

Ekaterina Bobrinskaya

CULTURAL MEMORY AND ANTI-WESTERN UTOPIAS OF RUSSIAN FUTURIANS

In his book *Russian Painting. The Awakening of Memory* Dmitry Sarabianov wrote about the “inherent tradition” that pervades culture and works “over and above changing styles”, the tradition connected with the innermost characteristics of man’s disposition formed by geography and religion, history and language. “Art itself”, he pointed out, “regardless of the artist’s will, has the ability to remember”¹. Sarabianov attributed the specifics of Russian culture, its “inner memory” to the Orthodox tradition and Eastern Christianity. According to Sarabianov, “the clue to the riddle of Russian artistic culture should be sought” in the distinguishing features of Eastern Christianity “not only of the period when art and religion were inseparable, but also when the time of secularisation set in. Herein lies the ‘Eastern component’, which is indisputably present in Russian culture but does not coincide with Eastern culture as such”².

I will bear in mind this ability of art “to remember despite the artist’s will” when considering a mythologem of the Russian avant-garde of the 1910s, namely, the anti-Western utopia of Russian Futurists. I will focus on those components of their utopian project in which the hidden traditions and “inherent memory” of culture manifest themselves. The anti-Western myth in question formed in the 1910s primarily among artists and poets associated with Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova. It was

¹ Sarabianov D., “Preliminary Notes” // Sarabianov D., *Russkaia zhivopis. Probuzhdeniye pamiati* (Russian Painting. The Awakening of Memory). Moscow: Iskusstvoznanie, 1998, p. 22.

² Sarabianov D., “Obraz Vostoka v russkoi zhivopisi Novogo vremeni” (The Image of the East in Russian Painting of Modern Times) // Op. cit., p. 42.

their milieu that used the Russian word “budushchniki” (literary Futurians) instead of the foreign, “Western” word “Futurists”.

Anti-Western motifs are a stable archetype in Russian culture. on the one side, anti-Western ideas are rooted in confessional differences or even opposition, that is, the struggle waged by the Russian church against Catholic and Protestant influences. The religious element was essential even to the secular versions of the anti-Western sentiments. on the other side, the anti-Western idea had to do with the modernisation processes and the assertion of a new type of national identity (especially actively in the 19th century). in this respect Russian anti-Westernism was in the mainstream pan-European processes: the formation of nation states and national cultures of a new type proceeded through contrasting oneself with others. Within the framework of those concepts art was viewed as a tool of developing, maintaining and promoting national identity.

The anti-Western mythologem incorporated many an important theme of Russian Futurism. on the one hand, it is of course linked with the tactical objective of asserting the independence of their own version of new art, and on the other, it falls in line with many fundamental features of Russian modernism, such as the tendency towards archaisation and interest in national self-identification problems and Eastern cultures, that scholars have already written about and that were characteristic of not only the *budushchniks*. I am going to dwell on yet another aspect of the anti-Western myth in Russian Futurism.

The anti-Western archetype has a long history in Russian culture. I will review it in a very rough outline. The early 19th century saw the appearance of a myth of the perishing West traced back to the aesthetics of Romanticism and above all to the legacy of the German Romanticists. The historiosophic concept of Romanticism, according to which countries, nations and cultures go through stages similar to the birth, growth, maturity, aging and death of living organisms, was behind the numerous prophecies of the forthcoming demise of the Western world and arguments about the frailty and old age of Europe. European culture that had already reached the age of maturity was inevitably to head towards decline: it was growing decrepit, aging and was eventually doomed to die. in his article “A Journey to France” (1803) Friedrich Schlegel drew a grim picture of the decay of the Western world: “Division has reached its apogee; the character of Europe has revealed itself in full and is complete, and this is precisely the essence of our epoch. Hence the utter inaptitude towards religion (...) absolute dying out of the higher bodies. Man can fall no deeper (...) The race of people in Europe will not change for the better, but after several fruitless attempts will continue increasingly to deteriorate by dint of inner depravity and will finally sink outwardly into a state of frailty and destitution”¹.

