

## CHAPTER I

### 'КАК DELAT' STIKHI'

In his major theoretical article 'Kak delat' stikhi' (1926) Maiakovskii identifies the basis of verse as a rhythmical 'rumble' ('гул'):

Я хожу, размахивая руками и мыча еще почти без слов, то укорачивая шаг, чтоб не мешать мычанию, то помычиваю быстрее в такт шагам.

Так обстругивается и оформляется ритм — основа всякой поэтической вещи, проходящая через нее гулом. Постепенно из этого гула начинаешь вытискивать отдельные слова. (xii, 100)

Then, in a unique account of the creative process, he demonstrates the actual generation of verse from this bare rhythmical form to its final verbal form. The example he uses to demonstrate the generative process is the opening stanza of his poem 'Sergeiu Eseninu', the stated intention of which is to answer the latter's final poem:

Сначала стих Есенину просто мычался приблизительно так:

та-ра-ра /ра ра/ ра, ра, ра, ра/ра ра/  
ра-ра-ри /ра ра ра/ ра ра /ра ра ра ра/  
ра-ра-ра /ра-ра ра ра ра ра ри/  
ра-ра-ра /ра ра-ра/ ра ра /ра/ ра ра.

Потом выясняются слова:

Вы ушли ра ра ра ра ра в мир иной.  
Может быть, летите ра ра ра ра ра.  
Ни аванса вам, ни бабы, ни пивной.  
Ра ра ра /ра ра ра ра/ трезвость.

(xii, 102)

Subsequently he works, often at great length, on each line separately and in an order (1, 3, 4, 2) which shows that the odd lines play the leading role. The eight versions (initial, intermediate, and final) of the first line are as follows:

1. та-ра-ра /ра ра/ ра, ра, ра, ра/ра ра/ (xii, 102)
2. Вы ушли ра ра ра ра ра в мир иной. (xii, 102)
3. Вы ушли ра ра ра в мир иной, и т. д. (xii, 102)
4. Вы ушли в мир иной. (xii, 103)
5. Вы ушли, Сережа, в мир иной. (xii, 103)
6. Вы ушли бесповоротно в мир иной. (xii, 103)
7. Вы ушли, Есенин, в мир иной. (xii, 103)
8. Вы ушли, как говорится, в мир иной. (xii, 107)

The five versions of the third line, the next to be worked on, are as follows:

1. ра-ра-ра /ра-ра ра ра ра ри/ (хп, 102)
2. Ни аванса вам, ни бабы, ни пивной. (хп, 102)
3. Ни аванса вам, ни пивной. (хп, 104)
4. Нет тебе ни аванса, ни пивной. (хп, 104)
5. Ни тебе аванса, ни пивной — (хп, 107)

The fourth version of this line is introduced to show the derivation from the popular saying ‘нет тебе ни дна, ни покрывши’ (хп, 104) and so does not count as a proper rhythmical variant. The four versions of the last line are as follows:

1. ра-ра-ра /ра ра-ра/ ра ра /ра/ ра ра. (хп, 102)
2. Ра ра ра /ра ра ра ра/ трезвость. (хп, 102)
3. ра ра рà ра ра рà ра рà трезвость. (хп, 104)
4. Трезвость. (хп, 107)

The five versions of the second line, the last to be completed, are as follows:

1. ра-ра-ри /ра ра ра/ ра ра /ра ра ра ра/ (хп, 102)
2. Может быть, летите ра ра ра ра ра. (хп, 102)
3. может быть, летите ра-ра-рà-ра. (хп, 105)
4. Может быть, летите . . . знаю вашу резвость! (хп, 106)
5. Пустота, — летите, в звезды врезываясь . . . (хп, 107)

With the completion of the second line the whole stanza is brought together in its final form:

Вы ушли, как говорится, в мир иной.  
Пустота, — летите, в звезды врезываясь . . .  
Ни тебе аванса, ни пивной —  
Трезвость.

(хп, 107)

The graphical division into the step-ladder form would come later, during the preparation of the text for publication.

Of course, as Maiakovskii himself points out, his outline of the creative process is a simplified and intellectualized schematization of the real, ‘more intuitive’ thing, but it is, nevertheless, reliable:

Разумеется, я чересчур опрощаю, схематизирую и подчиняю мозговому отбору поэтическую работу. Конечно, процесс писания окольней, интуитивней. Но в основе работа все-таки ведется по такой схеме. (хп, 107)

The ensuing analysis of the rhythmical *gul* proceeds from Maiakovskii’s assertion that the representation is, at base, accurate, but it is sufficient for the argument that it should have a general validity as an accurate representation of a possible generative process.

### A Definition of the Rhythmical *gul*

The division of the original rhythmical *gul* into lines forming a stanza is already an indication of verse form. Maiakovskii uses eight symbols in his representation of this original *gul*: та ; па ; пи ; ` ; / ; — ; , ; and a period (.). The first three symbols (та, па, and пи) are used in a standard way to represent syllables. Та serves as the initial symbol, while пи would represent a marked syllable relative to па and so would be stressed in Russian; in terms of the stanza's composition it would be expected to herald some kind of break or fall. The two such marked syllables both show up clearly in the final version of the stanza — as dashes on the level of punctuation: the one in the second line is realized in the syntactic break after 'Пустота', and the one at the end of the third line is realized in the rhythmical and also intonational fall to the shortened last line.

