Chapter 4.

Pragmatics of the Avant-Garde and Life-Creation (Zhiznetvorchestvo). Towards an Interpretation of Avant-Garde creative Behavior

0.0. Introductory Remarks.

In his essay, devoted to the theoretical interpretation of the Avant-Garde (primarily based on Russian sources) Maksim Shapir\(^{753}\) outlined – albeit in the most general terms – his views on the semiotic nature of Avant-Garde art. In interpreting the semiotic foundations of the Avant-Garde, Shapir insisted upon emphasizing the "pragmatics of action", the dissection and promotion of the idea of the Avant-Garde-as-Provocation and the complex deixis for comprehending the use of Gestures by the Avant-Garde. One should not forget that the very etiological definition of pragmatics (from the Greek word prágmatos –act, action) refers directly to the actant/doer and to the actantial representativeness of the function of language. Speaking in general terms, pragmatics studies the potential characteristics of any given sign system seemingly by means of revealing the ineffable, the contextual-behavioral points of this entire sign system. The current chapter will concern itself primarily with materials taken from the “revolutionary” Russian Avant-Garde.\(^{754}\) But it will exclude from this discussion the field of “leftist Life-Building” which followed Avant-Garde life-creation and was developed in the utopian stream of the early-Bolshevik period by Sergei Tretiakov, Nikolai Chuzhak and Alexander Bogdanov on the one hand and the entire “Soviet Constructivist” movement on the other.\(^{755}\)

0.1. Pragmatics of Expression and Deixis as Semiotic Determinants of Avant-Garde Life-Creation

For a possibly more accurate perceiving of Shapir’s work it may be necessary to consider how an understanding of the communicative act is realized, produced and affirmed and how the semiotic reality of sending and receiving of any given (aesthetic) utterance exists. Thus the problem of deixis may be defined as one of the key links of the pragmatics of action for each speech event. Here, deixis is recognized as the contextuality of indicating the very medium in which any speech or speech-creating activity occurs, and more specifically, any act of a verbal-aesthetic nature. The deictic nature of expression is referenced by the physical field (coordinate) positions of real-life circumstances that accompany every communicative act.

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\(^{754}\) The Futurism of Kruchenykh, early Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov I consider a predominantly Extra-Soviet phenomenon originating in the pre-Revolutionary era. The work of Daniil Kharms bears little relation to the “Soviet art” because of its otherworldly (“banned”) quasi-underground nature.

\(^{755}\) For more on this, see Заламбани 2006; Добренко 2001.
Deixis in this sense resembles an analogy to that “gestural” practicality which Shapir addressed in relation to the essence of the Avant-Garde. Not running afield, it should be noted that it was Karl Bühler, who examined this important psychosomatic aspect of the functionality of deixis and addressed the question of the representativeness of utterance in his work. Alluding to its potential suggestiveness, he named this aspect of language theory *demonstratio ad oculos* (moment of the utterance) and deixis towards the imaginary.\(^{756}\) I will return to this Austrian philosopher of language below.

Deciphering what is conveyed in the signs of one or another utterance (Äußerung) depends on the presuppositional “performative deixis quality” which I deem the *internal logic* of meaning for any concrete communicative utterance.\(^{757}\) It is particularly important here to point out two aspects: performativity, that is operational depictiveness or representativeness, and the direct contextuality resulting from this, thereby producing a complete and indispensable associative semantic chain leading to the semiotic discerning and decoding of the reported utterance. I would stipulate that we understand the term “utterance” to mean any contrived, semiotic activity intended as a declarative act of expression for the purpose of successful semiosis.

Performativity in the process of pragmatics suggests and implies that any given utterance is based not entirely upon its verbal component alone.\(^{758}\) Instead it is determined to no small extent by the surrounding, life-based context of the utterance – that is to say, the physical objects which define the effectiveness of the reporting of this utterance and the group of referential clues responsible for the adequacy of its function. This set of factors naturally leads to the problem of the gestural nature of an utterance and to the question of the semiotic effect of any utterance and its potentially transgressive (violative) nature. The non-verbal aspects of man’s lingual behavior, which compose an utterance, thus fall within the purview of an analyst observing the mechanical function of the entire sign-rendering process – the parsing of a transpiring event into signs. Pragmatics, in this regard, should naturally be viewed as perhaps the most important category of semiotics,\(^{759}\) transferring the focus of the operational attention of the researcher directly on “the speaker” and his “perceiving recipient” with all the multi-dimensional life circumstances regulating the “channel” of their symbolic connection. Pragmatics as such focuses on the integrated disclosure of interrelationships of subjects-interpreters within any given sign system.\(^{760}\)

The theory of speech acts, as it was formed in the sixties by employing the legacy of the British philosopher John Austin,\(^{761}\) is renowned today primarily through the research of the Berkeley theoretician John Searle,\(^{762}\) whose ideas today have been

\(^{756}\) See: Бюлер 2000: 119-120.
\(^{757}\) On performativity in particular see for a good introduction such studies as: Robinson 2006 and Grundy 2008.
\(^{758}\) Among the recent general studies on pragmatics see: Adolphs 2008; Burton-Roberts 2007; Bonhomme 2005; Szabó 2005.
\(^{759}\) For the interdisciplinary context see: Cummings 2005.
\(^{760}\) On this see Martin 1974; and several contributions in Weinert 2007.
\(^{761}\) See: Austin 1967.
\(^{762}\) See: Searle 1965: 221-239.
largely subjected to revision by his opponents. According to Austin, the performative utterance proposes a certain category of determinant form of physical efficiency or functionality. In this sense the illocutionary act itself (that, which is defined by the contextuality embedded within the very utterance) does take place. The speaker, as the subject of a speech act, produces an utterance one way or another perceived by the addressee in which the speech act yields the most direct “reportable report”. Depending on the various specific circumstances under which the speech act occurs in reality, we can determine its potential semiotic realization or failure. It is proposed that each “act” (speech or sign action) be considered successful in accordance with its “noticing” and semiotic disclosure. Any utterance noticed by the recipient should be considered successful.