¹ Schlegel, F., *Reise nach Frankreich* (Journey to France) // *Estetika. Filosofija, Kritika* (Aesthetics. Philosophy. Criticism. Moscow: Iskustvo, 1983, in 2 vols. Vol. 2, pp. 16–7.

The mythologem of the “oldness of Europe”, which was compared to an old infirm man or a sick and waning organism, appeared in the Liubomudry (Lovers of Wisdom) Society in Russia in the 1820s-1830s and was then taken up by the Slavophiles. In the epilogue to his *Russian Nights* Vladimir Odoevsky wrote about the “old West”, where science and philosophy were no longer capable of perceiving and understanding the world comprehensively, art was devoid of its great meaning and power, and religious feeling had petered out. “The West is perishing!” Odoevsky proclaims. “While it is collecting its petty treasure, while it abandons itself to despair, time flies (...), it flies and will soon overtake the old and decrepit Europe and maybe cover it with the same layers of immobile ashes that have covered the huge buildings of the peoples of old America, peoples without names”¹. Several decades later the Westerniser Alexander Herzen would depict similar pictures of the imminent demise of the West: “in the middle of the grim and heart-rending requiem, in the middle of the dark night falling over the tired and sick West I turn away from the terminal groan of the great fighter whom I respect but who cannot be helped, and look with hope at our dear East”².

Next to the image of the old and dying West the German Romanticists nurture the images of the East, of Asia where, according to Schlegel, there was still a “possibility of enthusiasm”. It is these young peoples who have retained an integral world outlook and a live religious feeling that would be able to breathe new power into waning Europe. The future belongs to them. Youth oriented to the future became the constant motif of anti-Western arguments in Russian culture. Contrary to the West, which is sinking into darkness, the East is associated with the images of light, dawn or the brightness of the Sun.

I would like to stress the paradoxical nature of this version of the anti-Western myth, which did not originate in Russia but was borrowed from Europe. In other words, it was the voice of that very “perishing West”, which even contemporaries noted. For instance, N. Chernyshevsky queried with annoyance: “Whither did we (and part of the Western public) get the idea, or rather not the idea but the melodramatic phrase that the West is a decrepit oldster who has already extracted from life everything there is to be extracted, who has been exhausted by life and so on? Well, from all sorts of little shallow or stupid Western books and articles”³. In its basic aspects this romanticist and Slavophile version of anti-Westernism survived until the early 20th century. Of course, with the passage of time the mythologem of the “aging and decaying West” sunk in the dark and the young East illuminated by light kept growing like a snowball. It could be laced with

¹ Odoevsky V., *Russkie nochi* (Russian Nights), Leningrad: Nauka, 1975, p. 147.

² Herzen, A., *Collected Works* in 30 vols., Moscow, 1954–66. Vol. 12, pp.431–2.

³ Chernyshevsky N., *Ocherki gogolevskogo perioda russkoi literatury* (Essays of the Gogol Period of Russian Literature) // Chernyshevsky N., *Izbrannyye Filosofskiyi Sochineniya* (Selected Philosophical Works) in three volumes, Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1950, Vol. 1, p. 507.

motifs of personal disillusionment in Europe (as was the case with Herzen or Merezhkovsky, for example), or the theme of Western betrayal of Christian culture in the circle of the so-called “Scythians”¹.