The accent and slash are also used in a standard way to mark a stress and a boundary; the slash divides the syllable sequences into groups varying in length from one to seven syllables, but the stresses are only marked in the first line (one in each group).

The remaining three symbols are of secondary importance and can be interpreted according to their significance as punctuation marks. The hyphen, for example, could be expected to indicate a tighter syllable grouping, while the comma could be expected to indicate a looser syllable grouping or a hesitation in the line's flow. Both these symbols, however, appear only locally in the initial version and always within the primary divisions marked by the slashes. The final symbol, the period, is found just once in the initial version at the end of the fourth line (the other three lines end with slashes); this can be taken as an indication of the self-sufficiency of the stanza as the basic compositional unit, or 'brick', in Maiakovskii's verse: 'Наработав приблизительно почти все эти кирпичи, я начинаю их примерять, ставя то на одно, то на другое место' (хп, 107).

The rhythmical *gul* can essentially be defined in terms of the first five symbols, that is, in terms of sequences of stressed and unstressed syllables arranged in groups. In 'Sergeiu Esenin' Maiakovskii answers Esenin's last poem, which is written in the trochaic pentameter with a single hexameter line, in the free trochee, and the position of the stresses marked in the first line of the initial version — on the third, fifth, ninth, and eleventh syllables — is already sufficient to indicate a trochaic metrical base. But this is not a conventional metrical scheme because the line is not divided into six feet but into four syllabo-accentual units of varying lengths, each with a stress. The stresses must therefore represent fulfilled ictuses, not just ictuses, and the syllable groups must represent stressed words or groups of words united under one stress, with the position of the stress governed by the metrical base. This is readily confirmed by a comparison of the initial and subsequent versions: in the second

version the slash disappears (apart from in the fourth line) as words appear, and most of the words or word groups correspond exactly to syllable groups from the preceding version, a correspondence which is closer still in the final version.

Having indicated the trochaic metrical base in the opening line, Maiakovskii does not then need to mark any stresses in the initial versions of the other lines: this is because the division into syllable groups involves the presence of stress, while the ictus position of the stresses, as the generation of the first line will show, is not necessarily fixed. Not all the original syllable groups are subsequently realized in verbal form, but where they are, they correspond to words or word groups which carry a heavy stress (the stress of a fully-stressed word). In two cases, however, corresponding word groups also include a stress-ambiguous word which, according to accepted practice, would carry a light stress: at the beginning of the first line 'та-ра-ра' corresponds to 'Вы ушли' (XII, 102), while in the third line 'ра-ра ра ра ра ра ри' corresponds to 'Ни тебе аванса' (XII, 102, 107). This means that, here at least, the rhythmical *gul* primarily distinguishes the heavy stresses of fully-stressed words, grouping syllables around them. It does not mean, however, that the light stresses of stress-ambiguous words should be discounted, because they will still figure in the final rhythmical form of the line; moreover, although there is no apparent indication yet of a light stress on 'Вы' in the first line (unless in the initial 'та'), there may well be some indication of a light but subordinate stress on 'тебе' in the third line, since the hyphenation of the first two syllables in the original syllable group suggests some internal dissimilation.

In the initial version of the stanza the four lines consist of eleven, twelve, ten, and eleven syllables respectively. This range, which is roughly equivalent to five or six trochaic feet with clausulae, already suggests a free measure, but at the same time it also establishes the leading line lengths of pentameter and hexameter which account for sixty-two of the poem's seventy-eight lines. As the verse takes on verbal form the length of each line varies, but in the final version of the stanza the first two lines return to their exact original length, the third line is reduced to nine syllables, while the fourth line is cut down to just two syllables. A free measure can be considered a rather special case but this variation nevertheless accords with Maiakovskii's general account of the stage at which the measure defines itself: 'Размер получается у меня покрытием этого ритмического гула словами' (XII, 102).

The rhythmical *gul* can thus be defined in general terms as verse form, since it involves both the division into lines and their metrical organization; or, more specifically, it can be defined as the metrico-rhythmical level of verse, since it involves a precise indication of the metrical base embodied in syllabo-accentual units that represent words or groups of words (united, here, under a heavy stress).<sup>1</sup> The rhythmical *gul* also carries an indication of the poem's measure,

though here not necessarily a precise indication of the length of each individual line.

### **Maiakovskii's Versification: The Tonic Principle, Rhyme, Graphical Lay-out**

The initial version of the first line ('та-па-пà /па пà/ па, па, па, пà/па пà/' (XII, 102)) has the form of a trochaic hexameter with four main (heavy) stresses. In subsequent versions, however, the number of ictuses in the line varies, while in all but one case the number of main stresses stays constant; the exception (version 4: 'Вы ушли в мир иной') is introduced hypothetically and is immediately rejected not only because its rhythm reminds Maiakovskii of the line 'Бедный конь в поле пал' but also because it breaks the metre, which is set: "'Па па па" выкидывать никак нельзя — ритм правильный' (XII, 103). The maintenance of a constant number of stresses in all the other versions suggests that a scheme of four main stresses, a tonic base, may also be defined in the original *gul*. Although the number of main stresses seems to be defined already, the position of the ictuses they fulfil is not: the first, third, and fourth stresses stay fixed in position (the latter two relative to the end of the line), but the second stress moves and in the final version ('Вы ушли, как говорится, в мир иной' (XII, 107)) falls on the seventh, not the fifth, syllable. In the initial version of the second line ('па-па-ри /па па па/ па па /па па па па/' (XII, 102)) the number of ictuses is even ambiguous (it could be five or six), but the line can be defined as a trochaic line with four main stresses, as it turns out to be: 'Пустота, — летите, в звезды врезываясь' (XII, 107). This is a further indication of the role of a tonic, as well as syllabo-tonic, base in the structure of the rhythmical *gul*.

