

Ukrainian Futurism: Re-Appropriating the Imperial Legacy

Oleh S. Ilnytskyj

Abstract: This article surveys the research on Ukrainian Futurism that appeared just before and after Ukrainian independence (1991), and offers critical annotations of these publications. It deals with the literary as well as the visual arts, with works that appeared in Ukraine and in the West. The literature review is preceded by a short outline of Ukrainian Futurism and its fate in scholarship from the 1930s. Much of what has been written on Ukrainian Futurism has appeared in the context of more general ‘avant-garde’ and even ‘modernist’ debates. This paper respects these perspectives but foregrounds Futurism. The author shows that one of the central issues of the new research has been the delineation of a ‘Ukrainian’ movement on the basis of cultural capital that is generally still called ‘Russian’. The research discussed here highlights the multi-national character of avant-garde practices in the Russian and Soviet Empires, offers a suggestion on how imperial cultural processes should be conceptualized and questions the appropriateness of current ‘Russian’ terminology.

Keywords: Ukrainian Futurism, Cubo-Futurism, Russian Futurism, Avant-garde, Mykhail’ Semenko, David Burliuk, *Nova generatsiia*, imperial culture, culture and empire, Ukraine, Russia.

Don’t mistake them for Russians: Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitsky, Alexander Rodchenko, Alexander Archipenko and Alexandra Exter were actually born, or identified themselves as, Ukrainian.¹

Ukrainian Futurism was the last literary avant-garde movement in the Soviet Union to succumb to pressures of the Communist Party, that is, to disband under duress as an organized and distinct group. The Russian *Novyi Lef* (Moscow) ceased publication in December 1928. In contrast, *Nova generatsiia* (The New Generation, published in Kharkiv), the Ukrainian Futurist journal that had been appearing since October 1927, saw

1 Glueck: “Ukrainian Modernists, All Alone, Here at Last.”

its last issue in December 1930. The organization behind this periodical officially disbanded on 11 January 1931.²

The last issue of *Novyi Lef* (No.12, 1928) encouraged its former contributors to publish in *Nova generatsiia*:

TO THE ATTENTION OF SUBSCRIBERS AND READERS OF "NOVYI LEF". During the absence of our own journal, we propose that our principal theoretical works, those which fail to find a place for themselves in the general press, be printed in the Ukrainian journal *Nova generatsiia*, published by the State Publishing House of Ukraine (p.45).³

Writings by Dziga Vertov,⁴ Aleksei Gan,⁵ Pavel Neznamov,⁶ Mikhail Matiushin,⁷ and Sergei Tretiakov⁸ appeared in the journal or in its sister

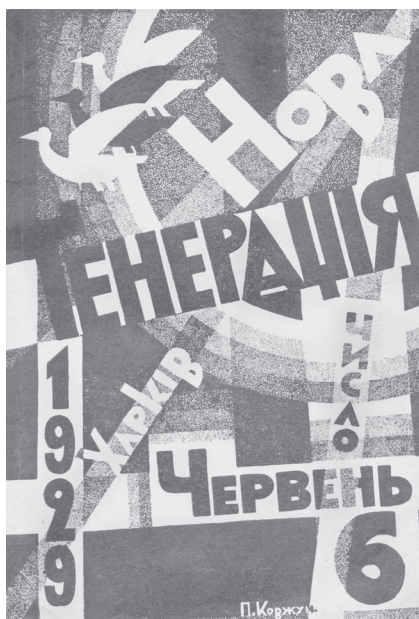


Fig. 1: Cover design of *Nova generatsiia* 6 (1929).

2 Ilnytskyj: *Ukrainian Futurism*, pp. 162–178.

3 Quoted in Ilnytskyj: *Ukrainian Futurism*, p. 134.

4 Vertov: "Liudyna z kino-aparatom, absoliutnyi kinopys i radio-oko. (Zaiava avtora)." Dziga Vertov's film, "A Man with a Movie Camera", the subject of this article, was released in 1929 by VUFKU, the All-Ukrainian Photo-Film Administration.

5 Han [Gan]: "Spravka pro Kazimira Malevicha."

6 Neznamov: "Na fronti faktu."

7 Matiushyn: "Sproba novoho vidchuttia prostorony."

8 Tretiakov: "Kino p'iatorychtsi."

publication *Avanhard: Al'manakh proletars'kykh pys'mennykiv Novoi generatsiia* (Kyiv), the last issue of which appeared in April 1930 (an October number was planned but failed to materialize). Kazimir Malevich was another well-known artist that appeared in these journals.⁹

The Ukrainian Futurist movement, characterized by tenaciousness and longevity during the 1920s, faded into planned oblivion after 1931 under the watchful eye of Soviet authorities. Of course, other avant-gardes in the USSR suffered as well, but not as badly as the Ukrainian. If Vladimir Maiakovskii, to take one example, was re-fashioned into a hero of the Revolution and a major Russian poet, Mykhail' Semenko, the icon and founder of Ukrainian Futurism, was executed in 1937 for "bourgeois nationalism" and erased for all practical purposes from Ukraine's cultural memory. He remained a virtual unknown almost to the last days of the Soviet Union, as did the Futurist movement itself, which he inaugurated in 1914. The political Thaw of the 1960s, with its rehabilitation of Stalinist victims, did relatively little to reintegrate Futurism into Ukrainian literature, although a few cautious reprints and scholarly works on the topic began appearing. Émigré researchers in the West championed many forgotten and persecuted writers from the 1920s, but Ukrainian Futurism as such was not a popular topic, largely because of its 'Leftist' and 'Communist' orientation.