Western anti-West was an essential component of Russian culture of the early 20th century, and in their declarations the *budushchniks* likewise reproduced the stable elements of that mythologem. In his lecture “On Futurism” Ilya Zdanevich used metaphors referencing the romanticist rhetoric of youth and of going out of dark into light: “There is still much of what is barbarian in us, and in this respect we are better placed than Europe... We should study the masters of Asia rather than those of the West. We are [Mongols] Asians. We have been wandering blind and have now seen the light. Look, the sky is being touched with dawn, [it is the time of sunrise] (...) we are young, and our youth will prevail”². The *budushchniks*’ declarations about the inability of modern Western culture to create anything genuinely new and about its infertility likewise reference the stable motifs of old age, exhaustion and frailty. Natalia Goncharova writes: “I turn my back on the West in view of its depletion”³. “Europe has not, nor can have any new art”, claim the authors of the *We and the West* manifesto⁴.

In addition to the Western version of anti-Westernism, there existed another version of the anti-Western myth in Russia. Conventionally, it can be called eschatological. Although it is traced back to the confessional opposition to Catholicism and Protestantism, it took its final form after the 17th-century schism and had as its basis the feeling of life approaching the end of time, or, to quote Georgy Florovsky, the “eschatological fright” that swept over Russian society on the eve and especially after the 1666–7 Council. This version of anti-Westernism references the

¹ R. Ivanov-Razumnik: “Two foes are standing face to face: the Russian ‘Scythian’ and the European, a ‘bourgeois’, new Russia and old Europe. So if Russia does have a mission, here it is: blowing up the old world of Europe from within with its ‘Scythianism’, its spiritual and social ‘maximalism’, that is, doing what the old world once did the other way round with the spiritual and social maximalism of Christianity. The old world entered that ‘barbarity’ and blew it up from within: it made Christianity philistine. So now the mission of the new Russia is to imbue the ‘cultured’ old world with the spirit of maximalism. Indeed, only this spiritual maximalism, this ‘Scythianism’ opens the way to that true liberation of man that Christianity never achieved because Christianity itself never ‘came into its own’.” Ivanov-Razumnik R., *Ispytaniye v groze i bure* (A Trial in Storm and Tempest), Berlin, 1920, p. 37.

² Zdanevich I., *O futurizme* (On Futurism) // Zdanevich I., *Futurizm i vsyochestvo* (Futurism and Everythingism), Moscow: Hylaea, 2014. in 2 vols., Vol. 1, p. 86.

³ Goncharova, N. *Predisloviye k katalogu vystavki kartin* (Foreword to the Picture Exhibition Catalogue (Moscow, 1913)). Cit. Kovalev, A., *Mikhail Larionov v Rossii 1881–1915 gg.* (Mikhail Larionov in Russia 1881–1915), Moscow: Elizium, 2005, p. 466.

⁴ Livshits, B., Yakulov, G., Lurie, A., *My i Zapad* (We and the West) // *Russkii futurizm. Teoriya. Praktika. Kritika, Vospominaniya* (Russian Futurism. Theory. Practice, Criticism. Memoirs, Moscow: Naslediye, 1999, p. 243.

national myth linked with messianic ideas of Russia as the last Orthodox power warding off the end of time and resisting the advent of Antichrist. The messianic national idea was formalised in the notorious concept of Moscow as the Third Rome and in a number of other writings. (For instance, in the *Story of the White Cowl*, which was widespread already in the 16th century). The ideas of the messianic centre having moved to Russia prompted rejection of all things Western as associated with the fallen and depraved world of apostasy and abandonment of truth. In the context of such an eschatological feeling of life Patriarch Nikon's reforms were seen as movement towards the West. For the large mass of the Russian people the rejection of the old faith signalled that the world definitively embarked on its last stage. After the schism the apocalyptic vision of modernity governed by "spiritual Antichrist" became forever engrained in the world outlook of all types of the Old Believers. Such eschatological anti-Westernism gave rise to popular myths (not only among the Old Believers) that identified things "Western" with forces undermining the truth of faith and life and signalled the imminent end of time. The wholesale inculcation of Western culture and lifestyle in the Petrine period finally imparted the meaning of heretical, depraved and pernicious to things Western in popular myth. The impact of this eschatological anti-Western myth on secular culture has been little studied to date. Needless to say, I do not aspire to give any comprehensive picture in this short article, but merely want to formulate the problem and point to the existence of such a layer of "inner traditions" in the Russian avant-garde.

