



The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism

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Gerald Janacek

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“Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutunglos”

– Hölderlin “Mnemosyne” [1803], Zweite
Fassung (1951:195)

“The heart has its reason of which the reason knows nothing . . . ”

– Pascal, *Pensée* 477 (1961:164)

“ . . . the unpronounceable heart of speech”

– Pete Spence (1988:5)

“It is admittedly tempting to suppose that there must be some limit to the degree of repugnancy that is admissible in literature; and certainly there is a point beyond which language can only turn into nonsense. But then nonsense can be literature too, and sometimes is—a warning that, if there is a limit to be placed, it may be worth insisting that it should be placed at some remote point.”

– George Watson (1969:75)

“Nam neponyatnoe priyatno, neob”yasnimoe nam drug”

[For us the incomprehensible is pleasant, the inexplicable our friend]

– Aleksandr Vvedensky (1980:128)

“Nonsense explores the interaction of pattern and freedom, as a theme about both life and art.”

– Wendy Steiner (1982:132)

“All verbal structures with meaning are verbal imitations of that elusive psychological and physiological process known as thought, a process stumbling through emotional entanglements, sudden irrational convictions, involuntary gleams of insight, rationalized prejudices, and blocks of panic and inertia, finally to reach a completely incommunicable intuition.”

– Northrop Frye (1957:83)

“What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”

– Ludwig Wittgenstein, [1921] (1974:74)

Dedication:

To all who work
to keep human nature indeterminate

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PREFACE

As one who cannot pass by a superscript for a note without wanting to know what it says and who at the same time resents the interruption if it is merely to give a page reference, I have chosen the parenthetical method for citations, keeping the notes to a minimum. References to the bibliography will be made in the body of the text by author, date, and page, e.g., (Bely 1910:232). Brackets will be used to enclose titles and dates which are not meant as references to the bibliography. They will also be used to indicate archival sources not listed in the bibliography, e.g., [RGALI 1334-1-25] is Rossiiskiy Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva Fond 1334 Op. 1 ed./ delo 25; IRLI=Institut russkoy literatury i iskusstva (Pushkinsky dom). They will also be used to enclose translations of words or phrases given first in Russian or the original Russian of words or phrases given first in translation, e.g., *mysl'* [thought], significance [*znachenie*]. Finally, brackets will be used to indicate my interpolations in a quotation, usually to give the original Russian of some word, and will be placed around three dots to indicate that this is my ellipsis and is not the punctuation of the original.

All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Since the book is aimed at an English-speaking audience, reference will be made wherever possible to sources available in English translation. If the reference is to a source in English translation, then the translation is from there.

Unless otherwise indicated, italics and other forms of emphasis in quotations are given as in the quoted source.

Transliteration: A modified form of the Library of Congress will be used (exceptions: ia=ya, iu=yu; omitted in proper nouns in the text but retained in the bibliography and transliterated quotations; ĭ [i-kratko]=y; -skii=sky; -yy will be contracted to -y; ë will be rendered as yo, but after sibilants).

INTRODUCTION: DEFINITIONS AND BACKGROUND

ZAUM: A DEFINITION

Zaum' (pronounced: ZA-oom, i.e., in two syllables) is a Russian Futurist neologism used to describe words or language whose meaning is "indefinite" [*neopredelennoe*] or indeterminate. *Zaum'* is arguably the most prominent, unique feature of Russian literary Futurism, a feature which distinguishes it even from Italian Futurism, and it is easily its most provocative feature, the value and purpose of which was and still is much disputed and much doubted. The term has been variously translated as "trans-mental," "transrational," "trans-sense," "metalogical," or "nonsense" language. Perhaps the cleverest and best rendering is Paul Schmidt's "beyonsense" (Khlebnikov 1985:113). The basic root of the word, *um*, is a noun that means "mind, wit, intellect" and is the Russian word that would be used in such phrases as "a man of great intellect," "in one's right mind," "to lose one's mind," "to be at wit's end." It refers to the locus of normal mental activity of a rational, logical sort. The adjective from the noun (*umny*) means "intelligent, witty." In a prefixed form, *razum*, it means "reason, logic, intellect." However, the addition, instead, of the prefix *za-* introduces an element of uncertainty. This prefix has been characterized as "among the most productive and versatile of Russian prefixes, and it has the widest semantic role" (Mickiewicz 1984:374). Readers wanting an exhaustive survey of its usage can consult Mickiewicz's fine study, but my present purpose is to define the word *zaum'* for English-speaking readers so I can use it as a term hereafter. When attached to a noun, *za-* is roughly equivalent to the Latin prefix *trans-*; hence *Zamoskvorech'e* is the district of Moscow "beyond the Moscow River," that is, on the opposite side of the river from the Kremlin and the center of the city. Thus in a topographical sense it means "beyond, on the other side of," and by extension "outside of" or "beyond the bounds of." It is a matter of escaping from or going beyond the limits of a locale, in this case of something like rational, intelligible discourse. At the same time, the negative connotations of "nonsense" are avoided in the Russian, which

2 *Zaum: The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism*

also has at its disposal *neumny* [not intelligent, stupid] and *bezumny* [mad, insane]. *Za-* has a rather clear-cut geographical denotation, despite Beaujour's contention that "it is almost impossible to specify which of the many senses of the prefix *za* must be understood in *zaum*" (1972:13). Rather, the uncertainty enters when the prefix is combined not with a precise topographical designation but instead with an abstract notion like mind or reason, the boundaries of which are unclear and open to dispute. Mickiewicz aptly characterizes the root *um* as "highly accommodating to diverse semantic input" (1984:370). However, to this must be added the observation that in numerous Russian expressions the word *um* is used in ways that suggest a more concrete sense of place than is perhaps the case in English. For instance, to "lose one's mind" or to "go crazy, go insane" or, in a closer equivalent, to "go out of your mind" in Russian is "*soyti cuma*," literally to "step (or go) down from one's mind," as if it were an elevated place such as a platform or throne that one could descend from. Beaujour (:13) notes a possible origin of the coinage in the expression "*um zarazum zashol*" (literally: "the mind went beyond (or behind) reason," that is, "to be at wit's end"). It is interesting that here the mind and reason are not equated, and the mind can move around, behind, and outside reason.

At first the term was used in its adjectival form to modify the noun language: *zaUmny yazYk* [1913], but later the coinage *zaum'* was arrived at (Kruchonykh 1916a:25). In addition to the two components already discussed, this noun involved substantivization by the addition of final palatalization [']. Mickiewicz defines this palatalization, which he refers to as a *jer*, as follows: "By making a second noun from the same root, the *jer* acts as a generalizing, abstract, nominalizing, evaluative agent with a strong predicative connotation (*um* > *um'*)" (:373). By "predicative connotation" I assume he means that *um'* is a product of *um*, i.e., that *um* is the agent and *um'* the result. He identifies a series of folk coinages with prefix *za-* added to an unstressed, monosyllabic root, to which palatalization of the final consonant is added to form a feminine noun (*zaval'* [rubbish], *zavist'* [envy], *zavod'* [backwater], *zakup'* [boiling point], etc.) and concludes:

We have something of a stylization here: a very complex concept, signalled by a truncated adjective and by a vestige of another term (*jazyk*), poses as a harmless, simple colloquialism. Etymologically, our neologism differs from the above group in that its "root" is a truncation of an adjective (*zaumnyj*) and is not based, as usually, on a verb or, as sometimes, on a noun. (:373)

Although Mickiewicz does not take note of it, this difference (whether *za-* prefixes a noun, adjective or verb) makes a difference in the meaning of the prefix itself. *Za-* when prefixing a verb, as it does in most of

the folk coinages, can mean "beginning of the action" or, with a verb of motion, "brief entrance into an area." These additional meanings of *za-* are weak or absent in nominal prefixations, but they become reactivated in the form *zaum'* by the preponderance of verbal derivations in analogous folk coinages, thus introducing not only an element of folk stylization, but also an additional element of semantic uncertainty or polyvalency, albeit a weak one. Mickiewicz notes one other interesting result of the addition of the "jer" to *zaum'*: it produces a shift of stress from the main root *um* to the prefix *za-*. "This accentological shift transfers the attention from the basic morpheme or the main carrier of the lexical meaning to what was formerly the secondary morpheme and now governs the semantic unit," in the process "shortening the *u* vowel" (:381), thus strengthening the element of "beyond" vis-à-vis the element of "mind."

Since *zaum'* is a succinct, specific term, and none of the possible English translations is either succinct or wholly satisfactory, I have decided to use the Russian word itself throughout. However, since the apostrophe indicating final palatalization is meaningless to a reader who does not know Russian and potentially confusing, it will be dropped hereafter, as will the italics. I will also use one further extension of the term, *zaumnik* (plural: *zaumniks*), to refer to practitioners of *zaum*.

The origin of *zaum* as a self-conscious phenomenon is easy to pinpoint: Kruchonykh's poem "Dyr bul shchyl" (*Pomada*, 1913). The only equivocation might be on whether some of Khlebnikov's earlier experiments are to be classified as *zaum*, in which case, depending on which poem or form one chose, the date might be put as early as 1906-08 (see Ch. 5).

Why write about *zaum*? On one hand, it was part of a major trend in all the arts of the first decade of the century back to "the basics," that is, a re-examination of the fundamental principles of each art form and of art forms in general. In that respect, *zaum* can be and has been considered an equivalent in language to abstractionism, and a *zaum* poem by Kruchonykh an equivalent to Malevich's "Black Square." In addition, *zaum* can be said to exist at the limits of language, and therefore an examination of it is one way of getting at the roots (and limits) of human language itself. This will become clearer subsequently. What might seem to be a minor episode in Russian avant-garde poetry has very broad implications and a historical scope that ranges from Plato to current theories of language and literature (e.g., Deconstructionism).

This study will begin with a survey of ideas and discussions in the Russian context that might be taken as leading to *zaum*. A detailed history of *zaum* practice and theory in its leading practitioners will form the main part of the book. Finally, a chapter surveying the discussion of *zaum* in the 1920s after it ceased to be an active phenom-

enon, and a discussion of later developments and conclusions, will round the study out. Overriding these is an obvious chronological-historical design. My intention is to cover the work of all the zaumniks, with major focus on the work of Kruchonykh and briefer treatments of Khlebnikov and of lesser figures such as Zdanevich, Tufanov, Alyagrov, Gnedov, Terentev, Bolshakov, Lotov, and even the zaum works written by avant-garde painters such as Rozanova, Malevich, Stepanova, Filonov, and Boris Ender. A few zaumniks have already received some study, e.g. Terentev (Sigov 1987; Bogomolov 1990), Zdanevich (Janecek 1982; Janecek/Riggs 1987), and Tufanov (Nikolskaya 1987). Numerous studies have already dealt with zaum in Khlebnikov to some extent. It has been convincingly argued that, while using the same term, *zaumny yazyk*, Khlebnikov did not intend to create an indeterminate language (Brik 1975:229; Lönnqvist 1987; Grigorev 1986:241; Solivetti 1988; Douglas 1987:166 ff.; et al.) as Kruchonykh clearly did, and therefore by our definition he is not a true zaumnik; however, his influence on the process of its development in Kruchonykh would seem to have been great and we cannot avoid considering him, if only for comparison purposes (see Ch. 5). On the other hand, certain other poets such as Kamensky, Aseev, A. N. Chicherin, and Petnikov, characterized as zaumniks by some because they employ neologisms and are to varying degrees difficult to comprehend, neither write zaum by our definition nor contribute anything original to its history and are therefore not studied here. I would also like to point out the existence of four article-length surveys of zaum, two in German (Ziegler 1984, 1990) and two in Italian (Marzaduri 1983a, Lanne 1983), and Lawton's encyclopedia article (1985).

The reader should not expect to find definitive or perhaps even definite interpretations of poems here nor expressions of dissatisfaction from this writer for his failure to find unequivocal solutions to interpretive puzzles provided by zaum poems. The arrival at such solutions immediately places the given works outside the realm of zaum and therefore on the periphery of this book. I instead will be advancing the view that indeterminacy of meaning in the given texts – and by implication in other texts as well – is a positive feature. If one has the firm conviction that clarity and monovalency of meaning are the only proper goal of language, then one can expect to find my book and its arguments misguided. However, I would hope that many readers have an open mind on this subject and would be willing to entertain the notion that indeterminacy in human affairs has a value worth considering.

In an earlier article (1986), I proposed a system of classification for types of zaum as a tool for critical analysis. Since I have used it as a descriptive means in this study, let me outline it in brief again here. The basic principle is that dislocations [*sdvigi*] that produce indetermi-

nacy can occur on a variety of linguistic levels, ranging from the phonetic to various aspects of semantic construction. Dislocations producing effects most characteristic of zaum occur mainly on the level of phonemes, morphemes, and syntax. Hence, what we will refer to as "phonetic zaum" is a situation in which letters are presented in combinations that do not form recognizable morphemes. "Morphological zaum" uses recognizable morphemes (roots, prefixes, suffixes) in new combinations where the resultant coinage is to some significant extent indeterminate in meaning. Of course, some new coinages can be perfectly clear and easily understood, and these would not qualify as zaum. Finally, "syntactic zaum" results when each word in a passage is a standard word in a standard form, but the syntactic relationships between the words are grammatically incorrect, shifted, or garbled. Subject and verb, or an adjective and the noun it presumably modifies, may not agree; case relationships may be distorted; division into phrases, clauses, and sentences may be uncertain, perhaps because necessary punctuation has been omitted. These types, though they rarely occur in pure form, are basic to our study and will be exemplified and discussed in detail. When we move beyond these linguistic units into areas where semantics plays an increasing role, however, we add to the picture important considerations of external reference. Such phenomena as absurdity, parody, humor, automatic writing, surrealism, stylistic impropriety, and so on, may well have significant elements of indeterminacy in them, but they involve complex judgments based on a view of reality rather than on straightforward linguistic standards and our system cannot be successfully extended to cover them, though the general term "suprasyntactic zaum" is suggested as a collective label for these. Indeed, the precise mix of dislocations in any given zaum text is usually complex and multi-leveled, and often it extends beyond the types defined. The proposed classification is merely a convenient way to characterize some of the devices present in a zaum text as a basis for further discussion.

