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From a Space out of Time: Russian Poetry and Aesthetic Ideology after the Soviet Union

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FROM A SPACE OUT OF TIME: RUSSIAN POETRY AND AESTHETIC IDEOLOGY AFTER THE SOVIET UNION

David Hock

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Abstract

This dissertation, “From a Space out of Time: Russian Poetry and Aesthetic Ideology after the Soviet Union,” considers four examples of the first post-Soviet generation of Russian poets (born roughly 1965 – 1975) against the backdrop of the aesthetics and poetic practices of their immediate predecessors in the late Soviet underground.

In contrast to the majority of current scholarship in this area of research, this book makes no effort to (re-)periodize or (re-)contextualize the experimental poetics it treats in a holistic or programmatic way (e.g., as “postmodern,” “neomodern,” “avant-garde,” etc.) but rather looks at them both as monads and comparatively in order to identify how they rearrange common categories of aesthetic production and ontological value. The goal is to grope for an essential sense of what *happens* to poetry in the aporia separating the “late Soviet” from the “post-Soviet” by positing points of continuity and rupture between what shall be referred to as hypothetical “aesthetic ideologies” that inform and support the prevailing poetic strategies of each. As such, it grounds its methodology in close reading and looks at two practices of the late Soviet period – Dmitrii Prigov and Arkadii Dragomoshchenko – and four practices of the post-Soviet period spanning the 1990s – 2010s: Aleksandr Skidan, Kirill Medvedev, Anna Glazova, and Nika Skandiaka.

Finally, much of the book’s theoretical apparatus is based upon readings of Aristotle through Martin Heidegger, and some familiarity with these terms might be useful to the reader, although they are simplified and explained for use as a heuristic.

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Preface on Method

Although this book was undertaken as early as 2014 and therefore responds primarily to poetry written before that date, it was almost entirely written or re-written in the period of 2019 - 2020, in large part thanks to the generosity of Henrieke Stahl and the DFG Research Group "Lyrik in Transition," which provided me with the time and means to complete it, and the faculty of Princeton University, in particular my advisor, Michael Wachtel, who graciously allowed me to submit it.

Its thesis is both foolishly ambitious and foolishly simple. It is that the fall of the Soviet Union was accompanied by a rapid and profound transformation of cultural forms, including the language of poetry, and that this transformation was occasioned not only by the assimilation of new freedoms, new discourses (including its own suppressed canon),[1] and new technologies (most significantly, the internet)[2] but also by a simultaneous ideological shift in the thinking of art, ontology, and history. That is, new forms were the product not only of new tools and materials but of new ideas – new ways of perceiving, ordering, and valuing things. How best to trace the *development* of this transformation is where things become methodologically difficult, inasmuch as 1) first, one must establish what hypothetically constitutes the ideological "before"

[1] One of the best indices of the direction(s) of Russian literary culture in the 1990s was, for instance, its editorial practices and the curation of anthologies, to which the entire canon of censored authors was open for the first time. This, combined with the sudden influx of the history, philosophy, and literature of the Western 20th century in translation, produced a bizarre anthropological anomaly: a kind of "time glut" akin to the effects of rapid colonization but not limited to external influence and content. So strange is it that it could only have been artificially induced by the sudden opening of a closed, pre-digital society – akin to breaking a dam on history. On the question of anthologies, see, for instance: Hodgson, Katherine. "Two Post-Soviet Anthologies of the 1990s and the Russian 20th-Century Poetry Canon." *The Slavonic and East European Review,* Vol. 90, No. 4 (October, 2012). 642-670.

[2] The historical coincidence of the birth of the digital age with the collapse of the Soviet Union – no less fascinating in that it is arbitrary or only indirectly correlated (the internet was originally a U.S. Cold War technology) – set up 1990s - 2000s Russia for two profound and simultaneous revolutions, the eventual entanglement of which would be the subject for a different and more ambitious book in the field of history or cultural anthropology.

and the ideological "after" and 2) there is no simple path from A to B, particularly, again, for a culture that was actively rediscovering its own history in order to reconstitute itself in the present.

The boundary of perestroika (1985 - 1991) or the dissolution of the USSR (1988 – 1991; officially, December 25, 1991) is in some sense arbitrary. Chronology is nothing but the "tasteless seed" ["des Geschmacks entratende Samen"][3] contained by the fruits of history, says Walter Benjamin; and nothing happens overnight – although, in 1990s Russia, some things came damn close. Moreover, the political dissolution of the USSR was itself so sudden and seemingly unnecessary that it had something more like the effect of a rogue asteroid impact than the gradual melting of an icecap. This, I would argue, is the place to start: in the acknowledgment that the transformations of this period – aesthetic, political, cultural – are the effects of violence and rupture without a clear original teleology. Paradoxically, they develop their own historical causes retroactively – which is to say, ideologically. Their evolution begins with a hole – the outline of a crater – at the center.

If we think of that 'crater' as an aporia separating one way of thinking art, history, and ontology from another, we might be able to hypothesize the general outline of what came before and after it in order to place them in dialogue. For that reason, I will increasingly refer to what I am calling 'aesthetic ideologies' as hypothetical complexes of aesthetic, ontological, and historical thought structures underwriting a given set of heterogenous poetic practices being used in a given context and at a given time. As such, the prevailing aesthetic ideology of a given period is not necessarily tethered to it nor exclusive to it – history, and, in particular, art or

[3] Benjamin, Walter. Thesis XVII von „Über den Begriff der Geschichte". *Gesammelte Werke.* Ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser and Rolf Tiedemann, vol. I/2. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991. 706.

symbolic history, is a series of returns, and time itself is heterogenous. My assertion will simply be that certain structures of thought tend to dominate the discursive field of a given period. Thus, a late Soviet 'aesthetic ideology' may have certain features in common with a post-Soviet 'aesthetic ideology' or other features that seem to be dialectically or efficiently related to it. However, because I am approaching the concept of aesthetic ideology through the poetic practices that I will be reading and believe that it can only be hypothesized *from what is given in the articulation of the text* – which is why I call it 'aesthetic' – I will be treating each aesthetic ideology essentially as a monad and leaving speculation as to its root contextual cause and determinate evolution fairly agnostic except in my overall conclusions. The purpose is to place these monads in dialogue with each other – to let them breathe and speak with each other about common practices, common motivations, common terrors, common goals.

Some of the best books currently available on the subject of late Soviet and contemporary (post-Soviet) Russian poetry fall into precisely this trap set in the gap between formal theory and historicity: they attempt to provide a pre-existing context and a *rationale* for the aesthetic practices of these periods. For the first wave of scholarship approaching late Soviet underground art and poetry, primarily written by émigrés such as Mikhail Epstein, Mikhail Iampol'skii, Boris Groys, and others, this rationale was outward- and forward-looking, much like the life-trajectory of these scholars themselves: their goal was to *integrate* the work of the late Soviet underground with the pre-existing meta-historical narratives of Western postmodernism. In contrast, scholarship written on and by the succeeding generation of post-Soviet poets tends to be inward- and backward-looking: it seeks to re-integrate Soviet work with the corpus of Russian literature before and after the Soviet Union in order to recuperate and make amends with its immediate past. The result of both of these approaches has been a smorgasbord of strong claims about the

ideological *content* of poetic practices and works. For example, Aleksandr Zhitenev's incredibly valuable *The Poetry of Neo-Modernism* [*Поэзия неомодернизма*][4] (2012), as its title suggests, stages a continuity between Silver Age poetics and those practiced in the 1960s-2000s, as if modernism had never died (and, more alarmingly, the political history surrounding it had never happened) but merely changed hats. Marijeta Bozovic's forthcoming *Avant-Garde Post-: Radical Poetics after the Soviet Union* (2021),[5] which I was fortunate enough to consult with the author's permission, is, in contrast, a convincing and more focused attempt to draw today's experimental poetics into the fold of the historical (mostly Russian/Soviet) avant-garde. Still other studies, taking their cue from the 'Old Guard' of émigré scholarship and usually focused on continuations of conceptualism, will label these phenomena as quintessentially "postmodern." It is not at all impossible for today's poetry to be all of these things simultaneously or in part: modernist, avant-garde, postmodern, etc. The field of Russian poetry, as we shall see, has become *incredibly* porous and diverse, and we would do well to approach it with a corresponding pluralism and acknowledgement of apparent contradiction and pastiche. The problem is simply that, by very dint of that pluralism and heterogeneity, judgments of its content according to pre-existing aesthetic and historical programs would seem to tell us very little that couldn't be said otherwise.

My course has therefore been to start with close reading and look at specific works by six poets – two primarily late Soviet and four post-Soviet – while scanning for certain features of

[4] See Zhitenev, Aleksandr A. *Poeziia neomodernisma.* St. Petersburg: Inapress, 2012.
[5]See Bozovic, Marijeta. *Avant-Garde Post-: Radical Poetics after the Soviet Union*. Forthcoming, 2021. The introduction and several chapters were sent to me for review by the author in late 2019. Bozovic's book is structured similarly to this one in that she focuses on close readings of individual poets one "case study" at a time and often singles out similar players (e.g., Kirill Medvedev). Although these books were written independently of each other, our collaborations with each other in the past have surely contributed to our shared interests – particularly in specific poets. However, I do not believe that readers will find much that overlaps in the treatment of the material between Bozovic's book and this one. Our theoretical preoccupations and vocabularies differ significantly, and I confess that Marijeta's lucid, belletristic prose is a mode of communicating that I can only dream of.

their poetic practices that belie underlying aesthetic ideologies or, if you like, artistic and philosophical worldviews. Such features might include dominant tropes, temporalities, or accompanying aesthetic practices (performance, sculpture, photography, activism, scholarship), as well as motivating ideological or philosophical considerations.

The cornerstone of this book's strategy – and, admittedly, its greatest risk or frailty – is the question of exemplarity. One of the strengths of the existing approaches that I mentioned above – particularly Zhitenev's *Поэзия неомодернизма* – is their scope and their ability to assimilate an enormous variety of material into their central premise. At times, that book reads almost like a concordance of Silver Age and contemporary work and is therefore not only extremely expansive but extremely useful as a reference. This book will not be so useful to the reader in search of citable material – or at least not in the same way. In all, I will be reading five poems and one trans-textual 'figure' (Prigov's "Militsaner"), which, with the exception of the latter, are available in the Appendix. Selection not only of the poets but of poems was therefore challenging and highly motivated, and I will attempt to explain it below.

The selection of exemplary late Soviet unofficial poets was easier both because they are already well-represented in scholarship and because the passage of time allows history to come into focus. My inclusion of Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (1940 – 2007) and Arkadii Trofimovich Dragomoshchenko (1946 – 2012) was intuitive but also calculated according to two primary considerations: 1) an attempt to represent a diversity of style and 2) their continued influence and survival on the bookshelves of today's poets and readers. There is much that the two have in common – even the magical year 1978, in which they both began producing their mature work in earnest – however, they also arguably represent two antipodes of late Soviet unofficial poetics and even of basic aesthetic instincts. Prigov, a Moscow-based sculptor by

training with absolutely no interest in learning foreign languages or reading foreign poetries, produced in massive serial volume and pushed textual performativity and the subject-less discursive horizon of conceptualism to its point of rupture; Dragomoshchenko, a dedicated amateur photographer from St. Petersburg and a modernist by taste, is most well-known for his transcultural interest in the American poetic tradition – old and new – and his revision of lyric voice and subjectivity, digging into the performative fiction of the self rather than digging out. Despite this apparent contrast in style and articulation, however, both of them have thrived in the discursive environment of post-Soviet poetics – even at the end of their own lifetimes – which begs the obvious question: *why*? Without fulling attempting to answer that question, I have here at least attempted to treat it as historical fact and answer *how* by considering which common and essential features of these two poets' approach to the aesthetic act could possibly constitute a coherent and shared ideology of their time that was able to adapt and remain relevant (even oppressively so) for the succeeding generation.

Assembling an adequate ensemble of post-Soviet poets was more difficult and is, perhaps, impossible at the moment. Acknowledging this impossibility, I decided to embrace a specific theoretical fiction and to tell a specific story: the story of an evolving post-Soviet poetic subject through key moments of its development, each leading to the next. This fictive model of evolution, I would argue, which ultimately anthropomorphizes the field of 'the literary' as if it were itself an evolving organism or aesthetic/authorial subject, is a necessary fiction and the only meaningful one in that every evolution in culture is structured as a *narrative* that mediates context and causation. It is an approach that is also inspired by two works in particular, both of which is a 'failure' in its own way: one is Juilia Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* [*La*

Révolution du langage poétique] (1974, trans. 1985)[6], which treats the whole of the historical avant-garde as if it were an emergent psychoanalytic subject, and the other is Iurii Tynianov's study, "The Interlude" [«Промежуток»] (1924), which traces the evolving poetics of his own time from one poet to another, and to which I will return in my conclusions.[7] Neither work is able to firmly delimit the bounds of its object – in the stories they tell, they do not "finalize" [«завершить»] their heroes, as Bakhtin would say. However, they may not wish to do so, and what they do provide is incredible insight – albeit 'fictive' – into what their hero, poetic language, can *do.*

Similarly, I will treat each instance of post-Soviet authorship that I consider as a specific textual practice that may be read alone, as a monad, or in combination with the others (their arrangement is loosely chronological but also theoretically intentional) in order to sketch the narrative of an evolving reaction to what I believe are the same motivating forces, anxieties, and compounded impasses. That is to say that I consider them of a single, evolving *literary* 'generation,' the first to exist fairly independently of the Soviet Union, which may or may not correspond to the same thing sociologically. Of the four poets I have selected, the oldest, Aleksandr Skidan, b. 1965, is separated by thirteen years of age from the youngest, "Nika Skandiaka," b. 1978. They were all roughly between the ages of 10 – 25 when the Soviet Union collapsed and between the ages of 20 – 35 when Putin ascended to power ten years later. One (Skandiaka) emigrated from the USSR at an early age and another (Glazova) later in life. They are all roughly one to one-and-a-half biological generations younger than Prigov and Dragomoshchenko.

[6] Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language.* Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia UP, 1985.
[7] Tynianov, Iu. N. "Promezhutok." *Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino.* M: Nauka, 1977.

This "transitional generation" has, moreover, reached maturity and is already being displaced by another, making it a more or less bounded object for study. I had thought, for instance, of including Galina Rymbu (b. 1990), but her place in a different generation is apparent not only chronologically but, more importantly, in her *poetics.* Her early work, such as *Жизнь в пространстве* [*Life in Space*] (2018) reads very much like the gnomic, metaphysical poetry of Anna Glazova, albeit in a more erotic, tactile language and with more sudden and jagged edges. By 2020, in contrast, she self-published the poem «Моя вагина» ["My Vagina"] on Facebook to enormous scandal and controversy – in part, because the latter poem is no longer metaphysically vague at all but incredibly forceful and bluntly discursive in the mode of someone like Kirill Medvedev. It yells to a crowd (often in all caps) rather than cryptically whispers to its reader in private. These are large generalizations and only meant as heuristic comparisons, but Rymbu's leap in style signals two things – one quantitative and one qualitative – that already constitute an essential departure from the past: 1) the fact of such intense variation occurring at all, which was highly uncommon to the first generation of post-Soviet poets, who tended to refine a single style and practice it to exhaustion and 2) in that it shatters a prominent and taboo gender divide by which the men of the transitional generation tend to "write in one way" (indeed, quite phallically, like Medvedev) and the women tend to "write in another" (indeed, with more reliance upon linguistic and conceptual negativity, like Glazova). The fact that Rymbu not only transgresses but *transverses* this unspoken divide in the matter of a few years is more evidence not only of her personal talent and versatility but of her belonging to a distinct, younger generation of poets for whom such divisions and self-concepts are not nearly as ingrained or (self-)enforced.

Finally, I would like to point out that, in my analysis, I rely in part on a critical vocabulary that is derived from Greek terms and categories – primarily as used by Aristotle. I did

this for several reasons. First, the critical terminology of my own era seems to me inadequate to the problem: this is the gap I mentioned above between 'theory,' which treats its objects as transcendental or ontological phenomena (even in order to reject them as such), and naïve historicist narratives, which more often end in the periodization of form – "modernist," "avant-garde," "postmodern," etc., which take on a descriptive life of their own – than in the formalization of a set of concepts belonging to a historical period. The use of terms like τέχνη (techne) and πρᾶξις (praxis) allow me to arrange and rearrange more or less stable concepts belonging to aesthetics in order to show their *shifting relations* and configurations in time and in given historical practices: i.e., the configurations of a given 'ideology.' This is because, second, I am more concerned here with questions of *how* than questions of *why*. Although I am using the term 'aesthetic ideology' – even in my title – I do not intend a mode of scholarship that retrospectively asks after its objects' historical mission or gifts them with a raison d'être. In some cases, such as that of conceptualism and its relation to the Soviet State, that historical mission was and is already amply clear – to the point of being little more than a pretext for its aesthetic articulation, which continues to this day. Rather, I am taking it as my premise that such 'ideologies' – complexes of thought and belief – exist as a matter of fact and asking after how they are articulated and how they aesthetically function and come into being, which is what the text can reveal to us. Lastly, it seems to me – and this remains highly speculative – that the passage from what I am calling late Soviet aesthetic ideology into post-Soviet aesthetic ideology did, in fact, constitute a passage out of what Heidegger would call positivist, 'ontic' thinking (artificially reenforced by the State) and *into ontology per se*, which makes the use of Greek terms – which struggled to capture precisely this post-Socratic revolution in their own time – all the more appropriate and useful. It also makes the radical transformation of aesthetics and

ideology punctuated by the fall of the Soviet Union – as well as the plight of everyone involved – a subject that should continue to provoke the fascination and empathy of scholars, artists, and historians of every persuasion and present concern.

PART I

Technics and Ontology in Late Soviet Poetry: Two Signatures [ДАП] // [АТД]

I. Introduction

The Strange Positivism of the "Literocentric" Generation

Was ist also Wahrheit? Ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen… – Friedrich Nietzsche, *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne* (1873)

[What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms…][8]

It is at times the case that art seems to portend great change rather than reflect it – this is where the avant-garde gets its name. Before perestroika could have been imagined in the Soviet Union, the unofficial art milieu of the 1970s and 80s was such that it prefigured several simultaneous revolutions that would take place in the Russian 1990s and already 'post-figured' many of their aesthetic consequences. In retrospect, these bastard offspring of the late Soviet Union have become the natural heroes of the post-Soviet mythos, in which all of its children are made orphans. But the pre-perestroika revolution within unofficial art's own aesthetic attitudes was the purely Soviet product of its exclusionary status within the institutional dyad of official/unofficial prior to the State's collapse.

In *Paralogies* (2008), one of the best of many attempts to formulate the rules of this era, Mark Lipovetsky turns precisely to art's institutionality in order to frame unofficial art's functional goals. *As* unofficial, it was naturally a form of critique. However, according to Lipovetsky, the axis of its thinking was indigenously Soviet in that it attempted to renew and subvert literary production from a fundamentally *philological* position rather than what I would call the *ontological* position of the early 20th century modernists, which until then still had held

[8] Nietzsche, Friedrich. Werke in drei Bänden. Band 3. München: 1954. 314. Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense." *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings.* Trans. Ronald Speirs. Ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Spiers. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 146.

sway as the dominant (and only indigenous) framework for thinking about art outside the purview of socialist realism. That is, what might separate a Soviet conceptualist from a Russian Symbolist, Lipovetsky suggests, is a reaction not to logocentricism but to "*literocentrism*"[9]: to the (state) *institution* of art. This is not functionally different from a Western postmodern of the same era according to Peter Bürger's widely accepted theory of the historical and neo- avant-garde.[10] However, the context of the Soviet Union complicates the game being played with art's instiutionality by fixing its rules. For the avant-garde as an imaginary, 'pure' rather than historical phenomenon, 'meaning' is secondary to and derivative of institutionality, and this extends, as an epistemological worldview, into its legacy in postmodernity. But the Soviet artists and writers of the 1970s and 80s worked in a world in which the 'meaning' of any discourse was already *officially* ancillary to its institutional and ideological value. Art's purchase on truth was dictated by non-aesthetic principles by order of the State. If one were to 'deconstruct' it, one would not target signification or even dissemination, but *circulation.*[11]

A further consequence of this suppression of *aesthetic* ideology by its political counterpart is that the attitude of Soviet unofficial artists to modernism and the historical avant-garde was by no means adversarial as was explicitly the case for 1960s and 70s Western postmodernisms like the American Language Poets or German Neue Subjektivität. Rather,

[9] See Lipovetsky, Mark. *Paralogii: Transformatsii (post)modernisticheskogo diskursa v kul'ture 1920 – 2000-kh godov*. Moscow: NLO, 2008. 24-33.
[10] See Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde.* Trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
[11] Thus, in masterful studies of Prigov, Bridgitte Obermayr and Holt Meyer may claim that his *Onegin* and *Азбуки* series are not auto-referential (on the basis of a semiotics), but rather *"auto-philological*" in that they mirror the massive apparatus of the Soviet academy and reduplicate a text's passage through an institutional intermediary by replacing it with the bracketed author. See Meyer, Holt. "Unreadabilities and / as Autophilology in (Prigov's) Letter Work." In *Jenseits der Parodie*: Dmitrij A. Prigovs Werk als neues poetisches Paradigma. Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. Vienna: Wiener Slawistischer Almanach, Sonderband 81, 2013. 72-161. See also Obermayr, Brigitte. „P-rigov wie P-uskin. Zur Demystifikation der Autorfunktion bei Dmitrij A. Prigov" In *Mystifikation—Autorschraft—Original.* Ed. S. Frank, R. Lachmann, S. Sasse, S. Schahadat, C. Schramm. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2001. 283-311.

Soviet unofficial artists of the 1970s and 1980s tended to view their modernist forebears as fellow sufferers, whether censored or coopted by official speech. To paraphrase and extend the radical-sounding but widely accepted thesis of Boris Groys: the ontological assumptions of the historical (modernist) Soviet avant-garde *never left official speech* to begin with, *nor* were they questioned by the unofficial artists *politically* opposing it. If modernism was the age of "*l'absolu littéraire*" in Western Europe, this was also true in early 20th century Russia, including its early Soviet incarnation. The historical schism between the two occurred when, by the First Congress of Writers in 1934, Russian modernism's apotheosis in its historical avant-garde had been halted full stop as an errant phenomenon on the road to socialist realism, and it had begun to be archived, censored, and re-ordered according to the State's own ideological (and *philological*) mission.

That official act of ordering and the defiant counter-ordering of unofficial artists half a century later is what makes late Soviet 'postmodernity' so peculiar, exemplified, for instance by Rubenstein's library notecards or Bitov's *Пушкинский дом*. In both cases, the procedure of the State is repeated in order to bare its device – but the device is not aesthetic; it is primarily philological. Its limit case is not the negation of an aesthetic ideology that preceded it – socialist realism had done that forcibly and regressively already – but rather a *positive* counter-value: a "philological absolute," not displacing but existing alongside the official order as counter-ordering, counter-citation, counter-canonization, counter-curation.[12] Forces of *negation* –

[12] Thus, among unofficial writers in the 1970s and 80s, there is a surge in 'memoiristic' or autobiographical work that continues into the 1990s- 2000s as a dominant literary genre. On the one hand, this is a Soviet response to lyric (some, like Mikhail Epstein consider *Москва-Петушки* the opening text of this era); on the other, it is a more socially oriented archival gesture ("documentalist" per the terminology of Ilya Kukulin). However, in either case, an archaeology of the self and of society is undertaken in which authorial voice is either covertly or overtly positioned in resistance to the voice of another, in this case, the official word. See Kukulin, Ilia. "Documentalist Strategies in Contemporary Russian Poetry." *Russian Review*, Vol. 69, No. 4, 2010, pp. 585 -614. Kukulin is not specifically discussing this period, but rather focused on providing a genealogy of the "documentalism" of the 1990s – 2000s.

aesthetic forces – were pushed underground where they grew unquestioned and unimpeded out of *modernist* ontological assumptions about the truth at art's center. In other words, the ontology of modernism never left the content or ideology of late Soviet official discourse, nor its counterpart in unofficial art.

The question, rather, was who dictates, circulates, and *uses* the currency of this ontology. It is at this site of this battle for 'truth' in the work of art that I would most agree with Mark Lipovetsky's assertion that: "It is precisely the open presence of *violence* […] *directed above all at the reconstruction and deconstruction of the transcendental signified*, that distinguishes Russian postmodernism from its Western analogues."[13] Let us consider what he is saying and what this means. For the discourse of modernism, it could be argued that the "transcendental signified" was the 'truth' as such, or more precisely, the zero-content of art's reflection upon itself.[14] For the discourse of official art in the Soviet Union, the transcendental signified was the State, fully realized as Communism. In reaction to *both* of these, the discourse of unofficial, 'postmodern' art in the Soviet Union attempts – impossibly – to *synthesize* them as a truth that can only be circulated as debt and lack looking both forward and backward, and this is the heart of its constant discursive tension. The resulting 'irony' is of an alloy unique to the Soviet experiment. Unlike Western postmodernisms, it does not categorically *reject* (Freud:

[13] "Именно открытое присутствие *насилия в апории, нацеленной прежде всего на реконструкцию и деконструкцию трансцендентального означаемого,* отличает русский постмодернизм от западных аналогов." Lipovetsky, Mark. *Paralogii: Transformatsii (post)modernisticheskogo diskursa v kul'ture 1920 – 2000-kh godov*. Moscow: NLO, 2008. 56.

[14] This could be seen as an extension of Peter Bürger's category of the "purpose or function" of art (its content), which develops from the medieval "cult object" (sacral art) to "representational object" (courtly art) to "portrayal of bourgeois self-understanding" (bourgeois art) and then, using his own analysis, I would add "the interpretation of bourgeois life praxis" (realism) and finally "self-reflection" (aestheticism/modernism). It is at this zero-point of content that art was prepared to transgress its frame in the work of the avant-garde. See Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde.* Trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. 47-49.

Verneinung)[15] the "transcendental signified" – it 'merely' but more radically retains its place as a debt while *denying* (*Verleugnung*) and *disavowing* (*Verwerfung*) the possibility that any content can occupy it *in the present*, including the reflection of art upon itself (the 'truth' of modernism) and the living realization of official ideology (the 'truth' of socialist realism). Moreover, by playing these two systems against each other in a disjunctive synthesis, the effect is in fact a strange sort of vacillating *positivism* – a positivism *without content.*

Thus, contrary to Kierkegaard's definition of irony as "infinite absolute negativity," the *positive* valence of late Soviet 'irony' here – if one can call it that – is the essence of unofficial art's paradoxical relationship to truth value. Art negates nothing. Rather, it is both promoted above all signifiers and demoted to the clerical role of hovering 'over' (*meta*-), sorting 'after' (*meta*-) the fact, and pointing 'beyond' (*meta*-) in a relationship of debt to the place where a "transcendental signified" is *supposed to be*.

An important corollary to this 'hovering' is that it does not fully attach itself (*влипаться*) to the discourse it circulates. If it did so, it would encounter *itself* as the "transcendental signified," and that is a possibility among all others that it has categorically foreclosed (again, Freud: *Verwerfung*; Lacan: *forclusion*). I use these terms from psychoanalysis because this 'positivism without content' *resembles* the properly psychotic (more on this in Prigov below) in that it does not exclude and *therefore cannot not self-reflect.* This is programmatically apparent in Soviet unofficial art's most seized-upon interpretation, «мерцание» or "shimmering," which could be rendered as the image of *irony without negativity*, which is to say, irony that has lost its own formal essence – an allegory about irony, irony without irony, irony overcome by itself.

[15] See Freud, Sigmund. "Die Verneinung" (1925). In *GW*, Vol. 14, 11-15. My reasons for introducing psychoanalysis and using Freud's German to distinguish between these various terms will become clear in the course of my reading of Prigov.

The Technics of Truth: The Priority of ἀλήθεια and the Move from Voicedness to Vision

Unverborgenheit heißt *ά-λήθεια* — die Wahrheit, wie wir übersetzen, ist anfänglich, und d. h. wesen-haft nicht ein Charakter des menschlichen Erkennens und Aus-sagens, Wahrheit ist auch erst recht kein bloßer Wert oder eine »Idee«, nach deren Verwirklichung der Mensch — man weiß nicht recht weshalb — streben soll, sondern Wahrheit gehört als Sichentbergen zum Sein selbst: *φύσις* ist *ἀλήθεια,* Entbergung und deshalb *κρύπτεβῦαι φιλεϊ.* – Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen und Begriff des* φύσις*: Aristoteles' Physik B* (1939)

[Unhiddenness is called ἀ-λήθεια. Truth, as we translate this word, is of the origin, i.e., it is essentially not a characteristic of human knowing and asserting, and still less a value or an "idea" that human beings (although they really do not know why) are supposed to strive to realize. Rather, truth as self-revealing belongs to being itself. Φύσις is ἀλήθεια, unconcealing, and therefore κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ.][16]

In considering poetry among other arts of this period, however, there is a more specific aesthetic consequence of such a relationship between art and 'the truth of art.' One of the signatures of this transition, I would argue, is the priority of *vision* over *voice* as the mode by which poetry is tested and its truth is received, which is already implied in the visual metaphor and concept of «мерцание» [shimmering]. Again, this shift seems to mirror the symptomatic visuality, discursive deconstruction, and seriality characteristic of Western postmodernism, even (or especially) in poetry[17], but it is in fact the fruit of an altogether different (Soviet) tree.

The transition from voicedness to vision directs us back to the "transcendental signified" that was never rejected by Soviet postmoderns but rather disavowed as a stable content. The 'truth of art' *exists* for a Soviet postmodern but cannot be realized (*embodied* like a voice) or

[16] Heidegger, Martin. "Vom Wesen und Begriff des φύσις: Aristoteles' Physik B, 1." *Wegmarken*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976. 371. English: Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence and Concept of φύσις in Aristotle's *Physics* B, I." Trans. Thomas Sheehan. *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 230.
[17] For a masterful treatment of this phenomenon in American poetry of the period, see Marjorie Perloff's *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*, particularly the chapter "Against Transparency: From the Radiant Cluster to the Word as Such" for an account of the transition from modernism's elevation of the "transparent image" to postmodern attention to the visual difficulty of a text and of language that exceeds visual metaphor. I am indebted to her ideas throughout. See Perloff, Marjorie. *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

maintained; *nor* is it simply negated in the form of apophatic denial. It "shimmers." It is always in excess of itself. Of course, voice as *parole* may also be in excess of itself. This is the fantasy of the Romantic fragment formally (re-)presenting a phantom totality: *parole* is imagined as a synecdochal fragment of *langue*, which is why Cratylism is a "mimologics of truth," to quote Gérard Genette.[18]

However, *parole* will always exceed *langue*, escape its authority, and disguise itself as what it is not (yet).[19] The Soviet postmodern preference for *vision*, it turns out, is likewise the product of an epistemological bias running counter to this possibility of "telling the whole truth," and it is all the more marked in a culture that, by comparison with the West, was still *highly* "litero-centric" and even *oral* in its normative as well as subversive modes of transmission, not to mention socially and *juridically* reliant upon the authority of the *confession* as a forensic signature of guilt and authenticity. Running counter to this, that such a preference for visuality existed in unofficial Soviet poetry of the 1970s-80s is subject to some debate; I argue that it did. That this would constitute a reversal of the entire history of Russian literature up to this point is simply a fact.[20] Part of this is circumstantial. There can be no great unofficial orator – a "bard" or "stadium poet" like Evtushenko – by definition, in some sense institutionally excluding voicedness from unofficial work. But the counter-running *visuality* of the unofficial poet goes

[18] See Genette, Gérard. *Mimologics* (*Mimologiques: Voyage en Cratylie*). Trans. Thais E. Morgan. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
[19] See Newmark, Kevin. "On Parole: Legacies of Saussure, Blanchot, and Paulhan." *Irony on Occasion: From Schlegel and Kierkegaard to Derrida and de Man.* New York: Fordham UP, 2012.
[20] This is a grandiose-sounding claim, but it is also straightforward. Russian literature, which has its roots in the theology of Orthodoxy, on the one hand, and the Romantic on the other, almost unilaterally associates *human* truth with embodied voicedness, whereas vision, although aligned with both the poetic function as well as divine or iconic truth, is also aligned more often with its opposite: hubris and metaphysical errancy. This is what makes a poem like Tiutchev's «Silentium!» (1829) theologically as well as poetically radical (it approaches *God's* silence) and why Pushkin's «Пророк» (1826) daringly elevates the human, *artistic* truth of poets via its retelling of Isaiah, Chapter 6 by effectively transfiguring the poet-prophet's *voice* rather than his image. In contrast, in both poetry and prose, vision harbors the threat of the simulacrum, in the sense of ontological miscarriage and deception, particularly in tension with Russia's native theological tradition of the iconic. Thus, Gogol's most allegorically explicit portrayal of the Devil was a story about a *painting* run amok («Портрет», 1835/1842).

deeper: of the two writers of this period that I consider most subsequently influential, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (1940 - 2007) and Arkadii Trofimovich Dragomoshchenko (1946 - 2012), for instance, the former was trained as a sculptor and heavily indebted to practices of the visual arts,[21] while the latter was also a photographer, the final decade of whose work could be read as a prolonged and philosophically frustrated exploration of *ekphrasis*, with titles progressing (epistemologically regressing?) from *Описание* (2000), to *Безразличия* (2007), to, finally, *Тавтология* (2011).[22]

Moreover, since we are attempting to speak here of a holistic aesthetic ideology practiced by these artists, with its attendant categories of thinking such as 'truth,' 'reality' or 'being,' and 'the natural,' etc., which underwrite its attitudes and rules, it would be good to clearly distinguish those rules and the thinking behind them. Taking the example of the shift from voicedness to visuality, we might remark that a poetry of visuality belongs to a different class of technical devices, particularly if concerned with truth value and particularly as a verbal art, for which visuality itself is intrinsically a metaphor.

Heidegger's distinction between two different kinds of truth – each, I would argue, associated with either voicedness or visuality – might be instructive here. In sketching his own history of the Western concept of truth, Heidegger's lecture, "On the Essence of Truth" ["Vom

[21] Most commentators at some point are forced to come to grips with Prigov's reliance on visual and tactile art. A fascinating example is Mikhail Iampol'skii's comparison of Prigov's (self-)sculpting to the creation of a "golem" in his long study, «Высокий пародизм» (2010). See Iampol'skii, Mikhail. "Vysokii parodizm: filosofiia i poetika romana Dmitriia Aleksandrovicha Prigova *Zhivite v Moskve*." *Nekanonicheskii klassik: Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (1940 – 2007).* Ed. Mark Lipovetsky. M: NLO, 2010.

[22] Two excellent studies of Dragomoshchenko and visuality are, again, Mikhail Iampol'skii's «Поэтика касания» (2000), which serves as a preface to the volume *Описание* and Anna Glazova's "The Fluid Image in Arkady Dragomoshchenko's Poetics" (2011), which takes up a correspondence she herself had with Dragomoshchenko about language, memory, and the art of photography. For the former: Iampol'skii, Mikhail. "Poetika kasaniia." In Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii. *Opisanie.* SPb: Gumanitarnaia Akademiia, 2000. For the latter: Glazova, Anna. "The Fluid Image in Arkady Dragomoshchenko's Poetics." *SEEJ,* Vol. 55, No. 4 (2011).

Wesen der Wahrheit"] (1930)[23], primarily distinguishes between two 'historical' forms: revelatory truth, which he identifies with Greek ἀλήθεια [lit. "un-forgetting; un-forgetfulness"] and adequative truth, which he identifies with Latin *veritas* [lit. "properness; rightness; suitability"]. What becomes clear through Heidegger's careful choice of words in "On the Essence of Truth" is that ἀλήθεια – which he philosophically prefers – is aligned with visual revelation, whereas *veritas* is aligned with voice and rhetoric.[24] From Heidegger's lecture, the following table may be extrapolated, to which I have added two rows, "τέχνη" and "temporality," as regards the deployment of *veritas* and ἀλήθεια in verbal art:

	veritas	**ἀλήθεια**
Dominant Sense	voice (active)	vision ([active]/passive)
Conceptual Principle	*adequatio* (mimesis)	"unconcealment" (Ger. *die Unverborgenheit*)
τέχνη	trope (valence: metaphor)	none (valence: irony)
Temporality	present	non-present (past/future)
(Non-Case)	non-correspondence	"errancy" (Ger. *irren;* Lat. *errare*)

[23] Heidegger, Martin. "Vom Wesen der Wahrheit." *Wegmarken*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976. 177-202. English: Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence of Truth." Trans. John Sallis. *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 136-154.

[24] When speaking of *veritas*, Heidegger uses variations on the verb "*stimmen*" (to accord, to attune, to be the case), which in turn has its root in "voice" (*die Stimme*); in contrast, his language for ἀλήθεια concerns light (*die Lichtung*), spatial openness/closedness (e.g., *die Erschlossenheit; die Entschlossenheit*), and vision. For example, on *veritas:*

> Die Frage kehrt wieder: was heißt hier echt und wahr? Echtes Gold ist jenes Wirkliche, dessen Wirklichkeit in der Übereinstimmung steht mit dem, was wir mit Gold »eigentlich« im voraus und stets meinen. Umgekehrt sagen wir dort, wo wir falsches Gold vermuten: »Hier stimmt etwas nicht.« Was dagegen so ist, »wie es sich gehört«, dazu bemerken wir: es stimmt. Die S a c h e stimmt. 179.

On *ἀλήθεια*:

> Dieses Offene hat das abendländische Denken in seinem Anfang begriffen als *τά ἀλήθεια*, das Unverborgene. Wenn wir *ἀλήθεια* statt mit »Wahrheit« durch »Unverborgenheit« übersetzen, dann ist diese Übersetzung nicht nur »wörtlicher«, sondern sie enthält die Weisung, den gewohnten Begriff der Wahrheit im Sinne der Richtigkeit der Aussage um- und zurückzudenken in jenes noch Unbegriffene der Entborgenheit und der Entbergung des Seienden. 188.

One should note that *veritas* and ἀλήθεια do *not* form a dialectical pairing, which is essential to the point that Heidegger is making. Their properties can and often do coincide; one simply *mistranslates* the other. They are not mutually exclusive but mistakenly and too easily interchanged. This is also the story of trope and irony since the Romantics and the thing that makes irony as a form of concealment/unconcealment (ἀλήθεια) so difficult to parse from within a language of adequation (*veritas*), a rhetoric of tropes.[25] Indeed, one could say that irony designates the encounter of revelatory truth (ἀλήθεια) and tropes – the interruption of the latter's economy of correspondence – just as tropes can, finally, defuse irony by mistranslating it into a form of *adequatio* (*veritas*): 'I mean not what I say but (*precisely*) its opposite.' Between these two truths – *veritas* and ἀλήθεια – an abyss opens up, and this is what Heidegger calls "errancy," which is both ἀλήθεια and the non-case that constitutes its essence. The truth of *veritas* may be the very non-truth proper to ἀλήθεια that it subsequently interrupts and "unconceals"; in fact, Heidegger suggests as much.[26]

The result of an aletheiac poetry is a language that "shimmers": primarily deconstructing and reconstructing the systematicity of *veritas* to show that every movement of *adequatio* – every metaphor – is inadequate, every correspondence already interrupted. The technique to

[25] De Man, for one, seems uncharacteristically uncertain as to the *what* of irony: Is it a trope? He cannot say. Like "anthropomorphism," which he isolates from Nietzsche's "army of tropes" in "Über Wahrheit und Lüge" (De Man, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in Lyric"), de Man yields that irony "seems to encompass all tropes" yet does not belong alongside them ("The Concept of Irony," 168). Recognizing that irony extends to the performative and does not necessarily submit to the economy of tropes, the cryptic definition that he ultimately gives is the following: "if Schlegel said irony is permanent parabasis, we would say that irony is the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes" (Ibid., 179). That is, irony *interrupts* (parabasis) the circulation of properties, which, as a system, regulates the economy of tropes. To understand it, de Man claims, we need a new theory of economics: "what we would call a performative rhetoric" (Ibid., 184). De Man, Paul. *Aesthetic Ideology*. Ed. Andrzej Warminski. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

[26] Heidegger: "However, what brings into accord [i.e., the truth of *veritas* – DH] is not nothing, but rather a concealing of beings as a whole." This untruth as concealing of beings as a whole is doubly essential to *ἀλήθεια*, for it 1) gives it something to disclose and 2) sets it apart; it "preserves what is most proper to *ἀλήθεια* as its own." Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence of Truth." Trans. John Sallis. *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 148.

which it resorts in order to accomplish this task is most often a form of irony, the *interruption* of trope broadly conceived.

Heidegger would remind us, however, that this can have *unnatural* consequences. *Veritas* is the truth proper to most arts because it is the truth that *requires a* τέχνη. In the case of a painting or a poem that represents something, this τέχνη is mimetic – it is used for making (ποιεῖν) something that corresponds (to nature). But ἀλήθεια is the truth *proper to nature* (φύσις). Nature does not require a τέχνη – that is what makes it nature. If we introduce a τέχνη to ἀλήθεια, what is *naturally* true, we have gone a step too far. Such a τέχνη, which we will call a form of metaphysical irony or negativity and, per Heidegger, *should not exist* – would be the *technical art of becoming or supplanting nature*. This, it turns out, was the project of the historical avant-garde, both in Russia and the West. However, the more complex art of supplanting the State, which had already supplanted nature, was the project of Soviet unofficial art: it was the art of supplanting art that had already supplanted nature. Its concerns have to do with truth and the natural or the nature of 'truth' itself. What follow are two examples of that art, which I have chosen to call 'signatures.'[27]

[27] I have chosen to use the term "signatures" here because the "texts" that I am dealing with are best represented virtually as the *productive totality, real and potential,* of the performative authorship of the poets that I have selected. These are poets without works so much as holistic aesthetic "projects" that are ongoing and open-ended (indeed, often literally signed for), which is not only a function of their artistic programs and conceits but also a product of the censorship under which they were working, in which works themselves were less integral or inviolable: these were originally self-published manuscripts (*samizdat*), rumors, drafts, semi-private scribblings, textual happenings. In calling them, "signatures," however, I am also referring to how authorship functions here in an essential and characteristic way. In a well-known essay, "Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject: Ron Silliman's *Albany,* Susan Howe's *Buffalo,*" Marjorie Perloff introduces the term "signature" in order to account for the common-sense difference by which we can distinguish one poet from another, even in the absence or dilution of categories such as "voice," lyric subject, and authorship in a movement like American Language Poetry. When approaching movements like Moscow Conceptualism or even Soviet "metarealism" (Dragomoshchenko), signature might be useful in much the same way. Interestingly, "signature" in the way Perloff employs it often connotes a loose unity of text and topos (thus, both books she considers involve *place names*: Albany and Buffalo). I believe that this can hardly be arbitrary, as signature does still connote, as Perloff admits, not only a distinguishing mark but a problem of *authority* and *dominion* (over text, over place, over event) that cannot simply be ignored and that we will reencounter here in the relationship between the topoi and authority of our own authors: e.g., Prigov's *Moscow*. In other words, the unity of topos and text is one of the ways in which these poets incorporate authority over language into works in which that authority is meant to be assigned exclusively to language itself (whether as

official speech in Moscow Conceptualism or language as such in American Language Poetry). Finally, the issue of authority brings us to the most theoretically complex and widely circulated text on "signature," which is Jacques Derrida's "Signature Event Context" (1971), officially subtitled and performed on the topic of "communication" as "A communication to the Congrés international des Sociétés de philosophie de langue français, Montreal, 1971." The text analyzes those aspects of the performance of communication -- particularly *context* -- that exceed semantics, semiotics, and linguistics and attempts to make writing, in which these disjunctive features are most evident, the model for rather than the subordinated exception to language as such. Without retracing the entire thread of Derrida's argument, what he says about signature is that it models the way that all language maintains its authority to "communicate"; namely, by signifying two things that cannot coexist simultaneously: "the pure reproducibility [1] of a pure event [2]" (*Margins of Philosophy*, 328). Signature thus performs the displacement and totalization of context that all authoritative ("communicative") language presupposes. What we will find in these late Soviet unofficial authors -- Prigov and Dragomoshchenko -- is that although in one sense their language is meant to *undermine* authoritative discourse (e.g., that of the State or of the canon [Prigov]; that of itself and its own authorship [Dragomoshchenko]), on the other, they rely heavily and explicitly on "signature" -- i.e., these non-linguistic, performative guarantees that Derrida associates with the *great lie* or *misapprehension* behind authoritative discourse and its power: pure iterability, purity of event, mastery and totality of context. See Derrida, Jacques. "Signature Event Context." *Margins of Philosophy.* Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. 307-330. See also Perloff, Majorie. "Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject: Ron Silliman's *Albany*, Susan Howe's *Buffalo*." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring, 1999). 405-434.

Signature I: [ДАП]

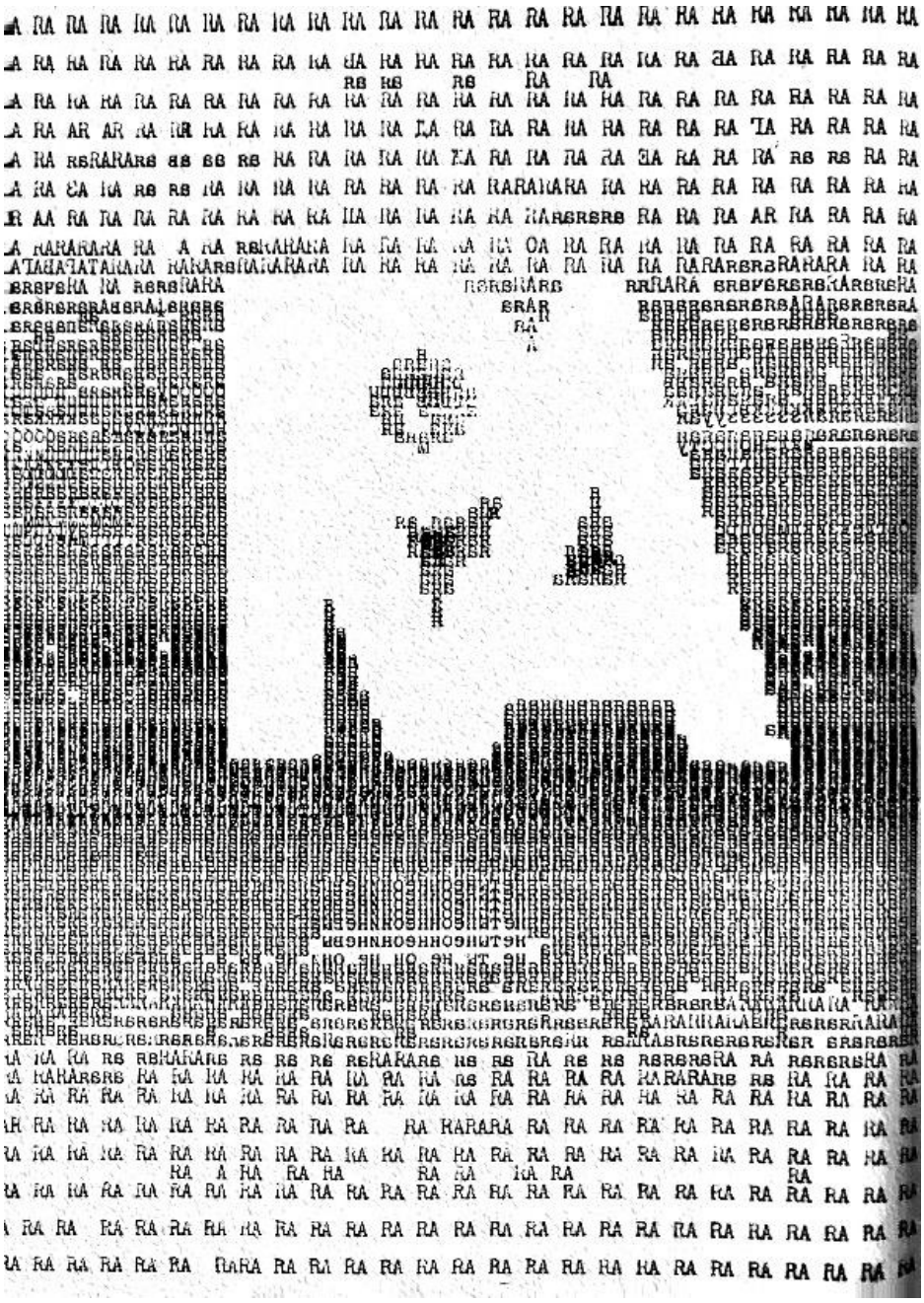


Illustration 1. Prigov, *Стихограммы* (1985). *Text throughout:* «RA»[«АЯ»]. *Lower center, reversed:* «НЕТЫНЕОННЕОНИНЕВЫ»[28]

[28] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. *Stikhogrammy*. Paris: «А – Я», 1985. 32.

The Τέχνη «ДАП»

Weder dieser Witz noch eine Mythologie können bestehn ohne ein erstes Ursprüngliches und Unnachahmliches, was schlechthin unauflöslich ist, was nach allen Umbildungen noch die alte Natur und Kraft durchschimmern läßt, wo der naive Tiefsinn den Schein des Verkehrten und Verrückten, oder des Einfältigen und Dummen durchschimmern läßt. – Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Unverständlichkeit* (1800)

> [Neither this spirit nor a mythology can subsist without a highly original and inimitable element, something that is absolutely irreducible, something that after all transformations still allows its primal nature and force to shimmer through, in which naïve profundity lets the shine of error and madness, or of foolishness and stupidity, to shimmer through.][29]

Like Friedrich Schlegel, who left us cryptic instructions on how (not) to read him in the essay "On Incomprehensibility" ["Über die Unverständlichkeit"] (1800), Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (1940 - 2007) was an author at pains to be misunderstood by those who would understand and not misunderstood by those who would misunderstand him. Arguably the most essential part of his work—usually evidenced by the invented prefatory genre of the «предуведомление»—is the performance of a *method of reading*. As such, however, Prigov rarely 'reads' or reflects upon himself or his method out of character. Presumably, one such occasion is the following response he gives, late in his life, to a simple question—"Can one look at your poems and novels as artistic actions [performances]?" [«Можно ли рассматривать ваши стихи и романы в качестве художественных акций?»]—in an oft-cited 2004 interview with Alena Iakhontova:

> Все мои занятия происходят в общепринятых, конвенциональных рамках данного вида деятельности. Когда я пишу стихи и они попадают к читателям, которым совершенно безразлично, как именно и в сумме с чем они сосуществуют в пределах моей деятельности, то это просто стихи. Если роман попадает в руки к любителю романов, то есть такого вида текстов, ему совершенно необязательно знать, чем я там еще занимаюсь. Но для меня все эти виды деятельности являются частью большого проекта под названием ДАП – Дмитрий Александрович Пригов. Внутри же этого

[29] Schlegel, Friedrich. Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe. Band 2. München: 1967. 319. English translation amended from Schlegel, Friedrich. *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms.* Trans. and ed. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc. University Park: Penn State UP, 1967. 86.

цельного проекта все виды деятельности играют чуть-чуть иную роль. То есть они есть некоторые указатели на ту центральную зону, откуда они все исходят. И в этом смысле они суть простые отходы деятельности этого центрального фантома. В будущем, может быть, возникнет специальная оптика для отслеживания данного фантома. Пока же она отсутствует, посему почти невозможно следить и запечатлевать эту центральную – фантомную, поведенческую, стратегическую – зону деятельности. Современное литературоведение обладает оптикой слежения только за текстами. А когда оно смотрит в эту самую обозначенную центральную зону, перед ним просто несфокусированное мутное пятно. Литературоведы не могут ничего разобрать. Посему они и занимаются отдельными окаменевшими текстами. Но если со временем наука или исследователи изобретут оптику, которая могла бы считывать вот эту центральную зону, тогда все остальное, как и было сказано, предстанет им как пусть порой и привлекательные и даже кажущиеся самоотдельными, но все-таки случайные отходы деятельности вот этой центральной зоны, где происходят основные поведенческие события. Возможно, все это лишь мои личные фантазмы — и слава Богу. Останутся какие-то там плохие или не очень плохие романы, стихи, картины.[30]

[All of my pursuits take place with the broadly accepted, conventional framework of a given form of activity. When I write poems and they reach readers who are absolutely indifferent to exactly how and in what sum total they exist within my activity, then they're just poems. If a novel falls into the hands of a reader of novels, that is, of that sort of text, it's completely unnecessary for him to know what else I'm doing there. But, for me, all of these activities are part of a large project called DAP: Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov. Within this integrated project, all kinds of activity play a slightly different role. That is, they somehow point toward a central zone from which they all originate. And, in this sense, they are the simple byproduct of the activity of this central phantom. In the future, perhaps, a specialized optic will emerge for tracking that phantom. While such a thing is wanting, it is almost impossible to investigate or grasp this central—phantasmagoric, behavioral, strategic—zone of activity. Contemporary literary scholarship employs an optic that only investigates texts. But when it gazes into this centrally designated zone itself, it sees only a muddy, out-of-focus stain. Literary scholars can't make out a thing. They only study discrete, ossified texts. But if, in time, scholarship or critics procure an optic that could account for that central zone, then the rest, as I've said, will appear to them like an at times attractive and seemingly self-sufficient but nonetheless incidental waste product of the activity of that central zone, where fundamental behavioral events take place. Perhaps all this is just my own personal phantasm – and praise the Lord. All that will remain are some bad or not so bad novels, poems, paintings.]

[30] Prigov, Dmitrii. "Otkhody deiatel'nosti tsentral'nogo fantoma." *Nekanonicheskii klassik: Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (1940 – 2007).* Ed. Mark Lipovetsky. M: NLO, 2010. 74-75. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted – DH.

There are a few decisive moments here. One, presumably triggered by a question about «акции» ["(performative) actions"], is Prigov's preference for "activity" [«деятельность»] over artifact – for a topography of "behavioral events" [«поведенческие события»] over a "byproduct" [«отходы»] of aesthetic traces. Even the fact that he carefully calls these "events" rather than "actions/happenings" [«акции»] and "behavioral" rather than "performative" [«перформативные»] is a clear indication that he wants to avoid aestheticizing the "central zone" [«центральная зона»] of his activity for fear of opening it to critical intervention that would assign attributes to its technics.

The best way to understand Prigov's authorship, according to this statement, is indeed *as a method* – a τέχνη – called «ДАП» ["DAP" – the author's initials]. Prigov's metaphors for this method or technic are highly visual, which is appropriate in that vision captures the subject-object reversibility with which Prigov entertains authorship: primarily as "event" and "activity" (a *how*) rather than performance or production (of something) (a *what*). This method, Prigov tells us, has a corresponding "optic" [«оптика»] through which it may be properly seen. If I look at something through the optic and mistake what I see for the truth—not of the optic but of the thing—then I have fallen victim to a simple trick [«фокус»] of perspective; I have erred. Worse, I could mistake the thing I see (the artifact) for how I see it (the activity; the optic)—and I am *in* errancy. According to Prigov's logic, it is this latter overlooking or bypassing of the τέχνη that is the mistake of literary critics who "research only texts" – which is to say, aesthetic systems of meaning that they mistake for closure of the open, unending "activity" that is art. Prigov's *real* trick is that «ДАП» – the "central phantom" – is not a product or thing or even a "zone"; it *is* the "optic." This can be difficult to grasp. Prigov's optic is a *way of seeing,* which is how it overtakes the content that passes through it.

In «ДАП», Prigov lays claim to himself as a 'natural' (found) technic and institution *exterior* to himself. If the τέχνη «ДАП» can be likened to an "optic," moreover, then to project from one end of it is *to write*; to look through the other end is *to read*. Things just pass through, and in doing so, they perform the concealment and unconcealment of the optic/τέχνη itself. It is exterior to itself because its mastery is the product of a certain kind of blindness: an optic cannot hold a mirror to itself or see *through* itself *to itself*. To do so, Prigov suggests – to create an optic for viewing the optic – would be to behold it an impossibly 'un-author-ized' perspective; it would also be to shatter that perspective. Like Heidegger's version of ἀλήθεια, the truth of nature [φύσις], «ДАП» in fact *requires errancy* in order to reveal itself and, by its very essence, must *avoid itself* in order to remain itself.

Errancy: The Militsaner

If we are to fall into the errancy of "only investigating texts," the best and most obvious approximation of «ДАП» is his double, the Militsaner [Милицанер]. In the Militsaner, we do have a *figure*—a trope, an illusion of closure—rather than a sheer method or τέχνη. We have an allegorical image of Prigov's art [ποίησις], the product of the τέχνη «ДАП», *as nature* [φύσις]; and it holds to reason that like ἀλήθεια, the truth of that nature [φύσις], the only thing the Militsaner really *does* in Prigov's texts is reveal and conceal himself – or, better, "shimmer" [мерцает] between transfiguration and degradation, ἀλήθεια and its attendant self-concealment as errancy.

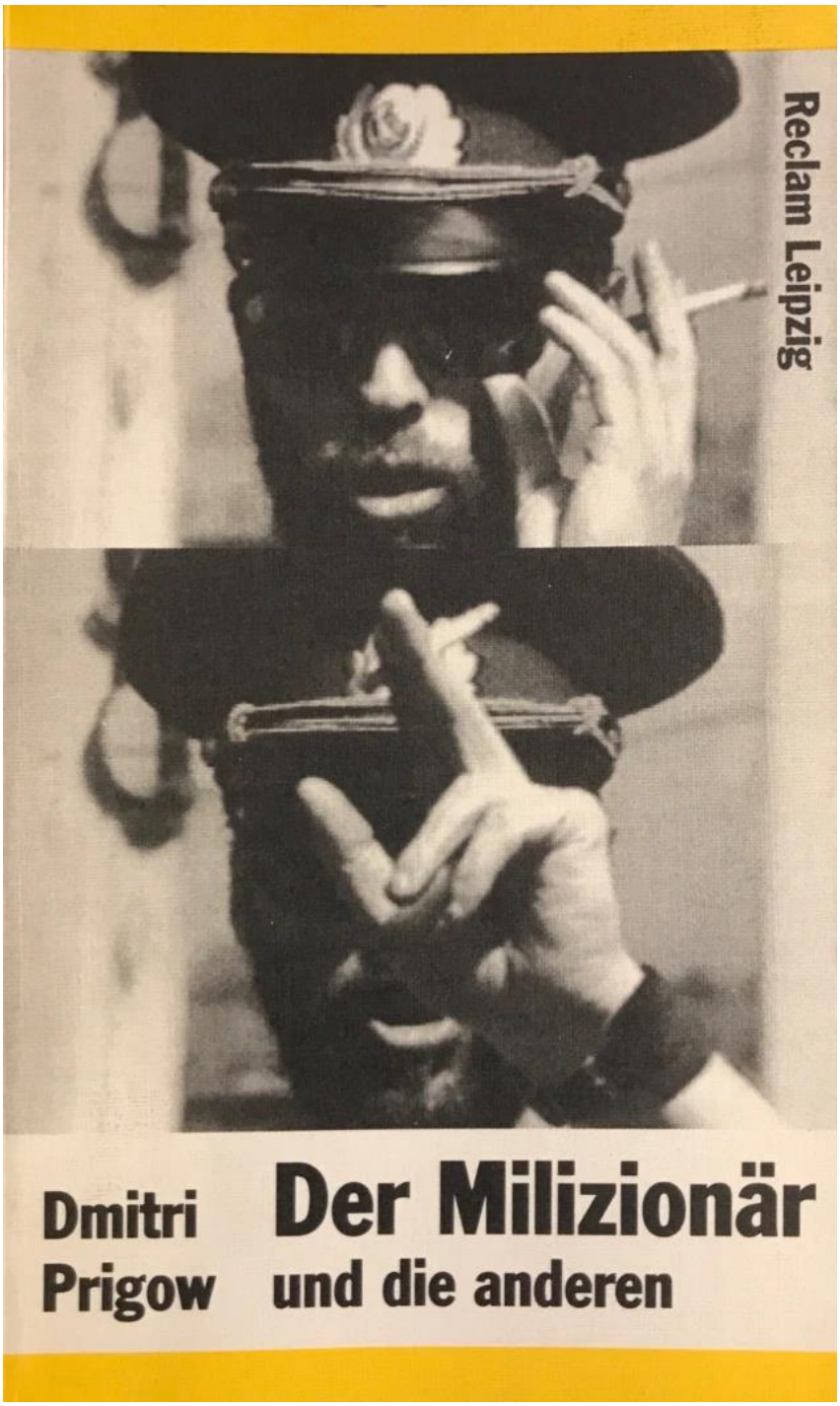


Illustration 2. Prigov dressed as the Militsaner on the cover of *Der Milizionär und die anderen* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1992).

The Militsaner is also a fortunate figure in that he finds his way into all genres of Prigov's writing, visual art, and performance, eliminating the less philosophically taxing but still important issue that occasioned the description of the "phantom" «ДАП» in the first place: namely, the diversity of Prigov's trans-generic "activity." When Prigov popularized his alter ego *after* 1991 by wearing a police uniform to public readings and on the cover of the Leipzig volume (see above), it was already a licit and effectively dead gesture, which is perhaps exactly as he would have it.[31] However, the Militsaner began appearing in *poems* of the late 1970s that eventually evolved into a cycle or cycles – hereafter referred to as the Militsaner cycle(s) – published first in German translation as *Der Milizionär und die anderen* [*The Militsaner and the others*] (Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 1992), subsequently in Russian under the same title, *Милицанер и другие* (M: Obscuri Vidi, 1996), and finally as *Апофеоз Милицанера* [*The Apotheosis of the Militsaner*] *(1975 – 1980)* in the collection *Советские тексты* (SPb: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997). Of these three antemortem [прижизненные] editions, the most significant change is the addition of three «предуведомительные беседы» to *Апофеоз Милицанера* (1997 ed.), in which the central figure of the Militsaner is put in dialogue with another Militsaner, a Major [Майор], and, finally, the Author on the topic of his titular "apotheosis."[32]

Since Prigov's death, other versions of the poems have been published. The most definitive posthumous edition is included in *Москва* (2017), part of NLO's five-volume incomplete collected works under the direction and patronage of Irina Prokhorova and the editorial direction of Mark Lipovetsky and Brigitte Obermayr. The editors of that volume

[31] After all, these were the long, post-perestroika mourning years, characterized by bathetic gestures like *Гробики отринутых стихов* (1999).
[32] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Apofeoz Militsanera." *Sovietskie teksty*. Ed. A. Zorin. St. Petersburg: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997. 150-152.

(re-)assemble elements of previous editions into two conjoined poem bundles: *Апофеоз милицанера(дабл-сборник) (1975-1980)* and *Милицанер и другие (1978)*.[33] Although, with one exception, the changes make little difference to the arguments I'll be making—and that says a lot about the nature of «ДАП»—for the purposes of this text, I will refer primarily to the final antemortem edition, *Апофеоз Милицанера (1975 – 1980),* in the volume *Советские тексты* (SPb: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997) edited by Andrei Zorin, unless otherwise noted. The other text to which I will refer is the memoiristic novel, *Живите в Москве* [*Live in Moscow*] (2000), which is broken up into serialized sections/chapters (e.g., «Москва-1», «Москва-2», etc.) with the exception of its middle section, which is titled «Милицанер московский» ["The Militsaner of Moscow"].

In the poem cycle(s) as well as the section «Милицанер московский» of the novel, Prigov is extremely attentive to how he frames his central figure – indeed, *the* axial figure of his Soviet cosmos. As Brigitte Obermayr comments with regard to the structure of *Живите в Москве*:

> Как уже упоминалось, кульминационную роль в миметической конструкции романа играют две главы: во-первых, центральная глава «Милицанер московский», во-вторых, финальная «Москва 6». Эти главы являются антиподами друг друга: «Милицанер Московский» следует читать как биографию поэтического имиджа «Дмитрия Александровича Пригова» (написанную как бы от третьего лица), «Москву 6» – как автобиографию (от первого лица). В главе «Милицанер московский», образующей ось симметрии или нарративный фокус всего романа, в полном объеме разворачивается созданная автором дискурсивная реальность, вернее, взрыв советской дискурсивной системы. Согласно автокомментарию, «в отличие от предыдущих глав-описаний, мне не приходится напрягать память».[34]
>
> As already mentioned, the culminating role in the mimetic construction of the novel is played by two chapters: first, the central chapter, "The Militsaner of

[33]Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. *Moskva: virshi na kazhdyi den'. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh.* Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. M: NLO, 2017.
[34] Ibid., Obermayr, Brigitte. "Roman iz stikhov: "Zhivite v Moskve" i khudozhestvennyi proekt D. A. Prigova. Dialog Brigitte Obermayr i Georga Vitte." 51-2.

> Moscow," and, second, the final chapter, "Moscow 6." These chapters are each other's antipodes: "The Militsaner of Moscow" should be read as a biography of the poetic image of "Dmitry Alexandrovich Prigov" (written as if from the third person) and "Moscow 6" as [the author's] autobiography (from the first person). In the chapter, "The Militsaner of Moscow," which forms the axis of symmetry or the narrative focus of the entire novel, the discursive reality created by the author, or rather, the explosion of the Soviet discursive system, unfolds in full. According to the auto-commentary, "unlike the previous chapters-descriptions, [here] I do not have to strain my memory."

Although *Живите в Москве* is a (loosely and fictively 'autobiographical') novel, the Militsaner plays the axial role, and two formal characteristics familiar from Prigov's poetry reinforce this: 1) as Obermayr notes above, Prigov introduces the Militsaner in the *physical* center of the work[35] and 2) he locates the Militsaner in close proximity to or symmetry with a

[35] Similarly, in the poem cycle *Москва и москвичи* [*Moscow and the Muscovites*], the Militsaner makes its (his?) appearance almost dead center in the *eleventh* of twenty-three sections (twenty-five if one includes the last two, which simply read: «Текста нет и не будет»). He is there precisely to bind the authority of the text with an ever-expanding topos. It reads:

> А вот Москва эпохи моей жизни
> Вот Ленинский проспект и Мавзолей
> Кремль, Внуково, Большой театр и Малый
> И на посту стоит Милицанер
> Весной же здесь цветут сады и парки
> Акацьи, вишни, яблони, сирени
> Тюльпаны, розы, мальвы, георгины
> Трава, поля, луга, леса и горы
> Вверху здесь - небо, а внизу - земля
> Вдали - китайцы, негры, мериканцы
> Вблизи у сердца - весь бесправный мир
> Кругом же - все Москва растет и дышит
> До Польши, до Варшавы дорастает
> До Праги, до Парижа, до Нью-Йорка
> И всюду, коли глянуть беспристрастно -
> Везде Москва, везде ее народы
> Где ж нет Москвы - там просто пустота
>
> But here is Moscow in the era of my life
> Here is Leninsky Prospekt and the Mausoleum
> The Kremlin, Vnukovo, the Bolshoi Theater and the Maly
> And the Militsaner stands on duty
> In spring, gardens and parks blossom here
> Acacia, cherry, apple, lilac
> Tulips, roses, mallow, dahlia
> Grass, fields, meadows, forests and mountains
> Above—the sky, and below—the earth
> Far off—Chinese, negroes, 'Mericans

lyric or narrative "I." The fact that the chapters «Милицанер московский» (the only unnumbered/non-serial chapter) and «Москва 6» fall outside the narrative chronology reinforces Obermayr's desire to read them allegorically: as *visual* meditations upon two "antipodal" authorial "images" cast outside narrative time. Thus, for Obermayr, the biographical subject of the section «Милицанер московский» is not actually the Militsaner but "Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov," the image of the established *poet*, and the (auto-)biographical subject of «Москву 6», meanwhile, is his double, Prigov, the real, not implied (!), author of the present novel, his first. If we allow ourselves to exceed Obermayr's rationale for this split persona – the distinction between the poet and the author/novelist – we could extend her bifurcation further to our own model of Prigov's authorship and name these two "authors": 1) the "activity"/"project"/τέχνη that I will henceforth call «[ДАП]» in brackets[36] 2) Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov, the actual author/artist who *employs* that "activity"/"project"/τέχνη. Here, we are primarily interested in the first, [ДАП], who, according to Obermayr, is the subject of «Милицанер московский»; and, for us, it is sufficient to identify [ДАП] and the Militsaner as functional doubles for each other in the novel who occur in proximity: the latter as a *figure* for the *method* of the former.

Near to heart—the whole disenfranchised world
All around—all Moscow is growing and breathing
To Poland, to Warsaw it grows
To Prague, to Paris, to New York
And everywhere, if you look objectively—
Moscow is everywhere, everywhere its peoples
Where there is no Moscow—there is just emptiness

Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Moskva i moskvichi." *Sovietskie teksty*. Ed. A. Zorin. St. Petersburg: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997. 184.

[36] I borrow here from Holt Meyer's play on orthography. See Meyer, Holt. "Unreadabilities and / as Autophilology in (Prigov's) Letter Work." In *Jenseits der Parodie*: Dmitrij A. Prigovs Werk als neues poetisches Paradigma. Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. Vienna: Wiener Slawistischer Almanach, Sonderband 81, 2013.

In this light, one can actually read the section «Милицанер московский» of *Живите в Москве*, as Obermayr implies, as a prose commentary on its poetic predecessor, *Апофеоз Милицанера*. The narrative – if one can call it that – that the two works present is generally the same. In the case of the novel, what Obermayr calls "the explosion of the Soviet discursive system" [*взрыв советской дискурсивной системы*] is something of an apotheosis of the title character in reverse. In both the poem cycle and the novel, however, the image of the Militsaner undergoes the same linear history: beginning in its most transcendent, discursive-ideational form and progressively degrading towards bodily or immanent death, with the dualism 'discursive/bodily' shifting its balance within a closed dialectical economy.