A milestone of sorts in the study of Ukrainian Futurism was the publication of Semenko's selected works in 1979 and 1983 under the editorship of Irina (Iryna) Semenko, the poet's daughter and scholar of Russian Romanticism.¹⁰ A resident of Moscow, she clandestinely published the two volumes of Semenko's works under the pseudonym Leo Kriger in Würzburg, Germany.¹¹ Iryna Semenko's long Russian-language essay characterizing her father's poetry and the Ukrainian Futurist movement was a major breakthrough at the time. Her publication prompted a one-volume edition of Semenko's work in Kyiv two years later.¹² From the mid-1960s to the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, several scholars in both the East and West played a part in reinstating Semenko and Ukrainian Futurism to their rightful place in history. Among others these were: Mykola [Mikuläs]

9 For a complete list of articles published by Malevich (Malevych in Ukrainian) in *Nova generatsiia*, see: Il'nyts'kyj: *Nova generatsiia (The New Generation), 1927–1930. A Comprehensive Index*.

10 Semenko, Irina M.: *Poety pushkinskoi Pory*. Semenko, Irina M.: *Vasily Zhukovskiy*. Semenko, Irina M.: *Zhizn' i poeziia Zhukovskogo*.

11 Semenko, M.: *Ausgewählte Werke*.

12 Semenko, M.: *Poezii*.

Nevrli,¹³ Mykola Dmytrovych Rod'ko,¹⁴ Myroslava M. Mudrak,¹⁵ Ievhen Heorhiiiovych Adel'heim,¹⁶ Halyna Chernysh,¹⁷ Oleh S. Ilnytskyj¹⁸ and Mykola Sulyma.¹⁹ As some of the publication dates suggest, research on Futurism in Ukraine was made possible during Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* years. Ukrainian independence (1991) finally lifted all restrictions on scholarship. When the first postmodernist trends emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they actually harkened back to Futurism and embraced its spirit of experimentalism and provocation (*épater le bourgeois*). The journal *New Generation* [*Nova generatsiia*], for example, was parodied as the New Degeneration.²⁰ However, the first comprehensive, book-length study of Ukrainian Futurism²¹ appeared in the West, published in 1997; a Ukrainian translation of the book was issued in Lviv in 2003.²²

The work carried out just before and since 1991 helped establish Futurism not only as a 'normal' phenomenon of Ukrainian *literary* culture, but also a major presence in the *visual arts*, where it had been even less perceptible. Art exhibitions and the accompanying publication of catalogues and albums were especially instrumental in constructing an image for Ukrainian Futurism in the fine arts, most often within the context of the broader avant-garde, from which it is even today not easily set apart. One of the key issues that emerged, especially in relationship to painting, was the connection between the Ukrainian and Russian avant-gardes. Ukrainian literary Futurism (with some minor exceptions) had demarcated itself from the Russian most obviously by its choice of language; the visual arts, however, could not (and often purposely would not) tender obvious signs of 'nationality', such as theme or subject matter. Moreover, what the Ukrainian avant-garde claimed for itself was already known to the wider world as 'Russian' (e.g., David Burliuk, Aleksandra Ekster, Kazimir Malevich). Not surprisingly, therefore, when an exhibition of Ukrai-

13 Nevrlī: "Mykhail' Semenکو, ukrains'kyi futurizm i slovats'ki davisty."

14 Rod'ko: "Vid futuryz pro tr'okh P'iero do temy revoliutsii."

15 Mudrak: *The New Generation and Artistic Modernism in the Ukraine*.

16 Adel'heim: "Mykhail' Semenکو: Dolia, tvorchist', poetyka (Z istorii ukrains'koho poetychnoho avanhadyzmu)."

17 Chernysh, Galina Nikolaievna: *Ukrainskii futurizm i poeziia Mikhaillia Semenکو*. Chernysh, Halyna: "Proza Mykhailia Semenکا."

18 Ilnytskyj: "Mykola Bazhan: Six Unknown Poems." Ilnytskyj: "Idiotyzm, shcho buv poeziieiu." Ilnytskyj: "Leonid Skrypnyk: Inteligent i Futuryst." Ilnytskyj: "Shevchenko i futurysty."

19 Sulyma: "Mykhail' Semenکو." Sulyma: *Ukrains'kyi futurizm. Vybrani storinky / Az Ukraїn Futurizmus. Szemelvények*.

20 Hundorova: 117.

21 Ilnytskyj: *Ukrainian Futurism, 1914–1930. An Historical and Critical Study*.

22 Ilnytskyj: *Ukrains'kyj futurizm, 1914–1930*.

nian avant-garde art was held in Zagreb's Museum of Contemporary Art (16 December 1990 to 24 February 1991) – during what would turn out to be almost the last months of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union – one scholar felt obliged to explain “the validity of the syntagm [‘Ukrainian avant-garde’ for] denoting the ethnic character of a literary and artistic formation”, while another tried to find an answer to “Why Ukrainian and Why [sic] Avant-garde?”²³ As the answers appear now inconclusive (or unsatisfactory) and as the issue remains a contested area of dispute to this day, I will digress briefly to offer my own take on this problem.

“Russian” or “Imperial”?

