



arts

Slavic and Eastern-European Visuality

Modernity and Tradition

Edited by
Dennis Ioffe

Printed Edition of the Special Issue Published in *Arts*

www.mdpi.com/journal/arts



Slavic and Eastern-European Visuality: Modernity and Tradition

Slavic and Eastern-European Visuality: Modernity and Tradition

Editor

Dennis Ioffe

MDPI • Basel • Beijing • Wuhan • Barcelona • Belgrade • Manchester • Tokyo • Cluj • Tianjin



Editor

Dennis Ioffe

Department of Languages
and Letters

Université libre de Bruxelles

Brussels

Belgium

Editorial Office

MDPI

St. Alban-Anlage 66

4052 Basel, Switzerland

This is a reprint of articles from the Special Issue published online in the open access journal *Arts* (ISSN 2076-0752) (available at: www.mdpi.com/journal/arts/special_issues/slavic_art).

For citation purposes, cite each article independently as indicated on the article page online and as indicated below:

LastName, A.A.; LastName, B.B.; LastName, C.C. Article Title. <i>Journal Name</i> Year , <i>Volume Number</i> , Page Range.

ISBN 978-3-0365-6635-1 (Hbk)

ISBN 978-3-0365-6634-4 (PDF)

Cover image courtesy of Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

“New Planet” by Konstantin Yuon

© 2023 by the authors. Articles in this book are Open Access and distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license, which allows users to download, copy and build upon published articles, as long as the author and publisher are properly credited, which ensures maximum dissemination and a wider impact of our publications.

The book as a whole is distributed by MDPI under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND.

Contents

About the Editor	vii
Preface to "Slavic and Eastern-European Visuality: Modernity and Tradition"	ix
Dennis Ioffe Avant-Garde versus Tradition, a Case Study—Archaic Ritual Imagery in Malevich: The Icons, the Radical Abstraction, and Byzantine Hesychasm Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2023, 12, 10, doi:10.3390/arts12010010	1
Igor Pilshchikov "More than Just a Poet": Konstantin Batiushkov as an Art Critic, Art Manager, and Art Brut Painter Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022, 11, 126, doi:10.3390/arts11060126	29
Christina Lodder 1905 and Art: From Aesthetes to Revolutionaries Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022, 11, 65, doi:10.3390/arts11030065	91
Henrietta Mondry Physical and Metaphysical Visualities: Vasily Rozanov and Historical Artefacts Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022, 11, 70, doi:10.3390/arts11040070	107
John E. Bowlt "Wings of Freedom": Petr Miturich and Aero-Constructivism Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022, 11, 52, doi:10.3390/arts11030052	119
Willem Jan Renders "You Can Do This": Working with the Artistic Legacy of El Lissitzky Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022, 11, 109, doi:10.3390/arts11060109	133
Ekaterina Bobrinskaya New Anthropology in Works of Vasily Chekrygin Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022, 11, 86, doi:10.3390/arts11050086	163
Alexander Zholkovsky Digital High: The Art of Visual Seduction? Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022, 11, 97, doi:10.3390/arts11050097	179
Sarah Wilson <i>All the Missiles Are One Missile</i> Revisited: Dazzle in the Work of Zofia Kulik Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022, 11, 116, doi:10.3390/arts11060116	197
Monika Spivak Andrey Bely as an Artist vis-à-vis Aleksandr Golovin: How the Cover of the Journal <i>Dreamers</i> Was Created Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022, 11, 99, doi:10.3390/arts11050099	209
Willem G. Weststeijn Sergei Sigei and Aleksei Kruchenykh: Visual Poetry in the Russian Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022, 11, 98, doi:10.3390/arts11050098	235

Mark Lipovetsky	
A Trickster in Drag: Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe’s Aesthetic of Camp	
Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022 , 11, 87, doi:10.3390/arts11050087	257
Mary A. Nicholas	
Metaphor and the Material Object in Moscow Conceptualism	
Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022 , 11, 88, doi:10.3390/arts11050088	277
Dorota Walczak-Delanois	
The Visuality of Hortus Mirabilis in Krystyna Miłobedzka’s Poetry—A Study of Selected Examples	
Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022 , 11, 104, doi:10.3390/arts11050104	309
Nataliya Zlydneva	
Representation of <i>Corpus Patiens</i> in Russian Art of the 1920s	
Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022 , 11, 105, doi:10.3390/arts11050105	331
Leanne Rae Darnbrough	
Visions of Disrupted Chronologies: Sergei Eisenstein and Hedwig Fechheimer’s Cubist Egypt	
Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022 , 11, 92, doi:10.3390/arts11050092	347
Andrey Astvatsaturov	
The Bridge and Narrativization of Vision: Ambrose Bierce and Vladimir Nabokov	
Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022 , 11, 89, doi:10.3390/arts11050089	361
Irina Sakhno	
The Metaphysics of Presence and the Invisible Traces: Eduard Steinberg’s Polemical Dialogues	
Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022 , 11, 85, doi:10.3390/arts11050085	381
Evgeny Pavlov	
Andrei Sen-Senkov and the Visual Poetics of the Global Commonplace	
Reprinted from: <i>Arts</i> 2022 , 11, 123, doi:10.3390/arts11060123	401

About the Editor

Dennis Ioffe

Prof. Dr. Dennis Ioffe is an Associate Professor of Russian Studies (Titulaire de la Chaire de langue et littérature Russe), Département d'enseignement de Langues et Lettres, Faculté de Lettres, Traduction et Communication, Université libre de Bruxelles. Before coming to ULB Dr Ioffe served as a post-doctoral Research Fellow and an Assistant Professor at the Department of Languages and Cultures (Slavic and East-European), The Faculty of Arts, Ghent University, Belgium. He also served as a Research Fellow at the University of Amsterdam's Department of Slavic Languages & Cultures. Since January 2016, Dr. Ioffe is Co-Editor-in-Chief, Russian Literature, Elsevier Science BV. Together with Prof. Petra James, he co-founded a new research center MODERNITAS (La Maison des Sciences Humaines de l'ULB). Since 2017 he is a Senior Scientific Evaluator at The European Commission (EC), The European Innovation Council. Aside from ULB, UvA, UGent, during his career Dennis Ioffe has held lecturing and research appointments at the University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom) and Memorial University (Canada).

He has authored over 100 scholarly articles and edited/co-edited a dozen academic collections with major academic publishers in Western Europe and the US. Prof. Ioffe's publications have appeared in "Canadian-American Slavic Studies", "Soviet and Post-Soviet Review", "Oxford University Press", "Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism", "East European Jewish Affairs", "Arts", "Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire", "Russian Studies in Literature", "New Literary Review" (NLO), "Religions", "Studies in Slavic Cultures", "Australian Slavonic and East European Studies", "Neohelicon", "Slavonic and East European Review", "The Journal of European Studies", "Russian Literature" (Elsevier Science), "Slavic & East European Journal", "Acta Semiotica Fennica" and others.

Preface to “Slavic and Eastern-European Visuality: Modernity and Tradition”


This Special Issue of *Arts*: “Slavic and Eastern-European Visuality: Modernity and Tradition” is focused on researching interactions of art and literature, of philosophy and visual poetry, and generally on theoretical aspects of cultural analysis. Despite the absence of an all-encompassing theoretical manifesto, a certain “Modernist urge” displayed several consistent aesthetic principles and methods of creation that resulted in a fundamental revision of the universal values that had been previously culturally dominant. Modernism permanently struggled with tradition. How do we define “tradition” as applied to Eastern European cultural subjects? How do we define “experimental visuality”? What are some of the intriguing case studies Eastern Europe can offer in this respect? Our Special Issue explores how tradition coexisted with various modernist visuality, how innovation combatted archaicism, how powerful art institutions along with political regimes shaped this entire scene of visual and literary action over the last two and half centuries, up until the present day. We adopt Jürgen Habermas view of modernity and Modernism as a fundamentally unfinished project. Initiated by the combatant philosophy of Enlightenment (starting from 18th century), “the project of modernity” offers a form of permanent progress and constant change, the everlasting state of evolvement that cherishes art’s autonomous status which answers to its intrinsic immanent logic of “total representation”.

Dennis Ioffe

Editor

Article

Avant-Garde versus Tradition, a Case Study—Archaic Ritual Imagery in Malevich: The Icons, the Radical Abstraction, and Byzantine Hesychasm

Dennis Ioffe 

Faculty of Letters, Translation and Communication, Department of Languages and Letters,
Université libre de Bruxelles, 1050 Bruxelles, Belgium; denis.ioffe@ulb.be

Abstract: Serving as a conceptual introduction to the ARTS special issue, the article discusses the importance of archaic imagery and poetics of a major avant-garde actor who often symbolizes the main axis of Slavic radical modernism in its Avant-garde phase. Kazimir Malevich has widely explored religious archaic imagery in his oeuvre, engaging in a dialog with a historical tradition of representation. The article discusses Malevich's iconic legacy, zooming in on the philosophy of Malevich's suprematist imagery of peasants, Orthodox icons, and the ways of visualizing of an inner Hesychast prayer. In this context, the paper also analyzes Russian philosophy of language, imiaslavie and Hesychasm as it stemmed out from the creative perception of Byzantine philosophical lore developed by Gregory Palamas and several other thinkers.

Keywords: Slavic and Russian modernism; life-creation; self-fashioning; icons; Hesychasm; Malevich

Citation: Ioffe, Dennis. 2023. Avant-Garde versus Tradition, a Case Study—Archaic Ritual Imagery in Malevich: The Icons, the Radical Abstraction, and Byzantine Hesychasm. *Arts* 12: 10. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12010010>

Academic Editor: Nadezhda Stanulevich

Received: 3 November 2022

Revised: 20 December 2022

Accepted: 26 December 2022

Published: 9 January 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

The *long 20th century* is arguably the most turbulent and complex of all grand-scale periods in the history of European visual art. Eastern Europe is no exception in this context, and if anything, a prime example of the veritable explosion culture underwent during this period. Many Eastern European authors and artists made more than sizeable contributions to this explosion in various directions and experimental forms. Modernism, viewed as a totality of aesthetic principles and theories, took shape already during the second half of the 19th century and achieved a measure of aesthetic coherence before the First World War. Despite the absence of an all-encompassing theoretical manifesto, this 'modernist urge' displayed several consistent aesthetic principles and methods of creation that resulted in a fundamental revision of the universal representational values that had been previously culturally dominant. Modernism permanently struggled with tradition. How do we define 'tradition'? How do we define 'experimental visuality'? What are some of the intriguing case studies Eastern Europe can offer in this respect?

The special volume of *ARTS* explores how tradition coexisted with various modernist visualities, how innovation combatted archaicism, how powerful art institutions along with political regimes shaped this entire scene of visual and literary action over the last two and a half centuries, until the present day. It may appear logical to adopt Jürgen Habermas' view of modernity and modernism as a fundamentally *unfinished project*. Initiated by the combatant philosophy of Enlightenment (starting from the 18th century), 'the project of modernity' offers a form of permanent progress and constant change, the everlasting state of evolvement that cherishes art's autonomous status, which answers to its intrinsic, immanent logic of 'total representation'.

Elements of the reign of politics in Russian modernism seem to be in direct contact with various models of cultural experimentation. (See: Ioffe 2010, 2011; Groys 2008, 2012; Glisic 2020; Pavlov and Ioffe 2017; Ioffe 2008a). The original possibility of distinguishing between the 'theoretical' and the 'empirical' was prominently present in many of the discussions about a cultural experiment that occurred in later years. In operative methods of science,

the experiment is usually designed to reveal the theoretical value, applicability, and ideally some general confirmable significance of some point of (possibly pre-existing) theory, including political theory. In this perspective, the role of a special 'mental' experiment cannot be overestimated: in particular, coming into contact with the ideal constructs of the human Spirit manifested in the sphere of culture and society. Here, the cultural experiment that occurs in the mind is a special transcendental activity of consciousness, where the realization of the real experiment is modeled in the imaginative sphere. The experiment is valuable to test a theory and, in particular, to find something nontrivial as a result, if possible. The very question of the 'significance' of theory in isolation from the experiment may seem rather far-reaching: an experiment can either confirm a theory or not. If a modernist experiment confirms a theory, then it is the experiment that establishes its relevance and further validity. (Bürger [1974] 2014; Poggioli 1968) A cultural theory usually has no universal 'relevance' per se until some creative experiment finally tries to actually put it into practice (Jeremia Ioffe 2006). One can further debate whether there is 'theoretical applicability' per se, not just practical applicability. For a fuller and more fruitful understanding of all these matters, it will be necessary in the future to distinguish terminologically between cultural 'theory' and the corresponding 'hypothesis'. (See various examples discussed in Ioffe 2011; Ioffe 2012a, 2012b, 2017). The research project of the Belgian literary historians Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, and Gunther Martens in its time was devoted to the different political experiments of international modernism, and it resulted in several valuable scholarly publications (Bru 2006; Bru and Baetens 2009).

Still influential and inspiring is Raymond Williams's valuable volume focused on the complex ideological background(s) of international modernism. It presents the whole complex of modernist politics in a somewhat more debated and suggestive way than the later valuable work of the Icelandic critic Astrudur Eysteinnsson (Eysteinnsson 1990), a book that has also in its own way shaped various knots of academic reflection on modernism in the last two decades. An earlier generation, Raymond Williams was, along with Terry Eagleton, one of the most significant figures among the New Left in what in Britain is usually called the 'Marxist critique of culture and the arts'. Jacques Rancière (Rancière 2004), a prominent French aesthetic theorist, has been working fruitfully on the implicit Marxist fundamentality of modernist art for a long time. (An alternative theoretical view might be found in Ankersmit 1997). Williams's posthumous collection on modernism and politics is one of the most notable because it establishes the original principles for thinking about the entire structure of topics & issues at hand sub specie specific political tasks, including the more arcane ones. Several previous books published immediately prior to Williams's work may also be useful for discerning analysis—for instance, the influential volume by the New York comparatist scholar Frederick Karl (Karl 1985).

Since the publication of Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's valuable monumental compilation (Bradbury and McFarlane 1976), there have also been published several important collective scholarly efforts (Taylor and Jameson 1977; D'Arcy and Nilges 2016; Hinnov et al. 2013; Kalliney 2016; Levenson 2011; Reeve-Tucker and Waddell 2013; Sherry 2015, 2016; Taminioux 2013; Waddell 2012; Wasser 2016; Winkiel 2017; see also Bradley and Esche 2007; Erjavec 2015; Groys 2008; Hinderliter et al. 2009; Raunig 2007, as well as collections: Brooker et al. 2010; Eysteinnsson and Liska 2007; Wollaeger 2012). As Frederick Karl observes, apart from all its innovative forms, modernism is necessarily a kind of insurgent opposition to discursive Power. According to him, 'modernism is always a defiance of authority: Authority can be generational or governmental, it can represent more ambiguously, the State or Society, or simply an Other. Modernism is an effort to escape from historical imperatives' (Karl 1985, p. 12). It might be worthwhile, however, to note once again that it is Williams's posthumous collection that offers what seems to be the clearest descriptions of what one may choose to understand as *the political poetics* of modernism. Beginning with the defining moments of chronology, chronotopia (and partly the historiosophy and historiography of the movement in question), Williams moves on to the problems of modernist institutions and metropolises (including the natural connection

between modernism and the new modern city), speaking of such crucial concepts as the institutions and technologies of art ('technologies and institutions of art'; Williams 1989, p. 37), which influenced the formation of modernist politics and poetics (Pavlov and Ioffe 2017; Hadjinicolaou 1982, pp. 39–196; Roberts 2015; Webber 2004).

The terminological distinction proposed by Williams regarding the historical (and traditional) concepts of *politics and policy* in the aspect of modernism and its further cultural development remains relevant and influential. As I have strived to show in a special work, the movement of avant-garde, at the level of its operative radical-modernist ideology, the issues of policy and politics essentially coincide dialectically and phenomenologically and are a sort of diffusively 'removed' (Ioffe 2010). This refers in particular to the institutional aspects of what Lawrence Rainey (1999) aptly referred to as 'the Cultural Economy of Modernism', and Sara Blair, in turn referred to in the same volume as 'Modernism and the Politics of Culture' (Blair 1999). Raymond Williams debated problems of 'avant-garde politics' that epitomize the most radical phase of modernism (Williams 1989, pp. 49–63). This tangled knot of semantic and terminological problems, besides the well-known theoretical efforts of Peter Bürger (Bürger [1974] 2014), has been developed by Williams's followers, such as John Roberts in his *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (with particular attention paid to concepts of avant-garde autonomy) and Andrew Webber in *The European Avant-Garde*, with interestingly detailed reflections on urban technologies and poetic techniques of representation in the international avant-garde as the final phase of modernity (Webber 2004). This latter work also dedicates much attention to the complex questions of avant-garde *historicity* in cultural analysis. A major contribution to the construction of a 'general' cultural history of modernism is the recent collective monograph (of nearly a thousand pages) edited by Vincent Sherry (Sherry 2016), where among other matters, one may find interesting reflections on how Russian vitalist futurism tried to fit into the vanguard of global modernist politics (Rasula 2016, pp. 51–52).

Our special volume of ARTS opens with John E. Bowlit's essay '*Wings of Freedom: Petr Miturich and Aero-Constructivism*'. The article focuses on the aerodynamic experiments of Petr Vasil'evich Miturich (1887–1956), in particular his *letun*, a project comparable to Vladimir Tatlin's *Letatlin*, but less familiar. Miturich became interested in flight during the First World War, elaborating his first flying apparatus in 1918 before constructing a prototype and undertaking a test flight on 27 December 1921, which might be described as an example of Russian Aero-Constructivism (by analogy with Italian *Aeropittura*). Miturich's basic deduction was that modern man must travel not by horse and cart, but with the aid of a new ecological apparatus—the *undulator*—a mechanism that, thanks to its undulatory movements, would move like a fish or snake. The article delineates the general context of Miturich's experiments; for example, his acquaintance with the ideas of Tatlin and Velimir Khlebnikov (in 1924, Miturich married Vera Khlebnikova, Velimir's sister) as well as the famed inventions of Igor Sikorsky, Fridrikh Tsander, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, and other scientists who contributed to the 'First Universal Exhibition of Projects and Models of Interplanetary Apparatuses, Devices and Historical Materials' held in Moscow in 1927.

The volume proceeds with Christina Lodder's valuable article '1905 and Art: From Aesthetes to Revolutionaries', which examines the impact that the experience of the 1905 Revolution had on the political attitudes of professional artists of various creative persuasions and the younger generation who were still attending art schools. It inevitably focuses on a few representatives and argues that realists and more innovative artists like Valentin Serov and the *World of Art* group became critical of the regime and produced works satirizing the tsar and his government. These artists did not, however, take their disenchantment further and express a particular ideology in their works or join any specific political party. The author also suggests that the revolution affected art students like Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, who subsequently became leaders of the avant-garde and developed the style known as neo-primitivism. We can see the influence of 1905 in their pursuit of creative freedom, the subjects they chose, and the distinctly antiestablishment ethos that emerged in their neo-primitivist works around 1910.

The special volume includes papers by Henrietta Mondry ('Physical and Metaphysical Visualities: Vasily Rozanov and Historical Artefacts'), Irina Sakhno ('The Metaphysics of Presence and the Invisible Traces: Eduard Steinberg's Polemical Dialogues'), Ekaterina Bobrinskaya ('New Anthropology in Works of Vasily Chekrygin'), Mark Lipovetsky ('A Trickster in Drag: Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe's Aesthetic of Camp'), Mary Nicholas ('Metaphor and the Material Object in Moscow Conceptualism'), Andrey Astvatsaturov ('The Bridge and Narrativization of Vision: Ambrose Bierce and Vladimir Nabokov'), Leanne Rae Darnbrough ('Visions of Disrupted Chronologies: Sergei Eisenstein and Hedwig Fechheimer's Cubist Egypt'), Alexander Zholkovsky ('Digital High: The Art of Visual Seduction?'), Willem G. Weststeijn ('Sergei Sigei and Aleksei Kruchenykh: Visual Poetry in the Russian Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde'), Monika Spivak ('Andrey Bely as an Artist vis-à-vis Aleksandr Golovin: How the Cover of the Journal Dreamers Was Created'), Dorota Walczak-Delanois ('The Visuality of Hortus Mirabilis in Krystyna Miłobędzka's Poetry—A Study of Selected Examples'), Igor Pilshchikov ('More Than Just a Poet: Konstantin Batiushkov as an Art Critic, Art Manager, and Art Brut Painter'), Nataliya Zlydneva ('Representation of Corpus Patiens in Russian Art of the 1920s'), Willem Jan Renders ('You Can Do This: Working with the Artistic Legacy of El Lissitzky'), Sarah Wilson ('All the Missiles Are One Missile Revisited: Dazzle in the Work of Zofia Kulik'), and Evgeny Pavlov ('Andrei Sen-Senkov and the Visual Poetics of the Global Commonplace').

The complex relations of (Russian) modernist suggestive aesthetics with religious popular lore, pastoral roots of new life, and new apperception of reality via the lens of the folk patterns remain to a great extent a terra incognita. One may instantly recollect the suggestive peasant imagery (Figures 1–5) in Malevich (including some other figures like Velimir Khlebnikov) as a development of previous mimetic/realist practices so characteristic of Russian literature and culture.



Figure 1. Kazimir Malevich. Four peasants.

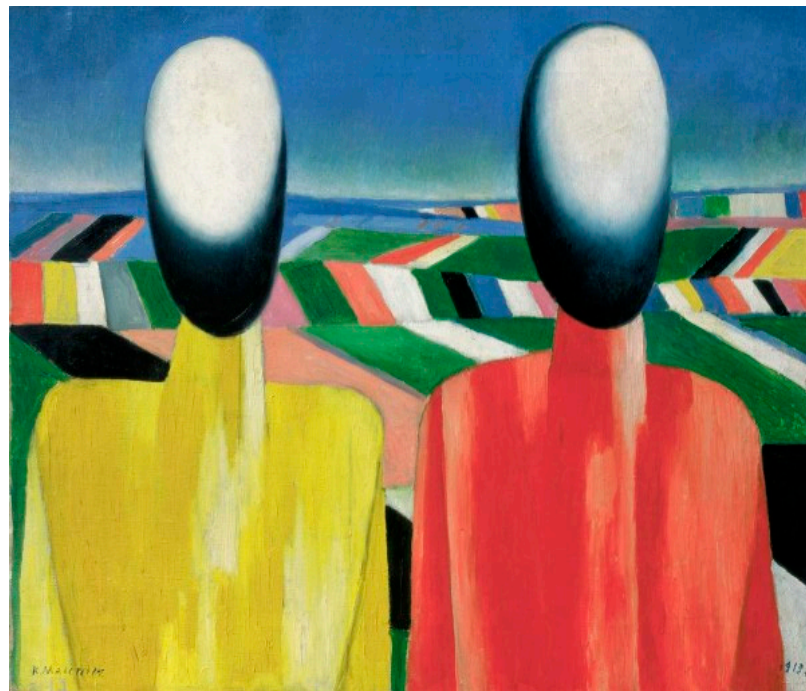


Figure 2. Kazimir Malevich. Two peasants.



Figure 3. Kazimir Malevich. Head of a peasant.



Figure 4. Kazimir Malevich. A peasant at work.

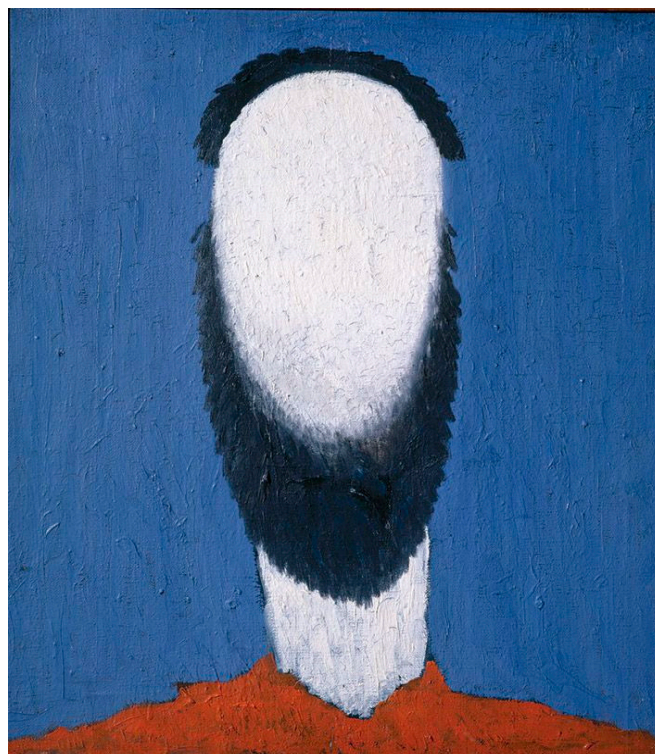


Figure 5. Kazimir Malevich. Head of a peasant.

The parallel figurative iconography is grounded in the so-called 'Kurgan stelae' (in "pan-Mongolian" these were known as '*khyn-chuluu*' or in Russian tradition, 'kamennye baby'—'stone babas') (Figures 6–9) (Ioffe 2008c). These archaic babas most probably represent the archetypal matriarchal cult of a universal feminine fertility deity (Gimbutas 1974).

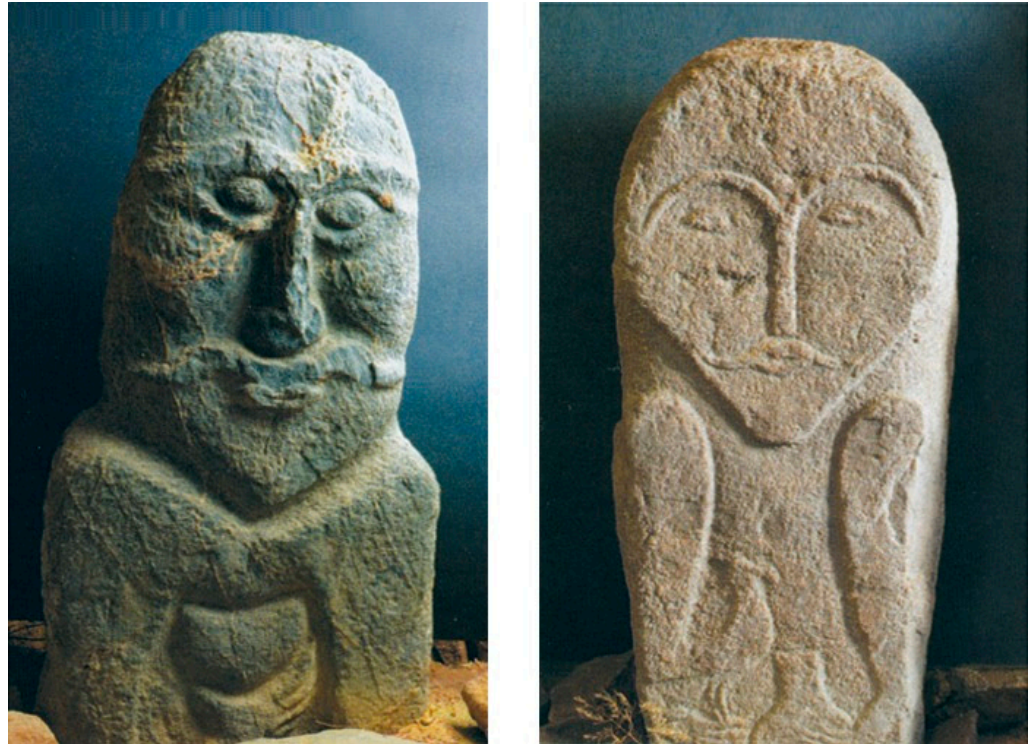


Figure 6. Archaic women made of stone. *Kamennye Baby*.

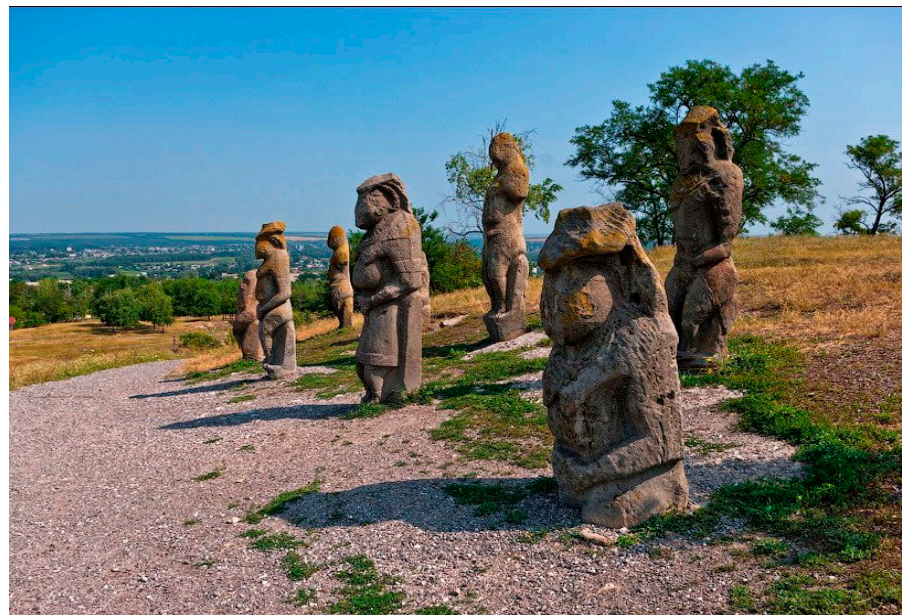


Figure 7. *The babas of Polovtsy*. Near Kharkiv, 12th century.



Figure 8. The babas of Polovtsy. Near Kharkiv, 12th century.

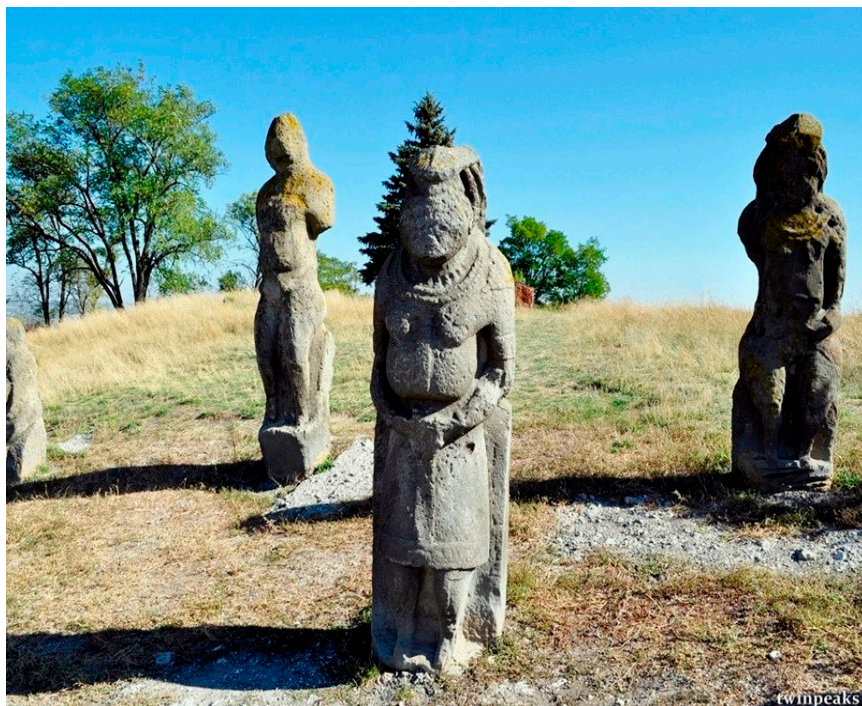


Figure 9. The babas of Polovtsy. Near Kharkiv, 12th century.

In the (Pan)Turkic world, the concept of ‘balbal’ usually signifies a ‘remote mythical arch-ancestor’ hacking back to Mongolic primordial ‘barimal’ (Ioffe 2008c). The folk term ‘baba’ refers to this (Pan)Turkic universe of ‘balbal’. In a curious way, the common in nearly all Slavic languages ‘baba’ remarkably signifies ‘father’ in Turkic languages. This entire system of complex cultural (and cultic) meanings makes up something that we can include under the umbrella term of ‘Slavic Oriental Universe’ (Ioffe 2008c). The stone-made enigmatic sculptures represented an important stage in the Indo-European and Asian semichthonic maternal ‘fertility cult’ (Gimbutas 1974) featuring landscapes filled with various kurgan cemeteries and cenotaph spaces. Important to mention would be that these artifacts were already attentively noticed by Herodotus, who also left some unique information about (possibly) Slavic-related inhabitants of the related environs, usually disguised under the suggestive general name of ‘Scythians’ (Kim 2010). As recent detailed research demonstrates, these ‘stone babas’ have the most peculiar ‘modernist inheritance’ (Kunichka 2015), in terms of Slavic (Russian and Ukrainian) avant-garde that mostly concerns the creative early futurist ‘colony’ or ‘a farm’ symbolically built in the *wild place* of Tauric Hylea (Livshits 1931; Markov 1968).

These historical monuments belong to several Eurasian inland cultures and stretch across the centuries representing a meeting (and melting) point between the legendary ‘Scythians’, the Turks, and the Slavs, as these monuments were later gradually discovered in Southern Russia but also in Germanic lands (such as Prussia), Southern Siberia, Central Asia, Turkey, and Mongolia. All these loci represent extremely valuable sources of metaphysical inspiration for Khlebnikov, but also for Malevich, who was quite interested in the past of the collective Slavdom to whom he belonged on several sides. These archaic monuments challenge the traditional perception of what the ‘North’ is, as contrasted to the ‘South’, what should exactly be counted as ‘West’, and what then will be ‘East’ in such a disposition of Eurasian, Indo-European mega-Slavic universe. Where lies the boundary between the ‘civilized’ and the so-called ‘primitive’ (‘noncivilized’)? Malevich created a famous series of the abundant ‘faceless’ images of these celebrated ‘female peasants’, which might refer to ‘kamennye baby’ of the Kurgan stelae (see above Figures 6–9). Velimir Khlebnikov, in his turn, composed a special prozo-poetic longer text titled ‘Kurgan Sviatogora’, which becomes highly relevant sub specie the ethno-religious lens as offered by the avant-garde poetics of ‘reenactment of history’. Which de facto means in a certain way making ancient remote history newly ‘available’ for modernist articulation and creativity.

ao o ,

o oa oa —

a ooo a —

o.

o o oo o.

o o ao Bo.

oo a o ao o a o a ooo?

oa ao oo a aa o o o o?

Bless or dew poison,

But you’ll be alone

The covenant of the seabed

Russia.

We are the doers of the will of the great sea.

We are the drainers of the tears of the eternally sad Widow.

Shall we bear our law under the rule of those who have taken the covenants of the ancient islands?

And the breadth of our being is not heir to the breadth of the waves of the ancient sea?
(Khlebnikov 1986)

Kazimir Malevich conceptually and coherently applied his radical abstraction to the traditional imagery of Slavic peasants, which refers to the complex context of his theory of the image. What lies behind the faces of the peasants, behind the light that emanates from them? We may consider the medium of the tradition of Hesychasm, which is hiddenly connected to the complex relationship of Malevich to Byzantine Orthodox icons.

As many competent scholars observe, Malevich was rather obviously ‘influenced by icons more radically than any other Avant-garde artist’ (Antonova 2015; Spira 2008). In a quite meaningful quotation, an important ‘culture commissar’, Anatolii V. Lunacharsky, addressed Malevich’s relation to icon painting: ‘Malevich began by imitating icons [. . .] went on to make his own icons [. . .] (under the influence of the Cubists, resembling Francis Picabia)’ (see Spira 2008).

As Malevich himself would meaningfully observe, ‘acquaintance with the art of icon painting taught me that it was not a question of studying anatomy or perspective, it was not a question of whether nature had been truthfully reproduced—the important thing was a feeling for art and artistic realism. In other words, I saw that reality, or a subject, is what must be re-embodied in an ideal form coming out of the heart of an aesthetic’ (see Khardzhiev 1976; Tarasov 2017).

As it may seem, Malevich’s iconic peasant imagery represents, in its own way, the development of his theme of ‘suprematist idealist iconography’, of which his squares were the original element.¹ As is often acknowledged, Malevich referred to his main work, the black square, as the ‘Sacred-King Child’, emphasizing the direct line between his art and iconography. His famous depictions of peasant faces contribute to the development of the Hesychast substrate of his philosophy of art and visibility.

One may subscribe to Oleg Tarasov’s learned view asserting that the new Malevich’s suprematist image had ‘arrived at a new threshold, opening onto a different reality’, where ‘Malevich’s *Quadrilateral (Chetyrekhugol’nik*, known as *Black Square*, 1915)’ became de facto a new icon, ‘which testified to the presence of a direct link with the transcendental—a link the painter himself had experienced’ (Tarasov 2017). In agreement with Tarasov, ‘the phenomenon of revelation’, such as ‘a crossing of the un-crossable boundary between the earthly and the divine, traditionally studied by mystical theology, appears here as a palpable example of transgression taken by the artist from cultural tradition’. The scholar emphasizes that ‘it was not by chance that this artist noted that his time was the age of analysis, the result of all the systems that have ever been established’ (Tarasov 2017). This was the ‘new experience of seeing *the transcendental* presupposed the mastering of the most diverse practices in art and meditation’. Such a meditation may immediately remind one of the Hesychast ‘*umnaia molitva*’. For “transgression of the boundary into the invisible world not only ensured the openness of the numinous to the metaphysics of the image but reduced the role of the frame as a recognizable boundary, as it had been in preceding cultures” (Tarasov 2017).

The existing consensus in the Malevich studies suggests a certain agreement on the recognition of the general mystical orientation of his art and his philosophy.² There is no specific need to dwell on all the details here; let us just briefly point only, for example, to the general anthro/theosophical dominance of the artist, which, incidentally, he shared with another father of world abstraction, the famous Dutch Avant-garde painter Piet Mondrian.³ For the sake of heuristic completion, we need also to point out the possibility of iconoclastic (and at the same time parodying) interpretative perception related to Malevich Quadrilateral/Rectangular (as well as Round & Oval) image series. This interpretation has its own valid arguments and has been analytically developed by several art historians. This is something that Mojmir Grygar labeled as ‘inner antagonism of Malevich’s thought’ (Grygar 1991).

The concealed ecstaticism of the black square has been observed by numerous critics, while the meaningful operations with the color energies encapsulated in these works correspond well with Malevich's ecstatic *white poems*, which not so long ago became known to the general public.⁴ One can conclude that Malevich's *suprematist energism* is intrinsically related to the energetic discourse of several mystical traditions at once. The aesthetical output generated by Malevich has relevance for the debate on the meditative reflection on religious apophaticism, in the context of the 'deification of man' and their further descension into nothingness; and this, as was already noted (Bax 1995), may refer directly to Jacob Boehme's treatise *Silence without Essence*.⁵ As another scholar has aptly observed in her very recent monograph, 'many Russian avant-garde artists reached back to pre-Petrine, or pre-Enlightenment Russian tradition as the most valid source of their culture. While Malevich claimed an entirely new beginning with his 1915 *Black Square on White Ground*, which cleaned the picture surface of all vestiges of previous painterly image-making, historically speaking his thinking had roots in religion adopting the rich and varied Russian tradition of icons and spirituality' (Forgács 2022). (See also Kudriavtseva 2017).

As Malevich observes,⁶ the religious person who knows God as singular⁷ 'seeks to destroy his multitude in him'. Such a person is eternally in prayer and does not want to know or cognize anything, but reveals himself in nature and God. The one and indivisible God is in his dispersed world, and the world, not to disappear, must be in him as a place where nothing is dispersed. God is neither comprehensible nor ever visible. He is beyond knowledge; the divine whole nature is not visible, though we sometimes see it. Therefore, the holy person avoids knowing and becomes holy when he dissolves himself in God, dissolves himself in the *unknowable*. (There is always a danger of course of experimenting with sanity during this process see Sass 1992; Vöhringer 2007). Malevich's mystical philosophy of representation appears in its dominating mainstream as a kind of objectless rebellion against traditional logocentricity and, more generally, against the material word of objects, marking a kind of enigmatic point of reference with a concealed interest in Russian religious philosophy of language, which manifested itself around the same time (Ioffe 2008b). Malevich, possibly through his close acquaintance Mikhail Gershenzon,⁸ was at least partially privy to the common teachings of the Russian religious *philosophers of word/name* who were developing, as is well known, the traditions of Byzantine Hesychast thought.⁹ This refers primarily to Pavel Florensky and Sergius Bulgakov, and somewhat later to Alexei Losev, to whom a connection might also have been made through the apocalyptic metaphysics of Nikolai Berdyaev. (Ioffe 2007). The *ontology of nonobjectivity*, which Malevich constructed, appears to have existed in precisely the same symbolic territory as the philosophy of word/name in its theory of divine energies of the no less divine name(s) as per the system of teachings attributed to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (his *Celestial Hierarchy of the Divine Names*) later developed by Fr. Pavel Florensky (Tarasov 2002; Antonova 2020a, 2020b). Suprematist nonobjectivity, pictorial nothingness, may present purity of a receptive embodiment of the thought–conceptual core as it appears in the famous 1918 painting 'White Square on a White Background' (Figure 10), which allows the viewer to touch a radical new idea of the emerging modernist culture, based, as it were, on the ecstatic religious beliefs of the founder of suprematism.

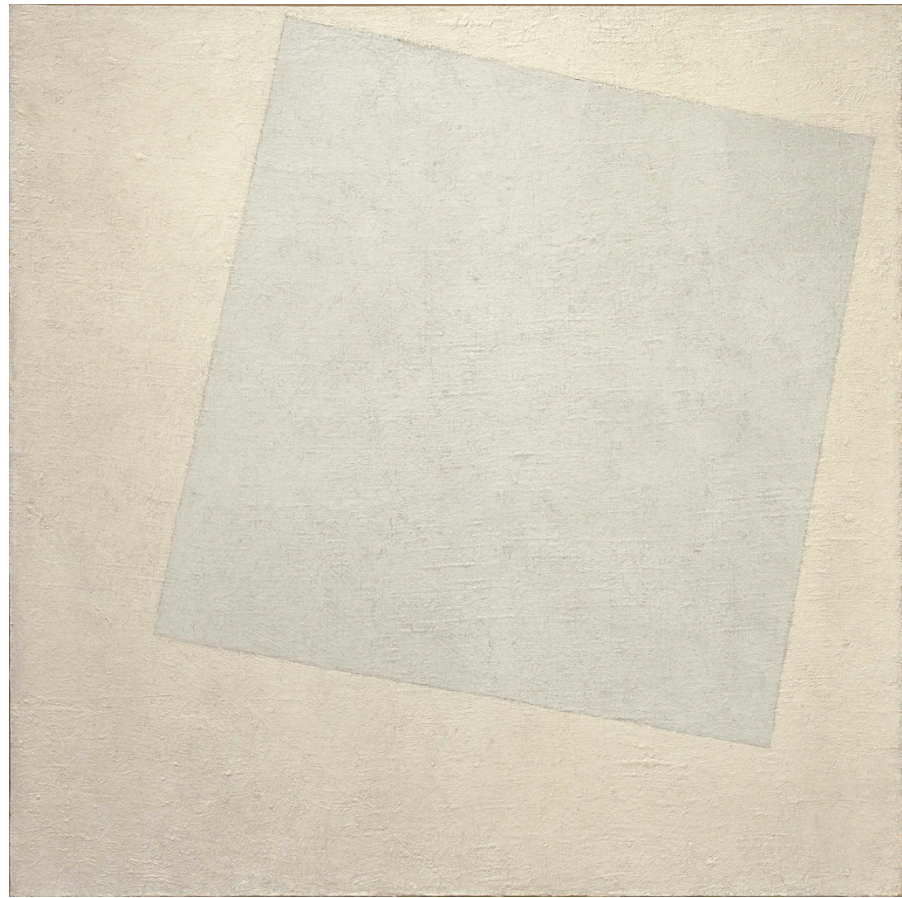


Figure 10. Kazimir Malevich. *The White on White*, 1918.

Here it should probably be emphasized that the concepts of the church and God are far from being alien to Malevich's general outlook, and sometimes find their implicit presence in many examples of his work. The artist's white square, as it seems, provides a fairly concrete idea and almost a direct reference to the Hesychast doctrine of divine energies, to historical discussions of the Light of Tabor and its miraculous immateriality.¹⁰ One might recall that the Light of Tabor in Byzantine theology is usually defined as an intense white substance (Lossky 1997). A discussion in this context should involve Malevich's philosophy of light and color, including his ideas about how light breaking apart gives life to the many individual color-bearing matters that make up the full panorama of basic colors. Below one may initially compare the both traditions: Figures 11–13.

These unique series of Malevich's ecstatic studies for fresco paintings, from the *Yellow Series* of 1907 (Figures 12 and 13) executed probably on tempera/oil on a cardboard (the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg), were recently extensively studied by an American-Ukrainian academic, Myroslava M. Mudrak (Mudrak 2015). Her thoughtful interpretation of Malevich religious imagery largely shares my earlier observations first presented at the University of Amsterdam Avant-garde congress (see Ioffe 2008b) that connect a Polish/Ukrainian/Russian artist with the Byzantine mystical body of theology as developed by Gregory Palamas. As the American scholar justly observes, 'according to Palamas, the mystery of Christ's Resurrection is encoded in the Cherubic hymn. That liturgical moment presents a shift of mode and tone within the celebration, allowing the faithful to convert their earthly station to become the surrogates of the angelic orders: *Let us, who mystically represent the Cherubim . . . now set aside all earthly cares that we may welcome the King of all, invisibly escorted by angelic hosts.* As the elect are delivered into ordinary space, so the faithful, too, assume a hallowed role in the divine condescension. The hymn signifies the interplay and merging of dual liturgical registers—the angelic and the earthly—creating a

virtual dialogue between the two spheres in a temporally unified expression of worship and witnessing. The Byzantine historian, Cedrin (11th century) states that the Cherubic hymn was sung at the Divine Liturgy from the sixth century, beginning with an original request of Byzantine Emperor, Justin II' (quoted in Mudrak 2015, p. 45).

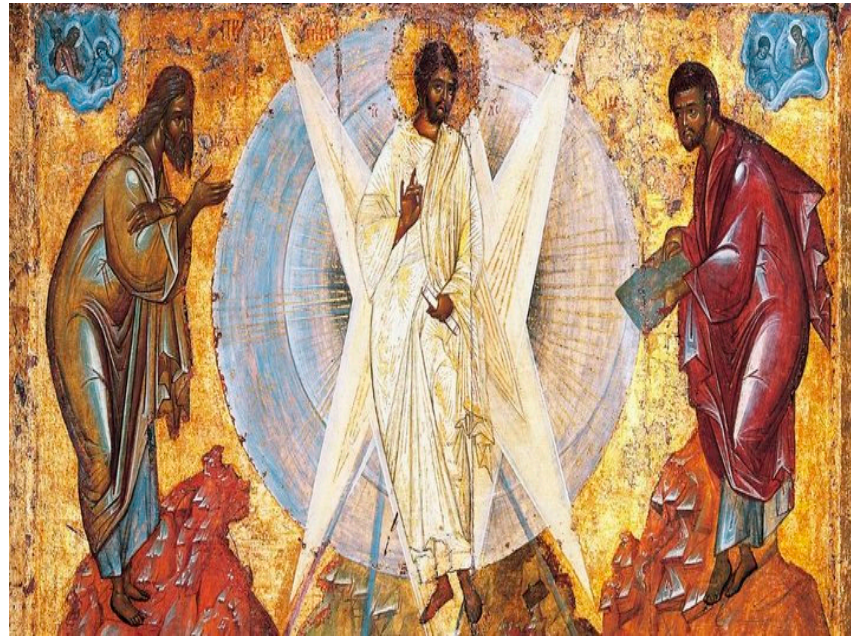


Figure 11. The Orthodox icon representing Christ as a manifestation of the emanating divine Light of Tabor.

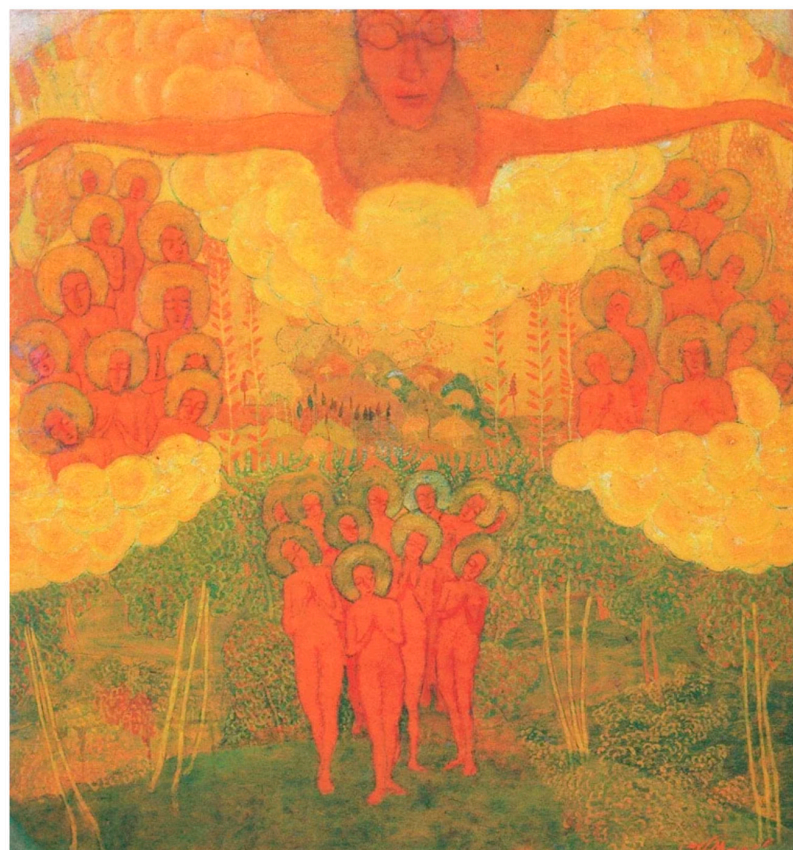


Figure 12. Kazimir Malevich. The Triumph of Heaven, 1907.

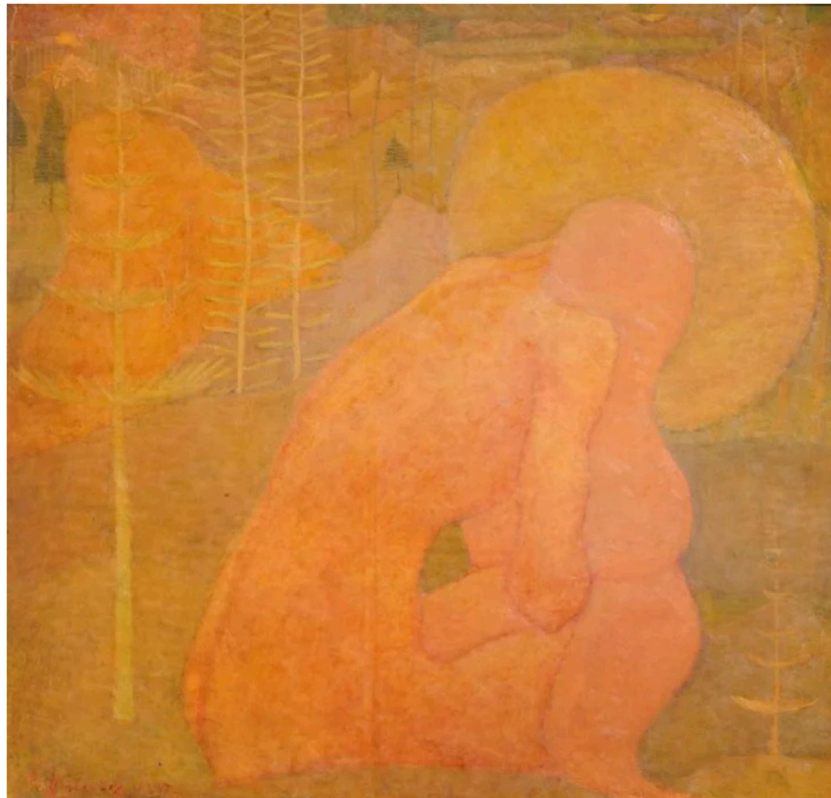


Figure 13. Kazimir Malevich, Prayer, 1907.

Russian-American scholar Alexandra Shatskikh has rightly observed in her numerous studies, when interpreting Malevich's mysticism, one should remember the artist's evident philosophical and religious *monism*, his persistent confidence in a certain universal, unified, comprehensive grand idea, which his suprematist art is partially designed to describe and embrace. One can conclude that this absence of a polyphonic dialogue may contain not the least bit of spiritual originality of the suprematist painter, especially striking against the background of several emblematically polyphonic cultural icons of the Russian Silver Age. Malevich consistently preaches an ecstatic fusion with the universal cosmos representing his own special type of religiosity and mysticism (Cf. recently a theoretical essay by Irina Sakhno 2021).

In the discussion of the possible influence of Byzantine Hesychasm on Malevich's work, we must find initial answers to several major questions that remain positively open. What was Malevich's spiritual identity in strictly confessional terms? What was the initial influence of the Catholic religion of his father Severin? In what way did he forge his own path between the poles of the Western and Eastern types of Christian ritual? At the heart of the doctrine of the quietists is the notion that the highest Christian perfection consists in the divine tranquility (or stillness) of the soul, unperturbed by anything earthly. Intense inner prayer and direct mental contemplation of God can attain such tranquility. Quietism was rather popular in Russia during the Romanovs' reign (late 18th–early 19th centuries), when polyvalent mysticism, as we know, reached a considerable flowering and a noticeable popularity in the higher strata of society. Modernism, and especially Slavic one seems to have a special conceptual and cultural connection to Byzantine tradition of artistic representation broadly understood. (Misler and Bowlt 2021; Shevzov 2010; Taroutina 2015, 2018; Nelson 2015).

There appear considerable similarities between Byzantine Hesychasm and Western quietism: there are common theological roots of the two systems of teachings, related to the close study of the heritage of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and his doctrine of divine names. Alexandra Shatskikh, in one of her essays, also notes the proximity of quietism

and Hesychasm with a reference to Malevich's philosophy (Shatskikh 2000), suggesting that because of Malevich's monist worldview, active mystical dialogue with the deity, the idea of the inner prayer could be essentially rather foreign for the artist. Shatskikh argues Malevich would be more in tune with and congenial to the concept of Zen Buddhism taken from the Mahayana Buddhist canon; the scholar perceives the idea of nirvana as a space of general serene Nothingness as very similar to Malevich's idea of 'an Absolute Objectless Nothing' (Shatskikh 2000; see also Sakhno 2021).

We can add that the teachings of the Buddhist East could have been known to Malevich through the popularization in the work of Madame Blavatsky, who devoted numerous pages of her various circulated writings to explaining the basic principles and attributes of Eastern religious metaphysics. In this vein, Berdyaev's thoughts about the mysticism of Western quietism bring this context closer to the religious heritage of the traditional East. One may recall the rather enigmatic saying of the Apostle Paul: 'Faith is the realization of the expected and the certainty of the unseen . . . By faith we know that the ages have been arranged by the word of God, so that out of the invisible things there came forth the visible things' (Faith is the assurance (confirmation) of things hoped for (i.e., divinely guaranteed), and the evidence of things not seen) (*'Faith is the realization of what is hoped for, and evidence of things not seen'*, Hebrews 11:1, 3, 6). Malevich's 'White Square on White' (Figure 10) offers an esoterically encrypted representation of the Apostle Paul's enigmatic notion of the 'certainty in the invisible' = 'evidence of things not seen', where the viewer in his own way guesses the invisible objectification of faith in the absence of a figurative image.

The synergetic nature of the universe, the visual subordination to higher energies, the all-pervading transcendence of the senses of being is perceived as a general hypostatic outline for any discussion of the spiritual affinity between Hesychasm and suprematism. Hesychasm essentially is a doctrine of energies, dominated by the metaphysical issue of light. (Maloney 1973). At first approximation, Malevich's representational suprematism with its predominant attention to light & monochrome color, with its ideas of innovatively distributed energies, represents such a doctrine. A perceptive émigré art critic (and painter), Viacheslav Zavalishin, once interpreted (Zavalishin 1988) black square(s) as 'gearboxes' (literally '*boxes of speeds*' (oo oo)) imprinted in them, which as if metaphorically noted the importance of the suprematist doctrine of energy and its 'oikonomia'. As Malevich argues in his treatise 'God Has Not Been Cast Off!' (*Bog ne skinut!*) (Malevich 1995), describing the dialectical nature of the dynamics of movements of the divine absolute rest, 'God is a Calm Peace, it is perfection, everything is achieved, the construction of worlds is finished, the movement is established in eternity. His creative thought moves, he himself is freed from madness, for he no longer creates; and the universe, like a mad brain, moves in a whirlwind of rotation, without answering to itself where and why. The universe is the madness of a liberated God, hiding in eternal peace' (Malevich 1995, pp. 237–61; See also Barr 2007).

Another important study dealt with the Russian abstract avant-garde, especially Malevich and Kandinsky in the context of the Byzantine images, iconoclasm and Hesychasm, was a monograph published in the mid-1990s in Paris titled *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Besançon 2000). Natalia Smolianskaia (2001) critiqued Besançon's concept of 'Abstraction as Negative Symbolism', providing alternative interpretation in the context of the history of iconoclasm as rather (mis)represented by Alain Besançon.

In this case, the abstraction must apparently be regarded as a particular case of the multidimensional formation of the symbolic. This large-scale work by the French historian of culture, who has devoted much attention to Russian and Soviet issues, is interesting in particular because it demonstrates how certain key moments and stages in the general development of the concept of the image (mainly in the history of Byzantine iconoclasm, interpreted as a 'tendency to combat the representation of the sacred and the divine') serve to build a general modernist paradigm of artistic experiment. Interestingly, in Alain Besançon's work, the sacral level of almost every creative potency is in fact isolated from any special dogma of any form of theology to which the author would eventually subscribe. In Besançon, the sacred appears as a certain functional technical aspect that has dominated

the nature of the symbolic representation throughout many forms of art history. The French critic emphasizes symbolic overtones of the process of artistic visualization, including those areas that are traditionally reserved for the phenomenon of the 'unrepresentable'. Another personified subject of Alain Besançon's volume (along with Malevich), was the Russian/European radical abstractionist Vasily Kandinsky. One of Besançon's discussions is related to the question of substitution of the iconic representation with theosophical engagement. The abstractionist 'iconographer' transforms the divine in his own way, setting his mystical experience in the focus of observation of the rhythm of the cosmic universe. This process Kandinsky could, as the common public knows, call the 'spiritual in art'. It is no coincidence that Kandinsky, as well as Malevich, is known, in a theoretical sense, to be attached to the concept of 'whitest color' as the highest stage of radical abstraction of silence. Thus, in 1910, Kandinsky wrote about white: 'White sounds like a silence that can be suddenly understood. White is Nothing that is young, or, even more precisely, it is Nothing pre-existent before birth' (Malevich 2000b). This may among other things remind how the earth looked/sounded during the old days of the Ice Age.

As noted, having regarded art solely for its spiritual content-value, Kandinsky comes to the conviction that the means of expressing this unique content is a combination of nonobjective forms. Kazimir Malevich completed this evolution with the invention of suprematism. It was a decisive leap into nonobjectivity.¹¹

Malevich and Kandinsky are the main *cultural protagonists* of the 'new art' of this semi-iconoclastic tradition of painting representing the figurative Nothingness (in both Sartrean and Heideggerian senses). This *Nothingness*, a *propos*, must never be confused with *Emptiness*. Both painters can personify two different visual and conceptual types of articulation of the attitude to the idea of semi-figurative abstraction related to the nonshaped *Void*. With Kandinsky, a special saturated positive topic of abstraction appears in the visual sphere, whereas Malevich, with his quite obsessive and uncompromising idea of 'total representational zero', can be characterized as a parallel version of the modernist *zero-degree abstraction*. For the German-Russian artist (Kandinsky), many of the basic constituent parts of artistic environments, linked on the basic elements of the construction of painting—brushstrokes, paint lines, and the texture of the canvas—are involved in the creation and accumulation of the spheres of the Pauline 'certainty in the invisible' as mentioned above the world of the astral-virtual experience of the artist, his intimate thoughts about the 'spiritual in art'.

For the Polish/Ukrainian/Russian suprematist, the implicit conceptual reduction of the entire pictographic activity to a greater 'zero of forms', to the area of complete sensual isolation of the 'plans' of content and expression (*a oa a*), turns out to be somewhat more significant than adhering to the familiar Renaissance professional activity of the artist. In accordance with the ideas of Malevich's *figurative theodicy*, the Absolute produces/creates the Universe from a myriad of possible forms and their objectified embodiments, generating providential energy into dark vessels of figurative tiles barely accessible to our empirical mind.¹²

The motif of the enzymatic emptiness that pacifies the viewer, already mentioned earlier, will receive a very strong 'life impulse' in much later Russian postmodernist art (e.g. the notion of Buddhist emptiness in Moscow Conceptual School). In accordance with Besançon's work, the Absolute God of the main Slavic abstractionist radicals Malevich and Kandinsky is meant to be slightly 'objectified' Void, a kind of 'universal concept', referring, through theosophy to various subspecies of contemplative nothingness, whereas any concrete and figurative embodiment of this concept is symbolically tabooed and presented as an idol forbidden to visualization, de facto unacceptable for modernist art, following the old conventions of Christian historical dogmatics of Byzantine and Isaurian origin.

Jean-Claude Marcadé deemed that Kazimir Malevich in his work fully embraces the eternal philosophical problems of the icon, perceives, as the scholar has put it, 'the real presence of God not in the symbolic image, but in the relation of the latter to the absent fore-image (in contrast, the idol has no prototype, for it is a prototype of itself)'. According

to J.-C. Marcadé, ‘in the final analysis we may venture to express our thought as follows: in the icon, through the absence of the *Depicted*, His presence is revealed. This is also where the entire essence of the black square runs through . . . The essence of the encounter with the icon is to see beyond the visible world the features of what is invisible’ (Marcadé 1978; quoted in Lukianov 2007). The first critical parallel between Malevich and icons was drawn by Alexandre Benois, albeit in an explicitly ironic way. Malevich himself is well known to have referred to *Kvadrat* as the ‘Divine Child-King’ in his discussion on art, thus making the *Square* closer to the image of an abstract Christ-infant (rather than say Louis-Dieudonné/Louis Quatorze).¹³

The Black Square was erected at the virtual Head of the early Petrograd exhibition (Figure 14):

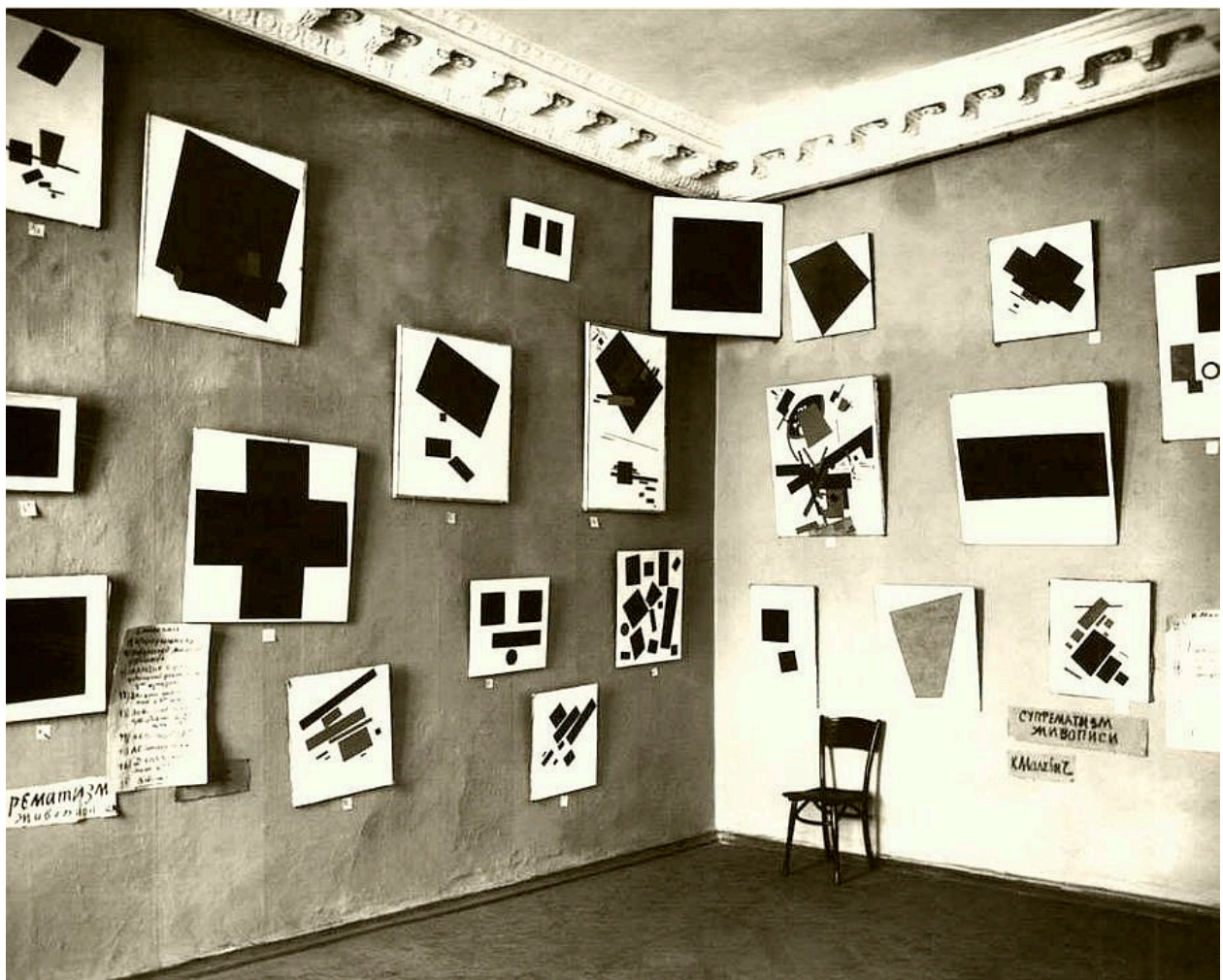


Figure 14. Kazimir Malevich. Black Square as the Divine Child-King (*Tsarstvennyi Mladenets*) at the Head of one of the first Avant-garde exhibitions in Petrograd. December 1915.

As it turns, the Light is one of the key concepts of Christian evangelism and the image provided in the Gospel for the true and sensual comprehension of God. ‘I am the light of the world’ (John 8.12), Christ says of Himself. God de facto comes into the world as light: ‘Light shines in darkness, and darkness has not consumed it’ (John 1.5). Orthodox theology constructs its teaching about God as the light working in the world, through which the world is saved, enlightened, and transformed. ‘You are the light of the world’ (Matt. 5.14), Christ says to his disciples, and this is the basis of almost all Orthodox ascetics. As Palamas noted in his *Triads*, ‘in the same way, the higher ranks of supra-worldly minds, under their dignity . . .’ They are filled not only with primordial knowledge but also with the first light,

becoming partakers and contemplators not only of the Trinitarian glory, but also of Christ's ultimate manifestation (and materialization) of *divine light*, which was once revealed to the disciples on the Mount Tabor (Bibikhin 2003). Those who are worthy of this contemplation are initiated into the God-generating light of Christ, being directly communicated to the hidden lights, according to the Coptic monk and philosopher Macarius of Egypt (c. 300–391) who calls the light of grace to be actually *the food* of the heavenly inhabitants: 'The whole mental intangible order of the beings above the world is the most obvious evidence of the light-bearing humanity of the Word' (Makarov 2003).

The prayerful contemplation of the sacred Light of Tabor, the light that the apostles allegedly saw during the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, was of great value for Hesychast spiritual practice. Through this light, nonmaterial in its essence, as the Hesychasm taught, the ascetic enters into communion with the Incomprehensible (and unattainable) Absolute. Having been filled with this light, in his life-temporal, sensual shell, he becomes a part of the divine life; in essence, he is transformed into a radically new creature. In iconography, great importance is assigned to the ultimate infinity of space, achieved through, as Pavel Florensky observes (Florensky 2003), a reverse perspective, whereas the 'one-dimensional/ one-eyed' *direct* perspective can only convey a finite world, as if falling into a distant spatial point.¹⁴ However, despite the importance of the problem of space, the main thing in iconography is the Image, to whom space is wholly subservient. In the direct (technocratic) perspective, the objects depicted are such moments of space, entirely subject to the dictate of its modulation. The direct perspective is a window to this world; it appears to us as a kind of virtual breakthrough in its own fixed limits. In this connection, it would be logical to conclude that Andrei Rublev's *Trinity* (Figure 15) is in a way the quintessence of the artist's visual Hesychast inner sermon, which leads his prayer by speculative means available to him.¹⁵

According to Malevich's contemporary, religious philosopher of science and language Father Pavel Florensky, in a *descent* of God to man, that is, to the mortal physical existence on earth, lies the inverse factor of human rapture to God, the Divine Fire, which, in this connection, generates the Light. Light, in turn, emanates the conceptual Color and the appropriate Spiritual Sacrament. In such an intimate process of seeing the Iconic Order, a kind of unearthly silence and will-be-extended, peace and quietness emerges (Florensky 2003). Creating the series of white rectangles (Figure 10) Kazimir Malevich offers a possibly similar **eternal rest** at his treatise of (nearly) the same name (*Eternal peace*): 'Unobjective action moves silently in its virtual madness, no differences are heard in it, there is a dynamic silence in it' (Malevich 2000b).

The notable 'negative' theorist of Hesychasm, Nikephóros Gregorás, stated that God's energies deify not only the mind, the 'inner self', but also the outer flesh; therefore, the body of the saint appears as if turned off from the natural order of nature and can no longer be depicted as such.¹⁶ By the action of noncorporeal energies, the earthly flesh itself is burned away; it escapes from the visible world, escapes the usual gaze. Meanwhile, St. Gregory Palamas (Figure 16) instructs his listener and reader: 'accustoming the mind not to retreat to the surrounding and not be mixed with that, make it strong to focus on the one'. Further, 'forgetting the lower, the secret knowledge of higher . . . this is the true mental work, climbing to the right contemplation and vision of God. The *triunity* of God is neither the sum, nor the three nor the one, but the unity of identity and difference' (Bibikhin 2003). This largely makes up St. Palama's politics of Trinitarian identity.



Figure 15. Andrei Rublev, Holy Trinity, 1425–1427.



Figure 16. St. Gregory Palamas. A Byzantine Saint-Philosopher.

Of all the historical Avant-garde, the figure of Malevich provides interesting grounds for considering radical artistic abstraction sub specie the tradition of Hesychast theology. Here one may see, once again, the importance of the 'departure' of the represented object from the expectedly familiar sensation, from the ground of the senses of the visual, into the sphere of the serene and subdued abstraction (Figure 17) of the primordial Zero of Forms.¹⁷ The Jungian interpretation of the artist's 'project of squares' is supported also by some testimonies of Malevich's contemporaries and listeners, seems interesting and close to the main points of this suggestive discourse.¹⁸ The mystical depth of the visible, accessibly outlined in Malevich's most 'Hesychastic' work, *The White Square on a White Background* (Figure 10), is abundantly interpreted by many competent researchers.¹⁹

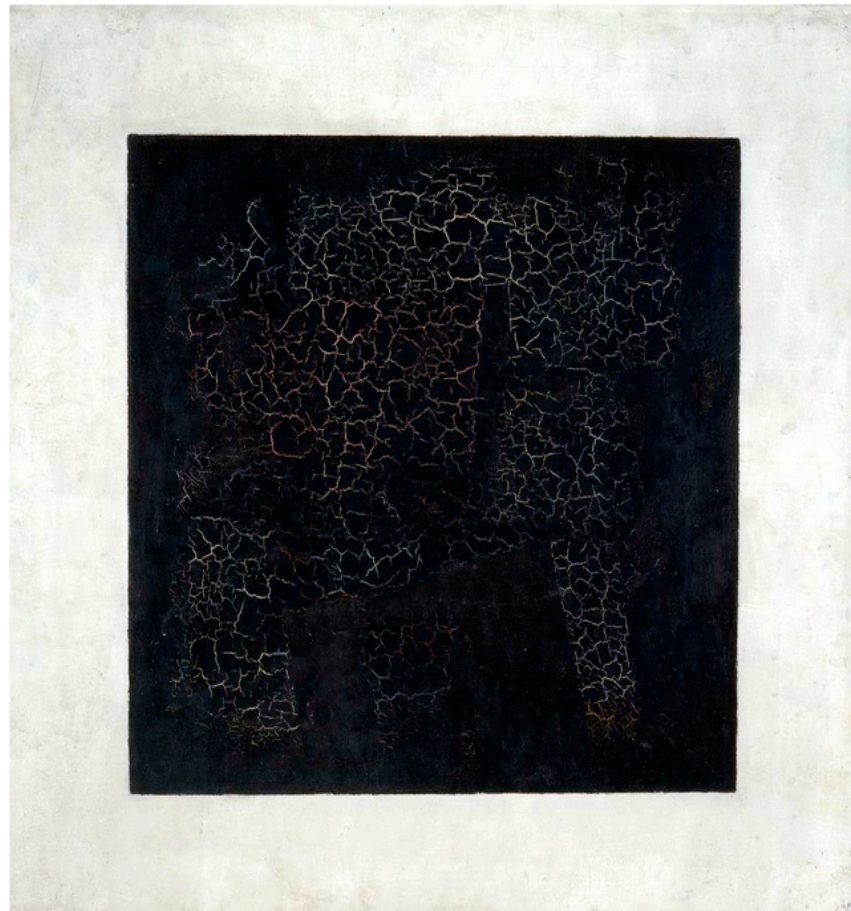


Figure 17. Kazimir Malevich. Black Square. The painted structure of Malevich's coloring resembles to some extent the known traditional technique of the Orthodox Icon painting.

Tomáš Glanc, in his penetrating analytical essay 'The Word and the Text of Kazimir Malevich' (Glanc 1996), is emphasizing a certain 'mimetic' distance necessary for understanding the religious component of Malevich's work, and observed that the general mimetic skepticism, which first manifests itself in Symbolism and reaches its extreme limits in the avant-garde, should be aptly illustrated by a quote from Malevich's text (1924): 'No crucifixion of Christ is like reality because it is artistic. . . . But only art is capable of transforming being and image, of embodying myth, just as in religion every phenomenon is a reflection of God' (see Glanc 1996). To this one may add observations left by Jerzy Faryno, expressed in a thorough essay, 'The Alogism and Iosemantism of the Avant-Garde' (Faryno 1996), where he contextually describes the hieratic and *ciphered* essence of the crypto-image of the fish as the secret sign of Christ, as the designation of the catacomb mystic guardians of the first centuries of Christianity, which is known to the initiated.

Faryno's general reasoning on the example of a quite figurative 'traditionally modernist' painting by Malevich may permit a relatively firm conclusion about the extraordinary importance of the iconographic presence of Christ and, more broadly, 'church attributes' in the early stages of "suprematist art", answering, even partially, the important question mentioned at the beginning of our discussion about the need to understand the religious affiliation of the artist. In the same way, Jerzy Faryno (1996) considers a modeling and image-semantic parallel in the sphere of constructing the space of objects of Malevich's work corresponding to the Christian icon. Taking into account all the facts discussed, the response to this question should emerge more unambiguously in favor of the Christian mystical variant of the artist's *visual performance*. The candle, the church, and the fish are mutually corroborated as manifestations of the same semiotic (symbiotic) system, implementing the implicit principle of *isosemantism*, thereby opening a semantic perspective on some other motifs as well. Here, it is only possible to substantiate the connection between the mystical fish and the candle in even greater detail. Malevich outlined only the principal echo of the form of the flame with the hint of the fish itself.

All the theoretical and iconographical intersections and possible implicit correspondences we have outlined above, as well as some specific facts of Malevich's metaphysical art that champions a specific type of creative semiosis (Faryno 1996), permit one to assert with more confidence the essential crossover between Kazimir Malevich and the spiritual energies of Orthodox icons on one hand and Hesychast prayer on the other. Suprematist theory of representation as championed by Malevich seems quite openly enrooted in non-artistic philosophical grounds. Part of this non-art backgrounds should be of course perceived and discerned in Nature. As Isabel Wünsche has emphasized using the example of Malevich's colleague and friend Mikhail Matiushin, art may be primarily perceived as "manifestation of a tendency to grow toward light and nourishment" (Wünsche 2015, p. 92): this invokes and involves faculties of a tree, but also brings into memory a Hesychast inner prayer and the Light of Tabor. Working on the first Futurist (anti)opera that was supposed to celebrate a synesthetic *victory over the Sun*, Matiushin together with Malevich (as well as Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh) creatively contributed towards "a synthesis of all forms of sensory perception and knowledge acquisition". As "a new stadium" of Avant-Garde world-understanding seems to be implicitly Hesychast-scented in its instantaneous "allowing one to grasp the true reality" behind the appearances of the visible world which evidently "represents a new synthesis of perception enabling one of simultaneous seeing and knowing" (Wünsche 2015, p. 112).

Generally speaking, icons prove to be highly relevant to Slavic and Russian avant-garde in its totality (see Spira 2008; Tarasov 2011; Gill 2016). In this context, the Hesychast religious philosophy may become the necessary descriptive tool offering a historical-intellectual and general-cultural framework heuristically describing the conceptual paradigm of Malevich's philosophy of representation in its holistic entirety, where too obvious similarities between his works and the legacy of the Byzantine Hesychasm can hardly be accidental. The future task of comparing Malevich's aesthetic fashions with other fellow Avant-gardist personae will include analyzing the profound interest in conceptual engaging with spiritual visuality and especially with a religious philosophy of the European Orient as explicated in Byzantine Orthodox (and at times heterodox) systems of thought.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 Malevich's suprematist theory has been analyzed in many scholarly works. See, for example, a valuable pioneering monograph by Larissa Zhadova (first published in German): (Zhadova 1982). See also a number of works by an American Malevich scholar, Charlotte Douglas (1994, pp. 164–98). See also her other studies: (Douglas 1980; 1986); on the mysticism of Black Square see also (Simmons 1980; Milner 1996; Martineau 1977).
- 2 On the mystical (and popular–religious) component of Malevich's work, see the analytical catalog: (Cortanova and Petrova 2000a). See also (Cortanova and Petrova 2000b). For general observations, see also (Mudrak 2015; Sakhno 2021; also Blank 1995; Bowlt 1986, 1991, 2008; Sarabianov 1993, pp. 7–21). As one may not fail to remember, 'Once Malevich began to take art classes and learn about art, he openly acknowledged the effect of icons on shaping his aesthetic ideas: *I felt something native and extraordinary in icons . . . I felt a certain bond between peasant art and the icons*'. Quoted in Mudrak (2015, p. 38).
- 3 On Mondrian's theosophical interests, see, for example, brief considerations by the distinguished cultural historian Peter Gay: 1976. Also, cf. Champa (1985) and Jaffé (1970). In addition, important articles from a valuable and wide-ranging book on modernist avant-garde art and the occult tradition should also be mentioned: (Apke et al. 1995; Marty Bax 1995; Wladimir Kruglow 1995; Anthony Parton 1995). See also the valuable article by Agnès Sola (Sola 1985, pp. 576–81). See also a volume of interest in this context: (Golding 2000).
- 4 See Malevich's published 'white' poems in Malevich (2000a). For an analysis of these texts (including the so-called 'Liturgical Cycle', which corresponds semantically with the iconographic analysis of 'An Englishman in Moscow' by Jerzy Faryno 1996). Cf. also Marinova (2004, pp. 567–92).
- 5 Böhme's apology of mystical silence was also appreciated by the English quasi-Protestant Quakers. A known quote from Böhme tells, 'When thou art quiet and silent, then art thou as God was before nature and creature; thou art that which God then wats; thou art that whereof he made thy nature and creature: Then thou hearest and seest even with that wherewith God himself saw and heard in thee, before every thine own willing or thine own seeing began'. See this in: (Hartmann 1977). (See also Leloup 2003).
- 6 I have used an edition of Malevich's works, edited by Alexandra Shatskikh: Malevich (1995–2004). See also Marcadé (1978, pp. 224–41). For similar themes, see John Bowlt (1990, pp. 178–89). See generally some recent studies as (Lodder 2019; Nakov 2010).
- 7 The Hebrew concept of God is demonstratively grammatically plural (*Elohim*) or neuter (i.e., *Elohút* - the godly essence of *Godhead*).
- 8 On the connection between Malevich and Gershenson, see their exchange of letters (1918–1924), (Malevich 2000b, pp. 327–54).
- 9 On Hesychasm in historical and theological illumination, see the eminent studies of the late Archpriest John Meyendorff (Meyendorff 2003, pp. 277–36 and, Meyendorff 1999). See also a special collection of Meyendorff's research published in *Variorum*: 1974. See also (Lossky 1997; LaBauve 1992). Another recent work concerned with Hesychasm and Byzantine mysticism: (Andreopoulos 2005). As regards the historical and art history study of iconoclasm, since the pioneering French monograph by André Grabar, which has been republished many times by (Grabar 1984), an enormous number of valuable works have been published. See also (Ioffe 2005, pp. 292–315).
- 10 There are quite a few interesting works devoted to various aspects of Russian 'philosophy of name'. For the most important example, one must mention a series of very insightful studies by the late Moscow philosopher Larissa Gogotishvili (1997a, 1997b). See also Natalia Bonetskaia (Bonetskaia 1991–1992, pp. 151–209). Cf. a series of papers by Moscow art historian Tatiana Goriacheva on the metaphysics of Kazimir Malevich's pictorial activities (from a somewhat different perspective than the above): (Goriacheva 1993a, pp. 49–60; 1993b, pp. 107–19; 1999, pp. 286–301). (See also Marcadé 1990; Douglas 1980, 1986; Mudrak 2017).
- 11 Oleg Khanjian, quoted in Lukianov (2007). There are also valuable reflections of Dmitry Sarabianov: 'the mesmerizing influence of the Black Square is connected with its ability to concentrate in itself the infinite world space, to transform into other universal formulas of the world, to express everything in the Universe, concentrating it all in an absolutely impersonal geometrical form and impenetrable black surface. Malevich was drawing a conclusion from the entire fruitful period of symbolic thinking in European culture with his program picture, moving from a symbol to a formula, a sign that acquires an identity'. See *ibid*.
- 12 This description might even sound a little "Gnostic" to some critics. As Malevich reports in his famous treatise *God Is Not Discounted (Not Cast Down)*: '[Indeed] it is not surprising that God built the universe out of nothing, just as man builds everything out of nothing of his own image, and that which is imagined does not know that [he] is the very Creator of everything and created God—also as His image [of Him]. See Malevich, *God Is Not Discounted! (God has not been cast off!)* (Malevich 2000b; Malevich 1995). See also Barr (2007).
- 13 Icon painting in general seems to have been a major influence on the work of many Russian avant-garde artists. See, in the context of Tatlin's prerevolutionary tumultuous fascination with frescoes and icons, Gassner (1993, pp. 124–63).
- 14 On the inverse perspective in icons, see the classic work by Florensky (2003, pp. 133–41).
- 15 Here one should recall the role of 'light' and its perception in semiotics and the iconic essence, which is also discussed by Leonid Uspensky, the namesake of the pioneer of Soviet semiotics, Boris Uspensky. See: (Léonid Ouspensky 2017; Léonid Ouspensky 1980). Cf. the fundamental essay by Boris A. Uspensky, 'Semiotics of the Icon' (Uspensky 1995, pp. 221–96). On the role of light, see also Viktor Zhivov (2002, pp. 40–72). Generally see: (Meyendorff 1974, 1987).

- ¹⁶ Some information on Nikephóros Gregorás and his polemic with Hesychasm (from 1346 onwards), Malevich could have acquired from many sources. Let us mention, for example, Guillana (1926).
- ¹⁷ For the general scholarly overview of the Russian avant-garde and icons see (Spira 2008; Gill 2016; Bowlt 2022).
- ¹⁸ Cf. Lukianov's analysis from the aforementioned essay, referring to the discussion of the embodiment of the archetypal image of the contemplative Deity in the quadruped, which is contained in the book *Psychology and Religion* by the Swiss philosopher and psychologist Carl Gustav Jung. 'Malevich argued that each color has its own form. The black square is the geometric form in which color is maximally tense. As an exercise, he recommended finding on an orange square that size of a green circle, until that circle moves when you look closely' (see Lukianov 2007).
- ¹⁹ According to J.-C. Marcadé's observations, Malevich defied any possibility of fully conveying the visible by previous methods of depicting reality. 'Going from conclusion to conclusion, by simplifying the external signs of real things, he came to the conclusion that a pure sense of the object could only be achieved through intuition alone, penetrating to the very essence of creation. Starting from the geometric square, Malevich proved on the flat surface the solution to the possibilities of suprematist movement: the power of immobility, the dynamics of rest, the potentiality of magnetism and mystical depth. The highest point of his aesthetic theories is the *White Square on a White Background* of 1918, expressing the beginning and the end of the created world, the purity of creative human energy and the unperturbed calm of nonexistence' (Marcadé 1978; Lukianov 2007). Interpreting the suggestiveness of white color for ideology and ideography of 'figurative Nothing' by Malevich involves ethnopoetic tradition and folklore mythology, in particular the ambivalent legacy of Russian folklorist Alexander Afanasiev: 'White color traditionally played the key role both in ancient Russian pastoral cosmology and in mythology of other peoples. The image of a white stone on the sea, and sometimes on an island allows to reconstruct the associative chain germ-cheese/cottage-island/stone. The sea is also sometimes referred to as a white substance. In various versions of the ancient Indian myth of Creation by means of churning, the sea is either called milky or, having thickened, it turns into dense milk and butter. In the mythology of the Mongolian people(s) the solid earth is created by stirring the milky sea-ocean. The process of the emergence of the germ within the milk moisture was largely thought of by analogy with the process of fermentation. The semantic series of representations concerning cheese/cottage cheese is greatly expanded if they are considered in the cosmogonic aspect . . . To this day, the world around us is often referred to as 'white light': to live in white light, to walk in white light. And the white stone is mentioned in the Apocalypse of John the Theologian: 'He who has an ear (to hear), let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches: to him who overcomes I will give to taste the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone, which no one knows, except he who receives it'" (Quoted in Lukianov 2007).

References

- Andreopoulos, Andreas. 2005. *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*. Crestwood and New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Ankersmit, Frank R. 1997. *Aesthetic Politics. Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Antonova, Clemena. 2015. Visuality among Cubism, Iconography, and Theosophy: Pavel Florensky's Theory of Iconic Space. *Journal of Icon Studies* 1.
- Antonova, Clemena. 2020a. The Icon and the Visual Arts at the Time of the Russian Religious Renaissance. In *Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*. Edited by George Pattison, Caryl Emerson and Randall A. Poole. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 412–33.
- Antonova, Clemena. 2020b. *Visual Thought in Russian Religious Philosophy: Pavel Florensky's Theory of the Icon*. London: Routledge.
- Apke, Bernd, Veit Loers, Pia Witzmann, and Ingrid Ehrhardt, eds. 1995. *Okkultismus und Avantgarde: Von Munch bis Mondrian, 1900–1915, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt*. Ostfildern: Edition Tertium.
- Barr, Adrian. 2007. From Vozbuzhdenie to Oshchushenie: Theoretical Shifts, Nova Generatsiia and the Late Paintings. In *Rethinking Malevich*. Edited by Charlotte Douglas and Christina Lodder. London: Pindar Press, pp. 203–23.
- Bax, Marthy. 1995. Theosophie und kunst in den Niederlanden 1885–1915, Die Theosophische Gessellschaft. In *Okkultismus und Avantgarde: Von Munch bis Mondrian, 1900–1915, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt*. Edited by Bernd Apke, Veit Loers, Pia Witzmann and Ingrid Ehrhardt. Ostfildern: Edition Tertium, pp. 245–66, 282–321.
- Besançon, Alain. 2000. *Image interdite. The Forbidden image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*. Translated by Jane Marie Todd. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bibikhin, Vladimir. 2003. *Sv. Gregory Palama. Triady v zaschity sviachenno-bezmolstvuiuschikh*. Sankt Petersburg: Nauka.
- Blair, Sara. 1999. Modernism and the Politics of Culture. In *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Edited by M. Levenson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 157–74.
- Blank, Ksana. 1995. Lev Tolstoy's Suprematist Icon-Painting. *Elementa: Schriften zur Philosophie und ihrer Problemgeschichte* 2: 67–89.
- Bonetskaia, Natalia. 1991–1992. O Filologicheskoi shkole P.A. Florenskogo. *Studia Slavica Hung* 37: 151–209.
- Bowl, John. 1986. Esoteric Culture and Russian Society. In *The Spiritual in Abstract Painting 1890–1985*. Los Angeles and New York: Abbeville Press, pp. 165–83.
- Bowl, John. 1990. Malevich and the Energy of Language. In *Kazimir Malevich, 1878–1935*. Edited by Jeane D'Andrea. Los Angeles: The Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Culture, pp. 178–89.

- Bowl, John. 1991. Orthodoxy and the Avantgarde: Sacred images in the work of Goncharova, Malevich, and Their contemporaries. In *Christianity and the Arts in Russia*. Edited by Milos M. Velimirovic and William C. Brumfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowl, John. 2008. *Moscow & St. Petersburg 1900–1920: Art, Life, and Culture of the Russian Silver Age*. London: Vendome Press.
- Bowl, John. 2022. 'Wings of Freedom': Petr Miturich and Aero-Constructivism. *Arts* 11: 52. [CrossRef]
- Bradbury, Malcolm, and James McFarlane, eds. 1976. *Modernism: 1890–1930*. London: Harvester Press.
- Bradley, Will, and Charles Esche. 2007. *Art and Social Change*. London: Tate Publishing.
- Brooker, Peter, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth, and Andrew Thacker. 2010. *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bru, Sascha. 2006. The Phantom League. The Centennial Debate on the Avant-Garde and Politics. In *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde: 1906–1940*. Edited by Sascha Bru and Gunther Martens. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, pp. 9–35.
- Bru, Sascha, and Jan Baetens. 2009. *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Bürger, Peter. 2014. *Teoriia Avangarda*. Moskva. First published 1974.
- Champa, Kermit. 1985. *Mondrian Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cortenova, G., and E. Petrova. 2000a. *Kandinsky, Chagall, Malevich e lo spiritualismo russo: Dale collezioni del Museo statale russo di San Pietroburgo, a cura di Giorgio Cortenova, Evgenia Petrova, Milano*. Singapore: Electa.
- Cortenova, Giorgio, and Evgenia Petrova. 2000b. *Kazimir Malevich e Le Sacre Icone Russe: Avanguardia e Tradizioni*. Verona: Electa.
- D'Arcy, Michael, and Mathias Nilges, eds. 2016. *The Contemporaneity of Modernism: Literature, Media, Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Douglas, Charlotte. 1980. *Swans of the Other Worlds: Kazimir Malevich and the Origins of Abstraction in Russia*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press.
- Douglas, Charlotte. 1986. Beyond Reason: Malevich, Matiushin, and their Circles. In *The Spiritual in Abstract Painting 1890–1985*. Los Angeles and New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, pp. 189–99.
- Douglas, Charlotte. 1994. *Kazimir Malevich*. New York: H.N. Abrams.
- Erjavec, Aleš, ed. 2015. *Aesthetic Revolutions and Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Eysteinson, Astradur. 1990. *The Concept of Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Eysteinson, Astradur, and Vivian Liska, eds. 2007. *Modernism (2 Vols)*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Faryno, Jerzy. 1996. Alogizm i izosemantizm Avant-Garda, na primere Malevicha. *Russian Literature* XL-I.
- Florensky, Pavel. 2003. *Obratnaia perspektiva. Esteicheskoe samosoznanie russkoi kultury. 20e gody*. Moskva: RGGU, pp. 133–41.
- Forgács, Éva. 2022. *Malevich and Interwar Modernism Russian Art and the International of the Square*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Gassner, Hubertus. 1993. *Konstruktivisty na puti modernizatsii, Velikaia Utopia. Russkii i Sovetskii Avant-Garde 1915–1932*. Bern and Moskva: Guggenheim Museum, pp. 124–63.
- Gill, Charlotte. 2016. A 'Direct Perception of Life. How the Russian Avant-Garde Utilized the Icon Tradition'. *IKON* 9: 323–34. [CrossRef]
- Gimbutas, Marija. 1974. *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 7000 to 3500 BC: Myths, Legends and Cult Images*. London: University of California Press.
- Glanc, Tomáš. 1996. Slovo i tekst Kazimira Malevicha. *Blokovskii Sbornik* XIII: 93–102.
- Glisic, Iva. 2020. *The Futurist Files. Avant-Garde, Politics, and Ideology in Russia, 1905–1930*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.
- Gogotishvili, Larisa. 1997a. Losev, hesychasm, platonism. In *Losev A.F. Imia*. Sankt Petersburg: Aleteia.
- Gogotishvili, Larisa. 1997b. Linguisticheskii aspekt triokh versii imiaslavia. In *Losev A.F. Imia*. Sankt Petersburg: Aleteia.
- Golding, John. 2000. *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Goriacheva, Tatiana. 1993a. Malevich i metafizicheskaia zhivopis'. *Voprosy iazykoznanii* 1: 49–60.
- Goriacheva, Tatiana. 1993b. Malevich i Renaissance. *Voprosy Iskusstvoznania* 2–3: 107–19.
- Goriacheva, Tatiana. 1999. Tzartstvo dukkha i tzarstvo kesaria. Sudba futuristicheskoi utopii v 1920–1930g. *Iskusstvoznanie* 1: 286–301.
- Grabar, André. 1984. *L'ictonoclasme byzantin: Le dossier archéologique*, 2e rev. et augm ed. Paris: Flammarion.
- Groys, Boris. 2008. *Art Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge Mass.
- Groys, Boris. 2012. *Politika Poetiki*. Moskva.
- Grygar, Mojmír. 1991. The contradictions and the unity of Malevich's world-outlook. *Avant-Garde. Interdisciplinary and International Review* 5/6: 181–206.
- Guillana, Rodolphe. 1926. *Essai sur Nicéphore Grégoras*. Paris: P. Geuthner.
- Hadjinicolaou, Nicos. 1982. On the Ideology of Avant-Gardism. *Praxis: A Journal of Radical Perspectives on the Arts* 6: 39–196.
- Hartmann, Franz. 1977. *Jacob Boehme: Life and Doctrines*. Blauvelt: Steinerbooks.
- Hinderliter, Beth, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick. 2009. *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hinnov, Emily, Lauren Rosenblum, and Laurel Harris, eds. 2013. *Communal Modernisms*. New York: Springer.
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2005. Liki tishiny. Novejshaya istoriya russkogo eksperimental'nogo stikha Sub Specie Hesychiae: Tri skhematicheskii vzyatyie poetiki umnogo delaniya. *Russian Literature* LVII: 293–314.
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2007. Russkaia religioznaia kritika jazyka i problema imiaslavia (o. Pavel Florenskii, o. Sergii Bulgakov, A.F. Losev). *Kritika i Semiotika* 11: 109–72.

- Ioffe, Dennis. 2008a. *Diskursy telesnosti i erotizma v literature i kul'ture. Epokha modernisma*. Moskva: Lodomir.
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2008b. K postanovke problemy: Malevich i hesychasm. In *The Case of the Avant-garde: Delo Avangarda*. Edited by Willem G. Weststeijn. Amsterdam: Pegasus, vol. 8, pp. 581–617.
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2008c. Velimir Khlebnikov, Islamic mysticism, and Oriental Discourse. In *Doski sud'by Velimira Khlebnikova: Tekst i konteksty, stat'i i materialy*. Edited by N. Sirotkin, V. Feschenko and N. Gritsanichuk. Moskva: Tri Kvadrata Academic Publishers, pp. 547–637.
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2010. Ideologia avangarda kak fenomen. *Russian literature* 67: 417–41.
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2011. The Legacy of Experiment in Russian Culture. *Russian Literature* 69: 169–183.
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2012a. The Notion Ideology in the Context of the Russian Avant-Garde. *Cultura. International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology* 9: 135–54. [CrossRef]
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2012b. The Tradition of Experimentation in the Russian Avant-Garde. In *The Russian Avant-Garde and Radical Modernism*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, pp. 454–68.
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2017. The Politics of Modernism in Russia. *Russian Literature* 92: 2–14.
- Ioffe, Jeremija. 2006. Simvolizm (misticheskiy idealizm), Konstruktivizm, Ekspresionizm i surrealizm. In *Izbrannoe*. Edited by M. S. Kagan, I. P. Smirnov and N. Ia Grigorieva. Sankt Petersburg: Petropolis, pp. 197–251.
- Jaffé, Hans Ludwig. 1970. *Piet Mondrian*. New York: H. N. Abrams.
- Kalliney, Peter. 2016. *Modernism in a Global Context*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Karl, Frederick. 1985. *Modern and Modernism: The Sovereignty of the Artist 1885–1925*. New York: Atheneum.
- Khardzhiev, Nikolai. 1976. *K istorii russkogo avangarda*. Stockholm: Hylaea Prints.
- Khlebnikov, Velimir. 1986. *Tvoreniia*. Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel'.
- Kim, Hyun Jin. 2010. Herodotus' Scythians Viewed from a Central Asian Perspective, Its Historicity and Significance. *Ancient West & East* 9: 115–35.
- Kruglow, Vladimir. 1995. Die Epoche des grossen Spiritismus—Symbolistische Tendenzen in der fruhen russischen Avantgarde. In *Okkultismus und Avantgarde: Von Munch bis Mondrian, 1900–1915, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt*. Edited by Bernd Apke, Veit Loers, Pia Witzmann and Ingrid Ehrhardt. Ostfildern: Edition Tertium, pp. 175–93.
- Kudriavtseva, Ekaterina. 2017. *Kazimir Malevich. Metamorphosy chernogo kvadrata*. Moskva: NLO.
- Kunichka, Michael. 2015. 'Our Native Antiquity' Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Culture of Russian Modernism. Boston: Academic Studies Press.
- LaBauve, Hébert. 1992. *Hesychasm, Word-weaving, and Slavic Hagiography: The Literary School of Patriarch Euthymius*. (Sagners slavistische Sammlung). Munchen: Otto Sagner Verlag.
- Leloup, Jean-Yves. 2003. *Being Still: Reflections on an Ancient Mystical Tradition*. Mahwah: Paulist Press.
- Levenson, Michael. 2011. *Modernism*. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Livshits, Benedikt. 1931. *Hylea*. New York: Burliuk.
- Lodder, Christina. 2019. Conflicting Approaches to Creativity? Suprematism and Constructivism. In *Celebrating Suprematism. New Approaches to the Art of Kazimir Malevich*. Edited by Christina Lodder. Leiden: Brill.
- Lossky, Nikolai. 1997. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Lukianov, E. A. 2007. Lev Tolstoy v suprematicheskome zerkale Kazimira Malevicha. *Chelovek* 6: 157–68.
- Makarov, D. I. 2003. *Antropologia i kosmologia sv. Grigoria Palamy*. Abisko: SpB, Abyshko.
- Malevich, Kazimir. 1995. 'Bog ne skinut!'. In *Sobranie Sochinenii*. Moskva: Gileia.
- Malevich, Kazimir. 2000a. *Poezia*. Moskva: Epifania.
- Malevich, K. 2000b. *Sobranie Sochinenii*. Moskva: Gileia.
- Maloney, George. 1973. *Russian Hesychasm: The Spirituality of Nil Sorskij*. Mouton: The Hague.
- Marcadé, Jean-Claude. 1978. An Approach to the Writings of Malevich. *Soviet Union/Union Sovetique* 5: 224–41.
- Marcadé, Jean-Claude. 1990. *Malévitch*. Paris: Casterman, Nouvelles Editions françaises.
- Marinova, Margarita. 2004. 'Malevich's Poetry: A 'Wooden Bicycle' against a Background of Masterpieces?'. *Slavic and East European Journal* 48: 567–92.
- Markov, Vladimir. 1968. *Russian Futurism: A History*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Martineau, Emmanuel. 1977. *Malevitch et la philosophie. La question de la peinture abstraite*. Lausanne: L'age d'Homme.
- Meyendorff, John. 1974. *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems*. London: Variorum Reprints.
- Meyendorff, John. 1987. *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Meyendorff, John. 1999. *Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Meyendorff, John. 2003. Sviatoj Grigorii Palama i pravoslavnaia mistika. O vizantijskom hesychazme i ego roli v kul'turnom i istoricheskom razvitii Vostochnoj Evropy v XIV veke. In *Istorija Tserkvi i vostochno-christianskaia mystica*. Moskva: Pravoslavnyi Svjato-Tikhonovskii Bogoslovskii institut, pp. 277–336, 561–74.
- Milner, J. 1996. *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Misler, N., and J. Bowl. 2021. Catherine's Icon: Pavel Filonov and the Orthodox World. *Religions* 12: 502. [CrossRef]
- Mudrak, Myroslava. 2015. Kazimir Malevich and the Liturgical Tradition of Eastern Christianity. In *Byzantium/Modernism. The Byzantine as Method in Modernity*. Edited by Roland Betancourt and Maria Taroutina. Leiden: Brill, pp. 37–75.

- Mudrak, Myroslava. 2017. Kazimir Malevich, Symbolism, and Ecclesiastic Orthodoxy. In *Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art: New Perspectives*. Edited by Louise Hardiman and Nicola Kozicharow. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Nakov, Andréi. 2010. *Malevich: Painting the Absolute*. Surrey: Lund Humphries.
- Nelson, Robert. 2015. Modernism's Byzantium, in Byzantium/Modernism. In *The Byzantine as Method in Modernity*. Edited by Roland Betancourt and Maria Taroutina. Leiden: Brill, pp. 15–37.
- Ouspensky, Léonid. 1980. *La Théologie de l'Icone dans l'Église Orthodoxe*. Paris: Editions du Cerf.
- Ouspensky, Léonid. 2017. *Le Mystère de l'Icone*. Paris: Diocese of Chersonesus, Patriarchate of Moscow.
- Parton, A. 1995. Avantgarde und mystische Tradition in Russland 1900–1915. In *Okkultismus und Avantgarde: Von Munch bis Mondrian, 1900–1915, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt*. Edited by Bernd Apke, Veit Loers, Pia Witzmann and Ingrid Ehrhardt. Ostfildern: Edition Tertium, pp. 245–67.
- Pavlov, Evgeny, and Dennis Ioffe. 2017. Poets and the City: Locating the Political in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Poetry. *Russian Literature* 87–89: 1–15. [CrossRef]
- Poggioli, Renato. 1968. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rainey, Lawrence. 1999. The Cultural Economy of Modernism. In *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Edited by Michael Levenson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 33–70.
- Rancière, Jacques. 2004. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Rasula, Jed. 2016. Ahead of Time: The Avant-Gardes. In *The Cambridge History of Modernism*. Edited by Vincent B. Sherry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 47–64.
- Raunig, Gerald. 2007. *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*. Los Angeles: Semiotext.
- Reeve-Tucker, Alice, and Nathan Waddell, eds. 2013. *Utopianism, Modernism, and Literature in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Roberts, John. 2015. *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*. London: Verso.
- Sakhno, Irina. 2021. Kazimir Malevich's Negative Theology and Mystical Suprematism. *Religions* 12: 542. [CrossRef]
- Sarabianov, Dmitry. 1993. Russkii Avant-Garde pered litsom religiozno-filosofskoi mysli. *Voprosy iskusstvovedeniia* 1: 7–21.
- Sass, Louis. 1992. *Madness and Modernism. Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, and Thought*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Shatskikh, Alexandra. 2000. Malevich posle zhivopisi. In *Sobranie Sochinenii*. Moskva: Gileia.
- Sherry, Vincent. B. 2015. *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sherry, Vincent, ed. 2016. *The Cambridge History of Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shevzov, Vera. 2010. Between Purity and Pluralism: Icon and Anathema in Modern Russia, 1860–1917. In *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity*. Edited by Jefferson J. Gatrall and Douglas Greenfield. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Simmons, W. S. 1980. Kazimir Malevich's Black Square and the Genesis of Suprematism, 1907–1915. Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.
- Smolianskaia, Natalia. 2001. *Abstraktsia kak negativnoe simvolicheskoe i ee interpretatsia v kontekste istorii ikonoklazma*. Moskva: Logos, vol. 4.
- Spira, Andrew. 2008. *The Avant-Garde Icon: The Russian Avant-Garde and the Icon Painting Tradition*. Aldershot: Lund Humphries.
- Sola, Agnès. 1985. Hérmetisme ou obscurité: XVIème et XXème siècles. In *Proceedings of the Xth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association/Actes du Xe congrès de l'Association internationale de littérature comparée, Vol. 2: Comparative Poetics/Poétiques Comparées*. Edited by Anna Balakian and James J. Wilhelm. New York: Garland, pp. 576–81.
- Taminiaux, Pierre. 2013. *Littératures modernistes et arts d'avant-garde*. Paris: Champion.
- Tarasov, Oleg. 2002. Florenskij, Malevich e la semiotica dell' icona. *La Nuova Europa* 1: 34–47.
- Tarasov, Oleg. 2011. *Framing Russian Art: From Early Icons to Malevich*. Translated by Robin Milner-Gulland, and Antony Wood. London: Reaktion Books.
- Tarasov, Oleg. 2017. Spirituality and Semiotics of Russian Culture: From the Icon to Avant-Garde. In *Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art: New Perspectives*. Edited by Louise Hardiman and Nicola Kozicharow. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Taroutina, Maria. 2015. Byzantium and Modernism. In *Byzantium/Modernism. The Byzantine as Method in Modernity*. Edited by Roland Betancourt and Maria Taroutina. Leiden: Brill, pp. 1–15.
- Taroutina, Maria. 2018. Toward a New Icon: Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, and the Cult of Nonobjectivity. In *The Icon and the Square: Russian Modernism and the Russo-Byzantine Revival*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 179–218.
- Taylor, Ronald, and Frederic Jameson, eds. 1977. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: Verso.
- Uspensky, Boris. 1995. 'Semiotika ikony'. In *Semiotika iskusstva*. Moskva: IaRK, pp. 221–96.
- Vöhringer, Margarete. 2007. *Avantgarde und Psychotechnik. Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik der Wahrnehmungsexperimente in der frühen Sowjetunion*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag.
- Waddell, Nathan. 2012. *Modernist Nowheres: Politics and Utopia in Early Modernist Writing, 1900–1920*. New York: Springer.
- Wasser, Audrey. 2016. *The Work of Difference: Modernism, Romanticism, and the Production of Literary Form*. New York: Fordham Univ Press.
- Webber, Andrew. 2004. *The European Avant-Garde: 1900–1940*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Williams, Raymond. 1989. *Politics of Modernism*. London: Verso.
- Winkiel, Laura. 2017. *Modernism: The Basics*. New York: Routledge.

- Wollaeger, Mark, ed. 2012. *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wünsche, Isabel. 2015. *The Organic School of the Russian Avant-Garde: Nature's Creative Principles*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Zavalishin, Viacheslav. 1988. *Kazimir Malevich. Mysli o zhizni i tvorchestve osnovatelya suprematizma*. Introduction John E. Bowlt. New York: Effect Publishing.
- Zhadova, Larisa. 1982. *Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art, 1910–1930*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Zhivov, Victor. 2002. Bogoslovie ikony v pervyi period ikonoborcheskikh sporov. In *Razyskania v oblasti istorii i predystroii russkoi kultury*. Moskva: IaRK.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.

Article

“More than Just a Poet”: Konstantin Batiushkov as an Art Critic, Art Manager, and Art Brut Painter

Igor Pilshchikov 

Department of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Languages and Cultures, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA; pilshchikov@ucla.edu

Abstract: This paper focuses on the Russian Golden Age author Konstantin Batiushkov’s involvement with fine arts. He is recognized as an exquisite elegist, an immediate predecessor of Alexander Pushkin in poetry, and “a pioneer of Russian Italomania.” Much less known is that Batiushkov was always deeply involved with painting, drawing, and sculpture—not only as a poet but as Russia’s first art critic, an ad-lib art manager, who worked on behalf of the President of the Russian Academy of Arts Aleksei Olenin, and an amateur artist. The paper offers addenda to the commentary on his essay devoted to the 1814 academic exhibition, commonly referred to as the earliest significant example of Russian art criticism. Many of Batiushkov’s extant paintings and drawings belong to the time when he was mentally insane. Since he was a self-taught artist, his visual works of this period can be categorized as early examples of art brut.

Keywords: Russian Golden Age poets; Batiushkov; art criticism; Russian Academy of Arts; Russian painters in Rome; early art brut painting



Citation: Pilshchikov, Igor. 2022. “More than Just a Poet”: Konstantin Batiushkov as an Art Critic, Art Manager, and Art Brut Painter. *Arts* 11: 126. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11060126>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 20 October 2022

Accepted: 3 December 2022

Published: 14 December 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The artistic tastes of the authors of the so-called Golden Age of Russian literature and their knowledge of painting and sculpture, either contemporary or those of previous epochs, remain practically unresearched (Pigarev 1966, 1972). The same applies to the writers’ own pictorial art, although to a lesser extent. This research was initiated by the studies and editions of the drawings of Russia’s iconic poet Alexander Pushkin as an extraverbal element of his poetry writing process (Efros 1930, 1933, 1945, 1946; Tsiavlovskaja 1970, 1980; Zhuikova 1996; Denisenko and Fomichev 1996, 2001). Editions of the oils, watercolors, and crayons of the last Golden Age author, Mikhail Lermontov, followed next (Kovalevskaja 1964, 1980).

Russian émigré artist and art collector Nikolai Zaretzky (b. 1876–d. 1959) spent the last decade of his life working on a description of 19th- and early-20th-century Russian writers’ achievements as artists. Originally entitled *Russkie pisateli kak zhivopistsy i risoval’shchiki* [Russian Writers as Painters and Drawers], his book was edited and published posthumously in German translation by the prominent Slavist Dmytro Chyzhevsky (Zaretzky 1960). In 1981, the first exhibition of the drawings of 19th- and 20th-century Russian authors was held in the State Literary Museum in Moscow (Shakhalova 1981). This exhibition provided the impetus for a survey edition of the most important drawings of Russian authors from the late 17th to the early 20th century, published with a solid introduction by Rudol’f Duganov (1988). A conference called “Drawings of Saint Petersburg Writers” was held in Saint Petersburg in May 1999, and its proceedings were published the following year (Denisenko 2000). The latest Literary Museum exhibition, titled “Poeta pingens,” was held in 2004 (Zalieva and Rudnik 2004).

The present paper focuses on a less-known aspect of the life and oeuvre of a leading poet of the period, Konstantin Batiushkov. He was born in Vologda, a baroque city in the European Russian North, in 1787. For contemporary and later critics, he and his friend

Vasilii Zhukovsky were the founders of a new school in Russian poetry defined today as a transition from Neoclassical to Romantic; both are appraised as Pushkin's mentors in poetry and his immediate predecessors. Most of Batiushkov's poems, published during the mid-1800s and 1810s, were collected in the second volume of his *Opyty v Stikhakh i Proze* [Essays in Verse and Prose] (1817). This book set a compositional standard for younger Romantic poets: in particular, Pushkin (1826) and Evgenii Baratynsky (1827) modeled their collections on Batiushkov's book with its genre headings ("Elegies," "Epistles," and "Miscellanea").

Batiushkov's prose essays in the first volume of *Opyty* are non-fiction articles on Russian and European cultural history. One of them, "Progulka v Akademiiu Khudozhestv" [A Stroll to the Academy of Arts] (1814), is commonly referred to as the earliest significant example of Russian art criticism (Efros 1933, p. 94; Pigarev 1966, p. 44; Fridman 1965, pp. 92–93; Serman 1974, pp. 106–7; Volodina 1989; Baluev 2015, pp. 40–48; Buckler 2018, p. 97). Section 2 of this paper offers addenda to the commentary on this important text.

Some of Batiushkov's essays, including "A Stroll," are composed in epistolary form. Batiushkov's friends considered his correspondence to be of great literary interest and started publishing it as early as the 1820s (Stepanov 1926; Todd 1976; Pilshchikov 1994–1995, 2003, pp. 90–115; Lappo-Danilevskij 2013). In one such letter (to Dmitrii Dashkov on 25 April 1814),¹ Batiushkov describes his Parisian impressions (to be discussed in Section 2.2); an abridged version was published in *Pamiatnik Otechestvennykh Muz* [The Monument of Fatherland Muses] in 1827 (Batiushkov 1827). Interestingly, some of his letters include pictorial elements (Duganov 1988, p. 71; Koshelev 2000, p. 165), discussed in Section 4 of the present paper.

The leading comparativists called Batiushkov "a pioneer of Russian Italomania."² His love for Italian literature began with Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, the epic which was generally acknowledged as the principal link in the chain between antiquity and modernity. He extended this attitude to the whole of Italian Renaissance literature, in which he found "genuinely classical beauties, well-trying by the centuries."³ The chronological horizon of Batiushkov's Italian interests gradually expanded backward to Dante Alighieri and further to contemporaries, such as Vincenzo Monti (Gorokhova 1975; Pilshchikov 2003),—until he conceived the project of *Panteon Itail'ianskoi Slovesnosti* [A Pantheon of Italian Letters] in 1817 (realized only partially).

Already in his young years Batiushkov formed a friendship with Aleksei Olenin—a dignitary, a successful career official, and a knowledgeable amateur of the arts in one person. On 21 April 1817, Olenin was appointed the President of the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg and retained this position until he died in 1843. In summer 1818, following Olenin's advice, Batiushkov traveled to the Black Sea shore (the territory conquered during the Russo-Turkish Wars of 1768–74 and 1787–91), where he examined the ruins of the ancient Greek city of Olbia⁴ and described his findings (medals, vases, etc.). De facto, it was the first Russian expedition to Pontic Olbia, three decades before the site was made an archaeological reservation. Batiushkov wrote an essay on Olbian antiquities (accompanied by drawings) but it did not come down to us (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 522; Maikov and Saitov 1886, p. 761).

Before his departure to the Black Sea, Batiushkov sent a letter to emperor Alexander I, asking for a post in Italy. On 16 July 1818, the emperor raised him to the rank of Court Councillor (the seventh class in the Table of Ranks) and attached him to the Russian consulate in Naples, where he arrived at the end of February 1819. His route lay via Rome, where he—again on behalf of Olenin—supervised the living and working conditions of the Russian artists who resided there on academic stipends (one of them was Orest Kiprensky, the most famous Russian Romantic painter before Karl Briullov). I describe the less known details of Batiushkov's Italian journey in Section 3 of this paper.

Meanwhile, the poet's health was failing and his depression grew. A local doctor persuaded him to receive balneological treatment on the island of Ischia, but it did not help. The painter Sylvester Shchedrin, who moved from Rome to Naples in June 1819 and

stayed with Batiushkov for more than a year, produced many of his Neapolitan cityscapes from and around Batiushkov's apartment (also discussed in Section 3). In the summer of 1820 a revolution broke out in the Kingdom of both Sicilies, and the Russian envoy left Naples. In December 1820, Batiushkov received permission to move to Rome and then to Bohemia. He applied for retirement; instead, the emperor granted him indefinite leave. In August 1822, Batiushkov arrived in Simferopol in Crimea, where, over the following months, symptoms of persecution mania became obvious. He burnt his books and attempted suicide a few times. From 1824 to 1828 he was treated at the "Maison de santé" in Sonnenstein (Saxony), from 1828 to 1833 in Moscow. On 9 December 1833, he was officially found incurable, released from service and granted a life pension. From 1833 onward he lived in Vologda.

Batiushkov lived a long life, 68 years, but his last "sane" poem was written when he was only 34, and his contemporaries deemed him, to use the critic Vissarion Belinsky's words, pronounced in 1841, "as if dead."⁵ After Batiushkov became mentally ill, he wrote only a few incoherent texts. However, he spent another 34 years producing watercolors, gouaches, and crayons. Many of his extant paintings and drawings belong to this period. Together with his earlier artwork, they are discussed in Section 4 below.

2. "A Stroll to the Academy of Arts" and Its Enigmas

In January 1814, the Russian army crossed the Rhine, entered France and moved in on the capital. Batiushkov took part in this campaign as an adjutant to General Nikolai Raevsky, commander of the Third Corps of Grenadiers. Our warrior poet visited the castle of Cirey in Lorraine, where the fugitive Voltaire had lived, and described the visit in a prose piece, "Puteshestvie v zamok Sirei" [A Visit to the Castle of Cirey]. It was written in the fall of the following year in the form of another letter to Dashkov and included in the prose volume of the *Essays in Verse and Prose*.

In early July 1814, Batiushkov returned from Paris to Saint Petersburg via England, Sweden, and Finland; he described the crossing in a letter to Dmitrii Severin of 19 June 1814, revised later as a traveler's sketch, and in the elegy "Ten' Druga" [The Shade of a Friend]. Upon arrival, he worked on "Stseny chetyrekh vozrastov" [Scenes of the Four Ages of Man], a libretto for the celebrations on the return of Alexander I, which took place in Pavlovsk on 27 July 1814. An annual exhibition at the Academy of Arts described in "Progulka v Akademiiu Khudozhestv" was opened on 1 September 1814. This date is registered in the official reports on the exhibition at the Academy published annually by its Conference Secretary (and, later, Vice-President) Aleksei Labzin, a leading figure of the Russian Enlightenment and Russian Freemasonry (Labzin 1814, p. 1; Beliaev 2016, p. 194). The textual correspondences between the 1814 report and "Progulka" testify to the fact that Batiushkov made an ample use of it (Volodina 1989, pp. 104–5).

Therefore, "Progulka v Akademiiu Khudozhestv" (or at least its main part, devoted to the exhibition) was written between early October (Labzin's report was published on 2 October) and late November 1814: its first portion was published in Nikolai Grech's journal *Syn Otechestva* [Son of the Fatherland] on 3 December 1814 (see Batiushkov 1814).⁶ The definitive version of the essay was completed in the summer of 1816 when Batiushkov revised his prose works for the first volume of *Opyty* (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, pp. 114–58). In early September 1816, he informed his friend and editor, the poet and translator Nikolai Gnedich, that the text of his "Letter on the Academy" was "corrected" and that Olenin, whose advice he had used when writing the essay, should be asked for permission to publish it: "The canvass is his, and the silks are mine."⁷

2.1. The Russian and British Reception of Batiushkov's Essay

Curiously enough, "Progulka" became accessible to Anglophone readers very early. Its unsigned translation into English, titled "A Visit in the Academy of Arts," appeared in *Arnold's Magazine of the Fine Arts* in March and April 1834 (see Batiushkov 1834). The translator, William Henry Leeds (b. 1786–d. 1866), was "a truly significant figure in the

early history of British reception and perception not only of Russian literature but also of Russian art and architecture" (Cross 2012, p. 56). The translation was preceded by the praise of Batiushkov's essay in Leeds's review of *Opyty*, published in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* in January 1832 (Cross 2012, p. 61):

The "Visit to the Academy of Arts" would be valuable, were it merely for the information it affords relative to some of the most noted artists of Russia, Yegorov, Kiprensky, Varnik, &c.; independently of which, his remarks on painting convince us that Batiushkov was fully capable of appreciating, and entering with real feeling into the beauties and excellencies of that art. (Leeds 1832, p. 219)

The review concludes with a complete poetic translation of Batiushkov's then most acclaimed elegy, "Umiraiushchii Tass" [The Dying Tasso] (1817).

A special emphasis on "Progulka" and "Umiraiushchii Tass" is already found in Leeds's earlier review of Grech's *Opyt kratkoi istorii russkoi literatury* [A Brief History of Russian Literature] (1822), published in 1828 in the *Foreign Review and Continental Miscellany*, an unsuccessful short-lived rival of the *Foreign Quarterly Review* (Cross 2012, p. 55):

While Zhukovsky caught the spirit of the bards of the north, Batiushkov infused into his strains the grace, delicacy, and refinement of the Italian muse. His "Dying Tasso" is one of those productions which stamp at once the reputation of a poet.

As a writer of prose, he is no less admirable, for there is a charm and finished elegance in his style, that well accord with the refined criticism in his essays: amongst which, his "Visit to the Academy of Arts" is exceedingly interesting, and written with great eloquence. (Leeds 1828, p. 295)

The contrast of Zhukovsky and Batiushkov as the singers of Anglo-German north and Franco-Italian south, correspondingly, goes back to Pyotr Pletnev, whom Grech (1822, pp. 305–14) extensively quotes, and further to Sergei Uvarov, a former member of the Arzamas literary society and Batiushkov's one-time coauthor (Ouvaroff 1817; Pletnev 1817; see Pilshchikov and Fitt 1999; Pilshchikov 2003, pp. 5, 186). However, the preference given to "Progulka v Akademii Khudozhestv" is the reviewer's own. Therefore, Leeds distinguished Batiushkov's innovative essay more than a decade earlier than Russia's most eulogized 19th-century literary critic Belinsky, who remarked in 1843 that the author of "Progulka" was "a passionate lover of the arts, a man gifted with a truly artistic soul,"⁸ and more than a century earlier than the celebrated Soviet art critic Abram Efros, who wrote in 1930:

Batiushkov was the Columbus of Russian art criticism. "Progulka" is its first high example. In it, our art found the first living link with our literature, history, and the whole early-19th-century Russian culture. Batiushkov created a new literary genre here, just as he created it in poetry. The vividness of his imagination, the subtlety of taste, the uninhibited writing style, and the confidence of his critical judgment seem captivating even a century later.⁹

Despite all the (overall, very moderate) plaudits, the text of Batiushkov's essay has never been commented on consistently. Leonid Maikov, the editor of Batiushkov's complete works published in 1885–1887 to celebrate the poet's centenary, laid the foundation for an academic commentary on his literary heritage. Not much has been added to the comments on "Progulka v Akademii Khudozhestv" since then. The modest aim of this section is to offer a few addenda.

2.2. Winckelmann and the Apollo Belvedere

A tradition of prose writing was virtually non-existent in early-19th-century Russia. For this reason, some of the new prosaic genres Batiushkov developed in the prose volume of his *Essays* were disguised as private letters. "Progulka" is no exception. It begins and ends as a letter to a friend and has the subtitle "Pis'mo starogo Moskovskogo zhitelia k

priiateliu v derevniu ego N.” [A Letter from an Old Moscow Resident to his Friend in the Village of N.].

The signaling names in Batiushkov’s essay are those of Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Anton Raphael Mengs, the main Neoclassical intermediaries between pictorial and verbal art. Roman Jakobson maintained that “intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (Jakobson 1959, p. 233). But the reverse is also true, and an interpretation of nonverbal signs by means of signs of natural languages is an equally important mechanism of cultural polyglotism. This type of intersemiotic translation—“the verbal representation of the graphic representation” (Heffernan 1991, p. 299)—has long been known as ekphrasis (Krieger 1967, 1992; Braginskaia 1977; Lund 1992, pp. 12–16; Heffernan 1991, 1993; Mitchell 1994, pp. 151–65; Wagner 1996; Webb 1999; Bartsch and Elsner 2007).¹⁰ In the Neoclassical age, Winckelmann became the first interpreter/translator of plastic arts into the verbal medium. He was the author who combined reinvented ekphrasis with newly invented art history and transformed a rhetorical exercise of interpreting an artwork into an independent work of art (Pommier 2003, p. 15).

A mention of his book, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* [History of the Art of Antiquity] (1764), sets up a Winckelmannian frame of reference at the beginning of the third paragraph of Batiushkov’s text, i.e., the first paragraph of the narrative, which begins after the introduction addressed to the fictitious owner of the village of N.:

I shall begin from the very beginning, after the old fashion of old folks.

Listen

While sitting yesterday morning by the window, with a volume of Winckelmann in my hand, I indulged in a reverie, of which you must not expect any particular account. (Batiushkov 1834, p. 452; translation modified)¹¹

Winckelmann’s name also sets up a framework composition of the essay, which ends with invoking the same fictional addressee (Lappo-Danilevskij 2007, pp. 187–89). It is followed by a Postscriptum—not translated in Leeds’s version—which relates an imagined conversation with a fictitious painter who catechizes the author’s intimate thoughts:

So far we do not have our own Mengs, who might reveal to us the secrets of his art, at the same time as adding another, equally difficult art to the art of painting: the art of expressing one’s own thoughts. We have not yet had a Winckelmann (Batiushkov 2002)¹²

Finally, a quotation from Winckelmann’s *Geschichte*—a book which is “widely considered to be a foundational text in the history of art” (Harloe 2007, p. 229)—, appears in the very middle of the essay.

To appreciate the context, we should recall not only the significance of the *Geschichte* in the late Neoclassical age, but also the public repercussions of its author’s name:

The credit for inventing the scientific study of Greco-Roman sculpture still belongs to the German scholar, Johann Joachim Winckelmann. The reason for this, the *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* [. . .], was first published Dresden in 1764 [. . .]. So important was the project that Winckelmann was revising it when he was murdered a year later. This evolving version was published in Vienna in 1776. It is this amended *Geschichte* that formed the basis of influential French and Italian editions. These followed quickly, propelled perhaps by the interest generated by his murder. Though it was another hundred years before the text was translated into English, its impact has been extraordinary. [. . .] His death is documented in autopsy reports and defendant’s account of the murder. Murmurings of a sexual motive fuel the “facts” of his homosexual lifestyle and the web of fictions that have been written about him since. But for classicists, Winckelmann is his *Geschichte* and his *Geschichte* his defining narrative: in the words of

its author, the book represents the first serious attempt to construct a framework for ancient art. (Vout 2006, p. 139)

The quotation Batiushkov used was so famous that Leeds omitted it as a matter of common knowledge:

In that figure we at once behold Apollo [. . .]! While contemplating this exquisite prodigy of sculpture, I fully assented to Winckelmann's enthusiastic comment. "I forget the universe, he says, when gazing on Apollo; I myself adopt the noblest posture in order to be worthy of contemplating him." (Batiushkov 1834, p. 524; the quotation "I forget the universe . . ." is taken from Batiushkov 2002)¹³

The German original of the chapter "Beschreibung des Apollo im Belvedere" [Description of the Apollo Belvedere] reads as follows:

"Ich vergesse alles andere über dem Anblicke dieses Wunderwerks der Kunst, und ich nehme selbst einen erhabenen Stand an, um mit Würdigkeit anzuschauen" [I forget everything else at the sight of this miracle of art, and I myself adopt an elevated stance to gaze with dignity]. (Winckelmann 1764, vol. I, p. 393)¹⁴

The German original reads "I forget *everything else*," but Batiushkov translates it as "I forget *the universe*." Apparently, he used a French translation of Winckelmann's passage (Maikov and Saitov 1885, p. 438). Enormously popular, it was translated into French several times (Griener 1998, pp. 44–48, 75–81; Vout 2006, p. 139 fn. 1). The first translation, not authorized (and subsequently scolded) by the author, was made by Gottfried Sellius, edited by Jean-Baptiste Robinet, and published in 1766 (Griener 1998, p. 45). The passage under discussion reads thus:

A la vue de cette merveille de l'Art, j'oublie la terre, je m'éleve au-dessus des sens, & mon esprit prend aisément une disposition surnaturelle propre à en juger avec dignité. [At the sight of this marvel of art, I forget the earth, I rise above the senses, and my mind easily takes on a supernatural disposition appropriate for judging it with dignity.] (Winckelmann 1766, vol. II, p. 287)

This version is so unfaithful to the original that it can be labeled a mistranslation. The word *Stand* has several meanings in German (DWB 1907, pp. 683–727), but here it means 'Stand des Körpers,' 'stance of the body.' It is "a favorite expression of Winckelmann's, from whom Lessing and Herder may have adopted it" and who usually used it "with an adjectival addition, whereby *Stand* then acquires the meaning of a special way of standing, a particular posture of the body."¹⁵ Other translators corrected this flaw. At the same time, later translations supported the tendency to substitute a noun for the pronoun after the verb *forget*.

In the same year, Michael Huber (b. 1727–d. 1804) published his version of Winckelmann's description of the Apollo Belvedere in *Gazette littéraire de l'Europe* with a parallel text of the first French translation of the *Geschichte* to demonstrate its faults (Griener 1998, pp. 45, 77). Huber included it with emendations in his complete translation of Winckelmann's treatise made in 1781 (Winckelmann 1781), which was republished with more revisions in 1789. The passage under discussion did not change and appeared in the same form in all editions:

A l'aspect de ce chef-d'œuvre j'oublie tout l'univers; je prends moi-même une attitude noble pour le contempler avec dignité. [At the sight of this chef-d'œuvre, I forget the universe; I myself adopt a noble posture in order to contemplate it with dignity.] (Winckelmann 1789, vol. III, p. 197)

Huber chose the equivalent *attitude*, which now has two meanings, 'manière de tenir son corps' and 'disposition d'esprit' (TLF 1974, pp. 872–73). One may think that the entire phrase means either 'an elevated or lofty stance of the body' or 'an elevated or sublime state of mind.' However, the second meaning was initially considered figurative, and the

word developed full-fledged polysemy only through the 19th century. The original meaning was formed in 1637 when painter Nicolas Poussin borrowed this word from Italian as a term of plastic arts (TLF 1974, pp. 873–74). The fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* gives only one meaning for *attitude*: ‘Situation, position du corps’ (DAF 1762, vol. I, 121); the fifth edition, in addition to the initial meaning, registers only the figurative meaning of ‘a stance that expresses particular feelings’ (“L’attitude qui exprime ces sentimens ou ces passions,” DAF 1798, vol. I, p. 97). Only the sixth edition of the academic dictionary, published in 1835, presents this word as having two different meanings, familiar to us (DAF 1835, vol. I, p. 127). It is no surprise that Batiushkov chose the literal meaning of *attitude* in 1814.

Huber’s version of *Histoire de l’Art chez les Anciens* is still considered the best translation of this text in French and a turning point in the reception of Winckelmann in France (Griener 1998, p. 45). Nevertheless, it was (unsuccessfully) rivaled by translator and publisher Hendrik (Henri) Jansen (b. 1741–d. 1812), who combined the versions of his predecessors:

A l’aspect de cette merveille de l’art j’oublie tout l’univers; et mon esprit prend une disposition surnaturelle propre à en juger avec dignité. [At the sight of this marvel of art, I forget the universe; and my mind takes on a supernatural disposition appropriate for judging it with dignity.] (Winckelmann 1802–1803, vol. II.1, p. 428)

Batiushkov used Huber’s translation, and it looks like it is this book that he refers to at the beginning of the essay. However, Leonid Maikov noticed that the 1814 publication of “Progulka” begins with a mention of “a volume of Montaigne in my hand”¹⁶ and not of Winckelmann (Maikov and Saitov 1885, p. 434). The commentator found this replacement natural because, in the final version, a reference to *History of the Art of Antiquity* presages a quotation from this book.¹⁷ Michel de Montaigne belonged among Batiushkov’s favorite authors, and his *Essays in Verse and Prose* begin with an epigraph from Montaigne’s *Essais* (Pilshchikov 1994–1995, vol. 2, pp. 222–23). But what about Winckelmann, whose name was even more popular in Russia?¹⁸

Some Batiushkov scholars believe that he “knew well the famous work of the ‘eloquent’ Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, and the theoretical treatises of Mengs, who developed Winckelmann’s ideas.”¹⁹ However, as Andrei Zorin points out in the article “Batiushkov and Germany,” although Batiushkov’s “observations develop in line with Winckelmann’s ideas,” the Russian poet “was not by temperament a diligent reader of aesthetic treatises.”²⁰

It is time now to “deconstruct” Batiushkov’s reference. I have demonstrated elsewhere that he sometimes used fewer book sources than he referred to (Pilshchikov 1994a, 2003, pp. 158–179). Winckelmann’s description of the Apollo was often quoted and anthologized. In particular, it was included in the most popular 19th-century French school reader, *Leçons françaises de littérature et de morale*, compiled by François Noël and François de La Place (Delaplace). A fragment titled “L’Apollon du Belvedere,” with a direct reference to the source—“Winkelman [sic!], *Histoire de l’Art chez les Anciens*”—appeared in the section “Descriptions” in all the editions of the anthology (it went through six editions between 1804 and 1813, with many more to come in the following decades).²¹ But, most likely, the direct source of Batiushkov’s quotation were the historical and literary notes to Jacques Delille’s philosophical poem in eight cantos *L’Imagination*, compiled by his learned commentator Joseph Esménard (b. 1767–d. 1811).

For Batiushkov and his contemporaries, l’abbé Delille was influential, first and foremost, as the most successful French translator of Vergil (“l’abbé Virgile” was his ironic nickname at that time) and the author of the most celebrated “descriptive” poem *Les Jardins* [The Gardens].²² His *Dithyrambe sur l’immortalité de l’âme* and the poem *L’Imagination* also attracted the vivid attention of French and Russian readers. *Les Jardins* and *L’Imagination* were also abundantly anthologized in such sections of *Leçons françaises* as “Tableaux” [Pic-

tures] and “Descriptions,” which presented exemplary literary descriptions of nature, historical sites, architecture, and the works of art, including ekphrastic poetry.

The fifth canto of *L’Imagination* is called “Les Arts” and features numerous ekphrases, including that of the Apollo Belvedere:

O prodige! long-temps dans sa masse grossière,
Un vil bloc enferma le Dieu de la lumière.
L’art commande, et d’un marbre Apollon est sorti;
[...]
D’un tout harmonieux j’admire les accords;
L’œil avec volupté glisse sur ce beau corps.
A son premier aspect, je m’arrête, je rêve;
Sans m’en apercevoir ma tête sa relève,
Mon maintien s’ennoblit. Sans temple, sans autels,
Son air commande encor l’hommage des mortels;
Et, modèle des arts et leur première idole,
Seul il semble survivre au dieu du Capitole.²³

Esménard’s note to this passage discloses the source of Delille’s inspiration and quotes Huber’s version of Winckelmann’s description in its entirety (Delille 1806, vol. II, pp. 59–62; cf. Winckelmann 1789, vol. III, pp. 195–98). This passage was also anthologized by Noël and Delaplace (beginning from the third edition of *Leçons*), who refer to Winckelmann in a footnote: “Voir *Descriptions* en prose, même sujet” [See the section *Descriptions* in prose, the same subject].²⁴ What makes me think that Batiushkov’s source was the complete edition of Delille’s poem and not the anthology, is that “Progulka” features a modified quotation from the sixth canto of *L’Imagination* (Maikov and Saitov 1885, p. 434):

I directed my eyes involuntarily towards the Troitzky Bridge, and thence towards the humble dwelling of that great monarch, to whom may justly be applied the well-known verse,

Souvent un faible gland recèle un chêne immense.

My imagination forthwith pictured to me Peter himself, as he stood contemplating the banks of the [wild] Neva [. . .]! (Batiushkov 1834, p. 453)²⁵

As we can see, a verse from Delille’s *L’Imagination* is immediately followed by the imagined scene of Peter the Great’s foundation of Saint Petersburg. These two paragraphs famously served as the source for an analogous scene in Pushkin’s *Mednyi Vsadnik* [The Bronze Horseman] (1833).²⁶ This time it’s not an ekphrasis but a hypotyposis that describes an event of which no factual evidence has come down to us. Batiushkov’s description, ingeniously versified by Pushkin, created this scene in Russian historical imagination. At this point, we can guess which chapter of Montaigne’s book Batiushkov’s narrator could have been reading before he “indulged in a reverie.” Most likely, it was “De la force de l’imagination” (*Essais*, book 1, chapter XXI or XX, depending on the edition), with its opening motto: “Fortis imaginatio generat casum” [Powerful imagination creates an event].

As regards Anton Raphael Mengs, Batiushkov must have seen his paintings and drawings at the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts, where they were used as models for instruction (Bogdan 2017). Moreover, in 1784, by the decision of the council of the Academy’s professors, a relief was placed on the facade of its building, reproducing the composition of Mengs’s *Parnassus* (Ibid., p. 138). However, I cannot establish the extent of Batiushkov’s acquaintance with Mengs’s writings.

Mengs met Winckelmann in 1755; they soon became close friends and exerted considerable mutual influence. Winckelmann’s ideas guided Mengs in his aesthetic views, particularly in his treatise *Gedanken über die Schönheit und den Geschmack in der Malerey* [Reflections on Beauty and Taste in Painting] (Mengs 1762), dedicated to Winckelmann.²⁷ In his turn, Winckelmann called Mengs “the greatest artist of his time and possibly of future times as well” and believed his works “immortal.”²⁸ The complete writings of Mengs

came out in French translations by Hendrik Jansen (1786, 1787), preceded by less ambitious editions by Jansen (1781) and Paul-Jean-Baptiste Doray de Longrais (1782). Still, there is no documentary evidence that Batiushkov consulted them.

Batiushkov mentioned Mengs only twice, and both times paired with Winckelmann. Although the author of “Progulka” complains that “so far we do not have our own Mengs, [and] we have not yet had a Winckelmann,” he soon ascribed both roles to Olenin. In June 1817, writing a congratulatory letter to Olenin on his appointment as President of the Academy of Arts, Batiushkov included in it a poetic impromptu, whose addressee allegedly could “draw like Mengs, / and write like the eloquent Winckelmann” (Koshelev 1987, p. 302; Wes 1992, p. 128; Zorin 1997, p. 146; Zorin 1998, pp. 507–8; Lappo-Danilevskij 2007, p. 186).²⁹ “Please don’t take this as the *poison qu’on prépare à la cour d’Étrurie*, i.e., flattery,” added Batiushkov.³⁰ The French quotation has not been commented on yet. It is taken from Voltaire’s tragedy *Brutus* (act 1, scene 2).³¹

The last topic discussed in this section is Batiushkov’s own encounter with the Apollo of Belvedere. “Batiushkov’s ‘Stroll’ evinces a nervous preoccupation with the distinctions between original and copy, as they relate to the native and the foreign in Russian art” (Buckler 2018, p. 99). Similarly, the availability of numerous copies of the Apollo Belvedere in and around Saint Petersburg did not deter him from his desire to see the original. Before and in 1814, Batiushkov could have seen at least five such copies in various materials. One of them, exhibited at the Academy of Arts, is described in “Progulka” among other plaster casts of the antiques and provokes the Winckelmann quotation (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, pp. 134–37). In fact, the Academy possessed two copies of the Apollo at that time. The earliest was cast from the form ordered by “the Maecenas of the Russian Enlightenment,” Ivan Shuvalov, in 1769, and the other was sent from Vienna by artist Jakob Joseph Müller in 1797 (Andreeva 2017, pp. 119, 127). More copies were found in the emperor-owned suburbs. A copy in bronze was placed near the Neptune Fountain of the Peterhof Palace’s Upper Garden during the 1799 reconstruction commissioned by the emperor Paul I. It was made in the Academy of Arts by the brass-founder Vasilii Mozhalov after the wax model cast by its adjunct rector of sculpture, the leading early-Neoclassical Russian sculptor Fedor Gordeev (Yumangulov and Khadeeva 2016, p. 170; see Figure 1).³² An 18th-century marble copy made in Italy was placed near one of the Oranienbaum palaces (Yumangulov and Khadeeva 2019, pp. 34–35; see Figure 2).



Figure 1. *Apollo Belvedere* (a bronze copy). Peterhof, near Saint Petersburg.



Figure 2. *Apollo Belvedere* (a marble copy). Oranienbaum, near Saint Petersburg.

Last but not least, there were two copies in Pavlovsk park. One was the 1782 copy in bronze situated in the Twelve Paths area at the Old Sylvania (by Edme Gastecloux, after Gordeev's cast; see Figure 3). The other was a plaster cast in the Apollo Colonnade, replaced by an iron cast in 1826 (Andreeva 2017, pp. 120, 128). More copies were made in or brought to Saint Petersburg in the 1820s or later. After WWII, they were all reinstalled in what is believed to be their original places.



Figure 3. *Apollo Belvedere* (a bronze copy). Pavlovsk, near Saint Petersburg.

Batiushkov had encountered the original Apollo (Figure 4) not long before “Progulka” was written—not in Rome, as our contemporaries might expect, but in Paris (Maikov 1896, pp. 135–36). The statue was brought to Paris by Napoleon after his 1796 Italian campaign following the Treaty of Tolentino (1797). From 1798, it formed part of the Galerie des Antiques of the Musée central des arts de Paris, soon rechristened Musée Napoléon (Belting 2001, pp. 27–33; Gallo 2009). The Apollo’s sojourn in Paris ended in 1815, and the next year the statue was reinstalled in the Belvedere Court in Rome. Batiushkov saw it during his stay in Paris in the spring of 1814 and described it in his literary and private letters (a reminder: the border between the two genres was blurred). The earliest and longest is the aforementioned letter to Dashkov of 25 April 1814. Batiushkov writes that he and his comrades-in-arms can now “stand in amazement before the Apollo Belvedere, before Raphael’s paintings, in the magnificent Gallery of the Museum”³³ and then, a few pages later, returns to the same topic:

Now you ask me what I like most about Paris?—It’s hard to decide.—I’ll start with the Apollo Belvedere. It is higher than Winckelmann’s description: it’s not marble, it’s a god! All copies of this priceless statue are weak, and those who have not seen this miracle of art cannot have any idea of it. You don’t need to have a deep knowledge of the arts to admire it: you have to feel it! Strange thing! I saw ordinary soldiers who looked at the Apollo with amazement; such is the power of genius! I often go to the Museum just to look at the Apollo . . . ³⁴



Figure 4. *Apollo Belvedere.* Belvedere Court, Rome.

Batiushkov also mentions the Apollo in his other letters from Paris—to Elena Pushkina on 3 May 1814, and Nikolai Gnedich on 17 May 1814 (compare Todd 1976, pp. 159–63).

In “Progulka,” Batiushkov simultaneously gives voice to two opposite opinions on the issue of copies. One of his characters exclaims: “I hate [plaster] casts—no mock things for me: the real ones, or else none at all—that’s my maxim” (Batiushkov 1834, p. 523).³⁵ The other argues that they are “beautiful, for the casts are accurate and will satisfy even the most rigorous observer of antiquity” (Batiushkov 2002).³⁶ The real Batiushkov was immensely struck by the original Apollo. Alas, the Belvedere statue itself is a Roman marble copy or replica of the lost Greek bronze original from the late fourth century BCE, attributed to Leochares. If we get back to the initial context of Winckelmann’s *Geschichte*, we will immediately recall that the famous description of the Apollo is “introduced into the history of the decline of art in ancient Rome as an ideal that, at the time, could no longer be recreated, but only plundered, stolen from the past.”³⁷ The age of Neoclassicism and neo-Hellenism gave rise to its own simulacra.

2.3. Yegorov, Rubens, and Poussin

After the Apollo, the characters of the “Stroll to the Academy of Arts” moved into the halls where new paintings by Russian artists were exhibited. Maikov commented on most artworks they saw but left lacunae that have not been filled in the past 130 years.

The first picture they discuss is *The Flagellation of Christ* (Figure 5)³⁸ by Aleksei Yegorov (or Egorov, b. 1776–d. 1851), the most titled Russian academicist. He studied at the Academy of Arts from 1782–97, was sent abroad in 1803, elected an academician in 1807, and appointed professor in 1812 (Mroz 1947). “The name alone of this respected academician will stimulate your curiosity,”³⁹ promises the narrator and offers an ekphrasis:

The artist has depicted the flagellation of Christ in a dungeon. There are four figures, larger than life. The main figure is that of the Saviour, in front of a stone pillar, his hands tied behind him, and three torturers, one of whom is attaching a rope to the pillar, while another is removing the garments which cover the Redeemer, and is holding a bundle of birch rods in one hand, and the third soldier . . . appears to be reproaching the Divine Sufferer, yet it is very difficult to determine the intentions of the artist with certainty, although he did try to give a strong expression to the face of the soldier, in order, perhaps, to contrast it with the figure of Christ. (Batiushkov 2002)⁴⁰

Batiushkov’s attitude to Yegorov was ambiguous, and, abstaining from a direct assessment, he cites again two opposing observations belonging to two fictional characters (“So I will relate word for word the opinions I heard about his new painting, while I kept completely silent”⁴¹). The exchange of opinions contains a curious reference:

“Unfortunately, this figure resembles representations of Christ by other painters, and I search in vain in the picture as a whole for originality, for something new and unusual, in a word—for a unique, not borrowed, idea.”—“You are right, but not entirely. This subject has been painted several times. But so what? Rubens and Poussin both painted it in their own manner and if the painting of Yegorov is inferior to that of Poussin, than it is certainly superior to that of Rubens . . . ”—“What do you mean: so what? Both Poussin and Rubens painted the Scourging of Christ: the more particular I am, the more critical I am in my judgement of the artist.” (Batiushkov 2002)⁴²

A commentator noted: “It is characteristic of Batiushkov’s artistic tastes that in ‘A Stroll to the Academy of Arts’ he places Poussin above Rubens.”⁴³ This is very true, but what paintings does Batiushkov refer to? One is rather apparent: Peter Paul Rubens’s *The Flagellation of Christ*, also known as *The Torture of Christ* (c. 1650), exhibited in the Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Ghent, Belgium (Figure 6). However, Poussin’s catalog does not feature a *Flagellation*. There are two possible solutions to this enigma.



Figure 5. Aleksei Yegorov. *The Flagellation of Christ*, 1814. State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.



Figure 6. Peter Paul Rubens. *The Flagellation of Christ*, c. 1650. Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent.

One hypothesis is that Batiushkov meant *The Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus* (1628–29), the first public work of Poussin in Rome, where he arrived in 1624 (Figure 7). Exhibited now in the Vatican Pinacoteca, it was originally an altarpiece for St. Peter’s Basilica, Rome; but between 1797 and 1817, seized by the French, it was displayed in Louvre, Paris, where Batiushkov could have seen it. However, it is hard to imagine that neither Olenin nor Gnedich noticed this mistake.



Figure 7. Nicolas Poussin. *The Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus*, 1628–29. Vatican Pinacoteca.

The other hypothesis is that it is pseudo-Poussin. The most large-scale falsification of paintings ascribed to the French artist is presumably connected with the heirs of Claudine Bouzonnet-Stella (b. 1636–d. 1697), a prominent French engraver, most of whose prints were after works by Poussin or by her uncle (and Poussin’s closest friend) Jacques Stella. A few sets of her engraving series *The Life and Passion of Christ*, made after Jacques Stella or after her own drawings, were fraudulently inscribed *N. Poussin pinx.* After that, “no less than thirty-four paintings attributed to Poussin” were hoaxed, “and among these were twelve canvases representing scenes from the Passion, described as ‘engraved’ and corresponding to those in the series of engravings” (Blunt 1974, p. 747). Among the engravings (and, correspondingly, paintings) were *Christ Mocked by Roman Soldiers* (also known as *The Mocking of Christ*) and *Christ Scourged* (perhaps the same as *Christ Stripped for the Flagellation*). Unlike the former, originally titled *Jésus moqué par les soldas [sic] dans leurs cor de card* (Guiffrey 1877, p. 76), the latter is, most likely, not even by Claudine or her sisters (who

were also engravers). The primary victims of the fraud were private collectors, who bought the mock originals and collected the engravings as Poussin's and not Stella's. Furthermore, "as they [we]re placed among the works of Nicholas Poussin, in the Royal Library at Paris" (Smith 1837, p. 53), they were listed as Poussin's *dubia* long after the forgery was identified in the early 19th century. The following is a description of *Christ Stripped for the Flagellation* in *A Catalogue Raisonné* compiled by the London art dealer John Smith (b. 1781–d. 1855) two decades after Batiushkov's "Stroll" was published:

The Flagellation. The artist has chosen to avoid the representation of the actual infliction of that degrading punishment, and confined himself to the preparations, leaving the spectator to conceive the rest. Two executioners are engaged, one of them is attaching the wrist of the Saviour to a block, while the other is withdrawing His raiment: the instruments of punishment lie on the ground. In the back of the prison are seen three persons looking through the iron grating. (Smith 1837, p. 57)

Indeed, simulacra reign in art history (Deleuze 1994, pp. 293–94; Baudrillard 1994, pp. 99–100). I could only trace two engravings depicting the Mocking of Christ. One of them is an interior scene mentioned above as *Christ Mocked by Roman Soldiers*; the other is an exterior scene, also known as *Christ Conducted from Caiaphas to Pilate* (Figure 8). It can give an idea about the style of *The Flagellation*.



Figure 8. Claudine Bouzonnet-Stella. *Christ Conducted from Caiaphas to Pilate*, before 1697.

As regards Batiushkov's honest thoughts on Yegorov's painting, he exposed them in a letter to Gnedich of July 1817, in unexpected connection with the elegy "The Dying Tasso" (Maikov 1885, p. 563; Volodina 1989, p. 109):

But, speaking of Tasso. It would help if you whispered to Olenin that he should assign this theme to the Academy. The dying Tasso is a truly rich subject for painting. [. . .] I am afraid of only one thing: if Yegorov paints him, he will dislocate his arm or leg even before his death agonies and convulsions and will make of him such a Rafaelesco as from his *Flagellation* which, as you remember, was displayed in the Academy (to its shame!); and Shebuev will rub his forehead with a brick. Others will do no better.⁴⁴

Vasilii Shebuev (b. 1777–d. 1855) was another prominent professor at the Academy and its future rector (from 1832). Batiushkov mocks the red color of faces in many of his paintings. One of Shebuev's later (1821–23) works, *Moses with Tablets of the Commandments* (now in the Irkutsk Regional Museum of Art), perfectly illustrates this feature (see Figure 9). We do not know what artwork Batiushkov had in mind. The most likely suspects—*Noah's Sacrifice*, for which the Academy awarded Shebuev with the Second Golden Medal in 1797, and a huge (480 × 382 cm) battle piece *Peter the Great in the Battle of Poltava*, for which he was appointed a professor of historical painting in 1807—, did not survive. In the 1810s both were kept in the Academy's Museum (Kruglova 1982, pp. 13–14, 118).



Figure 9. Vasilii Shebuev. *Moses with Tablets of the Commandments*, 1821–23. Sukachov Irkutsk Regional Museum of Art.