Again, due to the care with which Prigov *frames* the image of the Militsaner, it is essential to compare how the poem series and the novel present this image in its initial – transcendent – aspect. This is how we are introduced to the Militsaner in *Апофеоз Милицанера*:

> Когда здесь на посту стоит Милицанер
> Ему до Внукова простор весь открывается
> На Запад и Восток глядит Милицанер
> И пустота за ними открывается
> И Центр, где стоит Милицанер —
> Взгляд на него отвсюду открывается
> Отвсюду виден Милиционер
> С Востока виден Милиционер
> И с Юга виден Милиционер
> И с моря виден Милиционер
> И с неба виден Милиционер
> И с-под земли...
> Да он и не скрывается.[37]
>
> When the Militsaner stands on duty
> The whole expanse opens up before him, all the way to Vnukovo
> The Militsaner looks to the West and the East
> And emptiness opens up behind them

[37] Prigov, Dmitrii. "Apofeoz Militsanera." *Sovietskie teksty*. Ed. A. Zorin. St. Petersburg: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997. 153. In the *Москва* (2017) edition, this stanza is reproduced as the first of the poem group *Милицанер и другие (1978)*.

And the Center, where the Militsaner stands –
A look at it opens up into everything
The Militsaner is seen from everywhere
The Militsaner is seen from the East
And the Militsaner is seen from the South
And the Militsaner is seen from the sea
And the Militsaner is seen from the sky
And from beneath the earth…
He does not hide himself.

If we were again to take up Heidegger's epistemology, this would appear to be the Militsaner "unconcealing" himself in the light of ἀλήθεια; certainly, Prigov plays on the same dynamic of what is true/natural opening and closing itself [открывается/скрывается] to our view. What we can say without question is that this opening image of the Militsaner presents a zero degree of discursive tension between what *is* and what is *said* to be. There are no negative rejoinders or even negative grammatical markers other than in the final line, which is ultimately affirmative: «Да он и не скрывается» (as in «он не *не* открывается»).

This is reinforced by a dual parallelism: first, between *vision and speech*; second, and as a corollary, between *the body and language*.[38] Of the five verbs used in this section, arguably only one (стоить) is not visual, and it merely functions to make something "stand" in a field of vision. Earlier, we claimed that Prigov prefers visual metaphor due to its subject/object reversibility; one sees and is seen ("виден") because vision pertains to as many subject-objects as there are eyes; one is not typically speaking and '(be)spoken' because (my) voice actively belongs to 'me,' more like the 'seeing' verb of '*my*' eye, "глядеть." Here, however, we see a second type of heterogeneity sewn up by the complicity between sight and speech: namely, that vision, rendered identical to an act of speech, opens up a passage for its object through a

[38] Here, I am heavily indebted to Gilles Deleuze's reading of *The Baphomet* by Pierre Klossowski, which I include in greater detail in my analysis below. See Deleuze, Gilles. "Klossowski or Bodies-Language." *The Logic of Sense.* Trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale. Ed. Constantin V. Boundas. London: The Athlone Press, 1989.

potentially infinite series of predicates. When that object is the 'seen'/'bespoken' body – in this case, of the Militsaner – then it becomes the ontological plaything of the discourse, and its degree of being at home in itself may be measured by the degree of tension between the two. In other words, the "apotheosis" of the Militsaner could simply be the measure by which his (visual, immanent, bodily) being fully coincides with his parallel (discursive) deployment. In the section above, that coincidence appears almost complete.

The opening pages of the «Милицанер московский» section of *Живите в Москве,* published in 2000, repeat this parallelism but reverse the values of its outcome. Again, the alliance of vision and speech introduces an immanent/transcendent dyad to the body and language that it attempts to reduce and resolve. But the intrinsic heterogeneity of the Militsaner – both a man (a body) and the State (a discourse) – is presented here as a potentially volatile hypostatic union, already tending towards dissolution:

> Он обычно смотрится вертикальным. То есть, конечно, он не есть вертикален каким-то необычайным образом, отличным от иной попавшейся на глаза вертикали, особенно антропоморфной. Нет. Но он по внутренней сути своей вертикален.
> […]
> Это ведь обычная ось коммуникация человека с высшим, небесным, в мифологии обычно обозначаемая через пространственно-метафорическое уподобление неким доминирующим направлением.
> […]
> Вот он сейчас стоит в мышиной форме, причастный, естественно, в своей нижней части нашей земной мышиной суете. Каков же он в высотных своих частях, формах, образах, состояниях?
> […]
> Содержимое какое-то. Нечто. То, вернее тот, кто перемещается и что перемещаемо. Это фейерично и неугрожающе. И ненавязчиво. Не хочешь -- не созерцай. Оно существует и без твоего созерцания. Оно сущностно. Это и есть Милицанер.[39]

[39] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. *Zhivite v Moskve.* M: NLO, 2000. 122-123.

> He usually looks vertical. That is, of course, he isn't vertical in some fantastic way set apart from any other vertical line that might come into view – especially an anthropomorphic one. No. He's vertical by his very essence.
> […]
> This is, after all, the usual axis for humans to communicate with the highest, the heavenly, what in mythology is usually designated by spatial-metaphorical association to some dominant direction.
> […]
> Now he stands in his mousy form, participating, naturally, with his lower parts, in our earthly, mousy trifles. What must he be like in his highest parts, forms, guises, states?
> […]
> Some content. Something. That which – or better – he who moves and is movedness. It happens like a fairy tale, gently. And unassumingly. If you don't want to – don't behold it. It exists without your beholding. It is, essentially. This is the Militsaner.

Here, there is something to be said for prose's supposed 'honesty.' The discourse, unable to sustain an illusion of correspondence to what is true (*adequatio*), falters. Its rhetoric accedes to prevarication and self-doubt, in the *verbal* rather than visual mode of *veritas*. In other words, it is an issue of description rather than performance: constative utterance rather than illocution. Prigov's narrator can't find the right words for the Militsaner – the adequate, proper, corresponding ones – and, in becoming self-reflexively aware of this, finds himself in a state of *errancy*. In contemplating its own rhetoric, the discourse identifies the primary trope of its inadequacy: the binary anthropomorphism/naturalization. The Militsaner is not "set apart from any other vertical line that might come into view – especially an anthropomorphic one" and in fact has a 'naturalized' "mousy form" for participating in the trifles of mouse-like people. So, is he a god or a god who is like a man or a man who is like a mouse or a mouse?

It is language as a series of gaps here – and particularly *metaphor* when turned to reflection upon itself – that strains anthropomorphism/naturalization and draws attention to the altogether *unnatural* or *artfully anthropomorphic* tropological economy of *veritas*, which

constitutes identity through rupture. The grotesque 'honesty' of this prose image is thus also the product of its *negativity* as *self-reflection,* which we did not see in the poetic production of [ДАП]. One might call this introduction to the Militsaner the negative exposure of its poetic counterpart. Unsurprisingly, this is also felt as a falling out between vision and speech, wherein the subordination of the former to the latter is reversed. In the poem, an active sense (voice) is able to disguise itself as a passive one (vision); here the reverse is true: vision is rediscovered as a passive principle confused with speech («Не хочешь—не созерцай», from the root «зреть» [to see]), as if one could actively 'un-contemplate' or 'un-behold' as one could refrain from speaking. By staging a mutiny against speech, vision (and with it, ontological identity) asserts itself in the negative. The Militsaner "exists," "essentially" – in the Russian, *adverbially* («Оно сущностно») – with or without your seeing him, *with or without your* (or the narrator's) *speech*.

"Parodism" and Affirmation

In the «предуведомление» to another series of poems, *Стихи осени, зимы года жизни 1978* – written in the same year as the majority of the poems in *Апофеоз Милицанера* or *Милицанер и другие* (1978) – Prigov had the following to say about irony and errancy, or what we have approached as the conflation of the truth of art (*veritas*) with the truth of nature (ἀλήθεια):

> Единственно, против чего я возражаю, так это против скоропалительного вывода, что ироническая интонация (в смысле насмехания, опорочивания) является основным пафосом моего творчества. Тут происходит пародии и сатиры (которая не обязательно связана со смехом). Я, несомненно, являюсь представителем пародизма (да и слово-то само приятно своим созвучием с парадизмом). Наиболее известный пример – это пародии на литературные произведения, где (пусть в ограниченном масштабе и, соответственно, с более узким охватом жизни) проявляются основные черты пародизма:

> отрывание стилистики описания от предмета описания и возможность расталкивания до предела их парадоксальной неналожимости друг на друга. Ограничительным моментом в данном случае служит любовь как к предмету описания, так и к стилистике, в то время как неприятие их снимает всякие ограничения (что является шагом на пути к сатире).
>
> The only thing I object to is the hastily drawn conclusion that the primary pathos of my work is an ironic intonation (in the sense of mockery and slander). Those are parodies and satires (which are not necessarily associated with laughter). I, undoubtedly, am a representative of parodism [sic] (the word itself is pleasant because it sounds like 'parade-ism'). The most famous example of this is the parody of literary works, wherein (albeit on a limited scale and, accordingly, with a narrower view to life), the fundamental features of parodism [sic] are made manifest: the stylistics of description are torn apart from the object of description and the possibility opens up for pushing their paradoxical non-coincidence to its limit. In this case, that liminal moment is love both for the object of description and for the stylistics of description, at the same time as their antagonism removes every limit from each (which is a step towards satire).[40]

This, for Prigov, is "high parodism" [высокий пародизм].[41] What is most important to him, however, is the *affirmative* character of this strained relationship between art and its object: "the stylistics of description" and the thing being described. He insists that the non-coincidence that parody asserts over its object is the product of "*love*" (!)—*both* for the object of parody *and* for the parodic discourse of description that exceeds it. This is also, for Prigov, what separates "parody" from "satire": not a structural variation but a *valuation*, a way of perceiving things. Parody affirms all possibilities in its open-endedness; satire, which he (mis-)labels "ironic," *only negates* and is therefore guilty of a kind of metaphysical resentment or bad faith, in which the non-coincidence [неналожимость] of the object and the discourse causes the satirist, a lover of limits, to contemptuously reject both. Thus, Prigov writes: "Parodism is to look at phenomena

[40] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. *Sbornik preduvedomlenii k raznoobraznym veshcham.* M: A*d* M*arginem*, 1996. 53.
[41] Ibid. Mikhail Iampol'skii takes this further as Prigov's definitive artistic self-reading in an essay by the same name. See Iampol'skii, Mikhail. "Vysokii parodizm: filosofiia i poetika romana Dmitriia Aleksandrovicha Prigova *Zhivite v Moskve*." *Nekanonicheskii klassik: Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (1940 – 2007).* Ed. Mark Lipovetsky. M: NLO, 2010.

from the point of view of life, whereas satire is to look from the point of view of moral-ethical maxims and cultural values" [«Пародизм – это взгляд на явления с точки зрения жизни, в то время как сатира – это взгляд с точки зрения морально-этических максим и культурных ценностей»].[42] The satirist is like the priest who claims to so love God that he rejects the world while maintaining precisely the *worldly* institutions of divinity.[43] The parodist, whose love is different and knows no such boundary rejects nothing. Prigov refers to such "satanic love" [сатанинская любовь] for the Militsia in one section of *Милицанер и другие*.[44] Satanic love, the love of the parodist, it seems, is non-exclusionary.

[42] Ibid., 54.

[43] Here time also intervenes against ontology. The satirist, Prigov reasons, could be corrected if he understood the *historical* rather than just ontological dimensions of both "stylistics" (art) and its object. It is at the gap between the two that the parodist locates what is essential to both: «Именно в эту щель и влезает пародист с целью выявить суть времени, материализовавшегося в стилистике, и точки его прирастания к вечности» (СПКРВ, 53–55). Whether Prigov *succeeds* in this "high parody" or instead creates something more like the postmodern "pastiche" that Frederic Jameson calls an "attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place" is a different question.

[44] The entire section (11 | 01332) appears in the *Москва* (2017) version and is worth reproducing. Again, it was written in 1978, the same year as the above meditation on parody and satire.

> В Ленинграде стихи почитал
> И по лицам увидел впрямую —
> Всю духовность я порастерял
> Даже если имел таковую
>
> Исповедую вновь я и вновь
> Никому не родную, не близкую
> Все к Милицьи любовь сатанинскую
> Господи! но ведь тоже — любовь!
> Бескорыстная
> Жалостливая
> Но и уважительная
> Нелицеприятная
> Но и смиренная
> Необъяснимая
> Но и опасная
> Двусмысленная
> Но — любовь!

Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Militsaner i drugie (1978)." *Moskva: virshi na kazhdyi den'. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh.* Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. M: NLO, 2017. 401-402.

These qualities of affirmation and non-exclusionary difference are essential to the operation of [ДАП] as a τέχνη. Again, this also distinguishes Prigov's conceptualism from the historical avant-garde, which would have attempted to *negate* and supplant nature with art as something external to it. Rather, Prigov is attempting to *interrupt* the discourse and ideology of a state that has already supplanted nature and claims to have no outside. To do so, one must first inhabit that discourse; thus, it is imperative that [ДАП] *also* have no outside and admit no negation, which is why Prigov resists interpretation and works in auto-philology, performing what is external to himself as [ДАП] while paradoxically avoiding self-reflection from a position exterior to the "optic" [ДАП].

The Antichrist: Becoming Other than Totality from Within

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, writing *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) only a few years earlier in what might as well have been another world, issued a challenge to discourses of totality in a way that will be familiar to readers of Prigov. The project of their book is to imagine possible exits from ideological systems that admit no exteriority: primarily the Oedipal triangle in psychoanalysis but also complicit ontological and theological principles of identity, first in Plato and later in Kant. To do so, Deleuze and Guattari attempt a specific mode of critique: they do not (initially) introduce an alternate system or discourse but rather a *method*, a theoretical τέχνη and a corresponding praxis, for *becoming other* than the totality from within it.

The knower of this art and user of this praxis for Deleuze and Guattari is the "schizophrenic." It was earlier suggested that the 'strange positivism' characteristic of Soviet postmodernism resembles the properly 'psychotic' in that it does not exclude or self-reflect but

merely affirms a place where (absolute) values *should* be while ejecting those that pass through it. This sets it apart from both the Romantic mode of irony (negativity without negation) and its eventual offspring, the deconstructionist critique of the late 20th century West. Deleuze and Guattari, however, make the psychoanalytic comparison quite literal and give us a better vocabulary for it in a conceptualist context:

> It becomes nevertheless apparent that schizophrenia teaches us a singular extra-Oedipal lesson, and reveals to us an unknown force of the disjunctive synthesis, an immanent use that would no longer be exclusive or restrictive, but fully affirmative, nonrestrictive, inclusive. A disjunction that remains disjunctive, and that still affirms the disjoined terms, that affirms them throughout their entire distance, *without restricting one by the other or excluding the other from the one,* is perhaps the greatest paradox. "Either ... or ... or," instead of "either/or."[45]

I would argue that this is highly reminiscent of Prigov's views on "parodism." Deleuze and Guattari's τέχνη in this case, their art of reasoning, is the "*disjunctive synthesis*," which they borrow and repurpose from Kant, a secondary object of their philosophical 'parody.' The principle of disjunctive synthesis, as they understand it, is difference without exclusion. It is difference, one might say, that doesn't "grab on" to things in the sense of «влипаться» but rather traverses them. The one who practices it is the "schizophrenic," the hero of *Anti-Oedipus.* Deleuze and Guattari thus invent the category of the "schizophrenic" as one who has passed beyond (or *prior to?*) the Oedipal negations that, if undone, precipitate psychosis (namely, through symbolic "disavowal/foreclosure" [Freud: *Verwerfung*; Lacan: *forclusion*]) into a purely *affirmative,* phantasmagoric zone of meaning untethered to the supposedly 'outside-less' exclusions of the Oedipal triangle. One could argue that this is analogous to the method of conceptualism – at least, if it is successful – in disavowing the possible *content* of a symbolic

[45] Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983. 76.

order (that of the State), while maintaining and even endlessly re-iterating its discursive *structure* in order to affirm but eject and destabilize those values that are traversed.

In Deleuze's essay "Klossowski or Bodies-Language" (1969), which laid the groundwork for *Anti-Oedipus,* moreover, we discover that "disjunctive synthesis," like the method [ДАП], has a theological counterpart: The Antichrist. To consider the Militsaner a Soviet Antichrist would seem either oxymoronic or redundant; Christ was the Soviet Antichrist. But few figures (the "schizophrenic" Anti-Oedipus included) have more in common with the mythos of our own theologized protagonist, the Militsaner. Writing on Pierre Klossowski's *The Baphomet* (1965), Deleuze invests the "disjunctive synthesis" with a meaning-making function similar to that performed by [ДАП] and his Soviet figurehead:

> In Kant, therefore, we see that God is revealed as the master of the disjunctive syllogism only inasmuch as the disjunction is tied to exclusions in the reality which is derived from it, and thus to a *negative and limitative use.* Klossowski's thesis, with the new critique of reason that it implies, takes on therefore its full significance: it is not God but rather the Antichrist who is the master of the disjunctive syllogism. This is because the anti-God determines the *passage* of each thing through all of its possible predicates. God, as the Being of beings, is replaced by the Baphomet, the "prince of all modifications," and himself modification of all modifications. [46]

Deleuze, seemingly pleased with the phrase "the *passage* of each thing through all of its possible predicates" repeats it a few years later in *Anti-Oedipus*.[47] It is a formulation that perfectly describes what happens to the Militsaner beginning in the first poem of *Апофеоз Милицанера* or his invocation in *Живите в Москве* and also goes far in a very general way to describe the transformative effect of [ДАП] in all of its iterations: the guises in which it

[46] Deleuze, Gilles. "Klossowski or Bodies-Language." *The Logic of Sense.* Trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale. Ed. Constantin V. Boundas. London: The Athlone Press, 1989. 296.
[47] Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983. 77.

(re-)produces a set of meaning-making rules and simply passes discursive-ideological material through them.

If we consider the *figure* of the Militsaner as an allegory for [ДАП], then the epithet, "the Baphomet, the 'prince of all modifications,' and himself modification of all modifications" seems to describe what is essential to him. This is how both [ДАП] and the Militsaner satanically dis-order the State of/as nature. They assume an ordering function [ἀρχὴ] of the endless modification of form [μορφή] from *within themselves*, as if according to their own entelechy [ἐντελέχεια; lit. "having-its-end-in-itself"]. This is what Aristotle calls "the ordering/origin of movedness and of what moves, of and by itself" ["ἀρχὴ κινήσεως τοῦ κινουμένον καθ' αυτό"], which is proper to nature [φύσις] alone and separates it from the linear, teleological *fixity* of art [ποίησις] and other products of τέχνη, which are beholden to form from without.[48] Nature does not require and indeed *cannot be analogous to* the product of a τέχνη because it has no teleology exterior to itself: movedness and change is its formal essence, καθ' αυτό, *of itself*. Prigov uses the same language to both deify and *naturalize* his hero in the opening description of the Militsaner in *Живите в Москве*: "Some content. Something. That which – or better – *he who moves and is movedness* [*move-ability*]" [«Содержимое какое-то. Нечто. То, вернее тот, *кто перемещается и что перемещаемо*»] (my italics). However, there is an important inversion between form and content here: unlike nature, the Militsaner is *not* essentially a form [μορφή] of movement and movedness, but some kind of unstable, unbounded "*content*" [содержимое] whose form, which should be interior to him, is… diplaced?... suppressed?... externalized?... covered up?

[48] I am, of course, still limiting my use of these terms from Aristotle's *Physics* with fidelity to Heidegger's specific reading and framework. See Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις in Aristotle's Physics *B*, I." Trans. Thomas Sheehan. *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 228.

By avoiding themselves as a τέχνη, a thing with exteriority, [ДАП] and the Militsaner assume godlike/ontic proportions, the most essential of which is to appear constantly, of themselves, in movedness and change. But the cost of this apotheosis/naturalization is their loss of identity as a stable, bounded concept. They cannot turn upon themselves. They likewise avoid exclusion, negativity, and *judgment*—the "sweet" [милый] Militsaner goes very easy on his more prodigal comrades—because were they to include these *formal* functions, every one of their relations/judgments would be revealed to imply a *thetic* judgment (a judgment of how an entity relates to itself), and suddenly *they*, too, would be subject to trial and (self-)scrutiny. This illicit passage through formal self-reflection is in fact how the image of the Militsaner degrades in *Живите в Москве*, beginning with the identification of its own primary trope: naturalization and "anthropomorphism." As his image comes apart, the Militsaner does not fall into the *natural* opposite of form (μορφή), which is its privation (στέρησις). The latter would be inseparable from the former and still belong to the twofold essence of nature and the truth of its concealment/unconcealment (ἀλήθεια). Rather, the degraded Militsaner, through his unbound *multiplicity of forms*, gradually reveals himself to be (the product of) a τέχνη, belonging to a different kind of formation (namely, human art [ποίησις]), which is theologically, ideologically, and ontologically infinitely more compromising.

With Death, Transformation: Between Pornography and Theology

Like the Christ/Antichrist, the only possible resolution to the hypostatic union of antinomies – word and body; technic [τέχνη] and nature [φύσις]; anthropomorphism and naturalization – in the Militsaner is *death*, which finally disentangles his two aspects. As we already began to see above, when these two things begin to part ways, the force of their division

ripples violently through the text, and the narrative itself – in both the poems and novel – turns to bloodshed. It becomes apparent that the entire series of binaries—sight/speech, body/discourse, citizen/State—bound together by the image of the Militsaner in something like a "disjunctive synthesis," has stored an enormous amount of potential energy in the form of suppressed self-contradiction. Death, releasing them from that positive field, unleashes their antinomy as sheer negativity, and their violent repulsion from each other becomes grotesque. The binaries remain as antipodes bereft of each other—driven to liminal cases.

In both the poems and the «Милицанер московский» chapter of *Живите в Москве*, the Militsaner is stabbed (three times) in the heart. The details are remarkably consistent. We get the fullest account in the novel, wherein a young Prigov witnesses the assault and, ultimately, murder of a militsaner (lower case 'm') in the early hours of the morning from the fourth-floor window of his apartment. He describes the entire event like a vision or a fevered dream and, importantly, as if it were staged, framed by his window *like* a "painting" [картина], with the figures below assembled *like* a "*mise en scène*" [мизансцена].[49] I emphasize these similes to underscore that we have left the natural but also *theological* province of transfiguration and revelation that belongs to ἀλήθεια; we are firmly entrenched in *veritas*, in semblance and in art that does not disguise itself as art.

The local militsaner, intoxicated, pulls a pistol on a group of approaching men, who swarm him and fight him to the snowy ground. The young Prigov is astounded that they could be so "metaphysically blind" [слепые метафизически].[50] He recalls: «И вот они, попущенные этим злом, наделенные невероятной слепотой, дабы не иметь сомнений и не ослабеть перед его величием и блеском, не различили в нем Милицанера, а видели только глупое,

[49] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. *Zhivite v Moskve.* M: NLO, 2000. 143.
[50] Ibid., 144.

неловко движущееся человеческое тело» ["And there they were, propelled by evil, endowed with incredible blindness so as not to have doubted or faltered before his brilliance and grandeur; they did not discern in him the Militsaner but saw only a dumb, clumsily moving human body"].[51] This is how he describes the mass of bodies on the ground and the violence that follows:

> Мне представилось, что эти виденные мной рано утром, обступавшие Милицанера и исполнявшие какой-то странный отвратительный танец обернулись единым страшным чудищем, потерявшим человеческий облик и дар речи, бросавшиймся на все мало-мальски людское.[52]
>
> It seemed to me that these figures I saw that morning, who surrounded the Militsaner and performed some kind of strange, disgusting dance, turned into a single terrible creature that had lost its human appearance and gift of speech, having hurled itself at everything even a teeny bit human.

This image of grotesquely protean matter could be the inevitable counterpart to the Militsaner originally presented as a paradox of pure content: «Содержимое какое-то. Нечто.» The mass of attackers lose first their appearance and then their "gift of speech" [дар речи]. How does the young Prigov know this? He can't hear them from his window, and they aren't saying anything. But their "metaphysical" blindness to the militsaner as Militsaner seems tied to the divestment of the word from flesh; when they gaze on the local militsaner, they discern "only a dumb, clumsily moving human body" [«только глупое, неловко движущееся человеческое тело»]. The militsaner and his attackers suddenly seem other than human primarily because their bodies-in-language have been robbed of the word as form; their grotesque appearance, as reported by the young Prigov, merely corroborates it.

[51] Ibid., 145.
[52] Ibid., 146.

This, then, is the pornographic double to the original, theological union of bodiliness and language in the image of the Militsaner: and both the former and the latter rest on a relation of ambiguity.[53] Deleuze writes of bodies-in-language in Klossowski: "If perversion is the power befitting the body, equivocity is the power of theology; they are reflected in one another. If one is the pantomime par excellence, the other is reasoning par excellence."[54] The body invested with the Word (of the State) is an immanent manifestation of a transcendent order, and to be so, its bodiliness must be protean and constantly shifting; the body divested of that Logos becomes, visually, a simulacrum of the same: a thing whose flux connotes pantomime, perversion, chaos, and ontological decay.

Order is temporarily restored as a group of other militsaners rush in to break up the mob. The narrator, performing 'Young Prigov,' who is always fixated on the dress of the militsia and often recognizes the Militsaner by his coat [мундир], describes the scene like a primordial, neo-platonic battle between form and content. Against the mass of perverse bodiliness, "the eye was struck by the sheer dominance of people in militsia uniforms" [«Бросалось в глаза явное преобладание дюдей в милицейской форме»].[55] Against inhuman bodies robbed of speech, men in "*form*/uniform" [в форме] intervene.

With this episode and the death of the local militsaner, we arrive at a moment that no commentator on *Живите в Москве* will fail to mention. Prigov performs an act of time travel or

[53] Again, I am indebted to Deleuze's reading of Klossowski for this pairing of pornography and theology around the body in language. An assemblage of Prigov's Militsaner poems, Klossowski's *The Baphomet*, and Gombrowicz (especially *Pornografia*) would certainly make for interesting reading. See Deleuze, Gilles. "Klossowski or Bodies-Language." *The Logic of Sense.* Trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale. Ed. Constantin V. Boundas. London: The Athlone Press, 1989.
[54] Ibid. "If perversion is the power befitting the body, equivocity is the power of theology; they are reflected in one another. If one is the pantomime par excellence, the other is reasoning par excellence. That which accounts for the surprising character of Klossowski's work derives from this: the unity of theology and pornography in this very particular sense. We must call it a superior pornology." 281-82.
[55] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. *Zhivite v Moskve.* M: NLO, 2000. 147.

autobiographical montage and inserts into the mind of his younger self two lines of verse included in both the antemortem *Милицанер и другие* and *Апофеоз Милицанера*; these two lines, which in the poems also occur in proximity to the Militsaner's death, summarize the entire logical 'double bind' of his hypostasis. For Young Prigov, they are an immature, almost psychotic coping mechanism: a way of disavowing the Militsaner's bodily death and resurrecting him in his discursive, "vertical" form. However, Prigov, the autobiographical narrator, claims that the lines resonated in his mind for all the years to follow. They are:

> А он – государственность есть в чистоте
> Почти что себя этим уничтожающая
>
> Whereas he—is statehood in its purity
> Almost so that, as such, it destroys itself[56]

[56] Ibid., 147. The full section in which the lines appear in both *Милицанер и другие (1978)* and *Апофеоз Милицанера* is reproduced below. See Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Apofeoz Militsanera." *Sovietskie teksty*. Ed. A. Zorin. St. Petersburg: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997. 161. Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Militsaner i drugie (1978)." *Moskva: virshi na kazhdyi den'. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh.* Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. M: NLO, 2017. 399 (11 | 01324).

С женою под руку вот Милицанер
Идет и смущается этим зачем-то
Ведь он государственности есть пример
Таки и семья – государства ячейка

Но слишком близка уж к нечистой земле
И к плоти и к прочим приметам снижающим
А он – государственность есть в чистоте
Почти что себя этим уничтожающая

With wife in hand the Militsaner
Goes along and hesitates for some reason
After all, he is the paradigm of statehood
And the family—is the nucleus of the state

But it's too close to the unclean land
And to the flesh and to marks of corruption
Whereas he—is statehood in its purity
Almost so that, as such, it destroys itself

If we take Prigov at his word(s), then among the entire, 'satanically' voluminous corpus of his work, these are the two most important – or, which is the same thing, the *longest lasting* – lines he ever conceived.

The Militsaner Transfigured: The Mad Iconography of Multiple Selves

To see what happens to the Militsaner after his death, we should turn back to where Prigov leads us in his novel: back to his poetry. In the third «предуведомительная беседа» to *Апофеоз Милицанера*, the "Author" explains to the hero: «Да, апофеоз – это торжество жизни в лучах восходящей смерти» ["Yeah, apotheosis: that's the victory of life in the rays of ascending death"].[57] We have seen that "ascending death" functions in the text as the ultimate interruption and exposure of its primary device: suspending antinomies in a field of positivity. Death introduces a principle of identity to the ontology of the world seen through [ДАП] – something *is* or *isn't* because of death – and the result is an explosion of difference that had been neglected or suppressed. After this 'Big Bang,' something else peculiar happens, however, and [ДАП] is, in a way, able to reassert the physics of its cosmos. Namely, all of those antinomies and values that had passed through [ДАП] reemerge, but *atomistically,* entropically – no longer held in union. The "madness" [безумие] of the device persists *as madness* that no longer disguises its essential heterogeneity as ordered. This "victory of life in the rays of ascending death" is the apotheosis of… *the simulacrum.* Well, of course. But it is worth pointing out that, as a theological principle, this transfiguration does not precede death but can only occur *violently, after the fact* and that the resulting multiplicity of 'selves'—of atomized moments of

[57] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Apofeoz Militsanera." *Sovietskie teksty*. Ed. A. Zorin. St. Petersburg: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997. 153.

being—in the text no longer bear a clear relation to each other, making them almost impossible to read.

The one heuristic in reading these sections, in fact, which occur towards the end of the Militsaner poem cycle(s), is the more or less explicit Orthodox symbolism that interferes and intervenes, allowing us to pursue an almost anagogical interpretation of their 'signifiance' rather than signification.[58] Two poem sections stand out in particular as scrambled 'anti-icons' of a sort, both with intensely relevant themes: 1) the actual Transfiguration of Christ on the mountain and 2) the Holy Mother (here, as *death*). Below, I have inserted in brackets moments where the text reproduced as *Милицанер и другие (1978)* in *Москва* (2017) diverges from the antemortem, Zorin edition, published as *Апофеоз Милицанера* in *Советские тексты* (1997). The first scene, that which parodies the actual Transfiguration is as follows:

Там, где с птенцом [ласточкой] Катулл,
Со снегирем Державин
И Мандельштам с доверенным щеглом
А я с кем? – я с Милицанером милым
Пришли, осматриваемся кругом

Я тенью легкой [легкой тенью], он же – [с] тенью тени
А что такого? – всяк на свой манер

[58] It would be fascinating and worthwhile to pursue a reading of Prigov using medieval modes of interpretation; they somehow feel entirely more appropriate to his world than the Saussurean alternative – primarily (and this is no small statement) because Prigov is self-consciously dealing in *substance*, which is to say, *positive ontological quantities*. Here, I refer to anagoge, a form of revelatory allegory directed into futurity and the most elevated of the four medieval hermeneutic methods applied to Biblical text. I use this term as it applies specifically to the moments of "transfiguration" in the Militsaner cycle(s). However, there is equally something to be said for Prigov's more uninterrupted mode of grotesque play, which is to strain what the medieval logician/theologian would call the doctrine of analogy; this, in its most fundamental form, that of *being*, states that "reality is divided both horizontally into the very different realities of substances and accidents and vertically into the very different realities of God and creatures, and that these realities are analogically related." (See Ashworth, Jennifer E. "Medieval Theories of Analogy." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Stanford: Stanford Metaphysics Research Lab, 2017. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/analogy-medieval/). In marshalling Heidegger's version of Aristotle, I simply took a very long way around to the same thing: i.e., the metaphysical problem of common natures within the doctrine of analogy, which Prigov philosophically parodies to its breaking point. I did this because to consider the metaphysical analogy via the truth-principle of *veritas*, which is grounded in *adequatio*, or correspondence, is a vastly richer course: 1) it opens up "aesthetics" and 2) Heidegger also provides an ontic alternative in ἀλήθεια.

Здесь все – одно, ну – два, [Так все одно! Ну, два!]
здесь [Там] просто все мы[—] птицы

И я, и он, и Милицанер

There, beside Catullus with a hatchling [swallow],
Derzhavin with a bullfinch
And Mandelstam with his trusty goldfinch
Who am I with? - I am with the nice Militsaner
We come, look around

I, a gentle shadow, he: [with] the shadow of the shadow
And so what? — to each his own
Here [Thus] all is one, well: two
here [there] we are all simply birds

And I, and he, and the Militsaner[59]

[59] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Apofeoz Militsanera." *Sovietskie teksty*. Ed. A. Zorin. St. Petersburg: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997. 164. Textual divergences in brackets from Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Militsaner i drugie (1978)." *Moskva: virshi na kazhdyi den'. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh.* Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. M: NLO, 2017. 402-3. (11 | 01333).



Illustration 3. Icon of the Transfiguration by Theophanes (Feofan) the Greek. 15th Century. Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

The analogy to the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 17:1–9; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28–36) might not be readily apparent, were it not for the theme of the text and the conspicuous, almost painterly groupings: three apostles/witnesses (Catullus, Derzhavin, Mandelstam) and three other figures on the mountaintop («я, и он, и Милицанер»), one of whom is presumably transfigured and the other two of whom stand, like Elijah and Moses did, as messengers and divine *aides-de-camp*. A far more explicit reference appears two sections earlier in the Милицанер и другие (1978) version from Москва (2017), when the poet speaks of "the faces of Johannine-ified wise men" [«лица / Равносионских мудрецов»] and a flying, flaming chariot [«И огненная колесница / Летящая»], referring, presumably, to Elijah.[60] The miscarriage of that metaphor, utterly appropriate whether intentional or not, is of course that John, "the Beloved," was one of the disciples present for the Transfiguration, along with Peter and James, but the Gospel of John is the only text that *omits* the Transfiguration, so the "Johannine-ified" [Равносионские] faces of the Old Testament prophets are a solecism in more ways than one.

The second 'anti-icon' appears in the last section of the *Советские тексты* edition and the second to last of the Москва (2017) edition. It begins by reproducing a very regular iambic tetrameter in the first two lines[61] that then quickly degrades rhythmically, and it uses chiasmus in an intentionally poor attempt to disguise increasing tautology and repetition (e.g., the homophonic rhyme «долго»/«долга»). In it, we encounter a female Militsaner, the only one in the poem, as '*Death*-Bearer' ("death" [смерть] is also grammatically female in Russian). Only six lines long, it reads:

[60] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Militsaner i drugie (1978)." *Moskva: virshi na kazhdyi den'. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh.* Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. M: NLO, 2017. 401 (11 | 01331).
[61] This is a common meter but also not accidentally (I wager) the meter of *Evgenii Onegin*, which provided the source material for Prigov's greatest work of "parodism" – more on that below.

Я просто жил и умер просто
Лишь умер – посреди погоста
Мучительно и нестерпимо долго
Глядя в лицо мое умершее
Стояла смерть Милицанершею
Полна любви и исполненья долга.

I lived simply and died just so
In a churchyard I expired
Where looking painfully and overlong
At my lifeless face there stood
Death as a Militsanersha
Full of love and fulfillment of duty.[62]

The theological parody of the Virgin is tied to one of her most common iconic configurations, which is as «Живоносный источник» [Life-Bearing Source; *Theotokos*]. In the traditional prayer to that icon, she is referred to as «Предстательница» [Advocate; Intercessor] and «Покровительница» [Protector; lit. "Veil-er"]. Here, as Death-Bearer, her attitude is the same ("love and fulfillment of duty"), but her role, particularly as «Покровительница», the "Veil-er," takes on a double meaning: she veils with a funeral shroud; she also *un*-veils the metaphysics of [ДАП]'s discursive world, through which it potentially (and here, certainly rhythmically and poetically) falls apart.

[62] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Apofeoz Militsanera." *Sovietskie teksty*. Ed. A. Zorin. St. Petersburg: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997. 165. Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Militsaner i drugie (1978)." *Moskva: virshi na kazhdyi den'. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh.* Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. M: NLO, 2017. 404. (11 | 01338). My translation.



Illustration 4. Icon of the Virgin as «Живоносный источник» [Life-Bearing Source]. Russia. Mid-19th Century. Note how she (particularly, her veil) frames the Christ Child within a chalice at the center of the entire cosmos.

These two moments of anti-iconic transfiguration near the end of the Militsaner poem cycle(s), moreover, introduce multiple 'selves' ensconced in different temporalities of being, including that of the lyric 'I,' who, with a few exceptions,[63] was absent from the odic narrative of the poem. This is possible and even necessary because the previously suspended heterogeneity of the poem's metaphysical content (its cosmos) has, as we argued above, been released by death and left to persist *as heterogeneity.* If we again 'contemplate' (созерцаем) the anti-icon of the Transfiguration, at least four layers of allegorical content are superimposed upon each other in the figures present without any clear syntax or consistent temporality for reading them: there is 1) the level of the Gospel, with three disciples (John, James, and Peter), a transfigured Christ, and, by his side, Moses and Elijah; 2) the level of philology, in which Catullus, Derzhavin, and Mandelstam appear in the place where the disciples should be; 3) the anagogic level of the Spirit/birds associated with these poets via their work (Khlebnikov's «птичка зензивер» makes a similarly bizarre appearance in a nearby section)[64]; and 4) the intra-textual level of authorship in which "I" [я] mixes with the hero (the Militsaner) and also with an 'other,' "he" [он], who could be a double of one or both, while it is absolutely unclear *which* of the three (or all) is being transfigured (into *what/whom*?).

Both anti-icons accomplish their metamorphosis through the instrumental case – «Я тенью легкой, он же – тенью тени» (the anti-icon of the Transfiguration) // «Стояла смерть Милицанершею» (the anti-icon of the Holy Mother/Life-Bearing Source) – which gives us a

[63] There are three. The first is the final section of the *Милицанер и другие (1978)* version included in *Москва* (2017), which I will read below (11 | 01339); the second is the section mentioning "satanic love" that was noted above (11 | 01332); and the third is, similarly, the odically conventional interruption of the lyric 'I' to sing about singing early on in the poem: «И я пою его в восторге / И лиры не передаю» ["And I sing him in ecstasy / And I will not pass my lyre"] (11 | 01293). See Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Militsaner i drugie (1978)." *Moskva: virshi na kazhdyi den'. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh.* Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. M: NLO, 2017.
[64] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. *Moskva: virshi na kazhdyi den'. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh.* Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. M: NLO, 2017. 404. (11 | 01337).

tenor and a vehicle but little else; in the former instance, not even the information: "I [*am*/*was/will be*] [like] a shadow"/"I [*do/did/will do*] [like] a shadow"/"I [*become/became/will become*] [like] a shadow." Such is the degree of atomization and syntax-less symbolic content left to spill through [ДАП]'s broken optic. All was one («все – одно»); now, even *one* is *many*.

Accretion into the Eternal: «прирастание к вечности»

In the «Предуведомление к сборнику 'Стихи осени, зимы года жизни 1978'» already mentioned above, Prigov writes that if "love" [«любовь»] is the parodist's attitude towards his object as well as his own discourse, then his *goal* is "extension into eternity" [«прирастание к вечности»].[65] What does he mean? Prigov argues that the "paradoxical non-coincidence" [«парадоксальная неналожимость»][66] of parodic discourse and parodied discourse opens up a *gap* that can be de-historicized and, thereby, he strongly implies, de-'ironized,' de-negativized, de-*ontologized* in its relation to the eternal. In other words, he proposes an imaginary *interlinear reading* of parodic discourse that opens up and expands a field of sheer positivity. Between two symbolic or discursive orders, we are led to imagine, lies a clearing for transcendental value that could be best described as both *madness* and *freedom.* Prigov habitually aligns himself with the former; he rarely, *if ever,* to my knowledge, dares to mention the latter.

His own signature piece of literary parody, *Евгений Онегин Пушкина* (begun in the same critical year of 1978[67]; finished 1992; published 1998) made this opening up of madness its singular device. In "Lermontovizing" [лермонтизирование] Pushkin's novel in verse – in fact,

[65] Prigov, Dmitrii A. *Sbornik preduvedomlenii k raznoobraznym veshcham.* M: A*d* M*arginem*, 1996. 54.
[66] Ibid., 53.
[67] I.e., in the form of *Продолговатый сборник* (1978), in which Prigov overwrites a selection of Russian masters, including Pushkin and Lermontov.

he '[ДАП]-ized' it – Prigov simply disorders the text by repeating it verbatim, while interrupting it with either variations on the word «безумный» [mad] or «неземной» [otherworldly], depending on the meter. Thus, we get:

Безумный дядя честных правил
Когда безумно занемог
Безумствовать себя заставил
Безумней выдумать не мог

[My / The / A] mad uncle, a man of honor,
When he fell madly ill,
Forced himself to madness
Nothing madder could he invent.[68]

Rhythmically, there is absolutely no change, and even many of the vowel placements coincide with the original. As we tend to believe of Soviet postmodernism in general: the structure (of a symbolic order, of a totalizing discourse, of a work, etc.) is repeated; the content (*any* present, ontologically stable content, *including negativity, thetic self-reflection, or a non-content*) is disavowed. What is left is *positive* "madness."

This is also how the Милицанер и другие (1978) version of our poem cycle ends, following the murder of its hero and the anti-iconography of the Holy Mother as Death-Bearer:

11 | 01339
Полюбил я от детства Милицию
И не мог ее не полюбить
Я постиг ее тайную суть
Совпадать с человечьими лицами

Человеку же с нею совпасть —
Все равно что в безумие впасть

Потому что конкретные лица мы
По сравненью с идеей Милиции

[68] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. *Evgenii Onegin Pushkina.* SPb: Mit'kilibris, 1998.

Since childhood, I loved the Militsia
I couldn't not love it
I grasped its secret essence
To coincide with human faces

For a man to coincide with it—
It's the same as going mad

Because concrete faces are we
In comparison with the idea of the Militsia.[69]

The previous section (the death-bearing Mother) had self-consciously imitated Pushkin; so much for musicality in these final stanzas. The crucial lines are: «Человеку же с нею совпасть — / Все равно что в безумие впасть» ["For a man to coincide with it— / It's the same as going mad"]. A more artistic translation that could capture the (mad) tautology of the original could be something like: "For a man who in its shadow *falls* / It matters little what madness *befalls*." Prigov restates the metaphysical impasse of the Militsaner that he articulated to himself as a child, if we are to believe the narrative of *Живите в Москве*; this was, namely, the problem of common natures and a choice between tautology and irresolvable heterogeneity: «А он – государственность есть в чистоте / Почти что себя этим уничтожающая». Now, with the Militsaner out of the picture, he extends the spell of [ДАП] to his author/reader, leaving, theoretically, *nowhere* to go but the same death, magically (Prigov would say "*lovingly*") recast as madness (and, secretly, freedom). This is the apotheosis the "Author" foretold in the «предуведомительная беседа» – «Да, апофеоз – это торжество жизни в лучах восходящей смерти» – and now we understand why death was paradoxically "ascending" [восходящей].

[69] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Apofeoz Militsanera." *Sovietskie teksty*. Ed. A. Zorin. St. Petersburg: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997. 163. Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Militsaner i drugie." *Moskva: virshi na kazhdyi den'. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh.* Ed. Brigitte Obermayr. M: NLO, 2017. 404. (11 | 01339).

To conclude, I would simply add a note on Prigov's Militsaner as a *signature* of his authorship, a master figure that bears the imprimatur of [ДАП]. The first thing to say is that the intended discursive function of the Militsaner is indeed *transfiguration* on the level of identity; its dominant trope – "anthropomorphism" and, implicitly, naturalization – is itself an anti-trope of sorts in that its truth and pretensions extend beyond *likeness* or correspondence (*veritas*, the 'what') and into the *'how*' of being (ἀλήθεια). Moreover, we see now that the *scope* of that transfiguration is absolute because it extends directly from the original form (ἀρχή) of authorship, with which it is identified, demiurgically repeating its structure ([ДАП]) upon the other elements in the text. Its argument about itself is that it cannot be a *product* of art (ποίησις) or its technics (τεχνή), an *authored* thing! Nor even bear a relation of createdness to itself. It "*is, beingly*": «Не хочешь -- не созерцай. Оно существует и без твоего созерцания. Оно сущностно.» What we ultimately have in the figure of the Militsaner is an image of the "apotheosis" of the technic (τεχνή) in order to disavow its own createdness (the fact of its ποίησις) and maintain itself as nature/being. This is the function of [ДАП], which supplants its own authorship (Prigov) – and it is the price that Prigov willingly pays to supplant the art and authorship of the State, which has already supplanted nature/being. It is a signature forged upon a signature forged upon being.

Signature II: [АТД]



Illustration 5. Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1914

АТД: «…как фотография Эдны Сент Миллей в цветущих яблонях»
АСГ: «…если это яблони, то тогда… Эдна должна быть дюймовочкой»

[ATD: "…like the photograph of Edna St. Millay among apple blossoms"
ASG: "…if those are apple blossoms, then Edna must be Thumbelina"][70]

[70] From a private correspondence between Arkadii Trofimovich Dragomoshchenko and Anna Sarkisovna Glazova. Reproduced in Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. "Mestnost' kak usilie." *Tavtologia.* M: NLO, 2011. 211.

"Double Exposure/Exposition": Error and the Optic [АТД]

Все начинается с ошибки зрения. – Аркадий Драгомощенко, *кто действительно разбирает буквы* (2010)[71]

> [Everything begins as an error of vision. – Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, *who can actually make out the letters* (2010)]

When writing about Arkadii Trofimovich Dragomoshchenko (1946 - 2012), one is immediately drawn into his territory: abstraction, catachresis, tautology… But this effect of wandering and errancy is also one that he *intends* to have, even upon himself, as he positions himself between frames: as simultaneous (self-)author and (self-)reader, aesthetic subject and work of art—framer and enframed. To illustrate this point, although it insistently returns in Dragomoshchenko's essays on poetry and aesthetics, I'd like to retrace an anecdote surrounding the portrait and caption reproduced above (*Signature II: [АТД]*) in order to analyze a single phrase. The image is of Edna St. Vincent Millay, and the text is from a correspondence between Dragomoshchenko and the poet Anna Glazova in 2010, near the end of his life.[72]

In an email to Glazova, Dragomoshchenko refers to the magnolias in the picture as (much smaller) apple blossoms. Amused by his own error, he blames "the effect of double exposure/exposition" [эффект двойной экспозиции]. In English translation, this double exposure of the double exposure—«экспозиция» being an Anglicism that combines the senses of "exposure" and "exposition" from the common Latin root, "exponere," meaning "to set forth; to lay open; to reveal"—is itself fortuitous inasmuch as it points to a "laying open" in both space

Also reproduced in Glazova, Anna. "The Fluid Image in Arkady Dragomoshchenko's Poetics." *SEEJ*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011. 571-582.

[71] Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. "Accidia." *kto deistvitel'no razbiraet bukvy. Znamia*, No. 6, 2010. http://znamlit.ru/publication.php?id=4296

[72] See Glazova, Anna. "The Fluid Image in Arkady Dragomoshchenko's Poetics." *SEEJ*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011. 571-582. See also Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. "Mestnost' kak usilie." *Tavtologiia*. M: NLO, 2011. 211-213.

(exposure) and in time (exposition), just like the complex of error that leads Dragomoshchenko to imagine a Millay the size of Thumbelina. After all, he means both the synesthetic (simultaneous, "exposed") and mnemonic (temporalized, "exposited") lapses by which he associates the image of Millay with verbal clichés like «юность, цвет яблонь и т.д.» ["youth, the color of apple blossoms, etc."] as well as well as one time (the past) with another (the present). What is "laid open" by this error is a structure involving two senses and two temporalities, exchanged and condensed in the form of a chiasmus; the middle term displaced by this movement, the aporia produced and ejected by the error of metaphor, is Millay herself, who changes proportions as a result.[73]

Furthermore, "double exposure/exposition" is a figure to which Dragomoshchenko had been returning for some time. To perceive truth (sense) in the substance (sensuousness) of things, he tells us, is to perceive them laid bare to each other and to themselves by an "error in vision."[74] Ten years earlier, in his afterword to the first book of criticism by his friend and pupil, Aleksandr Skidan, Dragomoshchenko said the following:

> Казалось бы, двойная экспозиция "прозрачного" – стекла и воды (и то и другое содержит в себе текучесть) предстает допустимым приближением к поэтической работе: поэтическая речь и мир одинаково проницаемы друг для друга, хотя по существу/веществу совершенно отличны.[75]
>
> [It seems as if the double exposure/exposition of the 'transparent' – of glass and water (both contain the property of fluidity) – presents an acceptable approximation of the work of poetry: poetic speech and the world are equally permeable to each other, although in essence/substance, they are completely different.]

[73] From this double erring, Dragomoshchenko constructs an allegory for memory, time, sense, and the interstice of art and the natural that concludes his last major statement on poetry, *Местность как усилие* [*Placeness as Exertion*] (2011), to which we will return below.
[74] Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. "Accidia." *kto deistvitel'no razbiraet bukvy. Znamia*, No. 6, 2010. http://znamlit.ru/publication.php?id=4296
[75] Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. "Posleslovie." In Aleksandr Skidan. *Soprotivlenie poezii: izyskaniia i esse.* SPb: Borei-Art, 2001. 227. My translation.

This concise "approximation" of poetry as a lens that doubly exposes/exposits (itself to) itself and its object is nearly as close as one can get to Dragomoshchenko defining the aesthetic-metaphysical complex of his own practice, along with its implicit limits and goals. There are two moments to which we should pay close attention. First, we are again directed to the indefinite point that joins a chiasmus, and, at this "equally permeable" moment of mobility and exteriority (the *event* of trope), all values transform and subsequently reveal themselves in and to each other.[76] Second, it is only at such a point—indeed, of error—that Dragomoshchenko can casually make «существо» and «вещество», οὐσία and παρουσία, interchangeable—or, better, *simultaneous*—separated only by a slash, and thus disclose the real undertaking of "double exposure/exposition": that, in making what belongs to οὐσία (sense) and what belongs to παρουσία (sensuousness) the same (ἀπουσία), *sense should 'sense' itself*, being should exteriorize and *encounter* its own beingness. Put otherwise and returned to the terms of his metaphor: "water" (life) and "glass" (poetry) are the same but different – simultaneous and "permeable" to each other when the transparency of both touches over and comes into contact with itself (as other). This is the "error of vision" occasioned by "double exposure/exposition": the *metaphor* of being returned to being itself, only to find itself incomplete.

The poem to which almost every critic turns for confirmation of this disposition in practice is *Настурция как реальность*, a twelve-part meditation on encountering oneself through a pane of glass, which, along with the cycles *Сумма элегий* and *Острова сирен*, comprises the small book *Небо соответствий* (1990), Dragomoshchenko's only Russian publication of the Soviet period. From a metapoetic standpoint, the uncharacteristically *short* and

[76] One of course thinks, by way of contrast, of Prigov's very *un*-chaismatic and *un*-dialectical "phantom center" (a center *without movement*, least of all "permeable" or self-reflexive), which is nonetheless attributed the same truth-revealing effect.

neat volume (three cycles, two of which are numbered) could certainly be considered the poet at his most programmatic. As for *Настурция,* those who read it—particularly here in the United States—tend to see in it an 'optic' or allegory through which Dragomoshchenko can and *should* be read.

This is natural for three reasons: 1) he wrote it for Lyn Heijinian to translate (it also features prominently in *Description*, published the same year), so one may safely assume that Dragomoshchenko indeed intended it as a calling card of sorts[77]; 2) the poem mimics the discourse of deconstruction (fashionable at the time), much as it mimics the 'English voice' that it anticipates receiving in Heijinian's translation, and, in fact, such anticipation of one's own presence/essence—perpetually receding and deferred—is what the poem is about; 3) as we will hopefully see, like Prigov, who always displaces and refers back to the discourse of the State, Dragomoshchenko's poetry in general requires the response(-ibility) [ответственность] of its reader to complete its meaning, and this is in part fulfilled by the kind of ideological, ethical, and hermeneutic reasoning—how something *ought* or *ought not* be read—that often slips into a poetry that is otherwise simply an account of *the natural*.

Below is the first meditation of *Настурция как реальность*, which depicts something that Dragomoshchenko elsewhere called the object of photography: to capture the viewer in his or her own act of apperception.[78] To do this verbally, just as one might layer multiple exposures

[77] See Edmond, Jacob. *A Common Strangeness*. New York: Fordham UP, 2012. 64-65.
[78] Dragomoshchenko explores this in the prose text *Здесь* [Here], as yet unpublished (although google-able) in Russian but available in English in the volume *Dust* (2008). Here, I use Evgeny Pavlov's reproduction of the original and his translation as included in a footnote to his article, "'Poetry' vs. 'Literature' in Dragomoshchenko's Tautologies," which brought it to my attention: «Все обстоит проще. Нам хочется *рассматривать фотографией* самих себя, глядящих в поле изображения, а желание окончательно совместить взгляд извне со взглядом вовне означает свести воедино 'будущее' и 'прошлое', убрать 'между', что невозможно, поскольку только в этом 'между', в этом желании сведения и того и другого, мы обречены находиться,—мы есть 'между'» ["What we want, simply, is to study *ourselves* through photographs, ourselves looking out onto the field of depiction; and our desire to conclusively combine the outside view with the inside is like bridging 'future' with 'past,' deleting the space 'in between,' which is of course impossible, since we can exist only in this

from different vantages on a single frame of film, Dragomoshchenko uses visual narration directed outwards from multiple perspectives. What is illicit to the focalization of lyric (multiple topoi; multiple selves) mimics what is illicit to the focalization of photography (multiple exposures; the passage of time), forming an analogy between two discontinuities in presence, the 'gap' in space and the 'interval' in time:

1
Опыт
описания изолированного предмета
определен предвосхищеньем итога—
взглядом через плечо другого.

Настурция состоит
из дождливой прорвы окна
для себя самой «до»,

для меня—«за». Кому достоянье
рдеющей дрожи
спрессованного обнажения
в проеме обоюдоострых предлогов

створчатой плоскости,
прозрачность
разящей
стекла?

*Heijinian and Balashova's original translation (*Description*, 1990):*

1
An attempt
to describe an isolated object
determined by the anticipation of the resulting whole—
by a glance over someone else's shoulder.

A nasturtium composed
of holes in the rain-spotted window—to itself

'between'"]. See Pavlov, Evgeny. "'Poetry' vs. 'Literature': Dragomoshchenko's Tautologies." *SEEJ,* Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011. 562, note 12. See also Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii. "Here." Trans. Evgeny Pavlov. In *Dust*. Trans. Evgeny Pavlov, Thomas Epstein, Shushan Avagyan, and Ana Lucic. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008.

it's "in front,"

to me, "behind." Whose property is the gleaming
tremor
of compressed disclosure
        in the opening of double-edged prepositions
                                                in
a folded plane,
which strikes
the transparency
of the window pane?[79]

An attempt at 'literal' translation—DH:

1

[The/an] attempt
at description of an isolated object
is defined by the anticipation of totality –
by a glance over the shoulder of another.

[The/a] nasturtium is comprised
of a rainy hole of window,
for itself "before/in front of"

for me "coming after/beyond/behind." For whom the domain
of a blushing tremor,
a compressed revelation
in [the/an] aperture of double-edged prepositions

[of/for] a hinged flatness,
shattering [*lit. 'dis- -ing'*; '*once-ing'*]
the transparency
of glass?

[79] Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii. "Nasturtium as Reality." *Description.* Trans. Lyn Heijinian and Elena Balashova. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1990. 93. I reproduce the translation first published by Heijinian and Balashova due to its historical import and the fact that it was supervised by Dragomoshchenko himself. A slightly different version by the same translators was published after the poet's death in the book *Endarkenment* (2014). In this latter version, the lineation changes to more closely reflect the Russian, and there is a single semantic change that is for the better: "in / a folded plane / of transparency which strikes the window pane?" (*Description*, 1990) becomes (correctly), "in a folded plane, / which strikes / the transparency / of the window pane?" See Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii. "Nasturtium as Reality." Trans. Lyn Heijinian and Elena Balashova. *Endarkenment.* Ed. Eugene Ostashevsky. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2014. 107.

Anna Glazova beautifully summarizes this chiasmatic use of vision and language: "Dragomoshchenko takes vision as his object and attempts to see through the immediacy of seeing. To be able to make this seeing visible, he needs a different medium—the medium of language."[80] This synaesthetic conflation permits another aporia in the analogy between time and space (simultaneity); Dragomoshchenko takes the unity of place (topos) in lyric and the unity of time in the image allows them to intervene in and disturb each other. The result is the "compressed disclosure/unconcealment" [спрессованное обнажение] (line 10) of both: we perceive the shifting *selves* involved in the unity of speech about an object when our perspective is reversed to that *of* the object as well as the *delay* involved in the visual apperception of the seer by the seen. Both of these effects point our attention directly to the *frame* of the work—whether actual or metaphorical, visual or linguistic—but also to the titular frame of 'reality' *qua* subjectivity, which is taken to be ourselves in our own act of apperception and reading.

As this allegory of 'becoming-through-vision/language' (to quote and then expand Michael Molnar)[81] shows, the 'object' of *Настурция как реальность* is not the nasturtium nor even reality in the sense of *realia* but rather the '*realness*' of reality—the *truth* of it; the οὐσία (essence) of its παρουσία (substance), which is figured here by the self-concealing/self-disclosing "transparency" [прозрачность] of a pane of glass. In fact, if we look closely, we see that there is no direct relation between the speaker and the nasturtium—only his awareness of himself and of it simultaneously regarding the glass in which de-situated images accumulate: rain drops, one's own reflection, what is on the other side. "We" are on one side and "it" on the

[80] Glazova, Anna. "The Fluid Image in Arkady Dragomoshchenko's Poetics." *SEEJ*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011. 578.
[81] In his introduction to *Description* (1990), Dragomoshchenko's first book in English, Molnar offers this extremely quotable endorsement of its author: "*[speaking of Mandelstam]* But within Russian literature that hesitant self-orienting voice was hardly heard again until Dragomoshchenko began a more systematic topography of becoming-through-language." Molnar, Michael. "Introduction." In Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii. Trans. Lyn Heijinian and Elena Balashova. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1990.

other. Whatever dwells in the lost middle (truly a "pit/hole" [прорва] of metaphor) does so in a non-place and a non-time[82] of radical simultaneity at which all perspectival values collate and collide. This elusive in-between, I believe, is what is intended by both "double-edged prepositions" [обоюдоострые предлоги]—i.e., Russian prepositions that indicate *either* place *or* time but *not both simultaneously*—and by the predicate «разящая» [that shatters/shattering], which could be rendered etymologically either spatially ("dis- -ing" as in "scattering") or temporally ("once-ing"). In both cases, the effect is one of out-of-jointness, now-ness, discontinuous movement, *event*. The truth of such an event—the ostensible subject matter of the poem—is so abstracted for its hypothetical observer that the latter is invoked simply as "For whom" [Кому] at the beginning of the third and last sentence, which ends the section in the form of an open-ended question as if addressed to God: the displaced middle of metaphor's 'error,' being's beingness, the anthropomorphism of the only "transparent" thing.

Warding off Error from Errancy: Plato's Χώρα and a Substance(-)"like Reality"

«Все обстоит проще. Нам хочется *рассматривать фотографией* самих себя, глядящих в поле изображения, а желание окончательно совместить взгляд извне со взглядом вовне означает свести воедино 'будущее' и 'прошлое', убрать 'между', что невозможно, поскольку только в этом 'между', в этом желании сведения и того и другого, мы обречены находиться,—мы есть 'между'.»

["What we want, simply, is to study *ourselves* through photographs, ourselves looking out onto the field of depiction; and our desire to conclusively combine the outside view with the inside is like bridging 'future' with 'past,' deleting the space 'in between,' which is of course impossible, since we can exist only in this 'between.'"][83]

[82] Mikhail Iampol'skii calls it a poetry of "non-place" [«не-место»], or, alternatively, speaks of its proper (non-)topos as "a space of pure potentiality" [«пространство чистой потенциальности»] (Iampol'skii, Mikhail. "Poetika kasaniia." In Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. *Opisanie.* SPb: Gummanitarnaia akademiia, 2000. 375).

[83] Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. "Zdes'," 1999. Unpublished Manuscript. See "Here." Trans. Evgeny Pavlov. In *Dust*. Trans. Evgeny Pavlov, Thomas Epstein, Shushan Avagyan, and Ana Lucic. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008. For Russian text, see Pavlov, Evgeny. "'Poetry' vs. 'Literature': Dragomoshchenko's Tautologies." *SEEJ,* Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011. 562, note 12.

The kind of error—or better, *errancy*—that interests Dragomoshchenko is one that is always *in process* and *on trial*—more of a philosophical wandering that solicits truth's reply than a way of locking oneself into (or out of) any fixed concept or way of thinking. In the epigraph above, for example, what stands out is not only his insistence on a neither-here-nor-there subjectivity demarcated by the discontinuity between inside/outside (gap) and future/past (interval) but also the more radical claim he makes against presence as such: that "to be situated" [находиться] is to be "displaced" [убрать; lit. "to delete; to take away"].

If this all sounds like the discourse of deconstruction—and, particularly, Derridian *différance*[84]—it *should*, just as the account I gave above of "water" (life) and "glass" (art) in Dragomoshchenko should sound like a fuzzy adaptation of Hegel's dialectic of Spirit. Dragomoshchenko was aware of and highly interested in both new and old Western philosophies and Eastern religions (although untrained in any and with an amateurish syncretic enthusiasm for all). *However*, there is a defining difference between Dragomoshchenko's project and these (trans-)ontological precedents, and that is the status of *substance* in his reality, which, by virtue of its primacy, I would argue, makes him more primordially ontic or 'Ancient' and, specifically, pre-Socratic in his thinking; Glazova, for her own reasons, calls him "Heraclitean."[85]

One way to think this difference is to continue to pursue the distinction between errancy and error or negativity and negation. The former is an account of process and potentiality, the latter of the act, and, implicitly, of a subject who *acts upon*. In Prigov's case, we saw that discourse acts upon subjects, not the other way around, and, moreover, that negativity as a potential for discursive miscarriage hardly even exists, except as a "phantom" that haunts and

[84] This will be further unpacked below.
[85] Glazova, Anna. "The Fluid Image in Arkady Dragomoshchenko's Poetics." *SEEJ*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (2011): 576.

animates the machine—ultimately, as a question, perhaps *the* question for [ДАП], of *belief and disbelief*. This is because Prigov categorically rejects and ejects any outside to the sovereignty of [ДАП]. In this very important regard, his text resembles the discourse of science or theology (i.e., discourses of *totalizing* mastery); it is constructed like a city without walls (and, moreover, without inhabitants or architects). In Dragomoshchenko, on the other hand, we see a renunciation of discursive mastery that, it is true, also renegotiates the frame of inquiry and the authority of the subject but that takes very much the opposite turn—*into* negativity—and thus requires a definition of negativity that precedes negation or *acting upon*.

In order to expose this negativity, I would invoke an ancient metaphor—again, for a *territory*—and that is "χώρα" (*chora*), the name given by Plato to the "third type" of space, which is neither form [μορφή] nor matter [ὕλη] (*Timaeus*, 48-52). Its fluidity is further emphasized by a series of inconsistent metaphors: "the receptacle," "the mother," "the nurse"; however, the one that Plato keeps and promotes to a name is "χώρα." It appears only in his account of creation in *Timaeus*, a kind of ontogenetic double to Aristotle's *Physics*, and it simply and literally means the *in-between, liminal territory that lies outside the walls of a polis/city but still belongs to it*. Plato's Socrates uses this conceptually neither-inside-nor-outside, neither-here-nor-there place as an analogy for the interval between being and non-being prior to both. That is, "χώρα" is what can be *pointed to* but not demarcated, captured, or acted upon: belonging neither to being nor to non-being, neither to presence nor to absence, resisting all symbolization yet necessarily preceding and setting a horizon for its possibility.[86]

[86] Conceptually, this is, I suspect, exactly what Iampol'skii means by "non-place" and "a space of pure potentiality" in Dragomoshchenko; he even dismissively alludes to «хора», then discards it, perhaps for fear of its neo-Platonic as well as Derridian implications (see below). But, as we saw with Prigov, whose practice could, in quite rigorous allegorical detail, be compared to that of the neo-Platonic *demiurge*, there is certainly a lot of Platonism and anti-Platonism to go around with these late Soviet poets as discontinuities in their own native and positivist 'ontology'—the univocal, *substantive* one of the State—in a more ancient than modern conceptualization. See Iampol'skii,

As a result, "χώρα" has come to be seen as a seductive and potentially heretical (read: *theological*) trapdoor to ontology that grew in interest in the 20th century, beginning with Heidegger and culminating, perhaps, in Derrida's essay *Khôra* (1993).[87] But, in fact, as I wish to emphasize, a Derridean use of χώρα to talk about Dragomoshchenko's negativity would, in very crucial respects, miss the target while describing its very outline. This is because Derrida cannot in good faith conceive of an 'outside' to ontology and to the mode of metaphysical critique (of metaphysics) that we call deconstruction and that he simply calls philosophy. He cannot posit a *pre-ontological* philosopheme—however provisional or in the negative—that is not deferred, ontologically recuperated, compromised, abjected; so, for him, χώρα is the topos *par excellence* of a *negative theology* that is *différance*'s (fictive and dangerous) double and that goes where philosophy dares not tread: namely, into *substance*, where empiricism and theology, as Derrida was fond of saying,[88] seem to meet in complicit self-certainty.

Mikhail. "Poetika kasaniia." In Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. *Opisanie.* SPb: Gummanitarnaia akademiia, 2000. 375.

[87] See Derrida, Jacques. *Khôra*, Paris: Galilée 1993. In English: Derrida, Jacques. "*Khôra.*" Trans. Ian McLeod. In *On the Name.* Ed. Thomas Dutoit. Trans. David Wood, John P. Leavy, Jr., and Ian McLeod. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995. For reasons that hopefully become clear, for the purposes of talking about art, I far prefer and, in writing this, was deeply indebted to Julia Kristeva's conceptualization of χώρα [*chora*] as it appears in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984). For a debate between Kristeva and Derrida on these issues, see "Semiology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva" in *Positions.* Derrida, Jacques. *Positions.* Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. 15-36.

[88] For example, in the final moments of the essay *Violence and Metaphysics* (1964), it is on this point (the point of substance as prior or exterior to the metaphysics of presence) that Derrida reluctantly but forcefully parts with Levinas' ethics of exteriority. He writes: "But can one speak of an *experience* of the other or of difference? Has not the concept of experience always been determined by the metaphysics of presence? Is not experience always an encountering of an irreducible presence, the perception of a phenomenality? This complicity between empiricism and metaphysics [in the 'theological' sense of self-positing presence—DH] is in no way surprising. By criticizing them, or rather by limiting them with one and the same gesture, Kant and Husserl indeed had recognized their solidarity. It calls for closer meditation. Schelling went quite far in this direction." The Schelling to which he directs us in a footnote could be very close to the issue at stake in Dragomoshchenko for which I have called upon χώρα; in the former's *Exposition of Philosophical Empiricism*, we read (following Derrida): "Thus God would be Being enclosed in itself in an absolute manner, would be substance in the most elevated sense, free of every relation. But from the very fact that we consider these determinations as purely immanent, as related to nothing external, one finds oneself in the necessity of having to conceive them by parting from *Him*, that is, to conceive of him as the *prius*, that is as the absolute *prius*. And it is thus that, pushed to its final consequences, empiricism leads us to the supra-empirical." This is exactly the "push" that Dragomoschenko intends to make by "double exposure/exposition." See Derrida, Jacques. "Violence and Metaphysics." In *Writing and Difference.* Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. 152 and n. 90, p. 320.

This original nature or primordial being, I wager, is precisely the territory that Dragomoshchenko wishes to delimit in the *poetic act* while recognizing the purely *discursive* impossibility of doing so. I even suspect that he would identify quite strongly with the assignation of negative theology that Derrida would perhaps give him. Aesthetically, they are both interested in the liminality of something like χώρα that arises before meaning-making itself but part ways around a complication for which Derrida does not (for he cannot and refuses to) adequately account: the *materiality* of the work of art and of the text, which is non-dissociable for Dragomoshchenko, as it would be for a 'pre-ontological' or 'Heraclitean' Greek, from any contemplation of how and what that art 'stands for.'