The “painted faces” of the Russian Futurists which Shapir mentions in his work should be evaluated in conjunction with that semiotic effect which they produce on their addressed attendees on Nevsky Avenue within the constraints of real time. The given problem, in my opinion (see note 4), excludes the norm of evaluating the

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764 The addressee’s identification of an utterance on the evaluative true/false vector has no defining significance here. That is to say for confirming the semiotic act it is sufficient to indicate if the act was “noted” and “understood” in the context of a determinate signifying event. The ability to achieve a “true” (intentional) semantic meaning of this act of utterance becomes less important. The city dwellers of St. Petersburg walking along the Nevsky Boulevard did not know and did not understand what was the exact meaning of the peculiar facepainted messages conveyed by Larionov, Zdanevich and Goncharova. This does not prevent us from recognizing the function of semiotic expression of this group of Russian Avant-Garde. The man in the street, who did not possess an exact awareness of Larionov’s and Zdanevich’s concrete semantic intention understood and identified the communicative act transpiring in front of him as significant and worthy of attention. Discussion of “communicative acts” of this kind allows one to remove the traditional true/false opposition in dealing with the semiotic nature of illocutionary in any communicative action. Developing the ideas of Shapir, I conclude that there would seem to be no “empirical truth” for the Avant-Garde aesthetical Pragmatics. There exists only “sign” and “non-sign” in a semiotic sense. This also corresponds to the expression of Joseph Brodsky (taken from Akutagawa), “I have no principles, only nerves…”. The same Brodsky used to say “…there is a Latin saying, it goes: “Fatum non penes, in manus non recite”. In English this means: ‘Fate – is not a penis, don’t grab it with your hands’”. In my opinion, Shapir’s theory of Avant-Garde Pragmatics also helps understand the revolutionary nature of such expressions. “I remember well”, tells Alexander Kobrinsky, “how Maksim Shapir at an Oberiuty conference in the Hermitage Theater in 1990 answered questions following his speech: ‘What is the Avant-Garde?’”. Kobrinsky observes: “pausing briefly to think, M. Shapir shocked a considerable part of his audience (in 1990!) by loudly reciting lines from [the obscene poem] ‘Luka Mudishev’: And only Mudischev was Porfirey
He served his duty in Grozny’s reign
By lifting barbells with his cock
The tsar with laughter he made rock.”
("Один Мудищев был Порфирьй,
При Гроздном службу свою нес
И, хуем поднимая гири,

The Avant-Garde, accordingly exists only in a given concrete moment of time. Its existence depends on destroying the inertia of a reader’s comprehension. It is precisely this radical intention of destroying the addressee’s automated function of speech reception that may be recognized as the primary goal of Avant-Garde Pragmatics as such. Not by coincidence, this phenomenon inspired the Russian Formalists who in a similar manner (Shklovsky) viewed the artistic sign above all else as intended for the elimination of inert automatization and for the creation of a “defamiliarization” effect. (For more on this see Hansen-Löve (Хансен-Леве 2001)).
semantic content of a concrete utterance by a simple true/false test, asserting any reaction as *adequate*. On the other hand, the absence of any “notice” by the recipient, and consequently the absence of any reaction, amounts to nothing else but semiotic failure and a real, strategic miscalculation. In order to succeed, the speech act must be identified as such, otherwise the result for its performer is utter communicative failure.

In the *process of speaking* (that is to say *in locutio*), the performing actant should always produce a physically recognizable, real kind of action having a certain *non-lingual*, non-verbal basis. A similar speech act, approaching its “non-lingual goal”, may be understood as an “illocutionary act”. According to John Searle, who developed and expanded the ideas of Austin, there exists in this speech act an “illocutionary force” which by definition is embedded in the utterance itself. It is precisely this force which, in my opinion, Maxim Shapir addresses when advancing his theoretical issue of unrestrained Avant-Garde pragmatics. Much of the pragmatic *success* of every speech act depends on this illocutionary force. At this point we should make note of the significant term of implicature which should be directly applied here. This important concept of “pragmatics” addresses any *indirect* sign indication that does not arise from an apparent set of information reported in a given utterance.

Implicature directly appeals to the undisclosed amalgam of meanings, accrued in the informational base of each of the engaged actants (in other words, “the speaker” and his “addressee”). Implicature also involves the significant “cooperative principle” which provides the opportunity for each of the interlocutors to participate meaningfully in the communicative act itself. Implicature is by all means the integral component of the illocutionary act. It functions by indicating what is embedded in the physical situation of delivering a statement despite being absent in its verbal form.

Simply put, pragmatics in this regard is the unique substructure of semiotics, transforming each problematic speech act with its “traditional aspects” into a successful one through the engagement of concealed elements in its formal organization. First among such concealed elements, is the *very behavior* of the one who is “producing meanings”, who initiates the process of speaking and who combines with it a “physical dimension” of his life experience.