Zhirmunskii characterized Maiakovskii's free trochee as an accentual reinterpretation of syllabo-tonic metre, and an explanation of this apparent tonic character has recently been put forward by Mikhail Lotman. He stresses the distinction between factors of metre and factors of prosody, and suggests that the 'tonic organization of prosody is characteristic not only of Maiakovskii's accentual verse, but also of his syllabo-tonic verse'. He goes on to distinguish between 'primary' and 'secondary' metre: in Maiakovskii's free trochee and iamb the primary metre is accentual and the secondary metre — syllabo-tonic.<sup>2</sup> This explanation can account for the anomalous rhythmical character of Maiakovskii's free trochee and iamb in which the secondary rhythm of strong and weak ictuses is levelled, a phenomenon that runs counter to the two main laws of Russian binary verse: the laws of regressive accentual dissimilation and stabilization of the first ictus after the first weak position in the line.<sup>3</sup> Here, in the structure of the rhythmical *gul*, this phenomenon can be related to the fact that the number of main stresses in the line may be defined before the position of the ictuses they fulfil and even before the number of ictuses in the line.

In connexion with the role of the tonic principle in Maiakovskii's verse it is also worth noting that his classical binary verse can be unusually fully-stressed: the schematic rhythm of his earliest, syllabo-tonic poems (1912–13), five of which are written in iambic tetrameter, has often been noted, and the same feature can be found in later verse too. The stress load in these five poems of iambic tetrameter is 85.9%, which is significantly higher than Taranovsky's figures both for the typical stress load of this measure in Russian verse (78.4%–81.5%) and for the theoretical stress loads in the language and discourse models (71.3% and 70.2%).<sup>4</sup> Omission of stress is also rare in Maiakovskii's *dol'nik*, even though it is a regular rhythmical feature of the *dol'nik* metre (after the earliest period of the metre's development). In the four-ictus *dol'nik* of *Liubliu*, for example, lines with omitted stresses comprise only 6.1% of the total, compared with Gasparov's theoretical figure of 36.2% and overall figure for verse (1900–60) of 21.3%.<sup>5</sup> This serves to enhance the status of the strong syllables (the tonic principle).

Among Maiakovskii's earliest poems there are two experimental rhyme poems ('Utro' and 'Iz ulitsy v ulitsu') in which the division into lines dissolves, but the crucial, transitional stage in the development of his verse comes in the four poems of the cycle 'Ia' (1913). In these poems Maiakovskii tries deregulation of the line length (free iamb, free trochee, free *dol'nik*/ternary), he varies the anacrusis in *dol'nik*/ternary verse, he mixes metres within the cycle, within individual poems, and even within stanzas, and, finally, he introduces irregular intervals in binary, ternary, and *dol'nik* metre. Both the deregulation of the line length and the variation of the anacrusis are important, but it is above all through the deregulation of the intervals between ictuses, rather than through the omission of stress which gives binary metre its flexibility, that Maiakovskii's verse develops from the cycle 'Ia' onwards, and the tonic principle comes into its own as the leading principle in his verse.

The generation of the opening stanza of 'Sergeiu Eseninu' can also be related to the characteristic absence of fixed clausula patterns in Maiakovskii's verse, since the marking of slashes at the end of the first three lines (replaced by a period at the end of the last line) implies that the original *gul* takes in the whole line and that the clausula is not determined independently of the last syllable group in the line (the rhyme itself only takes phonetic shape at a later stage since the rhythmical *gul* has no value as sound). This is confirmed by the exact correspondence between the initial and final versions of those lines which extend beyond the last metrical stress into hyperdactylic and feminine clausulae respectively: 'pa pa pa pa' — 'врезываясь'; 'pa pa' — 'Трезвость' (XII, 102, 107).

Finally, it is interesting to compare the structure of the original *gul*:

та-па-пà /па пà/ па, па, па, пà/па пà/  
 па-па-ри /па па па/ па па /па па па па/



6. Вы ушли бесповоротно в мир иной. (хп, 103)
7. Вы ушли, Есенин, в мир иной. (хп, 103)
8. Вы ушли, как говорится, в мир иной. (хп, 107)