This is the paradox of Dragomoshchenko's supposedly 'ontological' negativity and 'metaphysical' errancy—that it is, in fact, *extremely* material. Anna Glazova says that Dragomoshchenko dwells in the "ink-ness" of the text[89]—and, virtually alone in the generation of the 80s, it is true that he intended for his works to be *read* (as texts) rather than *read* (out loud and thus disembodied from themselves *as texts*, i.e., preceding any speaker). It is a poetry of material remains. Evgeny Pavlov speaks of the "residue" of Dragomoshchenko's poetic language[90]; Barret Watten alludes to a poetics of (often quite literal) "erasure."[91] Dragomoshchenko himself describes his first encounter with books and with 'literature' as one in

[89] Referring to the strange metalinguistic allegory that concludes *Тавтология* (pp. 194-5), Glazova writes: "Dragomoschenko locates the origin of metaphysics not so much in the *logos* as in the ink [чернила] through which *logos* is mediated. The fluidity of the linguistic medium is what matters more than the words. The strange claim of this passage is that the semantic as well as the visual side of all things has a fluid nature. This fluidity is merely reflected and imitated in our discursive descriptions which – like pencil marks in a book's margin – are secondary to the 'ink-ness' of language." Glazova, Anna. "The Fluid Image in Arkady Dragomoshchenko's Poetics." *SEEJ*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011. 576.
[90] Pavlov, Evgeny. "'Poetry' vs. 'Literature': Dragomoshchenko's Tautologies." *SEEJ*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011.
[91] See Watten, Barrett. "Post-Soviet Subjectivity in Arkadii Dragomoshchenko and Ilya Kabakov." *Postmodern Culture:* Vol. 3, Issue 2, 1993. 555-58.

which he was preoccupied with both the ontological aura and the 'bookness' of the books, which he ultimately conflated with one other, as he later would in poetic practice:

> Я отношусь к поколению, для многих из которого книги были частью просто онтологического уклада, и иногда, возвращаясь к тому времени, удивляюсь поразительной остроте ощущения неотъемлемости того, что называется «книгой», ото всего «остального» […] Например, не было Пушкина, был сине-чернильный холщевый переплет с размочаленным уголком (приложение к «Огоньку»), за которым скрывалась какая-то русалка, вирированная в полиграфическую зелень; она же много позднее на страницах Гоголя брезжила в сепии. И так далее.
>
> I belong to a generation in which, for many of us, books were part of a simply ontological order, and, sometimes, returning to that time, I am struck by an acutely visceral sensation of the inalienability with which the thing called "a book" was distinguished from "everything else" […] For example, there wasn't a Pushkin, there was a navy-inky canvas binding with a broken corner (the supplement to *Ogonek*) behind which lay some mermaid, virage-toned into the printed green; much later, on the pages of Gogol, she shone in sepia. And so on.[92]

Again, my insistence on this feature of Dragomoshchenko's worldview is due to the fact that, in a truly *essential* way, it sets him apart 1) from his own late Soviet generation (1970s – 1980s), who, like Prigov, often dwell in material discontinuity but almost never in '*ontological*' negativity or in an 'original' nature of things behind that discontinuity[93] and 2) from what he is most often mistaken for *outside* a Soviet context, which is an uneducated and therefore revanchist or 'modernist' poetry of (proto-)deconstruction. The latter could absolutely be a working hypothesis—reductive, but permissible—for many of the post-Soviet generation of poets like Skidan, whom Dragomoshchenko deeply influenced. But he is a thinker of a prior reality: the negativity that is the subject-matter of (and inevitably replaces the subject in) his

[92] Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. "Mestnost' kak usilie." *Tavtologiia*. M: NLO, 2011. 196-197.
[93] As Barrett Watten suggests, someone like Il'ia Kabakov might be an exception among others. See Watten, Barrett. "Post-Soviet Subjectivity in Arkadii Dragomoshchenko and Ilya Kabakov." *Postmodern Culture:* Vol. 3, Issue 2, 1993. There are, however, *earlier* Soviet precedents for this kind of 'metaphysical' negativity, most notably, the Oberiuti.

work, like χώρα, is not entirely discursive, nor does it properly belong to the articulation of the text itself as what 'takes place.' It does and it does not. It moves between what is said and unsaid, and it does so as the production and withdrawal of *place(-ness)* («местность») itself: «находиться»/«убрать».

Thus, when we speak of Dragomoshchenko, we must speak of negativity, but of a version of negativity that is not an act (negation, dialectic), not a force (*différance*), but something prior to those formal relations and to the articulation of the text itself—a *substance* "like reality" in a substance-like reality, and, therefore, a substance like χώρα.

[АТД] // [ДАП]: **Two Competing but Compatible Truths**

"The doctrine of Heraclitus, that all things are and are not, seems to make everything true, while that of Anaxagoras, that there is an intermediate between the terms of contradiction, seems to make everything false" –Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1012a25–27[94]

If we keep our focus on *negativity*, then, and return Prigov to the foreground, we will uncover two competing truths in [ДАП] and [АТД] as optics and signatures of authorship that nonetheless coexist more or less naturally as exponents of a shared, characteristically late Soviet ontological worldview.

We recall from his «предуведомление» on parody and satire that Prigov was interested in the gap of "non-coincidence" [неналожимость] between parodic discourse and the discourse being parodied. Prigov tells us that the goal of the parodist, with whom he identifies, is to *widen* this gap to liminal, "paradoxical" proportions, and, in doing so, clear a space for the "eternal."[95]

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[94] Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Trans. W.D. Ross. *The Complete Works of Aristotle.* Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. II. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984. 1598.

[95] See above. The text is the «предуведомление» to *Стихи осени, зимы года жизни 1978*. The excerpt reads as follows:

Importantly, Prigov never refers to a natural, non-discursive object or to 'natural' speech, and he likewise never addresses what fills the gap of "non-coincidence" created by parody or how it might be closed. *Everything* is "parody"; and surely, "the eternal" is not a promise of closure so much as the fantasy of its total disavowal.

But in Prigov, there is no need for such closure. This is because, as we argued, [ДАП] is a τέχνη at odds with itself as τέχνη; it views itself as nature. Therefore, any 'negative space' left outside of it is recuperated as the *positive* absence of itself. There is no 'outside' to [ДАП]; only [ДАП] and a place where [ДАП] is not (yet/anymore). We can thus view Prigov's sheer positivity—even when engaging in discursive modes of negation such as parody or satire—as belonging to one half of its own view of (itself as) the natural, in which there *is* no negation of nature-[ДАП]—only its *privation*.

This is how Heidegger presents such negativity (στέρησις; lit. "privation") in Aristotle's *Physics*: "Στέρησις as absencing is not simply absentness; rather, it is a *presencing*, namely, that

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> Единственно, против чего я возражаю, так это против скоропалительного вывода, что ироническая интонация (в смысле насмехания, опорочивания) является основным пафосом моего творчества. Тут происходит пародии и сатиры (которая не обязательно связана со смехом). Я, несомненно, являюсь представителем пародизма (да и слово-то само приятно своим созвучием с парадизмом). Наиболее известный пример – это пародии на литературные произведения, где (пусть в ограниченном масштабе и, соответственно, с более узким охватом жизни) проявляются основные черты пародизма: отрывание стилистики описания от предмета описания и возможность расталкивания до предела их парадоксальной неналожимости друг на друга. Ограничительным моментом в данном случае служит любовь как к предмету описания, так и к стилистике, в то время как неприятие их снимает всякие ограничения (что является шагом на пути к сатире).
>
> The only thing I object to is the hastily drawn conclusion that the primary pathos of my work is an ironic intonation (in the sense of mockery and slander). Those are parodies and satires (which are not necessarily associated with laughter). I, undoubtedly, am a representative of parody (the word itself is pleasant because it sounds like 'parade-y'). The most famous example of this is the parody of literary works, wherein (albeit on a limited scale and, accordingly, with a narrower view to life), the fundamental features of parody are made manifest: the stylistics of description are torn apart from the object of description and the possibility opens up for pushing their paradoxical non-coincidence to its limit. In this case, that liminal moment is love both for the object of description and for the stylistics of description, at the same time as their antagonism removes every limit from each (which is a step towards satire).

Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. *Sbornik preduvedomlenii k raznoobraznym veshcham.* M: A*d* M*arginem*, 1996. 53.

kind in which the *absencing* (but not the absent thing) is present."[96] As the privation of μορφή (natural form, the form of self-becoming), στέρησις constitutes what Heidegger considers one half of the twofold, self-concealing/self-disclosing essence of nature/being.[97] This accords with what we are told over and over again in Prigov: that, to quote the poem *Москва и москвичи*, «Где ж нет Москвы – там просто пустота» ["Where there is no Moscow – there is just emptiness"][98]; and, for "Moscow," one could easily substitute Prigov's other big M's: «Милицанера» or «*меня*, Дмитрия Алексадровича» in the sense of [ДАП]. Prigov does not say «(нет) ничего» ["(there is) not-anything"], but, in direct juxtaposition to the genitive privation of «Где ж нет Москвы», he says «там просто пустота» ["there is just emptiness"] in the nominative—where there is not Moscow, there is the present value of its being-absent (στέρησις). An empty space is opened, a gap that does not require closure because it does not in any way lie *outside of* the natural or hang in the ontological negative of being-[ДАП]. Outside of Moscow, there is simply space for more Moscow.

In contrast, a negativity like χώρα in Dragomoshchenko has no need to open or empty spaces for itself—it is what precedes them all. In order to expose χώρα, Dragomoshchenko is also interested in the discontinuities that invade and undermine an economy of correspondence. However, he seems to see little need for creating them, much less widening them—they simply exist; in fact, they might be *all that exists* when the rest is tested and erased by error. The question of closure is always there: «Опыт / описания изолированного предмета / определен

[96] Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence and Concept of φύσις in Aristotle's *Physics* B, I." Trans. Thomas Sheehan. *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 226-7.
[97] In fact, in Book II of *Physics*, στέρησις is what accounts, above all, for *art itself* as an *interruption of* μορφή *by τέχνη*. To take what Aristotle views as a commonplace example from Antiphon: a tree has been made into a bed; it is still wood, but it cannot be planted (*Physics* II, 1). Τέχνη produces an artifact that is (temporarily; in-essentially) 'stuck' in the state imposed upon it but still *belongs* to natural being; its μορφή, its self-becoming, has simply been interrupted.
[98] Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich. "Moskva i moskvichi." *Sovietskie teksty*. Ed. A. Zorin. St. Petersburg: Izd. Ivana Limbakha, 1997. 184.

предвосхищеньем итога»; however, the "total" is always simply the inadequate result of an almost scientific inquiry into what *cannot* (and perhaps should not) be closed.

Thus, where Prigov's maximalism attenuates the gap between sense and non-sense in order to make them meet like two parallel lines extended infinitely, Dragomoshchenko seems intent on (*de-)limiting* discontinuity, fencing it in, as if building a frame to *contain* it at the center of the work of art by repeatedly performing his own failure to do so. Such discontinuities are emphasized *within* the frame of the textual unit/image—its joints, its syntax, its misunderstandings of itself—rather than at its circumference as a discursive whole.

But what happens to discourse and to the world when viewed through these strange, non-negating forms of negativity (στέρησις, χώρα)? These are limit cases—versions of negativity without alterity; they present discursive paradigms that are always true but also only *self-true*. If we look at the basic structure of a Prigovian metaphor, it breaks outward entropically into affirmative self-contradiction (Moscow and not-Moscow is Moscow; $\bot \Rightarrow A$), while its counterpart in Dragomoshchenko implodes into tautology (the nasturtium is not not-the-nasturtium; $A \Rightarrow \top$); in fact, both propositions are compatible with each other as a truth glut and truth gap, respectively, yet satisfy nothing but themselves. More importantly for our argument, they privilege *errancy* as the only mode of truth-telling available to either the artist or the metaphysician. Look at Prigov, or better, look *through* the optic [ДАП] and the words begin to "shimmer" (мерцают); look again, this time through the optic [АТД], and the *world* "shimmers" (мерцает) in the stronger Vvedenskiian sense.[99] However, in both cases, one must look *again*;

[99] I am, of course, referring to the *Gray Notebook* (*Серая тетрадь*) of the early 1930s and particularly the section titled "Simple Things" ("Простые вещи"). Therein, we find the parable of the world and the mouse: "The shimmering will begin. The mouse will begin to shimmer. Look again: the world shimmers (like a mouse)" ["Начнется мерцание. Мышь начнет мерцать. Оглянись: мир мерцает (как мышь)"]. This comes as a meditation on being and time and particularly upon the discontinuity of the now with the continuity of history.

one must *perform* truth, iteratively and in error, because errancy and self-truth are the *requirements for each other*. This is the movement, par excellence, of ἀλήθεια.

The Allegory of the Frame

"φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ" – Heraclitus, Fragment 123

> [nature loves to hide itself][100]

"Wahrheit gehört als Sichentbergen zum Sein selbst: *φύσις* ist *ἀλήθεια*, Entbergung und deshalb *κρύπτεβῦαι φιλεϊ."* – Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen und Begriff des φύσις: Aristoteles' Physik B, 1*

> [Truth as self-revealing belongs to being itself. Φύσις is ἀλήθεια, unconcealing, and therefore κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ ("loves to hide itself")].[101]

Perhaps someone will object that I am making of [ДАП] and [АТД] more than what they are: that Prigov and Dragomoshchenko are, after all, *artists* and, more specifically, *writers*—no more, no less. However, it should be no surprise that Dragomoschenko was also a semi-professional photographer,[102] just as Prigov was trained in sculpture; and the case for their fundamental orientation towards intermediality might be the birthmark of their work's origin and end in an ontology *preceding* aesthetic articulation, just as it might help distinguish *how* it is so peculiarly 'un-literary.' Put more simply, their shared and fairly explicit goal of capturing what

[100] Heidegger intentionally mistranslates "φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ" as „*Das Sein* liebt es, sich zu verbergen" [*Being* loves to hide itself – my italics] (*Wegmarken,* 300), demonstrating his intent to conflate φύσις(nature)-οὐσία(being)-ἀλήθεια(truth) as multiple aspects of the same principle.

[101] Heidegger, Martin. "Vom Wesen und Begriff des φύσις: Aristoteles' Physik B, 1." *Wegmarken*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976. 301. English text: Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence and Concept of φύσις in Aristotle's *Physics* B, I." Trans. Thomas Sheehan. *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 230.

[102] Although Dragomoshchenko's photography is not usually mentioned in criticism, two very notable exceptions were published together in the same issue of *SEEJ* in 2011. The first is a brief, impressionistic essay by Dennis Ioffe that includes several reproductions of Dragomoshchenko's own photos, and the second is a masterfully suggestive but quietly open-ended article by the poet Anna Glazova, from whom I take the 'signature' (including the caption) reproduced above. See Ioffe, Dennis. "Arkady Dragomoshchenko's Photography: A New Visuality and a Poetics of Metaphysical Inebriation." *SEEJ*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011. 583-613. See also Glazova, Anna. "The Fluid Image in Arkady Dragomoshchenko's Poetics." *SEEJ*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011. 571-582.

otherwise falls between incompatible discourses and even media (language and visuality; text and representational art) belies a primary interest in what preceded discourse and signification as such, and, by analogy, in a reality preceding the real.

Moreover, if we *do* return to the specificity of art and of media, we uncover more from their peculiar preferences. Sculpture and photography, after all, occupy special positions among the mimetic arts. One is perhaps the oldest sister art, the other the youngest, but, in terms of τεχνή, each points us to a liminal case by which the mimetic stands in relation to the natural—each provides us with a different but compatible allegory for the function of the frame.

One technic, that of sculpture, produces works that at their limit exist framelessly, alongside and usurping *our space*, the space of the natural; the other technic, that of photography, mechanically reproduces the trace of the natural in time, identical to it *if not* for its interposing itself upon *our time* in a state of overdetermined simultaneity. Sculpture thus works in the identity of space; photography works negatively in the identity of time. However, it is the '*alongsideness*' of sculpture and '*simultaneity*' of photography (both could be rendered by the Greek "ἅμα")[103] that marks them as art and as products of τεχνή. Without the frame that renders 'alongsideness' and 'simultaneity' possible and perceptible, they *do not exist as what they are.*

To illustrate: one can, in fact, 'break the frame' of either sculpture or photography by transgressing 'alongsideness'/'simultaneity' without ever having to mark or (re-)move the frame itself—because it only ever existed as a formal or *conceptual* discontinuity between its

[103] The Greek adverb/preposition "ἅμα" ("at the same time"; "alongside"; "together with") is in fact the *linguistic* means by which it is possible for Aristotle to describe the relation of time and space to each other in *Physics* IV, producing an analogy that was subsequently naturalized in the philosophical tradition. In his essay, "*Ousia* and *Gramme*: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*," Jacques Derrida calls ἅμα ("*hama*") the "pivot of essence" by which presence (*ousia*) is distributed; without it, the aporetic argument of *Physics* IV about the nature of time (and its spatial analogy) would not be possible. See Derrida, Jacques. "*Ousia* and *Gramme*: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*." In *Margins of Philosophy.* Trans. and ed. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1982. 29-68; especially 53-57.

space/time and ours. The case of sculpture is fairly straightforward. I can sculpturally produce a 'sculpture of sculpture' simply by chiseling the nose off of Michaelango's *David* (would I then have *two* sculptures?), or, conversely, I can make a sculpture of the natural simply by taking a rock and *naming* it so—in a limited sense, this was the effect/'optical illusion' of [ДАП] and its figurehead, the Militsaner.

The case of photography is analogous—only a bit more complicated. A photograph of a photograph is just that: a negation of a negation that lacks any productive or formal negativity. It is still a reproduction of *one* time (with another reproduction of another time contained therein, ad infinitum). But to *photographically* break or expand upon photography's technical frame—the thing that marks it as a product of τεχνή and not of φύσις—requires some sort of illicit self-reflection: some intervention of photographic time *upon itself* and *internally improper to itself* according to the identity of its time and ours. The perfect example of this phenomenon is something like "double exposure" [двойная экспозиция]. In double exposure, the identity of time reasserts itself—but as *our time only*, in juxtaposition to the doubly exposed, impossible time of the image.

The crucial moment in each case is that the performance of errancy—of 'breaking down'—in fact *restores* the frame to its proper function, which is *discontinuity with the natural*. *In performing errancy, the frame performs its (self-)truth*; it unconceals its very essence, while restoring the identity of the natural (*our time* and *our space*) as well. The errant frame of sculpture or photography is also its truest frame, and it provides an allegory for the function of the frame in all mimetic art as it stands in relation to the natural.

In the epigraph above, Heidegger concludes *Vom Wesen und Begriff des* φύσις*: Aristoteles' Physik B, 1* [*On the Essence and Concept of* φύσις *in Aristotle's* Physics B, I] with

the cryptic and even *poetic* statement, based on Fragment 123 of Heraclitus (via Porphyry): "Wahrheit gehört als Sichentbergen zum Sein selbst: *φύσις* ist *ἀλήθεια,* Entbergung und deshalb *κρύπτεβῦαι φιλεϊ"*[104] ["Truth as self-revealing belongs to being itself. Φύσις is ἀλήθεια, unconcealing, and therefore κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ"].[105]

So, nature (φύσις) is (a) truth (άλήθεια), that/which "loves to hide itself." This could be both the "central phantom" [центральный фантом] of Prigov and the two-sided thing that Dragomoshchenko's "double exposures/expositions" [двойные экспозиции] are meant to capture. To do so mimetically would be impossible, like catching running water; it can only be demonstrated, performed—primarily *as interruption, errancy, and failure* in the unmarked borderlands of the frame of itself.

The *performativity* essential to such an art and such a truth might lead us to a final consideration. Prigov instructs us emphatically that his work is *not* to be read ironically. As for Dragomoshchenko, is he to be read ironically? Does his poetry actually provide a narratology/phenomenology of self-becoming in the mode of irony? This is certainly its subject-matter (*Настурция как реальность* being a paradigmatic example), and it contains all of the necessary ingredients for irony: negativity, self-reflexivity, errancy, *performativity.* Why, then, to an even casual reader, does an ironic reading of Dragomoshchenko 'feel' so *tonally* wrong?

I would suggest that in both Prigov and Dragomoschenko – or, better, [ДАП] and [АТД] – the strange and almost total *prohibition* on irony is in fact the shibboleth of almost *everything said above* with regard to 'ontology,' 'the natural,' άλήθεια vs. *veritas*, the inapplicability of the discourse of 'theory,' etc. In Prigov's case, the impossibility of irony is (and must be) guaranteed

[104] Heidegger, Martin. "Vom Wesen und Begriff des φύσις: Aristoteles' Physik B, 1." *Wegmarken*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976. 301.
[105] Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence and Concept of φύσις in Aristotle's *Physics* B, I." Trans. Thomas Sheehan. *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 230.

by sheer positivity—if [ДАП] were to encounter irony, as, arguably, it *did* after perestroika, the entire conceptualist edifice would corrode and collapse upon encountering *itself,* as, arguably, *it did*.

Dragomoshchenko's negativity, meanwhile, is never purely formal but *substantial*. It performs the production and withdrawal of *place,* not what *takes place.* That's a very different kind of 'performative' function. Where irony shows up in his later, primarily post-Soviet, work as the ultimately 'Socratic' thing with which we are familiar, it inevitably feels like a joke that doesn't quite come off—because it is, quite literally, *out of place,* de-situated from any 'stage' upon which the choral function of the "permanent parabasis" (to use Schlegel's metaphor for irony) could effectively intervene and interrupt.

More importantly, both [ДАП] and [АТД] perform (because it can only be performed) a very specific kind errancy and a very specific kind of truth: *self-truth* and *self-errancy*, which coincide with each other like the truth of ἀλήθεια that loves to hide itself. They perform a *truth without alterity*. This is the very antithesis of irony, which takes a truth *of* alterity (*veritas*), and deconstructs it by performing that alterity as error. I would hardly be bold or original in suggesting that metaphysics and irony arise simultaneously by breaking with the self-truth of the natural (the same ancient philosopher and mentor of Plato popularized both); and, although I doubt that they were thinking explicitly in such terms, it is this dualism and metaphysical alterity that both Prigov and Dragomoshchenko seem to overcome by both disavowal and design.[106]

[106] It was important to begin with Prigov for this reason. If he epitomizes the strange (and strained) ontological and discursive 'positivism' of late Soviet art, Dragomoshchenko was somehow not entirely 'of his time/place' even as he is increasingly viewed as one of its most lasting exponents. There are, of course, Soviet precedents for the kind of 'pre-Socratic' play with negativity in which Dragomoshchenko dwells, most notably the Oberiuty (like others, notably Skidan, I am thinking particularly of Vaginov and Vvedenskii). One can also point to the strong influence of American Language School poetries and of Western theory on Dragomoshchenko, beginning with his fateful encounter with Lyn Heijinian, who was visiting Leningrad in June 1983 as part of her husband's "saxophone diplomacy" mission. But neither the "Soviet" (Oberiu) nor the "American" (Language School) versions

This was the lesson embedded in sculpture and photography as Prigov and Dragomoshchenko's preferred sister arts: the two that occupy opposite ends of the mimetic spectrum and inform us of its most essential feature, which is the frame. Can a sculpture stand ironically in regard to nature or to itself? *Yes*, if, like *Illustration 6* (below), it seems to encounter an external frame by which to do so. Can a photograph likewise be ironic? Yes, if its fixed internal frame—its 'stuck-ness' in time in relation to our own—can be manipulated so as to seem mobile, alterior to itself and intervened upon, as in *Illustration 7* (below). But these are not *ironies* to [ДАП] and [АТД], respectively; they are *alternate realities* of little interest to them. In fact, they are realities *forged and falsified*—whether it is by "R. Mutt" (*Illustration 6*) or "The Chicago Daily Tribune, November 3rd, 1948" (*Illustration 7*)—by alternate, in some ways 'untrue,' and, therefore, prohibited signatures: signatures that sign for what is *alterior*, not one's own, not self-true, and, therefore, unreal.

satisfactorily encompass or explain Dragomoshchenko's own unique brand of negativity—his optic on the world and how art stands in relation to it.



Illustration 6. Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917

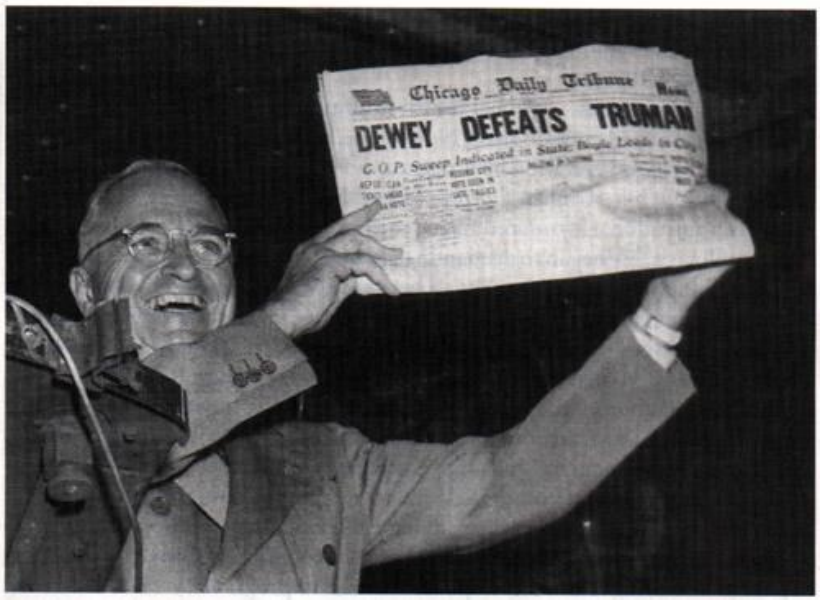


Illustration 7. "Dewey Defeats Truman," November 3, 1948

Domesticating the Frame

114. Log. Phil. Abh. (4.5): "Die allgemeine Form des Satzes ist: Es verhält sich so und so." – Das ist ein Satz von jener Art, die man sich unzählige Male wiederholt. Man glaubt, wieder und wieder der Natur nachzufahren, und fährt nur der Form entlang, durch die wir sie betrachten. – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, 114 (November-December, 1936)

> [114. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (4.5): "The general form of propositions is: This is how things are." – That is the kind of proposition one repeats to oneself countless times. One thinks that one is tracing nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.][107]

The allegory of the frame brings us to the aesthetic 'problem' presented by ἀλήθεια, which is a problem of legibility that has to do with necessity. If the truth of ἀλήθεια is a truth without alterity, then what kind of necessity is able to sign for, motivate, or restrict it? In a way, this is a restatement of Kant's predicament with regard to the judgment of the beautiful. How can an art of self-truth and self-errancy be written, and how can it be read? An art that performs ἀλήθεια (if possible) is an art of performing entelechy [ἐντελέχεια]. It lacks technic or teleology, because it doesn't need them—it performs itself as pure exteriority. Through it, one traces the outline of the natural by retracing the frame through which one looks—it signs (for) itself.

Indirectly, and in a holistic partnership with political exigency, I would argue that this ontological worldview restricts and suppresses authorship in such a way that it strongly motivates what appears to be its opposite: autophilology or self-reading as a paradigmatic genre of Late Soviet unofficial literature—a *displacement* of authorship that simultaneously hypertrophies the signature of its absence. Certainly, this kind of autophilology is Prigov's stock-in-trade. *How he does it,* on the archetypical basis of the Militsaner, is somewhat *sui generis.* By the same token, Dragomoshchenko's early work is largely 'autobiographical' in the same skewed

[107] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations.* Bilingual ed. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. Ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. 52-53.

and heterogenous sense that all lyric is, but what he *does* isn't exactly lyric. *Настурция как реальность* and other "*descriptions*" of a largely autobiographical reality like it are prolegomena to any possible autophilology in Dragomoschenko, but this is less because the early poems reflect on the author's life and the later poems reflect on his work and more because the early poems read like an experimental phenomenology of self-becoming[108]: the 'physics' preceding the 'metaphysics.' His descriptions of being-in-the-world necessarily precede his ordering of them—his own presence, whether 'biographical' (as content) or 'philological' (as method), is treated as incidental.

Thus, Dragomoshchenko progresses – again, quite logically through titles: *Описние* [Description] (1991) - *Безразличия* [Indifferences] (2007) -*Тавтология* [Tautology] (2011) – from 'painting a picture' of reality toward what, in his later work, becomes increasingly an act of arranging and interpreting that reality from above (meta-) or of autophilology in a unique sense. To illustrate that point, I would like to turn to the second poem of his last book[109], which makes self-reference (autophilology) and self-reading (autophilology) one and the same (tautology).

What this will allow us to read *for* in the late Dragomoshchenko is the only legibility left to us by a text that performs its own writing as a reading—something analogous to what Heidegger calls the (self-)concealing (*Verbergung*) and (self-)unconcealing (*Entbergung*) of

[108] We have it on good authority from Evgeny Pavlov, who spoke directly to the poet on the subject, that the choice of the nasturtium for that poem was "random" and unrelated to Mandelstam's *Путешествие в Армению* (1931-32), in which he uses the image of the nasturtium as an allegory for nature (and art). See Pavlov, Evgeny. "'Poetry' vs. 'Literature': Dragomoshchenko's Tautologies." *SEEJ*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011. 559. I strongly suspect that this is true but that in typical form (the truth begins "as an error in vision"), Dragomoshchenko chose the nasturtium [Настурция] on an 'arbitrary'-but-not-at-all-"random" word-associative basis due to its resemblance to the word/flower «Нарцисс» [Narcissus], the mythos of which underwrites the not-so-hidden epistemological danger at the heart of the poem's content and the dialectic of self-becoming that it presents.

[109] Here, I have to extend an apology to Evgeny Pavlov. I selected these two works before having read his remarkable article, which also primarily reads *Настурция как реальность* and *Изображение плантации.* Having read it, I owe him a great debt, and I only hope that my reasons for reading the latter poem in particular will become eminently clear and justify an additional treatment when his was already quite superb.

άλήθεια. That is, even when left with the supposed "tautology" of the shifting frame, there are frames that conceal and frames that unconceal. The question becomes not *what* is framed (as in, "what is the meaning?") but *how* the double frame of exposure/exposition operates dynamically: centripetally or centrifugally, concealing or unconcealing, producing *placeness* (a field of/for legibility; potentially legible substance; χώρα) or withdrawing it.

Due to its relative brevity and what I view as the formal necessity of reading it *in toto*—which is, again, an open question of necessity at the heart of the poem—I reproduce it below along with my attempt at an English translation:

ИЗОБРАЖЕНИЕ ПЛАНТАЦИИ

What have you done, Odysseus,
We know what you have done…
Ezra Pound *The Cantos*, IV

Тавтология не является мыслимой точкой
равновесия значений, но описанием пространства
между появлением смысла и его расширением.
Расширение (игра по принятым правилам на отвесном свету)
совмещается со строением отсутствия.
Отсутствие почти, — необходимый остаток, —
всегда недостаточно.
Недостаточность, стремясь к полноте,
заключает субъект в предложение.

Предложение длиться (бежать): продлевать след угасания —
в итоге описано сочетанием «заглянуть за часть речи».
Речь расстилает пейзаж факультативности форм.
Форма (игра по принятым правилам на рассвете) —
разновидность внимания; биение «поэтому», в смысле, «из-за».
За окном располагается другое окно.
Окно в этом случае — описание желания, т. е. зрения.
Зрение не существительное, оно — не исполняемая форма
глагола «чтение».
Чтение перебора условных пространств

(игра по принятым правилам в беспечном саду,
лето благоприятно и руки просты),
но чаще чтение очерчено путешествием
в ландшафтах необязательных форм;
на полях выцветает стерня и замечание: «писать...».

Писать историю каждого имени. Пусть первой
будет страница, когда появляется Гермоген
(игра по не принятым правилам в ночь, когда осыпается клён;
в ту ночь написал, что никогда не стану писать),
который, оказывается, не имеет ни к чему отношения.
Отношение предполагает соединение
в возможности вне направления.
Направления листа, если слетает, не «сосчитать».
Считая по именам, возможно представить,
что порой имя шлёт отражение,
где неполнота обретает собственное завершение, т. е. в нас.
Нас — местоимение множественного числа,
винительного падежа. «Падать».
Опиши, как падать, не касаясь поверхности притяжения,
совлечённого... (игра по забытым правилам в углу переулка,
а за спиной ветер несет мусор вселенной) в лёгкость любви.
Любовь — как разъять то, что «отсутствие»,
но при этом моет волосы ветер,
сносящий назад представления о том,
что там могло бы случиться.
Быть означает не только статью
в словаре, но и телефонный звонок,
когда говорится о «бытии», которое рассыпается в эхо, —
однако в распределении частот слово забыто.
«Забыто» просачивается в забвение —
(игра, правила, лето, смена сезонов, «мне холодно»,
вероятно стоит поздняя осень)
то, что ранее не поддавалось ни описанию, ни полноте.
Полнота, не только исчезновение того,
что снимается именем, она — не предложение длиться,
но будто икота, кончики пальцев,
немеющие на ракушечных отмелях шёлка,
поскольку лето в мяте благоприятно,
разновидность внимания расположена в направлении
при пересмотре пространства, но чаще:
правила листьев, система связей
при ветре, наплывающем со спины, сзади,
застывающем в равновесии тавтологии «одиссей / цитата».

Подпись к изображению
Возрастание атмосферического давления при постоянстве западного ветра накануне выходных дней, когда произошло погребение дельтаплана…

Подпись к подписи изображения
Близорукость есть нечто вроде средства обобщения, если принять во внимание, что каждому следу надлежит знать о предшествующем, чтобы найти себя в смещении. Безопасность обещает только одно — слияние вещи и слова. Легче вообразить изображение как уловку времени. Каждая вещь и слово — и не слово, и не вещь. На самом деле все заключается в том, чтобы найти то, чего никогда не было. Поди туда не знаю куда. Они похоронили дельтаплан. Вечером. Закат. Длинная тень у полы пешехода. При не ошеломительном стечении публики. Дельтаплан закопали в сырой, а далее (глубже — таково слияние) вовсе мокрый песок немного южнее яхт-клуба на Крестовском. Мы, с Трембитского подтянулись на яле. Вилась мошкара. Канал походил на отвратительный детский почерк про «ничего не знаю». Не знакомые мне люди сидели на полотняных стульях. Как на сессии disgrace. Птицы не пели. Глаза сидевших были мучительны. Причина погребения дельтаплана предельно понятна — отсутствие малозначащей, какой-то неописуемо гибельной детали, фрагмента. Того, что по свидетельству Бхагавадгиты создаёт нас, как не целое, но вожделеющее того. На закате при публике. Дельтаплан, по-видимому, с честью сыграл свою икарийскую роль. Прощай механическое тело летания. Я с удовольствием вспоминаю этот необязательный эпизод. Есть ещё кое-что, о чём следовало бы сказать. И уложив без хлопот парус, а после уложив сложенный дакрон, а затем переломанные полые ребра в сырую уже вскипающую водой яму, мы разогнули спины, бросили по пригоршне песку, а затем открыли вино. Fly, robbin, fly. Это — закат в дельте, на островах. Там светлей. Прощай дельтаплан. Тебе уже не увидать островов, тебе не воспарить на плоской местности и не присниться зеркалом, расходящимся на части в соприкосновении с восходящим потоком. Кто ты и зачем не понять, в какой раз рассказывая сон о похоронах дельтаплана, как будто мы действительно приглашены на ужин с приветливыми богами.

ILLUSTRATION OF A PLANTATION

What have you done, Odysseus,
We know what you have done…
Ezra Pound *The Cantos*, IV

Tautology is not a conceivable point
of equilibrium between meanings, but a description of space
between the appearance of sense and its expansion.
Expansion (a game played according to accepted rules in direct light)
coincides with the building of absence.

Absence is almost – the inevitable remainder, –
always inadequate.
Inadequacy, striving for wholeness,
locks a subject into a sentence.

A sentence, to lengthen (to run on): to extend past the trace of its expiration,
in sum, described by the phrase "to look behind a part of speech."
Speech sows a landscape of the facultativeness of forms.
Form (a game played according to accepted rules at dawn)
is the variability of attention; the pulsation of "thus" in the sense of "due to."
Behind the window is stationed another window.
The window in this case is a description of desire, i.e., vision.
Vision is not a noun, it is a yet-to-be form of
the verb "reading."
Reading the ransacking of provisional spaces
(a game played according to accepted rules in a carefree garden,
the summer favorable and the hands plain),
but more often reading is circumscribed by traveling
in landscapes of unrequired forms;
in fields the stubble is fading and the remark: "to write…"

To write the history of every name. Let the first
page begin with the arrival of Hermogenes
(a game played according to unaccepted rules at night, when the maple sheds its skin; on that night, you wrote, I shall never write),
who, it turns out, does not bear any of this any relation.
A relation presumes unity
in possibility without direction.
The direction of a leaf, if it glides down, doesn't "count."
Counting off names, it is possible to imagine
that at times a name sends a reflection,
where incompletion acquires its own realization, i.e., in us.
Us is a plural pronoun
in the accusative case. "To fall."
Describe how to fall, without touching the surface of gravity,
for the one lured down… (a game played according forgotten rules in the corner of an alley, while behind your back, the wind carries the refuse of the universe) into the lightness of love.
Love – how to partition that which is "absence,"
but just then the wind washes your hair,
letting fall behind it imaginings of
what might have been.
To be is not only an entry
in the dictionary but a telephone call,
when "being" is spoken of, which disperses in an echo –
while in the distribution of frequencies, the word is forgotten.

"Forgotten" saturates forgetting –
(a game, rules, summer, the change of seasons, "I'm cold,"
it will probably be a long autumn)
that which earlier did not give itself over, either to description or to wholeness.
Wholeness is not only the disappearance of that
which a name removes, it is not a sentence to endure,
but, like a hiccup, the tips of fingers
growing numb on shell-strewn shoals of silk,
inasmuch as summer in mint tea is favorable,
the variability of attention is situated on a course
according to a reconsideration of space, but more often:
the rule of leaves, the system of connections
as the wind swells at your back, from behind,
stiffening in the equilibrium of the tautology "Odysseus / quotation."

Caption to the Illustration
An increase in atmospheric pressure due to the persistence of a westerly wind just before the weekend, when the *deltaplane* was buried.

Caption to the Caption of the Illustration
Myopia is something like a means of generalization if we pay attention to the fact that each trace must know its antecedent in order to find itself in displacement. Safety promises just one thing: the ingathering of the thing and the word. It's easier to imagine an illustration as a trick of time. Every thing and word – is not a word and not a thing. In fact, it all comes down to finding that which never was. Go on, I know not where. They buried the *deltaplane*. At evening. Sunset. A long shadow on the skirt of a passerby (the floor of a cave). An underwhelming convergence of the public. They covered the *deltaplane* in damp and, later (deeper – such was the ingathering), wholly wet sand just south of the sailing club on Krestovskii. We had dragged ourselves there from Trembitskii on a yawl. Midges buzzing everywhere. The channel resembled a disgusting child's handwriting about "I don't know." People I didn't know were sitting on canvas chairs. As if playing a game of *disgrace*. The birds didn't sing. The eyes of those sitting were torturous. The reason for burying the *deltaplane* was utterly clear: the absence of some hardly noticeable, indescribably fatal detail, a fragment. That which, according to the *Bhagavad Gita*, creates us as something un-whole but lusting after it. At sunset before the public. The *deltaplane*, it was obvious, had played its Icarean role with honor. Farewell, mechanical body of flight. I recall with pleasure that unnecessary episode. There is yet another something that should be said. And having laid down the sail without hurry, and then having laid down the folded Dacron, and then having laid down the hollow, broken ribbing into the damp, already frothing pit of water, we straightened our backs, scattered a handful of sand, and then opened the wine. *Fly, robin, fly.* This: is sunset on the delta, on the islands. It's lighter there. Farewell, glider. It's no longer for you to see islands, to soar on the flat terrain and dream a mirror that breaks into pieces as it meets the rising current. Who you are and what you are for is not to be understood, that time we were narrating a dream about the burial of a *deltaplane*, as if we really were invited to dinner with affable gods.

For the sake of reading the poem in detail, it may be broken down into two types of text. First, there is the lineated 'poem proper'—hereafter, referred to simply as "the poem" or, following the title, "the illustration"—which is comprised of twenty-two sentences occupying sixty-two lines. Next, there is a set of paratexts: 1) an epigraph, supposedly from Pound's Canto IV (more on why "supposedly" below) and 2) two prose sections titled "Subtext/Caption/Signature to the Illustration" [*Подпись к изображению*] and "Subtext/Caption/Signature to the Subtext/Caption/Signature of the Illustration" [*Подпись к подписи к изображению*], which are comprised of one and thirty-three sentences, respectively.

One would expect these "captions" to illuminate the illustration, much like the medieval *Allegory of Death* pictured in *Figure 3* (below). However, they only complicate that reading. In fact, in looking for a semblance of design—a 'wholeness'; the hermeneutic closure that a "caption" might provide—we encounter the vast majority of devices that condense and 'domesticate' meaning within the illustration itself. Moreover, these 'internal' frames of correspondence and potential coherence are, by and large, either 1) self-referential as a mode of directing and restricting reading (e.g., language games, anaphora, parataxis) or 2) self-referential in the sense of auto-allusion, employing Dragomoshchenko's own body of work as a hermeneutic guide, much as official language and ideology (as well as his own corpus, [ДАП]) stand behind the language of Prigov.



Illustration 8. Andrea Andreani, after Giovanni Fortuna (1535-1611). *Allegory of Death.* The text at bottom and throughout is an example of a medieval "illumination" (caption) to an illustration.

Within the poem/illustration, one can distinguish a set of themes familiar to readers of Dragomoshchenko, as well as two distinct 'plots' and corresponding timelines. These themes include, but are not necessarily limited to: 1) grammar, order, rule and, particularly, what is called "the rule of leaves, the system of connections" [«правила листьев, система связей»] (line 60) and turns out to be something like *veritas*, the law of correspondence; 2) desire and, particularly, desire as error (i.e., an "error in vision"); 3) reading/writing and the fetish of the name. All three are joined by a concern with the proper/improper and the potential violence of error that belongs to correspondence: e.g., what is it to be "locked into a sentence" (line 9)? (1); is desire a way of making the beloved 'proper' to oneself and thereby of "partitioning" his/her "absence" (line 41)? (2); what constitutes a 'proper' name and can it have a history (line 25) or is its very 'properness' a "forgetting" of that to which it belongs (line 48)? (3). These themes are distributed across two plots and timeliness: A) A third-person description of a falling leaf, which takes place in the non-time of a *past* 'now'—what Dragomoschenko elsewhere calls "the *perfected time* of the present" [*совершенное время* настоящего][110] and we might call the temporality of allegory[111]; and B) The remembrance of a romantic relationship, which takes place in a narrative past (the temporality of history) and first enters the poem in parenthetical interjections, gradually shifting voice from third-person to "I" (line 15), to "we" (line 35), to "thou" (line 38) before returning to rest in a third-person.

[110] Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. *Tavtologia.* M: NLO, 2011. 157. See epigraph below.
[111] This is debatable. Here, I am following the conventions set forth by Paul De Man, as well as the neo-romantic thinking behind them.

The poem's construction, meanwhile, follows the rule of a language game. It is the second poem of *Tautology,* immediately preceded by (in Latin letters, all caps) "LUDWIG JOSEF JOHANN" (Wittgenstein), who might be considered the book's unofficial dedicatee. Thus, the father of the picture theory of language and of language games as limits upon the articulation of truth corresponding to *what* is (again, *veritas*) finds Dragomoshchenko's reply in this picture/illustration [изображение], which is structured like a game of 'exquisite corpse' (*cadavre exquis*)—a macabre pun, no doubt, on its elegiac tone and content.

The game revolves around the device of anadiplosis: the repetition of the last word of the preceding clause. The contextual conceit is that this game, *cadavre exquis*, as it was played by the French surrealists, involves multiple authors whose constructive limitations are also epistemological: they are only able to see the last word of the previous author's sentence and must begin by repeating it. Thus, the game limits and also fractalizes authorship: its one rule being that one begins where another ended (or ends where another is yet-to-begin). One could compare the mantra of Eliot's *Four Quartets*, a poem that Dragomoshchenko greatly admired and often repeated[112]: "In my end is my beginning"; consider, then, the lesson, bordering on the grotesque, of a poem that takes this metaphysical doctrine seriously but literalizes it as a constructive principle, elevating and devaluing it at the same time.

[112] See, for example, the essay, «Местность как усилие» [*Placeness as Effort*], which is intimately related to «Изображение плантации». Allusions to Eliot as well as Eliot's library (particularly the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*) are abundant. Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. "Mestnost' kak usiliie." *Tavtologia.* M: NLO, 2011.196-216.

“An Error Is Always Conscious”

On the one hand, the game immediately introduces an expectation of formal necessity that we elsewhere argued gets lost or displaced in Dragomoshchenko. Put otherwise, the ‘metaphysics’ of this poem—the laws that structure its reality—are simple and clear. On the other hand, they are introduced as patently arbitrary—unreal, fictive, (a)grammatical, errant. There are even clear indications in the poem that its ‘authors’ are cheating or that several of these ‘authors’ are *bad* at this language game: they break its rule at critical junctions. The first two such errors occur when a compression or ‘enjambment’ of sorts takes place, meaning that the beginning of a sentence does not coincide with the beginning of a line: “Писать историю каждого имени.
Пусть первой” (line 25) and “винительного падежа. «Падать». / Опиши, как падать […]” (lines 37-38). Rather than begin where the previous sentence ends, the first of these (line 25) seems to backtrack and (re-)“write history” rather than repeat it; thus, the lapse of “Писать […] Пусть,” between which the trace repetition of consonants remains, but the vowels are altered. The second error (lines 37-38) relies on an etymological ‘rhyme’[113] (“падежа”/“«Падать»”) to bend the rules and then discard them altogether as it transitions to the next line/sentence—"Опиши, как падать […]” (line 38)—using quotation marks around «Падать» (line 37) to emphasize and perhaps justify its interruption. The third error—"что там могло бы случиться. / Быть означает не только статью” (lines 44-45)—does something we have seen in Dragomoshchenko before: it

[113] Lyn Heijinian saw this as one of Dragomoshchenko’s signature devices and called it “etymological metonymy,” in which “words of like origin branch out into a poem.” See Heijinian, Lyn. *The Language of Inquiry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. 313.

anticipates its own idiomatically English translation ("what could have *been*. / To *be*…"). Finally, the poem as a whole, which would otherwise end where it began on the word "tautology" [тавтология] (line 1; line 62) instead concludes with a remainder: "«одиссей / цитата»," again, framed in quotation marks and referring back to another frame, which is the epigraph of the poem. «Промежуток»

Why does Dragomoshchenko 'justify'—and it does seem to be a question of 'justice'—the errors of these bad writers by endowing them with a semblance of order? They are *close* to playing by the rule of the game—they always gesture at it. However, by breaking it, they disavow not only its lawfulness but also the *reality* that would engender its necessity: after all, the reason for the rule of exquisite corpse is that, when playing, one literally cannot see past the last word of the previous sentence—one *cannot* 'correspond' other than arbitrarily or indirectly. The French surrealists employed *cadavre exquis* for this reason: in order to banish mimetic teleology from the frame of the work. Dragomoshchenko, by stark contrast, seems to use the game specifically to *generate* a semblance of correspondence, of *veritas*—to fence in and cultivate, in a poem called "Illustration of a Plantation," a field of potential meaning and convention.

This is nowhere so clear as when we focus our reading around the errors themselves, which seem to present an elevated coherence of their own. They accumulate around words that articulate what I would call the poem's *theology*: namely, that language ("naming") itself and writing in particular is *nothing but error—the* error, akin to Original Sin but also to a vehicle for transcendence:

Писать историю каждого имени. Пусть первой (error one; line 25)

[…]

винительного падежа. «Падать».
Опиши, как падать […] (error two; lines 37-38)

[…]

что там могло бы случиться.
Быть означает не только статью (error three; lines 44-45)

«Писать» «имени» «Падать» «Опиши» «Быть». "To write" is to surrender to the improper propriety of "a name," "to fall," forever to repeat an imperative encounter with (*merely*) "a description" of "being." Elsewhere, Dragomoshchenko claims that "an error is always conscious" [«ошибка всегда сознательна»].[114] Here, it operates like the *unconscious* of the poem, returning its repressed 'guilty conscience' to the foreground of a seemingly arbitrary operation. The fact that we can call it a 'guilty conscience' or psychologize (and thereby unify) its voice at all is due to the fact that an additional frame that runs throughout the poem, which is the auto-allusion mentioned above, making its titular "illustration" a form of self-portraiture or even self-caricature: an elegy for one's own authorship.

The poem reads like a compendium of paraphrases, titles, and allusions belonging to Dragomoshchenko's corpus—a bibliography/concordance of its author's collected works. Among these, some of the most important, from the standpoint of his evolving poetics are, in order: *Тавтология* (2011) (line 1; line 62); *Описание* (1991) (line 2); the poem "Наблюдение падающего листа, взятое в качестве последнего обоснования пейзажа (чтение)" (*Небо*

[114] Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. *Tavtologia.* M: NLO, 2011. 156. Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii and Evgenii Pavlov. "On the Superfluous." *boundary 2,* Vol. 26, No.1, 99 Poets/1999: An International Poetics Symposium (Spring, 1999). 97.

соответствий, 1991), which informs the entire allegorical 'A plot' of the description of the falling leaf; and *Ксении* (1993) which informs the entire romantic 'B plot.' The most unmistakable self-reference, which returns the end of the poem back to the beginning of its author's career appears as the last words of the second "caption" and, thus, of the text as a whole: "ужин с приветливыми богами" (caption 2, sentence 33), the title of Dragomoshchenko's first major poem, published in *Mitin Zhurnal* in 1978. Like the game of exquisite corpse, this gesture of ending where one began ("Ужин с приветливыми богами," 1978) and beginning where one ended (*Тавтология*, 2011) belongs to a structure appropriate to the 'unworking' of an elegy or an elegy 'in reverse.' It also confirms [АТД] as the signatory of the poem and the source of its errors as well as the only available hermeneutic for reading it.

The Wandering Frame

Поэзия безошибочна в любой проекции своего спрашивания о себе, поскольку является четырехмерным пейзажем безукоризненного действия, «*где все сходится в точности, даже если чьи-то записи не сходятся»*. Она – полнейшее отсутствие (прежде всего репрезентации) […] а потому пребывающее вне прошлого и будущего в *совершенное время* настоящего (которое «испаряется в собственном сиянии»), т.е. в претерпевание недостаточности возвращения к собственному началу, нельзя назвать странствием.[115]

> [Poetry does not err in any projection of its questioning of itself, since it is a four-dimensional landscape of flawless action, "where everything comes together precisely, even if someone's notes don't come together." It is an utter absence (first of all, of representation) […] and thus abiding outside past and future in the *perfected time* of the present (which "dissolves in its own radiance"), i.e., in enduring the failure of returning to where one began, which cannot be called a wandering.]

[115] This short, untitled prose piece from *Tautology* begins from a concept with which we are now all too familiar: «Зрение также лингвистическая процедура, процесс описания, различия…» ["Vision is also a linguistic procedure, a process/trial of description, differentiation…"]. Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. *Tavtologia.* M: NLO, 2011. 155-7. It is here translated by Evgeny Pavlov and the author as "On the Superfluous." See: Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii and Evgenii Pavlov. "On the Superfluous." *boundary 2*, Vol. 26, No.1, 99 Poets/1999: An International Poetics Symposium (Spring, 1999). 95-98.

We could also remark, however, that *Изображение плантации*—a poem seemingly about domesticating the frame of one's own authorship and, below it, one's reality—is an oddly life-affirming statement (an elegy 'in reverse') about accepting the error and inadequacy of *veritas—our* system of connections/relations/correspondences [«система связей»] (line 60)—in the face of a sublime natural truth (άλήθεια) that, like death, exceeds us: beginning where we end.

In the epigraph above, Dragomoshchenko makes a crucial distinction: representation errs, language errs, writing errs (and is *guilty* of erring—not in the performance of itself, but in its performance of the truth); *poetry* does not—poetry *only* performs itself and is therefore "a landscape of *flawless action*" [безукоризненного действия] (my emphasis). It does not 'describe' worlds—it *creates* them, which is both guiltless and guileless. On a fundamental level, this is not unlike the distinction made by the Russian Formalists and the Soviet avant-garde between the language of life and the language of art, but it is also like the metaphysical distinction drawn by Heidegger between (communicative) language (a τέχνη) and poetry (ποίησις) or by Paul Celan between literature and *Dichtung* in his *Meridian* speech. These are all paradigmatic examples of the 20th century's tendency in general to elevate and *justify* poetry on a simultaneously ontological and epistemological basis that rejects mimesis and interprets the poetic function as a performance of (self-)becoming.

However, Dragomoschenko retains and *maintains* the traces of early 'modernist' *guilt*, which has a certain 'honesty' or 'propriety' (*veritas*) to it. This is even more striking considering that this short passage, also in *Tautology*, misrepresents itself as a citation/paraphrase of Ezra

Pound: "«*где все сходится в точности, даже если чьи-то записи не сходятся*»."[116] Even in prose, Dragomoschenko is truly acting out (knowingly or not—his argument is that it *doesn't matter*) the errancy of which he speaks. And, in fact, this error, like the others, *does* "come together" in some sort of sense that exceeds the context and conventions of its meaning.

On the one hand, Dragomoshchenko seems to genuinely believe that, as a Soviet/Russian poet several generations later, he is imitating and fulfilling the early Pound's dictum on the Image, which was always an argument about *necessity*. Pound promoted the "radiant node or cluster" of the Image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"[117] – it is about maintaining a teleology in its purest and most compressed form. Why, then, may we safely assume that Pound would be *horrified* by Dragomoshchenko's so-called discipleship: his paratactical obliqueness, his arrhythmia, his metalanguage, his mixed metaphors (e.g., the phrase "four-dimensional landscapes" [четырехмерным пейзажем]), the at times stupefying banality of his over-generalized sublime?…

The issue is not merely one of (im-)precision. Again, it is of *what kind of truth* and *what kind of necessity* we are speaking: that of correspondence and of metaphor (*veritas*, Image) or that of something like ἀλήθεια? In "How to Read," Pound says that "Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree."[118] Dragomoshchenko seems to say that great *poetry*, in contrast, is the "utter absence" [полнейшее отсутствие] of any such

[116] I cannot be certain which passage Dragomoshchenko is misquoting in the form of his own tautological imprint ("«*где все* сходится *в точности, даже если чьи-то записи не* сходятся»," my emphasis), but I am certain that it is Pound for two reasons: 1) In the English translation of this piece published in *boundary 2* (Spring, 1999), the author and Evgeny Pavlov include an explicit attribution to Pound and Pavlov even translates the second "сходятся" as a Poundian-sounding "(notes don't) tally"; 2) The title given to that translation is "On the Superfluous"—presumably in response to Pound's oft-quoted statement in "A Retrospect" (1918): "Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something" (Pound, Ezra. "A Retrospect." *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound.* New York: New Directions, 1968. 4). See Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii and Evgenii Pavlov. "On the Superfluous." *boundary 2,* Vol. 26, No.1, 99 Poets/1999: An International Poetics Symposium (Spring, 1999). 97.
[117] Pound, Ezra. "A Retrospect." *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound.* New York: New Directions, 1968. 4.
[118] Pound, Ezra. "How to Read." *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound.* New York: New Directions, 1968. 4. 23.

meaning as content: it is the erasure of meaning by its own errancy, its wandering and homecoming into the greater, formal and phenomenal truth from which it emerged.

For Dragomoshchenko, who is far more interested in a *subjective* truth than Ezra Pound, this is also the very definition of the human condition and the *only* thing that poetry essentially and authentically 'reflects': a wandering that is both an ontological homecoming and an unending nomadism in the vicissitudes of form. This can be put into a single word ("desire" [желание]) or into a barely coherent, 78-word sentence, as below. The one names the problem, the other dramatizes it to a breaking point:

> Если допустить общеизвестное – что культура, в которой мы воспитаны, принявшая нас в свое тело, формирующая язык, зрение, представления как окружающего, так и самое себя, т.е. «реальности», -- функционирует как метафизическая машина совершенства, неуязвимой полноты, телеологичности, то будет вполне резонно полагать, что внутреннее пространство драмы, действующими лицами которой мы становимся в момент зарождения собственной истории, может быть описано как пространство несовпадения между машиной самодовлеющей полноты, телоса и присущей нам недостаточностью, определенной заведомой конечностьыю существования, или же, того проще: желания.
>
> If we admit what is well known – that the culture in which we are educated, which has absorbed us into its body, which forms our language, vision, and ideas of both the environment and of itself, that is, of "reality" – functions as a metaphysical machine of self-realization, invulnerable fullness, teleology, and it would be quite reasonable to assume that the inner space of that drama, whose roles we take on at the moment we conceive our own history, can be described as a space of non-coincidence between the machine of self-sufficient fullness and entelechy and our inherent insufficiency, determined by the finitude of our existence, or, to put it simply: desire.[119]

The themes that we identified in *Изображение плантации* – 1) grammar; order; rule; 2) desire; and 3) writing and the name – are thus all of a piece. The second is a response to the first, and the

[119] This is from the same text as the epigraph to this section, elsewhere translated by Evgeny Pavlov as "On the Superfluous." Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii Trofimovich. *Tavtologia.* M: NLO, 2011. 155. English my translation.

third is a way of provisionally sublating this conflict, only to reencounter it again as 'oneself' or as 'the subject' qua textuality.

This is nowhere so eminently clear as in the displacement of 'heroes' in *Изображение плантации*, beginning with the figure of Odysseus, whom Dragomoshchenko also invokes here via Pound. That epigraph is:

> What have you done, Odysseus,
> We know what you have done…
> Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*, IV

It comes from the beginning of *Canto VI* (*not* "IV"), which reads as follows:

> What have you done, Odysseus,
> We know what you have done…
> And that Guillaume sold out his ground rents
> (Seventh of Poitiers, Ninth of Aquitain).
> "Tant las fotei com auzirets
> "Cen e quatre vingt et veit vetz…"
> The stone is alive in my hand, the crops
> will be thick in my death-year… [etc.][120]

Thought by commentator Carroll F. Terrell to be a "reworking or an echo of the sirens' song [*Od.* XII, 185 ff.; 1:24]," [121] Pound's invention "What have you done, Odysseus / We know what you have done…" in this early canto frames his primary hero and double, Odysseus, as a figure of *guilt*. This is an interesting choice. In part, it serves the associative movement Pound makes from Odysseus to Guillaume de Poitou, a philandering and wayward troubadour.[122]

[120] Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos*. New York: New Directions, 1970. Canto VI: 1-8, p. 21.
[121] Terrell, Carroll F. *A Companion to* The Cantos *of Ezra Pound*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. 22.
[122] Ibid. 22-23.

However, as a *poetic* hero, it would make more sense to introduce Odysseus by those qualities derived from his Homeric epithets: for example, "many-wiled" (πολύμητις)—from "μῆτις" (cunning, guile)—or "much-turned" (πολύτροπος)—from "τρόπος" (turn), whence we get "trope." The accusation of 'guilt' here and the open question as to its cause is not proper to Homer but to Pound—particularly in the form of 'debt' or "*Usura*," the economic name he subsequently gives to his great adversary, the spirit of aesthetic and metaphysical decadence. Odysseus, the modernist poet, thus stakes himself as a kind of collateral—he is a figure both *of* and *against* debt/guilt. That Dragomoshchenko selected these lines from Pound, which address guilt and the unconcealment of guilt *related* to the poetic act, is also an interesting choice.

When he introduces Odysseus via Pound's *Cantos*, Dragomoshchenko does so *by way of error*. The epigraph is *not* from Canto IV as he notes but from its mirror image—Canto VI. However, this lapse (purposive or not) draws yet another parallelism: Canto IV begins by associating Cadmus of the Golden Prows with Guillems de Cabestanh, a troubadour poet and ascetic who, ironically, was brutally put to death for his rumored affair with the wife of his patron; Canto VI, as shown above, begins by associating Odysseus with Guillaume de Poitou, another troubadour who roamed freely, duped many lovers, and never paid for his own numerous transgressions except with fame and fortune.[123] Two Greeks and two lusty troubadours named William: the former pair meet with terrible retribution for *dwelling* in error despite their overall tendency towards *abiding* by 'the rules' (by one telling, Cadmus was forced into eight years of slavery to Ares after founding Thebes, and Cabestanh's heart was cooked and served to his lady); the latter, despite their characteristic craft and overreaching, meet felicitous ends for their lives of

[123] See Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos*. New York: New Directions, 1970. Canto IV: 13-16; Canto VI: 21-23. See also: Terrell, Carroll F. *A Companion to* The Cantos *of Ezra Pound*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. 11-12; 22-23.

transgressive *wandering*. Rather than 'guilt' or 'debt,' it is simply a matter of which fealty—to 'the rules' or to nature (one's own as well as divine, between which there can *only* be a wandering)—is better kept. Dragomoshchenko takes his epigraph about guiltiness from a canto about the latter (providential wandering) and misattributes it to a canto about the former (dwelling and perdition).

Moreover, a kind of 'debt' or unconcealment of 'guilt' *does* strongly inform Dragomoshchenko's use of Odysseus and how he structures his text in comparison to Pound. The American poet seamlessly merges Odysseus and Guillaume de Poitou (and Cadmus and Guillems de Cabestanh, for that matter) by the logic of the Image—the logic of metaphor. Through *condensation*, the associative similarity between figures takes on the guise of necessity, resulting in a compound text-image that is more than the sum of its parts, essentially on the model of the ideogram. Beginning with the very nature of "exquisite corpse," by contrast, Dragomoshchenko's entire text is structured as a *spaced-out series* (rather than a unity) of frames between syntactic, metonymic, and referential *displacements*: "«одиссей / цитата»" (line 62)[124] that he believes constitute and reveal a "tautology." I say "believes," because this *is* a matter of *belief*.

What these displacements *show*, on the other hand, in "baring the device" of the poem so openly is the citational (line 62) structure of textuality as such and its resemblance to a key theme of the poem: desire, as well as a new opposition between guilt/debt and *wandering*. Guilt/debt is something *accrued*. It is a form of (ac-)counting. Dragomoshchenko ultimately

[124] Although Dragomoshchenko insisted that it was unintentional (intention, like necessity, being the very question here), this figure also recalls Mandelstam's remark: "A citation is not a transcript. A citation is a cicada. It's not in its nature to fall silent. Having clutched the air, it does not let go" [«Цитата не есть выписка. Цитата есть цикада. Неумолкаемость ей свойственна. Вцепившись в воздух, она его не отпускает»]. This is a particularly remarkable 'coincidence' given that in pursuing almost the same aesthetic allegory, one of Dragomoshchenko's 'heroes' in *Изображение плантации* is a falling leaf, the thing that a cicada *imitates* in appearance. For Mandelstam, see Mandelstam, Osip. *Slovo i kul'tura*. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987. 113.

identifies this as “the rule of leaves, the system of connections” [правила листьев, система связей] (line 60), which is negotiated throughout the poem. Metaphor, the system of connections, the giving of names (lines 25-35), functions both by relation and by the “forgetting” (line 49) of what is proper—the forgiveness of debts and losing track of accounts. Thus, the falling leaf, the *wandering* leaf supposedly ‘in error’ underwrites/signs for the functioning of the whole: “Отношение предполагает соединение / в возможности вне направление. / Направление листа, если слетает, не «сосчитать»” [A relation presumes unity / in possibility without direction. / The direction of a leaf, if it glides down, does not ‘count.’] (lines 30-32)—“направление” [direction] from the same root as “правила” [rule]. Desire, constantly displacing its object, losing track of accounts, also bears the imprint of that debt, as does the poem; however, in forgetting its origin and missing its mark, its errancy is the very thing that allows a “system of connections” to exist.

This is fitting. There *is* a place for the “rule of leaves/sheets” in *Изображение плантации*. “To write” [“писать”] (line 25), “to describe” [“опиши”] (line 38) is an imperative—as is, presumably, to be errant and to wander. To accrue a guilt/debt is also to acquire the means by which to forgive it. What I would call the four correlated heroes of the text as a whole—1) Odysseus; 2) the falling leaf; 3) the “deltaplane”; 4) [АТД]—thus survive (or, better, are textually *survived*) by their very errancy as desirers and wayfarers, as well as readers and writers, displacing one another one by one and frame by frame, and in no way resolving a final critical philosophical ambiguity, which is whether *they* are in thrall to the wandering of the text or the text is meant to be in thrall to ‘*their*’ wandering. A ‘theological’ reading would imply the former; a secular reading of ‘guilt/debt’ would imply the latter. However, neither the former

‘aletheiac’ reading nor the latter ‘*veritas*’ reading could exist without the other. Dragomoshchenko calls this a “tautology.”

As for the lengthy prose paratexts, called “подписи” [“subtexts”; “captions”; “signatures”], they are in some sense a ‘red herring.’ I strongly suspect that they describe the scene of the poem’s *composition*—perhaps truly among friends or by multiple authors. They certainly do little to illuminate the poem by way of allegorical inscription, although they redouble its author’s (*errant*) “signature” [подпись] in the form of the last line (again, a reference to his first major poem) as well as provide a last, mechanical analogy for the wandering Odysseus/leaf/citation: the deltaplane [дельтаплан], the burial (or planting?) of which returns the reader to the title of the poem: *Изображение плантации*… the “illustration of a plantation”… “of a plan-tation”… “of a plane-tation…” “of ‘plane-ification’…” in perpetual “change” (“Δ”) of “the plan”? The lesson of the poem is that such keeping of accounts—the hermeneutic impulse of the reader and desirer—is in fact a damning kind of rule [правила] and an enslaving form of mastery, whereas to write—to wander without direction [вне направление], forgetting one’s debts—is not only necessary but providential.

PART II

THE POET IN SEARCH OF HISTORY: FOUR POST-SOVIET PRACTICES

Век мой, зверь мой, кто сумеет
Заглянуть в твои зрачки
И своею кровью склеит
Двух столетий позвонки?

– Мандельштам, «Век мой…» (1922)

My age, my beast, who shall
Gaze into your pupils
And with his blood fuse
Two centuries of vertebrae?

– Mandelstam, “My age…” (1922)

INTRODUCTION

Truth, Institutionality, Authorship: Summary of Part I

In the first part of this study, I represented Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov ([ДАП]) and Arkadii Trofimovich Dragomoshchenko ([АТД]) as two complementary paradigms of a single *way* of thinking and presenting the ground of truth that gained prominence in the poetry of the late Soviet underground. I should reiterate that they by no means exhaust this period nor should they be conflated with it – which I will here try strenuously to avoid – and, in fact, [ДАП] and [АТД] are not only different *poetically* (that is, as poetic *'signatures'*) but *strange* enough that it is more characteristic for them to receive the anodyne treatment, whether reverentially or dismissively, of being considered inscrutably and inimitably 'unique.'

I selected them for two reasons: 1) their common consideration of truth content as the most significant function of the work of art 2) their *survival* on the book shelves of the subsequent, post-Soviet generation. The poet Aleksandr Skidan (b. 1965), whom I will read in more detail below, for example, compares Prigov's effect on Russian letters unironically to "the Industrial Revolution."[125] Meanwhile, he was a student and acolyte of Dragomoshchenko, in whose name he for many years presented a very prestigious national poetry award.

Thus, I will be addressing poets who actively counter-pose themselves to the legacy of the late Soviet underground – *as an aesthetic ideology*, which is how I have attempted to outline it here. However, that legacy also exists in a more straightforward manner in which the untimely

[125] «*Революция, совершенная Приговым в поэтическом способе производства, сродни промышленному перевороту*» [*The coup Prigov mounted upon the means of poetic production is comparable to the Industrial Revolution*] (italics in the original). Skidan, Aleksandr. *Summa poetiki*. Moscow: NLO, 2016. 264. My trans.

survival of its *poetics* makes it abundantly clear what *died* with it irreversibly: a way of seeing truth and history. As Tynianov says of the epigones of Blok: "remove the title from the painting, and it turns out to be an oleograph" [снять с картины название, и картина окажется олеографией].[126] We might say, remove the signature "[ДАП]" from the performance, with all that it guarantees, and the work turns out to be something different: perhaps a YouTube video by Roman Osminkin, which seemingly imitates Prigov in the mode of travesty but has its own set of rules, technics, and self-considerations—that is, which thinks itself, its truth, and its history quite differently and is therefore unable to inhabit Prigov's poetics and technics of performance in the same way.

The subject of the second part of this study will therefore *not* be the survival or imitation of the poetics presented in Part One, but rather the continuation, rejection, and transformation of the aesthetic ideology for which they 'signed.' There are a few points related to that ideology as established in Part One that are perhaps worth repeating and further clarifying. This is particularly the case (and a sensitive one) because my underlying premise is that what distinguishes the worldview of [ДАП]/[АТД] is essentially incompatible both with our own so-called 'late capitalist' modes of aesthetic interpretation and practice as well as with those of the first post-Soviet generation of newly minted 'Russians.' The late Soviet poets presented here are an endpoint to a certain *way* of thinking, doing, and creating.

How they thought and practiced differently requires a great deal of exploration and, in Part I, it led to the testing of a series of hypotheses upon which one could, I hope, greatly expand. Of these, a few general ideas are decisive, and I will recapitulate them here:

[126] Tynianov, Iu. N. "Promezhutok." *Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino.* M: Nauka, 1977. 171.

1) *Truth and the natural*.

This is the primary and essential way in which [ДАП]/[АТД] can be distinguished from and are incommensurable with deconstructive thought or 'postmodernity' of the same period in a Western consumer capitalist, democratic context. Although the question of truth is overwhelmingly present in the work of [ДАП]/[АТД], they almost never ask what the truth is or to what it corresponds. The question is not "what is truth" –and, implicitly, is it true at all? – but "*how* is truth": how does it unfold or reveal itself as presence? How is this expressivity likewise *performed* (rather than reflected or symbolized) in the work of art? That is, *they inhabit a world without a simulacrum*, or, (as in Prigov's case), a world in which the simulacrum is *all* that exists, *prior* to everything, and, therefore, not really a simulacrum at all.

In this way, the truth in both art and life is naturalized and presented as essentially free of symbolic alterity—of non-being, non-presence, the falsum, or even, crucially, *of a subject who presumes to stand outside of it*. It does not require the guarantee of subject-oriented categories such as circulation, communication, or correspondence, because, while it is not an 'in-itself' (which would exclude the subject) it is also certainly 'not-other-to-itself.' Neither the truth nor the subject who stands in the truth are bisected in such a way, even from each other. That is, the function of truth in these poets is overwhelmingly that of *self-truth* (following Heidegger, I called it *aletheiac*). Alternately, one could call it a truth without history or epistemology, just as [ДАП]/[АТД] tend to think being without metaphysics ('ontically') or, rather, by returning metaphysics to the incredibly *physical*.