Florovsky characterised the Old Believers' culture as a "socially apocalyptic utopia"¹. Although secularised, yet nevertheless in accord with the popular tradition, the "apocalyptic utopia" became a key element of the way the *budushchniks* saw modern times and, to quote Larionov, a tool for the "Russification of western forms"². The close associates of Larionov and Goncharova manifested their ties with popular eschatology especially consistently not only theoretically in their declaration rhetoric, but also in their works³. Artists and poets in Larionov's milieu programmatically addressed folk culture as a national tradition that escaped Western influence. In one of his speeches Ilya Zdanevich stressed the fundamental difference between Western urban and rural folk art: "To cultivate Westernism is tantamount to broadening the rift between our art and our people. We needed Westernism so that, after overcoming the ruin of urban art, mind you, urban because in the countryside it has always stood up to the mark, the Russian master could rise in his understanding to the level

¹ Florovsky G., *Puti russkogo bogoslovia* (The Paths of Russian Theology), Vilnius, 1991, p. 67.

² M. Larionov's letter (March 1913) to M. Le Dantu. OR GRM. F. 135, ed. khr. 7.

³ However, similar motifs are found also in other Russian avant-garde artists and poets, such as A. Kruchenykh, V. Khlebnikov, B. Livshits, P. Filonov, and in part D. Burliuk and G. Yakulov, many of whom were close to Larionov and Goncharova at certain times.

of old and rural Russian art”¹. Such programmatic address of folk culture helped “awaken memory” in the art of the *budushchniks* not only at the level of motifs and iconography, but also in creative work philosophy. It was precisely in connection with this programmatic address of folk art that the *budushchniks* developed an interest in the Old Believers’ culture.

The Romanticists’ myth of the demise of the West merged with eschatological anti-Westernism in the *budushchniks*’ works and theoretical writings to form the basis of their own version of anti-Western utopia, in which cultural archetypes went hand in hand with a keen sense of modernity. I will dwell on only one aspect of the *budushchniks*’ anti-Western mythology that has to do above all with their special understanding of time. I am interested not so much in the rhetoric of their declarative rejection of the West as in their attempts at formulating their own version of contemporaneity based on the archetypes of folk myths in their art or self-representation strategies. It was here that what the Russian *budushchniks* did touched common ground with innermost cultural memory, and in particular with the eschatological disposition that persisted among the people and especially the Old Believers.

Rejection of linear time, progress and the forward movement of history was an important strategy of the *budushchniks* that enabled, according to Benedict Livshits, “casting aside the shameful and ludicrous yoke of Europe”². a sort of chronoclasm, or struggle with time and the logic of progress, and an attempt to build a new system of coordinates for art that would substitute synchrony for linear development and cause-and-effect relationship became a central theme with the *budushchniks* and the basis for programmatic rejection of Futurism as an exhausted Western trend. *Vsyochestvo* (Everythingism) was proclaimed as a new trend instead of Futurism. According to Zdanevich, *vsyochestvo* was “our national trend”. The birth of *vsyochestvo* coincided with the peak of anti-Western sentiments among the *budushchniks*. in his lecture about Natalia Goncharova Zdanevich proclaimed the overthrow of Futurism: “*Vsyochestvo* makes struggle against the past absurd and thus overthrows Futurism”³. *Vsyochestvo*, Zdanevich claimed, was a new trend “that definitively abolished time and space and liberated art from its temporal and spatial dependence”⁴.

¹ Zdanevich I., *on Futurism*. Op. Cit., p. 85.

One of the most ardent advocates of anti-Westernism, Zdanevich was at the same time far from the profundity of the anti-Western myth. While proclaiming in his speeches: “we demand patriotism, love for Russia and her victoriousness. We hold dear everything that is of our nation”, he simultaneously constructed his concepts as replicas of the nationalist rhetoric of the Italian Futurists.

