Revolution of Clocks: Time and Future in the Work of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This dissertation explores different conceptions and constructions of time and future in the work of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, a Soviet-era writer of Polish descent active in Moscow's literary and theatrical scenes in the 1920s and 30s. In analyzing Krzhizhanovsky's writing from the 1920s, I trace how his work both reflected and responded critically to the future-tensed rhetoric of Soviet utopianism. In this period, official discourse shifted between separate sets of temporal beliefs and practices, which I have categorized into four types of approaches—apocalyptic, charismatic, rational, and charismatic-rational—using typologies from scholars Frank Kermode and Stephen Hanson. These conceptions are related to Krzhizhanovsky's fiction and essays from the 1920s to show the fraught relationship between the Soviet experiment and Krzhizhanovsky's own literary experiments.

In my analysis of **apocalyptic time** in Chapter One, I discuss Krzhizhanovsky's short-story collection *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder,* which treats the revolution and civil war as a cosmic catastrophe through various estranging frames. Chapter Two looks at **charismatic time** in an episode from the 1924 novella *Odyssey of the Odd*, one in which the hero shrinks himself to microscopic size and journeys into the center of a ticking timepiece in order to halt the mechanism. Chapter Three, by contrast, examines the clock's ascendancy over the human in the dark satire of **rational time** found in an embedded tale from Krzhizhanovsky's 1926 novel *The Letter Killers Club.* This *mise-en-abîme* narrative imagines a future in which the government uses radio-waves to corral all human movement into a lockstep of synchronized labor. Finally, in Chapter Four, the human again attempts dominate the clock in *Memories of the Future,* a novel about an inventor constructing a machine to defeat time—not through brute force or heroic struggle, but through science and reason, thus providing a fictional example of the **charismatic-rational** time that emerged during Stalin's first Five-Year Plan.

For all of these stances, I discuss how the concepts structuring time and future fall short, in Krzhizhanovsky's estimation, before the actual experience of lived time. In attempting to derive Krzhizhanovsky's own metaphysics of time from his writing, I show how his set of beliefs and suppositions drew on the philosophers and scientists of his day—Henri Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Einstein, Hermann Minkowski and others—to pose broader questions about the nature of time: Is existence a form of being or becoming? Is the passage of time a physical or psychological process? What is the ontological status of future events?

These questions are never resolved unambiguously in Krzhizhanovsky's work, but the worldview that emerges from his fiction shows a philosophy of time that stands in sharp contrast to reigning orthodoxies of dialectical materialism and Marxist-Leninist teleology. Krzhizhanovsky is critical of what he terms the Soviet "culture of tempos," and the way the regime's focus on the future and temporal acceleration only manages to hollow out the present moment and turn humans into ghosts of themselves. As Maximillian Shterer, inventor of the time machine in *Memories of the Future,* notes upon arriving in (his) future year of 1928: "… my sense of the people surrounding me is that they are people *without a now*, people whose present has been left behind, people with projected wills, with words resembling the ticking of clocks wound long before, with lives as faint as the impression under the tenth sheet of carbon."[1]

[1]Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskiĭ, *Memories of the Future*, trans. Joanne Turnbull, New York Review Books Classics (New York: New York Review Books, 2009), 205. Russian: «наблюдения над окружающими теперь меня людьми дают ощущение, что это люди без теперь, с настоящим, оставшимся где-то позади их, с проектированными волями, словами, похожими на тиканье часов, заведенных задолго до, с жизнями смутными, как оттиск из-под десятого листа копирки» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 420).

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I would like to express profound gratitude to my dissertation advisor, Julian Connolly, for his unflagging patience, understanding and encouragement as I pursued this project. Also, my sincere thanks to committee members for their help in this and many other endeavors: Edith Clowes, Dariusz Tolczyk, and Lorna Martens. Additional thanks to Karen Ryan, who encouraged me to return to the Slavic fold, and to Duffield White, who first introduced me to Russian literature. Special thanks to the Jefferson Scholars Foundation and the generosity of John S. Lillard, who provided me with financial and other assistance during my time at the University of Virginia. And most of all to my wife, Jessie, without whom I would never have been able to complete this work, and whose love and support have made even these words *without whom* now unimaginable.

A Note on Transliteration and Citation Format

In the pages that follow, I have transliterated Russian names using the Library of Congress system without diacritics, except where names already possess generally accepted spellings in English, such as Maxim Gorky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Fyodor Dostoevsky and a few others. I have also adopted the English spellings of Russian names for characters in Krzhizhanovsky's works where such works have already been translated into English, in order to avoid confusion in names between quoted text and main body of this dissertation.

All of the primary source material in Russian for the works of Krzhizhanovsky have been drawn from the definitive six-volume collected works of the writer, edited by Vadim Perel'muter. For the sake of brevity, this source has been abbreviated to the writer's initials plus "*Ss*", for *Sobranie sochinenii,* plus volume and page number, e.g., *SK:Ss* 6: 499.

INTRODUCTION

The Empire of Time

"Our time is the time of time. We have given up on seizing spaces, on the annexation of territory. Instead we have seized time for ourselves, we have annexed the epoch."[2] These words, found in the story "Unfree Lane"[3] [Невольный переулок] by the Soviet-era writer of Polish descent Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky (1887-1950), captures an essential characteristic of the new Soviet state. This was no conventional nation, nor even in the 1920s a conventional land empire, although it had inherited much of its territory from the Russian imperial state and made no secret of its designs for world domination. The new regime's authority was derived not from institutions of power rooted in the past—dynasties, religious traditions, the sheer weight of history—but rather in its ability to create and control a certain set of ideas about time and, most importantly, the future. "We have annexed the epoch," Krzhizhanovsky writes, by which he means that the country's leadership was not just content to assert its hegemony over the present moment, but all those moments yet to come. In this way, its source of power lay not what it had *done*, but what it promised that it *would do*; its authority was vested in the future. For this reason, it was a regime that was living on borrowed time.[4] Thus the character of the new Soviet state was defined not so much by its geographic or

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[2] All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Russian original: «Наше время—это время времени. Мы отказались от захвата пространств, от аннексии территорий. Но мы захватили себе время, аннексировали эпоху". (*SK:Ss* 6:10) The line echoes one he'd earlier recorded in his writer's notebook.

[3] This title has been rendered by the eminent Krzhizhanovsky translator Joanne Turnbull as "Unwitting Street" in a forthcoming collection of the author's work in English from NYRB Classics to be published under this same title.

[4] Krzhizhanovsky seems to have intuited the contingent nature of the future of the USSR, particularly in his time-travel novel *Memories of the Future*. The implication of the country's "borrowed time," of course, is that if the state fails to deliver on these promises, it would ultimately lose both its present and its future, which is exactly what happened more than a half-century later.

territorial extent, but its temporal reach: It was the world's first *empire of time,* as Krzhizhanovsky appears to suggest above.[5]

That we should be reading Krzhizhanovsky's words at all seems a minor miracle. The particular work they are found in was long considered to be lost—as indeed was the writer himself. As Krzhizhanovsky wryly writes of himself, he was "known for being unknown," [известен своей неизвестностью][6] a writer whose prodigious output in the 1920s and 30s was fated to remain almost entirely unpublished and unread.[7] By the time of his death in 1950, his name was known only to a select few in Moscow's literary and theater circles; indeed, to this day his final resting place remains unknown.[8]

As for the story quoted above, its path to readers was even more tortuous. When the bulk of Krzhizhanovsky's stories and essays were discovered by happenstance in the Soviet state archives in the late Soviet period, "Unfree Lane" was not found among them; only a passing reference to the story in Krzhizhanovsky's papers hinted at its existence. It took another two decades before the work surfaced in an unexpected place: the KGB's criminal file on the poet N.A. Kliuev, arrested in 1934 for "making and distributing counterrevolutionary literary works" and shot by the NKVD in 1937.[9] From this it seems likely that Krzhizhanovsky's work had circulated in samizdat form in the 1920s and 30s. The story of "Unfree Lane" takes the form of a series of letters that a despairing

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[5] This contrast between the character of a "temporal empire" and more traditional spatial/territorial empires is not to suggest that the territorial ambitions of the USSR were not an crucial part of its ideology. In fact, these ideas do not at all imply an "either/or" relationship: the Soviet Union's "annexation of the future" was in fact entirely dependent on its complete territorial domination of the globe—without this domination, it was believed that the communist future would always be under threat by capitalist countries seeking to overthrow the "power of the Soviets" by any possible means.

[6] *SK:Ss* 5: 328.

[7] Jacob Emery points out that in fact Krzhizhanovsky's thwarted publication plans may have ultimately turned out to his advantage during the Stalin purges: "Krzhizhanovsky's inability to publish may well have saved his life, or at least delayed his death by a dozen years or so" (Jacob Emery, "Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky's Poetics of Passivity," *Russian Review* 76, no. 1 (2017), 114).

[8] *SK:Ss* 1: 17.

[9] V.V. Petrov, "Istoriia Nevol'nogo Pereulka: K Rasskazu SD Krzhizhanovskogo," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 41 (2012), 85.

writer pens "to the emptiness"[10] and postmarks to various whimsical addressees, including "the blowing wind" [вей-ветер]; "Citizen Whomever-it-might-be" [гражданину Кому-бы-то-ни-было]; the unnamed resident of an as-yet unbuilt building; "the person on the postage stamp" [человеку на марке]; and "the always-lit window" [негаснувшему окну].[11] A more fitting metaphor for Krzhizhanovsky's own quixotic endeavors is hard to imagine.

But what do these missives, delivered at last to our doors across the span of decades, tell us about time—both *his* time and more generally about time, that ineffable quality of our existence that has perplexed human minds for centuries? (St. Augustine in 400AD: "What then *is* time? If no one asks me, I know; If I want to explain it to a questioner, I do not know."[12]) It is a subject that Krzhizhanovsky doggedly returns to again and again in his writing, each time refining and reframing his questions anew. His writing concerns itself with the philosophy of time both in the abstract and in its particular manifestations in the form of Soviet ideology and its future-tensed rhetoric. Indeed, such strict divisions between philosophy and politics had little meaning in the Soviet 1920s and 30s, when all forms of thought were politicized, and when being accused of "Kantian tendencies" (as was, for instance, Mikhail Bakhtin) was enough to earn a prison sentence or worse. In other words, the political and philosophical dimensions of Krzhizhanovsky's work are not so easily disentangled.

The thrust of the present study is twofold: first, to show how Krzhizhanovsky's works are *of* their time—in other words, how they both reflect and interrogate new ideological constructions of time and futurity in the fledgling USSR—and how they are *about* time, which is to say that they exist

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[10] Ibid., 97.

[11] The "always-lit window" appears to be a sly reference to the notion, popularized by Soviet propaganda, that the window of Stalin's office in the Kremlin was always lit, since the great leader worked tirelessly around the clock to bring about the communist future (Dariusz Tolczyk, personal correspondence). Thus the writer of these letters may be seen as sending his appeals to the very top, so to speak, to the only reader who seemed to matter in the USSR: Stalin himself.

[12] F.J. Sheed, M.P. Foley, and P. Brown, *Confessions (Second Edition):* (Hackett Publishing, 2007), 242.

not only as political critiques of a particular historical moment, but also serve to address timeless philosophical questions on time, the ontological status of the future, the meaning of eternity, and so forth. As is true more generally in Krzhizhanovsky's work, these different levels, physical/worldly and metaphysical/otherworldly, interpenetrate in his fiction, calling forth resonances and echoes between them. Complicating the analysis, these works on time are also written *through* time—that is, they provide a diachronic view of the country's changing temporal conceptions across the period from around 1921, the earliest work under discussion here, to the last, written in 1929, allowing us to draw conclusions about all-important shifts in early Soviet temporal conceptions.

In the chapters that follow, these works will be analyzed in light of four different relationships toward time, each of which dominated the country's discourse for a period of time in the 1920s. The first relationship is addressed in Chapter One as **apocalyptic time**, an eschatological stance that dominated time discourse in the years preceding and following the Russian Revolution and civil war (1917-1921). Apocalyptic time is characterized by the belief or assertion that ordinary time is no more, that everything familiar has been upturned, and that soon a "timeless time" will ensue—a belief that found eager converts among the artistic avant-garde and millenarian revolutionaries. When the apocalypse did not come to pass, a new revolutionary temporal stance came to the fore in the early 1920s, a heroic human-centered time of direct action that the scholar Stephen Hanson terms **charismatic time**.[13] This attitude toward time stresses the human ability to transcend mundane temporality through continued struggle (e.g., the "permanent revolution") and heroic domination of the clock and calendar. Soon, however, Soviet authorities were faced with the transition from fomenting revolution and then quelling anti-Bolshevik revanchism to actually governing the country, a task that required more than bare revolutionary zeal: "Because charismatic

[13] Stephen E Hanson, *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 12.

time precludes regularized economic activity …. there is a strong pressure within social groups that accept a charismatic conception of time for that concept to give way, eventually, to "routinized" time…"[14] This routinized time, in Hanson's terminology, is called **rational time**, a relationship to time which eschews heroic struggle in favor of "time discipline," or the rigid and scientific organization of labor and all other human activity (such as the widespread attempts to implement Taylorist time-management methods in the mid-1920s.)[15]

In its turn, the main concern in regard to this routinized time was that it was insufficiently revolutionary: instead of humans mastering and transcending time, they would be made instead to march to the clock. This emphasis on incremental, rational and evolutionary (read: not revolutionary) progress in society could hardly hope to mobilize the masses for a worldwide struggle, and a fixation on streamlining production and increasing efficiency would seem more the tools of exploitative capitalist bean-counters than the true heirs of the revolution. For this reason, according to Hanson, Stalin hit upon a sort of Hegelian

Figure 1. Propaganda poster from 1927 (artist unknown) reading "The October Revolution: The Bridge to a Bright Future". Note how time has been spatialized, and that each arch of the bridge represents a year. The "locomotive of the revolution," to borrow Lazar Kaganovich's words, is a thoroughly modern and fast-moving machine barreling through this spatialized time. Compare the image to this passage from Krzhizhanovsky's 1929 novel *Memories of the Future:* "My mission, in essence, was to proceed along the hyphen still separating time from space, to cross the bridge thrown over the abyss from one millennium to the next." (*Memories,* 195.)

[14] Ibid., 13.

[15] Ibid., 11.

synthesis of these two opposing views of time in the late 1920s, one in which strict time discipline and scientific principles are brought to bear on mastering time itself, a stance Hanson terms **charismatic-rational time**, or an attempt to "transcend time from within."[16]

A more detailed discussion of chapter themes and structure is provided at the end of this introduction, but first we should take a step backward in order to sketch out a larger picture of the writer and the metaphysical dimensions of his writing.

Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky (1887-1950)

In "The Bookmark" [Книжная накладка], a story from 1927, a writer troops from one editorial office to another in an attempt to interest publishers in his collection of stories. Most of these editors read no further than the title page before summarily rejecting the work. The manuscript is titled *Stories for the Crossed-Out* [Рассказы для зачеркнутых], a reference to the so-called "former people" [бывшие люди], as the social groups disenfranchised by revolution, civil war and ensuing one-party rule were known. Ten years later, such a manuscript might well have earned the writer a lengthy sentence in the camps. But here—the story is set in Moscow in the late 1920s—he is only sent packing with his manuscript: the topic is untimely, if not deliberately provocative. Only one editor reads past the title page. "Having leafed through my manuscript, the man behind the editor's desk inspected me with his sharp graphite pupils and, tapping his pencil, said, 'And you? Are you

[16] Ibid. These terms in Hanson's usage are themselves borrowed from Max Weber's tripartite division of traditional, rational and charismatic authority.

one of the crossed-out or one of the crossers-out?""[17] and then adds, "a person skilled at crossing out would likely be of use to us."[18]

Although "The Bookmark" was written when Krzhizhanovsky still harbored some hope that his work might achieve belated recognition, a palpable sense of frustration and gloom pervades the work. At the time of its writing, Krzhizhanovsky himself was struggling to find a publisher for his short story collections and novellas.[19] Part of the problem was that the ideological winds had shifted—by the late 1920s, Stalin had consolidated control over the party apparatus, which in turn was moving quickly to subordinate all cultural production to its own political agenda. Such an agenda had little room for a writer like Krzhizhanovsky, who wrote playful and subtly subversive fictions which bore little relation to the literary forms then in demand. Indeed, for Russian literature during this period, these stories and novellas would seem to be *sui generis* in their combination of high literary style—part philosophical treatise, part poetry in prose—and phantasmagorical plots on loan from the pulp genres of horror, science fiction and the tall tale. These works range in length from lapidary miniatures of a page or two up to the short novels of *Memories of the Future* and *The Letter Killers Club*. The protagonists of these stories often resemble the writer himself in various ways; like Krzhizhanovsky, a prototypical narrator of these works often ekes out an existence at the margins of Soviet society, most often in an urban setting—Moscow, or some alternate reality version of this city—where he lives in straitened circumstances in some small closet of a room. (Krzhizhanovsky himself, upon arriving to Moscow in 1922, was allocated a room of only about one hundred square feet, or ten square meters, in the former residence of a noble on the Arbat.)[20] A

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[17] «А сами-то вы из зачеркнутых или из зачеркивающих?» (*SK:Ss* 2: 591).

[18] «Но человек, умеющий зачеркивать, нам, пожалуй, подойдет» (*SK:Ss* 2: 591-592).

[19] Caryl Emerson notes that "[o]nly 9 of his 150 original stories, dramas, and libretti were published during his lifetime, and none after 1932" (Caryl Emerson, "Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky at the Edges of the Stalinist Shakespeare Industry, 1933-1938," *Russian Studies in Literature* 50, no. 3 (2014), 9).

[20] *SK:Ss* 1: 10.

feeling of claustrophobia permeates these stories, heightening the desire of these protagonists to escape their circumstances. This escape may take an inward form, into dreams or the imagination, or outward, into the outside world of the city: The prototypical Krzhizhanovskian protagonist is a *flâneur*, a learned but dispossessed person who takes in the life of the city as an observer and bystander, not as an active participant, and any anthropological interest the character takes in the urban landscape only heightens his deep feeling of alienation from it.[21] Accordingly, this urban landscape can appear strange and even nightmarish, an irrational space where chance encounters and inexplicable occurrences drive the machinery of fantastical plots. On a deeper level, these fantastic plots are yoked to a set of broader questions that occupied Krzhizhanovsky throughout his writing career: the nature of the relationships between reality and fantasy, being and nonbeing, idea and thing.[22]

Needless to say, such metaphysical debates were of little interest to the Soviet cultural commissariat, which took a more instrumentalist view of the role of literature. In addition to the formidable challenge of getting his work past cautious editors and overzealous censors, Krzhizhanovsky was plagued by simple bad luck, such as when the publishing house slated to bring out his first collection of stories, *Fairy Tales for Young Prodigies* [Сказки для вундеркиндов] unexpectedly went bankrupt in 1923.[23] On behalf of the writer, in 1932 a well-connected friend of Krzhizhanovsky attempted to enlist the sympathy and patronage of the Soviet Union's most powerful writer, Maxim Gorky, the arbiter of literary policy from his position as head of the Writers Union, to whom he passed a few unpublished stories. The attempt, however, backfired. Instead of

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[21] In a similar fashion, Walter Benjamin notes the dispassionate gaze of the *flâneur,* likening him to Chesterton's priest-detective, Father Brown, with his "unassuming passer-by, with his clerical dignity, his detective's intuition" (Walter Benjamin, "The Return of the Flâneur" in *Selected Writings* II 1927-1934. Trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1999).

[22] Rosenflanz, 21.

[23] *SK:Ss* 1: 19.

advocating on Krzhizhanovsky's behalf, the head of the Writers Union characterized the work as untimely and unpublishable, implying it might cause actual harm to the minds of readers—the stories, he wrote in his letter, "would most certainly knock the brains of young folks out of whack."[24] This was serious blow to Krzhizhanovsky, not because he held Gorky's opinion in particularly high esteem (he didn't[25]), but because the negative opinion of Gorky, by depriving him of a sort of court of final appeal, essentially sounded a death knell for his would-be career. The official verdict was in: Unfit for consumption.

And yet still Krzhizhanovsky continued to write. During his productive years—the period, roughly speaking, from 1922, when he moved to Moscow, to 1940—Krzhizhanovsky produced more than three thousand typewritten pages of work, which he organized into six major story collections—*Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder* [Сказки для вундеркиндов], *Someone Else's Theme* [Чужая тема], *What Men Die By* [Чем люди мертвы], *The Unbitten Elbow* [Неукушенный локоть], *Each Smaller than the Next* [Мал мала меньше], and *Stories from 1920s-40s* [Рассказы 1920-1940-х годов.]—and a half-dozen longer works, ranging from novellas to novels, including *The Odyssey of the Odd* [Странствующее "странно"], *The Letter Killers Club* [Клуб убийц букв], *The Return of Munchausen* [Возвращения Мюнхгаузена], *Materials for the Biography of Gorgis Katafalaki* [Материалы к биографии Горгиса Катафалаки], and *Memories of the Future* [Воспоминания о будущем]. This in addition to various plays, sketches and screenplays, including for two well-regarded Soviet films, *St. Jorgen's Day* [День святого Йоргана, 1930], directed by Aleksandr Protazanov, and *New Gulliver* [Новый Гулливер, 1935], directed by Iakov Ptushko—neither of whom mentioned Krzhizhanovsky

[24] «…всеконечно вывихнут некоторые молодые мозги» (*SK:Ss* 1: 26).

[25] Of Gorky, he acerbically points out the proletarian writer's *dolce vita* in the USSR: "У нас слаще всего живётся Горькому", "Our Gorky lives a sweeter life than any," a pun on the name writer's name, which means 'bitter'. (*SK:Ss 1: 39*.)

in the film credits.[26] In addition, Krzhizhanovsky worked on translations, including from his first language of Polish, and scholarly essays on Shakespeare, Poe and Shaw, whom he read in the original. These scholarly essays fared marginally better, publication-wise, than his fiction. Out of all this, the number of Krzhizhanovsky's works that were printed in his lifetime comprises a rather slim volume, and even these works, which found their way into isolated periodicals, were not enough to provide him the literary reputation he so desired.

Mikhail Bakhtin, in *The Dialogic Imagination,* discusses how the literary word is fundamentally dialogic, in part because it is written in anticipation of a response, and indeed incorporates that reaction, or that objection, into itself.[27] But what about works that are written without real expectation of being read—in other words, the literature of the desk drawer? In Krzhizhanovsky's works, we can see that silence resounds, a paradox that a character in *The Letter Killers Club* refers to as "the art of being silent through words."[28] Stirring images of silence are woven throughout these texts: the hidden interpolated Biblical text known as "the Gospel according to Silence" in *The Letter Killers Club*;[29] the tongueless bells, their clappers removed, ringing noiselessly in "Red Snow" [Красный снег]; the blank white pages of newspapers, newly letterless, in "Paper Loses Patience" [Бумага теряет терпение]; the burnt manuscript in *The Letter Killers Club* [Клуб убийц букв] or, in "The Mute Keyboard" [Немая клавиатура] the composition "A Deaf-Mute March for the Legless"

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[26] *SK:Ss* 1: 15.

[27] M. M Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press Slavic Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 280.

[28] «Искусство молчать словами» (*SK:Ss* 4: 684).

[29] Jacob Emery's analysis of silence in *The Letter Killers Club's* embedded medieval tale of Notker the Stammerer connects it to a (mute) assertion of being and presence, noting the similarity of the medieval ligature for "silentium," *S—um,* to the Latin first-person "to be": "On the flyleaf of the volume is the quasi-authorial inscription *S—um*. One character calls this a "nonsense syllable," but then all the Club's members are storytellers with "nonsense syllables" for names. This particular syllable happens to be the name of Tiutchev's poem, "a flattened Silentium." What is more, the partial repression of the Latin word for silence reveals, in the very elision that spans the word's initial and its suffix, the statement of a speaker's being: *sum*, I am" (Emery, 103).

[Глухонемой марш для безногих] played on a silent piano.[30] The anticipation of silence is incorporated into these stories, a prophecy that is subsequently fulfilled; Krzhizhanovsky's work is both a literature of absence and absent from literature.

Publication was not the only way to reach readers, however. Through his acquaintances among Moscow's avant-garde circles, Krzhizhanovsky was able to read his work aloud to appreciative listeners, and some of his typescripts apparently circulated in samizdat form in these same circles, as previously mentioned.[31] The danger for Krzhizhanovsky in continuing his unauthorized literary output was considerable, as he himself surely understood—not in the least because he himself was denounced in October of 1935 in the pages of *Pravda* for a small collection of aphorisms he'd written for *Literaturnaia gazeta* under the title "Rough Drafts of Prutkov-Vnuk" [Черновые записи Пруткова-Внука], after which *Literaturnaia gazeta* hastened to repudiate his work as well. But as Anna Bovshek, Krzhizhanovsky's lifelong partner, writes in her memoirs, he simply could not help but continue to write, even at great peril to himself.[32] At the height of Stalin's terror in 1937, Krzhizhanovsky wrote a wry story-vignette called "The Goose" [Гусь]. The story concerns a writer whose work, due to his laborious writing process, is always one step behind the times: he writes an ode to some august personage, only to find that the subject has already fallen out of favor; his lyric to the spring is completed only in time for the first snows of winter. As a result, he's too poor to even afford a replacement when his pen breaks and resorts to plucking himself a new quill feather from the tail of a living goose—as he explains to the goose, this is 'for the sake of divine poetry.'

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[30] Vadim Perel'muter, editor of Krzhizhanovsky's Collected Works, notes that the story about silence as a musical composition anticipates John Cage's postmodern *4'33"* by a dozen years (*SK:Ss* 1: 53).

[31] V.V. Petrov, "Istoriia Nevol'nogo Pereulka: K Rasskazu SD Krzhizhanovskogo," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 41 (2012), 85.

[32] These recollections appear in Anna Bovshek's memoir of Krzhizhanovsky, "Through the Eyes of a Friend" [«Глазами друга»]: *SK:Ss 6: 241.*

"What is, *quack*, poetry?" a gander asks the outraged goose. "Oh, now I know well enough," the goose declares. "It's when your own quill causes you pain."[33]

The pain of writing eventually became too much for Krzhizhanovsky. Within three years of writing "The Goose", he had ceased writing fiction, turning for a time to essays and sketches of Moscow during wartime and writing the librettos for a trilogy of patriotic operas on the history of Russia's military that became popular, though Krzhizhanovsky's contribution was elided, once again, through significant editorial reworking of his text.[34] By the end of the war, Krzhizhanovsky had ceased writing altogether, putting down his pen and picking up the bottle in a downward slide into alcoholism. Ultimately, he could not content himself with writing only for the desk drawer. Nor was he a writer willing to produce fiction in the prevailing genre of socialist realism, whose romantic conventions he seems to parody in his stories even as the genre became the official literature of the Soviet Union.[35] His interests did not lie with writing about heroes of socialist labor. Instead, as his writerly alter ego states in "The Bookmark," "One may only write about that which has been crossed out, and only for those who have been crossed out."[36] Or from the story "Seams," a quote from which opens this introduction: "How many of us there are, those who do not fit in, who are 'marked for return.' How many of us there are, crossed out and pushed outside the margin."[37] And

[33] «О, я это теперь хорошо знаю … Это когда твоё же перо делает тебе больно» (*SK:Ss* 3: 207).

[34] *SK:Ss* 1: 59.

[35] In seeming reaction to the 1934 Party congress that adopted socialist realism as the country's official genre, Krzhizhanovsky wrote in his notebooks that the literary form "resembles literature as much as a zoological park resembles nature" [Это так же похоже на литературу, как зоологический сад на природу.] (*SK:Ss* 1: 45).

[36] «Можно писать только о зачеркнутом и только для зачеркнутых» (*SK:Ss* 2: 601).

[37] «Сколько нас, тех, которые не подходят; "подлежат возврату". Сколько нас, перечеркнутых и отодвинутых за черту» (*SK:Ss* 1: *403*). Here, the margin is literally 'boundary' in Russian, though the idea of 'marginalization' is clearer in a passage from one of his notebooks: "I live on the margins of a book called 'Society'" ["Я живу на полях книги, называемой: "Общество""] (*SK:Ss 5: 374*).

in his own diaries, in a blunt formulation which recalls Dostoyevsky's opening lines of *Notes from the Underground*, he writes in his diary, "I am a crossed-out man." [Я — зачеркнутый человек.][38]

At the end of his life, Krzhizhanovsky suffered a stroke that deprived him of his ability to read. He died December 28, 1950. Recent efforts to locate his gravesite have met with failure; any information about his final resting place seems to have been lost with paperwork about his death.[39]

A similar fate surely would have befallen his corpus of work if not for the efforts of two people. The first was his wife, Anna Bovshek, an actress and well-known figure in Moscow's theatre circles, who carefully collated his stories and petitioned to have them accepted into the State Archive after his death.[40] This was, by itself, no guarantee of posterity, and in 1957 Bovshek, working with a small group of friendly writers and scholars, formed a committee to have the late writer's fiction and scholarly essays published, but was again met with official rejection. In fact, the archive languished until 1976, when the scholar Vadim Perel'muter made a serendipitous discovery. One day while reading the diary of the poet and critic Georgy Shengeli, he came across a black-framed entry recorded on the date of Krzhizhanovsky's death. "Today," the critic wrote, "died Sigizmund Dominikovich Krzhizhanovsky, writer of the fantastic and unrecognized genius, an equal to Edgar Allen Poe in talent…"[41] Intrigued, Perel'muter began digging through the archives, eventually uncovering the thousands of pages of the writer's work earlier deposited there for safekeeping by Bovshek. This discovery came at the height of the Brezhnev stagnation; even then, some half-century after many of these works were written, they were apparently too controversial, at least in

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[38] *SK:Ss 5: 342*. Thus Krzhizhanovsky answers the question posed to his fictional alter ego by the editor in "The Bookmark": "Are you one of the crossed-out or the crossers-out?"

[39] Perel'muter, Vadim. "Nad ego knigami i knigoj o nem," Keynote Address from "Planting the Flag: the Nonfiction of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky," Bloomington, Indiana, October 21, 2016.

[40] The collected works submitted to the archives left out Krzhizhanovsky's provocative story "Red Snow," only recently discovered in the writer's Kiev archive, which Bovshek feared including among the other stories (*SK:Ss* 5: 542).

[41] Turnbull, Joanne. Introduction to *Seven Stories.* (Moscow: Glas New Russian Writing, 2006), 6.

unexpurgated form, to be published until the final years of the USSR. It was a fate that Krzhizhanovsky himself seemed to anticipate; as he wrote in his diary: "I'm not on good terms with the present, but loved by eternity."[42] Or, in the words of the editor from "The Bookmark", in the scene that begins this section: "These stories of yours are, well—how shall I put it?—ahead of their time. Hide them away—let them wait."[43] Krzhizhanovsky would find his readership only in 1989, the same year that the Berlin Wall fell.

Literature of the As If: Subjectivity and Subjunctivity in Krzhizhanovsky's Work

Of the two-hundred-odd stories, plays and novels written by Krzhizhanovsky during his most productive decades of the 1920s-1930s, nearly all of these works feature aspects of everyday (often specifically Soviet) reality that coexist on the page with strange and fantastical elements: a Soviet bridge designer is confronted by a talking toad from hell in "Bridge Over the River Styx" [Мост через Стикс]; a Soviet bureaucrat's train is diverted to a branch line, and a land where the nightmares of dreamers are created in factories emblazoned with socialist slogans in "The Branch Line" [Боковая ветка]; a pickled human fetus used for training medical students escapes its jar and finds a life for itself in the new Soviet Union in "Phantom" [Фантом]. In these stories, the fantastic functions as a sort of escape from the strictures of everyday reality, whether it is to escape from the grim present into the future on a time machine in *Memories of the Future* [Воспоминания о будущем], or simply to escape the confines of cramped living quarters caused by the Soviet housing shortage by applying a growing potion to the walls of one's room in "Quadraturin" [Квадратурин]. But while

[42] «С сегодняшним днем я не в ладах, но меня любит вечность» (*SK:Ss* 5: 404).The theme of the seer who is misunderstood in his time, but later proven right, is found in several of his works, including "Story of the Prophet" [История пророка] and the end of *Memories of the Future.*

[43] «Рассказы ваши, ну, как бы сказать,- преждевременны. Спрячьте их - пусть ждут» (*SK:Ss* 2: 592).

these works may center on escapes from reality, the stories are not *themselves* escapist in the sense normally applied to works of fantasy. Instead, the fantastic in these stories should be seen primarily as a way to reflect critically back on contemporary reality, to force new understandings of this same reality through devices such as hyperbole and defamiliarization. Thus Krzhizhanovsky's fiction remains deeply engaged with reality even as it departs from it in flights of fantasy.

In this sense, Krzhizhanovsky was influenced by a rich tradition of satire that used fantastical settings as a way to displace political debates of the day in allegorical form—Swift, in particular, had a large effect on Krzhizhanovsky's work, which abounds with various playful refractions and inversions of *Gulliver's Travels,* among other 'Swiftiana'.[44] At the same time, however, Krzhizhanovsky never quite seems a convincing political satirist; he becomes too interested in the broad philosophical and metaphysical questions raised by his distortions of reality, treating his imaginary worlds not as allegorical contrivances, mere metaphors for more earthly concerns, but as alternate realities in their own right, with their own laws and their own logic.

This blurring of the real and imaginary reveals a great deal not only about Krzhizhanovsky the writer, but also about Krzhizhanovsky as would-be philosopher.[45] Although the primary focus of this dissertation is Krzhizhanovsky's treatment of the subject of time and the future, it is nonetheless important to characterize the author's broader philosophical orientation in order to show the link between his ideas about time and broader systems of thought that influenced these ideas.

According to an autobiographical sketch he wrote, Krzhizhanovsky was captivated by questions of being and existence from an early age, reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as a fifth-grader and,

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[44] Vadim Perel'muter writes that "Krzhizhanovsky called himself as satirist, in the Swiftian sense of this genre designation" [Кржижановский называл себя сатириком—в свитианском понимании этого родового обозначения] (*SK:Ss* 1: 7-8).

[45] Krzhizhanovsky notes with irony that "I am a philosopher by my non-education" ["По необразованию я философ"] (*SK:Ss* 5: 295).

according Krzhizhanovsky himself, suffered an early sort of existential crisis.[46] Kant continued to exert a powerful influence on his writing—the German philosopher appears either explicitly or implicitly in many of his stories—which put him directly at odds with the reigning philosophical paradigm of dialectical materialism in the Soviet Union. From the German idealists, Krzhizhanovsky adopted a deeply skeptical attitude toward the reality of appearances in the everyday world (the Kantian phenomena); at the same time, however, Krzhizhanovsky was seemingly unable to muster up any firm belief in the world of transcendent reality (or noumena) either.[47] This doubt is reflected in his writing, which often features characters trapped in the shadowlands of nightmares and unreality, unable to discern what is real and what is a projection of their own mental landscapes. These mental landscapes are themselves shadows of shadows, the world of phenomena further phenomenalized into their abstract mental representations (what he called "phenomena of phenomena" [явления явлений][48]), a hall of mirrors that holds only reflections and not a single true image.[49]

In "Postmark: Moscow" [ШТемпель: Москва], the narrator organizes these shades of being (in an echo of Plato's allegory of the cave) into levels of reality, from most real to most fantastic, using the word for being, *bytie* [бытие], from which he derives the word for mundane reality or everyday life, *byt* [быт], and, in a further stepwise truncation of the final letters, the word *by* [бы], the Russian

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[46] *SK: Ss* 4: 383-4

[47] Alexander (Sasha) Spektor contrasts Krzhizhanovsky's treatment of the transcendental with that of the Symbolists: "What differentiates Krzhizhanovsky's "doubleworldiness" from that of his Symbolist predecessors is that in his prose he is neither concerned with establishing the hierarchy between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds, nor does he use language to gain access—even if momentary—to the transcendental realm." (Alexander Spektor, "A Timely Discovery: Experimental Realism of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky," *Slavic & East European Journal* 59, no. 1 (2015), 111).

[48] *SK:Ss* 4: 51.

[49] It's therefore not surprising that Krzhizhanovsky is most frequently compared to two other writers who were deeply concerned with ontological questions, Franz Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges, although neither of these writers was accessible to Krzhizhanovsky while he was writing his own work; he read Kafka only in 1939, after he had all but ceased writing fiction (Robert Chandler, "Seven Stories Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky Joanne Turnbull," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 50, no. 4 (2006), 715). Like Borges, Krzhizhanovsky uses fiction as a way to plumb deep philosophical questions. And like Kafka, the lack of satisfying answers gives rise to a feeling of dread and existential doubt.

subjunctive particle, which we might render here in the expression 'as if'. The passage is characteristic of Krzhizhanovsky's paranomastic style[50]:

> But shadows separated from things, *byt* [everyday mundane existence] separated from *bytie* [being; transcendent existence], are impotent and illusory. *Byt,* everyday reality, plus the "I" [я], gives existence; everyday reality itself doesn't have much of an "I". And if we're going to tear shadows away from their things, everyday life [*byt*] from being [*bytie*], there's no reason to stop halfway; one must take this everyday life [*byt*] and chop off its dimwitted 't': *by* [as if] is the purely subjunctive, the fusion of free phantasms…[51]

The narrator then goes on to explain that there are two paths of escape from Plato's cave, the *byt* of everyday shadow-existence: either through attempting to see *bytie,* transcendental reality, Kant's noumena—stepping outside into the light—or in the opposite direction, further into the shadows of shadows, into *by,* the 'as if', the fantastic and imaginary, the world of fiction. This is perhaps the choice that Krzhizhanovsky's wife, Anna Bovshek, was speaking of when she wrote in her memoir, *Through a Friend's Eyes* [Глазами друга], about how, when a young Krzhizhanovsky was "faced with the choice between Kant and Shakespeare, Krzhizhanovsky decisively and irrevocably chose the side of Shakespeare."[52] In other words, one could be either a metaphysician, dedicated to discovering the true reality but forever being thwarted by the limitations of one's own senses and experience, or else one might instead embrace fiction instead, finding freedom within one's own limitations in the form of the imagination and play.

This parsing of reality into different levels as in the above quote from "Postmark: Moscow" is a subject that Krzhizhanovsky returns to again in his theoretical writings on the theater in a 1923 essay titled "Philosopheme on the Theatre" [Философема о театре]. In this essay, he develops the notion

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[50] See Rosenflanz, 45, for a discussion of the importance of paranomasia in Krzhizhanovsky's work.

[51] «Но тени, в отрыве от вещей, *быт* в отрыве от *бытия*; бессильны и мнимы. Ведь *быт* -- и "я" *бытия*; своим "я" он не богат. И если уж отрывать от вещи тень, от бытия быт, то незачем останавливаться на полпути; надо, взяв *быт*, оттяпать ему его тупое "т": *бы* -- чистая сослагательность, сочетанность свободных фантазмов…» (*SK:Ss* 4: 52).

[52] «Предстоял выбор между Кантом и Шекспиром, и Кржижановский решительно и бесповоротно встал на сторону Шекспира» (*SK:Ss* 6: 264). Kierkegaard's "Either/Or" sets up a similar opposition between philosophy and art.

still further, even identifying the types or genres of drama in which each of these levels of reality (*bytie, byt, by*) is the dominant—in other words, these categories are not so much applied here to reality itself as to the make-believe world onstage. The implications of Krzhizhanovsky's system has been discussed at length by Alisa Ballard;[53] here these categories of reality are important to this study insofar as they provide an organizing principle for Krzhizhanovsky's own work, a sort of key to his multilayered fictional world. Instead of the three layers of reality in "Postmark: Moscow", in "Philosopheme on the Theatre," Krzhizhanovsky here adds a fourth and final category, one in which all the letters have been removed, leaving a null or blank at the end:

Bytie
Byt
By
0

This final null category represents nonexistence, silence, erasure—subjects that were very much on the writer's mind at this time.[54]

Although in this essay Krzhizhanovsky was writing about dramatic works by other writers, it's also clear that this ontological division, one that appears in both his fiction and scholarly work, is significant to understanding the way his own fiction explores the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, between degrees of being and nonbeing. The mimetic aspects of Krzhizhanovsky's work, which often focus on the grim everyday realities of Soviet citizens during this time period, belong to the world of *byt*; the fantastic and phantasmagorical elements of his fiction, to the subjunctive, as-if world of *by*. His characters long for reprieve from the grinding, everyday world of tiny rooms and hunger, seeking escape in some sort of transcendent reality, or *bytie*, but often end up facing the terror of the void, the state of nonexistence, instead. In Krzhizhanovsky's work—unlike,

[53] See Alisa Ballard, "Быт encounters бы: Krzhizhanovsky's Theater of Fiction." *Slavic and East European Journal* 56.4 (2012): 553-76.

[54] *SK:Ss* 4: 52.

perhaps, the Russian symbolists that preceded him—*bytie,* the transcendent realm, is a place that, if it exists at all, is ungraspable or inhospitable to humans: Like Icarus, those characters that seek to rise into this higher realm may instead fall back to earth, plummeting to their deaths and nonbeing. The only real escape from the confines of everyday reality, Krzhizhanovsky seems to indicate, is into the world of the mind, the fantastic, the realm of possibility, not certainty; of conjecture, not universal truths.

In Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, these categories of reality are nonetheless permeable and dependent on each other, just as the shadow depends on the thing that casts it. We can view this hierarchy of dependency as a sort of nesting structure, similar to how the word *bytie* contains within it the other levels. As Krzhizhanovsky points out in the quote above from "Postmark: Moscow", there is no *byt,* everyday life, without existence, that mysterious force of being. Likewise, the world of *by,* the 'as-if', the world of the mind and imagination, cannot exist without the physical world in which it is situated. (As the hungry narrator of "Seams" notes, he can only engage in his thought experiments when his mind has been fed, an alternating process he calls "sandwich - metaphysics - sandwich - metaphysics"[55]—without his sandwich, he might "fade out, sit here empty, as if without a pulse and even without an "I"[56]—that is, disappear into nonbeing.)

At the same time, this process of interdependence or encroachment of these levels can operate in the opposite direction as well: Out of nothingness comes an idea, which encroaches on a mind, which causes a body to act, which may in turn influence the world. Naum Leiderman writes that "Krzhizhanovsky, who sees the highest value of human existence in the search for truth, in the production of meanings, is convinced of the preeminence of ideas—for ideas give birth to the deed,

[55]«…бутерброд — метафизика — бутерброд — метафизика» (*SK:Ss* 1: 401).

[56] «…схлынет, и сижу пустой, будто и без пульса, и без 'я'» (ibid.).

they direct the energy of the individual and of the million-bodied masses."[57] Krzhizhanovsky's stories are full of examples of this power of ideas over the world.[58] This is not surprising in light of the personal trauma he experienced from war and revolution (he called the Bolshevik revolution "жизнетрясение", or the "lifequake"[59])—both events brought about through the power of ideas over people, who in turn helped reshape the world: "Shadows cast things," as the narrator of "Seams" [Швы] tells us.[60] A frequent protagonist in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction is a person in thrall to some idea—building a time machine to escape the present in *Memories of the Future*, for instance, or an obsession with being able to bite one's own elbow in "The Unbitten Elbow"—who then attempts to realize this idea in the world, only to discover that this thought, so beautiful in the mind, becomes nightmarish or fatal when forced into reality, just as utopian thinking paved the way for the physical carnage of revolution and civil war and the later purges.[61] The path from the imagined or the imaginary into real life is one fraught with danger, but at the same time it is also the path of the writer, the artist, and the dreamer.

Movement between these different levels of (un)reality in these stories often occurs by way of some sort of crack or gap [щель] through which these different worlds may seep. The motif of the crack or gap is an important one in Krzhizhanovsky's work, appearing throughout his fiction; the critic V.N. Toporov sees the crack as a crucial aspect of Krzhizhanovsky's metaphysics and his

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[57] Naum Leiderman, "The Intellectual Worlds of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1, 2012), 530.

[58] Writing about the power of ideas in the author's work, Alexander (Sasha) Spektor notes that "[w]hile Krzhizhanovsky is rarely overtly political in his fiction, the high toll that an individual or a society has to pay for bringing ideas into reality portrayed in his works puts him into the ranks of the most dystopian of Russian twentieth-century writers, such as Zamyatin and Platonov." (Spektor, 112-113).

[59] *SK:Ss* 2: 589.

[60] «…вещь отброшена тенью» (*SK:Ss* 1: 407).

[61] In "The Unbitten Elbow," the would-be elbow-biter realizes that his only way to achieve the impossible is to bite through his elbow from the *inside* of the joint, chewing through his own flesh to reach it, which severs the arteries in a fountain of blood and causes his own death—in other words, the only way to gain what remains stubbornly out of reach is by devouring oneself alive. Read against the backdrop of the Soviet experiment, the effect is chilling.

poetics.[62] The crack is the central theme in stories like "Seams" [Швы] and "The Collector of Cracks" [Собиратель щелей], about a hermit who asks God to eliminate the cracks in all things and make his world whole again—and, when God obliges, about the disaster that ensues. In Krzhizhanovsky's work, the world is riven and fractured.[63] Cracks can be the liminal spaces of city streets: in the gaps between houses, within the fissures in the urban landscapes where the fantastic meets the real, or existence turns into nonexistence.

In Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, the crack is not only a central thematic concern, however; it is also a *structural* feature of these works, which abound in gaps, elisions and silences of all kinds. Sometimes the stories themselves break off without resolution, as in several of the embedded tales of *The Letter Killers Club.* They may instead make jumps in point of view or time, skipping over critical junctures in the text, such as when Maximillian Shterer, in *Memories of the Future,* finally leaps into the future, leaving readers behind. Krzhizhanovsky's stories abound in unexplained paradoxes and logical aporias; their narrative unity is variously fractured, their forward momentum frustrated, narrators themselves occasionally left scratching their heads. These narrative gaps are places of disappearance—dropped storylines, vanishing characters, crucial explanations or key scenes left out, characters' hesitant speech trailing off into ellipses.[64]

The sense of ontological and existential doubt that suffuses Krzhizhanovsky's writing is, at the same time, offset by a sense of freedom and play that arises with the realization that one's reality is

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[62] See V.N. Toporov, "Minus-Prostranstvo Sigizmunda Krzhizhanovskogo" in *SK:Ss* 6: 386, 1992.

[63] Naum Leiderman writes that "crackedness [щелинность] is the universal emblem of a chaotic, diffuse, anti-harmonious world structure, the symbol of a flight from reality and the disintegration of the wholeness of a worldview" (Leiderman, 532). But this ignores the positive role that cracks and gaps may play in Krzhizhanovsky's writing—as places of refuge and creation, as sites where ontological levels seep into each other, recombine, and generate new meanings.

[64] An entire monograph can be written about Krzhizhanovsky's use of ellipses, which is highly idiosyncratic and often quite suggestive. The author seems to be marking the absence in the text, flagging the gap for the reader in a highly visible way. The reader is encouraged to complete this absence in the mind, perhaps thereby making her (in some sense) complicit in the thought. The punctuation occurs often at the most politically charged moments of the author's prose, a pattern that can be seen in the quoted passages to follow.

subjective, not objective. If ultimate truth is to remain inaccessible to the human mind, then we might at least construct worthy fictions. The antidote to philosophy's ontological conundrums is the boundless realm of the creative imagination. Krzhizhanovsky found a philosophical justification for his unreal fiction in the work of another German thinker, Hans Vaihinger, whose 1911 book *Die Philosophie des Als Ob,* or *The Philosophy of the As-If* argues for treating conjectures about truths, if these conjectures are useful to us, *as if* they were truths. While Krzhizhanovsky, as a fiction writer, does not deal with Vaihinger's argument in a philosophically rigorous way, he seems to have been intrigued by the creative possibilities of this end-run around intractable ontological questions: Treat the fantastic as if it were real, and one might aspire to illuminate deeper sorts of truths—repurposing Vaihinger's title, Krzhizhanovsky's body of work might be called the literature of the as-if.[65]

Krzhizhanovsky himself referred to fantastical writing resembling his own as "experimental realism," for lack of a ready-made term for his approach to fiction.[66] Today, these stories might be grouped with the genre known as speculative fiction, or perhaps the school of magical realism often associated with postmodernism.[67] Here, the word "experimental" is meant not in its most common meaning as applied to literary works—that is, stylistically innovative or transgressive—but rather in

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[65] This preoccupation with the 'as-if' can be traced back to Krzhizhovsky's very first story, "Jacobi and 'Yakoby'" [Якоби и якобы], or "Jacobi and the 'As-If'", a conversation between the absolutist German philosopher Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and the word 'As-if', якобы, 'Yakoby', which comes alive off the page when Jacobi copies it down out of a passage from Kant, after which the two—Jacobi and Yakoby—have a lively debate about whether reality is, in fact, real at all. This question has significant implications for the later discussion of the ontological status of the future in Chapter Four of this study. In some sense, the subjunctive *бы,* transposed to the temporal realm, is much like future contingency: that is, a hypothetical that is an as-yet unrealized possibility, or what Krzhizhanovsky calls "pure subjunctivity."

[66] *SK:Ss* 1: 54. Leiderman captures an emergent consensus in the scholarly literature around the author's "experimental realism," noting that "[i]t is obvious that speaking of "Experimental Realism," the writer is laying down his own creative principles." (Leiderman, 523).

[67] The reference here to postmodernism is not accidental; several scholars have seen in Krzhizhanovsky's work various proto-features of postmodern thought. Citing Brian McHale's influential definition of postmodernism, Spektor writes that "[o]ne can argue that Krzhizhanovsky's critique of Symbolist dualism aligns his prose with postmodernism, especially in Brian McHale's definition of it as an acceptance of "ontological plurality or instability" over "epistemological uncertainty" (Spektor, 111). Naum Leiderman seems to agree. In his view, Krzhizhanovsky's creative concerns "anticipate by almost half a century the debates triggered by the advent of Postmodernism as a new type of culture—"the world as text," the theory of simulacra, the critique of a "metaphysics of presence," and so forth" (Leiderman, 509, as translated by Caryl Emerson.)

its scientific meaning (in fact, Krzhizhanovsky refers to his fiction as *opyty* [опыты], the same Russian word used to describe scientific experiments.[68]) As Naum Leiderman writes, the author's stories are "a testing ground where the abstract idea is regulated by the self-developing rules of a fictive artistic world."[69] In this sense, his work bears some relation to the thought experiments of the physicists and metaphysicians of his day[70]—that is, deforming some aspect of conventional reality through a hypothetical in order to test its underlying logic.[71] The fantastical elements of his work are the hypotheticals in his thought experiments, while the realistic elements of his stories are the fixed terms. As he writes in his diary: "It's not the arithmetic but the algebra of life that interests me."[72]

As Adam Thirwell points out, Krzhizhanovsky's fictional experiments can be seen as a reflection of another, larger experiment: the Soviet experiment, perhaps the greatest in scale in history: "The streets were an experiment in changing what was accepted to be real. So one form of resistance would be to submit those streets' rhetoric to the private pressure of a style, to trace all its fantastical implications."[73] The chief fantasists of the USSR were not its writers but its propagandists, those who created the utopian vision of life in the USSR—an idealized and ersatz reality, a hyperreality, to use Baudrillard's term, that was meant to occlude the mundane and often vexing realities of actual life in the Soviet Union. It is perhaps ironic that dialectical materialism, the official philosophical system of Marxism-Leninism, proclaimed that matter preceded thought, while in actual practice it

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[68] *SK:Ss* 5: 336.

[69] Leiderman, 521.

[70] *SK:Ss* 1: 55.

[71] Krzhizhanovsky was, in fact, well apprised of the latest in scientific developments, including Einstein's theory of relativity and Minkowski space-time (*SK:Ss* 1: 38).

[72] «Меня интересует не арифметика, но алгебра жизни» (*SK:Ss* 6: 265)

[73] Thirwell, Adam. Introduction to *Autobiography of a Corpse.* New York Review Books Classics (New York: New York Review Books, 2013), xvi.

functioned in precisely the opposite way under Stalin: reality was determined by ideology, facts by preconceptions.

And indeed, Krzhizhanovsky was quick to capture this hollowing out of reality in the Soviet Union—where "only minus-truths make sense—only facts that have fallen on their heads"[74]—but unlike the state propagandists, for whom simulacra masqueraded as actual truths, Krzhizhanovsky foregrounds the fictionality of his fantasies, reveling in their artifice and absurdity—just as the Baron Munchausen raises the outrageous tall tale to a higher form of ecstatic truth-telling in Krzhizhanovsky's *The Return of Munchausen* [Возвращение Мюнхгаузена]. For the author, the fantastic is a sort of mode of resistance, a space of alternate realities that had neither to conform to the rigid laws of scientific socialism and materialist philosophy, nor to the conventions of the new socialist literature. This resistance was, by necessity, a quiet one, inscribed on pages destined for the desk drawer, but it was nonetheless principled in its non-acceptance of the totalizing view of reality imposed by the new regime. In Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, the rupturing of conventional reality (or the characters' attempts to escape its rigid logic) is both an assertion of autonomy and freedom from reality and simultaneously a way to reflect critically back upon it.

Thus, Krzhizhanovsky's fiction from the 1920s depicts the social and political upheavals of the time period, often through a distorted or hyperbolic lens, while at the same registering his philosophical objections to these same trends.[75] And what held particular interest for

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[74] Ibid., xiv. Russian: «в призрачном, минусовом мирке имеют смысл лишь минус-истины, - лишь упавшая на свою вершину правда» (*SK:Ss* 1: 407).

[75] Leiderman notes that in Krzhizhanovsky's work, "as a rule, Soviet reality is evaluated through the Aesopian language of parables and innuendo." However, he points out that "all the same, social and political collisions never openly play a significant role in Krzhizhanovsky's plots. They are no more than person, isolated episodes in relation to the eternal existential problems that agitate the author and his heroes. The reverse is more likely the case: that Krzhizhanovsky views historical cataclysms and a reshaping of the entire system of values brought about by the 1917 Revolution from the heights of philosophy, in light of the existential and historiosophical conflicts that the revolution itself had created, or rather prodded to the surface, actualized, and then reduced to bloody, destructive, catastrophic consequences" (Leiderman, 526).

Krzhizhanovsky was the new regime's overriding interest in and anxieties about time—a subject that also held great interest for him personally, starting from the time he first read Kant as an adolescent. Krzhizhanovsky's unease with the Soviet regime's fixation on acceleration and the future was not merely a disagreement regarding tactics and outcomes.[76] Rather, these works attempt to show the lasting damage to the moral fabric of the country and culture stemming directly from the regime's misguided ideology around time. His concern appears to be that Soviet modernity was hollowing out the present, attenuating the phenomenological experience of time—its *durée*, in Bergsonian terms—and creating an inauthentic reality, a life lived solely on borrowed time.

Krzhizhanovsky Criticism

Since their discovery, Krzhizhanovsky's stories and novellas have been issued and reissued as both stand-alone editions and collections, including the six-volume *Collected Works*, edited by Vadim Perel'muter and comprising over 4,200 pages, which provides the primary source material for the present study. In addition, Krzhizhanovsky's writing has now been translated into French, German, Polish, and English. The American editions of four collections of his stories have been issued through the publishing arm of the New York Review of Books under the imprint NYRB Classics; the translator, Joanne Turnbull, has won the PEN Translation award for her work, which has been reviewed favorably in *The New York Times, The Times Literary Supplement, The Paris Review* and

[76] Emerson notes Krzhizhanovsky's fixation on the idea of speed and acceleration while registering his philosophical disagreement with the phenomenon: "This fascination with increased velocity recalls other modernists under the influence of H. G Wells, for example the nautical engineer Evgeny Zamyatin and the restless film-makers of Kino-Eye and agit-kino. But Krzhizhanovsky was no Futurist. He did not worship the cutting-edge industrial machine." (Emerson, "Krzhizhanovsky as a Reader…", 605)

elsewhere. This flurry of publications has sparked the imagination of the reading public both in Russia and abroad. Krzhizhanovsky has at last, in Perel'muter's words, "returned from oblivion."[77]

The publication of this massive trove, however, has not yet occasioned a corresponding output of scholarship, at least in the English-speaking world. Krzhizhanovsky still remains largely unread in academic circles in the US, and for the most part his work seems not yet to have found its way onto college syllabi or graduate comprehensive exam reading lists. This lack of critical attention to Krzhizhanovsky's work is perhaps not entirely surprising. The creation of literary canons is, by its very nature, a conservative process, and scholarship more generally often lags behind popular appraisals. But the (re)discovery of Krzhizhanovsky's works is not in itself sufficient to ensure their continued life; the task of creating a literary reputation for the crossed-out writer falls largely to the scholarly community.

Fortunately, academic interest in Krzhizhanovsky's work is showing notable signs of stirring. In 2012, *The Slavic and East European Journal* devoted most of an issue to a special forum on the author. Edited by Caryl Emerson, the forum comprised articles from Russian scholar Naum Leiderman (1939-2010) on Krzhizhanovsky's philosophy, translated into English by Caryl Emerson;[78] from Karen Link Rosenflanz—the author of a monograph which remains, to date, the only such book-length work on Krzhizhanovsky in English—writing about Krzhizhanovsky's treatment of the idea of the fourth dimension;[79] from Alisa Ballard, who provides an excellent analysis of the intersection of Krzhizhanovsky's ideas about metaphysics and the theater;[80] and from Caryl Emerson herself,

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[77] Vadim Perel'muter, commentary to *Vospominaia o Budushchem* (Moscow: Moscovskii rabochii, 1989).

[78] See Leiderman, "The Intellectual Worlds…"

[79] Karen Link Rosenflanz, "Overturned Verticals and Extinguished Suns: Facets of Krzhizhanovsky's Fourth Dimension," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 536-552.

[80] Alisa Ballard, "Быт Encounters Бы: Krzhizhanovsky's Theater of Fiction," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 553-576.

whose article discussed how Krzhizhanovsky read and was influenced by the works of Shakespeare and Shaw.[81] This forum in *SEEJ* provides an excellent introduction to the writer and in-depth explication of major themes in his work, all while supplying a diversity of approaches and topics, from the author's philosophical preoccupations to his literary influences.

Of these articles, perhaps the one most germane to the present study is Rosenflanz's discussion of Krzhizhanovsky's *Memories of the Future* and its relation to the fourth dimension (which includes both the spatial and temporal treatment of this idea). In particular, my discussion of the novel in Chapter Four is deeply indebted to this article, especially its analysis connecting Krzhizhanovsky's ideas of time to the philosophy of Henri Bergson. Similarly, Rosenflanz's monograph on Krzhizhanovsky,[82] which analyzes his poetics through their interest in and representation of the relationship between word and idea, is an invaluable study, one that perhaps has done more than any other to establish the contours of the author's critical reception in English. Finally, more recently Krzhizhanovsky scholar Jacob Emery has published an article in the *Russian Review* that looks at a different aspect of Krzhizhanovsky's work, reading the novel *The Letter Killers Club* in relation to ideas around creative labor and exchange.[83]

On the Russian side of Krzhizhanovsky scholarship, a somewhat longer history of work on the author has meant a greater volume of critical studies, not all of which are generally available in either electronic or book form as of this writing. Besides the article by Leiderman mentioned above, A.A. Manskov's Russian-language monograph, *Intertextuality of the Prose of S.D. Krzhizhanovsky*

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[81] See Emerson, "Krzhizhanovsky as Reader…"

[82] Karen Link Rosenflanz, *Hunter of Themes: The Interplay of Word and Thing in the Works of Sigizmund Kržižanovskij*, Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature (New York: P. Lang, 2005).

[83] Jacob Emery was also a co-organizer together with Sasha Spektor (whose writing on Krzhizhanovsky is quoted above) of the first-ever symposium on Krzhizhanovsky's nonfiction, which I had the honor of attending in Bloomington, Indiana in 2016, and which helped me greatly in generating and refining many of the ideas presented in this study.

[Intertekstual'nost' prozy S.D. Krzhizhanovskii][84] provides a useful introduction to the topic of Krzhizhanovsky's literary influences in its introduction. Its broad-sounding title notwithstanding, the bulk of the work is devoted to only a handful of lesser-known works by Krzhizhanovsky, however, and focuses mainly on a small subset of topics—for example, Krzhizhanovsky's musical references and Shakespearean influences, and therefore has been used here only as background for the present study. More pertinent to the topic of Krzhizhanovskian metaphysics has been the lengthy analysis on the subject by V.N. Toporov, which develops the idea of Krzhizhanovsky's "minus-space" and the importance of the crack [щель] in his fictional worlds.[85] (Toporov addresses the topic of time as well as space, though the discussion is mostly taken up with lengthy quotes and is not given the same comprehensive theorizing as is space.) E.O. Kuz'mina has written several critical works on Krzhizhanovsky, including analyses of the author's use of biblical[86] and folkloric elements[87] in his fiction, while E.V. Livskaia has written extensively on the generic aspects of Krzhizhanovsky's prose.[88] Finally, Vera Kalmykova has written a wide-ranging exploration of Krzhizhanovsky's use of

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[84] Alekseĭ Anatol′evich Manskov, *Intertekstual′nost′ Prozy S.D. Krzhizhanovskogo: Monografiia͡* (Barnaul: Barnaul′skiĭ gos. pedagogicheskiĭ universitet, 2013).

[85] V.N. Toporov, "'Minus'-Prostranstvo Sigizmunda Krzhizhanovskogo," in *Mif. Ritual. Simvol. Obraz (Issledovanie v Oblasti Mifopoeticheskogo)*, by Todorov (Moscow: Progress, 1995), 476–574. Vadim Perel'muter, the editor of Krzhizhanovsky's *Sobranie sochinenii,* felt Toporov's contribution was important enough to include it in the final volume of the author's work. The article, as Perel'muter notes, "was published about a decade-and-a-half ago and remains to this day, in my view, the most solid and profound work of everything that has been written about Krzhizhanovsky" ["опубликованной полтора десятка лет назад и остающейся, на мой взгляд, по сей день наиболее основательной и глубокой из всего, что написано о Кржижановском» (notes: *SK:Ss* 6: 674).] (For a more critical reading, see Caryl Emerson's footnote commentary in Leiderman's article, in which she piquantly characterizes Toporov's writing as "grim, lonely, starvation-marked commentary" (in Leiderman, 520).)

[86] Elena Olegovna Kuz'mina, "Evangel'skii Siuzhet v Poetike Tvorchestva S. Krzhizhanovskogo," *Vestnik Volzhkogo Universiteta Im. V.N. Tatishcheva* 6 (2010): 31–40.

[87] Ibid., "Poetika Fol'klornykh Siuzhetov v Literaturnoi Skazke S. Krzhizhanovskogo," *Vestnik Volzhkogo Universiteta Im. V.N. Tatishcheva* 9 (2012): 20–27.

[88] E.V. Livskaia, "Zhanrovoe Svoebrazie Prozy S.D. Krzhizhanovskogo: Fenomen 'Chuzhogo Slova,'" *Vestnik Brianskogo Gostudarstvennogo Universiteta* 2 (2012): 144–48.

metonymy and his artistic treatment time and space, although her focus is again mainly on the latter.[89]

As can be seen, both Russian- and English-language scholars have focused the bulk of their attention on Krzhizhanovsky's poetics and overall philosophy, particularly as it relates to questions of artistic creation. This sort of work is absolutely essential, and should be undertaken before any other: Krzhizhanovsky's poetics are both unusual and unusually dense in meaning, in part because of the compression and economy of the works and their preoccupation with the texture and play of language, and a more formalist examination of these elements yields rich insights into the inner workings of his prose. Nonetheless, an exclusive focus on Krzhizhanovsky's writerly craft risks creating the impression of these works of fiction as free-floating outside of history, as a body of work shorn of its ideological and social situation. This would be a mistake, particularly given Krzhizhanovsky's identification as a Swiftian satirist and a writer whose work presents rich allegorical play and encoded allusions to the grand social and political cataclysms of his day. Despite this, to date there seems to have been no comprehensive attempt to frame Krzhizhanovsky's body of work in the political and ideological context of the Soviet 1920s.

This is the aim of the present study. Broadly conceived, its questions are twofold: How does our understanding of the time period deepen our understanding of Krzhizhanovsky's work, and how, in turn, does reading Krzhizhanovsky's work deepen our understanding of this time period? To address these questions, I focus on the author's work as the record of a literary encounter with modernity in the form of the early Soviet Union and its struggle to develop new conceptions around time and the future. This attempt to historically contextualize the author's work furthers an

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[89] Vera Kalmykova, "Arkhaika Sigizmunda Krzhizhanovskogo: 'Poperek Vremeni,'" *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 19 (2007), http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/19/kalmykova19.shtml.

additional goal of this study: to press for a reappraisal of the twentieth-century Russian canon with a view toward including the forgotten writer in its pantheon—or, in Soviet terminology, to offer him full rehabilitation.

