limit which belongs to an altogether different ontological realm. But there is only one me. Before we turn to chapter one, to see how, by rendering the death of Ivan Ilyich as that of a paradigmatic other, Tolstoy captures the domestication of death in the everyday as constitutive to human culture by virtue of using language and symbolic representation, we must consider some critical responses to the story that philosophers and philosophically-minded critics have produced.

I.4. *Ivan Ilyich* and Some Philosophically-minded Critics

Philosophers and literary critics writing on philosophical motifs in Tolstoy in a systematic way have approached the Heidegger and Tolstoy topic in very different ways, their studies not particularly numerous.[25] While only few share Walter Kaufmann's conviction that "Heidegger on death is for the most part an unacknowledged commentary on *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*,"[26] they seem to agree that Tolstoy's profound artistic intuitions expressed in the story either helps problematize Heidegger's account of timeliness and the human,[27] or provide an

[25] See Roberto Bernasconi, "Literary Attestation in Philosophy: Heidegger's Footnote on Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich," in *Philosophers' Poets*, ed. David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 7-36; Zoltan Hanady, "Ivan Ilyich and Existence Compared to Death: Lev Tolstoy and Martin Heidegger," *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 27(1-2) (1985): 3-15 and "Bytie k smerti: Tolstoi i Khaidegger," *Croatica et Slavica Iadertina V* (2009): 473-492; Natalie Repin, "Being-Toward-Death in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*: Tolstoy and Heidegger," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 36, 1-2, (2002):101-132; William Spanos, "The Death of Ivan Ilyich: A Temporal Interpretation," in *De-Structing the Novel: Essays in Applied Postmodern Hermeneutics*, ed. Troy Leo Orr (New York: The Whitson Publishing Company, 1982), 1-64; and William Irwin's "Death by Inauthenticity: Heidegger's Debt to Ivan Il'ich's Fall," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* XXV(2013): 15-21.

[26] Walter Kaufmann, *Discovering the Mind* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1980), vol.2, 214.

[27] Bernasconi, unlike Kaufmann and Spanos, both of whom view Tolstoy's moralizing as precluding him from establishing a unity with Heidegger, asks whether he should take at the face value the philosopher's expressed self-renunciation of the moralizing tone evoked by his language. Bernasconi who, rightly points in his critique of

additional line of evidence in its favor.[28] They thus focus on a narrow range of philosophical aspects of the two works, losing the sight of how these aspects relate to the formal and thematic peculiarities of the text as a whole. Neither Bernasconi nor Spanos, let alone Kaufman, thinks it worthwhile to connect, in a way other than offering of a symbolic reading, the narrative break between chapter one and the rest of Tolstoy's text with the Heidegger's concept of ontological difference or the peculiarity of death as finitude in relation to the individual. And because this break is both formal and thematic it warrants more philosophical scrutiny because its double character suggests an articulation of an underlying philosophical problem. That the "break" is shown to be of at least two kinds irreducible to one another suggests that articulated a "thought," "concept" of a break. Of what this concept is I will try to make clear.

The standpoint from which literary scholars tackle the dialogue between various ontological structures of being in its unique mode of existence available only to human beings is such that at the expense of the methodological rigor and precision of meaning, which their philosophical colleagues provide, they approach Tolstoy's text looking for ways to show how his method of addressing the fundamental structures of human existence furnishes an alternative

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Kaufman and Spanos that a philosophical interpretation of the story carried in the spirit of Emmanuel Levinas will lead to an impasse as far as "the question of the character and legitimacy of philosophical readings of literature," offers instead to focus on how effectively Ivan Ilyich serves Heidegger as anthropological data set with which to probe his theory. He writes: "Heidegger's reference to "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" serves not only to confirm the account of everyday Being-towards-death, but also to mark a place where the factical idea of authentic existence intervenes. As Heidegger subsequently admitted, such ideas had inevitably determined the formal analysis from the outset. To put it in another way, Heidegger would subsequently attempt an existentiell confirmation of the existential structures in an effort to save fundamental ontology from being reduced to the status of an arbitrary fiction. Meanwhile, this footnote reference to Tolstoy's story was a kind of holding operation, a temporary measure, although perhaps not without permanent consequences for the meaning of Being and Time," in Bernasconi, "Literary Attestation in Philosophy: Heidegger's Footnote on Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich," 19, 21.

[28] While the way Spanos' treats temporality in Tolstoy— the rapidly increasing perception of temporality in the story mirrors its transformation in Ivan Ilyich— is convincing, his reading remains selective, and Bernasconi is right in saying that he is "inclined to see only those aspects of Tolstoy's story which are in conformity with his picture of Heidegger," in Bernasconi, "Literary Attestation in Philosophy: Heidegger's Footnote on Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich," 15.

system of thinking about eternal questions. Tolstoy is either seen as someone whose understanding of the gravity of the existential predicament matches the profundity of Heidegger's vision, while using a different medium for its philosophical exposition,[29] or as the author of the text whose juxtaposition with Heidegger allows putting the two classics in a productive dialogue.[30] One of such critics is Zoltan Hanady. As Natalie Repin explains,[31] "he

[29] "Tolstoy, in The Death of Ivan Il'ich, has indeed succeeded in anticipating the main features of what Heidegger calls the authentic understanding of death, being-towards-death. And while it would be indeed problematic, on a variety of counts, to claim that Tolstoy constitutes a precedent to Heidegger's existential analytic, the comparison should underscore and make conspicuous Tolstoy's merits as regards his subtle, highly original, and in many ways "precocious," in spite of his age, or perhaps because of it, fashion of relating to death. One has to be aware of chronological seduction, which regrettably does not take into consideration the added value of hermeneutical augmentation and reads the final result back into the beginning while losing the entire process of mediation between the two. Consequently, what is obliterated is the historicity of understanding, which some claim is the essential mechanism of human awareness and cognition. The entire analysis of this essay seems to warrant the conclusions that it is Tolstoy's uniquely sophisticated understanding of death that maintains readers' interest in this particular work, considered important even today on philosophical, not only artistic, grounds. To that effect, however, Heidegger's interpretation of death is essential in that it mediates, accommodates, and augments Tolstoy's philosophical relevance, for the former may be viewed as both as inadvertent elucidation of the latter and an incentive to its reappropriation," writes Repin in her "Being-Toward-Death in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*: Tolstoy and Heidegger,"131-132.

[30] "Толстой не создал философии смерти, это сделал немецкий философ М. Хайдеггер. Русский писатель творил не в жанре теоретической философии, а в жанре художественной метафизики. Но их произведения и сегодня поучительны и актуальны. Потому что там, где нет экзистенционального отношения человека к смерти, нет и настоящего этоса. Оба серьезно относились к смерти, потому что серьезно относились и к жизни. Они толковали смысл бытия с горизонта смерти. Хайдеггер и Толстой, каждый своими средствами, на своих философском и художественном языках, предупреждает: смерть является концом существования в мире. Это означает не только то, что каждый человек смертен, но и то, что любая возможность человека исторически случайна, преходяща и неповторима, следовательно, жизнь нельзя растратить бессмысленно и бесцельно. Жизнь не имеет заранее данного смысла. От нас зависит, придадим ли мы ей смысл. Не только наша жизнь формирует наше представление о смерти, но и наше представление о смерти формирует нашу жизнь. Оно навязывает нам всеобщий обязательный нравственный закон, которому все люди должны подчиняться," writes Hanady in "Bytie k smerti: Tolstoi i Khaidegger," 489-490.

(Tolstoy did not develop a philosophy of death; Heidegger did. The Russian writer created not in the genre of theoretical philosophy, but in one of artistic metaphysics. Yet their works are still actual and informative today. It is so because where there is no existential relation to death, there is no real ethos. Both thinkers treated death seriously because they treated life seriously. They understood the meaning of being from within the horizon of death. Heidegger and Tolstoy, each through their own means, in their philosophic and artistic languages, warn: death is the end of existence in the world. This means not only the fact that every man is mortal, but also that man's every possibility is historically contingent, finite and inimitable, and, that, because of this, therefore, one can't squander life without living it in way that invites reflection and planning. Our life doesn't have a pre-determined meaning. It depends on us whether what meaning it will have. Not only our life shapes our notion of death, but our notion of death, too, shapes our life. It imposes on us a universal and necessary law which all people must obey.)

[31] I must say that Repin's patronizing attitude toward her colleague Zlotan Hanady, whose vision of the historicity of understanding as an essential mechanism of human awareness and cognition is a "common and recalcitrant mistake…characteristic of what is perhaps the most comprehensive study of the Heidegger-Tolstoy

succumbs to the illusion that Heidegger's analysis of death is already to be found in full-blown presence in *Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Il'ich*," while "the truth appears to be in the contrary, that it was Heidegger whose work made transparent the significance of Tolstoy's achievements by showing the ripened version of it. Again, the problem lies in the mirror illusion of hermeneutics."[32] While Repin may be right about the futility of thinking about the significance of influence in view of other possibilities opening up through a dialogical reading, she, herself, does not deliver what she promises. Following her extended summary of Heidegger's magnum opus in part one of her paper with a little other than a motley selection of quotes from *Being and Time* and *Ivan Ilyich* in parts two and three, she does not give a detailed account of "the retrieval of Tolstoy's implied critique of everydayness and conception of death as implemented in the story of Ivan Ilyich."[33] Moreover, Repin errs in her sketch of Heidegger's philosophy on virtually every page of her article.[34] All in all, Repin's inquiry does not address the problem literary scholars should be particularly attuned to. The problem is as follows. If death is what allows an individual human project be as a whole, and if death is what makes oneself through the state of anticipatory resoluteness be the master of her future, then there has to be a connection between death and narrativity. This interpretative freedom that the dynamic interpretative relating of the episode, in which we engage every day in defining who we are, must be connected

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relation on the matter of death" surprises me even more than her omission to include any of the articles on the work on Heidegger and Tolstoy in her bibliography.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 102.

[34]For Heidegger specialists and readers with some philosophical training I provide here the examples I discovered on three randomly chosen pages from Repin's "Being-Toward-Death in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*: Tolstoy and Heidegger": on page 104 she writes "Death serves that very coil that produces the recoil from inauthentic to authentic existence, which are both tied in a causal connection, but still do not operate automatically"; on 107 "The fact that both Dasein and das Man die means that both must have some kind of recourse to death, which in turn signifies that each of them does have some understanding of death"; and on 111 "This is the moment when the question of the transition from existentiality to authenticity is posited". There are many more.

with human temporality as the horizon of intelligibility, including its "subjective corollary," one's "inner curvature" Care [*Sorge*]. This means that what must be present is a perspective of meaning and significance fundamental to how we arrange various elements of the world as we experience it. This task remains unfulfilled, and I will try to contribute to the future solution of this problem in this chapter.

The most succinct and precise[35] treatment on death and inauthenticity in Tolstoy yet written is one by William Irwin, who, while stressing the effectiveness of the existential message both texts convey,[36] does not tackle the question of how narrativity as such and the narrative peculiarity of Ivan Ilyich are both connected with how Tolstoy understands the problem of human rootedness in the everyday and of the resources available for turning one's project into a flourishing human life.

To avoid these pitfalls, we must proceed slowly. We will first look at the formal and thematic peculiarities of chapter one and ponder its philosophical significance as a phenomenological account of Ivan Ilyich's death, that is experienced by the other, namely his old friend Petr Ilyich. We will pay special attention to the stylistic devices Tolstoy uses to convey

[35] Irwin understanding of Heidegger is more nuanced than Repin's, but his account leaves much to be desired. In his text technical errors, e.g., when he uses existence interchangeably with (Zu-sein) to be, occur together with the overly simplified concept like "the One" (das Man) whose primary mode of being he lists as "a public identity and meaningless chatter of the crowd," but whose vital importance as partaking in the backbone of the intelligibility of the totality of background practices he entirely misses, just as he does the paradoxical function of the structural elements that Heidegger calls falling which has to do not so much with fleeing as choosing to go with the flow, but with our doing anything we do being a certain aberration from the trajectory of the normal that reinforces the social matrix nevertheless.

[36] "As Heidegger would insist, the point in coming to accept the fact of one's own inevitable death is not morbid preoccupation. The contemplation of death is not meant to make us depressed and fearful in our actions. Quite the contrary, coming to terms with the inevitability of our own death is just the thing to make our existence authentic" If we can own the fact of our unavoidable death, we can own ourselves. For that we do not need to wait for a deathbed conversion, why should we?" writes Irwin in his "Death by Inauthenticity," 21. What he entirely misses is that that kind of conversion for it to be anything more than a mere assurance of the kind "you're free because you are going to die anyway" requires a whole different structure of temporality, one with no past and no future, but remembered past and anticipated future. Also has to be shown how our thinking about spatial boundaries and extended entities conditions our thinking about temporality and existence as a continuous mode of being outside of oneself always stretch toward some "I gotta to because."

the paradoxical presence of death in life in its appearance as an utmost limit of one's personal project distanced by multiple layers of signification. We will also examine the function of the contrast the primary mode of access to death by the other, namely, its always appearing as a perished body-thing that used to belong to some I-thing, that chapter one establishes in relation to the rest of the story in which Tolstoy presents the individual temporality of Ivan Ilyich's life as a separate narrative.

We will then switch to Heidegger's analytics of how human projects unfold as time, paying particular attention to both divisions of *Being and Time*. So doing will allow us to avoid reducing Heidegger's nuanced account of self-determination, available to man in view of the interpretative dimension of his project grounded in the structure of temporality itself, to an existentialist doctrine urging one to be free because there is nothing to her being other than existing in the now. In conclusion, I will discuss the sacred as it appears in the dialogical perspective that a comparative reading of the texts of Tolstoy and Heidegger allows us to establish. Before looking in detail at chapter one, we should briefly sketch the horizon of the contradiction between Heidegger and Tolstoy's thought over the ultimate source of intelligibility, creative freedom self-determination, and the role of the sacred.

We have already seen that for Heidegger the sacred, if thought of as the privileged center of meaning in a culture, that is, one whose foundation has its validation in a source external to this culture, while it itself serves as the ultimate criterion for various laws and customs within it, is just another manifestation, of predominantly institutional form, of the very externalizability and universality of the perspective of meaning and significance. This perspective is operant in the world subjectively and objectively but its ontological account might do well without the Judeo-Christian God. Heidegger, in other words, is simply not interested in defining the place of

God within the self-transcending system of world-time that enables the human project to exist as a self-relational structure. Continuing the mystical tradition of Meister Eckhart and Hegel, in his phenomenological anthropology, Heidegger seeks to completely sever his ties with the doctrine of being as it appears most notably in the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, who suggests that the structure of intelligibility in human life resides in God, because of which fact *what* something is always derivative of the fact *that it is*. Heidegger does not see the separation of existence from essence as either possible or necessary, suggesting instead that insofar as human ecstatic temporality is predicated on World Time, man exists as a self-interpretation that is only possible because of the world being a self-differentiating totality of what we could refer to as "quantum forms." The structure of these quantum forms is always already intelligible, and while capable of modification, it is fully "compatible" with the "quantum ego" of the individual project. The Aristotelian Eternal Mover makes in Heidegger an appearance *only* in its ensouled hypostasis as a *differentia differans*, an entity capable of differentiating itself by recognizing itself in the series of self-creative acts it can separate from the host of activity flows. I may be typing now, but I am never identical with the typing itself, always directed to achieve some goal.

With the assertion that a human being who has grasped the predicament of never existing past his eternal now is the only kind of God there can be, even if God himself makes this state of affairs possible in the still uncreated world, Tolstoy would never agree. While the will to freely choose how to inter-relate one's action within the boundaries of a personal life story is in part meaningful in view of the temporal stricture that makes an individual life possible as a self-conscious repository of experiences, this cannot be the whole story. For Tolstoy, to think that the world is a multitude of shifting categorial positions, even if their totality included a detailed and most sympathetic account of a limited point of view belonging to the human subject, is a wrong

way to think about God. It is so because for Tolstoy existence is not a category that can be either deduced or formalized in some definitive way.

To think that a complete system of immanently developing categories could ever answer the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" without the figure of God is an act of hubris, not knowledge. The sacred could never merely be a categorial inkling of the asymmetry in which various ontological levels that comprise the givenness of the world stand in relation to one another. The world is not as a secular garden with all things discernible in it together with a realization that an individual project is, too, its flower. For the sacred always points to that without which neither the world nor time nor man could possibly be, or that by virtue of whose benevolence they persist. And the danger of forgetting God lies in giving up one's creative freedom and turning into a desire-satisfying mechanism, whose mode of existence is but a sequence of automatic assemblages of human instrumental knowledge and contextually available entities. The description in chapter one of the structuring force of interruption that frames Petr Ivanovich as an acting machine illustrates this godless auto-pilot mode very well.

I.5. *Ivan Ilyich*: a Phenomenological Close Reading

We get in chapter one a glimpse at the eight hours in the life of Petr Ivanovich during whose course he learns about Ivan Ilyich's death, has dinner, visits Ivan Ilyich's widow, and goes to his colleague Fedor Vasilievich to play bridge. What makes this chapter particularly effective is its phenomenological unfolding of Peter Ivanovich's experiencing of Ivan Ilyich's death. What first appears as an obituary in the *Vedomosti* (The Record) *becomes* his participation in a collective act of remembering of what Ivan Ilyich was like *that changes into* an assessment of what his disappearance from work could mean for personal career advancement *that changes*

into the reinforcement of feeling good about not being the one unable to dodge the blow of death *that changes into* the seeing of Ivan Ilyich's corpse in the presence of his family and listening to the laments of his widow *that changes into* the pleasure of still being able to enjoy living as he breathes fresh air, heading out to Fedor Vasilievich's.[37]

Everything he experiences after learning about Ivan Ilyich's death is permeated by the sense of the inevitable and final interruption[38] of his own project that for now has been postponed. Yet the ultimate interruptibility of the individual human project into which we are all involved is concealed behind the multiple activity-switching acts that are available to us in view of the different know-hows we find in our culture. The whole can be always split into multiple intelligible activity-regions in which we choose to situate ourselves attending to some idea of what we set out to do in life. This dual-potential account of interruptibility-based vision of human time is exactly what Tolstoy recreates in chapter one together with his vision of the

[37] The death of Ivan Ilyich appears for Peter Ivanovich as a succession of multiple activities-episodes connected with it. The rapidity with which their succession takes place is best seen as fleeing that takes place through a metonymic dispersal. To capture this fleeing more fully I estrange a summary of Peter Ivanovich's activities within the confines of a single sentence whose episodes are strung together with a visible degree of artifice. I do this as descriptive approximation of how experiential unfolding of the subject takes place within a singular consciousness in the form of multiple activity episodes.

[38] That is the sense of a connection between the sheer negativity of the absolute abstraction of pure thinking (my ability to rapidly shift the item boundaries of the content appearing in my mind whether in relation to the immediate sensory input from the outside world or not) and the necessity with which this power of negating movement by negating itself as only being a negative movement generates determinate content in the form of multiple limit-levels/cognitive dimensions-axis alongside which every item of experience can be seen as having multiple "coordinates" (syn)thesized into the "one" accompanying the process of categorical determination. To the question of dimensionality of the world of experience Hegel would insist that while no such dimensionality is possible in the sense of a three dimensional physical world or a four dimensional time space, the most adequate coordinate approximation of the experiential item would be one plotting the "hottest" aspect under which this or that thing appears yet keeping in mind all other multiple categorical axis along which the less salient aspects of it are nevertheless recorded. Idealist dimensionality, then, is akin to a hologram in which most real and closest is the categorial source of highest situational intensity. The intuition of the inevitable interruption is one's sense of there being a connection between the possibility of differential conscious states related to personal narrative possible in view of the absolute negativity of thinking and there being a limit to a number of moves a self-relating cognitive center can make while having a unified cognitive experience unfolding under the aegis of a singular life story. In the departing of the other, though, we tend to see the limit as an "objective notification" of running out of the "user space," not as another dimension guise of a self-limiting form because of which we are in the business of daily (re)creation of ourselves to begin with.

estrangement of the ultimate interruptibility through personal and collective framing of the unsayable with different technologies of signification.

Petr Ivanovich learns about the death during the break while he is still at work, and this news *interrupts* the course of the discussion. Petr Ivanovich *interrupts* his after-dinner routine when he goes to see Ivan Ilyich's family and is diverted by his widow from following Schwarz to Fedor Vassilevich's. The awkward thingness of the world *interrupts* the normal flow of activities as a part of Praskov'ia Petrovna's dress catches furniture, and Petr Ivanovich's struggle with the pouf is only brought to an end by Sokolov who *interrupts* this interruption by announcing the price the family will have to pay for the place in the cemetery. Lastly, Petr Ivanovich arrives in time to briefly *interrupt* the game of cards other people are playing by joining it.

The functional significance of interruption as it appears in this narrative is double: it is the sheer faculty to willingly engage in new activities, yet it is also the very tendency to overlook the singularity of any life-event by categorizing it under the rubric of something familiar and expected to be done in such-and-such a way.[39] Interruption is thus both the power to swerve from any inertia-driven course one chooses to pursue in life, yet it is also the tendency not to swerve into the position of experiencing the burden of radical indeterminacy which as one field of its

[39] That is, while the ultimate differentiation between the situational particulars of the activity I "think-thing" with a goal in mind and to what extent they actually conform to the "next imagined narrative episode of myself" will always reside in me, for no official procedure can make my dissertation "actually" finished if I don't see it that way and equally no official denial of its actual conforming to its "thought to be finished" can make me see it as unfinished or rule out the actuality of a dual conflicting perspective, there is nothing I can to fully complete myself as a narrative project the way I can, for instance, complete another "tactical" move conforming to the always shifting and unattainable strategy of "being me." The point is that we tend to forget about the "empty" strategy center and see, in the sheer possibility of switching between multiple courses of action, the freedom of self-creation understood as the minimum degree to which one's will in inhibited or as a widest degree of experiential dispersal seeking to achieve the highest possible "number" of things done. Tolstoy convincingly shows the illusion of empowerment through the cult of having things done. While multiple points of interruptibility would suggest a possibility of instant self-change through an act of free-will, this does not happen as will instrumentalizes intelligence reducing its scale of action to multiple technical problems occurring at various "tactical installments."

possibilities every human being is. Tolstoy captures how this tension plays out as our experience of the space of human actions.

I have chosen the term "interruption" to foreground our switching between multiple states and activities we routinely achieve without making it an object of philosophical reflection or detailed phenomenological description. Another way to describe "interruption" would be to say that it acts as a limit of multiple acts as which we exist. Every one of these acts has a unique experience of temporality associated with it and could be called a chronotope, though not in the sense Mikhail Bakhtin used the term. Writes Bakhtin:

> We will give the name chronotope (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The special meaning it has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature; we will not deal with the chronotope in other areas of culture.' In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.
> The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time. The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic.[40]

My understanding of the term is different because I do not restrict the concept of time-place to the domain of various literary genres. Rather, I use it the way Aristotle, from the ontology of whose *Physics* Bakhtin has derived it, would have used the term, if asked to apply Einstein's idea of time-space to the scale of individual human life in its everydayness. That is to say, I use it as the most elementary unit of time as it is experienced by us: the time of action duration. Because

[40] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in the *Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin,* tr. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84-85.

every one of these actions-durations involves certain equipment, it is most fitting to call it time-place and not time-space to avoid conceiving of space as some absolute container in which all that happens "takes place." Since most everyday activities require "equipment assemblage," the "where" of this or that action, in the sense of the "where" in which the action in question "takes place" becomes strongly associated with this action. Yet while actions require assembled "places," the latter are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the former. The significance of "interruption," in view of its connection with the multiple chronotopes of our everyday existence, is, therefore, twofold. While the activity switching foregrounds the idea that we can always find ourselves doing something else that has a potential of severing the burden of the past, or the future imagined in a particular way, without sufficient self-reflection, "interruption" becomes an act of subjective reorientation that equates a typical place of activity assembly with the activity associated with it.

Tolstoy shows here how the notion of our physical space as the objective grid-like space of science into which the sites of human activities are as if "installed" comes to be at odds with another notion of space. This other notion is a notion of space that emphasizes it not as some primarily physical locale, a certain *where* which determines an activity in question, but as a primarily functional locale, a certain *what* of activity that determines the *where*. The fact that the idea of ultimate interruptibility of one's personal project infiltrates multiple spaces suggests that while every one of those spaces is in principle capable of acting as a multiple locus of action, there is typically a by-default mode of action associated with the physical boundaries enclosing that space. That is, the fact that we are fluent with the rules of multiple cultural stagings in which we are involved, much too often obscures our power to performatively modify the piece in

question, suggesting instead a way of existing as active participation in multiple stagings, each of which offers limited or no degree of improvisation.

During its business hours, the courtroom is a place where cases are heard. When on their lunch break courtroom workers can talk about other matters. Because of our familiarity with the character of the by-default fragmentation of the world, its objective character weighs heavily on how we think about space in time, forgetting that the particular arrangement of the physical configuration of sites featuring various activities would be impossible without the interruptibility which defines these activities as what they are by placing a temporal boundary upon them. The repetitive, enclosed givenness of human activities lures us into seeing them as rooted in the objective realm. Instead of seeing sites of activities as cultural temples where a local deity dwells for as long as there is a religious service, we think of this service as something that itself solidifies into the physicality of the temple and then recreates itself by itself.

This vision of human activity, in turn, leads one to thinking about time as a large region of empty space that within the course of one's life begins to get filled with things seen as location-events. Yet the way Tolstoy describes Ivan Ilyich's corpse suggests that the space as the experienced space of human project is the exact opposite of the one dominated by the location-event inertia. In fact, he equates the location-event inertia character with the property of a corpse:

> The dead man lay, as dead men *always* lie, in a specially heavy way, his rigid limbs sunk in the soft cushions of the coffin, with the head forever bowed on the pillow. His yellow waxen brow with bald patches over his sunken temples was thrust up in the way peculiar to the dead, the protruding nose seeming to press on the upper lip. He was much changed and grown even thinner since Peter Ivanovich had last seen him, but, as is always the case with the dead, his face was handsomer and above all more dignified than when he was alive. The expression on the face said that what was necessary had been accomplished, and accomplished rightly.[41]

[41] Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, tr. Louise and Aylmer Maude (New York: Health Science Publishing Corporation, 1973), 10. Unless otherwise indicated, this translation is used throughout this dissertation.

The fixed certainty of the spatially-determined position of the dead is the intelligible with which what once used to be associated with self-determination is now just a thing to behold; Tolstoy lays bare the device in showing death interwoven within the tapestry of the background practices. It is domesticated by being made a thing whose thingness masks the fact that it has nothing to do with the empirical realm of perishable objects amidst which we find ourselves, that it is principally different from croaking, perishing, or coming to an end.

Tolstoy treats this domestication subtly and on multiple levels. Firstly, the news of anyone's death always arrives in someone else's actual reality, creating a stark contrast between the ultimate disappearance of the world and the very buoyancy of existence as the source of everything happening in it:

> "Gentlemen," he said, "Ivan Ilyich has died!"
> "You don't say so!"
> "Here, read it yourself," replied Petr Ivanovich. Handing Fedor Vasilievich the paper, still damp [*свежий, пахучий еще номер*] from the press.[42]

The sensuous immediacy of the material medium through which the news conveys, signifies, points to the certainty, the sheer presence of the consciousness whose intentional act is about to capture some image of Ivan Ilyich. The way of being present of this consciousness, given with the distinctiveness similar to that of the sensory experience of holding the paper, clashes with the irreversible absence of a human person, which, in turn, forcefully suggests yet another inevitable interruption awaiting the beholder.

Secondly, apart from serving as a proof of one's being alive (I see a dead body, therefore I am alive) the contemplated paraphernalia associated with the earthly affairs of the departed soul create an exchange economy of loss. Appearing in the realm of language, the fact of loss generates multiple networks of new meanings on which the weave of the social fabric depends to

[42] Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 7.

a large degree. It also serves to strengthen the pull of publicity, the indestructibility of the intersubjective character of the totality of the background practices inextricable from the world of human culture. It will happen to everyone, but we know what to do. At a funeral, the collective narrative framing of an individual complexity extinguished becomes one of the sacraments administered in the church of the everyday. The comforting presence of the community that "has seen" and knows "what to do" suggests also that there is a right way to do things, a right way to live, and that it, too, knows this way.

That everyone's first thought of Ivan Ilyich has to do with his death as an opening for "changes and promotions it might occasion among themselves or their acquaintances" is not merely a depiction of a godless world driven by avarice and career ambition. Much more important is that these changes are desirable precisely in view of the limited availability of the privileges and identity that a professional position like the one that used to belong to Ivan Ilyich might afford. This valuation of identity in view of its inevitable disappearance is what arouses "'in all who heard it the complacent feeling that, "it is he who is dead and not I."[43] It becomes a means to assert the meaning and significance of one's living a life merely by virtue of having some participatory power in one's project. In this case dying is compared to a bad decision and this is precisely Schwarz's judgment, which he conveys when by winking at Peter Ivanovich, he as if tells him "Ivan Ilyich has made a mess of things—not like you and me."

Peter Ivanovich inquires into what Ivan Ilyich's last days were like, "as though death was an accident natural to Ivan Ilyich but certainly not to himself". Appearing as narrative, language provides distance from the brute singularity of the traumatic event. The ultimate diffusion of the sheer impact of the other's death happens through its metonymic dispersal. Social sanity is

[43]Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* , 8.

resilient. Its symbolic fragmentation of one's death supplies through ritual a scenario of the always "untimely, tragic departure," represented metonymically during the service through "candles, groans, incense, tears, and sobs."[44] The voicing of the funereal alphabet is an act of social solidarity asserting the indestructibility of the run of things.

Tolstoy chooses Schwarz as a character most representative of this eradicable optimism over the inertia of the everyday; he is someone "whose very look said that the incident of a church service for Ivan Ilyich could not be a sufficient reason for infringing the order of the session—in other words, that it would certainly not prevent his unwrapping a new pack of cards and shuffling them that evening while a footman placed four fresh candles on the table: in fact, that there was no reason for supposing that this incident would hinder their spending the evening agreeably."[45] For Tolstoy it is the same run of things whose corrupting influence masks the radical indeterminacy of being by creating a semblance of human presence as a thinking thing finding itself among other thinking and simply extended things.

The sheer momentum of the kaleidoscopic frenzy in which one exists as a changing pattern of multiple engagements with things and people, an engagement directed primarily to achieve personal goals, is what allows ridding oneself of the burden of responsibility.[46] Instead of fully appreciating the significance of there always being a space for choosing at all, one chooses to be overwhelmed by the number of options she has and desirability of possible outcomes. That Ivan Ilyich dies at forty-five, "a member of the Court of Justice" is, for Tolstoy,

[44]Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* , 15.

[45] Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 11.

[46] I am aware of the resonances this word might have, and do not mean it as another mythologeme of the suppressive code of culture. Rather by responsibility I mean precisely one's attunement of the practice of a unique responding to one's project and situation.

only a physical confirmation of the truly wretched spiritual state into which he allows the inertia of the everyday to take him as he is striving to achieve yet another interruption.

Because Tolstoy's thematization of human oblivion through collective self-forgetfulness by way of constant switching among various activities, as well as his thematization of the necessary yet often lethal role of the influence of background practices over one's personal project of existing are both prominently present in chapter one, we now have to consider the role of the narrative interruption in how chapter one stands in relation to the rest of the text. Other than a profound observation that death is a unique phenomenon and that it is available to the living as something mediated through the cultural practices whose purpose is to diffuse, through however complex a system of signification, the mysterious substitution of the existing human being with the rapidly decomposing physical body, chapter one's position of radical distance from the story is also Tolstoy's self-conscious positioning of it in between the two literary paradigms within the Russian tradition to which we could broadly refer to as classical and modernist. By singling out subjective experience and suggesting that our grasp of reality is conceptual through and through, many, by no means all, works of modernism, whether or not their authors held any nuanced ontological and aesthetic views, posited the artist's self as the highest expression of the self-moving form. Insofar as human beings could exist as self-creating projects, God was made Man and Man God.

If chapter one by itself is how the story could have been written, the contrast between it and the rest of text is exactly Tolstoy's interruption, his halting of the vogue for the assertion of subjectivity that will come into bloom in the first third of the twentieth century. Tolstoy's artistic position is made all the more subtle by his phenomenological approach to the medium-related possibilities for the perpetuation of the two sets of paradigm-related values. And it seems

that he was particularly against the type of thinking that made inference from the fact that Christianity became a first truly global system of temporality, suggesting that Jesus was only a precursor to a long list of similar technologies, all of which, after having originated in an individual knower could become a global know-how. Christ was not and could not be a simple but confused intuition of a zero in a Cartesian system of coordinates or a historically contingent observer. The relativistic pull Tolstoy could undoubtedly discern in European art circa 1880s made all the more clear the dual danger of losing man as a subjectivity in the world, which could either take place through his succumbing to radical skepticism of scientific explanation or through falling under the spell of the solipsistic annihilation of the world, of which individual consciousness was always capable. What Tolstoy convincingly shows is that put side by side the two takes on the world in their incongruence give a much more truthful account of the complexity of human being-in-the-world.

It is as if Tolstoy first offers the reader to consider a short story that posits death as an infinitely remote phenomenon obscured by layers of discourse, and then presents a conventional chronological narrative, which too can be read in a stand-alone mode, in which the reader has access to the inner universe of the protagonist, within which a human gasping for meaning and significance is elevated to the level of the universal while retaining its connection to a wholly individual situation of Ivan's life. Tolstoy's conclusion is clear: authorial access and a detailed rendering of his observations of the inner world of the protagonist, however naïve or authoritarian this narrative's epistemological presupposition may seem to today's reader, can only be supplemented, not supplanted, by one or more external, "objective" points of view. And yet the sheer multiplicity of narrative perspectives can do little to bring the reader to the real protagonist of the story that can only be Truth itself.

For Tolstoy, the multiplicity of interacting perspectives that are always involved in a description of a unique situation attests not so much to the ontological primacy of the pluralist view of the world, whose only mode of existence this dispersal into the multiple subjective viewpoints, however substantiated, each individual and unique, may be, but suggest that the world might have a source that fully transcends it.[47] It also suggests that the fullest understanding of the exact fit of the subjectivity in question with those of others might be glimpsed in the refraction of the protagonist's actions via multiple subjective narratives. This would allow to uncover some of the protagonist's innermost motives, without necessarily suggesting a wholly skeptical viewpoint.

To do this most effectively Tolstoy creates a system of correspondences between macro- and microcosms. This he has already done in *Anna Karenina* (1875-77) in which he chooses the railroad imagery as a symbol for the interconnectedness of everything in the world, and the paradoxical relationship in which the laws of nature and those of society as second nature stand, particularly when it comes to the different patterns of narrative framing with which the novel abounds.[48] The railroad imagery in *Anna Karenina* is multidimensional. It supplies a metaphor of the moving location of the personal "where" through which the protagonist delivers herself into the world of events (the train on which Anna meets Vronsky). Yet insofar as the moving train is associated with the notion of momentum, as a force into which a physical body is turned as a

[47] We could alternatively use the term "cosmic weave" here to suggest that there is something that secures the very possibility if co-existence and interaction of these viewpoints. This ultimate source of everything is then what secures the ultimate horizon for the possibility of the narrative perceptivity in culture and human personality. The ever differentiated multiplicity of the world far from striking Tolstoy as an ontological fact pointing to the presence of some deity also existing as in the human form as a difference that keeps differentiating itself, pointed to another equally salient fact of that multiplicity existing at all, which fact seemed for Tolstoy to require God's presence in the world.

[48] For more on framing in Tolstoy see Amy Mandelker's excellent *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, Women Question, and Victorian Novel* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1994) and Vladimir Alexandrov's *Limits of Interpretation: The Meanings of Anna Karenina* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 2004).

moving mass that has both direction and magnitude, it suggests a certain conflict between private and public.

Every *individual* human project is subject to reason as much as it is to its own emotions and desires. It is impossible without the ever-present actuality of the faceless matrix of normativity, or the realm of the social, necessary for the continued intelligibility of the world, or the *universal*. Written over a decade later, *Ivan Ilyich* features a more nuanced account of the tragic fall of the protagonist to the de-individualizing power of cultural momentum. This momentum shows personal fall not as a possibility inherent in the secular world, but as an unavoidable state of being of the individual human project, who cannot withstand the creative intensity of the self as a continuous recreation of the world and chooses instead to be carried by the multiple currents of the average understanding, whose primary mode of being is abstraction that needs not be bothered with the particulars. Tolstoy does this without demonizing culture as a fall into the untruth, but suggests that in the absence of a system of core values, there is a serious danger of turning the totality of what has been collectively achieved by humanity, into a mere multiplicity of means of differentiating one's desires through inscribing them within multiple systems of differential signification, the pattern of whose ever-changing hierarchy a given culture can be said to be. The code is as threatening as is the increasing narrowing of the human into a functional range of what today would be called subject positions. It is rendered as threatening because the chronological narrative of Ivan Ilyich's life shows this thingly dispersal of the self, shows its spiritual death as actually happening on an account of Ivan Ilyich's utmost desires.

During his formative years Ivan Ilyich never opens himself up to fully experience life: "All the enthusiasms of childhood and youth passed without leaving much trace on him; he

succumbed to sensuality, to vanity, and latterly among the highest classes to liberalism, but always within limits which his instinct unfailingly indicated to him as correct."[49] In the absence of life experience the unfailing instinct of this kind can only be the voice of average, de-individualized understanding of what one does.[50] Heeding to this voice is a self-directed course for uprooting all sense of individuality, for living in blind conformity to the rigid matrix of "what is done" is nothing other than reducing the complexity of one's particular situation for the sake of its safe interpretation by the Other, whose vigilant eye accompanies us in everything we do. In a similar vein he attends to the sensual pleasures of life in the beginning of his career, still in his early twenties. In debauchery Ivan Ilyich manages to remain immoral in the most moral way: "all this was done was done with such a tone of good breeding that no hard names could be applied to it. "Il faut que jeunesse se passe." It was all done with clean hands, in clean linen, with French phrases, and above all among people of the best society and consequently with the approval of the people of rank."[51] Tolstoy exposes this take on morality as the mere behavioral consistency with which the prevalent ideologems of polite society are employed by its members in a variety of situations, but which in itself is bereft of any value other than functional utility.