Deconstruction, in contrast, remains forever tethered to the opposition "true/false," even in subverting it as a supplement to and effect of metaphysical closure. If we take that impasse to be the philosophical endpoint of capitalist 'postmodernity,' what Baudrillard calls the "precession of the simulacra,"[127] it is a station that [ДАП]/[АТД] as late Soviet avant-gardists never reach, because they are not even on the same train.

2) *Institutionality.*

The term 'avant-gardist,' which I have heretofore avoided, is itself useful, inasmuch as, per Peter Bürger's definition, it functionally describes works whose content is art's (bourgeois) institutionality.[128] As poets, Prigov and Dragomoshchenko certainly challenged the Soviet institutionality of art by their very act of existing, *unofficially*. However, the key components of *bourgeois* institutionality—most notably, the autonomy of art, and, as a corollary, art's privileged judgment of truth as independent of and alterior to other social institutions (i.e., a truth already imbued with alterity)—are not challenged in [ДАП]/[АТД] because they are never presumed under Soviet institutions in the first place. There is, in fact, very little room for aesthetic *judgment*—the hallmark of bourgeois art's institutionality—in their work at all. To call them 'avant-gardist' is thus to claim that the term can be expanded to mean art that challenges the institutionality of art even outside a bourgeois/capitalist context in which such autonomy and such grounding

[127] See Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. Originally published in French as *Simulacres et Simulation* (1981).
[128] See Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde.* Trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

of truth (namely, as symbolic; other-to-itself; prior to but requiring judgment; truth with alterity) are taken for granted.

3) *Authorship, subjecthood*.

If the above hypotheses hold, there are powerful consequences in [ДАП]/[АТД] for the function of subjecthood and authorship around the concept of *judgment*. The most obvious effect of these is its suppression.

In [ДАП]/[АТД], aletheiac truth and authorship are fused to dictate the frame of the work of art, which, in turn, dictates the self-truth of its content in a hermeneutic circle that binds author and work in the mode of *signature* or, theologically speaking, of *creator and creation*. Its context is total, and its disavowal of the absence of itself is the guarantee of its "response-ibility" [ответственность] before truth and its reader. In other words, by this model, the author (and the reader) function as *context* rather than as parties to a *communication.* The signatory/creator is *always* present in the creation, and that unity of context and event *is* the creation's ultimate truth content – this is the fantasy.

By analogy, it seems appropriate that Soviet ideology, which likewise demanded that its truth be absolute and self-expressive, found its preferred model of jurisprudence in the form of the signed confession. Such a truth does not require the State to pass judgment on the accused—only to fulfill a sentence. Neither does it require that a subject stand trial for the accusation (this is the function of the signature); for the sentence to be passed, it merely requires that a subject stand *in* it.

These implications are severe: on the one hand, it is tyrannical; on the other, utopian. But the tyranny it implies is not that of the 'author' or of the subject, who is in

fact made into ‘mere’ content, but of the overextension of the *natural*: of aletheiac truth and the suppression of judgment itself.

The Question of History

Having established our focus on the categories of ‘truth’ and ‘authorship’ as key indices of an aesthetic culture in Part I, we may now turn our attention to its historical transformation, revaluation, and arguably even extinction in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In order to do so, however, we might ask how [ДАП]/[АТД] themselves thought history and how subsequent changes in the thinking of history made their aesthetic ideology untransmissible in its native form. I say ‘thinking history,’ but history itself is the inescapable content of ideology and of any metaphysics, including that of the subject, with which we are primarily concerned here. It informs and is informed by the very premises laid out above.

Without even understanding them as ‘Soviet’ poets, although the crossover with Soviet ideology will be plain, we can say observationally that [ДАП]/[АТД] orient history in their work in the following ways:

1) *There is a highest metaphysical state of history.*

In [ДАП]/[АТД], history, even within the unity of the poem or text, is not linear (teleological) but rather focalized and permutational in that it reveals its truth content *as presence* and likewise passes into abeyance at any moment. That is to say that history in [ДАП]/[АТД] is *messianic* in something like Benjamin’s sense[129]: time promises to

[129] Benjamin’s ideas on history and messianic time are most fully but cryptically developed in his theses “On the Concept of History” [“Über den Begriff der Geschichte”] (1940); however, they are also present in his work on

disclose the truth of things, and its historical "errancy" is on the road to a horizon at which history itself is transfigured into presence; that presence may likewise be projected into the past. In that sense, [ДАП]/[АТД] give priority to presence ("the now") over history and think history in terms of a 'becoming-now.'

2) *Truth – the irruption of Being into history – has no history*

Accordingly, the object and hidden truth of history is *being*, not *historical* being or beings or even the *history* of being, but the substantial irruption of Being as such into the world and into history. The Militsaner is not a militsaner and the nasturtium is not a nasturtium—they are moments of Being intruding upon and transfiguring historical reality. In this sense, their truth content *has no history* (Althusser: "ideology has no history").

3) *The function of poetic language is to transfigure 'history' into presence.*

Poetic language reveals presence and truth content where there seems to be 'merely' a signified history: word, code, image, text, memory, etc. However, unlike more

Early Romanticism (*Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* [1920]) and in the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" to *Origin of the German Mourning Play* [*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*] (1928). Here, it is important to remember that, for Benjamin, messianic time as well as the method of Marxist "historical materialism" is *backward-looking*, like the "angel of history" (a metaphor based on Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* in Thesis IX of "Über den Begriff der Geschichte"). If this orientation is reversed, one in fact gets something like the Soviet ideology of progress or the Social Democrat (Nazi) ideology of the same, which Benjamin describes as follows: "Social Democracy thought fit to assign to the working class the role of the redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength [that it is "the depository of historical knowledge" – DH]. This training made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren." Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations.* Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. 260. See Benjamin, Walter. „Über den Begriff der Geschichte". *Gesammelte Werke.* Ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser and Rolf Tiedemann, vol. I/2. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991. 690–708. See also „Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels." *Gesammelte Werke.* Ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser and Rolf Tiedemann, vol. I/1. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

familiar dialectics of immanence and transcendence typified by the revelatory Romantic figure of the symbol or the Saussurean bisection of signifier/signified, presence in [ДАП]/[АТД] is imagined both in and against history not as an absolute *form* but as an absolute *content,* so it is neither altogether immanent nor guaranteed or supplemented by any transcendental Idea or version of itself.

In practice, this way of thinking and writing is technicalized into a form of discursive *self-forgetting* or suppression of history bordering on psychotic incomprehensibility or abjection; but it is 'self-forgetting' that provides the ground for revelation. For example, we saw how internal contradiction (in [ДАП]) and tautology (in [АТД]) encourage revelatory, aletheiac reading practices by degrading and even prohibiting features of 'historical thinking' like continuity (cause and effect), correspondence, and closure—whether on the level of the overall code or image (e.g., the Militsaner) or a level as infrastructurally basic as lineation and syntax (e.g., in «Настурция как реальность»).

What is forgotten or leftover returns as transfiguration. Thus, one of the reasons these authors might appeal to deconstructive readers who take aim at a dialectic of immanence and transcendence – I read Prigov against Deleuze, for instance – is that *polysemy*, as an effect of poetic language predicated upon the bisection of meaning, is more or less overtly displaced by *dissemination* in the sense of an apparent glut/deficit of meanings for which no transcendental value – neither 'history' nor the code – can account. But this is not a mode of radical or deconstructive resistance of metaphysics. It is simply that such bisections do not operate in [ДАП]/[АТД] other than as a loss to be recuperated and redeemed, which is exactly what spurs the movement of transfiguration's

constant self-forgetting and return. This is the functional essence and technical deployment of "shimmering" [мерцание], the term used by some Moscow conceptualists for the overwhelming effect of simultaneity (self-remembering and self-forgetting) achieved by their works upon the reader.

The Event and Thereafter

Having presented 1) a mode of thinking truth and 2) a mode of thinking history in [ДАП]/[АТД], it is perhaps possible to trace a full outline of its discontinuity with the present, as one might survey the circumference of a crater left on the landscape of post-Soviet poetics. The shape of that outline will always conform, however, to a single motivating (and, more importantly, retroactively ontologized) event, which was the fall of the Soviet Union and the utter revision of truth and of history as such for those who survived it.

Its lesson was, in fact, *anti-historical.* That is, much like the French Revolution, the collapse of the Soviet Union was notoriously swift, sloppy, and seemingly aleatory rather than necessary or inevitable. It did not supply a ready alternative to the ideology of the past; its collapse was what exceeded that ideology or indeed *any* predictive model of its history.[130] It simply *happened,* with vulgar and violent immediacy.

[130] This is, of course, debatable. Many people, from economists to mystics, predicted the eventual fall of the Soviet Union. However, Western Sovietologists of the 1980s were by and large taken by surprise. As George F. Kennan, an architect of U.S. Cold War policy and a major proponent of containment, wrote in 1995: "Reviewing the history of international affairs in the modern era […] I find it hard to think of any event more strange and startling, and at first glance inexplicable, than the sudden and total disintegration and disappearance from the international scene, primarily in the years 1987 through 1991, of the great power known successively as the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union." Interestingly, the tide of Western historical scholarship, which initially backlashed against its own bewilderment at the collapse of the Soviet Union and revised it as structural and inevitable, has now turned the other way and begun to vindicate Sovietologists of the time by pointing out how much of it was in fact a product of executive political action and "the human factor." More importantly for our purposes, we could point out that the tide of Russian scholarship has followed the same trajectory since the 2000s under the political leadership of Putin

As a result, post-Soviet history also tends to be focalized, but its point of reference is always a shifting version of the traumatic event of its emergence. A theological analogy is again useful for the totality of its reach, and I would strongly suggest that if the pre-perestroika historical thinking we saw in [ДАП]/[АТД] was a distortion of the messianic, then its post-Soviet counterpart is *postlapsarian* – its telos has been projected into its past – and, likewise, that if the object of history in [ДАП]/[АТД] was the irruption of Being into history, then the object of post-Soviet history is the Event, an impossible hypostasis of history itself.

However, this does not merely constitute a reversal of messianic thinking, in which one substitutes a vague, transcendental notion of 'the Past' for 'the Future' and tethers history to it accordingly. The more powerful reordering undergone is one in which the priority of *presence* over history in messianic thinking is met with the utter displacement of presence and the present by a view of history in which it is forever turned backwards upon itself – vainly searching itself for presence and traumatically reconstituting and revising itself in every moment as an extension of the past Event from which it emerged. As a consequence, post-Soviet thinking *qua* post-Soviet thinking incorporates and indeed cannot escape several structural features of a metaphysics that was completely absent in or suppressed by the strategies and worldview of [ДАП]/[АТД], among them: 1) *self-reflexivity* and 2) *self-alterity*. It reflects upon itself and its own history, and, in doing so, performs being other-than-itself in order to constitute itself as present. In its very performance of itself, it becomes inaccessible to itself. This is also evident in mainstream politics: in annexing Crimea, for example, the Russian State performs an act of stewardship on

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and the United Russia Party, which considers it central to their own ideology that the fall of the USSR was both an anomaly and a *mistake* – one that never should have happened in the first place and that requires large-scale rectification. To view it in this way also allows Putin's ideologues to argue that it was both an accident (unaccountable and therefore un-enforceable) and a forced error (a conspiracy, an injustice, a coup, etc.) simultaneously.

behalf of a Soviet Union that no longer exists; yet it is the very non-existence of that Union by which it justifies itself and its action in the present, literally reconstituting itself geopolitically as a thing that, by its own reckoning, *it is not*.

This way of thinking is powerful and self-perpetuating. However, what interests us here is that self-reflexivity and self-alterity are also deeply consequential aesthetic structures, particularly for something like poetry (Rimbaud: "*Je est un autre*"), whose basis remains the formation and maintenance of, as well as resistance to, a lyric subject: one who performs itself in speaking itself and, in doing so, becomes other than itself. The mere introduction of these structures to a Soviet tradition (both "official" and "unofficial") in which they were deeply suppressed constitutes a break in aesthetic ideology and practice on the order of a quiet revolution. As was the case with [ДАП]/[АТД], this is particularly true of avant-garde poetry, which builds a frame around its own technics, truth values, and institutions. Such art is *always* political. Four examples of it will be read below.

FIRST PRACTICE: ALEKSANDR SKIDAN (b. 1965)

An Introduction to the Post-Soviet Romantic: Revolution and Return

Die Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh, ein Trieb überall zu Hause zu sein.[131]
– Novalis, *Fragmente*

[Philosophy is really a homesickness, a drive to be everywhere at home.
– Novalis, *Fragments*]

Je ne suis pas mort, mais je suis séparé.[132]
– Antonin Artaud, « Les nouvelles révélations de l'être » (1937)

[I am not dead, but I am separated.
– Antonin Artaud, "The New Revelations of Being" (1937)]

It is common now, in the late 2010s, for Russian intellectuals to accuse each other of 'romanticizing' (*романтизировать*; *романтизация*) both the Soviet past and the period of the 1990s, whether it is the right accusing the left of a nostalgia for chaos or the left accusing itself of a vague infidelity to the present. However, "romanticism," this word that is even more capacious and polemical in Russian than it is in English, conceals an essential truth about post-Soviet ideology that stretches into the present and that, when taken literally, suggests a few strong parallels between the Russian 1990s and the German Early Romantic (Frühromantik) from which the practice of modern, bourgeois "Romanticism" (capital R), in its many permutations, still derives.

There are at least two ways of considering this phenomenon. The first, which is to call it a 'return,' is to draw a broad historical analogy – a 'rhyme' of history, itself a properly Romantic trope. The second, which would arguably make it a 'revolution' in a Russian context, is to look

[131] Novalis. *Schriften*, vol. 2. Ed. J. Minor. Jena: Diedrichs, 1923. 179.
[132] Artaud, Antonin. *Les nouvelles révélations de l'être*. Paris: Denoël, 193.

more deeply at Romanticism as a complex rhetorical and conceptual strategy that has always been conceived *in resistance to history, wrought upon history*, particularly to *justify the exclusion of history* at moments of rupture such as that precipitated by the fall of the Soviet Union. Both will lead us to the first poetic practice I wish to discuss, which is that of Aleksandr Skidan and which emerges from the immediate context of the post-Soviet Russian "Nineties."

Beginning with the weaker argument – that of historical analogy – the correspondence between Jena in the 1790s and Moscow/St. Petersburg in the 1990s is roughly that of two European backwaters experiencing ideological crisis on an all-pervasive scale. Like the Soviets-turned-Russians of the 1990s, German Early Romantics (the Schlegels, Fichte, Schelling, Novalis) were reacting to simultaneous and systemic disruptions in the history of 1) politics (the French Revolution), 2) economic institutions (the emancipation of the bourgeoisie), and 3) ideas (the Kantian Revolution).

Their response, in essence, was to rewrite not just history but *historicity*, staking a new *ideological* homeland for themselves in a transhistorical view of aesthetic, political, and philosophical truth that could exceed, account for, and be defensible against present discontinuities in history and its underwriting truths (political, economic, etc.). In this sense, the project of the Jena Romantics was also the primary preoccupation (and paranoia) of the post-Soviet Russian intellectual: to reconstruct a homeland by reconstituting history in a way that justifies the overdetermination of the present; and this is especially true of the era book-ended by the official dissolution of the Soviet Union (December 26, 1991) and the resignation of Boris Yeltsin (December 31, 1999), which effectively constitutes the Russian "Nineties."

Few figures of lasting importance emerged from this abbreviated decade at all, but fewer still assumed the role of dissident intellectual (*интеллигент*) as eagerly or in as self-styled a

manner as Aleksandr Skidan (b. 1965). A secondary-school dropout and autodidact who worked as a boiler-room attendant (*котельщик*) while voraciously assimilating newly available philosophy and literature, he was also a protegee and close friend of Arkadii Dragomoshchenko. That is, if Skidan's background sounds like the fictional pedigree of a counter-cultural hero (a new Bazarov or Pechorin), that's because it is – there can be very little doubt as to its meticulous and intentional construction. This is made all the more interesting by the fact, that, to a very high degree, this mythos succeeded. Among poets of the 1990s, he has arguably remained the most influential, both literarily and publicly. A symbolic example is that, until recently, Skidan personally awarded the prestigious Arkadii Dragomoshchenko Prize [*Премия Аркадия Драгомощенко*] on behalf of his old friend and mentor. A far more decisive example in terms of his stature and reception is that, as a senior editor and advisor to Irina Prokhorova, Skidan is essentially the poetic gatekeeper to the NLO empire, Russia's biggest publishing house. Meanwhile, the poems of Skidan's youthful first volume, *Delirium* [*Делириум: Стихи*] (1993), are now widely considered classics that speak directly from the soul of their era. It was published – again, with coded gravitas and the authority of the past – by Mitin Zhurnal, the same Soviet unofficial magazine that first published Dragomoshchenko in its inaugural issue of 1984.

It is through this connection to the Soviet past that Skidan also represents a bridge with the succeeding literary generation, which came into its own in the 2000s – 2010s. To return to the Jena analogy, one could say that where the Schlegels had the *Athenaeum* (1798-1800), the present generation of Russians has *Translit* (2005-present), edited under the direction of Pavel Arsen'ev, almost twenty years Skidan's junior. Unlike Dmitrii Kuz'min's massive *Vavilon* and litkarta.ru projects or his programmatically liberal journal *Vozdukh*, which also play a very different and essential role in the world of post-Soviet poetry, *Translit*'s primary criterion for its

agenda seems to be that it actively and adamantly *has one*, however shifting or ill-defined. And if Arsen'ev is its F. Schlegel, Skidan seems to function something like its Schelling: central but always at a critical remove; more conservative and of the 'old school,' while simultaneously attempting to formalize his younger peers' theoretical vision from the sidelines. It is Skidan's voice that rings out in the 3- to 5-page theoretical summaries that begin each issue of *Translit* (he writes most of them).[133] That is to say, Skidan positions himself in relation to this cohort as something like its signatory, the figure that both stands outside the work and completes or authorizes it, which also repeats how his generation views itself as a whole with regard to the Soviet past.

Like his mentor, Dragomoshchenko, Skidan's succession of titles speak directly to the intensifying pitch and scale of his project: *Делириум* [*Delirium*] (1993), *Критическая масса* [*Critical Mass*] (1995), *В повторном чтении* [*Upon Repeated Reading*] (1998), *Сопротивление поэзии* [*The Resistance of Poetry*] (2001), *Красное смещение* [*Red Shifting*] (2005), *Расторжение* [*Dissolution*] (2010), *Сумма поэтики* [*Summa Poetica*] (2013), *Membra disjecta* (2016).[134] Not only is Skidan a poet who practices an unusually high degree of revision in individual texts (one thinks of Eliot, whom we shall see later in his early poetry), he also self-curates, as in the case of *Сумма поэтики* [*Summa Poetica*] (2013) and *Membra disjecta* (2016), which are explicitly presented as living retrospectives of his critical and poetic contributions, respectively.

[133] This was particularly true of early issues of the journal, which Skidan enthusiastically supported. However, even if he hadn't signed them, it would be easy to identify his style and tone.
[134] Since this was originally written, Skidan has published two more books: *Путеводитель по N.* (2018) and *Сыр букв мел: об Аркадии Драгомощенко* (2019).

In fact, Skidan's careful control over his image and living legacy (a lesson learned from Prigov, no doubt) are part of what makes him quintessentially a product of the post-Soviet age, and it is a strategy that will be repeated by almost all of his more late-coming contemporaries, each in his or her own way. One could remark that this mythos-building is nothing new and has a multitude of precedents (e.g., Prigov, Kharms, Akhmatova, Esenin, Blok…) and it *is* an old Russian/Soviet game, deeply, but for one essential difference: unlike these mythoi of the poet, Skidan positions himself as *both poet and critic/'theorist,*' responsible to both camps, and thus (ostensibly) pulls back the curtain on his own thought, dissolving the univocity and illusion of transparency that allows, for example, the Prigovian machine to operate from its inscrutable "phantom center" (or that allowed Akhmatova to operate from hers). I dwell specifically on Prigov as a paradigm of the fusion of poetic mythos and practice – rather than the older examples listed above or others contemporary to Prigov, such as Brodsky or Evtushenko – because Prigov/[ДАП] presents, as we shall see, the figure for the past that Skidan, like many of his contemporaries, most explicitly and torturously attempts to revise and overcome.

At the heart of Skidan's eventual and traumatic rejection of the poetics of [ДАП] is the interpolation of a new school of thought, and that new school is *critique*, which would have been utterly foreign not only Prigov but to almost any previous Soviet or Russian generation. It is difficult to say whether the rejection of conceptualist (as well as traditional lyric) poetics or the interpolation of critique in the form of Western 'theory' came first – I would argue that the latter precedes the former – but Skidan sets a precedent repeated by today's authors of blending poetry and 'theory' into a single practice, which, as such, implies a set of structures antithetical to those of the mythoi and practices that preceded them. These include, first and foremost: 1) material self-reflection as the formal condition for constituting subjecthood (a poet *must* reflect on the

language of poetry in order to *be* 'in poetry') and 2) the poet/theorist as a *system-subject*, or a textually constituted subject, rather than the invisible hand of the technical (Prigov) or creative (Brodsky, for instance) process.

This is also where the argument for an Early Romantic return in the Russian 1990s, via an extremely long detour in the 20th century West, extends beyond the context of historical analogy and into the more complex territory of practice and ideology. I called the new school of thought in Skidan's work "critique." But "critique" (German *Kritik*, like and related to "irony," another Frühromantik repurposing) is a heady and deceptively slippery word/concept – and one not frequently used as such (*критика*) by Skidan or his contemporaries. It falls under the strong and telling taboo among contemporary Russian poet-theorists on Romantic vocabulary. However, the mode of critique *in theory* is nearly ubiquitous, as are its fundamental assumptions about itself.

An example is the title that Skidan gives, at the age of 36, to his collection of essays written in the 1990s: *Сопротивление поэзии* [The Resistance of/to Poetry] (2001), which refers to Paul de Man's "The Resistance to Theory" (1982)[135], an essay written at the peak of the latter's currency and elder statesmanship in the year before his death. I note these dates, again, in order to emphasize Skidan's perpetual sense of looking back on himself – even at a relatively young age – as if he were already an institution of the past and also one who is tied directly to and speaks for the great 'heroes' of the past, including De Man as a figure for deconstruction.

De Man wrote the essay at the request of the MLA in order to define the terms of his discipline, only to 'discover' the essential "resistance" to/of "theory" to the method of its own discourse. His argument, including its deployment as a discovery-in-practice, is that critique or

[135] De Man, Paul. *The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

theory always turns back on itself and, as a result, cannot be defined but *can only be performed*, which is the very identification that links it with the (autonomous and autotelic) work of art. It is in this same spirit and according to these same underlying valuations of both art and theory that Skidan makes the work of 'theory' and the work of 'poetry' indistinguishable and enmeshed in the figure of the poet, who is elevated to the status of the frame. Thus, we might understand it better as the practice of an ideology, particularly if we return it to its root in the Frühromantik and define the revolution that Skidan's generation introduces to Russian letters as what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy describe in *L'absolu Litteraire* (1978) as: "*theory itself as literature* or, in other words, literature producing itself as it produces its own theory."[136]

This, then, is our transhistorical and functional definition of 'romanticizing' and of the Early Romantic project as it has permeated the last two centuries; but, by that same token, whether or not one considers the Russian "Nineties" properly 'Romantic'—terminologically or literary-historically—is also somewhat incidental. We are simply talking about a set of assumptions and practices that blend (auto-)critique with art – indeed, laying the foundation for the bourgeois institution and modern interpretation of autonomous and autotelic art – and when viewed as such, the 'Romantic' also lays the basis for an ideological agenda that Skidan initiates in the 1990s and in which others will join him of reconstructing a homeland—a *territory* for poetic action—with an eye to two forms of anamnesis or symbolic restoration:

> 1) The anamnesis of history. The restoration not only of content to history but of *historicity*, the order of history that was overturned by yet also emerged in its current form from the event of the Fall of the Soviet Union, from which it is now constituted as a lack.

[136] Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe and Jean-Luc Nancy. *The Literary Absolute.* Trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester. Albany: SUNY Press, 1988. 12.

2) The anamnesis of the subject *by and in the mode of critique,* which is to say qua the thetic subject or the *subject of judgment* (aesthetic, political, ethical, epistemological); for such a subject, if it ever existed in a late Soviet context, was not only called into crisis by the disruption of its history but was also suppressed and displaced *before* that Fall even occurred, Prigov's unequivocally *Soviet* poetics (see Part I) being a prime example. This new subject could also be called the *critical subject.*

Genealogy

Революция, совершенная Приговым в поэтическом способе производства, сродни промышленному перевороту…[137] – Александр Скидан (2010)

[*The coup Prigov mounted upon the means of poetic production is comparable to the Industrial Revolution...* – Aleksandr Skidan (2010)]

In the Hebrew Bible, after the story of the Creation and of the Fall, Genesis Book 5 concerns itself with the genealogy of the patriarchs. The expulsion from the Garden introduces the faculty of judgment (the knowledge of good and evil) quite literally *as death* and with it, history. In order to secure presence in history, which has become precarious, the Biblical author(s) supply a genealogy.

This is not at all unlike the project Skidan undertakes in the 1990s to establish his own history in the form of a canon – nor was he alone. Everyone from conservative academics to avant-gardist poets to everyday people at metro kiosks were engaged in rediscovering Russian letters (again, anthologies from this era are extraordinarily motivated and telling) as well as

[137] Skidan, Aleksandr. "Prigov as Brecht and Warhol in one Person, or Golem-Sovieticus" [«Пригов как Брехт и Уорхол в одном лице, или Голем-советикус»] (2010). In Skidan, Aleksandr. *Summa poetiki.* Moscow: NLO, 2016. 264. Italics in the original.

selectively assimilating the enormous influx of foreign material, each to justify his or her concerns in the present. What is perhaps true of all of these attempts at historical revision but is uniquely acute in Skidan's case is how very *trans*-historical and *trans*-cultural the genealogy he developed for himself and for his generation would be. It acts as if in resistance to history in order to secure a *historicity immune to history*.

When the *Athenaeum* group took up the same task in 1790s Jena – and with precisely the same ideological motivation in regard to history – they first bypassed what was local to them both in time and in place. The genealogy they constructed for themselves was *focalized* and permutational rather than continuous, which betrays their view of historicity itself. The patriarchs whom they established were first the Ancients and then a triad of foreign masters – Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare – in order to define their own modernity by bracketing out entire epochs, most conspicuously that of the Enlightenment and of the German baroque that formed their native inheritance.

If we look to Skidan's first two major collections of essays, *Сопротивление поэзии* [The Resistance of Poetry] (2001) and *Сумма поэтики* [*Summa Poetica*] (2013), twelve years apart and each meticulously presented at a different moment towards a slightly different historical goal, we notice that his historical memory is equally selective and purposive. It could be said generally that the former collection treats primarily philosophers and concepts that establish the ideological foundation of his worldview, while the latter lays out a literary correspondence with other writers more local (Russian/Soviet) and contemporary in order to construct a community and a history to populate that ideological project. Thus, in *Сопротивление поэзии* (2001), we encounter Skidan's version of the foreign masters: primarily Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Heidegger, meant to guarantee his ideology *against* history; in *Сумма поэтики* (2013), we encounter a

revisionist Russian/Soviet genealogy of letters that serves as a guide to the imaginary history with which he replaces it. It must be said that whether or not it is merely a coincidence, the structure of Skidan's genealogy thus corresponds directly with that of the Early Romantics. The interesting detail is that, for the Romantics, the triad of foreign masters from a past epoch – the Renaissance of Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare – were understood as an expression and transhistorical justification of the spirit of the Ancients; in the case of Baudelaire, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, the 'Ancients' whom these foreign masters transform and reinvent are likely the German Early Romantics themselves, although Skidan passes over the latter in silence.

His genealogy of Russian and Soviet letters in *Сумма поэтики*, meanwhile, projects two major generational groupings of past writers, who were in fact largely intransmissible to each other before *glasnost'* due to censorship and other issues of material availability: what we might call, after Tynianov, the 'Fathers' (Prigov, Dragomoshchenko) and the 'Great-Uncles' (Vaginov, Vvedenskii, Mandel'stam, as well as writers better known for prose like Platonov and Shalamov). It is in part because of the intransmissibility of their relations that I call this latter grouping "Great-Uncles," although one could see an aesthetic and ideological line, for instance, from Acmeism to Vaginov to Dragomoshchenko or from Futurism to Vvedenskii to Prigov, as well as note the fraternal resemblance between the Oberiuty (Vaginov and Vvedenskii) that will be repeated (albeit in a more distantly related, cousinly fashion) in Prigov and Dragomoshchenko. And, in fact, it is *only* the legacy of the Oberiu group that is broad enough to accommodate as its offspring *both* Prigov *and* Dragomoshchenko, and by positioning himself between these, Skidan, who has a deep and longstanding interest in Vaginov and Vvedenskii, seems to point to the Oberiuty as the 'secret grandfather(s)' of his generation – the ones whose parentage was covered up but that the grandchildren most closely emulate and resemble.

The most telling alchemy of Skidan's genealogy, however, takes place between its bookends: the 'Fathers' (Dragomoshchenko and Prigov) who dominate the immediate local past and the foreign masters (Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Heidegger) who are marshalled on behalf of the present. As I have mentioned before, Skidan shared a close personal and working relationship with Dragomoshchenko, and, although I am unaware of his personal interactions with Prigov, Skidan usually refers to him not as "Prigov" but as "Dmitrii Aleksandrovich" or (in the style of this study) "DAP" as if to confer upon him a super-personal status. In a dramatic passage to which I have alluded to several times already and that begins the essay «Пригов как Брехт и Уорхол в одном лице, или Голем-советикус» ["Prigov as Brecht and Warhol in One Person, or Golem-Sovieticus"], Skidan has the following to say about Prigov:

> *Революция, совершенная Приговым в поэтическом способе производства, сродни промышленному перевороту*: *его логико-поэтические машины пришли на смену «живому труду» традиционного лирического высказывания,* так сказать, ручному лиризму (лиризму ручной выделки, тому, что сам Дмитрий Александрович любил называть «художественным промыслом»). Это новый вид пойесиса, а не просто поэтики.[138]
>
> *The coup Prigov accomplished upon the means of poetic production is comparable to the Industrial Revolution: his logico-poetical machines have replaced the "human labor" of traditional lyric utterance,* which is to say, skilled lyricism (the lyric of the hand-made, which Dmitrii Aleksandrovich himself liked to call "artistic craftwork"). This is a new type of *poiesis*, not just poetics.

This certainly corroborates our own reading of Prigov's poetics; but Skidan views this practice not as a localized phenomenon but as something like the metaphysical Bronze Horseman that haunts contemporary Russian letters, and I can confirm anecdotally from hearing him speak about Prigov (for instance, at an ASEEES Conference in Philadelphia in October

[138] Summa 264 Александр Скидан, «Пригов как Брехт и Уорхол в одном лице, или Голем-советикус» (2010) My trans.

2015) that his awe and even terror is genuine. Prigov, for Skidan, is the phantasmagoric father who cannot be deposed, the very air that the post-Soviet avant-garde breathes (or, rather, that makes it impossible to breathe). Why?

The question points us towards Skidan's own most persistent goals and beliefs: that 1) the poetic subject has been disembodied, dismembered (a recurring metaphor), and disarticulated by the repeated violence of both 'theory' and history and that 2) the job of poetry is to restore it to the faculty of judgment and to its historicity, which is exactly what Prigov—or rather, [ДАП]—so successfully suppresses. That is, Skidan finds his poetic subject, if it indeed exists, caught between a 'Western/European' rock (theory) and a 'Soviet' hard place (conceptualism). It is in response to this *present* impasse that Skidan summons his proto-deconstructionist foreign masters— Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Heidegger—as prophets who anticipate the disasters of both 'theory' and 'Prigov-ism' and can therefore retroactively defend against both.

Unlike 'theory,' Prigov, of course, cannot be directly connected to Baudelaire, Nietzsche, or Heidegger. But between these masters and Prigov, we see a conspicuously mirrored performance of certain Romantic endgames. For example, Prigov shares in and travesties: the 'genius'-turned-celebrity and mass commercialism of Baudelaire; the performative artist/philosopher and spirit of affirmation in Nietzsche; even Heideggerian *cura*, "existential care," by which *Dasein* becomes the agent of its own structural articulation – in Prigov's version, by emptying itself of all qualities qua subjectivity and becoming the ghost in the serializing machine.

And, yet, as I hope this list of parallelisms suggests, there is a striking and essential difference that has to do with subjecthood and the very concept of 'mastery' itself. That is, unlike these past 'masters' and endpoints of the Romantic impulse, Prigov does not, in any obvious

way, become *slave* to his own mastery. Baudelaire's commercialism and drive for celebrity drove him into financial and spiritual destitution; Nietzsche's performativity degraded into madness; Heidegger's entire philosophical edifice revealed its alliance with conformativity beginning in something as seemingly innocent as its reliance on etymology but ending in his great compromise with Nazism. Prigov's machine, [ДАП], in contrast, *does not break down*, even in its afterlife. What is astounding about Prigov is his incredible, almost *terroristic* health; his sheer, unrelenting *positivity*, which can absorb and extend its context outwards seemingly indefinitely and without compromise.

It is this metaphysical positivity in Prigov that Skidan finds most disturbing. And he has good reason. Prigov is able to do what he does because, as we suggested and as Skidan also implies in the passage cited above, his great innovation was to technicalize the subject in such a way that it no longer recognizes itself as a subject but as something else. If we turn to Heidegger, one of Skidan's masters, we are warned that this *first* compromise with 'mastery' is in fact the most compromising of all. Heidegger writes in 1939 that "if humanity achieves this ['*producing itself technologically,*' ibid.], it will have exploded itself, i.e., *its essence* qua *subjectivity*."[139] In such a world, Heidegger perceives the meaning of *Dasein* to be irrevocably exchanged as collateral for "domination" and concludes: "This is the most extreme nonessence (*Unwesen*) in relation to φύσις-οὐσία."[140] In our terms, this is the staggering price of Prigov's gamble on what Skidan calls the "meta-position" [«мета-позиция»].[141] Its subject-as-method or subject-as-

[139] Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence and Concept of φύσις in Aristotle's *Physics* B, I." Trans. Thomas Sheehan. *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 197.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Skidan uses this phrase ("meta-position") constantly when writing or speaking of conceptualism and particularly of Prigov, but it is unclear exactly what he means. Certainly, something unassailable – like a defensive posture – but simultaneously, I would suggest, one of mastery. A rather telling example of Skidan's own poetic fantasies (which are actually fantasies of power) is this "ode" composed for Prigov upon his death:

techne is, at the expense of all else, a *master*, but, annexed outside the seemingly limitless extension of its dominion, it also *does not* and *cannot* know itself.

Writing from a very different perspective in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), Julia Kristeva calls such a position "metalanguage" and simply identifies it as one of four signifying practices that describe the field of subjects in language—one that occurs most frequently as the topos of science and any philosophical positivism.[142] She writes:

> *Metalanguage* may be said to suture the signifying process by eliminating the negative charge, by subordinating negativity to affirmation, and by *reducing instinctual dyads to positivity.* Once it has helped constitute the real object as such and, hence, symbolism, the negative charge seems to withdraw into this symbolism and become subsumed by the *Bejahung* Freud speaks of. The object is thus posited as real only if it is forever dissociated from the positivity directly observing it, hovering over it, *meta-*; over-hanging it, raising it, as in a meta-physics, meta-body, meta-logic, and meta-language. The object is forever cast

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Субъектность Пригов превозмог	Subjectivity Prigov surpassed
он превзошёл в себе субъекта	he transcended the subject in himself
и стал как бы всесильный Бог	and became as if the all-powerful God
деталей	of details
в тотальности поэтического проекта	in the totality of the poetic project
метапозицию он занял	he occupied the meta-position
он имиджи кругом расставил	he arranged images in a circle
смерть автора он жить заставил	he forced the author's death to live
он Пригова Дмитрия Александровича, Беляевского академика восславил	he, Prigov, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich, academic of Belyaev, himself glorified
и Рубинштейна он восславил	and Rubinshtein he glorified
и Кабакова он восславил	and Kabakov he glorified
и Монастырского восславил	and Monastyrskii he glorified
и Звездочетова восславил	and Zvezdochetov he glorified
и Пивоварова восславил	and Pivovarov he glorified
и Пепперштейна он восславил	and Pepperstein he glorified
и Гройса чуточку прославил	and Groys he praised a little
и многих, многих он ославил	and many, many he defamed a little
а вот Гандлевского он переставил	but Gandlevskii he moved aside
и Седакову переставил	and Sedakova he moved aside
и Некрасова Вс. переставил	and Seva Nekrasov he moved aside
и Хармса может быть обставил	and Kharms he might have outmaneuvered
и уважать себя заставил	and he made them respect him
потому что встал по отношению к себе в метапозицию метапоэтическую	because he put himself in a metapoetic metaposition

Meanwhile, a *discursive* "meta-position" could be something as simple as the positivist discourse of science, which draws an impenetrable line between itself and its objects at the very heart of its method. See below on Kristeva.

[142] Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language.* Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. 93-94.

> out, and made inaccessible as such; though it has no existence of its own, it can be constructed, deduced, and known from a position in front and above. *Material discontinuity* is thus posited as the predicate of a syllogism and assimilated within it as a *complement* to be constructed in utterances; metaphysics is indissociable from a meta-logos.[143]

Put more simply, such a discursive subject has a demiurgical tendency (and *need*) to abscond from the very system in which it places itself at the center. As Kristeva writes further on, "Since the subject articulated in this way is an axial position, he is not included, dissolved, or implicated in the system; instead, he hovers above it, subdues it, and is absent from it."[144] He is a ghost, a *techne* (the how), rather than a *poietes* (the who)—what Prigov calls the "central phantom."

Thus, while Skidan thoroughly fetishizes the monumental and essential *sickness* of the old masters, he does so because it is this sickness, so it seems, that initiates a trial through which the subject as such can emerge, whereas Prigov's health comes at the steep price of suppressing that subject and its history entirely. The fundamental impotence of the old masters over themselves – their affinity with death – is rewritten, meanwhile, as the cost of self-knowledge, and the model of a system-subject whose trial of self-becoming is staged in perpetuity on the ruins of its history.

As we turn to one of Skidan's most well-read texts from the 90s, the poem "Scholia," we shall see this process unfold in real time – or rather, the poetic 'time' of what is still recognizably lyric, something Prigov could never accommodate. A feature that will become worthy of note, however, is that even as he attempts to reassemble the subject of/in lyric, Skidan does not fully reject Prigov's "meta-position"—rather, he adopts and modifies it as that of the contemplative seer (a 'theorist'), whose gaze of judgment, extended from above, is the means by which the

[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid., 95.

disjecta membra of the poet (his scattered lines, his fragmented history) are directed by the work to a phantom wholeness. The difference is that this theorist-seer cannot remain separate from the thing he sees, dissects, judges – he becomes drawn into the work as a *critical* subject, and thus also the subject of his own agonizingly disjunctive critique.

"Scholia": The Parasitic Paronym

В рамках конвенциального метрического стиха поэтическая техника может быть виртуозной, очень разнообразной и богатой смыслами, но эти смыслы не выходят за пределы того, что можно назвать русской культурной матрицей, или кодом, они паразитируют на нем. Это вечная архаика, упоительное переливание чужих снов из стакана в стакан.[145] – Александр Скидан (2014)

> [Within the framework of a conventional metrical verse, poetic technique can be virtuosic, very diverse and rich in its meanings, but these meanings do not go beyond what one could call the Russian cultural matrix or code—they parasitize it. It is an eternal archaism, the intoxicating transfusion of other people's dreams from glass to glass. – Aleksandr Skidan (2014)]

The poem "Scholia" (see Appendix for full text), which is dated "January 1999" but underwent extensive revisions before publication in 2005, is, in a sense, the calling card not just of Skidan's early career but of the distinct, borderline cultural era of the Russian Nineties. It marks the culmination of a style in which he wrote beginning with "Delirium" [«Делириум»] (1993) (see Appendix) and treats the same subject-matter, which is the ideological and personal chaos experienced by the figure of a poet wandering the streets of St. Petersburg, much like a version of Pushkin's Evgenii ("The Bronze Horseman"), in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Foreign and first-time readers may find it juvenile or self-serious (and it *is*) as well as slavishly indebted to some of the American modernists Skidan was reading

[145] Interview with RUNY Web, June 20, 2014: http://www.runyweb.com/articles/culture/literature/alexander-skidan-interview.html. My trans.

at the time – undeniably: Charles Olson (in style), Ezra Pound (in tone and aspiration), and T.S. Eliot (in allusions and theme). However, this was the tone of the era. Combine these with the personal grandiosity of Blok's mythos of 'the Poet' and the clichés and hero-worship of 'theory' (figures like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Blanchot, and Baudrillard make celebrity appearances in these poems, which are a who's-who of modern civilization's most abjectly discontent) and you have something of Aleksandr Skidan in the 1990s. At its most puerile, the results can be downright tasteless in the mode of shock value that has lost whatever edge it perhaps had to begin with:

искусственный член
задроченный троеперстьем

крестовый поход
капитала

artificial cock
jerked by a trinity of fingers

the crusade
of capital

(lines 121 – 124)

Considerably more troubling than dildos, Orthodoxy, and capital (*Capital*?) is Skidan's willingness – a willingness still somehow in vogue in Russian poetry – to mix theoretical cliché with lazy reference world-historical trauma, including the Holocaust; see lines 150 - 151: "the angel of history with a swastika / on silver wings" [«ангел истории со свастикой / на серебряных крыльях»]. Like an Orthodox dildo, this is done for glib effect, while assuring us (and Adorno) in a tone of impotent frustration that "<this is not a poem>" [«<это не стихотворение>»] (line 37). This comes, moreover, amidst a dramatically staged conflict

between the speaker's admiration for Heidegger, on the one hand, and Benjamin on the other (a rival idolatry that it is less fraught with controversy than shared by every college junior in American German departments) and mediated by (who else than?) a breathy and sexualized Hannah Arendt, who whispers "I love [you]" (line 143) like a noir heroine with an empty bed and a case to solve. While the tone aspires to irony, its pretension to pathos is deadly serious – this poem is not a joke but a gesture of the most expansive, almost transcendental self-pity.

However, it would serve to remind the reader that every American of a certain time or inclination can repeat the opening lines of "Howl" (1955) – "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, / starving hysterical naked, / dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking / for an angry fix" – which are no less potentially bathic, sweeping in scale and grandiosity, and (for their own reasons) politically unadvisable now. Like Ginsberg, Skidan's *ambition* is, in fact, the most salient feature of his work and the thing that has, for now, stood the test of time and made "Scholia" a kind of rallying cry for a generation, setting the tone for an ideological and poetic agenda that is still actively being pursued today, particularly by the young men who dominated the scene in the 2000s – 2010s (Yaroslav Mogutin, Kirill Medvedev, Roman Osminkin, Pavel Arsenev, etc.). That agenda is ambition itself: to return not only status and identity to the poet (something Soviet "official" poets enjoyed) but critical *force* (something they didn't) in order to make him or her culturally and politically relevant to the needs of today's society.

The rearrangement of values for those who adopt this course is something we now regard as quintessentially postmodern but also perhaps peculiarly Russian in that Tynianov identified it during his own period of "interlude" in the 1920s[146]: the ascendance of the poetic persona over

[146] See Tynianov, Iu. N. "Promezhutok." *Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino.* M: Nauka, 1977. 168 – 195.

the work as the primary vehicle for and frame of meaning.[147] This is natural to an essentially revanchist strategy conceived to return force and purpose to the figure of the poet. Yet its marriage to an active political tendency towards the left among today's Russian poets has given it a more interesting twist and solidified another union that is simultaneously 'postmodern' and Romantic to its core, which is that of the 'poet' and the 'theorist.'

To pursue a metaphor for this dialectic that will take on more meaning: the moment of great consequence for such poetry is not Orpheus' *song* (Orpheus the poet) but his look backward, past Eurydice, into Hell (Orpheus the prophet/'theorist')[148]; for history and culture itself, Skidan will seem to argue, can only be reassembled through the *Orphic gaze*, and it is the *critical* rather than creative function of the poet that is necessary to his or her aesthetic function and role in society. It is here that 'theory' itself—freshly available from abroad in the Nineties—becomes the poet's greatest ally, granted that its own fundamental impotence over and removal from its discursive objects is either disavowed or transubstantiated and overcome; and to take this later course, the poet will wager his own person against that abyss, like Orpheus trudging with his lyre into Hell.

The fantasy is that of a poet who stands in the frame of the work as a self-sacrificial lamb upon whose body history can be rewritten, its effects measured, and its meanings ascertained. Indeed, throughout "Scholia," the dominant metaphor for the poet (who is the axial metaphor for everything else) is vertiginously expansive but also self-reflexive: the poet is both "we," the fragmentary body of the collective dead, and the godlike clinician who hovers above and

[147] Tynianov makes this claim in passing in the opening pages of the essay "The Interlude" (1924) and elaborates it further in the essay "Literary Fact" (1924), which he published that same year. The two essays may be found in the same volume given above.
[148] Compare Blanchot, one of Skidan's favorite authors, particularly the crucial sections on the Orpheus myth in *L'Espace littéraire*. Blanchot, Maurice. *L'Espace littéraire*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1955.

performs the autopsy. The text is littered with corpses (line 53), dismemberments (lines 63, 172), embodiments (line 71) and disembodiments (line 51) wrought upon this person; but he is also the one, by definition, who exercises the right to examine (his own) body and discern the cause of death (line 80).

To draw a comparison with the "meta-position" that Skidan so fixates upon in Prigov, the effect could not be more different, but that difference is constituted by how the removal of such a position is conceptualized. Prigov's "central phantom" cannot judge or reflect upon itself – that is the very essence of its demiurgical removal and unassailability; in contrast, Skidan makes self-reflective judgment (in the critical mode of 'theory') the singular function of the poet to a degree of narcissistic expansiveness and double vision that borders on paranoia. He replaces Prigov's ghost-in-the-machine with the *critical gaze*, the very thing that it precluded, and this is done both at the expense of the poet (who sees himself everywhere as the vivisected body of the work, history, and society) and in order to resurrect the godlike poet and elevate him to the status of the one "above" (himself and all others) who *sees* and *knows*. At its extreme, such poetry itself becomes unnecessary – merely an echo; the poet's greatest performance is that of one who occupies all positions in *visionary silence*.

In "Scholia," one of the clearest textual indications of this authorial position – and its limitations – is the title itself. To a Russian ear with any foreign language exposure whatsoever, its Latin will nonetheless recall English "school," French "école," or German "Schule" and for good reason, all of them deriving from Greek "σχολή" ("free time, leisure; a lecture, learning"). In Latin, "scholium" (pl. "scholia") is such a lesson or lecture undertaken by a professional commentator or scholast (not to be confused with a "Scholastic") in the margins of an existing text – usually a manuscript of an Ancient author, such as Homer. Its intention is to rectify,

clarify, interpret, and provide context, like a gloss. Skidan, then, announces himself as one who not only assembles the textual body (indeed, the disjecta membra) of the poet and his history but who exists in its margins, curating and commenting upon it. Moreover, he does not provide a single "scholium" but many "scholia," meaning that he is a *fragmentary* scholiast—one who clarifies and assembles fragmentarily, from many positions, or something of an oxymoron.

This accords with another Greek word that appears in "Scholia" and that describes the title itself: "paronym" (line 36). In Russian, "paronymous" [*паронимический*] is a word often (mis-)used simply to mean "assonant, having arbitrary phonetic resemblance or correspondence." However, as in English, a "paronym" [*пароним*] is actually a technical term for a word derived from the same root as another word (by morphology) or a word formed from a foreign word with only a slight change of form (e.g., Greek 'σχόλιον' ➔ Latin 'scholium'). Aristotle uses it in his *Categories* to describe terms that seem synonymous or logically interchangeable but are not so (e.g., saying that a man is "white" because he possesses "whiteness"). In other words, a "paronym" – literally, in Greek, a "beside name/term" – is para-sitic; it stands for an accidental elision and displacement of the original/proper meaning or something lost or added in translation or interpretation.

Our titular scholast builds his poem, "Scholia," around such slippages within multivalent networks of reference. Yet he also seems to have a contrary fixation on proper names – names that *cannot* be confused or accidentally changed. Below is a gloss in order of appearance of a majority of the references, citations, and allusions (some of them 'paronyms' of a sort) in the poem that should be immediately recognizable to most readers:

Line (Number)	***Author***	***Text***	***Allusion***
колёса мельниц (2)	Cervantes	*Quixote* (1605)	Figure of protagonist (metonymically)
<и Гёте Гёте конечно!> (5, 168)	Goethe	N/A	Biographical author
прологомены / ко всякой будущей метафизике (16 - 17)	Kant	*Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik* (1783)	Title of work
сопротивление безполезно (29)	N/A	*Star Trek: Borg* (1989)	"resistance is futile" (catchphrase of titular villain)
<это не стихотворение> (37, 166)	Adorno	"Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" (1951)	"Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch"
болезнь как имя есть частное бытие (80)	Foucault (trans. Tkhostov)	*Naissance de la Clinique*, Russian trans. by A. Sh. Tkhostov (1998)	"Болезнь как имя -- есть частное бытие, но как слово -- оно обладает конфигурацией." (Tkhostov, 184)
"я буквально разъят на части" (63, 172)	Various (Horace; Mallarmé)	Various	Various (the "Poet"; Orpheus; Dionysus)
аура всесожженья / аура исчезновение ауры (116 - 117)	Benjamin	*Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1935)	Concept of aura; Holocaust
<назови себя Беньямин> (118)	Benjamin	N/A	Biographical author
In <the> dead God we trust (127)	Nietzsche	*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882); *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883 - 1885)	"Gott ist tot"; U.S. currency
в "Бытии и Времени" (на странице (128)	Heidegger	*Sein und Zeit* (1927)	Title of work; section beginning p. 163 of *GS*
163) Х. утверждает (129)	Heidegger	N/A	Biographical author
<Ханна Арендт шепчущая *люблю*> (142)	Arendt	N/A	Biographical author; affair with Heidegger
ангел истории со свастикой (151)	Benjamin	"Über den Begriff der Geschichte" (1940)	*Angelus Novus*; "Der Engel der Geschichte"
перманентная катастрофа (154)	Various (Benjamin; Adorno; Baudrillard; Blanchot)	Various (Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk;* Adorno, *Minima Moralia;* etc.)	"permanente Katastrophe"
клинамен (156)	Lucretius (Epicurus)	*De rerum natura* (1st cent. BCE)	concept of "clinamen"

избирательное сродство (157)	Goethe	*Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809)	Title of work
<иными средствами> (165)	Carl von Clausewitz	*Vom Kriege* (1832 - 1834)	"Der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln"
существительное <Целан> (167)	Celan	N/A	Biographical author
"увидеть Александрию и умереть" (171)	Goethe	*Italienische Reise* (1816)	"vedi Napoli e poi muori" (cf. Neopolitan: "vide Napule e po' muore")
повешенный висит вечно (178)	Various (Baudelaire; Eliot; Self)	Various (Baudelaire, "Un Voyage à Cythère"; Eliot, "The Waste Land"; Skidan, "Делириум")	Various

Allusions in "Scholia"

Of the twenty-one allusions listed above, five are to biographical authors, three are to the titles of works, at least six are extremely well-known citations or can be considered 'paronymic' corruptions of well-known citations by authors (e.g., "Gott ist tot" + "In God We Trust" ➔ "*in <the> dead God we trust*" [line 127]), and at least six are allusions to an author's signature concept (e.g., "aura," "clinamen," "the angel of history," etc.). That is, almost all of them are either proper names or function similarly as metonymic agents – a protagonist, a concept, a citation, a *"beside word"* – for the proper name of an author. They are almost like Warhol's Campbell's soup cans: brand names in pop literature and philosophy. How this vacuous "properness" – this naming of things that name (i.e., authors) – attempts to control the field of reference is something to be explored.

Let's consider an exception to this rule of branding, which is the line "*болезнь как имя есть частное бытие* [illness as name is private being]" (line 80). There is no proper name or

easily attributable authorship here, but Skidan places it in italics to mark it as foreign speech. A bit of research will show us that Skidan is citing A. Sh. Tkhostov's 1998 translation of Foucault's *Naissance de la Clinique* (1964), *Рождение клиника* (M: Smysl, 1998), page 184: "Болезнь как имя—*есть частное бытие* [my italics], но как слово—оно обладает конфигурацией. Номиналистская редукция существования освобождает постоянную истину."[149] The original, however, is: "La maladie, comme le nom, *est privée d'être* [my italics], mais, comme le mot, elle est douée d'une configuration. La réduction nominaliste de l'existence libère une vérité constante"[150]; and this is how it is translated by Alan Sheridan Smith into English: "Disease, like the word, *is deprived of being* [my italics], but, like the word, it is endowed with a configuration. The nominalist reduction of existence frees a constant truth."[151] In other words, French "privée" ("deprived," "лишённый") has been mistranslated by Tkholstov as "частное" ("private" – a new and foreign concept in the Russian Nineties), completely changing the meaning of the sentence while demonstrating the very distinction being made by Foucault between the "word" [le mot, слово], which can be translated and mistranslated, and the "*name*" [le nom, имя], which *cannot*, and whose *properness* – as in privateness, proprietariness, indexicality, as well as *privation* – gives it a special ontological as well as grammatical function.

This mistranslation, of which Skidan was likely unaware, is, in fact, a perfect example of a "paronym" (line 80) at work, parasitically corrupting a name and a text. It also gets to the crisis at the heart of the poem. At worst, one could accuse Skidan's scholast of being something of a sciolist; but if we conceive of his errancy and fragmentary field of reference as of a piece with a

[149] Foucault, Michel. *Rozhdenie klinika.* Trans. A. Sh. Tkhostov. Moscow: Smysl, 1998. 184. Full text available at: http://www.lib.ru/CULTURE/FUKO/clinica.txt
[150] Foucault, Michel. *Naissance de la Clinique.* Paris : P.U.F., 1963. 120.
[151] Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception.* Trans. Alan Sheridan Smith. London: Tavistock Publications, 1973. 119.

strategy, we might understand his name-dropping and ill-fated attempt to hedge "paronymic" losses as motivated not only by his obsession with the figure and person of the dissected, disembodied, or dismembered author/poet (that is, himself) but as the performance of a more primal drama enacted around the word and textuality itself as death-bearing instruments of that violence—of the author's (and the subject-in-language's) failure to master the word, to reduce it to a name, and of its operation at a semiotic gain and ontological loss that cannot be marshalled or controlled.

The very idea that the name could be under threat in the person of the poet is what makes the following Skidan's focal image/referent: "'I am literally torn to pieces'" ['я буквально разъят на части'] (lines 63, 172). This is, "*literally*," an image of the speaker's/poet's dismemberment, which recalls Horace's phrase, "disiecti membra poetae," to which we will return below; idiomatically, it could describe the speaker's intoxication ("разъят" is also a colloquialism for "pissed" or "ripped" on drink); but perhaps *most* "literally," it could be read as "torn apart *by the letter*" [буквально разъят], which is the great paranoia of Skidan's poetic subject as he perpetually anticipates and attempts to pre-empt his own discursive unraveling, his sacred (self-)sacrifice to the altar of the letter.

The Death's Head: Orpheus, Osiris, Dionysus (Narcissus… Echo)

Während im Symbol mit der Verklärung des Unterganges das transfigurierte Antlitz der Natur im Lichte der Erlösung flüchtig sich offenbart, liegt in der Allegorie die facies hippocratica der Geschichte als erstarrte Urlandschaft dem Betrachter vor Augen. Die Geschichte in allem was sie Unzeitiges, Leidvolles, Verfehltes von Beginn an hat, prägt sich in einem Antlitz—nein in einem Totenkopfe aus.[152] – Walter Benjamin

> [Whereas in the symbol, with the transformation of the deceased the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the *facies*

[152] Benjamin, Walter. *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels. GS*, Vol. 1.1, 343. English: Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama.* Trans. John Osborne. London: Verso, 1998. 166. Translation amended.

> *hippocratica* of history lies before the eyes of the observer as a stiffened, primal landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed as a face—or rather in a death's head." – Walter Benjamin]

Much as Prigov, throughout his career, had a figurehead for his project—the Militsaner—Skidan in these early works demonstrates a rigorously allegorical imagination that, however purposively disarticulated or supposedly aleatory/"paronymic," naturally coalesces around certain images and themes, the most salient of which return, gyre-like, to the Orphic figure of 'the Poet.' The axial function of 'the Poet,' who is only somewhat ambiguously or daimonically identified with the speaker of these poems or their author, is to serve as a sacred, even divine victim—first and foremost, *of*/*to* and *in the performance of* the text. He is "literally torn to pieces" – that is his Dionysian fate and calling. However, it is the Orphic *gaze* in Skidan (as in Blanchot – or Breton, or Baudelaire, or Mallarmé) that defines his *action* as an artist and a daimonic figure. It is the double vision of the poet/theorist, the one who inscribes the letter on his own person and, in doing so, is "torn apart" by it – who frames and completes the work with his own lack – which makes the narcissistic circle of the work, its articulation of itself unto death, possible and even inevitable.

To read the Orphic myth and function into Skidan's poetics, as well as to demonstrate how he uses allusion or hypertext to refer to the "disiecti membra poetae," I would like to look more closely at the final section of "Scholia" as well as the final section of an earlier poem, "Delirium" [«Делириум»] (1993), with which I believe it undoubtedly engages. The poems were written six years apart by Skidan's reckoning, but their level of dialogue, correspondence, and outright coincidence with each other makes them arguably readable as a diptych. I find it unsurprising that they seem as if they could have been written days apart, because my contention

is that Skidan's use of allusion in fact gets obsessive-compulsively "stuck" in the insistence of its repetition and, at a certain point, ceases to move metaphorically *as* allusion and instead fixates on the level of reification and identity (again, the proper name). This fixity is also related to allegory, wherein Eliot (who figures here) tried and failed to reify the "objective correlative"; and there is a similar tension in Skidan's early work between the possibility of movement/metaphor (anamnesis, resurrection, fulfilled transcendence) and fixation (death, dismemberment, lack).

Due to the complexity of the network of reference between these two poems as well as to external sources that they often share – including Mallarmé, Eliot, Petronius (via Eliot), Horace, and Plato – I will lay them out below with footnotes in the style of my own commentary (*scholion*) or exegesis. As a note on lineation, I count marked but non-verbal lines in "Delirium" due to its inclusion of a final section composed entirely of dashes in the mode of Pushkin's "Autumn" [«Осень»], which used dots (a phenomenon that fascinates Tynianov and that he calls "the equivalent" [«эквивалент»][153]). Both translations into English are by Genya Turovskaya with a few minor changes and appear in the volume *Red Shifting* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2008).

Below are the final sections of "Delirium" and then "Scholia" in side-by-side Russian (original) and English translation, with explanatory notes and commentary, which I encourage the reader to explore carefully in order to understand the spirit in which Skidan does what he does:

[153] See Tynianov, Iu. N. *Problema stikhotvornogo iazyka.* Leningrad: Academia, 1924.

ДЕЛИРИУМ (1993)		DELIRIUM (1993)
----------	133	----------
но эти танцы у огня огня		but these dances by the fire fire[154]
----------	135	----------
мы в оптиной как постояльцы как отцы		we at optina[155] are as guests fathers
любовной бойни аспиды аскезы		asps of ascesis in love's slaughterhouse
пустыня оптимальная. а я		an optimal desert. whereas I
а я великий в той пустыне бражник		am a great tippler in that desert
муссирующий аппиевый тракт	140	whipping up the apian way
как бы калигула		like a caligula
последний грешник		the final sinner
на кали-юге на пупе		on the kali-yuga[156] on the navel
как муссейон– и в розницу и оптом		like the mouseion[157]—the wholesale and retail
центурион на медленном коне	145	centurion on a slow horse
(прощай прощай мой август августейший!)		farewell farewell my most august[158] august
косская тень филета сука		o cossic[159] shade of philitas[160] bitch
слышу вижу тебя в петардах эзры.		I hear thee see thee in ezra's[161] petards.
а они сказали нет один		but no they said one
кто-то сказал пойдем	150	someone said let's go
я покажу агнца в чалме и агнца		I'll show thee the lamb[162] in a turban and the lamb
в шлеме		in a helmet[163]
и сорок четыре приема любви		and the forty-four[164] moves of love

NOTES TO "DELIRIUM"

[154] Cf. Eliot. "Burning burning burning burning / O Lord Thou pluckest me out / O Lord Thou pluckest / Burning" (*The Waste Land*, III, "The Fire Sermon"); "We only live, only suspire / Consumed by either fire or fire." (*Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding," IV, 13-14).

[155] Optina Monastery or Opta's Monastery [Введенская Оптина пустынь]. An all-male cloister located near Kozelsk. It reached the height of its influence in the 19th century and was the ideological center of a religiously conservative movement, aligned with pan-Slavism, known as the "Elders" [Старцы]. Skidan makes a wordplay in Russian on the similarity between «пустынь» [monastery] and «пустыня» [desert].

[156] The Kali-Yuga is the last of four stages of the world cycle in Hindu cosmology and the one that we currently inhabit. It is governed by the demon Kali and is a time of strife and discord.

[157] In Russian, a misspelling of the «Александрийский мусейон» [Mouseion at Alexandria], which also housed the famous library, destroyed several times in succession but most completely at some point in the mid- to late- 3rd century CE, perhaps by the Siege of Diocletian in 297.

[158] Caesar Augustus (63 BCE – 14 CE), emperor at the time of Christ's birth and initiator of the *Pax Romana*.

[159] From the Greek island of Cos. It could also refer to *coa vestis* [косская одежда], a luxurious silk-like fabric from the island of Cos that reached the height of its popularity in Rome in the late first century BCE (the time of Augustus). The implication here is that it is gaudy, fashionable, and worn by a well-kept prostitute.

[160] Philitas of Cos [Φιλίτας ὁ Κῷος] (c. 340 – 285 BCE). An ancient scholar and poet (one of the most ancient of this unseemly hybrid) who lived and worked in Alexandria, where he was tutor to the Ptolemaic Dynasty.

[161] Ezra Pound. The dedication of Eliot's *The Waste Land* reads: "For Ezra Pound: il miglior fabbro" [Italian: "the better craftsman"] from Dante, *Purgatorio,* Canto 26. Here, we may assume that Skidan is speaking with or reporting the speech of his mentor, Dragomoshchenko, the "better craftsman" of this period of his development and also an enthusiast of both Pound and Eliot.

[162] *Agnus Dei* [Агнец Божий] – the Lamb of God. This is explicit in the Russian.

[163] "Turban" (чалма) and "helmet" (шлем). Likely a reference, in the context of the 1st century CE that runs throughout the poem, to the Roman occupation of the Levant.

[164] I am unsure of the value of the number "forty-four" other than that it repeats the number "4," which, along with the quaternary principle, stands for the value of the natural world and of natural harmony in most cosmologies and

и сорок четыре приема смерти		and the forty-four moves of death
(но я	155	(but I
не вижу повешенного)		don't see the hanged man[165])
утешься		console thyself
этой тщетой утраченной звучной		with this vanity[166] this lost sonorous
устраненной ненужности		discarded uselessness
нежности безделушки ptyx	160	tenderness trinket ptyx[167]

numerologies. In Christian numerology, it is also one digit away from "144," the number of total completion, and the perverse product of "4" and "11," the latter being the number of (Satanic) excess and in- or over-completion. There have been attempts, rather masterful in fact, to assign mathematical and cosmological coherence to Skidan's texts (see Дмитровская М. А. Икс, Игрок, Death («Амадеус» et al.: основания философско-художественной системы А. Скидана) // Критика и семиотика. 2016. № 2. С. 231–258). I do not endorse such an approach and, rather than a functional hypertext or dynamic and systematic harmony of number and metaphor, see a single movement between obsession and errancy that is meaningful in its own right.

[165] See Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922). Below, I reproduce lines 43-59 of Section I, "The Burial of the Dead." "The Hanged Man" appears in line 55:

> Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
> Had a bad cold, nevertheless
> Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
> With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,
> Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
> (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
> Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
> The lady of situations.
> Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
> And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
> Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
> Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
> The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
> I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
> Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
> Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
> One must be so careful these days.

Eliot appended the following note: "The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V."

What is of interest here is the relationship between the "Seer" (whether Madame Sosostris or Tiresias, another *daimon* inhabiting the world of Eliot's text) and the Hanged Man, who, like Orpheus or Dionysus, is a god-figure of dying and rising. Skidan is equally fixated on the martyred kinship between prophet and poet, seeing and writing (and, inexorably, *dying*).

[166] Notably, this is *not* Ecclesiastical "vanity" (*vanitas*), which would be «суета» in Russian and connote both spiritual errancy and the humdrum of everyday activity. This "vanity" [тщета] is of a rather more grandiose and deadening character and could be translated as "vacuity" or "futility."

[167] "ptyx". This made-up word is taken from Mallarmé's enigmatic "Sonnet allégorique de lui-même" or "Sonnet en X" (1868), written in alexandrines:

Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx,	With her pure nails offering their onyx high,
L'Angoisse, ce minuit, soutient, lampadophore,	lampbearer Agony tonight sustains
Maint rêve vespéral brûlé par le Phénix	many a vesperal fantasy burned by
Que ne recueille pas de cinéraire amphore	the Phoenix, which no funerary urn contains
Sur les crédences, au salon vide : nul ptyx	on the empty room's credences: no ptyx,
Aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore,	abolished bauble, sonorous inanity

и клюв птаха дрожал. тот бог брал пункцию у меня: пиши (но я не вижу) и тогда я сказал "хочу умереть	and ptah's[168] beak trembled, the god thoth[169] tapped into my spine: write (but I can't see) and I said "I want to die[170]

(Car le Maître est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s'honore.)	(Master has gone to draw tears from the Styx with that one thing, the Void's sole source of vanity).
Mais proche la croisée au nord vacante, un or Agonise selon peut-être le décor Des licornes ruant du feu contre une nixe,	Yet near the vacant northward casement dies a gold possibly from the decorations of unicorns lashing a nymph with flame;
Elle, défunte nue en le miroir, encor Que, dans l'oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe De scintillations sitôt le septuor.	dead, naked in the looking-glass she lies though the oblivion bounded by that frame now spans a fixed septet of scintillations.

Scholars do not agree on the meaning or origin of "ptyx" in the poem, although I believe that "nul ptyx" might refer to a phonetic scrambling of the obsessional word "La Pénultième" ["The Penultimate"] that haunts the poet in the prose poem "Le Démon de l'analogie" ["The Demon of Analogy], written a few years earlier in 1864 or 1865. The speaker of that poem hears an intrusive voice that repeats to him in his head "La Pénultième est morte" ["The Penultimate is dead"]; the phrase possesses him with paranoia and both removes him from his own language and imprisons him in its own.

The "Master" who goes to draw tears from the Styx in Mallarmé's sonnet (lines 7-8) could be Orpheus himself, no longer singing but forging a path toward the night of the underworld, the impossible retrieval of Eurydice, and his own death.

Skidan might have had nothing more in mind than to reference Mallarmé in such a way that he could alliteratively move on to Ptah in the next line. However, the constellation of "ptyx"/"Styx", death, vanity, obsession and transgression, and the Orphic motif undoubtedly play out in the final lines of "Delirium." It is also important to note that the form of Mallarmé's sonnet (the alexandrine) of course points back to the centrality of "Alexandria" (and its destruction) in Skidan's network of reference and was the traditional French meter that Mallarmé, perhaps more than any other poet, displaced and *destroyed.*

[168] Ptah. Ptah was an Ancient Egyptian creator deity and patron of craftsman who later also merged with Osiris in some syncretic traditions to become a benevolent overseer of death and the afterlife.

[169] Thoth (or Theuth). In the last section of Plato's *Phaedrus* (274b – 278d), Socrates instructs Phaedrus in the myth of King Thamus and the Egyptian god, Theuth, who gave mankind the art of writing. Theuth is proud of his gift, which he believes will enhance the memory of mortals, but Thamus gently objects that its effect is the opposite: a tool for *reminding*, it will allow them to forget.

[170] Skidan is almost certainly quoting the Sybil at Cumae, via Petronius' *The Satyricon*, via Eliot. The lines, which are given as the epigraph to *The Waste Land*, are as follows:

> *Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumīs ego ipse oculīs meīs vīdī in ampullā pendere, et cum illī puerī dīcerent*: "Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις;" *respondēbat illa*: "ἀποθανεῖν θέλω."

Eliot gives the following (accurate) translation: "I have seen with my own eyes the Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys asked her 'What do you want?' She answered, 'I want to die.'" This is, in fact, a rather lame joke being told by the drunk buffoon Trimalchio at his feast in *The Satyricon*. The Sybil was granted immortality by Apollo but not eternal youth; by joking about her being an old, decrepit hag who wants to die, he is metonymically referring to Cumae and bragging that he has been to what amounts to a once-magnificent cultural site that is now a lackluster tourist attraction and was not impressed. Eliot, however, like Skidan, completely ignores the irony and levity of the context and imbues the statement with a deadening pathos, making of the ancient prophet a martyr imprisoned by her own flesh, to be identified with the seeing-and-knowing poet. It is, therefore, very telling that Skidan's speaker cannot write if he "cannot see" (lines 162-63).