The key and rhyming words are the first to appear, as Maiakovskii predicts, and are immediately fixed in the second version. ‘Вы ушли’ and ‘иной’ correspond to the first and last syllable groups respectively, with a light stress on ‘Вы’ not indicated in the original *gul* (unless in the initial ‘та’). But, although the stress on ‘в мир’ corresponds in position to the penultimate stress of the initial version, it would seem that the two central groups have in fact changed places with the longer group now preceding the shorter one. Even so the monosyllabic ‘в мир’ still does not match the disyllabic second group exactly, but it does match the penultimate, monosyllabic group from the initial version of the last line (‘/ра/ ра ра’ (хп, 102)). Bearing in mind that in Maiakovskii’s work on the stanza this second version of the first line would have followed on from the initial version of the last line, such a translation or influence seems very likely. The other central syllable group, originally the third but now the second, causes problems: ‘Что же это за “ра ра ра” проклятая’ (хп, 103). The possibility of doing without this ‘ра ра ра’ is rejected in the hypothetical fourth version, and in all the other versions of the line, as has already been pointed out, the number of stresses and words or word groups remains constant while the number of syllables and of ictuses does not. It seems of no great concern to Maiakovskii whether this second group consists of three or five syllables, and in the fifth, sixth, and seventh versions he tries three different words, ‘Сережа’, ‘бесповоротно’, and ‘Есенин’. He rejects the first as too familiar, the second as semantically weak, and the third as too serious; finally he adopts ‘как говорится’, justifying his choice on the grounds of meaning and tone:

“как говорится”, не будучи прямой насмешкой, тонко снимает патетику стиха и одновременно устраняет всяческие подозрения по поводу веры автора во все загробные ахинеи. (хп, 103–04)

At the same time, however, ‘как говорится’ is also closer to the structure of the original *gul* than all the preceding versions: like ‘бесповоротно’, but unlike ‘Сережа’ and ‘Есенин’, it returns the line to its original length, while, unlike ‘бесповоротно’, it also realizes the commas of the initial version in a break or hesitation in the line’s flow.

The five versions of the third line, the other odd line and the next line to be completed, are as follows:

1. ра-ра-ра /ра-ра ра ра ра ри/ (хп, 102)
2. Ни аванса вам, ни бабы, ни пивной. (хп, 102)
3. Ни аванса вам, ни пивной. (хп, 104)
4. Нет тебе ни аванса, ни пивной. (хп, 104)
5. Ни тебе аванса, ни пивной — (хп, 107)

This line is the only one to move straight from fully symbolic to fully verbal form. Given that the final 'ри' is stressed, the line as it originally stands is not in fact consistent with trochaic metre because 'ри' is the tenth syllable; it seems likely that Maiakovskii lost count in the long second syllable group. He returns to this line after completing the key first line which determines the shape of the stanza as a whole. According to Maiakovskii the high tone of the opening calls for a contrasting, more conversational tone in the second half of the stanza, so, given his conviction that short lines are light and jolly (xii, 104), he sets about cutting down the length of the last two lines. He rejects 'ни бабы' as 'tactless' (xii, 104), but in so doing he also returns the line to its original bipartite structure, though as yet without the distinctive asymmetry of the initial version. The deletion of 'ни бабы' makes the line both rhythmically and semantically false:

Недостает какого-то сложка. Эта строка, выбившись из ритма, стала фальшивой и с другой стороны — со смысловой. Она недостаточно контрастна и затем взваливает все "авансы и пивные" на одного Есенина, в то время как они одинаково относятся ко всем нам. (xii, 104)

In order to heighten the contrast and generalize the reference, Maiakovskii takes a popular model: 'нет тебе ни дна, ни покрывки' (xii, 104); this model, when fitted to the metrical base and put in its most conversational form, gives a final version which again is closer to the structure of the original *gul* than all the intermediate ones. The line now has the distinctive asymmetric structure of the initial version, though in reverse order, with two main stresses on 'аванса' and 'пивной' and a light but subordinate stress on 'тебе'. The trisyllabic 'ни пивной' corresponds exactly to the first syllable group ('ра-ра-ра'), while the final position of the stress corresponds to the original 'ри'. The first half of the line also corresponds very closely to the longer syllable group: it is just one syllable shorter to fit the metre, and, as has already been pointed out, the original *gul* may even carry some indication of the light stress on 'тебе' in the hyphenation of the opening syllables. So in its final version the line is only two syllables, or one foot, shorter than the first line, a disparity that hardly constitutes a striking contrast between the two. The contrast lies instead in the length measured in stresses or the lightness of rhythmical form: the first line has four heavy stresses with one light stress in addition, while this line has only two heavy stresses with one light stress in addition; just such a contrast, however, is already evident in the initial version of the stanza before any words have appeared.

The four versions of the last line, which is completed after the third, are as follows:

1. ра-ра-ра /ра ра-ра/ ра ра /ра/ ра ра. (xii, 102)
2. Ра ра ра /ра ра ра ра/ трезвость. (xii, 102)
3. ра ра рà ра ра рà ра рà трезвость. (xii, 104)
4. Трезвость. (xii, 107)