Figure 2. Poster by V. Stepanova, 1919; the words read "RSFSR [the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic]" and "The Future is Our Only Goal."

Chapter Structure

In addition to this introduction and a conclusion, this dissertation is divided into four chapters, each of which focuses mainly on a work by Krzhizhanovsky written in the 1920s that bears some relation to conceptions of time. These works here will offer a chronological look at the author's artistic reworking of these concepts, starting around 1921 and concluding in 1929. A brief summary of the questions and conclusions from each of the chapters follows here.

In **Chapter One**, I analyze Krzhizhanovsky's first collection of stories, *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder,* in its relation to apocalyptic time. Using the critical lens provided by Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending,* I look at Russian millenarianism and Kermode's division of time into *Chronos*, the impersonal and quantitative clock-time of the universe, and *Kairos,* the qualitative and eventful time of human deeds and the moment of change and transformation. In *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder,* this *Kairos*-type time is related to the Revolution (and revolutions more generally), represented in these stories in defamiliarized settings as a sort of cataclysm, often rendered in the apocalyptic language of the Bible. In Krzhizhanovsky's depiction of revolutionary eschatology, I identify various features of these putative end-times, including the use of the imagery of an upturned world and a

sharp division of time into *before* and *after* characterized by an intermediate time of various sorts of gaps and temporal ruptures. In these stories, Krzhizhanovsky depicts the revolutionary moment not from the perspective of its actors, but from below, in the eyes of those who have been swept up in it. In this sense, the revolution is portrayed, if not as inevitable, then at least as an implacable force, a catastrophe on the order of a natural disaster in which humans are deprived of agency in the context of this apocalyptic moment.

This passive relationship toward time shifts in the works discussed in **Chapter Two**, however. Here, characters attempt to carry over the language and tactics of revolution into the temporal domain, an attitude that I connect with the relationship toward time that Hanson calls "charismatic domination." This idea of heroic human struggle against abstract and impersonal time was picked up by Russian practitioners of futurism—Velimir Khlebnikov, one of the main figures in the futurist movement in Russia, considered himself a "warrior against time"[90] and made it his life work to determining the "laws of time," so that humankind might be liberated from its ravages and thus achieve immortality, while his fellow futurist Vladimir Mayakovsky writes of the coming age when people would "compel time to stop—or else rush off in any desired direction and at any desired speed. People will be able to climb out of days like passengers out of a streetcar or bus."[91] This chapter addresses the artistic, social and economic projects of the revolutionary romantics, finding echoes of their ethos and praxis in the charismatic time domination episode of Krzhizhanovsky's novella *Odyssey of the Odd.* In this episode, the hero of the tale shrinks himself to microscopic dimensions and infiltrates the workings of a pocket watch, where he battles against the tiny carriers of the force of time. For this tale, I identify likely sources of inspiration for the hero's journey into

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[90] Williams, Robert C. "The Russian Revolution and the End of Time: 1900-1940." *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 43, no. 3, 1995, p. 387.

[91] Vladimir Mayakovsky, Guy Daniels, and Robert Payne, *Mayakovsky: Plays*, Northwestern University Press ed, European Drama Classics (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 199-200.

the "clock-face world" [циферблатная страна], from Jonathan Swift and Lewis Carroll to the Bolshevik revolutionary and science fiction writer Alexander Bogdanov and Platon Kerzhentsev's Time League [Лига «Время»], an organization that applied revolutionary/charismatic tactics to assert control over both temporal theory and praxis in the Soviet Union.

If Chapter Two focuses on the meaningful, heroic time of *Kairos,* then **Chapter Three** turns instead to *Chronos*, the steady and uniform march of time, which I associate with Hanson's notion of rational time discipline. In this chapter, I discuss various rationalizing methods of time control, such as the form of Taylorism adopted in the mid-1920s in the Soviet Union. This type of time I connect with a dystopian embedded tale from Krzhizhanovsky's novel *The Letter Killers Club* from 1926, which imagines a regime that controls the bodily movements of its citizenry through a centralized "nervous system" of radio towers, and which subordinates all movements to rational timekeeping. In this work, time is portrayed as an abstract quantitative measure that can be subdivided and exchanged for money or labor; as such, this time is linked to the body and movement, though it is not experienced internally but is instead imposed externally on its unwilling subjects. Krzhizhanovsky links this sort of time to technology and modernity, especially their expression in "the machine" [машина], an entity that is contrasted with the human in his "Man Against the Machine" [Человек против машины], an essay that outlines his opposition to the increasing encroachment of the mechanical on human life, language, and morality.

In **Chapter Four**, the human subject does not fight against the machine, but instead uses it to continue the struggle for control over time—in this case, in the form of Maximillian Shterer's time machine in *Memories of the Future.* Here I apply the notion of "charismatic-rational time," a mix of both the time domination and the time discipline model to achieve what Hanson terms "time

transcendence."[92] Here, time transcendence is analyzed in relation to Krzhizhanovsky's time-travel opus *Memories of the Future*. This novel was written in 1929, at the start of the first Five-Year Plan, and I argue for interpreting the work in part as a response to Stalin's campaign to leap headlong into the future. But the novel undoubtedly has broader implications than its political satire, however. Krzhizhanovsky uses the time-travel narrative as an opportunity for a disquisition on the philosophy of time, addressing age-old debates over the nature of reality, such as eternalist and presentist positions on the ontological status of the future. In his fictional exploration of time, he draws not only on classical sources, but also the contemporary works of Henri Bergson and Albert Einstein, whose debate in 1922 set the era's terms for the debate over the nature of time.

Finally, I move outward in the **conclusion** to address the overarching issues that this study of Krzhizhanovsky's work raises. First, I discuss what Krzhizhanovsky's inclusion into the literary canon might entail for our understanding of Russian literary and intellectual history, and how previous understandings of the further development of modernism—a movement cut short in Russia by Stalin's regime—should be revised in light of Krzhizhanovsky's work. Second, I will briefly examine the broader relationship between totalitarian regimes and writing of the fantastic, drawing lessons that may be used to frame other writers in other historical and political contexts. In other words, Krzhizhanovsky's work, and that of writers like him, seems to offer a different way of imaginatively engaging with the world—seeing it not only for what it is, but for what it might otherwise be.

[92] This combination of rational and charismatic elements may have appealed to the ethos of Marxism-Leninism, which itself fused rational scientific discourse with emotional appeals, paroxysms of indiscriminate violence and charismatic leadership.

CHAPTER ONE

Revolutions of the Minute Hand: Apocalyptic Time and Upturned Worlds in Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder

1.1 Introduction: To the End of Time

In July of 1923, Krzhizhanovsky writes to his partner Anna Bovshek from Moscow, where he has been living for scarcely a year while seeking his entrée in the literary scene of the new Soviet capital. "'For the time being', I'm not working: and I don't know where the end of this *time being* is," he tells her.[1] In the meantime, he is fitfully reading a mélange of revolutionary works and German social-democratic theory—V.I. Lenin, Georgii Plekhanov, Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, "et cetera"—and struggling to resolve, on the one hand, the European humanism instilled in him by his education and, on the other hand, his apparent misgivings about the direction of the new socialist state.

It's a position Krzhizhanovsky will occupy, as near as can be ascertained from his writing, for much of his life: neither here nor there, neither a conservative wistful for the ancien régime, nor a supporter of the Bolsheviks who replaced it.[2] As he writes to Bovshek in this same letter, "[I am]

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[1] «'Пока' не работаю: и не знаю, где конец этого *пока*.» (*SK:Ss* 6: 25).

[2] According to Bovshek, "his attitude toward the revolution and its transformations was complex and at times contradictory [«Его отношение к революции и ее преобразованиям было сложным и подчас противоречивым»] (*SK:Ss* 6: 264). It's important to note that this was written in 1965, when Bovshek was attempting to assure her

trying to decide the "either/or"[3] that so torments me, and I don't know, in truth, who I am: a chess player who has spent *too* long pondering his next move, or a bumbler who has *already* lost the game. In fact, maybe everyone, even the winners, know only how to lose time to the winning of their game."[4] In other words, choosing sides is inconsequential, a waste of time given that *time*, not the Bolshevik revolution, is the only thing eternal. A similar sentiment is found in Krzhizhanovsky's novel *Memories of the Future,* his novel about a man who is locked in a battle with time itself: "Time always prevails by virtue of its passing."[5] Krzhizhanovsky thus transposes the political struggles of the time period onto a more transcendent or metaphysical level, one in which revolution is not merely a battle fought against a political regime, but a war to be waged with reality itself.

This struggle against reality, and more specifically with the relentless progression of time, is the focus of the present chapter, which will explore the linkages between revolution, apocalypse and disruptions in time in the stories of Krzhizhanovsky's collection *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder*. Through an exploration of the various ways that the forward movement of time is frustrated,

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husband's literary legacy, and so would probably not have dared to say that he was an anti-Soviet writer, even if indeed he was. Caryl Emerson writes that "the archival record suggests that Krzhizhanovsky was not a dissident in principle, nor an anti-Soviet outsider by conviction" (Emerson, "Krzhizhanovsky as a Reader…", 580). Here Emerson seems to be pushing against the overtly anti-Soviet readings of Krzhizhanovsky's first Russian readers and scholars such as Perel'muter, who appear to perhaps overstate the author's anti-Stalinist credentials. Nonetheless, evidence for Krzhizhanovsky's "dissident stance," ("dissident" being an anachronistic concept for this time period), while not an active one, can be found as subtext in a great many of the author's works, as will be further explored below.

[3] The "either/or" enclosed here in quotes ["или-или"] seems to suggest that Krzhizhanovsky was reading Kierkegaard and quoting from the title of his work *Enten – Eller* (in Russian *Или-или*), which posits that a person might choose either an ethical existence or an aesthetic existence, but not both. (Krzhizhanovsky makes explicit reference this work of Kierkegaard's in his *Poetics of Titles;* see *SK:Ss* 4: 16). Or in Krzhizhanovsky's case, the choice between philosophy and fiction—or, as Bovshek writes elsewhere, the "choice between Kant and Shakespeare" (*SK:Ss* 6: 264).

[4] «…Стараясь решить мучающее меня "или-или", ин не знаю, право, кто я: шахматист, *слишком* долго задумавшийся над очередным ходом, или партач, *уже* проигравший игру. Впрочем, м<ожет> б<ыть>, все, даже победители, умеют лишь проигрывать время на выигрыш своей игры.» (*SK:Ss* 6: 25, emphasis preserved). Even in this private letter, Krzhizhanovsky can't resist engaging in the wordplay that characterizes his literary style, circling through different forms of the word 'play' (играть): "проигравший игру" "проигрывать время на выигрыш своей игры." He immediately continues his letter by characterizing the movement of time itself as a rival for her affections: "And so, I 'shine' rather dully, while in the meantime [тем временем], my rival, in all likelihood, has already had time to recolor you in black and make you healthier and happier." [«Итак, я "свечу" весьма тускло, а мой соперник, тем временем, уже успел, наверное, перекрасить Вас в черный цвет, сделать Вас здоровее и радостнее»] (ibid).

[5] «Время побеждает всегда тем, что оно *проходит*» (*SK:Ss* 2: 352).

diverted or halted altogether, I will outline in the following pages a specific type of revolutionary-apocalyptic temporality, a gap in time in which the usual rules of reality are suspended, at least for a limited period in—or rather, outside of—time. This will lead into a more broadly theoretical discussion of differing conceptions of time in history and philosophy, centering on the opposition of human and cosmic time, a distinction that underpins Krzhizhanovsky's treatment of revolution as not merely a political event, but a metaphysical one as well.

The metaphor of the chessboard Krzhizhanovsky uses above in his letter to Anna Bovshek is a recurring motif in his work, particularly in regard to political themes, providing a ready, if somewhat facile, analogy for political machinations.[6] His story "The Lost Player," written just two years previously in 1921, concerns the fate of a certain retired British public figure by the name of Pembroke, who'd "traded away the expansive arena of political skirmishing for the square of the chess board."[7] Unluckily for him, Pembroke begins a round of chess with a demonic force, a nebulous being that takes the form of evening darkness. When Pembroke decides to sacrifice his pawn for the sake of winning against the darkness, his opponent forces the politician's soul to inhabit the wooden body of the sacrificed pawn in the very moment it is vanquished by its knight. Thus, the chess master who had started the game is forced to end it as a lowly pawn, stripped of status and sacrificed as part of a larger game. At the heart of this reversal of fortune is a certain cruel logic—the same sort of ironic reversal as when, a few short years before this story was written, Tsar Nicholas II met his end at the hands of his former subjects.

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[6] For instance, in "My Match with the King of Giants" [Моя партия с королем великанов], the narrator, Swift's Gulliver, is invited to play chess against the Brobdingnagian king, a towering giant of a man with a short temper. When Gulliver puts him in a checkmate, the king slams his fist on the board, causing a sort of earthquake that knocks Gulliver unconscious. When he awakens, he's been locked up in the chess box with other pieces, and is only saved from death when the King decides he wants to have a rematch. The second time, Gulliver wisely decides to lose. Krzhizhanovsky wrote this story in the early 1930s during Stalin's total consolidation of power (*SK:Ss* 3: 90.)

[7] «…променял широкую арену политической борьбы на квадрат шахматной доски» (*SK:Ss* 1: 133).

Such a reading of the story—that is, as a displaced narrative about the Russian revolution—finds credence in a later work, the novella *Odyssey of the Odd* [Странствующее "странно"] that contains a similar conceit. An embedded tale inside the novella tells the story of the two-headed and legless King of Hearts whose figure is found on a deck of playing cards. This two-headed King of Hearts (the deformity suggests the symbol of the Russian imperial throne, the two-headed eagle) also has two hearts, one large and one small. As he laments, "My large heart loved a small woman; my small heart loved a great people. And both of them, large and small, felt constricted under my royal mantle. They beat against each other, preventing the other from beating."[8] The King of Heart's lament seems to suggest the divided loyalties of the last Tsar, Nicholas II, a devoted husband whose familial loyalty was commonly seen as coming into conflict with his official duties. The king decides to have one of these hearts amputated, and chooses to remove from his chest the smaller one, which loved the people, in an echo of the Tsar's abdication. But this causes the downfall of his kingdom:

> Both the kingdom and my autocracy have long since been eaten away by worms [черви, a homonym of the word for the hearts suit in cards]; our venerable bloodline has become a dumb card suit [another untranslatable play on words: наш маститый род стал глупой мастью], and I, who along with my ministers once used to play at the game of people, now I have been turned into an ordinary card, and must allow them, the people, to play with us as cards.[9]

The king thus suffers the ignominy of being played by the owner of the card deck—an old professor who, it turns out, is a rather poor card player—as he whiles away the hours hoping for a military intervention from sympathetic royal families in other countries, who, as he asserts, simply *cannot allow* this sort of thing to happen. The narrator is not unsympathetic to the King of Hearts, who appears in the story as a somewhat tragic figure, but it's also clear that he sees the man's plight

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[8] «Мое большое сердце любило маленькую женщину; мое маленькое сердце любило великий народ. И обоим им, большому и малому, было тесно под моей королевской мантией. Они бились друг о друга, мешая друг другу биться» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 294).

[9] «И царство, и власть мои давно источены червями; наш маститый род стал глупой мастью, и я, который некогда со своими министрами игрывал в людей, я, превращенный в обыкновеннейшую карту, должен позволять им, людям, играть в нас, в карты» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 294).

as irreversible. The past cannot be returned; the age of great monarchs has passed in Europe, and waiting for rescue is a fool's errand. "It's said that the time is approaching," the main character tells him, "when the kings from European decks who have gotten used to amusing themselves with "the game of people" will be forced to transform themselves from those who play to those who are played. I'm no pagan, but I do believe in Nemesis," the narrator adds, referencing the Greek goddess who delivered retribution to powerful men who had succumbed to hubris.[10]

As in the above stories, the specter of revolution haunts the pages of Krzhizhanovsky's work from the 1920s, particularly his first (and, until recently, unpublished) collection, most of which were written during or immediately after the Russian civil war, which he called *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder* [Сказки для вундеркиндов]. The title—with its Russian folkloric 'skazki' and the German loanword 'wunderkind'—is an apt one for the collection, which contains, like much of Krzhizhanovsky's work, a syncretic mixture of Russian and non-Russian elements.[11]

Despite the wide range of locales, time periods and literary models found in these stories, Krzhizhanovsky's first collection is nevertheless held together by a strong thematic unity. Most of these stories feature some sort of major disruption at their core, and in this they seem to reflect the author's grappling with the upheavals in Russia at the time period in which they were written,

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[10] «Говорят, недалеко то время, когда королям из европейской колоды, привыкшим к забавной "игре в людей", придется превратиться из тех, которые играют, в тех, которыми играют. Я не язычник, но верю в Немезиду» (*SK:Ss* 1: 297).

[11] The foreign elements may be specifically Western European, such as the English setting of "The Lost Player," above, although often the stories draw on classical sources from antiquity—"The Graeae" [Грайи], for instance, or "Bound By Prometheus" [Прикованный Прометеем]—or even ancient China, in "Fu Gi." Pre-Petrine Russia also inspires some works in the collection, such as "Itanesies," a story that the narrator claims was taken from a sixteenth-century Russian *azbukovnik*, while more contemporary Russia is given a fairy-tale treatment in "Tears for Sale," in which a young girl who cries diamonds is ruthlessly exploited by her peasant parents for material gain. Russian literary classics are given sly nods in the collection as well, from echoes of Turgenev's peasantry in "Stumps" [Пни], to Chekhovian struggles of the sublime with the everyday in "The Square of Pegasus" [Квадрат пегаса] and Gogolian runaway body parts in "The Runaway Fingers" [Сбежавшие пальцы]. The sheer number and wide variety of stories—twenty-nine short works are included in this first collection—are a showcase of the author's broader preoccupations and techniques, and betray a restless mind that ranges across various philosophical debates and literary styles in a manner that seems somewhat lighter and more playful than the author's subsequent work.

though the actual events are addressed only obliquely in its pages. In this way, Krzhizhanovsky is not so much interested in exploring the actual details or historical reality of the Russian revolution as he is confronting the underlying logic—or perhaps more accurately, the illogic—of the revolution.

In fact, the historical reality of the revolution, familiar as it would have been to Krzhizhanovsky's would-be readership, actively interfered with grasping this underlying logic. In other words, seeing reality impedes *actually* seeing reality—a seemingly paradoxical stance that makes sense in the context of Krzhizhanovsky's Kantian worldview, which makes a clear distinction between the world of phenomena, or what we see, and the world of noumena, the metaphysical essences of things. These essences might be revealed in the connections between Krzhizhanovsky's purely imaginary world and their referential reality: for instance, between a story about a British chess master who is made into a pawn and then executed, on the one hand, and the historical events of the Bolshevik revolution and civil war on the other. This sort of displacement is a favorite technique of the author, a device that he consciously borrows from Swift: By extracting a situation from its original context and defamiliarizing it for readers in a new context, the situation may better be seen for what it *is*, and not merely what it appears to be. Thus, although the stories in the collection range in settings from ancient Greece to England in the twenty-third century future, they all seem to beckon us back to the Soviet Union in the years during and immediately following the revolution, the better to reflect on the underlying nature of this cataclysm.[12]

As transformed in Krzhizhanovsky's fictional worlds, however, the revolution becomes more than the overthrowing of an established political or social order. Instead, in these stories of the fantastic, revolution is a rupture in the fabric of conventional reality. The political act of the

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[12] As he writes of his satirical technique in his diaries, "I have a short sword: with it, I strike at the West (a safe form of satire) and the East, but the blow lands close… right here." ["У меня короткий меч: ударяя им по Западу (безопасный способ сатиры) и по Востоку <попадаю> близко—тут " (*SK:Ss:* 5: 367.)] It's also worth noting that when Krzhizhanovsky was allowed to choose the entries he was to write for his work for the *Literaturnaia entsiklepedia*, among the half-dozen entries he chose to write was one on "Aesopian language." (The entry was never published).

'*perevorot*,' (lit. 'the turning over,' a *coup d'etat* or overthrow of a regime) becomes inscribed with ontological dimensions, as conventional logic and reality crumble and give way to absurdity and impossibility. This revolutionary reality seems to be precisely the inverse of the one it has overthrown, with all signs reversed, a mirror-world of opposite meanings, the antithesis to the preceding thesis. For this to be a true '*perevorot*,' a turning over, the chess master can only become the vanquished pawn; in this upside-down world, the 'last wall be first and the first will be last'—a credo, it should be noted, that was shared both by the militantly atheist Bolsheviks and the Orthodox church.

Figure 3. Poster from 1920 by artist V.N. Deni. The caption reads "The Final Hour", with a list of Tsarist/White leaders in place of hours that have already passed by (and are crossed out). The hands of the clock are the long handles of the hammer and sickle capped with red stars.

Indeed, many of the stories from this period after the Bolshevik revolution and civil war are limned with Christian eschatological imagery, although there is no evidence that Krzhizhanovsky himself was particularly religious. Instead, the author repurposes a long-established system of poetic language and imagery of the Christian apocalypse in order to underscore the totality of this world-rending, even in some sense a world-*ending*, event—a vision that is replete with extinguished suns, comets and planets careering out of orbit, mountains turning over, and even time itself grinding to a halt. This end of time is a hallmark of the End of Times, an apocalyptic temporality that will be discussed in more detail below.

In connecting revolution and revelation, Krzhizhanovsky was following a path already rather well-trodden in his day. In a study of millenarianism in the pre- and post-revolutionary Russia,

Robert C. Williams traces how the revolution was received (rapturously by some; regretfully by others) as the beginning of the end of the world. Williams notes the powerful influence of Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev's apocalyptic writings on both the popular and artistic imagination at the turn of the century, singling out the philosopher's 1899 story "Tale of the Antichrist" as a key moment in bringing the eschatological turn in Russian culture into the cultural and intellectual mainstream. Solov'ev's work, Williams notes, exercised a powerful hold on the imagination of the Russian symbolists, who strove to break free of the recent past and remake the world in which they dwelled. "Poets and artists saw all around them omens, portents, and symbols of an eternal and transcendent reality beyond the apparent world. Millenarianism abounded," he writes, quoting predictions of the coming end of the known world by such luminaries as Viacheslav Ivanov, Aleksandr Blok and Andrei Belyi.[13] Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, a founder of the symbolist movement, wrote in anticipation of the coming cataclysm that "we believe in the end, we see the end, we desire the end, for we ourselves are the end, or at least the beginning of the end."[14] In early 1918, not long after the October revolution, Blok wrote his famous paean to the revolution, "The Twelve" in which Christ's Second Coming was poetically conjoined to the Bolshevik revolution in the image of the Messiah leading a band of Red Army soldiers through the snow—the two parallel lines of Christianity and Bolshevism having apparently intersected at the end of time.[15]

Others, particularly after the bloodletting of the First World War and the ensuing Russian civil war, were somewhat less sanguine about the end of the world. Andrei Belyi's 1918 poem "Christ has Risen," like Aleksandr Blok's "The Twelve," is full of Christian eschatological imagery, though he

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[13] Williams, 364.

[14] Ibid., 370.

[15] Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok, *Sobranie Sochineniĭ V Vos'mi Tomakh* (Москва: Gos. izd-vo khudozhestvennoĭ lit-ry, 1960), 3: 359.

sees the Bolshevik revolution in a darker light, as a "negative Apocalypse of comets, explosion, fire and catastrophe out of which a positive Apocalypse would inevitably follow."[16] The writer and philosopher Vasilii Rozanov similarly viewed the revolution as an apocalyptic and cathartic act of cleansing, but saw in it the wholesale rejection of traditional Orthodoxy in favor of his own idiosyncratic beliefs about sexual liberation and the cult of birth and procreation.[17] The writer Boris Pil'niak felt certain that the revolution would sweep away the vestiges of Western European culture from the Russian land, returning it to its prelapsarian Slavic roots.[18] Other writers making the connection between revolution and the apocalypse included Vladimir Mayakovsky, Nikolai Kliuev, Aleksei Tolstoi, Boris Savinkov, Zinaida Gippius, and Andrei Platonov among a whole host of other lesser-known literary figures.[19] But this type of eschatological thinking was by no means limited to the artistic intelligentsia; following the revolution, Russian villages were consumed with the question about whether Lenin should be seen as the second coming of Christ or his opposite, the Antichrist, without coming to a firm consensus.[20] As Williams writes, "If the Messiah turned out to be the Antichrist, the revolution a restoration of autocratic power, and the end of time a new beginning, such paradoxes only reflected fundamental ambiguities embedded in the very notion of times as both line and cycle, and the end of time as endpoint and new beginning."[21]

This brings us to perhaps the most important aspect of Williams's argument as it relates to the present discussion: How do we conceptualize the passage of time, and how does this in turn reflect on the revolution and its aftermath? This is not a question of mere semantics; differing ways of

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[16] Williams, 371-72.

[17] ibid., 372.

[18] ibid., 373.

[19] ibid., 369-374.

[20] ibid., 371

[21] ibid, 373.

conceiving time and the movement of history were perhaps the unacknowledged center of many of the great ideological debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Technological developments and the discovery of Darwinian evolution and the long march of geological time upended previous notions of time, foregrounding ideas of progress and continual rational development as the engines of history. At the same time, the history of technological innovation and even the geological strata laid down underground—time, in essence, made visible to the eye in stone—testified not so much to a steady forward progression, but a series of periodic major disruptions, periods of rapid change, repeated and massive cataclysmic events which swept away everything that had come before—in other words, history as a record of intermittent bursts of change rather than an orderly progression of events.[22]

In this way, the passage of time can be seen either as either linear or essentially cyclical in nature, though not both at the same time, a paradox noted in the quote above. Williams explicitly links revolution to cyclical time, writing that "the idea of the Russian Revolution as a cycle, a continuing and recurring pattern without end, persisted among Russian intellectuals after the revolution," and that

> World War I and the Russian Revolution stimulated a wide variety of cyclic and pessimistic theories of history and time. Time seemed not absolute and objective, but relative and subjective. Time was not a line of progress stretching out to an infinitely better future, but circles of endless recurrence of all too human behavior. Revolutions and civilizations were recurring types of events.[23]

The characterization is fitting; after all, the word 'revolution,' may also refer to the rotation of a wheel—or in Solzhenitsyn's memorable formulation, the "red wheel" of revolution, presumably

[22] In contemporary biology, such a view of evolution is known as "punctuated equilibrium," a term coined by Stephen Jay Gould, which links brief periods of rapid biological changes and adaptations to natural cataclysms, "extinction events," etc., and sees evolutionary history primarily as repeated cycles of dramatic changes separated by long periods of stasis.

[23] Ibid., 395

both in reference to the socialist color and the blood of the victims whom it crushes as it turns (or, if the wheel refers to the torture device of the same name, those whose bodies it breaks.)

But if the revolution is a wheel, however, further turnings would seem to be inevitable. Such logic was not lost on the new Bolshevik regime, of course. In cyclical time, counterrevolution is as inevitable as revolution. In fact, it was the very fact that the Bolsheviks had deeply internalized this conception of time that in part led to the bloody purges of the Stalin era, when counterrevolutionaries were seen behind every rock and tree and millions of innocent people were imprisoned and murdered. In order to reconcile the cyclical logic of revolution with the more stable progression of linear time, thus preventing further cataclysms, the circle had to be straightened.[24]

In the Soviet ideological construction of time, both cyclical and linear/progressive conceptions of time were important. Revolutions were disruptive events in the normal flow of time, upturning or inverting the trajectory of the previous order, a sort of heroic time outside of time. But soon mundane chronological time reasserts itself; the revolutionary moment passes on and becomes history, and the revolutionary order becomes status quo. How does one reconcile these heroic conceptions of revolutionary time, on the one hand, and the mundane march of ordinary time, what Arnold Toynbee famously called "one damned thing after another"?[25] This question was of paramount importance over the course of the 1920s, during the period in which the Bolsheviks sought to cement their gains and prevent further cycles of history from upending their rule.[26]

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[24] A way of straightening the circle that reconciles both the cyclical and linear conceptions of time is to see history as a spiral, a figure found both in Hegel's dialectic and Belyi's notion of time. For discussion of Belyi's spiral, see Williams, 389. The spiral as synthesis of line and circle appears as well in Krzhizhanovsky's *Memories of the Future;* see *SK:Ss* 2: 362-3.

[25] One such form of reconciliation was the idea of "permanent revolution," in which the revolutionary classes continue to direct the development of socialism on their own, a concept which unites both the heroic/charismatic aspects of revolutionary time with its mundane progression.

[26] Mikhail Zamyatin, in his novel *We,* uses his protagonist, D-503, to parody the revolutionary authorities' desire to "halt" time: "Our revolution was the final one," he tells I–330. "There can be no further revolutions. Everyone knows that." In reply, I-330 appeals to the notions of infinity and eternity, asking D-503 to name the "final number." "There is no final one. Revolutions are endless." [«…наша революция была последней. И больше никаких революций не

These differing concepts of revolutionary time and ordinary time find expression in two different ancient Greek words for time, *Chronos* and *Kairos*. The Greeks drew a distinction between the steady linear march of time—an abstract time termed "Chronos"—and meaningful, eventful time, the time of human action, the charismatic and even heroic time known as "Kairos."[27] The scholar Frank Kermode, who uses this distinction to frame his argument about literature, time and the apocalypse in his seminal study *The Sense of an Ending,* calls *Chronos* "passing time, or waiting time, that which, according to Revelation, 'shall be no more,' while *Kairos* is "the season, a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end."[28] Literature, Kermode asserts, is humanity's way of pushing back against the impersonal time of the universe, of asserting the primacy of *Kairos* over *Chronos*, by giving cosmological, impersonal time the contours of a human life: that is to say a beginning, middle, and end.[29]

This human desire to grasp the entirety of time at once—to see through to the end, an end that will imbue the long arc of history with meaning—is, in Kermode's analysis, also linked to the apocalyptic impulse—in other words, the common tendency of cultures widely separated in time

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может быть. Это известно всякому.» … «Последней – нет. Революции бесконечны.»] Evgenïĭ Ivanovich Zamiâtin and Natasha Randall, *We*, Modern Library pbk. ed, Modern Library Classics (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 153.

[27] The ancient Greeks not only possessed two different words for time; they also originated two philosophical schools that saw the nature of time itself in fundamentally contradictory ways. Heraclitus, in the fifth century BC, saw the world as constantly in flux, a place where the only thing that is permanent is change. Aristotle agreed, and defined time as change, which would seem to fit better with the human experience of time—how else, after all, would we know that time has passed, if not for witnessing the endless series of changes in ourselves and the world around us? On the other hand, the Eleatic school, particularly Zeno and Parmenides, argued an idealist position that the world is perfect and eternal, thus change, and time, must be an illusion. In their argument, the past, present and future all exist in equal measure; to believe otherwise would mean that things must blink in and out of being as they pass into the present moment. This nature cannot allow, as nothing may spontaneously emerge or be erased from being. Since this time, these two positions—in essence, the 'presentist' and the 'eternalist' views of time—have since shaped much of the philosophical discourse around our understanding of time, and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Adrian Bardon, *A Brief History of the Philosophy of Time* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 22.

[28] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, Mary Flexner Lectures (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 47.

[29] Ibid., 62.

and space to see themselves as occupying a unique moment in time.[30] Because the era that we live in feels meaningful and special to us (because it is our present moment, and thus phenomenologically privileged) we want to believe that it has special meaning even outside of our realm of experience. And since we can only, by necessity, see what has come, not what will be, we situate ourselves at the end of time. Thus is our present moment given special meaning: through its proximity to the end, its "sense of an ending."

This is not necessarily a false belief; in some sense, *every* moment is a culmination of everything that has come before, and every era is always the end of some era. Where these beliefs conflict with reality, however, is not in positing *an* end, but *the* end. Kermode discusses how millennial cults resolve the cognitive dissonance that arises when predictions about the Apocalypse are discomfirmed by reality—when time continues to march on in its steady pace, and we are once again reminded that we live amidst time and not astride it. The solution is simple for these believers in the apocalypse: the initial calculations of Doomsday were performed wrong, and the end of the world will come not today but rather two years hence, or two decades hence, etc. In other words, the apocalypse is always just around the corner, which invests every passing moment with the sense of the end: thus, in Kermode's formulation, the end is both *imminent* and *immanent*.[31]

It is these contradictory stances that underpin the argument that time itself is an illusion, made by British philosopher JME McTaggart in 1908 in his treatise *The Unreality of Time*. In this book, McTaggart maintains that our different views of time are incoherent and mutually exclusive. The first way to conceptualize time, which he calls the "A-series" is as a set of events that belong to either the past, present or future, though these temporal qualities—their "tensedness," in some sense—can change as the events move from future to present to past. In the other conception of

[30] Ibid., 10-17.

[31] Ibid., 101.

time, which he calls the "B-series," events are characterized by their temporal relations to each other—whether they fall earlier than or later than other events in the temporal order. To use an example, "Nicholas II abdicated yesterday," is a statement that uses "A series" time, or *tensed* time, while "Nicholas II abdicated on March 15, 1917," is a statement that relies on "B-series," or a sort of "tenseless" time. McTaggart argued that the A-series alone cannot provide an adequate representation of time, since the notion of "yesterday," for instance, is constantly changing, while "B-series" time is similarly an incomplete description, as it does not admit any change in the quality of an event as it moves from future to present to the past: March 15, 1917 remains isomorphic with itself whether it happens to be in the past, present or future.

We can see this conflict playing out between two different sorts of conceptions of time outlined above: *Chronos,* the impersonal clock of the universe, and *Kairos*, meaningful time, human time. This latter category, *Kairos,* is one that Kermode links explicitly to the apocalyptic. *Kairos*, he writes, linking the word to its Greek etymology, is a moment of crisis, and that we "hunger for ends and crises." At the same time, however, we lament the end of our times, when "[t]he foundations of life quake beneath our feet."[32] This also happens to be a fitting description of the revolutionary moment, or what Krzhizhanovsky terms the "lifequake" [жизнетрясение],[33] a time when *Kairos* is ascendant and the old world is engulfed in an apocalyptic struggle against the new—as Williams describes it, "the end of time as endpoint and new beginning."

The present chapter will focus specifically on the relationships between the revolution, the apocalypse and *Kairos,* through a half-dozen stories from Krzhizhanovsky's first collection, *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder*. Through these stories, the general contours of a revolutionary/apocalyptic temporality in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction will be mapped against the social and political upheaval of

[32] Ibid., 47.

[33] *SK:Ss* 2: 589.

the early 1920s. The features of this *Kairos*-inflected revolutionary chronotope (to borrow Bakhtin's term) will be later contrasted with a different conception of time, related more closely to *Chronos,* which becomes dominant in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction later in the 1920s—a topic that will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapters.

The main features of this apocalyptic temporality that I discuss below are as follows. First, the revolutionary moment in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction is distinguished by sudden ontological uncertainty and chaos, an **overturning or upending** of conventional reality which I link to Hegel's concept of *die verkehrte Welt*, or the inverted world. This upending of reality is accompanied by a dizzying disorientation in Krzhizhanovsky's characters, a loss of all previous frames of reference. Flux and change are the main attributes of this revolutionary moment, but these changes are disjunctive, chaotic and disordered in character, in keeping with their relationship to *Kairos,* the time of crisis and upheaval.

Related to this is the second characteristic of Krzhizhanovsky's apocalyptic temporality, which conceives of the revolutionary moment as a sort of **crack or rupture in the flow of time**. This gap or crack is a sort of liminal or threshold moment when the usual physical laws seem to be suspended and everything seems to exist in a state of uncertainty and suspension, a sort of singularity in the fabric of reality. This crack in time cleaves the flow of time into two parts, **before and after,** a temporal organization in which events are given meaning, just as in Kermode's formulation, not by their orderly relations to each other, but in their proximity and relationship to a pivotal moment in time. This is similar to McTaggart's 'A-series'

Figure 4. Soviet poster detailing the world of the future (top) steamrolling the world of the past, below (Date and artist unknown.)

'tensed' conception of time, which emphasizes the before/after qualities of human time, as opposed to the more abstract timeline of *Chronos* and McTaggart's B-series, which sees time as a sort of progression in which events are defined by the property of earlier/later. In Krzhizhanovsky's stories, the revolutionary moment, the *perevorot,* is the sort of fulcrum at the center of the plots, the moment that changes everything that follows.

Within this crack or gap, a strange sort of temporal interregnum reigns, characterized by various **discontinuities, gaps, frozen time and a state of timelessness** [безвременье]. These disruptions would seem related to Biblical notions of time during the apocalypse, which envisions a time without time, a moment when time will be no more [*tempus non fore amplius*]. Kermode makes explicit reference to this description, stating that "In apocalypse there are two orders of time, and the earthly runs to a stop; the cry of woe to the inhabitants of the event means the end of their time; henceforth, "time shall be no more."[34] The idea of a rupture or gap in time also finds apt comparisons in this period immediately following the Russian revolution: One need only recall how the Soviet authorities erased thirteen days from the calendar by decree at the height of the civil war in order to bring the country into alignment with the Western European dating system, a disruption to the progression of time that could only have been profoundly disorienting to the population.[35]

Perhaps more disorienting than the sudden loss of thirteen whole days from the year, however, were broader disruptions to the social fabric that halted or reversed all manner of pre-revolutionary trends; Nadezhda Mandel'shtam wrote that "…it looked as though *time had stopped*, the world had

[34] Kermode, 89.

[35] Even to this day, the consequences of this 'lost time' continue to reverberate—for instance, in the doubling of certain holidays, such as 'old New Year's', the dim echo of the previous New Year's that comes thirteen days into January, along with various religious holidays that have retained their footing in the discarded Julian calendar.

come to an end and everything was lost forever. The collapse of all familiar notions is, after all, the end of the world."[36]

1.2 The World Upended: Turning "A Page in History"

In "The Lost Player," the chess-themed story mentioned at the start of this chapter, the logic of the revolution is represented by *perevorot,* a word that can denote both a *coup d'état* and more generally an overturning or upending. This word "*perevorot*," used in reference to the October Revolution, would almost certainly be seen in the Soviet period as deliberately provocative, however accurate it might be: "coup" implies a small cadre of elites, instead of the mass uprising implied by "revolution." Nevertheless, the word appears both in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction and in Bovshek's discussion of his relationship toward the Bolshevik revolution.[37] The term may have seemed more apt for him than "revolution," as it captured the upending of ordinary life after October 1917 in a more visceral way in the Russian than in the foreign loan-word.

The complete upending of life in the revolution bears some resemblance to what Hegel called *die verkehrte Welt*, the inverted world. The inverted world is a representation of the "tranquil kingdom of laws" after it has been turned on its head and "Consciousness now finds itself in a topsy-turvy kingdom where fools flourish—where the north pole is the south, criminals are saints, men are women."[38] In this inverted semiotic system, the valences of all the signs have been reversed, but the

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[36] As quoted in Williams, 401; emphasis added.

[37] *SK:Ss:* 1: 209; Bovshek in *SK:Ss* 6: 264.

[38] Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit*, SUNY Series in Hegelian Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 45.

relationships between them—that is to say the relationship of polar opposition—have remained the same, which makes it difficult to tell whether anything has really changed at all.[39]

The strange congruity of certain aspects of the new regime with the one it had replaced was remarked upon by none other than Rosa Luxemburg, who is said to have acerbically stated that Bolshevism was Tsarist autocracy merely turned upside down.[40] An American journalist who was in Petersburg immediately after the October revolution records her impressions of the changes in a book chapter she titled "Topsy-Turvy Land": "I saw a working class which had been oppressed under czardom itself become the oppressor; an army that had been starved and betrayed use its freedom to starve and betray its people. I saw elected delegates to the people's councils turn into sneak thieves and looters."[41]

These sorts of foreign views of the Soviet Union become the target of parody in Krzhizhanovsky's novel *The Return of Munchausen* [Возвращение Мюнхгаузена], completed in 1928 but set some five years earlier in time:

> These European yarns of ours about the capital of the Republic of Soviets that depict it as a city turned upside down, where houses are built from the roof to the foundation, where people tread on the clouds, cross themselves with their left hand, where the first is always last (for instance, standing in lines), where the official narrative is "Pravda" ["The Truth"], because it's the opposite, and so on and so forth—one can't recall it all—it's all falsehood.[42]

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[39] The question of rotation and change is addressed in Memories of the Future in regard to the circular notion of time. Shterer writes how Leibniz, "in answer to the question of how any changing of places, any motion is possible given that matter is continuous and fills all of space, given that all places have been taken, Leibniz said that the only motion possible within such a continuous world was the rotation of spheres about their axes." (Krzhizhanovsky and Turnbull, 150.) ["отвечая на вопрос, как при непрерывности материи, заполняющей все пространство, при занятости всех мест возможна перемена мест, то есть движение, - утверждал: единственное движение, возможное внутри такого сплошного мира - это вращение сфер вкруг своих осей. Если представить, додумывает Стынский, что сплошность этого мира не из материи, а из движения (время и есть чистое движение), то его нельзя мыслить иначе, как в виде системы круговращений, стремящихся из себя в себя» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 357).

[40]B. Landers, *Empires Apart: A History of American and Russian Imperialism* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2011), 349.

[41] Rheta Childe Dorr, *Inside the Russian Revolution* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), 2.

[42] «Наши европейские россказни о столице Союза Республик, изображавшие ее как город наоборот, где дома строят от крыш к фундаменту, ходят подошвами по облакам, крестятся левой рукой, где первые всегда последние (например, в очередях), где официоз - "Правда", потому что наоборот, и т. д., и т. д. - всего не припомнишь, - все это неправда» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 186-7).

The truth, as Munchausen later discovers, is that the Soviet Union is a place far stranger than he'd imagined, "a country about which one cannot lie," [страна, о которой нельзя солгать][43] simply because the actual truth outdoes fiction. In the words of the narrator of Krzhizhanovsky's story "Seams," the country is "a little minus-world where only minus-truths make sense—only the truth that has been turned on its head" [лишь упавшая на свою вершину правда].[44]

This upturned world, *die verkehrte Welt,* is at the center of Krzhizhanovsky's short story "A Page in History" [Страница истории], written in 1922. The title comes from the stock expression of "turning over a new page in history," a favorite of the revolutionaries, and reinvigorates it through a vivid imagining of a world turned quite literally on its head. The technique of reification, a favorite of Krzhizhanovsky's, involves treating an abstraction as if it were a real concrete thing, a playful device which allows him to test the consequences of a thought experiment or to defamiliarize language and reveal underlying meanings.[45] In the case of "A Page in History," the phrase "turning over a new page in history" is thus imagined as a literal occurrence, a physical upending of the present world as it is turned over in the great book of history and relegated to the past.[46]

In the story, the main character, a university professor named Heinrich Ivanovich Nol'de (note the comical combination of German and Russian names in "Heinrich Ivanovich"), steps out of his house on a windy evening in March[47] 1917, to follow the sound of a distant voice outside: "A page in

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[43] *SK:Ss* 2: 253.

[44] *Autobiography of a Corpse,* 70. Russian: «в призрачном, минусовом мирке имеют смысл лишь минус-истины, - лишь упавшая на свою вершину правда» (*SK:Ss* 1: 407). Note the use of the word "вершина," or summit, which fits with similar descriptions of mountains falling upon their summits in the collection, as discussed below.

[45] Spektor writes that "[o]ne of Krzhizhanovsky's frequently used devices is the literal treatment of idiomatic constructions" (Spektor, 114). This is the same device that Leiderman calls the "materialization of metaphors" (Leiderman, 518, in Emerson's translation) and Rosenflanz calls "reification of the idea" ("Hunter", 106).

[46] This is but one example among many in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction that portrays the porosity of the boundary between books and their external reality. More commonly, the process is the reverse of the above, with things springing to life from the pages of books. This is seen in *The Return of Munchausen*, where Munchausen himself emerges from a woodcut illustration in the book by Raspe, and in stories like "Jacobi and Yakoby", "The Life Story of One Thought", "Therefore" and "A Certain Person."

[47] This would appear to be a reference to the February revolution, which actually occurred in March due to the

history has turned, gentlemen… we are witness to events… we will write a new page…"[48] Suddenly, the moonlit ground under his feet appears to turn into a white sheet of paper, and then this page begins to turn over, causing the ground beneath his feet to shake and buildings to collapse all around. This is not an earthquake, but instead what Krzhizhanovsky refers to in other work as "the lifequake" [жизнетрясение][49]—the revolution. Or rather, in this case, it is the sound of the realized metaphor of this particular page in history being turned over:

> Afraid to open his tightly shut lids, Nol'de could only hear things, but he heard them loud and clear: there were the houses, lifted up and turned and dropped on their roofs; the screams of people who were shaken out of their beds and their dreams, crushed by the falling stone walls; there were the bells, which struck with a brief bronze cry and then went silent, buried beneath the mounds of brick of their collapsed bell towers. There were the forests, crunching like brushwood under a giant's boots; the lakes, spilling out from their shores; the mountains, thundering with landslides, fell upon their summits.[50]

These images have a decidedly apocalyptic cast, with the language and images echoing those of the Book of Revelation, along with other prophetic passages found in the Bible. The people in the story who are "crushed by the falling stone walls" recalls the verse in the Book of Revelation where the people call out "to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne,"[51] and Ezekiel, which prophecies that "the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground."[52] In turn, the story's description of how "mountains, thundering with landslides, fell upon their summits," echoes the

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differences in the Julian and Gregorian calendars.

[48] «Страница истории переворачивается, господа … мы присутствуем при событии … мы впишем новую страницу…» (*SK:Ss* 1: 221).

[49] *SK:Ss* 2: 589.

[50] «Боясь разжать стиснутые веки, Нольде лишь слышал все, но слышал ясно: вот – дома, поднятые навзничь, падают на свои крыши; вытряхнутые из постелей и снов люди кричат, расплющиваемые спавшимися каменными стенами; коротким медным воплем ударили и стихли колокола, погребаемые под кирпичными грудами рухнувших колоколен. Вот леса хрустят, как растоптанные гигантом кучи валежника; озера – плеснулись вон из берегов; горы, прогудев обвалами, пали на свои вершины» (*SK:Ss* 1: 222).

[51] *The Bible,* Revelation 6:616*,* KJV.

[52] ibid. Ezekial 38:20.

wrath of God in the Book of Job, which is said to "removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger," and "He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots."[53] Krzhizhanovsky's story thus melds the apocalyptic discourse of the Bible with this particular revolutionary moment in history in a politically suggestive pairing.

The movement of time is also disrupted in Krzhizhanovsky's story, so that Nol'de, lying underneath the rubble, has no idea how much of it has passed. "Maybe seconds, maybe centuries, the thing that had, it seems, once been 'Nol'de' gave itself over to a strange feeling of nonbeing [безбытийность]: it was—and it wasn't. And only that."[54] Eventually, after this 'timeless time' of the apocalyptic moment has passed, a 'feeling of being' [бытие] gradually returns to Nol'de, as the world around him tries to straighten itself out again, as "the old overturned verticals attempted to right themselves and retake their places."[55] But the world that Nol'de finds himself in now has been transformed; the old professor—though he imagines it only to be a stubborn illusion and refuses to believe it—has been trapped inside a book. Nol'de, pinned on a closed page of history, has moved from the present to the past and is now a "former person" [бывший человек]—in essence becoming the *nol'*, the zero, of his last name.

The physical form of the book provides a felicitous metaphor for time, particularly in regard to the revolutionary or apocalyptic junctures in time. Unlike the clock, which provides an unbroken stream of seconds, a book is punctuated by smaller 'beginnings' and 'ends' in the form of pages, providing discrete intervals that more clearly delineate breaks in its continuity. The page break thus

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[53] ibid. Job 9:5 and 28:9.

[54] «Может быть, секунды, может быть, столетия то, что было когда-то, кажется, Нольде, отдавалось странному чувству безбытийности: было—нет. И только» (*SK:Ss* 1: 222). The confusion of seconds and centuries mirrors conflicting interpretations of the time units in the Book of Revelation, where weeks are often interpreted as referring to centuries or millennia.

[55] «Пытались старые опрокинутые вертикали распрямиться и стать на свои места» (*SK:Ss* 1: 223).

affords us an obvious *before and after*, a moment of literal turning that cleaves the flow of time. In this way, it captures the apocalyptic temporality described above, where everything is defined in relation to some transformational event, the moment when everything changes and previous notions are stood on their heads. Krzhizhanovsky's story uses this metaphor to its fullest effect, instantiating the logic of revolutionary/apocalyptic time as a turning page by treating the clichéd expression as if it were fact.

The book as a metaphorical figure for time goes beyond the mere act of the page turn, however. Krzhizhanovsky returns to the idea of time as a book in his 1929 novel *Memories of the Future,* where the protagonist's time machine is compared to a book knife: "But my durations are pages of a single book: my time-cutter was much more complex than the book knife that cuts unread pages—it could return me to pages that I hadn't understood, lying like a book mark between any two pages as I reread and refigure the reconstructed past."[56] Frank Kermode discusses time-as-book in *The Sense of an Ending,* calling it a "kind of man-centered model of world time," and linking the metaphor back to St. Augustine and tracing it through "modern critics, who wonder how it can be that a book can simultaneously be present like a picture … and yet extended in time."[57] The book can mark both the present moment (that is, the page it is open to) and also contain the entirety of its fictional world-time between the covers. In this way, the book is an object that seems to reconcile some of the contradictions in McTaggart's presentation of "A-series" time and "B-series" time. Without a reader to open and turn the pages, the book is simply B-series time: a sequence of events in which none is

[56] «Но мои длительности были листами единой книги: мой времярез был много сложнее разрезального ножа, вскрывающего непрочитанные листы,- он мог вернуть меня к непонятным страницам и лечь закладкой меж любых двух, пока я буду перечитывать да пересчитывать реконструированное прошлое» (*SK:Ss* 2: 418).

[57] Kermode, 52.

privileged. But the addition of a human consciousness creates A-series time, a sense of the story unfolding: the time of the open book.[58]

1.3 Revolution in Consciousness: The Inverted Worldview of "The Graeae"

The Bolshevik project did not merely restrict itself to a vision of changing the social and political landscape, but saw such changes as fleeting without an accompanying transformation in consciousness. What was needed was for the population to adopt a revolutionary mindset, a new way of seeing that would match this new world being built. And later, when the creation of this new world turned out to be more difficult than expected, the Soviet authorities found that this recalcitrant reality could be obscured by changing the way that the people viewed it. In fact, it might be easier to transform the way people saw the world than *actually* change the world. In our next story from *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder*, written in 1922 and titled "The Graeae," Krzhizhanovsky returns to the metaphor of the overturned world, but in this case it is not external reality that has been turned upside down, but rather the way that people *see* it.

The story's plot revolves around the Graeae, the three sisters from Greek mythology who share a single eye and a tooth among them. In the course of an argument, one of them drops their eyeball into a ravine, where it takes root in the soil and sprouts, eventually turning into a tree that bears eyeballs as fruit.[59] Later, a blind beggar happens upon the tree, and replaces his sightless eyes for the

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[58] What is also significant about the metaphor of time as book is that it implies that time would seem to be eternal and unchanging and the appearance of change is created in the mind—in other words, this sense of change imparted by the apparent flow of time is merely an illusion. Moreover, if time is a book, there is no ontological difference between the future and the past: they are in some sense both *past*, in that they have been already written down, with the end predetermined, thus able only to be read, not changed. The question of the ontological status of the future is a major unresolved question in these early works of Krzhizhanovsky, and the issue will be explored in greater depth below.

[59] An entire book can be written about Krzhizhanovsky's interest in the eyeball, especially in his interest in the eyeball as representing an entire world in miniature. In "The Beads" [Четки], the beads of the title are the eyeballs of dead metaphysicians that contain entire worlds and arranged like a rosary on a string; "The Land of Nots" [Страна нетов] details a cosmic origin story in which the entire world is pulled out of the eyeball of a deity into the realm of existence

ones plucked from the tree. This allows him to regain his vision, although now everything that he sees through his new eyes is turned upside-down: "the mountains stood on their summits, the trees stretched downward like the growths of stalactites; under his feet yawned the sky with stars strewn into the abyss,"[60] while above him was the "low hanging black surface of the earth, with homes, turned upside down with roofs below, constantly threatening to plunge into the starry abyss together with their inhabitants."[61]

The story about the blind man who could now see, albeit upside-down, reaches the authorities, who decide to forcibly implant the eyeballs growing on the Graeae-eyeball tree into the vision-impaired, who find the effects upsetting. But soon more people opt for transplants to replace their healthy eyeballs. These people with Graeae-like vision differ in their lifestyles, their world-views and their religiosity from everyone else, and tend to marry only each other, giving birth to more people with this upside-down vision:

> The new generation of the Graeae-eyed no longer showed any of the symptoms of that particular melancholy and disorientation so commonly found among people caught between two worlds: one of them hidden away in memory, the other given through the agony of their transplant; these young Graeae-eyed stride confidently among the clouds and stars, casually trampling them, but, when speaking of the ground and the puddles, they gaze upwards.[62]

In the passage above, it seems evident that Krzhizhanovsky has taken a rather innocent-seeming fable about ancient Greece and imbued it with new ideological and political significance, particularly

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(the eye is frequently depicted in Krzhizhanovsky's work as an aperture or opening that allows the passage of things from the mind to external reality). The connection between the world and the eyeball is made explicit in "The Catastrophe", where "the world, spherical and with flattened poles, and the tiny spherical crystal of the human eye are in fact one and the same." [«…сферическая, со сплюснутостью полюсов, земля и крошечный сферический хрусталик человеческого глаза -- одно и то же» (*SK:Ss* 1: 131).]

[60] «…горы стали на свои вершины, деревья потянулись, точно сталактитовая поросль, комлями вниз; под ногами зазияло небо с оброненными в бездну звездами» (*SK:Ss* 1: 158).

[61] «…низко нависший черный пласт земли, с домами, запрокинутыми кровлями вниз, неустанно грозящими рухнуть вместе с людьми в звездную бездну» (ibid).

[62] «Новое поколение грайеглазых не обнаруживало уже признаков особой тоски и растерянности, столь характерных для людей, заблудившихся меж двух миров: одним - спрятанным в памяти, другим - данным мукою операции; юные грайеглазые уверенно шагают по тучам и звездам, спокойно топча их, но, говоря о земле и лужах, глядят ввысь» (*SK:Ss* 1: 160).

in relation to the new Soviet man, *Homo Sovieticus,* whose consciousness was to be transformed by the revolution. It is this new generation of Soviet people, this story implies, who go casually trampling the stars, and look upward when speaking of puddles and the ground. In other words, the new ideology elevates material and earthly concerns, exalting them as their firmament, and treads with contempt on transcendental aspects of being.

Reading this story as a critique of the supposed shift in human consciousness that would accompany the revolution is buttressed by other passages in the story. Although the work is ostensibly set in Greece, various types of Soviet discourse creep into the narrative. For instance, a commission is formed to regulate public access to Mount Parnassus, mythical home of the Muses, with signs written in Soviet-style language: "1. Access to the summit of Parnassus from this day forth is strictly prohibited for all persons with the exception of those displaying formal certification with the seal of the Collegium of the Big Quill."[63] The passage reads quite clearly as a satire of the official artistic organizations (Proletkult, and later RAPP and the Writer's Union) that the Soviet Union began establishing immediately following the revolution in its attempts to rationalize and control creative production. Indeed, in Krzhizhanovsky's story, this same commission captures Pegasus—the winged horse often associated with poetic inspiration—and tethers it to a stake, allowing it only enough freedom to take children on pony rides.

By framing this story about Soviet authority and mentality in the myth of the Graeae, Krzhizhanovsky seems to invite a deeper skepticism toward the ideals and the communitarian principles of the socialist revolution. After all, the Graeae are three hags who have little but share it amongst themselves: one tooth for all, one eyeball for all. Despite the obvious imperative to cooperate, the Graeae squabble constantly among themselves:

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[63] «1. Доступ на вершину Парнаса всем лицам, кроме предъявивших удостоверение с печатью Коллегии Большого Пера, с сего числа безусловно воспрещен» (*SK:Ss* 1: 151).

> Often the Graeae came to blows as a result of the eye, rolling along the sharp stones as a six-armed, three-headed monstrous tangle, tearing vision from each others' fingers back and forth. If the sentry Graea fell asleep, another of them would immediately stick a hand under the sagging lid of the sleeper and steal the eye.[64]

As a result, the old women end up losing their eye, depriving them of vision altogether. The eyeball grows an eyeball tree; the authorities begin implanting these eyes into people, who are given this Graeae-like inverted vision.[65] This new way of seeing the world requires some adjustment, of course, and for some this this sense of dislocation and disorientation never truly disappears, at least for those who are caught between the world of their memory and the unfamiliar world they now find themselves in. These "two worlds" of the previous passage, that of memory and perceptual reality, manage to coexist alongside each other in a strange fashion, not only in this particular setting—where one part of the population sees things upside-down, the other part sees everything right-side-up—but similarly overlapping within the mind of a *single* individual, who is trapped between seeing things both the old way and the new. In fact, there would seem to be three different worlds represented here: the inner world of the mind—the mind of memory and the past—the world inside the eye, which sees everything turned upside down, and the 'actual' external world of the story, which still remains upright. The past world still intrudes on the present world as memory, and the break with the old way of seeing is not so neat for these transplant recipients as the authorities had hoped. It is only the future generations, who know of no other way of seeing things, that are able to stride with confidence through the new upturned world, oblivious to their own inverted sight.

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[64] «Часто Грайи дрались из-за глаза, катаясь по острым камням шестируким и трехголовым безобразным комом, вырывая друг у друга переходившее из пальцев в пальцы зрение. Если сторожившая Грайя засыпала, другая тотчас же, сунув руку под отвислое веко спящей, крала у нее глаз» (*SK:Ss* 1: 148).

[65] The eyeball is frequently associated with *миросоцерзание,* or worldview, in Krzhizhanovsky's writing. See, for instance, the story «Четки.»

1.4 Metaphysical Revolutions: "God is Dead" and "The Catastrophe"

If the previous two stories explore the theme of the *perevorot* as an upturning of physical reality and as an attempt to achieve a new sort of upside-down consciousness, then the next two stories that will be discussed here show the consequences of revolution transposed into a more transcendental realm. Both of these stories—"God is Dead" [Бог умер] and "The Catastrophe" [Катастрофа]—take as their jumping-off points the controversial assertions of two different German philosophers. In the case of "God is Dead," that philosopher is Friedrich Nietzsche, with his famous assertion regarding the death of God, while in the case of "The Catastrophe," the philosopher Immanuel Kant is invoked, in particular his skepticism regarding the ontological reality of space and time. In both cases, Krzhizhanovsky takes an abstract philosophical argument or metaphor—for instance, Nietzsche's argument that "God is dead" is meant to indicate the demise of traditional Christian morality—and makes it literal, playfully speculating on the consequences of the actual death of God *à la* Nietzsche,[66] or the banishment of space and time from reality in Kant's metaphysical world.

"God is Dead" is set in February, 2204, in a future land that resembles Western Europe, where skyscrapers shed artificial electric light over the streets and religion is practiced only by a handful of eccentrics, who are studied by psychiatrists as mental aberrations. The story opens with a direct reference to Nietzsche: "An event once prophesied by a certain widely-mocked philosopher way back in the nineteenth century came to pass: God died."[67] The problem is that no one in this atheist

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[66] Thus Krzhizhanovsky employs his favored device of literalizing the metaphor, here in Nietzsche, who used the phrase as shorthand for "the whole system of idealist values—its modes of justification and judgment, and its standards of the good, the true, and the beautiful…" (Edith W Clowes, *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness: Nietzsche in Russian Literature, 1890-1914* (DeKalb, Ill: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988), 17.)

[67] «Случилось то, что когда-то, чуть ли не в XIX столетии, было предсказано одним осмеянным философом: умер Бог» (*SK:Ss* 1: 255).

society even notices—not at first, at least. Even in heaven itself nothing seems to be any different: "God died—and nothing changed. The moments continued circling around moments. Everything was just as it had been."[68] But soon a creeping nothingness [Ничто] starts to extend black rays throughout the universe, pushing out everything in its path. Stars begin to blink out, swallowed by the spreading black hole. The death of God also deprives the world of meaning and beauty in a strange and subtle fashion: The character Victor Renee, "a famous poet," discovers that his poetry remains the same but is deprived of something essential:

> …everything that had been there was still there, and just as it had been. But out of everything came an emptiness: as if someone had yanked out the sound from the letters, the light from the rays, leaving only the dead contours of lines. Everything was just as before, but *nothing* was already there.[69]

Soon, the black rays of nothingness reach Earth, and masses of people gather to stare up at the starless sky in awestricken wonder and terror. In short order, the population turns to millenarian religious belief to explain the coming cataclysm. Krzhizhanovsky plays with this irony—that is, the revival of belief in God just as He has passed away—turning this fact into a sort of postmodern theory *avant la lettre* on the signifier as absence or displacement of the signified:

> While the object is object-ifying, [Пока предмет предметствует], the nominative function gives way to the substantivized, and the name is silent; but should the object leave the world of being [бытие], then immediately its widow [вдова], the word, appears, beating down all the doors of consciousness. […] God was no more—which is why everyone began to say, with sincere belief and reverence, that He exists.[70]

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[68] «Бог умер—и ничего не менялось. Миги кружили вкруг мигов. Все было как было» (*SK:Ss* 1: 256).

[69] «…всё было там, где было и так, как было. Но из всего -- пустота: будто кто-то, коротким рывком выдернул из букв звуки, из лучей свет, оставив у глаз одни мёртвые линейные обводы. Было всё, как и раньше, и *ничего* уже не было» (*SK:Ss* 1: 258).

[70] «Пока предмет предметствует, номинативное уступает место субстанциональному, имя его молчит: но стоит предмету уйти из бытия, как тотчас же появляется, обивая все "пороги сознания", его вдова -- имя: оно опечалено, в крепе, и просит о пособии и воспомоществованиях. Бога не было -- оттого и сказали все, искренне веруя и благоговея: есть» (*SK:Ss* 1: 263).

But the rediscovered faith of the population makes no difference: God is still dead, and so cannot hear their entreaties to rescue them.[71]

God's death causes a disruption in the order of the cosmos, causing stars to slip from their predefined trajectories[72] and then to start blinking out, one by one, until the sun itself begins to fade, and "twilight now never left the Earth; the black starless night gaped wide all around the planet, which was still led by the weakening and guttering rays of the sun around its final orbit."[73] The image is yet another that seems to borrow from the Book of Revelation, where "the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shined not for a third part of it, and the night likewise."[74] However, in "God is Dead," Krzhizhanovsky has upended the usual apocalyptic narrative: Instead of people perishing in Armageddon while God continues in His eternal existence, it is *God* who dies and the people who live on. There will be no heaven on earth to come; only nothingness, the absence of all things. The spreading black void is a vision of the universe stripped of things, an idea of pure space that contains absolutely nothing.

This fictional attempt to grasp the nature of emptiness and nothing is also a key element of our next story from this collection, "The Catastrophe," which turns to imagining *pure time*, or time without events, as a consequence of another sort of metaphysical apocalypse.

"The Catastrophe" is one of the rare Krzhizhanovsky stories to be printed during his lifetime. In this case, the work was published in 1919, the year it was written, in a minor arts weekly that folded

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[71] Krzhizhanovsky acidly remarks in one of his writer's notebooks that "If there even ever was a God, people would have long ago driven him to suicide." [Если когда и был Бог, то люди давно довели его до самоубийства] (*SK:Ss* 5: 341.)

[72] The word "революция" or revolution, was first used as a term related to the movement of heavenly bodies, and only subsequently adopted to describe political events.

[73] «…сумерки теперь не покидали землю; чёрное беззвёздное небо раззиялось вкруг планеты, всё ещё ведомой слабнущими и гаснущими лучами солнца по одинокой последней орбите мира» (*SK:Ss* 1: 263.)

[74] *The Bible,* Revelation 8:12, KJV.

shortly thereafter, ending a run of only three editions.[75] There is no known extant copy of the story in its original published form; the only version to have survived is from 1922, after Krzhizhanovsky returned to the story and revised it.[76] What form these revisions took is also unknown, though the story would likely have been too controversial to print later in the 1920s, when it was submitted to publishers as part of the collection *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder* and unceremoniously rejected.

Like the much of the rest of this story collection, "The Catastrophe" obliquely and playfully refers to the Bolshevik revolution, though the story's events ostensibly take place more than a century earlier in Germany. The story is among Krzhizhanovsky's more dense and philosophical works, though it retains a certain tongue-in-cheek tone throughout, a sort of mock academic seriousness belied by its absurd premise.