СХОЛИИ (1999, оп. 2003)			SCHOLIA (1999, pub. 2003)
<это не стихотворение>		166	<this is not a poem>[171]
существительное <Целан>			a noun <Celan>[172]
<И Гёте Гёте конечно>			<and, of course, Goethe! Goethe!>[173]
некий смысл			a certain sense
пусть в отсутвие и украдкой		170	even if in absence or on the sly
“увидеть Александрию и умереть”			“to see Alexandria and to die”[174]
“я буквально разъят на части”			“I am literally torn to pieces”[175]

NOTES TO SCHOLIA

[171] Repeated twice in “Scholia” – here and in line 37 – the phrase “<это не стихотворение>” [“<this is not a poem>”] dubiously prostrates itself before Theodor Adorno’s oft-quoted (and misquoted) dictum in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* [*Cultural Criticism and Society*] (1951): “Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch” [“To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric”]. It is as if, anticipating his own celebrity, Skidan dodges the protests of his critics, which in fact belong to a world-historical trauma completely foreign to him. It is a strange anachronism/aculturalism that is symptomatic of the chimeric, out-of-time-and-place conjuncture of the Russian 1990s, but it is also symptomatic of Skidan’s vision of the poet as one who sacrificially absorbs the trauma and memory of *all*, across time and history, in order to *restore* that history to order.

[172] Paul Celan (Paul Antschel) (1920 – 1970). Arguably the most important German-language poet of the 20th century, Celan (the pen name of Paul Antschel) was a Holocaust survivor whose work self-consciously struggled with the same question posed by Adorno as to the place of art – even more so in the language of the aggressor – amid the mass atrocities of the 20th century.

[173] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832).

[174] “to see Alexandria and die” [“увидеть Александрию и умереть”]. Here, Skidan quotes Goethe but exchanges Naples for Alexandria. In *Italienische Reise* [*Italian Travels*] (1816), Goethe writes: „Vedi Napoli e poi muori!“ sagen sie hier. „Siehe Neapel und stirb!“ Daß kein Neapolitaner von seiner Stadt weichen will, daß ihre Dichter von der Glückseligkeit der hiesigen Lage in gewaltigen Hyperbeln singen, ist ihnen nicht zu verdenken, und wenn auch noch ein paar Vesuve in der Nachbarschaft stünden. [“Vedi Napoli e poi muori!” they say here. "See Naples and die!" The fact that no Neapolitan wants to leave his city, that their poets sing of the bliss of the local situation in powerful hyperboles, one cannot blame them for it, even if there were a few more Vesuviuses in the neighborhood.] Interestingly, the actual Neopolitan dialect for this phrase is somewhat different: “vide Napule e po’ muore.” Perhaps Goethe is simply recording it in the Italian that he knew.

[175] The line “’я буквально разъят на части’” [“’I am literally torn to pieces’”] (lines 63, 172) is, to my mind, a condensation of this entire poem and even this entire period of Skidan’s work. Some Russian readers (e.g., Dmitrovskaia, 2016) attribute this line to Mallarmé verbatim but do not substantiate that claim, and I have been unable to verify it in French or in English. What I can say with certainty, however, is that it refers to and comments upon the image of the dismembered poet – here, “literally” or “*by the letter*” – that returns constantly in Skidan’s work and elevates the status of the poet to that of an Orphic *daimon* or demi-god of prophecy, dying, and rising (a combination of both Apollonian and Dionysian functions). It is worth noting that Skidan also wrote a poem called “Disjecta membra” (1998) and gave his own retrospective collection of new and selected poetic works the title “Membra disjecta” (2016). This phrase, taken from Horace, originally had nothing to do with the Orpheus mythos, but it seems to have become superimposed upon it in Skidan’s imagination. The lines from Horace (*Sermones,* 1.4, 45-65) are as follows. I have italicized the sentence in which the phrase “disiecti membra poetae” appears:

> Idcirco quidam Comoedia necne poema
> esset quaesivere, quod acer spiritus ac vis
> nec verbis nec rebus inest, nisi quod pede certo
> differt sermoni, sermo merus. “at pater ardens
> saevit, quod meretrice nepos insanus amica

<некий смысл>			<a certain sense>
обезглавленный			a headless man
ходит ещё	четыре часа	175	still walks for four hours
но сказать это			but to say this
значит сказать			is to say
повешенный висит вечно			the hanged man[176] hangs forever

> filius uxorem grandi cum dote recuset,
> ebrius et, magnum quod dedecus, ambulet ante
> noctem cum facibus." numquid Pomponius istis
> audiret leviora, pater si viveret? Ergo
> non satis est puris versum perscribere verbis,
>
> quem si dissolvas, quivis stomachetur eodem
> quo personatus pacto pater. *his, ego quae nunc,*
> *olim quae scripsit Lucilius, eripias si*
> *tempora certa modosque, et quod prius ordine verbum est,*
> *posterius facias, praeponens ultima primis,*
>
> *non, ut si solvas "postquam Discordia taetra*
> *Belli ferratos postis portasque refregit."*
> *invenias etiam disiecti membra poetae.*
> Hactenus haec: alias iustum sit necne poema,
> nunc illud tantum quaeram, meritone tibi sit
>
> suspectum genus hoc scribendi.
>
> [Hence some have questioned whether Comedy is or is not poetry; for neither in diction nor in matter has it the fire and force of inspiration, and, save that it differs from prose-talk in its regular beat, it is mere prose. "But," you say, "there is the father storming in passion because his spendthrift son, madly in love with a wanton mistress, rejects a wife with large dower, and in drunken fit reels abroad—sad scandal—with torches in broad daylight." Would Pomponius hear a lecture less stern than this, were his father alive? And so 'tis not enough to write out a line of simple words such that, should you break it up, any father whatever would rage in the same fashion as the father in the play. *Take from the verses which I am writing now, or which Lucilius wrote in former days, their regular beat and rhythm—change the order of the words, transposing the first and the last—and it would not be like breaking up: "When foul Discord's din War's posts and gates of bronze had broken in," where, even when he is dismembered, you would find the limbs of a poet.* Of this enough. Some other time we'll see whether this kind of writing is true poetry or not. To-day the only question I'll ask is this, whether you are right in viewing it with distrust.] (*Loeb Classics Library*, 194: 52-53)

The reason that I provide such a full citation is to show, again, how Skidan deadens the image with pathos by literalizing its *semantic content* while ignoring its context. Like Trimalchio's joke about the Sybil in *The Satyricon*, Horace here is ironically deprecating his own lucid and simple verse in order to poke fun at the pretentious high style of his interlocutor. His point is that, as opposed to his own verses, which use simple language set harmoniously to a regular rhythm, there are those (certainly, including Skidan) who believe that poetry is constituted by the semantic elevation of its content, such that their language is so ornate and grandiose that it would be recognizable as "poetry" even if it were fragmented or stripped of any musicality or measure (i.e., *context*).

[176] See the note above to "Delirium" and the "The Hanged Man" in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. To my mind, the insistence of this image implies a very high probability that Skidan was, in fact, referring to *The Waste Land* in

Orpheus Revised: Death without Death

Skidan also wrote a series called "Fragments of Orpheus" [«Фрагменты Орфея»] early in his career (1990 – 1993), so why, in tracing the Orphic motif, should we focus on the network of reference that joins these other two poems – "Scholia" and "Delirium" – written six years apart? My answer is that they both provide insight into the Orphic *function* of the 'Poet' as the axial figure and essential mediator of Skidan's world.

Both "Delirium" and "Scholia" end in a death that is not death but the impossibility of death: what Blanchot would call an image of "the Disaster."[177] The Sybil, who wants to die ("Delirium," 164), was given immortality by Apollo at the expense of her once-vaunted beauty; Orpheus, likewise, "torn to pieces" ("Scholia," 172) by the maenads, continues to prophesy (*not* merely sing) as his severed head flows down the river Hebrus to Lesbos and the altar of Dionysus, until Apollo eventually silences him out of jealousy.[178] They are left as "the hanged

"Delirium," but, more importantly, its repetition in the last line of "Scholia" shows that, as a motif for the *daimonic* figure of death, identified with the poet, it continued to haunt him obsessionally throughout the 1990s.

[177] See Blanchot, Maurice. *L'écriture du désastre*. Paris: Gallimard, 1980.

[178] As a didactic reminder of the Orpheus myth, which is strewn (like the limbs of the poet) across a variety of different sources and eras, I find the following step-by-step summary by Robert McGahey extremely helpful. He includes in it both ancient sources (5th – 4th century BCE, when the Orphic myth and cult first emerged) and later classical sources (Virgil and Ovid). His book, *The Orphic Moment: Shaman to Poet-Thinker in Plato, Nietzsche, and Mallarmé*, was an inspiration to read. This is his syncretic account of the various Orpheus mythemes:

1) Orpheus is born of Kalliope and Oiagros (in some versions, Apollo is his father). Kalliope is a Muse, "she of the beautiful voice." The muses live high on the slopes of Olympus and are associated with Apollo. Oiagros was a river god but also king of Thrace, home of the religion of Dionysos. His father, Charops, was a pupil of Dionysos.
2) Orpheus is paired with Eurydice (Eurydike, "the wideruling" [Jane Harrison]), interpreted as a variant of Persephone but sometimes seen simply as a dryad (tree spirit). By some accounts, they have a son, Musaios. In other accounts, Musaios is Orpheus's father. (Musaios is widely mentioned as a religious reformer and shaman, but these accounts are independent of the stories containing Orpheus.)
3) In a famous episode, Orpheus charms the forest beasts, the trees, and the birds – even the stones – who all gather around him, transfixed by his singing, as he accompanies himself on the lyre. The lyre is from Apollo (who got it in turn from Hermes). In all the ancient depictions (primarily vase paintings) his head is

man [who] hangs forever" ("Scholia," 178). This is the consequence, from an Apollonian point of view, of both figures having extended themselves beyond the measure of their proper place; but this transgression of excess is precisely how Skidan imagines the Dionysian countermeasure of the Orphic Poet.

It is thus in Orpheus' look backwards, past Eurydice (a surrogate for the work), into the abyss that Skidan envisions the essential function of the Poet and its tragic alliance with prophesy and *seeing*. This is what Maurice Blanchot, who supplies the epigraph for the book *Сумма поэтики* [*Summa poetica*] (2013) and whom Skidan admires in no uncertain terms, has to say about this moment in the Orpheus mythology:

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thrust back as he sings, as if in ecstasy. This episode is repeated in the accounts of the voyage of the Argo, where it is the seabirds and dolphins that he charms.

4) Eurydice, chased by Aristeas (a beekeeper, aligned with Apollo), steps on a viper, which her bites her on the heel, and she dies. A sorrowful Orpheus persuades Hermes to lead him into the underworld in an effort to bring her back (Virgil).
5) Once in the realm of Hades, Orpheus again takes out his lyre and sings, moving everyone to tears. Sisyphos sits on his rock, transfixed. Ixion's wheel stops turning. The Danaides' leaky vase stops overflowing. For the first time, the Fates cry. Hades and Persephone are persuaded to release the shade of Eurydice, but on the condition that Orpheus not look back at her until he reaches earth again. As Orpheus, Eurydice, and Hermes approach the upper world, Orpheus, thinking to have lost her, turns around for reassurance, whereupon Hermes turns to guide her back, this time forever. After losing Eurydice a second time, Orpheus is griefstricken.
6) As a consequence, he goes into "celibate" retirement, "shunning the company of women." He climbs Mount Pangaion daily to worship Apollo as Helios. The Thracian women complain that he has lured away their warrior husbands (Aeschylus *Bassarides* fragment).
7) While these warriors are worshipping inside Apollo's temple, their angry wives – turned Maenads – steal their husbands' weapons, piled outside the temple, and assault Orpheus. He continues to sing, warding off the first blows, but they overpower his music with their own wild Phrygian shrieking, piping, and clapping; then they kill him with stones, spears, and in some versions, agricultural implements that they have taken from workers in fields nearby.
8) The Maenads then tear him to pieces in a ritual *sparagmos*, throwing the body parts in the sea (or they are retrieved by the Muses, who bury them) while the head and lyre float down the Hebrus, eventually landing on Lesbos. There the lyre rests in the sanctuary of Apollo, the head at the shrine of Dionysos.
9) The head continues to prophesy, until Apollo, made jealous by this intrusion on his function, silences it (usually by burial). When it first arrives, however, he saves it from being swallowed by a snake, which he strikes to stone, its mouth agape. Eventually the lyre makes its way to the heavens, where it becomes the constellation Lyra.
10) Dionysus angrily pursues the fleeing Maenads, spelling them into a grove of trees (*Mythologems* 7-10, all Ovid).

From McGahey, Robert. *The Orphic Moment: Shaman to Poet-Thinker in Plato, Nietzsche, and Mallarmé.* Albany: SUNY Press, 1994. 17 – 19.

> The work is everything to Orpheus except that desired look where it is lost. Thus it is only in that look that the work can surpass itself, be united with its origin and consecrated in impossibility.
>
> Orpheus's gaze is Orpheus's ultimate gift to the work. It is a gift whereby he refuses, whereby he sacrifices the work, bearing himself toward the origin according to desire's measureless movement – and whereby unknowingly he still moves toward the work, toward the origin of the work.[179]

It is, in fact, the moment that qualifies all of Blanchot's *The Space of Literature* (*L'Espace littéraire*, 1955) in its meditations on the essence and function of the artist, which is always twofold. Orpheus guides the work from the darkness to the light, but his essential *desire* is for the darkness itself, and it is in his betrayal of the work that he paradoxically demonstrates his greatest fealty to its freedom and origin. Orpheus worships death by mediating the moment of its passage into life.

Skidan, however, arguably takes this excess one step further by insisting that the sacrifice being performed is not of the work, but of the Poet – that Orpheus *himself, as the work*, occupies all positions and inscribes his song and his prophecy on his own body, tearing it to shreds. His look backwards is a gaze directed ever at himself. It is telling that "Delirium," in its first line, begins with two counter-texts to the story of Orpheus and Eurydice: that of Lot and Lot's Wife fleeing Sodom (Genesis 19:15-26) and that of Narcissus and Echo.[180]

If we see Orpheus's great "refusal" – in the words of Blanchot – as a *self*-refusal or act of *abjection*,[181] we begin to understand the emotional logic of Skidan's texts, their aspiration to

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[179] Blanchot, Maurice. *The Space of Literature.* trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. 174.

[180] The line is «(…) убыль убиенного эхо. лот,», which Genya Turovskaya translates as, "(…) the fading of the annihilated echo. lot,". See full text in Appendix.

[181] I mean this in the full sense entailed by Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* [*Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection*] (1980), which lays out the topography of the term and concept (prophetically, I might add, for a digital generation born beginning in the 1980s, for whom abjection and its attendant moral and psychological disorders have become something of a cultural norm).

violence and surrender before the inevitability of their own impotence – their call to a death that never comes. In more formal terms, we can say that by overlaying the Orpheus mythos, which operates homeopathically and by analogy (between Eurydice and the Abyss; between Orpheus and the Abyss; between the Abyss and Itself), with the *narcissistic* and *allopathic* structure of *dialectic* (in the form of Self and Other, a gift of critical theory), Skidan changes the essential movement of the Orphic myth and brings it to a point of dysfunctional stop. If *all* roads lead back to the dismembered Poet, it becomes impossible for him to see beyond his own reflection or hear beyond the echo of his own words, and that essential excess meant to constitute both his desire and its sublimation in the act of the work becomes, rather, an essential *lack*: a *deadening* in and of language that is, nonetheless, like Echo rather than Eurydice, *unable to die.*

This is why I would fundamentally disagree with Dmitrii Kuz'min's excellent article, "Fragging: Dispersing and Reassembling the Lyrical Subject in Aleksandr Skidan" [«Фрэггинг: Распыление и собирание лирического субъекта в поэзии Александра Скидана»] (2019),[182] only in its estimation that Skidan in any sense achieves (or even *desires*) metaphysical closure and restoration for his "subject." Certainly, his texts perform mourning for the dismembered Poet and his equally fragmented history; yet their central *refusal* seems to be the anamnesis of that subject, which is rather, like the death's head of Orpheus, buried by Apollo and relegated to visionary silence. There is nothing here to reassemble that does not *will* its continued otherness to itself as the very essence of its own being and function: a path that is not "Orphic" but rather *critical* to the extreme.

[182] Kuz'min, Dmitrii. "Fregging: Raspyleniie i sobraniie liricheskogo subekta v poezii Aleksandra Skidana." *Russian Literature*, Vol. 109-110 (Nov.-Dec. 2019). 203-220.

In Skidan's work, our first practice, we thus find the following drama played out, which mixes tragic content (the myth of Orpheus) and allegorical (read: 'critical') form in the mode of travesty:

1) The Poet, with the gift of *vision*, must reclaim his history and the history of his culture from the Underworld.
2) That history (Eurydice) turns out not to be dead or sequestered in the Abyss but present and fragmented – a double of the Poet himself.
3) Confused, the Poet asserts his gift of vision, but his gaze – which is no longer prohibited, as it was to Orpheus, but rather frenzied and *compulsive* – reenacts the *sparagmos* [σπαραγμός], the tearing apart of its object, which turns out to be himself.
4) Now occupying *all* positions (history/Eurydice, Orpheus, the frenzied maenads who tear him apart), the Poet, in a state of narcissistic paranoia, realizes that the single thing he has utterly displaced himself from – that he *cannot* occupy – is Death and the Abyss itself, that he has exiled himself from the source of the Orphic mythos and function.
5) Doomed to repeat this cycle indefinitely, the Poet is forever in the position of the *sparagmos* without a god or an altar, vivisecting himself as a travestied (i.e., impotent, un-tragic) sacrifice in the mode of eternal return.

One question that Walter Benjamin never asks in his masterful *Origin of the German Mourning-Play* [*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*] (1928) is what would happen if an attempt were made to restore the "death's head" (*facies hippocratica, Totenkopf*) of allegory to the status of symbol and the living, mythic mode of the tragic. He never asks this question

because, in all likelihood, the Frühromantik had already performed the answer. Here, in Skidan, we have a ‘postmodern’ but also uniquely post-Soviet reply, in which the consummation of the work by critique becomes the face of its disaster.

Therein, we will see several essential characteristics repeat themselves in the formally much different work of our next poet and practice, Kirill Medvedev, among them: 1) the Poet as he who occupies all positions; 2) the Poet as (self-)sacrifice; and 3) perhaps, most importantly, the Poet as he who must lapse into silence.

SECOND PRACTICE: KIRILL MEDVEDEV (b. 1975)

Rhetoric and Power: Putinism, Conceptualism, and the "New Sincerity"

If Aleksandr Skidan's work in the Nineties epitomizes many of that decade's cultural pathologies – its symbolic excesses and material lack; its obsession with power; its plaintive search for identity and history in a correlative "one/we" – then the work of Kirill Feliksovich Medvedev (b. 1975) responds to a much different set of ideological circumstances, which are inescapably focalized *not* directly around the fall of the Soviet Union but around the much quieter revolution in politics and power that rapidly took place between the apartment bombings of 4-16 September 1999, the beginning of the Second Chechen War, the resignation of Yeltsin in December, and, finally, Putin's inauguration as elected president on May 7, 2000.[183] Medvedev was twenty-five at the time, the same age that Skidan was in 1990.

The landscape of literature, and especially poetry, had also changed – not only in its rhetoric but in its fears and aspirations, its motivating goals. Two essays by poet and omnivorous synthesizer, Dmitri Kuz'min – "Postconceptualism" [«Постконцептуализм»] (2001)[184] and

[183] Many of Putin's critics in the intelligence community, including the late Aleksandr Litvinenko, believe that the apartment bombings, which were carried out between September 4-16 in Moscow, Buynaksk, and Volgodonks, were orchestrated by the FSB (at the direction of then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin) as a false flag operation in order to bolster support for the government and provide a pretext for the Second Chechen War, which essentially consolidated the federalism of the Russian state and set a precedent for meeting future secession or nationalist unrest with violence. Internally, the path to Putin's future leadership was, at this point, largely already set, and when Yeltsin resigned in December, it was due to a combination of poor health (largely due to complications of his alcoholism) and a corruption scandal involving his family that was quickly pushed under the rug and legally made un-prosecutable due to its destabilizing and humiliating nature. The idea was not only to protect future leaders from the consequences of their abuses of power but to preserve Yeltsin's image as a morally uncompromised idealist while quietly installing Putin, who, in contrast, had virtually no public face. The latter was appointed interim president subsequent to Yeltsin's resignation, and elections, scheduled for June, were pushed ahead to March, leaving political opposition scrambling and unprepared.

[184] Kuz'min, Dmitrii. "Postkontseptualizm. Kak by nabroski na monografii." *Novoe literaturnoe obozreniie,* Vol. 50 (Winter, 2001). 459 – 76.

"Russian Poetry at the Beginning of the 21st Century" [«Русская поэзия в начале XXI века»] (2008)[185] – paint a picture of this period of transition as they survey the field of poetry. Kuz'min begins from a thesis that we have already adopted over and over again in this work: namely, that conceptualism, which, in the latter essay, he identifies with five poets by name – Prigov, Monastyrskii, Rubinstein, Sukhotin, and Kibirov[186] – presented, aesthetically speaking, the single monolithic impasse facing poetry both immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union and at the turn of the 21st century. *However*, by the end of the 90s, writes Kuz'min, both the major players of conceptualism (with the indefatigable exception of Prigov) and the logic of the movement, purely Soviet in its original motivations, were exhausted.[187] Without its monopoly on experimental style and aesthetic ideology, there loomed a gaping, conceptualism-sized hole in the field of poetry.

Nonetheless, its influence persisted in the negative, assimilating discourse on language and poetry to its own totalizing rationale. According to Kuz'min, who follows the conventional wisdom on this point, the long hangover of conceptualism can be distilled to two major precepts that, both on their own terms as well as *de facto* at this point in literary history, had acquired the transparency of dogmatic beliefs: 1) there can be no authentic or original artistic utterance; all utterances are derivative of others and therefore contingent and provisional;[188] and 2) there can likewise be no individual *experience* that is communicable to others outside pre-existing discursive forms or in an authentic language of the self.[189] The second of these seems like a

[185] Kuz'min, Dmitrii. "Poeziia v nachale XXI veka." Presentation given at the "СЛОWWWA" Festival for new poetry, Kaliningrad, 24-27 August, 2007. First published online in *RETS*, 2008, No. 48: http://polutona.ru/rets/rets48.pdf.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Kuz'min, Dmitrii. "Postkontseptualizm. Kak by nabroski na monografii." *Novoe literaturnoe obozreniie,* Vol. 50 (Winter, 2001). 459 – 76.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid.

corollary of the first, but the two can in fact be played upon in opposition. The first is aesthetic; the second, which revolves around *communicability,* is intrinsically political and ethical. Inasmuch as conceptualism began as a reaction to a *political* discourse of power and censorship, one could also argue that it is primary. And, between these two precepts on language, as the Putinist state quickly realized, a loophole opens for a new, *heterogenous discourse of power* to insert itself: now of a dissimulating, 'democratic,' late capitalist kind; for the Soviet state, in contrast, never acknowledged or presupposed its own simulacrum.

That is, conceptualism was a Soviet movement because its double was a Soviet State that uncompromisingly grounded itself upon an ontological positivism with regard to its *own* discourse: official discourse was always univocal from the position of the State, even when it wasn't. Without that background and reserve of univocality, which was always the basis of its critique of language and ideology, conceptualism in the Russian 1990s and beyond could no longer function as a politically viable position, but, worse, it persisted ideologically as a *negative theology* in which all discourse is viewed as inadequate to itself yet abandoned by its own ontological Other and *raison d'être* in the form of the State – it's little wonder that in search of a univocal 'host,' Prigov's performances in the 90s became increasingly Christological, perhaps culminating in the request in his will, which was fulfilled, to be buried according to Orthodox rites. Unburdened of the need for univocality, meanwhile, the post-Soviet Russian State, like conceptualism itself formerly, could, in the mode of the simulacrum, ideologically and discursively do as it pleases.

Kuz'min, however, is not concerned here with navigating power and the simulacrum or with the nascent Putinist state – he is concerned with the field of poetic language, which, it seems to him in 2001, remains trapped in the belly of a gangrenous whale. In

"Postconceptualism" – the title of which is already programmatically optimistic – Kuz'min is eager to find a way out, and he points to a group of otherwise unaffiliated poets who, at the beginning of the 21st century, seemed to be calling the aesthetic ideology of conceptualism into question. That movement (or rather impulse), which Kuz'min calls "postconceptualist" and identifies roughly with Kirill Medvedev,[190] Dmitrii Vodennikov, Dmitrii Sokolov, and Danila Davydov, among others,[191] would subsequently and dubiously be popularized among critics as "The New Sincerity" [«Новая искренность»], following the American brand of the 1990s and in fact gaining the most Russian traction and coherence in minor performance theater of the 2010s. In its lyric form, however – which, as *new*, non-acmeist-derived lyric, was already a gauntlet thrown at the feet of conceptualism – it came to be identified with an ideology of the private: private experience, private meaning, and private language that Medvedev, we shall see, found unequivocally abhorrent. Yet the stylistic resemblance remains.

This is how Kuz'min characterizes the "postconceptualist" evolution of Dmitrii Vodennikov from his first book, *The Burdock* [*Репейник*] (1996), to 2001's *How One Must Live – In Order to Be Loved* [*Как надо жить – чтоб быть любимым*]:

> От концепции поэта как арены борьбы тех или иных (психических, мифологических, языковых) сил: «во мне рвалось и пело» — Воденников возвращается к классическому представлению о поэте как субъекте индивидуального высказывания: «я теперь пою и рвусь». Этот возврат осуществляется путем вычитания из собственной поэзии всего внеположного по происхождению. Оставшиеся слова — да, жалкие, безликие;

[190] Medvedev perceived this grouping by Kuz'min as a slap in the face. Why it was an affront will become clearer below. However, Kuz'min is arguably completely correct to align Medvedev with the other poets here on the basis of *style*, which is his explicit and exclusive concern. Medvedev's frenzied rejection of that grouping has, in fact, little to do with conceptualism and even less with style and *much* to do with what was already alluded to in the previous paragraphs about power and politics. In his essay, Kuz'min is concerned with the aesthetic and poetic legacy of conceptualism. He thus ignores the second of what Medvedev perceives as a discursive war on two fronts: one aesthetic (conceptualism) and the other political (Putinism). Medvedev saw the other poets with whom Kuz'min aligns him less as challengers of conceptualism and more as effete colluders with the Putinist discourse of power, and it would indeed be this misunderstanding (or misalignment of interests) between the two men that provided a pretext for a bitter feud on both personal and ideological grounds.

[191] See Kuz'min, Dmitrii. "Postkontseptualizm. Kak by nabroski na monografii." *Novoe literaturnoe obozreniie,* Vol. 50 (Winter, 2001). 459 – 76.

> оставшиеся переживания — да, жалкие, тривиальные; зато они ничьи — и потому принадлежат лично и непосредственно автору.[192]
>
> From the conception of the poet as an arena of struggle between various forces (mental, mythological, linguistic) – "it burst open within me and sang" – Vodennikov returns to a classic conception of the poet as the subject of the individual utterance: "Now I sing and burst open." This return is carried out by subtracting from his own poetry all that takes its origin from without. The remaining words are admittedly pathetic, faceless; the remaining experiences are admittedly trivial, banal. But they are no one's, and for that reason, they belong personally and directly to the author.

This *privatization* of lyric, in a double sense with which Medvedev the Marxist would deeply distrust it, can also describe, however, the movement in ten years' time from a poet like Skidan, whom we analyzed previously, to a poet like Medvedev. Gone are the neo-modernist (formerly, acmeist) pretensions to grandeur, myth, and collective natural or historical experience – albeit, in Skidan's case, internalized in the figure of the Poet (see above: "*It* burst open *within me* and sang," always in the past tense). Instead, in the later Vodennikov of *How One Must Live…*, as in Medvedev or the other poets whom Kuz'min names, we find a *present tense narrative of the self* in lyric or monologic form that is seemingly diminished to its most *momentary* and *inalienable*. Like the American "deep image" and confessional poetry of the 1960s and 70s – which equally bowed out before the epic scope of modernism but also before the uncompromisingly anti-lyrical evolution of Objectivism, Charles Olson, or its contemporary rival, Language Poetry – the poetry of the Russian 2000s that Kuz'min calls "postconceptualist" digs in to the minor: minor genre, minor experience, minor key, minor selfhood. Its characteristic forms are not lyric at all but those of narrative constricted into a single voice: the anecdote, the short story, the reported dialogue, the meditation, the confession. Fleeing from the insatiable appetite of conceptualism to swallow the word of another and regurgitate it as parody – de-authenticized, de-contextualized, and de-authorized – this poetry takes refuge in a language of

[192] Ibid.

either rhetorical blankness (see the "faceless"-ness above) or utter opacity: what Kuz'min calls the "zone of untransparent meaning" [«зона непрозрачного смысла»].[193] Its movement, Kuz'min writes, appears to be from myth to *byt* ["the everyday"],[194] but, arguably, it is also a reactive diminishment from *privateness* – in the sense of what cannot be discursively requisitioned by another – to *privation*.

What does legitimately differentiate Medvedev from this precedent is that even as he digs *in* to the minor genre and the unmediated discourse of the private, he is always simultaneously trying to *dig out.* The thing that haunts his work is not the first tenet of conceptualism – that there can be no original or authentic artistic utterance – but the *second*: that, as such, no experience is *communicable* outside the prevailing discourse of power in all its rhetorical and ideological forms and manifestations – and thus, that *political or ethical life* in language, if that life is to be based upon a practice of communication, is *prohibited* to its very core.

Medvedev's works are populated almost exclusively by victims of this prohibition on meaningful communication, most unambiguously the author himself. He wants to be able "to comfort" others («я с ужасом понял…» / "I realized with terror…" [2000]); he wants to communicate a pain (ibid.); he wants to present himself to the pitying, absolving judgment of others but also to reject that judgment out of hand («ярко одетый парень…» / "a guy in his nicest clothes…" [2005, see Appendix 4]); he wants a "soul" that isn't "conditional," but he believes only in conditions and not in souls («Сверкала рябина...» / "The Rowan-Tree Glistened…" [2004]). Although ostensibly a lyric poet (or a political activist) and not a novelist, it is almost impossible to read Medvedev without feeling the discursive tension of Dostoevsky's prose, and particularly of the Dostoevskiian confession, with its dual apotheosis in Ippolit and

[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.

the Underground Man.[195] The self-contradictoriness of his discourse is its most essential nature, vacillating at a moment's notice between the spiteful cynic and the holy fool. It occupies all discursive positions – not, in the paranoiac manner of Skidan, in order to internalize them – but rather in order to *hysterically reject them*, and it shudders at itself constantly as a result.

"The Battle for Reality"

One aspect of Medvedev's poetic strategy that is relevant here is that, like Skidan's self-reference and self-theorization, Medvedev's work has *always* staged its own trial and required alterity to itself in the form of self-examination (at first in prose essays, but increasingly in performances and political demonstrations) in order to achieve what he views as the desired "poetic" effect. At some point, the supplementary literature (and, primarily, the life-work or life-text of the poet) becomes the center of the work, and the poems themselves become irrelevant. Nevertheless, Medvedev, again like Skidan, views the poet primarily as a myth or messianic hero of culture. This is how he describes the chimeric cultural milieu that he inherits in the early 2000s as a Russian 20-something living in Moscow (although hardly from an average background[196]):

> В нашей стране сейчас сложилась чудовищная эстетическая атмосфера. Национальное культурное сознание представляет собой полусоветское-полубуржуазное смердящее болото, в котором лежат, разлагаясь, мертвые Пушкин, Достоевский, Иосиф Сталин, Алла Пугачёва и Иисус Христос.[197]

[195] This is Bakhtin's characterization, to which we will return below.
[196] Medvedev is the only son of Soviet celebrity journalist Feliks Medvedev (Partosh), which resulted in a uniquely elite communist upbringing. The father was well known as both a political provocateur (within reasonable, permissible bounds) and a degenerate gambler, among other things. Medvedev the younger mostly avoids talking about his family or his personal upbringing, which is understandable but also significant, given his inclination to talk and write about almost anything that would otherwise be considered "too personal" or taboo.
[197] Medvedev, Kirill. "Moi fashizm." *Teksty, izdannye bez vedoma avtora.* Moscow: NLO, 2005. 171.

> A monstrous aesthetic atmosphere has taken hold in our country. The national cultural consciousness is a putrid swamp—half-Soviet, half-bourgeois—in which Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Josef Stalin, Alla Pugacheva, and Jesus Christ all lie side by side, dead and decomposing.[198]

This pastiche, rather than the neo-modernist montage of the 1990s, could signal the sedimentary 'settling in' of the belated Russian 'postmodern' (if there is such a thing) in its most bourgeois, globally true-to-form capitalist manifestation; and Medvedev's hard left politics and abject disgust with the 21st century cultural life of his nation are so simultaneous and reactive that it is difficult to say which precedes which. Yet, unlike most Marxists, Medvedev thinks his world in the present rather than historically because he acknowledges that he lives in a world that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place.[199] Its reality is as alien to (Soviet) conceptualism as it is to the grand narratives of history that pervade Skidan's work. And, as Medvedev reminds us from a Marxist standpoint, this grotesque explicitly extends to the practices of cultural producers like himself, inasmuch as it is a world in which Alexander Prokhanov can be published alongside Žižek or skinhead manifestos alongside anarchist ones.[200]

The question for the (leftist) artist in this context, he suggests, is therefore not merely what art should be – he refers to Rimbaud's maxim "to be absolutely modern [*il faut être absolument moderne*]"[201] – but also with what aspects of that modernity it is *appropriate* for the poet as a citizen and member of the *polis* to engage. It is the open question not of 'What is poetry?' but of '*Who is a poet*?' that begins Medvedev's career (literally, in the poem "I'm sick of translating…" «мне надоело переводить» [2000]) and ultimately ends it by seeing him

[198] Medvedev, Kirill. *It's No Good.* Trans. Keith Gessen, Mark Krotov, Cory Merrill, Bela Shayevich. Brooklyn: n+1/Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012. 115. Translation amended.
[199] See Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* Durham: Duke UP, 1991. I am paraphrasing his opening shot that: "It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place" (vii).
[200] Medvedev, Kirill. "Moi fashizm." *Teksty, izdannye bez vedoma avtora.* Moscow: NLO, 2005. 189.
[201] Ibid., 187.

gradually withdraw from literary life and defiantly (if rather meaninglessly) renounce copyright in 2004, which, as Marijeta Bozovic points out, arguably only amplifies the superimposition of his aesthetic commitments upon political ones, reconfiguring him "as a performance artist, whose extended practice is to perform 'the poet, defiantly mute.'"[202]

We might ask the obvious, however, which is how one performs the poetry of silence or if a silent poet is a poet at all, even mythically speaking. Orpheus continued to prophesy even after death, although he was no longer singing. Even on Medvedev's terms, which blend political praxis and poetic mythos, does this not directly contradict the path of a figure like Blok, whom he admires for his ambivalent acceptance a revolution that he both feared and prophesied?[203] Although Medvedev supplies us with a host of *political* rationales for his literary actions (and inaction) in essays such as «Мой фашизм» [My Fascism] (2004) or «Литература будет проверена» [Literature Will Be Tested] (2007), he is ever reluctant to consider himself anything else but an *artist*. Therefore, one of the more interesting explanations for his eventual silence in fact begins with an incongruence between poetic practice and theory that is indicative not only of his predicament but of the specificity of the Russian post-Soviet/post-modern (both ideologically only half-true) condition and its contemporary legacy in general.

In «Паралогии» [Paralogies] (2008), Mark Lipovetsky acknowledges a strange feature of this period:

> Примечательно, что в появившихся в 90-е годы отечественных монографиях о постмодернизме (Н. Маньковская, И. Скоропанова) обширные пересказы теорий Ж. Деррида, Ж. Делёза и Ф. Гваттари, Ж. Лакана, Ж. Бодрийяра и других классиков постструктуралистской мысли фактически никак не коррелируют с анализами

[202] Bozovic, Marijeta. "Poetry on the Front Line: Kirill Medvedev and a New Russian Poetic Avant-Garde." *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie*. Vol. 70, issue 1, 2014. 89 -118. 99.
[203] On Blok, see Medvedev, Kirill. "Moi fashizm." *Teksty, izdannye bez vedoma avtora.* Moscow: NLO, 2005. 209.

> литературных текстов русских постмодернистов – «мухи отдельно, котлеты отдельно».[204]
>
> It is worth noting that in the Russian monographs on postmodernism that emerged in the Nineties (N. Mankovskaya, I. Skoropanova), extensive paraphrases of the theories of Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Lacan, Baudrillard, and other classics of post-structuralist thought do not, in fact, in any way correspond with the analysis of the literary texts produced by Russian postmodernists – "flies to one side, cutlets to the other."

Lipovetsky further concludes that this is in no way the result of theoretical deficit on the part of these authors but rather the result of «сопротивление материала» [the resistance of the material][205] – or, in more positive terms, the sharp divide between Russian practices and Western theory of the 1970s - present. The reason for this, Lipovetsky argues, is that Russian 'postmodernism' – taking, as usual, the paradigmatic example of the conceptualists – never mounted a critique of logocentrism but rather of "literocentrism" (see Part I),[206] placing the author or poet in the position of the curator, the archivist, or the philologist by proxy: the mediating instance of any ideology. I have mentioned this argument before, and although I disagree that the conceptualists were *ever*, in any essential sense, transmissible as a post-Soviet, much less postmodern, phenomenon, this is where Lipovetsky's narrative about the specificity of Russian 'postmodernism' is at its most provocative and, I believe, most convincing.

For Medvedev, at any rate, conceptualism is already moot in the 2000s. What strikes fear in the heart of Skidan is for him the passé affectation of a generation of castrated fathers (a leitmotif in Medvedev's work and life, to be sure). In response to Prigov's passing in 2007, for instance, he writes on his "LiveJournal" account that, in the words of Kuz'min, his sometimes adversary, it marked "the death of the father" [«смерть отца»], but, furthermore, that "the death

[204] Lipovetsky, Mark. *Paralogii: Transformatsii (post)modernisticheskogo diskursa v kul'ture 1920 – 2000-kh godov*. Moscow: NLO, 2008. 24.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid., pp. 24-33.

of Prigov is also the death of the Soviet Union" [«смерть Пригова это тоже смерть Советского Союза»].[207] It is a death unnaturally belated, because, for Medvedev, the critical strategies that Prigov and other conceptualists employed in the late Soviet Union were already phantasmagoric in a 21st century cultural space. Moreover, under Putinism, which rose to power through misinformation rather than outright coercion, it was quickly becoming clear that these same, formerly conceptualist discursive *practices* had been appropriated by a performative official discourse with a logic of its own. With prophetic acuity, Medvedev perceived that the greatest conceptualist or "postmodern" actor in the 2000s was the State itself. Who else but either Prigov or the vassals of Putinism could dream up terms of ideological pastiche such as: "We, the government of the dispossessed Russian people, oppose the fascists of Ukraine and their gay imperialist collaborators," etc. Again, this is the kind of official culture to which Medvedev reacts in the long essay «Мой фашизм (Несколько истин)» ["My Fascism (A Few Truths)"] (2004), titled precisely to accentuate and juxtapose itself to the already heterogenous and de-centered word of the State:

> Мой фашизм […] это попытка цепляться за призраки вместо того чтобы признать, что мы, уже набитые этими останками, стоим на голой земле. Что у нас уже нет не только классической музыки, классической литературы, поэзии, у нас нет уже и велосипедного колеса, приделанного в табуретке, у нас нет писсуаров и картин с кляксами. Максимум, что у нас есть, воздух.[208]
>
> My fascism is […] is an attempt to cling to ghosts rather than acknowledge that we, already stuffed with these remains, are standing on bare ground. Not only do we no longer have classical music, classical literature, poetry – we no longer have a bicycle wheel attached to a stool or urinals or paintings with blots on them. The maximum that we have, right now, is air.[209]

[207] See Medvedev's livejournal, named after his paternal great-grandfather: http://zoltan-partosh.livejournal.com/2007/07/16 (Posted 16/07/2007).
[208] Medvedev, Kirill. "Moi fashizm." *Teksty, izdannye bez vedoma avtora.* Moscow: NLO, 2005. 197.
[209] Medvedev, Kirill. *It's No Good.* Trans. Keith Gessen, Mark Krotov, Cory Merrill, Bela Shayevich. Brooklyn: n+1/Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012. 132. Translation amended.

This is not Medvedev's only disgusted meditation on art as a reflection of a broken bourgeois political ideal. As opposed to Alexander Kosalapov's lucrative *Marlboro Malevich* series, for example, which seems only to mimetically *extend* an ideological pastiche already fully – and cynically – incorporated into consumer capitalism, Medvedev prefers the work of Alexander Brener, who spray-painted a green dollar sign on an authentic Malevich in the Stedelijk Museum, for which he was given six months in Dutch prison – although perhaps, too, with the promise of a future gallery exhibition.[210] That is, Medvedev subscribes to *performance* – but of a very specific type.

[210].See Medvedev, Kirill. "Moi fashizm." *Teksty, izdannye bez vedoma avtora.* Moscow: NLO, 2005. 207 – 208.



Illustration 9. Aleksandr Kosolapov, *Malevich*, 1989, one of a hugely lucrative series (note the artist's signature in Latin letters)



Illustration 10. Malevich, *Suprematism*, vandalized by Brener in 1997, originally valued at $7.5 million USD, subsequently valued at $5 million USD, amounting to a loss of $2.5 million

The thing that constitutes performative value, Medvedev seems to believe, is not a question of rhetorical or gestural 'sincerity,' the authenticity of the defaced Malevich in question, or the complex games played by neo-conceptualism with the status of the simulacrum. It is whether the word or artistic gesture *extends* or *disrupts* – reflects or interrupts and interjects itself into – the discourse and circulation of power. Rather than *reflecting* an ideological pastiche, as conceptualism did with the discourse of the Soviet Union or as postmodernism did with the discourses of 'autonomous' art and capitalism, Brener critically (or terroristically) *performs*, at the existential risk of the artist, however slight, an interrogation of its means of circulation and power: namely, *money*, and lots of it. But it is its ability to interrupt and disrupt that circulation, primarily by defacing and thereby devaluing a valuable object, that makes it constitute a "word-act" [«слово-поступок»],[211] which for Medvedev is always embodied in the person and at the risk of the actor.

Rhetoric alone, Medvedev argues, is insufficient as a political act and *over*-sufficient or excessive in its reliance on a symbolic glut that can easily be coopted by heterogenous (capitalist, then Putinist) discourses of power. The problem with the 'New Sincerity,' he argues, is that, in reacting to conceptualism – a relic of the political past – it overlooks its political present. It develops upon the principled apoliticality of the Brodsky generation of humanist intelligentsia; *however*, its practitioners fail to match word with deed in a way that Brodsky himself, under Soviet conditions, not only didn't but *couldn't*. *Any* word that escaped the discourse of the State was political and constituted an act – so much so that it was prosecutable under the law, as Brodsky's generation knew too well. By contrast, Medvedev suggests that the new freedom to 'say anything' without risk but also without consequence results in a situation that is just as

[211] Ibid.

useful to the Putinist state's amorphous and dissembling discourse of power as it is potentially unsettling. He writes in «Литература будет проверена» [Literature Will Be Tested]:

> Власть боится этой искренности, но и пытается воспользоваться ей. Дать молодым неонацистам припугнуть обывателя своей искренней ненавистью, одновременно держа их под контролем. Предоставить модным поэтам и актёрам возможность кричать и материться со сцены Политехнического, одновременно послав им сигнал: «делайте что хотите. Вы свободные художники. Главное, не суетитесь и не лезьте в политику, ну, вы же умненькие, вы и сами знаете, что это гадость. Всё равно ваше творчество переживёт вас (и нас). А с политикой мы разберёмся сами».[212]
>
> The authorities are afraid of this sincerity, but they also try to take advantage of it. Let young neo-Nazis scare the common man with their sincere hatred, but keep them in line. Let fashionable poets and actors scream and curse from the stage of the Polytechnic, but send them the signal: "Do whatever you want. You are free, independent artists. Just don't worry your pretty little heads about politics; after all, you're smart, you know yourselves that it's a dirty business. Your art will obviously outlive us all. Just leave the politics to us."[213]

So, for Medvedev, both the "conceptualist" and the "New Sincerity" models result in equal but opposite forms of historical estrangement from the truth of their political reality. They are simply inadequate to the conjuncture in which they are writing – a performance out of context, after all, is a *dead* performance. Moreover, although the 'New Sincerity' views itself as a reaction against the conceptualist paradigm, the impotence of each can be described in terms of a programmatic failure of poetic language to connect with or act upon its audience – both the negative theology of conceptualism and the atomizing discourse of 'New Sincerity' simply *reflect* and *extend* the status quo, in which nothing means anything, and political life, *qua communication*, is as impossible to the artist as it is to the citizen.

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[212] Medvedev, Kirill. "…Literatura budet proverena." Taken from Medvedev's personal site: http://kirillmedvedev.narod.ru/liter-.html (Posted 03/2007).
[213] Medvedev, Kirill. *It's No Good.* Trans. Keith Gessen, Mark Krotov, Cory Merrill, Bela Shayevich. Brooklyn: n+1/Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012. 238. Translation amended.

We might therefore also characterize the gap between these two positions as attenuated by a broad dearth of critique, which forces the *hyper*-critical paradox of Medvedev's own stance in rejecting them both: on the one hand, he wishes to (re-)motivate the word in life, which was the project of the historical avant-garde; on the other, to engage and even deconstruct that same word's self-understanding as a truth-teller, which was the project of Western postmoderns. His only recourse is some form of *performance* – and namely, *performing the truth*; truth-*doing* rather than truth-*telling.* All of this, therefore, must be *embodied* in the person and praxis of the poet, whose life is an extended performance. Nothing is satisfactory. Perhaps it is no wonder that he occasionally falls silent or that he named his first book *Всё плохо* [*It's No Good* – lit. "Everything Is Bad"].

The stakes for Medvedev are existential because they *have to be* in order to have meaning. He calls his vocation a "battle for reality" [«борьба за реальность»].[214] Below and with great sympathy, I must admit, I will present two models for how that discursive battle plays out – one utopian, via Foucault; the other pessimistic, via Bakhtin – and interjected (for his work itself is always an interjection) with a relatively well-known example of Medvedev's poetry from 2005.

The Zero Degree of Rhetoric

Although I have characterized Medvedev's discursive practice as paradoxical and self-contradictory, it does have one univocal and radical ambition that combines the aesthetic and political axes of his thought in a single moment: namely, *to perform the truth*. What that might

[214] Ibid., p. 250.

entail, however – and *how* it might be performed, rather than merely told – is rather complicated. Therefore, in reading Medvedev's poetic texts themselves, which are rife with contradiction, violence and victimhood, pathos and self-recrimination, we must ask what his criteria for the performance of the truth are.

He rarely lays out such terms without loophole or hyperbole. As we have seen, however, he is clear about what he wishes to resist: private confession; public ideology; cerebral abstraction; a new metastasis of "art for art's sake" (the word disconnected from praxis). The only thing uniting all of these discursive adversaries seems to be their relationship to *power*: the power to finalize the word of another, the power to absorb the word of another, the power to conceal one's word from another, the power to abandon the word of another or to abandon the field of living action. Against this, he juxtaposes some notion of discursive freedom that must be fully embodied and existentially coincident with the one who is speaking-acting: by giving itself over to transparency, it asserts its unassailability. This discourse resists and acts upon power, yet it liberates itself from power only in surrendering itself to power – it performs power itself in the negative.

This is a fantasy that takes shape around the performance of a (politically) *true* utterance; and as distant as it might seem from the context in which Medvedev is writing, one figure for understanding his rhetorical goals is in fact a Greek concept, via Michel Foucault, the 20th century's great scientist of discourse and power, that draws on many of the speech genres already named above (e.g., confession) and returns rhetoric to its original purpose: the proper use of the word (*logos*) in political/public life (the *polis*). This concept is *parrhesia* (παρρησία), translated as "free speech" or, literally, "saying everything," and is outlined in a series of lectures given by Foucault at Berkeley in October 1983 and posthumously compiled and edited by Joseph Pearson

as *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia* in 1985.[215] As a note, it is very unlikely that Foucault intended to present an 'antidote' to his life's work on the discourse of power, but it is natural to speculate that in *parrhesia*, as he presents it, he performs a late-life imaginary encounter with his Other – namely, an *outside* to the discourse of power and to discursive heterogeneity as such. Moreover, the concept and practice of *parrhesia* itself, as we shall see, is inherently eschatological: outwardly utopian, but lined with violence, it invites itself to be a last word, most radically *as silence*.

As a mode of political, philosophical (after Plato's *Apology*), and interpersonal discourse, Foucault identifies four necessary conditions and attributes of *parrhesia*, which correspond closely with the rhetorical ambition of Medvedev's own poetics:

1. *Parrhesia* cannot be the disembodied language of the postmodern ('mere' dissemination or language itself speaking through the 'dead author') inasmuch as it explicitly, according to Foucault, "refers to a type of relationship between the speaker and what he says."[216] The speaker presents his opinion *as the truth* and guarantees it with his own person, thereby eliminating the 'cover' of rhetoric but also the possibility of a word *escaping* his mouth and entering the mouth of another. Thus, Foucault reminds us that Quintillian considered *parrhesia* a "natural" figure employed "without simulation," or "the zero degree of those rhetorical figures which intensify the emotions of the audience."[217] In other words, *parrhesia* is the rhetorical performance of the absence of a rhetoric – what Tynianov would call its (negative) "equivalent."

2. There is thus an *art* to *parrhesia.* In order for *parrhesia* to function properly, it cannot be merely "saying everything" as saying *anything* or mere "chatter."[218] It implies, on the part of the speaker, "an exact coincidence between belief and truth,"[219] which is why,

[215] Foucault, Michel. *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia*. Ed. Joseph Pearson. Evanston: University of Illinois Press, 1985. Pearson notes: "The text was compiled from tape-recordings made of six lectures delivered, in English, by Michel Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley in the Fall Term of 1983. The lectures were given as part of Foucault's seminar, entitled 'Discourse and Truth.' Since Foucault did not write, correct, or edit any part of the text that follows, it lacks his imprimatur and does not present his own lecture notes. What is given here constitutes only the notes of one of his auditors. Although the present text is primarily a verbatim transcription of the lectures, repetitive sentences or phrases have been eliminated, responses to questions have been incorporated – whenever possible – into the lectures themselves, and numerous sentences have been revised – all in the hope of producing a more readable set of notes."
[216] Ibid., 2.
[217] Ibid., 7.
[218] Ibid., 3.
[219] Ibid.

Foucault admits, "It appears that *parrhesia*, in this Greek sense, can no longer occur in our modern epistemological framework."[220]

3. One of the guarantees of this coincidence between belief and truth again refers back to context, which is internalized in the attributes as well as the actions of the speaker. *Parrhesia* as truth-telling is only possible in the presence of some form of existential risk, such as the rebuke of a philosopher to a tyrant or a citizen to the majority of the *polis* (e.g., *The Apology*); in this sense, it "has the function of criticism: criticism of the interlocutor or of the speaker himself."[221] Here we begin to see most clearly the relevance of *parrhesia* to Medvedev's own demands on artistic and poetic practice, again taking the example of Alexander Brener or Medvedev's own demonstration against the Kalyagin Theater in 2007.

4. *Parrhesia* is an issue of both freedom and duty: the freedom to put oneself at risk in telling the truth, and the moral obligation to do so. Thus, *parrhesia* becomes both intensely personal and intensely political. It signals the coincidence between the speaker's *logos* and *bios*[222] – his word and his way of living – as well as his obligation to the community, by which the personal risk of the speaker is beneficial to the polis whereas the bad kind of *parrhesia* – mere "chatter" – becomes corrupting. The problem, as Foucualt notes, is that the good, courageous kind of *parrhesia* is ultimately only possible as a mode of *resistance* and therefore of risk, which in the ancient world becomes associated not with democracy but with monarchy or tyranny and in our modern one with a critique of authority.[223]

Finally, and very importantly, there is an issue that Foucault only implies but never fully explicates: that is, that the freedom necessary to the performance of *parrhesia* distinguishes it from the discourse of modern jurisprudence as well as confession in a Christian sense. To take an example relevant to Russian pop-political discourse shortly after the period in which Medvedev is writing, the defiant witness statements of Pussy Riot in a Moscow court cannot be considered *parrhesia* because they are compelled by the State and therefore only confirm that authority's *raison d'état*. That is, *parrhesia* requires tyranny but also must open a *caesura* to that tyranny in

[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid., 4.
[222] Ibid., p. 33.
[223] Ibid.

which free speech is possible – as a speech genre, it is thus essentially structured as *an interjection to the discourse of power*.

Since Foucault's lectures are on the historical "problematization" of *parrhesia*, however, the question for him, and certainly for Medvedev, comes down not to the philosophical possibility or impossibility of *parrhesia* but to how to distinguish the 'good' practice of *parrhesia* from the 'bad'; the 'truth-performer' from the sophist; or in Medvedev's words on the 'New Sincerity,' how "to separate sincerity from hack work, because one is in the employ of the other"[224] [«как отделить искренность от заказа, одно работает на другое»].[225]

Interjection or Permanent Caesura?: Medvedev the *Parrhesiastes*

When Medvedev published his first book, «Всё плохо» [It's No Good] (2000), he was writing self-effacing texts composed of short, irregularly punctuated lines that narrate memory and trauma as well as reflect on the role of the poet against the backdrop of everyday life. These texts are self-consciously un-curated – deliberately stripped of rhetorical and even grammatical markers of premeditation and artifice. They both project and demand from the reader a kind of whispered and conspiratorial privacy and immediacy. The opening poem, which Medvedev later considered his first worthwhile literary effort, muses on his abandonment of translation – at the time, of Charles Bukowski – in favor of a more personal commitment of authorial voice. Why? Because in a world of discursive hegemony, there are only parasitic "ghouls" [«упыри»] and

[224] Medvedev, Kirill. *It's No Good.* Trans. Keith Gessen, Mark Krotov, Cory Merrill, Bela Shayevich. Brooklyn: n+1/Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012. 239.
[225] Medvedev, Kirill. "…Literatura budet proverena." http://kirillmedvedev.narod.ru/liter-.html (Posted 03/2007).

sacred, sacrificial victims to discourse (i.e., a messianically twisted vision of the *parrhesiastes*), and he would rather be the latter:

> […]
> я думаю что переводчики
> это за редким исключением
> упыри
> кормящиеся
> чужой кровью
> потому что перевод
> это сладкий сон
> а творчество
> это мука
> поэтому
> я наверное больше не буду
> заниматься переводом
>
> […]
> in my opinion translators are
> on the whole
> with some rare exceptions
> ghouls
> feeding on
> other people's blood
> because translation is like
> a sweet dream
> whereas actually creating something
> is torture
> which is why
> I will probably stop
> working on
> translations[226]

Over the following years, however, Medvedev's work evolves into an increasingly dramatized form of lyric motivated by political performance, both on the page and off of it. Scenes of private reflection, as well as the use of hermetic personal reference and proper names – again, a device common to the "postconceptualists/New Sincerity" and to other poets who

[226] Medvedev, Kirill. *It's No Good.* Trans. Keith Gessen, Mark Krotov, Cory Merrill, Bela Shayevich. Brooklyn: n+1/Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012. 25.

populate Medvedev's early texts, such as Stanislav Lvovsky and Dmitrii Kuz'min – are gradually replaced by an ever more emphatic and boisterous internalized polemic. Just as overheard conversations are exchanged for public proclamations, the addressee of these texts shifts from the private confessor to the cacophonous space of the internet message board, on which, via sites like "VKontakte" and "LiveJournal," Medvedev increasingly published.

In considering him as a poet of this era, it is therefore most interesting to look at the Medvedev of this middle-period (around 2004 - 2005) of his brief career, which was his most productive and stylistically transformative and in which both his early and late tendencies are on display and in full lateral conflict with one another. To that end, I reproduce below one of nine poems comprising the 2002–2005 cycle "LOVE, FREEDOM, SINCERITY, SOLIDARITY, DEMOCRACY, TOTALITARIANISM" [«ЛЮБОВЬ, СВОБОДА, ИСКРЕННОСТЬ, ЕДИНЕНИЕ, ДЕМОКРАТИЯ, ТОТАЛИТАРИЗМ»], which has been translated into English by Keith Gessen, although, truthfully, it could be exchanged with almost any other Medvedev text from this period:

ярко одетый парень у входа в метро,
две девушки прошли мимо,
наверное, засмеялись над ним,
он всё кричал им вслед:
девушка, что не так? что не так? девушка? девушка?
а потом громко, уже про себя:
ПИЗДА!
...
какой-то неуверенный в себе пижон;
конечно, в этой сцене было больше жизни,
чем в груде прочитанных книг;
но это столкновения элементарных частиц,
происходит трение оболочек;
я - элементарная частица:
моё тщеславие, пересекающее
границы моего "я" -

невероятное тщеславие,
существующее уже где-то отдельно,
как душа,
без меня;
идёт ли это вразрез
с интересами людей, желающих тусоваться
и потреблять,
с их мелким тщеславием? -
там, где у меня - революция,
перелицовывающая всё -
переворачивающая на голову всё и вся -
там у них
мелкобуржуазная революция -
где у меня - золотая медаль за трусость,
у них - экстремальный спорт;
где у них китайский массаж, у меня -
наркоз, жестокий режим (священная деспотия).
глубокое бессилие,
отрешённость;
среди ледяного разнообразия этого буржуазного мира,
среди его покрытых инеем предметов, бледных, цветных,
мы рады тому, что у нас не остаётся ничего общего, только любовь,
и там где у них любовь,
у меня тоже любовь,
я люблю двух девок,
которые проходили мимо,
я люблю парня,
который сказал "пизда".
НО - ЧТО ЭТО ЗА ЛЮБОВЬ?!
ЭТО ИНТЕРЕСНО,
ПОТОМУ ЧТО МНЕ ЖЕ НЕДОСТУПНА
НОРМАЛЬНАЯ ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСКАЯ ЛЮБОВЬ -
ЛЮБОВЬ МУЖЧИНЫ К ЖЕНЩИНЕ НАПРИМЕР,
МНЕ ДОСТУПНО ТОЛЬКО СЕКСУАЛЬНОЕ ВЛЕЧЕНИЕ
И ЛЮБОВЬ КО ВСЕМУ ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСТВУ -
невинная отрешённая любовь -
и вот я спрашиваю кого-то далёкого и отрешенного,
но он молчит - как будто немой или его нет,
так выясняется, что это я холодный умалишённый.
тот кто был мной, уже никогда не будет со мной. ...

(а ЗА мной уже встаёт благодарная очередь из тех,
кто так никого и не полюбил,
не исследовал, не растлил и не убил)[227]

[227] Medvedev, Kirill. *Teksty, izdannye bez vedoma avtora.* Moscow: NLO, 2005. 123-24.

a guy in his nicest clothes
standing next to the entrance to the metro
two girls walk by
they must have laughed—
he kept yelling after them:
girls, what's wrong? what is it? girls? girls?
then loudly, to himself now:
CUNT!

an insecure fop, next to the metro;
there was more life in this scene, of course,
than in a pile of battered books;
but this is a collision of elementary particles,
it's a rubbing-together of fragments;
I'm an elementary particle:
my ambition exceeds
the limits of my "I"—
my awesome ambition,
which already exists as if separately,
without me,
like a soul;
does this contradict
the interests of people who want to hang out
and consume,
with their tiny ambitions?
whereas I want—revolution,
to change the face of everything,
to overthrow everything and everyone—
they want
a petty bourgeois revolution—
whereas I have a gold medal for cowardice,
they have—extreme sports;
they have Chinese massage, whereas I have
narcotics, and a cruel regime (enlightened despotism),
profound powerlessness,
and alienation;
among the icy variety of this consumer paradise,
among the objects covered in sparkles, white, and colorful,
we are happy to find that we have nothing in common, except love,
and where they have love,
I also have love,
I love the two girls
who walked by,
I love the boy

who said “cunt.”
BUT WHAT SORT OF LOVE IS THIS?
THAT’S AN INTERESTING QUESTION,
BECAUSE I AM UNABLE TO EXPERIENCE
NORMAL HUMAN LOVE—
THE LOVE OF A MAN AND A WOMAN, FOR EXAMPLE,
I CAN ONLY UNDERSTAND SEXUAL ATTRACTION
AND LOVE FOR ALL MANKIND—
an innocent, self-negating love,
and so I ask someone far away, and also self-negating,
but he doesn’t answer—as if he’s mute or not there,
and that’s how I find out that I’m frigid and insane;
the person who was me will never now be with me….

(meanwhile BEHIND me a line is already forming,
of those whom no one ever loved,
no one ever investigated, no one corrupted, and no one killed)[228]

In Gessen’s translation, as it appears here, this was also one of Medvedev’s first poems to be published in English and garner him international attention, appearing in Gessen’s journal, *n+1*, in late 2008.[229] However, as one in a series of nine poems written over an unusually long period of time (2002–2005), it marks a tipping-point at which Medvedev’s self-understanding as a poet and activist significantly changed. It was during these years that he renounced copyright (2003) and produced, in prose, his most developed and urgent public statements about his own political and aesthetic positions. Even more remarkable, then, that in contrast to his winding and often deeply prevaricative prose texts, a rigid formal symmetry emerges in the rhetorical strategies of all nine poems in “LOVE, FREEDOM, SINCERITY, SOLIDARITY, DEMOCRACY, TOTALITARIANISM” [«ЛЮБОВЬ, СВОБОДА, ИСКРЕННОСТЬ, ЕДИНЕНИЕ, ДЕМОКРАТИЯ, ТОТАЛИТАРИЗМ»].

[228] Medvedev, Kirill. *It’s No Good.* Trans. Keith Gessen, Mark Krotov, Cory Merrill, Bela Shayevich. Brooklyn: n+1/Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012. 155-56.
[229] It appeared in Gessen’s translation in *n+1*. No. 6, 2008.
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The movement can be described as follows: Medvedev's speaker begins impersonally by recounting a scene from everyday life. The tone is tensely neutral or blank and of the minor genre and key common to the other poets that Kuz'min calls "postconceptualists." However, Medvedev leaves clear markers – the implicitly derelict entrance to the metro, the badly but ostentatiously dressed young man of a superfluous type inseparable from post-socialist experience – that lead the reader to believe that this is a scene not of private but of *collective* victimhood and its potential for re-actualization as an event of violence. It is the staging of a particular kind of Passion Play.

That violence erupts as pigeon speech – the word «ПИЗДА!» [CUNT!] – an aside said both "to" and potentially "about" oneself [*про себя*], which draws the lyric speaker into the poem as if recoiling from himself. Between the two sits an ellipsis that reminds us that the first seven lines of the poem are little more than stage directions for players who make their exeunt before the soliloquy that follows. Transitioning into that pronounced first person, Medvedev's speaker begins his meditation on the scene and on himself with a catalogue of ruptures: parts and wholes; "elementary particles"; the borders of the self and others; mind-body dualism; etc. Of the "separated soul," a leitmotif of this period, he similarly writes in the concluding lines of ("The Rowan-Tree Glistened There Were a Whole Lot of Dogs" [«Сверкала рябина было очень много собак»] (2004): "I think / that souls don't ever return right away / because a soul is a condition. / conditions don't ever return right away" [«я думаю, / что души никогда не возвращаются сразу - / потому что душа это состояние. / состояния никогда не возвращаются сразу»].[230]

[230] Medvedev, Kirill. *Teksty, izdannye bez vedoma avtora.* Moscow: NLO, 2005. 94. My trans.

The greater drama of the poem, however, unfolds according to the confessions of the speaker and the imagined rejoinders of one or several dialogic interlocutors. The moment of discursive trauma, here figured as potential sexual violence, becomes an impetus for a schizophrenic conversation between three distinct voices, whom I will give the following names: the Judge, always in full capitalization, polemically anticipating the word of another and more and more insistent in Medvedev's later work; the Victim, always silent but palpable in every chiasmus and caesura as the motive and object of discourse; and the Poet, who at times polemicizes with the Judge and at times speaks for the Victim, mediating the discourse and concluding parenthetically from a place of elevated distance and dulled resignation. The Poet occupies the position of a third – an ineffectual mediator, a witness no one calls on, an impotent or disinterested god.

What becomes clear as one reads more of Medvedev is that his view of the poet or artist becomes increasingly severe and increasingly marginalized by the speech acts of others. The reflective Poet, whom we might recognize from the early Medvedev, is reduced to parentheses in order to draw him closer to the silence of the Victim. Trapped in the uncomfortable position of a kind of morally polemical conceptualist, Medvedev can only supply found discourse to respond to the trauma of the Victim, while the Judge ridicules it from a tyrannical distance. If there is a *parrhesiastes* here, speaking back to authoritarian monologue, he or she is ultimately merely *implicit in it*, as an *unspoken rejoinder* around which all found speech turns.

The cycle of poems as a whole ends with a similar conflict between all three voices and an interesting allegory for the movement above as well as for *parrhesiac* speech in general. Medvedev writes:

ПРИХОДИТЕ ПРИХОДИТЕ КО МНЕ
ПОКА НАС С НЕИМОВЕРНОЙ СИЛОЙ
НЕ ВЫВЕРНУЛО ИЗ НАШИХ МИРОВ
И УЖЕ ДРУГИМИ НЕ ВЕРНУЛО ОБРАТНО.
ПОКА НАС НЕ РАСТАСКАЛО ПО ОБОЧИНАМ
НИКОМУ НЕ НУЖНЫХ ПУТЕЙ.
и пока мы представляем собой слова –
это значит, что нас ещё не разорвало на запятые,
точнее, мы сами пока ещё только запятые,
и нас разделяют только слова.[231]

COME COME TO ME
BEFORE AN UNSPEAKABLE FORCE
TEARS US FROM OUR WORLDS
AND REFUSES TO PUT US BACK AGAIN
BEFORE WE'VE BEEN PUSHED INTO THE GUTTERS
OF PATHS NO ONE USES
and while we still represent words—
which means, we haven't yet been torn into commas,
that is, we're still just commas ourselves,
and it's only words that separate us.[232]

Parrhesia is possible when it is still "we" who "represent words" – not the other way around. This ability to tether one's word on oneself – one's *logos* on one's *bios* – is the central concept and paradox of Foucault's problematization of *parrhesia,* both in the ancient and in the post-structuralist world in which he presents it. For his part, Foucault simply concedes that such embodied truth-performance is no longer epistemologically possible for us: that context cannot be so easily internalized in order to be mastered. Medvedev, the heir of conceptualism and the heterogenous discourse of capitalism and Putinism, incredibly – perhaps even holy-foolishly – seems to hold out hope for something like *parrhesia* in its most dramatic form. That is, he implies that there is a truth yet to be achieved *by the performance of silence* as a *total act* of critique «про себя» (both *to* and *about* oneself), by which we may acknowledge that we are "just

[231] Ibid., 127.
[232] Medvedev, Kirill. *It's No Good.* Trans. Keith Gessen, Mark Krotov, Cory Merrill, Bela Shayevich. Brooklyn: n+1/Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012. 159.

commas ourselves, and it's only words that separate us," *acting* upon the discourse of power by interjecting – as it were – *ourselves* as caesuras.

It was in 2006, shortly after this period of productivity and the publication these and other poems by NLO as *Тексты, изданные без ведома автора* [*Texts Published Without Permission of the Author*] (2005) that Medvedev 'officially' declared his own silence and renunciation of poetry ("for at least five years").[233] Kuz'min was horrified.[234] Others considered it the petulant gesture of a minor poet who had, with *Texts Published…*, already won the Andrei Bely Prize and far overshot his own relative merit and potential. *Most likely*, I would argue, the attitude of renunciation is written into the strategy of these texts themselves, which follow the formula *projection (displacement) : reversal : rejection* and ultimately travesty the discourse of the *parrhesiastes* from the position of the man of *ressentiment.* Medvedev himself surely realized this (although not on these terms) and committed himself to silent political praxis when it became apparent that his texts functioned, *ideally*, as the imagined interjections of one about to be (violently) silenced or at least under threat of permanent silence anyway (i.e., in the mode of the *parrhesiastes* emblematized by Socrates in Plato's *Apology*); but, in any case, they only perform caesuras to the discourse of power itself. As was the case with Skidan, but for very different reasons, it is precisely at the moment of falling silent that the aesthetic fantasy and its underlying ideology most fully coincide – which, again, is a feature of Romanticism *par excellence*.

[233] He did publish again, both officially, in NLO (2011) and with *Поход на мэрию* [*March on City Hall*] (2014), as well as on the internet.
[234] Kuz'min responded with the essay, "The Surrender and Death of a Post-Soviet Intellectual" [«Сдача и гибель постсоветского интеллигента»]. See Kuz'min, Dmitrii. "Sdacha i gibel' postsovietskogo intelligenta." *Kriticheskaia massa,* No. 1, 2006.

Medvedev from the Underground: From Discourse to the "Third"

> «болезнь; / вся моя жизнь / освещена болезнью» [sickness: / all my life is / illuminated by sickness].[235] – Medvedev (2000)

> Here we have the foundation of the paralogism of *ressentiment: the fiction of a force separated from what it can do.*[236] – Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*

I cannot help concluding with Medvedev, however, by way of looking at the long and *very* Russian development of his discursive style – not in poetry but in prose. Medvedev might claim to have been influenced early on by Charles Bukowski, and this is true, but he also reads like a quintessential Dostoevskiian hero-confessor thrown into early 2000s Moscow with a Facebook/VKontakte page and a computer (not entirely common at the time). Moreover, in considering him a *parrhesiastes* or at least as one with a fantasy of *parrhesiac* utterance, we can also point precisely to Bakhtin's Dostoevskii to find the reverse image of the concept and exactly how it can 'go wrong': namely, "dialogically." Moreover, this positions Bakhtin's own dialogic principle [*диалогичность*] within a timeline of literary history by which, as I am surely not the first to point out, it might have been developed in 19th century realist prose (if one can call Dostoevskii's novels of ideas 'realist') but has found its contemporary home in *poetry* of a multivalent yet recognizably lyric sort.