### 0.2 The Role of Gestures in Life-Creation

The complex issue of “gestural explication” should comprise a separate aspectual basis for the pragmatics of communicative behavior. In Russian semiotics this topic has been researched by Gregory Kreidlin. In a recent work devoted to the concept of gesture and gesticulation Nadezhda Man’kovskaia observes that “gestural utilization in aesthetic discourse is inextricably based in the categorical apparatus of non-classical art”. The attributes of gestural utilization, accordingly, are aesthetic

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65 Distinct from the reported *by means of* speaking – that is, *per locution*.

66 On this see the recent study by the German scholar from Tübingen Alexandra Kallia: Kallia 2007.

shock, contradiction, absurdity and often cruelty. Man’kovskaia attempts to provide “a rough, working definition” of the concept “gestural utilization” which should be defined as “a play device expressing the circumstantial and creative position of the author by artistic/non-artistic means…, by a program, a manifesto, by means of symbolic forms of behavior”.  

In the West this subject has been extensively researched, including its semiotic synthesis, by Julia Kristeva (2004). In her discourse on the composition of gestural semiotics she argues that “it becomes necessary to distinguish the various layers of gestural code. These may be layers which correspond to the layers distinguished in the linguistics of language, or layers which allow us to research the interdependency between speech and gesture”.  

The special branch of science regarding the signs of human language called “Kinesics” plays one of the major roles in this context. Kristeva observes: “…‘Kinesics as a methodology concerns the communicative aspects of memorized and structured body movement as components of human behavior’, wrote the American Kinesiologist Ray Birdwhistell. The essential characteristics and limitations of this new science, located at the intersection of the theory of communication and behaviorism, are based in his definition”.  

0.3. Pragmatics of Life-creation and the concept of a “Kinetic Character” – Literary Author ↔ Hero, existing beyond the bounds of texts

In his research on the complex idea of the “kinetic character” the Amsterdam Slavist and literary theoretician Willem Weststeijn developed a new line of thought on this phenomenon. Weststeijn defines this type of character by a special trait regarding the emergence of the hero’s activity beyond the traditional verbal bounds of that literature in which he was created initially: “…‘kinetic’ characters…exist outside the bounds of the fiction in which they were created; accordingly, they are not fully accessible to us, we can only know them partially.” The researcher further explains his position with the aid of the works of Thomas Docherty, who distinguishes between “static” and “kinetic” characters. According to Weststeijn the “static” character is that one “…whose existence is entirely accounted for in the fiction: this character is simply a function in the plot or design of the whole and cannot step outside the bounds of the fiction”. At the same time, the kinetic character displays a sense of motivation, seemingly “beyond” the text and its rigid boundaries. Moving beyond the printed page, such a character “is able to be absent from the text. This character’s motivation extends beyond that which is merely

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768 See: Маньковская 2008: 471.  
769 See: Кристева 2004: 121. On Birdwhistell see also the good summarizing introductory article by Stephen Jolly: Jolly 2000: 133-139.  
770 See Ibid.  
774 See: Weststeijn 2004: 59
necessary for the accomplishment of the design of the plot, and he or she ‘moves’ in other spheres than the one we are engaged in reading”.

A similar kind of “extra-textuality” of the kinetic character of which Weststeijn and Docherty spoke about, finds an interesting resonance in the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin. I have in mind here the ability of such a character to “supplant” his traditional bounds, seemingly liberate himself from under the influence of the author who created him and move in the direction of a certain kind of aesthetic autonomy. It is worth noting here the French movement of naturalism developed by the Goncourt Brothers and especially Emile Zola. Both the Goncourt Brothers and Zola emphasize the development of a character into someone who is freer in relation to his creator, more physically separate from the conceit and “caprice” of the author, and directed towards the sphere of concrete reality. The presumption by Zola of the closest connection existing between the world of empirical reality and the sphere of the novel seems to be an interesting supplement to Bakhtin’s theory of “independent character”. Zola’s “documentary” characters also are somewhat less dependent on the author because they serve as a stronger tie to the physicality of direct empirical reality in which the author does not actually have the right to intrude.

“Bakhtinian” Dostoevsky and his hero-characters appear here as a kind of secret progeny of the Gogol’ tradition of an author’s particularly “anxious” relationships with the characters and their “freedom” of action. One of the notable Russian scholars on Gogol’, Yuri Mann, writes regarding Dead Souls, “…the poem emphatically develops the concept of an autonomous protagonist, independent from the author’s will. It seems that in no other work of Russian literature of that time was there such a large number of indications supporting a similar impression…” Mann quotes here the characteristic words of the author-narrator (Gogol’) on his hero, Chichikov, “…the device of deliberate movement of the hero who dictates to the author where to take him and what to describe: ‘Here he (i.e. Chichikov – D.I.) is total master; and where he fancies to go, thereto we shall be taken’”.

In the essay “Why Narrators Can be Focalizers and Why it Matters” James Phelan demonstrates how the “omnipotent narrator” becomes in part the main deictic subject of the entire process of “focalization”. In the true spirit of Bakhtin’s theory, Phelan writes about “double-voicing” or “double-vision” – the complex system of focalization pursuing a dual point of view describing what happens. Various schemes of narration are partially applied one on the other, producing a mosaic form of narrative comprised of autonomous and relatively independent “speaking identities”.