The central figure of "The Catastrophe" is a German idealist philosopher referred to, perhaps with a tinge of irony, as the "Wise Man" [Мудрец]—the link to Kant is made explicit in the author's footnote—who turns the universe upside down by interrogating conventional notions of reality. He begins with the nature of the heavenly bodies in the night sky, in his 'Theorie des Himmels' (Kants' *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven*, published in 1755), "rummaging through Sirius' white rays in a calm and businesslike manner, as if it weren't the heavens at all but the underwear drawer of your father's bureau or something."[77] After this, the Wise Man turns his attention to earth, equating "the starry sky above and the moral law within," in Kant's famous phrase—in other words, he begins applying theoretical abstractions to more earthly phenomena. At this, "Space and time

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[75] *SK:Ss* 1: 611.

[76] Ibid.

[77] «Мудрец рылся в ворохе белых сириусовых лучей, спокойно и деловито, точно это и не небо, а бельевой ящик старого отцовского комода, что ли» (*SK:Ss* 1: 125).

were filled with panic nearly all across their worldly beachhead."[78] The description of the disaster which follows—a vision of the world upended—is already familiar from Krzhizhanovsky's other stories from this post-revolutionary period:

> The fleeing churches [кирхи], grabbing hold of the tiled roofs of the small homes of philistines, turned the homes upside down, then were themselves turned upside down, jabbing their steeples into the silt of the lakes that had spilled out of their banks. […] Caught by the catastrophe in their homes as they were torn from their foundations, people went out of their minds, then ran back into their minds, grabbed some superfluous quote, a prayer in which all the words were turned upside down (such was the panic), then quickly went out of their minds again, senselessly spinning around their own selves [бессмысленно кружа по своему "я"], back and forth.[79]

This confusion even seeps into "dispassionate Reason" which "dealt with facts as ideals and began conceiving ideals as facts."[80] Gripped with hysteria, soon everything begins to flee the path of the Wise Man, who is unbothered by the rapidly emptying world left behind: He is interested in imagining to himself an idealized space purged of all things and an idealized time purged of all events, so the 'mass emigration' of all physical beings and things fits his plans exactly. Soon nothing is left but "a few books and the Wise Man's ego."[81] Among the physical things that had managed to escape destruction through fleeing "abroad"—i.e., to another dimension of reality, a parallel world where they are safe—"there was no attempt to hide the feeling of despondency that reigned in émigré circles."[82] A logic textbook which had managed to escape with only a few of its pages intact

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[78] «Пространство и время почти на всём их земном плацдарме переполнились паникой» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 125). The English 'beach head' is inadequate to 'плацдарм', a word that is part of a complex of revolutionary/Bolshevik vocabulary that Krzhizhanovsky consciously employs in the story.

[79] «Улепётывающие кирхи, цепляя за черепичные кровли маленьких филистерских домиков, опрокидывали домики, опрокидывались сами, тыча шпили в ил расплескавшихся озёр. […] Люди, захваченные катастрофой в своих сорвавшихся с фундамента домах, сходили с ума, снова вбегали в ум, хватали какую-нибудь ненужную цитату, перевёрнутую кверху словами молитву (такова уж паника), снова поспешно сходили с ума, бессмысленно кружа по своему "я" -- то взад, то вперёд» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 126).

[80] «Бесстрастный Разум … обошелся с фактами как с идеалами, а идеалы стал мыслить как факты» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 127).

[81] «…ничего кроме пары книг да Мудрецова "я"» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 131).

[82] «…в кургах эмиграции царило ничем не прикрытое уныние» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 129).

gives voice to the apocalyptic feeling of all that had survived the destruction: "the world is not to be."[83]

Along with this apocalypse, the flow of time is disrupted, and "an oppressive timelessness commenced."[84] The clocks and watches that had survived and fled into emigration wring their hands—minute and second hands, of course—and convene an emergency congress to determine whether they should continue measuring out something that no longer exists. The pendulum clocks give impassioned speeches arguing that all clocks would soon be forced to stop for the lack of time,[85] while a Geneva-made chronometer, referencing Schopenhauer, argues that time is not a physical thing and therefore cannot intervene in physical processes[86], and therefore they should keep on ticking "as if nothing had happened."[87] A heated argument ensues between the wall clocks, who side with pendulum models, and the newer pocket-watches, who argue that their movement is not subject to time; mutual accusations of backwardness and conservatism are lobbed[88] and the question is debated at length by the timepieces until the moment that a bombshell piece of news arrives "which restored all temporal and spatial rights to seconds and the inches: the Wise Man was no more."[89] The more cautious among the émigrés sense this might be a *провокация*, a provocation or

[83] «Миру не быть.» (*SK:Ss* 1: 129). This may also be translated as "Peace is not to be"—in other words, the Russian émigrés' opposition to cooperating with the Bolshevik regime, or perhaps a play on the Bolshevik sloganeering about ending Russia's involvement in the First World War.

[84] «…наступало тяжкое *безвременье*» (ibid.)

[85] «…всем часам, за отсуствием времени, предстояло остановиться» (ibid.)

[86] «…время, не будучи вещью, вещно в вещах не участвует» (*SK:Ss* 1: 129-130).

[87] «…как если б ничего не случалось» (*SK:Ss* 1: 129-130).

[88] «Посыпались обвинения в отсталости, консерватизме» (*SK:Ss* 1: 130).

[89] «…восстановившая секунды и дюймы во всех правах времени и пространство: Мудреца не стало» (*SK:Ss* 1: 130).

trick, to lure them back into their old world, and implore the rest to "refrain from time and space. Patience."[90] But the news is confirmed, and time and space once again return.[91]

The satirical implications of this story in relation to the Soviet Union are readily apparent. Vadim Perel'muter refers briefly to this story in his introduction to Krzhizhanovsky's six-volume Collected Works in an essay which he names "After the Catastrophe," by which he means after the Bolshevik revolution.[92] Krzhizhanovsky tips his hand in referring to "émigré circles" in particular; these words had particular resonance in the period 1919-22, when the story was written and reworked. The wholesale flight of people and objects in the world of the story echoes the real mass emigrations of the years of civil war.[93] And, despite the differences in philosophy, the figure of the 'Wise Man' [Мудрец] seems to have something in common with Lenin, was also bent on disrupting the world in order to recreate an idealized vision of it. In the story, order in the world is reestablished when the Wise Man dies—perhaps the fervent hope of the real-life émigré community at the time, though the socialist order, of course, managed to survive his demise.[94]

Viewing the work solely through the lens of political satire, however, would be perhaps to ignore the weighty questions that Krzhizhanovsky develops within the work, questions that loft the text

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[90] « … воздержитесь от времени и пространства. Терпение» (SK:Ss 1: 131).

[91] This happens when Time [Время] lifts up its giant lid—an allusion to Gogol's "Viy", as Perel'muter notes in the commentary to the story. The full passage is «Время медленно подымало тяжкие веки глазу, искавшему видеть самое видение. Видение было странно и страшно, но длилось недолго. Мёртвым веком снова прикрыт остекливший глаз. Теперь у нас, слава Богу, земля отдельно -- глаз отдельно» (*SK:Ss* 1: 131-2.) See the footnote above on Krzhizhanovsky and the eyeball.

[92] *SK:Ss* 1: 30.

[93] This was especially true of intellectuals, like those who departed on the so-called 'Philosophers' Ships,' steamships carrying Russia's intellectual elites into forced exile from the Soviet Union following the revolution.

[94] Lenin was, of course, still alive in 1922 when the story was revised, though his health problems, particularly after Fanny Kaplan's assassination attempt and his stroke, were well known. Krzhizhanovsky may have been enacting wishful thinking here, at least on the part of the emigres, who still imagined in 1922 that the new socialist government would be toppled, just as it had toppled the provisional government before it. (They were right, of course, that nothing is eternal—even Soviet power—but wildly incorrect on the timing; as we know, it would take another seventy years for the 'new socialist regime' to be overturned.)

into the more rarified air of philosophical discourse. As the story progresses, Krzhizhanovsky uses the familiar themes of the revolution to delve deeper into the relationship between physical things, such as the stars and planets, and the categories—that is to say, time and space—that structure or organize them in our perceptions. Are these abstract categories or part of physical reality? Are they created by the relationships between the things they contain, or do space and time exist on their own, even when devoid of things and events? Does time exist at all in the ontological sense, or is it only an experience of the perceiving mind?

Here Krzhizhanovsky wades into a long-running philosophical debate about the nature of time, one begun in antiquity and continued later in the disagreement between Newton and Leibniz: namely, whether time is a set of relationships between events—which would imply that some sort of change is necessary for the passage of time—or whether time is a sort of container, part of the underlying physical substrate of the universe, existing even without events or change. Kant was skeptical about the ontological existence of time and space separate from the mind ("Space is not objective and real," he writes in his dissertation, "instead, it is subjective and ideal, and originates from the mind's nature in accord with a stable law as a scheme, as it were, for coordinating everything sensed externally.")[95] In other words, Kant reframes the question in the context of human subjectivity, wherein time is simply an *a priori* condition of thought, a structuring of experience. At the same time, he takes issue with Leibniz's argument that space and time exist, but only in relation to that which they contain—in other words, space and time emerge as a network of relations between objects and events in the non-empty universe. Relying on a sort of mental experiment, Kant attempts to refute Leibniz's argument by stating that we can imagine empty space,

[95] As quoted in Graham Bird, *The Revolutionary Kant: A Commentary on the Critique of Pure Reason* (Chicago: Open Court, 2006), 174.

but we cannot imagine the lack or absence of space itself.[96] In other words, pure time and space *can* exist, if only because we can represent them in our minds, but we cannot imagine their absence, because they are fundamental mental categories that structure our experience of the world. In Krzhizhanovsky's story, Kant's imagining of empty space and time has dire repercussions, purging the world of things and events:

> All that remained for the Wise Man was to describe this pure space and pure time, now terribly empty, exactly as though someone had overturned them and carefully scooped or shaken out of it all things and events. So he described it.[97]

The story thus continues an omnipresent theme in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction: the power of the imagination to shape reality. As we see from the text, this is a philosophical or metaphysical stance, inspired by the author's reading of Kant. In this sense, reality—that is, the apparent reality of phenomena—is a projection of the mind, and the mind wields immense power in the construction of the apparent reality of the world.

Inevitably, this stance is also a political one. First, the primacy of the mind over matter directly contradicts the central precepts of the reigning dogma of dialectical materialism, which holds that it is external reality that determines consciousness, not the other way around. (Krzhizhanovsky disagrees—as he writes in his notebooks, "Let existence allow itself to determine consciousness, but consciousness does not consent to it."[98]) And second, because although it runs counter to Marxist-Leninist theory, it would seem to echo it in practice: The Wise Man is in thrall to an abstract idea, and realizing this dream of purity means purging everything that might stand in the way without regard to consequence.

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[96] Andrew Janiak, "Kant's Views on Space and Time", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/kant-spacetime/.

[97] «Мудрецу оставалось: описать чистое пространство и чистое время, ставшие жутко-пустыми, точно кто опрокинул их и тщательно выскоблил и вытряхнул из них все вещи и события. Он описал» (*SK:Ss* 1: 128).

[98] «Бытие пусть себе определяет сознание, но сознание не согласно» (*SK:Ss* 5: 366).

1.5 Branching Futures: Mapping Time in "The Lost Player"

Yet another exploration of the political and philosophical dimensions of the *perevorot,* the revolutionary moment of upturning, is found in "The Lost Player," the chess-themed story discussed at the start of this chapter. In this story, written in 1921, the events of the revolution are transposed not to eighteenth-century Germany, but to the chessboard, a game that held a lifelong fascination for Krzhizhanovsky. For him, the value of chess was not just as a way to pass the time—though he was an apparently gifted and original player[99]—but also for its relationship to narrative, which he, like Nabokov, found one the most intriguing aspects of the game.[100] (Later, Krzhizhanovsky would set out his theories about chess and drama in a scholarly essay, "The Dramaturgy of the Chess Board," which he wrote in 1946.)

In the case of this story, Krzhizhanovsky uses a chess match as a structuring device for the narrative. The plot is organized around a sequence of moves, provided in the text using standard chess notation: "e2—e4; e7—e5," etc. At the heart of the story lies an implicit analogy between the players and the chess pieces (the chess players in the club are referred to as 'figures' [фигуры] and figurines [фигурки]), a comparison that is made more explicit by the checkered parquet of the chess hall. "There were twenty of them … symmetrically arrayed along both sides … the soles of their feet pressed to the light and dark, dark and light squares of the parquet floor,"[101] the narrator tells us, not in reference to the chess pieces, but to the players themselves. When the story opens, Mr. Edward

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[99] *SK:Ss* 1: 613.

[100] For a discussion of Nabokov and chess, see e.g.: Janet Gezari, "Chess Problems and Narrative Time in 'Speak, Memory,'" *Biography* 10, no. 2 (1987), 151.

[101] «Их было двадцать … Симметрично рассаженные по обе стороны … подошвы их ног, прижатые к светлым и темным, темным и светлым квадратам паркета» (*SK:Ss* 1: 134).

Pembroke, a retired public figure known in the past for political intrigue, is playing against himself. As evening descends in the twilit hall, however, a formless demon creeps in as a sort of inky darkness, which commences playing white against Pembroke's black. When Pembroke moves his pawn into the path of a knight in order to trade pieces, the darkness forces his soul into the wooden body of the pawn as it is captured, and the *perevorot* is complete.

Inspiration for "The Lost Player" may well have come in part from a poem by Boris Pasternak, published in 1917 in his collection "Over the Barriers" [Поверх барьеров].[102] The poem, "Marburg", is a meditation on a love lost to poor timing, and ends with a quiet sort of rebirth in the poetic alter ego of the author. Interestingly, this rebirth occurs at the end of a chess match that he plays against the darkness: "The nights sit down to play chess / With me on the moonlit parquet floor."[103] Here, just as in Krzhizhanovsky's story, the parquet floor provides an implicit analogy to the squares of the chessboard. And, just as in Krzhizhanovsky's story, the speaker of Pasternak's poem loses his match to the darkness: "And the night is victorious."[104] However, Pasternak's story ends with a metaphorical rebirth, with the pale light of morning, while Krzhizhanovsky's work remains resolutely dark throughout.

Two years later, following the revolution, Pasternak followed "Marburg" with a rather less hopeful chess-related poem, "The Definition of Creative Art" [Определение творчества] which may have also influenced Krzhizhanovsky's story. In the poem, Pasternak mixes archaic Biblical language about the Apocalypse—"preparing for the end of the world" [к представлению света

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[102] Krzhizhanovsky was well-acquainted with Pasternak both personally and professionally, and the latter consulted him while writing his famous Russian translations of Shakespeare. (See Vadim Perel'muter, "Prozevannyi genii," in *Skazki dlia vunderkindov: povesti, rasskazy,* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1991), 3-26).

[103] «Ведь ночи играть садятся в шахматы / Со мной на лунном паркетном полу» (Boris Pasternak, "Marburg." *Slova: Serebriannyj vek,* slova.org.ru/pasternak/marburg/. Accessed 1 February, 2017.)

[104] «И ночь побеждает.»… (ibid.)

готовит]—with chess-related imagery: "the horseman above the pawn on foot"[105] [Конноборцем над пешками пешими.] In Krzhizhanovsky's story, we have a similar description of the knight that rears above Pembroke-as-pawn:

> … there, in the yellow glow of the sun that had once been the bulbs of the chandelier, stood the pale horse, its eye sockets yawning with emptiness. It bared its teeth, nostrils flaring evilly, straight mane standing on end. Only at this moment did the pawn realize the full extent of how much he'd been played.[106]

It is also entirely possible that both writers were influenced by that most famous Russian epic of power, Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman,* in which a lowly clerk is terrified by a vision of the rearing eponymous horseman, Falconet's famous statue of Peter the Great, who comes to life during an apocalyptic flood.[107] Thus the figure of Peter the Great becomes a godlike figure who presides both over the creation of a world—in this case, the city of Petersburg—and its apparent destruction. It is not surprising then, as David Bethea notes in his study of Russian literature and the apocalypse,[108] that the bronze horseman became conflated with a different mounted rider: the "pale horseman" of the apocalypse, which symbolizes death in the Bible's Book of Revelation.

This connection becomes especially visible in the first decades of the twentieth century, for instance in Belyi's *Petersburg* [Петербург]*,* written when the apocalyptic mood had reached a fever pitch.[109] "In fact, it is difficult to find a symbolist poet or prose writer who did not at some point write a piece centering around the horseman of doom (usually linked to Peter)," Bethea writes.[110]

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[105] Ibid.

[106] «… там, в жёлтом осиянии солнц, мнившихся ранее глазу лишь лампионами люстры, зияя пустотой глазниц, стоял бледный конь. Прямая грива его вздыбилась, ноздри злобно раздулись, обнажая оскал рта. Теперь только пешке-игроку стала ощутима вся глубина его *пойденности*» (*SK:Ss* 1: 138).

[107] See also the story from this collection "Kunz and Schiller" [Куниц и Шиллер], where a bronze monumental statue comes to life—in this case, that of Schiller—to haunt the main character. (*SK:Ss* 1: 247.)

[108] M. Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1989), 124.

[109] See also the 1909 novel *The Pale Horse* [Конь бледный], by Boris Savinkov.

[110] Ibid.

Thus, Krzhizhanovsky's particular wording in his description of the chess knight is laden with meaning. Krzhizhanovsky's horse is "a pale stallion"—the same word, *бледный*, used in the Russian Book of Revelation to describe the horseman of death—and it has a terrifying skeletal visage, with 'yawningly empty eye sockets' [зияя пустотой глазниц] and bares its grinning teeth [обнажая оскал рта]. And, of course, the knight appears as the instrument of death for Pembroke-as-pawn.[111]

This pale horse is not the only connection between the story and the apocalypse, however. Another eschatological aspect of the text is its peculiar treatment of time, which emphasizes a rupture in its flow, a time outside of time. In this story, the temporal flow is interrupted at the moment when Pembroke becomes pawn. He notes of the chess pieces that "[s]trangely enough, *time appeared to pass them by*. The seconds changed, but inside these seconds nothing changed at all: the white and black obelisks on their black and white tiles stood unmoving."[112] In this description, we can see Krzhizhanovsky again playing with the idea of "pure time," or time stripped of all events, that he describes in relation to Kant in his story "The Catastrophe," discussed above. In this story, there is no motion or change to mark the continuing flow of time, except for the change in Pembroke's own consciousness, which moves from a state of bewilderment to horror as he realizes how he's been played.

Yet another feature of the metaphysics of time addressed in "The Lost Player" is something that Krzhizhanovsky will return to later in other fictional works: the blurring of the distinction between

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[111] It should be noted, however, that what actually appears to end Pembroke's 'match' is not the rearing pale chess horseman at all. Instead, his match is ended by the chess clock, which has been steadily ticking during the story and returns in the final, two-word sentence of the story: "Цейтнот истекался," or "the time on his clock ran out," (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 138). Pembroke is defeated by what is known in chess as 'time trouble,' or *цейтнот* in Russian, a borrowing from the German of *Zeitnot*. The "oval chess clock with the two ticking hands" [овального, с двумя тонкими стрелками хронометра (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 136)], a round dial that measures out finite, linear time, is in fact the third player in "The Lost Player," and the one to whom Pembroke ultimately loses as he reaches the end of the allotted time—perhaps another nod to the topos of the end of time.

[112] «И странно—время двигалось будто мимо них. Секунды менялись, но в секундах ничего не менялось: белые и чёрные обелиски на белых и чёрных плитах стояли недвижно» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 137): Emphasis added.

time and space, and in particular the use of spatial metaphors to describe time. This concept had an established pedigree by the 1920s, of course—the very notion of "time travel," popularized by HG Wells' *The Time Machine,* depended implicitly on the mental leap that time might be traversed just as space can be, and European philosophers had treated space and time as fundamentally related aspects of reality for centuries. Physicists like Minkowski and Einstein had gone beyond the metaphor to unite both space and time in a continuum by the first decade of the twentieth century, and Krzhizhanovsky, who was much taken with the latest developments in physics, even attended a course in Moscow on Einstein's relativity. The treatment of the time dimension as analogous to a spatial dimension is a key part of Krzhizhanovsky's fictional speculations about the nature of time, and in "The Lost Player," we see it represented not as a single dimension—the so-called 'arrow of time'—but rather as a two-dimensional space, akin to a map. This allows for the *branching* of time. In this story, the branching or forking is directly related to Pembroke's decisions in how to move his chess pieces; in other words, Krzhizhanovsky is showing us time as a sort of decision tree. At first, the connection is made only obliquely:

> Making his opening move, he glanced through the clear rectangle of the windowpane: outside was the tracery of bare branches of a frozen garden. The pattern appeared to him to be a blueprint for an enormous fantastical city that someone had unrolled and pressed up against the dull sheen of the glass: a web of tangled intersecting alley, streets, side streets and dead ends. He wasn't on his game. His brain was troubled by a sense of foreboding, the presentiment of something that had long been itching to be discovered, an inescapable brush with some sort of prowling phantasm that had wandered in off the black-on-red side streets of the fantastical city that was traced across the window by the play of branches.[113]

But the connection of this image and the idea of choice and future outcomes is made explicit later, as Pembroke ponders his next move against the twilight:

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[113] «Делая первый ход, он глянул за прозрачный прямоугольник из стекла: иззяблый, из сплетения голых ветвей, сад. Было похоже, будто кто-то развернул и притиснул к матовым мерцаниям стекла план огромного фантастического города -- паутину спутанных и пересекшихся уличек, улиц, переулков и тупичков. Не игралось. Предчувствие чего-то давно уже ищущего быть найденным, неизбежной и близкой встречи с каким-то бродячим фантазмом, заблудившимся, быть может, здесь, в этих чёрных по красному уличках несуществующего города, вычерченного игрою заоконных ветвей, тревожило мозг» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 134-5).

> At this moment the thoughts of the chess player were tracing the familiar lines of the black byways of the city outside the window, drawing down along their zigzag runs, passing for a moment at each of their crossings. "If I accept this exchange of pawns, it won't clear the board" […] After staring down dozens of dead ends, an idea navigated through hundreds of intersections and found itself standing at an entrance.[114]

What Krzhizhanovsky is describing in this passage is Pembroke's attempts to see into the future, to weigh action against consequence and make the best choice. His endeavor to do this presupposes that the future is not singular, but full of branching worlds where nothing is preordained—in other words, the future consists only diverging possibilities; of probabilities, not certainties.

This conception of time in fiction is most often credited to Jorge Luis Borges, whose 1941 story "Garden of Forking Paths" [El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan] is a more extensive development of much the same idea. In this, Borges is often regarded as prefiguring theoretical developments in quantum mechanics, in particular the "many worlds" interpretation, which was first proposed as a solution to the problem of quantum indeterminacy by Hugh Everett in 1957. Krzhizhanovsky wrote "The Lost Player" in 1921, two decades before Borges' "Garden of Forking Paths," but we can see it contains similar spatialized metaphors of time. The branches outside the window become a map of a fantastical city, full of intersecting streets and dead ends, cracks and crevices in the cityscape, and this in turn becomes a metaphor for the branching and crisscrossing paths of the future.

This particular metaphor, however, raises important questions about free will and the inevitability of the future. In the previous metaphor of time as a book, it is clear that the experience of time passing and the apparent unresolvedness of the end is only an illusion—the end of the book is just as real as the beginning, and both follow no other path than the one laid out in their pages. In the metaphor of the branching streets of this "fantastical city", however, there seems to be

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[114] «Тогда-то мысль игрока и пошла знакомыми ему чёрными уличками заоконного города, влекомая их зигзагным бегом, останавливаемая у их скрещений. -- Если принять размен пешками, поле не обнажится […] Пройдя сотни перекрестков, глянув в десяток тупичков, мысль стала у входа» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 135-6).

an additional degree of freedom: time is seen not as a one-dimensional linear progression, as a narrative, but as a two-dimensional map of a territory that the character navigates through.[115]

Of course, this still does not resolve the question of free will; it is equally possible that the path one takes along this map is also preordained in some sense. It may well be that the branching structure represented in this story reflects an epistemological problem, not an ontological one. In other words, Pembroke's attempt to peer down these different paths or branches is a reflection of our lack of knowledge about the future, not an indication that the future itself is ontologically indeterminate.

To attempt to answer this question, we will now turn to another of Krzhizhanovsky's stories from this collection, "The Story of a Prophet," which more directly addresses the problem of the future.

1.6 A Philosopher's Death: Noncompossible Worlds and "The Story of a Prophet"

"The Story of a Prophet" [История пророка], which Krzhizhanovsky wrote along with most of the previously discussed works in 1922, an extraordinarily productive year for him, exemplifies many of the themes that bind together the stories of *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder* into an artistic whole. Like the other stories in the collection, "The Story of a Prophet" playfully combines fantastical and mythological elements (the "fairy tale" part of the title of the collection) with the author's abiding interest in difficult philosophical conundrums, the sort of questions that might indeed interest the "wunderkinds" of the second half of the collection's title.[116] Indeed, Krzhizhanovsky's synthesis of

[115] This two-dimensional spatial description of time forms the crux of Shterer's theoretical work for his time machine in Krzhizhanovsky's 1929 novel *Memories of the Future*.

[116] Krzhizhanovsky was highly attuned to the potentials of titles, and wrote an entire scholarly work, *The Poetics of Titles*, on just this subject. As discussed above, this particular title combines the foreign and the Russian, the rational and the

the impossible and the rational that is characteristic of all his fiction has even deeper roots in this story, as we shall see below.

Any retelling of the plot of "The Story of a Prophet" risks falling into something that might resemble the second-hand recitation of a joke. The story's tone and structure has much in common with the Russian genre of the *anekdot*, effectively marshalling a mix of absurdity and pathos leavened with dry humor. The story opens with two amorous donkeys, each one famous in his or her own way: Buridan's Ass, a hypothetical creation that comes to us by way of a conundrum involving rationality and free will, named for the fourteenth-century philosopher Jean Buridan; and Balaam's Donkey, the mythical and visionary talking animal from the Hebrew Bible. Opposites, of course, attract. Buridan's Ass mates with Balaam's Donkey, thus begetting a forlorn little donkey who combines in himself both the religious-charismatic visions of his dame and the rational-philosophical inclinations of his sire.[117] This same sire, Buridan's Ass, later dies as a result of the conundrum that is named for him: Unable to make a rationally-motivated choice between two piles of hay lying equidistant from him, he starves to death—as the narrator deadpans, "he died a philosopher's death"[118] Balaam's Ass, the donkey's dame, perishes in a way that also fits her calling as a seer: stoned to death by a mob, "the usual end of all prophets."[119]

As for the little donkey himself, his situation in life proves a difficult one; the world seems hostile to the strange hybrid offspring of a philosopher father and a prophetess mother. Thinking that he might make a living as a fortune-teller or seer, the little donkey stands on a street corner and

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impossible, in a more subtle form of his frequent use of paradox in titling a work (see, for instance, *Memories of the Future, Autobiography of a Corpse,* etc.).

[117] This synthesis of rational and charismatic ideas of time and the future receives further development in *Memories of the Future.*

[118] «…он умер смертью философа, не переоценив ни одного из двух мотивов равной силы» (*SK:Ss* 1: 104).

[119] «…избиение камнями – естественный конец всех пророков» (*SK:Ss* 1: 104).

shouts out his visions of the future for passersby. His conflicted nature makes him a rather poor prognosticator, however:

> The philosophical dualism [раздвоенность] passed down from his father, a congenital tendency toward all manner of metaphysical "either/ors," ["или … или"[120]] sapped any zeal from the hapless little Donkey's prophecies, nipping the experiment in the bud. Thus, one fine day, nearly rapturous with hunger (all those who've experienced it will understand), the Donkey, taking up position at an intersection, bellowed out in a hoarse voice: "Either there'll be a bit of rain, or else snow. Either it will be, or it won't." And then, after a pause: "Anything can happen!"[121]

This passage in the story, particularly its description of the paralysis induced by two different choices—as Krzhizhanovsky calls it, the either/or ["или … или"]—immediately brings to mind the passage from the letter the author wrote to Anna Bovshek quoted at the very beginning of this chapter, in which he describes his inability to decide whether or not to cast his lot in with the new government: "[I am] trying to decide the "either/or" that so torments me, and I don't know, in truth, who I am…" In part, it is Krzhizhanovsky's inability to know the future that seems to paralyze him, even as he notes that inaction itself could be fatal—just as Buridan's Ass starves to death when faced with two equally distant piles of hay. In fact, the hunger that is described in the above passage (as the narrator writes of the ecstatic mental state caused by extreme hunger, "those who've experienced it will understand") is something that Krzhizhanovsky himself knew well at the time of the story's writing; Bovshek writes that although everyone was thin in those years, Krzhizhanovsky was so skeletal, with a bluish pallor, that he appeared to be quite ill.[122] Given also Krzhizhanovsky's own intellectual heritage—equal parts rational European enlightenment and stories of the fantastic, Biblical and otherwise—one might see how Krzhizhanovsky might see a

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[120] A likely reference, once again, to Kierkegaard's work, *Either – Or*.

[121] «…перешедшая от отца философская раздвоенность мысли, наследственная склонность ко всякого рода метафизическим «или – или» расщепила у корня и обессилила пафос первых же пророческих опытов несчастного Ослика. Так, однажды, в припадке особого голодного экстаза (кто испытал, поймет), Осел, став у скрещения путей, проревел срывающимся голосом: – Либо дождик, либо снег. Либо будет, либо нет! – И, помедлив: – Всяко бывает!» (*SK:Ss* 1: 105).

[122] *SK:Ss* 6: 205-6.

kindred spirit to himself in this hungry donkey, a forlorn creature who is mocked or ignored by the public. There's some gentle irony here in this connection; Krzhizhanovsky may see his work as prophetic (as indeed it turned out to be) but it was also ineffective, seemingly plagued by ambiguity and existential doubt. (The theme of the Cassandra-like seer who is misunderstood and mocked in his day, a person who finds himself living in the wrong time, is one that Krzhizhanovsky will return to again, most notably in *Memories of the Future*.)

In the donkey's case, his audience has no interest in hearing contradictory predictions about the future ("either it will be or it won't … Anything can happen!") and, having grown tired of him, the crowd does what it always does with prophets: it begins pelting him with stones. To escape, the donkey escapes into the future, at least to wait things out until the present catches up to it.[123] And when the future *does* come, the people realize that, against all odds, the prophetic donkey had been right all along: he'd managed to foretell the upending of the world and the moral and ontological rupture of the coming revolution:

> And then along came strange and terrible days, a time when everything fell at the same time—rain and snow both, along with everything else imaginable, when things got so whirled around that even our benighted comprehension came to an end. The wheel of the zodiac was knocked off its emerald axle. Orbits and centuries became tangled up.
>
> And when the cyclone spun itself out, those few people who were led through it didn't even know whether they were dead or alive. Maybe yes. But maybe…
>
> And when once again it became possible to tell snow from rain, good from evil, truth from lies, blood from water, somebody asked thoughtfully, "Where's that funny little donkey, you remember, the one who foretold everything that came to pass? We were unfair to him: let's go search him out and heap him with laurels."[124]

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[123] The impending future [грядущее] is the only place of freedom for this seer who is ahead of his time; as the narrator tells us, "Asses aren't allowed into the present. And the past has long since been divvied up, to the last second of the heap, by historians, conservatives, and in general those beings whose thoughts run backwards like a crayfish's crawl." [«В настоящее ослов не пускают. Прошедшее давно все, до последней завалящей секунды, расхватано историками, консерваторами, вообще существами с мышлениями ракообразного хода. Ослику только и оставалось: грядущее» (*SK:Ss* 1: 105).] This theme of an escape into the future, a place of freedom from the oppressive present moment, is one that will return in *Memories of the Future*.

[124] «Настали странно-страшные дни, когда одновременно и шел, и не шел – и дождик, и снег, и все, что угодно, когда завихрилось такое, что нищете «пониманий» пришел конец. Колесо зодиака соскочило с изумрудной оси. Перепутались орбиты и столетия. И когда циклон откружил, – те немногие, что были проведены сквозь него, так и не знали: мертвы ли они или живы? Может быть: да. А может быть…И когда снова можно было отличить снег от дождя, добро от зла, правду от лжи, кровь от воды, кто-то, раздумчивый, спросил: «А где же тот смешной Ослик, что, помните, предрек нам свершившееся? Мы были несправедливы к нему: пойдем отыщем его и

When the donkey is found, however, it turns out that he's dead, crushed to death by the stones of an ancient church or temple destroyed in the cataclysm. The words Krzhizhanovsky uses to describe the collapsed structure are 'old temple' [ветхий храм], which conjures up the Biblical allusions of the old testament [*ветхий* завет] and the first (Solomon's) temple [первый *храм*] in Jerusalem, which of course was also leveled. It seems that the donkey has escaped being stoned to death only to be crushed to death by stones.[125] The language of the above passage echoes Biblical language and cadences, particularly with its repetitions of sentences that begin with the conjunction 'and': "And when … And when…", etc. Characteristic of Krzhizhanovsky's apocalyptic temporality, the passage of time becomes confused at the moment of overturning; in the above passage, it even becomes entangled with a term denoting space—"Orbits and centuries became tangled up"—and is associated with cyclical circular motion: the whirlwind [вихр] and cyclone [циклон], the thrown axle of the zodiac [колесо зодиака], the orbits [орбиты], all of them revolutionary.[126]

Thus once again we can see the double-voicedness of Krzhizhanovsky's fiction: on one level, the story functions as a metaphorical description of the upheavals of revolution and civil war; on another level, it grapples with longstanding philosophical and metaphysical issues of free will and ontological uncertainty.

венчаем лаврами» (*SK:Ss* 1: 106).

[125] Note the similarity here with other stories above (in particular "A Page in History") where people are crushed to death by the falling stone walls of buildings—itself an image that draws on the Biblical apocalypse.

[126] Using 'whirlwind' [вихрь] as a metaphor for the revolution was not Krzhizhanovsky's innovation, though it fits well with his complex of images that indicate a process spinning out of control. The image appears in Blok's "Intelligentsia and Revolution" [Интеллигенция и революция] ("Революция, как грозовой вихрь, как снежный буран, всегда несет новое и неожиданное"), as well as the title of a 1927 book about the revolution by Aleksei Remizov ("Whirlwind Russia"), and a 1924 socialist ballet ("The Red Whirlwind", [Красный вихрь], as well as polemical writing by Trotsky and Lenin. In his writer's notebooks, Krzhizhanovsky takes the metaphor and reifies it in his characteristic way, writing that "the whirlwind of the revolution blew off my hat: let's consider that to be genuflection." [«Вихрь революции сшиб с меня шляпу: будем считать это за поклон» (*SK:Ss* 5: 366.)] This idea from his notebook is later reworked in his 'lost' story, "Unfree Lane" [Невольный переулок], but where he suggests that a hat lost to the whirlwind, though it may appear to be genuflection, is not the same thing as bowing down to the revolution (*SK:Ss* 6: 10).

This philosophical frame of the story is signaled from the very beginning, starting with Krzhizhanovsky's description of Buridan's Ass standing paralyzed between two equal choices, which the author follows immediately with a quote from Leibniz, complete with citation ("Opera philosophica. Ausg. Erdman" … "pg. 507"), regarding the impossibility of such an impasse: "the universe cannot be divided by a plane into two perfectly equal parts that mentally bisect the ass, as there exist a great many things, both within the ass and outside it, even though we don't notice them, that will nonetheless cause the ass to prefer one side over the other."[127] Here, Krzhizhanovsky seems to take delight in quoting this exalted philosophical rhetoric in regard to an ass, even though he apparently disagrees with Leibniz's conclusion: *his* Buridan's Ass does, in fact, starve to death, if only because he has been inculcated with the same over-intellectualized philosophical reasoning which had imagined him into being in the first place.

This quote from Leibniz at the start of the story underscores the importance of the German philosopher to the complex of ideas that Krzhizhanovsky plays with over the next few pages. Refuting the logic of Buridan's Ass is critical to Leibniz's ideas about the universe, as the conundrum poses a challenge to one of his core assertions—to whit, that everything is motivated by the "principle of sufficient reason," that is to say, everything flows from an earlier cause, and that nothing occurs without a reason in God's plan. But what happens if two different outcomes—two different piles of hay, say—each can lay equal claim to sufficient reason? One possible recourse would seem to be in randomness: one may simply choose one outcome over the other, by coin toss if need be. But randomness violates the integrity of God's plan, introducing a world outside the

[127] «…но, – пишет, наконец, Готфрид Лейбниц (Opera philosophica. Ausg. Erdman.), – вселенная не может же быть рассечена на две совершенно равные части плоскостью, мысленно проведенной через середину осла, так как существует множество вещей, как в осле, так и вне осла, хотя мы их и не замечаем, которые заставят-таки осла склониться скорее в одну сторону, чем в другую» (стр. 507)» (*SK:Ss* 1: 103-4).

deity's control, and is therefore disallowed in Leibniz's theory. So instead, the philosopher rejects the very premises of the argument, asserting that such a state of perfect equipoise is impossible in the universe.

Related to this argument is Leibniz's notion of possible worlds, which has become important more recently as a theoretical foundation for both modal logic and possible worlds theory. Leibniz introduces this concept as a way to reconcile a greater issue, the related problems of theodicy and determinism. The general contours of the argument are already familiar, and need little in the way of introduction here. Briefly, Christian thinkers have long attempted to reconcile an omniscient and omnipotent God with the existence of evil (the problem of theodicy) and with the concept of an individual's free will (the problem of determinism), which is deemed necessary for the existence of sin, and thus virtue. Leibniz approaches this problem by positing that both conditions—an all-knowing God; an individual's free will—may in fact coexist. To show this, he draws a distinction between the possibility and necessity of an action.[128] In other words, we are free to make choices among various possibilities, but God, being all-knowing, already sees exactly what choices we will make.

As a solution to the problem, Leibniz's thinking seems somewhat unsatisfactory: If only one outcome to a choice is possible, i.e., the choice that God knows we will make, does that constitute a real choice? Leibniz's solution requires that we accept the logic of counterfactuals—that is, only one outcome exists in actuality, but there many other possible choices that *could have* been made, but were not. These counterfactual worlds—or, to return to the earlier discussion of Hans Vaihinger, the worlds of *'as if'*—must somehow then exist, at least as possibilities, even if they are not actualized in

[128] Michael V Griffin, *Leibniz, God and Necessity* (Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 58.

reality. Leibniz's solution to this halfway, twilight ontology is to assert these counterfactual realities *do* exist, but only in the mind of God, who does not see fit to bring them into being.[129]

This raises further questions: why then does God choose this particular outcome among all possible outcomes to realize in the word? Leibniz has, in some sense, already boxed himself in by the parameters of his argument, which is constrained by the condition that God be both omnipotent and good, so the only satisfactory answer becomes the one which Leibniz famously states—namely, that our world is the best of all possible worlds.[130]

By uncovering this network of philosophical allusions, we can see that what at first appears to be the donkey's epistemological uncertainty about the future—"either it will be or it won't … Anything can happen!"—is in fact a reflection of deeper indeterminacies. Anything can happen, and anything (or everything) *does* happen: both snow and rain and everything all at once. In other words, the statement reflects not the donkey's uncertainty about the future, but about the indeterminacy contained within time itself—or, at the very least, the indeterminacy of one particular juncture in time, the temporal nexus of the revolution, a gap in time that spawns worlds.

Krzhizhanovsky's fictional representation of the problem of Buridan's Ass thus rejects both the original argument and Leibniz's refutation. The paradox as originally posed is that one must choose between two equally good options, but that one cannot choose, lacking any basis for doing so. Leibniz asserts, in essence, that the choice has already been made by God, who selected the best among all possible worlds. Krzhizhanovsky upends the question: why must one choose at all? Is it possible for two contradictory things—good and evil, or truth and lies, to use the example from the text above—to somehow coexist simultaneously?

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[129] Ibid., 131.

[130] Krzhizhanovsky subtly mocks Leibniz's notion as a sort of Panglossian view of the world in the story "Seams" [Швы]; clearly, the world seemed a more cruel and inhospitable place to him, just as it is to the hapless donkey of "The Story of a Prophet."

This is, in fact, the only possibility that is explicitly proscribed by classical philosophy. The foundational precepts of the method include both the "law of non-contradiction," that is, that two contradictory statements cannot be true at the same time, and the related "law of the excluded middle," i.e., that everything must either be or not be.[131] But while these bedrock principles of philosophy seem clear enough when applied to the present moment in time, they run into difficulties when applied to statements about the future—a logical snag known as the "problem of future contingency."

In regard to future events, classical philosophers struggled to reconcile the binary true-false distinction; Aristotle discussed the problem in his seminal argument about a hypothetical sea battle which may or may not occur tomorrow. Thus, the statement "there will be a sea battle tomorrow," in Aristotle's view, is neither true nor false until such sea battle has occurred. For these future events, Aristotle introduces the concept of contingency, which stipulates that while both outcomes are possible, neither outcome is necessary.[132] In other words, the future is distinct from the past and present in that it exists in a logical or truth category all of its own, one characterized by indeterminacy or contingency. What is *not* allowed, however, is that the sea battle both happen and not happen tomorrow. As Aristotle plainly states, "A sea-fight must either take place tomorrow or not, but it is not necessary that it should take place tomorrow, neither is it necessary that it should not take place, yet it is necessary that it either should or should not take place tomorrow."[133] And yet

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[131] R. M Dancy, *Sense and Contradiction: A Study in Aristotle*, Synthese Historical Library (Dordrecht, Holland, Boston: D. Reidel Pub. Co, 1975), 8.

[132] Richard Gaskin, *The Sea Battle and the Master Argument: Aristotle and Diodorus Cronus on the Metaphysics of the Future*, Quellen Und Studien Zur Philosophie (New York: W. de Gruyter, 1995), 12.

[133] Ibid.

it seems evident that Krzhizhanovsky is attempting to violate just this dictum in his story, creating a fictional reality where mutually exclusive outcomes in fact do occur simultaneously.[134]

In this, he may have been taking aim at Leibniz, whose conception of possible worlds allowed that they may contain contradictions *among* themselves, since only one world is actualized by God, but they may not contain contradictions *within* themselves, as even God himself is unable to violate the laws of logic. (To quote an example of one such inconsistency from an article on possible world theory: "It rained. It did not rain."[135]) To use Leibniz's term, a world must be "compossible," or internally consistent with itself. The philosopher Gilles Deleuze has proposed a modification to Leibniz's stipulation of "compossibility" in situations like fictional worlds, which may in fact contain logical paradoxes or contradictions, coining the term "noncompossible worlds." He uses the term specifically in reference to Borges' "Garden of Forking Paths," a story that solves the problem of future contingents by positing that all branchings are not only possible but actual, at least in some world-line, even though they may be mutually contradictory.[136] It would thus seem that "Story of a Prophet" would fall under this category of 'noncompossible world,'—or perhaps more simply put,

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[134] In this sense, Krzhizhanovsky is anticipating the challenges to classical logic that would arise in quantum physics a decade and a half after the story was written. By this I mean the notion that indeterminacy in predicting certain outcomes is not a result of epistemological limitations, but that indeterminacy is woven directly into the fabric of reality—a discovery that initially prompted widespread disbelief and resistance (as in Einstein's much-quoted assertion that "God does not play dice.") This new paradigm led to the idea that something might exist in the quantum realm in a "superposition" of states, thus violating the classical law of non-contradiction. Notably, one way to resolve this fuzziness in reality was put forth by Hugh Everett in 1958, who posited that each possibility is realized not in the same time and space, but as branching realities in a much larger multiverse, a theory that has since become enshrined in physics as the "many worlds interpretation" of quantum mechanics, discussed above in the section on "The Lost Player" and its relation to Borges' "Garden of Forking Paths." This "many worlds interpretation" in turn has influenced possible worlds theory in literary criticism, which sees numerous sites of potential overlap between itself and this quantum view of physical reality. For a further discussion of the promise and limitation of this cross-pollination, see: Marie-Laure Ryan, "From Parallel Universes to Possible Worlds: Ontological Pluralism in Physics, Narratology, and Narrative," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 4 (2006): 633–74.

[135] Raine Koskimaa, "Possible Worlds in Literary Theory," Review of *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory,* by Ruth Ronen, *Poetics Today* 20, no. 1 (1999), 134.

[136] Daniel Smith and John Protevi, "Gilles Deleuze", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/deleuze/. Accessed 1 February 2017.

an *impossible* world. In this sense, fiction necessarily departs from reality. It is only in a story like Krzhizhanovsky's that anything and everything might be realized, if only in the mind of its reader.

1.7 Conclusion: Revolution as Cataclysm

The half-dozen works discussed above contain not a single shared character or common setting, and the stories may be read apart from the larger collection, *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder,* to which they belong.[137] Indeed, given the wide range of literary styles, time periods and cultural references which these stories contain, one could easily imagine that they might have been authored by different people, were it not for the overarching artistic and intellectual sensibility that binds them. In this sense, all of these stories are paradoxically alike in their uniqueness, equally strange and estranged from the everyday world. They provide a record of the encounter of a fertile imagination and a restless mind with a new reality that was making less and less room for both.

But despite the apparent heterogeneity of these stories, they are also clearly meant to be read together as part of the larger collection. According to Bovshek, Krzhizhanovsky envisioned these stories from the very beginning as belonging to a cycle of philosophical miniatures.[138] The themes of this larger work emerge only when all the stories are read together, something like a charcoal rubbing in which a ghostly image emerges only through repeated iterations. In this case, the ghostly image is the specter of the Russian revolution and civil war, a trauma that Krzhizhanovsky returns to repeatedly in various guises in the collection. Each time, the depiction of this juncture in time is

[137] To date, there has been only one Russian edition of Krzhizhanovsky's work that has kept the collection intact as the author intended, and this edition (the first volume of Krzhizhanovsky's collected works) is now out of print. There has been no English translation of the collection as a whole, and only a handful of stories have been excerpted and translated separately.

[138] *SK:Ss* 6: 217.

linked with imagery invoking disaster, disruption and the apocalypse. In this fashion, Krzhizhanovsky's stories of this period capture the overwhelming feeling of disorientation in his characters, the sense of loss (and being lost) that occurs when the world shifts and the formerly fixed stars of the firmament—of morality, ethics, politics and society—are rearranged into new and bewildering constellations.

The enormity of these various dislocations, as Krzhizhanovsky seems to say with these stories, cannot be grasped in the usual quotidian terms of literary realism, and thus he resorts to broad metaphors, fantastic events and heightened figural language to convey the revolutionary moment. Displacement and defamiliarization of this event into fantastical worlds force the reader to apprehend its essential nature—a device that fits the author's Kantian leanings and his determination to peer into the essence of things hidden behind their varied phenomenological manifestations. These stories ask us to reflect not so much on the revolution as a political or historical event, but as a deeper disruption, one with wide-reaching implications for reality and our perception and understanding of its underlying nature.

Krzhizhanovsky thus encourages the reader to see the revolution as an event that stands out from the ordinary flow of time and is not subject to conventional physical laws. Although Krzhizhanovsky's fictional revolutions may take various forms—for instance, the turning of an enormous page, or the transplanting of eyeballs in ancient Greece, or the death of God in the twenty-third century, or the cosmic disaster following Kant's conceiving of empty space and time, or the transformation of a chess master into a pawn, etc.—they are all structured around a singular sort of disaster, often painted in overtly apocalyptic terms. This disaster seems often to fit Hegel's idea of the 'topsy-turvy world' (*die verkehrte Welt*), in which everything has been turned upside down and all valences swapped: good becomes bad, the rich become the poor, and so forth. This overturning or '*perevorot'* is associated with a strange sort of time, an apocalyptic or revolutionary temporal

interregnum that divides the normal flow of time. Such a division provides clear before-and-after relations within the plot, and emphasizes *kairos* over *chronos*, McTaggart's A-series over B-series representations of time. This depiction is one that sees chaos and indeterminacy in the revolutionary moment, a crack or singularity that is simultaneously a site of disruption and potential.

This pivotal revolutionary moment will continue to be important in Krzhizhanovsky's writing later in the 1920s, but these works will shift away from the disruptive *Kairos*-type time in favor of *Chronos,* the reassertion of linear, progressive time that occurs later in the decade. It is to this changing conception of time that we turn to in our following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

Hero of the Hour: Charismatic Time and The Odyssey of the Odd

2.1 Introduction: Revolutionary Romantics

> "I took the watch-face in hand; the hands did not move: they'd forgotten to wind it. I turned the gold crown of the watch a few times, and from inside it came the tick-tocking of time once again."[1]

The above words, from Krzhizhanovsky's 1924 novella *Odyssey of the Odd,*[2] capture a sense of this period immediately following the revolution and civil war: Ordinary time was indeed returning. The revolutionary *Kairos* inscribed in Krzhizhanovsky's *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder*—its "timeless time" [безвременное время], its slippages and dilations—was now giving way to *Chronos,* the rational time of the clock, the calendar, and the factory whistle. Apocalyptic rhetoric about the end of days was itself coming to an end. In the meantime, the Bolshevik revolutionaries found

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[1] «Я взял циферблат в руки; стрелки не двигались: забыли завести. Я повернул несколько раз золотую головку часов, и внутри опять зацокало время» (*SK:Ss* 1: 343).

[2] This work has not yet been translated into English. For the translation of the Russian title, *Странствующее "странно",* I have chosen to use the English *Odyssey of the Odd* felicitously suggested by Karen Rosenflanz in her study of Krzhizhanovsky, *Hunter of Themes,* since it captures the spirit of the story and the repeating first syllable of the two title words in the Russian. (The Russian title comes from a translation of the first two lines of the following quote from *Hamlet*, Act 1 Scene 5, which give Krzhizhanovsky's novella its epigraph: … *this is unbelievably strange. / And therefore as a stranger give it welcome. / There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*) For a thoughtful analysis of the influence of Shakespeare on Krzhizhanovsky, see Caryl Emerson, "Krzhizhanovsky as a Reader of Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 577.

themselves in possession of a country that still had to be run—a country that, according to Stalin, had fallen as much as a century behind Western capitalist societies in its development.

In this task, *Chronos* could be seen as much as an enemy as ally.[3] From its inception, the Soviet Union had a complex and fraught relationship toward the ordinary flow of time. It was simply no good that everyone was progressing into the future at the same rate; the Soviet state, in Lenin's memorable 1917 formulation, had to "catch up and surpass" [догнать и перегнать] the West, which meant that its primary duty, in keeping with the Party's general ethos of asserting the power of human will over nature, was to find a way to become the master of time and accelerate its own rate of change. In a sense, the Soviet Union had to become one vast time machine, attempting to leap ahead of its ever-advancing rivals in a race to the future.

To achieve this vision, the Soviet Union adopted a comprehensive and far-reaching program centered on asserting dominance and control over time. Similar to the Soviet erasure and replacement of toponyms (e.g., the names of streets and squares, or even the names of major cities, such as Petrograd/Leningrad), many of these changes were as much symbolic as they were practical. In 1918, Soviet authorities moved the country ahead by thirteen days when it adopted the Gregorian calendar by decree—a move that had the practical effect of synchronizing Russia's calendar with the Western world and at the same time had profound emblematic significance for a country that desired above all to catch up to the West in its development.

Other changes to the calendar had less obvious symbolic import, but were nevertheless profoundly disruptive to traditional timekeeping, including attempts at the end of the 1920s to implement rotating five-day work weeks for the purposes of continuous production during the first Five-Year Plan. In practice, these five-day work weeks, designated by color or Roman numeral in

[3] Hanson, 152-3.

official calendars, meant that many citizens' days off did not coincide with Sunday—the traditional day of rest ostensibly having no meaning in an officially atheistic society—nor, in fact, did their day of rest coincide with their colleagues' or their spouses' or children's, which had the effect of eroding traditional family and community ties.[4] Also during the first Five-Year Plan—which was itself a massive country-wide undertaking aimed at leaping into the future—Soviet authorities instituted the so-called "decree time" [декретное время], moving clocks ahead by one hour to be closer to Europe.[5] Authorities' attempts to control time did not end, of course, with symbolic gestures such as turning the clocks ahead, but manifested themselves in ways that reached deep into the lives of ordinary citizens, including new and often coercive ways to organize both labor and leisure according to "rationalized" timetables, as will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

But despite these outward expressions of temporal regimentation, Soviet time-management practices during the early to mid-1920s could still be more accurately characterized as haphazard and irrational—more rhetorical than functional, almost entirely dependent on zeal and enthusiasm and motivated by charismatic individuals instead of broader systems. They remained, in a word, revolutionary. Unlike in capitalist society, where humans toiled as slaves to the clock, Soviet citizens would make clocks serve *them*. No longer alienated from their labor, they would not be compelled but rather propelled by enthusiasm and the joy of the common task. In fact, there would no longer be any need for the artificial divide of work and leisure time necessary in capitalist societies. In the earliest years of the USSR, the scientific study of workplace efficiency, or "Taylorism", was still mostly seen as a tool of the exploitative classes, the capitalists who saw time only as money and were

[4] Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 38.

[5] As a matter of fact, this decree reinstated the time differences that had been established with Greenwich Mean Time soon after the revolution, though the USSR had in fact dropped back an hour during the retrenchment period of NEP before setting the clocks forward *again* during Stalin's industrialization drive, appropriately enough.

eager to wring every possible minute-cent out of their workers. If the revolutionary subject was free of the yoke of capital, it should also be free of the yoke of capitalist timekeeping.

These first years after the revolution were still a time of great excitement in avant-garde cultural circles, and new ideas about conquering time found their rhetorical expressions in the arts as well. The new artistic medium of film, especially in the montage techniques of revolutionary filmmakers like Eisenstein, who used jump cuts to move the audience abruptly through both time and space, showed that these categories were no impediment for the human mind. Even in a real, physical sense, great distances could be transcended by the latest technologies—in fact, the first trans-Atlantic airplane flight had been undertaken in 1919, mere years before—so why couldn't time be overcome in some similar fashion? After all, in 1905 a patent clerk in Switzerland published a scientific theory according to which clocks might run faster or slower depending on inertial frames of reference.

But even if the *physical* flow of time remained unchanging, the human relationship to time could still be fundamentally reordered. This transformation in consciousness became the main focus of Soviet temporal rhetoric starting in the early 1920s. This rhetoric underscored its decisive break with the past, emphasizing instead the goal of overcoming the ordinary rate of change in order to usher in the future ahead of its time—a seemingly paradoxical stance that was achievable only through revolutionary fervor. In his study *Time and Revolution,* Stephen Hanson describes this temporal orientation as *charismatic time,* a term he adapts from Max Weber's concept of charismatic authority. "The charismatic view of time might best be understood as the view that ordinary time is transcended for those accepting charismatic domination,"[6] he writes, noting the affinity between this concept of time and Marxist ideology. But if Marx believed that it was through human labor that the

[6] Hanson, 12.

movement of time could be transcended,[7] Lenin and his fellow Party members believed that it was only through a sort of permanent revolution that the erosive forces of time could be overcome. As Hanson states, "Proletarian revolutionary action, then, ends up playing the role of the charismatic force of conquering time that labor alone cannot."[8] In other words, the new social and political order of permanent revolution was rewriting the rules of what was possible. With the correct application of revolutionary zeal, the ordinary rules of how much could be done in how much time could be rewritten. The Bolsheviks' struggle was not just against the forces of counterrevolution, but against the limits of time itself—that is, against the only thing standing between them and the bright communist future that surely awaited.

In this chapter that follows, I focus on Krzhizhanovsky's fictional portrayal of this struggle between man and time in his novella *Odyssey of the Odd*. I begin with a brief discussion of the temporal structure of the novella's frame tale, followed by a more detailed analysis of various intertextual linkages, including the work's allusions to the works of Jonathan Swift and Lewis Carroll. Following this section, I look at sources of inspiration from inside Krzhizhanovsky's contemporary Soviet Union, including Bogdanov's speculative research into slowing the physical effects of time on the body and Platon Kerzhentsev's Time League. Finally, I discuss the larger implications of a key scene in the novella where the hero, shrunk to microscopic dimensions, quite literally engages in battle against the invisible minuscule carriers of the force of time, the so-called "temporal bacilli," whom he tries to control by putting a leash on them, "like house-trained pugs or lapdogs."[9] This attempt to control time does not end well for the hero, who discovers that these carriers of time still hold an unassailable power over him: They may simply boycott him, leaving him

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[7] Ibid, p. 40.

[8] Ibid, p. 42.

[9] «…и стал водить ее всюду за собой, как водят комнатных мопсов или болонок» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 320).

locked in a state of suspended animation, like the "timeless time" from *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder*. But unlike the earlier stories of *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder*, this breakdown in time is caused not by some outside cataclysmic disruption of reality, striking with all the inexorable and impersonal force of a natural disaster, but rather by an active antagonism between humans and time personified. The human has brought about this disastrous state of affairs through believing he might control time or be exempted from its laws. In this way, Krzhizhanovsky's novella, a satirical tale of a man foolish enough to wage a battle against time itself, literalizes Soviet temporal rhetoric and its attempts at charismatic time domination, exposing this approach as misguided, destructive—and ultimately futile.

2.2 A Journey of Seventy Feet: Compressions in Space and Time

Following on the heels of *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder,* the story collection discussed in the previous chapter, Krzhizhanovsky turned to drafting his first major work, the novella *Odyssey of the Odd* [Странствующее "странно"], which he completed in 1924. Unlike *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder,* however, he made no documented attempts to find a publisher for the work.[10] Reading the novella, it's not hard to see why. Krzhizhanovsky takes the time-honored figure of the 'small man' [маленький человек] in canonical Russian literature and places him in a Soviet context of diminishment; unlike his predecessors, the small man is acutely aware of his status, expressly dubbing himself a "diminished man" [умаленный человек.][11] This is not merely a figure of speech, however—in keeping with the author's characteristic device of literalizing the metaphor, *Odyssey of*

[10] See Perelmuter's commentary: *SK:Ss* 1: 587.

[11] For the affinity of the Russian trope of the "small man" and Krzhizhanovsky's "diminished man", see N. L. Leiderman, "The Intellectual Worlds of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1, 2012), 507.

the Odd is the story of a man who has actually been diminished to minuscule proportions by means of shrinking potions. This use of scalar contrasts and paradoxes, especially on the side of diminishment, is one of Krzhizhanovsky's signature devices. As he writes in his notebooks: "The fusion of biology and mathematics, the combination of microorganisms and the vanishingly small—that's my logical element."[12] In his microscopic form, the intrepid hero of the novella sets off on various adventures in the exotic *terrae incognitae* he discovers in his immediate domestic surroundings, now defamiliarized.[13]

At first glance, *Odyssey of the Odd* conforms to many genre conventions of the adventure tale, a genre popular in Russia in the decades before the revolution. But the narrative also contains elements of parable, as the journey it describes is not merely a physical one, but a moral one as well. The novella is told from the point of view of the unnamed first-person narrator, a young man who visits the storyteller in his apartment before departing on his own journey to points unknown. He refers to the storyteller throughout as "teacher" (учитель), asking him to offer his wisdom. Forming the bulk of the novel, the embedded tale told to him by the teacher is a story of hubris and ambition, which he offers as a cautionary tale to his young acolyte. Some forty years earlier, the teacher relates, he visited his *own* then-teacher for moral guidance, and instead was given three small glass bottles containing a yellow, blue and red tincture, each of which, taken in the proper sequence, would shrink him successively smaller.[14] He goes on to relate to the narrator his experiences after drinking

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[12] «Сочетание биологии с математикой, смесь из микроорганизмов и бесконечно-малых—вот моя логическая стихия» (*SK:Ss* 5: 405).

[13] Such a conceit may seem rather stale to modern readers—after all, a whole host of Hollywood productions have worked over the same (ever diminishing) territory since—but when Krzhizhanovsky wrote the novella nearly a hundred years ago, no one had seen *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids;* indeed, his depiction of the wild jungle of his own carpet still feels strangely defamiliarized and fresh to this day to this reader.

[14] This story is, in a sense, the mirror image of Krzhizhanovsky's more famous short story "Quadraturin", written in 1926, where a mysterious liquid in a glass bottle expands a room. But in fact, the effect is essentially the same: The ordinary bedroom becomes a vast wilderness in which the protagonist loses himself.

the tinctures, depicting them as a series of trials that provided him with a moral education, albeit only belatedly.

Thus the story becomes a sort of bildungsroman in picaresque miniature, told in three main parts, that charts a seemingly paradoxical progression: as the hero's size diminishes, his power and charismatic authority increases, as does his ability to use this power to immoral ends. This is vividly illustrated in the Teacher's youthful interactions with different groups of "natives" in his voyage through his and his lover's apartments: in his first adventure, he is the passive victim of the minuscule furry-pawed *zlydni* [злыдни, sing. злыдень] a malevolent creature from Slavic folklore; in the second, he wars with the even-smaller temporal bacilli [бациллы времени]; and in the third, he becomes the charismatic leader of the rebellion of the red blood cells that fells his rival, whose bloodstream he has infiltrated. Perel'muter notes that each of these three adventures involves qualitatively different sorts of journeys, calling them the "three voyages of the "New Gulliver"—in space, in time, and in the being or essence [в существе] (the "inside") of human life."[15] For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the author's treatment of time in the novella, especially in his depictions of the hero's attempts to shape and control its flow.

The story's preoccupation with the movement of *Chronos* is telegraphed from the very first lines of the novella: "The clock face says six. Your train is at nine?" the teacher asks. "At nine thirty, teacher," the narrator answers.[16] This information immediately sets up a source of subtle tension in the story: the teacher has a limited time, only three hours, in which to relate the tale of his moral education in full to his listener.

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[15] «Это, если угодно, три путешествия "Нового Гулливера"— в пространстве, во времени и в существе ("внутри") человеческой жизни» (*SK:Ss* 1: 634).

[16] « - На циферблате шесть. Ваш поезд в девять? - В девять тридцать, учитель» (*SK:Ss* 1: 279). Note the occurrence of multiples of threes, which is echoed in the folkloric tripartite structuring of the novella. Interestingly, we are told explicitly that the teacher's story begins at exactly six thirty, and that his journey into the microscopic world inside his story also begins at exactly six thirty, setting up a sort of equivalence between the levels of the narrative.

This listener is, of course, the novella's narrator, but it should be noted that he is curiously flat as a character or filtering consciousness, remaining effectively transparent to the story within. Thus the framing device does not serve to direct our attention to the narrator or narrative act, but seems to exist for the sole purpose of both *offsetting* and *setting off* the teacher's story in time. First, this temporal *offset* means that the outer level of the story can reflect on the teacher's youthful adventures forty years previous through the lens of the present time—that is, circa 1924, the year Krzhizhanovsky wrote the story and the year that Petrograd was renamed to Leningrad, an event mentioned in the outer frame story and quoted at the start of this chapter. The use of the frame also serves to temporally *set off* the story, that is, to delineate its borders in time. From the beginning, we know the teacher's story exists not in the "timeless time" of impersonal narration, but in the bounded fictional time of its actual telling to the youthful listener, who must hurry to make his train in three hours. The listener is unperturbed, however, telling the teacher that "a story about a journey stretching only a distance of seventy feet, I think, could not take up much time."[17] The teacher objects: "You're sorely mistaken. Though if I can only avoid bumping into details, I might yet make it in time. What's the time now?"[18] A half hour has passed since the beginning of the story, which means that only three hours are left for the teacher's embedded tale.

This focus on narrative time and time of narration seems quite careful and deliberate, and of course echoes the way that the novella plays with the theme of shrinking in space. The teacher deliberately draws attention to the temporal compression of his story: "Time rolled quickly onward, and the hour hand, stuck out of its carriage, smacked against the days with the same speed that

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[17] «Рассказ о путешествии с маршрутом длиной в семьдесят футов, думаю, не отнимет много времени» (*SK:Ss* 1: 281). The story's conceit reflects Krzhizhanovsky's interest in the "confined expanse," or the large in the small, a way to find degrees of freedom inside restriction and confinement. (For more on constriction and the void, see Toporov's essay on 'minus-space reprinted in *SK:Ss* 6: 354-497).

[18] « Не скажите. Хотя, если мне только удастся разминуться с деталями, может быть, я и успею. Который сейчас?» (*SK:Ss* 1: 281).

Munchhausen's cutlass, in very same situation, smacked against the mile-markers. First I gave my beloved all my free time, and when free time was not enough, I began to steal time for her from my workdays."[19] The teacher spends six months trapped inside the glass walls of the old professor's alcohol thermometer, where he nearly drinks himself to death from the pain of captivity, but this span of time is summarized in a few brief minutes of narration in the retelling.[20] Permeating the narrative is a sense of accelerating time between the time of the actual events, forty years in the past, and the current time, characterized by the hurrying of the minute hand: "The minutes crawl by on the clock face too quickly, my friend, for me to allow myself a painstaking blow-by-blow account of the wanderings that commenced with the dawn of the following day," he tells his listener.[21] Just as the narrator has been shrunk in space to smaller than the head of a pin, so too must his account be greatly compressed in time—an entire perilous journey of many months shrunk to fit the span of only three hours.

