

ANDREA HACKER

## Khlebnikovian Time: Between H.G. Wells and Kalachakra

In October 1904, at the peak of the Russo – Japanese war, the Russian Baltic fleet embarked on a colossal journey from St. Petersburg around Africa, across the Indian Ocean, and up the Yellow Sea to meet their Japanese enemies in what became one of the bloodiest clashes in Russian maritime history: the sea battle at Tsushima in May 1905. 21 Russian ships sank, and more than 4300 Russian sailors died in a single day.

Combined with the terrible losses the Russian infantry had suffered at the battle of Mukden in Northern China two month before, losing this battle meant that the Russian campaign in the Far East was practically over. The great empire was defeated.<sup>1</sup>

The news of Tsushima quickly reached Russia's major cities, and among the many that reacted in disbelief and horror to the event was a young aspiring poet, Velimir Khlebnikov. Unlike anyone else, however, Khlebnikov decided that day to find the laws of time according to which events unfold, particularly those of a belligerent nature.<sup>2</sup>

It is the aim of this essay to demonstrate how Khlebnikov's quest and his resulting cosmological writings bear witness to a unique blend of Eastern and Western thought, and how Khlebnikov's notion of time and vision of the future merged Asian and European elements, like his country. The essay begins by introducing Khlebnikov's principal ideas on time and briefly contextualising them within Russian modernism. The two following sections demonstrate how Khlebnikov's ideas on time are indebted to East and West by investigating their links first to the works and ideas of Herbert G. Wells, and second to Kalachakra Tantra of Tibetan Buddhism. The concluding, third section briefly evaluates how Khlebnikov's synthesis of these notions supplements his idea of a global future.

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1 Jeff Leser, ed., *The Russo-Japanese War Research Society* (2002). <http://www.russojapanesewar.com/tsushima.html>.

2 Velimir Khlebnikov, *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov. Volume 1. Letters and Theoretical Writings* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), pp. 148, 171.