Bakhtin’s theory of “character” (or in his terms “hero”), it seems, should not contradict other contemporary interpretations existing in literary criticism of character. The Canadian narratologist Uri Margolin, the author of a whole series of engaging articles on the topic of character, left us with many interesting observations on the ontological nature of the literary hero consisting of the structure:

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775 See:Ibid.
776 See: Манн 2002: 175.
777 Ibid.
778 See: Phelan 2001: 51-64.
text→action→ character: “Within the constructed narrative universe, characters and character-features are not primary; they presuppose other representational elements, such as actions, events and settings which serve as signifiers for them. Character features thus become second level narrative signifieds in the model of text-action-character. The presupposition relation is ontological in nature and asymmetrical”. 780

It may also be added here that the concept of an “independent”, transgressive-kinetic character about whom Willem Weststeijn wrote and what Mikhail Bakhtin developed in his various texts (dialogism, polyphony, multi-voicing, etc.) turns out to be especially pertinent for the studying of modernist Life-Creation. Of the many examples available, two are worth mentioning here – Andrei Belyi who often assumed the role of a literary “character” 781 and Alexander Blok who seemingly “embodied”782 in life his previously conceived poetic form which was related to his “lyrical hero”.

1.0. The case studies of the Russian Avant-Garde life-creation

1.1 Eccentric Character of the Futurist Life-Creation: Aleksei Kruchenykh

The quintessential Avant-Garde figure of Aleksei Eliseevich Kruchenykh is of great use for illustrating the ideas of Shapir. A contemporary of Kruchenykh observed how he related a “speech event” to its poetics of sound and its performative pragmatics: “…Kruchenykh began to read. I started to hear the spells of the village sorcerers. I recorded Russian songs and heard the singing of ecstatic Tadjik singers. And then what happened next, made me visualize everything at once! ...In front of me was the most realistic sorcerer, spinning, swaying harmoniously with the rhythm, stomping his feet,…It seemed unbelievable! It was something marvelous! A kind of synthetic art, expanding the boundaries of traditional literature…” 783

Another contemporary of Kruchenykh, Yuri Denisov also described this magical ability “to animate” poetic text, to transform it into genuine theatrical performance, the sign recognition of which fully depends on the direct behavior of the poet as language-creator. “Transferred to paper, his production at last lost its charm and did not convey the phonetic richness of the language…Kruchenykh read while standing, moving, with mimicry and facial gestures assisting him…:

Taste with the green heel of the water-eye,
Lick off with tongue the cardinal's meal into a napkin!
Dear ones,

781 For more on this see the work of Slavic scholar from the University of Haifa Vladimir Papernyi describing how Belyi "played" a certain scene from Dostoevsky’s Demons portraying himself as Shatov: Паперний 1992: 38-45. See as well Lena Szilard’s pioneering essay: Силард 1982: 80-107.
782 See my recent work devoted to this: Ioffe 2008: 19-47.
783 “Крученых начал читать. Мне приходилось слышать заговоры деревенских колдунов. Я записывал русские песни и внимал пению таджикских гафизов. И вот то, что произошло тогда, заставило меня вспомнить всё это сразу!... Передо мной был самый настоящий колдун, вертелся, покачивавшийся в такт ритму, притоптывавший, завораживающее выпевавший согласные, в том числе и шипящие. Это казалось невероятным! Это было нечто удивительное! Какое-то синтетическое искусство, раздваивающее рамки привычной словесности…”. See: Молдавский 1994: 162.
In his work on life-creating behavior and contrived performative activity Benedict Livshits wrote about Kruchenykh: “Only the label of madman, which gradually was transformed from a metaphor into a permanent, official title for the Futurist could allow Kruchenykh, without risk of being hacked to pieces, to fling a cup of hot tea into the first row of the audience. Shrieking all the while that ‘our tails have been dyed yellow’, Kruchenykh proclaimed that he, in contrast ‘to the unrecognized pink corpses, will fly away to the Americas, since he forgot to hang himself’. The audience already could not ascertain where “transreason” (“zaum”) ended and insanity began”.

In his introduction to the new edition of Kruchenykh’s texts, S. Krasitsky observed: “…Life-Creation is the decisive, revolutionary transformation of reality – for this was the ultimate objective of Futurism – the goal unconditionally justified the means as the ‘Futurists’ themselves believed. It is unimportant what was the reaction of the despicable philistine (laughter, contempt, indignation, patronizing disgust, a desire to teach the ‘knights of the green mule’[786] a ‘lesson with the help of the law’[787]). All that mattered was that there be a reaction. ‘The horror of Msrs. Chukovsky, Red’ko and Filosofov before the swineophiles pleases me’, Kruchenykh wrote, ‘Yes, we are dispensing with your beauty and reason, woman and life. Call us bandits, laggards, hooligans!’…And therefore much in the Futurist practice was done on the principles of ‘Yours!’; ‘Here!’; henceforth – the clearly hypertrophied anthropocentrism of many futurists (the ‘I’ principle) was to be”.

784 “…перенесенная на бумагу, его продукция, конечно же, теряла свою прелесть, не передавала фонетического богатства языка... Читал Крученых стоя, в движении, помогал себе мимикой, лицедейством... Закусывайте зеленой пяточкой морского водоглаза, Слизните языком в салфетке кардинальский обед! ДорогиFАKKА, ДырwбулwщикиFАKKАFАKKА, Уюwюнки – Глотайте из бобовой рюмочки душистый ИЗОВАТС!” See: Денисов 1994: 155.