2.4. The Schaffhausen Waterfall

The next artwork presents yet another enigma:

The exhibition continued in the following rooms, mostly by young students of the Academy. I scrutinized with curiosity a landscape depicting a view of the environs of Schaffhausen and the hut in which the new Philemon and Baucis entertained the SOVEREIGN EMPEROR and the GRAND DUCHESS EKATERINA PAVLOVNA. In the distance a waterfall on the Rhine is visible, but not very successfully painted. (Batiushkov 2002)⁴⁵

Previous commentators proved unable to identify the painting. “The name of the artist who exhibited a view of the surroundings of Schaffhausen is not known to us,” the erudite Maikov stated.⁴⁶ A century later, the commentator of the late Soviet jubilee edition of Batiushkov’s works confirmed: “This painting is currently unknown.”⁴⁷ Irina Semenka, an eminent Golden Age scholar who edited Batiushkov’s *Essays in Verse and Prose* for the academic book series “Literaturnye pamiatniki” [Literary Monuments], conjectured in more detail:

This painting is currently unknown. Judging from Batiushkov’s description, its subject was the entry of Russian troops into the Swiss town [and] canton of Schaffhausen in 1813, and the locals’ warm welcome accorded to Alexander I. Batiushkov associates this story with the Greek myth of Philemon and Baucis, who treated Zeus and Hermes in a friendly manner.⁴⁸

However, Batiushkov’s description contains nothing like this. Moreover, Russian troops never entered Schaffhausen—the Austrians occupied it. On 8 (20) December 1813, the Austrian Army of Bohemia under Prince Karl von Schwarzenberg crossed the Rhine between Basel and Schaffhausen, violating the cantons’ neutrality, and moved further to France. Alexander, who supported Swiss neutralism, was extremely disappointed with the allies’ actions (Schilder [Shil’der] 1897, p. 180). He wrote about this on the same day in a letter to his former mentor, Swiss politician Frédéric-César Laharpe. In this letter, Alexander also informed Laharpe that he was going to Schaffhausen soon to meet with his sister, Grand Duchess Ekaterina Pavlovna (then Duchess of Oldenburg) and that he would stay there until 10 January (New Style), 1814 (Ibid., p. 182). A few days later, on 1 (13) January 1814, the Russian army crossed the Rhine near Basel in the presence of the emperor.⁴⁹ Batiushkov was there and witnessed these events. He described them in a letter to Gnedich on 16 (28) January 1814, and in the poem “Perekhod cherez Rein. 1814” [The Crossing of the Rhine. 1814] (see France 2018, pp. 106–11). He knew what he was writing about.

The clue to the right answer is concealed in Labzin’s official report on the exhibition. In the report, each artwork is described twice, in the list of the displayed works and in Labzin’s speech at the Academy’s annual meeting on 19 September. Item 26 in the list of painting is this:

A landscape depicting the Rhine waterfall near Schaffhausen with a hut where the Russian EMPEROR and the Grand Duchess dined with Swiss peasants, by the Academy’s pensioner (stipend holder) Shchedrin.⁵⁰

In addition, we find in Labzin’s speech the Neoclassical simile that Batiushkov borrowed for his essay:

Then curiosity draws the visitor to the landscape by the Academy’s pensioner Shchedrin, representing that poor hut in Schaffhausen near the Rhine waterfall, where the Russian EMPEROR and the Russian Grand Duchess, having shared a hospitable meal with poor Swiss peasants, made these new Philemon and Baucis happy.⁵¹

Sylvester Shchedrin’s *Alexander I at the Schaffhausen Waterfall* (oil on canvas, 78 × 98 cm, inscribed *Sil. Chedrin 1814* in Roman script) is now kept in the State Russian Museum in

Saint Petersburg (Figure 10). It is the earliest extant landscape of this master (Mikhailova 1984, p. 8). The young artist had not been to Switzerland, so he had to use engravings with the views of the Schaffhausen waterfall. It is unclear what dissatisfied Batiushkov—the artistic technique or the inconsistency of the image with reality.



Figure 10. Sylvester Shchedrin. *Alexander I at the Schaffhausen Waterfall*, 1814. State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Shchedrin's *Schaffhausen Waterfall* never left Saint Petersburg/Leningrad, but it had been in private possession for more than a century, so Maikov could not trace it: he mostly relied on Andrei Somov's catalog of the picture gallery of the Imperial Academy of Arts (Somov 1872). The painting belonged to artist and photographer Viktor-Bait Meyer (b. 1821–d. 1897) and then to his heirs, Iu. Meyer, A. V. Meyer, and L. A. Meyer-Suslova, whose widower A. K. Suslov sold it to the Russian Museum (Mikhailova 1980).⁵²

Schaffhausen Waterfall was painted in Saint Petersburg. The quality of painting is markedly inferior to Shchedrin's famous Italian landscapes made from nature in Italy (see Section 3 below). The waterfall was depicted from an engraving, the main characters were copied from their portraits, and the foreground trees were painted from life on Petrovsky Island (Mikhailova 1984, pp. 9–13; Usacheva 2009, pp. 19, 22–23). The latter is detectable to the naked eye when compared with Shchedrin's 1815 work, *View of the Tuchkov Bridge and Vasilievsky Island from Petrovsky Island in Saint Petersburg* (Figure 11).

One of the most distinguished Russian landscape painters was born in Saint Petersburg in 1791. His father was sculptor Fedos (Theodosius) Shchedrin (the Academy's professor of sculpture from 1794), and his first mentor was his uncle Semyon Shchedrin (the Academy's professor of landscape painting from 1799 until he died in 1804). Sylvester Shchedrin perfectly fits Batiushkov's definition of the "young students of the Academy." He studied painting at the Academy under Mikhail Ivanov and was granted an academic internship in 1811. As the Academy's pensioner (stipend holder), he worked in Rome from 1818, staying long in Naples, where he finally settled in 1825. In the summers he lived and worked in the surroundings—Capri, Amalfi, and Sorrento, where he died in 1830 (Atsarkina 1978; Mikhailova 1984). In Italy he became a close friend of Batiushkov (more on this in Section 3 below).



Figure 11. Sylvester Shchedrin. *View of the Tuchkov Bridge and Vasilievsky Island from Petrovsky Island in Saint Petersburg, 1815.* State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

In 1817, Batiushkov planned to write “something about the arts, for example, an essay on the Russian landscape.”⁵³ This idea was not realized; neither were other items from his plan “Chto pisat’ v proze” [What to write in prose] preserved on the cover of his 1817 notebook.

2.5. Medallists

Labzin’s report helps to recognize a few other works mentioned in “Progulka,” even though not all of them. One of the artworks that have not been identified so far is mentioned in the first redaction of the essay but excluded from *Opyty*:

We also noticed a wax bas-relief [depicting] Olga’s betrothal to Igor; the finishing is thorough, but everything as a whole is dry.⁵⁴

Labzin informs:

Igor, betrothed to Grand Princess Olga, [was] molded from wax by 4th grade student Gaidukov.⁵⁵

Ivan Ivanovich Gaidukov was born on 12 (23) November 1791 to a family of a Ryazan merchant (Kondakov 1915, pp. 249, 311). His elder brother, architect Alexander Gaidukov (b. 1788–d. after 1817), also studied at the Academy (Kondakov 1915, p. 311; Beliaev 2016, pp. 179, 182). In 1815, Ivan Gaidukov received the title of medallist with a certificate of the first degree and was granted an academic internship (Kondakov 1915, p. 249). He was registered as an employee of the Medal Chamber in 1819–20 (Shchukina 2000, p. 114). His traces are lost after 1820.

Medallists typically produced their designs—an initial draft drawing and then a work in relief molded in wax or carved on stone or steel—before casting the final product in bronze. Such works were exhibited alongside medals.

The name of the author of two other reliefs is explicitly cited in “Progulka,” but their subjects do not appear obvious:

Let our eyes [. . .] rest on the work of Mr. Yesakov. Here are his carved stones: one depicts Hercules throwing Iolas into the sea, another a Kievan swimming

across the River Dnieper. What great confidence there is in his line! We shall hope that this skillful artist will gain in experience, without which a lightness and ease in the finishing touches on small details is impossible.

(Batiushkov 2002; translation modified)⁵⁶

Iolas mentioned here is presumably not the Iola(u)s, the elder son of Iphicles and Heracles/Hercules' nephew who assisted him in conquering the Hydra. He may be "another" Iolas (for whom a classical source is unknown), Hercules' cousin whom the early-19th-century standard reference book of mythology, François Noël's *Dictionnaire de la Fable* credited to be "killed by this hero in a fit of rage, on his return from the underworld."⁵⁷ According to Pseudo-Apollodorus (2.4.12), "after the battle with the Minyans Hercules was driven mad through the jealousy of Hera and flung his own children, whom he had by Megara, and two children of Iphicles into the fire" (tr. by James G. Fraser).⁵⁸ However, the author of the *Bibliotheca* does not give the names of these two nephews. According to Diodorus Siculus (4.11.1) and Nicolaus Damascenus (Frag. 20 in Müller 1848–1853, vol. III, p. 369), Iolaus was there, but when Hercules tried to slay him, he escaped.

It seems that Batiushkov was not sure who fell victim to Hercules' fury. In the *Syn Otechestva* publication (Batiushkov 1814, p. 203), *Iolas* (Юласъ) is called *Golas* (Голасъ). Of course, this can be a typo for *Iolas*, but it can equally be a typo for *Hylas* (Гиласъ). This is precisely how Leeds interpreted Batiushkov's text: in his translation, the narrator describes "Yesakov's beautiful intaglios, among which I particularly noticed one representing Hercules and Hylas [. . .]" (Batiushkov 1834, p. 527). However, Hylas, Hercules' arms-bearer and lover (ερωμένος), was not thrown into the water—he was kidnapped by the Naiads, whereas Hercules tried to find and save him (Apollod. 1.9.19).

Labzin's report on the previous (1813) academic exhibition registers the following artwork, for which Aleksei Yesakov (Esakov) was promoted to academician (Labzin 1813, p. 1944):

A group carved on stone, which depicts Hercules precipitating a youth into the sea who brought him a poisoned shirt from Deianira, by pensioner Yesakov.⁵⁹

Yesakov displayed it at the 1814 exhibition too (Labzin 1814, p. 3; Beliaev 2016, pp. 126, 182, 192, 197).

According to Sophocles (*Trachiniae*, 749–84), Pseudo-Apollodorus (2.7.7), and Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 9.141–228), the name of this youth was Lichas, and he was Hercules' herald. Ovid famously depicts the furious Hercules hurling Lichas to the Euboic Sea:

Ecce Lichan trepidum latitantem rupe cavata
adspicit, utque dolor rabiem conlegerat omnem,
"tune, Licha," dixit "feralia dona dedisti?
Tune meae necis auctor eris?" Tremuit ille pavetque
pallidus et timide verba excusantia dicit.
Dicentem genibusque manus adhibere parantem
corripit Alcides et terque quaterque rotatum
mittit in Euboicas tormento fortius undas.

(Ovid. *Met.* 9.211–18)⁶⁰

In her translation, Carol Adlam substitutes Lichas for Iolas: ". . . one depicts Hercules throwing Lichas into the sea" (Batiushkov 2002). This emendation is undoubtedly true from the standpoints of comparative mythology and history of art but hardly correct from the point of view of textual criticism.

Unlike Yesakov's other reliefs, the Hercules has not survived (Wrangel [Vrangel'] 1908, pp. 104–5), and we cannot conjecture its particulars. It is unlikely that the medallist was familiar with the now-canonical interpretation of this rare subject, Antonio Canova's first colossal statue *Hercules and Lichas* designed in 1795 (Figure 12). Although Canova com-

pleted its gesso in 1796, the marble (now in the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, see Figure 13) remained unfinished until 1815, when Prince Giovanni Torlonia purchased it (Rosenblum 1969, pp. 14–15; Johns 1998, pp. 123–44; Gonzáles 2020). The owner placed the statue in the Palazzo Bolognetti-Torlonia in Piazza Venezia, Rome, where Batiushkov could have seen it later.⁶¹



Figure 12. Antonio Canova. *Hercules Hurling Lichas into the Sea* (sketch), 1795. Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa.



Figure 13. Antonio Canova. *Hercules and Lichas*, 1815. National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome.

Pavel Sorokin's later *Hercules and Lichas* (1849; now in the Odesa Fine Arts Museum, Ukraine) was evidently influenced by Canova (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Pavel Sorokin. *Hercules and Lichas*, 1849. Odesa National Fine Arts Museum.

In its turn, Canova's *Hercules* should be compared to the *Farnese Hercules*, an early third century CE Greco-Roman marble statue by Glykon after the lost Greek original by Lysippos from the fourth century BCE (now in the National Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy; see Figure 15). The characters of "Progulka" admire its copy in the Saint Petersburg Academy:

Here you see Hercules Farnese, a model of both mental and physical strength. (Batiushkov 2002)⁶²

Labzin's 1814 report lists "a Kievan swimming across the Dnieper" among Yesakov's stonework:

A Kievan who saved Kiev from the Pechenegs, Hercules, and two portraits of the Sovereign Emperor, [all] carved on stone [. . .], by academician Yesakov.⁶³

When the Pechenegs invaded Rus for the first time, they besieged its capital, the city of Kiev (today Kyiv, Ukraine). The Russian troops gathered on the other side of the Dnieper could not enter Kiev, and no one from Kiev could cross over to the army from the city. This story is told in the Primary Chronicle (by Nestor the Chronicler, according to the 19th-century common belief) and dated *Anno Mundi* 6476 (i.e., AD 968):

The inhabitants of the city were afflicted, and lamented, "Is there no one that can reach the opposite shore and report to the other party that if we are not relieved on the morrow, we must perforce surrender to the Pechenegs?" Then one youth volunteered to make the attempt, and the people begged him to try it. So he went out of the city with a bridle in his hand, and ran among the Pechenegs shouting out a question whether anyone had seen a horse. For he knew their language, and they thought he was one of themselves. When he approached the river, he threw off his clothes, jumped into the Dnieper, and swam out. As soon as the Pechenegs

perceived his action, they hurried in pursuit, shooting at him the while, but they did not succeed in doing any harm. (RPC 1953, p. 85)⁶⁴



Figure 15. *Farnese Hercules*. National Archaeological Museum, Naples.

Once the brave youth reached the other bank of the Dnieper, he reported to the warlord Pretich, who frightened the Pechenegs, and they withdrew.

Yesakov (b. 1787) died on August 8, 1815; in the 1817 *Essays*, at the mention of his name in “A Stroll,” Gnedich added a footnote:

Take pity on this skillful artist: his early death stole our good hopes in him. *Ed.*⁶⁵

3. Batiushkov’s Italian Sojourn

3.1. *Batiushkov, Olenin, and Russian Painters in Rome*

The climax of the discussions of Russian artists and their originality in “A Stroll to the Academy of Arts” is a dialogue about Orest Kiprensky, “that deservedly great favorite with the public” (Batiushkov 1834, p. 528). One character, Starozhilov (literally, Mr. Old-Timer) is more conservative, the other — “a young artist” — is more enthusiastic (and Romantic):

“Here we may plainly discern the effects,” continued [Starozhilov], “of able training. What would Kiprensky have been had he not travelled?—had he not visited Paris—had he not — — —.” “But he has never seen, either Paris, or Rome,” replied the artist.” “Never studied abroad!—That is very strange, very strange indeed!” muttered our grumbling friend. (Ibid.)⁶⁶

Russian artists had been prevented from going abroad because of the Napoleonic wars; but the situation changed, and soon Kiprensky and Batiushkov met in Italy. In late November 1818, Batiushkov set off for Naples via Lemberg (Lwów/Lviv), Teschen (Cieszyn/Těšín), Vienna, Venice and Rome. “The classical land,”⁶⁷ in which he was to

spend more than two years, appeared to him as “a library, a museum of antiquities.” “Magical, unique city, it is a cemetery of the universe,” he wrote of Rome to Gnedich in May 1819.⁶⁸

The poet stayed in Rome from 24 January (5 February), 1819 (Halberg 1884, p. 60), till mid-February 1819. The practical reason was that Olenin asked Batiushkov to inspect the pensioners in Rome and pass on some instructions. In particular, at the request of Count Nikolai Petrovich Rumiantsov received via Olenin, Batiushkov came on his behalf and with his letter to the workshop of Canova, who had made a statue of Peace for Rumiantsov (now in the Khanenko National Museum of Arts in Kyiv, Ukraine; Figure 16). Gnedich described this statue in the form of a letter to Batiushkov and published it in *Syn Otechestva*, where Batiushkov had published his “Progulka” three years earlier (Gnedich 1817). Gnedich’s essay is now commonly (and perhaps unjustly) considered to be an imitation of “Progulka” (Blagoi 1934b, p. 647), but it was highly evaluated and often anthologized in its time. Another piece of art criticism by Gnedich, a discussion of the 1820 academic exhibition, also published in *Syn Otechestva* (Gnedich 1820), seems considerably more influenced by Batiushkov’s pioneering essay (Naryshkina 1987, pp. 11–12; Baluev 2015, pp. 49–54).



Figure 16. Antonio Canova. *A Statue of Peace*, 1814. Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts, Kyiv.

In 1819, painters Vasiliï Sazonov, Orest Kiprensky, Sylvester Shchedrin, and sculptors Mikhail Krylov and Samuel Halberg lived in Rome (Maikov and Saitov 1886, pp. 766–67). Sazonov received a stipend from Rumiantsov, the other four were sponsored by the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts and were Olenin’s responsibility. A complete list of instructions is contained in Olenin’s letter to Batiushkov on 10 November 1818 (Zorin 1987). Judging by the date, Olenin handed or passed the letter to Batiushkov before departure, rather

than sending it by mail. This letter has long awaited publication and commentary (see a facsimile of the first page on Figure 17). I include it here with a minimum of necessary explanations:

To His Excellency K. N. Batiushkov

On 10 November 1818

At last my dear Konstantin Nikolaevich will soon arrive in the classical land. He will soon see the places where Dantes, Tassos, and Ariostos were born and died, and where Ciceros, Horaces, Virgils, Juliuses Caesars, and Augustuses once lived, but Tiberiuses and Claudiuses lived too! I confess that I would like to see them myself, but only in a dream because I am not a traveler. Hoping for your friendship, I am sure you will present them all to me in your descriptions as *faithfully* vividly as if I had actually seen them. To not burden you here with excessive writing (unnecessary for the first time when I write), I decided to fill the content of my letter only with my various commissions for you in Italy, which you accepted for execution out of your friendship with me. Here they are all, one by one:

1. My letter to our Envoy in Rome, Andrei Yakovlevich Italinsky. With this letter, please hand him one copy of the portrait of our glorious Suvorov, engraved by our skillful Utkin. As you are aware, in my letter I ask him to allow you to explain some of my suggestions for the benefit of arts in Russia. I will mention these suggestions below among my commissions.
2. My letter to Prince Grigorii Ivanovich Gagarin. With it, I also ask you to hand over Suvorov's portrait. I wrote to him that you, as a living parchment, will take it upon yourself to tell him about our way of life and my daily cares. I humbly ask you to take on the task of doing this.
3. I am not writing to our dear Orest Adamovich Kiprensky because I have recently passed him a letter with the pensioners of the Academy, and therefore I will await his reply. In the meantime, persuade him not to paint Apollo Belvedere as a picture. I may be wrong, but it seems to me this cannot be good. Let me know how he lives there and how I long to see him here. Tell him about my portrait painted by Varnik.
4. I humbly ask you to visit the Imperial Academy of Arts pensioners, whom I sent there, and, having handed them my prescript, to declare that they should accurately fulfill it.
5. I humbly ask you to find out thoroughly (*doskonale*, as the Poles say) whether it is possible to have in Rome or elsewhere in Italy plaster casts of the columns of Trajan and Antoninus, of various reliefs of the triumphal gates, of the monument of Tiberius, and of various famous statues (and which ones).
6. Please talk to reliable people—our envoy, Prince Gagarin, or whomever you like—about establishing a **home for the students of the Russian Imperial Academy of Arts in Rome** à l'instar de l'Académie de France à Rome. "*Casa per i pensionarii della Imperiale Accademia delle Belle Arti di Russia, in Roma.*" This house must have enough room for a small common modeling class, six studios, and, in addition, a room or two for each of the six students, as well as enough space for an inspector with a family and household servants. I humbly ask you to inquire what such a house could cost to buy and what could be the annual cost of its maintenance. But I beg you to do all this without any publicity and as if it came from you, solely for your curiosity.
7. Please find out who exactly are the Heads of various Italian Academies, i.e., the Academies of Arts, what their names are, how they are titled, and where to write to them.

8. Please also find out who is now considered the finest artists and the best antiquarians in Florence, Rome, and Naples, what their names are, and how to write to them.
9. In addition, I earnestly ask you to determine if it is possible to obtain accurate and detailed pictures in Naples, i.e., *les dessins au trait des différentes armes antiques vus du face, de profil et par derrière, avec leurs coups et plans*,⁶⁹ of all the ancient military weapons found in Pompeii, Herculaneum, ancient cities, Nola, and other places, and also drawings of every kind of antique household belongings and tools, and, furthermore, most accurate copies, in miniature, with watercolors, of some picturesque Herculanean paintings (to be selected), and, in addition, if it is possible to have plaster casts of various statues found in Herculaneum, especially the newly discovered statue of Aristides.

Last but not least:

10. I humbly ask you not to leave me without your notice of new discoveries of antiquities throughout Italy. In concluding this letter, I think there is no need for me to assure you of my unflinching loyalty to you; time and occasion will prove it much better than vain words. Stay well in the favorable *and hot* climate and do not forget us, ~~poor~~ unfortunate inhabitants of the North.⁷⁰

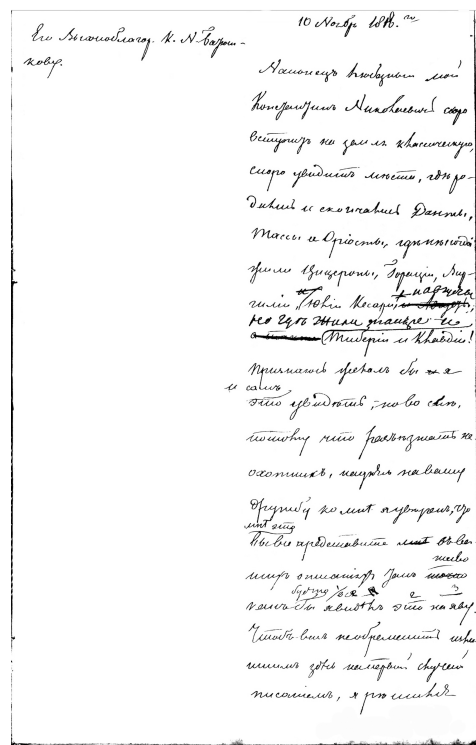


Figure 17. Aleksei Olenin. A letter to Konstantin Batiushkov, 10 November 1818. State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow.

Most importantly, this letter enables us to date the earliest version of Olenin’s portrait painted by Alexander Varnik (or Varnek, b. 1782–d. 1843). Its latest version (Figure 18) was completed “in or after 1824” because Olenin is portrayed here with the breast star badges of the Orders of Saint Vladimir, 2nd class, and Saint Alexander Nevsky that he was awarded on 26 January 1812, and on 1 January 1824, respectively (Grishina 1989, pp. 26, 43; Timofeev 2007, pp. 218, 439–40, 563). Its earlier version should not date later than 1820 because it was displayed at the 1820 academic exhibition (Gnedich 1820, p. 268; Bestuzhev 1820, pp. 166–67; Turchin 1985, p. 133). The initial crayon (Figure 19) and the first version

may thus date back to 1818 (*pace* Varnek 2013). Olenin is decorated here with the breast star badges of the Orders of Saint Vladimir, 2nd class, and Saint Anne, 1st class, awarded to him on 28 January 1811 (Timofeev 2007, p. 439).



Figure 18. Alexander Varnek. *A Portrait of Aleksei Olenin*, 1824. Research Museum of the Russian Academy of Arts, Saint Petersburg.



Figure 19. Alexander Varnek. *A Portrait of Aleksei Olenin (sketch)*, 1818. All-Russian Pushkin Museum, Saint Petersburg and Tsarskoe Selo (Pushkin).

The painting was not displayed before 1820 because no academic exhibitions were held between 1815 and 1820 (Gnedich 1820, p. 205; Svin'in 1820, p. 269; Beliaev 2016, p. 5). Utkin's portrait of Suworov mentioned in Olenin's letter (Figure 20)⁷¹ as well as Shchedrin's Petrovsky Island landscapes of 1815 (Figure 11) and 1816, were also displayed at the 1820 exhibition for the first time (Gnedich 1820, pp. 225, 257; Svin'in 1820, p. 274; Bestuzhev 1820, p. 163).



Figure 20. Nikolai Utkin, after Johann Heinrich Schmidt. *Suvorov*, 1818.

Other items in Olenin's letter also deserve attention. Kiprensky's idea "to paint Apollo Belvedere as a picture" refers to *Apollo Smiting Python*, an allegory of Alexander I's victory over Napoleon, of which Kiprensky informed Olenin in 1817: "I began a very daring work: Apollo smiting Python. I took the whole motif, and even the whole posture of the Apollo Belvedere; in a word, I am transferring this Apollo to the painting of the same size."⁷² The correspondence shows that Olenin was not an initiator or defender of this allegory (*pace* Bocharov and Glushakova 1990, p. 213), but, just the opposite, its adversary. In February 1819, Batiushkov assured Olenin that Kiprensky "has not yet painted Apollo and is unlikely to paint him, unless out of stubbornness."⁷³ In his reply on March 13, 1819, Olenin confirmed his position: "I am delighted that Kiprensky abandons his Apollo, but one must remain silent, and I should do so."⁷⁴ Of the whole project, only a pen-and-ink artwork was completed in 1818 or 1819 (Figure 21) and displayed at the 1825 academic exhibition in Saint Petersburg, when its political topicality was already obsolete (Turchin 1982, p. 25; Zimenko 1988, pp. 220–22, 229; and especially Petrova 1999).

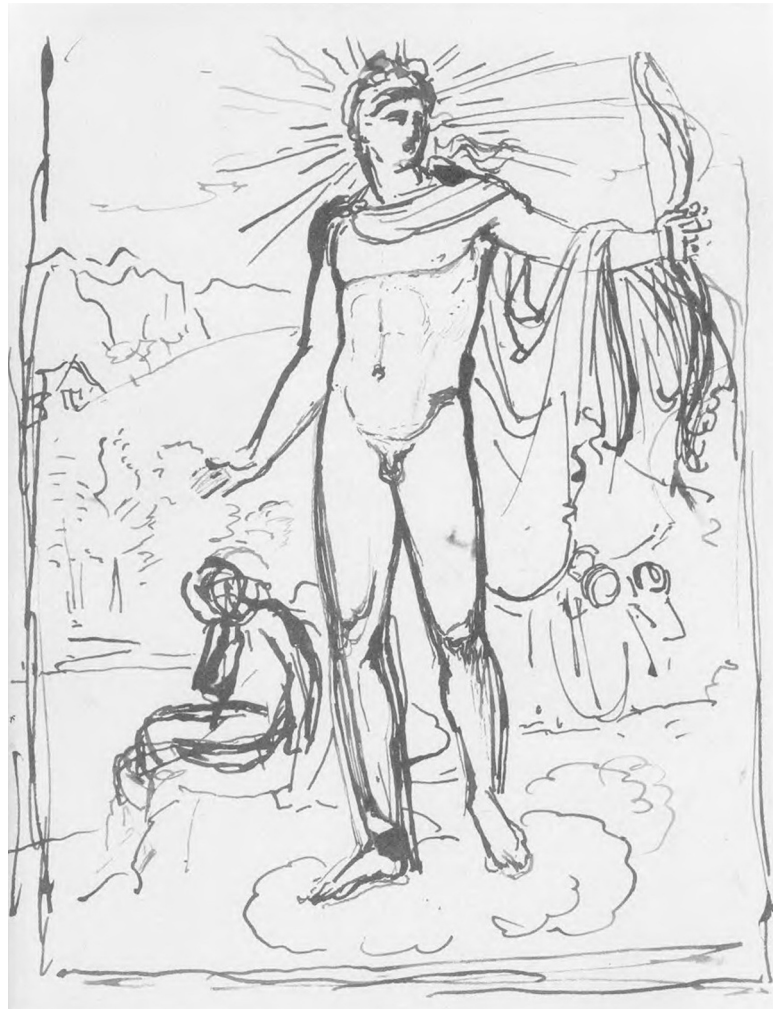


Figure 21. Orest Kiprensky. *Apollo Smiting Python*, 1818–19. State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Sylvester Shchedrin's report to the Senate of the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg on 22 February (6 March), 1819, reveals the content of Olenin's "prescript" (*predpisanie*) to the pensioners:

On February 6, New Style, Mr. Court Councillor Batiushkov, on his way via Rome, handed us a letter, which prescribes us to report to the Academy more often than it was required before; on my part, I will do so in due course. This time I have the honor to report the following: We arrived in Rome on October 15/27 and received our four-month salary in advance, counting from November 1, New Style; the banker wishes to issue us a pension in this manner during the entire time of our stay here.⁷⁵

Batiushkov gave a full account of the situation in a letter to Olenin of February 1819:

I met with the artists. Please tell Count Nikolai Petrovich that I have handed his letter to Canova and bowed to the statue of Peace in his workshop.⁷⁶ This statue is its best decoration. I spoke at length with Canova about Count Rumiantsov, and we both wished him long life and prosperity from the bottom of our hearts. His protégé gives good hope; according to Kiprensky, he works very hard, paints incessantly and wishes to pay with his successes a tribute of due gratitude to his esteemed patron. The other graduates of the Academy are behaving perfectly well, and they seem to like me. [. . .] I talked about them with Prince Gagarin [. . .]. I can tell you conclusively that the pay they are entitled to is so small, so

insignificant, that they can hardly support themselves on a decent footing. Here a footman or valet gets more. The artist should not live in luxury, but poverty is dangerous to him as well. They have nothing to buy plaster and pay for nature and models. The prices are terribly high! The English flooded Tuscany, Rome, and Naples; the latter is even more expensive. But even here [in Rome] it is three times more expensive than at home, if you live in an inn; and renting a house is almost one and a half or two times as expensive. Kiprensky will testify to this.⁷⁷

Olenin noted the message and took the necessary action:

Thank you for the detailed justification that our pensioners in Rome cannot decently live on the pension I have granted them, although they get twice as much as their predecessors. I will immediately use this information to their advantage.⁷⁸

In a letter to Prince Grigorii Gagarin on 14 March 1819, Olenin gave vent to his surprise and provided financial details:

I can't stop wondering what is cheap in foreign lands. The current pensioners—as you and Batiushkov and they themselves say—need three times as much as before. In total, no less than 2400 assignation rubles per year for each. After all, they will not receive the same amount when they return home! That is why I am right, it is too early to send our pensioners to foreign lands.⁷⁹

The situation changed on 9 September 1820, when emperor Alexander I ordered the Minister of Finance, Count Dmitrii Guryev, to raise each pensioner's stipend to 300 *chervontsy* (Dutch ducats of Russian coinage) per year and to pay each pensioner a lump-sum allowance of 225 *chervontsy* from the funds of the Treasury (Yevseyev in Shchedrin 2014, p. 206). The value of the *chervonets* was circa ten rubles (from 11.8 assignation rubles in 1824 to 10.8 in 1830—*ibid.*), and Olenin wrote to Russia's Foreign Minister, Count Karl Nesselrode on 20 November 1824:

In Rome, the capital of fine arts, in the favorable climate and under the clear sky of Italy, where everything enchants them and contributes to their pursuits and pleasures, they receive considerable salaries for their maintenance from the Monarch's generosity, which they can in no way expect to have here soon after their return. The Academy's most distinguished faculty members, under whose supervision they were formed, receive salaries barely equal to the third part of what the said young artists are paid yearly for their maintenance, while others receive incomparably less, namely: rectors no more than 1350 rubles, senior professors 1000 rubles, junior professors 800 rubles, and adjunct professors 400 rubles, whereas everything is incomparably more expensive here than in Italy.⁸⁰

We have seen that Batiushkov's insistence was decisive in persuading Olenin to approach the emperor. Batiushkov's own salary was considerably higher. On 3 August 1818, he informed his sister Alexandra that he had been appointed to the Foreign Collegium and "granted the rank of Court Councillor and a salary of 1000 rubles 'with a rate,' which makes about 5000 rubles and sometimes more, plus the sum equal to an annual salary to travel to Naples."⁸¹ The adjustment of salary "съ курсомъ" (literally: 'with a rate')—a short for "съ дополненіемъ or добавленіемъ вексельнаго курса" (literally: 'with an addition of the exchange rate')—meant that an officer working abroad would typically be paid an equivalent of one ruble at the home rate of 50 Dutch stuivers per ruble⁸² (equal to 250 Dutch cents after the 1817 decimal reform in the Netherlands)⁸³ instead of the foreign rate of ruble, which was some ten times lower (e.g., from 7 to 12 stuivers per ruble in Amsterdam in July–December 1811).⁸⁴ Batiushkov's annual revenue from his estate (*obrok*) was up to 6000 rubles per year.⁸⁵ Still, both salary and estate revenue taken together were hardly enough to maintain himself abroad.

3.2. Batiushkov and Shchedrin in Naples

In a letter on 4 (16) February 1819, Gagarin wrote of Batiushkov to Olenin: “What a sweet, pleasant, and interesting man he is. It’s a pity he will be leaving us soon, hurrying to Naples.”⁸⁶ The date when Batiushkov left Rome is yet to establish. Gagarin’s letter is a *terminus post quem*. A *terminus ante quem* for Batiushkov’s departure is Shchedrin’s letter to his parents on 21 February (5 March) 1819:

Batiushkov, during his stay in Rome, showed me all sorts of kindness. When he was leaving, he told me to write to him: when I want to come to Naples, I should let him know in advance, and if he has at least one extra room, he will give it to me; otherwise he will prepare everything for me, which I will try to use, because he will be there for some years at the embassy.⁸⁷

Indeed, arriving in Naples on 3 (15) June 1819, Shchedrin moved into Batiushkov’s apartment close to the Castel dell’Ovo, on the Santa Lucia embankment (situated before the reconstruction of 1869, where via Partenope is located now) and lived there until the spring of 1820. In April or early May 1820, Batiushkov’s hostess m-me Saint Ange, a French lady with two young daughters, moved house, Batiushkov and Shchedrin followed them, and as of 2 (14) May 1820, their new address was 22 Capella Vecchia nearby. However, by 8 (20) September 1820, Shchedrin had rented a new apartment alone, again on the Santa Lucia embankment.⁸⁸ This is how he described the place in a letter to his parents on 23 July (4 August) 1819:

The Santa Lucia embankment where I live is as crowded as Toledo Avenue, and one must get into the habit of not being disturbed by the noise. Imagine the whole jumble: the shore is full of stands where Lazzaroni sell oysters and other sea creatures, as well as fish. There is also a well with sulfur water and taverns where they gather to dine only fish and eat in the open air under my windows [. . .]. Many people fill this part of the city; moreover, this road leads to the Royal Garden. The strongest rattle and noise begins at 6 o’clock [pm] when people only ride by and pass by without stopping; pedestrians stroll in the garden, and carriages drive along the shore until 8 o’clock. Disturbances begin on the way back, with a well where people stop to drink stinking sulfur water [. . .]. Some people take baths set up along the seashore. At 9 o’clock, the musicians step by [. . .]; they are outstandingly good at their art here. At 10 o’clock they sit down for dinner, and until about midnight I watch with pleasure as they treat themselves to fish [. . .]. When I go to bed, I close the blinds, then the window, then the shutters, and there’s no more strength, you fall asleep a little, but the devil will wake them up to dance [. . .]. You stay in bed but get up to look at the damned dancers—and besides dancing, they also have a masquerade [. . .]; and they incessantly keep inventing new things, so you can’t even remember them to describe them adequately.⁸⁹

We find a similar description in Batiushkov’s letter to Ekaterina Muravyova on 1 July 1819:

Naples is prey to all winds and, therefore, sometimes unpleasant, especially for newcomers. I still can’t get used to the local noise, especially since I live on the noisiest side of the city, on the waterfront of Santa Lucia. Outside my windows is a perpetual jamboree, rattle and yells and screams, and at noon (when all the streets are empty here, like ours at midnight)—splashing waves and wind. Opposite there are many taverns and sea baths. People eat and drink in the street, as you have on Krestovsky [Island], with the only difference being that if you add all the noise of Saint Petersburg to that of Moscow, this is still nothing compared with what is going on here. [. . .] But I cannot part with this place, first and foremost, because the hostess is French, my rooms are cheerful and clean, and I am one step away from San Carlo [. . .]. Toledo—the local equivalent

of Nevsky Prospect—, all the shops, the palace, and the festivities are near me. These benefits make me prefer noise to other disadvantages.⁹⁰

Since Borgo Santa Lucia was substantially reconstructed, we need to compare Batiushkov’s descriptions with Shchedrin’s paintings of his first and second Neapolitan periods to imagine how the territory looked like in the early 19th century. The first Neapolitan period is when the painter lived in the poet’s apartment. Just as today, the embankment led to the Royal Garden (Villa Reale, renamed Villa Comunale, i.e., the Municipal Garden, in 1869), a promenade at the Riviera di Chiaia. These painting made from or around Batiushkov’s apartment include but are not limited to the following pictures (all—canvas on oil):

- *A View of Naples*, 1820 (Figure 22);
- *A View of Naples from the Garden of the Royal Palace*, 1820 (Figure 23);
- *A View of Naples. On the Embankment (Riviera di Chiaia)*, 1819, and the same landscape painted in 1826 (Figures 24 and 25);
- *Moonlit Night in Naples*, 1828 (Figure 26);
- *The embankment of Santa Lucia*, late 1820s, and the same landscape painted from a different angle in 1829 (Figures 27 and 28);
- *A View of Naples from the Road to Posillipo*, 1829 (Figure 29).⁹¹

The emperor’s younger brother, Grand Prince Mikhail Pavlovich, commissioned Shchedrin’s early Neapolitan landscapes as support for stipend holders (Mikhailova 1984, p. 17). He announced an exceedingly high price of 2500 rubles and asked Batiushkov to show Shchedrin what views to paint. The initial order was for two watercolors, but the artist asked for a permission to replace them with oils (Shchedrin 2014, pp. 73, 120, 134, 162, 173). While still in Rome, Batiushkov also “commissioned Shchedrin a painting—a view from the porch of Jean de Latran [the Basilica of Saint John in Lateran]” —, to support the artist, as he informed Olenin in February 1819 (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 540).⁹² Unfortunately, this cityscape has not survived (Atsarkina 1978, p. 180).



Figure 22. Sylvester Shchedrin. *A View of Naples*, 1820. Kramskoi Voronezh Regional Museum of Art.



Figure 23. Sylvester Shchedrin. *A View of Naples from the Garden of the Royal Palace*, 1820. State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.



Figure 24. Sylvester Shchedrin. *A View of Naples. On the Embankment (Riviera di Chiaia)*, 1819. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 25. Sylvester Shchedrin. *A View of Naples. On the Embankment (Riviera di Chiaia)*, 1826. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 26. Sylvester Shchedrin. *Moonlit Night in Naples*, 1828. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 27. Sylvester Shchedrin. *The Embankment of Santa Lucia*, late 1820s. State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.



Figure 28. Sylvester Shchedrin. *The Embankment of Santa Lucia*, 1829. State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Batiushkov did not wish to see the mundane Italy; hence his dislike of Naples and admiration for Vesuvius, Pompeii, Cumae, Ischia or Baia. For him, only in Italy nature and culture were in harmony. In a letter to Zhukovsky from Ischia on 1 August 1819, he wrote:

I am not in Naples, but on the island of Ischia, in sight of Naples, [. . .] enjoying the most magnificent spectacle in the world: in front of me in the distance lies Sorrento—cradle of that man [Tasso] to whom I am obliged for the best delights of my life; then Vesuvius, which at night casts out a quiet flame like a lantern; the heights of Naples, crowned with castles; then Cumae, where Aeneas or Virgil

wandered; Baia, now mournful, once luxurious; Misena, Puzzoli; and at the end of the horizon, mountain ranges separating Campania from Abruzzo and Apulia. The view from my terrace is not limited to this; if I turn my gaze to the north, I see Gaeta, the summits of Terracina, and the whole coast stretching toward Rome and disappearing into the blue of the Tyrrhenian Sea. [. . .] At night the sky is covered with an astonishing brilliance; the Milky Way looks different here, incomparably clearer. [. . .] Nature is a great poet, and I rejoice to find in my heart feeling for these great spectacles.

(qtd in Todd 1976, pp. 86–87)⁹³



Figure 29. Sylvester Shchedrin. *A View of Naples from the Road to Posillipo*, 1829. Pozhalostin Ryazan State Regional Museum of Art.

Of these visions of Italy, only one paved its way to Batiushkov’s poetry, but the result was amazing. He described “Baia, now mournful, once luxurious” (Italian: Baia; Roman: Baiae) in a short poem that remained unpublished until 1857 but later became well-known and even archetypal of Batiushkov’s poetics (Blagoi 1934a, p. 543; 1934c, p. 31; Fridman 1971, p. 239). It is an epitaph on Baiae’s ruins that “symmetrically inverts Horace’s ode to the builder of Baiae (book II, xviii)” (Greenleaf 1998, p. 77):

Ты пробуждаешься, о Байя, изъ гробницы
 При появлении аврориныхъ лучей,
 Но не отдасть тебѣ багряная денница
 Сіянія протекшихъ дней,
 Не возвратитъ убѣжищей прохлады,
 Гдѣ нѣжились рой красотъ,
 И никогда твои порфирны колоннады
 Со дна не встануть синихъ водъ!

(Longinov 1857, p. 82)⁹⁴

In his *Analysis of the Poetic Text*, Yurii Lotman described the technique of Batiushkov’s ekphrasis of *l’architecture morte* in cinematic terms:

If the chain of images were translated into the language of the cinema, then we would see a distinct transition from a long shot, to a medium shot and, finally, to a close-up, i.e., the columns on the bottom of the sea. In this case, as in cinema

language, the detail assumes added, transferred significance and is perceived as a trope. The more significant the detail, the more substantial and spatially enlarged it becomes. The porphyry columns and the blue waters while preserving all of the concreteness of individual objects become textual symbols concentrating in themselves an involved complex of ideas—beauties, ruins, the impossibility of recovering that which is lost, and eternity.

(Lotman 1976, p. 146)

What makes Batiushkov's *poétique des ruines* so distinctive (cf. Mortier 1974) is that he depicts drowned underwater ruins, which resurrect before our eyes to die again. In contrast, Shchedrin, who also visited Baiae at the same time as Batiushkov (see Shchedrin 2014, pp. 109, 118), painted typical pre-Romantic antiqués—overland ruins, the dead remnants of the past (see Figures 30 and 31).



Figure 30. Hubert Robert. *Ruines antiques*, 1779. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, dépôt du Musée du Louvre.



Figure 31. Sylvester Shchedrin. *Ruins of Baiae near Naples*, 1820s. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

4. The Poet's Visual Art

Batiushkov described himself as a poet and a willy-nilly warrior, comparing his situation to that of his favorite Roman elegist, Tibullus (Pilshchikov 2006). He took part in all anti-Napoleonic campaigns. When the Prussian campaign of 1807 started, he enlisted in the Saint Petersburg battalion of the Militia. On 2 March 1807, he was in Narva (now in Estonia, on the border with Russia), on March 19—in Riga (now the capital of Latvia), from where he sent letters to Gnedich containing a poetic impromptu and a verse epistle. These poems are now included in the editions of Batiushkov's works, both as parts of the letters and separately. Unfortunately, the same does not apply to the poet's pictorial impromptu—a self-portrait in military uniform on a stallion in the Narva letter (Figure 32). It was published in the epistolary volume of Maikov's edition and in the "Academia" edition (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III: between pp. 6 and 7; 1934: between pp. 384 and 385) but has not been reproduced in the poet's works since then.



Figure 32. Konstantin Batiushkov. A self-portrait in a letter to Nikolai Gnedich from Narva, 2 March 1807. Lost.

On 29 May (10 June), Batiushkov was seriously wounded at the battle of Heilsberg. After the battle he was transported to Riga where he convalesced in June and July 1807. From there, he wrote another letter to Gnedich, in which he replaced a signature with a picture of himself (Todd 1976, p. 72; Duganov 1988, p. 71; see Figure 33). First published in Maikov's edition (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III: fol. between pp. 12 and 13), it was printed in its—presumably—original place, after the words “Instead of the name” (“Вмѣсто имени”), only once (Batiushkov 1934, p. 385). I use the caveat *presumably* because the holographs of both letters with self-portraits have been lost.



Figure 33. Konstantin Batiushkov. A self-portrait in a letter to Nikolai Gnedich from Riga, June 1807. Lost.

Yet another opus—this time a poem—that is usually published without an obligatory pictorial element is “Pafosa bog, Erot prekrasnoi (Na roze babochku poimal)” [The God of Paphos, beautiful Eros caught a butterfly on a rose] (1809). The holograph shows that this poem is an ekphrasis that describes an original drawing (Blagoi 1934a, p. 563; Koshelev 1989, p. 474), and they should be published together (Figure 34).⁹⁵

Batiushkov's graphic legacy includes about fifty works, but there were many more. When mentally ill, he wrote only a few texts which combine 19th-century poetic formulae in an unusual way to express idiosyncratic associations (Orekhov 2013; Uspensky 2014); but he was actively engaged in drawing, painting, and wax modeling. Doctor Anton Dietrich, who treated the poet in Sonnenstein and then in Moscow, meticulously registered his patient's everyday behavior from 4 March 1828 till 30 May 1830 (Novikov 2005, pp. 168–70, 206–26; Koshelev 1987, pp. 326–32):

- “Showed a wax cast from his brother's portrait” (5 March);
- “Yesterday morning he sent his sister a wax sculpture [. . .]. It is difficult to get to its meaning: it consists of three bizarre wax figures” (19 March);
- “A portrait of his father molded in wax” (26 March);
- “The wax head of Grand Duke Constantine” (30 March);
- “The head of Christ painted on the wall with charcoal” (16 April);
- “Painted the head of the Archangel Michael on the wall” (23 April);
- “We found him drawing, and he immediately asked for paper and pencils in order to draw a self-portrait” (6 May);
- “The subject of most paintings is Tasso's confinement” (20 May).⁹⁶



Figure 34. Konstantin Batiushkov. “The God of Paphos, beautiful Eros . . .”, 1809. National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg.

In Vologda, Batiushkov continued to paint until the end of his days. He employed various techniques, “using watercolor, gouache, whitewash, pencil, and appliqué” (Zalieva and Rudnik 2004, p. 79). Although Dr. Dietrich remarked that “talent shines in many of his finished drawings” (7 May 1828; qtd in Koshelev 2000, p. 163), other contemporaries noticed in his artwork what was later described as “art brut” or “outsider art.” Anikita Semenovitch Vlasov, the headmaster of the Vologda gymnasium, wrote in 1855:

In terms of their content and technique, his paintings were something strange, sometimes even childish; he executed them in every possible way: he cut out figures of birds and animals from paper and, after coloring, pasted them on a hued background, gave objects completely unnatural tints, and dappled his watercolors with gold and silver paper.⁹⁷

The original document had a supplement with non-extant examples of such works. Stepan Shevyrev, a poet, critic, and Moscow University professor of Russian literature, who visited Batiushkov in the summer of 1847, witnessed that:

At home, his favorite pastime is painting. He paints landscapes. The content of the landscape is almost always the same. It is an elegy or a ballad in colors: A horse tied to a well, the moon, a tree, more often a fir tree, sometimes a grave cross, sometimes a church. Landscapes are painted very roughly and awkwardly. Batiushkov gives them to those whom he particularly loves, most of all to children.⁹⁸

Poet and translator Nikolai Berg visited Batiushkov on 8 July 1847, and left a similar testimony (also reported by Shevyrev):

He often draws pictures—mostly paintings—, and he gives what he paints to children. His pictures always contain the same image: A white horse is drinking water; on one side there are trees painted in different colors—yellow, green, and red; sometimes the horse gets a share; on the other side there is a castle; in the distance there is a sea with ships, a dark sky, and a pale moon.⁹⁹

“The moon, a cross, and a horse are the indispensable elements of his landscapes,” Batiushkov’s grandnephew Pyotr von Graevenitz (Grevens) confirmed in 1855.¹⁰⁰ These images can also be exemplified by his paintings from 1828–30 (Figures 35–37).

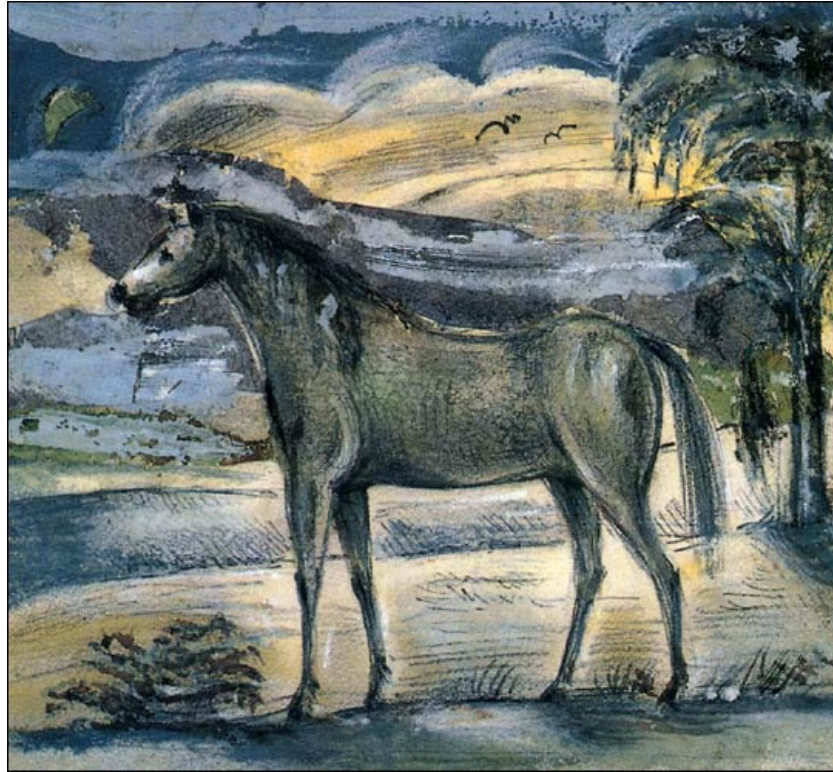


Figure 35. Konstantin Batiushkov. *A Horse*, 1828 (?). State Literary Museum, Moscow.



Figure 36. Konstantin Batiushkov. *Landscape with Horses*, 1830. State Literary Museum, Moscow.



Figure 37. Konstantin Batiushkov. *Landscape with a House*, 1830 (?). Literary Museum of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg.

Dr. Dietrich thus explained the poet's mental conditions:

I do not need to say that such a severe and prolonged illness had to paralyze all his mental powers. In Sonnenstein, the patient said several times: "I am not a fool, I have lost my memory, but I still have my reason." Only his memory, the mental power most closely bound up with bodily conditions, seems to fulfill its duties more regularly [than other powers], although it is weakened too. It is true, it also obeys the despotism of imagination and does not easily step outside the circle that imagination has drawn out for it. Still, within this circle, it combines picturesque paints from long-gone times to embellish the most varied and colorful mirages.¹⁰¹

Pictures are built of the elements of recollections, just as poems are made of ready-made formulas. Both function as a kaleidoscope, a popular optical instrument (incidentally, patented in 1817—the same year that Batiushkov's *Essays* were published). If so, the imagery of his paintings and drawings may have had a biographical background. When taking part in the Prussian campaign of 1807, Batiushkov met Ivan Petin, an officer who was to become his close friend and comrade-in-arms. They participated in three campaigns together. Batiushkov described his death in the Battle of Nations at Leipzig (4–7 (16–19) October 1813) in "Vospominanie o Petine" (Memoir of Petin, 9 November 1815; unpublished until 1851):

In my eyes, the belfry flashed incessantly, where the body of the best of humans lay, and my heart was filled with unspeakable sorrow, which not a single tear could ease. [. . .] On the third day, soon after the capture of Leipzig, I [. . .] met my friend's faithful servant [. . .]. He led me to the grave of his good master. I saw this grave covered with fresh earth; I stood over it in deep sorrow and relieved my heart with tears. The best treasure of my life was hidden in it forever—friendship. I asked, begging the venerable and elderly priest of the village to preserve the fragile monument—a simple wooden cross with the brave young man's name inscribed on it—in anticipation of a more lasting one made of marble or granite.¹⁰²

Batiushkov also described these events in a letter to Gnedich on 30 October 1813:

The whole battlefield was held by us and covered with dead bodies. A terrible and unforgettable day for me! The first Household Guard's Jäger [whom I met] told me that Petin had been killed. [. . .] To the left of the batteries, in the distance, was a [Protestant] church. Petin was buried there, and there I bowed to his fresh grave and asked the pastor with tears in my eyes to take care of my comrade's ashes.¹⁰³

Nikolai Fedorovich Bunakov, a Vologda educationalist and local history scholar, linked the content of Batiushkov's landscapes with his memoir and supposed that "it was this bell tower and this grave cross that haunted Batiushkov for the rest of his long and unhappy life."¹⁰⁴

Batiushkov's extant artwork from the Sonnenstein and Vologda periods does not allow us to unequivocally judge what is depicted there, a church or a castle—an image the poet also associated with his deceased friend. Together with the "Memoir on Petin," Batiushkov's other work of reminiscence was published in 1851, entitled "Vospominanie mest, srazhenii i puteshestvii" [A Recollection of Places, Battles, and Travels].¹⁰⁵ Like the "Memoir," it was also written in Kamieniec Podolski (now Kamianets-Podilskyi in Ukraine), whose old Polish fortress (see Figure 38) reminded Batiushkov of Bohemian castles, where he saw Petin for the last time:

I [. . .] am transported to Bohemia, Teplitz,¹⁰⁶ and the ruins of Bergschloß¹⁰⁷ and Geyersberg,¹⁰⁸ where our camp stood after the victory under Kulm.¹⁰⁹ One memory brings forth another, as one stream in a river brings forth another. The whole camp comes back to life in my imagination, and thousands of minute circumstances enliven it. My heart drowns in pleasure: I am sitting in my friend Petin's hut at the foot of a high mountain crowned with the ruins of a knight's castle. We are alone. Our conversations are frank [. . .]. That is what the towers and ruins of Kamieniec bring to me: sweet memories of the best times of my life! My friend fell deathly asleep as a hero on the bloody fields of Leipzig [. . .], but Friendship and Gratitude have imprinted his image on my soul.¹¹⁰



Figure 38. Napoleon Orda. *Kamieniec Podolski*. *Zamiek*, 1875.

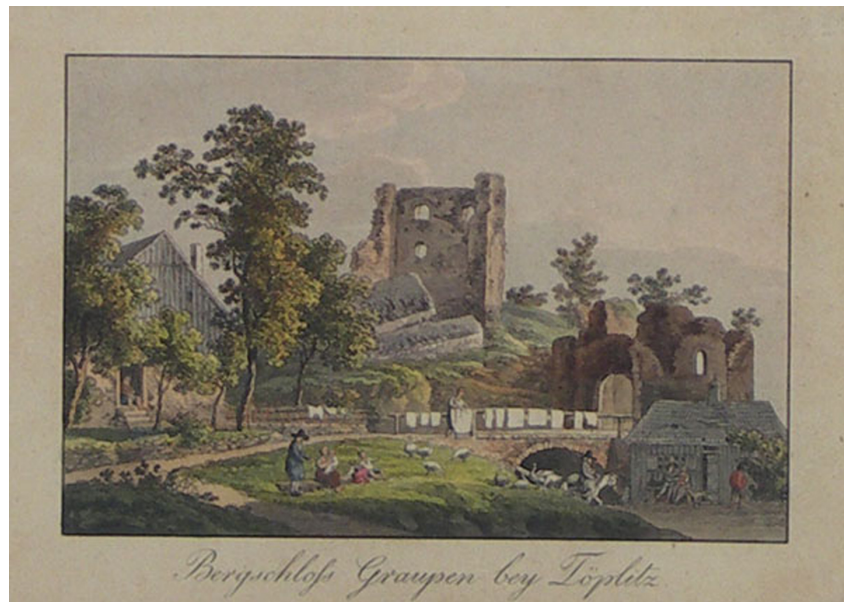


Figure 39. Unknown artist. *Bergschloß Graupen near Töplitz*, c. 1830.



Figure 40. Simon Petrus Klotz after Lorenz Jansch. *A View of Geyersberg near Töplitz in Bohemia*, early 1800s.

When insane, Batiushkov was fascinated by Napoleon. The French emperor is featured in his last poem, written on 8 July 1852 (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. I, pp. 588–89; Uspensky 2014, pp. 18–19; France 2018, pp. 221–22), and in his last letter addressed to Pyotr Beletsky¹¹¹ on September 28, 1853, in which he suddenly recalled “A Stroll to the Academy of Arts”:

I am grateful for your letter and equally for the gift of a portrait of Napoleon: I pray to him daily; *pago debiti miei*.¹¹² May he reign again in France, Spain, and Portugal, the indivisible and eternal French Empire, which adores him and his venerable family! [. . .] Reading my strolls through the Academy of Arts, I wish both of us to see there a portrait of Napoleon, the benefactor of the universe, painted by our Russian masters, worthy of their vaunted brush, which may not be afraid of the grouchy Starozhilov. The great oceans subdued to France and her lands with their happy citizens will bless this image of the great emperor Napoleon. Looking forward to my new stroll to the Academy of Arts, which I

hope you will describe yourself, and wishing you all the best, I will remain your loyal friend and sympathizer, *Konstantin Batiushkov*.¹¹³



Figure 41. Simon Petrus Klotz after Johann Friedrich Wizani. *Geyersberg near Töplitz in Bohemia*, early 1820s.

Napoleon is depicted in one of Batiushkov's earlier paintings as if presaging the future program (Figure 42; cf. Monakhova 2008, pp. 139–41; Misailidi 2017, p. 55; 2020, pp. 46–49).



Figure 42. Konstantin Batiushkov. *Napoleon*, 1828 (?). Literary Museum of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg.

One frequent subject of Batiushkov's drawings and paintings from the 1830s to the 1850s was a cow, always depicted from behind (Figures 43 and 44). These pictures are

numerous, and there is no obvious explanation for them (Koshelev 2000, p. 171). I propose a hypothesis based on the fact that the word *cow* (корова) is unusually rare in Batiushkov's neo-Karamzinist lexicon. It occurs only once, in the aforementioned letter of 2 March 1807, from Narva: "Я здоровъ какъ корова" [I'm as healthy as a cow] (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 6). This is a Russian saying, usually used in feminine gender for rhyme's sake, whereas the masculine counterpart is compared with a 'horse' and is unrhymed: "Здоровъ, какъ лошадь; здорова, какъ корова" [As healthy (masc.) as a horse; as healthy (fem.) as a cow] (Dahl [Dal'] 1862, p. 1059).



Figure 43. Konstantin Batiushkov. *A Cow*, 1850s (?). State Literary Museum, Moscow.

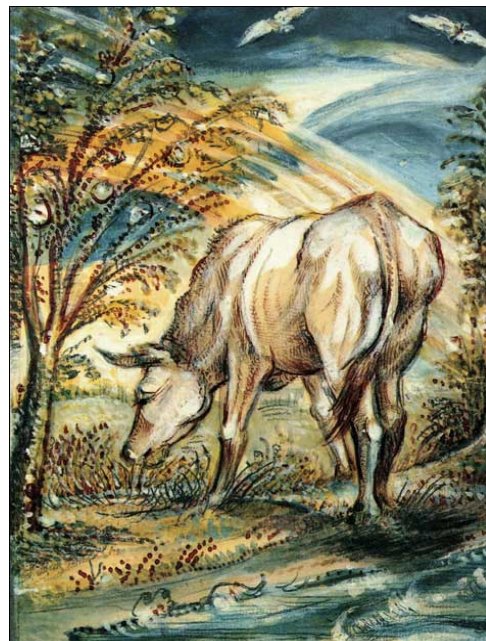


Figure 44. Konstantin Batiushkov. *A Cow*, 1830 (?). State Literary Museum, Moscow.

Perhaps the paintings and drawings of cows (and horses?) objectify Batiushkov's concern about his mental and physical health, which preoccupied and worried him from the

moment his illness began. One piece of evidence is his self-portrait presented to Zhukovsky in 1821 (Figure 45); the autograph inscription reads: “Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov, a pleasant poet and a nice person. — Look at me! At the age of twenty, / pallor spreads over my cheeks.”¹¹⁴ The taglines are from Batiushkov’s free imitation of Évariste Parry’s “Le Revenant,” which, in the original, begins with the phrase “Ma santé fuit . . . ” [My health flees . . .]. A distorted color vision that sometimes accompanies personality disorder can plausibly explain the unusual color schemes that surprised Batiushkov’s contemporaries. Vincent van Gogh was later diagnosed with similar color vision deficiency.



Figure 45. Konstantin Batiushkov. Self-portrait, 1821. Manuscript Department of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House), Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg.

5. Conclusions

Konstantin Batiushkov is recognized as an exquisite elegist, an immediate predecessor of Pushkin, and “a pioneer of Russian Italomania.” Much less known is that Batiushkov was always profoundly involved with painting, drawing, and sculpture—not only as a poet but as Russia’s first art critic, an ad-lib art manager, and an amateur artist. His essay “A Stroll to the Academy of Arts” (1814) inaugurated the genre of art criticism in Russia. It was one of the earliest specimens of Russian prose writing translated into English (1834). As an art lover, Batiushkov was impressed by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, but most likely knew only excerpts from his writings in French translation. His love for Italian culture eventually brought him to Italy, where he supervised the living and working conditions of the Russian painters on behalf of the President of the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg, Aleksei Olenin. Batiushkov’s own paintings and drawings show correspondences between what was memorable for him in poetry and real life and what he tried to depict in his artwork. Many of them belong to the time when he was already mentally insane. Since Batiushkov was a self-taught artist and a psychiatric hospital patient, his visual works of this period can be categorized as early examples of art brut.

Several questions are left open for future research. “A Stroll to the Academy of Arts” is rich in an artistic context and cultural references. The commentator’s task is to identify the remaining artworks discussed in “A Stroll,” to determine where the newly and previously identified ones are presently kept, and reproduce them visually to compare the ekphrases with the original images. The story of how the Russian Imperial Academy of Arts in Rome was designed but was eventually not established awaits a more detailed reconstruction. It should be based on the unpublished or partially published documents, such as Olenin’s letters to Andrei Italinsky of November 1818,¹¹⁵ to Prince Grigori Gagarin on 10 (22) November 1818, and 14 (26) March 1819,¹¹⁶ and to Batiushkov on 13 (25) March

1819,¹¹⁷ as well as Gagarin's letter to Olenin on 4 (16) February 1819.¹¹⁸ Long needed is a consolidated publication of all of Batiushkov's artwork, supplemented by a list of those works that have not survived but are known from descriptions. There is a chance that some of them can be found in provincial archives (Chekalova 2008). A particular task is to analyze the context and meaning of the poet's drawings and watercolors in one of the most significant memorials of the Russian Golden Age's literary and artistic milieu—Sofia Ponomaryova's album (Duganov 1988, pp. 12–13, 75–58; Vatsuro 1989).¹¹⁹ They remain a complete mystery, especially the picture with a lady (Ponomaryova?) sitting on the clock (Figure 46).



Figure 46. Konstantin Batiushkov. *Sofia Ponomaryova with her Dame de Compagnie (?)*, 1818 (?). Russian State Archives of Literature and Art, Moscow.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Here *et passim* all dates of Batiushkov's letters from Europe are "New Style" (Gregorian), and all other dates are "Old Style" (Julian), unless stated otherwise or both dates are given.
- ² Compare: "пионер нашей италяномании" (Rozanov 1928, p. 12); "пионер русской италомании" (Golenishchev-Kutuzov 1971, p. 457). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine (*IP*).
- ³ "Чѣмъ болѣе вникаю въ италянскую словесность, тѣмъ болѣе открываю сокровищъ истинно классическихъ, испытанныхъ вѣками" (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 427). From Batiushkov's letter to Prince Pyotr Viazemsky on 4 March 1817.
- ⁴ It is situated at the mouth of the Southern Bug river, halfway between the Ochakov fortress and the city of Nikolaev (now the town of Ochakiv and the city of Mykolaiv in Ukraine).
- ⁵ "Батюшков (которого можно считать как бы умершим)" (Belinsky 1954, p. 574).
- ⁶ The traditional *terminus post quem* (July 1814; see Maikov and Saitov 1885, p. 433; Semenko 1977, p. 512) does not make allowance for the date of the exhibition's opening.
- ⁷ "Письмо объ академіи, переправленное (надобно спросить у Оленина, можно ли его печатать? Канва его, а шелки мои)" (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 395; compare Blagoi 1934a, p. 593; Fridman 1965, pp. 90–91).
- ⁸ "В статьях своих «Прогулка в Академию художеств» и «Две аллегории» Батюшков является страстным любителем искусства, человеком, одаренным истинно артистическою душою" (Belinsky 1955, p. 254).

- 9 “Батюшков был Колумбом русской художественной критики. «Прогулка» — ее первый высокий образец. Наше искусство впервые нашло в ней живую связь со своей литературой, со своей историей, со всей русской культурой начала XIX в. Батюшков создал здесь новый литературный жанр так же, как создал его в поэзии. Живость воображения, тонкость вкуса, свободная манера письма и уверенность критического суждения кажутся нам пленительными даже спустя столетие” (Efros 1933, p. 94).
- 10 On the poetics of ekphrasis in Russian literature, see (Heller 2002; Tokarev 2013).
- 11 “Я начну мой рассказ сначала, какъ начинается обыкновенно болтливая старость. Слушай. || Вчерашний день по утру, сидя у окна моего съ Винкельманомъ въ рукѣ, я предался сладостному мечтанію, въ которомъ тебѣ не могу дать совершенно отчета” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 117).
- 12 “[...] у насъ еще не было своего Менгса, который открылъ бы намъ тайны своего Искусства, и къ Искусству Живописи присоединилъ другое, столь же трудное: искусство изъяснять свои мысли. У насъ не было Винкельмана” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 158).
- 13 “Вотъ сей божественный Аполлонъ [...]! Взвирая на сіе чудесное произведеніе искусства, я вспоминаю слова Винкельмана. «Я забываю вселенную, говорить онъ, взвирая на Аполлона; я самъ принимаю благороднѣйшую осанку, чтобы достойнѣ созерцать его»” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 136).
- 14 Compare (Winckelmann 1873, p. 214; Winckelmann 2006, p. 334). On this passage see, in particular: (Zeller 1955; Leppmann 1970, pp. 154–55; Lange 1982, p. 106; Pommier 1989, p. 14; Aldrich 1993, pp. 50–52; Potts 1994, pp. 127–29; Morrison 1997; Mah 2003, pp. 94–97; Tanner 2006, pp. 5–7; Harloe 2007, 2013, pp. 92–93; Harloe 2018, pp. 46–48; Fitzgerald 2022, pp. 19–22).
- 15 “Insbesondere ist es ein Lieblingsausdruck Winckelmans, von dem es vielleicht Lessing und Herder übernommen haben [...]. gewöhnlich mit adjectivischem Zusatz, wobei denn *stand* in die Bedeutung einer besondern Art zu stehen, der Haltung des Körpers im einzelnen übergeht” (DWB 1907, p. 683; in the printed source, nouns are not capitalized).
- 16 “. . . съ Монтанемъ въ рукѣ” (Batiushkov 1814, p. 123).
- 17 “Упомянутое о Винкельманѣ, съ которымъ въ рукахъ сидитъ авторъ письма, принадлежитъ къ числу вариантовъ по здѣйшей окончательной редакціи «Прогулки»; въ первоначальномъ текстѣ говорилось здѣсь о Монтанѣ, любимомъ писателѣ Батюшкова. Но и замѣна его Винкельманомъ не есть приемъ искусственного сочинительства: далѣе въ «Прогулкѣ» дѣйствительно находимъ цитату изъ знаменитаго историка древняго искусства” (Maikov and Saitov 1885, p. 434).
- 18 On the Russian reception of Winckelmann in the 18th and 19th centuries, see (Lappo-Danilevskij 1999, 2007, 2017; Dmitrieva 2019).
- 19 “Батюшков хорошо знал известный труд «красноречивого» Винкельмана «История искусства древности» и теоретические трактаты Менгса, развивавшего идеи Винкельмана” (Fridman 1965, p. 92).
- 20 “Сам Батюшков по складу характера отнюдь не был прилежным читателем эстетических трактатов. И все же его собственные размышления о языке и словесности развиваются в русле винкельмановских идей” (Zorin 1997, p. 147; Zorin 1998, p. 509).
- 21 See, e.g., (Noël and Delaplace 1804, vol. I, pp. 118–19; Noël and Delaplace 1813, vol. I, pp. 132–33). Batiushkov mentions Noël’s *Leçons* in a letter to Nikolai Gnedich on 13 March 1811 (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 113).
- 22 *Les Jardins, ou l’Art d’embellir les paysages: Poème en quatre chants* (1782; revised edition, 1801).
- 23 “O miracle! for a long time, in its coarse mass, / a simple stone has enclosed the God of light. / Art gives a command, and from a piece of marble Apollo comes out. / . . . / I admire the concord of the harmonious whole; / the eye slides voluptuously along this beautiful body. / At the first sight of it, I stop and start dreaming; / without realizing it, my head rises, / my posture becomes noble. Even without a temple and altars, / his appearance still strikes the mortals with awe; / and, the paragon of the arts and their first idol, / he alone seems to have outlived the god of the Capitol (i.e. Jupiter)” (Delille 1806, vol. II, pp. 15–16).
- 24 See, e.g., (Noël and Delaplace 1808, vol. II, pp. 170–71; Noël and Delaplace 1813, vol. II, p. 154). The first two editions of *Leçons françaises* (1804, 1805) had come out before the publication of *L’Imagination* in 1806.
- 25 “Я взглянулъ невольнo на Троицкій мостъ, потомъ на хижину Великаго Монарха, къ которой по справедливости можно примѣнить извѣстный стихъ: / Souvent un faible gland recéle un chêne immense. / И воображеніе мое представило мнѣ Петра, который въ первый разъ обозрѣвалъ берега дикой Невы [...]!” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 118). Compare: “Mais l’homme tout entier est caché dans l’enfance; / Ainsi le faible gland renferme un chêne immense” [But the whole man is hidden in childhood; / thus a feeble acorn contains a huge oak] (Delille 1806, vol. II, p. 78).
- 26 First noted by Maikov (Maikov and Saitov 1885, p. 435).
- 27 “Herrn Johann Winkelmann [sic] gewiedmet von dem Verfasser.”
- 28 “. . . in den unsterblichen Werken Herrn Anton Raphael Mengs, [...] des größten Künstlers seiner, und vielleicht auch der folgenden Zeit” (Winckelmann 1764, vol. I, p. 184).
- 29 “Какъ Менгсъ рисуетъ самъ, / Какъ Винкельманъ краснорѣчивый пишетъ” (The Russian State Library (Moscow), Manuscript Department [henceforward RSL], fond 211, karton 3619, delo I–1/3, fol. 1; first published in Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 445).
- 30 “Прошу не принимать это, за poison qu’on prépare à la cour d’Etrurie; то есть за лесть” (Ibid.).

- 31 “Quittez l’art avec nous: quittez la flatterie; / Ce poison qu’on prépare à la cour d’Étrurie” [Don’t employ artifices with us; don’t employ flattery, / this poison that is prepared at the court of Etruria].
- 32 The statue was destroyed during WWII. In 1956–57, it was cast again from a plaster model (Yumangulov and Khadeeva 2016, p. 170).
- 33 “... стоимъ въ изумленіи передъ Аполлономъ Бельведерскимъ, передъ картинами Рафаэля, въ великолѣпной Галлерей Музеума” (Batiushkov 1827, pp. 26–27).
- 34 “Теперь вы спросите у меня, что мнѣ болѣе всего понравилось въ Парижѣ?—Трудно рѣшить.—Начну съ Аполлона Бельведерскаго. Онъ выше описанія Винкельманова; это не мраморъ,—богъ! Всѣ копии этой безцѣнной статуи слабы, и тотъ, кто не видалъ сего чуда искусства, тотъ не можетъ имѣть о немъ понятія; чтобъ восхищаться имъ, не надобно имѣть глубокаго свѣдѣнія въ искусствахъ: надобно чувствовать! Странное дѣло! Я видѣлъ простыхъ солдатъ, которые съ изумленіемъ смотрѣли на Аполлона; такова сила генія! Я часто захожу въ Музеумъ единственно за тѣмъ, чтобы взглянуть на Аполлона...” (Batiushkov 1827, pp. 33–34).
- 35 “Я никогда не былъ охотникъ до гипсовъ; лучше ничего или все—вотъ мое правило” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 132). Another translation: “I have never liked plaster casts: my rule is either all or nothing” (Batiushkov 2002).
- 36 “... то, что есть, прекрасно: ибо слѣпки вѣрны и могутъ удовлетворить самаго строгаго наблюдателя древности” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 137). Leeds’s translation is eloquent but inaccurate: “... casts, moulded from the originals themselves, give us all the essential excellencies of the latter” (Batiushkov 1834, p. 525).
- 37 “Elle est donc introduite dans l’histoire du déclin de l’art dans la Rome antique comme un idéal qui, à l’époque, ne pouvait plus être recréé, mais seulement pillé, volé au passé” (Potts 1991, p. 30).
- 38 Now in the State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.
- 39 “Одно имя сего почтеннаго Академика возбуждаетъ твое любопытство...” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 137). This paragraph is omitted in Leeds and is quoted here in Carol Adlam’s translation (Batiushkov 2002).
- 40 “Художникъ изобразилъ истязаніе Христа въ темницѣ.—Четыре фигуры выше человѣческаго роста. Главная изъ нихъ Спаситель, передъ каменнымъ столпомъ, съ связанными назадъ руками, и три мучителя, изъ которыхъ одинъ прикрѣпляетъ веревку къ столпу, другой снимаетъ ризы, покрывающія Искупителя, и въ одной рукѣ держитъ пукъ розогъ, третій воинъ... кажется, дѣлаетъ упреки Божественному Страдальцу; но рѣшительно опредѣлить намѣреніе Артиста весьма трудно, хотя онъ и старался дать сильное выраженіе лицу воина—можетъ быть, для противоположности съ фигурою Христа” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 138). Leeds: “This piece, the subject of which was Christ in Prison, are four figures, somewhat above the size of life, namely, the Saviour himself and three executioners. The former is standing, with his hands bound behind him, while one of the latter is fastening the cord to the column against which he stands; another of them is taking off his upper garment; and the third appears to be insulting and reviling the divine sufferer; and, in the malignant expression of his countenance, the artist has evidently exerted himself to produce a complete contrast to the resignation depicted in the features of Christ himself” (Batiushkov 1834, p. 525).
- 41 “И такъ, я перескажу отъ слова до слова сужденіе о его новой картинѣ, то есть, то, что я слушалъ въ глубокомъ молчаніи” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 137).
- 42 “«Къ сожалѣнію, эта фигура напоминаетъ изображеніе Христа [у] другихъ Живописцевъ, и я напрасно ищу во всей картинѣ оригинальности, чего-то новаго, необыкновеннаго, однимъ словомъ своей мысли, а не чужой».—«Вы правы, хотя не совершенно: этотъ предметъ былъ написанъ нѣсколько разъ. Но какая въ томъ нужда? Рубенсъ и Пуссенъ каждый писали его по своему, и если картина Егорова уступаетъ Пуссеновой, то конечно выше картины Рубенсовой...».—«Какъ, что нужды? Пуссенъ и Рубенсъ писали истязаніе Христово: тѣмъ я строже буду судить Художника, тѣмъ я буду прихотливѣе»” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 139). Leeds is again very inaccurate here. He even corrects the character’s opinion to make it less insolent: “Both Poussin and Rubens have painted the same subject, each treating it according to his own feeling. Yet what does that signify? And if Yegorov be inferior to the former, he has certainly here shown himself quite equal to the latter” (Batiushkov 1834, pp. 525–26).
- 43 “Для художественныхъ вкусовъ Батюшкова характерно, что въ «Прогулке въ Академію художествъ» онъ ставитъ его выше Рубенса” (Blagoi 1934b, p. 686).
- 44 “Но кстати о Тассѣ. Шепнулъ бы ты Оленину, чтобы онъ задалъ этотъ сюжетъ для академіи. Умирающій Тассъ—истинно богатый предметъ для живописи. [...] Боюсь только одного: если Егоровъ станетъ писать, то еще до смертныхъ судорогъ и конвульсій вывихнетъ ему либо руку, либо ногу; такое изъ него сдѣлаетъ рафаэлеско, какъ изъ *Истязанія* своего, что, помнишь, висѣло въ академіи (къ стыду ея!), а Шебуевъ намажетъ ему кирпичемъ лобъ. Другіе, полагаю, не лучше отвѣчаютъ” (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, pp. 456–57).
- 45 “Въ слѣдующихъ комнатахъ продолжались выставки и по большей части молодыхъ воспитанниковъ Академіи.—Я смотрѣлъ съ любопытствомъ на ландшафтъ, изображающій видъ окрестностей Шафгаузена и хижину, въ которой ГОСУДАРЬ ИМПЕРАТОРЪ съ ВЕЛИКОЮ КНЯГИНЕЮ ЕКАТЕРИНОЮ ПАВЛОВНОЮ угощены новымъ Филемономъ и Бавкидою. Вдали видно паденіе Рейна, не весьма удачно написанное” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, pp. 142–43).
- 46 “Фамилія художника, выставившаго видъ окрестностей Шафгаузена, намъ не извѣстна” (Maikov and Saitov 1885, p. 438).

- 47 “Эта картина в настоящее время неизвестна” (Koshelev 1989, p. 445).
- 48 “Эта картина в настоящее время неизвестна. Сюжетом ее, судя по описанию Батюшкова, было вступление русских войск в швейцарский город (кантон) Шафгаузен [sic] в 1813 г. и радушный прием, оказанный Александру I местными жителями. Батюшков ассоциирует этот сюжет с греческим мифом о Филемоне и Бавкиде, дружелюбно угостивших Зевса и Гермеса” (Semenko 1977, p. 515).
- 49 He chose this day to commemorate the crossing of the Neman a year before when Russia ended the Patriotic War and started the Foreign Campaign as part of the Sixth Coalition against Napoleon.
- 50 “Пеизажъ, изображающій Рейнскій водопадъ при Шафгаузенѣ, съ хижиною, гдѣ Россійскій Императоръ и Великая Княгиня кушали у Швейцарскихъ крестьянъ.—Пенсіонера Академіи Щедрина” (Labzin 1814, p. 2; Beliaev 2016, p. 195).
- 51 “Любопытство влечетъ потомъ зрителя къ пеизажу Пенсіонера Академіи Г. Щедрина, представляющему ту бѣдную хижину въ Шафгаузенѣ при Рейнскомъ водопадѣ, гдѣ Россійскій Императоръ и Россійская Великая Княгиня, раздѣля гостеприимную трапезу съ бѣдными Швейцарскими крестьянами, осчастливили сихъ новыхъ Филемона и Бавкиду” (Labzin 1814, p. 4; Beliaev 2016, p. 198).
- 52 A 1815 authorial variant (copy) of this painting from the collection of Vasilii Khvoshchinsky, an attaché of the Russian Embassy in Rome (b. 1880–d. after 1915), is now kept in the Slavic Institute (Slovanský ústav) of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague (Atsarkina 1978, p. 26; Mikhailova 1984, p. 66).
- 53 “Что-нибудь объ искусствахъ, напримѣръ, опытъ о русскомъ ландшафтѣ” (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. II, p. 288).
- 54 “Мы замѣтили еще изъ воску барельефъ: обрученіе Ольги съ Игоремъ;—отдѣлка тщательная, но все вообще сухо” (Batiushkov 1814, p. 202).
- 55 “Игорь обручающійся съ Великою Княгиною Ольгою, вылѣпленный изъ воску, ученика 4 возраста Гайдукова” (Labzin 1814, p. 3; Beliaev 2016, p. 197).
- 56 “Пускай глаза наши [. . .] отдохнуть на произведеніи Г. Есакова. Вотъ его рѣзные камни: одинъ изображаетъ Геркулеса, бросающаго Юласа въ море, другой Кіевлянина переплывшаго Днѣпръ. Большая твердость въ рисунокъ!—Пожелаемъ искусному Художнику болѣе навыка, безъ котораго нѣтъ легкости и свободы въ отдѣлкѣ мѣлкихъ частей” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 145).
- 57 “ЮЛАС [. . .] 2.—Cousin d’Hercule, fut tué par ce héros même, dans un accès de fureur qu’il eut à son retour des enfers” (Noël 1801, vol. II, p. 72). Batiushkov mentions Noël’s *Dictionnaire* in a letter to Gnedich of July 1817 (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 455).
- 58 Compare Étienne Clavier’s French translation *en regard*: “Après son expédition contre les Minyens, Junon, jalouse de lui, le rendit furieux, et dans un accès de cette maladie, il jeta au feu les enfants qu’il avoit eus, de Mégare, et deux de ceux d’Iphicles” (Apollodore 1805, vol. I, p. 167), cf. “καὶ τῶν Ἰφίκλου δύο” (Ibid., p. 166).
- 59 “Группа, вырѣзанная на камнѣ, изображающая Геркулеса, повергающаго въ море отрока, принесшаго ему отъ Деяниры ядомъ отравленную рубашку, пансіонеромъ Есаковымъ” (Labzin 1813, p. 1938).
- 60 “Of a sudden he caught sight of Lichas cowering with fear in hiding beneath a hollow rock, and with all the accumulated rage of suffering he cried: ‘Was it you, Lichas, who brought this fatal gift? And shall you be called the author of my death?’ The young man trembled, grew pale with fear, and timidly attempted to excuse his act. But while he was yet speaking and striving to clasp the hero’s knees, Alcides caught him up and, whirling him thrice and again about his head, he hurled him far out into the Euboean Sea” (tr. by Frank Justus Miller).
- 61 The palazzo was demolished as late as 1903.
- 62 “Здѣсь вы видите Геркулеса Фарнезскаго, образецъ силы душевной и тѣлесной” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, p. 135). Leeds: “Look at the Hercules Farnese—what an image of strength, mental as well as bodily” (Batiushkov 1834, p. 524).
- 63 “Кіевлянинъ, спасшій Кіевъ отъ Печенеговъ, Геркулесъ и два портрета Государа Императора, вырѣзаны на камнѣ [. . .].—Академика Г. Есакова” (Labzin 1814, p. 3; Beliaev 2016, p. 197).
- 64 “Придоша печенѣзи на Руску землю первое [. . .] И оступиша печенѣзи градъ в силѣ велицѣ, бещисленное множество около града, и не бѣ льзѣ изъ града вылѣсти, ни вѣсти послати; изънемогаху же людье голодомъ и водою. Събрашеса людье оная страны Днѣпра в лодьяхъ, объ ону страну стояху, и не бѣ льзѣ внити в Кіевъ ни единому ихъ, ни изъ града къ онѣмъ. И вѣстужиша людье в градѣ и рѣша: «Нѣсть ли кого, иже бы могъ на ону страну дойти и рещи имъ: аще не подступите заутра, предатися имамъ печенѣгомъ?». И рече единъ отрокъ: «Азь преиду». И рѣша: «Иди». Онъ же изиде изъ града с уздою и ристаше сквозѣ печенѣги, глаголя: «Не видѣ ли коня никтоже?». Бѣ бо умѣя печенѣжски, и мняхуть ѥ своего. И яко приближися к рѣцѣ, свѣргъ порты сунуся въ Днѣпръ, и побреде. Видѣвше же печенѣзи, устремишася на нь, стрѣляюще его, и не могоша ему ничто же створити” (PVL 1950, p. 47).
- 65 “Пожалѣемъ объ этомъ искусномъ Художникѣ: ранняя смерть похитила съ нимъ хорошія надежды. *Изд.*” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, 145 fn.; Maikov and Saitov 1885, p. 439).
- 66 “Но съ какимъ удовольствіемъ смотрѣли мы на портреты Г. Кипренскаго, любимаго Живописца нашей публики! [. . .] «Видите ли, продолжалъ [Старожилловъ], видите ли, какъ образуются наши Живописцы? Скажите, чтобъ былъ Г.

Кипренский, если бы он не въездил в Париж, если бы ... »—«Он не был еще в Париж, ни в Рим, отвѣчал ему Художник»” (Batiushkov 1817, vol. I, pp. 146, 148).

67 “Земля классическая,” an expression Batiushkov applied to Olbia and Italy in his letters (see Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, pp. 424, 429, 515, 516).

68 “Это библиотека, музей древностей [...]. Чудесный, единственный город в мѣрѣ, онъ есть кладбище вселенной” (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 553).

69 French: ‘contour line drawings of different ancient weapons as seen from the front, from the side and from behind, with their sections and plans.’

70 “Его Высокоблагор[одио] К. Н. Батюшкову 10 Ноября 1818¹⁰. Наконецъ любезный мой Константинъ Николаевичъ скоро вступитъ на землю классическую, скоро увидитъ мѣста, гдѣ родились и скончались Данты, Тассы и Аріосты, гдѣ нѣкогда жили Цицероны, Горации, Виргилии, Юліи Кесари и Августы; но гдѣ жили также и Тиберіи и Клавдіи! Признаюсь желалъ бы я и самъ это увидѣть,—но во снѣ, потому что разъѣзжать не охотникъ, надѣясь на вашу дружбу ко мнѣ я увѣренъ, что мнѣ это вы все представите в вашихъ описаніяхъ такъ *точно* живо какъ будто бы я видѣлъ все это на яву. Чтобъ васъ не обременить излишнимъ здѣсь на первой случай писаніемъ, я рѣшилъ содержание моего къ вамъ письма наполнить единственно разными отъ меня порученіями в Италію, которыхъ исполненіе вы на себя приняли *ст* по дружбѣ вашей ко мнѣ *на себя принимаете исполнить*. Вотъ они всѣ по порядку: 1^е. Письмо отъ меня къ Г. Посланнику нашему в Римѣ Андрѣю Яковл[евичу] Италинскому при чемъ прошу васъ вручить ему одинъ экземп[ляр] портрета славнаго нашего Суворова гравирован[ный] искуснымъ нашимъ Уткинымъ; в письмѣ моемъ какъ вамъ извѣстно я говорю, чтобъ онъ дозволилъ вамъ объясниться по нѣкоторымъ моимъ предположеніямъ для пользы художества [въ] Россіи[.] Сіи предположенія будутъ упомянуты здѣсь в числѣ моихъ порученій. 2. Письмо къ Князю Григор[ію] Ив[ановичу] Гагарину и при ономъ также прошу портретъ Суворова вручить[.] Я къ нему писалъ, что вы примете на себя трудъ какъ живая грамота рассказать ему нашъ образъ жизни и мои хлопоты. Прошу покорнѣйше принять на себя трудъ это исполнить[.] 3^е[.] Любезному Оресту Адам[овичу] Кипренскому я не пишу потому что писалъ недавно съ посланными пенсіонерами Академіи и слѣдственно буду ожидать его отвѣта[.] между тѣмъ уговорите его не писать Аполлона Бельведерскаго какъ картину[.] Я могу ошибаться но мнѣ кажется что это не можетъ быть хорошо. Увѣдомьте меня какъ онъ тамъ живетъ какъ я нетерпѣливо желаю его здѣсь видѣть. Скажите ему про мой портретъ писанный Варникомъ. 4^е. Прошу покорнѣйше увидѣться съ отправленными мною пенсіонерами И.А.Х. и вручивъ имъ мое предписаніе объявить, что оно въ точности будетъ исполнено.—5. Прошу покорнѣйше узнать досконально, какъ говорятъ Поляки, можно ли имѣть въ Римѣ или въ друг[омъ] мѣстѣ Италіи гипс[овые] слѣпки съ колонны Трояна и Антонина, съ разныхъ барельефовъ триумфальныхъ воротъ, съ Тиберова памятника и съ разныхъ знаменитыхъ статуй и съ какихъ именно; что это можетъ стать на наши деньги, что будетъ стоить ихъ укладка и перевозка моремъ въ Петербургъ, къ какому времени могло бы это поспѣть естли бы я тотчасъ отвѣчалъ на ваше письмо и кому можно будетъ поручить исполненіе сего дѣла в Римѣ. 6^е[.] Прошу переговорить съ надежными людьми, съ нашимъ посланникомъ, съ Княземъ Гагаринимъ или съ кѣмъ вамъ угодно будетъ о учрежденіи в Римѣ à l’instar de l’academie de France à Rome *дома для питомцевъ Россіи[кой] Импер[аторской] Акад[еміи] Художествъ въ Римѣ*. Casa per i pensionarii della Imperiale Accademia delle Belle Arti di Russia, in Roma. Въ этомъ домѣ должно быть достаточное помѣщеніе для небольшого общаго Натурнаго класса[.] для шести мастерскихъ и къ нимъ по комнатѣ или по двѣ для шести питомцевъ, также достаточное помѣщеніе для инспектора съ семействомъ и съ домашнею прислугою, прошу покорнѣйше узнать что можетъ такой домъ стоить въ покупкѣ, что можетъ стать годовое его содержаніе[.] но все это прошу дѣлать безъ всякой огласки и какъ будто собственно отъ васъ единственно для вашего любопытства[.] 7. Прошу узнать кто именно в разныхъ Академіяхъ Италіян[скихъ] то есть Академіи [sic] Художествъ находятся теперь Начальниками[.] какъ ихъ зовутъ[.] какъ ихъ титулуютъ и куда къ нимъ писать. 8. Также прошу узнать кого теперь в Флоренціи[.] Римѣ и Неapolѣ почитаютъ отличнѣйшими художниками и лучшими антикваріями[.] какъ ихъ зовутъ и какъ къ нимъ писать. 9. Сверхъ того прошу убѣдительнѣйше узнать в Неapolѣ, можно ли имѣть вѣрные и подробные рисунки то есть: les dessins au trait des differentes armes antiques vus du face, de profil et par deriere, avec leurs coups et plans: съ древнихъ всѣхъ военныхъ оружій найденныхъ в Помпеи, Геркуланѣ, в древнихъ градахъ[.] в Нолѣ и в другихъ мѣстахъ[.] также рисунки со всякаго домашняго древняго скарба и орудій, равнымъ образомъ вѣрнѣйшія копіи в маломъ видѣ водяными красками съ нѣкоторыхъ живописныхъ

Геркуланскихъ картинъ по назначенію, а равнымъ образомъ можно ли имѣть гипсовые слѣпки съ разныхъ найденныхъ в Геркуланѣ статуй и въ особенности съ новооткрытой статуи Аристида[.] Наконецъ, 10^е, прошу покорнѣйше не оставлять меня извѣщеніями вашими о новыхъ открытіяхъ древностей по всей Италіи, Въ заключеніи сего мнѣ кажется нѣтъ нужды увѣрять васъ въ моей неизмѣнной къ вамъ преданности, время и случай это гораздо лучше докажутъ нежели пустяки слова. Будьте здоровы, не забывайте въ благограстворенномъ *и жаркомъ* климатѣ *бѣдныхъ* несчастныхъ насъ жителей на Севѣрѣ” (The State Archive of the Russian Federation (Moscow), fond 279, opis’ 1, delo 1161, fol. 9r–12v).

71 On its background and context, see (Perova 2005, pp. 34–39).

72 “Началъ весьма смѣлое дѣло: Аполлона, поразившаго Пифона. Я взялъ весь мотивъ да и всю осанку Аполлона Бельведерскаго; словомъ сего Аполлона переносу на картину, въ ту же самую величину” (RSL, fond 542, delo 527, fol. 8; Bruk and Petrova 1994, p. 134).

- 73 “[Кипренскій] еще не писалъ Аполлона и едва ли писать его станеть, развѣ изъ упрямства” (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 542).
- 74 “Я очень радъ что Кипренскій отстаетъ отъ своего Аполлона, но молчать надобно и это должно” (RSL, fond 211, karton 3619, delo I–3, fol. 1v; Bruk and Petrova 1994, p. 384; Petrova 1999, p. 138).
- 75 “Февраля 6-го дня нов: ст: г-н надворный советник Батюшков в проезд его чрез Рим вручил нам письмо, в коем предписано уведомлять Академию сверх постановленнаго сроку чаще, что с моей стороны и будет по временам исполняемо. На сей раз честь имею донести следующее: в Рим прибыли октября 15/27-го дня и получили жалование свое вперед за четыре месяца, считая с ноября 1-го нов: ст; сим порядком желает банкир производить нам выдачу пенсионна во все время нашего здесь пребывания” (Shchedrin 2014, p. 60).
- 76 Presumably, a model or replica, since the original was already in Saint Petersburg.
- 77 “Видѣлся съ художниками. Доложите графу Николаю Петровичу, что вручилъ его письмо Кановѣ и поклонился статуѣ Мира въ его мастерской. Она—ея лучшее украшеніе. Долго я говорилъ съ Кановою о графѣ Румянцовѣ, и мы оба отъ чистаго сердца пожелали ему долгоденствія и благоденствія. Воспитанникъ его подаетъ хорошую надежду; онъ, по словамъ Кипренскаго, очень трудится, рисуеть безпрестанно и желаетъ заплатить успѣхами дань должной признательности почтенному покровителю. Другіе воспитанники Академіи ведутъ себя отлично хорошо и меня, кажется, полюбили. [. . .] Съ княземъ Гагаринымъ я говорилъ о нихъ [. . .]. Скажу вамъ рѣшительно, что плата, имъ положенная, такъ мала, такъ ничтожна, что едва они могутъ содержать себя на приличной ногѣ. Здѣсь лакей, камердинеръ получаетъ болѣе. Художникъ не долженъ быть въ изобиліи, но и нищета ему опасна. Имъ не на что купить гипсу и не чѣмъ платить за натуру и модели. Дороговизна ужасная! Англичане наводнили Тоскану, Римъ и Неаполь; въ послѣднемъ еще дороже. Но и здѣсь втрое дороже нашего, если живешь въ трактирѣ, а домомъ едва ли не въ полтора или два раза. Кипренскій вамъ это засвидѣтельствуетъ” (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 540).
- 78 “Спасибо за обстоятельное подтвержденіе, о невозможности порядочно содержаться нашимъ пенсионерамъ въ Римѣ тѣмъ пенсиономъ, который я имъ назначилъ, хотя они въ двое ровно получаютъ противъ ихъ предмѣстниковъ.—Я это свѣдѣніе тотчасъ употреблю въ ихъ пользу” (RSL, fond 211, karton 3619, delo I–3, fol. 1v; Bruk and Petrova 1994, p. 384). A letter on 13 (25) March 1819.
- 79 “Я опомниться не могу, гдѣ же дешевища въ чужихъ краяхъ.—Вотъ и нынѣшнимъ пансионерамъ—и вы и Батюшковъ и они говорятъ, что надобно прибавить втрое, противъ прежняго[.] Итого не менѣе 2400^{xp} [sic] ассигнаціями въ годъ на каждого.—Вѣтъ они этаго неполучать возвратъ въ свояси!—А потому я и правъ, что рано посылать нашихъ въ чужіе краи” (RSL, fond 211, karton 3620, delo 5–b, fol. 1v–2r).
- 80 “. . . находясь в Риме, в столице изящных искусств, в благотворенном климате и под ясным небом Италии, где все их обворожает, все способствует их занятиям и наслаждениям, они получают от щедрот монарших на свое содержание значительные оклады, каких здесь они вскоре по своем возвращении никак не надеются иметь. Ибо самые заслуженные чиновники Академии, под руководством коих они образовались, получают оклады едва равняющиеся с третьею частию того, что упомянутым молодым художникам производится в год на их содержание, а другие несравненно менее, как то: ректоры не более 1350 рублей, профессоры старшие по 1000 руб., младшие по 800 руб., а адъюнкт-профессоры по 400 рублей, тогда как здесь все несравненно дороже, нежели в Италии” (qtd by Yevseyev in Shchedrin 2014, p. 19).
- 81 “При опредѣленіи [въ иностранную коллегію] получилъ чинъ надвор[наго] совѣтника и тысячу рублей жалованья съ курсомъ, что составляетъ около 5 тысячъ рублей, а иногда болѣе, да годовое жалованье на проѣздъ въ Неаполь” (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 525; 1989, vol. II, p. 511).
- 82 “. . . съ дополненіемъ вексельнаго курса, то есть считая рубль въ пятьдесятъ штиверовъ Голландскихъ” (Emperor’s Ordinance to the Collegium of Foreign Affairs on 24 February 1810, in the Senate Gazette 1810, p. 185).
- 83 “. . . Чиновниковъ нашихъ, въ чужихъ краяхъ по службѣ находящихся и получающихъ жалованье съ добавленіемъ вексельнаго курса въ 250 цѣнсовъ Нидерландскихъ . . . ” (Emperor’s Ordinance to the Collegium of Foreign Affairs on 23 February 1829, in the Complete Collection of the Laws 1830, p. 127).
- 84 See Nikolai Mordvinov’s “Measures to Correct Finances” (Mordvinov 1902, pp. 520–21).
- 85 As indicated in the abovementioned letter to Alexandra (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 526; 1989, vol. II, p. 511).
- 86 “При семъ письмо Батюшкова на имя ваше. Какъ я радъ былъ съ нимъ познакомиться[.] какой милой[.] пріятной, и интересной человѣкъ[.] Жаль что онъ насъ скоро покинетъ, спѣшить въ Неаполь” (RSL, fond 211, karton 3620, delo 5–a/2, fol. 2v; fragments published in Bruk and Petrova 1994, pp. 675–676).
- 87 “Батюшков в бытность свою в Риме оказывал мне всякия ласки, отправляясь, велел мне написать к нему: когда я захочу приехать в Неаполь, то чтоб дал ему знать наперед, и естли у него будет хоть одна лишняя комната, он мне оную уступит, в противном случае приготовит для меня все нужное, чем я постараюсь воспользоваться, ибо он пробудит там несколько лет при посольстве” (Shchedrin 2014, pp. 54–55; see Koshelev 1987, p. 270).
- 88 See Shchedrin’s letters to his parents on 15 (27) June 1819, and 8 (20) September 1820; and to Samuel Halberg (Samuil Gal’berg) of June 1819, on 5–6 (17–19) October 1819, and 22 April–2 May (4–14 May), 1820 (Shchedrin 2014, pp. 89, 170, 88, 120, 152).

- 89 “Санто-Лучиа набережна где я живу, так же многолюдна, как и Толеда, и надобно иметь привычку, что[бы] быть спокойну от шуму. Вы сами себе представьте весь ералаш, берег уставлен стойками, где лазароны продают устрицы и прочие морския гадины, также и рыбу, тут же находится колодезь с серной водой, трактиры, куда собираются ужинать только одно рыбное, и едят на открытом воздухе под моими окнами [. . .]: множество народу наполняют сию часть города, сверх того дорога сия ведет в Королевской сад, стук и шум самый сильной начинается в 6 часов, в которое время только мимо проезжают и проходят, не останавливаясь, пешие прогуливаются в саду, а в экипажах ездят по берегу до 8 часов. Вот уже на обратном пути начинается тревога, с колодца, где останавливаются пить вонючую серную воду [. . .]. Некоторые идут купаться в ванны, которые расставлены по берегу морскому, в 9 часов проходят музыканты [. . .], которые здесь чрезвычайно хороши в своем искусстве. В 10 часов садятся ужинать и часов до 12 я смотрю с удовольствием, как оне потчуют себя рыбами [. . .]. Ложась спать, я запираю жалюзи, после окошко, там ставни, и нет сил, немножко заснешь, чорт их подымет танцевать, [. . .] лежишь, лежишь, да встанешь смотреть на проклятых, а у них не только танцы, да и маскарад [. . .] и беспрестанно новья явления, которые невозможно упомнить, чтоб описывать со всем порядком” (Shchedrin 2014, p. 102). See also his letter to Halberg on July 6 (18), 1819 (Ibid., p. 94).
- 90 “Неаполь добыча всех ветров, и потому иногда бывает неприятен, особливо для новоприезжих. До сих пор не могу привыкнуть и к здешнему шуму, тем более что я живу в стороне города самой шумной, на краю S. Lucia[.] у окон моих вечная ярмонка, стук, и вопли, и крики, а в полдень (когда все улицы здесь пусты, как у нас в полночь) плескание волн и ветер. Напротив меня множество трактиров и купанья морские. На улице едят и пьют, так как у вас на Крестовском, с тою только разницею, что если сложить шум всего Петербурга с шумом всей Москвы, то и тут еще это все ничего в сравнении со здешним. [. . .] Но я не могу расстаться с этим местом, первое потому, что хозяйка французенка, комнаты мои веселы и чисты, и я один шаг от Сан-Карло [. . .]. От меня близок Толедо, здешний Невский проспект, все лавки, дворец и гулянье. Сии выгоды заставляют меня предпочесть шум другим невыгодам” (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. II, p. 550).
- 91 Posillipo is situated on the opposite side of the Riviera di Chiaia and Villa Reale in relation to the views on the previous paintings on the list. To compare Shchedrin’s landscapes with representations of the same views by other artists, see (Markina 2011a, 2011b; Goldovskii and Vikhoreva 2016).
- 92 “Щедрину заказываю картину: видъ съ паперти Жана Латранскаго” (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, p. 540).
- 93 “Я не въ Неаполѣ, а на островѣ Искіи, въ виду Неаполя; [. . .] наслаждаюсь великолѣпнѣйшимъ зрѣлищемъ въ мірѣ: предо мною въ отдаленіи Сорренто—колыбель того челоуѣка, которому я обязанъ лучшими наслажденіями въ жизни; потомъ Везувій, который ночью извергаетъ тихое пламя, подобное факелу; высоты Неаполя, увѣнчанныя замками; потомъ Гумы, гдѣ странствовалъ Эней, или Виргилій; Баія, теперь печальная, нѣкогда роскошная; Мизена, Пуццолі и въ концѣ горизонта—гряды горъ, отдѣляющихъ Кампанію отъ Аbruцo и Апуліи. Этимъ не ограниченъ видъ съ моей террасы: если обращу взоры къ сторонѣ сѣверной, то увижу Гаэту, вершины Террачины и весь берегъ, протягивающійся къ Риму и исчезающій въ синевѣ Тирренскаго моря. [. . .] Ночью небо покрывается удивительнымъ сіяніемъ; Млечный Путь здѣсь въ иномъ видѣ, несравненно яснѣе. [. . .] Природа—великій поэтъ, и я радуюсь, что нахожу въ сердцѣ моемъ чувство для сихъ великихъ зрѣлищъ” (Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. III, pp. 559–60; compare 1827, pp. 40–42).
- 94 “Thou art awakening, o Baia, from the grave, / with the appearance of Aurora’s rays, / but the purple dawn will not return to thee / the radiance of thy past days, / nor will it bring back the retreats of coolness, / where swarms of beauties luxuriate, / and never will thy porphyry colonnades / arise from the abyss of the blue waves!” (for other translations see Serman 1974, pp. 147–48; Lotman 1976, p. 141; France 2018, p. 207).
- 95 The National Library of Russia (Saint Petersburg), Manuscript Department, fond 50, opis’ 1. delo 14. Pace Koshelev (2000, p. 172), the inscription “Нарисовалъ и написалъ Конс. Никол. Батюшковъ” [Painted and written by Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov] is not from Batiushkov’s pen (Otchet IPB 1913, p. 163) and, therefore, does not form part of the verbal-graphic oeuvre.
- 96 Qtd in Russian translation from the German in (Koshelev 2000, pp. 163, 171; 1987, pp. 326–27) (all dates according to the Gregorian calendar).
- 97 “Картины его по содержанию и исполнению представляли что-то странное, даже иногда ребяческое; он выполнял их всеми возможными способами—вырезывал фигуры птиц и животных из бумаги и, раскрасив, наклеивал их на цветной фон, давал предметам совершенно неестественный колорит и пестрил свои акварели золотом и серебряною бумагой” (Vlasov 2002).
- 98 “Дома любимое его занятіе—живопись. Онъ пишетъ ландшафты. Содержаніе ландшафта почти всегда одно и тоже. Это элегія или баллада въ краскахъ: конь, привязанный къ колодцу, луна, дерево, болѣе ель, иногда могильный крестъ, иногда церковь. Ландшафты писаны очень грубо и нескладно. Ихъ дарить Батюшковъ тѣмъ, кого особенно любить, всего болѣе дѣтямъ” (Shevurev 1850, p. 110; Novikov 2005, pp. 227–28; Maikov 1896, pp. 234–36).
- 99 “Онъ часто рисуетъ картинки и больше красками, и то, что нарисуетъ, отдаетъ дѣтямъ. На картинкахъ его всегда одно и тоже изображеніе: блѣлая лошадь пьетъ воду; съ одной стороны дерева, раскрашенныя разными красками—желтой, зеленой и красной; тутъ же досталось иногда и лошади на долю; съ другой стороны замокъ; вдали море съ кораблями, темное небо и блѣдная луна” (qtd in Shevurev 1850, pp. 113–14; compare Novikov 2005, pp. 228–33; Maikov 1896, pp. 236–37; Koshelev 1987, p. 300; 2000, p. 175).

- 100 “Луна, крестъ и лошадь—вотъ непремѣнные принадлежности его ландшафтовъ” (qtd in Maikov 1896, p. 233).
- 101 “Ich brauche nicht erst zu sagen, dass eine so schwere und langwierige Krankheit allmählig alle Seelenkräfte lähmen musste. Der Kranke sagte selbst auf dem Sonnenstein mehrmals: „Ich bin kein Narr, das Gedächtnis hat man mir genommen, aber meine Vernunft habe ich noch“. Allein das Gedächtnis, als diejenige Seelenkraft, die am meisten unter allen an körperliche Bedingungen gebunden ist, scheint, obschon ebenfalls geschwächt, grade noch am regelmässigen bei ihm seine Verpflichtungen zu erfüllen. Zwar gehorcht es ebenfalls dem Despotismus der Einbildungskraft und tritt aus dem Kreise, der ihm von derselben vorgezeichnet wird, nicht leicht hinaus, aber in diesem Kreise trägt es der Malerin Farben aus längst verwichener Zeit zur Ausschmückung der mannigfachsten und buntesten Wahnbilder geschäftig zusammen” (Dietrich 1887, p. 345).
- 102 “Въ глазахъ моихъ безпрестанно мелькала колокольня, гдѣ покоилось тѣло лучшаго изъ людей, и сердце мое исполнилось горестію несказанною, которую ни одна слеза не облегчила. [. . .] На третій день, по взятіи Лейпцига, я [. . .] встрѣтилъ вѣрнаго слугу моего пріятели [. . .]. Онъ привелъ меня на могилу добраго господина. Я видѣлъ сію могилу изъ свѣжей земли насыпанную, я стоялъ на ней въ глубокой горести, и облегчилъ сердце мое слезами. Въ ней сокрыто было на вѣки лучшее сокровище моей жизни: дружество. Я просилъ, умоляя почтеннаго и престарѣлаго священника того селенія сохранить бранный памятникъ—простой деревянный крестъ, съ начертаніемъ имени храбраго юноши, въ ожиданіи прочнѣйшаго—изъ мрамора или гранита” (Batiushkov 1851, pp. 19–20).
- 103 “Все поле сраженія удержано нами и усѣяно мертвыми тѣлами. Ужасный и незабвенный для меня день! Первый гвардейскій егеръ сказалъ мнѣ, что Петинъ убить. [. . .] На лѣвой рукѣ отъ батарей, вдали была кирка. Тамъ погребень Петинъ, тамъ поклонился я свѣжей могилѣ и просилъ со слезами пастора, чтобъ онъ поберегъ прахъ моего товарища” (Batiushkov 1851, pp. 19–20).
- 104 “Эта колокольня, этотъ могильный крестъ и грезились Батюшкову до конца его долгой и несчастной жизни” (Bunakov 1874, p. 514; cf. Novikov 2005, p. 237).
- 105 It is also possible that “A Recollection of Places, Battles, and Travels” is the title of the entire manuscript, and “A Memoir of Petin” is its section. The autograph and the text of its other parts are lost.
- 106 Töplitz or Teplitz, now Teplice, Czech Republic.
- 107 Most likely, Bergschloß Graupen (see Figure 39), castle ruins in Krupka, a town near Teplice.
- 108 Geyersberg or Geiersberg (see Figures 40 and 41), now Kyšperk or Supí hora, castle ruins near Teplice.
- 109 Czech: Chlumeц.
- 110 “Я [. . .] переносишь въ Богемію, въ Теплицъ, къ развалинамъ Бергшлосса и Гайерсберга, около которыхъ стоялъ нашъ лагерь послѣ Кульмской побѣды. Одно воспоминаніе рождаётъ другое, какъ въ потокѣ одна струя рождаётъ другую. Весь лагерь воскресаетъ въ моемъ воображеніи, и тысячи мелкихъ обстоятельствъ оживляютъ мое воображеніе. Сердце мое утопаетъ въ удовольствіи: я сижу въ шалашѣ моего Петина, у подошвы высокой горы, увѣнчанной развалинами рыцарскаго замка. Мы одни. Разговоры наши откровенны [. . .]. Вотъ что рождаютъ во мнѣ башни и развалины К[аменца]: сладкія воспоминанія о лучшихъ временахъ жизни! Пріятели мои уснуль геройскимъ сномъ на кровавыхъ поляхъ Лейпцига [. . .], но дружество и благодарность запечатлѣли его образъ въ душѣ моей” (Batiushkov 1851, pp. 9–10).
- 111 On Pyotr Ivanovich Beletsky (b. 1819–d. 1870) and his relationship with Batiushkov, see (Misailidi 2020, pp. 49–51).
- 112 Italian: ‘I pay my debts.’
- 113 “За письмо Ваше я благодаренъ, равномѣрно за подарочекъ портретомъ Наполеона: ему молюсь ежедневно; pago debiti miei. Да царствуетъ онъ снова во Франціи, Испаніи и Португаліи, нераздѣлимой и вѣчной имперіи Французской, его обожающей и его почтенное семейство! [. . .] Читая мои прогулки въ Академіи художествъ, я желаю съ вами увидѣть тамъ портретъ благодѣтеля вселенной Наполеона, живописи нашихъ русскихъ мастеровъ, достойный ихъ пресловутой кисти, которая да не боится брюзги Старожилова. Великіе океаны, покорные Франціи, и земли ея съ гражданами счастливыми благословятъ сей образъ великаго императора Наполеона. Въ ожиданіи сей новой моей прогулки въ Академію художествъ, которую приглашаю васъ самихъ описать, и пожелавъ вамъ возможныхъ благъ, пребуду вѣрный вамъ доброжелатель *Константинъ Батюшковъ*” (Batiushkov 1883, pp. 551–52; Batiushkov 1885–1887, vol. I, p. 592; Batiushkov 1989, vol. II, pp. 589–90). The holograph is in the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Saint Petersburg), Manuscript Department, fond 265, opis’ 2, delo 244.
- 114 “Константинъ Николаевичъ Батюшковъ. Пріятный стихотворецъ и добрый человекъ.[.] Посмотрите въ двадцать лѣтъ / Блѣдность щеки покрываетъ.” The holograph is in the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Saint Petersburg), Manuscript Department, fond 244, opis’ 1, delo 1736. On the context and dating see (Terebenina 1968, pp. 6–9).
- 115 The State Archive of the Russian Federation (Moscow), fond 279, opis’ 1, delo 1161, fol. 3r–5r (a draft).
- 116 Ibid., fol. 6r–8v (a draft); RSL, fond 211, karton 3620, delo 5–b (a copy).
- 117 RSL, fond 211, karton 3619, delo I–3 (a copy).
- 118 RSL, fond 211, karton 3620, delo 5–a/2.
- 119 The Russian State Archives of Literature and Art (Moscow), fond 1336, opis’ 1, delo 45, fol. 39.

References

- Aldrich, Robert. 1993. *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Andreeva, Ekaterina. 2017. O znachenii kolleksii gipsovykh "antikov" Imperatorskoi Akademii khudozhestv dlia vospriiatiia i rasprostraneniia idei I. I. Vinkel'mana v Rossii/Die Bedeutung der Sammlung von "Gipsantiken" der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Künste für die Rezeption und Verbreitung der Ideen von J. J. Winckelmann in Russland. In *Drevnost' i klassitsizm: Nasledie Vinkel'mana v Rossii/Antike und Klassizismus—Winckelmanns Erbe in Russland: Akten des internationalen Kongresses St. Petersburg 30 September–1 Oktober 2015*. Edited by Max Kunze and Konstantin Lappo-Danilevskij. Mainz and Ruppolding: Franz Philipp Rutzen, pp. 117–31.
- Apollodore. 1805. *Bibliothèque d'Apollodore l'Athénien*. Traduction nouvelle, par M. [Étienne] Clavier. Avec le texte grec revu et corrigé, des Motes et une Table analytique, 2 vols. Paris: Delance et Lesueur.
- Atsarkina, Esfir'. 1978. *Sil'vestr Shchedrin, 1791–1830*. Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Bunakov, Nikolai. 1874. Batiushkov v Vologde. Zаметki k ego biografii. *Russkii vestnik* 112: 503–18.
- Baluev, Sergei. 2015. *Kritika izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva na nachal'nykh etapakh stanovleniia russkoi khudozhestvennoi shkoly*. Saint Petersburg: Knizhnyi dom.
- Bartsch, Shadi, and Jaś Elsner, eds. 2007. *Classical Philology* 102, No. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Batiushkov, Konstantin. 1814. Progulka v Akademii Khudozhestv. Pis'mo starogo Moskovskogo zhitelia k priiateliu, v derevniu ego N. *Syn Otechestva* 18: 121–32, 161–76, 201–15.
- Batiushkov, Konstantin. 1817. *Opyty v Stikhakh i Proze*. 2 vols. Saint Petersburg: N. Grech.
- Batiushkov, Konstantin. 1827. Pis'ma K. N. Batiushkova. In *Pamiatnik Otechestvennykh Muz.* Edited by Boris Fedorov. Saint Petersburg: Aleksandr Smirdin, pp. 24–46.
- Batiushkov, Konstantin. 1834. A Visit in the Academy of Arts. [Translated by William Henry Leeds]. *Arnold's Magazine of the Fine Arts, and Journal of Literature and Science* 3: 451–56, 522–29.
- Batiushkov, Konstantin. 1851. Vospominanie mest, srazhenii i puteshestvii. I; II. Vospominanie o Petine. *Moskvitianin* 5: 8–20.
- Batiushkov, Konstantin. 1883. Stikhi, zametki i pis'ma K. N. Batiushkova v sumashestvii. *Russkaia Starina* 39: 551–52.
- Batiushkov, Konstantin. 1885–1887. *Sochineniia*. 3 vols. Saint Petersburg: P. N. Batiushkov.
- Batiushkov, Konstantin. 1934. *Sochineniia*. Moscow and Leningrad: Academia.
- Batiushkov, Konstantin. 1989. *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*. 2 vols. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura.
- Batiushkov, Konstantin. 2002. A stroll to the Academy of Arts: A letter from an old Muscovite to his friend in the village of N. (1814). Translated by Carol Adlam. Notes by Carol Adlam and Robert Russell. Available online: <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/rva/texts/batiushkov/bat01/bat01.html> (accessed on 4 October 2022).
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Beliaev, Nikolai, ed. 2016. *Torzhestvennye publichnye sobraniia i otchetny Imperatorskoi Akademii khudozhestv (1765, 1767–1770, 1772–1774, 1776, 1779, 1794, 1802–1815)*. Saint Petersburg: The Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences.
- Belinsky, Vissarion. 1954. Portretnaia i biograficheskaia gallereia slovesnosti, khudozhestv i iskusstv v Rossii. 1. Sankt-Peterburg: Karl Krai, 1841. In his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13 tomakh*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, vol. 4, pp. 574–76.
- Belinsky, Vissarion. 1955. Sochineniia Aleksandra Pushkina. Sanktpeterburg. Odinnadtsat' tomov. MDCCCXXXVIII–MDCCCXLI. Stat'ia tret'ia. In his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13 tomakh*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, vol. 7, pp. 223–65.
- Belting, Hans. 2001. *The Invisible Masterpiece*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Bestuzhev, Aleksandr. 1820. Pis'mo k izdateliu. *Syn Otechestva* 65: 157–72.
- Blagoi, Dmitrii. 1934a. Kommentarii. In *Batiushkov* 1934: 433–608.
- Blagoi, Dmitrii. 1934b. Slovar' sobstvennykh i mifologicheskikh imen. In *Batiushkov* 1934: 619–720.
- Blagoi, Dmitrii. 1934c. Sud'ba Batiushkova. In *Batiushkov* 1934: 7–39.
- Blunt, Anthony. 1974. Jacques Stella, the de Masso Family and Falsifications of Poussin. *The Burlington Magazine* 116: 744–51.
- Bocharov, Ivan, and Irina Glushakova. 1990. *Kiprenskii*. (Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei 710). Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia.
- Bogdan, Veronika-Irina. 2017. Znachenie proizvedenii A. R. Mengsa (Sobranie Imperatorskoi Akademii Khudozhestv) v protsesse podgotovki khudozhnikov/Die Bedeutung der Werke von A. R. Mengs (Sammlung der kaiserlichen Kunstakademie) für die Ausbildung von Künstlern. In *Drevnost' i klassitsizm: Nasledie Vinkel'mana v Rossii/Antike und Klassizismus—Winckelmanns Erbe in Russland: Akten des internationalen Kongresses St. Petersburg 30 September–1 Oktober 2015*. Edited by Max Kunze and Konstantin Lappo-Danilevskij. Mainz and Ruppolding: Franz Philipp Rutzen, pp. 133–42.
- Braginskaia, Nina. 1977. Ekfrasis kak tip teksta (k probleme strukturnoi klassifikatsii). In *Slavianskoe i balkanskoe yazykoznanie: Karpato-vostochnoslavianskie paralleli. Struktura balkanskogo teksta*. Edited by Tamara Sudnik and Tat'iana Tsiv'ian. Moscow: Nauka, pp. 259–83.
- Bruk, Yakov, and Evgenia Petrova, eds. 1994. *Orest Kiprenskii: Perepiska. Dokumenty. Svidetel'stvo sovremennikov*. Saint Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB.
- Buckler, Julie A. 2018. *Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and Cityshape*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Chekalova, Irina. 2008. Pis'mo vnuchatoi plemiannitsy K. N. Batiushkova E. L. Sheiber. *Russkaia Literatura* 2: 106–14.
- Complete Collection of the Laws. 1830. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii. Sobranie vtoroe. Vol. 4 (1829)*. Saint Petersburg: The Second Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery.

- Cross, Anthony. 2012. William Henry Leeds and Early British Responses to Russian Literature. In *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture*. Edited by Anthony Cross. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, pp. 53–68.
- DAF. 1762. *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 4^e éd. ed. 2 vols. Paris: La Veuve de Bernard Brunet, imprimeur de l'Académie française.
- DAF. 1798. *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 5^e éd. ed. 2 vols. Revu, corrigé et augmenté par l'Académie elle-même. Paris: J. J. Smits et C^e.
- DAF. 1835. *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 6^e éd. ed. 2 vols. Paris: Firmin Didot frères, imprimeurs de l'Institut de France.
- Dahl [Dal'], Vladimir. 1862. *Poslovitsy russkogo naroda: Sbornik poslovits, pogovorok, rechenii, prislovii, chistogovorok, pribautok, zagadok, poverii i proch.* Moscow: V Universitetskoi tipografii.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1994. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Delille, Jacques. 1806. *L'Imagination: Poème en VIII chants*. 2 vols. Accompagné de notes historiques et littéraires [par Joseph Esménard]. Paris: Giguët et Michaud.
- Denisenko, Sergei, and Sergei Fomichev, eds. 1996. *Pushkin. Risunki. Volume 18 (additional) of Aleksandr Pushkin's Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 17 tomakh*. Moscow: Voskresen'e.
- Denisenko, Sergei, and Sergei Fomichev, eds. 2001. *Pushkin risuet: Grafika Pushkina*. Saint Petersburg: Notabene. New York: Tumanov & K^o.
- Denisenko, Sergei, ed. 2000. *Risunki pisatelei: Sbornik nauchnykh statei po materialam konferentsii "Risunki peterburgskikh pisatelei"*. Saint Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt.
- Dietrich, Anton. 1887. Über die Krankheit des Russisch-Kaiserlichen Hofrathes und Ritters Herrn Konstantin Batuschkoff. In *Sochineniia Konstantina Batiushkova*. vol. 1, 1st pagination. Saint Petersburg: P. N. Batiushkov, pp. 334–53, Written in 1829.
- Dmitrieva, Ekaterina. 2019. Klassika, klassitsizm, Vinkel'man i Rossiia: Istoricheskaiia metafizika prekrasnogo. *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 155: 370–83.
- Duganov, Rudol'f, ed. 1988. *Risunki russkikh pisatelei XVII—nachala XX veka/Pictorial Souvenirs of Russian Writers from the 17th to the Early 20th Centuries*. Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia.
- DWB. 1907. *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*. vol. 10, part. 2, fasc. 4 (Stählen–Stand) and 5 (Stand – Stark). Edited by H. Meyer and B. Crome. Leipzig: S. Hirzel.
- Efros, Abram. 1930. *Risunki poeta*. Moscow: Federatsiia.
- Efros, Abram. 1933. *Risunki poeta*, 2nd rev. and enlarged ed. Moscow: Academia.
- Efros, Abram. 1945. *Avtoportrety Pushkina*. Moscow: Goslitmuzei.
- Efros, Abram. 1946. *Pushkin portretist: Dva etiuda*. Moscow: Goslitmuzei.
- Fitzgerald, William. 2022. *The Living Death of Antiquity: Neoclassical Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- France, Peter. 2018. *Writings from the Golden Age of Russian Poetry: Konstantin Batiushkov*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fridman, Nikolai. 1965. *Proza Batiushkova*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Fridman, Nikolai. 1971. *Poeziia Batiushkova*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Gallo, Daniela. 2009. The Galerie des Antiques of the Musée Napoléon: A New Perception of Ancient Sculpture? In *Napoleon's Legacy: The Rise of National Museums in Europe, 1794–1830*. Edited by Elinoor Bergvelt, Debora J. Meijers, Lieske Tibbe and Elsa van Wezel. (Berliner Schriftenreihe zur Museumsforschung 27). Berlin: G. & H. Verlag, pp. 111–23.
- Gnedich, Nikolai. 1817. Pis'mo k B[atiuskovu] o statue Mira, izvaiannoi dlia Grafa Nikolaia Petrovicha Rumiantsova Skul'ptorom Kanovoiu v Rime. *Syn Otechestva* 37: 41–53.
- Gnedich, Nikolai. 1820. Akademiia Khudozhestv. Sentiabria 7, 1820. *Syn Otechestva* 64: 205–26, 255–77, 299–316.
- Goldovskii, Grigorii, and Lada Vikhoreva. 2016. *Sil'vestr Shchedrin i shkola Pozzillipo*. Saint Petersburg: GRM [State Russian Museum].
- Golenishchev-Kutuzov, Il'ia. 1971. *Tvorchestvo Dante i mirovaia kul'tura*. Moscow: Nauka.
- González, Manuel Caballero. 2020. New Representations of Hercules' Madness in Modernity: The Depiction of Hercules and Lichas. In *The Exemplary Hercules from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and Beyond*. Edited by Valerie Main and Emma Stafford. (Metaforms 20). Leiden and Boston: Brill, pp. 320–45.
- Gorokhova, Raisa. 1975. Iz istorii vospriiatiia Ariosto v Rossii (Batiushkov i Ariosto). In *Epokha romantizma: Iz istorii mezhdunarodnykh sviazei russkoi literatury*. Edited by Mikhail Alekseev. Leningrad: Nauka, pp. 236–72.
- Grech, Nikolai. 1822. *Opyt kratkoi istorii russkoi literatury*. Saint Petersburg: N. Grech.
- Greenleaf, Monika. 1998. Found in Translation: The Subject of Batiushkov's Poetry. In *Russian Subjects: Empire, Nation, and the Culture of the Golden Age*. Edited with an Introduction by Monika Greenleaf and Steven Moeller-Sally. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, pp. 51–79.
- Griener, Pascal. 1998. *L'esthétique de la traduction: Winckelmann, les langues et l'histoire de l'art (1755–1784)*. Genève: Droz.
- Grishina, Ekaterina, ed. 1989. *Nauchno-issledovatel'skii muzei Akademii khudozhestv SSSR*. Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo.
- Guiffrey, Jules-Joseph. 1877. Testament et Inventaire des biens: Tableaux, dessins, planches de cuivre, bijoux, etc. de Claudine Bouzonnet Stella, rédigés et écrits par elle-même. 1693–1697. *Nouvelles archives de l'art Français 1877*: 1–117.
- Halberg, Samuel Friedrich [Gal'berg, Samuil]. 1884. *Skul'ptor Samuil Ivanovich Gal'berg v ego zagranichnykh pis'makh i zapiskakh 1818–1828*. Edited by Vladimir Eval'd. (Vestnik iziashchnykh iskusstv 2: Supplement). Saint Petersburg: M. M. Stasiulevich.
- Harloe, Katherine. 2007. Allusion and Ekphrasis in Winckelmann's Paris Description of the Apollo Belvedere. *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 53: 229–52. [CrossRef]

- Harloe, Katherine. 2013. *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity: History and Aesthetics in the Age of Altertumswissenschaft*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harloe, Katherine. 2018. Winckelmania: Hellenomania between ideal and experience. In *Hellenomania*. Edited by Katherine Harloe, Nicoletta Momigliano and Alexandre Farnoux. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp. 40–55.
- Heffernan, James A. W. 1991. Ekphrasis and Representation. *New Literary History* 22: 297–316. [CrossRef]
- Heffernan, James A. W. 1993. *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Heller, Leonid, ed. 2002. *Ekfrasis v russkoi literature: Trudy Lozanskogo simpoziuma*. Moscow: MIK.
- Jakobson, Roman. 1959. On Linguistic Aspects of Translation. In *On Translation*. Edited by Reuben A. Brower. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 232–39.
- Johns, Christopher M. S. 1998. *Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Kondakov, Sergei. 1915. *Spisok russkikh khudozhnikov k Yubileinomu spravochniku Imperatorskoi Akademii Khudozhestv*. (Yubileinyi spravochnik Imperatorskoi Akademii Khudozhestv 1764–1914, part 2: Chast' biograficheskaja). Saint Petersburg: R. Golike i A. Vil'borg.
- Koshelev, Viacheslav. 1987. *Konstantin Batiushkov: Stranstviia i strasti*. Moscow: Sovremennik.
- Koshelev, Viacheslav. 1989. Kommentarii. In *Batiushkov 1989*. vol. 1, pp. 437–86.
- Koshelev, Viacheslav. 2000. O risunkakh K. N. Batiushkova. In *Risunki pisatelei: Sbornik nauchnykh statei po materialam konferentsii "Risunki peterburgskikh pisatelei"*. Edited by Sergei Denisenko. Saint Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, pp. 160–78.
- Kovalevskaia, Elena, ed. 1964. *Mikhail Yur'evich Lermontov: Kartiny i risunki poeta. Illiustratsii k ego proizvedeniiam: Al'bom reproduksii*. Moscow and Leningrad: Sovetskii khudozhnik.
- Kovalevskaia, Elena, ed. 1980. *Lermontov: Kartiny. Akvareli. Risunki: Al'bom reproduksii*. Introduction by Iraklii Andronikov. Notes by Irena Zhelvakova. Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo.
- Krieger, Murray. 1967. Ekphrasis and the Still Movement of Poetry; or, Laokoön Revisited. In *The Poet as Critic*. Edited by Frederick P. W. McDowell. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, pp. 3–26.
- Krieger, Murray. 1992. *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kruglova, Valeria. 1982. *Vasilii Kuz'mich Shebuev (1777–1855)*. Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Labzin, Aleksandr. 1813. Opisanie torzhestvennogo sobraniia Imperatorskoi Akademii Khudozhestv, byvshego Sentiabria 1go dnia 1813 goda. *Moskovskie Vedomosti* 75: 1938–45, Reprinted in *Beliaev* 2016: 181–93.
- Labzin, Aleksandr. 1814. Opisanie torzhestvennogo sobraniia Imperatorskoi Akademii Khudozhestv 1814 goda. *Sanktpeterburgskie Vedomosti* 79: 1–10, Reprinted in *Beliaev* 2016: 194–206.
- Lange, Victor. 1982. *The Classical Age of German Literature, 1740–1815*. New York: Holmes & Meier.
- Lappo-Danilevskij, Konstantin. 1999. Die Anfänge der Winckelmann-Rezeption in Rußland. *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie* 58: 293–311.
- Lappo-Danilevskij, Konstantin. 2007. *Gefühl für das Schöne. Johann Joachim Winckelmanns Einfluss auf Literatur und ästhetisches Denken in Russland*. Köln, Weimar and Wien: Böhlau.
- Lappo-Danilevskij, Konstantin. 2013. Druzheskoe literaturnoe pis'mo: Spetsifika, istoki. In *XVIII vek*. Saint Petersburg: Nauka, vol. 27, pp. 121–53.
- Lappo-Danilevskij, Konstantin. 2017. Russische Winckelmann-Rezeption: Chronologie und Spezifika/Russkaia retseptsiia idei I. I. Vinkel'mana: Khronologii i spetsifika. In *Drevnost' i klassitsizm: Nasledie Vinkel'mana v Rossii/Antike und Klassizismus—Winckelmanns Erbe in Russland: Akten des internationalen Kongresses St. Petersburg 30 September–1 Oktober 2015*. Edited by Max Kunze and Konstantin Lappo-Danilevskij. Mainz and Ruppolding: Franz Philipp Rutzen, pp. 11–38.
- Leeds, William Henry. 1828. Opüit Kratkoi Istorii Ruskoi Literaturüi, &c. (A Sketch of Russian Literature.) By Nicholas Ivanovich Grech. St. Petersburg, 1822. *The Foreign Review, and Continental Miscellany* 2: 218–22.
- Leeds, William Henry. 1832. Opüite v' Stikhakh i Prose Konstantina Batiushkova. (Essays in Poetry and Prose, by Constantine Batiushkov.) in 2 vols. St. Petersburg, 1817. *The Foreign Quarterly Review* 9: 279–309.
- Leppmann, Wolfgang. 1970. *Winckelmann*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Longinov, Mikhaïl. 1857. Bibliograficheskie zapiski. XXXV: Nenapechatannye stikhi Batiushkova. *Sovremennik* 62: V.82.
- Lotman, Yury. 1976. *Analysis of the Poetic Text*. Edited and Translated by D. Barton Johnson. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Lund, Hans. 1992. *Text as Picture: Studies in the Literary Transformation of Pictures*. Translated by Kacke Gotrick. Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Mah, Harold. 2003. *Enlightenment Phantasies: Cultural Identity in France and Germany, 1750–1914*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Maikov, Leonid, and Vladimir Saitov. 1885. Primechaniia. In *Sochineniia Konstantina Batiushkova*. Saint Petersburg: P. N. Batiushkov, vol. 2, pp. 375–547.
- Maikov, Leonid, and Vladimir Saitov. 1886. Primechaniia. In *Sochineniia Konstantina Batiushkova*. Saint Petersburg: P. N. Batiushkov, vol. 3, pp. 595–776.
- Maikov, Leonid. 1885. Primechaniia dopolnitel'nyia. In *Sochineniia Konstantina Batiushkova*. Saint Petersburg: P. N. Batiushkov, vol. 2, pp. 559–68.
- Maikov, Leonid. 1896. *Batiushkov: Ego zhizn' i sochineniia*, 2nd rev. ed. Saint Petersburg: A. F. Marks.

- Markina, Lyudmila. 2011a. "O dolce Napoli": Neapol' glazami russkikh i ital'ianskikh khudozhnikov pervoi poloviny XIX veka/O dolce Napoli': Naples through the Eyes of Russian and Italian Artists of the First Half of the 19th Century. *The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine/Tret'iakovskaia Galereia* 33: 5–17.
- Markina, Lyudmila, ed. 2011b. "O dolce Napoli": Neapol' glazami russkikh i ital'ianskikh khudozhnikov pervoi poloviny XIX veka. Moscow: GTG [State Tretyakov Gallery].
- Mengs, Anton Raphael. 1762. *Gedanken über die Schönheit und den Geschmack in der Malerey*. Edited by J. Caspar Fuessli. Zürich: Heidegger und Compagnie.
- Mikhailova, Kira. 1980. Kartina S. F. Shchedrina "Aleksandr I u Shafgauzenskogo vodopada" (k voprosu o peterburgskom periode tvorchestva khudozhnika). In *Sovremennyyi khudozhestvennyi muzei: Problemy deiatel'nosti i perspektivy razvitiia*. Edited by Larisa Novozhilova. Leningrad: State Russian Museum, pp. 99–110.
- Mikhailova, Kira. 1984. *Sil'vestr Feodosievich Shchedrin, 1791–1830*, 2nd ed. Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR.
- Misailidi, Liudmila. 2017. Relikvii K. N. Batiushkova v sobranii Pushkinskogo Doma. In "Moi penaty." *Russkaia provintsia i ee rol' v istorii kul'tury: Sbornik materialov po itogam Vserossiiskoi nauchnoi konferentsii (Vologda, 29–30 maia 2017 g.)*. Edited by Irina Kolesova. Vologda: I. V. Babushkin Vologda Regional Universal Scientific Library, pp. 51–57.
- Misailidi, Liudmila. 2020. "Sobstvennost' sleptsya G. I. Shiriaeva": Iz istorii formirovaniia batiushkovskikh fondov v Pushkinskom Dome. In *Ezhegodnik Rukopisnogo otdela na 2020 god*. Edited by Tat'iana Tsar'kova. Saint Petersburg: Rodnik, pp. 44–55.
- Mitchell, W. J. Thomas. 1994. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Monakhova, Elena. 2008. "Stikhotvoreniia dlia glaza": K voprosu o risunkakh K. N. Batiushkova iz sobraniia Literaturnogo muzeia Instituta russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii Dom) RAN. In *Konstantin Batiushkov: Epokha. Poeziia. Sud'ba*. 2 vols. Edited by Sergei Tikhomirov. Vol. 1: Issledovaniia i materialy. Vologda: Knizhnoe nasledie, pp. 139–48.
- Mordvinov, Nikolai. 1902. Mery k ispravleniiu finansov. In *Arkhiv grafov Mordvinovykh*. Edited by Vasilii Bil'basov. Saint Petersburg: I. N. Skorokhodov, vol. 4, pp. 517–30, Written in 1812.
- Morrison, Jeffrey. 1997. Johann Joachim Winckelmann: The Body in Question. In *Text Into Image, Image Into Text: Proceedings of the Interdisciplinary Bicentenary Conference Held at St. Patrick's College Maynooth (the National University of Ireland) in September 1995*. Edited by Jeff Morrison and Florian Krobb. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, pp. 39–46.
- Mortier, Roland. 1974. *La poétique des ruines en France: Ses origines, ses variations de la Renaissance à Victor Hugo*. Geneva: Droz.
- Mroz, Elena. 1947. *Aleksei Egorovich Egorov, 1776–1851*. Moscow and Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Müller, Karl [Müllerus, Carolus], ed. 1848–1853. *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*. 4 vols. Paris: Ambrosio Firmin Didot.
- Naryshkina, Natalia. 1987. *Khudozhestvennaia kritika pushkinskoi pory*. Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR.
- Noël, François, and François Delaplace, eds. 1804. *Leçons de littérature et de morale, Ou Recueil, en prose et en vers, des plus beaux Morceaux de notre Langue, dans la Littérature des deux derniers siècles*. 2 vols. Paris: Le Normant.
- Noël, François, and François Delaplace, eds. 1808. *Leçons de littérature et de morale, Ou Recueil, en prose et en vers, des plus beaux Morceaux de notre Langue, dans la Littérature des deux derniers siècles*, 3^e éd. 2 vols. Revue et augmentée. Paris: Le Normant; H. Nicolle.
- Noël, François, and François Delaplace, eds. 1813. *Leçons de littérature et de morale, Ou Recueil, en prose et en vers, des plus beaux Morceaux de notre Langue, dans la Littérature des deux derniers siècles*, 6^e éd. 2 vols. Paris: Le Normant; H. Nicolle.
- Noël, François, ed. 1801. *Dictionnaire de la Fable, Ou Mythologie Grecque, Latine, Égyptienne, Persanne, Syriaque, Indienne, Chinoise, Scandinave, Africaine, Américaine, Iconologique, etc.* 2 vols. Paris: Le Normant.
- Novikov, Nikolai. 2005. K. N. Batiushkov pod gnetom dushevnoi bolezni: Istoriko-literaturnyi psikhologicheskii ocherk. Arzamas: AGPI (Arzamas State Pedagogical Institute), Written in 1884.
- Orekhov, Boris. 2013. "Ne Apollon, no ia kuiu sei tsepi zven'ia . . . ": Pozdnie stikhi Batiushkova v svete korpusnykh dannykh. In *Korpusnyi analiz russkogo stikha*. Edited by Vladimir Plungian and Larisa Shestakova. Moscow: Azbukovnik, pp. 157–71.
- Otchet IPB. 1913. *Otchet Imperatorskoi Publichnoi Biblioteki za 1906 god*. Saint Petersburg: Imperial Public Library.
- Ouvaroff, Serguei. 1817. Essais en vers et en prose par M. Batuchkoff. *Le Conservateur impartial* 83: 414.
- Perova, Evgenia. 2005. Byl mal, byl velik: Iogann Genrikh Shmidt—avtor znamenitykh pastelei. *Mir muzeia* 211: 34–39.
- Petrova, Evgenia. 1999. Risunok Oresta Kiprenskogo "Apollon, porazivshii Pifona". In *Stranitsy istorii otechestvennogo iskusstva*. Vol. 4: XVIII—pervaia polovina XIX veka. Saint Petersburg: Palace Editions, pp. 127–41.
- Pigarev, Kirill. 1966. *Russkaia literatura i izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo (XVIII—pervaia chetvert' XIX v.)*: Ocherki. Moscow: Nauka.
- Pigarev, Kirill. 1972. *Russkaia literatura i izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo (Ocherki o russkom natsional'nom peizazhe serediny XIX v.)*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Pilshchikov, Igor. 1994a. Batiushkov and French Critics of Tasso. *Essays in Poetics* 19.2: 114–25.
- Pilshchikov, Igor. 1994–1995. Literaturnye tsiaty i alliuzii v pis'makh Batiushkova (Kommentarii k akademicheskomu kommentariiu). *Philologica* 1: 205–39.
- Pilshchikov, Igor. 2003. *Batiushkov i literatura Italii: Filologicheskie razyskaniia*. Moscow: Yazyki slavianskoi kul'tury.
- Pilshchikov, Igor. 2006. Tibullovyy elegii v perevode Batiushkova: Materialy dlia akademicheskogo kommentariia. In *Tekst i kommentarii: Kruglyi stol k 75-letiiu Viacheslava Vsevolodovicha Ivanova*. Edited by Vladimir Toporov. Moscow: Nauka, pp. 267–336.
- Pilshchikov, Igor, and T. Henry Fitt. 1999. Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov. In *Russian Literature in the Age of Pushkin and Gogol: Poetry and Drama*. Edited by Christine A. Rydel. (Dictionary of Literary Biography 205). Detroit, Washington, DC and London: Brucoli Clark Layman and The Gale Group, pp. 20–37.
- Pletnev, Pyotr. 1817. O sochineniakh g. Batiushkova. *Vestnik Evropy* 96: 204–8.

- Pommier, Édouard. 1989. Winckelmann et la vision de l'antiquité classique dans la France des Lumières et de la Révolution. *Revue de l'art* 83: 9–20.
- Pommier, Édouard. 2003. *Winckelmann, inventeur de l'histoire de l'art*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Potts, Alex. 1991. Vie et mort de l'art antique: Historicité et beau idéal chez Winckelmann. In *Winckelmann: La naissance de l'histoire de l'art à l'époque des Lumières*. Edited by Édouard Pommier. Paris: Winckelmann, pp. 9–38.
- Potts, Alex. 1994. *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- PVL. 1950. *Povest' vremennykh let. Part 1: Tekst i perevod. (Literaturnye pamiatniki)*. Edited by Dmitrii Likhachev. Translated by Dmitrii Likhachev, and Boris Romanov. Moscow and Leningrad: The Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences.
- Rosenblum, Robert. 1969. *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rozanov, Matvei. 1928. Pushkin i Dante. *Pushkin i ego sovremenniki: Materialy i issledovaniia* 37: 11–41.
- RPC. 1953. *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*. Translated and Edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross, and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor. Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America.
- Schilder [Shil'der], Nikolai. 1897. *Imperator Aleksandr Pervyi. Ego zhizn' i tsarstvovanie*. Saint Petersburg: A. S. Suvorin, vol. 3.
- Semenko, Irina. 1977. Primechaniia. In *Konstantin Batiushkov's Opyty v stikhakh i proze. (Literaturnye pamiatniki)*. Moscow: Nauka, pp. 493–595.
- Senate Gazette. 1810. *Sanktpeterburgskiiia Senatskiiia Vedomosti* 3.13 (April 2). Saint Petersburg: Governing Senate.
- Serman, Ilya. 1974. *Konstantin Batyushkov. (TWAS 287)*. New York: Twayne.
- Shakhalova, Natalia, ed. 1981. *Risunki pisatelei iz sobraniia Gosudarstvennogo literaturnogo muzeia: Katalog vystavki*. Moscow: State Literary Museum.
- Shchedrin, Sylvester [Sil'vestr]. 2014. *Ital'ianskie pis'ma i doneseniia Sil'vestra Feodosievicha Shchedrina 1818–1830*. Edited by Mikhail Yevseyev [Evsev'ev]. Moscow and Saint Petersburg: Al'ians-Arkheo.
- Shchukina, Evgenia. 2000. *Dva veka russkoi medali: Medal'ernoie iskusstvo v Rossii 1700–1917 gg.: Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh*. Moscow: Terra.
- Shevyrev, Stepan. 1850. *Poezdka v Kirillo-Belozerskii monastyr': Vakatsionnye dni professora S. Shevyreva v 1847 godu*. 2 vols. Moscow: V Universitetskoi tipografii.
- Smith, John. 1837. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters, Part 8: Containing the Life and Works of Nicholas Poussin, Claude Lorraine, and Jean Baptist Greuze*. London: Smith and son.
- Somov, Andrei. 1872. *Kartinnaiia galereia Imperatorskoi Akademii khudozhestvo, Vol. 1: Katalog original'nykh proizvedenii russkoi zhivopisi*. Saint Petersburg: The Imperial Academy of Arts.
- Stepanov, Nikolai. 1926. Druzheskoe pis'mo nachala XIX v. In *Russkaia proza: Sbornik statei*. Edited by Boris Eikhenbaum and Yurii Tynianov. Leningrad: Academia, pp. 74–101.
- Svin'in, Pavel. 1820. Otkrytie Akademii khudozhestv i chrezvychainoe onoi sobranie. *Otechestvennye zapiski* 6: 269–91.
- Tanner, Jeremy. 2006. *The Invention of Art History in Ancient Greece: Religion, society and artistic rationalisation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Terebenina, Rimma. 1968. Novye postupleniia v Pushkinskii rukopisnyi fond. In *Vremennik Pushkinskoi komissii 1965*. Leningrad: Nauka, pp. 5–22.
- Timofeev, Lev. 2007. *Priiut, liubov'iu muz sogretyi*. Saint Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia.
- TLF. 1974. *Trésor de la langue française: Dictionnaire de la langue du XIX^e et du XX^e siècle (1789–1960)*. Sous la direction de Paul Imbs. Vol. 3: Ange-Badin. Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique.
- Todd, William Mills, III. 1976. *The Familiar Letter as a Literary Genre in the Age of Pushkin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tokarev, Dmitrii, ed. 2013. *"Nevyrazimo vyrazimoe": Ekfrasis i problemy reprezentatsii vizual'nogo v khudozhestvennom tekste*. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Tsiavlovskaiia, Tat'iana. 1970. *Risunki Pushkina*. Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Tsiavlovskaiia, Tat'iana. 1980. *Risunki Pushkina*, 2nd rev. and enlarged ed. Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Turchin, Valerii. 1982. *Orest Kiprenskii (K 200-letiiu ko dniu rozhdeniia)*. Moscow: Znanie.
- Turchin, Valerii. 1985. *Aleksandr Grigor'evich Varnek, 1782–1843*. Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Usacheva, Svetlana. 2009. A Life-Long Italian Journey: Sylvestr Shchedrin in the Tretyakov Gallery / Kartiny Sil'vestra Shchedrina v Tre't'iakovskoi galeree. Iz istorii kollektcii. *The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine/Tre't'iakovskaia Galereia* 25: 16–27.
- Uspensky, Pavel. 2014. Razmyshlenie o "Podrazhanii Goratsiiu" K. N. Batiushkova (Tak li "bezumno" stikhotvorenii poeta?). *Slavica Revalensia* 1: 9–29.
- Varnek, Vladimir. 2013. Zagadka portreta A. N. Olenina. 3: 13. Available online: <https://www.nsartmuseum.ru/journal/id/91> (accessed on 7 November 2022).
- Vatsuro, Vadim. 1989. *S.D.P. Iz istorii literaturnogo byta pushkinskoi pory*. Moscow: Kniga.
- Vlasov, Anikita. 2002. Podrobnye svedeniia o poslednikh dniakh Konstantina Nikolaevicha Batiushkova [1855]. Edited with notes by Tat'iana Latypova. *Nashe nasledie* 6: 67–71.
- Volodina, Natalia. 1989. Sta't'ia K. N. Batiushkova "Progulka v Akademiiu khudozhestv" kak opyt khudozhestvennoi kritiki. In *Venok poetu. Zhizn' i tvorchestvo K. N. Batiushkova*. Edited by Viktor Gura. Vologda: Uppoligrafizdat, pp. 103–12.
- Vout, Caroline. 2006. Winckelmann and Antinous. *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 52: 139–62.
- Wagner, Peter, ed. 1996. *Icons—Texts—Iconotexts. Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.

- Webb, Ruth. 1999. *Ekphrasis ancient and modern: The invention of a genre*. *Word & Image* 15: 7–18.
- Wes, Marinus A. 1992. *Classics in Russia 1700–1855. Between Two Bronze Horsemen*. (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 33). Leiden, New York and Köln: E. J. Brill.
- Winckelmann, Johann [Joachim]. 1764. *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*. 2 vols. Dresden: In der Waltherischen Hof-Buchhandlung.
- Winckelmann, Johann [Joachim]. 1766. *Histoire de l'Art chez les Anciens*. 2 vols. Ouvrage traduit de l'Allemand [par Gottfried Sellius et rédigé par Jean-Baptiste-René Robinet]. Paris: Saillant.
- Winckelmann, Johann [Joachim]. 1781. *Histoire de l'Art de l'Antiquité*. 3 vols. Traduite par M. [Michael] Huber. Leipzig: J. G. I. Breitkopf.
- Winckelmann, Johann [Joachim]. 1789. *Histoire de l'Art chez les Anciens*. 3 vols. Traduite par M. [Michael] Huber. Nouvelle Édition, revue et corrigée. Paris: Barrois l'aîné; Savoye.
- Winckelmann, Johann [Joachim]. 1802–1803. *Histoire de l'Art chez les Anciens*. vol. II, Parties 1–2. Traduite de l'Allemand [par Henri Jansen], avec des notes historiques et critiques de différens auteurs. Paris: chez H. J. Jansen et Comp^e.
- Winckelmann, Johann [Joachim]. 1873. *The History of Ancient Art*. Translated from the German by G. Henry Lodge. Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, vol. 4.
- Winckelmann, Johann [Joachim]. 2006. *History of the Art of Antiquity*. Translated by Harry Francis Mallgrave. Introduction by Alex Potts. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute.
- Wrangel [Vrangel'], Nikolai. 1908. *Katalog starinnykh proizvedenii iskusstvo, khраниashchikhsia v Imperatorskoi akademii khudozhestv*. (Supplement to *Starye gody*). Saint Petersburg: Sirius.
- Yumangulov, Vil', and Natalia Khadeeva. 2016. *Skul'ptura Nizhnego parka i Verkhnego sada: Katalog kollektsii*. (Petergof: Gosudarstvennyi muzei-zapovednik. Polnyi katalog sobraniia: Skul'ptura.). Saint Petersburg: GMZ "Petergof."
- Yumangulov, Vil', and Natalia Khadeeva. 2019. *Skul'ptura Oranienbauma: Katalog kollektsii*. (Petergof: Gosudarstvennyi muzei-zapovednik. Polnyi katalog sobraniia: Skul'ptura.). Saint Petersburg: GMZ "Petergof."
- Zalieva, Olga, and Anna Rudnik, eds. 2004. *Poeta pingens/Pisatel' risuiushchii. Zhivopis' i grafika pisatelei v sobranii Gosudarstvennogo literaturnogo muzeia: Al'bom-katalog*. Moscow: Tri kvadrata.
- Zaretsky, Nikolai. 1960. *Russische Dichter als Maler und Zeichner*. Aus dem Nachlass des Verfassers herausgegeben und ergänzt von Dmitrij Tschizewskij. Recklinghausen: Aurel Bongers.
- Zeller, Hans. 1955. *Winckelmanns Beschreibung des Apollo im Belvedere*. Zurich: Atlantis.
- Zhuikova, Redmona. 1996. *Portretnye risunki Pushkina: Katalog atributsii*. Saint Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin.
- Zimenko, Vladislav. 1988. *Orest Adamovich Kiprenskii, 1782–1836*. Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Zorin, Andrei. 1987. *Novye materialy o K. N. Batiushkove v 1819–1821 gg.* In *Tezisy dokladov k nauchnoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 200-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Konstantina Nikolaevicha Batiushkova*. Edited by Viacheslav Koshelev. Vologda: Uprpoligrafizdat, pp. 72–73.
- Zorin, Andrei. 1997. *Batiushkov i Germaniia. Arbor mundi/Mirovoe drevo* 5: 144–64.
- Zorin, Andrej. 1998. *Sehnsucht nach dem Süden—Konstantin Batjuškov*. In *Deutsche und Deutschland aus russischer Sicht, [Vol. 3]: 19. Jahrhundert: Von der Jahrhundertwende bis zu den Reformen Alexanders II*. Edited by Dagmar Herrmann and Alexander L. Ospovat in collaboration with Karl-Heinz Korn. Munich: Wilhelm Fink, pp. 504–27.