Zdanevich I., *on Futurism*. OR GRM. F. 177, ed.khr. 10.

² Livshits B., *Polutoraglaziye strelets* (One-and-a-half-eyed Strelets)...

³ Zdanevich I., Natalia Goncharova i vsyochestvo // N, Goncharova, M. Larionov, *Issledovaniya i publikatsii* (Studies and Publications), Moscow: Nauka, 2001, p. 174.

⁴ Zdanevich, *Futurizm i vsyochestvo*, OR GRM, F. 177, ed. khr. 21

The concept of *vsyochestvo* accumulated the ideas of Larionov and his associates about art outside the evolution process and free from the notions of innovation and historicism (“the value and objective of a work of art are not considered from the point of view of time”, Larionov claimed¹). In his foreword to the catalogue of the “Exhibition of Original Icons and Luboks” (1913), which was programmatic for Larionov’s associates, Larionov presented a mystification, make-believe concept of the history of art that lacked linear development or any differentiation between historical epochs and styles, the new and the old. He cited fragments of an “unpublished history of art”, in which the event of the exhibition itself was shifted to the mythical past, to the reign of the King Hammurabi of Assyria: “An exhibition of 19th- and 20th- century *luboks* was staged in the reign of King Hammurabi of Assyria... They caused such an upsurge of feelings of the order of the arts that time was killed by the extratemporal and the extraspatial”². On account of Goncharova’s solo exhibition in the autumn of 1913 Zdanevich made a public report “Natalia Goncharova and *Vsyochestvo*”, in which he used Goncharova’s works as an example to expound the concept of art outside time or the logic of progress, together with the principles of an imaginary, mystification history of art. “There is no historical perspective,” Zdanevich claimed. “There are only systems created by man. Struggle against the past is absurd because there is no past. Striving after the future is absurd because there is no future: the future can be made the past and vice versa... There is neither aging nor innovation.”³ The noteworthy fact is that the exhibition itself complied with the principle of rejection of historical sequence and linear time: the chronological principle to which the public was used was ignored when hanging the pictures.

The rejection of linear progressive time was not merely proclaimed in theoretical declarations. The *budushchniks* also proceeded from it when elaborating the new principles of creativity in painting and poetry. In poetry it was polyphony, that is, the creation of works intended for the simultaneous sounding of several voices built as “sound chords” despite the linear principle of writing and reading. Zdanevich formulated the principles of such poetry in his manifesto “Multiple Poetry and *Vsyochestvo*” (1914) and applied them in his *zaum’* works. In pictorial art this abandonment of linear thinking found expression in the programmatic multistyle and the abandoned principle of division into high and low art. “We recognise all styles suitable for the assertion of our creative work”, the *budushchniks* stressed⁴.

¹ Livshits B., *Polutoraglaziye strelets*. (One-and-a-half-eyed Strelets) L.: Sovetskij-pisatel, 1989, p. 57.

² “The Exhibition of Original Icons and Luboks”, organised by M. Larionov, Moscow, 1913, p. 3.

³ Zdanevich I., Natalia Goncharova i *Vsyochestvo* // Op. cit., p. 172.

⁴ “Luchisty i budushchniki” (Rayonists and Futurians) // *Russkii futurism. Teoriya. Praktika. Kritika. Vospominiya* (Russian Futurism. Theory. Practice. Criticism. Memoirs.), eds. V. Terekhina and A. Zimenkov, Moscow: Nasledie, 1999, p. 241.