785 “Только звание безумца, которое из метафоры постепенно превратилось в постоянную графу будлянского паспорта, могло позволить Крученых, без риска быть искрошенным на мелкие части, в тот же вечер выплеснуть в первый ряд стакан горячего чаю, пропищав, что ‘наши хвосты расцвечены в желтое’ и что он в противоположность ‘неузнанным розовым мертвецам, летит к Америкам, так как забыл повеситься’. Публика уже не разбирала где кончается заумь и начинается безумие”. See: Лившиц 2007: 142. On zaum, in particular see Janecek 1996; for additional performative aspects of zaum see: Иванов 2000: 263-278.

786 “Green mule” corresponds to the scandalizing practice of the early Futurist public evenings. The participants were strangely fascinated with the image of “mule” or “donkey” (“осел”). They considered this animal creature to be particularly useful for their teasing performing strategy. The newspapers were usually giving scandalous titles referring to these Futurist performances. The corresponding titles were: “Amusing chaps”, “Performance of the Red-haired”, “Clowns in literature”, “Knights of the donkey’s tail”, “Grimacing the literature”, “Evening of jesters”, “Futurist Sabbath”, “Who’re the crazy ones – the Futurists or the public?” etc., (“Забавники”, “Выход рыжих”, “Клоуны в литературе”, “Рыцари ослиного хвоста”, “Литературное кривлянье”, “Вечер скоморохов”, “Розовое мордобитие”, “Шабаш футуристов”, “Рыцари зеленого осла”, “Спектакль футуристов: Кто сумасшедшие – футуристы или публика?”, “Спектакль душевнобольных”, On this see Markov 1968: 38-39; see also: Дядичев 2006: 5-17.

788 From the beginning of the Krasitsky’s quote: “Жизнетворчество, решительное, революционное преобразование действительности – такова была сверхзадача футуризма, – цель, безусловно,
The universal concept of “materiality of word”, the various forms of its substantiation and, as a result of this, the performative-phonetic liberation of poetic text beyond the traditional bounds of conventional literature greatly fascinated Kruchenykh. Krasitsky remarked that “Kruchenykh first applied the concept of technique (‘faktura’) to literature, and this concept was one of the vital ideas in his theory. Technique characterizes the peculiarities of combining diverse elements of text and, accordingly, may manifest itself on different levels”.

As Krasitsky recounts, Kruchenykh distinguishes several discrete, nontraditional types or “levels” of interpreting the poetic word and poetic speech: “Kruchenykh distinguished the following kinds of technique: *phonetic, *syllabic, *rhythmic, *semantic, *syntactical, *graphic rendering, *coloring, *reading”.

The scholar emphasizes that the reference here is to those extraordinary, multi-layered aspects which Kruchenykh offers for perceiving the new poetic work. Krasitsky observes that “the impression is given, that Kruchenykh appeared as if so tightly bound within the traditional constraints of literature, that he constantly attempts to extract literary texts from the confines of their previous existence, trying to establish for them a new, original context. This was characteristic as well of the books being published in the 1920’s – the Phonetics of theatre, sound tracked movies, etc”.

Commenting in approximately the same manner on Kruchenykh’s defiance of traditional forms of literary text, Vasilii Katanyan remarked, “As it seemed to me, Aleksei Eliseevich modulated his speech in an utterly stunning way. He raised and lowered his voice, accelerated and decelerated his pronunciation, declaimed individual words and skipped over – or more accurately swallowed – entire phrases. If we were to use music terminology, his tessitura (texture) was the broadest possible, distant tonalities improbably converged, unexpected modulations astounded, sharp staccato replaced legato, his cutting arro (burs) were brief and compelling. Moving to film terminology, the rhythm of juxtaposing wide and standard shots with frighteningly tight ones held his audience in constant tension… I recall the story of Ilia Zdanevich regarding one riposte of ‘Kruch’ in a dispute concerning ‘Bubnovy Valet’ (‘Jack of Diamonds’) which elicited a storm of applause. During a pause in a speech by Tugenkhold when the lector reached for a carafe, Kruchenykh loudly, one would even say dramatically, and BLARINGLY YAWNED, perhaps even clicking his teeth like a partially stirring dog in heat swallows a fly….”

See: Красицкий 2001: 11.

790 Quote according to Красицкий (2001: 22).
792 “Алексей Елисеевич совершенно изумительно – как мне казалось... – держал речь. Он поднимал и опускал голос, убыстрял и замедлял произношение, выкрикивал отдельные слова и проговаривал или, лучше сказать, проглатывал целые фразы. Если говорить словами музыкальной терминологии, тесситура была максимально широка, далёкие тональности...”
important to underscore that the personal habits of Kruchenykh, which I consider to be willfully “deviant” and conceptually transgressive in comparison to the predominant standards of personal behavior, remained the same for the entire life of the Avant-Garde artist. Kruchenykh behaved this way in the twenties and continued to conduct himself in such an eccentric and shocking manner in the forties and fifties. This explains my equal use of eyewitness accounts of contemporaries with regard to Kruchenykh’s behaviour from the forties and fifties. Unfortunately several other sources dating from the stormy twenties – the “heroic” years of the age of the Futurists’ Sturm und Drang – are far less detailed.