The sly solicitousness of the crushing momentum with which the run of things paralyzes the very faculty of practical reason becomes clear in the formalism with which Ivan approaches

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[49] Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 17.

[50] Heidegger describes the effect of the invisible, but always present eyes of the other that are always looking. This is what he says in relation to one's sense of responsibility "The One is there amidst everywhere, but in such a manner that it has always stolen away whenever Dasein (the individual human project) presses for a decision. Yet because the One presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability. The One can, as it were, manage to have 'itself' constantly invoking it. It can be answerable for everything most easily, because it is not someone who needs to vouch for anything. It 'was' always the 'they' who did it and yet it can be said that it has been 'no one'. In Dasein's everydayness the agency through which most things come about is one of which we must say that 'it was no one'.
Thus the particular Dasein in its everydayness is disburdened by the One [which] accommodates Dasein if Dasein has any tendency to take things easily and make them easy," in *Being and Time*, 165.

[51] Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 18.

his work in which "especially in his examinations, he very soon acquired a method of eliminating all considerations irrelevant to the legal aspect of the case, and reducing even the most complicated case to the form in which it would be presented on paper only in its externals, completely excluding his personal opinion of the matter, while above all observing every prescribed formality."[52] Tolstoy's description of the increasing toll of this blind behavioral momentum, with which the banality of evil reveals itself, establishes a parallel narrative to Ivan Ilyich's illness over whose diagnosis doctors never concur. The problem of chapter one, then, also points to the disconnect between the spiritual and the material as well as to the problem of establishing the temporal boundaries demarcating exactly when Ivan Ilyich falls ill.

Tolstoy suggests an alternative narrative of how Ivan Ilyich's falls ill. And this alternative ending has at least two readings. The first one stresses how his gradual loss of touch with the spiritual element comes to an end when he himself first reduces his life aspirations to the realm of the material and then comes to fully embody this very realm after he dies. The second interpretation stresses the trajectory of a gradual loss of his materialistic orientation and of a rekindling of the connection with the spiritual both of which the disease brings.

According to this alternative narrative, then, Ivan Ilyich dies for the first time, when after his marriage, he begins to live through the thoughts of the future apartment about which he and his wife are dreaming. Ivan Ilyich's anticipated future is bereft of the network of dynamic relations with the world but is thingly throughout: "On falling asleep he pictured to himself how the reception-room would look. Looking at the yet unfinished drawing-room he could see the fireplace, the screen, the what-not, the little chairs dotted here and there, the dishes and plates on the walls, and the bronzes, as they would be when everything was in place. He was pleased by the thought of how his wife and daughter, who shared his taste in this matter, would be

[52] Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 19-20.

impressed by it."[53] In so far as the anticipated reaction of his wife and daughter only serves to confirm his set of criteria behind his esthetic judgments, they become a mere *extension* of himself, two *things* that reflect himself as a particular configuration of *things* that are not yet. In so doing Ivan Ilyich relegates the human power of self-determination to the objective realm.

The emptiness of radical indeterminacy which is human essence in view of the uniquely human way of being in the world via existence is substituted by a representation of a collection of physical object whose actualization in the here and now his life is supposed to become. The real death of Ivan Ilyich happens when he recognizes in the diagnosis of the famous doctor he comes to visit, his own method of approaching individual cases. This recognition is a recognition of entrusting the burden of situational interpretation and the responsibility lying therewith to the average everyday gravitational pull of institutional functioning. This recognition is the recognition of human culture reduced to the sum total of variegated institutional mechanisms, each helping to reduce the complexity of any situation to a list of predicates, every one of which a cognitive judgment could put under this or that category. What Ivan Ilyich sees during the visit is how human spirit is made dead through the reduction of human subjectivity to yet another physical mechanism whose aggregate the world is. In recognizing himself in the act of the ontological reduction his doctor undertakes, he also recognizes the fact that for quite a while he himself has already been dead.

I.6. *Ivan Ilyich*: In Search of Lost Self

Our reading of Tolstoy's text has discovered the pivotal role of the narrative break separating chapter one from the rest of the story. We have shown that as a compositional solution

[53] Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 27.

it serves well not only to suggest the discursive framing of the limit situation known as death, thus preventing its full experience as foundational for human life as an individual creative project, Dasein, whose ontological weave contains ungroundedness and interruptibility, but also to highlight the importance of switching among different activities which occurs as a series of interruptions whose rapid sequence and sheer diversity as if seek to cover up the ultimate interruption to come.

Apart from expressing Tolstoy's position toward the onset of the subjective clearly discernible in European art around the 1880s, the stand-alone mode of chapter one invites us to such a reading of the story which ponders how reading it alone measures up with reading of it together with the narrative tracing of the inner history of the character, the news of whose death is presented as a fact each recipient approaches only from a point of view of utility. Chapter one's special status allows Tolstoy to convey the temporality of individual life as a unique system of experiencing the world.

We have taken Tolstoy's decision to incorporate the descriptive technique what we would identify with the phenomenological method in *Ivan Ilyich* as a clue to the possibility of an alternative narrative of Ivan Ilyich's dying. This alternative narrative is centered on the growing presence of the thingly pull of the world in Ivan Ilyich's creative project. His understanding of life as a project, whose multiple relational networks interact in a way wholly different from the interactions between things and his understanding of temporality are both skewed toward such an understanding of being that forgets its fundamental difference from that of another entity present-at-hand, a physical thing that instead of being used according to its function is merely looked at, and no more. This happens because Ivan Ilyich falls into the inauthentic mode of

existence, entrusting himself to the comforting inertia of the average understanding of the world the one [*das Man*] always has to offer.

Ivan Ilyich seeks the most comfortable adjustment to the exigencies of the cultural practices into which he is thrown by birth and not to their modification in view of the unique interpretation of the Situation of his life-project. Death as an impossibility of any further possibility suggests that this creative freedom is open to him. The existential reality of death is attested by the call of conscience uncovering the nullity of one's self-determination. Ivan Ilyich, nevertheless, remains within the grasp of the fragmented temporality that posits future as a still outstanding succession of frames "to be experienced." Such an understanding of human temporality overlooks the potency of the narrative component inherent in the very ontological structure of the existential project. Yet this structure is transparent in its acts of self-determination as the meaning-making power of the multiple connections between life events and how they are grouped in the eternal now.

This oversight leads Ivan Ilyich to seeing "more" and "more" of "the present" grow out of the past. That is, instead of thinking of the past as having weight and significance only in relation to one's anticipated state of being, he thinks the past as the origin to which many of the structures found in his "now" are linked as causally determined. Thus no effort is made to reinterpret what appears as the external situational necessity in terms of its relation to what appears as the internal situational component; instead, by simply equating the two, he answers the existential why with a gesture toward a series of past events all of which supposedly preclude any other outcome in the here and now. Ivan Ilyich does not recognize himself in his own past and his future in his present.

While Tolstoy and Heidegger seem to agree on the lethal hypnosis of what the latter calls the "inauthentic mode" which Dasein has to withstand to become a master of the future, it seems that for Tolstoy the death of a forty-five year-old bureaucrat is emblematic of the spiritual corruption of Russian society, one ushered by the advance of the secular culture with its emphasis on the individual freedom of being in the world. Self-determination is capable of leading to such a state of affairs which one of Dostoevsky's character aptly dubbed a time when "everything is permitted." While Tolstoy himself never uses these words, his choice of the epigraph for Anna Karenina "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," which frames the tragic fall of the character who dares to go against tradition seems to suggests that he did not think that tradition should simply be cast aside as world-changers looked for new ways to do things. His choice to omit the "sayeth the Lord" part of would otherwise be a quotation from Romans 12:19 suggests this much. One way to interpret this significant omission is to render it as "If you forget God, you will kill yourself." What would act as the ultimate horizon of intelligibility and meaning in the world where "everything is permitted"? And what, according to Tolstoy, one's awareness of the ontologically authenticated right to self-authorship could and would do to an individual who did not fear God?

In his investigation of how primordial time can temporalize itself as infinite, Heidegger notes the essential relational structure of datability [*Datierbarkeit*] that underlies such temporal markers such as "then," "earlier," and so on. By relating a state of affairs to a designated instant, the relating entity, Dasein, expresses itself as being amidst what it describes, thus, addressing itself interpretatively to the above state of affairs. This bringing to the fore from the darkness of all there is "based upon a making-present and is possible only as such"[54] and in it the ecstatical character of the present lies. As an on-going individual datability of itself in the world, Dasein

[54] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 460.

can be seen as an individual point, radiating into a multiplicity of event-episodes in an interpretative making-present which collapses back into unity with any other such interpretative act. The children of Chronos need no Christian God. They are godlike because their real self is a narrative self. Tolstoy would simply think of this as a bad story.

It is clear that in the ontology Heidegger has to offer, there is no place for Christian God and that the future reconciliation with the divine essence this ontology promises stands in opposition to the paradigm of the eternal mystical return to the origin. Yet one's true understanding of God's goodness, seen as the very possibility of free-determination overflowing into the realm of the actual from the realm of the merely possible, would require as the only positive program for action nothing short of a divine revelation. If all that was internalized was only the logical consistency of Aristotelian metaphysical notions, but not the actual experience of one's mystical participation in the divine, a more likely option was the path of existential excess, the path characterized by the unbridled self-affirmation in which one's recognition of her mortality serves as a license to pursue the infinite in the realm of sensual things. And this strategy already had a name: nihilism.

For Tolstoy the increasing secularization of Russian society in the late nineteenth century was bound to result in the spiritual corruption of people like Ivan Ilyich. In the absence of the traditional system of values the possibility of narrative re-creation of oneself in a unique way was for Tolstoy a possibility whose divine origin could never be approached, let alone privatized. The dying Ivan Ilyich wants to ask for forgiveness (*prosti*) but whispers a request to let him pass through (*propusti*). This is significant because his misspeaking points to the overlooked potential of forgiving as a narrative reconfiguration of reality whose practice is legitimated by the religious bond a community shares. As Hanna Arendt tells us "only through

this constant mutual release from what they do, can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new."[55] Central to Christianity the institute of forgiveness as an act it is

> the exact opposite of vengeance. Which acts in the form of re-acting against an original trespassing, whereby far from putting an end to the consequences of the first misdeed, everybody remains bound to the process, permitting the chain reaction contained in every action to take its unhindered course. In contrast to revenge, which is the natural, automatic reaction to transgression and which because of the irreversibility of the action process can be expected and even calculated, the act of forgiving can never be predicted; it is the only reaction that acts in an unexpected was and thus retains, though being a reaction, something of the original character of action. Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.[56]

The paradox of forgiveness is in that the logic of the narrative reframing of the situation, by which the culprit is disengaged from what he has done, is rarely looked at as what has self-determination as a ground of possibility. If I can elevate my relationship with another to a new level by changing the frame of causal relations within which I might place a variety of life events, I can surely forgive myself not in the sense of self-eradicating the guilt I might feel for doing such and such, but by understanding that forgiveness is possible as the very change within the networks of principle narrative connections that my life-story is. And this narrative is what makes me what I am.

Forgiveness, then, is an ethical action pointing to the self-transcending essence of human mind and to narrativity as a form in which the world worlds itself in its conceptual grasp. As Julia Kristeva eloquently says:

> Forgiveness emerges first as the setting up of a form. It has the effect of an acting out, a doing, a *poiesis*. Giving shape to relations between insulted and humiliated individuals—group harmony Giving shape to signs—harmony of the work, without exegesis, without explanation, without

[55] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 240-241.

[56] Ibid.

> understanding. Technique and art. The "primary" aspect of such an action clarifies why it has the ability to reach, beyond words and intellects, emotions and bruised bodies.[57]

But in thus ontologizing forgiveness Kristeva herself narratively detaches its "essence" from the historical and religious contexts from which this practice is inseparable. All the more interesting is that Jesus himself holds that not only God has the power to forgive, but that this power did not stem from God.[58] He thus sees God more as rational formative principle operating in the world. Mortals have access to this principle in a way other than being mere vehicles to carry it.

Tolstoy's choice to separate chapter one from the rest of the story, as well as his choice to provide a detailed phenomenological description of the self-imposed activity of switching among multiple activities, in which people in their daily life continue to "fall," as well as a detailed description of how spiritual corruption happens in a secular world with its thingly pull—all seem to suggest that he has an unique answer to the questions of personal responsibility, authenticity, and religious faith. While he sees the narrative curvature of an individual life possible in view of its finitude, thus as a necessary condition for a life worth living, he thinks it way too limited to approach Christian narrative as a late modification of the philosophical account of the eternal self-differentiating mind of the Aristotelian system.

Tolstoy's answer to the first alternative of secular understanding of God is clear. My being-in-the-world is experienced as the flowing individual narrative differentiation of that which from the start reveals itself as an astonishing intelligible diversity. It is a fact. But from the fact that a there is number of ways to construe the relational configuration of forms comprising one's thought *does not* follow that completely ruled out is a possibility of a radical epistemological break between that fact *that something is* and the fact *that everything that is, is*

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[57] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 206-207.

[58] Arendt*, The Human Condition,* 239.

always a something. When I open my eyes the multitude is always there, yet from this fact of experience alone, it is in no way clear whether the "is" of this multitude is merely an abstraction from the determinate concrescence as which this multitude appears in experience, or a fundamental act that secures the "is" of any determination as actual and not merely potential.

Tolstoy the thinker is ready to define God as the irrefutable fact of there being existence at all, if by existence is meant actual, not possible being. As a believer, he takes radical uncertainty over any possibility of coming to faith through the rational deduction of the Divine as a corollary of the limited creative freedom that man can experience. And no matter what the narrative intensity of the doubt is, there is no way of knowing when the light will come. As he himself said "God is that without which it is impossible to live."[59]

[59] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 23:46.

Second: ***Zangezi*** **and the Odyssey of the Russian Poetic Spirit**

II. 0. *Zangezi* and the *Phenomenology of the Russian Poetic Spirit*

This chapter presents a comparative reading of G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Velimir Khlebnikov's supertale [*сверхновесть*] *Zangezi* (1921),[60] the name of whose narrative hero, I provisionally take to be, in part, an anagram of the German word *Seingeschichte* (history of being),[61] in part, an allusion to the famous protagonist of Frederic Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883/91).[62] Approaching the intricacies of *Zangezi*'s narrative structure and thematic range from the narrative and philosophic standpoint of the *Phenomenology* is fully warranted given the importance Russian Silver Age artists placed on the suggestibility and the world-changing power of the word [*λόγος*]. For one thing, Hegel thought reality as inclusive of a self-enclosed totality of discursive frameworks, each based on the converging power of the word and having to be raised to the standpoint of historically actual

[60] Unless otherwise indicated I am using Paul Schmidt's translation of *Zangezi*.

[61] I do not mean Seingeschichte the way Heidegger uses this term to designate the ontological "fall" of being in western philosophy and the trivialization of the philosophy of presence that followed it. Seingeschichte is meant, first and foremost, as the history of being whose role in Khlebnikov's metaphysical system plays nothing other than human language.

[62] See Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal's *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2004) for an account that reconstructs the history of how Russian poets, philosophers, and political activists had been creatively responding to Nietzsche's ideas which fact influenced the nature of esthetic and political claims and resolutions voiced by various representatives, among others, of Symbolism, Futurism, Nietzschean Christianity and Nietzschean Marxism. In chapter three we shall discuss in more detail the ways in which Hegel's two key notions (Absolute Knowledge and Absolute Idea) were fundamental to Marx and his dream of informational transparence elimination the labor-capital binary internationally and Nietzsche and his idea of individual creative freedom as a continuous struggle to breathe life into the world of culture as a totality of dead universals amidst which we all always find ourselves and into which every single form of an individuated act immediately passes the second it reaches completion.

formation before undergoing further logical concretion.[63] Khlebnikov's anti-historicism, on the other hand, is well known. As I will show in this chapter, the manner of the poetic word's journey in time, as it is conceived in *Zangezi,* is crucial to Khlebnikov's understanding of the logic underlying world history. This position reveals a significant influence of the still popular interpretation of the *Phenomenology* as God's journey to consciousness through history that culminates in some kind of perfect unity named Absolute Knowledge [*absolute Wissen*].

I argue that Khlebnikov polemicizes with Hegel's progressive model of human history by granting the select historical formations (e.g. gods) the ontological status of Platonic ideas. The triumph over death that in *Zangezi* takes place in the Plane Twenty One is a triumph of a future world-historical individual freely choosing how much material from each of the twenty-one plane-formations is to converge in his here and now. I conclude my comparative reading of *Zangezi* and the *Phenomenology*, by looking at Khlebnikov's estrangement of the analogy underlying the structure of the subject in his work. Khlebnikov conceives events from the world chronicle as partitioned into frames of a single film reel. Combining material from each of the frames comprising the film of world history allows for the experiential singularity of the observer approach history as a free dialogue of the past with the future. The consciousness of the beholder is the projector displaying history on the screen of reality. God appears as an entity continuously recreating itself in multiple configurative readings of the past by individual artists as well as artistic communities.

A quick glance at the structure of the *Phenomenology* is now in order before tackling the nuances of Khlebnikov's poetic historiosophy in *Zangezi* as well as the story of how individual representatives of Russian poetic logos figure in the narrative of its journey to the standpoint of

[63] This is only true of the last three sections of the *Phenomenology*: Spirit, Religion, and Absolute Knowledge.

Absolute Knowledge, the notion of the ultimate control over reality achieved through the power creative ideas can have over life.

II.1. Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Khlebnikov's *Zangezi*: A Bird's Eye View

Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology* is to provide a dialectical deduction of a standpoint from which to write a system of speculative logic. The book has eight sections: i) Sense-certainty; ii) Perception; iii) Understanding; iv) Self-Consciousness; v) Reason; vi) Spirit; vii) Religion; viii) Absolute Knowledge. In the language of Khlebnikov we could say that it has eight planes. The dialectical progression starts from the point of view of Sense-Certainty, a position of the philosophical observer who is merely aware of the ever moving limit enclosing what his consciousness confronts in an act of knowing, but not more. The dialectical progression in the *Phenomenology* culminates in Absolute Knowledge, a position of the philosophical observer, who is aware not only of the historicity of human life, but also of the fact that a system of speculative philosophy has been actualized through the work of history, and that the minimum set of categories structuring the human subject, which human personality comprises as God's ultimate form of otherness, is yet to be presented.

In (i) Sense-certainty the investigation of forms of consciousness begins with a hypothesis that no conceptual supplement needs to be provided to what one already experiences in the here and now. The minimal ontological unit is thus nothing more than an independent something coming forth to meet perception as a separate, independent whole. But this ostensibly pure movement of differentiation with no further specification is more than a state of cognitive awareness: it is perception. To be intelligible this ontological unit must be determined as a something. This something has to appear in a way other than the indication of the fact that the

boundaries of the multiple regioning limits we experience in the here and now are moving. This means that an immediate knowing of any "this" is impossible, because the act of differentiation of anything, or by anyone, or by anyone of anything from multiple other unified fields that are "contextually adjacent," requires further specification of what is meant in the act articulating any "this." Thus the minimal possible level of differentiation has to have a form "one/many" to be intelligible. The simplest ontological configuration of this second-degree differentiation is, therefore, a [perceptible] thing with properties which we approach in (ii) Perception.

Having made our new ontological unit a thing with properties or one of many, we now face another problem. It is as follows. Unless we know how one thing with properties relates to other things with properties through what each of them can do, it is impossible for us to assign any properties to any enclosed region of space, signifying it as one thing. Because the boundaries of one thing now appear as determined by multiple patterns of its connection with other things we move to yet another level of epistemological resolution—that of (iii) understanding. It is so by virtue of the fact that the realization that we would not be able to differentiate a particular thing with properties from other things in its "environment"—unless we knew about the multiple patterns of its interaction with other things [*essences*]—implies that what we first took to be perceptible things must be primarily understood as "thought things" or functional positions within some contextual whole.

In (iii) Understanding we investigate how intelligible functional positions of "thought things" are determined. And sure enough another problem occurs. If our new things with properties are multiple relational networks whose boundaries are defined in interaction, we are back where we started, for what is it by virtue of which these networks neither mingle into one indeterminate network nor are they individuated into ontological units among which there is no

interaction at all? If we try to escape this difficulty by suggesting a further degree of differentiation amidst *essences* to which we may refer to as *event* (appearance) and which provides the minimum frame for our understanding of the functional interaction among these *essences*, the question immediately arises as to the criterion used to differentiate the single *event* frame from all other event frames. If we posit *law* (fact) as still a higher-order concept, the problem recurs, for we cannot explain why there isn't simply either one law of all laws or an infinite number of laws. The only law operant within the realm of understanding is one of the power to authenticate anything as *actually occurring*, to equate different aspects of the manifold with a certainty of a scientific fact, and thus to assign to it a different ontological status. *Essence* thus turns out to be the absolute identity of *actuality* and the *transcendental unity of apperception*, or self-consciousness.

The supposedly detached position of the mind that has been running up until now the phenomenological thought experiment aimed to describe multiple modes of differentiation happening within consciousness—thus operant already in the immediate knowing of sense-certainty—has reached a point where it must account for itself. It has to now admit that it's the mind of a living being, whose minimal interiority is its will projected into its environment as a series of acts through which it asserts itself as living. In other words the self-identity of multiple intelligible quanta with which we began our investigation has proved to be nothing short of the unity of self-consciousness as the condition of possibility that is prior to anything differentiated as *actual.*

What appears in the first three parts of the *Phenomenology* seen as an epistemological narrative, whose provisional hypothesis of what constitutes a minimal ontological unit gets more and more "concrete" as phenomenological description gets more nuanced, is easy to interpret in

a very different key. This interpretation is centered not so much on first providing a most general sketch of what is immediately given and then filling it in, but on the mythical narrative of consciousness' immanent development, which begins from the point of view of some Absolute Being to culminate in the position of a dialogical space-time as which the phenomenological observer comes to exists as the Universe and the Universe as the phenomenological observer. As we will shortly see this is exactly the interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, some aspects of which Khlebnikov chooses to creatively appropriate, subjecting it to a Platonic ontological modification, and some of which he chooses to playfully subvert.

That Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology* is centered on a dialectical reformulation of the minimal frame of what is already understood and must be accounted for in the description of the shape of consciousness is easy to show. Hegel's epistemic orientation is evident from his presupposing already some crucial structures of human knowing like memory, language, subjectivity, objectivity, culture, scientific community, paradigm and others. This is in perfect accord with the peculiarity of the method of investigation he employs in the *Phenomenology*: it is not a science of logic, nor is it a philosophy of either nature or spirit; it is rather a meticulous description of various modes of consciousness and hierarchies they form that we discover in a thought experiment which can be replicated in the here and now of any the *Phenomenology*'s readers.

The philosophic apprentice begins this thought experiment with the immediate certainty of what she knows to slowly accumulate the logical concreteness, which the starting point lacks. Throughout this journey a variety of ontological units (e.g. indexical, things, essences, potentiality and actuality, subjectivity, objectivity) as well as cognitive faculties (consciousness, self-consciousness, reason) supporting them are discovered. To Khlebnikov we now turn with an

eye not only on his mytho-poetic modification of the first three sections of the *Phenomenology* but also on his personal quest to overcome history through a discovery of a universal rational key to all its events. His thought experiment was very different than Hegel's ascent from abstract to concrete.

II.2. Khlebnikov's Platonic Rebellion against Historicism

A vision of finitude that had much currency in Russian Silver Age Culture was one that saw human finitude as an obstacle to be overcome by turning life into art and art into life.[64] The consensus among Khlebnikov scholars has been that the poet strove to get away from all totalizing accounts of history like the one often ascribed to Hegel[65] and saw it as originating in time that unfolded not in a straight line but in repetitive ways, moving "in waves of procession and recession, the crests and troughs representing similar and opposing forces."[66] Made a philosopher of history by the 1905 naval fiasco of Tsushinama, Khlebnikov wanted to unearth mathematical laws behind the chaos of historical forces, thus submitting it to reason so that human destiny could be won once and for all. Looking at *Zangezi*'s formal peculiarities in light of the polyphonic narrative of the *Phenomenology*, which Terry Pinkard

[64] See Aage A. Hansen-Löve, "Die antiapokalyptische Utopik des russischen Futurismus", *Russian Literature* XL-III (1996): 319-354; Jean-Claude Lanne, "Mesure du destin (sud'bomerie) et poesie chez V. Chlebnikov," Russian*, Croatian and Serbian, Czech and Slovak, Polish Literature* 55 (2004): 279-97 and his "L'histoire dans la pensée et l'œuvre de Xlebnikov," in *La Geste russe: Comment les Russes écrivent-ils l'histoire au XXe siècle?* ed. M.Weinstein (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2002) 137-169.

[65] See for example A.E. Kulinkovich, "Velimir Khlebnikov kak osnovopolozhnik novoi, 'ne-Gegelevoi' filosofii," in *Doski sud'by Velimira Khlebnikova: Tekst i konteksty*, eds. Nikolai Gritsanchuk, Nikita Sirotkin, Vladimir Feshchenko (Moscow: Tri Kvadrata, 2008), 191-217.

[66] Andrea Hacker and Ronald Vroon, "Velimir Khlebnikov's 'Perevorot vo Vladivsotoke': History and Historiography," *Russian Review* 60 (2001): 36-55.

rightly describes as Hegel's "most read, best known, and least understood work,"[67] should give us a more nuanced vision of Khlebnikov's philosophy of history, whose main protagonist is the Russian Poetic Spirit. In approaching the structure of the supertale as influenced by Hegel's narrative structure, I make as my point of departure the idea that the decision to isolate entire historical epochs in the form of a self-contained narrative plane which is always co-present with other planes-epochs has an openly anti-progressive character. Ironically, by stressing the freedom with which narrative planes of *Zangezi* appear together in the experiential "now" of the reader, as well as by trying to recreate the divine journey of the Russian poetic Spirit and thus deduct the grounds of its creative possibilities, Khlebnikov makes his take on the narrative journey of Russian logos all the more Hegelian. This so because in discussing the chapters preceding to the one on Religion, Hegel unequivocally states that

> As moments they are consciousness, self-consciousness, Reason and Spirit—Spirit, that is as immediate Spirit, which is not yet consciousness of Spirit. Their totality, taken together, constitutes Spirit in its mundane existence generally; Spirit as such contains the previous structure shapes in universal determinants, in the moments just named. Religion presupposes that these have run their full course and is their simple totality of absolute self. The course traversed by these moments is, moreover, in relation to Religion, not to be represented as occurring in Time. Only the totality of Spirit is in Time, and the Shapes, which are shapes of the totality of Spirit, display themselves in a temporal succession; for only the whole has a true actuality and therefore the form of pure freedom in the face of an other, a form which expresses itself as Time.[68]

In other words, Hegel says that in the *Phenomenology* historical analysis starts only in the chapter on Spirit, while everything preceding that chapter is a long dialectical deduction of the multiple epistemic frames, many of which, like positions of *subjectivity* and *objectivity*, have been in use, if without a proper philosophic justification, for a long time. The first five parts of the *Phenomenology*, then, can be said to be approaching forms of knowing from a trans-

[67] Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

[68] Hegel, *Phenomenology,* ¶679.

historical perspective; Khlebnikov's choice to switch to the transhistorical method of presentation in order to battle Hegelianism does remain within the narrative framework of the *Phenomenology*.

It is clear, then, that just as we are not to approach the *Phenomenology*'s system of categories as anything other than a reconstructed, and dialectically justified narrative describing multiple conditions of possibility for our fluid coping with things in the world, we are not to approach isolated planes in *Zangezi* as occurring in temporal succession; rather, language for Khlebnikov is the whole expressing itself as poetic Time.

Zangezi's twenty-one diverse planes span a wide range of artistic material from the Russian poetic tradition. This is evidenced by such different poetic ontologies of the world as opening up through the phenomenological description of the performance of what can be called is a pre-linguistic consciousness that appears as utterances of birds and gods in Planes One and Two, as well as those featuring a more sustained presentation of what Khlebnikov sees as poetic essence in a number of distinct and recognizable idiolects of artists like Fyodor Tiutchev, Evgenii Boratynskii, Alexander Blok, Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Osip Mandelshtam in Planes Thirteen, Fourteen, Sixteen, and Twenty. Understanding the centrality of the multiple seemingly autonomous planes of action, each embodying an ontological level of its own, for the overall structure of the work, is instrumental in our discerning in *Zangezi* a narrative dimension of a star-language [*звездный язык*] chronicle of the experience we should refer to as a journey of the Russian Poetic Spirit through a gallery of its shapes of knowing.[69]

[69]"Possible subtexts in the works of Velimir Xlebnikov remain largely unexplored. Results to date, coupled with what we know about Xlebnikov, suggest that his extensive reading did in fact shape, the content of many of his poems, prose tales, and dramatic works. Identifying subtexts may be even more difficult than has become the case with the Acmeist poets: material for his creative work comes from literature, folklore, myth, natural sciences.

This neither suggests that Khlebnikov either simply sought to furnish Hegel's vision of the journey of the " absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'"[70] with Russian historical and cultural material, nor points at the outright rejection of the popular Bildungsroman interpretation of the *Phenomenology,* construing it as a naïve account of progressive history of mankind, which contained within itself another a curious reframing of Apocalypse as Hegel's clearing way for his *Science of Logic* in which he would tackle nothing less than the exact succession of the thoughts of God before the creation. Rather, Khlebnikov's offers a method of revising history that is much more radical than the neat dialectical description of various patterns of progression and co-extension of different shapes [71] [*Gestalten*] of consciousness in human history. Where Hegel, as is widely believed, saw as a nexus of interconnected fundamental structures, each presupposing all others leading to it, and each taking place historically in some concrete form, and capable of recurring, Khlebnikov saw an unlimited freedom to recreate world, history, and language anew. God for him could never be reduced to the province of speculative thinking. God was freedom understood as a self-transcending creation inherent in the structure of the world. Yet the degree of determinacy needed for creation meant that finitude was always a part of creative infinity.

Moreover, Xlebnikov often considerably transforms such borrowings. To make matters worse, Xlebnikov's manuscripts and papers are fragmentary, chaotic, and frequently confusing, and contrast strikingly, for instance, with Blok's systemized autographs…Establishing the semantic function of subtexts used by Xlebnikov is no less difficult than identifying them. Many of Xlebnikov's works— particularly the lyrics—are distinguished by a "confusing plot", unmotivated composition, imagery of uncertain status, neologisms. Such elements often make it hard to formulate an overall interpretative framework within which one might account for a potential text or subtext," points out Henryk Baran in his "Xlebnikov and The History of Herodotous," *Slavic and East European Journal* 22,1 (1978): 30-34.

[70] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶177.

[71] A single narrative plane in *Zangezi* is thus also a configuration of the Russian Poetic Spirit in its journey.

In rendering human finitude a symbol of the antagonism between the spiritual and the material, Khlebnikov presents in *Zangezi* a narrative of what it means to be a poet in different times. To solve the riddle of being, to discover the laws of historical change, its diversity and unpredictability, Khlebnikov listens to the tales of death coming from artistic prophets and holy fools.

II.3. The Verbal and the Visual: Overcoming the Finitude of Language

Khlebnikov is one of the most innovative poets of the Russian avant-garde; his works resist convenient classification and membership under the rubrics of various artistic movements such as cubism, futurism, and cubo-futurism; it is much more difficult, if at all possible, to come up with a satisfactory definition of what these movements were in prose and poetry than in the visual arts; it is problematic to classify any work of art as belonging exclusively to one of the said movements if it contains material that could just as easily be put under the rubric of another movement. In the case of *Zangezi*, which is among Khlebnikov's latest works, this is especially true, for it can be seen as the culmination of his experiments in language and artistic thinking.[72] Programmatic collections, *Trap for Judges* (1910), and publications, "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" (1912), of different avant-garde groups, including the so-called cubo-futurists, in which Khlebnikov had participated as a co-author of "The Word as Such" and "The Letter as Such," strove to enrich the expressive potential of the verbal medium through neologisms and the amplification of the visual-auditory dimension of how the word is experienced, alive or on a printed page.

[72] Gerald Janecek, *The Look of Russian Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 145-146.

We get a glimpse into the nature of interaction between the visual and verbal media in the very beginning of *Zangezi* in the introduction to which the poet writes:

> A story [povest'] is made of words, the way a building is made of construction units. Equivalent words, like minute building blocks, serve as the construction units of a story.
> A superstory [sverkhpovest'], or supersaga [zapovest'], is made up out of independent sections [otryvkov], each with its special god, its special faith, and its special rule. To the old Muscovite question about one's orthodoxy, "How dost thou believe?" each section must answer independently of its neighbor. Each is free to confess its own particular faith. The building block of the supersaga, its unit of construction is the first- order narrative [povest' pervogo poriadka]. The supersaga resembles a statue made from blocks of different kinds of stone of varying colors – white for the body, blue for the cloak and garments, black for the eyes.
> It is carved from the varicolored block [glyb] of the Word, each with its own different structure [stroeniia]. Thus do we discover a new kind of operation [novyi vid raboty] in the realm of verbal art. Narrative is architecture composed of words [rasskaz est' zodchestvo iz slov]; an architecture composed of narratives is a "supersaga." The artist's building block is no longer the word, but the first-order narrative.[73]

Though the poet's comparison of his own text to a multicolored statue made of narratives, which in turn are composed from words, may seem a mere analogy in which a parallel is drawn between visual aspects of architectural design and artistic principles of textual composition, it reflects an innovative artistic practice of redefining the more traditional role of artistic texture (*faktura*) by both poets and painters from the international and Russian avant-garde scene, as well as the practice of turning *faktura* into one of their central aesthetic categories.[74]

Having shifted in their work the emphasis from the representational to conceptual, many avant-garde artists now turned to the study of material itself. This allowed to discover new ways in which human experience of space could be conceived. As a theme of artistic reflection *faktura* also changed the laws of artistic composition on the plane. It was now used to express the heretofore silenced aspect in any painting's real life: not only that it was always a composite of form and matter, but that it was a composite of two composites; to be fully actual one's artistic

[73] Velimir Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v. 2, 331.

[74] I. M. Sakhno, "Faktura slova v kubofuturizme," in *Russkii kubofuturizm*, ed. G. F. Kovalenko (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2002), 155.

vision had to find itself represented on some physical surface. Painters not only looked for correspondences between geometric shapes and colors, color tonalities and different levels of lamination, but they also introduced new materials such as newspaper clips, sawdust, and clay into their composition in order to heighten the intensity of human experience of texture and its multiple associations with sound or color.

The texture was not only associated with color, but also with various types of its movement and their relationship with spatial forms. In studying these correspondences, the painters tried to discover the spiritual nature of color. The texture was therefore also viewed as a vehicle for emotional qualities, which was at the same time a medium of aesthetic influence; it gave the beholder a new emotional experience as a result of perceiving novel combinations of the material, paint, and the surface of the painting itself. The concepts of "noise" and "sound" were because of this experimental technique added to the semantic field of "artistic texture." This is hardly, if at all, surprising: the idea of a correspondence between different sensory modalities (synesthesia) had been around since the times of Ancient Greece; avant-garde artists who worked with the visual media were quick to realize the expressive potential of their material. This rediscovery of texture allowed to reevaluate the ways color, form, material, and space related to one another in the compositions of Russian avant-garde artist: the visual element was now complemented by and inextricably entwined with the audio and tactile sensory modalities informing it.

The intense artistic collaboration between painters and poets of the Russian avant-garde scene in the beginning of the twentieth century led to a high degree of convergence among many of their artistic interests. Many avant-garde poets were profoundly influenced by the experiments with texture in which avant-garde painters were involved. In 1913 Kruchonykh and Khlebnikov

publish their manifest *The Word as Such* (Slovo kak takovoe) in which for the first time in the history of Russian avant-garde culture they consider texture as containing the linguistic properties of the textual fabrics, as well as its structure, qualities, and character.[75] Texture is seen as the linguistic fabrics of the text and its structural components, that is, it is seen as something "material"; it is also seen as the character and quality of the "beyonsense" word (*zaumnogo slova*) itself. The "beyonsense" language (*zaum*) features most extravagant neologisms, as well as numerous cases of incorrect and unusual usage. Among the innovations in the poetic texture are the practices of plastic deformation of grammar, semantics, meter and rhyme, orthography and typography, color and the typographic layout of the individual words and their letters.

The texture of the word is connected most intimately with the emotional, sensory perception of the word itself. On an analogy with materials used in the plastic arts, the word, too, is compressed and expanded, fragmented and randomly reassembled, its meaning made more opaque or lucid. But the plasticity of the word together with its fluidity invites another analogy - that of a living organism, whose psychological life allows to experience meanings, forms and sounds it itself produces. The concept of the word's fluidity is tied with that of color fluidity that conceives of the color of an object as based on a unique emission of a geometric body. Another factor affecting the concept of fluidity is the constant relational dynamics between the word and its "object-based nature" that could be altered through a series of multiple deformations. Virtually all avant-garde experiments with the word allowed both to create new words and discover ways to work with the very texture of poetic and prosaic texts; and virtually all these experiments are firmly rooted in the groundbreaking strategies of the avant-garde artists working with various visual media.

[75]Sakhno, "Faktura slova v kubofuturizme," 157.

While *Zangezi'*s Introduction has suggested some ways in which to contextualize Khlebnikov within the artistic activity of the Russian avant-garde, a more detailed and specific examination of selected passages from the poet's "supersaga" is now in order to appreciate the relationship between the verbal and the visual together with some other formal and thematic peculiarities in which this work abounds.

