Time, Moment, Eternity: Hieroglyphs and Meditations in Yakov Druskin's Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author explores the interest of the interwar intellectuals in "time, death, God". This focus on temporality as an existential problem engendered some major philosophical projects, which aimed at complete revision of how philosophy should be done, including Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, Franz Rosenzweig. The main part outlines a philosophical project of Yakov Druskin who addressed the problem of temporality in a highly original manner. Druskin combined philosophical reflection on time in its existential meaning with the search for intellectual methods and linguistic techniques to transcend our ordinary reality. Among these methods, in Druskin's works at least two major modes—meditation and "hieroglyphs"—can be identified. Both methods, however, aim at "transforming rather than informing" and at enabling us to linger in a "certain equilibrium with a minor error".

KEYWORDS

Russian Avant-garde, Russian philosophy, OBERIU, Druskin, temporality, time, languages of time, existential meaning of time

Introduction

A century ago, Franz Rosenzweig published his *Der Stern der Erlösung* [The Star of Redemption] (1921), in which a prominent German Jewish intellectual sought to address "various themes already familiar to a new generation tutored in Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Bergson" (Gordon, 2007, p. 122). Peter Eli Gordon enumerates among these themes further

> the primacy of poetic language, the bankruptcy of rationalist and idealist philosophy, the constitutive-existential function of temporality, the linguistic, spoken, and always intersubjective grounding of human meaning, the paradigmatic import of religious revelation, and, perhaps most of all, the turn from theoretical knowledge to 'life' itself as the chief field of hermeneutic inquiry (Ibid.).

These themes Rosenzweig developed in his "new thinking" laid out in *The Star* and, perhaps, they can be best summarised in a phrase, which Aleksander Vvedensky used: "I am interested in three themes—time, death, God" (see: Druskin, 1998a, p. 47, my translation from Russian—A. M.). This phrase was reported to us by Yakov Druskin, a Russian philosopher, who, in another work *Zvezda Bessmyslitsy* [The Star of Meaninglessness] (Druskin, 1998c), explicated Vvedensky's philosophical approach and literary method.

The interest of the interwar intellectuals in "time, death, God" was spurred by the profound suspicion towards or outward rejection of established systematic philosophy in its idealist or materialist versions. Systems of philosophy seemed too abstract and the laws of history, which had promised the progress of humanity, seemed too arid to validate the subjective existence of individual human beings who had to navigate through major transformations of the early twentieth century. A number of intellectuals focused on temporality, primarily in its existential and subjective function rather than on history in its majestic course because in the systems of philosophy, ironically, the explanation of the ongoing social transformations by the laws of history deprived the future of its novelty. As Leonard Lawlor notes, "continental philosophers are opposed to norms because norms stop thinking. Norms allow us to deduce actions, and then we do not really struggle with the decision. Norms stop thinking because they close off the new" (Lawlor, 2012, p. 50).

On the European continent, this focus on temporality as an existential problem engendered some major philosophical projects, which aimed at complete revision of how philosophy should be done, including Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, Franz Rosenzweig, to name just a few. However, in order to explore this personal significance of time, to initiate new ways of thinking about time, it was necessary to find new ways of speaking about time. Thus, the philosophical reflection on time was interwoven with the search by philosophers, poets, artists, musicians for the new forms of conveying and expressing the experience of time. Moreover, as Lawlor aptly puts it, for these philosophers "the idea that thinking happens to you implies that

thinking is not a natural ability. It occurs under the pressure of extreme experiences and experimentation. Because thinking happens in an experience, continental philosophy is always interested in the experience of death, madness, and blindness. All of these experiences concern disorientation in time" (Lawlor, 2012, p. 47). Thus, apart from new ways of thinking and of speaking about time, it is necessary to find ways, methods, techniques of "disorienting" us, of pushing us out of the ordinary and the everyday in order to create the conditions for experiencing time existentially.