According to the Romanticists, the “demise of the West” was always associated with a special sense of time: terror of the irreversible flight of time or “terror of history”, to quote M. Eliade. The immutable law of the unidirectional movement of time was pivotal to the myth of the “demise of the West” and the forthcoming old age of European culture. The abandonment of linear time emerged as an important component of the *budushchniks*’ anti-Western utopia and an attempt to avoid the fate of the West, that is to say, to escape death and drop out of history¹. The *budushchniks* overcame the myth of the “demise of the West” by professing nonlinear, extrahistorical time through the apocalyptic exit from history. Instead of the inexorable flight of time, that is, instead of the all-consuming and destructive time of the “demise of the West”, the *budushchniks* addressed eschatological time that promised “the new sky and the new earth” and had eschatological enthusiasm instead of the “eschatological terror”.

In some aspects the Book of Revelation is of the same nature as the disposition of the *budushchniks*, primarily as a prototype of the crack of time, the exhaustion of energy and forces of the dilapidated world and the creation of the new one: “And he who sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (Rev 21.5). The “apocalyptic” striving of the Russian Futurists after things new was one of the most paradoxical images of modern times. Their aspiration towards novelty, search of novelty and hankering for novelty come across as a craving for and search of the end. This apocalyptic perception of things new is a crucial point that brings the avant-garde and popular eschatological disposition close together. Ever since the time of the schism the agonizing feeling of the catastrophic crack of time dominated the popular mood, together with the understanding of the new epoch as that of the end, as the epoch drawing the Sacred History to a close and the nearing end of world history. As Archpriest Avvakum wrote: “The time of the Writ has come”² or “God has given to live to the edge”³. Such sentiments not only conditioned the specific disposition in the concrete historical period, but became engraved in Russian mentality.

“Artificial Optimism” proclaimed by the Italian Futurists forces them to welcome progress and plunge ecstatically into the vortex of time. The *budushchniks* asserted eschatological enthusiasm as a means of overcoming linear time. Eschatological enthusiasm was at the heart of one of Natalia

¹ Poets of the Russian avant-garde frequently used motifs of dodging death. Elena Guro, for instance, wrote: “And we, if we still die, will do so quite believing in the immortality of the body and open spaces! Our death is just a mistake, a failure of the inapt”. Elena Guro. Selected Writings from the Archives. Ed. A. Ljunggren, N. Gourianova, Stockholm, 1995, p. 91.

² *Zhitye Protopopa Avvakuma im samim napisannoe* (The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum Written by Himself), Moscow: Direkt-Media, 2014, p. 34.

³ Avvakum. Letter to Simeon // *Zhitye Protopopa Avvakuma im samim napisannoe i drugie ego sochineniya* (The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum Written by Himself and His Other Writings), Moscow: Academia, 1934, p. 341.

Goncharova's central works of the 1910s, the apocalyptic cycle *Harvest* (1911) brimming with an optimistic, joyous and festive mood. Goncharova opted for the combination of "fiery" colours that were frequently used in peasant-drawn pictures of the apocalypse. She created an image of the utmost tension of life, red-hot to the moment of explosion, and simultaneously a solemnly festive atmosphere. Goncharova proceeded from the traditional images of the end of the world from the Revelation and the Gospel: "the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels" (Mt 13.39). She follows not only the canonical text, but the stable narrative as represented in prints or hand-drawn *luboks* and manuscript illustrations of the Old Believers' books. Meanwhile she never ever reproduces the well-known iconographic schemes directly. In her interpretations of the revelations of St John the Evangelist she acts in the spirit of folk masters who far from always stuck to the canonical representations and frequently developed their own iconography and style in the manuscript books of the apocalypse they produced instead of working with tracing models. In her *Harvest* cycle Goncharova invented new modernist optics to depict "the end of time". Dynamics, sharp paradoxical angles, fragmented pictures next to hieratic immobility, flat forms and ornamentality produce an explosive effect of the archaic wedded to modernism. Her pictures are instants of explosion snatched out of the flow of time and breaking the linear unidirectional movement of time.