Plane One features a selection of different birds' morning speeches addressed to the sun. These utterances are presented as multiple series of words that despite having nothing to do with human language constitute an example of natural or bird language, however impressionistic such an application of a term may be from a point of view of formal linguistics:

> *Chaffinch (from the very top of the fir tree, puffing out its silver throat)* Peet pate tveechan! Peet pate tveechan! Peet pate tveechan!
> *Yellow Bunting (quietly, from the top of a walnut tree)* Kree-tee-tee-tee-tee-ce- tsuey tsuey-tsuey-tsuey-ssueyee.[76]

Though the calls of these birds may seem a purely onomatopoetic record of the empirical observations of ornithologists, of whom Khlebnikov was one, they are far from being transparent since the onomatopoetic was shown to be complicated by semantic subsystems.[77] I agree with Ronald Vroon for two reasons. First, stage directions indicate the movement and mood of different birds and this may be relevant to a choice of emotionally dependent utterance, of which there can be several, and all of which are typical for a bird in question. Second, all the birds vary in how many letter strings they produce, how many letters each string comprises, and how many times each string is repeated in different birds' speeches to the rising sun. Janacek's comment

[76] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v.2, 332.

[77] Ronald Vroon, *Velimir Xlebnikov's Shorter Poems: A Key to the Coinages* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 187.

that these utterances cannot be considered as proper *zaum,* for all the cries can be empirically recorded and ultimately deciphered and codified by humans,[78] seems to me to beside the point.

In Plane One Khlebnikov neither writes *zaum*, nor presents an example of some universal language; rather, he shows language in its pristine, primeval form in which linguistic units are the most accurate and organic approximations of emotional experience and the distance between the signifier and the signified is not yet obscured by civilizational influence. By contextualizing the letters of human alphabet in bird's speeches, Khlebnikov is detaching the verbal medium from its conventional framework, the existence in which leads human language to its ossification and slow death.

Birds' speeches allow Khlebnikov to tap into the natural laws that define the relationship between language and nature; the poet uses the word and its letters in Plane One to establish a dimension of musicality, accentuating the beauty of this often forgotten, but inherent aspect of human language. If avant-garde's painters strive to link concepts of sound and noise with those of color and form, Khlebnikov tries to reestablish the relationship between sounds and words with their letters.

The notion of the inherent musicality of language is further reinforced in Plane Two where different gods speak with one another. Consider this short excerpt featuring the address of one of the gods:

> *Veles* Broovoo*roo* roo-roo-*roo*!
> P*ee*ts *ts*ape seh seh *seh*!
> Broovoo *roo*roo roo-roo-*roo*!
> *See*tse, *lee*tsee tsee-tsee-*tsee*!
> Painch, panch, painnch! [79]

[78] Gerald Janecek, *The Look of Russian Literature: Avant-garde visual experiments, 1900-1930* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 146.

[79] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v.2, 334.

Gods' language, full of rhythmic and sonic patterns as well as sounds resembling children's counting rhymes together with some elements of folkloric speech attributed to mermaids and witches may very well be an example of this very dimension of musicality.[80] Just like the language of the birds in Plane One, the language of the gods in Plane Two has little to do with human language. It is way too repetitive. But the nature of this repetitiveness is curious. Each line represents a distinct phonological entity in which the repeating consonants function to establish its identity; line-to-line variations in the patterning of these repeated syllables is what creates an impression of a complete utterance.[81] I disagree with Vroon's interpretation that gods in Plane Two are trying to utter their own names together with those of other gods to define their own essence, while every god is a word trying to pronounce itself.[82] No sufficient evidence in support of this interpretation can be found in the text. We simply have no way of knowing what gods say to each other in their addresses. If anything Khlebnikov seems to heed the warning Socrates issues in the *Cratylus*, Plato's only dialogue on language and intelligibility:

> The first and finest line of investigation, which as intelligent people we must acknowledge, is this, that we know nothing about the gods themselves or about the names they call themselves—although it is clear that they call themselves by true ones.[83]

And yet, Khlebnikov clearly wants to get to the level of verbal expression at which he would see the laws according to which the recombination of vowels and consonants begets human language. So doing will allow a glimpse into the now lost precision of the verbal approximation of emotional and psychological states, which the primeval language was once thought to have. Khlebnikov wants nothing less than language before its fall into culture.

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[80] Janecek, *The Look of Russian Literature*, 146.

[81] Ronald Vroon, *The Structure of a Literary Process: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Felix Vodicka* (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1982), 584.

[82] Vroon, *The Structure of a Literary Process*, 187-188.

[83] Plato, *Cratylus*, tr. by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1998), 400E.

Truly remarkable is the poet's ability to present gods' language so that it appears to possess syntactic properties, which is what gives the reader a sense of each line being a complete utterance in absence of such intelligible units to which it is common to refer as words. This was congenial with the line of enquiry avant-garde artists also pursued across various visual media, frequently juxtaposing in their collages several unrelated objects, which by virtue of their spatial proximity would form multiple networks of conceptual relations. Khlebnikov is playing along the border of sign's legibility at the syntactic level: he is trying to arrive at a minimum level of phoneme organization an utterance has to have to be experienced as complete. Like Cubist painters he is looking for a minimum level of semantic articulation a shape has to perform to be read as a sign.

Khlebnikov's experiments with the verbal medium not only mirror a set of experimental operations used by the avant-garde artists to explore the secrets of visual texture. They are directed at discovering a visual dimension in language and speech. In Plane Eight the poet introduces several star-language letters that are defined in terms of movement and space:

> V means the revolution of one point around (circular motion).
> L is the cessation of fall, or motion generally by a plane lateral to a falling point.
> R is a point that penetrates a transverse area.
> P is the rapid movement of one point away from another, and hence of many points, a multitude of points, form a single point; the expansion of volume.
> M is the dispersion of volume into infinitely smaller parts.
> S is the movement of points out from one motionless point: radiation.
> K is the encounter and hence the halt of many moving points in one motionless point. Hence the ultimate meaning of K is rest, immobilization.
> KH is a surface the serves to shield one point from another point moving toward it.
> CH is a hollow volume whose void contains a different body. Hence a bent or curved shield.
> Z is the reflection of a ray from a mirror. The angle of incidence is equal to the angle of reflection (vision).
> G is the movement of a point at right angles to the fundamental line of movement, away from it. Hence height.[84]

[84] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v.2, 344.

Having established several spatial and dynamic properties of star-language letters, Khlebnikov creates a system of correspondences between human experience of space and the elemental units of language. Brought to the foreground are some essential characteristics of the words lost in history. The word containing one of these letters is used in reference to an object or a phenomenon based on the spatial and dynamic properties of a given letter, e.g. the word laziness because of the letter "L," on this view, receives such an essential quality as "cessation of movement." Yet the above table of correspondences used to describe the star-language alphabet also suggests a different way of sound articulation, one that reflects the spatio-dynamic properties of both the letter and the word containing it. Janecek, who thinks that these definitions are based on a kind of spatiality derivative from oral articulation, is being unnecessarily reductive.[85] This is all the more so, given that one of Zangezi's followers says in Plane Six that "Alphabet is the echo of space" ("Пространство звучит через азбуку"). Moreover, Zangezi himself makes a similar statement in Plane Eight—"Speech is an edifice built out of blocks of space. Particles of speech are parts of movements. Words do not exist; there are only movements in space and their parts—points and areas."[86] Let us now turn to a more detailed analysis of these analogical systems.

We find an extensive poetic elaboration of the above two statements in Plane Seven in Zangezi's description of the 1917 Revolution and the Civil war. The multiple events that took place during that time are described not as people—but as letter-oriented. It is as if these latter were some metaphysical elements akin to earth, fire, air, water, and ether. The revolutionary

[85] Janecek, *The Look of Russian Literature*, 148.

[86] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v.2, 344-345.

turmoil appears as a series of oppositions between R and L, as well as K and G. The dynamics of historical change is reflected as a succession of words containing these letters:

> K in chains, in vain in chains (*I tshchetno K neslo okovy*)[87]
> While G and R collide in combat
> G falls. Cut down by R,
> And R now lies at the feet of L![88]

K in this song becomes an embodiment of suppressive, ultra-conservative politics of the old regime, some supporters of which fought the Bolsheviks under Kolchak:

> when K resounded in Kolchak.
> K has knotted a whiplash
> of shackles, decrees, kicks, commands, and rocks-
> the prophets perished by means of these:
> They all contain killing and death at the stake.[89]

Having defeated R ("rasp of rapaciousness, insatiable war's ha-ha"), L gains dominance over the post-revolutionary Russia. The transformation Russia undergoes from a country torn apart by the revolutionary violence to a devastated political state in which hunger, poverty, and brutal executions of the old regime supporters are the price at which peace is obtained, is depicted by the poet through the substitution of R for L in the words he uses to describe these two periods:

> Then L began, and R declined and fell. (No L nastalo – R upalo)
> The nation drifts idly in a vessel of laziness: (Narod plyvet na **l**odke **l**eni)
> the battering ram becomes a sacrificial lamb, (I po**r**okh boevoi on zameniaet p**l**akhoi)
> and the roar of the storm becomes a stale roll. (a bu**r**iu bu**l**koi)[90]

The literal translation of the third line of above excerpt is "And the gunpowder of a combat he (L) substitutes with an execution b**l**ock." If we keep in mind the definitions of these two letters, we see their succession in *porokh* and *plakha*; we can this way appreciate the visual and spatial

[87] I provide transliteration in the block quotes to facilitate a Russianless reader's appreciation of the musical aspect of Khlebnikov's verse we are reading.

[88] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v.2, 342.

[89] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works,* v.2, 341.

[90] Khlebnikov, *CW*, v.2, 340.

dynamics of the described change. The explosion of tiny gunpowder particles creates pressure in the gun barrel, propelling the bullet forward. Hitting a human body, the bullet often makes an exit wound, and continues to move forward. Hence the gunpowder's R becomes the exit wound's "point that penetrates a transverse area." As regards the head that falls off an execution b**l**ock, its dynamics in space is fairly accurately reflected in the definition of L as "the cessation of fall, or motion generally by a plane lateral (the surface on which the head falls) to a falling point." The events from two historical periods are thus not only described as a cosmic battle between R and L, in which the words containing the former give way to those containing the latter, but they are also rendered as essentially spatial events and their spatiality is concrete, even if not at the level of sensuous concreteness. Khlebnikov enriches the expressive potential of the words he is using, bringing into his text far more than what linguistic conventions would normally allow or account for.

Notwithstanding his radical experiments, the poet does not abandon such conventional poetic devices as alliteration, not even when he is assigning new visual and spatial properties to different letters. He wants to have the best of both worlds:

> The murmur of folklore (*Ty nishchikh lopot*)
> becomes the roar of an angry nation (*Ob**r**aschaesh' v na**r**odnyi **r**opot*)
> the peasant's lumbering step (*Lapti iz lyka*)
> becomes the rumble of revolt! (*Zamenish' **r**opotom **r**yka!*)[91]

The juxtaposition of the two words starting with R is a classic example of a poetic alliteration, the primary purpose of which is to also imitate the very sound the word *ryk* (roar) is used to mimic. On the other hand, since both *ropot* (rumble) and *ryk* (roar) contain the letter R, they also provide a visual illustration of the chaotic movement of different sounds in the midst of the

[91] Khlebnikov, *CW*, v.2, 340.

revolutionary turmoil: the grumbling of the discontent people mixes with the peal of a cannonade to become a "point that penetrates a transverse area."

As we saw, the introduction of various elements establishing a sense of visual dynamics in physical space, and the use of these elements to characterize different letters, allows the poet to enrich the expressive potential of the words he employs to describe the Revolution and the Civil war. These words, however, still belong to the standardized language. Because of this Khlebnikov also explores the expressive potential of the "star-language" letters as autonomous linguistic particles in a poetic text of Plane Eight in the section called *The Songs of the Star Language.* It is truly astonishing that apart from being visual extensions of the already existing words, the letters of the star-language, the way they are defined in terms of various types of movement in space, function as autonomous semantic units of a poetic text significantly exceeding other words in terms of their semantic capacity and economical use of textual space. Using within a poetic text these "particles" together with common words makes it possible to fully capture spatial dynamics of what is being described and also to make this description shorter, substituting several otherwise crucial words for a combination of just two letters:

1. Within a haze of green *KHA*, two figures,
2. the *EL* of their clothes as they move,
3. a *GO* of clouds above the games they play,
4. the *VE* of a crowd that circles un unseen fire,
5. the *LA* of labor and the *PE* of games and songs.
6. The *CHE* of the young man in his bright blue shirt,
7. the *ZO* of his shirt – its glow and its gleam.
8. The *VE* of curls around his face,
9. the *VE* of curls around his face,
10. the *VE* of branches on the pine tree trunk,
11. the *VE* of stars, the night world turning overhead.
12. A *CHE* of girls – golden shirts,
13. a *GO* of Girls – garlands of wildflowers.
14. A *SO* of rays of happiness,
15. *VE* of people in a ring
16. with *ES* of spring time pleasure,
17. *Mo* of sadness, grief, and sorrow.
18. And the *PI* of happy voices,

19. the *PE* of peals of laughter,
20. the *VE* of branches when the wind blows-
21. a brief *KA* of rest.
22. Maidens, men, more *PE*! More *PI*!
23. *KA* comes to us all in the grave!
24. *ES* of laughter, *DA* like a rope of hair,
25. and the groves – the *KHA* of springtime rituals,
26. the oak grove – *KHA* of the god's desires,
27. eyebrows – *KHA* of springtime glances
28. and braids – *KHA* of midnight faces.
29. And *MO* of long curling hair,
30. and a *LA* of labor while all is in motion,
31. and the *VE* of merrymaking, *PE* of happy talk,
32. the *PA* of a white shirt sleeve,
33. the *VE* of dark braids in coils,
34. the *ZI* of eyes, golden *RO* of young man's hair.
35. *PI* of laughter! *PI* of horseshoes and the clink of sparks!
36. *MO* to torment and longing.
37. *MO* to yesterday's sorrow.
38. The *GO* of a rock high above them,
39. the *VE* of river waves, the *VE* of winds and trees,
40. *GO* – the night- world's constellation.
41. *TA* of a shadow in evening – a girl,
42. and *ZA-ZA* of delight- her eyes.
43. The *VE* of people circling an unseen fire.
44. The *PE* of singing
45. and the *RO* of singing heard in silence,
46. the *PI* of voices, calling out.[92]

Most of the syllables that appear in this excerpt are clearly defined in terms of space and the specific range of spatial movement; they provide in every strophe visual supplement to the images formed through the use of the first-level semantics associated with these words. *VE*, for example, appears in strophes 8-11, 15, 20, 31, 33, 39, 43 to suggest the circular direction of movement in which human figures, tree branches, river waves, and stars in the night sky all participate in relation to Earth's orbital rotation. Though it is the same syllable VE that appears in every one of the above strophes, it serves to convey different, yet subtle nuances of the circular movement that poetic objects undergo.

[92] Khlebnikov, *CW*, v.3, 342-343.

To be sure, the circular movement of a crowd around the unseen fire (strophe 4) is qualitatively different from either the movement of branches that bend in the wind and curl a little bit (strophe 20), or a ripple spreading along the water. By combining within a syntactical unit the size of a single poetic strophe a syllable denoting a general direction of movement with words establishing its physical framework in terms of concrete objects, the poet is able to fully depict one's emotional experience of the scene as informed by the visual, audio and tactile sensory modalities involved in this experience. A single syllable here has a context-dependent semantic capacity that in some cases (strophe 20) equals to that of several words, if not sentences.

Khlebnikov also uses single syllables of the star-language in creating complex metaphors core to which are the spatial and dynamic properties of the letters contained in the syllable. In strophe 25 the groves are defined as the *KHA* of the spring rituals. *KHA* here evidently stands for the movement reflecting the biological activity of vernal fauna. Since *KHA* is defined as a surface that serves to shield one point from another moving towards it, in calling the groves a *KHA*, the poet renders its static flora in terms of how its inhabitants move. These latter navigate the forest, having to overcome the barriers of trees and tree logs, bushes and dense brushwood to get to their prey, nests, offspring, and mates. Strophe 26 has a double metaphor in which the oak groves are described as the *KHA* of gods' desires. The reference is obviously to human love affairs taking place in the forest. The static flora of the grove is evocative of the movement two lovers produce as they navigate through oak trees to see each other. The static nature of the grove becomes a barrier for human passion; the contextualization of *KHA* in this line allows adding to its semantic field such aspects of human psychic life as passion and desire. Spatial movement is shown as causally linked with affection and love.

Not all syllables appearing in this passage, however, are either explicitly defined in the leaflet of the star-language cited earlier. When aspects of movement and space are both involved, even with the help of a good definition, the exact mapping of star-language letters onto the realities of the physical world is often difficult to visualize. For example, it is not quite clear what is the difference between *PE* (strophes 5, 19, 22, 31, 44), *PI* (18, 22, 35, 46), and *PA* (32). While all of these syllables do, to some extent, denote "the rapid movement of one point away from another, and hence of many points, a multitude of points, form a single point; the expansion of volume," it is difficult, for example, to pinpoint the difference between the *PI* of happy voices (18) and *PE* of happy talk (31). Both syllables, it seems, denote here a rapid expansion of the sound produced during a pleasant conversation by a group of people, and yet, it is difficult to appreciate the distinction between the two in terms of how this expansion is to be characterized in terms of space and movement if these syllables are not interchangeable.

This problem is even more evident when we look at the line 32 "the *PA* of a white shirt sleeve." If we are to accept Vroon's interpretation that this excerpt describes a Ukrainian peasant wedding,[93] *PA* most likely describes an expansion of the air volume confined by the white material of a shirt during a dance. To what extent, however, the movement in space denoted by *PA* is qualitatively different from that of *PE* and *PI* remains unknown and cannot be inferred even when the whole of *Zangezi* is examined. The poet here may merely be suggesting to his readers the infinite possibilities to convey most subtle nuances of human experience through different aspects of clearly defined letters of the "star-language."

In conclusion of our brief discussion of *The Songs of the Star Language* one critical opinion has to be confronted. Ronald Vroon's suggestion that this passage is reduced to a series

[93] Vroon, *Velimir Xlebnikov's Shorter Poems: A Key to the Coinages,* 171.

of essential movements[94] seems to lack ground. As we have shown earlier, the poet contextualizes the spatial and dynamic properties of the star-language letters, using them as phonemes in standardized words and sometimes as autonomous lexical elements. This technique allows Khlebnikov to get much out of such classic poetic devices as alliteration and compound metaphor. At the same time, he manages to amplify the expressive capacity of verbal medium through emphasizing the visual, spatial, and tactile aspects inextricable from human experience of the world but often downplayed in "speech practices."

So far we have seen Khlebnikov using the star-language letters as either phonemes of already existing words or as one- or two- phoneme autonomous syllables used in conjunction with open syntactic units that comprise several words. In Plane Nine we discover another poetic technique featuring the letters of the star-alphabet involved in the experimentation with the verbal texture of the word. Yet this time the poet adds star-language syllables to the root of an existing word. He adds these syllables as prefixes in order to form a new word. The poet chooses the word *um/oom* (mind), which denotes a rather abstract concept of human intelligence difficult to define in terms of either space or movement. Khlebnikov is now testing the applicability of his poetic discoveries to the process of new word formation in one of the most complex spheres of any language—that of abstract expression:

PRO-OOM (Proum)
PRA-OOM (Praum)
PREE-OOM (Prium)
EXCL-OOM (Nium)
DEV-OOM (Veum)
OR-OOM (Roum)
ZA-OOM (Zaum)
FREE-OOM (Vyum)
VAV-OOM (Voum)
RE-OOM (Boum)

[94] Vroon, *Velimir Xlebnikov's Shorter Poems: A Key to the Coinages*, 171.

BY-OOM (Byum) [95]

Zangezi provides definitions of some of these words later in this plane. The words in this excerpt fall into three categories: 1) the words whose meaning is explicitly defined by Zangezi himself (*proum, praum, nium, veum, voum, vyum, boum, byum*); 2) the words whose meaning is not defined but can probably be inferred due to the presence of one of the letter from the star-language (*zaum, roum*); 3) the words whose meaning can hardly, if at all, be inferred with any degree of certainty (*prium*). Strictly speaking, there is only one word (*veum*) from the first category that is formed through the addition of the star-language letter-based prefix *VE* to the root *um*. *Veum* is defined as the mind of discipleship and true citizenship, the mind of the spirit of devotion. Such a meaning ties in neatly with the qualities of VE in terms of both space and movement (the revolution of one point around another, circular motion). The nature of this comparison is quite clear—the physical, intellectual, and spiritual movement of a proselyte is like an orbit that a celestial body of a smaller mass makes around that of a bigger one.

The suffixes of all words from the first category are selective morphological borrowings from the existing words of the Russian language. *Um* + *pro*rok (prophet) becomes *proum* (provision, foresight); *um* + *pra*ded (ancestor) becomes *praum* (the intellect of a distant land, the ancestor-mind); *um* + *ni* (negation particle in Russian) becomes *nium* (the negating mind); *um* + *vo*gnannyi (nailed) becomes *voum* (the nail of an idea, driven into the plank of stupidity); *um* + *vy*dumyvaiushchii (inventing, fantasizing), or *vy*d*um*ka (invention; fib) becomes *vyum* (the inventing mind). Of course, rejecting what is old leads to *vyum*[96]; *um* + *bol'* (pain)[97] becomes

[95] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v.3, 345-346.

[96] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v.3, 347.

[97] This is my tentative estimate of *boum* formation, since there is hardly a word containing ***bo*** other than ***bol'shoi*** (big) that immediately comes to mind when the description of human experience is concerned. The word pain (***bol'***) seems to me a good candidate, since pain is an important part of human experience.

boum (the mind heeding the voice of experience); *um* + *by* (a conditional particle in Russian similar to the English if) becomes *byum* (craving intelligence, called into being not by what is, but by what is desired).

The textual space of this plane does organically bind neologisms formed through the fragmentation and recombination of several words. This is followed by an eclectic appropriation of their semantics as well that of the words formed via the agglutination of their star-language based syllables as prefixes. What we have, then, are semantic units of the same order. In other words, the conventional meaning of one of the words used in a neologism both define and are defined by the presence of one or more letters of the star-language alphabet. Thus the word *praum* is defined as the ancestor-mind because it inherits the meaning of *praded* (ancestor), which in turn stands for what it does because it contains *-pe,* "the rapid movement of one point away from another, and hence of many points, a multitude of points, form a single point; the expansion of volume," which reflects learning as a life-long process. Khlebnikov explores the properties of spatial, temporal, and dynamic orientation inherent in the semantics of the words he chooses to work with.

Transcending multiple artistic boundaries, Khlebnikov's experiments highlight and emphasize the presence of the visual element in language on three different levels: that of synthetic texture of individual words (neologisms); the synthetic texture of poetic syntax (the star-language letters and syllables used in conjunction with an open syntax structure); the synthetic texture of the word's conventional semantics (by highlighting the presence of one of the star-language letters as part of a conventional word in order to strengthen its expressive capacity).

II.4. Thus Spake Seingeschichte

Unlike Walt Whitman, whose numerous references to Hegel and whose attempts to master his philosophy, after being introduced to it by Ralph Waldo Emerson, are well known, the extent to which Khlebnikov was familiar with it, if at the level of sweeping generalities, is unknown. This means that a critical view that *Zangezi* might have or be in its own trans-sense world that need not to intersect with that of Hegel or any other thinker or artist must now be contended. Among the recent proponents of this view is Krzystof Ziarek, whose excellent *Historicity of Experience: Modernity, the Avant-Garde, and the Event* (2001) is one the most theoretically sophisticated approaches to *Zangezi*:

> When Zangezi remarks that words do not exist as entities or signs but find themselves in motion, much as forces or occurrences do, he discounts the idea that experience, the "secret building blocks of language," remains prior to or independent from language. Representation depends upon the distinction and separation of the represented from the medium or the moment of representation. It relies upon the possibility of a mimetic reflection which doubles the mirrored object, both instituting and suspending the difference between the thing and its representational double. By contrast, Khlebnikov regards experience as inextricably interfaced with language: The form experience takes is negotiated linguistically, with words playing a constitutive role in this event. The event never transpires outside or before language but, instead, happens into words. Beyonsense functions as the edge upon which the world opens itself as a linguistic configuration of the particles of experience, the edge continuously blunted by the discursive practices and linguistic convention. This noncontemporaneity, or, we might say conversely, a paradoxical contemporaneity that lacks self-coincidence and presence, marks the "translation" constitutive of experience. The phenomenality of being is structured as this translative event, nonsynchronous with the representational optics.[98]

What Ziarek seems to be suggesting is that Khlebnikov's ontology requires at least three pure forms of sensibility structuring the subject: space, time, and language. But exactly what is this opening up of the world that takes the form of a "linguistic configuration of the particles of experience"? Does this mean that there is a network of multiple categories structuring my experience of the event and that every one of these events is always "negotiated" with some

[98] Krzysztof Ziarek, *The Historicity of Experience: Modernity, the Avant-Garde, and the Event* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 206.

"others" who also might have an account of what has happened? Exactly how linguistic is my understanding of the difference between the possible, actual, and necessary? I am certainly using language right now to represent what is being talked about, but there might very well be categories of experience ontologically prior to language. Are we to understand noncontemporaneity as a critique of time or history, a critique that stresses multiple temporalities and histories central to which is an act of interpretation structuring what we understand as experience? But what is it by virtue of which particles of experience have however transient a duration of self-identity without which we would not be able to differentiate various aspects in our many experiences? How is it that there is compatibility between the particles of experiential content? Unless these questions are answered it seems that Khlebnikov is thinking what is essentially the Platonic time on an analogy with how the subject of a conversation might exist, more precisely, as certain interpretative "quanta" as which the participants exist while talking. In so doing, he would be very close to Hegel's idea of the historical time as a differential of multiple temporalities, be these temporalities global or local. That he would not share the philosopher's idea about history having a goal does not prevent him from thinking of time primarily as a time of culture and therefore existing as multiple temporalities.

If Khlebnikov understands the connection between time and history in a way surprisingly similar to Hegel, perhaps we could find other grounds on which *Zangezi* escapes his system of absolute idealism? Ziarek suggests another possibility:

> Perhaps the most poignant indication of this tendency to transgress rationality and invert it against itself is Khlebnikov's description of the temporality of experience as an event by reference to an impossible number ($\sqrt{-1}$), a number which indicates a temporal structure beyond the binary opposition of presence and absence and points to a (non-)time that falls outside the scope of representation. This peculiar "non-origin" dislocates experience, rendering it noncontemporaneous with itself. Because of this noncoincidence, experience finds itself always "out of joint" with the very space of representation.[99]

[99] Ziarek, *Historicity of Experience*, 189.

On this view, Khlebnikov, insofar as he limits reason's claim to knowledge, appears closer to Socrates than to Hegel, his reference to $\sqrt{-1}$ (the imaginary number *i*) being an implicit admission that we might never get fully clear about why we are the way we are, let alone explaining away the givenness of time and existence. But $\sqrt{-1}$ is an imaginary number which belong to the number system whose main function is to provide a solution to a polynomial equation. It is another way to say that complex numbers as a class are a mathematical formalization of human capacity to solve problems, or even of human conceptual thought itself. In choosing the square root of negative one to indicate a temporal structure beyond the binary opposition of presence and absence that would point to a non-time, Khlebnikov again, if unconsciously, pledges allegiance to idealist ontology: no binary opposition because there are degrees to which anything is said to be; a non-time falling outside the scope of representation is the first principle which cannot be adequately formalized through the use of the intra-systemic axiomatic principles.

Further idealist affinities in Khlebnikov's ontology come to the fore if we consider how close his "pure words" are to Platonic forms whose best one-paragraph formulation belongs to John Burnet who remarks:

> The predicate of a proposition is always a form, and a particular sensible thing is nothing else but the common meeting-place of a number of predicates, each of which is an intelligible form, and in that sense there is no longer a separation between the world of thought and the world of sense. On the other hand, none of the forms we predicate of a thing is present in it completely, and this relation is expressed by saying that the thing "partakes in" the forms that are present in it. Apart from these, it has no independent reality; and if we know all the forms in which anything participates, there is nothing more to know about it.[100]

Interestingly enough, from "Our Fundamentals" ("Наша основа"), Khlebnikov's most detailed and nuanced essay on language and word creation, we learn that:

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[100] John Burnet, *Greek Philosophy from Thales to Plato* (London: Macmillan&Co, 1914), 165.

> A word divides itself into the pure word and the daily existing word. We may even imagine a word that contains both the starlight intelligence of nighttime and the sunlight intelligence of day. This is because whatever single ordinary meaning a word may possess will hide all its other meanings.[101]

Khlebnikov's word, when it appears in an utterance is akin to Plato's particular sensible thing: its daily existing component may be seen as a form least fully present in it and its pure word component either as a form more fully present or equivalent to the higher level concepts like the Just, the Beautiful, and the Good. In this regard Zangezi's address in Plane Eight contains an attempt to politicize Plato's ontology. Zangezi suggests that the limits of the sensible, the way they appear to the exploited masses when the meaning of the word is dictated exclusively by convention, can easily be overcome because in the physical world words appear as movement, which fact means that conventions are temporary and could be changed.

> Have you heard all I've said, heard my speech that frees you from the fetters of words? Speech is an edifice built out of blocks of space.
> Particles of speech. Parts of movement. Words do not exist; there are only movements in space and their parts- points and areas.
> You have broken free from you ancestral chains. The hammer of my voice has shattered them; your frenzied struggle against those chains has ended.[102]

Striking here is not only the parallel between Zangezi's audience and the prisoners of Plato's cave. The movements in space as which words exist are the forms whose reflection the Platonic space as a receptacle can be said to be. If we were to express this idea in Platonic terms, we would say that the exploited masses would be urged to overcome their dependence on the conventional meaning of sensible particulars in their life because the degree to which these exist is determined by the fullness of these particulars' partaking in different forms as well as by the compatibility of multiple forms, time itself being their "moving image."

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[101] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v. 1, 377.

[102] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v. 2, 344-345.

But perhaps Ziarek is right when he attributes Zangezi's unusual literary form and constant movement across multiple generic artistic boundaries to:

> A typical modernist gesture of undoing the unity of the literary text and present language as a complex and layered structure existing on several planes, this particular hybrid geometry of language constitutive of Khlebnikov's conception of the relation between reality and language?[103]

At first glance this explanation seems right. And it seems all the more convincing in view of the fact that Khlebnikov supersagas are "concerned with the nature of destiny and predestination, with humankind's attempt to wrest the threads of life from the hands of Fate…The heroes of the supersaga are those who have attempted to defy the gods and demigods of history and usually perished in the process."[104] But the innovative structure this generic form requires and employs cannot account for the ultra-conventional presentation of Khlebnikov's material in different planes, as well as for the pattern of their narrative succession. Why is the pure language of nature in Plane One is followed by the language of the invisible gods in Plane Two and by that of people in Plane Three?

Is the poet following the narrative convention of another genealogy only to subvert it the next Plane? But this does not happen; instead we get in Plane Four an excerpt from the impenetrable *Tables of Destiny* in which an attempt is made to extract, using mathematical notation, the laws of human history, and in Plane Five Zangezi the prophet arrives. The arrival of the prophet is perfectly in line with the narrative transition in the *Phenomenology* to the section on Self-Consciousness, where: "in the Concept of Spirit, consciousness first finds its turning point, where it leaves behind it the colourful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the

[103] Ziarek, *The Historicity of Experience*, 203.

[104] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, v.2, 276.

present."[105] What are we to make of the fact that the image of Zangezi changes from plane to plane not only in terms of how he is perceived by his audience but also in terms of the poetic personae he comes to embody? Is this not the movement of the subject matter in a systematic dialectical inquiry as it appears in Aristotle and Hegel?

How are we to account for Zangezi's appearance in Plane Twenty-One to deny rumors of his suicide published in a newspaper? Is it a mere coincidence that the two planes circling the work, itself "to be continued," are those in which the reality of primordial language stemming from sense-certainty as "a richest kind of knowledge, [one] of infinite wealth for which no bounds can be found, [one] that appears to be the truest knowledge; for it has nothing yet omitted from the object but has the object before it in its perfect entirety"[106] is contrasted with the reality of Absolute Signification, in which the status of reality of any sign is defined exclusively through its relations to other signs? It seems much more plausible that the structure of *Zangezi* points toward its being a historical account of poetic language. This account is a systematic attempt to capture and order the logic of the historically unfolding events in a way that denies the progressive idea of history the way it appears in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, while retaining the narrative flexibility of the latter.

[105] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶177.

[106] Hegel, *Phenomenology,* ¶91.

II.5. Back to the Future: Zangezi and the Prison House of Language

Resonating with Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology* is Khlebnikov's idea of liberating man by imposing rational design on what would have otherwise been forces of blind fate that made him ignorant:

> Because what confronts him is an alien world, something outside him and in the offing, on which he depends, without his having made this foreign world for himself and therefore without being at home by himself as in something his own. The impulse of curiosity, the pressure for knowledge, from the lowest level up to the highest rung of philosophical insight arises only from the struggle to cancel this situation of unfreedom and to make the world's one's own in one's in one's ideas and thought.[107]

If Hegel emphasizes the necessity to overcome the very idea of otherness in its multiple guises as something external to the community of knowers, Khlebnikov sees the stifling effect of culture as originating in the loss of the primal unity between man and nature. The poet reconstructs some of the early configurations of this unity in Planes One and Two.

In Plane One, through birds' morning speeches to the Sun, Khlebnikov directs our attention to a possible genealogy of human language as it exists in its early phases lying outside the fetishism of a contemplative perspective, outside the notion of being a mere instrument to convey the multiple meanings which structure our world as we know it. In so doing, he also refers to his very first poem "Ptichka v kletke" (Bird in a cage) whose main theme is the loss of primeval unity with the world at the price of which human culture appears as self-differentiating system of signification.

> О чем поешь ты, птичка в клетке?
> О том ли, как попалась в сетку?
> Как гнездышко ты вила?
> Как тебя с подружкой клетка разлучила?
> Или о счастии твоем
> В милом гнездышке своем?

[107] G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, tr. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), vol. 1, 97-98.

Или как мушек ты ловила
И их деткам носила?
О свободе ли, лесах,
О высоких ли холмах,
О лугах ли зеленых,
О полях ли просторных?
Скучно бедняжке на жердочке сидеть
И из оконца на солнце глядеть.
В солнечные дни ты купаешься,
Песней чудной заливаешься,
Старое вспоминаешь,
Свое горе забываешь,
Семечки клюешь,
Жадно водичку пьешь.[108]

Here, just like in *Zangezi*, the language of cultural captivity is juxtaposed with the originary language to which the artist wants to come back. That is, the lost language appears in stark contrast with the one used to describe captivity: it is not as an instrument, with which one's objects of thought are communicated to another, but the self-sustaining duration of meaning that once accompanied the life of animals and humans.

But in this case, language is Being, and its self-sustaining dispersal is akin to existence, the divine light by virtue of possessing which anything can come into actual, not potential being. The now and here of the birds is the one of pure contingency, one involving categorial determinacy which is not understood as projected by the mind, but as the "unconscious" movement of "attention," only as a succession of the multiple moments of sense-certainty and its content. The succession of the sounds they make serves as if an analogue notation for their immediate awareness of things in the world, an awareness that is opposed to that of mental determination whereby all objects are structured through language and focalizing attention. Any

[108] Khlebnikov, *Tvoreniia* (Moscow: Sov. pisatel', 1986), 41. (What are you singing of, bird in a cage? / Of how you got ensnared? / Of how you made your nest? /Of how the cage separated you from your friend? / Maybe you're singing of how happy you were in/ Your cute little nest? / Or how you were catching flies /And gave them to your children/ Of freedom or forests/ Of high hills/ Of green fields/ The poor little darling is bored, sitting on a perch,/Looking at the Sun from a little window/In sunny days you swim/Loosing yourself in a beautiful song/ Remembering the old days,/ Forgetting her sorrow/ Pecking seeds/ Drinking water thirstily – translation mine).

possible object of knowledge thus collapses into a sensory state that corresponds to it at the level of sensory apprehension, and so does the distinction between fact and knowing.

Birds live in a mystical union with nature: their songs say no-thing to us because there can be no determinacy for Being. As animals "they do not just stand idly in front of sensuous things as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall without ceremony and eat them up. And all Nature, like the animals, celebrates these open Mysteries which teach the truth about sensuous things."[109] But the certainty, contingency, and transiency that characterizes one's fluid coping in the world in the pure now, pure here, and as a pure "I" are all lost in the determinacy without which there can be no content of experience. The birdcage that a boy birder carries in the end of Plane One becomes a powerful metaphor for human language as a prison-house of determinacy, a precondition for intelligibility in the world. Because it is a whole, multiple operative limits are always already set in a particular relationship to one another, allowing meaning to be created in the form of a differential predicate attribution.

Yet the death of the mystical unity with nature becomes precisely the event that opens up a possibility of an infinite interplay between the signs. The capitulation of immediate knowledge to space, time, and language is far from a simple acknowledgement of epistemic finitude; rather, the very admission of concrete content via differentiation through the imposition of multiple boundaries also becomes a moment when the instrumental view of language and reason comes into being.

The language of the birds is in Khlebnikov's cosmogony Logos appearing to itself as "Light [which] disperses its unitary nature into an infinity of forms, and offers up itself as a

[109] Hegel, *Phenomenology,* ¶109.

sacrifice to being-for-self, so that from its substance the individual may take an enduring existence for itself."[110] And it is exactly language as the interaction of the individuated life forms that is described in the language of the gods. Khlebnikov reserves Plane One for the birds and not gods because he thinks that the language of birds is not as much removed from the pristine state of originary logos as utterances of the gods, a notion thoroughly infused with the corrupting character of cultural oblivion.

The equally unintelligible—for us—linguistic exchange of the gods in Plane Two marks the advent of the world in which apart from God's self-contemplation as Light sacrificing itself to itself to appear as a multitude of stable individual forms, we now have a world dominated by God's self-perception. The god Ulinkulu who is described listening to the noise of a beetle that had eaten tunnels in a log of its [his] wooden body of (a god) is emblematic of how gods stand in respect to nature: they appear as this nature, its forces and things with properties whose totality together with the laws regulating their transition in time nature can be said to be:

> The innocence of flower religion, which is merely the self-less idea of self, gives place to the earnestness of warring life, to the guilt of animal religions; the passivity and impotence of contemplative individuality pass into destructive being-for-self.[111]

The simple stability of the spiritual atoms as forms not yet having actual existence is now put into motion so that each form is determined through the pattern of the interacting whole. At the level of human religious consciousness this is a collective identification of the tribe with a particular animal it thinks to form its essence. At the level of its epistemic powers, god's self-perception, appears as what allows to a single consciousness experience plural qualities as properties of a thing that make it different from other things by virtue of those predicates being repeatable qualities. If the immediacy of perceptual awareness is due to concatenation, that is, the

[110] Hegel, *Phenomenology,* ¶688.

