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1

The “events” interesting us here, namely, fertile in scientific results meditations of the young innovative visual artists and poets on the essence of the crafts and trades plied by them, took place in the pre-war Russia (1910–1914).

Cubism was coming in from France. We can say without exaggeration that the time which elapsed from the moment of birth of some new modification of cubism in Parisian studios till the moment of enthusiastic welcome in both Russian capitals was not much longer than a span needed to cover that distance in an express train. Thus, the Russians almost simultaneously with Frenchmen began move away from essentially “cubistic” compositions in solids to two-dimensional works, cast away convergence for divergence, statics for dynamics, exercising athematic forms, renew texture, and all in all, drop painting for spatial constructions of glass, wood, steel, etc.; let us add that they lived with their “negroidal” period much longer than the French and they did it with their native material: folk primitivism and icons.

Among the groups paying tribute to cubism one called “Gileia”, or “Bubnovyi Valet”—from the name used at their exhibitions—distinguished itself with the fact that most of its members were visual artists and poets at the same time while those who were professionals in only one of these arts had a professional knowledge of the other.

The uniqueness of this group, however, was not limited to this feature only. Even though "Gileia" did not feel like having any contact with the currently developing Italian futurism, on each occasion sharply manifesting its separation from them, although for some time it recoiled from the name "futurism," as it was both baptized and insulted with at the same time by the yellow press, in the end it not only gave up the fight but also started to use this label as an advertising board and even tried to play the role of a monopolist (literally: "all futurists are in our group only!").

Cooperation of arts in this by name futuristic and spiritually cubistic group of poets-painters provided quite unusual results. The artists from "Gileia" (particularly active were Khlebnikov and Livšic) analyzed the problems of cubism from the point of view of visual arts and poetry. And it was not done with an intention to work out principles of some meta-art: the idea, so close to the hearts and so dear to former artistic groups, was strongly opposed by the members of "Gileia," who were so apprehensive of "literature" in painting and "pictures" in literature. They strove to reach something quite opposite: by considering and pondering over several arts at a time—with isolating the most general common features proper every work of art "as such"—they tried to arrive at distinguishing features specific for individual branches of art, and for them only.

The pattern of this project was as follows: at first they took ontological and evaluating sentences from French innovators. The sentences' contents were visual arts. Modifying them appropriately they replace in them the word "visual art" with "art"; then again, but in a different direction, their range was narrowed by substituting the word "art" with "poetry." The effect corresponded to the intentions.

Thus a general normative theory of art developed: and next to it and from it—two individual normative systems; one for visual arts, the other for poetry; finally—two creative practices, which had at least as much in common as there was commonality in the very norms (not to mention disturbances effected by the influence of Italian futurism and other social factors).

The normative poetics of futurism was destined to make a scientific career. This system of notions and postulates—we add also "and

terms” because we are not quite certain in this respect—somewhat later (since ca. 1917) became a fixed repertoire of Russian formalism; however, all the theoretical and scientific (minus normative) consequences were drawn from it by a “fraction” that in those days was not much different from formalism but already displayed opposition attitudes towards the mainstream. Later on this fraction became autonomous under the name of *phonological school*.

The part of considerations presented below, which pertains to the theoretical contribution of futurism, bears the character of reconstruction. It is because nowhere and never systematically expounded these matters. It would be rather humorous to expect them to do such a painstaking job because they were artists on the go, storm-like fashion. They even did not make passing remarks about links between their poetics and cubism. Neither did the formalists do the job for them. Therefore, trying to prove indirectly the verity of this reconstruction (it cannot be done directly because this would call for extensive quotations) we introduce to our description terms of formalism, appropriately marking them graphically, although, as we said, it is not certain whether the futurists already used them. Elementary demands of correctness will be met if these terms have, firstly, a Russian equivalent of a cubist system of notions (strictly in visual arts), and secondly—a system of futuristic poetics.