VIKTOR SHKLOVSKY: ON POETRY AND TRANSRATIONAL LANGUAGE.

An excellent place to begin a discussion of the roots of zaum is Viktor Shklovsky's article "On Poetry and Trans-sense Language" (1916; 1919a; 1990:45-58; Eng. trans. 1985), which lays out what an educated Russian interested in the phenomenon would identify as its likely sources at the time of its inception. The article was begun in 1913 in immediate reaction to Kruchonykh's "Declaration of the Word as Such," and its first variant, titled "On zaum language," bore the inscription: "I dedicate this to the first investigator of this question, the poet Aleksey Kruchonykh. The stone rejected by the builders has become the cor-

nerstone" (1990:488). Although his survey is brief, not exhaustive, and rife with technical errors (see notes to 1985, 1990), it nevertheless provides us with a useful outline for an exploration of those sources. Along the way, we will also consider some additional factors not covered by Shklovsky.

From time immemorial, language-using humans have probably sensed the gap between what they would like to express in words and what they are able to express. This is doubtless due to the fact that emotions and other kinds of complex experiences have a considerable element of the non-verbal in them which is not just pre-verbal, but inherently non-verbalizable. Indeed, the non-verbal arts exist precisely to convey human experiences that exist outside the verbal realm. Thus many writers, and especially poets, who must naturally be particularly sensitive to the so-called "musical" aspects of language, have expressed an acute awareness of this gap between what they "hear" in their mind's ear and what they are able to put into a corresponding poem. Shklovsky's article therefore begins with a quotation from a poem by Russia's great Romantic poet, M. Lermontov (1814-1841):

If at a marvelous special moment
 In your long-mute soul you happen to discover
 A yet unknown and virginal wellspring
 Full of simple and sweet sounds,
 Do not listen to them closely, nor give yourself to them,
 But draw the veil of forgetfulness over them:
 Through measured verse and icy words
 You will never convey their meaning.
 "Ne ver' sebe" [1839]

The idea contained in this excerpt has two aspects: 1) there are beautiful sounds arising in the soul of interest in themselves, and 2) it is difficult or impossible to convey their "meaning" [*znachenie*] in words.

1) "A Wellspring of Sweet Sounds."

Many poets report that lyric inspiration first takes the form of vague sounds that are not yet recognizable words but have a certain rhythm or sonic patterning. Shklovsky indirectly refers to Schiller's statement made to Goethe: "With me the conception has at first no definite or clear object; this comes later. A certain musical state of mind precedes it, and this, in me, is only then followed by the poetic idea" [March 18, 1796] (Shklovsky 1985:18 n. 53; Schiller 1877:154). Shklovsky comments:

In this I think that poets have fallen victim to a lack of precise terminology. There is no word for inner sound-language, and when one wants to speak about it, the term "music" turns up as a description of certain sounds which are not words; in this particular case not yet words, because they eventually emerge in a wordlike manner. (:18)

What is translated as "sound-language" is the Russian neologism *zvukorech'*, which might alternately be translated "sound-speech," since *rech'* focuses not on language as a system, but on its active production, pronunciation, the process of emitting words (or, in this case, vocal sounds). Earlier in the article, Shklovsky had raised the question whether speech sounds without definite meaning were expressive for everyone or only selected individuals, such as poets (:5-6). If sound-language can act directly on the emotions "outside of or separately from meaning," on what could this be based? We should distinguish two aspects to sound in language: 1) the auditory phenomenon, and 2) the articulatory phenomenon.

There is only one reference (Tasteven 1914:25)¹ in the whole discussion surrounding *zauim* to *Cratylus*, where Plato considers the nature of linguistic signs, their mode of representation, and the relationship between verbal sounds and meaning. *Cratylus* maintains that names are "natural and not conventional" (Plato III:41), Hermogenes insists that they are purely conventional, while Socrates takes a middle position, maintaining that language has both natural and conventional elements. Socrates argues that language in its best and most effective expression does, in naming, "show what each thing is like" (:85). In this view, it is the kinesis of articulatory movements, rather than the acoustic product, upon which the "meaning" of individual sounds is based. Indeed, those sounds whose articulations are expressive in themselves, notably most of the ones singled out by Plato (r, i, s, z, l, g), are the ones whose semantic interpretation tends to produce agreement (Janecek 1985:174). Socrates therefore finds some objective basis for *Cratylus'* position.

In the Russian sphere, the first to speak about the emotional qualities of specific sounds seems to have been the great classic poet M. V. Lomonosov (1711-1765) in his "Short Guide to Eloquence" [*Kratkoe rukovodstvo k krasnorechiiu*, 1748], where he ascribes emotional qualities to the vowels and consonants. For example, the vowels *e*, *i*, *iat'*, and *yu* are suitable "for the depiction of tenderness, affection, sad or small things," whereas *o*, *u*, and *y* are for "frightening and strong things: anger, envy, fear and sadness" (1952:241; for a detailed consideration of Lomonosov's use of sounds see Kjetsaa 1976).

The only statement by a Russian Symbolist that Shklovsky mentions is by Vyacheslav Ivanov on Pushkin's "The Gypsies," in which Ivanov discusses the prevalence of the vowel *u* "now muffled and pen-

sive, receding into the distant past, now colorful and wild, now sultry and evocatively melancholy" (1909:148). As with Plato, Ivanov sees imitation (mimesis) as "an indispensable ingredient of artistic creativity" (:252).

But, in fact Andrey Bely in his important and controversial book *Symbolism (Simvolizm, 1910a)* also addresses issues relevant to poetic language and zaum. In one of its articles, "The Magic of Words" [1909] ("Magiya slov" 1910a:429-48, 618-26; Eng. trans. Cassedy 1985:93-110), Bely picks up where Ivanov left off on the matter of word creation. For Bely, the word is a theurgical conjuring mechanism based on sound:

Sound is the objectivization of time and space. But every word is a sound before it is anything else. The original victory of consciousness lies in the creation of sound symbols. For in sound there is recreated a new world within whose boundaries I feel myself to be the creator of reality. [...] By calling the frightening sound of thunder *grom* [thunder], I am creating a sound that imitates thunder (*grrr*). And by creating this sound, it is as if I were beginning to recreate thunder itself. (Cassedy:94-95)

According to Bely, this method of word creation is preferable to more rational procedures: "With a successfully created word I can penetrate far more deeply into the essence of phenomena than I can through the process of analytical thought" (:95). At the same time, it opens new vistas:

The goal of living communication is a striving toward the future. This is why abstract words, when they become signs of communication, cause communication between people to revert to something that has already existed in the past. When we hear living, imaginal speech, on the other hand, it kindles our imagination with the fire of new creations, that is, with the fires of new word constructions. And a new word construction is always the beginning of the acquisition of new acts of cognition. (:96-97).

A word bursting out of its previous usage is a sign of life, like a seed bursting out of its hull, and this requires a certain violence, playfulness, a "healthy barbarism" (:99), which, we might add, was characteristic of the Futurists, but not particularly of the Symbolists.

In a note to another article in *Symbolism*, "Lyric Poetry and Experiment" [1909] ("*Lirika i eksperiment*"; Cassedy:222-73), Bely remarks: "the capacity to gain aesthetic enjoyment not only from the figurative image of the word but also from the very sound of the word independent of its content is extremely developed in artists of the word" (Bely 1910a:578). He points to Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger*, where the hero imagines a girl with the name Ylayali and is haunted by the meaningless word "kubooa," an example also pointed out by Shklovsky

(1985:9-11). Shklovsky notes that the word is attractive to the novel's hero precisely because he can make it mean whatever he wants. Bely then refers to "the theory of a certain Frenchman" (unidentified) in which the vowels refer to spiritual actions, the consonants (m, l, v, f) refer to matter, and others (t, d, s) serve as connecting links between the two realms (Bely 1910a:578).²

Shklovsky quotes from an article by psychologist Dr. B. P. Kiterman, "The Emotional Meaning of a Word" ("*Emotsional'ny smysl slova*," 1909). Kiterman maintains that in addition to a logical and psychological meaning, the word also has a "powerful" emotional factor to be considered in it. He identifies three major sources of this emotional impact. The first is sound: "Sounds in themselves, sound combinations, as physical sound waves connected with physiological acts, sometimes serve as the element determining the emotional impact of the word" (:165). In this area there are three main modes. Some words are onomatopoeic; that is, they attempt to duplicate natural sounds, and their impact is dependent solely on their external form, their sound composition. Following Wundt, Bourdon, and Kussmaul, he locates another mode in articulation: "the imitativeness, the depictiveness of a word is contained in the *movements* of the speech organs and in other mimetic and pantomimic gestures accompanying them" (:165). And then there are "associations" connected with sound combinations (he gives the example from Bourdon that the sounds *jaja* and *zaza* are suggestive of tenderness and affection to the French), but Kiterman points out that such associations "are to a significant degree dependent for their development on the sound forms themselves" (:166). Presumably, because words with the associated meaning already have those sounds in them, the relationship is therefore reciprocal.

In the first area of emotional impact, Kiterman identifies two paths of action: 1) sound sensations, and 2) the motor or kinetic impressions that arise under the influence of the sound sensations, the relative impact of which would be expected to differ depending on individual nervous systems. Thus acoustic properties, oral articulation, and emotional import are effectively united. Kiterman maintains that speech sounds are as much sounds as are musical tones and have a similar capacity to produce a "neuro-psychic response." In support of this, he delves briefly into sound-color synaesthesia where, according to Fechner, a=white, e=yellow, o=red, and i=black.³ The second major factor in emotional impact are those associations that result from the word's usage, that is, its contextual and stylistic references, such as the differing associations with *kon'* and *loshad'* (stallion, horse). The third factor is the emotional impact of the object or phenomenon referred to by the given word.

Additional theoretical support in this area is mustered by Shklovsky's reference to Maurice Grammont's book, *Le vers français*,

ses moyens d'expression, son harmonie [2nd ed. 1913]. Shklovsky simply says that the author "concluded that each sound evokes its specific emotions or range of emotions" (:7). Although Grammont richly illustrates this point, we should not miss a note of circumspection that Shklovsky does not repeat, though it was contained in the Russian translation of Grammont's introduction which appeared in the same issue of *Poetika*: "In general, all sounds in a language, vowels and consonants, can take on expressive meaning only when the meaning of the word in which they occur itself supports it; if the meaning of the word in this regard does not do so, then the sounds remain inexpressive" (Grammont 1967:206-7; *Poetika* 1916:60).

Shklovsky filled his article with examples of situations where ordinary people, as well as poets, respond to the sounds of words above and beyond their meaning, even when the meaning itself is unknown or unimportant to the person involved. He refers to Mr. Micawber's "relish in [a] formal piling up of words" [Dickens, *David Copperfield* III, Ch. 52]. Satin in Gorky's *The Lower Depths* [*Na dne* [1902], Act I] comes up with the neologism "sikambr" and other barbarisms to express his disgust with "all human words." The servant Valentin in Goncharov's *The Servants of the Old Days* [*Slugi starogo veka* [1888], I] collected incomprehensible words of foreign origin and organized them according to sound instead of meaning (e.g. constitution and prostitution, *numizmat* and *kastrat* [numismatist and castrate]) without ever feeling the need to know what they meant. Goncharov in the same work notes that simple people are "moved to tears by holy books in Church Slavonic although they understand nothing or only understand 'other words' like my Valentin," and that sailors would sit listening for hours enraptured by similar readings as long as they were read sonorously. Chekhov in "The Peasants" likewise describes old peasant women being brought to tears by Church Slavonic words *ashche* [if] and *dondezhe* [until]. A merchant wife in Ostrovsky's play *Bad Days* [*Tyazholye dni* [1863], Act II, Sc. 2] is frightened just by the sound of the words *metall* [metal] and *zhupel* [spook]. In *The History of My Contemporary* [*Istoriya moego sovremennika* [1908], I, Ch. 20], Korolenko describes how a high school teacher of German whips himself and his class into an ecstasy by having them rhythmically chant the declension of "der gelb-rote Papagei."

Shklovsky also refers to poets fascinated by the sounds of words, irrespective of their meaning. Vyazemsky as a child enjoyed going to the wine cellar to read the euphonious names on the labels and particularly liked the name *Lacrima Christi*. We have already quoted Schiller to the effect that the lyric impulse usually came first in the form of inchoate sounds, of "sound patches not formed into words" (Shklovsky 1985:16). Shklovsky describes the process of transformation as follows:

Sometimes the patch approaches, sometimes it recedes, then finally it becomes clear and coincides with a sonorous word. The poet does not decide to speak a “trans-sensible word”; usually the trans-sensibility conceals itself under the mask of some often-deceptive apparent content so that poets themselves have to admit that they do not understand the content of their own verses. (:16)

In addition to Schiller, Shklovsky somewhat obscurely identifies Calderon, Byron, Blok, and Sully-Prudhomme with this idea (:16, see n. 49), and we can easily add other Russian poets, such as Mandelstam and Mayakovsky. He concludes his article with a prophecy by the Polish Romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849) to the effect that poets will one day write poetry only for the sake of the sounds (:24).

Noting that poets do not complain about mediating concepts or images with words, Shklovsky points out: “they do complain about the impossibility of mediating sensations and spiritual experiences with words. And not for nothing do they complain that they cannot mediate sounds with words” (:17).