Article

1905 and Art: From Aesthetes to Revolutionaries

Christina Lodder

Department of Art History, University of Kent, Canterbury CT2 7NZ, UK; christina.lodder@gmail.com

Abstract: This article examines the impact that the experience of the 1905 Revolution had on the political attitudes of professional artists of various creative persuasions and on the younger generation who were still attending art schools. It inevitably focuses on a few representatives and argues that Realists as well as more innovative artists like Valentin Serov and the World of Art group became critical of the regime and began to produce works satirizing the Tsar and his government. These artists did not, however, take their disenchantment further and express a particular ideology in their works or join any specific political party. The author also suggests that the Revolution affected art students like Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, who subsequently became leaders of the avant-garde and developed the style known as Neo-Primitivism. The influence of 1905 can be seen in their pursuit of creative freedom, the subjects they chose, and the distinctly anti-establishment ethos that emerged in their Neo-Primitivist works around 1910.

Keywords: 1905 Revolution; Nikolai II; Neo-Primitivism; realism; World of Art; satirical journals; Valentin Serov; Mikhail Larionov; Natalia Goncharova

On 9 January 1905, a peaceful demonstration of ordinary citizens, led by the Russian Orthodox priest, Father Gapon, was fired upon by Tsarist troops in St. Petersburg.¹ The massacre unleashed a series of mass uprisings, which became known as the 1905 Revolution. Although the Tsar made some concessions, ultimately the entire revolt was brutally suppressed by the Imperial government. The events shocked and outraged all progressive elements within Russian society, and the artistic community was no exception (Shleev 1987, p. 172). Numerous artists of very different political and creative persuasions, who were at various stages in their careers—from highly respected members of the Imperial Academy of Arts down to lowly students—were politicized by the revolution and reacted against the brutality displayed by the regime in suppressing the revolt.

In this article, I shall examine some of the initial responses to Bloody Sunday and the unfolding events of 1905 by established artists of various persuasions. I shall then go on to suggest that the reverberations of 1905 continued to be felt for many years afterwards, and that one of the long-term effects of the revolution can be detected in the decidedly anti-establishment ethos of the avant-garde artists who experienced the event and came to prominence in the Russian art world a few years later. Their lack of respect for the regime and their critical stance towards it were revealed creatively in the subject matter and style of their Neo-Primitivist paintings and socially in their provocative behaviour and shocking public performances. In developing Neo-Primitivism, which emerged in its mature form around 1909–1910, these innovative artists self-consciously rejected accepted aesthetic conventions and prevailing notions of good taste and frequently adopted a subject matter that deliberately challenged the aesthetic, social, and political values of the current artistic and cultural establishment.

Some of the initial responses to 1905 were perhaps predictable. This is particularly true of artists, like Ilya Repin, a celebrated realist painter, who is known for works such as *The Volga Barge Haulers* of 1870–73, which depicted men hauling a barge, their bodies broken by this back-breaking work, and *They Did not Expect Him* of 1884–1888 (both State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg), which showed a political exile returning to his family. Repin was

Citation: Lodder, Christina. 2022. 1905 and Art: From Aesthetes to Revolutionaries. *Arts* 11: 65. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11030065>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 18 April 2022

Accepted: 1 June 2022

Published: 15 June 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

a prominent member of the Wanderers' group (The Association of Travelling Exhibitions), which had fought for artistic freedom in the 1860s and 1870s and saw its role as contributing to the revolutionary struggle in the widest meaning of the word, by painting Russian life as it was, warts and all, and exposing society's iniquities and inequalities (Valkenier 1989).

By 1905, these ideals had lost some of their original intensity. Repin, like most of his realist colleagues, had joined the artistic establishment and had become a respected Academician, executing several important government commissions, such as his enormous (4 × 8 m) composite portrait of 81 figures, commissioned by Tsar Nikolai II, *The Ceremonial Meeting of the State Council, 7 May 1901* (1903, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg). Recognition and prosperity may have muted the artist's radicalism, but his response to the events of Bloody Sunday showed that his political and social conscience were easily reawakened. He not only painted the study *Breaking up the Demonstration, Bloody Sunday* (1905, Central Museum of the Revolution, Moscow), but he also took the opportunity to make a public intervention on behalf of the revolutionary cause. On 20 January 1905, eleven days after the massacre, Repin and some fellow realists published a petition, entitled "The Need for Enlightenment" [*Nuzhdy prosveshcheniia*]. In this document, he and his colleagues called for "the foundations of political freedom" to be established in Russia, not in "a partial way as at present", but by means of a "full and radical transformation"².

Other realist artists also demonstrated their solidarity with the victims of 9 January. For instance, on 26 January, the artist Mikhail Malyshev sent one of his paintings to the newspaper *Our Life* [*Nasha zhizn'*] as a contribution to the fund set up to help the victims of Bloody Sunday. He wrote, "wanting to help the families of workers, suffering from 9 January as much as possible, I can only offer my own work and therefore I humbly ask the administration of the respected newspaper *Our Life* to accept my painting *Hard News* . . . and sell it for money" (Malyshev 1905; in Shleev 1987, p. 173).

Such sympathy from realist artists for the victims of the massacre was, perhaps, to be expected. Inevitably, too, these artists produced paintings that illustrated the events of 1905, conveying messages that were highly critical of the regime, such as *The Shooting* (Figure 1). The artist was Sergei Ivanov, a Wanderer, who usually depicted the hardships endured by ordinary citizens.³ In *The Shooting* of 1905, the focus is not on the soldiers but on the dead victims. The soldiers on the left are hidden behind the smoke of their guns, while the demonstrators to the right are barely visible, their presence indicated by the red flag. The main focus is on the corpses lying in the sun. Ivanov used emphatic contrasts to emphasize the horror of the image. The dramatic play of light on a small part of the buildings serves to emphasize the shadows engulfing the rest. The dark buildings contrast with the starkly sunlit ground on which two small figures lie huddled and inert. They stand out in relief against the vast empty space, and their immobility is highlighted by the small running dog. To emphasize the revolutionary message of the image further, a red flag waves above the demonstrators, while the dark buildings present a rather forbidding presence, like the implacable oppression of the Tsarist regime itself.

Yet it was not just creative figures associated with the Wanderers who responded critically to "Bloody Sunday". There are several instances where artists' responses to events seem out of character with what we know of their activities and social and political allegiances prior to this date. Such reactions highlight the degree to which the events of 1905 seem to have made artists rethink their political positions and radicalized their outlooks.

Valentin Serov was one of these. A former pupil of Repin, he was also an Academician and had established a reputation as an artist who employed an acceptable degree of experimentation in his painting. He was a successful and popular portraitist among the upper echelons of Russian society and had produced numerous paintings of members of the Court and the Imperial family. In 1896, he had painted the Tsar's coronation and had subsequently produced more than one flattering portrait of Nikolai II, which showed him in a positive light (Figure 2). Serov seems to have been a rather urbane figure, and although it is difficult to establish precisely his political allegiances before 1905, his works

and activities make it extremely hard to believe that he had any revolutionary inclinations. But this changed completely during 1905. He actually witnessed the events of “Bloody Sunday” and saw the soldiers firing on the peaceful demonstrators on the Troitskii Bridge. On 20 January, he wrote to Repin, “I will never forget what I saw from the windows of the Academy of Arts on 9 January—the restrained, majestic, unarmed crowd, going to meet the cavalry attack and pointed guns—it was a horrific spectacle.” (Golubev 1941, p. 32; Shleev 1987, p. 174).



Figure 1. Sergei Ivanov, *The Shooting (Rasstrel)* also known as *Soldiers Shooting at the Demonstration*, 1905, oil on canvas, State Museum of the Revolution, Moscow.

A few weeks later, Serov wrote a letter to the Academy protesting about the events. This was not an empty gesture because the president of the Imperial Academy of Arts was none other than Prince Vladimir Aleksandrovich Romanov, who was also commander in chief of the troops in St. Petersburg, and ultimately responsible for the massacre on “Bloody Sunday”. Serov’s letter was not read out to the Academy. Outraged at being deprived of his voice in this way and horrified by the Academy’s association with the bloodbath, on 10 March, Serov took the drastic step of resigning (Serov 1937, pp. 102–3). Since the Imperial Academy was very closely associated with the Imperial household, his action signalled the intensity of his feelings of disapproval and the strength of his desire to disassociate himself from the government. The action also entailed a certain degree of financial sacrifice on his part because it removed him from the significant sources of patronage that were exerted by the court as well as by the Academy, which still dominated artistic life in Russia at this point.

The strength of Serov’s feelings was subsequently expressed in a painting *Soldiers, Good Fellows! Where is Your Glory?* (Figure 3). The title is particularly ironic, because it comes from a popular military song of the time and seems to have been deliberately chosen to emphasize the disparity between the values that the soldiers (in theory) held dear and their actual deeds. It also implies that their skills, which should be used to defend the country against enemy attack, are now being employed to murder the country’s citizens, the very people whom the army should be defending.



Figure 2. Valentin Serov, *Portrait of His Imperial Majesty Nikolai II, Tsar of All the Russias*, 1902, oil on canvas, 117 × 89.50 cm., Trustees of the Regimental Trust of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, on loan to the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Romanov is shown in the full uniform of the Royal Scots Greys to which he was appointed colonel-in-chief by Queen Victoria in 1894.

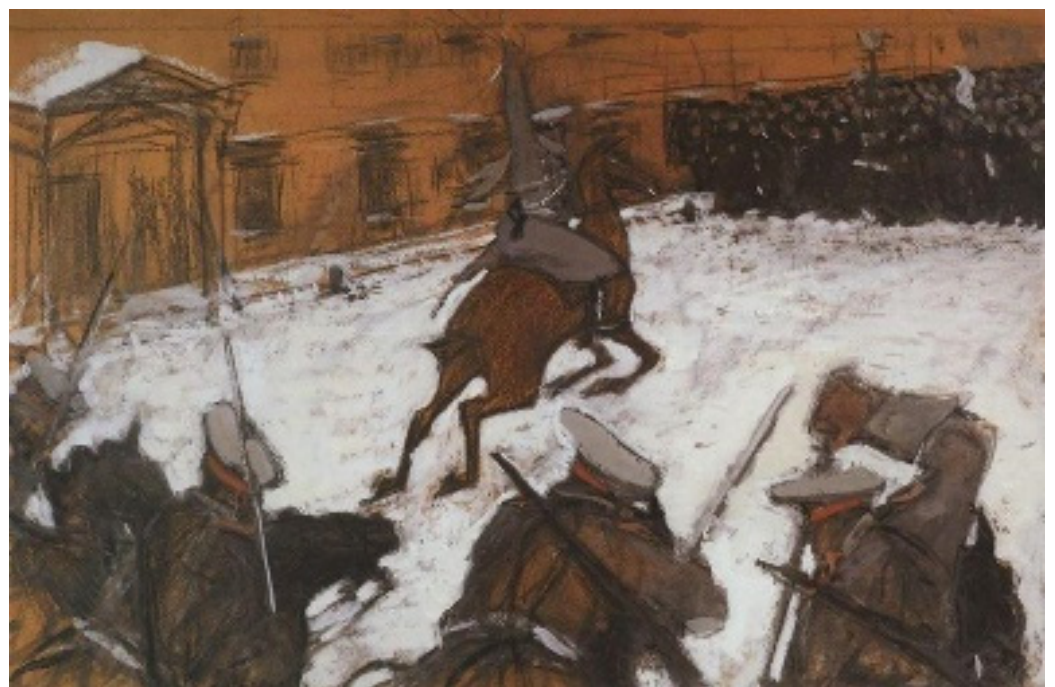


Figure 3. Valentin Serov, *Soldiers, Good Fellows! Where is Your Glory? [Soldatushki, bravy rebyatushki! Gde zhe vasha slava?]*, 1905, gouache on board, 47.5 × 41.5 cm, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Serov's image focuses on the action of the soldiers, and particularly on the role of the commanding officer, waving the punitive force forward. His face and actions are exaggerated and dominate the center of the composition. He is almost grotesque (Sidorov 1969, p 120). Yet the image does not place any revolutionary emphasis on the demonstrators or the victims. There is no red flag. Instead, the icon held aloft indicates the religious aspect of the demonstration, evoking the leading presence of Father Georgii Gapon and emphasizing those very qualities that Serov himself had stressed in his earlier letter—the “restrained and majestic” quality of the crowd.

In fact, Serov identified this image as a representation of the dispersal of a demonstration that took place in Moscow, close to the School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in October 1905 (Serov 1971, vol. 1, p. 84). There is no reason to doubt his testimony, since the work was not published until December 1905 (*Zhupel*, No. 1 (1905), p. 5). Nevertheless, the art historian Vladimir Shleev has suggested that it was really a visual expression of Serov's horror at what he had witnessed earlier that year in St. Petersburg. Shleev cites the nature of the buildings and the snow lying on the ground as reasons for identifying this scene not with October in Moscow, but with January in St. Petersburg (Shleev 1987, pp. 174–75).

Whatever the precise location and time of the action depicted in Serov's painting, the image is clearly directed against the men who were responsible for leading the soldiers and inciting them to mow down their own people. The work is an extremely powerful criticism of the regime. Even so, one should beware of jumping to conclusions. The work expresses Serov's protest against a specific government policy and action, it does not necessarily indicate that the artist, at this time, was completely disenchanted with the Tsarist regime to the point of becoming a revolutionary or joining any political party. There is, for instance, no red flag, which might signal such an ideological position.

Nevertheless, Serov was clearly becoming increasingly critical of the regime and particularly of the Tsar himself. This is revealed in a drawing, entitled *1905: After the Suppression* (Figure 4). This is a sharply satirical composition, which shows the commanding officer, the Tsar, rewarding his troops (Sidorov 1969, p. 120). Serov's caricature of Nikolai II stresses his moustache and beard, and shows him holding a tennis racket under one arm, while stretching out the other to pin a medal on a soldier. The Tsar ignores and, indeed, has his back to the numerous civilian corpses, unarmed and innocent, which lie in rows in front of the soldiers. The carriage in the background being driven towards the group of men is clearly coming to take the Tsar away for a game of tennis.



Figure 4. Valentin Serov, 1905. *After the Suppression* [1905-oi god. Posle usmireniia], 1905, pencil on paper, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Serov's drawing makes the Tsar the center of the composition, standing between the victims and the perpetrators of the crime. This serves to highlight visually Nikolai II's responsibility. The fact that he has his back turned to his victims and is holding a tennis

racket suggests that he is callously indifferent to the suffering of his people. It implies that his mind is too full of trivial pursuits, like tennis, to be in a position of such responsibility or to give much thought as to how he should command his troops. The notion of Nero fiddling while Rome burned has been translated here into the idea of the Tsar thinking of tennis while his military representatives slaughter his subjects.

I would argue that this drawing reveals a substantial change in the artist's political stance, which over 1905 had developed from, at the beginning, inherent support for the regime to criticism of the Tsar's soldiers, and ultimately to criticism of the Tsar himself. Before 1905, Serov's work does not display any indications of revolutionary sentiment or anti-establishment attitudes. His 1902 painting of the Tsar in the uniform of the Royal Scots Greys (Figure 2) shows Nikolai as intelligent, serious, responsible, and even heroic. Serov's 1905 painting of *Soldiers* criticized the military commanders for their brutality, not the Tsar. The later drawing, however, places the blame firmly on the Tsar himself, whom Serov portrays as an irresponsible, frivolous, and immoral leader, incapable of ruling his country.

Serov was not alone in reassessing his political allegiances in response to the events of 1905. His painting *Soldiers, Good Fellows! Where is Your Glory?* appeared in the first issue of the satirical journal *Zhupel'* [*Bugbear*], which was politically linked to the Social Democratic Party. Founded and edited by Zinovii (Zeilik) Grzhebin, three issues of the journal were published (December 1905–January 1906) by Sergei Yuritsyn in St. Petersburg. Mstislav Dobuzhinskii and his colleagues who collaborated on *Bugbear*, namely Evgenii Lansere and Konstantin Somov, were attached to the World of Art Group. Set up in 1898, the group rejected the realism of the Wanderers and the idea that art should provide some sort of social commentary. Instead, they celebrated purely artistic values and sought to evoke purely aesthetic and sensual sensations in their audience. Their works often portrayed Versailles and themes from the eighteenth century, expressing a poetic nostalgia for an age of elegance and dalliance, while visually relying on tonal harmonies and linear rhythms (Kannedy 1977).

This creative approach, which is often labelled "art for art's sake", initially went along with a profound indifference to politics, a fact that makes these artists' involvement in a satirical journal like *Bugbear* all the more surprising and significant. It seems to indicate a fundamental change of direction among these members of the World of Art—a change that signified their transformation from aesthetes into revolutionaries or at least into critics of the regime and sympathizers with those espousing revolution.

This change in attitude is further demonstrated by the fact that they sought and indeed managed to secure the co-operation of the revolutionary realist writer Maxim Gorky. Dobuzhinskii explained "This idea of inviting Gorky at first seemed rather wild (Somov, Benois and Gorky!). But it seems that from this something unexpected could result. Of course, his name is important, and that is precisely what is needed at this time." (Revoliutsiia 1977, p. 24). Lansere explained to Benois (who was in Paris at this time), "I know that you have a great antipathy to Gorky. And I do not know how long we will be able to go along with him—but it seems to me that we need to try this partnership and try it with an open heart, because something very significant and totally new could arise from it." (Gorkii 1957, pp. 359–69). Being present and involved in the events was clearly crucial; Benois never became as fervently anti-establishment as his colleagues, who remained in Russia and experienced the 1905 revolution first-hand.

In November 1905, the World of Art artists, Dobuzhinskii, Somov and Lansere, published a declaration "The Artists' Voice" [*Golos khudozhnikov*]⁴. In political terms, this could be characterized as liberal, rather than revolutionary. It seemed genuinely to welcome the Tsar's promise of partial democracy in the October Manifesto as inaugurating "a great renewal of the country". The artists' main concern, however, inevitably centred on the role that art would play in performing the new tasks that now confronted the nation. The artists expressed the hope that "beauty would not be forgotten", that "art and beauty [would] become a part of life", and that they would help to "establish a link and a mutual

understanding between the artist and not just society, but the people". They argued that such a link would be facilitated by a thorough reform of the Imperial Academy of Arts. Demanding reform of an art school might seem quite innocuous, but it was not. Given the close links between the Tsar's household and the administration of the Academy, and especially the close association between the events of Bloody Sunday and the President of the Academy, the call for reform was not without political implications. On the contrary, it was implicitly radical; it challenged the regime's control of art and the art world, demanding freedom from ideological control.

The actions of the artists matched their words. In December 1905, they actively participated in the publication of the satirical magazine *Bugbear*, and so they became publicly involved in the current political debate, and "a part of life". The first issue of *Bugbear* in December 1905 contained not only Serov's image *Soldiers, Good Fellows! Where is your Glory?* but also Dobuzhinskii's *October Idyll* (1905, Figure 5). Not surprisingly, the magazine was confiscated by the authorities (Sidorov 1969, p. 122). Dobuzhinskii's image shows the corner of a city street after a demonstration has been forcibly dispersed. Traces of violence are still present. Blood trickles down the wall and a few items lie discarded on the ground—a child's doll, some glasses, and one shoe. There are no people; instead, the discarded objects poignantly emphasize their absence and suggest the horror of their experiences and their fate. The title refers to the Tsar's October Manifesto, which is posted on the wall. The reality behind the false promises of the declaration, however, is dramatically represented by the blood beneath, symbolizing the bloodshed and the brutality that accompanied the repression of the revolution.

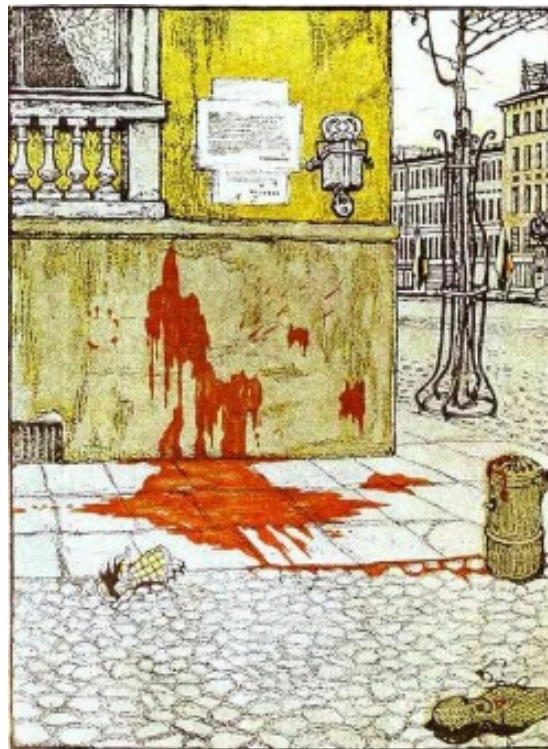


Figure 5. Mstislav Dobuzhinskii, *October Idyll* [*Oktiabr'skaia idilliia*], reproduced in *Bugbear* [*Zhupel*], No. 2 1905.

The third issue of *Bugbear* contained Ivan Bilibin's image of a donkey, enshrined amongst the imperial regalia and clearly intended to represent the Tsar (Figure 6). The Griffons refer to the house of Romanov. This irreverent image is drawn in precisely in the same style that Bilibin had used in his illustrations for children's books and his record of Russian peasant costumes. Its meaning was clearly apparent, and, for his pains, Bilibin was arrested and briefly imprisoned.



Figure 6. Ivan Bilibin, *The Donkey at a Twentieth of its Natural Size* [Osel v 1/20 natural'noi velichiny], reproduced in *Bugbear* [Zhupel], No. 3, 1906.

Bugbear was closed down after its third issue, but Grzhebin founded another journal to continue its work, *Hell's Post* [Yadskaiia pochta]. In the second number of the new publication, Lansere, like Serov and Dobuzhinskii, expressed his disgust with the regime in *The Funeral Feast* (Figure 7). Like Serov, he focused on the soldiers and their indifference to their bloodthirsty actions. His image shows the military elite feasting and celebrating (presumably rejoicing in the deaths of the demonstrators), instead of mourning the victims and being ashamed of their actions and the bloody reprisals that they had taken and were still taking against their fellow Russians.



Figure 7. Evgenii Lansere, *The Funeral Feast* [Trizna], reproduced in *Hell's Post* [Adskaiia pochta], No. 2, 1906.

Such critical images were not unique amongst the work of these artists but formed part of a much larger and sustained satirical output. Dobuzhinskii produced a striking image of evil in *The Devil* (1907, Figure 8), which was reproduced in the literary and artistic journal *The Golden Fleece* [*Zolotoe runo*] in 1907. With its essentially symbolist orientation, this was a serious and intellectual publication, rather than a political or satirical magazine. Dobuzhinskii produced his image for an issue devoted to the satanic, but he took the opportunity to associate the devil with incarceration and control, and in this respect his vision was clearly directed at the regime.⁵ The beard, and the halo echoing the imperial crown, suggests the Tsar, while the prison scene, with the dwarfed figures going around in circles, suggests the inescapable oppression imposed by the government. The image recalls the composition of Vincent van Gogh's *Prisoners Exercising* of 1890 (Pushkin State Museum of Arts, Moscow), which itself seems to have been inspired by Gustav Doré's print of Newgate Prison, London.

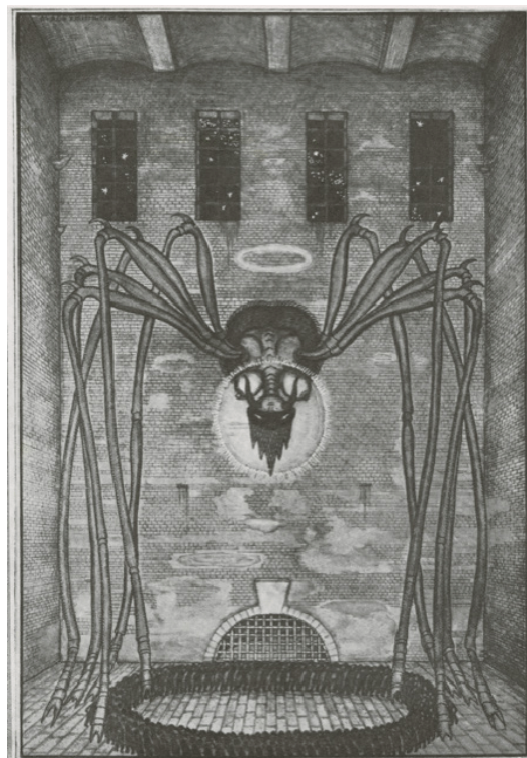


Figure 8. Mstislav Dobuzhinskii, *The Devil* [*D'iavol*], reproduced in *The Golden Fleece* [*Zolotoe runo*], No. 1, 1907.

The politicization of professional artists during 1905 led them to engage either implicitly or explicitly with political themes in their work, but it did not necessarily lead to political activism as such. Although these artists were concerned to “express publicly their sympathy for the Revolution and protest against the Tsarist establishment,” (Minin 2009, p. 16), this did not lead them to go further in opposing the *status quo* by becoming politically active or joining any of the revolutionary parties.⁶

This absence of a specific political allegiance distinguishes the work of the realist and World of Art artists from some of the more ideologically charged and partisan caricatures, such as *The Hare and the Lion*, produced by Mikhail Chemodanov (Figure 8). He had been producing caricatures since the 1880s, while working as a dentist, and published this image in 1905, in the first and only issue of *The Sting* [*Zhalo*], a pro-Bolshevik publication (Figure 9).⁷ Basing his image on Ivan Krylov's fable of “The Hare and Lion”, Chemodanov indicated that, although it was the workers who were bringing the regime to its knees, it was the liberal bourgeoisie that was reaping the benefit. This message reflected the Marxist

notion of class conflict, indicating the author's allegiance to communism⁸ Even more explicitly revolutionary was his image *Two Perspectives*, which was issued as a postcard in 1906 (Figure 10). Such images throw the works produced by the Wanderers and World of Art painters into relief. The extreme revolutionary ideas expressed by Chemodanov were absent from the satirical output of professional painters, who were politicized to the extent of producing images that explicitly attacked the regime but did not produce works that espoused specific revolutionary ideas or tactics.



Figure 9. Mikhail Chemodanov, *The Hare and the Lion* [*Zaiats na lovle*], October 1905; reproduced in *The Sting* [*Zhalo*], No. 1 (1905). The Lion is labelled “The Proletariat”; the Bear “Power”; and the Hare “The Liberal Bourgeoisie”.



Figure 10. Mikhail Chemodanov, *Two Perspectives* [*Dva Perspektivy*], postcard (Moscow, October 1906). On the left, the Tsar is dancing on a pile of corpses. The caption reads “The triumph of battlefield autocracy (More than 300 executions in two months)”. On the right, the Tsar is hanging from a noose and the caption reads “It will end badly!”.

Not surprisingly, the events of 1905 seem to have politicized not only artists who had already established themselves as professional painters, but also those who were still

studying. The artist, Aleksei Kravchenko, then a student at the Moscow School of Painting Sculpture and Architecture, recalled how the school became a focus for revolutionary activity and how the students handed it over to the striking workers:

The autumn of my second year of study, 1905, found me and my colleagues more often in a series of demonstrations in streets filled with banners and people, and rarely in the studios, where, instead of plaster casts, there now stood young, burning faces, deathly quiet and with fiery eyes. The doors of our school were wide open—and in the basement one could constantly hear gunfire. The university, the conservatory, technical institutions, and we represented the avant-garde movement among the student youth. (Dmitrieva 1951, pp. 152–55)

Even without such sentiments, the students and staff at the school would have found it difficult to remain completely aloof from the conflict. The school building stood at the top end of Miasnitskaia street, just near the Central Post Office, which meant that it was very close to the frequent and often violent confrontations between strikers and police (Sharp 2006, p. 70). Indeed, at one point, the school's dining room was used as a hospital to tend the wounded (Dmitrieva 1951, p. 154). We know that several students were arrested as a result of such activities and that the school was temporarily closed by the authorities. This was contested by the students who demanded the director's resignation (Dmitrieva 1951, p. 154). Not surprisingly, the police regarded the institution with deep suspicion and continued to keep it under surveillance (Moleva and Beliutin 1967, p. 282).

The other main art school in Moscow, the Stroganov School of Applied Arts, was similarly engulfed by revolutionary fervor. Nikolai Globa, its director, reported that the students "have become incapable of serious work" (Kurasov et al. 2015, p. 45). The basement of the students' hostel on Miasnitskaia became a shooting range, while the main hall was devoted to combat training. Students engaged in the fighting and, at one point, were responsible for cutting the telephone connection between Moscow and St. Petersburg. As a result, the school was closed through most of 1905 and only reopened on 1 September 1906 (Kurasov et al. 2015, pp. 45–46).

Elsewhere in Russia, the future sculptor Naum Gabo described being caught up in a pogrom, of almost being burnt alive by the black hundreds, and how this experience made him a revolutionary overnight (Gabo 1970; Hammer and Lodder 2000, pp. 17–18). In Moscow, the painter Kazimir Malevich recalled fighting on the barricades, fleeing the victorious Tsarist troops, and taking shelter in the room of a stranger who was celebrating his birthday (Malevich 1930; and Bowlt and Konecny 2002, p. 165).

Among other artists who were politicized by witnessing or participating in the events of 1905 were Mikhail Larionov and Natalya Goncharova, who five years later emerged as leaders of the avant-garde and spearheaded the development of Neo-Primitivism. During the events of 1905, they were students at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, which was one of the centers of the revolutionary student movement (Moleva and Beliutin 1967, p. 281). Although neither Larionov nor Goncharova seem to have been actively involved in revolutionary activities in 1905, they were clearly sympathetic to the revolutionaries and knew some of the activists, maintaining relationships with them even after they had been arrested. Larionov, for instance, visited fellow students imprisoned over the period, including Nikolai Vinogradov, who was studying architecture and was "in charge of ammunition for the school's insurrectionist armed force" (Moleva and Beliutin 1967, p. 281). Larionov and Vinogradov remained friends and later, in 1913, co-operated in exhibiting popular woodcuts, bringing what were considered low forms of art to the attention of the art establishment and asserting (rather provocatively) the right of these works to be taken as seriously as high art.⁹

There is no evidence that the experience of 1905 prompted either Larionov or Goncharova to become political activists or join any political party, but it clearly did produce a more critical attitude towards the status quo. This seems to have taken a creative rather than an ideological direction. Like Dobuzhinskii and other artists active during 1905, they became concerned with artistic freedom—the freedom of artists to paint whatever they

wanted in whatever style they wanted. This inevitably entailed challenging the establishment's control of art. Moreover, given the close connection between the Imperial Court and the Imperial Academy of Arts, this inevitably involved some inherent opposition to the regime. It was, however, an anti-establishment ethos that was expressed in artistic, rather than explicitly political, terms.

Hence, Goncharova and Larionov enthusiastically embraced the latest trends coming from France, which offered exciting, new, and definitely non-academic approaches to painting. The young artists may have initially encountered Impressionism and Post-Impressionism through their teachers or seen examples at the exhibition of French Painting, which was open in Moscow from 26 December 1896 to 26 January 1897 (*Ukazatel'* 1896)¹⁰. This celebrated show included two paintings by Monet, two by Renoir, three by Sisley and one pastel by Degas. At the same time, the two students might have had access to the important collection of French masterpieces amassed by the Moscow merchants Ivan Morozov and Sergei Shchukin, as well as reproductions in journals and first-hand accounts (Baldassari 2016, pp. 437–66; Baldassari 2021, pp. 487–512).

In 1906, Larionov seems to have been working in an Impressionist idiom as epitomized by his painting *Fishes* (1906, Centre Pompidou, Paris). In September that year, he visited Paris with Sergei Diaghilev to help organize the Russian section at the Salon d'Automne. There, he saw Paul Gauguin's retrospective (227 works) and paintings by the Post-Impressionists, including Paul Cézanne, the Nabis, and the Fauves. The opportunity to study the latest French innovations in quantity and at first hand had an enormous impact on his own work and stimulated his interest in primitive art. This led Larionov and Goncharova to develop the style known as Russian Neo-Primitivism, which combined the latest Western developments with various features taken from Russian folk art, the icon, the *lubok* (popular print), children's art and toys. This mixture of diverse art forms—high and low, sacred and profane—undermined accepted conventions and was highly offensive to the artistic establishment, even when the subject matter was relatively innocuous, such as still lives and portraits.

Western developments were harnessed by Russian artists and played an important role in the drive to create a vitally new and profoundly nationalist Russian art. Several years later, in spring 1913, Goncharova made this clear in an unpublished statement of her creative position:

Contemporary Russian art has reached such heights that, at the present time, it plays a major role in world life.

Contemporary Western ideas cannot be of any further use to us.

The aims I advance are as follows:

The creation of new forms in art and, through this, new forms of life. (Sharp 2006, p. 276)

As Neo-Primitivism developed, the new style, with its creative fusion of indigenous forms and the latest Western innovations, including Fauvism, Cubism and Futurism, embraced a more contentious range of subjects. A more explicitly critical and focused anti-establishment ethos began to emerge. Increasingly, the artists chose to depict the less elevated aspects of everyday life, such as brawls (Larionov, *Quarrel in a Tavern*, 1911, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid), and people on the fringes of society, like prostitutes, gypsies or Jews (e.g., Larionov's *Jewish Venus*, 1912, Sverdlovsk State Art Museum, and *The Gypsy*, 1909, private collection, France; or Goncharova's *Wrestlers*, 1909–1910, and *Bread Seller*, 1911, both Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).

Simultaneously, the mixture of stylistic and compositional devices taken from high and low art became more pronounced as in Goncharova's *Evangelists* (1911, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Figure 11). The painting was removed from her exhibition along with other religious works because it was considered blasphemous, being a religious painting, based loosely on an icon format, but produced in a secular style, by a woman (Sharp 2006, pp. 238–44).

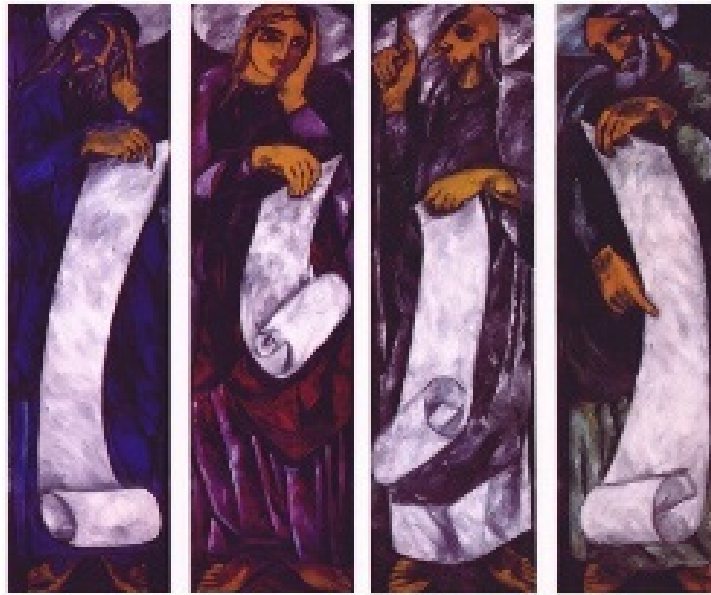


Figure 11. Natalia Goncharova, *The Four Evangelists* [Evangelist], 1911, oil on canvas, each canvas 204 × 58 cm, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Goncharova had challenged establishment values and asserted the rights of artists, including women artists, to paint whatever subject they wanted, in whatever style they wanted. She continued to assert her creative freedom by painting works like *Model (against a blue background)* (c. 1909, State Tretyakov Gallery), which shocked the establishment not only because it was a nude painted by a woman, but also because it was anatomically explicit and showed pubic hair. She was accused of having “stepped beyond the boundaries of morally correct behavior” and producing “blatantly corrupting pictures” (Sharp 2006, p. 104ff).

The assertion of creative freedom is combined with a more implicitly political resonance in Larionov’s *Soldier on a Horse*, also identified as *The Cossack* [Kozak], of 1911–1912 (Tate, London, Figure 12),¹¹ which mixes high and low sources of inspiration, while also challenging the conventional conception of soldiers as heroes. The pigment is applied in a crude emulation of Cézanne’s constructive brush stroke, while the organization of the image, including the addition of lettering and the absence of volume and space, emulates the style of the *lubok* images of popular heroes, which were sold at fairs. Although the stance of the horse and its salient features, such as its full-frontal eye in the profile face, are almost identical to those of Eruslan Lazarevich’s mount in the *lubok* depicting the mythic hero (Figure 13), Larionov’s soldier is far from heroic (Parton 1993, pp. 80, 82, 83). He looks like a harmless plaything, painted by a child.

The inscription is “8th Squadron” [8—esk] (Pospelov and Iliukhina 2005, p. 98). There were over 100 squadrons of Cossack cavalry and some Cossack regiments also served in the Imperial Guard. The Cossacks were famous for their prodigious fighting skills and their brutality in repressing the unrest during 1905. Yet Larionov’s *Cossack* does not look like a ferocious fighter but more like a toy soldier sitting on a wooden horse. Artistically, Larionov was subverting the style and the accepted iconography of the long-established genre of the heroic general on horseback. Indeed, Larionov’s painting is the antithesis of the traditional type of gallant rendition of military leaders, epitomized by Serov’s dignified *Portrait of Prince Felix Yusupov—Count Sumarokov—Elstone* of 1903 (State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg).



Figure 12. Mikhail Larionov, *Soldier on a Horse*, also known as *The Cossack [Kozak]*, 1911–1912, oil on canvas, 87 × 99.1 cm, Tate, London.



Figure 13. Anon, *The Powerful Hero Eruslan Lazarevich [Sil'nyi bogatyr' Eruslan Lazarevich]*, 18th century woodcut, 35.6 × 29.8 cm, private collection.

Politically, too, Larionov depicts the soldier not as a noble hero and respected representative of the Tsar's military might, but as a toy, a powerless entity only activated by the will of the Tsar. Larionov's *Cossack* does not inspire hatred or fear, but a certain indifference and disdain. Inevitably, this lack of respect extends to the Tsar himself. It could be argued that Larionov was mocking the Tsar indirectly by mocking the troops on whom the Tsar relied.

Larionov had adopted a style and approach that are completely different to those of Serov and the painters of 1905. Yet Larionov had clearly reached the same conclusion as Serov—that the soldiers are merely the pawns of the regime. There is no evidence that Larionov's *Cossack* relates directly, or in any way, to the events of 1905, since it is one of a series of soldier paintings that Larionov produced while he was doing his military service—from autumn 1910 to August 1911 (Pospelov and Iliukhina 2005, p. 363). Yet, any image of soldiers made little more than five years after the bloody reprisals of 1905–6 inevitably raised (and still raises) associations with those events.

Of course, it is also possible that Larionov was inspired by Serov's example. Serov had been one of Larionov's teachers at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, which the young artist had attended intermittently between 1898 and 1909.¹² Larionov

would, therefore, almost certainly have been familiar with Serov's work, including his portraits of the aristocracy, as well as with his 1905 image of charging soldiers, which had been reproduced in *Bugbear* and had become well-known in Russia's artistic circles (Figure 3). Larionov might also have been aware of his later drawing, *After the Suppression* (Figure 4). In January 1909, Serov resigned from the Moscow school because the administration had rejected his petition to have the sculptor Anna Golubkina readmitted as a student following her expulsion for political activities in 1905 (Sharp 2006, p. 71). This made Serov a figure of respect amongst the student body. In fact, the students wrote a collective letter to the administration lamenting the departure of this "irreplaceable" teacher (Sharp 2006, p. 71). Although Larionov's painting shares very little stylistically with Serov's works, Larionov followed Serov's example in focusing on soldiers and viewing these soldiers as pawns of the Tsar. Both artists showed their distrust and contempt for the regime—Serov explicitly and Larionov implicitly.

The Neo-Primitivists' lack of respect for figures in authority, their disregard for social and artistic conventions, and their powerful assertion of and demands for creative freedom were politically provocative—implicitly and explicitly. Both the style and subject matter of the works produced by the Neo-Primitivists tended to offend, and indeed were conceived deliberately to offend the conservative tastes and refined sensibilities of the establishment. This anti-establishment element in Neo-Primitivism seems to have derived in part from the artists' own first-hand experiences of 1905, but may also have taken inspiration from the example of mature professional painters of the time, such as Serov, Dobuzhinskii, Lansere et al. Younger artists were perhaps emboldened by the freedoms that these artists had grasped and the biting satirical images that they had produced. In this respect, the Neo-Primitivists can be considered to have continued the critical and confrontational attitudes towards the regime that had been adopted by many professional painters in 1905. In turn, this anti-establishment ethos of younger artists may have predisposed them to react favorably towards the destruction of the Tsarist establishment a few years later and led them to support—either passively or actively—the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917.

The 1905 Revolution had politicized a wide range of creative figures. It had profoundly affected artists like Serov and Dobuzhinskii, who had been relatively apolitical, and had transformed them into harsh critics of the regime. It also affected the outlook of a younger generation of artists who had witnessed these events and who had observed the reactions (both practical and creative) of their teachers and other painters whom they respected. This experience, along with exposure to the uncompromising innovations of Western painting, fueled the emergence of Neo-Primitivism and the fundamental challenges that it posed to the artistic, cultural, social and political establishment of Tsarist Russia.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ In 1918: Russia adopted the European calendar. "Bloody Sunday" took place on 22 January 1905 (New Style), but 9 January 1905 (Old Style). The crowd is estimated to have numbered around 80,000 and the brutal soldiers were members of the Preobrazhenskii Regiment of the Imperial Guards. For more details, see Williams (2005).
- ² Repin Ilya. 1905. "Nuzhdy prosveshcheniia," *Nasha zhizn'* (20 January 1905); *Rus* (27 January 1905); and *Nashi dni*, No. 22 (1905).
- ³ See, for instance, Sergei Ivanov, *On the Road. Death of a Migrant* (1889, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow), which highlighted the poverty and plight of the dispossessed peasantry, wandering through a harsh landscape in search of work and sustenance, accompanied by a few paltry possessions.
- ⁴ Dobuzhinskii, Mstislav, Konstantin Somov, and Evgenii Lansere, 1905. "Goloz khudozhnikov," in *Rus'* (11 November 1905); *Syn otechestva* (12 November 1905); and *Nasha zhizn'* (2 November 1905).

- ⁵ For a discussion of imprisonment as an image of despotism, see Burrow (2000), pp. 28 ff.
- ⁶ Many artists remained sympathetic to the revolutionary cause. For instance, Boris Kustodiev, who was associated with the World of Art group in 1905, produced an image of the 1905 massacre, under the month of February, for the Revolutionary Calendar of 1917. See *Kalendar' 1917*; reproduced in Sidorov (1969, p. 138).
- ⁷ This was later produced as a postcard in October 1906, as *An Old Song Played to a New Tune [Staraiia basnia na novyi lad]*. See Mathew 2018, pp. 192–93. On the symbolic use of the Bear to represent the regime, see Riabov (2020).
- ⁸ Chemodanov was subsequently arrested and died in prison in 1908; (Mathew 2018, p. 170).
- ⁹ *Pervaia vystavka lubokov organizovannaia D. N. Vinogradovym 19–24 fevralia 1913* held at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. *Ikonopisnye podliniki i lubki organizovannaia M. F. Larionovym*, 24 March–7 April 1913, at the Khudozhestvennyi Salon, Moscow. For translations of Larionov's text in Vinogradov's catalogue and Goncharova's articles in Larionov's publications, see Sharp (2006), pp. 273–75.
- ¹⁰ *Ukazatel' Frantsuzskoi khudozhestvennoi vystavki 1896*. Moscow
- ¹¹ Larionov's *Soldier on a Horse* is given the title *The Cossack [Kozak]* in Pospelov and Iliukhina (2005, p. 98), reproduced p. 102. Pospelov and Iliukhina do not give their reasons for this change in title.
- ¹² Larionov was awarded the title of Painter of the Second Class on 25 September 1910. (Pospelov and Iliukhina 2005, p. 363).

References

- Baldassari, Anne, ed. 2016. *Icons of Modernism: The Shchukin Collection*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Baldassari, Anne, ed. 2021. *The Morozov Collection: Icons of Modern Art*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Bowl, John E., and Mark Konecny, eds. 2002. *A Legacy Regained: Nikolai Khardzhiev and the Russian Avant-Garde*. St. Petersburg: Palace Editions.
- Burrow, John Wyon. 2000. *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848–1914*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Dmitrieva, N. 1951. *Moskovskoe Uchilishche Zhivopisi, Viania i Zodchestva*. Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Gabo, Naum. 1970. *Avtobiografiia*. Typescript. London: Tate Gallery Archive.
- Golubev, V. 1941. *K istorii odnoi kartiny*. Moscow: Iskusstvo i zhizn'.
- Gorkii, Maksim. 1957. *M. Gorkii v Epokhu Revoliutsii 1905–1907 Godov*. Moscow: KHUD LIT-RA.
- Hammer, Martin, and Christina Lodder. 2000. *Constructing Modernity: The Art and Career of Naum Gabo*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Kannedy, Janet. 1977. *The "Mir Iskusstva" Group and Russian Art 1898–1912*. Outstanding Dissertations in the Fine Arts. New York: Garland Publishing Inc.
- Kurasov, S. V., A. N. Lavrent'ev, E. A. Zaeva-Burdonskaia, and A. V. Sazikov. 2015. *Stroganovka: 190 Let Russkogo Dizaina*. Moscow: Russkii Mir'.
- Malevich, Kazimir. 1930. "Chapters from an Artist's Autobiography", ms., Khardzhiev Collection. English translation in Bowl and Konecny 2002. 147–71.
- Malyshev, Mikhail. 1905. Letter to the editor. *Nasha zhizn'*, January 26.
- Mathew, Tobie. 2018. *Greetings from the Barricades: Revolutionary Posters in Imperial Russia*. London: Four Corners Books.
- Minin, Oleg. 2009. *Art and Politics in the Russian Satirical Press, 1905–1908*. Ph.D. dissertations, University of Southern California, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.
- Moleva, N., and E. Beliutin. 1967. *Ruskaia Khudozhestvennaia Shkola Vtoroi Poloviny XIX-Nacha XX-ogo Veka*. Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Parton, Anthony. 1993. *Mikhail Larionov and the Russian Avant-Garde*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pospelov, G. G., and E. A. Iliukhina. 2005. *Mikhail Larionov*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo RA [Russkii avangard].
- Revoliutsiia. 1977. *Revoliutsiia 1905–1907 godov i izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo. Vypusk peroyi. Peterburg*. Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo.
- Riabov, Oleg. 2020. The Birth of the Russian Bear? The Bear Symol in the Satirical Journals of the Russian Revolution of 1905. *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia* 9: 139–68. Available online: <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=googlescholar&id=GALE\T1\textbar{}A630408549&v=2.1&it=r&sid=AONE&asid=88d110aa> (accessed on 22 January 2022). [CrossRef]
- Serov, A. Valentin. 1937. *Perepiska 1884–1911*. Leningrad and Moscow: Gosizdat'.
- Serov, A. Valentin. 1971. *Valentin Serov v Vospominaniakh, Dnevnikakh i PEREPISKE sovremennikov*. Leningrad: Gosizdat', vol. 1.
- Sharp, Jane Ashton. 2006. *Russian Modernism between East and West: Natal'ia Goncharova and the Moscow Avant-Garde*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shleev, V. V. 1987. *Revoliutsiia i Izobrazitel'noe Iskusstvo. Ocherki, Stat'i, Issledovaniia*. Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo.
- Sidorov, Aleksei Alekseevich. 1969. *Ruskaia Grafika Nachala XX Veka. Ocherki Istorii i Teorii*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Iskusstvo.
- Valkenier, Elizabeth. 1989. *Russian Realist Art*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Williams, Beryl. 2005. *The Russian Revolution of 1905*. London: Routledge.

Article

Physical and Metaphysical Visualities: Vasily Rozanov and Historical Artefacts

Henrietta Mondry

Department of Global, Cultural and Language Studies, University of Canterbury, Christchurch 8041, New Zealand; henrietta.mondry@canterbury.ac.nz

Abstract: In Russian modernism, the work of writer Vasily Rozanov (1856–1919) presents an understudied case of constructing a worldview based on the study of the parallel history of human physicality and artefacts, which he articulated within the framework of the physical and metaphysical. I argue that Rozanov widened the domain of what was viewed as “compelling visuality” at his time, in line with the subjective synthesising principles of his worldview. He looked in art for the manifestations of that which he considered to be eternal and trans-historical: the mystery of the metaphysical roots of human sexuality.

Keywords: Russian modernism; art historical hermeneutics; compelling visualities; embodied sexualities

1. Introduction

The culture of early European modernism was characterised by a heightened interest in the world of things and materiality. Emergent museum displays and ethnographic exhibitions created analogies between the exhibited objects and bodies. Such correlations between people and artefacts brought together humans and things, and these visibility-based narratives migrated to literature, with writers devoting themselves to “exploring slippage of fluctuation between the physical and metaphysical referent” (Brown 2003, p. 142). In Russian modernism, the work of writer Vasily Rozanov (1856–1919) presents an understudied case of constructing a worldview based on the study of the parallel history of human physicality and artefacts, which he articulated within the framework of the physical and metaphysical. Rozanov viewed his own writing activities as a mission to reform his contemporary Russian culture’s somatophobia. In addition to historical and religious writing, his gaze searched for visual artefacts that provided indication of the “noumenal” in physicality (Rozanov 1971, p. 144). Since he often considered Christianity as the main cause of dominance of asceticism, his scope of collecting evidence included pre-Christian cultural productions related to the mystery of sexuality.

In his most famous work, *Fallen Leaves* (1915), Rozanov explained that his “philosophy of life” started from his “visual perception [zrenie] and surprise” (Rozanov 1971, p. 144), thus stressing the role of seeing and viewing as an experience foundational for the conceptualisation of a worldview. He noted that this new philosophy of life was no longer a philosophy of abstract ideas and intellectual understanding, obliquely referring to his earlier philosophical investigation *On Understanding*. Yet already in this early philosophical tract, *O Ponimanii* (On Understanding) written in 1886, he explored the question of meaning embodied in shapes and forms. He postulated that every individual work of art embodies a range of human moods that due to their universality continue to impact the perception of future generations (Rozanov 1996, p. 418). Thinking about the intellectual and spiritual effect of objects of art, he noted that creativity has its “objective and subjective sides” (Rozanov 1996, p. 416), and that there is little existing methodology that pays attention to the study of creative subjectivity. This remark registers Rozanov’s early interest in the subjectivity of perception. In his later writing he used historical artefacts as objects that

Citation: Mondry, Henrietta. 2022. Physical and Metaphysical Visualities: Vasily Rozanov and Historical Artefacts. *Arts* 11: 70. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11040070>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 17 June 2022

Accepted: 5 July 2022

Published: 6 July 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

conveyed encoded meaning. As his interest turned to the materiality of the human body as inseparable from spiritual and metaphysical spheres, he used historical artefacts as the source material to understand the meta/physical body. Various aspects of visuality became central to his investigations. The scope of this visuality was typical for the interest of turn of the century modernism in artefacts as inseparable from (quasi)anthropological thinking (Bell and Hasinoff 2015), which in Rozanov's case materialised in his collecting ancient coins, discovery of new cultural objects during international travels, visits to museums and art exhibitions, as well as studies of drawings of material objects brought from various ethnographic expeditions. These activities formed a foundation for his "philosophy of visual perception" (Rozanov 1971, p. 144), which aimed to promote the main overarching idea of his oeuvre: to prove that the spiritual and ontological side of human life is homogenous with the life of the physical body.

Rozanov's method of interpretation of art is based on his quest to understand the hidden meaning of historical artefacts, albeit within the main problematics of his writing. It is noteworthy that he turned to this subject in the tract *On Understanding*, which indicates that his interpretation of visual art is driven by the need to comprehend its meaning. This is in line with theorising on hermeneutics of interpretation of historical visual artefacts articulated in recent scholarship. Oscar Batschmann, in his authoritative "A Guide to Interpretation: Art Historical Hermeneutics", writes about the role of understanding in the interpretative dynamics in relation to a historical visual artefact:

It also happens, though, that we are looking at a work and that we experience its "call," or that we are struck by its mystery or incomprehensibility. It may be either such a call or our incomprehension—our *Unverständnis*—that prompts us to engage in the act of interpretation. We can describe the interpretation of a visual artwork in general terms as the act by which we seek to do away with our incomprehension. (Batschmann 2003, p. 182)

As will become clear in my article, this element of perceived "mystery" in historical visual images is particularly applicable to Rozanov's visualities. In line with early Russian modernism's conflation of history and myth (Matich 2005, p. 246), Rozanov used historical artefacts as evidence of lost beliefs and historical myths pertaining mystery of the corporeal Creation.

Relevant for understanding Rozanov's visuality is the fact that his writing in its synthetic form is a form of creative writing. While his early work *On Understanding* was written as a systematic formal philosophical tract, the majority of his writing breaks boundaries between various genres. His essays and articles related to visuality are not written as academic investigations and refer to eclectic sources; they express evoked glimpses of subjective discovery. Rozanov not only wants to understand but also to explain historical objects. Elucidating on the role of explanation of historical artefacts, Batschmann notes that "in historical explanations, the rules of historical connections and the motives for a specific connection together make up the *explanans*" (Batschmann 2003, p. 197). This notion of "motive" is especially relevant for Rozanov's explanations. In what follows, I will demonstrate that Rozanov's main motive to create explanatory connections between visual objects, history, and mythology was to understand and explain the mystery of embodied sexuality. A recently used notion of "compelling visuality" in art history scholarship proposes that a sculpture or painting is defined not only by its historical domain, "but also—not least—by its significance or value to us, contemporary beholders" (Zwijnenberg and Farago 2003, p. xi). I argue that Rozanov widened the domain of what was viewed as "compelling" at his time, in line with the subjective synthesising principles of his worldview. He looked in art for the manifestations of that which he considered to be eternal and trans-historical: this eternal in his worldview was the mystery of the metaphysical roots of human sexuality.

As a religious thinker who looked for the monistic continuity of the divine presence in physical matter, Rozanov was particularly interested not only in written sources such as the Scriptures, but also in objects that were invested with religious meaning. One of his

ideas that helped him to show similarities between the divine and human essence related to the notion of the sexed body of God (Mondry 2021). In his essay *Judaism* (1903), he argued that the first human, Adam, was bisexual in a way that out of his body a female was created and this serves as a proof of God's intention to stress the importance of sexuality and procreation. Rozanov's fascination with the notion of bisexuality and androgyny materialised in a number of streams of thought. Evidence of divine origins of Adam's original bisexuality helped Rozanov to postulate the divine nature of sexuality, which, in turn, served his self-proclaimed mission to rehabilitate sexuality. He also looked for historical visual representations of human bodies that expressed celebration of sexuality and procreation as inseparable from the religious domain. Among the artefacts that caught his attention were sculptures, paintings, and frescoes in churches and cathedrals, figurines and stone reliefs from antiquity, all of which he interpreted as manifestations of the universality of his notion of the mysterious nature of sexuality. At the same time, in line with modernist culture's preoccupation with sexual "deviances" and "anomalies", he could explore cases of effeminate maleness and masculine femaleness as atavistic variations in nature. Yet, unlike the medicalised discourse around non-normative sexuality, Rozanov endowed cases of alleged androgyny, same-sex leanings, and asexuality with religious and metaphysical meaning. He often explained cases of ascetic religious leanings or cases of secular asexuality as evidence of the mysterious nature of sexuality. Historical artefacts served as a source and illustration of the core ideas of his "philosophy of life".

2. *Italian Impressions: Visuality in Search for Features of Metaphysical Embodiments*

In line with the cultural trends that ascribed value to visuality in the quest to understand history, Rozanov embarked on travels to search for the monuments of different and past cultures. His first destination was Italy, which for him as for his intellectual Russian milieu represented the land of a combination of pagan antiquity and Catholicism. Visual objects of a pagan past were the focus of his gaze, and he was similarly interested in the contemporary Catholic culture of the Vatican. The results of his trip in 1901 were essays that he later published as a book under the title *Italian Impressions (Ital'ianskie vpechatleniia)* (1909). His previous encounters with ancient artefacts were in the form of photographs and a handful of ancient coins brought by a colleague. In the first year of the new century, Rozanov had an opportunity to see and study historical artefacts in situ. This for him was an opportunity to experience the effects of created shapes and forms that he contemplated in an abstract vision in his philosophical tract *On Understanding* (1886).

While Rozanov finds signs of affirmation of love and acceptance of the natural world in samples of ancient artefacts, he pays attention to Catholic religious art that he juxtaposes to the vibrancy of the pagan worldview. Yet, at the same time, he searched for a synthesis between paganism and Christianity in order to show that Christianity can have life-affirming qualities.

Notably, his search for synthesis in religions is paralleled by the search for manifestations of blurred borders between the male and female physicality.¹ His gaze discovers and stops at those artefacts that help him to formulate his views on the necessity to rethink the relationship between religion and nature, to destigmatize the life of the body, and to unravel the mystery of sexuality and love. As early as the first page of his first essay, "Good Friday in St. Peter's Cathedral" ("*Strastnaia piatnitsa v sobore Sv. Petra*"), Rozanov introduces the theme of synthesis in the description of the clothing of the Catholic priests. He searches for commonalities between ecclesiastical garments both in the West and in the East and suggests that the cut and bright colour of these ceremonial robes signify important tendencies. Rozanov examines the Catholic cardinal Rampolla clad in colourful and effeminate garment and presents the clothing as a meaning-creating artefact of ecclesiastical culture:

A striking feature of priests' clothing in both the West and the East is that its cut is typically feminine, not at all masculine: sleeves which broaden at the cuffs, a wide-banded girdle (men never wear such a thing), and finally, even a train.

And in the actual colour of the clothing there is something bright: lilac, green, blue, red, something one never finds with men. And yet this choice of clothing and colour expresses an unconscious and very profound part of the human soul. (Rozanov 1994a, p. 21)

While Rozanov does not directly articulate the idea of an androgynous character of priestly attire, he nevertheless raises the issue of latent inclination of priests to choose effeminate cut and colour. Using the notion of the unconscious leaning of the human soul, he suggests that male priests express their inner nature via their sensed tastes. Rozanov's impressions made by the shape of the garment echo his early formulations about the impact of art expressed in the tract *On Understanding* by means of outer shapes. Yet, he also tries to fit his a priori ideas about metaphysical physicality into this visual sphere. He clearly pursues the notion of bisexuality embedded in his idea of God's bisexuality and hints at the existence of hidden unconscious leanings that prove his idea about the mystical nature of sex.² The fact that Rozanov registers that he notices an effeminacy of priestly costume in the opening paragraph of his first essay on his travel impressions emphasizes that he uses visuality to support his theorizing of the physical and metaphysical materiality.

Rozanov's interpretation of the psychological aspects expressed in the choice of clothing presents an early case of theorizing clothes. Carl Fluegel's influential *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930) classifies two types of dress codes as most resistant to fashion and changeability: dress as a sign of rank and dress as a sign of nationality: "All the costumes or decorations falling within these two categories possess an important feature in common—their tendency to immutability" (Fluegel 1966, p. 32). Fluegel's most original contribution to interpretation to the history of costume relates to his psychoanalytical approach to clothes. He views clothes as a coded message of sublimated inner desires, and these include sexual tendencies. Rozanov's visuality in interpretation of priestly garments identifies signs of aspects of sexuality that fall into his notions of mystery of sexuality as inseparable from religion. He searches for the remnants of the past in ecclesiastical clothes that due to their "immutability" (Fluegel 1966, p. 32) encode historical knowledge, some of which is lost in culture.

Rozanov likewise imputes similar features of gender and sexuality to bodies of canonical ecclesiastical personalities depicted in sculpture. In the essay "In old Rome" ("*Po staromu Rimu*"), he comments on the striking impression made on him by a statue of Saint Francis carrying a child in the Santa Maria in the Cosmedino Church in Rome. He states that he had previously seen, more than once, statues of the Saint in other churches during his journey through Italy, and in order to typify the sentiment expressed in the sculpture, he notes that Saint Francis has become a favourite among the Italian Catholics in spite of the humble origins of his early followers. Rozanov admits that the statue captivates his attention because of the representation of a male figure carrying a child in a stylistic borrowed from the representation of the Madonna. Rozanov formulates the idea of this statue as a "male Madonna" (Rozanov 1994b, p. 36), with an infant touching lovingly the Saint's face and the Saint tenderly holding the infant on his left arm. Polemically, he observes that this composition catches his attention as a Russian Orthodox person because such a plot does not exist in Eastern Orthodox art. Drawing parallels between art and life, Rozanov states that it is inconceivable to imagine a representation of love between a cleric, especially a monk, and a baby, as it is similarly impossible to imagine the existence of such love in real life in Russian society. In his interpretation of the sculpture, Rozanov implicitly introduces the notion of the gendered character of Russian Orthodox life and art, and he displaces the binary opposition of male–female. By pairing "male" and "Madonna", he challenges the gender concepts embedded in Russian Orthodoxy and icons. He also makes his personal mission evident by stating that there is a lack of tenderness towards children in Russian culture that is influenced by the severity of the rules of family conduct canonized in the sixteenth-century *Domostroi*. In this essay and others in the series, Rozanov's visuality allows him to notice ideas and messages in surrounding artefacts that lead him to religious-philosophical conclusions. He maintains that the philosophical position of

Catholic ecclesiastical culture reaffirms the notion of “*Sancta Natura*” (Rozanov 1994b, p. 37) and notes that as opposite to this, Russian Christianity has the cult of saintly personalities, but never of sacred spiritual nature. Rozanov uses examples of Catholic art as evidence in his formulation and promotion of the main ideas of his body politics.

In his essay “Fading Pictorial Art” (“*Vytsvetaiushchaia zhivopis’*”), he once more returns to the leitmotif of gentility and femininity in Catholic art, this time drawing parallels between Rafael’s frescoes and his personal traits of character. In his search for religious pagan/Christian synthesis, Rozanov evaluates Rafael’s work as unique in this ability to portray spirit in matter:

Affection, meekness, some sort of paradise in the human face—these are characteristics of his art. [. . .] Only Rafael has captured the ancient Psyche, the Soul. He fantasizes, meekly, sweetly, charmingly, at times borrowing from Christianity, at other times borrowing from paganism; he does it without effort, without tension, like a king, who takes everything because everything belongs to him. (Rozanov 1994c, p. 50)

Turning to Rafael’s self-portrait, Rozanov continues to pursue the theme of mystery in sexuality, explaining Rafael’s unique gift by his maiden-like nature:

Raphael is known to have had a face different from that of all other people: the face of the purest of maidens, a long and tender face, without a trace of beard or moustache. In history he is the same kind of miraculous phenomenon as Joan of Arc, i.e., a phenomenon specially forged in the depths of the earth, a supernatural creature, to a higher degree than all the rest of us, natural people. (Rozanov 1994c, p. 51)

Notably, in his later work, *People of the Moonlight* (1911), devoted to the exploration of bisexuality in its relation to asexuality and homosexuality in the context of mysterious and metaphysical origins of sex, Rozanov will again mention Raphael’s face as an example of what is mystical and incomprehensible in sex. Rozanov’s visuality of perception of artefacts is a complex process, in which he looks for manifestations of conscious and unconscious drives. His aim is to identify in these manifestations a range of beliefs, knowledge, or intuition that was lost in the history of civilization. These visualities feed into his “philosophy of life” as he formulated it later in *Fallen leaves* (1915).

In his other essay in *Italian Impressions*, “In the Vatican Museums” (“*V muzeiakh Vatikana*”), Rozanov continues to use perceived sculptural representations of the androgynous thematic to eliminate the binary opposition between paganism and monotheism:

Of the interesting features which strike one when observing Greek art, I shall draw attention merely to one: the male appearance of the female faces and the female appearance of the male. Pallas Athene is not merely a warrior by reason of her weapon and helmet, not a warrior by virtue of all the mythological stories told about her: she is a warrior as the Greeks actually portrayed her—she is masculine, male in form, manlike. What is this idea? Juno, i.e., the Greek Hera, is also manlike. And in the myths neither of them has any children. (Rozanov 1994d, p. 57)

The above passage indicates that Rozanov treats sculpture as an authentic primary source that has a value in culture no less important than a written source. Furthermore, having legitimized sculpture as a cultural canon, he proceeds to interpret its significance as a source with higher meaning. The description of the manlike goddesses is followed by a description of womanlike male figures. Having prepared the ground by using the image of “male Madonna” in the earlier essay (Rozanov 1994b, p. 36), he now draws a parallel between Christian saints and pagan gods, using their perceived androgenized femininity as indicative of the riddle of sexuality:

In the Capitoline Museum I simply stood in amazement before a statue of full human size: it was a Greek Saint Francis, holding the Holy Infant. And in the Vatican Museum there is an even more striking form of the same statue: its male forms are preserved, but the head is completely feminine, its long hair is

plaited like a woman's, and it too is carrying a child! The hair of the so-called Apollo Musagetes [. . .] is female, long, not plaited, but hanging down in two unattractive broad tresses, and the Apollo is wearing female clothing! So what is all this blatant unattractiveness? For it is not natural for us to admire a masculine appearance in women or a female appearance in men. If these images were created it means that they indicated ancient Greeks were searching for something. (Rozanov 1994d, p. 58)

In these passages, Rozanov's tactic is to find common ground between representations of historical and mythological characters that he takes from pagan and Christian traditions. In Batchmann's "A Guide to Interpretation: Art Historical Hermeneutics", a search for a historical explanation of the visual object using written references is viewed as part of the normative process of understanding, interpretation, and explanation of historical art. In this particular case, when Rozanov focuses on androgyny, he turns to mythology from two different traditions in antiquity: pre-Christian paganism and the Judaic Torah. Having stated that the Greeks were searching for "something", he not only interprets the image but explains it. His goal is to explain a cluster of ideas that are fundamental for his personal interest in the mystery of the meta/physical body. What Rozanov calls "something" is an understanding of the divine nature of sexuality, which relates to the bisexualities of the Biblical God and the gods of Antiquity.

Rozanov's explanation is akin to Batchmann's notion of explanation of historical artefacts. Batchmann uses two terms for explaining artefacts: *explanans*, "that which explains something" and the *explanandum*, "that which is to be explained" (Batchmann 2003, p. 197). In Rozanov's essay, the mystery of sexuality is that which is to be explained, while sculptural and religious texts are "that which explains something". Having described the sculptures, he develops an argument stating that the androgyny of the ancient statues expresses the way the Greeks were searching for features of the metaphysical in human beings, which would bring them closer to the divine. To explain this search, he turns to the Judo-Christian canon, to the "infallible Sinai account" (Rozanov 1994d, p. 58) and argues in favour of bisexuality as a characteristic common to God and to humans created in God's likeness. While discussing Ancient Greek art, he states that an androgynous Adam was created in the likeness of God and was "a perfect human being" (Rozanov 1994d, p. 58), before Eve was made out of Adam. This allows him to promote the idea of metaphysical physicality and sexuality in real life and he moves from interpretation of artefacts to physiology. He asserts that in the physiological development of every human, there is a period when the two sexes have not separated—the period of adolescence: "The mystery of the remarkable separation of the sexes, psychological and noumenal, happens with and in the growth of every human being. In every human the story of Adam and Eve is repeated." (ibid., p. 58). To assert the metaphysical importance of pagan art as a form of expression of spirituality, he concludes that "the Greeks sought God through a material human being. And the way of their search was a true one" (ibid., p. 58). I propose that with his statement about the "unattractiveness" of figures bearing the signs of a third sex, Rozanov employs his tactic of changing the stereotypical reception of sculptures of antiquity as inferior to Christian spiritual art. He counters modernity's stereotype of pagan art as a form of worship of "attractive" and, therefore, non-spiritual materiality. It was precisely this stereotype of the ancient statue that was often used in Russian high culture.

This particular understanding of pagan sculpture was articulated in Petr Chaadaev's influential *Philosophical Letters* (1836), where statues of pagan antiquity were characterized as provoking base sensual desires, and as such were juxtaposed to the sublime monotheism of the Ancient Israelites. Chaadaev's "Third and "Fourth Philosophical Letters" singled out the architecture of Ancient Egypt, its pyramids, as an example of sublime spiritual shapes as opposed to "the lust-provoking bronze and marble bodies" of Ancient Greek and Roman art (Chaadaev 1971, p. 57). Going against this tradition of interpreting pagan sculpture as devoid of spirituality, Rozanov resorts to maintaining similarities between the sculptures' androgyny and the Biblical Creation mythology. He uses the concept of

androgyny to ascribe the sculptural representations of the body in Ancient Greece with the intuitive search for monotheistic notions of Creation. Androgyny put into the context of Creation helps Rozanov to dismantle Cartesian dualisms of body and soul, flesh and spirit (Mondry 2021).

His essays in *Italian Impressions* suggest that at this juncture of his oeuvre, Rozanov uses Ancient Greek sculpture as visual evidence of the metaphysical nature of human physicality. He boldly links the pagan art of antiquity with monotheism's notion of humans being created in God's image:

Looking at the first-class creations of an ancient carver a thought occurs: wasn't the ancient art more metaphysical [than modern art]? [. . .] We can find links between ancient Greek sculpture and religion: if human-being was created "in likeness", then it follows that in the image one can get closer to its prototype, and via the human and "measurements" find God's image. The task is different from our iconography that gives an abstract representation of a worshipped face; the task rather was to find, to construct, to create [. . .] such an image that would be invented by a human and at the same time brought from the Sinai. (Rozanov 1994d, pp. 56–57)

3. *Resurrected Egypt: Discovering Metaphysical Bodies in Artefacts of Ancient Egypt*

While Rozanov was looking for signs of embodied metaphysics in the artefacts of antiquity during his travels in Italy, in later years, he turned his attention to artefacts of Ancient Egypt. However, while Chaadaev was interested in expressions of sublime spirituality in the shape of pyramids, Rozanov was interested in the harmonious synthesis of the spiritual and the physical in Egyptian representational art. In particular, he found evidence of a special veneration of the loving family in Ancient Egyptian artefacts. Strikingly, in his article "Aphrodisian Beauty" ("*Afrodizianskaia krasota*") (1916), placed by him in the collection of his essays under the title *Resurrected Egypt (Vozrozhdaishchiisia Egipet)*, he severely criticises Ancient Greek representations of the female body in the images of Aphrodite. In the general context of his essays on Ancient Egypt, this negative evaluation of Ancient Greek sculpted representations of the ideal of beauty is meant to juxtapose the two cultures of antiquity in matters of the family and procreation. Rozanov claims that these Greek statues are completely devoid of biological reality. For him as a philosopher of life, this art is false, as it represents the body that was not born in a way that bodies are born in real life. Noting that Aphrodite in Greek mythology came out of the sea and was not born "physiologically" (Rozanov 2002a, p. 80), he maintains that sculptural representations of her body similarly have no life in them. These observations based on his subjective visuality further allow him to make generalisations about the lack of importance of the family in Ancient Greek society:

Family in Ancient Greece was pushed into "the back yard", while *hetaira* were placed in the front. And this presents the core of their civilization, the state of things that could not be corrected in transitioning to marble, golden and bronze "sculpting of life". The "lye of life" was passed onto the "lye of art." (Rozanov 2002a, p. 80)

Claiming that everything beautiful is "born" naturally, he makes both an aesthetical and an ontological judgment. He also resorts to the stable Christian characterisation of Ancient Greek sculptural representations of female beauty as "depraved" and even "transgressive" (Rozanov 2002a, p. 81), but then turns the argument upside down. In his argument, this beauty is depraved *not* because it represents physical baseness, but because the Ancient Greek ideal of female beauty does not connect with the physiology of birth. He endows an aesthetic category of beauty with both physical and metaphysical meaning, expecting embodied beauty to express ideas of procreation, fecundity, and emotional warmth.

On the basis of his interpretation of the pagan art of Ancient Greece and Rome, he explains these civilisations' historical collapse and subsequent embracing of Christianity

since, in his opinion, these civilisations did not have the notion of an afterlife. For Rozanov, the first civilization that was involved in the search for immortality was Ancient Egypt, and in the essay “Aphrodisiac Beauty” written in 1917, he turns to the visual representations of women’s bodies and female goddesses in Ancient Egyptian artefacts as well as various drawings representing families. In these artefacts, he finds the culture that celebrates the birth of children, love, family, tender feelings and nurturing attitudes to children by both parents. Strikingly, these are the same themes and categories that he detected in his viewing of sculptures in Rome and conveyed in *Italian Impressions*. In *Italian Impressions*, his goal was to juxtapose Catholic religious art with Russian Orthodox icons and culture, in order to change his Russian readers’ opinions about the relationships within the family and to instil his main idea—that the physical body has metaphysical connections. In this essay, “Aphrodisiac Beauty”, written some 15 years later, he juxtaposes Ancient Egyptian ideas of family with those of the Ancient Greeks, but elaborates on the same concepts and sets out to find visual signs of the metaphysical in the material, to celebrate physical life, to promote the importance of parental love and care and the family. Rozanov’s gaze searches for these main notions of his “philosophy of life” in artefacts and visualises their presence or absence to support his arguments.

His idea that the metaphysical beginnings of the body are linked with the mystery of sexuality finds its expression in his interpretation of visual historical artefacts from Ancient Egypt. Additionally, to procreative sexuality, his search for representations of androgynous features and same-sex leanings is also part of his theorising of the mystery of sexuality. In his description of ancient artefacts, he finds proof of both phenomena: he refers to bearded Venuses of antiquity and some drawings on Ancient Egyptian artefacts as proof of this idea. In an essay called “Mystery of four faces” (“*Taina chetyrekh lits*”) (1917), he comments on the stone drawing of a dance dating back to 3000 BC. He copied the drawing from Gaston Maspero’s authoritative book on the art of Ancient Egypt, but in addition to the existing explanation of the drawing he gives his own assertive interpretation.³ Noting that he disagrees with Maspero’s opinion that the depiction of the female body movements represents a dance, he offers an interpretation that reveals Rozanov’s method of visibility as ancillary to his own agenda. In terms of hermeneutics of interpretation of historical art, he turns to Herodotus’s descriptions of festivities in Ancient Egypt and in particular to the annual festival in Bubastis. One detail of the description by Herodotus particularly fascinates Rozanov; it refers to the ritual behaviour performed by groups of women during the festival:

Arriving by boat to a town, they bring the vessel to the shore and some sing and clap in the manner they have performed before, but others shout abusively at the women of this town, and some others dance, while others jump, raise their dresses and uncover themselves [. . .]. (Herodotus, II, pp. 59–60). (Rozanov 2002b, pp. 96–97)

Having italicised those parts of Herodotus’s text that captivate him, Rozanov suggests that the movements are sexually significant. The dance for him is a performed mystery-play that he relates to the cult of Artemis, the goddess associated by him with androgyny. Since the ritual dance is performed by women and, in his view, for female audiences, the combination of visual and textual narratives allows him to jump into a discussion of the mystery of same sex desires and/or asexual leanings. He concludes that the drawing expresses a religious “adoration” of each other among the people of alternative sexual orientation (Rozanov 2002b, p. 98), while the pose with a raised leg suggests exposure and “fetishism” of sexual organs (Rozanov 2002b, p. 98). He notes that this detail is not typical for Ancient Egyptian artefacts, and it represents a phenomenon that stands apart from the mainstream normative sexual orientation of the society. This evaluation of the image as atypical allows him to detect signs of encoded mystery in the drawing.

In a characteristic link to explain contemporary occurrences by examples from historical and mythological past, he observes that contemporary cases of non-normative sexuality similarly manifest the same mystery. In his evaluation of this ancient Egyptian drawing,

he assertively refers to his own book *People of the Moonlight: Metaphysics of Christianity* (1911), dedicated to the study of alternative forms of sexuality (androgyny, bisexuality, hermaphroditism) in a historical perspective. While in *People of the Moonlight* he refers to medical literature on non-normative sexuality, including the at the time influential work by Richard Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, his interest is not in medicalising these cases. Rather, he uses these contemporary sources together with ancient artefacts and historical texts indiscriminately as intertexts to prove the idea of the mysterious nature of sex. In *People of the Moonlight*, he uses figurines of the “bearded Venuses of antiquity” unearthed by archaeologists in Cyprus to support evidence from written sources and cases of contemporary sectarian cults and medical “anomalies” studied in the work of sexologists. In this new essay, “Mystery of four faces” (1917), on ancient Egyptian drawings, his previous writing helps him to conclude that nature is unchangeable, “*natura aeterna*” (Rozanov 2002a, p. 98). By the time he writes on artefacts of Ancient Egypt (1916, 1917), his own stance on the mystery of sexuality has become firmly established. His trans-historical interpretation of historical art objects is in line with his views on the trans-historical nature of metaphysical physicality.

4. Conclusions

Rozanov’s personal friend and art historian Eric Gollerbach maintained that Rozanov’s travels in Italy and visits to the Vatican and the Coliseum did not give him anything “essentially new”, but rather evoked in him “certain motifs, certain moods” (Gollerbach 1922, p. 61). Gollerbach rightly stresses the subjectivity of Rozanov’s gaze, and the point about the role of impression and mood-creation of art is in line with Rozanov’s own comments on the role of art, expressed by him in his early work, *On Understanding* (1886). However, his visual contact with historical artefacts resulted in more than producing an impression or “mood”. I have demonstrated that Rozanov’s visuality correlated with his search for mystery of sexuality and sexualities. This search for a mystery in itself is a characteristic feature of hermeneutics in the interpretation of historical art, as defined by Batschmann (2003, p. 182). What makes Rozanov’s visuality original is the very nature of a mystery that he postulated and attempted to unravel: the mystery of the metaphysical roots of embodied sexualities.

My investigation has demonstrated that there is a certain dialectics in Rozanov’s interpretation of historical artefacts. Visuality plays a central part in this dialectic as it moves from abstract ideas about forms and shapes to visual encounters with concrete objects, such as ecclesiastical costume, sculpture, and drawings. Notably, his gaze selected those shapes that represented the human body and arguably signified aspects of sex and gender. In his early philosophical tract, *On Understanding*, he wrote about the universal impact of art, yet at the same time he briefly noted that aspects of subjective motivation in creativity had not been explored and understood. His hermeneutics of interpretation of artefacts attests to his own subjectivities that can be fully understood in conjunction with his later writing. His analysis of historical objects often references historical, religious, and literary texts, which he uses to substantiate his “understanding”. Myths and legends of classical antiquity as well as the Bible provide eclectic material and evidence for his understanding. In some cases, he uses contemporary historical and medical literature as supplementary sources for unlocking the hidden meaning of artefacts. All these methods are part of the hermeneutics of interpretation of historical art (Batschmann), while a range of Rozanov’s sources extends the domain of “compelling visuality”. His synthetic genre of writing combines scholarly insights with creative writing, references to academic work and anecdotal material or lived experience, and this eclectic combination constitutes the unity of form and content of his texts. This amalgamation of sources used to explain art objects is precisely a marker of his subjectivity as well as characteristics of this new form of writing. In his work, which was a self-proclaimed mission of sex, his methods included not only understanding and interpretation, but also explanation. For him, all forms of historical and

mythological material make up what Batchmann calls the *explanans*—“that which explains something” (Batchmann, p. 197). His synthesising narratives make visuality compelling.

There is, albeit a flat, trajectory in the role visuality played in the development of his philosophy of life through seeing objects of art and observing life. In his essays written during his travels in Italy in 1901, visuality plays both a supportive and, to a degree, a formative role as it helps him to accumulate images and sensed experiences that underpin his inner searching that will later form the core idea of his oeuvre. Visuality in his later writing, devoted to interpreting artefacts of Ancient Egypt, has an intertextual character and not only supports, but is supported by the set of ideas that by then were formulated in his numerous essays and books. By borrowing arguments and data from his own earlier book *People of the Moonlight* to interpret a newly discovered drawing from Ancient Egypt, he reveals a circular course of his interpretative visuality, which in later years was reinforced by a set of his own formerly articulated ideas. Starting from “impressions” during his travels in Italy, articulated visuality becomes a powerful tool in his self-styled mission of sex, as he employs art objects as historical evidence in support of his ideas.

Like cultural evolutionists of his time, Rozanov applied a synchronic and diachronic approach to cultures and artefacts. In his contemporary society he was looking for embodied physical and psychological signs of “survivals” of not only a historical past, but of pre-historical, mythic, and cosmic origins of life and creation. Among these features he viewed sexuality and variations in sexual orientations as proof of links between physical and metaphysical phenomena. Instead of treating “primitive” and pagan cultures as inferior to contemporary western Christian civilization, he attempted to reconstruct those beliefs and views that, in turn, helped him to advocate his “philosophy of life”. As his method of understanding life was based on “visual perception and surprise” (Rozanov 1971, p. 144), he used historical artefacts as objects that revealed the metaphysical in physical embodiments.

From Rozanov’s views on the impact of the artistic creation expressed in his tract *On Understanding* follows that he believed in the power of the artefact to influence the perception of future generations. I propose that as a beholder of these historical artefacts, he not only wanted to decipher their meaning, but also believed that he found a way to connect with them and their creators by overcoming temporal and spatial barriers. He, thus, opened an inter-generational flow of influence because for him it meant to find a link with those historical people who, in his opinion, had knowledge that was lost to later generations. To understand the mystery of historical artefacts for him was identical with understanding the mystery of life.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ This synthesis was evaluated unequally by his contemporary critics. In a review on *Italian Impressions in Novoe vremia*, A. Beliaev stated: “What kind of a sectarian fit of madness is this, in which Tolstoi, Diana of Ephesus, Gogol, Mithras, the Romans, the Greeks, the Slavs, are mixed together?”. However, most critics wrote about Rozanov’s subjectivity as the source of his originality. For a discussion, see Fateev and Nikoliukin (1994, p. 427).
- ² Notably, attention to unconscious femininity implies also alternative sexual leanings—a variation of sexuality that Rozanov identified in his later writing as yet another manifestation of the mystery of sexuality. See Mondry (2000, 2010).
- ³ The whole collection *Resurrected Egypt* contains illustrations of artefacts that Rozanov personally copied from various authoritative sources, including G. Maspero, whose three volumes on Ancient Egypt were published in Russian translation between 1892 and 1915. He used these translations of Maspero: Gaston Maspero. *Drevniaia istoriia. Egipet. Assiriia*. St. Petersburg. 1905. Gaston Maspero. *Egipet*. Moscow: Problemy estetiki. 1915.

References

- Batschmann, Oscar. 2003. A Guide to Interpretation: Art Historical Hermeneutics. In *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and Out of History*. Edited by Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 179–209.
- Bell, Joshua, and Erin Hasinoff. 2015. Introduction: The Anthropology of Expeditions. In *The Anthropology of Expeditions: Travel Visualities, Afterlife*. Edited by Joshua Bell and Erin Hasinoff. New York: Bard Graduate Centre, pp. 1–33.
- Brown, Bill. 2003. *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter in American Literature*. Chicago: Chicago UP.
- Chaadaev, Petr. 1971. *Filosoficheskie pis'ma*. Michigan: Ardis.
- Fateev, Valerii, and Aleksandr Nikoliukin. 1994. Kommentarii. In *V.V. Rozanov. Ital'ianskie vpechatleniia*. Edited by Aleksandr Nikoliukin. Moscow: Respublika, pp. 423–29.
- Fluegel, John. 1966. *The Psychology of Clothes*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Gollerbakh, Erik. 1922. *V.V. Rozanov: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo*. St. Petersburg: Poliarnaia Zvezda.
- Matich, Olga. 2005. *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination of Russia's Fin de Siècle*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Mondry, Henrietta. 2000. O nekrasovoj androginnosti. Statuia kak politika tela u Vasiliia Rozanova. *Russian Literature* 48: 17–24.
- Mondry, Henrietta. 2010. *Vasily Rozanov and the Body of Russian Literature*. Bloomington: Slavica.
- Mondry, Henrietta. 2021. Synthesizing Religions: Vasily Rozanov's Phallic Christianity. *Religions* 12: 430. [CrossRef]
- Rozanov, Vasili. 1971. *Opavshie list'ia*. Munich: Neimanis, pp. 81–427.
- Rozanov, Vasili. 1994a. Strastnaia piatnitsa v sobore Sv. Petra. In *Ital'ianskie vpechatleniia*. Moscow: Respublika, pp. 21–23.
- Rozanov, Vasili. 1994b. Po staromu Rimu. In *Ital'ianskie vpechatleniia*. Moscow: Respublika, pp. 3–40.
- Rozanov, Vasili. 1994c. Vytsvetaiushchiasia zhivopis'. In *Ital'ianskie vpechatleniia*. Moscow: Respublika, pp. 46–52.
- Rozanov, Vasili. 1994d. V muzeiakh Vatikana. In *Ital'ianskie vpechatleniia*. Moscow: Respublika, pp. 52–61.
- Rozanov, Vasili. 1996. *O ponimanii*. Moscow: Tanais.
- Rozanov, Vasili. 2002a. Afrodiziaskaia krasota. In *Vozrozhdaishchiasia Egipet*. Moscow: Respublika, pp. 79–83.
- Rozanov, Vasili. 2002b. Taina chetyrekh lits. In *Vozrozhdaishchiasia Egipet*. Moscow: Respublika, pp. 91–106.
- Zwijnenberg, Robert, and Claire Farago. 2003. Art History after Aesthetics. In *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and Out of History*. Edited by Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. vii–xvi.

Article

“Wings of Freedom”: Petr Miturich and Aero-Constructivism

John E. Bowlt

Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089, USA; bowlt@usc.edu

Abstract: The article focuses on the aerodynamic experiments of Petr Vasil’evich Miturich (1887–1956), in particular his so-called *letun*, a project comparable to Vladimir Tatlin’s *Letatlin*, but less familiar. Miturich became interested in flight during the First World War, elaborating his first flying apparatus in 1918 before constructing a prototype and undertaking a test flight on 27 December 1921—which might be described as an example of Russian Aero-Constructivism (by analogy with Italian *Aeropittura*). Miturich’s basic deduction was that modern man must travel not by horse and cart, but with the aid of a new, ecological apparatus—the undulator—a mechanism which, thanks to its undulatory movements, would move like a fish or snake. The article delineates the general context of Miturich’s experiments, for example, his acquaintance with the ideas of Tatlin and Velemir Khlebnikov (in 1924 Miturich married the artist, Vera Khlebnikova, Velemir’s sister) as well as the inventions of Igor’ Sikorsky, Fridrikh Tsander, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky and other scientists who contributed to the “First Universal Exhibition of Projects and Models of Interplanetary Apparatuses, Devices and Historical Materials” held in Moscow in 1927.

Keywords: Petr Miturich; Velemir Khlebnikov; Vera Khlebnikova; Georgii Krutikov; Nikolai Punin; Igor’ Sikorsky; Vladimir Tatlin; Fridrikh Tsander; Konstantin Tsiolkovsky; aeronautics; *letun*; *Letatlin*; *volnovik*; “First Universal Exhibition of Models of Interplanetary Apparatuses and Mechanisms Gadgets and Historical Materials” (Moscow 1927)

Citation: Bowlt, John E. 2022.

“Wings of Freedom”: Petr Miturich and Aero-Constructivism. *Arts* 11: 52. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11030052>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 11 March 2022

Accepted: 12 April 2022

Published: 20 April 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

One of the salient themes of Russian Modernism is flight, metaphorical and practical, examples of which are legion—from the flying demons of Mikhail Vrubel to Aleksandr Blok’s poem “Aviator”, from the crashing airplane in the Cubo-Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun* to Kazimir Malevich’s Aero-Suprematism. The numerous visual and literary manifestations of the subject would take us into a dense and long orbit of angels, airplanes, balloons, spaceships, levitation, and the firmament, but this essay focuses on a single artist, Petr Vasil’evich Miturich (1887–1956), and a single event which seems to have influenced or, at least, paralleled, one of the most visionary inventions of the later avant-garde, i.e., his flying apparatus or *letun* (literally, one who possesses the capacity to fly) which he first envisaged in 1918. If Vladimir Tatlin’s *Letatlin* has been discussed widely, Miturich’s *letun* has not and, therefore, deserves serious investigation, the more so since it leads us into the wider context of Velemir Khlebnikov’s own flights of imagination. After all, from 1924 onwards Miturich was the husband of the artist Vera Khlebnikova, sister of Velemir, who exerted a profound influence on the artist’s worldview (Figure 1).

Miturich seems to have first cultivated an interest in flight during the Great War when he studied and introduced hot air balloons as part of the defense system of the Osovetz Fortress on the Eastern Front. Inspired, of course, by Khlebnikov’s designs for “flying abodes—cells” and astute observations of birds, Miturich designed his first apparatus in 1918—captured in the drawing called *Bird on Branch* (Figure 2), which, as Nina Belokhvos-tova argues, seems closer to an incoming flying object or to the *ornitoper* (mechanical bird) on which Miturich worked in 1918–1922 (Figures 3–6). In turn, Miturich tested a model prototype on 27 December 1921, in Santalovo¹ and, like Tatlin, seems to have elaborated the idea of his flying machine with particular enthusiasm in the mid-1920s—which begs

the question: Why? By way of an answer, let us recapitulate the essential details of the *letun* which might be allied with what might be called a Russian Aero-Constructivism (by analogy with the Italian Aerofuturismo or Aeropittura) (Figure 7).



Figure 1. Vera Khlebnikova: *Portrait of Petr Miturich*, 1924, Pencil on paper, 25 × 35, Private collection.

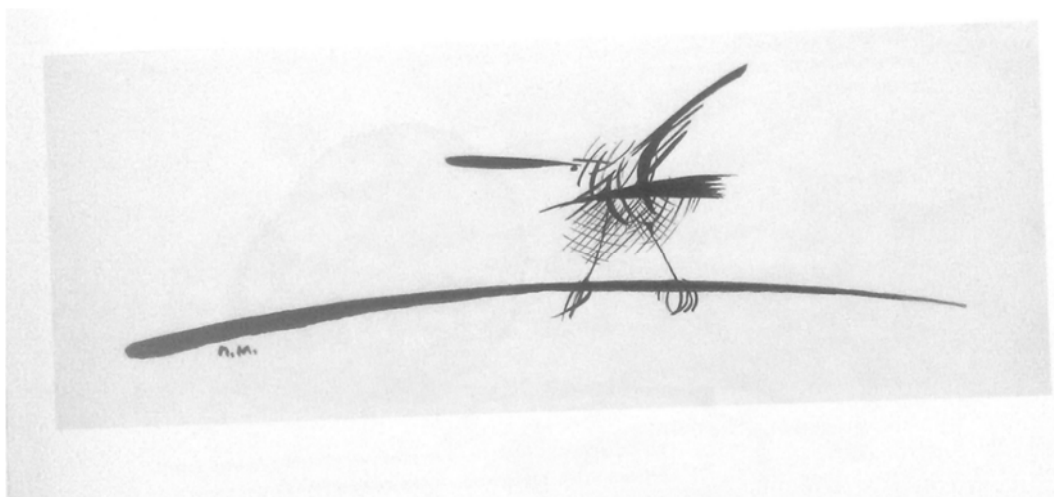


Figure 2. P. Miturich: *Vignette (Bird on Branch)*, 1918–1922, Indian ink on paper, 9.4 × 26, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Inv. No.: RS-4330 (p. 44822/4).

Miturich's basic argument was that man should no longer be moving around with carts and horses, but with a new ecological apparatus—the *volnovik* [undulator]—a mechanism which, like a fish or snake, would advance by undulatory action (Ibid.). Miturich contended that the motor impulse of all animals, fish, and birds relied on a spiralic thrust and that each resultant wave continued to reverberate—and to generate further energy—like an echo. Through the judicious application of placement and displacement, traction and distraction, the *volnovik* would move in air and water and on earth and, in accordance with the respective application, would be called variously an airship, boat, hydroplane, or caterpillar. Miturich justified his argument as follows: “Technology aspires to straighten out the crooked paths and forms of space and to furnish itself with a hardness and strength so as to overcome the counter and lateral forces of the ambience. . . . Technology ignores the facts of intermittent movement and as well as the rhythms of the moving phenomena themselves. . . . The engines which I am proposing adopt—automatically—a complex undulatory movement and, technically speaking, are a valuable expression of a different

kind of space and of movement therein, i.e., of time".² The airship or flying apparatus—the (Figure 8)—was also meant to extend this principle: there exist four drawings on one sheet dated 1923, a single design dated 26 March 1923, a project with an explanation dated to the 1920s–1930s, and a set of eleven sketches for an “airship based on the principle of ‘undulatory’ movement” of 1932.³ Judging from Miturich’s notes and drafts, the pilot of the *letun* would have directed the contraption by arms and hands only.

Inevitably, Miturich’s machine elicits comparisons with Tatlin’s *Letatlin* which is more celebrated in part because much of the original body exists—and there have been many reconstructions such as this one produced for the Costakis collection now in the Museum of Modern Art in Thessaloniki. Suffice it to recall that *Letatlin*, too, was to have flown without fuel and with wings operated by the arms—plus a bicycle mechanism for take-off. Tatlin tested his prototype with modest success but seems to have shelved the project after 1932, crash-landing into heavy still-lives and textured portraits.

Miturich and Tatlin came to their respective constructions via different trajectories, although in the 1910s both achieved artistic maturity during the frenetic development of the airplane industry, witnessing the construction of all manner of flying machines. Tatlin talked of “iron wings” in a lecture in Tsaritsyno in 1916 and, as Nikolai Punin (1920) observed, the very incline of the Monument to the III International of 1919 was meant to symbolize the intergalactic impetus of Communist colonialization, i.e., of the planets. Miturich, on the other hand, cultivated a deep interest in ornithology and, as a student at the Battle-Painting studio of the Academy of Arts, learned how to paint machines of war, including airplanes. In 1915 he even tried to enter flying school⁴ and the following year took courses in military engineering, including airplanes and oo o.⁵ In 1925 Miturich accomplished his one and only flight between Moscow and Kiev which “remained vivid in my memory. . . . In fact, falling for a few seconds, weightless, only to ascend in quick bursts, is not very pleasant and you start to worry a lot about the wings—maybe they’ll break off as a result of such sharp tremors?”⁶

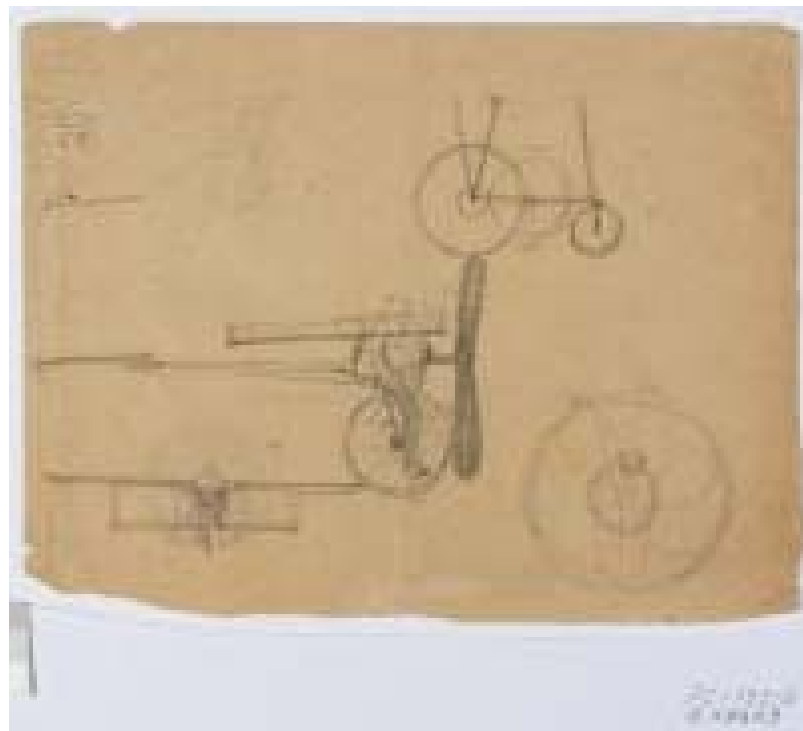


Figure 3. P. Miturich: Designs for a flying apparatus, 1918, Graphite pencil on paper, 17.5 × 22.1, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Inv. No.: RS-13518 (p. 69603).

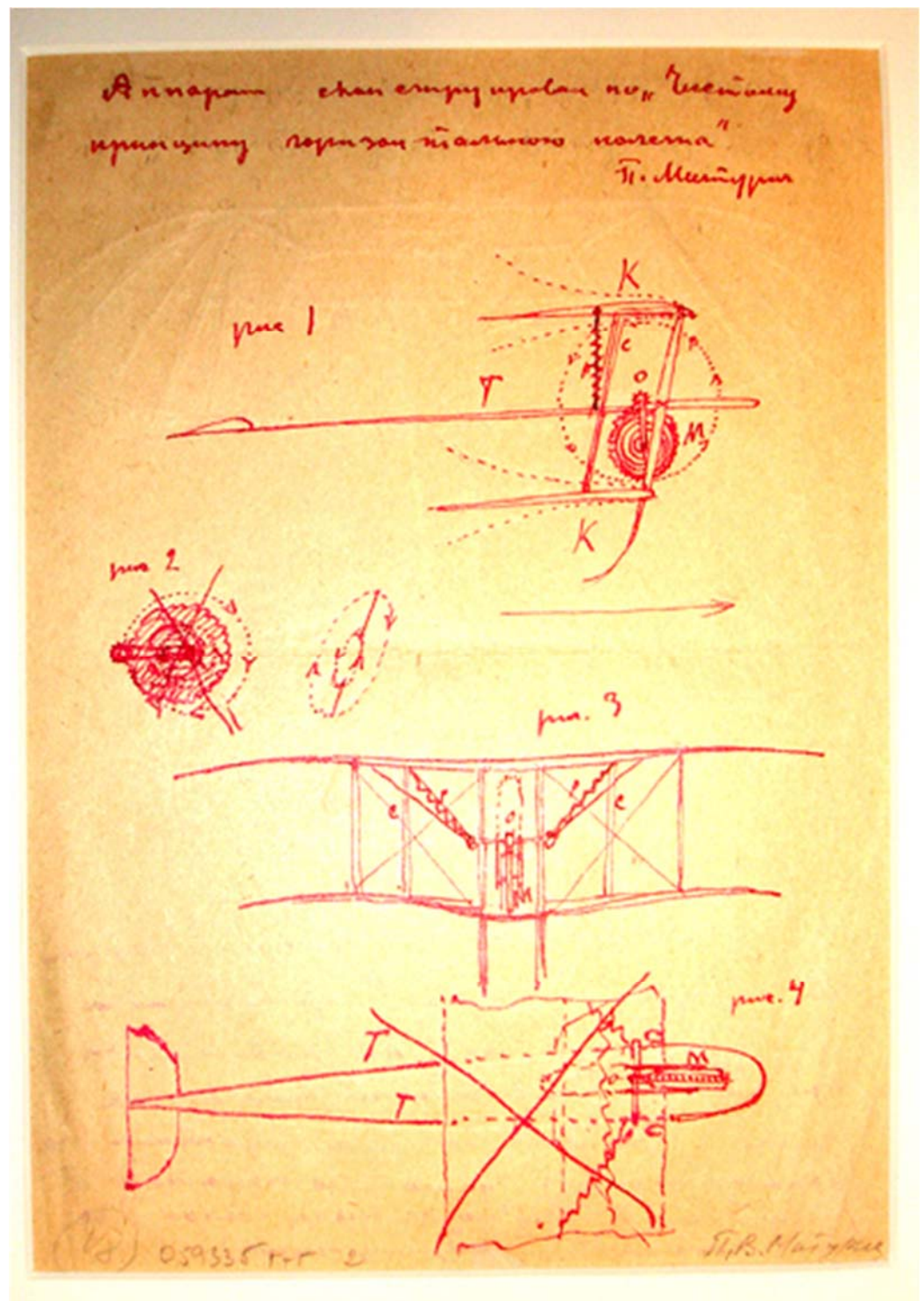


Figure 4. P. Miturich: "I have constructed my apparatus according to the 'Pure principle of horizontal flight'", ca. 1921, Red Indian ink on paper, 40 × 27, Private collection.



Figure 5. P. Miturich: "Hurrah! First flight completed, 28 II 1921", 1921, Pencil on paper, Private collection.

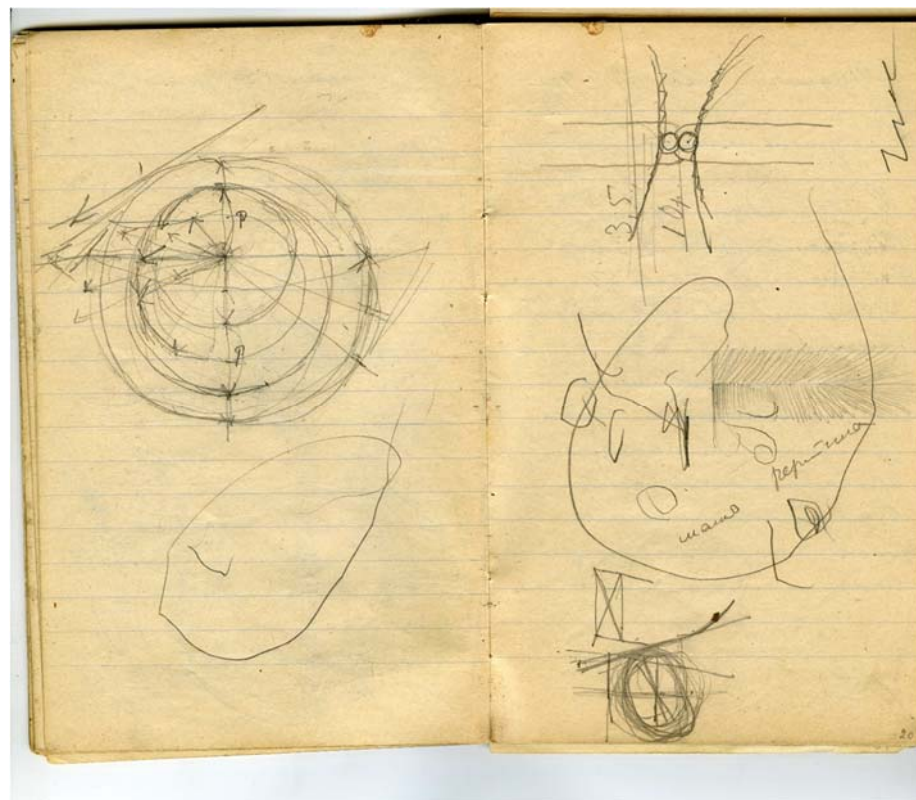


Figure 6. P. Miturich: Drawings for a flying apparatus. Notebook, 1921, Pencil on paper, Private collection.

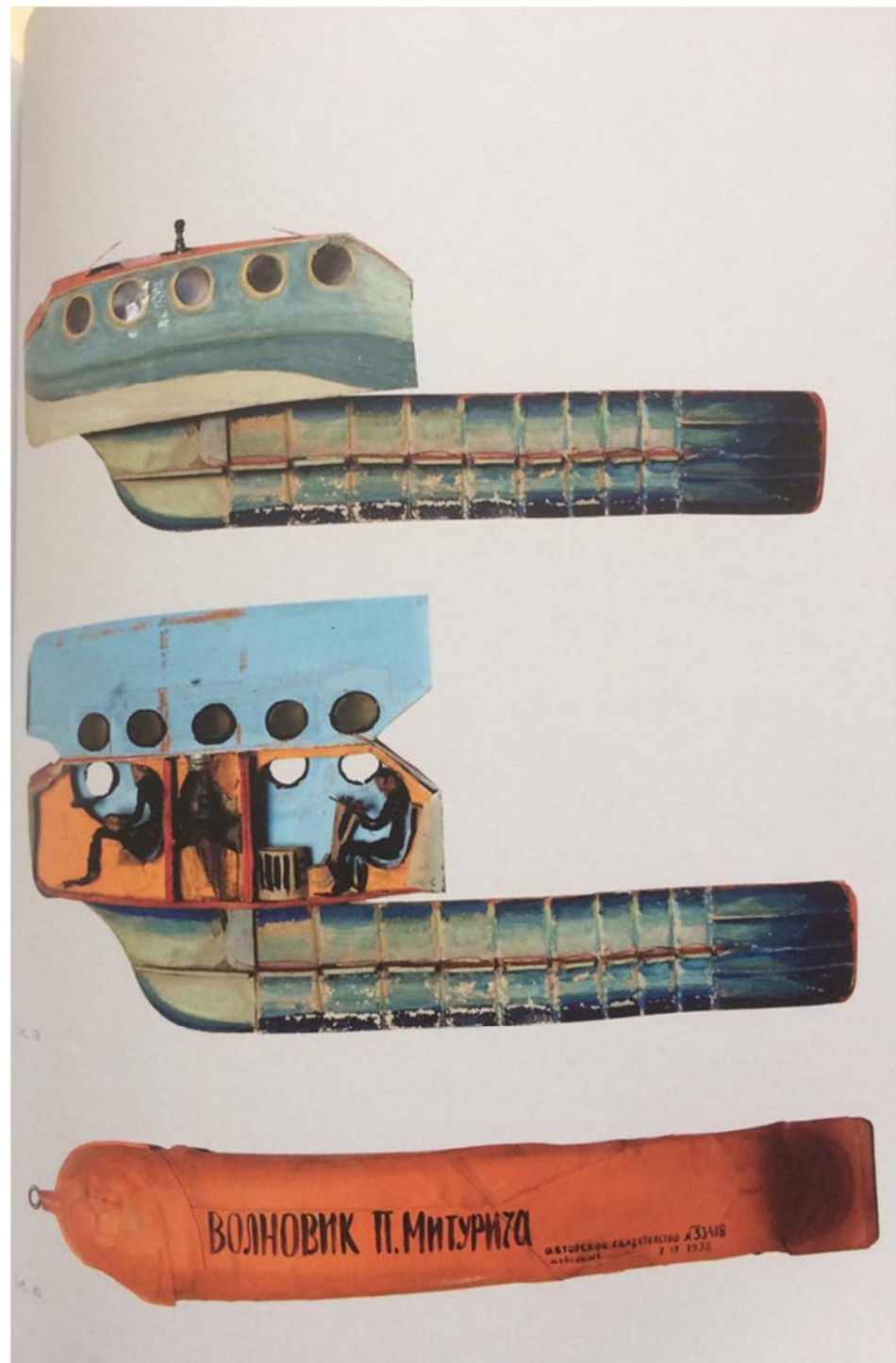


Figure 7. P. Miturich: *Volvovik*, ca. 1930, 60 cm long, mechanism wrapped in oilcloth, Private collection.

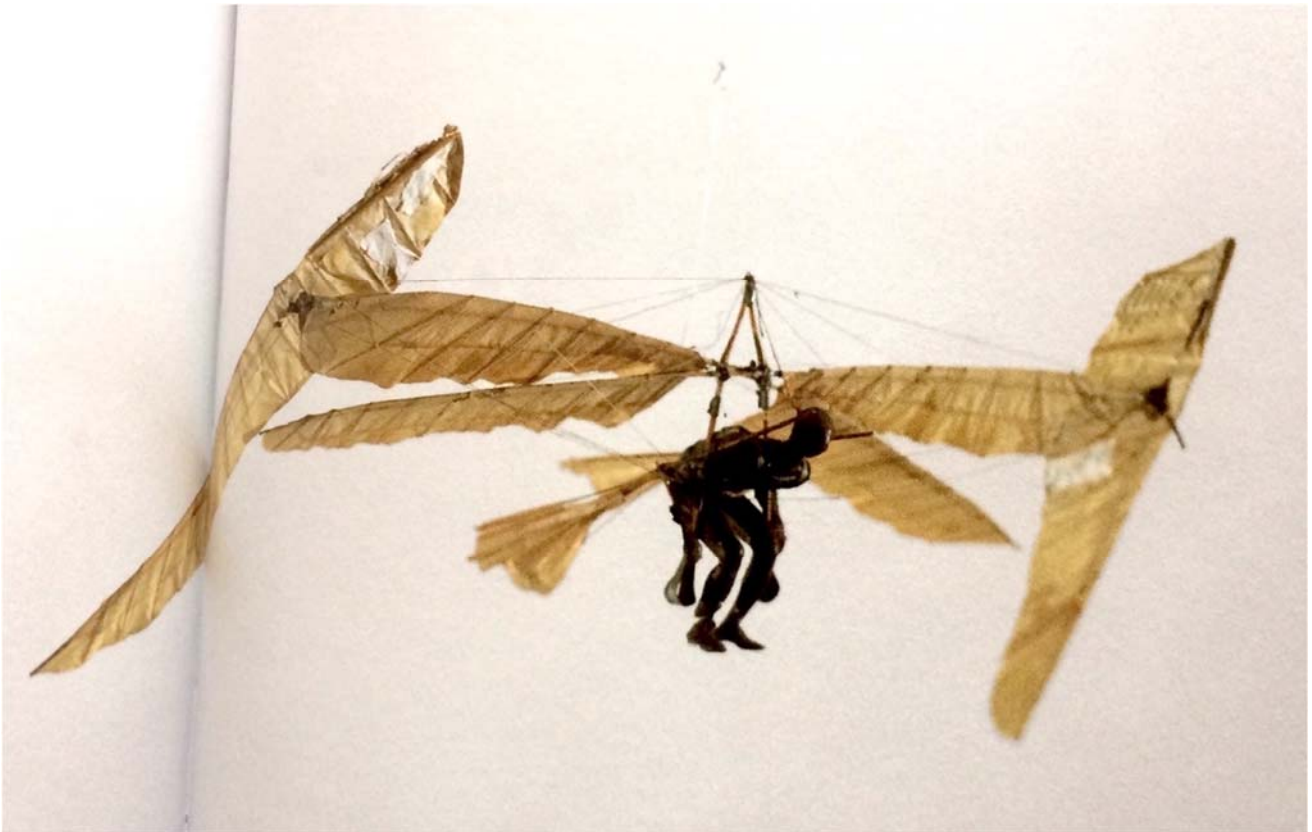


Figure 8. P. Miturich: Model of a *Letun* (Flying machine), ca. 1927, 60 × 30 × 30, Wood, metal, parchment, Private collection.

In any case, as an artist, soldier, and engineer, Miturich must have been very impressed by the huge flying apparatuses which Igor' Sikorsky was designing in 1913–1914, i.e., the *Grand* and the *Il'ia Muromets*, which, incidentally, were quickly adjusted to the military exigencies of the First World War (Figure 9). Furthermore, the popular press ran countless articles on air and space, carrying exuberant renderings of airplanes and spaceships by professional engineers as well as by countless amateurs. With particular zeal, the press commented on the triumphs of the first Russian airplane builders, pilots, and aerodynamicists, giving pride of place to Sikorsky and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, and, obviously, Miturich (and Tatlin) followed these trends with particular enthusiasm. In 1930 Miturich, for example, witnessed the flight of the famous airship *Count Zeppelin 127*: “This morning I was woken up by boys shouting ‘Zeppelin’ ... [you could see] the grey, metallic contour of [what looked like] a cloud. ... Made two circles above the Kremlin. ... Lots of airplanes circling. ... Extraordinary spectacle”.⁷

What is often disregarded is that, during the 1920s, Miturich and Tatlin were well aware of each other's aerial experiments and even, as their correspondence of 1926–1927 demonstrates, were ready to collaborate: On 1 April 1927, Tatlin wrote to Miturich: “I've thought through my research on the bird, although one thing is clear—we have very different ideas about implementing the model. ... Some elements I have already produced in the model, others life size ... I accept your proposal to participate in the work”.⁸ However, nothing came of Tatlin's tentative call to join forces, and in 1929 their brief rapprochement turned into a condition of mutual distrust, enmity, and avoidance, caused, apparently, by Tatlin's acceptance of the state commission to design Vladimir Maiakovsky's coffin (Miturich interpreting this as an affront to the memory of Khlebnikov).



Figure 9. Minister of War Vladimir Sukhomlinov (in white) and aeronautical engineer Igor' Sikorsky (in black) standing in front of the *Il'ia Muromets* airplane, 1915.

Of course, the evocation of an Aero-Constructivism does beg the basic question as to why Tatlin and Miturich, amateur inventors, could have arrived at such a crazy enterprise as a flying machine, reliant upon hand-controlled wings, which in strong winds would have spun out of control and crashed. In turn, their preposterousness does remind us that we now remember Russian Constructivism more for what it did NOT produce than for what it did. In any case, Miturich's and Tatlin's proposals were not especially revolutionary—by 1927 there were many gliders, aerospace engineering was evolving rapidly and the skies were full of airplanes. But why is 1927 so crucial? Perhaps the response is to be found in a particular event that took place in Moscow, triggering Miturich's (and Tatlin's) flights of fantasy and, for that matter, the interest of many of their contemporaries.

On 24 April 1927, a decade after Red October, an unusual exhibition opened at House 68 on Tverskaia Street in Moscow (Figures 10–12). This was the "First Universal Exhibition of Projects and Models of Interplanetary Apparatuses, Devices and Historical Materials", an extraordinary celebration of the ancient dream to conquer space and reach the planets of our solar system. Divided into national sections, the "First Universal Exhibition" gave pride of place to the discoveries and inventions of the modern pioneers of space travel from Robert Goddard and Tsiolkovsky to Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. Consisting of diagrams and sketches of airplanes and rockets, three-dimensional models, artists' impressions of celestial and galactic phenomena, and detailed explanations of velocity, traction, gravity, and so on, the "First Universal Exhibition" summarized the intense curiosity, enthusiasm, and passion which Russians, in particular, were manifesting towards the idea of manned air and space flight in the 1920s. Certainly, there were political and military dimensions to the exhibition, for one of the initial sponsors of the project was Feliks Dzherzhinsky and the aspiring Stalin is said to have visited the display, but, whatever its strategic importance to the Soviet regime, the exhibition can be regarded not only as a fundamental milestone in

the history of Russian technology but also as a strong symptom of Russia's Modernist mix of physics and metaphysics, astronomy, and astrology. The "First Universal Exhibition" received an enthusiastic public response, was discussed in the press, and from documentary sources, we know that Ivan Kudriashev, Aleksandr Labas, Vladimir Liushin, and probably Aleksandr Rodchenko visited the show. Given their special interest in flight, it is tempting to add Miturich and Tatlin to the list.



Figure 10. The Konstantin Tsiolkovsky section at the "First Universal Exhibition of Projects and Models of Interplanetary Apparatuses, Devices and Historical Materials", Moscow, 1927. Photographs from the handmade album entitled "First Universal Exhibition of Projects and Models of Interplanetary Apparatuses, Devices and Historical Materials" (no date, editor, or page numeration), Private collection.

Not surprisingly, Tsiolkovsky commanded a primary position at the "First Universal Exhibition" of 1927, with didactic panels reproducing many of his drawings and statements (Figure 10). Although lacking a rigorous scientific and technical education, Tsiolkovsky, like Miturich and Tatlin, revealed an astonishing perspicacity and intuition, offering potential solutions to the major technical problems which hindered the development of air and space flight a century ago, e.g., liquid fuel, the multi-stage rocket, the effects of gravitation, the harnessing of atomic and solar energy, space stations, and many other related phenomena. Tsiolkovsky was represented here by models in wood and metal and numerous sketches and diagrams of trajectories, wind tunnels, airships, spaceships, and cosmonauts.

No catalog of the "First Universal Exhibition" was published, but the surviving photographs and reviews underscore the vision of its organizers—amateur inventors as well as professional engineers and, in a very tangible way, signaled a rich period of scientific and cultural gestation when numerous Russians were giving thought to the conquest of the air. One of the key sources of information is an album or scrapbook of original photographs and captions compiled by the organizers—members of the Interplanetary Section of the Association of Inventors and Inventists—and issued in three copies. The photographs of the

airplane and rocket models, technical charts, and renderings of the planets provide us with a rich, graphic impression of that historic exhibition held almost a century ago. Grigorii Polevoi's so-called rocket-mobile next to the Tsiolkovsky section attracted immediate attention.



Figure 11. Grigorii Polevoi in front of his Rocketmobile at the “First Universal Exhibition of Projects and Models of Interplanetary Apparatuses, Devices and Historical Materials”, Moscow, 1927. Photograph from the handmade album entitled “First Universal Exhibition of Projects and Models of Interplanetary Apparatuses, Devices and Historical Materials” (no date, editor, or page numeration), Private collection.



Figure 12. Fridrikh Tsander: Model of an interplanetary ship. Photograph from the handmade album entitled “First Universal Exhibition of Projects and Models of Interplanetary Apparatuses, Devices and Historical Materials” (no date, editor, or page numeration), Private collection.

(Figures 12 and 13) Of direct relevance to this discussion of Miturich and his *letun* is the model of the winged rocket on display at the “First Universal Exhibition” designed by scientist Fridrikh Tsander, one of the most original and exciting of the early rocket engineers who went on to perfect his formula for jet engines and liquid fuel rockets which, he hoped, could be used for interplanetary flight. Trained at the Riga Polytechnic Institute (the alma mater of El Lissitzky, incidentally), Tsander built his first glider in 1909 and became so passionate about aviation, rocketry, and the potential conquest of space that he even baptized his children Astra and Mercury.

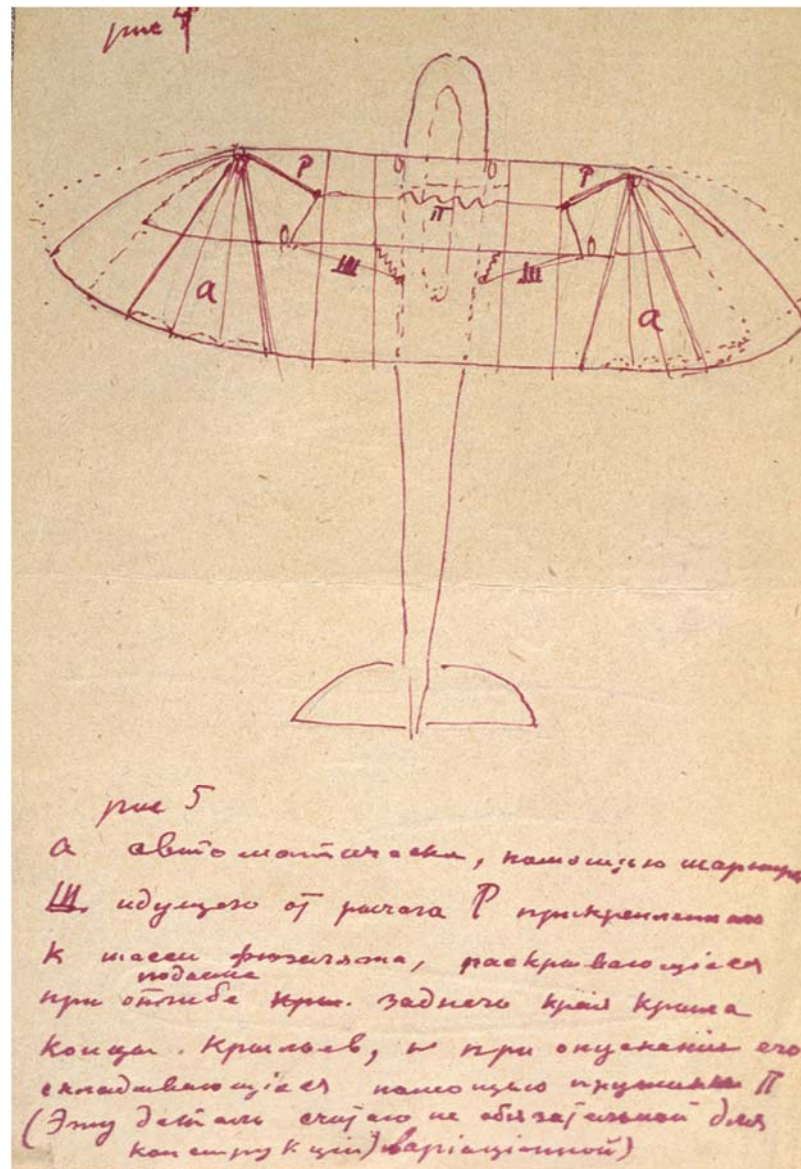


Figure 13. P. Mitrich: Flying apparatus. Drawing No. 4, ca. 1922, Red ink on paper, Private collection.

At the 1927 exhibition, Tsander’s experimental vehicle took pride of place, for it offered a remarkably prescient solution to the problem of fuel consumption. In a lecture which he gave at the Moscow Society of Lovers of Astronomy in 1924, Tsander had already elaborated the principles of his aircraft, according to which the basic fuel would derive from parts of the metal structure itself which would be made of aluminum, magnesium, and plastics. In proportion as the aircraft gained in altitude, these materials (wings, fuel tanks, propeller, etc.) would become superfluous, would be directed into a special chamber where they would be crushed and shredded, then transferred to a boiler to be melted down and

then fed into the jet engines as fuel. Tsander also entertained the idea of adding external mirrors which would capture the light of the sun (solar panels), cultivating a kitchen garden onboard, yielding fresh fruits and vegetables, and the engagement of a parachute to land. In other words, physically, the machine which arrived would have looked very different from the one which departed.

Set off against artists' impressions of outer space and flight simulation, Tsander's "Interplanetary Ship" was highly visible, just like Tatlin's glider hanging in the Museum of New Western Art, and must have impressed the innocent and the prodigal alike. In 1932 (a few months before the test flight of Letatlin) Tsander (1932) published the findings in his book, *Problema poleta pri pomoshchi reaktivnykh apparatov* (The problem of flight using jet apparatuses), discussing the subject of jet propulsion, and, like Miturich, he also developed a manned glider which was meant to carry and be driven by a rocket, the basic concept being a tri-partite, winged vehicle also made of wood and controlled with pedals and flaps. The glider ran a successful test flight in March 1933, following Tatlin's test flight the previous summer and coinciding with Miturich's airship, "based on the principle of 'undulatory' movement". Such experiments, pragmatic and prescient, led directly to the astounding accomplishments of the Soviet space program in the 1950s–1970s.

True, the cataclysm of Stalin's Great Terror hindered and deformed the evolution of aerial and cosmic exploration. On the other hand, for those who adjusted and survived, aviation and cosmonautics represented an escape route from the oppression of everyday, maintaining—strangely enough—a continuity of both scientific research and aesthetic release throughout the Soviet period. For the more sensitive artists of that time, the aerial and the cosmic even became an alternative theme unadulterated by the triviality of material life, and Miturich, combining Constructivist technology with private imagination, never abandoned the theme of flight, drawing the interior of an airplane model workshop as late as 1954.⁹

A century ago, Miturich and Tatlin, Tsiolkovsky, and Tsander embarked upon what many regarded as a mission impossible, but their ideas, grandiose, incredible, and prescient, came to fruition and their artifacts, weird and wonderful, ushered the human race beyond the last frontier into interplanetary space. At the end of his 1915 Suprematist manifesto, Malevich declared: "Comrade aviators, swim into the abyss",¹⁰ a sentiment which, even today, has not lost its energy.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ For technical details of the model and the test flight see Miturich's notes in (Rakitin and Sarab'ianov 1997, p. 104).

² P. Miturich: "Dnevnik izobretatelia" (1933). Quoted in (Rakitin and Sarab'ianov 1997, p. 107).

³ See (Zhukova 1978), unpaginated. For illustrations of the *volnoviki* see (Miturich 2018, pp. 265–72).

⁴ See (Belokhvostova 2012): *Petr Miturich*, p. 20.

⁵ See (Rakitin and Sarab'ianov 1997): *Petr Miturich*, p. 278.

⁶ P. Miturich, untitled text supplied by Vera Khlebnikova-Miturich, Moscow.

⁷ See (Rakitin and Sarab'ianov 1997): *Petr Miturich*, p. 104.

⁸ Letter from Tatlin to Miturich dated 1 April 1927. Quoted in (Miturich 2008, pp. 321–24). The original is in the Khardzhiev-Chaga Archive, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

⁹ Illustrated in (Rozanova 1973, p. 122).

¹⁰ Malevich ([1919] 1996): "Suprematism" (first published in the catalogue of the "X State Exhibition. Non-Objective Creativity and Suprematism", Moscow, 1919). Republished in A. Shatskikh, ed.: Kazimir Malevich. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, Moscow; Gileia, 1996, vol. 1, p. 151.

References

- Belokhvostova, Natalia. 2012. *Petr Miturich*. Moscow: Catalog of exhibition at the State Tretyakov Gallery.
- Malevich, Kazimir. 1996. "Suprematism". In *Kazimir Malevich. Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*. Edited by A. Shatskikh. Moscow: Gileia. First published in 1919.
- Miturich, Petr. 2008. *Neizvestnyi Miturich, Materialy k biografii*. Moscow: Tri Kvadrata.
- Miturich, Petr. 2018. *Petr Miturich*. Moscow: Tri Kvadrata.
- Punin, Nikolay. 1920. *Pamiatnik III Internatsionala*. Petrograd: NKP.
- Rakitin, Vasily, and Andrej Sarab'ianov. 1997. *Petr Miturich*; Moscow: RA.
- Roanova, Natalia. 1973. *Petr Miturich*. Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik.
- Tsander, Friedrich. 1932. *Problema poleta pri pomoshchi reaktivnykh apparatov*. Moscow: Oborongiz.
- Zhukova, Ekatherina. 1978. *Petr Vasil'evich Miturich*. Moscow: Catalog of Exhibition at the State Tretyakov Gallery.

Article

“You Can Do This”: Working with the Artistic Legacy of El Lissitzky

Willem Jan Renders 

Independent Researcher, 5652 EN Eindhoven, The Netherlands; w.j.renders@protonmail.com

Abstract: The collection of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven comprises works by some 800 modern and contemporary artists, and El Lissitzky is one of the most important among them. This special position for Lissitzky is not due simply to the number of his works in the collection. In addition, his oeuvre, ideas and artistic objectives correspond closely with the museum’s engagement with experimentation, radical creativity and public participation. As one of the most dynamic artists of his time, over the years Lissitzky has become more and more important to the museum. He was anything but a creator of static, self-contained works. His creativity was powerful and open to many, a mass of plans and projects bristling with life. Inspired by Lissitzky, the Van Abbemuseum was keen to make that verve and vitality tangible for today’s public. The primary way to do that was to research, show and discuss his original works, but in many cases it was possible to go one step further and reconstruct what was lost or finish what the artist had started. Also, Lissitzky’s works were a source of inspiration for a number of contemporary artists. In this article I will discuss how these works came to Eindhoven and give examples of how the Van Abbemuseum treated this artistic legacy in exhibitions, reconstructions, constructions and new artworks.

Keywords: Russian avant-garde; visual art; El Lissitzky; cultural heritage; art education; curatorial practice

Citation: Renders, Willem Jan. 2022. “You Can Do This”: Working with the Artistic Legacy of El Lissitzky. *Arts* 11: 109. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11060109>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 27 August 2022

Accepted: 12 October 2022

Published: 23 October 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Art Museums, Works of Art and the Continuation of the Creative Process

An art museum researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits objects of art. How it fulfils these tasks, often remains hidden for the public. Sometimes the acquisition of a very expensive artwork gets some publicity. But, once they have entered a museum collection, the majority of artworks lead a secluded life in dark spaces with a constant temperature and humidity. The older and weaker they are, the more dangerous it becomes to put them on show. Relatively few artworks enjoy the privilege of being exhibited; they are part of a permanent or semi-permanent display in the museum. The exhibitions are what the public sees of all the work behind the scenes.

There is a way, however, in which the less lucky artworks can escape their cloisters: the temporary exhibition. When a curator finds it worthwhile to research and inventory the work of one artist, for instance, this may result in a retrospective. Many unknown works are then shown for the first time. Or it may be that an artwork can be linked to a theme. Then it may become part of a thematic exhibition. This can also be a reason to search the museum stores and temporarily free some artworks.

Both retrospectives and thematic exhibitions need more than artworks alone to tell their story to the public. Documents, photographs, videos and historical publications complete the narrative, together with accessible texts in the exhibition spaces and a catalogue for those who want more information. However, the artworks and their arrangement are the main treat; only once in a decade, or even once in a lifetime, are these works on show together.

Art exhibitions in museums treat the artwork as a unique object. And in most cases, this makes perfect sense; the artwork is the end of a unique creative process and as such

it should be respected and preserved. But sometimes it is possible or even necessary to go one step further. What can be done, for instance, if an artwork is too delicate to show? Or what if it no longer exists? Is it enough to show the few documents related to it? Or are museums allowed to go beyond that and make a reconstruction? When an artwork is unfinished, can a museum somehow ‘finish’ it?

In many cases exhibition makers have to come to terms with the fact that the (art)historical narrative has holes that cannot be filled. But sometimes it is possible to fill some gaps in the story of the creative process and provide a more complete picture to the public. The history of the Lissitzky collection in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven offers some examples of how to take works of art as a starting point for further elaboration. This article tells the story of how a large number of works by El Lissitzky were acquired for the Van Abbe collection and how they were subsequently shown to the public¹. In some cases, the museum’s curators were able to reconstruct Lissitzky’s works or add to them.

This story of collecting and exhibiting provides a look behind the scenes of museum work. And it may be the start of a critical evaluation. Did the Van Abbemuseum treat El Lissitzky’s artistic heritage appropriately? Or was it not one step further but one too far?

2. Lissitzky Comes to Eindhoven

The Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (The Netherlands) owes its large collection of works by the Russian avant-garde artist El Lissitzky primarily to the efforts of its former director, Jean Leering (1934–2005). As a student of architecture, Leering became interested in the relationship between architecture and art, particularly in Constructivism, De Stijl and the Bauhaus. At a very young age, in 1964, he became director of the Van Abbemuseum². Well before that time, he had discovered and studied the work of El Lissitzky (1890–1941) and he immediately began planning a major exhibition of his work, which would be the first Lissitzky retrospective in Western Europe.

Jean Leering was one of the first in Western Europe to study the works of Lissitzky thoroughly, not only by looking at and reading about them but also by making careful drawings (Figure 1). As a meticulous curator, he also listed the titles, materials, measurements, photographs and collections in a very systematic way. During preparations for his Lissitzky exhibition, this list grew into an inventory of paintings, drawings, photographs, prints and designs by Lissitzky. While working out his ideas for the exhibition, Leering also wrote to many people that had known Lissitzky: his widow Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, who was working on her well-known monograph at the time³, the collector and historian of literature and art Nikolai Khardziev, film maker Hans Richter, graphic designer Jan Tschichold and art collector Ella Winter.

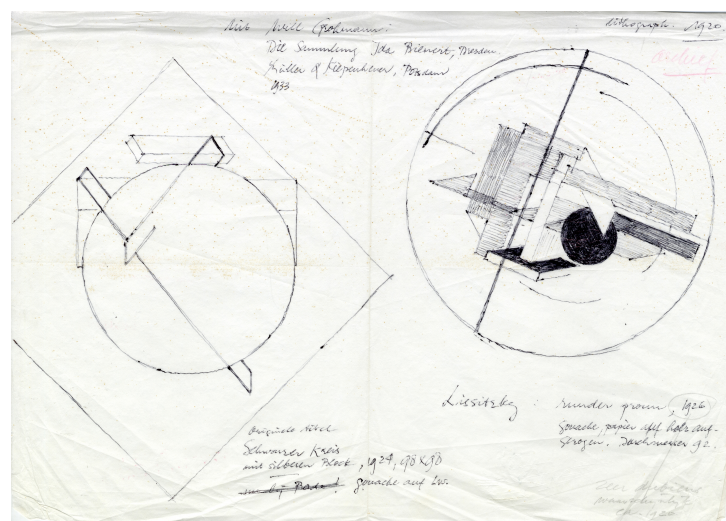


Figure 1. Jean Leering, one of a series of drawings after Lissitzky’s ‘Prouns’, Van Abbemuseum exhibition archive, inv. nr. 155.

One of the people Jean Leering wrote to was Hans Klihm, a gallery owner in Munich. Leering asked him to look around for works by Lissitzky on the market. And it was this gallerist who discovered a private collection with a lot of early works by Lissitzky in Stuttgart⁴. It was owned by Ilse Vordemberge-Leda, the widow of the painter Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart. He had taken over Lissitzky's temporary studio in the Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hanover in 1924 after a seriously ill Lissitzky left the city at the end of 1923 for an extended period of convalescence in Switzerland. In this studio, Vordemberge-Gildewart found a portfolio with works on paper by Lissitzky. We do not know whether Lissitzky actually gave these works to Vordemberge-Gildewart, but as far as we know, he never asked for them back.

Leering requested that Ilse Vordemberge-Leda lend these newly discovered works for his exhibition. The widow agreed, but Leering had to promise that she would remain anonymous as a lender. Leering went to Stuttgart to see the works. There, a curator's dream came true. He saw a collection of over eighty unknown works by Lissitzky: early drawings, watercolours, gouaches, etchings, typographical designs and proof prints. He readily agreed to the loan conditions and also agreed right of first refusal were she to sell the works.

In the meantime, Leering kept looking for other loans. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers asked her son, Jen Lissitzky, to go to Moscow to convince the Tretyakov Gallery to lend some of their Lissitzky works for the exhibition. She had donated almost 300 works by Lissitzky to the museum in 1959—the most important Lissitzky collection in the world—so she had the right to ask for loans. But the works in the Tretyakov Gallery could not be lent because they were 'indispensable for scientific research' (Pingen 2005, p. 224). This response illustrates the isolation and secretive treatment of the work of Lissitzky and the Russian avant-garde in general in the Soviet Union at the time.

But even without the works from Moscow, the exhibition quickly came into being as a collaboration of the Van Abbemuseum, the Kunsthalle Basel and the Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hanover. It opened in Eindhoven in December 1965, later travelling to the other venues. The essays in the catalogue, published only in German, focused on several aspects of Lissitzky's oeuvre: painting, typography, architecture, demonstration rooms and photography. The exhibition followed the arrangement of these themes. Furthermore, in the catalogue there were several key texts by Lissitzky, reminiscences by people who had known the artist and numerous illustrations in black and white. To keep the Vordemberge-Gildewart collection hidden from possible other buyers, in his foreword Leering thanked "several lenders who wish to remain anonymous", thus suggesting that the newly discovered works came from several collections (Leering et al. 1965, p. 5).

Among the works in the 1965 Lissitzky exhibition was the 'Figurinnenmappe', a portfolio of lithographs that Lissitzky published when he was working in Hanover in 1923. This was one of the first works that Leering bought when he became director of the Van Abbemuseum. Many of the drawings in the collection of Ilse Vordemberge-Leda were sketches for these lithographs. In the introductory text of this portfolio (Figure 2), Lissitzky explains that these figurines are some of the actors in the opera 'Victory over the Sun', first performed in 1913 in St. Petersburg. Malevich designed the backdrops and costumes for this first performance⁵. Lissitzky worked with Malevich and others on a new performance in Vitebsk in 1920. Inspired by this, he re-invented the opera as a mechanical performance. He designed nine puppets that would play on a stage and could be operated by one person: the 'Schaumaschinerie' ('Viewing Machine') (Figure 3).



Figure 2. El Lissitzky, Introductory leaflet for the 'Figurinnenmappe', 1923. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.



Figure 3. El Lissitzky, 'Schaumaschinerie' (Viewing Machine), lithograph for the 'Figurinnenmappe', 1923. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

After describing how these figures should be executed, Lissitzky ends his introduction with a statement that would be of key importance for Leering and for the treatment of Lissitzky's artistic legacy in the Van Abbemuseum:

The further elaboration and application of the ideas and forms laid down here, I leave to others and go about my next task myself⁶.

What the artist clearly states here, is that anyone is free to take the designs of the figurines and develop them further. Lissitzky encourages us to complete his project and seems to tell us: "You can do this." Mutatis mutandis, this inducement could be applied to his whole oeuvre. On several occasions, Leering cited Lissitzky's statement that his works can be a "cause for action"⁷.

This incentive from the artist himself prompted the brand-new director of the Van Abbemuseum to do more with Lissitzky's work than simply study and exhibit it. Even during his training as an architect, Leering was interested in the relationship between architecture and visual art. The work of Lissitzky—also trained as an architect—was a treasure trove in this field. Leering was especially interested in the 'Prouns', a series of drawings, paintings and graphic works that Lissitzky started when teaching in 1919 at the People's Art School in Vitebsk together with Malevich.

The word 'Proun' is an abbreviation of 'Proekt Utverzhdeniia Novoga', a 'Project for the Affirmation of the New'. This series of works represents a search for new forms which, according to Lissitzky, would have their social impact and meaning in the future, not only in art but also in architecture and society⁸. It was a logical consequence that this series of two-dimensional works would eventually result in works of three dimensions. In 1923, Lissitzky designed such a space for the Große Berliner Kunstausstellung, a spatial painting as it were: the 'Prounenraum'⁹.

The Prounenraum was the first actual space designed by Lissitzky. Because the original from 1923 had been lost, Leering decided to make a reconstruction of this room for his exhibition. As a model, he used a lithograph from the so-called first Kestner portfolio, a series of prints Lissitzky made in Hanover in 1923 (Figure 4).

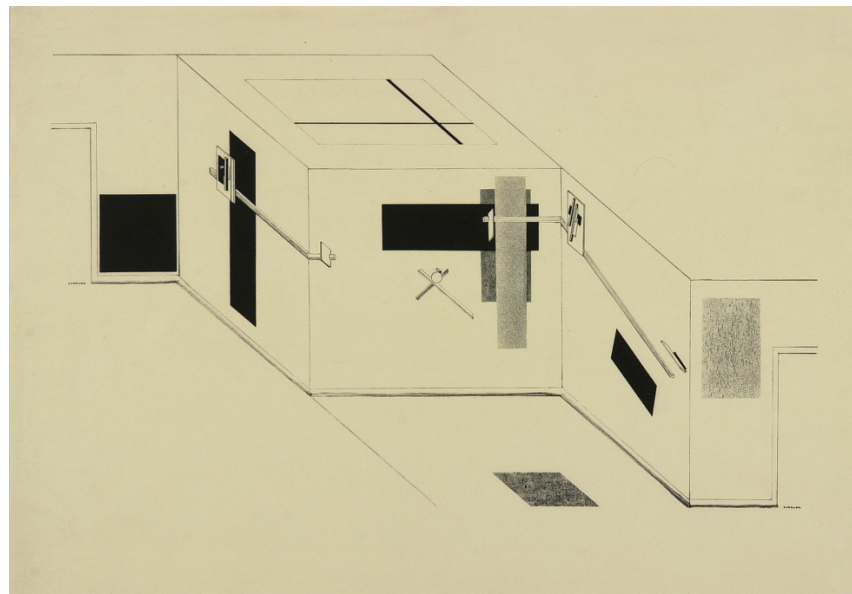


Figure 4. El Lissitzky, Isometric layout of the Prounenraum, lithograph for the 'Kestner Portfolio', 1923. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

This intriguing room (Figure 5) is a small space with a square floor, which can be entered through a doorway. Rectangular black and grey fields have been painted on the white walls and reliefs have been attached to these which partly continue from one wall to the next. There is a large square opening in the ceiling and cheesecloth is stretched over

the top. In this opening, two bars painted black form an asymmetrical cross. The reliefs are mainly made of wood and are composed of thin sheets, slats and bars, largely coated with transparent varnish. In addition, they contain elements which have been painted in an even black, white or grey. Here and there are narrow edges of red. One exception to the otherwise rectangular shapes is a small sphere which forms part of a relief on the back wall.



Figure 5. El Lissitzky, Prounenraum, 1923, reconstruction Van Abbemuseum, 1971. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

Looking back many years later, Leering described how this reconstruction came into being:

I got to see a print of the Prounenraum that was drawn isometrically. By measuring the door height and assuming that the standard height of a door is two metres ten, I discovered that the print had been made on a scale of 1:20. Then it became clear that we could reconstruct the Prounenraum¹⁰.

The reconstruction was meticulously executed by the technical department of the Van Abbemuseum under Leering's supervision. It was the first time since Lissitzky's death that one of his designs had been executed. This new version of the Prounenraum showed for the first time what the original might have looked like. It was one of the more eye-catching exhibits. A few years later, the museum made a new model that was more suitable for transportation. It was shown in the exhibition 'Art in Revolution' at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1971. In the interview mentioned above, Leering also made a few remarks about the purpose of such reconstructions:

A reconstruction has a different status from an original, that should be made clear, even if it is very close to the original. Because the aim of a reconstruction is to evoke an experience almost equal to that of an original that is no longer present in its original state. In the case of reconstructions, too, I was concerned with stimulating the audience's ability to imagine¹¹.

All in all, the 1965 Lissitzky exhibition showed the breadth of Lissitzky's artistic production: paintings, drawings, graphic works, photographs, typographical and architectural designs (Figure 6). This retrospective took the artist out from behind the shadow of Malevich. In the catalogue introduction, Leering described chronologically the several stages of Lissitzky's multifaceted artistic production, while underlining the duality in his

oeuvre. Leering saw Lissitzky as being constantly torn between utopian ideals and concrete challenges. Against this background, he points to the importance of the Prounenraum and the other so-called demonstration rooms in Lissitzky's oeuvre:

In my view, the design of demonstration rooms was a way of creative activity for Lissitzky in which this polarity was dissolved. Here he could create >objects< of a concrete kind, with a spiritual expressiveness that was far above that of Industrial Design. Just as with his typography, he assumed that what was shown had to be transferred to the viewers in such a way that they were included in the transfer, i.e., the creativity of the viewers themselves was set free¹².



Figure 6. View of one of the rooms in the exhibition 'El Lissitzky', Van Abbemuseum, 1965. Photo: F. v.d. Bichelaer.

A comparison with the work of Malevich makes even more clear what Leering admired in the work of Lissitzky:

Movement occurs in the concepts of both [artists], but with Malevich it is more as if he shows the viewer a movement in space. Lissitzky makes the viewer himself move in that space. The latter is central to Lissitzky's work, and this principle of actively involving the viewer in the image is also the starting point for his other work, such as his typography and demonstration rooms (...)¹³.

Leering was interested not only in the participation of the viewer but also in Lissitzky's strong social involvement. This relationship of art and society was also a special point of interest for some of the art critics writing about the exhibition. They did not see this simply as a historical aspect of Lissitzky's work, but viewed his oeuvre as inspiration for 'improving the world by integrating art and life'. The Dutch weekly magazine *De Groene Amsterdammer* wrote:

The Eindhoven exhibition is by no means an end point: what Lissitzky had in mind is still to come. An exhibition can hardly be more inspiring¹⁴.

Leering's inventive and innovative exhibition garnered much praise. The first time that Lissitzky was shown in Western Europe, the visionary and open character of his work was fully revealed. In retrospect, the meticulous reconstruction of the Prounenraum contributed to this appreciation. It was a necessary step to show the full extent of Lissitzky's artistic ideas.

The Vordemberge-Leda collection was one of the main attractions of the exhibition, and Leering managed to keep the lender anonymous. After the exhibition tour, this collection came to the Van Abbemuseum on long-term loan. Although the director still had first option to purchase it, finding the money was by no means an easy task.

Successful museum exhibitions of an artist's work often have a positive effect on the price, especially if there are few works on the market. In retrospect, it would have been better to purchase the Lissitzky collection before the exhibition opened. But for a municipal museum a large purchase requires a great deal of consultation, and such a decision could not be made during the short period spent organising the exhibition.

The opportunity to acquire this collection was certainly unique. There were not many works by Lissitzky in the Netherlands at the time. The Gemeentemuseum in The Hague had one painting, 'Proun GBA' (1923). The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam had the Proun portfolio, the Kestner portfolio and the Figurinnen portfolio—only graphic works. In some private collections (Oud, Alma en Zwart) there were typographical and architectural designs.

The acquisitions committee was enthusiastic when Leering proposed buying the Lissitzky collection. They immediately saw the importance of the collection for the Van Abbemuseum: as Amsterdam had Malevich and The Hague had Mondrian, Eindhoven would have Lissitzky. Moreover, this collection showed the multifaceted nature of Lissitzky's oeuvre. But after the exhibition tour the prices of Lissitzky's work rose sharply, and the asking price for the Vordemberge-Leda collection rose to more than double the original amount: from the insured value of 172,000 guilders to 360,000 guilders.

The exhibition was not the only reason for the change in price. In violation of the agreement, the art dealer Klihm had also offered the collection to another buyer. However, the new price was still considered reasonable, and Leering promised the widow to complete the deal before 1 May 1968. In the meantime, he tried to persuade the state to buy the collection, but the Dutch Minister of Culture declined. Further efforts to obtain private funding were also unsuccessful.

After all attempts failed, in desperation Leering wrote a press release on 29 April 1968 with the headline "Works of El Lissitzky lost to the Netherlands". This had the golden touch. Several articles appeared in Dutch newspapers and soon a large Dutch bank announced that it was willing to lend the purchase price. The minister agreed to the loan and after a long and tumultuous meeting on 27 May 1968, the city council of Eindhoven also agreed. The Lissitzky collection finally entered the Van Abbemuseum and became the specialty of the house¹⁵. After the Tretyakov Gallery, it is the largest collection of works by this artist. In the years to come, these works would prove a rich source of inspiration, not only for art historians and art lovers but also for a broader public and for contemporary artists.

Immediately after Lissitzky's work became the focus of the museum's collection, everything to do with this artist began to be collected: books and magazines that Lissitzky had designed or to which he had contributed in other ways, texts that he had written, photographs, letters and other correspondence. In 1970, for example, Jean Leering managed to purchase one of the numbered copies of 'The Story of Two Squares' (Figure 7), as well as the booklet 'Kunstismen' (Figure 8). Reprints of works by Lissitzky were also acquired, including the famous poster 'The Red Wedge Against the Whites' (Figure 9). In addition, all publications about Lissitzky were collected in the museum's library. In the years following Jean Leering's directorship, the Van Abbemuseum grew into a place where Lissitzky's work was documented and studied. This generated many international contacts and offered opportunities for cooperation on new Lissitzky projects.

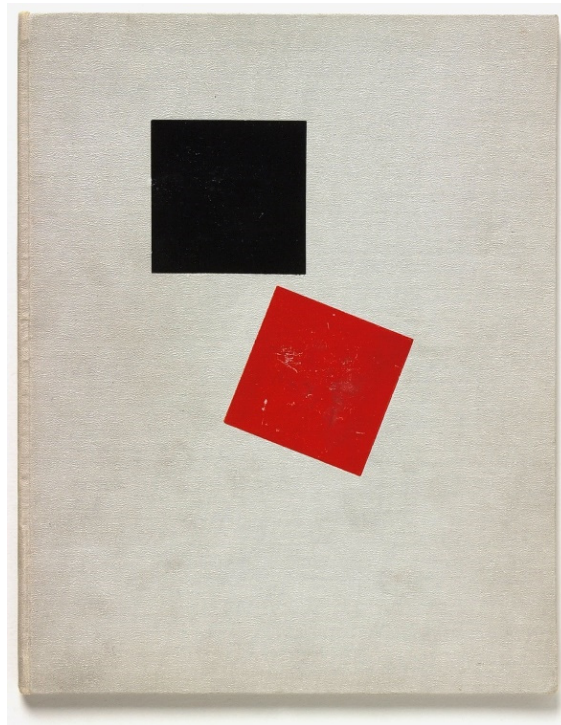


Figure 7. Kazimir Malevich and El Lissitzky, 'The Story of Two Squares', Berlin, 1922 (Lissitzky and Malevich 1922). Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

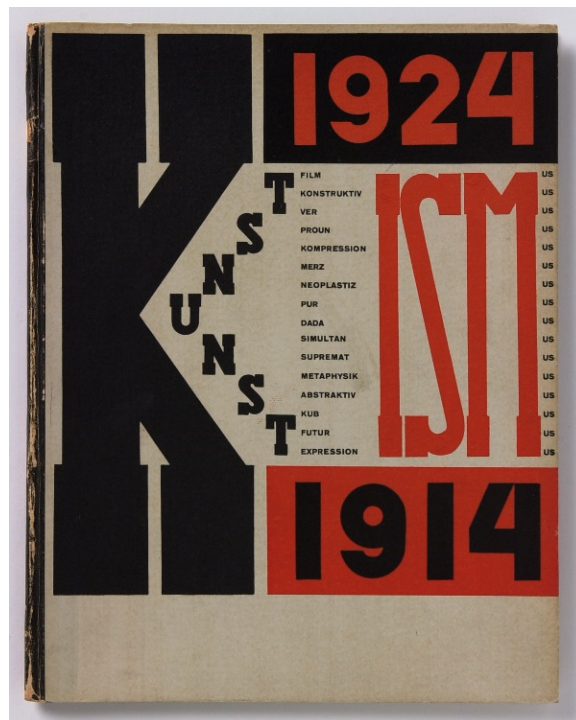


Figure 8. El Lissitzky and Hans Arp, 'Kunstismen 1914–1924', Zürich, 1925 (Lissitzky and Arp 1925). Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.



Figure 9. El Lissitzky, 'The Red Wedge Against the Whites', 1920, reprint 1966.

3. A Major Retrospective

What was still impossible for director Jean Leering in 1965 was realised 25 years later by one of his successors. In 1990, director Jan Debbaut together with the curators Mariëlle Soons, Caroline de Bie and Frank Lubbers, organised a major Lissitzky exhibition in collaboration with the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. By combining the two largest Lissitzky collections with many other important loans, it was possible to produce an enormous retrospective to mark the hundredth anniversary of Lissitzky's birth. A total of 330 works were shown, 250 of which came from the Moscow and Eindhoven collections. At last, the full breadth of Lissitzky's oeuvre could be admired: early travelling sketches, book illustrations, Prouns, Figurines, typographical designs, photography, demonstration rooms, architecture and exhibition designs.

The exhibition started in Moscow in 1990 and then travelled to the Van Abbemuseum, where it opened in December. In the following year the exhibition was also shown in the Fundación Caja de Pensiones in Madrid and in the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris¹⁶. It was accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue in Dutch, English, French and Spanish for the European tour (Debbaut 1990). Several international Lissitzky experts contributed: Yve-Alain Bois, S.O. Khan-Magomedov, Kai-Uwe Hemken, Jean Leering, Peter Nisbet and M.A. Nemirovskaya. Thus, Lissitzky's multifaceted oeuvre was analyzed from many sides and the catalogue provided an up-to-date overview of the state of research in the field.

Also included in the catalogue was a bitter comment by Lissitzky's son Jen, who spoke at the opening of the exhibition (Figure 10). He did not agree with M.A. Nemirovskaya's article about the Lissitzky collection in the Tretyakov Gallery. Jen Lissitzky argued that his mother, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, had been forced to sell her husband's work to the Moscow museum in 1958 for a paltry sum, and that it had certainly not been his father's intention that this collection should end up there. A few years later, it turned out that this commentary was a prelude to a legal claim: in 1992, Jen Lissitzky demanded the works from the former Vordemberge-Leda collection that had been bought by the Van Abbemuseum. However, he did not pursue this case in court¹⁷.