2

The French cubists, and their Russian comrades in arms, brought to visual arts the neo-Kantian principle of method domination over object subjected to “studying.” They believed that the artist is externally given by the so-called nature and social conventions some single models, individual or collective, i.e. “themes,” in other words — the *material*. Internally — some colour and, mainly, morphological problems, or to use another phrase. *catches*, by means of which the artist transfers the extra-artistic material into the domain of art as if using a pair of pliers. That is how the trend got its name: not the quality of the material or “theme” is important but the catch, the specific problem of visual arts is shape, and one of the shapes is a cube. They went keeping the belief that

any good painting from former epochs is *ex definitione* cubistic because the artist, realizing what his tasks were, always gave priority to the catch over the material. But he did not visualize this in an oppressive way: he gave in to the terror of the social convention according to which the image must have some “contents.” He would resort to tricks. He made use of the fact that in a theme given to him by society there were, in a germ form, such arrangements of shapes and colours which the artist aimed at in his composition, or – without excessive violation of the convention – you could suggest them to the theme. These extra-artistic arrangements became, in this way, the *motivation* for the artist’s catch (e.g. the extra-artistic plot of the homage by the Three Kings included the blackness of the Negro, the purple of coats, etc.). The public was happy because the “real life truth” (N.B., often quite relative) was met; the artist provided motivation only for the sake of having peace and quiet since what he really cared for was the catch, i.e. “form.” The cubists—French and Russian—understood this latter term in the sense of almost Kantian character—as an *a priori* category of art, as a method of organizing extra-artistic elements.

The following normative theses stemmed from it for cubism, ordered here in a *crescendo* fashion on account of the degree of their radicalism:

1. It is necessary to seek such themes that would permit underscoring of the primacy of catch and at the same time not to resign from clear motivation.

2. It is necessary to curtail the domination of the traditional material which is lording it, considerably reduce motivation, ostentatiously underline the catch.

3. It is necessary to eliminate material from “life” either almost completely or completely, and stay with the catch only, i.e. the combination of surfaces and colours. In this way motivation will become “dispensable,” and the catch, stripped of motivation, the *naked catch*.

Ad 1. In practice of both cubisms this norm was to be met by themes about machinery or urban subject in general.

Ad 2. This norm, the implementation of which often put the viewer before a difficult if not downright disheartening task of plucking out the theme from a “directly given” tumble of shapes

and colors—to give him, as it were, an object-lesson on what is more important here, splits into several varieties.

A. The image is morphologically “parallel” to the model but qualitatively different from it. If a model is, for example, a river harbour, if the model includes masts, hulls, railway tracks, etc., then the elements appear on canvas, their reciprocal configuration is approximately the same as in the model, only that masts turn into triangles, hulls into truncated cones, etc. Thus, these two morphological structures correspond to two semantic structures: one—the “sense” of the port, the other—the “sense” of the arrangement of shapes to which the port was “reduced.” The more important is, of course, the second sense, the “unlife-like,” some sort of para-semantics, some sort of *zaum*. This port, made banal in so many pictures becomes *palpable*, or received by his sensitivity, because it turned out that apart from its sense in the natural life it also has the geometric and coloristic “sense” contributed by the artist. This contribution of the artist enables us to see this port as if for the first time, it *decommonizes* it.

B. Image is a pictomontage (a provisional term, coined after “photomontage”). As an example of it we may quote a drawing by D. Burlyuk (*Trebnik troikh*). Something of a prosectorium: a buttock cut off “the world” with two parallel lines, then a half of female torso cut off in the same way; and again these two parallels, and then...

Most certainly it is not Italian futurism, neither French cubism, directly—but it seems to be its Russian continuation.

Every element separately is copied from “reality” in the academic way, preserving its morphological specificity, that we cannot speak of a catch in the sense of decommonizing the speech of everyday. The “catch” turned banal does not count; it has to be assumed that the image was entered by concrete, although selected in advance, fragments of material—and only here it was re-grouped in accordance with the artist’s concept. So the composition begins here, as it were, “at the second floor.” That is for one.

Two—we have here, most clearly, new instead of traditional topics, and not renunciation of themes all together. And one more thing: modality A represents an arrangement of two parallels but of different senses; modality B contains an arrangement of senses

acutely contradictory. Because there elements here are decisively traditional, the entirety is innovative; the elements are *disiecta membra*; ripped off various real extra-artistic contexts, while the entirety is an entirety—artistic one, at that.

However, some contact points between variant A and B exist; the very principle of predomination of the catch without stripping it, increased sensitivity plus decommonalization as its consequence.

Ad 3. Here the duality of semantics disappears completely. One remains—the one that considers entirety conceived as an arrangement of such and such curves and straight lines and that a given curve, on account of its dimensions, shape and location, has such and such function in this artistically organized entity.