2) “*Muki slova*” – *The Trials of a Poet*. “Certain thoughts [*mysli*] without words languish in the poet’s soul and cannot be adumbrated into an image or a concept” (Shklovsky 1985:3). There are assumed to be non-verbal “thoughts” which cannot be converted into an adequate, verbal sign. This idea is echoed by other Russian poets besides Lermontov, such as V. Zhukovsky (1783-1852, “Nevyrazimoe (Otryvok)” [1819]), A. Fet (1820-1892, “Kak moshki zaryoyu” [1844]), F. Tyutchev (1803-1873, “Silentium” [1830]), and S. Nadson (1862-1887, “Mily drug, ya znayu” [1882]). Nadson’s lines about “suffering over the word” from this last poem enter the discussion as an epigraph and title to an article by A. G. Gornfeld first published in 1899 [“*Muki slova*”].⁴

Gornfeld’s article focuses on the reasons for these creative torments. He asks: “Is what we have here a matter of inadequacy of formal means for embodying a ready thought [*gotovoy mysli*] – or does the impossibility of finding a suitable form shed a certain light also on the state of the content?” (1927:26-27). In his first section, he surveys various writers’ statements – referring to or quoting, in addition to the above poems by Lermontov, Tyutchev, and Fet, similar remarks by Pisemsky, Odoevsky, Kireevsky, K. Batyushkov, Baratynsky, A. K. Tolstoy, Golenishchev-Kutuzov, Merezhkovsky, Lvov, Apollo of Corinth, Sully-Prudhomme, Goethe, Dostoevsky, and Gleb Uspensky, or their heroes – on the problem of finding an adequate verbal expression for their thoughts. The word “thought” here refers to a mental gray area in which something has been formed definite enough that it can be called a “thought,” but not definite enough to have acquired a satisfactory verbal expression. *Mysl’* generally corresponds to the words

"thought" or "idea" in English, if you allow enough latitude in both Russian and English for ideas that may be inchoate, pre-verbal, or non-verbal. As Dal defines it, however, it is "any unitary action of the mind, reason, intellect [*uma, razuma, razsudka*], a representation of what is in the mind; an idea" (II:365), thus a product of and closely related to *um*. An etymologically related word is *smysl*, which can be translated as "meaning, sense, purport" and is the Russian word used in the phrase "common sense." Another commonly used word for "meaning," *znachenie*, is derived from the word *znak*, "sign." In many contexts the two are synonymous, but because of the differing derivations, while *smysl* refers to the outcome of thinking as a comprehensible idea that makes sense or is logical, *znachenie* refers more specifically and concretely to the signification process and its outcome in a verbal "signifier." Both Russian words are usually translated as "meaning," but to maintain a certain consistency I will translate *smysl* as "meaning" and *znachenie* as "significance" wherever possible (though in the plural *znacheniya* will have to be translated as "meanings"). *Mysl'* floats somewhere between or outside them and at times even seems to be a synonym for *zaum*. Nevertheless, its down-to-earth translation will consistently be "a thought." There is a similar problem with *chuvstvo* [feeling] and *oshchushchenie* [sensation]. The former may be one of the five "senses," but it is also akin to "emotion," while the latter is close to the idea of "perception, impression." When necessary, I will give the Russian in brackets.

Gornfeld points out that "our whole system of Schellingism is saturated with thoughts about the inexpressible" (:32), thereby revealing certain roots in the philosophy and aesthetics of Romanticism. At approximately the same time as Odoevsky in his *Russian Nights* [1844], Ivan Kireevsky was also, as Gornfeld puts it, "defending the right to 'hyperlogical' cognition [*giperlogicheskoe poznanie*]" (:33; Kireevsky [Letter to Khomyakov, 15 July 1840] 1861 I:90-91). In the typical situation, the poet is experiencing a new sensation. "This is a state of incomplete inspiration, when the poet is already quivering in the creative grip of some new feeling which is searching for a formulation, but is still incapable of finding a verbal expression for it" (Gornfeld:38). Such a view places the poet at the vanguard of human experience and innovation. The struggle with one's material and with the clichés of one's artform leads to the creation of new, if still inadequate, forms of expression and embodiments of new, if still inadequately expressed, thoughts (:89, 95-96). "A search for the word is a search for the truth" (:72).

In the latter part of his essay, Gornfeld redefines *mysl'* to give it a more explicit relationship with the word [*slovo*](:56-57). He recognizes the two usual sides in the dispute on this issue, in which some say that a perfectly clear insight may not be able to be converted into words, while others insist that if something is clearly understood it can be

clearly expressed. Rather, he says, "the truth is somewhat to the side of these two extremes; *complete* clarity is a concept that is rather indefinite [*neopredelennoe*] and relative" (:57). Gornfeld discusses the fact that many poets do not in fact wish to be perfectly clear in their expression, recognizing that apparent clarity is an illusion which, at the very least, destroys the sense of newness and mystery that is part of their original vision.

In the final analysis, Gornfeld remains conservative, rejecting before the fact, as he will after the fact (see Ch. 13), any attempts to break away from traditional verbal means (:69). The Futurists would take this as a challenge: to find a new means of expression, a new language for the new world that they saw or foresaw. They would not feel that they were limited to "mundane expressions," as Goethe was (Gornfeld:41; Goethe 1901:375-76), but were free to invent words and poems that went "beyond the mind."

Gornfeld's essay, in addition to providing some material for Shklovsky's, stimulated a response from the Petersburg University professor of philology F. D. Batyushkov (1857-1920), "Struggle with the Word" (1900), published in the major *Journal of the Ministry of Education*, presumably required professional reading for a broad spectrum of Russian educated society. Batyushkov generally agrees with Gornfeld's views, but provides several correctives. He thinks, first of all, that Gornfeld too closely equates thought and language, or, in other words, content and form (:212). Batyushkov points out that the abstract ideal in which a word will have a single, fixed, uniformly accepted meaning is unattainable in living languages, which will always depart from the initial concrete meaning [*smysl*] of

that "sound image" which we call a word. Furthermore, there is no direct connection between a word and its significance [*znachenie*], with the exception of that small group of so-called onomatopoeic words . . . The "life of language" leads to a constant destruction of the original relations between form and content, to the creation of neologisms, finally, — in rare instances, it is true, — to the formation of new words (*Urschöpfung*). When a new concept is established, a word in its old significance [*znachenie*] may even turn out to be a hindrance to thought, and language also can be such a hindrance if it corresponds to a definite, known content and is not adaptable to the expression of a new content. (:214)

Gornfeld seems to prefer attempts to express new meaning within the limits of already existing vocabulary, while Batyushkov allows for going beyond those limits when necessary.

On the nature and goals of poetic language, Batyushkov also has a different emphasis. The difficulty is not in finding words to name an emotional response, but in finding a way to produce an equivalent

emotional response in the reader (:219). In artistic speech the choice of words must be made “independently of the accurate communication of content and according to their degree of ‘emotionality’” (:221). Batyushkov is only one step away from saying that the denotative features of words interfere with their use as emotional expression and must be obliterated or somehow put to one side. Batyushkov concludes: “In freeing a thought from the word, the realm of what is inexpressible in words must be taken into account, both in essence and as a condition for active, independent efforts – by the creator and the reader – to feel the content of the poetry directly. This is the highest stage of its evolution” (:227).

The discussion on the nature of poetic expression would appear to be fairly heated (for another view see Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy 1909b, esp.:100-04). Batyushkov reports, for instance, someone’s reaction that Gornfeld was giving too much credence to poets’ statements about the difficulty of expressing their thoughts, that the poets were exaggerating as a pose so as to make the process seem more difficult than it was and thus to make themselves seem more important (:222). While Gornfeld, in a later essay written when zaum was already on the horizon, expresses impatience with lack of clarity, particularly if it is deliberate (1912:24-26), Batyushkov actively argues for a neo-Romantic emphasis on the direct communication of emotion, which inevitably requires a certain level of semantic indefiniteness. The roots of this emphasis are to be found in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s theories and their elaboration by Potebnya and others in the Russian context.

3) *From Historical Poetics to Psychophysiology: Veselovsky, Wundt, Zelinsky, Wm. James.* Shklovsky makes only passing reference to the work of the literary critic A. N. Veselovsky (1838-1906)(:23), probably to Veselovsky’s view of the origins of poetry in *Three Chapters from Historical Poetics* [*Tri glavyy iz istoricheskoy poetiki*, 1898]⁵:

In the oldest combination [of music, dance and words] the guiding role went to rhythm, which consistently normalized the melody and the poetic text which developed along with it. The role of the last element [the text] could be considered in the beginning the most modest: it consisted of exclamations, expressions of emotions, a few meaningless, contentless words, the bearers of the beat and the melody. From this kernel a text with content developed in the slow course of history; thus even in the primeval word the emotional element of the voice and movement (gesture) supported the element of content, which inadequately expressed the impression of the object; a fuller expression of the content would result from the development of the sentence. (1940:200-01)

In this primitive condition of "syncretism," as Veselovsky called it, verbal, musical, and kinetic components were not clearly distinguished, but formed an undifferentiated whole.⁶ Shouts of unclear denotative, but strong emotional, content were echoed in emotive gestures. What might originally have been an involuntary emotional response to an external stimulus becomes repeated, ritualized, and given a rhythmic form as a way of dealing with or defusing the intensity of strong emotional experiences. Only gradually do the components of this syncretic whole develop autonomy and independent form. So it is unclear to Shklovsky whether poetry emerged first as a formalization of inarticulate vocal exclamations, or language emerged first and was then formalized into poetic works.

Shklovsky also refers to the theories of the German psychophysicist Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), especially to what Wundt called *Lautbilder* (sound-pictures):

Under this term Wundt groups words which express not an acoustic, but rather an optical or other notion, but in such a way that between this notion and the choice of sounds of onomatopoeic words a certain correspondence is felt. In German, for example, *timmeln torkeln* (to stagger) and in Russian *karakuli* (badly written, smudged words).

Previously, such words would have been explained thus: after the pictorial elements of words disappeared, the meaning of words became linked solely to their sounds; finally this gave the words their sensual tonality. But Wundt principally explains the phenomenon thus: that in the pronunciation of these words the organs of speech make equivalent movements. (Shklovsky:8-9)

Shklovsky sees this as Wundt's attempt to draw *Lautbilder* closer to gestural language.

Wundt's theories and writings were actively discussed in Russian circles at the turn of the century, and some writers in the previous section refer to him (Kiterman:165; Bely 1910a:467-511 passim, 572-73; 1910b:247-49). However, it is the articles by the Polish-Russian classical scholar and popularizer, F. F. Zelinsky (1859-1944) which form the basis of Shklovsky's own comments.⁷

In a footnote to the above passage, Shklovsky refers directly to a key article by Zelinsky:

F. F. Zelinsky's experiment is interesting: it gives another explanation for the origin of sound-pictures. "And then I'll *tilisnu* you with a knife on the throat," Dostoevsky's fellow camp inmate says in *Notes from the House of the Dead* [1860], II, Ch. 4. Is there a similarity between the articulatory movement of the word *tilisnut'* and the movement of a knife sliding over

and cutting into the human body? No, but this articulatory motion describes as well as possible every instinctive state of the facial muscles during the specific feeling of pain in the nerves experienced by us when we imagine a knife sliding along the skin (but not stuck into the body); the lips are rigidly drawn apart, the throat constricted, the teeth gritted; this permits the use of only the vowel *i* and the tongue consonants *t, l, s*, whereby the selection of them and not of the voiced sounds *d, r, z* involves a certain sound-imitating element. Consequently Zelinsky defines sound pictures as words whose articulation requires the general mimicry of the face in order for these words to express the feeling evoked (F. Zelinsky, "Wilhelm Wundt and the Psychology of Language" [1901], from *The Life of Ideas*, Vol. II, St. Petersburg, 1911, pp. 185-86).

Zelinsky's article is a detailed, laudatory survey of the main ideas in the first volume of Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie, Die Sprache* [1900, 2nd ed. 1904, 3rd ed. 1911; Russ. trans. 1912a]. After putting the subject in a historical context for the general Russian reader in which he mentions Humboldt, Schleicher, Steinthal, Lazarus, and Paul (Zelinsky 1911:151-60), Zelinsky outlines the features of Wundt's theories, where "for the first time psychology, and furthermore experimental psychology, i.e. the most solid system and the one most rich in possibilities, meets with linguistics" (:160-61).

In his first three chapters, which Zelinsky finds to be "the most original" (:164), Wundt discusses: 1. Expressive Movements (*Ausdrucksbewegungen*), 2. The Language of Gestures (*Gebärdensprache*), and 3. Expressive Sounds (*Sprachlaute*). Expressive movements can be divided into three groups: "first, *internal* movements, i.e. changes in respiratory organs and blood circulation; second, *mimetic* movements made by the face muscles; and finally *pantomimic* movements, the organs for which are mainly the hands, but to some extent also the legs and other parts of the body" (Zelinsky:165). Affects can be divided into two elements, feelings [*chuvstva*] and ideas [*predstavleniya*], and the former into two aspects, sensation [*oshchushchenie*], which is neutral, and feeling [here we would probably prefer "emotion" in English], which is an accompanying evaluative reaction to the sensation, whether positive or negative. Sensation is quantitative, while feeling is qualitative. Ideas also accompany affects, "are lasting and produce a sense of the fact which caused the affect" (:166). These three aspects of affect (sensation, feeling, idea) correspond to the three types of movement (internal, mimetic, and pantomimic). Every sensation [stimulus] produces a change in internal state (increased or decreased pulse, more or less rapid breathing, etc.), accompanied by particular involuntary muscular movements of the face that indicate the emotional response of the subject. Out of these can be created a "language of gestures," but for this an intention to *communicate* is essential.

Zelinsky digresses briefly on theories of “expressive movements” in Spencer and Darwin.⁸ For Spencer, all psychological phenomena are neurological, and affect is a neurological impulse scattered from the neural centers to the periphery. The most delicate muscles (those of the face) respond most readily. On the other hand, some of these miscellaneous movements serve to satisfy the affect (e.g., in anger, movements to destroy the object of the anger) and therefore become associated with, and serve as an expression of, the emotion itself. Wundt, however, insists that expressive movements are not purely physical, but psychophysical:

at the beginning of development stands not a mechanical (automatic), nor even an involuntary movement, but an instinctive movement (*Triebbewegung*) mediating between both and which has in time produced both the involuntary movement (by way of the development of consciousness) and the automatic movement (by way of mechanization, i.e., by shutting off the so-called higher neurological centers). (Zelinsky:168)

Zelinsky indicates that Wundt himself recognizes that this “psycho-physical monad” cannot be deduced from the physical reality of the situation, but is simply posited as a given. In fact, any attempt to explain psychological phenomena in physical terms has a miraculous leap of human development hidden in it.

Automatic movements can be subdivided into two subcategories, reflex movements and accompanying movements (*Mitbewegungen*): “The first are produced by direct excitation of the sensory nerves; the second, on the contrary, by virtue of the so-called coordination of movements, automatically accompany any other movement, which can in turn belong to any of the three categories.” This distinction permits us to separate expressive movements into those which are “central” and “a whole series of accompanying movements produced by the central ones” (:169). It is on the latter that the psychology of language is based. Thus an unpleasant taste produces central movements of the mouth designed to eliminate the bad stimulus and additional movements of the nearby facial muscles which have an expressive capacity. The same is true of pantomimic motions of the whole body. And such expressive movements not only express an affect; they can actually produce it in the absence of an actual stimulus, since they are so closely associated with it to begin with (see also William James below).