The Russian avant-garde – and Russian Futurism in particular – are justifiably recognized as major iterations of analogous international phenomena. However, it is relatively rare among Western scholars to truly interrogate what ‘Russian’ actually means. Unlike the expression ‘*Italian* Futurism’, for example, which is generally self-explanatory and self-contained, the adjective ‘Russian’ is often used to refer to *non-Russian* culture and territory – as it does, for example, in the parlance of the Museum of Modern Art and The British Library. Both these institutions, following a very common practice, have no qualms placing *Georgian* (not to mention *Ukrainian*) publications in the category ‘Russian book.’²⁴ In such instances, ‘Russian’ is not only deceptive but also downright meaningless. If such usage is meant to capture all cultural activity within a political State, it too remains a misnomer because, strictly speaking, there was no ‘Russia’ until 1991, only a multinational Russian Empire and a Soviet Union. Thus, it would clearly be more accurate to speak of an ‘Imperial’ or ‘Soviet’ avant-garde when multiple cultures and territories are referred to, not least because such terminology leaves room for ‘national’ difference (e.g., Soviet Georgian, Soviet Ukrainian, Soviet Russian), whereas ‘Russian’ does not. What is more, the latter usage subordinates and appropriates non-Russian culture for purposes of a false, single national ‘brand,’ thereby impoverishing other nations.

The issue of terminology burdens discussions of Ukrainian Futurism and, more broadly, the Ukrainian avant-garde, largely because a considerable amount of art and cultural activity in the empire that is strictly speak-

23 See, respectively, Flaker: “Avantgarde [sic] in the Ukraine”, p. 56; and Mudrak: “Why Ukrainian and Why Avant-garde? An Essay”, p. 61.

24 Rowell and Deborah Wye: *The Russian Avant-Garde Book, 1910–1934*; Hellyer: *A Catalogue of Russian Avant-Garde Books 1912–1934 and 1969–2003*.

ing Ukrainian has, for a long time, been listed, a priori, as 'Russian.' Many scholars have yet to confront the problem of how to conceptualize culture and art under imperial conditions in a multinational state, especially how to give acknowledgment to subaltern peoples who struggled to differentiate themselves against the dominant discourse and often had limited or no independent institutional channels to express their cultural activity separately from the empire without provincializing themselves. The current terminological status quo that privileges 'Russian' cannot and does not account for the empire, and views this polity more or less as a unified 'nation', while relegating non-Russian phenomena – such as the Ukrainian or Georgian – to a minor, even, diverting issue. In my view, however, terminology is crucial for purposes of formulating a true understanding of the thing habitually called 'Russian' – not only for the sake of non-Russians but for Russians as well. It seems obvious that because "Many of the modern artists and designer who are generally categorized as Russian were, in fact, Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, etc",²⁵ the institutionalization of their activity as 'Russian' is a serious misrepresentation. Moreover, by doing so, scholarship is inadvertently succumbing to a Russian nationalist ideology that has been trying – unsuccessfully – since the early-nineteenth century to fashion the multi-ethnic imperial cultural processes (especially among East Slavs) into a single 'Russian' nationality. This ideology necessarily either marginalized the centrifugal cultural forces that contested this imperial (and imperialist) nationalist discourse or appropriated them for centripetal purposes. Such tendencies are clearly evident in the interpretation – and national designation – of the great artistic ferment under discussion here.

A relatively recent example of the problems, ironies and contradictions of referring to a 'Russian' avant-garde when dealing with Ukraine is Andrei Krusanov's three-volume *Russkii avangard* [The Russian Avant-Garde]. This is in many respects an excellent and erudite piece of research, a highly useful compendium of facts.²⁶ In volume 2, book 2, Krusanov has a substantial chapter (pp. 5–474) entitled "Left Art in the Province" ("Levoe iskusstvo v provintsii") that includes considerable information on Futurism. Almost fifty pages of this chapter touch on Ukraine, specifically the cities of Kharkiv (Kharkov), Kyiv (Kiev), Poltava and Odesa (Odesa), where avant-garde manifestations were especially strong; the cities of Mykolaiv (Nikolaev) and Ekaterynoslav (Ekaterinoslav, now Dnipropetro-

25 Baer: "Design and Movement in the Theatre of the Russian Avant-Garde", p. 54.

26 Krusanov: *Russkii avangard, 1907–1932: Istoricheskiy obzor v trekh tomakh*. Vol. 2, Book 2.

trovsk), are also mentioned, but only very briefly. We should make a note of the irony that Ukraine appears in the context of such other provinces as North Russia, Southwest Russia and Belarus, Central Russia, the Crimea, Southern Russian, the Caucasus, Ural and Priural'e, Siberia, and the Far East. Structurally and culturally, therefore, Ukraine (and Belarus) is presented as equivalent to North Russia and Siberia. The cultural 'whole' here is 'Russia' and Ukraine is its province.

Krusanov describes 'Left' art as emanating from the capitals of Moscow and St. Petersburg in a southerly and easterly direction (p. 6), encompassing greater and greater areas of "Russia". Nevertheless, this model falters, especially when it comes to Ukraine, since this "province", like some others, sometimes turns out to be more active artistically than the imperial centres (cf. p. 9). Following his own data, Krusanov therefore acknowledges the existence of indigenous "provincial" artistic life, "local" (*mestnye*) initiatives, manifestations and movements. He also finds it necessary to differentiate between two national cultures (Russian and Ukrainian), between artistic activities that took place in what he calls the "Russian stream" (*v rusle russkogo avangarda*, p. 225) and the "Ukrainian" stream, a subject that he states is outside the scope of his book, as if, so to say, everything he has written about Ukraine is relevant only for Russian cultural history. That Ukraine was a major site of the avant-garde, and of Futurism in particular, has been known for some time, and Krusanov actually cites a considerable amount of information that reinforces this view. "In general", he concludes, "the Left art in Ukraine from 1917–1922 represents a phenomenon that is not at all provincial, especially if we take into consideration the role played in its history by natives (*vykhodtsy*) from Ukraine both in the pre-revolutionary period and the subsequent 1920s" (p. 273).