The *budushchniks* had a special kind of eschatologism that was directly embedded in modernity and tied to the realities of modern life. It was the eschatologism of popular myths in which "a great red dragon, having seven heads" from the Apocalypse becomes a "fiery serpent" that has come to earth in the form of new technical inventions, such as steam engines, steamboats or trams¹. I will briefly review just some of the motifs connected with the way the *budushchniks* saw new machines as symbols of the apocalyptic period. The image of "iron birds" common already in the 19th century was a popular motif in the descriptions of "the end of time" in popular myths². P. Chubinsky, a 19th-century ethnographer, recounted those myths as follows: "Birds with long iron beaks that are still in the sky will come flying to kill living people"³. In the 20th century aeroplanes seen as the "iron birds" of the end of time came to embody those eschatological fears. One of the authors who collected popular legends of the First World War in 1915 left the following evidence: "old men took the aeroplane for the legendary

¹ Bessonov I., *Russkaia narodnaia eskhatologiya: istoria i sovremennost* (Russian Folk Eschatology: History and Modern Times), Moscow: Gnosis, 2014, pp. 137–8.

² In folk eschatology the images of iron birds go back to the text of the Apocalypse: "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, 'Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.'" (Rev 19.17–18).

³ Cit. Bessonov I., *Op. cit.*, p. 146.

iron bird, which was to appear before the Judgement Day and start pecking at the Orthodox”¹.

In a 1913 poem A. Kruchenykh directly used that image of folk eschatology:

Mir konchilsya. Umerli trubyy...
 Ptitsy zheleznye stali letet
 Tonushchikh mokrye chuby
 Kosti zhelteiushchei plet².
 [The world is over. Pipes are dead...
 Birds of iron start taking wing
 People drowning, their forelocks wet,
 Yellowish bone hanging like a string.]

Birds with copper beaks also appear in the poem *Ef luchy* (Ef Rays), in which Kruchenykh describes apocalyptic visions, lacing myths with modernity. V. Khlebnikov, too, gives an image of a similar monster bird in his poem *Zhuravl* (Crane). N. Goncharova’s *Angels and Aeroplanes* from the series *Mystical Images of War* (1914) indirectly references the same motifs. “Iron birds” and angels find themselves in the same space as signs of calamitous times. The *budushchniki* often placed new machines next to disasters. In one of his linocuts Malevich shows *Death of the Man on the Airplane and on the Train at the Same Time* (1913). Goncharova’s painting *Plane over Train* (1913) is also pervaded with alarming undertones of an impending disaster of a clash and compositionally is reminiscent of the calamitous subject of Malevich.

There are other examples of such an apocalyptic vision of modern times in the works of Russian Futurists. Khlebnikov, too, sees the modern city through apocalyptic allusions, referencing popular prints in which the lords of hell are frying sinners: “There is a certain lover of dainties and podge who loves piercing precisely human souls with a spit, taking slight delight in the sizzle and crackle and seeing the glistening drops fall into the fire and streak downwards, and that podge is the city”³. Finally, traces of eschatological motifs can be found in the concept of *zaum’* and *alogism*. The rejection of reason proclaimed by Malevich (“At a public lecture on 19 February 1914 I renounced reason... the supreme work of art is produced in the absence of mind”) references visions of the last times from the Book of Ezra “then understanding will be hidden, and reason withdraw to her secret chamber” (Second Book of Ezra: 5, 9)

Eschatological time, the period of waiting for “the end of time” and destruction, for overpowering the rule of linear time, accounts for still another

¹ Cit. Bessonov I., p. 144.

² Kruchenykh A., *Stikhotvoreniya. Poemy. Romany. Opera* (Verses. Poems. Novels. Opera). St Petersburg: Akademicheskyy proekt, 2001, p. 263.