A separate place in this set of norms is taken up by the new Texture, this *sui generis canonization* of the *younger line*, this trespassing into the so far “aristocratic” pallet—real matchboxes, trampled shoe soles, pieces of a broken bottle and strips of old newspapers. Here the catch borders with new topicality, or new themes. Next to it—more acute sensibility because not only the composition but also “the modes of putting colours on” undergo decommonization, i.e. become visible.

3

Let us move on to the “parallel” poetics of futurism now.

The “material” for the poet is what in traditional poetics is called “contents,” “idea,” or even “plot,” that is, some extra-artistic entirety of sense, relatively independent of the word. The poet’s contribution, as a catch, is the word (qualitatively different from the extra-linguistic word) and higher order *structure* composed of it. The word is a *sui generis* shape; it consists of elementary shapes called word-forming particles, i.e. roots, affixes, prefixes, as well as formants of subordination, parts of speech, etc.; in turn, it is an element of sets of units organized at a higher level such as sentences, phrases—all the way to complete literary works. The catch is more important than material, the word is more important than the plot “taken from life.” The word forming particles are divided not only in terms of their dependence on the form quality but also on account of the *function* they have in a given *language*

system, that is to say, on account of their “sense.” A piece of poetry constructed according to the principle of primacy of the word over the plot “taken from life” will have the *sui generis* semantics—parasemantics. As the artist-cubist, creating a “study in blue” gives up the plot semantics for the sake of the colour, so Khlebnikov creating a piece *Lyubkho* (where one and the same root is repeated in several scores of modifications) gives up semantics of images and poetry for the sake of the semantics of word formation. In this way, therefore, we should understand Khlebnikov’s term *zaimnyj jazyk* (a Polish equivalent could be *mirohlady*): not extra-semantic language but specifically semantic, conditioned by the specificity of morphology of the poetic language. The motivation for the “catch” here will be the identity or semantic “analogy” of word forming particles and entire word structures in a given poetic and colloquial, extra-poetic language system; in other words, simply speaking—the reader will eventually get at some “contents.”

The word-forming particles—it is one type of specifically literary “catches.” There are others, e.g. individual sounds. At stake here is not only their purely sonic aspect but above all the semantic, meaning-oriented one. Khlebnikov goes as far as recognizing every speech sound (we should add: every one that has some linguistic and not only phonetic value) as a word-formation particle, e.g.,

El’ – put’ točki s vysoty
Ostanovennyi širokoi
Ploskost’yu.

It is not at all the point whether the speech sound “I” has in the Russian language system this very meaning as ascribed to it by Khlebnikov in his very suggestive poem. Nor is it important whether such meaning of a single sound isolated from a live context is at all possible (if it is not a formant of a given grammatical category). The important thing is that in language—even poetic—it is impossible to *a priori* recognize the existence of naked, meaningless sounds, that meanings of linguistic phonemes are not identical with emotions. Let us recall that this view was voiced from the Petersburg chair by Ščerba, the most outstanding disciple of Baudouin de Courtenay; among formalists Jakobson declared his access to it without any reservations, and Jakubinsky and Polivanov—with reservations;

all of them, while ascribing both to morphemes and phonemes the feature of sensibility, found a difference between these form qualities because they regarded morpheme as a language entity of higher order than phoneme.

But *zaum* may go even a step further. There is in poetry an old category of ungrammatical rhymes. Two members of such a rhyme lend each other their form qualities. For example, in the rhyme *prostych* – *akrostych* we are ready to treat the sound *ch* in *akrostych* as an inflexional ending (Genitive, Plural) and incorporate this word with the category of adjectives in Polish; we were ready to forget about the categorial affiliation of the word *prostych* with the system of Polish in order to decompose it into fictitious word-formation particles: *pro-stych*. There is a specific poetic word-formation assimilation. Many puns are based on this principle: *Pro-naszko*, *Contra-naszko*, *tata-rak*, or many rhymes by Khlebnikov, as for example, *cistych* – *plecistych*. Thus, the semantics of poetic language consists of sets of poetic word-forming particles which are authentic and fictitious, based not on an extra-poetic system of language, from which the poet started, but on purely sonic coincidences, resulting from a poetic matching of words. Although we deal here with interference of semantic systems but their material starting point for the author and their material point of arrival for the reader are pure, nonsensical sets of sounds. Here *they* are the ultimate motivation and not a specific function of the word-formation particles in an extra-poetic system of language. In this way, de-commonalization and sensitivity—we are going to touch upon it in a while—concern not only word-formation particles but the instrumentation of poetic language in general, although even here because of the already mentioned interference of semantic planes, *zaum* cannot be understood in absolute terms.