In the Bergsonian approach, access to pure time is gained by means of intuition. However, the way Bergson describes how intuition can actually work is mostly in negative terms and, as it were, in parables. In his lectures *Histoire de l'idée de temps* [History of the Idea of Time] (Bergson, 2016), Bergson strives to direct us to the comprehension of time by a number of oppositions: internal–external, direct–intermediate, simple–complex/composed, relative–absolute. Bergson outlines the distinction between internal (direct, simple, absolute, intuitive) and external (mediated, composed, relative, conceptual) knowledge of things by deconstructing our ordinary experiences of learning a foreign language, observing some movement, understanding a fictional character in a novel, grasping the notion of life in biology (Bergson, 2016). He gives an ordinary example and shows how it actually misconstrues the experience of duration, although it is this duration that makes it at all possible. In all these cases, Bergson proceeds in, what can be called, an apophatic fashion: we need to step out of our habitual ways of perception, use of concepts, reliance on analytical thinking, usage of language, and to replace it all with intuition, or direct knowledge of the absolute.

In phenomenological philosophy, this process of transcending the ordinary and the everyday is described by the concept of *epoche*, or phenomenological reduction. But, in a way, this procedure of lifting us out of the ordinary is similar to what various thinkers described as ecstasis or rapture and is fraught with religious overtones. Georgiy Chernavin highlights the following observation made by Druskin who berates Husserl for insufficient courage to accept the religious function of the *epoche*:

> Ambiguity of transcendental reduction, its madness is the same madness as the madness of religious conversion. Husserl himself says that many phenomenologists pass off their purely psychological descriptions for a phenomenological investigation. But if we deny the religious foundation of transcendental reduction, any phenomenological reduction will be merely a psychological description. Phenomenological reduction presupposes two states, or two orders, of mind. But there is only a natural state or an unnatural state, that is, a religious state, no third state of mind exists (...) Husserl himself wished to come to God. But this is impossible, it is contradictory: it is I who runs away from God. If God does not drag me to Himself, I can't come to God (…) transcendental reduction is necessary. Husserl is wrong in believing that it [transcendental reduction] is only theoretical, it is simultaneously practical.

> Therefore, I can't do it [reduction] myself, although I ought to do it. (Druskin's passage *Videnie nevideniya* [The Vision of the Unseen], cited from Chernavin, 2020, p. 75, my translation from Russian—A. M.).

Transcendental reduction, therefore, can be regarded as a religious act, an act of meditation aimed at ecstasis. But this act introduces rupture into the way we experience the world and splits it into two—or potentially many—worlds.

Rosenzweig interprets this division of the totality of knowledge, so vigorously sought for by systematic philosophy, in the context of religion. He claims that

> it is the unity of reasoning, which here insists on its right over against the multiplicity of knowledge by asserting the totality of the world. The unity of the logos establishes the unity of the world-as-totality (...) Thus a successful resistance against the totality of the world implies at the same time a denial of the unity of reasoning (Rosenzweig, 1921/1971, p. 12).

But for Rosenzweig, this exit from false totality, which systematic philosophy tried to impose by its notion of "all", or the "world", can only be achieved in emancipating individuality through an otherworldly experience given to us in religion and, in particular, in revelation. As P.E. Gordon explains, "through the encounter with divine love, we pass from abjection to reconciliation (…) Because they [Jews] remain open to the eternity of future redemption, they exhibit a profound indifference to history" (Gordon, 2007, p. 135). Thus, truly experiencing time presupposes actually stepping out of history. In other words, one has to establish a connection between one's immediate moment and eternity.

Both Bergson and Husserl showcase duration, the internal continuous process of experiencing time, the process, in fact, of living as a conscious being. Both philosophers try to lead us to this experience of time by affecting a rupture with the experience of the ordinary by means of intuition or reduction, that is, by reconceptualising traditional methods of philosophy. Both philosophers try to reinvent how philosophy should be done, while Franz Rosenzweig aims at "new thinking", which ought to be based on the old revelation. It is divine revelation alone, which can open our true selves and our actual place in the world to our reflection.