The language of gestures has as its purpose to communicate with another. A person under the influence of an affect does not experience a desire to communicate, but is in the grip of the affect itself. Only after it has loosed its hold to a significant extent does the desire to communicate it arise. Zelinsky points out that

pantomimic movements serve to express ideas, while internal and mimetic movements express feelings; thus the initial basis of the language of gestures lies in ideas, the basis of the language of sounds—in feelings. I must note that this parallelism is not drawn by Wundt himself, but is a natural conclusion from his theory, and a conclusion, I think, of some interest and importance. (:177-78)

There are three areas where this can be investigated: in animals and primeval humans, in infants, and in some aspects of developed speech. There are three categories of animal sounds on three successive levels of development: 1) tones that convey the intensity of an affect; 2) moderate expressions with qualitative aspects in which the tone is modified by articulation, as in the sounds of most domestic animals; and 3) those cases in which expressive sounds develop into two separate groups, one for intense and another for moderate affects, as in dogs, apes, and songbirds. In humans, the first developed into song, while the second is the basis for language in which articulation “initially expressed only *feelings* and in particular their qualities, as opposed to tone, which expressed their intensity; yet there is no doubt that in human speech it expresses precisely ideas, where the expresser of feelings to their full extent is ‘the voice,’ i.e., the modulation of tone” (:179).

Finally we come to the *Lautbilder* mentioned by Shklovsky. These are elements of developed language which are neither exclamations (i.e., remnants of primitive cries), nor onomatopoeic sound imitations (i.e., approximations of natural sounds), but “sound pictures.”

By these [Wundt] understands words which—as in German *tummeln*, *torkeln*, *wimmeln*, etc.—express not auditory, but visual or other ideas, but express them in such a way that we feel a certain similarity between the very acoustic selection of sounds and the corresponding idea; in Russian we could include such words as *baybak* [marmot, sluggard], *balabolka* [chatterbox], *karakuli*, *tilisnut'*, *skhlizdit'* [*sic*, to backslide], etc., the majority of which are non-literary and can be multiplied *ad libitum*. In Wundt's opinion, sound imitations and sound pictures together constitute one category, and he develops a special original and interesting theory about them. (Zelinsky:181-82)

An infant, in exercising its vocal apparatus by making various miscellaneous meaningless sounds, is building up a close association between articulations and the sounds that result from them, so that when it comes time for the child to imitate adult language, he or she has built up the necessary experience to perform an imitation with some success. This observation leads to a key statement:

This skill has become so solidified that, in thinking about a word, we do not at all think about its articulation; but nevertheless it is the direct result of enervation of the motor nerves. The sonic physiognomy of the word is merely a consequence of its articulation. This articulatory movement of the tongue and lips belongs without doubt to the mimetic movements; as the mimetic gesture develops in general from mimetic movements, so a special *sound gesture* develops from articulatory movements. Now it is easy for us to apply to this denominator both sound imitations and sound pictures: they are all imitations, but the organ of imitation will not be sound directly, but a "simulatory" sound gesture.

Once one accepts this theory, the area of expressive sounds and their progeny in language is significantly broadened; it is broadened still more by adding related phenomena, which Wundt calls "sound metaphors." By these he means those relationships between pairs and groups of words which can be explained by a simulatory change in the sound gesture. One can relate this to such correlates as *kryaknu'* [quack, grunt] and *kriknu'* [cry, shout], but they are not the strongest element: there are more interesting cases. It has long been noted that in the huge majority of languages the names *otets* [father] and *mat'* [mother] form correlates in which the hard, explosive sounds in the name for father (*t*, *r* and related sounds) correspond to the soft, nasal sound in the name for mother (*n*, *m*). [. . . T]here is the possibility of imagining a language (or series of languages) which consist exclusively of sound pictures or sound metaphors which would correspond to the simulatory and symbolic gestures of the optitic [sic] language developed above; generating from this language (or these languages) those we already know will become comprehensible if we take into account the conditions of sound change [. . .], conditions which fundamentally distorted primitive words and obscured their initially clear psychological character. (:182-83)

In this passage we find at least Khlebnikov's program for zaum.

Zelinsky then considers objections to this theory, several of which Wundt himself raises. Wundt points out that sound imitations and sound pictures are usually found in relatively recent words and are relatively few in number in the total word pool of a language. Zelinsky himself has some additional objections. He finds Wundt's position that the sounds produced are merely the result of mimetic articulatory gestures to be somewhat overstated and imprecise. For Zelinsky, mimetic movements are related not, as for Wundt, to the idea of a word, but rather "to the feelings which these ideas awaken in us" (:186). Zelinsky further explains that, since ideas expressed by pantomimic gestures are automatically accompanied by mimetic facial movements, there is an interpenetration of the language of gestures into the language of words, and, while this link may be elusive, "nevertheless we have here not a 'chance or arbitrary association,' but a completely natural and inevitable one" (:187). ■

In summation of Wundt, Shklovsky adds:

Perhaps the extracts quoted below will cast a slightly different light on the question. We have literary evidence which does not merely give examples of sound-pictures but also allows us, as it were, to be present at their creation. It appears to us that the closest neighbors to onomatopoeic words are "words" without concept and content that serve to express pure emotion, that is, words which cannot be said to exhibit any imitative articulation, for there is nothing to imitate, but only a concatenation of sounds and emotion—of a movement in which the hearer participates sympathetically by reproducing a certain mute tensing of the speech organs. (:9)

As examples he gives Hamsun's "Ylayali," Satin's "sikambr" from Gorky's *Lower Depths*, among others.

Later in his article, Shklovsky makes brief reference to a book by the Petersburg actor-director-pedagogue Yuri Ozarovsky (1868-1924), *The Music of the Living World* (1914), where Ozarovsky discusses his theory that "the timbre of the voice is dependent on mimicry" (Shklovsky:20). Ozarovsky describes how, in 1902 while giving a course in mimicry at the Imperial Drama School using the method of F. Del Sarte (1811-1871), he observed that the students, when asked to add phrases that seemed appropriate to the given mimetic movements or positions, said them with more "genuine timbre" than was usually the case during lessons in declamation (:113). According to the theory he then developed, "Even the slightest word is a product of the brain, and the least tremor of soul found in the most elementary exclamation is not any longer just a pure emotion, but is also something from reason, from thought (the pure appearance of pure emotion is only *mimicry*)" (:110). This mimicry, by which he means the bodily state that automatically and involuntarily occurs in correspondence with an emotion, produces changes in the disposition of the speech apparatus, which in turn produces subtle but significant changes in the timbre of the voice.⁹

The connection Ozarovsky had noted between timbre and mimicry leads Shklovsky immediately to William James (1842-1910) and his thesis "that each emotion is the result of some bodily state (a sinking heart is the cause of fear, and tears are the cause of sorrow)." On this basis "one might say that the impression which the timbre of the voice summons up in us may be explained thus: when we hear, we reproduce the mimicry of the speaker and therefore we experience his emotions" (Shklovsky:20). James' apparently paradoxical thesis was originally stated in his *Psychology, Briefer Course* (1891:375-76). His point is that the nervous system and physical reflexes involuntarily react to stimuli immediately, producing bodily changes, while the mind may perceive the reason for these changes only moments later (if at all). In

other words, radically stated in James' terms, "the emotion here is nothing but the feeling of a bodily state, and it has a purely bodily cause" (:378). Furthermore, "a disembodied human emotion is a sheer nonentity" (:380), and there is "no 'mind-stuff' out of which the emotion can be constituted" (:379). In other words, the bodily state is not an expression of the emotion, but the reverse. The wide variety of emotions is a result of subtle differences in bodily states.

4) *Children's Babble, Language Learning and Folklore*. For lack of access to mankind at the dawn of civilization, empirical studies of the development of language have focused primarily on the development of language in a typical child. One foundation for this is the Haeckelian assumption of biogenesis (Haeckel 1896, esp. Ch. XV) extended by Spencer, Darwin, and others into the sphere of culture, namely, that children individually (ontogenetically) retrace the steps the human race took (phylogenetically) in developing language (see, e.g., Letourneau 1895:16). Many, including Wundt and Zelinsky, disagree with this hypothesis because of the obvious fact that children are born into a cultural environment in which they are surrounded by, and proceed to learn, an already fully developed language, whereas primitive man would have been only at some early stage in the process of creating such a language (Zelinsky 1911:179-80). In any case, the study of childhood language acquisition became very active in the latter part of the 19th century and included a number of studies and reports by Russians (Simonovich 1880; Aleksandrov 1883; Blagoveshchensky 1886).

Sechenov, for instance, when he discusses language, tends to relate what he says to the child. In *Reflexes of the Brain* [first ed. 1866] he spells out the connection between hearing, muscular reflexes, and children's speech in concrete terms:

the hearing of the new-born child is approximately in the same state as, say, the hearing of a Russian peasant in the society of Englishmen. In both cases a long time passes before they learn to listen to words. In the case of the child this state is expressed in the fact that it begins to babble. To put it another way, reflexes from the organ of hearing to the muscles of the breast, larynx, tongue, lips, cheeks, etc. (i.e., muscles participating in speech), hitherto uncoordinated, begin to assume definite shape. [. . .] Essentially it consists in association of sensations caused by the muscles of speech during contraction with aural sensations induced by the sounds of the individual's own speech. (1965:50-51)

This reflex is developed at such an early age that we would have to consider it subconscious or preconscious, where it remains for most people even in adulthood. Nevertheless, the muscular reflexes continue to function even during the silent thinking processes of adults,

though in more or less inhibited form, depending on the individual (:74). Thus zaum might be seen as a way of bringing to the conscious surface this subconscious muscular reflex by eliminating the automatic association of given musculo-acoustic speech reflexes with expressed thoughts, thereby allowing us to focus attention on the physical sensations themselves.

Child psychology is mentioned by Shklovsky in connection with a book by the English psychologist James Sully (1842-1923): "James Sully (*Ocherki po psikhologii detstva* [*Studies of Childhood* (1895)]) includes many interesting examples of 'zaum speech' among children" (Shklovsky:13). Sully in his Chapter V, "The Little Linguist," carefully describes the language development of the typical child, using observations of individual children by a variety of investigators, including Darwin, often from their own families, as the children learn their native language. (The Russian translation overtly substitutes specific Russian examples at one point (1901:174) to allow Russian readers to relate the discussion to their own language.) Sully accompanies these with suggestions of a phylogenetic relationship.

The child's first sounds are instinctive cries "springing out of certain congenital nervous arrangements by which feeling acts upon the muscular organs" and are expressive of "changing conditions of feeling, pain, pleasure" (Sully 1895:134-35/ 1901:158). These become differentiated into "a rich variety of expressions." Infants of about five months engage in babbling or "impulsive phonation," which covers virtually all the sounds later needed for language, but which cannot be called speech, since there is no reason to believe that the child is attempting "to use a sound intentionally as a sign of an idea" (:136-37/ 160). Yet a certain pleasure can be observed in the child's exercise of this phonative function (:138/161-62). In the second half-year certain of these sounds have become expressive of specific moods and marked off to convey, say, the important feeling of hunger. "True language-sounds significant of things grow out of this spontaneous expressive articulation" (:140/164), as when *da* accompanied by pointing indicates wonder at the appearance of a new object. These are "spontaneous and not imitative," but tend to become fixed as linguistic signs when recognized by others (:141/165-66). At this same age, a child "is apt to imitate eagerly any sound you choose to produce before him. [. . .] And this same impulse leads the child beyond the servile adoption of our conventional sounds to the invention of new or onomatopoetic sounds" (:143-44/168 [Russ.: "new sounds based on sound imitation"]). As Sully notes, the two sources of original child language—expression of states of feeling and sound imitation—are commonly seen as the basis for the development of human language in general.

Before long the child begins to identify and attempt to repeat specific words, usually with varying success, depending on the difficulty of the articulations or combinations required. The explanation for this difficulty is that at this stage the child is not freely vocalizing but attempting the much more complex operation of matching a sound heard with the articulatory movements needed to produce the same sound, which requires "the formation of some definite neural connexion between the auditory and the motor regions of the speech-centre" (:154/180). Here certain laws of simplification and sound substitution seem to apply, and examples given of childish approximation may have been taken by Shklovsky to be a form of *zaum* [biscuit=bitchic, umbrella=nobella, elephant=etteno (:150); chatterbox=jabberwock (!) (:152)/ Russ.: pryanik=pachik, skameyka=timeyka, Astrakhan'=atoro (:176)], though in fact we should not consider them such.

Shklovsky then shifts to children's folklore to provide examples "more interesting for a Russian reader" and "because of their mass-culture features" (:13-14). Thus we enter into an area very important for Futurism and *zaum*. He quotes (faultily) four choosing-up rhymes [*pribautki dlya zhrebiya*] from E. A. Pokrovsky's book *Children's Games, Principally Russian* (1887:56-58). As Sully indicates is typical of children's language, these tend to be characterized by vigorous rhythmic qualities and rhyme, while the meaning is obviously less important. Pokrovsky puts it this way: "in the majority of cases they are little thought out, but instead they are almost always made into rhymes and verses with an emphasis on humor and concerned hence with the satisfaction and merriment of the players" (:54). Some elements of counting are typically present at the beginning, often in distorted form (*pervo-drugo, odiyan-drogiyan*, elsewhere *pervinchiki-druginchiki* [=approximately "first-next"]) and a vague narrative subject, but the rhymes and rhythms are often filled in with hardly intelligible words. *Shishel* (possibly related to *shish* [fig (vulgar)]) appears paired with *vyshel* [he went out] in a number of examples for this reason. Often the initial counts have a foreign origin. One commentator attributes the meaningless words "eniki beniki" to a Hebrew origin (Faccani:72). Other examples have an obvious French origin, doubtless long since forgotten and unrealized by the children who now use them.