Figure 10. Jen Lissitzky speaking at the opening of the exhibition ‘El Lissitzky’, Van Abbemuseum, 15 December 1990. Photo from Van Abbemuseum exhibition archive. Photographer unknown.

For this major retrospective, part of another of Lissitzky’s demonstration rooms was reconstructed: the ‘Abstract Cabinet’. Lissitzky designed this room in 1927 for Alexander Dörner, then director of the Provincial Museum in Hanover. Dedicated to the presentation of contemporary art, this exhibition room also had its own artistic value. The original was destroyed by the Nazis in 1937 and the museum in Hanover made its first reconstruction in 1968, followed by several other versions¹⁸. The reconstruction in the Van Abbemuseum consisted of two of the walls of this room, both with the black and white slats that formed a dynamic background for the paintings exhibited on them. One of the walls had the slideable panels in which graphic works could be shown (Figure 11).



Figure 11. El Lissitzky, One wall of the ‘Abstract Cabinet’, 1927 (reconstruction 1990). Collection Van Abbemuseum. Photo from Van Abbemuseum exhibition archive. Photographer unknown.

If we compare the Eindhoven ‘Abstract Cabinet’ with the one in Hanover, we notice that the German version is more elaborate and precise. Looking back, I wonder why there was no cooperation between the museums to develop this reconstruction together. Surely, the Van Abbemuseum would have benefited from this.

4. One of the Few Proun Paintings

Although the collection in the Van Abbemuseum provided a good picture of the breadth and variety of Lissitzky's oeuvre, it still lacked a painting by the artist: one of his Prouns. Since only a few of these paintings have been preserved—about 25 in total—and because a large number of these works are in public collections, Prouns rarely come onto the market. And if they are offered for sale, they are virtually unaffordable for a smaller museum. It is therefore a miracle that the Van Abbemuseum, in the person of director Jan Debbaut, succeeded in 1997 in purchasing the painting 'Proun P23, no. 6' (Figures 12 and 13) from the estate of collector and art dealer Eric Estorick.



Figure 12. Director Jan Debbaut presents the newly acquired 'Proun P23, no. 6', 8 April 1997. Photo from Van Abbemuseum exhibition archive. Photo: Joep Lennarts.

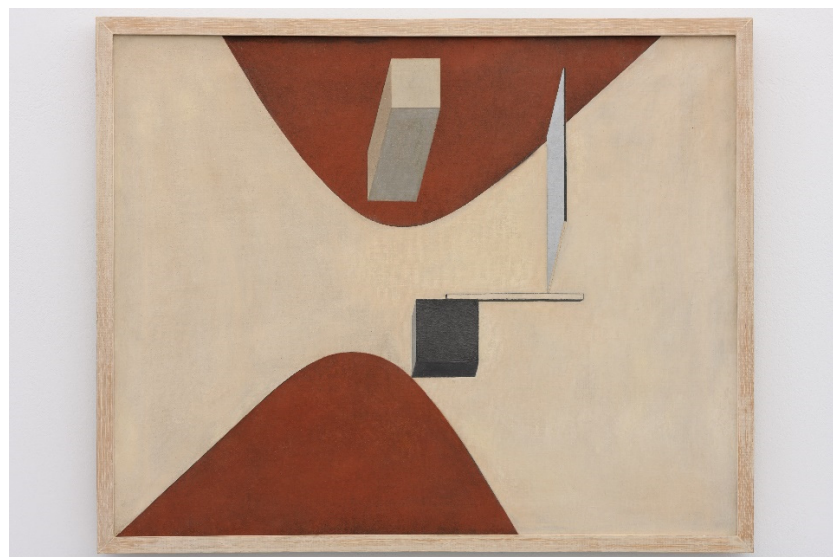


Figure 13. El Lissitzky, 'Proun P23, no. 6', 1919 (?). Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

The painting had already been shown twice at the Van Abbemuseum, in the 1965 and 1990 exhibitions. Jan Debbaut was one of the first to contact the Estorick heirs and, thanks to smart negotiation, managed to keep his bid on the table. He found six financing partners in the Netherlands. In the meantime, the price rose dangerously high due to exchange rate fluctuations. In addition, other interested parties came forward. The sale was finally

concluded on 20 February 1997 for the amount of \$1,414,000 and this Proun painting was added to the Lissitzky collection of the Van Abbemuseum (Pingen 2005, p. 484).

5. Lissitzky and Contemporary Art

In 2006, the Van Abbemuseum asked the artist Deimantas Narkevicius (1964, Uthena, Lithuania) to curate a 'Plug In' presentation, one in a series of interventions in the then semi-permanent presentation of the museum's collection¹⁹. The result, 'Plug In #6', was curated by director Charles Esche and curator Christiane Berndes. It consisted of an ambulatory space in which a selection of graphic works and drawings by Lissitzky was shown and a central projection room that showed Narkevicius's work 'Energy Lithuania' (2006) (Figures 14 and 15).



Figure 14. View of some of the works in the corridor of the presentation 'Plug In #06: El Lissitzky, Deimantas Narkevicius', Van Abbemuseum, 2006. Front: El Lissitzky, 'Die vier Grundrechnungsarten' ('The Four Basic Calculation Types'), 1928 (reprint 1976). Collection Van Abbemuseum. Back: El Lissitzky, 'Catalogue of the Pressa Exhibition', Cologne 1928. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.



Figure 15. Room view of the presentation 'Plug In #06: El Lissitzky, Deimantas Narkevicius', Van Abbemuseum 2006. Still from the film 'Energy Lithuania' by Deimantas Narkevicius, 2006. Photo: Peter Cox.

Like many of the works of Narkevicius, the film 'Energy Lithuania' is a cinematic essay on the Soviet period in his homeland. It tells the story of 'Elektronai', a Lithuanian town around a former Soviet power plant. It includes impressive images of the exterior and interior of the industrial building—still in use at the time—and interviews with people who used to work there. With its huge socialist realist tableaus and clear architectural references to the Communist period of the recent past, the power plant became a kind of museum after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The room surrounding the projection room showed a broad selection by Narkevicius of works from the museum's Lissitzky collection. There were some of the sketches and lithographs for the 'Figurinnenmappe', discussed above. Also shown were the prints of 'Die vier Grundrechnungsarten', a proposal for the combined education of basic mathematics and the structure of Soviet society (1928, reprint 1976). There was the catalogue for the Pressa exhibition in Cologne with the famous leporello showing the huge propagandistic photomontages (1928). Furthermore, there were some of the drawings and lithographs for the 'Proun Portfolio', the first series of prints for the Kestner Foundation in Hanover made in 1923. And to conclude there was a reading table with, among other works, *The Story of Two Squares*, the children's book Lissitzky made together with Malevich in 1922 (Figure 7) and the booklet *Kunstismen*, the catalogue of art movements that Lissitzky compiled together with Hans Arp in 1924 (Figure 8).

In this context these silent works mainly in black, white and red, containing the hopes of a new era, formed a contrast with the moving images in technicolour of the film on the Soviet power plant inside the screening room. Looking back on this project, Narkevicius says:

The total presentation had something of a stylised cinema interior, with an entrance showing posters and a place to sit and drink before entering the 'inner sanctum' where the dream is projected. (. . .) In this presentation the 'film posters' in the 'entrance' were all works by Lissitzky connected with the propaganda of the early Soviet state and its hopes for mechanisation and industrialisation. The 'cinema' showed a striking example of one of the dystopian places where this utopian ideology came to an end: the Lithuanian power plant. The studies for 'Victory over the Sun' for instance, formed an interesting contrast in this context. In many ways you could compare Soviet history at its beginning and end. (. . .) In the oeuvre of Lissitzky I like the fact that he was an international artist looking for common ground for the new art of East and West. In his creative work he was both a visionary and spiritual protagonist and a very practical person involved in all kinds of projects dedicated to changing society. This is a combination that one rarely finds in artists. In that sense he is still of value for us today.

6. Taking Lissitzky's Designs One Step Further

The idea to create a new series of Lissitzky exhibitions in the Van Abbemuseum dates from 2008. Director Charles Esche saw Lissitzky as an important precursor of many contemporary artists, someone who was aware of his social and political role as well as of his demands regarding artistic innovation. Because of that, Esche wanted to give the Lissitzky collection a central place in the museum. The aim of this new exhibition series was to show Lissitzky's oeuvre, as well as work by his historical and contemporary colleagues in several different contexts. This would cast new light on his oeuvre and the context in which it was produced, as well as on Lissitzky as a person.

The first exhibition in the series was 'Lissitzky+'. It was based on the 1913 Russian futurist opera 'Victory over the Sun', mentioned above. Inspired by the 1920 Vitebsk performance of this opera, Lissitzky designed a dynamic stage and a number of 'figurines', doll-like figures. The collection acquired by Jean Leering included some sketches for these figurines, as well as a number of printer's proofs and the ultimate result, the portfolio of lithographs.

As we have seen, Lissitzky's introduction to the 'Figurinnenmappe' (Figure 2) had inspired director Jean Leering in 1965. But this same text continued to inspire his successor in 2008. Not only are Lissitzky's ideas on theatre, as expressed here, very original, in this introduction we can also read about his intentions with this graphic project and its possible continuation. As Leering noted, the last sentence of the introduction makes it clear that Lissitzky actually provides instructions for anyone who would like to create these figurines based on these illustrations. But strangely enough nobody had ever actually done this.

Encouraged by Lissitzky's advice, Charles Esche, together with guest curator Professor John Milner and me, seized the initiative to construct these figurines. We even went one step further: thinking along these lines, other sketches and designs by Lissitzky could be developed into three dimensions as well. Thus, the concept of the transformation of flat designs into spatial ones became the underlying principle for the whole exhibition 'Lissitzky+'. The newly developed models were presented in different rooms, often together with their two-dimensional counterparts.

Carefully looking at Lissitzky's drawings and lithographs in the museum's collection and studying the other documentation of the figurines, John Milner and his son, modelmaker Henry Milner, constructed four models: the 'Announcer', the 'Time Traveler', the 'Gravediggers' and the 'New Man'. Moreover, in the pond of the museum an eight-metre-high statue of the 'Gravediggers' arose (Figures 16–23).

In the abovementioned introduction to the portfolio, Lissitzky also describes what he calls the 'Schaumaschinerie', the 'Viewing Machine'. It is the center of the play: a flexible construction of ribs that can be viewed from every side. In it we can see the so-called 'Playing Bodies' ('Spielkörper'), mechanical puppets that take the place of players. For the exhibition 'Lissitzky+', this complex design was also transformed into three dimensions (Figure 24).

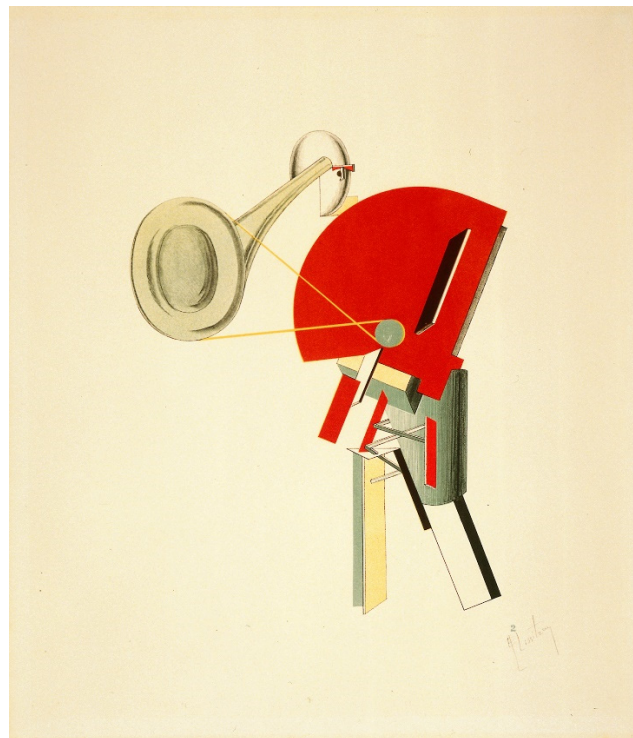


Figure 16. El Lissitzky, 'The Announcer', lithograph for the 'Figurinnenmappe', 1923. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.



Figure 17. Model after El Lissitzky, 'The Announcer', 1923, construction by Henry Milner, 2009. Van Abbemuseum, photo Perry van Duijnhoven.



Figure 18. Model after El Lissitzky, 'The Time Traveller', 1923, construction by Henry Milner, 2009. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Perry van Duijnhoven.

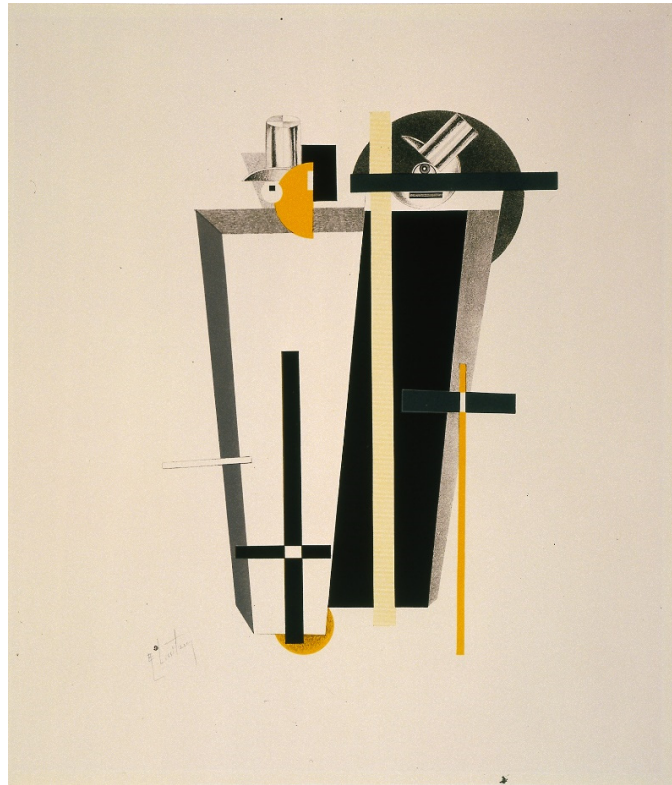


Figure 19. El Lissitzky, 'The Gravediggers, lithograph for the 'Figurinnenmappe', 1923. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.



Figure 20. Model after El Lissitzky, 'The Gravediggers', 1923, construction by Henry Milner, 2009. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Perry van Duijnhoven.



Figure 21. Statue after El Lissitzky, 'The Gravediggers', construction designed by Henry Milner, 2009. Museum Danubiana, Bratislava. Photo: Peter Cox.

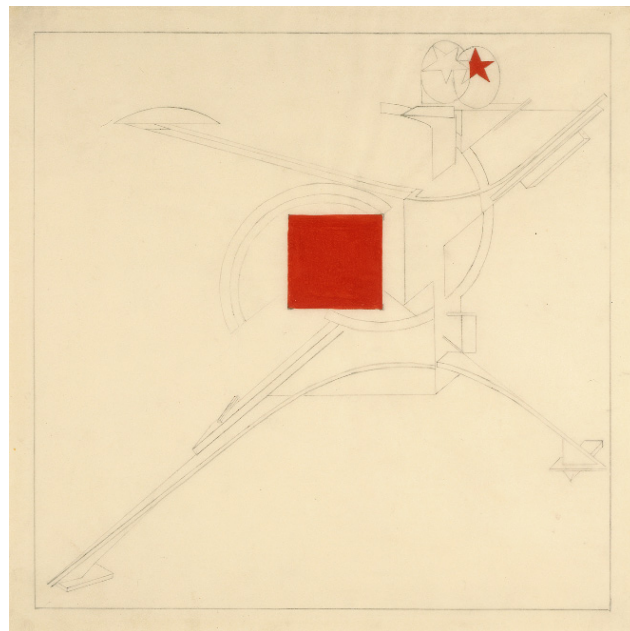


Figure 22. El Lissitzky, 'The New Man', drawing for the 'Figurinnenmappe', 1923. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.



Figure 23. Model after El Lissitzky, 'The New Man', 1923, construction by Henry Milner, 2009. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Perry van Duijnhoven.



Figure 24. View of one of the rooms in the exhibition 'Lissitzky+: Victory over the Sun', Van Abbemuseum, 2009. Front: Model after El Lissitzky, 'The Viewing Machine', construction by Henry Milner, 2009. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

In this exhibition concept of spatiality, Lissitzky's architectural designs were essential. Although never actually built, these drawings were intended to be made into buildings. They were presented in a separate room of the exhibition, together with models of several designs by other artists and architects. The presentation in this space included a towering maquette of Lissitzky's 'Wolkenbügel', a skyscraper designed in 1924. Also on view was a model of 'Proun 1 E, The City' after a lithograph by Lissitzky of 1921 (Figure 25). An earlier version of Lissitzky's 'New Man', a lithograph from the so called 'Kestner Porfolio' made in

1923, was transformed into a blown-up hanging version and was mounted on the window in the stairwell (Figure 26).



Figure 25. View of one of the rooms in the exhibition 'Lissitzky+: Victory over the Sun', Van Abbemuseum, 2009. Left: Model after El Lissitzky, 'Wolkenbügel', construction by Van Abbemuseum, 2009. Right: Model after El Lissitzky, 'The City', construction by Henry Milner, 2009. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

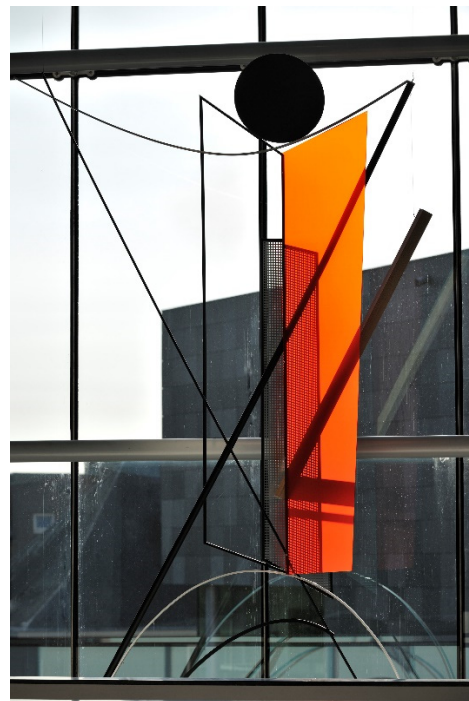


Figure 26. Model after El Lissitzky, 'The New Man', 1923, hanging construction by Henry Milner, 2009. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

The exhibition 'Lissitzky+: Victory over the Sun' opened in September 2009 and ran for one year. It was accompanied by an extensive educational program, a symposium and several other activities. Attracted by the positive reviews in the press, many visitors came to the museum. Taking designs by Lissitzky one step further proved a useful educational concept: it encouraged the public to look closer and to compare Lissitzky's designs with the models made based on them.

In retrospect however, we might ask ourselves—myself as part of the curatorial team included—if some of these constructions were not a step too far. With his figurines, Lissitzky intended to make a theatrical performance. Constructing them as puppets thus would be the right continuation of this idea. But turning one design into a colossal statue in the museum’s pond now seems over the top to me. Today, more than ten years later, I also have my doubts about the large ‘New Man’ model hanging in front of the big museum window as a sign board. Was this in line with Lissitzky’s intentions? To think big is not always good advice.

7. Lissitzky’s Bright Future and the Reverse

A very elaborate artistic dialogue with the work of Lissitzky followed when in 2010 the Van Abbemuseum invited the artists Ilya and Emilia Kabakov to conceive an exhibition using the Lissitzky collection. For this presentation, Ilya Kabakov came up with an ambitious plan. The curatorial team consisting of the artists, director Charles Esche and me, was immediately convinced: we would arrange both oeuvres in eight opposing pairs according to the following themes:

Lissitzky	Kabakov
THE ARTIST AS A REFORMER	THE ARTIST AS A REFLECTING CHARACTER
THE COSMOS	VOICES IN THE VOID
CLARITY OF FORMS	GARBAGE
VICTORY OVER THE EVERYDAY	EVERYDAY’S VICTORY
MEMORY: MONUMENT TO A LEADER	MEMORY: MONUMENT TO A TYRANT
TRANSFORMING LIFE	ESCAPING LIFE
TRUST IN THE NEW WORLD	UNREALIZED UTOPIA
THE BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD	THE BRIGHT FUTURE BEHIND US

Following this concept, each room in the exhibition had its own theme and was divided into two parts: one for Lissitzky and one for Kabakov. The themes were indicated with big upper case letters on the wall, red for Lissitzky, black for the Kabakovs. Thus, each room compared a different aspect of the oeuvre of both artists. The resulting exhibition, carefully designed and prepared by the Kabakovs in collaboration with the museum, took place on two floors in the new building of the Van Abbemuseum. It opened there in December 2012. The exhibition subsequently travelled to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, the Multimedia Art Museum in Moscow and the Kunsthaus in Graz²⁰.

At first sight, the title of the exhibition, ‘Lissitzky–Kabakov: Utopia and Reality’, led many to believe that Lissitzky was the utopian and Kabakov the realist here. But a closer look at the presentation was enough to conclude that it was more complicated: aspects of both utopia and reality were present in the work of the two artists in totally different ways. And despite the many differences in their oeuvres there were also similarities to be discovered.

To make the intended juxtapositions visually more effective, some of the Kabakovs’ installations were recreated, and some new Lissitzky models were needed as counterparts. Once again, the Van Abbemuseum asked Henry Milner to design and execute these. The division of each room into a Lissitzky and a Kabakov part worked very well. The visitors had to walk in between the two and involuntarily asked themselves which of these artistic visions on Soviet society was the right one.

Two examples will have to be sufficient to illustrate the exhibition concept here. In the room ‘Victory over the Everyday’ and the corresponding ‘Everyday’s Victory’, the Lissitzky part was left almost empty. His 1930 floorplan for an apartment to solve the housing shortage was executed in lines on the floor to indicate the intended available space. A few historical photographs, a reconstruction of the Lissitzky chair of the same year (Figure 27)

and a reconstruction of the 1927 maquette for a communal house were all of the exhibits in this part of the room (Figure 28). The opposite part showed a plethora of Kabakov works that had to do with daily Soviet life in and around the communal kitchen. One wall was filled to the ceiling with paintings, and along the other two walls were parts of the 1991 'Communal Kitchen' installation (Figures 29 and 30).



Figure 27. El Lissitzky, 'Armchair of bent plywood', 1930, reconstruction by Mark van den Heuvel, 2012. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.



Figure 28. Model after El Lissitzky, Interior Project for the F-type Residential Cell, 1927, reconstruction by Henry Milner, 2012. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.



Figure 29. View of one of the rooms with works by Ilya Kabakov in the exhibition 'Lissitzky-Kabakov: Utopia and Reality', Van Abbemuseum, 2012. Photo: Peter Cox.



Figure 30. View of one of the rooms in the exhibition 'Lissitzky-Kabakov: Utopia and Reality', Van Abbemuseum, 2012. Front: part of the installation by Ilya Kabakov, 'In the Communal Kitchen', 1991. Back: El Lissitzky, 'Armchair of bent plywood', 1930, reconstruction by Mark van den Heuvel, 2012. On the floor at the back: El Lissitzky, 'Floorplan for an apartment to solve the housing shortage', 1930, executed in actual measurements by Van Abbemuseum, 2012. Photo: Peter Cox.

Another theme in the exhibition was propaganda. Lissitzky's part, 'The Bright Future is Ahead of Us', consisted of hardcore Soviet propaganda: photos and reconstructions of objects related to the 'Pressa' exhibition that was held in 1928 in Cologne. For the occasion, the grandiose 'Pressa Star' (Figure 31) was put up on one side of the room. The other part, 'The Bright Future Is Behind Us', showed a new version of the Kabakovs' agitprop propaganda wagon of 2004 (Figure 32). Inside you could hear women singing heroic Soviet songs.



Figure 31. View of one of the rooms in the exhibition ‘Lissitzky–Kabakov: Utopia and Reality’, Van Abbemuseum, 2012. Front: model after El Lissitzky, ‘Pressa Star’, 1927, reconstruction by Henry Milner, 2012. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

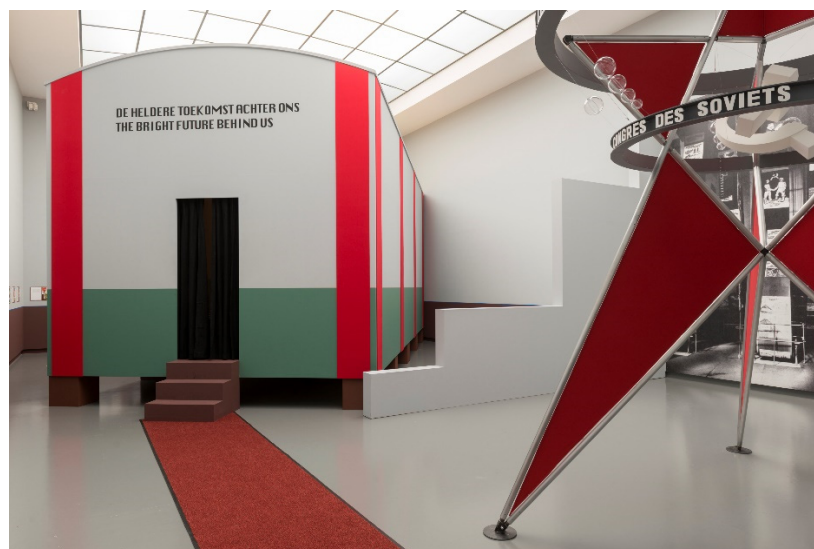


Figure 32. View of one of the rooms in the exhibition ‘Lissitzky–Kabakov: Utopia and Reality’, Van Abbemuseum, 2012. Front: part model after El Lissitzky, ‘Pressa Star’, 1927, reconstruction by Henry Milner, 2012. Van Abbemuseum. Back: Ilya Kabakov, ‘Let’s Go Girls’, 2012. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

This exhibition was the first time that these two 20th-century Russian artists had been presented together. It completed a circle that started with the revolutions in the early years of the twentieth century and finished with the upheavals of 1989. This confrontation between early Soviet art and that of the late Soviet era did not consist solely of original artworks. It was largely made possible thanks to numerous meticulous reconstructions. In

this way, the exhibition enabled a broad public to obtain a better understanding of the art and culture of the intervening period.

One reason the Lissitzky reconstructions worked so well in this exhibition, was that they were shown together with some of the Kabakov models. For many of their projects, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov made prototypes. And like some of Lissitzky's projects, some of the Kabakov projects are still not realised. For both Lissitzky and the Kabakovs, utopia is a well-known place.

8. Lissitzky Even More Contemporary

Sarah Pierce (1968, Dublin, Ireland) was one of four artists participating in the exhibition 'Positions #2', curated by Annie Fletcher (Van Abbemuseum, 28 November 2015–3 April 2016)²¹. In this exhibition she showed three installations, one of which, 'Gag', made in 2015, was based on the work of El Lissitzky and Alice Milligan. Lissitzky needs no introduction in this context. Alice Milligan (1865–1953, Omagh, Ireland) was a poet and writer. As a nationalist she promoted Gaelic, the Irish language, and understood amateur theatre as a medium to involve rural communities in the Irish cultural revolution.

The starting point of the installation 'Gag' (Figure 33) was an 'archive of debris': in the lead up to Milligan's presentation the unused scraps and remnants from the last exhibition—plinths, presentation walls and other material normally thrown away—were amassed. In her resulting installation, these leftovers not only made the immediate past of these particular museum rooms visible and tangible, they also related visually to the photographs of works in the 'First Constructivist Exhibition' in 1921 as reconstructed in the Tretyakov Gallery and to a photograph of Malevich's 'Black Square'. On the walls, the 'Proun' lithographs from the Kestner portfolio mentioned earlier were displayed, including the isometric layout of the 'Proun' room.



Figure 33. View of one of the rooms in the exhibition 'Positions #2', Van Abbemuseum, 2015. Sarah Pierce, 'Gag', 2015. Photo: Peter Cox.

Looking back at this project, Sarah Pierce says:

(. . .) Lissitzky's work is important for my work, although I am not at all interested in either the cult of the artist or the cult of genius. In fact, my turn to Lissitzky has less to do with specific historical works created in his lifetime or the artist himself as a historical figure and more with what I read as the interplays between a specific and general address in his work. Lissitzky made his works in direct dialogue with artists around him. This transfer between artists, how one person's work changes through the work of others, has always interested me.

What also strikes me is that I can still take up this address a century later. This is important because it speaks to a way that artists work, really, across geographies and times. I do not mean this as a universal address—it is not received in the same way by everyone, or every artist. (...) In these projects my concern is how to take up the work of these artists, not as an act of reverence, but as a real and material transfer of concepts across time. The best art history understands how to do this. It requires a complete institutional shift, away from individuals, biographies and the intrigue that often compels historians to look closely at the figure. Instead, we should turn to the signs and symbols of a total system of art making. That is what we can get from artists such as Lissitzky. (...) I would like to think more about Lissitzky as a teacher. Did he teach? I have learned from him. I have looked at his contributions to the language of art and thought “Oh good, that is allowed. Then that is what I’ll do!”

9. Lissitzky in Person

Over the years, the Van Abbemuseum has collected letters and other correspondence of Lissitzky. Many of these writings were directed to his colleagues and show Lissitzky as a serious and tireless worker on many different artistic projects. But occasionally, one gets a glimpse of his character, his intelligence and his sense of humor. A letter written to his wife Sophie while convalescing in Switzerland, for instance, includes a self-portrait of the artist working on some of his projects (Figure 34).

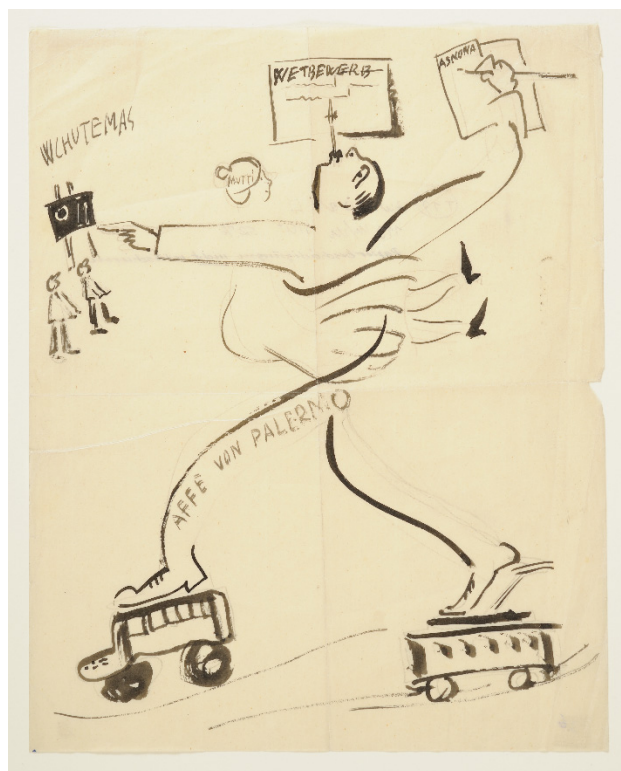


Figure 34. El Lissitzky, Drawing in a letter to Sophie Küppers, 1924. Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

In 2017, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Dutch artistic movement De Stijl, curator Diana Franssen and librarian Willem Smit organised an exhibition in the museum library on the correspondence of Lissitzky with his Dutch colleague and friend, the architect J.J.P. Oud (Figure 35). This correspondence, acquired in 1970, is archived in the Van Abbemuseum and only accessible for research purposes. The written texts in German were now transcribed and translated into Dutch in a publication (Franssen 2017).

This exchange of letters and postcards, which took place between 1923 and 1928, not only enables us to follow Lissitzky on his tour through Europe but also to see the two friends' opinions on the situation in art and politics at the time and how they developed and discussed artistic theories.



Figure 35. View of one of the vitrines in the exhibition '100 Years De Stijl: Lissitzky and Oud in dialogue', Van Abbemuseum, 2017.

10. A Collection Traveling around EUROPE

In recent years, several opportunities arose to show large parts of the Lissitzky collection outside the Van Abbemuseum, either in solo exhibitions or in combination with the work of other artists. In 2015, a large part of the collection travelled to the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) in Dublin as part of the exhibition 'El Lissitzky: The Artist and the State'. Lissitzky's works were shown there alongside archival material related to Alice Milligan and newly commissioned and recent works by several contemporary artists. Two years later, many works were lent to the major Lissitzky retrospective in the Tretyakov Gallery and the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Centre in Moscow, and in 2018 many works from the Lissitzky collection were on show in the exhibition 'Chagall, Lissitzky, Malévitch—l'Avant-garde Russe à Vitebsk 1918–1922' in the Centre Pompidou in Paris. In 2019 most of the Van Abbemuseum's Lissitzky collection was shown in the Danubiana Museum in Bratislava.

11. Epilogue

Ever since Lissitzky came to Eindhoven, his works have been an inspiration for the Van Abbemuseum and its public. The fact that Lissitzky was very open to the art of Western Europe and was in dialogue with many of his colleagues there made his entrance into the collection a kind of homecoming. Forming a focus there from the beginning in 1965, the open character of Lissitzky's oeuvre and the fact that others can participate and even finish it appealed to several of the museum's directors and curators and to many visitors.

In retrospect, not every way in which the museum dealt with this artistic heritage was successful. A few of the Lissitzky reconstructions were over the top and some of the artists' projects with his work were more successful than others. Art historians often meticulously reconstruct the personal history and the oeuvre of an artist. But other artists can take the liberty to use (art)history as a flexible and dynamic tool to create new works. Looking at such works, we may realise that we too can use art as a source of inspiration.

For more than one hundred years, Lissitzky's works have been aiming at the future with the intention to be of use. It is this aiming at a new reality that gives many of his artworks an unfinished character. They invite us to work further in this direction. Because

of his pluriform and open way of creating, Lissitzky is one of those artists who allows such dynamic use. In these cases, a museum can help to enforce this creative impulse and pass it on to the public.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Archival material on all exhibitions of the Van Abbemuseum can be found at: <https://vanabbe.inforlibraries.com/abbeweb/Vubis.csp?Profile=Default>, accessed on 11 October 2022.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 For this article I have used several unpublished lectures that I gave in Moscow, Novosibirsk, Belgrade and Cambridge. I also used one of my published articles: (Renders 2017). I would like to thank Ruth Addison for editing and improving my English text.
- 2 For a survey of Jean Leering's directorship of the Van Abbemuseum, see: (Pingen 2005, ch. 3).
- 3 (Lissitzky-Küppers 1967). For the English version, see: (Lissitzky-Küppers 1980).
- 4 For a more detailed account of the acquisition of the Lissitzky collection by the Van Abbemuseum and the contacts between Klihm and Leering, see: (Pingen 2005, pp. 224–26).
- 5 For the text, music and designs for this opera as well as numerous essays on the different aspects of this work, see: (Railing 2009).
- 6 "Die weitere Bearbeitung und Anwendung der hier niedergelegten Ideen und Formen überlasse Ich den Anderen und gehe selbst an meine nächste Aufgabe" (my English translation).
- 7 "Anleitung zum Handeln" (my English translation). Mentioned in: (Kempers 2018, p. 67).
- 8 For an introduction to the 'Prouns', see: (Goryacheva 2017). In 1924, Lissitzky made an inventory of his 'Prouns', see: (Nisbet 1987, pp. 155–76). Perloff (2003) offers a chronological overview and an analysis of the artistic legacy of Lissitzky.
- 9 Lissitzky published his design for the Prounenraum in the first issue of the magazine G in 1923. For the text of this publication, see: (Leering et al. 1965, p. 57).
- 10 (Berndes 1999, pp. 62, 63). "Ik kreeg een prent onder ogen van de Prounenraum die in isometrie was getekend. Door de deursoort te meten en er van uit te gaan dat de standaardhoogte van een deur twee meter tien is, kwam ik erachter dat de prent op schaal 1: 20 was uitgevoerd. Toen werd het duidelijk dat we de Prounenraum konden reconstrueren." (my English translation).
- 11 (Berndes 1999, p. 67). "Een reconstructie heeft een andere status dan een origineel, dat moge duidelijk zijn, ook al wordt het origineel zeer dicht benaderd. Want het is de bedoeling met een reconstructie een ervaring op te roepen die nagenoeg gelijk is aan de ervaring van het origineel, dat niet meer in de originele staat aanwezig is. Ook in het geval van reconstructies ging het me om het stimuleren van het beeldvormingsvermogen van het publiek." (my English translation).
- 12 (Leering et al. 1965, p. 14): "Meiner Ansicht nach bedeutete das Gestalten von Demonstrationsräume für Lissitzky eine Weise der schöpferischen Betätigung, worin sich diese Polarität auflöste. Hier könnte er >Gegenstände< schaffen, von konkreter Art, mit geistiger Aussagekraft, die sich weit über die von Industrial Design erhob. So wie bei seiner Typografie ging er auch hier davon aus, daß das Gezeigte auf der Zuschauer so übertragen werden mußte, daß sie in die Übertragung einbezogen wurden, d.h. die Kreativität der Zuschauer selbst frei gemacht wurde." (my English translation).
- 13 Leering gave this lecture at the end of the exhibition, on January 10 1966 in the Van Abbemuseum. This quote is from: (Kempers 2018, p. 68). "In beider conceptie treedt beweging op, maar bij Malewitch is het meer alsof hij de beschouwer een beweging in de ruimte laat zien. Lissitzky doet de beschouwer in zijn beschouwing zelf bewegen in die ruimte. Dit laatste staat centraal in het werk van Lissitzky, en dit principe: de beschouwer actief in de beelding betrekken, is ook uitgangspunt voor zijn ander werk, zoals zijn typografie en demonstratieruimten (. . .)" (my English translation).
- 14 Cited in: (Pingen 2005, p. 226). "De Eindhovense tentoonstelling is allerminst een eindpunt: waar het Lissitzky om ging staat nog te gebeuren. Inspirerender kan een tentoonstelling nauwelijks zijn." (my English translation).
- 15 For a more detailed account of the ups and downs of the purchasing process, see: (Pingen 2005, pp. 262, 263).
- 16 For more information on the preparations and the exhibition tour, see: (Pingen 2005, pp. 483, 484).
- 17 For the comment in the catalogue, see: (Debbaut 1990, p. 217). For the claim see: (Pingen 2005, p. 484).
- 18 For the history of the Hanover reconstructions of the Abstract Cabinet, see: (Krempel 2015).
- 19 For more information on this project and the interview with Deimantes Narkevicius, see: (Renders 2017, pp. 94–96).
- 20 The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue in Dutch, English and Russian: (Renders 2012; aoa 2013). For more information on this exhibition, see: (Renders 2017, pp. 96–99).
- 21 For more information on this project and the interview with Sarah Pierce, see: (Renders 2017, pp. 100–2).

References

Exhibitions Discussed

- 1965, 1966: *El Lissitzky*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Kunsthalle Basel, Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover.
- 1990, 1991: *El Lissitzky: 1890–1941: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer*, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Fundación Caja de Pensiones, Madrid, Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris.
- 2006: *Plug In #6*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.
- 2009, 2010: *Lissitzky+: Victory over the Sun*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.
- 2012, 2013, 2014: *El Lissitzky, Ilya/Emilia Kabakov: Utopia and Reality*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow, Kunsthau, Graz.
- 2015: *El Lissitzky: The Artist and the State*, Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin.
- 2015, 2016: *Positions #2*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.
- 2017: *El Lissitzky*, Tretyakov Gallery and the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Centre, Moscow.
- 2017: *Lissitzky en Oud in dialoog*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.
- 2018: *Chagall, Lissitzky, Malévitch—l'Avant-garde Russe à Vitebsk 1918–1922*, Centre Pompidou, Paris.
- 2019: *El Lissitzky*, Danubiana Museum, Bratislava.

Secondary Sources

- Berndes, Christiane, ed. 1999. *Een collectie is ook maar een mens: Edy de Wilde, Jean Leering, Rudi Fuchs, Jan Debbaut over verzamelen*. Eindhoven Rotterdam: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum NAi.
- Debbaut, Jan, ed. 1990. *El Lissitzky: 1890–1941: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer*. Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum.
- Franssen, Diana, ed. 2017. *100 Jaar De Stijl: Lissitzky en Oud in dialoog*. Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum.
- Goryacheva, Tatyana. 2017. The Proun Station. In *El Lissitzky*. Edited by Tatyana Goryacheva. Moscow: Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center & State Tretyakov Gallery, pp. 30–49.
- Kempers, Paul. 2018. 'Het gaat om heel eenvoudige dingen': *Jean Leering en de kunst*. Amsterdam: Valiz.
- Krempel, Ulrich. 2015. Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau und El Lissitzkys Kabinett der Abstrakten. Zwei Rekonstruktionen von zerstörten Räumen der Moderne im Sprengel Museum Hannover. In *Die Ausstellungskopie. Mediales Konstrukt, Materielle Rekonstruktion, historische Dekonstruktion*. Edited by Annette Tietenberg. Köln: Böhlau Köln, pp. 115–28.
- Leering, Jean, Joost Baljeu, Camilla Gray, Mart Stam, Dietrich Helms, Schuldt, and El Lissitzky. 1965. *El Lissitzky*. Eindhoven: Stedelijk van Abbemuseum.
- Lissitzky, El, and Jean Arp. 1925. *Die Kunstisten = Les Ismes De L'art = the Isms of Art*. Erlenbach-Zürich: Eugen Rentsch.
- Lissitzky, El, and Kasimir Malevich. 1922. *Pro Dva Kvadrata: Suprematicheskii Skaz: V 6-Ti PostroiKakh. [About Two Squares.]*. Berlin: Skify.
- Lissitzky-Küppers, Sophie. 1967. *El Lissitzky: Maler, Architekt, Typograf, Fotograf*. Dresden: Verlag der Kunst.
- Lissitzky-Küppers, Sophie. 1980. *El Lissitzky, Life, Letters, Texts*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Nisbet, Peter. 1987. *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941: Catalogue for an Exhibition of Selected Works from North American Collections, the Sprengel Museum Hanover, and the Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg Halle*. Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, Busch-Reisinger Museum.
- Pingen, René. 2005. *Dat museum is een mijnheer: De geschiedenis van het Van Abbemuseum 1936–2003*. Amsterdam: Artimo.
- Perloff, Nancy, ed. 2003. *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow. Issues & Debates*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute.
- Railing, Patricia. 2009. *Victory over the Sun*. Forest Row: Artists Bookworks.
- Renders, Willem Jan, ed. 2012. *El Lissitzky, Ilya/Emilia Kabakov: Utopia and Reality*. Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum.
- Renders, Willem Jan. 2017. Why Lissitzky? In *El Lissitzky*. Edited by Tatyana Goryacheva. Moscow: Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center & State Tretyakov Gallery, pp. 94–102.
- aoa, a, e. 2013. , aao: o ao. Ca-II: oa a.

Article

New Anthropology in Works of Vasily Chekrygin

Ekaterina Bobrinskaya

Modern and Contemporary Art Sector, State Institute for Art Studies, 125009 Moscow, Russia;
ekaterina173@gmail.com

Abstract: The article considers the concept of new anthropology in the works of Vasily Chekrygin in the context of the scientific and philosophical ideas of his time. Chekrygin's anthropology drew on the new concepts of life, discoveries made in biology and chemistry and new ideas of matter. A paradoxical fusion of scientific and occult thought, coupled with ideas of Christian anthropology, formed a crucial component of Chekrygin's works. The artist produced his anthropological project at the intersection of two cultural paradigms: that of Christianity, on the one hand, and science and the occult, on the other. This blend of such heterogeneous concepts was not an accidental fact of the artist's biography. It makes it possible to see certain problems and antinomies that were fundamental to the Russian culture of the 1910s through the early 1920s.

Keywords: V. Chekrygin; cosmism; anthropology; new man; Russian art; N. Fyodorov

A new man was one of the principal utopias of the Russian and European art of the early twentieth century. All sorts of cultural figures anticipated the possible and downright inevitable transformation of man in that period. Pyotr Ouspenskii, whose books were well known in artistic circles, wrote in 1911, "Man is by and large a transitional form, moving, progressing, and changing nearly before our eyes" (Ouspenskii 1913, p. 87). Anthropological fantasies usually associated with modernist art are typically connected with human machine projects, the radical change of man's natural form and the creation of a symbiosis of the living and the mechanical. Enthusiasm for machinery prevails in the images of a new man in the early twentieth century. However, occasionally fantasies of a human machine entered seemingly impossible interactions with vitalistic and religious ideas. Precisely such interactions became the decisive factor in the evolution of his version of new anthropology in Chekrygin's works.

In the early twentieth century, neovitalism was a notable trend in reflections on the new man. Anti-mechanistic anthropology relied on new concepts of life, discoveries in biology and chemistry and new ideas of matter (vibration theories, radiating power, electromagnetic waves, etc.). Protoparticles of life, protoplasm and "living matter"; Hans Driesch's entelechy governing living matter, the "cellular soul" of Ernst Haeckel and "biogenous ether" of Alexander Danilevsky are but a few examples of the vast range of ideas that promoted the spread of new views of the living organism, matter, and human body. The possibility of fathoming the depths of organic matter and transforming it not only at the level of cells but also at the invisible levels of emissions, vibrations and waves opened breathtaking prospects for creatively intervening in the human organism and changing the border between the animate and inanimate.

New anthropology fed on these ideas that were in the air and came to be discussed in scientific articles, as well as in numerous media publications, and gradually penetrated art. Tangible changes occurred in the "shape of man". The human body lost its solid closed outline and appeared as part of the finest movements and fluctuations of the environment and space pervaded by emissions and vibrations. Such bodies can be seen in many of the pictures of the Neo-Impressionists and Futurists (G. Seurat, *La Parade*, 1889; G. Previati, *The Return of the Pious Women*, 1910; L. Russolo, *Profumo*, 1910; C. Carrà, *Leaving the Theatre*,

Citation: Bobrinskaya, Ekaterina. 2022. New Anthropology in Works of Vasily Chekrygin. *Arts* 11: 86. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050086>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 9 August 2022

Accepted: 8 September 2022

Published: 13 September 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1910). The disconnected physicality of emissions, light waves, and electromagnetic fields appeared in works of František Kupka (*Woman Picking Flowers*, 1910–1911) and Marcel Duchamp (*Portrait of Dr. Dumouchel*, 1910).

Some Russian projects, primarily Rayonism of Mikhail Larionov and his associates, also fitted into the anti-mechanistic line of new anthropology. Closed bodies likewise disappeared from Larionov's Rayonist works. The human body found itself drawn into light and energy flows of the surrounding space; what was more, the living body itself was capable of emitting "radiant matter" (*Woman at a Table*, 1912; *Rayonist Portrait*, 1913). Unstable, open human shapes also appeared in the works of Larionov's associates (Mikhail Le Dantu, *The Portrait of M. Fabbri*, 1912, and *Lady in a Café*, 1910s).

Vasily Chekrygin, too, proceeded from such anti-mechanistic anthropology in his works. In the 1910s, he cooperated with Larionov and contributed to exhibitions organised by the latter. After Larionov had left Russia, Chekrygin stayed in touch with him and in his letters discussed his artistic projects in detail. Nonetheless, in his art, Chekrygin comes across rather as the antipode of Larionov. A paradoxical blend of scientific and occult thought and ideas of Christian anthropology became a crucial component of Chekrygin's works. Unlike Larionov, who never addressed Christian iconographical sources, Chekrygin produced his anthropological project at the intersection of two cultural paradigms—one Christian and the other scientific and occult. This merger of such heterogeneous concepts was not an accidental fact of the artist's biography. It makes it possible to see certain problems and antinomies that were fundamental to Russian culture in the 1910s.

There is an established custom of associating the concepts of a new man exclusively with secular ideas of science and philosophy. I would like to point to yet another context, that of Christianity, which is in fact primary and serves as a point of reference for philosophical and social concepts. The anthropology of change, transformation, and radical transfiguration of man (not only internal, but also of the human body) lies at the heart of the Christian view of man. The epistles of Paul the Apostle repeatedly speak of the Christian man as a goal and project to be implemented in history. The Epistle to the Colossians reads, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3 9–10). Or the first letter of St John, "what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him" (1 John 3: 2). The ontological transformation of man and going beyond the borders of actual human nature were set as goals and viewed as a desired prospect for the realisation of the Christian man. Man's transformation is possible primarily as an eschatological prospect in future resurrection. That projected image of a Christian oriented towards radical transformation, no doubt, continued to play an important role in secular culture as well, frequently in the form of a covert or distorted archetype for modernist projects. This Christian context became a crucial one for Vasily Chekrygin.

A broad range of scientific and occult ideas connected with neovitalism was another component of Chekrygin's new anthropology. Notions of the human organism going beyond its physical and chemical parameters and the presence of some "vital force" or entelechy guiding a living organism were the basic neovitalist ideas of the late nineteenth—early twentieth centuries. Already then, people observed parallels between the neovitalist ideas and certain concepts of Christian authors. Such parallels were above all encountered in thoughts about the resurrection of the dead and the dissolution of the human body. "It is easy to see in the first elements of St Gregory of Nyssa a very close similarity with the living proto elements of modern vitalist revival", said one of the 1912 publications in *Bogoslovsky vestnik* (Theological Bulletin) (Strakhov 1912, p. 10). The primary particles of life that lie beyond the boundaries of physical being and are only noumenal, yet capable of interacting with matter to form inimitable living organisms, were a frequent motif of Christian anthropology. Athenagoras of Athens wrote about the intangible "particles of the body" that upon the death of man "combined with the elements and the universe" (Athenagoras of Athens 2013, p. 15) and the raising of those gathering to form a new

body. In the anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa supersensible substance (“intelligible elements for the emergence of bodies”) consisting of “the first elements created in the beginning of creation” (Strakhov 1912, p. 10) is viewed as the innermost foundation of the soul. These prime elements are “quite real, but bodyless and merely intelligible essences” (Strakhov 1912, p. 10). The prime elements of the soul leave their special signs or imprints on the primary elements of the body.¹ Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes, “. . . some signs of our compound nature remain in the soul even after dissolution” that enable it to recognise kindred things at the moment of resurrection, and then “the soul attracts again to itself that which is its own and properly belongs to it” (Saint Gregory of Nyssa 1861, p. 188).

Christian anthropology itself underwent certain changes way back in the nineteenth century. The outcomes of contemporaneous scientific theories and experimental scientific discoveries were frequently incorporated in theological reflections on man. The polemics between Saint Ignatius (Dmitry Brianchaninov) and Saint Theophan the Recluse was perhaps the most indicative in this respect. The debate arose in 1863 after Saint Ignatius published his *Word on Death*, in which he, drawing on the contemporaneous teachings of gases, considered the human soul as a fine “ethereal body”. His ideas of the “fine ethereal corporeity” of angels and souls became commonly known. Saint Theophan reciprocated with his arguments under the expressive title *Dusha i angel—ne telo, a dukh* (The Soul and Angel Are No Body but Spirit”, 1891), accusing his opponent of “ultra-materialism”. Skipping the details of their heated polemics, let me point out that Saint Theophan himself addressed the teaching of ether. He wrote about a “very subtle element” that “penetrates and passes everywhere, serving as the smallest particle of material substance”; “the soul itself is the immaterial spirit; but its covering is made from this ethereal immaterial element” (Saint Theophan the Recluse 2012, p. 51). What is more, in his texts Saint Theophan used modern images such as electricity, wireless telegraphy and emissions to describe the effect of prayer and communication with the spirit (Saint Theophan the Recluse 2012, p. 57). Similar views (of course with significant corrections) were also common among the spiritualists and theosophists. In his early works *Souls* (1914–1915, see Figure 1) Chekrygin nearly literally reproduced the ethereal corporeity of the soul that was much written about in those years. The glowing outlines of bodies in his work reference, for instance, Saint Theophan’s descriptions of the immaterial angelic vision capable of seeing the ethereal body of the soul: “Then, having turned your gaze upon the earth, you would see among the varied masses of people bright shades, semi-bright, hazy, murky” (Saint Theophan the Recluse 2012, p. 53).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the entire atmosphere of early twentieth-century culture was pervaded with the ideas of new anthropology, in which Christian, scientific and occult ideas occasionally formed a paradoxical fusion. That atmosphere became the cultural context in which Vasily Chekrygin developed his ideas.

Another important context of his anthropology had to do with radical fantasies and expectations born of the 1917 Russian revolution. The conceptions of the radical transformation of man formed a significant part of Russian culture in the post-revolutionary period. In these theories, socio-political radicalism frequently accompanied anthropological radicalism. Dreams of the ultimate revolution that was to transform human nature and free man from the last bondage of death inspired anarcho-futurists, biocosmists and members of the Proletkult.² The attainment of immortality and the raising of the dead were discussed in the 1920s as the pressing objectives set by the revolutionary epoch. P. Ivanitsky (member of the biocosmist group) wrote in those years, “proletarian mankind will of course not confine themselves to securing immortality only for the living, they will not forget those who have fallen to accomplish this social ideal, they will undertake to free ‘the last of the oppressed’, to raise those who lived in the past. After all, the material basis of man (the atoms of his organism) does not disappear in principle, and consequently there is hope for its restoration” (Ivanitskii 1921, p. 8). In their reflections, artists and men of letters addressed not only the philosophical legacy of Nikolai Fyodorov, but also the numerous scientific experiments of the early twentieth century. In Russia, both before and after the

revolution, scientists attempted to resuscitate (individual organs, parts of the body or cells of a living organism) and extend life through cryopreservation or anabiosis.³ Biocosmist A. Svyatogor wrote in that period, “Unprecedented grand prospects are opening up before man (mankind). Struggle against death is no longer fundamentally impossible (experiments of Steinach, Andreyev, Kravkov, etc.). The possibility of individual immortality can already be substantiated scientifically, while accomplishments of physics and technology give grounds to raise the cosmic problem (interplanetaryism) scientifically. < . . . > The ultimate aspiration is immortal life in space. The ultimate evil is death. (. . .) The postulated problem strongly requires man to be free” (Svyatogor 2008, p. 414).

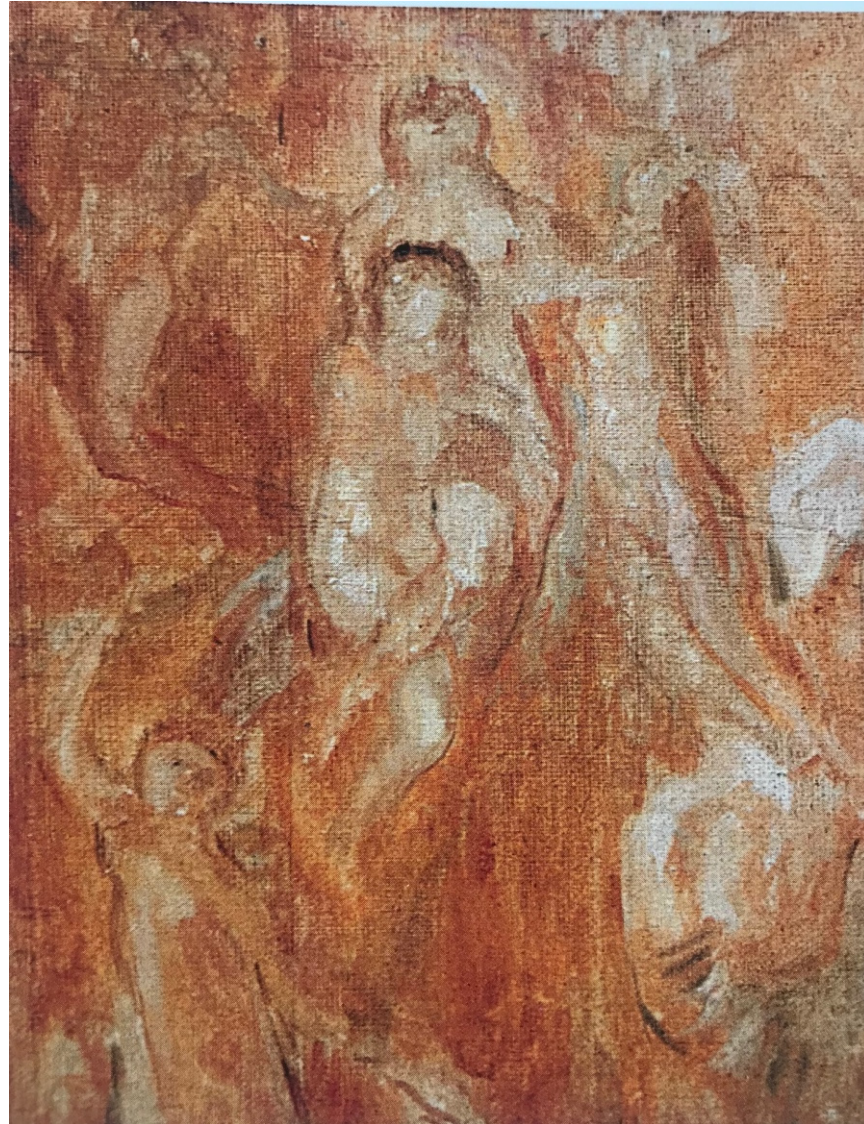


Figure 1. Vasily Chekrygin, *Souls*, 1914–1915, oil on canvas, private collection.

It was in this space of culture, where the problem of transforming human nature occupied pride of place, that Vasily Chekrygin developed his ideas.

Rayonism can be considered the starting point for Chekrygin’s anthropological fantasies in art. In one of his texts, he pointed out, “I would like to paint with rays of light” (Murina and Rakitin 2005, p. 222). In a 1921 letter to Mikhail Larionov Chekrygin spoke of “light as an instrument of revivers” (Murina and Rakitin 2005, p. 195). The new body of the risen man is made of rays of light. Mentioning that repeatedly in his texts, he spoke of “the revelation of the human body in light” or about “man in the whirlwind of his tribe

swept in time like a fiery column" (Murina and Rakitin 2005, p. 246). He pictured the creation/resurrection of a new body as construction "from fiery grains (atoms, electrons)" (Murina and Rakitin 2005, p. 247).

In his reasoning about the risen flesh, Chekrygin also proceeded from the theory of "luminiferous ether" that transmitted and sustained the vibrations of all atoms forming bodies. It was in that light-bearing environment that at the moment of resurrection the original elements of human bodies scattered in cosmos would be able to recognise one another by subtle vibrations and reunite in a new body. In one of his manuscripts, Chekrygin described the process of the ultimate transformation of the human body in terms of the scientific and occult knowledge of his time as follows, "The son has in his hand the ray weapon of Resurrection. The process and way of the conversion of rays can be presented in the following way, the vibration or convulsion to which the particles were subjected inside the organism continue upon their release from the organism and the destruction of the body < . . . > From these convulsions the rays, penetrating towards the surface, go together with the reflected and other rays, forming not only the outer image and those living on it, but also the inner one with the dead decomposing in it < . . . > The construction activity of the rays begins here. < . . . > the rays bear in them the images of the creatures who lived and then died, the images of the bodies decomposed into particles, these rays, meeting the particles, reunite the pictured gaseous molecules of the atmosphere with the solid ones on earth < . . . > into living bodies" (Murina and Rakitin 2005, p. 41). For Chekrygin the human body is a subtle physiology of fluctuations, vibrations, emissions, and light and electromagnetic waves. It is within this occult and scientific mechanics of the recreation of a new body that traces gleam, or the ruins of the Christian tradition are discerned.

The destiny of the human body, the different metamorphoses that it undergoes or can undergo in the future, flesh itself and matter are always at the heart of Chekrygin's anthropology. The normal static human body remains at the periphery of his interests. Chekrygin is above all interested in the changed, decomposing, or reconstituted human body, a body in extreme conditions. In his series *Execution by Shooting* (1920, see Figure 2), *Crazy People* (1921–1922), *Orgies* (1918) and *Povolzhye Famine* (1922, see Figure 3) he examined man at the borderline moments of being.

Pregnancy (1913) was yet another motif of interest to Chekrygin that also had to do with changing corporality. And finally, the main theme of Chekrygin's works of the final years of his life—the raising of the dead—references the most radical transformation that the human body can undergo.⁴

An important feature of Chekrygin's works is his direct reliance on Christian iconography and, above all, the iconography of bodily transformations.⁵ References to such iconography can be encountered in quite a few of his works. Just a few of them will be mentioned below. *Adam and Eve* (1913) pictures the moment of their loss of heavenly physicality and acquisition of "garments of skin". *Three Figures* (1914–1915, see Figure 4) references the iconography of the Transfiguration, when according to Saint Gregory Palamas, "(the disciples) of the Lord < . . . > passed beyond mere flesh into spirit through a transformation of their senses" (Lossky 1991, p. 368). The same theme is elaborated in *The Transformation of Flesh into Spirit* (1913, see Figure 5). Traces of the traditional iconography of *The Descent into Hell* are discernible in the nearly abstract mass of colour on the canvas. A study for *Down with Illiteracy* (1920) is associated with the iconography of the Ascension.



Figure 2. Vasily Chekrygin, From the *Execution by Shooting series*, 1920, pencil and charcoal on paper, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 3. Vasily Chekrygin, From the *Povolzhye Famine series*, 1922, pencil and charcoal on paper, collection of K.I. Grigorishin, Moscow.

Chekrygin is literally enchanted by the phenomenon of transforming physicality. He sees the mystery of the Eucharist as the archetype for every transformation of flesh, as well as for artistic creativity that transforms natural matter into a work of art. In his notes he repeatedly writes about that: “Creativity is the sheer Eucharist, the supreme creation regardless of time and space” (Murina and Rakitin 2005, p. 166). The mystery of the Eucharist enables him to describe the creative process itself as the transformation of the natural matter the artist works with. Chekrygin writes that the artist “does not know in the Eucharist of creativity where his flesh is—in the chalice on the altar or he is in it. Time and space recede, and it is the artist’s flesh in the altar, the chalice, and the wine is his blood while flesh is matter, stone, canvas. This is a mystery” (Murina and Rakitin 2005, p. 166). Chekrygin’s interest in the Eucharist resides in the context of that period’s general excitement about the problems of material world transformations, transformation/disappearance of matter and, on the other hand, the discovery of the materiality of the mind and the invisible.



Figure 4. Vasily Chekrygin, *Three Figures*, 1914–1915, oil on canvas, Perm Picture Gallery.

A characteristic of Chekrygin’s references to Christian iconography is their “ruined” state. The artist extracts the very core and essence from his iconographic references, e.g., the figures of Christ, Moses or Elijah, that is, the very phenomenon of transfiguration from *The Transfiguration*, and leaves in the figures of the Apostles, that is, just signs of trauma and shock. In *The Descent into Hell* there remain traces of images barely discernible in the play of colours and in *The Ascension* only the column of light or blank space amidst the crowd and hands raised to heaven. And, finally, in one of the drawings of *The Raising of the Dead* series (see Figure 6) there remains only the empty mandorla and the cross of the traditional

iconography of *The Descent into Hell*, while the figure of Christ effecting the transfiguration of man disappears. These deletions from the iconography are not fortuitous. Chekrygin's man exists on the ruins of the Christian world. His man is a sign of trauma. Christianity itself is rather a trauma for Chekrygin, a traumatic memory or magic instrument, the entire skill of using which has been forgotten. In one of his letters of 1915 he characteristically admits, "I am no Christian or Buddhist but mostly a pagan, or to be more correct, all of them put together" (Murina and Rakitin 2005, p. 158).

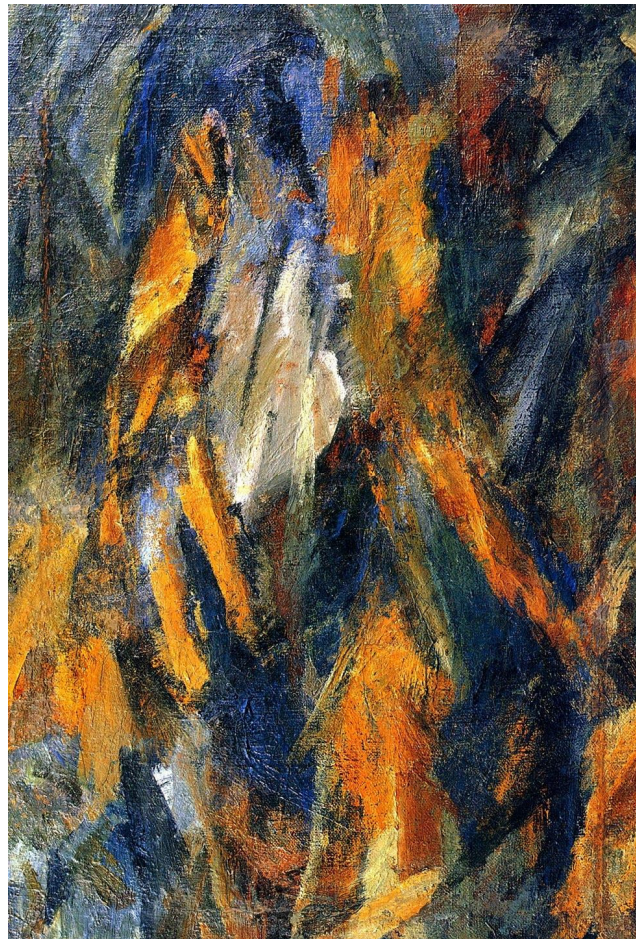


Figure 5. Vasily Chekrygin, *The Transformation of Flesh into Spirit (Agonising)*, 1913, oil on canvas, collection of S.I. Grigoryants, Moscow.

The ideas of Nikolai Fyodorov, whose works Chekrygin got to know only in late 1920 shortly before his death, merely gave a boost to his extreme conclusions and radicalised the motifs he had already had. At the same time, it was Fyodorov's concepts that imparted a definite bioengineering tenor to all Chekrygin's constructs and turned his Eucharist creativity into a "common cause" or "common enterprise", cosmic liturgy outside of church.

His most radical statement on new anthropology was a series of works (or rather hundreds of graphic sheets) that Chekrygin made as studies for monumental paintings for the Cathedral of the Reviving Museum. The raised bodies of Chekrygin are the result of bioengineering—the regulation of light flows and control over atoms, prime particles, and vibrations of "luminiferous ether". They appear outside the Christian prospect of resurrection and as a result of the technical magic of manipulation of matter. The hundreds of drawings made by Chekrygin in the final years of his life are astounding in their agonising monotony and endless repetition of the same thing. All the compositions consist of heaps of bodies twisted into balls and glued together into a horrendous biomass. His

mystery of human transformation shows a mass of people either rising from the dark or falling into cosmic darkness. His bodies are drawn into an endless and inextricable process of the transformation of matter. It is never nor can ever be finished. The vortex of bodies is like the eternal gyre of the elements of nature (see Figure 7).



Figure 6. Vasily Chekrygin, *The Raising of the Dead*, 1920–1921, pencil and charcoal on paper, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Chekrygin's images of new man raised by the force of reason and science are captivating with their grandiose and daring concept and at the same time off-putting with their wearisome repetition and monotony. The closest parallel is the description of the world of the Titans from Greek mythology offered by Friedrich Jünger. According to him, the world of the Titans, in which there are no Gods, is "an eternal vortex closed in itself" and "coming into being that has no point of support outside itself and is anxiously going back and forth as an ebb and flow"; it "produces nothing mature, nothing accomplished" (Jünger 2006, pp. 55, 62). Many contemporaries saw the same monotony and hopelessness in Fyodorov's philosophy. In his philosophical conceptions, according to one of the reviewers, "history short of loses its creative character and becomes a restricted vortex of forces: all it has is the mixing and restoration of the primordially given elements" (Golovanenko 1915, p. 502).

The iconographical prototypes for Chekrygin's "common cause" can be identified primarily in scenes of the Last Judgement and the torment of sinners. His man (see Figures 8–10) arising from nonexistence agonisingly goes through resurrection very much like human bodies go through hell. It seems that the pictorial language per se, which is deeply rooted in traditional religious iconography and from which Chekrygin cannot nor wants to break free, "leaks a word" about a deep conflict: the insoluble problem of victory

over death without Divine involvement in the process of Resurrection. Like many of his works based on Christian iconography, his scenes of the restoration of human bodies are distinguished by a characteristic “gap”, an incomplete process, and the loss of a conceptual focus. A well-known passage from the Book of Ezekiel on bringing “dry bones” back to life is best suited to describing that incomplete and unfinished process of restoring man involving bodies in Chekrygin’s liturgy outside of church: “Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy over these bones, and tell them: Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the sovereign Lord says to these bones: Look, I am about to infuse breath into you and you will live. I will put tendons on you and muscles over you and will cover you with skin; I will put breath in you and you will live. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’ So I prophesied as I was commanded. There was a sound when I prophesied—I heard a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to bone. As I watched, I saw tendons on them, then muscles appeared, and skin covered over them from above, but there was no breath in them” (Ezekiel 37:4–8).



Figure 7. Vasily Chekrygin, *The Raising of the Dead*, 1920–1921, pencil and charcoal on paper, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Chekrygin’s cosmic liturgy and his religious technological project of making a new man in fact negated the centerpiece of Christian faith—the redemptive sacrifice and Second Coming. He replaced messianic expectations and the unknown historical perspective open for creativity with mechanical collective work and consistent regulation of the eternal cycling of matter in nature. At the heart of his teaching of man is care about the future of man’s dust and body and the unconditional prevalence of the ancestral and collective over things personal (see Figures 11 and 12). His new man is entirely and inevitably

subordinated to the collective liberation project. However, the coveted freedom from death leads to total dependence: the new man remains forever shut in the cosmic vortex of natural matter. Chekrygin's anthropology reflects the inherent and insoluble antinomy of Russian culture of the revolutionary period, on the one hand, and, in a broader sense, of the entire modern epoch, on the other, and looking further forward, modernity, when every titanic stride towards human freedom results in its loss at an increasingly deeper level. His Cathedral of the Reviving Museum comes across as a prelude to the alarming and intriguing biotechnologies of our day and the images of current biopower that is penetrating human life ever deeper and more comprehensively.



Figure 8. Vasily Chekrygin, fragment of a fresco on the theme of *The Raising of the Dead*, 1921, charcoal on paper, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 9. Vasily Chekrygin, *The Raising of the Dead*, 1922, pencil and charcoal on paper, collection of K.I. Grigorishin, Moscow.

In Chekrygin's works, the contours of new anthropology loom out of the ruins of Christian images. This is the fundamental difference between his anthropology and the many fantasies of his contemporaries. Unlike, for example, biocosmists or proletarian poets, who just parodied Christian motifs and images ("The Gospel According to the Mare" by the biocosmist A. Svyatogor and "The Iron Messiah" by the proletarian poet V. Kirillov), Chekrygin was profoundly traumatised by the ruins of the Christian world. In his projects Christianity manifests itself only as a trace, "the mark, perceptible to the senses, which some phenomenon, in itself inaccessible, has left behind" (Bloch 1973, p. 33). It is these traces of Christian culture discernible behind bioengineering fantasies that imbue Chekrygin's works with a real dramatic effect. "I used to think," the artist wrote, "that creation comes easy. That 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks'. It speaks out of the tormented heart. My art sees life that is ominous, the life of the flesh. In its fall it feels heavens far stronger" (Murina and Rakitin 2005, p. 224).



Figure 10. Vasily Chekrygin, *The Raising of the Dead*, 1922, pencil and charcoal on paper, collection of K.I. Grigorishin, Moscow.



Figure 11. Vasily Chekrygin, *The Raising of the Dead*, 1922, pencil and charcoal on paper, collection of K.I. Grigorishin, Moscow.



Figure 12. Vasily Chekrygin, *The Raising of the Dead*, 1922, pencil and charcoal on paper, private collection.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ This theory of Saint Gregory of Nyssa came to be called “Sphagidism” (from σφραγίς meaning seal, imprint): “... for as the soul is disposed to cling to and long for the body that has been wedded to it, there also attaches to it in secret a certain close relationship and power of recognition, in virtue of their commixture, as though some marks had been imprinted by nature, by the aid of which the community remains unconfused, separated by the distinctive signs. Now as the soul attracts again to itself that which is its own and properly belongs to it, what labour, I pray you, that is involved for the Divine power, could be a hindrance to concourse of kindred things when they are urged to their own place by the unspeakable attraction of nature... There is therefore nothing beyond probability in believing that in the bodies that rise again there will be a return from the common stock to the individual” (Saint Gregory of Nyssa 1861, pp. 187–88).
- ² For details see Burenina-Petrova (2019, pp. 222–40).
- ³ P. Bakhmetiev (1860–1913) studied anabiosis, S. Metalnikov (1870–1946) conducted experiments in the freeze preservation of cells, and A. Kuliabko (1866–1930), S. Briukhanenko (1890–1960), F. Andreyev (1879–1952) and others experimented with revivification. The problem of immortality and resurrection in those years interested V. Bekhterev (1918, pp. 2–19). In 1922, the biocosmist A. Iaroslavskii published a *Poem of Anabiosis*, in which he described the world falling into anabiosis (“Chelusti Anabioza/Zavtra zakhlopnut mir” [The jaws of Anabiosis / Will snap shut the world tomorrow]), work to transform the world’s imperfections in ice sleep and awakening into a wonderful tomorrow: “I kogda vsia rabota gotova/I kogda, kak igrushka, zemlia-/Prosypaites, zhivushchiie snova,/V gorodskikh ploshchadiakh i poliakh!” [And when the work is done/And the earth is like a toy-/Wake up, those living anew,/In city squares and fields!] (Iaroslavskii 1922, p. 3).
- ⁴ According to Athenagoras, “... the resurrection is a species of change, and the last of all...” (Athenagoras of Athens 2013, p. 28).
- ⁵ In his work, Chekrygin constantly showed profound devotion to the imagery and iconography of icon painting and, more broadly, religious painting. In January 1921 he wrote, “I have to go away into the world of Russian icons, this is my native language” (Murina and Rakitin 2005, p. 222). In his search of new images for the Cathedral of the Reviving Museum Chekrygin frequently used stable archetypes (pictorial formulas) from the well-known iconography of icons, incorporating them in his scientific and technical project and treating them as a sort of “alphabet” for constructing his own iconography. This visualisation of traditional iconography and multi-layered imagery is an important aspect of Chekrygin’s art.

References

- Athenagoras of Athens. 2013. *O Voskresenii Mertvykh [Resurrection of the Dead]*. Moscow: Sibirskaya Blagozvonnitsa.
- Bekhterev, Vladimir. 1918. “Bessmertie s tochki zreniia nauki” [Immortality from the Point of View of Science]. *Vestnik znaniia* 2–19.
- Bloch, Marc. 1973. *Apologiia Istorii ili Remeslo Istorika [The Historian’s Craft]*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Burenina-Petrova, Olga. 2019. “Bessmertie cheloveka i telesnyie metamorfozy v tvorchestve anarkhobiokosmistov” [The Immortality of Man and Bodily Transformations in the Creative Work of Anarcho-biocosmists]. *Quaestio Rossica* 7: 222–40. [CrossRef]
- Golovanenko, Sergei. 1915. “Taina synovstva (O Khristianstve N.F. Fyodorova)” [The Mystery of Sonship (On N.F. Fyodorov’s Christianity)]. *Bogoslovsky Vestnik* 498–516.
- Ivanitskii, P. 1921. Bibliografiya: (NN. O proletarskoi etike. Izdatel’stvo V.Ts.I.K. Str. 45. Moscow) [Bibliography. NN. On Proletarian Ethics. V.Ts.I.K. Publishing House. Building 45, Moscow]. In *Universal. Organ Vserossiiskoi Sektzii Anarkhistov-Universalistov*. No. 5–6 (November–December), p. 8.
- Jünger, Friedrich. 2006. *Grecheskiie Mify [Greek Myths]*. Saint Petersburg: Vladimir Dahl.
- Lossky, Vladimir. 1991. *Ocherk Misticheskogo Bogosloviia Vostochnoi Tserkvi [A Study of Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church]*. Moscow: Tsentr SEI.
- Murina, Elena, and Vasilii Rakitin. 2005. *Vasily Chekrygin*. Moscow: RA.
- Ouspenskii, Pyotr Demianovich. 1913. *Vnutrennii Krug. O Poslednei Cherte i Sverkhcheloveke [The Inner Circle. On the Last Line and Superman]*. Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Trud.
- Saint Theophan the Recluse. 2012. *Chto est Dukhovnaia Zhizn i kak na neio Nastroitia. Pisma [The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned to It. Epistles]*. Moscow: Otchii dom.
- Strakhov, Paul. 1912. “Atomy zhizni” [Atoms of Life]. *Bogoslovsky Vestnik* 1: 1–29.
- Svyatogor, Alexander. 2008. “Doktrina ottsov” [The Fathers’ Doctrine]. In *N.F. Fyodorov: Pro et Contra*. Saint Petersburg: RKhGA, vol. 2.
- Saint Gregory of Nyssa. 1861. *Tvoreniia Sviatogo Grigoriia Nisskogo [Works of Saint Gregory of Nyssa], Part 1*. Moscow: Tipografiia V. Gotie.
- Iaroslavskii, A. 1922. *Poema anabioza*. Petrograd: Komitet Poesii BOKOSMISTOV-immortalistov (Northern Group).

Digital High: The Art of Visual Seduction?

Alexander Zholkovsky

College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90007, USA; alik@usc.edu

Abstract: The paper focuses on the structure of an advertising image for a 2010s computer company in the neo-capitalist Moscow, Russia. The analysis looks back to the pioneering studies of advertising as a commercial “applied art” by Sergei Eisenstein, Leo Spitzer and Roland Barthes. The picture’s plot and composition are shown to be a consistent and sophisticated near-artistic design that uses textual puns, poetic topoi and visual stereotypes (in particular, sex appeal) for the promotion of the advertised merchandise (a smartphone). The psychological naturalization of the design is clarified with references to the insights of Sigmund Freud, Heinz Kohut and Gerard Genette into the dynamics of narcissism. In a widening circle, the contextualization of the design involves: the literary topos of using birds in love poetry (made famous by its treatment in the lyrics of the Roman poet Catullus) and in painterly variations on the theme; the narcissist discourse of a modern Russian poet (Eduard Limonov); and the grand pictorial tradition of portraying a nude (Venus) before the mirror (relevant classical canvases are considered briefly).

Keywords: advertising; semiotics; design; visual; sex; narcissism; poetry; painting; mirror; classical; Russian; self-portrait; selfie

1. The Project: Analyzing a Commercial Image¹

In the window of the computer company *Belyi Veter digital.ru* (White Wind Digital.ru)’s store on the ground level of my 16-floor apartment building, at the corner of Sadovaya-Triumfalnaya boulevard and Vorotnikovskiy lane (in Moscow, Russia), was a gorgeous and unusually sophisticated poster.² I asked the staff inside for a copy, but they could only give me a pamphlet with a slightly different version of the image (see Figure 1). In what follows, I will offer a thematic and structural analysis of that visual text.

Before proceeding to specifics, let me entertain a question that begs to be asked: Why would I analyze an ad?!

Well, for the very general and venerable reason that semiotics is interested in all signs—just like linguistics is interested in all languages. And, in my case, for a somewhat personal one—because ever since I read Roland Barthes’s analysis of an advertisement for “Pasta Panzani” (Barthes 1964) I always wanted to emulate it.³

One of Barthes’s most interesting insights was that the color scheme of the ad (red, green, whitish) implicitly brings in the colors of the Italian national flag, while “l’italianité” itself connotes, for the French consumer, “freshness and abundance” (Barthes 1964, pp. 41, 49).

In fact, Roland Barthes was not the first to zero in on ads.

As a typically capitalistic genre, advertising has flourished in the West, especially in the U.S., and it has attracted the scholarly attention of psychologists, sociologists, and semioticians. Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (Packard 1957, itself a best-seller) focused on the rhetoric of advertisements which sell you the product by selling you on the idea that underlies it.

Leo Spitzer, in a sympathetic outsider’s view of Americana and a *tour de force* of “an *explication de text* of a good sample of modern advertising” (Spitzer 1962, p. 249), analyzed an ad for *Sunkist* oranges as an instance of *Gebrauchskunst*, a notion which, curiously, he had

Citation: Zholkovsky, Alexander. 2022. Digital High: The Art of Visual Seduction? *Arts* 11: 97. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050097>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 29 July 2022

Accepted: 26 September 2022

Published: 28 September 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

at the time to paraphrase in English as “‘applied practical art’: that art which has become a part of the daily routine and which adorns the practical and the utilitarian with beauty” (Spitzer 1962, p. 248).



Figure 1. The “SNAP QUICK!” poster/image.

One of Spitzer’s major points was about the “disinterestedness” of that art, or to translate this into the Slavic dialect of Structuralese, its “set towards expression” (the Jakobsonian *ustanovka na vyrazhenie*). I, for one, remember and admire many advertisements and commercials, but hardly ever what they are supposed to sell me.

In my pre-capitalist past (= prior to my emigration from the Soviet Union to the United States), as I studied the theoretical works of Sergei Eisenstein, a great artist but also an inspiring student of art, I found a telling reference to—what else?—the art of advertising. In his 1945 article, devoted to the art of Charlie Chaplin (and titled, even in its Russian version, “Charlie the Kid”), Eisenstein discusses the compositional device known in English as foreshadowing by citing five pages from an American handbook of advertising, Professor H.A. Overstreet’s *Influencing Human Behavior* (Overstreet 1925)!

To make that story very short here, here is an example of what Eisenstein quotes from Overstreet:

The canvasser rings the doorbell. The door is opened by a suspicious lady-of-the-house. The canvasser lifts his hat. “Would you like to buy an illustrated History of the World?” he asks. “No!” And the door slams < . . . >

Hence <...> we [must] start a person in the affirmative direction. A wiser canvasser rings the doorbell. An equally suspicious lady-of-the-house opens < . . . > “This is Mrs. Armstrong?”

Scowlingly – “Yes.”

“I understand, Mrs. Armstrong, that you have several children in school.”

Suspiciously – “Yes.”

“And, of course, they have much home work to do?”

Almost with a sigh – ““Yes” < . . . >

We do not guarantee the sale. But that second agent is destined to go far! He has captured the secret of getting, at the outset, a number of “yes-responses”. (Overstreet 1925, pp. 16–17; Eisenstein 1982, pp. 116–17)

Foreshadowings in prose and poetry as kindred to the “yes-response-techniques” in advertising! I used this insight of Eisenstein time and again since, including in an analysis of a Boris Pasternak masterpiece (see Zholkovsky 1994, p. 230).

2. A Close Reading of the Post-Soviet Ad

The inscription in block yellow can be translated literally as: “Snap quick!”; lower down, in smaller yellow letters, it says, “Digital technology for your vacation! Swoop in!” And depicted against the white-blue background of the sea below a lightly clouded sky is a sultry brunette (modeled perhaps, after a Latin American TV star?)⁴ with flowers in her long wind-swept hair, wearing a short open white dress that exposes tanned legs above the knees (her skin tone matches the color of the inscription, which is, of course, the computer company’s main color). With a smartphone (as an example of the digital products to be consumed during summer holidays)⁵ in her left hand, she takes a snapshot of herself, or rather, of a white seagull spreading its wings as it lunges with its open beak for an ice cream cone in her right hand.

Thus, we are presented with a unique dramatic moment (a wild seagull eating practically out of your hands!) that calls for prompt *carpe diem* action and, as is clearly shown, can indeed be captured—as advertised—thanks to new digital technology. The Faustian motif of stopping a beautiful but fleeting moment is conveyed by the seagull’s hovering, by the dancery half-turn of the female figure juggling cell phone and ice cream cone, and by the hem of her dress fluttering from the wind and from her own motion. The theme of ‘a fleeting moment’ is expressed by the girl’s facial expression: her oblique gaze at the cell phone while biting her lower lip either in response to her photo-journalist’s acrobatic tension or from sheer momentary pleasure. Also observed is the principle of auto-meta-creativity, so cherished by artists: the photograph portrays the making of a photograph.

As deliberately ostentatious and somewhat overloaded with images as the poster is, the composition does not fall apart, thanks to the skillful organization of the visual route along it. Our attention is immediately attracted to the flirtatious beauty, but she does not look at us, but rather at her cellphone screen; as we follow her gaze, we figure out it is directed at the seagull, which, in turn, is focused on the ice cream.

A counterpoint to this visual plot is provided by the picture’s color pattern. Against the background of the dominant white, black, and blue colors is a dotted line in red tones, formed by the top scoop of the ice cream, the bracelet on the brunette’s arm, one of the flowers in her hair,⁶ and the swimsuit visible beneath her dress. This sensuous red pattern is organically grounded in the calmer yellow-brown color of the girl’s swarthy body, while at the other end of the spectrum, it is akin to the scorching blackness of her hair.

The wind blowing up her dress is explicitly inscribed in the poster’s text: in the lower left corner of the picture, as part of the name of the store (“White Wind”), below which is the IT link to the company’s site (**digital.ru**)⁷ in black letters, echoing the blackness of the girl’s hair. The simple pun on the seme of “wind” is picked up by an even more obvious pun on the verb *naletai*, “swoop in and snatch,” urging the buyer to follow the example of the seagull aiming for ice cream. A subtler pun, underlying the entire structure, is the *double entendre* inherent in verb of the invitation (*sniat’*, “snap”), which in the current Russian slang means “pick up a hottie.”

Many other details of this seductive picture are ambiguous, too. As usual in advertising, a commodity is promoted through sex appeal: the idea of buying a smartphone materializes as gazing at a gorgeous female. But this is not performed in a primitive slam-dunk way—by simply placing a cell phone in the hands of a hottie who gives the viewer a “come-on” look—but rather by getting us involuntarily involved in her moment of self-admiration under the pretext of taking a picture.

3. Archetypes and Intertexts: Narcissistic Venuses

This design relies on a cluster of archetypal constructions of which the viewer’s identification with the viewed character is only the most obvious one.

Self-admiration is a powerful psychological mechanism, the professional study of which was pioneered in 1914 by Sigmund Freud, who pointed out that it was a universal phenomenon, characteristic in particular of the female psyche, and dubbed it narcissism.⁸ Hence, choosing a woman for the role of a self-photographing character is quite justified. Other components of the picture’s plot are also archetypal. The targeted consumer, primarily a male,⁹ is supposed to enjoy looking at a beautiful woman showing a lot of naked flesh (an elementary erotic interest); he becomes involved in peeping at her movements (voyeurism), which, in turn, are motivated by narcissism and exhibitionism.

In the fine arts, especially in painting, the classic embodiment of the theme of female narcissism is the motif of Venus in front of the mirror. Among the great examples are canvases by Titian (see Figure 2: “Venus with a Mirror,” circa 1555; http://muzei-mira.com/uploads/posts/2013-01/1359536068_venera-pered-zerkalom-tician-vechellio.jpg (accessed on 25 September 2022)): Venus is shown seated almost frontally, with a portion of her face visible in the mirror;



Figure 2. Titian. “Venus with a Mirror” (circa 1555).

Peter Paul Rubens (Figure 3: “Venus at a Mirror,” 1615; <http://rybens.ru/woman/rubens2.php> (accessed on 25 September 2022)): she is portrayed from behind in profile, and in the mirror her face is in full-face;



Figure 3. Peter Paul Rubens. “Venus at a Mirror” (1615).

Diego Velázquez (see Figure 4: “The Rokeby Venus,” circa 1648–1651; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c5/Diego_Vel%C3%A1zquez_064.jpg (accessed on 25 September 2022)): her nude body is seen from behind and her face in the mirror.



Figure 4. Diego Velázquez. “The Rokeby Venus” (circa 1648–1651).

Among prominent Russian artists of the 20th century, Aleksandr Deineka has two notable paintings in this genre:

“The Model” (1936 http://img1.liveinternet.ru/images/attach/c/5/89/220/8922043_3_large_a10.jpg (accessed on 25 September 2022); see Figure 5), an obvious variation on Velázquez’ canvas, with the difference that there is a nude figure repeating the original, but no mirror: instead, there is a window with a view of the city in winter;



Figure 5. Aleksandr Deineka. "The Model" (1936).

and "The Model in Front of a Mirror" (watercolor, 1928; http://artinvestment.ru/content/download/news/20091222_deineka_naturshica.jpg (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 6), portrayed from behind (= a Rubensian *derrière*) in front of a mirror in which, however, there is no reflection.



Figure 6. Aleksandr Deineka. "The Model in Front of a Mirror" (watercolor, 1928).

In our poster/image, the “Venus” is presented from the front and almost in full height, but we do not see the “mirror,” rather in this case, the camera screen, and we are invited to guess what’s in it.

The juggling pose, in which both hands are actively involved is a characteristic one—a well-known manifestation of narcissism, whose dynamics have been defined as a “confirmation of the Ego under the guise of the Other” and the corresponding aesthetic, as “a baroque < . . . > Vertigo < . . . > one that is very conscious and < . . . > well-organized” (Genette 1966, p. 28).

Thus, in Eduard Limonov’s poem “I will hold another person in my thoughts,”¹⁰ the following lines become the pinnacle of the poetic plot:

a a a a

o ao oo

ao

o o a o

ao a

(and I even try to take a peek at my back / I stretch stretch / but the mirror will help / interacting with the two / I’ll get to see the searched-for mole on my skin / Long have I been stroking it lovingly)

But the protagonist of the poem is consumed exclusively with his own self, and almost seems to have three /hands: two to hold the mirrors and, as it were, a third one to stroke the mole, while the heroine of our poster/image does not limit herself to narcissism/autoeroticism.

4. Archetypes and Intertexts (cont’d): Erotic Bird(s)

If, according to the external plot, the cutting-age technology is supposed to help capture an exceptional moment, the general strategy of advertising suggests a sexual lure, while narcissism implies a focus on something very personal and intimate, so what is needed is a love scene. But that would seem too risky for a computer store ad. The maximum titillation the artist can afford are the girl’s partially exposed breasts and gently wagging pelvis under an impeccably white dress, with some telltale folds clinging to her lap. What in literary scholarship is known as Aesopian writing comes into play: “sex” is only alluded to by subtle innuendo. In particular, it is refracted through yet another archetypal motif boasting a venerable pedigree.

Let us take a closer look at the left edge of the painting: the image of the seagull. The erotic pairing of a woman and a bird is a familiar combination. For instance, the Latin poet Catullus (himself looking back to a more ancient tradition) made a bird, in his case a sparrow, a mediator (if not a tool or perhaps even a symbolic organ) of his amorous passion for his elusive beloved Lesbia. In one of his poems (Catullus, 2), he envies the bird’s right to freely caress her:

Passer, deliciae meae puellae,
quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere,
cui primum digitum dare appetenti
et acris solet incitare morsus,
cum desiderio meo nitenti
carum nescio quid lubet iocari
et solaciolum sui doloris,
credo ut tum gravis acquiescat ardor:
tecum ludere sicut ipsa possem
et tristis animi levare curas!

(Sparrow —my sweetheart’s delight—/ she often plays with you, has you in her lap, / giving her index fingertip to you / teasing you to make sharp nips, / when my shining object of love / is pleased to play by some unknown dear reason / and a small comfort from pain; / I think it’s so her love may then subside. / If only I could play with you as she does, / and relieve my soul’s sad torments!)

In the next poem (Catullus, 3) the poet mourns the death of the pet:

Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque < . . . >
passer mortuus est meae puellae,
passer, deliciae meae puellae,
quem plus illa oculis suis amabat <...>.
nec sese a gremio illius movebat,
sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc
ad solam dominam usque pipiabat.
qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum
illuc, unde negant redire quemquam < . . . >

(Weep, Venus, and you, Pleasures, weep! <...> / Poor chick, my girlfriend’s love died, / Poor chick, my girlfriend’s / love. / He was dearer to her lovely eyes <...> / He never flew off his mistress’s lap, / He chirped sweetly for her alone, / He fluttered here and there, playing. / And now he walks on a misty path... / To a land of horror from which there is no return...)

Both poems¹¹ provided subjects for renowned paintings of the late 19th–early 20th centuries, somewhat reminiscent of our poster’s design.

The vivacious sparrow of Catullus 2 is featured in

“Lesbia and Her Sparrow” by Sir Edward John Poynter (1907; (http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/72/Sir_Edward_John_Poynter_lesbia_and_her_sparrow.jpg (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 7).



Figure 7. Sir Edward John Poynter. “Lesbia and Her Sparrow” (1907).

and “Lesbia with a Sparrow” by John William Godward (1916; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8b/Godward-Lesbia_with_her_Sparrow-1916.jpg (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 8).



Figure 8. John William Godward. “Lesbia with a Sparrow” (1916).

The deceased one can be seen in “Lesbia, Mourning a Dead Sparrow” (lying in the hollow between her thighs) by Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1866; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Lawrence_Alma-Tadema_lesbia_and_sparrow.jpg (accessed on 25 September 2022); see Figure 9):



Figure 9. Lawrence Alma-Tadema. “Lesbia, Mourning a Dead Sparrow” (1866).

But an even closer ornithological prototype of our picture, whether intentionally so or not, is the classic motif of Leda being violently seduced by Zeus in the guise of a swan, which has inspired some of the greatest masters.

There is “Leda and the Swan” by Jacopo Pontormo (1513; <http://www.varvar.ru/arhiv/gallery/mannerism/pontormo/images/pontormo1.jpg> (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 10):



Figure 10. Jacopo Pontormo. “Leda and the Swan” (1513).

the one by Leonardo (1515), of which only a copy has survived (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leda_Melzi_Uffizi.jpg?uselang=ru (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 11):



Figure 11. Leonardo da Vinci. “Leda and the Swan” (1515).

the erotically more daring one by Michelangelo (circa 1530), also lost and known from a copy by Rubens (1600; http://www.wm-painting.ru/plugins/p19_image_design/images/3/862.jpg (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 12):



Figure 12. Peter Paul Rubens. “Leda with a Swan” (1600) after Michelangelo (circa 1530).

and the anatomically even more explicit one by François Boucher (he had several paintings on this subject, see, for example, the 1740 version: https://arthive.com/francoisboucher/works/389707~Leda_and_the_Swan (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 13):



Figure 13. François Boucher. Leda and the Swan (1740).

This remarkable and highly provocative visual setting brings to mind the idea of the “mirror stage” (*stade du miroir*) of psychological development, ensuring a person’s intimate awareness of their own body as actively distinct from others. This concept forms an influential cluster of the “French theory,” starting with Henri Wallon and followed by René Zazzo, Jacques Lacan, Donald Winnicott and Françoise Dolto.¹² Another relevant background for the understanding of our poster is offered by the so-called “pornolatric” visual theory of the French philosopher Georges Batailles,¹³ whose “Le gros orteil” provocatively celebrated the ultimate desire to tangibly visualize—*see* and *sense*—the reflected self-image:

Le sens de cet article repose dans une insistance à mettre en cause directement et explicitement ce qui séduit, sans tenir compte de la cuisine poétique, qui n’est en définitive qu’un détournement (la plupart des êtres humains sont naturellement débiles et ne peuvent s’abandonner à leurs instincts que dans la pénombre poétique). Un retour à la réalité n’implique aucune acceptation nouvelle, mais cela veut dire qu’on est séduit basement, sans transposition, et jusqu’à en crier, en écarquillant les yeux: les écarquillant ainsi devant un gros orteil. (Bataille 1929, p. 302)

This peculiar attitude illuminates the complex view of the “discourses of love” as formulated by Roland Barthes (see Barthes 1963; Ioffe 2008).

As if in order to prove the relevance of the association between the “Venus before the mirror” and the “Leda and the Bird” motifs (so important for the commercial poster under consideration), there exists a painting that combines both topoi: “Lascivia” (c. 1618) by Abraham Janssens (see Figure 14 or the less successful image at <https://www.adam-williams.com/object/789585/0/lascivia> (accessed on 25 September 2022)).



Figure 14. Abrahams Janssens. Lascivia (c. 1618) Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels.¹⁴

Back to our poster/image: the “Swan” is represented not in immediate contact with the “Leda,” but interacting with her indirectly—through the ice cream cone. Nevertheless, the erotic drive is clearly outlined by the red-color sequence identified above: the ice cream ball; the bracelet on the girl’s forearm; the pink flower in her hair; the top of the bathing suit. This colorful dotted line then breaks off, but its erotic connotations are picked up by the suggestive folds of the white dress that simultaneously hide and accentuate (thanks to the

caressing breeze and the torso's dancing curves) the desired female groin, the *locus amoenus*, to which they definitely point. Incidentally, the white does not appear all that innocent here, as it is also the color of the seagull, who embodies passionate desire (gastronomic and sexual), and whose phallic left wing, the one closest to the girl and suggestive of erection, plays with the transition from white to black (the pitch-black at the top of the wing forming a pattern with the black of the girl's hair and of the cell phone).

In fact, the interplay of the two white-and-black figures is more ambiguous than it may seem at first glance. The "Swan," represented by a seagull (*chaika*), a bird, in Russian, of the feminine grammatical gender, plays—with respect to the distinctly phallic outline of the ice cream cone—an admittedly female oral sexual role: licking the penis (*fellatio*). The corresponding connotations of consuming ice cream are well-known and a popular topic of discussion.¹⁵ As a result, the seagull turns out to be not only the seductive girl's symbolic male partner, but also her *alter ego*/*Doppelgänger*. This enriches her erotic repertoire and expands the poster's potential sex appeal.

To be sure, there is more to the "White Wind" poster than its subliminal eroticism. The image of a bird coming down from the sky at the call of a human being, not necessarily of a woman and not necessarily for amorous purposes, carries a more general theme of power over the world, as, for instance, in Boris Pasternak's poem "A Dream" (1913, 1928):

a o o o,
oo ,
, a o o oo,
Cao a .

(I dreamed of autumn in the half-light of window panes, / My friends and you in their jesting crowd, / And like a falcon who has extracted blood from heaven, / My heart descended onto your hand).

Our seagull is, of course, no falcon, nor does it bring its prey from the sky so much as it expects to benefit from ice cream on the ground, but a nod towards falconry is felt here as a sort of archetypal design. Cf. The image of a hunter of the 18th century (the times of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich) with a falcon on his hand: (<https://kulturologia.ru/files/u22291/222911144.jpg> (accessed on 25 September 2022); see Figure 15):



Figure 15. A Falcon Hunter.

But falconry was not so much a woman's as a man's pastime. In Valentin Serov's 1902 painting "Catherine II Setting out to Hunt with Falcons" (<http://www.bibliotekar.ru/kSerov/19.files/image001.jpg> (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 16) falcons are held by male rangers rather than by the Empress herself.



Figure 16. Valentin Serov. "Catherine II Setting out to Hunt with Falcons" (1902).

5. A Long-Awaited Point: Selfies

Taking pictures of herself with her smartphone, our heroine is indulging in an activity that is now practically universal: taking "selfies," i.e., literally speaking, "off-hand" self-portraits.¹⁶ This suggests adding to the visual tradition (discussed above) the genre of self-portrait (usually in front of a mirror), which was practiced mainly by male artists and less frequently by women; as far as selfies are concerned, the opposite has been noted.

The most influential female self-portrait in the history of Russian painting appears to be Zinaida Serebryakova's "At the Dressing-Table. A self-portrait" (1909; http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Serebryakova_SefPortrait.jpg (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 17):



Figure 17. Zinaida Serebryakova. "At the Dressing-Table. A self-portrait" (1909).

a selfie is featured in a picture authored by an unknown third-party photographer (= the creator of the ad).

* * *

I hope to have demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the post-Soviet commercial image promoting a computer company's merchandise is well-rooted in the complex historical cultural tradition, especially visual, but also verbal, and in the archetypes that underpin it. This modern variation on the age-old themes both relies on the tradition in many subtle ways and creatively diverges from it by replacing

- a "Venus" before a mirror with a lightly clad selfie-taking modern beauty,
- Leda's sexually aggressive swan with an ice-cream hungry seagull
- and the genre of self-portrait with an apparently innocent but elaborately suggestive beach scene, a classical fleeting moment capturable nowadays by the advertised electronic device.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 A revised and expanded version of (Zholkovsky 2013). My sincere thanks go to Dr. Christopher Gilman for editing the translation—A.Z.
- 2 It was there at the time of this essay's writing, in 2013, but, alas, not anymore.
- 3 My first attempt was (Zholkovsky 1983).
- 4 A slim, young and thus pointedly positive female model.
- 5 No specific smartphone model is being promoted; evidently, the company wants to advertise its summer offer in general.
- 6 There are two flowers there, the color of the other one, white, matching that of the beach and of the vanilla ice cream flavor.
- 7 The website is no longer accessible after the company was dissolved in 2015 (cf. the Wikipedia article: [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/__\(oa\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/__(oa)) (accessed on 25 September 2022).
- 8 See (Freud [1914] 1964) and a redefinition of that classic study in (Kohut 1978).
- 9 Primarily but perhaps not exclusively: the ad is not only for men, but also for (young) women because the eroticism is rather veiled (and of course women often adopt these stereotypes) and combined with nice beach scenery and pastime. One could argue that the ad is neither completely gender neutral nor strictly for male customers, and this ambiguity raises its quality.
- 10 On that poem see (Zholkovsky 1994, pp. 148–63).
- 11 For my detailed analysis of Catullus' sparrow poems see (Zholkovsky 2017a, 2017b).
- 12 Cf. (Wallon 1983); (Lacan 1949); (Thévoz 1996); (Dolto and Nasio 2002); (Guillerault 2003); (Roussillon 2008a, 2008b).
- 13 See his magisterial literary work (Bataille 1928); cf. (Didi-Huberman 1995); (Mayné 2001, 2003).
- 14 The remarkable combination was observed, and the photograph kindly provided by Prof. Dennis Ioffe.
- 15 See for example: <http://lady.pravda.ru/articles/psycho/15-03-2013/9905-icecream/> (accessed on 25 September 2022). On icecream as an important iconography in pop art see (Sooke 2015).
- 16 On selfies see: (Qiu et al. 2015); (Sorokowski et al. 2015); (Stavans 2015); (Halpern et al. 2016); (Eler 2017); (Mills et al. 2018); (Storr 2018); (Veldhuis et al. 2020); (Raymond 2021).

References

- Barthes, Roland. 1963. La Métaphore de l'œil. *Critique* 195–196: 770–77.
- Barthes, Roland. 1964. Rhétorique de l'image. *Communications* 4: 40–51. [CrossRef]
- Bataille, Georges. 1928. *Histoire de l'œil par Lord Auch*. Paris: Fayard/Pauvert, Illustrée de huit lithographies anonymes (André Masson), sans nom d'éditeur (René Bonnel), sur des maquettes de Pascal Pia, tirée à 134 exemplaires, diffusés clandestinement.
- Bataille, Georges. 1929. *Le gros orteil*. Documents 6 (November 1929): 297–302. Reprinted in his *Ceuvres Complètes* in 1970. Edited by Denis Hollier. Paris: Gallimard, vol. 1, pp. 200–4.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. 1995. *La ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*. Paris: Éditions Macula.
- Dolto, Françoise, and Juan-David Nasio. 2002. *L'enfant du miroir*. Paris: Payot.
- Eisenstein, Sergei. 1982. Charlie the Kid. In *Film Essays and a Lecture*. Edited by Jay Leyda. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 108–38.
- Eler, Alicia. 2017. *The Selfie Generation: How Our Self-Images Are Changing Our Notions of Privacy, Sex, Consent, and Culture*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing.

- Freud, Sigmund. 1964. On Narcissism: An Introduction. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth, vol. 14, pp. 69–102. First published 1914.
- Genette, Gerard. 1966. Complexe de Narcisse. In *Figures. I*. Paris: Seuil, pp. 21–28.
- Guilleraut, Gérard. 2003. *Le miroir de la psyché*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Halpern, Daniel, Sebastián Valenzuela, and James E. Katz. 2016. “Selfie-ists” or “Narci-selfiers”? A cross-lagged panel analysis of selfie taking and narcissism. *Personality and Individual Differences* 97: 98–101. [CrossRef]
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2008. The Discourses of Love: Some observations regarding Charles Baudelaire in the context of Brjusov’s and Blok’s vision of the Urban woman. *Russian Literature* 64: 19–45. [CrossRef]
- Kohut, Heinz. 1978. Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage. In *The Search for the Self*. New York: International Universities Press, vol. 2, pp. 615–59.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1949. *Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je: Telle qu’elle nous est révélée dans l’expérience psychanalytique*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Mayné, Gilles. 2001. *Pornographie, violence obscène, érotisme*. Paris: Descartes et Cie.
- Mayné, Gilles. 2003. *Georges Bataille, l’érotisme et l’écriture*. Paris: Descartes et Cie.
- Mills, Jennifer, Sarah Mustoa, Lindsay Williams, and Marika Tiggemann. 2018. “Selfie” Harm: Effects on Mood and Body Image in Young Women. *Body Image* 27: 86–92. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Overstreet, Harry Allen. 1925. *Influencing Human Behavior*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Packard, Vance. 1957. *The Hidden Persuaders*. New York: D. McKay Co.
- Qiu, Lin, Jiahui Lu, Shanshan Yang, Weina Qu, and Tingshao Zhu. 2015. What does Your Selfie Say About You? *Computers in Human Behavior* 52: 443–44. [CrossRef]
- Raymond, Claire. 2021. *The Selfie, Temporality, and Contemporary Photography*. New York: Routledge.
- Roussillon, René. 2008a. *Le transitionnel, le sexuel et la réflexivité*. Paris: Dunod.
- Roussillon, René. 2008b. *Le jeu et l’entre-je(u)*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Sooke, Alastair. 2015. *Pop Art: A Colourful History*. London: Viking/Penguin Books.
- Sorokowski, Piotr, Agnieszka Sorokowska, Anna Oleszkiewicz, Tomasz Frackowiak, A. Huk, and Katarzyna Pisanski. 2015. Selfie Posting Behaviors are Associated with Narcissism Among men. *Personality and Individual Differences* 85: 123–27. [CrossRef]
- Spitzer, Leo. 1962. *Essays on English and American Literature*. Edited by Anna Hatcher. Princeton: Princeton UP.
- Stavans, Ilan. 2015. *I Love My Selfie*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Storr, Will. 2018. *Selfie: How We Become So Self-Obsessed and What It Is Doing to Us*. London: Macmillan.
- Thévoz, Michel. 1996. *Le miroir infidèle*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit (coll. Critique).
- Veldhuis, Jolanda, Jessica M. Alleva, Anna J. D. (Nadia) Bij de Vaate, Micha Keijer, and Elly A. Konijn. 2020. Me, My Selfie, and I: The Relations Between Selfie Behaviors, Body Image, Self-Objectification, and Self-Esteem in Young Women. *Psychology of Popular Media* 9: 3–13. [CrossRef]
- Wallon, Henri. 1983. *Les origines du caractère chez l’enfant. Les préludes du sentiment de personnalité*. Paris: PUF.
- Zholkovsky, Alexander. 1983. October 19, 1982, or The Semiotics of a Soviet Cookie Wrapper. *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 11: 341–54.
- Zholkovsky, Alexander. 1994. *Rereadings in Russian Literary History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Zholkovsky, Alexander. 2013. Tsifrovoi kaif. *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie [New Literary Review]* 124: 212–23.
- Zholkovsky, Alexander. 2017a. Uroki irokezskogo: Catullus, 2. *Zvezda* 9: 233–46.
- Zholkovsky, Alexander. 2017b. Poeziia grammatiki i neperevodimost’: Catullus, 85. In *M. L. Gasparovu-Stikhovedu: In Memoriam*. Edited by Marina Tarlinskaya and Marina Akimova. oscar: IASK, pp. 280–88.

Essay

All the Missiles Are One Missile Revisited: Dazzle in the Work of Zofia Kulik

Sarah Wilson

Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Courtauld, University of London, London WC1E 6BT, UK; sarah.wilson@courtauld.ac.uk

Abstract: This essay revisits one of Polish artist Zofia Kulik's most important 'photocarpet', produced in a moment of hope, retrospection yet continuing war in 1993; seen by an international public in 1997. Visually, its composition is dominated by late Soviet sculptures symbolising Mother Russia and military aggression, yet the composition, 'kilim-like', with an additional reference to Polish Catholicism, involves bilateral and rotational symmetries which undermine significations of power and might with various other symbols: bodies, naked or draped, and Polish TV screenshots from both the military and entertainment worlds. 'Dazzle', the camouflage-related military term is also related to tears and (repressed) mourning. The female artist's attitude to gender is crucial. The piece is both a 'revisualisation' and 'rewriting', relating both to the author's previous texts on the artist from 1999 and 2001, and Kulik's own rediscovery of her Ukrainian heritage, which reframes her own vision and understanding of the piece in 2022.

Keywords: dazzle; kilim; missile; mourning; photocarpet; power; Soviet; Ukraine

And now, after 24 February when the Russian aggression came to Ukraine—the second wave came to me in looking at 'my place and time'. *All the Missiles are One Missile*—it is a work that again or even more today seems to be so 'current'.

Zofia Kulik, 3 July 2022

The fundamental substance of an epoch and its unheeded impulses illuminate each other reciprocally.

Siegfried Kracauer, *Mass Ornament*, 1927¹

All the Missiles are One Missile (Wszystkie pociski są jednym pociskiem), 1993, was a focus of discussion on my first visit to Zofia Kulik in November 1998 (Figure 1).² This great 'photocarpet' (3 × 8.5 m), in an edition of three, now resides in Kraków's MOCAM Museum of Contemporary Art, the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris and a private collection.³ Kulik is an internationally revered figure, especially so in the artworlds of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw-based, she has constructed a major body of work, while simultaneously constituting the definitive archive of avant-garde art in her country over the last few decades, including photography-based, performance and video pieces—many her own or created with her partner as the duo 'KwieKulik'.⁴ She has preserved the very soul of Polish Conceptual art; she has mentored generations of young curators, collaborators and academics, and generated the most audacious contemporary scholarship.⁵

Citation: Wilson, Sarah. 2022. *All the Missiles Are One Missile Revisited: Dazzle in the Work of Zofia Kulik*. *Arts* 11: 116. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11060116>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 30 August 2022

Accepted: 18 October 2022

Published: 11 November 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

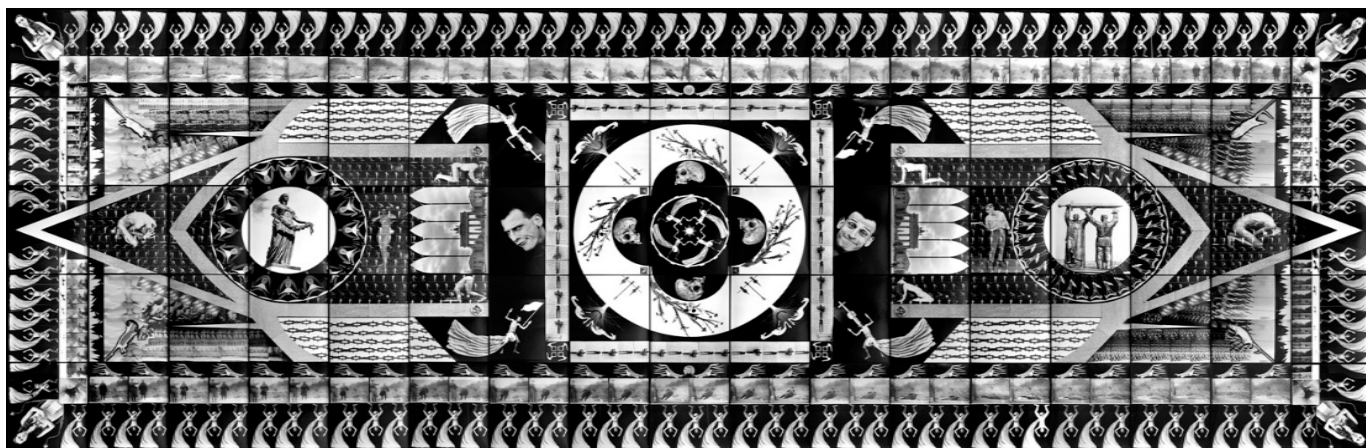


Figure 1. *All the Missiles are One Missile*, 1993.

All the Missiles are One Missile dominated Kulik's solo show in the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 1997 after an extensive tour (Kulik 1997).⁶ It was an astonishing installation, looking both forward and backward during the transitional period of the engagement of former Soviet satellite territories with the contemporary world, and created specifically during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁷ But for an issue of *Arts* devoted to Eastern European visuality, this individual work is exceptional. Its visual complexity is compounded by a perceptual challenge linked to an emotional depth relating to content, history and memory. It is in itself both an *éclatement*—an explosion and shattering of meaning—and simultaneously an archive where memory and amnesia struggle for supremacy. The revisiting of the work, so current today as Kulik emphasises, is an act of revisualisation in tragic times, while also an act of textual revisiting, of rewriting.

When I first landed in snowy Warsaw in November 1998, Zofia took me to Łomianki, to her house of many stories (Piotr Piotrowski 1999).⁸ Our communication with each other was hesitant: a guessing game in English and Polish punctuated with Żubrówka vodka and flashes of illumination. The most powerful moment came when Zofia revealed that *All the Missiles are One Missile* as a title originated in T. S. Eliot's *Notes to The Wasteland* of 1922: 'All the women are one woman'.⁹ This act of renaming—the refiguration of masculine content by the artist—confirmed an alternative secret. Despite the Soviet bleakness of the work's content, its imagery of power, submission and of imposed socialist realism, Eliot himself, his voice and his poetry are covertly preserved. The Stalinist desire to impoverish language and to eradicate European heritage—psychoanalysis as well as literature—formed part of our discussion. 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins' . . . Eliot's line resonated in my own theatre of memory.¹⁰

Simultaneously, then, with its visual complexity, *All the Missiles are One Missile* is an aural palimpsest. Once the title is known and understood, the spectator is taken *beyond* the visual, *beneath* the surface. Kulik's verbal substitution, both ironic and tragic, relates to female voices within the polyphonic structure of *The Waste Land* which Eliot conceived in the aftermath of World War 1. Human losses of unimaginable magnitude were echoed by the bombed and devastated landscapes of Europe. He espoused the persona of the seer Tiresias, who spoke out of time and beyond sexual difference, to depict a historical fresco of fragments redeemed.

All the Missiles are One Missile is likewise a historical fresco of fragments redeemed, in a context of ever-renewed war and bellicosity. At the end of my catalogue essay for the Poznan retrospective with its forward-looking title, *From Siberia to Cyberia* written in March, 1999 (the very month Poland joined NATO), I was compelled to add a post-scriptum: 'This essay was completed a few days before the NATO bombing of Serbia and the tragic renewal of genocide policies in Kosovo'. Now thirty years of exchanges between Russia and the west are endangered: warm relationships between new generations of intellectuals, writers

and curators, using old and new means of communication. The skies darken; warfare has opened up to cyberwarfare; yet Russia's use of Second World War army material, vehicles, weapons and indeed anti-Nazi propaganda reactualises *All the Missiles are One Missile*; its dazzle not only evokes issues of visibility, of seeing, but again tears, renewed mourning.

To start with, why a 'photocarpet' (Kulik's term)? Evidently the work is constituted of black and white photographic elements, arranged with a dizzying repetition yet a forceful symmetry. In size and visual impact, Kulik references the *polonaise* or Polish kilim, part of the familiar behind-the-bed decor of so many Polish homes. The kilim's zig-zag symmetrical patterns relate back to Turkish influences from the Ottoman empire: 'Our South is Turkish half-moons and horsetail ensigns, Persian tents and carpets, coats of mail and robes, those knightly customs and splendours which the chroniclers of the gentry called "Sarmatic"'.¹¹ The history of the transmission of ornament and of information relates directly, always, to histories of conquest (Jones 1986).¹² The kilim retained ancient motifs in themselves female, such as the triangular or diamond-shaped body with outward-facing hooks: the 'arms akimbo' motif known as the *elibelinde*. Another shocking statement by Zofia came from that first interview: 'In the form of my mother I put the content of my father'. Her mother, a dressmaker, lived in the 'soft' world of kilims, embroideries and printed cottons, visits from elegant clients and fashion talk, where cutting out a dress pattern became an occasion for careful economy, skilful artistry. Yet, looking out of the window, Kulik watched out for her father performing in countless military exercises: changing geometric formations on the parade ground.¹³

After the recognition of format comes the recognition of greyness, the greyness of multiple black and white photographs seen from a distance. Occupied first by the Nazis and subsequently by the Soviets, with over six million war dead, Poland's boundaries shifted radically once more as it became a one-party, Stalinist state by 1947. The greyness of Poland as Soviet satellite pervades Czesław Miłosz's (1953) *Zniewolony umysł* (*The Captive Mind*), with its analysis of Eastern doublethink and language; greyness as a metaphor was a recurring motif in KwieKulik's previous performance work (Golinski 2005).¹⁴ The patterns one sees might suggest a comparison with the well-known photomontages of the Soviet modernists, Rodchenko, El Lissitzky or Gustav Klucis, with his duplicated miniscule Lenins, the repetition of heads in a crowd, of gymnasts, strikers, soldiers, bayonets: a mass glorification of the Revolution. Repetition under socialism was celebratory, a sign of the will to power—all prior to the excesses of the 1930s, the huge tragedies of the war, the expansion of the dystopian empire and its ultimate fall.

All the Missiles are One Missile is dominated by two recognisable Soviet monuments. The left side of the tripartite work celebrates Vera Isaeva and Robert Taurit's *Mother Russia*, 1960, a memorial to the thousands of victims of the siege of Leningrad (Figure 2). She is counterbalanced by Lev Golovnitsky's *Rear to the Front*, the gigantic, sword-wielding duo from Magnitogorsk of 1979: the worker, back to us, surveys the iron and steel weapon-manufacturing city, the warrior, facing us, looking west towards the sites of the Great Patriotic War (Figure 3). The wreath-like surrounds are made, on the left, of the repeated pattern of a girl bearing swags of material (her head alternately hidden), on the right, a repeated naked man, again bearing drapes, with a phallus-loincloth formed from a pointed flagpole finial. Berlin's Brandenburg Gate with bullet-shaped skies at the foot of each 'horizontally-placed church elevation' (here, Kulik recalls Poland's Catholic heritage with this mirror-image structuring device) is again war-related, as are the repeated shots of an assassination, arranged in decorative bands (Figure 4), or the blurred skulls of Polish victims of the Katyn massacre. The pale figure of Kulik's model Zbigniew Libera in various poses appears as a form of punctuation; repeated on black he contrasts with grey hordes of marching soldiers: German, Chinese, Soviet . . . (Figure 5) Clothed, he has a dominant position on the black ground between the Brandenburg gate motif and the great twin sculpture, complemented symmetrically on the left by the apparition of a Polish academic female nude (Pantaleon Szyndler's lascivious *Eve*, 1902) which elicits a degree of proto-feminist contempt from the artist (Figure 6).¹⁵

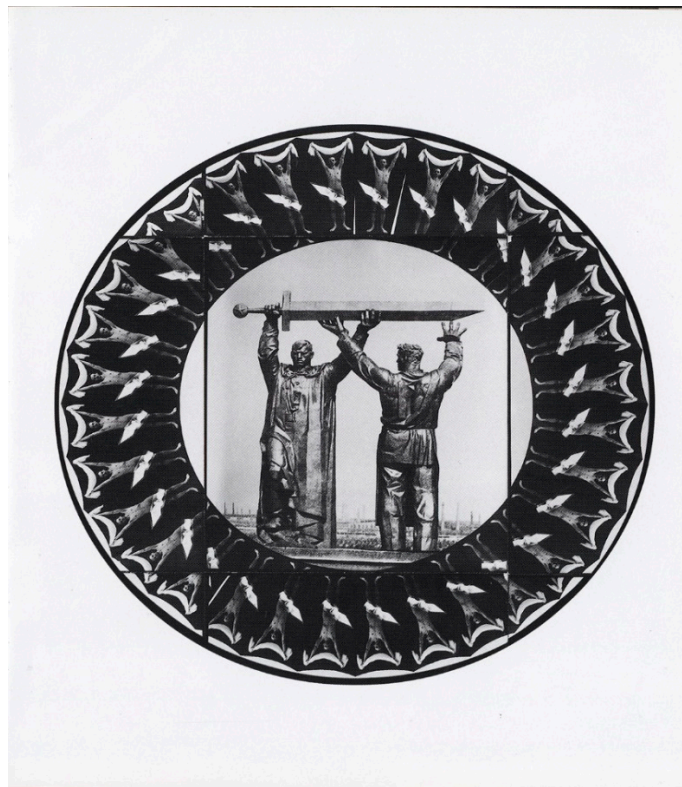


Figure 2. Kulik, *All the Missiles are One Missile*, guide, 1997. Vera Isaeva with Robert Taurit, *Mother Russia*, 1960, Piskaryevsky Cemetery, Saint Petersburg.



Figure 3. Kulik, guide, 1997. Lev Golovnitky, *Rear to the Front*, 1979, Magnitogorsk.



Figure 4. Kulik, guide, 1997. *Assassination* (TV screen photos).

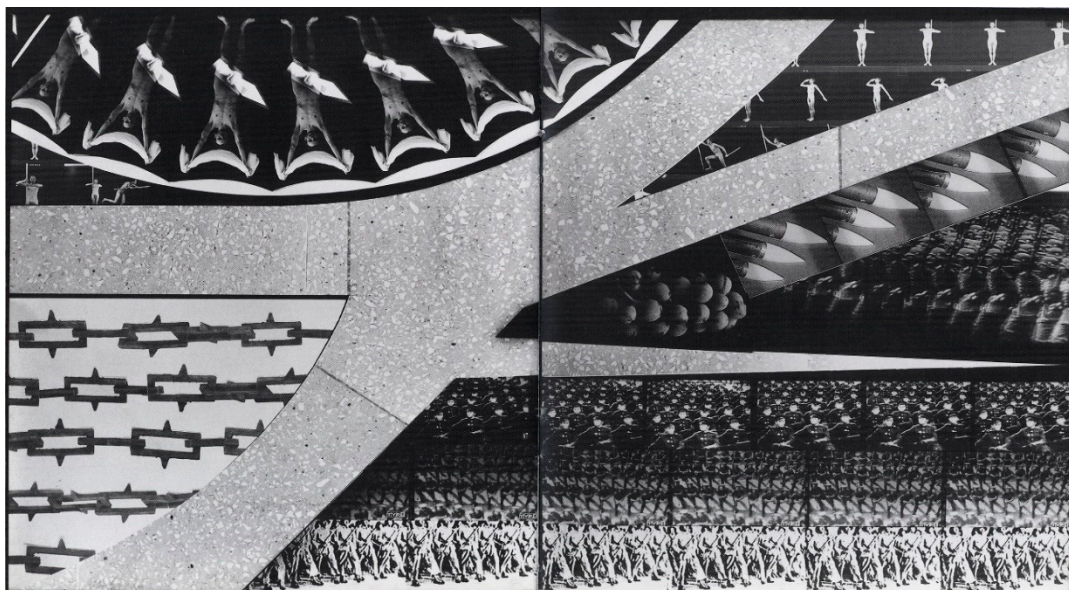


Figure 5. Kulik, guide, 1997. *Marching soldiers*.

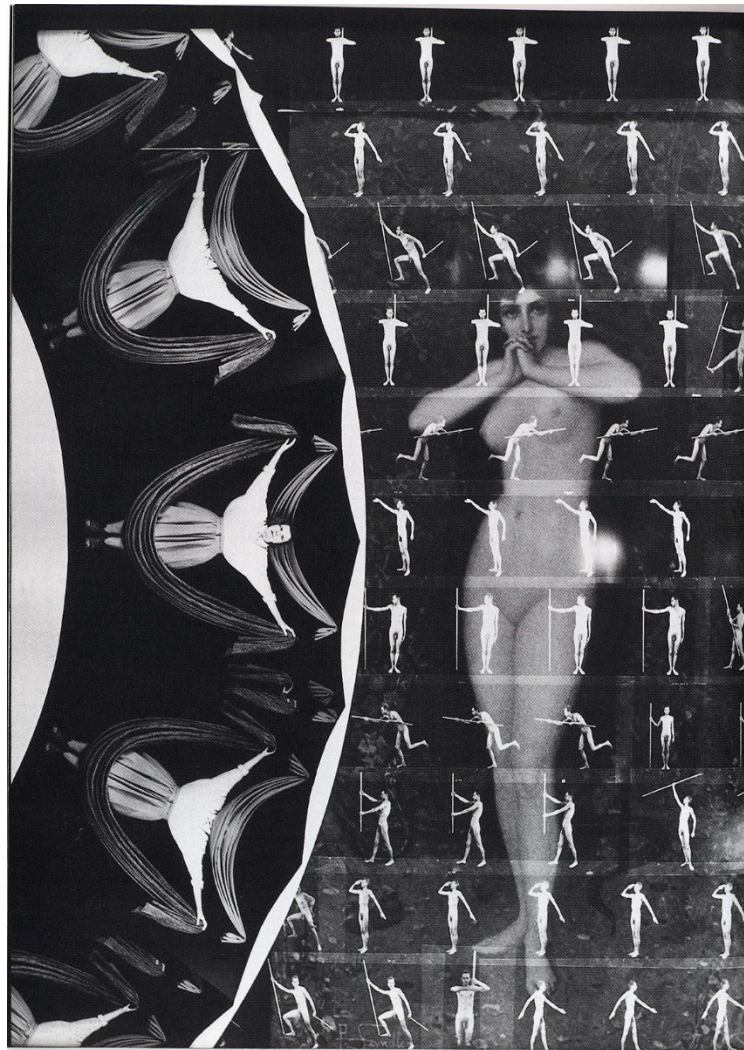


Figure 6. Kulik, guide, 1997. Pantaleon Szyndler, *Eve*, 1902, with Zbigniew Libera in nude poses.

Indeed as a counterpoint there are many female images in *All the Missiles . . .* : still frames from TV programmes showing female dancers, the Miss America contest, or Chinese girls singing in praise of Chairman Mao. In March 1993, Kulik was also watching the film *Oh les Girls* (Figure 7). She never hesitated to add crutch shots from underwater ballet to her composition (Figure 8).¹⁶ Inevitably one thinks back to Siegfried Kracauer's Tiller Girls whose 'indissoluble girl clusters' signified a new modern (Kracauer 1995). 'Only as parts of a mass, not as individuals who believe themselves to be formed from within do people become fractions of a figure'.¹⁷ The 'reciprocal illumination' between impulse and epoch that he sees within these practices (see my epigraph) now becomes obscene. The juxtapositions of war and commodified sex compound the information overload in not only Western but 'Eastern' TV by this time. The processes would be repeated as Kulik's photocarpets expanded from *All the Missiles . . .* to the huge historical fresco *From Siberia to Cyberia*, which has likewise received meticulous iconographic treatment and her filmed explanation (Kulik 2004).¹⁸ In fact, Kulik's veritably semiotic analyses of the gestures of the parade, of banners, of flag-waving and of war, anticipate the *propos* of Georges Didi-Hubermann's (2016) celebrated exhibition, *Uprisings*.¹⁹ Kulik is a voracious historian of art.



Figure 7. Kulik, guide, 1997. Female elements.

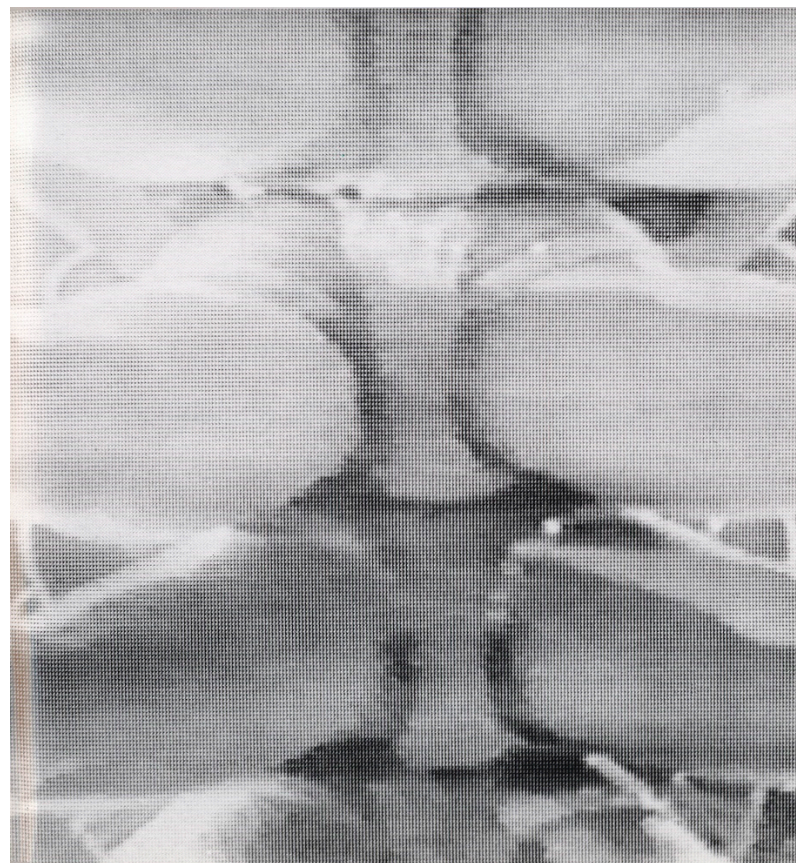


Figure 8. Kulik, guide, 1997. Crutch shots.

The very premise of grand politics, grand confrontations is, however, collapsed and mocked in *All the Missiles are One Missile ...* Only the two Soviet sculptures stand fast. Kulik's obsessive duplications and kaleidoscopic principles turns image into madness; bilateral and rotational symmetries dissipate all linear rationality, all hierarchy. The reference to mental instability becomes explicit in figures such as the headless draped female, chosen for the 1994 catalogue cover (Ursula Kwiek, Kwiek's challenged younger sister posed here). Quantity is also an alibi, while a spatial synchronicity destroys private space, narrative, causality, the blunders of history or the logic of unspeakable crimes. Moreover, yesterday's live news is now dead, like its protagonists: at the mercy of memory, or today, the zombie resurrections of Vladimir Putin's fake rhetoric. Let one remember that in *All the Missiles are One Missile*, beneath the uniform of each robotic soldier, each arm carrying a gun or a banner, is a naked man, a mother's son.

The process for the creation of *All the Missiles are One Missile* was highly labour-intensive. Besides rephotography, Kulik's large TV set (very old-fashioned to my eyes on that first visit) was the source for screen photographs snapped from documentaries, often Soviet, about World War II and its atrocities. The photos were developed in Kulik's own dark room, with patterns made by the repeat printing of one or more negatives on photosensitive paper while playing with masking to create blank backgrounds and decorative arrangements. Another shock for me in that dark room: Kulik's white Ilford photographic paper boxes bearing dark photographs of London's Saint Paul's Cathedral: so familiar, so estranged in Łomianki.²⁰ I thought at that time of our countries united in war and of Britain's Blitz, just as I look now at *All the Missiles are One Missile*, while Russia blitzes Ukraine.

My essay on Kulik, 'Discovering the Psyche' was so named precisely because of the dialectical relationship of the artist with mass and the discourse of the mass. The 'impersonal' intellectual tools she deployed at the time, from structuralism to mathematics or open and closed forms as analysed by her mentor, Oscar Hansen, were the counterpart to an individual subjectivity and the subjectivities of our encounter: two mutually unknowns engaged in a process of familiarisation which required leaps of historical imagination.²¹ New interviews corroborate the retrospective strangeness of my experience.²² Our encounter also spins around the concept of 'dazzle'.

All the Missiles are One Missile cannot be grasped with a 'look' or a 'gaze'. William de Kooning's words come to me: 'Content is a glimpse ... an encounter like a flash' (Kooning 1963).²³ The counterpoint of black and white camouflages the images, confusing the viewer—the spectator's viewing distance here is crucial. My Poznan text emphasised the military dimensions of camouflage: dazzle-painting on the sides of ships which conceals identity and number as a counterpoint to Kulik herself, the 'dazzling' artist (a doubling surely untranslatable in Polish). I repeat: 'The psychoanalytic dimension of this unresolved struggle between masculine and feminine, creation and destruction, exposure and hidden identity, accounts for the feelings of both violence and impotence that Kulik has expressed. The body as sign and ensign exists in dazzling tension in the hard/soft, light/dark patternings of the splintering photographic surface'. The entire Manichean structure of the Cold War is expressed here: the dialectic between light and dark as good versus evil, redemption versus damnation. Moral and ethical dimensions are thus imparted via this visual contrast, which exists in a knowing play with 'materialism': visual (photographic) representations which from a technical point of view depend upon light itself and its withdrawal, upon the 'positive' and the 'negative'.

When I returned to Kulik's work in 2001, hoping to extend the exploration of the visual, from language and the psyche to the performative and psychoanalytic, I was wiser. I did not reveal in my new text the shock I felt when discovering Zofia had 'tested' me upon our first encounter. She 'forgot' to mention Ewa Lajer-Burcharth's strong reading of Kulik's post-communist body, recently published. Here, the author mentioned 'the pang of an exile's nostalgia', in the account of her first Western May Day parade in Copenhagen in 1982, and how she 'burst into tears' when Italian Communists sang the *Internationale* at a

Bologna rally in 1990.²⁴ Far more than just a ‘pang’ or mere ‘nostalgia’ (a pain for home), the dazzle of tears as mourning for loss or a lost past, is a complex, physiological betrayal of repressed—or positively ‘future-orientated’—attitudes: in Lajer-Burcharth’s case and Kulik’s, the loss of the positive ideologies of a whole Soviet universe. John Webster’s phrase from *The White Devil* had come instantly to me: ‘Mine eyes dazzle’ (Gunby 1972).²⁵ By this time Jacques Derrida (1990) himself was contemplating Andrew Marvell’s words, ‘These weeping eyes, those seeing tears’—a prelude to his reformulation of the ancient *ars lachrimandi* (a counterpart to the warlike *ars bellandi*) into a mourning literature for our times (Brault and Naas 2001; Kuchar 2006).²⁶

I now understood how within Kulik’s post-Soviet ‘photocarpets’, visual imagery was played with and perverted not just as a critique, or an interrogation of historical memory, but as an act of holding, of a making visible as a form of repressed, interrogative mourning.²⁷ What must be factored into the visual encounter—the flash of images—of *All the Missiles are One Missile*? The Soviet demand for labour and self-sacrifice extends from soldiers, heroes and mothers to the everyday: Lajer-Burchart declares masochism to be at the core of Eastern European subjectivity.

In this light, how might one develop Tomasz Załuski’s analyses of the ‘political economy of the potboiler’ (*chłatura*) as regards KwieKulik (Kulik in tandem with her partner, Przemysław Kwiek), as they dealt with the local command economy of art production to support their avant-garde work? He rightly places KwieKulik, ‘command performers’ as I would prefer to call them, as precursors of Western institutional critique.²⁸ Rather than upholding Załuski’s ‘avant-garde versus potboiler’ antithesis, I would advocate an analysis through Jean-François Lyotard’s notion of libidinal economy and the affiliated exploration of ‘living currency’ (Lyotard 1993; Klossowski 2017).²⁹ Here, making and performing are libidinal investments. Communist imagery, its sculptures and its commemorative plaques were subtended by armies of cheerleaders, wreath layers, the organisers of military, gymnastic or mass processions, and on a microlevel, emotional responses to the visual brilliance of red, or the familiar, the sliced yellow curve of a sickle. In 1970’s Warsaw, KwieKulik’s work for the State was continually commemorative. The visual poetry of their critique at this point is full of emotion: see the white sculptured head fragments—brows with noses, chins with mouths—distributed over red cloth or among precious pale orange slices (*Activities with AK Kinga Plaque*, 1974)³⁰ Kulik’s work on arrangements of archive material for the ‘October Revolution and Poland’ exhibition in the Lenin Museum in 1977 shows the same care for detail, the ‘care’ in curating, that anticipate her future as curator/archivist, as does her insistence on a well-arranged photograph of this moment. And emotionally—bringing us back to her photocarpets—can one really carve commemorative inscriptions for murdered National Army Soldiers without the slightest emotion? The dazzle of *All the Missiles are One Missile*, distracting attention from Kulik’s orchestral imagination and the hours of patient craft involved, cannot but conceal a repressed mourning, not only for the loss of bodies and ideologies ‘held’ within the parodic structuring of content, but for past selves, past beliefs and past and present investments of desire itself.

Zofia recalls a greater interest in her ancestors at the time of her breakaway from Kwiek. She has now read a more extensive history. She recently wrote to me about her family: “‘We’ means: my parents, my grandparents, and some other close relatives, all came from today’s Ukraine, Lviv district, after the end of 2ww.”³¹ Her great-grandmother was the native-born Ukrainian, Tekla Bilozor. In addition she recalls living in the closed military town of Legnica ... ‘a town near Wrocław, where Soviet Army was stationed in years 1945–1993’, where her brother was born in 1946, a year before her own birth in a hospital in Wrocław ... Above all she was moved by an image of her father on military parade with the People’s Army of Poland, sending me a photograph: ‘A small arrow is there that starts from one officer, this is my father and the arrow was made by him’ (Figure 9).³² The Soviet army—who liberated Poland from the nazis, yet became a quasi-occupying force, were symbolically seen off the territory on the anniversary of Poland’s 1939 invasion in 1993, the year *All the Missiles are One Missile* was conceived.



Figure 9. People's Army of Poland, Legnica, Poland. Adam Kulik marked with an arrow.

This simple, ageing photograph of Adam Kulik in Legnica, pointed out with an arrow from a row of identical uniformed and saluting soldiers on a cold day in 1947, offers the intimate seeing experience that is the antithesis to the 'Eastern European, post-Soviet visuality' of *All the Missiles are One Missile*: the dazzling, manipulated, politically critical, archive-perverting exercise viewed by the international art world in Venice in 1997.

Its accumulative meanings and affects resonate with us today.

Post-Scriptum

This text is dedicated to Pavel Filatyev, the Russian soldier whose brave denunciation of his shared experiences was published as ZOV on his social media platform VKontakte on 1 August 2022.³³ And Zofia Kulik, of course, refutes me: 'I do not 'lament'' she writes. Via her foundation she is supporting twenty Ukrainian women and children, hosted by a local farmer, her friend: 'I see him as a real hero'.³⁴

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: Thanks to Zofia Kulik, Wiktoria Szczupacka and Klara Kemp-Welch for their help and suggestions, to Anda Rottenberg, the Polish Pavlion commissioner, and to Zofia Kulik for the illustrations. Figures 2–8 come from the *Iconographic Guide to All the Missiles are One Missile*, 1997.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ Siegfried Kracauer, 'Mass Ornament', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, no. 71, nos. 420, 423, 9–10 June 1927; 1995, pp. 75–6.

² I shall call Zofia Kulik the artist 'Kulik' (accepted usage), but Zofia in terms of our friendship stemming from our first meeting, 21–23 November 1998.

³ See <https://muzea.malopolska.pl/en/objects-list/1144> (accessed on 11 October 2022).

- 4 See Kulik's extensive website (Polish and English), at <http://kulikzofia.pl/en/> (accessed on 13 October 2022) including the film of 2016, prepared for the Kyoto University-Inamori Foundation Joint Kyoto Prize Symposium (KUIP) where she discusses *All the Missiles are One Missile* with *From Siberia to Cyberia*: <http://kulikzofia.pl/en/archiwum/cultivating-the-archive-films-by-zofia-kulik/> (accessed on 12 October 2022).
- 5 Curators Sylwia Serafinowicz and Natalia Sielewicz (my students) and Tomasz Załuski have been trained in Zofia Kulik's archive project. See the collected essays in Agata Jakubowska (2019).
- 6 Zofia Kulik, *An Iconographic Guide to All the Missiles are One Missile*, 1997; Polish Pavilion, XLVII International Biennale of the Visual Arts, Venice, 12 June–9 November 1997. The work had previously been shown in Sopot, National Gallery, 1993; Warsaw, Zacheta Gallery, 1993; Poznań, Galeria u Jezuitów, 1993 and in reduced versions in Graz, *Krieg*, Neue Galerie 1993; Tokyo, *Another Continent*, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 1994; Kwangju, '95 Kwangju Biennale, 1995; Enschede, *Obsession: From Wunderkammer to Cyberspace*, Rijksmuseum Twenthe, 1995; and in the UK: Dundee, *Fotofeis '95*; Newcastle upon Tyne, Zone Gallery; Glasgow, Street Level Gallery; Bristol Watershed Media Center, 1995. (I was unaware of these shows in 1998).
- 7 <https://labiennale.art.pl/en/wystawy/47-art-exhibition/> (accessed on 11 October 2022).
- 8 'You must come to my house': so begins my text 'Discovering the Psyche', 1999.
- 9 T. S. Eliot, *Notes to the Wasteland* ('The Fire Sermon') from *Poezje*, (tr. Michał Sprusiński), Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, (bilingual edition), 1978, p. 179.
- 10 Eliot, *The Wasteland*, (1922), conclusion from part V 'What the Thunder said'. I read *The Wasteland* and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), with its 'dazzle' line as a schoolgirl, subsequently as a student of English Literature at the University of Oxford—and likewise W.B. Yeats' *Leda and the Swan*, (1923), whose 'staggering girl' I misremember as 'dazzling girl', thinking of Zofia.
- 11 From Mieczysław Porębski (1969): 'The Genealogy of Contemporary Polish Art', *Projekt*, no 5–6, 1969, quoted more extensively in Wilson (1999) above (note 8).
- 12 As discussed in Owen Jones, 1986.
- 13 '... until I was fourteen, I lived in military quarters ... Day after day I would see soldiers and officers walking or marching to and fro; I saw military ceremonies, the changing of the guard, the raising of the flag, and there were commands and salutes. From *Camera Austria International*, no. 47–48, 1994, <http://kulikzofia.pl/en/archiwum/camera-austria/> (accessed on 11 October 2022)
- 14 See Miłosz (1953) and Sarah Wilson (2001), for performances *A Polish Duet* 1984, and *Banana and Pomegranate* 1986, relating to 'greying' http://sarah-wilson.london/publications/2001_ZofiaKulikCen.html (accessed on 14 October 2022) http://sarah-wilson.london/publications/2001_ZofiaKulikCen.html (accessed on 12 October 2022).
- 15 Kulik includes a disparaging quotation about *Eve* by Teresa Grzybowska, *Eros w sztuce polskiej*. Warsaw, 1993 in *An Iconographic guide. ...*, Warsaw, 1997 (non-paginated), raising the question of an already existing feminist art history together with a shared mindset that goes beyond the scope of this paper.
- 16 Kulik references frames from the movie *Oh les Girls* directed by Marc Briones' (*Les Girls*, 1957, directed by George Cukor?) shown on TVP, March 1993.
- 17 Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Mass Ornament' (1927) 1995
- 18 Relatives of Kulik's family were sent by the Soviets to Siberia; she explained how Polish 'enemies' were coopted for a Polish army in the USSR after 1942. *From Siberia to Cyberia*, has likewise received meticulous iconographic treatment in Zofia Kulik, *Od Syberii do Cyberii, 1998–2004*, 2004 and a filmed explanation (see note 4). Warsaw, Zacheta National Gallery and Kraków, Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej Bunkier Sztuki, 2004,
- 19 Georges-Didi Hubermann, *Soulèvements*, exhibition and catalogue, Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2016.
- 20 The Ilford Saint Paul's Cathedral image is not (as I remembered) Herbert Mason's famous *Saint Paul's survives*, taken in the night of 29–30 December 1940; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Paul%27s_Survives Second Great Fire of London (accessed on 17 September 2022).
- 21 From 1972–1974 both artists attended so-called 'logic-humanistic' seminars, and chess theory seminars at the University of Warsaw and in 1975, seminars at the Studio of Design Methodology at the Polish Academy of Science. See also Wieder and Zeyfang (2014), with an interview with Zofia Kulik, and Pawel Kwiek, experimental film and video maker, brother of Premysław (of KwieKulik).
- 22 Kulik's disarming frankness in conversation contradicts her own precepts especially in 'Being nothing but an obedient psycho-physical instrument', Ryszard Ziarkiewicz talks to Zofia Kulik, 1992 (originally published in *Magazyn Sztuki*, 1/1993, Sopot), (<http://kulikzofia.pl/en/archiwum/badz-tylko-posluszny-psychofizycznym-instrumentem/>) and 'Obedient to the method (method as a straightjacket to be placed over emotions', Elzbieta Dzikowska talks to Zofia Kulik. Lomianki-Dabrowa, 18 April 1998, <http://kulikzofia.pl/en/archiwum/posluszna-metodzie-metoda-czyli-gorset-na-emocje/> (accessed on 11 October 2022).
- 23 Willem de Kooning in conversation with critic David Sylvester, March 1960, from 'Content is a Glimpse', *Location* 1, no. 1, Spring 1963, pp. 45–52.

- 24 Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, 'Old Histories: Zofia Kulik's Ironic Recollections', *New Histories*, Boston, Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996, in *Zofia Kulik. Methodology My Love*, 2019, pp. 145, 48. (See also Kulik's *May Day Mass*, 1990, which uses her own photographs of May Day, 1971).
- 25 'Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle: she di'd young', *The Duchess of Malfi*, Act IV, Scene 2, (1614).
- 26 Jacques Derrida first encountered Marvell's 'Eyes and Tears' (c. 1681) when preparing his Louvre exhibition, 1990. For the *ars lachrymandi* see Kuchar, 2006.
- 27 I use 'holding' in the sense of D. W. Winnicott's 'holding environment' defined in 1953.
- 28 Tomasz Załuski (2018). See <https://context.reverso.net/translation/polish-english/cha%C5%82tura> (accessed on 11 September 2022).
- 29 In particular regarding KwieKulik's projects with money, see Jean-François Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* (French, 1974), 1993.
- 30 The period of the *Activities with A. K. Kinga Plaque*, 1974 (discussed by Załuski) coincided with the *Activites with Dombromierz*, her baby son: an extraordinary correspondence to be explored.
- 31 'Recently I also read the history of my family from the beginning of 19 cent. written partly by my father and partly by one of his older relative, Julian Ross, who was a history professor in Krakow. (mother of my father and my grandmother was Aniela Ross, married later to Kulik)' Email to the author, 22 June 2022 For her Ukrainian origins see also Kulik's text 'Another Continent', Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 1994 (from Graz, 1994) <http://kulikzofia.pl/en/archiwum/another-continent/> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/17/i-dont-see-justice-in-this-war-russian-soldier-exposes-rot-at-core-of-ukraine-invasion> (accessed on 21 September 2022).
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/17/i-dont-see-justice-in-this-war-russian-soldier-exposes-rot-at-core-of-ukraine-invasion> (accessed on 21 September 2022).
- 34 Mail to the author, 3 July 2022.

References

- Brault, Pascale-Anne, and Michael Naas, eds. 2001. *The Work of Mourning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1990. *Yseult Séverac Mémoires d'aveugle: l'autoportrait et autres ruines*. Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux.
- Didi-Hubermann, Georges. 2016. *Soulèvements, Uprisings*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Golinski, Hans Günter, ed. 2005. *Zofia Kulik: From Siberia to Cyberia, und andere Arbeiten*. Bochum: Museum Bochum, Kunsthalle Rostock.
- Gunby, David C., ed. 1972. *John Webster. Three Plays Harmondsworth*. London: Penguin Books, p. 260.
- Jakubowska, Agata, ed. 2019. *Zofia Kulik, Methodology My Love*. Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art with KwieKulik Foundation.
- Jones, Owen. 1986. *The Grammar of Ornament*. London: Studio Editions.
- Klossowski, Pierre. 2017. La Monnaie Vivante, Paris, Eric Losfeld, 1970. In *Living Currency*. Edited by Daniel W. Smith, N. Morar and V. W. Cisney. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kooning, Willem. 1963. David Sylvester, 'Content is a Glimpse'. *Location* 1: 45–52.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. 1995. 'The Mass Ornament' 1927. In *The Mass Ornament. Weimar Essays*. Edited by Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kuchar, Gary. 2006. Andrew Marvell's anamorphic tears. *Studies in Philology* 102: 345–81. [CrossRef]
- Kulik, Zofia. 1997. *An Iconographic Guide to All the Missiles Are One Missile*. Warsaw: Zacheta Gallery of Contemporary Art.
- Kulik, Zofia. 2004. *Od Syberii do Cyberii, 1998–2004*. Warsaw: Zachęta National Gallery and Kraków, Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej Bunkier Sztuki.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. 1993. *L'Economie Libidinale*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1974. In *Libidinal Economy*. Edited by Jaian Hamilton. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Miłosz, Czesław. 1953. *The Captive Mind*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Piotrowski, Piotr, ed. 1999. *Zofia Kulik, From Siberia to Cyberia*. Poznan: Poznan Museum of Art.
- Porębski, Mieczysław. 1969. The Genealogy of Contemporary Polish Art. *Projekt*, 5–6.
- Wieder, Axel, and Florian Zeyfang. 2014. *Open Form. Space, Interaction and the Tradition of Oskar Hansen*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Wilson, Sarah. 1999. Discovering the Psyche: Zofia Kulik. In *n. paradoxa*. Edited by Piotrowski. London: KT Press, vol. 4, pp. 53–73. Available online: <http://kulikzofia.pl/en/archiwum/sarah-wilson-odkrywanie-psyche-zofia-kulik/> (accessed on 17 October 2022).
- Wilson, Sarah. 2001. Zofia Kulik from Warsaw to Cyberia'. *Centropa* 1: 237–38.
- Załuski, Tomasz. 2018. KwieKulik and the political economy of the potboiler. *Third Text* 32: 392–411. [CrossRef]

Article

Andrey Bely as an Artist vis-à-vis Aleksandr Golovin: How the Cover of the Journal *Dreamers* Was Created

Monika Spivak

The Gorky Institute of World Literature, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow 121069, Russia;
monika_spivak@mail.ru

Abstract: Samuil Alyanski, the owner and founder of the Alkonost publishing house (1918–1923), as early as 1918 had decided to issue a journal called *Dreamers' Notes*, meant to bring together the Symbolist writers remaining in Russia after the October Revolution, primarily Aleksandr Blok, Vyacheslav Ivanov, and Andrei Bely. Despite the generally accepted view based on the memoirs of Alyanski, Andrei Bely played a leading role in the creation of the journal including the design of the cover commissioned by Alyanski from the famous Modernist artist Aleksandr Golovin. This article analyzes the sketches that Andrei Bely proposed as an idea for the journal cover as well as establishing their connection with the writer's visionary drawings from the period of life when he was close to Rudolf Steiner and with book graphics from the period of his collaboration with the publishing house Alkonost. At first cursory glance, there is little in common between the cover of *Dreamers' Notes* drawn by Golovin in the Modernist style and the sketches of Andrei Bely who was trying to make the journal a platform for Anthroposophy. However, as demonstrated in the article, all of Bely's ideas were utilized by Golovin in creating his own artistic masterpiece.