³ Khlebnikov V., *Collected Works*, Leningrad, 1928–1933. in 5 vols. Vol. 4, p. 211.

aspect of the *budushchniks'* utopia. Their anti-Western slogans served as a basis for the rejection of the European principle of developing national culture that was used as a model for the development of Europeanized Russian art. "My national and Oriental aspirations," Goncharova stressed, "are not to narrow the objectives of art but, on the contrary, to make it all-embracing and worldwide"¹. The "national trend" of *vsyochestvo* rejects things "Western" as narrowly national, or to quote the *We and the West* manifesto, narrowly territorial, local, and asserts instead the cosmic, universal elements, or the principle of "omnipresence", to use Zdanevich's terminology. The *budushchniks* likewise treated omnipresence or universalism as an option to escape the fate of the West and an attempt to destroy the logic and the very myth of the "demise of the West". In one of his speeches Zdanevich described the utopian model of the special time of *vsyochestvo* as follows: "The self-sufficient *vsyochestvo*, with its extratemporaneity and leap forward and return and infinity"².

By way of conclusion let me single out yet another aspect of the *budushchniks'* anti-Western utopia that also has to do with the abandonment of linear time. In his article "The Church and the Kingdom" Giorgio Agamben wrote about a special "experience of messianic time" which is devoid of linearity: "Messianic time means not chronological duration but the qualitative transformation of the experienced time. (...) in the Gospels Messiah is called *ho erchomenos*, that is, he who never ceases to come. Messianic time is not the end of time, but rather the correlation of every instant, every time (*kairos*) with the end of time and with eternity"³. Traces of such experience of time can be observed in the Russian Futurists' concept of the future. It attracted them not merely as the power of youth, which the logic of progress deems it mandatory to seek, but, speaking conventionally, from the messianic point of view, as something which is always only forthcoming, but "never ceases to come". Mikhail Larionov set forth precisely such a concept of the future and of the new. For him "the new" "never ceases to come", that is, cannot become a consummate school or trend. In the collection "Donkey's Tail and Target" Zdanevich related Larionov's views as follows: "My goal is not to assert new art because it will cease to be new after that, but to try and... do as life itself does, every second it gives birth to new people, creates a new image of life, and new opportunities endlessly arise from that"⁴.

Despite the declarative split with the historical tradition, the avant-garde culture does not boil down to "destructive gestures" and the creation of the new. Alongside the destruction strategies, the mechanisms of recollection and restoration of the broken and forgotten images of the tradition were

¹ Goncharova N., Predisloviye k katalogu vystavki kartin (Foreword to a Picture Exhibition Catalogue) // Kovalev A. Op.cit, p. 466.

² Zdanevich I., O Natalii Goncharovoi // Zdanevich I., Op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 143.

³ Agamben, G. "The Church and the Kingdom" <http://www.bogoslov.ru/text/2331830.html>

⁴ Zdanevich, Op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 12.

operating in the avant-garde art, and the new frequently appeared through recollection and the revival of the past. In his book *Cultural Memory* Jan Assmann pointed out paradoxical points in the way the mechanism of cultural memory operates. A break in historical continuity provokes culture to give birth to new things by moving back to the past: “Renovation, revivals and restoration always take the form of addressing the past. While mastering the future, they create, recreate and discover the past”¹. The *budushchniks* interpreted modernity and the new in this vein. They rather recollected than invented in their art. For them the modern and the new frequently looked not so much towards the future as towards the past and were seen as a recollection and going back to the sources. These qualities make it possible to point out elements of their theoretical programmes and works that can be defined as “conservative avant-gardism”. I think it important to point to the existence of such a conservative impulse in avant-garde culture that has so far remained unexplored and is yet to be properly described. The anti-Western utopia of the *budushchniks* can be viewed as one of the brightest embodiments of such conservative avant-gardism.

¹ Assman Jan, *Kulturnaya pamyat. Pismo, pamyat o proshlom i politicheskaya identichnost v vysokikh kulturakh* (Cultural Memory. Writing, Memory of the Past and Political Identity in High Cultures), Moscow: Yazyki slavyanskoi kultury, 2004, p. 33.