It is important to remember that Bakhtin's "dialogism" [*диалогизм*] or "dialogic principle" [*диалогичность*] evolved from the earliest writings of his career, such as *The Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* [*Автор и герой в эстетической деятельности*] (mid-1920s), which always imagined discourse in art, as in life, as grounded in phenomenological relations of

[235] Medvedev, Kirill. *Vse plokho.* Moscow: Proekt OGI, 2000.
[236] Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson. New York: Columbia UP, 1983. 123.

power: the capacity to "finalize" [*завершить*] another's word,[237] to be "finalized" [*завершенный*] by it, etc. Discourses are spatialized and imagined as territories for conquest. The titular author and hero in that first book are essentially co-dependent antagonists in a phenomenology of violence in which the question of shared discourse (for discourse is always shared according to Bakhtin) is who can dictate the truth of his word to another by dictating the truth of another's word for him. Dialogue is thus always merely a metaphor for voices that are as monadically separate from and impenetrable to each other as Medvedev's non-communicative 'protagonists,' yet which share a *space* and thereby anticipate each other, grasp at each other, project upon each other and struggle to the death, whereupon they are compressed into the form of a *single* voice and a single operating consciousness, as if wrestling for mastery over an utterance.

Bakhtin would eventually find his modern paradigm of dialogism in the prose of Dostoevskii, whom Nabokov complained never knew what his characters' hands were doing. That is, Dostoevskii's heroes are *essentially* disembodied – the antithesis of *parrhesiac* speech. Yet their voices compete precisely for dominion over the disembodied territory of truth – a discursive, common (or "dialogic") truth that is nonetheless singular – and it is this conflict that animates his prose. This could, moreover, be the fundamental reversal between *parrhesia* and dialogism: the former attempts to intervene in the temporality of power with truth as a caesura (it presents *a* truth among others, embodied in its speaker, which *interrupts power*); the latter, pessimistically, engages the territory of discursive power (totalizing and singular, like a shared space) without which the truth is presumed to be unthinkable.

[237] See Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deiatel'nosti." *Sobraniie sochinenii*. Vol. 1. Ed. C. G. Bocharov and N. I. Nikolaev. Moscow: Russkie slovari / Iazyki slavianskoi kultury, 2003.

In Medvedev's case, we might call the former his lyric or artistic fantasy for his own discourse and the latter his Marxist, political understanding of it. In practice, however, it should be clear by now where his texts inevitably end up. We need look no further than Bakhtin's descriptions of "dramatized confession" [«драматизованная исповедь»][238] in *The Double* [*Двойник*] (1846) or its development in *Notes from the Underground* [*Записки из подполья*] (1864) – originally titled "A Confession" [«Исповедь»] – to find discursive analysis that is uncannily appropriate to Medvedev's own voice(s). Bakhtin writes of the anonymous protagonist and first-person narrator of *Notes*:

> Вследствие такого отношения «человека из подполья» к чужому сознанию и его слову — исключительной зависимости от него и вместе с тем крайней враждебности к нему и неприятия его суда — рассказ его приобретает одну в высшей степени существенную художественную особенность. Это — нарочитое и подчиненное особой художественной логике неблагообразие его стиля. Его слово не красуется и не может красоваться, ибо не перед кем ему красоваться. Ведь оно не довлеет наивно себе самому и своему предмету. Оно обращено к другому и к самому говорящему (во внутреннем диалоге с самим собой). И в том и в другом направлении оно менее всего хочет красоваться и быть «художественным» в обычном смысле этого слова. В отношении к другому оно стремится быть нарочито неизящным, быть «назло» ему и его вкусам во всех отношениях. Но и по отношению к самому говорящему оно занимает ту же позицию, ибо отношение к себе неразрывно сплетено с отношением к другому. Поэтому слово подчеркнуто цинично, рассчитано цинично, хотя и с надрывом. Оно стремится к юродству, юродство же есть своего рода форма, своего рода эстетизм, но как бы с обратным знаком.[239]

> As a result of the Underground Man's attitude toward the other's consciousness and its discourse—extraordinary dependence upon it and at the same time extreme hostility toward it and nonacceptance of its judgments—his narration takes on one highly essential artistic characteristic. This is a deliberate clumsiness of style, albeit subject to a certain artistic logic. His discourse does not flaunt itself and cannot flaunt itself, for there is no one before whom it can flaunt. It does not, after all, gravitate naively toward itself and its referential object. It is addressed to another person and to the speaker himself (in his internal dialogue with himself). And in both of these directions it wants least of all to

[238] Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Problemy tvorchestvo Dostoevskogo." *Sobraniie sochinenii*. Vol. 6. Ed. C. G. Bocharov and A. A. Gogotishvili. Moscow: Russkie slovari / Iazyki slavianskoi kultury, 2002. 239.
[239] Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Problemy tvorchestvo Dostoevskogo." *Sobraniie sochinenii*. Vol. 6. Ed. C. G. Bocharov and A. A. Gogotishvili. Moscow: Russkie slovari / Iazyki slavianskoi kultury, 2002. 257.

> flaunt itself and be "artistic" in the usual sense of the word. In its attitude toward the other person it strives to be deliberately inelegant, to "spite" him and his tastes in all respects. But this discourse takes the same position even in regard to the speaker himself, for one's attitude toward oneself is inseparably interwoven with one's attitude toward another. Thus discourse is pointedly cynical, calculatedly cynical, yet also anguished. It strives to play the holy fool, for holy-foolishness is indeed a sort of form, a sort of aestheticism — but, as it were, in reverse.[240]

Bakhtin's aphoristic last line, "for holy-foolishness is indeed a sort of form, a sort of aestheticism – but, as it were, in reverse" has the open-ended sound of something that could in fact *literally* conclude a Medvedev poem (as usual, from the elevated voice and perspective 'the Poet'). Perhaps the most interesting comparison to be made between Medvedev and Bakhtin's account of the Dostoevskiian confessor, however, is not a matter of content, value-judgment (cynical or holy foolish?), or any ascribed motive; rather, it is structural in at least two important respects. First, Bakhtin writes that the Underground Man, like all of Dostoevskii's confessor-heroes, is quintessentially a man with a discursive "loophole" [«лазейка»] that he continually and hysterically re-threads with the anticipated response of another. It is in these pages on the Underground Man that we find Bakhtin's most concise definition of the "loophole" as a device:

> Лазейка — это оставление за собой возможности изменить последний, окончательный смысл своего слова. Если слово оставляет такую лазейку, то это неизбежно должно отразиться на его структуре. Этот возможный иной смысл, то есть оставленная лазейка, как тень, сопровождает слово. По своему смыслу слово с лазейкой должно быть последним словом и выдает себя за такое, но на самом деле оно является лишь предпоследним словом и ставит после себя лишь условную, не окончательную точку.[241]
>
> A loophole is the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words. If a word retains such a loophole this must inevitably be reflected in its structure. This potential other meaning, that is, the loophole left open, accompanies the word like a shadow. Judged by its meaning alone, the word with a

[240] Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.* Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. 230-31.
[241] Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Problemy tvorchestvo Dostoevskogo." *Sobraniie sochinenii*. Vol. 6. Ed. C. G. Bocharov and A. A. Gogotishvili. Moscow: Russkie slovari / Iazyki slavianskoi kultury, 2002. 259-260.

> loophole should be an ultimate word and does present itself as such, but in fact it: is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final, period.[242]

We are only "commas" – caesuras to a discourse that threatens to subsume us all – writes Medvedev. Although he takes the route of the *parrhesiastes* by choosing silence as an appropriate end to a poetic mythos, it is clear that the internalized polemic of his texts themselves is already subsumed and unending. There is no final word in Medvedev because such a thing would be too horrifying – too *existentially* unimaginable. To close the "loophole" on the discourse of another is to both inflict and succumb to the most terrible violence, meted out not in solipsism but in *death*. The possibility of other meanings, other voices, is here the possibility of a space left open to being itself.

Finally, this brings us to the last and – to my mind, most important – "dialogic" feature of Medvedev, which we saw in the splitting and dramatization of his voice into several 'characters' (the Victim, the Poet, the Judge). This is that his discourse is always a discourse of address, which invites into itself an anthropomorphic but impersonal *third*. Bakhtin writes, concluding his remarks on Dostoevskii's *Notes*:

> Слово «человека из подполья» — это всецело слово-обращение. Говорить — для него значит обращаться к кому-либо; говорить о себе — значит обращаться со своим словом к себе самому, говорить о другом — значит обращаться к другому, говорить о мире — обращаться к миру. Но, говоря с собою, с другим, с миром, он одновременно обращается еще и к третьему: скашивает глаза в сторону — на слушателя, свидетеля, судью.[243]
>
> The discourse of the Underground Man is entirely a discourse-address. To speak, for him, means to address someone; to speak about himself means to address his own self with his own discourse; to speak about another person means to address that other person; to speak about the world means to address the world. But while speaking with himself, with

[242] Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.* Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. 233.
[243] Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Problemy tvorchestvo Dostoevskogo." *Sobraniie sochinenii*. Vol. 6. Ed. C. G. Bocharov and A. A. Gogotishvili. Moscow: Russkie slovari / Iazyki slavianskoi kultury, 2002. 263-264.

> another, with the world, he simultaneously addresses a third party as well: he squints his eyes to the side, toward the listener, the witness, the judge.[244]

In Medvedev, it is difficult to say who this "third party" is. In the poem we read at length above, for instance, is it the silent Victim? The Judge? The Poet, who performs witness? The answer in Bakhtin, here in the Dostoevskii book, as well as in essays like "The Word in Life and the Word in Poetry" [«Слово в жизни и слово в поэзии»][245] (Voloshinov, 1926) is that the third is played by some sub-personal and pre-semantic property of language itself: the possibility of discourse underlying the sedimentary strata of every existing and emerging word.

This *third*, still obscure in Medvedev, who remains at the uppermost, ideological layers of discourse in an embattled narrative of self, is exactly where the development of post-Soviet Russian lyric is heading, and it is the function and nature of the primordial third – grammaticality? pre-semantic language (the *chôra* or "*stuff*" of language)? law? even nature itself? – that will be isolated and solicited directly and increasingly inventively by the next two practices: those of Anna Glazova and Nika Skandiaka.

[244] Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.* Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. 236-37.
[245] Voloshinov, Vladimir. "Slovo v zhizni i slovo v poezii." *Звезда*, № 6, 1926. 244-267.

THIRD PRACTICE: ANNA GLAZOVA (b. 1973)

From Rhetoric to Grammar, From Communicability to Encounter

> Aber ich denke – und dieser Gedanke kann Sie jetzt kaum überraschen –, ich denke, daß es von jeher zu den Hoffnungen des Gedichts gehört, gerade auf diese Weise auch in *fremder* – nein, dieses Wort kann ich jetzt nicht mehr gebrauchen –, gerade auf diese Weise *in eines Anderen Sache* zu sprechen – wer weiß, vielleicht in eines *ganz Anderen Sache*.[246] – Paul Celan, *Der Meridian*, 1960
>
> > [But I do think—and this thought can hardly surprise you by now—I think that it had always been part of the poem's hopes to speak on behalf of exactly this *strange*—no, I cannot use this word this way—exactly *on another's behalf*—who knows, perhaps on behalf *of a totally other*.[247] – Paul Celan, *The Meridian*, 1960]

Here is the place at which our conversation on "discourse" – if it is to be understood as a common tongue, a medium of *communication* – ends. This is the point of rupture. It is felt as a rupture not only between the old and the new but between the men and the women (or others)[248] and between entire understandings of ethics, politicality, and the limits, goals, and functions of poetic language. More importantly for a study of aesthetics and their motivating ideologies, I would argue that this is the point at which rhetoric (trope, device, voice) as a dominant problematic of the text is exchanged for grammar or grammaticality; polysemy is exchanged for polyvalent codes; and the dialectic of self and other *represented in language* is exchanged for a phenomenology of encounter *experienced* in language as fore- and background, touch and transference, cleaving to and cleaving from the field(s) of articulation.

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[246] Celan, Paul. "Der Meridian." *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 3. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2000. 196.
[247] Celan, Paul. *The Meridian.* Trans. Pierre Joris. Ed. Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2011. 8.
[248] This marked gender divide in style, modernity, and, arguably, quality is an open and taboo secret but also an obvious feature of the Russian-language poetry landscape of the 2000s onward. As mentioned in the preface, things are changing today as a younger generation has come to prominence roughly in 2015 - 2020.

Yet both the before and the after of this passage from communicability to encounter share a commanding motive that is the common concern of poetry of this period. Kirill Medvedev and Anna Sarkisovna Glazova (b. 1973), writing concurrently in the first decade of the 21st century, are both, I would argue, almost univocally concerned with the ethics of language and test them in poetry as its limit case. Yet, where in Medvedev, this becomes a quixotic search for a pure discourse of self, focused on the addresser, that is communicable in its full range of being and discursively active upon others – both politically and interpersonally – for Glazova, as we shall see, "communication" [«коммуникация»] itself becomes identified with "authority" [«власть»] as an obstacle (the greatest and perhaps only obstacle) to the ethics of encounter: a pure address to another, a non-discursive "conversation" [«разговор»] that *touches* – gently, devastatingly, with the help of a third – upon another's own being-in-language, upon the very possibility and infinite divisibility of that being. In her two-page preface to 2013's *For the Shrew* [*Для землеройки*], she writes:

> В стихах открытость даётся легче, хоть стихи и обдумываются труднее. У стихов нет прямой, практической цели, они служат не столько передаче информации, сколько – в самом широком смысле – передаче состояния. Возможно, что основное использование языка в жизни и есть коммуникация, т.е. обмен информацией, но дело в том, что возможности языка гораздо шире, и стихи существуют как раз в том языковом пространстве, в котором у коммуникативной функции нет неоспоримой верховной власти.[249]
>
> [In poetry, openness comes more easily, although poems are harder to think up. Poetry doesn't have a straightforward, practical goal; it serves not so much for the transmission of information as – in a broad sense – for the transmission of a state of being. It is possible that the fundamental use of language in life is communication – that is, exchange by way of information – but the fact is that the possibilities of language are far broader, and poetry exists precisely in that linguistic space wherein the communicative function does not possess undeniable and supreme authority.]

[249] Glazova, Anna. *Dlia zemleiroiki*. Moscow: NLO, 2013. 5. My trans.

What begins here from a Formalist and, more specifically, Jakobsonian commonplace – that poetry does not (primarily) have a practical or communicative function – opens broader and stranger implications for what it *does* do. When Glazova speaks of the "transmission of a state of being" [«передача состояния»], she is using the same idiom of transmissibility applied to radio broadcasts: "given" (-дать) "across" (пере-) long distances, yet of something that "stands" (-стоять) "together" (со-). How can one give across something that stands – and holds – together, like a state of being? There is an inherent power and ephemerality to this concept embedded in its language and the image of the radio wave: its mode of transmission is silent and invisible, almost magical, and seemingly indefinite in its reach; yet it can only be received by those equipped with the intention (the "openness" [«открытость»]) to do so, and it always runs the risk (more or less an inevitability) of being intercepted, corrupted, stolen, or divided as it is received. Information can always be divided and shared. Communications, signals, can be broken down into parts. In fact, their very nature is this brokenness and reassembly. But a "state of being" [«состояние»]?—the fact of its coherence is what gives it meaning, what makes it *untransmissible* in the sense that information is transmissible or at least not by the same linguistic or technological means.

Glazova was arguably the first of her generation to put this question in this way or to reassign poetry the ultimate task not only of addressing and mediating the ethics of language but of doing so on the basis of an *encounter* with, in the words of Paul Celan, a "*wholly other" ["ein ganz Anderes"]*, "*whole*" ["*ganz"*] in the sense of both "entirely*"* and "*in its entirety*" – incommunicable and uncommunicated, alien and yet unalienable. She did so, in large part, under Celan's textual tutelage, learning German (what kind of 'conversational' German, one might ask) by reading him and, in the same period in which she was first publishing poems in Russian,

completing a dissertation at Northwestern University in the United States on Celan's poetic intercourse with Mandel'stam. However, it would be as much a mistake to call Glazova an epigone of Celan as it is to deny his influence on her poetics. What she does, rather, is something difficult to translate – a form of torturous constriction and release inflicted upon her native tongue – that mirrors Celan's relationship with German. In that sense, it is both undeniably *Russian* – inseparable from it – and yet totally new and virtually unprecedented in the canon. Ivan Sokolov, for instance, almost twenty years Glazova's junior and writing in 2013 as a very young man, remarks in a review of *For the Shrew*:

> Как представляется, эти тексты являют собой пример «актуальной поэзии» в высшем смысле этого слова, куда современнее пресных манифестов левой поэзии. Они имеют дело с, возможно, самым болезненным нервным узлом современной культуры — и открываются ему, честные, беззащитные.[250]
>
> [These texts seem to present an example of "*contemporary* poetry" in the highest sense of the word, more modern than the fresh manifestoes of the poetry of the left. They touch perhaps the rawest nerve of modern culture - and open themselves to it, honestly, defenselessly.]

"Honest" and "defenseless"… is this really the *most* "contemporary"? Responding to the same book, Polina Barskova writes, with great precision and sympathy: "Quiet, soft, bitter, stern is the voice of Anna Glazova. Rereading her poems for days, to my surprise, I realized to what an extent they are dialogic – addressed to another, to what an extent everything here is constructed on the possibility and the practice of address." [«Тихий, мягкий, горький, строгий голос Анны Глазовой. Перечитывая днями её стихи, я с удивлением для себя сформулировала, насколько они диалогичны — обращены к другому, насколько всё здесь построено на возможности, практике обращения»].[251]

[250] Sokolov, Ivan. "Vopreki zokonu." Colta.ru: 16 September, 2013.
[251] Barskova, Polina. "Anne Glazovoi." *Vozdukh*, 1/14, 2014. 6.

I can only concur with Sokolov and Barskova, among others.[252] The question for the rest of this chapter, with detours into Celan and Lévinas for the philosophy of the encounter, will be how such address is *practiced* – what are its laws (if it has any), what are its modes, and what are its motives? How does it develop upon the ethics of language already implicit in Skidan's collective history, explicit in Medvedev's discourse of self and other, and *how*, above all, does it take shape – as if *necessarily* – in poetic language?

Creatureliness (*Die Kreatürlichkeit*)

Homo homini lupus est. – Latin Proverb

> [Man is a wolf to man.]

Dieses lmmer-noch des Gedichts kann ja wohl nur in dem Gedicht dessen zu finden sein, der nicht ver gißt, daß er unter dem Neigungswinkel seines Daseins, dem Neigungswinkel seiner Kreatürlichkeit spricht.[253] – Paul Celan, *Der Meridian*, 1960

> [This always-still of the poem can indeed only be found in the work of the poet who does not forget that he speaks under the angle of inclination of his Being, the angle of inclination of his creatureliness.[254] – Paul Celan, *The Meridian*, 1960]

Подозрение в безумии падает на поэта. И люди правы, когда клеймят именем безумца того, чьи речи обращены к бездушным предметам, к природе, а не к живым братьям. И были бы вправе в ужасе отшатнуться от поэта, как от безумного, если бы слово его действительно ни к кому не обращалось. Но это не так.[255]
– Осип Мандельштам, *О собеседнике*, 1914

> [Suspicion of madness falls upon the poet. And people are right to affix the name of madness to one whose speech is addressed to inanimate objects, to nature, and

[252] Poet Stanislav L'vovksii writes, for instance: «Ее стихи – разговор с не умеющими ответить […] Обращаясь речью, слухом и зрением к своим порой едва видимым, бессловесным, часто безгласным и оттого, кажется, бесконечно внимательным собеседникам, Глазова свидетельствует о том, что они нуждаются в представительстве.» ["Her poems are a conversation with those who cannot answer (…) Addressing her voice, hearing, and vision to at times barely visible, wordless, often voiceless and thus, it seems, infinitely attentive interlocutors, Glazova is a witness to their need for representation."] L'vovskii, Stanislav. In "Otzyvy." *Vozdukh*, 1/14, 2014. 26.
[253] Celan, Paul. *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 3. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2000. 197.
[254] Celan, Paul. *The Meridian.* Trans. Pierre Joris. Ed. Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2011. 9.
[255] Mandel'stam, Osip. "O sobesednike." *Pamiatniki literatury.* Moscow-Ausburg: Im Werden, 2004. 3. My trans.

> not to his living brothers. And they would be within their rights to recoil in horror from the poet, as if from a madman, if his word were really not addressed to anyone. But this is not the case. – Osip Mandel'stam, *On the Interlocutor,* 1914]

One of the more pivotal words repeated in Paul Celan's *Meridian* speech is "creature" [Kreatur] or "creatureliness" [Kreatürlichkeit]. In the face of his ambiguous oppositions of other terms such as "poetry" ["die Dichtung"] and "art" ["die Kunst"], "creatureliness" is apt to be overlooked, but it is inserted near the middle of the speech as Celan contemplates the poem's "strong tendency to fall silent" ["eine starke Neigung zum Verstummen"] – its ephemeral, suspended presence between being "already-no-longer" ["Schon-nicht-mehr"] and "always-still" ["Immer-noch"] itself.[256]

Humility in the *remembrance* of "creatureliness" is the condition of possibility – the *sine qua non* – by which the poet (or reader) is equipped to understand this. To adopt Glazova's language of "transmission" [*передача*] and extend it metaphorically, it is the receiving end of the poet's onto-linguistic radio. But in German – even more so, arguably, than in English – this is a strange and ultimately theological choice of words. There are other words for "creature" in German: for instance, "das (Lebe)wesen," which neutrally denotes a "(living) being," a natural entity like a plant or an animal, or "das Geschöpf," the Germanic cognate of "creature," including in a phrase such as: "The poor creature [*das arme Geschöpf*]!" Celan's Latinate word, "*Kreatur,*" is markedly foreign because it derives precisely from Roman Catholicism, wherein it describes not a thing so much as a *relation*: *createdness,* by which a creature is related to a Creator and by which it lives in an essential ontological debt.

[256] Celan, Paul. *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 3. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2000. 197. English: Celan, Paul. *The Meridian.* Trans. Pierre Joris. Ed. Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2011. 8-9.

Why would a poet, "one who makes/creates" (Greek: "ποιητής/poiētēs"), be tasked with remembrance of his or her *createdness* – even "*creatureliness*" [Kreatürlichkeit], which is felt in German as in English with a humility that borders on the abject? Glazova chooses the humble shrew (family *Soricidae*) as the addressee and figurehead of her 2013 book, *For the Shrew* [*Для землеройки*], which I will read here in the most detail; and, in her preface, she speaks of animals («*животные*», literally "[non-human] living beings") as ideal interlocutors – models of a "non-communicative reader" [«некоммуникативный читатель»].[257] Four years later, in a widely published essay titled "Poetry as an Address to an Other" [«Поэзия как обращение к Другому»], Glazova was still making this claim with a persistence and opacity that seems to surpass mere analogy or metaphor.[258] On the one hand, that is, when she speaks about modelling poetic address on address to the creatureliness of animal being(s), she seems to mean it quite literally. On the other hand, a "shrew" [землеройка] as a purely *linguistic* construct has a depth of embedded etymological metaphor in Russian that points, simultaneously and non-exclusively, in the opposite direction. It is impossible to render this metaphor in another tongue, and English in particular shrouds the shrew with the pejorative anthropomorphic connotations that we all know from Shakespeare. But this is, in itself, a paradigmatic example of Glazova's poetics of address: she intends both the shrew, the animal itself, and also the being-in-language from which it is distinct yet inseparable to our understanding. Every word addressed to another is bifurcated and suspended between the Other and the other Other, which is our naming of it and calling to it.

[257] Glazova, Anna. *Dlia zemleiroiki*. Moscow: NLO, 2013. 5-6.
[258] Again, I'm referring to the article "Poetry as an Address to an Other" [«Поэзия как обращение к Другому»] (2017), written for and published on colta.ru, which has a large and not only literary readership. As of this writing, the article has been viewed 13,592 times. In it, Glazova again insists that address to *animals* [животные] is a paradigmatic/limit case of "encounter" in the philosophical sense advanced by Lévinas and the poetic sense advanced by Celan.

Etymologically, the shrew in Russian is composed of two parts: «земле-» ("earth") and «-ройка» ("digger") – as if it were a "hacked in half by a shovel" (cf. «запах лопатой разрубленной землеройки», p. 28),[259] to use an image from the book. The first of these halves («земле-» ["earth"]) is straightforward; the latter («-ройка») is complex. The semantic unit, «-ройка», can further be reduced to «-рой», which comes, at the most superficial level of etymology and meaning, from the verb «рыть», "to dig (up), to burrow, to unearth, to uproot," and describes what a shrew *does*. However, it is also linked both etymologically and mimologically to two nouns: «рыло» ("a muzzle; a mug; an animal-like face") and «рой» ("a swarm [of bees]"), as well as to a second verb by way of «рой», which is «роить» ("to swarm; to gather together"). Thus, when put through poetic translation (or transmission), the humble "shrew" becomes a sort of Janus-metaphor for contradictory meanings that all hold high currency in Glazova's conceptual lexicon. Rather than *For the Shrew*, the title could be 'translated,' breaking down these simultaneities into parts and then reassembling them as equivalences, as *For the Earth-Swarm-Muzzle-Dig-In-Gathering* or some other combination of that sort.

Remarkably, this all could be seen to make sense. Glazova's use of language can indeed be described as a "digging-out"/"digging-in" and "gathering-together" of semantic material, as the example of the shrew itself shows. Bees make appearances in key passages of the book that vacillate between chaos and order – Andrei Bely, too, liked to muse upon the opposition «рой» [*roi*: swarm, chaos] // «строй» [*stroi*: order] – and perhaps most striking is the "creaturely" allusion to the face («рыло» ["muzzle, mug, snout"]). «Рыло», strictly speaking, is the face of an

[259] Glazova, Anna. trans. Anna Khasin. *Relocations: Three Contemporary Russian Women Poets*. Ed. Catherine Ciepiela. Brookline: Zephyr Press, 2013. 75. Typically, translations of Glazova included here are mine unless otherwise noted, in which case, they belong to her preferred translator, Anna Khasin. I defer to Khasin wherever possible.

animal, although figuratively or idiomatically, it is also used to describe a 'naturalized,' animal-like human face – a "mug" – bringing the two closer together.

One of the only images given in Glazova's preface to her book is of the silent face of an animal at attention[260] – that of the "non-communicative reader" [«некоммуникативный читатель»]. It is also the *face* (*le visage*) that informs Lévinas' philosophy of non-discursive encounter,[261] with which Glazova is explicitly familiar and with which she identifies poetic address.[262] A "swarm" of "(animal) faces" – a "creatureliness" that is both *collective* and *given face* – this might in fact touch upon the very thing, halfway between anthropomorphism and naturalization, that would draw Glazova, Celan, and Lévinas together in the presence of "*the third*," the mysterious Other – *entirely Other* – who for Celan or Glazova is present in every poetic address to another, and whom Lévinas calls "all of humanity" as a *linguistic* content,[263] although in this case, reduced to its most silent, *creaturely* form.

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[260] Glazova, Anna. *Dlia zemleiroiki.* Moscow: NLO, 2013. 5-6.

[261] The entire third section of Lévinas' rewriting of ethics and ontology, *Totality and Infinity*, is devoted to the "face" ["le visage"], which he sees as an "irreducible relation" ["une relation irréductible"]. Somewhat analogously to Kant's conception of "the beautiful," it holds his entire philosophical edifice together, aesthetically bridging ethics and ontology around a figure of immense ambiguity and definitional inarticulability.

[262] See Glazova, Anna. "Poeziia kak obrashcheniie k Drugomu." Colta.ru: 29 August, 2017. https://www.colta.ru/articles/literature/15797-poeziya-kak-obraschenie-k-drugomu.

[263] Here, I will cite Lévinas at length from a moment in *Totality and Infinity* that synthesizes and confirms several of the concepts that I have attributed to him above and that I find particularly important to understanding Glazova's poetics of address, given her knowledge of and interest in his philosophy:

> Le langage, comme présence du visage, n'invite pas à la complicité avec l'être préféré, au «je-tu» se suffisant et oublieux de l'univers; il se refuse dans sa franchise à la clandestinité de l'amour où il perd sa franchise et son sens et se mue en rire ou en roucoulement. Le tiers me regarde dans les yeux d'autrui le langage est justice. Non pas qu'il y ait visage d'abord et qu'ensuite l'être qu'il manifeste ou exprime, se soucie de justice. L'épiphanie du visage comme visage, ouvre l'humanité. Le visage dans sa nudité de visage me présente le dénuement du pauvre et de l'étranger; mais cette pauvreté et cet exil qui en appellent à mes pouvoirs, me visent, ne se livrent pas à ces pouvoirs comme des donnés, restent expression de visage . Le pauvre, l'étranger, se présente comme égal. Son égalité dans cette pauvreté essentielle, consiste à se référer au *tiers*, ainsi présent à la rencontre et que, au sein de sa misère, Autrui sert déjà. Il se *joint* à moi. Mais il me joint à lui pour servir, il me commande comme un Maître. Commandement qui ne peut me concerner qu'en tant que je suis maître moi-même, commandement, par conséquent, qui me commande de commander. Le *tu* se pose devant un *nous*. Etre *nous*, ce n'est pas se « bousculer » ou se côtoyer autour d'une tâche commune. La présence du visage l'infini de l'Autre est dénuement, présence du tiers (c'est-à-dire de toute l'humanité qui nous regarde) et commandement qui commande de commander. C'est pourquoi la relation avec autrui ou discours est non seulement la mise en question de ma liberté, l'appel venant de

We must look to Glazova's poetry, however, to see what form this "creatureliness" – and our encounter with it – might take in practice. Surely, silence is part of it, as is the theological value of createdness. In this sense, the "creaturely" might be the Poet's *most* Other, yet also forever present in the *poem* as its most essential attribute, the thing that defines its very borders. For the poet to remember his or her "creatureliness" is thus to fully identify with the poem, the created thing, as address(ee). Glazova writes in *For the Shrew* – not of any creature but perhaps of "creatureliness" itself:

сплелось из остатков струн — что-то
негодное но целое. сырые
доски, тонкий лак, вообще мастерство
достались кому-то, но звук в снегу не для слуха.

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l'Autre pour m'appeler à la responsabilité, non seulement la parole par laquelle je me dépouille de la possession qui m'enserre, en énonçant un monde objectif et commun; mais aussi la prédication, l'exhortation, la parole prophétique. La parole prophétique répond essentiellement à l'épiphanie du visage, double tout discours, non pas comme un discours sur des thèmes moraux, mais comme moment irréductible du discours suscité essentiellement par l'épiphanie du visage en tant qu'il atteste la présence du tiers, de l'humanité tout entière, dans les yeux qui me regardent. (Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l extériorité.* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961. 233-34.)

Language as the presence of the face does not invite complicity with the preferred being, the self-sufficient "I-Thou" forgetful of the universe; in its frankness it refuses the clandestinity of love, where it loses its frankness and meaning and turns into laughter or cooing. The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice. It is not that there first would be the face, and then the being it manifests or expresses would concern himself with justice; the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity. The face in its nakedness as a face presents to me the destitution of the poor one and the stranger; but this poverty and exile which appeal to my powers, address me, do not deliver themselves over to these powers as givens, remain the expression of the face. The poor one, the stranger, presents himself as an equal. His equality within this essential poverty consists in referring to the *third party*, thus present at the encounter, whom in the midst of his destitution the Other already serves. He comes to join me. But he joins me to himself for service; he commands me as a Master. This command can concern me only inasmuch as I am master myself; consequently, this command commands me to command. The *thou* is posited in front of a *we*. To be we is not to "jostle" one another or get together around a common task. The presence of the face, the infinity of the other, is a destituteness, a presence of the third party (that is, of the whole of humanity which looks at us), and a command that commands commanding. This is why the relation with the Other, discourse, is not only the putting in question of my freedom, the appeal coming from the other to call me to responsibility, is not only the speech by which I divest myself of the possession that encircles me by setting forth an objective and common world, but is also sermon, exhortation, the prophetic word. By essence the prophetic word responds to the epiphany of the face, doubles all discourse not as a discourse about moral themes, but as an irreducible movement of a discourse which by essence is aroused by the epiphany of the face inasmuch as it attests the presence of the third party, the whole of humanity, in the eyes that look at me. [Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority.* Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969. 213.]

вихрится увиденное,
тяготит грубый напев,
как из скважины брызжет глубокое,
но оно блестит.

— без права голоса, рот,
замкни, запечатай неясность
того, что точно случается неподалёку.[264]

In Anna Khasin's translation:

woven from the remnants of strings — something
useless but whole. damp
boards, thin lacquer, skill generally
fell to someone, but a sound in the snow is not for hearing.

the seen swirls,
weighs on a rude chant,
the deep jets from a well
but it shimmers.

— having no voice, mouth,
lock, seal the vagueness
of that which certainly happens nearby.[265]

In a more literal translation (DH):

it wove itself from the remnants of strings – something
useless but whole. damp
boards, thin lacquer, master craftsmanship generally
they fell to someone, but a sound in the snow is not for hearing.

what was seen swirls about,
pulls on a crude melody,
as from a bore hole the deep shoots out,
but it glistens.

—without the right to voice, the mouth
shut [it], seal up the ambiguity
of that which certainly happens nearby.

[264] Glazova, Anna. *Dlia zemleiroiki*. Moscow: NLO, 2013. 13.
[265] Glazova, Anna. trans. Anna Khasin. *Relocations: Three Contemporary Russian Women Poets*. Ed. Catherine Ciepiela. Brookline: Zephyr Press, 2013. 63.

Despite my sincere deference to Khasin's skill as a translator, I include my own more literal version here due to several key words and phrases that I believe determine the specific tension of the text: «мастерство» ["mastery, specifically that of a craftsman or artist," line 3], «скважин[а]» ["a bore hole; a well that has been drilled, specifically using manmade industrial technology," line 7], and «без *права* голоса» (my italics) ["without a/the *right* to voice," line 9]. This is primarily because all of this reads as a cumulative indictment of man's voice, man's 'rights,' man's mastery, and man's way of 'digging' for "the deep" as opposed to that of, for instance, the shrew. By the time we arrive at the last stanza of three lines, we come to the second-person familiar imperative (a command to "thou") that often concludes Glazova's parabolic address. It could be addressed to a man or a woman or it could be addressed to an animal – "a non-communicative reader" – but in either case it demands this non-communication as the very currency of creaturely understanding. Without "rights," without law, without voice, certainly without a drill for digging, Glazova presents a model of encounter in which "ambiguity" is "sealed" in proximity – in which one *touches* upon the Other who is always "nearby" and in silence. *One shares a destiny with that which is nearby*, that which is encountered and touched upon, rather than merely "heard," "seen," or reported. It is unsurprising that in interviews, Glazova has mentioned that when she writes, she does so by hand with her eyes closed – in her words, «наощупь» ["[guessing] *by touch/feel*"].

On the other side of this groped-for "creatureliness," however, is what Celan calls "the Medusa's head" ["das Medusenhaupt"] and the "automatons" ["die Automaten"][266] – a reified

[266] These are two complementary figures – like a Scylla and Charybdis – that stand, in Celan's speech, for the potential failures and violence of "art" [die Kunst], as ambiguously opposed to "poetry" [die Dichtung]. On the one hand, the "Medusa's head" designates art's attempt to seize upon life, grasping at and conflating itself with the Real as if to turn it into stone, while, on the other, the "automatons" seem to represent an excess of the Symbolic in which life is discarded or disavowed entirely. See Celan, Paul. *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 3. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2000. They will be considered in more detail below.

language that is also non-communicative but performative in a different and intrinsically violent way. Here we lapse back into the discursive understanding of self and other in language that we encountered in Medvedev. To analyze it, I would like to turn against the shrew and into a cycle that punctuates Glazova's book with immanent critique and alterity to its design: as a theological account of *man's* law, *man's* frailty, and the wages of death written into the discursive act, which for Glazova always seems to entail a transfer of power and a displacement of presence – a theft from the "entirely Other" that lapses into violence precisely when it removes man from his own "creatureliness" and transforms him into a law- (*logos*-) giver.

The Law

> Ведь поэзия есть сознание своей правоты. Горе тому, кто утратил это сознание.[267] – Осип Мандельштам, *О собеседнике,* 1914
>
> > [Indeed, poetry is an awareness of one's being right. Woe to him who has lost that awareness. – Osip Mandel'stam, *On the Interlocutor,* 1914]
>
> Le tu se pose devant un nous.[268] – Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et infini,* 1961
>
> > [The Thou is posited in front of a we.[269] – Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 1961]
>
> «Кто *мы?, /* Подошло! Подошло!»[270] – Анна Глазова, стихи посвященные Полине Барсковой, 2013
>
> > ["Who is *we*?, / That's it! That's it!" – Anna Glazova, poem to Polina Barskova, 2013]

[267] Mandel'stam, Osip. "O sobesednike." *Pamiatniki literatury.* Moscow-Ausburg: Im Werden, 2004. 4.
[268] Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l extériorité.* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961. 234.
[269] Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority.* Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969. 213.
[270] Glazova, Anna. *Dlia zemleiroiki.* Moscow: NLO, 2013. 10.

The cycle "Laws" [«Законы»] is unlike any other in *For the Shrew*, including formally. It is composed of eight parts,[271] which follow sequentially in a kind of allegorical narrative – i.e., *a communication* that avails itself of logic, syntax, argument, and structure. Critics and other 'communicative' readers seem drawn to this text precisely for that reason[272]: it satisfies (or ostensibly *promises* to satisfy) a hermeneutic compulsion towards order and meaning that, in all of us, Glazova suggests, borders on the worship of death. We want laws for her poetics of encounter – what it means, to whom it is addressed, how it operates in language, and how it is meant to be read. "Laws," of course, does not ultimately make good on any of these promises of closure, but it does point backward to an origin beyond its own comprehension, opening with an Edenic/Promethean scene of original theft – the theft of naming and judgment – and then proposing a set of laws by which to counter it. In Glazova's account of this act, however, the Fall and the Law (the *logos*, specifically of Creation) are identical or at least simultaneous, written into each other as absence and death; it is the word (*logos*), moreover, that constitutes both the Fall and the Law and by which that death is meted out, transmitted, and carried. The poem is itself, necessarily, an instrument of this scheme: a product of absence, both lawful and fallen, it is death-bearing. Its origin and end are beyond its horizon, and its relation to them is one of lawful guilt/debt.

The full text of "Laws" is available in the Appendix. Below is the first section – that of the theft and the name, the genesis of the Fall and the Law:

[271] These are reduced to five, presumably with the consent of the author, in the bilingual Russian/English translation published in *Relocations* (2013).
[272] Ivan Sokolov's review of Glazova's book (cited above), also focuses on this cycle and deconstructing its performance of coherence, as do many American responses to the book. Sokolov is, of course, aware that this is exactly what the poem cycle invites and, in a sense, tempts out of its reader.

1

украл вину у виновного, провинился,
чтобы на краденом месте вырос,
на пустом месте, вырос закон.

украл что-то,
бесхозное,
и назвал: «вина»
или соврал, что украл;
тем и виноват, что невинен.

сделал, чтобы зачлось его имя,
чтобы из имени выросло дерево и из дерева дом –
чтобы для кражи был дом.

In a literal translation [DH]:

1.

[he] stole guilt from the guilty, fell into guilt,
so that in the stolen place there would grow,
in the empty place, there would grow a law.

[he] stole something,
unattended,
and named it: “guilt”
or [he] lied about stealing;
and is guilty for being guiltless.

[he] did it so that his name might be credited,
so that from the name there might grow a tree and from the tree a home –
so that there might be a home for stealing.

This “he” is anonymous. Due to the ambiguity of the past tense and the omission of pronouns in Russian, it could also be “one,” and, until line 9 – “[he] did it so that *his* [его, third-person possessive male pronoun] name would count” – it could even be read as “I” or “you” because no other pronoun is given in order to clarify the identity of the (male) actor. The repeated word “guilt” appears as a noun, “guilt” [«вина»]; a verb, “to fall into guilt”

[«провиниться»]; and several adjectives: "guilty" [«виновный» ("*always* guilty"), «виноват» ("guilty *in this case*")], and "guiltless" [«невинен»]. However, the question of "guilt" – the *value* of guilt – seems to be posed between two counterbalanced groups of other verbs: those of economy ("to steal" [«украсть»]; "to be credited; to count [for/towards something]" [«зачесться»]), on the one hand, and those of natural genesis ("to grow [up]" [«вырасти»]) on the other.

Despite their conceptual opposition, however, these two modes of growth and change – the economic and the natural – are fused precisely by the transgression being performed: the bracketed economic actor "[he]" *grows* a "law" out of emptiness in the act of his theft, and, Adamically, he names it "guilt," himself becoming the name/law-giver. He does so for economic/symbolic reasons: so that his name ("guilt") might "be credited" or "count" for something. The fetish of the name in fact seems to be the ultimate motive for his action. As ends are turned backward into means, "[he]" steals guilt so that there may be guilt so that he may be guilty of stealing, *so that he may name it "guilt*." What he has stolen, what is precious to him, is the naming itself – the giving of the law, the passing of judgment, the use of naming – by which one is always made guilty, as the first line presupposes: "[he] stole guilt from the guilty [виновный – '*ever* guilty']." One could chart this movement of linguistic ontogenesis as a circle: absence → violence → name/law → violence → absence, all of which is compressed by parallelism and equivalence into Glazova's sense of "guilt" as symbolic *debt*.

The moment of Edenic Fall or Promethean theft, for Glazova, is thus an unending cycle written into the economy of the symbolic. The *passage* into the symbolic – the moment of transgression into naming and law – covers its own tracks, and it does so as the displacement of presence (namely, death). As a result, other provisional laws are proffered, because one

necessarily leads to another like word to word or violent act to violent act. In all, we encounter "natural law" [«природный закон»] (section 3, see Appendix), the "law of contradiction" [«закон противоречия»] (section 6), and its negation: the "law" of "everything is the same / so everything is confused with everything else" [«если закон что всё равно / всё со всем смешано»] (section 5).[273]

It is only after the speaker, now in an unmarked "I," abandons discourse in section 6 and returns to the embodiment of the creaturely – "then [I] will agree to a compact / with small movements / of [your/my/the] hands and face" [«тогда буду соглашаться на сговор / с маленькими движениями / рук и лица»] – that the poem makes a turn away from the law and towards simultaneous identification with and address to its "non-communicative reader." In the final two sections of the cycle, the use of law is foregone entirely: exchanged for a "first rule" [«первое правило» – a rule of *practice* rather than of theory]. The third-person shifts into an intimate second-person address/command to "thou," which, however, is posited in the presence of a "we," whether it be the speaker speaking to herself, to God, or to a collective, creaturely humanity:

[273]See Sokolov, Ivan. "Vopreki zokonu." Colta.ru: 16 September, 2013. Sokolov parses the laws as follows:

> Начинается цикл (как и стихотворение Одена, кстати) с настойчивой попытки достучаться до сути того, что́ являет собой закон. Предлагаются закон-1 (модель «вина — возмездие»: украл вину у виновного <…> / <…> чтобы <…> / <…> вырос закон), закон-2 (модель «имя вещи — порядок вещей»: из звука извлечь / целый закон, ключ к каждому звуку), закон-3 (модель «природный закон»: со светом остынет взгляд), потом возникнут еще закон что <…> все со всем смешано и закон противоречия. Но каждый из этих законов последовательно разрушается.
>
> The cycle begins (like Auden's poem, incidentally) with a persistent attempt to grasp at the essence of what the law is. It proposes: Law-1 (on the model 'guilt – retribution': "stole the guilt from the guilty <...> / <...> so that <...> / <...> there would grow a law"); Law-2 (on the model of 'the name of a thing – the order of things': "to derive from a sound / a whole law, the key to every sound"); and Law-3 (on the model of 'natural law': "with light will cool the look"), then finally another law that "everything is mixed with everything else" and the law of contradiction. But each of these laws is consistently destroyed.

7

когда под луной зацветает подлунок
и растёт,
яркие звёзды его морочат,
ему их мгновенный склад –
распорядок вещей.

а когда в поворот
подброшен как дитя камень,
это приблудный сон,

первое правило: не запомни.[274]

In a literal translation [DH]:

7

when under the moon blooms a moonflower [lit. under-moon-let]
and grows,
bright stars beguile it;
to it, their instantaneous disposition is
an ordering of things.

but[/and] when into the wending
is tossed off [abandoned] like a child a stone,
it is a bastard dream,

first rule: don't remember.

If section 1 of "Laws" is a theological allegory (for the Fall, the Law), then section 7 displaces it with another allegory that is primarily meta-poetic. There are at least three biographical poets present in section 7 who are figured through metonymy: Mandel'stam, Celan, and Glazova herself. The first line – "when under the moon blooms a moonflower" – refers to

[274] Glazova, Anna. *Dlia zemleiroiki*. Moscow: NLO, 2013. 20.

the first lines of the last poem of Glazova's 2008 book, *Loop. Unhalved* [*Петля. Невполовину*][275]:

под подсолнечником
то есть дважды под солнцем
так мы живы

In Anna Khasin's translation:

in the sunflower—
that is: in the sun and in flower—
so are we alive

In a literal translation [DH]:

under undersunlet [In Russian, a "sunflower" is an "under-sun-let (dim.)"]
that is twice under sun
so we [are] alive

It is one of Glazova's most recognizable images, and it is therefore likely that when it is repeated and transformed here as "the moonflower [«подлунок», lit. "under-moon-let"], the poet herself – her own poetic practice and being – is the ultimate frame of reference. Similarly, I would argue that we meta-poetically encounter Celan *qua* poet in "into the wending [turn]" [в поворот] (line 6), which I translate as such because of its association with the "*Atemwende*" or "breathturn," Celan's technical term for the conceptual movement of poetic language. Finally, Mandel'stam comes forward in the iconic "stone" [«камень»] (line 7), the title of the repeatedly revised and republished volume of poems that marked the first (and only publishable) phase of his career.

[275] Poems from this book, including this one, were also translated by Anna Khasin and published in English as *Twice Under the Sun* (Exeter: Shearsman Books Ltd, 2008). The figure of the "loop" [«петля»] makes insistent returns in Glazova's poetry, as does "halving" or variations on the words for "half" or "in half" [«половина», «вполовину»], which in Russian contain – although arbitrarily – the word "*guilt*" [«вина»].

We may then read the first stanza/sentence of section 7 against the second as follows, substituting poets for their metonymic referents: The poet Glazova ("the moonflower"; "the under-moon-let"), belongs under the moon but is "beguile[d]" by stars that seem to it an "ordering of things" (first stanza/sentence; lines 1-5). Its fate is related by the ambiguous conjunction "but/and" [«а»] (line 6) to a "bastard dream" (line 8), which is (like) a "stone" (Mandel'stam) that has been abandoned, like an unwanted baby, at the doorstep of the "wending" (Celan) (second stanza; lines 6-8). The "first rule" of this convoluted genealogy is "don't remember" (line 9).

Don't remember. Isn't this injunction the opposite of law, guilt, and debt with which the poem began? Nietzsche, the great prophet of an ethic to counter *ressentiment* and *Schuld* (Ger. "guilt/debt") called forgetfulness its divine requirement.[276] Certainly, here, memory and "ordering" become a source of "beguile[ment]," both *leading towards* ("and" [«а»], line 6) and *interrupted by* ("but" [«а»], line 6) a poetically encountered "bastard dream" [«приблудный сон», line 8], which makes it impossible to say what the value of that dream is. Good or bad? Apollonian (a dream) or Dionysian (a divine bastard)? In Celan's terms: is it "art" ["die Kunst"] or is it "poetry" ["die Dichtung"]? The only way forward, the first and only rule for passage out of the law that dictates these oppositions is *forgetting*, in which they are subsumed in each other and renewed as raw life, raw being – in an abyss that, when called, does not call back.

Prayer [«Молитва»]: The Abyss

> Ich bin, auch hier, in Ihrer Gegenwart, diesen Weg gegangen. Es war ein Kreis. Die Kunst, also auch das Medusenhaupt, der Mechanismus, die Automaten, das unheimliche und so schwer zu unterscheidende, letzten Endes vielleicht doch nur eine Fremde - die Kunst lebt fort.[277] – Paul Celan, *Der Meridian*, 1960

[276] See, for example, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so wise," section 2.
[277] Celan, Paul. *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 3. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2000. 200.

> [I took this route, here too, in your presence. It was a circle. Art—thus also the Medusa's head, the mechanism, the automatons, the uncanny so difficult to separate out and which in the final analysis is perhaps only *one* strangeness—art lives on. – Paul Celan, *The Meridian*, 1960][278]

8
молитва

сделай так
чтобы был человеку волк – волк
чтобы под кожей над сердцем
шли от стыда красные пятна когда на тебя смотрят.[279]

8
prayer

make it so
that to man a wolf is a wolf
that under the skin above the heart
[there would] break out from shame red spots when they look upon you.

--Anna Glazova, final section of "Laws"

The final section of "Laws," titled "prayer," returns the cycle to its beginning – or rather, past its beginning to its origin. Against every anthropomorphic law, name, and discursive act, Glazova addresses a prayer both to and *for* the creaturely. "Make it so" [«Сделай так»], a vulgarization of "Amen" [Heb. "so be it"] begins this prayer in a mode of willed transformation grafted over surrender. The Latin proverb "man is wolf to man" [*Homo homini lupus est*] is naturalized, its metaphor un-knotted and straightened into tautology: "to a man a wolf is a wolf" [«человеку волк – волк»]. "Guilt" [«вина»] is replaced with "shame" [«стыд»], which can only be expressed in the body, as red spots above the heart. The same "you/thee" [«тебя»] to whom

[278] Celan, Paul. *The Meridian.* Trans. Pierre Joris. Ed. Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2011. 11.
[279] Glazova, Anna. *Dlia zemleiroiki*. Moscow: NLO, 2013. 20.

the "amen" is addressed is present as an object – "when they look upon you" [«когда на тебя смотрят»] – but who is "they"?

I would argue that if "Laws" began with an Edenic scene of the theft of the word/law, this is the moment of man's nakedness before God – a nakedness that *preceded* the theft but was only recognized afterwards. Yet Glazova suggests that to return to Eden, that nakedness must be *forgotten.* To surrender to "creatureliness" – to re-naturalize the symbolic as raw life, raw being solicited by the encounter – is the only way through, and on the other side of that creatureliness is a mute abyss in which all of our laws and words are only spots that break out as shame under our skin. Raw life, after all, is hardly utopian; and the "entirely Other" is not a fraternal companion (more wolf than dog). There is a pessimistic value to the encounter in Glazova that is both poetic and cosmic and that one would not find, for instance, in Lévinas' philosophy of ethics. It is not merely a giving face but also a *disgorging* of the primal negativity that the symbolic has swallowed, and it returns one to an originary abyss: an Orphic darkness from which both violence (transgression) and law first emerge.

Paul Celan, whom I will quote here for the last time, suggests this much in *The Meridian* speech. "The meridian" itself is a metaphor for crossing over unlike concepts and values that return one – through an ancient darkness – to where one began. What was "art" ('bad') can also be "poetry" ('good') – what was dead (the "Medusa's head" of raw, reified life) or deadened (the "automatons" of the symbolic – see Skidan) can be brought back as life; but the cost of this transformation is passage through the abyss itself. He writes:

> Dichtung: das kann eine Atemwende bedeuten. Wer weiß, vielleicht legt die Dichtung den Weg - auch den Weg der Kunst - um einer solchen Atemwende willen zurück? Vielleicht gelingt es ihr, da das Fremde, also der Abgrund *und* das Medusenhaupt, der Abgrund und die Automaten, ja in einer Richtung zu liegen scheint, - vielleicht gelingt es ihr hier, zwischen Fremd und Fremd zu unterscheiden, vielleicht schrumpft gerade hier

> das Medusenhaupt, vielleicht versagen gerade hier die Automaten -für diesen einmaligen kurzen Augenblick? Vielleicht wird hier, mit dem Ich - mit dem *hier* und *solcherart* freigesetzten befremdeten Ich, - vielleicht wird hier noch ein Anderes frei?[280]
>
> Poetry: that can mean an *Atemwende*, a breathturn. Who knows, perhaps poetry travels this route—also the route of art—for the sake of such a breathturn? Perhaps it will succeed, as the strange, I mean the abyss *and* the Medusa's head, the abyss and the automatons, seem to lie in one direction—perhaps it is exactly here that the Medusa's head shrinks, perhaps it is exactly here that the automatons break down—for this single short moment? Perhaps here, with the I—with the estranged I set free *here* and *in this manner*—perhaps here a further Other is set free?[281]

Perhaps. But the abyss, the source of this negative freedom, cannot be *maintained* – only passed through, *turned through* by the *Atemwende*. It is felt only in and as transformation. The Medusa's head and the automatons will rectify themselves and live on. Glazova's prayer – "make it so" [«сделай так»] – is a call to this abyss past all maintenance and naming. She comes closer than any poet read here thus far to a poetry of *pure negativity* – negative even in its solicitation of and pretense to articulate that negativity. She takes the symbolic to its very horizon at which, unable to pass, it loosens the bounds of all grammaticality in search of its "entirely Other" and withers under its own weight. It is difficult even to write of this process and practice other than 'poetically.' The very faith it requires is not a happy one but a dark surrender to unknowing – gropingly guessed at as if "by touch" [«наощупь»] and bound to its language as if by proximity. As Glazova writes in one of her earliest poems (from 1999), and on which I will end:

> Я знаю знак.
> Протяни руку -
> здесь мел.

[280] Celan, Paul. *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 3. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2000. 195-6.
[281] Celan, Paul. *The Meridian.* Trans. Pierre Joris. Ed. Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2011. 7.

Этот знак мне знаком.
Мел готов;
стена ждет:

рука дрогнула.[282]

I know the mark.
Extend your hand –
here is the chalk.

This mark is known* to me. *[lit., “marked, markable”]
The chalk is ready;
the wall waits:

the hand shuddered.

[282] From the cycle, “Chicago” [«Чикаго»]. First published in Vavilon. No. 6 (22), Moscow: ARGO-RISK, 1999.

FOURTH PRACTICE (2002 – Present): 'NIKA SKANDIAKA'

A Language 'on Trial/in Process'

Isn't it about time you unfractured your accent with ideas it was intended to pronounce?	Не пора ли наречию зарубцеваться мыслями, которые оно создано произносить?
I felt a forest under my skin.	Я ощутил под кожей лес.
Sahoc, ocahs, csoah.	Схао, ахсо, саох.
Use your voice.	*Голосом*.
Chaos.[283]	Хаос.[284]
–Randolph Healy, *Arbor Vitae*, 1997	–Ника Скандиака, *Arbor Vitae* (перев.), 2006

This book has had a certain hidden teleology or a progressive story that it has been telling about post-Soviet poetry of which this last practice – 'Nika Skandiaka' (b. 1978) – is the culminating example. All of these discussions of 'aesthetic ideology,' of 'truth' (aletheiac [Prigov/Dragomoshchenko], allegorical [Skidan], parrhesiastic [Medvedev], or semi-mystical [Glazova]), and of the discourses of history and power have been leading to a primary consideration, which is the poem's ethical promise.

However, I would argue with a clear conscience that this is a course chosen for me by the material, particularly if focalized upon the first post-Soviet Russian generation of the 2000s – 2010s. Early 21st century Russian-language poetry was extraordinarily diffuse and diverse, but

[283] Healy, Randolph. *Arbor Vitae*. Wicklow, Ireland: Wild Honey Press, 1997.
[284] Skandiaka, Nika. [12/7/2007]. Moscow: NLO, 2007.

almost every poet, including those that I have considered here, seems to take some version of this question – the ethics of language – as his or her object. In retrospect, I would argue, it was the birthmark of the post-Soviet moment.

By ethics, I do not intend a discursive (normative, moral, or ideological) content, nor even any notion of the subject (the do-er) or 'the Good' (the deed). I simply intend an ethical function of language that poetry seems uniquely positioned to practice and question and that each poet considered thus far in Part II has variously attempted to perform, represent, or even arrest, subordinate, and master – reifying the ethical process of the poem, as it were, and transforming it into an object of art. Julia Kristeva, from whom I take both terminology and inspiration here, writes of such an ethics in language:

> Abandoned by formalism, transformed into a moralist humanism by idealist philosophy and vulgar sociologism, the question ["concerning the ethical function of art"] cannot be asked again except from a perspective that takes into account the process/trial of the subject in language or, more generally, in meaning. "Ethics" should be understood here to mean the negativizing of narcissism within a *practice* […] The ethical cannot be stated, instead it is practiced to the point of loss, and the text is one of the most accomplished examples of such a practice.[285]

I would argue that such a *practice* has been attempted by each one of these poets and only subsequently subordinated to the goals of their art, where it often succumbs to failure. Skidan's allegorical approach arrests the mobility of being in process/on trial (French: *en procès*), deadening and restraining it in the verbal image. Its verdict is decided from the beginning, and its edges, intended to be sharp, therefore feel rather dull. Its "narcissism" – in the technical sense of its inability to supersede its own discursive insularity and emblematics of

[285] Again, Kristeva's thinking was hugely influential upon this book, and ethics is the point at which her account of poetic language breaks off. See Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language.* Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia UP, 1984. 232-34.

meaning – is vivisected, displayed, and sewn back up for the reader in an attempt at virtuosity rather than "negativized" or opened in the slightest. However, it cannot be denied that the object of his poetics is precisely to assign an ethical, social, and, above all, *historical* meaning to the subject-in-language reified and elevated as 'the Poet': to give the Poet a *project* involving others on a historical scale. Somewhat similarly, Medvedev's discursive approach to subverting the language of power ultimately collapses upon itself under the weight of its own 'conscience': its tendency to become *disembodied* and caught up in others' discourse, which causes it to hover above the scene and speak, like a Dostoevskiian hero, only in and through others about itself. Hysterically mapped onto all discursive positions and unable to separate itself from any of them, its truth about itself becomes a panoramic and paranoid narrative of symbolic violence that retraces the pathways of power in language back to itself, where it finds a lack that again propels it outward. Glazova, finally, in staging an ethics of *encounter* in poetic language, theatricalizes its most primordial and gnomic function: that of religious address, of prayer. It drifts on the surface of a totality that it dares not penetrate, and, in addressing its other, it simultaneously retreats in devout terror, approaching a liturgical horizon at which language can only point towards silence – as if it were this total silence (attentive silence, God's silence) that governed it.

I would argue that *all of these practices* are attempts at an "ethical" practice as Kristeva describes it above; yet all of them stray beyond "practice" towards the formalization of 'the work,' whereby ethics as process gets lost or subsumed in an aesthetic function. Arguably, in Skandiaka, the latter *is not the case.* As we shall see, Skandiaka presents a form of poetic language so much "in practice," "in process," and "on trial" that it could hardly be called an object (of art) at all. In Kristeva's terms, it is a "text [in] practice." Returning us back to what makes Prigov so unique, it presents, as it were, simply a *how*; and in tracing its development, we

may wish retrace some of the arguments made from our consideration of Prigov and late Soviet conceptualism up to this point in order to see how Skandiaka might overcome and bring closure to them.

On Technics (τέχναι) and Praxis (πρᾶξις)

> [на (красной [ознаменовался?])/ {[сем]заброшенной {[ритм](ткацкой)}[сем] [на закате]}[ритм] {фабрике/ на канале из обратных косых и нулей,} воздухе?][286]
>
> —Ника Скандиака, *[12/7/2007]*, 2007
>
> [on (the red [was it commemorated?])/ {[sem]abandoned {[rhythm](textile)}[sem] [at sunset]}[rhythm] {factory/ on the channel made of backslashes and zeros,} the air?]
>
> —Nika Skandiaka, *[12/7/2007]*, 2007

Above is an excerpt from one the untitled poems in Skandiaka's 'untitled' book *[12/4/2007]*.[287] Before attempting to make sense of it, however, I would like to dwell on how much it seems both to invite and to resist 'close reading' of the hermeneutic or 'deciphering' sort. To what end? What does this tell us about reading/writing? Skidan, for instance, might at first seem daunting to read – he invokes an entire intellectual autobiography in a single poem and aggressively demands that the reader keep up – but his 'code' is conservative, allegorical; its contents, however commonplace or obscure, are ascertainable because they are subordinated to a consistent and dominant logic of communication. Skandiaka is different. The code itself seems

[286] Skandiaka, Nika. [12/7/2007]. Moscow: NLO, 2007. 47. My trans.
[287] On its cover, the book is titled (in brackets) *[12/4/2007]*; on the copywrite page, however, it is titled *[12/7/2007]* – a difference of exactly three months (following Russian conventions for numerical dating). Most of the poems in the book itself are similarly titled in brackets with dates presumably corresponding to the date of their composition. One could reasonably assume that the title of the book refers either to its date of completion or date of publication – or both, accounting for the apparent error and ambiguity of its title(s), which make the book, like its contents, difficult to catalogue and keep fixed in one place.

open, not least of all to our own grammatical or structural intervention. It reads – if it "reads" normatively at all – like an unfinalized fragment staged not between different and competing discourses/ideologies (dialogism) or semantic contents (polysemy) but between different *grammars* (poly-coding), inviting in foreign codes and structural interpretations in order to make sense.

This is where we must turn backwards to Prigov to consider a poetics of *method* – even method without/in-search-of content – in order to ask what such writing performs. It was our argument that Prigov – as the method [ДАП] – functions as a *techne* (τέχνη) that presents itself as nature (φύσις). One simply introduces verbal and ideological content into the machine (the τέχνη), and it is homogenized, re-coded, and transfigured into a discourse with the ontological pretensions of nature. But the machine – although (or because) its technique is to make itself transparent and to disguise itself as a technic – *is stable*. It has *one* method – *one* performative trick – and that trick is repeated indefinitely, acquiring formal variation only through its constant consumption of new material. Ultimately, this consumption is also how it manages to conceal itself: it disguises itself behind the *productive totality, real and potential* of what it processes and re-codes.

Skandiaka seems to turn this principle on its head. Her code(s) – the τέχναι (plural) of her operation – are brought *as* τέχναι to center of aesthetic attention, but they are left open, relativized, pastiched. They may acquire meaning in combination with *external* modes of reading, but there is no prior code or sense of a potential productive totality to which these poems, lines, or words belong. Moreover, whereas Prigov's machine or the figure behind it, [ДАП], must offer itself up as a *total* context for its content (whether under the signature "[ДАП]" or other totalizing figures such as "Moscow" or "the Militsaner"), Skandiaka's practice

relies upon almost *zero* context as well as *zero* performative presence to support itself. It simply and open-endedly *produces* – it reads/writes.

Since her texts are presented as a pure practice, moreover, Skandiaka's only real conceit is that her authorship *does not and cannot exist*. One of the most important aspects of her poetics is her closely guarded anonymity, and she is almost militant in her rejection of the authorial frame. She offers no statements of intent (no "prefaces" [«предуведомления»] in the manner of Prigov), no performance of 'the Poet,' and even her pseudonym, "Skandiaka" is based, among other things,[288] upon a name given by Linaeus to a genus of bird that *may or may not exist* other than as a lexical remnant of an outdated taxonomy.[289] Is *nyctea scandiaca* a name designating a genus of *beings* (the snowy owl) or simply a name like any other and, what's more, a scientifically inaccurate one—denaturalized and disposable, implicitly like the function of authorship itself? The snowy owl, of course, exists, but is *nyctea scandiaca* a "snowy owl"? Skandiaka exists, but is she "Skandiaka"? Does it matter? The ambiguity is far-reaching: without performative context (authorship, intention) to marshal presence, the pretensions of the code to closure, indeed on the level of being, fall apart and become frayed traces of a fictive and heterogenous history. More importantly, it makes perfect sense for Skandiaka to obscure the

[288] "Skandiaka" is also reminiscent, of course, of "Skidan" (almost anagrammatically) as well as the Russian word «скандал»/*skandal*, meaning "scandal" in the broad sense beloved by 19th century novelists like Dostoevsky: a social disruption that brings values into question and is usually precipitated by the transgression of a taboo.
[289] "Nika Skandiaka" comes most directly from a species of bird, *Nyctea scandiaca* (also *Bubo scandiacus, Strix scandiaca,* and *Strix nyctea*), or the snowy owl, which was identified by Linnaeus in his 1758 edition of *Systema Naturae.* Fittingly, like Skandiaka the person, the owl's range spans both the Old and New World of the arctic Northern Hemisphere. More fittingly, as its many names would suggest, there is broad debate to this day as to what it should be called and whether it in fact exists distinctly at all at a biological level. Until recently, the snowy owl was regarded as the sole member of the genus *Nyctea scandiaca*, but mtDNA cytochrome b sequence data shows that it is very closely related to the horned owls in the genus *Bubo*, and the species is now often considered inclusive with that genus. Some authorities debate this classification, still preferring *Nyctea*; others are motivated to retain the separate genus on the grounds of osteological distinctions (bone structure). I am forever grateful to Ilya Vinitsky at Princeton for discovering this connection during a writing seminar with his trademark curiosity and attention to detail.

frame of her authorship, as it is just one more code – and traditionally a very significant one – that can be denaturalized and left open in order to allow words (like beings) to 'speak among themselves.'

Such challenges to closure also belong, intrinsically, I would argue, to the new technicality of the digital age, in which every code can be re-written, and which the conceptualists both prefigured and could not survive. Prigov, like other conceptualists, famously relied upon the use of technical props – the typewriter, for instance – to allegorize a certain type of mechanicalized (re-)*production* of codes; but, like the keys on the typewriter, they were *set.* Skandiaka's practice reflects a new and fluid technicality in which the (digital) technics themselves are unstable and constantly adapting in real time to meet the demands of their content. Machines speak to each other in a complex multilingualism that is always in the process of evolving, and they are, it turns out, more powerful as readers than as writers. It is their ability to aggregate, curate, and reassemble semiotic content rather than manufacture it that dictates everything from the politics to the social relationships to the sexuality that invades the semiosphere of our everyday lives. They *read* (for) us, algorithmically reassembling our digital presence for us, and it is the primacy of machine reading that underwrites everything from the relativization of truth value (algorithms do not read for truth) to the subordination of aesthetic functions to disseminative ones.

The historical irony (or perhaps not an irony at all) is that conceptualist production presented itself as just such a method of 'prior reading' and dissemination, but even Prigov – even an *army* of typewriting Prigovs – could not read-write fast enough to keep up with the everyday ideological/informational flow of today's technology. And it is not only a matter of speed but of a certain vision of language corresponding to the technic at hand. Conceptualism as

an *aesthetic mode* secretly and fundamentally relies upon the stability (the ontologization) of both its technics and its ideological/discursive objects (e.g., official speech), and this is nowhere so apparent as in the fact that the primary index of conceptualist technics is *spatial*, even monumental: again, the typewriter is a good example, as is its implementation in projects like the "Addresses of Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov to the People" [«Обращения Дмитрия Александровича Пригова к Народу»] (1996), in which, leaning heavily on the experiments of Monastyrskii and the "Collective Actions" group, Prigov pasted his brief, typewritten "addresses" all over the streets of Moscow.[290] Today, the ideological content of these "addresses" (a kind of meme), if not externally reinforced by the constant aggregation of more (machine) readers/readings in real time, would lose the force of context essential to the performance of parody and become either passe or incomprehensible or simply irretrievable – just a piece of paper or its digital equivalent, an error message on a forgotten webpage. Thus, conceptualist practices, while in a sense anticipating the *effects* of machine reading upon discursive value (in that they, too, presented a mode of 're-coding' as a form of production), are also pre-digital and insensitive to the *technics* and *temporality* of digitality in every way.

The *semiotic time* of the digital age is felt as flux and instability, and if we interrogate her practice further, we likewise notice that when new 'content' is introduced to Skandiaka's 'machine,' rather than being assimilated or 'processed,' it seems to activate the structural and technical fluidity – the syntagmatic 'in-process-ness' – of the machine itself. *New words introduce new grammars*, disrupting syntax and continuity: in the example above, each new element is separated by a bracket or notation signifying its own discrete mode of legibility in (or out of) sequence with the others. Its grammatical time is evolving faster than language as

[290] See Prigov, Dmitrii. *Obrashcheniia Dmitriia Aleksandrovicha Prigova k Narodu.* Moscow: I.Ts. Garant, 1996.