In what follows I intend to offer a brief outline of another philosophical project, which addressed the problem of temporality in a highly original manner. It combined philosophical reflection on time and eternity in their existential, subjective meaning with the search for intellectual methods and linguistic techniques to transcend our ordinary and everyday attitude to reality. This project was developed over the decades by Yakov Druskin who traditionally is mentioned in relation with the Russian Avant-garde stars—Aleksander Vvedensky and Daniil Kharms whose archive Druskin saved from the besieged and bombarded Leningrad, and whose philosophical discussions he reported and whose literary oeuvre he explicated in his own texts.

"Before Belongings to Anything": Yakov Druskin in His Circumstances

Yakov Druskin was born in 1902 in Yekaterinoslav, he was the first son to the Druskins, a Jewish family whose name probably stems from Lithuanian "salt", and who were involved in revolutionary activities, including participation in "Bund" ("General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia"). The family were also blessed with two more children—Mikhail, a famous Soviet musicologist, and Lidiya who preserved, helped publish and commented on Yakov Druskin's archives. Yakov attended Lentovskaia Gymnasium where he made acquaintance with Leonid Lipavsky and Aleksander Vvedensky, but their true intellectual friendship developed later. He graduated from the philosophy department of the Petrograd State University and Leningrad Conservatory (the latter while working as a teacher at school).

In the late 1920s, Druskin takes part in the *Chinari* group whose name refers to the Slavonic equivalent of "order" or "rank" and, omitting the disputes about precise titulature, more known due to the activities of another grouping OBERIU ("Association of Real Art"). Vvedensky and Kharms perished in the early 1940s, Druskin saved their archives and was evacuated to Sverdlovsk, but in 1944, he returned to Leningrad where he lived to the end of his days in 1980 (see Dmitrenko & Sazhin, 1998, for more details). Druskin was fascinated by music and published a volume on Bach and cooperated in translating Bach studies, though later he was no less thrilled by Webern and Schoenberg (M. Druskin, 1999). He also developed interest in painting due to his friendship with V. Sterligov. But overall, to the external view, his life was utterly uneventful.

Druskin himself reports two events that deeply affected his personality in his diaries, which Druskin named *Pered prinadlezhnostiami chego-libo* [Before Belongings to Anything] (Druskin, 1999). The first event was what he describes as a call of God and a realisation of the fact of human mortality in 1911. In 1928, some episode of revelatory experience was recorded by Druskin in a small piece under the title *Dushevniy prazdnik* [Spiritual Festivity]:

> I have seen something simple, something so simple, clear, and evident that I can't even understand how I could not see it before, how I could live without seeing it. This was simple, clear, and evident all the time, right before me, it was my soul.
> (...) This is so simple: think of your soul. Again, "think of your soul", but it is your soul, that is, when I think of my soul, I have my soul. Thinking about the soul is thought. But the soul is not thought, neither thinking nor reflecting. Soul is greater than thought, than thinking, because it is soul that thinks and has thought. Still, when I think of my soul I have my soul, this thought, this thinking about my soul actually is my soul. So, this thought is greater than this thought, it exceeds the limits of thought: as it is [this thought about the soul] is greater than it is.
> I have seen something new, something simple, something joyous, I always had it but I have not seen it. No, I have always seen it, could not not see it and still did not see it, only now I see it (Sazhin, 1998, p. 655, my translation from Russian—A. M.).