Thus, although Krusanov provincializes Ukraine, the facts he marshals speak against it and lead him to an opposite verdict. What also becomes apparent – although between the lines – is that Krusanov's binary treatment of the avant-garde (the 'Russian' versus the 'Ukrainian' stream) is inadequate – for there is no tidy division between the two. For example, he includes Ukrainian painters (e.g., Oleksandr Bohomazov [Alexander Bogomazov], Anatolii Petryts'kyi, etc.) in the so-called 'Russian' stream, which immediately raises questions about the appropriateness of the term. Krusanov also notes that artists moved from one stream to another: "Subsequently the work of the Kharkiv Left artists flowed within the framework of the Ukrainian avant-garde" (p. 240). This suggests that rather than recognizing a 'Russian' stream it would be more appropriate to speak of a multinational, mutually enriching pan-imperial process that had strong non-Russian national/ethnic hallmarks. In fact, those Kharkiv painters to which Krusanov refers were not departing from a 'Russian'

stream but an 'imperial' one, gravitating toward more strictly national institutions once political conditions allowed and imperial bonds were loosened. It is not 'Russian national culture' that holds sway in the empire; it is the multiethnic imperial that does so. Russians simply identify with the imperial as 'national', but their subjective experience need not constrain scholarship to the same view.

Krusanov offers unambiguous proof that there were Russian artists who worked, published and exhibited in Ukraine *along with Ukrainians and other ethnic / national groups*. But whether this state of affairs deserves to be called a 'Russian' stream is open to debate. Even the fact that much of the published material on art and literature in Ukraine was in the Russian language is not necessarily conclusive evidence of 'Russianness' – only confirmation of imperial practice; Russian was, after all, a controversial but normal aspect of Ukrainian society. In fact, attributing restricted 'Russianness' or, for that matter, any 'nationality' to this process is notoriously difficult when the evidence points to quintessentially inter-national (inter-ethnic) collaboration. Be that as it may, Ukraine was nevertheless a major site of the imperial avant-garde, and it was not 'Russia' in the sense that other ethnic Russian regions ("provinces") were. Art production did occur in Ukrainian locations and drew on local culture. Individual artists and writers did have nationality and/or ethnicity, even if some retained a certain form of identification with the empire (but not necessarily 'Russia'). Many painters overtly self-identified themselves as Ukrainians and were committed to the national cultural cause as exemplified by the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Given Ukraine's unique status in the empire as a non-Russian imperial province – and later as a Soviet Republic – there was no reason for many Ukrainian scholars after 1991 to adhere to the interpretation and conceptualization of culture to which Soviet imperial strictures previously bound them.

Re-appropriation and re-conceptualization

A good indication how scholarship began straying from the traditional 'Russian' interpretations is a Ukrainian Russian-language book that came out two years before independence. Written by Natal'ia Aseeva and titled *Ukrainian Art and European Artistic Centers*,²⁷ this was a significant event

27 Aseeva: *Ukrainskoe iskusstvo i evropeiskie khudozhestvennye tsentry: Konets XIX – nachalo XX veka*.

in at least two respects. It took Ukrainian art out of the traditional Ukrainian-Russian binary bind and replaced it with a Ukrainian-European dyad, demonstrating that Ukrainian artists had links with Paris, Munich and Krakow (instead of emphasizing the traditional links to Moscow and St. Petersburg). Aseeva's book re-positioned a number of artists who were normally treated as 'Russian' within the artistic culture of Ukraine. She wrote: "In the not too distant past, several major masters, such as A. Archipenko, Mykhailo Boichuk or David Burliuk were either simply ignored or were not examined in connection with the artistic process in Ukraine. Some artists, for example, Marie Bashkirtseva and Ivan Pokhitonov are, through inertia, included in the school of Russian art [even though they] were born in Ukraine, deemed it their fatherland, created there a whole series of works, even as they were fated to live beyond [Ukraine's] borders and effectively represent there the art of Russia" (p. 10). Aseeva not only brings the "Father of Russian Futurism" (Burliuk) into the Ukrainian cultural context (she calls him a "Ukrainian artist" [p. 164] while still acknowledging his friendship with Maiakovskii and ties to Russian Futurism), but also, among others, Alexandra Ekster, whose baroque-futurist style, she says, betrays Ukrainian roots (cf. p. 107).

Aseeva seems to have been the first to quote from Burliuk's unpublished manuscript memoirs, housed at the Saltykov-Shchedrin library, in which he stated (sometimes between the 1920s and 1930s) that "Ukraine... was and remains my fatherland" (p. 158) and that it has "in me a loyal son" (p. 161).²⁸ Further 'Ukrainization' of Burliuk occurred with the publication in Lviv of Oles' Noha's book *Davyd Burliuk and the Art of the Global Avant-Garde*, influenced no doubt by Aseeva, whom he cites.²⁹ This study appeared two years after Ukrainian independence when the book market in Ukraine was close to collapse and the cheap paper and grainy reproductions of this publication attest to a sad state of affairs. Nevertheless, as a brief (and, on some topics, very brief) overview and introduction to Burliuk, it is worthy of note. It is a sketch of Burliuk's life, his art, poetry and prose, his role in the theatre, his achievements in book illustrations, his contributions to the cinema, and to art theory. The author treats Burliuk as "one of the most dramatic figures of Ukrainian twentieth-century culture", a "child of Ukraine" (p. 5). In a concluding paragraph, he states "everywhere before the name of D. Burliuk there is the comment: Russian artist. However, if we return a little to the past, we'll recall that in

28 The text is reproduced in English as well as in Ukrainian translation in Horbachov, ed.: *Ukrains'kyi avanhard 1910–1930 rokiv: Al'bom = Ukrainian Avant-Garde Art, 1910s–1930s*.