Ultimately, however, the teacher is unable to finish his tale in time, breaking it off abruptly in mid-sentence on the novella's final page even as the pace is accelerating: "'I quickened my step. And not a half hour had passed before…'"[22] And here, the narrator tells us, the teacher abruptly falls silent. The listener presses him to continue: "Teacher, I'm listening. Not a half hour had passed, you were saying, before…"[23] But here the teacher laughs and deftly turns the listener's attention to their

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[19] «Время быстро катило вперед, и часовая стрелка, высунувшись из его кибитки, задевала о дни с той же быстротой, с какой шпага Мюнхгаузена стучала, при тех же обстоятельствах, о верстовые столбы. Сначала я отдавал любимой женщине все досуги; потом досугов не хватило - я стал красть для нее время у рабочих дней» (*SK:Ss* 1: 315).

[20] For a more detailed discussion of the relationship of narration time and story time, see Gerard Genette's discussion of narrative speed: Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1988), 33-37.

[21] «Минуты слишком быстро ползут по циферблату, мой друг, чтобы я мог позволить себе дробное и копотливое, день за днем, описание моих странствий, начатых с зарею следующего дня» (*SK:Ss* 1: 287).

[22] «Я ускорил шаг. И не прошло и получаса, как…» (*SK:Ss* 1: 343).

[23] « -Учитель, я слушаю. Не прошло и получаса, вы говорите, как…» (Ibid.)

current temporal frame instead: "Not a half hour will pass before… your train will leave the station. And, I'm afraid, already without you aboard. Look at the clock face: five minutes past nine. It's time. Goodbye, my son!"[24] The teacher's final journey, the one undertaken with the most powerful potion—the *red* tincture, which is capable of shrinking the entire globe to the size of a child's inflatable ball if applied across its surface—breaks off—as so often with Krzhizhanovsky's work—just as it is beginning, and so the final chapter of the teacher's story, as indeed the final outcome of the wider Soviet experiment itself, would for the listener remain unknown.[25]

2.3 Drink Me: Adventures in the Land of the Small

Krzizhanovsky's playful use of shrinking potions in little glass bottles brings to mind another author and work that may have influenced *Odyssey of the Odd:* Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, whose heroine may only enter Wonderland by drinking a shrinking potion from a small glass bottle to reduce her body to the necessary size.[26] Just like Alice, who encounters the King and Queen of Hearts along with other playing cards, Krzhizhanovsky's hero similarly encounters the King of Hearts, a playing card, on his journey. The parable that the King of Hearts tells about his amputated heart, as discussed in the previous chapter, would seem to be a uniquely Russian twist of

[24] « -Не пройдет и получаса, как... ваш поезд отойдет. И, чего доброго, без вас. Взгляните на циферблат: пять минут десятого. Пора. Прощайте, мой сын!» (Ibid.)

[25] The connection between the red tincture, which is capable of dramatically shrinking the globe (making the human in control of the red tincture enormous by comparison) has clear parallels to Soviet rhetoric about spatial domination, and seems to parody the regime's inclinations toward various forms of giganticism.

[26] Nabokov published his translation of Lewis Carroll's novel in 1923, just the year before Krzhizhanovsky wrote *Odyssey of the Odd,* and it's possible that he may have read this Russian version (though his English was, by all appearances, quite good).

the political satire of the Carroll's *Queen* of Hearts, though Krzhizhanovsky substitutes amputation for decapitation, Russian heart for English head.[27]

Reading Lewis Carroll, the anglophile Krzhizhanovsky may have felt a strong sense of kinship with the English author, despite their wildly different backgrounds and cultures—both authors were fascinated with chess and incorporating it into their works,[28] both delighted in manipulations of space and physical size in their works, both blended absurdity and paradox with mathematical logic, and in the broadest sense, both authors excelled at delving into profound metaphysical questions of meaning and existence through playfully constructed and fantastic works of fiction.[29]

More importantly for the present discussion, the human relationship to *Chronos* is addressed in similar ways in Krzhizhanovsky's *Odyssey of the Odd* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Alice's story famously begins when she follows a white rabbit who rushes by, fixated on his pocket watch and afraid of being late; the teacher's voyage in time in *Odyssey of the Odd* begins when he realizes that his lover is also fixated on her watch, and "only rarely lets this metallic, softly ticking creature out of her sight, often seeking her appointed minutes and allotted times at the sharp ends of this disc-shaped creature's moving arrows."[30] In order to keep tabs on his lover, the teacher shrinks himself and passes through a small hole he has made in the face of her watch, thus beginning the journey he calls his "wanderings in the country of the clock-face" [блужданий по циферблатной стране], a phrasing that echoes the Russian title of Carroll's work, *Adventures of Alice*

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[27] Interestingly, in *Through the Looking Glass*, the White Queen mentions that she can remember the future, which might have served as inspiration for Krzhizhanovsky's own 'sequel' of sorts to this book, *Memories of the Future*.

[28] Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* is played out on the chessboard, just as other stories of Krzhizhanovsky's, such as "The Lost Player"—itself a story about shrinking—are also set on the chessboard.

[29] For more on Lewis Carroll's sizable influence on Russian writers of the early 20th C, especially the Futurists, see Nikolai Firtich, "Worldbackwards: Lewis Carroll, Aleksei Kruchenykh and Russian Alogism," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 48, no. 4 (2004): 593–606.

[30] «…редко когда расстается с этим вот металлическим, тихо тикающим существом и часто ищет своих условленных минут и сроков у остриев шевеляющихся стрелок дискообразного существа…» (*SK:Ss:* 1: 317)

[or sometimes *Anya*] *in the Country of Wonders* [Приключения Алисы в стране чудес]. Here he meets the "aborigines of the country of the clock-face" [аборигенов циферблатной страны]—tiny beings inhabiting the clock who convey the force of time to the outside world. Seemingly akin to elementary particles like neutrinos, these beings are, in the words of the teacher, "completely transparent, streaming beings that quivered past and through me, like water through a filter,"[31] and he dubs them "bacilli of time," due to their deleterious effects on the human body.

In both works, time is imagined as a living being, one that must be treated with respect to stay in its good graces. In *Alice in Wonderland,* the Mad Hatter has also gotten on the wrong side of time—which is, as the Hatter points out, not an *it* but a *he,* an actual living being with actual feelings—and time has retaliated by freezing the Hatter and all of his tea party in an eternal six p.m. teatime. The idea of frozen time is one that causes much consternation for poor Alice, who cannot understand how the party refreshments never seem to run out. In Krzhizhanovsky's *Odyssey of the Odd,* the teacher manages to provoke the ire of the capricious "temporal bacilli," who take revenge upon him by similarly freezing him out of time:

> [The bacilli] decided to boycott me, and for some time I was left without any time. No words may convey, even in the most hazy or jumbled fashion, the feeling of distemporalization [обезвремененности] I then experienced—you may have read how a young Jacobi accidentally collided mind-first smack against the eight bookish signs of *Ewigkeit* ["Eternity," *author's note*] and experienced a certain something that pulled him into a deep swoon and a long stupor that took hold of him once consciousness was restored. I'll say this: I withstood the blow not of the sign, but what it signified, coming up against not the word, but the essence.[32]

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[31] «…совершенно прозрачные, струящиеся существа, которые продергивались мимо и сквозь меня, как вода сквозь фильтр.» (*SK:Ss:* 1: 318) Interestingly, in appearance (though not in size), these temporal bacilli are almost identical to the "temporal switch" that Max Shterer dons on his head to travel through time in *Memories of the Future:* both are glasslike and taper to a nearly invisible point at one end. Both these forms seem to echo the form of one hemisphere of an hourglass, an object that becomes important in *Odyssey of the Odd,* as shall be seen later in this chapter.

[32] «…решили бойкотировать меня, и на некоторое время я остался без времени. Мне не сыскать слов, чтобы хотя мутно и путано передать испытанное мною тогда чувство обезвремененности, - вы, вероятно, читали о том, как отрок Якоби, случайно ударившись мыслью о восемь книжных значков *Ewigkeit*, испытал нечто, приведшее его к глубокому обмороку и длительной прострации, охватившей вернувшееся вспять сознание. Скажу одно: мне пришлось вынести удар не символа, а того, что им означено, войти не в слово, а в суть» (*SK:Ss* 1: 321).

The passage above is a further development of the idea that so fascinated Krzhizhanovsky, one that indeed might have been inspired by Lewis Carroll's playful scene of the Mad Hatter's eternal six p.m. tea party: the paradoxical notion of "timeless time," or what the narrator of "The Catastrophe" [Катастрофа] calls "безвременье," or a state of timelessness, here equated with *Ewigkeit*, eternity.

Krzhizhanovsky's use of a miniature kingdom to defamiliarize and satirize his contemporary society owed much, of course, to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, which Krzhizhanovsky counted as one of his major influences. The author's 'Swiftiana,' as Vadim Perel'muter calls it, can be found throughout his oeuvre, including such stories as "The Itty-Bitties" ["Чуть-чути"], from the beginning of his career in 1922, about a microscopic king and his subjects; to "My Match With the King of the Giants" ["Моя партия с королем великанов"] and "Gulliver Looks for Work" ["Гулливер ищет работу"] later in around 1933, as well as working on the famous 1935 Soviet remake, "The New Gulliver", for which he was never credited.[33] Krzhizhanovsky explicitly references Swift at the beginning of *Odyssey of the Odd*, explaining the path by which one might become "big among the small, giants among the Lilliputians"[34]:

> We are people who feel deeply the cramped confines of our planetary living quarters [жилпланетных площадей], and desire the bigger world here, within this world of the small. But there's only one path to the greater, and that is through the smaller; it is only through diminishment we may reach expansiveness. Gulliver, who began his journeys in Lilliputia, was obliged to end them in the land of giants.[35]

This theme of the "large in the small" also sets up Krzhizhanovsky to use another of Swift's preferred genres, the mock-heroic or mock-epic, here to satirize charismatic domination of time and

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[33] *SK:Ss 1:15*.

[34] «большими среди меньших, великанами среди лилипутов» (*SK:Ss* 1:282).

[35] «Мы - люди, почувствовавшие всю тесноту жилпланетных площадей, захотевшие здесь, в малом мире, мира большего. Но в большее лишь один путь - через меньшее; в возвеличенье - сквозь умаление. Гулливер, начавший странствия с Лилипутии, принужден был закончить их в стране Великанов» (Ibid.).

space.[36] Instead of traveling to exotic and dangerous lands, the hero of *Odyssey of the Odd* journeys a mere "seventy and one-half feet," as he tells us across the cramped domestic space of his familiar apartment and that of his lover, though the journey is indeed arduous due to his greatly diminished stature.[37] In this estrangement of familiar spaces, as well as the story's satire of the hero's journey, the *Odyssey of the Odd* is likely to have been influenced by Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (1794), as noted by Perel'muter in his commentary.[38] The work is a parody of the adventure story related by a man confined to his bedchamber, a space he describes as if it were an exotic land, though notably no shrinking is involved in his journey. In the case of Krzhizhanovsky's work, the bedchamber is his future lover's, and in a scene that is notable in the author's work for its erotic potential, he uses his tiny size to make his way into the young woman's bed unnoticed.[39] To his disgust, however, the hero finds himself caught in the bed during an energetic session of lovemaking between the young woman and her elderly professor husband, an earth- (or at least mattress-) shaking event that he calls "apocalyptic," a "cataclysm" and a "catastrophe" which nearly costs him his life.

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[36] For instance, Swift's "Battle of the Books". It seems, logical enough, that the theme of miniaturization lends itself to the mock epic, as in Fielding's *Tom Thumb*.

[37] In Krzhizhanovsky's notebooks, he refers to this paradox as being "far away from the nearby" [«На далеком расстоянии от недалекого» (*SK:Ss* 5: 336). This idea is developed further in Krzhizhanovsky's *Materials for the Biography of Gorgis Katafalaki* [*Материалы к биографии Горгиса Катафалаки*], in which the titular character sets out to walk all the streets in London—first on one side, and then returning on the other side of the street. When someone invites him for a drink in a pub a few steps and across the way, he sadly informs the person that the other side of the street was still *hundreds of miles and months away*. This theme of the large inside the small, what I will call the "confined expanse" applies to much of Krzhizhanovsky's work, whether that confined expanse is in space or time (as in the narrow crack of the present moment, which contains everything). In this repeated theme, one might sense a desire to discover freedom inside confinement, strictures, authoritarian society (somewhat akin to what would in the later Soviet period be termed "internal migration.")

[38] *SK:Ss* 1:635. Unremarked on here by Perel'muter is the interesting fact that Maistre wrote a great deal of work set in Russia and indeed even lived in Russia, where he was popular for his "miniature portraits" (including one of Pushkin's mother), and it's likely that Krzhizhanovsky was acquainted with his work for this reason.

[39] The erotic potentials of *Gulliver's Travels* have not escaped notice. In fact, a Russian author claimed in 2005 to have discovered the "original" "unexpurgated" erotic version written by Swift, though she only provided the Russian translation and was unable to produce the English-language "original."

Here we might immediately note that these are the same apocalyptic terms earlier associated in Krzhizhanovsky's artistic lexicon with the events of the revolution and civil war, as discussed in the analysis of stories as "The Catastrophe" and others in the previous chapter. In fact, just as in these earlier revolutionary-themed works from *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder*, Krzhizhanovsky includes a gap or aporia at a critical juncture in the narration—in this case, the hero is thrown to the floor and loses consciousness for an undetermined period. The near-fatal shaking of the bed is compared to the force of a terrifying earthquake, similar to Krzhizhanovsky's previous portrayals of the revolution as "lifequake" [жизнетрясение], an image that is literalized in the stories of *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder* as a destructive natural disaster and/or physical overturning (*perevorot*) of reality. But the tone in *Odyssey of the Odd,* unlike these previous stories, is unmistakably mock-epic, a mixing of high and low, small and large. Thus, this sordid sex act on a bouncing mattress, defamiliarized and hyperbolized through the tiny hero's diminished point of view, is the object of a grandiose comparison to the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755:

> Here I recalled Kant's treatise on the Lisbon earthquake, as well as the remarkable reflections of Arouet Voltaire on the very same topic. Gradually the syllogism led me further afield than the inch-narrow confines of my horizon, and after sloughing off the lingering residue of bitterness and egoism, I began to think of the recent catastrophe on the mattress that had nearly claimed me as a victim, considering it *sub specie aeternitatis* [—from the vantage of eternity [author's note]], as it were. I reflected on the fact that Aristotle himself said that society is a "large person". His point is granted; but consequently this means that I, as a small person who found himself quite inopportunely caught between two undeniably "big people," had wound up in the same position that the individual, the microhuman, was fated to occupy in relation to society—that is to say, the macrohuman. Yes, that day nearly made an anarchist of me, my friend.[40]

[40] «Мне вспомнился трактат Канта о лиссабонском землетрясении, а также примечательные размышления Аруэ Вольтера на ту же тему. Понемногу силлогизмы выводили меня за пределы узкого, вершкового горизонта, и я, смыв с себя желчь и эгоистическую накипь, стал представлять себе недавнюю катастрофу на матраце, жертвой которой я чуть не сделался, так сказать sub specie aeternitatis [С точки зрения вечности (лат.).—author's note]. Еще Аристотель сказал, медитировал я, что общество - это "большой человек". Допустим; но тогда, значит, я, попавший весьма некстати меж двух для меня, маленького человечка, несомненно "больших людей", очутился в том положении, в котором личности, микрочеловеку, суждено пребывать по отношению к обществу, то есть макрочеловеку. Да, в тот день я чуть не сделался анархистом, мой друг» (*SK:Ss* 1: 300-301).

But the juxtaposition of high and low, large and small, in the above passage is not deployed merely for comic effect. Instead, the scalar syllogism or analogy that it sets up—in logic terms, *hero : couple :: individual : society*—is Krzhizhanovsky's key to the work, the authorial "baring of the device" [обнажение приема]. His small man is caught between different enormous bodies—in this case, coming together for sexual congress instead of revolution and civil war—and is nearly crushed by them, an experience which almost convinces him to become an anarchist. In other words, the author is using this passage to flag his intentions for the novella as a whole—not merely tinkering with scale for mock-heroic comedy, but using shifts in scale to duplicate in miniature a set of broader relations that he subsequently satirizes. The intent is clear: we are to read this episode from *Odyssey of the Odd* as a parable about the relationship of the individual to the state, the body to the body politic.

2.4 A Cure for Time: Biological Clocks and Bolshevik Bloodshed

In keeping with this emphasis on the body, the biological aspects of time—specifically, its destructive effects on the body—are emphasized over other temporal manifestations in *Odyssey of the Odd*. Time here is seen not so much a universal and unchanging structure of reality itself, as in the old Newtonian model of time and space, but instead as a mutable force that infects the physical world with creeping entropy and decay, often in doses that vary in size from person to person. These doses are carried by the temporal bacilli, who swarm around their victims and cause them to lead lives of dissolution and exhaustion:

> After infiltrating the human body, the bacilli of time put their stinging barbs to work, and the victim, thus injected with the toxin of duration, inevitably fell ill with Time. The living people whom the swarms of Seconds fell upon, invisibly stinging them like botflies thronging over a sweating horse, lived a herky-jerky life, shredded into seconds, slapdash and hard-driven.[41]

[41] «Пробравшись в человека, бациллы времени пускали в дело свои жала: и жертва, в которую они ввели токсин длительностей, неизбежно заболевала Временем. Те из живых, на которых опадали рои Секунд, невидимо

Living life quickly means dying quickly as well. As Hegel writes, "from the perspective of finite beings, time represents a destructive force causing the death and decay of all present existence."[42] And if time is a destructive force, then one cannot simply speed up its passage without consequence; there must instead be a way to overcome its attendant forces of entropy and decay while still forging ahead into the future.[43] To address this problem, Krzhizhanovsky turns to a disease model for time—a view that sees it not as an inevitable physical feature of the universe, but as an infection. Thus the human subject to time is a "victim" [жертва] who "falls ill with Time" [заболевает Временем], a sickness carried by these temporal microorganisms.

If the invisible destructive force of time is seen not as a natural process but as disease, then presumably its ravages could—and indeed *should*—be reversed. Luckily, medical science was discovering new ways to ameliorate or even reverse the course of other sicknesses. In Krzhizhanovsky's era, great strides had been made in eradicating diseases that had once been thought incurable. Effective plague, cholera and anthrax vaccines were developed by Louis Pasteur at the turn of the twentieth century, rendering these scourges of the past far less threatening. By the 1920s, the so-called "germ theory of disease" had at last become accepted fact, and common diseases like tuberculosis were poised to be largely eliminated from the general population through vaccines like the bacilli Calmette-Guérin (BCG), developed three years before Krzhizhanovsky

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искусывающие их, как оводы, кружащие над потной лошадью, - жили раздерганной, разорванной на секунды жизнью, суетливо и загнанно» (*SK:Ss* 1: 319).

[42] As quoted in Hanson, 28.

[43] Entropy was a much-discussed topic in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, perhaps inspired by the popularity of the "heat death" theory of the universe's demise. Among Krzhizhanovsky's Russian-language speculative writer peers, Zamyatin wrote an essay about entropy, "On Literature, Revolution and Entropy" and his characters in *We* speculate on the relationship of entropy and revolution, though Zamyatin's understanding of the concept seems to be more speculative and less than purely scientific.

drafted his novella. Why not, then, consider this "germ theory of time?" If diseases could be cured through vaccination, then humankind might well overcome the ravages of time in a similar manner.[44]

This "techno-optimist" point of view is shared, at least initially, by the teacher in *Odyssey of the Odd,* though the actual solution to the problem eludes him: "Oh yes, my friend," he tells his listener, "some years later, working in my own laboratory, I toiled over this project, attempting similar to what Charcot did with his anti-plague serum: to provide afflicted humanity a vaccine against time. The solution didn't yield itself to me; does that mean that it won't also yield itself to others?"[45] The answer is no, at least for Krzhizhanovsky, who appears instead to be caricaturing this idea of the lone genius toiling in his laboratory in an attempt to overturn the laws of time and achieve immortality. The image today seems mildly absurd at the least, but during the era in which Krzhizhanovsky lived and wrote, such a possibility, if one was extrapolate from the breakneck pace of social and technological change of the previous few decades, may have perhaps seemed imminent.

This idea of defeating *Chronos* and eventual death (that is, achieving immortality not in spirit, but in body, right here on earth) permeated Russian art and philosophy in the years preceding and following the revolution. In large part this was due to the influence of the heterodox philosopher Nikolai Fedorov, who promoted this notion of earthly immortality and resurrection of the dead to his adherents and admirers—among them Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Vladimir Solov'ev, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, who would go on to become the father of the Soviet space program—before his own mortality intervened in 1935. Some of these same admirers later collected

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[44] For a more detailed treatment of the Bolshevik interest in defeating mortality, see Irene Masing-Delic, *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature.* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[45] «О да, мой друг, уже несколько лет спустя, работая в своей лаборатории, я положил много труда, стараясь, подобно Шарко, изготовившему свою противочумную сыворотку, дать страждущему человечеству прививку от времени. Мне проблема не далась; значит ли это, что она не дастся и другим?» (*SK:Ss* 1:319-320).

his writings into a single omnibus volume, *The Philosophy of the Common Task* [Философия общего дела], which was published in 1906 and reissued in 1913. The titular 'common task' of humanity outlined in this work was to "reverse the natural flow of life toward death."[46] In the future, humanity would become a sort of demiurge, exercising power over natural forces like time and biological decay through the application of science and technological progress. Not all progress was positive, however: Fedorov, a social conservative, was profoundly skeptical of modernity, and felt that "the nineteenth-century ideal of progress simply meant acceleration toward death."[47] Humanity needed to break the shackles of time completely, not merely speed up its ruinous effects. This notion resonated with a new generation of avant-garde artists and poets, including such luminaries as Vladimir Mayakovsky and the self-proclaimed "King of Time" Velemir Khlebnikov. The latter believed that "Time and death would be overcome. The 'ticking timepiece of Humanity' would run down, but man would be liberated from the ravages of time … Life beyond time would be life eternal."[48]

In addition to influencing Russian poets and other creative artists in the first decades of the twentieth century, Fedorov's ideas about immortality held sway over various loose communities of thinkers under the umbrella of "Russian cosmism." Among them was a group calling itself the biocosmists, a short-lived movement that was inspired by Fedorov's ideas about overcoming death but rejected the religious aspects of his teachings.[49] This group, which also published the journal *Immortality*, achieved some notoriety for their outlandish behavior and zealous utopianism in the years 1920-22, when they were one of the best-known splinters of the cosmist school.[50] This

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[46] George M. Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 49.

[47] Ibid., 89.

[48] Williams, 387.

[49] Young, 198.

[50] Ibid., 199.

visibility was no doubt in part due to the group's explicitly secular orientation, which rejected Fedorov's religious and quasi-mystical leanings in favor of a cult of science instead.

Other cosmists found common cause with the revolution and new Bolshevik state as well, rising through the ranks of Proletkult—an organization and movement also influenced by Fedorov's ideas—and taking positions within the government. The 'God-builders' [богостроители][51] included such illustrious revolutionaries as Maxim Gorky and the first People's Commissar for Education Anatolii Lunacharskii, along with the blood-transfusion pioneer, science fiction writer and Bolshevik Aleksandr Bogdanov and Leonid Krasin,[52] who negotiated the end of Britain's blockade of Soviet ports on behalf of the fledgling government.[53] Not incidentally, Krasin was also involved with the effort to preserve Lenin's body after his death in 1924, which was intimately related to the cosmists' belief in the imminent physical resurrection of the dead through science.[54] Krasin himself died in 1926 following a blood transfusion performed by fellow scientific cosmist Bogdanov, who would go on to accidentally kill himself in the same manner two years later.

In his commentary to the "red blood cell rebellion" passage of *Odyssey of the Odd,* Perel'muter notes Krzhizhanovsky's interest in Bogdanov's work.[55] The scientist, science-fiction writer and revolutionary was the founder of the Soviet Union's Institute for Blood Transfusion, where he performed experiments designed to defeat the ravages of time. Bogdanov believed that an infusion of young blood—in the most literal sense of the word—could turn back the clock of ageing. This comported with Bogdanov's notion that time could be transcended through the heroic action of a

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[51] For a discussion of the God-builders and their philosophical relationship to Nietzsche, see Edith W Clowes, *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness: Nietzsche in Russian Literature, 1890-1914* (DeKalb, Ill: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988), 200-203.

[52] Ibid., 182.

[53] John Gray, *The Immortalization Commission: Science and the Strange Quest to Cheat Death* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 160.

[54] Ibid., 166.

[55] *SK:Ss* 1: 639

revolutionary genius. Not surprisingly, Hanson associates the romantic artist-scientist with the charismatic school of time, writing that "If Plekhanov and the other Mensheviks appeared to counsel a passive embrace of development within linear, abstract time, Bogdanov's left Bolsheviks slid into a purely charismatic, undisciplined irrationalism."[56] Perel'muter points out—not without a measure of Schadenfreude—that Bogdanov was a Bolshevik who "performed a bloodletting on the country perished himself from blood (literally)" after his experimental blood transfusion on himself.[57]

As noted above, echoes of Krzhizhanovsky's interest in Bogdanov's work may be seen in *Odyssey of the Odd,* where the hero is shrunk to the size of a single cell and infiltrates the bloodstream of his rival. Once there, he tries to make his host's body ill by inciting the simpleminded worker red blood cells to go on strike for an eight-hour workday instead of their usual twenty-four hour circulation, promising them a better life in the future. When the strike is unsuccessful, he uses his charismatic rhetoric to incite these red blood cells to revolution, upon which they "man the barricades" in the bloodstream and shut down the circulatory system completely, thus unintentionally murdering their host body. The passage is replete with Soviet revolutionary slogans and political discourse, in case the would-be reader had not already made the intended connection. Naum Leiderman notes the obvious historical subtext of the "red blood cell rebellion": "What can this be but a bitter parable of the Russian revolution? Krzhizhanovsky considers the starting point of the historical catastrophe that struck Russia to be those abstract ideas of extreme radicalism which acknowledge only bloody and destructive acts as the major means for attaining the radiant heights … Those who create such

[56] Hanson, 83.

[57] *SK:Ss* 1: 639.

revolutions drive themselves literally into a lethal dead end. In the 1920s, such a view on revolution was very far from official ideology."[58]

Bogdanov's attempt to achieve eternal youth through blood transfusions made a deep impression on another Fedorovian cosmist, Valerian Murav'ev, who saw these biological experiments, along with new understandings of the physics of time, as a way to achieve real immortality. Summarizing Murav'ev's beliefs, George M. Young writes that "Einstein's theory of relativity suggests that there are multiple time frames, which Muravyov calls simply 'multiple times,' each associated with a known system and therefore different and relative. At the same time, recent experiments in biological rejuvenation, specifically Bogdanov's experiments in rejuvenation through blood transfusion, suggested to Murav'ev that in limited circumstances and within limited boundaries, time becomes reversible."[59] Like the other cosmists mentioned above, Murav'ev went to work on behalf of the new Soviet government, but in his spare time he worked on the treatise that he is best known for today, which he called *Mastery Over Time* [Овладение временем], a title that neatly captures the tone of the era.

2.5 Annexing the Epoch: Kerzhentsev's Time League

Like Murav'ev's title, discourse about time in the period following the revolution emphasized themes of domination and control, often enlisting the rhetoric of war and revolution transposed onto this nonphysical realm. Banerjee notes that even before the revolution, journals like *Nature and People* [Природа и люди] "declared that modern life had been reduced to a constant "War with

[58] Leiderman, 525. (Translation by Caryl Emerson).

[59] Young, 210.

Space and Time" ("борьба с пространством и временем")".[60] Robert C. Williams writes of the revolutionary period that "if the laws of time could be comprehended, then perhaps they could be conquered. Man could and should rebel against time and death…"[61] Humans were no longer content to be passive victims of time; instead, they would struggle and rebel against the forces of time in the same way they had overturned oppressive political and social structures through war and revolution.

One of the leading ideologues of time in the USSR in the mid-1920s was the revolutionary, writer and theorist of the theatre Platon Mikhailovich Kerzhentsev (1881-1940), who had worked with Aleksandr Bogdanov in Proletkult.[62] The author of the book *Struggle for Time* ["Борьба за время"], Kerzhentsev yielded enormous influence over the formation of new Soviet conceptions of time starting in 1923, when he published an article in *Pravda* entitled "Time Builds Aeroplanes" [«Время строит аэропланы»]. In the article, he argues for attacking and rooting out any source of time wastage in the workplace and in society at large. Soon, newspapers across the Soviet Union were carrying regular columns under the heading "The Struggle for Time."[63] In the same year of the 1923, Kerzhentsev created a group of volunteer temporal commissars to monitor time management practices in the USSR, the Time League [Лига «Время»]. Richard Stites puts membership of the Time League at twenty-five thousand "fanatics of time," forty percent of them Komsomol members, many of whom wore wristwatches as a symbol of their group identity.[64]

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[60] Banerjee, 63

[61] Williams, 387.

[62] It seems likely that Krzhizhanovsky was acquainted with Kerzhentsev, or at the very least with his work, through his connections in Moscow's theatrical milieu.

[63] G.A. Arhangel'skij, *Organizat͡sii͡a Vremeni: Ot Lich. ėffektivnosti K Razvitii͡u Firmy*, Praktika Menedzhmenta (St. Petersburg, Russia: Piter, 2013), 21.

[64] Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 157.

In its scale and influence, Kerzhentsev's movement rivaled that of Aleksei Gastev, another avant-garde writer from Proletkult under Bogdanov who was similarly engaged with the problem of time. Unlike Kerzhentsev, however, Gastev was attempting to marry Taylorist ideas about workplace efficiency to socialist ideology—a "rational" approach that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter—and criticized Kerzhentsev for his unsystematic approach to time management. In the public rift between these two men and their time-management movements, the contours of the debates emerge between the rational time of Gastev's socialist Taylorism and the charismatic time of Kerzhentsev. At issue was whether the human was to become subordinate to time, or whether the human would subordinate time to himself. Using the metaphor of the machine, Kerzhentsev takes the charismatic view that "the goal of socialism is to institute *the domination of the machine by labour,* for the worker to be the commander of the machine."[65]

Broadly speaking, Kerzhentsev's charismatic approach to the effective use of time was anything but. "Under Kerzhentsev's leadership," Stephen Hanson writes, "groups of Time League enthusiasts periodically burst into the meetings of Party bureaucrats, exposing whatever wastage of time they encountered—and generally wasting quite a bit of time themselves in the process."[66] Richard Stites points to Kerzhentsev's background in revolutionary theater, noting his "esthetic impulse to stage everything … to join audience and cast in a great social 'performance' of his real-life play, which he might have entitled, had he succeeded, 'The Land of Time.'"[67]

In his notebooks, Krzhizhanovsky conveys the martial tone of his era's pronouncements on time domination, seeing these pronouncements as a qualitative shift from the earlier imperial discourse on spatial and territorial domination. The Soviet Union was a new sort of state, one with a

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[65] As quoted in C. Brandist, *The Dimensions of Hegemony: Language, Culture and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*, Historical Materialism Book Series (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 119.

[66] Hanson, 125.

[67] Stites, 159.

uniquely temporal focus, one directed not outward in space but forward in time, projecting itself into the future. As Krzhizhanovsky writes in "Unfree Lane": "Our time is the time of time. We have given up on seizing spaces, on the annexation of territory. Instead we have seized time for ourselves, we have annexed the epoch."[68] Here, Krzhizhanovsky seems to mimic Soviet discourse that transposes traditional terms of military campaigns—words like "seizure" and "annexation") onto the temporal realm.

To some extent, this shift in priorities may have been a form of psychological compensation for the stinging loss of territory after the treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the civil war, from which the USSR emerged a far smaller state in territory—minus the newly-independent Baltic states, Finland, Bessarabia, Western Ukraine and Poland—than the Tsarist Empire preceding it, notwithstanding attempts to recapture Poland and export revolution to the rest of Europe. But Krzhizhanovsky's emphasis here is less on the loss of territory, more about what he calls the "annexation of the epoch"—that is, the war to conquer the present and build a beachhead into the future for the fledgling Soviet state. Its bellicose stance toward time is neatly summed up in the words of Max Shterer, the protagonist of *Memories of the Future,* who describes his mission as "a matter of attacking time, striking and overturning it."[69]

Indeed, a similar idea is mined for humor in Krzhizhanovsky's novel from 1929—the same *annus mirabilis* that yielded *Memories of the Future*—a work titled *Materials for the Biography of Gorgis Katafalaki.* In Moscow, the titular Gorgis Katafalaki meets an odd foreigner travelling undercover to the land of the Soviets who claims to be none other than Time itself. Time has made the journey "from clock-face to the railway and on to Moscow" [с циферблата на рельсы и в Москву] to investigate rumors

[68] «Наше время—это время времени. Мы отказались от захвата пространств, от аннексии территорий. Но мы захватили себе время, аннексировали эпоху» (*SK:Ss* 6: 10). This line, from the story «Невольный переулок», echoes one he'd recorded in his writer's notebook.

[69] «…чтоб напасть на время, ударить и опрокинуть его» (*SK:Ss* 2: 347).

that the Soviets have been encroaching on his temporal prerogative. "You see," it tells Katafalaki, "the rumors about a country that has been interfering in my business could not have avoided piquing my attention. At first we moved up the clocks by an hour, then by two, then three, and then we started moving the centuries around from one place to another: from the twentieth to the twenty-fifth, and so on and so forth. I don't care much for people who mess up my seconds, let alone the epochs."[70] In Moscow, Time's worst fears seem confirmed when it overhears someone discussing how to kill Time [как убить Время], a misunderstanding that nevertheless causes it to fear for its life. Fleeing, it happens upon a church whose bells have been silenced by the Bolshevik authorities in their latest campaign against religion in 1929:

> And then above me I saw the silent apertures of the bell-towers with their bells sagging inside untollingly [безбойно]. And I drew my conclusions. To whit—the mechanisms that ring out faith [вера] have been broken and stand still; soon the mechanisms of measure [мера], having rung for the last time, will cease swinging their pendulums across the whole earth at the same time; that will be the moment when I will be put just like this, back up against the wall, and …[71]

The word he does not dare say—and perhaps the word that Krzhizhanovsky doesn't dare write in 1929—is "executed." Time takes refuge in the countryside in a village of clock-makers, where it is the object of consternation: It "expressed itself with an obvious foreign accent, asked about the mood in neighboring villages, made notes in its notebooks and posted letters to foreign addresses."[72] The villagers draw the obvious conclusions: they denounce Time to the Soviet authorities, and the secret police soon arrive to take it away.

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[70] «Видите ли, слухи о стране, вмешивающейся в мои дела, не могли не задеть моего внимания. Сначала мы перевели часы на час, потом на два, на три, потом мы начали переставлять с места на место века: из двадцатого в двадцать пятый, ну и так далее. Я не люблю, когда кто-нибудь путает мне секунды, не то что эпохи» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 330).

[71] «…и тогда я видел над собой молчаливые прорези колоколен с безбойно обвисшими колоколами. И я додумывал свои думы. Так, механизмы, отзванивающие веру, испортились и стали; скоро и механизмы меры, прозвенев в последний раз, остановят свои маятники по всей земле и сразу; это будет тогда, когда меня поставят вот так, спиной к стене, и...» (*SK*:*Ss* 2:331-2).

[72] «…изъяснялось с ясным иностранным акцентом, расспрашивало о настроении соседних деревень, делало записи в своих тетрадях и отправляло письма с заграничным адресом» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 333).

2.6 Bringing Time to Heel: Charismatic Domination and Temporal Subjugation

Krzhizhanovsky's novella *Odyssey of the Odd* takes this Bolshevik dream of "mastery over time" and gives it the fantastical form of an adventure tale. In keeping with Krzhizhanovsky's penchant for literalizing metaphors, the hero of the tale, shrunk to microscopic proportions, does battle with time in the form of the aforementioned "temporal bacilli." These strange beings inhabit the face of his beloved's wristwatch—which he has infiltrated as part of his jealous plan to keep watch over her—and pay him little attention as they go about their business as the carriers of time. Soon, the hero realizes that he can capture these temporal bacilli and see the contents of the moment they carry within them: "Once, by accident, having caught one of these sprightly Seconds, I tightly squeezed it between my palms, paying no attention to its angry ticking and tocking, and looking deep into its madly squirming body, I suddenly spied some vague contours and colors begin to emerge within the Second's transparent coils …"[73] The contours and colors take the shape of his beloved, and he realizes that he is looking into a moment that they had once shared together, a moment that had been preserved within the body of this temporal bacilli. This vision only inflames his desire to control time, and he sets out deliberately to catch a Second and keep it for himself: "Now it was in my hands: after finding a thin and flexible strand of hair, I fashioned it into a noose around the powerlessly quivering stinger of the Second and began to lead it everywhere behind me, just as people walk housetrained pugs or lapdogs."[74]

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[73] «Как-то случайно, изловив одну из юрких Секунд, я, несмотря на ее злобное цоканье и тиканье, крепко сжал ее меж ладоней, всматриваясь внутрь ее бешено извивавшегося тела, - и вдруг на прозрачных извивах Секунды стали проступать какие-то контуры и краски…» (*SK:Ss* 1: 320).

[74] «Теперь она была в моих руках: отыскав тонкий и гибкий волосок, я стянул его петлю вокруг бессильно шевелящегося жала Секунды и стал водить ее всюду за собой, как водят комнатных мопсов или болонок» (Ibid.)

The image is an absurd one, but it captures the absurd essence of these charismatic dreams of pacifying time, of domesticating and controlling its flow: Time has quite literally been brought to heel. Krzhizhanovsky writes of this dream of collaring and controlling time in his notebooks, a sketch of an idea that would later become the second journey in *Odyssey of the Odd:* "Time, corralled into a watch [clock], on a chain like a dog (in a vest pocket)."[75] But these temporal bacilli have no intention of being corralled by the story's hero, however. "The irritation that I'd aroused in the aborigines of this clock-face land swelled and grew with every passing day,"[76] he notes. Soon, angered by his attempts to harness the Seconds, they turn against him, declaring war on the blithe interloper to the land of the clock-face, who relates that he was unaware of the danger: "Since I still had only a poor grasp of the metallic ticking and tocking of the bacilli language, I was unable to forestall the danger in time, all the more because now time itself rose up in revolt [восстало] against me."[77]

Like many revolts, this one begins with a general strike. The bacilli decide to boycott the protagonist, shutting him outside of time, as already described above: "It began with the tiniest of the durational bacilli, the sort that now inhabited my shrunken self; swayed by the pressure of the general mood, they decided to boycott me, and for a certain time I was left without time."[78] This of course brings to mind the paradox that Krzhizhanovsky employs earlier in *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder* as "timeless time"—in other words, how can one experience a feeling of timelessness

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[75] «Время, загнанное в часы, на цепи, как пес (в жилетном кармане)» (*SK:Ss* 5:362).

[76] «Раздражение, вселенное мною в аборигенов циферблатной страны, от дня к дню возрастало и ширилось» (*SK:Ss* 1: 321).

[77] «Так как я плохо еще понимал металлически цокающие и тикающие звуки бациллового языка, то и не мог вовремя предупредить опасность, тем более что самое время восстало тут против меня» (Ibid.).

[78] «Началось с того, что те самые крохотные по размерам бациллы длительностей, какие сейчас, при всем моем умалении, обитали внутри меня, под давлением общего настроения решили бойкотировать меня, и на некоторое время я остался без времени. Мне не сыскать слов, чтобы хотя мутно и путано передать испытанное мною тогда чувство обезвремененности…» (Ibid.).

without being inside some sort of time? The answer, one that he will develop further in *Memories of the Future,* is found in a meta-time, a time beyond ordinary *Chronos* that in the chapter to follow is termed *Aion.* In other words, he has managed to transcend time and enter into eternity, an experience that causes him to take leave of his senses—albeit *temporarily*, of course.

2.7 The Permanent Revolution and Second-Hand Time

When he regains consciousness, the protagonist finds that the natives of this clock-face land, in keeping with the genre conventions of the exotic adventure tale, have captured him and bound him to a sharpened stake—or rather, as it turns out, the hand of the watch: "The temporal bacilli returned to my body, but only in order to subject me to the most torturous of torments: torture by durations [пытка длительностями]. Having been allowed back into time, I opened my eyes and saw that I was bound to the sharpened point of the second hand."[79] Now, instead of being subjected to the terror of eternity, he is tormented by the movement of time. Quite literally, in fact, since the second hand drags his bloodied body around and around the watch-face in a

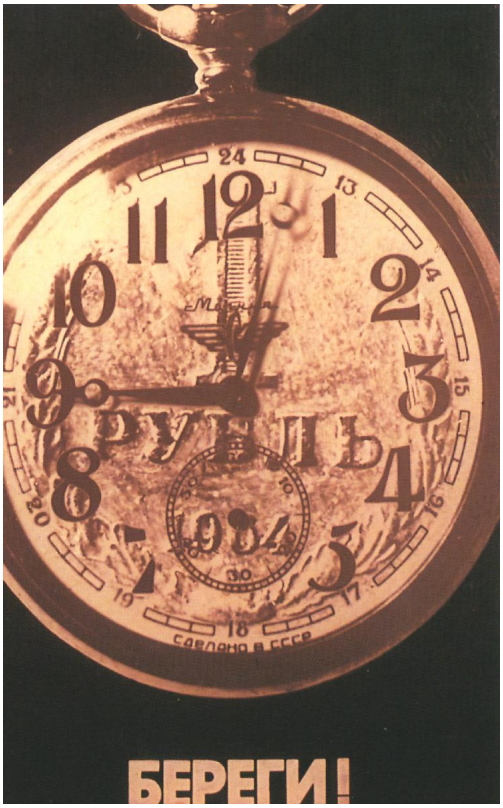

Figure 5. Soviet poster for time-management with caption "Save!" Here the connection between time and money is made visually by replacing the face of the watch with the face of a coin (artist and date unknown).

[79] «Бациллы времени вернулись в меня, но лишь затем, чтобы подвергнуть мучительнейшей из пыток: пытке длительностями. Включенный опять во время, я, раскрыв глаза, увидел себя привязанным к заостренному концу секундной стрелки» (*SK*:*Ss* 1:321).

state of "permanent revolution."[80] He describes this torture by recalling a disturbing image he'd seen during the civil war between the Whites and Reds:

> During the Civil War I had the misfortune to briefly witness an Ossetian cavalryman who, having lassoed a thin-legged colt, was dragging it behind him; the animal couldn't keep up with the taut rope, and its thin and weak legs tangled up and buckled, but the rope noose pulled it along its back and belly along the stones of the road and forced it to run and fall, fall and once again run on its mutilated and trembling legs.[81]

The invocation of the barbarity of the civil war at this juncture in the narrative seems hardly accidental. Just as with the other parables of *Odyssey of the Odd*—the story of the deposed King of Hearts that precedes this journey, for instance, or the rebellion of the red blood cells that follows it—the political subtext of the work seems almost to suggest itself. Interpreted as an allegory of Russian and Soviet history, the journey's progression resolves itself into clear stages. First, the hero is tempted by looking into the crystal body of one of the temporal bacilli and seeing himself with his beloved—a sort of beautiful idyll, in other words—which spurs him to attempt to control time in order to bring himself closer to this idyll. But these attempts to control time only backfire, causing him to run into an apocalyptic sort of timeless time of the *perevorot,* after which he returns to time only to find himself bound even more tightly to it—instead of controlling time, the clockwork is now controlling him, forcing him to stumble ever onward in the forced march of *Chronos*, dragged along by the unflagging revolution of the second hand. (Here, Krzhizhanovsky seems to be playing with the etymology of "революция", or "revolution" in the form of the revolving watch hands.) In other words, the playfully named "land of the clock-face" seems meant as none other than the temporal empire of the Soviet Union.

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[80] A similar image is found in *The Return of Munchausen,* in which the Baron spends some decades being dragged around the face of a clock by a clock-hand, until he is shaken free by the "lifequake" of the revolution.

[81] «Во время гражданской войны мне довелось как-то мельком видеть, как конный осетин, закинув аркан на тонконогого жеребенка, тащил его за собой; животное не поспевало за натянувшимся канатом, тонкие и слабые ноги его путались и подгибались, но веревочная петля тянула его спиной и брюхом по камням шоссе и заставляла бежать и падать, падать и вновь бежать на искалеченных и дрожащих ногах» (*SK:Ss* 1:322). The image echoes works of Dostoevsky in Nietzsche in which the cruel beating of a horse elicits moral and spiritual crises.

The hero's journey does not end with imprisonment and torture, however. As he makes his revolutions around the minute, he hears a voice calling out to him: he is passing the other dial's hour hand, upon which a fellow sufferer has been lashed. "*Omnia vulnerant, ultima necat,*"[82] the sufferer calls out to him. The Latin inscription, the author tells us in a footnote, is found on old Zurich timepieces: "All [the hours] wound, the last one kills." After uttering the phrase, the fellow sufferer is then carried away by the movement of time; the hero calculates that "before the next meeting with the hour hand, I had to endure seven hundred and twenty full revolutions, and every revolution cost me a good Golgotha."[83] As he stumbles around and around his circle of hell on the clock face,[84] he is slowly able to piece together his fellow prisoner's story, which he is told in snippets every time their respective watch hands reach speaking distance.

His fellow prisoner, as it turns out, is not a human being shrunk to tiny proportions like the hero, but rather a grain of sand that has found its way inside the watch crystal. And not just any grain of sand, but one that used to reside in an ancient hourglass. For this reason, he has a different conception of time, and cannot bring himself to understand modern timekeeping: "And just to think … We've now come to this, that time has been flattened onto a disc."[85] Instead of a constantly rotating watch hand, the grain of sand describes the way that time reigned in the "two-bottomed

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[82] *SK:Ss* 1:322.

[83] «До новой встречи с часовой стрелкой мне предстояло семьсот двадцать полных кругов, и каждый круг стоил доброй Голгофы» (*SK:Ss* 1:323). This is the first of two mentions of Calvary, clearly meant to invite the reader to compare the hero's trial to a sort of crucifixion. This is part of a larger mirroring of Biblical themes in the novella: the hero (called "the Teacher" [Учитель]) wanders in the wilderness, is lured by various temptations, throws himself from a great height into an alcohol-filled thermometer, becomes a charismatic ruler to the red-blood cells, and eventually meets a "serpent of steel", the devil at the center of Hell, making the story in some sense a sort of mirror-image of Christ's temptations.

[84] Dante is explicitly mentioned twice by name in the story, as Perel'muter notes in his commentary to the novella: *SK:Ss* 1:639.

[85] «И подумать, - добрюжжал он недовольными осыпающимися словами, - до чего дожили: время и то приплющено к диску.» (*SK:Ss* 1:326)

motherland" [двудонная родина] of the hourglass. The prisoner's description is worth quoting in full:

> At first I was in the upper cone. There it was noisy, boisterous and youthful. The spirit of the future resided in us. We unrealized moments [несвершившиеся миги], jostling our sharp edges, made a joyous hushing sound as pushed by each other toward the little mouth of the hourglass that counted off the rush of the present. Each of us wanted to squirm into that present as quickly as we could and to jump ahead of the others into that narrow, glass-throttled hole. The desire to make myself into the present [онастоящиться] grabbed hold of me with irresistible strength: descending along with the layers of other sand grains who also tried to overtake me, I made use of the sharpness of my edges and comparative heft, scratching and pushing around my rivals, and rather quickly forced my way to the pit. Having slipped by two or three runners who tried in vain to block my path, I leaped into the emptiness that suddenly yawned beneath me. True, at the last moment a certain terror gripped me by my edges, but it was too late: from above pressed the masses of sand grains hurtling after me, and the slippery glass pushed me into a new cone that opened up into glassed-in emptiness. And flying through it, I collided painfully with the upper layer of sand grains that lay strewn with corpse-like stillness over the bottom of this up-pointed cone. I tried to move; I wanted to go back, to that upper half-world that I, gripped with mania, had run from to here, to this graveyard of spent moments [отдлившихся мигов]. But I couldn't make the smallest movement: The fetters that bind me now are nothing in comparison to that immobilization and finishedness [обездвиженностью и конченностью] that then possessed me. Lying with my edges wedged unmoving into the edges of other fallen moments, I saw how newer and newer layers buried me deeper and deeper among the others that had been buried alive.[86]

The passage above provides a striking visual metaphor for Krzhizhanovsky's developing concept of the passage of time; here, the world of the future and the past are separated by the vanishingly small gap of the present moment, through which the sand grains leap. Interestingly, unlike most metaphors for time—the most common of which are a river or flowing current—in

[86] «Вначале я находился в верхнем конусе. Там было шумно, весело и юно. В нас жили души грядущего. Мы, несвершившиеся миги, толкаясь гранями о грани, с веселым шуршанием проталкивались к узкому часовому устьицу, отсчитывающему бег настоящего. Каждому из нас хотелось скорей пролезть в это настоящее и прыгнуть, в обгон других, в его узкую, схваченную стеклом дыру. Стремление онастоящиться охватило меня с непреодолимой силой: опадая вместе с слоями других пробующих обогнать меня песчинок, я, пользуясь отточенностью своих граней и относительно тяжелым весом, царапая и расталкивая соперников, довольно быстро протискался к яме. Скользнув меж двух-трех напрасно пытавшихся мне преградить дорогу бегунов, я прыгнул в вдруг разверзшуюся подо мной пустоту. Правда, в последнее мгновение какой-то страх схватил меня за грани, но было уже поздно: сверху давила масса бегущих вдогонку мне песчин, а скользкое стекло толкало внутрь новой конусом раскрывшейся остекленной пустоты. И, пролетев через нее, я больно ударился о верхний слой песчин, с трупной неподвижностью устилавших дно запрокинутого вершиной кверху конуса. Я пробовал было пошевелиться, мне хотелось назад, в тот верхний полумир, из которого я, одержимый безумием, бежал сюда, на кладбище отдлившихся мигов. Но я не мог сделать ни малейшего движения: путы, связывающие меня сейчас, ничто в сравнении с той обездвиженностью и конченностью, какие овладели мною тогда. Лежа, с гранями, недвижимо втиснувшимися меж граней других падших мигов, я видел, как новые и новые их слои все глубже и глубже погребали меня среди заживо мертвых» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 323-4)

Krzhizhanovsky's description, the structure of time is static: It is not time that flows, but it is *we* who flow through *it*. This idea has important repercussions for Krzhizhanovsky's understanding of the nature of time, as will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this work. For the present, it's important to draw attention to the emotional trajectory of this allegory of the passage of time. Krzhizhanovsky skillfully captures the feeling of living for the future, the rush to "presentify it"—"The spirit of the future resided in us," the grain of sand says, perhaps capturing the zeitgeist of Russia's avant-garde before the revolution—and then captures the dismay upon realizing that, in the hurry to jump into that abyss, the world has rushed past, and there is no returning to that exciting past anticipation of the future.

Or is there? Krzhizhanovsky does not allow us to forget the particulars of the hourglass's operation, which involves periodic overturning, or *perevoroty*. In this ever-turning hourglass, he may have been alluding to Friedrich Nietzsche and his concept of "eternal recurrence," the notion that histories and lives repeat themselves in an infinite loop, and that one may indeed derive a sort of comfort from this endless turning of time back and forth.[87] The hourglass, having spent all the time that it contains, is simply turned over again and time begins anew:

> Suddenly an abrupt jostling turned our graveyard upside down and we, the spent moments, tumbled out of our upturned graves and once again propelled ourselves into life. Apparently there'd been some sort of cosmic catastrophe that had overturned existence and forced the already-decayed and the not-yet-decaying past and future to swap places. Oh yes, that two-bottomed world, which I have been forced to give up for this dumb black roost I'm on, could do something that other worlds are not allowed. And if only…[88]

[87] Edith Clowes has reconciled the opposing conceptions of linear and circular time in the metaphor of the Moebius strip: each side of the strip, representing past and future, seems different, but they in fact turn into each other as one follows the topology of the twisted paper, thus invoking the idea of eternal recurrence—with a twist. See Edith Clowes, *Russian Experimental Fiction: Resisting Ideology After Utopia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 59-60.

[88] «Вдруг резкий толчок опрокинул все наше кладбище дном кверху, и мы, отдлившиеся длительности, вывалившись из вздыбившихся могил, снова ринулись в жизнь. Очевидно, произошла какая-то космическая катастрофа, опрокинувшая бытие и заставившая оттлевшее и незатлевшее прошлое и грядущее обменяться местами. О да, тот двудонный мир, который мне пришлось променять на вот эту глупую черную насесть, мог то, чего иным мирам не дано. И если бы...» (*SK:Ss* 1: 324-5).

The grain of sand does not finish his thought, which trails off suggestively in an ellipsis. The reader must finish the thought for him: If only *here*, in this land of the clock-face, the past and the future could change places through a *perevorot*. In short, the unspoken thought seems to express a desire for counterrevolution.

The idea of the *perevorot,* in both its senses—physical overturning and a coup d'etat—echoes the frequent appearance of this image in *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder* in relation to revolution*,* as discussed in the previous chapter. Just as in these stories, this moment of overturning, or revolution, is accompanied by apocalyptic imagery and an invocation of "cosmic catastrophe" (cf. "The Catastrophe," or «Катастрофа») to describe its disruptive effects. In the above passage from *Odyssey of the Odd,* the apocalyptic imagery is straight from the Bible: The graves open up and the dead are returned to the living: "… we, the spent moments, tumbled out of our upturned graves and once again propelled ourselves into life."

But the theme of *perevorot* also harkens back to the earlier episode within *Odyssey of the Odd* involving the two-headed King of Hearts. His playing-card figure, like the hourglass, is symmetrical at the midline, so that it looks the same played both upside-down and right-side-up. The grain of sand calls the hourglass his "two-bottomed motherland," a phrasing that recalls the "two-headed king" from earlier in the novella. Moreover, as discussed previously, the deposed two-headed king in turn may signal a connection with imperial Russia, whose symbol was the two-headed eagle, and was indeed a place of periodic palace coups, *perevoroty.* Indeed, the deposed two-headed king finds himself also wishing for a coup that will return him to his offices: Perhaps, like the grain of sand, the sort of *perevorot* in which the (Russian imperial) past would trade places with the (Soviet) future.

Hearing the tale of the "two-bottomed motherland" from the grain of sand, the hero of *Odyssey of the Odd* is somewhat swayed by this image of the "eternal recurrence" (to use Nietzsche's term). Although he does not seem to be inspired by the idea of an hourglass universe—that is, one with

two pasts and no future at all—he clearly has no desire to be dragged relentlessly around for one more second by the forward march of the second-hand: "'I don't care,' I said, 'So what if your universe is just a simple hourglass. I want to be where the past is able to turn itself into the future. We'll run. We'll run to your two-bottomed motherland, that land of wanderers from one bottom to the other. Because I am a man without a future.'"[89]

2.8 A Metallic Silence: Sabotaging the Factory of Time

Having escaped their minute and hour hands on the clock, the hero and his fellow prisoner, the grain of sand, flee from the angry temporal bacilli, who encircle them and try to bar their escape. Their path to the outer edge blocked, the two instead run for the very center of the watch face and its axis, where the temporal bacilli are afraid to venture. Their plan is to stop the watch by destroying the mechanism. Or, as the grain of sand vows: "I will destroy their workshop of time."[90] At the very center of the churning mechanism, they find a spiral spring that propels the clockwork, and the grain of sand attacks it. Here, the spiral spring is personified as a "steel serpent" [стальная змея], whose body is lit with a red glow from the rubies in the mechanism. The vision is a hellish one, and the journey to the very center of the circular world, down into the heart of the mechanism, recalls Dante's trip through Hell in the *Inferno*: a journey that, it should be noted, starts from the edge of the

[89] « - Мне все равно, - сказал я, - пусть ваша вселенная - лишь простые песочные часы. Я хочу быть там, где прошлое умеет превращаться в грядущее. Бежим. Бежим в вашу двудонную родину, в страну странствующих от дна к дну. Потому что я - человек без грядущего» (*SK:Ss* 1: 325).

[90] «Я им разрушу их мастерню времени» (*SK:Ss* 1:327).

circle, progresses inward, involves a Latin-speaking companion as a guide,[91] and eventually ends by exiting Hell through the very center.

During this episode at the center of the watch, the word "steel", or "сталь" in its various forms, is repeated a total of eight times in the description of the struggle between sand grain and the steel serpent: "…the diameters of the turning *steel* … carefully approach the coil of the *steel* serpent … over the supple breathing of *steel* … beneath the blow of its *steel* coil … back into the *steel* vice of its regularly breathing spring … in the *steely* embrace of the serpent … the clang of gears and the hammering of *steel* against *steel*…"[92] And in fact, the word steel occurs earlier as well, when the two enter the center of the mechanism:

> At first our eyes couldn't make anything out; then a dull scarlet luminescence helped us to make out vague outlines and counters of steel protrusions that were noisily laboring and knocking against each other with pealing tones. The light was filtering out from the semiprecious jewels of the rubies[93] set into the steel: their transparent fluorescence led us on by its wavering scarlet flares…[94]

The word "сталь," of course, would have inevitably evoked the name of Stalin in the mind of would-be readers, particularly by the end of the 1920s, and the "scarlet flares" that illuminate this

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[91] The grain of sand, according to the narrator, is from Rome, which is why he speaks to the hero in Latin; Perel'muter's connects this to the multiple references to Dante's *Inferno* in the work, pointing out the parallels with Dante's guide (*SK:Ss* 1: 639).

[92] «Диаметры кружащей *стали* … осторожно придвигаться к извиву *стальной* змеи … над упругим дыханием *стали* … под удар его *стального* извива … назад в *стальные* тиски мерно дышащей пружины … в *стальном* охвате змеи … лязг зубцов и стук *стали* о *сталь*…» (*SK:Ss* 1:327-8): emphasis added.

[93] Rubies, of course, were often used as jeweled bearings in mechanical watches, though the description pays particular attention to the light they cast: The two discuss their plan for sabotage "under the flickering red rays of the ruby" and the hero "catches [his] eyes on the ruby flares." In the Soviet Union, however, "ruby rays" were famous for another reason as well: The Kremlin towers were lit with enormous red stars made with real rubies. One problem with this interpretation, however, lies in the fact that, according to Perel'muter, Krzhizhanovsky drafted the story in 1924, before the ruby stars were installed on the Kremlin towers. Certainly, one might imagine that the date we have for the work (which Krzhizhanovsky himself later supplied) does not mean that the author did not in fact return to the novella and revise it later, as he did with a significant portion of his other works. After all, this novella was never published, and the typescript we have was entered into the archives in the late 1950s, some three decades after the story was first drafted.

[94] «Сначала наши глаза ничего не различали; потом смутное алое свечение помогло нам различить какие-то очертания и контуры стальных выступов, шумно трущихся и со звоном ударяющихся друг о друга. Это был свет, сочащийся из самоцветного тела рубинов, вправленных в сталь: их призрачная флуоресценция вела нас своими дрожащими алыми бликами…» (*SK:Ss* 1:326).

demonic "steel serpent" at the center of the mechanism deepen potential political associations. Buttressing such an interpretation is the fact that Krzhizhanovsky imagines the circular layout of Moscow's center as a clock (with the Kremlin at its very axis) in *Materials for the Biography of Gorgis Katafalaki,* in which Time calls the city a "clock-face disc fourteen miles wide."[95] In other words, Krzhizhanovsky seems to have crafted a particularly Soviet *Inferno*, albeit one necessarily cloaked in Aesopian language and indirection.

The grain of sand manages to defeat the steel serpent, but only when he wedges his own body into the mechanism, crushing himself in the process. With this, the protagonist says, the "noisy and rumbling factory of time suddenly fell silent, leaving me alone in the hush and gloom standing over the corpse of my only friend."[96] The grain of sand dies a hero's death; the dream of charismatic domination of time has finally been realized in the "metallic silence" [железной тишины] of the inside of the watch.

The quiet reigns until its owner takes the watch to the repair shop, where the watchmaker—who looms as large as God to the tiny protagonist—tinkers with his mechanism and sets it moving once again: Time restored.

2.9 Conclusion: Revolutionary Rhetoric and Reality

Written in 1924, *Odyssey of the Odd* captures a transitional period in Krzhizhanovsky's thinking and in the Soviet Union as a whole. For the author, the novella functions as a sort of a laboratory for his ideas at the time about time: both an object of philosophical inquiry and as a set of

[95] «Циферблатный диск в четырнадцать миль» (*SK:Ss* 2:331).

[96] «…шумевшая и грохотавшая фабрика времени вдруг замолчала, оставив меня одного в беззвучии и тьме над трупом моего единственного друга» (*SK:Ss* 1:328).

ideological and rhetoric concepts in the Soviet Union immediately following the revolution. We can see already emerging in this work many aspects of Krzhizhanovsky's 1929 novel-length investigation into the nature of time, *Memories of the Future*: the fixation on measurable clock time versus malleable human time; the use of elaborate metaphors to render abstract concepts of time; the skepticism toward future-tensed existence. But Krzhizhanovsky's own metaphysics of time still remain hazy in this novella; the author appears primarily focused on developing the political dimensions of his story without the lengthy philosophical meditations of the later *Memories of the Future*.

On this political level, we may read the work as a sort of allegory about the promise and subsequent disappointment of the revolutionary desire to change the world. From the story of the grain of sand in the hourglass, who rushes through his existence to make himself real only to end up in a graveyard of dead moments, to the tale of the rebellion of the red blood cells, who end up taking their own lives when they kill their host body, the episodes in this novella capture revolutionary desire as it collides with reality. The journey to the land of the clock-face serves as an apt illustration of the futility of this struggle: Those who try to defeat the clock may wind up crucified on its second hand.

For the Soviet Union in the early to mid-1920s, the transition from revolution to actual governance was an uncertain process, with no practical guides or similar examples to be found in human history. In these heady years, it still seemed as if the world, and human consciousness, would soon be reshaped in the forge of revolutionary ideals. The familiar language of struggle and violence that had served the revolutionaries so well when directed against the tsarist rulers now had to be redirected towards other targets than the state and government, which now lay in Bolshevik hands. Instead, the rhetoric of struggle was directed at more abstract obstacles in the path of the Soviet Union—chief among them being the country's comparative backwardness and insufficient industrial base for building communism. The only way for the country's economic development to catch up to

its political revolution was through a concerted effort to "revolutionize" time: both the practical use of time and temporal conceptions in the popular consciousness.

Krzhizhanovsky challenges this particular approach of revolutionary struggle against ordinary time and natural processes of development—what Hanson calls "charismatic domination"—through his characteristic use of hyperbole and reification. In this story, different conceptions of time are represented by physical objects: the hourglass, representing a cyclical, human-directed time of events, and the wristwatch, the mechanical and abstract time reestablishing itself after the revolution. In *Odyssey of the Odd,* time is equated with a clockwork machine, one that the heroic human attempts to dominate and destroy. But if this novella is a tale of man versus machine, then our next chapter will focus on the same struggle from a different perspective: machine versus man. Now we will turn to a discussion of rational time, Taylorism, and how the clock subjugates the human.

CHAPTER THREE

Time of the Machine: Rational Time, Synchronicity and Biological Automata

3.1 Introduction: Dead Poet or Boots

"There were two of them living in the square unheated room in a clapboard house out near the city limits. An accountant and a poet,"[1] begins Krzhizhanovsky's 1937 story "The Players," set in an unnamed city during the Russian civil war. The poet and the accountant are playing cards with each other to pass the time, gambling a single shared pair of boots back and forth as the civil war rages on the streets outside.[2] Their shifting fortunes in the game mirror the shifting fortunes of the combatants outside, which the accountant tracks by moving a bead from one side of his abacus to the other each time the city changes hands. When the poet has lost everything to the accountant—including the future advance for his verse collection *Dreams of a Freezing Man* [Сны замерзающего] and even the as-yet unwritten dedication to the volume—he is struck by sudden inspiration. Apparently inspired by the socialist rhetoric of collective ownership, he decides that he can requisition the stars from the night sky, anteing up his next hand with the North Star. This too the

[1] «Их было двое в нетопленой квадратной комнате дощатого дома, что у заставы. Бухгалтер и поэт» (*SK*:*Ss* 3:212). The contrast in these two professions immediately suggests deeper incompatibilities—the figure of the accountant in Krzhizhanovsky's work represents (fairly or unfairly) the apotheosis of materialism, rational thinking and cold calculation, while writing poetry implies intuition, inspiration, and the transcendence of material being.