[111] Hegel, *Phenomenology,* ¶689.

mere succession of properties as the sole source of unity of the perceived object, setting the cut off point for relevant properties becomes problematic as the many properties satisfying the contiguity and continuity criteria within one's perceptual field rarely lumped into one. If unity precedes this succession, however, then, the bare substratum collecting all the relevant properties is bound to lose the determinacy perceptual awareness offers. Either the object is essentially one that appears to me as many, or it is essentially the many that appears to me as one, me being the source of unity.

Since Plane Two features a description of a series of verbal exchanges between several gods whose host is hovering above the earth and since the number of gods is potentially unlimited, as well as their attributes and accidents, we now see nature not as a world of immediate awareness of sense-certainty, but as a miracle of perceptual awareness whose main object is things with properties. Because of the fluidity with which multiple universal aspects of an individual entity come to the foreground in one's perception, it is clear that we are already dealing with multiple contextual "object positions." But because "object positions" are determined by other "object positions" we need a higher order concept to allow for a "relevant grouping." We might call this concept "event" but its appearance signals another problem – there always being multiple events. In case we choose "law" or "schema" as yet another concept to account for our ability to group only the events that are relevant the question arises how spontaneous hybridization of multiple schemata is possible. We have arrived at self-consciousness as the law of laws and what secures the actuality status of a relevant law in a given context. The position of self-consciousness is of utmost importance for *Zangezi*'s overall composition because this is a position, which multiple poetic personae assume each stressing a different aspect of it. Let us look more closely at the Hegelian equivalent of a poetic voice, that is,

a way to relate different aspects of experience within a single worldview relegating different elements of what is experienced (e.g. sensible particulars, fluidity of thinking) to different places within a hierarchy of being.

The ostensibly detached phenomenological participation of the observer turned out to have the effect of a situational meaning focalization. One might arrive at a complex equation explaining how the world is but the cognitive structure authenticating the identity of its left and right sides may not itself be capable of formalization. This structure is self-consciousness. Because we are now in the domain of self-consciousness, it is not going to be enough to limit the scope of sense-certainty to the mere act of choosing what to do in which a self-conscious agent periodically engages. Qua self-consciousness, sense-certainty is at the very least the animal's choosing of a behavioral item as conditioned exclusively by a number of situational exigencies. But this means that the unity of the animal's mind is also one of many, an episodic consciousness, a series of outwardly directed impulses. So each biological genus is our new thing with properties, that is, an interiority as a specific range of desire realization. For this interiority to be self-conscious it must experience itself as not just its will temporarily interrupted by the will of another, but as something being at the mercy of extermination of another the way its environment has been up to its mercy up until now. This interruption of a self is a replay of the interruption of the thing, except it is *experienced* and not merely fixated as actually existing in the realm of things. The section on self-consciousness is a section on consciousness's awareness of it triple limit: its dependency on life (master-slave); its dependency on another for positions of subjectivity and objectivity (inter-subjectivity in stoicism and skepticism); its dependency on the differential symbolic coding of what it experiences seeking to assign various aspects of this

experience to wholly different yet interacting ontological realms (Empirical World and the Immutable God).

The realization that the dual subject of self-consciousness (myself as a thing for another's will-self, but also a will-self for which multiple things and will-selves are) is determined as a connection of meanings is *stoicism*. Thinking here is equivalent, in so far as it determines the various contexts to which "of the master" and "master of", to *essence* the way it appeared in the third section on consciousness. We know what a thing is from the pattern of its interactions with other things, or through multiple dynamic contexts. Similarly we know what one is from how one relates to her own determinations of thought within herself. One's realization that the power of thought-determination is necessarily limited (the power of another's will may not affect one's inner life, but in so far as this inner movement of thought claims independence it, too, is limited) is *skepticism*. The Unhappy Consciousness is a form of self-consciousness that knows God's Law (the transcendental) as the condition of possibility for the experience of its singularity (its possession of the inaccessible core of thinking as opposed to what can be challenged by others in the inter-subjective mediation of meaning). That is, one's awareness of thinking as ultimate Subjectivity also contains within it, though implicitly, one's awareness of ultimate Objectivity as something external what makes the internal possible. Unhappy Consciousness thus is not a form into which what begins as a tribal form of consciousness "develops" after the advent of Christianity, but is a more detailed description of various levels of thought-differentiation within self-consciousness. So the movement is as follows:

(i) Subjectivity (Work to unearth Mastery)

(ii) Objectivity (Question to unearth Thinking)

(iii) Objective Subjectivity and Subjective Objectivity (Worship to Unearth Science)

The uniquely Hegelian move here is to suggest that worshiping the transcendental is tied with the notion of Scientific Objectivity. The world is seen as an intelligible multitude either because its individual forms and knowledge are infinite or through the grace of God.

Self-consciousness shows us a triple interruption of consciousness, which it experiences as a will in the world. Self-consciousness realizes that it is bound to other self-consciousness's yet it understands that because they may be bound to yet another self-consciousness, their authority cannot be ultimate. It is the idea that that any Master can be an object to another master in a way a sensible object belongs to a Servant. It is a thought of an invisible source acting as a condition of possibility for the mastery of the master. But the idea behind this invisible source may have come about as result of a configurative reading of an actually present physical plurality whose different elements are experienced as a value hierarchy. Unhappy consciousness, then, is the eradicable metaphysical aspect of human thinking insofar as our conceptual grasp of the world presupposes differential value attribution to different aspects of what we experience (e.g. Plank's constant as a ruse to account in a mathematical way for an asymmetry of time and space). From the point of view of human creativity this implies a narrative conceptualization of the imperfect world against which the meaning and significance of what is to come is defined.

Of the poetic personae making their appearance in *Zangezi,* Tiutchev and Boratynskii in Plane Fourteen can be seen as embodying Khlebnikov's equivalent of stoicism, Mayakovsky in Planes Ten and Fourteen of skepticism, Alexander Blok in Planes Thirteen and Sixteen of the two irreconcilable sides of Unhappy Consciousness, and Tsvetaeva in Plane Twenty of some aspects of the metaphysical dualism characteristic of Unhappy Consciousness. Just as Hegel's *Phenomenology* only has its three concluding sections to deal with world history and systems of knowing arising in it, only some planes in *Zangezi* are historical, but in these planes the actual

work of history appears as that through which the artistic standpoint is reached from which Khlebnikov's *zaum* can legitimately appear as a poetic equivalent of a system of speculative philosophy.

While a detailed study of this revelation is here not possible and should be dealt with in a separate monograph, common to these shapes is a series of metaphysical dualisms of time and eternity, the physical and spiritual, nature and culture, all of which converge in the tragic narrative of a creating soul, a prophet who is never at home in the world. Within the limits of this chapter we can look at one such persona— Marina Tsvetaeva, an artist, whose work and life, best capture the agonizing tension of her embodying a contingent, finite individual, who is divinely inspired and thus also participates in the eternal. Our choice of Tsvetaeva's artistic persona is warranted in view of the fact that she appears in the last poetic plane of Zangezi under the name of Gore (Sorrow). Her poetic persona is in a way a narrative culmination of the odyssey of the Russian Poetic Spirit, whose highest narrative standpoint is the appearance of Zangezi himself to deny the rumors of his death.

II. 6. The Story of One Encounter

Of what Tsvetaeva and Khlebnikov thought of each other's work next to nothing is known,[112] the extent of their mutual influence remaining virtually unexplored.[113] Our first task

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[112] E. Mindlin recalls Tsvetaeva saying "Poet's deeds are his verse …Khlebnikov is hiding from the daily round behind this doctor's note [Khlebnikov' note of psychiatric assessment which read "Grazhdanin RSFSR Velimir Khlebnikov, who does not have a permanent address, cannot be held responsible for his actions because of his mental illness that this stamp confirms."– A.G.]. It is his version of 'don't touch my work'; it is his way of saying 'don't interfere in my creation.' He is not understood now, but one day he will be." in Emil' Mindlin, "Iz knigi neobyknovennye sobesedniki," in *Marina Tsvetaeva v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov: rozhdenie poeta,* ed. Lev Mnukhin (Moscow: Agraf, 2002), 164. Mark Slonim states that the Russian Futurists, especially Maykovsky and Khlebnikov, were of great interest to Tsvetaeva in his "O Marine Tsvetaevoi: iz vospominanii," in *Marina Tsvetaeva v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov: gody emigratsii,* ed. Lev Mnukhin (Moscow: Agraf, 2002), 96. Zinaida Kul'manova, who met Tsvetaeva in 1940, recalls that when she wanted to give the poet as a present a collection of Khlebnikov's poetry printed the same year, Tsvetaeva, though she obviously had known and read Khlebnikov, looked surprised when she heard his name. See Zinaida Kul'manova, "Chto ia pomniu," in *Marina Tsvetaeva v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov: vozvrashchenie na rodinu* ed. Lev Mnukhin (Moscow: Agraf, 2002), 123-125. In poetic texts the only exception is in Tsvetaeva' *Poema Kontsa (The Poem of the End)* (1924): "Расставание - просто школы / Хлебникова соловьиный стон, / Лебединый...." ("Parting is only the moaning of a nightingale from Khlebnikov's school…").

[113]In the first, and, so far, only fundamental biography of Velimir Khlebnikov, Sofia Starkina's *Korol' vremeni* (St. Petersbutg: Vita Nova, 2005), Marina Tsvetaeva is mentioned to say that her work was for a long time forbidden in the Soviet Russia (8), that like many of her contemporary colleagues, including Khlebnikov, Tsvetaeva also turned to the character of Stepan Razin in her work (334), and that she sometimes appeared in the illustrious Kafe poetov (Poets' cafe) or in Domino amidst other prominent Russian poets (388). In her biography of the poet, *Byt i bytie Mariny Tsvetaevoi* (Moscow: SP Interprint, 1992), Victoriia Shveitser mentions Velimir Khlebnikov when talking about poet's turning to Stepan Razin (169). In *Marina Tsvetaeva: The Woman, her World and her Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) Simon Karlinsky lists formal and thematic parallels between the two poets: in Khlebnikov's "Zhuravl'' ' (The crane) and Tsvetaeva's "Poema lestnitsy" (The Poem of a Stair) respectively, they both used logaoedic meter (65) and developed the theme of the revolt of objects against people (171); a poetic diary of 1921, a truly devastating year to the Russian literary community, Tsvetaeva's *Craft* contains in it a reference to Khlebnikov's personality (107).

Michael Makin in *Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) notes the two poets' interest for Russian folklore materials (p.n. 42) and their using the technique of "collage" (p.n.56), or citation, of the literary works of the past, as in the *Igor Tale* (Slovo o polku Igoreve), in their own works; this, the critic maintains, allows them to establish a dimension of historical memory and evoke an emotional state associated with it. In *Marina Tsvetaeva: zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 1997) Anna Saakiants mentions Khlebnikov twice: in Tsvetaeva's conversation with Anna Akhmatova (743) and in an episode when, smiling, she remembers the famous Russian futurist manifesto *Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu* "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," one of whose authors Khlebnikov was (40).

In individual articles and reviews touching on the Khlebnikov–Tsvetaeva poetic connection, G. Struve notes a point of convergence between the poetry of A. Bely and V. Khlebnikov—both were strongly influenced by Russian folklore, particularly Russian folk songs, at the level of word and verse structure—in his "Tsvetaeva," in *Marina Tsvetaeva v kritike sovremennikov: obrechennost' na vremia,* ed. Lev Mnukhin (Moscow: Agraf, 2003), 87-88. V. Orlov emphasizes their love for the principle of "korneslovie," or poetic agglutination, in which the researcher sees an attempt to get to the word's deepest meaning and to derivate from it a whole slew of new words related by sound. V. Orlov, "Silnaia veshch' poeziia," in *Marina Tsvetaeva v kritike sovremennikov: obrechennost' na vremia,* ed. Lev Mnukhin (Moscow: Agraf, 2003), 308. V. Pertsov asserts that as a poetic phenomenon

then is to examine the Tsvetaevan subtexts in *Zangezi* where they primarily appear in the two addresses of Sorrow [Gore],[114] a character entering the stage in Plane Twenty. Khlebnikov's nuanced portrait of Tsvetaeva reveals his preoccupation with understanding the enigma of the rational formative principle behind the history of Russian poetry.

A quick detour and some methodological clarifications are in order. "Zangezi is assembled and settled," writes Khlebnikov in his diary on January 16, 1922.[115] Since the manuscript saw alterations and corrections as late as April 1922,[116] by which time it was already

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Tsvetaeva's verse must be connected with the oeuvre of Boris Pasternak and Velimir Khlebnikov. V. Pertsov "Rets.: Marina Tsvetaeva Izbrannye proizvedeniia," in *Marina Tsvetaeva v kritike sovremennikov: obrechennost' na vremia,* ed. Lev Mnukhin (Moscow: Agraf, 2003), 5.
Since the first and only extensive comparative analysis of the two poets' verse are only five—the four shorter works on this topic belong to L. V. Spesintseva, "Khlebnikov i poeziia M. Tsvetaevoi 20-kh godov," in *VI mezdunarodnye Khlebnikovskie chteniia* (Astrakhan: Izdatel'stvo Astrakhanskogo Gos. Universiteta, 1998), 86-90, and "Obraz Razina v poeme V. Khlebnikova 'Ustriug Razina' i v stikhotvorenii Mariny Tsvetaevoi 'Sten'ka Razin," in *III mezdunarodnye Khlebnikovskie chteniia* (Astrakhan: Izdatel'stvo Astrakhanskogo Gos. Universiteta, 1989), 39-40; and Iu. V. Iavinskaia in "Semantika veshchi u Khlebnikova i Tsvetaevoi," *Russkaia rech'* 2 (2000): 20-24 and "Semantika obraza cheloveka u Khlebnikova i Tsvetaevoi" in *A. S. Pushkin-M.I.TSvetaeva: sed'maia tsvetaevskaia mezhdunarodnaia nauchno-tematicheskaia konferentsiia*, ed. V. I. Maslovskii (Moscow: Dom-muzei Mariny Tsvetaevoi, 2000), 268-272, and a monograph-length study is *Sopostavitel'nyi analiz obraznykh sistem chelovek, veshch, priroda v idiostiliakh Velimira Khlebnikova i Mariny Tsvetaevoi* that is Iu. V. Iavinskaia's doctoral dissertation (Russian Language Institute, 2001)—V. Grigor'ev is correct in that Tsvetaeva scholars have paid little attention to Khlebnikov's influence on her work. V. Grigor'ev, "Khlebnikov i Puskin," in *Budetlianin* ed. V. P. Grigor'ev (Moscow: IAzyki russkoi kul'tury, 2000), 626-627. He is also accurate in his estimate that a study of the underlying connections between the works of two poets may discover many interesting facts not necessarily confined to the levels of either language or poetry. V. P. Grigor'ev "Velimir Khlebnikov," in *Velimir Khlebnikov v chetyrekhmernom prostranstve iazyka* ed. V. P. Grigor'ev (Moscow: IAzyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2006), 338.

[114] Because there is virtually no information whether Khlebnikov had actually read Tsvetaeva, my reading of the text is bound by several methodological strictures. First, I determine the upper time limit for choosing Tsvetaeva's work that Khlebnikov targets in plane twenty and narrow this selection to those poems that he could have read himself or heard someone read to him. Second, I address a possible objection that by late 1921 Tsvetaeva was too minor a poet to be one of Khlebnikov's targets in *Zangezi*, showing that the two had enough in common for him to be interested in Tsvetaeva's verse and her manner of self- presentation. My final step is to show that literary allusions, polemical citations, poetic dedications, satirical descriptions, and anagrammed references to his contemporaries were characteristic of Khlebnikov's work.

[115] Khlebnikov, *SW*, vol. 5, 447.

[116] An obvious obstacle to this choice is the fact that literary material of *Gore i smekh* is dated by the June 20, 1920 in Khlebnikov, *SW*, vol. 5, 455. While a comparison of the two versions in clearly in order (unfortunately I did not have access to Khlebnikov's archives while writing this paper), by itself, however, a diary entry should not and cannot serve as reliable marker with which to establish the time-frame of writing. Khlebnikov had never led a systematic diary and would often return to some events from his life later, as he made of a *post factum* entry as we find in Khlebnikov, SW, vol. 6(2), 338. Using April 1922 as an upper chronological boundary for selecting Tsvetaeva's poems for discussion until I have access to Khlebnikov's archives seems warranted.

at the printer's, the upper chronological boundary for choosing Tsvetaeva's verse that appeared in literary journals and poetry collections should be set at this date. Similarly, Tsvetaeva's poems from *Mileposts I* and *II* (*Versty I* and *II*) will have to be limited to those published in the literary journals and periodicals before the two collections came out.[117] We also need to show that by the late 1921 she was a poet whose stature was enough for Khlebnikov to have heard of both her verse and artistic persona.

By the late 1921, Tsvetaeva is the author of four collections of verse: *Evening Album* (*Vechernii al'bom)* (1910), *Magic Lantern* (*Volshebnyi fonar')* (1912), *From Two Books* (*Iz dvukh knig)* (1913), and *Mileposts II (Versty II)* (1921). Her first is widely reviewed and well received by the critics, including Nikolai Gumilev, G. Shanginian, M. Voloshin, and V. Briusov.[118] In the early 1911 anthology of contemporary Russian poetry by the Masaget, two of her poems appear alongside those of A. Blok, A. Bely, N. Gumilev, M. Kuzmin, M. Voloshin, and V. Ivanov. Her verse becomes a poetic standard for younger poets: in his highly positive

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[117] Another difficulty is in choosing from the poems included by Tsvetaeva in her collections *Versty I* (*Mileposts I*) and *Versty II* (Mileposts II). Unlike *Versty II* that was first published in 1921, *Versty I* was published only in 1922, which poses a question whether Khlebnikov could have access to this collection before final drafts of *Zangezi* were made. In her commentary to *Versty I*, Victoriia Shveitser writes that she examined its copy that belonged to A.E. Kruchonykh, in Tsvetaeva, *SW*, vol. 1, 300. Khlebnikov and Kruchonykh saw each other in Moscow on several occasions during Khlebnikov's last stay in the capital—between the evening of December 28, 1921 and the early May 1922 (Starkina, *Korol' vremeni*, 388-397). Although the two poets were no longer bound by the strong friendship ties of their 'futurist youth'—this is evident from the dying Khlebnikov's request to his loyal friend and proselyte Miturich not to write to the Briks, Mayakovsky and Kruchonykh to ask for help (421)—Kruchonykh could have easily introduced Khlebnikov to Tsvetaeva's *Versty I*. Given Tsvetaeva's prominence on Russian literary scene by the late 1921, it is little surprising that Kruchonykh would want to discuss this momentous event with Khlebnikov when they met. Fortunately, the poems from both collections were written between 1916 and 1920 and many of them appeared in literary journals and periodicals. Many lyrics written by Tsvetaeva between 1917 and 1921, the poet chose not to include in any of her collections, publishing some of them in journals while leaving others in final versions in her notebooks, as we learn in Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva,* 52-53.

[118] Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva,* 18.

review of Anna Akhmatova's first collection *Vecher* (1912), emphasizing the poet's refined voice, Kuzmin compares her to Ilia Ehrenburg, Osip Mandelshtam, and Marina Tsvetaeva.[119]

If by 1915, the poet is "firmly infixed"[120] within the cohort of contemporary poets,[121] the summer of the year following sees her verse appear in the first, third, fifth and sixth issues of *Severnye zapiski*, and in *Almanakh muz* published in St. Petersburg. The poet's verse is flanked by that of Briusov, Akhmatova, Kuzmin, Mandelshtam, and Churilin. She is an active participant of St. Petersburg's literary life: an envoy of literary Moscow, she meets many Petersburg poets during her stay in the northern capital.[122] Already in the summer of 1917, Voloshin, in *Poets' Voices (Golosa poetov)*, asserts Tsvetaeva to be a poet of Akhmatova and Mandelstam's magnitude.[123] After some of Tsvetaeva's *Moscow cycle* poems are published in the first issue of *Severnye zapiski* later that year, Petersburg poets are much impressed by it. As G. Adamovich would later recall:

> The Petersburg poets were stunned by Tsvetaeva's cycle – its beauty and the unpredictability of her Moscow…One copy of the journal, having just been issued, was passed around, and I still see Anna Akhmatova, a sense of a puzzled approval all over her face, reading in a soft voice:
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> "And for me to be dreaming free, for me to hear bells toll, for me early dawns will rise at Vagankovo."[124]

[119] Saakiants, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 42.

[120] Saakiants lists Vyacheslav Ivanov, Valerii Briusov, Konstantin Bal'mont, "Tsekh poetov" (Nikolai Gumilev, Sergei Gorodetskii), Anna Akhmatova, Mikhail Kuzmin, Igor' Severianin, Nikolai Kliuev,' in Saakiants, *Marina Tsvetaeva,* 42.

[121] Saakiants, *Marina Tsvetaeva,* 53.

[122] Shveitser, *Byt i bytie*, 141.

[123] Shveitser, *Byt i bytie*, 173.

[124] Shveitser, *Byt i bytie*, 383.

Some four years later, in 1921, Tsvetaeva is invited by the Pervyi teatr—then still headed by Vsevolod Meyerhold— to translate Paul Claudel's "Tête d'Or" (Golden Cockerel) and work on a production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Though she never accepted the offer to work on *Hamlet* with Meyerhold and Mayakovsky, it was she, not Mayakovsky, who was expected to write verse for that production.[125] By the end of the year, then, Tsvetaeva is a poet of prominence, well known and highly esteemed by contemporary critics, poets, and readers. It is very unlikely, then, that Khlebnikov have not heard of her or not known of her verse. In light of the fact that he led a nomadic life style, which precludes a possibility of our generating anything remotely resembling a list of the works he had been reading during this time, we must admit that this circumstantial evidence is all we can get.

Yet the mere familiarity with Tsvetaeva's verse, for Khlebnikov to target her in his work, let alone to depict her as a finite mode of the Russian poetic God, had to be grounded in a more personal mode of spiritual encounter. One line of evidence suggesting how it may have happened, as well as what kind of magnitude this encounter could have had, comes from comparing the two poets' reading history. Establishing the common textual horizon whose elements inspired their works thematically and stylistically, while being capable of planting the seed of the jealousy over not being the sole possessors of the transcendental realm of what they each thought to be their paradisiac past, is another way to ensure that our hypothesis is not verging on fiction.

The young Tsvetaeva's favorite poets were Johann Goethe and Heinrich Heine, Friedrich de Lamotte-Fouqué's *Undine*, most likely known to her in Zhukovsky's translation, being her

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[125] Shveitser, *Byt i bytie*, 186.

absolute favorite.[126] Some of the thematic preoccupations of her verse from 1910 to 1916, namely thoughts of the horror of the inexorable end and a fascination with the "chosen" status of the lyrical heroine suggest Tsvetaeva's strong attraction for Mariya Bashkirtseva (Marie Bashkirtseff).[127] Gifted and sensitive persons, who like Bashkirtseva died young, attracted the poet who always saw heroic, miraculous death as preferable to the disappointments and frustrations of attaining maturity, another way to escape which a stay in the magical region of children, the nursery, would allow.[128]

The spell of the romantic aura of Marina Mniszek's persona was even stronger. The notorious Pole belonged to a long list of the elect characters with all of whom Tsvetaeva had a special bond that affected the choice of themes and characters in her verse. John of Arc, Napoleon, Byron, and Alexander Pushkin together with his *Pugachev* all raised themselves "high above the crowd" to be later vanquished by the mediocrities.[129]

In *Mileposts I* and *II*, the two collections that form the bulk of her verse written between 1916 and 1922, she turns to a wide range of themes and styles, whose major sources are folklore and history. Tsvetaeva' poem "Not Crying in Vain" (I ne placha zria) evokes the seventeenth century *Tale of Misery-Luckless Plight* (*Povest' o gore-zloshchastii*) and belongs to a large corpus of her Apocrypha, that is, idiosyncratic, irreverent and often blasphemous versions of sacred texts.[130] The poet's interest in historical characters is realized most fully in the Razin cycle. Appearing in the third and last poem of the cycle, the mutineer's dream draws its material

[126] Simon Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 27.

[127] Saakiants, *Marina Tsvetaeva,* 43.

[128] Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 40.

[129] Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 67.

[130] Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 32.

from the Knight's dream in Fouqué's *Undine* and Zhukovsky's verse translation of it that appeared as *Undina.*[131] Interested in the history of Moscow, Tsvetaeva is passionately involved with its topography and history, both becoming a forcefully sounded central theme in *Mileposts I.*[132] Engaging with history through the events as different as Mongols' nomadic invasions and the French campaign of 1812 allowed her to find parallels with and precedents to what happened in the Russia during the Revolution and Civil war as well as to escape the drabness and terror of the present.[133]

The use of archaisms and colloquial as well as vulgar diction are two stylistic strains in Marina Tsvetaeva's poetic diction in *Mileposts I*:

> Her archaist manner comprised Church Slavic and Old Russian vocabulary and grammar of the Russian Bible and of Orthodox prayers; also the remnants of chancery language of pre-Petrine Russia, as well as her later deliberate imitation of the style of eighteen-century Russian poets. Her colloquial manner likewise absorbed a number of linguistic phenomena of various origins: uneducated and peasant speech, regional expression, formulae from folklore and, where appropriate, deliberately coarse language.[134]

But of all literary and historical characters important to Tsvetaeva's artistic identity, Pushkin was the most prominent. Having found inspiration in his work and life, Tsvetaeva used the poet's confidence and charm in creating a charismatic personality of her own.[135]

The premier poet of Russian Golden Age, with whom Futurists often compared Khlebnikov himself, was equally important for one of the pioneers of Russian Futurism, who, because the qualities he shared with Pushkin, namely the fascination with the proximity of love

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[131] Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 56.

[132] Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva,* 65.

[133] Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva,* 88.

[134] Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva,* 63.

[135] Stephanie Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin: Russia's Myth of a National Poet* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 214.

and death, and with the presence of death in human life,[136] proclaimed Pushkin's soul a "sister" of his own.[137] The shaping of Khlebnikov's artistic worldview, themes and style happen under the aegis of Aleksei Remizov's work steeped in Russian folklore and mythology: Khlebnikov's "…experimental work with the word (slovotvorchestvo) is connected with the artifacts of writing in ancient Rus as well as with epics in general."[138] But while the legacy of ancient Rus' became for him an inexhaustible source of literary themes, whose paradigmatic example describes Sviatoslav's death from the Pechenegs' hand upon his return from the Byzantium campaign in a short poem, "Pechenegs' cup" (Kubok pechenezhskii) (1916), Khlebnikov's interests were never circumscribed by it. Drawn to history, Khlebnikov, like Tsvetaeva, was fascinated with Stepan Razin and Polish history.

Having identified himself with the famous Russian mutineer in "Pesn' mne'" (Song to me) (1911), Khlebnikov casts himself as a rebel, a herald of the future, but also, in another of his poems "Voina v myshelovke" (War in a mouse trap) (1919), as a lonely dreamer, a prophet who is not understood. "I am a Razin with an unfurled banner of Lobachevski's logarithms," the poet would later say in *Razin* (1920).

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[136] Contemporary poets who influenced Khlebnikov's poetic making include Bely, Bal'mont, Mikhail Kuzmin, whom the poet regarded as his master, and Aleksei Remizov, whom Khlebnikov esteemed to be a good friend. Nikolai Stepanov, *Velimir Khlebnikov: zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Sov. Pisatel', 1975), 14-15. Walt Whitman, the only poet an edition of whose collected verse Khlebnikov always carried with him during the last period of his life, is also a major source of poetic influence. Stepanov, *Velimir Khlebnikov*, 61.

[137] Henryk Baran, "Pushkin in Khlebnikov: Some Thematic Links" in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism*, eds. Boris Gasparov, Robert P. Hughes, Irina Paperno (Berkley: University of California Berkley, 1992), 355-358.

[138] Natalia Pertsova, *Slovotvorchestvo Velimira Khlebnikova* (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 2002), 43.

Khlebnikov passion for Polish history that he in a letter to Kruchonykh lists as source of artistic interest for his work[139] culminates in *Marina Mniszek*, a poem of some 400 lines, written during 1908-1910, never to be published during his life. Recurrent in Khlebnikov's poetry, the images of a sorceress, "pol'ka," a "Polish woman," and "mavka," an Ukrainian mermaid, are associated with the character of Marina Mniszek, anathemized by the Russian Orthodox Church and endowed with the black magic powers in the popular imagination.

Like Tsvetaeva, Khlebnikov admires Bashkirtseva's diary which he studies in the early 1915.[140] After its first publication in Russia in 1892, it was widely read, but toward the end of the 1900s its popularity significantly waned, the reading public increasingly deeming it too juvenile. Khlebnikov and Tsvetaeva were the only two poets of their generation to mention their fascination with the *Diary.* [141]

For both poets Russian folklore and myth, and the history of ancient and medieval Rus' became a mother lode of artistic material and formal solutions. Both were fascinated with the life and art of Pushkin as well as other exceptional, elect personalities like those of Mariya Bashkirtseva, Marina Mniszek, and Stepan Razin, all of whom embodied the spirit of rebellion, the spiritual heights one could reach, leaping ecstatically toward freedom of absolute self-expression. Tsvetaeva's verse, then, could never be alien to Khlebnikov, major differences in their philosophical and aesthetic views notwithstanding. And, as I show below, the practice of turning to world culture for literary characters was one of Khlebnikov's artistic signatures.

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[139] Stepanov, *Velimir Khlebnikov*, 62.

[140] Khlebnikov, *SW*, vol. 1, 453.

[141] Irina Shevelenko, *Literaturnyi put' Mariny Tsvetaevoi: ideologiia, poetika, identichnost' avtora v kontekste epokhi* (Moscow: NLO, 2002), 22 p.n.

The poet frequently engages in literary polemics with his contemporaries and predecessors, making references to their works, casting them as characters, and "ciphering" their identities. A dialogue with Khlebnikov's artistic predecessors is at the heart of his poetry, the two ideas central to his entire work—studies in the nature of language and time—both stemming from a dialogue with Tiutchev's "Umom Rossiiu ne poniat'."[142] While it is the name of the modern hero of Khlebnikov's *Oleg Trupov* (1915) through which the poet connects him to the protagonist of Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*, the "sun of Russian poetry" itself makes a solo appearance to deliver an explanatory remark in Khlebnikov's play *Deti Vydry,*[143]whose list of stage characters in its last part, or "sail" (*parus*), also includes such celebrated personae as Hannibal, Cipius, Sviatoslav, Pugachev, Lomonosov, Razin, and Jan Hus. And the density with which mermaids, devils, and witches populate Khlebnikov's poetry and prose is matched only by that found in the work of Gogol.[144]

Khlebnikov draws from his list of Russian writers and poets in a manner very similar to that of how Russian classical poets did from the world of Greek and Roman mythology. The master of the chthonic realm, Dostoevsky represents the earthly world, while Pushkin and Tiutchev both epitomize the celestial realm of the sun and stars. Together these three artists create neither an impressionistic, nor an anthropomorphic landscape of Russian literature, but establish the foundation for its harmonious aesthetic cosmos.[145] In his poems "Nastoiashchee" (Present) (1921) and "Nochnoi obysk" (Night Search) (1921) Khlebnikov gestures toward the

[142] R.V. Duganov, *Velimir Khlebnikov: priroda tvorchestva* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), 16.

[143] Stepanov, *Velimir Khlebnikov*, 81.

[144] Stepanov, *Velimir Khlebnikov*, 55-56.

[145] Duganov, *Velimir Khlebnik*ov, 101-103.

bard of the beautiful lady through creating clear thematic and formal references to Blok's *Dvenadtsat' (Twelve)*.[146]

In 1909 the poet seems to have kept a "poets' meeting diary" which he had later turned later into a series of poetic satires,[147] two of which "Kramora N 2oi" and "Zhut' lesnaya" taunt the contemporary art scene. While Khlebnikov settles his accounts with the symbolists in the former, in the latter he captures the episode of P. Morozov's publicly slapping Bal'mont in the artistic cafe Stray Dog.[148] The identities of the people who had witnessed this event—E. Dmitrieva, F. Sologub, and Appolon's editor Sergei Makovskii—are carefully ciphered.

As its title suggests, Khlebnikov's play *Markiza Dezes* (1910) refers to Voloshin's famous mystification whereby the poetry of Elisaveta Dmitrieva (1887-1928) had appeared under the exotic pseudonym of Cherubina de Gabriak. Also telling are this play's "speaking names," which refer to the Stray Dog's regulars, and references to his own poems, namely "Predo mnoi varilsya var" and "Kramora N2oi" both of which targeted the poets from the Apollo circle.[149] If the former poem hints at Sologub, Ivanov, and Gumilev, the latter does at Mikhail Kuzmin, his identity concealed as Amazuk.

Written after the news of Gumilev's execution had been received on September 1, 1921, Khlebnikov's "Litsedei" (Actor) (1922) not only tells the tragedy of Gumilev's life, his poetic and personal fate as well as of his tragic loneliness,[150] but also engages Anna Akhmatova in the

[146] Stepanov, *Velimir Khlebnikov,* 219-220.

[147] Khlebnikov, *Selected Work*s, vol. 6(2), 338.

[148] Stepanov, *Velimir Khlebnikov,* 118-120.

[149] Khlebnikov, *Selected Works*, vol. 4, 380.

[150] Stepanov, *Velimir Khlebnikov*, 239.

line “Lilos’ pen’e i slezy Akhmatovoi” (Akhmatova’s singing and tears were flowing)[151] her name associated with harmony by way of contrasting the motifs of speech, music, poetry and emotional expression with the lyrical hero’s blindness and numbness.[152]

Occasionally, Khlebnikov devises entire poems as literary portraits: a portrait of Lermontov appears in his poem “Na rodine krasivoi smerti – Mashuke…” (In Mashuk - the motherland of beautiful death) and of Mayakovsky in “Nash marsh” (Our march). In 1916, he completes a poetic portrait of Vladimir Tatlin. Near the end of his carrier, he writes cycle of poetic sketches featuring “Burliuk”,”Kruchonykh”, and “Priznanie” (Confession), a poem dedicated to Mayakovsky.[153]

In polemicizing with Russian literary classics and his contemporaries, Khlebnikov has them—their identities often concealed—appear as characters in his work alongside the world historical individuals. In *Zangezi* some of them appear as part of the star language chronicle of the Odyssey of the Russian Poetic Spirit.

II.7. Station Tsvetaeva

Having addressed some of the methodological limitations of the comparative reading we are about to do, we now turn to the text of *Zangezi’s* Plane Twenty, which, as we suggested earlier, has a nexus of allusions to the verse and poetic persona of Marina Tsvetaeva and which we will treat as one text for the ease of reference.

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[151] Khlebnikov, *SW*, vol. 2, 255.

[152] V. N. Gvozdei, “K interpretatsii stihotvoreniya Velimira Khlebnikova “Odinokii litsedei,”’ in *VIII Mezdunarodnye Khlebnikovskie chteniya* (Astrahan: Izdatel’stvo Astrakhanskogo Gos. Universiteta, 2003), vol.1, 37.

[153] Khlebnikov, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, 234-235.

Я горе. Любую доску я
Пойму, как царевну печаль!
И так проживу я, тоскуя.
О, ветер, мне косы мочаль!
Я когтями впилася в тело,
Руками сдавила виски.
А ласточка ласково пела
О странах, где нету тоски.
И, точно в долину, в меня
Собралась печаль мировая,
И я прославляю, кляня,
Кто хлеба лишен каравая.
Зачем же вы, очи умерших,
Крылами плескали нужды?
Я рыбою бьюся в их вершах,
Русалка нездешней воды![154]
Сумрак — умная печаль!
Сотня душ во мне теснится,
Я нездешняя, вам жаль,
Невод слез — мои ресницы.
Пляшу Кшесинскою пред гробом
И в замке дум сижу Потоцкой
Перед молчанием Гирея.
А в детстве я любила клецки,
Веселых снегирей.
Они глазам прохожих милы,
Они малиновой весною зоба,
Как темно-красные цветы,
На зимнем выросли кусту.
Но все пустынно, и не ты
Сорвешь цветы с своей могилы,
Развеешь жизни пустоту.
Мне только чудится оскал
Гнилых зубов внизу личины,
Где червь тоскуюший искал
Обед из мертвечины.
Как синей бабочки крыло
На камне,
Слезою черной обвело
Глаза мне.[155]

I'm Sorrow. I will know the headstone of
Heartaches, as sadness knows a princess.
And all my life I'll spend in longing-
Wind, come tear my braids to tatters!
I clutched my body with my claws,
Squeezed my temples with my hands.
Yet a swallow sang sweetly of places
Where there is no longing.
Sadness, universal sadness,
Fills me, like a reservoir in flood time.
I praise it with the curse of those
Deprived of a crust of bread.
Then why do you, eyes of the dead,
Seem awash with the wings of need?
I flap like a fish in their fish trap,
A mermaid of the otherworld seas.
Subtle gloom of evening!
The souls of hundreds are confined in me,
I am of another world, which makes you sad
My eyelashes are a net of tears
I dance like Kschessinska before a coffin
And in a castle of thought I sit like Potocka
Before Giray's silence
When I was small I loved kneydls,
Cheerful bullfinches.
They are pleasing to the passersby's eye
The raspberry spring of their throat
Grew like dark red flowers
On a winter bush.
But it's desolate all around, and it is
Not you who will pick flowers from
Your own grave, fill up the emptiness of life.
I see a growl of rotten teeth underneath
The countenance where a bored worm
Sought a carrion dinner.
As a blue butterfly's wing
On a stone,
A black tear has lined my eyes.