The shortening of the third line is given as the precedent for discarding all the redundant syllables before 'трезвость', yet this final form is already suggested in the structure of the original *gul*: both by the 'ри' at the end of the third line, which requires a break or fall following, and, within the fourth line itself, by the arrangement into syllable groups. This arrangement marks out the end of the line and especially the penultimate division, which produces the only monosyllabic unit in the initial version of the stanza; it is the ninth syllable and will be stressed, but if the initial version of the second line is correct and so does not end in a masculine clausula it is almost certain that the last line ends in a feminine clausula (a heterosyllabic rhyme combining masculine and feminine clausulae, though not impossible, is most unlikely). If so, however, the metre would be broken because both the ninth and tenth syllables would be stressed. This means that the last two syllables are already set apart from the rest of the line which, given the probable translation of the penultimate, monosyllabic unit into the second version of the first line, already appears redundant. 'Трезвость', a feminine clausula and the third rhyming word to be fixed straight away, duly appears in the second version, but it is still preceded by seven syllables divided into two groups by slashes. This, the only use of the slash outside the initial version, is itself an indication that these syllables now only have symbolic value; moreover, with the stress falling on the first syllable of 'трезвость', the number of syllables preceding (seven) is inconsistent with the metre. Such carelessness suggests that Maiakovskii has ceased to discern any clear structure in this part of the line, so the ultimate discarding of all the redundant syllables has, in effect, already been accomplished without the precedent of the third line. The carelessness becomes almost wanton in the next version when 'трезвость' is preceded by eight syllables with stresses marked, incorrectly, on the third, sixth, and eighth syllables. The perversity of this last stress on the syllable immediately preceding 'трезвость' serves as a final confirmation of the extra syllables' redundancy. Such a contiguity of stressed syllables would normally only occur within a line when there is a hypermetrical stress, but it can also occur between lines when one line ends in a masculine clausula and the next opens with a stressed syllable, as is the case in the final version of the stanza.

The five versions of the second line, the last line to be completed, are as follows:

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1. ра-ра-ри /ра ра ра/ ра ра/ра ра ра ра/       | (хп, 102) |
| 2. Может быть, летите ра ра ра ра ра ра.        | (хп, 102) |
| 3. может быть, летите ра-ра-ра-ра.              | (хп, 105) |
| 4. Может быть, летите . . . знаю вашу резвость! | (хп, 106) |
| 5. Пустота, — летите, в звезды врезываясь . . . | (хп, 107) |

The first words to appear in the second line are 'Может быть' and 'летите', corresponding to the first two syllable groups 'ра-ра-ри' and 'ра ра ра'.

Although ‘*Может быть*’, as a tightly knit word group, may realize the force of the hyphens, it does not realize the force of the far more distinctive and powerful ‘*ри*’ because it is not followed by an appreciable break and the stress probably falls on the first, not the third, syllable. Maiakovskii then leaves this line, with its second half untouched, until the whole of the rest of the stanza has been fixed; when he does return to it he defines the work to be done as a matter of finding a rhyme: ‘*остается только одна строка, не заполненная рифмой*’ (xii, 105). This definition of his task is reflected in the third version which, through the use of hyphens, seems to reduce the second half of the line to just one word. The stress is marked to match the feminine clausula of the fourth line, but the line is thereby reduced from twelve syllables to ten and probably also from four stresses/syllable groups to three. The further work on this line is explained almost exclusively in terms of considerations of sound. The fourth version returns the line to its original length in syllables, but the rhyming word ‘*резвость*’ is rejected as too obvious. So, moving from sound to sense, Maiakovskii looks for a more striking rhyme:

Взяв самые характерные звуки рифмуемого слова “резв”, повторяю множество раз про себя, прислушиваясь ко всем ассоциациям: “рез”, “резв”, “резерв”, “влез”, “врез”, “врезв”, “врезываясь”. Счастливая рифма найдена. Глагол — да еще торжественный. (xii, 106–07)

Having established this rhyming word which, hyperdactylic clausula notwithstanding, corresponds exactly to the final syllable group of the initial version, Maiakovskii then moves on to support it over the line as a whole:

Но вот беда, в слове “резвость”, хотя и не так характерно, как “резв”, но все же ясно звучат “т”, “сть”. Что с ними сделать? Надо ввести аналогичные буквы и в предыдущую строку.

Поэтому слово “может быть” заменяется словом “пустота”, избыточным и “т”, и “ст”, а для смягчения “т” оставляется “летите”, звучащее отчасти как “летитьте”. (xii, 107)

A more important (but unacknowledged and therefore perhaps subconscious) influence in the exchange of ‘*Пустота*’ for ‘*Может быть*’ could well be the structure of the rhythmical *gul*, because the force of the original ‘*ри*’, which has lain dormant in the intermediate versions, is at last realized. The first stress now falls on the third syllable and there is a clear break in the line’s flow before ‘*летите*’. The introduction of ‘*в звезды*’, on the other hand, is not commented upon, although it is an obvious example of support for the rhyme beyond the rhyming word itself. But the influence of the original *gul* is again evident too, for the correspondence between the syllable groups of the initial version and the words of the final version is now both complete and exact. The correspondence is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that work on this line is suspended after the second version and only taken up again when the other three lines have been finished (if there is felt to be some stage management in

this correspondence, then it still shows that this is precisely what Maiakovskii wished to demonstrate as characteristic of his creative process).

The process of finding words that fit, therefore, is not one of moving away from the structure of the original rhythmical *gul* as considerations of sound and sense take over, but one of returning to it; the final version of the stanza is closer to the initial version than all the intermediate ones. Maiakovskii may explain the transformation into words as dictated largely by considerations of sound and sense, but these factors never take over to direct the words away from the structure of the original *gul*; its influence may work in part on a subconscious level.<sup>7</sup> The word in Maiakovskii's verse is first and foremost metrico-rhythmical; it is first defined on the metrical level and receives articulation as sound and sense through this, its primary form. The rhythmical *gul* thus serves as the vocal and semantic chords of Maiakovskii's verse, or, in his own early definition of its ideal role: 'ритм, воскрешающий слова' (I, 301).<sup>8</sup>

### A Framework for the Semantic Interpretation of Verse Form

As the generative base of Maiakovskii's verse the rhythmical *gul* is already significant as a model of existence:

Откуда приходит этот основной гул-ритм — неизвестно. Для меня это всякое повторение во мне звука, шума, покачивания или даже вообще повторение каждого явления, которое я выделяю звуком. Ритм может принести и шум повторяющегося моря, и прислуга, которая ежеутренне хлопает дверью и, повторяясь, плетется, шлепая в моем сознании, и даже вращение земли, которое у меня, как в магазине наглядных пособий, карикатурно чередуется и связывается обязательно с посвистыванием раздуваемого ветра.