While highly important, it was not transformative unlike the second event, which occurred in 1932. It was a dream, in which his former teacher from Lentovskaia Gymnasium, L. Georg appeared to him and "showed me death (...) but this was the death in relation with the fear of God: 'I am not ready for the Judgement, and death scares me'" (Druskina, 1999a, p. 529, my translation from Russian—A.M.). This prompted the decision to abandon philosophical system building in a traditional way and align thinking and living in his personal development. His subsequent life was the exercise in finding ways to extricate oneself from the world, to transcend the ordinary and the everyday:

> I never felt myself at home in this life (...) Earlier I thought this was caused by personal circumstances, my school work, for instance, or the like. Every spring I thought: something is going to happen; I will leave the school by the fall and start a new life. Then I realised that nothing is going to happen, and even if it would have happened, I still will not feel at home in life (…) When Georg came to me and showed me death, I thought: I was insincere, I wanted to build a system, but a system is impossible, every system has gaps and contradictions, I bridged the gaps as I could and I ignored the contradictions. Before the face of death, we can't write like that. I have rejected the system (Druskina, 1999a, p. 529, my translation from Russian—A. M.).

Since this personal revelation, Druskin has decided to embark on the project of turning thinking into practice. He made himself and his thinking an object of experiment and investigation. He experimented both in his writing and in his thinking. His writing is extremely esoteric and, as it were, idiosyncratic.

Problems of Interpretation

Several scholars attempted to approach his philosophy and find it an appropriate context. Aleksey Kozyrev (Kozyrev, 1997) reviews Druskin's later work *Videnie nevideniya* [The Vision of the Unseen] and compares Druskin's quest for sanctity to Gregory Skovoroda's, while his philosophical methodology is described as phenomenological reduction and one of the ways Husserl's phenomenology was adopted in Russia. Georgiy Chernavin (Chernavin, 2020), on the other hand, suspects that Druskin was playing at phenomenological reduction, whereas, in fact, he parodied the literary genre of philosophical text, quite in line with his OBERIU friends, in order to create a poetic effect. Chernavin wonders whether it would not be more accurate to assume that Druskin actually aimed at producing "an applied psychedelic use of phenomenological methodology" (Chernavin 2020, p. 80, my translation from Russian—A. M.).

To some extent, this conjecture echoes the analysis of Evgeny Pavlov who sees Druskin in the context of literary experiments of other OBERIU members (see Roberts, 1997):

> Thus surviving Russian avant-gardists built literary machines of their own with which to critique and radically transform the commonly accepted notions of

time and history. Kharms' and Vvedensky's machines were of the extreme variety, each in his own way questioning the very core of what constitutes our temporal perception and any philosophical and social systems we construct on its foundation (Pavlov, 2012, p. 298).

It is hard to agree, though, that the interest in time, and, we should remember, in death and God, of the OBERIU can be explained away as a competition with and a response to Stalinism. Particularly it is difficult to see the direct link between Stalin's "time machine" and OBERIU's "literary machines" when Pavlov claims:

> Yet the obsessive thinking about time that marks the entire oeuvre of both men is not a mere exercise in abstract speculation, but inevitably represents an engagement with the political in ways that are no less radical than an open confrontation with the regime (...) A certain time machine is at work during the years of high Stalinism: it aims to conquer time by "petrifying the utopia" of the future and remaking history, as it ought to have happened (Pavlov, 2012, p. 296).

Graham Roberts discusses philosophy of OBERIU (1997) in greater detail. While indicating the common aspiration of the *Chinari* group "to construct a new, non-substantial existential ontology", quoting from Druskin's remark (Ibid., p. 126), Roberts seems to overstate the common theoretical foundation and principles of their philosophies, as if it were a unified whole, and seems to ignore the substantial differences in philosophical orientations, methods, and achievements. Druskin describes his own interest, his own twist of the group's project in his essay *Chinari*:

> Thinking, by its own nature, contrasts what is thought with thinking itself, that is, it extracts from thinking, from the act of thinking its content and its object; and it opposes thinking to the content of thinking and then [it opposes] thought to the object of thought, which is independent from thinking. Unlike animals, human beings think and thereby oppose themselves to society (...) I am interested in this last division. This is what I mean: I am left alone. I must correct myself: by saying I, I mean everyone, not just myself. Everyone who thinks will say: I am alone, I am before God, I and God. Again, I must correct myself: I meant exactly myself and not everyone, I don't even know what everyone is, I don't even know if there is any other. When I think, I do not see him. Not some other, but exactly myself, and right now: I am alone. Not because I do not have any acquaintances. I am alone because there is no external comprehension: I comprehend nothing. This, however, does not imply that there is no internal comprehension, that nobody can understand anyone else. But to have actual internal comprehension—rather than hypocrisy—a complete incomprehension must precede it; I must remain alone: I and God. But once I said this, I see that not I, but God: there is no I anymore. But how can I say that there is no I? I repeat: there is no I. The first part of the sentence negates the second, but both are correct. This is what I call the last division: I am divided, I observe my own absence and do not comprehend it. But