[2] The pair of shared boots as emblematic of deprivation echoes of the plight of Plyushkin's serfs in Gogol's *Dead Souls*, who also share the same pair of boots between them.

accountant wins from him, followed by the Big and Little Dipper and, after a whole night of gambling, the entire Milky Way.

But just as the city outside is changing hands once again, the poet's fortunes change, and he embarks on a winning streak, gathering back all the stars in the heavens into his possession—indeed, even the shared pair of boots. This means that it now falls to the lucky poet to venture out with his boots into the streets and scavenge for firewood. While doing so, he is caught in the crossfire of the warring factions and, while shielding the body of a passing child, he is hit by a stray bullet. When the accountant goes looking for him, he finds him lying dead in the snow. At this discovery, the accountant, ever the utilitarian, "yanked the boots off the corpse, pulling them onto his own cold-pinched feet without looking back. About the universe, which remained in the possession of the poet, he didn't give a thought."

This story, written at the peak of the Great Terror in 1937, seems to provide a sort of postmortem on the revolution and its aftermath. Reflecting on the outcome of the broader struggle between idealism and utilitarianism, Krzhizhanovsky implies that a pure poetic idealism, the revolutionary spirit of artists and dreamers, soon fell victim to a sort of crass materialism of accountants and "men of action"—that is, those who cared only for sturdy boots and gave no thought to the stars in the sky.[3] Bolstering this reading is the story's ironic emphasis on the importance of good boots over dead poets, an opposition that slyly echoes the famous debate in the late nineteenth century between the utilitarians, represented by Pisarev and Chernyshevsky, and their detractors, who parodied the utilitarian argument about art as "Pushkin or a pair of boots."[4]

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[3] In keeping with the author's Kantian leanings, "stars in the sky" function in Krzhizhanovsky's work as metonym for the transcendental and immaterial world.

[4] Eric Naiman notes that "the theme of 'Pushkin or a pair of boots' was a stock figure of derision used to parody the utilitarianism of Chernyshevsky and his colleagues at the journal *The Contemporary*." Eric Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2010), 77. Lenin was so inspired by Chernyshevsky's novel *What is to be Done?* that he named his own political treatise after it, so that even unpublished, Krzhizhanovsky's mockery of the Chernyshevsky school's utilitarianism would seem risky, particularly in 1937.

The struggle between these two ways of thinking seems to reflect Krzhizhanovsky's own apparent ambivalence over the revolution. His notebooks mention a "February soul" [февралевая душа], a reference to the first, "bourgeois" revolution of February 1917 that established the Provisional Government. The ideals of this fledgling democratic system were never realized, however; by late October the Bolsheviks had seized control. And yet these two strands of revolutionary spirit—the apocalyptic, avant-garde utopianism of the poets, and the ruthlessly utilitarian materialism of the accountants[5]—continued into the mid-1920s, when the balance began shifting decisively away from the poets. We can see the above story of Krzhizhanovsky as capturing this struggle in the 1920s for the soul of the revolution: tracing its trajectory from the unexpected ascendance of the poet, when all the universe is in his pocket, to the abrupt conclusion in which he lies dead in the snow, killed by an errant bullet. And while the accountant may have recovered his boots, the stars remain in the dead poet's possession.

The chapter that follows will explore this shift away from the charismatic to the rational in revolutionary thought and action in the mid-1920s. These different strains coexisted not just in the country at large, but in the minds of the revolutionaries themselves: Marxism-Leninism was in some ways a millenarian movement clothed in the language of science and Enlightenment reasoning, and these divergent ways of looking at the world never fully resolved themselves.[6] This shift toward scientific-sounding discourse also entailed a corresponding change in emphasis in Soviet temporal rhetoric, from charismatic views of time to rational, or as Stephen Hanson terms it, a move from

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[5] The figure of the accountant may encompass further layers of meaning: Not only do accountants tally figures, but they also "сводят счета/счёты," balance the books—or the alternate meaning of "settle scores," perhaps the ruthless score-settling of formerly oppressed against their oppressors.

[6] The French philosopher Raymond Aron has this to say about the connection between Marxism and religion: "Marxism is a Christian heresy. As a modern form of millenarianism, it places the kingdom of God on Earth following the apocalyptic revolution in which the Old World will be swallowed up" (R. Aron, *The Dawn Of Universal History: Selected Essays From A Witness To The Twentieth Century* (Basic Books, 2009), 203.) For more on the affinities of Bolshevism and Christian eschatology and religious practice, see e.g.: Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017).

"time domination" to "time discipline." If Platon Kerzhentsev and his Time League represented the former approach of time domination, then their rival group, organized around Aleksey Gastev and his attempts to apply Taylorist principles to socialist labor, promoted a rational approach emphasizing discipline and scientific efficiency. As we will discuss further below, however, this latter approach was also not without its flaws. Chief among these was its apparent lack of revolutionary spirit and faith in the ability of the new man to exceed scientifically-determined limits. And there still remained the problem of Taylorism being seen as an essentially exploitative tool: How was this not simply capitalism under new management? Lastly, this rational approach tended to treat humans as machines, but humans had a way of acting like—well, like *humans*: that is, individual beings who inconveniently retained their own ideas and ways of being in the world.

In his stories and essays from the mid- to late-1920s, Krzhizhanovsky attempts to address this creeping subordination of the human to the machine and the clock. His writing from the period shows him to be an astute observer of Soviet modernity, capturing the political, social and technological transformations of the period and rendering them in often hyperbolized fictional form. His intent in doing so, it seems, remains the same as before: using estrangement as a tool to reveal deeper networks of logic and illogic in his society as he perceived them.

This focus on modernity and rapid change (in particular, the ever-accelerating pace of life in the metropolitan center in the 1920s) is the focus of the first two sections of the present chapter. Our first section explores Krzhizhanovsky's writing about Soviet modernity and urban life, with an analysis of a passage from the 1927 story "The Bookmark" that captures this association between the city and the fleeting present, on the one hand, and the village left behind in the past on the other. The second section discusses three essays that Krzhizhanovsky wrote in 1925, all of which allude to the drawbacks of modern fast-paced life in the Soviet capital. In these essays, the writer has left the provinces (and the past) behind, but he has not quite arrived in the present, either; his train appears

to have been delayed, so he is perpetually trying to catch up. This liminal temporality—not wholly in the past, nor entirely in the present—creates an odd sense of dislocation: a feeling of being locked out of the present, of always marching slightly out of step.

Figure 6. Soviet poster for rationalized time management showing clock and calendar. The clock face exhorts workers to "use productively 480 minutes in twenty-four hours." (Artist: V.B. Koretsky, 1940)

The cure for being out of step, of course, was the lockstep of temporal conformity. The remaining chapter sections all deal with various permutations of this sort of imposed time discipline. In the third section of this chapter, Taylorism and Aleksey Gastev's temporal praxis is related to an essay by Krzhizhanovsky about the increasing mechanization of the human body and mind, a work which he unambiguously titled "Man Against the Machine." From this overtly polemical writing, I turn to Krzhizhanovsky's fictional treatment of similar themes in "A Certain Person," written earlier in the decade, and its relation to philosophical ideas about empty, homogenous time. Finally, the last and longest section of the present chapter will address the theme of time discipline through a dystopian tale-within-a-tale from Krzhizhanovsky's 1926 novel *The Letter Killers Club*. More than any of the author's other works, this story illustrates the dismal consequences of making humans slave to the clock, and in hindsight the work appears almost prophetic in its depiction of the totalitarian state before the rise of Hitler and Stalin.

In each of these chapter sections, the various features of rational time in Krzhizhanovsky's writing will be developed in more detail. Most of these features of rational time are not specifically his own conceptual innovations, although he sometimes gives them unexpected fictional forms in his stories. Here, rational conceptions of time are intimately linked with the *Chronos* half of the

Chronos-Kairos dichotomy discussed in the first chapter—that is, linear, abstract and mathematical time, the Newtonian model of absolute and universal time that Kant (and later Einstein) confounds. Because of this origin, the rational time conception inherits a mathematical disposition: that is, time is something **precise** and **precisely measured***,* an attribute that Krzhizhanovsky will equate with various measuring devices in his prose: the abacus, the metronome, the chronometer, the chart and timetable. Moreover, rational time is both **uniform** and **discrete**. If premodern ideas of time centered around phenomenologically distinct and cyclical measures of time—day/night, summer/winter—then the fundamental unit of rational time is the second, a discrete division of time that captures the speed of modern life and is universal and uniform no matter the season or day. Because of the uniform and discrete nature of rational time, it is **fungible**—that is, easily converted between various non-temporal measures such as money or labor output and back again into time. This association means that time is frequently associated with **movement**, especially mechanical movement in space: the pendulum, the machine, the ergonomics of manual labor.[7] The rationalized focus on time as movement through space elevates the importance of **synchrony***,* or the harmonization of simultaneous movement. As illustrated by this focus on synchrony over diachrony, rational time is firmly grounded in the present, but it is also **forward-facing***,* that is, it emphasizes planning and planned activity—in other words, the subordination of the present moment to future goals. Finally, rational time is fundamentally **external** to the body, not internally experienced or manifested (as was the case in the internal/bodily time of *Odyssey of the Odd* in the previous chapter). As a temporality that is external and imposed on its subjects, rational time is

[7] According to Marx, "the clock was the first automatic device to be used for practical purposes, and from it the theory of the production of regular motion evolved." (Quoted in Jimena Canales, *The Physicist & the Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson, and the Debate That Changed Our Understanding of Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 260).

generally inhospitable to humans and inimical to free will in Krzhizhanovsky's work—an aspect of this time that will be illustrated in the works to follow.

3.2 Speeding into the Machine Age: Urban Time and the Fleeting Present

"Every year, the second is made more slippery and elusive,"[8] Krzhizhanovsky writes in "A Collection of Seconds," [Коллекция секунд] a brief but wide-ranging essay on Moscow street photographers from 1925 that spirals outwards, in a typical Krzhizhanovskian fashion, into broader musings on time and modernity. The title of the piece refers to still photographs, which capture individual moments from the flow of life and fix them, like butterflies on pins in a collector's cabinet, for all eternity. But the "collection of seconds" also would seem to refer to the passage of time itself, which Krzhizhanovsky describes as a series of moments, a string of nows of varying duration—"now collapsing, now stretching like an accordion"[9]—that flicker through our consciousness. These presents, Krzhizhanovsky writes in the essay, speed by us with an ever-increasing tempo. This acceleration is especially true for those who live in the urban center, whom Krzhizhanovsky calls "beings with an exceedingly brief present."[10] The increasing pace of modern life is too quick for older photographic technology to catch, so that only a new machine, the movie camera, is equal to the task:

> In the metropolis, the passersby who dash by opening and closing doors, briefcases clutched under their arms, are people hastening after the rushing seconds. Even modern cameras aren't always able to catch this 'catcher of seconds': agitated, he goes along his way moving in zigzags, now coming to an abrupt halt, now nearly breaking into a run. Only the cascading race of images of the cinema reel may keep up with the acute and headlong pace of the city's clanking and thundering machine.[11]

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[8] «Что ни год, секунда делается все увертливее и неуловимее» (*SK:Ss* 1: 559).

[9] «…то плющась, то растягиваясь, как гормоника…» (Ibid.).

[10] «…существа с чрезвычайно коротким *настоящим*» (Ibid.)

[11] «Прихожие большого города, спешащие с портфелями под локтем мимо раскрывающихся и закрывающихся дверей, это люди, бегущие вдогонку за улепётывающими секундами. Даже усовершенствованному аппарату не

In this passage, technology, temporality and the modern urban life are inextricably bound up together. Life is artificially sped up due to the advance of technology, and only new technological advances—the automobile, say, or the telephone, or the machine of the metropolis itself—may keep pace with the changes it has wrought.

Indeed, in 1925, the year Krzhizhanovsky wrote his essay, Moscow was a city in the throes of profound transformations. Following the privations of revolution and war communism, the NEP period ushered in new life to the city, which had become the capital of the fledgling Soviet state in 1918. Demobilized soldiers, carpetbaggers, war orphans and displaced peasantry thronged the city streets, and commerce, suppressed during the civil war, swiftly rebounded—a revival of the city that is depicted through the eyes of Maximilian Shterer, the protagonist of Krzhizhanovsky's 1929 novel *Memories of the Future,* as occurring quite suddenly, practically overnight.[12] During these first years of NEP, Moscow had turned, in the words of historian Timothy Colton, from "ghost town to boom town."[13] Automobiles, rare even in major metropolitan areas before the revolution, were everywhere in evidence in the Soviet capital by the mid- to late-1920s, and in the second half of the decade were being manufactured domestically just outside city limits, new manifestations of the need for speed.[14] Faster modes of transportation, one of the most visible forms of technological innovation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, were inextricably intertwined in the popular imagination with modernity, with the physical speed of planes, trains and automobiles standing in for a general

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всегда удается изловить ловца секунд: он идет нервно, зигзагами, то круто останавливаясь, то переходя почти в бег. Только сквозящие в обгон друг другу изображения кинофильмы поспевают за стремительными острым темпом лязгающей и грохочущей машины города» (*SK:Ss* 1: 560).

[12] *SK:Ss* 2: 383.

[13] Timothy J Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis*, Russian Research Center Studies (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 153.

[14] Lewis H Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 17.

perception of temporal acceleration.[15] In her pioneering study of the emergence of science fiction and Russian modernity, *We Modern People,* Anindita Banerjee traces the connection between speed of travel and modernity, noting that "With the advent of swift machines that were projected to serve as urban transport in the near future, speed came to be acknowledged as an inalienable component of modern life …"[16] Additionally, advances in communication such as undersea telegraph cables and radio transmitters allowed for nearly instantaneous communication between far-flung locales, and to technological optimists and utopians, it seemed as though humans might indeed be able to transcend the limitations of our physical boundedness in time and space.

As discussed in this dissertation's introduction, such techno-optimism found its cultural expression in the movement of futurism, which began in Western Europe prior to the First World War but found fertile soil in late-Tsarist Moscow around the revolution and in the decade following. An essential component of this new movement for the modern era was aestheticizing and valorizing speed, a stance that was vividly articulated in futurism's manifesto written in Italian by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1909: "We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath … a roaring motorcar which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace."[17] Moreover, Italian futurism conceived of the new machine age as a great battle against our time- and space-boundedness through fully embracing

[15] Significantly, speed is neither an entirely spatial or temporal measure, but in fact unites the two—units of distance over units of time—into a single quantity, which aligned with the new scientific conceptions of time in the early twentieth century that merged space and time into a continuum.

[16] Banerjee, 60.

[17] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Futurism Manifesto." *Futurism: An Anthology*. Ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, Laura Wittman. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 51.

speed. With characteristic bombast, Marinetti writes: "Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, since we have created eternal, omnipresent speed."[18]

Not everyone was as bullish about the coming machine age, of course. Anxieties about the increasing pace of life were commonplace in both Western Europe and Russia in the nineteenth century—although Russia experienced industrialization and its railroad-building fever later than in Europe, these changes proceeded even more frenetically to make up for lost time. Decades before the Russian Revolution, according to Anindita Banerjee, European psychologists had already located the roots of the "epidemic" of neurasthenia in the increasing pace of modern life—clearly, anxieties about the psychological consequences of modernity had established themselves firmly by the turn of the century in both Russia and the West.[19]

At the same time, however, the Soviet population, especially in the large metropolises, had to contend with not just with the technological changes sweeping across the continent, but an entirely separate Russian set of wrenching dislocations caused by the imposition of a novel social and political order as well. The new Soviet government did nothing to mitigate these shocks; on the contrary, it explicitly aligned itself with the disruptions of the modern age, harnessing the rhetoric of technological change and upheaval for its own political and economic goals. Thus, the accelerating forces of modernity collided with the cataclysm that was the Russian revolution, creating shocks and aftershocks in its wake that amplified a general sense of disruption.

These upheavals were perhaps nowhere more suddenly visible than in Moscow, the new capital of an empire that had entered the war as an agrarian, largely pre-industrial society, and emerged from

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Banerjee, 60. Incidentally, these sentiments fade with the end of the age of industrialization; in 1970, at the dawn of the so-called information age, the American futurist Alvin Toffler published *Future Shock,* a book that argued that our minds were being overwhelmed by the breakneck speed of social and technological change. Today, the ever-increasing pace of life is both celebrated or lamented as a manifestation of the coming 'singularity,' a millenarian-type prediction of the coming dominance of artificial over human intelligence.

it with a new political system that was embracing the prospects of modernity and modernization with a profound zeal. Arriving in Moscow in 1922, Krzhizhanovsky writes of walking for hours each day around the city, observing the changes as outsider and disconnected flâneur. His observations from the NEP period, which he recorded in a several essays, including his 1925 "A Collection of Seconds," quoted above, show a deep interest in and anxiety about the increasing tempo of the capital city. As with the nineteenth century psychologists like Beard,[20] who saw neurasthenia as a mental response to the new and bewildering conditions of modernity, Krzhizhanovsky felt that life was accelerating to the point where the mind might easily be overwhelmed by an abundance of impressions. As he writes in his notebooks, "Revolution is the speeding up of facts such that thought cannot keep up with them."[21]

The conceptual linkage of urban space with modern, Soviet time—and conversely, rural space with a forgotten past life—occurs in a brief *mise-en-abîme* tale in the 1927 story "The Bookmark." The tale concerns a village carpenter named Vas'ka Tyankov who goes to the city for work and comes back infected with revolutionary ideals:

> … every so often Vas'ka Tyankov heads to the city for earnings, cashes himself out and heads back to the village. On the way there, a chisel, axe and planes ride with Vas'ka in a chamfered wooden box, and on the way back, ticketless, so to speak, hidden under the chisel, rides a bundle of leaflets and proclamations. In short, the city meetings first take up all his free time, and then even more. Events follow events. February – July – October. The Party comes out from the underground, seizes power. Carpenter Vas'ka, long since transformed into Comrade Vasily, swaps his box with chisels and little padlock for a paper-stuffed leather briefcase with a steel clasp. He's up to his ears in work: automobiles carry Comrade Vasily from one set of proceedings to another, all around typewriters pound and telephones bark: "Immediately"—"Extremely Urgently"—"Without Delay".[22]

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[20] Ibid., 65. Incidentally, schizophrenia has a higher incidence among people raised in urban settings: See, for instance, Glyn Lewis and Anthony David, "Schizophrenia and City Life," *Lancet* 340, no. 8812 (1992): 137–40.

[21] «Революция—убыстрение фактов, за которыми не поспевает мысль» (*SK:Ss* 5: 371).

[22] «Только на деревне нищо, а руки зудят по работе, и Васька Тянков за заработками нет-нет да и в город; отработает и - назад. Туда вместе с Васькой в деревянном ящике со скосом едут долота, топор и рубанки, а оттуда, так сказать, безбилетно, под долота запрятавшись, пачки листовок и прокламаций. Одним словом, городские встречи отнимают сначала досуги, затем и больше. События вслед событиям. Февраль - июль - октябрь. Партия выходит из подполья, овладевает властью. Столяр Васька, давно уже превратившийся в товарища Василия, меняет свой ящик с долотами и подвесным замочком на распертый бумагами кожаный

Tyankov seems to have forgotten his village past for the rush of the present. But one day, running to a car waiting for him, he comes across a fragrant wood-shaving, and quickly, without thinking, sticks it in his briefcase and

> …[jumps into] the automobile, [hurries] through the official meetings, from entrance halls to entrance hall. Report, special opinion. Another report. Someone: [names] a number [in regard to] a number. And Tyankov wants [to do] numbers by numbers, automatically unlatches the briefcase and [runs] fingers along the edges of files, but here—once again—the small spiral, like a soft tress, of the little wood shaving. The tenacious little shaving is already round his index finger like a wedding ring, and not just his wrist, his whole arm, shoulder, body, gathers itself and strains, calls out to that old work which years had imprinted into his blood and muscles and which had been violently torn from his body. In short: the villager Vas'ka once again asserts his right to existence; he had been silent years and years, could have been silent more, except for that little wood shaving—and…[23]

Here the story breaks off abruptly, and it is not clear whether Comrade Vasily will yield to Carpenter Vasily or not.

In the above passages, Krzhizhanovsky does not just describe the speeding up of time from the village to the city, from before the revolution to after it: He actually performs this acceleration in the text. History speeds past like the months tearing themselves off calendars in old films: "Events follow events. February – July – October. The Party comes out from the underground, seizes power." The list of months is shorthand for the events of the revolution: February is the "bourgeois" revolution, July is the armed demonstrations of the "July Days", and October is the Bolshevik Revolution. Vas'ka trades his tool box for a briefcase,[24] a metonym for his transformation

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портфель с стальным защелком. Работы выше макушки: автомобили возят товарища Василия из заседания в заседание, вокруг стучат машинки и тявкают телефоны: 'Спешно' – 'Срочно' – 'Безотлагательно'» (*SK:Ss:* 2: 581).

[23] «И автомобиль - сквозь заседания, от подъездов к подъезду. Доклад, особое мнение. Еще доклад. Кто-то - цифру к цифре. И Тянков хочет по цифрам цифрами, привычно отстегнул портфель и пальцами по обрезу дел, но тут - опять - крохотная, мягким локоном извитая стружечка. Уже вкруг указательного обручальным кольцом цепкая стружечка, уже не кисть, вся рука, плечо, тело, стягиваясь и напрягаясь, зовет ту старую, годами вогнанную в кровь и мускулы, насильно разлученную с телом работу. Короче: деревенский Васька вновь предъявляет права на бытие; он молчал годы и годы, мог бы молчать и еще, но крохотная стружечка - и...» (*SK:Ss:* 2: 581-2).

[24] In his fiction, Krzhizhanovsky uses the briefcase [портфель] as a symbol of Soviet bureaucracy; the briefcase is often portrayed as propelling the person, who has lost individual will and only follows it around as its servant. See, for example, «Чуть-чути», «Боковая ветка»—in which the briefcase holder is named "Quantin" [Квантин], to accentuate the connection with rational numbers—along with «Автобиография трупа» and «Тринадцатая категория рассудка».

from carpenter to comrade. Instead of hand-tools and fragrant wood, he's surrounded by machines: the automobile, the typewriter, the telephone that barks at him to speed up his work. The text seemingly unconsciously takes on the linguistic conventions of another modern invention, the telegraph, leaving off verbs, communicating in staccato facts: "Someone: [names] a number [in regard to] a number. And Tyankov wants [to do] numbers by numbers." And, of course, the foregrounding of numbers and figures to this new Soviet bureaucracy is essential, implying as it does a rational, scientific basis for its decisions about the future. But although the carpenter has been seduced by these numbers and this new and faster life, his physical being still yearns for the slowness of the village, for the past, for the smell of wood-shavings on the workbench. His consciousness may have been transformed, but his body still aches for his previous self. Put in the language of time, the constant piling-up of new moments does not erase or displace those that came before, but instead, like archaeological strata, merely covers them over. This means the past still exists, and still periodically makes itself known in human consciousness and through its material artifacts. Our present moment, as Henri Bergson suggests, encompasses more than its brief duration would suggest, carrying within itself a record of its memory and history.[25] Thus does the past remain present.

3.3 Out of Step: Fractured Temporality and Uneven Development

If the present carries both the memories of the past and the potentials of the future, the Soviet metropolis of the 1920s in particular abounded with situations and settings in which the new and the

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There's also this passage from *Memories of the Future* describing the routine of a Soviet bureaucrat: "From morning until late at night his briefcase steered him from meeting to meeting, from folder to folder, from this numbered file to that; come evening the briefcase bulged while the briefcase carrier felt flattened…" (*Memories,* 181).

[25] Leonard Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism: Phenomenology, Ontology, Ethics* (New York, London: Continuum, 2003), 55.

old, the outdated and futuristic, jostled shoulder-to-shoulder. This mix of temporalities created a portrait of what Trotsky, in a different context, dubbed "uneven and combined development"—in other words, Soviet modernity was a patchwork of temporal contexts, some more modern than others. Krzhizhanovsky was particularly attuned to these often paradoxical juxtapositions of pre- and post-revolutionary life, and devoted two essays to the phenomenon, one on new and old Moscow store shingles, "Moscow Shop Signs" [Московские вывески], the other on street names, "2000 (Regarding the Question of Street Renaming)" [2000 (К вопросу о переименовании улиц)] These essays, along with "A Collection of Seconds," the essay on Moscow street photography and modernity quoted above, were among Krzhizhanovsky's rare published works; all three were published in the same year of 1925.[26] Each of these essays deals, either explicitly or implicitly, with the inexorable forward progression of time, *Chronos*, and represent a kind of attempt to catch and fix a still portrait—to halt this continual progression of time, if just for one small representative slice of time—of a city in the throes of an enormous transformation.

In "Moscow Shop Signs," Krzhizhanovsky uses the city's various store shingles as a way to muse on the strangeness of his present moment, a moment in time that encompasses different layers of the past and present, palimpsest-like, within itself. His essay is a virtual tour of Moscow through the words and images depicted on its storefronts and hanging signs, characterizing them by when they were painted: before the revolution, or during the destitute years of civil war, or most recently during NEP. Instead of a geography-based tour that ranges through space, however, Krzhizhanovsky is more interested in ranging through *time,* showing how the very same urban space can conceal different layers of both past and present. This uneven temporality is a result of the breakneck pace of change in this new world: "The Revolution has intensified Moscow's tempo too

[26] *SK:Ss* 1: 679-82.

greatly for the words and images on the signboard surfaces to keep up with everything that is happening in this enormous horizontal space of a city…"[27] Not only have the signs themselves been transformed as a result of the Revolution (dropping the old orthography, for instance, to conform with the reformed alphabet introduced by the Soviets), but the pace of technological change has itself necessitated novel and abbreviated ways to grab the eyes of passersby: "With each passing year, the movement that carries people by these signboard symbols continually increases its tempos. Eyes that once passed by on a slow-moving horse-drawn cab now speed by in automobiles or on trams."[28] In this essay, Krzhizhanovsky avoids overt criticism of these changes, but concludes his piece with a call to "make a snapshot" of the old signs as a valuable record of the past before they disappear completely.[29] Here, instead of focusing on Soviet modernity as a force for creation and production, he emphasizes the destructive nature of its emphasis on speed, using a metaphor he borrows from Einstein's famous equivalence of matter and energy: "Einstein teaches us that a mass may be imparted a speed that increases at the expense of this same mass until it has been completely destroyed. The acceleration imparted to everyday life by the Revolution has destroyed this same everyday life."[30] Thus, in Krzhizhanovsky's metaphor, the Bolsheviks' quest to speed the country into the modern age is one that would seem to devour everyday existence and perhaps ultimately destroy it.

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[27] «Революция слишком участила темп Москвы, чтобы слова и изображения на вывесочных плоскостях могли угнаться за тем, что происходит на огромной горизонтальной площади города …» (*SK:Ss* 1: 568).

[28] «От года к году движение, несущее людей мимо вывесочных знаков, все более и более ускоряет свои темпы. Глаза, провозимые прежде мимо них на медлительном "извозце", сейчас быстро мчатся в автомобилях и трамваях» (*SK:Ss* 1: 576).

[29] «Если сейчас не защелкнуть в камере фотографических аппаратов постепенно оттесняемую к окраинам, изчезающую под слоями новой, свежей краски, во многом ценную и примечательную старую московскую вывеску с ее своеобразным отмирающим стилем,—то скоро будет поздно» (*SK:Ss* 1: 585).

[30] «По учению Эйнштейна, массе может быть придана скорость, возрастающая за счет самой массы до полного уничтожения таковой. Ускорение, приданное революцией быту, уничтожило самый быт» (*SK:Ss* 1: 569).

In 1925, Krzhizhanovsky published another essay, "2000 (Regarding the Question of Street Renaming)," using one aspect of Moscow life to metonymically capture the city's rapid and uneven transformation. As in his essay on Moscow shop signs, he draws the reader's attention to the paradoxical juxtapositions of the old and new that show a city living in two epochs simultaneously. Adopting the point of view of a foreign tourist—the use of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization, is an omnipresent device in Krzhizhanovsky's work—he points out the irony of various street name pairings that are contiguous in space but temporally incoherent: "The foreign traveler wishing to study Moscow through the names of its streets, lanes and squares, would soon become convinced that the streets and squares of Moscow speak in two different languages, […] an old-testament language and new, the language of Ivan I and Lenin."[31] For example, this hypothetical tourist, "without venturing even a hundred steps from Revolution Square, could end up bounded in the rectangle known since time immemorial as 'Moses Square'."[32] As in "Moscow Shop Signs," Krzhizhanovsky explores the urban landscape as a strange amalgam of signifiers of past, present and future all rolled together into a multilayered present moment. Reality appears frayed, almost schizophrenic in its hodgepodge presentation of conflicting information and symbols. In "Postmark: Moscow," an epistolary story Krzhizhanovsky also wrote in 1925, the narrator describes his attempts to find the common denominator of this city of contrasts:

> When first I walk by the faded yellow building with its stamped symbols *TsKRKP (b)* [the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)], and then a half-hour later pass by the crooked bell-tower of the Church of the Nine Martyrs on the Cabbage Stalk, the one over near Humpback Bridge, I can't help but make a despairing attempt to find the common denominator of that and this. I walk past the bookstore windows with their daily changing book covers: Moscow. Past the beggars who block the way with their outstretched

[31] «Путешественник-чужестранец, который пожелал бы изучить Москву в названиях улиц, переулков и площадей, вскоре бы убедился, что улицы и площади Москвы говорят на двух разных языках […] язык ветхий и новый, от Калиты и от Ленина» (*SK:Ss* 1: 550).

[32] «…не отойдя и сотни шагов от "площади Революции", он очутился бы внутри квадрата "Моисеевской площади", издревле так названной» (Ibid.).

> palms: Moscow. Past the fresh typographic paint stamped on the white stacks of papers with the sharp black word "Pravda": Moscow.[33]

In other words, the only thing that can unite this riot of impressions and warring temporalities is the name of the city itself, *Moscow*—a sign that encompasses all the contradictions the city contains.

By seizing on these signs and using them as metonyms for larger processes of flux and change in society, Krzhizhanovsky is returning to an abiding interest of his fictional work: the life of the word, of the name, and the complex interrelationship between signifier and signified. Signs have real power, he continually asserts in and through his writing. (Indeed, the only book published during his lifetime was his monograph on the naming of literary works, *The Poetics of Titles* [Поэтика заглавий].[34]) Signifiers do not slavishly exist to signify; they also shape the world/work and our perceptions of it. In this sense, Krzhizhanovsky sensed the importance of new street names to the Soviet authorities: to name is to claim, to give something a new existence and to erase its previous incarnation.

Toponyms, in particular, were rich symbolic sites for the new regime. In *Odyssey of the Odd,* discussed in the previous chapter, Krzhizhanovsky plays on the renaming of Petersburg to similarly invoke the figure of the foreign traveler, but this time one who has travelled through time and not space. The novel's main character introduces his tale by telling the narrator, "my longest and most arduous journey transported me in space a mere seventy feet,"[35] and continues:

> And it seems to me that one can trade countries for other countries even without any recourse to these feet I'd counted off on my fingers: These last four years, my friend, I have been no more mobile than a corpse, as you know. My window frame has not moved an inch

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[33] «Когда я прохожу сначала мимо блекло-желтого дома с оттиснувшимися на нем знаками ЦК РКП (б), а получасом позднее мимо кривой колокольни церкви Девяти Мучеников на Кочерыжках, что у Горбатого моста, я не могу не сделать отчаянной попытки найти общий знаменатель тому и этому. Шагаю мимо книжных витрин с меняющимися, что ни день, обложками: Москва. Мимо нищих, загородивших путь протянутыми ладонями: Москва. Мимо свежей типографской краски, оттиснувшейся поверх белых кип четким черным словом "Правда": Москва» (*SK:Ss* 1: 512-3).

[34] *SK:Ss* 4: 708.

[35] «…самое длительное и самое трудное мое путешествие передвинуло меня в пространстве всего лишь семьдесят футов» (*SK:Ss* 1: 281).

> in any direction. But that country, people and goings-on that I have been observing not without curiosity is no longer the same country; and as you are well aware, there was no need for me to bother myself with tickets and visas in order to be transformed into a foreigner and journey from St. Petersburg to Leningrad.[36]

Here, the novel's storyteller invokes an image of two separate cities, St. Petersburg and Leningrad, that are separated not by space but by time. The native of one city turns out to be a foreign traveler in another, a neat metaphor that serves to bring home the sense of temporal dislocation in more familiar spatial terms.[37] Of course, the traveler has stayed in one place: It is time that has moved around him. This feeling of asynchrony with the present moment is explained ironically in this same novella by way of the mechanism of the aforementioned "temporal bacilli," some of which bind to the brain and block the way for newer bacilli:

> But sometimes it happened that the temporal bacilli, having carried out their mission, did not make way for the new swarms that were flying to replace them, instead continuing to latch on parasitically to the brains and thoughts of their host, irritating the sites of old bites with their empty stinger. These unfortunate people had a hard time of it during the days of our recent revolution: they had no … mmm, immunity of time.[38]

This sense of temporal dislocation—a sense of being one step behind the world around them—engenders a feeling of profound alienation from the present in Krzhizhanovsky's characters. The time is not theirs, even if the place still remains physically the same, as a character in Krzhizhanovsky's lost-then-found story 1930 "Red Snow" tells another:

> Surely you've noticed how over the past few years a certain nonexistence has crept into our life. Little by little, stealthily. We are still embedded into this old space of ours like stumps in a felled forest. But our lives were long ago stacked into woodpiles, and not for us, but for

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[36] «И мне кажется, что можно менять страны на страны, не прибегая даже к этим на пальцах отсчитанным футам: последние четыре года, мой друг, я, как вы знаете, не многим подвижнее трупа. Моя оконная рама не сдвинулась никуда ни на дюйм. Но та страна, людей и дела которой я не без любопытства наблюдаю, уже не та страна; и мне не нужно было, как вы это хорошо знаете, хлопотать о билетах и визах для того, чтобы превратиться в чужестранца и переехать из Санкт-Петербурга в Ленинград» (Ibid.).

[37] A similar spatializing of time occurs in the now-famous quote from the first line of LP Hartley's 1953 book *The Go-Between: "*The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." L. P Hartley, *The Go-Between* (London: H. Hamilton, 1953), 1.

[38] «Но случалось иногда, что бациллы времени, выполнив свое назначение, не уступали места новым роям, прилетевшим им на смену, и продолжали паразитировать на мозге и мыслях человека, растравляя пустым жалом свои старые укусы. Этим несчастным плохо пришлось в дни недавней революции: в них не было... м-м... иммунитета времени» (*SK:Ss* 1: 319).

> others. This watch with its pulsing hands on my wrist is still mine, but the time is no longer mine—it's someone else's altogether, and won't allow either me or you into a single of its seconds.[39]

Thus, instead of being a foreigner in a strange land, these characters are foreigners in a strange *time*, where everything is both the same and profoundly different, transformed by the ever-increasing pace of change. For someone unused to this pace, just the idea of catching up to the present moment seems daunting. Krzhizhanovsky's fictional alter-ego in "Postmark: Moscow," a person who, like Krzhizhanovsky, is a recent transplant to the capital, jokes that his train was late in arriving to the station two years earlier, and now he must forever rush to try to catch up: "Every morning at $9^{3}/_{4,}$ I button myself into an overcoat and set off in pursuit of Moscow. Yes indeed: Two years ago my train, which I remember arrived thirteen hours behind schedule, brought me only to Bryansk Station: To the crux of Moscow [до смысла Москвы] from out there is quite a haul."[40]

This sense of being out of synchrony with the present is one that permeates much of Krzhizhanovsky's writing.[41] A story from 1937, "Goose," captures the plight of a writer who is continually out of synch with his present moment:

> Once upon a time there lived a poor poet. Fortune did not smile upon him. It was enough for him to write an ode to some dignitary, and before the ink of his ode was even dry, the

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[39] «Разве ты не замечала, что уже несколько лет, как в нашу жизнь вкралось несуществование. Исподволь, тишком. Мы ещё вправлены в своё старое пространство, как пни на месте срубленного леса. Но жизни наши давно уже сложены в штабеля, и не для нас, а для других. Вот эти часы с пульсирующей стрелкой на моём запястье ещё мои, но время уже не моё, оно чужое и не пустит ни меня, ни тебя ни в единую из своих секунд» (*SK:Ss* 5: 150-1).

[40] «Каждое утро в $9^{3}/_{4}$ я, застегнув себя в пальто, отравляюсь **вдогонку за Москвой**. Да-да: два года тому назад поезд, помню, запоздавший на 13 часов, довез меня только до Брянского вокзала: **до смысла Москвы** отсюда еще большой конец» (*SK:Ss* 1: 511-2) [author's emphasis].

[41] See, for instance, the figure of Josef Stynsky in *Memories of the Future,* who is, like the author himself, a writer fallen upon hard times. Unlike Krzhizhanovsky, Josef Stynsky is initially quite successful at accommodating changing political expediency in his art: "One day there was a demand for light, next day shadow had gone up in value, and Stynsky, having shifted his theme by a halftone, would transpose it from major to minor. … But for two years now his pen, caught fast on that annoying *if not for,* had found itself outside first-rank shop-window literature, unfit for the plump journal and the person per-page fee." The "*if not for"* refers to Stynsky's misfortune of being thrown off his precise temporal synchrony by an editor, who holds onto his essay—comparing the hammer of the Soviet emblem and the hammer of the auctioneer—a bit longer than usual: "by the time the piece appeared, it was out of step and at odds with the times, and after that Stynsky simply couldn't get his rhythm back" (*Memories,* 189-190).

> dignitary had fallen into disgrace.[42] He worked so long, and with such diligence, on some lyric about the arrival of spring, that spring had already blossomed and gone to seed, summer had come and gone and snow lay on the ground. The covers of all the literary journals slammed shut for the belated masterpiece.[43]

It requires no great stretch of the imagination to surmise that Krzhizhanovsky, in writing these lines, may have been thinking about his own difficulties in publishing his own work. After all, his writing had been roundly rejected not because of its literary failings, but rather because it was considered passé, out of step with the new spirit of the age. Such was the opinion of Maxim Gorky, whose all-important patronage for Krzhizhanovsky's work was sought by a mutual friend in 1932. Upon reading Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, Gorky responded that

> I cannot evaluate the ironic works of citizen Krzhizhanovsky in terms of their philosophical value, but it seems to me that they are rather interesting and likely would have enjoyed some success back in the decade of the eighties of the nineteenth century. In those years, daydreaming [праздномыслие] was in fashion among intellectuals, and friendly debates around the samovar regarding the authenticity or inauthenticity of our understanding of the world served as a rather popular form of entertainment. … [But] in our days, it is as if a new epistemology is being created, one founded on deeds, not contemplation; on facts, not words. Therefore I think that these works of citizen Krzhizhanovsky will hardly find a publisher.[44]

Of course, Gorky's appraisal that the works would "hardly find a publisher" was a self-fulfilling prophecy, as he likely knew it would be. Krzhizhanovsky could not have been very happy at this facile dismissal of his work. But he seems to have done nothing to change the content of his writing to better suit this new age of "deeds, not contemplation," apparently having decided that he would

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[42] This may possibly be a veiled and ironic reference to the purges and the Moscow show trials of 1937, the year this story was written.

[43] «Жил-был бедный поэт. Ему не везло. Стоило ему написать оду вельможе – и не успевали строки его оды просохнуть, как вельможа попадал в опалу. Над одной песней о приходе весны он трудился так долго, с таким тщанием, что весна успела отцвести, лето прошло мимо и выпал снег. Переплёты всех альманахов захлопнулись для запоздалого шедевра» (*SK:Ss* 3: 205).

[44] «…я не могу рассматривать иронические сочинения гр. Кржижановского со стороны их философской ценности, но мне кажется, что они достаточно интересны и, вероятно, имели бы хороший успех в 80-х годах XIX столетия. В те годы праздномыслие среди интеллектуалов было в моде, и дружеские споры вокруг самовара на темы достоверности или недостоверности наших знаний о мире служили весьма любимым развлечением … В наши дни как будто бы создается новая гносеология, основанная на деянии, а не на созерцании, на фактах, а не на словах. Поэтому я думаю, что сочинения гр. Кржижановского едва ли найдут издателя» (*SK:Ss* 1: 25-6).

continue to try writing timeless—even if untimely—fiction. As he dryly observes in his notebooks: "I'm not on speaking terms with today, but I am beloved by eternity."[45]

3.4 Machine Against Man: On Taylorism and Bayonets

If the largely spontaneous events of the revolution and the impulsive and often irrational pace of reforms in the early 1920s had created pockets of new Soviet modernity, then by the middle of the decade, Soviet authorities became interested in more systematic and broad-based approaches to modernization that were grounded in rationalizing methods. For these, they turned to the work of the American engineer and prophet of scientific management Frederick Taylor. Aided by the stopwatch and the technique of "chronophotography," Taylor and his disciples analyzed labor and movement over time, even up to gradations as small as thousands of a second, in order to eliminate wasted movement and increase worker productivity.[46] Instead of time—*Kairos*—being seen as event-based, pliable and subject to the force of human will, this scientific approach to time emphasized the abstract, invariable nature of *Chronos,* to which the human subject must itself adapt.

In the Soviet Union, this approach toward maximizing worker efficiency was met with some ambivalence; Lenin himself called it a "scientific system of sweating" workers, in which capitalist bosses "within the same nine or ten working hours as before […] squeeze out of the worker three times more labour, mercilessly drain him of all his strength, and are three times faster in sucking out every drop of the wage slave's nervous and physical energy."[47] But at the same time, this method

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[45] «С сегодняшним днем я не в ладах, но меня любит вечность» (*SK:Ss* 5: 404). See also Krzhizhanovsky's assertion that he is "on familiar terms with eternity" [«с вечностью на 'ты'"] (*SK:Ss* 1: 7).

[46] Banerjee, 64.

[47] Vladimir Il′ich Lenin and Russia) Institut Marksizma-Leninizma (Moscow, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1960), 18: 594.

proved effective at raising productivity, and so Lenin advocated "combining Soviet power and the Soviet organization of administration with the up-to-date achievements of capitalism."[48] In other words, the only thing that mattered was who controlled the means of production: the people (or rather, party bosses), or the exploiting capitalist class.

The chief proponent of the widespread adoption of Taylorism in the Soviet Union, Aleksei Gastev, sought to rationalize the workplace in order to create efficiencies not only in the actions of individual workers, but to create synergies of efficiency among workers and between socialist enterprises as well. In other words, the human labor was to be treated like machine labor, but so too was the entire economy a vast interconnected machine, much like the cogs and flywheels of a mechanical clock. This metaphor of interconnected machinery is laid out in Valentin Kataev's 1932 socialist production novel *Time, Forward!* [Время, вперёд!]

> …an increase of the productivity of one machine automatically entails the increase of the productivity of the others indirectly connected to it. And since all machines in the Soviet Union are connected with each other to a greater or lesser degree, and together represent a complex interlocking system, the raising of tempos of any given point in this system inevitably carries with it the unavoidable—however minute—raising of tempos of the entire system as a whole, thus, to a certain extent, bringing the time of socialism closer.[49]

Thus we can see one of the values of socialist Taylorism is not simply in its efficiency—thereby shortening the amount of time needed to achieve communism—but also in its potential for *synchrony*. This was a latent strain in Taylorism that appealed specifically to its socialist adopters, who perhaps saw a machine-like beauty in harmonized labor activity across the factory floor—indeed, across the entire country, which could be turned into something like a vast orchestra, where each player would be following the same exact score and where no one would be out of step. In short, the human was to be more like the machine: efficient, powerful, untiring and synchronized.

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[48] As quoted in Julia Vaingurt, *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde: Technology and the Arts in Russia of the 1920s*, Northwestern University Press Studies in Russian Literature and Theory; Studies in Russian Literature and Theory (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 159.

[49] Valentin Kataev, *Time, Forward!*, 1st Midland book ed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 166.

Seeing this valorization of machine labor and machine synchrony in the Soviet Union, artists responded with works that blurred the line between the human and the machine. In 1921, even before the end of the civil war, the writer Yevgeny Zamyatin already perceived the potential direction this subjugation of humans to rationalized time might take in the future. In his dystopian novel *We* [Мы]*,* all human activity, including leisure and sex, is performed according to scientific timetables. Zamyatin's novel had the dubious distinction of being the first work banned by Goskomizdat[50] (if Krzhizhanovsky ever read it, he does not make any reference to it[51]). At the same time, similar (though perhaps less far-reaching) projects were already underway to rationalize leisure time in addition to work time. In the mid-1920s, the Soviet economist Stanislav Strumilin kept careful records of workers' time off in "a comprehensive set of 'time-budget analyses' of the daily life activity of Soviet workers, peasants and professionals, registering down to the minute the amount of time, on the average, spent by the Soviet population in 'productive' and 'nonproductive' activity."[52]

Other artists responded more positively to the blurring of the line between man and machine, among them theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold, who was inspired in part by Taylorism to develop his theory of biomechanics. In 1922, Meyerhold staged *The Death of Tarelkin,* in which a constructivist set became a sort of machine for the actors, who in turn moved in ways reminiscent of machinery. Richard Stites notes that Meyerhold explicitly references the work of Gastev and the Time League (of which he was a member) in his search for scientific and precise movement that

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[50] Patrick Eichholz, "Double-Edged Satire in Zamyatin's We," *Extrapolation* 56, no. 3 (2015), 267.

[51] See Perel'muter's commentary: SK:Ss 2: 613

[52] Hanson, 128.

would create a "high-velocity man" who could stage four-hour productions in one hour, maximizing efficiency of movement.[53]

Such an approach was anathema to Krzhizhanovsky, both on the stage and in life itself. In his 1924 essay "Man Against the Machine" [Человек против машины], published in the theatrical bulletin of the Moscow Chamber Theater, *7 Days of the MKT,* Krzhizhanovsky makes a thinly-veiled reference to Meyerhold and his theatrical school, connecting it to the mechanized warfare of the First World War:

> Just as the war's monstrous engineering had one sole objective—to kill man—so too does the scenic engineering which has now taken the theatre by storm have a single objective: to kill the actor. His body has been encased in contraptions, his voice drowned out by the clamor of a moving set; the actor has gotten lost in this complex latticework, disoriented among the flat surfaces and rigging like a soldier deafened by shelling in a tangle of barbed wire and communication trenches.
>
> The battle of machine against man proceeds with intermittent success: the machine has gradually begun to retreat into the wings from certain stages. The actor has begun *coming into play* again, timidly for now, like a refugee who has been driven off by the machines occupying the stage. And there's hope that soon the human will no longer play "servant" to stage equipment, but that this stage equipment will be used merely to serve the human.[54]

But Krzhizhanovsky's essay is not simply to attack an aesthetic movement that celebrates the machine. For him, the theatrical school of Meyerhold and others is but a symptom of a larger process of mechanization of the living being and its subordination to the machine. He traces this broader development once again to a different sort of theater: the theater of war. It was in the trenches of the First World War, Krzhizhanovsky suggests in "Man Against the Machine," that European humanistic values were superseded by the cult of the machine:

> This past war was waged not by people against other people (this is a fiction), but instead by machine against man: the machine has triumphed. Humanism has crumbled; the artillery

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[53] Stites, 161.

[54] «Как у чудовищной инженерии войны была одна цель: убить человека, —так и у сценической инженерии, захватившей театр, одна цель: убить актера. Тело его вделано в конструкцию, голос заглушен шумами движущегося монтажа; актер заблудился в сложных плетениях, меж плоскостей и тросов, как оглушенный канонадой солдат в путаной проволоке и «ходах сообщений». Бой машины против человека протекает с переменным успехом: от иных рамп машина начинает понемногу отползать. Актер пока робко, как беженец, прогнанный машинами, оккупировавшими сцену, начинает *возвращаться в игру*. И верится: скоро не человек будет «прислугой» у сценических орудий, а сценические орудия будут лишь обслуживать человека» (*SK*:*Ss* 4: 661).

> guns, muzzles raised skyward, announced their victory. According to the tenets of European philosophy, the human, who should be a person's object and *aim*, has instead been transformed into its *target*.[55]

In warfare, the machine no longer serves the human, Krzhizhanovsky argues, but rather serves to destroy the human: "By flattening himself out into a bullet-riddled cardboard target,[56] man made himself into an irksome obstruction to be cleared away, a task requiring the increase of a military-industrial complex already bloated beyond measure. The fear: The copper supply would run out. The possibility that the supply of human might run out somehow didn't cross anyone's mind."[57] During war, the worth of a human life reaches its nadir, while the value of the machine climbs to new heights. In "Man Against the Machine," Krzhizhanovsky writes that "Every military officer was well aware that to lose a man was a trifle, but losing a machine gun (a machine) was a disgrace. Not that anyone ever asked after the officer's men, only inquiring about them: How many *bayonets*?"[58] This arid and depersonalizing language, what Krzhizhanovsky calls "the machine tongue" crept into human discourse during wartime and then lodged itself there permanently. This machine tongue is laconic, refers to objects instead of people—or metonymically to people by the objects they carry (e.g., the bayonet)—and deals primarily in hard facts and cold figures.

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[55] «Минувшую войну вели не люди против людей (это мнимость), а машина против человека: победила машина. Гуманизм рухнул; а пушки, задрав кверху жерла, торжествовали. Человек, который, по максимам европейской философии, для человека должен быть *целью*, из цели превратился в *мишень*» (*SK*:*Ss* 4: 660).

[56] This reversal, in which the human is now the target, is refashioned by the author in fictional form in his 1927 story "The Targets Attack" [Мишени наступают]. As the title implies, the story is a phantasmagorical tale in which the flat outlines of humans that soldiers use for marksmanship training suddenly become animate and begin marching on the humans, who panic and run. The military command is forced to intervene, sending out columns of soldiers to surround the targets. Here they are mown down by bullets—not the bullets of the targets, who, after all, carry no weaponry, but by their fellow soldiers, whose bullets fly through the thin outlines and find their living targets on the other side of their encirclement.

[57] «И человек, сплющившийся в дергающуюся под пулями картонную мишень, превратился в досадливое препятствие, для ликвидации которого приходилось расширять и так непомерно разбухшее фабричное-военное производство. Боялись: не хватит меди. О том, что может не хватить человека, как-то и не думалось» (*SK*:*Ss* 4: 660-1).

[58] «Любой прапорщик знал: потерять человека—пустяки, потерять пулемет (машину)—позор. До про людей у прапорщиков никто и не спрашивал, а осведомлялись: сколько *штыков*?» (*SK*:*Ss* 4: 660).

The above observation about soldiers and bayonets Krzhizhanovsky seems to have borrowed from his own unpublished story, "A Certain Person" [«Некто»], written in 1921 and included in *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder*. The narrator, describing soldiers mustering in the trenches and massing for an assault, describes the transformation of people into bayonets, and these bayonets then being further abstracted into pencil marks on a page:

> People came into the trenches, and someone said to them in a precise but quiet voice, "Count 'em off in numeric order", "Count 'em off first and sec-ond." Someone quietly wrote in precise handwriting: "1000 – 2000 – 100,000 bayonets"; it was easy to count these rows of sharpened steel units spiking the air like spines: there, underneath the bayonets, something shifted and stirred, crossed itself and moaned—but the bayonets shone identically black with their identical points. Incidentally, it was as easy to thread crunching bodies on [the bayonets] as it was to thread abacus beads ["bones": костяшки] onto abacus spindles.[59]

Here, the image of the abacus, so emblematic of the rational utilitarianism that Krzhizhanovsky attacks in "Man Against the Machine" brings to mind the accountant in "The Players," with whom we began our discussion in this chapter. Indeed, the accountant of that story owns an abacus, which he uses to keep track of the changing fortunes of the war outside his window. But in this story, the man who is tallying up the bayonets is only an accountant *in a manner of speaking*; he is the "Certain Person" of the story's title, a Mephistopheles-like figure who keeps his own sort of balance sheets. His calculating mindset neatly encapsulates both this language and time of the machine. As such, the story merits a more detailed analysis in the pages that follow.

3.5 Uniform Time, Time in Uniform

[59] «Приходили в окопы люди, и кто-то говорил им четко, но тихо: "По порядку номеров расч...айсь" - "На первый-второй расч...айсь". Кто-то тихо писал четким почерком: "1000 - 2000-100 000 штыков"; было удобно считать эти торчмя торчащие в воздухе ряды стальных заостренных единиц: там, под штыками, что-то копошилось, крестилось и охало,- но штыки одинаково чернели одинаковыми остриями. Кстати, на них так удобно, как на стержни счетов нанизывать - костяшками - хрустящие тела» (*SK:Ss* 1: 216).

Figure 7. Soviet poster for rationalized labor. The title reads "Conduct Affairs Skillfully!" (Govorkov, 1966).

As it turns out, the "Certain Person" of this story's title is not really a person at all, at least not at first. He begins the story as a figment of the imagination of a young student studying for a mathematics exam. To prepare for the exam, the student is bent over a book of practice problem sets with a red cover, going through a series of word problems that all involve a "certain person," [некто], who the student imagines as an odd man with a sharpened goatee and blue-tinted glasses. In these problem sets, the "Certain Person" is an industrious employer who hires workers to perform various tasks—digging a certain number of yards of trench; filling a certain size swimming pool with water and then draining it—all done in varying amounts of time. Here, the intimate connection between labor, money and time that characterized capitalist time management (i.e., Taylorism) is made evident. When the sleep-deprived student, worrying these word problems while sitting on a park bench, is unable to arrive at an answer that does not involve an impossible two-thirds of a worker,[60] the "Certain Person" suddenly appears beside him in the

[60] The figure of fractional person is one that occurs in various works by Krzhizhanovsky: for instance, the 0.6 of a person in "Autobiography of a Corpse", or the person whose existence/non-existence quotient is calculated to three decimal places in "Phantom." In Krzhizhanovsky's ontology, the state of being/nonbeing is not a binary relationship but a continuum; people fade into shadows or shades of themselves, or emerge like ghosts from nonbeing for a time. The idea is one that Krzhizhanovsky seemed to apply to himself—that is, a person who is both ostensibly alive and entirely invisible. This question of fractional existence and its relation to quantum mechanics will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four.

park to solve the problem: "'Well, look here,'" [the Certain Person] said, requisitioning my pencil. And the gray numerals obediently and nimbly began scrambling under his grip. 'Done.'"[61]

At this moment, a destitute beggar-woman with two small children approaches their park bench to ask for money for food, and the Certain Person proffers some coins to her, but only if she can solve the thorny math problem of how to divide them equitably among her children. The beggar is unable to do this, and silently retreats with her hungry children. "You think I begrudge them this pocket change?"[62] the Certain Person asks. "Let them have it, I'm no numbers-pincher, but there must be order. There has to be calculation. It has to match the answer in the book. All this "give for the sake of Christ" business, well, I just can't, you see…"[63]

The mention of Christ may be an affront to the Certain Person for a different reason, however: in the story, his figure appears associated with the demonic. Most obviously, the Certain Person takes refuge in the exercise book in Exercise #666, the "number of the beast" in Revelation. His arrangement with the student in return for his help reveals shades of a Faustian bargain: "'But you should know, young man,' the gentleman in the gray suit continued in a measured voice, adjusting his glasses, 'Seeing that I hire my workers…' The words were rapped out measuredly and calmly. 'You catch my meaning?'"[64] Indeed, the moniker of "Certain Person" ["Некто"] sounds distinctly like the evasive Russian folk language used to refer to the devil without actually summoning him. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the use of "Certain Person" to refer to demonic figures appears in Russian literature prior to Krzhizhanovsky. For example, a demonic "Certain Person" appears in the work of

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[61] «- Ну, вот, - сказал он, овладевая моим карандашом. И серые цифры покорно и юрко забегали под его нажимом. – Готово» (*SK:Ss* 1: 211).

[62] « … вы думаете, мне жаль медяшек?» (*SK:Ss* 1: 212).

[63] «Пусть берут, мне цифр не жалко, но нужен порядок. Счет нужен. И чтобы "по ответу". А так, "Христа ради" не могу же я, поймите вы...» (Ibid.).

[64] «- Надо вам знать, молодой человек,- продолжал мерным голосом господин в серой паре, поправив очки,- что раз я нанимаю рабочих... Слова стучали мерно и спокойно. - Ну, что, поняли?» (Ibid.)

Veniamin Kaverin, Krzhizhanovsky's contemporary and writer of the fantastic,[65] along with Dostoevsky's devil from Ivan's dream in *The Brothers Karamazov* ("Someone [некто] suddenly turned out to be sitting there, though God knows how he got in;"[66] ["Там вдруг оказался сидящим некто, Бог знает как вошедший:"]) who, it should be noted, also has a graying and sharply-pointed goatee. Another likely inspiration for Krzhizhanovsky's gray-suited demon was the character of "The Certain Person in Gray" [Некто в сером] from Leonid Andreev's play "Life of a Man" ["Жизнь Человека"],[67] a figure representing destiny or the Prince of Darkness and who also served as inspiration for Bulgakov's character of Woland from *The Master and Margarita*.[68]

The student, who is more of a dreamer than a quantitative thinker, flunks his exam. But he continues to run into the Certain Person with his gray pencil-point goatee in the years that follow. When the student is drafted in the war, the Certain Person can be seen at the front, arriving to take stock of the "bayonets" in the trenches and ordering them to mount a frontal assault with no concern for casualties. Later, during the Bolshevik revolution, the Certain Person disappears for a time, "probably hiding under the cover of the problem-set book; in the underground; sheltering himself either in [exercise] #1001, or #666, afraid that they would search him, confiscate all the numbers."[69] But a few years after the revolution, he appears again, this time apparently having propelled himself up the ranks as a Bolshevik apparatchik. At this time, the protagonist finds himself waiting along with many others in the receiving room of this Certain Person, "whose gray penciled

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[65] Panchenko, *Ėsse O IUrii Oleshe i Ego Sovremennikakh* (Neformat, 2018), 487.

[66] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Richard Pevear, and Larissa Volokhonsky, *The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts With Epilogue*, Vintage Classics (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 635. Note how the Russian emphasizes the *некто* in the sentence more than the bland English pronoun of "someone," making the two participles—whose sibilants almost rhyme in their hissing serpent-like sound—agree with the pronoun as they would with a noun.

[67] In fact, Perel'muter notes the apparent connection with Andreev's play in his commentary on the story, in which he similarly notes the significance of the number 666: *SK:Ss* 1: 626.

[68] B.V. Sokolov, *Mikhail Bulgakov, Zagadki Tvorchestva* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2008), 406.

[69] «Где "Некто"? Наверное, под переплетом задачника; в подполье; ночует то в No. 1001, то в No. 666; боится: найдут, обыщут, отнимут все цифры» (*SK:Ss* 1: 217).

signature would decide my fate like the simple study problem No. --…"[70] But the Certain Person refuses to acknowledge him or grant him an audience: "Behind the door panel a measured and precise voice rapped out: 'You've been crossed off the list, comrade; I can't do a thing… Next!'"[71, 72]

These improving fortunes of the demonic Certain Person—culminating with a quick ascent in the new Soviet *nomenklatura* after a brief period during the revolutionary years hiding underground as a former capitalist exploiter—serve to illustrate the increasing importance of disciplined calculation after the irrational catharsis of the revolution. Just as in "The Players," the story of the poet and the accountant with which we began this chapter, Krzhizhanovsky sets up a conflict between two value systems which frequently clashed in the early Soviet period. In this story, the protagonist is a daydreaming student who is all passion but has no talent for figures, while the Certain Person is his dispassionate and demonic antipode. Their trajectories on the *being-nonbeing* axis intersect at the revolution, each headed in the opposite direction: The student begins the story as fully human and later finds his existence flattened to a piece of paper and then altogether "crossed off the list" into nonbeing, while the Certain Person begins on paper as an abstraction (just as communism was itself, in a manner of speaking, an abstraction that forced its way into being), but ends up as a Soviet bureaucrat in the flesh, with his own office and list of names to cross out.

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[70] «…от серого карандашного росчерка которого зависело решить мою судьбу, как простенькую приготовишкину задачу No. ...» (Ibid.) Note again the similarities between this figure, who is able to determine a person's fate with a stroke of his pencil, with Andreyev's "Certain Person in Gray" [Некто в сером] who is an arbiter of human fates or destinies.

[71] «За доской двери мерный и четкий голос чеканил: 'Вы вычеркнуты из списка, товарищ; ничего не могу... Следующий'» (Ibid.) The words to describe the Certain Person's voice are the same as found in the previously quoted passage about the bayonets: *measured* [мерный] implies *мера,* measure, quantity, while *precise* [чёткий] seems to be associated in Krzhizhanovsky's work with beads on a string, rosary [четки]—an abacus of sorts for counting prayers and the title of one of Krzhizhanovsky's stories from this same collection.

[72] The phrase "crossed out" recalls Krzhizhanovsky's specific use of the word in his writing to describe "former people": see "The Bookmark," "Seams" and Krzhizhanovsky's own notebooks, in which he writes "I am a crossed-out man." [Я — зачеркнутый человек] (*SK:Ss* 5: 342). Note as well the similarities between this Soviet bureaucrat and the editor in "The Bookmark," both of whom are associated with the pencil, in one case the pencil-like beard, and in the other, pencil-like eyes: "the man behind the editor's desk inspected me with his sharp graphite pupils and, tapping his pencil, said, 'And you? Are you one of the crossed-out or one of the crossers-out?'" (*SK:Ss* 2: 591).

The story's temporal discourse changes in tandem with this shift, from a phenomenological and subjective time in the beginning to an increasingly rational and atomized description of time toward the story's end. Thus the story begins with temporal descriptions that are characterized by elasticity and colored with emotional qualities. For the student, bent over his book studying, "the long winter evenings stretch out."[73] The passage of time between the first and second meeting with the Certain Person is only approximate, an estimate: "Ten or so years went by. Night. Stuffing my hands into the pockets of my student pea-coat, I walked along the deserted streets, listening to the sound of my own footsteps and my own thoughts. Suddenly, right in my ear: 'A-ha, how long's it been now, how many years [сколько лет, сколько зим...]"[74] The student answers this rhetorical question about time with an approximate amount: "it's been about four years since I looked in on you under that red book binding, but … I remember."[75] But the Certain Person knows precisely the amount of time that has elapsed since their last meeting: "Ten years, two months and fourteen days ago I had the pleasure of conversing with you and was even then extremely intrigued in the *amathematicality* [аматематичностью], if you'll allow me to express it thus, of your highly eccentric thinking."[76]

As they converse, the Certain Person needles the student over the unsound mathematics of his love affairs. He points out to the student that "…you've loved, what is it, your first *one and only*, your second *one and only*, your third *one and only* … Which one is it now?"[77] To this, the student replies that "the heart, Mister Certain Person [господин "Некто"], isn't an abacus bead threaded on a spindle.

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[73] «Тянутся долгие зимние вечера» (*SK:Ss* 1: 210).

[74] «Отошло лет десять. Ночь. Сунув руки в карманы студенческой тужурки, я шел пустынными улицами, вслушиваясь в свои шаги и в свои мысли. Вдруг у самого уха: - А-а, сколько лет, сколько зим...» (*SK:Ss* 1: 213).

[75] « … года четыре как не заглядывал к вам, под красный коленкор, но... помню» (*SK:Ss* 1: 214).

[76] «Десять лет, два месяца и четырнадцать дней тому назад я имел удовольствие уже беседовать с вами и был чрезвычайно заинтересован уже тогда *аматематичностью*, если разрешите так сказать, вашего высоколюбопытного мышления» (*SK:Ss* 1: 214).

[77] «…любите, там... первую "единственную", вторую "единственную", третью "единственную"... Которая сейчас?» (*SK:Ss* 1: 214).

I'll love if I desire, and won't if I don't. I don't use the beats of my heart to keep running tallies."[78] The mention of the abacus bead prompts the Certain Person to lament his life, his loneliness and his role in his abstracted world,[79] which he describes as being as predetermined as the movement of a bead on a spindle:

> …you see, if the stars have orbits from which they cannot diverge even in the slightest, and if the abacus bead—which you so very cleverly have deigned to equate to the heart—is itself stuck on the iron of its spindle, then the very same … You are biting your tongue, you think it's easy for me: millennium on top of millennium, century on top of century, year upon year—and in each of them, just think of it, is 525,600 minutes—no, 31,536,000 seconds, and all of them are identical, you understand, identical and empty. One [один] among the billions of emptinesses. Numbers – numbers – numbers: and each of them masquerading as an inch, a meter, a milestone, a verst, space, endlessness; a worker, a son, a brother, a human; depth, height, width. Alone [один], always alone [всегда один] among the myriad of emptinesses![80]

In this passage, Krzhizhanovsky plays with the idea of the number one, the singular, against and among the many, at the same time as invoking the other meaning of one [один]—*alone*. In the passage, the meaning of the word seems to shift from the numeric—"One among the billions of emptinesses"—to the existential: "*Alone* [один], always *alone* [один] among the myriad of emptinesses!" But despite this plaintive *cri de coeur*, the Certain Person cannot be anyone other than himself: an abstraction masquerading as a living being.[81]

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[78] «…сердце, господин "Некто", не счетная костяшка, вдетая на стержень. Хочу - люблю, хочу - нет. Ударом сердца счета не веду» (Ibid.)