Keywords: Andrei Bely; Aleksandr Golovin; Samuil Alyanski; the publishing house Alkonost; the journal *Notes of Dreamers*; Modernism; Symbolism; Anthroposophy



Citation: Spivak, Monika. 2022.

Andrey Bely as an Artist vis-à-vis
Aleksandr Golovin: How the Cover
of the Journal *Dreamers* Was Created.
Arts 11: 99. [https://doi.org/
10.3390/arts11050099](https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050099)

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 5 August 2022

Accepted: 23 September 2022

Published: 30 September 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Andrei Bely¹ (1881–1934) was a writer who could draw well and he enjoyed it very much. His artistic heritage is considerable and very diverse². To date, this point has not been fully understood, nor has it been identified and described in its entirety. Even a brief glance at Bely's drawings, however, shows that their nature differs from that of other writers who also drew in their free time, such as Mikhail Lermontov or Maximilian Voloshin. The connection between his drawings and texts was fundamental for Bely. The majority of his drawings may be said to represent a continuation of his texts, or the preparation of his texts in a more compact and vivid way than words.

Two examples are the beautiful landscapes of Georgia and Armenia made by Bely at the same time that he was writing the travelogue book *Wind from the Caucasus* in 1927 and the feature story "Armenia" in 1928 (Ohta 2008). The autobiographical sketch *Line of Life* (1927) hanging on the wall in the exhibition of Andrei Bely's Memorial Apartment is connected with his correspondence with Ivanov-Razumnik and, of course, with his prose memoirs (Bely 2010). His historiosophical and culturological sketches were intended to explain the main ideas of the treatise *The History of the Formation of the Self-Conscious Soul* (Bely 2020; Odesskiy and Spivak 2020).

Where the texts and sketches are most closely linked, the works could be called book graphics—if Andrei Bely had been a professional artist. These are, for example, his illustrations to the novels *Petersburg* and *Moscow* (Nasedkina 2020) and for the essay *Glossolalia* (Glukhova 2005; Glukhova 2008)—the explanatory sketches for his lectures, drafts of posters, programs (Glukhova and Torshilov 2020), and book covers.

This last is considered to be the most conceptual. Namely, the sketches of book covers in concentrated form express the author's message to the reader and provide guidelines

to a complex perception to the text concealed under the cover. Such drawings despite their artistic imperfections are deeply imbued with ideology and can be regarded as programmatic works of Bely.

Let us pay attention, as an example, to the group of drawings connected with the activities of the last Symbolists' publishing house Alkonost (1918–1923)³—first and foremost to the sketches for the cover of the journal *Dreamers' Notes* drawn by Bely and, at first glance, not at all useful to Samuil Mironovich Alyanski (1891–1974), the founder of the publishing house and the publisher of the journal. As it is known, all six issues of the journal have a cover illustrated by the famous theatre artist Alexandr Yakovlevich Golovin (1863–1930) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Journal *Dreamers' Notes* (1919–1922). Cover by A.Y. Golovin.

At the center of attention in our article will be this cover by Golovin. At the beginning both the proposed ideas and those rejected for the cover of the *Dreamers' Notes* Journal will be considered by relying on Alyanski's memoirs. Then, we will move on to a detailed analysis of the journal cover drafts that were made by Andrei Bely and we will try to understand whether Golovin used them in his work. With the help of Andrei Bely's drafts we will attempt to decipher what Golovin depicted in his cover.

However, let us first concentrate on the role of Andrei Bely in the creation of the *Dreamers' Notes*.

In June 1918 in Soviet Petrograd the publishing house Alkonost appeared. The young enthusiast S.M. Alyanski intended to unite the Symbolist writers whose works he admired around Alkonost. He had actually managed to establish contact with Alexandr Blok, whom Alyanski worshiped, as well as with Andrei Bely and Vyacheslav Ivanov to whom he reached out on Blok's recommendation. All three supported the new undertaking and offered manuscripts of their books for publication. Alkonost's publishing portfolio started to be quickly replenished with the works of other writers.

Traditionally, the unification of the Symbolist writers existed not on the basis or not to a great extent on the publishing house, but rather on the basis of the almanac or the journal

published by this publishing house. Both the journal *Libra* and the almanac *Northern Flowers* were published by the publishing house *Skorpion*, and the publishing houses *Grif* and *Sirin* published journals with the same names. The publishing house Musaget published the magazine *Works and Days*. In planning to publish a journal, Alyanski consciously focused on pre-revolutionary traditions of Symbolist book publishing (Spivak 2008).

The first issue of *Dreamers' Notes* appeared in May 1919. It is noteworthy that already in August 1918 Alyanski had begun to look actively for contributions.

We know about the creation of *Dreamers' Notes* as well as about the history of Alkonost mostly from the rather brief memoirs of S.M. Alyanski:

The name of the journal of the publishing house Alkonost had been extensively discussed by the writers of Petersburg and Moscow. Many names had been suggested and ultimately they agreed to accept the name suggested by Blok—*Dreamers' Notes*. In proposing such a name for the journal Blok would say that it corresponded to the works of Alkonost's writers addressing the future (Alyanski 1969, c. 66)⁴.

We have no reasons to doubt the authenticity of information presented by Alyanski—he was better informed than others of the details of the story of his most famous venture. Nevertheless, doubts still appear. The reminiscences of Alyanski first appeared in 1969, some fifty years had transpired between the event and its description. . . It is not just the enormous time gap. It was the time of the Soviet dictatorship. Having survived these dangerous years Alyanski distinguished himself by his discretion in describing the events of Soviet literary history. In this regard we must not forget that Alyanski's book was published by the publishing house, Children's Literature (Detskaja Literatura) for which the entertainment factor and emotionality were more important than truth and depth in presenting the material. It was not that Alyanski consciously deceived the reader, but he was silent about many things, sidestepped many details, and oversimplified much. One could hardly envy Alyanski's position as a memoir-writer. In fact, among the major writers gathered around Alkonost, the majority of the names were fully or partially banned (V.I. Ivanov, A.M. Remizov, Andrei Bely), and Alyanski had already said a few kind words about them.

Among them only Blok was permitted to be the subject of study and promotion. It was, namely, Blok with whom Alyanski was close during the last years of the life of the poet, and Alyanski's reminiscences were mostly devoted to him (they are called *My Encounters with Aleksandr Blok*). That is why the memoirist speaks about Alkonost and *Dreamers' Notes* mostly in connection with Blok. He intentionally recounts the entire history of publishing with Blok at its center.

Nevertheless, as recently published papers devoted to the epistolary heritage of Alyanski, Bely, and Ivanov-Razumnik have clearly shown, the role of Blok in the creation of Alkonost in the publisher's memoirs was greatly exaggerated. It seems that the centrality of Blok in Alyanski's story about the birth of *Dreamers' Notes* is likewise exaggerated.

It was Bely who during the whole preparatory period consistently acted as a promoter of *Dreamers' Notes* and tried to persuade his friends to support Alyanski's journal. "Dear Razumnik Vasilyevich,— he addressed Ivanov-Razumnik, "Could you please write something for *Dreamers' Notes*. . ." (Bely and Ivanov-Razumnik 1998, p. 174—Letter from 12 March 1919).

Blok was among those whom he literally enticed into the journal.

Dear Sasha,

If you wrote for the *Dreamers' Notes*, it would be so important. If you, Razumnik Vas[ilyevich], Vyacheslav [Ivanov] and I were to write about the *most* important issues now and they resonated with each other, *Dreamers' Notes*, providing the 6th and the 7th issues came out, would become *the spirit of the epoch*.

The stars seem to be on their side so that something real could grow out of this gathering around *Dreamers' Notes*. . . It is not because I want to write much there

I'm looking at them as if it were my most important business, but because we can meet there.

My dear, dear, one— write back to me: take the *Dreamers' Notes* to your heart. Let them be our common "child"; I'm convinced as never before—this is very important: *it's important that they exist* (Bely and Blok 2001, pp. 519–20—Letter from 12 March 1919)⁵.

Alyanski's assertion that it was Blok who gave the journal the name *Dreamers' Notes*; "he said that it corresponds to the work of the Alkonost writers addressed to the future" appears particularly dubious. It was not Blok, but Bely (to the greatest extent at that time) who was characterized by thinking in terms of temporal layers and epochs, operating and juggling with categories of the past, the present and especially the future. It is noteworthy that Bely was consistently working on the idea of movement from the past to the future applying it to the mission of Alkonost.

He publicly announced this in connection with the nine-month anniversary of the publishing house celebrated at the beginning of March 1919. In the album created by Alyanski especially for this occasion⁶ Bely left a lengthy congratulatory message, the main idea of which consists in this "address to the future":

The line of evolution "→" consists of a series of interruptions; at the point of an interruption there is a catastrophe; within the catastrophe falls a new impulse. . . After the fall of Troy Aeneas sets out on a journey so that his descendants could found the Rome of the future era.

At the present moment we must take the best of the dying Troy and carry it to other epochs; and—we must pass over our heritage to the next generations; combining the gifts of the past era and its fruits with the garden of the future which is beginning to bloom—represents a true process of dedication. We, Aeneases emerge from Troy: the path—is long. . . On what shall we sail? *Alkonost* has a heavy burden: to complete this voyage. Samuil Mironovich, there are many storms ahead: one can lose one's way; stay the course!

I join those congratulating *Alkonost* on one condition; these are not cheers to the hero of the anniversary who has completed his journey; these are cheers "Bon voyage!" . . . And onward! Years lay ahead of us.

Andrei Bely. Moscow. 8 March 1919.⁷

Bely finished his album note with a clarifying drawing in which Alkonost is depicted as a boat sailing through rough waters. It has left the shore of the "Old Era" where only the ruins remain, depicted schematically ("The Fall of the Old"), and is heading towards the coast of the "New Era" that is symbolically presented as a lighthouse, giving off the "new light". The ship *Alkonost* is showing the way to the "New Era," "the new impulse" emanating directly from the "Kingdom of the Spirit" . . . (Figure 2).

In a letter from 15 December 1918 Alyanski addressed Bely with a request. "Can you suggest the name for a journal" (Bely and Alyanski 2002, p. 77). It is difficult to imagine that Bely, being at the origins of the almanac's idea and so ardently engaging into the work of uniting the literary community around Alkonost would be indifferent to such a proposal. Yes, it was precisely Bely (not Blok or Vyacheslav Ivanov) from whom Alyanski ordered the "Introduction" for the first issue of *Dreamers' Notes* in which the ideological program of the journal would be outlined: ". . . I would like to have your introductory article on the governing programmatic content; so that we can put our little journal on tracks, animate it and show it the way" (Bely and Alyanski 2002, p. 77).

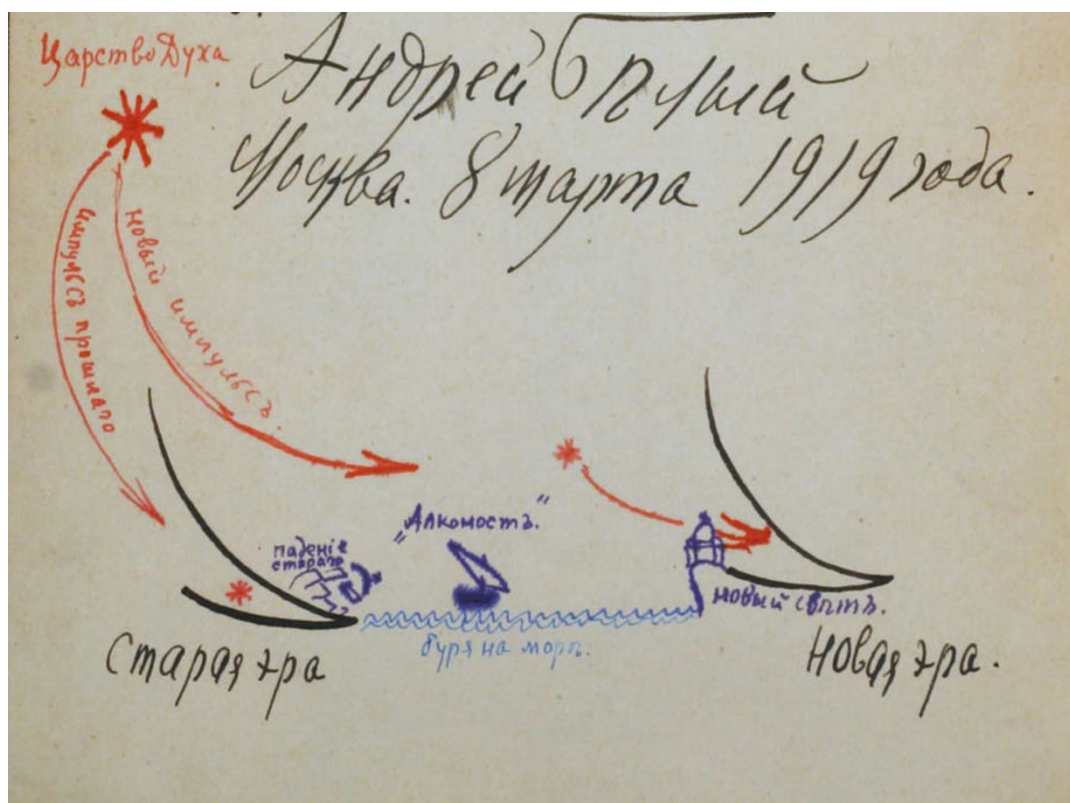


Figure 2. Andrei Bely. Drawing from Samuil Alyanski's album. 1919. The State Museum-Reserve of D.I. Mendeleev and A.A. Blok.

Thus, Bely can be called the key figure of *Dreamers' Notes*, Alyanski's main assistant in preparing the journal for publication. He was deeply involved both in the process of developing the concept of the journal, as well as in the search for concrete forms of manifesting its main idea. The journal cover was one of the most important elements of such a manifestation. Alyanski's memoirs, however, make no mention of Bely's involvement in the developmental concept of the cover. Nor do they mention the drawings by Bely preserved in the Russian State Archives of Literature and Arts (further RGALI) and the V. I. Dal State Museum of the History of Russian Literature (further GLM). Nonetheless, the process of creation of the journal cover was described by Alyanski in great detail.

Alyanski, as usual, begins with Blok.

We had to order the cover, choose the artist.

Having consulted with Blok I named the artist Golovin. I thought it would be a good idea to depict a theater curtain that could serve as a front door to the journal. And who could make a theater curtain better than Golovin? The last theatre curtains of Golovin for the plays staged by Meyerhold came to my mind: *Don Juan* and *Masquerade* in the Alexandria theatre, *Boris Godunov* in the Mariinsky theatre, and we decided to ask Vsevolod Emilievich [Meyerhold] to introduce us to Golovin.

Meyerhold was glad to find an excuse to see Golovin and suggested: "Let's go to Golovin, all three of us! Aleksandr Yakovlevich will be glad. By the way, we can see what he is working on, this old man.

We agreed to go the next Sunday. Golovin lived outside the city in Tsarskoe Selo near St. Petersburg (now the town of Pushkin). Blok could not go and the two of us went together with Meyerhold (Alyanski 1969, p. 88)⁸.

The first idea of the cover suggested a theater curtain. There was certainly some logic in this idea—although it was not very original. Golovin was primarily an artist of the theater, and his famous curtains were known and loved by everybody. The theater curtain was often used for the design of covers, for example, in the edition of the famous *Lyrical Dramas* by A.A. Blok (Blok 1908) (Figure 3) or *Cor Ardens* by V.I. Ivanov (Ivanov 1911) (Figure 4). The author of both works of art was K.A. Somov. Golovin himself had used this technique brilliantly when he designed a periodical—*Journal of Doctor Lapertutto, The Love of Three Oranges*. Golovin designed the cover for the issues of 1915 and 1916 (Figure 5). The publisher-editor of that journal was V.E. Meyerhold, and the editor of the poetry section was A.A. Blok. The draft, preparatory materials for Alyanski's memoirs found in his daughter's collection confirm that it, the *Journal of Doctor Lapertutto* was meant to serve as a model to be emulated.

... From all the covers that I have seen during the last years I particularly liked the covers of A.Y. Golovin for the journal of Doctor Lapertutto (V.E. Meyerhold) *The Love of Three Oranges*. There was a theater curtain depicted with two characters from the play by Carlo Gozzi. At that time I was under the charm of Golovin's theatre curtains for Lermontov's *Masquerade*⁹.

Taking this into account, it seems rather strange that Blok—if he had been interested in *Dreamers' Notes* at all—could have supported the idea of the theatre curtain, as not only did it not possess any originality, but it also bordered on blatant plagiarism. Blok might have agreed with Alyanski's words without thinking and not using his imagination. No wonder, he did not go to Golovin to discuss this idea.



Figure 3. A. Blok. *Lyrical Dramas*. . . Sankt-Peterburg, 1908. Cover by K.A. Somov.

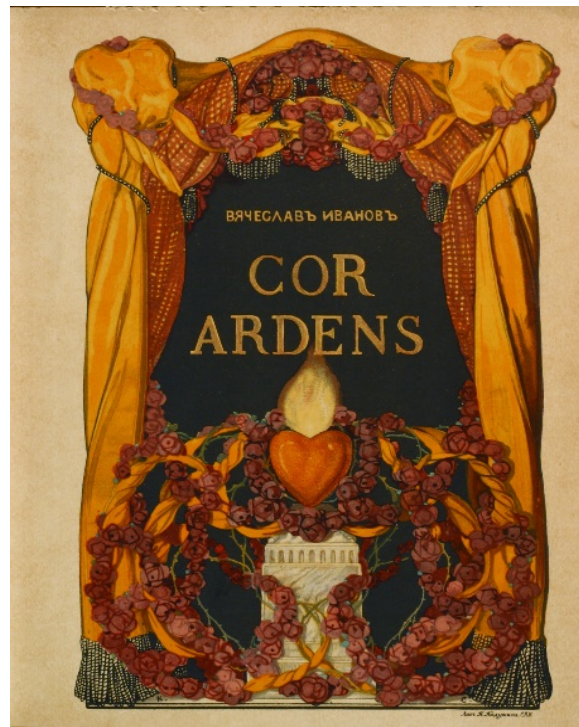


Figure 4. Vyach. Ivanov. Cor Ardens. Part 1. Moscow, 1911. Cover by K.A. Somov.



Figure 5. The Love for Three Oranges, Journal of Doctor Dapertutto. 1915. Cover by A.Y. Golovin.

Still, Meyerhold's negative reaction to the "curtain idea" seems quite justified. It is highly unlikely that he could like the idea of literal repetition (in fact stealing) of a cover from his own journal and on top of it made by his artist, A.Y. Golovin. He did, however, find some more delicate and wiser arguments for Golovin:

On the train Vsevolod Emilievich was asking about *Dreamers' Notes*, about who and what would get published and what cover we were considering. When he found out about our intention to make the cover a curtain, he exclaimed:

“Why should it be a curtain? You’re not going to publish only plays in the journal?” And he added: “No, leave the curtain to the theater, you have to think of a plot connected with the name of the journal—*Dreamers' Notes* (Alyanski 1969, p. 90)¹⁰.”

As follows from Alyanski’s memoirs, Meyerhold not only criticized the “curtain idea,” but he tried to replace it with something else as quickly as possible:

“We must think what they are like, today’s dreamers. I think, that while they’re still closely connected with the past, they’re only dreaming of the future. . . .”

This was how Meyerhold was conceptualizing the dreamers first on the train, and then—as we were walking along the paths of Tsarskoe Selo. When we approached the house where Golovin lived, he said: “I think, I’ve got an idea! Let’s discuss it with Golovin” (Alyanski 1969, p. 90)¹¹.

Meyerhold’s attempts to invent something more original and worthy than the “curtain idea” continued in the home of the artist:

We found Aleksandr Yakovlevich Golovin at his easel—he was drawing a still life *Flowers in a Vase*. Golovin was glad to see Meyerhold, they kissed each other as friends and exchanged friendly hugs at great length.

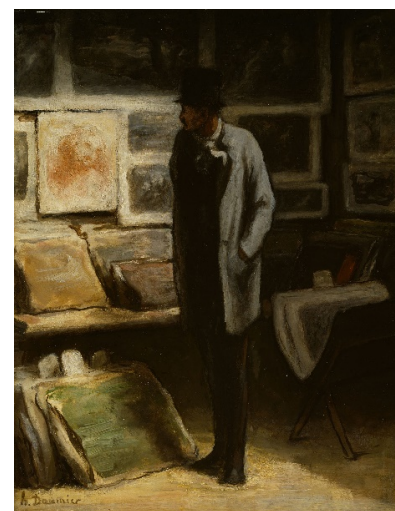
Having introduced me, Meyerhold told us about Blok’s request and Alkonost. Having criticized the idea with the curtain he started walking around the room impulsively, fantasizing aloud the idea of the cover.

“Do you remember Daumier’s lithograph *The Stamp Lover*? That Stamp Lover bears great resemblance to our today’s dreamer” (Alyanski 1969, p. 90)¹².

It is difficult to say in the end how much *The Stamp Lover* (1856–1860) of the French artist Honoré Daumier (1808–1879) influenced the final work of Golovin (Figure 6a,b)¹³. Possibly the headgear and partly the type of clothing was borrowed from Daumier. The perspective of the “dreamer” is essentially different, although by a strong stretch of the imagination, one can find some overlap. Yet, the spaces in which these characters of Daumier and Golovin are placed are strikingly different: instead of the cramped dark room of *The Stamp Lover*—there is a magnificent panorama of a city and sky lying in front of the reader’s eyes.



(a)



(b)

Figure 6. (a) A. Daumier. *The Stamp Lover*. 1856–1860 Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris. (b) A. Daumier. *The Stamp Lover*. 1856–1860 The Art Institute of Chicago.

If Alyanski is to be believed, “the contents of the picture” were designed by Meyerhold “on the spot”.

It seems to me that we must draw the following picture: the dreamer must be standing on a very high rock with his back turned to the viewer. In front of him (beneath his legs) lies a huge industrial city. Roofs, roofs, roofs. . . and somewhere industrial chimneys. Over the roofs smoke is being trapped which is merged with clouds on the horizon and there, further on, through the smoke and clouds one can faintly see the bright city of the future (Alyanski 1969, p. 91)¹⁴.

He also played the role of an impromptu “dreamer” to illustrate his idea sitting for Golovin, while he was painting from him the figure for the cover:

Having told us the main idea of the picture, Meyerhold turned to Golovin asking him to take a pencil and a sheet of paper and make a drawing of him being in the same posture as of the dreamer in the cover of the journal.

Meyerhold walked up to the door, stood with his face to it, his back to the artist, put his hands into the pockets of his jacket, first shrinking himself and then stretching out and stood without moving for a few minutes while Golovin did the sketch.

I ended up as an accidental witness to the mysterious creative process of the two outstanding artists (Alyanski 1969, p. 91)¹⁵.

Blok, as it follows again from Alyanski’s story, readily agreed with the new concept of the cover:

In the evening I was telling Blok in great detail what I heard and saw. Blok was smiling, and when I finished, he said:

“I wish I had gone with you and seen everything with my own eyes. As for the plot devised by Meyerhold, I think it’s interesting and his thoughts are more profound than our curtain. One thing is certain: the cover will show a lot of talent. Congratulations” (Alyanski 1969, p. 91)¹⁶.

The obvious merit of Alyanski’s story is its entertaining character, dynamism, and coherence. However, on a closer look, quite a number of things in this story seem highly unlikely—either because memory failed the memoirist or he sacrificed much to ideology and artistry.

What remains unclear is the origin of the strange imagery that gushes forth from Meyerhold on the train trip to Golovin’s house. Although Meyerhold sympathized with Alyanski’s undertaking, he never published anything in *Dreamers’ Notes*. It is even less comprehensible how the sketches for the journal cover made by Bely could be “attached” to this dynamic narrative. It is obvious that Bely did not make them for his enjoyment or admiration. The sketches were accompanied by an explanation, at the end of each there is a signature of the author of the idea (“A. B”). Such a presentation of the sheets with drawings unambiguously indicates that they were meant for discussion, maybe even not necessarily in the presence of Bely himself. It goes without saying that these clarifying notes were addressed to Alyanski himself. However, Alyanski, as noted earlier, does not mention Bely’s sketches at all nor Bely’s or anyone else’s involvement in the discussion of the cover.

It is noteworthy that in the journal version of Alyanski’s memoirs there is a phrase that did not make it into the book: “A question of the cover arose. It appeared irrelevant to give this publication a Constructivist or Cubist cover (which was fashionable at that time)” (Alyanski 1976).

It seems that those words of Alyanski stricken from the final version of the memoirs are a clear indication of the fact that even before his visit to Golovin not only was the hackneyed idea of the “theater curtain” discussed in the Alkonost circles, but other variants

of presenting *Dreamers' Notes*—that were more closely connected with the name of the journal, so as with the more pressing tendencies of painting than Golovin's Modernism.

To whom from Alyanski's entourage could "a Constructivist or Cubist cover" come to mind? It seems that the author of this idea could only be Meyerhold, the recognized father of "Theatrical Constructivism" who in his own productions had replaced the Modernist A.Y. Golovin with L.S. Popova—an artist who left a notable trace in the history of the Russian Cubism and Constructivism. This makes us question even more the veracity of the story vividly described by Alyanski of the "mysterious creative process of the two outstanding artists" to which he had been an "accidental witness".

As for Bely, he was known by his own words to be rather hostile to Cubism, as well as to Constructivism. It is hardly worthwhile to regard and classify his nonprofessional artistic works in the context of painting trends existing at his time. It is obvious, however, that Bely's sketches are closer to the Avant-garde art than to the Modernism in line with which Golovin used to work.

In any case, Alyanski's slip of the tongue in the journal variant of his memoirs shows that the question of the journal's cover was being discussed. It is possible that Bely's sketches were those that were suggested for discussion as a variant of the journal cover or as an alternative to the "theater curtain," which Alyanski kept quiet about either intentionally or out of forgetfulness.

In this regard, it makes sense to address Bely's sketches of the *Dreamers' Notes* cover that remained outside the publisher's memoirs. We will consider three drawings that are kept in the writer's fund in RGALI (Fund 53. Inventory 1. Storage Unit 62—Figures 7–9).

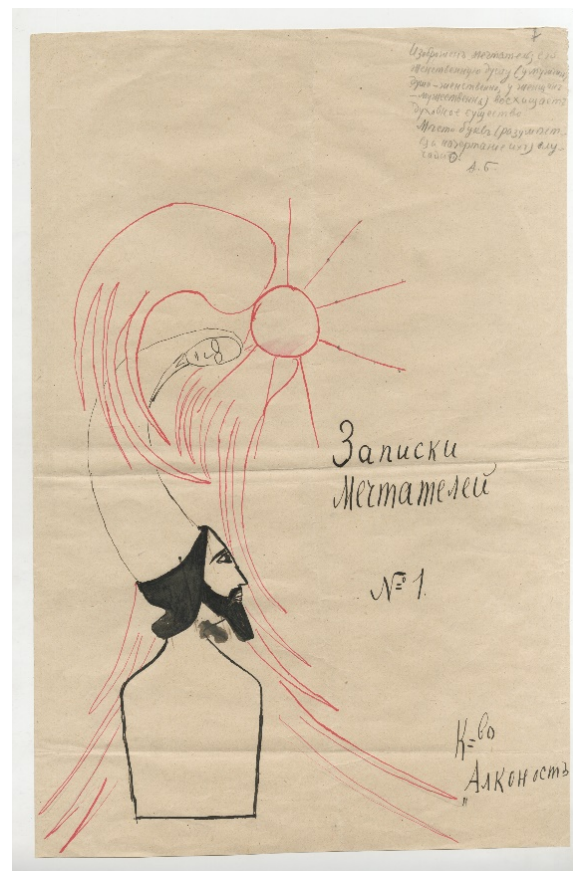


Figure 7. Andrei Bely. Sketch for the journal cover *Dreamers' Notes*. 1918–1919. RGALI.



Figure 8. Bely's sketch for the journal cover *Dreamers' Notes*. 1918–1919. RGALI.

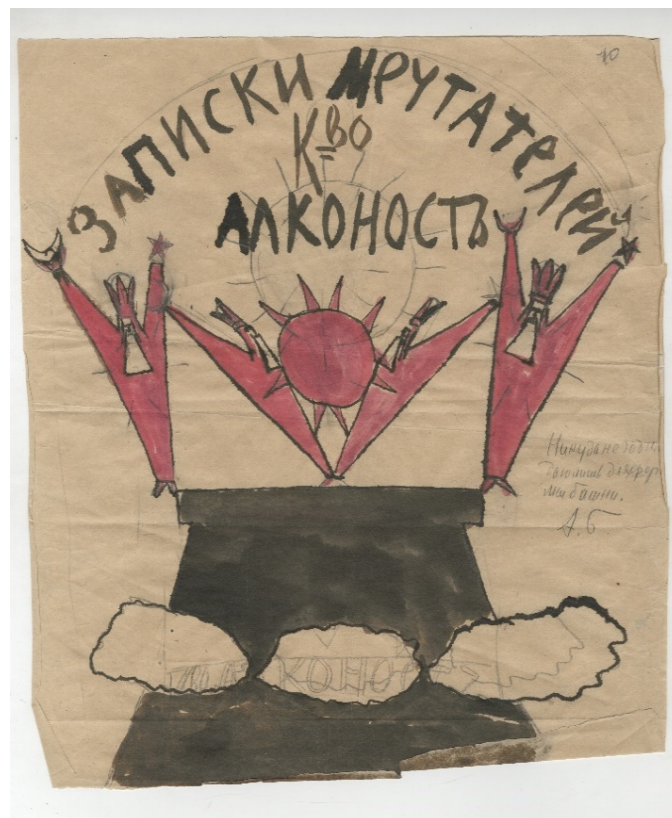


Figure 9. Bely's sketch for the journal cover *Dreamers' Notes*. 1918–1919. RGALI.

We will also consider the following additional drawing from the State Literary Museum (GLM; KP-9670/36—Figure 10), which can be attached to this series of sketches.



Figure 10. Andrei Bely. Drawing (sketch for the journal cover *Dreamers' Notes*?). 1918–1919. GLM.

Even from a cursory look at the preserved sketches their connection with Anthroposophy becomes clear. This comes as no wonder, taking into account Bely's desire to use *Dreamers' Notes* as a platform to promote R. Steiner's ideas. Bely had tried to express his Anthroposophical ideas not through text, but through drawing earlier. This practice can be traced to the period of his study in the esoteric school. Recall that in 1913, Bely was accepted into the esoteric school, members of which under the leadership of their teacher mastered the details of occult practices and were following the path towards initiation. Bely achieved huge success within the shortest time: he mastered, according to his own witness, the technique of "exiting" his physical body, attained the ability to see "landscapes of the spiritual world" and behold the "life of angelic hierarchies" (Bely 2016a, p. 143) etc. According to his own account, in this initial period of active esoteric practice he was under such an enormous impression from the new experience that he was unable to express it through words and was searching for an alternative. Here, his artistic self came to help: Bely started to draw much, implementing his experiences not in words but with the help of pencils and paints. This period seems the most productive in the biography of Bely-the-artist (Spivak 2006). "Day after day I color images drawn by me (symbols of my spiritual knowledge) . . . they're not drawings but copies of what I beheld spiritually. . ." (Bely 2016a, p. 143)¹⁷—he recalled. Characteristic examples of the "symbols of my spiritual knowledge" are the pictures left by Bely in Dornach and now kept in the archives (Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung). The images inscribed there can undoubtedly be called visionary (Figures 11–13)¹⁸.

Bely's inability to express his visionary experience obtained during his esoteric scholarship proved to be only temporary. From the middle of the 1910s Bely consistently made

more or less successful attempts to lay out his Anthroposophical revelations in reports, lectures, articles, and philosophical essays and treatises, as well as to incorporate them into his works of art both in prose and poetry.



Figure 11. Bely's drawing. 1913? Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung (Dornach).



Figure 12. Bely's drawing. 1913? Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung (Dornach).



Figure 13. Bely’s drawing. 1913? Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung (Dornach).

Some of his texts or individual parts of texts are direct textual commentaries to the drawings of “spiritual revelations” made by him earlier.

For example, his poem “Spirit” written in Arlesheim in 1914 can be viewed as an explanation of his two visionary drawings (Figures 11 and 12).

I was falling asleep... (striving thoughts
Were dashing in some spirals;
Opening in the conscious sense
The unrevealed to consciousness height)—

And I saw the spirit... It appeared like a spark
Like lightning, his elusive face
And two wings—the drilling spirals—
Tore the distance with a bloody sparkling
(Bely 2006, p. 399)¹⁹.

Two other drawings needing clarification were placed by Bely on a single sheet (Figure 13). On the left an arrow—a new-born child raised into the starry sky surrounded by three spiritual creatures; a human on the right with streams bursting through upward and downward from the top of his head. It is the image of an enlightened person who, like Bely himself, having followed Steiner’s instructions, has achieved the knowledge of higher worlds. As a partial commentary to both drawings are the stanzas from the programmatic poem of 1918 “Anthroposophy”.

... A glistening beam from the starry hilt,
Like a swift sword;
My poor mind falls upon my embarrassed brothers’ feet
Falls down from my shoulders.
I’m beheaded in the engulfing light

Of the radiant eyes.
Between us—He stands Unrecognized, being the Third:
Be not afraid of us.

We flared up, but we went out for the earth.
We're a silent verse.
We are forming a sunny manger.
The infant is in it (Bely 2006, p. 411)²⁰.

It is important to mention that this Anthroposophist writer perceived World War I and the Revolution as a global crisis and at the same time as a collective initiation mystery²¹. In these conditions Bely saw his sacred mission to be the initiator of Steiner's ideas into the public consciousness that in his opinion could point to ways out of the crisis, thus providing a chance for the salvation of Russia, humanity, and the whole world.

It is significant that Bely used the experience of Steiner's esoteric school not only for writing his "textual" works proposed to Alyanski for publication (the long short story "Notes of an Eccentric", the essay "Crisis of Life", some articles for *Dreamer's Notes*, and others), but he also used it in his drawings directly or indirectly connected with Alyanski's publishing house.

So, for example, the creature named *Alkonost* depicted in Alyanski's Anniversary album on 8 March 1919 (Figure 14) is composed in the same style as "spiritual creatures" in the pictures from Dornach (Figures 11 and 12).



Figure 14. Andrei Bely. Alkonost. Drawing from S.Y. Alyanski's album. 1919. The State Museum-Reserve D.I. Mendeleev and A.A. Blok.

They resemble the picturesque vignettes made by Bely for the manuscript of his collection of poems called "Verses. . ." kept in the Manuscript Department of the Russian State Library (F. 25. Box. 37. Storage Unit 13—Figure 15) and his drawings of theses to

the lecture “Light from the Future” (3 February 1918)²², and the characters that literally flooded the cover sketch to the poem *The First Encounter* made by Bely in 1921 (RGALI. Fond 53. Inventory 1. Storage Unit 7—Figure 16).



Figure 15. Andrei Bely. Poems. . . Handwritten book. 1918–1922. RGALI.



Figure 16. Andrei Bely. Sketch for the cover *The First Encounter*. 1921. RGALI.

Alkonosts both from Alyanski's album and from the cover of *The First Encounter* acquired some anthropomorphic (or angelomorphic) form though their origin, which seems obvious. These forms derived from those "symbols of spiritual knowledge" that Bely depicted during his anthroposophical discipleship in the esoteric school of Steiner. We can speak, as it seems, about stages of "humanization" of the symbols: from the visionary drawings of Dornach to the vignettes from the handwritten book, kept in the Russian State Library—to the Alkonosts, inspired by Alyanski.

A similar and even more close connection of the images from the Anthroposophical texts and Bely's visionary drawings can be followed in the sketches to the cover of *Dreamers' Notes*.

In the first sketch, as follows from the explanatory note at the top right hand of the picture, "a dreamer is depicted; his feminine soul (men have a feminine kind of soul, women—a masculine one) precedes the spiritual creature" (Figure 7). Bely tried to draw the process of departing from one's physical body into the spiritual world and the encounter with spiritual substances and spiritual creatures—that was exactly what he had learned in Steiner's esoteric school and what he described in his story "Yogi" (1918). Remember that the special exercises practiced by the main character of the story Ivan Ivanovich Korobkin for many years led to the following effect:

Stretching on his back and with closed eyes he was lying motionless; the imaginary screwball in his head was revolving in a spiral hit the . . . bones of the skull, the skull bursting and the contents of the head. . . in the sensation were expanding infinitely; first it felt as if a tiara had been put on his head; then the tiara would grow into his head and expand into a huge tower. . . (Bely 1995, p. 304)²³.

It seems that Bely tried to depict a spiritual "tiara" extending from the crown of the "dreamer's" head. A most detailed description of the process of the soul's "departing" from the body in the story "Yogi" culminates exactly as shown in the given sketch of the cover.

Ivan Ivanovich's soul broke away from the earthly, cloudy sphere . . . (it broke away from the top of his own head) and—there proceeded the union of the person with the spirit . . . (Bely 1995, p. 307)²⁴.

We see something of a similar kind in the above-mentioned visionary sketches of Bely, for example, in the image of an initiated person with a hole at the top of his head (Figure 13 on the right of the sheet).

The second and the third sketches of the cover can be regarded as invariants composed from the same formative elements: 1. a tower, 2. three creatures, 3. a setting sun (Figures 8 and 9). The similarities between these two sketches with the visionary drawing, placed on the left of the sheet in the same drawing (Figure 13) are indisputable. In both drawings we see the joyous "trinity" (astrologers-sorcerers-angels) standing on the tower, rising high above the earth. The difference is that in the sketches to *Dreamers' Notes* the trinity's attention is concentrated on the descending sun, but in the visionary picture it is on the infant lying like Jesus Christ in the scenes of "The Birth of Christ" or "The Adoration of the Magi". It appears that both the "infant" and the "sun" have a spiritual nature and both symbolically denote one and the same phenomenon—the so-called "Christ Impulse". Steiner's followers associated with the "Christ Impulse" the beginning of a new era, the birth of a new man and the awakening in each person of a "larger" spiritual "I" (Bely 2000).

Strange as it might seem, from the notes on the sheets with sketches it follows that Bely first tried to render expressively not so much the "dreamers," but rather the tower on which they rise above the world. The tower in the second drawing (Figure 8) colored in black ink seemed to look neither good nor high enough, that is why he drew it again in pencil in the top right corner of the sheet accompanying the duplicate with a note: "It's good-for-nothing, given just for the shape of the tower. A.B". The note in the third sketch (Figure 9) shows that Bely continued his work to perfect an object that was so important for him: "A tower on which dreamers are standing is better just because of its outline and a different shape. . .".

Naturally, a question arises about the origin of this strange “tower” that Bely wanted so stubbornly to place on the journal cover.

The answer to this question, it seems, is contained again in the description of the occult visions and experiences that Ivan Ivanovich Korobkin, the character of the story “Yogi”, feels while departing from his body.

Here by an act of will I felt like a powerful, bright point tearing everything and it felt like a shock; the body lying amid the sheets cracked as if it had been a pod and Ivan Ivanovich Korobkin got the opportunity to move over a tremendous tower (from the heart—through the throat—to the hole at the top of his head); he felt like he was running inside the tower—on the staircase: from one step to another (from an organ to an organ); and he ran out onto the terrace of a most magnificent tower (outside his physical body or body of elements). It turned out that he was surrounded by celestial space sparkling with stars. . . (Bely 1995, p. 305)²⁵.

It is remarkable that it is on the very “tower” that the hero-mystic is coming to at the last stage of his initiation.

Meanwhile: the true Ivan Ivanovich Korobkin, having risen to the terrace of the huge tower stood leaning on the railing and looking at the worlds of stars moving from one place to another in the sky; *his star was rushing towards him . . .* to carry him forever to the awaiting . . . Teacher (Bely 1995, p. 308)²⁶.

No less important is that the image of “tiara” from the first sketch and the image of the “tower” which is central for the other two sketches are very closely connected: “The tiara was growing together with the head and stretching into an enormously high tower. . .” (Bely 1995, p. 304). Both images have a visionary character and depict other stages of the same process of initiation coming one after another: first the perception of one’s head as a tiara stretching from the opening in head, and then—after exiting one’s physical body—the feeling of a self standing “on the terrace of a huge tower,” rising above the earthly world. It is significant in this plan that even having been concentrated on the image of a “tower”, Bely was far from abandoning the image of “tiara”. This becomes obvious when closely looking at the second and third sketches: on the heads of the “dreamers” standing on the tower Bely imposed tiaras.

The connection of the head (with a hole on the top) and a tower on top of which there is something mysterious happening is clearly seen in another visionary drawing of Bely preserved in the collection of the Memorial Apartment of Andrei Bely (1910-s)²⁷—Figure 17), in it we can see that the head is actually the tower.

All of these images (the head—the tiara—the tower) reflect the stages of the initiation process. These spiritual creatures—according to Bely’s definition in the story “Yogi” are the “starry birds” that fly down from the celestial spheres. The encounter of the hero on the way of initiation with them occurs as follows:

He turned out to be surrounded by celestial space sparkling with stars, but the peculiar features of these stars were that they were fluttering rapidly like birds; approaching the terrace where Korobkin was contemplating them being himself freed from his body, they became many-feathered creatures; they were pouring fountains of lights from the center, like feathers; and one creature there—a starry bird (*Ivan Ivanovich’s star*) descended upon him, embracing him with the raging fire of its wings; and—it took him away; one could feel the boiling water burning the whole body of Ivan Ivanovich; the feeling in his hands was transformed into the sensation of the star’s wings embracing him and lighting the fires; and Ivan Ivanovich Korobkin was flying through all into the sparklers, brocades or gold-cloths, shrouds made from the space of shining substances—into *Nothing* in the middle of which the very Old, Forgotten Acquaintance primordially meeting us says: “Behold, I am Coming!” (Bely 1995, p. 306)²⁸.

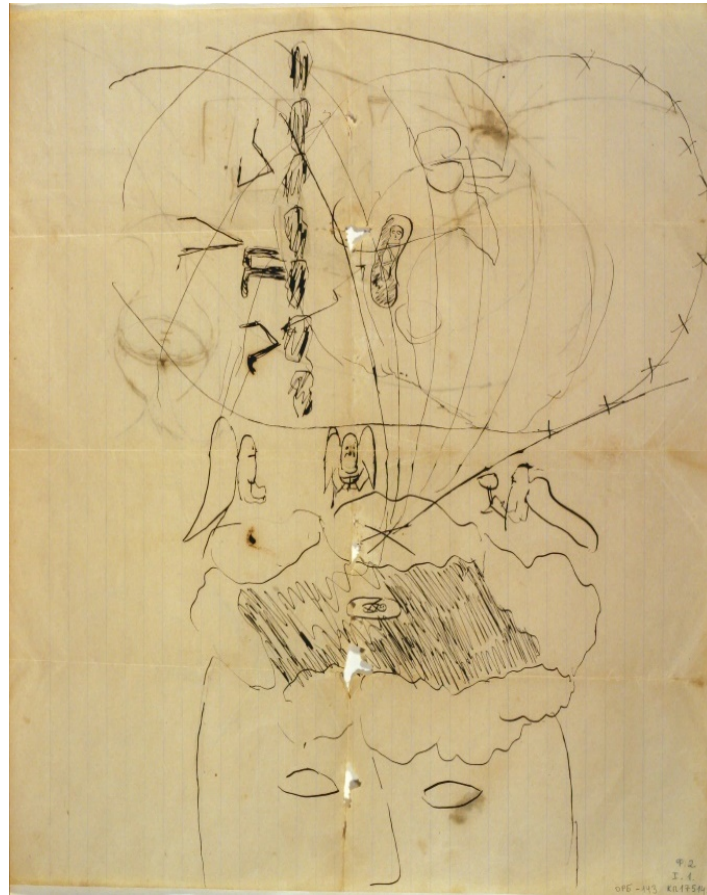


Figure 17. Andrei Bely. Drawing. 1910-s. Memorial Apartment of Andrei Bely (Branch of the State A.S. Pushkin Museum).

One of Bely's drawings of the period of his study at the esoteric school is in full conformity with this description. The drawing shows a tower rising amid the celestial sphere and the winged "trinity," standing on its terrace beholding "worlds of stars moving in space" similar to that of Ivan Ivanovich Korobkin (Figure 13, from the left side of the sheet). There is also a star in the picture of the "enlightened one" with his skull opened to "the spiritual world" (Figure 13, from the right side of the sheet).

Bely also presented the "spiritual creature" in the form of a heavenly star in the sketches of the journal cover. In all three sketches, it is not just a star but rather a radiating sun. In the first sketch, to emphasize the spiritual and mystical natures of the sun Bely also endows it with wings. In the third picture, he places a star and a crescent into the hands of each "dreamer". In order to dispel the doubts about the scene being set in the celestial space, Bely lets a string of clouds flow along the lower edge of a third sheet for illustrative purposes (Figure 9), and the tower on which "the dreamers" adorned in tiaras are meeting the sun that rises high above them.

It is possible that one more drawing can be regarded as the sketch for the cover of the *Dreamer's Notes* that entered the collection of the GLM (Figure 10). The museum's "Record of Entries" reveals to us that this drawing was given to the museum not by some random individual but by Alyanski himself—the Alkonost's publisher. This fact alone allows us to place this drawing of Bely from the GLM in the series together with the other journal cover sketches. In fact, if we take into account the source of entry, while analyzing the drawing from GLM, it turns out that the people happily walking with their hands raised are not the revolutionary people (in the GLM the picture is called the "revolutionary allegory") but the very dreamers that, as Bely explained in Alyanski's album, are harmoniously moving from the past to the future, to the Kingdom of Spirit. According to the posture of the dreamers,

they are joyfully welcoming the Sun of the “New Era” drawn in the same style as in the sketches from RGALI.

Both in the first sketch and in the picture from the GLM, the sun is not only radiant but also winged, which points to its spiritual, divine, rather than astronomical nature. Unlike the sketches from RGALI, in the GLM drawing the “dreamers” are placed not onto some high place beyond the clouds and not on the terrace of a huge tower, but, on the contrary, they are trapped in a deep gorge between two high rocks. From the earthly depth they are carried away to the radiant and winged sun, turning their faces and joyfully raising their extended arms. Nevertheless, they are still on the earth. One may think that the deep gorge (or chasm) is a metaphor for this crisis, the condition of being unenlightened by Anthroposophy in which all humanity found itself and from which, in Bely’s conviction, humanity must escape.

Bely placed one of the “dreamers” higher than the others. That is why he sees further as if showing the others the way, calling them to follow him to the sun and light (to be understood as—to the Kingdom of Spirit). How did this advanced dreamer emerge from the gorge? Where does he have to climb to get closer to the winged sun? He has not yet overcome even half of the sheer cliff, but at the end of the climb he will find himself on a high plateau depicted by Bely resembling extremely that “terrace with a tremendous tower” analyzed before.

It would seem that the drawing from the GLM consists of the same structure-forming elements as the sketches from RGALI: a dreamer or a group of dreamers; the symbol of the forthcoming Kingdom of Spirit in the form of the radiant and/or winged sun and, finally, the symbol of rising/ascension to the world of Spirit in the form of “tiara” and a “tower” or plateau on a high rock. All can be traced to the visionary drawings from the period of Bely’s discipleship at the esoteric school of Steiner and various images connected with the “way of initiation”. The fact that Bely suggested for the cover of *Dreamer’s Notes* drawings of such a kind indicates his desire to unite authors under the banner of Anthroposophy. However, it is possible that the Anthroposophical ideology, too obviously expressed, resulted in the end not just with Alyanski’s rejection of these sketches but even keeping silent about them in the memoirs.

Comparing the sketches from RGALI with the drawing from the GLM we can assume that there was a certain sequence in which they were made and it is possible to follow the logic of processing them.

It seems that chronologically the first was an openly Anthroposophical sketch with the picture of a dreamer from which extends the “soul-tiara” from the top of his head (Figure 7). Leaving to the side its artistic merits (or to be more exact its shocking defects), one can suppose that Alyanski did not quite like the images for being too esoteric.

It appears that after it comes a sketch with a low tower, the outlines of which did not suit Bely himself: in the upper corner he tried to draw in pencil a tower with the correct form (Figure 8). One might suppose that this was the very pencil sketch that the writer took as the basis of the next, third sketch (Figure 9). In both sketches with “towers,” the Anthroposophical idea, as we have tried to show, is fully present, but the images in which it is expressed are simpler and can be perceived not only in a specifically Anthroposophical way, but rather in a way that is generally cultural (for example, in the context of the “Argonautic” solar myth of Bely the Symbolist). This symbolism could have been more comprehensible and familiar to Alyanski and his authors.

In the chronologically last created sketch (the sketch from GLM—Figure 10), the Anthroposophical ideology and imagery are even more blatant. Variants of its interpretation may be rather diverse: from the “Argonautism” to “the revolutionary allegory”. This begs the idea that in the process of considering the sketches for the cover of *Dreamers’ Notes* Bely tried to make the Anthroposophical ideology less openly demonstrative, and he tried to transform his visionary imagery into general cultural and universally understandable symbols.

Was it Bely himself who came to think that it is necessary to visually reduce the Anthroposophical layer or Alyanski who encouraged him to do this? It appears that the

second variant is more plausible. Was it not Alyanski primarily to whom Bely addressed his clarifying notes in the sketches? Furthermore, how else could the last sketch be “set aside” in the publisher’s archives?

Consequently, there is the undeniable fact—the existence of Bely’s sketches for the cover of *Dreamers’ Notes*. We have revealed their genetic ties with the esoteric, visionary experience of Bely-the-Anthroposophist, reflected in his sketches and works of the 1910s. We have tried to prove that Alyanski was aware of Bely’s artistic and ideological projects.

However there is another, even more irrefutable fact—the cover was drawn by A.Y. Golovin. According to M.A. Chegodaeva’s characterization, the writer had done a “very ‘artistic world-like’, strictly graphical, decorative work”; “with ‘Modernist’-styled printed letters with serpentine leaves and a fine black and yellow frame and with a beautiful sophisticated composition through the entire cover: on a bare, cracked rock overgrown with thorns stands the Poet with his back to us, a scroll of papers in his pocket, thoughtfully looking down at the gloomy black multi-storied city cloaked in grey waves of smoke from factory chimneys and above them—visions of antique temples and dancing muses” (Chegodaeva 2002, p. 291).

So were Bely’s sketches decisively rejected or did they just happened to be unneeded? Or was the idea proposed by Bely replaced with Meyerhold—Golovin’s idea so picturesquely described in Alyanski’s memoirs? Such things happen quite often in publishing and writing practices; however, such an inviting assumption seems to us to be too hasty and—incorrect.

In order that these two undeniable facts cease to contradict each other, we must first of all try to distance ourselves from the diametrically opposed manners of style (Bely’s and Golovin’s) and compare the rough sketches with the journal’s cover without bias.

Again we introduce a quotation from Alyanski’s memoirs that explains the idea as if it was proposed by Meyerhold to Golovin:

... one must draw such a picture: a dreamer seems to be standing on a very high rock with his back to the viewer. In front of him (under his feet) is spread out a large industrial city. Roofs, roofs, roofs... and somewhere industrial chimneys. Over the roofs smoke is being trapped which is merged with clouds on the horizon and there, further on, through the smoke and clouds one can faintly see the bright city of the future.

It was precisely this idea that was embodied by Golovin (Figure 1): a “dreamer” is depicted on the cover. He is placed by the artist on the terrace of a rock from whose height he is looking at the dark, dusty present and he foresees the bright future in the heavenly distances.

However, the very idea to place the dreamer on a terrace of a high rock (in the same way as its embodiment in the Golovin’s drawing) is enormously puzzling. There is not such a tall observation deck in either St. Petersburg or Moscow. This rock dominating the city, where did it come from?

It seems to us that this mysterious rock with a “dreamer” on a high terrace, came to Golovin directly from Bely’s sketches and is in fact a variant of Bely’s “tower” recaptured in the Modernist way. Here, the key is the third sketch in which the tower rises over the carefully detailed cloud bank (Figure 9), and, of course, the drawing from the GLM in which the transition from the image of the “tower” to the image of the “rock” occurred (Figure 10).

Other constituent elements of the cover are obviously taken from the same source—from Bely’s sketches. For example, in the upper right-hand corner of the cover the rising sun is shining—the same sun that figures in all of Bely’s sketches. Only the sun in Bely’s sketches acts as a compositional center, whereas in Golovin’s drawing it is moved to the periphery.

In addition, if we look closely at the upper right-hand corner of the cover (Figure 18), we can find some kind of architectural construction: is it a sanctuary, an antique temple? Or

is it the very “Temple” at the threshold of which, according to Bely-the-Anthroposophist, humanity is standing and entrance into which Bely was actively encouraging?



Figure 18. Journal *Dreamers' Notes* (1919–1922). Cover by Aleksandr Golovin. Fragment.

Three fantastic creatures are bathing against the background of the temple and practically dissolving into three fantastical creatures. One can certainly try to discover their mythological names, but it seems more productive to turn for an answer to Bely. It cannot be excluded that in the upper right-hand corner Golovin depicted in his own way those three “dreamers” that are present in the second and the third sketches of Bely (Figures 8 and 9). Obviously, the architectural structure and “the spiritual creatures” in the rays of the rising sun on Bely’s journal cover made by Golovin symbolize “the bright city of the future,” or—as Andrei Bely would have put it—“The Solar City”. It is remarkable that it was Bely who proclaimed “The Solar City” to be the central image of the dreamer’s “fantasy” and his final goal. He devoted to this topic his essay “Utopia,” written specially for *Dreamers' Notes* in 1919:

The “fantasy” will come true. . . the dreamer will shout: The City of the Sun of Campanella has descended, and here we are—in the Solar City!

By the word of the dreamer we will step into the Solar City.

Its Kingdom will last forever! (Bely 1921, p. 144)²⁹.

At first glance, only one figurative element of the cover is missing from the sketches by Bely: the dark shrouds of smoke covering the city below the rock, and the light, sunny shrouds in the heavenly perspective in which the dreamer foresees the future. In Alyanski’s memoirs this element is highlighted as a formative one: “Over the roofs assembles the smoke that transforms into clouds on the horizon. And there, further, through the smoke and the clouds lurks the bright city of the future”.

Actually, in Bely’s sketches the “smoke that is transformed into clouds on the horizon” is not gathering, but that dark, dirty smoke is wreathing at the foot of the high tower in

the drawing from the period of Bely's esoteric practice. It is that very drawing, as we were trying to show earlier, which was in its turn the visionary prototype of Bely's "tower" sketches (Figure 13). As on Golovin's cover, in that very drawing the dark smoke of the "lower part" is juxtaposed to the bright air of the "upper part". The dark shrouds on the cover wreathing over the roofs of the houses are transforming into the light sunny shrouds, though in the visionary drawing as an antithesis to the dark smoke there is provided at the foot of the tower a heavenly sphere covered with azure clouds and with soaring stars.

If we take into account this visionary drawing, one of the sketches can be looked at in a different way. In it there are also curling clouds at the foot of the tower, though not yet colored. From the context one can suppose that they were meant to be dark and weighty.

Moreover, Bely presented an extensive explanation of these "cloudy" images, as well as their mutual metamorphoses in his short story "Yogi":

But as Russia was melting while boiling. . . while in Moscow yellowish-brown clouds of dust were flying and stinging your eyes and papers started twirling. . . he addressed his colleagues with a phrase that sounded strange:

"Yes, yes, yes—the air is pure and radiant".

However, he was obviously speaking not about the air inside the museum which was definitely full of dust; he spoke neither about the air on the street, nor did he speak about the air on the field. As for the *air* about which Ivan Ivanovich Korobkin was shouting at the absolutely wrong time, this air was in the country of thoughts and feelings, where he travelled every day; that country of thinking and feeling was actually the air and light, and he clearly saw that this country became obscure and faded before the Revolution; clouds of oppressive smoke broke out into the light playing here; only from the time of the Revolution had he noticed the clearness of the atmosphere (the wreathing clouds of smoke came down, they covered the surface of our life like a residue causing the collapse of it: this dust dampened down by the rain is deposited on the surface of things leaving its spots on them; and the cleansed air shines radiantly).

His words referred to this state of the atmosphere: "The air is pure and radiant" (Bely 1995, p. 303)³⁰.

One can conclude that indeed Bely's ideas and sketches were used by Golovin for creating the famous cover of the journal *Dreamers' Notes*, which is known worldwide. It was only that the Anthroposophical ideas were alien to Golovin, and the stylistically unacceptable sketches were re-structured, translated into the language of Modernism and Symbolism.

We have not found any evidence of private communication between Andrei Bely and Golovin which, however, does not preclude the stated assumptions. Bely's sketches or his ideas could have reached the artist through Alyanski who had come to Moscow in the first decade of March in 1919. In his "Perspective to the Diary" from March 1919, Bely wrote: "The appearance of Alyanski, a number of organiz[ational] talks about the journal *Dreamers' Notes*" (Bely 2016b, p. 450). One of the topics of such "organizational talks" could well have been the concept of the cover.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ I greatly appreciate the invaluable assistance of Oksana Chebotareva and Tom Beyer.

² See: (Kajdalova 1988; Pisatel Risuyushchij 2004, pp. 84–89; Andrei Bely. Aleksandr Blok. Moskva 2005; Risunki Poetov 2013, pp. 22–27; Kochevniki Krasoty 2016, pp. 193–234; Bely 2018, 2020).

- 3 I would like to express my gratitude to the Russian State A.S. Pushkin Museum, the State Museum of the History of Russian Literature named after V. I. Dal, the State Museum-Reserve D.I. Mendeleev and A.A. Blok, the Russian State Library, the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art for their help in this work and for producing the materials for the publication.
- 4 “Название альманаха издательства Алконост долго обсуждалось писателями Петербурга и Москвы. Было предложено много названий, и в конце концов все согласились принять название, предложенное Блоком,—*Записки мечтателей*. Предлагая такое имя альманаху, Александр Александрович говорил, что оно отвечает творчеству писателей «Алконоста», обращенному к будущему”.
- 5 “Дорогой Саша, Если бы Ты писал в *Записках Мечтателей*—как это было бы важно. Если бы Ты, Разумник Вас<ильевич>, я и Вячеслав <Иванов> писали бы о самом главном сейчас и перекликались бы, то—*Записки Мечтателей*, если бы вышло лишь 6–7 №№, были бы эпохой. Звезды благоприятствуют им, звезды благоприятствуют (во внутреннем смысле) тому, что из этого объединения вокруг *Записок Мечтателей* может создаться настоящее дело. . . Я смотрю на них, как на самое близкое дело свое не потому, что я хочу там много писать, а потому, что там мы можем встречаться. . . Милый, милый,—пиши: положи на сердце себе *Записки Мечтателей*. Пусть они будут нашим общим ‘детищем’; знаю, как никогда, это—нужно: нужно, чтобы они были”.
- 6 The album is kept in the State Museum-Reserve D.I. Mendeleev and A.A. Blok.
- 7 “Линия эволюции ‘→’ слагается из ряда прерывов; в точке прерыва—катастрофа; внутри катастрофы—падение нового импульса. . . После гибели Трои Эней отправляется в странствие, чтобы потомки его основали Рим будущей эры. В настоящее время должны понести мы все лучшее погибающей Трои в иные эпохи; и—передать дар наш грядущим: соединенье даров прошлой эры, плодов ее, с зацветающим садом грядущего есть подлинно действие посвящения. Мы, Эней, выходим из Трои: путь—долг. . . На чем же нам плыть? На *Алконосте* лежит строгий долг: совершить это плаванье. Самуил Миронович, много бурь впереди: можно сбиться с дороги; оставайтесь же у компаса! Присоединяюсь к приветствующим *Алконост* с одним лишь условием; эти приветствия—не приветствия юбиляру, совершившему плаванье; эти приветствия—в «добрый путь!». . . И—вперед! Впереди лежат годы. Андрей Белый. Москва. 8 марта 1919 года”.
- 8 “Предстояло заказать обложку, выбрать художника. Советуясь с Блоком, я назвал художника Головина. Мне казалось, что на обложке хорошо было бы изобразить театральный занавес, который мог бы служить парадным входом в альманах. А кто лучше Головина сделает занавес? Вспомнились последние театральные занавесы Головина к спектаклям, поставленным Мейерхольдом: *Дон-Жуан* и *Маскарад* в Александрийском театре, Борис Годунов в Мариинском театре, и мы решили просить Всеволода Эмильевича познакомить нас с Головиным. Мейерхольд обрадовался поводу повидаться с Головиным и предложил:—Поедем к нему все втроем! Александр Яковлевич будет рад. Кстати, посмотрим, над чем сейчас старик работает. Мы условились поехать в ближайшее воскресенье. Головин жил за городом, в Царском Селе под Петербургом (теперь город Пушкин). Блок поехать не смог, и мы отправились вдвоем с Мейерхольдом”.
- 9 “. . . из всех виденных мною за последние годы обложек, мне очень нравились обложки А.Я. Головина к журналу д-ра Дапертутто (Вс. Эм. Мейерхольд) *Любовь к трем апельсинам*. Там был изображен театральный занавес с двумя персонажами из пьесы Карло Гоцци. В это время я находился под обаянием театральных занавесей Головина к *Маскараду Лермонтова*”. Private collection of N.S. Alyanskaja.
- 10 “В поезде Всеволод Эмильевич расспрашивал о *Записках мечтателей*, о том, кто и что там будет печатать и о какой обложке мы думали. А когда узнал о нашем намерении просить Головина сделать для обложки занавес, воскликнул:—Почему занавес? Ведь не только пьесы собираетесь вы печатать в альманахе?—И добавил:—Нет уж, занавес оставьте театру, а вам надо придумать сюжет, связанный с названием альманаха—*Записки мечтателей*”.
- 11 “—Надо подумать, какие они, сегодняшние мечтатели. Думаю, что пока они еще крепко связаны с прошлым, они только мечтают о будущем. . . Так вслух размышлял Мейерхольд о мечтателях сначала в поезде, а потом—когда шли по аллеям Царского Села. Когда же подходили к дому, где жил Головин, он сказал:—Кажется, придумал! Обсудим вместе с Головиным”.
- 12 “Александра Яковлевича Головина мы застали за мольбертом—он писал натюрморт Цветы в вазе. Головин обрадовался Мейерхольду, они расцеловались и долго обменивались дружескими объятиями. Представив меня, Мейерхольд рассказал о просьбе Блока и *Алконоста*. Раскритиковав нашу затею с занавесом, он начал порывисто ходить по комнате, фантазируя вслух сюжет обложки:—Помните ли вы литографию Домье *Любитель эстампов*? Так вот, этот ‘Любитель эстампов’ очень похож, по-моему, на сегодняшнего мечтателя”.
- 13 Daumier has an entire collection of works with this name. The most famous one that became widely reprint is *The Stamp Lover* from Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris (Figure 6a). The Stamp Lover that resembles (by his posture) the dreamer from Golovin’s journal cover even more is the one that is kept now at the Art Institute of Chicago (Figure 6b), but it is not clear whether it was known to Meyerhold and his interlocutors. Daumier has an entire collection of works with this name. The most famous one that became widely reprint is *The Stamp Lover* from Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris (Figure 6a). His posture resembles more that of the dreamer from Golovin’s journal cover.
- 14 “Мне кажется, нужно нарисовать такую картину: мечтатель стоит, должно быть, на очень высокой скале, спиной к зрителю. Перед ним (под его ногами) расстилается большой промышленный город. Крыши, крыши, крыши. . . и кое-где—фабричные трубы. Над крышами стелется дым, который на горизонте переходит в облака, а там, дальше, сквозь дым и облака, неясно мерещится светлый город будущего”.

15 “Рассказав содержание картины, Мейерхольд обращается к Головину, просит взять бумагу и карандаш и зарисовать его, а он будет позировать в том положении, в каком видит мечтателя на обложке. Мейерхольд подошел к двери, встал к ней лицом, спиной к художнику, засунул руки в карманы пиджака, как-то сжался, собрался в струнку и так неподвижно стоял несколько минут, пока Головин делал набросок. Я оказался невольным свидетелем таинственного творческого процесса двух замечательных художников”.

16 “Вечером я рассказывал Блоку со всеми подробностями все, что видел и слышал. Александр Александрович улыбался, а когда я кончил, сказал:—Очень жаль, что не поехал с вами и не видел всего своими глазами. Что касается сюжета, придуманного Мейерхольдом, я думаю, что он интересен и по мысли глубже нашего занавеса. Одно несомненно: обложка будет очень талантлива. Поздравляю”.

17 “Цельми днями я раскрашиваю образы, мной зарисованные (символы моих духовных узнаний). . . не рисунки, а копии с духовно узренного. . .” Undoubtedly one of the reasons that made Bely start drawing was that his German was too bad to speak to Steiner about the mystical and meditative experience. The writer is openly telling us about this in his “Reminiscences about Steiner”. See (Bely 2000, p. 363).

18 See (Andrei Bely: Symbolismus, Anthroposophie, Ein Weg 1997). See About Bely’s drawings of that time: Spivak (2006).

19 “Я засыпал. . . (Стремительные мыслиКакими-то спиральми неслись;Приоткрывалась в сознающем смыслеСознанию неявленная высь)—И видел духа. . . Искрой он возник. . . Как молния, неуловимый ликИ два крыла—сверлящие спирали—Кровавым блеском разрывали дали”.

20 “. . . Блестит луч из звездной рукояти,Как резвый меч;Мой бедным ум к ногам смущенных братьевСлетает с плеч.Я—обезглавлен в набежавшем светеЛучистых глаз.Меж нами—Он, Неузнанный и Третий:Не бойтесь нас.Мы—вспыхнули, но для земли—погасли.Мы—тихий стих.Мы—образуем солнечные ясли.Младенец—в них”.

21 The whole collection of Bely’s essays “On the Border”: “The Crisis of Life” (1918), “Crisis of Thought” (1918), “Crisis of Culture” (1920) and his treatise *The History of the Formation of the Self-Conscious Soul* (1926–1931), the last chapters of the second volume in particular. See (Bely 1923, 2020).

22 See Figure 3 on the insert: (Glukhova and Torshilov 2020).

23 “Вытянувшись на спине и закрывши голову, он лежал без движения; мысленный винт в голове, развивая спираль, острием упирался в . . . кости черепа, отчего череп лопался и содержимое головы . . . в ощущении вытягивалось в неизмеримость; сначала казалось ему, что его голова есть голова, на которую надета тиара; потом, что тиара сросталась с головой и вытягивалась в невероятно огромную башню . . .”

24 “. . . из земной, отуманенной сферы, вдруг вырвалась душа . . . Ивана Иваныча (вырвалась из темени собственной головы) и—произошло соединение человека и духа. . .”

25 “Тут усилием воли сжимался в себе и ощущался теперь силовой, яркой точкою, все рвущей; испытывал сотрясение; тело, лежавшее среди простынь, точно щелкало, как стрючок, и Иван Иваныч Коробкин получал возможность передвигаться по огромнейшей башне (от сердца—через горло—к отверстию темени); он себя ощущал перебегающим внутри башни—по лестнице: от ступеньки к ступеньке (от органа к органу); и выбегал на террасу великолепнейшей башни (вне тела физического и вне тела стихий). Тут оказывался он окруженный небесным пространством, блистающим звездами . . .”.

26 “Между тем: подлинный Иван Иваныч Коробкин, поднявшийся на террасу огромнейшей башни, стоял, опершись на перила, и созерцал миры звезд, переменяющих места свои в небе; к нему мчалась звезда его, чтоб. . . отнести навсегда к ожидающему. . . Учителю”.

27 Affiliate of the State Museum of A.S. Pushkin.

28 “Тут оказывался он окруженный небесным пространством, блистающим звездами, но особенность этих звезд состояла в том, что они быстро реяли, точно птицы; при приближеньи к террасе, где их созерцал, освобожденный от тела, Коробкин, они становились многоперистыми существами; и они изливали из центра, как перья, фонтаны огней; и одно существо—звездо-птица (звезда Ивана Ивановича) опускалась к нему, обнимала клокотавшим пожаром лучей (или крылий); и—уносила; чувствовался кипяток, обжигавший всю сущность Ивана Иваныча; ощущения рук переходили в ощущения крыльев звезды, обнимавшей его и зажигавшей пожары; и Иван Иваныч Коробкин сквозь все пролетал в искрометы, парчи, пелены из тончайших светящих субстанций—искрометами, пеленами, парчами пространства светящих субстанций—в Ничто, посередине которого возникал Тот же Старый, Забытый Знакомец, исконно встречающий нас—говорит:—Се гряди!”.

29 “Осуществится ‘фантазия’ . . . вскрикнет мечтатель: Вот Солнечный град Кампанеллы спустился, вот мы—в граде Солнца! По слову мечтателя вступим мы в Солнечный Град. Его царствию да не будет конца!”.

30 “Но по мере того как, кипя, расплавлялась Россия . . . по мере того как в Москве залетали столбы буро-желтой, глаза выедающей пыли и закрутились бумажки . . . обращался к его окружающим сослуживцам он с фразою, странно звучащей:—Да, да, да—воздух чист и лучист.Но говорил, разумеется, он не о воздухе музейного помещения, явно пронизанном пылью, и не о воздухе уличном; ни даже он разумел воздух поля; что касается воздуха, о котором нектати так возглашал Иван Иваныч Коробкин, то этот воздух был страны ежедневных его путешествий в страну мысле-чувств; та страна—мысле-чувствия—была воздушно-светом; и . . . он отчетливо видел, как до революции эта страна замутнела, поблекла; как облака душных дымов врываются в здесь играющий свет; лишь со времени революции замечал он

отчетливость атмосферы (все клубы удушливых дымов спустились; осаждались на внешности нашей жизни, производя в ней развал: так прибитая дождиком пыль осаждается на поверхность предметов, оставляя на ней свои пятна; а воздух, очищенный, лучезарнее светится). К этому состоянию атмосферы и относились слова: «Воздух чист и лучист!».

References

- Alyanski, Samuil Mironovich. 1969. *Vstrechi s Aleksandrom Blokom*. Moscow: Detskaya Literatura.
- Alyanski, Samuil Mironovich. 1976. *Vospominaniya o hudozhnikah knigi. Bajkal 2*: 141–45.
- Andrei Bely. Aleksandr Blok. Moskva. 2005. *Andrei Bely. Aleksandr Blok. Moskva*. Moscow: Moskovskie uchebniki i Kartolitografiya.
- Andrei Bely: Symbolismus, Anthroposophie, Ein Weg. 1997. *Andrei Bely: Symbolismus, Anthroposophie, Ein Weg: Texte–Bilder–Daten*. Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag.
- Bely, Andrei. 1921. *Utopiya. Zapiski Mechtatelej 2/3*: 139–52.
- Bely, Andrei. 1923. *Na Perevale*. Berlin, Peterburg and Moscow: Publishing House Z.I. Grzhebin.
- Bely, Andrei. 1995. *Iog*. In *Bely, Andrei. Sobraniye sochinenij: Serebryanyj Golub'*. *Rasskazy*. Moscow: Respublika, pp. 296–308.
- Bely, Andrei. 2000. *Sobraniye Sochinenij: Rudolf Steiner i Gete v Mirovozzrenii Sovremennosti. Vospominaniya o Steinere*. Moscow: Respublika.
- Bely, Andrei. 2006. *Stihotovoreniya i Poemy*. 2 vol. Akademicheskij proekt. Sanct-Peterburg and Moscow: Progress-Pleyada, vol. 1.
- Bely, Andrei. 2010. *Liniya Zhizni*. Moscow: GMP.
- Bely, Andrei. 2016a. *Material k biografii*. In *Andrei Bely. Avtobiograficheskiye Svody: Material k Biografii. Rakurs k Dnevniku. Registracionnyye Zapisi. Dnevnik 1930-h*. (Literaturnoe nasledstvo. vol. 105). Moscow: IMLI RAN, pp. 29–328.
- Bely, Andrei. 2016b. *Rakurs k dnevniku*. In *Andrei Bely. Avtobiograficheskiye Svody: Material k biografii. Rakurs k dnevniku. Registracionnyye zapisi. Dnevnik 1930-h*. (Literaturnoe nasledstvo. vol. 105). Moscow: IMLI RAN, pp. 329–654.
- Bely, Andrei. 2018. *Zhezl Aarona. Raboty po teorii slova 1916–1927 gg.* (Literaturnoye nasledstvo. T. 111). Moscow: IMLI RAN.
- Bely, Andrei. 2020. *Istoriya Stanovleniya Samosoznayushchej Dushi*. Book 1, 2. (Literaturnoe nasledstvo. vol. 112). Moscow: IMLI RAN.
- Bely, Andrei, and Alyanski. 2002. *Perepiska s Samuilom Mironovichem Alyanskim*. In *Litsa: Biograficheskij Almanach*. №. 9. Sanct-Peterburg: Feniks, pp. 67–115.
- Bely, Andrei, and Aleksandr Blok. 2001. *Perepiska. 1903–1919*. Moscow: Progress-Pleyada.
- Bely, Andrei, and Ivanov-Razumnik. 1998. *Perepiska*. Sanct-Peterburg: Atheneum and Feniks.
- Blok, A. 1908. *Liricheskiye Dramy: Balaganchik–Korol na ploshchadi–Neznakomka*. Sanct-Peterburg: Shipovnik.
- Chegodavaeva, Maria. 2002. «Tam za gorami gorya. . . ». *Poety, hudozhniki, izdateli, kritiki v 1916–1923 godah*. Sanct-Peterburg: Dmitriy Bulanin.
- Glukhova, Elena. 2005. *Neopublikovannyye risunki Andrey Belogo k «Glossolalii»: Chasha Svyatogo Graalya*. In *Trudy Russkoj Antropologicheskoy Shkoly*. Moscow: RGGU, No. 3. pp. 386–408.
- Glukhova, Elena. 2008. *Aleksandr Blok v stihovedcheskikh shtudiyakh Andrey Belogo: Po materialam neopublikovannykh risunkov k «Glossolalii»*. In *Shahmatovskij Vestnik*. Moscow: RGGU, No. 8. pp. 119–25.
- Glukhova, Elena, and Dmitry Torshilov. 2020. *Illyustrirovannyye programmy k lekcii Andrey Belogo «Svet iz griadushchego»*. In *Literatura i Iskusstvo. Vek XX*. Moscow: Litfakt, pp. 334–53.
- Ivanov, Vyach. 1911. *Cor Ardens. Part 1*. Moscow: Skorpion.
- Kajdalova, Natalia. 1988. *Risunki Andrey Belogo*. In *Andrei Bely: Problemy Tvorchestva*. Moscow: Sovetskij pisatel, pp. 597–605.
- Kochevnik Krasoty. 2016. *Kochevnik krasoty: Solovyova. Bryusov. Voloshin. Blok. Bely*. Albom. Moscow: Boslen.
- Nasedkina, Elena. 2020. *Andrei Bely i khudozhnik Nikolaj Kuz'min v rabote nad knigoy «Maski»*. In *Literatura i Iskusstvo. Vek XX*. Moscow: Litfakt, pp. 366–431.
- Odesskiy, Mikhail, and Monika Spivak. 2020. «Krivaya istorii–tema moej knigi»: «Istoriya stanovleniya samosoznayushchej dushi» i graficheskoe nasledie Andrey Belogo. In *Andrei Belyj. Istoriya Stanovleniya Samosoznayushchej Dushi*. Book 2 (Literaturnoe nasledstvo. vol. 112). Moscow: IMLI RAN, pp. 689–717.
- Ohta, Jotaro. 2008. «U gor–govor: S-l-o-v-o!»: O gornyyh pejzazhakh Andrey Belogo v sobranii Rossijskoj Nacionalnoj biblioteki. In *Andrei Bely v Izmenyayushchemsya Mire*. Moscow: Nauka, pp. 527–35.
- Pisatel Risuyushchij. 2004. *Pisatel risuyushchij = Poeta pingens: Zhivopis i grafika pisatelej v sobranii Gosudarstvennogo literaturnogo muzeya*. Albom-katalog. Moscow: Tri kvadrata.
- Risunki Poetov. 2013. *Risunki Poetov. Iz sobraniya Gosudarstvennogo literaturnogo muzeya i lichnykh arhivov*. Albom-katalog. Moscow: GCSI.
- Spivak, Monika. 2006. «Simvoly moih duhovnykh uznaniy. . . »: Meditativnyye risunki Andrey Belogo. *Russkoe Iskusstvo 1*: 28–33.
- Spivak, Monika. 2008. *Izdatelstvo «Alkonost»: K voprosu o traditsiyakh simvolistskogo knigoizdaniya*. In *Vestnik RGGU. Seriya «Zhurnalistika. Literaturnaya kritika»*. No. 11 (08). Moscow: RGGU, pp. 132–37.

Article

Sergei Sigei and Aleksei Kruchenykh: Visual Poetry in the Russian Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde

Willem G. Weststeijn

Slavic Department, The University of Amsterdam, 1012 VB Amsterdam, The Netherlands; w.g.weststeijn@uva.nl

Abstract: One of the characteristic features of the Russian Avant-garde is the close connection between painting and poetry. Futurist poets (Vladimir Maiakovskii, Aleksei Kruchenykh) were educated as artists, their books were illustrated by the famous painters of their time (Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova). Some of the Futurists designed their own books and did all kinds of typographical experiments. One of the most productive writers, designers, editors and publishers of such books was Aleksei Kruchenykh (1886–1968), who only recently has been given honour where it is due. One of his admirers is the Neo-avant-garde poet-artist Sergei Sigei (1947–2014), who was the first to publish some of Kruchenykh's hitherto unpublished works and in many respects repeated, changed, and further developed his forerunner's experiments with typographical signs and book production. Some of Sigei's unique handmade books are dedicated to Kruchenykh. Sigei, the leader of the group of the 'transfurists' (Ry Nikonova, Boris Konstriktor, A. Nik, Vladimir Erl') may be considered the main representative of the Russian Neo-avant-garde.

Keywords: Russian Avant-garde; Russian Neo-avant-garde; Aleksei Kruchenykh; Sergei Sigei; trans-furism



Citation: Weststeijn, Willem G. 2022. Sergei Sigei and Aleksei Kruchenykh: Visual Poetry in the Russian Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde. *Arts* 11: 98. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050098>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 15 August 2022

Accepted: 23 September 2022

Published: 29 September 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

The Russian Neo-avant-garde, which evolved in the unofficial world of art and literature in the Soviet Union during the 1970s and 1980s, can be considered the heritage or, perhaps, rather the continuation of the historical Avant-garde of the beginning of the twentieth century. Many of the devices that are characteristic of the Russian historical Avant-garde, particularly Russian Futurism, the most innovative one of the various Avant-garde movements, we also find in the art and literature of the Russian Neo-avant-garde. This 'second wave' of Russian Avant-garde was less impressive than its first wave, partly due to political circumstances (severe censorship, which hampered any advancement of art away from socialist realism)¹, partly to the general development of twentieth-century art and literature. For many critics, including Peter Bürger (1974) with his influential *Theorie der Avantgarde*, the Neo-avant-garde, which came into being after the Second World War, on the brink of Modernism and Post-Modernism, is, in general, a repetition, a recycling of what had been achieved already in the historical Avant-garde. Other critics were more positive. The American art critic Clement Greenberg, the great defender of Abstract Expressionism, writes about the continued value of the Avant-garde and considers Avant-garde art and aspects of the Neo-avant-garde as high culture that has to be defended against any intrusion of politics and commerce.² In my opinion, the Russian Neo-avant-garde must be primarily seen in the light of Greenberg's ideas. As a continuation of the exceptional rich historical Avant-garde, Russian Neo-avant-garde serves and is meant as a continuation and survival of high art, a bulwark against the officially, politically inspired, and obligatory forms of art in the repressive Soviet society.

One of the main representatives of the Russian Neo-avant-garde is the poet and artist Sergei Sigei (1947–2014). Together with his wife, Anna Tarshis, better known under her artist's name Ry (or Rea) Nikonova, he devoted his life to experimental art and poetry and created a unique collection of visual poetry, sound poetry, artist books, and paintings.

Moreover, he was an excellent connoisseur of the Russian historical Avant-garde, wrote a number of articles on some of their representatives and edited and illustrated their books.

Sigej (he also published under the name Serge Segay; his real name is Sergei Vsevolodich Sigov)³ was born in Murmansk as the son of the principal of a pedagogical institute. At an early age, he started to write anarchistic, Avant-gardistic poetry,⁴ which had nothing to do with post-war official Soviet poetry. In 1966, he met in Sverdlovsk (present-day Ekaterinburg) the Avant-garde poet and artist Anna Tarshis (1942–2014), who had already assembled a group of likeminded artists in her so-called 'Uktus School'. Sigei was immediately attracted by this group of unconventional artists and poets, fell in love with its leader and soon married her. His marriage with Tarshis resulted in a lifelong, and as it turned out remarkably fruitful collaboration. Both Sigei and Tarshis were gifted, exceptionally creative artists, who stimulated each other, but kept true to their own, personal styles.

The first project in which Sigei worked together with his wife was the hand-made journal *Nomer*, which Tarshis had already started in 1965. It was, of course, a *samizdat* publication and appeared in only one copy per issue. The journal existed from 1965 to 1974 (36 numbers in total) and published much material of the unofficial artistic world of Sverdlovsk. Unfortunately, most of this material has been lost, as the journal and its entire archive was confiscated by the KGB and probably destroyed. A second joint project Sigei and Tarshis started in 1979, after they had moved to the town of Eisk on the Sea of Azov. It was again a hand-produced journal, *Transponans* (five copies per issue),⁵ in which they published their own works, hitherto unpublished material of representatives of the historical Avant-garde (Kruchenykh, Bakhterev, and others) and poetry and pictures of contemporary Avant-garde artists, for whom the official press was closed. They headed this last group (which apart from Sigei and Nikonova consisted of Boris Konstriktor, V. Nik, and Vladimir Erl') and called them transfurists.⁶

In 1998, Sigej and Nikonova decided to emigrate to Germany, where they found a place to live in the city of Kiel. There they continued their work, became active in mail art and published a number of books with small western printing houses. They died both in 2014, Ry Nikonova in March, Sigei some months later.⁷

Sigei was an admirer of the Russian Futurists, in particular Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh. He illustrated many works of Khlebnikov (Figure 1), whom he considered the greatest Russian poet, but felt the most affinity with Kruchenykh, whose experiments with language, orthography, and book production he eagerly studied and applied and developed in his own work. He published some books by Kruchenykh and wrote articles about him. Although Kruchenykh died in 1968, Sigej never met him personally.⁸ Such a meeting might have been possible, but at the time of Kruchenykh's death, Sigei was occupied in Sverdlovsk. Only much later, in the 1980s, he often went to Moscow, where he regularly visited Nikolai Khardzhiev, another admirer of Kruchenykh. In one of his letters to Sigei, Khardzhiev compares Kruchenykh with the great writer Andrej Platonov and belittles the latter in favour of the former: 'Все сочиненное Платоновым не стоит одного "Дыр бул щыл"' а. Да-с!' ('Everything that has been written by Platonov is not worth one 'Dyr bul shchyl'. So it is!') (Khardzhiev 2006, p. 163).

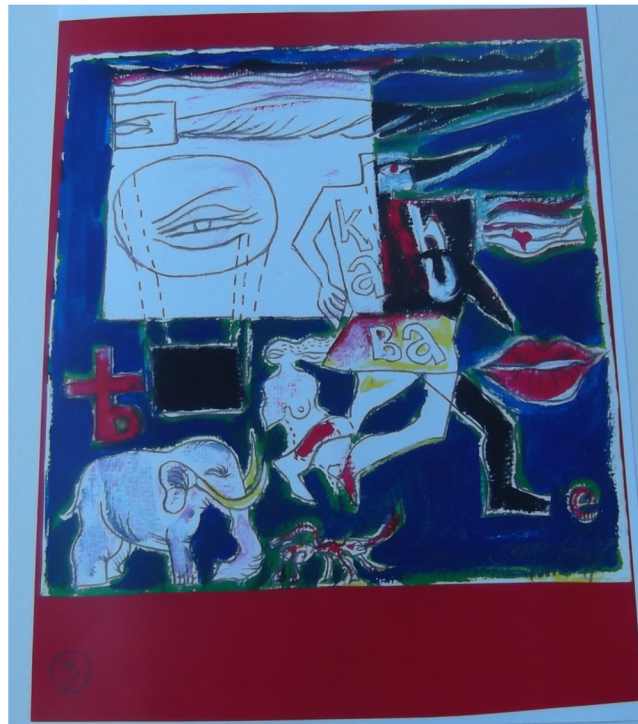


Figure 1. Illustration to Khlebnikov's 'Ka' (2012). All figures in this manuscript have copyright permissions.

What attracted Sigei in Kruchenykh's work was in the first place the combination of the verbal and the pictorial.⁹ Words in language consist of sound and meaning, but in much of his poetry, Kruchenykh emphasizes a third element, the image. This applies in particular to his *zaum'* poems, in which the words do not have a fixed, but a free, personal and, accordingly, wider meaning. As he writes in his pamphlet *Декларация слова как такового* (*Declaration of the Word as Such*, 1913):

(4) Мысль и речь не успевают за переживанием вдохновенного, поэтому художник волен выражаться не только общим языком (понятия), но и личным (творец индивидуален), и языком, не имеющим определенного значения (Не застывшим), заумным. Общий язык связывает, свободный позволяет выразиться полнее (Пример: го оснег кайд и т.д.).¹⁰

(4) Thought and speech cannot keep up with the emotions of someone in a state of inspiration, therefore the artist is free to express himself not only in the common language (concepts), but also in a personal one (the creator is an individual), as well as in a language which does not have any definite meaning (not frozen), a transrational language. Common language binds, free language allows for fuller expression (example: go osneg kaid, etc.).¹¹

In the same year as his *Declaration . . .*, Kruchenykh (1913) published his book *Pomada*, which contains his most famous poem 'Dyr bul shchyl', which is generally considered as the first instance of pure *zaum'* poetry (Figure 2).

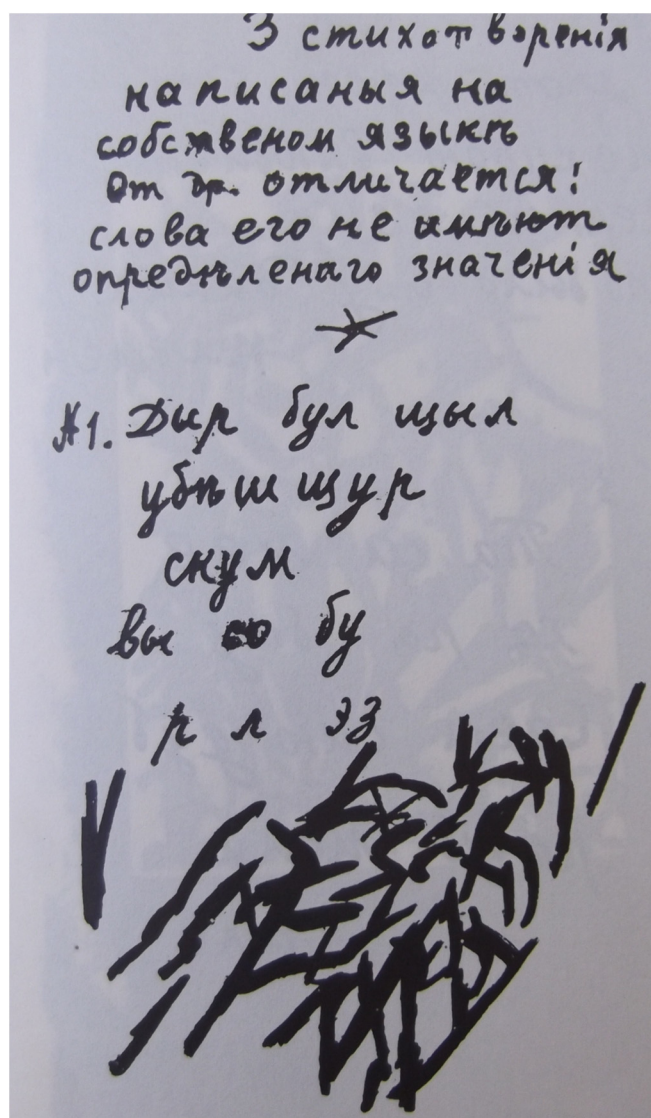


Figure 2. Kruchenykh's 'Dyr bul shchyl'.

The poem has met much critical attention, immediately after its appearance, but also much later, many critics trying to find some meaning in the at first sight incomprehensible words. In his study *Zaum. The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism* (1996), Gerald Janecek discusses the reactions, including those by Nilsson, according to whom the reader is inclined to decode the poem 'by means of the code which seems closest to hand, i.e., the poet's own language' (Nilsson 1979, p. 141) and Perloff, who emphasizes the triplicity of the poem: the introductory statement, the poem itself, and the drawing by Larionov below the poem. The three units look alike: the note "written in / my own language" is set in five short lines as is "Dyr bul shchyl," and the nonreferentiality of the poem is matched by the nonrepresentational grid of Larionov's drawing. The shapes of Kruchenykh's letters, especially the *лs* (*ls*) and *ps* (*rs*), correspond to the forms in the drawing (Perloff 1986, p. 123). Janecek adds that in Larionov's grid of diagonal lines and curves, we may perhaps make out a nude woman or a bird taking flight. This throws light on possible erotic meanings hidden in the words of the second part (*dyr*—hole, vagina; *bul*—breasts) (Janecek 1996, p. 62). He thinks, moreover, that the indefiniteness of the poem is intended, particularly as a contrast with Symbolist poetry, and compares the poem to an abstract painting, 'in which composition is the most obvious organizing feature rather than subject. [. . .] The pieces fit together not on the discursive-representational level, but on the abstract-compositional level, and are comprehensible only on that level' (Janecek 1996, p. 63). Janecek also

discusses the two other poems of the cycle of three ('Dyr bul shchyl' being the first one), which, oddly enough, nobody has done before him ('Admittedly, after the shock of the first, the other two seem less dramatic' Janecek 1996, p. 63).

Perloff rightly observes that the poem 'Dyr bul shchyl' consists of three visual units that cannot be separated from each other (although almost all critics only discussed only the second part of the triptych). One of the crucial aspects of 'pure' *zaum'* (and to my mind 'dyr bul shchyl' is intended as pure *zaum'*) is that the *signifié* of the words is toned down to a minimum. The loss of meaning is only partly compensated by a stronger emphasis on the *signifiant* and, accordingly, *visuality* is invoked to make the sign complete again. Sound and image replace sound and meaning. *Zaum'* poetry cannot be read adequately outside of its visual context. As Kristina Toland (2009, p. 311) writes about Kruchenykh's poems:

The visual appeal of Kruchenykh's poems as they appear in his books (each time a singularity) is lost when the same poem is printed in a regular type face outside the context of the book. The poem's meaning is likewise compromised, derived of all associated richness that is embedded in the materiality of the book. Poems offer themselves to the world by directly appealing to the senses, as living bodies that co-exist with the world. They come to exist in the act of our engagement with the book, and unlike a traditionally understood poetry, they cannot sufficiently exist in our memory as phonetic entities.

It is, indeed, a quite different experience: reading 'Dyr bul shchyl' as it was originally published in *Pomada*, or as it appears in editions that confine themselves to the reproduction of the text (e.g., Kruchenykh 2001c, pp. 55–56).

Like Kruchenykh being a poet and an artist (in the first place, perhaps, an artist), Sigei was particularly interested in the ways Kruchenykh fused the verbal and the visual. In many of his works, he did the same, and often he went much further than Kruchenykh by letting the visual dominate over the verbal. Sigei may be considered Kruchenykh's inheritor, who, on the one hand, borrowed a few things from his predecessor, on the other hand, did new and daring experiments, which artistically were certainly not inferior to those of Kruchenykh. However, the famous Futurist gets much more critical attention,¹² and Sigei's position as the Neo-avant-garde successor to Kruchenykh seems to be underrated. He did not even find a place in Sergei Sukhoparov's book with contributions on Kruchenykh by contemporaries,¹³ which is all the more remarkable as Sukhoparov lived in Kherson in the beginning of the 1990s¹⁴ and must have been aware of the existence of his 'neighbour' in Eisk.

One of the similarities between Kruchenykh and Sigei is their careful handwriting (in Kruchenykh's case particularly as regards the handwritten books he published) and their attention for the letters and the composition of the letters and the words on the page. Well-known are Kruchenykh's early handwritten, lithographed books, such as *Igra v adu* ('A Game in Hell', 1912; text by Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov), '*Starinnaia liubov'*' ('Old-time Love', 1912), *Pustynniki* ('Hermits', 1913), *Pomada* ('Pomade', 1913), and others.¹⁵ Many of his later books were printed, but also in these books, such as, for instance, *Lakirovannoe triko* ('Lacquered Tights', 1919), typographical design is very important. In the pamphlets *Deklaratsiia slova kak takovogo* ('Declaration of the Word as Such' 1913) and *Bukva kak takovaia* ('The Letter as such', [1913], 1930), written together with Khlebnikov (for the greater part by Kruchenykh himself),¹⁶ Kruchenykh emphasizes the independence of the word and the independence of the letters of a word. In the latter pamphlet, the letter is considered in its graphic essence, so that handwriting acquires an important role. I quote some passages from this pamphlet.

О слове, как таковом, уже не спорят, согласны даже. Но чего стоит их согласие? Надо только напомнить, что говорящие задним умом о слове ничего не говорят о букве! Слепорождение!

[...] А ведь спросите любого из речарей, и он скажет, что слово, написанное одним почерком или набранное одной свинцовой, совсем не похоже на то же слово в другом начертании.

Ведь не оденете же вы всех ваших красавиц в одинаковые казенные армяки!

[...] Понятно, необязательно, чтобы речарь был бы и писцом книги саморучной, пожалуй, лучше если бы сей поручил это художнику. Но таких еще не было. Впервые даны они будетлянами, именно 'Старинная любовь' переписывалась для печати М. Ларионовым. [...] Вот когда можно наконец сказать: 'Каждая буква—поцелуйте свои пальчики' (Terekhina and Zimenkov 1999, p. 49).

They no longer argue about the word as such, they even agree. But what is their agreement worth? You need only recall that while talking about the word, after the fact, they do not say anything about the letter! The born-blind!

[...] But ask any wordwright and he will tell you that a word written in individual longhand or composed with a particular typeface bears no resemblance at all to the same word in a different inscription.

After all, you would not dress all your young beauties in the same government overcoats!

[...] Of course it is not mandatory that the wordwright be also the copyist of a handwritten book: indeed, it would be better if the wordwright entrusted this job to an artist. But there haven't been any such books until recently. They were issued by the Futurists for the first time. Namely: *Old-Time Love* was rewritten in longhand for printing by M. Larionov. [...] Here, one can at last say: 'Every letter is ... A-1! (Lawton 1988, pp. 63–64).

Like Kruchenykh, Sigei wrote by hand many of his publications and books, not to publish them lithographically in a limited edition, which was not possible in the 1970s and 1980s in the Soviet Union, when the entire printing press, including photocopiers were in hand of the state, but as a unique document in one or sometimes several copies. He almost always illustrated his books himself, as he was not surrounded by such really great artists of the historical Avant-garde as Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich, and others, but was, in fact, together with his wife, the best artist of the groups he worked with or of which he formed a part. A good example of his early work is the book *Shedevrez*, written in 1973. The cover of the book is shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. 'Shedevrez'.

It is a drawing by Ry Nikonova and has the name of the author: 'Sig', and the title: 'Shedevrez'. The first page 'explains' the title: 'Shedevrez, shedevral' es de sig' and mentions the publisher: 'perepisatel'stvo FUTUROZA' and the illustrator: 'risunki sigavtora'. The copy in my possession is: 'ekzempljuk nomer I'. The book contains 44 'stixatvari' and 11 illustrations. All the texts are perfectly readable, that is to say, the handwriting is very clear and resembles that of Kruchenykh (Figure 4).¹⁷

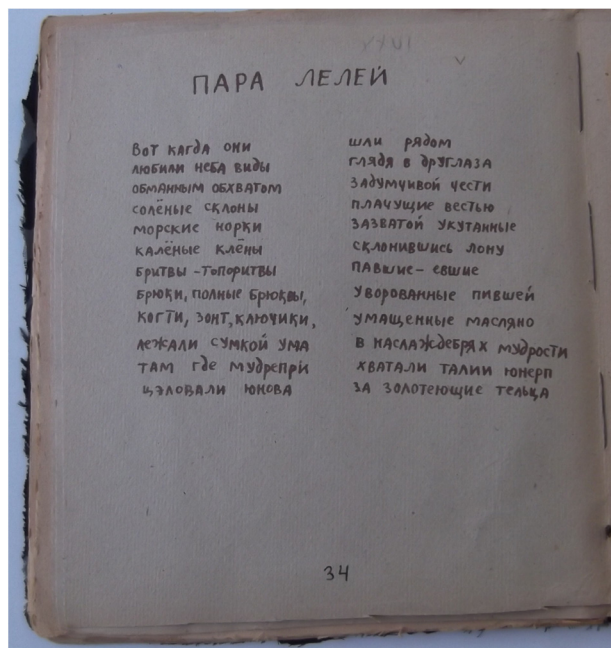


Figure 4. 'Shedevrez', p. 34.

The text itself is a mixture of words that are existing in 'normal' Russian language, words that have been changed, but are still easily understandable: 'khoshiro' instead of 'khorosho' (good), words analogous of existing ones: 'krasivyi—sin'sivyi' (beautiful—bluetiful), new combinations: 'jazykomobil' (languagecar) and pure *zaum'*. Some of the *zaum'* poems might have been written by Kruchenykh, for instance, 'Nostal'gamma' ('Nostalgamma'):

ро-ро-ро,
динь-динь-динь,
-А.

In other poems, there is a gradual change from 'normal' language into *zaum'*:

Медитация созерцаца
цветок
веток ТОК
цвет глазок, веко
цвекот цвеко
цве цеко

(Meditation of a spectatorer flower/stream of branches/flower little eye eyelid/flowlit fleyelid/flo flid.)

From many poems in *Shedevrez*, it is clear that Sigei is influenced by Kruchenykh, but at the same time goes further in mixing existing words with new words, with words that resemble existing words, or with entirely new, *zaum'* words. One might say that Kruchenykh showed the way, but that Sigei did more, and more daring experiments. That concerns not only the words, but also the letters. Kruchenykh combined small and large letters, normal and boldface, both in his hand-written and in his printed books; Sigei did not only do what Kruchenykh did, but developed new letters, sometimes on the basis

of existing ones, as in 'Potseliui' ('Kists') (Figure 5), sometimes as a kind of hieroglyphs (Figure 6).

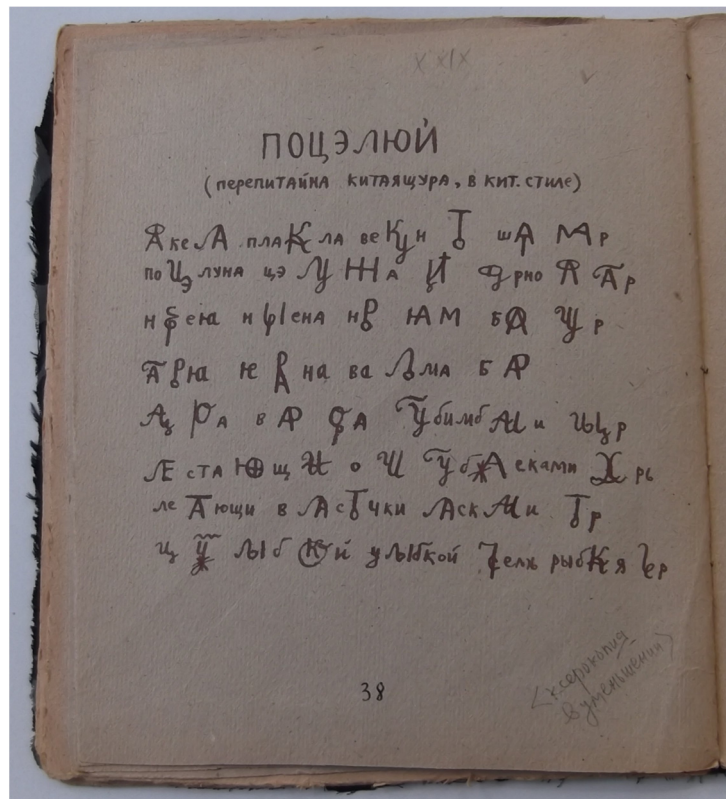


Figure 5. 'Shedevrez', p. 31.

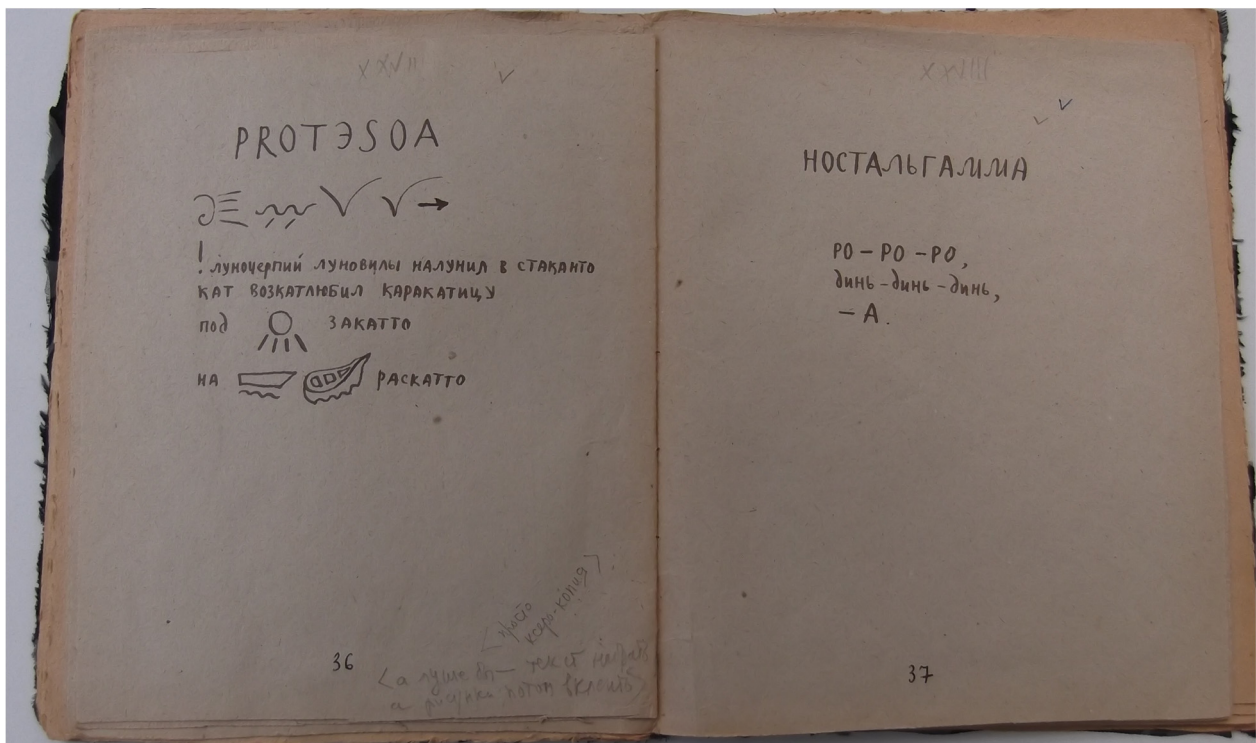


Figure 6. 'Shedevrez', pp. 36-37.

Remarkable in this respect is his book *Sobukvy* (*Co-letters*), for the greater part written in the 1970s, but printed only in 1996, in a small edition of 200 numbered copies.¹⁸ In his afterword to the book¹⁹, Sigei (1996) writes that he fuses, intertwines letters for economic reasons, but also, and ultimately, for a new and better understanding of the poetical text:

и принцип э к о н о м и и был первым побуждением к созданию сплетов букв.
но главным основанием для сплетотворчества было изумление.

никто из футуристов так и не создал стихотворений где буквы переплетались бы одна с другой и вступали бы в некие взаимоотношения воскресая воспоминания о старославянской вязи и все создавая новое поле и возможность для читателя угадывать гроздь пониманий (the book is unpagged).

(The economic principle was the first inducement to create intertwined letters, but the main basis for intertwining creation was amazement.

No one of the futurists created poems in which the letters would be fused with each other and would form certain interrelations that resurrect recollections of the old-Slavic ligatured script and yet create a new field and a possibility for the reader to guess rightly the clusters of understanding.)

Sobukvy is remarkable for its daring experiments with letters and signs. There are lines with normal letters and (partly) understandable words, lines with fused letters, and lines with newly invented signs. Together they form a poem in which the visual element often dominates over the verbal and meaning becomes secondary (Figures 7 and 8).

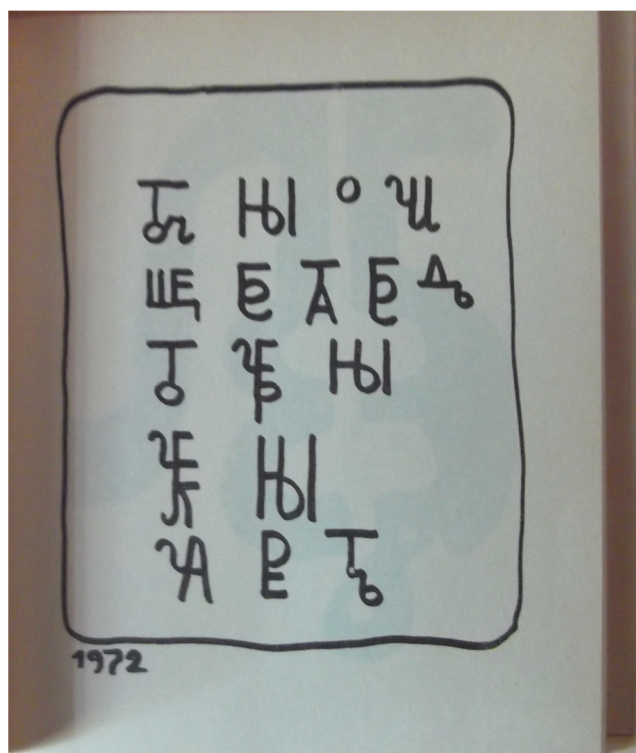


Figure 7. Page from 'Sobukvy'.

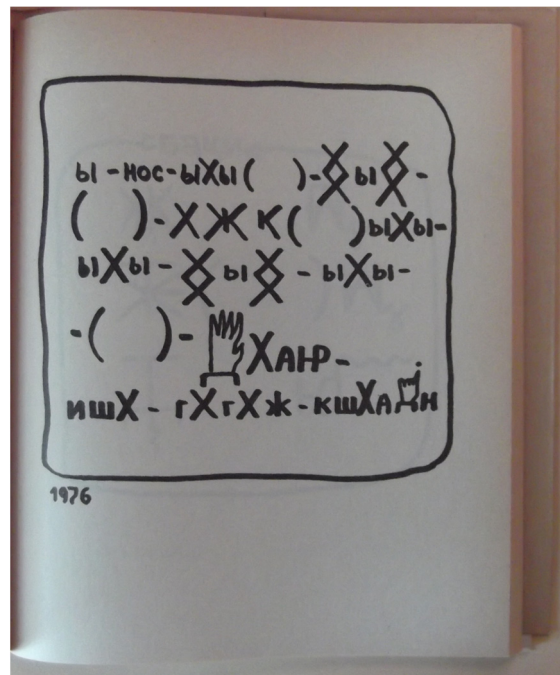


Figure 8. Page from 'Sobukvy'.

In some of these poems, images have taken the place of letters; they still may be called poems as they form lines as in 'usual' poetry (Figure 9).²⁰

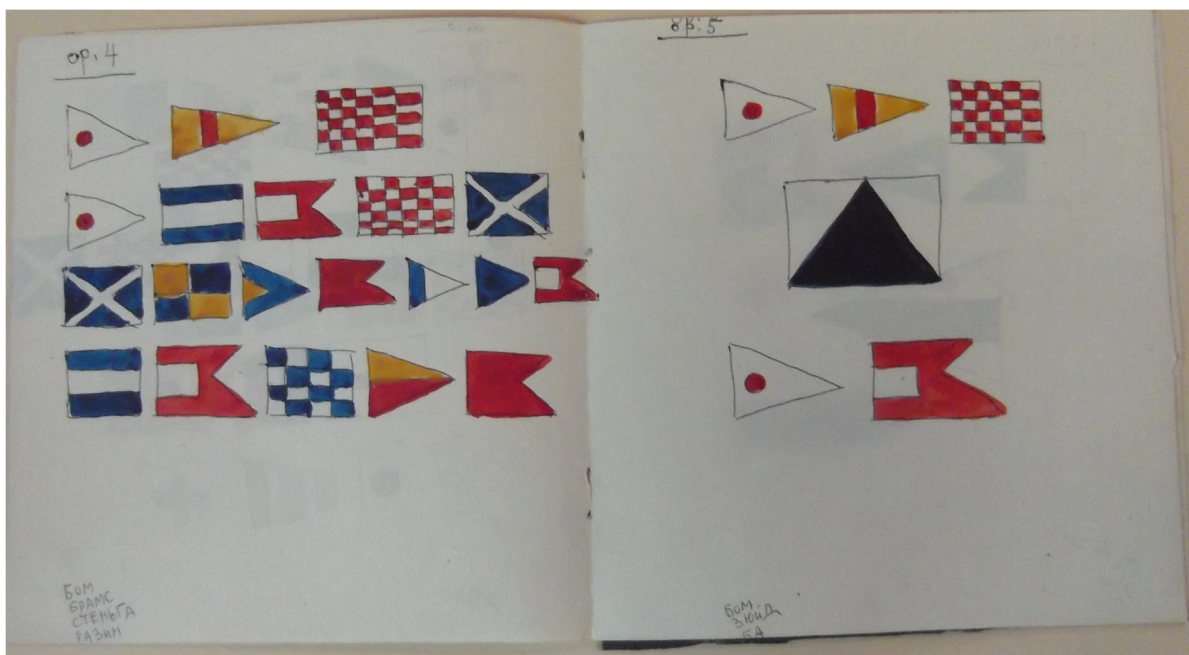


Figure 9. Pages from 'Stikhi dlia matrosov'.

Sigei followed Kruchenykh and developed his experiments with word and letters in a time (the beginning of the 1970s) when Kruchenykh was generally considered, in comparison with his fellow-futurists, as a nonentity. As Vladimir Markov writes in his edition of Kruchenykh's (1973) *Selected Works*:

The majority of those for whom the name Kruchenykh was a household word, at the same time were (and still are) convinced that he was a pathetic mediocrity, who, it is true,

has to be mentioned soon after Majakovskij and Chlebnikov for historical reasons, but whose work was really outside ‘true literature’. [. . .]

For his contemporaries, Kručenykh was nothing than a whipping boy. Hardly any Russian poet was so easily dismissed or abused with such vituperation. [. . .] He could not find universal recognition even within his own group, where only Elena Guro seems to have genuine respect for him (Kruchenykh 1973, p. 8).

Markov was the first influential critic who recognized Kruchenykh’s talent and his specific role in the Russian Avant-garde.²¹ He notes that Kruchenykh ‘was active (and important) in at least five fields of literature, and criticism owns him a great debt, having failed, so far, to describe and evaluate his achievements (or possible blunders) in all five of them.’ He then mentions Kruchenykh’s polemical writings, which are original, vivid, and insolent, Kruchenykh as a theoretician (particularly as the creator of *zaum*’), Kruchenykh the publisher (236 booklets), Kruchenykh the prose writer, and Kruchenykh the poet. For him, Kruchenykh is a fascinating figure of Russian futurism, who hopefully will be studied in depth in the future (Kruchenykh 1973, pp. 9–12).

Since Markov’s edition of Kruchenykh’s *Selected Works* much has changed in regard to the appreciation Kruchenykh has received. Susan Compton’s *The World Backwards. Russian futurist books 1912–1916* (1978) has stimulated interest in the book production by the Russian Futurists, in which Kruchenykh played a major role.²² A number of scholars focused on other aspects of Kruchenykh’s work, for instance, his *zaum*’ (Mickiewicz 1984; Janecek 1996), or hitherto unpublished materials.²³ An international conference on the occasion of Kruchenykh’s 125th birthday was organized by the Maiakovskii Museum in Moscow, in 2011.

Independently of Markov, whom he could not have read in the beginning of the 1970s, Sigei acknowledged Kruchenykh’s artistic talent, clearly felt a certain kinship with him and imitated and developed many of his devices. He considered Kruchenykh with his early lithographic books the founder of visual poetry in Russia, poetry in which not typography, but the artist played the dominant role.

Противопоставление руки и почерка строгой упорядоченности типографского набора оказалось первым шагом к превращению стихотворения в нечто подвластное художнику (Sigei 1991, p. 9).

(The opposition between hand and handwriting and the strict order of type-setting turned out to be the first step in making the poem something that was controlled by the artist.)

Sigei, himself being an exponent, one of the geniuses of Russian visual poetry, did a lot to make Kruchenykh better known. In his journal *Transponans*, he published much of and about Kruchenykh, for instance, a detailed commentary on *Igra v adu* (*Transponans*, 22, 1984) and a large number of poems on Kruchenykh, written by Feofan Buka (1993) (the pseudonym of Nikolai Ivanovich Khardzhiev).²⁴ He assembled these poems in the book *Kruchenykhiada*. In 1992, he was the first to publish Kruchenykh’s (1992) at that time still unpublished *Arabeski iz Gogolia*²⁵ (Figure 10).

After his emigration to Germany, Sigei came into contact with Mikhail Evzlin, the publisher of Ediciones del Hebreo Errante in Madrid, who specialized in originally designed publications of the Russian Avant-garde in small editions. For Evzlin, Sigei made a number of books, including a new version of *Igra v adu*, written by Kruchenykh in 1940 (Kruchenykh 2001a), Figure 11.

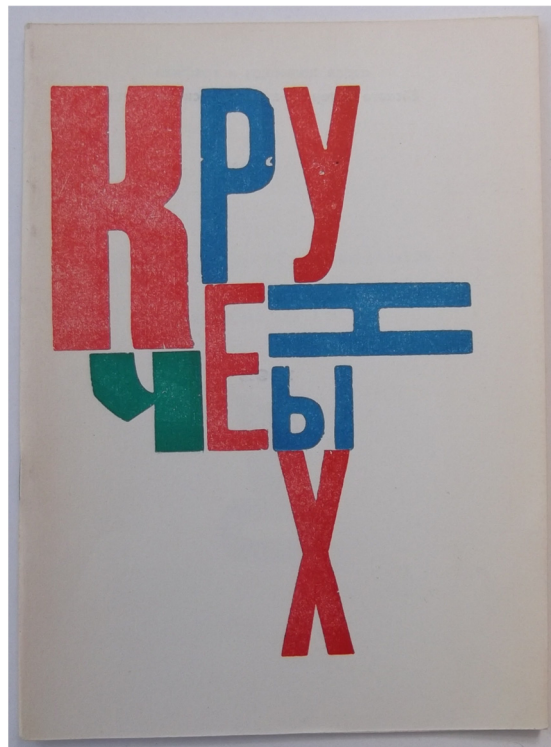


Figure 10. Cover of 'Arabeski iz Gogolia'.

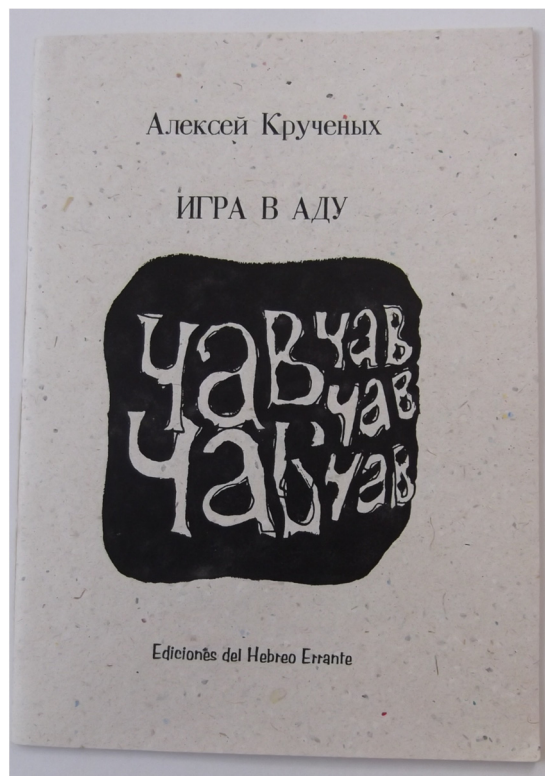


Figure 11. Cover of 'Igra v adu'.

In addition, a new edition of *Arabeski iz Gogolia* is now published together with *Slovo o podvigakh Gogolia*.²⁶ Some of his own books, and of his wife Ry Nikonova, were also published by Ediciones del Hebreo Errante.

Sigei dedicated several handmade books to Kruchenykh as, for instance, *Kruchenykh izuchenie* (1993) and *Kru ske uch da y* (2009) (Stommels and Lemmens 2016, pp. 173, 227). A highly interesting one²⁷ is a small box, covered with pieces of cloth, and tied up with bits of strings (Figures 12 and 13).



Figure 12. Box with four Kruchenykh booklets.



Figure 13. Inside of the box.

The box contains four booklets. In the first one, two pages in A4 format folded together (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Page from the first booklet.

Sigei writes (using a typewriter) that he made his first drawings with Kruchenykh's *zaum'* poems in 1968 and that he later continually returned to his work as a copyist and interpreter of Kruchenykh's poetry, but above all, as someone who 'perezaumnil' (over-transrationalized) the writer of transrational language by adding forms and verbal signs. The booklet is dated 1995 and has a drawing made in 1976. The second booklet (also two pages A4 folded together, but now cardboard-like paper) (Figures 15 and 16).



Figure 15. Second booklet of the box.



Figure 16. Pages from the second booklet.

It is a personal adaptation of Kruchenykh's *Slovo o podvigakh Gogolia* and is dated 1985/1995. The third booklet (20 pages, Figures 17 and 18) contains texts by Kruchenykh, partly made on the typewriter, partly handwritten, and illustrated with drawings and large letters, and some clippings from printed material. It is one of Sigei's early handmade books, dated 1972/1995, just as the fourth one, in which is written on the inside 1969/1995. This booklet (Figures 19 and 20) is titled *Stikhata*, has fifty pages, a cloth cover, and also contains excerpts from Kruchenykh's poetry, illustrated with large letters. On the last page of the book, Sigei has written: 'Serii knig dlia sobstvennogo udovol'stviia, kollekt'sar serzhbrinn" sig"' ('A series of books for my own pleasure, collectsaar serzhbrinn sig').²⁸ The box, designed in a time when in the Soviet Union, the Futurists were not published and only a few people knew and valued their work, was clearly a matter of love, Kruchenykh being Sigei's inspirator in many respects.

In the emigration, Sigei actively continued his work: as a critic, writing articles about the Russian historical Avant-garde, as an illustrator and editor of books, as a publisher (of a large number of hand-made books, one or several copies), as a prose writer (see Figures 21 and 22), as a poet and, in the first place, as an artist. His paintings, drawings, illustrations, and book designs easily surpass those of his Neo-avant-gardist contemporaries and, to my mind, surpass those of Kruchenykh. When we compare Kruchenykh's books or the drawings and illustrations of his recently published al'bom 'zZudo' (Khachatourian 2022), there are similarities with those by Sigei,²⁹ but the latter wins artistically. As in the case of Kruchenykh, it will take some time before Sigei will be valued as one of the true masters of the Russian Avant-garde.

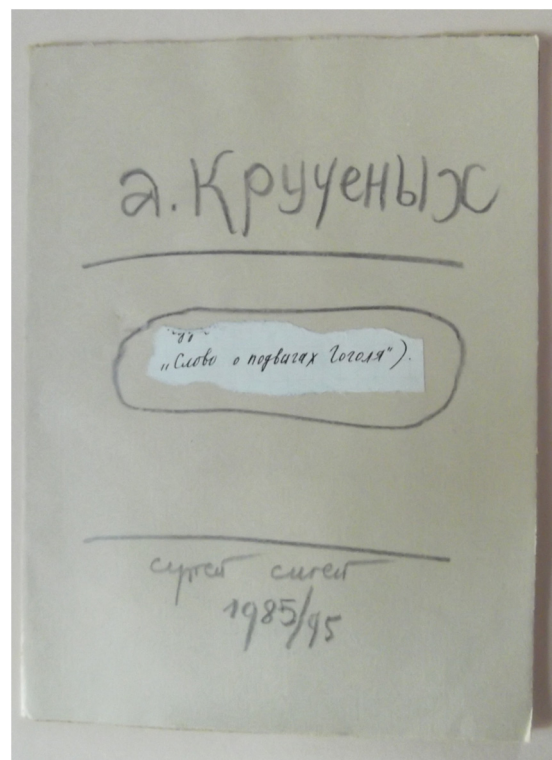


Figure 17. Third booklet.



Figure 18. Pages from the third booklet.



Figure 19. Fourth booklet.

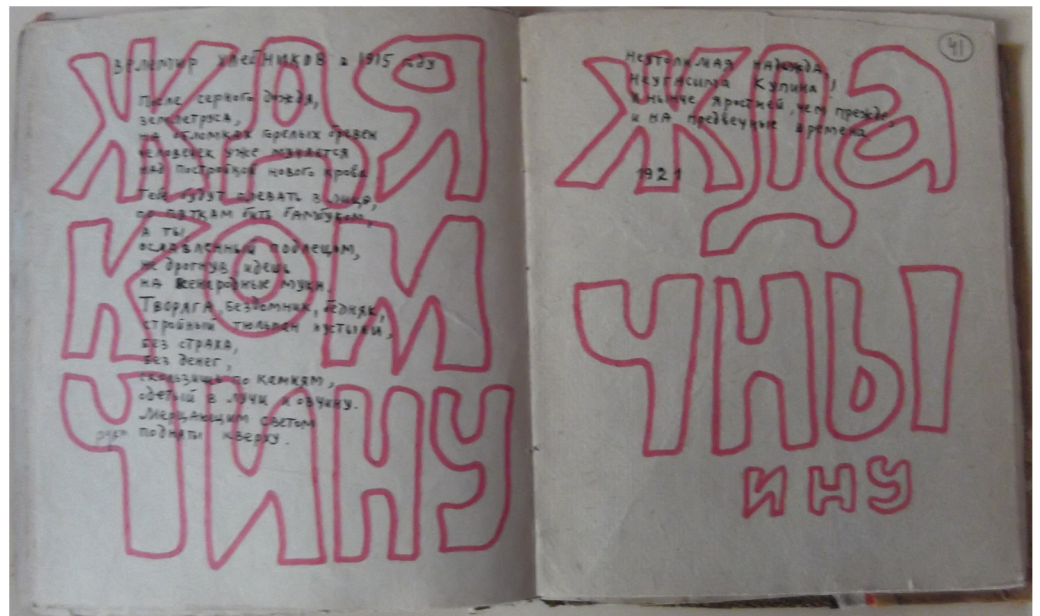


Figure 20. Pages from the fourth booklet.



Figure 21. Cover of Sigei's 'Raskazn'.

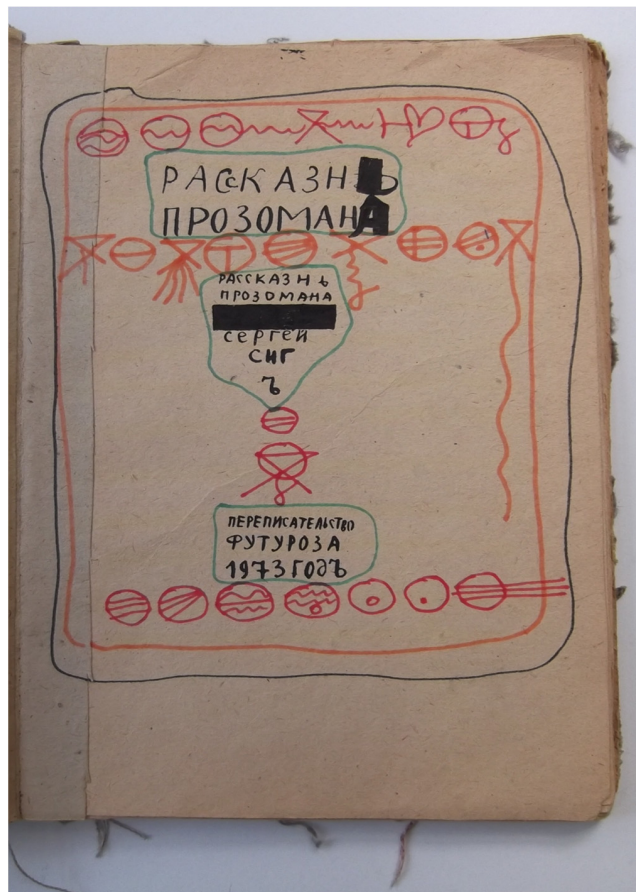


Figure 22. Title page of 'Raskazn'.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 As Renato Poggioli (1968, p. 101) writes: What characterizes a totalitarian state is, in fact, an almost natural incapacity to permit evasions, or to admit exceptions; it is not paradoxical to maintain that in Russia today, the Russia of the ‘thaw’, artistic conformity is even more mandatory than moral conformity, perhaps even more than ideological. Aesthetic and formal transgression is certainly more arduous there, if not more hazardous, than political or ethical transgression.
- 2 See particularly his *Art and Culture* (Greenberg 1961).
- 3 See also the obituary I wrote of him: (Weststeijn 2015).
- 4 As his brother-in-law, the artist-poet Boris Konstriktor (2006, p. 172) writes: ‘Сергей Сигей родился футуристом’ (‘Sergei Sigei was born a Futurist’).
- 5 About the history of the journal, see (Kukui 2006; Hildebrand-Schat 2016).
- 6 On transfurism see (Janecek 1987; Kukui 2009; Transfurizm 2017).
- 7 For a more extensive biography of Sigei and Nikonova see (Lemmens and Stommels 2016, pp. 11–23).
- 8 On the other hand, he met the poet Igor Bakhterev (1908–1996), the only surviving member of the OBERIU group, and edited and published some of his books.
- 9 Kruchenykh was educated as an artist (in Odessa and Moscow and qualified as an art teacher); only later, after having become into contact with David Burliuk and other Futurists, he decided to become a poet.
- 10 Quoted from (Terekhina and Zimenkov 1999, p. 44).
- 11 I used Anna Lawton’s translation in (Lawton 1988, p. 67).
- 12 See, for instance, the issues of the journal *Russian Literature* (LXV-I/II/III, 2009 and 131, 2022).
- 13 (Sukhoparov 1994). Apart from contributions by early contemporaries, such as Jakobson, Khlebnikov and Burliuk, there are reminiscences and comments by Aigi, Slutskii, Voznesenskii, and others.
- 14 As Wolfgang Kasack writes in the introduction to Sukhoparov’s biography of Kruchenykh (Sukhoparov 1992, p. 10).
- 15 Illustrations and descriptions of many of these book can be found in (Compton 1978; Janecek 1984), photocopies of entire books in (Kruchenykh 1973).
- 16 See Janecek 1980, in which the manuscript of the pamphlet is compared with its first publication.
- 17 Sigei (2003) published his book much later at Ediciones del Hebreo Errante.
- 18 Moskva: Gileia.
- 19 It is rather an appendix than an afterword, as the afterword is followed by twenty more pages with experiments with letters.
- 20 For his visual poetry or ‘picto-poems’ (see also Nazarenko 2003, 2006; Weststeijn 2016).
- 21 He gives Kruchenykh his due already in his basic study *Russian Futurism: A History* (Markov 1968).
- 22 Contrary to, for instance, Khlebnikov, who did not do anything in this respect. Khlebnikov was not interested in publishing his work and did not care about his manuscripts; all his works have come to light through the efforts of others. (See Markov 1962, pp. 32–33; Janecek 1984, p. 91).
- 23 To mention a few: (Kruchenykh 2001b, 2006, 2012; Gur’ianova 2009; Sigei and Weststeijn 2009; Khachaturian 2022).
- 24 Much of the material about Kruchenykh that was published in *Transponans* Sigei got from N.I. Khardzhiev, whom he often visited in the 1980s (see Sigei 2001, p. 22; Khardzhiev 2006). According to Sigei Khardzhiiev ‘ochen’ dorozhil zvaniem “buka russkoi literatury’ (Sigei 2001, p. 43).
- 25 In a later edition of the book (Kruchenykh 2001d), Sigei writes that the text had first been published in his journal *Transponans* (25, 1985). The booklet was sold in Moscow, but apparently did not get much attention: in an article in 1999, it was still mentioned as unpublished. In 1986, Sigei published the text in a handwritten book, see the illustration in Stommels and Lemmens 2016, p. 144.
- 26 Like *Arabeski iz Gogolia Slovo o podvigakh Gogolia* has been published for the first time in *Transponans* (25, 1985).
- 27 It is a unique copy; Sigei gave it to me as a present.
- 28 Like Kruchenykh often shortened his name to Kruch, Sigei sometimes signed as Sig. In one of his books presented to me, he wrote: ‘Byl Kruch, est’ Sig’ (‘There was Kruch, there is Sig’).
- 29 An almost complete catalogue of his works can be found in (Stommels and Lemmens 2016).

References

Buka, Feofan. 1993. *Kruchenykhiada. Predislovie Sergeia Sigeia*. Moscow: Gileia.

- Bürger, Peter. 1974. *Theorie der Avantgarde*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Compton, Susan P. 1978. *The World Backwards: Russian Futurist Books 1912–1916*. London: The British Library.
- Greenberg, Clement. 1961. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Gur'ianova, Nina. 2009. "Voennaia Opera" A. Kruchenykh i V. Khlebnikova. *Russian Literature* LXV-I/II/III: 183–236.
- Hildebrand-Schat, Viola. 2016. Anarcho-Futurismus revisited. The magazine *Transponans*. In *Bookwork. Rea Nikonova & Serge Segay*. Edited by Serge-Aljosja Stommels and Albert Lemmens. Eindhoven: LS Collection Van Abbemuseum, pp. 69–85.
- Janecek, Gerald. 1984. *The Look of Russian Literature: Avant-Garde Visual Experiments, 1900–1930*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Janecek, Gerald. 1987. A Report on Transfurism. *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 19: 123–42.
- Janecek, Gerald. 1996. *Zaum: The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism*. San Diego: San Diego State University Press.
- Khachatryan, Liubov'. 2022. "I vse tak khitro i prosto sdelano . . . ": Al'bom "zzZudo" Alekseia Kruchenykh: Vstupitel'naia stat'ia, komentarii i podgotovka teksta. *Russian Literature* 131: 37–142.
- Khardzhiev, Nikolai. 2006. *Pis'ma v Sigeisk. Vvedenie i komentarii Sergei Sigei*. Amsterdam: Pegasus, (Pegasus Oost-Europese Studies 4).
- Konstriktor, Boris. 2006. Zametki o Ry Nikonovoj i Sergee Sigei. *Russian Literature* LIX-II/III/IV: 165–75.
- Kruchenykh, A. 1913. *Pomada*. Moscow: Izd. G.L. Kuz'mina i S.D. Dolinskogo.
- Kruchenykh, A. E. 1973. *Izbrannoe*. Edited and with an Introduction by Vladimir Markov. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag.
- Kruchenykh, Aleksei. 1992. *Arabeski iz Gogolia. Predislovie, podgotovka teksta i shriftovaia aranzhirova Sergei Sigei*. Eisk: Otdel zhivopisi i grafiki Eiskogo istoriko-kraevedcheskogo museia.
- Kruchenykh, Aleksei. 2001a. *Igra v adu. Podgotovka teksta, slovesnye illiustratsy i posleslovie Sergeia Sigeia*. Madrid: Ediciones del Hebreo Errante.
- Kruchenykh, A.E. 2001b. *Katalog. Knigi A.E. Kruchenykh kavkazskogo perioda iz kollektcii Gosudarstvennogo muzeia V.V. Maiakovskogo*. Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi musei V.V. Maiakovskogo.
- Kruchenykh, Aleksei. 2001c. *Stikhotvoreniia Poemy. ROMANY. Opera. Sostavlenie, podgotovka teksta, vsupitel'naia stat'ia i primechania S.R. Krasitskogo*. Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii Proekt.
- Kruchenykh, Aleksei. 2001d. *Slovo o podvigakh Gogolia. Arabeski iz Gogolia. Podgotovka teksta, illiustratsii i posleslovie Sergeia Sigeia*. Madrid: Ediciones del Hebreo Errante.
- Kruchenykh, Aleksei. 2006. *K istorii russkogo futurizma. Vospominaniia i dokumenty. Vstupitel'naia stat'ia, podgotovka teksta i komentarii Niny Gur'ianovoj*. Moskva: Gileia.
- Kruchenykh, Aleksei. 2012. *Mir zapreshchit, a golova moia uzhe izriadno . . . Pis'ma A.A. Shemshurinu i M.V. Matiushinu, 1913–1921*. Moscow: Gileia.
- Kukui, Il'ia. 2006. Laboratoriia avantgarda: Zhurnal *Transponans*. *Russian Literature* LIX-II/III/IV: 225–59.
- Kukui, Il'ia. 2009. «Mania Fest»: Ideologemy transfurizma. In *Avangard i ideologija: Russkie primery*. Edited by V. S. Grubachin. Beograd: Filologicheskii fakul'tet Beogradskogo Universiteta, pp. 273–79.
- Lawton, Anna, ed. 1988. *Russian Futurism through its Manifestoes, 1912–1928*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Lemmens, Albert, and Serge-Aljosja Stommels. 2016. The Letter to West. In *Bookwork. Rea Nikonova & Serge Segay*. Edited by Serge-Aljosja Stommels and Albert Lemmens. Eindhoven: LS Collection Van Abbemuseum, pp. 11–23.
- Markov, Vladimir. 1962. *The Longer Poems of Velimir Khlebnikov*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Markov, Vladimir. 1968. *Russian Futurism: A History*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Mickiewicz, Denis. 1984. Semantic Functions in Zaum. *Russian Literature* XV: 363–464. [CrossRef]
- Nazarenko, Tatiana. 2003. Re-Thinking the Value of the Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Sign: Russian Visual Poetry Without Verbal Components. *Slavic and East European Journal* 47: 3. [CrossRef]
- Nazarenko, Tatiana. 2006. Writing Poetry Without Words: Pictographic Poems by Rea Nikonova and Sergej Sigej. *Russian Literature* LIX-II/III/IV: 285–315. [CrossRef]
- Nilsson, N. Å. 1979. Kruchenykh's poem "Dyr bul ščyl". *Scando-Slavica* 24: 139–48. [CrossRef]
- Perloff, Marjorie. 1986. *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Poggioli, Renato. 1968. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Sigei, Sergei. 1991. *Kratkaia istoriia vizual'noi poezii v Rossii*. Eisk: Uchenye zapiski otdela zhivopisi i grafiki Eiskogo istoriko-kraevedcheskogo museia. Vyp. pervyi. Literatura posle zhivopisi, pp. 9–14.
- Sigei, Sergei. 1996. *Sobukvy*. Moscow: Gileia.
- Sigei, Sergei. 2001. *Slovo o podvigakh Gogolia. Arabeski iz Gogolia*. Madrid: Ediciones del Hebreo Errante.
- Sigei, Sergei. 2003. *Shedevrez*. Madrid: Ediciones del Hebreo Errante.
- Sigei, Sergei, and Willem G. Weststeijn. 2009. Kruchenykh i Khlebnikov v Amsterdamskoj chasti arkhiva N.I. Khardzhieva. *Russian Literature* LXV-I/II/III: 15–109.
- Stommels, Serge-Aljosja, and Albert Lemmens, eds. 2016. *Bookwork. Rea Nikonova & Serge Segay*. Eindhoven: LS Collection Van Abbemuseum.
- Sukhoparov, Sergei M. 1992. *Aleksei Kruchenykh. Sud'ba budetliana*. München: Otto Sagner.
- Sukhoparov, Sergei. 1994. *Aleksei Kruchenykh v soidetel'stvakh sovmennikov*. München: Otto Sagner.
- Terekhina, V. M., and A. P. Zimenkov, eds. 1999. *Russkii Futurizm. Teoriia. Praktika. Kritika. Vospominaniia*. Moskva: Nasledie.
- Toland, Kristina. 2009. The Phenomenology of Kruchenykh's Futurist Books. *Russian Literature* LXV-I/II/III: 295–320. [CrossRef]

- Transfurizm. 2017. *Katalog k vystavke v Muzee nekonformistskogo iskusstva (Art-centr 'Pushkinskaia-10') (23 dekabria 2017–2021 ianvaria 2018)*. Sankt-Peterburg: DEAN.
- Weststeijn, Willem G. 2015. Serge Segay (1947–2014): An Obituary. In *International Yearbook of Futurist Studies*. Edited by Günter Berghaus. Berlin: De Gruyter, vol. 5, pp. 467–73.
- Weststeijn, Willem G. 2016. The Visual Poetry of Rea Nikonova and Serge Segay. In *Bookwork. Rea Nikonova & Serge Segay*. Edited by Serge-Aljosja Stommels and Albert Lemmens. Eindhoven: LS Collection Van Abbemuseum, pp. 59–67.

Article

A Trickster in Drag: Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe's Aesthetic of Camp

Mark Lipovetsky

Department of Slavic Languages, Columbia University, New York, NY 10025, USA; ml4360@columbia.edu

Abstract: The article discusses an artistic method of the post-Soviet artist Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe (1969–2013) as the nexus of several traditions embedded in modernist legacy. His main genre is remastered (scratched) photographs depicting him impersonating various historical and fictional characters, from Marylyn Monroe (whom he considered his alter ego) to Hitler, Jesus Christ, and Putin. His art and artistically designed image creatively develop the tradition of modernist life-creation (*zhiznetvorchestvo*), which he enriches by camp, thus becoming a pioneer of this elusive sensibility in post-Soviet culture. Camp, in turn, facilitates Mamyshev-Monroe's self-fashioning as the trickster whose transgressivity and ambivalence absorb his queerness and drag spectacles, and whose hyperperformativity manifests itself in his performative art. The article analyzes how Mamyshev-Monroe appropriates various cultural material in the trickster's way by using camp for its critique and deconstruction. The case of Mamyshev-Monroe is especially important since it demonstrates the limits of the trickster's transgression that resists its instrumentalization by the authoritarian state.

Keywords: Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe; trickster; camp; drag; photo art; impersonation

Citation: Lipovetsky, Mark. 2022. A Trickster in Drag: Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe's Aesthetic of Camp. *Arts* 11: 87. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050087>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 10 August 2022

Accepted: 9 September 2022

Published: 13 September 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Vladislav Mamyshev, better known under the pseudonym “Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe” for his frequent impersonations of Marilyn Monroe, was one of the most scandalous and willfully kitschiest representatives of the Leningrad-Petersburg group of “New Artists” that included Timur Novikov, Oleg Kotelnikov, Georgii Gur'ianov, Evgenii Yufit, and Sergei Bugaev (Afrika), among others. Although the group was created in 1982, it shaped the core of the first post-Soviet generation of Leningrad artists, who were both inspired and intoxicated by the new freedoms of the Perestroika period and the anarchic 1990s. The group's aesthetic was eclectic and included influences of Russian futurism, neoprimitivism, expressionism, and European Dada mixed with postmodernist playfulness and daring performance practices (see Andreeva and Podgorskaia 2012). Mamyshev-Monroe gravitated more to the postmodernist end of the spectrum adopted by the New Artists. Among his favorite genres were modified photographs and performances, which typically, albeit not always, represented the artist himself metamorphosing into historical or fictional characters, tinted with a strong sense of humor and irony.¹

Vladislav Mamyshev's biography was intentionally mythologized by himself, but thanks to memoirs of his friends (see Berezovskaia 2016) and an all-embracing web-portal dedicated to his life and work², the main parameters of his adventurous life were restored. Born in 1969 into a family of the party apparatchik, Vladislav first attended a prestigious literary school, but was expelled from it for drawing caricatures of Politburo members.³ After this, he graduated from another school for artistically gifted students, which brought him, while still a very young man, into the circle of Leningrad experimental artists. In 1987, he was recruited to the army, from which he was sent to the mental institution for the impersonation of Marilyn Monroe and for transforming Gorbachev's official photo into a now famous portrait of Gorbachev as an Indian woman. After his release from the institution, he returned to the Perestroika-driven Leningrad in 1989, where he soon gained

tremendous popularity thanks to his colorful impersonation of celebrities (among which Monroe was his favorite), and multiple pranks, scandals, and hilarious trouble-making (frequently drug-inspired). He participated in multiple exhibitions, and the best galleries of St. Petersburg and, since the mid-1990s, Moscow hosted his solo shows. Among the collective exhibitions in which he participated was *Caution: Religion!* (2003) at the Sakharov Center, which became the target of an attack by a mob of religious obscurantists—and participation in this project signified a protest against growing political and cultural “neo-traditionalism”. In 2007 he received the Kanidsky Prize, the most significant art award in Russia, for the remake of the classical Soviet comedy *Volga-Volga*, in which Mamyshev-Monroe played the female protagonist. Since this period, he spent more and more time outside of Russia. In 2010, Mamyshev-Monroe signed an appeal for the Russian opposition, “Putin must go”. His last production was a theater show, *Polonium/Polonius* (Polonii 2012), at the Moscow Polittheatre, which fused *Hamlet* motifs with references to the poisoning of Aleksandr Litvinenko with Polonium. This production, however, was interrupted by the sudden death of Mamyshev-Monroe. On 16 March 2013, he was found drowned in a hotel pool in the village of Seminyak in Bali. After his death, two major retrospectives of the artist took place in St. Petersburg (2014) and Moscow (2015). Several catalogues (Turkina and Mazin 2014; Selina et al. 2015) and a book of memoirs have also been published.

As an artist, Mamyshev-Monroe tirelessly tackled authoritative traditions in visual art, from the “parade portrait” of government officials to folklore stylizations harkening back to the early 20th century (Bilibin, Zvorykin). However, in all his encounters with an authoritative tradition, he created its comedic double, sometimes as a parody, sometimes a pastiche, but invariably, Mamyshev-Monroe employed tropes embedded in another long-standing tradition based upon the trope of the trickster.

The trickster is a traditional mythological and folkloric character, exemplified by such personages as Hermes, Prometheus, and Odysseus in Greek myths; Coyote and Rabbit in North American Indian mythology; Loki of the Norse pantheon; the Kitsune in Chinese and Japanese folklore; Ivan the fool and Thief in Russian wondertales; Hershele of Ostropol in Yiddish folklore; Hodja Nasreddin in Turkish; Till Eulenspiegel and Reineke the Fox in German, and so on. The folklore scholar William Hynes, characterizes the trickster as following:

Anomalous, a-nomos, without normativity, the trickster appears on the edge or just beyond existing borders, classifications and categories. [. . .] [T]he trickster is cast as an ‘out’ person, and his activities are often outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out-of-bounds, and out-of-order.

No borders are sacrosanct, be they religious, cultural, linguistic, epistemological, or metaphysical. Breaking down division lines, the trickster characteristically moves swiftly and impulsively back and forth across all borders with virtual impunity. A visitor everywhere, especially to those places that are off limits, the trickster seems to dwell in no single place but to be in continual transit through all realms marginal and liminal. (Hynes 1993, pp. 33–46)

The folkloric trickster gave rise to a number of later sociocultural roles, such as the carnival clown, the fool, the jester, the impostor, the thief, the holy fool, the adventurer, the female trickster, the con artist, and others. Mediated by these sociocultural roles, the trickster tradition boils down to what can be defined as the *trickster trope*. The constants of the trickster trope include (1) ambivalence, understood as a special principle of deconstruction of binaries; destruction of borders between the sacred and profane, private and public, normative and illicit; (2) transgressivity—the violation of borders, norms and laws of the social order, and the injection of chaos and unpredictability; (3) liminality as the basis for radical freedom connected with nonbelonging to social hierarchies; and (4) hyperperformativity: the trickster replaces his/her “self” with numerous performative “masks” that fuse together the personal and stereotypical, private and public. The trickster’s freedom in this context manifests itself mainly in endless metamorphoses of the subject—liberation from the burden of a given and unchangeable identity serves here as a source of joy and

playfulness—as well as the ability to involve others in a kind of participatory theater. The concretization of these constants in each specific case generates a specific set of variables, such as, for example, parodying authority and authorship, the aesthetic excess of tricks, the role of mediator, as well as many other characteristics, often directly reproducing the features of the mythological trickster.

Looking at various trickster roles across ages, it is impossible not to notice that they all retain the mythological semantics of chaos and freedom in their inseparable dialectic connection. This connection is most typically solidified by *laughter*. There are many tragic heroes who resemble tricksters (Hamlet, for example), but as a trickster they shine only in comic scenes. All of these categories are linked by “circular” cause-and-effect relationships. The liminality of the trickster justifies his or her transgressions, which in turn generate comic and ambivalent effects. In turn, it is the ambivalence of the trickster that motivates his or her liminality and is expressed in comic transgressions.

Looking at the cultural or political authority through the prism of the trickster act, Mamyshev-Monroe reinvented the modernist trickery of classical traditions exemplified by the Futurists’ and Oberiu performances (see Ioffe 2012), Meyerhold’s theater of the 1910–1920s, Eisenstein’s *Mudrets* (the 1920 production of Aleksandr Ostrovsky’s play *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol’no prostoty*), as well as comedic reinventions of classical plots and situations by the *Satirikon* writers, especially Aleksandr Averchenko and Teffi. Importantly, he inherited the modernist tradition of the ‘art of life’ (to use the title of Shamma Sahadat’s book about life-fashioning in Russian modernism [Shakhadat 2014]) and consistently inserted colorful theatricalized performances into the fabric of the everyday, as if prompted by Nikolai Evreinov’s theory of the “theatre for oneself”. According to Evreinov, the theatricalization of life is connected not only with the imitation of existing forms of art, but also with the methodical *transgression* of existing norms (behavioral, social, cultural, and moral), as well as with the excess, redundancy, and demonstrative overproduction of these forms.⁴ Certainly, one cannot disregard a possible influence of Marcel Duchamp—life theater, gender shifts and alternate identities (especially Rose Selavy)—and Cindy Sherman’s series, especially “Film Stills” and “Clowns”; Mamyshev-Monroe could have been introduced to these and similar works by his many friends well-informed about the avant-garde Western art. Last but not least, Mamyshev-Monroe reinvented the repressed and underground tradition of drag performance and theatricalized queerness (see Healey 2017, pp. 95–104), which he used for the deconstruction of patriarchal models of power—symbolic and political alike. While doing this, Mamyshev-Monroe, intuitively, rather than deliberately, became a pioneer of the camp aesthetic in Russia, which remained unrecognized as such until recently (notably, the majority of existing critical writing on Mamyshev-Monroe mentions neither camp nor even queerness).

It is a small wonder that the word “trickster” frequently pops up in critical or memoirist writings about Mamyshev-Monroe. Both his cross-gender performances and everyday performative practices trigger the association between Mamyshev-Monroe and the mythological figure of a trickster. Thus, artist and critic Andrei Khlobystin speaks about the connection of nonbinary gender practices in general, and those in Mamyshev-Monroe’s art in particular, with the jester and carnival traditions (Khlobystin 1999). He also compares the artist with a court jester who mocks and appropriates the king’s power in a playful way: “Traditionally for a jester’s mission, Mamyshev was at the same time an alternative king, with the permissiveness he was entitled to. While making others laugh, he amused himself, acting as an expositor and healer of people’s passions” (Khlobystin 2018, p. 17). Olesia Turkin and Viktor Mazin argue that Mamyshev-Monroe’s anarchic freedom “leads not to the schizophrenic doubling of the world but to the role of a quasi-trickster—one who dons and tears off masks and speaks the “truth” about oneself and others” (Turkina and Mazin 2013) (I fail to understand the meaning of the prefix “quasi” before the trickster in this quote). Maria Kravtsova compares Mamyshev-Monroe with 18th-century adventure-seekers who combined roguery with a playful messianism.⁵ Both Andrei Khlobystin and Ekaterina Andreeva interpret Mamyshev-Monroe as the successor, albeit inconsistent, to

the tradition of ancient Greek kynicism as, described by Sloterdijk and Foucault (see Sloterdijk 1987, pp. 156–68; Foucault 2011, pp. 157–306): “Although on the one hand he performs the function of a kynic, showing a different disregard for other people’s property and his own, on the other hand he is also a magpie thief, hungry for everything shiny and attractive” (Khlobystin 1999). A journalist and restaurant owner, Katia Bokuchava, compares Mamyshev-Monroe with “a little devil with an angelic face”, whom “you would pamper as a little child, until he, for example, would burn your apartment. But even after this, you won’t get rid of him” (Bokuchava n.d.). The carnival clown, the court jester, and the adventurer—these are all different historical and cultural manifestations of the trickster trope, combinations of those features that cement various modifications of the trickster myth.

Mamyshev-Monroe’s art is transgressive not only because of its open queerness that inevitably confronts Russia’s homophobic mainstream, but also due to his constant sacrilegious gestures and productions—he impersonated Hitler and Bin Laden, while making fun of national favorites, from Liubov’ Orlova, the famous star of Stalinist cinema, to the protagonist of a cult spy TV series from the 1970s, Otto von Stirlitz. Mamyshev-Monroe doesn’t spare any other norms either—moral, social, or cultural. Ekaterina Andreeva includes in her article an impressive list of his not always so innocent transgressions, among which the most famous is his arson of the apartment belonging to Boris Berezovsky’s daughter (see Andreeva 2014, p. 7). By the same token, the artist’s lifestyle until his last years was truly liminal. According to Andrei Khlobystin, “MVY [Mamyshev Vladislav Yurievich], is a natural, unadulterated adventurer, thief, nomad, living for years without a house or passport, the classic hero of a picaresque novel, constantly gets into risky situations and comes into contact with the criminal world in one way or another. MVY himself can, on occasion, be rude, aggressive and boorish a la Yesenin” (Khlobystin 1999).

Such a defining feature of the trickster as laughter is obviously characteristic of Mamyshev-Monroe’s art, as it is organically connected with different forms of carnivalistic inversions, mesalliances, and metamorphoses. Not only in post-Soviet but also in Russian art, Mamyshev’s series first pioneered camp as a queer sensibility in art, and with an accentuated sense of comedy. According to Susan Sontag, “the whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious [. . .] One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious. [. . .]” (Sontag 1966, p. 285). Among the defining features of camp, Sontag lists such contradictory features as extravagance and exaggeration, total aestheticism and theatricality; the indistinction of good and bad taste, dandyism, and strong ties with queer culture: “While it’s not true that Camp taste is homosexual taste, there no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap” (ibid., p. 287)⁶.