only through this incomprehension can one come to the internal comprehension, some incomprehension is comprehension, the rest is hypocrisy. Most of all I dread internal hypocrisy, the lie to myself. Only by dividing the incomprehension of others from myself and myself from the world will I be able to avoid internal lie. But this incomprehension is comprehension. Then, I can see life. Not the grid of relations and categories which reason imposes on life, but [I can see] actual life; [I can see] death and God, [I can see] mystery (Druskin, 1998a, pp. 63–64, my translation from Russian—A. M.).

Distinctly theological agenda of Druskin and his specific methodology, of which later, sets him clearly apart from other members of the *Chinari* and the OBERIU groupings.

While Druskin's name is rarely absent in the discussions about OBERIU (Ostashevsky, 2012), there are few scholars who analysed Druskin's philosophy in his own right. Tat'iana Rezvykh in explicating the antinomies of time in Vvedensky's writings (Rezvykh, 2014) addresses some aspects of Druskin's philosophical reflections, but some major effort at research is needed to give due to this remarkable and profound philosopher.

Translation Issues and Beyond

It should be noted that there is only one available translation of his texts published in English: some excerpts from the diaries (*Death* and *The End of the World*) and his *Letter to Kharms* (see: Ostashevsky, 2006). This lack of translations and the preference to abundantly quote rather than to analyse Druskin's writings can be explained, on the one hand, by the complexity of the task of translation. Because Druskin, firstly, uses a number of categories, which despite their apparent simplicity are hard to translate.

Two examples can be given here. His fundamental notion of *pogreshnost',* particularly in the formula *ravnovesie s nebol'shoi pogreshnost'yu,* has both mathematical and religious connotations. Thus, E. Ostashevsky chooses to translate this formula as "a certain equilibrium with a slight peccadillo" (Ostashevsky, 2006, p. 220): "Its meaning is deliberately vague, but the peccadillo is, as it were, departure from dead symmetry by either aleatory or voluntary error that constitutes creation in both the cosmological and the artistic senses of the word" (Ostashevsky, 2006, p. 252). On the other hand, G. Roberts uses "minor error" for *pogreshnost'* (Roberts 1997, p. 26). A wider range of connotations, in my view, can be evoked by using "minor error", the latter alluding to the "measurement error" and "margin of error" in mathematics as well as to moral sin and to cognitive lapse, but these remain crude approximations to the original.

Another example is his fundamental categories of "this" and "that". Despite his philosophical education at the best Russian university at the time and his extensive philosophical erudition, Druskin shuns from using traditional philosophical categories in his writings. One of the most remarkable things that a reader may notice in perusing

his texts is that there are practically no Grecisms, Latinisms or other philosophical terms of foreign origin. Druskin's vocabulary is astonishingly Russian in the choice of philosophical terminology. Yet, Druskin does not create any artificially Russian philosophical vocabulary; on the contrary, he relies primarily on the use of ordinary language such as, for instance, demonstrative pronouns this and that. Druskin, though, endows these simple pronouns with conceptual significance. But that makes them very difficult to translate because so much hinges on the underlying ordinary usage.

Secondly, the lack of translations and the preference to extensively quote him can be explained, by the methods Druskin uses in his philosophical work. Most of his texts are not purported to inform the reader, they intend to transform, to reproduce in a reader the transformation that was exercised and perfected by the writer. The editors often deplore the fact that Druskin did not date his texts and often returned to them and reworked them. The texts were, indeed, diligently honed instruments of meditation.