There is a notable enjoyment of sounds for their own sake, with rhythm and rhyme to make them suitable for their purpose and easy to retain in the memory. Their incomprehensibility and/or exotic origin is incidental or even perhaps contributes to the enjoyment. Shklovsky quotes Zelinsky about his experience as a school teacher of Latin and the fun his young pupils had repeating the mnemonic poems for rules of Latin grammar (Zelinsky 1905 II:30-31; Shklovsky:13).

Shklovsky also refers to an example from Gorky of a child's tendency to store a poem "in two ways: as words and also as what I would

call patches of sound" (Shklovsky:15). Gorky, in Chapter 10 of his autobiography, *My Childhood* [1913], describes how his mother attempted to teach him grammar by having him memorize a poem:

Bolshaya doroga, pryamaya doroga,
 Prostora ne malo beryosh' ty u Boga.
 Tebya ne rovnyali topor i lopata,
 Myagka ty kopytu i pyl'yu bogata.

Big road, straight road,
 You take a lot of space from God.
 You've not been smoothed by pick or shovel,
 You're soft to hoof and rich in dust.

Gorky describes misreading several words (*prostogo* for *prostora*, *rubili* for *rovnyali*, and *kopyta* for *kopytu*) and, even when he was corrected and tried to avoid these mistakes, he automatically made them when reciting from memory:

I hated these effusive lines and started angrily distorting them, putting in similar sounding but inappropriate words; I really liked it when the bewitched verses were deprived of all meaning until finally they came out:
 Doroga, dvuroga, tvorog, nedoroga,
 Kopyta, popy-to, koryto . . .

[Road, two-horned, cottage cheese, inexpensive
 Hoofs, priests/tested, trough . . .]

(Gorky 1962 IX:109-10)

Other genres of folklore, not exclusively for children, also contain semi-intelligible or unintelligible words. This is the case in particular for magic spells and incantations, which are made more frightening and effective by their mysterious language. In adult folklore, there are counting rhymes exactly like those for children, such as "Pervenchiki," in which grandmothers and their unmarried granddaughters while away leisure hours sitting in a circle holding out various numbers of fingers while trying to avoid being counted out. A number of Pokrovsky's children's rhymes are for this purpose, but a more completely *zaum* one is supplied by I. Sakharov in his *Legends of the Russian People* (1841):

Pervenchiki
 Druzhenchiki
 Tryntsy
 Volyntsy
 Popovy

Firsties
 Nexties
 [Threesies]
 Volynians]
 The priest's

Ladantsy
Tsyken'
Vyken'

(I, bk. 2:77)

Incense
[Tut-tut-um]
[Out-um]

Sakharov also provides, in his section on black magic, some fascinating witches' chants. When witches are flying to Bald Mountain, they chant the internationally famous "A.b.r.a.k.a.d.a.b.r.a" (I, bk. 2:45-46; see Higgins 1987:175 for succinct historical background on "abraxas," a word "in no known language"). Each sound of this "word" is supposed to release a soul from hell. Upon their arrival, the witches chant:

Kumara
Nikh, nikh, zapalam, bada.
Eshokhomo, lapasa, shibboda.
Kumaga.
A.a.a. — o.o.o. — i.i.i. — e.e.e. — u.u.u. — ye.ye.ye.
La, la, sob, li, li, sob, lu, lu, sob!
Zhunzhan. [. . .] (:46)

Since, as Sakharov points out, "there is almost no possibility of making any sense of these words" (:46), a transcription suffices. They create a certain poetic quality and incantatory dynamics without straining powers of invention or requiring much subtlety.

Composed along similar lines is the following Charm Song of the Watersprites [Rusalki]:

Shivda, vinza, kalanda, minogama!¹⁰
Iyda, iyda, yakutalima, batama!
Nuffasha, zinzama, okhyto, mi!
Kopotso, kopotsam, kopotsama!
Yabudala, vikhgaza, meyda!
Io, ia, o—io, ia tsok! io, ia, patstso! io, ia, pipatstso! [. . .] (:47)

At least in the way Sakharov has punctuated them, these songs would appear to be composed of individual, isolated words, as in a rhythmically designed list without syntax. While the words do not contain sound combinations difficult for a Russian to pronounce, their morphology usually makes them seem strange, like words from a foreign language, rather than neologisms in Russian (e.g., *batama*, *galemo*, *shono*).

A similar example occurs in Blok's translation of Rutebeuf's medieval play "Le Miracle de Théophile" in the scene where Saladin summons the devil with the incantation:

Bagagi laka Bashagé
 Lamak kagi ashabagé
 Karrelios
 Lamak lamek bashalios,
 Kabagagi sabalios,
 Bariolas.
 Lagozatkha kabiolas,
 Samagak et framiolas,
 Garragia! (Blok 1961:275)

The play was staged in Petersburg in December, 1907, but not published until 1915 in the miscellany *Strelets* [*The Archer*].

“Unknown sounds” are also an important part of ecstatic speech, to which Shklovsky devotes considerable attention in his article and to which the Futurists themselves made occasional reference. Though the texts of such speech may greatly resemble the examples from folklore just cited, their genesis from shamanism and religious sects is somewhat different.

5) *Speaking in Strange Tongues*. The impression that poetic inspiration is a kind of temporary madness caused by the intervention of the spirit world goes back to ancient times. The derivation of the word “inspiration” as well as its Russian equivalent *vdokhnovenie* testifies to this link. The madness which takes possession of the inspired poet and makes him or her the voice of God plays an important part in religious rituals from primitive times and often results in the production of songs and poems in a mysterious, secret language. In his *Historical Poetics*, Veselovsky quotes from Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Ion* on the subject (Veselovsky 1940:340-41; Plato III:151, I:107-08; also Shklovsky 1914:14).

Ecstatic speech occurs then in two main forms, both connected with religious rituals: shamanic chants and glossolalia. Strangely, Shklovsky does not refer to the chants of Siberian shamans, despite the Futurists’ obvious interest in them as we will see later. Rather, he refers to D. Konovalov’s *Religious Ecstasy in Russian Mystical Sects* [*Religiozny ekstaz v russkom sektantstve*] (1908).¹¹ Konovalov’s valuable book was known to the Futurists, but it explicitly focused on Russian sects, thus excluding consideration of shamanic practices, which are non-Russian. However, contact with shamans was nevertheless likely to have been direct. Even today Siberian shamans come to Moscow and other major cities to minister to all levels of Russian society, so we may comfortably assume a familiarity on the part of the Futurists with this folk institution and its practices. Konovalov gives only one example of a shamanic chant, the following brief quotation of a series of “meaningless” Chukcha shaman words: “kotero, tero, muro, koro, poro” (:189), significant nevertheless for its striking similarity to some of

Kruchonykh's zaum word creations (see Ch. 4).

Glossolalia traces its main origins to the moment in the Bible when, fifty days after Christ's resurrection (Pentecost), there was a great wind, the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles in the form of tongues of flame, and they "began to speak in foreign tongues, even as the Holy Spirit prompted them to speak." Jews speaking widely differing languages from "every nation under heaven" gathered, and when the apostles spoke to them, each "heard them speaking in his own language" (*Acts*, Ch. II). Since then the capacity to speak in unknown tongues, usually as a result of a trance or religious ecstasy, has been taken as a sign of special, privileged contact with the divine spirit, and "speaking in tongues" was a means for the Holy Spirit to manifest itself overtly through a human agent gifted to serve as such a conduit. There are, of course, pre-Christian and non-Christian versions of the phenomenon (e.g., oracles and shamanism), but in the Christian sphere glossolalic manifestations in pentecostal sects have a particular legitimacy because of their direct association with the events described in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Similarities to natural languages are likely to be either accidental or attributable to non-spiritualistic causes (subconscious recollections, imitations of foreign words present in the language environment, etc.). In general, glossolalic expressions are intended to be highly meaningful, perhaps even prophetic, but undecipherable. As one Russian critic points out (Orlov 1877), however, what usually occurs is precisely the converse of what happened in *Acts* Ch. II, where the apostles were *understood* by foreign listeners even though the apostles did not know the languages of their listeners. In the case of sectant glossolalia, usually neither the speaker nor the listeners understand the ecstatic speech and no meaningful communication occurs.

Russian mystical sects were already a subject of interest among the Symbolists. Bely's first novel, *The Silver Dove* (1909), describes the activities of one such sect of flagellants in great detail, though glossolalia is not a feature of their practice (see also Ivask 1970, 1976). Bely's important book on sounds is entitled *Glossaloliya* (1922). And Vyacheslav Ivanov in an essay in *By the Stars [Po zvezdam]* (1909) sees the Russian folk as invested with "metaphysical form-energy" descending from heaven in the Second Coming: "These mysterious signs seem to me inscribed on the brow of our people as His mystical name: 'a likening to Christ'—energy of His energy, living soul of His life" (:330). Alexander Dobrolyubov (1876-1943?) even organized a sect himself and wrote poetry using folk chants and spells (Grossman 1981, 1983). Blok also was interested in sects and at one point in 1908 considered following Dobrolyubov's lead (Grossman 1983:xii; Blok 1965:131).

Shklovsky, with some exaggeration, says: "The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is extraordinarily widespread and may be said to be universal among mystical sects" (1985:19). He then quotes four ex-

amples of glossolalia from Konovalov. Rather than limiting our view to Shklovsky's somewhat inaccurate presentation, let us look directly at Konovalov, who provides extensive factual material often based on government legal investigations of sect activities in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In Chapter III, "The Period of Speech Function Arousal," Konovalov describes glossolalia as a part of a period of release of tension after the highpoint of ecstatic sectant dancing in which the physical excitation, instead of involving the entire body, becomes localized in the speech organs. Spasms of the respiratory apparatus result in "spasmodic cries" that are mixed with "fragmented, but articulate sounds, words and phrases" (:158). As the general physical arousal declines in the later stages, the vocal organs come to the fore and produce "genuine *automatic speech* ('the living word,' or 'living water,' as the sectants call it), which consists of the involuntary pronunciation of articulate sounds of human speech" (:158). There are two types:

1) "*Incomprehensible words*" (*glossa*) not existing in any human language, if one does not count chance correspondences (i.e., *pure neologisms, new word formations*), or words borrowed (in correct or distorted form) from other languages, *foreign* by comparison with the usual colloquial language of the sectants and incomprehensible to them (*foreign language glossa*), and 2) *Utterances consisting of words and expressions of a language native to or known and understood by the sectants* (e.g., Church Slavonic). (:159)

We are concerned only with the first type.

An important point emphasized by Konovalov is that glossolalia was valued precisely *because* it was incomprehensible (:160-01). The group dynamic here and the conditions under which glossolalia arises in individuals are less relevant for our purposes than the glossolalic texts that Konovalov supplies and that may have served as models for zaum.

Sergey Osipov, a flagellant glossolal of the 18th century, is recorded as having uttered:

rentre fentre rente fintrifunt
nodar lisentrant nokhontrofint (:167; Shklovsky:19)

His contemporary, the Moscow flagellant Varlaam Shishkov, said:

nasontos lesontos furt lis natrufuntru natrisinfur
kreserefire kresentrefert cheresantro ulmiri umilisintru
gerezon drovolmire zdruvul dremile cherezondro fordey
kornemila koremira uzdrovolne korlemire zdrovalde
fanfute eshechere kondre nasifi nasofont meresinti feretra
(:167; first line Shklovsky:19)

When Shishkov was questioned further, he provided the following interpretations of the above “foreign speeches”:

“zdr̄uvule dremile” is “ne dremli, chelovek” [do not be *drowsy*, man]; “uzdrovolne” is “bud’ zdrav, chelovek, v zapovedyakh Bozhiikh” [be *healthy*, o man, in God’s precepts]; “kreserefire” is “krestnoe znamenie na sebe nosi” [carry the sign of the *cross* on yourself]; “kresentrefert” is “vstrepenis’ serdtsem k Bogu” [*lift up your heart to God*], etc. (Konovalov:253)

Konovalov notes that the interpretation is based on “whatever syllable in the glossa reminded [Shishkov] of a Russian word by sound similarity” (:253).

Melnikov-Pechersky (*Na gorakh [In the Mountains]*, 1875-81, Pt. 3, Ch. 4) provides an example from a prophet in the “Ship of God’s People” run by a Colonel Dubovitsky:

Savishrái samo,
Kapilásta gándrya,
Daranáta shántra
Sunkara purusha
Mayya diva lucha.

(Melnikov 1909 V:95; Konovalov:167-68; Shklovsky:21, and 1915:8)

(It is useful, but unusual, that stresses were marked on many of the words to guide accurate pronunciation.) The members of the Ship were under the impression that the words were “in Indian,” and Konovalov comments:

Indeed some of these words sound completely *Sanskrit*, e.g. purusha (=sct. *púruṣa* – person, man, husband), diva (dívā, instr. case of the stem *div* – sky, day), mayya (maya – art, magic force, illusion, or *maya* – name of one of the Asuras, an adept at magic, and *maya*, instr. case of *aham*, I), samo (from *samá* – smooth, identical, similar), while others, e.g. darana-ta, savishrai, sunkara, are very reminiscent of Sanskrit words. (:168; see also Toporov 1988:160-64 and 1989)

Here we may have an example of an ancient or foreign prayer dimly and incorrectly recalled or garbled as children might, according to Sully. A clearer case of this is:

Khristos [Christ] nekrata
ne tan fan
tan fatison
tintis’ tintis’

naim frison
domino (:171)

which seems to have a French-Latin flavor. Or is it Greek? Konovalov reports an instance in which a man who worked in the library of the Moscow Seminary heard the Greek Orthodox Easter anthem "Khristos anesti" in church and transcribed it as follows:

Khristos aneste
ak netro
fonaton fonaton
pantis antis
kintis mimosti (?)
zaekhal za mino [Russ.: stopped by for . . .] (:171)

A transcription of the Greek original, with lines divided to match the above version, would read:

Khristos anesti
Ek nekron
thanato thanaton
patisas
Ke tis en tis mnimasi
Zoin harisamenos.

[Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and giving life to those in the grave.]

We can note a tendency toward regularization of phonetic patterning in the librarian's version. His transcription is strikingly like other examples, and one may wonder whether a major influence may not have been Greek Orthodox prayers and hymns heard by simple folk as occasional parts of Russian Orthodox services, such as this Easter anthem, or the Easter Gospel which might be sung or read in several languages in sequence.