This role of sonic instrumentation is a clear parallel to cubists' experimentation with texture. Indeed: a line as an element of the linear system and a line as a more or less thin or thick, smooth, rough, etc. only a layer of crayon—these are quite different things. The differences concern, i.a., degrees and methods of their “humanization.” The layer of crayon and the “nonsensical” sound against the background of a work of art look as if they were brought transferred here from real life, from the world of nature. This illusion, in both cases, bears identical semblances of truth.

Finally, a truly innovative poetic work is characterized by making it impossible for the reader to perform his usual operation in regard to traditional poetic pieces: mechanical translation of language formal qualities into extra-verbal sense and possibly fastest elimination of these formal qualities from the area of consciousness. No, it is not so, because bringing out these qualities to the fore decommonalizes the language of a poem, that is, the piece itself intensifies its sensitivity since what took place here was *desautomatization* of specifically linguistic shapes, and by the same token – the possibility of their imperception was done away with. Hence the statement by the futurists that poetry is the form and not the “content.”

From this followed the normative theses for Russian futurism, analogous to those of cubists.

1. Themes should be sought which would make it possible to take up the issue of the “catch,” and at the same time not to resign from evident motivation.

Mayakovski’s urbanism, based on a cult of modern technological civilization, and Khlebnikov’s predilection for fairy tale-historical themes obtain the language-poetry motivation against the background of this thesis. In Mayakovski – on account of the possibility of using new, “big city” lexis, and new syntactical structures drawn from colloquial language; in Khlebnikov – on account of the possibility of introducing “archaic”-sounding lexical and syntactical freaks.

2. Traditional material, which is lording it, should be curtailed in its domination, and motivation – clearly reduced, the catch should be underlined ostentatiously.

A. The poetic work is morphologically “parallel” to linguistic morphology of extra-poetic plot but qualitatively different from it. Khlebnikov and Mayakovski’s pieces enter the scene here, particularly those in which the plot both legible in the end and it explains well why the poet used such and no other word arrangements, where, however, the arrangements simultaneously show structures based on categorial-linguistic and categorial-sonic principles.

| | |
|-------|-------|
| U- | Godov |
| lica | rez- |
| lica | če |
| U | če- |
| Dogov | rez |

(Mayakovski)

B. The poetic work is a linguistic equivalent of “pictomontage.” The main source of illustrations here is Mayakovski.

Na češue žestjanoj ryby
 Pročel ja zovy veščich gub
 A vy, noktjurn sygrat' mogli by
 Na flejtach vodostočnych trub?

To the explications concerning the drawing by D. Burlyuk we should add—since we are talking about a piece of poetry and not a visual art work—the following: the words of the quoted piece are taken, one by one, from the lexical thesaurus of the extra-poetic system of language. There is no word-formation principle of selection; besides, the words are introduced not only without deformations of the word-formation *explicite* but also the context leaves them in the inviolable, traditional word-formation shape (to put it more simply: there are no puns here). Thus, similarly to Burlyuk, the constructing starts at the “second floor.” The element is not the word but an expression, a phrase. The novelty here is in semantic clinches of not word-forming particles but inter-word items. The author chose words from diverse “dialectal” systems of Russian and put them together in an unexpected way. In this we should see a greater degree of Mayakovski’s traditionality in poetry than in Khlebnikov. This type of clinches is no more a “self-target” but a tool in the hands of a new range of themes. The specific verbal shape “palpable” also here but only on account of the context surprises, on inter-word clinches. However, it is not the only base for the palpability point of gravity. It is based on these “images” or pictures, on this new plot, or if you will, on the new *sujet*. This expansion of the notion of “catch” will add wings to Mayakovski’s creativity in the years to come—and it will also be the Achilles heel of the formalist system.