Commentators sometimes referred to the similarities of Druskin's methodology and *docta ignorantia* developed by Nicholas of Cusa and dating back to Dionysius the Areopagite's corpus (Rezvykh, 2014, p. 91). But it is important to keep in mind that this similarity does not lie in conceptual continuation. Nicholas of Cusa was a philosopher who tried to develop philosophical concepts, often drawing on mathematical notions and analogies, in building his late Renaissance theology. Unlike Nicholas, Dionysius, whoever might be hidden by this name, was a practicing mystic and in his *Mystical Theology,* the author was not trying to expound a theological doctrine *per se*, to argue and to convince a reader. He aimed at transforming the reader's mind, at inducing through meditation the experience of the divine. But how can one express the ineffable divinity, which is beyond all and every being? Dionysius relies on oxymoronic and paradoxical constructions such as "the rays of the divine darkness" (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1999, p. 212). These constructions are meaningless conceptually. But the semantic clash caused by "the most illustrious darkness", "eyeless minds" and "ignorant knowledge" (or "learned ignorance") in this mystical treatise is instrumental in achieving its practical purpose—to meditate out of the creation and into the state of ecstasis, that is, to achieve the union with the divine.

In his reflection on the aspirations and methods of *Chinari* group, Druskin distinguishes two types of the meaninglessness (Druskin, 1998a, pp. 47 ff.). Situational meaninglessness refers to the breaking of conventions and expectations, of norms of behavior, and of rules of acting and being in the familiar reality. For instance, Andersen's tale (*Keiserens nye Klæder* [The Emperor's New Clothes]) about the child who called off the bluff of the naked monarch. Semantic meaninglessness entails the clash of meanings in an utterance, in a sentence or a phrase. To illustrate the consequences of such a semantic clash, Druskin cites Vvedensky:

> If we experience wild incomprehension, we will acknowledge that none can dispel this incomprehension with anything clear. Woe to us who think of time. But then as this incomprehension grows, you and I realize that there is no woe, neither to us, nor to those who think, nor to time (Druskin, 1998a, p. 47, my translation from Russian—A. M.).

Semantic meaninglessness, thus, becomes a method of gaining access beyond the ordinary and the everyday, access to the other worlds.

Chinari used the notion of "neighboring worlds" to describe these alternative orders of reality, in which one or more of the familiar qualities might be reversed. For instance, "we live in the world of firm objects, we are surrounded by air, which we perceive as emptiness. How would a semiliquid jellyfish who dwells in the liquid water feel?" (Druskin, 1998a, pp. 60–61, my translation from Russian—A. M.).

Finally, could the inhabitants of those neighboring worlds communicate with us, and, if they could, what would be their message? *Chinari* used the word "*vestniki*"— messengers, literally angels, to describe the inhabitants of the neighboring worlds. One of the most significant philosophical reflections written by Yakov Druskin are included in the groups of texts under the title *Razgovory Vestnikov* [Conversations of Messengers] (Druskin, 1998b). The translation of a fragment from *Tret'e issledovanie ob etom i tom* [The Third Investigation about This and That], part VI, in *Razgovory Vestnikov* [Conversations of Messengers] is attached in the Appendix. But in this translation, I hope, it can be observed that unlike his partners in *Chinari* group Druskin deploys neither situational nor semantic meaninglessness. Yet, I would concur with the hypothesis made by G. Chernavin, though in a rather ironic manner, that Druskin's texts aim primarily at transforming rather than informing.

What Can Take Us Beyond?

When Druskin was disappointed in his idea of building a new system, he continued his literary and philosophical experimentations. But now they were all directed at practical aims. His writing and thinking were ascetic exercises that were needed to transform his life, or rather, in his own words, to find his true home. Instead of abstract reasoning and theoretical conceptualizations traditional for the European philosophy, in Druskin's works we can detect at least two major modes of "transforming rather than informing": meditation and hieroglyphs.