Elena Vialova-Vasilieva recounted how an unusual, jovial evening of the Futurists featuring “carrots”, “stockings” and other “defamiliarizing” elements of Futurist dress unfolded. Reminiscing about the event, Vasilieva recalled: “I first saw Aleksei Eliseievich in 1926 or 1927 in Leningrad, when I was still a school girl. I somehow noticed, while passing the House of Publishing, a large poster advertising a Futurist evening. When I entered the hall it was full and everyone was anxiously awaiting the appearance of the artists scheduled to perform. Suddenly and with great commotion the door opened wide and several people entered loudly, stamping between the rows of people. At the front was Mayakovsky, and what struck me was that two carrots, with the greens still on them, poked out of his breast pocket and instead of a tie, something resembling a lady’s stocking dangled around his neck. The event began when suddenly there was a piercing whistle backstage and a man of average height emerged. Stomping his feet and swinging his arms, he began to read. It was Kruchenykh. What he read was something totally incomprehensible to me and I left the hall utterly confused in complete bewilderment…” 793 In this story we have an archetypal example of Futurist performance, accumulating in its structure all the necessary elements of Avant-Garde behavioral pragmatics.

The multi-dimensional activity of Kruchenykh neatly fits the Life-Creation paradigm of forming a semiotic platform with the aid of extra-verbal behavioral norms, completely related to the sphere of aesthetics that employ an entire system of external gestures. As another memoirist, Mikhail Skuratov, wrote, “his face was set in constant nervous contortions and seemed even pallid to me... in life his face
projected, more than anything, an image which his friend Pavel Vasiliev had tartly used to describe him: ‘a small demon in human form’. There was something in his appearance, in his gait – he always walked with one shoulder jutting out to the side – and in all of his movement, a perpetually agitated walk that was truly impish. There was always the possibility of expecting some kind of assault in his speech, in his actions, something sharp, biting, sarcastic, challenging, aggressive…That was the kind of person he was in the twenties, the thirties and the ensuing years, right up to the end of his indefatigable life…” 794

Lidia Lebedinskaia remarked that “… Kruchenykh always ran – along the street, in the courtyard, down a corridor, around a room. Sitting in one place was obviously a form of torture for him because he even drank and ate standing up… when he stayed to dine or lunch it was an entire ritual. First, he would toast his bread on the gas range and when there was no gas on a kerosene stove. He would dry the dishes with wadding soaked in manganese. For tea he would insist that teapot be brought to such a boil that the lid popped off. In our house we’d say: ‘Boil it a la Kruchenykh!’…On freezing cold days he would leave the house with a mouthful of hot water, so as to avoid speaking on the street and catching cold in his throat, and would not swallow it until he arrived again in the warmth of the indoors. Mama said that Kruchenykh wore a yellow jacket and a carrot in his lapel…” 795

Lev Ozerov described another curious habit of Kruchenykh, presupposing utterly unique, truly “creative”, inventive-aesthetical gestures in relation to the process of eating: “…It was the end of the war. We were dining in the Central House of Writers, in the Oak Room. They brought appetizers and compote, the beginning and ending courses of the meal. Aleksei Eliseevich was impatient. He placed a herring in the compote. ‘What are you doing?’ I not really asked but exclaimed. ‘I’m doing it the correct way; in the end they will both be melded together in my stomach – the herring and the compote. I’m racing ahead of the process. This ‘outpacing’ (of time and conventionality) is the duty of every self-respecting artist, or even more accurately I’m pre-consum-ing. Meditate on this word, try to rip it from its root. Tear it from the root!’ These were the things we did in our youth. He was a child, a lad. A prankster until the end of his days. He did not grow up. With time this

794 “…лицо его было в каких-то постоянных нервных подергиваниях, и даже, мне казалось изможденным. … в жизни облик его отвечал скорее тому определению, которое язвительно давал ему его друг Павел Васильев: бес в образе человека. Что-то и в его облике, и в его походке, – а ходил он всегда выпирая одно плечо, боком, – и во всех его подвижностях, вечно суетящейся походке было поистине бессовское, и всегда можно было от него ожидать и в речах, и в поступках какого-нибудь выпада, нечто резкого, колкого, саркастического, вызывающего, воинственного… Таков он был и в 20-х годах, и в 30-х и в последующих годах, до конца своей неземной жизни…”. See: Скуратов 1994: 103-104.

795 “Крученых всегда бежал – по улице, по двору, по коридору, по комнате. Сидеть на месте для него, очевидно, было мучением, потому что даже пил и ел он стоя. … когда он оставался отобедать или отужинать, то это была целая церемония. Хлеб он предварительно обжигал на газе, а в те времена, когда газа еще не было, - на керосинке; посуду протирал ваткой, намоченной в марганцовке. А от чая требовал, чтобы тот кипел ключом и крышка на чайнике обязательно прыгала. У нас в доме так и говорили: Кипит по круженьковски!!!. В морозные дни, чтобы не разогревать на улице и не застудить горло, он выходил из дома, держа во рту глоток гоющей воды и не заглаживал ее до тех пор пока не оказывался снова в теплом помещении. … Мама рассказывала, что в молодости Крученых носил желтую кофту и морковь в петлице…”. See: Лебединская 1994: 209.
mischievousness became even more evident. He became impoverished but still played pranks”. Such naughtiness must be viewed within the same context of Life-Creation pragmatics of signaling even “neutral” everyday objects in the human environment. Practically nothing in the Avant-Garde (Futurist) experience can truly be viewed as semiotically “neutral” and practically everything in this kind of aesthetic pragmatics was primarily focused on “semiosis”.