For comparison with Russian examples, Konovalov (and Shklovsky) also presents glossolalic texts of English and German sects. Certain similarities in all these texts emerge, mainly in the area of sound patterning, which is generally greater than even the most richly patterned traditional poems. One can posit that if the speaker is not constrained by the conventional need for semantic and syntactic structure, then repetition of patterns and combinations is facilitated.

As a related topic, Konovalov describes in brief how phenomena similar to glossolalia, such as *verbigeratio* (:246), may result from mental illness. One hysteric woman babbled like a child: "zozo, ma nounou,

patapan, tatata, petite femme" (:190). Others were reported to speak in their own invented language, and one declared (as Kruchonykh was to do) that she knew all languages, but when asked to demonstrate this produced "a series of syllables strung together without any meaning and which were absolutely unintelligible" (:190). Organic trauma can produce aphasic spasms that result in incomprehensible utterances, such as "macassi, coussi cassa" (:193). Referring to Melnikov's novel *In the Mountains* (1875-81, Pt. 3, Ch. 4), Konovalov further points out that among the Russian folk one standard sign of *yurodstvo* [being a Holy Fool] was considered to be that the individual uttered incomprehensible words. A famous example of this is the nineteenth century Holy Fool I. Ya. Koreysa's saying: "Bez pratsy ne bendy kalalatsy," which has been translated "No work no kololatsy" (Chernyshevsky 1953:137).

In Konovalov's book, there are extensive examples of glossolalia from speakers of various native languages to serve as illustrations of already existing "zaum" texts and models for the creation of new ones. That the book was known directly and used by the Futurists is demonstrated by Kruchonykh's quotations from Varlaam Shishkov's above glossolalic speech in *Exploidity* [*Vzorval'*] (1913f:n.p.) and *The Three* [*Troe*] (1913j:27) which are both more accurate and more extensive than Shklovsky's.

OTHER FACTORS

6) *Philosophy and Linguistics*. The Futurists, in contrast to the Symbolists, were not philosophically oriented in a formal way and rarely referred to other sources. As mentioned before, Plato's *Cratylus* was curiously ignored, as were the Stoics who interested themselves in linguistic ambiguity, defining amphiboly as "diction which signifies two or more things in the strict prose sense of the terms and in the same language" (Stock 1908:20). Chrysippus maintained that "every word is naturally ambiguous on the ground that the same person may understand a word spoken to him in two or more ways" (Gould 1970:69). The natural ambiguity of words is an important feature of Humboldt's views (considered below), and deliberate ambiguity is a significant feature of zaum. Amphiboly became a keystone of A. N. Chicherin's Constructivist program, and he refers explicitly to Chrysippus on the matter in one of Kruchonykh's major theoretical works (Kruchonykh 1924:53).

The second half of the eighteenth century initiated a renewed concern with the origin of language that turned into a flood of works by the mid-nineteenth century largely based on pure speculation and fancy. Among prominent early contributions to this flood were essays by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried Herder, both of whom presented variants of the onomatopoeic theory.

But the most influential book, certainly in the Russian sphere, was Wilhelm von Humboldt's *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* (1836; Russ. trans. 1859; Eng. trans. 1971). It is constantly mentioned by Russian writers on the subject, including many we have already mentioned (Gornfeld, Batyushkov, Bely) and others (Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy 1900:89), who usually make reference to the famous statement: "Alles Verstehen ist daher immer zugleich ein Nicht-Verstehen" (1836:LXXX; "vzaimnoe razumenie mezhdou razgovarivayushchimi v to-zhe vremya est' i nedorazumenie" (1859:62); "Vsyakoe ponimanie est' vmeste s tem neponimanie" Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy:89). The complete passage in which this statement is contained is as follows:

Only in the individual does language attain its final distinctness. Nobody conceives in a given word exactly what his neighbor does, and the ever so slight variation skitters through the entire language like concentric ripples over the water. *All understanding is simultaneously a noncomprehension, all agreement in ideas and emotions is at the same time a divergence.* In the manner in which language is modified by each individual there is revealed, in contrast to its previously expounded potency, a power of man over it. It can be construed as a physiological effect (if we want to apply the expression to intellectual power); the power emanating from man is purely dynamic. In the influence exerted upon him lies the principled structure of language and its forms, whereas in the reaction proceeding from him opposes a principle of freedom. For in man a certain something may arise whose reason no rational process is capable of isolating from preceding conditions; furthermore, we would misconstrue the nature of language and thus injure the historical veracity of its origin and transformation, were we to exclude the possibility of such inexplicable phenomena from it. (1971:43, ital. by G.J.)

Everywhere Humboldt (1767-1835) maintains the dynamic nature of language and that every individual possesses unique language, which remains to some extent beyond the complete comprehension of any other individual. In this mysterious dynamic interaction between an individual, unique language, and the language of the surrounding society lies a principle of human freedom and progress for the whole society. Elsewhere in the book, Humboldt looks into the relationship between sound and meaning (:192-93; Russ.:278-79). Sound and sense are seen as intersecting and interacting in the process of articulation, which is guided by a posited "intimate linguistic sense" [*innere Sprachsinn*]. This rather vague relationship had been elucidated earlier in the book in more specific physiological terms:

The indissoluble bond connecting thought, vocal apparatus, and hearing [auditory perception] to languages reposes invariably in the original arrangement of human nature, a factor that defies further clarification. The coincidence of the sound with the idea thus becomes clear. Just as the idea, comparable to a flash of lightning, collects the total power of imagination into a single point and excludes everything that is simultaneous, the phonetic sound resounds in abrupt sharpness and unity. Just as the thought engages the entire disposition, the phonetic sound is endowed with a penetrating power that arouses the whole nervous system. This feature, distinguishing it from all other sensory impressions, is visibly based upon the fact that the ear is receptive to the impression of a motion, especially to the sound of a true action produced by the voice (which is not always the case for the remaining senses). (:34; Russ.:48-49)

Since the production of speech sounds involves articulatory movements, those movements become part of the sensory package of speech production in the speaker and also indirectly in the listener, who at other times is a speaker himself and therefore also automatically associates the same motions with the sounds, but as a listener does so only passively. Thus we have sound, motion, and meaning collected in a lightning-flash unity that arcs between two humans and which "reproduces the evoked sensation simultaneously with the object represented" (:35). Humboldt admits that the "character of this connection can rarely be stated completely" (:52). Rather, he provides a threefold schema of possible relationships: 1) the onomatopoeic, in which the articulated sounds are meant to imitate natural, inarticulate sounds; 2) indirect imitation, in which sounds are chosen that, "inherently and in comparison with others, produce for the ear an impression similar to that of the object upon the soul. For example, "stand," "steady," and "stare" [*stehen, stätig, starr*; Russ. *stoyat', stoyky, stavka, stan* (:77)] give the impression of fixity; the Sanscrit *li*, "melt" or "disperse," [Russ. *lit'*] suggests melting away; and "not," "gnaw," and "envy" [*nicht, nagen, Neid*] imply a fine and sharp severance (:52; the Russ. trans. substitutes equivalents in the text and gives the Germ. examples and an explanation in a footnote). But Humboldt recognizes the "great dangers" of turning this into a broad principle valid for all languages. Finally, 3) "designation [is] based on phonetic similarity in accordance with the relationship of the concepts to be designated" (:53), that is, by analogy. Words with similar meanings are given similar sounds, thus linking them by sound association, but the character of the sounds themselves is irrelevant.

Humboldt maintains the great value of individual subjectivity as the source of creative growth and progress in language, yet for him the goal remains "the complete clarity of a concept" as crystallized in the word (:11). He is able to strike a delicate, complex balance here in

the following way: "The comprehensibility of words is something completely different from the understanding of unarticulated sounds and includes much more than the mere reciprocal production of sounds and of the indicated object" (:37). The process is mediated by a variety of additional factors, including the common denominator of human nature, the active participation of two individual humans, and the shared entity of an existing language. The linguistic sense is described as "an instinctive presentiment of the entire system which the language needs in its individual structure" (:48) in which every element is intuitively related to the whole system, but on an unconscious level, in a certain sense "beyond the mind" as in *zaum*.

Humboldt's theories had a marked impact on Russia at the turn of this century largely because of his influence on one of the great Ukrainian-Russian linguists, A. Potebnya (1835-1891). Potebnya's most famous work, *Thought and Language* (*Mysl' i yazyk* [1862, 1892, 1913, 1922, 1926, 1976]), was the subject of active discussion in the first decade of this century. It presents a theory of language based expressly on Humboldt, who is mentioned in the second paragraph and quoted frequently and at length thereafter.

Potebnya rejects both the conscious-invention and divine-origin theories of language development, pointing out, as Herder had, that "in presupposing the existence of inventive thought prior to language, it would be simultaneously necessary to presuppose the word also, since for the invention of language an already prepared language would be necessary" (1976:37). Totally new words, those not dependent on previous linguistic history, are possible only at the dawn of language development, whereas now they must follow patterns already laid down by the so-called "internal form" of words, which is essentially their etymology. Here there is room for "folk etymology," in which the actual historical etymological origin may be so deeply buried as to be unknown to a speaker, but where a kind of *ad hoc* etymology is based on analogy with evidently similar forms or roots. Because the dawn of language creation is beyond our view, only an investigation of contemporary language processes can provide a key to the primeval processes (:71).

Among other German psycholinguists who play an important role in his discussion of this area, Potebnya quotes H. Lotze as follows:

Nature links the organs of breathing with the vocal organ and makes possible the transfer to the external world of the most imperceptible qualities of aimless soul excitations by depicting them in sounds . . . Thus, in the animal kingdom there appear sounds of suffering and pleasure which are more lacking in definite indication of objects and actions than the crudest gestures, but as a expression of even hidden movements of soul they are incomparably richer than any other means that living beings could have chosen for mutual communication. (:99)

Potebnya develops this idea:

Even articulate sound, the external form of human speech, is physiologically equivalent to these phenomena and similarly depends on soul-exciting feeling that initially is also involuntary, though it then becomes an obedient tool of thought. [...] The voluntary and conscious use of words necessarily presupposes the involuntary and unconscious. Our consciousness never goes farther than observation of the means by which we pronounce a sound, to which, however, we relate passively, as to a ready-made fact independent of us. At a certain stage of development it evidently depends on our will whether to pronounce the sound or not; but when we pronounce it, in our consciousness there is only our goal, that is the image of the needed sound and, connected with it, the vague memory of the general feeling accompanying the motions of the organs needed to realize this goal. The action of the will is evident here only in changing the goal, in changing the impetus which leads to its fulfillment and which in itself remains outside consciousness. (:99-100)

A cry of fright is an externalization of emotion which helps us to deal with the emotion; articulate sounds are similar externalizations of emotion, but submitted to human thought processes. In the latter category, Potebnya distinguishes two types of articulate sound, exclamations and words as such, representing respectively the "language of feeling and the language of thought" (:105). "In tone the language of exclamations, like mimicry, which in many instances, in contrast to the word, an exclamation cannot do without, is the sole language comprehensible to everyone" (:105-06). It communicates directly, without having to be converted into a "thought" or meaning, the exact content of which would vary among individuals and even in the same individual from one day to the next. The word, however, despite its internal variability, does retain a certain objectivity because of its fixed external form (its sounds). Finally, "the exclamation ceases being itself as soon as we direct our attention to it; therefore, in remaining itself, it is incomprehensible" (:107). If the speaker turns it into an object of contemplation, then it automatically loses its emotional content, which is its only content. It has no meaning in the sense that a word has meaning. However, it is in human nature to turn such phenomena into objects of contemplation, and, therefore, while some exclamations remained such (cries of pain, pleasure, surprise, joy, sorrow), others, evidently related to impressions of sight and sound, became the roots for words (:110).

The word, then, in Potebnya's (and Humboldt's) view, has three aspects, not just two (sound and meaning): 1) content, i.e., the original perception or emotion that, say, produced an involuntary exclamation; 2) the external form, i.e., the sounds produced in connection with the content which become objectified by being externalized; and 3) the

internal form, which is "the relationship of the content of thought to consciousness; it shows how a person's own thought is presented to him" (:115). That is, a careful analysis of a word's etymology will provide the key to what it is about a given phenomenon or object that first struck the human observer and caused him to produce an exclamation. Initially these relationships are subjective, but they become objectivized in the "internal form," the origins of which may not be consciously appreciated or may be lost in pre-history, but are the foundation of a language's growth and development. It is the role of art, then, of poetry especially, to revitalize or reestablish the important links that are the basis of internal form. "Art is the process of objectivizing the primeval givens of spiritual life" (:195).

Among those from whom Potebnya's book eventually produced a response was Bely, who in a review article (1910b), found Potebnya's methodological approach in many ways faulty, but nevertheless had high praise for his perceptiveness in appreciating that "the word is a work of art" independent of thought (:256). Bely also emphasized the value Potebnya places on "irrational" features of verbal creativity. This receives perhaps more emphasis in Bely's account than it does in Potebnya's book, even though, as in Humboldt, subconscious processes are noted as playing a role in linking sound and meaning. (Potebnya does not use the word "irrational" [*irratsional'ny*] to characterize them.) Bely sees as the "meaning of all of Potebnya's work" the attempt to "reveal 'the irrational roots of personality' in the creation of words," and argues that he has "proved the irrationality of the word itself, that condition of every expression" (:246).

Potebnya's ideas, along with similar theories by A. Veselovsky, were also propagated by their students and disciples (who include Gornfeld and Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky) in a serial called *Problems of the Theory and Psychology of Creativity*, published in Kharkov beginning in 1907 and continuing until 1923. In his discussion of why communication is difficult, Gornfeld reviews the path from Goethe, Humboldt, and other German linguists (Lazarus, Lotze, *et al.*) through Potebnya, referring to familiar themes and beginning with a quote from Flaubert probably drawn from the Maupassant story "Solitude": "We live in a desert – nobody understands anybody" (1906:15; Maupassant 1941:659).