29 Noha: *Davyd Burliuk i mytstvo vsesvitn'oho avanhardu*.

the 1930s D. Burliuk turned to Soviet authorities in Moscow on several occasions requesting that his works be handed over to the museums of Ukraine. All in vain... Well, we were not able and will not be able to return the artistic legacy of the Master to his Fatherland, but we are able and are obliged to return to Ukraine the name of Davyd Burliuk" (p. 90).

In 2008, the Winnipeg Art Gallery in Canada held an exhibition devoted to Burliuk. In the catalogue, Myroslav Shkandrij, the curator, states that "Burliuk is widely known as the father of Russian and Ukrainian Futurism"³⁰ and Myroslava Mudrak characterizes him as "one of the most radical of the Russian and Ukrainian avant-garde artists" "during the period of the 1910s and 1920s" (p. 19).

With respect to establishing Ukrainian Futurism as a coherent category in the visual arts, the work of Dmytro Horbachov holds a preeminent place. In the 1980s and 1990s, he authored many essays in Ukrainian periodicals on various aspects of the avant-garde. He was a key figure in mounting the Zagreb exhibition of 1990–91 mentioned above. The Croatian-English catalogue to that exhibition contained 185 reproductions of paintings, and of the nineteen essays and/or documents no less than five essays belonged to Horbachov as well. Of these, only one was directly related to Futurism: "Bohomazov's Cubo-Futurism",³¹ although other articles have fleeting mentions of the movement. The catalogue contained a full-page reproduction of a page from Semenکو's visual poem (*poezomaliarstvo* [poetry-painting], as he called it)³² and Vladimir Tatlin's cover to a Ukrainian Futurists publication.³³ It also contained David Burliuk's "Fragments from a Futurist's Reminiscences", from which Aseeva had quoted in 1988. There is no question that the Zagreb exhibition was a major achievement and breakthrough for Ukrainian modern art not only in the West but in Ukraine. The catalogue itself is an interesting and useful record of this event, marred only by the poor English editing and translations.

The Zagreb catalogue was in some ways a warm-up for Horbachov's 1996 album, *Ukrainian Avant-Garde Art*,³⁴ which now contained four hundred reproductions of avant-garde paintings, posters, book covers, costume and stage designs, and photos of sculptures, almost all in co-

30 Shkandrij: *Futurism and After: David Burliuk, 1882–1967*, p. 9.

31 Gorbachev: "Bohomazov's Cubo-Futurism", pp. 179–185.

32 Semenکو: "Kablepoema za okean".

33 See p. 47. The cover is to *Zustrich na perekhresnii stantsii: Rozmova tr'okh*. Kyiv: Bumerang, 1927.

34 Horbachov: *Ukrains'kyi avanhard 1910–1930 rokiv: Al'bom/ Ukrainian Avant-Garde Art, 1910s–1930s*.

lour. Of these, more than 100 were devoted to some form of Futurist art. A completely bi-lingual (Ukrainian-English) edition, it consisted of an Introduction, List of Illustrations and an Addendum. The latter is a compendium of very interesting biographical and theoretical statements by leading artists, some previously seen in the Zagreb catalogue. D. Burliuk and Kazymyr Malevych (Kazimir Malevich) are found here referring to themselves as Ukrainians.³⁵ A short essay by D. Burliuk about the painter Viktor Pal'mov is also included (it originally appeared in *Nova generatsiia* in the late 1920s.³⁶)

Horbachov relied on stylistic principles to arrange the paintings reproduced in this album, dividing it into the following sections: Secession and Symbolism; Fauvism; Post-Cubism; Constructivism and Electro-organism; Spectralism; Expressionism, Neo-primitivism and Naïve style; abstract and mystic Expressionism; Surrealism and expressive Realism. Futurism is represented under two headings: Cubo-Futurism and Folk Futurism. The first features works by Oleksandr Arkhipenko, Oleksandra Ekster, Oleksandr Bohomazov, Volodymyr (Vladimir) Burliuk, Davyd Burliuk, Lazar Lysyts'kyi (Lazar' [El'] Lisitskii), Kazymyr Malevych, Sonia Delone (Sonia Delaunay), Isak Rabynovych (Isaak Rabinovich), Viktor Pal'mov, Vadym Meller, Vasył Iermylv [Yermilov], Anatolii Petryts'kyi, Marko Epshtein (Marko Epstein), Mykhailo Andriienko-Nechytailo, Ivan Kavaleridze, Oleksii Usachov, Semen Zal'tser, and Pavl' Kovzhun. The second shows five paintings by two painters: Hanna Sobachko-Shostak and Vasył Dovhoshyia. (Many of these artists were also in the Zagreb catalogue.) Under separate heading, Horbachov reproduces two covers from Ukrainian Futurist publications (one appeared in Moscow, the other in Kyiv), executed, respectively, by Rodchenko and Tatlin (cf. plates 229 and 230). Although the book suffers from lack of pagination and a table of contents, and the English translations are not always completely idiomatic, it is unquestionable a major display of Ukrainian avant-garde art. Clearly, imperial and Soviet phenomena that normally figured under the category 'Russian' are here conceptualized as Ukrainian, using ethnic/national as well as territorial/political principles. The album includes artists of various ethnic backgrounds who were born and/or worked in Ukraine.

In retrospect, Horbachov's book may be taken perhaps as a polemical response to a Moscow publication (*The Unknown Russian Avant-Garde*) that was published in 1991 and incorporated several Ukrainian artists as

35 Burliuk: "My Ancestors"; "Fragments from a Futurists's Reminiscences (40 years, 1890–1930)"; Malevych: "We Recollected Ukraine".