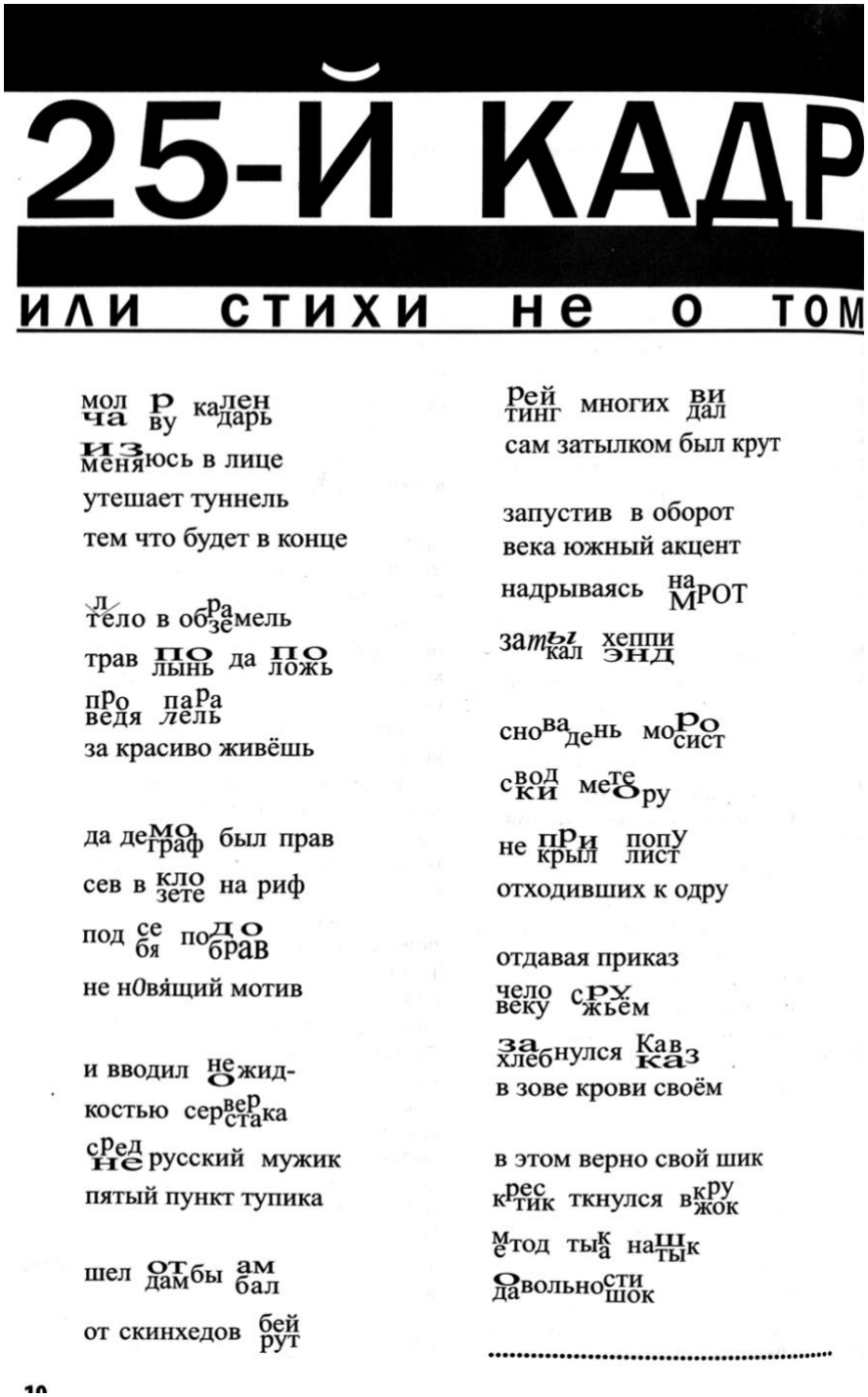
semantic content can keep up. It would be ridiculous to imagine similarly employing the essentially *sculptural* technique of typewriting in order to parody or subvert the evolving language of AI – not least because the former is a mode of production and the latter is a mode of mechanical *reception*. They employ different operating assumptions about the *temporality* and *mutability* of the code(s) at their disposal: one is fixed and totalizing (like the conceptualist vison of language), the other is evolving and open-ended (like machine reading and information processing).

Caught between Soviet conceptualism and post-Soviet digitality, Russian poetry of the 1990s-2010s passed through a uniquely fascinating and pathological relationship with the internet revolution with which it historically coincides – one that, for reasons both historical and cultural, was most often characterized by utopian embrace and naïve denial of its own modes of production. More so than any other world poetry of which I am aware, Russian-language poetry of the early digital age was published online in the Soviet tradition of *samizdat* by poets who were often expert programmers themselves: at first on sites like livejournal and vavilon.ru in the 2000s and, by the 2010s, almost exclusively on social media (Facebook and VKontakte, its Russian-language counterpart). The two realms of thought, however – the literary and the digital/medial – were kept separate. Incredibly, the hangover of conceptualism has been so great, as has technological and political optimism in the 'free' discursive space of the internet, that, in Russia, until very recently in the late 2010s – 2020s,[291] many of the poets who have represented themselves as the most forward-thinking and radicalized – aesthetically and politically – have never questioned the digital technics that they use as a medium and remain the most entrenched in the *technical* conservatism of conceptualist methods, already three to four decades old, usually

[291] Skandiaka, in contrast, grew up primarily in the United States and currently resides in the UK.

sculptural or theatrical, and unable to cope with or question the dissemination of language in a digital environment. Even young and media-savvy groups like the Laboratory of Poetic Actionism [*Лаборатория Поэтического Акционизма*], affiliated with *Translit,* tend to represent *the effects* of digitality discursively and polemically, if at all, rather than interrogate its means of production and dissemination (machine reading, AI, etc.), which are foreign to them precisely because they do not belong to the closed aesthetic or discursive codes of the sort that conceptualism is equipped to deconstruct.

The defining features of such neo-conceptualist techniques are 1) an overwhelming reliance on spatiality and a 'closed code' 2) performative play with the ontologization of both medium and content ("shimmering" [«мерцание»]), which a 'closed code' and the fixed background of spatiality reenforces, and 3) an almost inescapable tendency to require the supplementation of self-exegesis or some other auto-discursive material, which reflects the idea that the technics of language are indeed closed such that they can be *mastered,* domesticated, and maintained, even in or *with the help of* a digital environment. Below are two examples of such poetry from the Spring 2011 issue (#9) of *Translit*, which was appropriately titled *The Question of Technics* [*Вопрос о технике*]:



25-Й КАДР

ИЛИ СТИХИ НЕ О ТОМ

мол р кален
ча ву кадарь
изменяюсь в лице
утешает туннель
тем что будет в конце

л
тело в обрамель
трав по лынь да по ложь
про пара
ведя лель
за красиво живёшь

да демо граф был прав
сев в кло зете на риф
под се бя по до брав
не новящий мотив

и вводил не жид-
костью сер вер ста ка
сред не русский мужик
пятый пункт тупика

шел от дам бы ам бал
от скинхедов бей рут

рей тинг многих ви дал
сам затылком был крут

запустив в оборот
века южный акцент
надрываясь на МРОТ
затыкал хеппи энд

сно ва де нь мо ро сист
свод ки ме те ору
не при крыл попу лист
отходивших к одру

отдавая приказ
чело веку сру жьём
за хлеб нулся Кав каз
в зове крови своём

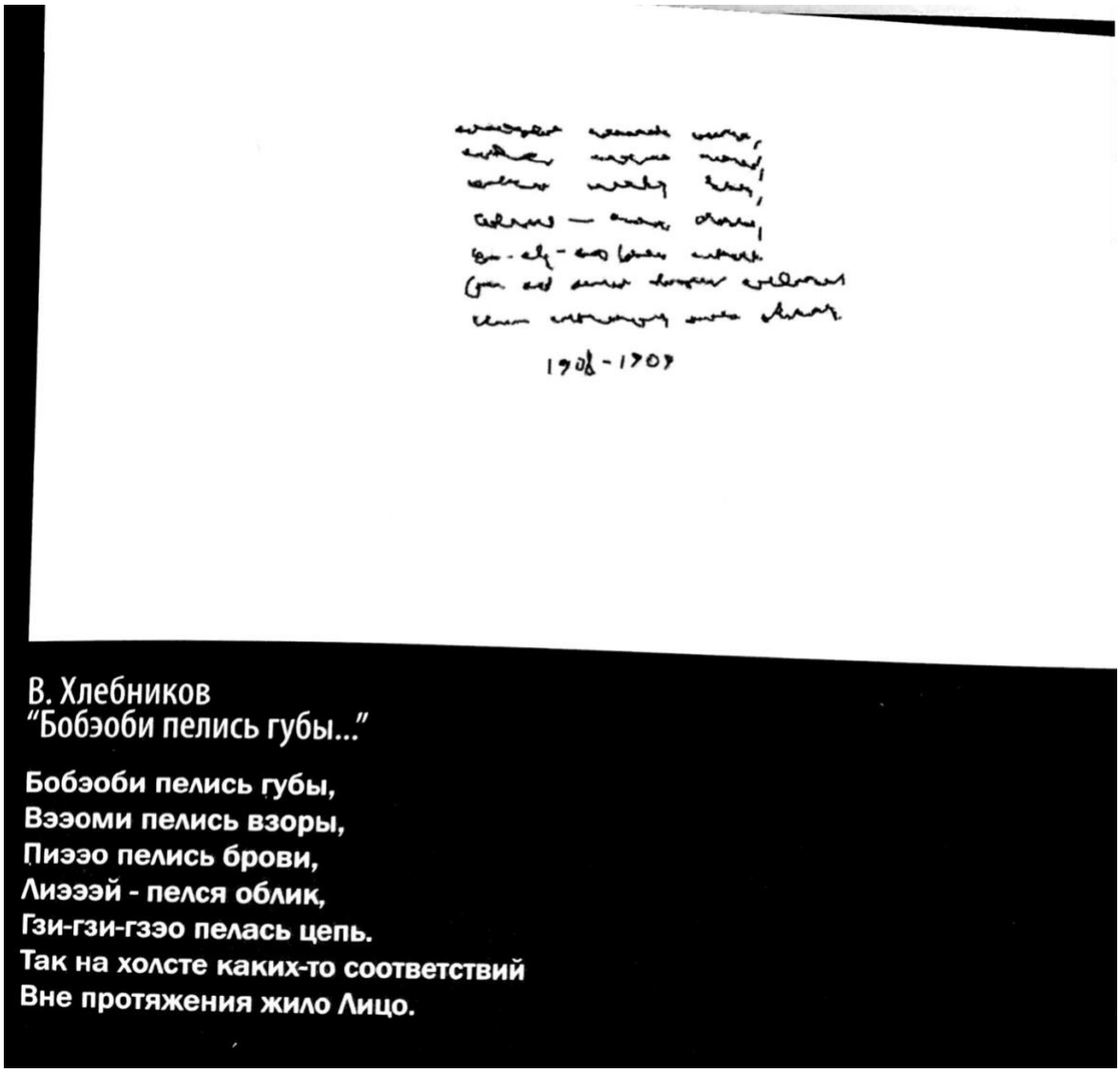
в этом верно свой шик
крес тик ткнулся вкру жок
метод тык а наш тык
да вольно сти шок

.....

10

Illustration 11. Aleksandr Gornon (b. 1946). Except from "The 25th Frame, or Poems Not About That/Anything" [«25-й кадр, или Стихи не о том»] (2011). Originally published in *Translit,* Issue 9, 2011. [292]

[292] Gornon, Aleksandr. *25-й кадр, или Стихи не о том.* In *Translit*. Issue #9. Ed. Pavel Arsen'ev. St. Petersburg: 2011.



В. Хлебников
"Бобэоби пелись губы..."

Бобэоби пелись губы,
Вээоми пелись взоры,
Пиээо пелись брови,
Лиэээй - пелся облик,
Гзи-гзи-гзэо пелась цепь.
Так на холсте каких-то соответствий
Вне протяжения жило Лицо.

Illustration 12. Iulii Il'iushchenko (b. 1985) and Ekaterina Samigulina (b. 1989). Excerpt from "Half-Life of the Mark" [«Период полураспада знака»] (2011). Originally published in *Translit,* Issue 9, 2011. [293]

[293]Il'iushchenko, Iulii and Ekaterina Samigulina. *Период полураспада знака*. In *Translit*. Issue #9. Ed. Pavel Arsen'ev. St. Petersburg: 2011.

The two examples illustrated by the figures are, in fact, *so* graphic and spatial that they can only be represented *as "figures"* akin to works of visual art. The author of the first is a contemporary of Prigov, born in 1946; the co-authors of the second were born in the late 1980s, setting them two generations apart. These works, however, were published side-by-side in the same year (2011), and although their methods are somewhat different, the assumptions behind their construction are almost indistinguishable and could be described as a form of closed "translation." On the one hand, we encounter Aleksandr Gornon's intentionally illegible or hetero-legible "polyphonosemantic" [*полифоносемантический*] paragrams (*Figure 1*)[294], which essentially graphically translate (and thereby negate) the semantic and grammatical ambiguity of something like Glazova's etymologically embedded metaphor and wordplay. On the other, we have self-described "visual translations" of Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky, Vsevolod Nekrasov, etc. (*Figure 2*),[295] which render the marks of words (presumably manuscripts) illegible and purely graphic, indeed *pointing* at the intervention of temporality upon the code – the series is called "The Half-Life of the Mark" – but then suppressing it, closing it, spatially *showing/telling* the performed simultaneity of a 'simulacrum' and an 'original' ("which is which?" it asks and winks, "shimmering") rather than *doing/performing* the mark's titular mutability in time. We, in turn, might ask what is the point – what readerly or writerly *process* is involved – in an illegibility that we are *told* is illegible. These 'texts' read themselves and must on their own terms in order to signify anything – trapped, as it were, in a circle revolving around the technics at their disposal.

Now, compare the fragment above from Skandiaka (2007):

[на (красной [ознаменовался?])/ {[сем]заброшенной

[294] *Translit*. Issue #9. Ed. Pavel Arsen'ev. St. Petersburg: 2011. 10-19.
[295] Ibid. 28-31, 38-39.

{ритм(ткацкой)}сем [на закате]}ритм {фабрике/ на канале
из обратных косых и нулей,} воздухе?][296]

[on (the red [was it commemorated?])/ {semabandoned
{rhythm(textile)}sem [at sunset]}rhythm {factory/ on the channel
made of backslashes and zeros,} the air?]

Skandiaka's fragment does not propose, much less *explains or ontologizes*, any such technique of composition or of signification, although clearly one or several are present. Moreover, it barely seems to notice its reader at all. It doesn't *tell* us anything. If it does read itself, it does so privately in a way that is not simultaneously addressed to us but only overheard. To read it is to eavesdrop upon it, like stumbling upon a conversation between a schizophrenic and him- or herself: we "know" (i.e., *trust*) that there is a code in order for it to be a language in a "poem," but we aren't privy to it prior to reading; moreover, in order to encounter it, we must, by analogy, first call into question our own process of reading and of understanding what both language and poetry are. It forces us to abandon the stability of our technics (our codes) and reapproach them as evolving practices, drawing us into the *writing* of the text prior to and in order to read it. Indeed, as one reads Skandiaka – or failing to do so, 'writes' with her – it becomes increasingly clear that the codes and technics governing her texts, while present, are *de-ontologized and de-naturalized* to the point that, like generative grammars, they are *only discoverable in practice* (πρᾶξις).

Ultimately, I would in fact describe the divergence between conceptualist poetics and a poet like Skandiaka as constituting two extreme ends of a spectrum that lies between a poetry of technique/technics (τέχνη) and a poetry of practice/praxis (πρᾶξις), in which meaning is primarily constructed or re-constructible by the one or the other. What distinguishes them most

[296] Skandiaka, Nika. [12/7/2007]. Moscow: NLO, 2007. 47.

fundamentally is their *temporality*, which also dictates whether they treat language as a closed- or an open-code system. The conceptualist understanding of poetic language is ontologized, total, fixed – it dictates practice, and, theoretically, no practice of it is necessary in order for it to function; one merely 'translates' new material into it. In contrast, Skandiaka's language translates and aggregates its own rules of meaning *in time* (recall that her titles are only bracketed *dates* of composition), which is not only open but *can only be perceived or reproduced in/as a practice*.

Finally, it must be reiterated that the favored *a priori* technic (τέχνη) of the conceptualist strategy and the favored *a posteriori* practice/*praxis* (πρᾶξις) of a poet like Skandiaka in this case imitate the very different technical and discursive environments in and against which these texts were produced. The mother tongue of the former is the monumentalism of tightly regulated pre-digital (and pre-democratic) official speech; the latter reflects the present dominance of programming and machine reading: a 'multilingual' (e.g., Python, PHP, Java), networked set of open-ended and evolving codes and algorithms that read information and each other and re-write themselves accordingly in real time *before* such a thing as 'meaning' (which is secondary) even comes to bear on whatever it is that they 'translate'/disseminate into digital presence in the form of a Google search result or a Facebook feed. The latter is not necessarily less coercive or restrictive than the former, as we are all finding out, but what they say about language and how it communicates is very different.

What I am calling the poetry of technics and the poetry of practice are also not limited to these radical contexts (the authoritarianism of the Soviet State or the very different totalization of the internet), nor do their goals need to be mutually exclusive – Skandiaka and the examples of neo-conceptualism above equally solicit the function of the code, front and center – but their

methods and orientations distinctly are. In reverse, this was, in fact, the point of pairing Prigov (a poet of technics) and Dragomoschenko (a poet of practice, I would argue) in Part I: to demonstrate the ideological coherence and continuity of late Soviet unofficial poetry despite wildly different poetic methods and approaches to process, code, and signification.

Skandiaka's poetics of practice – her 'in-practice-' and 'in-process-ness' – is not only extreme, however, but was relatively unique to the Russian-language poetry of the 2000s – 2010s, which was still completely saturated in the bias of conceptualism towards τέχνη and poetic language as theory and technique. It also far exceeds even Dragomoshchenko's poetics of practice in its willingness to be misread and misunderstood (for failure and error on the part of the code is always a part of praxis). The openness of her codes, the unfinalizability of her grammars and meanings could, on the one hand, be read as a deconstructive critique of technical and discursive authority and control as such *or* as a simple acknowledgment of and surrender to a chaotic semiotic world in which maintaining such coherence and control is, for the individual, 'multilingual' human subject at any moment in time, rendered doubly impossible by the digital technics of language's new disseminative environment. In a sense, these are the two ways of reading Skandiaka that are reflected in her comically Rorschach-like Russian reception[297]: when her book was published by NLO in 2007, readers tended to see her either as the internalized resistance to a digital future (a 21st century conceptualist, mimetically imitating digital codes and

[297] I have alluded to some examples below. The responses to Skandiaka's book, published in *Vozdukh* No 1 (2007), range from rapturous comparisons to Pushkin's genius and the nymph Echo (Oleg Dark) to cryptic ontolinguistic allegory (Glazova) to the affirmation that she is a high modernist after Mandelstam who is verging on a total work of art (Artemii Magun). What unites all of them and should draw our attention is the genuine fervor of their responses, which read (at times intentionally) like love letters to the unknown poet.

communicating in robot-speak[298]) or as the *most* human and *most* 'poetic' (even Romantic and Pushkinian, says Oleg Dark[299]) response to a digitalized world.

Both could be true; or neither. I would side with the latter. Conceptualism and romanticism might indeed be written into each other, but I believe that what Skandiaka is doing with an extreme form of *practice*-oriented writing is something not altogether new (as we shall see) but altogether in excess of these other models. Rather than *demanding* an ontology to support it like conceptualism or romanticism, it almost inevitably dissolves a priori ordering strategies back into process, experience, and agnosticism.

Below, I will read from *[12/4/2007]* – or attempt a mode of reading 'in practice,' which draws one into the *writing* of the text – in order to ask perhaps the only question available to a poetry of practice, which is what it *does.*

'Reading' Skandiaka Permutationally: Translation, Multilingualism, and Code

> The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original. This is a feature of translation which basically differentiates it from the poet's work, because the effort of the latter is never directed at the language as such, at its totality, but solely and immediately at specific linguistic and contextual aspects.[300] – Walter Benjamin

To ask into the practice of a poem is to ask how it is materially constructed. Anna Glazova, who has a particularly close and sympathetic relationship with Skandiaka, the fictive

[298] This is an admittedly unfair caricature of Aleksei Parshchikov's response to Skandiaka, which dwells on her connection to "cyberspace" [«киберпространство»]. What makes his argument inadequate to my thinking, however, is that he seems to believe that Skandiaka is simply modelling her discourse on "cyberspace" language (whatever that is) in order to give it a re-*valuation*, which would be very in line with conceptualist techniques. I would argue that *valuation* is precisely what this poetry shuns and that, very much contrary to conceptualism, it has no such ideological content – Parshchikov sees this valuation as re-humanizing and after Benjamin, calls it "aura." See Parshchikov, Aleksei. "Vozvrashchenie aury?" *NLO*, No. 82 (2006).
[299] See Dark, Oleg. "Nike Skandiake." *Vozdukh*, No. 1 (2007).
[300] Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." Trans. Harry Zohn. *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books (Harcourt), 1968. 76.

poet, focuses on the grammaticality of her work and attaches primary importance to her use or misuse of syntax. In a brief and cryptic review of *[12/7/2007]*, Glazova begins with a sort of parabolic tale of ontogenesis from language, not unlike those found in her own poetry (e.g., "Laws"); but here, attention is given not to meaning or interpretation (which in Glazova's work evolves into symbolic categories like "silence," "guilt/debt," "theft/exchange," etc.) but rather to the function of forms of order, such as time, sequence, and measure. She writes:

> В начале было слово, а потом сразу падеж. Когда слово пало, то глагол «упасть» стал временем, и так начался разговор. Разговор склеивается из сущности и действия, и этот клей – синтаксис. Строя предложение, мы строим мир. Соединяя подлежащее и сказуемое, мы всякий раз не только называем субъект и не только характеризуем его действие, но осуществляем синтез субстанции и времени. Высказывание Ницше о том, что метафизика не будет завершена, пока существует грамматика, следует понимать не как призыв перестать следовать правилам правописания, а как утверждение, что от порядка в предложении зависит и строй всего сущего. Пока идёт разговор, мир существует.[301]

> In the beginning was the word and then immediately the case [падеж – the "grammatical case," from the same root as «падать» "to fall" – DH]. When the word fell, the verb "fall" became time, and so the conversation began. Conversation is glued together from essence and action, and that glue is syntax. As we build a sentence, we build a world. By connecting a subject and a predicate, not only do we name the subject and characterize its action but we synthesize substance and time. Nietzsche's statement that metaphysics will not be complete as long as grammar exists should not be understood as a call to stop following the rules of spelling but as a statement that the order of a sentence also determines the structure of all that is. As long as there is conversation, the world exists.

This is heady stuff, even for Glazova. But it is not hyperbole on her part to call syntax the defining structural feature of poetry's world-building, despite the more 'poetic' reputation of other rhetorical features such as metaphor, rhyme, or rhythm. Even brilliant minds like Tynianov have been wrongly led to define the structure of poetry according to the metaphysical seduction of a more *meaningful* (signifying) formalism, as when he proposed in *Проблема*

[301] Glazova, Anna. "Katataksis: kommentarii k odnomy predlozheniu." *Rets*, No. 46 (August, 2007). My trans.

стихотворного языка [*The Problem of Verse Language*] (1924) that the specificity of poetic language is constructed around the conflict between semantics and verse rhythms, which tension he called the "the tightness of the verse order" [«теснота стихового ряда»].[302] Mikhail Gasparov subsequently and convincingly proved, however, that by "the tightness of the verse order," Tynianov was, in fact, simply speaking about syntax,[303] although he likely chafed at the 'prosaism' of naming it such.

Glazova's subsequent claim then, is that Skandiaka is writing not in syntax, which brings together, or parataxis, which equalizes, or hypotaxis, which hierarchizes, but in "catataxis" [«кататаксис», lit. "not-order"] – an order in which "the turn and return of grammatical structures reigns, in which parts of speech are connected in more than one possible way" [властвует поворот, оборот грамматических структур, в котором части речи соединяются друг с другом более, чем одним возможным образом].[304] This argument is a bold one, painting Skandiaka as something of a poetic John Cage. It is not altogether off-base either. The example Glazova cites from *[12/7/2007]* is typical of the book and of Skandiaka's work from this period:

> но то, в ковчеге, доверие к тебе, что ты ничем
> не станешь, а станешь;
> но то, вначале, доверие к тебе, что ты никем / никому
> не станешь, а станешь – всем[305]

> but that, in the ark, the trust in you, that nothing you
> wouldn't become, and you will become;

[302] See Tynianov, Iurii. *Problema stikhotvornogo iazyka.* Leningrad: Akademia (1924).
[303] See Gasparov, Mikhail. "'Tesnota stikhovogo riada': Semantika i sintaksis." In *Analysieren als Deuten Wolf Schmid zum 60. Geburtstag*. Ed. Lazar Fleishman, Christine Gölz und Aage A. Hansen-Löve. Hamburg: Hamburg UP, 2004. 85 – 95.
[304] Glazova, Anna. "Katataksis: kommentarii k odnomy predlozheniu." *Rets,* No. 46 (August, 2007).
[305] Skandiaka, Nika. "[26/2/2007]." *[12/7/2007]*. Moscow: NLO, 2007. 59.

but that, in the beginning, the trust in you, that no one / to no one
you wouldn't become, and you will become – everything

Translation actually softens the blow of this sentence, because, as Glazova suggests, its force lies in the multiple grammatical readings that it simultaneously affirms, in which "parts of speech are connected in more than one possible way." The anaphoric repetition «не станешь, а станешь» – "you would/will not become, and/but you would/will become" – could be read as a conditional that lacks a preceding clause, as in, "you say/said you won't/wouldn't become" [«ты говоришь/сказал, что не станешь»] or as a statement of future fact: "you *will* [not] become." What "you" will or will not, would or would not "become" is unclear – either "nothing" [«ничем»] or "no one" [«никем»] or "[something] to/for no one" [«никому»] or «всем», which could mean either "everything" or "[something] to/for everyone." Translation resolves these difficulties by making choices between alternate grammatical pathways that the original text neither affirms nor denies but simply leaves open. To understand the text 'correctly,' even in Russian, one would have to hold multiple 'translations' – multiple grammatical readings – in mind simultaneously, or, at least, to use Glazova's metaphor, remind oneself that these other "worlds," built by other grammatical sentences, exist.

What I will argue in the subsequent pages is that holding in mind multiple grammars and multiple 'translations' is precisely the way to understand Skandiaka's writing as a practice as well as an ethic, and the few things we know about her biography on public record support this. More can be deduced about Skandiaka by those who look closely,[306] but under her pen name, what we have is that she was born in Moscow in 1978 and raised in Flint, Michigan – how she

[306] I have a fairly certain idea of who Skandiaka is, but I feel strongly that it is in the interests of her poetics not to speculate openly upon her identity and rather to submit to the fiction and performative device of her anonymity.

got there, she doesn't say – she spent time in New York as a young woman, presumably at university, and currently resides in the UK (Scotland), where she has taken a special interest in translating obscure languages and poetries, such as Scots Gaelic, as well as English, into Russian; finally, there is some evidence that she works or has worked as a computer programmer.[307]

The fact that someone as programmatically anonymous as Skandiaka – she sends editors her texts by conventional ('snail') mail in a blank envelope without a return address[308] – allows these bits of data to repeatedly enter into the context of her authorship tells us something. First, it emphasizes 'foreignness,' multilingualism, and multiculturalism, locating her in a distinctive group of mostly female poets of the same generation that includes Anna Glazova (German and American English), Polina Barskova (American English), and Lida Yusupova (Canadian English), among others. Second, her choices as a translator as well as her work as a programmer tell us something very peculiar about her relationship to code(s), linguistic and otherwise. In translating William Soutar's (1898 – 1943) "The Tryst," for example, Skandiaka is working with an original that is *itself* already bilingual or idiomatically between languages, with couplets such

[307] Here is the biography given by Skandiaka to publishers that appears almost word-for-word wherever her work is found, with minor variations only to the list of publications and interests:

Родилась в 1978 г. в Москве. Выросла в США, в последнее время живет в Эдинбурге (Великобритания). Кроме стихотворений, публиковала в Интернете переводы русской поэзии (Ян Сатуновский, Семен Липкин, Вера Павлова, Владимир Гандельсман, Кирилл Медведев и др.) на английский и англоязычной поэзии на русский. Стихи публиковались в Интернет-журнале "TextOnly", альманахе "Вавилон", журнале "REFLECT... КУАДУСЕШЩТ" (Чикаго), антологиях "Девять измерений", "Освобожденный Улисс".

Born in 1978 in Moscow. Grew up in the US, currently resides in Edinburgh (UK). Other than poems, she has published online translations of Russian poetry (Jan Satunovskii, Semen Lipkin, Vera Pavlova, Vladimir Gandel'sman, Kirill Medvedev, and others) into English and English-language poetry into Russian. Her poems appear on the internet journals "Text Only," "Vavilon," "REFLECT… КУАДУСЕШЩТ" (Chicago), and the anthologies *Nine Measures* and *Ulysses Freed.*

[308] This, at least, is the story told by Dmitry Kuz'min, her earliest publisher and an enthusiastic supporter.

as: “And wi’ her ‘a my simmer days / Like they had never been”[309]; and in translating Anne Frater’s (b. 1967) “Aig an Fhaing,” which is written entirely in Scots Gaelic, she has a text that has already been translated by Frater into English as if by necessity but that indeed revolves around the question of this necessity, ending in the lines: “poll dubh bog air mo bhotannan / ‘s mo chanan fhin nam bheul” [“soft black mud on my wellies / and my own language on my tongue”].[310] Strangely, Skandiaka renders them in a highly literal, idiomatically neutral, and ‘readable’ Russian – the lines above are translated «А с ней – всех летних дней моих, / Как не бывало их.»[311] (Soutar) and «жижа, черная, мягкая, на моих сапогах, / во рту у меня – моя речь»[312] (Frater), respectively – and offers almost no unique linguistic context for them, smoothing over the roughness of the originals.

Finally, Randolph Healy’s *Arbor Vitae*, the translation of which occupies the entire last half of Skandiaka’s *[12/7/07]*, is itself a more or less explicit allegory for the frailty and necessity of ‘natural’ and ‘native’ codes. Long, arduous, and not at all a famous or popular poem like those listed above, Healy’s *Arbor Vitae* depicts the traumatic suppression of sign language in 20th century Irish schools for the deaf, called the “Oralism” movement.[313] It digs into analogues such as Morse code and computer code in order to relativize the ‘naturalness’ of any particular language, including an oral/spoken one, yet also to demonstrate the natural and native necessity of one’s ‘own’ language to human experience, the suppression of which can be devastating.

[309] Skandiaka translates this line: «А с ней – всех летних дней моих, / Как не бывало их.». See Skandiaka’s untitled translations on vekperevoda.com. https://www.vekperevoda.com/1950/skandiaka.htm
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Ibid.
[313] See the poet’s explanation of the poem on his personal website: http://www.wildhoneypress.com/BOOKS/AV.html. The historical and personal background to the poem is also provided in a single long footnote to the text.

One can infer from both her selection of materials and *how* she translates them – into a literalistic, plain-spoken Russian – that Skandiaka, on the one hand, values the preservation of neglected and suppressed linguistic traditions in their material specificity and yet, on the other, sees and works with them as de-naturalized and relativized codes that are immanently 'translatable' in a communicative and 'readerly' form. There is a certain Janus-faced view of language as a code here, for which perhaps only her lived experience as a multilingual and multicultural product of childhood migration can fully account. Lived experience, it implies, can only be experienced "with my own language on my tongue," to quote Frater in a tongue not entirely her own, but it is the *translatability* of that experience that makes it 'language.'

Such translation is, however, inevitably practiced at a loss, and, in her own poetic work, Skandiaka reminds us of this constantly. Again, *[12/7/07]* is structured not so much serially as *permutationally* – each 'poem'/fragment is given a date in brackets and occasionally a place or source of composition, but the internal frame or interpretive context for the poem (theme, speaker, place, fictive performativity, etc.) is left blank. The group of poems marked «[27/11/05 – 1/9/2006]», which I will read in some detail below, begins with a parodic nod to the practice of translation. It reads, this time citing a source, the popular online translator, multitran.ru:

□□□□□□[СВЕРКАНИЕ РАКЕТОБОКОГО МУЛЬТИТРАНА]

радужная форель (Salmo gairdneri)

зоол. rainbow trout радужная форель
зоол. rainbow trout форель радужная (Salmo irideus)
биол. rainbow trout радужная форель (Salmo gairdneri)

теперь / мы / можем говорить об отражении

животных

In a literal translation (DH):

□□□□□□[THE BRILLIANCE OF ROCKET-POWERED MULTITRAN]

rainbow trout (Salmo gairdneri)

zoo. радужная форель rainbow trout
zoo. радужная форель trout, rainbow (Salmo irideus)
bio. радужная форель rainbow trout (Salmo gairdneri)

now / we / can talk about the reflection

of animals[314]

The bracketed 'title,' which is extremely rare in this book, is both difficult to translate and could probably best be interpreted as a bilingual (Russian/English) pun. In Russian, the first word, «сверкание» is what a gemstone or fresh snow or even glitter does: it "shines / shimmers / radiates," not usually from within but in the form of a reflection. If we translate it into English as "brilliance," with the connotation "intelligence; creative wit," then we are 'in on' the joke of the poem: Multitran's ability to translate something as specific and supposedly indexical as the name of a species can be riddled with errors and curiosities. The first four lines of the poem are taken verbatim from Multitran's search results.[315] At first glance, it is an ordinary reference-book repetition of the same translation. If we compare the parenthetical Latin of the second and third terms, however, we realize that, whether by the arbitrariness of Russian word order or the whim of the aggregate translator(s), "rainbow trout" results in two different *species*: «форель радужная (Salmo irideus)» and «радужная форель (Salmo gairdneri)».[316] Reflecting upon the

[314] Skandiaka, Nika. *[12/7/2007]*. Moscow: NLO, 2007. 42.
[315] See multitran.ru.
[316] Both are incidentally also outdated, and both of these subspecies of "rainbow trout" were moved in 1989 from the salmo to the oncorhynchus species.

"brilliance" of this reflection in both syntax and translation, the poet remarks: "now / we / can talk about the reflection // of animals" [«теперь / мы / можем говорить об отражении // животных»], carefully parsing the syntactical elements of the sentence for the reader. The implication of the joke – that translation, as well as "reflection" (literally, in syntax), can alter states of being, even biologically – is a serious and seriously iconoclastic one that carries a subtext of violence for the "animals" and for us. However, it is also simply a treatment of everyday language that forces us to encounter the frailty and mutability of the code on honest terms – *particularly* in a digital environment whose meanings are constructed by the impossible simultaneity of millions of *paroles* aggregated in the form of a real-time collective discourse that regulates definition, naming, and meaning (like, to various degrees, Multitran, Google, or Wikipedia).

As Artemii Magun notes, it is typical of Skandiaka to treat Russian itself as a foreign language.[317] She frequently produces a sequence of words connected only by the apparent guesswork of phonetic resemblance/repetition – e.g., «не голуби, а облюбовали»[318]; «отцы / горцы // комната / мама»[319] – as one would when 'speaking in tongues' (glossolalia) or allows syntax and repetition to fold grammar and semantics in on each other: for example, «табличк, а таблчк» (untranslatable, something like: "tablet, 's tablets")[320] or «что ты ничем / не станешь, а станешь» (see above).[321] The case structure of the Russian language is attenuated and at times broken: the book begins "[in-]bats / [in-]flying [in-]penumbras" [нетопырях / летучих пенумбрах][322]; and an inordinate amount of importance is attributed to the function of those

[317] See Magun, Artemii. "Novye imena sovremennoi poezii: Nika Skandiaka." *NLO*, No. 82, 2006.
[318] Skandiaka, Nika. *[12/7/2007]*. Moscow: NLO, 2007. 27
[319] Ibid., 31.
[320] Ibid., 56. Magun also considers this example.
[321] Ibid., 59. Glazova also considers this example.
[322] Ibid., 21.

partial and incomplete linguistic markers – including deictics, prepositions, pronouns, and grammatical cases – that attempt to organize the field of language into a collective and successive *whole*.

If one were to assign a dominant trope to Skandiaka's poetry, it would thus certainly have to be grammatical parallelism or anaphora[323] – that is, the repetition of a word or sound to mark a sequence, or, in linguistics, a marker for a grammatical system of reference as such[324] – which, importantly, is also uniquely translatable, even into a non-linguistic code, as it has no semantic value and, as J. Weare notes in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetic Terms,* "neither results from nor signifies any poetic stricture."[325] Anaphora is, in effect, simply an indefinite principle of *rhythm* alluding to but not necessarily enforcing grammaticality, systematicity, and order.

What Skandiaka will seem to suggest, incredibly, is that rhythm, parallelism, and anaphora *can* spontaneously engender meanings and form codes in dialogue with the recipient – particularly when liberated from conventional grammaticality or a unitary code – and that, in fact, this might be the most basic and irreducible way in which all grammaticality, meaning, and language passes into being from a prior material heterogeneity. Further on in «[27/11/05 – 1/9/2006]», which begins with the Multitran bit cited above, we encounter the following 'diptych,' which I wager can – whether it must is a different question – be read not only through the now familiar trope of Russian/English bilingualism but also through complex code-switching

[323] Interestingly, one of the least productive but anecdotally most brilliant Russian Formalists, Osip Brik, believed parallelism to be the defining and most primordial feature of poetry, and he devoted most of the early years of his career to its study in what would become the book *Rhythm and Syntax* [*Ритм и синтаксис*] (Novyi lef: 1927). Although Brik never fully developed his ideas, the study provides an interesting counterpoint to Tynianov's theory of rhythm and semantics in *The Problem of Verse Language* and supports Mikhail Gasparov's revision of the latter.
[324] "Anaphora." J. Weare. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics.* Fourth Edition. Ed. Roland Greene. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012. 50.
[325] Ibid.

between multiple grammars, not all of which appear to be strictly linguistic at all (see below).

The original and my attempt at a literal translation are given below:

i

отличная композиция (взрыв)
[на (красной [ознаменовался?])/ {[сем]заброшенной
{[ритм](ткацкой)}[сем] [на закате]}[ритм] {фабрике/ на канале
из обратных косых и нулей,} воздухе?]
на овдовелом ивами канале, на
овдовелом ивами
(листьями?)
канале,

(взрыв)

[слева,] на пустующей внешними/ ивами [величинами?
признаками?]рике на /
[здешними?]овдовевшем

ивами канале из костей

ii

человечная оценка [(взрыв)]

отличная [(взрыв)] композиция [(взрыв)]

море

из обратных косых и нулей (истлевшее
[хорошо]
уцелевает) ([быстро]
успеваешь больше чем медленно) {более [(взрыв
[{дольше
носится}/{носится/ дольше}])]}/быстрее
[коренным образом] что-то
понемаешь или сделать/ {[всё,]
убегаю}/{[

и это
всегда}/{][326]

[326] Skandiaka, Nika. *[12/7/2007]*. Moscow: NLO, 2007. 47-8.

In translation:

i

excellent composition (bang)
[on (the red [was it commemorated?])/ {^{sem}abandoned
{^{rhythm}(textile)}^{sem} [at sunset]}^{rhythm} {factory/ on the channel
made of backslashes and zeros,} the air?]
on the widowly by willows channel, on the
widowly by willows
(by leaves?)
channel,

(bang)

[from left,] on the vacated by-outsiders / by-willows [by-magnitudes?
by-in-significations?]riverica on /
[by-locals?] the widowed

by willows channel made of bones

ii

human estimation [(bang)]

excellent [(bang)] composition [(bang)]

the sea

made of backslashes and zeros (the rotten
[alright]
survives) ([quickly]
you can go more than slow) {more [(bang
[{further
rushes on} / {rushes on/ further}])]}/ faster
[fundamentally] something
you understand or to do/ {[that's it,]
I'm running away}/{[

and this
always}/{]

What one immediately notices upon encountering the text is its complex segmentation. It is using some sort of non-linguistic or para-linguistic notation that has to do with syntax and ordering and that visually divides words into sets when viewed simultaneously or sequences when read consecutively. The marks themselves – mostly brackets: {[()]} – are used outside poetry or language proper in a variety of applications including mathematics (which would support a simultaneous or "value set" approach) and computer programming (which would support a sequential approach). They also visually – and, arguably, audibly, if they represent pauses – augment the lineation of the text to denote a rhythm or musicality when read in sequence.

If we recall the simultaneity of Glazova's etymological metaphor – for instance, in her titular word "shrew" / «землеройка [earth-dig-muzzle-swarm-in-gatherer]» – we could imagine it being organized this way, perhaps with different brackets hierarchically corresponding to different levels of meaning, inflection, or etymological relation: "earth{digger[muzzle/swarm-(gather)]}." This imposed simultaneity is not unique to Glazova but simply a function of polysemy and metaphor when they are activated by reference to the code; thus, a pun means two things *at once.* There does seem to be an element of simultaneity to what Skandiaka is doing with her notation – one must constantly retrace one's steps and hold previous marks and possible sequential relations in mind – but I would argue that, because it is reliant precisely upon this motion of sequence and tracing/retracing, it is aligned less with the code and more with an altogether different axis of language, which is syntagmatic, grammatical, and in process, rather than compressed, like metaphor, into an image of simultaneity and finality. To put it perhaps more cryptically but more concisely, I find it fruitful to compare Glazova's extreme and open-

endedly *polysemous* meanings with Skandiaka's extreme and open-endedly *polyvalent* grammaticality. There is a converse relationship between the two: what they do is somehow similar in its effect, yet *how* it is done presents a stark complementary opposition. In contrast to Glazova's use of polysemy, which tends to rip the reader from context and reorient his or her attention to the code, Skandiaka's writing directs us constantly *to* context while also deferring it: context, in other words, rather than the code, is the riddle of the poem and the answer to its question about itself. Yet to play a game with syntax, sequence, and (dis-)order requires that it first be situated. The text above, as previously noted, is in a group of poems under the title «[27/11/05 – 1/9/2006]», presumably indicating date of composition. However, it also seems to have a complex *internal* context that can only be discovered through its grammaticality and that we can begin to follow as we read it.

The scene of the text, produced in the wide titular timeframe of November 27, 2005 – September 1, 2006, also involves a place or places in the form of two concentric sites of ruin: an "abandoned […] textile […] factory" [«заброшенная (…) ткацкая (…) фабрика»] (i.2-3) and the larger and more abstracted «признаками?]рике» (i.11), which I have rendered "by-in-significations?]riverica" and is a combination of the words "indication" (also "mark"; "feature"; literally, "in/at-sign") in the instrumental case («признаками»), a corruption of "river" in the prepositional case («рике»), and a corruption of "America" in the prepositional case («ами?]рике»). It should be noted, moreover, that the choice of a "textile factory" [«ткацкая (…) фабрика»] initiates the persistent Russian/English bilingualism that Skandiaka will use to vault her language into metaphor, less through polysemy than through poly-coding; «фабрика», which entered Russian in the early 18th century from Polish "fabryk" (from Italian "fabbrica" and French "fabrique") is a "factory," whereas in English, we use the same Latin root ("fabrica";

"faber") to form the word "fabric," meaning "cloth" – primarily because the first industrial factories in England produced textiles. In a Russian/English bilingual ear, a "textile factory" [ткацкая фабрика] therefore resounds as a "textile fabric." It is a bilingual pleonasm produced by codes cancelling each other out, and it also divides the simple image of an abandoned textile factory – many of which still stand on the rivers of the American rustbelt in areas like Flint, where Skandiaka grew up – into a multi-coded language game with a tautological over-emphasis on meanings related to weaving, textiles, fabric(-ation?), etc. that typically accompany concepts such as fate, story-telling, and writing, all of which are significant here.

That emphasis on writing/composition (the physical process and practice of writing) as the primary scene of the text is reinforced by two other repeated frames or contexts: the image of reading/writing per se ("excellent composition" [отличная композиция], i.1; ii.1) and the image of reading/writing computer code ("of backslashes and zeros" [из обратных косых и нулей], i.4; ii.4); the two merge in the repeated interruption, "bang" [«взрыв»] (i.1,9; ii.1,2,7), which arguably mimics the archaic sound of a typewriter completing a line and is also slang ("bang") for the symbol "!", which in most coding languages, such as PHP, indicates a negation or "not" value. Finally, all of these themes – sites of ruin, old and contemporary technologies of writing and/or industrial production – come together in the strange temporality of the poem: "fast" [«быстро»] and "slow" [«медленно»] (ii.6-9), past and present, in conflicting tenses and aspects (e.g., the act of indefinitely and repeatedly "surviving" «уцелевает» [ii.6] the same ordeal, which is so temporally non-linear and therefore grammatically strange in Russian that the imperfective, continuous form of the verb [уцелевать] exists primarily in theory), and finally culminating in the non-time of "always" [«всегда»] (ii.14). What we have, apparently, is a poem literally *in translation* – between languages, between technologies, between sites, between times,

and in and out of grammars to which its own idiom does and does not belong and between which it leaves a series of excesses, aporias, and remainders.

If we continue to tease out some of the Russian/English bilingualism in the poem, we see that to read it is also to follow along in its composition – to write with it between open codes. Lines like «на овдовелом ивами канале» (i.5,6) sound genuinely bizarre in Russian, again, in part due to temporality and aspect: the verb «овдоветь» ["to widow"] is made adjectival («овдовелый»), contrary to its perfective aspect and the idiomatic past participle «овдовевший». However, the line suddenly makes compositional sense and betrays a familiar pattern of glossolalia and sound repetition when translated into English: "the widowly by willows." Other bilingual wordplay is more elaborate and precise. The three-line series of brackets that begins and ends «[на … воздухе?]» only makes sense when translated into English and then back-translated into Russian in the context of a pun that plays in both languages: «на канале» ["on the channel"], as both a small waterway and a broadcast channel. Below, I have highlighted three phrases in bold:

> [**на** (красной [ознаменовался?])/ {^{сем}заброшенной
> {^{ритм}(ткацкой)}^{сем} [**на закате**]}^{ритм} {фабрике/ **на канале**
> из обратных косых и нулей,} **воздухе**?]
>
> [**on** (the red [was it commemorated?])/ {^{sem}abandoned
> {^{rhythm}(textile)}^{sem} [**at sunset**]}^{rhythm} {factory/ **on the channel**
> made of backslashes and zeros,} **the air**?]

There is a doubling (or trebling) here between prepositional phrases that form maximum and minimum sets or semantic-syntactical units, both reinforced and interrupted by the use of brackets: the maximum 'set' is the extended prepositional phrase «на … воздухе» ["on … the air"], which contains and is interrupted by all the other brackets, phrases, and syntactical units in

between; the smaller two prepositional phrases, which are discrete, are «на закате» ["at sunset"] and «на канале» ["on the channel"]. In the Russian, each of these prepositional phrases begins with the word «на» ["on/at"], suggesting a certain functional or operative interchangeability that the brackets rhythmically distribute and semantically organize (see the superscripts "sem" [«сем»] and "rhythm" [«ритм»]). The word «на» is not necessarily a natural choice either: in Russian, «на воздухе» ["on the air"] sounds somehow abstractly conceptual, like floating *on* – not *in* – the air («в» ["in"] is the more natural choice in Russian as in English); but, in English, the technological/metaphorical sense of "on the air" and "on the channel" is almost the same, like the tautology "the textile fabric/factory," and suddenly the compositional logic of the text becomes clearer. Again, a semantic glut is built up between overlapping codes that simultaneously negate and exceed each other, and, again, that double vision draws us specifically to an attenuated opposition between old and new technologies, natural and technological images, and the scene being described (a factory on a waterway) versus the scene of the text's composition and dissemination.[327]

I would argue that if we introduce yet *another* code/grammar – that of the programming language PHP, which had wide web applications at the time the text was composed, including on Facebook and VKontakte – we can take our reading of Skandiaka even further. Below is a table of PHP notations that appear directly in the text above and in *[12/7/07]* as a whole; I have 'translated' them into a kind of half-grammatical, half-technical creole:

> **{} = Min./max. delimiter**. Sets apart a string or single element of syntax that is complete ("inescapable"). As a minimum, it is used to isolate single variables/elements within complex syntax as not belonging to the surrounding set. Akin to a complete sentence marked with a period.

[327] *Воздух* [*Air*] is also the name of the Russian-language journal, edited by Dmitrii Kuz'min, where Skandiaka first published her poems.

[] = Delimiter. Sets apart a line or element of syntax. Akin to a phrase or dependent clause.

() = Delimiter. Sets apart a line or element of syntax.

/ = Delimiter. Sets apart a line of logic or an operative function.

\ = Escape character. Invokes alternative interpretation of subsequent character(s). Introduces code operators.

\\ («обратные косые» ["backslashes"]) = Human Comment. Sets apart a human comment from the code.

| = Alternate pathway.

|| = Shift operator. Indicates an either/or action or a choice between paths/variables.

! ("bang") = "not" (what follows). Alters or excludes values.

0 (zero) = False. The only true negative value in PHP. It is marked as false. Everything else, from a Boolean standpoint, counts as "true."

@ = Ignore (what follows). Ignore an error in the code (e.g., incomplete or irrational syntax).

unset[] = Ignore the variable in brackets.

Like language, PHP is organized by a specific syntax and according to a specific symbolic vocabulary (its "code"), which operates on relational values similar to those of formal logic ("not," "if… then," etc.) or even grammatical cases (nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, instrumental) that indicate the function of a word in a sentence. This code or grammar is complete and without gaps, and these values can then be syntactically distributed in any way that the programmer wishes and assigned to different contents. Some of these notations in Skandiaka's poem make a sort of natural 'textual' sense: for instance, the brackets, which act as delimiters of larger and smaller syntactical units. Others, such as code operators that introduce a relational value or an instruction need to be 'translated.' The repeated interjection

“bang”/«взрыв» becomes a figure of negation and self-erasure: “not” (what follows). The reference to “backslashes and zeroes” [«из обратных косых и нулей»] (i.4; ii.4) becomes an association between external/human commentary inserted into the code (the function of backslashes) and falsehood (the function of zero). Or, in the complex brackets we read above, the repeated Russian/English preposition «на»/”on; at” and the prepositional phrase «на закате»/”at sunset” becomes, through a slippage with the grammar of PHP, a double forgetting: “@” [“ignore an error in the syntax of the code”] and “[ѕ]unset” [“ignore/remove the set of variables in the following brackets”]. We would get something like this:

> [**@** (красной [ознаменовался?])/ {[сем]заброшенной
> {[ритм](ткацкой)}[сем] [**@ ~~(s)~~unset**]}[ритм] {фабрике/ **@ канале**
> из обратных косых и нулей,} **воздухе**?]

And, indeed, there are “errors” present that need to be “ignored” for the code to operate. The syntax of the brackets here is actually symmetrical and complete: “[([]){{()}[]}{}]”; however, it is also irrational, with two “inescapable” or discrete delimiters (“{{}}”) set inside of each other. By the end of the second half of the diptych, that syntax has broken down or been interrupted entirely, cutting off:

> и это
> всегда}/{]
>
> and this
> always}/{]

If we were to take the grammar of PHP literally, moreover, and ignore/forget the errors and corresponding variables in brackets, we would get another poem entirely:

i

отличная композиция
на овдовелом ивами канале, на
овдовелом ивами
канале,

на пустующей внешними / ивами
рике на
овдовевшем

ивами канале из костей

ii

человечная оценка

отличная композиция

море

из обратных косых и нулей

i

excellent composition
on the widowly by willows channel, on the
widowly by willows
channel,

on the vacated by-outsiders / by-willows
r[i]ver on
the widowed

by willows channel made of bones

ii

human estimation

excellent composition

the sea

of backslashes and zeros

Amazingly, this new poem makes fairly good sense and reads grammatically correctly in Russian, with all of the genders, numbers, and cases matching up. By using a code to clear away the 'code,' we actually have a fairly conventional, even sentimental diptych in the mode of elegy that plays on the parallelism between natural (section i) and human (section ii) sites of ruin and decay. The symmetry is reinforced by parallelism between the last lines of each section: «ивами канале из костей» // «из обратных косых и нулей», which rhyme and play paronomastically with "bones" [«кости»] and "slashes" [«косые»], the former being the trace of the human left on nature and the latter being the trace of the human left on code (in PHP, backslashes introduce human commentary).

Not all of the poems or text fragments in *[12/7/07]* are as complex as the one read above. However, they do all operate according to the same basic principles of construction, which recall Dragomoshchenko's "Illustration of a Plantation" [«Изображение плантации»] from Part I: 1) an excess/deficit of internal context that simultaneously insists upon context (especially the context of composition) as the primary frame of interpretation; 2) poly-coding and poly-grammaticality; and 3) an insistent in-process-ness or in-translation-ness that compels the reader to become textually involved in an active, writerly way in order to participate in the poem's language and supplement its intentionality, which remains unfinalized and open, both beginning and ending as if in the middle.

Grammar and Praxis: Jakobson's Pushkin and Perloff's Wittgenstein/Creeley

> Man kann doch einen Spiegel besitzen; besitzt man dann auch das Spiegelbild, das sich in ihm zeigt?[328]
>
> [One can own a mirror; does one then own the reflection that can be seen in it?]
>
> —Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* #670, epigraph to Robert Creeley's *Away* (1976)

> Ничего хорошего от переводчика[329]
>
> [Nothing good comes from a translator]
>
> —Nika Skandiaka, *[12/7/2007]*

I indicated earlier that what Skandiaka does is innovative but not unprecedented. I have also suggested a constellation between praxis, ethics, and linguistic and poetic facts as seemingly everyday as translation and grammar. In order to bind these practices – and they are more *practices* than concepts – closer together, I would like to turn to two major critics who have found in grammatical writing the same quintessentially poetic quality – ambiguity, incompletion, the making strange of the ordinary, the humbling entanglement of poetic subject and reader – that I have tried to identify here. The first is Roman Jakobson, whose "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry" (1981) reads Pushkin's "I Loved You" [«Я вас любил»] (1829) for its "figures of grammar," and the second is Marjorie Perloff, whose *Wittgenstein's Ladder* (1996) pays cautious homage to Jakobsonin its final chapter, "'Running Against the Walls of Our Cage': Toward a Wittgensteinian Poetics,"[330] which takes the example of Robert Creeley's *Away*

[328] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Zettel.* Ed. and trans. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967. 117.
[329] Skandiaka, Nika. *[12/7/2007]*. Moscow: NLO, 2007. 65.
[330] A brief but important section of Perloff's final chapter is called "The Poetry of Grammar, the Grammar of Poetry," although she never mentions Jakobson by name. See Perloff, Marjorie. *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 199-200.

(the book and the poem) in order to align the direction of late 20th century American poetry with Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. By comparing these two critics as well as the two poems that they read, I would like to point towards a fundamental aspect of "the poetry of grammar" that we have seen in Skandiaka and that neither Jakobson nor Perloff engage, which is that such poetry is always and inherently a poetry of *practice* and incompletion, which chastens and challenges the technics of its language (most evidently, image and trope, but even the stability of the code, the transcendental guarantee of the whole *fact* of language) in favor of process and, ultimately, an ethical agnosticism with regard to what lies beyond the horizon of its communicated and communicable world.

Strangely, perhaps, I would like to begin with Perloff, because it is her conclusions with regard to a "Wittgensteinian poetics" that most closely resemble my own – drawing poetry, in which Wittgenstein never had much interest, into the realm of ethics, in which he also never had much interest.[331] In some ways, it is easier to define her case for a "Wittgensteinian poetics" in terms of what it isn't; and, in the last chapter of her book, she takes up her argument with two antagonists: one an explicit antagonist in the person of Lyotard (the 'bad' antagonist), the other a soft antagonist in the person of Bakhtin, with whom we are already familiar. Importantly, like these thinkers themselves, when Perloff takes a position, she is making an argument not only about poetic language but about a specific language practice (poetry) that reveals something essential about language itself.

In his essay, "Wittgenstein After" (1983), Lyotard took Wittgenstein for a specter of "humanism" – like "empiricism," a vulgar/revanchist word in the structuralism of the 70s/80s – and in Lyotard, Perloff finds a caricature of a certain kind of thinking about language that

[331] Perloff is highly aware of this apparent contradiction (that is, in its way, hardly contradictory at all) and reminds the reader of it throughout her book.

epitomizes the critical ideology of the late 20th century. Lyotard wants to convince his reader that perhaps language and capital operate in the same way, which seems reasonable, and that, moreover, the essential feature of both is the oppressiveness of their regimes whilst we labor under the illusion that *we* – subjects, people – use them rather than are used and dominated *by* them.[332] This also seems likely, were the relation of dominance as simple as that and were there such a 'humanist' illusion of power that needed to be dispelled. However, as Perloff implies, it is ironically this *essentializing* of language (and of capital) in the service not just of a theoretical analogy but of a certain closed *valuation* that makes Lyotard border on the hysterical when he declares, supposedly contra Wittgenstein: "Humanity is not the user of language, nor even its guardian; there is no more one subject than there is one language. Phrases situate names and pronouns (or their equivalent) in the universes they present."[333]

The most interesting detail of this statement, which Perloff doesn't bother to scrutinize, could be the phrase "names and pronouns (or their equivalent)," which will figure strongly in the specificity of the "poetry of grammar" that we will encounter below. Jakobson notes the superabundance of pronouns in Pushkin's "grammatical" poems and points out that they are a unique linguistic instance: "being thoroughly grammatical, purely relational words deprived of a properly lexical, material meaning."[334] That is, they only *situate,* they do not create a *situation*

[332] All of this is occasioned by Lyotard's 'postmodern' consideration of Wittgenstein in the essay "Wittgenstein 'After'" (1983) and can be found in Lyotard, Jean-François. *Political Writings.* Trans. Bill Redings and Paul German. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993.
[333] Ibid., 181. The citation is taken from Lyotard. "Wittgenstein 'After.'" In *Political Writings.* Trans. Bill Redings and Paul German. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993. 21-22.
[334] See Jakobson, Roman. "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry." *Language in Literature.* Ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1987. 129. Jakobson goes on to expand the unique function of pronouns to what Lyotard might mean by the completely ambiguous parenthetical "(or their equivalent)," which includes, for instance, the copula *to be.* He (Jakobson) writes: "The pivotal role performed in the grammatical texture of poetry by diverse kinds of pronouns is due to the fact that pronouns, in contradistinction to all other autonomous words, are purely grammatical, relational units, and besides substantival and adjectival pronouns we must include in this class also adverbial pronouns and the so-called substantive (rather pronominal) verbs such as *to be* and *to have*." Ibid., 133.

(contrary to Lyotard's thinking). What Perloff will focus on in Wittgenstein is, in fact, this kind of doggedly agnostic pursuit of "what is the case," which does not necessarily come down to any "humanism" or "empiricism" on his part, as Lyotard claims, but rather stems from an acute intolerance to the kind of theoretical self-certainty based on *value* that Lyotard is trading in. Perloff writes: "For Lyotard's assertion that 'Humanity is not the user of language, nor even its guardian,' Wittgenstein substitutes a series of seemingly endless 'poetic' questions as to how 'humanity' in fact *does* use language."[335] Wittgenstein, that is, is concerned with language *practices*; and it seems very unlikely that one who so struggled to put his thoughts in order and make them coherent – in either a single language (German) or translating between them (German/English) – had any such notion of a unitary subject or a unitary language, as per Lyotard, much less vis-à-vis a generalized "humanity" to which such things might be attributable.[336]

So, with Lyotard as the unfortunate 'fall man,' we understand one important aspect of what Perloff means by a "Wittgensteinian poetics": that it reflects a postmodernity not at all "inhuman" – to the extent that structuralisms are – but simply having assimilated the 20th century's critique of language and lost the innocence that would allow it to view itself naively as language's master and beneficiary. For a poet like Skandiaka, who plays with grammars and codes that clearly do *not* belong to a unitary subject, unitary author (who is Skandiaka?), or unitary language, Lyotard's accusation of "humanist" bad faith ("humanist" pretentions to univocality and mastery) would quite miss the mark; yet in its submission to play between codes

[335] Perloff, Marjorie. *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 182.
[336] One must always point out that Wittgenstein's whole philosophy of language was, in part and by his own admission, a byproduct of his own painful experience of personal (in-)communication and loss in translation from within his own idiolect: philosophical, linguistic, and otherwise.

and languages, her poetry suggests other – deeply 'human(ist)' – possibilities as well, which, like Wittgenstein's philosophy, might escape Lyotard precisely because they lie outside the economy of mastery and can only be practiced or perceived at a loss rather than arrested, technicalized, and maintained. The *material heterogeneity* of Skandiaka's language practice – and, Wittgenstein would suggest, language as it is practiced in general – prohibits mastery of its form within any such transparent economy of value, which is really what Lyotard wants to challenge and how his understanding jumps from capital (line 'A') to a certain understanding of language that he calls humanist (line 'B').

It is, moreover, this material heterogeneity that guarantees the rigor and vitality of a "Wittgensteinian poetics" and that also brings Perloff into opposition with her 'soft' adversary, Mikhail Bakhtin. He, privately a reciter of poetry in Russian and in German, conservatively defined lyric as a specific language practice that could serve as a formal and historical antagonist and counterpart to novelistic dialogism. Bakhtin viewed this lyric practice as monologic, homogenous, transparent to itself (self-naturalizing), and, at its limit, even "authoritarian."[337] In retrospect of how far 'lyric' has stretched itself since the early 20th century (and even before), Bakhtin's argument seems weak and beholden to a strong genre distinction (poetry vs. novelistic

[337] Perloff is reacting to Bakhtin's unfavorable treatment of lyric in the essay "Discourse in the Novel" [«Слово в романе»] (1934-5), which she finds in English translation in Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Bakhtin's treatment of poetry "in the narrow sense" occupies pages 285-288 therein. With regard to our poet, Skandiaka, one can hardly imagine anything farther from lyric as Bakhtin defines it (closed, "intentional," "unitary," "singular"):

As a consequence of the prerequisites mentioned above, the language of poetic genres, when they approach their stylistic limit, often becomes authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative, sealing itself off from the influence of extraliterary social dialects. Therefore such ideas as a special "poetic language/' a "language of the gods," a "priestly language of poetry" and so forth could flourish on poetic soil. It is noteworthy that the poet, should he not accept the given literary language, will sooner resort to the artificial creation of a new language specifically for poetry than he will to the exploitation of actual available social dialects. Social languages are filled with specific objects, typical, socially localized and limited, while the artificially created language of poetry must be a directly intentional language, unitary and singular. *The Dialogic Imagination.* 288.

prose) that has quite self-evidently not stood the test of time. The distinction that he makes between dialogic and monologic discourse as such, however, is far more compelling.

Perloff seems to grant this and 'goes easy' on Bakhtin, likely involving him because his mishandling of poetry as a genre points exactly to what her "Wittgensteinian poetics" *isn't*: it is *not* monological, *not* homogenous, and in fact has much more materially in common with dialogism than the majority of novels written today. However, Bakhtin is making an argument on the level of *discourse* – of ideological content; Perloff is making one, inseparable but distinct, on the level of what poetry does best: critique of language and of its own means of expression, down to the "bedrock of grammatical structure."[338] For Bakhtin's dialogism (which, in fact, *does* presuppose a unitary subject, speaking *in*, *through*, and *for* the other discourses of other unitary subjects), Perloff substitutes a poly-grammaticality that she calls "Wittgensteinian" in that it acknowledges that, although grammars are complete,[339] they are not unitary, and that "everything happens exactly as it does, but that, at any given moment, we also conjecture that it might have happened otherwise."[340] Grammars, in other words, can displace and bring order to material heterogeneity, but they never supersede or master it, and they always imply the resurgent heterogeneity of *other* grammars, *other* orders, and *other* potential worlds.

[338] Perloff, Marjorie. *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 187.
[339] Perloff cites a notebook entry from *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1930-32*: "There are no gaps in grammar, grammar is always complete." p. 16. Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 199.
[340] Ibid. 19. This is Perloff's formulation. Curiously, she refers us to p. 37 of *Culture and Value*. Trans. Peter Winch. Ed. G.H. von Wright. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), which does not necessarily correspond to her argument or apparent 'paraphrase.' Rather, it contains Wittgenstein's private reflections (apparently occasioned by reading Kierkegaard) on faith, Christianity, and different levels of meaning at which religious truth can be expressed or received, which suggests that Perloff is either mistaken in her note (unlikely) or offering her own interpretation here.

Jakobson, who coined the phrase "the poetry of grammar," claimed to have first noticed this effect when he appreciated how much of Pushkin's poetic quality – i.e., precisely this tension between grammatical order and material heterogeneity – went missing in translation:

> During the late 1930s, while editing Pushkin's works in Czech translation, I was struck by the way in which poems that seemed to approximate closely the Russian text, its images and sound structure, often produced the distressing impression of a complete rift with the original because of the inability or impossibility of reproducing their grammatical structure. Gradually, it became clear: in Pushkin's poetry the guiding significance of the morphological and syntactic fabric is interwoven with and rivals the artistic role of verbal tropes. Indeed, at times it takes over and becomes the primary, even exclusive, vehicle of the poems' innermost symbolism.[341]

The irony is that because *every* grammar wrestles with bringing language to order, it is these non-lexical features of language that translation and mistranslation would seem to affect least. Certainly, it makes little difference to denotation or communication; Jakobson sounds positively Wittgensteinian when he remarks: "A difference in grammatical concepts does not necessarily represent a difference in the state of affairs being referred to."[342] Yet each grammar wrestles in its own way; and the tension between "grammatical concepts" and other, heterogenous and potential "state[s] of affairs" is precisely what translation seems to deaden by bringing those "concepts" neatly to closure and 'straightening' them out into a semblance of necessity. Translation (the lexical product) brings to a close what being *in-translation* (the grammatical process) does and where the whole mystery unfolds in darkness, leaving its trace only as a vaguely felt loss – a negative space where something should be and perhaps is, inscrutably.

Eventually, Jakobson even begins to identify this grammatical something – we might call it *rhythm*, the active tension between order and heterogeneity – with poetry itself, merging his

[341] Jakobson, Roman. "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry." *Language in Literature.* Ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1987. 121.
[342] Ibid., 123.

definitions of it with those of the "grammatical concept": "One may state that in poetry similarity is superimposed on contiguity and hence 'equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence.' Here, any noticeable repetition of the same grammatical concept becomes an effective poetic device."[343] Jakobson notes, following Sapir, that the effect of these parallelisms often tends to supervene "conscious analysis."[344] That such active and mobile grammaticality could operate not only within a single code (e.g., Puhskin's Russian) but between them as *in-translation-ness* or in-process-ness, as we have seen in Skandiaka, would point less to a pre-critical understanding of language as 'translating' a non-linguistic content ('I transmit my idea/intent into and in spite of the language in which I am speaking') and more towards the strange ability of languages to communicate *with each other* in spite of us, confirming Walter Benjamin's suspicion that what gets lost in translation from one language to another exists most fully (albeit darkly) *between* them.[345]

Perloff, too, implies that her "Wittgensteinian poetics" – she gives the examples of Robert Creeley, Ron Silliman, Rosemarie Waldrop, and Lyn Hejinian – are often naturally practiced by those who, like Wittgenstein himself, operated between multiple codes: she cites the late modernist precedents of Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and Louis Zukofsky, all of whom learned English as a second language.[346] Paul Celan would arguably be an analogue in the European canon, although he is so much an institution unto himself that it is a difficult

[343] Ibid., 127. Jakobson later remarks that, "The essential literary-critical question of the individuality and comparative characteristics of poems, poets, and poetic schools can and should be posed in the realm of grammar." 135-6. That is, grammar is responsible for the material specificity of poetic language, per Jakobson – what makes each case "the case."
[344] Ibid., 127.
[345] See Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of Translator." Trans. Harry Zohn. *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books (Harcourt), 1968. Benjamin cryptically concludes the essay: "For to some degree all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines; this is true to the highest degree of sacred writings. The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation." 82.
[346] See Perloff, who is citing Charles Bernstein's "Time Out of Motion." Perloff, Marjorie. *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 185.

comparison to make. However, there seems to be a theme here by which being in-translation – real or figurative, implicit or explicit – clears a space for the existence of multiple grammars, multiple worlds, and multiple readings of everyday language by which it is made "poetic" rather than (merely) communicative.

If we look at the examples of both Jakobson and Perloff, we see a striking continuity between two very different poets (certainly one a major and one a minor talent) writing on different continents 147 years apart. Below, I include the first stanzas of Creeley's "Away" (1976) alongside Pushkin's «Я вас любил» ["I Loved You"] (1829):

Creeley:

Yourself walked in the room tonight
and it wasn't you. Your way of
being here isn't another's way.
It's all the same somewhere maybe,
and the same old thing isn't you.
All the negatives in existence
don't change anything anyway.

The people tell me a sad story sometimes,
and I tend to tell it back to them.

Come home. It's where you are anyway.
Anyway, I wish you weren't home.
Where is home anyway without me.[347]

1976
(dedicated to his estranged wife, Bobbie)

Pushkin:

Я вас любил: любовь ещё, быть может,
В душе моей угасла не совсем;
Но пусть она вас больше не тревожит;
Я не хочу печалить вас ничем.
Я вас любил безмолвно, безнадежно,
То робостью, то ревностью томим;
Я вас любил так искренно, так нежно,
Как дай вам Бог любимой быть другим.[348]

I loved you, and I probably still do.
And for a while the feeling may remain.
But let my love no longer trouble you,
I do not wish to cause you any pain.
I loved you; and the hopelessness I knew,
The jealousy, the shyness – though in vain
Made up a love so tender and so true
As may God grant you to be loved again.

1829
(meant to have been written in the album of an admirer or lover, possibly Anna Olenina or Karolina Soban'ska)

[347] Creeley, Robert. *Away.* Illustrations by Bobbie Creeley. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1976. 11.
[348] Pushkin, Aleksandr Sergeevich. "Ia vas liubil." *SS,* vol. 2. Moscow: GIKhL, 1959-1962. 259.

Both poems read – particularly in translation – almost inscrutably plainly. Perloff quotes one of Creeley's reviewers, John Perreault, as remarking: "The same subjects remain: personalized versions of love, pain, sex and death, but whittled down to 'breath units' of often breathless banality."[349] While lexically chastened and syntactically strained language is Creeley's signature style – a style from which he rarely, if ever, departs – Pushkin, too, who had by this time written in several distinct styles and genres (including the first half of his "novel in verse," *Evgenii Onegin*) and was emerging from the vigorous debates of the early 19th century over the lexical provenance, elevation, and symbolic content of poetic language, presents a poetry of apparent simplicity bordering on poverty that might have alarmed his lexically progressive *karamzinisty* ("innovator") and conservative *shishkovisty* ("archaist") contemporaries in equal measure.