Camp is ambivalent by default but, not satisfied with it, Mamyshev-Monroe deliberately accentuated the ambivalent as his artistic principle. His art is ambivalent, because, according to his own self-descriptions, he always enjoyed the moment of metamorphosis into the object of his impersonation. In his projects, the distinction between parody and admiring imitation of the object is frequently elusive. Mamyshev-Monroe semijokingly denoted his artistic method as “insinuationism”, which includes both life-creation and simulations of creative work that are so elaborate that they replace art itself: “Insinuationism is not simply ‘the art of lying,’ which Oscar Wilde admired so much, but the factual justification, the documentation of lies, the fiction, the creation of a logical plausible whole structure capable of misleading an opponent, or better yet, of convincing him of his worthiness (Chichikov)” (Mamyshev-Monro 1993a). Mamyshev-Monroe named Timur Novikov as the creator of this method, but also listed Hitler and Stalin among its forefathers, since they also succeeded in creation of various falsifications that effectively replaced reality: “Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, other tyrants who made their careers out of nothing belong to the guild of insinulators. [. . .] The methods that helped them to cross borders up to the frontier of supreme power are very artistic, daring and even adventurous. Document fraud, falsifications of an ideological nature, equipping their own regimes with a special artistic line designed to imitate an inferior reality, and other “miracles” are truly miracles”

(ibid.). This is certainly the trickster's method of deception which absorbs both post-Soviet cynicism and postmodernist hyperreality of simulacra.

Finally, the trickster's hyperperformativity secures his/her freedom to judge, perform, and mock within any given cultural milieu. As Bakhtin wrote about tricksters:

They are life's maskers [*litsedei zhizni*]; their being coincides with their role, and outside this role they simply do not exist . . . [They have] the right not to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others while talking, the right to not be taken literally, not to 'be oneself'; the right to live a life in the chronotope of the entr'acte, the chronotope of theatrical space, the right to act as a comedy and to treat others as actors, the right to rip off the masks, the right to rage at others with a primeval (almost cultic) rage—and finally, the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prudent little secrets. (Bakhtin 1982, pp. 159, 163)

This characteristic fully matches Mamyshev-Monroe's automythology⁷. Mamyshev used the self-made term «ceaeoc»—"allinclusivity" to define his self-expression through the nonstop impersonation of various characters, historical and fictional alike. Ekaterina Andreeva characterizes it as an echo of Dostoevsky's "universal responsiveness" of the "Russian soul" (Andreeva 2014, p. 8). I see here another manifestation of camp—camp allows one to combine the trickster's knack for the universal and exaggerated theatricalization (hyperperformativity) with a persistent sense of distancing detachment: "Camp proposes a comic vision of the world . . . If tragedy is an experience of hyperinvolvement, comedy is an experience of underinvolvement, of detachment" (Sontag 1966, p. 286). Camp motivates this detachment by pure aesthetic interest, releasing from moral responsibility, which corresponds the trickster's ability to be "a-moral, rather than immoral" (Hyde 2010, p. 10).⁸

Most symptomatically, Mamyshev-Monroe manifested the trickster's hyperperformativity through a nonbinary representation of the male/female dichotomy. In his 1994 article, Mamyshev wrote with sincere admiration about cross-dressing actors and travesties in Soviet film and TV—such as how Baba Yaga in filmic fairytales was routinely played by Georgii Milliar; Aleksandr Kaliagin played Charley's aunt from *Zdravstvuite, ia vasha tetia* (*Hello, I am Your Aunt*, 1975); and the comedians Vadim Tonkov and Boris Vladimirov appeared at all official TV concerts in the makeup of elderly ladies, Veronika Mavrikiyevna and Avdot'ia Nikitichna (see Mamyshev-Monroe 2014).⁹ However, in the majority of these examples, women's features were used almost exclusively as comical and "low" (in comparison to the "normative" male characteristics). Post-Soviet drag queens such as Vera Serdiuchka or aggressively misogynistic performers in Roman Viktiuk's theater not only preserve but aggravate this approach, which, in a new context, also paradoxically acquired homophobic overtones. Although Mamyshev-Monroe hardly knew any other traditions of drag-queen performances, his trickster ways allowed him to minimize the homophobia and misogyny embedded in Soviet drag, while emphasizing queerness and camp as a liminal zone of freedom.

The emphasis on the queer as the liminal zone of liberation from gender stereotypes, can be best illustrated by the work that has brought young Mamyshev international fame—his portrait of Gorbachev as an Indian woman (1989) (Figure 1). By transforming an official photo of the general secretary into a kitschy portrait with rosy cheeks, colored lips, heavy makeup on eyes and eyebrows, wearing an earring and necklace, and, most importantly, with a red Hindu bindi on the general secretary's bald forehead, surprisingly, did not denigrate Gorbachev, as one would expect. This representation transformed him into an androgenous divinity, a naïve image of an otherworldly messenger of peace—rather than the new ruler of the Soviet empire. At the same time, there is an obvious irony in the ease with which a black and white official portrait can be transformed into an androgynous icon of the kitschy "Oriental beauty". The positive message of this morphing was obvious and liberating for anyone—which explains why this image appeared on the covers of so many Western magazines in the early 1990s.

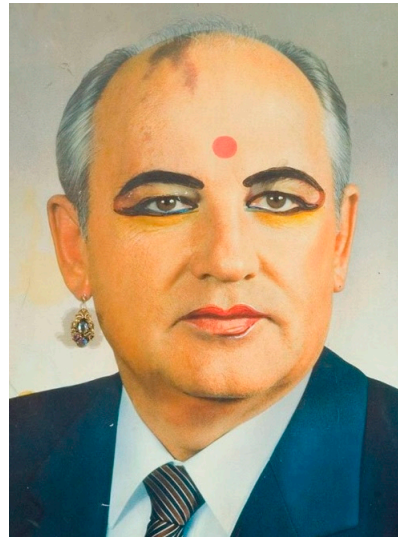


Figure 1. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. “M.S. Gorbachev” (1989). <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=47> (accessed on 8 September 2022).

The Gorbachev portrait was followed by Mamyshev’s long-going series “The Politburo” (1990, 1995, 2002, 2011), in which grotesquely exaggerated, almost clownish make-up turned Politburo members into funny and unappealing (unlike Gorbachev) drag queens. Mamyshev was not employing homophobic tropes as a satirical device here. By dressing Soviet functionaries in drag, he performs the transfiguration of scary death masks into carnivalesque figures comparable to Cindy Sherman’s clowns (Figures 2 and 3). The artist in one of interviews recalled that his mother, the party apparatchik, when he was a child, taught him to recognize all the Politburo members by names by playing with him a lotto-like game with their little portraits cut-off from a newspaper. The morphing of these deflated icons of power, thus, defamiliarizes the familiar, makes it strange—as per Shklovsky—and hence, valuable again, but this time, aesthetically rather than politically. After Mamyshev’s “editing”, the new versions of the Politburo’s “official” portraits appear to be filled with life and color, although the grotesque tension between their former (deathlike) and present (carnavalesque) representations remains tangible.



Егор Кузьмич
ЛИГАЧЕВ

Figure 2. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Politburo” (1995) E.K. Ligachev. <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=4#work-series-4-5> (accessed on 8 September 2022).



Figure 3. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Politburo” (2011). D.F Ustinov. <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=16#work-series-16-2> (accessed on 8 September 2022).

Symptomatically, Mamyshev’s “morphing” (Ekaterina Andreeva’s term [Andreeva 2014, p. 8])—an impersonation of different historical characters—generates an openly postmodernist effect of the “perpetual present” (Fredric Jameson) that suggests a virtual elimination of history and historical perspective. History appears as a costume, and not even a historical one, but one which a contemporary audience would recognize as “historical”. In other words, such a transformation reproduces a kitschy image of “historical accuracy”, a simulacrum in a chain of simulacra. However, what distinguishes Mamyshev-Monroe, say, from other “quasi-historical” portraits of pop celebrities¹⁰, is the detectable sense of irony towards his impersonations—an unstable distance from the created image that is best seen in such series as the “Life of Remarkable Monroes” (1995) (Figures 4 and 5). Despite “glamorous” poses and elaborate makeup transforming the artist into Peter the Great, Marylyn Monroe, Napoleon, Joan of Arc, Sherlock Holmes, Queen Elizabeth, Lenin, Hitler, and Jesus Christ, the series in its entirety produces an ironic effect. Mamyshev impersonated various symbols of power—political, symbolic, or aesthetic alike; at the same time, he tried to “de-ideologize” these icons. In the interview with Tomas Glanc he said: “. . . the main object of study for me are the geometric forms of these faces, a kind of portrait mandalas, i.e., absolutely symbolic values, which have long ago and automatically fixed in the minds of millions of those or other qualities”.¹¹ However, taken together, these images are truly grotesque—Jesus Christ and Hitler are equal in this series, because they are equally “famous”. This is how an ordinary Russian person imagines power and success; the absence of any ethical values at this mental map produces a staggering effect.

In the later series, such as “The Russian Questions” (1997), “Tales of the Time Lost” (with Sergei Borisov, 2001), “Star3” (Cap, 2005), and “Russia that We’ve Lost” (2007), Mamyshev impersonations were increasingly satirical. In “The Russian Questions” he created a contrast between stylized frames borrowed from Ivan Bilibin’s famous series of illustrations for Russian fairytales and scenes performed by Mamyshev and his friends (Timur Novikov, Georgii Gurianov, Elizaveta Berezovskaya, Irena Kuksenaite, and others). Using costumes from Soviet films such as the legendary *Amphibian Man* (1961), Mamyshev created grotesque “screenshots” from nonexisting Soviet cinematic fairytales, exemplified by Aleksandr Ptushko and Aleksandr Rou. The artist imitates their visual stylistics but applies it to subjects unimaginable in Soviet films—such as, for example, a confrontation between the Russian prince with a Jew or the representation of a sexually alluring mermaid (Figures 6 and 7). In “Star3”, he depicted various world celebrities against the same

background of the Moscow Kremlin, but while doing this he emphasized the unhappy or plain scared expressions of these “foreigners” in Moscow. DIY improvised media was used for their images—duct tape for Chaplin’s and Hitler’s mustaches, a garbage bag for Bin Ladin’s beard, a plastic shopping bag for Marilyn Monroe’s “cocktail dress”, and a ladle and plunger for the Egyptian pharaoh’s symbols of power (Figures 8 and 9)—conveying the simulative, fake nature of the created characters (despite their uncanny similarity to originals), and by this means, revealing the superficiality and hyperreality of westernization in post-Soviet Russia.



Figure 4. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Life of Remarkable Monroes” (1995). <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=1#work-series-1-9> (accessed on 8 September 2022).



Figure 5. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Life of Remarkable Monroes” (1995). <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=1#work-series-1-1> (accessed on 8 September 2022).



Figure 6. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “The Russian Questions” (1997), <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=6#work-series-6-3> (accessed on 8 September 2022).



Figure 7. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “The Russian Questions” (1997), <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=6#work-series-6-5> (accessed on 8 September 2022).



Figure 8. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Star3” (2005), <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=3#work-series-3-3> (accessed on 8 September 2022).



Figure 9. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Star3” (2005), <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=3#work-series-3-12> (accessed on 8 September 2022).

Nevertheless, the distance between the artist and the impersonated character, even one depicted satirically, remains unstable. Illuminatingly, when commenting on his impersonations of Putin (Figure 10) or Valentina Matvienko (at the moment, the governor of St. Petersburg) (Figure 11), Mamyshev emphasized the instant artistic metamorphosis that he experienced and that allowed him to “feel” his object from the “inside”:

First, I copy a character’s face from a photograph, change my clothes, stand in front of the camera . . . And then there’s a click. And for a few seconds the essence enters my body. Only the first photos can capture this penetration. Then I practice my acting skills. But only those seconds are magical, I myself do not fully understand how it happens. (Mamyshev-Monro 2013a)



Figure 10. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Remember about gas” (*Pomiatai pro gaz*, 2011), <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=42> (accessed on 8 September 2022).

When describing how he photographed as Putin for the series “Remember about gas” (2011), Mamyshev went as far as conveying the “inner image” of his model:

If you are making a precise drawing, you do not allow any deviations from the original, then at some point there is a strange chemistry of some kind. It literally lasts for a few seconds—and it’s only at that point that you have to take the picture—that someone else’s soul comes into you. For example, the first time I dressed up as Putin, I had the feeling that I had become some kind of colossal totemic maggot that was about to burst from the shit I ate. At the same time, I’m not a villain, but a forest ranger, and I have to gobble up our country—the dead, great Russian empire, the Soviet Union—as quickly as possible so that a new life can begin. (Mamyshev-Monro 2013b)¹²



Figure 11. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Valentina Matvienko” (2005), <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=30#work-series-30-2> (accessed on 8 September 2022).

These self-descriptions by Mamyshev are surprisingly reminiscent of those made by Dmitrii Prigov, a leading representative of Moscow Conceptualism. Prigov in similar terms described his *poetic* technique of speaking through voices of other, imaginary or collective, subjects¹³, while Mamyshev translated it into the visual. This translation suggests a certain dialectics of “recognition” and “estrangement”, which becomes especially challenging in the preferred medium of Mamyshev—modified photographs. Aleksandr Skidan emphasized in Prigov’s discursive “acting” elements comparable with Brechtian theater, in which

the actor does not reincarnate in the character of the play, but shows it, taking a critical distance in relation to it, so DAP [Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov] in his texts constantly “steps out of the role,” exposing the artificiality, the madeness of the textual construction, along with the construction (“personhood”) of the lyrical subject. [. . .] This self-reflexive, analytical technique becomes in Brecht and Prigov an instrument for the crystallization of the dominant ideology to the degree that it speaks through conventional artistic forms and discourses. Needless to say, for Brecht, the instance of power dispersed in “aesthetics” was bourgeois ideology, while for Prigov it was mostly communist (utopian, messianic) ideology. (Skidan 2010, p. 126)

Unlike Prigov, Mamyshev’s series highlight the artist’s “sincere” fusion with his models, but nevertheless, they also always contain elements of estrangement and irony that shape a critical distance between the artist and his character and prevent a full metamorphosis à la Stanislavsky’s “method”.

But what is the “dominant ideology” that Mamyshev deconstructs? Most likely, this is an ideology of the glamour that concentrates the pathos and repression of the “society of the spectacle”—both in its capitalist (post-Soviet) and quasisocialist (Soviet) versions. In both cases, the visual imagery promises an escape into an alternative—bright, beautiful, fantastic, and uplifting. According to Guy Debord,

the spectacle [. . .] obliterates the boundaries between self and world by crushing the self [. . .] also obliterates the boundaries between true and false by repressing all directly lived truth beneath the real presence of falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances. Individuals who passively accept their subjection to an alien everyday reality are thus driven toward a madness that reacts to that fate by resorting to illusory magical techniques. [. . .] As Gabel puts it in describing

a quite different level of pathology, ‘the abnormal need for representation here makes up for a torturing feeling of being on the edge of existence’. (Debord 2014)

In his art, Mamyshev highlights “illusory magical techniques” operating in the society of the spectacle and displays the “crushing of the self” as well as the obliteration of “the boundaries between true and false” in such a demonstrative and even naïve way that the entire theatricality of the society of the spectacle is laid bare, thus revealing a “a torturing feeling of being on the edge of existence”. In this respect, Mamyshev-Monroe’s art is not at all nostalgic, rather it falls into the category of postmodernist performances that, according to Marvin Carlson, combine “mimicry” and “counter-mimicry” (see Carlson 2017, pp. 192–94). Camp as a form of trickery (and trickery as an extension of camp) serves as a glue connecting the opposites and allowing Mamyshev to mock the societal spectacle by the spectacular means.

From this perspective it is not surprising that Mamyshev-Monroe’s attitude to socialist realism was more complex than either a Sots-Art tradition, exemplified by Moscow conceptualists, or the “New Artists’” admiration of socialist realism as a model for their “neo-academism”. On the one hand, he wrote an article on the “Impressive Greatness of Soviet Totalitarian Aesthetics” (see Mamyshev-Monro 1993b), in which he praised Soviet heroic mythology as being not only comparable with the ancient Greek myths but also, similar to them, serve as a source of aesthetically perfect works (he failed to provide concrete examples, of course):

... Soviet heroic mythology is a holistic aesthetic complex united by an impressive pathos of reproduction, a consistent evolution of once chosen artistic style, rich in discoveries, affecting the human psyche in a peculiar but qualitative way. [...] An inquisitive mind can take a tremendous aesthetic pleasure comparable to the rapture of a traveler at the recollection of a dizzyingly dangerous expedition. A series of amazing, sometimes incredible feats of Soviet heroes captures the highest degree of self-denial, incomprehensible, but iron logic of events, the vitality of diverse, but united in their heroism of characters, purity and full openness of feelings, the desire for spiritual self-improvement and the true immortality of heroes, finally, the atmosphere of mass heroism, meticulously created by the style of narration ... (Mamyshev-Monro 1993b)

On the other hand, he imagined Liubov Orlova as the antipode of his alter ego, Marilyn Monroe. If Mamyshev performed Marilyn as a personalized sentimentality and sensuality, Liubov (literally: Love) Orlova, in his interpretation, on the contrary, embodied a deathlike “mask of happiness” and the aggressive willpower: “The mask of happiness [...] crowned the hierarchy of the non-existing fairy-tale like paradise depicted in all her films. [...] Orlova herself would better match a non-existent first name ‘Will’ with the last name ‘Steel’ that reflect her professional and personal qualities most faithfully” (Mamyshev-Monro 2015, p. 89). In the later interview he added even angrier definitions of Orlova while comparing her with the snow queen who radiated icy-cold and absolutely asexual power and thus enhanced the regime’s cynical dominance (see Mamyshev-Monro 1993b).

Orlova appears in several of Mamyshev’s projects—most notably in the series of photographs, *Happy Love* (*Schastlivaia liubov’*, 2000), and in Pavel Labazov and Andrei Sil’verstov’s remake of Grigorii Aleksandrov’s Socialist Realist comedy, *Volga-Volga* (1937), with Mamyshev playing Orlova/Strelka (2006, the project won the Kandinsky prize). The first series displays Orlova’s choreographed poses, sophisticated costumes, and interiors oversaturated with symbols of wealth and abundance—old paintings, porcelain, crystal glasses, and carafes. Most likely, Mamyshev wanted to emphasize the hypocrisy of Soviet culture that propagated the revolution and egalitarianism while rewarding most active promoters of these values with the “bourgeois” lifestyle and comfort. (Figures 12–14). However, the result appears to be more ambivalent. Twice, Orlova was photographed against the backgrounds of ships—a revolutionary cruiser, *Avrora*, and the legendary

icebreaker, *Krasin*, for more than a year had been stuck in the polar ice. In both photos, Orlova's appearance contrasts these symbols of the epoch—her outfit with white socks and furs has nothing to do with the revolution and the heroic hardships. She appears as a timeless figure, free from the Soviet world and using it only as flashy background for her beauty. In other words, Orlova also manifests a fairytale-like freedom—choreographed, manufactured, and subsidized by lies and betrayals—but nevertheless, impressive and alluring.



Figure 12. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Happy Love (Liubov’ Orlova)” (2000); <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=15#work-series-15-9> (accessed on 8 September 2022).



Figure 13. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Happy Love (Liubov’ Orlova)” (2000); <https://vmmf.org/exhibition/view?id=80> (accessed on 8 September 2022).



Figure 14. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe. From the series “Happy Love (Liubov’ Orlova)” (2000); <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=15#work-series-15-3> (accessed on 8 September 2022).

A much less attractive Orlova appears in the remake of *Volga-Volga*. Mamyshev’s face with heavy make-up was pasted over the “real” Orlova in scenes from Alexandrov’s film. (Figure 15) In *Volga-Volga*, the real Orlova plays one of the few female tricksters in Soviet culture, who, by her own hyperperformativity, confronts the rigid bureaucrat Byvalov. Mamyshev-Monroe’s performance transforms Strelka into an alien monster with a motionless face and frozen smile. Nothing is changed in the dialogue, but it is Mamyshev who says Strelka’s text, with the tone of his voice rapidly jumping from the artificially girlish to the hypermasculine. All songs were also performed by Mamyshev, who intentionally distorts the music terribly.



Figure 15. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe as Strelka in *Volga-Volga* (2006, a remake of the 1937 film dir. by Pavel Labazov and Andrei Sil’vestrov).

The meaning of this distortion becomes clear only in correlation with the photographs from the series *Happy Love*—the monster from *Volga-Volga* secures the comfort of the elegant lady from the photo series; furthermore, being this monster is the *price* for Orlova's freedom and beauty, or its ugly, Hyde-like, shadow. This is the trickery that Mamyshev-Monroe apparently rejects—his idea of hyperperformativity suggests that each of his fictional personae manifests freedom, and each of them is beautiful in its own way.

Café Elephant, Mamyshev-Monroe's "remake" of the famous scene from the cult TV series, *17 Moments of Spring* (1973, dir. Tatiana Lioznova), depicting Otto von Stirlitz's—played by Viacheslav Tikhonov—silent and contactless "date" with his wife, is probably the most spectacular case of Mamyshev's camp targeting the Soviet material. In this two-minute-long silent video¹⁴, produced for the St. Petersburg New Pirate TV, Mamyshev performs both Stirlitz and his wife and thus rewrites one of the best examples of Soviet patriotic sentimentalism, turning it into a cluster of contradicting narratives. He reproduced the iconic scene frame by frame, which prompted Ekaterina Andreeva to argue that the artist reveals the personal drama of filmic characters: "While remaining very similar to the original and funny at the same time, this scene openly becomes what it is only implied in the film—a representation of mourning for a life lost, exchanged for a heroic feat, an irretrievable life and a tragic love" (Andreeva 2021, p. 78). Mamyshev even managed to "insert" his performance into the opening ceremony of the pompous 2006 exhibition "Russia!" at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, attended by Putin, among others. As Ekaterina Andreeva notes, there are no traces of this video in the exhibition's program, which suggests that it was a last-minute addition—or rather, a trickster's contraband (see Andreeva 2014, p. 15).

Surprisingly, when writing about *Café Elephant*, critics fail to notice clear references to the visual discourse of camp and drag culture. Among these signs, one may notice heavy makeup on the face of Stirlitz coupled with Mamyshev's simultaneous appearance in drag as Stirlitz-Isaev's wife. No less indicative is the exaggeratedly melodramatic facial and body language of both characters (clearly opposed to subtlety of their originals' emotional expressivity). The café suddenly turns into a cabaret where the artist in drag reigns upon the stage, performing all the parts by himself.

While recreating a scene of the secret meeting of the Soviet undercover spy with his wife, left behind in the USSR, Mamyshev, on the one hand, reveals the repressed sexuality of the original, and on the other, emphasizes the striking contrast between Stirlitz and his wife. He depicts Stirlitz as a decadent dandy, with exaggeratedly queered expressions and gestures (Figure 16). His wife, on the contrary, appears in drag as an ordinary, mundane lady with no distinctive features except for an awful hairdo and a *koshelka* in her hands. (Figure 17).



Figure 16. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe as Stirlitz in *Café Elephant*.



Figure 17. Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe as Stirlitz's wife in *Café Elephant*.

The ambiguity of the wife's image suggests at least two interpretations of the entire scene. One interpretation implies the hidden passion of two queer men, separated by duty and secrecy. If we look at *Café Elephant* as a secret meeting of estranged queer lovers, the somber scene becomes a melodrama of forbidden passion, queering the patriotic narrative. Another, interpretation offers an alternative reading for the entirety of Stirlitz's saga, transforming the spy thriller into the story of a queer man, who can be himself only when he is away from his stern motherland. In this interpretation, Stirlitz's wife appears as the personification of the motherland (cf. Blok's famous line "ea o o o"), who patiently waits for him to return and whom he would rather avoid for as long as he possibly can. In both readings, however, Mamyshev's performance critiques the heteronormative optics that fail to notice the painfully obvious queer overtones of this scene and the entire figure of Stirlitz and his secret freedom.

The coexistence of several parallel interpretations, especially with sexual and queer overtones, is the epitome of camp. According to Susan Sontag: "the Camp sensibility of one that is alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken [. . .] when a person or a thing is 'a camp', a duplicity is involved" (Sontag 1966, p. 286). The coexistence of conflicting intertexts leads here to the coexistence of mutually exclusive interpretations that, when taken together, produce at least two conceptual effects. First, they clearly *desacralize or profane* the sacred imagery associated with the Great Patriotic War and its mythology. The desacralization is performed in a recognizably carnivalesque manner, wherein tragic heroes are replaced by clowns appearing in two roles simultaneously; a display of forbidden sexuality with the spectacle of heroic self-restraint and self-sacrifice for the sake of the motherland; wherein the model of heteronormativity is transformed into a celebration of queer play. Secondly, this performance, with its open and emphatic theatricality, mocks the Soviet society of the spectacle, obviating the constructed and mutable character of cultural icons; showing how slight shifts in visual representation can radically rewrite—and even unwrite—the seemingly unshakeable "message" of the idiomatic spectacle.

Mamyshev-Monroe is not the first campy trickster in the world, but he is the first Russian artist who has turned camp into the foundation for his artistic metaposition. Camp is responsible for the laughter that connects such early works as the Gorbachev portrait with such mature projects as *Café Elephant* or the Orlova series. His laughter signifies liberation from delimiting gender norms and restraints through an outburst of queer freedom. Mamyshev's performances and his trickery display the inseparable fusion of camp, queerness, and freedom.

Despite his declarative lack of any political convictions and apparent cynicism, Mamyshev did not try to conform to the changing political climate in Putin's Russia. Beginning in 2007, he practically emigrated from the country. According to Peter Pomerantsev, Mamyshev's death in 2013 was also associated—if only indirectly—with an unwillingness to conform to a new authoritarianism: "Vladik himself was dead. He was found floating in a

pool in Bali. Death by heart attack. Right at the end an oligarch acquaintance had made him an offer to come over to the Kremlin side and star in a series of paintings in which he would dress up and appear in a photo shoot that portrayed the new protest leaders sodomizing. Vladik had refused” (Pomerantsev 2014, p. 278). In April 2013, the critic Artemi Troitsky published Mamyshev’s emails addressed to him, which corroborated Pomerantsev’s version. According to these documents, Sergei Bugaev (Afrika), a former member of the New Artists group and the star of Sergei Soloviev’s cult movie, *Assa* (1987), brought the artist to Cambodia, where a notorious businessman Sergei Polonsky, on behalf of Vladislav Surkov (at the moment, Putin’s closest aide and ideolog), pressed Mamyshev-Monroe to produce a series of pornographic photos in his idiosyncratic style depicting the leaders of the anti-Putin opposition (see Troitsky 2013). Appalled by this offer, Mamyshev escaped from Cambodia back to Bali, where he died. In his own words (from a message addressed to Troitsky), “I fu . . . d off from Sihanoukville, where Africa and Polonsky invited me under the pretext of filming a movie. But it was a trick, Afrika began to push me into making the propaganda for Putin, I fled in horror, the boy went crazy [. . .] I am a weak person, half Marilyn Monroe, you could say, so it’s easier for me to f.ck off, like I went back into drugs or something like that. I’m afraid to quarrel openly with devils” (ibid.).

Apparently, the trickster’s transgressively has its limits—it proves to be incompatible with the authoritarian regime’s attempts to instrumentalize it for its own repressive purposes. This principle, however, does not apply to all cultural tricksters of the 2000s–2010s—many of them gladly allowed their transgressions to be used by the transgressive regime who paid generously for their service (e.g., a transformation of the rock musician Sergei Shnurov, famous for his music videos about hapless tricksters, into an enthusiastic supporter of the regime after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022). Why was Mamyshev-Monroe so appalled by this perspective? He obviously could not cope with the aggression and potential violence that he clearly detected in his commissioners; in his email to Troitsky he wrote about Afrika: “He is fiercely motivated, promising that all those who now opposed it [Putin’s regime], will either be killed or maimed, or deprived of all means of subsistence. He was foaming at the mouth about all this to me. It made me sick” (ibid.).

But, perhaps, camp also granted Mamyshev-Monroe immunity to the attempt to “coopt” him for the repressive needs. “Camp, writes Sontag, is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world. It incarnates a victory of ‘style’ over ‘content’, ‘aesthetic’ over ‘morality’, of irony over ‘tragedy’”. (p. 10). Possibly, the “commissars” proposal was, first and foremost, aesthetically abject for the artist, which suggests that an aesthetic taste for a campy trickster acquires ethical and political meanings. In turn, one may conclude that the trickster’s reputation of being necessarily “a-moral” needs to be adjusted—at least, in the case of Mamyshev-Monroe.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Indicated in the pictures credits.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ As noted by Julie Cassiday, “Despite their close collaboration during the New Academy’s formative years, Mamyshev-Monroe and Novikov gradually parted ways [. . .] Despite his advocacy of the New Academy’s mission, Mamyshev-Monroe fit poorly into the ‘new seriousness,’ whose reactionary aesthetic platform and politics absorbed Novikov’s energies in the final years of his life. In the end, Mamyshev-Monroe’s cross-dressing turned away from both Neoacademism and New Russian Classicism, since his reincarnations of both men and women embodied not merely the beautiful, but also the tawdry, the tasteless, and even the unabashedly ugly” (Cassiday 2019, p. 222).

² See <https://vmmf.org> (accessed on 8 September 2022). Created by the Mamyshev-Monroe Foundation.

³ See Mamyshev’s bio on <https://artguide.com/people/2929> (accessed on 8 September 2022).

- ⁴ On Evereinov's theories see (Maksimov 2002; Chubarov 2006; Smith 2018).
- ⁵ "... the biography of Vladislav Mamyshev-Monroe is as if deliberately built according to all the canons of the picaresque novel, and in the fate of the artist one can trace many parallels with the fates of the most celebrated adventurers of the XVIII century: Giacomo Casanova, Stepan Zannovich, Alessandro Cagliostro, and especially the chevalier d'Eon, the brave dragoon captain in a woman's dress, who carried out diplomatic missions for King Louis XV of France and the Russian Empress Elizabeth Petrovna. And in this context, it is not at all surprising that on a par with Hitler's mask and Marilyn Monroe's white dress, one of Mamyshev's guises is that of an 18th-century aristocrat" (Kravtsova 2014).
- ⁶ Julie A. Cassiday defines Mamyshev-Monroe's performances as "a clearly gender-inflected *stio*", basing her approach on Alexey Yurchak's concept of *stio* (Cassiday 2019, p. 225). However, she uses only one part of Yurchak's definition—overidentification, while omitting the other—decontextualization. Indeed, unlike Yurchak's examples of *stio* (a birthday card for a friend written in the language of Politburo documents), Mamyshev-Monroe's impersonations do not decontextualize historical figures, or at least, they are decontextualized no more than any celebrity's portrait displayed in a gallery. Although there is a certain overlap between concepts of *stio* and camp, camp, in my opinion, offers a broader and, at the same time, more specific approach to Mamyshev's art.
- ⁷ Julie Cassiday cites a vast number of evidences by Mamyshev's friends and colleagues who testify that the artist was always in character and constantly performing. See (Cassiday 2019, p. 227).
- ⁸ Cf. a remark of the photographer Valerii Katsuba about Mamyshev-Monroe: "Vladislav is doomed to be forgiven. He is constantly balancing between being loved and hated by everyone". («Baca cepoae. O ocoo aacpye a pa ceoe a ea») (Katsuba 2013).
- ⁹ On the history of Soviet transvestism see (Khoroshilova 2012; Cassiday 2018; Cassiday 2019, pp. 229–31; Dviniatina 2018).
- ¹⁰ For example, Ekaterina Rozhdestvenskaya (a daughter of a renowned Soviet poet) became famous by her photo-portraits of post-Soviet celebrities in "historical" costumes and settings.
- ¹¹ Quoted from: <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=1> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- ¹² This "insight" translates into an accurate political forecast. When an interviewer asks the artist if he thinks that Putin will indeed "devour us all", Mamyshev responds: "Yes, very soon. You know, in Bali, where I lived for a long time, there are all kinds of parasites. Some kind of wood bugs, termites. And then there's this luxurious teak cabinet in the house, Dutch craftsman style. You use it every day, you have clothes hanging in it, but at some point, you touch it, and it crumbles. It's just eaten up. It's the same with our country" (ibid.).
- ¹³ For example, in a conversation with Mikhail Epstein, Prigov describes the effect of metamorphing as following:
 "M.E.: That is to say, when, say, you write women's poetry, you not only alienate and deconstruct this discourse, but in a way ...
 D.P.: ... fall into it!
 M.E.: And you fall into it, you inscribe it into yourself.
 D.P.: [...] Indeed, at some point I do genuinely fall into this discourse. The problem is not to deceive the reader into behaving this way. The problem is that you have to be insane yourself in this regard.
 M.E.: So, this is in a way an existential challenge?
 DP: It's a psychosomatic task. Well, existential in the translation for personal problems of some sort. But actually, this is like a psychosomatic, almost meditative task. It is a kind of work on myself, a kind of training. But I am not doing, let's say, yogic exercises for, so to speak, mastery of the flesh. I do a kind of conscious long procedure, which I have developed of my own, for working with my own evaluative methodological apparatus, linguistic and discursive". (Epshtein and Prigov 2010).
- ¹⁴ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfWmly3hx58&t=164s> (accessed on 8 September 2022).

References

- Andreeva, Ekaterina. 2014. *Vladislav Mamyshev-Monro: Genii peremen*. Moscow: Ad Marginem.
- Andreeva, Ekaterina. 2021. Sovetskoe v proizvedeniakh Vladislava Mamysheva-Monro. *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta. Iskusstvovedenie* 11: 69–82. [CrossRef]
- Andreeva, Ekaterina, and Nelli Podgorskaia, eds. 2012. *Novye khudozhniki = The New Artists*. Moscow: Moskovskii muzei sovremennogo iskusstva. Maier.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1982. *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated and Edited by Michael Holquist, and Caryl Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Berezovskaia, Elizaveta, ed. 2016. *Vladislav Mamyshev-Monro v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*. Moscow: Artgid.
- Bokuchava, Katya. n.d. "Vladik Monro: Instruktsiia dlia Obshcheniia". Available online: <http://kolonna.mitin.com/dantes/dj02/bokuchava.shtml> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- Carlson, Marvin. 2017. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Cassiday, Julie A. 2019. Vladislav Mamyshev-Monroe, Frog-Princess of Neoacademism. *The Russian Review* 78: 221–44. [CrossRef]
- Cassiday, Julie A. 2018. Glamazons en travesti: Drag Queens in Putin's Russia. In *Russian Performances: Word, Object, Action*. Edited by Julie A. Buckler, Julie A. Cassiday and Boris Wolfson. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 272–81.

- Chubarov, Igor. 2006. 'Teatralizatsiia zhizni' kak strategiiia politizatsiia iskusstva: Povtornoie vziatie Zimnego Dvortsia pod rukovodstvom N.N.Evreinova (1920 god). In *Sovetskaia vlast' i media*. Edited by Hans Gunther and Sabina Haensgen. St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, pp. 281–95.
- Debord, Guy. 2014. *The Society of Spectacle*. Translated and Annotated by Ken Knabb. The Bureau of Public Secrets: Available online: <https://files.libcom.org/files/The%20Society%20of%20the%20Spectacle%20Annotated%20Edition.pdf> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- Dviniatina, Mila. 2018. Travestiia v sovetskom kino. *Teoriia Mody* 41: 1. Available online: https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/teoriya_mody/47/article/19331/ (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- Epshtein, M. N., and D. A. Prigov. 2010. Popytka ne byt' identifikirovannym. In *Nekanonicheskii klassik: D.A. Prigov (1940–2007)*. Edited by Evgeny Dobrenko, Ilya Kukulin, Mark Lipovetsky and Maria Maiofis. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, pp. 69–70.
- Foucault, Michel. 2011. *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II), Lectures at the College De France, 1983–1984*. Edited by Frédéric Gros. Translated by Graham Burchell. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Healey, Dan. 2017. *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hyde, Lewis. 2010. *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Hynes, William J., ed. 1993. Mapping Mythic Tricksters. In *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*. Tuscaloosa and London: Univ. of Alabama Press.
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2012. The Futurist Pragmatics of Life-Creation and the Performative Ideology of the Avant-Garde. Looking at Aleksei Kručenykh Through the Prism of Life-Writing. *Russian Literature* 71: 371–92. [CrossRef]
- Katsuba, Valerii. 2013. "O Vladislave Mamysheve-Monro". Available online: <http://femme-terrible.com/dantes/number-two/o-vladislave-mamysheve-monro/> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- Khlobystin, Andrei. 1999. Merilin Makhno. *Dantes* 2. Available online: <http://femme-terrible.com/dantes/number-two/merlin-maxno/> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- Khlobystin, Andrei. 2018. *Shizorevoliutsiia: Ocherki peterburgskoi kul'tury otoroii poloviny XX veka*. St. Petersburg: Borey Art Center.
- Khoroshilova, Ol'ga. 2012. *Russkie travesti v istorii, kul'ture i povsednevnosti*. Moscow: MIF.
- Kravtsova, Maria. 2014. Monro v zerkale avantiurizma. *Art Gid* 73, March 13.
- Maksimov, V. 2002. Filosofiiia teatra Nikolaiia Evreinova. In *Demon teatral'nosti*. Edited and with a commentary by N. N. Evreinov, A. Iu. Zubkov and V. I. Maksimov. Moscow and St. Petersburg: Letnii sad.
- Mamyshev-Monro. 1993a. Insinutsionizm. *Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal* 3. Available online: https://vmmf.org/extlink/files/14/1413_643bae1241bc94a863ca367987ebc5902d8cb7e6.pdf (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- Mamyshev-Monro. 1993b. Vpechatliaiushchee velichie sovetskoi estetiki totalitarizma. *Kabinet* 3: 56–59. Available online: <http://kolonna.mitin.com/dantes/dj02/monro9.shtml> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- Mamyshev-Monro. 2013a. Interview with Maria Moskvicheva. *Moskovskii komsomolets*, March 21.
- Mamyshev-Monro. 2013b. Interview with Natalia Kostrova. *Afisha-Gorod*, March 11. Available online: <https://daily.afisha.ru/archive/gorod/archive/monroe-polonius/Curiously> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- Mamyshev-Monro. 2014. Travestizm v traditsii russkogo messianstva. Available online: <https://artguide.com/posts/674> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- Mamyshev-Monro. 2015. Liubov' ne umiraet. K vystavke v Galeree Marata Gel'mana. In *Katalog vystavki v Moskovskom muzee sovremennogo iskusstva*. Moscow: Moskovskii muzei sovremennogo iskusstva.
- Pomerantsev, Peter. 2014. *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Shakhadat, Shamma. 2014. *Iskusstvo zhizni: Zhizn' kak predmet estetieskogo otnosheniia v russkoi kul'ture XVI–XX vekov*. Moscow: NLO.
- Sloterdijk, Peter. 1987. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Translated by Michael Eldred. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, Alexandra. 2018. The Transgressive Capacity of the Comic: A Merry Death as an Embodiment of Nikolai Evreinov's Vision of Theatricality. *The Modern Language Review* 113: 583–609. [CrossRef]
- Skidan, Aleksandr. 2010. Prigov kak Brekht i Uorkhol v odnom litse, ili Golem-sovetikus. In *A Non-Canonical Classic: Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (1940–2007)*. Edited by Evgeny Dobrenko, Ilya Kukulin, Mark Lipovetsky and Maria Maiofis. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, pp. 123–44.
- Sontag, Susan. 1966. Notes on 'Camp', Sontag. In *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux.
- Troitsky, Artemii. 2013. Na dne. Prolog. *Novaia Gazeta*. April 14. Available online: <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2013/04/15/54350-na-dne-prolog> (accessed on 8 September 2022).
- Turkina, Olesia, and Viktor Mazin. 2014. *Zhizn' zamechatel'nogo Monro*. St. Petersburg: Novyi Muzei.
- Turkina, Olesia, and Viktor Mazin. 2013. "Svoeobrazie". Available online: <http://kolonna.mitin.com/dantes/dj02/turkina.shtml> (accessed on 8 September 2022).

Article

Metaphor and the Material Object in Moscow Conceptualism

Mary A. Nicholas

Department of Modern Languages & Literatures, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA 18015, USA;
man3@lehigh.edu

Abstract: Discussions of conceptual art both East and West have focused on the notion of “dematerialization” of the artwork and the substitution of “art as idea” for concrete works of art. Yet such an approach oversimplifies the role of materiality in works of conceptual art generally and underestimates the transformative role of the concrete object in early Moscow conceptualism in particular. An examination of the Nest, an influential group of artists active from 1974 to 1979, as well as other analytical conceptualists who highlighted materiality in their unofficial art practice suggests that their use of concrete objects and realized metaphors revolutionized late-Soviet unofficial art, moving it from an outdated modernist model of artistic autonomy to a more dynamic and engaged postmodernism. Their previously underappreciated contribution to the evolution of global conceptualism expands our picture of the movement as a whole and provides needed context for late-Soviet art and the post-Soviet period that followed.

Keywords: Moscow conceptualism; material object; dematerialization; Nest; metaphor; *byt*; Victor Skersis; Yuri Albert; Vadim Zakharov; Nadezhda Stolpovskaya; Vitaly Komar; Alexander Melamid; Joseph Kosuth

Citation: Nicholas, Mary A. 2022. Metaphor and the Material Object in Moscow Conceptualism. *Arts* 11: 88. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050088>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 16 August 2022

Accepted: 14 September 2022

Published: 19 September 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

One of the clichés of scholarship on conceptual art concerns the supposed “dematerialization” of the object and its replacement by a notion of “art as idea”.¹ That has been a truism about conceptualism in the West since the publication of Lucy Lippard’s groundbreaking volume on the subject in Anglo-American conceptual art of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it is still a commonplace in studies of conceptualism around the world. Yet recent studies have suggested that the transformation of the concrete object in conceptual art is both more complex and less widespread than expected, even in the work of the Art & Language artists Lippard favored. Christian Berger is just one of the scholars calling for an approach to Anglo-American conceptual art that is “not so rigidly ‘anti-materialist’” and for a “more holistic view” of the phenomenon worldwide as well (Berger 2019, p. 15).² Once we look closer, it becomes clear that the supposed disappearance of the concrete work of art played a more limited role than expected both East and West. For a significant group of unofficial artists in the late Soviet Union in particular, the conceptual object—far from being replaced by the idea—actually provided a path to return meaning, community, and agency to the practice of art. Creative focus on material objects allowed unofficial artists in the late Soviet Union to move beyond modernist ideas of artistic autonomy and nonconformist spirituality to a more broadly accessible, collaborative model of art situated in continual practice. In one of the many underappreciated aspects of Moscow conceptualism, a select group of artists used materiality and the concrete object as a postmodern springboard to return both sense and sensibility to unofficial art, moving as they did from a notion of “art as idea” to the related and equally revolutionary notion of “art as communication, dialogue, and embodied meaning”.³ Acknowledgement of the importance of the concrete object to these artists and of their role in the development of Moscow conceptualism is essential for a fuller understanding of both the movement as a whole and its relevance to developments in global conceptualism.

Descriptions of Moscow conceptualism have generally focused on disembodied and dematerialized artworks, particularly the ephemeral and esoteric works of Ilya Kabakov, Andrei Monastyrski's Collective Actions, and others, to the exclusion of more direct, materially grounded, and collaborative conceptual work. Primed to see the effects of Soviet "logocentrism" everywhere, observers have frequently treated the substitution of text for object as a near inevitability in the post-Stalin era, explaining it as an expected outcome of the "hypertrophy of the text" that supposedly accompanied the "atrophy of the image" (Debray 2007, p. 12) throughout the post-war Soviet bloc.⁴ Boris Groys's assertion that "Soviet culture had always been conceptual . . . in its entirety" both typifies and strives to justify such an approach (Groys 2008, p. 31).⁵ Contending that conceptualism in Russia was characterized by the "deliberate presentation of ideas denuded of their material referent", Mikhail Epstein argues that "pointing to [such] emptiness" is what distinguishes conceptualism in Russia from its Western counterpart (Epstein 1995, p. 35). Leaving minimal traces of its physical existence, such disembodied work is often deliberately detached from its surroundings, unforthcoming or deceptive about its origins, stripped of materiality, and focused on thought and cognition over everyday process and negotiated real-world practice.

Such commentary, although compelling for the work of certain unofficial artists in the Soviet Union, obscures the unexpectedly central role that concrete objects played in the work of other Moscow conceptualists, beginning in the mid-1970s. That is particularly the case for the Nest, an influential group of artists active from 1974 to 1979 largely excluded from the current limited "canon" of Moscow conceptualism.⁶ Nest artists frequently relied on extremely literal, over-realized metaphors in their efforts to expand the possibilities for artistic expression in the late Soviet Union. Such works typically included performative elements that required artists and spectators alike to acknowledge the interplay between rhetorical metaphors and their solid, tangible, often crude material manifestations in the real world. The performative elements of such "embodied" works emphasized the role even uninitiated observers play in making meaning manifest, further opening artistic inquiry to postmodern input from multiple sources. As a result, these concrete objects served as useful tools in liberating unofficial art from the confines of Socialist Realist strictures and nonconformist pieties alike. My closer look here suggests their particular importance in the Moscow conceptualist shift from modernism to postmodernism.

Focus on texture and tactility, or *faktura*, had been central to the Russian avant-garde, and it might be easy to imagine a connection between those early twentieth-century calls for the importance of material culture and the embodied metaphors of these late-Soviet unofficial artists.⁷ But Nest artists Gennady Donskoy, Mikhail Roshal, and Victor Skersis, had relatively little information about the historic avant-garde and scant interest in exploring it. They inherited their understanding of the material object primarily from their teachers Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid⁸ and from their own creative reinterpretation of dilemmas that Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, and other Western artists had left unanswered. In fact, their shared attention to materiality helps distinguish the work of these "analytical conceptualists", including Yuri Albert, Vadim Zakharov, Nadezhda Stolpovskaya, and others, from that of their contemporaries.⁹ Like most people in the late-Soviet unofficial art milieu, these artists, too, had noticed the disjunction between word and image around them: as official Soviet rhetoric grew further and further detached from the world of the signified, the denotative meanings of words had less and less connection to the material world they allegedly described. Kabakov describes the response of artists in his circle to this situation, noting "there was a complete absence of pragmatic subject matter. Any approach to that sphere was understood as painful dissonance" (Kabakov and Epstein 2010, p. 63). Rather than retreating from the world of everyday things and *byt*, as those contemporaries did, however,¹⁰ the Nest and other analytical conceptualists chose to highlight the stubborn literality of the objects around them, insisting on their material existence and their importance to the collectively determined meanings of the metaphors they reified.

Their approach did not include close attention to aesthetic beauty or the physical attributes of objects for “art’s sake”, naturally, but signaled instead these artists’ insistence on the real-world connections of their artistic activity. By fully “realizing” the rhetorical metaphors that surrounded them and reinvesting official and shared language with hard-edged contours, the Nest occasionally bordered on a pleonastic use of language that critics and even some fellow artists dismissed. Curators of the 2005 retrospective exhibit *Accomplices*, for example, called their approach “naively idiotic” (Erofeev et al. 2005, p. 40). Some of the Nest’s own later explanations of their work seem to encourage such an interpretation: Nest artist Roshal, for example, noted the group’s tendency to take the principle of “art as action, action as life and so on” to “the absurd” (Roshal 2008, p. 53). Art historian Octavian Eșanu explains this Nest technique as the artists’ supposed interest in “literal illustration” and dismisses it as “short-lived puns . . . quickly understood” (Eșanu 2013, pp. 98–99). Yet such interpretations miss the point, mistaking extended length, intricate structure, and retention of final artistic control for conceptual depth. As a comment by Gayatri Spivak makes clear, however, the disarming micronarrative is a powerful tool in disrupting power imbalances. Commenting on the need to overcome lingering colonial histories, for example, she argues that “the alternative to Europe’s long story—generally translated ‘great narratives’—is not only short tales (*petits récits*), but tampering with the authority of storylines” (Spivak 1990, p. 228). In the late-Soviet environment also, “short-lived puns . . . quickly understood” were often the best antidote to a totalizing State monologue.

The willful and intentionally comic “misreadings” of language that result from the Nest’s close focus on materiality thus serve a serious purpose: by highlighting the concreteness of such literal meaning, the artists direct viewers’ attention to the necessity of continual interpretation and artistic engagement with the world around them. Analytical conceptualists saw what Yuri Albert calls their “Art of short stories and quick perception”¹¹ as a way to reengage with the contingent meanings of everyday life, establish the validity of their own postmodern investigations into the meaning of art, and encourage others to join them in an unconstrained artistic process open to all. By insisting on the literal meaning of words and opening up the dialogue to others, these artists claim real-world authenticity for their work while rejecting modernist notions of transcendent spirituality and artistic autonomy and keeping it safely grounded in the contingent. The resulting conceits expose the actual dimensions of each figure of speech in order to insist that users of the language comprehend their own interactions with such commonplace metaphors and their real-world implications in context. Their focus on materiality did not preclude disembodied works of art. In fact, these artists created a number of such works themselves, fully embracing the occasional utility of such an approach in their ongoing investigations of the fundamental question “what is art”. It is also worth noting that literalism in the hands of these artists destabilizes meaning as often as it reveals it. But their early emphasis on performing embodied materiality was essential, a needed next step in conceptual art as a whole and crucial to the liberation of the late-Soviet unofficial art world. These artists saw from the beginning that exclusive focus on the disembodied, the spiritual, “art as idea”, or any other single-minded approach to the varied discipline of art would eventually lead to a creative impasse. As we will see, their investigations into object and metaphor in the late-Soviet period expand on lessons from semiotics, Formalism, and conceptual art to argue for a postmodern approach aimed at unscripted experimentation and collaborative investigation into the question of how art is made.

Komar and Melamid had demonstrated that mass-produced texts, like mass-produced artistic reproductions, belonged to everyone in the Soviet ecosystem. Nest artists made that lesson part of their overall project to return meaning, accountability, shared comprehensibility, and delight to the individual utterance, assigning actual weight to language that had otherwise lost its everyday connection to “fragile human existence”.¹² In the Soviet atmosphere of high-flown rhetoric and grandiloquent speechifying, their focus on the humorous and real-world implications of the words and images they used was unexpected

even for those in the unofficial art world. Despite their hatred of empty rhetoric, most unofficial artists in the mid-1970s were committed to an exalted model of artistic endeavor in which the creative individual produced “hermetic” works of such “mystical, irrational, or spiritual” intent that they required the artist’s (or the informed specialist’s) interpretation.¹³ In contradistinction to both official and underground approaches, however, Nest artists imagined assigning real weight to the everyday concepts that had lost their real-world signifiers and become nothing but hot air. Their little-known work *Mevkopizsan* (*Material Equivalent of the Air Fluctuations of Specific Periodicity and the Symbolic Markings Associated with It*) (*Material’nyj Ekvivalent Vosdushnykh Kolebaniy Osoboi Periodichnosti i Znakovoi Simvoliki Assotsirovannoi s Nim*), for example, involved a new periodic table of sorts in which each letter in the Russian alphabet was assigned a specific weight. The letter “A” was equal to 1 g; “ ” 2 g; “B” 3 g, and so on. The “weight” of a specific word—calculated whimsically according to the “fluctuation of air” that accompanies the pronunciation of each phoneme—combined the individual masses of each letter. To make the resulting “material equivalent of [such] air fluctuations” visible and palpable, the artists conceptualized metal cylinders equal to the summary mass of each individual’s name in a strictly personalized construction. Using “scientific” methodology humorously to make a serious point, the resulting cylinders—unfortunately none extant—offered concrete and graphic evidence of the Nest’s new approach to the language of art. Their primary focus with *Mevkopizsan* was to engage others in an individualized and constantly evolving conversation about the continually developing discipline of art. Cleansing humor was an essential part of that.¹⁴ Thus, the artists laughingly promise that others will have the ability “not only to hear their own name, but also to sniff, lick, and do much, much more to it”.¹⁵ The project, amusing and self-affirming, is educational as well. Each creation serves as a realized metaphor, announcing to would-be participants that words—with actual dimensions, specific meaning, and value—need their close attention and care. By interacting physically with embodied written texts, participants learn that they too have artistic agency and can mean what they say. The Nest’s lighthearted and determinedly material touch renders the serious endeavor of returning sense to everyday discussions open to all.

Nest artists continued to focus attention on the physical, concrete, and literal in their path-breaking performance piece *Hatching a Spirit* (*Vysizhivanie dukha*) (Figure 1). The work, exhibited publicly for the first time at the watershed VDNKh exhibit in 1975,¹⁶ played consciously on the amorphous spirituality that characterized much of the Russian avant-garde and late-Soviet unofficial art as well. But the Nest replaced exalted calls for ephemeral spirituality (*dukhovnost’*) with a real egg in an actual nest of leaves and branches that announced the artists’ freedom from both official and disembodied unofficial art and issued a general invitation for others to join them in the generation of embodied artistic meaning. Convinced they were creating “the most radical of events, even compared to things like Chris Burden’s body art”, the Nest envisioned their work as a “re-evaluation of all the principles of art” (Skersis 2014, p. 149).¹⁷ To achieve that goal, the artists made a virtue of collaboration, fully embodying their practice by occupying the nest publicly and cultivating an inclusive model of creation based on co-authorship (*so-avtorstvo*). Each artwork figured as a succinct and negotiated contribution to an ongoing dialogue intended as neither authoritarian nor sectarian but open and democratic.



Figure 1. The Nest. *Hatching a Spirit*. 1975. Installation view. VDNKh exhibit, Moscow. Image courtesy of Victor Skersis. Photograph by Igor Palmin.

Eye-catching, accessible, and fun, the young artists' multi-day, interactive space became a focal point of the exhibit, their open invitation to all who wished to join them in the nest for unscripted artistic performances of their own. Such public displays were so unprecedented that art historian Vitaly Patsyukov considered the coordinates of the nest itself the center of the entire exhibit, arguing that such performative works by the group served to release Russian art from the constraints of "fundamental traditions".¹⁸ Artist Viktor Pivovarov remembers it as "revolutionary in the extreme" (Pivovarov 2014, p. 136). As Daniil Leiderman has argued, certain late-Soviet artists adopted a "strategy of shimmering", or *mertsanie*, as the best way to avoid becoming trapped in any single discourse, avoiding final identification with a single language by "alternately becoming caught up with one and then the other opposing discourse, repeatedly betraying them for one another" (Leiderman 2018, p. 52).¹⁹ The Nest posited a different approach to making art in the real world, largely abandoning the modernist pretense of even temporarily autonomous art to embrace the cacophony of postmodern dialogue. In these public, collaborative, open-ended, performative works, there was no privileged observer to override the actions of the "Other", no "shimmering" authorial persona with a final say over meaning. In fact, *Hatching a Spirit* and other such Nest works demonstrated just the opposite, insisting that we are all in the same boat (or nest), hatched from the same egg, and required to negotiate the contours of our shared language together. The Nest's artistic mission included their investigation of the limits of that common language and repeated attempts to expand on its creative potential, but their rejection of the ephemeral "spirituality" of disembodied artwork in favor of direct engagement with meaning in the real world could not have been more resolute.

For these artists, solidity, literal meaning, and tangibility refocus attention on the possibility—the necessity—of action as the signifier of a concept. The Nest's performative

1975 work *Pump the Red Pump!* (*Kachaite krasnyi nasos!*) invited spectators at VDNKh to choose between two bicycle pumps—a red pump of détente and a black one of international tension—and thus demonstrate their commitment to global dialogue by pumping the red pump “in the name of peace on earth” (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Nest. *Pump the Red Pump!* 1975. Oil on fiberboard, two pumps, 175 cm × 120 cm. Installation view. Image courtesy of Victor Skersis.

In *Thermography of Maxim Gorky*, another tactile work from the same year, participants are jokingly encouraged to imagine the life of the writer, one of the founders of Socialist Realism, by touching a heated metal plate to distinguish warm moments of apparent artistic passion from colder points of his life.²⁰ The work makes graphically clear the liberating effect their focus on materiality had for the Nest (Figure 3). “What’s the point of paint and canvas?” Skersis asks in recalling the group’s creation of the work (Skersis 2008b, p. 11). No longer tied to traditional notions of visual art, the Nest was free to focus on alternative media and genres, particularly on unstructured performative works, that helped transform the unofficial art world.

Their work *Communication Tube* (*Kommunikatsionnaia truba*), which was also first displayed at VDNKh, was equally literal and interactive.²¹ The metal cylinder retained evidence of an official lineage in the bright Soviet-red paint that covered it (Figure 4). Yet because the tube needed at least two individuals in order to “function”, the object theorized not monologic communiqués from on high, but an active process of dialogue and communication between willing individuals. Participants soon learned that the tube was able to facilitate genuine conversation instead of official pronouncements, positing not passive spectators but real contributors capable of constructing their own individual messages. That was the point of the object: the Tube was an “essential item for communication” in this “century of isolation”, allowing participants “to look or listen to one another” (Skersis 1981). The implied interactivity of such works was essential to the Nest. For this group of artists, art no longer involved a staged activity conducted by an artist directing others to an immutable truth, but rather an unstructured, open, and constantly evolving postmodern conversation about art that is itself continually changing. Their works returned the idea of humorous, genuine, pleasurable human communication to art and placed it literally in the hands of individual agents. Skersis describes the process as leading words from the level of “metaphor to the level of concrete expression”, insisting on the notion of a concept that moves from its “overinflated” position in a “hyper-system” to be “transformed into a literality”. We were “struck by that”, Skersis continues, and by the fact that “once you simply take those metaphors literally”, then the ideas and concepts that had “hung over

everything, that explained that was going on” now “turn out to be something different”. According to him, the process changed the constrained Soviet situation completely, making it “comprehensible” and “clear”, and leaving artists free to act.²²



Figure 3. The Nest. *Thermography of Maxim Gorky*. 1975/2004. Metal, heating element. 30 cm × 90 cm × 20 cm (2004).



Figure 4. The Nest. *Communication Tube*. 1975. Galvanized iron, enamel, rubber. 130 cm × 16.5 cm. Installation view. VDNKh exhibit, Moscow. Image courtesy of Victor Skersis. Photograph by Igor Palmin.

Their insistence on employing realized metaphors to reconnect hegemonic ideas from Soviet discourse with their material embodiments in the real world requires the artists to deny, at least temporarily, the existence of such multi-stable images in the world around them. As W. J. T. Mitchell notes, multi-stable images often function to evoke a “threshold experience” in which “time and space, figure and ground, subject and object play an endless game of ‘see-saw’” (Mitchell 1994, p. 46). Arguing that such meta-pictures serve as emblems of “resistance to stable interpretation”, Mitchell contends that multi-stable images are what “allow us to observe observers” (Mitchell 1994, p. 49). Mitchell’s “see-saw” metaphor, however, like Wittgenstein’s famous Duck-Rabbit, moves back and forth between only two possibilities. When Nest artists juxtaposed demonstratively concrete objects to the rhetorical system of over-determined language and images that characterized life in the Soviet Union, they clearly wanted to confront that binary system with tactile evidence of its ideological overreach. In their restless, collaborative explorations of the role of materiality in meaning, however, they also saw the folly of trying to position themselves as supposedly independent observers of that same environment. Rejecting the modernist, either-or dichotomy that would restrict them to a game they no longer wished to play, these artists conceptualized instead a postmodern world of myriad possibilities, each firmly grounded in a decidedly contingent material world.

Such a corrective was particularly needed in the late-Soviet context where, as Piotr Piotrowski points out, the modernist paradigm continued “its programmatic investment in autonomy” long after it was abandoned elsewhere.²³ The Nest was moved by the solidity of all the words they incorporated into their work, and their creations played on this directly, using textual specularly and tactility in a bid to enhance—rather than debase—language’s communicative functions. Their approach was not on language as the “universal expression of the Other”, supposedly “predestined and even imposed from outside” (Bobrinskaya 2012, pp. 190–91). In their work, language hews closer to the “death of the author” that Roland Barthes imagined: “not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes 1977, p. 146). Some of Barthes’s work was undoubtedly familiar to these artists: a translated excerpt from *Writing Degree Zero*, with its discussion of Saussure’s distinction between “langue” (language/*iazuk*) and “parole” (speech/*rech*), and the distinction between the signified (*oznachaemoe*) and the signifier (*oznachaiushchee*), appeared in a 1975 volume published in Moscow, and Skersis remembers that it was of general interest.²⁴ He and his colleagues were struck by the Saussurean notion that meaning was unstable, established in a complicated negotiation process between interlocutors endlessly conducted on the vast territory of shared language. That idea was the fertile ground on which many Nest artworks sprouted, and it served as powerful inspiration for Skersis’s work as a solo artist as well, as these artists pushed the idea of verbal instability and cognitive play to its logical limits.

The Nest’s 1976 work *Iron Curtain* is the most obvious example since it interrogates the predictive power of words and their visual representation (Figure 5). The simplicity, density, and tactility of their “Iron Curtain” seems the literal embodiment of oppressive language, Churchill’s words in the original English appearing to reflect the Nest’s own doubly marginalized position in relation to them. The question of artistic hegemony arises naturally once that abstract concept is made concrete. Yet the Nest’s found object disturbs both sides of the East-West equation, condensing and concentrating the post-war period, offering the phrase and its history for spectator delectation, reinterpretation, and re-use. By rendering the phrase and the concept it represents in concrete form, the artists reveal the ephemeral underpinnings of that tyrannical threat. Their palpable object is real iron, and it rusts. The Iron Curtain works as embodied thought, its tangibility serving to capture the political debate and render those polarities human-size and harmless. It is aimed, then, not at “seizing the apparatus of value-coding” (Spivak 1990, p. 228), but at alerting spectators to the totalitarian project and urging them to evaluate it for themselves. These supposedly silent late-Soviet subalterns are multilingual, their real-world curtain—scavenged from a

Soviet building site—extending the invitation to speak to other citizen-artists. Authority now resides not with the artists—or even the artistic spectator, as we are accustomed to claiming for postmodernism—but with the larger community.



Figure 5. The Nest. *Iron Curtain*. 1976. Iron, oil, 102 × 100. Image courtesy of Victor Skersis.

Less convinced of their complete isolation than their older colleagues, the analytical conceptualists imagined themselves as integral parts of a global conversation about art to which they might contribute directly. With that in mind, the apparent simplicity of their literalism becomes a canny artistic device, as in the Nest's 1977 work *Let's Become One Meter Closer! (Stanem na metr blizhe!)* (Figure 6). That lighthearted work engaged participants on both sides of the artificial boundary separating East and West in the excavation of half a meter of the soil separating them in an attempt to draw people both physically and psychologically closer. This cheerful play with realized metaphor and the artists' relaxed irony toward official rhetoric underlines their ongoing emphasis on concrete and unpretentious communication. In a world grounded in authorized predictability and centralized communication, the direct utterance holds genuine power, as the Nest's work *Art to the Masses (Iskusstvo v massy)* makes clear (Figure 7). Interpreting Lenin's slogan "*Art Belongs to the People*" literally, the artists brashly shared their art directly with the "masses", demonstrating a Soviet banner rewritten as an abstract expressionist slogan on a busy Moscow street in 1978. Their skewed citation of Franz Kline's *Accent Grave* in the work indicates an underlying optimism about the possibility of connection that was missing from most other Moscow conceptualist work.

That creative focus on communication, citation, and shifting signifiers continued to interest these artists once the Nest unraveled in 1979. Skersis plays with denotation and connotation in a number of works from that year that were influenced by Joseph Kosuth, especially Kosuth's classic conceptual piece *One and Three Chairs* from 1965. Kosuth's artwork draws equivalences between the actual chair the artist displayed, a photograph of a chair, and a dictionary description of that named object, and he comments in a 1970 interview that the artwork proved that "formal components weren't important" (Kosuth 1992, p. 225).²⁵ Skersis, noting that he and the other Nest artists considered themselves part of a larger circle that included "Joseph Kosuth, Andy Warhol, Yves Klein, and, of course, the majestic Marcel Duchamp" (Skersis 2008b, p. 15), draws a slightly different conclusion, however. His black-and-white 1979 photographic series featuring two simple wooden vegetable crates testifies to Skersis's fascination with the displacement of objects from one semantic field to another, and the unexpected impact of the series relies almost entirely on the humorous mismatch between the various titles of individual works in the series and the primitive materiality of the stark images depicted there. As Skersis notes, the objects are simple "containers for holding items or storing or moving things around. But as soon as we call them by a different name, they transform into something else completely".²⁶ Although all the works in the series employ the same two rough wooden crates, the changing titles and the crates' relative placement in the photographs occasion the appearance of "meaningful transformations that were not obvious at first".²⁷ Those "meaningful" differences depend precisely on our perception of the incongruity of the rough, late-Soviet, material substrate and its alleged description, an inconsistency further heightened by the cultural differences and political divisions that separated these artists from their colleagues around the world.

The crates—crude, impoverished, authentic, humble, honest—appear as the main protagonists in *You're President. I'm President (Ty President. Ia President)* (Figure 8), *Choo-choo train (Tu-tu-u-u. Poezd)* (Figure 9), *Peekaboo, Sweetie (Ku-ku, Pupsik)*, and others in the series. In *Chair Wrapped in Chairs (Stul zavernutyi stuliami)*, another work from 1979, Skersis again makes a point of materiality by exploring what he calls the "interference" of influence from both Kosuth and Christo (Figure 10).²⁸ The resulting homage emerges as uniquely late-Soviet in its absurd, brutal, inconvenient, laughable (in)consistency. Skersis's 1980 work *Chair. Photograph of a Chair. Definition of a Chair* extended this creative dialogue even further by substituting three blank pieces of paper for Kosuth's original chair, photograph, and definition. By including the work in the first volume of the famous MANI archive Skersis made it generally available to "friends and acquaintances and even strangers" (Danilova and Kuprina-Lyakhovich 2017, p. 236).²⁹ Far from being irrelevant or redundant, the work's material content, visual depiction, and characterization are now essential to the meaning of the collaborative work, contingent on individual contributions and shared interpretation.



Figure 8. Skersis. *You're President. I'm President.* 1979. Wood, metal, black-and-white photograph. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 9. Skersis. *Choo-choo train.* 1979. Wood, metal, black-and-white photograph. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 10. Skersis. *Chair Wrapped in Chairs*. 1979. Wooden chairs, black-and-white photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

At the same time that Skersis was engaged in this extended dialogue with Kosuth, his friend and colleague Yuri Albert was creating a series of textual works to explore related problems of representation and meaning in art. Albert had been interested in work by Art & Language artists since his first encounter with it as a young art student while visiting the studio of Komar and Melamid, and one of his own early works involved a translation of Kosuth's article "Art Instead of Philosophy" into Russian (Figure 11). His interest in materiality and its connection to the artistic process is on full display in his engagement with the Kosuth text, which he presents not as a standard translation from English to Russian but as a poem. Equally unexpected is the fact that Albert bases his interpretation of Kosuth's work on the Onegin sonnet, one of the most demanding and still most recognizable Russian verse forms. Created by Alexander Pushkin for his masterpiece, the "novel in verse" *Eugene Onegin*, the Onegin stanza is uniformly admired by poetry lovers, as is the sparkling original itself, renowned for its wit, multilingual puns, effervescent rhythm and rhyme scheme, and encyclopedic narrative of early nineteenth-century Russian life.

The Onegin stanza is a decidedly unorthodox form to adopt for the first in a series of works Albert dedicated to the "mastery and interpretation of certain positions taken by the avant-garde of the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s".³⁰ His decision to employ the complicated poetic form to explore one of Kosuth's most anti-material pieces, however, is an early example of his committed investment in carefully rendered texts, physical labor, and directly manifested materiality as part of his artistic process. The effort of exploring Kosuth's prose was itself a painstaking and time-consuming process, which he was able to complete only thanks to a collaboration with Nadezhda Stolpovskaya, who remembers devoting months at a time to the unavoidably laborious translation of such works.³¹ Conveying Kosuth's abstract thoughts in a strict rhythm and rhyme scheme in Russian and preparing the complicated typescript required considerable additional time and effort. Yet such meticulous work with material was clearly essential to both artists' understanding of practice, as the other pieces in Albert's series—translations of excerpts from Terry Atkinson, Bernar Venet, and Robert Morris—demonstrate. Each of the other

translations is presented in prose, but they are carefully typed and prepared for exhibition along with the conscientiously prepared, handwritten drafts. Such textured and deeply personal investment in the artistic process results in the artist's intense engagement with his material, almost against common sense and his own anti-material wishes, yet such embodied performance is crucial to his work too. In a pattern that would reoccur repeatedly over his career, Albert chooses to express his conceptual discoveries in carefully rendered, highly individualized, and often deeply inconvenient fashion, as though the meaning of each work depends on his commitment to the assiduous rendering and performance of it.



Figure 11. Albert. *Art Instead of Philosophy*. 1979. Paper. 29.7 cm × 21 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Commentary from the late 1970s by Stolpovskaya makes it obvious that concepts of accessibility and materiality are essential in her richly textured works as well. In unpublished remarks from the time, she offers a clear rejection of the “traditional interpretation of the work of art as devoid of any kind of materiality [or] functional proximity to everyday, utilitarian objects”. In customary understanding, she notes, the supposed autonomous aesthetic artwork “existed as something independent of real measures of time”. Convinced they were creating eternal works of art, artists preferred “durable” (*dolgovechnye*) materials. In such a hierarchy, Stolpovskaya continues, works on paper occupy a special position since they are traditional in form but executed on “short-lived” material more common in everyday life than in the ethereal world of high art. Working against that tradition, however, Stolpovskaya uses the long-established materials of pen and paper to underline their “untraditional” qualities. Insisting that her works not only “can but should be touched”, the artist insists that perception of them, “like perception of any action (*aktsiia*) . . . unfolds over time” with an “active role” played by the spectator. “My works exist in real time and are subject to it”, Stolpovskaya notes. “They yellow and fade. Their edges get torn. They are not ‘unique, unrepeatabe creations.’ Thanks to simple technology, they can be remade. And that copy, like all to follow, will have the same significance as the first”.³² Stolpovskaya’s insistence on the active participation of the spectator is particularly obvious with tactile works such as *A Poem by Boris Pasternak* (*Stikhotvorenie B. Pasternaka*) from 1978–79 (Figure 12), where the meaning of the artwork and the Pasternak poem it references are revealed only when the paper object is removed from its envelope and gradually unfolded.³³



Figure 12. Stolpovskaya. *A Poem of Boris Pasternak*. 1978–79. Gouache and typewritten text on paper. 49.7 cm × 61.8 cm. Installation view. Courtesy of the artist.

By making her work touchable and the artistic act approachable, Stolpovskaya helped to relieve art itself of its pathos, freeing both the activity and the individual from the burdens of mystery and heroics, but nevertheless insisting on the importance of embodied engagement in the processes of the everyday artistic endeavor. This was precisely the intent of Vadim Zakharov's early works, especially his very first artistic endeavor, *An Exchange of Information with the Sun* (*Obmen informatsiei s Solntsem*) from 1978 (Figure 13). The work is elegant in its simplicity: the artist, a nineteen-year-old student in the Moscow Pedagogical Institute at the time, documents his entry into the creative world by firmly impressing his own thumbprint on a small hand mirror before angling the mirror to catch the sun's rays. Like many other early works by Zakharov, the gesture is self-affirming and bold, announcing the artist's arrival on the artistic scene with unalloyed certainty. The brashness of the announcement is tempered, however, by the artist's location in a winter landscape of late-Soviet prefabricated construction, returning Zakharov's interstellar communication to the prosaic earthly environment of Brezhnev's Moscow.



Figure 13. Zakharov. *An Exchange of Information with the Sun*. 1978. Black-and-white photograph. Image courtesy of Vadim Zakharov. Photograph by Yuri Albert.

That same devotion to process, personal investment, and focus on materiality was, in fact, part of Yuri Albert's debut work, *Y. F. Albert gives his entire share of warmth to others* (*Iu. F. Albert vse vydelaemoe im teplo otdaet liudiam*) from 1978 (Figure 14). The text for this early

performance work consisted of the single declarative sentence of the title, printed in black capital letters on a white signboard approximately one foot wide and two feet long. Albert hung the board around his neck and carried it around an artistic gathering at the studio of artist Mikhail Odnorolov while shaking spectators' hands in what he calls an "action" (*aktsiia*) and a "kind of performance" (*kak by performans*). His pointed demonstration of the awkward sign and his embodied gesture of generosity served as the gift to which the sign alludes.³⁴ Tellingly, the artist does not address his "warmth" only to fellow artists at the studio or to that traditional Soviet audience, the folk (*narod*). Just as the Nest did with *Communication Tube*, Albert calibrates his target to a larger and more inclusive audience instead, that of the ubiquitous, democratic, inclusive "people" (*liudi*). Albert's first action thus underlines the parameters of these artists' creative activity: concrete, accessible, direct, and broadly participatory. As with his work *Household Help* (*Pomoshch' po khoziastvu*) from 1979–1981,³⁵ this work also focuses on process, practice, and everyday existence to make its point (Figure 15).

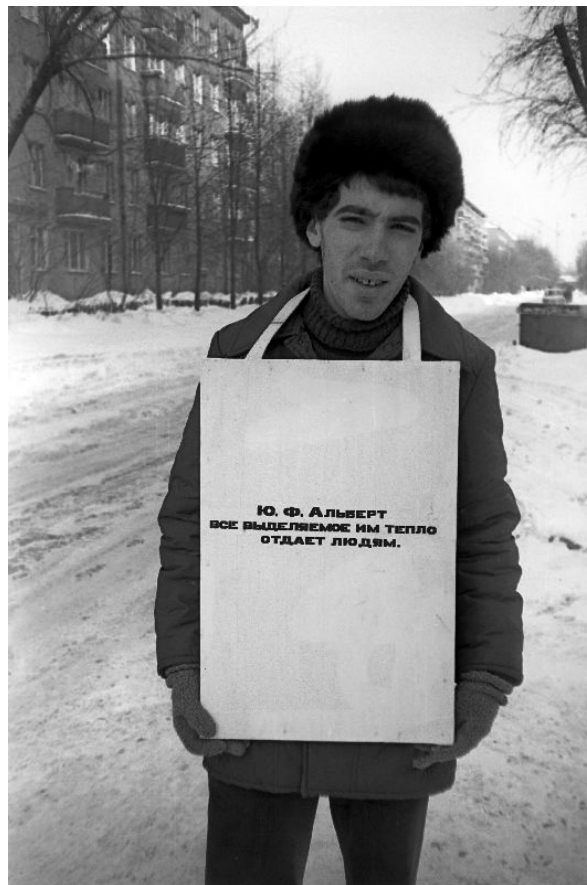


Figure 14. Albert. *Y. F. Albert gives his entire share of warmth to others.* 1978. Black-and-white photograph. 30 cm × 20 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Albert's complicated 1980 reworking of the Kosuth-Skersis dialogue plays with concepts both those artists had invoked. Albert's photographic work *Chair on Clay Legs, Two Chairs* (*V. Skersis*) (*Stul na glinianykh nogakh, Dva stula* [*V. Skersis*]) (Figure 16) from 1980 alludes to and continues the work of both Kosuth and Skersis, making the Biblical metaphor that the gods are fallible a tactile reality. Albert's chair returns the concept of "chair" to its origin as a physical object, as he plays simultaneously with notions of artistic influence, loyalty, and supposed betrayal. The Russian idiom "to sit on two chairs" refers to an individual who tries to hold two mutually contradictory opinions in the hope of benefiting from both positions. Albert's bold adoption of that very position indicates his arrival as an artist, his belief in the modular nature of art investigation, and his acknowledgment

of the role both personal investment and co-authorship play in every work of art. Rather than disguise the appropriated core at the center of all artistic endeavor, Albert highlights it, making his assumption of a metaphorical seat at the artistic table both comfortable and temporary. This explains his dual insistence that the focus of all his work is art alone and his equally hardheaded conviction that the individual work is less important than the connections artists make with other like-minded researchers.



Figure 15. Albert. From the series *Household Help*. 1981. Black-and-white photograph. Image courtesy of Yuri Albert. Photograph by Sven Gundlach.



Figure 16. Albert. *Chair on Clay Legs and Two Chairs (V. Skersis)*. Paper, black-and photographs. 36 cm × 48 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Albert expands on that notion in his open-ended *Autoserries*, an extended set of textual works begun in 1979. The series consists of short, typed statements originally conceived as conceptual works to be signed, framed, and exhibited under glass. Spectators would then “complete” these texts by imagining the artworks the artist describes. Yet these pieces evolved beyond their intended role as classically conceptual texts when they appeared out of context as commentary on work by Albert generally.³⁶ Albert worried that such a shift would deprive them of their status as conceptual works of art in their own right, but it does not, of course: their ability to move seamlessly from work to commentary to work establishes them definitively as postmodern texts. It is precisely such works and Albert’s studied production of them that help locate the artist in the pantheon of modern art. As he notes in the 1981 *Autoserries II*, “Art has no permanent features: its unity and continuous development are the result of the continuity of ties” that unite “traditions, influences, analogies, associations, contrasts, imitations, and so on” (Figure 17). Proceeding with a model of art that emerges from “three-dimensional space”, Albert imagines a map of sorts, on which individual artworks are the constantly shifting points of the compass. These individual works are connected by the “multiplicity of lines” representing that complex of influences, Albert continues, and his goal is to “connect those lines without leaving any [fixed] points” of his own. To attempt that feat, he creates works that incorporate real and immediate yet decidedly temporal gestures. Thus *Autoserries I* imagines an artist who plans to undertake serious research in his works, but “never brings the concept to a conclusion”, and insists that “fundamental to my work is that art interests me greatly” (Figure 18). *Autoserries II* refers pointedly only to Albert’s “latest works”. *Autoserries III* from 1984–1985 (Figure 19) conceptualizes a work that is “not mine” but nevertheless “does not violate the structure called ‘The Art of Y. Albert.’” Such works diverge significantly from the *personazhnost’* that Victor Tupitsyn and others identify as a characteristic of Moscow conceptualism. Tupitsyn argues that “the camouflaging of the authorial ‘I’ became [. . .] rather typical for Moscow communal conceptualism” (Tupitsyn 2009, p. 60), but Albert’s goal is investigation rather than camouflage, and the records he produces of those experiments exist as valid, concrete, material reflections of his continuing artistic evolution.

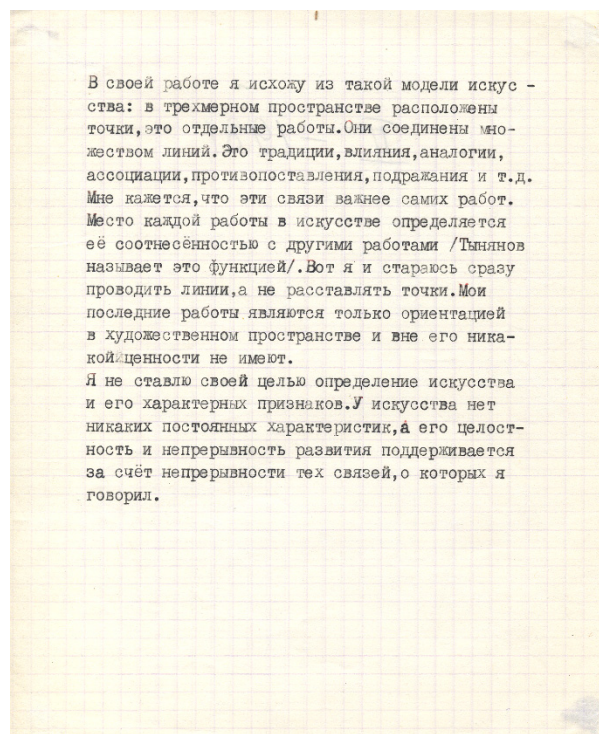


Figure 17. Albert. *Autoserries II*. 1981. Paper. 20.2 cm × 16.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

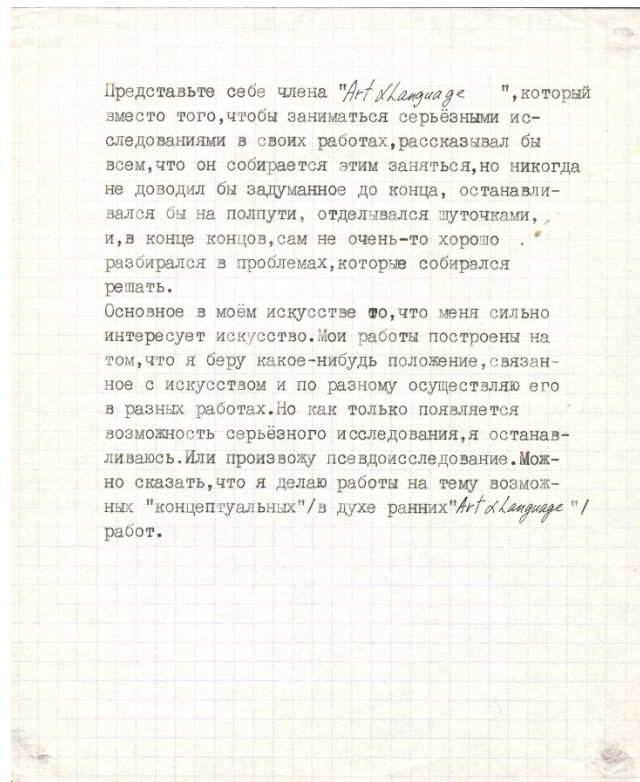


Figure 18. Albert. *Autoserious I*. 1979–1980. Paper. 20.2 cm × 16.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

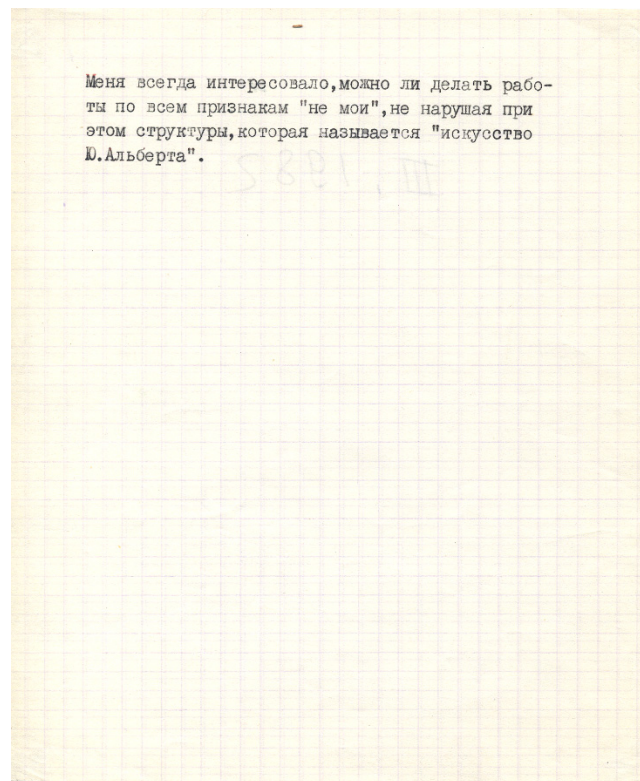


Figure 19. Albert. *Autoserious III*. 1982. Paper. 20.2 cm × 16.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Collaboration and materiality play significant roles in *Eight Assignments for N. Stolpovskaja* (*Vosem' zadaniy N. Stolpovskoi*), a work Albert created in 1980–1981 with the help of Stolpovskaya (Figure 20). Both concepts are complicated here by the fact that this seeming co-authorship

involves a strict division of labor, Albert assuming a dual role as “influence” and “art critic” as he assigns eight creative tasks for Stolpovskaya to complete. In a gesture he categorizes as an attempt to impact her work and determine the boundaries of it by pushing her to overstep those borders, he first presses Stolpovskaya to create an artwork depicting “someone else’s” work (*chuzhaia*). Other set tasks involve requests that Stolpovskaya create works done for “mass production” (*tirazhnaia*), pieces focused individually on painting or sculpture, and works concentrated on experiments in poetry or textual analysis.

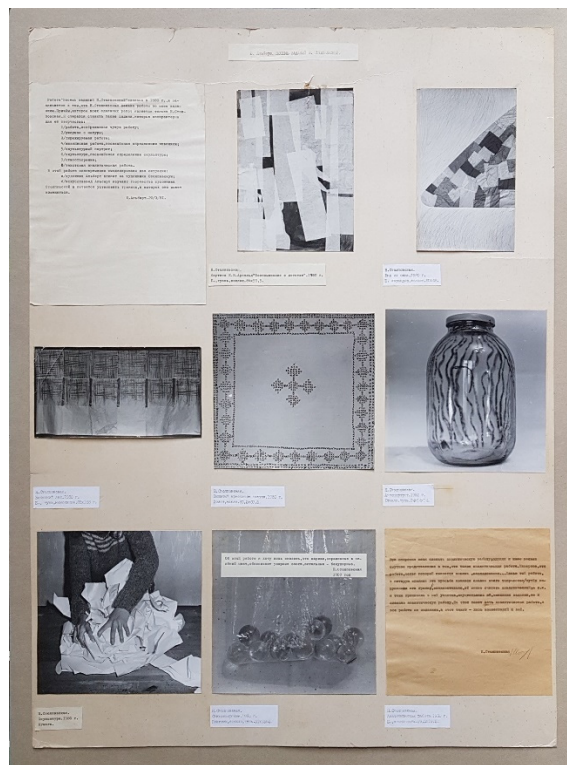


Figure 20. Albert. *Eight Assignments for N. Stolpovskaia*. 1980–1981. Paper, black-and-white photographs. 84.4 cm × 61.5 cm. Courtesy of Yuri Albert.

The experiment seems purposefully intended to encourage Stolpovskaya to violate the boundaries of her creative life, but she succeeds in extending them instead, nowhere more elegantly than in her “painting dedicated to the definition of painting”, *Cross-stitched Headscarf* (*Vyshityi krestikom platok*) from 1980 (Figure 21).

The painting itself, executed in oil on canvas 80 × 80 cm square, manages to contribute to several artistic traditions simultaneously. Most obvious is the role the work seems to adopt as decorative handiwork, like that done for centuries by Russian women. Using a traditional color palette of black and red, Stolpovskaya recreates a cross-stitch pattern classic to embroidery of the region, featuring a cross in the center of the “cloth” that is repeated in a decorative border around the edge of the canvas. Scrupulously reproduced, the traditional pattern uses a feminine vernacular that knowingly references the role of the woman artist and the traditional genres open to her. But Stolpovskaya’s creative use of the vernacular establishes her work comfortably in that tradition but nevertheless overturning it quietly: by using traditional motifs in her “painting to define painting”, Stolpovskaya makes the yawning difference between traditional modes of expression and her own radical reconfiguration of art unmistakable.

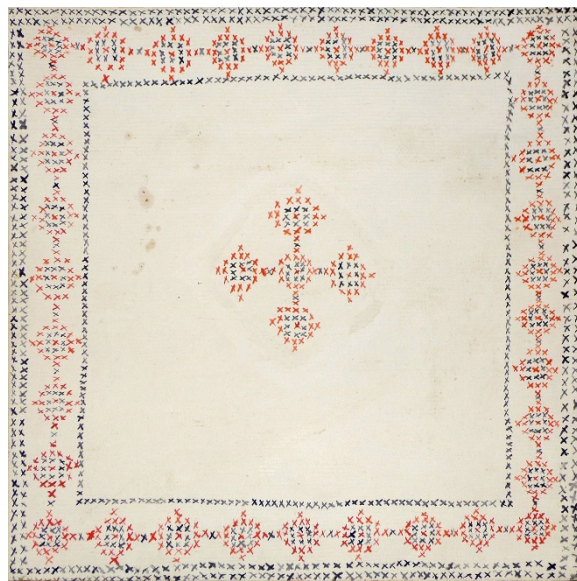


Figure 21. Stolpovskaya. *Cross-stitched Headscarf*. 1980. Canvas, oil. 69.5 cm. × 69.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

As she wields paint to mimic the supposedly more womanly arts, Stolpovskaya establishes both her mastery of the full range of contemporary and traditional media and her simultaneously easy claim of and indifference to solo authorship.³⁷ As such, Stolpovskaya’s painted canvas participates assuredly in the tradition of *trompe l’oeil* as a technique to establish artistic dominance. Stolpovskaya references this mimetic tradition in her “painting”, a perfectly executed swatch of apparent embroidery that is set to fool modern-day Zeuxis and Parrhasius into thinking that she accepts the restrictions set for her and believes in the need to overcome them to prove her worthiness. Her emphatic rejection of both limitations and the need for dominance suggests why Stolpovskaya has chosen a “white square” for her work rather than the rectangular shape typical for these embroidered samplers. The classic *rushnik*, or ritual cloth, would traditionally follow a girl from adolescence and engagement through marriage and final funeral rites. Stolpovskaya’s reinterpretation of the traditional craft suggests her intention to analyze such historical precedents and rework them for a modern context. The work is unquestionably Stolpovskaya’s own, but her deft allusions to both avant-garde innovation and time-honored tradition renders the question of proprietorship, appropriation, even influence *per se* largely irrelevant.

Stolpovskaya’s handling of the assignment to produce a work of poetry results in her equally sure-footed *Poem (Stikhotvorenie)* (Figure 22). Noting later that “with every one of their works”, Albert, Skersis, and Zakharov had “hypothesized an answer to the question ‘What is Art?’”,³⁸ she engages easily with that same inquiry, answering it on her own terms. Her response to Albert’s request is phrased, as always, as an ongoing process that engages spectators and leaves final reactions to them. Thus, for the assignment to produce a work of verse, she creates a collection of small glass globes that comes with instructions: “About this work I want to say only that the globes painted green are stressed syllables, while the unpainted globes are unstressed”. With this small gesture, Stolpovskaya again manages to expand, rather than violate, the boundaries of her own art practice by opening the work of art to spectators for direct tactile, auditory, and intellectual engagement on their own terms.

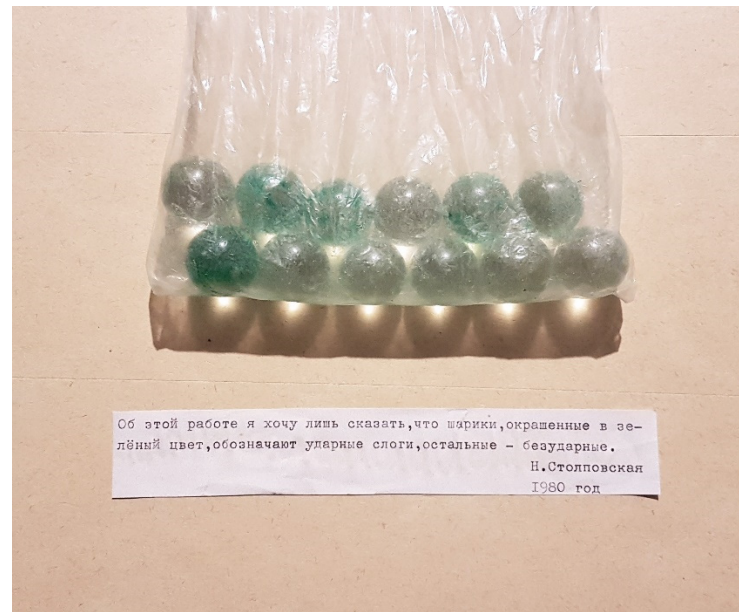


Figure 22. Stolpovskaya. *Poem*. 1980. Plastic, glass, ink. 31 cm × 15 cm × 4 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Charged in the eighth “assignment” to overstep her own approach by creating an “analytical work”, she feigns confusion before announcing that her participation in the project itself is that very investigative process. In *Analytical Work* (*Analiticheskaia rabota* (Figure 23), she thus declares “This text is not the analytical work”, but “all the works themselves”. As she mentions in an interview with Vadim Zakharov, Stolpovskaya notes that “the spectator is very important to me and my works”, including physical contact with the artworks themselves. Noting her interest in work by Walter de Maria, Bruce Nauman, Robert Morris, Richard Serra, and others, she emphasizes the role of the viewer—or reader—of Nauman’s monitors in particular, arguing that “without the spectator, the work doesn’t even exist”. Eschewing any complicated “subtext” to her works, “most likely as a reaction to the Moscow environment”, Stolpovskaya concludes that she considers a work “successful if the structure of the work transmits the structure of the depicted object”. For that, she notes, it is essential for the viewer to “open the work fully, to experience its materiality”.³⁹ That helps explain her focus on the mundane and common, on processes of everyday life accessible to everyone who takes the time to engage with them.

Albert combines a similar interest in materiality and open accessibility in his series *Continuation of Others’ Series* from 1980 and 1981. This exercise again makes a virtue of his devotion to materiality by allowing him to focus on process as he engages stylistically with the work of artists both in the Soviet Union and outside its borders. The series includes works that echo concepts from Joseph Beuys, Carl Andre, and others, documenting, for example, work by Roy Lichtenstein that Albert would develop further at the end of the decade. Early examples of such outreach expanded on work from artists in Albert’s own circle as well, as he reacted to work by Stolpovskaya, Zakharov, and, as we have seen, Skersis. *Glass with Sour Cream* (*N. Stolpovskaya*) (*Stakan so smetanoi [N. Stolpovskaia]*), for example, has Albert engaging with paper and acrylic enamel to create an imagined continuation of distinctive graphic work by Stolpovskaya (Figure 24). Part of the conceptual beauty of this work—and of the series in general—is that spectators of it are unavoidably pressed into service as participants in an extended analysis of the meaning of originality, authorship, and creation. Another reaction to and collaboration with Stolpovskaya involved an efficiently co-authored “work” from 30 December 1981: their signed and dated document hints at a rich and ongoing dialogue to which the artists allude in their otherwise succinct assertion that “this work we made together”. They refuse to belabor the point, however, inserting the signed document into the MANI archive as is, devoid of explanatory material or pictorial embellishment.⁴⁰ Such laconicism focuses attention on the collaborative process

of art for this branch of Moscow conceptualism: by shifting their teamwork to the end of the sentence, where it assumes pride of place as the most important information in the statement, the artists are able to underline their emphasis on artistic practice and shared endeavor.

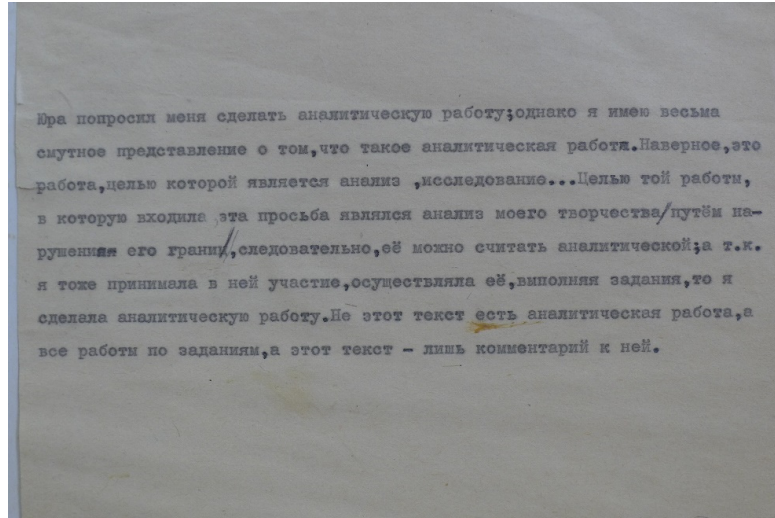


Figure 23. Stolpovskaya. *Analytical work*. 1980. Paper. 19.5 cm × 19.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

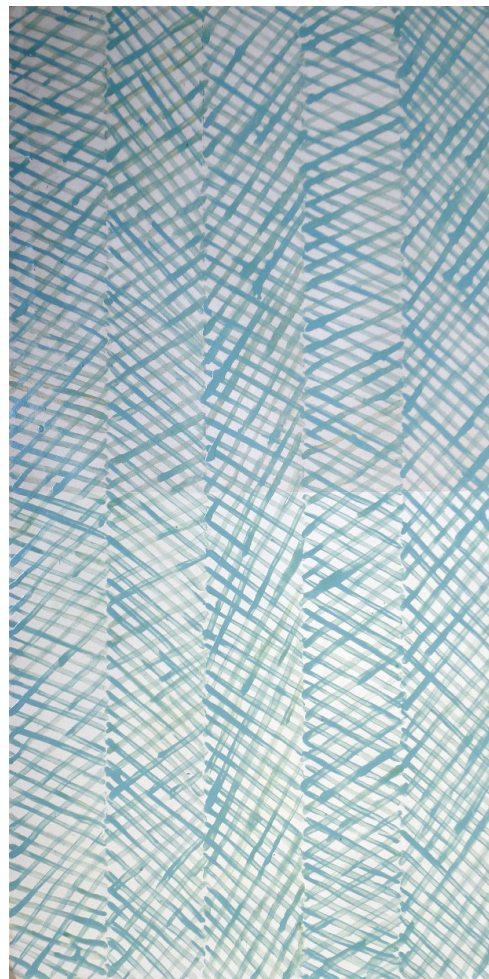


Figure 24. Albert. *Glass with Sour Cream (N. Stolpovskaya)*. 1980. Paper, alkyd enamel. 84 cm × 42 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Albert engages Zakharov directly in a letter from 30 April 1981 in which he requests that Zakharov conceive of, carry out, and then send him a work to continue that artist's work *Stimulations*, itself a profoundly tactile and collaborative series. The typed letter Albert sends to Zakharov documents Albert's request and makes it clear that Albert will include whatever work Zakharov produces into his own series. In anticipation of such co-authorship, Albert continues his own textual explorations of the meaning of art in context by imagining a work of art that would hang "between Nadia Stolpovskaya's *Table Covered with a Tablecloth* and Vadim Zakharov's *Stimulation* series". This, then, is the work that Albert creates by suggestion in his letter to Zakharov (Figure 25). Its exhibition makes it clear that this curated artistic community, ongoing conversation in and about it, and contextualized meaning are essential to the analytical branch of Moscow conceptualism.

Дорогой Вадим!

Последний год я работаю над
серией работ "Продолжение чужих
серий". В неё входят:

1/"Цветные цифры"/Джонс/;

2/"Скульптура из 36 листов бумаги"
/Андре/;

3/"Стакан со сметаной"/Столповская/;

4/"Стул на глиняных ногах" и
"два стула"/Скерсио/;

5/"четыре угла мира"/Бойс/.

Теперь я хочу продолжить твою
серию, посвященную идее стимулирования.
Поэтому прошу тебя придумать и
сделать работу, продолжающую эту
серию. Когда ты сделаешь эту ра-
боту, привли её, пожалуйста мне,
чтобы я мог включить её в свою
серию.

Заранее благодарен,
Н. Альберт / *Albert* 1
30.4.81

Figure 25. Albert. *Letter to V. Zakharov (Continuation of the series "Stimulation")*. 1981. Paper, ink. 20.4 cm × 14.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Like *Continuation of Others' Series*, Albert's numerous anti-self-portraits in his *I Am Not ...* series demonstrate his attention to and engagement in the materiality of the artistic process. Each work carefully appropriates the style, medium, color scheme, and other features of various well-known artists only to insist that Albert is a different creator altogether. The unexpected effect of these partially appropriated material qualities is a paradoxical insistence on the artist's irrefutable individuality. Albert's studied and painstaking performance of the roles he then rejects in the anti-self-portraits serves antithetically to establish him as a significant presence in the art world. The *I am not ...* series carefully analyzes the many techniques and styles Albert might have adopted, but has not, finally, assumed. He measures each role conscientiously, investigating each model fully before moving to another in a process that is intellectual and analytical but, antithetically, also personalized. His considered deployment of a host of artistic models, any one of which is part of Albert's artistic conversation, but none of which can sum up the artist in totality, counterintuitively manages to establish the parameters of his activity as an artist. The seemingly paradoxical conclusion that such borrowed material leads to a profoundly personal statement helps to explain Albert's interest in work by the Russian Formalist writer Yuri Tynianov. Tynianov's conviction that the application of old forms to serve new functions is one of the most productive ways for art to renew itself is directly applicable to Albert and other analytical

conceptualists.⁴¹ For these artists, additional iterations of an idea are acceptable, even welcome, and reengagement or repurposed performance of an earlier work makes perfect artistic sense. As Zakharov notes in a comment from his own collaborative project with Stolpovskaya, “the time for individual struggle [ryvok] has passed . . . Now the artist is allowed to use all methods and means”.⁴²

SZ, a partnership between Skersis and Zakharov, continued these artists’ early focus on real life and its material substrate in a number of works intended to elicit the direct participation of spectators acting independently. The SZ series *Self-Defense Courses Against Things* (*Zashchita i kursy samooborony ot veshchei*) from 1981–1982, for example, engaged spectators in a set of exercises to learn how to defend themselves from objects in the surrounding world (Figure 26). Combining outreach and humor with a clear recognition of the unfriendly reception late-Soviet reality—and even some colleagues—offered their work, the self-defense courses encouraged artists to return to the real world. The works developed in part from Skersis’s earlier investigations of the anthropomorphization of inanimate objects in a series entitled *In Order to Humanize Objects, We Need Birth Control and Punishment Devices*. Since the Soviet system discouraged independent initiatives, including unauthorized courses for self-defense, the SZ series also alluded in passing to the more dangerous aspects of autonomous action in the late-Soviet period. But their attacks on cupboards, doors, tables, and toilets and the clearly facetious “magical spells” (*zaklinaniia*) the artists wrote to arm their fellow citizens against such everyday objects aimed less at political power than at the constraints that restricted artistic innovation.⁴³ In a comment from 1982, Anatoly Zhigalov mentions that exact aspect of SZ work as the group’s most significant contribution, noting “SZ is distinguished by genuine democratism”. Zhigalov particularly notes the “neutrality” of their language and its adequacy to the “environment”, emphasizing that SZ work is accessible to all participants, regardless of their level, professional standing, or previous preparation. Zhigalov identified the Self-Defense Courses, as well as SZ’s 1980 series *Anatomy of Safety Matches* (*Anatomiia spichek*) as part of a necessary “‘kitchen rebellion’ against [overly spiritual] art”.⁴⁴



Figure 26. SZ. *Self-defense Courses Against Things*. 1982. Black-and-white photograph of action. Courtesy of the artists.

Zhigalov’s own work, done with his co-author and wife Natalia Abalakova, included similar moments of concretized meaning. At an AptArt apartment exhibit, their label on the gas stove (*dukhovka*) offered a tangible counterpoint to the exaggerated *dukhovnost’* (spirituality) of older generations, especially when coupled with the neologism—*netlenka*, or “imperishables”—over the kitchen sink, used ironically to refer to both immortal works of art and the detritus that ends up in the sink after a meal. Their 1982 work *Black Square* (*Chernyi kvadrat*)—a large plastic bag filled with carbon paper—provided concrete evidence

of their ambivalence to the avant-garde inheritance and their rejection of the disembodied, ephemeral, and vague (Figure 27).⁴⁵ Their justly famous *The Chair is Not for You. The Chair is for Everyone* (*Stul ne dlia Vas. Stul dlia vsekh*), an actual chair that was also exhibited at AptArt with its title keeping would-be users at bay, created vivid longing for the real-world “chairness” of the actual physical object.



Figure 27. Abalakova and Zhigalov. *Black Square*. 1982. Installation view. AptArt Gallery, Moscow. Courtesy of the artists.

For these analytical conceptualists, anxiety over the frequently predicted “end of art” involved less a sense of personal tragedy than it did for many of their Moscow colleagues or their counterparts in the West. In the late-Soviet unofficial art world, the end of “Real Art” (*nastoiashchee*), to use Albert’s terminology, came with a realization that the artist was just one voice among many clamoring for attention; paint and canvas was just one medium available for authentic artistic expression. Thus, chairs, bags, bodies, and other such objects came to play an increasingly important role in their embodied art, linking it to both a nonconformist past and the performative future of Russian actionism. Although Albert’s repeated reference to their current relegation to the category of merely “contemporary art” suggests lingering regret over that state of affairs, these artists embraced their position in the world of materiality and concrete objects in place of an exalted imaginary status apart from everyday existence. Commentators have described the rough, uneven, often unfinished physical nature of these and other works of Moscow conceptualism as an effect of, variously, Soviet “poverty”, the artists’ preferred focus on the ephemeral, or a reflection of their naïve sincerity. At least for this branch of conceptualists, however, the emphasis on tangibility and substance refocused attention on situational, real-time, embodied everyday meaning. By unwrapping certain key metaphors completely, mapping them fully onto the domain of quotidian life, Nest artists and their colleagues succeeded in making language solid and real. By doing so, they were able to direct attention to the compelling texture of art at our very fingertips. Some half a century on from the emergence of Moscow conceptualism and the (re)appearance of Russian performative art, it is time to expand our understanding of the movement as a whole to include such works. These artists and their concrete objects serve as particularly vivid counterexamples to the notion that conceptual art relied solely on the dematerialized, disembodied idea. As the 1980 work *Here! (Vot!)*, from SZ’s graffiti series *Inscriptions (Nadpisi)* (Figure 28) reminds us: art is continually right before us, concrete and real. All we have to do is notice it.



Figure 28. SZ. *Here!* From the Inscriptions (*Nadpisi*) series, 1980. Black-and-white photograph. 18.2 cm × 11.8 cm. Courtesy of the artists.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ The notion of the “dematerialization of art” was central to Lippard and Chandler (1968) and Lippard (1973).
- ² See Jane A. Sharp’s argument for moving beyond explanations about dematerialization in order to include “examples of object-based conceptual practices” and “recognize the complexity of unofficial art” in the late Soviet Union (Sharp 2016, p. 11).
- ³ Berger points out that Lippard and Chandler described both “art as idea” and “art as action” in terms of a departure from materiality (Berger 2019, p. 15), though, as we will see, some late-Soviet conceptualists used materiality itself as a path to communication and embodied action.
- ⁴ References to Russian and/or Soviet logocentrism litter both scholarly and journalistic discussions of the last several decades, although the implied meaning of the term can vary widely from speaker to speaker. In his study of late-Soviet materiality, Alexey Golubev calls logocentrism the “general modus vivendi” of scholarship on Soviet selfhood and subjectivity (Golubev 2020, p. 12).
- ⁵ Groys’s influential approach to the subject has evolved considerably over the years, ranging from an early description of a heterogeneous group of “romantic” artists and poets in the late 1970s to later claims for conceptualism as a “coherent, relatively clearly defined” art movement creating works for an insular “micro-public” unified across generations by the “systematic approach” and organizational efforts of Monastyrski (Groys 2008, pp. 29, 33).
- ⁶ See Schellens (2021) for an exhaustive treatment of the unusual—and still evolving—transnational reception history of Moscow conceptualism.
- ⁷ For a compelling discussion of the centrality of *faktura* to the turn-of-the-century avant-garde, see Gough (1999). As Christina Kiaer notes in her study of the importance of material objects to Vladimir Tatlin, Boris Arvatov, and others, the avant-garde hoped that close attention to socialist materiality would make the everyday citizen “critical and conscious” (Kiaer 2005, p.68).
- ⁸ Ksenya Gurshtein discusses the “utility of literalizing metaphors” in Komar and Melamid’s work in Gurshtein (2011, p. 220), and Backstein (1998, p. 145) refers to embodied performative experiments by Komar and Melamid as “a special chapter in the history of Russian body art”. Svetlana Boym points out that the “avant-garde was not part of the museum culture” and “had no official museatic sacrality” (Boym 2010, p. 71). Many late-Soviet artists familiar with the early avant-garde also believed there were “no figures more adversarial than Malevich, Khlebnikov, and other modernists of the beginning of the century” (Epstein 1995, p. 42).

- 9 Skersis describes an “analytical branch” of Moscow conceptualism headed by Komar and Melamid in contrast to “literary” and “deductive” branches headed by Kabakov and Monastyrski respectively in Skersis (2010, pp. 250–51). See Nicholas (2022) for a fuller discussion of the Nest’s underappreciated importance to late-Soviet unofficial art.
- 10 The Russian word used to describe everyday life, *byt*, often carries the markedly negative connotation of mindless, enervating routine. As a result, Svetlana Boym claims that an “anti-byt discourse” is “at the core of many Russian and Soviet self-definitions” (Boym 1994, p. 31).
- 11 Yuri Albert distinguishes between different branches of Moscow conceptualism by identifying the “Art of long stories and slow perception” typical of Monastyrski and others in contrast to the “Art of short stories and quick perception” of his own and others’ work (Albert 2008, p. 21). In a 2020 interview, Albert contended that the boundaries for the branches “frequently pass not just through artists, but through individual works” (my unpublished interview with Albert on 23 February 2020).
- 12 The phrase is Svetlana Boym’s in her study of the “battles with *byt*” that preoccupied Russian intellectuals and political leaders throughout much of the nineteenth century (Boym 1994, p. 31).
- 13 This comes from a proposed list of features common to Russian modernist culture as a whole in Wachtel and Vinitsky (2009, p. 158). Works in Hardiman and Kozicharow (2017) treat the subject as it relates to individual Russian and Soviet artists.
- 14 Yelena Kalinsky describes the appearance of supposedly “senseless laughter” as a marker that alienated older unofficial artists from a “new-wave” generation they felt “no longer respected the aesthetic as an autonomous sphere with important spiritual/metaphysical potential” (Kalinsky 2013, p. 65).
- 15 The 1975 work is described in Skersis (1981). According to that document, *Mevkopisan* was originally created by Skersis and Donskoy before being incorporated into Nest activities.
- 16 The historic 1975 exhibit at Moscow’s premier exhibition space, VDNKh, followed the infamous “Bulldozer” show of the previous year. Both are described in detail in Talochkin and Alpatova (1991, especially pp. 211–17, 240–44). The nest itself, so memorable it became synonymous with the artists’ group as a whole, is listed as both *Hatch Eggs!* (*Vysizhivaite iatsa!*) and *Hatching a Spirit* (*Vysizhivanie dukha*) in Donskoy et al. (2008, p. 164). According to Skersis, the second title was the final variant, and that is how it appears in Skersis (1981). Skersis is the only member of the Nest still actively engaged in making art. Roshal died in 2007 while helping to compile the catalog for a 2008 retrospective Nest exhibit and Donskoy withdrew from the art world decades ago.
- 17 Skersis’s reference to Chris Burden, whose infamous 1971 work *Shoot* involved the artist’s being wounded with a weapon, suggests again the Nest’s wholehearted commitment to materiality and literal embodiment.
- 18 Patsyukov’s comments come from an interview with critic Victor Misiano (2006, p. 283).
- 19 A definition for “shimmering” can be found under the entry for *mertsatel’nost’* (*mertsanie*) in Monastyrski (1999, pp. 58–59).
- 20 The original work, no longer extant, was recreated for the 2008 Nest retrospective show at Moscow’s National Centre for Contemporary Arts.
- 21 According to Skersis, the tube was created in 1974, shortly before Roshal officially joined the other two artists, though it was exhibited at VDNKh as a joint project (my interview with Victor Skersis, 6 June 2014).
- 22 This description comes from my unpublished interview with Skersis on 20 March 2020.
- 23 Piotrowski argues that the “neo-avantgarde” in the West “wanted to be critical and it directed its criticism mainly against the modernist paradigm” whereas artists in the East “often discarded this critical edge and did not appear to provide a complete alternative to modernism” (Piotrowski 2012, p. 84). This presents a distinct contrast to modernism’s supposed “nervous breakdown” in the West. See Tony Godfrey’s related comment that conceptual art in the West “reached both its apogee and its crisis” simultaneously (Godfrey 1998, p. 6).
- 24 See Barthes (1975) for the excerpt. Marginal marks in Skersis’s copy of the volume suggests that he was most engaged with the translations of works by Barthes, Jakobson, Jan Murkařovský, and Tzvetan Todorov.
- 25 See Berger (2019, pp. 18, 21) for fascinating evidence that Kosuth understood materiality as both “hopelessly real” and “irrelevant”.
- 26 My conversation with the artist, 6 August 2020.
- 27 My unpublished interview with the artist, 27 July 2020.
- 28 Skersis describes an “interferential model” in Skersis (2008a, especially p. 15).
- 29 See Danilova and Kuprina-Lyakhovich (2017) for an introduction to the archive, which was the result of an unofficial initiative in the early 1980s.
- 30 This comes from Albert’s introduction to *Art Instead of Philosophy* (*Iskusstvo vmesto filosofii*), which can be read along with the complete translation in Albert and Degot (2015, pp. 257–61).
- 31 Stolpovskaya was an essential source of information for Albert in his work on the poetic rendition of Kosuth’s article. Her knowledge of English allowed her to translate a number of such documents from Western journals and art histories. In an unpublished interview with me on 26 February 2020, she recalled making five copies of each samizdat document to share with interested artists and remembered receiving Ursula Meyer’s volume *Conceptual Art* as a gift from Komar and Melamid when those artists departed for the West at the end of the 1970s. See Bailey (2022) for a discussion of the role of translations in

interactions between Moscow conceptualism and American artists, including the “altered materiality” that she argues is crucial to understanding the reception of Western conceptual art by Moscow conceptualists.

- 32 Stolpovskaya, unpublished comment from the artist’s personal archives. She cites Walter de Maria, Michael Heizer, and Richard Serra as artists whose works take place “in time” and with the active participation of the spectator. My thanks to Stolpovskaya and Albert for sharing these and other materials from their archives with me. Stolpovskaya’s interest in the passage of time and the insistence of the Nest, SZ, and other artists on real-time communication in art contradict Mikhail Epstein’s argument that “the flow of time stops and categories of space become primary” in Russian postmodernism (Epstein 1995, p. 38).
- 33 Archival photographs of “A Poem by Boris Pasternak” are included in MANI volume 1, envelope #20, https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/islandora/object/samizdat%3AMANI_1_0204 (last accessed 14 August 2022).
- 34 The performance took place on 29 September 1978 at Odnoralov’s studio where spectators had gathered for an event organized by the Nest. Albert’s performance involved him shaking other attendees’ hands: the “transfer of warmth took place through the handshake” (personal communication to the author, 15 October 2010).
- 35 In an email communication to me from 23 June 2016, Albert noted that *Household Help* is “almost a diptych” to the earlier performance piece.
- 36 See, for example, Albert (1989, p. 44), where *Autoserie I* and *Autoserie II* were included as general commentary on Albert’s artistic activity.
- 37 In an unpublished interview with me on 26 February 2020, Stolpovskaya contended that her generation was the first post-Stalinist generation to be subjected to gender stereotyping in the schools where girls were assigned to study home economics while boys took shop classes. She recalls her own desire at the time to work with wood (*strogat’*) instead of taking sewing lessons.
- 38 This comment is from my unpublished interview with Stolpovskaya on 26 February 2020.
- 39 These comments by Stolpovskaya are from an interview with Albert and Stolpovskaia in 1982 that Zakharov conducted as part of a series of such conversations he and Georgy Kiesewalter had with artists in their studios that year. Several such discussions are included in Tupitsyn et al. (2017), though not the one with Stolpovskaya. My thanks to Zakharov for sharing these archival materials with me.
- 40 See their declaration “Etu rabotu my sdelali vmeste” in the MANI collection for Albert-Stolpovskaya, MANI volume 3, envelope #2, https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/islandora/object/samizdat%3AMANI_3 (last accessed 14 August 2022).
- 41 Tynianov’s early conviction that parody was not (or, at least, not only) a comic genre is equally useful in understanding their work, especially notions of “self-irony” in the work of Komar and Melamid. Hutcheon (1985, p. 44). notes similarly that parody always includes the norm within itself, ensuring that “any real attack [on on the parodied form] would be self-destructive”. See Nicholas (2022) for more on humor and parody in this branch of Moscow conceptualism.
- 42 This remark is part of Zakharov’s extended comments on their collaboration, available in MANI volume 3, envelope #27, https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/islandora/object/samizdat%3AMANI_3_0325 (last accessed 14 August 2022).
- 43 SZ included the spells in MANI volume 3, envelope #25, https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/islandora/object/samizdat%3AMANI_3_0325 (last accessed 14 August 2022). Those pages are marked prominently with a SZ “trademark” in another example of the “interferential” clash of systems that Skersis argues is the most dynamic (Skersis 2008a).
- 44 Zhigalov’s comment was part of a questionnaire about SZ that Zakharov asked his fellow artists to fill out in 1982; I am grateful to Zakharov for sharing these archival materials with me. Monastyrski describes a version of the *Self-Defense Courses* re-enacted in his apartment as part of a personal attack on himself and Kabakov, casting the entire series as a conflict between Duchamp, represented by the toilet bowl Zakharov attacked, and Kosuth, supposedly present in the chair Zakharov used as a weapon. Although Monastyrski initially seems to cast himself and Kabakov in the role of Duchamp, allegedly in conflict with Zakharov’s “Kosuth”, he argues in the same article that interest in Kosuth and his text actually united the disparate branches of Moscow conceptualism (Monastyrski 2006).
- 45 Abalakova and Zhigalov (1998, p. 125). Zhigalov’s further engagement with Malevich in a 1981 series, *Investigating the Square (Issledovanie kvadrata)*, can be seen in Abalakova and Zhigalov (1998, pp. 82–83). Abalakova remembers with exasperation an art historian from the West urging Moscow artists in 1988 “not to put out Malevich’s torch”, as though Suprematism and Constructivism were the only useable traditions for younger Russian artists (Abalakova 2003). In a later conversation with Liia Adashevskaja, Abalakova identifies the critic as Germano Celant (Adashevskaja 2012).

References

- Abalakova, Natalia. 2003. *Iskusstvo Prinadlezhit Narodu*. *Khudozhestvennyi Zhurnal*, no. 51–52. Available online: <https://moscowartmagazine.com/issue/57/article/1141> (accessed on 16 August 2022).
- Abalakova, Natalia, and Anatoly Zhigalov. 1998. *TOTART: Russkaia Ruletka*. Moscow: Ad Marginem.
- Adashevskaja, Liia. 2012. *Drugie Moskovskogo Kontseptualizma*. *Dialog Iskusstva*, no. 2. Available online: <http://di.mmoma.ru/news?mid=1706&id=584> (accessed on 13 August 2022).
- Albert, Yuri. 1989. Yuri Albert. In *10 + 10: Contemporary Soviet and American Painters*. New York and Leningrad: Harry N. Abrams and Aurora Publishers, pp. 44–47.

- Albert, Yuri. 2008. Kommentarii. In *Donskoi, Roshal', Skersis. Gnezdo/The Nest*. Moscow: National Centre for Contemporary Arts.
- Albert, Yuri, and Ekaterina Degot. 2015. *Chto etim khotel skazat' khudozhnik?* Moscow: Moscow Museum of Modern Art.
- Backstein, Joseph. 1998. Body Art in Russia. In *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present*. Curated by Zdenka Badinovac. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 145–55.
- Bailey, Julia Tatiana. 2022. Moscow Conceptualism and the (Mis)Translation of American Art. *Art in Translation*. [CrossRef]
- Barthes, Roland. 1975. Osnovy semiologii. In *Strukturalizm: "za" i "protiv"*. *Sbornik statei*. Edited by E. Ia. Basin and M. Ia. Poliakov. Moscow: Progress Publishers, pp. 114–63.
- Barthes, Roland. 1977. The Death of the Author. In *Roland Barthes. Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Fontana Press, pp. 142–48.
- Berger, Christian. 2019. Wholly Obsolete or Always a Possibility? Past and Present Trajectories of a “Dematerialization” of Art. In *Conceptualism and Materiality: Matters of Art and Politics*. Edited by Christian Berger. Leiden: Brill, pp. 15–53.
- Bobrinskaya, Ekaterina. 2012. *Chuzhie? Neofitsial'noe Iskusstvo: Mify, Strategii, Kontseptsii*. Moscow: Sh. P. Breis.
- Boym, Svetlana. 1994. *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Boym, Svetlana. 2010. Ruins of the Avant-Garde: From Tatlin's Tower to Paper Architecture. In *Ruins of Modernity*. Edited by Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Danilova, Alexandra, and Elena Kuprina-Lyakhovich. 2017. MANI: An Experiment in Modeling Cultural Space. In *Anti-Shows: APTART 1982–84*. Edited by Margarita Tupitsyn, Victor Tupitsyn and David Morris. Translated by Mikhail Grachev. Exhibition Histories. London: Afterall Books and the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, pp. 232–45.
- Debray, Régis. 2007. Socialism: A Life-Cycle. *New Left Review* 46: 5–28.
- Donskoy, Gennady, Mikhail Roshal, and Victor Skersis. 2008. *Gnezdo/The Nest*. Edited by Mikhail Roshal and Olga Kholmogorova. Moscow: National Centre for Contemporary Arts.
- Epstein, Mikhail. 1995. The Origins and Meaning of Russian Postmodernism. In *Re-Entering the Sign: Articulating New Russian Culture*. Edited by Ellen E. Berry and Anesa Miller-Pogacar. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 25–47.
- Erofeev, Andrei, Yulia Aksenova, Tatiana Volkova, Anna Dikovich, Sergei Yepikhin, Elena Zaitseva, and Natalya Sidorova, eds. 2005. *Soobshchniki: Kollektivnye i Interaktivnye Proizvedeniia v Russkom Iskusstve, 1960x-2000-x gg.* 29 January–6 March 2005, Exhibition Catalog. Moscow: State Tretyakov Gallery, Krymsky Val.
- Eşanu, Octavian. 2013. *Transition in Post-Soviet Art: The Collective Actions Group Before and After 1989*. Foreword by Boris Groys. Budapest and New York: Central European University Press.
- Godfrey, Tony. 1998. *Conceptual Art*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Golubev, Alexey. 2020. *The Things of Life: Materiality in Late Soviet Russia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gough, Maria. 1999. Faktura: The Making of the Russian Avant-Garde. *Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics* 36: 32–59. [CrossRef]
- Groys, Boris. 2008. Communist Conceptual Art. In *Total Enlightenment: Conceptual Art in Moscow, 1960–1990*. Schirm Kunsthalle Frankfurt and Fundacion Juan March, Madrid. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, pp. 28–34.
- Gurshteyn, Ksenya. 2011. *TransStates: Conceptual Art in Eastern Europe and the Limits of Utopia*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- Hardiman, Louise, and Nicola Kozicharov, eds. 2017. *Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art: New Perspectives*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1985. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. New York and London: Methuen.
- Kabakov, Ilya, and Mikhail Epstein. 2010. *Katalog*. Vologda: Biblioteka Moskovskogo Kontseptualizma Germana Titova.
- Kalinsky, Yelena. 2013. Useless Actions and Senseless Laughter: On Moscow Conceptualist Art and Politics. *Russian Literature* 74: 63–98. [CrossRef]
- Kiaer, Christina. 2005. *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kosuth, Joseph. 1992. Art as Idea as Idea. In *Jeanne Siegel. Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Leiderman, Daniil. 2018. The Strategy of Shimmering in Moscow Conceptualism. *Russian Literature* 96–98: 51–76. [CrossRef]
- Lippard, Lucy R. 1973. *Six Years. The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. New York: Praeger.
- Lippard, Lucy R., and John Chandler. 1968. The Dematerialization of Art. *Art International* 12: 31–36.
- Misiano, Victor. 2006. Moscow Recollections. In *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*. Edited by IRWIN. An Afterall Book, Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design. London: University of the Arts.
- Mitchell, W. T. J. 1994. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Monastyrski, Andrei. 2006. Kak Vadim Zakharov Koshutom Dushana razbil. In *Vadim Zakharov. 25 let na odnoi Stranitse*. Moscow: Tretyakov State Gallery, Stella Art Gallery, “Interros” Bookpublishing Program, pp. 21–23.
- Nicholas, Mary A. 2022. Reassessing Moscow Conceptualism: The View from the Nest. *Art Margins* 11: 171–200. [CrossRef]
- Piotrowski, Piotr. 2012. *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*. Translated by Anna Brzyski. London: Reaktion Books.
- Pivovarov, Viktor. 2014. Interv'iu. In *Yuri Albert, Moskovskii kontseptualizm. Nachalo*. Edited by Yuri Albert. 28 September–2 December 2012, Exhibition Catalog. Nizhnyi Novgorod: Arsenal, pp. 131–41.
- Roshal, Mikhail. 2008. Zhizn' byla sploshnym artifaktom. In *Donskoi, Roshal, Skersis. Gnezdo/The Nest*. Edited by Mikhail Roshal and Olga Kholmogorova. Moscow: National Centre for Contemporary Arts, pp. 44–59.
- Schellens, Dorine. 2021. *Kanonbildung im Transkulturellen Netzwerk: Die Rezeptionsgeschichte des Moskauer KONZEPTUALISMUS aus Deutsch-Russischer Sicht*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

- Sharp, Jane A. 2016. Introduction. In *Thinking Pictures: The Visual Field of Moscow Conceptualism*. Edited by Jane A. Sharp. 6 September–31 December 2016, Exhibition Catalog. New Brunswick: Zimmerli Art Museum, pp. 8–17.
- Skersis, Victor. 1981. Osnovnye Proizvedeniia. *MANI (Moskovskii Arkhiv Novogo Iskusstva)*. vol. 3. Envelope #24. Available online: https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/islandora/object/samizdat%3AMANI_3_0319 (accessed on 12 August 2022).
- Skersis, Victor. 2008a. *Aspekty Metaiskusstva*. Moscow: Proekt Fabrika and Ad Marginem Publishing.
- Skersis, Victor. 2008b. Vmesto predisloviia. In *Donskoi, Roshal, Skersis. Gnezdo/The Nest*. Edited by Mikhail Roshal and Olga Kholmogorova. Moscow: National Centre for Contemporary Arts, pp. 11–20.
- Skersis, Victor. 2010. Semidesiatye: Sem'-nol' v nashu pol'zu. In *Eti Strannye Semidesiatye, ili Poteria Nevinnosti: Esse, Interv'iu, Vospominaniia*. Edited by Georgii Kizeval'ter. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, pp. 247–53.
- Skersis, Victor. 2014. Interv'iu. In *Moskovskii kontseptualizm. Nachalo*. Edited by Yuri Albert. 28 September–2 December 2012, Exhibition Catalog. Nizhnyi Novgorod: Arsenal, pp. 148–54.
- Slovar' Terminov Moskovskoi Kontseptual'noi Shkoly*. 1999. Monastyrski, Andrei, ed. Moscow: Ad Marginem.
- Spivak, Gayatri. 1990. Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value. In *Literary Theory Today*. Edited by Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan. London: Polity Press, pp. 219–44.
- Talochkin, Leonid, and Irina Alpatova, eds. 1991. *"Drugoe iskusstvo", Moskva, 1956–76: K khronike khudozhestvennoi zhizni*. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Galereia "Moskovskaia Kolleksiia". Saint Petersburg: Interbuk.
- Tupitsyn, Margarita, David Morris, and Victor Tupitsyn. 2017. *Anti-Shows: APTART 1982–84. Exhibition Histories*. London: Afterall Books and the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College.
- Tupitsyn, Victor. 2009. *The Museological Unconscious: Communal (Post)Modernism in Russia*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Wachtel, Andrew Baruch, and Ilya Vinitsky. 2009. Life as Theatre: Russian Modernism. In *Russian Literature*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Article

The Visuality of Hortus Mirabilis in Krystyna Miłobędzka's Poetry—A Study of Selected Examples

Dorota Walczak-Delanois 

Faculty of Letters, Translation and Communication, Department of Languages and Letters, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1050 Bruxelles, Belgium; Dorota.Walczak@ulb.be

Abstract: Krystyna Miłobędzka (born 1932) is one of the most interesting and unique phenomena of the Polish poetry scene of the 20th and 21st centuries. Two characteristics of her poetry, the visual character of her many poems and her preoccupation with the concept of the garden-world, are worth a closer look. Miłobędzka's poetry refers to the topoï of the garden-world in single poems and cycles of poetic texts. Her hortus mirabilis, inserts itself into the sphere of the metaphysical reflection of nature, giving Miłobędzka's poetry a specific dynamic in which the "I"—the gardener—has a significant role as an observer, and as a creator of entities. The activity of looking, which happens, in fact, in all types of verbs and aspects, is in this specific sphere (look, watch, see), fundamental to defining oneself in the world and the world's relationship to oneself. In this perspective, the image of the garden from childhood, is confronted by a necessary new visualization. The temporal aspect of the garden is at the center of existence, in the cyclical return of nature's laws of rebirth and death, which are relevant to the personal, singular perspective of the end in many of Miłobędzka's volumes. In *Anaglify* (Anaglyphs), some poems particularly fit the issue of visuality in poetry, not only at the conceptual level, the place granted to observation, the poet-particular observer, but the poem itself. They are conceived as graphic and pictorial realizations. Poems from the volume *dwanaście wierszy w kolorze* (twelve poems in color) or *wszystkowiedzce* (omnipoems) are special cases of these. The selected words are conceived in color, and their arrangement on the space of the page has meaning. The parallel between looking and writing, which Miłobędzka consistently uses in her writing method and poetically admits, is also very important. Although her poetic diction alludes to historical avant-garde and linguistic poetry achievements, her lyrical savoir-faire is characterized by a certain new minimalist construction and a separate, recognizable style. Miłobędzka's innovativeness lies in combining seemingly distant and sometimes poetically opposite categories: full, ambiguous image-in-poem and asceticism by means of expression, such as a minimal number of words. Her poetry is deeply rooted in perceiving, seeing, watching, and contemplating the world—faithful to its physicality but also open to the most essential questions of philosophy asking about existence and its limits. This new visibility of elements is reflected in authentic poetic delight and in the "visualizing" form, where the poem also becomes an image on the plane of a sheet of paper or becoming one side of the house wall as a mural poem.

Citation: Walczak-Delanois, Dorota. 2022. The Visuality of Hortus Mirabilis in Krystyna Miłobędzka's Poetry—A Study of Selected Examples. *Arts* 11: 104. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050104>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 27 July 2022

Accepted: 21 September 2022

Published: 18 October 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Keywords: Hortus mirabilis; visual poem; poetic garden; picture of garden; Polish contemporary poetry; Krystyna Miłobędzka; rose; calligram; avant-garde poem



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Krystyna Miłobędzka was born in Margonin in 1932 and is one of the most interesting and unique phenomena of the Polish poetry scene of the 20th and 21st centuries. Although her debut in 1960 with the volume *Anaglyphs* (Miłobędzka [1960] 2019)¹ places her near the generation of "Współczesność"², the period of fascination with her work falls toward the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

The author currently lives in Puszczykowo near Poznań, Poland. She remains an inspiration for many Polish poets from different movements despite not identifying with

any fixed poetic group (Borowiec 2012). Krystyna Miłobędzka's published volumes following her first *Anaglyphs* are still consistently rich in meaning and formal, inseparable linguistic solutions, appropriate and recognizable to her style³. It is also worth recalling that Miłobędzka, who holds a doctorate in literary studies and is a theatre scholar, also worked as a theatre director, pedagogue, and lecturer in theatre classes at Adam Mickiewicz University. She is also the author and co-author of scripts, rehearsals, written dialogues and published letters⁴. Miłobędzka's work has also received numerous awards⁵.

Much has been written about Miłobędzka's poetry, emphasizing the character of her poems, such as their minimalism of form and consolidation (Nyczek 2008, pp. 173–77; Żurek [2017] 2022), wordiness (Maliszewski 2020, pp. 74–75), a strong childlike imagination (Orska 2018, pp. 255–85), predilection for concreteness (Kałuża 2008, pp. 199–215), incomprehensibility, avant-garde, and linguistic inspirations (Bogalecki 2011; Grądziel-Wójcik 2008, pp. 21–34), diversity of her poetical world (Borowiec 2012) or her references to the poetry of Tymoteusz Karpowicz (Górniak-Prasnal 2017, pp. 253–69) and Miron Białoszewski (Suszek 2020).

There is now also a group of critics who try to read Krystyna Miłobędzka's poetry in the context of the discourse of ecocriticism or interpret it with the tools appropriate for reading ecopoetry (Lekowska 2020; Jarzyna 2017; Skurtys 2017). This is entirely possible: in her attentiveness to nature, Miłobędzka becomes one of the pioneers of such a poetical world view. I also think that it is possible to outline many, compatible common parts between recent works in the field of reading ecopoetry and ecocriticism (Fiedorcuk and Beltrán 2020; Koza 2020; Małecki and Woźniak 2020) and Krystyna Miłobędzka's poetry. However, I find the best definition (in fact, rather a kind of "non-definition") in the fragment by Julia Fiedorcuk:

I talk about the "ecological turn", trying to avoid the terms "ecological poetry" or "ecopoetry". These terms do function, of course, but mostly they involve attempts at some new genre or subgenre of "ecological" poetry. I am skeptical of such attempts for two reasons. First, more than human, nature has always been one of the most important subjects of poetry, and it is indeed difficult to imagine a poem that does not in any way refer to the natural world or shed light on the question of the relationship between humans and the environment. Thus, there is a risk that "ecopoetry" is just a label, artificially generated to describe phenomena that have always existed. Secondly, attempts to describe "ecopoetry" as a new kind of poetry are often prescriptive, in other words, they propose a list of criteria that a "correct" ecological poem should meet (consequently, the others would have to be considered "non-ecological"). This approach seems uninteresting also because its proponents often lose sight of the literary qualities of the text, focusing almost on the content (Fiedorcuk 2019, pp. 14–15).

In other words, I think that Krystyna Miłobędzka's poetry escapes clear-cut categorizations, even the most fashionable and handy ones, even if they are "eco". In thinking about the world-garden, language-poetry, inspiration and creation, this poetry retains a separate, inherent, thoroughly original character.

That is why the hortus mirabilis motif discussed here, goes beyond the obvious conundrum, reaching out to poetic texts other than the important but already analyzed and repeatedly cited by critics⁶. Also because "spoken" here is primarily associated with what is "seen", "articulated" with what is "made visible", and "lost" with "found". In such a lecture the very known (and widely interpreted) poem *drzewo jak drzewo* (the three as the three) becomes a kind of primary symbol of hortus mirabilis—mirabilis and lost Eden but it also concretely guides our gaze vertically along the tree trunk upward toward the unreachable the tree crown:

drzewo tak drzewo	the three yes the three
że drzewa już nie ma	that the three is no more

chmury (chmury)	clouds (clouds)
	(Miłobędzka 2013b, pp. 132–33)

Krystyna Miłobędzka is still not known enough outside of Poland “because of its rootedness in the peculiarities of the Polish language” (Wójcik-Leese 2006, p. 44) although some of her poems have been translated into English⁷. Two characteristics of her poetry, hitherto not assembled by scholars, are worth a closer look today, especially in poem examples that combine both simultaneously. The first characteristic relates to the visual character of her many poems, and the second is her preoccupation with the world garden, which she perceived as a kind of “fair of wonders” (Szyborska 1986, p. 42). Miłobędzka’s poetry, which can be boldly described as modern and avant-garde, refers to the *topoi* of the garden-world in single poems and cycles of poetic texts. This important cultural trope stems from the primordial role of the poet-gardener because, as we read in one of Mateusz Salwa’s many works devoted to gardens, entitled *Antyogród w ogrodzie* (Antigarden in the Garden):

The garden is one of the more enduring *topoi* present in Western culture. At the same time, it must be remembered that it is a *topoi* in a double sense of the word. For the garden is as much a real place as it is a figure of thought. These two orders cannot be separated, as every real garden, i.e. a separate space where plants are cultivated for utilitarian or aesthetic purposes, is in its own way the realization of an imaginary garden (Salwa 2020, p.112).

However, with *hortus mirabilis*, regardless of the history and theory of the garden, the current concept and the practice of implementation of the times stimulates the imagination of the creator. The meaning of the word “*mirabilis*”—also changes over the centuries. The signification can be understood as:—marvelous, miraculous, wonderful, supernatural, extraordinary. Some examples include the hanging gardens of Semiramis (Figure 1), the Garden of Eden imagined in the form of a painting by the Upper Rhenish Master (Figure 2) or a map (Figure 3), or even the image of a man who is a garden himself by Arcimboldo (Figure 4).

Between the literary gardens of past centuries, we find additional examples from *Garden of Epigrams* by Waclaw Potocki (Potocki [1648] 1907) and Tytus Czyżewski’s *The Mechanical Garden* (Czyżewski [1920] 1922, p. 24) (Figure 5).

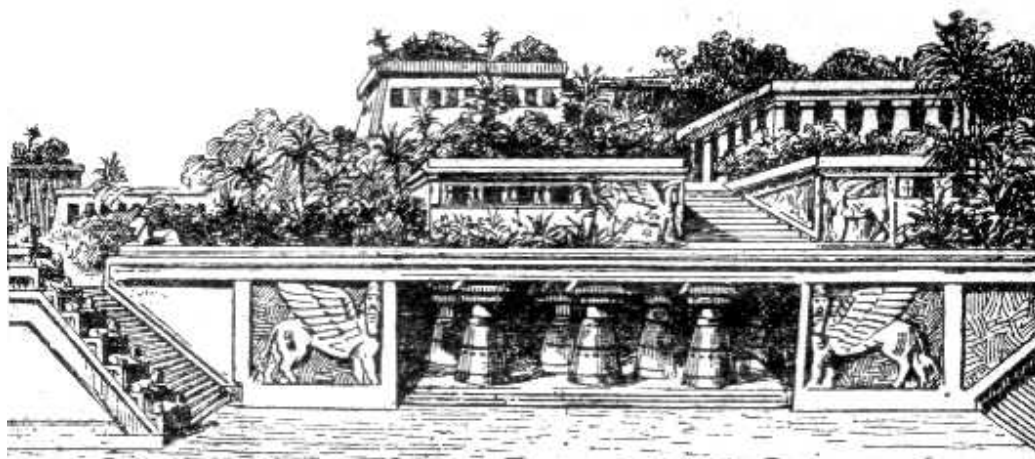


Figure 1. The Vision of Babylon Garden. 1912. https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Ogrody_semiramidy.jpgimage (accessed on 16 July 2022). From book published in 1912 (Petit Larousse).



Figure 2. Upper Rhenish Master. c.a. 1410–1420. *The Little Garden of Paradise*. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5f/Upper_Rhenish_Master_-_The_little_Garden_of_Paradise_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg (accessed on 16 July 2022).

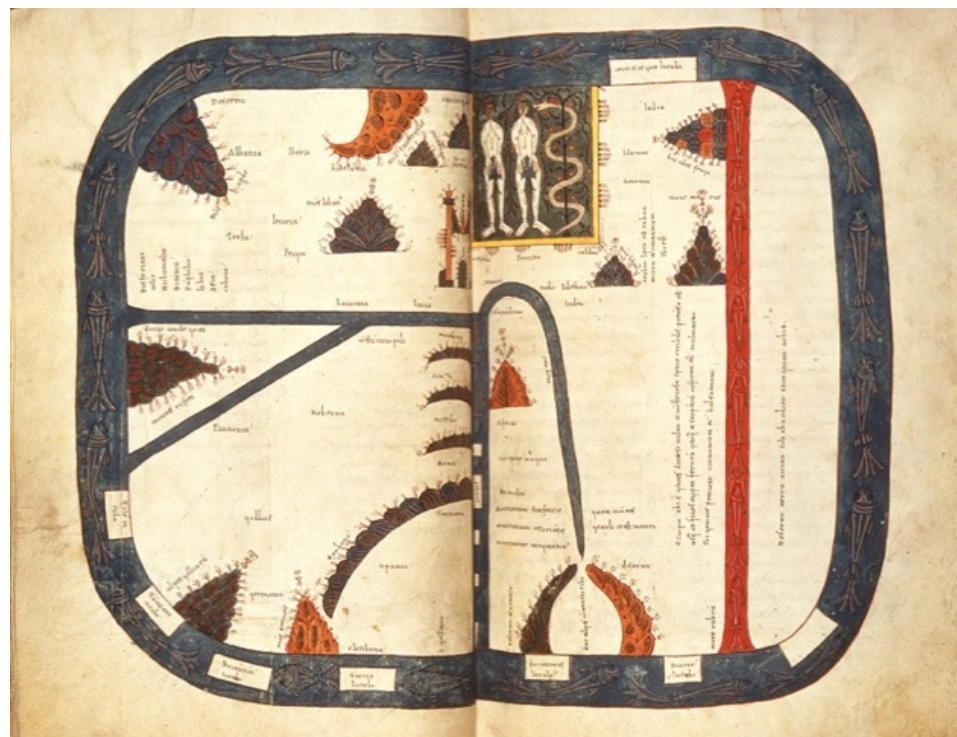


Figure 3. The Map of the Garden of Eden. c.a. 1009. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18757/18757-h/images/map06.jpg> (accessed on 18 July 2022).



Figure 4. Arcimboldo, Giuseppe. 1573. *Automne*. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/90/Giuseppe_Arcimboldo_-_Autumn_-_WGA00812.jpg (accessed on 18 July 2022).

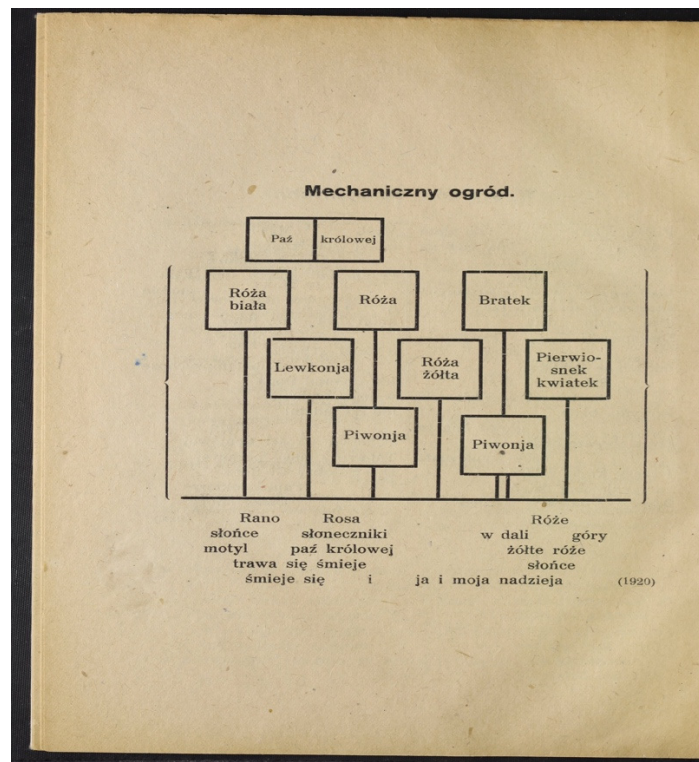


Figure 5. Czyżewski, Tytus. [1920] 1922. <https://polona.pl/item/noc-dzien-mechaniczny-instynkt-elektryczny,NzIxMzg5NDQ/31/#info:metadata> (accessed on 22 March 2022).

The history of gardens (Majdecki 1972; Szafrńska 1998) and literary research on the vision of the literary gardens (Rymkiewicz 1968), there is a special place in the imagination, meeting with what is seen by the poet. The meeting space for these gardens is as varied as they are. This is also partly because of a lack of a clear concept and definition in the description of gardens history, and thus of specific interpretation tools. As Jan Birksted writes: “Garden history, unlike the history of painting, sculpture, and architecture, has no conceptual foundations. It lacks the elements of scholarly and critical consensus: a conventional set of interpretive methods, agreed-upon leading terms, ruling metaphors, and descriptive protocols.” (Birksted 2003, pp. 4–5).

However, the concept of hortus mirabilis stimulating the imaginary and scientific approach is still interesting for the authors of literary works and scholars of different branches of sciences, as we can observe it in the recent publications. The fascination in the peculiar is because poetic garden has also been well described in an extremely interesting work by Dimitrij Sergeevič Lihačev (Lihačev 1991).

Similarly, Miłobędzka’s poetry, even if some scholars have already written about the presence of plants in her poetry (Górniak-Prasnal and Kuchowicz 2015, pp. 117–26; Lekowska 2020, pp. 262–71), has an as-yet-undefined world, a rediscovered hortus mirabilis. It spreads its secrets before the onlookers, amazing them and conveying a certain knowledge. Its image is meticulously created in the individual poems, which comprise a specific personal poetic “herbarium”. Thus, we find in this poetry in the space of the various specific volumes: seeds, leaves, flowers, trees and branches, their general symbolism, and species names. The most important thing, however, is beyond the botanical description—activated in the image are new meanings conveyed through the medium of the poem. First, careful observation of the world is made with a poetic eye (Figures 6 and 7):

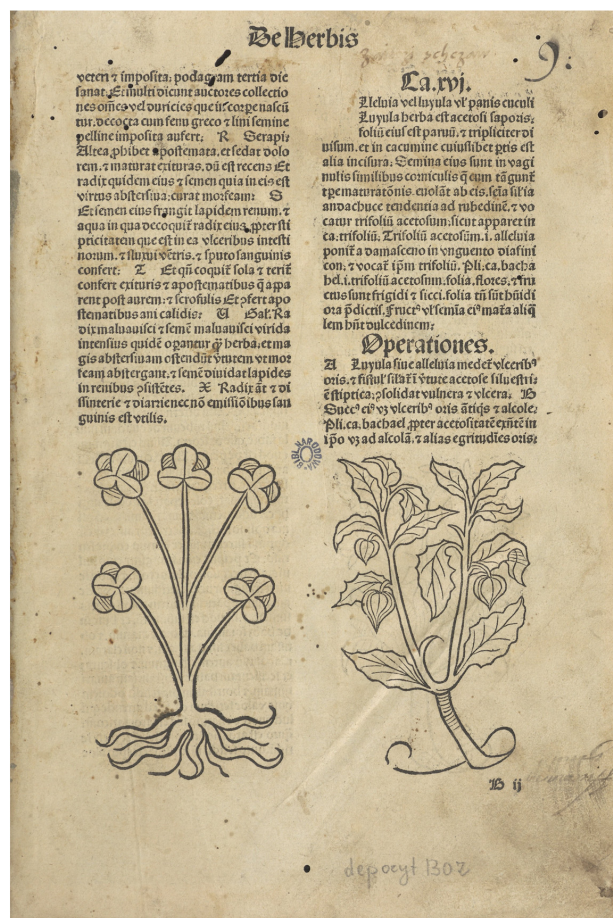


Figure 6. Meydenbach, Iacobus (1491). <https://polona.pl/item/Eadem,hortus-sanitatis,MTEzNzkwOTEx/28/#info:metadata> (accessed on 17 July 2022).



Figure 7. Cover by Marcin Markowski In: (Miłobędzka [1960] 2019).

2. Observation

Entering the marvelous garden first involves, in Miłobędzka's case, a very insightful view of oneself and the world in which this poetic "I" finds itself. It also marks an act of courage to step outside one's own comfort zone. The boundary-gate-wicket to the garden is an attempt to understand what is different from the "I", which is necessary to define the "I" itself. While encountering the world and the garden, crossing a hitherto impassable boundary is important, which may be the very ritual of sensual, visual initiation. Finally, it turns out that it is the world garden that invites itself and enters the thresholds of our private existence, discovering in ourselves the space where the viewed elements exist "from within" (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, pp. 22–27):

Na szybie pokrytej parą rysujemy dwa kółka dodając uszy, wąsy i ogon.
W ten sposób powstaje kot. Można także narysować świerk, kwiat
albo człowieka.

Dopóki różnica temperatur po obu stronach szyby utrzymuje się –
ludzie, zwierzęta i rośliny istnieją w sposób nie budzący wątpliwości.
Istnieją z zewnątrz i od środka.
(Miłobędzka [1960] 2020a, p. 9)

Draw two circles on the steam-coated glass, adding ears, whiskers and a tail.
In this way, a cat is created. One can also draw a spruce, a flower
or a person.

As long as the temperature difference on both sides of the glass remains—
humans, animals and plants exist in a way that is not—doubt.
They exist from outside and from within.

It is brought into being by very careful looking, or, in Miłobędzka's case, by its constant
"drawing", here on a pane of glass as on a sheet of paper, and in some works, in the very
space of the poem by its graphic location.

The verb "patrzeć", like the neologism "jestnienie", balances between "jest" (is) and
"nie" ((there is) not), indicating the paradox of being enchanted and dazzled by the world
as a kind of compliment, sending us back to the reflection of an image, in the flash of an
eye, in a pane of glass, or water, as in this poem by Miłobędzka:

Co ja robię, patrzę w jest
w to samo jest mnie i to samo jest wody
w to olśnienie
to jestnienie
jest nie nie

które scalam
które skracam do istnienia
(Miłobędzka [2000] 2020b, p. 233)

What I do, I look in is
into this same is me and this same is the water
into this dazzle
it's a beknowing
know being is not

which I merge
which I shorten into existence

In this way, hortus mirabilis, inserts itself into the sphere of the metaphysical reflection
of nature, giving Miłobędzka's poetic garden a specific dynamic in which the "I"—the
gardener—has a significant role as an observer (as we read in the poem's climax), and
as a creator of entities. The activity of looking, which happens in fact in all types of
verbs and aspects, is in this specific sphere (look, watch, see, perceive), fundamental to
defining oneself in the world and the world's relationship to oneself. This visualizing

reflection, in addition to careful observation, is accompanied by weighty optical discourses and statements reminiscent of the laws of physics and related to the perception of the dimensions of reality:

Oczy nie widzą głęboko, widzą daleko albo blisko, dlatego tyle brzegów,
tyle zgniecionych mórz—czy myśleniu wystarczy oczu na zatopienie świata?
Za dużo razy poznane przez siebie, żeby mogło zapuścić korzenie.
Przesuwane przez wszystkie pory roku. Zbliżało się do siebie
nieustannie zbyt lekkie, aż zmieniło się w wiatr.
(Miłobędzka [1970] 2020c, p. 62)

Eyes don't see deep, they see far or near, that's why so many shores,
so many squashed seas—is there enough eyes for thinking to sink the world?
Too many times met by itself to be able to put down roots.
Shifted through all the seasons. Approached constantly too
Light, until it turned into wind.