36 Burliuk: "Viktor Nikandrovych Pal'mov."

'Russians.'³⁷ It also unquestionably prefigured publications in this genre that followed. Take for example, *The Phenomenon of the Ukrainian Avant-garde*,³⁸ a catalogue of a travelling exhibition held at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, and the Edmonton Art Gallery; or *Ukrainian Modernism, 1910–1930*,³⁹ a catalogue that accompanied another travelling exhibition from Ukraine titled "Crossroads: Modernism in Ukraine 1910–1930". Both these catalogues feature many of the same artists and works that appear in Horbachov's book. The difference is that they do not segregate Futurism for separate treatment as he did, even though they reproduce Futurist-type paintings. *Ukrainian Modernism, 1910–1930* does have an excellent reproduction of Anatol' Petryts'kyi's almost totally unknown portrait of Mykhail' Semenko (see p.244), dated 1929. It also contains artists who contributed to the design of Ukrainian Futurists publications (e.g., Vadym Meller and Henke Meller) or contributed to their content (Kazimir Malevich). The only sustained reference to Futurism in the latter catalogue is in John Bowl's essay and, again, it is about Cubo-Futurism and Burliuk.

Since Ukrainian independence, literary Futurism has found some favour in institutions of higher learning, where it has become the subject of several dissertations (doctoral and candidacy),⁴⁰ and these, in turn, have led sometimes to published books.

The newest and most prominent scholar of Ukrainian Futurism at the moment is Anna Bila, who has three publications of note. Her first is *The Ukrainian Literary Avant-garde*. This book came out in two quick successive editions, one in 2004⁴¹ and another in 2006.⁴² There are only minor differences between the two, but the second version is more aesthetically pleasing and is a major improvement in that it has a very useful index of names. Bila surveys Ukrainian literary avant-garde practices of the 1920s–1930s (with excursions into 1910s), as well as post-WW II émigré writings in the West. Constructivism, Expressionism, Surrealism and Futurism are

37 Sarab'ianov: *Neizvestnyi russkii avangard v muzeiakh i chastykh sobraniakh*. Among the Ukrainians in this album, we find: O. Bohomazov, O. Hryshchenko, V. Ermilov, V. Pal'mov.

38 *The Phenomenon of the Ukrainian Avant-garde*.

39 Mel'nyk: *Ukrains'kyi modernizm, 1910–1930*.

40 Honcharov: *Formy realizatsii avtors'koi svidomosti v lirytsi Mykhailia Semenka*. Skorbach: *Movnyi obraz prostoru v poeziiakh Mykhailia Semenka i Valer'iana Polishchuka*. Zhadan: *Filosof's'ko-estetychni pobliady Mykhailia Semenka*.

41 Bila: *Ukrains'kyi literaturnyi avangard: Poshuky, styl'ovi napriamky*. Donetsk: Donetsk'kyi natsional'nyi universytet, 2004.

42 Bila: *Ukrains'kyi literaturnyi avangard: Poshuky, styl'ovi napriamky*. Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2006.

treated in separate sections, with Futurism receiving the most elaborate treatment (115 pages). The book is the fruit of a doctoral dissertation written at Donets'k University.⁴³

Bila sets up her discussion as a critique of the early condemnations of Ukrainian Futurism. These viewed it as an unsuccessful and late derivative of the Russian imperial movement and, therefore, doubly unacceptable to Ukrainian culture for being, according to contemporary reviewers, 'idiotic' and 'Russian'. Not surprisingly, she concludes that among the various Futurisms in the East and West, the Ukrainian one developed into a distinctive phenomenon (p.210) and was an important contributor to the modernization of Ukrainian culture. What makes her book interesting is the information she presents and the issues she discusses on the way to her conclusion. Although focused on Semenko and the literary aspects, she stages her discussion against the broader artistic trends in the visual arts that swept Ukraine from the 1910s to 1920s. Thus, Semenko's evolution as a poet and as theoretician of Panfuturism is nicely balanced between the strictly Ukrainian context and the pan-imperial/pan-Soviet. In the interest of comprehensiveness, Bila's narrative is forced to cover some familiar ground but along the way she adds to the subject many good nuances and insights. For example, she fleshes out the *commedia dell'arte* aspects of Semenko's lyrics, and the place of psychoanalytic theories and reflexology (psychology) in Panfuturism, a theory of art and the avant-garde developed by Semenko and his colleague Oleksii Poltorats'kyi.

Anna Bila's other book is simply titled *Futurism*.⁴⁴ This is an engaging, highly readable and popularly written series of related essays on various aspects of Futurism, primarily Ukrainian, but reaching beyond it as well. Virtually all the essays here have an introductory character but sometimes they also contain small gems of new information about Semenko's almost totally unknown and difficult to reconstruct biography. It is a handsome edition, printed in green ink and embellished with illustrations by Alexander Archipenko, Vadym Meller, Anatol' Petryts'kyi, among others. At the end, there are 15 pages of colour reproductions, showing covers, paintings, and other avant-garde forms of creativity by Vasili Kamenskii, Alexander Rodchenko, Geo Shkurupii, to name a few. Bila moves quickly through a succession of themes, beginning with Italian Futurism, proceeding to the Russian empire and specifically Ukraine's role in the imperial avant-garde (Hyleia; Mariia Syniakova), and then deftly highlights various aspects of

43 Bila, Hanna Viktorivna Davydova: *Ukrains'kyi literaturnyi avangard: Poshuky, styl'ovi napriamky*.

44 Bila: *Futuryzm*.



Fig. 2: Photograph of Mykhail Semenko in 1924.

Ukrainian Futurism, its history and poetry. Her book in effect recapitulates in a more accessible and condensed form the information contained in her 2006 book mentioned above. Semenko is the center of attention, but the other important figure of Ukrainian Futurism, Geo Shkuriupii (“King of the Futurist Prairies”), is featured briefly as well.