Lines 21-24 contain a triple reference to Tsvetaeva's posing as a Pole and *boliarynia* (sic!), a noble woman of an ancient lineage, she was keen on doing in her verse as early as 1916. Thus line 23 "I am sitting in Giray's silence" refers to Pushkin's *Bakhchisaraiskii fontan* (*The*

[154] Khlebnikov, *Selected Works*, vol. 5, 347.

[155] Khlebnikov, *Selected Works*, vol. 5, 351.

Fountain of Bakhchisaray) in which a Tatar Khan Giray's is trying to win the love of his beautiful captive, a Polish Countess Maria, who lives separately from his harem. Line 21 "I am dancing like Kschessinska before a coffin" mentions Mathilde Kschessinska (*Krzesińska)*, a famous ballerina[156] who made her carrier at the Imperial Mariinski Theatre of St. Petersburg, where she danced with the Imperial Ballet, which granted her the title *Prima ballerina assoluta* in 1896. Marius Petipa, arguably the world's most influential ballet master and choreographer to have ever lived, had in 1894 invented this title for the Italian ballet virtuoso Pierina Legnani and never consented awarding it to Kschessinska, who despite her being born in Russia belonged to a Polish family notorious for the superb dancing skills of its members, a clan of Polish "dance nobility." The illegitimate appropriation of the title by the Imperial Ballet makes Kschessinska a pretender, a motif associated in Tsvetaeva's verse with the political adventurer Marina Mniszek.

Connected to Mniszek is an unscrupulous opportunist Sophie Potocka, known, before her second marriage, as Sophie de Witte, who is, most likely, mentioned in line 22 "And, like Potocka, I sit in a castle of thoughts." Called in European aristocratic circles "the Beautiful Greek" and "La Belle Phanariote," Potocka brilliantly used her extraordinary beauty to manipulate men in power and work her way up to be accepted into the aristocratic milieu.[157]

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[156] Apart from her gift as a dancer, the ballerina also had a spell over men. Her liaisons first with Nikolai Mikhailovich Romanov, Sergei Mikhailovich, and Andrei Vladimirovich Romanov, not to mention Nicolas II himself, allowed her establish powerful connections at the Russian Royal Court. She used these connections not only to amass riches but also to resolve professional conflicts as a result of one of which Sergei Volkonsky, who had been the Director of the Imperial Theatre between 1899 and 1901, was dismissed from his post by the Tsar himself. Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance: a Cultural History of Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 454.

[157] In 1791, when his highness Prince Grigorii Potemkin first met Potocka in Paris during one of the balls given by the Prince de Nassau Siegen, she was twenty five years of age and eleven years married to Major de Witte, son of the Governor of the Polish fortress of Kaments-Podol'sk, who in 1779 bought her for 1000 ducats, putting an end to her being a teenage courtesan, the only profession known to her by that time. Simon Montefiore, *Prince of Princes: The Life of Potemkin* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002), 460-461. After Poland had accepted the constitution on May 3, 1791, Potemkin, who by that time had already made Sophie one of his spies and lovers, had ordered her to establish a close relationship with the richest 'kinglet' of Poland, Felix Potocki, in order to make him side with the Torgovitska confederation. Olga Eliseeva, *Grigorii Potemkin* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2005), 511. It was not long before the two were married. Remembered for her passionate incestuous affair with her stepson Yuri,

Though she married into Polish nobility, Sophie always remained an outsider, for she was an aristocrat-"imposter" with a courtesan's past and no noble lineage.

While the myth of Polish noble past and the imposter motif appear in Khlebnikov's other works[158] the probability that their appearance in Gore's address in connection with Marina Mniszek is purely accidental, having nothing to do with Marina Tsvetaeva's verse and poetic persona, is very low.[159] In view of how important this identification was for her sense of self-identity, so much so that the poet thought of herself as related to Mniszek.[160]

In "Babushke" (To Grandmother), a poem dedicated to her maternal grandmother who was Polish, a portrait of a real person is mentioned. By virtue of the two of them having the same name, a young romantic Polish woman is connected with Mniszek the Sorceress, whose magic spell over Tsvetaeva's verse [161] was as strong as that over the poet herself.[162] Appearing in

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whom she had thrown out from her estate after the death of her husband in 1805, Sophia Potocka also managed to accumulate a fortune and not to lose her reputation until her very death in 1822. Montefiore, *Prince of Princes*, 496.

[158] In *Ladomir* (1920) Khlebnikov mentions Mathilde Kschessinska's beautiful dance and also the castle that she coaxed for herself through her connections at the Russian royal court. Marina Mniszek-related motifs of a Polish woman imposter, and sorceress, implicated the painter Kseniia Leonidovna Boguslavskaia-Puni to whom Khlebnikov was attracted in the late 1913 early 1914, and who would have become a reason for a duel between him and Mandelshtam, had it ever followed the scandal in the Stray Dog on the night of November 1913. While in "Zhut' lesnaia" the poet called Boguslavskaia-Puni, "Marina Mnishka," in the verse his 1913-1915 verse, he also uses characters of "vorozheia" (sorceress), "pol'ka" (polish woman) and especially "mavka"— an Ukrainian or Galician mermaid which looked as a beautiful woman from the front and as an assembly of spooled intestines from the back— to refer to the painter. Khlebnikov, *Selected Works*, vol.1, 498-499.

[159] That the poet was turning to Boguslavskaia-Puni five years after his passionate attraction cannot be ruled out. Another possibility, although this is also unlikely, is that he reworked some his own poetry, be it personal names, rhymes and thematic associations. One example of this is the **Gir**eia – sne**gir**ei rhyme in lines 23-25 that we also find in Khlebnikov's early poem "Narod podnyal verhovnyi zhezel…": "Chto sdelal ia? Narodnoi krovi temnykh sne**gir**ei / Ia brosil okolo pylaiushchikh znamen, / Podrugu odevaia, kak **Gir**ei, / V snop umen'shitel'nykh imen," in Khlebnikov, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, 7.

[160] "Her maternal grandmother was a Polish noblewoman, Maria Bernacka, and her mother was Countess Maria Leduchowska. The poet was thus descended, on her mother's side, from three generations of Marias, all of whom were Polish and aristocratic and all of whom died before the age of forty. This circumstance gave rise, in her poetry, to the myth of her Polish roots, 'Polish pride', and a possible personal connection with one of her favorite historical personages, Marina Mniszek (Maryna Mniszchowna, ca. 1587-1614), whom most people remember from either Pushkin's or Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov,*" in Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 3.

[161] Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 208.

at least four of her poems, Mniszek seems to have embodied the two opposite, yet equally important elements of Tsvetaeva's identity. One had to do with the faithfulness and love of Marina Mniszek's as witnessed by her jumping out a window on the enemy spears to follow the path of False Dmitry, who kills himself first, while another did with Mniszek the epitome of mortal, empty beauty from which evil springs. This dark, demonic side of Mniszek the poet abhorred, for with it she has also come to associate the risk of getting hurt after the mutual exposition of vulnerability in a love affair, whose wounds, in the case of the one she had with Sofia Parnok were still all too fresh.[163]

Tsvetaeva was not alone in drawing connections between herself and Marina Mniszek. Other poets, too, suggested there was a connection between the two Marinas. Mandelshtam and Parnok, for example, both mentioned the Polish pretender in connection to Tsvetaeva to amplify the themes of rebellion and sexual transgression. To the subtlety of Mandelshtam's "Na rozval'niakh, ulozhennykh solomoi," Sofiya Parnok preferred the extreme openness of her "Sonet of 1915"—"…in your soul - how little of me she gets, / Bettina Arnim and Maria Mniszek!" concluding with "Where is your Goethe? And where is your False Dmitry?"[164]

Since references to Tsvetaeva's association with Mniszek had circulated in the Russian literary circles for at least four years before the first draft of "Sorrow and Laughter," one of the provisional titles of *Zangezi*'s Plane Twenty, Mathilde Kschessinska's dance beside a coffin mentioned in line 21 refers to Tsvetaeva the pretender, who first articulated her arrival in

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[162] Shveitser, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 130.

[163] Saakiants, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 254-255.

[164] "…в душе твоей—как мало ей меня, / Беттина Арним и Мария Мнишек!" "Где Гете твой! И где твой Лже-Дмитрий?"

"Nastanet den' pechal'nyi govoriat" (A sad day will come to pass, they say), a poem that appeared in the first issue of *Severnye zapiski* in 1917 and was later included in *Mileposts I*:

> По улицам оставленной Москвы / Поеду — я, и побредете вы. /И не один дорогою отстанет, / И первый ком о крышку гроба грянет, —/И наконец- то будет разрешен / Себялюбивый, одинокий сон. /И ничего не надобно отныне / Новопреставленной ***болярыне*** Марине.[165]
>
> (Along the streets of an abandoned Moscow/ I'll make my way, and there you, too, will plod, / neither of us lagging as the first / clod clatters down onto the coffin's lid; / I shall finally be released from this self-involved and solitary dream. / From now on there'll be nothing more Marina the late lamented noblewoman [*boliaryne*], needs)

Tsvetaeva's illegitimate appropriation of boliarynia (боля**р**ы**н**я) is akin to that of ballerina assoluta (боле**р**и**н**а) by Kschessinska. The source of her "Polish pride" is further travestied in line 24. The little Sorrow's favorite food is *kletski*, a type of kneydl especially popular in Ukraine and Poland. The royal opulence and intellectual sophistication of Tsvetaeva's much-coveted aristocratic upbringing strongly clash with a more prosaic, if not rustic, reality of her childhood. Meanwhile, a blow is dealt to the luscious sentimentality that permeates Tsvetaeva's first three poetic collections the main source of material for which came from her childhood reminiscences.

Aside from the Polish myth and the pretender motif, Khlebnikov parodies several easily recognizable aspects of the young Tsvetaeva's verse—the lyrical hero's obsession with death, the tonality of her straining voice characterized exclusively by the lament and profound grief over the forever lost paradisiac garden of childhood. To show this Khlebnikov uses a number of formal and thematic devices.

The strophic pattern of the concluding lines of Gore's address (37-40) "Как синей бабочки крыло/ На камне,/ Слезою черной обвело / Глаза мне" conform to the "rickety" logaoedic verse (*rasshatannyi logoed)*, a patterned alternation of meter in several heterogeneous

[165]Khlebnikov, *Selected Works*, vol.1, 217.

strophes, and stand in a stark contrast to the rest of the poems, its even strophes notably shorter than the odd. The richness and originality of her strophics unparalleled in Russian poetry, Tsvetaeva is the "absolute champion" of formal innovations in the history of Russian poetry.[166] Accounting for about thirty percent of her verse are logoeds and antic meters (poetic meters in their tonic embodiment). Both, then, are at the heart of her poetic experiments.[167] Khlebnikov's choice to write the last four lines of the address in "rickety" logoed is no accident, for it underscores the formal peculiarity of the above excerpt even more, pointing, in a way, to Tsvetaeva's strophic signature. The affinity of the four lines "Обвела мне глаза кольцом / Теневым – бессоница. /Оплела мне глаза бессоница / Теневым венцом"[168] from one of Tsvetaeva's poems dedicated to Sophia Parnok[169] with the concluding lines of Sorrow's first address supports our conjecture of Gore's prototype.

Having seen sufficient evidence in favor of the hypothesis that *Zangezi*'s Twenty-One planes comprise a narrative polemics with the institutional march of human freedom as it appears in Hegel's *Phenomenology* and that the poet targets the artistic persona of Tsvetaeva as his Russian Poetic equivalent of the Unhappy Consciousness, we must also consider a possibility that while Khlebnikov renders Tsvetaeva as Gore, the historical persona behind this mask is not

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[166] Efim Etkind, "Strofika Tsvetaevoi—(Logaedicheskaya metrika i strofy)," in *Marina Tsvetaeva: trudy 1-go mezhdunarodnogo simpoziuma*, eds. Robin Kemball, E.G. Etkind and L.M. Geller (Bern; New York: P. Lang, 1991), 309.

[167] Etkind, "Strofika Tsvetaevoi," 307.

[168] Tsvetaeva, *Selected Works*, vol.1, 224.

[169] Although this poem could have been read by Khlebnikov only in a 1922 edition of *Mileposts I*—it was never published before the collection came out—the poet's turning to the image found in abundance in Tsvetaeva's early and mature verse (eyes in general, and black and blackened eyes in particular) is emblematic. Khlebnikov's using the verb обводить (using the eye-liner analogy, I would translate it here as "to define") is also a loaded choice: present in the concordance dictionary of Tsvetaeva, it is altogether absent from that Akhmatova. Although by itself the above observation falls short of a proper statistical method of *idiolect* comparison, I will occasionally resort to such frequency comparisons, for they can be illuminating.

Tsvetaeva, but Akhmatova, or some other poet. After all, it is just as tempting to see the stage name Sorrow (Gore) as containing a hidden reference to Akhmatova's maiden name **Gore**nko and to interpret Sorrow's "невод слез мои ресницы" (line 20) as an overt reference to Akhmatova's reputation as a "muse of crying" (муза плача).

While the frequency of the word tear(s) sleza/y in Akhmatova's first five collection of verse *Evening (Vecher)*, *Beads (Chetki)*, *White Flock (Belaia staia)*,*Wayside Grass (Podorozhnik)* and *Anna Domini* is about one ninth[101] of that of Tsvetaeva, that Khlebnikov saw young Akhmatova as a poet of grotesque sentimentality is unlikely since Akhmatova's early verse is virtually devoid of the kind of sentimentality in which Tsvetaeva's early verse does abound.

Plentiful enough—there are fountains of it: "фонтаны из слез матерей" (the fountains of mothers' tears)[170]— tears and crying, in the poem "Vtoroe puteshestvie" (Second Journey) get a whole verse to themselves in "Slezy" (Tears):

> Слезы? Мы плачем о темной передней, / Где канделябра никто не зажег; / Плачем о том, что на крыше соседней / Стаял снежок; // Плачем о юных, о вешних березках, / О несмолкающем звоне в тени; / Плачем, как дети, о всех отголосках / В майские дни. //Только слезами мы путь обозначим / В мир упоений не данный судьбой … / И над озябшим котенком мы плачем, / Как над собой. // Отнято все, – и покой и молчанье. / Милый, ты много из сердца унес! / Но не сумел унести на прощанье / Несколько слез.
>
> Tears? We are crying of the dark living room, //Where no one has lit a chandelier / We are crying that on our neighbor's roof / The snow has melted // We are crying of the young birch trees / Of the unceasing jingle in the shade/ We are crying like children, of all the voices heard/ in May. // With tears do we draw our itinerary into/ The world of pleasures which one's fate does not bring / We cry over a kitten who is cold as / we would cry over ourselves. // All is taken away: calm and silence / Darling, how much, you took / away from my heart! /But you could not take away all of my tears.[171]

Contributing to the atmosphere of profound grief and mourning, the motif of tears and crying survives into Tsvetaeva's mature verse, becoming a hallmark of her straining muse that

[170] Tsvetaeva, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, 9.

[171] Tsvetaeva, *Selected Works*, vol.1, 110.

allows, among other things, to set it apart from that of Akhmatova. As Shveitser perceptively notes: "Covering her inner burning, and separating, distancing the author from her verse, Akhmatova's ostensible composure is opposed to the Tsvetaevan uproar in verse. In Akhmatova's verse harmonically bound are things that are irreconcilable at first glance, for example, black magic and prayer noted by Tsvetaeva. Tsvetaeva is a poet of extremes and disharmony, both of which are embodied not in not crying, but weeping poems that, even if predominantly loud, always, even if in whisper, scream of pain."[172] Tsvetaeva's, then, is a "weeping muse," whose logoeds, the highest degree of violence imposed on verse through form, set her apart from her many contemporaries. Unlike the latter, who through the extensive use of *dol'nik*, *taktovik*, and *aktsentnyi stikh* were moving toward the absolute liberation of poetic language, vers libre,[173] Tsvetaeva strove to "create an ultimately conflicting system: on the one hand, a most dynamic, oriented forward, oral speech, and the rapidly hurdling meter and strophics on the other. The clashing of opposed elements—statics and dynamics, artifice and ingenuousness, schematics and spontaneity—liberates the energy unforeseen in Russian poetry."[174]

Besides its peculiar metric and strophic patterns, the disharmony and tension in the lyrical hero's straining voice is also evident in the repertoire of her themes. These include the classic metaphysical opposition of good and evil with a reversal of the traditional emotional valence assigned to both elements, the color black now firmly connected with passion and seen

[172] Shveitser, *But i bytie*, 144.

[173] Etkind, "Strofika Tsvetaevoi," 324.

[174] Etkind, "Strofika Tsvetaevoi," 326.

as positive.[175] At the visual level this psychological orientation is mirrored in *Zangezi*: stage directions suggest that Sorrow appears in a white dress and wide-brimmed black hat; Khlebnikov, it seems, had an accurate, if intuitive, grasp of the crying tension of Tsvetaeva's poetic tonality described by her students years later. The emotional turmoil resulting from the tragic incompatibility between the individual and universal are essential to Tsvetaeva's poetry. The lyrical hero's every attempt to live an "earthly" life fails, every encounter with the world is catastrophic: "The lyrical hero's condition is that of extreme discomfort, and sickness: suffering, spiritual discord, dissatisfaction and other negative emotions."[176] The entire second sequence of *Miles II* points up the above disharmony. Tsvetaeva's voice is one of the Unhappy Consciousness, of "the tragic fate of the certainty of self that aims to be absolute… the consciousness of the loss of all essential being in this certainty of itself, and of the loss even of this knowledge about itself—the loss of substance as well as of the self."[177] Pitting being against objective existence, poetry becomes for Tsvetaeva a vehicle to temporarily transcend the restraints of facticity and existence, whose intricate ornament in the form of cultural practices and historical contexts never stops weaving itself. Yet Tsvetaeva's existential lacerations are not the only quality of her verse that makes Khlebnikov pick her as an exemplary poetic voice to illustrate a metaphysical position.

[175] Liudmila Zubova, *Poeziia Mariny Tsvetaevoi: lingvisticheskii aspekt* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo Universiteta 1989), 117.

[176] Svetlana El'nitskaia, *Poeticheskii mir Mariny Tsvetaevoi* (Wien: Wiener Slavistiche Almanach, special issue 30, 1990), 304.

[177] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶752.

Notwithstanding Tsvetaeva's wide poetic recognition by the early 1922, she is still being called a *poetess*.[178] In their reviews of Tsvetaeva's first collections, some critics relegated the poet to the camp of "women's poetry" whose very notion she always rejected together with her membership in it.[179] Mandelshtam's article "Literary Moscow" (Literaturnaia Moskva) (1922) echoes the then current attitude toward women's poetry:[180]

> Для Москвы самый печальный знак — богородичное рукоделие Марины Цветаевой, перекликающийся с сомнительной торжественностью петербургской поэтессы Анны Радловой... Худшее в литературной Москве — это женская поэзия... Адалис и Марина Цветаева пророчицы, сюда же и София Парнок. Пророчество как домашнее рукоделие. В то время как приподнятость тона мужской поэзии... уступила место нормальному использованию голосовых средств, женская поэзия продолжает вибрировать на самых высоких нотах, оскорбляя слух, историческое, поэтическое чутье. Безвкусица и историческая фальшь стихов Марины Цветаевой о России... — неизмеримо ниже стихов Адалис, чей голос подчас достигает мужской силы и правды."
>
> For Moscow the saddest portent is Marina Tsvetaeva's Madonna-like needlework, her response to the dubious solemnity of the Petersburg poetess Anna Radlova. Women's poetry is the worst aspect of literary Moscow…The vast realm of parody, in the most serious and formal meaning of the word, has fallen to the lot of women in poetry. Feminine poetry emerges as an unconscious parody of both poetic inventiveness and reminiscence…
>
> Adalis and Marina Tsvetaeva are prophets, as is Sofia Parnok. Their prophecy is a kind of domestic needlework. While the elevated tone and intolerable bombastic rhetoric of men's poetry has subsided, yielding to a more normal use of the vocal apparatus, feminine poetry continues to vibrate at the highest pitch, offending the ear, offending the historical, poetical sense. The tastelessness and historical inaccuracy of Marina Tsvetaeva's poetry about Russia—pseudo-populist and pseudo-muscovite—is much inferior to the poetry of Adalis, whose voice at times achieves masculine force and truth.[181]

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[178] Poliksena Solov'eva, Zinaida Gippius, Mirra Lohvitskaya, Lyubov' Stolitsa, Adelaida Gertsyk, Cherubina de Gabriak, Margarita Sabashnikova, E. Kuz'mina- Karavaeva, Anna Akhmatova were all called poetesses for some time. For more the word 'poetess' see the Tsvetaeva chapter in Svetlana Boym's *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of Modern Poet* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[179] Shveitser, *Byt i bytie*, 134.

[180] Though Khlebnikov's views on women's poetry need not to be fully consonant with those of Mandelshtam, and the poet finished *Zangezi* before the article came out, it is likely that he shared Madelshtam's discontent with women's, and specifically Tsvetaeva's poetry.

[181] Osip Mandelshtam, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1990) vol. 2, 275-276.

Khlebnikov's journey for "domestic needlework" continues in a series of references he makes to Tsvetaeva's early verse, as is in "сумрак – умная печаль" (line21) whose "dominant theme is the grey area between childhood and adulthood, full of tension and sexual anxieties. Hence the frequent depiction of the disquieting passage of day into night—evening, as the title suggests, is a favorite time."[182] What may seem a random instance of Khlebnikov's use of poetic agglutination technique (*корнесловие*) с**ум**рак-**ум**ная, whereby the semantic field of both words is extended through their phonetic proximity, is, as should become clear from the verse I analyze below, is a reference to Tsvetaeva's first three collections. Khlebnikov targets them because of their juvenile quality. They are lyrical journals in which the Eden of childhood is worshipped and the very thought of leaving it, as we have also seen earlier in the case with Tsvetaeva's fascination with Bashkirtseva, is associated with the heroine's awaiting to repeat a heroic, miraculous, and premature death.

By calling с**ум**рак (twilight) **ум**ная печаль (intelligent sorrow) Khlebnikov refers to the importance of the evening reading of which Tsvetaeva's talks repeatedly in her verse. Consider "Knigi v krasnom pereplete" (The books with red bindings):

> Из рая детского житья / Вы мне привет прощальный шлете, / Неизменившие друзья/ В потертом, красном переплете. / Чуть легкий / выучен урок, / Бегу тотчас же к вам бывало. / – "Уж поздно!" – "Мама, десять строк!"... / Но к счастью мама забывала / Дрожат на люстрах огоньки... / Как хорошо за/ книгой дома! / Под Грига, /Шумана и Кюи / Я узнавала судьбы Тома. / Темнеет... В воздухе свежо.../ Том в счастье с Бэкки полон веры. / Вот с факелом Индеец Джо / Блуждает в сумраке пещеры...
>
> From the heaven of children's life / You're saying goodbye / Loyal friends / In a worn out, red binding. / As soon as my easy homework is done. / I run to you. / "It's too late!" "Mom, Just ten more lines!" / Luckily, Mom would forget / The lights are flickering / It feels so good to be reading / While listening to Grieg, Schumann, and Cui /I would learn about the fate of Tom / It is getting dark … The air is fresh /Tom in his happiness with Becky / is filled with faith. / Here Joe the Indian/ is walking in the darkness of the cave.[183]

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[182] Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 18.

[183] Tsvetaeva, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, 20-21.

Yet others fragments like "Сотня душ во мне теснится" (A hundred souls are confined inside me) found on line 18, also point to a longing to be reunited with the universal soul in "Prayer" (Molitva), a poem from *Evening Album*.

> Я жажду сразу – всех дорог! // Всего хочу: с душой цыгана / Идти под песни на разбой, / За всех страдать под звук органа / И амазонкой мчаться в бой; // Гадать по звездам в черной башне, / Вести детей вперед, сквозь тень... / Чтоб был легендой – день вчерашний, / Чтоб был безумьем – / каждый день! // Люблю и крест и/шелк, и каски / Моя душа мгновений след.../ Ты дал мне детство – лучше сказки / И дай мне смерть – в семнадцать лет!
>
> I want to travel all roads // I want it all – I want with a Gypsy Soul /To go and rob while singing / I want to suffer while the organ is played /And to be running to fight like an Amazon // To tell fortune looking at the sky from the black tower / To lead children forward, through the shadow…/ So that yesterday would be a legend / So that everyday would be madness! // I love crosses, silk, helmets / My Soul is a trace of many moments…/ You gave me a childhood that is better than a fairy-tale/ And now give me death – at seventeen![184]

Sorrow's "hundred souls" then is also Tsvetaeva's willingness to appropriate multiple souls, assert multiple identities through acting out multiple roles, her refusal to subject to historical, cultural, and linguistic mechanisms of determination.

While "Зачем же вы, очи умерших / Крылами плескали нужды?" (Why do you the eyes of the dead splatter with the wings of need?) lines 13-14 and "Они глазам прохожих милы, / Они малиновой весною зоба, / Как темно- красные цветы / На зимнем выросли кусту. / Но все пустынно, и не ты / Сорвешь цветы с своей могилы," (They are pleasing to the eyes of the passerbys/ With the crimson spring of their tail/ Like dark red flowers/ They grew on a winter bush/ But all is empty, and it will not be you/ who will pick flowers from my grave) 26-31 are a double riff on Tsvetaeva's preoccupation with death, the poetic imagery of the former allows linking it with "Sovet" (Advice), a poem from *Magic Lantern* dedicated to Tsvetaeva's deceased mother the grief and pain over whose loss permeate the entire collection:

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[184]Tsvetaeva, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, 56-57.

> …Блещут крылышки их, а на самых концах / Шелестят серебристые блестки. / Что мне делать, дитя, чтоб у мамы в глазах / Не дрожали печальные слезки? // Плещут крылышки их и шумят у дверей. / Все цвета ты увидишь, все краски! // Чем мне маме помочь? Отвечай же скорей!"/ – "Я скажу: расцелуй ее в глазки!
>
> Their wings are shining and on their very end / Silver scales are rustling/ What should I do, child, so that mom would not have/ Sad little tears in her eyes? // Their little wings are splattering and are making noise at the door. / You will see all colors, all paints. // How do I help mom? Answer me now!" / "Here's what I say: kiss her little eyes![185]

The motifs of miraculous and heroic death as a way to escape the unbearable burden of having to live in an earthly world (lines 26-31) reappear now as a direct reference to Tsvetaeva's "Idesh' na menia pokhozhii" (Looking like me, you walk), one of the few poems from *Juvenile Verse* published in 1915 during her life in issues 5-6 of *Severnye zapiski*:

> Идешь, на меня похожий, / Глаза устремляя вниз. / Я их опускала — тоже! / Прохожий, остановись! // Прочти — слепоты куриной / И маков набрав букет — / Что звали меня Мариной / И сколько мне было лет. // Не думай, что здесь — могила, / Что я появлюсь, грозя... / Я слишком сама любила / Смеяться, когда нельзя! // И кровь приливала к коже, / И кудри мои вились... / Я тоже *была*, прохожий! / Прохожий, остановись! // Сорви себе стебель дикий / И ягоду ему вслед: / Кладбищенской земляники / Крупнее и слаще нет. // Но только не стой угрюмо, / Главу опустив/ на грудь. / Легко обо мне подумай, / Легко обо мне забудь. // Как луч тебя освещает! / Ты весь в золотой пыли... / — И пусть тебя не смущает/ Мой голос из-под земли.
>
> You are walking, you, who looks like me, / Casting your eyes down / I too used to cast them down! / Please stop! // Do read, as you pick / A bouquet of buttercups and poppies / That my name was Marina / And how old I was. // Do not think that this here / Is a grave, and so that I will appear, threatening you… / I myself loved to laugh / When I was not allowed to! // And blood rushed to my skin / My hair curled… / I too was, you hear! /Please stop! // Pick yourself a wild stem / And a berry after / There is nothing bigger / And sweeter than the strawberry that grows at the cemetery // Do not stand sulking / Having dropped your head to the chest / Think of me for a while / Forget me in a while // Look at how this sunray is casting light on you / You are all covered with golden dust / You should not get uncomfortable / Hearing my voice from under the earth.[186]

In addition to the motif of miraculous and heroic death that ties this verse to the Gore excerpt, Khlebnikov also alludes to Tsvetaeva directly through the association **tsvet**y—**Tsvet**aeva, while

[185] Tsvetaeva, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, 79.

[186] Tsvetaeva, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, 139.

another, more subtle reference is found in line 16 where she is implicated as "Русалка нездешней воды" (A mermaid from faraway waters).

Tsvetaeva's early verse is replete with themes from children literature: myriad fairytale characters dwell in the poetic world of her first two collections. Appearing as *undina, naiada, rusalka*, the mermaid is a folkloric character to which Tsvetaeva keeps turning in her later years, as in the case of the Razin cycle.[187] The poet's fascination with the world of fairy tales reveals itself in "Dusha i imia" (Soul and name), a poem that comes out in the collection *Volshebnyi fonar'* and that becomes for Tsvetaeva a space where she foregrounds her connection with the water element trough her name (Lat. *marina* "that of the sea'"):

> Пока огнями смеется бал, / Душа не уснет в покое. / Но имя Бог мне иное дал: / Морское оно, морское! // В круженье вальса, под нежный вздох / Забыть не могу тоски я. / Мечты иные мне подал Бог: / Морские они, морские! // Поет огнями манящий зал, / Поет и зовет, сверкая. / Но душу Бог мне иную дал: / Морская она, морская!
>
> While the ball is laughing with lights / My Soul will not fall asleep peacefully / God gave me a different name / It is of the sea, of the sea! // In the movement of the waltz, while hearing a tender sigh / I cannot forget my longing / God gave me different dreams: / They are of the sea, of the sea! // The room is singing with lights / It is singing and calling, twinkling / But God gave me a different Soul / It is of the sea, of the sea![188]

"Русалка нездешней воды" thus refers to Tsvetaeva's fascination with *Undina*, to her rejection of everything earthly and claiming the sea her true habitat, one in which she can most fully exist. Yet the "mermaid of foreign waters" is almost immediately subjected to a satirical lowering in "Я рыбою бьюся в их виршах" – where the highly romanticized figure, mermaid, is now made just a fish that flaps, the verb "биться" (to flap) appearing in its colloquial form (*бьюся* versus *бьюсь*).

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[187] Unlike Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova only used the word "rusalka"; in her first five collection of verse it appeared only twice.

[188] Tsvetaeva, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, 122.

Clashing several literary registers in lines 4-6 in the Zangezi excerpt we have been looking at "О, ветер, мне косы мочаль / Я когтями впилася в тело / Руками сдавила виски," Khlebnikov moves on to target Tsvetaeva through dissonance. Now it is Tsvetaeva's verse from the cycle *Craft* (*Remeslo*), whose poems were also published in *Trinadtsat' poetov* (1917), *Vesennii salon poetov* (1918), *Poeziia revoliutsionnoi Moskvy* (1921?) and known in Moscow where Tsvetaeva read them to most diverse audiences.[189] Khlebnikov alludes to Tsvetaeva's valedictory poem "Я эту книгу посвещаю ветру" (I dedicate this poem to the Wind), her remake of the "Yaroslavna Lament" part of the *Igor Tale*: "О ветер, ветер, верный мой свидетель, / До милых донеси, / Что ежечасно я во сне свершаю / Путь – с Севера на Юг."[190] Casting herself as Igor's wife Yaroslavna, Tsvetaeva's lyrical hero repeats in her "Lament"[191] the famous Yaroslavna line "О ветр, ветрило!" (O Wind, Wind!)[192]

The grotesque lowering of poetic register in "…мне косы мочаль / Я когтями впилася в тело" serves to expose Tsvetaeva's appeal to Russian history, her special bond with it and her cultural mission as its keeper. Yaroslavna's lament becomes a hysterical cry of a peasant woman. The use of the verb *mochalit'* (to strip into fibers), of the first person singular *vpilasia* instead of *vpilas'*, as well as the choice of the word *kogti* (claws) instead of *nogti* (nails)— the latter absent from Tsvetaeva's poetic language altogether—all suggest Khlebnikov's deliberation

[189] Khlebnikov, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, 355.

[190] Tsvetaeva, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, 83. (O Wind, Wind, my loyal witness, / Carry to the people dear to me, / The news that I travel / from North to South every night).

[191] Makin, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 45.

[192] Viewing Russian folklore as an inexhaustible source of poetic themes and linguistic discovery, Khlebnikov often overlaid the present with the past, making them two complimentary layers co-existing within one textual space and shimmering from under one another. Thus, in *Vnuchka Malushi* (1909) the poet compares contemporary St. Petersburg to Kievan Rus', its primal unity long lost. Besides numerous Russian mythical, the poem has strong thematic parallels with the *Igor Tale*. Given how important the Russian medieval culture was for Khlebnikov, scarcely surprising that his 'poetic ear' was attuned to the Igor Tale references in the verse of Tsvetaeva, or any other poet.

and utmost care in finding the means to be precise in indicating his addressee. The theme of the exaggerated role of angst in Tsvetaeva's verse that this brings to mind, also refer to Tsvetaeva's anxiety over motherhood that most fully shows itself in the poem "Ты будешь невинной, тонкой…" from her *Juvenilia,* dedicated to her daughter and first published in the third issue of *Severnye zapiski* in 1916: "Но будешь ли ты—кто знает— / смертельно виски сжимать, / Как их вот сейчас сжимает / Твоя молодая мать."[193] Verging on despair, Tsvetaeva's apprehension over the responsibility she had over the life of her beloved daughter rang to Khlebnikov unpardonably sentimental. The nervous squeezing of one's temples, it seems, had become for him one of the trademarks of the straining lire of Marina Tsvetaeva.[194]

II. 8. Tsvetaeva and the Beauty of Transcendental Suffering

The multiple Tsvetaevan contexts in Sorrow's poetic themes and imagery converge into a portrait of great complexity, one that captures the idiosyncrasies of her early poetic style in a collage-like manner. Excessive sentimentality, the grief over the expulsion from the Eden of childhood, fascination with mystical and glorious death as an alternative to this exile, and attraction to and imaginary identification with Marina Mniszek—all these were for Khlebnikov characteristic of her early and later period. Clearly discernible in Sorrow's voice is Tsvetaeva's existential strain, her travestied rejection of the finite world and aspiring for the absolute. The opposition of *byt* [the everyday] and *bytie* [being] that turns the world into a vale of sorrow is at

[193] Tsvetaeva, *Selected Works,* vol.1, 167. (But who knows if you will, / Squeeze your temples with the same lethal force, / Your mother / Is squeezing them now).

[194] Unlike Akhmatova (one instance), Tsvetaeva often used the word 'temple(s)' in her poetry. She was arguably the only prominent Russian poet of the early twentieth century to use this image so expressively.

the very heart of Tsvetaeva's weeping muse. Writing verse is what gives to the lyrical hero a sense of union with the unchangeable and yet even more distant from it:

> The fact that the unchangeable consciousness renounces and surrenders its embodied form, while, on the other hand, the particular individual consciousness gives thanks, i.e. denies itself the satisfaction of being conscious of its independence, and assigns the essence of its action not to itself but to the beyond, through these two moments of reciprocal self-surrender of both parts, consciousness does, of course, gain a sense of unity with the Unchangeable. But this unity is at the same time affected with division, is again broken within itself, and from it there emerges once more the antithesis of the universal and individual. [195]

But while acknowledging the world and its capacities as a gift from above, the Unhappy Consciousness, in creating, feels embarrassment for secretly enjoying these gifts in a way that it now starts feeling that it has not renounced itself. It now blames its body for its inability to rise above individuality and free itself from the constraints of human physicality:

> Consciousness is aware of itself as this actual individual in the animal functions. These are no longer performed naturally and without embarrassment, as matters trifling in themselves which cannot possess any importance or essential significance for Spirit; instead, since it is in them that the enemy reveals itself in his characteristic shape, they are rather the object of serious endeavor, and become precisely matters of the utmost importance. This enemy however renews himself in his defeat, and consciousness, in fixing its attention on him, far from freeing itself from him, really remains forever in contact with him, and forever sees itself as defiled; and, since at the same time this object of its efforts, instead of being something essential, is of the meanest character, instead of being a universal, is the merest particular, we have here only a personality confined to its own self and its own petty actions, a personality brooding over itself, as wretched as it is impoverished.[196]

In order to achieve a genuine self-renunciation, the poetic soul must surrender its own will as a particular will, and entrust itself to a mediator who is no other than the artist herself. Through the creation of artistic worlds, a poetic soul feels itself connected to the immutable. And through the collective effort of inner artist-priests, mortality as human finitude is reduced to a mere sign over which, just like over any other sign, the masters of the new world now have

[195] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶222.

[196] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶¶135-136.

control. In this world below everything will be made an object of artistic study. Language proclaims its reign.

Having devoted much of his life to studying the essence of language, which the poet thought to express collective consciousness, and of time, which he thought a key to the laws governing Russian history, Khlebnikov strove to derive the original principles that underlay the primal unity of the universe, that, he thought, were still discernible in how language exists. Central to this unity was the diversity of all things existing. The problem of one and many which is as old as philosophy itself never left Khlebnikov, whose artistic solution of this problem in *Zangezi* was to create narrative planes similar to the consciousness stages in the *Phenomenology* yet grant each of these planes a status similar to that of a Platonic idea, one of an eternal self-identity, which an intelligible cannot not have. The play's open structure reveals just as much—the thematic, stylistic, and formal diversity of *Zangezi*'s building blocks posits the multiplicity of languages, of spatial and temporal plans, and of events and fates as various manifestations of one primal principle of the universe, the sustained unity of its ever-changing manifold. Assembled in the consciousness of its reader, *Zangezi,* in so far as it involves a dynamic creative recombination of the multiple elements, each of which is a part of a plane-idea, becomes time understood as a moving image of eternity, or as how Plato understood it. There was one important difference, however—the reader was now the new demiurge creating time. In the realm of aesthetics, this self-propagating diversity revealed itself to Khlebnikov in the form of artistic ideas' capacity to generate the new.