That these read like 'greeting card' poems[350] is furthermore linked with the circumstance and conceit of their composition. They are, in a sense, epistolary. These are two men addressing lovers in seemingly plainspoken and 'private' language but with less than plain or univocal motives. Creeley's poem, like the book to which it belongs, is a love letter to his estranged wife, whose abstract photographs accompany his poems on its pages and even beg the question as to whether he had a material or legal right to use them: yet another plaintive but also naively entitled act of taking back his belonging to and over "Yourself" (line 1), Bobbie, the poem's departed addressee. Pushkin, meanwhile, is moving in the opposite direction: addressing an unrequited love belonging to a potentially extramarital affair in her keepsake album, he appears

[349] Perreault, John. "Holding Back and Letting Go." *New York Times Book Review*. 19 November 1967. 97. Cited in Perloff, Marjorie. *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary.* Chicago: Chicago UP, 1996. 190.
[350] Perloff aptly compares Creeley to a Hallmark card. Ibid., 189. The resemblance is more than just lexical; the intended private *function* of the poem is also the same.

to be saying goodbye – while 'letting her down easy,' potentially avoiding a scandal, and undeniably contributing to his own Byronic mythos as a lover.

These are not *moral* poems or poetries – quite the opposite. It is interesting, then, that in poems of address that are meant to be persuasive – even manipulative and 'amoral' (whatever that means) – we find so few rhetorical figures to speak of, leading to both Jakobson's and Perloff's considerations of grammar. Yet it is precisely the suggestion of other worlds, other outcomes, other formations and "states of affairs" to which the grammar of each poem contributes and which is their primary persuasive consideration: that love could have turned out differently, that things could have been or could now be otherwise. If not morality, what are they preserving? The answer might be freedom – that of the speaker and even of the addressee.

In Pushkin's case, the "I" and "you" mark the limits within which a shadow is cast by "another" [«другим»] (line 8, the last word of the poem) and in that expansive shadow of possibility, guaranteed by "God" himself, the "I" that is-not or is-no-longer or is-yet-to-be "I" and the "you" that is-not or is-no-longer or is-yet-to-be "you" – all of these possible "I's" and possible "you's" – become the proper subject-matter of the poem. Thus, as Jakobson remarks on Pushkin's poem, which dwells in the Russian imperfective, "nothing is completed" but the possibility of completion is permanently "plac[ed] into question."[351] Perloff, reading Creeley, goes one step further: while the elements and figures of grammar here, such as the pronouns "I" or "you," strain against the context and syntax in which they are placed, "there are," she reminds us, again paraphrasing Wittgenstein, "no gaps in grammar, grammar is always complete."[352] Thus, it is the profound openness and disorder of the self – the poet's self; "Yourself" – reduced

[351] Jakobson, Roman. "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry." In *Language and Literature.* Ed. Krystyna Pomorska. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987. 130.
[352] Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 199.

to the closed self-sufficiency of grammatical form that both occasions a sense of loss (in translation) and makes the poem polyvalent or ambiguous in its meaning. What *exceeds* grammatical order – most dramatically the first word, "Yourself," but also its syntax and lineation, anaphoric repetitions ("way"/"anyway" *six* times in twelve lines), etc. – marks the encroaching heterogeneity of other grammars, other "I's" and "you's," and even other, more effective poems that Creeley seems to suggest could have been written, although they wouldn't "change anything anyway" (line 7).

As a result, although there is certainly an ambiguity in both epistolary poems as to who "I" am and who "you" are, the mystery unfolds around the very possibility – a grammatical one – of "our" relation. This is the crux of each poem, although the pronouns "we," "us," and "our" are never used. Significantly, to achieve this effect, the poets prefer the intervention of a hypothetical third party – "another" (Creeley, line 3; Pushkin, line 8) – who ultimately stands, like grammaticality itself, for the possibility of an encounter between poet and addressee. The question these poets pose to us, to their addressees, and to themselves is thus not "Who am I?" or "Who are you?" or even "What happened to us?" but whether these concepts – "I," "you," "us" – can exist in the same space simultaneously: as Wittgenstein asks in a passage that Creeley selects as the epigraph for his book, "One can own a mirror [*Spiegel*]; does one then own the reflection [*Spiegelbild*] that can be seen in it?"[353]

The radical pathos (or even rejection of pathos) implicated in this idea need not be rendered so abstractly. The theme of both Pushkin's and Creeley's poems – love that could have happened or will turn out differently – readily admits to it, which is why the grammatical figures

[353] *Zettel,* #670. Epigraph to Creeley's *Away* (1976). Cited in Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder,* 188.

in the poems work so well. Understood in this way, moreover, the "grammaticality"[354] of which we speak can now lead us to two corollaries, one philosophical and one poetic.

The first, philosophical corollary, is that if, as Perloff writes, "everything happens exactly as it does, but that, at any given moment, we also conjecture that it might have happened otherwise,"[355] a "Wittgensteinian poetics" would also force us to confront "the articulation of an ethics beyond causality and explanation"[356] – i.e., an ethics *beyond moral content* and also the promise of *moral necessity* that makes the moral function so seemingly inevitable and seductive. The second, poetic corollary, is that if grammar itself is "always complete" and without "gaps,"[357] then the only figure available to a such a poetry is the suggestion of *othe*r, *different* grammars, of gaps in meaning produced *between* different grammars. Ultimately, *translation* – being *in-translation* and in-process – would supplant the army of tropes as the poem's sole commanding actor: its principal mode of mobility, figuration, and address.

It is these two correlated *open modes* – 1) the ethical as an ongoing and incomplete *form of address* rather than a case-governing law or moral-ideological content and 2) the poetic state of being in-process and internally in-translation – with which I would credit poets like Skandiaka

[354] It should also be clear that when speaking of "grammar" or "grammaticality" we have something very different in mind than the function of *différance* that Derrida assigns to the concept of *grammatology.* It is true that we are concerned here with that which escapes and exceeds meaning [*Bedeutung*] and closure. It is also true that we are dealing with a constitutive absence within the "presence of the trace" – the places where figures 'should be.' *However*, the grammaticality at play in the above poems, does not, like grammatology, delimit an enclosure that is 'inescapable,' because it does not nurse any such fantasy of *domination by* or *freedom from* the word, nor does it recognize a subject within itself as any more than one heterogenous element among many. The violent but necessarily impotent impulse of grammatology – to reject the symbolic function, to enter into contradiction with itself – is not constitutive of this kind of grammatical play or of its subject. In grammatology, the gramme, the trace, is *open*, but the system is *closed, inescapable*; *différance* assures it. In the grammatical play with which we are concerned, the grammar *such-as-it-is* is closed but the subject and the world itself are left open – open to the ever-present possibility of *other, different* grammars belonging to statements or translations as yet to be posited or posed.
[355] Perloff, Marjorie. *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 19. See note 341 above.
[356] Ibid. 21.
[357] Ibid., 199.

(its limit case) for introducing to Russian-language poetry in the late 2000s and early 2010s and which still seem to be thriving today as its new way forward.

I recently had the opportunity to read and edit Kirill Korchagin's article, "From Incoherence to Sustainability: Performance, Activism, and Social Media in the Most Recent Russian Poetry" (IZfK, 2021),[358] in which he considers four young poets working "performatively" in a digital environment: Dmitrii Gerchikov, "Nils Kjeldsen," Vadim Bannikov, and Jan Vygovskii. As I have done here, Korchagin compares the work of these poets to the techniques of Moscow Conceptualism, as well as its antecedents (e.g., Oberiu) and its continuators (e.g., the "Laboratory of Poetic Actionism"), and makes a convincing argument that today's poets are finally inverting and moving beyond conceptualist models of performance in response to publishing on social media platforms and existing in a primarily digital discursive environment. Korchagin's main point is that whereas the conceptualists performatively challenged the homogenous discourse of the State, these new poets have set themselves the task of finding performative "islands of freedom" (Korchagin's phrase) amidst the apparently *heterogenous* but no less totalizing discourse of the internet. They do so, he says, by abandoning the *embodied*, corporeal performativity of conceptualist activism (still practiced by artists like Aleksandr Brener, "Voina," "Pussy Riot," or Petr Pavlenskii) in favor of a *textual*, almost *viral* approach, often mimicking the language of online communities or machine-generated aggregations of content.

The text of the poet infiltrates the grammar of the existing text like a rogue strand of RNA or computer code. The result is often a form of parodic fraud at the expense of the reader ("Nils Kjeldsen," Dmitrii Gerchikov), solipsistic fantasy (Amelin), or total incoherency

[358] The article, in English, is forthcoming in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparistik* (izfk.uni-trier.de) in late 2021. The author plans to publish a Russian version sometime this year.

(Bannikov), but it follows the same mechanisms that we have seen in Skandiaka for subverting the authority of the code and opening a space for other codes and even other realities to find their way in. Here, for instance, is an example from Vygovksii's poem "The Elements Against the Capitalists" [«Стихии против капиталистов»], surely a play on W. G. Sebald's *Nach der Natur: Elementargedicht* (1988), which was long-listed for the Arkadii Dragomoschenko Prize, given by Skidan, in 2017:

> #круговорот воды в особенности всеобщего доверия к бифуркационным свойствам капитализма, распадающегося на излом; только это, да, только это достойно приближения, соответствующего каждому отдельному способу видеть развитие формы, делегированное в разрез: холодный, трезвый ум, но, одновременно жизнь и мягкость порыва, мягкая, пластичная, легкая в общении, легко вливается в любую компанию — в жидком состоянии принимает форму того сосуда, в который ее налили
>
> #поток становления как водоворот затягивает в свой ритм становление: [pool], заполненный до отметки, до самых краев стенок, тихое безмолвное перенесение плана, с высоты полета в отсутствии птиц, только колебания, обращающие внимание на *методологический предохранитель, вмонтированный, находящийся в слоях, внутри представляемого пейзажа
>
> #точка опоры при съемке внутри жанра: процесс считывания обстановки, как фона, а среды обитания — процесса, с которого начат пейзаж[359]

In literal translation:

> #circle of water in particular universal confidence in the bifurcated properties of capitalism, disintegrating at the kink; only this, yes, only this is worth approaching, that which corresponds to each individual way of seeing the development of form delegated to the cut: cold, sober mind, but, simultaneously life and the softness of impulse, soft, plastic, easy to communicate, easy to pour in any company – in its liquid state, it takes the form of the vessel in which it was poured
>
> #flow of becoming like a whirlpool pulls into its rhythm of becoming: [pool], filled to the mark, to the very edges of the walls, silent soundless transfer of the plan, from the height of flight in the absence of birds, only vibrations drawing attention to the *methodological fuse, embedded, located in layers, inside the represented landscape
>
> #point of reference when shooting within the genre: the process of reading the setting as the background, and the habitat – the process from which the landscape begins

[359] The full poem is available on the site of the Arkadii Dragomoschenko Prize: https://atd-premia.ru/2017/09/25/yan-vygovsky/

Whether or not this is 'good' poetry is debatable. What it *does*, like Skandiaka's work, is present a poetry of practice and in-process-ness in which traditional hermeneutic categories like authorship, intent, and necessity no longer function in the same ways. In his introduction to *[12/7/2007]*, Aleksei Parshchikov remarks that Skandiaka's is a poetry to which Mikhail Gasparov's dictum that "the design is accessible to us only through its implementation [lit., "embodiment; incarnation"]" [«замысел доступен нам только через воплощение»] no longer fully applies.[360] Gasparov, in fact, is supposing precisely what we are: that the materiality of the work marks the limit of what we can know. The difference is that he presumes a doubly anthropomorphic unity and linearity around the technical concept of "design" (its implied author and its "embodiment" in the work) that does not exist here or is precisely what the poem as an ongoing and heterogenous practice countervenes. Perhaps, however, we could rephrase Gasparov in a slightly more "Wittgensteinian" way to say that "the state of affairs" (the "design") in this poetry is only accessible in the grammatical articulation that it takes, and when that articulation is permutational and multiple, we end up with a formal openness in which other states of affairs and other modes of articulation are not only possible but able to enter and converse with each other.

Ultimately, it is the whole fact of language, not just one intention, mode of expression, or design, that gets questioned and "poeticized." Benjamin wrote:

> The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original. This is

[360] I am essentially paraphrasing Parshchikov, who writes: «Формулировка М.Л. Гаспарова «замысел доступен нам только через воплощение» [1] здесь не всегда подходит.» Parshchikov, Aleksei. "Vozvrashchenie aury." In Skandiaka, Nika. *[12/7/2007]*. Moscow: NLO, 2007. 6. Interestingly, the full context of Gasparov's quote brings us back to Pushkin and the idea of real ("embodied, implemented") and potential worlds: «Когда мы читаем строку Пушкина, мы не можем знать, что «хотел сказать» Пушкин, мы знаем только то, что он в действительности сказал: замысел доступен нам только через воплощение» (Gasparov, M. L. "Podstrochnik i mera tochnosti." *O russkoi poezii. Analizy. Interpretatsii. Kharakteristiki.* Moscow: 2001. 361-372.).

> a feature of translation which basically differentiates it from the poet's work, because the effort of the latter is never directed at the language as such, at its totality, but solely and immediately at specific linguistic and contextual aspects.[361]

We might counter that, in poets like Skandiaka, this is *precisely* what poetry is doing, and its intimacy with the practice of translation is *how it does it*. It might even point to a way forward for poetry that discards the quintessentially Romantic mode of lyric expression or the performative fiction of the subject (authorship, intention, mastery) altogether.

Meanwhile, we should not be fooled into thinking it 'inhuman.' The idea that our worlds are defined and limited by their grammatical articulation chastens our theoretical mastery of ourselves, nature, and others but clears a place for action (praxis), freedom, and non-dialectical heterogeneity and ambiguity. As critics in the West – particularly Europe – race towards the mastery of a theoretical language and ethics of globalism, digitalism, and the "Anthropocene," their prevailing question is how to think our relation to the natural (by categories as diverse as gender, history, technology, and ecological impact), but few have been able to address these concerns more than thematically (ideologically) or to surmount the essential, arguably theological impulse of Romanticism, which was always first a critique of nature and second a critique of itself. I sincerely doubt that a "new poetry of the Anthropocene" or a "post-post-modernism" or anything else of the sort will be truly new until the era of Romanticism, some 200 years old, comes to a close and makes way for new forms of art and thinking with new artistic functions and orientations.

How strange that a poetic reply to this impasse – and perhaps a way through the Romanticism's total paradigm of subject and self in conflict with nature and the language of the natural – might come from Russia, that most 'unmodern' of places. And yet, I wonder if it is the

[361] Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of Translator." Trans. Harry Zohn. *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books (Harcourt), 1968.. 76.

persistence and earnestness with which Russian letters have struggled with Romantic questions on Romantic terms – through national catastrophe, trauma, and constant reconsideration of history and identity – that has enabled such unprecedented growth in a period of global literary decline and fomented a rebellion, as if out of desperation, capable of making the leap to something genuinely new.

Afterward

[Там/Так] жили поэты.
– Блок, «Поэты» (1908)[362]

Здесь жили поэты. – Блок
– Тынянов, Ю. Н., эпиграф к статье «Промежуток» (1924)[363]

[There/thus] poets once lived.
– Blok, "Poets" (1908)

Here [sic] poets once lived. – Blok
– Iurii Tynianov, epigraph to "Interlude" (1924)

Most of the theoretical conclusions to this book can already be found in its middle, where the aporia opens between late Soviet and post-Soviet 'aesthetic ideology.' The key terms of this aporetic revolve primarily around the categories of truth and, through the introduction of critique, the naturalization or de-naturalization of both 'otherness' and of history. However, I would like to readdress these terms once more as an impasse between temporality and the formalization of history itself and end here by considering Iurii Tynianov, whose "Interlude" [«Промежуток»] (1924)[364] attempts to do something similar (trace a formal genealogy) with an arguably similar period in literary history, immediately following the historical avant-garde of the Soviet 20th century.

In the canonical 1929 version of his essay, which he published in *Archaists and Innovators* [*Архаисты и новаторы*] (1929) five years after it was originally written, Tynianov

[362] Blok, Aleksandr. "Poety." *PSS*, vol. 3. Moscow: Nauka, 1997. 88.
[363] Tynianov, Iu. N. 'Promezhutok.' *Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino.* M: Nauka, 1977. 168.
[364] Ibid. All English translations of the text and page numbers to the English translations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from Tynianov, Yuri. *Literary Evolution: Selected Essays on Literature, Theory and Film.* Trans. and ed. Ainsley Morse and Philip Redko. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019.

prominently notes that "The article was written in 1924 and is published without changes" [«Статья написана в 1924 году, печатается без изменений» (*Архаисты и новаторы*, 541)].[365] This is very obviously untrue. Tynianov added a dedication to Pasternak and omitted an entire section (originally section IV) on the poet Kazin.

Despite these significant alterations, however – and perhaps this warrants his strange justification of publishing "without changes" – he *does* retain a singular and important error. His epigraph to both the 1924 and 1929 versions of the essay reads: "Here poets once lived – Blok" [«Здесь жили поэты» – Блок»], which refers to Blok's poem, "Poets" [«Поэты»], written in 1908[366]; the line or lines to which Tynianov refers actually read "*There* poets once lived…" [«*Там* жили поэты…»] (line 3, my italics) or "*Thus* poets once lived…" [«*Так* жили поэты…»] (line 21, my italics). In earlier drafts,[367] Blok *had* used the line "Here poets once lived…" [«Здесь жили поэты»] (line 3), but it's unclear how Tynianov would have known this or why he would have wished to retain it against the more widely circulated version that was first published in *Кривое зеркало* №5 1909 and appeared in the book *Седое утро*.[368]

My argument, however, is that Tynianov's strange choice is more than a simple irony or an unconscious error. In order to 'bridge the gap' of time in his study, Tynianov first has to spatialize it as history – as a *unity of presence and place* ("here") in which the process of literary

[365] Here, as elsewhere, I am indebted to the commentary of M. Chudakova to Tynianov, Iurii. *Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino.* Moscow: 1977.
[366] Blok, Aleksandr. "Poety." *PSS,* vol. 3. Moscow: Nauka, 1997. 88.
[367] Ibid. 338.
[368] Blok himself figures prominently in Tynianov's argument. "The Interlude" was written three years after Blok's death in 1921, which coincided with the sudden vogue, promoted by Maksim Gorkii, of the Serapion Brothers (Серапионовы братья) in literary circles, essentially designating a full stop to a certain generation of poets and the dominance of poetry in the contemporary canon. By all accounts, including Tynianov's, it felt like the end of an era – ushering in the arguable decline of Formalism itself, which had always essentially constituted itself upon the specificity of *poetic* language – and prefigured the official socialist realist ascendency in both literature and criticism to come. Thus, Tynianov's alteration of Blok's line(s) from either "there" or "thus" to "*here*" [«здесь»] was likely not an unconscious error – especially after five years of retrospect – but rather a pointedly ironic and intentional critique of the world that he inhabited. However, I would argue that it is also intrinsic to the metaphysics and temporality of Tynianov's argument in "The Interlude" [«Промежуток»].

evolution *takes place*. As a result, his study treats a moment in historical time at which that unity of place is called into question, which is where his original irony arises. This much is written into his title, which imagines his present time, 1924, as a moment of punctuated equilibrium—a spaced-out gap/interval (*промежуток*) in the measured continuity of history at which the indetermination of the present is met with the overdetermination of the past. This is the paradox of Tynianov's interlude: it is a point of discontinuity and deceleration in the form of evolution itself at which present entropy and past inertia seem to meet. With it, Tynianov announces several catastrophic consequences for the poetry of his time: 1) he acknowledges, unironically, it seems, the "victory of prose" over poetry [«факт остается фактом: проза победила»];[369] 2) he declares the dissolution of distinct poetic schools or movements;[370] 3) he reckons that poetry has become a more or less effete exercise in metapoetics;[371] and 4) he reasons that the poem, in abeyance, has gradually been displaced from the frame of the work by the figure of the *poet*, alienating poetry from itself.[372] These last two developments – and particularly, the displacement of the poem by the poet – are built upon an implicit opposition between 'poetry' and 'not-poetry'

[369] Ibid.

[370] «Школы исчезли, течения прекратились закономерно, как будто по команде. Нарастали в геометрической прогрессии, дифференцировались, распадались; затем самоопределение малых поэтических национальностей стало совершаться на пространстве квартиры, и, наконец, каждый был оставлен на самого себя». Ibid., 170. [The schools have disappeared, the movements have ceased to be, as if on command. They gained prominence in geometric progression, became differentiated, and fell apart; subsequently, the self-determination of minor poetic nationalities began to take place within the confines of individual apartments, and, finally, each poet was left to his own devices. 175.]

[371] «Сам стих стал любимой темой поэтов. Лучшая половина стихов Пастернака — о стихе. Мандельштам пишет о 'родном звукоряде', Маяковский о 'поэтических шорах'». Ibid., 170. [Poetry itself has become a favorite topic for poets. The better half of Pasternak's poems are about poetry. Mandelstam writes about his "dear sound sequence," Mayakovsky about his "poetic blinders." 176.]

[372] Speaking (ostensibly) about the poetic persona of Esenin: «Но это и опасно. Может произойти распад, разделение — литературная личность выпадет из стихов, будет жить помимо них; а покинутые стихи окажутся бедными […] И все же эта личность, связанная с эмоцией, была достаточно убедительна для того, чтобы заслонить стихи, для того, чтобы вырасти в своеобразный внесловесный литературный факт.» Ibid., 172. [But it is also dangerous. A breakdown or dissociation could occur – the literary personality could fall out of the poems and begin living alongside them, and the abandoned poems could turn out to be poor (…) And still, this personality, tied to emotion, was sufficiently convincing to overshadow the poems, to grow into its own kind of extra-literary fact. 177-78.]

that, in its most drastic interpretation, would constitute a re-speciation of literature (living literature, the "literary fact") itself, a possibility that Tynianov explicitly acknowledges elsewhere.[373]

However, for all of its apparent chaos, it would be misleading to think of the "interlude" as a stopping place of literary history; as Tynianov says, "history has no dead ends" [«У истории же тупиков не бывает»].[374] Rather, he more than once calls the interlude an evolutionary "clot" [«сгусток»][375]: something more like a gouty and unnatural *surplus* of 'history' and 'historical' determination than any *lack* or negation of it by a competing force. Instead, one could say that Tynianov treats a moment in time (a 'present') that he imagines has become prematurely naturalized, homogenized, and suspended *as history*—a present that presents itself as already 'past'/absent with regard to its own effects and has therefore ceased to reflect upon itself or move other than uniformly as an extension of itself. Blok's adverbial and mythological "thus" has become an inert and withering "here": the imprint of a productive force in abeyance. It is this dialectic of time's heterogenous force upon history and power to interrupt and intervene in it as *presence* that has fallen out of joint and, in a Hegelian sense native to Tynianov's thinking on history and literary evolution, become stuck in and with itself like an "unhappy consciousness" (*unglückliche Bewusstsein*) for which natural laws and formal determinations of regular movement and change have been suspended.

The interlude thus calls into question the entire premise of formalist thinking (i.e., the determinative power and regularity of the superstructure), and implicit in Tynianov's critique is

[373] Here, I am extending the analogy of punctuated equilibrium. As a biological hypothesis, it was developed almost fifty years later (see Eldredge and Gould, 1972), but in fact this is exactly how Tynianov is thinking the evolution of literary forms and exactly what he means by the effect of the interlude. He takes up this argument about the shifting frame or "re-speciation" (my analogy) of the work of art – i.e., what constitutes a "literary fact" – with greater rigor that same year in the essay "Literary Fact" [«Литературный факт»] (1924).
[374] Ibid., 171.
[375] Ibid., 172.

also a demand for a different kind of formalist scholarship that *could* accommodate the state of exception or suspension that the interlude represents. Because, for Tynianov, there is something more ominous about all of this 'history' without 'presence' than merely a lack of good poetry, and it has to do with the truth value of the work of art: "remove the title from the painting," he says of contemporary poetry, "and it turns out to be an oleograph" [снять с картины название, и картина окажется олеографией].[376] That is, the interlude also marks the ascendency of the simulacrum—so much so that, in misquoting Blok, it inadvertently invades the very epigraph to Tynianov's study. But why is this the case?

One answer that I find compelling and that makes Tynianov's study appropriate to the one presented here is that he is, after all, addressing poetry in the precipitous fallout of a historical rupture (the October Revolution) attended by an *epistemic* rupture in terms of *how history is thought*, including how he himself is thinking it. During that "interlude," not only does the work of art understand itself and its own history differently, but the criteria of its truth content – the thing that informs Tynianov's reading of it – have also been interrupted and fundamentally changed; and, in fact, it is Tynianov's judgment of *truth content* to which he assigns 'historical' or 'evolutionary' functions. The former hides its primacy behind the latter.

This is the situation we find ourselves in when considering the interlude or aporia between late Soviet and post-Soviet poetry. The historical self-understanding and truth content of the works of poetry presented in Part I *cannot*, by their very essence, be transmissible in like form to the works presented in Part II, nor can the latter be adequately read without projecting back into the former, which is how they generate their own unique historical truth and temporality. *Changes in how presence and history are thought*, then and now, and in a broad

[376] Ibid., 171.

sense – from political ideology to the ideology of the subject – determine the relationship between history and truth in the work of art, from within and from without, and this is the key to understanding the mystery of the pregnant moment in which the two coincide.

Describing a method and way of thinking history similar to Tynianov's in his "Theses on the Concept of History" ["Über den Begriff der Geschichte"] (1942), Walter Benjamin writes:

> Der Historismus gipfelt von rechtswegen in der Universalgeschichte. Von ihr hebt die materialistische Geschichtsschreibung sich methodisch vielleicht deutlicher als von jeder andern ab. Die erstere hat keine theoretische Armatur. Ihr Verfahren ist additiv: sie bietet die Masse der Fakten auf, um die homogene und leere Zeit auszufüllen. Der materialistischen Geschichtsschreibung ihrerseits liegt ein konstruktives Prinzip zugrunde. Zum Denken gehört nicht nur die Bewegung der Gedanken sondern ebenso ihre Stillstellung. Wo das Denken in einer von Spannungen gesättigten Konstellation plötzlich einhält, da erteilt es derselben einen Chock [Schock], durch den es sich als Monade kristallisiert. Der historische Materialist geht an einen geschichtlichen Gegenstand einzig und allein da heran, wo er ihm als Monade entgegentritt. In dieser Struktur erkennt er das Zeichen einer messianischen Stillstellung des Geschehens, anders gesagt, einer revolutionären Chance im Kampfe für die unterdrückte Vergangenheit. Er nimmt sie wahr, um eine bestimmte Epoche aus dem homogenen Verlauf der Geschichte herauszusprengen; so sprengt er ein bestimmtes Leben aus der Epoche, so ein bestimmtes Werk aus dem Lebenswerk. Der Ertrag seines Verfahrens besteht darin, daß im Werk das Lebenswerk, im Lebenswerk die Epoche und in der Epoche der gesamte Geschichtsverlauf aufbewahrt ist und aufgehoben. Die nahrhafte Frucht des historisch Begriffenen hat die Zeit als den kostbaren, aber des Geschmacks entratenden Samen in ihrem Innern.[377]
>
> Historicism culminates by right in universal history. Materialist historiography stands out from it methodologically perhaps more clearly than from any other approach. The method [of the former] is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill homogeneous, empty time. Materialist historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history – blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. The yield of this procedure is that the lifework is preserved [*aufbewahrt*] in this work and at the same time suspended [*aufgehoben*]: in the

[377] Benjamin, Walter. Thesis XVII von „Über den Begriff der Geschichte". *Gesammelte Werke.* Ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser and Rolf Tiedemann, vol. I/2. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991. 706.

> lifework, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history. The nourishing fruit of the historically conceived contains time as a precious but taste-depriving seed within.[378]

I would argue that in the concept of interlude – even if it is ultimately 'fictive' or ahistorical – Tynianov has identified a moment of what Benjamin would call "immanent critique" [*immanente Kritik*] in the systemic development of literature itself. He encounters a monad – a point – at which history and presence coincide in the "cessation of happening," and, in it, he sees a "revolutionary chance" for a new poetry to emerge, which is itself a referendum on the past and a constructive form. Despite the flaws of this method, which indeed tends to generalize, to anthropomorphize, and to "blast" eras, poetries, and works from their historical context, it also "preserves" that context as heterogenous and un-masterable, like time itself. It allows works to be present *now* in their own temporality.

This was the goal and working logic of this book: to preserve the *now* of these works while bringing them into the present by allowing them to speak and even argue with each other about the historical truth that they conceal within themselves. Whether or not I have succeeded in that goal, I hope that I have at least contributed to a new way of approaching these texts, authors, and eras and that I have, as much as possible, allowed them to speak for themselves. More than any other, that is my wish and my own critical fantasy of time, text, and encounter.

[378] Benjamin, Walter. Thesis XVII of "On the Concept of History." *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. 262 – 63. Translation amended from the original – DH.

APPENDICES

A. Didactic Tables

Table I: Two Modes of Truth

	veritas	**ἀλήθεια**
Dominant Sense	voice (active)	vision ([active]/passive)
Conceptual Principle	*adequatio* (mimesis)	"unconcealment" (Ger. *die Unverborgenheit*)
τέχνη	trope (valence: metaphor)	none (valence: irony)
Temporality	present	non-present (past/future)
(Non-Case)	non-correspondence	"errancy" (Ger. *irren*; Lat. *errare*)

Table II: Four Post-Soviet Signifying Practices

	[Skidan]	**[Medvedev]**	**[Glazova]**	**[Skandiaka]**
Dominant Temporality	Past	Present	Future Perfect, Cyclical ("Always Already")	{} (Non-Linear, Permutational)
Dominant Spatiality	Lack (*Manqué*)	Presence	Totality	Infinity
Discursive Model	Science	Myth	Theory	Text (Dissemination)
Axis	Rhetoric (Communication)	Rhetoric (Persuasion)	Grammar	Grammar
Target (Jakobson)	Context	Addresser	Addressee	Code
Function (Jakobson)	Referential	Emotive	Conative	Metalingual
Dominant Person	"we"; "one"	"I"	"thou"	{} (None/Multiple)
Dominant Trope	Metaphor	Metonymy	Symbol/Catachresis	Anaphora, Parallelism
Mode of Negativity (Kristeva)	"Negation of the Negation" (~~p)	"Nondisjunction" (~∨~)	"Non-synthetic Combination" (~p∧p)	Pre-Symbolic Heterogeneity (“Rhythm”; “Mobility”)
Signifying Practice (Kristeva)	"Metalanguage"	"Narrative"	"Contemplation"	"The Text"; "Text-Practice"
Pathological Case	The Paranoid	The Hysteric	The Obsessional	The Schizoid

B. Texts and Translations

Note: Texts are listed in order of appearance by author and title in Russian and English, followed by the page numbers in which they are referenced. All translations (and errors) are mine unless otherwise noted. – DH

1.

Аркадий Драгомощенко "Изображение плантации" (2011) // Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, "Illustration of a Plantation"

(pp. 90 – 111)

ИЗОБРАЖЕНИЕ ПЛАНТАЦИИ

What have you done, Odysseus,
We know what you have done…
Ezra Pound *The Cantos*, IV

Тавтология не является мыслимой точкой
равновесия значений, но описанием пространства
между появлением смысла и его расширением.
Расширение (игра по принятым правилам на отвесном свету)
совмещается со строением отсутствия.
Отсутствие почти, — необходимый остаток, —
всегда недостаточно.
Недостаточность, стремясь к полноте,
заключает субъект в предложение.

Предложение длиться (бежать): продлевать след угасания —
в итоге описано сочетанием «заглянуть за часть речи».
Речь расстилает пейзаж факультативности форм.
Форма (игра по принятым правилам на рассвете) —
разновидность внимания; биение «поэтому», в смысле, «из-за».
За окном располагается другое окно.
Окно в этом случае — описание желания, т. е. зрения.
Зрение не существительное, оно — не исполняемая форма
глагола «чтение».
Чтение перебора условных пространств

(игра по принятым правилам в беспечном саду,
лето благоприятно и руки просты),
но чаще чтение очерчено путешествием
в ландшафтах необязательных форм;
на полях выцветает стерня и замечание: «писать...».

Писать историю каждого имени. Пусть первой
будет страница, когда появляется Гермоген
(игра по не принятым правилам в ночь, когда осыпается клён;
в ту ночь написал, что никогда не стану писать),
который, оказывается, не имеет ни к чему отношения.
Отношение предполагает соединение
в возможности вне направления.
Направления листа, если слетает, не «сосчитать».
Считая по именам, возможно представить,
что порой имя шлёт отражение,
где неполнота обретает собственное завершение, т. е. в нас.
Нас — местоимение множественного числа,
винительного падежа. «Падать».
Опиши, как падать, не касаясь поверхности притяжения,
совлечённого... (игра по забытым правилам в углу переулка,
а за спиной ветер несет мусор вселенной) в лёгкость любви.
Любовь — как разъять то, что «отсутствие»,
но при этом моет волосы ветер,
сносящий назад представления о том,
что там могло бы случиться.
Быть означает не только статью
в словаре, но и телефонный звонок,
когда говорится о «бытии», которое рассыпается в эхо, —
однако в распределении частот слово забыто.
«Забыто» просачивается в забвение —
(игра, правила, лето, смена сезонов, «мне холодно»,
вероятно стоит поздняя осень)
то, что ранее не поддавалось ни описанию, ни полноте.
Полнота, не только исчезновение того,
что снимается именем, она — не предложение длиться,
но будто икота, кончики пальцев,
немеющие на ракушечных отмелях шёлка,
поскольку лето в мяте благоприятно,
разновидность внимания расположена в направлении
при пересмотре пространства, но чаще:
правила листьев, система связей
при ветре, наплывающем со спины, сзади,
застывающем в равновесии тавтологии «одиссей / цитата».

Подпись к изображению
Возрастание атмосферического давления при постоянстве западного ветра накануне выходных дней, когда произошло погребение дельтаплана…

Подпись к подписи изображения
Близорукость есть нечто вроде средства обобщения, если принять во внимание, что каждому следу надлежит знать о предшествующем, чтобы найти себя в смещении. Безопасность обещает только одно — слияние вещи и слова. Легче вообразить изображение как уловку времени. Каждая вещь и слово — и не слово, и не вещь. На самом деле все заключается в том, чтобы найти то, чего никогда не было. Поди туда не знаю куда. Они похоронили дельтаплан. Вечером. Закат. Длинная тень у полы пешехода. При не ошеломительном стечении публики. Дельтаплан закопали в сырой, а далее (глубже — таково слияние) вовсе мокрый песок немного южнее яхт-клуба на Крестовском. Мы, с Трембитского подтянулись на яле. Вилась мошкара. Канал походил на отвратительный детский почерк про «ничего не знаю». Не знакомые мне люди сидели на полотняных стульях. Как на сессии disgrace. Птицы не пели. Глаза сидевших были мучительны. Причина погребения дельтаплана предельно понятна — отсутствие малозначащей, какой-то неописуемо гибельной детали, фрагмента. Того, что по свидетельству Бхагавадгиты создаёт нас, как не целое, но вожделеющее того. На закате при публике. Дельтаплан, по-видимому, с честью сыграл свою икарийскую роль. Прощай механическое тело летания. Я с удовольствием вспоминаю этот необязательный эпизод. Есть ещё кое-что, о чём следовало бы сказать. И уложив без хлопот парус, а после уложив сложенный дакрон, а затем переломанные полые ребра в сырую уже вскипающую водой яму, мы разогнули спины, бросили по пригоршне песку, а затем открыли вино. Fly, robbin, fly. Это — закат в дельте, на островах. Там светлей. Прощай дельтаплан. Тебе уже не увидать островов, тебе не воспарить на плоской местности и не присниться зеркалом, расходящимся на части в соприкосновении с восходящим потоком. Кто ты и зачем не понять, в какой раз рассказывая сон о похоронах дельтаплана, как будто мы действительно приглашены на ужин с приветливыми богами.

ILLUSTRATION OF A PLANTATION

What have you done, Odysseus,
We know what you have done…
Ezra Pound *The Cantos*, IV

Tautology is not a conceivable point
of equilibrium between meanings, but a description of space
between the appearance of sense and its expansion.
Expansion (a game played according to accepted rules in direct light)
coincides with the building of absence.
Absence is almost – the inevitable remainder, –
always inadequate.
Inadequacy, striving for wholeness,
locks a subject into a sentence.

A sentence, to lengthen (to run on): to extend past the trace of its expiration,
in sum, described by the phrase "to look behind a part of speech."
Speech sows a landscape of the facultativeness of forms.
Form (a game played according to accepted rules at dawn)
is the variability of attention; the pulsation of "thus" in the sense of "due to."
Behind the window is stationed another window.
The window in this case is a description of desire, i.e., vision.
Vision is not a noun, it is a yet-to-be form of
the verb "reading."
Reading the ransacking of provisional spaces
(a game played according to accepted rules in a carefree garden,
the summer favorable and the hands plain),
but more often reading is circumscribed by traveling
in landscapes of unrequired forms;
in fields the stubble is fading and the remark: "to write…"

To write the history of every name. Let the first
page begin with the arrival of Hermogenes
(a game played according to unaccepted rules at night, when the maple sheds its skin; on that night, you wrote, I shall never write),
who, it turns out, does not bear any of this any relation.
A relation presumes unity
in possibility without direction.
The direction of a leaf, if it glides down, doesn't "count."
Counting off names, it is possible to imagine
that at times a name sends a reflection,
where incompletion acquires its own realization, i.e., in us.
Us is a plural pronoun
in the accusative case. "To fall."
Describe how to fall, without touching the surface of gravity,

for the one lured down… (a game played according forgotten rules in the corner of an alley, while behind your back, the wind carries the refuse of the universe) into the lightness of love.
Love – how to partition that which is "absence,"
but just then the wind washes your hair,
letting fall behind it imaginings of
what might have been.
To be is not only an entry
in the dictionary but a telephone call,
when "being" is spoken of, which disperses in an echo –
while in the distribution of frequencies, the word is forgotten.
"Forgotten" saturates forgetting –
(a game, rules, summer, the change of seasons, "I'm cold,"
it will probably be a long autumn)
that which earlier did not give itself over, either to description or to wholeness.
Wholeness is not only the disappearance of that
which a name removes, it is not a sentence to endure,
but, like a hiccup, the tips of fingers
growing numb on shell-strewn shoals of silk,
inasmuch as summer in mint tea is favorable,
the variability of attention is situated on a course
according to a reconsideration of space, but more often:
the rule of leaves, the system of connections
as the wind swells at your back, from behind,
stiffening in the equilibrium of the tautology "Odysseus / quotation."

Caption to the Illustration
An increase in atmospheric pressure due to the persistence of a westerly wind just before the weekend, when the *deltaplane* was buried.

Caption to the Caption of the Illustration
Myopia is something like a means of generalization if we pay attention to the fact that each trace must know its antecedent in order to find itself in displacement. Safety promises just one thing: the ingathering of the thing and the word. It's easier to imagine an illustration as a trick of time. Every thing and word – is not a word and not a thing. In fact, it all comes down to finding that which never was. Go on, I know not where. They buried the *deltaplane*. At evening. Sunset. A long shadow on the skirt of a passerby (the floor of a cave). An underwhelming convergence of the public. They covered the *deltaplane* in damp and, later (deeper – such was the ingathering), wholly wet sand just south of the sailing club on Krestovskii. We had dragged ourselves there from Trembitskii on a yawl. Midges buzzing everywhere. The channel resembled a disgusting child's handwriting about "I don't know." People I didn't know were sitting on canvas chairs. As if playing a game of *disgrace*. The birds didn't sing. The eyes of those sitting were torturous. The reason for burying the *deltaplane* was utterly clear: the absence of some hardly noticeable, indescribably fatal detail, a fragment. That which, according to the *Bhagavad Gita*, creates us as something un-whole but lusting after it. At sunset before

the public. The *deltaplane*, it was obvious, had played its Icarean role with honor. Farewell, mechanical body of flight. I recall with pleasure that unnecessary episode. There is yet another something that should be said. And having laid down the sail without hurry, and then having laid down the folded Dacron, and then having laid down the hollow, broken ribbing into the damp, already frothing pit of water, we straightened our backs, scattered a handful of sand, and then opened the wine. *Fly, robin, fly.* This: is sunset on the delta, on the islands. It's lighter there. Farewell, glider. It's no longer for you to see islands, to soar on the flat terrain and dream a mirror that breaks into pieces as it meets the rising current. Who you are and what you are for is not to be understood, that time we were narrating a dream about the burial of a *deltaplane*, as if we really were invited to dinner with affable gods.

2.

Александр Скидан "Схолии" (1999, pub. 2005) // Aleksandr Skidan, "Scholia" (Trans. Genya Turovskaya, *Red Shifting*, 2008)

(pp. 139 – 161)

СХОЛИИ

пролёты моста
колёса мельниц

рожок почтальона
и перегоны метро

<и Гёте Гёте конечно!>

не прислоняться
не спать

крепкие
мужские объятья

сентиментальная чепуха

"заткни пасть"

буквы "М" и "Ж" стёрты

*

всё что связано с подлинностью
мыльный привкус

техномузыка из дверей кафе
пролегомены

ко всякой будущей метафизике
воображаемые решения

катакомбы

"никогда не говори со мной таким тоном"

красно-коричневая чума
новый порядок означающих

the sun is going so fast

берёзки
полупроводники

сновидения
обрезки ногтей

сопротивление бесполезно

*

реклама volvo и вульвы
нила и сены отца и сына

(параллелизм
аллюзии

пустые места

теодицея

для пассажиров с детьми

паронимическая аттракция

<это не стихотворение>
это теологические ухищренья товара

самореклама (откровение

святого духа
в абсолютной разорванности

*

первобытный идол
фетиш или Грааль

место эпифании
и исчезновения

заклинания
и искупления слова

опредмечивания
превращения в вещь

пройти через отчуждение
развоплотиться

<эстетический опыт>

превратить себя в изысканный труп
surplus value

перламутровый след

речь не о человеке

весь его пыл

неосязаемая фантомность живого
присвоение ирреальности

последняя явь

.....
.....

"я буквально разъят на части"

*

натяжение или искривление нервов
затвердевшие или воспалённые органы

особое качество
неосязаемый цвет

уникальная
и преходящая форма

(покраснение.

уплотнение.

жар.

видимое на аутопсии поражение.

речь идёт о сложных
производных процессах

с помощью которых артикулируется
сущность болезни

*

непосредственная чувственность
клинического подхода редукция

болезнь как имя есть частное бытие

разрушая ткани
движение или функции

хирургическое вмешательство
обретает плоть

особое качество
неосязаемый цвет

уникальную
и преходящую форму

лингвистической структуры *реального*

(таким образом
мы вправе сказать

если искусство хочет выжить
в условиях промышленной цивилизации
художник должен научиться воссоздавать
в своих произведениях разрыв

между потребительской стоимостью
и традиционной понятностью

<разрыв>

который и составляет по существу

опыт шока

*

ни нарывающих виноградниками холмов
ни терцин обещающих очищение

утилизация образа
мониторинг

валоризация трещины у тебя в паху
бесчестит воображение.

чистая длительность предложения
заняться любовью

разрушительное сияние
выставленных в витрине мощей

представь
что ты ещё жив

в сослагательном наклонении
в информационных сетях

глянцевые костры
аура всесожженья

аура исчезновения ауры
<назови себя Беньямин>

аутоэротизм и ауто-
референциальность искусства

искусственный член
задроченный троеперстьем

крестовый поход
капитала

вложенного
в крестовый поход

In <the> dead God we trust

*

в "Бытии и Времени" (на странице 163) Х. утверждает:

как словесное озвучание
основано в речи

так акустическое восприятие
в слышании

что же он слышит?

скрипящую телегу
мотоцикл

северный ветер
стук дятла

потрескивание огня
колонну на марше

<в этом месте мы закрываем глаза
и прислушиваемся к сердцебиенью>

<Ханна Арендт шепчущая *люблю*>

<документальная хроника>

слышание (утверждает он там же)
конститутивно для речи

*

обезглавленный
ходит ещё четыре часа

стихотворение в прозе
о нежных пуговицах

ангел истории со свастикой
на серебряных крыльях

(их ему не сложить
перманентная катастрофа

алеаторика
клинамен

избирательное сродство
IBM

эмпирическое определение правил
(их ему не сложить

сказать ли

все они уходят во тьму

нацизм последовательно приходит
к эстетизации политики <или смерти>

<иными средствами>

*

<это не стихотворение>
существительное <Целан>

<и Гёте Гёте конечно!>

некий смысл
пусть в отсутствие и украдкой

"увидеть Александрию и умереть"

"я буквально разъят на части"

<некий смысл>

обезглавленный
ходит ещё четыре часа

но сказать это
значит сказать

повешенный висит вечно

январь 1999

SCHOLIA (trans. Genya Turovskaya)

*

spans of a bridge
the wheels of windmills

the postman's horn
and the space between stations

<and, of course, Goethe! Goethe!>

no leaning on doors
no sleeping

firm
masculine embraces

sentimental nonsense

"shut your trap"

the letters *M* and *W* erased

*

everything having to do with authenticity
taste of soap

techno coming out of the café doors
prologomena

imaginary solutions
to any future metaphysic

catacombs

"never speak to me in that tone of voice"

a red-brown plague

a new order of signifiers

the sun is going so fast

birch trees
semi-conductors

dream-visions
nail clippings

resistance is futile

*

advertising of volvo and vulva
nile and seine father and son

(parallelism
allusions

vacant seats

theodicy

for passengers with children

paronymous attraction

<this is not a poem>
this is the theological dodge of commodity

self-advertising (the revelation

of the holy ghost
in absolute rupture

*

primitive idol
fetish or Grail

the place of epiphany
and dissolution

conjuration
and redemption of the word

turning into objects
transforming into things

to pass through alienation
to become disembodied

<aesthetic experience>

to transform yourself into an exquisite corpse
surplus value

mother-of-pearl trace

the issue at hand is not man

the whole of his ardor

the intangible ghostliness of the living
appropriation of irreality

the ultimate presence

.....
.....

"I am literally torn to pieces"

*

the tension or the twisting of nerves
hardened or swollen organs

a particular quality
intangible color

a singular

and transient form

(reddening.

thickening.

fever.

affliction is apparent in the autopsy.

we are speaking of complex
derivative processes

by means of which the essence
of disease is articulated

*

immediate sensuality
of the clinical approach reduction

illness as name is private being

destroying the tissue
motion or functions

surgical intervention
acquires flesh

a particular quality
intangible color

the singular

and transient form

of the linguistic structure of the real

(thus we can
rightfully say

if art wants to survive
in the conditions of industrial civilization

in his works the artist must learn
to reproduce the rupture
between use value
and traditional intelligibility

<the rupture>

which constitutes in essence

the experience of shock

*

neither the hills blistering with vineyards
nor the tercets which promise catharsis

the utility of the image
monitoring

the valorization of the chasm in your groin
dishonors dreaming.

the pure duration of the offer
to make love

the devastating splendor
of the saint's relics exhibited under glass

imagine
you're still alive

in the subjunctive mood
in webs of information

glossy fires
aura of the burnt offering

aura of the disappearance of aura
<call yourself Benjamin>

auto-eroticism and auto-
referentialism of art

artificial cock
jerked by a trinity of fingers

the crusade
of capital

invested
in the crusade

in <the> dead God we trust

*

in *Being and Time* (page
163) H. asserts:

as the sounding of the word
is founded in speech

so acoustic perception is
in hearing

what is it that he hears?

a squeaking cart
a motorcycle

the north wind
a woodpecker's tapping

the fire's crackle
a column of soldiers on the march

<here we close our eyes and listen
closely to the heartbeat>

<Hannah Arendt whispering I love>

<a documentary chronicle>

hearing (he asserts ibid.)
is constitutive of speech

*

a headless man walks lives
for four hours

a poem in prose
about tender buttons

the angel of history with a swastika
on silver wings

(he cannot fold them
a permanent catastrophe

aleatorics
clynamen

elective affinities
IBM

the empirical determination of rules
(he cannot fold them

should we say

they are all receding into the darkness

nazism logically comes
to the aesthetization of politics <or death>

<by other means>

*

<this is not a poem>
a noun <Celan>

<and, of course, Goethe! Goethe!>

a certain sense

even if in absence or on the sly

"to see Alexandria and to die"

"I am literally torn to pieces"

<a certain sense>

a headless man walks lives
for four hours

but to say this
is to say

the hanged man hangs forever

January 1999

3.

Александр Скидан "Дедириум" (1993) // Aleksandr Skidan, "Delirium" (Trans. Genya Turovskaya, *Red Shifting*, 2008)

(pp. 149 – 161)

ДЕЛИРИУМ

Мы – стрелки, ползущие слепо
к вершине ночи.
–Георг Тракль

(...) убыль убиенного эхо. лот,
камнем падая в забытье пращи,
зачинает неведомое, ведомый
мерой "падения"; дочь входит в него. и снова –
дочь, другая. Тьма дочерняя, низвергаясь,
покрывает Израиль; лист
воскуряет утопию
к небесам, книга
вопрошает огнь блед, облизывая язык. Племена. Откуда
убыль
в сих пустынных местах,
народ мой? Даже воспламеняясь, я не произнесет больше
"я"; пригуби шелест этой травы ниоткуда: пагуба
пыли. Распыление. Рот мой. Зреть,
как полыхает зима, как
раскрывается, сотрясаясь, плод пустыни,
горчайший.
Неизмеримость.
Низкие
облака. Облатка "александрийской" зимы; опьянение,
как если бы – никогда. Черным крылом помавает ночь,
как если бы водрузилась на бюст богини. Буква
плача
пред-восхищает поэму, прильнув
к плечу отсутствия.Кто немотствует здесь? Потлач,
он сказал. это когда некому, но его
поправили – никому. на бумаге
всесожжение напоминает
(ничто
напоминает ничто) упражнение

в поминальном искусстве; жанр, чей стиль также
"сделал стихописательство бесполезным",
курсив его. итак,
продолжает она, фраза, плач, или стена, льнет
к метонимии. он вкушает
                пряную прелесть ее
межножья: так нож
        возносит
молитву белизне теста, терзая; буквально было бы
"я люблю тебя" – ключом во влажном
отверстии замка повернулся язык,
выплевывая и повелевая, к кровосмешенью, к завязи.
Перед стеной огня она кончает, жить
бы буквально было

I

                как зима,
тринадцатое, мы выходим
на лед, еще светать не начинало,
и на губной гармонике с немецким
акцентом он наигрывает: ах,
мой милый, и так далее. А после
все елки, все шары, вся мишура,
вся чепуха, все елки с планетарным
девизом выспренним – в один
шатер. и...
нет, не всё, еще не всё,
ах, и так далее; как вспыхнет –
и "ах, мой милый августин", и
(...) чистый призыв, говор смертных. светлы
одежды странников; облаков белые свитки.
Из беззвучия восстает тонкорунный
ствол мелодии, паутину плетет шелковичный червь,
пожирая маковые зерна письма; рука,
мимезис. Тонкая изморозь на деревьях. Курить
траву, проникаясь пылью
пыльцой расцвеченных кимоно,
                никнуть
долу,
        исторгая безумие; ночь нежна. И
ни капли дождя. В легких – проникновенный жар,
пелена рун печальных – в глазах; ресниц мятный озноб

колотит пагоду нефритового стебля,входящего в шеи
медленный разворот, ах, как ворот теснит
сон, бездыханен. Пей
плывущую вдоль пустоты звезду.
Пыль. Как странны
прядь, распускающая погоду,
сегмент стекла, пение. Фрамуги
фрагмент. И
течет Иордан. Но вновь
окликает черное кружение кружение птиц,
их стигматы, светоносного отрока с кистью
женственной, в желтеющих лунах, се сестра!
Рождение рассветных теней.

любовь?
а что любовь – нечаянно нагрянет
кривой иглою в сердце

II

Но эти танцы у огня огня
испепеление роенье
над схваткой родовой играй
сбор траурный для урны праздной
единорог пироманьяк мефисто
"библиотека в сущности притон
пусть и александрийская гетеры ж
подобно бутерброду или книге
но тоже норовят упасть ничком
или раскрыться на пикантном месте
и в каждой буковке презренной алфавита
отеческой отечный Бог живет
и выедает то что повкуснее
как червь червленых уст спиритуал"
"так ментор лейбниц лейб-гусар монад
над или ниц но с тиком математик
и с ментиком бессмертия в уме
– держу в руках как череп гамлетизма
и взвешиваю бедный" ах
испепеление роенье
салютовали задираньем ног
во глубине сибирских руд колодца

картезианского не то чтобы смешно
шалун уж заморозил пальчик
как сменовеховец махно
и всех и вся слепая сила мнет
и всех и вся кладут в двусмысленный пенальчик
не искушайся друг петрарки тасса друг
без нужды
и вообще
БЕНЗИН!
над схваткой родовой играй
бессмысленно как камикадзе
кричат блаженные банзай
мучительный истошный комик
за ахеронт пронесся он
не венценосец – алкоголик пневмы
за тем что не избыть плерому травмы
и не исполниться
и не исполнить
ах, мой милый августин
августин августин
ах, мой милый Августин всё прошло
всё

III

но эти танцы у огня огня

мы в оптиной как постояльцы как отцы
любовной бойни аспиды аскезы
пустыня оптимальная. а я
а я великий в той пустыне бражник
муссирующий аппиевый тракт
как бы калигула
последний грешник
на кали-юге на пупе
как муссейон – и в розницу и оптом
центурион на медленном коне
(прощай прощай мой август августейший!)
косская тень филета сука
слышу вижу тебя в петардах эзры.
а они сказали нет один
кто-то сказал пойдем

я покажу агнца в чалме и агнца
в шлеме
и сорок четыре приема любви
и сорок четыре приема смерти
(но я
не вижу повешенного)
утешься
этой тщетой утраченной звучной
устраненной ненужности
нежности безделушки РТУХ
и клюв птаха дрожал. тот
бог брал пункцию у меня: пиши (но я
не вижу) и тогда я сказал "хочу
умереть

IV

.. . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . .
. . .
. . . . .
. .
. . . . . .
. . . . и т.д.

(апрель-июнь 93)

DELIRIUM (trans. Genya Turovskaya)

We are minute hands creeping blindly
towards the heights of night.
—Georg Trakl

(…) the fading of the annihilated echo. lot,
falling like a stone in the oblivion of a sling,
conceives the unknown, led by
the degree of "fall"; the daughter enters him and again—
the daughter, another. A daughterly darkness, cascading down,
covers Israel; a leaf
burns utopia
to the heavens, the book
questions the pale fire, licking its tongue. Tribes. Whence
the loss
in these desert places,
my people? Even igniting, I no longer pronounces
"I"; taste the rustle of this grass from nowhere: waste
of dust. Scattering. My mouth. To behold,
how winter blazes, how
the fruit of the desert, trembling, opens,
bittermost.
Immensity.
Low
clouds. The host of the "alexandrian" winter; intoxication,
as if—never. The night beats a black wing,
as if about to hoist itself onto the bust of the goddess. The letter
of weeping
anticipates the poem, cleaving unto
the shoulder of absence. Who keeps silent here? Potlach,
he said. this when there's nobody, but they
corrected him—no one. on paper
the holocaust recalls
(nothing
recalls nothing) an exercise
in funeral art; a genre, whose style also
"made verse-writing *useless*,"
his italics. even so,
she continues, the phrase, the weeping, the wall, leans
to metonymy. he tastes
the pungent delight of her
lap: thus the knife
offers up
a prayer to the whiteness of dough, as it tortures it; literally

it would have been "I love you"—like a key the tongue
turned in the moist opening of the keyhole,
spitting out and commanding, to incest, to the seed.
Before the wall of fire she comes, it would be literal
to live

I

as in winter,
the thirteenth, we go out
onto the ice, it still hasn't begun to grow light,
and he plays on the harmonica
with a German accent: ach,
my darling, and so forth. And later
all the firs, all the balls, all the tinsel,
all the nonsense, all the firs with a bombastic
planetary motto—into the same
tent, and...
no, it's not over, it's not over,
ach, and so forth; how it will blaze up
and "ach, my darling augustine," and

(...) a clear summons, dialect of mortals. bright
are the vestments of the pilgrims; white scrolls of clouds.
From the soundlessness rises up the thin-fleeced
stem of melodies, the silkworm weaves its web,
devouring the poppy seeds of writing; hand,
mimesis. A fine hoar-frost on the trees. To smoke
grass, letting the dust enter you,
the pollen of multicolored kimonos,
to slump
downwards,
expelling madness; tender is the night. And
not a drop of rain. Penetrating heat in the lungs,
shroud of sad runes in the eyes; the mint chill of eyelashes
strikes the pagoda of the jade stalk, entering in
the slow turn of the neck, ach, how the collar stifles
the dream, lifeless. Drink
the star sailing across emptiness.
Dust. How strange
the lock of hair that releases the weather,
a segment of glass, singing. A fragment
of the transom. And
the Jordan flows. But again

the black circling hails a black circling of birds,
their stigmata, the light-bearing lad with a woman's
hand, in yellowing moons, sister behold!
Birth of dawn shadows.
---
love?
what of love—it strikes suddenly
like a crooked needle in the heart

II

But these dances by the fire fire
incineration swarming
play above the ancestral skirmish
funeral gathering for the idle urn
unicorn pyromaniac mephisto
"the library is essentially a den of vice
even the Alexandrian heterae
like bread-and-butter or a book
but they too are in the habit of falling face down
or opening on a piquant place
and in each contemptible letter of the
paternal alphabet our dropsical god lives
and devours that which is tastiest
as the worm devours the spiritual of deep red lips"

"thus mentor Leibniz life-guard of the monads
above or face down but with the tick of mathematics
and with a hussar cloak of immortality in mind... I hold
in my hands like the skull of hamletism
and weigh the poor" ach

incineration swarming
they saluted by raising up their legs
deep in the Siberian mines of the cartesian well
not so the naughty child
should freeze a little finger
like the blue-blooded makhno
and the blind power crumples everyone and all
and everyone and all placed into an ambiguous pencil-case
don't tempt yourself friend of petrarch tasso's friend
needlessly
and anyway

and GAS!

play above the ancestral skirmish
senselessly like a kamikaze
the blessed cry banzai
the painfully emaciated comedian
rushing by the acheron he's
no crowned head—alcoholic of the lung
so as not to be rid of the plemora trauma
and not be fulfilled
not to fulfill
ah, my darling augustine
augustine augustine
ah, my darling Augustine all has passed

all

III

---

but these dances by the fire fire

---

we at optina are as guests fathers
asps of ascesis in love's slaughterhouse
an optimal desert. whereas I
am a great tippler in that desert
whipping up the apian way
like a caligula
the final sinner
on the kali-yuga on the navel
like the mouseion—the wholesale and retail
centurion on a slow horse
farewell farewell my most august august
o cossic shade of philetas bitch
I hear thee see thee in ezra's petards.
but no they said one
someone said let's go
I'll show thee the lamb in a turban and the lamb
in a helmet
and the forty-four moves of love
and the forty-four moves of death
(but I

don't see the hanged man)
console thyself
with this vanity this lost sonorous
discarded uselessness
tenderness trinket ptyx
and ptah's beak trembled, the god
thoth tapped into my spine: write (but I
can't see) and I said "I
want to die

IV

.. . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . .
. . .
. . . . .
. .
. . . . . .
. . . ., etc.

4.

Кирилл Медвевев «ярко одетый парень…» (2005) // Kirill Medvedev “a guy in his nicest clothes…” (Trans. Keith Gessen, *It’s No Good,* 2012)

ярко одетый парень у входа в метро,
две девушки прошли мимо,
наверное, засмеялись над ним,
он всё кричал им вслед:
девушка, что не так? что не так? девушка? девушка?
а потом громко, уже про себя:
ПИЗДА!
...
какой-то неуверенный в себе пижон;
конечно, в этой сцене было больше жизни,
чем в груде прочитанных книг;
но это столкновения элементарных частиц,
происходит трение оболочек;
я - элементарная частица:
моё тщеславие, пересекающее
границы моего "я" -
невероятное тщеславие,
существующее уже где-то отдельно,
как душа,
без меня;
идёт ли это вразрез
с интересами людей, желающих тусоваться
и потреблять,
с их мелким тщеславием? -
там, где у меня - революция,
перелицовывающая всё -
переворачивающая на голову всё и вся -
там у них
мелкобуржуазная революция -
где у меня - золотая медаль за трусость,
у них - экстремальный спорт;
где у них китайский массаж, у меня -
наркоз, жестокий режим (священная деспотия).
глубокое бессилие,
отрешённость;
среди ледяного разнообразия этого буржуазного мира,
среди его покрытых инеем предметов, бледных, цветных,
мы рады тому, что у нас не остаётся ничего общего, только любовь,
и там где у них любовь,

у меня тоже любовь,
я люблю двух девок,
которые проходили мимо,
я люблю парня,
который сказал "пизда".
НО - ЧТО ЭТО ЗА ЛЮБОВЬ?!
ЭТО ИНТЕРЕСНО,
ПОТОМУ ЧТО МНЕ ЖЕ НЕДОСТУПНА
НОРМАЛЬНАЯ ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСКАЯ ЛЮБОВЬ -
ЛЮБОВЬ МУЖЧИНЫ К ЖЕНЩИНЕ НАПРИМЕР,
МНЕ ДОСТУПНО ТОЛЬКО СЕКСУАЛЬНОЕ ВЛЕЧЕНИЕ
И ЛЮБОВЬ КО ВСЕМУ ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСТВУ -
невинная отрешённая любовь -
и вот я спрашиваю кого-то далёкого и отрешенного,
но он молчит - как будто немой или его нет,
так выясняется, что это я холодный умалишённый.
тот кто был мной, уже никогда не будет со мной. ...

(а ЗА мной уже встаёт благодарная очередь из тех,
кто так никого и не полюбил,
не исследовал, не растлил и не убил)

a guy in his nicest clothes
standing next to the entrance to the metro
two girls walk by
they must have laughed—
he kept yelling after them:
girls, what's wrong? what is it? girls? girls?
then loudly, to himself now:
CUNT!

an insecure fop, next to the metro;
there was more life in this scene, of course,
than in a pile of battered books;
but this is a collision of elementary particles,
it's a rubbing-together of fragments;
I'm an elementary particle:
my ambition exceeds
the limits of my "I"—
my awesome ambition,
which already exists as if separately,
without me,
like a soul;
does this contradict
the interests of people who want to hang out
and consume,
with their tiny ambitions?
whereas I want—revolution,
to change the face of everything,
to overthrow everything and everyone—
they want
a petty bourgeois revolution—
whereas I have a gold medal for cowardice,
they have—extreme sports;
they have Chinese massage, whereas I have
narcotics, and a cruel regime (enlightened despotism),
profound powerlessness,
and alienation;
among the icy variety of this consumer paradise,
among the objects covered in sparkles, white, and colorful,
we are happy to find that we have nothing in common, except love,
and where they have love,
I also have love,
I love the two girls
who walked by,
I love the boy
who said "cunt."
BUT WHAT SORT OF LOVE IS THIS?

THAT'S AN INTERESTING QUESTION,
BECAUSE I AM UNABLE TO EXPERIENCE
NORMAL HUMAN LOVE—
THE LOVE OF A MAN AND A WOMAN, FOR EXAMPLE,
I CAN ONLY UNDERSTAND SEXUAL ATTRACTION
AND LOVE FOR ALL MANKIND—
an innocent, self-negating love,
and so I ask someone far away, and also self-negating,
but he doesn't answer—as if he's mute or not there,
and that's how I find out that I'm frigid and insane;
the person who was me will never now be with me….

(meanwhile BEHIND me a line is already forming,
of those whom no one ever loved,
no one ever investigated, no one corrupted, and no one killed)

5.

Анна Глазова «Законы» // Anna Glazova “Laws” (2013)

ЗАКОНЫ

1

украл вину у виновного, провинился,
чтобы на краденом месте вырос,
на пустом месте, вырос закон.

украл что-то,
бесхозное,
и назвал: «вина»
или соврал, что украл;
тем и виноват, что невинен.

сделал, чтобы зачлось его имя,
чтобы из имени выросло дерево и из дерева дом –
чтобы для кражи был дом.

2

из звука извлечь
целый закон, ключ к каждому звуку.

в голосе будет медь или дерево,
если назвать имя краснея за голос,
будто о близком под присягой солгал,
променял на стыдное дело.

лучше бы выпустить из памяти имя.

3

обручились смертной кожей,
со светом остынет взгляд.

как в лодке лежит в теле топливо,
неподвижно,
внутренний жар.

по природному закону сгорает почти всё.
когда испарится вся кожа плёнка за плёнкой,

мы вдохнём в одно лёгкое,
только это будет не воздух уже.

4

если не взять законом –
бери измором, бери пример у болота,
только мёртвое может без ущерба вернуться.

но мы с лодкой ныряли уже и так и ныряем,
то два выхода на поверхности, то в глубоком сне,

много раз вернулись без груза и смерти от морока.

5

ручьи бы сами стекли на мель
а соль из глубоких слоёв растворилась
только зачем бы в воздухе камню гореть
с громом падая хоть в пресную воду?

если закон что всё равно
всё со всем смешано
ты бы не мог – под собственным весом – в него
провалиться

6

…уж лучше суди меня
по закону противоречия –

«что», говори, «ты сказал, было
не так сказано, а другому,
и это уже
само по себе
доказывает» –

тогда буду соглашаться на сговор
с маленькими движениями
рук и лица.

7

когда под луной зацветает подлунок
и растёт,

яркие звёзды его морочат,
ему их мгновенный склад –
распорядок вещей.

а когда в поворот
подброшен как дитя камень,
это приблудный сон,

первое правило: не запомни.

8
молитва

сделай так
чтобы был человеку волк – волк
чтобы под кожей над сердцем
шли от стыда красные пятна когда на тебя смотрят.

LAWS

1

[he] stole guilt from the guilty, fell into guilt,
so that in the stolen place there would grow,
in the empty place, there would grow a law.

[he] stole something,
unattended,
and named it: “guilt”
or [he] lied about stealing;
and is guilty for being guiltless.

[he] did it so that his name would be credited,
so that from the name there might grow a tree and from the tree a home –
so that there might be a home for stealing.

2

to derive from a sound
the entire law, the key to every sound.

in a voice there will be copper or wood,
to call a name blushing at [your] voice,
as if [you] lied about a loved one under oath,
bartering for something shameful.

it would be better to let the name fall from memory.

3

[they] were betrothed by mortal skin,
with the light will cool the gaze.

as in a boat lies in the body fuel,
a still,
inner heat.

by natural law almost everything burns away.
when the skin evaporates film by film,
we will inhale into one lung,
only it will be air no longer.

4

if you don’t take it by law –
take it by force, take the example of the bog,
only a dead thing can return undamaged.

but we have dived with the boat already and dive,
so there are two exits on the surface, so that in a deep sleep,

we returned many times without burden and death from the fog.

5

streams would have run themselves aground
and salt from deep layers have dissolved
only why should a stone burn in the air
if only with a thunder to fall in fresh water?

if it’s a law that it’s all the same
everything is confused with everything
you wouldn’t – under your own weight – be able to
fall through

6

…then you’d better judge me
by the law of contradiction:

say “what you said was
not said that way but to another,
and that already
in itself
proves it” –

then I will agree to a compact
with small movements
of hands and face.

7

when under the moon blooms a moonflower
and grows,

bright stars beguile it;
to it, their momentary disposition is
an order of things.

but when into the wending
is tossed away like a child a stone,
it is a bastard dream,

first rule: don’t remember.

8
a prayer

make it so
that to man a wolf is a wolf
that under the skin above the heart
[there would] break out from shame red spots when they look upon you.

6.

Ника Скандиака *из* «[27/11/05 – 1/9/2006]» (оп. 2007) // Nika Skandiaka *from* "[27/11/05 – 1/9/2006]" (pub. 2007)

(pp.)

i

отличная композиция (взрыв)
[на (красной [ознаменовался?])/ {сем заброшенной
{ритм (ткацкой)}сем [на закате]}ритм {фабрике/ на канале
из обратных косых и нулей,} воздухе?]
на овдовелом ивами канале, на
овдовелом ивами
(листьями?)
канале,

(взрыв)

[слева,] на пустующей внешними/ ивами [величинами?
признаками?]рике на /
[здешними?]овдовевшем

ивами канале из костей

ii

человечная оценка [(взрыв)]

отличная [(взрыв)] композиция [(взрыв)]

море

из обратных косых и нулей (истлевшее
[хорошо]
уцелевает) ([быстро]
успеваешь больше чем медленно) {более [(взрыв
[{дольше
носится}/{носится/ дольше}])]}/быстрее
[коренным образом] что-то
понемаешь или сделать/ {[всё,]
убегаю}/{[

и это
всегда}/{]

i

excellent composition (bang)
[on (the red [was it commemorated?])/ {sem abandoned
{rhythm (textile)}sem [at sunset]}rhythm {factory/ on the channel
made of backslashes and zeros,} the air?]
on the widowly by willows channel, on the
widowly by willows
(by leaves?)
channel,

(bang)

[from left,] on the vacated by-outsiders / by-willows [by-magnitudes?
by-in-significations?]riverica on /
[by-locals?] the widowed

by willows channel made of bones

ii

human estimation [(bang)]

excellent [(bang)] composition [(bang)]

the sea

made of backslashes and zeros (the rotten
[alright]
survives) ([quickly]
you can go more than slow) {more [(bang
[{further
rushes on} / {rushes on/ further}])]}/ faster
[fundamentally] something
you understand or to do/ {[that's it,]
I'm running away}/{[

and this
always}/{]

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