Kinetic and optical laws complement one other here, creating the credibility of the individual garden. What is too close becomes invisible to the eyes. *Jestem że widzę że widzę że mijam* (I am that I can see that I can see that I go by) (Miłobędzka [1975] 2020d, p. 113), says one of Miłobędzka's titles, bringing another important note a few lines further on: "less and less of me". Here, there is some kind of correspondence between the enlargement of the external garden and the diminution of one's own self. The parallel between looking and writing, which Miłobędzka consistently uses in her writing method and poetically admits, is also very important: "(...) pisz pisz aż w pisaniu znikniesz/ patrz patrz aż znikniesz w patrzeniu (Miłobędzka [2004] 2020e, p. 314)". (write write on till you vanish in writing/ look look on till you vanish in looking) (Miłobędzka 2013c, p. 127). An attentive reading of Miłobędzka's poetry and that of her life partner, Andrzej Falkiewicz, draws attention to an interesting aspect of sensory perception, admitting something that, for the poet, is also an answer to the loaded question of which of the senses she considers most important; he replies: "As a man of our civilization—the Western civilization—I have to put sight at the forefront. It is the sense that captures to some extent the functions of all the other senses. But as a universal man, I would say touch. It is the elemental sense—the sense that enables people to conceive new life." (Borowiec et al. 2009, p. 32).

3. To Touch by the Colors

For Miłobędzka, part of whose life was spent exploring nature (the forest park in Margonin, the Tatra Mountains, the forests near Poznań), childhood is also an important reminder of the world—a mysterious garden that preserves the colors and vitality of entities in memory. In this perspective, the image of the garden from childhood, is confronted by a necessary new visualization:

Kolory w dzieciństwie układają się same na powierzchniach miękkich
i delikatnych. Nie wiedząc nic o sobie, nie znając swojej wartości, nie
potrzebują się dopełniać tworzyć tęczy.
(Miłobędzka [1960] 2020f, p. 18)

In childhood, colors arrange themselves on the soft and delicate surfaces. Not knowing anything about themselves, not knowing their own value, they do not need to complement each other to form a rainbow.

The poet defines child gazing in an interesting way: "It is spontaneous, self-generated thinking, not taught by others. We are born with it, and then we learn to look at the world already with someone else's eyes, to speak in someone else's words, the words

of adults” (Borowiec et al. 2009, p. 86). Referring to the bearing of Jean Piaget’s theory (Piaget 1923, [1926] 2003), she also draws attention to the artistic realizations of children, where images and words are treated interchangeably. The poet finds a name-combination for them: “słoworysunki”, “word-drawings” (Borowiec et al. 2009, p. 142). The poetic tricks of animation and personification are also embedded in the children’s world and the power of children’s imagination. Here, plants and fruits exist in an important space because they significantly focalize the seemingly inanimate world. It is as if the magic of an enchanted garden, or the unique memory of colors, was transferred to everyday objects, as in her painterly poem from the volume *Anaglyphs*:

Ta butelka z sokiem pomarańczowym ma niebieski korek. Niebieskie korki zastępują wyduszonym pomarańczom niebo.

Jeszcze nigdy pomarańcze nie były tak blisko nieba jak w butelce - nigdy go nie dotykały. Zresztą nie muszą już dojrzewać, więc zetknięcie z niebem ma dla nich inne znaczenie—to jest albo inny przymus albo inna przyjemność.

(Miłobędzka [1960] 2020g, p. 10)

This bottle of orange juice has a blue cork. The blue corks replace heaven to squeezed oranges.

Never before have the oranges been as close to the sky as they are in the bottle – never touched it. Besides, they don’t have to ripen any more so their contact with the sky has a different meaning for them—it is either a different compulsion or a different pleasure.

The author also tells us another story from her time at the Institute of Wood Technology in Poznań, giving us the pictorial birth of the *Anaglyph* cycle and spatial vision that her poems preserve: “The most important thing I took away from the Institute were these wonderful glasses with one glass turquoise and the other red, which made it possible to receive spatial images. This, among other things, gave rise to the name for my first texts—*anaglyphs*” (Borowiec et al. 2009, p. 26). Commenting on this first series, the author also says: “It is there to see each thing at once from the outside and from the inside—and this is written clearly in the first *anaglyph*, but it is also repeated in the subsequent ones. In the s u b s t a n c e t h e i n t e r v e n t i o n is a seeing that is at once objective and personal, private. That is how I would read these records today” (Borowiec et al. 2009, p. 50).

4. The Garden Itself

In Miłobędzka’s volume entitled *Pokrewne* (Related), in addition to poems with significant titles for our considerations, such as *Roślinne* (Vegetal) (Miłobędzka [1970] 2020h, p. 57) or *Chlorofil* (Chlorophyll) (Miłobędzka [1970] 2020i, p. 58), there are also two poems of great importance to Miłobędzka’s imagery and to our considerations, entitled *Ogród* (Garden) (Miłobędzka [1970] 2020j, p. 66) and *Narodzenie z oczu* (Birth from the Eyes) (Miłobędzka [1970] 2020k, p. 59). The first contains a visualization (to which the reader succumbs) of the thicket, entanglement, and green elements of the garden climbing towards the sun. As we read the subsequent verses, we realize that the gardens are personified and that the thicket, the growing, and searching for paths also belong to the sphere of human communication. The visualization of the garden, here, acts as a costume and, as it were, a diagnosis of the lyrical situation, the passion, and the danger involved in “tissue penetration”:

Kto tu oddzieli, komu potrzebne nazywanie, splecione kryją się w sobie, owijające, owijane, dławione jednych oddechem, podają sobie pokarm wielkimi przetykami. Nie ma żadnych ścieżek, nie ma dojścia, jest tylko kawałek uległego podłoża, na ogrody w tobie, zawsze ten sam powrót, ten sam cień wysyłany spod najniższych roślin, wyrastanie powoli od stóp, uderzenie ciepła w ciasne objęcia tkanek. Tu ogień, kiedy się otworzą.

(Miłobędzka [1970] 2020j, p. 66)

Who here will separate, who needs naming, entwined they hide into each other, wrapping, wrapped, choked by one breath, they feed each other with great gulps. There are no paths, there is no access, there is only a piece of submissive ground, to the gardens within you, always the same return, the same shadow sent from under the lowest plants, growing slowly from the feet, the throb of heat in the tight embrace of tissue. Here the fire, when they open.

The second poem, demonstrates in its very fabric the close relationship between the one watching and the one watched, who/which simultaneously becomes a registration of life processes, as in the following extract from the poem: "Spojrzenie po spojrzeniu/rozgina wejścia coraz głębsze: trawa dzieli się trawą/liść łamie się liściem, gną się i strzepią, wplątane w ziemię biją powietrze drzewami." (Miłobędzka [1970] 2020k, p. 59). (Gaze after gaze bifurcates the entrances deeper and deeper: grass/shares grass, leaf breaks leaf, bend and fray, entangled/in the earth beat the air with trees).

The temporal aspect of the garden is at the center of existence, in the cyclical return of nature's laws of rebirth and death, which are relevant to the personal, singular perspective of the end:

jeszcze do wnuka
jeszcze do ogrodu
jeszcze do żalu nad sobą
(Miłobędzka [1970] 2020l, p. 225)

yet to the grandson
yet to the garden
yet to self-pity

The dynamics of change interact with the dynamics of the image seen and processed. Miłobędzka aptly describes this creative process:

Actually, none of the images we have in ourselves should be immobilized, that is, become something unchangeable, something absolutely permanent. Because, after all, these images even in memories do not freeze—"they are not a music box and not a photograph". They are important when they come to life, when something disappears and something arrives in them, no matter how far back in time they are. In fact, they are deprived of time, and in this deprivation, they are changing and touching the one who owns them. They do not speak back to us in the same way every moment, neither with the same voice nor with the same gesture; and even if there were the same image, for me, having a different experience and being in a different time, the gesture and word from there are already something completely different. As long as it is alive, changing and

moving, it has some meaning...—*it repeats itself, as long as it is alive*" (Borowiec et al. 2009, p. 26).

5. Living Garden of Poems

Among the poems by Miłobędzka, some particularly fit the issue of visuality in poetry, not only at the conceptual level, the place granted to observation, the poet-particular observer, but the poem itself. They are conceived as graphic and pictorial realizations. Poems from the volume *dwanaście wierszy w kolorze* (twelve poems in color) (Miłobędzka 2012) are the special cases of these. The selected words are conceived in color, and their arrangement on the space of the page has meaning. Here, they meet in the minimalist form of the poem "I" and "tree" and respond to each other in a congruent symmetry: two questions, two text fragments highlighted in green, a twice-referenced word: "I see":

(i mówiące mnie drzewo?)

z ilu drzew **t o j e d n o** widzę?

wreszcie raz powiedzieć

w i d z e

(Miłobędzka [2012] 2020m, p. 366)

(and tree speaking me?)

Of how many trees **this one** can I see?

finally say it once

I see

Behold, "I see" also means here as much as "I know"—read with the color codes and symbolism of nature (hope for green), it also means the selectivity of this knowledge if we read the green: "this one/I see" (as "this one I know" and "I am"). The minimalist form, when the poem fits at the top of the page and within empty space, is also impressive and helps to balance this ambivalence of meaning: a sense of pride in the joy of looking and seeing and the singularity of the experience. Intertextually, we are close to other texts such as the *wywód jestem'u* (discourse of I am) by Miron Białoszewski (Białoszewski 1961, p. 7), *Eimi* (I am) by E.E. Cummings (Cummings 1933), *Je suis comme je suis* (I am as I am) by Jacques Prévert (Prévert [1946] 1949, p. 100), but also the Socratic, "I know that I know nothing".

The poem of Miłobędzka can also be a kind of enigma or a clever riddle hidden in the answer to the question: What does not see deeply? Because the eye cannot see itself. With its blue color, the poem adopts the issue previously suggested by Miłobędzka—the impossibility of seeing deeply.

The author's decision here seems to be in a line with the conviction of the philosophical thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who in his *Remarks on Color*, notes: "If all the colors became whitish the picture would lose more and more depth". (Wittgenstein 1977, p. 44) Interestingly, Miłobędzka launches the rhyme deep in the process: deep—eye; and, let us say it one more time: it is important because in Polish the word "eye" (oko) is part of the word "deep" (głęboko). The eye, repeated in the poem, grows huge and intense simultaneously:

co nie widzi głęboko...?

what does not see deeply...?

oko

an eye

OKO

AN EYE

(Miłobędzka [2012] 2020n, p. 364)

We find an equally interesting notation in another poem, in which, repeating the word “only” in a specific arrangement relates it, both to the poem and to the hidden addressee “you”. The addressee is the most important, for to him/her (but also to the poem as well) refers the imperative, underlined “be” and enlarged ochre “shine”. This potential shining is implicitly introduced by the sun; in the space of Miłobędzka’s “colorful” poems, it is also coherent on the whole, precisely above the line image of the garden where the eye looks at the tree in the sun:

tylko badźonly be

tylko

only

ŚWIEĆ

SHINE

(Miłobędzka [1970] 2020o, p. 368)

The poem *Rose*, from the volume *omnipoes* (Miłobędzka [2000] 2020p, pp. 256–57) belongs to Miłobędzka’s visual and garden poems. However, it is also something more: it is a full calligram enriched by its reflection. The individual words are arranged verse by verse to form a graphic rose: “rose bloomed/ bloomed in the garden/ bloomed in the garden wet with dew/ bloomed in the garden wet with dew sparkling drops/ bloomed in the garden wet with dew sparkling drops on pink petals/ bloomed in a garden wet with dew sparkling drops on pink curled/ veined petals/ before I cut it down/ before I cut it right at the root and wrapped the cut in cellophane/ this rose/ my poem/ for Valentine”. Miłobędzka inscribes herself with her poem by developing it with the symmetry and meaning of the rose in bloom. She creates a poem-picture, in a certain rhythm, thus referring to Tadeusz Peiper’s concept of a blooming poem (Peiper [1926] 1972) and the love symbolism of the rose, thus inscribing herself in the rich history of poems dedicated to roses. The reverse image is similar to a flower, imprinted in the herbarium, a memento of the queen of the garden—the rose (Figure 8):

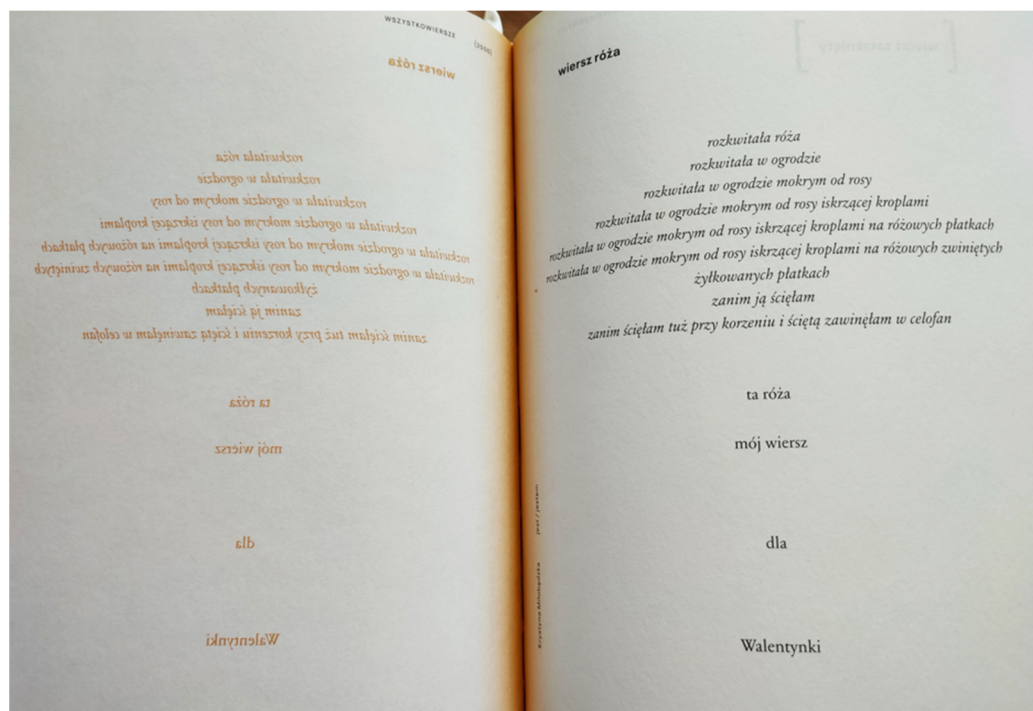


Figure 8. Miłobędzka’s poem *rose*—wiersz róža is composed by calligram and its reflected image in color on the left in: Krystyna Miłobędzka (2020), *jest/jestem* (is/I am), Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno, pp. 256–57. (Miłobędzka [2000] 2020p, pp. 256–57).

Two more poems deserve attention. The first poem asks the question of “having”, “possession”, belonging, and one’s place in the world. Underlined and “colored”, “there is no”, contradicts the invisible “is”. In Polish, it is this cluster of “nie ma” that is the answer to the question, “is there?” Here, the lyric subject has and does not have this small world; it is also reflected consistently in other poems because the following reading is also possible otherwise: it is the world that has me.

M A M

(M N I E M A)

WŁASNY

bardzo mały świat
(Miłobędzka [2012] 2020q, p. 360)

I HAVE

(H A S M E)

OWN

very little world

The last example shows a poem literally closed in a large square bracket. If we recall what the poem is about, for example, a rose or a tree, we can also interpret the poem as a kind of garden with a gate (Figure 9):

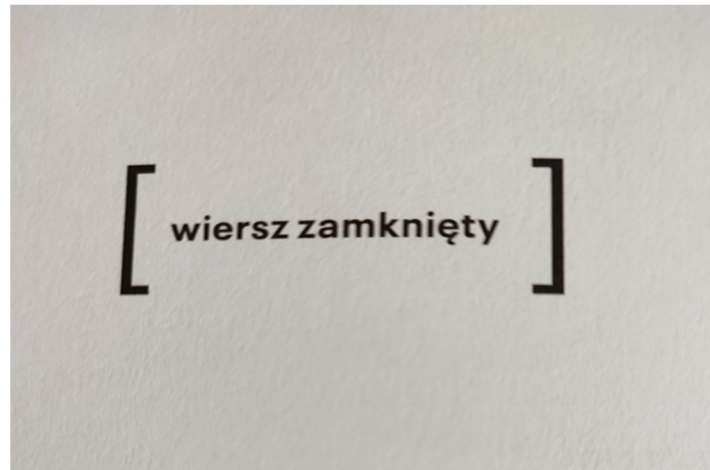


Figure 9. Krystyna Miłobędzka.2020. *wiersz zamknięty* (closed poem) *jest/jestem* (is/I am), Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno, p. 258. (Miłobędzka [2000] 2020r, p. 258).

Gutorow, writing about Miłobędzka’s poetry-creating power, draws attention to her desire to reach such a point of speech, which is the absolutization of speech or ultimate point (Gutorow 2011, p. 290). It seems that the “closed poem” is an example of just such attainment of speech, although even here, through the play of graphic (visual) closure, one may be tempted to make ambiguous interpretations for the reason that in the vertical line, there is an opening—light and space above the poem and below the poem. If the poem is a key, and we turn it from horizontal to vertical in the likeness of a key, we open the closure.

6. Hortus Mirabilis by Krystyna Miłobędzka—Conclusion

What is the character of the world-garden and hortus mirabilis in the poetry of Krystyna Miłobędzka?

The weight and admiration of the universe of the garden and its wonders are present all the time in Miłobędzka’s work. We also find traces of this importance in the poet’s correspondence with another poet important to her, the aforementioned Tymoteusz Karpowicz. Both poets and their life partners often change their opinions on gardening, on new plants, their development and illnesses, seasons, vegetables, flowers, trees and bushes. However, let us draw attention, once again, to the essence of the garden’s appearance, to the importance of its visual character which appears in these words of Tymoteusz Karpowicz in a letter addressed to Andrzej Falkiewicz:

“And how does your garden sing (in colors and shapes) under the magical baton of Ms. Krystyna? How wide the Newcomers have already opened the greenery?” (Miłobędzka Krystyna et al. 2021b, pp. 738–39).

After all, Krystyna Miłobędzka—the gardener and observer continuously shares her experience with Krystyna Miłobędzka—the poet, that is, a careful observer of the world.

On the one hand, the poet in her poems, refers to the topoï of the tender observer, the poet-gardener, and the garden-world. On the other hand, she introduces a new verbal articulation to her poetic pictures. Although her poetic diction alludes to historical avant-garde and linguistic poetry achievements, her lyrical savoir-faire is characterized by a certain minimalist construction and a separate, recognizable style. Miłobędzka’s innovativeness lies in combining seemingly distant and sometimes poetically opposite categories: full, ambiguous image-in-poem and asceticism by means of expression, such as a minimal number of words. Her poetry is deeply rooted in perceiving, seeing, watching, and contem-

plating the world—faithful to its physicality but also open to the most essential questions of philosophy asking about existence and its limits. Among Miłobędzka’s poems, a special category is formed by texts that introduce elements of the plant world and simultaneously strongly present interest in their visual side. This new visibility of elements is reflected in authentic poetic delight and in the “visualizing” form, where the poem also becomes an image on the plane of a sheet of paper. Poems by Miłobędzka are also understood and seen in their visual dimension by others, for example, in graphic realization by Jan Berdyszak in collaboration with Krystyna Miłobędzka (Berdyszak and Miłobędzka 2015).

The visuality of Miłobędzka’s poems, is also evidenced by two of them becoming the poems of public space, watched and read by everyone on the route of poetic murals in Poznań or in Puszczykowo. Here, as one can see at the photography of mural at Lodowa street, the two last lines really attest the poet’s attachment to the garden’s metaphysic architecture: *jestem wszystkim czego nie mam furtką bez ogrodu* (I am all what I have not/ the gate without the garden (Figure 10). The poem in Puszczykowo show the colors play and one more time, the importance of the verb “to be” and its possible senses (Figure 11).

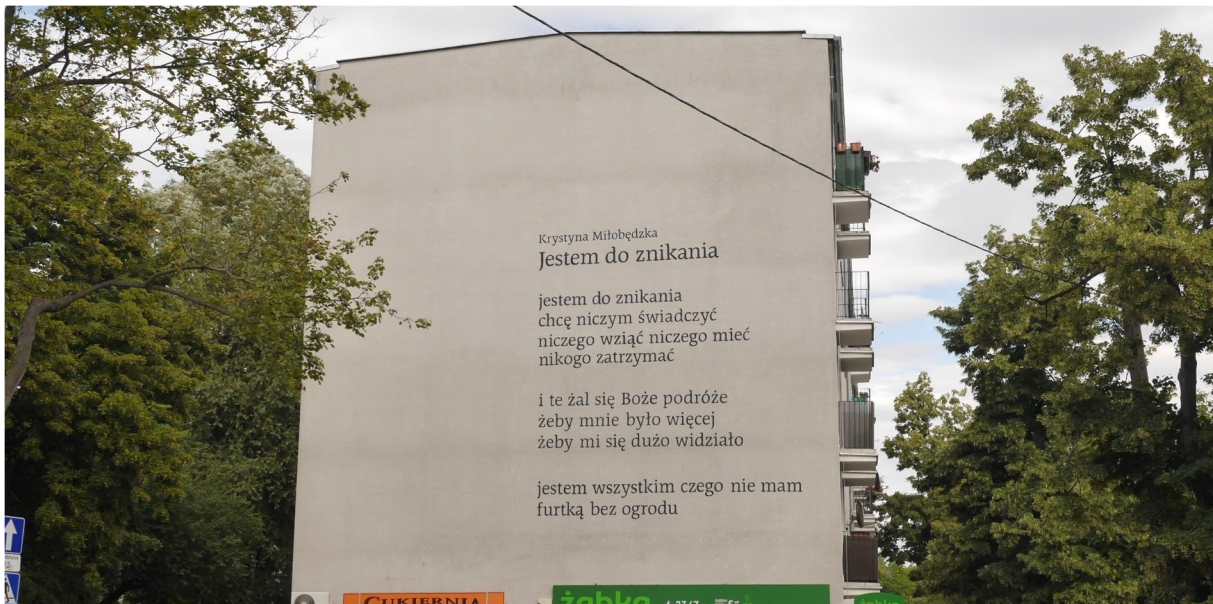


Figure 10. © photography by Paweł Jędrzejczak. Mural of a poem by Krystyna Miłobędzka, *jestem do znikania* (I am to disappear) in Lodowa street in Poznań, made in a frame of project by Joanna Pańczak and Tomasza Genowa.



Figure 11. © photography by Paweł Jędrzejczak. Mural of a poem by Krystyna Miłobędzka, *wróć i bądź jeszcze dalej* (come back and be still more) on the wall of library in Puszczykowo. The mural was made in a frame of project “Młodzież w działaniu” (Youth in Action), coordinated by Magda Nowicka Chomsk.

Finally, we have a kind of double illustration because the murals on the walls between the trees seems to show us the visual, that is concrete, character of her poetry, like in the example:

dróżki w ogrodzie	paths in garden
(czarne w głąb)	(black deep inside)
(przeskoki, zgłębnienia)	(leaps, deep insights)
dom przed zniknięciem w drzewach	the house before it vanishes among the trees
dom znikający w drzewach	the house vanishing among the trees
	(Miłobędzka 2013d, pp. 136–37)

The power of this poetry also lies in its ability to co-create a space viewed and experienced, in many ways, placing the multiplicity (repetitiveness) and singularity (uniqueness) of existence at the center of its interest. Miłobędzka is convincing in her poetic creations and their minimalistic form. She speaks of it with amazement: “I don’t know by what miracle I became interesting to young people. Maybe somewhere in the poems, I managed to—bagatelle!—capture the essence of life” (Borowiec et al. 2009, p. 141). In her original way of composing the visual hortus poems (e.g., *Rose*), she inscribes herself as a relative in the family of poets, including so ancient poetic garden as these by Johann Wolfgang Goethe (von Goethe 1789), William Blake (Blake 1794), and Emily Dickinson (Dickinson 1856, 1858) and their memorable poetic gardens and at the same time convincing today’s young people.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ All quotes and titles are translated by the author of this paper unless otherwise indicated. *Anaglify* (Anaglyphs) are the cycle of poems which were first published in periodicals such as: “Ziemia Kaliska”, “Nowa Kultura” and “Twórczość” in the years 1960–1962.
- ² “Współczesność” (Contemporaneity) was the name of the generation of artists and writers making their debut in Poland around 1956 and dominating literary life for the next 10 years. Their work was a reference point for all subsequent generations of writers and literary groups. To this formation belonged, among others: Andrzej Bursa, Stanisław Grochowiak, Miron Białoszewski, Jerzy Harasymowicz, Marek Hłasko, Halina Poświatowska and Edward Stachura.
- ³ These are: *Spis z natury* (Inventory of Nature) (Miłobędzka [1960] 2019), *Pokrewne* (Related) (Miłobędzka 1970); *Dom, pokarmy* (Home, Foods) (Miłobędzka 1975), *Wykaz treści* (Register of Contents) (Miłobędzka 1984), *Pamiętam (zapisy stanu wojennego)* (I remember (Martial Law Notes)) (Miłobędzka 1992), *Imiesłowcy* (Participels) (Miłobędzka 2000a), *wszystkowiersze* (omnipoems) (Miłobędzka 2000b), *Przesuwanka* (Shiftness) (Miłobędzka 2003), *Po krzyku* (After Shout) (Miłobędzka 2004), *Zbierane 1960–2005* (Gathered 1960–2005) (Miłobędzka 2006), *gubione* (lost) (Miłobędzka 2008a), *zbierane, gubione 1960–2010* (gathered, lost 1960–2010) (Miłobędzka 2010a) *dwanaście wierszy w kolorze* (twelve poems in color) (Miłobędzka 2012), and poems from multiple volumes of *is/am (selected poems 1960/2020) jest/jestem* (wiersze wybrane 1960/2020) (Miłobędzka 2020). All quotes and references to Krystyna Miłobędzka’s will refer to the collective edition of poems from 2020 entitled *jest/jestem*; the first editions are quoted also in the bibliography.
- ⁴ These are: *Teatr Jana Dormana* (Jan Dorman’s Theater) (Miłobędzka 1990), *Przed wierszem. Zapisy dawne i nowe* (Before a Poem. Old and New Notes) (Miłobędzka 1994), *Siała baba mak. Gry słowne dla teatru* (Old Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds. Word Games for Theater). (Miłobędzka 1995), *Na wysokiej górze* (On the High Mountains) (Miłobędzka and Chmielewska 2014); *szare światło. Rozmowy z Krystyną Miłobędzką i Andrzejem Falkiewiczem* (grey light. Conversations with Krystyna Miłobędzka and Andrzej Falkiewicz) (Borowiec et al. 2009), *W widnokregu Odmieńca. Teatr, dziecko, kosmogonia*. (In the Horizon of Different. Theater, Child, Cosmogonia) (Miłobędzka 2008b), *znikam, jestem*, (I disappear, I am) (Miłobędzka 2010b), *Dwie rozmowy. Oak Park—Puszczykowo—Oak Park* (Two Conversations. Oak Park-Puszczykowo-Oak Park) (Falkiewicz et al. 2011), *Blisko z Daleka. Listy 1970–2003* (Close from Afar. Letters 1970–2003) (Miłobędzka Krystyna et al. 2021a).
- ⁵ Among others, the author has received the following awards: the Barbara Sadowska Award (1992), the Culture Foundation Award (1993), the Minister of Culture Award (2001), the Four Columns Literary Award (2003), the Artistic Award of the City of Poznań and the President of the City of Poznań (2009), the Silesius Poetry Award (2013), and the Adam Mickiewicz Poznań Literary Award (2020).
- ⁶ Especially the poem *drzewo tak drzewo* (*the tree yes the three*) is an often-interpreted poem (cf. papers on Miłobędzka poetry quoted in this article).
- ⁷ I mean especially two publications: *Poezje-Poetry in “2B”* in 1999, n° 14 translated by F. Kujawski and A. Sułkowska (Miłobędzka 1999) and a volume *Nothing More* translated by E. Wójcik-Leese in 2013 (Miłobędzka 2013a).

References

Primary Source

- Figure 1.** *The Vision of Babylon Garden*. 1912. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ogrody_semiramidy.jpg (accessed on 16 July 2022) from book published in 1912 (Petit Larousse).
- Figure 2.** Upper Rhenish Master. c.a. 1410–1420. *The Little Garden of Paradise*. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Upper_Rhenish_Master_-_The_little_Garden_of_Paradise_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg (accessed on 16 July 2022).
- Figure 3.** *The Map of the Garden of Eden*. c.a. 1009. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18757/18757-h/images/map06.jpg> (accessed on 18 July 2022).
- Figure 4.** Arcimboldo, Giuseppe. 1573. *Autom*. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/90/Giuseppe_Arcimboldo_-_Autumn_-_WGA00812.jpg (accessed on 18 July 2022).
- Figure 5.** Czyżewski, Tytus. [1920] 1922. *Mechaniczny Ogród*. *Mechaniczny ogród*. In Idem, *Noc-dzień*. *Mechaniczny instynkt elektryczny*. Kraków: Geberthner i Wolf, p. 24. <https://polona.pl/item/noc-dzien-mechaniczny-instynkt-elektryczny,NzIxMzg5NDQ/31/#info:metadata> (accessed on 22 March 2022).
- Figure 6.** Iacobus Meydenbach. 1491. *Hortus sanitates*, Mainz: Meidenbach, p. 9. <https://polona.pl/item/hortus-sanitatis,MTEExNzkwOTEx/28/#info:metadata> (accessed on 17 July 2022).
- Figure 7.** Cover by Markowski, Marcin In: Krystyna Miłobędzka. 2019. *Anaglify*. In Eadem, *Spis z natury*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno.
- Figure 8.** Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020. *wiersz róża* (poem rose) In Eadem, *jest/jestem* (is/I am), Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno, pp. 256–57.
- Figure 9.** Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020. *wiersz zamknięty* (closed poem) In Eadem, *jest/jestem* (is/I am), Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno, p. 258.

Figure 10. photography by Jędrzejczak, Paweł. Mural of a poem by Krystyna Miłobędzka, *jestem do znikania* (I am to disappear) in Lodowa street in Poznań, made in a frame of project by Joanna Pańczak and Tomasz Genowa.

Figure 11. photography by Jędrzejczak, Paweł. Mural of a poem by Krystyna Miłobędzka, *wróć i bądź jeszcze dalej* (come back and be still more) on the wall of library in Puszczykowo. The mural was made in a frame of project “Młodzież w działaniu” (Youth in Action), coordinated by Magda Nowicka Chomsk.

Secondary Source

- Berdyszak, Jan, and Krystyna Miłobędzka. 2015. *Jan Berdyszak/Krystyna Miłobędzka. Ostatni Notatnik Malarski/Czytania Notatnika*. Edited by Waldemar Andzelm. Lublin: Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej Waldemar Andzelm.
- Białoszewski, Miron. 1961. Wywód jestem ‘u. In *Idem, Mylne Wzruszenia*. Warszawa: PIW.
- Birksted, Jan K. 2003. Landscape History and Theory: From Subject Matter to Analytic Tool. *Landscape Review* 8: 4–28.
- Blake, William. 1794. The Sick Rose. *Songs of Innocence and Experiences*. Available online: <http://erdman.blakearchive.org/#23> (accessed on 30 May 2022).
- Bogalecki, Piotr. 2011. *Niedorozumowy. Kategoria niezrozumiałości w poezji Krystyny Miłobędzkiej*. Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury.
- Borowiec, Jarosław, ed. 2012. *Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach i rozmowach*. Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Borowiec, Jarosław, Falkiewicz Andrzej, and Miłobędzka Krystyna, eds. 2009. *szare światło. Rozmowy z Krystyną Miłobędzką i Andrzejem Falkiewiczem*. Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Cummings, E. E. 1933. *Eimi (I Am)*. New York: Covici Fried.
- Czyżewski, Tytus. 1922. Mechaniczny ogród. In *Idem, Noc-dzień. Mechaniczny Instynkt Elektryczny*. Kraków: Geberthner i Wolf. First published 1920.
- Dickinson, Emily. 1856. When Roses Cease to Bloom, Sir. Available online: <https://www.edickinson.org/> (accessed on 23 April 2022).
- Dickinson, Emily. 1858. Nobody Knows this Little Rose. Available online: <https://www.edickinson.org/> (accessed on 23 February 2022).
- Falkiewicz, Andrzej, Karpowicz Tymoteusz, and Miłobędzka Krystyna. 2011. *Dwie rozmowy. Oak Park—Puszczykowo—Oak Park. (Two Conversations. Oak Park—Puszczykowo—Oak Park)*. Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Fiedorczuk, Julia. 2019. *Inne możliwości. O poezji ekologii i polityce. Rozmowy z amerykańskimi poetami*. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Katedra.
- Fiedorczuk, Julia, and Gerardo Beltrán. 2020. *Ekopoetyka/ Ecopoética/ Ecopoetics Ekologiczna obrona poezji/ Una defensa ecológica de la poesía/ An ecological “defence of poetry”*. Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Ludowego. Biblioteka Iberyjska.
- Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowicz. 1986. Of Other Spaces. *Diacritics* 16: 22–27. [CrossRef]
- Górniak-Prasnal, Karolina. 2017. Impossible Poetry: Reading Polish Postwar Avant-Garde: Tymoteusz Karpowicz and Krystyna Miłobędzka. *Aktuālas Problēmas Literatūras Un Kultūras Pētniecībā* 22: 253–69.
- Górniak-Prasnal, Karolina, and Katarzyna Kuchowicz. 2015. Motywy roślinne w *Anaglifach* Krystyny Miłobędzkiej. *Maska* 27: 117–26.
- Grądziel-Wójcik, Joanna. 2008. “Spróbuj zbudować dom ze słów”. O wierszach “niezamieszkanym” Krystyny Miłobędzkiej. In *Miłobędzka wielokrotnie*. Edited by Piotr Śliwiński. Poznań: WBPiCAK, pp. 21–34.
- Gutorow, Jacek. 2011. *Księga Zakładek*. Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Jarzyna, Anita. 2017. Wprowadzenie do post-koiné: Nieantropocentryczne języki poezji. *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* 30: 107–39. [CrossRef]
- Kałuza, Anna. 2008. Poezja konkretna w sporze z poezją hermetyczną. In *Eadem Wola Odróżnienia. O modernistycznej Poezji Jarosława Marka Rymkiewicza, Julii Hartwig i Krystyny Miłobędzkiej*. Kraków: Universitas, pp. 199–215.
- Koza, Katarzyna. 2020. Rola drzew w poezji Urszuli Zajązkowskiej. *Annales Universitas Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Poetica* 8: 286–99. [CrossRef]
- Lekowska, Daria. 2020. “Wyłaniam kraje kory pękate”. (Współ)drzewna poetyka Krystyny Miłobędzkiej. *Annales Universitas Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Poetica* 8: 262–71. [CrossRef]
- Lihačev, Dimitrij Sergeevič (Lichaczow, Dymitr). 1991. *Poezja ogrodów. O semantyce stylów ogrodowo-parkowych*. Translated by Budu Russe and Kaja Sakowicz. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
- Majdecki, Longin. 1972. *Historia ogrodów*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Maliszewski, Karol. 2020. *Bez zaszeregowania. O nowej poezji kobiet*. Kraków: Universitas, pp. 74–75.
- Małecki, Wojciech P., and Jarosław Woźniak. 2020. Ecocriticism in Poland: Then and now. *Ecozon@, European Journal of Literature, Culture & Environment* 11: 34–41.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 1970. *Pokrewne*. (Related). Warszawa: Czytelnik.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 1975. *Dom, Pokarmy*. (Home, Foods). Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 1984. *Wykaz treści (Register of Contents)*. Warszawa: Czytelnik.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 1990. *Teatr Jana Dormana (Jan Dorman’s Theater)*. Poznań: Ogólnopolski Ośrodek Sztuki dla Dzieci i Młodzieży.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 1992. *Pamiętam. Zapisy Stanu Wojennego*. (I remember. Martial Law Notes). Wrocław: Wydawnictwo A.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 1994. *Przed wierszem. Zapisy dawne i nowe*. (Before the Poem. Old and New Notes). Kraków and Warszawa: “Fundacja Brulionu”.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 1995. *Siała baba mak. Gry słowne dla teatru (Old Woman Sowed the Poppy. Word Games for the Theater)*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo A.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 1999. Poezje—Poetry. In *Collaboration with E. Sułkowska-Bierezin, “2B”, nr 14*. Translated by Kujawinski F.

- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2000a. *Imiesłowy (Participels)*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2000b. *wszystkowiersze (omnipoems)*. Legnica: Biuro Literackie.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2003. *Przesuwanka*. Legnica: Biuro Literackie.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2004. *Po krzyku*. (After Shout). Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2006. *Zbierane (1960–2005)*. (Gathered 1960–2005). Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2008a. *Gubione (Lost)*. Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2008b. *W widnokregu Odmieńca. Teatr, dziecko, kosmogonia*. (In the Horizon of Different. Theater, Child, Cosmogonia). Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2010a. *zbierane, gubione (1960–2010)*. (gathered, lost 1960–2010). Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2010b. *znikam, jestem. (I disappear, I am)*. Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2012. *dwanaście wierszy w kolorze (Twelve Poems in Color)*. Wrocław: Biuro Literackie.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2013a. *Nothing More*. Translated by Elżbieta Wójcik-Leese. Todmorden: Arc Publication.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2013b. Inc. drzewo tak drzewo (the tree yes the three). In *Nothing More*. Translated by Elżbieta Wójcik-Leese. Todmorden: Arc Publication.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2013c. Inc. pisz, pisz ... (write, write ...). In *Nothing More*. Translated by Elżbieta Wójcik-Leese. Todmorden: Arc Publication.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2013d. Inc. dróżki w ogrodzie (paths in garden). In *Nothing More*. Translated by Elżbieta Wójcik-Leese. Todmorden: Arc Publication.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2019. Anaglify (Anaglyphs). In *Eadem, Spis z natury (Inventory of Nature)*. 1. *Anaglify (Anaglyphs)*; 2. *Małe mity (Little Mythes)*; 3. *Jesteś samo śpiewa (You are self singing)*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1960.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020. *jest/jestem*. Wiersze Wybrane 1960/2020, (Is/I Am). Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno, pp. 256–57.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020a. Inc. Na szybie pokrytej ... (Draw two circles...). In *Eadem, Anaglify*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1960.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020b. Co ja robię, patrzę w jest ... (What I do, I look in is). In *Eadem, Imiesłowy*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 2000.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020c. Inc. Oczy nie widzą głęboko ... (Eyes don't see deeply). In *Eadem, Pokrewne*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1970.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020d. Jestem że widzę że widzę że mijam (I am that I see that I see that I pass). In *Eadem, Dom, Pokarmy*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1975.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020e. Inc. pisz, pisz ... (Write, write...). In *Eadem, Po krzyku*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 2004.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020f. Inc. Kolory w dzieciństwie ... (In childhood colors...). In *Eadem, Anaglify*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1960.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020g. Inc. Ta butelka z sokiem pomarańczowym ... (This bottle with orange juice). In *Eadem, Anaglify*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1960.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020h. Roślinne (Vegetal). In *Eadem, Pokrewne*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1970.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020i. Chlorofil (Chlorophyll). In *Eadem, Pokrewne*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1970.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020j. Ogród (Garden). In *Eadem, Pokrewne*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1970.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020k. Narodzenie z oczu (Birth from the Eyes). In *Eadem, Pokrewne*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1970.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020l. Inc. jeszcze do wnuka (still to the grandchild). In *Eadem, Imiesłowy*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1970.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020m. Inc. mówiące mnie drzewo (tree speaking me). In *Eadem, dwanaście wierszy w kolorze*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 2012.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020n. Co nie widzi oko głęboko...? (What does not eye see deeply?). In *Eadem, dwanaście wierszy w kolorze*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 2012.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020o. Inc. tylko bądź ... (Be only). In *Eadem, dwanaście wierszy w kolorze*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 1970.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020p. wiersz róża (poem rose). In *Eadem, wszystkie wiersze*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 2000.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020q. Inc. Mam. Mnie nie ma ... (I have. I am not). In *Eadem, dwanaście wierszy w kolorze*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 2012.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna. 2020r. Inc. wiersz zamknięty (closed poem). In *Eadem, wszystkie wiersze*. Lusowo: Wydawnictwo Wolno. First published 2000.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna, Falkiewicz Andrzej, Karpowicz Tymoteusz, and Karpowicz Maria. 2021a. *Blisko z daleka. Listy (1970–2003)*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna, Falkiewicz Andrzej, Karpowicz Tymoteusz, and Karpowicz Maria. 2021b. Letter nr 132 by Tymoteusz Karpowicz to Andrzej Falkiewicz. (Oak Park, 8 April 1998), pp. 738–39.
- Miłobędzka, Krystyna, and Iwona Chmielewska. 2014. *Na Wysokiej Górze*. (On the High Mountain). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Miejskie Posnania.

- Nyczek, Tadeusz. 2008. Mikromakro. In *Miłobędzka wielokrotnie*. Edited by Piotr Śliwiński. Poznań: WBPiCAK, pp. 175–78.
- Orska, Joanna. 2018. Ciało z klocków. Słowo na scenie w twórczości Krystyny Miłobędzkiej. In *Nauka chodzenia. Teksty programowe późnej awangardy*. Edited by Wojciech Browarny, Paweł Mackiewicz and Joanna Orska. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, vol. 1, pp. 255–85.
- Piaget, Jean. 1923. *Le Langage et la pensée chez l'enfant*. Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé.
- Piaget, Jean. 2003. *La Représentation du monde chez l'enfant*. Paris: Quadrige. First published 1926.
- Peiper, Tadeusz. 1972. *Nowe usta*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie. First published 1926.
- Potocki, Wacław. 1907. *Ogród fraszek*. Lviv: Towarzystwo Popierania Nauki Polskiej, vols. 1–3. First published 1648.
- Prévert, Jacques. 1949. Je suis comme je suis. In *Idem, Paroles*. Paris: Gallimard. First published 1946.
- Rymkiewicz, Jarosław Marek. 1968. *Myśli różne o ogrodach. Dzieje jednego toposu*. Warszawa: Czytelnik.
- Salwa, Mateusz. 2020. Antyogród w ogrodzie. *Aspiracje* 112: 59–60.
- Skurtys, Jakub. 2017. Zamiast Szymborskiej? Krystyna Miłobędzka i źródła współczesnej ekopoezji w Polsce. *Teorie przestrzeni* 28: 203–19.
- Suszek, Ewelina. 2020. *Figuracje braku i nieobecności. Miłobędzka—Białoszewski—Kozioł*. Kraków: Universitas.
- Szafrańska, Małgorzata, ed. 1998. *Ogród. Forma. Symbol. Marzenie*. Warszawa: Ars Regia—Zamek Królewski w Warszawie.
- Szymborska, Wisława. 1986. Jarmark cudów. In *Eadem, Ludzie na moście*. Warszawa: Czytelnik.
- von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. 1789. *Heidenröselin in: Goethe's Schriften*. Leipzig: Georg Joachim Göschen, vol. 8, pp. 105–6.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1977. *Remarks on Colour*. Translated by Linda L. McAlister, and Margarete Schättle. Oxford: C.G.E Anscombe.
- Wójcik-Leese, Elżbieta. 2006. Poland. *Poetry Wales* 42: 40–44.
- Żurek, Łukasz. 2022. Two Commas and a Hyphen by Krystyna Miłobędzka. *Forum Poetyki/Forum of Poetics* 27. First published 2017. Available online: <http://fp.amu.edu.pl/two-commas-and-a-hyphen-by-krystyna-milobedzka/> (accessed on 8 September 2022).

Article

Representation of *Corpus Patiens* in Russian Art of the 1920s

Nataliya Zlydneva 

Institute for Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, 119334 Moscow, Russia; natzlydneva@gmail.com

Abstract: Similar to the Russian historical avant-garde of the 1910s, which predicted the war and the social revolution of 1917, the late avant-garde of the 1920s anticipated the advent of the totalitarian terror and the Stalinist repressions of the 1930s. In figurative painting, this manifested itself in a specific visual “lexicon” and modality (bodily violence and the fragmented body, frustration, motifs of loss, death and general catastrophe), as well as in the expressive style (that inherited but not duplicated the models of European expressionism). In addition to proposing an analytical classification of semantics and poetics of the painting of the 1920s, the present article discusses the issue of the representation of political power in visual art and the presence of archaic roots in the *corpus patiens* (lat.) motifs. It examines artefacts made by eminent as well as little-known painters of the late avant-garde, including Kazimir Malevich, Alexander Tyshler, Kliment Redko, Georgy Rublev, Aleksandr Drevin, Boris Goloposlov and others.

Keywords: visual art; Russian avant-garde; prognostic function; violence; archaic stereotypes; totalitarian terror

1. Introduction: Art as a Foreteller

Hegel’s formula according to which art reflects life was in a simplified and perverted way hammered into the consciousness of the Soviet mass viewer from the 1930s, yet, in the very same years, it was refuted by the practice of the fine arts or, more specifically, their alternative trends in relation to the mainstream ideology. As one knows, text extends the meanings that it originally contained as the space and time of its functioning in culture expands (Toporov 1983). The text’s functions expand as well. The prognostic function of art comes to the fore in crucial historical epochs and times of social bifurcation. Fortune tellers, predictors of the future, and prophets meet with great demand in a society that seeks to get rid of the disturbing feeling of uncertainty about the future or at least to reduce its frustration. Art also acquires the function of anticipation—no matter whether the artists themselves are aware of it or not. In the history of literature, cinema and painting, one finds many cases of the anticipation of future events, both at the global historical scale and at the level of the life of individuals. The most striking textbook example is the date of the 20th-century Russian revolution that was predicted by Velimir Khlebnikov (whom Mayakovsky did not believe and mistakenly corrected the date in one of his poems: “The *sixteenth* year is coming in the crown of thorns of revolutions”). Khlebnikov deliberately looked for numerical patterns in historical chronology. At the same time, in certain Hollywood movies (*Armageddon*, 1998, dir. Michael Bay; *Escape from New York*, 1993, dir. John Carpenter; and others), the events of 11 September 2001—the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York—are foreshadowed not as an established law of time or as a mystical coincidence but as a real prophecy. Trends in art are also endowed with a prophetic gift: Russian symbolism of the turn of the 20th century, both in literature and in the fine arts, is imbued with a premonition of a civilizational catastrophe, as if foreseeing the collapse of Russian pre-revolutionary culture. The texts of Andrey Bely and Aleksandr Blok are full of vague allusions and gloomy predictions. The avant-garde—not only the historical avant-garde in Russia, but also Italian futurism and the early German expressionism—foresaw the horrors of the First World War: a blown-up world appeared in painting as fragmented polyhedrons, deviant

Citation: Zlydneva, Nataliya. 2022. Representation of *Corpus Patiens* in Russian Art of the 1920s. *Arts* 11: 105. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050105>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 31 August 2022

Accepted: 18 October 2022

Published: 20 October 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

corporeality, the attack of machines on the living organs of the human body, and borderline mental states. The meanings of Kazimir Malevich's famous "Black Square" are saturated with a general sense of catastrophe which lowered the curtain on the stage of European art history while outlining a broader context—a premonition of the decline of Russian culture. Thinking about the future, writers voluntarily or involuntarily surmised the outlines of the coming totalitarian era in anti-utopias—whether German Nazism in Karel Capek's novel *The War with the Newts* written in 1936 or contemporary events in Russia in Vladimir Sorokin's story "The Day of the Oprichnik" written in 2006. The exposure of a social project doomed to failure in Andrey Platonov's story "Foundation Pit" (written in 1930, first published in 1968) can be regarded in the same line. Although the genre of dystopia itself is still a by-product of the prognostic function, it is not so much about a critical look at modernity and its near future as about a kind of registration using the special sensory sensitivity of art of the seismic vibrations of upcoming social earthquakes. At the same time George Orwell's dystopic novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* written in 1948 demonstrated amazing insight into the Eastern European regimes that were to be established after the Second World War. The features of the carnival of death sweeping the world—the recent pandemic—can also be seen in the prophetic movie *Joker* (2019, dir. Todd Phillips). I should also mention personal foreseeing: Mikhail Vrubel predicted the death of his son, and Van Gogh—his own death. These are just a few examples.

Let me now turn to a phenomenon of this kind that is less obvious yet all the more revealing—the way in which Soviet paintings of the late 1920s and the early 1930s manifested a premonition of the onset of the repressive Stalinist regime. This took place mainly in the unofficial art of this time, which came to the attention of the broad public only in recent decades: a lot of paintings gathered dust in the funds of museums or the attics of collectors, while many others were destroyed during the Stalinist period during mass arrests or the self-censorship of their authors. This period has been widely discussed in recent decades, and a lot has been written about its artistic atmosphere and paintings. The most important information is found in Olga Roytenberg's book *Did someone really remember that we had been . . .* (Roytenberg 2004), which provides an essential introduction to the little-known aspects of the art of that era. Individual topics in the history of painting of the 1920s and the connection between semantics and formal stylistic practices are the subject of studies by the art historians Aleksandra Salienko (Salienko 2018), Sergey Fofanov (Fofanov 2019), Anatoly Morozov, me (Nataliya Zlydneva) and others. Significant issues of the historical avant-garde were raised by Boris Groys (Groys 1988) and in a book edited by Hans Guenther and Evgeny Dobrenko dedicated to the problems of socialist realism in a wide ideological and esthetic context (Guenther and Dobrenko 2000). The approach proposed in the present article to the late Soviet avant-garde as an art that was aloof from the main paths of development—industrial art, constructivism, etc.—has not been considered before and much remains to be clarified on this issue. The prognostic functions of painting of this period leads me to formulate some more general questions: the problem of the modality of the image, i.e., of the conveyance of emotions by non-verbal means, and the problem of identifying the level of visual "text" at which a social theme manifests itself in the form of the collective unconscious. A significant aspect of *corpus patiens* motifs deals with the proportions of subjectivity and objectivity in a visual communication. Bodily suffering can be presented as the object of a mimetic narrative, yet it can also have a subjective model which is wholly determined by the level/plane of expression (the motion of the pictorial mass, contrasting colour, swirling composition, etc.). Most often there is a correlation between the object and the subject of representation that increases the degree of semiotization of the visual text in which the social context and the ideological code of the époque becomes more perceptible.

2. Radical Shift in the Late Russian Avant-Garde

The generation that entered the artistic arena at the end of the 1920s received an impulse from the artists of the historical avant-garde of the 1910s, from whom they learned

in one form or another. Many of the younger artists began with non-objective painting and subsequently retained a commitment to the problems of pure form in their mature years; Sergey Luchishkin, Kliment Redko, Aleksandr Tyshler and others practiced non-objective painting in the beginning of the 1920s. However, these artists, along with many of their colleagues from different artistic associations (“OST” and the others), soon turned to figurative painting, narrative and symbolic compositions or genre scenes. Meanwhile, these figurative plots had little in common with the art of the pre-avant-garde period and even less with the mimetic tradition of the 19th century. While the art of the generation of the 1920s stood on the shoulders of the historical avant-garde and retained a taste for radical experiment, their radicalism shifted from form to motif, projecting the level/plane of expression onto the level/plane of content. This turn manifested itself, in particular, in the fact that the narratives of the paintings began to be saturated with negative topics. The motifs of bodily suffering and violence (hunger, disability, torture of the flesh) and physical withering (the themes of old age and death) swept over many of the new figurative works. Cases in point include *The Invalids of War* by Yuri Pimenov (1926), the numerous images of dead birds in works by Vladimir Sokolov, the *Makhnovshchina* series of paintings by Aleksandr Tyshler (1920s), Eva Levina-Rosengolts’ *Old Men*, Sergey Luchishkin’s *Famine on the Volga River* (1925, destroyed), Pavel Korin’s *The Beggar* (1933) and many other paintings.

The emphasis shifted from the spatial and coloristic arrangement of the canvas to accentuated modality. Bodily suffering was often conveyed either in terms of the emotional state of the subject or as a representation of the appropriate object. For example, Aleksandr Gluskin’s painting *The Tragedy of the Goose* (1929, see Figure 1) tries less to expose the theme of a slain bird with a wide range of connotations that are verbally supported by the title (it is no coincidence that the motif coincides, also compositionally, with Goya’s late canvas) than to depict a state unfolded in time. Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin’s *Death of the Commissar* (1928), on the contrary, shows the physical death of a human being through a spherical perspective that transposes time into space, turning the psychological state into an object constituting a sort of epic mode of communication and eliminating the *corpus patiens* topic as such. The subjectivity of representation is also introduced with the help of predicates in the title (Boris Golopolosov’s *The Man Beating his Head against the Wall*, 1938, or S. Luchishkin’s *The Balloon Flew Away*, 1926).



Figure 1. A. Gluskin. *The Tragedy of the Goose*. 1929.

The state of anxiety, fear, horror as well as the foreboding of catastrophe, which is especially important for our study, spread over the entire field of visual discourse in the

late 1920s. To a certain extent, this turn in painting was due to the wave of interest in the heritage of symbolism that came into evidence during those years. Memories of symbolism served as a sort of antiphase with respect to the historical avant-garde of the 1910s. As the programmatic work of Russian symbolist painting, Leon Bakst's *Terror Antiquus* (1907) contained the whole gamut of expectations of catastrophe, as brilliantly shown in the famous essay written in 1909 by Vyacheslav I. Ivanov ([1909] 1979). Many works of the late 1920s are in consonance with the theme of this painting. However, can this kind of emotional gamut be explained only by the turn to symbolism?

3. Fear in Literature and Art of the 1920–1930s

In the late 1920s, the atmosphere in Russia was largely saturated with a feeling of fear. In literature, the motif of fear is particularly evident. It suffices to mention Leonid Lipavsky and his book *The Study of Horror*, Daniil Kharmis with his old women falling out of the window and Petrov disappearing into the forest, and the different phobias and horrors in the works of Yury Olesha, Mikhail Zoshchenko, Mikhail Bulgakov and Vsevolod Ivanov to evoke a whole cavalcade of forms and ways of representing the impending terrible in verbal artistic expression. We should also mention the tragicomic play *Suicide* by Nikolay Erdman (1928), which Meyerhold intended to stage but failed to do so on account of pressure from the authorities. Aleksandr Afinogenov's play *Fear* (1931) directly asserted that the state indicated in the title was one of the determining factors of human life: the playwright said through one of his characters, "We live in an era of great fear." As to painting, it reacted to the waves of fear in its own way (Zlydneva 2009).

In 1925, Kliment Redko painted his picture *Revolt* (see Figure 2). The appearance of this work was extremely significant from the point of view of the overall artistic climate of the 1920s. It is strictly symmetrical, almost constructivist, composition that combines geometric conventionality and narrative plot is structured by the central division in the shape of a rhombus. A group of revolutionaries with the gesticulating figure of Lenin in the centre are depicted inside the rhombus. Numerous associates are located around the communist leader along the model of a group photograph: the viewer can easily recognize Trotsky, Stalin, Krupskaya, Mikoyan, and other leading figures of the communist revolution. Extended processions of rebellious masses stretch out along the edges of the rhombus, preparing for a battle: workers, militiamen, warriors and band members holding weapons, carrying wind instruments and dragging carts with provisions. Outside the rhombus, numerous dark walls are blazing with red flames and projecting rays of light. Covered by windows, these walls resemble either prison façades or apocalyptic honeycombs. A very gloomy feeling of catastrophe is conveyed by the ornament of these honeycomb windows immersed in the darkness. The motif of violence as a sort of order resonates with the ideas of Michel Foucault (Foucault 1977). The atmosphere is also enhanced by the unnatural exaltation of the leader's posture (the iconographical canon of Lenin had not yet been standardized by 1925) and the intensity of the gloomy colouring. The feeling of horror is partly due to the memory of culture in the form of an appeal to traditional iconography: such diamond-shaped forms were used in the *Saviour in Power* composition in which Christ administers the Last Judgment. Having received an artistic education in the icon-painting workshops of Kyiv, K. Redko could not fail to realize this connection. However, it is impossible to assume that the artist deliberately used this Gospel motif in his composition to demonstrate a social catastrophe: the painting was not perceived by contemporaries in a tragic mode, as evidenced by the fact that it was successfully presented at an exhibition of revolutionary art in Moscow in 1926 without receiving negative assessments from official critics. Nevertheless, the present-day viewer who is aware of the onset of the repressive regime a few years later inevitably sees a prognostic element in this message, which vividly brings across the emotional state of the collective unconscious at the time.



Figure 2. K. Redko. *Revolt*. 1925.

The motifs of loss and existential crisis are already quite consciously broadcast in the painting of S. Luchishkin *The Balloon Flew Away* (1926, see Figure 3). The anecdotal plot and its infantile intonation grow into a life tragedy thanks to the expressive composition: two towering walls of apartment buildings form a narrow well, spatially rushing upwards towards heaven; in the windows you can see the ant-like life of the inhabitants and, on one of the upper floors, a person who has hanged himself. The latter detail leads to a negative interpretation of the whole narrative, which becomes especially obvious when one considers that the painter almost literally duplicated the engraving of the German expressionist George Grosz (1917), borrowing its composition and even the person who committed suicide. The quotation of Luchishkin's painting should hardly be interpreted as simple plagiarism: the emotional density of the narrative is enhanced by eliciting a socially critical component of German expressionism. Considering how close the ties between Russia and Germany were at that time, there is no doubt that the artist was well acquainted with the work of George Grosz. We also find narrative and compositional echoes between B. Golopolosov's painting *Revolt* (1927) and G. Grosz's painting *Metropolis* (1917): the centre of the composition is accentuated by a sharp wedge that, as if in protest, cuts into a world immersed in chaos and excesses (observation made by Zaretskaya 2019).



Figure 3. S. Luchishkin. *The Balloon Flew Away*. 1926.

4. Archaic Stereotypes

The ambivalence of K. Redko's canvas *Revolt*, in which the heroics of the revolution are intertwined with apocalyptic foresight, and the existential motifs of loss and despair in Luchishkin's painting *The Balloon Flew Away* can be considered as signs of direct alarm. Meanwhile, the discourse of power that becomes increasingly repressive manifested itself in a number of pictorial practices indirectly, as if on the sly, which made it sound only stronger. I am referring to archaic stereotypes that emerged in the compositional schemes of a number of works. Two of them are of particular significance. The first is a group of images showing various kinds of meetings—from work to Komsomol or party meetings. Compositions of this kind became widespread and can hardly be explained simply by

the new realities of Soviet social life—ideological collective events or imitation of public control. Pictures of this kind represent people (bodily mass and/or side-by-side figures) gathered around a speaker or leader at a table parallel to the surface of the canvas. Such a scheme undoubtedly goes back to Leonardo’s fresco *The Last Supper*, which established the iconographic canon in European art for many centuries. The visual rhetoric of Leonardo’s work can be recognized in the poses and gestures of the characters in many works by Soviet artists: Samuil Adlivankin’s *Liquidating the Breakthrough* (1930), Vasiliy Tochilkin’s *Meeting of the Industrial Party* (1931), Nikolay Schneider’s *Trial of the Truant* (1932) and some others. The supposedly unconscious appeal to this visual stereotype has a deep and clear connotation—the premonition of impending catastrophe that was imprinted in the memory of culture. However, in the painting by Solomon Nikritin *Judgment of the People* (1934, see Figure 4) based on a similar compositional scheme (“comrades” sitting at a table), the allegory hardly appears in hidden form: the realistically presented scene of a repressive trial came true in a few years.



Figure 4. S. Nikritin. *Judgment of the People*. 1934.

Other signs of hidden stereotypes are found in the widespread dual images of this period. In some cases, the paired compositions are motivated by the plot—for example, the paired portraits of a couple: Fiodor Bogorodsky’s *In the Photo Studio* (1932) and K. Petrov-Vodkin’s *Spring* (1935). However, quite often there is no motivation, such as in the paintings by Boris Ermolaev *Red Navy sailors* (1934), Ivan Mashkov *The Lady in Blue* (1927), and Pavel Filonov *The Raider* (1926–1928). Doubling is characteristic of the compositions of K. Petrov-Vodkin’s earlier period (*Two Boys*, 1916). The twin images link to the cult of sacred twins evoking the ancient cultural archetype of supreme power and highest social status; in archaic societies, twins served for predicting the future (Ivanov 2009). It is significant

that this prefiguration of movement towards absolute power led a few years later to the emergence of the famous twin portrait by Aleksandr Gerasimov of Stalin and Voroshilov against the background of the Kremlin, which gave rise to the meme *Two Leaders after the Rain* (1938).

5. Discourse of Power: Gesture and Motion

Hidden symbols of power such as the onset of an era of violence can also be discerned in Georgy Rublev's still life *The Letter from Kyiv* (1929, see Figure 5). Painted in a primitive style the image shows a table viewed from above; there are a number of things on the table—a cup and saucer, a couple of lemons, a skein of thread, a brochure and an unopened envelope. From the inscriptions made in clumsy handwriting, one sees that the brochure contains Stalin's speech at a party congress, while the letter was sent from Kyiv and addressed to the author of the picture himself—"Yegor Rublev". If one takes into account that Kyiv was G. Rublev's hometown, this detail resembles an index sign of an auto-referential message. However, there is one more item on the table—huge tailor's scissors that stand out through their size and a thick black contour that visually resonates with the black letters of the inscriptions. This attribute of tailoring is a frequent "character" in Rublev's paintings representing sewing workshops. However, on this canvas this detail is not motivated by the narrative in any way and looks more like an instrument of torture than a household appliance. The composition as a whole resembles a children's puzzle where the combination of simple signs of everyday life, the brochure as an ideological resonator and the envelope as a sign of self-communication, as well as the scissors as a piercing and cutting tool (an unclearly articulated yet very formidable symbol of violence) add up to a single syntagma, a single vague dark message. It is worth noting that one year later the scissors reappeared on Rublev's canvas in a transformed form—their shape can be distinguished in a portrait of Stalin, in the outlines of the leader's eyebrows and nose, highlighted by the same thick, black and curved line (*Stalin Reading the Newspaper 'Pravda'*, 1930). It is unlikely that the artist employed this cross-textual visual rhyme consciously in this case, it is clearly more appropriate to talk about a discourse of power and perceived threat spread over the entire field of artistic practices and manifested (regardless of the author's intention) in the emphasis of details.

In a more explicit way, the discourse of power can be detected in the system of gestures of depicted characters. The waving arms, resembling the hands of a dial, of the figure of Lenin in Redko's above-mentioned painting *Revolt* are symptomatic. Imaging gestures actively flooded into painting from the mid-1920s and performed a variety of functions. Gestures in paintings echo the speech of natural language and iconically convey a message, raising its semiotic status. There are gestures of indefinite meaning that represent *homo loquens* (narrator) or *homo ambulans* (walking man) and have a mimetic purpose, i.e., to expand and corroborate a narrative. There also exists an arbitrary group of gestures aimed at describing modality: they convey emotion in a wide range of psychological states. Codified gestures form a special group: the gesture of a traffic controller, the gesture of finger pointing and—especially interesting for us—the gesture of a speaker. During this period, the central model of gesticulating characters is the model of a speaking person—a tribune (*homo loquens*)—which goes back to the antique motif of the oratory emperor. A final chord in this series of images is a multi-figured canvas by Konstantin Yuon *There is such a party!* (1934), in which a figurine of Lenin with an outstretched arm, barely visible in the multi-figure group of characters, prefigures the canonical pose in the visual representation of the leader for many decades to come. This gesture of the leader of the revolution is symbolically strengthened verbally by means of the title that conveys the legitimating slogan of the Bolshevik coup.



Figure 5. G. Rublev. *The Letter from Kyiv*. 1929.

By this time, the iconography of Lenin as a tribune addressing a crowd of adherents had already existed for more than 10 years in propaganda posters, paintings and sculptures of the post-revolutionary period. One should mention posters by Gustav Klutskis and Vladimir Shcherbakov, the painting by Isaak Brodsky *Lenin's Speech at the Putilov Factory in 1917* (1927), the monument to Lenin by Sergey Evseev and Vladimir Shchuko at the Finland Station (1925) and many others. During these years, a book entitled *Gesture in Art* was written by the famous art critic and staff member of the State Academy of Artistic Sciences Nikolai Tarabukin (Tarabukin 1929, still not published, the work exists in two typewritten manuscripts at the Russian State Library). According to Tarabukin, the gesture is “the external expression of an internal necessity” (p. 33), and its main property is its intentionality. The gesture acts as a function of the *will* (“strong-willed striving towards danger–gesture”, p. 358), which, obviously, goes back to German formalism, to Alois Riegl’s concept of *Kunstwollen*, as well as to Friedrich Nietzsche’s *will*, a motif that permeates all modernist art. Among Tarabukin’s colleagues at the State Academy of Artistic Sciences (GAKhN), A. Gabrichevsky also used the category of *will* in connection with the concepts of internal motion and formation, asserting that time is an integral property of artistic form and acts in tandem with space. Motion was an important subject of research at the State Academy of Artistic Sciences (Laboratory of Choreology, Section of Cinematography–Aleksy Sidorov) and the Central Institute of Labour (Aleksy Gastev). Nikolay Tarabukin also wrote the article “Motion” for the Dictionary of Artistic Terms that was prepared at the State Academy of Artistic Sciences (Tarabukin 2005). As a signifier whose signified is movement, the gesture for Tarabukin is charged with the tension of antinomy: “[Its] synthetic resolution is obtained in form < . . . > which by its nature is inevitably a form of becoming” (Tarabukin 1929, p. 123). In other words, “gesture < . . . > is a contradiction resolved in unity and < . . . > is considered by us as a category of becoming” (p. 125). According to Tarabukin, the function of the gesture is to make visible something that lies beyond the visible: “to make an invisible disturbance visible” (pp. 135–36).

Motion as a semantic category of artistic representation also occupied Tarabukin a few years earlier when he was writing his article on diagonal compositions in painting (published in: Tarabukin 1973). In the case of *homo loquens* discussed above, the diagonal composition of the speaker/leader's outstretched hand gives dynamism to the figure. This dynamism semiotizes the concept of *life* as the will to what is beyond the visible, as an invisible excitement.

6. Running Man: Motion in Expressionism as Prediction

Motion as such was the basis of the poetics of futurism in the 1910s, especially in Italy. However, in the historical avant-garde, motion mainly consisted of mechanical dynamics as well as the dynamics of binocular vision that changes points of view (simultanism). Meanwhile, in line with the shift in poetic focus from radical form to radical topics in the late 1920s, there was an increased interest in depicting the body in motion. El Lissitzky's photo collage *Runner* still fits into the early avant-garde paradigm yet the motif soon gives way to an ideologically loaded content. Thus, in the paintings of Aleksandr Deineka of the 1920s, the muscular male body, the body of an athlete and a warrior in motion, evoke the cult of strength and youth of the masculine world, unequivocally referring to the will to power and violence. The "invisible excitement" is hidden by the intentionality of the gesture of a running character despite all the positive ecstatic pathos perceived on the surface.

Far removed from official ideology, K. Malevich's painting *The Running Man* (1934, see Figure 6) represents a completely different model of motion. The man is running along a schematic representation of land lined with "suprematist" stripes; he appears huge against the background of the low horizon. The intense colouring of the composition based on the archaic triad of black–white–red, the torn contours of the depicted character against the background of symbolic figures (a cross, a sword and isolated blank houses), and the blackened face and bare feet contrasting with the white pants and hair create an atmosphere of anxiety and impending disaster. The reverse direction of motion (from right to left) reveals the important symbolic level of this visual text: a rush to the origins of the painter's poetics, an acknowledgment of the collapse of hope in the present and a desperate warning about the future. It is difficult to resist the temptation of seeing a socio-political subtext in this message by a dying artist, a message containing an insight into upcoming upheavals, which, in a sense, have already begun. It is no coincidence that one of the numerous interpretations asserts that the image is inspired by the dispossessed peasantry (on the various interpretations of the picture see: Zlydneva 2013).

Malevich's painting is the crowning achievement of the late figurative stage of the master's work, yet at the same time it is embedded into the art of the time, albeit far removed from its main trends. I am referring to the Soviet expressionism of the late 1920s and the early 1930s, a phenomenon that appeared above the artistic landscape of the era like a bright comet that was unfortunately short-lived. The range of themes and stylistic practices of this episode of the history of Soviet art was quite broad—from conventional landscapes (Aleksandr Drevin, Roman Semashkevich, Boris Golopolosov) to genre compositions in a conventionally metaphoric interpretation such as A. Tyshler's series "Makhnovshchina" with scenes of bodily violence (the painting *Gulyay Pole*¹, 1927) and paintings on the theme of the revolutionary struggle (B. Golopolosov's *The Battle for the Red Banner*, 1928), and direct illustrations of life in prison (see the aforementioned *The Man Beating His Head Against the Wall* by the same artist). A common feature of Russian/Soviet expressionism is its accentuated motion thanks to dynamic pasty brushstrokes, swirling compositions, and the corresponding motifs—running and rapid driving (from Tyshler's Makhnovist gigs and Malevich's galloping cavalry to turning car by R. Semashkevich, etc.). A. Drevin's canvases, for example, do not contain social themes, yet the impulsive dynamics of the landscape scenes, the contrasting combinations of pastel and dark colours, and the individual psychologized details of nature express the hysterical exaltation of a subject on the verge of an emotional breakdown (*Dry Birch*, 1930, see Figure 7; *Bulls*,

1931). Other examples include the representations of ecstatic excitement that describe the psychological state of instability and aggression: bloody battles and wounded bodies (B. Golopolosov's *The Struggle for the Red Banner*, 1928, see Figure 8), convulsive self-torment from extreme despair (B. Golopolosov's *A Man Beating His Head Against the Wall*, 1936–1937), and the demoniac jubilation of a crowd at a demonstration (A. Gluskin's *To the Demonstration*, 1932, see Figure 9). The latter work is especially significant as it refers (just as in the case of worker/party meetings) to the Christian iconography and, more precisely, the depiction of the Gospel episodes of the Mocking of Christ and the Carrying of the Cross. The similarity with the grotesque images of a saint's tormentors on the canvases of Bosch and with the infernal characters in the later paintings of James Ensor, the forerunner of European expressionism, is quite unambiguous in the painting of the Soviet artist.



Figure 6. K. Malevich. *The Running Man*. 1934.



Figure 7. A. Drevin. *The Dry Birch*. 1930.



Figure 8. B. Golopolosov. *The Struggle for the Red Banner*. 1928.



Figure 9. A. Gluskin. *To the Demonstration*. 1932.

The pictorial mass in motion and the representation of the suffering body as an expression of approaching catastrophe are also found in P. Filonov's paintings, which to a certain extent echoed the experiments of the expressionists. Already in the early work of the artist, the baroque *vanitas* was transformed into the motifs of death and decaying flesh, the world of the dead and witches (the watercolour *Man and Woman*, 1912–1913, the painting *Feast of Kings*, 1912). Later, in the 1920s and early 1930s, the painter turned to death masks (*Head III*, 1930, see Figure 10) and images of thinning bodily tissue—not of an individual figure but of the organic world as a whole. In the same years the artist began to decompose matter into atoms in motion. In the mosaic disintegration of a non-objective pictorial composition into elements and their subsequent reassembly into larger conglomerates, one can distinguish the influence of Vyacheslav I. Ivanov's ideas on Russian Dionysianism and the latter's links with ancient metamorphoses. The elemental forces of hidden, flickering mythology are at work here. Bidirectional metamorphoses of the descent and ascent of the bodily, its compression and decompression, its condensation and transparency refer to the mythopoetic complexes of Dionysus and Atlantis, which are so closely associated in Russia with the awareness of the metaphysical nature of social catastrophe.

The emergence of expressionism painting in the late 1920s in Russia was due to many reasons, including the close familiarity of Soviet artists of the second generation of the avant-garde with contemporary German art (direct contacts between artists, exchange of exhibitions, a general climate of rapprochement in Germany, etc.) and the logic of development of the artistic process, in which the disappearance of the avant-garde of the late 1910s required the compensation of the “warmed up” form, which had already gained inertia. However, there was another reason: the generic features of expressionism such as internal conflict, the complex of psychotic experiences, the themes of violence and fear and the developing, continuously moving pictorial matter/mass responded (whether consciously or not) to the desire to stave off impending disaster in the form of political terror. The themes of death, which were the main referent of totalitarian art according to Igor Smirnov (Smirnov 2005), began to sound ever louder in the paintings of the 1920s.

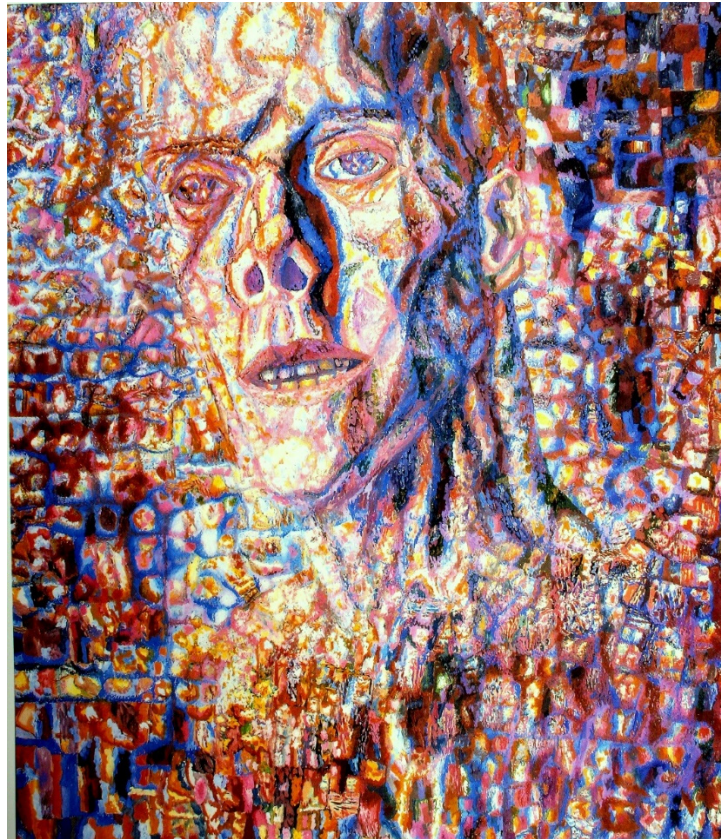


Figure 10. P. Filonov. *The Head. III.* 1930.

7. Conclusions

In this article, I examined the motif of the suffering body (Lat. *corpus patiens*) as a marker of the premonition of the tragic developments of Soviet history. I studied this motif from the dual standpoint of *what* it depicts and *how* it depicts it, i.e., both as an object and as a modality of representation. In the paintings of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the suffering body is linked to bodily violence, maiming and bloody battles. It is also expressed through metaphors: a dead bird, a withered tree, a desert landscape, the motif of loss or even scissors as well as manifestations of terrible events such as famine, suicide and death. The state of detriment, angst and psychological conflict as an expression of the suffering body in its subjective incarnation found expression in different types of visualization of motion such as motifs of running, a fluid painterly medium, dynamic compositions and, last but not least, the theory of gesture as the expression of *will* in the artistic image. Finally, the premonition of the approaching age of totalitarianism is suggested by disguised archetypes that, frequently unperceived by the artists themselves, manifested themselves as the collective unconscious. Here, I am referring to the most tragic episodes of the Gospels (Saviour in Power, the Last Supper, the Passion of Christ) that connote sacrifice and catastrophe as well as the motif of twins as a symbol of the sacralization of power. This deep semantic level of paintings attests to the memory of culture and expands the semantic field of the visual communication.

Naturally, all the aforementioned themes and forms of the expression of human suffering were largely an artistic reflection of the difficult tribulations of generations that lived through war, revolution and devastation. At the same time, considered alongside prophecies contained in other media and studied together with all the other factors that determined the “discourse” of the image, these signs of premonition unambiguously point to the manifestation of social intuition in the fine arts.

This article mainly focuses on the paintings of the younger generation of artists influenced by the historical avant-garde. However, other artists who were distant from experiments of form and motif and were completely embedded in the ideological matrix of the time were also involved in reflecting the gloomy forebodings that hovered in the air. These premonitions manifested themselves in different ways—in a conscious appeal to certain topics, such as the memory of culture in the use of traditional and archaic iconographic schemes that bear the connotations of catastrophe or in the activation of formal pictorial means that convey the anxious, gloomy emotional state of the subject. At the same time, it is important to note that, regardless of the intentions of the artists themselves, the art of the 1920s and the early 1930s served the social demand for the prognostic function. The predictions of many artists came true just a few years later in the disaster of repressions: B. Golopolosov was expelled from the professional community for 40 years in 1937, A. Drevin was executed in 1938, and P. Filonov died in poverty in 1942. It remains an open question whether such art contributed to shaping the future. Be that as it may, it was more of a diagnosis whose formulation does not accelerate or retard the inevitable development of the disease but only warns against its consequences. While the alternative movement of early Soviet art fulfilled its social mission, this message was unfortunately not heeded by contemporaries.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Note

¹ Gulyaypole is the Ukrainian town where in time of the civil war of the 1919s the Ukrainian anarchist state under the leadership of Makhno was established.

References

- Fofanov, Sergey. 2019. *Golovoy ob Stenu. Boris Golopolosov*. Katalog vystavki v Gosudarstvennoy Tretyakovskoy Galeree. Moskva: Gosudarstvennaya Trtyakovskaya Galereya.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Random House.
- Groys, Boris. 1988. *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*. München and Wien: Hanser Verlag (Edition Akzente).
- Guenther, Hans, and Evgeniy Dobrenko. 2000. *Sotsialisticheskiy Kanon*. Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii Proekt.
- Ivanov, Vyacheslav I. 1979. Drevniy uhzas. In *Ivanov, Vyacheslav I. Sobraniye Sochineniy Vv. 1-4. V. 4*. Brussel: Satyi. First published 1909. Available online: https://rvb.ru/ivanov/1_critical/1_brussels/vol3/01text/02papers/3_077.htm (accessed on 17 October 2022).
- Ivanov, Vyacheslav Vs. 2009. Bliznechny kult i Dvoichnaya Simvolicheskaya Klassifikatsiya v Afrike. In *Ivanov Vyacheslav Vs. Izbrannyye Trudy po Semiotike i Istorii Kultury. V. V. Mifologiya i Folklor*. Moskva: Yazyki slavyanskoy kul'tury, pp. 11–48.
- Roytenberg, Olga. 2004. "Neuzheli kto-to Vaspomnil, Chto My Byli". In *Istoriiyu Hudozhestvennoy Zhisni 1925–1935 godov*. Moskva: Galart.
- Salienko, Aleksandra. 2018. Vystavka Proizvedeniy Revolyutsionnoy i Sovetskoy Tematiki v Gosudarstvennoy Tretyakovskoy Galeree 1930 Gods. Zabytyi Eksperiment. In *Istoriiya Iskusstva v Rossyi XX vek: Intentsiyi, Konteksty, Shkoly. XXVIII Alpatovskiy Chteniya. Mezhdunarodnaya Konferentsiya. Materialy*. Moskva: Moskovskiy Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, pp. 171–89.
- Smirnov, Igor. 2005. O groteske i rodstvennykh emu kategoriayah. In *Semiotika straha*. Moskva: Nauka, pp. 204–21.
- Tarabukin, Nikolay. 1929. *Zhest v Iskusstve*. Manuscript. Moscow: Russia State Library, Fond 627.
- Tarabukin, Nikolay. 1973. Smyslovoye znachenie diagonalnykh kompozitsiy v zhivopisi. In *Trudy po Znakovym Sistemam. Vol. VI*. Tartu: Tartuskiy Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, pp. 472–81.
- Tarabukin, Nikolay. 2005. Dvizhenie. In *Slovar' Khudozhestvennykh Terminov. G. A. H. N. 1923–1929*. Edited by Chubarov Igor. Moskva: Logos-Altera, Esse Homo, pp. 126–27.
- Toporov, Vladimir. 1983. Prostranstvo i tekst. In *Tekst: Semantika i Struktura*. Moskva: Nauka, pp. 227–84.
- Zaretskaya, Anastasiya. 2019. Golovoy ob stenu. Boris Golopolosov skoro v Tretyakovke. In *ARTinvestment*. Available online: artinvestment.ru (accessed on 19 February 2019).
- Zlydneva, Nataliya. 2009. "Scaring" in the late avant-garde painting. In *Avant-Garde i Ideologiya: Russkie Primery*. Belgrad: Izdatel'stvo Belgradskogo Universiteta, pp. 521–31.
- Zlydneva, Nataliya. 2013. Kuda bezhit krestyanin: Zagadki pozdnego Malevicha. In *Vizual'ny Narrative: Opyt Mifopoeticheskogo Prochteniya*. Moskva: Indrik, pp. 179–94. Available online: https://inслав.ru/sites/default/files/editions/2013_zlydneva.pdf (accessed on 17 October 2022).

Article

Visions of Disrupted Chronologies: Sergei Eisenstein and Hedwig Fechheimer's Cubist Egypt

Leanne Rae Darnbrough 

Faculty of Arts, KU Leuven, 3000 Leuven, Belgium; leannerae.darnbrough@kuleuven.be

Abstract: By juxtaposing two ostensibly divergent characters, the Jewish art historian and Egyptologist Hedwig Fechheimer (1871–1942) and Soviet filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948), this paper investigates how both approaches folded time, creating Cubist chronologies. Fechheimer adapted the philological focus of her Berlin School contemporaries to create an ahistorical, anti-teleological grammar of ancient Egyptian art which espoused an artistic affinity between the Egyptians and the Cubist movement. Eisenstein, who held a copy of one of Fechheimer's books in his personal library, took a similar approach in the development of his critiques of historical allegory. This paper looks specifically at two shots of a sphinx during the bridge sequence in the 1927 film *October* to demonstrate how they correspond to Fechheimer's views on Egyptian art and also function peculiarly within the film. Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate how the interpellations of the sphinx demonstrate a particular critique of historicity that Eisenstein later expands upon in his *Ivan the Terrible* films.

Keywords: Hedwig Fechheimer; ancient Egypt; sphinx; Sergei Eisenstein; *October*; film; avant-garde; historicity

Citation: Darnbrough, Leanne Rae. 2022. Visions of Disrupted Chronologies: Sergei Eisenstein and Hedwig Fechheimer's Cubist Egypt. *Arts* 11: 92. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050092>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 8 August 2022

Accepted: 16 September 2022

Published: 21 September 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

The first decades of the twentieth century were effervescent with discoveries in many domains, but two of those, Egyptology and film, have surprising overlaps.¹ Much has already been written about the “hieroglyphic language” of film, with Jean Epstein asking if cinema could be considered “[...] une langue d’images pareille aux hieroglyphes de l’ancienne Égypte, dont nous méconnaissons le mystère, dont nous ignorons même tout ce que nous en ignorons?” (Epstein 1974).² and Abel Gance reflecting that “[...] le cinéma nous ramène à l’idéographie des écritures primitives, à l’hiéroglyphe, par le signe représentatif de chaque chose, et là est probablement le plus grande force d’avenir [...] Nous voilà, par un prodigieux retour en arrière, revenus sur le plan d’expression des Egyptiens” (Gance 1926).³ Film scholar Antonia Lant has also articulated the haptic tie between the cinema and the Egyptian bas-relief (Lant 1995). The medium of film, meanwhile, with its ability to preserve a dynamic facsimile of a particular space in time was often described as akin to the ancient Egyptian attempts at corporeal preservation via mummification. In his essay “Ontologie de l’Image Photographique” [The Ontology of the Photographic Image] André Bazin linked mummification and cinema when he stated “[...] le cinéma apparaît comme l’achèvement dans le temps de l’objectivité photographique [...] Pour la première fois, l’image des choses est aussi celle de leur durée et comme la momie du changement” (Bazin 1990).⁴ Lant has also made the connection, noting that the reanimation of mummies “[...] gave form to cinema’s power to rearrange time and space, as well as providing resonances with death” (Lant 1992). These connections linking ancient Egypt, temporal preservation, mummification and film were also earlier noted by the prolific Soviet filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein—perhaps most obviously in his 1946 text entitled “Dynamic Mummification: Notes for a General History of Cinema” (Eisenstein 2016). It is this last web of interstices—the supra-temporal aspect of cinema conjoined with the Egyptological—that I wish to elaborate upon in this paper.

I will be juxtaposing two divergent characters: the Jewish German art historian and Egyptologist Hedwig Fechheimer (1871–1942) and Soviet film director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948). I will first give a close reading of the bridge sequence in Eisenstein's 1927 film *October*, zooming in on two short shots of a sphinx which interject in the montage. While critics such as Annette Michelson have already given erudite and illuminating attention to the bridge sequence, the importance of the sphinx's temporal interpellation has thus far been largely neglected. However, as brief as the shots are, they function within the film in a number of interesting and critical ways; ways which are both perhaps serendipitously intriguing details and which also bring into sharper focus Eisenstein's particular theories of historicity.

The film *October* was commissioned as a celebration of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917 but was only released in March 1928, four months after the official celebrations on 7 November 1927. There were 13,000 reels of film shot, of which 9000 appeared in the final version, further attesting to Eisenstein's considerable editing efforts (O'Toole 2018).⁵ The film covers the initial hopefulness of the people with the founding of the Provisional Government after the February Revolution, their disillusionment as the Provisional Government does not usher in the longed for peace and prosperity, the Nevsky Square demonstrations in July 1917 and the final uprising under Lenin's command in October. By the end of October—and the end of *October*—the new Soviet government begins reforming the state, redistributing land and finally ending hostilities with Germany.

One of the most studied scenes of the film is that of the bridge sequence. In this scene we see a large mass of protestors who are fired upon by cannons—the rapid firing is emphasized through the repeated split second superimposition of guns and gunner as well as the flashing of the cannon mouths—the protestors reach the bridge and banners are carried up—there is a lone banner-bearer with a sphinx in the background, looking over his shoulder. The melee in the streets is repeatedly interjected into the flow of images—we see the crowd approaching—a soldier and a lady embrace on a boat—the soldier leaps from the boat to apprehend and assault the banner-bearing protestor—the soldier is joined by an older woman who begins beating the protestor with her umbrella—the lady in the boat looks on with scorn—the angry crowd nears, with a horse at the front—the horse is shot and stumbles, a swarm of ladies stab at the protestor with their sun umbrellas—the bourgeoisie laughs—a view of the dead horse and a dead lady with long blonde hair is shown from a multitude of angles—there is a phone call with the order to raise the bridges and cut off the workers from the city centre—the under-girding of the mechanical bridge is shown as the halves are slowly raised—the crowds rush past the dead woman and horse—the dead woman's hair drapes across the gap in the bridge halves—the horse dangles by its trappings into the chasm between the two bridge halves—the bridge halves are nearly at their peak, appearing to represent a pyramid—a *sphinx is shown staring off into the distance*—the bridge halves rise again in a near perfect pyramid—a *close up of the sphinx's face, still staring* [see Figure 1]—with the bridge halves now nearly perpendicular to the street the dead woman tumbles down to crash onto the pavement below—a prone, presumably dead protestor is shown lying with his hair in the Neva—the bourgeoisie runs to the railing to gleefully toss copies of *The Pravda* into the water—the papers fall like confetti into the water and swirl away along the eddies—the dead horse continues to hang over the city—a revolutionary banner is tossed in the river—the horse is finally free of its ballast and splashes into the water. The many superimpositions and juxtaposed shots enhance the perception of chaos, visually assaulting the viewer with gunshots, crowds, beatings, death and maniacal laughter. They also blatantly reorganize the chronology of events; the horse, for instance, is only shown falling into the Neva after the shots of the dead protestor with his hair in the water and the bourgeoisie throwing *The Pravda* into the river, although the laws of physics would make it more likely that the actual fall occurs when the bridge halves reach their acme and the woman falls to the pavement.



Figure 1. Screenshot of scene in Sergei Eisenstein's film *October*.

The only two moments of stillness in the scene are those of the stony gaze of the sphinx. Even the dead woman and dead horse are surrounded by markers of movement and duration; protestors dash and dart around their inert bodies; the mechanical bridge halves slowly increase their incline, the hair of the woman slips into the widening gap between the bridge halves. The shot of the sphinx is taken from below, giving the impression that the sphinx is staring upward, over the peak of a pyramid below (this is actually the corner of the pedestal the sphinx sits upon in St. Petersburg).

The utter stillness of the monument can be contrasted with the movement of another film of a sphinx: the 1897 short film by Alexandre Promio entitled *Les Pyramides (vue générale)* [see Figure 2]. Promio was engaged by the Lumière Brothers' company and had set off over two months to capture films of some of the world's most celebrated monuments. He arrived in Alexandria, travelled to Cairo, Giza and along the Nile to Upper Egypt. *Les Pyramides (vue générale)* "consists of a single almost 50-s shot that displays various layers of a sort of visual archaeology, divided into three planes: in the first, a row of travelers moving across the frame; in the second, the face of the Sphinx; and in the third, the towering pyramid" (Allan 2008). With the Great Pyramid in the background and the Sphinx at the centre of the scene, it is the first of these planes which most aptly emphasizes the life and duration of the film.

The *mis-en-scène* of Eisenstein, in contrast, has a pyramid shape in the foreground and a sphinx looming overhead, perhaps implying that the riddle of the sphinx supersedes the petty lives (and deaths) of humankind. The lack of spatial contrasts in the Eisenstein shots pluck the sphinx out of space and deny the viewer any reliable indication of the size or location of the statue.



Figure 2. Screenshot from Alexandre Promio's film *Les Pyramides (vue générale)*. Vue N. 381.

The fact that the two shots of the sphinx in *October* stand alone as still, silent sculptures make it all the more remarkable that a discussion of them has often eluded scholarship. One of the most in-depth readings of the bridge sequence was done by Annette Michelson in her article "Camera Lucida/Camera Obscura" in 1973, where she notes that in

[o]pening the bridge, Eisenstein opens, as well, a vast wedge of time within the flow or progress of action [. . .] As action is subjected to the extensive analytic reordering, when a multiplicity of angles and positions of movements and aspects alters the temporal flow of the event and of the surrounding narrative structure, the disjunctive relations of its constituents are proclaimed, soliciting a particular kind of attention, and the making of inferences as to spatial and temporal order, adjustments of perception. And the inferences, the adjustments thus solicited reinforce the visibility of things, make for a particular kind of clarity. Eisenstein gives us within this insertion another complex of insertions that intensify our sense of temporal flow in abeyance, conferring upon the sequence [. . .] something we may call the *momentousness* of the epic style. [Italics in original].

(Michelson 1973)

I want to delve into the detail of the sphinx shots, to show why these two short shots of serenity in a staccato montage of seemingly jumbled juxtapositions and dynamism are relevant to Eisenstein's edited temporal flow.

One reason why the sphinx shots might evade explicit explication is that ostensibly, the sphinx is just a part of the architecture surrounding the bridge. Both shots in the scene are of the "Western" sphinx of Amenhotep III, one of a pair of sphinxes which sit on a quay in front of the Imperial Academy of Arts building in St. Petersburg. The two sphinxes have sat on their pedestals on the University Embankment in St. Petersburg, temporally

and geographically exiled from their sunny, sandy homeland, since April 1832 or 1834 (Solkin 2007; Whitehouse 2016; Williams 1985).⁶ The two sphinxes were greatly admired by Jean-François Champollion, who had attempted to purchase them but was thwarted by Russia. According to Helen Whitehouse, “a pair of Egyptian sphinxes from the mortuary temple of Amenophis III at Thebes was placed on the Neva embankment in St. Petersburg. The site—the landing stage beside the Academy of Arts—was chosen by Nicholas I himself, the setting was designed by the Academy’s Professor of Architecture, Konstantin Thon, and the sphinxes came to number among the most familiar landmarks of the city” (Whitehouse 2016).⁷ Born beneath the desert sun in the fourteenth century BCE, the two serene, syenite statues have replaced the languid waters of the Nile for the frigid Neva, facing each other in a foreign land.

The placid expression of the face of Amenhotep III gazing off into the distance evokes an eternal complacency of the ruling classes over the suffering of the masses. The eternal element of the Egyptian statue is emphasized when compared with the earlier scene of the dismantling of the statue of the Tsar; with only superficial damage to his postiche, the Egyptian sphinx has, across millennia and continents, largely maintained its integrity. What the sphinx represents, thus, seems to belie the demolition of the Tsarist regime in favour of the Provisional Government. There is a change in leader, but the old arrangement of power in the hands of a few has remained—or, in the words of Jean-Baptiste Karr, “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”.⁸ Perhaps serendipitously the sphinx in St. Petersburg lends itself quite aptly to this reading. Amenhotep III ruled over an Egypt that was peaceful and prosperous, a reign rife with architectural and sculptural achievements (Kozloff 2012). He also ruled on the eve of one of the greatest revolutions of Egypt’s history. Amenhotep III’s son, Amenhotep IV, would later change his name to Akhenaten and radically alter the cultural praxis of his country. The older, traditional polytheism was replaced by a monotheistic worship of Aten, the sun disc. Akhenaten then built an entirely new city, Akhet-Aten (now Tel el-Amarna) and transported the capital thence. Akhenaten was so radical—such an aberration from the traditional pharaohs—that his name was kept off official kings lists and his existence was only discovered in 1911 during excavations done by Alessandro Barsanti, Flinders Petrie and the Deutsche Orientgesellschaft.

There is a sense then that the stony gaze of Amenhotep III, impervious to the chaotic revolution taking place on the bridge and in contrast to the demolished statue of the Tsar, slyly indicates a wariness with the longevity of the protestors’ project: it is the face of the precursor to the revolutionary Akhenaten who still survives on his pedestal; not Akhenaten. However, it is also possible to simply see the sphinx as representative of ancient Egypt, a period associated with a supreme splendor of wealth and luxury for the elite but presumably built on the backs of multitudinous labourers. Even when eliminating the Akhenaten angle, the sphinx silently speaks to the *longue durée* of unequal distribution of power and resources. As François Hartog notes, “[j]uxtaposer deux dates, ou plutôt les superposer, c’est exprimer à la fois leur écart, leur impossible coïncidence et les rapprocher l’une de l’autre: renvoyer de l’une à l’autre, produire un effet de réverbération, de contamination.”⁹ The choice to cut to the sphinx would fit in Eisenstein’s project where, according to Antonio Somaini, “Eisenstein ‘was searching for ce qui ne passe pas dans ce qui passe’ for that which doesn’t change among what changes” (Somaini 2016).¹⁰ In this case, whether one reads into the shots as much detail as the particular pharoanic history of Amenhotep III and Akhenaten or not, the stone statue of power remains a reminder of the longevity of the very concept of “the ruling class”. As such, the sphinx becomes metonymic for all rulers, and the almost callously calm disregard for the tumult on the bridge implies that regardless of who is in charge they will never look down and *see* those below them.

The blank gaze of the sphinx, and the question of what it sees, can also be treated with a Nietzschean reading. According to Greek mythology, Oedipus encounters the Sphinx in Thebes while on a journey of self-imposed exile to avoid marrying his mother and murdering his father—actions that eventually *do* transpire precisely *because of* Oedipus’ triumph in solving the Sphinx’s riddle. As such, the story is of course the epitome of the

saying that “the road to Hell is paved with good intentions” or, as Robert Burns remarked on turning up a mouse’s nest, “[t]he best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men/Gang aft a-gley”. Friedrich Nietzsche questioned the objectivity of truth in 1885 by taking recourse to the Sphinx when he wrote in *The Will to Power*, “[t]here are many kinds of eyes. Even the Sphinx has eyes—and consequently there are many kinds of ‘truths’, and consequently, there is no truth” (Nietzsche 1968). Tom Tyler has written on the mysteries implied by this gaze of the Sphinx, and the concept of a multiplicity of truths. Arguing that the answer supplied by Oedipus was not, in fact, the only possible answer to the riddle but that the veracity of the possible answers was contingent upon the perspective of the speaker, he states: “Nietzsche would have us remember [. . .] that even the Sphinx, even the keeper of this most vital truth, has eyes. And in virtue of that fact, she, like every other living creature, has her own distinctive ways of seeing, her own distinctive truths” (Tyler 2006). If the Sphinx is an embodiment of the enigmatic mysteries of the female, conquered by the superior wit and ratiocination of the male Oedipus, the larger context of the myth points to a nihilistic futility in the victory; why overthrow the Sphinx only to ultimately fulfil the incestuous parricidal prophesy? What secret truths did the Sphinx take with her into the depths of the abyss? From this angle, the sphinx in *October*, staring serenely over the chasm of the bridge as workers tumble or are trampled to death also intimates the inevitability of events. What good was the February Revolution if the Provisional Government proves to be only another iteration of the Tsarist regime?

Sergei Eisenstein was a prolific reader. Among his many volumes he held several pertaining to ancient Egypt including *Geschichte Aegyptens* by James Henry Breasted, *Sanc-tuaires d’Orient. Egypte–Grèce–Palestine* by Edouard Schuré, *Mystères égyptiens* by Alexandre Moret and *Kleinplastik der Aegypter* by the German Jewish art historian and Egyptologist, Hedwig Fechheimer.¹¹ It is the last volume which I wish to explore more fully. I believe that there are striking resonances between the Cubism that Fechheimer detects in ancient Egyptian sculpture and in the temporal rhythm of Sergei Eisenstein, culminating in a Cubist critique of historicity.

Hedwig Fechheimer, née Hedwig Jenny Brühl, has slowly faded from public memory. Born on 1 June 1871 in Berlin, she spent much of her childhood in Leipzig before training as a teacher in Breslau. It was this teacher training which granted her entrance to the University of Berlin as a guest student of art history and philosophy. Her status as a guest was a function of her sex; it wasn’t until 1908 that women were allowed to matriculate from Prussian universities and even sitting in on the lectures was prohibitively difficult and only possible since the 1890s (Marchand 2009). Female students who wished to attend lectures were required to have permission from the professor and to provide proof of an adequate educational background—although the institutions which would comprise such an adequate education, the Gymnasium and the Oberrealschule, were also only open to male students (Lemberg 1997). Thus, the aspiring female scholar needed not only intellect and the ability to tolerate no small amount of bigotry, she also needed access to the financial resources that would allow her to study abroad or with private tutors. In the domain of Egyptology, which Suzanne Marchand has described as one of increasing exclusivity in the early 20th century, the rise of a Jewish woman to prominence was not only improbable but also demonstrates formidable tenacity on her part (Marchand 2009).

Fechheimer was a close, albeit occasionally critical, companion of a cohort of German Egyptologists known as the Berlin School. With the eminent Egyptologist Adolf Erman at the helm, the Berlin School was characterized by its philological focus. Eschewing the material accumulations of their British and French counterparts, the Berlin School believed that literature was the key to understanding the inner life of a society and, in the words of Christian Bunsen, “[d]ie erste urgeschichtliche Tatsache, die uns hier begegnet, ist die Sprache” (von Bunsen).¹² The linguistic emphasis of the Berlin School was manifested in their ambitious endeavor, the *Wörterbuch der Altägyptische Sprache* [*Dictionary of Ancient Egyptian*]. This mighty tome would become the largest and most complete dictionary of the ancient Egyptian language in existence (Brewer and Teeter 1999; Silberman 2012).¹³

Additionally, the first academic journal dedicated exclusively to Egyptology, the *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* [Journal of Egyptian Language and Archaeology], was born in Berlin, 1863 (Brewer and Teeter 1999). The devotion to language inherent to the Berlin School can be partly attributed to a tradition of mining Biblical texts for presumed historical fact, but also largely as a pragmatic consequence of Germany's exclusion from most Egyptian excavation sites during the First World War (Gertzen 2014).¹⁴ Thus, German Egyptologists frequently fell back on philological and lexicographical rigor to recreate ancient Egypt and according to Marchand, "a great part of the scholarly energy in this era [the late 19th and early 20th centuries] was spent, indeed had to be spent, simply in trying to clean up (or besmirch) existing grammars, dictionaries, and lexica" (Marchand 2009). Fehheimer's attachment to the Berlin School is attested by her studies (she convinced Erman, a professor generally hostile to the notion of women in academia, to allow her to sit in on his lectures), by her associations (she was a friend, confidant and houseguest of Emilie Cohen, wife of Ludwig Borchardt—the Egyptologist credited with finding the famous bust of Nefertiti still contentiously housed in the Berlin Museum as ÄM 21300) and by her reciprocal scholarship with Heinrich Schäfer (Peuckert 2014; 2017).¹⁵ However, her critical distance can be discerned by her works, where, unlike the linguistic focus of her cohort, Fehheimer's philosophy and art history background led her to concentrate on questions of Egyptian art at a general, fundamental level. Until the publication of her first book, *Die Plastik der Aegypter* [Plastic Arts of the Egyptians] in 1914, this was a topic not dealt with in depth by any members of the Berlin School.

As a first book, *Die Plastik der Aegypter* was a surprising success.¹⁶ Prior to its publication Fehheimer had only two short papers to her name, both published in Cassirer's *Kunst und Künstler* in 1913. Aimed at a well-read and high-brow, but not necessarily scholarly, audience, the book draws a comparison between the art of the ancient Egyptians and Cubism. In the same vein as Wilhelm Worringer, Fehheimer argues against a teleological approach to art history and the assumption that the Graeco-Romanic works represent the apotheosis of artistic achievement. Rather, she opens *Die Plastik* with the note that it will examine "[...] das Beste der ägyptischen Kunst, die heute unmittelbar zu wirken beginnt" (Fehheimer 1914).¹⁷ This kinship between the work of the ancient Egyptians and her own contemporaneous time is elaborated upon when she claims that

In keiner Kunst ist so wie in der ägyptischen—streng und vielseitig zugleich—das Prinzip der 'intégration plastique' moderner Maler und Bildhauer erfüllt, oder Cézannes Grundforderung vorausgenommen: 'Traiter la nature par le cylindre, la sphère, le cône, le tout mis en perspective, soit que chaque côté d'un objet, d'un plan, se dirige vers un point central. Les lignes parallèles à l'horizon donnent l'étendue -, ... les lignes perpendiculaires à cet horizon donnent la profondeur.' Den Kompositionsmethoden ägyptischer Reliefbildner könnte die folgende (kubistische) Definition der Zeichnung entlehnt sein: 'Die Kunst der Zeichnung besteht darin, Verhältnisse zwischen Kurven und Geraden festzulegen.

(Fehheimer 1914)¹⁸

This is a particularly striking take on ancient Egyptian art. The affinity Fehheimer notes between the Cubist artists and the ancient Egyptians derives from what she perceives as their common use of a "point central"; not the receding convergence of perspectival lines à la post-Renaissance art, but rather "the unsurpassable plenitude" of "partial views" that Maurice Merleau-Ponty wanted "welded together" to forge a "lived perspective" (Merleau-Ponty 1993). Merleau-Ponty's explanation was also similar to Carl Einstein's earlier conception of African sculpture, which he claimed in 1920 is "daß sie eine starke Verselbständigung der Teile aufweisen [...] Jene sind nicht vom Beschauer, sondern von sich aus orientiert; die Teile werden von der engen Masse aus empfunden, nicht in abschwächender Entfernung; somit werden sie und ihre Grenzen verstärkt sein" (Einstein 1920).¹⁹ Fehheimer, who sustained a decades-long friendship with Carl Einstein, was probably heavily influenced by his avant-garde perspective.

Yet, it was Fechheimer's second book, *Kleinplastik der Ägypter* [*Small Sculpture of the Egyptians*], published in 1921, which ties her in the historical record to Sergei Eisenstein. This second book by Fechheimer appeared in 1921 as the third volume in Cassirer's *Exotische Plastik. Die Plastik des Ostens und der Primitiven in Einzeldarstellung* [*Exotic Sculpture. The Sculpture of the East and the Primitive in Individual Representation*]. While not the sensation of *Die Plastik der Aegypter*, *Kleinplastik* was nonetheless a success.²⁰ Similar in argumentation to her first book, in *Kleinplastik* Fechheimer applies the general theory of *Die Plastik der Aegypter* to the specificities inherent to smaller sculptures of ancient Egypt. The link with modern art is less explicitly pronounced in *Kleinplastik*, but rather the spiritual, supra-temporal, meta-historical abilities of great art is expounded upon. And it is in this context that we see an interesting overlap with Eisenstein.

What Fechheimer attempts in *Die Plastik der Aegypter*, and subsequently elaborates upon in *Kleinplastik der Ägypter*, is a dehistoricized grammar of the plastic arts of ancient Egypt. Her books, while written in an almost floridly lyrical prose and replete with translations of Egyptian texts provided by her fellow scholars of the Berlin School, make no moral judgements on the political times of ancient Egypt nor on the sumptuous excesses she depicts (*Kleinplastik der Ägypter* opens with an extended quotation running five pages adumbrating the luxuries of the court of Ramses III). Rather, following in the footsteps of Wilhelm Worringer's 1907 thesis *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, she argues for an anti-teleological reception and appreciation of the art of ancient Egypt.²¹ While her writing places the works within their historical, chronological context, she does not confine them to a trajectory of ever-increasing natural mimesis, nor does she admire rote repetition. Her chronology is chiefly concerned with the changing use values of the objects she is describing: critically, for Fechheimer, plastic arts and sculpture did not immediately arise as an independent domain in ancient Egypt; instead, art was always imbricated with religion—either as a means of embodying composite elements of a personality (an aspect elaborated upon in *Die Plastik der Aegypter*) or the preservation of the body post-mortem. As such, the “likeness” of a work of art was not intended to be viewed with the modern mendacity of post-Renaissance perspectivism but rather to incorporate a plethora of plastic perspectives; each a distinct unit and yet also a part of a constructed, overriding, whole. It is in this aspect that her work becomes most Cubist.

Sascha Bru offers a succinct overview of the manifold Cubisms of the early twentieth century in his book *The European Avant-Gardes, 1905–1935* (Bru 2018). Generally speaking, Bru claims that what united the various manifestations of Cubism was the method of “[s]hattering or fragmenting perspective, rendering multiple perspectives, orienting the observer towards the surface and material of the artwork, moving in and out of recognizable representation” (Bru 2018). These general characteristics of Cubism could then be further characterized into a painterly phase of analytical Cubism wherein “a limited (dark) colour palette was used with minor tonal variation to give shape to subjects whose facets were carefully studied, then broken up into parts, and finally reassembled in a flat grid or diagram that frequently resembled a crystal-like surface” and a synthetic phase which made use of elementary forms, working from memory rather than life, and the introduction of the medium of collage (Bru 2018). Fechheimer's ambition of a grammar for ancient Egyptian art accords tidily with the notion of a formal language of artistic representation as desired by the analytical phase of Cubism while her descriptions of sculptures given in *Kleinplastik* emphasize their simple forms and the materials they are composed of in a manner similar to synthetic Cubism. For example, in discussing a series of wooden statuettes of servants from Siut, Fechheimer writes

In sparsame Flächen aufgeteilt, zeichnet der Körper seine herbe Kurve, verzweigt sich in den reinen Biegungen der Arme, die stützen und tragen. Den vollzogenen Ausgleich der Bewegung, der dem berühmten Kontrapost der Griechen nicht nachgibt, betont die Silhouette. Die Künstler des Mittleren Reiches verstehen sich auf das Summarische, auf Zerlegen und Binden der gegliederten form. Sie

denken—gänzlich unprimitiv—eine Gestalt zur Säule, zur Ellipse zusammen, ohne ihr Lebendiges zu stören.

(Fechheimer 1922)²²

Fechheimer focuses here on the surface of the statuette, on its constituent forms of curve, column, ellipse—and most strikingly, what she perceives as the Egyptian tendency to de-compose a subject into its constituent forms in order to re-combine them in what she earlier referred to as “sinnlichen Unmittelbarkeit” [sensual immediacy]—which could also be considered a type of primal embodiment. As Joyce Cheng has aptly articulated in her essay “Immanence Out of Sight”, many of these objects were intentionally buried long ago, their sacred purpose not contingent upon the profane perspective of Western spatial conventions in sculpture (Cheng 2009). As such, their use value lies in their immediate verisimilitude as embodiments of ancient Egyptian religion rather than as re-presentations in a modern form of mimesis. Fechheimer herself compares the statuettes of Siut to the Cubism she and Carl Einstein would consider an integral element of African sculpture (Fechheimer 1922). This Cubism is one that relies on an intentional use of “extreme Form” and wherein “[d]ie Flächen sind heftiger gespannt” [the surfaces are more violently tensed] (Fechheimer 1922).

The reconstitution of a fractured subject is also apparent in Fechheimer’s description of the figure of Mete: “[d]iese Figur ist gegliederter, ihre Teilformen sind schärfer gesondert. Dadurch ist sie reich an unterschiedlichen Ansichten. Jede ist Totaleindruck, doch im Kleinsten durchdacht” (Fechheimer 1922).²³ The emphasis on simple forms is one Fechheimer traces through the existence of Egyptian art to its very prehistoric beginnings, claiming that even there “[d]ie Phantasie denkt in Kugeln, Zylindern, Spindeln. Das Dreidimensionale ist so verstärkt, daß man zur Abstraktion einer Silhouette fast nicht kommt. Die Künstler hatten die Gabe des ganz Deutlichen, der nackten Form. Sie erfüllen ein Volumen, das der Moderne konstruiert” (Fechheimer 1922).²⁴ Here, again there is an explication based on the deconstruction of the work of art into its many forms, only to reconstruct it anew.

Additionally, key to Fechheimer’s Cubist grammar of ancient Egyptian art is the element of movement and the different perspectives this creates. Here, there is an intriguing overlap with film. Fechheimer often writes that the various sculptures she treats in *Kleinplastik* depict subjects frozen in motion. When discussing the function of the ka and the servant statues buried in Egyptian tombs, she writes that they may have depicted moving subjects, meaning that each particular form requires a panoply of perspectives in order to incorporate a diachronic dynamism: “[h]ier waren Vorgänge des Lebens zu übertragen [. . .] das Einmalige, leicht Zersplitterte eines solchen Gestus bewältigt: Bewegung ist ruhendes Bild geworden, Symbol eines Daseins” (Fechheimer 1922).²⁵ This capturing of the multiplicity of views engendered by movement in a moment of stasis resonates deeply with the art form of film. Eisenstein wrote as much in his essay “Laocoön” when he referred to film as the “image of movement” and stated that “[i]f we were to be utterly pedantic, we could say that perception of the phenomenon of any movement consists of the continual break-up of a certain static form into a *new form*.” (Eisenstein 2010a) [Italics in original]. This iterative process of fracture and reconstitution was frequently referred to by Eisenstein as “The Osiris Principle”, named for the Egyptian god who was torn to pieces by his brother Set, but painstakingly puzzled back to life by his devoted sister-wife Isis. What results from the puzzling together of the disparate pieces (or, in the case of the film, shots) is, according to Eisenstein, “*not an idea composed of successive shots stuck together but an idea that DERIVES from the collision between two shots that are independent of one another*” (Eisenstein 2010b) [Italics and emphasis in original]. Cubism, in Eisenstein’s use of it (and it is worth noting that Eisenstein did not declare himself a Cubist, and also criticized the painterly, analytical form of Cubism for failing in its ambitious goal of caging a multitude of perspectives within a single canvas) is thus not only a question of a novel form of re-presentation, but also a generative impulse (Eisenstein 2010a). The Cubist film would make a careful collation of shots, akin to the collage of synthetic Cubism, which would produce certain psychological

affects and associations. What distinguishes this collage from the Dada exploit was its meticulous curation; the Dadaist collage, in contrast, reveled in the random.

It is in this careful collation of shots that the sphinx appears in the bridge sequence of *October*. Considering that Eisenstein was familiar with Fechheimer's work and his own theories coincided with hers on the particularity of parts and the necessity of the many perspectival views to capture movement in a static object, it could be fruitful to push the investigation a little further. Going back to *Kleinplastik*, the extreme placidity and seeming nonchalance of the sphinx works profoundly well in this particular juxtaposition of eras.

Amenhotep's blank eyes gaze into nothing, unfocused and unchanging, just as the ruling classes have, by implication, always blithely overlooked the suffering of those below them. One is reminded of this particular passage from *Kleinplastik*:

Unter den antiken Völkern haben die Ägypter einen Typus des Menschlichen beseelt, der—gänzlich ägyptisch—doch in Gebärde und Fühlen die Menschen aller Zeiten anruft [. . .] Der durch sich selbst aufgerichtete und verwandelte Mensch, der gänzlich unpathetisch in stiller Gelassenheit auf das Künftige sieht, allzu großer Sorge um die unverlässlichen Dinge entfremdet. Irdisches und Ewiges gleichen sich in ihm aus, der—unvollkommen in einer unvollkommenen Welt—doch nicht würdelos vor Gott steht. Über einer vermessenen Mystik, dem Zwang ererbter Kulte und der Hilflosigkeit wüster Beschwörungen scheint eine hellere Religiosität aufzugehen, die das bestehende Leben annimmt und den Tod mit ruhigem Herzen weiß.²⁶

While Fechheimer treats such a serenity of gaze as a purely artistic choice implying balance and generalizing the particular statue to encompass all people, Eisenstein uses it as a contrast to the manic suffering on the bridge. The sphinx's gaze then asks the audience: what does it see and what does it mean in conjunction with the contemporaneous moment?

Relevant to the riddle of what the sphinx sees is the exact position in the film of the two shots and the final line of the quote from Fechheimer, "das bestehende Leben annimmt und den Tod mit ruhigem Herzen weiß" ["which accepts the existing life and knows death with a calm heart"] (Fechheimer 1922). The two shots of the sphinx appear at precisely the moment the bridge halves reach their acme and the woman and carriage are loosed from the ballast of the dead horse, careening down to smash onto the pavement. Followed by the dead protestor with his hair in the Neva, the destruction of *The Pravda* papers and the dramatic fall of the dead horse, the sphinx appears to bridge the gap in time; there was the hopeful riot that stormed the streets heading for the city centre and then the crushing death of the revolutionaries and their enterprise. Situated astride this temporal diremption—the time of hopefulness and the time of despair—the sphinx conjures up, as Fechheimer mentions, the calm uneventful eternity of death and the peace that comes with accepting it. Yet, this leaves us with another quandary: is the sphinx representative of the blindness of the Provisional Government to the desperation of the proletariat, or of the revolutionaries' willingness to accept death as a consequence of their action? Or, is it possible that the sphinx is susurrating a subversive secret of Sergei Eisenstein: an oblique intimation that the coming ruler (Stalin) is unlikely to go down in the annals of history as a vast improvement on the previous regime? Or is the gaze like that of Nietzsche's Sphinx: "[t]here are many kinds of eyes. Even the Sphinx has eyes—and consequently there are many kinds of 'truths', and consequently, there is no truth" (Nietzsche 1968)?

Eisenstein uses the sphinx as a chronological collision: the ancient Egyptian erupting into the present. The two brief shots are a harbinger of Eisenstein's later, longer critique of historiography, *Ivan the Terrible*. As Kevin Platt claims,

[m]ore than any other medium, film could render the past seemingly present while sidestepping the overt articulation of problematic analogies. The fundamental principle of film is that when you move still pictures fast enough you create the illusion of motion. Historical films of the Stalinist era operated according to the reverse principle: if you project enough moving pictures on similar subjects, you can create the illusion of motionlessness [. . .] Eisenstein's films present a

meditation on the instability of historical discourse when it is burdened with the task of rendering comprehensible periods that have been seen as ruptures in collective identity and political formation—liminal epochs such as Ivan’s and the Stalinist era of revolution and war.

(Platt 2011)

The sphinx shots are the only two moments of motionlessness in the bridge sequence. Yet, despite their stillness, the silent shots are alive with meaning—all of it contingent upon perspective. That contingency, as Platt explains, becomes almost impossible to pin down when applied to historical analogy. The crux of the problem is that historical time operates like a Cubist film, allowing one object to spawn an almost infinite series of unique perceptions. Michael Allan claims that “time transforms the object into a manifold scattering of objects, based on a manifold scattering of the ‘here and now’” (Allan 2008). By leaving the viewer with more questions than answers, Eisenstein provokes an unease with the use of historical analogy; an unease which would blossom into fruition with his longer, unfinished, trilogy of *Ivan the Terrible*. The sphinx shots in *October* are clearly positioned to create an generative collision of chronologies but the resulting historical analogy remains elusively plastic. Perhaps Eisenstein simply did not want to be pinned down too precisely in any sort of criticism. The penalties for doing so could be catastrophic and, as Richard Taylor has pointed out, Eisenstein’s status as a possibly closeted homosexual from the periphery active in a highly competitive field and under the auspices of an increasingly despotic leader meant that he would be under immense pressure to temper or disguise any overt criticism (Taylor 2004). However, the many possible meanings that could be attributed to the sphinx at the specific juncture it appears all chip away at the edifice of a solitary concrete meaning to be derived from historical analogy. Depending on how one views the sphinx allegorically—as a calm member of the elite reposing in luxury on the eve of revolution; as emblematic of the excesses and blindness of the ruling classes; as symbolic of the revolutionaries’ acceptance of death; as a subtle critique of the Stalinist régime—its function within the film shifts.

If Eisenstein and Feuchheimer both fold time to bring the past bursting into the present, they do so not allegorically. The exact meaning of any implied allegory between the sphinx and the present time is suggestive but not exclusive nor determinative. Likewise, in Feuchheimer’s assertion that her contemporaneous moment bore an affinity with the ancient Egyptian, it was not because the two were producing the same art work all over again; it was because the world of art had come to a moment ripe for similar reflections and contemplations on the fundamental *meaning* and use value of art. If one were to imagine allegorical time folds as accordion folds, zig zagging back and forth across history in precise layers, the folds of Feuchheimer and Eisenstein rather resemble those of origami. With manifold creases and pleats of disparate sections, they nonetheless create a compound of perfectly folded intersections of paper, infinite *points centraux* ripe with rhisomatic meaning.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

² (Le Cinématographe vu de l’Etna, (Epstein 1974, p. 138)) “[a] pictorial language, like the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt, whose secrets we have scarcely penetrated yet, about which we do not know all that we do not know?”. English translation from (Jean Epstein Critical Essays and New Translations, (Epstein 2012, p. 293)).

- 3 (Gance 1926, pp. 100–1) “Cinema takes us back to the ideography of primitive writing, to the hieroglyph, by means of a symbol representing each thing, and therein lies probably the greatest force for the future [. . .] Here we are, by a prodigious return, back to the expressive plane of the Egyptians.”
- 4 (Ontologie de l’Image Photographique, Bazin 1990, p. 14) “the cinema is objectivity in time [. . .] Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were”. [Translation by Hugh Gray in (Bazin 1960, p. 8)].
- 5 (O’Toole 2018, p. 111) O’Toole suggests that much of the excised footage might have been of Trotsky, in an effort to downplay his role in the events for political reasons. In the final version, Trotsky does appear intermittently but often blends in with his revolutionary cohort and his character is certainly eclipsed by the prominence of others such as Lenin and Kerensky.
- 6 (Solkin 2007, p. 1713) (Whitehouse 2016, p. 58) (Williams 1985, p. 3) Solkin gives the date as 1834, while Whitehouse and Williams claim the Sphinxes came to rest in St. Petersburg in 1832.
- 7 Amenophis III is another name for Amenhotep III.
- 8 “The more it changes, the more it’s the same thing”.
- 9 (Régimes d’Historicité. Présentisme et Expériences du Temps, (Hartog 2003, p. 100)) English translation: “[. . .] juxtaposing, or rather superimposing, two dates not only highlights their difference, their ineluctable noncoincidence, it also establishes relations between them, setting off echoes and producing effects of contamination.” (Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time, (Hartog 2015, p. 88)).
- 10 (Somaini 2016, p. 61) The quotation Somaini uses is taken from Sergei Eisenstein’s notes for his work *Metod*, also quoted by Naum Kleiman in his introduction to the same.
- 11 From personal correspondence with Vera Rummyantseva, archivist at the Eisenstein Archive in Moscow, dated 18 May 2020.
- 12 (von Bunsen, p. 20) “[t]he greatest prehistorical fact we encounter here is language.” [Own translation].
- 13 (Brewer and Teeter 1999, p. 11) (Silberman 2012, p. 482) The work on this project began in 1897 but was interrupted by both world wars; thus, at the time that Fechheimer became associated with the Berlin School, research was in full swing. In the post-WWII period work resumed until 1961, and since 1992 the project has been resuscitated as the hybrid digital and hard copy *Altägyptisches Wörterbuch*. (Schneider 2022, footnote 1).
- 14 The First World War saw all German excavation concessions in Egypt withdrawn and all objects housed in the Cairo Museum credited to German excavations were confiscated. (Gertzen 2014, p. 40).
- 15 Published in 1914, a second edition was already issued in the same year and a third in 1918. A fourth edition was issued in 1920 with the inclusion of 14 additional plates of artifacts discovered by Ludwig Borchardt at Tel el-Amarna and a fifth followed by the year’s end. A small print run was also done of a French translation by Charlotte Marchand. (Peuckert 2014).
- 16 Published in 1914, a second edition was already issued in the same year and a third in 1918. A fourth edition was issued in 1920 with the inclusion of 14 additional plates of artifacts discovered by Ludwig Borchardt at Tel el-Amarna and a fifth followed by the year’s end. A small print run was also done of a French translation by Charlotte Marchand. (Peuckert 2014).
- 17 (Die Plastik der Aegypter, Fechheimer 1914) “[. . .] the best of Egyptian art, which today begins to have an immediate effect” [Own translation].
- 18 (Die Plastik der Aegypter, Fechheimer 1914, p. 4) “In no other art than Egyptian—at once strict and versatile—is the principle of ‘intégration plastique’ of the modern painters and sculptors fulfilled, or Cézanne’s basic requirement anticipated: ‘Treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, all put into perspective, that is, each side of an object, of a plane, goes towards a central point. The lines parallel to the horizon give the extent -, . . . the lines perpendicular to this horizon give the depth.’ The following (Cubist) definition of drawing could be borrowed from the compositional methods of Egyptian artists, who created images in relief: ‘The art of drawing is to determine the relationships between curves and straight lines.’” [Own translation].
- 19 Negerplastik, Einstein (1920, p. 14) English translation: “marked by a pronounced individuation of their parts; [. . .] The parts are oriented, not according to the beholder’s point of view, but from within themselves; they are perceived as confined by mass, not as diminished by distance; as a result, both the individual parts and their contours will be reinforced.” (Negro Sculpture, Einstein 2019, p. 49).
- 20 A second printing of 13–17 thousand copies was already issued in 1922 and a third followed in 1923.
- 21 In this thesis Worringer states that “Jeder Stil stellte für die Menschheit, die ihn aus ihren psychischen Bedürfnissen heraus schuf, die höchste Beglückung dar. Das muss zum obersten Glaubenssatz aller objektiven kunstgeschichtlichen Betrachtung werden. Was von unserem Standpunkt aus als grösste Verzerrung erscheint, muss für den jeweiligen Produzenten die höchste Schönheit und die Erfüllung seines Kunstwillens gewesen sein. So sind alle Wertungen von unserem Standpunkte, von unserer modernen Aesthetik aus, die ihre Urteile ausschliesslich im Sinne der Antike oder Renaissance fällt, von einem höheren Standpunkt aus Sinnlosigkeiten und Plattheiten. Nach dieser notwendigen Abschweifung kehren wir wieder zu dem Ausgangspunkt, nämlich zu der These von der beschränkten Anwendbarkeit der Einfühlungstheorie, zurück.” (Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie, Worringer 1921, p. 17). English translation: “Every style represented the maximum bestowal of happiness for the humanity that created it. This must become the supreme dogma of all objective consideration of the history of art. What appears from our standpoint the greatest distortion must have been at the time, for its creator, the highest beauty and the fulfilment of his

artistic volition. Thus all valuations made from our standpoint, from the point of view of our modern aesthetics, which passes judgement exclusively in the sense of the Antique or the Renaissance, are from a higher standpoint absurdities and platitudes.” (Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style, (Worringer 1997, p. 13)).

- 22 (Kleinplastik der Ägypter, Fechheimer 1922, p. 17) English translation: “Divided into sparse surfaces, the body draws its austere curve, branching out into the pure bends of the arms that support and carry. The silhouette emphasizes the completed balance of the movement, which does not give in to the famous contraposto of the Greeks. The artists of the Middle Kingdom understand the summary, the decomposition and binding of the articulated form. They think—entirely un-primitively—a shape to form a column, an ellipse together, without disturbing what is alive.”
- 23 (Kleinplastik der Ägypter, Fechheimer 1922, p. 14) English translation: “This figure is more articulated, its partial forms are more sharply separated. As a result, it is rich in different views. Each is a total impression, but well-thought out in the smallest details.”
- 24 (Kleinplastik der Ägypter, (Fechheimer 1922, p. 11)) English translation: The imagination thinks in terms of spheres, cylinders, spindles. The three dimensional aspect is so intensified that it is almost impossible to abstract a silhouette. The artists had the gift of very clear, naked form. You feel a volume that the modern constructs.”
- 25 (Kleinplastik der Ägypter, (Fechheimer 1922, p. 17)) English translation: “Life processes were to be transferred here [. . .] the unique, lightly fragmented aspect of such a gesture is matured: movement has become a still image, a symbol of existence.”
- 26 (Kleinplastik der Ägypter, (Fechheimer 1922, pp. 21–22)) “Among the ancients, the Egyptians animated a type of human who—although entirely Egyptian—nevertheless recalls in gesture and feeling people of all times [. . .] The man who is erected and transformed by himself, who looks completely unpathetic in quiet serenity to the future, unconcerned with unreliable things. The earthly and the eternal are balanced in him, who—imperfect in an imperfect world—does not stand undignified before God. Above a presumptuous mysticism, the compulsion of inherited cults and the helplessness of wild incantations, a lighter religiosity seems to rise, which accepts the existing life and knows death with a calm heart.”

References

- Allan, Michael. 2008. Deserted Histories: The Lumière Brothers, the pyramids and early film form. *Early Popular Visual Culture* 6: 159–70. [CrossRef]
- Bazin, André. 1960. The Ontology of the Photographic Image. *Film Quarterly* 13: 4–9. [CrossRef]
- Bazin, André. 1990. Ontologie de l’Image Photographique. In *Qu’est ce que le Cinema?* Edited by André Bazin. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, pp. 9–17.
- Brewer, Douglas J., and Emily Teeter. 1999. *Egypt and the Egyptians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bru, Sascha. 2018. *The European Avant-Gardes, 1905–1935. A Portable Guide*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- von Bunsen, Christian Karl Josias. 1845–1857. *Ägyptens Stelle in der Weltgeschichte*. 5 vols. Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, vol. 1.
- Cheng, Joyce. 2009. Immanence out of sight. Formal rigor and ritual function in Carl Einstein’s Negerplastik. *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 55–56: 87–102. [CrossRef]
- Einstein, Carl. 1920. *Negerplastik*. Munich: Kurt Wolff Verlag.
- Einstein, Carl. 2019. Negro Sculpture. In *A Mythology of Forms: Selected Writings on Art*. Edited by Charles Haxthausen. Translated by Charles Haxthausen. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 32–59.
- Eisenstein, Sergei. 2010a. Laocoön. In *Towards a Theory of Montage*. Edited by Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor. Translated by Michael Glenny. London and New York: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., pp. 109–202.
- Eisenstein, Sergei. 2010b. The Dramaturgy of Film Form (The Dialectical Approach to Film Form). In *Sergei Eisenstein Writings, 1922–1934*. Edited by Richard Taylor. Translated by Richard Taylor. London and New York: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., pp. 161–80.
- Eisenstein, Sergei. 2016. Dynamic Mummification. In *Notes for a General History of Cinema*. Edited by Naum Kleiman and Antonio Somaini. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 119–206.
- Epstein, Jean. 1974. Le Cinématographe vu de l’Etna. In *Écrits sur le Cinéma 1921–1953*. Paris: Seghers, vol. 1, pp. 131–69.
- Epstein, Jean. 2012. *Jean Epstein Critical Essays and New Translations*. Edited by Sarah Keller and Jason Paul. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Fechheimer, Hedwig. 1914. *Die Plastik der Aegypter*. Berlin: Cassirer.
- Fechheimer, Hedwig. 1922. *Kleinplastik der Ägypter*. Berlin: Bruno Cassirer Verlag.
- Gance, Abel. 1926. Le temps de l’image est venu! *L’Art Cinématographique* 2: 83–102.
- Gertzen, Thomas L. 2014. The Anglo-Saxon Branch of the Berlin School. In *Histories of Egyptology: Interdisciplinary Measures*. Edited by William Carruthers. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 34–49.
- Hartog, François. 2003. *Régimes d’Historicité. Présentisme et Expériences du Temps*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Hartog, François. 2015. *Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time*. Translated by Saskia Brown. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kozloff, Arielle. 2012. *Amenhotep III: Egypt’s Radiant Pharaoh*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lant, Antonia. 1992. The Curse of the Pharaoh, or How Cinema Contracted Egyptomania. *October* 59: 86–112.
- Lant, Antonia. 1995. Haptical Cinema. *October (MIT Press)* 74: 45–73. [CrossRef]

- Lemberg, Margret. 1997. Einleitung: Die ersten Frauen an der Universität Marburg. In *Es begann vor hundert Jahren. Die ersten Frauen an der Universität Marburg und die Studentinnenvereinigungen bis zur "Gleichsahlung" im Jahre 1934*. Marburg: Schriften der Universitätsbibliothek Marburg, pp. 1–31.
- Marchand, Suzanne L. 2009. *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*. Washington, DC, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo and Delhi: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1993. Cézanne's Doubt. In *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*. Edited by Michael B. Smith. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, pp. 59–75.
- Michelson, Annette. 1973. Camera Lucida/Camera Obscura. *Artforum* 11: 30–37.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1968. *The Will to Power*. Edited by W. Kaufmann. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, and Reginald John Hollingdale. New York: Vintage.
- O'Toole, Michael. 2018. Eisenstein in October. In *The Hermeneutic Spiral and Interpretation in Literature and the Visual Arts*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 109–14.
- Peuckert, Sylvia. 2014. *Hedwig Fechheimer und die ägyptische Kunst: Leben und Werk einer jüdischen Kunstwissenschaftlerin in Deutschland*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Peuckert, Sylvia. 2017. Überlegungen zu Heinrich Schäfers 'Von ägyptischer Kunst' und zu Hedwig Fechheimers 'Plastik der Aegypter'. *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache (De Gruyter)* 144: 108–38. [CrossRef]
- Platt, Kevin. 2011. *Terror and Greatness: Ivan and Peter as Russian Myths*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Schneider, Thomas. 2022. Hermann Grapow, Egyptology, and National Socialist Initiatives for the Humanities. In *Betrayal of the Humanities: The University During the Third Reich*. Edited by Bernard M. Levinson and Robert P. Ericksen. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Silberman, Neil Asher. 2012. *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*, 2nd ed. 3 vols. Oxford, New York, Auckland, Cape Town, Dar es Salaam, Hong Kong, Karachi, Kuala Lumpur, Madrid, Melbourne, Mexico City, Nairobi, New Delhi, Shanghai, Taipei and Toronto: Oxford University Press, vol. 1.
- Solkin, Victor. 2007. The Sphinxes of Amenhotep III. in St. Petersburg: Unique Monuments and their Restoration. Edited by Jean-Claude Goyon and Christine Cardin. In *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta. Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Egyptologists*. Grenoble: Uitgeverij Peeters & Departement Oosterse Studies, pp. 1713–920.
- Somainsi, Antonio. 2016. Cinema as "Dynamic Mummification" and History as Montage: Eisenstein's Media Archaeology. In *Sergei M. Eisenstein: Notes for a General History of Cinema*. Edited by Naum Kleiman and Antonio Somainsi. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 19–105.
- Taylor, Richard. 2004. Sergei Eisenstein: The Life and Times of A Boy from Riga. *The Montage Principle. Eisenstein in New Critical Contexts* 21: 25–43.
- Tyler, Tom. 2006. Snakes, Skins and the Sphinx: Nietzsche's Ecdysis. *Journal of Visual Culture* 5: 365–85. [CrossRef]
- Whitehouse, Helen. 2016. Egypt in the Snow. In *Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing Architecture*. Edited by Jean-Marcel Humbert and Clifford Price. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 57–73.
- Williams, Edward. 1985. Voices of Ancient Trumpets. In *The Bells of Russia*. Edited by Edward Williams. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 3–9.
- Worringer, Wilhelm. 1921. *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag.
- Worringer, Wilhelm. 1997. *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*. Edited by Hilton Kramer. Translated by Michael Bullock. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

Article

The Bridge and Narrativization of Vision: Ambrose Bierce and Vladimir Nabokov

Andrey Astvatsaturov 

Faculty of Philology, Saint Petersburg University, Saint-Petersburg 199034, Russia; astvatsa@yandex.ru

Abstract: The article contains a comparative study of the visual poetics observed in the literary texts of American writer Ambrose Bierce and Russian-American writer Vladimir Nabokov. In particular, the study focuses on Bierce's short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and Nabokov's three short stories "Details of a Sunset", "Aurelian", and "Perfection", in all three of which a number of narrative tools, images, and motifs borrowed from Bierce's text can be found. The representation of the bridge and the narrativization of mystical insight are regarded as the principal features of the correlative imagery systems. These features are analyzed in order to discover Bierce's and Nabokov's understandings of the artist, visual imagination, and the freedom of will.

Keywords: Bierce; Nabokov; narrative; visual image; painting; poetics; determinism

American writer Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914?) and Russian-American writer Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977) belonged to different generations and possessed different life experiences. Bierce was born in a small town in the State of Ohio. Nabokov was born in Saint Petersburg, a European capital. Bierce came from a poor family, whereas Nabokov belonged to a famous wealthy family with a long lineage of nobility; in fact, his grandfather was the Minister of Justice. Bierce did not receive any systematic education, while Nabokov attended the Tenishev School (Tenishevskoye Uchilische), famous for its intellectual atmosphere, and he later graduated from Cambridge University. It is interesting that the early years of both writers coincided with periods of civil war. Bierce took an active part in the American Civil War (1861–1865), supporting the Northerners; he was wounded and later promoted into the officer rank. Nabokov, with his family, fled from the turmoil of the October Revolution to Crimea. Later, when the Civil War in Russia was at its height, Nabokov emigrated to Europe.

Bierce made a living as a journalist. Nabokov concentrated on literary texts, also giving private lessons, and after moving to the United States from Europe he delivered lectures at American universities. The lives of the two writers ended very differently. In 1913 Ambrose Bierce went to Mexico, where the Revolution was raging, and joined the Army of Pancho Villa, soon becoming M.I.A. The circumstances of his death remain unknown. Nabokov spent the last days of his life in prosperous Switzerland where he moved in 1961 from the United States, and where he concentrated entirely on literary texts and entomology.

Such contrasting biographies of the two writers reveal differences in their occupations, interests, and, most importantly, temperaments. Bierce was a cartographer, a warrior, and a journalist actively involved in the political and economic events of the USA (O'Brien 1976), whereas Nabokov was a professional writer who was occupied with his own literary texts, teaching, and entomology.

In this context, it is extremely interesting to reveal and observe strong connections between these two writers that have been often pointed out by scholars (Teletova 1997, pp. 782–85; Dolinin 2004, p. 37) and find several important similarities and differences in their short story fiction. As far as is known, there has been no concerted effort to conduct a comparative study of their shorter fiction, especially in relation to the visual poetics of both writers. Usually, critics do not venture beyond noting that Nabokov, in his stories "Details

Citation: Astvatsaturov, Andrey. 2022. The Bridge and Narrativization of Vision: Ambrose Bierce and Vladimir Nabokov. *Arts* 11: 89. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050089>

Academic Editors: Dennis Ioffe and Nadezhda Stanulevich

Received: 22 July 2022

Accepted: 15 September 2022

Published: 19 September 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

of a *Sunset*” (1924), “*The Aurelian*” (1930), and “*Perfection*” (1932) utilized the literary tool of false narrative development, which he borrowed from Ambrose Bierce’s famous story “*An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*” (1890). The connection between Nabokov’s three stories and Bierce’s “*Occurrence*”, however, is not limited to the aforementioned literary tool: it also manifests itself in the implicit and explicit references to the images, motifs, and concepts that constitute Bierce’s text. A thorough comparative study of Nabokov’s and Bierce’s poetics inevitably reveals more similarities than differences; the latter primarily appear on the levels of personal outlook and philosophical meaning.

As we have already noted, scholars unanimously affirm that Nabokov’s literary texts contain numerous examples of poetic tools, images, and motifs borrowed from Bierce’s fiction. However, there exists no exact information on the circumstances that led to Nabokov’s acquaintance with Bierce’s prose. It seems to be a likely assumption that Nabokov read “*An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*” in the early 1920s, his attention being drawn to it by the general interest in Bierce’s fiction characteristic of the postwar European and American cultures. Bierce and Nabokov developed their own visual poetics (Ames 1987, p. 5; Grishakova 2002; Trubetskova 2010, pp. 63–70), enabling the readers to observe their literary texts as they would observe paintings or theatrical performances. This peculiarity to be discussed in detail is related to the natural acuteness which both writers fostered since their early years. During the war, Bierce was a scout and a topographer; he drew maps of territories where military action took place (Conlogue 1999, pp. 265–66). His keen vision and acuteness often determined the success of military maneuvers. This work stimulated his visual imagination, and eventually led to the development of his visual narratives. Among Bierce’s characters one often finds professional scouts carefully observe their surrounding environment and are perceptive of the tiniest details (“*Chickamauga*”, “*A Horseman in the Sky*”, “*One of the Missing*”). The visual poetics of Nabokov developed from his interest in painting, which had vividly manifested itself during his childhood. As a child, Nabokov was a keen painter, and his parents believed that one day he would become a professional artist. For two years he received lessons from the famous Russian painter Mstislav Dobuzhinsky (1875–1957), who developed the writer’s visual memory and visual imagination, and who “made young Nabokov depict from memory” (De Vries and Barton Johnson 2006, p. 13). Nabokov’s characters, especially the ones with whom he sympathizes, for instance, the character of Dryer in the novel “*King, Queen, Knave*”, are endowed with keen vision and perceptiveness—the traits that they share with the characters of Bierce’s stories.

Bierce and Nabokov attempt to overcome traditional linear narration by adding extra narrative dimensions that function as inconspicuous storylines which can only be disclosed through very attentive reading. These additional narrative levels are constructed by means of recurrent motifs, images, and isomorphic scenes. Unfolding alongside the main narration and interweaving with each other, they produce layers of hidden meanings and act as keys to deeper interpretation. Organized as patterns of horizontal and vertical connections, the texts appear as three-dimensional puzzles—visible constructions which require both reading and observation to be grasped.

Both writers challenged any ideology and ideological rhetoric, any holistic view of life ambitious enough to represent the absolute truth. They opposed knowledge and theories with observation, anticipating to some extent the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who would later separate reason and perception in his text “*Eye and Mind*” (1964). In his stories “*Chickamauga*”, “*A Horseman in the Sky*”, and “*One of the Missing*”, Ambrose Bierce criticized both the ideology of the South and the rhetoric of the Southern Confederacy (Cheatem 1985, p. 220), which believed Southern Army soldiers to be heroes. He opposed this rhetoric (which, according to Bierce, produced only inane clichés) with precise narrative (Davidson 1974, p. 265) containing vivid visible images. Nabokov, who in his understanding of fiction attached more importance to imagery than to ideas (De Vries and Barton Johnson 2006, p. 11), and thus compared a literary text to a painting, also opposed ideology with visual experience (Trubetskova 2010, p. 63) and contraposed the gift of discerning

the manifestations of the transcendent in the mundane reality to ideological reasoning. Similarly to Bierce, Nabokov created patterns of vivid visual images. Whenever Bierce or Nabokov address an idea or a concept, they always present it as a visual image (sometimes rather trivial), while an ordinary object perceived by a character with keen vision always gains in their texts the importance of a philosophical concept (De Vries and Barton Johnson 2006, p. 17).

The eye is always the focus of both writers' attention. It is integrated into their texts as an organ of vision which perceives reality while also functioning as a metaphor. Bierce and Nabokov pay close attention to the problems of vision, its acuity and its weakness, its relation to the imagination and the ability to see the realm of the transcendent. They were interested in the process of vision itself, the emerging relationship between the observer and the observed, the situation when a vague visual impression gives birth to an object. That is why both writers often describe various optical effects.

Analyzing Nabokov's visual poetics, scholars note the technique of ekphrasis which Nabokov actively utilized in his earliest texts, narrativizing paintings of European and Russian masters (De Vries and Barton Johnson 2006, p. 19). Practicing visual poetics, Nabokov often used art terminology to assess reality aesthetically. Viewing reality through the prism of art, he turned it into paintings. Bierce did not utilize such techniques, but it is noteworthy that both writers applied the optics and the rhetoric of a topographers and geographers, creating narratives of maps (Shrayer 1999, pp. 71–72).

Having outlined this circle of circumstances, we may now turn to the analysis of the problem of the visuality of the early texts of Nabokov and Bierce, which are united by common techniques, visual poetics, common images, scenes and motifs. However, it is first necessary to briefly present these texts in their relation to the worldview of both authors.

In Ambrose Bierce's short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", planter Peyton Farquhar, sentenced by the Northerners to be hanged for his attempt to set the bridge on fire, stands on this very bridge which has become a scaffold for him, with a noose around his neck and his hands tied behind his back. Before his death, he attempts to focus his thoughts on his wife and children and thinks about salvation. At the moment of execution, when the sentence is carried out, and the executioners remove the board from under the feet of Peyton Farquhar, the rope breaks, and the character falls into the water. A fierce struggle for life begins. Now in the water, Farquhar frees his hands and neck with great effort, then evades the shots of his executioners. He dives, is pulled into the whirlpool, and soon finds himself on the saving shore. He then heads home through the woods. Night falls, and the forest through which he walks appears uninhabited. Finally, in the morning (or so it seems), he finds himself at the gate of his own house. His wife, about whom he has been thinking all this time, comes out to meet him. Just then, a furious blow falls on him, everything becomes drowned in darkness, and the reader observes the body of Peyton Farquhar hanging under the bridge. The heroic fight with death and the escape are revealed to have been just the play of imagination.

Bierce very skillfully manipulates the naive reader (Ames 1987, p. 54) who is unaware that a false narrative development is unfolding in the story. Yet, the tragic finale is prepared by the use of a large number of hints, including hidden ones. These hints undermine the reliability of the narrative and inform the reader that Peyton Farquhar did not escape, but rather died of suffocation.

Nabokov, in his three stories "Details of a Sunset", "The Aurelian", and "Perfection", uses techniques and images from Bierce's story. In "Details of a Sunset", Mark Standfuss, a salesman, returns home in the evening, immersed in romantic dreams about his fiancée Klara. He does not know that Klara has left him and returned to her former lover. Sitting in the tram and thinking about Klara, about his happiness, about his love for everything he sees, Mark Standfuss misses his stop. He jumps off the moving tram and feels a sharp pain, realizing that he was almost hit by a bus. He approaches his house and, just like Peyton Farquhar, sees his beloved at the gate. Then, reality gradually acquires a dream-like character and turns into a fantasy that is interrupted by a short flash of what is really

happening—a picture of Mark lying on the operating table. Mark dies, but, unlike Peyton Farquhar, does not lose himself in darkness—he becomes immersed into the realm of magical dreams instead.

Nabokov, like Bierce, consistently places signs of death appearing in Mark's fantasies and in reality. Nabokov's narrative is filled with quotations and allusions. He refers not only to the text of Bierce, but also to the legend of Tristan and Isolde. Through the latter reference, Mark is associated with King Mark, while Klara, who is unable to resist her love to a certain foreigner (Tristan), correlates with Isolde. In addition, endowing the enamored Mark with immeasurable love for all things, Nabokov hints at his resemblance to Mark the Evangelist and even to Christ himself, offering a motif of spiritual resurrection. The sparkler running off the wires at the beginning of the story is associated with the Christmas Star. When Mark's friend Adolf jokingly pokes him in the rib with his finger, he thereby acts as the Roman warrior Longinus, who plunged the spear into the body of Christ (John 19:34).

In the story "The Aurelian", the technique of a false narrative development is not used—it is only briefly indicated in the final episode. Nevertheless, the story contains explicit references to "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." Pilgram lives as an unremarkable shopkeeper, but by vocation he is a born entomologist who dreams of going to exotic countries in search of butterflies. He often observes geographical maps for a long time, trying to imagine landscapes in which butterflies frolic. The surrounding reality irritates him and is perceived by him as an obstacle to the realization of his cherished dream. Pilgram appears to the reader as a hero of the early Romantic texts, experiencing longing, i.e., the desire to search for the infinite, the transcendent in finite forms of life, the spirit in earthly matter. A fluttering butterfly becomes a sign of this spirit, a new version of the blue flower imagined by Novalis in "Ofterdingen". However, mundane life hinders Pilgram from fulfilling his dream—his plans are inevitably disrupted. Finally, he finds a buyer for his collection of rare butterflies, hoping that the profit will allow him to go on a journey and fulfill his dream. Having received the money, he, keeping the plan a secret from his wife, prepares for a trip and suddenly dies. Nevertheless, the narrator states that Pilgram has gone on a trip and suggests that the reader should not attach importance to the fact that his wife found him dead in the morning.

In "Perfection", we can observe an instance of false narrative development which, however, is not expansive, being represented only by a few sentences. Here, as in the two previous stories, there are references to Bierce. Russian emigrant Ivanov, a geographer by profession, gives lessons to a teenager named David. Ivanov is naturally endowed with observational skills and strong imagination, while David is naive and stupid. Ivanov has a weak heart, while David is a great athlete. The two of them travel to a sunny Baltic resort where the heat causes Ivanov to have heart attack. The climax comes when Ivanov sees David drowning. Ivanov rushes into the water to save David, but his feeble efforts are in vain. He comes out on an empty shore, full of guilt and remorse, sees signs of death around him, and suddenly realizes that David is not dead. The reader, in turn, understands that it is Ivanov who has died, not David. Beyond the threshold of life, Ivanov's imagination awakens, revealing to him the beauty of the otherworldly, while in the real world, vacationers on the beach are trying to find his body.

"Perfection" contains an obvious reference to the Biblical story of David and Goliath. The role of David, who killed Goliath, is assigned to the boy named David, who becomes the involuntary killer of Ivanov-Goliath. An interesting scene in this regard is the one in which Ivanov tries to show David how to throw stones into the sea so that they bounce on the water. Ivanov fails to perform this feat, and David shows him how to throw correctly. Like the Biblical David who killed Goliath with a stone, Nabokov's David knows how to handle stones. Ivanov plays the role of Goliath. The narrator emphasizes his tall stature, and when Ivanov rides in the elevator to give a lesson to David, it seems to him that he is growing.

The obvious correlations between Bierce's story and Nabokov's three texts, such as the use of identical techniques, similar symbols, and visual effects, serve different purposes for

both writers which are related to the fundamental differences between Bierce and Nabokov in their understandings of man, free will, and imagination.

Ambrose Bierce's political and social views, as noted by John Brazil, changed throughout his life (Brazil 1980, pp. 230–33), but his understanding of human nature, formed under the influence of his Calvinist heritage (Brazil 1980, p. 232) and social Darwinism, persisted. Man, Bierce believed, is inherently vicious. His desires, no matter how diverse they might be, are subordinated to the desire to survive in the general war for existence, which, according to Bierce, is the natural state of human society. This means that a person is fundamentally a warrior and a killer. Such is Peyton Farquhar from "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", who, forced during the war to lead a lifestyle of a peaceful planter, dreams instead of military valor. This idea of man leads Bierce to the denial of free will, which combines the idea of the fate expressed in the ancient Greek tragedy and the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. The character of Bierce is always shown as an experiencer of some universal evil destructive will, diffused in nature, which acts through him and always leads him to death. He makes every effort to avoid death, but such efforts always turn out to be in vain. Peyton Farquhar seems to be taking some initiative, performing actions, running somewhere, but eventually he is standing still, bound hand and foot by the logic of fate which will inevitably actualize.

Nabokov, unlike Bierce, denied any form of determinism (Trubetskova 2010, p. 63) (Boyd 1990, p. 283) and refuted the indispensable attachment of a person to time and mundane reality. He advocated the idea of chance, unpredictability, and unexpected turns of events. The relationship of a person with the transcendent, with the otherworldly, is not tragic in his texts. The transcendent for Nabokov is not hostile to man (Alexandrov 1991, p. 54); rather, it is characterized by love and regarded as something that is disposed towards human beings. For Nabokov's character, it is the highest happiness to achieve unity with the other world, a state that Nabokov called "cosmic synchronization" (Shrayer 1999, pp. 18, 40, 42, 68–69). Nabokov translates the problem of predestination from the ontological sphere to the aesthetic one, not discussing people, but characters. The author acts as the supreme force, while for the characters predestination, as Khasin notes (Khasin 2001, p. 36), takes the form of a freely chosen and lived fate. Nabokov advocates free creative imagination that creates aesthetic reality.

The Bierce's and Nabokov's characters are endowed with visual imagination. They dream, fantasize, compose. Both authors present their narratives as close to visible images as possible. In the stories of Bierce and Nabokov, visual imagination always tends to transcend and substitute empirical reality. For both Bierce and Nabokov, such imagination opens the door to the transcendent world independent of the mundane reality, a terra incognita. However, even here there exists some differences in the authors' assessments of the imaginations of their characters and the worlds that they create. For Bierce, who tends not to trust a person, to see a man as a vicious being, Peyton Farquhar's consciousness, subordinated to the desire to survive, is always enthralled by propaganda clichés and inane rhetoric in peacetime. When the moment of execution approaches, his visual imagination begins to function, to produce images in accordance with primitive literary clichés. Bierce is openly ironic and satirical. His Peyton Farquhar is a poor storyteller; he composes an explicitly poor text. He cannot overcome the empirical reality. It invades his fantasies, pointing out that he is hanging in a noose and suffocating. His fate reminds him of itself with ominous symbols that tell the reader that the character is on his way to the world of death. In Bierce's fiction, there is nothing beyond the boundaries of life but darkness and emptiness.

Nabokov's sphere of imagination is associated with the idea of inner freedom. Visual imagination connects the past, present, and future in the mind of the character. It overcomes the empirical, presenting it as a manifestation of the transcendent (Rutledge 2011, p. 184). The empirical world declares itself, but it cannot destroy the world pictured by the imagination, as it happens in Bierce's texts. The transcendent world revealed to Mark Standfuss, Ivanov, and Pilgram does not conceal anything sinister and hostile. On

the contrary, for these characters it turns out to be the highest happiness to achieve unity with this world, i.e., to reach “cosmic synchronization.” While Bierce’s character is profane, Nabokov’s characters are talented and inspired artists.

The eye is the most important, most frequently occurring image in the stories of Bierce and Nabokov, and the problem of visual perception is one of the key themes of these stories. The eye appears in all four texts as a living optical device, an intermediary between the external world and the consciousness of the subject, as well as a sensitive recorder on which the objective reality leaves its traces. The eye, when properly adjusted, captures not only the visible and material, but also the possible, the transcendent. It is able to catch the light that gives life to every visible form. At the same time, the eye is a special symbol for Bierce and Nabokov.