As a narrative of Language-Spirit, whose self-alienation sets nature and history in motion in Plane One, *Zangezi* focuses on the history of Russian poetry. In the gallery of poetic types Tsvetaeva appears as the straining muse of twentieth-century Russian verse and the Russian

poetic equivalent of the Hegelian Unhappy Consciousness. Her tragic discord with the everyday world made her primary way of being-in-the-world, Tsvetaeva continues the thematic line of Russian Romanticism, whose true metaphysical origin harks back to Russian medieval literature. But just as the despair of the Hegelian Unhappy Consciousness is temporarily overcome in the *Phenomenology* in the advent of the Renaissance scientific objectivity, the performative excesses of Sorrow's transcendental beyond becomes the last station before the Russian Poetic Spirit can see the world as a totality of signs from which new worlds can be created in an infinite number of ways. Khlebnikov thought the arrival of this infinity was near: "We believe in ourselves, we reject with indignation the vicious whispers of people from the past who still delude themselves that they bait our hills. Are we not gods?"[197]

[197] Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 321.

Third: Engineering Red Existence

> ...Так идут державным шагом,/ Позади —голодный пес,/ Впереди—с кровавым флагом,/ И за вьюгой невидим,/ И от пули невредим,/ Нежной поступью надвьюжной, / Снежной россыпью жемчужной,/ В белом венчике из роз —/ Впереди—Иисус Христос.
>
> Alexander Block "The Twelve" [198]

> "If any would not work, neither should he eat".
>
> (Thessalonians 3:10)

> Свастика веры стянула лица/Вавилонская азбука налипла на пальцах/Исторически оправданный метод/Пожирания сырой земли/Это ли не то,
> что нам надо?!/Это ли не то, что нам надо?!
>
> Гражданская Оборона, "Русское поле экспериментов"[199]

III.0. Approaching History in the First Century after Max Sebald (A.M.S.)

On a hot summer day in the year of our Lord 1795, Daniel McGinnis, eighteen years of age, saw a clearing close to the eastern end of an island among whose magnificent red oaks he had already been wandering while not working on a farm. He discovered a circular depression, approximately thirteen feet across, above which stood an old tree hanging from one of whose branches was a tackle block with a piece of a decayed rope. Daniel came back the very next day with his friends John Smith and Antony Vaughan to find strange symbols engraved on the walls of the pit, and a layer of logs at about every ten feet under the flagstones barely covered with

[198] "…Onward still the Twelve go striding; /In their rear – a starving cur; /And with bloody banner leading, /Hidden by the howling storm, /Safe from human hurt or harm, /In a chaplet of white roses, /Stepping through the pearly snow dust, /Shrouded in the snowy mist, /In the distance – Jesus Christ," in Alexander Blok, *Selected Poems* tr. Alex Miller (Moscow: Progress, 1981), 317-318.

[199] "The swastika of faith constricted our faces, / The alphabet of Babel got stuck to our fingers / A historically legitimated method of / Devouring damp earth / Isn't this what we need?! / Isn't this what we need?!" in Grazdanskaia Oborona, "Russian field of experiments."

earth. When eight years later the three returned to continue their excavation they found at about ninety feet into the pit a large stone bearing an unknown inscription.

Since 1803, when, for the first time, the pit flooded to the 33-foot mark, many people and commercial companies tried to get to the treasure buried on Oak Island located just off the coast of the Province of Nova Scotia, Canada. The frequent collapse of the bottom of the shaft into either a natural cavern or system of booby traps led many to conclude that the pit is a sinkhole and a system of natural caverns, others to maintain that the entire beach where the Money Pit is located was at some point converted into a giant siphon whose man-made tunnel feeds water from the ocean into the pit.

The Oak Island treasure hunt has been on for over two centuries; many have perished, entire fortunes lost. Some say that the Money Pit holds the pirate treasure that may have served as the gold reserve to Sir Francis Drake, Captain Kidd, John Every, or Blackbeard himself, all of whom interfered with the imposition of new norms on the uncharted territories, especially after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, as capital's link to labor began to loosen and land became territory. Others claim that it has the missing jewels of Mary-Antoinette that she entrusted to her maid as the Palace of Versailles was stormed by Revolutionaries, as the split between deism and materialism that underlay humanism and a commitment to the happiness of the humankind as the fundamental value of the Enlightenment turned into the violence of "the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water."[200] Others yet suggest that inside the pit are the papers that prove Francis Bacon's authorship of Shakespeare's play, or that it may be the resting place of the Holy Grail, or even the holy Arc of the Covenant. One of the people who visited the island as part of the Old Gold Salvage Group of 1909 and who followed the news of and developments in the treasure

[200] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶590.

hunt was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who during his first presidency saved capitalism through state intervention, showing that Ford's belief that corporate power could regulate economy as a whole was little more than a kind of controlled, back-to-the-land utopianism.

And while the idea of the great American visionary, even if ignorant on every subject except automobiles, had little practical utility, for he kept insisting that "self-help was the only means of combating the economic depression," his recognition that a new politics of labor control meant new principles of labor management based on aesthetic and psychological aspects of labor reproduction, created a populist democratic society in which mass production was inseparable from mass consumption.

At the heart of Fordism was F.W. Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management,* the work that suggested new ways to maximize production efficiency by breaking down each step in the labor process into component motions that were further fragmented according to the rigorous standards of time and space. Taylor's approach to maximization of labor efficiency, if by reducing man to an entity whose main function was value transfer, mirrors Marx's description of how in its movement capital

> reduces the sound sleep needed for … restoration, renewal and refreshment … asks no questions about the length of life of labor-power. What interests it, is purely and simply the maximum of labor power that can be set in motion in a working day. It attains this objective by shortening the life of labor-power, in the same way as a greedy farmer snatches more produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility.[201]

Lenin was fascinated with Taylor because he believed that American means of production could build American-like technology. Before the NEP he saw the task of the Soviet government in setting the people in all its scope to learn to work:

> The Taylor system, the last word of capitalism in this respect, like all capitalist progress, is a combination of the subtle brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of its greatest

[201] Marx, *Capital*, 376.

> scientific achievements in the field of analyzing mechanical motion during work. The elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the working out of correct methods of work, the introduction of the best system of accounting and control, etc. The Soviet Republic must at all costs adopt all that is valuable in the achievements of science and technology in this field. The possibility of building socialism will be determined by our success in combining the Soviet government and the Soviet organization of administration with modern achievements of capitalism. We must organize in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system and systematically try it out and adapt it to our purposes.[202]

The socialist state, Lenin reasoned, need not exploit the workers to appropriate the surplus value but would simply redistribute the increased production among the workers and peasants. The Bolsheviks believed they could eliminate capitalism's political apparatus but keep the economic one.

And while the Soviet Union continued to marvel at the image of America as a land of inventors, industrial scientists, and system builders—its workers mercilessly driven to harvest the grain, cut the wood and dig the minerals to be imported in exchange for a largely American technology—Stalin lauded Taylorism. This shift of Taylorism from the limited domain of factory organization to one of national economy was following the logic of the now exiled Trotsky, who, fearing the total industrial collapse of the young Soviets in 1918, urged for militarization of labor, a project that saw a state-wide application of Taylorism in its extreme form.

Whether Ford's Architect, Albert Kahn, was really convinced that the Russian people, no matter under whose rule, had, after centuries of tsarist rule the right to be helped,[203] or because of his 250 billion dollar government contract to project and equip virtually all of Soviet military industry, his firm Gosproektstroi remains the only foreign company to have designed and built for the Soviet Union over five hundred projects and educated four thousand specialists. While Stalin's collaboration with Kahn ended in 1932, after he realized that England offered more for

[202] Lenin, *PSS*, vol.7, 332.

[203] Dmitrii Kmel'nitskii, *Zodchii Stalin* (Moscow: NLO, 2007), 27-41.

the foreign currency the Soviet Union received for the grain it kept supplying during the Great Famine, the industrial projects that Gosproektstroi had built became the resource centers around which the population of the entire country was supposed to be as Stalin is thought to have said "more or less uniformly distributed."

Stalin celebrated American efficiency as "that indomitable force which neither knows, nor recognizes obstacles; which continues on a task once started until it is finished, even if it is a minor task; and without which serious constructive work is inconceivable," and he also believed that "the combination of the Russian revolutionary sweep with American efficiency is the essence of Leninism."[204]

But this meant that he now saw the country's entire population as labor reserve. To ensure the uniform distribution of human resource, people were fired so that within 24-hours, having lost the privilege of buying bread at the state-regulated prices, they were either forced to register at labor exchange (*birzha truda*) that sent them to the places from which there was no return, or leave the city if they did not get a passport by the state-imposed deadline.

III.1. Andrei Platonov, Dialectical Proposition, and the Phenomenology of Collective Ascension

Like no other twentieth-century Russian literature text Andrei Platonov's novel the *Foundation Pit* (*Kotlovan*)[205] captures the historical complexity of the paradigm to which one could refer as Soviet "objectification of the human" under whose aegis the first five-year plan had unfolded. Andrei Platonov's stylistic experiments expose the methodological limitations

[204] Stalin, *PSS*, vol. 20, 36.

[205] Unless otherwise indicated, I am using Robert Chandler's 2009 translation of *Kotlovan* and Nauka 2000 edition of the Russian text.

inherent in how dialectical and historical materialism[206] conceived of the human; the state-wide frenzy to quantify the human appears as the grotesque instrumentality and functional transparency of the new language that the Young Soviet Russia speaks in Platonov's work. The kind of instrumentality behind Platonov's trademark "tongue-tied prose" [*kosnoiazychie*], as I will first argue, is informed by Platonov's philosophical polemics with Karl Marx's *Capital*, more precisely, with the Hegelian systematic dialectics constitutive to its method of enquiry. I will then show that a single most important device associated with what I would call a "hyper-conscious awkward awareness" of the predicating self in Platonov prose is nothing other than the estranged Hegelian "dialectical sentence."[207] At the level of Marxist doctrine this dialectical sentence also appears in the form of an enlightened proletariat's awareness of the necessity of appropriating the means of production and surplus value, its reality grounded in the state-wide commitment to maximum transparency in communication. Platonov shows as inevitable the

[206] Historical and dialectical materialism, a.k.a. *istmat* and *diamat,* are the two umbrella terms I am using here largely to designate two major conceptual approaches to speculative philosophy in the USSSR throughout the twentieth century, not to ascribe homogeneity to either of these "movements." It would not be an exaggeration to say that while *diamat* was primarily engaged in reassembling the three parts of Hegel's *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Science* so that the latest discoveries of natural sciences would correct the *always provisional* unfolding of logical moments, while *istmat* was akin to Hegel's famous Lectures of History of philosophy in that it sought to discern in the empirical thickness of world history the formalization of this or that category. For more on how dialectical materialism was used as an "empty signifier" in the struggle for power during the 1930s see in Daniel Todes and Nikolai Krementsov's "Dialectical materialism in Soviet science in 1920s and 1930s," in W. Leatherbarrow and D. Offord Ed. *A History of Russian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For a fundamental study of Marxism and its intellectual offspring see Leszek Kolakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism: its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

[207] Exactly what the speculative or philosophical sentence is will be made later in this chapter, for this concept cannot be adequately described in disconnect from Hegel's Method in the *Phenomenology* and *Science of Logic*. In a word, speculative sentence can be defined as a way of communicating information that breaks from the expected short-hand manner of using words. For instance, my inquiring if that is coffee in someone's hand, does not typically have a form which features an estranged description of that coffee as a beverage held in a container, itself an extended physical body, and whose chemical composition is such that health benefits are derived from coffee's phenolphthalein. Now imagine that while having that kind of conversation, I will be changing my description of what that cup contains depending what I learn from my interlocutor in addition to the psychological states I'll infer her to have based on her report so that a sip of coffee she takes then becomes, if she feels that there is too little time to submit an article on time, a bitter black share of the lagging work contingent, and the cup itself, a heavy, ineffective equipment now made all the heavier. This gliding of the subject of conversation interspersed with the series of retroactive "injections" of the mental into the physical and vice versa is at the heart of Platonov's dialectical sentence with a proviso that its scale than becomes that of world history where the Young Soviet Union gets a random re-staging of the events that took place within the World-Spirit.

conflict arising from any attempt to fully embrace the negativity of human subjectivity within the boundaries of any one paradigm of rationality. He argues that the interpretative situational transcendence, any community of people has because of the negativity of the process-oriented nature of thought-determination, cannot itself be "localized" as a single factor in social life akin to capital circulation. Because human subjectivity necessarily implies "situational ambiguity," in view of the inter-subjective negotiation of anyone's intended meaning, the closest one can come to calculating the incalculable, that is, the extent of ideological aberration, is through the imposition of an ontological framework approaching the world as plurality of physical entities.

In my reconstruction of this ontological orientation toward the transparent functionality of language used in communication, whose vision permeates the language of *Kotlovan*, I do not turn not to either the philosophy of N.F. Fedorov (1829-1903), from whom Platonov inherits the peculiar coupling of positivist thought and eschatology, or Alexander Bogdanov (1873-1928), whose attempts to blend Marxism with neo-positivism strongly influenced Platonov's worldview.[208] Rather I choose as my standpoint the absolute idealism of G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and *Science of Logic* (1812-1816) the radicalization of whose work Marxism[209] has been taken to be.[210] Even though there are multiple studies of communism

[208]Thomas Seifrid notes that this productive double influence of Fedorov and Bogdanov "allowed Platonov…to preserve the political and economic vocabulary of Marxism and remain within the context of an at least nominally Marxist vision of history while adhering to a vision of being which was contradictory to, and in the end even seditious of, materialism," in his *Andrei Platonov: Uncertainties of Spirit* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 25.

[209] This tendency in Marx is discernible as early as his *1844 Manuscripts* where he takes the Master-Slave part of the "Self-Consciousness" section *Phenomenology* to be the meta-structure of the relation between labor and capital.

[210] It seems that Lenin was convinced that "It is impossible completely to understand Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, a half-century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!" in *PSS*, vol. 7, 180, and was well aware of the detrimental effects of vulgar materialism. "Intelligent idealism", wrote Vladimir Il'ich, "is closer to intelligent materialism than stupid materialism," in *PSS*, vol. 7, 276.

as a religion, notably absent from virtually all of them is a discussion of how the immanent religiosity of the thought of Hegel and Marx resurfaced in Soviet history in ways different from its reliance on ritual, the sacred/profane dichotomy, or sweeping generalizations about the Russian Soul,[211] stable ethnic traits,[212] as well as attributions of apocalyptic or nihilist orientation to the Russians in view of "their religious-dogmatic quality of spirit."[213] Approaching Platonov's project in *Kotlovan* with an eye on the narrative of a willing self-estrangement of God into history, as well as how the motif of this estrangement were developed by Hegel and Marx, will allow a detailed reconstruction of Platonov's vision of how multiple axes of temporality are established in human culture as well as his critique of metaphysical attempts to formalize all aspects of human being in the world in a self-sustained and fully autonomous system of knowledge.

I will also look at the main paradox of the novel: the irreconcilable difference among different characters' experience of the foundation pit as what is supposed to be one and same

[211] Berdyaev writes in relation Russian communism being an international as well as national phenomenon that it's best understood as determined by national history, peculiarity of its national roots connected with the peculiarities of Russia's national character and historic destiny: "But in the Russian soul there remained a strong natural element, linked with the immensity of Russian itself, with the boundless Russian plain. Among Russians 'Nature' is an elemental power, stronger than among Western people, especially those of the most elaborated, i.e., Latin culture. The nature-pagan element entered even into Russian Christianity. In the typical Russian two elements are always in opposition - the primitive natural paganism of boundless Russia, and an Orthodox asceticism received from Byzantium, a reaching out towards the other world. A natural dionysism and a Christian asceticism are equally characteristic of the Russian people. A difficult problem presents itself ceaselessly to the Russian- the problem of organizing his vast territory. The immensity of Russia, the absence of boundaries, was expressed in the structure of Russian soul." Nikolay Berdyaev, *Origins of Russian Communism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 8.

[212] Such as "dogmatism, asceticism, the ability to endure suffering and to make sacrifices for the sake of its faith whatever that may be, a reaching out to the transcendental, in relation now to eternity, to the other world, now to the future, to this world, " in Berdyaev, *Origins*, 9. Berdyaev also believed that "the bringing together of principles which are antinomies and polar opposites is characteristically Russian. Russia and Russian people can be characterized only by contradiction. On the same grounds the Russian people may be characterized as imperial-despotic and anarchic freedom-loving, as a people inclined to nationalism and national conceit, and a people of universal spirit, more than others capable of ecumenic views; cruel and unusually human; inclined to inflict suffering and illimitably sympathetic. This contradiction is established by all Russian history and by the eternal conflict of the instinct of imperial might with the instinct of the people's love of freedom and justice," in his *Origins*, 18.

[213] Berdyaev, *Origins*, 9.

thing,[214] namely, a foundation for the future edifice in which all of the proletariat would live. The vision of the happy future infinitely removed from the present is contingent on defeat of the irrational by science. Platonov shows that this vision of rational fulfillment is itself fundamentally religious in conceiving the overcoming of the duality between the transcendental and empirical selfhood in the beyond. This dream of full reconciliation with scientific reason is yet another version of Christian apocalyptic narrative. Platonov shows the epistemic, ontological, and ethical bankruptcy of the political vision based on the idea of transparent inter-subjectivity rooted in the communal self-sacrifice qua total labor-mobilization and the pervasive self-instrumentality it presupposes. To do this, the author subverts the neat logical procession of historical shapes of knowing that consciousness undergoes in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. The foundation pit becomes a place of historical regress in which the shapes of consciousness actualized by the world spirit in Hegel's system begin to materialize in a way that defies reason. The second coming of Christ does not happen. What happens instead is the historical coming of the transcendental subject, a foreign God, and absolute negativity of Hegel's philosophical system, which the Russian intelligentsia gets in the world of Realpolitik as a result of its two main articles of faith: *bespochvennost'* and *ideinost'*.

[214] This paradox is all the more striking in view of many of the pit workers dreaming of their future salvation escape:
"Каждый из них придумал себе идею будущего спасения отсюда — один желал нарастить стаж и уйти учиться, второй ожидал момента для переквалификации, третий же предпочитал пройти в партию и скрыться в руководящем аппарате, — и каждый с усердием рыл землю, постоянно помня эту свою идею спасения"(48).
"Each of them thought up for himself an idea of future salvation from here- one hoped to accumulate a work record and go off and study, another was waiting for a chance to retrain for a new occupation, a third preferred to make his way into Party and disappear in the apparatus of leadership- and each of them dug the earth with zeal, constantly remembering this idea he had of salvation"(43).

III.2. In the Captivity of a Metaphor[215]

In one of the first studies of Platonov's language by Western Slavists, the poet Alexei Tsvetkov writes that

> The totality of Platonov's stylistic devices is so original and personal, that, in view of the absence of anything similar in other languages, namely in English, it becomes an insurmountable obstacle for any translator. Even the western literary scholars whose knowledge of the language of the original is near native find in Platonov's system a code to which they have no key. Much more common, however, it is the very existence of the code that is contested.[216]

Tsvetkov's comprehensive classification of the multiple ways of in which semantic deformation happens in Platonov, is, to be sure a giant leap forward in comparison to the majority of Soviet monographs on Platonov's style, most of which have either managed not to mention his style at all, or to succinctly conclude that "Platonov's language is highly complex, while the author, can really make one lose his temper, so hard to read he is at times, for he 'moves his tongue like an elephant does his trunk.'"[217]

Whereas he is right about Platonov's ability to capture some of the paradoxical tensions of post-revolutionary Russia and its language, Tsvetkov does not reconstruct the cultural paradigm showing us how in his prose a unique world is disclosed, meaning given, and truth revealed. Platonov's linguistic quest is all the more unique in that it articulates some of the

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[215] This section is connected with III.0. through its thematization of representation [*Vorstellung*] as the human mind's double tendency to (i) conceive of meta-cognitive relations in the form of physical entities interacting with one another in space and time and (ii) estrange its own operative singularity through multiple versions of what may be called an "originary event." Under investigation here are the assumptions of a critical narrative that thinks of itself as a beam of light that brings to view something that had happened in the past without admitting that its method of knowing is more than a neutral medium to approach the subject studied. Thus I intentionally here choose the critical views whose way of accessing the data rely on metaphorical thinking. I, then, too, perform a metaphoric variation which involves a selective close reading of fragments that is crowned by my analysis of the triple significance of the protagonist speaking name. My choosing to limit my associative stream to only three connected units is a double homage to the Christian idea of the triune God and its speculative critique by Hegel, as well as to Vladimir Propp's observation of the triple folkloric event appearance.

[216] Alexei Tsvetkov, *The Language of A. Platonov*, doctoral dissertation (University of Michigan, 1983), iii.

[217] Tsvetkov, *The Language of A. Platonov,* iii.

practices defining the intelligibility horizon of his time. But a careful and detailed account of the background against which significance and meaning are established is exactly what we need in order to understand Joseph Brodsky, who, writing about Platonov's language, says that

> His every sentence drives the Russian language into a semantic dead end or, more precisely, reveals a proclivity for dead-ends, a blind-alley mentality in the language itself…. He starts a sentence in a way familiar enough that you almost anticipate the tenor of the rest. However, each word that he uses is qualified either by epithet or intonation, or by its incorrect position within the context, to the extent that the rest of the sentence gives you not so much a sense of surprise as the sense that you have compromised yourself by knowing anything about the tenor of speech in general and about how to place these words in particular. You find yourself locked in, marooned in blinding proximity to the meaninglessness of the phenomenon this or that word denotes, and you realize that your own verbal carelessness, through trusting too much your own ear and the words themselves. Reading Platonov, one gets a sense of the relentless, implacable absurdity built into the language and that with each new—anyone's—utterances, that absurdity deepens. And that there is no way out of that blind alley but to retreat back into the very language that brought one in.[218]

So bureaucratese clashes with the rigidity of the dead language of cause and effect; entities from different ontological realms coexist; language is made an instrument with which to achieve perfect clarity in communication. It is tempting to see this as an introduction into a brilliant yet grotesque world of a confused working class consciousness, one that through Russian revolutionary Prometheanism is meant to "represent the way in which high-flown Marxist–Leninist rhetoric was refracted in the minds of the country's largely unlettered masses."[219] It is difficult to see what exactly Brodsky means when he says that it would be "idiotically simpleminded" to see Platonov as "another anti-Soviet satirical writer, with perhaps a surrealist bent."[220] In a way, he is right because what Platonov is after is not some caricature of a confused, non-existing subject, a purely contingent intersection of various institutional practices and their

[218] Joseph Brodsky, "Catastrophes in the Air" in *Less than One* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986), 286-287.

[219] Seifrid, *Andrei Platonov*, 2.

[220] Brodsky, *Catastrophes*, 283.

discursive fields, but because he is after a very careful reconstruction of a language-bound reality whose ontological, epistemological, and ethical commitments are conditioned by history.

Platonov's language is weird.[221] It is utterly bizarre, highly eccentric, peculiarly deformed, and exquisitely unpalatable. Its flickering semantics is viscous and unpredictable; it collapses and implodes. I know of no other Russian writer whose language makes it so patently clear that consciousness *is not* "in the head," that language *is* "how we are," and that the way we talk about and relate to the world embodies a set of interpretative commitments to our existential projects, of whose complicated history we are too often oblivious.[222] *Kotlovan*'s opening paragraph is a perfect access point to Platonov's experimental labyrinth.

> В день тридцатилетия личной жизни Вощеву дали расчет с небольшого механического завода, где он добывал средства для своего существования. В увольнительном документе ему написали, что он устраняется с производства вследствие роста слабосильности в нем и задумчивости среди общего темпа труда.
> Вощев взял на квартире вещи в мешок и вышел наружу, чтобы на воздухе лучше понять свое будущее. Но воздух был пуст, неподвижные деревья бережно держали жару в листьях, и скучно лежала пыль на безлюдной дороге — в природе было такое положение. Вощев не знал, куда его влечет, и облокотился в конце города на низкую ограду одной усадьбы, в которой приучали бессемейных детей к труду и пользе.
>
> On the day of the thirtieth anniversary of his private life Voshchev was made redundant from the small machine factory where he obtained the means for his existence. His dismissal notice stated that he was being removed from production on account of weakening strength in him and thoughtfulness amid general tempo of labor.
> In his lodgings Voshchev took his things into a bag; he then went to the outside so as better to understand his future out in the air. But the air was empty, motionless trees were carefully holding the heat in their leaves, and dust lay boringly on the deserted road— the situation in Nature was quite. Voshchev had no idea where to head for, and at the end of the town he leant his elbows on the low fence of a home where children with no family were taught to work and be useful. [223]

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[221] For a detailed investigation of the interplay between the peculiarity of Platonov's "aesthetic code" and the social, historical, and philosophical exigencies of his time see Mikhail Mikheev, *V mir Platonova cherez ego iazyk* (Moscow, MGU, 2003).

[222] Seifrid notes that "what distinguishes Platonov is the extent to which he was capable of rendering explicit the epistemological substratum of language and making it a manifest theme of his works, and it is undoubtedly his view of language as the privileged revealer of linguistic and, behind them, epistemological presuppositions which led him to embrace verbal art as the natural medium in which to conduct ideological debate," in his *Andrei Platonov*, 173-74.

[223] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 21/1.

There seems to be enough in this passage with which the journey of the outcast protagonist Voshchev[224] (from the Russian *voshchina*— both a honeycomb and an individual hexagonal wax cell), who, after being expelled from the project of the energetic socialist construction, realizes that the vacant lot where he has spent the night is one of the sites for the future Proletarian Home [*obshcheproletarskii dom*]. This House is an exercise in confusion and absurdity, to warrant the view about the "complex and ambivalent kind of parody"[225] that by applying a grotesque, caricaturing distortion to the elements of the production novel, while remaining hyper-loyal to their original intent, manages to creatively deconstruct official ideology as part and parcel of the irrational element saturating the new Soviet cosmogony.

Perhaps this de-humanized world is only a temporary state expected to disappear with the advent of technological culture? It would seem that Platonov's language merely refracts a kind of religious exaltation accompanying the collective readiness to sacrifice the present for the future that Aleksei Gastev's texts from the poetry of the working man's strike convey especially well:

> We will fulfill the dream of the first martyrs of thought, persecuted prophets of human power, great bards of iron. To Babylonian builders we cry through one hundred centuries: again breathing with fire and smoke your longing, iron altar is raised above the sky, a proud idol of work is again raging.[226]

Anatoly Lunacharsky, another ideologue of Soviet enlightenment, also makes use of the Babylonian imagery in depicting the new Soviet man.

[224] It is easy to see that the world-play is really triple here: voshhc(ina)-veshch'-vosh'. Voschev is an individual living being but one appearing under a finite number of objective categories dimension. As an objectified self he is a thing [*veshch'*] that is dispensable when compared with grandeur of the Communist dream of the arrival of the Heavenly Kingdom, thus, a mere organism, a louse (vosh').

[225] Thomas Seifrid, *Andrei Platonov,* 142.

[226] Aleksei Kapitonovich Gastev, *Poeziia rabochego udara* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pistael', 1968), 127.

> Человек шел как мог, спотыкался, падал, терзал себя об острые камни, валился снова и снова сверху в пропасть, и снова начинал свой путь Сизифа, и еще скалы, ущелья и потоки перед ним. Но уже видна светлая вершина горы.[227]
>
> Man walked with difficulty, stumbling, falling over, cutting himself on the sharp rocks, falling again and again into the abyss, and again he would start his Sisyphean task, and before him were more cliffs, crevices, and streams. But the bright summit is already in view.

Hans Gunter's is correct in singling out Dostoevsky's Great Inquisitor as one of the principle interlocutor of Platonov in *Kotlovan*: the mutineers will not beget the giants who will finish building the tower. But while the tower of Babel evidently stands for both the hope for ideal future and the self-destructive element inherent in reason, Gunter, apart from likening it to such impossible projects as Tatlin's tower or Stalin's megalomaniac Palace of the Soviets, does not talk about how the symbolic and narrative aspects of this project in connection with the historical trajectory of Russia and its place within that of the West. Was the Marxist theology simply "further developed by Soviet Marxism-Leninism while based on the Judeo-Christian eschatological model: The Garden of Eden-Original Sin/the Fall-Redemption and the Second Coming?"[228] After all, such a reading would be consistent with the enthusiasm that accompanied the reception by many a great Russian artists like Alexander Block, Sergei Esenin, and Vladimir Mayakovsky of the Bolsheviks' seizure of power which they say as a portent of a new age that provided ample for yet another system of mythopoetics.

To say that as a rejection of utopia, the grave is a symbol of a reversal of movement that substitutes the positive ascending line of the tower for the negative descending line of the foundation pit is not enough. In his commentary on the essence of Platonov's language, Brodsky,

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[227] Anatoly Lunacharsky, *Religiia i sotsializm*, (St. Petersburg: Iz-vo Shipovnik, 1908-1911), vol. 1,189.

[228] Anatoly Khazanov, "Marxism-Leninism as a Secular Religion," in *The Sacred in the Twentieth Century Politics: Essays in Honor of Professor Stanley G. Payne*, eds. Roger Griffin, Robert Mallett, John Tortorice (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 123.

talks about "the revolutionary eschatology embedded in the Russian language"[229] but feels that "there is no much point in going on about the roots of Russian millenarianism in great detail" because "the species' eschatological capacity is always one and the same."[230] Perhaps the eschatological capacity Brodsky is talking about is to be found in the fact that common to both the Enlightenment and the Darkness of superstition preceding it is the need for control, which takes the form of conceptualization as well as animism? Adorno and Horkheimer stress the presence in human civilization of a history of the growing dominance of instrumental reason that is bound to culminate in a regression to mythology, constitutive of whose thought is the "explanation of every event as a repetition."[231] This is why myth

> itself set off the unending process of enlightenment in which ever and again, with the inevitability of necessity, every specific theoretic view succumbs to destructive criticism that it is only belief, until even the very notion of spirit, of truth and, indeed enlightenment itself have become animistic magic. The principle of fateful necessity which brings low the heroes of myth and derives as a logical consequence from the pronouncement of the oracles, does not merely, when refined to the stringency of formal logic, rule in every rationalistic system of Western philosophy, but itself dominates the series of systems which begins with the hierarchy of gods and in permanent twilight of the idols, hands down an identical content: anger against insufficient righteousness. Just as myths already realize enlightenment, so enlightenment with every step becomes more deeply engulfed in mythology. It receives all matter from myths, in order to destroy them; and even as judge it comes under the mythic curse. [232]

But if this kind of repetition is what allows for concepts, rules, and laws, just as it does for empirical objects to be classified, to be differentiated from some higher-level concepts, rules, or laws, instrumental reason appears as dependent on mythic thought in its negation of sensory immediacy as a means to objectify experience. I do not think that the eschatological capacity Brodsky has in mind is one that belongs to the instrumental negation of the immediate sensory

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[229] Brodsky, "Catastrophes", 283.

[230] Brodsky, "Catastrophes", 284.

[231] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 11-12.

[232] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, 7-8.

experience. His is a vision of the world where the alienated nature and human body are both subjugated by science and become experimental objects capable of manipulation for the sake of maximum instrumental efficiency. One thing Platonov exposes in *Kotlovan* is the ontological relation between the temporalities of revealed religion like Christianity, and the way capitalist and scientific practices seek to localize an actually existing individual consciousness as a finite extended entity. Let us now look at several examples of how Platonov does this in his text.

Platonov's language captures the drive toward the infinite accumulation and vision of a limitless growth of wealth under the capitalist mode of production. Science becomes a road to infinite knowledge. Nature and people are turned into a homogeneous material for infinite production and scientific scrutiny:

> Инженер Прушевский подошел к бараку и поглядел внутрь через отверстие бывшего сучка; около стены спал Чиклин, его опухшая от силы рука лежала на животе, и все тело шумело в питающей работе сна; босой Козлов спал с открытым ртом, горло его клокотало, будто воздух дыхания проходил сквозь тяжелую темную кровь, а из полуоткрытых бледных глаз выходили редкие слезы — от сновидения или неизвестной тоски.
> Прушевский отнял голову от досок и подумал. Вдалеке светилась электричеством ночная постройка завода, но Прушевский знал, что там нет ничего кроме мертвого строительного материала и усталых, недумающих людей.[233]

> Prushevsky walked up to the barrack and peered inside through the aperture of a former knot in the wood. Chiklin was sleeping beside the wall; his hand swollen from strength, lay on his belly and his whole body was rumbling in the nourishment of sleep. Kozlov was barefoot and sleeping with his mouth open; his throat was gurgling as if the air of breath were passing through dark heavy blood; and out of his half-open, pale eyes were emerging occasional tears- from dreams or some unknown yearning.
> Prushevsky took his head away from the planks and thought. Far away a nighttime factory construction site was shining with electricity, but Prushevsky knew that there was nothing there except dead building material and tired unthinking people.

Prushevsky sees people as objects, as men-machines. His seeing them in this light is informed by science approaching nature as a homogeneous material substance governed by a set of universal

[233] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 32/18-19.

and necessary laws.[234] Nature becomes self-contained and self-explanatory, the cause of every event in the world to be looked for and found *only* within the boundaries of the visible. And what determines the utmost limit of the intelligible within the visible is labor:

> Все спящие были худы, как умершие, тесное место меж кожей и костями у каждого было занято жилами, и по толщине жил было видно, как много крови они должны пропускать во время напряжения труда.[235]
>
> All the sleepers were thin, as if they had died; the cramped space between each man's skin and his bones was occupied by veins, and it was clear from the thickness of these veins how much blood they must let pass during the tension of labor.

An embodiment of instrumental reason, Prushevsky can never get clear about why things in the world always appear as already intelligible and mattering, as well as about the source of meaning and significance that makes life worth living:

> Пусть разум есть синтез всех чувств, где смиряются и утихают все потоки тревожных движений, но откуда тревога и движенье? Он этого не знал, он только знал, что старость рассудка есть влеченье к смерти, это единственное его чувство; и тогда он, может быть, замкнет кольцо—он возвратится к происхождению чувств, к вечернему летнему дню своего неповторившегося свидания.[236]
>
> Suppose that reason is the synthesis of all feelings, the place where all the currents of alarming movements are stilled into resignation-but what gives rise to alarm and the movement? This was something he did not know; all he knew was that the passion of reason is the pull towards death, that this is only thing reason can feel—and then, perhaps, he might come full circle, returning to the origin of feelings, to the evening summer day of his never repeated tryst.

Similarly, biological life as a condition of possibility for a mixed life in which reason and psyche do not oppose each, but whose co-existence is what makes the peculiar creative infinity of the human project unique, is often portrayed by Platonov as a mystery, a source of knowledge

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[234] I agree with Hans Jonas who thinks that "the philosopher will not be content with the assumption (fitting as it is as a tool for scientist) that this sustained and far-flung process [the vast landscape of life on our planet], moving through aeons with circuitous consistency, always trying itself in subtler and bolder creations, should have been "blind" in the sense that its dynamics consists in nothing but the mechanical permutation of indifferent elements, depositing its chance results along the way and with them accidentally giving rise to the subjective phenomena that inexplicably adhere to them in a redundant byplay," in his *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological* (Chicago :University of Chicago Press, 1980), 1.

[235] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 27/10.

[236] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 104/132.

insubordinate to calculation and explanation. Consider this description of the signs of life still present in a person who is dying:

> Она лежала сейчас навзничь—так ее повернул Чиклин для своего поцелуя,—веревочка через темя и подбородок держала ее уста сомкнутыми, длинные, обнаженные ноги были покрыты густым пухом, почти шерстью, выросшей от болезней и бесприютности,—какая-то древняя, ожившая сила превращала мертвую еще при ее жизни в обрастающее шкурой животное.[237]
>
> She was now lying on her back—since Chiklin had turned her that way for his kiss. Her lips were still clamped by the little piece of string around her chin and the top of her head, and her long bared legs were covered by a thick down, almost fur, that had grown because of diseases and lack of shelter; some ancient energy had reawaken and had begun to transform the dead woman-even in life-into an animal growing a pelt.

And to blame for the hegemony of instrumental reason is not "technology [that] is the essence of this knowledge, [that] aims to produce neither concepts nor images, nor the joy of understanding, but method exploitation of the labor of others, capital."[238] To blame is the desire to possess capital, seeing it, because of a dimension of potentiality inherent in it, as the "collateral" for some perfect body of knowledge to come. While the notion of capital as "value in motion" has similarities with the expanding body of knowledge culled by social and natural sciences, the essence of the mathematization of the world as a totality of commodities, that takes place under a capitalist mode of production, is different. Insofar as the rapidity of business transactions becomes the equivalent of the accuracy with which these measurements represent the world, the idea of infinite capital expansion through total quantification has in it a promise of yet another reconciliation. In order for this quantification to be possible the "universal equivalent" or "money commodity," has to be used as a provisional way to relate the abstract value of human labor to human world understood as a totality of commodities.

[237] Platonov, Kotlovan, 56/55.

[238] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectics*, 2.

Platonov targets the notion of historical necessity. The spirit of Russian history replays, in *Kotlovan*, some of the episodes already experienced by the Hegelian *Weltgeist* ("world spirit"). Human labor has to become the purpose of itself much like the turning of money into a commodity of commodities, which fact owes to "the social necessity springing from the conditions of the process of circulation itself."[239] As a means to accumulate unlimited social power, "the unceasing movement of profit making"[240] is a strong psychological factor behind people's striving to augment value. This, however, helps little to advance our understanding of what it is about the money in circulation that allows it to appear as

> [a] radical leveler, extinguish[ing] all distinction…self-moving substance which passes through a process of its own, and for which commodities and money are mere forms and its entering into a private relationship in which it differentiates itself as original value from itself as surplus – value.[241]

The reason why money can function as a mediator of commodity exchange in a way different from the capitalist circulation, "the great social retort into which everything is thrown, to come out again as the money crystal,"[242] is not because monetized societies of the past denounced it as what destroyed the economic moral order. These societies did not share the infinite drive to measure the world, which, its source already evident in Renaissance science, survived into the Bolshevik utopia.

Paul Tillich holds the "spirit of capitalism" to be a "symbol for an ultimate, fundamental attitude towards the world," one he calls "self-sufficient finitude" [*in sich ruhenden Endlichkeit*] which he discerns in natural and mathematical sciences that aim to show that "reality is governed

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[239] Marx, *Capital*, 234.