[79] As pointed out by Julian Connolly, this passage resembles the complaint of the devil in Ivan's dream in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who also claims to be misunderstood and laments his fate as an abstraction who simply longs to be real. Moreover, Ivan claims that he dreamed up this devil as a student, just as the student in this story seems to have dreamed up the Certain Person. Given the similarities, it seems Krzhizhanovsky is almost certainly entering into an intertextual dialogue with Dostoevsky, along with a whole tradition of Russian writing against "European" rationality.

[80] «Но сложилось так: видите, если у звезд - орбиты, с которых им - ни-ни, если счетная костяшка, которую вы чрезвычайно остроумно изволили приравнять сердцу, и та вдета на железо стержня, то и... Вы молчите, вы думаете, мне легко: тысячелетие к тысячелетию, век к веку, год к году,- и в каждом, вы только подумайте, 525 600 минут, нет - 31 536 000 секунд, и все они одинаковы, понимаете, одинаковы и пусты. Один – меж миллиардов пустот. Числа - числа - числа: и каждое притворилось дюймом, метром, вехой, верстой, пространством, беспредельностью; работником; сыном, братом, человеком; глубью, высью и шириью. Один, всегда один среди мириады пустот!» (*SK:Ss* 1: 215).

[81] In The Brothers Karamazov, the devil calls himself "x in an indeterminate equation." (*Brothers Karamazov,* 642).

This shift toward abstract time over the course of the story means that the "empty" time in which history (and the story) progresses is not simply leaped over, but instead is quantified as it passes like individual grains of sand. The story notes that "31,536,000 seconds passed by, and then another 31,536,000. The flames of wars began to blaze."[82] During the student's time in the trenches, he describes "how keenly it was felt then, that in every day there are 86,000 seconds, each terrifying long, and each making an attempt on your life with its zero."[83] But he survives: "And more millions of seconds. Revolution."[84] The unexpected use of the second as a measure of time for such long intervals serves to underscore the scientific precision of this rationalized time. Furthermore, it illustrates the deeper shifts away from ancient to modern modes of timekeeping: from the imprecise and cyclical measures of years and seasons to the linear and precise subdivisions of time in seconds required to capture the pace of modern life.

The Certain Person's use of the descriptors "empty" [пустой] and "identical/homogeneous" [одинаковый] to describe abstract and rational time in the above passage is no mere linguistic happenstance. Instead, the word choice would seem to reflect the author's own interest in the work of French philosopher Henri Bergson, who used similar language to characterize this (mistaken, in his view) conception of time. Bergson's ideas about time were seen "as an antidote to a mathematical and static understanding of time of the universe, whose rigidity was widely despised, associated as it was with empty rationalism and the violent excesses of the French Revolution."[85] This attitude would also seem to extend to abstract and rationalized conceptions of time in socialism, as in, for instance, Engels' description of "pure time, unaffected by any foreign

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[82] «Отошли 31 536 000 и еще 31 536 000 секунд. Запылали зарева войн» (*SK:Ss* 1: 216).

[83] « …как ясно чувствовалось тогда, что в каждом дне 86 000 секунд, страшно длинных, и что каждая замахнулась на твою жизнь нулем» (Ibid.).

[84] «И еще миллионы секунд. Революция» (*SK:Ss* 1: 217).

[85] Canales, 30.

admixtures, that is, real time, time as such."[86] Likewise, Bergson disagreed with Kant, whose "error has been to consider time as homogeneous,"[87] and whose idea of "pure time" and "pure space"—that is, as a sort of universal matrix in which events may occur—is depicted in Krzhizhanovsky's story "The Catastrophe," discussed in Chapter One in its association with the Bolshevik Revolution.

According to Bergson, this "homogeneous empty time" does not describe the actual nature of time itself, but is simply an abstraction of time that borrows from conceptions of space. Time is never experienced—indeed, *cannot* be experienced—as either empty or homogeneous; it is only by taking heterogeneous temporal durations and mentally laying them out (spatially) end-to-end that we can conceive of an empty, homogeneous temporal matrix in which they appear to be situated.[88] But this is not so much a reflection as an *apperception* of time's metaphysics. This question of Bergsonian durations versus Newtonian (and Einsteinian) spatialized time will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

3.6 Lockstep into the Future

Krzhizhanovsky's most complete critique of rational time is found in a dystopian tale told by one of the characters in his 1926 novel *The Letter Killers Club*. The novel, which Krzhizhanovsky scholar Jacob Emery describes as "a kind of high modernist Decameron in which a fraternity of storytellers who have foresworn the written word take turns sharing potential plots,"[89] combines a series of nested stories in various genres and forms, including a play, a medieval carnivalesque

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[86] Quoted in Hanson, 57.

[87] Quoted in Canales, 135.

[88] Timothy Mitchell, *Questions of Modernity*, Contradictions of Modernity (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 14.

[89] Jacob Emery, "Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky's Poetics of Passivity," *Russian Review* 76, no. 1 (2017): 95.

(im)morality tale, a fairy tale of three brothers and an allegory about crossing the River Styx. While the frame story apparently takes place in the Soviet Union of the 1920s, none of the nested stories comment directly on the time period, though all of them—as is often the case with Krzhizhanovsky's stories—may offer submerged but rich allegorical readings in relation to Krzhizhanovsky's own time and situation. Of these embedded tales, the most obviously political is the dystopian science-fiction story told by the member of the secret society known only by his code name, Dyazh [Дяж].

Dyazh's story begins in an unnamed country at an unspecified time in the near future, "nearly as early as mid-twentieth century, if not earlier."[90] The setting is a modern metropolis, a space characterized in the work by its chaos and cacophony of sound. Immediately we are introduced to the story's theme of movement, and the interruption of movement, with the image of a person who, visited by sudden inspiration, halts amidst the Brownian motion of the city street: "a man who was at that very moment crossing the rumbling [грохочущую] street suddenly paused his step."[91] This abrupt cessation of motion causes others to stop as well: "An automobile, almost slamming into the pondering pedestrian, came to an abrupt halt."[92] The "pondering pedestrian" does not even notice that he has almost been killed by the machine. His eyes have been drawn to a street vendor selling lace bodices hung up on a line; the morning is windy, and the bodices inflate and move exactly as if they were filled with actual bodies. This vision suddenly inspires the dreamer to imagine human beings animated by some ethereal wind[93]—a wind of radio waves that might emanate from a central

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[90] «…чуть ли еще не в средине двадцатого столетия или и того раньше» (*SK:Ss* 2: 62).

[91] «…человек, переходивший как раз в это время через грохочущую улицу, вдруг задержал шаг …» (*SK:Ss* 2: 62).

[92] «Автомобиль, почти налетев на созерцательного пешехода, круто стал» (*SK:Ss* 2: 62).

[93] Jacob Emery notes the connection between this ethereal wind and inspiration, *vdokhnovenie,* here alienated from the individual and made involuntary and centralized: "[i]n Krzhizhanovsky's parody of the Soviet experiment, this demiurgic power of the idea becomes a mechanical "wind," which serves a society of rationally organized workers, their bodies directed by wireless signals emanating from a central authority, as the animating or inspiring breath of god" (Emery, 108).

tower, directing the movements of human bodies in concert. But why stop there? The internal force of will, the contents of the human mind, could also be externalized in the same way: "The psyche must be socialized; if a gust of wind can tear the hat from my head and send it careening away, then why not blow out all the psychic contents hiding inside people's heads out from their craniums with a controlled stream of ether?"[94] These hypothetical people, whose minds have been externalized to central control, the thinker calls "exons" [эксоны].[95]

As for the thinker himself, he is known only as Anonymous; he is "an idealist; a dreamer; his wide-ranging but uneven erudition could not bring his ideas through to fruition."[96] But like Karl Marx, his ideology later lays the groundwork for the creation of a world dictatorship based on socializing and supplanting the free will of citizens:

> It is only through depriving these discrete and uncoordinated nervous systems of their signals and handing them over to a unified, central innervator, Anonymous taught, that reality can be organized according to plan, once and for all doing away with our primitive senses of self [кустарничающими "я"]. By replacing the impulses of will with the impulses of a single so-called "ethical machine," constructed according to the latest achievements in morality and technology, it is possible to achieve a state in which everyone gives their all, in other words a complete *ex*.[97]

The political subtext of this "collectivization of wills" would have been quite clear in Krzhizhanovsky's time. As Perel'muter writes in his commentary, "It was precisely this idea [of "socializing the psyche"] that lay at the heart of the new regime's intense interest in psychology."[98]

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[94] «Необходимо социализировать психики; если ударом воздуха можно сорвать шляпу с головы и мчать ее впереди меня, то отчего не сорвать, не выдуть из-под черепа управляемым потоком эфира все эти прячущиеся по головам психические содержания, отчего, черт побери, не вывернуть все наши in в ex?» (*SK:Ss* 2: 63).

[95] The word is clearly meant to invoke axons [Russian: аксоны], the part of nerve cells that carry impulses from brain to muscle.

[96] «…идеалист, мечтатель; его несколько пестрая и разбросанная эрудиция не могла реализовать идеи» (*SK:Ss* 2: 63).

[97] «Лишь отняв иннервацию у разрозненных, враздробь действующих нервных систем и отдав ее единому, центральному иннерватору, - учил Аноним, - можно планово организовать действительность, раз навсегда покончив с кустарничающими "я". Заменив толчки воль толчками одной так называемой этической машины, построенной согласно последним достижениям морали и техники, можно добиться того, чтобы все отдали всё, то есть полного ex» (*SK:Ss* 2: 64).

[98] «Именно эта "идея" лежала в основе острого интереса "новой власти" к психологии» (*SK: Ss* 2: 623).

Elsewhere, Krzhizhanovsky uses this same image of the wind blowing off the hat to describe the Bolshevik revolution, writing sardonically in his notebooks that "the whirlwind of the revolution blew off my hat: let's just consider that to be genuflection."[99] The story literalizes the metaphor of collective will; instead of being bound together metaphorically by ideology and common purpose, the population is to be forcibly and literally integrated into a vast involuntary nervous system in which individual wills may be synchronized like the parts of a machine through radio waves.

Figure 8. Soviet poster from 1925 with the caption "RADIO: from the wills of millions we will create a single [or "united"] will."

Anonymous's plans remain just this, however, until they find the person who can bring them to fruition: an engineer named Tutus. This engineer has already begun work on a project to control muscle movements via external signals (much like the experiments in the previous centuries with galvanism that had inspired Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, among others.) But Tutus is interested not in animating the dead, but rather the living. The living, however, somewhat inconveniently retain their own individual will: "the problem was that the physiological innervation continued to emanate from the nerve centers, thus interfering, as it were, with the artificial

[99] «Вихрь революции сшиб с меня шляпу: будем считать это за поклон» (*SK*:*Ss* 5: 366).

innervation received from the machine."[100] Thus the engineer is missing one piece of the puzzle: that is, how to block people's brains from overriding the commands of his machine. Fortunately for the engineer, a scientist named Netetti has already developed a solution: a certain strain of microscopic brain parasites called vibrophages [виброфаги] that colonize the nerve fibers connecting brain to body.

In Netetti's invention—which is to say, Krzhizhanovsky's own—we can discern the author's continuing interest in the outsized influence of the microscopic world on the macroscopic, and his fascination in particular with the bacteriological realm. These vibrophages have much in common with the temporal bacilli of *Odyssey of the Odd,* particularly in how they infiltrate the brain and consciousness. Unlike the temporal bacilli, they are not carriers of the force of time, though they are, in fact, subject to a different temporality than humans, what Netetti calls a "compact time." "…These bacteria "over the course of twenty-four hours produced approximately as many generations as had been in the course of human history from the beginning of the common era; possessing a more *compact* time, as Nettetti put it, the experimenter could … achieve results …that would otherwise require millennia."[101] This compressed timespan allows Netetti to breed this particular strain of bacteria, which feed on nerve impulses and prevent them from propagating down to the muscles of the body.

The engineer Tutus immediately sees the promise of combining their technologies: Netetti's to block the brain's own signals to the nerves; Tutus's to innervate those same nerves with centralized signals from a broadcasting tower. He sketches out a utopian dream of a worldwide revolution to

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[100] «…дело в том, что физиологическая, идущая из нервных центров иннервация продолжала действовать, отклоняя, как бы интерферируя, искусственную иннервацию, получаемую из машины» (*SK:Ss* 2: 64).

[101] «… в течение суток давали приблизительно столько же поколений, сколько мировая история числила за человечеством на протяжении всей нашей эры; таким образом, обладая более, как выражался Нететти, *компактным* временем, экспериментатор мог … добиться в мире бактерий тех результатов, какие при опытах, скажем, с прирученными животными потребовали бы тысячелетий» (*SK:Ss* 2: 68).

the biologist: "… we will build all of human reality anew, from top to bottom—do you see? … if we combine your *everything* with my *everything,* they will together overturn [опрокинуть] everything."[102] Here, just as in *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder,* the idea of revolutionary change is associated with overturning. Indeed, the engineer's words may perhaps contain a subtle jab at the idea of revolution as implemented by the Bolsheviks; the hubristic notion of rebuilding all of human reality begins not at the bottom, but rather from the *top down* [сверху донизу]. In other words, this overturning resembles more a coup [переворот] than a genuine revolution of the masses—a depiction that may have been a more accurate description of the October Revolution, but quite the opposite of the official version.

The scientist and engineer pitch their utopian project to a government beset by a financial crisis, taking care to "base [their argument] in precise numbers and charts"[103] to enumerate the various "uncommon benefits, both of the financial and moral variety"[104] of their plan. The government undertakes a pilot project of the technology, using the mentally ill as involuntary test subjects. This has the added advantage of dealing with the ever-increasing ranks of the insane among society as a result of the stresses of modernity, or the "rise of psychological pressures and the deforming of everyday life,"[105] which have led to "enormous upsurges in numbers of the most anti-social psychoses."[106] The argument to experiment on the mentally ill—which here prefigures Nazism's own experiments by a decade—is made on entirely utilitarian grounds: the government is forced "to care for millions of pairs of hands that cannot labor due to illness, pulling still more hundreds of

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[102] «…и мы построим всю человечью действительность заново, сверху донизу, - понимаете? … если соединить ваше все с моим все - они опрокинут все» (*SK:Ss* 2: 71).

[103] «…упираясь в точнейшие цифры и схемы» (*SK:Ss* 2: 72).

[104] «…необыкновенные выгоды - как финансовые, так и моральные» (*SK:Ss* 2: 72).

[105] «…ростом психических нагрузок и кривизнами быта» (*SK:Ss* 2: 72).

[106] «…гигантскими прыжками вверх в области наиболее антисоциальных психозов» (*SK:Ss* 2: 72).

thousands of workers out of the productive workforce, all while squandering a growing sum of money on new asylums, on salaries of their personnel and so forth."[107] While under this new plan, not only will the mentally ill no longer need care, they will themselves provide "an immediate and enormous number of new workers into the workforce."[108] The result is a stepping stone into the glorious future. A few niggling doubts remain, however. At the unveiling of the first broadcasting tower, the country's leader gets on stage and "brandishing his arm toward the emptiness, began speaking tiresomely and at length about some bright era; pounding the words out of himself like dust from an old and much-trodden rug, the premier squinted his myopic eyes into the fenced-off emptiness—and suddenly, counter to the thrust of his words, he thought: "And what if there really isn't anything there at all?"[109] But it is not the future itself that is not meant to be, but rather the leader: the machine eventually turns him into an ex-leader.

This dream of motion coordinated across time, the heart of rational "time discipline" approaches, manifests itself in this story in the clockwork movements of the exons. They walk jerkily, robotically, all in thrall to an invisible clock measuring out the seconds of abstract and linear time. Only their eyes, the "windows of the soul,"[110] betray their horror: they "moved somehow joltingly and yet metronomically [метрономически]—precisely rapping out two steps per second; their elbows were pressed unmoving into their bodies, heads seated low between the shoulders, and from underneath their brows, as if they'd been screwed in tight, stared similarly unmoving, round

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[107] «…для ухода за оторванными болезнью миллионами рабочих рук отрывать еще сотни тысяч работников, расходуя при этом с каждым годом растущую сумму на постройку новых изоляторов, содержание персонала и т. д.» (*SK:Ss* 2: 72-3).

[108] «… сразу огромное количество новой рабочей силы» (*SK:Ss* 2: 73).

[109] «…тыча рукой в пустоту, заговорил о какой-то светлой эре, надсадно и длинно; выколачивая из себя слова, как пыль из старого и затоптанного ковра, премьер щурился близорукими глазами в огороженную пустоту - и вдруг как-то поперек слов подумал: 'А что, если его и в самом деле нет?'» (*SK:Ss* 2: 73-4).

[110] As previously discussed, the eye is an all-important image in Krzhizhanovsky's artistic world, and functions as the crack or portal where the outside world and the world of the mind meet. See also the story "In the Pupil" [В зрачке].

pupils."[111] Gone were the old chaotic and inefficient movements of the past; now their movements are rationalized through space. Their muscles "performed the same machine-like actions as all the others."[112] The rationalization of their movements in time divulges the shift away from natural, flowing movement—the time of continuity, of Bergsonian duration—in favor of granular time, regimented and regularized into discrete intervals: "they moved with the same jolting step, two beats per second, with their elbows pressed to their sides."[113] Krzhizhanovsky thus excavates down to the very center of Taylorist principles of time management—that is to say, turning the human into a machine—and uses hyperbole to extrapolate from these principles to reveal their potential consequences.

These consequences do not go unnoticed in society. In the story, the press engages in a certain amount of handwringing, with one brave soul even writing an open letter to the paper to proclaim that "Humans are beings of freedom. Even the insane have a right to their insanity. It's dangerous to give up the functions of the will to a machine: we still don't know what that will of the machine will want."[114] A vitriolic response to the letter, apparently penned anonymously by Tutus himself, swiftly follows:

> The editorial pointed out the untimeliness of these hysterical outbursts about pupils in someone's eyes when the fate of the entire social organism is at stake; tirades about "free will", according to the editorial, came several centuries out of date and seem even faintly comical in this era of science-based and corroborated determinism; when it came to the insane, whose exercise of free will was dangerous for society, it was of paramount importance not to give them freedom of will (which would have to be manufactured, since nothing of the sort existed in nature), but rather freedom *from* will directed against society.

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[111] «…шли как-то толчкообразно и вместе с тем метрономически - точно отстукивая по два шага на секунду; их локти были неподвижно вжаты в тело, голова точно наглухо вколочена меж плеч, и из подо лбов неподвижные же, словно ввинченные круглые зрачки» (*SK:Ss* 2: 74).

[112] «…проделывала машинную, единую для всех них, деятельность» (*SK:Ss* 2: 74).

[113] «…шли тем же толчкообразным - по два удара на секунду - шагом, с локтями, притиснутыми к телу» (*SK:Ss* 2: 75).

[114] «Человек - существо свободное. Даже сумасшедшие имеют право на свое сумасшествие. Опасно передавать функции воли машине: мы не знаем еще, чего эта машинная воля захочет» (*SK:Ss* 2: 76).

> The government has every intention of continuing down this path unflinchingly and unflaggingly, connecting more and more humans to the machine.[115]

What is worthy of note in this poison-pen letter is how the author avails himself of the rhetoric of time, attacking the humanist from the privileged vantage of modernity over the "untimeliness" [несвоевременность] of his views. In other words, these views are not merely wrong, they are outdated, indeed "several centuries out of date and even faintly comical in this era of science-based and corroborated determinism." This temporal rhetoric blends effortlessly into empirico-rational discourse, and relies on the metaphor of the body politic as physical body (as in *Odyssey of the Odd*) in order to define terms of the argument that are advantageous to itself.[116] After all, if the nation is a single "social organism," then by definition it should also be centrally controlled by a centralized nervous system, a singular will, a single brain.[117]

The humanist letter-writer embraces Tutus's epithet of old-fashioned, however, creating a movement called the Society for the Good Old Brain [Общество старого доброго мозга]. This Society stages a mass protest, but the demonstration is quashed with troops and, "as if to prove the self-defense capabilities of the system, detachments of armed machine-innervated 'ex-people' began

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[115] «В передовице указывалось на несвоевременность истерических выкриков по поводу каких-то зрачков, когда дело идет о спасении всего социального организма; тирады о "свободной воле" передовица объявляла запоздавшими на несколько веков и даже чуть смешными в эпоху научно-обоснованного и проверенного детерминизма; насущно важно, поскольку речь идет об опасных для общества волях душевнобольных, дать им не свободу воли (которую пришлось бы тоже искусственно изготовлять - за неимением таковой в природе), а свободу от воли, направленной антисоциально. По этому пути правительство намерено идти неуклонно и неустанно, делая новые и новые человеческие включения в экс» (*SK:Ss* 2: 76-7).

[116] The use of the body as metaphor for a nation has been a hallmark of much twentieth-century xenophobic discourse, with the foreign Other often cast in the role of germs; its success may lie with the ability of this rhetoric to activate deep subconscious aversion to infection and uncleanliness. See, for instance, Howard Markel and Alexandra Minna Stern, "The Foreignness of Germs: The Persistent Association of Immigrants and Disease in American Society," *The Milbank Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2002): 757–88.

[117] This notion that a collective consciousness was attempting to displace individual consciousness in the mind is found in Krzhizhanovsky's "lost" story "Red Snow," in which a character responds to another's complaint about being evicted from his apartment: "from your apartment? I've been evicted from own head…" [«из квартиры...[?] Меня вот из собственной моей головы выселили»] (*SK:Ss* 5: 150).

marching through the streets, methodically rapping out their two steps per second."[118] This marks an inflection point in the development of the dictatorship: no longer is the state interested in directing its Taylorist machine toward economic ends; it has now turned it to political repression. But this repression comes in an unexpected form. Instead of arresting the leader of the protest, the government simply infects him with its virus and plugs him into their innervating system: "In his soul, [the letter-writer] still hated and cursed the exes, but his muscles were now detached from his psyche and dished out a precise and impassioned stream of propaganda calling for a construction campaign for these new ethical machines."[119] For those who were not yet convinced, the authorities display a statement written in his handwriting with his signature affixed.

Although Krzhizhanovsky wrote *The Letter Killers Club* in 1926, this dystopian tale seems to anticipate the perversity of Stalin's show trials as they would be staged in Moscow more than a decade later. It was not enough to arrest someone; the real prize was forcing them to recant their views publicly, thus sowing confusion in the minds of their followers, crushing the arrestees' spirits and depriving them of any moral authority. The means of obtaining these confessions were different, of course, than in Krzhizhanovsky's tale, but ultimately no less coercive.

Few people in society are paying attention, however. The whole population has been engulfed in a construction mania: "The city of the exes grew and grew … everyone was swept up in an enthusiasm for building."[120] Flush with success, the country's leaders begin exporting the parasitic vibrophage onto the world market disguised in anodyne packaging of foodstuffs. Soon this allows

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[118] «…как бы в доказательство способности экса к самозащите, по улицам зашагали, методически отстукивая свои два шага в секунду, отряды иннервируемых машиной вооруженных 'экс-людей'» (*SK:Ss* 2: 77).

[119] «В душе Тумминс все так же ненавидел и проклинал эксы, но мускулы его, оторванные от психики, проделывали четкую и пламенную агитацию, проводя кампанию по постройке новых этических машин» (*SK:Ss* 2: 78). Note the use of the word "четкий", hallmark of the machine and the abacus, used in the earlier story of "A Certain Person" and appearing throughout this story as well.

[120] «Городок эксов рос и рос… увлечение стройкой захватило всех» (*SK:Ss* 2: 78).

them to engineer various revolutions throughout the world—events stage-managed by the dictator Zes and his machines:

> A few gusts of ether could manufacture several revolutions; Zes called them "revolutions from the machine." These were carried out in an exceedingly simple manner: tugging people by their muscles like marionette strings, the ex, broadcasting within its defined radius, amassed them in the central spaces of the capitals, where these puppets surrounded government institutions and palaces and then chanted in unison some simple rallying cry consisting of two or three words. People who hadn't been plugged into the innervator had only one choice: to run, fleeing from the ethereal tentacles of the machine. But soon a super-powered ex was constructed and went into service that could reach muscles even across oceans.[121]

The political subtext could scarcely be made more obvious; Krzhizhanovsky is painting the socialist dream of world revolution not as a genuinely popular movement, but as something exported by a small coterie manipulating their automaton-like followers abroad into overthrowing foreign governments. This campaign—in the story, that is, if not in real life—is quite effective, and soon the entire world becomes united under the looming shadow of the broadcasting tower: "When the ethereal broom stopped sweeping, all the territories had been united into a single world state, which was given a name that combined both the name of the machine and its reagent: Exinia. After that, the dictator Zes announced the transition to peacetime construction projects."[122]

Not surprisingly, these "peacetime construction projects" are orchestrated in a highly-centralized manner, following a plan executed by none other than the dictator Zes himself:

> Zes knew precisely the sum total of muscle power, or labor supply, that he could at any moment direct toward carrying out one task or another, apportioning or reapportioning this force in any way he wished. In short order, the cities of Exinia were embellished with enormous structures towering Cyclops-like; true, all this was built according to a single plan,

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[121] «В несколько порывов эфира было сделано несколько революций; Зес называл их "революциями из машины". Делалось это чрезвычайно просто: дергая людей за мускулы, как за веревочки у движущихся кукол, экс, действующий по определенному радиусу, накапливал их в столичных центрах, окружал куклами государственные учреждения и дворцы, заставляя толпы артикулировать - всех, как один человек, - какой-нибудь несложный, в два-три слова, лозунг. Людям, избегнувшим включения в иннерватор, оставалось бежать - подалее от эфирных щупалец машины. Но вскоре был закончен и пущен в ход сверхсильный экс, достававший до мускулов и через океаны» (*SK:Ss* 2: 84-5).

[122] «Когда эфирная метла кончила мести - все территории были соединены в одно мировое государство, которому было дано имя, сочетающее название машины и реактива: Эксиния. После этого диктатор Зес объявил о переходе на мирное строительство» (*SK:Ss* 2: 85).

> which took its orientation from the lines of the ethereal waves: everywhere all the streets as straight as a bowling lanes running from residential blocks to the factories and back, followed these meridians and lines of longitude.[123]

Here the spirit of scientific time management is not only directed at the worker drones—or, in the depersonalized discourse of the machine tongue, the "labor supply"—but in relation to the wise leader as well, who has calculated precisely the "sum total of muscle power" to move from one task to another through the keyboard of the innervator, the quintessence of the planned economy.

These tasks encompass not only political repressions and massive construction projects, but permeate into the personal lives (such as they might be) of the exon automata, including the most intimate relations of sex and procreation. As in Zamyatin's *We,* lovemaking is considered only from its utilitarian function, and thus is temporally rationalized like any other nation-building task: "In order to organize lovemaking according to plan, another ex was needed, the Mating ex, which periodically used short but powerful blasts of ethereal energy to throw men upon women, coupling and uncoupling them according to a calculation that would provide the largest number of conceptions for the least amount of time."[124] Love, like literature, has no place in Exinia, as it serves no useful function. And indeed, *history itself* becomes empty and meaningless, an endless march of *chronos*, precisely metered out, which no longer contains any meaningful human events:

> The time arrived of months and years counted out on meters, of reality in exact doses and in exact proportions; history, which had been calculated almost with almost astronomic precision beforehand, turned into a sort of exact science as conducted by two classes, the inits, who ruled, and the exons, who were ruled over. It seemed that the Pax Exiniae could be broken by nothing, but still…[125]

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[123] «Зес с точностью знал ту сумму мускульной силы, запас труда, который можно было в любой момент бросить на выполнение того или иного задания, распределить и перераспределить как угодно. Вскоре города Эксинии украсились грандиозными, циклопической мощи сооружениями, правда, застройка велась по единому плану, ориентирующему по линиям эфирных волн: прямые, как дорожки кегельбанов, улицы - от жилых корпусов к фабрикам и обратно - легли все и всюду по параллелям к меридианам и линиям долгот» (*SK:Ss* 2: 86).

[124] «Плановая организация любви потребовала сооружения еще одного, так называемого Случного, экса, который, действуя периодически, короткими, но сильными ударами эфира бросал мужчин на женщин, случал и разлучал с таким расчетом, чтобы наименьшая затрата времени давала наибольшее число зачатий» (*SK:Ss* 2: 86-7).

[125] «Наступили месяцы и годы отсчитываемой на счетчиках, точно дозируемой и распределяемой действительности; история, заранее, почти астрономически вычисленная, превратилась в своего рода

At this point, the dystopian system reaches its zenith, after which point its carefully planned order begins to unravel. In the Soviet-inflected discourse of Exinia, "The first 'deviations from the plan', as were entered into the minutes of the proceedings of the Supreme Council [Верховного Совета] had the appearance of accidental exceptions in the world of exons."[126] These deviations from the plan involve a rash of fatal accidents—deaths that under a system of free will would probably be termed suicides. "So, for example, some people—apparently improperly innervated—began crossing bridges not along their length, but across their widths."[127] Suicide, of course, is perhaps the least rational of all human acts, and the country's leaders are at a loss to explain the phenomenon. As a result, "a substantial amount of muscle supply from decommissioned individual units had to be written off; the amortization of exes was becoming a rather high coefficient,"[128] the narrator tells us in the "machine tongue" of scientific time management.

To investigate the strange phenomenon, the dictator summons his personal secretary, Shagg [ШІагг, which evokes the Russian "шаг" "step"], an idealistic youth who writes poetry (and as a member of the ruling class, has been made immune to broadcasts of the exes) as well as two of Zes's former friends, now exons. To this latter pair, Zes administers the antidote to the vibrophages in order to "return them to their previous, unmachinized [неомашиненную] life."[129] As soon as their bodies are free of centralized control, one of them falls upon the dictator in an attempt to strangle

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естествознание, осуществляемое при помощи двух классов: инитов, которые управляли, и эксонов, которыми правили. Казалось, что Pax Exiniae [1] ничем не может быть нарушен, но тем не менее...» (*SK:Ss* 2: 87-8).

[126] «Первые "выпадения из плана", как запротоколировали их на заседании Верховного Совета, имели видимость случайных исключений в мире включенных» (*SK:Ss* 2: 88).

[127] «Так, например, вместо того, чтобы проходить мосты вдоль, некоторые - очевидно, неточно иннервированные - эксоны стали переходить их поперек» (*SK:Ss* 2: 88).

[128] «…с мускульного запаса пришлось списать изрядное количество выбывших особей; амортизация эксов получала несколько высокий коэффициент» (*SK:Ss* 2: 88).

[129] "…вернуть их прежнюю неомашиненную жизнь" (*SK:Ss* 2: 95).

him, while the other lies on the floor softly keening, apparently having lost his mind. After subduing them both, the dictator points out to Shagg the impossibility of the desire, however high-minded, of ever going back to a system of free will: "The machines keep them in a state of submission, but once you free them, they will all throw themselves upon us and crush us along with our culture. And then—Exinia will be done for."[130]

This line, written in the mid-1920s before the full-fledged appearance of the totalitarian state, nevertheless captures one of its central dilemmas. Totalitarianism may creep insidiously into society in order to take control over it, but it rarely departs in the same manner. Almost invariably, these systems of control tend not to taper off, but rather to undergo catastrophic collapse. The problem, as Krzhizhanovsky has formulated above, lies in the fact that the more a government controls its people, the more it *must* control them. For the would-be poet, the revelation is an upsetting one. He leaves the audience with the dictator in a sort of fugue state:

> Exiting onto the street, Shagg automatically turned along the street and walked without knowing where he was headed. It was the hour in which the series of exons were returning from work; falling into their ranks of slowly and methodically marching people with their two footfalls per second, our poet didn't even notice how quickly he matched his step to the defined and precise rhythm of the line, even finding pleasure in that light and soulless emptiness that arose inside him as a result of his contact with the dead jolting of the machines; after what had happened in Zes's office, he wanted the possibility of not thinking any longer, to win some time from thought, and so, as if joining into some sort of game, he purposefully pulled his elbows into his body just like everyone else around him, and fixing his eyes into the round back of the exon's head who was marching ahead of him, and thought: "I need to be like him, do everything like him, it'll be easier." The head, swaying rhythmically, turned to the left at the intersection. As did Shagg. The head moved along the long straightaway of the avenue toward the steel hump of a bridge. As did Shagg. They marched along the echoing arch between two stone parallels of railing. And suddenly the head, bouncing like a pool ball off the side bumpers, hit the railing on the right, then deflected in a straight line to the railing on the left. As did Shagg. The head, now rounder and turning crimson, hung on the side and then dropped into the pocket: splash. As did Shagg: splash.[131]

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[130] «Машины держат их в повиновении, но стоит их освободить, и все они бросятся на нас и растопчут - и нас, и нашу культуру. Тогда - Эксинии конец» (*SK:Ss* 2: 93-4).

[131] «Выйдя на улицу, Шагг автоматически повернул вдоль улицы и шел, сам не думая куда. Это был час, когда серии возвращались с работы; попав в шеренги, медленно и методически - два удара в секунду - шагающих людей, наш поэт и не заметил, как вскоре подчинился четкому и точному ритму шеренг, ему даже нравилась та легкая бездушная пустота, какую привносило в него соприкосновение с мертвыми толчками машин; после происшедшего в кабинете Зеса ему хотелось возможно дольше не думать, выиграть время у мысли, и он

Just as in the story of the poet and the accountant in "The Players," the rationalized and utilitarian world is inhospitable to the creativity, intuition and inspiration that the poet programmatically represents in Krzhizhanovsky's writing. These qualities must be given up, since they may only bring unhappiness. But Shagg's story illustrates the danger of conformity for the writer in a totalitarian society as well. His relinquishing of his own will in order to follow the crowd and lessen his own psychological distress, ends as a sort of bitter joke: he jumps off a bridge only because the person ahead of him does. In other words, the writer who attempts to conform to society to reduce the burden of difference may find that this conformity may lead not to peaceful obliviousness but to the oblivion of death.

The underlying cause of the suicide epidemic, as the dictator soon discovers, is that the minds of the exons have begun to develop a certain immunity to the vibrophages, excreting their own natural antidote to centralized control. The immunity spreads, and soon that "harmony, that previous precisely calculated harmony, was lost."[132] Exons start besieging the gated inner city of the elites, and the leaders are forced to take measures to ensure their own personal survival—that is, they turn off their broadcasting towers and take to their heels. Fleeing the capital, they escape into the forests and wilderness, where—just as in Zamyatin's *We*—they find pockets of primitive peoples who have escaped the rule of the machine. They join them in their hunter-gatherer life, and

> … the wheel of history, having described a full circle, once again began to turn its heavy spokes. But if only the person who had nearly been crushed under the entirely ordinary wheel of an entirely ordinary automobile—the same person, you remember, from the first day of my story, the one concealed under the name "Anonymous"—if only he had in fact

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нарочно, как бы включаясь в какую-то игру, притиснул локти к телу, как и те, что вокруг, и, уставившись глазами в круглый затылок впереди идущего эксона, подумал: "Надо, как он, всё, как он, - так легче". Затылок, мерно качаясь, повернул от перекрестка влево. И Шагг. Затылок по прямому разбегу проспекта двигался к стальному горбу моста. И Шагг. Шли по гулкому взгорбию меж каменных параллелей перил. Вдруг затылок - как шар, заказанный от двух бортов, ткнулся о перила справа, потом - под углом отражения - по прямой на перила слева. И Шагг. Затылок, круглясь и алея, свис с борта и нырнул в лузу - вниз: всплеск. И Шагг: всплеск» (*SK:Ss* 2: 94).

[132] «…гармонии, прежней точно исчисленной гармонии не получалось» (*SK:Ss* 2: 95).

> been crushed under the wheel and been flattened by it along with his idea, then there's no way to know whether everything would have turned in a different direction. Although...[133]

In this way, cyclical time returns to the story, ultimately triumphing over rational and linear time. History turns out not to be the teleological narrative of continual progress toward the future. Instead, time is turned back on itself, and humanity reverts to premodern and cyclical notions of time in its hunter-gatherer existence. Was this revolution of the wheel preordained, or was it the particular result of the failure of Anonymous's hubris? The narrator, Dyazh, does not complete his thought, though his final "although" [Хотя…] casts doubt on this latter explanation. Even if Anonymous had been crushed by the wheel of the automobile, in other words, the wheel of history would still have turned full circle; this is simply what wheels do. Linear time may drive the movements of the stars in the heavens, but human history seems to be subject to other, more cyclical forces, which serve to disrupt narratives of continual and steady progress.

In Dyazh's story, Krzhizhanovsky seems to have discerned not only the rise of the Soviet totalitarian state, but he also has managed to prophecy its ultimate collapse as well. He shows in miniature how a coercive system that treats its subjects as parts of a vast interconnected machine, with no concern for the force of individual human desire, cannot survive. This story about the mechanization of human life is not simply about rational time, of course—the questions it raises about the life of the mind and the question of free will are broader—but the particular form of coercion used by the state of Exinia is directly related to early Soviet rhetoric around temporal discipline and control, showing once again how integral new conceptions of time were in structuring Soviet ideology and discourse.

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[133] «… колесо истории, описав полный круг, снова заворочало своими тяжкими спицами. Но если б человек, скрытый под именем "Анонима", чуть не попавший - в тот, помните, первый рассказанный мною день - под обыкновеннейшее колесо обыкновеннейшего автомобиля, все-таки попал бы под него и был расплющен вместе с идеей, то как знать - может быть, все завращалось бы в другую сторону. Хотя…» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 97).

3.7 Conclusion: Recovering the Human

The works discussed above outline a fairly comprehensive view of the author's thoughts in regard to the possibility and desirability of regimenting human activity according to rationalized timekeeping. Above all else, Krzhizhanovsky associates this type of temporal discipline with the machine and the mechanization of everyday life, which he counterposes to the human and human time. The works discussed in this chapter chart the rise and fall of this machine time, starting from its roots in utilitarian thought (sturdy boots over dead poets, as discussed in the chapter introduction) and the technological advances of early-twentieth century modernity. These have given rise to new relationships to time, especially temporalities that emphasize abstract and granular subdivisions of time—the second, and the fraction of a second, as seen above—over the older units of time emphasizing natural cycles like the days or seasons. But Krzhizhanovsky's characters, perhaps like the author himself, have a difficult time integrating themselves into this synchronized, universal time, which leaves them as temporal outcasts. The first half of the chapter is concerned with this phenomenon of being out of step, while the second half is devoted to the opposite: the compulsory adoption of rationalized, monolithic time, which finds its fictional apotheosis in the dystopian tale of the exes in *Letter Killers Club*.

In the broadest sense, Krzhizhanovsky's critique of rational time is only a part of his neo-Kantian critique of reason more generally. Although this would seem to put him in philosophical alignment with earlier Russian literary schools such as the symbolists before the revolution, or the absurdist post-revolutionary Oberiuty group after the revolution, he does not seem interested in exploring either mysticism (in the case of the former) or games of illogic (as the latter). He seems very much invested in the ability of the mind to grasp and know the world, just not simply through the materialist and rationalizing lens of his contemporary socialist ideology. This seems doubly true

for questions of morality or ethics, which for the author cannot be resolved through the mechanical application of utilitarian calculations. When Krzhizhanovsky's characters call the exes of Dyazh's dystopian world "ethical machines," there is little doubt that the author writes this with tongue planted firmly in cheek; for Krzhizhanovsky, an ethical machine would surely be a contradiction in terms. The stories discussed in this chapter all seek to symbolically overturn the increasing domination of the machine over man, and restore the human—human time, human love, human morality, humanist thought—to the increasingly inhuman age in which time had left the author stranded.

CHAPTER FOUR

Future Imperfect: Charismatic-Rational Time and the Nature of Tomorrow in Memories of the Future

4.1 Introduction: Does the Future Already Exist?

On the evening of April 6, 1922, the intellectual elites of Paris crowded into a hall at the Société Francaise de philosophie to witness an unusual event. Later billed as a watershed moment in twentieth-century intellectual history,[1] that evening's program featured a debate between two titans—one a French philosopher who had dominated European thought for much of the new century, and the other an unassuming German physicist whose Nobel Prize lay still ahead of him. Today the philosopher's name is less familiar than the upstart scientist who challenged him, but at that time the opposite was still true, and if there were any one moment that cemented their diverging trajectories, it may have been this evening in early April, 1922.[2] The philosopher's name was Henri Bergson, a metaphysician whose writing on the nature of time helped shape the thought of such thinkers as William James, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Gilles Deleuze, among others. The physicist likely needs little introduction: His name was Albert Einstein.

The throngs that had gathered in the hall at the Société Francaise de philosophie were eager to hear the physicist speak about his special and general theories of relativity (the first theory was

[1] Canales, 3.

[2] Ibid., 6.

published in 1905; the latter came eleven years later in 1916), especially since the theories were still poorly understood even in the scientific community. Henri Bergson began his speech by expressing unfeigned admiration for the physicist; for Bergson, Einstein's theory of time was not fundamentally dissimilar to his own, which also denied the universal and absolute status of objective time as asserted by thinkers from Aristotle to Sir Isaac Newton. In fact, contrary to various subsequent representations of the debate, Bergson was not at all hostile to Einstein's theory as a physical and mathematical explanation of time—that is, "the time that clocks divide into equal parts"[3]—but instead only objected to its universalizing scope, which he saw as "a metaphysics grafted upon science."[4] In other words, he believed that Einstein's theory dealt perfectly well with what he called "lower-case-t time," or clock time, but that it was left to philosophers to grapple with the nature of "Time with a capital T."[5] Einstein's realm was physics, while Bergson staked out metaphysics for himself.

Speaking only for a brief minute, Einstein rebutted this division, denying the philosopher any realm of time at all. "*Il n'y a donc pas un temps des philosophes,*" he famously said: "The time of the philosophers does not exist." There was only the physical time that clocks measure; anything else had no objective reality and was merely a matter for psychologists. This included the intuitive and universally human experience of the *tensedness* of time, or its division into past, present and future. As Einstein was to say many years later at the funeral of his friend Michele Besso, "People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion."[6]

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[3] Bergson, qtd. in Canales, 42.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 24.

[6] Albert Einstein, quoted in Lee Smolin, *Time Reborn: From the Crisis in Physics to the Future of the Universe* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 88.

For Bergson, Einstein's dismissal of the objective reality of time's passage was one of the physicist's most objectionable claims about time. Einstein's integration of time into the three spatial dimensions, a concept developed further by Hermann Minkowski in the space-time continuum named for him, stripped time of its special tensed properties. If time and space were combined into a whole, time then must necessarily exist in the same way that space does, not *successively* but *simultaneously,* even though we may perceive only the portions of it that lie closest at hand. The intrepid explorer who sets a course for over the horizon rightly does not believe he is *creating* distant lands, merely *discovering* them where they have always existed. And just as we do not doubt the existence of places that lie beyond the horizon, so too should we not doubt the existence of the so-called past, present and future, all embedded in a four-dimensional Minkowski space, a manifold where no one moment can be ontologically privileged over any other. That is the lesson of Einstein's relativity.

But the fundamental disagreement underlying this debate about the nature of time did not originate on that evening in Paris. As we have seen in previous chapters, the basic contours of this debate stretch back millennia. The debate between Einstein and Bergson was essentially the same, *pace* Heidegger, that pitted the Heraclitian understanding of time as change and flux against Parmenides's unchanging vision of eternity.[7] In fact, these mutually contradictory views later formed the basis for McTaggart's rejection of the objective reality of time in the first decade of the twentieth century, as discussed in Chapter Two. And while McTaggart's denial of time has not found much traction among contemporary philosophers, his division of temporal conceptions into two different types—what he calls A-series time and B-series time—has retained its usefulness as a descriptor. A-series time, if we recall, accords objective status to the ever-changing qualities of pastness, presence

[7] Canales, 147.

and futurity of events, while B-series time holds that only the invariant qualities of *earlier than* or *later than* can be real.[8] The philosophy of time has other ways of distinguishing these conceptions of time as well. Those who believe that only the present moment is objectively real in an ontological sense are called *presentists;* those who believe that all times are equally real are known as *eternalists*. In turn, we might link these different stances to the types of time discussed previously: *Kairos* seems to correspond more closely to time as it is experienced, with its notion of heterogeneous, human-centered time, while *Chronos* has more affinity with the rational view of time that decenters human experience of its passage in favor of the uniform, homogeneous time of the clock. Coming full circle, we might note the general similarities between these conceptions of time and Bergon's emphasis of *becoming* over *being,* what he termed the *élan vital*, on the one hand, and Einstein's insistence that physics had no language for *becoming,* only *being*.

True, Bergson had initially seen Einstein as a potential ally, someone who dismissed, just as he did, the universal homogeneous time of Newton, replacing this with a multitude of temporal frames instead. But the effects of fragmenting the "now" had far-reaching consequences that soon became apparent. Just as there is no absolute point in space from all which all spatial relations—up and down, left and right—can be objectively determined, then there was no one present moment either; one person's "now" was likely to be someone else's past or even future, rendering these categories meaningless in any objective sense. But by erasing the boundaries between yesterday and tomorrow, the differing ontological significances of these categories are also destroyed: If before yesterday was fixed but tomorrow was free, still indeterminate and contingent, now both seemed fixed. This idea

[8] Thus, the "arrow of time"—as attested, for instance, by the tendency for entropy, a measurable quantity, to increase—appears to be real, though not the existence of privileged positions along this direction. There is still much debate over this question, and some physicists now see time as an "emergent" phenomenon, while others deny the reality of time entirely; see Julian B Barbour, *The End of Time: The Next Revolution in Physics* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

of time is known as the "block universe": time is "given all at once," as Shterer says, and we have only to move through it to discover what already exists.[9] The future then becomes not an ontological problem but an epistemological question, as discussed previously in Chapter Two. For Henri Bergson, who averred that "[t]he future in reality is open, unpredictable and indeterminate,"[10] such a view of the universe led to a logical determinism that he refused to accept.

If we now return to Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, we see that this unresolved question of the ontological status of the future seems to have similarly nagged at the writer. Based on his references to both Einstein and Bergson, Krzhizhanovsky seems to have more than a passing familiarity with the different theories of time espoused by the two rivals. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Krzhizhanovsky wrote about Einstein's theory four years earlier in his published essay "Moscow Street Signs," and attended a course on Einstein's theory in Moscow in this period. The author's 1929 novel *Memories of the Future* (to which we now turn in this chapter) borrows terminology from the still-new general theory of relativity, and explicitly refers to Minkowski space-time. At the same time, however, the novel's time-discourse is also influenced by Bergson's opposing philosophy, especially the invocation of the Bergsonian duration, *la durée,* or as it was translated into Russian, *dlitel'nost'* [длительность]: Max Shterer, the time-travelling protagonist of the novel, is referred to as a "future master of durations" [будущий мастер длительностей].[11] Karen Rosenflanz convincingly charts Bergson's broad influence on Krzhizhanovsky, noting that "[l]ike his Russian formalist contemporaries, Krzhizhanovsky was enamored of Bergson's approach to time, and incorporated

[9] And if we continue to repeat the same trajectories, or "world lines" in Minkowski space-time, then we arrive at the idea that Nietzsche suggested in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "'Must not whatever *can* run its course of all things, have already run along that lane? Must not whatever *can* happen of all things *have* already happened, resulted, and gone by?" F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Dover Thrift Editions (New York: Dover Publications, 2012), 108.

[10] Quoted in Canales, 45.

[11] Karen Rosenflanz notes the paradoxical nature of this appellation, conflating as it does the organic Bergsonian duration with Soviet discourse on mastering time (Rosenflanz, 548).

ideas and terminology clearly influenced by this Bergsonian paradigm into his stories."[12] This all-important connection between Bergson and Krzhizhanovsky is explored in great depth and detail by Rosenflanz in her article "Overturned Verticles and Extinguished Suns: Facets of Krzhizhanovsky's Fourth Dimension," published in the special edition of *SEEJ* devoted to the author. The article, which discusses spatial and temporal conceptions of the fourth dimension in relation to both Einstein and Bergson, provides a crucial foundation for the arguments to follow in this study. It is important to note that Rosenflanz's comprehensive discussion of Bergsonian philosophy in Krzhizhanovsky's work is not limited to *Memories of the Future,* but also sees his influence in such works as "The Rosary" [Четки] and *Odyssey of the Odd.* In regard to the latter, Rosenflanz writes that the novella "imagines a battle between the physical manifestation of the concept of Bergsonian time—becoming that is engraved with experience—versus segmented time." The goal for the present study is to extend Rosenflanz's argument about the fourth dimension in Krzhizhanovsky's work, and show how *Memories of the Future* charts a pivot from an Einsteinian conception of time to a Bergsonian view by the end of the novel—in other words, recapitulating the debate over the nature of time in that crowded lecture hall of the Société Francaise de philosophie a few years earlier, ultimately resolving it in Bergson's favor.

Memories of the Future's narrative arc tracks the protagonist, the scientist and genius Maximillian Shterer, as he endeavors to build a time machine and leap ahead into the future. This idée fixe of cheating the normal forward progression of time starts as Shterer's childhood obsession: "The child, and later the youth, strove to see down the road that stretched ahead without taking a single step along it."[13] Here we can see how spatial metaphors predominate in Shterer's conception of time

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[12] Ibid. 538.

[13] *Memories,* 137. Russian: «Ребенок, затем отрок, как бы стремился вглядеться в протянувшийся впереди путь, не делая по нему ни единого шага» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 342).

from the very beginning. This static or eternalist position should come as no surprise, of course. After all, the very idea of traveling to the future necessitates a spatialized conception of time, one in which all times exist simultaneously in eternity, and not consecutively as durations. To think otherwise would mean that his time machine would be impossible; otherwise how could one travel to some place (or rather, some *time*) that does not exist?[14] As Shterer asserts, "time is given to us *all at once*, whereas we peck at it one grain at a time, in split seconds."[15]

In his quest to overcome this ordinary "pecking" of time, Shterer imagines a sort of transcendent time, the endless and timeless time of all times, the circular figure of eternity, through which he can move at will, just as he moves freely through space: "People move about in space. From any point to any point. They ought also to move through time: from any point to any point."[16] This transcendent and unmoving time, like the underlying space-time continuum of Einstein, is neither the time of human lives and events of *Kairos,* nor is it the rational and ever-progressing clock time of *Chronos.* Instead, we can denote this sort of time using another Greek mythological figure, *Aion,* the deity connected with circular, eternal time in the universe, "time in the absolute sense."[17] Starting from Plato, philosophers saw *Aion* as "the conception of ideal eternity, in contrast with Chronos, empirical time," and that "the idea of Aion, eternal time, is now clearly distinguished from the subdivisions of Chronos into past, present and future, of which indeed the nonexistence is

[14] The question of whether presentism is incompatible with time travel is more complex than it might seem at first glance, and some scholars have argued that it is in fact compatible. See Simon Keller and Michael Nelson, "Presentists Should Believe in Time Travel," in *Philosophy of Time*, ed. L. Nathan Oaklander Critical Concepts in Philosophy, v. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2008) For alternate opinions, see "Traveling in A- and B-Time" in the same volume.

[15] Ibid., 150. Russian: «время дано *сразу* и все, но мы клюем его, так сказать, по зерну, в раздерге секунд» (*SK:Ss* 2: 358).

[16] Ibid., 141. Russian: «Люди передвигаются в пространстве. От любых точек к любым. Надо, чтобы и сквозь время: от любой точки к любой» (*SK:Ss* 2: 346).

[17] Levi, Doro. "Aion." *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 13, no. 4 (1944): 269-314.

pointed out."[18] This third conception of time, along with our previous images of time as *Chronos* and *Kairos*, will inform the discussion of *Memories of the Future* in the pages that follow.

As a starting point for this discussion, it should be pointed out that while Krzhizhanovsky's novel is deeply concerned with the philosophy of time, as indicated above, he is as much interested in how different temporal conceptions affect spheres of human thought and action outside of philosophy—for instance, how ideas about time shape ideology, politics, and the moral and personal realms of experience. In other words, time is dealt with in both the rarified discourse of science and metaphysics *and* through the more embodied level of story, with all its attendant concerns with character, plot (a series of causally-connected events in narrated time) and the specific social and political context in which the character finds himself. Accordingly, the present chapter will address problems of time and the future not in isolation and through disparate fields of discourse—philosophy, ideology, morality, etc.—but in a more holistic manner in order to show the interconnectedness of thought and action in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction generally and *Memories of the Future* in particular.

Nevertheless, insofar as the complex intermingling of these different types of discourse in the novel permits, this chapter will parse out various strands of *Memories of the Future* for discussion in separate sections. These sections in turn are grouped into larger interpretive questions. Thus, the first two sections address the question of context: The first section explores the novel's **literary contexts**—its precursors, influences, and the literary-cultural ecosystem of the late 1920s—while the chapter's second section deals with the **political and ideological contexts** of the same period, especially in regard to what Hanson terms "charismatic-rational" time and the First Five-Year Plan. The next two sections deal with narrative manifestations and fictional **phenomenology of time**:

[18] Ibid.

how is time made visible in the novel, how is it experienced, what metaphors are used to describe it? These sections will deal with aspects of narrative time (in Genettian terms, speed, order, and various anachronicities of the novel's syuzhet[19]), and the various indirect and metaphorical ways in which the apparent movement of time is represented in material terms through comparisons to film projectors, high-speed trains, and other mechanical devices. After that, we will turn to the novel's **theoretical dimension**, analyzing Shterer's philosophy of time and the future. Finally, the last three sections deal with the **moral and personal dimensions of time**—the squandering of time and opportunity, the search for lost time, and the resulting moral education for the protagonist, who is transformed by a brief glimpse of the future into a writer and a seer. But like Cassandra, Shterer's oracular vision of the future is painful; he may sense its contours, but it is now too late for him to change anything about it. This is the great irony at the heart of the novel. Shterer has spent all his time searching for time, and in the process he has lost the most important part of it: the eventful time of the present, the crucible in which the future takes shape. Thus Shterer's story is that of a man who struggles against *Chronos* to propel himself into *Aion,* the timeless time of eternity, but ends up by losing *Kairos*, meaningful time, the *time when,* a tragedy that resonates with profound moral, personal, and political significance.

4.2 Futures Past: Literary and Cultural Influences

Memories of the Future, written in 1929, was not Krzhizhanovsky's first attempt at the theme of time travel. Two years earlier, the author began a novella he titled *Discomfort* [Неуют], which begins on the front during the First World War. The protagonist, a lieutenant in the Russian imperial

[19] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1980), 33-85.

military named Zygmin,[20] is returning from the front at night on a train[21] when he is suddenly transported together with his troops to somewhere else entirely. The terrain in which he finds himself matches his maps perfectly, but there are no familiar human landmarks, which makes him wonder if he's been transported not through space but time. The hypothesis is confirmed when he stumbles upon the pivotal battle on the River Kalka between the Mongol Empire and the principalities of medieval Rus' in the year 1223, a clash that ended in disaster for the Russians. The lieutenant decides to intercede with his regiment on behalf of the beleaguered Russian forces, and when they turn their artillery pieces on the Mongols, the course of history is redirected.[22]

As a novel, *Discomfort* was to remain unfinished; Krzhizhanovsky expressed frustration with the plot in a letter to Anna Bovshek, and when the first chapter came back with a rejection from the periodical *Krasnaia Nov'*, he rewrote the first chapter of the work into a short story that he called "Through Tracing Paper"[23] [Сквозь кальку] [24] In this story, the logical and plot issues that he perhaps struggled with in the novel—for instance, how to deal with the ramifications of altering this key moment in the past as they spiral outward to the present—were nullified by making the whole thing appear to be merely a dream in the lieutenant's mind (this shorter version of the story was

[20] Perel'muter notes that this is a variation of the Polish spelling of Krizhizhanovsky's first name (*SK:Ss* 2: 556).

[21] Note that the train is associated with temporal travel here, as it will be later in *Memories of the Future* and indeed in Soviet political posters, which often show the country as a locomotive speeding into the future through spatialized time (see, for instance, the illustration reproduced later in this chapter).

[22] For a somewhat similar time-travel conceit, see Mikhail Bulgakov's *Ivan Vasilievich* [Иван Васильевич], his play about an ordinary person traveling back to the time of Ivan the Terrible, a work that was written in mid-1930s and later turned into the beloved Soviet film *Ivan Vasilievich Changes Profession* [Иван Васильевич меняет профессию].

[23] This is a typical Krzhizhanovskian play on words. The famous site of the battle depicted is the river Kalka [Калка], but the Russian title uses a similar word "kal'ka", [калька], which in Russian is either a translation loanword (calque, itself a calque in Russian) or—more appropriately here with the preposition "through"—"tracing paper," or perhaps "map overlay." Thus the title implies both a military offensive pushing through the river barrier, and also the palimpsestic tracing paper or map overlay, which captures the simultaneous nature of the same place overlaid with a different time.

[24] *SK:Ss* 2: 556.

fated to remain unpublished as well).[25] Even with this swerve away from the ontological problems of time travel, many of Krzhizhanovsky's ideas on the subject are present in embryonic form in the story. For instance, the juxtaposition of spatial travel (especially by train) and temporal travel, and the way that the same exact same place in space is seen across time such that history seems to collapse on itself (or is overlaid in the tracing paper of the title.) Thus, in this story, a battle on the banks of the River Kalka during the First World War is transformed into a battle occurring centuries earlier, and the past and present commingle, turning the linear march of time into a circle.

For these time-travel narratives and particularly for *Memories of the Future,* Krzhizhanovsky was employing the now-familiar topoi of a genre that was first established in 1895 with the publication of the *ur*-text of time travel, HG Wells's *The Time Machine.*[26] It was this work that laid the conceptual groundwork for all time-travel narratives to come. As James Gleick notes, before Wells's novel, the idea of a spatialized time through which a person might "travel"—itself a word repurposed from the language of space—was a foreign one in the popular imagination, and some critics reacted with consternation and bafflement at this mixing of different linguistic domains.[27] The hero of Wells's tale (referred to only as "the traveler") gamely explains the notion of time as the fourth dimension to his listeners in the novel, who function as a sort of proxy for his contemporary reader, to whom these concepts would have still been unfamiliar:

> …any real body must have extension in *four* directions: it must have Length, Breadth, Thickness, and—Duration. But through a natural infirmity of the flesh, which I will explain to you in a moment, we incline to overlook this fact. There are really four dimensions, three which we call the three planes of Space, and a fourth, Time. There is, however, a tendency to draw an unreal distinction between the former three dimensions and the latter, because it

[25] The following year of 1928, Krzhizhanovsky returns again to the subject of time travel in his novel *The Return of Munchausen*—in this case, time travel from the past into the present when the Baron Munchausen materializes in post-revolutionary Russia.

[26] Well's *Time Machine* was not the first story to make use of time travel, nor was it even the first modern story. Others, such as *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court,* by Mark Twain, or Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, involved transpositions in time. But in these tales, the travel through time happened via magical means and was not grounded in scientific (or pseudoscientific) descriptions, and the time travel process was not central to the plot.

[27] James Gleick, *Time Travel: A History*, First edition (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016), 49.

> happens that our consciousness moves intermittently in one direction along the latter from the beginning to the end of our lives.[28]

After Wells's famous explanation of time—which predated Einstein and Minkowski's space-time continuum by more than a decade—all subsequent writers in the genre relied upon this convention of making time and space equivalent, and by 1929, when Krzhizhanovsky sat down to write his novel, this convention would have likely have become already invisible: no longer a metaphor requiring a mental leap, but an established scientific fact.

But Krzhizhanovsky's novel does not accept Wells's explanation of the workings of the traveler's time machine without question. Shterer reacts jealously to the discovery of Wells's book, which is gifted to him by his classmate, Ikhya: "Shterer did not feel gratitude—flipping quickly through the pages, his hands expressed, if anything, rage. Someone, some fabricator of fictions, had dared to invade his own Shtererian brain, an idea that could be taken from his brain only with his brain."[29]

But soon Shterer feels vindicated. Wells's time machine is nothing like *his,* which relies not on the simple transfer of the machinery of physical conveyance into the temporal realm—Shterer notes in disdain Wells's contraption's "wires, even that absurd bicycle seat"[30]—but instead relies on changing how the mind perceives time. Thus, the "neuromagnet" [нейромагнит] in his machine reroutes temporal perceptions to the spatial centers of his brain, allowing him the ability to navigate through time *as if* it were space.

Whatever the nature of Shterer's disagreement with Wells, Krzhizhanovsky acknowledges his debt to the earlier writer through various allusions to Wells that would likely have been familiar to

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[28] H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine: An Invention*, Modern Library (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 4.

[29] *Memories,* 141. Russian: «Штерер не чувствовал благодарности - руки его, быстро закопавшиеся в страницах, скорее, выражали гнев. Кто-то, какой-то сочинитель романов посмел вторгнуться в его, исконно штереровскую, мысль, которую из мозга, можно взять лишь вместе с мозгом» (*SK:Ss* 2: 346-7).

[30] Ibid., 142. Russian: «какие-то провода, даже нелепое велосипедное седло» (*SK:Ss* 2: 347).

readers in the 1920s. (For instance, his description of the artificially sped-up sun, rocketing across the sky in a blaze of light in the brief moment from sunup to sundown, draws directly from a similar image in *The Time Machine.*[31]) Krzhizhanovsky appears to have been fascinated by Wells's novels, and indicates in a letter to Anna Bovshek in July of 1922 that he was working on a screenplay adaptation of one of the author's novels[32] and also translated Wells's *The World Set Free* into Russian.[33] He also later planned to edit a collection of "scientific belletristic works" [научная беллетристика] that would include Wells.[34] Neither of these projects came to fruition, despite Wells's enormous popularity in Russia. The British author's popularity reached a peak in the 1920s, when there was a veritable craze of "Wellsiana" in the Soviet Union, particularly for the author's science fiction novels, which were retranslated and republished.[35] "Wells's keen interest in the future was one of the reasons for his popularity in a country which stood on the eve of a radically new stage in its development," as the scholars Adelaida Lyubimova and Boris Proskurnin note.[36]

Krzhizhanovsky was not the only writer in the 1920s to avail himself to the topoi of the time-travel narrative as established by HG Wells. In the very same year of 1929 while Krzhizhanovsky was writing his unpublished *Memories of the Future,* the famed poet Vladimir Mayakovsky wrote and staged not one but *two* different plays about traveling to the distant future, "The Bedbug" [Клоп] and "The Bathhouse" [Баня], works that bear a strong resemblance to Krzhizhanovsky's. The first play, "The Bedbug," involves time travel only in a manner of speaking: the protagonist's passage

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[31] For instance, from *The Time Machine*: "…the jerking sun became a streak of fire, a brilliant arch, in space; the moon a fainter fluctuating band" (Wells, 18).

[32] *SK:Ss* 6: 29; also Perel'muter's commentary in *SK:Ss* 6: 549.

[33] *SK:Ss* 1: 632.

[34] *SK:Ss* 5: 397.

[35] Adelaida Lyubimova and Boris Proskurnin, "H. G. Wells in Russian Literary Criticism, 1890s– 1940s" in *The Reception of H. G. Wells in Europe*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, John S Partington (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 64.

[36] Ibid.

through time is in fact ordinary, but his consciousness is in a state of suspended animation and so he does not experience the interim travel-time to the future, having been accidentally encased and frozen in a block of ice. He awakens to the seemingly utopian world of the future, free of vice and exploitation, but soon has difficulties in adapting to this perfect world.