Describing the Life-Creation pragmatics arrangement of Kruchenykh’s home life, Viacheslav Nechaev recalled it as one founded on the laws of total eccentric expressiveness: “There were rags of indeterminate color right on the window instead of curtains. Many were cast off during the day so that the small vent window could be opened. There were piles of books and folders, bound and lying on the floor, from the bed to the window. At the top of the pile in the middle of the room was a tall bookcase, smothered with books and covered at the top with a zinc wash-tub. You could only reach the bookcase by crawling over the stacks. The corner of a table, covered with yellowing papers, poked out from a mound of books. This was the poet’s lair – the realm of Turkish delight, boxes of honey spice cookies, packets of sugar, two mugs and medicines. It was here that we typically gathered to drink tea. I would decline the tea but, so as not to offend the host, would nosh on the spice cookies. Kruchenykh would dip the cookies into his mug, drink them with the hot tea and begin to eat”.

According to Nechaev, the most essential feature of Kruchenykh’s home life was the continual process of “playing-the-fool” and eccentric oddball-ism: “Kruchenykh’s ticks knew no end. He would throw curds into boiling water and only after five minutes or so would he begin to eat. You would catch Kruchenykh doing laundry; he would boil it in a small saucepan on the edge of which was a piece of soap. One of the ladies who visited him once offered to clean up his flat to which Kruchenykh responded in a mumble something to the effect that he wouldn’t even let...
her dust the place. His primary goal in life, in the life of a Futurist, it seemed was to shock society with his behavior.”

The idea of a “flat”, and communal apartment living in general, is very important in understanding the daily expressiveness which Kruchenykh constructed through his behavior and which directly corresponded to his literary texts. A friend who lived on his floor, Yunna Tutova-Sen’kina recalled exactly how the room of the poet was “organized”. She described Kruchenykh’s extraordinary and startling property there and the prominent role the countless books played which, one can suppose, were the pre-eminent source of interest for the poet. Tutova-Sen’kina tells: “Aleksei Eliseevich’s room was not so large and was dominated by bookshelves. It was astounding…since no repairs had been done to the apartment for several years the large window was covered with some kind of fabric so that the books did not fade in the sun. Only a small square of the window pane remained uncovered. Along the entire room there were shelves and stands with books. Part of the stands had warped and many books had fallen on the floor. The racks were also covered within fabric, paper and dust. Books were everywhere. The floor, which could not be seen, concealed items and clothing from which mountains of books rose upward. A path had been cleared out from the door to the window for which the layer of books seemed shallower. There was also a table where he sometimes ate. When on occasion various personalities came to pay a visit he memorialized their entire visit. ‘This is where so-and-so sat, and here is where what’s-his-name ate and drank.’ I once wanted to clear the table, but Aleksei Eliseevich screamed in horror, ‘Impossible! Never! Don’t you know that so-and-so sat there and ate this-and-that, and ate from this can, and drank from this cup’…”

Under such an organizational system it would seem that the boarder of this room was superfluous. In such a “confined” structure, which was the framework of his living space, there remained little for Kruchenykh to do and so it was not surprising that the poet used any opportunity available to escape the confines of his so oddly configured residence. Continuing her story, Tutova-Sen’kina recalled, “there was no place for himself in the room. It was utterly impossible to live there. He was obligated to either sit in the kitchen, if nobody was home, or in the summertime sit on...

798 “Чудачествам Крученых не бывает конца. То в кипящую воду он бросит творожный сыр и только после этого, минут через пять, начинает его есть. То застаешь Крученых за стиркой белья: в маленькой кастрюле он кипятит белье, на верху которого лежит кусок мыла. Кто-то из женщин, навещавших его, предложил убрать в комнате. В ответ Крученых невнятно пробормотал что-то, но так и не дал даже стереть пыль. Думается, что эпатировать во всем было главным в его жизни, жизни футуриста”. See: Нечаев 1994: 178.

799 “Комната у Алексея Елисеевича была небольшая и вся заставленна стеллажами. Она была удивительна... Кроме того, что много последних лет в ней не делался ремонт, очень большое окно было затянуто какой-то тканью – чтобы книги не выгорали. Из всей площади этого окна был оставлен только маленький квадратик для света. Вдоль всей комнаты были полки и стеллажи с книгами. Часть стеллажей покосилась многие книги попадали на пол. Стеллажи тоже были покрыты тканью, бумагой и пылью. Книги были везде. Пола видно не было, хорошо под собой вещи и одежду, высыпались горы книг. Была проложена тропинка от двери до окна, на ней слой книг был как бы меньше. Еще был столик, за которым он когда-то ел, но в разное время к нему приходили разные знаменитости, и он превратил все это в музей: – Вот здесь сидел такой-то, вот тут ел и пил тот-то. Хотела я как-то убрать на этом столике, но Алексеей Елисеевич в ужасе закричал: Нельзя! Нельзя! Ведь здесь сидел и ел такой-то, а из этой банки ел... а из этой чашки пил...”. See: Тутова-Сенькина 1994: 139.
a bench in the courtyard with a book or walk to the Lenin Library... Once Aleksei Eliseevich paid us a visit and said that Roman Jakobson and his wife had been his guests that day. Fully understanding his housing situation, I was surprised that he had invited them both into his flat. His answer to this was rather cheery, ‘nobody was in the (communal) apartment so I brought them into the kitchen’. He said that Jakobson’s wife was very young and pretty, she tried to race into the room but he explained to her that women were forbidden to enter and that men really shouldn’t either. Kruchenykh loved dates, raisins, apples. He ate them primarily because of his strong belief in the omnipotence of vitamins. Of course, he did not want to die and always paid for the apartment many months ahead figuring that if the flat was paid for then death would pass him by...”.