[240] Marx, *Capital*, 254.

[241] Marx, *Capital*, 256.

[242] Marx, *Capital*, 229.

wholly by its own laws and is rationally intelligible, technology that conquers time, space, and nature," and capitalist economy that "seeks to arouse and to satisfy every increasing demands without raising the question as to the meaning of the process which claims the service of all the spiritual and physical human abilities."[243] Like science and technology, then, capitalism takes a form of self-elevation to "infinite finitude" when we see "the indeterminate freedom of producing means for ends which in turn becomes means and so on without limit."[244]

In this light Brodsky is right to say that "like no other Russian writer before or after him, Platonov was able to reveal a self-destructive, eschatological element within the language itself, and that, in turn, was of extremely revealing consequences to the revolutionary eschatology with which history supplied him as his subject matter "[245] and later when he says that he "speaks of a nation which in a sense has become the victim of its own language; or, to put it more accurately, he tells a story about this very language, which turns out to be capable of generating a fictitious world, and then falls into grammatical dependence on it."[246]

To impose a worldview according to which man would exalt himself to "the posture of lord of the earth", to believe that "man everywhere and always encounters only himself" [247] while putting a ban on religion and on capitalism as the mode of production and knowing, meant that the new Soviet reality was bound on a language whose extreme instrumentality was of the

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[243] Paul Tillich, *Religious Situation*, tr. H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: Henry Holt, 1932), 47-48.

[244] Ibid.

[245] Brodsky, "Catastrophes," 286-287.

[246] Brodsky, "Catastrophes," 290.

[247] Martin Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, tr. Wiliam Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 27.

worst possible kind. This language belonged to a consciousness that had no awareness that the spatial metaphors it used in its dealings with the world were only metaphors.

One could read into Platonov's language the irony of the Marxist-Leninist *alienation* that instead of bridging the gap between the workers and the value of their work, brings about a fundamental estrangement of the workers' way of being-in-the world, one that reconfigures the role of the body as their point of access to reality through absorbed coping with things and as temporal structures. One could see in the abrupt application of new ideology "the linguistic confusion arising out of the collision between the colloquial speech instincts of Russia's unlettered masses and the bookish, abstract, figure-laden patterns of the assorted styles of writing and speaking that had early coalesced into a recognizable 'Soviet-speak.'"[248] To move past the vision of Platonov as a writer involved in an ideological debate whose principle aim is to show the aggressively imposed brand of Soviet materialism failed to solve "the antinomies of spirit and matter,"[249] we must carefully reconstruct the worldview behind Platonov's language and see how its constituents relate to what it is used to describe.

A number of able scholars have inquired into the significance of the foundation pit as the novel's master metaphor. While in his study of Platonov Kevin Platt moves past the "direct equation of foundation pit and grave"[250] which he imputes to Eric Naiman's article "Thematic Mythology of Andrei Platonov," his challenge "to recover the full figural significance of the foundation pit and the collective farm" remains. Building on Platt's intuition that "one must keep in mind the essential ambivalence of these images, that can serve both as symbol of the death of

[248] Seifrid, *Andrei Platonov*, 160.

[249] Seifrid, *Andrei Platonov*, 172.

[250] Platt, *Semiotic Catastrophes: Russian Literature and Revolutionary Social Change, 1700-1994*. PhD dissertation (Stanford University, 1994), 179.

the past and of the birth of the future," for "the dual potential of the central figures of the *Foundation Pit* is matched by the dual potential of the social world and the characters depicted in the work," I will show in this chapter that Platonov's big idea in *Kotlovan* is to estrange the idea of historical necessity foundational to the Marxist vision of the new world order. In the context of Russian history the abstract notion of historical necessity becomes a self-devouring carnival of matter the shape of which the spirit of Russian history comes to possess. We see political ramifications of an attempt to model human world on a system of speculative philosophy. The reality of the foundation pit becomes the reality of a self-sustaining dialectical glitch.

Platt is right in pointing out that *Kotlovan* "stalls this process of natural and social transformation in mid-leap, in an uncompleted trajectory that leaves the characters of the work and the reader with the plenitude of meaning promised by successful and final transfiguration of the universe, … the endless, dull 'endurance' between past and future … figur[ing] so often in the work."[251] He is mistaken, however, in his estimate that the peculiarity of Platonov's language and imagery is primarily motivated by the merging of "the typical opposed images of past and future society of the late twenties into an impossible moment of simultaneity" in which "the absurd confusion of standard conceptions of the social past and future leads to an utter breakdown of human language into nonsense."[252] Platt is mistaken because his reading of the "dialectics come to life" sidesteps a dimension constitutive to Platonov's worldview in *Kotlovan*, namely, the writer's philosophical polemics with an account of progressive philosophy of history originating in Hegel. This also means that in the *Kotlovan* the surreal itself appears as the

[251] Kevin Platt, *Catastrophes*, 179-180.

[252] Kevin Platt, *Catastrophes*, 179-180.

product of the dialectical unfolding of the Russian Spirit, informed by a productive collective misreading of Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach.

This thesis read that "The chief defect of all previous materialism (including Feuerbach's) is that the concrete thing [*Gegenstand*], the real [*Wirklichkeit*], the perceptible is considered to be an *object* [*Objekt*] or [datum of] *perception only* and not to be a *perceptible* human *activity*, or *praxis*, i.e. it is not considered subjectively. That is why this *active* aspect or side has been developed abstractly, in opposition to materialism, by idealism, which of course ignores real sensible activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensible objects that are really distinct from thought objects; but he does not grasp the fact that human activity itself is *objective* activity."[253] In other words, what if the reality Platonov is rendering is a reality in which consciousness is seen as the highest degree of complexity in matter's self-structuration? What if Platonov's reality is one in which the new Soviet man routinely localizes emotional and cognitive states as "contained within" physical objects, as if consciousness were not an entity altogether different from a sensible thing?

III.3. A Slow-slow Reading

The novel's first sentence begins with the words "On the day of the thirtieth *anniversary* of his *private life*". Why anniversary and why private life? Why not just write "when he turned thirty" or "on his thirtieth birthday"? And why the "private life" [*lichnaia zhizn'*]? One answer is that what Platonov here carries out is a complex parody of a society in which the postulate *matter determines consciousness* has long ago become an article of faith. He does this by

[253] Karl Marx, *Early Political Writings*, ed. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). 116.

showing the extent to which official ideology shapes the narrator's consciousness so that the description of an event that has primarily personal importance is refracted stylistically to expose some of its ideologems. Similarly, by mentioning the protagonist's thirtieth birthday as an event from Voshchev's *private life*, the narrator tries to protect himself from a ludicrous but frequent, first during the Red and later Great Terror, accusation of being part of some counter-revolutionary organization and thus using ambiguity as a means to send a message to his fellow saboteurs.

There is yet another important source informing the narrator's emphasis of the individual timeline of the birthday event. It has to do with how Marx defines value in the first chapter of *Capital*. Unlike David Ricardo, who uses the concept of labor-time as value, Marx, stressing the historical contingency in how social institutions function, says that "what exclusively determines the magnitude of the value of any article is therefore the amount of *labor socially necessary*, or *labor-time socially necessary* for its production."[254] While this Marxist formulation leaves much to be desired when it comes to the level of empirical reality and language use,[255] its stressing of the social, historical, and political dimension of value production without doubt influenced the analytical method and categorical set of researchers working under the aegis of Marxism-Leninism.

Platonov's phenomenological move is to let language itself to expose one of the narrator's fundamental epistemological commitments. This commitment is most evident in his determination to provide a most detailed and accurate description of the subject matter. It avoids every possibility of misinterpretation and misrepresentation, for these might lead to the

[254] Marx, *Early Political Writings*, 129.

[255] Because Marx does not elaborate the concept of labor-time socially necessary anywhere else in Capital, it is little wonder that David Harvey who in the early 1970s taught *Capital* at John Hopkins to a group of literature students who attended the seminars of Jacques Derrida never got past Chapter One.

exploitation of one party by another. The enlightened proletarian mind remembers all too well the days when someone in position of power would appropriate from and exploit everyone who did not see the deep structure of multiple relations appearing as the "wealth of nations, where the capitalist mode of production prevails as an immense collection of commodities." The objective account of what happens on Voshchev's thirtieth birthday, which the flickering proletariat consciousness provides in the very beginning of *Kotlovan*, shows us some of the ways in which it is conscious of some of the categories structuring what it knows: it *knows* that value is *socially necessary labor time*; it strives to be objective and thus by using the public/private dichotomy it describes an event so that it is seen in exactly the same way by another observer; it feels insecure and tries to prevent any possible ambiguity in what it says because it has experienced Russian revolutionary terror firsthand.

We do not learn that Voshchev is fired from the machine factory because he became less productive but are told instead that "he was made redundant" from a "small machine factory" where he "obtained the means for his existence" and that his dismissal notice stated that "he was being removed from production on account of growing weakness within him." This level of description does not approach the protagonist as an embodied mind existing as a shifting singularity of the categorial synthesis whose multiple categories-dimensions are always co-present but have a different degree of a "hologram clarity." A good example of this latter is what everyone of us now experiences as the immediate certainty of the actually existing unity of many differentiated "ones," each a "region," miraculously "fused with" but "different from" all other "regions." The narrator's voice here is as if oblivious of the fact that being told is a life story, which belongs to an ontological entity whose mode of being is radically different from that of physical objects. It is so because physical objects have no understanding of themselves as

temporal projects, but exist exclusively as physical entities among other physical entities. The unfolding events are viewed as a *chain* that is subject to *cause and effect*; social reality becomes *determined by, not bound on, institutional practices*. Noticeably absent from this world of the homogeneous space and time of science is such an experiential aspect of human life as meaning and significance, both of which are *essential* to the human existential project.

Platonov's rendering of language in the first paragraph as a descriptive tool at the service of calculus ontology, if of Soviet materialist variety—a science seeking to represent everything there is in the world as a multiplicity of sets containing all possible functional predicates an entity in question might have—suggests the unbridled enthusiasm of the Communist fathers for the idea of scientific progress that will one day demystify how, at the highest level of organization, matter becomes consciousness. This enthusiasm transfers into the hope infiltrating the very language of the uneducated masses, whose predominant mode of being-in-the-world[256] has never been that of deep reflection and who, by viewing language as something they routinely use, are themselves "instrumentalized" by this idea. In the character of Engineer Prushevsky, an intellectual heir to the tradition of militant skepticism first voiced by Dostoevsky's underground man, Platonov shows how scientific explanation falls short of getting to why things already appear as mattering, and becomes an alienating force extinguishing life, an annihilating side of the power of abstraction without which there would be no singularity of human experience:

> Инженер Прушевский уже с двадцати пяти лет почувствовал стеснение своего сознания и конец дальнейшему понятию жизни, будто темная стена предстала в упор перед его ощущающим умом. И с тех пор он мучился, шевелясь у своей стены, и успокаивался, что, в сущности, самое срединное, истинное устройство вещества, из которого скомбинирован

[256] Being-in-the-world thus spelled refers to Heidegger's fundamental ontology of *Being and Time* in which he offers an existential categorical set of the self-aware narrative project which he plays against the Kantian subject seen as a minimal set of processing functions inter-related in a way so that human experience is possible. Heidegger's being-in-the-world suggests that he thinks the set of Kantian categories necessary but insufficient to account for much of what is actually experienced by the human subject "proximately and every day."

> мир и люди, им постигнуто, — вся насущная наука расположена еще до стены его сознания, а за стеною находится лишь скучное место, куда можно и не стремиться.[257]
>
> From as early as the age of twenty-five, Prushevsky the engineer had felt a constriction of his own consciousness and an end to any further understanding of life; it was as though a dark wall had appeared straight in front of his groping mind. And he had been in torment ever since, moving about beside this wall of his and calming himself with the thought that he had, in essence, already grasped the true innermost structure of the substance out of which the world and people had been thrown together; the essentials of science all lay on this side of the wall of his consciousness, while beyond the wall could be found only a boring place that there was really no need to struggle towards.

Personal identity— itself a "flickering in the enclosed circuits of historical" that accounts for "why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being"[258]—is opaque to instrumental reason. This suggests that integral to the human is the *pre-reflective* sensitivity to possibilities of action. We see them in a polarized perceptual field as in a field of action, so that a "host of signs which guide action"[259] is constantly brought to view during our daily interactions with things-in-the-world. The accuracy of scientific measurement and the precision in observation that such reduction allows are shown as in a sense hyper-conscious yet still oblivious of the principles of the libidinal economy involved in the subjugation of matter. The drive to homogenize the world, in which scientific reason engages and which seeks to suppress the sensuous singularity of the human, is now countered with some strong bodily impulse, whose exact origin and direction are not clear. The conscious becomes the unconscious.

> Инженер рассмотрел грунт и долго, по инерции самодействующего разума, свободного от надежды и желания удовлетворения, рассчитывал тот грунт на сжатие и деформацию. Прежде, во время чувственной жизни и видимости счастья, Прушевский посчитал бы надежность грунта менее точно, — теперь же ему хотелось беспрерывно заботиться о предметах и устройствах, чтобы иметь их в своем уме и пустом сердце вместо дружбы и привязанности к людям. Занятие техникой покоя будущего здания обеспечивало

[257] Platonov, *Kotlovan,* 33/20.

[258] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 245.

[259] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 112.

> Прушевскому равнодушие ясной мысли, близкое к наслаждению, — и детали сооружения возбуждали интерес, лучший и более прочный, чем товарищеское волнение с единомышленниками. Вечное вещество, не нуждавшееся ни в движении, ни в жизни, ни в исчезновении, заменяло Прушевскому что-то забытое и необходимое, как существо утраченной подруги.[260]
>
> The engineer examined this ground and for a long time, with the momentum of self-acting reason that was free from hope and any desire for satisfaction, assessed it for compression and deformation. In the past, during the time of sensual life and the appearance of happiness, Prushevsky would have checked the reliability of the ground less precisely; now, however, he wanted to attend without interruption to objects and mechanisms, so as to possess them inside his mind and empty heart in place of friendship and affection for people. Engineering the peace and stability of the future building guaranteed Prushevsky the indifference of clear thought, and indifference close to delight – while the interest awoken in him by the construction detail was something better and more reliable than comraderly excitement with like-minded people. Eternal matter, needing neither movement, nor life, nor extinction, had come to take the place, for Prushevsky, of something forgotten and necessary, like the being of a lost sweetheart

This eruption of the irrational is far from being a rare episode in *Kotlovan*. For one thing, Voshchev is suffering from a very similar kind of existential malaise:

> Вощеву дали лопату, он сжал ее руками, точно хотел добыть истину из земного праха; обездоленный, Вощев согласен был и не иметь смысла существования, но желал хотя бы наблюдать его в веществе тела другого, ближнего человека,—и чтобы находиться вблизи того человека, мог пожертвовать на труд все свое слабое тело, истомленное мыслью и бессмысленностью.[261]
>
> Voshchev was given a spade, and he gripped it in his hands with the ferocity of despair of his own life, as though wanting to obtain truth from amid the earth's dust; dispossessed as he was, Voshchev was even willing to do without the meaning of existence, but he wished at least to observe it in the substance of the body of another, neighboring man – and to find himself near such a man he was ready to sacrifice in labor the whole of his own weak body that had been exhausted by thought and senselessness.

There are multiple instances of descriptive orientation toward spontaneity as the principle characteristic of the human subject understood as the primary locus of self-determination. Human beings are subject to a wide range of psychic experiences, including that of a biological organism and its vegetative desires. Sometimes the realization of the impossibility to fully

[260] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 37/26-27.

[261] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 28/12.

subordinate to reason the unknown origin of life, desire, and pleasure leads to the state of a profound depression:

> Явившись в техническую канцелярию работ, Прушевский сел за составление проекта своей смерти, чтобы скорее и надежней обеспечить ее себе. После окончания проекта Прушевский устал и спокойно уснул на диване. На завтра ему осталось составить лишь объяснительную записку к проекту, а затем найти достаточно прелестную женщину для однократной любви с ней; после удовлетворения любви к Прушевскому всегда приходило нормальное желание скончаться, и такой же точный расчет он сделал и теперь.
>
> Back in his technical office of works, Prushevsky sat down to draft the project of his own death, in order to secure it for himself sooner and with more certainty…. All that remained for the morrow was to draw up an explanatory note for the project and then to find a woman whose charms were adequate for single-fold act of love; after the satisfaction of love Prushevsky always felt the normal desire to pass away, and now too he had made the same precise calculation.[262]

At times Platonov shows desire reigning supreme as when Voshchev and Zhachev see the Pioneer procession:

> Одна пионерка выбежала из рядов в прилегающую к кузнице ржаную ниву и там сорвала потребное себе растение. Во время своего действия маленькая женщина нагнулась, обнажив родинку на опухающем теле, и с легкостью неощутимой силы исчезла мимо, оставляя сожаление в двух зрителях — Вощеве и калеке. Вощев, ища себе для облегчения равенства, поглядел на инвалида; у того надулось лицо безвыходной кровью, он простонал звук и пошевелил рукою в глубине кармана.
>
> One Pioneer girl ran out the ranks into a field of rye beside the forge and picked a plant she could use. In the course of her action the small woman bent down, baring a birthmark on her swelling body, and with the lightness of power that could not be felt, she disappeared past, leaving regret in the two onlookers –the cripple and Voshchev. Voshchev, seeking equality for the sake of relief, looked at the veteran; the man's face was swollen with blood and had no way out, and he groaned a sound and moved one hand deep in a trouser pocket.[263]

Apart from the brutal facticity of the empirical selfhood's claim to residence, this excerpt emphasizes aberration [*clinamen*] as the very space of the individual. That is, Platonov sees one's ability to shift between various cognitive frames as that which always reminds oneself that personal narrative synthesis is possible, all institutional commandments notwithstanding. Not only the young Pioneer girl runs out of the ranks, even if to pick a plant she thinks she will use,

[262] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 60/61.

[263] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 25/7.

but the unintended consequences of her intended action (pick up the flower), itself not-intended by her superiors, is to arouse desire in Voshchev and Zhachev. This unforeseen chain of events also suggests that the range of context-dependent interpretations of an utterance is beyond the immediate horizon established by the intention of the speaker.

Zhachev the cripple appears as a symbol of a strange kind of language that despite its proclaimed course toward objectivity and scientific understanding of the world suppresses the sensual particularity, describing erection as the movement of "one hand deep in a trouser pocket." What we see is a body castrated by the philosophical abstractions operating under a guise of scientific reductionism. That some aspects of human being in-the-world appear only as part of a double-speak suggests the presence within the nascent Soviet culture of the strand of a historical memory of transcendental-empirical tension inherent in the notion of selfhood in the West since the time of Judaism. We also see that the remnants of "foreign" history, namely the protestant disembodiment through work,[264] are curiously blended with such quintessential Russian trait as holy-foolishness. Zhachev is a new *iurodivyi* whose high degree of industrial "wear and tear" authenticates his connection with God. Platonov inscribes this techno-mutant of the *Novel of the Real Man* variety within the tradition of narratives of man arising from and dominating nature.[265]

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[264] The denial of the empirical is also evident in the world whose domination over which Chiklin is helping to establish by having "long ago left his spade and taken a crowbar, to pulverize the compressed layers of rock lower down" and who is in "annulling nature's old order [feels] unable to understand it," in Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 13.

[265] To provide an illustration from contemporary American apocalyptic frenzy, consider one of the final scenes from *Terminator II* (1991). The crippled torso of the terminator crawling, half-skinned, to the cauldron with the melted iron in order to be destroyed, reveals the dream of a future reconciliation with man's true essence in the beyond. (talk about the inherent ambiguity of the human). Half-human and half-robot, the crippled terminator is the history of the rise of the techno-culture as an attempt to overcome the limitations of the empirical self. The machine is crippled not only because science kills the complexity of what is by subduing it to the network of instrumental correlations but also because the denial of the body as something finite, takes from of replacing it with something build to last forever, i.e. with something infinite. Falling into the melted iron allows the man-machine to be reconciled with his true essence—he now has no form because God, the unchangeable, is the realm of pure being that corresponds to pure not-being, but at the same time he is reconciled with the empirical, the very thing in denying which his individuality becomes possible to assert, because this deformation takes place on Earth, inside a factory, in the cauldron with melted iron.

Zhachev's disabled body is the paradoxical space of the human subject in possession of double-speak. In its striving to be objective, this subject "objectively" renounces its claims to the exclusivity of the singular experiential position in an act of inter-subjective mediation of meaning. Platonov shows us a hyper-conscious human subject trying to eliminate the subjective aspect from the act of communication. As Hegel famously says in the end of his chapter on Sense-Certainty:

> If they actually wanted to say "this" bit of paper which they mean, if they wanted to say it, then this is impossible, because the sensuous This that is meant cannot be reached by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e. to that which is inherently universal. In the actual attempt to say it, it would therefore crumble away; those who started to describe it would not be able to complete the description, but would be compelled to leave it to other, who would themselves finally have to admit to speaking about something which is not.[266]

Below is another example of a self-deconstructing sequence rendering impossible, all attempts to use language to convey the experience of individual consciousness that is bound to the body, finite, and resides in the realm of concrete-empirical. This thwarting of all hopes aimed at the subject's total control and transparency over the content of his experience, this sudden escape of language can be traced all the way back to at least Nikolai Gogol:[267]

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[266] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶110

[267] Consider how language functions to establish the ontological break in Gogol's description of Chichikov's experience at the town ball:

"Вошедши в зал, Чичиков должен был на минуту зажмурить глаза, потому что блеск от свечей, ламп и дамских платьев был страшный. Всё было залито светом. Черные фраки мелькали и носились врознь и кучами там и там, как носятся мухи на белом сияющем рафинаде в пору жаркого июльского лета, когда старая клюшница рубит и делит его на сверкающие обломки перед открытым окном; дети все глядят, собравшись вокруг, следя любопытно за движениями жестких рук ее, подымающих молот, а воздушные эскадроны мух, поднятые легким воздухом, влетают смело, как полные хозяева, и, пользуясь подслеповатостию старухи и солнцем, беспокоящим глаза ее, обсыпают лакомые куски, где вразбитную, где густыми кучами. Насыщенные богатым летом, и без того на всяком шагу расставляющим лакомые блюда, они влетели вовсе не с тем, чтобы есть, но чтобы только показать себя, пройтись взад и вперед по сахарной куче, потереть одна о другую задние или передние ножки, или почесать ими у себя под крылышками, или, протянувши обе передние лапки, потереть ими у себя над головою, повернуться и опять улететь и опять прилететь с новыми докучными эскадронами," in Nikolay Gogol, *PSS*, vol. 6, 14.

> *От сознания* [Italics mine – AG] малочисленности своей артели Чиклин спешно ломал вековой грунт, обращая всю жизнь своего тела в удары по мертвым местам. Сердце его привычно билось, терпеливая спина истощалась потом, никакого предохраняющего сала у Чиклина под кожей не было — его старые жилы и внутренности близко подходили наружу, он *ощущал* окружающее без расчета и сознания, но с точностью. Когда-то он был моложе и его любили девушки — из жадности к его мощному, бредущему куда попало телу, которое не хранило себя и было преданно всем. В Чиклине тогда многие нуждались как в укрытии и покое среди его верного тепла, но он хотел укрывать слишком многих, чтобы и самому было чего чувствовать, тогда женщины и товарищи из ревности покидали его, а Чиклин, *тоскуя* по ночам, выходил на базарную площадь и *опрокидывал* торговые будки или вовсе уносил их куда-нибудь прочь, за что *томился* затем в тюрьме и *пел* оттуда песни в летние вишневые вечера.[268]
>
> Because the clay was alien, and because he knew that his brigade was undermanned, Chiklin hurried to break up the age-old ground, turning all the life of his body into blows at dead places. His heart was beating as usual and his patient back was wearing away in sweat; Chiklin had no protective fat beneath the skin- his aged veins and innards lay close to the outside and he sensed what surrounded him without calculation or consciousness but with precision. Once he had been younger, and the girls had loved him, greedy for his powerful body that wandered wherever it wandered, reckless of itself and devoted to all. Many people then had needed Chiklin—needing peace and shelter amid his faithful warmth—but he had wanted to shelter too many of them, so that there would be something for him to feel himself, and then a women and comrades had abandoned him out of jealousy, while Chiklin, yearning with nightmare melancholy, took to going out into the marketplace and overturning the stalls, or simply carrying them away somewhere, as a result of which he had languished in prison, singing songs from there into the cherry-red evenings of summer.

What we see here is a dialectical reversal *par excellence*. The site of absorbed coping, where Chiklin surrenders himself to the whirlpool of the know-how which lets him to be in the zone, points to both a pre-meditated act that has its for-the-sake-of-which, and, at the same time, to the pull this activity exerts on the disengaged, detached, contemplative stance a scientific observer might have toward his surroundings. Chiklin's mind begins to wonder as he travels along an

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(The intense glare of the candles, the lamps and the ladies' gowns, made Chichikov screw up his eyes for a moment as he set foot in the room. Everything was bathed in light. Black tail-coats flashed and fitted singly and in swarms here and there, like so many flies buzzing round the bright whiteness of sugarloaf in the hot month of July, when some old housekeeper is breaking the loaf up into glittering lumps by an open window; the children gather round and look inquisitively at the movements of her horny hands wielding the hammer, while the aerial squadron of flies, upborne on the light air , dart in boldly as if they were masters of the domain and, profiting by the dazzling sun and the feeble eyesight of the old woman they swarm round the tasty lumps singly or in throngs. Already satiated by the abundance of summer, which proffers tasty dishes at every step, they fly here not to gorge but only to display themselves, to saunter up and down the sugar pile, to rub their back or front feet, to rub them both together over their heads, spin round and wing away, and then fly back in fresh irritating squadrons away.)

[268] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 29/19-20.

elaborated chain of memory associations. We enter the subjective when the third-person "anatomical description," which makes a connection between the position of his veins and his precise movement in the world that involves no calculation but mere felling, suddenly slips into an extended excursus into the memories of his hedonistic youth. Chiklin's promiscuity proclaims a temporary triumph of human physiology. The vision of a conscientious Soviet citizen is now reduced to that of a sad animal. Platonov's *post coitum omne animal triste est* appears not as a momentary aberrant psychological state, but as one of the moods, our attunement to which always structures how we experience the world. Platonov, then, renders existential melancholy as a point of access to the irrational. He shows it as constitutive of the human. It is inextricable from the very flexibility of a human life seen as a self-interpretation. Singing into the cherry-red evenings of summer, Chiklin attempts to escape the physical boundaries of his confinement via his connection with the transcendental element of his selfhood; unlike a physical body that is subject to a relentless chain of the determinate states regulated by cause and effect, music, while dependent on our ability to hear, expresses no-thing and represents no-thing.

Opposed to Chiklin's sensuous particularity and connection to the irrational is the character of Prushevsky, "not an old man but gray from the calculation of nature." This is what we learn about his worldview.

> Весь мир он представлял мертвым телом—он судил его по тем частям, какие уже были им обращены в сооружения: мир всюду поддавался его внимательному и воображающему уму, ограниченному лишь сознанием косности природы; матерьял всегда сдавался точности и терпению, значит—он был мертв и пустынен.
>
> He saw the whole world as a dead body, judging it by those parts of it that he had already converted into structures: the world has always yielded to his attentive, imagining mind that was limited only by an awareness of the inertness of nature; if material always gave in to precision and patience, then it must be deserted and dead.[269]

[269] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 28/12.

Prushevsky's vision of Nature as a dead body to be subdued and transformed also suggests the tension that exists between the idea of a transformation through creative appropriation of our surroundings and the will to fully subjugate the world to some rational principle. The resolute pull of labor is much too often appears in Platonov as a cover-up of the utterly unintelligible fragility of human existence:

> Истомленный Козлов сел на землю и рубил топором обнажившийся известняк; он работал, не помня времени и места, спуская остатки своей теплой силы в камень, который он рассекал,—камень нагревался, а Козлов постепенно холодел. Он мог бы так весь незаметно скончаться, и разрушенный камень был бы его бедным наследством будущим растущим людям. Штаны Козлова от движения заголились, сквозь кожу обтягивались кривые острые кости голеней, как ножи с зазубринами. Вощев почувствовал от тех беззащитных костей тоскливую нервность, ожидая, что кости прорвут непрочную кожу и выйдут наружу.[270]

> Exhausted, Kozlov had sat down on the ground and was hacking the exposed limestone with an ax. He worked without memory of time or place, discharging the remnants of his own warm strength into the stone he broke up, the stone getting warmer as Kozlov himself grew gradually colder. All of him could have imperceptivity passed away, and shattered stone would have been his poor legacy to the future growing people. Kozlov's trousers had gone bare from movement; his sharp, crooked bones were like jagged knife blades tight against the skin of his shins. The defenselessness of these bones filled Voshchev with anguished nervousness: the bones might tear the flimsy skin and come out through it.

While this kind of attitude to the total reworking of the organic nature seems, among other things, to have been prepared by the spread of progressive narratives of history starting with J. G. Herder's seminal work in 1774, the belief in the calculability of Nature and the human world resulted in series of calamities in which the self-destructive essence of instrumental rationality revealed itself. These eruptions of the escalated instrumentality into history were inseparable from the kind of thinking based on our common experience with how predication works in a sentence. That is, the grammatical boundaries of the sentence suggest a certain stability of the grammatical subject, some of whose aspects, all supposedly independent of whether or not they

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[270] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 31-32/17-18.

are articulated through grammatical predication, are revealed in the sentence as a statement of what is objectively contained in the subject. Anyone familiar with the Proustian sentence (the subject of the sentence becomes clear as the very unfolding of the series of adjacent and mutually approximating clauses) knows why this view is problematic; the stable boundaries of all sentences in a finished work, say, a novel, belie the connection between sentences, paragraphs, events, episodes, chapters, let alone the multiple context "outside" the text itself.[271]

If, to give another example, one takes unhappiness to be the individualizing force of the family narrative, Tolstoy's entire novel *Anna Karenina* then becomes the approximating whole furnishing with detail the assertion made in the first sentence. The subject of *Anna Karenina* is, on this view, the very movement of predication, which reveals the unique way in which a family can be unhappy. Without dwelling on the importance of the hermeneutic circle and various ways in which it has been challenged and defended by philosophers, we see that there are at least two seemingly different ways to approach any given sentence. The first is to see it as identical with the multiple interpretative contexts informing our entry into it. The second is to insist that it may be read in isolation from these contexts—even if the idea of reading any sentence in isolation is itself a "reading" that implies multiple interpretative contexts—and to approach the sentence in question in this minimal way, a wedge between the notions of meaning and significance having been firmly drawn.

Hegel delineates the difference between the reductive power of the still-frame predication analysis, which he attributes to discursive thinking, and the infinite depth of the shifting center of narrative gravity, which one sees in the relational totality of a speculative system. He does this because he realizes that while nearly everyone understands what both these styles of predication

[271] The Proustian sentence then can be seen as a self-conscious descriptive function that also gets desperate over its inability to fully capture the singularity of the experiential item and tries to compensate for it by a series of detailed statements striving to include all of the relevant particulars.

involve, even if unable to explicitly formalize this knowledge, it is the discursive thinking and its predication that people tend to rely on in most cases. Instead, the subject should appear as the predicational movement of the accidents that are "objectively contained" in what is being described, whether or not we choose to engage in any predicational activity at all. Hegel describes both ways:

> For whereas, in its negative behavior, which we have just discussed, discursive thinking is itself the self into which the content returns, in its positive cognition, on the other hand, the self is a (re)presented Subject to which content is related as Accident and Predicate. This Subject constitutes the basis to which the content is attached and upon which the movement runs back and forth.[272]

So there is a knower and an ostensibly independently existing subject this knower confronts in an act of knowing. This subject is actually existent and is the source for all the details a contingent situational interpretation might unearth. The said discursive thinking is a knowing self in the sense of its power to temporarily contain the relevant accidents of the subject matter examined. While it itself may contain the most recent "version" of what is being known, there is a sense in which a certain state of affairs must hold true, separate and independent from the knowing consciousness, for this knowing to be possible. The computer screen I am looking at right now, on this view, is a concrete, sensible something, some substance, whose existence has nothing to do with my experiencing as "to look at while typing" or as an abstract mathematical entity called a "rectangle." To see this screen from the point of view of a speculative sentence, one needs to equate the existence of this screen with the narrative history of various configurations of how it appeared in multiple experiential singularities of different people who each experienced it as a very different something they used to achieve an aim they had. This is not say, that existence is perception, but rather to suggest that every determination of a sensible entity, even if we choose

[272] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶ 60.

it to be as abstract as a "sensible entity with magnitude" requires a consciousness that would record a video showing the "fact that left to stand by itself through the night the computer screen did not disappear." This consciousness would already have to have and understand such ideas as expressed by "fact," "left to stand by itself," "computer screen," and "disappear."

Understanding a philosophical or speculative sentence like "Being is the indeterminate *immediate*;"[273] is difficult because of the analytical pull of the discursive thinking:

> Usually, the Subject is first made the basis, as the objective, fixed self; thence the necessary movement to the multiplicity of determinations or Predicates proceeds. Here, the Subject is replaced by the knowing 'I' itself, which links the predicates with the Subject holding them. But, since that first Subject enters into the determinations themselves and is their soul, the second Subject, viz. the knowing 'I', still finds in the Predicate what it thought it had finished with and got away from, and from which it hoped to return into itself; and, instead of being able to function as the determining agent in the movement of predication, arguing back and forth whether to attach this or that Predicate, it is really still occupied with the self of the content, having to remain associated with it, instead of being for itself.[274]

Hegel, in other words, ascribes our tendency to see any subject under investigation as having existence independent of its "contextual meaning," which he would say is its actual essence, as a tendency to hypostatize the absolute power of abstraction that human thinking has. That is, because there are multiple determinations among which I shift in my experience of the world, I think that there must be some stable "ones" acting as ultimate referents of the "ones" of my experience. Because the world is full of sensible things, I am tempted to think of these referents as material substances. A processual unrest accompanying the shifting of the multiple epistemic positions during categorial synthesis should not be thought of resembling physical movement. Yet this happens when we forget that the subject matter is always "cognitively staged" even if this staging explicitly stipulates a most minimal cognitive frame-category like one of pure contemplation of a thing through the senses:

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[273] Hegel, *Logic*, 81.

[274] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶ 60-61.

> The philosophical proposition, since it is a proposition, leads one to believe that the usual subject-predicate relation obtains, as well as the usual attitude towards knowing. But the philosophical content destroys this attitude and this opinion. We learn by experience that we meant something other than we meant to mean; and this correction of our meaning compels our knowing to go back to the proposition, and understand it in some other way.[275]

What Hegel means is that the "subject matter," "the situation," "the thing itself" are nothing less than the self-sustained "polyphonic ontological refraction" in which the meaning of the "truth" of anything is the process of meaning-negotiation itself.

Let us look at the concrete instance of philosophical exposition that "rigidly excludes the usual way of relating the parts of a proposition [to] achieve a goal of plasticity"[276] and which expresses subject as what is essentially true, that is, as "merely the dialectical movement, [a] course that generates itself, going forth from and returning to, itself."[277] The import of Hegel's method, as it appears in the opening passage from his *Science of Logic,* which I provide below*,* is immediately clear. It is a model of exposition with which Platonov polemicizes in the Chiklin excerpt to which I previously referred to as a "dialectical reversal par excellence" and whose phenomenological reading we have done already. The opening of the *Science of Logic* provides a good substantiation for the claim that the "dialectical movement ... has a content which is, in its own self, Subject through and through. Thus no content occurs which functions as an underlying subject, nor receives its meaning as a predicate; the proposition as it stands is merely an empty form."[278] Let us tarry with the negative:

> **Being**, pure being, without any further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy it is equal only to itself. It is also not unequal relatively to an other; it has no diversity within itself nor any with a reference outwards. It would not be held fast in its purity if it contain any determination or content which could be distinguished from an other. It is pure indeterminateness and emptiness.

[275] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶ 63.

[276] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶ 64.

[277] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶ 65.

[278] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶ 66.

> There is nothing to be intuited in it, if one speaks here of intuiting; or it is only this pure intuiting self. Just as little is anything to be thought in it, or it is equally only this empty thinking. Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact nothing, and neither more nor less than **nothing.**[279]

If all we begin with is the aspect of unity or oneness which we "see" in the immediate givenness of the multiple units of experience, yet if this isolated aspect appears the only thing we are positing, we are bound to admit that *nothing* could be predicated of this oneness, not even that it *is*. So nothing is added to the definition of being as the immediate givenness of experience as a necessarily present negating function or difference as such. So the sentence "Being is the indeterminate *immediate"*[280] could be rendered as

(Being) is)) the indeterminate))) immediate))))

to give through the typographic estrangement a better sense of the plasticity of exposition Hegel has in mind. What we see here is a self-unfolding logical self. **Being**? Well, the sheer being of, the **is**, the to be. But of what? Of **no-one-thing** yet. So where is it? In **no-one-place** yet. So (Being) is)) the indeterminate))) immediate)))) **is nothing**)))))).

Hegel's first sentence in the *Science of Logic* is not unlike the reversal of Chiklin's cognitive state. Chiklin's train of thoughts first appears as a focused allotment of instrumental intelligence to sensible objects for the sake of remedying the deficit of the labor force, which actualizes the great proletarian plan. This train of thought then becomes a randomly unfolding web of memories the last of which is centered on the consciousness in the act of detachment from its objective mode. Platonov's riff on the speculative sentence, then, captures a historical instance of the unintended self-imposed dialectical reversal of the Russian Spirit as well as this spirit's objective being qua language and the latter's most evident tension arising from the

[279] Hegel, *Logic*, 82.