Старание организовать движение, организовать звуки вокруг себя, находя ихний характер, ихние особенности, это одна из главных постоянных поэтических работ — ритмические заготовки. Я не знаю, существует ли ритм вне меня или только во мне, скорей всего — во мне. (XII, 101)

The examples cited in the first paragraph imply that the scope of the model is both extensive and general; they may all be identified, though with varying degrees of certainty, in the works to be studied.

In its most general aspect the model can be related to the nature of verse itself. Verse form arises out of the imposition of certain specific constraints on language. The verse text is divided into relatively short segments, or lines. This division is set, and need not coincide with the syntactic division of the text; it is a division over and above that which the text receives as a text of the language.<sup>9</sup> The lines themselves are organized prosodically according to a system of versification. Verse is rhythmically organized as such, but the natural language is not, although it does have prosodic properties. In Russian these properties include the qualitative distinction of stressed and unstressed syllables, their

relative overall frequency, certain tendencies in their arrangement, and so on. In this respect the imposition of verse form on language is the imposition of an extra level of order on the properties of the language. Verse form, therefore, involves a dialectic, an interplay between different degrees and kinds of order. In this way verse form can correspond to a dialectic model of existence, as is the case in the texts to be studied.<sup>10</sup>

In Maiakovskii's verse the primary constraint of verse form — the division into metrical lines — is almost invariably marked by rhyme; rhyme is the most constant feature of his verse (Shtokmar even defined Maiakovskii's verse system as 'rhyming').<sup>11</sup> Unrhymed lines are therefore particularly anomalous and may signify the breakdown of verse form itself (into 'prose'), as Maiakovskii himself indicates in 'Kak delat' stikhi': 'без рифмы (понимая рифму широко) стих рассыплется' (XII, 105). This key role of rhyme is reinforced by the maintenance of a standard stanza form or 'brick' (XII, 107), the abab quatrain, throughout nearly all of his work. In his later verse, in *Pro eto*, for example, the couplet comes to play a more important, though still minor, role, but other stanza forms stand out as unusual and may have a special, local function.

After his earliest, syllabo-tonic period Maiakovskii moves into an accentual verse in which the division into metrical lines is not generally consolidated into a system of fixed measures, although his first major work, the *Tragedy*, is still transitional in this respect.<sup>12</sup> In the fluid structure of this verse the organization according to line length is manifested instead in the leading role of four-stress lines and the major, but subsidiary, role of three-stress lines (56.5% and 35.2% respectively in *Oblako v shtanakh* and 63.6% and 24.1% respectively in *Fleita-pozvonochnik*).<sup>13</sup> Against this background both shorter and longer lines are perceived as deviations from the norm, and so may acquire a compositional or other significance accordingly. The significance of short (one-stress and two-stress) lines is compounded, in metrical context, by the fact that they may involve a more radical breakdown of form than simply deviation from the norm. One-stress lines have no internal structure and so, inasmuch as the constraint of rhythmical organization primarily governs the stem, they effectively break this constraint; two-stress lines, on the other hand, have a more uncertain status in that they do have a minimal internal structure but yet cannot by themselves develop a rhythmical inertia in the stem, since this requires two or more commensurable intervals. The significance of long lines may also be compounded in a different, but complementary, way. In theory no precise limit can be set on the length of the line; but in practice, beyond a certain length, which for classical Russian verse Tomashevskii put at five to six feet,<sup>14</sup> the structure of the verse becomes less and less clearly defined. In the hexameter and other long measures a caesura, which divides the line into two and so facilitates perception of its structure, is normal or obligatory, but in Maiakovskii's accentual verse, in the absence of such compensatory factors as a division

into half-lines, a fixed line length, or a regular rhythm, rhythmical organization may almost dissolve in long lines. Finally, the organization of this verse according to line length (measure) also covers the arrangement of lines in the stanza. In the standard quatrain four-stress (and five-stress) lines normally occupy first and third positions, while three-stress (and shorter) lines occupy fourth and second positions (compare the order of work (1, 3, 4, 2) on the opening stanza of ‘Sergeiu Eseninu’); a different arrangement, such as a 4434 or 3444 stress scheme or even the promotion of a short line to the head of the stanza, is perceived as more or less anomalous.

In the middle of Maiakovskii’s career the fluid structure of his early accentual verse gradually consolidates and his verse returns to a system of generally discrete and fixed measures, among which four-ictus verse plays the leading role (a consolidation of the role of four-stress lines). This return to a system of discrete measures brings the associative semantic function far more into play. Maiakovskii himself defines some associations of measures in ‘Как delat’ stikhi’, both specific: ‘4-стопный амфибрахий, придуманный для шопотка’ (XII, 84); and more general: ‘Я просто убежден для себя, что для героических или величественных передач надо брать длинные размеры с большим количеством слогов, а для веселых — короткие’ (XII, 102). Since the particular associations relevant to a given text are identified by the words, Maiakovskii’s account of the stage at which the measure defines itself applies equally to the stage at which the associations of the measure define themselves: ‘Размер получается у меня покрытием этого ритмического гула словами, словами, выдвигаемыми целевой установкой’ (XII, 102).