The European Romantic tradition that formed Bierce and Nabokov (Dolinin 2004, p. 34) associates the eye with the spirit, understanding the eye as a metaphor for the soul. The loss of the character’s soul, along with the ability to imagine, in many Romantic texts results in the weakening or even the complete loss of vision. In E.T.A. Hoffman’s “The Sandman”, the abduction of Nathanael’s soul by the devil-Coppelius is accompanied by the clouding of Nathanael’s eyes. Charles Baudelaire describes the blind (poem “The Blind”) like soulless automaton dolls.

Ambrose Bierce and Vladimir Nabokov both focus their attentions on the eyes of the characters and on the process of visual perception. For Bierce’s character, who is involved in the general struggle for existence which takes the form of war between all human beings, eyes serve primarily as a weapon. They often look “through the sights of the rifle” (Bierce 1909, p. 14). Vigilance and observation in Bierce’s stories are a property of good warriors, excellent killers. The ability to see well in his world is crucial for survival. This vigilance is combined in Bierce’s characters with a kind of blindness, an inability to distinguish the signs of fate in the surrounding world. For Bierce’s character, these signs are obscured by illusions and therefore are not clear to him. It is up to Providence to gradually remove the veil of illusions and enable the character to see the essence of things before his eyes are closed forever.

In Nabokov’s stories, visual acuity of the characters is their positive property. It is inextricably linked with creative imagination and even clairvoyance, the ability to discern the transcendent—the invisible area from which objects are born. Nabokov endows his truly creative characters (Mark Standfuss, Pilgram, and Ivanov) with such visual acuity. At the same time, their antagonists often suffer from poor eyesight (Trubetskova 2010, p. 59). Thus, in Nabokov’s early novel “King, Queen, Knave”, the main character Dreyer has amazing visual acuity, the observational skill of a genuine artist (Dolinin 2004, p. 50), while the unimaginative Franz, who enters into an implicit confrontation with him, suffers from myopia and wears glasses.

The differences in ethical assessments of the eye and the ability to see, found in the stories of Bierce and Nabokov, paradoxically highlight some important parallels in their texts. Nabokov uses several characteristics of the eye and vision that also appear in Bierce’s writing.

Bierce and Nabokov, directing the vision of their characters to the world around them, tend to periodically interrupt this vision. Their characters frequently open and close their eyes, turn blind for a moment and instantly regain the ability to see. These trivial physiological actions and transitions have symbolic meaning. In “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge”, Peyton Farquhar stands on the bridge with his eyes open. The narrator specifically emphasizes that the executioners have not blindfolded their captive. He looks down at the water moving under his feet. He is symbolically forced to see his inescapable fate in the image of the river flowing under his feet. Peyton Farquhar closes his eyes, trying to focus his thoughts on his wife and children, and thinks about salvation. Having turned off his vision and detached himself from the visible, closing his eyes to reality (Linkin 1988, p. 141), he makes a symbolic escape into the world of illusions, at the end of which his wife should meet him.

This very first scene of Bierce's story is parodied by Nabokov in "The Aurelian." Both Bierce and Nabokov integrate the images of closed eyes and a wife in their respective episodes. Peyton Farquhar's wife is far away from him, and Pilgram's wife is nearby. Peyton Farquhar, closing his eyes, dreams of being next to his wife, and Pilgram, who has closed his eyes, dreams of disposing of his wife: "He refused his supper, and for several minutes, with his eyes closed, nagged his wife, thinking she was still standing near; then he heard her sobbing softly in the kitchen, and toyed with the idea of taking an axe and splitting her pale-haired head" (Nabokov 2002, p. 256). Pilgram symbolically closes his eyes to his boring empirical reality in which there are no signs of genuine life.

In Bierce's story and Nabokov's related stories, the characters periodically lose their sight. Bierce's Peyton Farquhar goes blind three times: first from the light of the sun, then due to the water, and for a third time when he dies and drowns in darkness. These moments of blindness have symbolic meaning: they signify the character's inability to discern the Plan of God. In "Perfection", Ivanov, like Bierce's character, goes blind in the water. However, the motif of blindness is initiated in this story a little earlier, when Ivanov tells David about imagination and visual memory: "But the point is that with a bit of imagination—if, God forbid, you were someday to go blind or be imprisoned, or were merely to perform, in appalling poverty, some hopeless, distasteful task; you might remember this walk we are taking today in an ordinary forest as if it had been—how shall I say?—fairy-tale ecstasy" (Nabokov 2002, p. 345). Physical blindness, closed eyes, and the darkness of the prison do not hinder imagination and the inner vision which allows one to see the innermost secret of objects.

Weakness of vision, as we have already noted, is one of the most important motifs in Nabokov's texts. Nabokov presents poor eyesight, which makes it necessary for the character to wear glasses, as symbolic of the character's lack of imagination. In "Perfection", Ivanov puts on David's sunglasses: "Before leaving the house, he put on David's dark-yellow sunglasses—and the sun swooned amid a sky dying a turquoise death, and the morning light upon the porch steps acquired a sunset tinge" (Nabokov 2002, p. 345) The world seen through glasses loses its brightness, becomes dim, and appears as though dying. At the same time, Ivanov's imagination is weakened—he cannot concentrate on visual memory and evoke vivid images in his own mind. When Ivanov dies and passes into the other world, the glasses are removed. His imagination awakens, and reality regains its brightness and clarity: "Only then were the clouded glasses removed. The dull mist immediately broke, blossomed with marvelous colors, all kind of sounds burst forth . . ." (Nabokov 2002, p. 347). Weak eyesight is mentioned in the story once again when a woman in pince-nez (the one who takes a frightened David away) appears on the shore. This woman belongs to the vacuous beach crowd—the very crowd of people who, devoid of imagination and thus disconnected from the otherworldly reality, are futilely searching for Ivanov.

Bierce's and Nabokov's characters tend to observe, and they often become the objects of their own observation. Both writers create situations in which observation itself is observed. Nabokov's characters often imagine themselves as objects of someone else's observation (Connolly 1992, pp. 3–4). In "Details of a Sunset", Mark reflects on how Klara sees him, believing that she has fallen in love with him because of his tag. It is not for his internal properties, but for a visually accessible feature of appearance that Klara loves Mark. Similarly, in "Perfection", Ivanov adopts David's perspective, as well as the perspective of the people around him, trying to imagine his own appearance as it is seen by others.

In this context, a direct parallel arises between the texts of Bierce and Nabokov. In Bierce's story, Peyton Farquhar notices the shooter's gaze directed at him. Peyton Farquhar, catching this look, sees himself as an object of aggression and a victim: "The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle" (Bierce 1909, p. 14). Nabokov, in the story "Details of a Sunset", offers a similar scene—the doctor looks at the pupils of dying Mark: "Mark was lying supine, mutilated and bandaged, and the lamp was not swinging any longer. The familiar fat man with the

mustache, now a doctor in a white gown, made worried growling small noises as he peered into the pupils of Mark's eyes" (Nabokov 2002, p. 85). The character's eyes turn out to be the eyes of the victim again, but in Bierce's story they are looked at by an unfortunate killer, while in "Details of a Sunset" it is an unfortunate savior who is looking. This intersection of looks is not the only coincidence; it can also be observed in the shift of focalization. The aforementioned scenes mark the points in the respective stories of both writers when the reader is no longer forced to see the reality through the eyes of the characters, but may assume a third point of view which becomes possible through the intersection of looks.

The problem of visuality in the texts of Bierce and Nabokov, as noted, should be considered in the context of the desire of both authors to present concepts and motifs in the form of vivid visual images. In this regard, the concept of fate is a key feature for both writers. Bierce, creating a character determined by physiology, heredity, and circumstances, denies free will and demonstrates the irresistibility of fate. Peyton Farquhar dreams of escaping from the place of execution, invents another narrative, but fate holds him tight and does not let him go. Peyton Farquhar is bound and motionless, a toy of fate. The visual correlates of this idea are the noose around Peyton Farquhar's neck and the rope binding his hands behind his back.

Nabokov, marking the presence of fate, uses similar images, apparently responding to Bierce's text. Mark Standfuss, who dreams of returning home to his beloved, lies on the operating table, and his body is bound with bandages: "Mark was lying supine, mutilated and bandaged, and the lamp was not swinging any longer" (Nabokov 2002, p. 85). In "Perfection", the character's binding by fate is also conveyed by a visual metaphor when Ivanov goes into the water to save David: "He felt enclosed in a tight painfully cold sack, his heart was straining unbearably" (Nabokov 2002, p. 346). It is notable that Ivanov is described not so much as a swimmer, but as a hanged man. The character suffocates, he is shackled, and a bag, which is usually put on the head of a condemned man on the gallows, appears in this description.

The motif of temptation is connected with the concept of fate in the texts of Bierce and Nabokov. Peyton Farquhar, standing tied up on the bridge, dreams of being next to his beautiful wife. She is a source of temptation for him. In the second episode of the story, it is revealed that Peyton Farquhar dreamed of being at war while he was living a peaceful life with his wife and children. He wanted to play theatrically the role of a warrior, as Peter Morrone notes (Morrone 2013, p. 317). At that moment, the war was a temptation for him, while the spy of the Northerners acted as an insidious tempter, seducing him with the prospect of a heroic death on the gallows.

This combination of two motifs, fate (boundness, stranglehold, rope) and temptation, also occurs in "Details of a Sunset." The temptation here comes not only from Klara, but also from Mark himself, who seduces the buyer with a beautiful tie in the store: "He knotted the tie on his hand, and turned it this way and that, enticing the customer" (Nabokov 2002, p. 81). The tie is a version of the noose from Bierce's story, and the hand tied with a tie is a reminder of Peyton Farquhar's tied hands. Thus, a rather mundane clothing item is revealed to be a visual correlate of the temptation and fate that binds the character.

The tie is not Nabokov's only reference to the noose. His stories contain multiple other images that resemble garrotes. For instance, Mark Standfuss grabs a hanging belt when he loses his balance in the swaying tram. When he lies on the operating table, his dream about Klara is interrupted by a vision of reality in which, instead of the beloved's dress, a lamp appears swinging on a cord: "He writhed, and Klara's green dress floated away, diminished, and turned into the green shade of a lamp" (Nabokov 2002, p. 84).

In "Perfection", the feelings of tightness and stiffness that Ivanov experiences on the train are complemented by an important detail: "The train was crowded, and his new, soft collar (a slight compromise, a summer treat) turned gradually into a tight clammy compress" (Nabokov 2002, p. 342). The collar presses on Ivanov's neck like a noose. In the same story, there is an optical effect that refers to the gallows of Bierce's text. In Ivanov's eyes, a moment before he jumps into the water and dies, "knots" appear that represent

opacities in the vitreous body of the eye: "His shoes were already full of sand, he took them off with slow hands, then was again lost in thought, and again those evasive little knots began to swim across his field of vision—and how he longed, how he longed to recall . . ." (Nabokov 2002, p. 346). The narrator calls the opacities "knots", seeking an association with a noose and, accordingly, a fate ready to happen. It is important that the knots are a part of the character; they represent an element of his physiology, marking its indissoluble connection with fate. Fate leaves a symbolic mark on the vitreous body of Ivanov's eye, like the noose leaving a mark on Peyton Farquhar's neck.

The concept of fate in texts by Bierce and Nabokov is also realized as an audio-visual complex, combining both visual and audial images. In "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", Peyton Farquhar hears a sound resembling a hammer blow, which prevents him from concentrating on the thoughts about his wife and children:

And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near by—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch. (Bierce 1909, p. 10)

Peyton Farquhar's thoughts are symbolically interrupted by the blows of fate, by the inexorable clock (Ames 1987, p. 63), predicting the imminent death of the character. Then, Peyton Farquhar falls off a bridge and swings like a pendulum, hanging on a rope: "Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum" (Bierce 1909, p. 12). The audial image of time and destiny turns into a visual one. Peyton Farquhar himself confluences with time and finally connects with his destiny.

Nabokov uses the same audiovisual complex in his stories, somewhat reworking it. Doomed by fate, Mark Standfuss drops his cane while he is climbing the stairs, and it jumps down the steps with a rhythmic sound. Mark listens to the wooden knocking, which fades after a while. The knocking of the wooden cane against the steps represents the earthly time allotted to Mark, which is about to end.

In "Perfection", time is symbolically represented by tapping in the very first description of David:

Fair-haired and thin, wearing a yellow sleeveless jersey held close by a leather belt, with scarred naked knees and wristwatch whose crystal was protected by a prison-window grating, David sat at the table in a most uncomfortable position, and kept tapping his teeth with the blunt end of his fountain pen. (Nabokov 2002, p. 338)

In this mundane, meticulous description, there is once again the familiar audiovisual complex. The sound, tapping, unites with the visible and tangible figure of a boy with a watch on his left hand. The tapping and the watch seem to be meaningless details, as they do not represent anything that could be regarded as crucial for the narrative at this point. However, fate has already assigned David the role of the involuntary killer of Ivanov-Goliath. He has a watch on his hand, and by tapping his teeth with a pen, he unconsciously counts down the time allotted to the teacher. This episode is recalled in the scene in which Ivanov's visual memory recreates a picture of Russian men running out of the water, their teeth chattering from the cold: "Muzhiks came running out of the water, frog-legged, hands crossed over their private parts: pudor agrestis. Their teeth chattered as the pulled on their shirts over their wet bodies" (Nabokov 2002, p. 341). The

audiovisual complex is also preserved here, but now it is altered. Water (a reference to future drowning) and cold (an anticipation of the cold of death) are combined here with the sounds of chattering teeth.

An audiovisual complex that conveys the concept of fate appears in the story when Ivanov sees flapping flags on the beach before his death. They are mentioned twice in the text: "The dusky flags flapped excitedly, pointing all in the same direction, though nothing was happening there yet. Here is the sand, here is the dull splash of the sea." (Nabokov 2002, p. 345). The flapping flags beat time and reveal the direction of the character's fate. They point towards the sea where nothing has happened yet, but where the character will soon die. One more manifestation of the concept of fate can be observed in the fact that throughout the story Ivanov hears the loud pounding of his sick heart, which foreshadows his death. This manifestation is purely audial, as the source of the sound (which is Ivanov's heart) cannot be seen.

As can be observed, Nabokov, in his recreation of the concept of fate through the audiovisual complex, explicitly refers to Bierce. However, unlike Bierce, he arranges many miscellaneous objects of the mundane world as signs of fate. In Nabokov's stories, Bierce's noose turns into a cord of an electric lamp, a tie, a hanging belt, a collar, and even into opacities of the vitreous body. At the same time, the audiovisual complex of fate that appears in Bierce's story and which is expressed by the sound of the character's watch is transformed in Nabokov's stories into the knocking of a falling cane, the tapping of a self-writing pen, the flapping of flags, and the pounding of a sick heart.

The journey of Bierce's and Nabokov's characters into the transcendent world and the visualization of the works of their imaginations begins with a geographical map. The map is a projection of reality onto a plane, a schematization of the visible world. It translates three-dimensional, visible objects into signs, which represents a case when observation of the world turns into generalized knowledge about the world. Nevertheless, the map appeals to the eye and contains the potential of three-dimensional reality in the signs applied to it. In the texts of Bierce and Nabokov, we observe a transition from the map to the visible empirical reality, and then to the transcendent reality, i.e., from the generalized knowledge, the representation of the world, to its sensory perception, and then to the perception that reveals the supersensible.

Bierce, as aforementioned, was a professional cartographer and thus a skilled drawer of maps. The beginning of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" is characterized by scholars as a kind of narrative map (Conlogue 1999, p. 264), on which the bridge is designated as the center from which the lines diverge in different directions: "Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost farther along. The other bank of the stream was open ground—a gentle acclivity topped with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loop-holed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge" (Bierce 1909, p. 8).

By creating a visual map, Bierce appeals to the reader's vision. He paints an objective picture, relying on his knowledge of military affairs and choosing the dry intonation of a military report. The second part of the story contains the episode with the spy. The third part, which introduces the escape scene imagined by Peyton Farquhar, is filled with sensual, visual images. However, as the narrative develops, the imaginary character of Peyton Farquhar's experience is exposed, and the visible, three-dimensional world gradually becomes flat, turning into a scheme and resembling a map again: "At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective" (Bierce 1909, pp. 16–17). Knowledge is replaced by vision, and then vision becomes knowledge again.

Nabokov, as M. Schrayer rightly notes (Schrayer 1999, pp. 81–86), uses the techniques of a cartographer, as geographical maps appear in his stories “The Aurelian” and “Perfection.” Ivanov in “Perfection” is a geographer by education. The story begins with Ivanov drawing two parallel lines during the lesson he gives David. Further in the story there is introduced an enthusiastic commentary about the map, which is regarded as a form of primary knowledge with the potential to stimulate visual imagination that creates an imaginary three-dimensional world:

How beautiful, for instance, are ancient charts! Viatic maps of the Romans, elongated, ornate, with snakelike marginal stripes representing canal-shaped seas; or those drawn in ancient Alexandria, with England and Ireland looking like two little sausages; or again, maps of medieval Christendom, crimson-and-grass-colored, with the paradisiacal Orient at the top and Jerusalem—the world’s golden navel—in the center. Accounts of marvelous pilgrimages: that traveling monk comparing the Jordan to a little river in his native Chernigov, that envoy of the Tsar reaching a country where people strolled under yellow parasols, that merchant from Tver picking his way through a dense “zhengel”, his Russian for “jungle”, full of monkeys, to a torrid land ruled by a naked prince. (Nabokov 2002, p. 338)

The reality of the map is the beginning of the mystical journey that Ivanov is taking. Schematic reality gradually acquires visibility and three-dimensional properties, and knowledge is replaced by imagination.

The image of the map also appears in “The Aurelian.” The narrator names some geographical locations which Pilgram transforms in his imagination into visible pictures of a three-dimensional world imbued with spirit. Each location is reigned by a butterfly which is seen as the soul of the place: “Out of localities cited in entomological works he had built up a special world of his own, to which his science was a most detailed guidebook. In that world there were no casinos, no old churches, nothing that might attract a normal tourist. Digne in southern France, Ragusa in Dalmatia, Sarepta on the Volga, Abisko in Lapland—those were the famous sites dear to butterfly collectors, and this is where they had poked about, on and off, since the fifties of the last century (always greatly perplexing the local inhabitants)” (Nabokov 2002, p. 253).

Shortly before the trip, Pilgram constantly turns his gaze to the map: “He spent several hours examining a map, choosing a route, estimating the time of appearance of this or that species, and suddenly something black and blinding welled before his eyes, and he stumbled about his shop for quite a while before he felt better” (Nabokov 2002, p. 256). As in “Perfection”, the map is not only a schematic image of the world; it is a representation that must be transformed into an imaginary world in order to elevate flat reality into three-dimensional existence.

As observed, Bierce and Nabokov both create narratives of maps. The only difference is that Bierce returns his narrative back to the map, while Nabokov takes it to another world where there is no place for rational knowledge or calculation.

The most important image that visualizes the character’s transition to another world in the stories of Bierce and Nabokov is the bridge. By the end of the 19th century, the image of the bridge had become extremely popular in Western European painting. The bridge appears in the paintings of Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissaro, Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, and many others, as a form that organizes the composition of the work and sets it a certain rhythm. Bierce uses the bridge as an image that represents a peculiar theatrical stage. It is on this stage that the last act of the tragedy is to be played. In Nabokov’s “Details of a Sunset”, the bridge is a direct reference to Bierce’s story. It is used as if as a secondary image but is mentioned twice. The first time it occurs is when Mark Standfuss comes out of the pub: “When, half an hour later, he came out of the pub and said goodbye to his friend, the flush of a fiery sunset filled the vista of the canal, and a rain-streaked bridge in the distance was margined by a narrow rim of gold along which passed tiny black figures” (Nabokov 2002, p. 82). The second time, the bridge is referred to

implicitly. In the final scene, in the imaginary world just before his death, Mark addresses his imaginary audience and utters a phrase: “The foreigner is offering the aforementioned prayers on the river. . . .” (Nabokov 2002, p. 84). When Mark mentions a foreigner, he means both Klara’s lover and the American (foreigner) from Bierce’s story, who does not pray in the literal sense of the word, but appeals to Providence, hoping for justice and salvation. There is no explicit image of the bridge here, but it is hidden in the subtext.

Bierce and Nabokov depict their bridges in slightly different ways, focusing on different painting traditions. First of all, Bierce’s narrator sees the bridge up close; he fixes on the most insignificant details, working out the figures of the officer and the soldiers who stand on the bridge. Nabokov’s narrator sees the bridge from a great distance, the bridge is “far away”. The people on this bridge are barely distinguishable, dark figures seen from afar. Another difference is the angles from which the bridges are viewed. Bierce’s narrator observes the bridge from above and from the side: he sees all the participants of the action on the bridge, as well as boards under their feet and the railway rails. Nabokov’s narrator observes the bridge not from above, but from below. This is how the bridges of Vincent Van Gogh (*Langlois Bridge at Arles*) (Figure 1) and Cézanne (*Bridge over the Marne*) (Figure 2) are shown in the paintings with which Nabokov was well acquainted (De Vries and Barton Johnson 2006, pp. 50–51, 59–61, 55, 178). Drawing analogies with painting, Bierce undoubtedly adheres to the classical tradition of depicting the bridge, and shows a picture in which, in addition to the bridge, there exists a whole panorama. The bridge functions as a horizontal compositional link in the painting, drawn according to the classical tradition. M.Yampolsky notes: “The bridge creates a horizontal thrust, connecting the banks and ‘taking away’ the body residing in it into the forest, into the invisible. Below, the river sets a different direction of horizontal movement, orienting its dynamic energy along the banks (Yampolsky 1996, p. 11). Bierce thoroughly reveals all the details, buildings, and elements of the landscape, and even describes in detail the poses of the military men standing on the bridge. The bridge is revealed to be an image that serves as the uniting element of all the details of this composition.

Nabokov includes no panorama in his text. The bridge is represented as an object set apart from the rest of the imagery, its only compositional relation being the channel on which the fiery sunset is reflected. Nabokov introduces the bridge as an image referring to Bierce’s story and as a detail of the overall picture which splits into colors and lines that are related to other colors and lines integrated in the text. In this sense, Nabokov is a direct heir to the traditions of William Turner and the Impressionists.

Explaining the semantics of Bierce’s bridge, M.Yampolsky, developing the ideas of M. Heidegger, describes the bridge as a “place” that unites space and creates its boundaries (Yampolsky 1996, pp. 8–9). Bierce’s bridge indeed functions in this manner. It connects several elements: the earth, the shores of which it attracts to each other; the water (a stream flows under the bridge); the sky, to which it aspires; and the fire (falling from the bridge, Peyton Farquhar feels that streams seem to pass through his body and that he has turned into “a fiery heart” of a “luminous cloud” (Bierce 1909, p. 12)). The man on the bridge is placed at the intersection of these elements, i.e., in the center of the universe.

Nabokov also uses the image of a bridge as a place connecting the elements. The water, the earth, the sky, and the fire are present here, as in Bierce’s text. The fire is reflected in the water of the canal: . . . the flush of a fiery sunset filled the vista of the canal” (Nabokov 2002, p. 82). On Nabokov’s bridge, like Bierce’s images, people are at the center of the intersection of the elements, but they are more dehumanized, reduced to color and form: these are not characters with faces and external differences, but identical black figures.

The bridge in Bierce’s story is described not only as a place collecting the elements, but also as a primitive execution machine. Bierce’s narrator explains in detail how the execution will be put into action. Nabokov does not use the semantics of the image, but instead reinforces its metaphysical significance, describing it as a place where prayers are performed, i.e., as a version of a sacred center or a temple where a link to the transcendent world opens.

Finally, in Bierce's and Nabokov's prose, the bridge acts as a traditional symbol of transition to the other world. It is a place from which Peyton Farquhar goes to the world of visions and to the realm of the dead. Nabokov's bridge scene involves figures that are marked in black, i.e., the color of death.



Figure 1. Vincent Van Gogh, *Langlois Bridge at Arles* (1888).



Figure 2. Paul Cézanne, *Bridge over the Marne* (1888).

However, Nabokov accumulates additional meaning in the image of the bridge and involves it in an interesting associative game in which sunset and fire appear. This game of repetitive images forms an additional line in the story, capturing the central characters, their feelings, elements, and symbolic time of action. It may be assumed that Nabokov, who knew and loved the paintings of William Turner (De Vries and Barton Johnson 2006, pp. 20, 23), in his description of the bridge narrativizes Turner's famous painting *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons* (1834) (Figure 3), namely the second version of this painting, which was presented at the Royal Academy's summer exhibition in 1835 and acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1942. The motifs, details, images, and colors of Turner and Nabokov coincide. Both present disastrous situations and include in their compositions a water element, a bridge, and a fire (Nabokov's sunset is fiery), as well as figures of people. It is essential that both Turner and Nabokov move the bridge a considerable distance from the observer, placing it in the distance. Turner's flames engulfing the buildings and the bridge are painted in gold. The golden color is also present in Nabokov's image of the bridge: the bridge is "margined by a narrow rim of gold" (Nabokov 2002, p. 82). Here, in addition to the possible reference to Turner, there is a reference to the golden stars from Bierce's story, as well as to the alchemical tradition. In the case of Nabokov, it seems to us that the narrative picture is not localized in one description. Spread across the text, its elements are gradually collected to produce the whole image. The fire is referred to in the story as the "red blaze" (ryzhij pozhar) of Klara's hair (Nabokov 2002, p. 79), a metaphor involving

amorous passion and possible death. When Klara decides to leave Mark, Nabokov shows the reader a burnt match as a visual correlate for extinguished passion and loneliness: “A two-dimensional wooden pig hung on the wall, and half-open matchbox with one burnt match lay on the stove” (Nabokov 2002, p. 81). Then, in the episode where the bridge appears (a symbol of the transition to another world), the fire correlates with sunset, the symbolic time of the transition from the day world to the night world, from life to death, from the realm of reason to the realm of imagination. Finally, in Mark’s vision the sunset covers half the sky, just like the golden fire in Turner’s painting. Winged statues also appear in Mark’s vision “lifted skyward golden” (Nabokov 2002, p. 83). Gold converges with fire, alchemically producing a single motif complex. This convergence correlates with Turner’s golden fire.

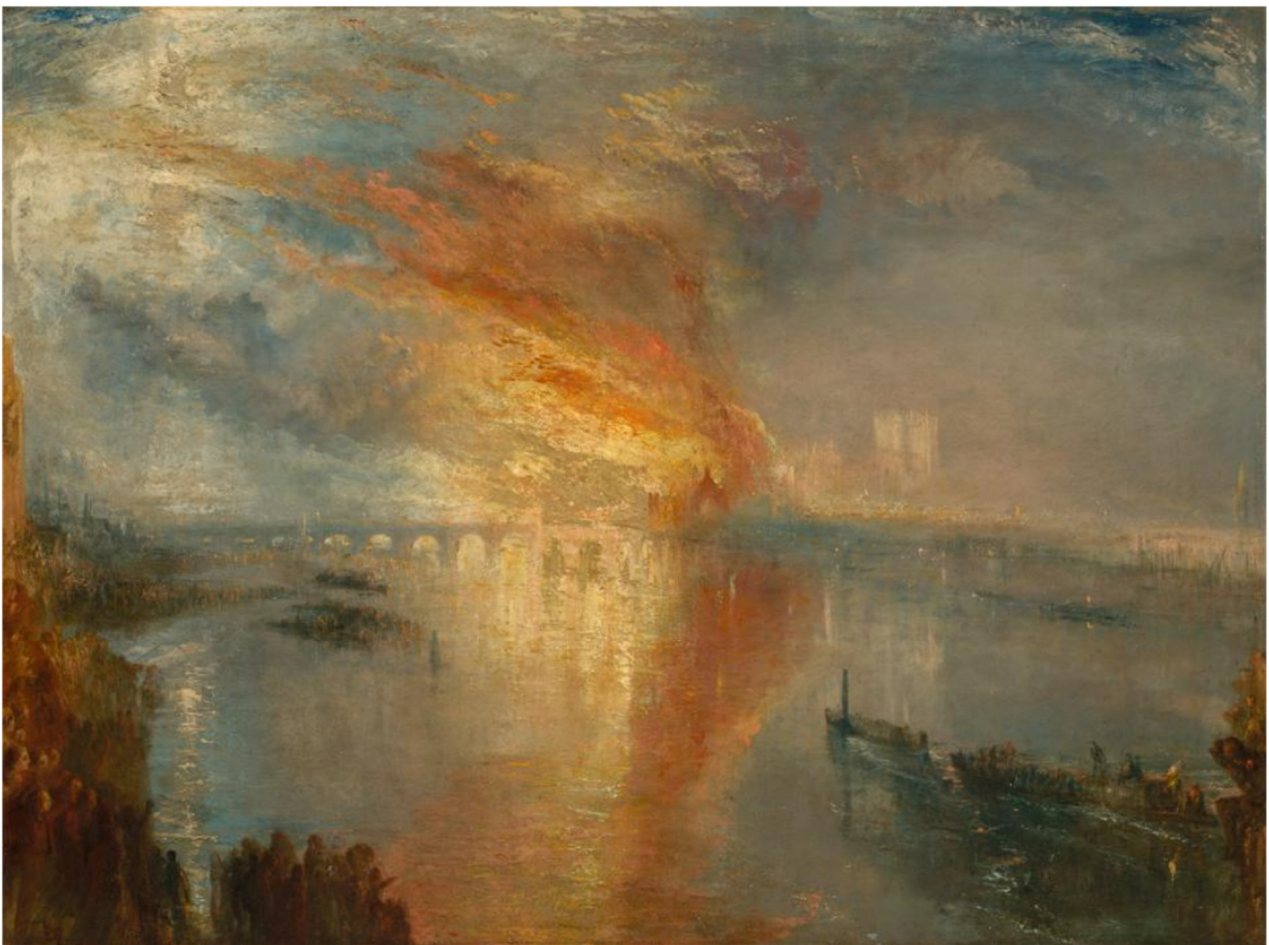


Figure 3. William Turner, *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons* (1834).

Thus, the bridge, for Nabokov and for Bierce, becomes an important motif node and a visual correlate of many overlapping concepts and motifs.

The characters’ transitions into the fantasy world, which allows them to see the terra incognita of the transcendent world, is accompanied by a painful shock, followed by death. Lightning becomes a visual emblem that conveys pain and near-death convulsions. Peyton Farquhar, at the moment when he falls off the bridge, feels as if fiery streams are passing through his body: “These pains appeared to flash along well-defined lines of ramification and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature” (Bierce 1909, p. 12). Peyton Farquhar feels that he himself becomes a flame enclosed in a cloud, i.e., an electric lightning: “Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum”

(Bierce 1909, p. 12). Bierce, as we see, objectifies the inner feelings of the character, making them visible and symbolic.

In “Details of a Sunset”, Nabokov uses the image of a lightning several times: first as a mundane technical phenomenon, then as a design element, and finally as a visualization of the protagonist’s shock. At the very beginning of the text, lightning appears as an electric discharge running along tram wires and is associated with the Christmas Star and with anticipation of spiritual resurrection. Then, Mark sees the “arrow of bright copper” (Nabokov 2002, p. 82) on the dapper shoe as a design element, as a flat visual sign: “An arrow of bright copper struck the lacquered shoe of a fop jumping out of a car” (Nabokov 2002, p. 82). And finally, when Mark jumps off the tram, he feels as if stricken by lightning: “He felt as if a thick thunderbolt had gone through him from head to toe, and then nothing” (Nabokov 2002, p. 83). Visualizing the pain shock, Nabokov resorts to the same emblem as Bierce. Lightning marks the transition of Mark Standfuss into a borderline state, into the world between life and death, into the reality of his imagination. At the same time, Nabokov creates a visual image of a character struck by lightning, referring the reader to the famous Greek myth of Phaeton.

In “Perfection”, Nabokov also mentions lightning, a “flash of fingers” (*molnievidnyj perebor pal’cev*). When Ivanov plunges into the water, he experiences a strange sensation: “All at once a rapid something passed through him, a flash of fingers rippling over piano keys—and this was the very thing he had been trying to recall throughout the morning” (Nabokov 2002, p. 346). This lightning-like movement of the fingers visualizes the pain shock, but more importantly, Ivanov’s transition from the real world to the borderline world.

For Bierce’s and Nabokov’s characters, mystical insight happens upon crossing the boundary between life and death, liberating their souls and their imagination from the confinement of the empirical reality (Babikov 2019, pp. 81–82). In Bierce’s text, however, this liberation is shown as deceptive and illusory, while Nabokov presents it as genuine spiritual experience.

Bierce and Nabokov lead their characters to mystical insight and a vision of the transcendent. In this case, both are heirs of traditional Western European Romanticism, whose representatives (Novalis, Ludwig Tieck, William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, etc.) sought to convey the mystical experiences of their characters who journeyed (externally and internally) with a purpose to overcome the material plane and reach the domain of spirit in which all life forms are united. Experiencing a mystical feeling, a vision of the transcendent, discovering the realm of spirit, the Romantic hero discovers this spirit in his own self. He experiences belonging, closeness to all things. He gains the ability to hear music which pervades the world, and, like a fairytale hero, begins to distinguish the secret language of plants and animals. In this way the subject becomes indistinguishable from the object.

In Bierce’s story, Peyton Farquhar experiences a mystical vision. At the beginning, it appears as a vague anticipation of the transcendent experience which is the first stage of the “journey”:

He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon-flies’ wings, the strokes of the waterspiders’ legs, like oars which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water”. (Bierce 1909, pp. 13–14)

In Romantic poetry (William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, etc.), and painting (Caspar David Friedrich, etc.), reality usually appears vague, blurred, almost immaterial, seen as if through fog. Bierce, describing a mystical anticipation and placing the character at the border of the transcendent, focuses on the visual poetics of Henry Thoreau, who

in *Walden* sought to show things not as they are revealed to man, but as God sees them. In Bierce's text, reality is seen by a person, but by a person whose reason is disabled and whose visual perception is extremely enhanced. While in the first part of the story he shows reality as a map, as a system of visual signs marked on a plane, in the aforementioned passage he presents reality as it is. He appeals not to the reader's consciousness, but rather to their vision. Objects appear to be three-dimensional, material, vivid forms, because Bierce reduces the distance between the observer and the observed to the point where the opposition is hardly distinguishable, and therefore Peyton Farquhar sees the smallest details. This approach to objects and the convergence of the subject and the object ironically make it clear to the reader that Peyton Farquhar is dying; that his reason, which has always distanced the subject from reality, is fading.

However, this episode contains only an anticipation of the transcendent experience. A mystical insight comes later when Peyton Farquhar reaches the land:

The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him, and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of Aeolian harps. He had no wish to perfect his escape—was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken. (Bierce 1909, p. 16)

Bierce, as seen above, conveys mystical revelation through concrete visible images and even through a vivid gesture. Peyton Farquhar's imagination reaches the realm of the transcendent and creates an allegorical image of Paradise. The salvation from death, i.e., the salvation of the body, is presented as the salvation of the soul. Bierce visualizes the experience of the impossible, unattainable in earthly life—the vision of Paradise and heavenly bliss (Linkin 1988, p. 148). However, it is not difficult to notice the hidden bitter irony of Bierce here. By creating a picture of paradise life, he makes the reader understand that the character has not escaped physically—on the contrary, he has died and gone to the afterworld. The paradise picture itself, which serves as a symbol of mystical insight, is deliberately constructed by Bierce as a compilation of literary clichés. Bierce borrows the image of shining grains of sand from Blake's poem "Auguris of Innocence"—"to see a world in a grain of Sand" (Blake 2005, p. 88). The Aeolian harp, which conveys the transcendent music of life and symbolizes the unity of man and nature, as well as "creative imagination" (Ames 1987, p. 64), appears in the Romantic poems of Coleridge ("The Aeolian Harp") and P.B. Shelley ("Ode to the West Wind"). The Romantic clichés also include pink light—the light of mystical illumination. Thus, Peyton Farquhar's imagination turns out to be formulaic, and his mystical vision of Paradise is a parody. Later in Bierce's story, Peyton Farquhar moves through the abode of death (the forest) to darkness and nothingness.

Nabokov, visualizing mystical insight in the stories "Details of a Sunset" and "Perfection", is not parodic, like Bierce, but, on the contrary, extremely serious. In his case, mystical insight and ascension into the realm of the transcendent is the coveted goal of imagination, which is the main quality of a genuine, i.e., creative personality. Nabokov, unlike Bierce, presents imagination as a free and unpredictable productive force which originates from the inner freedom of an individual. Another difference is in their choices of the imagery patterns. Bierce, verbalizing and visualizing mystical insight, uses images of nature, while Nabokov uses elements of urban space.

Unintentionally debating with Bierce in "Details of a Sunset", Nabokov borrows from Bierce several images and techniques. Bierce, as aforementioned, demonstrates two versions of the visual narrative: the verbalization of a geographical map which produces visible signs, and the verbalization of mystical insight which produces material, vivid forms permeated with light. Nabokov also offers the reader two versions of the visual narrative. However, unlike Bierce, who presents his versions with an interval of several pages, he

arranges them in close sequence and applies them to the same material, deliberately forcing the reader to see two different ways of its representation. In the first case, Mark Standfuss sees reality in a state of happiness or delight, being on this side of life. In the second case, he sees the same thing again, but in a moment of mystical insight, being on the threshold of life and death, on the border between the earthly world and the transcendent world. In the first case, reality appears quite earthly, concrete and visible:

The houses were as gray as ever; yet the roofs, the moldings above the upper floors, the gilt-edged lightning rods, the stone cupolas, the colonnettes—which nobody notices during the day, for day people seldom look up—were now bathed in rich ochre, the sunset's airy warmth, and thus they seemed unexpected and magical, those upper protrusions, balconies, cornices, pillars, contrasting sharply, because of their tawny brilliance, with the drab façades beneath". (Nabokov 2002, p. 82)

This is not yet a mystical insight, but a certain approach to it: the pleasure of contemplating earthly beauty. Nabokov verbalizes the visible, utilizing the definitions of an art critic. He seems to be describing a painting instead of reality, as Theophile Gautier and Anatole France would do. The visible forms located above—that is, in the direction where people do not habitually look—are closer to the sky, to the realm of spirit, but at this point they are not yet recognized as spiritual by the character. Such recognition occurs at the moment of the mystical insight of Mark Standfuss. Nabokov once again presents the same Berlin houses to the reader:

The colors of the sunset had invaded half of the sky. Upper stories and roofs were bathed in glorious light. Up there, Mark could discern translucent porticoes, friezes and frescoes, trellises covered with orange roses, winged statues that lifted skyward golden, unbearably blazing lyres. In bright undulations, ethereally, festively, these architectonic enchantments were receding into the heavenly distance, and Mark could not understand how he had never noticed before those galleries, those temples suspended on high. (Nabokov 2002, p. 83)

Nabokov again turns his character (and with him, the reader) into an observer. However, this time the inner vision opens in Mark Standfuss. He sees not just images, but earthly forms imbued with heavenly light. Reality is presented as a visible embodiment of spirit—it rises to the sky. Here Nabokov, like Bierce, visualizes the heavenly bliss experienced by the character. Visible forms are associated with the heavenly host.

In this episode, Nabokov borrows a number of images from Bierce. The Aeolian harp that appears in Peyton Farquhar's vision is manifested in his text in the images of blazing lyres. The sentries standing on the Owl Creek bridge like statues turn into winged statues of heavenly warriors in Mark's mystical insight. The phrase "Half the sky was covered by sunset" (Polneba ohvatil zakat) is an altered quotation from Feodor Tyutchev's poem "Last Love": "Half the sky was wrapped in a shadow . . ." (Polneba obhvatila ten') (Tutchev 2003, p. 59). Tyutchev's poem is about love which has come at the end of life and brought a feeling of bliss and hopelessness. These motifs are also present in Nabokov's "Details of a Sunset": Mark Standfuss experiences love on the eve of death, and this love is unrequited and hopeless, although the character does not know about it. The domes and the temples hanging in the air refer to Coleridge's famous fragment "Kubla Khan Or a Vision in a Dream", where the mystical artist builds domes in the air.

Coleridge's fragment, like the fragment of Nabokov's story, is a visualization of mystical insight. When the epiphany fades, the characters of Bierce and Nabokov move into the realm of death. This experience is also visualized by a chain of visual images and actions. However, Bierce and Nabokov visualize this transition differently. Peyton Farquhar, as we remember, walks through a gloomy forest without signs of life, contemplating the ominous stars. Meanwhile, Mark Standfuss enters an empty van, a kind of portal to another world (Suslov 2012, p. 38–42), which appears at the very beginning of the story as a furnished domain of death:

On the other side of the fence, in a gap between the buildings, was a rectangular vacant lot. Several moving vans stood there like enormous coffins. They were bloated from their loads. Heaven knows what was piled inside them. Oakwood trunks, probably, and chandeliers like iron spiders, and the heavy skeleton of a double bed. The moon cast a hard glare on the vans. (Nabokov 2002, p. 80)

When Mark, having experienced the disaster, enters the van, it turns out to be empty.

In the finale scenes of both stories, Peyton Farquhar and Mark Standfuss are met by the women the characters have been yearning for. Peyton Farquhar pushes the gate and sees his wife coming down to meet him. Nabokov paints a similar picture with the only minor difference that the gate is opened not by the character himself, but by his beloved Klara.

In Nabokov's "Perfection", there is also a visualization of a mystical insight and a scene where the character appears in the abode of death. This time Nabokov changes the sequence that is present in Bierce's text and in "Details of a Sunset." Ivanov passes through the abode of death first, and then experiences a mystical insight. It is essential that this time Nabokov specifically focuses on the appearance of the character in the abode of death, while the insight is conveyed only in two phrases.

Nabokov visualizes the experience of death in the style of Romanticism by using vague, blurred visual correlates:

He came out on a stretch of sand. Sand, sea, and air were of an odd, faded, opaque tint, and everything was perfectly still. Vaguely he reflected that twilight must have come, and that David had perished a long time ago, and he felt what he knew from earthly life—the poignant heat of tears. Trembling and bending toward the ashen sand, he wrapped himself tighter in the black cloak with the snake-shaped brass fastening that he had seen on a student friend, a long, long time ago, on an autumn day—and he felt so sorry for David's mother, and wondered what would he tell her. It is not my fault, I did all I could to save him, but I am a poor swimmer, and I have a bad heart, and he drowned. (Nabokov 2002, pp. 346–47)

This indistinctness and dimness of the world is symptomatic of the weakness of the inner vision, which is not yet able to distinguish light in the surrounding reality. The stiffness of the character's confined imagination is visualized in the following action: Ivanov wraps himself in a black cloak with snake clasps. Snake clasps refer to the beginning of the story, where the road maps of the Romans are likened to snakeskin, as well as to Bierce's story, where the rope that tied Peyton Farquhar's hands is identified with a snake:

The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water-snake. (Bierce 1909, p. 13)

It is essential that Peyton Farquhar is freed from the rope, while Ivanov, on the contrary, wraps himself in a cloak, thereby making his boundness and lack of freedom visible to the reader. The vagueness of visible forms, the absence of light, and deafness also have a mundane, physiological explanation which discloses the false narrative and Ivanov's delusion: the character is underwater. That is why he does not hear anything, and his vision is blurred. Ashen sand is another visual correlate of death that the character encounters when he (as it seems to him) comes out of the water. Nabokov once again uses an episode from Bierce's story—the one in which Peyton Farquhar, as it seems to him, gets out of the water onto the sand. Nabokov's sand, unlike Bierce's, does not sparkle in the sun, but resembles ash. Ashen sand is a visual correlate not only of death, but also of remorse: Ivanov feels guilty for being unable to save David. A mystical insight occurs later in "Perfection", and the visual correlates of death are replaced by the correlates of the awakened visual imagination: "Only then were the clouded glasses removed. The dull mist immediately broke, blossomed with marvelous colors, all kinds of sounds burst forth—the rote of the sea, the clapping of the wind, human cries . . ." (Nabokov 2002, p. 347).

Nabokov uses a visual metaphor, complementing it with sound effects and creating an audiovisual complex that conveys the ascension into the transcendent realm through imagination.

Thus, Bierce and Nabokov, using visual poetics, present to the reader the experience of the transcendent with the help of a clearly constructed system of images. At the same time, Bierce, focusing on the Romantic tradition, parodies it, while Nabokov, using the images of Bierce and the Romantics, reasserts it.

This exploration is a comparative study of a story by Ambrose Bierce and three stories by Vladimir Nabokov, written under the direct influence of Bierce. This influence is reflected not only in Nabokov's borrowing of Bierce's narrative strategy or individual images, but also in the visual poetics that both authors carefully developed. In this regard, the goal that both authors pursued became especially important—to visualize an experience that transcends the empirical and can be understood as a mystical vision. As demonstrated, the approaches of both authors are similar in certain aspects, but they manifest essential differences that stem from Bierce's and Nabokov's conflicting understandings of man, the freedom of will, and the imagination.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Alexandrov, Vladimir E. 1991. *Nabokov's Otherworld*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ames, Clifford. 1987. Do I Wake or Sleep? Technique as Content in Ambrose Bierce's Short Story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge". *American Literary Realism, 1870–1910* 19: 52–53.
- Babikov, Andrey. 2019. *Prochtenije Nabokova. Izyskanija i Materialy*. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Ivana Limbakha.
- Bierce, Ambrose. 1909. *The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce*. Moscow: Dodo Press, vol. 2.
- Blake, William. 2005. *Collected Poems*. Edited by William Butler Yeats. London and New York: Routledge Classics.
- Boyd, Brian. 1990. *Vladimir Nabokov. The Russian Years*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brazil, John. 1980. Behind the Bitterness: Ambrose Bierce in Text and Context. *American Literary Realism, 1870–1910* 13: 225–37.
- Cheatem, George. 1985. Point of View in Bierce's "Owl Creek Bridge". *American Literary Realism, 1870–1910* 18: 219–25.
- Conlogue, William. 1999. Beating the Bounds with Ambrose Bierce, or Learning to Read without Getting Shot. *Studies in Short Fiction* 36: 263–67.
- Connolly, Julian W. 1992. *Nabokov's Early Fiction. Patterns of Self and Other*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davidson, Cathy. 1974. Literary Semantics and the Fiction of Ambrose Bierce. *A Review of General Semantics* 31: 263–71.
- De Vries, Gerard, and Donald Barton Johnson. 2006. *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Painting*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Dolinin, Aleksandr. 2004. *Istinnaya Zhizn' Pisatelya Sirina. Raboty o Nabokove*. Sankt-Peterburg: Akademieskij Proekt.
- Grishakova, Marina. 2002. Visual'naya Poetika Vladimira Nabokova. *Novoje Literaturnoje Obozrenije* 54: 205–28.
- Khasin, Grigoriy. 2001. *Teatr Lichnoy Tajny. Russiye Romany V. Nabokova*. Moskva and Sankt-Peterburg: Letniy Sad.
- Linkin, Harriet K. 1988. Narrative Technique in "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge". *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 18: 137–52.
- Morrone, Peter J. 2013. Disciplinary Conditioning and Self-Surveillance in Ambrose Bierce's War Fiction. *The Midwest Quarterly* 54: 310–25.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. 2002. *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*. New York: Vintage Books.
- O'Brien, Matthew C. 1976. Ambrose Bierce and the Civil War: 1865. *American Literature* 48: 377–81. [CrossRef]
- Rutledge, David S. 2011. *Nabokov's Permanent Mystery: The Expression of Metaphysics in His Work*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers.
- Shrayer, Maxim D. 1999. *The World of Nabokov's Stories*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Suslov, Pavel. 2012. Meblirovannije Komnaty Nebytija. *Vestnik Udmurtskogo Universiteta Istorija I Filologija* 4: 38–42.
- Teletova, Natalija. 1997. Vladimir Nabokov isungla Ego Predshestvenniki. In *V. V. Nabokov: Pro et Contra. Lichnost' i tvorcestvo Vladimira Nabokova v Ocenke Russkih I Zarubezhnyh Issledovatelej. Antologija*. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo RHGA, pp. 779–90.
- Trubetskova, Elena. 2010. Soznaniye kak Opticheskij Instrument: O Visual'noj Estetike V. Nabokova. *Izvestija Saratovskogo Universiteta Novaja Serija Serija Filologija Zhurnalistika* 10: 63–70.
- Tutchev, Feodor. 2003. *Polnoye Sobranije Sochinenij I Pisem v Shesti Tomah. Tom Vtoroy. Stihotvorenija 1850–1873*. Moskva: Klassika.
- Yampolsky, Mikhail. 1996. *Demon I Labirint (Diagrammy, Deformacii, Mimesis)*. Moskva: Novoje Literaturnile Obozrenije.

Article

The Metaphysics of Presence and the Invisible Traces: Eduard Steinberg's Polemical Dialogues

Irina Sakhno

Art and Design School, Faculty of Creative Industries, HSE University, 115054 Moscow, Russia; isakhno@hse.ru

Abstract: The article examines the paintings by Eduard Steinberg, a Soviet non-conformist painter from the 1950s to the 1980s from the standpoint of the plastics of his language. The author focuses on Steinberg's polemical dialogues with the greatest names in Russian and European avant-garde art, including both common points and disagreements. By analyzing the painter's texts through the prism of poetics of the invisible and the ontology of traces, the author observes Steinberg's early art of the 1960s and 1970s as an attempt to create a symbolic language and attach an ideographic status to art. Through simultaneous use of two artistic strategies—mystical and religious symbolism, coupled with metageometry Steinberg arrives at optical formalism and spectator dialectics, vying to see the invisible and record the polysemantic nature of the symbolic sign. The article analyzes the influence Vladimir Veisberg and his "invisible painting" had on Steinberg, including the "white on white" style, as well as Giorgio Morandi's still-life vision of metaphysical painting. The author believes that by relying on analogies and reminiscences, Steinberg refers his audience to his predecessors and joins them in an intertextual dialogue. A special place here belongs to Kazimir Malevich with his radicalism, his trend towards metasymbolism and the language of the basic forms—the circle, square and cross. All of these are close to Steinberg's geometric plastics of the 1970s and 1980s. Staying true to the pure forms of Suprematism, Steinberg builds up an aesthetics of the geometric forms of his own, where abstract art comes together with the ontological progress towards God. *The Countryside* series (1985–1987) shows influence of Kazimir Malevich's *Peasant Cycle*, some principles of icon painting and Neo-Primitivist art.

Citation: Sakhno, Irina. 2022. The Metaphysics of Presence and the Invisible Traces: Eduard Steinberg's Polemical Dialogues. *Arts* 11: 85. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050085>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 25 July 2022

Accepted: 2 September 2022

Published: 9 September 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Keywords: Steinberg; non-conformist art; metaphysics of the presence; ontology of traces; apophatic vision; symbolism; "invisible painting"; Veisberg; Suprematism; Malevich; metageometry; icon painting; Neo-Primitivism

1. Introduction

A lot has been written on Eduard (Edik) Steinberg both in Russia and outside it, including marvellous essays and insightful research articles. Compilations of his letters and memoirs have been published, as well as his numerous interviews. Given the multitude of researcher opinions and reflections, there is still a large, uncovered space of Steinberg's marginalia—a kind of margin notes which appear as unverified universals, such as the sign/symbol, meaning/non-meaning, the visible/invisible, the sacred and profane. Steinberg's plastic language borrowed from and appropriated traditions of both Russian and European Modernism, and in search of new modes of expression arrived at a novel visual optic. One way to do it was by entering into polemical conversations with Russian icon art, with mystical ideas of Russian Symbolism, and the other, by setting up a new geometrical lexicon of Suprematism and "optical neoplasticity"¹ of contemporary art. The illusion of laconic simplicity of Steinberg's art often devalues the nature of his plastic expression, and the causal relationships and intertextual parallels are, thus, annulled and ignored. This is probably why the existing body of literature on Steinberg lacks semiotic analysis of his pictorial texts and does not attempt to decipher the meanings present therein, nor feature a detailed study of the morphology and cultural semantics of his art. At the first glance, the

plastic symbols of his object-free art seem a manifestation of Steinberg's unlimited subjectivity. We then discover a plethora of thriving suggestive forms and imagery in his works, and, in search of tools to help us illustrate the work of the artist's abstract imagination, we have to turn to various fields of the humanities, such as philosophy, religious studies, social sciences, semiotics and arts studies proper, thus, transcending the boundaries of separate disciplines. It is this integrative approach that will help us expand the horizons of how we see Steinberg's art, discern the traces of the corpus of previous artistic texts therein, as well as actualize the visible and invisible forms, as well as their interaction and juxtaposition. Steinberg's art teaches us to see new trajectories of how abstract forms move in space, and a new energy of representing the invisible. The creative capability of visual art gives space to more than just the aesthetic and the mystical, it also covers the social function of art. Steinberg's iconography gives preference to the link between the image and meditative contemplation and empathy, which can be traced throughout the structure of his visual formulas. His art is a representation of an optical experience which arises from congested images created as signs in the space of microcosm and a unique temporality. Our methodology of studying Steinberg's art is also based on the latest trends in visual studies and the poststructuralism of Jacques Derrida. Without claiming complete coverage, we would like to examine Steinberg's poetics through the prism of the metaphysics of presence and the "anthology of traces" (Barthes 2020, p. 65) as crucially important visual codes which set the textual trajectory and the semantic of descriptions in the painter's work.

The concept of 'trace' first appeared as a revision of classical metaphysics and its notes in Jacques Derrida's post-modernist classic "Of grammatology" (1967).² Derrida links 'trace' to the 'origin' of sense:

The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the differance which opens appearance [l'appaître] and signification. Articulating the living upon the nonliving in general, origin of all repetition, origin of ideality, the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and no concept of metaphysics can describe it. (Derrida 1997, p. 65)

The trace as a presence and an act of difference is a phenomenon of graphic writing, but it is also a more global mechanism of the existence of culture and a way to learn the cultural and historical heritage. The trace in Derrida is linked to the multitude definitions of "the metaphysics of presence in the form of ideality" (Derrida 1973, p. 10). The self-erasing trace as a form of both presence and non-presence belongs to both culture and transcendental conscience. According to Derrida, this self-erasure reveals the trace's double reference, both annulling and representative correlation with another trace. While marking the key phenomena of difference, Derrida mentions yet another important notion—reproducing memory as "reproduction of presentation" (Derrida 1973, p. 49). An important role belongs not only to how he defines metaphysical presence, but also by how he observes the signifier and the signified in the whole context of the system of signs. Adding to "supplement", "sign", "writing", or "trace" a . . . newly, ahistorical sense, "older" than presence and the system of truth, older than "history" (Derrida 1973, p. 103), the philosopher distinguishes between "sensible literalness" and the proper metaphor of the "breakup of presence" (Derrida 1973, pp. 103–4). Extrapolating this model now into the field of the phenomenology of language, Derrida brings presence and trace to work for the form and semantics of text. By seeing the text as a fabric and the language's 'interweaving' nature (*Verwebung*) as a form of establishing connection with other threads of experience, Derrida is able to state the following:

The interweaving (*Verwebung*) of language, of what is purely linguistic in language with the other threads of experience, constitutes one fabric. The term *Verwebung* refers to this metaphorical zone. The "strata" are "woven"; their intermixing is such that the warp cannot be distinguished from the woof. If the stratum of logos were simply founded, one could set it aside so as to let the under-

lying substratum of nonexpressive acts and contents appear beneath it. But since this superstructure reacts in an essential and decisive way upon the *Unterschicht* [substratum], one is obliged, from the start of the description, to associate the geological metaphor with a properly textual metaphor, for fabric or textile means text. *Verweben* here means *texere*. The discursive refers to the nondiscursive, the linguistic "stratum" is intermixed with the prelinguistic "stratum" according to the controlled system of a sort of text. < . . . > In the spinning-out of language the discursive woof is rendered unrecognizable as a woof and takes the place of a warp; it takes the place of something that has not really preceded it. This texture is all the more inextricable in that it is wholly signifying: the nonexpressive threads are not without signification. (Derrida 1973, pp. 111–12)

There is yet another important point to make. In his discussion of writing as a form of language's existence which always leaves traces, Jacques Derrida explains his ontological formula of multiple distinctions, references and erasures as signs which arise through oppositions and differences. Semantic scattering of meanings and the interplay between traces is Derrida's main focus. He is attracted by how the fabric of text is put together, since everything is textual. This endless vista of interconnected signs and their meanings, authors facing and rethinking cultural traditions is what happens when a text is constructed. We have no proof that Steinberg ever read Derrida's works, but they have the common background of 1960s as a period aimed at social and creative transformation. Steinberg observed art as a symbolic and metaphorical language. He was a master of analogies which gave signs a new semantics; he directly addressed the cultural memory and elegantly summed up the lived experience. Lifting the curtain of the transcendent, Steinberg invites the spectator to enjoy the deciphering of cross-references and the decoding of the unrevealed traces. Both memory and the elusive optics in his work bring order into what we see and give access to a wide sphere of its semantics.

The constituted sense of Steinberg's texts is multi-layered. The "interweaving" of signified descriptions that Derrida noted, leads us to search for more layers hidden within the textual space of Steinberg's art. Similar to reflections in the mirror, they reveal their capability only when found, and what they contain may range from a virgin pre-text to visible traces and imprints of cultural memory. The artist's text, 'woven' from many senses and meanings into the historical and contemporary cultural context, produces an interweaving, and this interweaving as "mirrored writing" (Derrida 1973, p. 113), finds the semi-erased signs and hidden layers of symbolic patterns. In his contemplation of contemporary art, a French philosopher Thierry de Duve was quite right to state that any work of art is "destined to be a sign" (de Duve 2014, p. 31), while the "hum of language" (p. 32) and the flutter of meanings produce "generate polysemy and ambiguity, noise and dispersion" (p. 32). We will take a deeper look at how analogies, reminiscences, hints and reference help Steinberg add markers to acts of artistic expression. We believe that producing new meanings as a marker of the author's style owes a lot to the special nature of the artist's polycode text where the allusive narrativity appears on various levels and might be discovered and deciphered by addressing a previous artistic experience. The artist as an "operator of gestures" (Barthes 2020, p. 54) scans the see-through text to find the meaning (which is not always possible to do) and broadcasts it further as a multitude of modalities, thereby entering an intertextual and polemical dialogue with both previous and contemporary texts of culture and art.

2. The Optical Non-Obvious: On the Way towards a Language of Symbols

In Evgeny Shiffers' earliest article on Steinberg and his work (1973), the religious thinker and theologian reflects on the ideographic language of the artist whose paintings are "generated by symbolic models" (Schiffers 2019, p. 14). Using the works of Pavel Florensky, Sergey Solovyov and religious mystics as a point of reference, Shiffers traced the connection between the works of Steinberg and the metaphysical symbols of Eternal Being and of the Church (therefore, the paintings are metaphysical), with the manifestly visible world and "the invisible ideas taking flesh" (p. 15). Hence, the picture is an act of "uttering the comprehensible" and a "symbolic creative model" (p. 22). Staying far from the semiotics of art, Schiffers outlined several important ways to study Steinberg's art. First of all, the ideographic status of Steinberg's paintings gives them a kind of universal language capable of capturing abstract concepts as symbolic signs. Secondly, Steinberg's religious and philosophical quests are both permeated with the desire "to develop a modern universal symbolic language" (Chudetskaia 2020, p. 410). Thirdly, Shiffers discovered crucial symbolic patterns that permeate all of Steinberg's work, including the sphere, cube, pyramid, horizontal and vertical lines, the bird and the cross (Schiffers 2019, p. 14). Regarding the symbols of symbolic "top" and "bottom", Shiffers observes to have been designed as a bridge between earth and sky, the profane and sacred, hence, the symbolic model of space and time includes the artist's ideographic alphabet of "water, fire, dove, light, and sphere" (p. 19). A personal meeting with Schiffers helped Steinberg to further his search for a new plastic language rooted in mystical metaphysics and Symbolist worldview. Steinberg himself has repeatedly spoken about the influence the Silver Age and Symbolism had on him, in particular V. Borisov-Musatov and V. Kandinsky (whom he also considered a Symbolist) and stated that he himself was "a Symbolist in point of fact" (Steinberg 2015, p. 236). In a conversation with Yevgraf Konchin, the artist thus described the two artistic strategies that influenced his work:

I haven't actually discovered anything new, I just gave the Russian avant-garde art a new perspective. What kind of perspective? Rather, a religious one. I based my spatial geometrical structures on old catacomb mural paintings and, of course, on iconography. My small merit is that I have gave the avant-garde a bit of a turn. But on the other hand, I am furthering the traditions of Russian Symbolism in my works, the Symbolism of Boris Musatov. The Mir Iskusstva also approached it, and so did Kandinsky. He is a pure Symbolist in my opinion. The internal concept of my works thus rest on the synthesis of the mystical ideas of 1910's Russian Symbolism and the plastic solutions offered by Kazimir Malevich's Suprematism. (Steinberg 2015, p. 211)

The symbolic structure of Steinberg's paintings is arranged into a complex system of signs and symbols that are quite difficult to decode. This is further complicated by the fact that the artist never offered interpretations of his texts, and was generally irritated by such attempts. However, the hidden contexts of his works have clear references to Christian iconography and catacomb painting, especially in his early period of the 1960s. For example, in *A Composition with Fish* (Figure 1), 1967, we encounter the eponymous mythologem associatively linked to the acronym 'ΙΧΘΥΣ,' which comprises the Saviour's name and the earliest Christian creed.³ In his numerous interviews, Steinberg frequently admitted the influence of Early Christian catacomb art. In Figure 2, we might probably see a reference to a fresco in the catacombs of St. Callistus church in Rome (Figure 2)—a fish bearing a basket of bread. We see how simple forms codify sacred symbols and ideologemes of signs referring us back to Christian symbolism.



Figure 1. Eduard Steinberg. A Composition with Fish. Oils on canvas, 1967. 100 * 100. Private collection, USA. https://artinvestment.ru/auctions/2244/records.html?work_id=850820 (accessed on 16 May 2022).



Figure 2. Eucharistic Fish and Loaves. A fresco of the catacombs of St. Callistus, Rome. 2nd–4th century CE. <https://www.wikiwand.com/ru/> (accessed on 16 May 2022).

Sergey Kuskov claims the signs and symbols in Steinberg’s works get “transformed into pockets of spiritual energy” and reveal “the presence, most commonly unseen, of the Vertical of the World, with the whole array of its symbolic divisions” (Kuskov 2019, p. 55). To see the invisible is the task the artist assumes throughout his work. The optically non-obvious nature of his works provokes a search for the polymorphic text hidden in the deeper layers of his works.⁴ This particular vision manifests optical formalism, when the visual is dialectically conveyed through mirror imagery of the top and the bottom, the

horizontal and the vertical, the sky and the Earth. The dichotomy of the visible/invisible captures two important aspects of Steinberg's art: the enduring presence of the inexpressible and optical duality. The first option Steinberg associates with the transcendental and with the other reality, which in its turn relies on negative theology (apophaticism), i.e., the doctrine of God in Himself, unattainable and unknowable. To attain it, one must follow the "path of negation", learning to apprehend that God is beyond space and time, invisible, indescribable and unrecognizable. The inexhaustible fullness of God's super-being cannot be expressed in human words or concepts, so the artist recognizes the immanent essence of the transcendent Absolute. Steinberg was close to the idea of apophaticism and in no way did it contradict his Orthodox religiosity. In his letter to Malevich, the artist discussed his language of geometry as follows: "< . . . > there is a yearning for the truth and for the transcendent, a certain affinity for apophatic theology" (Steinberg 2015, p. 39). He repeatedly confessed in his correspondence that he was a man of faith, and in a response to Martin Hüttel, Steinberg thus stated his belief: "The Lord God helps me, I know it now, and I know it firmly" (p. 52). His faith is coupled with pessimism, for "our time is a God-forsaken time" (p. 133), plagued with a sense of "unyielding existential disaster" (p. 203). He is also convinced that "everyone matches their her own existential space" (p. 202). His personal view of the Absolute and the Infinite, formed largely through a religious worldview and mystical symbolism, found its expression in pure abstraction, "in a line of persons and signs" (p. 123):

The peace of the Absolute is only conceivable through the variability of becoming. In each period of Steinberg's existential exploration, a certain stylistic or, more precisely, plastic approach to understanding a unified structure of Being dominated hierarchically among the rest. This ideal and fundamentally ineffable object of contemplation, however, could only be relatively pushed from its apophaticism to become somewhat comprehensible by a gradual hierarchical manifestation. Therefore, every period in the artist's work was and remains a step of this type in this hierarchy. (Kuskov 2019, p. 61)

Steinberg used to repeat in many of his letters that in God, there is no time. Aware of the transience of metaphysical time, the artist hurries to capture the sense of the invisible and hidden, once saying that "It is important to see in a painting what we cannot see" (Steinberg 2015, p. 151). This presence of the invisible in Steinberg is never limited to the multi-layered structure of the canvas. He observed the whole of his art as one huge painting: "I love paintings where the question is asked and they also answer it" (p. 151). While denying narrativity, technology and depiction of everyday life in painting, the artist follows the ambiguity of visual optics when, through temporal work, all anthropomorphism is eliminated. The illusionism of his minimalist works is such that the juxtaposition of the presence and the trace of another text indicates the overcoming of the barrier between one's own and another's artistic statement. The "evidence of presence" (Didi-Huberman 2001, p. 53) in Steinberg consists of the play of visible and invisible forms mirroring each other in the transcendental space of the painting. The ways the "new field of the visible" is discovered (Marion 2010, p. 37) have been masterfully traced by the French phenomenologist and theologian Jean Luc Marion:

The true artist participates in the simple mystery of a unique Creation, in the sense that he reproduces nothing-only produces. Or, more precisely, he leads from the invisible into the visible, sometimes by intrusion, a meager reproduction of the visible done by the visible itself: this is what is usually called "creation" < . . . >. The real picture does not ascend from one visible thing to another, but conjures the visible which has already appeared to multiply and reveal itself with a new radiance. The invisible ascends to the visible and reaches up to it. But the invisible also informs the visible, presenting and prescribing what the visible had so far been ignoring, and thus restoring the balance of power < . . . >. (p. 62)

While considering Steinberg's visual codes and symbolic language, we should focus awhile on his fascination with Vladimir Veisberg's "invisible painting" (Figure 3), a style of "white on white" that goes back to Malevich's Suprematism. The artist's paintings are brought together by half-tones, transparency, and shimmering shades of white. Their subtle immateriality is akin to universal harmony and peace.⁵ Without doubt, Steinberg is close to Veisberg's translucent painting and his search for its special tonality and ethereal transparency. He repeatedly singled out Veisberg, together with Krasnopevtsev and Sooster, as his favorite artists from the nonconformist circle. The link between the divine and the unknowable that these artists explored was also important for Steinberg, as was their search for new spatial coordinates and existential formulas. The pictorial parallels are obvious, much similar to the common elements in the plastic language and in the structure of the composition. The space of Veisberg's paintings is consonant with metaphysical abstraction, with algorithms of signs and a special semantics of meanings firmly embedded.

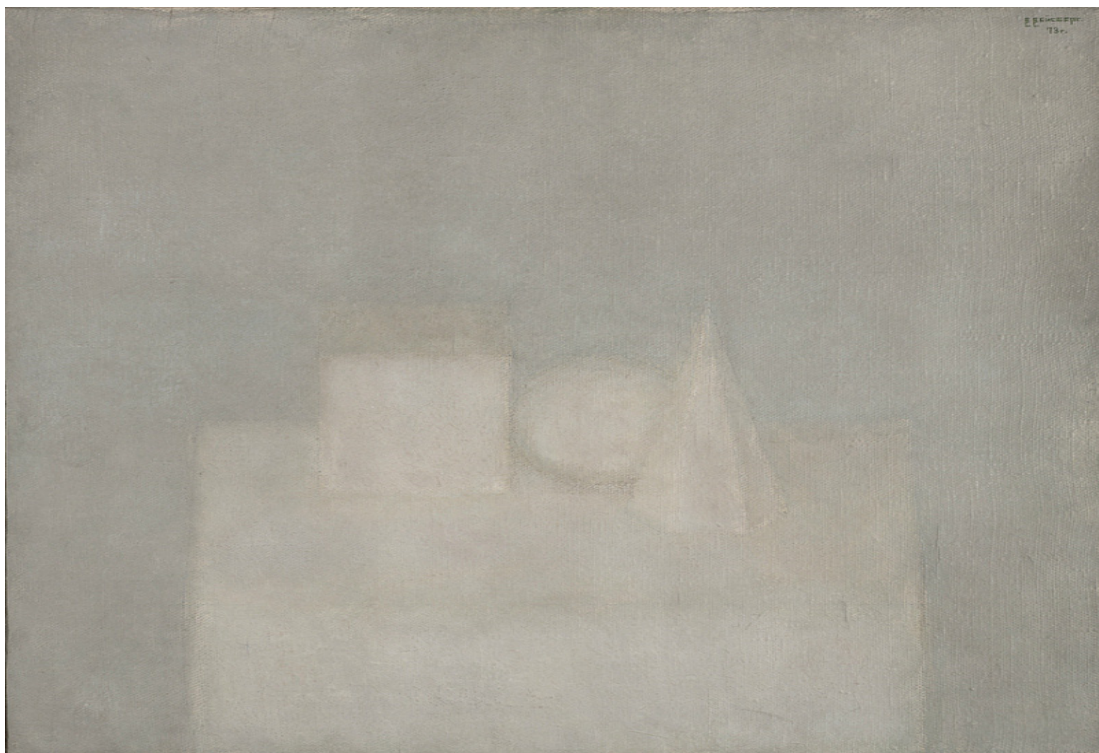


Figure 3. Vladimir Veisberg. The cube, sphere and pyramid, 1973. Oils on canvas, 55 * 58. Art4 Museum, Moscow (Igor Markin's collection). <https://www.art4.ru/museum/shteynberg-eduard/> (accessed on 22 May 2022).

Veisberg's and Steinberg's semiotic systems not only share the simplest repeating structures and signs, such as spheres, squares, rectangles, triangles, etc. Their early paintings make use of the technique of grisaille, i.e., creating a painting by using different shades and tones of the same color: Veisberg's choice was the gray-white, and Steinberg's was milky beige, sometimes diluted with blue (Figure 4). Their monochrome painting, imitating the plastics and relief of a sculpture, is similar to a mural or decorative panel and cannot avoid the obligatory blurring carried out with a brush, paint and oil. The range of a single tone and its color shades and unique glazes give the image a special optical illusionism and transparency, manifested at the level of deep layers of the text. This optic forms the author's grammar of symbols, in which the real contrasts with the unreal, the mundane with the spiritual, and the visible with the invisible. Borrowing and perfecting Veisberg's concept of "invisible painting" allows Steinberg to rethink the relationship between abstract

metaphysics and its concrete visual trace, between the dialectic of presence and the optically non-obvious, and finally, between mysticism and symbolism.



Figure 4. Eduard Steinberg. An abstract composition, 1970. Oils on canvas 80 * 100. Private collection, Switzerland. https://artinvestment.ru/auctions/2244/records.html?work_id=1164540 (accessed on 26 May 2022).

This appeal to the philosophical and mystical tradition of Symbolism is far from accidental, and has been admirably described by Hans Günther:

It is in the symbolic meaning of light, geometric shapes and numbers, as well as in the frequent use of Christian symbols, that we can find a further difference between Steinberg and the Russian avant-garde. He swings the achievements of the avant-garde around and giving them a symbolic sounding. Whereas the avant-gardists strove for pure form-creation and balance, Steinberg offers the viewer a certain conceptuality through the symbolic semantization of abstract forms. One might say he re-endows the avant-garde art with new semantics—precisely in the sense of returning to the aesthetics of early twentieth-century Russian symbolism, which saw the symbol as a mediator between empirical and transcendent realities. (Günther 2019, pp. 41–42)

Blurred and fluid forms, light haze, soft and indistinct contours, nuances of light and the white light emanating from the beige supremacist square and transforming into the shape of a cross—all of these can be seen in Steinberg's *Dedication to Rothko*, 1999 (Figure 5). It owes a lot to metaphysical painting, with its emphasis on reminiscences, allusions and visual metaphor. Steinberg's pictorial analogy works by giving a precise laconic form to functional signs.

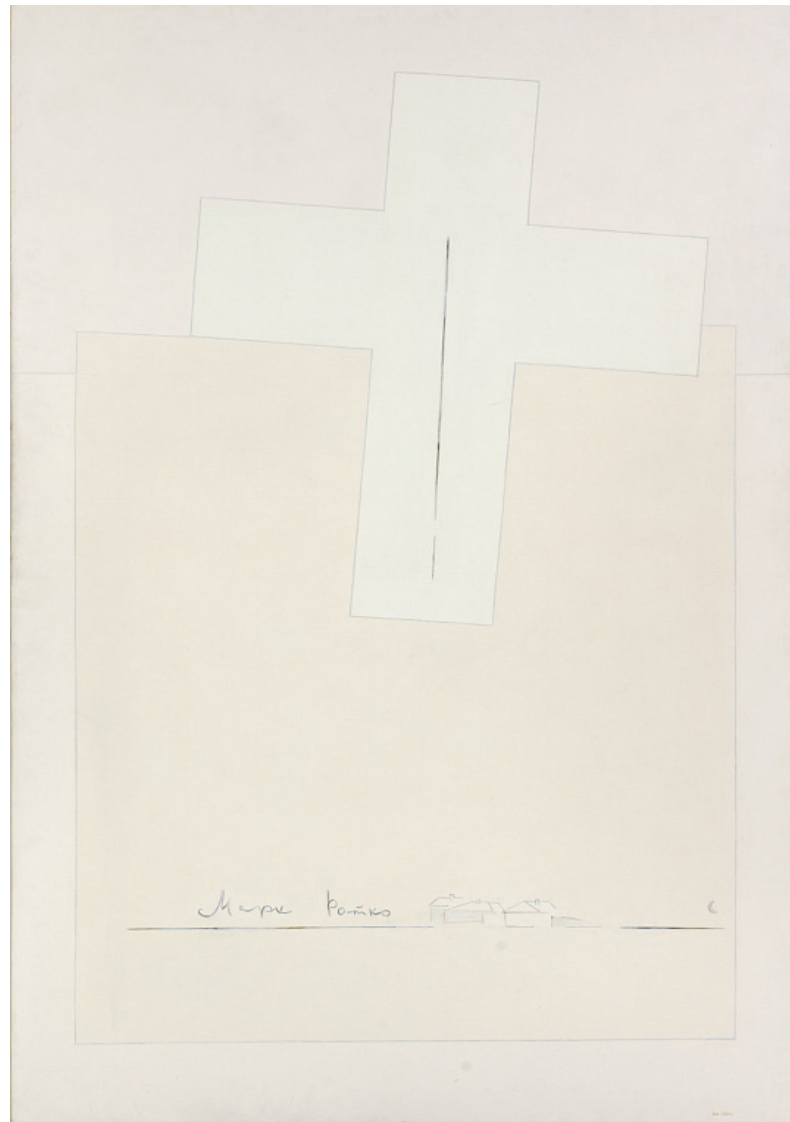


Figure 5. Eduard Steinberg. A Dedication to Rothko, 1999. Oils on canvas, 195 * 130. Art4 Museum, Moscow. <https://www.art4.ru/museum/shteynberg-eduard/> (accessed on 22 May 2022).

Steinberg seems to have been impressed by Rothko's "color field painting"⁶ and especially by his work with color and the special energy of the pictorial space. In his homage to Rothko, Steinberg makes use of monochrome color planes and blurred outlines of the rectangle and the cross, arranging colors to capture unconventional combinations of shades which produces a unique effect of flickering and moving glow.

Steinberg was especially fond of the metaphysical art of the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi. Morandi's artistic vision was akin to still life, with the color nuances built on the scheme of the beige, grey and brown, while vessels, jugs, bottles and other objects, coming in various combinations, appearing clear-cut and tangible. At the same time, a certain plastic language, softening their contours, dissolves them in a hazy haze similar to the *sfumato* and captures reality through abstraction. Despite the difference in their styles of the two artists, there is something that brings Morandi and Steinberg together. According to Claudia Beelitz (see also Beelitz 2005): "In Morandi, as it is in Steinberg, light is transmitted through color. External lighting has no place in Steinberg, and plays only a secondary role in Morandi. The refracted, muted light that appears in subtle tonal shades both keeps the motifs together and links figures with their background. In this respect, both artists give the rhythmic and organizational role to color" (Beelitz 2019, p. 168). Spatial ambivalence

and the play of forms define the metaphysicity—the optical illusion of everyday life in Morandi, and the organics of geometric forms and spheres in Steinberg. The latter observed Morandi as one of the most significant artists of his time and said in an interview to Vadim Alekseev, “I love Morandi—with him, art has ended” (Steinberg 2015, p. 237). He apparently referred to the final liberation of painting from objectivity and the rise of object art, which the artist disliked.

3. Rethinking Tradition: From Metageometry to Neo-Primitivism

An internal link between Steinberg and Malevich traced by the scholars of Russian avant-garde is, in fact, quite evident, and should be the subject of a separate in-depth discussion. I will only glimpse at the most important points and landmarks. As an artist, Steinberg was undeniably influenced by the father of Suprematism and stayed in dialogue with him throughout his entire artistic career.⁷ In an interview given to Grigory Khabarov, Steinberg thus said about Kazimir Malevich: “We all came out of his square. I am the heir of the entire Russian culture” (Steinberg 2015, p. 227). The artist considered himself a follower of the founder of Suprematism, and repeatedly admitted his influence: “This Russian genius of the world, so to say, colored me, flamed me, and here I am, deriving more pleasure from talking with the dead than with the living” (p. 151). Malevich’s radicalism and his trend towards metasymbolism, his language of the primary forms—the circle, square and cross—all of these come close to Steinberg’s geometrical plastics. He believes that Malevich found that fundamental structural formation and optics of vision, which make geometrical abstraction reach a special kind of materiality. Denying the very presence of pure abstraction in Malevich, Steinberg notes, “With Kandinsky and Malevich there is always a reminder of the subject, a connection with the landscape; their works feature no bare play of forms or combinations of blots. So I call myself a traditionalist, since I am firmly rooted in the ground upon which I was born, and art for me it the matter of its coloring” (p. 217). Seeing geometrical abstraction as an aesthetics of pure form, Steinberg transforms the Suprematist tradition by minimizing its sharp contrasts of color. He was most attracted by the religious and mystical aspects of Malevich’s art. Since the artist for Steinberg was primarily a mystic, he puts together a metaphysical geometry of his own, where abstraction and the sacred presence come joined as a synthetic entity. A “Letter to K.S.”, written on 17 September 1981, is revealing in this respect. It presents an important rhetorical dialogue between Steinberg and Malevich as his spiritual teacher and mentor. In the letter, Steinberg discusses the language of artistic geometry and Malevich’s Black Square “as the ultimate godforsakenness” (p. 38) which can be expressed by means of art.

Apparently, you were born to remind the world of the language of geometry, a language capable of expressing a tragic dumbness. The language of Pythagoras, of Plato, of Plotinus, of the early Christian catacombs. For me, this language is not universal, but it does express a yearning for truth and for the transcendental, a certain affinity with apophatic theology. By leaving the viewer free, the language of geometry forces the artist to abandon himself. Trying to make it ideological and utilitarian at the same time violates this language. So for me it has become a way of existence in the night you named the Black Square. I think human memory will keep revisiting it in the moments of mystically experiencing the tragedy of being abandoned by God. Moscow, summer 1981. Your Black Square has once again been exhibited to the Russian public. And once again there is night and death in . . . And the question persists—will there be a Resurrection? (Steinberg 2015, p. 39).

In this dialogue, Steinberg presents Malevich as an apophaticist (see Landolt 2015), who observed the cosmic abyss through the black square. There are obvious parallels with Malevich’s own ideas of the Mystery of the Universe and “God as the Absolute of Nature’s perfection” (Malevich 1995, . 243), which the artist observed as incomprehensible truths. The man who strives towards God as an ideal is on a conscious quest for harmony and cosmic calm. He is struggling to understand the meanings which are impossible to find, as they lie beyond human conscience. In fact, Malevich as an original thinker advances his own interpretation of divine ontology—not of a Christian God, but of a transcendental

personality, perfection incarnate and incognoscible: “God cannot have a human meaning; since reaching him as the final meaning does not allow to reach God, since God is the final limit, or, more correctly, the limit of all meanings lies before God, and in God there is no meaning already. Thus, in the end, all human meanings pointing towards God the meaning, will be crowned with thoughtlessness, hence God is the non-meaning rather than meaning. It is his thoughtlessness that must be seen as objectlessness in the Absolute, in the final limit. Reaching finality is achieving objectlessness. It is indeed unnecessary to strive for God somewhere in the spaces of the celestial, since He is present in every human meaning, as every meaning of ours is, at the same time, a non-meaning” (Malevich 1995, p. 243).⁸

By defying both Suprematism as a utopian project and its Utilitarian aspect, Steinberg accentuates the victory of the spiritual over the material. His “metageometry” is a metaphysical language, a system of symbolic signs endowed with existential meaning and apophatic senses. Just as Malevich, Steinberg accepts the notions of the hidden and unknown God, but follows his own path by interpreting Suprematist forms as signs of mystical and religious experience. In a letter to Valentin Vorobiev, a friend and fellow non-conformist painter, Steinberg leaves behind Malevich’s Suprematism to describe his language as “the tragedy of the Russian history with its church Schism” (p. 189). Hence, the artist appears in the letter as a sectarian⁹, and the *Black Square*, as a painting primarily focused on philosophic and religious issues: “His Square is also an icon, but that of the schism in the church” (p. 227). For Steinberg, the icon is not only a narrative of the cult, but a special visual representation. Relying largely on the same signs as Malevich did—circles, spheres, squares and triangles—the artist fills his own lexicon with a different semantic subtext and visual imagery. He calls his plastic language of the 1970s “metageometry”, appealing to “Christian archetypes” (Patsyukov 2019a, p. 32), and recreating the inner experience and longing for beauty and perfection. The architectonics of his plastic space touches the earth and the sky, and works with the top and bottom. In contrast to Malevich’s philosophy of rest and Nothingness, Steinberg constructs “supra-worldly” figures that symbolize perfection and finality. Responding to questions from Gilles Bastianelli, Steinberg wrote:

The main problem in my paintings is the top and the bottom, heaven and earth. It seems trivial, but on the other hand, it is an important aspect of <my> philosophy. An attempt to discover beauty which does exist in the world, even though they are killing her. If there is anything left of me after death, I would like it to be beauty. The problems of death and beauty, of the beginning and the end are expressed between the two lines—the top and the bottom. The square is the symbol of the earth, and the black square signifies emptiness < . . . > These are philosophical and religious issues, and in working with them, we should focus on substances, not formalities. And the substantial side is, first of all, the life of the artist, and not ideology, where things can be added or removed—not this, but life itself. They have removed art from contemporary situation, and are offering life alone. What kind of life is that? Does it have freedom? There is no freedom. As I understand it, you get freedom when you die. For us Russians, death is love, death is memory. Or a pragmatic issue that freedom is not when you take, but when you give something. (Steinberg 2015, p. 252)

In the abstract compositions of the 1970s (Figures 6 and 7) we see the geometric shapes of the cross, the circle, 3D quadrangles, and all of these figures represent the continuity of the universe, and the cyclicity of time (with the four circles on the right and left as if returning the whole composition to unity). Pure geometry is likened to sacred geometry, to Platonic bodies as Euclid described them in Book XIII of his *Beginnings*.¹⁰ In ancient cultures, primary geometric forms revealed energies of primal elements of the universe. Geometric forms were then appropriated by both Hellenistic aesthetics and Christianity, which was reflected “in church iconography” (Barabanov 2019, p. 121). One may also recall the Gnostic tradition and alchemical symbolism.



Figure 6. Eduard Steinberg. An abstract composition. February. 1970. Oils on canvas, 69.5 * 82.5 cm. Denis Khimilyaine's collection. <https://deniscollection.com/eduard-steinberg/composition-1975-5/> (accessed on 2 June 2022).

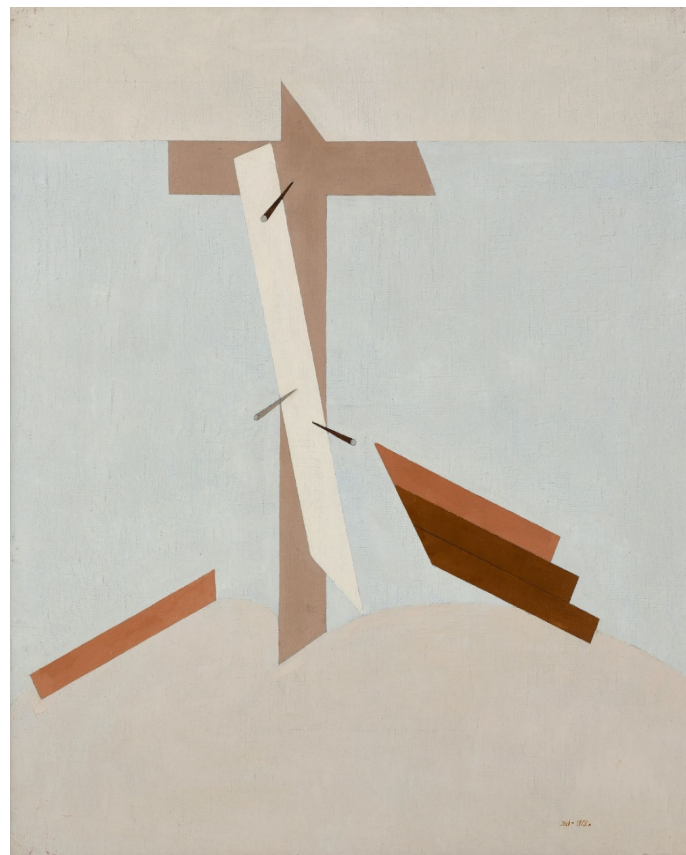


Figure 7. Eduard Steinberg. A Composition. 1975–77. Oils on canvas, 100 * 90 cm. Denis Khimilyaine's collection. <https://deniscollection.com/eduard-steinberg/composition-1975-5/> (accessed on 6 June 2022).

While remaining faithful to Suprematist primary forms, Steinberg builds his poetics of geometric forms without color contrasts. While Malevich follows the path of economizing and arrives at minimalism, Steinberg demonstrates an ontological pathos, a rise to God and metaphysics. “He soared above geometry”, as Hans-Peter Riese beautifully put it in his obituary (Steinberg 2015, p. 478). “The inner space of Steinberg’s artistic text”, as Vitaly Patsyukov correctly observed, “turns out to be sturdier than any outer space” (Patsyukov 2019b, p. 208). It is in this personal experience of moral laws and the moral imperative that the way of comprehending the Absolute lies. In developing the concept of his metageometry, Steinberg made use of the inherited tradition of geometric abstraction and built a new relationship between the iconographic and the formal. The ontological advantages he gains are in imprinting the trace of past cultures and in asserting the special status of his transcendental vision:

Taking further the comparison with Malevich, there are two entirely new categories that Steinberg introduced and Malevich did not have. I would define them as existential pity and transcendental tenderness. Malevich’s transcendent being is pure and dispassionate, his forms radiate light and energy, but they have nothing to do with us. He is stern and detached. In Steinberg, two streams seem to be merging—pity as if coming from below and tenderness as if from above. Taking this comparison to a higher level (I apologize in advance for this excessive sublimation), Malevich’s painting can be analogous to a Savior the Bright Eye; and Steinberg’s, to an Madonna with Child. Malevich represents male power and energy, while Steinberg stands for the female, warm, enveloping and soothing, for the weak and gentle. In general, the more you compare the two artists, the more you realize that Steinberg, howsoever often he declares loyalty to his teacher, in fact presents, so to say, a different version of the teaching. Malevich differs from Steinberg not as heaven stands apart from earth, but more like the gap between heaven and earth-and-sky. Existential pity and transcendental tenderness could only have emerged in the era of existentialism, and all of us, I mean my generation, are children of that era. (Pivovarov 2019, pp. 70–71)

Central to Steinberg’s paintings is the cross. On the one hand, this is due to his reinterpretation of the iconographic tradition. The artist observes the icon as not only a cult object, but also an object of visual reflection: “For me, the icon is first and foremost a space of cult, from whence I draw my knowledge. The icon has different dimensions, such as religious or visual. It has a timeless artistic language that stems back to Byzantium. As an artist, I came out of the Russian avant-garde, which was connected to Russian icon painting. It was through the icon that I understood Malevich and realized what I myself was doing” (Steinberg 2015, p. 227). On the other hand, Steinberg’s reflection on God as the Absolute and Eternal Truth is no less important. His religious feeling is close to Malevich’s apophaticism, as indicated in the 1981 letter, and to mystical symbolism. In 1968, he was baptized at the age of 31—a crucial step which had a lasting impact on his creative quest. While being a deeply religious man, he did not belong to any church.¹¹ When asked by Evgraf Konchin if he was religious, Steinberg replied, “I am a believer, though not a man of the church. I try not to judge anyone, and to adhere to certain rules. I paint life as it is, with heaven and earth, so my work is filled with religious symbols: the cross, the black and white, life and death, and emptiness. I am fascinated by the early Russian avant-garde, whose language I dared to restore” (p. 218).¹²

The cross, thus, reproduces the sign on several levels. Steinberg conveys its semantics through various formats of statement. We find reminiscences of the cross in *The Country-side series* (1985–1987), which was undoubtedly influenced by Malevich’s *Peasant Cycle*. The plastic language is shaped by the principles of iconography, where the cross is a symbol of sacrifice and redemption, and the ground resembles the “*pozyom*”, earth as shown on icons (Barabanov 2019, p. 129). On the other hand, the series is apparently imbued with the motif of death and resembles jotted commemoration notes, where all deceased close relatives and friends are listed for their names to be read during the memorial service¹³

(Figure 8). The series was created when Steinberg was staying in the village of Pogorelka on the bank of the Vetluga River in the Nizhny Novgorod region, and is a requiem for the dead of the Russian countryside. Although the series surely does not feature portrait likeness, the level of symbolization still allows us to see half-destroyed huts, boarded-up windows and cemetery crosses. The dying Russian countryside, which once was the focus of Russian national traditions, evokes the artist's genuine pain.

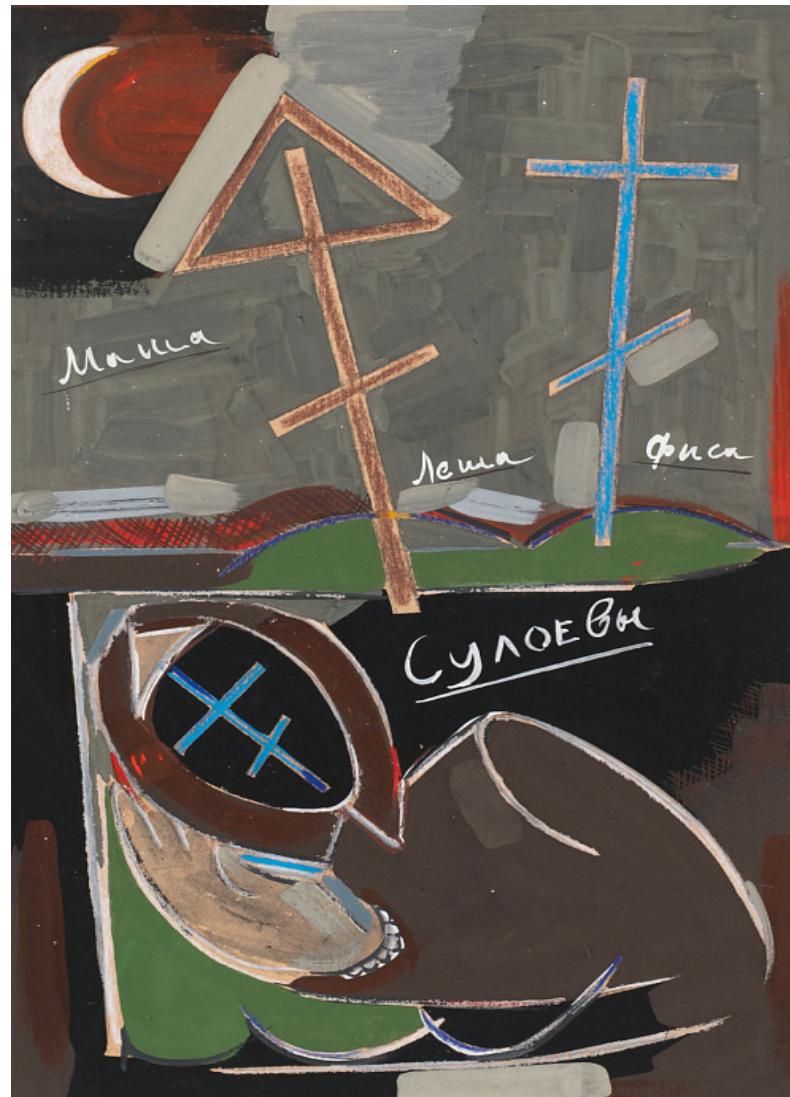


Figure 8. Eduard Steinberg. Masha, Lyosha and Fisa Suloyevy. 1980s. Cardboard, gouache, pastel. 60 * 39. Art4 Museum, Moscow <https://www.art4.ru/museum/shteynberg-eduard/> (accessed on 12 June 2022).

Some of the departed even receive a personal mention, such as Fisa from Semyonov from the eponymous painting, 1988 (Figure 9), where the title of the painting also works as an epitaph. What we see here is utmost simplification and iconography referring us back to Russian Neo-Primitivism. Members of the *Knave of Diamonds* group (1911–1912)¹⁴ aimed to imitate and use the techniques of the icon painting, *lubok* (cheap popular print), primitive art, shop signs and popular toys. All of these had their impact on the style of their painting with its simplistic forms, 2D shapes, bright colors and black outlines. Naive vision and childish shapes also appear in Steinberg's *Countryside* series. The new alphabet of color in his paintings of the period is dominated by dark colors—black, green, brown, red. The crosses upon the graves of the village people appear in different shapes. The catacomb

cross in the *Fisa from Semyonov* is a simple four-pointed cross, the sign of the victory of life over death and the triumph of Christianity over paganism. Subsequently inherited by the Catholic Church, it was known as the Latin “immissa”, or the Roman cross.¹⁵ The cross as the symbol of Christ’s redeeming sacrifice in this painting brings to mind the Old Believers’ cross as well, and this symbol of Church schism and sectarianism is anything but accidental. In Steinberg’s works, it is ambivalent, appearing both as a reference to the fountainhead of Orthodoxy and as an element in the geometrical language of the early Christian catacombs. In *Masha, Lyosha and Fisa Suloyevy*, we also see six-pointed Orthodox crosses¹⁶, which symbolize the ascent to the Kingdom of Heaven.

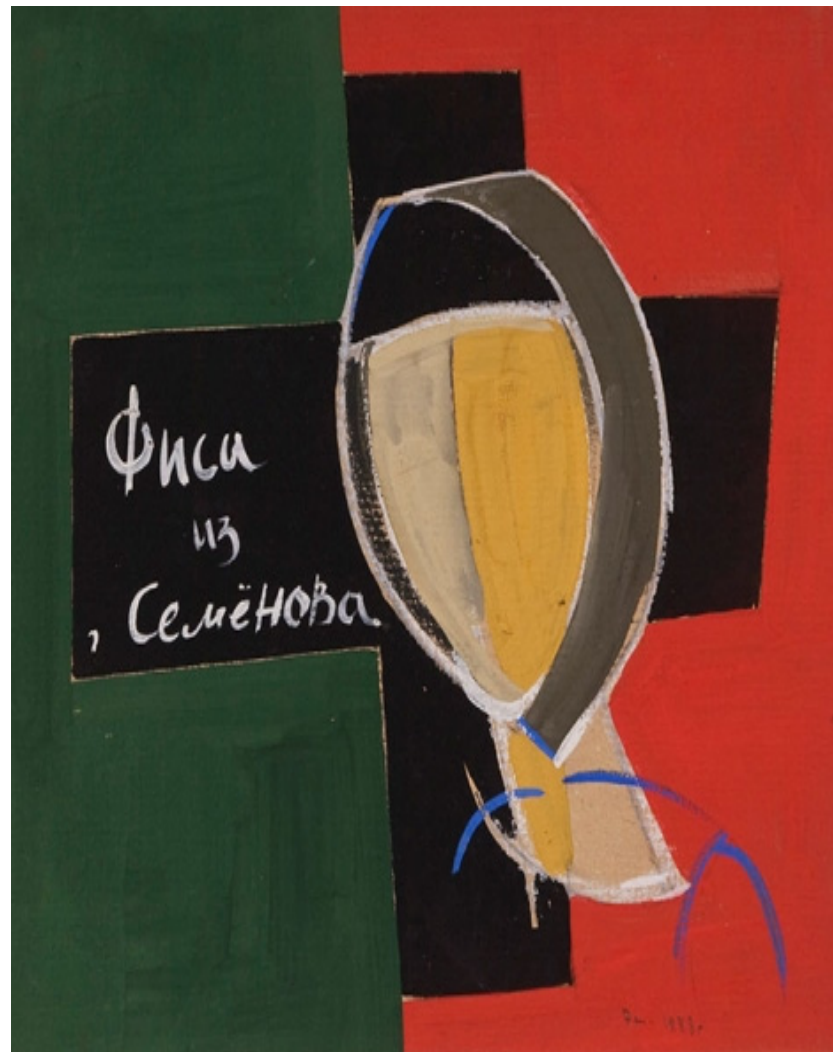


Figure 9. Eduard Steinberg. *Fisa from Semyonov*. 1988. Cardboard, gouache. Moscow Museum of Modern Art (MMOMA). https://mmoma.ru/exhibitions/gogolevsky10/eduard_shtejnberg_esli_v_kolodce_zhivet_voda/ (accessed on 16 June 2022).

The village of Pogorelka for Steinberg is akin to a coffin or a cemetery (pogost) with its dead silence. In a dedicated memoir, “Pogorelka: a village on the hill”, he writes,

The village comes from childhood. Lots of sky, little land. On the horizon, are the roofs of houses and the treetops of an overgrown pogost. Coming from the city, it’s a dream. A dream with your eyes open. The village-silence-silence outside of time. In front of you is your house < . . . > The house is like a coffin, like an ark, and the land around is a pier. You enter the house—you go into the coffin. Then you go to get some water from the well, and shudder under the gaze of

your fellow villagers and their domestic animals. Curiosity and longing follow your trail. You only come here in the summer. And every year someone leaves this place. A new tree-cross rises at the pogost. And the coffin houses still stand. Total emptiness. (Steinberg 2015, p. 55)

This fragment barely hides the pain of losing Steinberg's village friends, while also exposing the tragedy of desolation and abandonment of the Russian countryside. The interweaving of the real with the unreal, the mundane with the mystical, is conceived in the space of a multidimensional plane, which combines the tradition of Orthodox commemoration and the laconic Neo-Primitivism of the 1910s. The symbol of the inseparable unity of the sensual and the supra-sensual world—the cross—comes as “the intersection of the horizontal line of earthly existence with the vertical of the eternal and the Divine. The semantics of the Christian cross adds an eschatological perspective to this archaic image” (Barabanov 2019, p. 131).

4. Conclusions

Eduard Steinberg's philosophical and artistic thesaurus cancels the logic of habitual perception due to the multidimensional architectonics of his paintings and appeals to different cultural traditions and languages of art. Bringing back to mind his polemical dialogue with many twentieth-century artists, we can arrive at a number of preliminary conclusions. Having discovered that the view in the multilevel space of Steinberg's art (metaphysical abstraction, metageometry and peasant lubok) is itself multidimensional, we examined the artist's work from the perspective of the conjunction of ideas, styles and discoveries in the field of plastic language of both his predecessors (Malevich, Morandi, Rothko) and contemporaries (Veisberg). By appropriating the discoveries of Catacomb Christian art, Russian icon painting and Malevich's Suprematism, Morandi's metaphysical abstraction and Veisberg's “invisible painting”, the artist constructs an artistic universe of his own, where the metaphysics of presence ushers in the idea of apophaticism, concealed Divine Light. By marking invisible traces, Steinberg brings together the invisible and the visible world in the formulas of symbolic signs, focused on personal experience of the spiritual. Christian archetypes, sacred geometry of the ancients and Malevich's black square shine through the light of the other world and the secrets of the innermost. Optical neoplasticity, where the invisible layer becomes visible due to the discovery of hidden signs, is another important discovery. To decode invisible ideas and symbolic patterns, the viewer must withstand intellectual tension and become an experienced interpreter. Steinberg's reference to the legacy of Russian Symbolism and the historical avant-garde carries an additional semantic load. Following the pre-existent corpus of ideas and artistic discoveries allows him to set up a morphological infrastructure which can be studied through a number of discursive practices: philosophy, religion, art history and semiotics. A polemical dialogue is a special logic of similarity and difference, of discovering the presence of another's discourse and an implicit polemic. It is a new reading of the entire previous corpus of pictorial texts, and finding that they somewhat overlap. Steinberg's semantics of the sign implies different levels of instancing: the vertical, horizontal and hierarchical. In the polymorphic text the artist puts together, one can find traces of folklore and primitivist stylistics, references to Larionov and the grassroots primitive artists of the Knave of Diamonds group. The semantics and chronology of the everyday, the metaphor of the cross as a symbol of death and the finitude of human existence—all these markers of dialogue between the earthly and the heavenly, the secular and the eternal, the light and the dark establish distance from the existential. A legitimate question then arises: what is the meaning of these references to the heritage of Russian and European artists? In our view, Steinberg's mastering of traditions was to a certain degree a symbolic process. He does not recreate a particular aesthetic system or borrow ideas from the outside, but rather signs off with the deepest respect for his predecessors and their spiritual and artistic experience. Steinberg is quite self-sufficient as an artist, as evidenced by the plastic transformations and stylistic dialectic in his art. It is his uniqueness that determines the dualism of his plastic

language, which combines using classics of the avant-garde as his landmarks and setting his inimitably own path and view of the nature of artistic statement.

Funding: This study received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: I wish to thank the School of Design, National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE University).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ The term has been suggested by Vitaly Patsyukov, a scholar of arts from Russia. Attempting to define Steinberg's style, Patsyukov notes the presence of links between the "phenomena of the visible world and corresponding ideas which belong to the plane of the invisible and the most intimate" (Patsyukov 2019a, p. 33). On the one hand, we have here an obvious allusion to Neoplasticism (Nieuwe Beelding)—a new plastic art created by Dutch artists Theo van Doesburg and Pieter Cornelis Mondriaan as an art of primary elements, such as lines, geometrical shapes and figures and the main colors of the spectrum. In 1920, Mondrian published a book in Paris titled *Le Néo-Plasticisme: Principe Général de l'Équivalence Plastique*. In the book, he proposed the line and a specific rhythm as the main principles of form-building which are somewhat sacred. Mondrian's hallmark were his abstract compositions of rectangles and squares in «basic colors» and separated with thin black lines. It was the paradoxical simplicity of Mondrian's lines and shapes that stood behind the basic principles of the art of the Dutch *De Stijl*. On the other, by introducing the notion of «optical Neoplasticism», Patsyukov emphasizes Steinberg's unique visual optics, focusing on building a multi-level space where geometrical abstraction and optical illusoriness merge to create a language of art. In this sense, I quite agree with Patsyukov's definition.
- ² Both works were first published in Paris in 1967: Jacques Derrida. *De la grammatologie*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967, Jacques Derrida. *L'écriture et la différence* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967.
- ³ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ translates as "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour". The Gospels tell us of the symbolism of the fish in the life, works, death and resurrection of Jesus. The ἸΧΘΥΣ sign refers us to many episodes in the New Testament featuring the fish and fishermen, hence the multitude of explanations why it was chosen as a symbol for the Messiah. It must also be noted that some of the Apostles were fishermen and the Saviour Himself called them "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17). For more details, see (Gumerov 2008): *Pochemu Iisusa Khrista nazyvali ryboi*: <https://pravoslavie.ru/7028.html> (accessed on 16 May 2022).
- ⁴ An analogy can be drawn here with "covering by discovering", a famous formulation by Clement of Alexandria (Greek Κλήμης ὁ Ἀλεξανδρεὺς, c.150—c.250 CE), Christian theologian and philosopher, head of the theological school of Alexandria. The phrase is linked to the apophatics and liturgical symbolism.
- ⁵ Recalling her meetings with the artist, Elena Murina noted the artist's inimitable unique style and technique, "Veisberg constantly applied the term 'touch', which had a twofold meaning for him. On the one hand, it defined the moment of conjugation of an object and space, that subtle border separating and at the same time connecting them, being a very important indicator of the achieved or broken continuity of the pictorial fabric. On the other hand, the 'touch' referred to the moment when the brush touched the surface of the canvas, which should concentrate all the care with which the artist approached the pictorial values at his disposal. Ultimately, each Weisberg painting is "a model of the infinite in the limited space of the finite, where the recognizable and the unrecognizable, the visible and the invisible are in constant equilibrium" (Murina 2000).
- ⁶ Clement Greenberg was one of the first critics of art to discuss this problem. His definition of the abstract is quite indicative: he observes it as pure painting which has a physical impact on the viewer and is endowed with pure plasticity: "The arts, then, have been hunted back to their mediums, and there they have been isolated, concentrated and defined. It is by virtue of its medium that each art is unique and strictly itself. To restore the identity of an art the opacity of its medium must be emphasized. For the visual arts the medium is discovered to be physical; hence pure painting and pure sculpture seek above all else to affect the spectator physically< . . . > The purely plastic or abstract qualities of the work of art are the only ones that count. Emphasize the medium and its difficulties, and at once the purely plastic, the proper, values of visual art come to the fore. Overpower the medium to the point where all sense of its resistance disappears, and the adventitious uses of art become more important" (Greenberg 1992, . 4).
- ⁷ It must be noted that the artists of the «second wave of the avant-garde» took deep interest in Malevich and his personality, especially in the radicalism of his creative thought, his attitude to tradition and a new type of artistic utterance. This was mentioned on the pages of the *A-* (Issue 5, 1983), a mouthpiece of non-conformist Russian art, a magazine which was prepared in Russia but published in Paris between 1979 and 1986. The issue featured thoughts on Malevich by Eric Bulatov, Boris Groys, Ilya

Kabakov and a number of other non-conformist artists from Moscow. Here is, for instance, the contribution by Oleg Vasiliev: «Malevich appeared to me as a great discoverer: a pilgrim to the summit of intellectual art, a mythical hero who proclaimed the abyss of the «black square» and the «white nothingness». < . . . > It was emptiness, or rather, «the white nothingness» which was behind the work done now. It was a most serious metaphor by the author of the «black square», the artist who broke through the world of objects to the abyss of another space and ultimately coming to be the one who established objectness on all levels of existence < . . . > The accent is placed on the moment when the object is liberated from everything, i.e., on the «nothingness» (Vasiliev 2004, . 32–33).

⁸ Among the academic studies of Kazimir Malevich's mystical symbolism and apophatism that have been published in the recent decades, the following are to be recommended: (Bering 1986; Bowlt 1991; Goryacheva 2020; Ichin 2011; Krieger 1998; Kurbanovsky 2007; Milner 1996; Mudrak 2016; Marcadet 2000; Rostova 2021; Spira 2008; Sakhno 2021; Tarasov 2002; 2017).

⁹ In an interview he gave to Vadim Alekseev, Steinberg thus spoke of the matter: “Malevich is a religious artist at his finest, albeit a sectarian. He might have been a *khllyst*—they had geometric icons. In Russia, one can't exist without God” (Steinberg 2015, . 236).

¹⁰ *Beginnings* (Greek Στοιχειῖα, Latin *Elementa*), a fundamental work written by Euclid c. 300 BCE and devoted to a systematic reading of geometry and number theory. In Book XIII, Euclid systematizes the knowledge on the five perfect solids which he correlates with natural elements: e.g., the pyramid and tetrahedron match the element of fire.

¹¹ In Russian Orthodoxy, the *votserkovlyonny* (lit. ‘churched’) man is a Christian who is a Church member following the teachings of Christ, the rules of Church life, service and the sacraments, a regular reader of the Bible living in accordance with the canons of Orthodox community life.

¹² Steinberg's baptism brings up another interesting question: how does Steinberg's art bring together two traditions—Jewish theology and Orthodox religion? As an ethnic Jew, Steinberg feels the drive towards abstraction typical for the old Kabbalistic tradition. but combines it with his interest in Christian iconography. Accepting the teaching of Christ as a “true Jew of the Eternal Israel” (Ioffe 2018, p. 82), Steinberg appeals to Christian symbolism as the space of memory. The man with a “Russian soul”, Steinberg kept Malevich as his main interlocutor, but did not refuse dialogue with the iconographic tradition of Andrei Rublev and Theophanes the Greek as well. The artist grew up in provincial Russia, with his painting largely inspired by landscapes of rural Russia, and remained an ardent lover of European culture. Being truly religious, Steinberg was what in Russian can be termed “nadmirny”, a man “above the world” with a transcendental consciousness. In a certain sense Steinberg, having first imbibed numerous religious and artistic traditions, managed to create a personal grammar of most sincere art. This is what he mentioned in his interview to Vadim Alekseev in 2004: “My achievement is that I have built a bridge over time—that's all” (Steinberg 2015, p. 236).

¹³ As reported by Galina Manevich (Beelitz 2005, p. 218).

¹⁴ A group of Russian avant-garde artists comprising, among others, Pyotr Konchalovsky, Ilya Mashkov, Mikhail Larionov, Aristarkh Lentulov, Aleksandr Kuprin, Robert Falk and Natalya Goncharova.

¹⁵ For more detail, see: Pravoslavnye kresty: kak razobrat'sia v ikh znachenii. [Orthodox Crosses and Their Meanings]. <https://www.pravmir.ru/kak-razobratsya-v-izobrazheniyax-kresta/> (accessed on 16 May 2022).

¹⁶ Crosses of this shape have long been known in culture: e.g., the six-pointed memorial cross set up by St. Euphrosynia Princess of Polotsk in 1161.

References

- Barabanov, Evgenii. 2019. Nebo i zemlia odnoi kartiny [Heaven and earth of a painting]. In *Izumlennoe prostranstvo: Razmyshleniia o tvorchestve Eduarda Shteinberga. Sbornik statei i esse [A Space Surprised: Thinking of Eduard Steinberg's Art: A Collection of Articles and Essays]*. Edited by Galina Manevich. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, pp. 111–35.
- Barthes, Roland. 2020. *Cy Twombly*. Moscow: Ad Marginem Press, Muzei sovremennogo iskusstva «Garazh».
- Beelitz, Claudia. 2005. *Eduard Steinberg: Metaphysische Malerei zwischen Tauwetter und Perestroika*. Köln and Wien: Böhlau.
- Beelitz, Claudia. 2019. Cosidetta Realita. In *Izumlennoe prostranstvo razmyshleniia o tvorchestve Eduarda Shteinberga. Sbornik statei i esse*. Edited by Galina Manevich. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, pp. 157–62.
- Bering, Kunibert. 1986. *Suprematismus und Orthodoxie. Einflüsse der Ikonen auf das Werk Kazimir Malevics*. No. 2/3. Minneapolis: Ostkristliche Kunst, Fortress Press, pp. 143–55.
- Bowlt, John. 1991. *Orthodoxy and the Avant-Garde. Sacred Images in the Work of Goncharova, Malevich and Thier Contemporaries. Christianity and the Arts in Russia*. Edited by Miloš Milorad Velimirovic and William Craft Brumfield. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Chudetskaia, Anna. 2020. Fliuidy simvolizma v «metageometrii» Edika Shteinberga [Fluids of symbolism in Edik Steinberg's “metageometry”]. In *Sviaz' vremen: Istoriia iskusstv v kontekste simvolizma. Kollektivnaia monografiia v trekh knigakh [The Links between Times: History of Art in the Symbolist Context: A Monograph in Three Books]*. Edited by Olga Sergeevna Davydova. Moscow: BuksMArt, pp. 402–22.
- de Duve, Thierry. 2014. Imenem iskusstva. In *K arkhologii sovremennosti [Au nom de l'art: Pour une archéologie de la modernité. Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1988]*. Translated by A. Shestakov. Moscow: Izd. Dom Vyshei shkoly ekonomiki.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1973. *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Translated by David B. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

- Derrida, Jacques. 1997. *Of Grammatology*, Corrected ed. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2001. *To, chto my vidim, to, chto smotrit na nas. [What We See Looks Back at Us]*. Translated by Aleksey Shestakov. Saint Petersburg: Nauka Publ.
- Goryacheva, Tat'iana. 2020. Pochti vse o «Chernom kvadrate» [Almost everything about the Black Square]. In *Teoriia i Praktika Russkogo Avangarda: Kazimir Malevich i ego Shkola [Theory and Practice of the Russian Avant-Garde: Kazimir Malevich and his School]*. Edited by Tatiana Vadimovna Goryacheva. Moscow: AST.
- Greenberg, Clement. 1992. Towards a Newer Laocoon. In *Art in Theory 1900—1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 554–60.
- Gumerov, Iov. 2008. Pochemu Iisusa Khrista nazyvali ryboi. Available online: <https://pravoslavie.ru/7028.html> (accessed on 16 May 2022).
- Günther, Hans. 2019. Ot konstruktсии k sozertsatel'nosti—Eduard Shteinberg i russkii avangard [From constructing to contemplating: Eduard Steinberg and the Russian avant-garde]. In *Izumlennoe prostranstvo: Razmyshleniia o tvorchestve Eduarda Shteinberga. Sbornik statei i esse*. Edited by Galina Manevich. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, pp. 36–42.
- Ichin, Cornelia. 2011. *Suprematicheskie Razmyshleniia Malevicha o Predmetnom Mire [Malevich's Suprematist Reflections on the World of Objects]*. Moscow: Voprosy filosofii, Izdatel'stvo Nauka, vol. 10, pp. 48–56.
- Ioffe, Dennis. 2018. The Garden of Hidden Delights of the Russian-Jewish Avant-Garde. *Special Issue: Jewish Underground Culture in the late Soviet Union. East European Jewish Affairs* 48: 78–89. [CrossRef]
- Krieger, Verena. 1998. *Von Der Ikone Zur Utopie: Kunstkonzepte der Russischen Avantgarde*. Köln: Böhlau.
- Kurbanovsky, Aleksey. 2007. *Malevich's Mystic Signs: From Iconoclasm to New Theology. Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia*. Edited by Mark D. Steinberg and Heather J. Coleman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kuskov, Sergei. 2019. Tvorchestvo Eduarda Shteinberga v zerkale idei Serebrianaogo veka [Eduard Steinberg's art in the mirror of the Silver Age]. In *Izumlennoe prostranstvo: Razmyshleniia o tvorchestve Eduarda Shteinberga. Sbornik statei i esse*. Edited by Galina Manevich. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, pp. 46–61.
- Landolt, Emanuel. 2015. À la recherche de la peinture pure et de Dieu: Édouard Steinberg interprète de Malevič. *Dans Ligeia. Ligeia* 141144: 5–20. [CrossRef]
- Malevich, Kazimir. 1995. Bog ne skinut. Iskusstvo, tserkov', fabrika [God has not been toppled: Art, Church and Factory]. In *Stat'i, Manifesty, Teoreticheskie Sochineniia i Drugie Raboty. 1913–1929 [Articles, Manifestos, Theoretical Works and Other Texts, 1913–1929]*. Moscow: Gileia.
- Marcadet, Jean Claude. 2000. *Malevich i Pravoslavnaia Ikonografia [Malevich and Orthodox Iconography]*. Moscow: Yazyki knizhnoi kul'tury, pp. 167–74.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. 2010. *Perekrest'ia vidimogo [The Crossing of the Visible]*. Translated by Nikolay Sosna. Moscow: Progress-Traditsiia.
- Milner, John. 1996. *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Mudrak, Miroslava. 2016. *Kazimir Malevich i Vizantiiskaia Liturgicheskaia Traditsiia [Kazimir Malevich and the Byzantine Liturgical Tradition]*. Iskusstvo 2 (597). Moscow: Alya Tesis, pp. 50–67.
- Murina, Elena. 2000. Vladimir Veisberg. 'Nevidimaia zhivopis'' i ee avtor [Vladimir Veisberg: "Invisible painting" and its author]. *Nasledie. Istoriko-kul'turnyi zhurnal. №55*. Available online: <http://www.nasledie-rus.ru/podshivka/5515.php> (accessed on 12 April 2022).
- Patsyukov, Vitaly. 2019a. Bytie chisla i sveta (o tvorchestve Eduarda Shteinberga) [The being of number and light: On Eduard Steinberg's art]. In *Izumlennoe prostranstvo: Razmyshleniia o tvorchestve Eduarda Shteinberga. Sbornik statei i esse*. Edited by Galina Manevich. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, pp. 31–35.
- Patsyukov, Vitaly. 2019b. Eduard Shteinberg. Dialog s Malevichem [Eduard Steinberg's dialogue with Malevich]. In *Izumlennoe prostranstvo: Razmyshleniia o tvorchestve Eduarda Shteinberga. Sbornik statei i esse*. Edited by Galina Manevich. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, pp. 201–9.
- Pivovarov, Viktor. 2019. K vystavke E. Shteinberga «Derevenskii tsikl» [On E. Steinberg's The Countryside exhibition]. In *Izumlennoe prostranstvo: Razmyshleniia o tvorchestve Eduarda Shteinberga. Sbornik statei i esse*. Edited by Galina Manevich. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, pp. 69–71.
- Rostova, Natalia. 2021. Religioznaia taina «Chernogo kvadrata» [The religious mystery of The Black Square]. In *Filosofia Russkogo Avangarda: Kollektivnaia Monografia [The Philosophy of the Russian Avant-Garde: A Collective Monograph]*. Moscow: RG-Press.
- Sakhno, Irina. 2021. Kazimir Malevich's Negative Theology and Mystical Suprematism Special Issue East-Slavic Religions and Religiosity: Mythologies, Literature and Folklore: A Reassessment). *Religions* 12: 542. [CrossRef]
- Schiffers, Evgenii. 2019. Ideograficheskiy iazyk Eduarda Shteinberga [Eduard Steinberg's ideographic language]. In *Izumlennoe prostranstvo: Razmyshleniia o tvorchestve Eduarda Shteinberga. Sbornik statei i esse*. Edited by Galina Manevich. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, pp. 9–28.
- Spira, Andrew. 2008. *Avant-Garde Icon. In Russian Avant-Garde Art and the Icon Painting Tradition*. Aldershot and Burlington: Lund Humphries.
- Steinberg, Eduard. 2015. *Materialy k biografii [Materials for a Biography]*. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie.
- Tarasov, Oleg. 2002. *Icon and Devotion. Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*. Translated and Edited by Robin Milner-Gulland. London: Reaktion Books.

- Tarasov, Oleg. 2017. Spirituality and the Semiotics of Russian Culture: From the Icon to Avant-Garde Art. Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art. In *New Perspectives*. Edited by Louse Hardiman and Nicola Kozicharow. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, pp. 115–29.
- Vasiliev, Oleg. 2004. Portret vremeni [A Portrait of Time]. A—. In *A Magazine of Non-official Russian Art, 1979–1986*, Reprint ed. Edited by Igor Shelkovsky and Alexandra Obukhova. Moscow: ArtKhronika, pp. 32–33.

Article

Andrei Sen-Senkov and the Visual Poetics of the Global Commonplace

Evgeny Pavlov 

Department of Global, Cultural and Language Studies, University of Canterbury,
Christchurch 8140, New Zealand; evgeny.pavlov@canterbury.ac.nz

Abstract: This article considers the visual poetics of the prominent contemporary Russian poet and poetry translator Andrei Sen-Senkov whose work is examined through the Deleuzian lens as a prime example of rhizomatic poetry. Senkov's poetics is that of the commonplace: working with cultural clichés, and primarily visual material, it embeds very private concerns within a global matrix, with astounding and often theoretically challenging results.

Keywords: Sen-Senkov A.; Deleuze G.; visual poetry; Magritte R.; rhizome; global poetics

Introduction

In today's globalizing world, questions of poetic sameness and difference have long been in the foreground of literary debates. According to Jacob Edmond whose contribution to these debates *A Common Strangeness* remains unsurpassed for the rigour and sophistication of its approach to the question of global poetics, the old Cold War binaries of "us and them" have mutated into similarly conceived dichotomous models of commonness/strangeness or local/global; "yet they are also embedded in a messy, complex reality of interactions that a dichotomy such as local-or-global elides" (Edmond 2012, p. 3). Edmond's approach is informed by the logic of comparison as encounter and superimposition as an alternative to a single comparative framework of commonness and strangeness. This, no doubt, is an immensely fruitful strategy that carefully bysteps the risk of falling into the trap of single modernity models. At the same time, however, its applications are somewhat limited in that it is just as firmly grounded in the historical moment of the immediate post-Cold War decades to which it is applied and to which the poets he discusses travelled through the Cold War era.

I wish to suggest that in our own historical moment, poetry, while it certainly continues to be shaped by its contents, contexts, and individual transnational encounters, is also increasingly defined by sweeping challenges, the most obvious of which is posed by a competing representational medium. The visual has come to dominate the verbal in the global cultural sphere, pushing local poetic traditions bound by specific languages further and further into the margins. As the Russian poet Aleksandr Skidan noted back in 2007 in his manifesto "Poetry in the Age of Total Communication", "the centre of creative activity has shifted to the visual arts because they ... immediately reflect, and partially coincide with, the new technogenic sphere which, in turn [...] corresponds to the dominant regime of temporality and synthetic perception assigned by the mass media [...], is inscribed into the culture industry and consequently [...] into the machine of capitalism that deterritorializes any identities centred on linguistic competences which it replaces" (Skidan 2007). While poetry is excluded from this sphere, continues Skidan, this lot is nothing new as poetry is fundamentally homeless, placeless. "To hold on to this 'non-place,' this expanding hiatus [...], means to wish the impossible, but perhaps the impossible is the only asset and destiny of the poet" (Skidan 2007).

This essay focuses on a poetic strategy of impossibility that takes on the challenge of the visual sphere by working with it while at the same time embracing the deterritorializing,



Citation: Pavlov, Evgeny. 2022.

Andrei Sen-Senkov and the Visual Poetics of the Global Commonplace. *Arts* 11: 123. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11060123>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 24 August 2022

Accepted: 24 November 2022

Published: 7 December 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

rhizomatic logic of language itself. It does so in ways that are global, local, and homeless all at the same time. Andrei Sen-Senkov who in 2018 was awarded Russia's prestigious Andrei Bely prize for poetry (having been nominated a number of times in the past) is a very interesting case to consider. Despite the well-deserved recognition and prominence he now enjoys, his background could not be more marginal. Born in 1968 in Dushanbe, Andrei Senkov grew up in Soviet Tajikistan, went to medical school in Yaroslavl, and upon graduation settled in Russia, first in Borisoglebsk in Voronezh province, and subsequently in Moscow. A practicing doctor, he writes poetry in his spare time (publishing under the pen-name Sen-Senkov) and keeps this pursuit quite separate from his professional life even though his occupation clearly affects his writing. Author of numerous poetry volumes, he is also an avid translator; his own poetry has been translated into 21 languages to date, arguably more than most other prominent contemporary Russian poets could boast. He worked with other artists on collaborative projects with visual poetry and music. A note on his English-language volume *Anatomical Theater: in a Grip of Strange Thoughts* translated by Ainsley Morse observes that "Sen-Senkov's poetry comes across easily and well in translation . . . Translators and English-language readers alike can delight in the fact that the intuitive logic of his imagination essentially transcends linguistic boundaries" (Sen-Senkov 2013, p. 3). Part of this ease has to do with the fact that Senkov's poems are usually short vignettes, mostly narrated in syntactically uncomplicated, deceptively simple language, as a rule, with no rhythmical patterns, let alone rhymes. His work translates so well also because it hovers on the boundary between the verbal and the visual, sometimes resorting to calligrams, and, on occasion, to visual poetry. Senkov's poetry abides in a very peculiar kind of space where surfaces of familiar objects, familiar names, or familiar, well-documented facts, even clichés, are distorted ever so slightly so that they shrink, eventually morphing into something that can be visualised and yet explodes the habitual optics of linear vision and binary or hierarchical thinking. Doctor Senkov calls this strategy an attempt at healing: "I always liked small things that diminish if you look at them long enough. I got interested in this attempt to heal with the gaze" (Sen-Senkov 2003, p. 88). Mikhail Iampolsky is well-justified in calling this approach "post-conceptualism" which, to him, manifests itself in Senkov's "attention to the medium, rather than to what we usually call 'reality'" (Iampolsky 2003, p. 91). With conceptualists, it is the cultural artefact that becomes the object of aesthetic manipulation. According to Iampolsky's early article, Senkov's understanding of the medium is akin to that of photography which, to a degree, is a violation of reality and as such of necessity deforms and distorts, while allowing us at the same time to observe the structure of distortion and deformation. In other words, it is not the artefact per se but rather its medium, the intermediary realm that becomes the object of scrutiny. This medium is both image and language, and it creates its own space which most certainly could be construed as the impossible non-place of Skidan's manifesto, the only common place to which poetry has been aspiring from the very beginning. More recently, Massimo Maurizio suggests a special term (which he partially derives from Yury Lotman) to describe the kind of poetry Senkov writes: "mediated utterance" or "mediated self-expression" (Maurizio 2019, p. 4). This kind of mediation, according to Maurizio, is necessary in order to overcome the mistrust towards the language of emotional experience. In another recent study of the poet's use of the specifically photographic visual domain, Molly Thomasy Blasing describes his poetry as an attempt at transcending "the representational force of even the most experimental of photographic ways of seeing" (Blasing 2021, p. 240). Blasing also notes that Senkov's poetry often combines the visual language of violence with that of "innocence and childhood play": his poems "blend the rhetoric of war, violence, and abuse with sounds and visions of childhood" (Ibid., p. 234; see also Blasing 2013). The latter are both intimate and shared, and Senkov's overarching strategy, in my view, is often to manipulate immediately recognizable visual clichés in such a way as to draw the reader's attention not so much to the visual medium as to language itself, its representational surface which both conveys sensation and, impossibly, lays itself bare to view.

Clichés, Labyrinths, and Rhizomes

An interesting example of Sen-Senkov's baring the representational surface is the poem titled *Iz Podmoskov'ia s liubov'iu* (*From Moscow Region with Love*):

в пятидесятые лас-вегас привлекал туристов
не только своими казино

в сотне километров
от игровой столицы америки
военные испытывали ядерное оружие

люди сидели на балконах
в барах
лежали у бассейнов
наблюдая за бокалом сухого мартини
как после взрывов
красиво вырастают ядерные грибы
всевозможные подберезовики
подосиновики сыроежки
мухоморы поганки
шампиньоны лисички
размножаются спорами
о многом спорят
наступает дождливая
немного холодная
война

in the fifties las vegas attracted tourists
not only with its casinos

in a hundred kilometers
from the gambling capital of america
the military tested nuclear weapons

people sat on balconies
in bars
lay around by poolsides
watching with a glass of dry martini
nuclear mushrooms grow beautifully
after explosions
all sorts of birch and orange
bolets russulas
fly banes toadstools
button mushrooms chanterelles
multiply by spores
spar and argue about many things
a rainy and slightly cold
war sets in
(Sen-Senkov 2018b, p. 30)

The machinery of Senkov's "rainy, slightly cold war" is based on a refusal of binaries and hierarchies. The visual image of Nevada nuclear explosions viewed from the balcony of a Las Vegas hotel morphs into mushrooms that germinate into an autumn in forests near Moscow, familiar to any Russian reader, especially one of his generation whose childhood surely included regular mushroom-hunting trips into the woods. This imagery explodes not the world but rather its habitual structures of meaning and, in a conscious nod to Giles

Deleuze and Félix Guattari, exposing the spatial logic of the language rhizome itself: “споры начинают спорить/*spory nachinaiiut sporit*”/spores begin to spar and argue.” Senkov’s little explosions capture the outlines of virtual worlds hidden in clichés, in places as common as familiar toponyms when the sounds of the Russian language and its gendered grammar suddenly conspire to reveal a peculiarly gendered dot on the visual map where a metro stop used to be.

РАЗНОВИДНОСТЬ ПОЛА: СЕДЬМАЯ ОСТАНОВКА ОТ КОЛЬЦА

ЗВОНОК НА МОБИЛЬНЫЙ:

- ты где сейчас?

- я в люблино

звучит как влюблено

(не влюблен и не влюблена)

как может быть влюблено

только одиночество голыми руками (Sen-Senkov 2018b, p. 123)

A VARIETY OF GENDER: SEVENTH STOP FROM THE RING

a mobile phone call:

where are you now?

I am in Liublino [v liublino]

sounds like it’s in love [vliubleno]

(not he’s in love or she’s in love)

as only loneliness can be in love

with its naked hands

According to Deleuze, a cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing. We do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés. “But, if our sensory-motor schemata jam or break, then a different type of image can appear: a pure optical-sound image, the whole image without metaphor, brings out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character, because it no longer has to be justified, for better or for worse . . . ” (Deleuze 1989, p. 20). Deleuze is speaking here in the context of cinema, but the same thinking is clearly at the heart of Senkov’s poetry, where the thing in itself jumps at the reader as the virtual is freed from its clichéd actualisations. Anything can be this thing, including, for example, colour which has its own taste:

девочка спрашивает

а зачем фиолетовый цвет

и сама отвечает знаю зачем

раскрашивать космос

своей беспросветной бесцветностью

он сам как маленький ребенок раздетый до трусов

раздетый потому что вот земляной арбуз

и нужно не испачкать одежду

и нужно счастливо наесться

и нужно провалиться в самую большую ягоду на свете (Sen-Senkov 2018b, p. 73)

a girl is asking
and why do we need the colour purple
and answers herself I know why
to colour the cosmos
with its impenetrable colourlessness
it itself is like a little child stripped to his underpants
stripped because here is the earthen watermelon
and you don't want to dirty your clothes
and you want to happily gorge yourself
and you want to fall into the biggest berry in the world

People are in no privileged position here. A person is also just such a thing, emerging at birth, like a chewed-up “sheet of two-legged pink paper” out of a malfunctioning photocopier:

человек тесно выползает из липкого лабиринта плохо работающего ксерокса
зажеванной двуногой розовой бумагой на которой напечатаны подлые варианты
ответа на вопрос **так кого ты больше любишь папу или маму?**

a human being squeezes himself out of the sticky labyrinth of a poorly operating photocopier in a sheet of chewed-up two-legged pink paper printed on which are treacherous answers to the question so who do you love more, mummy or daddy? (Figure 1) (Sen-Senkov 2010, p. 93)

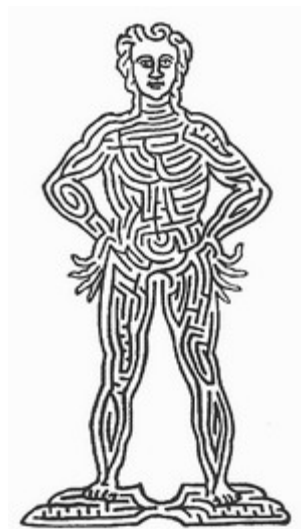


Figure 1. Woodcut from Francesco Segala’s *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.

Like many other Senkov poems, this one is ekphrastic. Entitled “*Labirint-roddom 1*” [Labyrinth-Maternity Hospital 1], it is part of a series describing a set of early Baroque labyrinthine prints by the Paduan architect and sculptor Francesco Segala. The person who has just completed a journey through the birthing labyrinth is no less labyrinthine, made up of endless folds. In his book on Leibniz and the Baroque, Deleuze points out that etymologically “labyrinth” means “multiple” because it contains many folds: “the multiple is not only what has many parts but also what is folded in many ways.” The Baroque then, according to him, refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function, that of producing folds, unfurling them all the way to infinity: “The Baroque endlessly

produces folds . . . The Baroque trait twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other. The Baroque fold unfurls all the way to infinity" (Deleuze 1993, p. 3). Deleuze calls such unfurling series "impossible", which he means to be a relationship distinct from impossibility or contradiction.¹ According to Leibniz, the only thing that does not allow impossible worlds to coexist is the theological hypothesis that God chooses the "best" one among the infinite number of possible worlds. As we enter the modern era then, as Deleuze writes in *Cinema 2: the Time Image*, literature turns not just to language as its own precondition of existence, but also frees the virtual from its actualisations as monadology becomes nomadology (Deleuze 1989, p. 54). Deleuze often cites Borges' "Garden of Forking Paths", a novella in which the book that is also a labyrinth of the Chinese philosopher Ts'ui Pên describes a purely virtual world: "In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses—simultaneously—all of them" (Borges 1964, p. 26). In Ts'ui Pên's labyrinth, God is no longer the higher Being that chooses the best "compossible" world, but is instead just a Process that goes through all these virtual possibilities and spinning the web of converging and diverging series (Deleuze 1993, p. 60).²

Similarly, Sen-Senkov throws open the doors into a labyrinth whose bifurcations embrace endless virtual possibilities, while belonging to one and the same universe. The visual means of representing the fold that makes this labyrinth are extremely important in his poetry. Consider Sen-Senkov's story of Che Guevara from his 2006 book *Zaostrennyi basketbol'nyi miach [A Sharpened Basketball]*. Che Guevara's iconic image has long become a stilted cliché of late postmodernism, and the title of the poem about him, "A Rare Specimen of Che Guevara", directly points to the multiplicity of the impossible versions of his story. But the "specimen" presented here is singled out from the entire series of ideological and media products under the name of Che Guevara not because the biography presented here is different from the rest. The baffling subheading of the poem ("a novel-pin that broke when it touched a Cuban guerrilla newspaper) and its "pin-like" graphic presentation (one word per line) give the reader to understand that this is not so much about an object of reality as it is about its representation that has acquired a life of its own. At the same time, one cannot say that we are dealing exclusively with a cultural artefact: rather, this is a certain virtuality that is not reducible to a limited number of actualisations.

The general rule for reading this text is given in its very first pages:

Эрнесто начал читать с четырех лет. Чуть позже у него появилась любимая игра. Он рвал книжки и перекладывал страницы так, что получалась какая-нибудь новая история. Несколько другой игрой была поэзия: комкая страницы, он превращал стихотворения в бумажные шарики, на которых сдвинутые взрослые строчки становились ему наконец-то понятными. (Sen-Senkov 2006, p. 63)

Ernesto started reading at four years of age. A bit later he started a favourite game. He would tear up books and move pages around so that a new story would result. Poetry was a somewhat different game: he crumpled pages and turned poems into paper balls on which shifting adult lines finally became comprehensible to him.

The poem is prefaced with an epigraph from a song by the Russian rock singer Yegor Letov "Nasekomoe sterpit vse" ["An insect will bear anything"] (and these three words are merged together, as per Ernesto's poetry game) which suggests that the specimen in question is also a kind of a rare beetle that refuses to be pinned down by the "novel." As we read early in the poem, "Argentiniens borrowed the interjection 'che' from the Guarani people who use it to express practically any emotion (both human and animal) depending on the intonation" (Sen-Senkov 2006, p. 54). Thus the function of the proper name amounts to a gradual depersonalisation of whoever is behind it, in turning it into a hieroglyph filled with all possible meanings that refer the reader to political history,

literature, mythology, medicine, pop-culture, and critical theory. Intonation is all that matters. Thus commonly known facts from Che's life get augmented in the spirit of Latin American magic realism: "Celia, Che's future mother, was born in Venezuela. The country where fish with lungs instead of gills live in Angel Falls. Where only girls get sick, and boys do not drink mother's milk at all. Where men are so handsome that they often get kidnapped by female wild animals" (Sen-Senkov 2006, pp. 56–57). Borges, Guevara's compatriot, professional librarian, and the author of "The Library of Babel", also makes an implicit appearance in the narrative: "Ernesto had a job at the University Library famous of its disappearing and appearing books. No one knew the exact number of volumes. It was the librarians who were busy unsuccessfully counting the books and searching for the universal law of their movement in space" (Sen-Senkov 2006, pp. 69–70). We further learn that "in Mexico, Che works as an allergy doctor at the Institute of Cardiology and studies the impact on the human immune and cardiovascular systems of the beetle *Prosopesum follius* that lives between pages of old books" (Sen-Senkov 2006, pp. 85–86).

One of the central episodes of Che's revolutionary adventures tells the story of Che's transcending his own body and his merging with the outside physical space: "They practiced blending in with the sea waves, changing their colour to blue, practiced moving so quietly that dogs would take them for the shadows of their own leads, and they learned a special technique that allowed people to change their faces beyond recognition by using muscles of expression" (Sen-Senkov 2006, p. 90). With this, we finally enter the media space of radio and print where the poem ends abruptly with a graphic diagram of the novel-pin coming into contact with the guerrilla newspaper *El Cubano Libre*:

Большинство
номеров
«Эль
Кубано
Либре»
выходило
с
бумажными
прорезями,
символизирующими
раны
повстанцев

(Sen-Senkov 2006, p. 105)

[the majority of issues of *El Cubano Libre* came out with paper cuts symbolising the wounds of the guerrillas]

The symbolic slots in the newspaper, while being just paper cuts, prefigure Che's own future stigmata inflicted upon him by his captors to imitate his dying in a shoot-out. This brings to mind yet another Deleuze passage, this one from *The Logic of Sense* where the philosopher talks about the French poet Joe Bousquet who was badly wounded in WWI and spent the rest of his days paralysed, in constant pain for which he took opium, and often in the company of surrealists.

Joe Bousquet [. . .] apprehends the wound that he bears deep within his body in its eternal truth as a pure event. To the extent that events are actualized in us, they wait for us and invite us in. They signal us: "My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it." It is a question of attaining this will that the event creates in us; of becoming the quasi-cause of what is produced within us, the Operator; of producing surfaces and linings in which the event is reflected, finds itself again

as incorporeal and manifests in us the neutral splendour which it possesses in itself in its impersonal and pre-individual nature, beyond the general and the particular, the collective and the private. It is a question of becoming a citizen of the world. (Deleuze 1990, p. 148)

Senkov's poetics, if anything, aspires to a mode of representation which is precisely this: intimate but also pre-individual, impersonal, virtual, unactualized, beyond the general and the particular, in other words, truly global because it is in fact homeless. This is achieved in multiple ways the most radical of which are presented in poems where the reader is made to see what is normally given in pure sensation, quite often a sensation of pain.

Feet, They Hurt

In 2018, Sen-Senkov completed a project titled *Nogi, im bol'no* [*Feet, They Hurt*]. Pain is at the centre of this project. To celebrate the 120th anniversary of René Magritte, he wrote twelve ekphrastic poems, each on a drawing of feet by the artist Igor Ulangin. Senkov's poems were then translated into 11 different languages (Albanian, Georgian, English, Italian, Polish, Belarusian, Greek, Latvian, Lithuanian, Bulgarian, and Serbian) in four different scripts. The resulting series is a fascinating exercise in ekphrasis, an original poetic statement, and, last but not least a novel, theoretically significant contribution to global poetry.

That Magritte should hold special significance for Senkov is to be expected. In his famous discussion of *La Trahison des Images* in *This is Not a Pipe*, Michel Foucault makes an interesting comparison between Magritte, Kandinsky, and Klee. The latter two artists worked with the medium, Kandinsky giving up representation and "thingifying" colours and shapes, while Klee wove a new space. Magritte, on the other hand, allowed "the old space of representation to rule, but only at the surface, no more than a polished stone, bearing words and shapes: beneath, nothing" (Foucault 1983, p. 41). Magritte is eminently quotable, his work—for want of a better word—iconic and easily adapted by artists from any place and for any purposes. What Magritte does to the visual image, Senkov does to words, and with very similar effects.

The *Feet* project is, however, more complicated. Ulangin's drawings (which incidentally were completed before the book project was conceived—by his own account, Senkov saw the set on the artist's Facebook page and immediately wanted to write a poem for each picture) enter into a conversation with Magritte's famous series of paintings in which a pair of shoes changes into a pair of feet the shoes are meant to cover (Figure 2). What happens in Magritte, is, par excellence, what Deleuze calls the appearance of the thing in itself as the image foregrounds mechanisms of perception and demonstrates how easily the viewer is led by clichés, readily confusing the image with the reality it both describes and obscures (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Woodcut from Francesco Segala's *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.



Figure 3. Woodcut from Francesco Segala’s *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.

Ulangin’s drawings complicate these inside/outside confluents further by adding new elements to them that suggest a temporal dimension, without, however, telling a proper story. These drawings speak even if it is up to the viewer to read what it is that they say. What Senkov does then is an ekphrasis of the images that in themselves already comment on the original image by Magritte. And in Foucault’s view, Magritte’s paintings speak too.

This, on the face of it, very much goes along with Lessing’s attempt to justify and codify the distinction between the plastic and the verbal modes of art in his *Laocoon* where the former is attached to the privileged or frozen moment extended in space, while the latter can be dramatic and narrative, extended in time. It is Senkov’s ekphrastic poems that narrate: each of the poems sets in motion the static image with a story told in the present tense. And yet, the plastic and the verbal are very closely linked; they overlap, puzzle, confuse, and dumbfound. This kind of representational practice already features in *Zaostrennyi basketbol’nyi miach*. There Senkov describes a certain passage from the Egyptian Book of the Dead in which a dead person on his way to heaven on meeting a scarab who pushes two dung balls has to “write a picture” on one of them and to “draw a letter” on the other. “Неспособного это сделать превращают в какой-нибудь еще не существующий иероглиф и сбрасывают вниз” [“Whoever is unable to do this, gets turned into some other, not yet existing hieroglyph and is thrown down”] (Sen-Senkov 2006, p. 111).

What exactly are these “feet” in which the action of poems unfolds? They are neither a thing, nor an image of anything material but rather hieroglyphs of sorts, schematic representations of sensations, of pain or discomfort, a space of pure virtuality—a present that is always a product of a certain past or an as of yet unactualized future. The most poignant of the 12 poems is one representing the passage of time as an act of killing it, with the clock being an instrument of cleaning up the murder scene (Figure 4).

часы вместе со всеми своими стрелками
 маленькая фирма по уборке места преступления
 чистят

ОТМЫВАЮТ
ВОССТАНАВЛИВАЮТ
ВЫНОСЯТ ИЗ НОГ КРАСИВО УПАКОВАННЫЕ ТРУПИКИ ВРЕМЕНИ
В КОНЦЕ РАБОТЫ
СЕКУНДНАЯ СТРЕЛКА СТРЕЛЯЕТ У МИНУТНОЙ СИГАРЕТЫ
ЖАДНО ЗАТЯГИВАЕТСЯ
И ДОКУРИВАЯ
ВТАПТЫВАЕТ ЕЕ В ГОРЛО
СВОЕЙ НЕВИДИМОЙ ПЯТКОЙ (Sen-Senkov 2018b, p. 30)

the clock with all its hands
a small company that cleans up crime scenes
they clean
wash out
restore
carry nicely packaged little corpses of time out of the feet
when the work is done
the second hand bums a cigarette from the minute hand
takes a deep drag
and finishing up
stamps it into the throat
with its own invisible heel (Sen-Senkov 2018a, p. 31; translation modified)

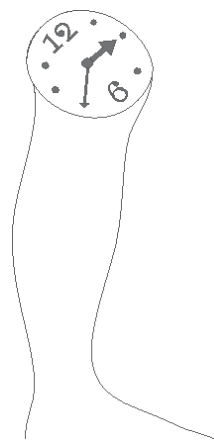


Figure 4. Woodcut from Francesco Segala’s *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.

Little corpses of time are neatly packed up and evacuated from the feet by the clock’s hands. The verbs here emulate the movement of the second hand round the dial while the last breath is a drag it takes on a cigarette which is then stamped into the throat in the final second. The alliteration “стрелка стреляет/*strelka streliat*” [the second hand bums] as well as the semantic suggestiveness of the colloquial term for bumming a cigarette (literally: shoots) add to the overall metaphor. It is, however, unclear whose throat this is—that of the foot whose heel is incidentally also invisible in the picture, or of the second hand itself.

Language once again becomes the place where this very visual, deceptively familiar, and yet utterly staggering scene is taking place. What lies at the centre of this scene, as well as all the other scenes, presented in the poems is pain, abstract, impersonal, and devoid of actualisations.

A different scenario is presented in poem 8 (Figure 5).

нога показывает крылышки
ее слегка трясет
как секунданта протягивающего пистолеты
все это подшерсток события
в котором
ноготок состриженной пули
вылетит в девятнадцатом веке
из нижней конечности
указательного пальца (Sen-Senkov 2018a, p. 95)

this foot is showing its wings
shaking a little
like the second handing over the pistols
this is all just the underwool of an event
in which
the nail of a neatly clipped bullet
in the nineteenth century will fly
out of the lower extremity
of the pointer finger (Sen-Senkov 2018a, p. 96)



Figure 5. Woodcut from Francesco Segala’s *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.

This poem is just as hard to visualise as the previous one, with many intricate folds added to what literally is in the picture—a foot with wings. While in the clock poem,

time is already packaged up in little coffins of past events, here the event of inflicted pain is prefigured; it is virtually real but not yet actualised. This “underwool” of an event—presumably a 19th-century duel—is a certain anticipation that is both a physical trembling and an abstract, visualised extension of this anticipation that gets represented in a sequence of verbal folds that have little to do with material reality. The fingernail of a bullet flying out of the foot of the index finger is nothing but a series of impossible extensions, pointing to what is about to occur without communicating anything whatsoever.

Another poem in the series is even more confounding in its optics (Figure 6).

если смотреть
глазами ноги
на руки
то как в боковом зеркале автомобиля
они ближе чем кажутся
если сбросить скорость и остановится в тихом месте
ноги начнут проникать
в отражения рук
с бижутерией мягких волосков посередине (Sen-Senkov 2018a, p. 56)

if you look
through the foot's eyes
at your hands
it's like in the side mirrors of an automobile
they're closer than they appear
if you slow down and stop somewhere quiet
the feet will start to penetrate
the hands' reflections
with a jeweled cluster of soft little hairs in the middle
(Sen-Senkov 2018a, p. 58, translation modified)

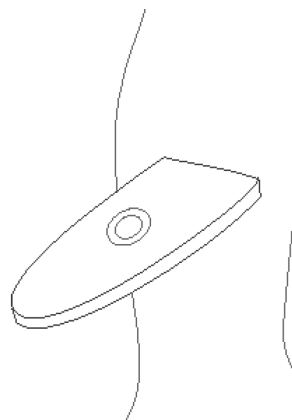


Figure 6. Woodcut from Francesco Segala’s *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.

Mirrors play a significant part in Senkov’s poetry. In Lacan’s terms, reaching the mirror stage of development is about the non-coincidence of our own internal image of ourselves

with what we see in the mirror. In the above scenario, however, something different seems to occur. As the feet's eyes become mirrors by which the hands are seen and in which they are also reflected, the very process of vision closes in on itself, with the feet penetrating the reflections of the hands, becoming both a sensation (hence the little hairs in the middle) and an object of unhurried contemplation akin to a meditative experience. The astounding thing, however, is that this expressive scenario is taking place entirely within the sphere of schematic ideation. These poems really communicate nothing and yet succeed in schematising pure sensation.

The fact that the poems appear not just in their Russian original but in eleven other languages is in itself a statement of profound significance. As said, the mechanisms and tools of such poetry are indeed easily accessible to translators who each in their own language are able to produce yet another part of the infinite series that can stretch as far as the eye can see and further. This poetry is homeless in the fullest sense of the word—it is homeless because it is rooted in the global common place, in fact, in artefact, in cliché, which is to say, no place at all. No matter in what language we read it, it remains confined to this non-place of visibility, both on the near and the far side of representation.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ “Inpossibles can be called (1) the series that diverge, and that from then on belong to two possible worlds. and (2) monads of which each expresses a world different from the other (Caesar the emperor and Adam the nonsinner). The eventual divergence of series is what allows for the definition of impossibility or the relation of vice-diction” (Deleuze 1993).
- ² See Gilles Deleuze. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, tr. T. Conley (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 60.

References

- Blasing, Molly Thomasy. 2013. Slomannye fotografii Dzhona Glessi. In *ULBANDUS XV: Seeing Texts*. Translation of and critical essay on Andrei Sen-Sen'kov. New York: Columbia University.
- Blasing, Molly Thomasy. 2021. *Snapshots of the Soul: Photo-Poetic Encounters in Modern Russian Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. 1964. *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*. Edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. New York: New Directions.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1989. *Cinema 2: Time-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson, and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1990. *The Logic of Sense*. Translated by Mark Lester, and Charles Stivale. London: The Athlone Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1993. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Translated by Tom Conley. London: Athlone Press.
- Edmond, Jacob. 2012. *A Common Strangeness: Contemporary Poetry, Cross-Cultural Encounter, Comparative Literature*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1983. *This Is Not a Pipe*. Translated by James Harkness. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Iampolsky, Mikhail. 2003. *Dzen-Barokko*. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, no. 62.
- Maurizio, Massimo. 2019. *Po(s)le Stikhov: O Nekotorykh Tendetsiakh v Sovremennoi Russkoiazychnoi Poezii (na Materiale A. Sen-Sen'kova i Gruppy "Orbita")*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Sen-Senkov, Andrei. 2003. *Tsarapina Okolo Romeo*. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, no. 62.
- Sen-Senkov, Andrei. 2006. *Zaostrennyi Basketbol'nyi Miach*. Cheliabinsk: Entsiklopediia.
- Sen-Senkov, Andrei. 2010. *Bog, Stradaiushchii Astrofiliei*. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie.
- Sen-Senkov, Andrei. 2013. *Anatomical Theatre; In a Grip of Strange Thoughts*. Translated by Ainsley Morse, and Peter Golub. Brookline: Zephyr Press.
- Sen-Senkov, Andrei. 2018a. *Nogi, im Bol'no*. Cheboksary: Free poetry.
- Sen-Senkov, Andrei. 2018b. *Stikhotvoreniia, Krasivye v Profil'*. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie.
- Skidan, Alexander. 2007. *Poeziia v Epokhu Total'noi Kommunikatsii [Poetry in the Age of Total Communication]*. Available online: <http://www.litkarta.ru/projects/vozdukh/issues/2007-2/skidan/> (accessed on 15 April 2022).

MDPI
St. Alban-Anlage 66
4052 Basel
Switzerland
Tel. +41 61 683 77 34
Fax +41 61 302 89 18
www.mdpi.com

Arts Editorial Office
E-mail: arts@mdpi.com
www.mdpi.com/journal/arts



MDPI
St. Alban-Anlage 66
4052 Basel
Switzerland
Tel: +41 61 683 77 34
www.mdpi.com



ISBN 978-3-0365-6634-4