[280] Hegel, *Logic*, 81.

ambiguity due to the "mixing up of the [of] the speculative with the discursive methods, so that what is said of the Subject at one time signifies its Concept, at another time merely its Predicate or accidental property."[281] What happens to Chiklin's unfolding of memories happens without any plan, yet it happens from his being conscious (*ot soznaniia*) of the state of affairs against which he must act. Also under attack are the consequences of the massive dialectical exodus from the cave of "Russian civilizational backwardness"; an exquisite philosophical system, having first been trivialized by Marx, is now estranged once more as it becomes a foundational document for the new kind of philosophical sophistry and political rhetoric both serving to justifying a collective sacrifice of whatever size.[282]

Right after the liquidation of the kulaks Voshchev asks the political activist whether truth is the due of the proletariat. The activist replies that it is rather "movement…along with whatever the proletariat comes across on the way. Doesn't matter if it's truth or a looted kulak jacket—it'll all go into the organized cauldron till you won't be able to recognize anything at all."[283] This understanding of the Hegelian dialectics is as oblivious of Hegel's warning that "from its very beginning, culture must leave room for the earnestness of life in its concrete richness"[284] as it is of his insistence that in a philosophy properly done: "The real issue is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result of the actual whole, but rather the result

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[281] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶ 64.

[282] As Adorno and Horkheimer observe "language thereby becomes more than a mere system of signs. With the concept of determinate negation Hegel gave prominence to an element which distinguishes enlightenment from the positivist decay to which he consigned it. However, by finally postulating the known results of the whole process of negation, totality in the system and in history, as the absolute, he violated the prohibition and himself succumbed to mythology," in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment*,18. This criticism is just only from the point of view of how Hegel was understood by many of his readers.

[283] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 78-79. "А истина полагается пролетариату? — спросил Вощев. — Пролетариату полагается движение, — произнес активист, — а что навстречу попадается, то все его: будь там истина, будь кулацкая награбленная кофта — все пойдут в организованный котел, ты ничего не узнаешь (71).

[284] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶ 4.

together with the process through which it came about. The aim by itself is a lifeless universal, just as the guiding tendency is a mere drive that as yet lacks an actual existence; and the bare result is the corpse which has left its guiding tendency behind it."[285]

III.4. Between Analogical Imagination and Speculative Theogony

One way in which Platonov lets the enlightened consciousness of the liberated proletariat to perform an unconscious dialectical reversal of its fully rational and informed point of view is to show it as performing some contingent themes from the *Phenomenology*. The proletariat's blindness is as ironic as it is tragic, for in its reenactment of the events from the repertoire of the World-spirit, it draws from some of the goriest pages of this chronicle. This is the case, for instance, when the anonymous letter arrives to the kolkhoz, whose lack of concreteness immediately points us to the terror of the universal will that reigned in France in the wake of the Revolution of 1789.

> По последним материалам, имеющимся в руке областного комитета, видно, например, что актив колхоза имени Генеральной Линии уже забежал в левацкое болото правого оппортунизма. Организатор местного коллектива спрашивает вышенаходящуюся организацию: есть ли что после колхоза и коммуны более высшее и более светлое, дабы немедленно двинуть туда местные бедняцко-середняцкие массы, неудержимо рвущиеся в даль истории, на вершину всемирных невидимых времен. Этот товарищ просит ему прислать примерный устав такой организации, а заодно бланки, ручку с пером и два литра чернил. Он не понимает, насколько он тут спекулирует на искреннем, в основном здоровом, середняцком чувстве тяги в колхозы. Нельзя не согласиться, что такой товарищ есть вредитель партии, объективный враг пролетариата и должен быть немедленно изъят из руководства навсегда.[286]
>
> According to the latest materials now in the hand of the provincial committee," concluded the directive, "it is apparent, for example, that the activist committee of the General Line Collective Farm has already gone rushing forward into the leftist quagmire of right opportunist. The organizer of the local collective has asked the aforesaid organization whether there is anything

[285] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶ 3.

[286] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 106-107/147-148.

> after the collective farm and the commune, anything higher and brighter to which he came forthwith dispatch the local poor- and middle-peasant masses who cannot be held back from hurtling forwards into the far distance of history, towards the summit of universal and unprecedented times. This comrade asks to be sent model statues of such an organization, together with appropriate forms, a pen and nib, and two liters of ink. He does not understand the magnitude of the gamble he is taking on the sincere and fundamentally sound attraction felt by the middle peasant towards the collective farm. No one can disagree that such a comrade is wrecker and saboteur of the Party, an objective enemy of the proletariat, and that he should forthwith and forever be removed from the leadership.

The tongue-tied quality of this missive points not so much to the confused state of the illiterate masses as it does to the regnant political terror because of which all concretization is avoided lest the writer be accused of imposing his individual will on collective will. To understand Platonov's irony we need to go back to the days of the French Revolutionary terror and see how it is connected with the program of European Enlightenment.

In so far as the Enlightenment directs the negative power of the analytic frame to Faith, it highlights the unsustainability of the dualistic worldview and insists that the dualist valuation of all entities encountered in the physical world must be explained within a single frame of reference, like the one allowing to assign ontological primacy either to pure matter or to pure thought. And although Faith's counteracting claim is equally appealing, in that it turns the randomness, with which Pure Insight combines analytical fragments into which any aspect of the world as a meaningful whole can be fractured, against itself, thus making any functional debunking of religious practices look one-sided because nothing in them reduces the sacred to the realm of objective reality, it recedes to the background because the ideology of the Enlightenment has to offer more. It too posits an Absolute, perhaps best conceived as the infinite potential of reconfiguring the world through scientific discoveries, but it fully rehabilitates the objective world, managing to inscribe Faith within its new framework. It explains it away. Utility now is what determines the true essence of the subject matter.

The gathering together of the analytical fragments by the Pure Insight, now appears as hierarchy of meanings whose new intermediary is the principle of functional utility. But equating functional utility with the essence of anything is to deny the aspect of objective reality of this very something, its independence, its being-in-itself. The objective reality of everything becomes a mere appearance separating self-consciousness from any style of possession it may choose to impose on this appearance. Insofar as the universal is now seen reduced to the individual assessment of usefulness of anything, the whole world becomes nothing but the universal will of all acting individuals. What's really there is what we will choose to have as being there. The degree to which anything is said to exist now is the degree to which its existence does not violate everyone's will. Only everyone together can be King.

The actualization of this form of the individual takes the form of sheer negativity; the frenzy of destruction of all existing hierarchies of power-differentiation is what drives self-consciousness to continue seeing in its activity all the proof it needs to take itself as having no other essence apart from itself. But the unity of the individuals wreaking havoc means the impossibility of the implementation of any positive program of action, because as something universal toward which some individuals will be standing in a relation different than others, this initiative will be seen as an attempt to impose one's individual will upon the universal will and thus as an act of oppression whose yoke the latter has sought to overcome. The prolonged period of terror after the French revolution of 1789, in which people perish by necessity, since a positive program of political action always has a possibility of being seen as infringement of the will of others, brings the people back to their senses and unites them via differentiation without which substantial actuality is impossible. It is possible to do away with the regnant structure of power asymmetry, not with the determinacy inherent in any social structure.

This reign of terror is the fury of destruction, whose participants sooner or later understand that the only way not to fall under suspicion is by always being engaged in accusation. But because everybody understands that this state of mind:

> is thus the interaction of consciousness with itself in which it lets nothing break loose to become a *free object* standing over against it. It follows from this that it cannot achieve anything positive, either universal works of language or of reality, either of laws and general institutions of *conscious* freedom, or of deeds and works of a freedom that *wills* them…
>
> Just as the individual self-consciousness does not find itself in this *universal work* of absolute freedom *qua* existent Substance, so little does it find itself in the *deeds* proper and *individual* actions of the will of this freedom. Before the universal can perform a deed it must concentrate itself into the One of individuality and put at the head an individual self-consciousness; for the universal will is only an *actual* will in a self, which is a One. But thereby all other individuals are excluded from the entirety of this deed and have only a limited share in it, so that the deed would not be a deed of the *actual universal* self-consciousness. Universal freedom, therefore, can produce neither a positive work nor a deed; there is left for it only *negative* action; it is merely the *fury* of destruction.[287]

Platonov emphasizes the metaphysical bankruptcy of the German metaphysical import in a few more places other than the impossibly abstract language of the letter: in the officials' descriptive reduction of people to sensible objects,[288]their constant reassurance of the inevitability of the historic onset of happiness,[289]and the immediately understood gap between the human world as

[287] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶588-589.

[288] "Вместо людей активист записывал признаки существования: лапоть прошедшего века, оловянную серьгу от пастушьего уха, штанину из рядна и разное другое снаряжение трудящегося, но неимущего тела" (99).
"The activist duly began to list the things that had arrived with Voshchev, organizing a special column in the margin under the heading: "Inventory of proletariat liquidated to death by the kulak as a class, in accordance with escheated remnants." Instead of people, the activist listed tokens of existence: a baste sandal of a bygone century, a tin ring from the ear of a shepherd, a homespun trouser leg, and sundry other accouterments of a laboring but dispossessed body" (123-124).
"Пашкин вынул записную книжку и поставил в ней точку; уже много точек было изображено в книжке Пашкина, и каждая точка знаменовала какое-либо внимание к массам" (64).
"Pashkin took out his notebook and entered in it a dot; a great number of dots had been depicted in Pashkin's notebook, and each of them signified the full stop of some act of attention toward the masses" (68).

[289]"счастье наступит исторически" (34), "happiness will set in historically all the same" (22).

experienced and theorized.[290] This is the kind of consciousness that belongs to a society in which the last words of a dying child are not any different than a faceless bit of a "public code" floating around.[291] Platonov renders the ontological rift separating philosophy from life as what inevitably shows itself when the veneer of certitude is broken down in the face of an approaching death as in the scene describing the revenge of a kolkhoz bear that kills his past master:

> Сердце мужика самостоятельно поднялось в душу, в горловую тесноту, и там сжалось, отпуская из себя жар опасной жизни в верхнюю кожу. Мужик тронулся ногами, чтобы помочь своему сердцу вздрогнуть, но сердце замучилось без воздуха и не могло трудиться. Мужик разинул рот и закричал от горя смерти, жалея свои целые кости от сотления в прах, свою кровавую силу тела от гниения, глаза от скрывающегося белого света и двор от вечного сиротства.[292]
>
> The peasant's heart had, of its own accord, risen up into his soul, into the cramped space of the throat, and it had clenched tight there, releasing the heat of dangerous life into his outer skin. The peasant twitched his legs, in order to help his heart to quiver, but his heart was exhausted without air and was unable to labor. The peasant gaped his mouth wide and cried out from the grief of death, pitying his intact bones against decomposition into dust, his red-blooded power of body against decay as pus, his eyes against the disappearing light of day, and his home and yard against eternal orphanhood.

Just as all other systems of objective knowledge, philosophy has no access to life as human experiential singularity, the sheer givenness of the world as "particularly mine" and "my only true world." But the fact that subjectivity relates to existence in a way for which no official religion can account does not mean that the traditional role of Orthodox Christianity in Russia can be reduced to the celebration of the communal bond formed around the minimal sets of biological necessities.

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[290] "The snowy wind fell silent; an unclear moon came to light in a distant sky that was now emptied of storm clouds and blizzards, a sky so deserted that it allowed for eternal freedom, and so sister that freedom was unthinkable without friendship" (116-117).
"Снежный ветер утих; неясная луна выявилась на дальнем небе, опорожненном от вихрей и туч, на небе, которое было так пустынно, что допускало вечную свободу, и так жутко, что для свободы нужна была дружба" (95).

[291] "Ликвидируй кулака как класс. Да здравствует Ленин, Козлов и Сафронов. Привет бедному колхозу, а кулакам нет" (75).
"Liquidate the kulak as a class. Long live Stalin, Kozlov, and Safronov…Greetings to the poor collective farm, but not to the kulaks" (86).

[292] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 79/91.

The new individuality arising in the *Phenomenology* in the wake of the Great Terror is one of a universal self-legislation. Not so in Platonov. What we have instead follow the Red Terror is another narrative reversal of the Hegelian World-Spirit: from the vacuity of French revolutionary terror we travel to a human city based on the vision of the human as reduced to the metabolism between man and nature. This is not even Plato's city of pigs yet. The Russian Revolutionary Spirit, at the stage of collectivization, reverses historical time, finding in one of the moments of its becoming the stage of animal worship:

> Снег падал на холодную землю, собираясь остаться в зиму; мирный покров застелил на сон грядущий всю видимую землю, только вокруг хлевов снег растаял и земля была черна, потому что теплая кровь коров и овец вышла из-под огорож наружу и летние места оголились. Ликвидировав весь последний дышащий живой инвентарь, мужики стали есть говядину и всем домашним также наказывали ее кушать; говядину в то краткое время ели как причастие,—есть никто не хотел, но надо было спрятать плоть родной убоины в свое тело и сберечь ее там от обобществления. Иные расчетливые мужики давно опухли от мясной еды и ходили тяжко, как двигающиеся сараи; других же рвало беспрерывно, но они не могли расстаться со скотиной и уничтожали ее до костей, не ожидая пользы желудка. Кто вперед успел поесть свою живность или кто отпустил ее в колхозное заключение, тот лежал в пустом гробу и жил в нем, как в тесном дворе, чувствуя огороженный покой. [293]
>
> Snow fell on the cold ground, meaning to remain for the winter; a peaceful shroud covered the entire visible earth for its sleep to come; only around the animals' sheds did the snow melt and the earth become black, since the warm blood of cows and sheep had seeped out underneath the boards, and summer places had been bared. After liquidating all their last breathing livestock, the peasants had begun to eat beef and had instructed all the members of their household to do the same; during this brief time they had eaten beef as if it were a communion—no one had wanted to eat but the flesh of dear and familiar carcasses had to be hidden away inside one's own body and preserved there from social ownership. Some calculating peasants had long ago swollen up from meaty food and were now walking heavily, like moving barns; others were vomiting continually, but they were unable to part with their cattle and so they destroyed it down to the bone, not expecting benefit of stomach. As for anyone who had managed to eat his stock of life in advance or else released it into collective imprisonment—he lay in an empty coffin and lived there as if confined in a snug home, sensing enclosed peace.

The new Soviet Eucharist in which the kulaks are shown here to participate is one that strips the entire symbolic dimension of Christian sacrament away and with it the mystery of human individuality and its world. Peering at the Russian Revolutionary Spirit from the depth of history

[293] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 86/102.

is now the sacred of the Paleolithic hunters-gatherers who experience the self only in a ritualistic animation of the now dead object of their worship. Let us consider a logical reconstruction of the forms of religious worship a regress to some of whose aspects Platonov shows.

The religions of Paleolithic hunter-gatherers are plant and animal religions. Both can be seen as ritualistic emphasis of the seemingly paradoxical relation between the oneness of some perceptual entity and the multiplicity of the dynamic networks it forms with other such entities. This religion of flowers picks the concrete sensible individual "cognitive frame function" to be represented by what we might broadly refer to as plant. That is plant worship is a kind of formalization of an insight that as a sensible entity a plant is one of a kind. As a growing thing, plant is markedly different from its surrounding elements like soil, rock, or a body of water nearby. It is a perishable life form that in its multiple instantiations appears as multiple short-lived separate and independent objects. It seems that way because the multiple elements going into the "plant-ness" of the plant are not immediately obvious to the consciousness encountering itself as nature for the first time. Very few plants resemble animals in moving their bodies to other physical or organic bodies through interacting with which they nurture themselves.

Animals, on the other hand, while having a body of which functional unity of its multiple organs can be predicated, display their "nature" as involvement across multiple sites found in their habitats: they instrumentalize themselves to interact with the environment and they instrumentalize environment to maintain themselves. The animal thus becomes another representative of what can be here called "essence" or a set of functional "powers" of life which in the form of biting, gnawing, clawing are appropriated by man during the Neolithic Revolution. The animal self-supporting instrumentality is exteriorized when first tools become portable chopping teeth whose properties would not be detectible without the recognition of basic

geometric relations. The animal appears as a "collection" of functional organs. That self-supporting instrumentality is seen as a new configuration of consciousness is evident from the burial practices framing man as inseparable from the functions that manufactured grave goods are supposed to facilitate. The foraging man, whose instrumental knowledge is such that he moves to where the resources are, is not worshiping plants and animals in the same sense an agriculturalist does. The latter "makes" plants and animals and then truly worships them through festive offerings in which a sacrifice of individual plants and animals becomes what elevates them to the level of true intelligibles. This happens in the ritual when the act of sacrifice symbolically separates what is being worshiped from all other physical entities. But the sacrifice the way it occurs here is of a simplest kind: there is no celebration yet of the laboring power, which connects the individual and the universal in the ritual, at the level of a communal practice. The gods honored by the kulaks, are the gods of nature who have not yet appeared estranged enough to be offered physical embodiment in the form of statues, dance, or food. The *homo faber* of the foundation pit will discover his "true" self in the sacred monumentality of human instrumentality best exemplified in the Egyptian mortuary cult and in the pagan festival of the ancient Greeks. In *Kotlovan* the moment of the most basic form of animal worship quickly transforms into a more developed kind.

The kulaks, through whose archaic form of worship the Russian Historical Spirit is thrown back in time, are themselves sacrificed to a New Religion. They are expropriated and banished so that the being-for-itself of the new Eucharist can reflexively succeed its being in-itself (the excessive devouring of raw meat as a form of natural religion in which the deity worshiped has not yet been objectified in a way so that it also appears differently than the animal being hunted or consumed) the form of the kulak' Holy Sacrifice:

> Активист выставил на крыльцо Оргдома рупор радио, и оттуда звучал марш великого похода, а весь колхоз вместе с окрестными пешими гостями радостно топтался на месте. Колхозные мужики были светлы лицом, как вымытые, им стало теперь ничего не жалко, безвестно и прохладно в душевной пустоте. Елисей, когда сменилась музыка, вышел на среднее место, вдарил подошвой и затанцевал по земле, ничуть при этом не сгибаясь и не моргая белыми глазами; он ходил, как стержень, — один среди стоячих, — четко работая костями и туловищем. Постепенно мужики рассопелись и начали охаживать вокруг друг друга, а бабы весело подняли руки и пошли двигать ногами под юбками. Гости скинули сумки, кликнули к себе местных девушек и понеслись понизу, бодро шевелясь, а для своего угощенья целовали подружек-колхозниц. Радиомузыка все более тревожила жизнь, пассивные мужики кричали возгласы довольства, более передовые всесторонне развивали дальнейший темп праздника, и даже обобществленные лошади, услышав гул человеческого счастья, пришли поодиночке на Оргдвор и стали ржать.[294]
>
> The activist had placed the wireless loudspeaker out on the OrgYard porch, and from it came the march of a great campaign, while the entire collective farm, together with the guests who had made their way over on foot, was stamping joyfully on the spot. With their shining faces, the collective farm peasants looked as if they had just been scrubbed, and in the emptiness of their souls there was no pity or regret for anything and no knowing anything, and it felt cool. When the music changed, Yelisey went out into the center, slammed down one foot, and began to dance over the earth, not bending in any way or blinking his white eyes; he was moving like a piston, alone amid the standers, and working his bones and torso with precision. Gradually the peasants got into the swing of things and began to circle around one another, while the women merrily raised their arms and began to move their legs beneath their skirts. The guests threw down their nags, called the local girls over, and hurtled about close to the ground, moving spiritedly – and as a treat for themselves they kissed their new collective girlfriends. The wireless music alarmed life still more; the passive menfolk yelled out exclamations of satisfaction while the more progressive ones developed the further tempo of the festival in all directions and even the collectivized horses, hearing the din of human happiness, filed over one by one to the OrgYard and began to whinny.

Yet, in this kolkhoz Eucharistic liturgy the transubstantiation of prejudice into knowledge has not yet happened. To be sure, what we see is a disenchanted collective performative action of a community that has replaced the authority of organized religion with that of an organized science, whose voice, in the form of a radio translation, is now orienting their bodies. This community understands the elevating effect of one's individual experience of partaking in collective consciousness. It also understands that this elevating effect cannot be found in the world in the way physical objects can be. But it does not see the hierarchy of values as inextricable from human symbolic imagination to the same degree that existence resists philosophical formalization. Two things are noteworthy about this dance: that it is a dance in which the

[294] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, (95/116).

community bond of the "rodovoe telo" ("clan body") is reestablished; that every dancer partakes in a mystical communion in a way informed by the concept of labor relations. Platonov again signals a double logical regress to the religious forms of the past. We also get a glimpse into the ritual as a fragmentary system of metaphysics.

The perishability of the individual plant or animal does not affect our understanding their "power" to persist. Ritual thus is not only a distinction between the universal and individual aspects of the entity under consideration, but qua "sacrificial excess" it is a distinction between the negativity of death and the negativity of constructive instrumental subordination. By making something perish in worship without any benefit for the person, the natural perishing of this very thing is now articulated as an object of thought. By because in this narrative estrangement of the finitude of the sacrificial offering instrumental skills play an important role, the "accelerated" death of the sacrificial offering recasts the extent of man's instrumental imagination. It too becomes an object of thought capable of being worshipped.

Egyptian pyramids are monuments to the constructive power of labor, of human understanding as infinity of semiotic signification a religious consciousness presupposes. The pyramid is put between light and darkness, life and death. Its sheer magnitude and shape, as well as the fact that it is embodied in a stone material, points to the actuality of a syncretic union of the visible tangible stuff and the abstracting power of human understanding itself. What comes to view is the incommensurability of the world of geometrical forms and their actual embodiment in the physical world. The "constructed" darkness of the pyramid is an attempt to isolate darkness from light as a natural complex.

This arbitrariness is now attributed to an "event," the "death" of the king, which can become an event if its connection to the "laws" governing human events is indicated. And we

find this in the pyramid texts, written in hieroglyphs, which feature king's accomplishments and various spells. But this hieroglyphs use as their elemental forms the images of the entities whose meaning they are trying to create. The pyramid turns out to be a monumental sign whose true content is a self-referential system of signs: on the "outside" it is a decoration inserted in the "body of nature," on the "inside" natural shapes become inserted into the "body of a decoration." To become self-conscious this system of the mutual estrangement of the semiotic sign through the instrumentality guided by human understanding, we need to have a "monumental proof" of human subjectivity involved in this architectural ensemble. That is, the singularity of human self must appear in an explicit way as part of the labor monument. Insofar as the peasants' bodies are instrumentalized in a religious ritual in a way similar to how their bodies are instrumentalized in the project of the "proletarian home," the foundation pit projects yet another phantom from the past. Yet we do not leave the great building projects in ancient Egypt right away. Before moving from the first monuments to the religion of labor to the reality or the Greek polis and its forms of art religion the Russian Revolutionary Spirit has another narrative episode happen to it. This time it is from the *Exodus*.

Platonov's allusion to the *Tanakh* is clear. We learn this from the clouds of flies that become intermingled with the snowy wind in which Nastya and bear the hammerer get caught after the bloody Eucharist. In the foundation pit the fourth (flies or wild animals) and the fifth (diseased livestock) plagues of Egypt recur in a hybrid form. The kulaks kill all their sheep, which, left to rot in a barn become flies' habitat and the source of food. This narrative recombination in *Kotlovan* of the two separate events initiated by the God of Exodus not only suggests that people are to blame in the misery they inflict on other people, but also the irony

characterizing the discrepancy between the theoretical prowess of the new Soviet science and its total oblivion of the past which the participants of the foundation pit are doomed to repeat.

Because the peasants participating in the Christian mass of liberation that features radio as its equipment, are still united by the bonds of the "clan body," also fused with their second regress to the religious worship of the past is the aspect of cults and sacrificial rites which could be seen as humanity's first attempt to formalize the unconscious conceptual identification of an individual deity with some of the categories constitutive of the human subject. The new dance of the enlightened peasant, Platonov shows, is also a dance with which the Russian War God is honored, its human and animal sacrifice having been already offered during the bloody Eucharist.

In this dance sacrificial offerings are made and this is another form in which individuality is articulated in relation to the universal. In the act of relinquishing other human beings, the kulaks, in the name of the Revolution, the divinity shows itself through the performance of sacrificial excess. The Russian War God appears as what sacrifices itself. Insofar as human worship is also a staging of the deity, the sacrifice made by a human individuality becomes the sacrifice constitutive of god's existence. Human sacrifice is the staging of the divine that is inclusive of finitude. For one thing the people offering the sacrifice are allowed to appear and act in what otherwise would have been some pure absolute essence (God before he created the universe). As part of a cult offering, the enlightened dance points to a cyclical model of time, one of a pagan festival, whose recurrence allows for the mortal individuality to sacrifice itself to appear under a guise of a more perfect form of itself in the name of some deity. The arrival and stay of this deity is signified through the multiple labor channels centered on the object of veneration whose riches can be used for personal needs as well as in the name of a particular god. Kolkhoz barns and storehouses become temples of the Russian Revolution.

Yet the fact that the peasants are described standing at first with "shiny faces looking as if they had just been scrubbed" suggests that the new communion also contains within itself the culture of the banished Orthodox Christianity. This delayed return to the Christian layer of worship warrants more attention in view of the little Nastya's death.

The being in- (the religion of excessive consumption and labor monumentality) and for- (performing the self in cult worship) itself of the Russian Revolutionary Spirit is now thrown back to the historical origins of Christianity, having survived two plagues of Egypt. It is no longer the unconscious articulation of the self in the kulak raw-meat worship. Nor is it a reformed version of the "clan body" whose performance of the individual event is coordinated with the help of the instrument and is sanctioned by science. Human individuality must enter a newly formed system of symbols. It has to happen in the form that has a separate narrative articulation. This happens when a child dies.

> В полдень Чиклин начал копать для Насти специальную могилу. Он рыл ее пятнадцать часов подряд, чтоб она была глубока и в нее не сумел бы проникнуть ни червь, ни корень растения, ни тепло, ни холод и чтоб ребенка никогда не побеспокоил шум жизни с поверхности земли. Гробовое ложе Чиклин выдолбил в вечном камне и приготовил еще особую, в виде крышки, гранитную плиту, дабы на девочку не лег громадный вес могильного праха.
> Отдохнув, Чиклин взял Нартю на руки и бережно понес ее класть в камень и закапывать. Время было ночное, весь колхоз спал в бараке, и только молотобоец, почуяв движение, проснулся, и Чиклин дал ему прикоснуться к Насте на прощанье.
>
> At noon Chiklin began to dig Nastya's special grave. He dug it for fifteen hours on end – in order that it should be deep and that neither a worm nor the root of a plant, nor warmth, nor cold should be able to penetrate it, and so that the child would never be troubled by the noise of life from the earth's surface. Chiklin gouged out a sepulchral bed in eternal stone and, by way of a lid, he prepared a special granite slab so that the vast weight of the grave's dust should not press down on the little girl.
> After he had rested, Chiklin took Nastya in his arms and carried her out with care, to lay her in the stone and fill in the grave. The time was night, the whole collective farm was asleep in the barrack, and only the hammerer, sensing movement, awoke, and Chiklin allowed him to reach out and touch Nastya farewell.[295]

[295] Platonov, *Kotlovan*, 115/149.

Because Christian story has an episode featuring the departure of the divine individual it can be seen not only as a more detailed formalization of what actually takes place in time but also as a more legitimate standpoint of knowing because it arises in the wake of a concrete historical experience: the death of Greek gods after the advent of Greek comedy. In *Kotlovan* this departing individual is Nastya. Platonov suggests that Chiklin's digging out of a special grave for Nastya is the recurrence of the foundational signification of the story of the death of the innocent on which the early Christian commune is built.

For the community of the foundation pit the death of Nastya is as significant to establish a dimension of collective memory as Jesus is for the early Christian commune:

> The death of the Mediator as grasped by the Self is the supersession of his objective existence or his particular being-for-self: this *particular* being-for-self has become a universal self-consciousness. On the other side, the *universal* has become self-consciousness, just because of this, and the pure or non-actual Spirit of mere thinking has become *actual.* The death of the Mediator is the death not only of his *natural* aspect or of his particular being-for-self, not only of the already dead husk stripped of its essential Being, but also of the *abstraction* of the divine Being. For the Mediator, in so far as his death has not yet completed the reconciliation, is the one-sidedness which takes as *essential Being* the simple element of thought in contrast to actuality: this one-sided extreme of the Self does not as yet have equal worth with essential Being; this it first has as Spirit. The death of this picture-thought contains, therefore, at the same time the death of the *abstraction of the divine Being* which is not posited as Self. That death is the painful feeling of the Unhappy Consciousness that *God Himself is dead.*[296]

This passage does not suggest that the death of the mediator in the Christian narrative is merely an inkling of a metaphysical system with a clearly articulated concept of the subject and existence, or as a metaphysical statement equating reality with the historically contingent plurality of institutional practices serving as a background for any intelligibility. Rather, the death of the mediator is the formalization of the signification behind cultural temporality. The death of the mediator is a possibility of universal transfer of the individually created idea. The

[296] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶785.

death of Nastya is the arrival of the new secular sacred consummated in the void of the foundation pit.

According to Hegel the standpoint of knowing that is supposed to supersede the configuration of religion is that of a system of speculative philosophy. But in the young Soviet Russian of the Five Year plan, there is no moving to the last section of Hegel's *Phenomenology* called Absolute Knowledge. Instead, the new man finds himself in the collective grave of metaphysical formalization. If there is one thing *Kotlovan* formalizes in the final scene, if by way of representation, it is that existence remains an indivisible remainder that now replays the Christian narrative in a melancholic key.

Platonov again reverses the Hegelian narrative of the triumphant march of Reason. The emphasis the final scene places on the individuating act of religious experience not only suggests that the reinvention of personal meaning is eradicable, but also through the lingering sense of loss that there is always a limit to reason. Platonov's take in *Kotlovan* on the religiosity of the new state is a curious one. Dialectical and historical materialism both require a set of analytical tools at its disposal as well as a sense of evolutionary pragmatism inherent in human history whole logic it is to reconstruct. The monotheism of the *Torah* provides both. The new *Genesis* is quickly written. The new God is the abstract Mother-Matter. Soviet Exodus is from the past of Tsarist Russia. Soviet *Leviticus* is received from Reason itself through Marx and Lenin. Even more important in this narrative estrangement of the *Torah* is a striving to recapture the primeval unity with the world before the fall. But to get back to the cult of the Damp Mother Earth (*Mat' syra zemlia*) Soviet materialism has to creatively estrange the dual origin of its religious foundation. First, the polyphony of the pagan world has to be recovered through a return to polytheistic practices now couched as unified but variegated sites of scientific worship of the

world. Studying a single aspect of nature or culture, a single god, is—in so far as it abstracted it from the whole, that is, all other gods, while dedicating to it a set of institutional practices, be it equipment or multiple scientific hypotheses, as well as a privileged position within a value hierarchy of other such cults or practices—the very turning of the whole of nature and culture into multiple name-sites, infinite modes of a single god of matter, even if no longer understood exclusively in relation to its agricultural wonders of change and generation. To reach unity with the Mother Earth Soviet science has to fully dissolve the irrational sediment of human subjectivity in the objectively observable and physically localizable sites correlated with subjective states accompanying human activity. Materialist perfection, then, is akin to the full fusion of man with the self-moving totality of matter, a sensuous oblivion of rationality, the much-coveted return to the Garden of Eden. The new pagan was now beyond his old superstitions. He simply knows all the voices in which Nature speaks. But this subject was also melancholic. It was still possible to tell him that his loss was for a good cause but there was no way of convincing him that he did not have the loss. But inasmuch as this was certain, any elaborate philosophical system imposed on him from without was now subject to doubt. And this doubt could only be overcome if a new myth was written.

Conclusion: Between Myth and Reason

Our investigation of how Tolstoy, Khlebnikov, and Platonov carried out the liminal hermeneutics of suspicion directed at the idea of freedom as self-determination is now finished. We saw how each of the three authors questioned and challenged a technology of creative infinity, as well as metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, aesthetical, and political aspects under which individual freedom appeared.

In the *Death of Ivan Ilyich* Tolstoy performs a detailed phenomenological description of how the anticipation of death or its proximity affects one's understanding of the ontological structure of human being, namely, of the fact that to exist is to relate one's anticipated future to what one think is available to him from the past in the narrative of the present. Because the self thus conceived is essentially a narrative self, the interrelation of the narrative planes in the form of disconnected ecstases of time (past, present, future) is an illusion. The three are united within the narrative arc of one's self whose only time is now. The connection between mortality and narrativity seems to allow for the very possibility of one's authentic life. One can lead an authentic life because this project is bound by multiple limits, yet leaves ample space for one's creative modification of one's existential situation. Yet the unbridgeable distance separating the individuality of one's death from the world, as well as the nearly infinite potential to change one's life story may suggest what Tolstoy sees as rather dangerous the cultural possibility, which Russian society with the advent of the secular culture in the second half of the nineteenth century, inherits from European modernity—life without God. His peculiar formal and thematic solution how to place chapter one in relation to the rest of the chapters in the novella, and to do it in a way that defies the principle of chronological exposition, is his double statement on the secular culture's celebration of human creative infinity.

While doubting the acceptability of general guidelines for one's life conduct in one's individual narrative seems necessary, to be doubting the existence of God is not to be willing to admit that one's power of doubt, too, has its limits. The first major fictional work published by Tolstoy after his crisis and the conversion of the late 1870s, *Ivan Ilyich* thus continues the study of the cultural impact of European modernity on Russia and its dialogue with tradition he began already in *Anna Karenina*. The ideology of affirming one's freedom which modernity knows as self-determination appears to Tolstoy most problematic not so much in view of its not having a place for God, but in view of its suggesting a possibility that the new secular god was none other than the self-determining individual himself.

To make a more compelling the argument that the position of God is unassailable and that without his grace nothing can exist, Tolstoy needs to introduce the idea of an entity beyond being. This has to be done in an oblique way. The narrative discontinuity of *Ivan Ilyich* serves exactly to achieve this end. Just as much as death, as it is commonly understood, is beyond life, and the authentic life is beyond a life unexamined, so, too, is God, as the only thing that truly is, beyond the boundaries of the physical world. Tolstoy voices his main critique of how modernity sees finitude in relation to self-creation—its infatuation with self-determination obscures the simple realization that to be truly free one need to relinquish all claims to absolute power, knowledge, or will. To do so is to mimic God's ultimate gift of love.

Unlike Tolstoy, Khlebnikov sees all conventions as what needs to be broken, and creative freedom to be oneself as exactly what man must understand as absolute in order to become god-like. For him historicity within which as a horizon of intelligibility a self-determining subject always finds himself can be narratively appropriated. In *Zangezi* Khlebnikov approaches finitude in three primary ways: as a debilitating influence of Hegel's thought on philosophy of history; as

the inertia of the existing artistic boundaries poetry is hesitant to transcend; as voices of other poets whose metaphysical orientation goes against his artistic credo, that there was no creative limit to *zhiznetvorchestvo*. Khlebnikov sees history as the multiplicity of eternally existing dimensions from which the present is assembled differently, each time through a configurative reading in which each of the historical subjects partakes.

Khlebnikov settles his accounts with Hegel by creatively appropriating some of the elements of his narrative system and playfully subverting others. His critique of the Hegel-inspired narrative of modernity is that by making History a universal protagonist, Hegel defeats the very standpoint he worked so hard to deduce. If History is what is real, what happens to self-determination and why not simply entrust oneself to History and observe how Spirit marches to freedom?

To overcome finitude understood as a multiplicity of formal and thematic constraints, Khlebnikov extends the expressive capacity of language, playing at border of sign legibility, and turning to avant-garde's artistic practices in the visual media, as well as borrowing some of the Cubits experimental techniques. Another aspect of finitude he sees in the metaphysical orientation of other Russian poets like Marina Tsvetaeva is their transcendental dualism. This worldview makes these artists see the world below as a vale of tears, and the one in the beyond as the only real one to which the striving of their soul must be directed. These vestiges of the Romantic poetic paradigm must be overcome if life is to equal art. While Khlebnikov's take on human finitude is radically different from Tolstoy's, in that he sees real freedom as a freedom to doubt every argument advanced to suggest that one's power to create cannot be absolute, it falls prey to irony. In urging everyone to forget the burden of the past and be innovative, the poet

often finds himself several millennia back in time, thinking to be his innovation what humanity has already achieved in the etymologies of the *Upanishads* or in Plato's dialogues.

Platonov approaches the problem of human finitude yet from another angle. In *Kotlovan* he investigates the linguistic and metaphysical foundation on which the vision of bright Soviet future rests. Looking at the philosophical legacy of German Idealism that Young Soviet Russia adopts as a guide to action, he quickly realizes the metaphysical bankruptcy of the system of thought on which Soviet science is based. Insofar as Hegel and Marx both promise the arrival of God's Kingdom as some kind of historical closure, both become hostage of their narrative imagination, in which elements of Christian narrative recur.

Platonov sees philosophical systems as mythical narratives, the main objective of whose authors is to inscribe their names is human history. The building project that unfolds in the foundation pit becomes for Platonov a place in which to test whether the logic of Russian history is compatible with the logical advance of Spirit in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. It is not. The proletariat working in the foundation pit is made by Platonov to speak the peculiar version of Russian whose stylistic features suggest that the proletarian consciousness is structured by Marxist's categories and a belief that consciousness is derivative of matter. But these enlightened masses get drawn into the grotesque carnival of self-devouring matter, whose narrative episodes replay those from Hegel's logical gallery but often in reverse. Platonov sees life and existence as what neither philosophy nor science can formalize: attempts to do so lead to the illusion of mastery over the earth and the will to dominate. Platonov's overcoming of creative infinity is in one's attunement to being itself and its constant slipping away from any ideological, philosophical, or linguistic nets people may create in time.

In carrying out their hermeneutics of liminal suspicion in relation to the legacy of European modernity, Tolstoy, Khlebnikov, and Platonov each adopt a unique artistic solution to the challenges this legacy poses. In the end Tolstoy sees human finitude in relation to freedom as one's ability to be humble in the face of God and in that state seeing the range of possibilities open for one in life; Khlebnikov in a continuous creative emptying out of all preconceptions, plans, and ideas, only to be able to always see the world anew; Platonov in learning how to immerse into a state of meditative trance in order to hear the being of language and language of being. In view of the paramount importance the artistic form has for each of the three works, Tolstoy, Khlebnikov, and Platonov also articulate yet another type of finitude—an impossibility of an independent and self-sustained system of knowledge, be it philosophy or art.

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