Anna Bila also figures as the editor and compiler of a third publication, a solid volume of *Selected Works* by Mykhail’ Semenko.⁴⁵ She and the publisher have done readers and scholars a great service by publishing this attractive 696-page book, the first serious edition of Semenko since the Würzburg volumes mentioned above. The latter was a low-cost soft cover publication that relied on photocopied original printed books of the 1920s and poorly typed manuscripts. This, on the other hand, is a nicely typeset, modern edition that includes illustrations and photographs. Besides providing a balanced selection of Semenko’s poetry, prose, dramatic works, manifestoes, and theoretical writings, the book serves as a small anthology of critical writings about Semenko, some that appeared during his lifetime

45 Semenko: *Vybrani tvory*.

and others of more recent vintage (articles by Leo Kriger [Iryna Semenکو], Oleh S. Ilnytskyj, Halyna Chernysh, and Mykola Sulyma). This is still not the complete works of Semenکو, and it does not entirely replace the Würzburg edition, which was more extensive, but for the majority of readers and researchers it is an excellent representation of the Ukrainian Futurist and his movement.

Of all the recent publications on Ukrainian Futurism, the next one stands out as the most specialized, being a linguistic and lexicographic investigation into Semenکو's neologism, nonce words, and other forms of word experimentation. Even the title, *I am the Poet of Exemplariness: Mykhail' Semenکو's Word Coinage*, is unique.⁴⁶ Halyna Vokal'chuk, the author, notes that among Ukrainian poets, Semenکو and Pavlo Tychyna (a Symbolist) were the most productive when it came to devising their own words, but Semenکو's inventions have more often than not been criticized than analyzed. This work, therefore, is a refreshing departure from such tendencies; it identifies a whole range of words (from nouns and adjectives to verbs and participles) that Semenکو made-up and describes the morphological means he employed (suffixation, pre-fixation, compounding, onomatopoeia, juxtaposition, etc.); it also posits the function for which he used them (e.g., rhyme, brevity, dynamism). Some of the examples go beyond Semenکو's immediate works, encompassing other Futurists and contemporaries. This allows Vokal'chuk to engage also in some statistical comparisons based on frequency counts. The last part of the book contains a very practical dictionary of Semenکو's neologisms (over 700 words). Each entry presents the word in context, identifies the source and date of creation. While at first glance this book may appear as a highly technical and narrow investigation, it is actually quite fascinating for what it reveals about an important aspect of Semenکو and Futurism in general.

Oleksandr Ushkalov's edited collection of the *Selected Works* of Iulian Shpol,⁴⁷ a pseudonym of Mykhailo Ialovyι, is a different type of publication than those already mentioned in that it is oriented on someone other than Semenکو and is designed to put into circulation an individual and works that have been virtually unknown since the 1920s. Ushkalov is a young scholar, who recently defended a dissertation on Shpol, which, among other things explores his Futurist poetry, focusing on themes, images and versification.⁴⁸ Shpol's association with Semenکو's group was rather short-lived and his contribution to Futurist poetics was, ultimately,

46 Vokal'chuk: *Ia bezzraskovosti poet*.

47 Shpol: *Vybrani tvory*.

48 Ushkalov: *Tvorchist' Mykhaila Ialovoho (Iuliana Shpola) v ukrains'komu literaturnomu protsesi 1920-kh rokiv*.

unremarkable.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it is beneficial to have, finally, an accessible edition of his 1923 collection *Vérkhy* (Astride), which comprises 44 poems, published originally under the Futurist imprint “Gol’fshtrem” in Kyiv and – if the title page is to be believed – simultaneously in Moscow and Berlin. A few other poems appear in Ushkalov’s edition as well, as do two translations from German (poems by Johannes Becher and Alfred Lichtenstein). Ushkalov includes a very informative introduction that outlines Shpol’s life and work against the background of his epoch. In the second half of the 1920s, Shpol moved away from Futurism, aligned himself with Mykola Khvyly’ovyi, becoming the first president of VAPLITE (The Free Academy of Proletarian Literature) and gaining a reputation as a prose writer and dramatist in the formalist vein. This volume also contains Shpol-Ialovy’s articles devoted to various aspects of literary life and inter-organizational conflicts. Some of these have a direct bearing on the history of Ukrainian Futurism and were previously accessible only in rare publications. In short, Oleksandr Ushkalov has produced a very valuable book. It contains one small error in relationship to Semenko. In the bibliography, Ushkalov attributes an article about Semenko to Ialovy (p. 525; cf. also p. 10), whereas in fact it was written by B. Iakubs’kyi and it appeared not in 1923 but in 1925.⁵⁰

Modernism in Kyiv,⁵¹ edited by Irena R. Makaryk and Virlana Tkacz (both of whom also figure as authors), is the most recent and very major effort to survey and put on view Ukrainian Modernism – in the broadest sense of the word – as it was practiced first and foremost in Kyiv. The book brings together in a single volume many strains of research carried out by the contributors over several decades. Almost 700 pages in length, with close to twenty authors taking part, this volume includes essays on literature, politics, painting, graphic arts, dance, choreography, music, film, and theatre (the latter receives special and varied attention). ‘Modernism’ here subsumes the avant-garde. Although there is only one essay, strictly speaking, devoted to Futurism,⁵² there are scattered references to the movement, with substantial sections appearing in articles by D. Horbachov and M. Mudrak.⁵³ Taken together, the three authors explore various aspects of ‘abstraction’, i. e., abstraction in Futurist theory, poetry, visual poetry, and the graphic arts (cover and page design). Cubo-Futurism is also touched