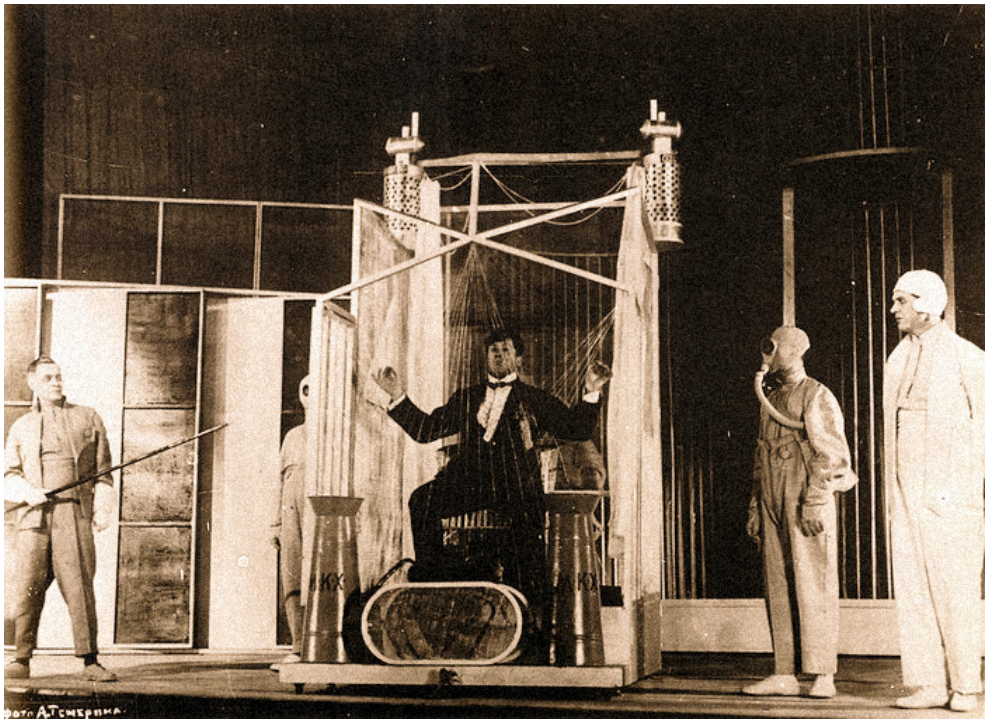

Figure 9. A 1929 photograph of Meyerhold's production of Mayakovsky's "The Bathhouse," showing the inventor's time machine.

The second play, "The Bathhouse," is more of a canonical time-travel story in the spirit of HG Wells, and as in the earlier novel—indeed, like Krzhizhanovsky's *Memories of the Future*—the plot centers on a lone genius inventor who creates a time machine to travel into the future. As in Krzhizhanovsky's novel, all manner of obstacles are thrown in the inventor's way, including perhaps most significantly the machinery of government bureaucracy. By the end of the play, however, the inventor triumphs, transporting himself and his enlightened supporters into the gleaming future of the year 2030 and leaving behind the venal Soviet apparatchiks in their flawed present. Although less sophisticated than Krzhizhanovsky's work in both concept and execution, Mayakovsky's play is

quite forceful in its satire of Soviet bureaucracy, a quality that did not endear it to the authorities. The official reaction to the play was swift and merciless, and the play's disastrous reception may have contributed to Mayakovsky's depression and subsequent suicide the following year.[37]

Some of the similarities between this play and Krzhizhanovsky's novel may be attributed to a generic family resemblance arising from the common ancestor of HG Wells's *Time Machine,* which also featured a similar protagonist. But other aspects of the work seem to imply a more direct connection. Take, for instance, the first scene in Mayakovsky's play, where the inventor, Chudakov, explains his grand vision of temporal domination to a visitor to his laboratory:

> Stop clicking your tongue like an abacus counting up the petty political gains of the present day! My idea is much grander. Henceforth the Volga River of Time, in which, by our birth, we were cast like so many logs for floating—cast, I say, to flounder and float downstream—that river will be subject to our control! I shall compel time to stop—or else to rush off in any desired direction and at any desired speed. … The fireworks fantasies of HG Wells, the futuristic brain of Einstein, and the bestial hibernating habits of bears and yogis—all these are compressed, squeezed together, and combined into my machine![38]

Shterer's gives a similarly enraptured explanation to his schoolmate, Ikhya, on the workings of his time machine, which functions by spatializing temporal perceptions. He too uses the image of floating in the river of time:[39]

> And in that instant when it jumps into the glint, so to speak, and becomes three-dimensional, present, past and future may be made to change places like dominoes, a game requiring at least two dimensions. The third dimension is for safety's sake. After all, for the сапое [челна] that has lost its paddle, there's only one solution—to float downriver with the current, from past to future. Until the skiff is wrecked on the rocks or swept away by a wave. What I'm giving people is a plain paddle, an oar with which to restrain the racing seconds. It's as simple as that. Use it and you, or anyone, will be able to row against the days, or ahead of them, or even across time…to the shore.[40]

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[37] Victor Erlich, *Modernism and Revolution: Russian Literature in Transition* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 263.

[38] Vladimir Mayakovsky, Guy Daniels and Robert Payne*, Mayakovsky: Plays.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 199-200.

[39] It should be noted that this is an exceedingly common metaphor, one that has infiltrated our language even when it is not explicitly present—as seen, for example, in the use of the word "flow" to describe time's progression.

[40] *Memories,* 143. Russian: «И в миг, когда он, так сказать, впрыгнув в блик, отрёхмерится, настоящее, прошлое и будущее можно будет заставить как угодно меняться местами, как костяшки домино, игра в которое требует минимум двух мер. Третья мера - для беспроигрышности. Ведь для челна, потерявшего весла, один только путь - по течению вниз, из прошлого в будущее, и только. Пока не разобьет о камни или не захлестнет волной. То, что я даю им, людям, это простое весло, лопасть, перегораживающая бег секунд. Только и всего. Действуя им - и

In both cases, the romantic-revolutionary vision of time domination is clear, though in Krzhizhanovsky's novel, this utopian dream is rendered—at least in light of the future which awaits the inventor in the novel—in an ironic form, while for Mayakovsky the tone is not so much ironic as it is ecstatic. Given the similarity of these works, it seems possible, even likely, that Krzhizhanovsky may have been parodying Mayakovsky's satire[41]—that is to say, satirizing the romantic revolutionary's desire to escape the flawed present into a more perfect future. Though perhaps satire is not quite the right term: After all, Shterer is more of a tragic than comic figure, a man who does everything to bring about the future, but realizes too late it is not the tomorrow that he has envisioned. In this way, *Memories of the Future* may be read both as a response to Mayakovsky's play and perhaps to the author himself, who seems to have been growing visibly disillusioned with the future he'd helped inspire.

The fact that 1929 was the year that saw the production of these time-travel narratives (both Mayakovsky's plays and Krzhizhanovsky's novel) is hardly a coincidence. The previous year had marked the start of Stalin's all-out mobilization to modernize the country in the first Five-Year Plan, and the country was swept up in the drive for ever-accelerating production. As one of the characters in Mayakovsky's play remarks, "Our shop has just gone over to continuous production, and it will be very important and interesting to see whether we fulfill the Five-Year plan in four years."[42] In

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ты, и всякий - вы можете грести и против дней, и в обгон им, и, наконец, поперек времени... к берегу» (*SK:Ss* 2: 349).

[41] It is unclear who wrote his work first. Mayakovsky wrote his play in the fall of 1929, while Perel'muter asserts that Krzhizhanovsky worked on *Memories of the Future* "by all appearances … for most of 1929" (*SK:Ss* 2: 664), so it seems as though Krzhizhanovsky at least *began* writing his work first. But if these similarities are not mere coincidence, it seems more likely that Krzhizhanovsky was responding to Mayakovsky, rather than the other way around, given the public nature of the latter's work; Mayakovsky first read aloud his play to friends on September 22, 1929 ("Osnovnye daty zhizni i tvorchestva Vladimira Mayakovskogo," accessed February 25, 2018. http://v-mayakovsky.com/dates.html). There is no record of Krzhizhanovsky reading the work aloud, and no attempts were made to publish the novel (*SK:Ss* 2 664).

[42] *The Bathhouse,* 245.

addition, the play's "phosphorescent woman," a visitor from the year 2030 who escorts the progressive group of heroes into the future, also references the plan, telling the group that they were well-adapted to speeding through time in the time machine, since "The five-year plan has accustomed you people to the rhythm and speed. The transition will be hardly noticeable."[43]

It's difficult to overestimate how much the design and implementation of the First Five-Year Plan had come to dominate official discourse in 1929, when *Memories of the Future* was written. Suffice to say that this was the same year that the then-dominant Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) announced that the First Five-Year Plan was to be the *only* suitable subject matters for all works of fiction.[44] All of society was being mobilized toward the goal of modernization, and writers were no exception. All of Soviet literary culture, in accordance with the demands of party leaders, had turned its eyes toward the future. Conversely, reflections on the past were suspect, and indeed "one publishing house even refused to print a novel because the time of action was three years behindhand."[45] Mayakovsky's plays reflect this focus, even if their critique of the present day proved too sharp-edged for the authorities. *Memories of the Future* answered this call too, albeit in a contrary spirit; unlike Mayakovsky's play, Krzhizhanovsky's novel undermines the very idea that time can or should be rushed, as we shall see in more detail in the following sections of this chapter.

In answering the call to write about Stalin's modernization drive, Soviet writers laid the groundwork for a literary genre that would come into full flower in the canonical works of Socialist Realism in the 1930s. This genre was the production novel [производственный роман], a work that valorized industrial labor in Soviet factories. The prototype for the novel was Fyodor Gladkov's

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[43] Ibid., 255.

[44] Laurence Senelick and Sergei Ostrovsky, *The Soviet Theater: A Documentary History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 293.

[45] Harriet Borland, *Soviet Literary Theory and Practice During the First Five-Year Plan, 1928-32* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1950), 120.

Cement [Цемент], published in 1925, which established many of the conventions of the form. The protagonist of the production novel is typically a selfless hero, often an engineer, who works obsessively to institute modernized forms of industrial activity in a factory despite various obstacles, both natural and man-made, laid in his path. The prize for this struggle, in the words of Gladkov, author of *Cement*, was "the boundless future"[46]

Although *Cement* was published as early as 1925, the genre took off with the start of the first Five-Year Plan; as one critic notes, "By 1928, production had assumed the status of cultural commodity, making for good reading, good art, as well as good political sense."[47] By 1932, conventions of the production novel were firmly entrenched with the official adoption of Socialist Realism as the only acceptable form of literature. As Gorky defined it, the form was to enshrine the worker's "deeds, creativity … with a view to his victory over the forces of nature."[48] For a novel like Valentin Kataev's *Time, Forward!* (whose title was taken from Mayakovsky's play "The Bathhouse"), the force of nature to be defeated was the regular and incremental advance of the present moment, which stood in the way of ever-increasing pace of industrial output. The novel follows brigades of shock-workers [ударники] who vie against each other—and against the apparent limits of their physical capabilities—for the title of largest number of batches of concrete mixed over the course of a single day. This race against time to fulfill some task became not only an adopted convention of the production novel, but underpinned the entire labor movement of shock-workers, or Stakhanovites, as they were later called, and became an absolutely indispensable part of the rhetorical strategies and practice of Soviet labor.

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[46] Ibid., 70

[47] Karen A. McCauley, "Production Literature and the Industrial Imagination," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 42, no. 3 (1998): 444–66.

[48] Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1992), 51.

This plot element of the race against time can be found in the pages of *Memories of the Future*. In Krzhizhanovsky's novel, the stock figure of the single-minded engineer in the production novel is occupied by Shterer, who rushes to complete his time machine before he is conscripted into the army:

> If he worked nineteen hours a day, then in two to two and a half weeks the time machine would be finished; checks of its operation, spare parts, and double-braking system would have to be done without. Better to crash into the future, having ejected oneself into unknown centuries, than to surrender one's device, than to allow oneself to be crushed by a page from a tear-off calendar, than to have one's idea crossed out by the flight of a random bullet, eternity by today's date.
>
> Now began an odd sort of game *a tempo* between man and time during a fitful and sleepless week: time made its moves with events, man with the development of his machine. For the man it was clear: if time outpaced him, the time machine would be lost; if he outran time, time would lose its own self.[49]

Thus Krzhizhanovsky appears to be using the race-against-time convention of the production novel in his own novel. Except that his race against time is *against time itself,* a fact which only seems to underscore the futility of his mission, as if he were waging war on the very air he breathes. Nevertheless, as writes in his notebooks: "Today I am twenty-two. I delay and demur and, at the same time, time is gaining time in the fight for the theme of time … Time always wins because it *goes by*. Either it will take my life before I take its meaning, or…"[50] Here his thoughts break off. A faint echo of this passage can be find in the words of Stalin, who writes that "The tempo must not be reduced! … To slacken the tempo would mean falling behind. … We are fifty or one hundred years

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[49] *Memories,* 159. Russian: «Если работать по 19 часов в сутки, через две - две с половиной недели машина времени будет закончена; от проверки хода, запасных частей, системы двойного торможения придется отказаться. Лучше разбиться о будущее, выбросившись в безвестные века, чем сдать свой замысел, позволить раздавить себя листком отрывного календаря, перечеркнуть идею лётом случайной пули, вечность - датой сегодняшнего дня. Это была своеобразная партия а темпо, которую человек и время вели в течение бессонной и судорожной недели: время ходило событиями, человек - ростом своей машины. Для человека было ясно: если опередит время – машина времени проиграна; если опередит он - время проигрывает себя самое» (*SK:Ss* 2: 367-8).

[50] Ibid*,* 141. Russian: «Сегодня мне исполнилось двадцать два. Я медлю и медитирую, а тем временем время в борьбе за тему времени выигрывает темп … Время побеждает всегда тем, что проходит. Или оно отнимет у меня жизнь, прежде чем я отниму у него смысл, или... » (*SK:Ss* 2: 352).

behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or they crush us."[51]

The Herculean (or, if one prefers, Sisyphean) nature of this task underscores the rhetoric of struggle and heroism, while simultaneously sharpening the satire of the Soviet experiment on the level of political allegory. In these passages the heroic rhetoric of first Five-Year Plan seems deliberately heightened for the purposes of satirizing the emerging conventions of the production novel. For Shterer, there is no time to build any safety features into his machine; there is only one revolutionary approach to the struggle against nature: full steam ahead. In its uncompromising race to the future, this relationship to time seems to fit with the charismatic time domination paradigm discussed earlier, but with one critical difference: This time domination does not rely on revolutionary fervor alone, but instead on a synthesis of charismatic and rational relationships to time. It is to this integrated approach that we now turn in our next section.

4.3 Five in Four: Rational-Charismatic Time and Marxist-Leninist Teleology

Although both the rational and charismatic approaches to time had their supporters and detractors during the 1920s in the Soviet Union, the fortunes of these approaches tended to wax and wane with the fortunes of the larger ideological groupings they were associated with. At first, the charismatic approach was ascendant together with the leftist revolutionary romantics, a group that included cultural icons like Mayakovsky. This group was then supplanted by the "right opposition," with their rational, capitalist-inspired view of time during the latter half of the decade, although they too were soon eliminated by Stalin by the start of the first Five-Year Plan. In their temporal

[51] As quoted in Hanson, 152-3.

ideology, each of these groups could plausibly lay claim to Lenin's legacy, since Lenin himself espoused both positions at various times.[52] It was left to Stalin to work out these contradictions. "Overcoming the dichotomy between Lenin's advocacy of draconian labor discipline and his call for enthusiastic time transcendence in economic activity, Stalin hit on an ingenious synthesis of the two,"[53] Hanson writes, noting that Stalin's particular strength was in overcoming the weakness of each approach. For charismatic time, the problem lay in its doubtful efficacy, while rationalized timekeeping was deemed too incremental and insufficiently revolutionary.[54]

In Stalin's synthesis, the overall approach of charismatic time domination was adopted, but the tools used were those of rationalized and planned labor. In practice, this meant instituting a culture of rationalized temporal norms *that were then to be heroically overfulfilled.* "In the years of the First Five Year Plan, Stalin presided over the creation of a fundamentally novel type of socioeconomic order, one based on the institutionalization of a system of "planned heroism."[55] Hanson charts this progression through the 1920s as a process of moving from "time domination" to "time discipline" and finally to the synthesis of the two in "time transcendence" of the first Five-Year Plan—a way of defeating time from within.

This rational-charismatic conception of time comports well with Shterer's project in *Memories of the Future.* He too decides to transcend time, and much like the protagonist of *Odyssey of the Odd,* he plots how to capture and dominate it, "dreaming of a trap that would catch time."[56] But unlike the protagonist of the previous novella, he does not simply attempt a brazen attack on time, armed only with revolutionary enthusiasm; he uses science and reason, filling his notebook with detailed

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[52] Ibid., 152.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 149.

[56] *Memories,* 141. Russian: «грезил о капкане, в который будет изловлено время» (*SK:Ss* 2: 346).

mathematical formulas and designing a machine to help him in the struggle against time. Thus we can see that although Shterer's mission of overturning time is charismatic in nature, the tools that he uses belong more properly to a rational approach.

In keeping with his utilitarian mindset, among these "tools" that Shterer uses are his fellow humans. For him, other people appear mostly as abstractions, classed according to whether they will help or hinder him in the realization of his dream. Accordingly, he has little real human contact over the course of the novel. A classmate at boarding school named Ikhya attempts to befriend Shterer, who mostly rebuffs him, but Ikhya soon dies, and "this attempt at friendship was Shterer's last."[57] Years later, the inventor tutors a boy who reminds him of Ikhya, and conducts an affair with the boy's mother—but only because he believes that she will be willing to supply him with the needed funds to build his time machine. The woman, whom Shterer refers to not by name but by her place of residence ("the lady from across [the Moscow] River" [замоскворецкая дама]), is represented by proxy in the text with the image of the mouth of her purse—a form of synecdoche that simultaneously conveys both the financial and sexual dimensions of their transaction.

This clumsy seduction soon ends, however, with Shterer's conscription into the army at the beginning of the First World War. Fearing that a bullet might get between himself and his idea, he quickly "gave himself up to the Germans for safekeeping,"[58] and is placed in a prisoner-of-war camp. There, surrounded by his compatriots, he works with the camp management to improve their electrified barriers to prevent his fellow prisoners from escaping—though only because he is interested in the science behind the new technology. While at the camp, "[i]n all those many months, Shterer never did learn to tell apart the men occupying the bunks to his right, to his left, and in front

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[57] Ibid, 144. Russian: «В дальнейшем попыток к дружбе за Штерером не числится» (*SK:Ss* 2: 350).

[58] Ibid, 161. Russian: «сдать себя на хранение немцам» (*SK:Ss* 2: 370). Wittingly or not, Krzhizhanovsky's words bring to mind Lenin's relationship with the Germans, who delivered him back to Russia in a train much like Shterer, and who also felt that his beautiful idea must be protected at all costs.

of him; this seemed to him as needless as the ability to tell apart the boards from which the bunks were made: he might have learned with practice, but what was the point?"[59] Shterer's problems with facial discrimination[60] are reiterated later in the novella when he bilks a group of investors made up of "former people," who give him their heirloom valuables in order to use his time machine to travel back in time "to at least 1861,"[61] the year when serfs were emancipated. As one of these investors speaks, "Shterer raised his gaze to the dark oval throwing out these words…"[62] Another of these men is simply called "faded piping," [блёклый кант] in reference to his wardrobe. The group's leader tries to hurry him, telling him that one of the investors is in danger of arrest: "Things are not well with Ivan Elpidiforovich. They're looking for him. He's got to get out of the present,"[63] but Shterer is unmoved: "Instantly forgetting his guest's face and words, Shterer went calmly on with his work."[64] For Shterer, there is only the overriding force of his dream: "He must finish building his machine. No matter what."[65]

And finish it he does. Instead of transporting his hapless investors to the past, he uses his machine to claim a "test ride" for himself into the future. This future is nothing like what he expects, however. As he relates later in his description of the trip:

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[59] Ibid, 161. Russian: «в течение долгих месяцев Штерер так и не научился различать друг от друга людей, занимавших нары справа, слева и перед ним; это казалось ему столь же ненужным, как -умение различать доски, из которых сколочены нары: при упражнении можно бы, но ни к чему» (*SK:Ss* 2: 370).

[60] Here, Shterer's continued inability to distinguish faces seems almost like a case of prosopagnosia, or perhaps something like autism (especially in his reduction of faces to constituent forms/shapes), but perhaps a more likely reading is that Krzhizhanovsky is emphasizing Shterer's extreme solipsism, his lack of interest in anything but his dream. Also, the face, *litso,* carries great significance in Russia (including religious, as in icons), and is deeply connected, linguistically and semantically, with personhood (eg., *litso* (as person), *lichno, linchnost'*), thus Krzhizhanovsky may be using this facial blindness to underscore how Shterer is depriving those around him of their personhood.

[61] Ibid, 175. Russian: «уж не ближе чем до 1861-го» (*SK:Ss* 2: 386).

[62] Ibid, 175. Russian: «Штерер поднял взгляд на темный овал, выбрасывающий слова» (*SK:Ss* 2: 385).

[63] Ibid, 178. Russian: «С Иван Елпидифоровичем неблагополучно. Ищут. Оставаться в настоящем ему дольше никак» (*SK:Ss* 2: 389).

[64] Ibid, 178. Russian: «тотчас же забыв и лицо, и слова гостя, спокойно продолжал работу» (*SK:Ss* 2: 389).

[65] Ibid, 156. Russian: «Машину надо достроить. Во что бы то ни стало» (*SK:Ss* 2: 364).

> Now that I had left the present far behind, I began to sense the incompleteness, the flatness and impalpability of this anticipated time through whose millisecond pores, in pursuit of the future, I was now making my way higher and higher. My artificially grown future, like a plant forced upward ahead of the natural cycle, was painfully thin, withered and wan."[66]

In these words we are witness to Shterer's first discovery that not all times are created equal—*contra* Minkowski et al.—and that the future is in fact covered with a "grayness, by the colorless residue of the unreal [налёт нереального],"[67] quite unlike the present. This, as he later discovers, seems to be the result of the fact that the future has not yet fully *come into being*. In traveling to the future, Shterer has, in a sense, created it, forcing it to grow ahead of itself "like a plant forced upward ahead of the natural cycle."

Besides the obvious metaphysical dimensions of this argument about the nonbeing of the future—a topic that we will return to in later sections of this chapter—there is also a clear political aspect to this image of a plant forced to grow ahead of its time. The simile captures the essence of the first Five-Year Plan, which endeavored to speed up everything (including, incidentally, the growth of crops *a la* Lysenko) irrespective of any and all natural limits.

Intriguingly, in Krzhizhanovsky's notebooks, a jotted note links the image of plant growth to the acceleration of the first Five-Year Plan and its attempt to compress five years' worth of work into only four calendar years: "The Five-Year Plan in Four, the future in three, in two years—and the shaped hedges (of the world): the culture of tempos," he writes.[68] Stephen Hanson notes a similar logic behind the acceleration, writing that "To fulfill a *pyatiletka* [five-year plan] in four years thus

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[66] Ibid, 202. Russian: «оставив далеко позади настоящее, я начал ощущать неполноту, оплощенность и недоощутимость предвосхищенного времени, сквозь секундные поры которого, вдогонку за будущим, пробирался я все выше и выше. Мое будущее, искусственно взращенное, как растение, до природного срока выгнанное вверх, было болезненно тонким; никлым и бесцветным» (*SK:Ss* 2: 416).

[67] *Memories,* 202. «какая-то серость, бесцветящий налет нереального» (*SK:Ss* 2: 417).

[68] «Пятилетка в четыре, будущая в три, в два года - и формовые растения (мира): культура темпов» (*SK:Ss* 5: 379). The meaning of this note appears ambiguous, perhaps reflecting some private meaning or shorthand known only to the writer, but it seems to be associating the Five-Year Plan with the plants that are shaped and trimmed [формовые растения] by humans, an image that suggests a sort of a confined and artificial growth or development.

meant not only to achieve a high growth rate but actually to compress five years' time into four… If five years could be compressed into four, then, in principle, four years could be compressed into three, three into one, and so on."[69] If Krzhizhanovsky is comparing this acceleration of the future to the forced growth of plant before its natural time,[70] as it seems from the above passage, then the conclusion is clear enough: The breakneck campaign to create the future ahead of its time will force it to *be* before it has fully *become,* leaving it stripped of life and vitality.

This is, of course, a striking repudiation of Marxism-Leninism and the utopian socialist position more generally. These ideologies are based on a teleological view of history in which the future, shaped by inexorable social forces, is already seen as determined and just as real—in Soviet rhetoric, even *more* real in a certain sense—than the dismal present. This utopian teleology has roots in nineteenth-century determinism, which attempted to derive social and historical laws on par with natural laws to show the inevitability of future developments. In science, Newton showed that any natural process could, in theory, be calculated either forward or backward, allowing someone with sufficient information to determine the state of universe at any moment in its time, either in the past or future. This Newtonian language of forces and bodies was subsequently adopted into the social realm to explain human behavior—a stance that was particularly influential on the European left, which sought to replace old religiously-derived laws with new and supposedly scientific principles.

Friedrich Engels was particularly swayed by this sort of determinism, a position that was likely influenced by the theological determinism of his strict religious upbringing.[71] This in turn may have colored Marxist-Leninist teleology, which believed in the reality and inevitability of the communist

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[69] Hanson refers to Engels' upbringing as being in the Calvinist tradition (Hanson, 152), but Edith Clowes notes instead that Engels was a Pretist in the Lutheran tradition (Clowes, personal correspondence).

[70] This may also refer to the Soviet attempt to bring about the communist future before the natural interim stage of capitalism, which, as Marx himself wrote, was a requisite step to communism.

[71] Hanson, 58.

future with all the fervor of religious faith. Thus, in a strange sense, conservative theological determinism was aligned with Marxism-Leninism—which was in turned oddly aligned with some of the most up-to-date scientific theories postulated the closed nature of the future in the block universe model. In each of these sets of beliefs, the future was essentially already there, and one need only reach it.

Krzhizhanovsky notes the power of this belief and how it erases the distinction between past and future. In his story "Autobiography of a Corpse," the corpse of the title (who leaves these notes to be found after his death, thereby achieving an odd sort of time travel in the form of his textualized self) points out that "the precisely-calculated future is perceived of as a sort of already-accomplished fact [осуществлённость], in other words, essentially like the past."[72] In his notebooks, Krzhizhanovsky is more explicit in connecting this form of deterministic thought to socialism, writing that "I am witness to the future being transformed into the past … Socialism plans the future, diagrams it out as if it has already passed."[73]

But for Krzhizhanovsky, socialism did not just replace the indeterminacy of the future with the determinacy of the past; these qualities were now flipped, so that flux and uncertainty characterized not the future, but relationships to the past instead.[74] This aspect of Soviet reality is captured in the ironic description in *Memories of the Future* of job applicants in the 1920s being required to fill out questionnaires about their past:

> Then again, their memories weren't up to much: in their wrangles with questionnaires, they were constantly having to pigeonhole their lives—no simple task—from 1905 to 1914, from 1914 to 1917, from 1917 to —, and again from and to; they were always having to quickly forget one past and learn another, while memorizing the present according to the latest editions of the papers.

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[72] «…точно расчисленное будущее мыслится как некая осуществленность, то есть почти как прошлое» (*SK:Ss* 2: 511).

[73] «Я наблюдаю, как будущее превращается в прошлое … Социализм планирует, расчерчивает будущее, как прошедшее» (*SK:Ss* 5: 383).

[74] This is captured in the old Soviet joke: "The future is certain, it's the past that is unpredictable."

> Meanwhile, here in their midst was he, preparing to launch a machine whose first thrust would overturn all pigeonholes before and after; the past and the future would become two sidewalks of the same street along with people could stroll on either side—future or past—as they liked.[75]

The dates listed above—1905, 1914, 1917—refer to the cataclysmic events in Russia in the first decades of the twentieth century, the 1905 revolution, the start of the First World War and the revolution/coup of 1917. This series of historic events stresses Kairos-inflected time, one that is segmented into meaningful periods of *before* and *after*, a distinction that is overturned by Shterer's machine to spatialize time and turn these events from consecutive to simultaneous, from A-series time to a traversable B-series, from past and future to the wide-open vistas of eternity.

4.4 Narrating Time

But if there is any "master of durations" of *Memories of the Future,* then it seems it is perhaps the author of the novel himself, who stages Shterer's story through a series of temporal leaps, zig-zags, and fictional durations of both the compressed and expanded variety, lurching from the protagonist's childhood in the late nineteenth century right up to 1957[76]—a year that still lay nearly three decades in the future when Krzhizhanovsky wrote his novel—before falling back to 1928. Indeed, the role of writer and time traveler is conflated at the novel's end, when Shterer sets his memories of the future to the page and his progress in writing down time is compared to his progress traveling through it.[77] Thus, the novel's structural elements are in harmony with its thematic

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[75] *Memories,* 177. Russian: «Впрочем, памятям было и не до того: они, препираясь с анкетами, раскладывали по коробам - от 1905-го по 1914-й, с 1914-го по 1917-й, с 1917-го по, и опять от и по - всю, легко ли сказать, жизнь; в памяти наспех забывали, переучивали свое прошлое и затверживали по свежим номерам газет настоящее. А между тем здесь же рядом подготовлялся старт машине, с первым тактом хода которой все короба до и после опрокидывались, а прошедшее и будущее превращались лишь в два тротуара одной улицы, проходящим по которой предоставляется идти и по будущей и по прошедшей стороне - кому как удобнее» (*SK:Ss* 2: 388).

[76] Perel'muter notes in his commentary to the novel that 1957 marks forty years from 1917, a period Perel'muter sees alluding to Christ's forty days of wandering in the wilderness (*SK:Ss* 2: 665).

[77] *SK:Ss* 2: 422. Also, Shterer calls his machine a "timecutter" [времярез], comparing it to a book knife. «Но мои длительности были листами единой книги: мой времярез был много сложнее разрезального ножа,

concerns: shedding the shackles of time and moving freely through it without regard for chronology. Starting in this section, we now shift away from the novel's *context* to its *text,* with a view here to establishing the various ways the novel enacts or performs its temporality. How does the text construct chronology, and how does it make time visible through words?

An obvious place to begin is the concept of the chronotope, developed in 1937 by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe how a text structures time and space, or "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."[78] Critics have already delineated the features of a "time-travel chronotope," one which inherits a blurring of the spatial and temporal realms from the original time-travel chronotope of HG Wells's *The Time Machine.*[79] Accordingly, "The time-travel chronotope represents history as a frozen "space-time continuum," in which the future is as determined and immutable as the past."[80] This feature, as previously discussed, forms the contested center of Krzhizhanovsky's novel. But there are other features of this work's chronotope that appear both distinctive and in harmony with the time-travel narrative; for instance, the novel's treatment of space is almost cursory, with none of the rich descriptions of place found in other works by the author; rather, it is *time* that is treated in a comprehensive manner in the rich descriptions and evocations of novel's different periods—periods that break along historical moments, as in the above quote, "from 1905 to 1914, from 1914 to 1917, from 1917 to —."[81]

вскрывающего непрочитанные листы,- он мог вернуть меня к непонятным страницам и лечь закладкой меж любых двух, пока я буду перечитывать да пересчитывать реконструированное прошлое» (*SK:Ss* 2: 418).

[78] Bakhtin, 84.

[79] Elana Gomel, "Shapes of the Past and the Future: Darwin and the Narratology of Time Travel," *Narrative* 17, no. 3 (2009): 334.

[80] Ibid.

[81] This final date of the pair starting with 1917 is rendered with an em-dash, much like the birth and death dates of someone still living. In this case, it is the Soviet Union that is still alive, but like anything else, it too will have an end—or at least that seems to be the implication. (Leaving this blank in the text is characteristic of Krzhizhanovsky's style, which uses ellipses, blanks and dashes to indicate a sort of self-censorship of material too sensitive to write out in full.)

Another feature of this chronotope is the contrast between the abrupt and far-reaching temporal leaps and escapes from the story's main timeframe (in the form of prolepses, or "flash-forwards" and analepses, or "flashbacks") with a sense of extreme confinement, even claustrophobia, that predominates in its treatment of space, from the cramped outbuilding where Shterer first builds his machine, to the tiny room in a communal apartment where he later lives, and the barbed-wire enclosed space of the German POW camp. About this latter confinement, the narrator notes that "[e]ven the star-shaped barbs down the parallels of wire, inside which he liked to take himself and his idea for walks, irritated him no more than the real stars overhead, swaddling earth in concentric orbits. Shterer's approach to space and its contents tended to be that of a *nonspecialist*, indifferent and inconsistent, confusing the capacious with the cramped…"[82]

In addition to the concept of the chronotope, Russian formalism provides another important tool for discussing the temporal structure of narratives: the distinction it draws between the narrative's *fabula* and *syuzhet*. A work's *fabula* is the order of the story's events as they "actually" happen, while the *syuzhet* is the order of these same events as they appear in the story's plot, which might utilize various anachronicities in order to heighten tension, provide backstory, and so on. But it becomes immediately clear that this distinction must be further problematized in time-travel narratives like *Memories of the Future*, since there can be no consensual single timeline for the story's *fabula*. Is it the order of events as experienced by the time-traveler (irrespective of how they are actually presented in the plot)? Or is it the order of events as experienced by the story's non-time-traveling characters, who experience the ordinary flow of time? For this reason, as a time-travel narrative, Krzhizhanovsky's *Memories of the Future* has not two sorts of narrative time, but *three*: the

[82] *Memories,* 161. Russian: «Даже звездчатые шипы вдоль параллелей проволоки, внутри которой любил прогуливать себя и свою идею Штерер, раздражали его не более, чем настоящие звезды там, на концентрах орбит, сомкнувшихся вкруг Земли. Вообще к пространству и его содержаниям Штерер относился как неспециалист, равнодушно и сбивчиво, путая просторное с тесным…» (*SK:Ss* 2: 370).

ordinary *fabula*, the time-travel *fabula*, and the *syuzhet*. To complicate matters further, the novel makes use of a device that Gerard Genette calls "double narrative,"[83] such as the lengthy passage where Shterer relates his time-travel experience in lecture-form to a group of Moscow intellectuals after his "crash landing" in 1928.[84] Here the embedded story has its own temporal frame, stretching from around 1922 to 1957, wholly situated within the temporal frame of Shterer's own storytelling in the year of 1928, making the passage seem to exist in two "nows" simultaneously.

This embedded relationship is reduplicated on the novel's larger level in its *narrative situation*. This narrative situation includes *when* the story is being told: is it told retrospectively, for instance, or simultaneously with the events of the narrative? In the case of *Memories of the Future,* the narrative situation adds another layer of time, since the novel's narrator (who is distinct from Shterer) is telling the story at some point in the future of the plot's main temporal frame. This sort of storytelling time is known as subsequent narration,[85] and the novel draws the reader's attention repeatedly to its retrospective stance, which allows it to jump effortlessly between different times in its past through associative threads, unrestrained by strict chronology.

This seeming simultaneity of the narrative's events may be related here to *Aion*, the conception of time discussed earlier as an non-consecutive, non-chronological time that allows access to any point within its eternal circle. Thus, on a structural level, the novel's chronotope enacts the idea that it explores on a thematic level: the dream of transcendent time. This feature is set out in the novel's first pages, when the narrator, in the midst of a discussion about Shterer's childhood, alludes to events in the story that would take place thirty years later when the inventor builds his time machine.

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[83] Genette, 56.

[84] This appears to be in conscious imitation of Wells' *Time Machine,* in which the narrative is delivered in the form of a lecture on his journey to a group of intellectuals.

[85] Genette, 217.

The retrospective (or subsequent) stance of the narrator is underscored by foreshadowing and what Genette calls "advance notice,"[86] or allusions to events lying far in the story's future. The use of this device gives the narrative an almost portentous tone, a continual coloring of the story present by the story's future. In other words, the narrator's knowledge of what is to come—Shterer's success at building his time machine and transcending ordinary time—hovers over the storytelling, inscribing it with signs and omens of Shterer's future and his fate. In this sense, Krzhizhanovsky's science-fictional novel resembles, oddly enough, an ancient form of traditional religious narrative, the hagiographic saints' lives [жития святых]. Shterer is, of course, no saint. But he is marked from early childhood by difference in the novel, much like the saints of orthodox hagiography: He has no friends, his teachers and classmates find him perplexing and strange, and even his own father cannot understand his dedication to his singular vision. By rendering Shterer's story as a lifelong quest for transcending ordinary time, and building the narrative through a string of illustrative episodes that show his progress towards his goal, the narrator of *Memories of the Future* is engaging in a sort of narrative teleology, where contingency and accident are banished and everything in the story is already viewed through the lens of its conclusion.

One does not have to go back to medieval Rus' to search for examples of this type of writing, however. During the 1920s, official hagiography illuminated the lives of various icons of the revolutionary movement, and struggling writers—including, it seems, Krzhizhanovsky himself—cobbled together a living through ghostwriting these ideologically-motivated pamphlets. In *Memories of the Future,* the fictional biographer of Shterer, Josef Stynsky, is such a writer, someone whose writing was out of step with the time and who "was eventually reduced to living on 'Great Men'—a cheap series of pamphlets that could dispense with any genius in ten or twenty pages."[87] The

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[86] Ibid., 74.

[87] *Memories,* 190. Russian: «пришлось питаться "Великими людьми" - так называлась дешевая серия листовок, расправлявшихся с любым гением десятком-другим страниц» (*SK:Ss* 2: 402). Krzhizhanovsky uses quotes from

teleological approach to biography in these "Lives of Great People" (shared, of course, with orthodox hagiography) seems to color the biographer Stynsky's treatment of Shterer's life, which alludes to his later fate throughout the narrative. For instance, childish doodling made by Shterer in one of his father's books serves as a sort of prophecy of the boy's future greatness in conquering time:

> Next to the saying "Time marches on," was the scrawled remark: "But I'll make it dance in a circle." Shterer père never did learn what "it" in fact referred, but Max Shterer's biographer, Joseph Stynsky, calls this jotting "the first threat" and notes the image of a circle, which the inventor later used—as opposed to the straight line that typically symbolizes time—in realizing his plan.[88]

As we can see from the above passage, the novel's narration implicitly models itself on biography, reconstructing Shterer's life through scholarly supposition and the marshalling of evidence gleaned from fragmentary diaries, papers and the biography of Shterer written by the similarly fictional Josef Stynsky, who is distinct from the novel's narrator.[89] On the one hand, this allows the fictional text to imitate biographical nonfiction, and thus perhaps gain a certain measure of verisimilitude; on the other hand, the fake biography becomes a way for Krzhizhanovsky to play with his fragmentary style, his *avant la letter* postmodernist reveling in pastiche and artifice. The heteroglossia of *Memories of the Future*—a tapestry of made-up sources, excerpts from Shterer's diary, the record of his lecture about his time travel to the future, etc.—cannot lay claim to omniscience, and the record of Shterer's life is full of gaps and suppositions, particularly regarding its own

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Stynsky's "Great Men" series to mock how Soviet scholarship and literature had to refer to Marxist tenets, even when the connection was tenuous at best: " This was the era when commercial capital …' or 'Capital, which felt confined on the continent of Europe…' or 'Socrates, the son of a midwife, belong to the petit-bourgeois intelligentsia of Ancient Athens" (*Memories,* 190-1). Incidentally, "Great Men" was an actual series of pamphlets published in the early Soviet era.

[88] Ibid.*,* 138. Russian: «…рядом с поговоркой "Время на дудку не идет" трудными детскими каракулями было: "А я заставлю его плясать по кругу". Штерер-отец так и не понял, про какого "его", собственно, шла речь, но биограф Макса Штерера Иосиф Стынский называет эту запись "первой угрозой" и отмечает образ круга, которым и впоследствии, в отличие от символизирующей обычно время прямой, пользовался изобретатель при осуществлении своего плана» (*SK:Ss* 2: 342-3).

[89] While not made invisible, the narrator remains unnamed, and the actual circumstances—for instance, the time and place—of the narration are never defined, and the narrator hides behind the scholarly 'we' and 'our'—a figure that assembles the story and comments on it, but never steps out from behind the curtain him- or herself.

chronology. As the narrator notes, "These quotes culled from Shterer's few surviving notebooks are impossible to date. Shterer, who sought to overthrow the power of dates [опрокинуть власть дат], never noted years. One can only hazard the guess that all these scraps of ideas, which happened onto paper by chance, relate to 1912-1913."[90]

The narrator's difficulties in establishing a chronology to these "scraps" mirrors a larger question of chronology in the narrative, one hinted at by its mention of dates: How is the reader to fit this story into larger historical narrative of the period, the arc of events like the 1905 revolt, the First World War, the February and October Revolutions, the civil war period, NEP, etc.? In other words, behind the *syuzhet* and the two *fabula* of the narrative, another sort of *fabula* infiltrates our reading of the story: the sequence of actual events in historical time in the world outside of the text. Reconstructing the relationship between this real historical time and story time poses a challenge (much as the narrator is stumped by the difficulties in reassembling Shterer's life), but by relating the story's chronology with the real-world events mentioned in its pages, we can see how *Memories of the Future* is more than a history of a fictional Maximillian Shterer and his fictional time machine—it also functions as a sort of history of Russia over the same period, allowing us to see it take shape over time.

If *Memories of the Future* provides a history of Russia through Shterer's life, however, it is an odd sort of history. Shterer is resolutely uninterested in human events in time, and so these events are captured seemingly haphazardly in his story, seen only in the briefest of glimpses of the world beyond the inventor's window. These brief glimpses of history-in-the-making, however, seem paradoxically to underscore their importance in the story. Somehow, these historical events seem to

[90] Ibid., 152. Russian: «Все эти цитаты, выхваченные из немногих уцелевших тетрадей Штерера, невозможно датировать. Автор, стремившийся опрокинуть власть дат, естественно, не помечал чисел и годов. Можно лишь с некоторой приблизительностью догадываться, что все эти обрывки мыслей, случайно заглянувших на бумагу, относятся к 1912 - 1913 годам» (*SK:Ss* 2: 359-60).

loom larger off the pages than on them, and Shterer's attempts to ignore them only draw our attention to their importance. His obliviousness to history provides a strange defamiliarizing lens to the great events that consumed the country:

> Immersed in his work, Shterer, because of the one thing coming slowly into existence, did not see other things; he lived past the facts accumulating around his three windows. The word "war," lost at first in the fine print, had gradually enlarged its type to fill all the headlines in all the papers. The word caught Shterer's eye for a second or two only because of its resemblance to another word: "warp" (as in time warp)."[91]

But despite his best efforts, he cannot completely disregard worldly time, which continually threatens to derail his project. The revolution of 1905 means that Shterer cannot return to his home outside Kiev, while the beginning of the First World War means conscription and imprisonment in a German POW camp, where he misses the Bolshevik Revolution. But this event still manages to leave its mark on him; he gets himself repatriated to Russia—now the Soviet Union—in order to collect an inheritance so that he might build his time machine, but discovers that this inheritance is expropriated by the new Soviet government when it nationalizes the banking system, leaving him with nothing at all (an event that happens to mirror Krzhizhanovsky's own would-be inheritance from an uncle.[92])

Upon returning to Moscow, now the new capital of the USSR, Shterer cannot help but see the drastic changes in the streets after the revolution. There's an oppressive atmosphere in the air: "The streets were dim and dirty, with only here and there red patches of flags. Above the backs hunching along the sidewalks, tall letters towered on posters and slogans." These slogans are "shorter and capped with exclamation marks," with seemingly nonsensical formulations such as "LONG LIVE

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[91] Ibid., 157. Russian: «Поглощенный работой, Штерер из-за своей единственной вещи, медленно веществлявшейся в бытие, не видел иных вещей, жил мимо фактов, скапливавшихся вокруг его трех окон. Слово "война", сначала затерянное в газетном петите, постепенно укрупняя шрифты, выставилось из всех заголовков всех газет. Слово это привлекло на 2-3 секунды взгляд Штерера лишь потому, что начальной буквой и числом их напомнило другое: 'время'» (*SK:Ss* 2: 366).

[92] *SK:Ss* 2: 669.

THE DEATH OF CAPITALISM!" [ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТ ГИБЕЛЬ КАПИТАЛИЗМА!] The bellicose revolutionary spirit takes Shterer by surprise, and he sees the changes more clearly for having sat out the interim period far away in Germany:

> In the vestibule Shterer again looked around. A grimy marble staircase. A guard with passes threaded on his bayonet. A group of exhausted and unshaven men on the landing with Colts pressed on their hips. A machine gun staring out of the entrance at the street… Gritting his teeth, Shterer retraced his steps down all those same submissive streets…[93]

Here, Shterer is retracing his exact steps from before the revolution, but this time everything has changed in these "same submissive streets." Here Krzhizhanovsky employs a device that he uses frequently in the novel to make the passage of time more visible: the place remains exactly the same, but it is rendered unfamiliar with the passage of time. In a sense, Krzhizhanovsky has isolated the effects of time from space by showing the same place in different eras.

Such a device can be seen later on in the novel as well, when these "submissive streets" are again depicted, this time during the relative affluence of the NEP period in the mid-1920s. As in the above quote, Shterer again looks around himself with the eyes of a stranger:

> Shterer raised his eyes and, for the first time in years, looked intently and cautiously around him. A milliner and a watchmaker had divided the tinplate sign above a mended shop window. At a crossroad, in a rusty cauldron under caracoling smoke, a new sidewalk was boiling … It seemed as though, from under the scabs, now here, now there, the city's new epidermis was beginning to emerge.[94]

Fully absorbed in his work, Shterer is continually like a person who has just emerged into sunlight, dazed and blinking; he experiences history not as a steady, continuous stream of daily

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[93] *Memories,* 170-71. Russian: «В вестибюле Штерер еще раз огляделся вокруг. Затоптанный грязью мраморный марш. Часовой с пропусками, нанизанными на штык, группа небритых и усталых людей с кольтами, вжатыми в бедро, на площадке. Пулемет, выглядывающий со ступенек подъезда на улицу … Штерер шел, стиснув зубы, вдоль все тех же покорных, забитых миллионами ободов и подошв улиц» (*SK:Ss* 2: 380-81).

[94] Ibid., 173. Russian: «Штерер, вскинув зрачки, внимательно и настороженно, вероятно, впервые за эти годы, огляделся по сторонам. Над заштопанным стеклом шляпник и часовщик поделили красной чертой жесть вывески. У перекрестка в ржавом котле под штопорящимся дымком варился новый тротуар. … Казалось, будто из-под струпьев то здесь, то там, проступями - обновленная эпидерма города» (*SK:Ss* 2: 383).

events, but through sudden leaps and lurches.[95] In this sense, his experience of time has much akin to the movement of the time machine he endeavors to build—that is, he skips through time without experiencing the interims between. In this sense, Shterer continually travels to the future in the manner of some pre-Wellsian time-travel narratives to the future: The journey occurs in ordinary time, but this time is not experienced, either because the time-traveler has fallen asleep (as in "Rip Van Winkle") or has been frozen in a block of ice (as in Mayakovsky's 1929 play "The Bedbug"). But instead of being encased in ice, Shterer sits out the revolution in a German camp, or instead he misses the change from war communism to NEP because he is holed up in his makeshift laboratory. This allows the narrative to represent that shifting qualities of these eras through someone who is transported (in a manner of speaking) from the past.

In staging the transformations of the era without changing places, Krzhizhanovsky throws the effects of these changes in relief. "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible," as Bakhtin writes of narratives more generally.[96] As mentioned above, the novel's chronotope restricts space, and this has the effect of isolating and enunciating the effects of time. For instance, the narrative may repeat similar scenes—what has been called a "situation rhyme" in the works of Dostoevsky[97]—and keep them in the same place. Such a situation rhyme occurs when Shterer visits a government office in Moscow in order to interest the new Soviet regime in funding his invention. He first visits this office upon returning to Moscow after the revolution, whereupon he witnesses an atmosphere of chaos and charismatic revolutionary spirit. After taking this scene in,

[95] This seems to be a continuation of the "creator out of step with his time" theme in Krzhizhanovsky's work, related especially to the writer who is judged to have fallen behind in time, such as Josef Stynsky in *Memories of the Future,* or the poet in "The Goose." The long hours of self-isolation necessary for creative work results in this sense of estrangement from one's own contemporary time, and this appears to be the case with Shterer as well.

[96] Bakhtin, 84.

[97] J.M. Meijer, *Situation Rhyme in a Novel of Dostoevsky*, Dutch Contributions to the Fourth International Congress of Slavicists (The Hague: Mouton & Company, 1958).

Shterer attempts to sell his plan to the new Soviet officials by using a martial language calculated to appeal to their revolutionary ethos:

> In his hands, Shterer held a sheet folded in four. The man behind the desk grabbed a two-eared instrument as though he meant to defend himself with it.
> "Make it short."
> Shterer began. "I am offering you a raid on the future. Ahead of time. My most exact formulas—"
> "Um-hmm. Hello! Sorting? Get me comrade Zadyapa."
> "Depending on the results of my reconnaissance in time, you may either occupy the approaches to the future or re—"
> "Zadyapa, that you? Listen, here's the deal. On the double— Who the hell's cutting us off? Hello?[98]

Here, the "two-eared instrument" is the new technology of the telephone, which the revolutionary is using to exhort the person on the other end to greater speed ("on the double") through debased and staccato language, though the effectiveness of the exchange is undermined by the faulty telephone. In any event, the crude Bolshevik "man of action" is not interested in hearing about Shterer's invention.

As we can see, the above scene captures the charismatic time of the early 1920s discussed in previous chapters. But Shterer's return to the same office in the mid-1920s captures quite a different atmosphere: "…now, a noiseless lift overtook the steps, while the desks had been rearranged in a neat trilinear U and weighted down with mounds of folders. Through a door, typewriters chirred like crickets in the grass. To sign the registry, there was a long line."[99] Here, the machinery works smoothly and quietly (the noiseless lift and the chirring typewriters). Neatness and regular angles predominate in the space, and systems, like the line to sign into the registry, have now replaced the

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[98] *Memories,* 170. Russian: «В руках у Штерера была бумага, сложенная вчетверо. Но человек за столом схватил в руку двуухую трубку, как если б собирался ею защищаться: - Покороче. Штерер начал: - Я предлагаю рейд в будущее. В обгон дням. Мои точнейшие формулы... - Так-так. Алло. Сортировочное? Товарища Задяпу. - В зависимости от результатов разведки во времени вы можете или занять подступы к будущему, или от… - Задяпа, ты? Слухай, вот какое дело. Немедля... кой-черт там разъединяет? Алло!» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 380).

[99] Ibid., 173. Russian: «Но теперь, в обгон ступеням, полз неслышный лифт, а столы были расставлены аккуратным трехлинейным "покоем" и придавлены кипами папок. Из-за двери стрекотали, точно кузнечики из травы, машинки. К толстой регистрационной книге тянулась очередь» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 383).

earlier haphazard atmosphere. The mounds of folders [папки] are a Krzhizhanovskian shorthand for rationalized Soviet bureaucracy. In short, these two visits to the same office serve to illustrate shifts in Soviet governance from charismatic to rational approaches, thus giving shape and color to the movement of history.

Another way that time "takes on flesh" in the text is through the narrative's skillful use of summary. In Genette's nomenclature, *summary* is a form of narrative speed, one in which *fabula*-time is condensed into much less time on the page. Rather than skip over intervening time in silence (what Genette calls *ellipsis*) our attention is drawn instead to its passage: "Days piled up into weeks, weeks into months,"[100] the narrator of *Memories of the Future* tells us in order to mark the passage of time. Or, instead of describing this passage in direct terms, Krzhizhanovsky's summaries might instead focus on the physical manifestations of time's passing. For example, when Shterer is transformed from boy into young man in the eyes of his father, who only sees him on vacations: "With each new visit the son would be taller and thinner; his sleeves and trousers could scarcely keep up with him; even his hair, once fair and shoulder-length, now stood up on end no matter how often it was cut."[101] The same time-lapse technique is applied in the novel not just to Shterer's own biography, but the development of the Soviet Union as a whole. For instance, this masterful example of leaps through the years from war communism to NEP in a single sweeping paragraph:

> The daily turning of the tide [of days], the sun-shot ebb and flow quietly added something each time and took something away. The bank of burial mounds by the Kremlin wall grew gradually longer. Five-domed churches behind high gates vanished with the ebb of tides, and cobbles grew over the ground where they had stood. Trucks stopped guzzling alcohol and exhaling drunken fumes. Above the canted roofs radio sound began to weave its wire web; round-mouthed loudspeakers drew thousands of greedy ears. Motor buses, overstraining their springs, bounced from pit to pothole. Behind the old Peter Palace there stretched—like a stone ellipse—a gigantic stadium for forty thousand eyes. Forty Martyr's Lane was renamed Dynamo Street. On Novoblagoslovennaya Street the stacks of Moscow's first

[100] Ibid., 163. Russian: «Дни скапливались в недели, недели в месяцы» (*SK:Ss* 2: 372).

[101] Ibid., 138. Russian: «С каждым приездом сын делался длиннее и худее; рукава и брюки еле поспевали за его ростом; даже волосы, прежде светлыми прядями опадавшие к плечам, теперь, сколько их ни стригли, топорщащимся ежом вытягивались кверху» (*SK:Ss* 2: 343).

> vodka distillery began smoking. Meanwhile, the theatergoer's nose would occasionally detect, amid the smell of sweat and cheap eau-de-cologne, a whiff of imported Chypre…[102]

In this paragraph, we can see quite clearly how time is made flesh through the word: It seems to pass before us in an artificially quickened pace in the form of sweeping changes in the landscape. These changes serve to mark larger shifts in the era from war communism to NEP: Churches are demolished, their spots paved over, while the row graves in the walls of the Kremlin for revolutionary leaders grows longer almost before our eyes. New technology sprouts up throughout the city—motored buses, for instance, and radios and loudspeakers to broadcast Soviet propaganda. Alcohol has gone from being a truck fuel to being a drink once again, and the new "affluence" of NEP is illustrated through theater smells, with sweat mixing with a whiff of foreign-made perfume. This view of time is consummately Heraclitean, linked as it with flux and constant change. Time in this passage is not the regular march of identical temporal increments— "Days piled up into weeks, weeks into months"—but is intimately connected with change.

At the same time, *Memories of the Future* offers some striking examples of time passing without any change at all. From the point of view of narrative time, these passages are related to another sort of speed from Genette's classification, *pause,* when time in the story does not move forward even as the narration continues. This commonly occurs, for instance, when the action of a scene is interrupted for a description, or to provide background information on a character. In other words, the device is generally a narrative convenience rather than a statement about the nature of time in

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[102] Ibid., 183. Russian: «Приливы и отливы дней, солнечные нахлыни и схлыни, незаметно с каждым разом нечто приносили и нечто уносили. Шеренга взгорбий у Кремлевской стены медленно длиннилась. Пятиголовые вратастые храмы проваливались в отливы, и почва над ними зарастала булыжинами. Грузовики перестали пить спирт и дышать пьяным перегаром. Над скатами кровель радиозвук стал плести свою проволочную паутину; круглоротые рупора собирали вокруг себя тысячи жадных ушных раковин. Автобусные короба, надсаживая рессоры, закачались из ухабов в ухабы. За старым Петровским дворцом вытянулся каменным эллипсом гигантский стадион на 40 000 глаз. Переулок Сорока Мучеников переименовали в Динамовскую улицу. На Новоблагословенной задымил трубами первый водочный завод. Нос посетителя премьер среди запахов пота и рублевого одеколона нет-нет да натыкался на дуновение заграничного 'Шипра'» (*SK:Ss* 2: 394).

the story. Not so in Krzhizhanovsky's time-travel narrative, which highlights Genette's narrative pauses as arising from actual pauses in story time—for instance, when Shterer's time machine malfunctions and time suddenly freezes, as he relates to his audience:

> The reel of seconds threading through my machine had jammed at a certain instant, a certain fraction of a second—it wouldn't go forward, it wouldn't go back. Somewhere below the horizon, the sun's orbit had intersected with eternity. Ugh, 'eternity,' what a horrible word for those who have seen it not in books, but in … The air was cindery gray, the way it sometimes is before dawn. The lines of a roof and the crooked outcrop of a street were etched in immobility, as in a steel engraving.[103]

Here time does not freeze completely, at least for Shterer himself, who is able to register this "timeless time" in his consciousness. Thus, stuck in this moment in the indeterminate future, Shterer has time to see out his window a red flag, suspended and frozen in air, and below it, "beside a curbstone, a dog's hind leg was cocked—eternity's spasm had suspended it."[104] The juxtaposition of the red flag and urinating dog is a suggestive one. More suggestive still is that Shterer's "reel of seconds" appears to jam on the particular date of November 7th, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. Evidence for this dating of the episode is provided by an accidental witness to Shterer's "intersection with eternity," a Soviet bureaucrat who rents the inventor's room after his disappearance into *Aion*. This bureaucrat hears "glassy, mechanical sounds piercing the air,"[105] which seems to be the sound of Shterer's time machine suddenly running aground in ordinary *Chronos*. This sound "was discovered by the new tenant the night of November 7."[106] This association of timeless

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[103] Ibid., 199. Russian: «Лента секунд, продергивающаяся сквозь мою машину, застопорилась на каком-то миге, какой-то дробной доли секунды - и ни в будущее, ни в прошлое. Там, где-то под горизонтом орбита солнца пересеклась с вечностью. Брр, препоганое слово "вечность", для того, кто ее видел не в книгах, а в... Воздух был пепельно-сер, как бывает перед рассветом. Контуры крыши, косая проступь улицы были врезаны в бездвижье, как в гравюрную доску» (*SK:Ss* 2: 413).

[104] Ibid., 200. Russian: «…у тумбы задняя нога пса, приподнятая кверху - спазм вечности остановил ее» (*SK:Ss* 2: 414).

[105] Ibid., 181. Russian: «…механические мерные, колющие воздух стеклистые звуки» (*SK:Ss* 2: 392).

[106] Ibid., 181. Russian: «…был обнаружен новым постояльцем в ночь с 7 на 8 ноября» (*SK:Ss* 2: 392).

time and the 1917 coup, just as discussed above in Chapter One, fits into the author's metaphysics of revolution, where the event is associated with a rupture in the flow of time.

The novel contains other noteworthy deformations of time in addition to pause. Borrowing again from Genette, we can see how Krzhizhanovsky uses *ellipsis* in constructing his time-travel *syuzhet*. Ellipsis is essentially the opposite of a narrative pause—instead of time freezing while the narration continues, the narration instead skips over the passage of story time, leaving a gap in the narration that corresponds to this skipped-over time. According to Genette, these gaps can be either literal, such as in the form of a white space or simply no narration at all, or they can be found in some form in the text, a distinction that relates to Genette's distinction of explicit ellipses and implicit ones.[107] For instance, the narrator notes a two-year gap in the chronology of Shterer's life in which nothing is known, a period of time that coincides with the civil war period after the revolution:

> In later years Shterer did not like to recall his seven-hundred-day march through the Hungry Steppe, as he dubbed this period. His biographer passes over it in silence, not counting several conjectures as to how Shterer again managed to avoid the grave. He seems to have worked for a time as a watchman at a warehouse on the edge of Moscow, conscientiously guarding an emptiness kept under lock and key.[108]

Here, Krzhizhanovsky has made content and form match, using vivid semantic choices to draw attention to the structural gap in the narrative. The biographer "passes over it in silence," noting only that Shterer stood watch over the emptiness [охраняя *пустоту*] of an unused warehouse (as did Krzhizhanovsky himself during the civil war). And this warehouse is kept under lock and key, just as this period of empty time is closed off to the narrative. Using Genette's terminology, the narrator's

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[107] Genette, 107-8

[108] *Memories,* 171. Russian: «Впоследствии Штерер не любил вспоминать переход через все 700 дней Голодной степи, как он называл этот период. Биограф умалчивает о нем, если не считать нескольких догадок о том, каким образом Штереру еще раз удалось обойти кладбищенскую яму. Кажется, некоторое время он служил сторожем на одном из окраинных складов Москвы, добросовестно охраняя пустоту, запертую висячими замками» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 381).

ellipsis is *explicit*, *definite* and *significant*—i.e., the gap elides some important information, instead of one that simply skips over unimportant details—and the text seems to function to draw attention to this gap. Indeed, if the gap or crack is an important part of Krzhizhanovsky's poetics, as critics have asserted,[109] then this gap in time is the hollow void at the center of Shterer's story. When the time-traveller reaches his withered and wan future, he turns his machine around and attempts to return—not to the present from which he set out on his journey, but to this missing time of the civil war. As he relates later in the story: "Behind me was a blank, a chain of three or four years gone completely out of my head. One can't get used to life if behind one is not-life, a gap in existence."[110]

The question of lost time will be taken up in a separate section below. But first we should relate these different types of narrative time to temporal metaphors in the novel, in particular the images of the film reel and the train wheel.

4.5 Real Time, Reel Time, Rail Time

In imagining the moments freezing into stillness as Shterer becomes stuck in time, Krzhizhanovsky relies on an implicit metaphor to make this image more familiar. As Shterer relates, "The reel of seconds threading through my machine had jammed at a certain instant, a certain fraction of a second—it wouldn't go forward, it wouldn't go back."[111] This reel of seconds threaded through the machine is meant of course to bring to mind the film projector, a machine that also frequently broke down, especially in its technological infancy, whereupon it would show a still frame

[109] See V.N. Toporov in *SK:Ss* 6: 386.

[110] *Memories,* 203. Russian: «За спиной у меня был пропуск, сцеп из трех-четырех годов, начисто выключенных из моего сознания. Нельзя вживаться в жизнь, если позади нежизнь, пробел в бытии» (*SK:Ss* 2: 417).

[111] Ibid.*,* 199. Russian: «Лента секунд, продергивающаяся сквозь мою машину, застопорилась на каком-то миге, какой-то дробной доли секунды - и ни в будущее, ни в прошлое» (*SK:Ss* 2: 417).

almost as if time itself had jammed. Indeed, it seems no great leap to imagine a time machine as something akin to a film projector, a technological marvel that could display captured moments as if they were still occurring before the eyes. Or perhaps it might be more appropriate to reverse the terms: The film projector really was a sort of time machine. Like Shterer's machine, the film projector settings could be changed to control speed, from freezing a single moment to reversing time, jumping ahead or speeding up its course. Unlike most other machines of this era, the projector was a mechanism that did no "real" work, but existed only to turn still images into the illusion of movement and change—to create, in other words, the *illusion of time*.

Krzhizhanovsky was no stranger to the cinema. He was involved as a writer in several film projects in the 1920s, and some of his prose works, like *The Return of Munchausen,* were written first as film scripts and only later rewritten as novels and stories.[112] Film was taking the Soviet Union by storm in the 1920s, and Krzhizhanovsky, as a member of the Moscow theatrical and artistic avant-garde, was at the epicenter of this storm. The language of film permeates *Memories of the Future*. The Russian word for the spool or strip of film stock, *лента,* or "ribbon," is used in the above quote to describe the "reel of seconds" [лента секунд] and once again when Shterer speeds up time as he progresses into the future: "I increased my speed—the gray *reel* of days chafed against my eyes; I closed them and, gritting my teeth, tore blindly on with levers thrown forward."[113] In other words, time is the reel, and the time machine is the projector, while the image on the screen—the current frame that flickers in and out of the light in less than a tenth of a second—is the present moment, which travels from the unspooling future to the ever-accumulating past of the take-up reel. It was perhaps this image that Krzhizhanovsky had in his mind when he wrote of Shterer's conception of time, which does not so much rotate as a circle as it seems to spool from one circle to another: "Yes,

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[112] *SK:Ss* 2: 628.

[113] *Memories,* 202-3. Russian: «Я наддал скорости - серая лента дней терлась о мои глаза; я закрыл их и, стиснув зубы, вслепую мчался на выброшенных вперед рычагах» (*SK:Ss* 2: 417).

my wheel [обод] goes not around an axle, but from axle to axle. This is the specific nature of transtemporal journeys."[114] What better metaphor for time moving "from axle to axle"—an image that combines both the circular form of time in the spool and the linear form of time in the film—might be found than the movie projector?

Here, the image of film projector has the advantage of being instantly graspable; it gives a physical form to this perplexing problem of the passage of time, one that readers would have been familiar with. In fact, it seems entirely likely that it was precisely the development of motion-picture technology that made the idea of time travel possible; HG Wells was reportedly inspired by the kinetoscope[115], which was publicly demonstrated two years before the publication of *The Time Machine*. The manipulations of cinematic time by the device made it perhaps that much easier to imagine similar manipulations of time itself. In the same decade that saw the beginning of time travel narratives as a genre, film audiences were regaled with the sight of "a bud unfolding and a fly buzzing its wings in the same interval of time,"[116] demonstrating the malleability of time and relativity of duration in this new medium.

Thus, while time could be slowed down (the fly buzzing its wings) or even stopped with film, it could also be sped up to show, as in the above quote, a bud unfolding. This form of temporal compression in film echoes Genette's idea of summary in narration, which relies on the difference between two times, the duration of action and the duration of presentation. In film, this difference is obtained between *real time* and *reel time*; when the latter is less than the former, we have sequences now familiar through time-lapse photography, such as the opening tree bud. It is precisely these

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[114] Ibid., 151. Russian: «Да, мой обод не вкруг оси, а с оси на ось. В этом своеобразие трансгемпоральных путешествий» (*SK:Ss* 2: 359). Besides the obvious similarities with the movie reel, this passage also gestures towards one of Bergson's metaphors for the movement of time, which he likens to tape moving from one spool to another, with the spool of the future gradually diminishing as the spool of the past grows as it turns (Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind,* trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Citadel Press, 2012), 164-5.)