F. Batyushkov, however, finds it necessary to disagree with the position held by Humboldt, Potebnya, and Gornfeld that the word is a condition of thought, "for more precisely it is only a *conditional form* of thought, a form necessary for fullness of consciousness, but scarcely exhausting the possible means of expressing the process of thinking and not to be equated with thought" (1900:211). He ends his article with a footnote on a recent article by Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky, "Toward a Psychology of Understanding" ("K psikhologii ponimaniya," 1900),

in which the latter traces the familiar path from Goethe and Humboldt to Potebnya's book as a preface to a discussion of differing views on the possibility of communication via language as expressed in Tyutchev's poem "Silentium" ("An uttered thought is a lie") and Maupassant's story "Solitude" (1884), a story also referred to later by P. D. Uspensky (1911: 168; 1970: 198). Goethe had asked himself the question whether it was possible for two humans to fully understand each other. By turning to Spinoza, he concluded definitely no: "no one understands another" (Goethe 1969: 309; Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy 1900: 88-89). This brings Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy immediately to Humboldt's statement about every understanding being also a misunderstanding, and thence to Potebnya, who is reported to have regularly discussed the Tyutchev poem in his lectures (see Potebnya 1894:162, 1905:34, 1976:313, 559). In comparing the Tyutchev poem with Maupassant's story, Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy concludes that Tyutchev retained the "illusion" of possible communication, while Maupassant's hero suffers from having lost this illusion.

7) *The Fourth Dimension. Intuition, and Cubism.* Most important for the development of zaum is the rise of Cubism, Primitivism, Rayism, Suprematism, and of abstract art in general. A group of Russian avant-garde artist-theoreticians were actively involved in these movements, and the zaumniki were an intimate part of this group. Of especial significance are two early books by P. D. Uspensky (standard English spelling: Ouspensky), *The Fourth Dimension* (1909) and *Tertium Organum* (1911).¹² In fact, *Tertium Organum* can be used in the same way as Shklovskiy's article on zaum as a guide to the important ideas and formative sources in this particular, somewhat narrower sphere.

Taking his cues mainly from C. H. Hinton, Uspensky describes the fourth dimension atemporally as the next dimension of space. In looking for clues to hyperspace, Hinton and others had tried to understand and depict the fourth-dimensional realm by drawing analogies to the other three dimensions, in particular by describing an imaginary two-dimensional world with two-dimensional beings who try to imagine our three-dimensional world without being able to experience it directly. Certain phenomena that appear perfectly normal from a three-dimensional perspective look very different or seem irrational or unrelated when viewed from two dimensions (Uspensky 1970:30). This investigation takes on a mystical, spiritual quality that it does not necessarily have in other, more purely mathematical views. In *The Fourth Dimension (Chetvyortoe izmerenie, 1909)*, Uspensky summarizes Hinton's view in the following way. The fourth dimension is assumed to exist, but our imperfect powers of perception make it inaccessible to the senses. However, by special effort and training it is possible to develop the capacity to achieve a higher consciousness, that is, conscious-

ness of how things actually are, not merely how they appear to our senses. This would be like seeing a cube from all sides at once, rather than only from one side and distorted by perspective. The goal therefore is to achieve true, or at any rate greater, objectivity by the elimination of the “personal element” (i.e., by avoiding the *illusion* of perspective). The result is true perception. “It is very likely that Hinton wants to say that the elimination of the self in concepts leads to the development of intuitive capacities, i.e., the development of direct cognition” (Uspensky 1909:10).¹³ The psychological concept of intuition introduced here is Uspensky’s contribution. If *The Fourth Dimension* gives us the current state of thinking on the subject with only glimmers of new ideas from Uspensky, *Tertium Organum* presents a full-fledged program with clear new elements. Uspensky’s attention to language emerges for the first time briefly in Chapter VI when, in developing the analogy of a two-dimensional world, he adds a psychological viewpoint:

We should experience considerable difficulty in explaining anything to the plane [i.e. two-dimensional] being; and it would be very difficult for him to understand us. First of all it would be difficult because he would not have the *concepts* corresponding to our concepts. He would lack “necessary words.”

For instance, “section” — this would be for him a quite new and inconceivable word; then “angle” — again an inconceivable word; “centre” — still more inconceivable; the *third* perpendicular — something incomprehensible, lying outside of his geometry. (:59/51)

Uspensky admits the inadequacy of the analogical approach to this question and proposes instead to attack the problem “by studying our consciousness and its properties” (:69/61). He points out:

The content of emotional feelings, even the simplest — to say nothing of the complex — can never be wholly confined to concepts or ideas, and therefore can never be correctly or exactly expressed in words. Words can only allude to it, point to it. The interpretation of emotional feelings and *emotional understanding* is the problem of art. (:73/64)

Uspensky links the concepts of intuition, poetry, the language of the future, and the vanguard of human psychic evolution, all on the basis of principles related to the fourth dimension; that is, the way beyond the merely rational is through art (poetry in particular), and this breakthrough could be accomplished by a form of higher intuition which would lead to the creation of a new language of the future. The importance of the word “intuition” (*intuitsiya*) is weakened in later editions by the substitution of a vaguer term like “a higher form of psychic life”

(:73-74/65-66; also :197/168, 208-09/178-79), though a few instances of "intuition" are allowed to remain (:209/178, 236/204). Nevertheless, the important concept of a form of direct cognition which unifies knowledge on a suprapersonal, extra-logical level is fully retained. Uspensky describes the four stages of consciousness (sensation, perception, concept, higher intuition) as comparable to the sequence of dimensions. Thus higher intuition is seen as corresponding to the fourth dimension (:74/66); and he explicitly relates them to Kant's idea that the concept of space is an *a priori* category, that is, that "space with its characteristics is a property of our consciousness" (:73/66). It is here that art enters into its important role:

The artist must be a clairvoyant: he must see that which others do not see; he must be a magician: must possess the power to make others see that which they do not themselves see, but which he does see.

Art sees more and farther than we do. [. . .]It sees vastly more than the most perfect apparatus can discover; and it senses the infinite invisible facets of that crystal, one facet of which we call man. [. . .]And therefore concerning certain sides of life art alone can speak, and has the right to speak. (:145/121)

This Neo-Romantic notion was closer to the Symbolist ethos than to the Futurist orientation, but the Futurists nevertheless adopted the visionary elements, including the role of the artist as seer of the future. Intuition gives the artist the power to pass beyond the limits of three-dimensional logic and glimpse the fullness of that "beyond." Here we might also add Uspensky's dictum that "All art is just one entire illogicality" (:223/193). This brings us to the second important aspect of Uspensky's "Third Tool" (*tertium organum*), alonism or the absurd. He notes that "the axioms of logic are untrue even in relation to emotions, to symbols, to the musicality and the hidden meaning of words [to say nothing of those ideas which cannot be expressed in words]" (:223/193; bracketed portion not in 1911 ed.). "This higher logic may be called *intuitive* logic—the logic of infinity, the logic of ecstasy" (:236/204). Axioms of the new logic might therefore be: "A is both A and Not-A, or Everything is both A and Not-A, or Everything is All" (:236/205). These formulations seem to have been suggested by Plotinus' essay "On Intelligible Beauty" quoted later in the book (:253/222). But even such axioms of higher logic are also "not essentially true":

[I]t is impossible to express super-logical relations in our language as it is presently constituted.

The formula, "A is both A and Not-A" is untrue because in the world of causes there exists no opposition between "A" and "Not-A." But we cannot express their real relation. It would be more correct to say:

A is all.

But this also would be untrue, because "A" is not only *all*, but also *an arbitrary part* of all, and at the same time a *given* part.

This is exactly the thing which our language cannot express. It is to this that we must accustom our thought, and train it along these lines.
(:240/208)

This surely would encourage advanced artists of the word to use their intuitive powers to search for a new language beyond the bounds of logic.

The book ends with an extensive survey of supporting statements by and about mystics quoted at length and usually from English-language sources. These range from Lao-tze, Plotinus, Vedanta, and Muslim writings to Clement of Alexandria, Jacob Böhme, Blavatsky, Mabel Collins (Edward Carpenter is a later addition), and Lodyzhensky (1912). The chapter on mysticism from William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* [1902] is quoted extensively in the 1910 Russian translation, as is Max Müller's book *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* [1893]. As Charlotte Douglas points out (1986:186), James' book is one source for yet another possible influence on the rise of zaum, namely yoga, and in particular Vivekananda's book *Raja-Yoga*, which was available in a Russian translation of 1906. James gives the following quote from Vivekananda's book: "[The yogi teaches] that the mind itself has a higher state of existence, beyond reason [*prevoskhodyashchie razum*], a superconscious state, and that when the mind gets to that higher state, then this knowledge beyond reasoning comes [*bez posredstva razuma*]" (James 1958:306-07/1910:389; Vivekananda 1953:614). Finally R. Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901) is presented in Uspensky's final chapter (also James 1958:306-07/1910:387-89) as an example of the new literature on higher consciousness which synthesizes all past attempts to deal with this subject.

Another very important proponent of intuition is Henri Bergson, whose philosophy was extremely influential at the time (see esp. Beck, Rusinko, Curtis, Livshits (1977:80-81, 191-92)). For Uspensky, reality is essentially timeless, fixed, and simultaneously present from the higher vantage point. For Bergson, on the contrary, the illusion is of *fixity*, of constant categories artificially subdividing reality into manageably stable, comparable units of time and matter; whereas true reality is in eternal flux in which no one moment is comparable to another, no bit of matter the same as another. Reason cannot deal with this condition; only intuition can. In both Uspensky and Bergson, intuition gains us access to a greater reality than reason, but those realities are opposed, one maximally stable and fixed, the other maximally fluid and changing. Bergson's view of intuition is much less mystical or exclusive than

Uspensky's. For Uspensky it is a special power given only to specially endowed, clairvoyant individuals, beyond everyday life, something to be developed and aspired to. But for Bergson, as Rusinko puts it, "the poet . . . is a 'seer' in the literal, not the Symbolist, sense of the word, and his perception is not mystical or visionary, but a refinement of normal perception, characterized by increased precision, clarity, and intensity" (:506). This shift away from the mystical is an important facet of Post-Symbolism, Acmeism as well as Futurism.

For Bergson thought and language both dissociate "each change into two elements—the one stable, definable for each particular case, to wit, the Form; the other indefinable and always the same, Change in general." And in language "Forms are all that it is capable of expressing" (1983:326). Although he does not present any specific recommendations for releasing language from its formal limitations, in one place he provides a truly remarkable picture:

When a poet reads me his verses, I can interest myself enough in him to enter into his thought, put myself into his feelings, live over again the simple state he has broken into phrases and words. I sympathize then with his inspiration, I follow it with a continuous movement which is, like inspiration itself, an undivided act. Now, I need only relax my attention, let go the tension that there is in me, for the sounds, hitherto swallowed up in the sense, to appear to me distinctly, one by one, in their materiality. For this I have not to do anything; it is enough to withdraw something. In proportion as I let myself go, the successive sounds will become the more individualized; as the phrases were broken into words, so the words will scan in syllables which I shall perceive one after another. Let me go farther still in the direction of dream: the letters themselves will become loose and will be seen to dance along, hand in hand, on some fantastic sheet of paper. I shall then admire the precision of the interweavings, the marvelous order of the procession, the exact insertion of the letters into the syllables, of the syllables into the words and of the words into the sentences. The farther I pursue this quite negative direction of relaxation, the more extension and complexity I shall create; and the more the complexity in its turn increases, the more admirable will seem to be the order which continues to reign, undisturbed, among the elements. Yet this complexity and extension represent nothing positive; they express a deficiency of will. (:209)

With this last sentence, Bergson would seem to part company with the zaumniks. Yet the path of negation leads to vital indeterminacy: "negation is but one half of an intellectual act, of which the other half is left indeterminate" (:289). If, to use Bergson's example, you say "This table is not white," you have removed an affirmation without putting anything in its place, leaving the statement open-ended or indetermi-

nate. Removing a definite meaning from a word by fragmentation or distortion might serve the same purpose, though Bergson cannot be said to suggest this. The problem for Bergson is that negation "takes account only of the replaced, and is not concerned with what replaces" (:294), thus focusing on what is not, rather than on what is. But language is always faced with this difficulty, since it deals in fixed concepts which by their very fixity fail to do justice to fluid reality. "It is the essence of reasoning to shut us up in the circle of the given. But action breaks the circle" (:192). Consciousness cannot be equated with the intellect: "the state of consciousness overflows the intellect; it is indeed incommensurable with the intellect, being itself indivisible and new" (:200).

Bergson's influence has been studied in relation to Malevich (Douglas 1975b, 1975c, 1980, 1984, 1986) and is relevant to other Russian avant-garde artist-theoreticians, such as Matyushin and Nikolay Kulbin (Douglas 1980, 1984, 1986). Moreover, Matyushin and Kulbin were able to read French and thus were able to serve as conduits for writings from Europe which had yet to be translated into Russian for their less-educated Futurist colleagues. Kulbin also read German, and his early medical-psychological works (e.g., 1907) show a professional familiarity with the theories of Wundt, James, Spencer, *et al.* Benedikt Livshits described Kulbin's lectures of 1912 as involving a process of emptying "his box of Bergsonian, Ramsesian and Picasso discoveries" and making "fleeting" references to Bergson (Livshits 1977:80-81, also :191-92).

In the Russian context it is possible in fact to identify a whole "intuitivist" trend in late Symbolist/early Futurist art focused on Kulbin, but including Kandinsky, Vladimir Markov (Waldemars Matvejs (1877-1914)), Olga Rozanova, and others centered around the Petersburg group Union of Youth.¹⁴ Kulbin called for "liberating art, literature and music from conventional patterns, replacing these with the 'intuitive principle'" (Bowl 1976a:12), and painted several "intuitive works," but generally failed to articulate a specific program involving intuition. Although Kandinsky avoided the term "intuition," he nevertheless developed a full-fledged theory of art on a comparable basis, using instead the term "inner necessity."¹⁵

Markov developed a theory from primitivist and oriental sources that seems independent of Bergsonian (though possibly not Uspensian) influence. His essay, "The Principles of the New Art," published in April and June 1912 in Nos. 1 and 2 of *The Union of Youth*, begins: "Where concrete reality, the tangible, ends, there begins another world—a world of unfathomed mystery, a world of the Divine. Even primitive man was given the chance of approaching this boundary, where intuitively he would capture some feature of the Divine—and return happy as a child" (Bowl 1976a:25/*Soyuz molodyozhi* I:5). This "world of unfathomed mystery" is accessible through "the intui-

tive faculties of the spirit" (Bowlit :25). Moreover, the element of childish playfulness is an important idea in connection with zaum, particularly when contrasted with the profound meaning usually sought with high seriousness and taken as a measure of greatness in art. Markov frees the artist from the need to be "serious." This allows him to broaden the base for acceptableness in art. He asks the question: "Why does the art of so many peoples bear the character of apparent absurdity [*neleposti*], coarseness, vagueness, or feebleness?" (:31). He is careful not to characterize all non-European art in this way, however, noting that much of it is "very refined and delicate," but there are some peoples who "profoundly loved the simple, the naive [*naivnogo*] and apparently absurd [*nelepogo na vid'*]" (:32).