49 For more detail on Shpol, see Ilnytskyj: *Ukrainian Futurism*, pp. 287–290.

50 Iakubs’kyi: “Mykhail’ Semenko.”

51 Makaryk and Tkacz: *Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation*.

52 Ilnytskyj: “Abstraction and Ukrainian Futurist Literature”, pp. 387–406.

53 Horbachov: “In the Epicentre of Abstraction: Kyiv during the Time of Kurbas”, pp. 170–195; Mudrak: “The Graphic Arts: From Page Design to Theatre”, pp. 408–441.

upon. There are 16 pages of colour plates and almost every second page has a black and white illustration or photograph. Many of these are directly relevant for Futurism, even if they are not explicitly identified as such. It can be said – to return to the leitmotif of this essay – that *Modernism in Kyiv* continues, perhaps crowns, the process of re-appropriating a large part of the imperial legacy for Ukrainian culture. Kyiv here is definitely Ukrainian; however, it is also multicultural (Yiddish, Polish, Russian), with essays devoted to non-Ukrainian aspects of modernism that took place on Ukrainian soil.

The last publication in our survey is a non-profit audio book on CD prepared in Kyiv in 2010 for the visually impaired: *Futuryzm, 1914–1937*. This philanthropic project is a unique listening resource for its intended audience, but it also turns out to be very entertaining for everyone else. Conveniently, it has been made available online as well.⁵⁴ A brainchild of students in the Journalism Institute at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, the readings were made in cooperation with their friends in the theatre. The immediate architects of the venture were Ievheniia Viatchaninova and Ilyzaveta Oliinyk, but it involved more than a dozen other young people.⁵⁵ They perform the poetry of Mykhail' Semenko (27 tracks), Kost' Burevii (who wrote brilliant parodies of Futurist verse under the pseudonym Edvard Strikha; 2 tracks) Geo Shkurupii (4 tracks), Oleksa Slisarenko (2 tracks), and Oleksa Vlyz'ko (1 track). Each author's works are preceded by a biography that runs from one to two and half minutes. The readings are quite endearing and include appropriate sound effects that enhance the experience.

Conclusions

The publications reviewed here (an incomplete selection) attest that much constructive, revealing, and original work has been done about Ukrainian Futurism since Ukraine's independence and in the years immediately leading up to it. These works also reveal what still remains to be done. More research is required on individuals other than Semenko in terms of analysis and re-publication of sources. Historiographical surveys should be

54 <http://www.chytomo.com/rozdil/vydane/futuryzm-onlayn-audio-prezentatsiya-na-chytomo.html> (accessed 16/9/10).

55 Anita Hrabovs'ka, Viktoriia Levchenko, Danylo Bilyk, Oksana Khmel'ovs'ka, Oleksii Daruha, Oleksii Havrylenko, Nadiia Fedorova, Oksana Tsymbal, Taras Kyschun, Ihor Iskhakov, Iryna Baturevych, Iryna Matviichuk. For details on the project, see: <http://www.chytomo.com/rozdil/vydane/audioknyha-futuryzm.html> (accessed 16/9/10).

supplemented by more specialized investigations with a broader range of theoretical approaches. The experimental prose of the Ukrainian Futurists deserves greater attention. It would be interesting to see more archival data brought into the discussion, although I fear that the destruction of personal and journal archives was depressingly complete during the Soviet era. The “Ukrainian Futurist Book and Magazine” would be a visual delight and a worthy object of analysis. Various comparative studies would be fruitful. The theoretical writings of such Futurists as Oleksa Poltorats’kyi and Leonid Skrypnyk, who wrote on film, deserve better recognition and availability through reprints. In a word, while Ukrainian Futurism has come a long way, there is still plenty of room for further research.

It is obvious that scholarship is no longer content to limit Ukrainian Futurism (and by extension the Ukrainian avant-garde) to Ukrainian-language phenomena or narrow ethnic boundaries. All Ukrainian territory – ethnographic, geographic, and political – is now subject to ‘Ukrainian’ analysis, much as at one time the whole imperial High Culture was subject to a ‘Russian’ interpretation. It is heartening to see that ethnic minorities in Ukraine are given recognition under the ‘Ukrainian’ banner (as in the Makaryk/Tkacz volume), something that was often sorely lacking when the empire was constructing everything as ‘Russia.’ More research of this type is desirable.

The developments noted here illustrate that the imperial cultural processes leave scope for being re-conceptualized in multiple ‘national’ ways. The goal is not to place a new ‘Ukrainian’ straightjacket on cultural activities in the empire, but to find ways to do justice to the variety of sources and the myriad of cultural influences that flowed from so many directions. The recognition of Burliuk, Ekster and Malevich as Ukrainians does not diminish their relevance for either the imperial (transnational) avant-garde or for strictly Russian culture, where their impact is undeniable. The Ukrainian perspective does correct misrepresentations of fact and throws light on the nature of culture in the empire. We should note that the re-appropriation of imperial culture for national Ukrainian construction is not a zero sum game; in other words, if Burliuk accrues to Ukrainians, he still remains available for Russians, albeit in a different national guise. One clever Ukrainian modernist, who passionately rejected Russian (i.e., imperial) culture in the name of the Ukrainian, wrote in 1912 that “culture cannot be divided; it is in us, not outside us”.⁵⁶ In short, Futurism and the avant-garde in the empire can be experienced and studied as holistic imperial phenomena, but not at the expense of the ‘national’ parts or at the cost

56 Tovkachevs’kyi: “Budynok na pisku, abo ‘sobiraniie Rusi’ Petrom Struve”, p. 232.

of reckoning them simplistically as 'Russian.' The recognition of an imperial Futurism and avant-garde actually establishes a foundation for some very fruitful investigations of the Ukrainian-Russian artistic relationship.

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