[115] Gleick, 25.

[116] Banerjee, 73.

sorts of images that both HG Wells and Krzhizhovsky use to describe their time travelers speeding through time. In *The Time Machine,* the traveler relates how he "saw the sun hopping swiftly across the sky, leaping it every minute, and every minute marking a day. …. Presently, as I went on, still gaining velocity, the palpitation of night and day merged into one continuous greyness…"[117] while Krzhizhanovsky's traveler relates how as he increases his speed, the "the gray reel of days chafed against my eyes."[118] Wells's traveler notes how "the jerking sun became a streak of fire, a brilliant arch, in space,"[119] while Krzhizhanovsky notices a similar phenomenon:

> …the sun…shot up like a yellow rocket from behind the huddled roofs then down a sparkling arc aflame with scarlet bursts of sunset, disappearing behind the firewall. Before its reflection on my night-cloaked retina could dissolve, it was again whizzing up from behind those same roofs like a yellow rocket to its zenith, striking its phosphorescent yellow head against the darkness so as to flare, again and again, with new days brief as the burning of a match.[120]

At lower speeds, human movement is also compared to a rocket in HG Wells:

"I drew a breath, set my teeth, gripped the starting lever with both hands, and went off with a thud. The laboratory got hazy and went dark. Mrs. Watchett came in and walked, apparently without seeing me, towards the garden door. I suppose it took her a minute or so to traverse the place, but to me she seemed to shoot across the room like a rocket."[121] In Krzhizhanovsky, this time-lapse view of human activity—in this case, the movements of the Soviet bureaucrat who occupies the inventor's room after his disappearance—takes on a sort of Chaplinesque madcap quality:

> Although the door to my room was a plain, ordinary, single-panel door, it now gave the impression of a swinging door at a chaotic, slot-sized entrance. At any rate, there was a person, or persons, or no, a man with a briefcase under his elbow who simply could not extricate himself from the door's batting panels—he would tumble out and then, as though

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[117] Wells, 41.

[118] *Memories,* 202. Russian: «серая лента дней терлась о мои глаза» (*SK:Ss* 2: 417).

[119] Wells, 41.

[120] *Memories,* 198. Russian: «оно взлетало желтой ракетой из-за сбившихся в кучу крыш и по сверкающей выгиби падало, блеснув алым взрывом заката, за брандмауэр. И прежде чем отблеск его на сетчатке, охваченной ночью, успевал раствориться, оно снова из-за тех же крыш той же желтой солнцевой ракетой взвивалось в зенит, чтобы снова и снова, чиркая фосфорно-желтой головой о тьму, вспыхивать новыми и новыми, краткими, как горение спички, днями» (*SK:Ss* 2: 412).

[121] Wells, 39.

> he'd forgotten something, dash back inside, tear all his clothes off and dive under the covers only to remember something else, jump into his clothes, and vanish out the door only to come racing in again. And all this against competing flashes of sun and electric light.[122]

With its crazed energy, the description borders on farce, reminiscent, perhaps, of the silent film comedies, which due to technological limitations were filmed at lower speeds than they were projected, making movements jerky and faster-than-life. This farcical tone carries over to the actions depicted in this passage, as the Soviet bureaucrat's life is compressed into a meaningless sequence of comings and goings from work. In this sense, the narrative illustrates both the general acceleration of life and the general emptiness of its events. For the bureaucrat, a representative of Soviet rationality, the day can be compressed in such a manner precisely because it appears to consist of the essentially empty and homogeneous time of rationalized routine.

But this sort of compressed time through time-lapse sequences was never more than a novelty in film, unlike its utility as summary in prose, where the narrated nature of the story makes the device feel more natural. In film, the easiest way to reduce real time into reel time was not through compression but through cuts, akin to the narrative technique of ellipsis. The technique of cutting in film had existed before the 1920s, of course, but Soviet filmmakers, most notably Eisenstein, developed these film montage techniques into art. The use of dramatic cuts which worked through juxtaposition was a particular specialty of Eisenstein; it was through these selective cuts and juxtapositions that viewers' experiences could be controlled for greater effect. In *Memories of the Future,* the narrator relates this cinematic technique of cuts to the question of memory and time. As the passage attempts to show, changing the temporal nature of an action through cuts can have profound effects on its deeper meaning and essence:

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[122] *Memories,* 199. Russian: «Хотя дверь моей комнаты была обыкновенной глухой и одностворчатой дверью, но сейчас она производила впечатление вращающейся двери сутолочного щелевого подъезда, по крайней мере, человек, или люди, или нет, человек с портфелем под локтем, никак не мог выпутаться из ее движущейся створы - он проваливался наружу и тотчас же, будто забыв что-то, возвращался внутрь, срывал с себя все, нырял под одеяло и, снова вспомнив, впрыгивал в одежду и исчезал за дверью, чтобы тотчас же появиться вновь. И все это под вспыхивающими вперебой солнцем и электрической нитью» (*SK:Ss* 2: 413).

> …an outside observer might have acquainted himself with the theory of *time's cuts* as set forth in the batting eyes of the lady from across the river. As applied to love, the theory went like this: memory "unrolling its long scroll," may, like a reel of film, be edited. One may cut bits out of both time and the reel and dispense with the longueurs. Thus if one were able to make cuts between a woman's first meeting with her first lover and her first meeting with her second, her third, and so on, that is, if one were to leave what was purest, most sincere, and deeply embedded in memory, the film reel onto which we transposed this series of spliced-together first meetings would show us the woman—with the speed of a roulette ball skipping from number to number—whirling from embrace to embrace and aging before our eyes. To a lawyer, of course, this would recall the article in the Criminal Code dealing with mass violence. Try editing out the superfluous out of anything at all, leaving only what is essential, and you'll see that it won't be to your ...[123]

Here the narrator breaks off into a characteristic ellipsis, which is itself an interruption or cut that only serves ironically to underscore the point—namely, that one cannot simply excise things from time. It is in the *spaces in between*, the interim time between events, that something essential takes shape. (This idea, of course, reflects rather negatively on time travel and on Shterer's invention, which he calls his "time cutter" [времярез].)

The technique of cinematic cuts and its relation to the ellipsis of narrative time is made explicit later in the novel, when Shterer begins to tell his assembled audience about his time in the future, but soon is stopped from doing so by his host, the writer Josef Stynsky, who interrupts his tale at a critical moment by shouting the word "cut!" Stynsky wants to leave out parts of the narrative so that the story might be sold profitably to a publisher. (As he tells Shterer on the way to see an editor, "We're going out to sell those cuts."[124]) But something essential has been lost from Shterer's narrative, and we never get to hear what the future was actually like, since no publisher will touch his

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[123] Ibid., 153-4. Russian: «…сторонний наблюдатель мог бы ознакомиться с теорией о купюрах времени, излагаемой прямо в хлопающие глаза замоскворецкой дамы. Применительно к любви теория эта строилась так: память, "развертывающая свой длинный свиток", и кинолента, разматываемая с катушки, могут быть подвергнуты монтажу. И из ленты, и из времени можно вырезать куски, убрать длинноты. Так, если между первым свиданием женщины с ее первым и первым свиданием с ее вторым, третьим, ну и так далее, сделать купюры, то есть оставить наиболее чистое и искреннее, глубоко западающее в память, то кинолента, на которую мы перенесем ряд примкнутых друг к другу первых свиданий, покажет нам женщину - с быстротой шарика рулетки, перепрыгивающего с номера на номер,- переключающуюся из объятия в объятие и стареющей на наших глазах; юристу это, конечно, напомнило бы ту статью Уголовного закона, которая трактует о массовом насилии. Попробуйте убрать лишнее - из чего бы то ни было оставить лишь самое нужное, и вы увидите, что оно вам не...» (*SK:Ss* 2: 361-2).

[124] Ibid., 206. Russian: «Идем продавать купюры» (*SK:Ss* 2: 421).

memoir of the future as it has been written. As Shterer protests to Stynsky when his lecture is cut short, "If this … is to be with cuts, then there isn't much to tell."[125] These gaps in time and narrative are crucial to *Memories of the Future*, which is quite pieced together through montage of different sources, and contains a void or cut at its heart in the two-year stretch of "not-life, a gap in existence" that Shterer attempts to return to in his machine.

Krzhizhanovsky was not alone in his worry that reel time left out something essential from real time. This concern was shared by Henri Bergson. The comparison of time and film, Bergson felt, was one that contemporary physicists (Einstein, in particular) invited by positing that the movement of time was a psychological phenomenon, not a physical one.[126] The same could be said of film: essentially, the illusion of time passing was created in the mind of the viewer, which strung together a series of stills and perceived movement between them where there was none in actuality. Moreover, film and the block-universe paradigm shared a belief that, in the words of Shterer, "time is given to us *all at once*, whereas we peck at it one grain at a time, in split seconds,"[127] in the same way that the film reel exists all at once, though we see each frame flicker by for the briefest of moments. As Canales notes, "The philosopher protested that if one flattened Einstein's universe and arranged one instant after another, the result would end up looking 'like a screen upon which the cinematography of the universe would be run off.'"[128]

Worse, the idea of time as film, in Bergson's view, accepted the old fallacy of time and motion in Zeno's paradox as something that can be segmented into stillness, which went against Bergson's

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[125] Ibid., 202. (original ellipsis preserved). Russian: «Если... с купюрами, то осталось немного» (*SK:Ss* 2: 416).

[126] Henri Bergson and Herbert Dingle, *Duration and Simultaneity*, The Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 141.

[127] Ibid., 150. Russian: «время дано *фразу* и все, но мы клюем его, так сказать, по зерну, в раздерге секунд» (*SK:Ss* 2: 358).

[128] Canales, 283. See also Bergson, 141.

own idea of time as composed of durations characterized by change and indivisible motion.[129] The illusion of movement created by film was just that, illusory; it took the actual movement of the projector's turning spools to create it, meaning that the passage of time could not be explained without somewhere resorting to real physical movement of the sort that static views of the universe denied.[130]

Further, as Canales notes, "Bergson's critique of the cinematographic method was based on the conviction that something essential escaped from the small gaps, or frame lines, bordering successive film stills"[131] In other words, not only did film present a series of still images and call it movement, it also elided all the other moments *in between* each frame. Not surprisingly, this question of gaps in time seems to have interested Krzhizhanovsky too. In "The Collector of Cracks," Krzhizhanovsky's story devoted to the topic of "ethics of the gap" [щелиная этика], as described by Lövenix, the "collector of cracks", who discusses the problem of the temporal gaps between successive frames of a film: "Wedged in between instants—when the film, having withdrawn one image from the retina, is advancing as to produce another—is a split second where everything has been taken from the eye and nothing new given it. In that split second the eye is before emptiness, but it sees it: Something unseen seems seen" [вид*е*ние мнится ему в*и*дением.][132] In the same way, the human eye perceives the flash of an automobile's spark plug as constant, though it lasts only a fraction of a second:

> The spark-like flash from an electric machine lasts only 1/50,000th of a second. But it remains in the eye for one-seventh of a second. Thus seven fleeting flashes separated by pauses of almost one-seventh of a second, will be perceived by the eye as a continuous, second-long flash. Yet the actual flashes take up only 7/50,000ths of a second. In other words, for 49,993/50,000ths of the length of the experiment there is darkness perceived as

[129] Bergson, 49.

[130] Canales, 295-6.

[131] Ibid., 284.

[132] *Autobiography*, 95-6. Russian: «Меж мгновениями, когда лента, сняв с ретины одно изображение, продёргивается, с тем чтобы дать другое, вклинен миг, когда у глаза всё *уже* отнято и ничего *ещё* не дано: в этот миг глаз перед пустотой, но он *видит* её: вид**е**ние мнится ему в**и**дением» (*SK:Ss* 1: 473): emphasis added.

> light. Do you understand? Now extend that second to a minute, the minute to an hour, the hour to a year, to a century, turn that flash into the sun, and it turns out that the sun may be taken out of orbit for 99/100ths of a day and we, who live under that sun won't notice—you understand—we won't even notice, and, cast into darkness, will rejoice in an illusory sun and an illusory day.[133]

Similarly, in *Memories of the Future,* Shterer uses the idea of the non-zero duration of the present (a Bergsonian concept here attributed to "American scientific findings," likely in reference to William James) to explain how human consciousness can miss perceiving changes which occur faster than the duration of the psychological "now."

> …but were the clockmaker to construct a 1/60-second dial, whose hand would have to make sixty successive movements in 1/60 of a second, we would apprehend those 60 movements as *one* since the time allotted us for their apprehension would not exceed in duration that of our *present.* If—having adjusted the hand's speed to our apperceiving apparatus so that it went around the circle, divided into fractions, in one instant—we were to focus on one particular fraction marked with, say, red paint, our consciousness would merge the moment of the hand's departure and that of its return into one *present*; the hand would have time, so to speak, to dash off, run around the circle, lingering at dozens of other fractions, and return, without ever having been "missed." Inside every instant there is undoubtedly a complexity, what I would call an untimely time. One can cross time the way one crosses the street—one can dart in among the streaming seconds the way one darts in among the rushing automobiles, without ever being run over.[134]

Although Krzhizhanovsky does not directly invoke the cinema's illusion of time and motion through successive instants here, there is a clear connection between how film works and the

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[133] *Autobiography of a Corpse,* 95. Russian: «Искровая вспышка электрической машины длится всего одну пятидесятитысячную секунды. Но удерживается в глазу в течение одной седьмой секунды. Таким образом, семь кратких мельков искр, отделённых друг от друга паузами почти в седьмую долю секунды, будут восприняты глазом как непрерывное, секунду длящееся горение искры. Но ведь подлинное-то её горение, в данном случае, отняло лишь семь пятидесятитысячных секунды. То есть 49993/50000 длительности опыта – была тьма, воспринятая как свет. Поняли? Растяните теперь: секунду в минуту, минуту в час, час в год, в век, взрастите искру в солнце, — и окажется: можно убрать солнце с орбиты на девяносто девять сотых дня и мы, живущие под солнцем, не заметим этого, понимаете, *не заметим* и, брошенные в тьму, будем радоваться мнимому солнцу и мнимому дню» (*SK:Ss* 1: 472).

[134] *Memories,* 151. Russian: «…но если б часовой мастер захотел пустить острие стрелы по кругу, требующему 60 движений в 1/60 секунды, мы б восприняли 60 движений как одно, так как время, отпущенное нам на восприятие этих последовательных движений, не превышает по длительности нашего настоящего, которое не допускает в себя никакого последования. Если, пригнав быстроту движения стрелки к нашему апперципирующему аппарату так, чтобы острие обегало круг, разделенный на деления в течение одного мига, воспринимаемого нами неделимо, если сосредоточить внимание на каком-нибудь одном, скажем, отмеченном красной краской, делении, то сознание сольет момент ухода острия с моментом возврата к данной черте в одно настоящее, стрелка успеет, так сказать, отлучиться, обежать круг, задерживаясь на десятках других делений и вернуться, не будучи ни в чем "замеченной". Несомненно, внутри каждого мига есть некая сложность, некое, я бы позволил себе сказать, несвоевременное время; можно перейти время, как переходят улицу,- можно проскочить меж потока секунд, как проскакивают меж мчащихся колес, не попав ни под одну» (*SK:Ss* 2: 358-9).

description of how small fractions of time escape human perception. This "complexity … an untimely time" contained in each second is compared to the gaps between cars on a busy street. It is precisely these spaces between that makes the street traversable, and so it through these gaps (or as Shterer calls them, pores [поры][135]) that Shterer moves through time "through whose millisecond pores, in pursuit of the future, I was now making my way higher and higher."[136]

The presentation of time as a city street is elsewhere in the novel rendered in similar terms as a road. Shterer's discovery is that this street or road exists not in one dimension as a line, but in two dimensions, as a ribbon of a certain width, just like the film reel. Being able to move orthogonally to the direction of this road is crucial to his movement through time: "On a single-track road one cannot *pass* without swerving to one side. So long as we conceived of time as a straight line, points along it blocked the way of other points. The discovery of *time's* diameter has allowed me to build a *second track*. Now points will have to make way when I want to pass them."[137] This crucial discovery appears to have come to him while he was out walking and was nearly hit by a speeding train: "…blocking [his] path, along parallels of steel, a spiral of smoke came thundering up followed by round racing wheels. Shterer stopped, gasping for break; his face burned with furious joy: he had caught the last symbol in the last formula—finally!—under his frontal bone."[138]

The idea of the multidimensionality of time suggests itself, it seems, by his narrow escape from the train, which is confined to a single dimension by the linear tracks on which it travels, while

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[135] Here Krzhizhanovsky is playing on the homonym «пора», which means both "pore" and "time/moment when" (e.g., in the *Kairos*-meaning of "it's time ["пора" + verb] to do something").

[136] Ibid., 202. Russian: «…сквозь секундные поры которого, вдогонку за будущим, пробирался я все выше и выше» (*SK:Ss* 2: 416).

[137] *Memories,* 151. Russian: «На одноколейной дороге нельзя обогнать, не съехав в сторону. Пока время представлялось нам линейным, точки перегораживали дорогу точкам. Открытие *поперечника времени* дает мне возможность проложить *вторую колею*. Точкам придется посторониться, когда я пойду им в обгон» (*SK:Ss* 2: 358).

[138] *Memories,* 155. Russian: «…но в это время, перерезая им путь, по параллелям стали - грохочущая спираль дыма с бегущими за ней кругами колес. Штерер остановился, тяжело дыша; лицо его горело гневной радостью: последний знак последней формулы был изловлен - о, наконец-то! - под лобную кость» (*SK:Ss* 2: 362-3).

Shterer himself can cross the tracks or step aside to allow it to pass. Interestingly, the description of the train as it thunders by does not name it outright (there is no mention of "train", "locomotive" or "cars") but instead presents it in defamiliarized manner that is fragmented and composed of abstract geometric shapes—the parallels of steel, the spiral of smoke and the circles of wheels—emphasizing not its function but its *geometry*. Like the film projector, the train's motion combines both the line and the circle (with a Hegelian spiral of smoke, a hybrid of the two forms), which allows it to represent both the linear and circular qualities of time that Shterer struggles to reconcile. As the child-Shterer vows, "I will make [time] dance in a circle," a promise of rotation that is freighted with revolutionary significance.

The fact that this key conceptual aspect of Shterer's time travel is linked to the image of a speeding train is perhaps not surprising. As we have seen in Krzhizhanovsky's earlier time-travel narratives ("Discomfort" and its shorter version, "Through the Tracing Paper"), the train is already connected in the author's work with this idea of traveling through time. In *Memories of the Future,* Shterer sees his consumptive schoolmate rapidly aging and imagines the passage of time and entropy as two trains moving at different speeds: "Max Shterer, who paid Ichya more attention than did the others, did not mock him, but neither did he feel compassion, he simply observed him and pondered the processes of deterioration now gaining on that of regeneration; here was a problem about difference in speeds, like the arithmetic problem about the freight train overtaken by the express."[139] In fact, the idea that time might move at different rates for different observers is related to Einstein's relativity, which was frequently explained with examples of two different trains moving

[139] *Memories,* 140. Russian: «Макс Штерер, чаще других останавливавший свое внимание на Ихе, не глумился, но и не сострадал, он просто наблюдал и думал о процессе распада, обгоняющем процесс восстановления; это была задача на разность скоростей, аналогичная арифметической задаче о курьерском поезде, нагоняющем товарный» (*SK:Ss* 2: 345).

at different speeds, an image that both Einstein and Bergson used to discuss the speeding up or slowing down of time.[140]

In addition, the high-speed train was a potent symbol of modernity and the machine age, and Soviet propaganda made frequent use of its image. As Banerjee notes, "the futuristic express train epitomized the Bolshevik dream of technological hypermodernization."[141] Thus the locomotive was a fitting image for the revolution, a fire-breathing iron behemoth that conquered both space and time. Marx himself famously called revolutions the locomotives of history,[142] and this connection was picked up by numerous writers and artists in the Soviet Union, including Pil'niak[143] and Platonov, particularly in the novel *Chevengur*. Krzhizhanovsky himself gives the idea a tragicomic treatment in *The Return of Munchausen* when the Baron sees that Soviet locomotives run by burning not coal but books, and wonders "how long the supplies of Russian literature would last"[144]—an absurd scene that nevertheless captures both the destruction of writers and their works in the Soviet Union and more generally the early Soviet animosity toward the past. In *Memories of the Future,* Shterer uses the metaphor of the railway line to represent history and the train as the Soviet Union speeding along it. After returning from the future, he meets with a potential publisher for his memoir, who hints that his book might be more palatable if it were to "amend certain things and omit others," to which Shterer answers, "You're suggesting that I mix up my signal flags and signal instead that the line is clear."[145] This, of course, he refuses to do.[146]

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[140] Canales, 70.

[141] Banerjee, 40.

[142] R. Marchionatti, *Karl Marx:*, Karl Marx, v. 4 (Routledge, 1998), 149.

[143] See Williams, 394.

[144] *Munchausen,* 49. Russian: «надолго ли хватит запасов русской литературы» (*SK:Ss* 2: 186).

[145] *Memories*, 210. Russian: «… подправить, опустить …»; «Вы предлагаете мне перепутать флажки и сигнализировать: путь свободен» (*SK:Ss* 2: 426).

[146] Shterer's refusal to modify his writing to make it more convenient for the authorities underscores the similarities between character and author, who also refused to "signal instead that line is clear."

Figure 10. Stalin-era poster with the heading "This train goes from the station of Socialism to the Station of Communism … Time-tested engineer of the locomotive of the revolution Comrade Stalin." The text in the middle of the poster relates the "Timetable of the Bolshevik Train" listing important dates from the founding of Lenin's newspaper in 1900, through the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. Perhaps wisely, the final destination of "Communism Station" has been left without a date or time of arrival (P. Sokolov-Skalia, 1939).

Although condemned by Bergson as a false conception of time,[147] the spatialized view serendipitously aligned both the latest scientific theories and Soviet ideology. In both cases, time was equivalent to space, making the future as real as the present. Shterer's calculations for his machine reveal his attempt to make time and space change places. As he explains during his lecture after his return from the future:

> Science, which used to separate time from space, has now joined them together in a single space-time. My mission, in essence, was to proceed along the hyphen still separating time from space, to cross the bridge thrown over the abyss from one millennium to the next. If Riemann and Minkowski looked for a so-called world point at the intersection of four coordinates—x + y + z + t—then I have aimed to recoordinate those coordinates as follows: x + t + y + z.[148]

And if time could be seen as just another space-like dimension, then this meant that one could traverse it in similar ways as one would traverse space, for instance, in a modern

[147] Canales, 76.

[148] *Memories,* 195. Russian: «Наука, некогда резко отделявшая время от пространства, в настоящее время соединяет их в некое единое Space-Time51. Вся моя задача сводилась, в сущности, к тому, чтобы пройти по дефису, отделяющему еще Time от Space, по этому мосту, брошенному над бездной из тысячелетий в тысячелетия. Если в своих работах Риман-Минковский отыскивает так называемую мировую точку в скрещении четырех координат: x + y + z + t, то я стремлюсь как бы к перекоординированию координат, скажем, так: x + t + y + z» (*SK:Ss* 2: 408).

conveyance like a train. Even better: a high-speed train, which would allow its passengers to reach the promised land of the future even sooner. The metaphor of time as space, once lodged and made invisible in the mind and in language, becomes a powerful one for the utopian imagination. After all, "Utopia" was essentially a spatial concept—the Greek *topos* means "place"—before it was an exclusively temporal concept applied to the future. And if time was like space, that meant that the deterministic future was, in some sense, just around the corner.

4.6 In Search of Lost Time

But as Shterer discovers when he finally manages to use his machine to reach the future, this future is nothing like what he expected, as discussed above. The changes are not the expected ones—the sort of social, political and even biological transformations in the future that Wells's *Time Machine,* and nearly every time-travel narrative since, has used its science-fictional lens to explore. Instead, as noted above, the future seems somehow less real than the present, as Shterer relates to his audience upon his return to 1928:

> "Now that I had left the present far behind, I began to sense the incompleteness, the flatness and the impalpability [недоощутимость] of this anticipated time through whose millisecond pores, in pursuit of the future, I was now making my way higher and higher. My artificially grown future, like a plant forced upward ahead of the natural cycle, was painfully thin, withered, and wan. Everything, absolutely everything—the red flag, for instance, that I think I mentioned earlier was gradually turning from red to—"
> "To?"
> "To" Two or three stools edged soundlessly closer.
> "No, not that," Shterer brushed the question aside, "the flag hadn't faded [не отдавал своей краски], but like everything else it was being gradually becindered [подпепливаться] together with the seconds by a grayness, by the colorless residue of the unreal…"[149]

[149] *Memories,* 202. Russian: «Только теперь, оставив далеко позади настоящее, я начал ощущать неполноту, оплощенность и недоощутимость предвосхищенного времени, сквозь секундные поры которого, вдогонку за будущим, пробирался я все выше и выше. Мое будущее, искусственно взращенное, как растение, до природного срока выгнанное вверх, было болезненно тонким; никлым и бесцветным. Всё, решительно всё... ну, например, красный флаг, о котором я уже, кажется, упоминал, постепенно превращался из красного в... - В? - В? - два-три табурета беззвучно пододвинулись ближе. - Нет не то,- отмахнулся Штерер,- он не отдавал своей краски, но в нее, как и во все, постепенно вместе с секундами стала подпепливаться какая-то серость, бесцветящий налет нереального» (*SK:Ss* 2: 416-7).

Here it seems that the audience eagerly anticipates future tidings of regime change, seizing on this powerful metonymic image of the flag and its change in color. But Shterer must disappoint them: the color of the flag changes not due to a shift in this future Moscow's political status, but rather its ontological status. It simply does not exist *in toto* as does the Moscow of the present.[150] The experience of the future seems to cause Shterer to reconsider his conception of time and the future. "Time," he says, "is not a chain of seconds driven from cog to cog by a weight; time, I would say, is a wind of seconds buffeting things as it whirls them away, one after another, into nothingness."[151] In this metaphor of time as a wind—something that emphasizes both its changeable nature and ephemeral quality—Shterer seems to shift away from an Einsteinian idea of time as space to a concept that is quintessentially Bergsonian, as Karen Rosenflanz notes.[152]

This concept of time also more closely aligns with Krzhizhanovsky's own metaphysics, as outlined in the introduction to this dissertation. Specifically, by differentiating between past, present and future according to their *degrees of existence,* Krzhizhanovsky links time to his larger system of ontology based on the scale he develops in his 1923 essay "Philosopheme on the Theatre" [Философема о театре], consisting of nested levels of reality:

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[150] This difference in reality is made manifest in the Russian word for the present, *настоящее,* which carries the meaning both of the temporal category ("the present") and an adjective meaning "real", "actual", "authentic." This is conceptually different from the English equivalent, which characterizes our "now" by the binary of presence-absence; in other words, unlike the Russian, English makes no judgement about whether different times exist, only whether they are close at hand (i.e., not absent.) At root, *presence* implies a spatial relation, meaning that English may indeed lend itself more easily on a linguistic level to conceptions of different times being equally real even if they are not close at hand (present)—just as with distant places. Incidentally, the Russian conflation of "the real" and "the present" is found in *Odyssey of the Odd*'s description of the grains of sand in the hourglass desiring to "онастоящиться", a Krzhizhanovskian neologism that may be translated either as "realify themselves" or "presentify themselves".

[151] Ibid., 195. Russian: «Время - это не цепьё секунд, проволакиваемых с зубца на зубец тяжестью часовой гири; время - это, я бы сказал, ветер секунд, бьющий по вещам и уносящий, вздувающий их, одну за другой, в ничто» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 408).

[152] "Overturned Verticals", 549.

in which "bytie" is transcendental reality, "byt" is everday reality, and "by" is subjunctive reality, the world of "as if", and zero is the gap or absence contained in all levels. It seems clear that Shterer is attempting to escape his *byt,* everyday time of his present, and rise into a sort of transcendent time-of-times (or time-outside-of-time), or *Aion,* which we may link here to *bytie.* By squeezing through the gaps in everyday time into this metatemporal (or hypertemporal) *bytie,* he is able to navigate himself to the future, which is still undetermined. In other words, the future is aligned with *by,* what Krzhizhanovsky, in his story "Postmark: Moscow" calls "pure subjunctivity [сослагательность], the union of free phantasms."[153] And if the wind of seconds blows from this future through the present to the past and "into nothingness," as Shterer describes it, then the past constitutes a sort of zero, a nonexistence that lies at the heart of existence.

In Shterer's imagination, the hollowness of the future appears to be a direct result of a certain hollowness in the past, the gap or absence in time. As he says, "Behind me was a blank, a chain of three or four years gone completely out of my head. One can't get used to life if behind one is not-life, a gap in existence."[154] But this ontological argument has a political dimension as well. The hollow moment of the past responsible for the unreality of the future, according to Shterer, can be traced to the revolution and civil war years, what he calls his "seven-hundred-day march through the Hungry Steppe,"[155] when he stood "guarding the emptiness" [охраняя пустоту] of a warehouse as the rest of the country was convulsed with violence. He characterizes these years in the same apocalyptic terms outlined in Chapter One, with the same temporal gaps and voids discussed previously: "Those destitute years stained with blood and rage when crops and forests perished while a forest of flags rose in revolt—they appeared to me as a hungry steppe, I walked through

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[153] «…чистая сослагательность, сочетанность свободных фантазмов» (*SK:Ss* 4: 52).

[154] *Memories,* 203. Russian: «За спиной у меня был пропуск, сцеп из трех-четырех годов, начисто выключенных из моего сознания. Нельзя вживаться в жизнь, если позади нежизнь, пробел в бытии» (*SK:Ss* 2: 417).

[155] Ibid.*,* 171. Russian: «семьсот дней Голодной степи» (*SK:Ss* 2: 381).

them as through a wasteland [сквозь пустоту], not realizing that…that in a certain present there is more of the future than in the future itself."[156] In other words, the present *byt* contains within itself its own future possibility, *by* (just as one word contains the other). Thus his search for the future should have instead focused on his present, when he might still shape that future. He has shifted from an eternalist perspective on time, when past, present and future are all equally real and equally determined, to a presentist position, which emphasizes the indeterminacy of the future and the importance of fully inhabiting the present moment. This Shterer has not done; he has squandered *Kairos,* meaningful human time, the pivotal moment of action and change, in an attempt to achieve *Aion*.

Seeking to correct his mistake, the inventor turns his machine around to 1918 in search of lost time.[157] But if the future is still in a partial state of existence, then the past seems now to have become a zero, a state of nonexistence. This perhaps explains why he never reaches 1918, crash-landing instead into the year 1928.

The collision occurs as he attempts to move through *Aion* back into regular *Chronos*. Echoing Bergson's division of capital-T metaphysical Time and lower-case-t time of physicists and clocks, Shterer explains that a person can move "from the big T to the little t and back again."[158] But ordinary clock time continues to advance, complicating Shterer's calculations: "measuring t inside t

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[156] Ibid., 203 (ellipsis in original). Russian: «Эти нищие, кровью и гневом протравленные года, когда гибли посевы и леса, но восставал лес знамен, - они мнились мне голодной степью, я проходил сквозь них, как сквозь пустоту, не зная, что... что в ином настоящем больше будущего, чем в самом будущем» (*SK:Ss* 2: 418).

[157] This is a central idea of the novel, one that is telegraphed from the first page. The first sentence of the novel begins: "Four-year-old Max's favorite tale was the one of Tick and Tock." The story is about two young boys, Tick and Tock, who are walked around the clock face by their clock father. But growing up, the boys are unhappy with this circumscribed space and dissatisfied with their present («Тик и Так: все им не то, все им не так»). They run away, disappearing off the face of the clock, and now the old clock wanders in circles, calling their names. In this small parable that begins the novel, Shterer's dissatisfaction with his circumstances and his escape from time are conveyed in miniature, as is his later search for lost time in the father's plaintive calling after his lost Tick and Tock (*Memories,* 133).

[158] *Memories,* 152. Russian: «можно пройти из большого Т в малое и обратно» (*SK:Ss* 2: 359).

isn't easy."[159] Turning his machine to the past, traveling against the "wind of seconds," Shterer collides with *Chronos*: "But coming at me was time itself, the real, astronomic, conventional time toward which the hands of our clocks all point, as the arrows of compasses point toward the pole. Our speeds banged into each other, we knocked heads, my time machine and time itself; the bright brilliance in a thousand suns blinded my eyes…"[160] In other words, several years have elapsed in normal time since Shterer set off in his time machine, and the present moment is now in his formerly future year of 1928.

Or *is* this the present? Looking around himself in this Soviet Union of 1928, Shterer begins to wonder if he hasn't quite made it back into the present after all (that is, into the *настоящее,* a word meaning both "the present" and "the real.") This Moscow still seems ahead of itself, subtly colored by the "colorless residue of the unreal," as he says about the far future. As he tells his audience in 1928,

> …my meeting with real time may never have occurred (my machine could have been destroyed by a less serious obstacle), and that I am among ghosts, forgive me, engendered by ghostly durations … we may suppose that my machine never managed to reach reality, that it crashed into the shadow cast ahead by t time and… My sense of the people surrounding me is that they are people without a now, people whose present has been left behind, people with projected wills,[161] with words resembling the ticking of clocks wound long before, with lives as faint as the impression under the tenth sheet of carbon."[162]

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[159] Ibid., 205. Russian: «отсчет t внутри t вещь не слишком легкая» (*SK:Ss* 2: 419).

[160] Ibid*.,* 204. Russian: «Но навстречу мне шло само время, то вот реальное, астрономическое и общегражданское, к которому, как стрелки компасов к полюсу, протянуты стрелки наших часов. Наши скорости ударились друг о друга, мы сшиблись лбами, машина времени и самое время, яркий блеск в тысячу солнц заслепил мне глаза» (*SK:Ss* 2: 418).

[161] The idea of "projected wills" [проектированные воли] evokes multiple associations; first, the verb "проектировать" suggests projecting a future outcome in a planned economy, as in the first Five-Year Plan. Second, it suggests something projected as in thrown forward (here, in time); thirdly, "projected wills" implies the metaphor of the film projector, and the air of unreality of the projected image as opposed to its flesh-and-blood equivalent.

[162] *Memories,* 205 (ellipsis in original). Russian: «что, может быть, я и не успел, что, возможно, встречи с реальным временем и не произошло (моя конструкция могла разбиться и о менее серьезное препятствие) и что я, извините меня, среди призраков, порожденных призрачными длительностями. … мы можем предположить, что машина не успела достигнуть реальности, она расшиблась о выставившуюся вперед тень t-времени и... наблюдения над окружающими теперь меня людьми дают ощущение, что это люди без теперь, с настоящим, оставшимся где-то позади их, с проектированными волями, словами, похожими на тиканье часов, заведенных задолго до, с жизнями смутными, как оттиск из-под десятого листа копирки» (*SK:Ss* 2: 420).

This striking passage reads as a clear indictment of future-tensed Soviet existence during the first Five-Year Plan: the country has dislodged itself from the present in order to reach the communist future. This fits well with Krzhizhanovsky's beliefs about the Soviet experiment expressed in his notebooks. "New state institutions," he writes, "have done away with the past and demand renunciation of the present—all for the sake of the future, toward which all efforts are focused… All of us in Russia are people without a yesterday and without a today: The revolution has killed yesterday and turned its back on today."[163]

But in addition to these clear political implications of these Soviet "people without a now, people whose present has been left behind," the passage echoes with scientific and metaphysical significance as well. If we return to the great debate between Einstein and Bergson with which we began this chapter, we can see how their argument about time travel is reflected in this passage. To briefly summarize this disagreement over time travel: Einstein and other physicists were, by the 1920s, beginning to realize the consequences of relativity, particularly in regard to its association of acceleration and time dilation. The question of the reality of this time dilation was discussed through the famous time-traveling twin thought experiment, in which a twin accelerates to relativistic speeds through space on a rocket-ship before returning to his earthbound twin, who is now elderly. Whose time is "real"? Einstein and his fellow physicists argued that both times were equally real. Bergson disagreed. The time-traveling twin was living in "imaginary" or "virtual" time, unlike his brother; Bergson referred to this future-dwelling time traveler as a "phantasm,"[164] a phrase that fits the above description of the grayed Soviet reality and captures Krzhizhanovsky's depiction of *by* as "pure subjunctivity, the union of free phantasms."

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[163] «Бывают государственные новообразования, навсегда покончившие с вчера и призывающие отречься от сегодня—ради грядущего, к которому направлены все усилия, вся воля государственного новообразования […] мы все, включенные в Россию, люди без вчера и без сегодня: революция убила вчера и отвернулась от сегодня» (*SK*:*Ss* 1: 34).

[164] Canales, 165; Bergson, 141.

The flip-side of this only partial reality of the future, however, lay in its freedom and indeterminacy. As discussed in Chapter One, Krzhizhanovsky first addressed this question of the open-endedness of the future in the story "Story of a Prophet," in which a fortune-telling ass brays to passers-by that it will either rain or snow, refusing to specify which because "anything can happen!" [Всяко бывает]. And in fact, both do happen at once, an outcome linked in our discussion with noncompossible worlds, or worlds that violate one of philosophy's oldest dictums, the "law of the excluded middle": either something *is* or it *isn't,* but it cannot be both at once. But as we can see, Krzhizhanovsky's fiction is full of descriptions of partial existence. In "Autobiography of a Corpse," the narrator describes the "0.6 of person" inhabiting each square kilometer of Russia's northern wastes, literalizing the abstraction as "a stooped, thread-paper body bent low to the bare, ice-covered ground: 0.6 person."[165] Or in the story "Phantom," where a reanimated corpse offers to "calculate the coefficient of your reality" [исчислить коэффициент вашей реальности] to three decimal places, part of what he calls his philosophy of "phantomism" [фантомизму]. A similar "phantomism" is found in *Memories of the Future,* when Shterer speculates on "why that *future* [то буду] which is now *past* [в котором я был], looked so dead to me and shrouded." The answer, he asserts, lies in the fact that he "had merely obtained the difference between my existence and nonexistence" [разность меж 'буду' и 'не буду'].[166]

This violation of the law of the excluded middle does not fit with standard Newtonian or even Einstein's physics. But it does appear to suggest a different sort of physics, one that had not yet emerged fully in 1929 when *Memories of the Future* was written: quantum physics. Shterer's "difference between existence and nonexistence"' seems to anticipate the famous "Shrödinger's cat" thought

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[165] *Autobiography,* 10. Russian: «сутулое, скудное телом и низко склоненное над нищей обмерзлой землей -- 0,6 человека» (*SK:Ss* 2: 518).

[166] *Memories,* 209. Russian: «почему то буду, в котором я был, виделось мне так мертво и будто сквозь пелену … я получил лишь разность меж 'буду' и 'не буду'» (*SK:Ss* 2: 424). (Krzhizhanovsky himself dies in the year 1950.)

experiment, first suggested in 1935 by the physicist whose name it bears. This thought experiment imagines a cat suspended in a superposition of existence and nonexistence—both alive and dead at once from a vial of poison that is either activated or not activated by the quantum decay of a particle—an outcome that does not collapse into a state of determinacy until such time as it is measured.[167] In other words, existence is not a binary condition, but one that follows probabilistic laws. The critical breakthrough for this theory—and the aspect of quantum physics that Einstein had such a difficult time reconciling with his deterministic universe—was that these probabilities were not merely epistemological, i.e., based on lack of knowledge, but the actual ontological states of things until they are forced to "choose" their path. This moment is called the collapse of the wave function, meaning that, according to the most common, "Copenhagen" interpretation,[168] outcomes can truly be indeterminate before they are measured. In this sense, quantum mechanics may be seen as reinjecting the role of possibility and contingency in the block universe model of space-time.

Can we call Krzhizhanovsky the first writer of the new era of quantum physics? His works seem to advocate for a different view of reality than the reigning scientific paradigms of his time. No other writer springs to mind who has so thoroughly imagined states of partial being, superpositions of mutually-exclusive states of existence of the sort later asserted by quantum mechanics. No other writer seems to have written a time travel story in which the future is imagined as anything less than real. These achievements belong to Krzhizhanovsky's imagination alone.

4.7 Conclusion: Apropos of Soft Snow

[167] Sean M Carroll, *From Eternity to Here: The Quest for the Ultimate Theory of Time* (New York: Dutton, 2010), 240.
[168] Ibid., 239.

Memories of the Future ends in the year of 1928 on a grimly tragic note. The manuscript of Shterer's own *Memories of the Future*—in a wink that anticipates postmodern metafiction, this is the name given the book inside the book—is rejected by publishers when he refuses to change it to fit their ideological concerns. But much like Krzhizhanovsky's own writing, Shterer's memoirs begin circulating in samizdat form after their official rejection:

> But texts are capable of diffusion; certain paragraphs and pages of *Memories* seeped through the cardboard folder and, multiplying and modifying, began to whirl from hand to hand and mind to mind. The pages hid in coat pockets and stole into briefcases, squeezing between official records and reports; they unfolded their folded-in-four bodies so as to slide into circles of lamplight; their lettered residue settled in the convolutions of brains, turned up in private discussions between public lectures, became twisted into jokes and circumlocutions.[169]

Word of Shterer's predictions of the future appear to reach the highest echelons of power; under the cover of darkness he is visited by a chauffeured automobile that discharges a man whose "face, reflected hundreds of times in posters placarded on kiosks, was instantly recognizable."[170] The doorman of the apartment building where Shterer is staying, in the cramped space underneath the stairs in the entry hall, panics upon sight of the man and rushes to open the door, but the visitor sweeps by with a "calm, forcible stride"[171] and goes inside. The doorman, "trying to disentangle his feelings of pride and fear [страх],"[172] takes up position by the door, "in the attitude of a guard standing by a banner. Anyone who came running down the stairs or shoving in at the front door was

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[169] *Memories,* 210-11. Russian: «Но тексты обладают способностью к диффузии; отдельные абзацы и страницы "Воспоминаний" как-то просочились сквозь картонную папку и, множась и варьируясь, начали медленное кружение из рук в руки, из умов в умы. Листки эти прятались по боковым карманам, забирались внутрь портфелей, протискиваясь меж служебных отчетов и протоколов; разгибали свое вчетверо сложенное тело, чтобы вдвинуться в круг абажуров; буквенный налет листков оседал в извивах мозга, вкрапливался отрывами слов в кулуарные беседы меж двух официальных докладов, искривлялся в анекдот и перифразу» (*SK:Ss* 2: 426). In the "folded-in-four" manuscript pages sliding into "circles of lamplight," Krzhizhanovsky continues his geometrical juxtaposition of the line and circle. The figures of square, triangle, line and circle are used throughout the text in ways that seem systematic and deliberate (much like the use of geometry in Bely's *Petersburg*), though an analysis of Krzhizhanovsky's use of geometry does not, alas, fit in these pages.

[170] Ibid., 212. Russian: «Лица его, отраженного сотни раз бумажными листами, пластающимися по киоскам, нельзя было не узнать» (*SK:Ss* 2: 427).

[171] Ibid. Russian: «спокойный упругий шаг» (*SK:Ss* 2: 427).

[172] Ibid. Russian: «стараясь распутать из гордости и страха спутанные чувства» (*SK:Ss* 2: 428).

stopped by a preemptory whisper: "Shh-h! Tiptoe! If you can't be quiet, go around the back"—and then the soft (soft as a rustling) name."[173] Hearing this famous name, the doorman's fright is mirrored in the building residents' reactions.

What exactly is this "soft as a rustling" name? Judging by the uniform reactions of fear and awe, it seems likely that Krzhizhanovsky expected his reader to be able to fill in this blank with the obvious candidate: Josef Stalin. The doorman tries to listen in on the conversation between the "visitor on high"[174] and the time-traveling seer, but hears only murmurs of indistinct conversation: first the visitor speaks, and then Shterer, and then "there was a long pause…the silence grew longer like a tapering thread. The visitor's voice, slightly hoarse and even lower, finally burst forth on a questioning note. There was no reply."[175] The man throws open the door and exits toward his chauffeured car, and the doorman notes that "his shoulders seemed slightly more stooped, his tread heavier and slower."

Whatever the nature of Shterer's conversation with the man whose name is so powerful it must be whispered, it seems clear that Shterer has refused to do what has been asked of him. It is a refusal that turns out to be fatal. Before the end of the night, Shterer has disappeared, and his makeshift living quarters, the "under-stairs closet, right up to the ceiling, was stacked with sticks of stovewood: pressed snugly together, their flat ends protruding from the throat of the cage like a tight damp gag."[176] There can be no misreading this image: Shterer has been silenced. Even the very fact of his

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[173] Ibid. Russian: «…в позе часового, стоящего у знамени. Всех сбегавших по лестнице или вталкивавшихся в дверь снаружи останавливал повелительный шепот: "Тш-ш... на носках, не молотить ногами, а то обошли б с черного",- и за этим следовало тихое, как шуршание, имя» (*SK:Ss* 2: 428).

[174] The word that Krzhizhanovsky uses is "высокий гость," which Turnbull translates as "tall visitor," but it seems more likely given the context that here "высокий" carries the meaning of "high-ranking" instead.

[175] Ibid. Russian: «…наступила длительная пауза … Но молчание длиннилось утоняющейся нитью. Голос посетителя, хрипловатый и сниженный еще раз, рванулся на вопрошающуюся ноту. Ответа не последовало» (*SK:Ss* 2: 428).

[176] Ibid., 213. Russian: «Вся подлестничная каморка от низу доверху была забита поленьями дров; их плоские распилы, тесно вжатые друг в друга, тугим влажным кляпом торчали из распяленного горла дверей» (*SK:Ss* 2: 429).

disappearance is being erased: "the one post-midnight wheel track, sinking down into the drifts, was carefully covered over by flatteringly soft, soft snow."[177] But still,

> The disappearance of Maximillian Shterer did not go unremarked. The whispers became whirrs. Silence itself was afraid of keeping silence too loudly. Then again, neither Stynsky, nor the reticent-in-twenty-six-languages linguist, nor the publisher, who had promptly removed the manuscript of *Memories of the Future* from the Central Publishing archives, was surprised: the manuscript had predicted precisely this outcome—in the nearest term.[178]

Thus, Shterer's *Memories of the Future* prophecies its own fate, and this fate becomes metonymically linked to the fate of the enclosing *Memories of the Future* by Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, who inscribes his novel, as seen above, with the implied anticipation of its dismissal and silent demise. Of course, no great powers of oracular vision were perhaps needed to see that this novel, with its clear political subtext, was fated to remain in the desk drawer.

Nonetheless, Krzhizhanovsky's novel is remarkable in its foresight of the nature of Stalinism as a rationalized system of oppression, which had only just began to take form in the years 1928-29. The end of the novel, with the car arriving to take Shterer away, and the snow covering up its tracks, seems quite prophetic of the Stalinist purges, which would reach their peak only a decade after Krzhizhanovsky conceived his novel.

In the image of the sole set of wheel-ruts [единственная … колея] in the snow, one is reminded of Shterer's earlier goal to do away with the single-track [одноколейная дорога] movement of time, to create a second set of tracks to move more freely. Now, however, there is no second set. The future, which once seemed open, is now closed, and only one set of wheel-ruts can be seen in the snow, leading to wherever Shterer has been taken: interrogation, forced labor, starvation, execution.

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[177] Ibid. Russian: «И единственную послеполуночную колею, западающую в сугробы, заботливо затянуло льстиво-мягкой, мягкой снежью» (*SK:Ss* 2: 429).

[178] Ibid., 214. Russian: «Исчезновение Максимилиана Штерера не было одиночным. Шепоты превратились в шелесты. Самое молчание боялось слишком громко молчать. Впрочем, ни Стынский, ни двадцатишестиязыкий молчальник лингвист, ни издатель, заблаговременно выселивший рукопись "Воспоминания о будущем" из архивов Центроиздата, не удивлялись: именно это - на ближайшие сроки – и предсказывала рукопись» (*SK:Ss* 2: 429-30).

Even the past, recorded in these post-midnight set of tracks, is now being erased, as the white surface of the street, like a book that has lost all its letters,[179] is made unblemished and whole again by the snow falling silently over the sleeping city.

[179] Krzhizhanovsky uses just this image in "Paper Loses Patience" [Бумага теряет терпение], a story in which printed letters go on strike for being made to represent falsehoods, and words disappear from books and newspapers everywhere, leaving blank white pages. (*SK:Ss* 3: 148-158)

Conclusion: Truth in Lies

Perhaps no aspects of our mental life are as fundamental as our minds' constructions of space and time. For Kant, these categories of space and time were even more basic than thought itself, being *a priori* structuring of reality that precedes and permits our thinking. But the mind, in turn, reflects back on the reality in which it dwells, conceptualizing these basic properties of the world around it in ways that might differ from era to era and from culture to culture. So instead of addressing the problem of how time and space structure our thoughts, we might just as profitably discuss the ways in which thought, shaped by individual experience and larger cultural and historical influences, structures our fundamental perceptions of space and time.

Of these two categories, space seems to have attracted far more interest over the last decade or so of literary criticism than time.[1] The relative lack of contemporary scholarship on how literature inscribes temporal attitudes and beliefs in society—especially in comparison with the recent flood of work on space and place in literature—would seem to be the result of a confluence of several factors. Firstly, time by its nature is perhaps less immediately visible to us than the three dimensions of space describing our physical world, although it is no less foundational to our perceptions of reality. Secondly, there is a basic conceptual instability in our understanding of time itself—for

[1] There is a rich tradition of literary criticism that explores how modernist literary works structure and deform time in narrative form—indeed, such fictional representations of time was an overriding concern for such modernists as Joyce, Woolf, Proust and others. The present study is concerned not so much with narrative time—a topic touched on only briefly in chapter four, where I use Genette's taxonomies of narrative deformation of time—but this remains a topic that is very much relevant for future research on Krzhizhanovsky. Here I restrict myself to time as a set of philosophical, scientific and political concepts that Krzhizhanovsky addresses, leaving for the most part unaddressed the various ways in which time is instantiated in his narratives. That work will have to remain for future study, as will the broader links between Krzhizhanovsky's temporal investigations and European literary modernism, for which time was a central concern.

instance, as discussed above, whether time should be understood as analogous to space (that is, in terms of simultaneous, not sequential, relationships), or instead whether it requires the non-spatial concept of tense to describe it properly. Despite the attention of some of the greatest minds in the Western philosophical tradition, from Plato to Heidegger, there still seems to be a lack of consensus on such a basic question as what time *is*—if it even "is" at all—and these basic disagreements over the nature of time may serve to keep this particular scholarship still anchored in the harbor. Thirdly, literary scholarship has been preoccupied over the last several decades with structures of power, often the political power of the nation-state or empire, and this type of hegemony is perhaps more readily conceived in geographic or territorial terms than in temporal ones.

In the case of the Soviet Union, territorial reach is an important part of its construction of national selfhood and myth. But viewing the Soviet Union solely as a territorial/spatial construct would deprive the country of some of what made it unique. As Krzhizhanovsky writes, the Soviet Union as a political and ideological entity was built around ideas about time, particularly in the way it derived its authority not from past deeds but from future promise. Returning to the passage from "Postmark: Moscow" that begins this study: "We have seized time for ourselves, we have annexed the epoch."[2] Such a claim should be taken seriously: not as literal fact, but as a sign of the importance of the study of how cultural and ideology shapes underlying understandings of time, especially in the context of the Soviet Union in the 1920s, the world's first "temporal empire."

In these foregoing chapters, I have attempted to delineate some of these metaphors and concepts of time in the early Soviet context and show how they are invoked and artistically deformed in Krzhizhanovsky's work. Using three names from Greek mythology to denote time, *Kairos, Chronos, Aion*, this analysis attempts to define concepts of time in terms of difference, where

[2] «…мы захватили себе время, аннексировали эпоху» (*SK:Ss* 6:10).

each of these terms captures some essential quality of time: in *Kairos,* its meaningful content; in *Chronos,* its structure; in *Aion,* its transcendent or eternal nature. In addition to these different concepts of time, I have also sought to identify different relationships or attitudes toward time found both in early Soviet discourse and in Krzhizhanovsky's writing. Borrowing from the typologies of Stephen Hanson and Frank Kermode, I have discussed four different stances toward time in these contexts: the *apocalyptic, charismatic, rational* and *charismatic-rational.* Each of these stances toward time has in turn been related to a major work by Krzhizhanovsky (along with myriad shorter works) and the time of its creation. In order, these are the apocalyptic time of the short story collection *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder,* which was written mainly during the civil war period and shortly after, up to 1923, followed by a discussion of charismatic time in the 1924 novella *Odyssey of the Odd.* After this I turn to rational time in Dyazh's dystopian tale from the 1926 novel *The Letter Killers Club,* and then finally to the charismatic-rational time of Krzhizhanovsky's science fiction novel from 1929, *Memories of the Future.*

These works afford a diachronic view of Krzhizhanovsky's developing ideas about time, from the somewhat cursory treatment of time in early stories like "God is Dead" and "A Page in History" to the elaborate play of metaphors and the latest ideas from philosophy and science found in *Memories of the Future.* In addition, I argue that these works capture important shifts in broader social and cultural representations of time in their time. These shifts track broader ideological currents in the 1920s, starting from the apocalyptic discourse around the revolution and civil war (the subject of Chapter One and *Fairy Tales for Wunderkinder*), followed by the charismatic, time-dominating stance of the revolutionary romantics in the early 1920s (Chapter Two and *Odyssey of the Odd*), followed by a retreat into rational calculation during the peak of the NEP years (Chapter Three and Dyazh's tale from *The Letter Killers Club*) and finally the reconciliation of these conceptions of time in Stalin's Five Year Plan and its system of norms and heroic labor (discussed in Chapter Four in the context of

Memories of the Future). These works by Krzhizhanovsky both *reflect* and *reflect on* these shifting attitudes over the first full decade of the Soviet regime as it attempted to define and implement new ways of viewing time and futurity.

But while Krzhizhanovsky's work provides a window into the development of early Soviet time discourse, they are more than mere historical curiosities or cultural relics of the era. In fact, these works would probably not have found a wider audience today if they presented solely historical or scholarly interest. Krzhizhanovsky's prose, with its complex syntactic features, incisive aphorisms, neologisms and densely-woven intertextual and intellectual allusions, is simultaneously challenging and rewarding, and his innovative use of language places him on par with other, more famous European modernists of his era.

At the same time, Krzhizhanovsky's musings on this era still seem to resonate today, so that their relevance seems to have diminished only somewhat in the almost century since they were written. True, the Soviet Union has now been replaced by Russia, a politically conservative state which derives its moral authority not so much from the future as from the past (in particular the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany). But in various cultural, social and technological aspects of development, the country has been transformed in ways that echo the scale of disruptions Krzhizhanovsky depicted nearly a century earlier. The author, who shortly after arriving in Moscow wrote about "the acute and headlong pace of the city's clanking and thundering machine,"[3] would not even recognize the Moscow of today, with its multiple ring roads and traffic jams that routinely rank among some of the worst in the world. And the author's warnings about how the ever-accelerating pace of life in the 1920s has made people "beings with an exceedingly brief present,"[4]

[3] «Только сквозящие в обгон друг другу изображения кинофильмы поспевают за стремительными острым темпом лязгающей и грохочущей машины города» (*SK:Ss* 1: 560).

[4] «…существа с чрезвычайно коротким *настоящим*» (*SK:Ss* 1: 559).

with "lives as faint as the impression under the tenth sheet of carbon"[5] seems almost prophetic in our distracted and harried age of instant gratification and social-media ephemera.

Krzhizhanovsky's fiction seems prescient in other ways as well. His short story "Yellow Coal," for example, predicts an environmental apocalypse from global warming due to the unchecked use of fossil fuels: "Even the snowy coverings of glaciers, melted by the never-ending summer, could not serve as a dependable reserve of hydroelectric energy; the bottoms of the dwindling rivers began to show through, and soon the turbine generators would have to cease functioning. The earth was running a fever."[6] Moreover, the story foresees the social and political consequences of this climate change, noting that a solution could be found if all nations worked together for a solution, but instead they squabble over the shrinking reserves of energy. The story was written in 1939—decades before scientists formulated theories about global warming and its attendant social upheavals—and was one of Krzhizhanovsky's last works of fiction. As such, it offers precious little by way of hope for humanity.

Or take, for instance, *The Return of Munchausen,* which imagines an era in which truth no longer holds meaning. The time-traveling Baron von Munchausen's talent for fabrication and falsehood makes him indispensable to the European diplomatic corps, which accepts him into their ranks as member. The Baron, however, has bigger plans for himself. He takes the continent by storm with a series of public appearances, skillfully using the newspapers to bolster his outrageous statements about the corruption of both right- and left-leaning political parties, and spreading slanderous lies about foreigners—in his case, largely about the Russians. The public eagerly accepts these lies, because Munchausen plays directly to their prejudices and fears about the new Soviet state. And the

[5] «с жизнями смутными, как оттиск из-под десятого листа копирки» (*SK:Ss* 2: 420).

[6] «Даже снежные покровы ледников, растопляемые неуходящим летом, не могли служить надежным резервом водной энергии; дно выпячивалось из мелеющих рек, и вскоре турбогенераторы должны были стать. Землю температурило» (*SK:Ss* 3: 65).

newspapers obligingly print his interviews and statements without scrutiny, since he turns out to be good for their bottom line. The Baron has understood a simple fact about the media ecosystem: Everyone loves scandal, and the more outrageous the lie, the more attention it garners. And the more that Munchausen can confuse people's understanding of the truth, the easier it is to manipulate them. As Munchausen notes, "Horses and voters … if you do not put blinkers on them, they will throw you into the nearest ditch. I have always admired Tenier's technique of allowing black to become white and white to grade into black, through gray ... let the Johns, Gunthers and Pierres go goggling into the fog: 'What is that? The moon or a streetlamp?"[7]

In his wildly mendacious and media-loving Munchausen, Krzhizhanovsky has hit on some essential truths of our post-truth era. Long before our recent anxiety over fake news, Krzhizhanovsky's Munchausen showed photographs of ruined houses he claimed were in Moscow, but were in fact photos of a historical earthquake in far-away Martinique. In fact, Munchausen delivers his lectures on Russia without ever setting foot in the country—far better that way, he says, so as not to have one's mind clouded by any shred of fact. Despite this, however, the Baron soon discovers that his outrageous stories about Russia have actually been surpassed by reality. His Russian fans write him to tell him that, if anything, his accounts of the disorder and chaos in the socialist economy are tame compared the actual situation in the country. In a sense, the Baron has unintentionally given the lie to the Soviet Union's own lies. Or, as the Munchausian motto states: *mendace veritas*—"truth in lies."[8]

This motto might as well be Krzhizhanovsky's own. His fictions seem calculated to arrive at the truth by detouring into fantasy. In this sense, the goal of his work is not strictly mimetic, no more

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[7] *Munchausen,* 15. Russian: «Лошади и избиратели … если не надеть на них наглазников, непременно вывалят вас в канаву, и я всегда был поклонником Тенирсовой техники, дающей возможность черному стать белым, а белому породниться с черным: через серое. Нейтральные тона в живописи, нейтралитет в политике, и пусть себе Джоны, Михели и Жаны пучат глаза в туман: что там - луна или фонарь?» (*SK*:*Ss* 2: 148).

[8] Ibid., 28.

than a caricaturist seeks to capture a photographic likeness of his or her subject. Instead, like the caricaturist, Krzhizhanovsky relies on hyperbole and distortion in order to capture an essence that somehow seems *more* true, in its enunciation of distinctive features, than the exact likeness. No reader of the dystopian tale of Exinia in *The Letter Killers Club* could mistake it for "realist" science fiction, but that does not mean that this tale of centralized control over minds via the airwaves does not convey some powerful truth about how the Soviet Union, and the totalitarian state more generally, would later use broadcasting media as a pernicious form of mind-control over the population—a development Krzhizhanovsky seems to have anticipated just two years into the country's first rudimentary radio broadcasts.

In fact, the poetics of Krzhizhanovsky's *mendace veritas* may fit a larger pattern of writing under authoritarian regimes. Fantastical fiction produced under these circumstances—such as Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez in South America, perhaps Franz Kafka in the Austro-Hungarian Empire—might seem at first glance to be a retreat from the real world into the world of fantasy and make-believe. Such a retreat can be seen as a form of escapism, as a refusal to address the problems of real world, or as a refuge for writers who are simply not allowed to write the truth, or fear reprisals for doing so. Alternately, one might see the fantastic as a mode that allows for veiled criticism of the political regime through allegory and Aesopian language, features that allow it to escape the notice of the censors and find readers in print. It seems that both these possibilities could be true for different writers at different times. But there exists a third possible reason for the odd symbiosis of the literature of the fantastic and the authoritarian state—that is, that the imagination can be a site of resistance, not even so much in its content as in its mere exercise. An important feature of totalitarian systems lies in how they seek to assert control not only over the actions of their citizens, but over their thoughts and beliefs as well. This includes, of course, making their regimes seem like the natural result of historical predestination. "History does not tolerate the

subjunctive mood,"[9] Josef Stalin asserted to the German writer Emil Ludvig in 1931, thus rejecting any consideration of the role of contingency or "what-ifs" in the Bolshevik coup and his own rise to power. This is the nature of totalitarian regimes, to cast themselves as inevitable, to occupy not only the present but all possible pasts and futures.

By engaging in alternative and fantastical stories and scenarios, however, the fiction writer may resist this deterministic teleology—what in a different context Gary Saul Morson terms "semiotic totalitarianism."[10] It may do this, as Morson argues in *Narrative and Freedom*, through what he calls "side-shadowing," the author's implicit suggestion in the text that other choices were available to characters than those actually taken in the story, and that this particular story is only one in a web of possible (even if unrealized) alternate timelines, which emphasizes the roles of agency and freedom.[11] In this sense, Morson's description of the potentials of literature fits well with Krzhizhanovsky's fictional exploration of possible worlds and futures in his literature of the fantastic, or what he calls elsewhere the world of "subjunctivity," *soslagatel'nost',* the realm of the would-be and the as-if. By imagining *otherwise*, one might become *other-wise*: more aware of the contingent nature of our present reality and the world of freedom and possibility in our subjunctivities.

What if we were to take Krzhizhanovsky's idea of subjunctivity and apply to his life and writing? How might things have turned out differently for him and for Russian literature, if things had indeed turned out differently? Such questions belong more properly to the realm of fiction than academic writing, of course. But just because there are no answers to these questions does not mean that they are not worth asking. They perhaps the only way left us to recover a bit of lost history, to fill in

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[9] «…история не терпит сослагательного наклонения» (D.A. Gutnov, *Lektsii Po Istorii Otechestva: Chast' Tret'ia* (Moscow: Fakul'tet zhurnalistiki MGU, 2018), 6. Accessed online at <http://docplayer.ru/70595229-D-a-gutnov-lekcii-po-istorii-otechestva-chast-tretya-istoriya-rossii-xvii-v-moskva-2018.html>).

[10] Gary Saul Morson, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in "War and Peace"* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1987), 188.

[11] Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 129.

some blank territory on the map—to show, at the very least, the presence of the absence. How does one study a counterfactual? In 1936, Krzhizhanovsky began a scholarly project to document the unfinished and unwritten works of literature conceived by great writers through the ages, which he called "A History of Unwritten Literature" [История ненаписанной литературы]. In the essay, he speculates on the feasibility of writing about unwritten literature: "to what extent," he writes, "is it possible to actualize a study of the un-actualized?" [осуществимо изучение неосуществленного].[12] The answer was apparently negative; like so much else by the author, Krzhizhanovsky's "History of Unwritten Literature" was itself to remain unfinished.

And yet what we do have is far from being inconsequential: thousands of pages of densely philosophical but playful works of literature from a writer who was unheralded in his day, but who is now finally finding a readership almost exactly a hundred years after he began his work of turning ideas into words on the page. Like Shterer's time machine, these pages have disappeared and then suddenly reemerged out of the past to our present. And just like Shterer's time machine, these pages allow us to return to the past and contemplate its lessons. As Shterer says of his machine: "my timecutter was far more sophisticated than a knife for cutting pages, for unsealing unread leaves—it could return me to pages I hadn't understood and lie like a bookmark between any two while I reread and reconsidered the reconstructed past."[13] In this same way, the author of these words has succeeded in building another sort of time machine—one that bids us to step inside and enter into the timeless time of the written word.♦

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[12] *SK:Ss* 5: 271.

[13] *Memories,* 203. Russian: «мой времярез был много сложнее разрезального ножа, вскрывающего непрочитанные листы,- он мог вернуть меня к непонятным страницам и лечь закладкой меж любых двух, пока я буду перечитывать да пересчитывать реконструированное прошлое» (*SK:Ss* 2: 418).

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