Reportedly, the notion of hieroglyphs was suggested by Lipavsky, but Druskin adopted it, perfected it, and reflected on it in several texts. In *Zvezda Bessmyslitsy* [The Star of Meaninglessness], Druskin elaborates on this notion in some detail:

Hieroglyph is a material phenomenon, which I can directly perceive, feel, apprehend and which tells me more than it can directly express as a material phenomenon. Hieroglyph is ambivalent, it has its proper and additional meaning. The proper meaning of hieroglyph is its definition in its capacity of a material phenomenon—physical, biological, physiological, psychophysiological. Its additional meaning can't be defined precisely and unambiguously, it can be conveyed metaphorically, poetically, sometimes by joining logically incongruous notions, that is, by antinomy, contradiction, meaninglessness. Hieroglyph can be understood as an indirect or mediated speech of the immaterial, that is, of spiritual or supersensible, by means of material and sensible when it is addressed to me" (Druskin, 1998b, pp. 550–551, my translation from Russian—A. M.).

One might wonder to what extent this interpretation of the hieroglyph is similar to the notion of symbol in the Areopagite's corpus whose function is described as "to reveal and to conceal at the same time". But it is important to emphasize that hieroglyphs are much more diverse and poetic than theological symbols. Examples of hieroglyphs include fall of the leaves, fire in a fireplace, and a series of literary and cinematographic images such as the road in the final episode of Chaplin's *The Pilgrim*. Moreover, while theological symbols all point in the same direction—towards God, hieroglyphs reveal the multiplicity of neighboring worlds.

The other methodology, which I named meditation earlier, might seem a parody of philosophical treatise, as Chernavin suggested. Some of *Razgovory Vestnikov* [Conversations of Messengers], indeed, might seem repetitive, obscure, and uninformative. But I argue that this is precisely their point. They are not purported to report anything to us, to enlighten us or to educate us in any way. They work as music works by setting certain rhythm, and certain pitch, and certain mood, and by guiding our thinking in a very specific way. The ultimate purpose of these meditations is not to fall into any of the neighboring worlds, but to remain on the border between them, in the gap between different orders, different systems of logic and aloof from the norms, which subjugate into compliance our thinking, our living, our existing. Druskin strives to enable us not to succumb to any definite order and to linger in a moment, to hang at the tip of the balance in a "certain equilibrium with a minor error".

In conclusion, I would emphasize again the originality and the ingenuity of the philosophical project developed by Yakov Druskin. L. Lawlor claims that

> the experience of the moment being the experience of death implies that although all continental philosophy starts out being a relativism and a subjectivism, all continental philosophy ends up being an "absolutism" and an "objectivism." Death is what is outside of subjective experience; therefore, being non-subjective, death is "objective." Death is what I cannot relate to, since relating to it destroys my life; therefore, being non-relative, death is absolute (Lawlor, 2012, p. 32),

but I would caution against such a generalization. Druskin's philosophical practice of reflecting on "time, death, God" demonstrates that death is not "outside of subjective experience", its deeply personal acknowledgment initiates the search for an exit from the temporal world and for the means—philosophical and poetic—to enter the moment, in which God meets its "thinking creature".

Many intellectuals of the interwar period sought to make meaning of the historical transformations, which undermined the Enlightenment's expectations of progress. The latter was supposed to combine social, technical, and moral development of the humanity. But while technology and societies were becoming more and more complex, they were also growing more and more overbearing towards individual subjectivity. In this article, I outlined a number of ways that philosophers proposed to reconnect human existence with transcendent dimensions of reality and to renew the relation between philosophy and religion. While H. Bergson leaned towards traditional

Catholic Christianity, F. Rosenzweig offered a renewal of Judaism, Yakov Druskin practiced his own sort of religion, though based on the Gospels.

In my view, the study of the religious aspects of the Russian avant-garde will greatly enrich our understanding of the "continental philosophy" and will place Yakov Druskin on par with most prominent intellectuals of the interwar period Bergson, Husserl and Rosenzweig.