Finally, one of the physical conditions cited by Maiakovskii as necessary for the creation of verse can be related to a possible iconic significance of line length organization as a model of the organization of space: ‘Перо, карандаш, пишущая машинка, . . . жилплощадь определенного количества шагов, которые нужно делать для работы’ (XII, 87). A free measure could correspond to the removal of barriers in space, and a fixed measure to its more rigid organization with extended or contracted boundaries (long lines or short lines). This iconic significance of measure is explored most fully in *Chelovek*, while another possibility, the iconic association of measure with size, number, or degree, though found in the works to be studied, is explored most fully in *150000000* (as befits the title) where long lines and large numbers go together.

In Maiakovskii’s accentual verse the basic unit is the stressed word or group of words united under one stress, and syllabo-tonic metre proper is absent.<sup>15</sup> In these circumstances the norms of the language, subject to modification or stylization according to the conventions of verse, may serve as a model of rhythmical regularity.<sup>16</sup> In Russian the overall ratio of stresses to syllables is around 1:2.7 or 1:2.8, although it varies according to the discourse model chosen.<sup>17</sup> This theoretical or ‘natural’ inertia of Russian has no exact artificial

equivalent, but it is nevertheless close to ternary metre, while *dol'nik* metre may approximate it more broadly.<sup>18</sup> According to the conventions of Russian verse ternary metre is perceived as more regular than *dol'nik* metre (and historically the *dol'nik* arose on a ternary base), so the model of rhythmical regularity in Maiakovskii's accentual verse is a ternary inertia.

The significance of any rhythmical tendency can then be determined, still subject to modification or stylization according to the conventions of verse, by the way in which it organizes the language, or, in Maiakovskii's actual creative practice, by the way in which it makes the language 'walk' (further metaphorical usage of this kind derives from this creative practice): 'Я хожу, . . . то укорачиваю шаг, чтоб не мешать мычанию, то помывчиваю быстрее в такт шагам' (xii, 100). A ternary rhythmical tendency of two syllables between stresses, as the ideal walking pace of the language, expresses order and inertia, while a binary rhythmical tendency of one syllable between stresses, as a contraction of the language's rhythmical stride, expresses constraint.<sup>19</sup> A *dol'nik* rhythm of one or two syllables between stresses can approach binary rhythm, but more normally it approaches ternary rhythm and serves as a broader model of regularity and so also, though more loosely, expresses order and inertia. Contrasting or opposing values are expressed by the looser rhythms, *taktovik* (one to three syllables between stresses) and accentual (zero to four or more syllables between stresses). In a process which accompanies the similar consolidation into discrete measures, metres return or redefine themselves, as it were, in Maiakovskii's verse through the consolidation of certain rhythmical tendencies into fixed, or ideal, rhythmical types.<sup>20</sup> A metre's significance, which is to be distinguished from meaning conveyed through associations, is then determined in exactly the same way as that of the rhythmical tendency out of which it evolves, while rhythmical variations articulate meaning through the way in which they realize the metre. Thus, as on the level of measure, the semantic structure of the metrico-rhythmical level corresponds precisely to its formal structure.

The examples Maiakovskii gives of the rhythmical *gul* as a model of existence (the servant, the earth's rotation, and so on) all have a kinetic aspect which is then highlighted, together with the organization of sound, as the basis of a rhythmical perception of existence: 'Старание организовать движение, организовать звуки вокруг себя, . . . одна из главных поэтических работ — ритмические заготовки' (xii, 101). These two features, rhythm as the organization of movement (and time)<sup>21</sup> and rhythm as the organization (or articulation) of sound, are central to the meaning of Maiakovskii's verse.

The interaction of language norms and verse conventions is also evident in the anacrusis and clausula. In the accentual verse of *Oblako v shtanakh* and *Fleita-pozvonochnik* zero, monosyllabic, and disyllabic anacrusis stand in a ratio of 38:47:13 compared with a theoretical ratio (according to Gasparov) of 29:43:23.

Commenting on this greater relative frequency of zero anacrusis, Gasparov suggests that Maiakovskii tries to reach the first stress as soon as possible in order to set the rhythm in motion.<sup>22</sup> Compositional variations in the anacrusis tend to follow the rhythm, which is as one would expect since anacrusis and rhythmical form are closely related. In Maiakovskii's *dol'nik* the anacrusis may still vary, but more commonly there is a dominant tendency (usually monosyllabic, amphibrachic) or the anacrusis is even fixed (as in classical verse) and so it participates in defining the measure and associations. Where there is a dominant monosyllabic anacrusis, as in *Liubliu* and *Pro eto*, the rhythmical quickening of a zero anacrusis may have a compositional role signalling a climax.