3. The plot material should be almost completely or completely taken away while keeping only the catch, i.e. combinations of language categories. In this way, a purely linguistic principle of linearity turns into motivation, and the catch stripped of the “life” motivation becomes the naked or denuded one.

| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Trepetva | or Snežogi |
| dyšva | Vodogi |
| pomirva | Kostrogi |
| pleščva etc. | Lesnogi etc. |

(Khlebnikov)

The principle of linearization here is the selection of words: a) from only one part of speech, b) with a common word-formation suffix. The plot motivation is almost completely absent here. But to speak of any nonsense or extra-sense at this point is impossible.

The history of this live heritage, received by formalists after futurists are illustrated here, for the sake of brevity, with only a few examples.

The worst beginnings were experienced by the Khlebnikovian concept of the language of extra-reason. Already within the confines of Russian futurism it was opposed by a member of "Gileia," at the same time an admirer of Marinetti, A. Kruchenykh. According to the ideas of his master, by the language of extra-reason he understood, quite simply, as the language of emotion, the blubber of the soul sunk in excitement. In "language" conceived in such a way the product of articulation as an expression of trembling inner self indeed becomes something quite beyond reason—but at the cost losing affiliation to the phenomena of culture. It quite strangely happened that the formalists, headed by Shklovski, initially (in the first set of *Shorniki po teorii poeticheskogo yazyka*, 1916) were oriented not on Khlebnikov but on Kruchenykh. They identified poetic language with the language of emotion.

In the same paper, however, Evgeni Polivanov, one of the future phonologists, vetoed this approach. His dissertation *Po povodu zvu-kovykh zhestov yaponskogo yazyka* came as a true gift from the Danao tribe: in the intention of the editors most probably it was to consist for an erudite contribution to the issue of emotional *zaum* but it became a true (although at that time only half-ripe) manifesto of the early period of phonology (the author, gropingly but persistently, was trying to overcome in his mind the naturalism of Wundt at that time).

Introducing the notion of context and underlining the tremendous role of this factor, Polivanov, first of all, establishes strict distinction

between – if I may use terms applied later – the phonology of word and the phonology of phrase (a common word in phrases “old servant” and “your obedient servant” has, as a separate word, some basic meaning A while as a component part of phrases – appropriate modalities of this meaning: $A+x$ and $A+y$). Passing on to gestures, he ascribes to them, depending on circumstances, either expressive or communicative (i.e. related to sign) functions. Moreover, when discussing language phenomena in general, he divides them (according to distinctions contained in Plato’s *Kratylos*) into *natural*, i.e. those in which you can grasp some similarity between a language formation and its live “model,” and *conventional*, i.e. symbolic, in which this relation is beyond our grasp.

However, Polivanov immediately makes a break in this division: conventionality is by no means limited to phenomena of the second type; for example, a child, expressing its anger, imitates the behaviour of its parents on similar occasions. To language forms resembling “conventional release of emotions” it ascribes only potential naturalness (i.e. she was – but she went out).

The same feature is proper to sound gestures (e.g. *pikapika* – a “lightning” in Japanese) “whose role is analogous to the role of gestures.” It turns out, however, that all of them possess in Japanese a common morphological structure, which by itself is a proof of their semasiologization. And what is more: “The complex *pikapika* evokes an image of a lightning in no one, just as a lightning is not going to evoke an image of *pikapika*, if a conventional association had not been established between one and the other.” Marinetti, Kruchenykh and Shklovsky’s *zaum* was dealt a blow it never recovered from; justice was rendered to the concept of Khlebnikov.

This was not the only difference of opinion between the mainstream of formalism with the headquarters in Petersburg (Association for Studies on Poetic Language; the Russian abbreviation – Opojaz), and the phonological opposition rallying primarily around The Moscow Linguistic Circle, the *spiritus movens* of which, undoubtedly, was Jakobson. Thus, the Moscow group assumed that poetry is the language in its aesthetic function, while the Petersburg group maintained that poetic motif not always turns out to be an extension of the language material. In this difference of opinion lies the germ of separation of these two fractions’ academic orientations. The

first, when posing the question “what is poetry” makes its answer depend on an answer to the question “what is language”—with the course of time they cared less and less for poetry while becoming more and more like linguists “in general.” The others, free of such problems but invigorated with an ambition to expand the circle of the Opojaz narrow range of problems, at a certain moment performed a beautiful but highly risky *salto mortale*: they started to study a “higher mathematics of style,” i.e. *sujet* and composition, without a possibility to fit these categories into linguistics.

Transl. by *Bogdan Lawendowski*