Appendix

Razgovory Vestnikov [Conversations of Messengers]
Tret'e issledovanie ob etom i tom [The Third Investigation about This and That]
VI

1. Watching trees in a garden during the rain, or watching fire in a fireplace, or the flow of a river you find some certainty and clarity. You say: I have achieved an equilibrium, I have seen the great moment, when there was no time, [I have seen that] something truly exists. But then you notice a minor error, and the equilibrium is disturbed.

2. When the great moment exists, something can be named. There will be an affirmation, but there is yet no reasoning. This is the way of messengers and trees to give names. If, however, you have noticed a minor error, the names are doubtful.

3. Once I noticed a small error in some equilibrium, I began my investigation. I said something and said this. I noticed some duplication here: I supposed that something existed, but by naming it this, I gave it existence anew. And it exists as if for the first time: I have realised that it had not existed before it was named.

4. By saying this, I say it [is] different from that. If I could say this directly, I couldn't doubt its existence. Moreover, I would regard its second existence as the first and the only. But now I see a minor error: I didn't say this, but this in contrast to that. I reverted the error to the beginning. I noticed some duplication and in recollecting how I said this by saying something I supposed that I had noticed it then.

5. By saying this in contrast to that, I simultaneously said that. I said that before actually saying that, simply by referring to this. Now I say that before that and here a number of suppositions follow because even the first that was a supposition. These suppositions emerge at the first distinction, or division. When there is a series of suppositions, I can see nothing determinate and clear and remain in doubt.

6. I said this and that, and by saying this and that, I said one thing; one thing because it is no greater than this or than anything, thus, the doubt remains. If I join this and that, I say one and the other, I find some certainty.

7. I named something and I made a minor error in doing so. Then I observe it. I observe it twice: first, I observed a minor error when I made it. Some observation was a minor error. Later, I observe it again, this second observation is the second error. Thus, I observed some duplication here.

8. Comprehension is recollection of some certainty of a moment. I recollect now some certainty of a moment, I had it before. At that time I gave a name to something, I recollected then something that had not existed before naming. Thus, in recollection there is also some duplication.

9. If there were only one error, who would notice it? By naming something I made a minor error, but noticed it later, by observing it and by recollecting it. This is the second error.

10. Something exists and needs affirmation. Naming something will be its affirmation; it will be [an affirmation] without reasoning, if I haven't noticed the error; and it will be [an affirmation] with reasoning when I notice it. Thus, here, too, some duplication exists.

11. If there is affirmation without reasoning, then might there be an equilibrium without error, too? – If there exists something that does not need affirmation, then there truly exists equilibrium without error. But any affirmation is some duplication and some error. Thus, every equilibrium is equilibrium with a minor error. But to see that it is complete equilibrium, no affirmation is needed.

12. Some wearisome waiting, impatience, boredom accompany observation of time. This is the feeling of reality. It is tiresome and gives no pleasure. The other feeling of reality is in the great moment, and it does not make us weary.

13. You can stop the flow of time for a moment. You can see the beginning of a moment, but it can't be retained, its ending will be lost. The beginning of a moment is the beginning of some reality. This is the third feeling of reality.

14. You have named something this. You have noticed some certainty and said this or that. Some sign – a turn of the head, an observation or a word – has by chance acquired certainty; it became this or that. In some interval, in the great moment, you have named something this. Now, just now, you have uttered some word, perhaps, some word of no specific meaning, and thereby something got affirmation. This is the fourth feeling of reality.

15. In order to find some certainty, it is necessary to join one with the other. But for doing so there needs to be something irrelative. I have found the irrelative: some accidental token of time, the naming in the great moment, the beginning and the sign, which possibly has no specific meaning. These are the tokens of a minor error in some equilibrium: something that had not existed before naming was named because it needed affirmation (Druskin, 1998c, pp. 805–807; my translation from Russian—A. M.)

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