In the accentual verse of *Oblako v shtanakh* and *Fleita-pozvonochnik* masculine, feminine, and dactylic clausulae stand in a ratio of 27 : 44 : 27 compared with a theoretical ratio (according to Gasparov) of 34:44:17, a compensatory preference for longer clausulae which, Gasparov suggests, gives Maiakovskii more rhyming space; even hyperdactylic clausulae are not altogether rare. Maiakovskii develops heterosyllabic rhyme, to the extent that about 15% of rhymes in his accentual verse and *dol'nik* may be of this type; generally he combines feminine and dactylic clausulae, while heterosyllabic rhyme combining masculine and feminine clausulae is rare, and therefore more marked. He also develops rhyme with a (heavy) hypermetrical stress in the clausula, although this type can have a rather specialized function in association with iambic metre; heterotonic rhyme, however, is very rare. In Maiakovskii's later verse, especially in the context of fixed measures, the clausula (like the anacrusis) comes more under the sway of the conventions of Russian verse and masculine clausulae reassert themselves at the expense of dactylic ones.<sup>23</sup> Fixed clausula patterns are still not the rule, but through the traditional link of rhyme scheme and metrico-stanzaic types the clausula may become involved in the articulation of meaning through associations; the clausula may also assist in the demarcation or correlation of measures. In the architectonics of the texts, however, the clausula and clausula pattern generally play a relatively neutral role, but they may complement trends in other elements or, more interestingly, even contrast with those trends; otherwise, in accordance with the marginal metrical role of clausula, the compositional (as opposed to structural) significance of rhyme in its metrical aspect is largely determined in local context. The phonological aspect of rhyme, which is of course very prominent in Maiakovskii's verse, does not fall within the scope of this study, nor, more generally, does the sound texture of the verse.

### **The Role of the Rhythmical *gul* in Relation to the Basic Semiotic Premise of Futurism**

The basic semiotic premise upon which Futurism is founded has been defined by Smirnov as follows:

Футуризм сообщил смыслу свойство вещи, материализовал семантику художественного знака, уравнивал идеологическую среду с эмпирической. По этим причинам переделка вещей для Маяковского есть ничто иное, как смена имен, обновляющая объекты, с которыми срослись единицы выражения . . . . Художественный смысл, это не то, что артикулируется, а то, как артикулируется, сам звуковой, графический, или мимико-жестикуляционный акт. Внешняя, материальная сторона знака отождествляется с его идеальным аспектом.<sup>24</sup>

This basic premise is capable of explaining many elements of the poetic systems of Futurism in general and its individual poets, Maiakovskii included, in particular. It can be related to the oft-noted Futurist orientation towards the iconic arts of painting and cinema, the conception of art as the continuation of life and vice versa, the organization of space and time and cause and effect, the typical reordering of syntactic, morphological, or phonetic units (inversion, metathesis, anagrams), and so on; it can even be related to the Futurists' generic concept of man.<sup>25</sup>

Smirnov and others have identified and illustrated many or all of these features in Maiakovskii's work, but the basic premise from which they derive has never been properly shown to apply in his verse. On the contrary, ever since Matiushin's complaint (referring to the *Tragedy*) that Maiakovskii 'нигде не отрывает слово от смысла, не пользуется самоценным звуком слова',<sup>26</sup> there has been a general tendency to oppose his poetic practice to that of the so-called *zaumniki*, Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, if not to dissociate him from Futurism altogether; the Futurist principle of the '*slovo kak takovoe*' (the 'word as such') or the '*samovitoe slovo*' (the 'self-sufficient word') is generally considered to apply only marginally, if at all, in his verse. Pomorska, for example, while recognizing that Maiakovskii 'utilised Futurist technique', places him 'at the opposite pole from the "transrational" poets' and emphasizes that 'he implements the program of "the word at liberty" mostly in the structure of rhyme', citing in particular the early experimental rhyme poems 'Utro' and 'Iz ulitsy v ulitsu'.<sup>27</sup> Smirnov, while showing that the basic premise of Futurism can lead to an overcoming, reordering, or dissolution of language's structure, suggests that in Maiakovskii's verse only superficial syntactic structures are dissolved, a feature which Vinokur characterized as 'своеобразное явление преодоления синтаксиса и высвобождения семантики из связи формальных отношений'.<sup>28</sup> This weakening of syntax, however, can be related to the pre-eminence of the rhythmical *gul*, because in their primary form words are already both demarcated and metrically linked; in effect, the metrical level may partially supplant the role of syntax.<sup>29</sup> Even Jakobson, while he asserts Maiakovskii's technical achievement in the rhythmical liberation of the word, still opposes this to Khlebnikov's achievements in the field of semantics and word formation:

Маяковский, подписавший в 1912 г. прошумевшую декларацию освобождения поэтического слова, не освобождает слова от традиционной семантики и традиционной формы словообразования подобно Хлебникову, но он освобождает его от Прокрустова ложа ритмической инерции силлабо-тонического стиха.<sup>30</sup>

But, as both stated and demonstrated in 'Kak delat' stikhi', the form of Maiakovskii's verse has more than this merely technical significance. The rhythmical *gul* is the generative base of his verse; the word is first defined on the metrical level and receives articulation as sound and sense through this, its primary, material form. The 'word as such' or the 'self-sufficient word' is relevant to Maiakovskii as well as to Khlebnikov or Kruchenykh, only it takes metrical, not morphological or phonological, form.<sup>31</sup> In Maiakovskii's verse the basic semiotic premise of Futurism finds its application in the role of the rhythmical *gul*.