Mikhail Matyushin (1861-1934) also developed relevant theories. According to Alla Povelikhina (1976:68), he was the first Russian artist to introduce the problem of the fourth dimension of space, beginning in 1911. The timing would suggest that the impulse was related to Uspensky's publications. In 1912-13 he wrote an unpublished article "The Sensation of the Fourth Dimension" and "other pieces on the same subject" (Povelikhina:70). In 1912, he met Mayakovsky, Kruchonykh, and Malevich for the first time in Moscow (Kovtun 1974:40). In early 1913 Hylaea joined forces with the Union of Youth (Matyushin 1976:140-43). In addition, Matyushin reports on the presence in their group of a mathematics teacher, S. Myasoedov, who "used to tell us that in their family all the Myasoedovs would speak to each other in their own invented language" (1976:143). Henderson suggests that Myasoedov may have played a role analogous to Princet for the French Cubists as a conduit for non-Euclidean mathematics among the Russians (1983:265). Matyushin notes that although they had heard of Italian Futurism, they knew "little" about it, but followed news of the new art emanating from France (:143).

Even if most of Matyushin's writings did not see print at the time, they were surely read and discussed by his Futurist associates. His one important early publication was an article "On the Book by Gleizes and Metzinger *Du Cubisme*," which was dated March 10, 1913, and published in *Union of Youth* No. 3 (March 1913):25-34.¹⁶ Though it slightly postdates the rise of zaum, it is certain to reflect knowledge and discussions at the end of 1912.

Matyushin's article consists almost entirely of alternating selections from *Tertium Organum* and *Du Cubisme* in Russian translation. He quotes the latter extensively, in the process manipulating it in interesting ways. Gleizes and Metzinger do not mention the fourth dimension, though they do refer to non-Euclidean scientists and to Riemann's theorems (1964:8; Henderson trans.:371); but in the passage:

"If the artist has conceded nothing to common standards, his work inevitably will be unintelligible to those who cannot, with a single beat of their wings, lift themselves to unknown planes" (:14), by translating the French *plan* [plane] as *izmerenie* [dimension], in fact ending his whole article with this word, Matyushin not only establishes a link to Uspensky but adds a kind of emphasis and specificity of his own, "rejecting Gleizes and Metzinger's subtlety in favor of an outright statement" (Henderson 1983:266). This corresponds to Matyushin's emphasis in his opening paragraph:

In essence no one yet has presented such important words about the process of world perception and the evolution of the human soul. Whereas, following the revelation of the universal human soul—blazing up with a wonderful fire of divinely creative thought now here and now there—we sense the advancing regal moment of the passage of our consciousness into a new phase of dimension, out of three-dimensional into four-dimensional. (Henderson :368)

In conjunction with quotations from Uspensky on higher intuition, on the artist as clairvoyant, and on Hinton's visions of the fourth dimension, the effect was to give Russian Cubism a greater mystical and irrational emphasis than was generally true of its French manifestation (see Henderson:266-68 and Douglas 1974b for other details).

With the exception of this shift in emphasis, the major points in *Du Cubisme* were conveyed accurately by Matyushin's excerpts. These include the idea that reality goes beyond academic visual conventions; that imitation of nature is not an adequate goal for art (Gleizes and Metzinger call it "the only error possible in art" (1964:3)); that art is autonomous and its own *raison d'être*; that the artist must avoid the commonplace; that art nevertheless, while it may be initially difficult for the average person to understand because of its newness, is not meant to be unintelligible and this is "only a consequence, merely temporary, and by no means a necessity" (1964:14). The artist is to create by his own activity a dynamic forum in which the spectator will also then actively participate, and this is accomplished by maintaining a certain degree of indefiniteness, indeterminacy: "The diversity of the relations of line to line must be indefinite [*indéfinie/beskonechno*]" (:9). (Note that the Russian *beskonechno* literally means "endless" or "infinite" rather than "indefinite" or "undefined.") It would appear that the artist should leave out certain determining features or leave gaps so that the viewer might fill them in, providing resolutions to the question posed by the given image, as in a Gestalt.

If for Gleizes and Metzinger the sense of higher reality may be created by moving around the object and presenting it in a synthetic view (1964:15),

The process for the Russian adherents of hyperspace philosophy was not so direct. The development of the ability to visualize objects from all sides at once was only the first step toward the desired “higher consciousness.” And this higher consciousness with its “fourth unit of psychic life” (higher intuition) would have to be attained before man’s perception could increase to include a fourth dimension of space. In contrast to the Cubists with their matter-of-fact geometric approach, the Russian follower of Ouspensky had to transform his own consciousness radically. (Henderson 1983:268)

Such theories have more obvious relevance for the painter than the poet, yet their extension into the verbal sphere was a natural development at the time, given the close relationship, often in the same person, between work in visual art and in verbal art. And even if, as it would turn out, Uspensky did not himself approve of zaum (“it is no merit in an author to invent new words, or to use old words in new meanings which have nothing in common with the accepted ones — to create, in other words, a special terminology” [1921] (1970:xiii)), Kulbin, Matyushin, and other Union of Youth members certainly did approve of it, thus creating a congenial atmosphere for its development as a verbal parallel to similar developments in the Russian brand of Cubism.

While it would not be safe to claim that, with all these contributing factors outlined above, zaum could not help but appear, nevertheless they provide a firm basis for its development, and the precise mix of such factors may explain why it made a strong appearance in Russia, rather than somewhere else in Europe.

Notes

¹Kruchonykh mentions Plato once (1913:33), but without indicating any specific works, and it is doubtful he actually read him (Markov 1968:398).

²For a detailed study of Bely’s sound orchestration and use of colors in his poetry and prose, see Steinberg (1982). See Janecek (1974) for a study of sound structure in Bely’s novel *Kotik Letaeu*. In the present context, one might note that in Bely’s novel *Petersburg*, which first appeared in serialized form in the almanac *Sirin* in 1913-14, the mad revolutionary Dudkin is tormented by “the meaningless word enfranshish” (Eng. trans. 1978:58), which later in the retrograde form of *Shishnarfne* emerges from Dudkin’s voicebox to take on the haunting identity of an alter-ego. “Shish” (fig [vulgar gesture]) was a favorite word of Kruchonykh’s.

³While there is significant agreement on speech sound and meaning correspondences based on articulation, correspondences between speech sounds or musical pitches and colors produce radically different results. Recall that in

"Voyelles" Rimbaud had: "A Black; E white; I red; U green; O blue" [1871]. This may have been a purely arbitrary connection on Rimbaud's part (David Antin, quoted in Perloff 1981:294). For musical pitches, one need only compare the opinions of Rimsky-Korsakov and Scriabin to uncover a similar lack of agreement (Delson 1971:400-01).

René Ghil's (1862-1925) *Traité du verbe* (1887) is another important work on this subject in the Russian context. He makes reference to Helmholtz's work (1877; Eng. trans. 1948), but his main source for such associations is G. H. von Meyer's *Les Organes de la Parole* ([1880] 1885; Eng. trans. 1883). In addition, Ghil traces the meaningfulness of certain sounds back to Marin Mersenne's *Harmonie Universelle* (1636) and to Boiste (1765-1824). Ghil played a prominent role in Russian Symbolism, contributing regular articles and reviews on French poetry to *The Balance* [*Vesy*] in the years 1904-09, and his book was certainly read by all the Symbolists (see Donchin 1958:53-58; Douglas 1984:158-59). Since Roman Jakobson (1921:47) quotes from Mallarmé's preface to Ghil's book, it may have come under discussion in Futurist circles as well. For a very interesting look at Ghil's theories and their influence on Cubism and Futurism, see Robbins (1981).

⁴The Gornfeld article first appeared in 1899, but was republished in 1906 (where it was dated 1900), 1922, and 1927 in unchanged form. Since the 1927 edition is the most accessible, references in the text will be made to that edition.

⁵*Tri glavy iz istoricheskoy poetiki* was originally published in the *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya* in 1898 and simultaneously as a separate brochure. It was subsequently included in Volume I of Veselovsky's posthumously published collected works in 1913. Finally, an edition of Veselovsky's writings under the title *Istoricheskaya poetika*, edited by V. Zhirmunsky, was released in 1940 and included this work. For the sake of convenience, the 1940 edition will serve as reference.

⁶Veselovsky refers later (1940:250-52, 629) to works by Ludwig Jacobowski (1891) and Charles Letourneau (1894), among others, where similar theories are presented. Letourneau's work was available in a Russian translation (1895), which was referred to also by Bezpyatov (see below). Mention can be made of a Russian school textbook, Kolosov's *Theory of Poetry* (1878:24-25) which also presents similar views on sound and meaning in folk poetry.

⁷*Völkerpsychologie*, Vol. I (*Die Sprache*, 1900) Ch. 3, IV: 1, contains the passage referred to above by Shklovsky, but the first German word in the Shklovsky paraphrase is misspelled. It is either *bummeln* (to stroll, bum around) or *wimmeln* (to swarm). Shklovsky's *timmeln* must have been based on a similar passage in F. F. Zelinsky's article on Wundt's theories. Zelinsky has *tummeln*, *torkeln*, *wimmeln* (:181), but the first word is not found in Wundt. The fact that it is an actual German word (to put in motion) may have caused Zelinsky not to no-

tice the mistake. Shklovsky's garbling of Zelinsky's mistake and his borrowing of the latter's Russian examples (*karakuli, tilisnut*) suggest that Shklovsky's source on Wundt is the Zelinsky article and that he did not consult Wundt's work directly.

⁸Shklovsky does not mention Darwin or Spencer in connection with zaum, but their works were known and much discussed in Russia at the turn of the century. On Darwin's influence in Russia, see Vucinich 1970:104-08, 1989, and Douglas 1984:153-54. For Darwin's theories on the origin of language, see *The Descent Of Man* (1874:esp. 101-05); for Spencer: 1900:318 ff. Darwin disputes the theories of F. Max Müller, whose writings were also known and discussed in Russia (Baudouin 1904:544; Potebnya 1905:418-25; Bely 1910a:573, 621; Müller esp. 1884 II:366 ff., 1887:189 ff.). The main works by Darwin, Spencer, and Müller were available in Russian translations soon after their original publication.

⁹Ozarovsky began to lecture and publish on this theory in 1903-04 (1914:114) and in Dec. 1912 began editing a section of the Petersburg journal *Teatr i iskusstvo* titled "Golos i rech'" [Voice and Speech] which focused on these issues. Contributions by V. V. Chekhov and E. M. Bezpyatov (a series of articles on "voice gestures"), and by Mishchenko, S. V. Volkonsky, and related books by Volkonsky (1913b) and L. Shcherba (1912) added arguments and evidence to the discussion.

¹⁰In his essay "The poetry of exorcisms and curses" [1906], Blok quotes similar lines as an example of "secret words and strange magic songs consisting of incomprehensible words" used to ward off rusalkas:

Ai, ai, shikharda kavda!
Shivda, vnoza, mitta, minogam,
Kalandi, indi, yakutashma bitash,
Okutomi mi nuffan, zidima . . . (Blok 1962 V:59)

¹¹Prior to its publication as a separate book, Konovalov's work was serialized in *Bogoslavsky Vestnik* in 1907-08, which Markov claims is Kruchonykh's source (Markov 1968:202, 398).

¹²The English translation (1920/1922; reprinted in 1970) was made from the second Russian edition of 1916, which contains two chapters added since the first edition (Chapters XI and XV). Much of the remainder is identical to the first Russian edition (1911), but there are a number of other additions, omissions, and changes. In our discussion I will be working directly from the 1911 Russian edition so as to avoid any anachronisms, but since it is generally unavailable, while the English translation is readily available, references will be made to and translations drawn from the latter whenever possible. Any differences between the two will be duly noted. In his "Author's Preface" to the English translation, Uspensky states: "after a very attentive review of the book

I could find only one word to correct" (:xv). We may therefore consider it to be authorized for those passages that correspond to the original 1911 edition as well. Citations in the text will be first to the English translation (when used) and then to the 1911 Russian edition, thus (:199/170) is: 1970 (Eng. trans.) p. 199/ 1911 edition p. 170. It should be mentioned that the 1931 Berlin Russian edition is identical not to the 1916, but to the 1911 edition, having obviously been printed from the original plates.

A Russian National Library copy of the 1911 edition is missing the pages after 254 and may have been the source for the microfilm used by Henderson, thus causing her to say that the fold-out chart was not part of that edition (:248). However, such a chart was included between pages 260 and 261, though it differs from the later edition and English translation.

¹³The Russian edition of *The Fourth Dimension* came out in 1909, bearing a date of 1910. It was later incorporated into *A New Model of the Universe* (1931/1971) in revised and abbreviated form as that book's Chapter II. Once again, I have worked from the original Russian edition, which was unavailable to Henderson (1983:245).

¹⁴See Bowlt (1976b) for an excellent history of Union of Youth activities; also Dyakonitsyn (1966 Ch. 7).

¹⁵Kandinsky apparently first used the term in print in 1911 in his article "Content and Form" (Bowlt/Long 1980:115). For a translation of this text see Bowlt 1976a:19-23. A fully developed presentation of Kandinsky's theories is contained in "On the Spiritual in Art (Painting)," which was read (or summarized) in Kandinsky's absence by Kulbin in Petersburg, December 29 and 31, 1911, and then published in 1914. On Kandinsky and the fourth dimension, see Henderson (1983:240-41).

¹⁶A complete English translation of this text can be found in Henderson (1983:368-75). Later in 1913 a complete translation of *Du Cubisme* would appear in two separate versions, one in July by the poet Maximilian Voloshin in Moscow and in November the full version by E. Nizen, Matyushin's sister-in-law, in Petersburg under his "Zhuravl'" imprint.