One should also note and highlight the important general norms of Avant-Garde “unconventionality” in the psychological complex of Aleksei Kruchenykh’s multi-faceted behavior that seemed to be based on a single “mandated” formula geared towards eccentricism, deviancy and epatage. As we have seen, the rather large emphasis of his contemporaries on such behavior leads to the conclusion that the behavioral structure of the activities of first generation Russian Avant-Garde Futurists was designed for the purpose of total semiotic provocation through the constant practice of “shock”- inducing actions. It was this behavioral practice of the Avant-Garde that Shapir addressed in his work as the quintessential element for understanding the corresponding pragmatics of artistic text.

1.2 Velimir Khlebnikov: The Dervish of Life-Creation

The interplay between the daily behavior of Khlebnikov and his artistic creativity should be justly emphasized in any discussion devoted to the topic of the “Oriental Life-Creation” of the poet. In my opinion, the behavioral practices of Khlebnikov may be included within the phenomenon of Avant-Garde pragmatics and Life-Creation that we are examining. These behavioral strategies of Khlebnikov also relate in part to the aesthetic-behavioral phenomenon known as “life-building”.

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800 “В результате, самому ему места в комнате не осталось. Жить там было совершенно невозможно. Он вынужден был или сидеть в кухне, если дома никого не было, или летом, на лавочке во дворе с книгой, или ходил в ленинскую библиотеку. ... Однажды Алексей Елисеевич пришел к нам в гости и рассказал, что днем у него в гостях был Роман Якобсон с женой. Очень хорошо зная обстановку, в которой он живет, я удивилась, как же он решился пустить их в свою комнату. На это Алексей Елисеевич ответил очень весело: В квартире никого не было, я их принимал на кухне. Говорил, что жена Якобсона, очень молодая и красивая, все порывалась попасть в комнату, но он объяснил ей, что женщинам туда входить нельзя, да и мужчинам- не следовало бы... Крученых очень любил финики, изюм, яблоки. Он ел их ещё и потому, что твердо был уверен во всемогуществе витаминов. Он, конечно, не хотел умирать и всегда платил за квартирку на много месяцев вперед, считая, что если уплачено, то смерть за ним не придет...”. See: Тютова-Сенькина 1994: 138-40.

The material examined below allows one to peer into the geography of Khlebnikov’s life and literary experience through the prism of the author’s biographical myth which exerted direct influence on all the creative work of the poet. As is well-known, the sixteen-month “respite” of Khlebnikov in Kharkov towards the end of August 1920 when the poet was observed, besides other things, in the local psychiatric hospital (“Saburova Dacha”), obviously exhausted him to the core. The purpose of Khlebnikov’s wandering was to lead him to a new plane of experience, which is how the author arrived in the Orient.

It has been confirmed through documents that the Kharkov Board of Political Education dispatched Khlebnikov on a paid, government trip to Baku and Astrakhan. At the end of October, 1920 Khlebnikov arrived in Baku. A group of Russian writers gathered there including V. Ivanov, S. Gorodetskii and A. Kruchenykh. Khlebnikov’s path lay even farther – in Iran, in the provinces of Gilan and Gulistan.

Upon his arrival in Gilan, Khlebnikov began to write the poem “Tyrant Without the ‘T’” which was first entitled “The Trumpet of the Gul’ Mullah”. Practically every researcher of “Tyrant Without the ‘T’” has seen in this text a concrete, biographical (and at the same time a poetic, allegorical) diary of Khlebnikov’s period in Gilan. As one biographer noted, “the stay in Persia with all its challenges of the road and wanderings was one of the brightest and happiest moments in the poet’s life”. We can agree with this assessment even now, albeit with some reservation.

Khlebnikov’s lifestyle in his Baku and Gilan periods remained virtually unchanged from before. The indigent “wandering”, so important in the dervish culture, was manifested for example in the total disregard to personal dress and appearance, comfort and money that was characteristic of Khlebnikov. As recounted by O. Spektor in her work on Khlebnikov’s period in KavRosta, “Khlebnikov’s way of life in KavRosta was highly eccentric (…) He walked to a canteen for meals where he did not eat but gnawed on large amounts of grain, leaving the impression that he could eat it to no end. At night he went to bed in the office on a large table among unfinished posters of distemper paint and assorted rubbish”.


804 Khlebnikov was subjected to “experimental-physiological research”, diagnosed as schizophrenia (see Андреевский 1935). Johannes von Guenther wrote about the “abnormality” of the poet still in the period of “Wednesday-nights” of Viacheslav Ivanov (Guenther 1969: 209-210).


810 “КавРостовское существование его (Хлебникова) было весьма своеобразно (…) Ходил обедать в столовку, где не съедал, а пожирал должные порции пшена, так что создавалось
The same topic also exists in the memoirs of Lili Brik where she briefly described her visit to Baku, “Khlebnikov had no money, only one shirt and torn pants with a fringe. I had no idea where he lived. He came to our place in winter for some reason in a summer coat and blue from the cold. We sat with him in a carriage and went to Mandel’s Store (prêt-a-porter) to buy a winter coat. He tried on everything and chose an old-fashioned but stylishly quilted one with an upturned collar as a shawl. I gave him three more rubles for a hat and went about my business, but instead of buying a cap he spent all the money of course in a Japanese store on some brightly-colored tablecloths and brought them to me as a present. He had seen them in the store window and liked them”.

It was no other than the famous Symbolist elder poet Viacheslav Ivanov who busied himself with the regulation of finances for Khlebnikov “the-wanderer”. Ivanov “constantly worried about him and even withheld his salary for safekeeping and doled it out sparingly (even adding to it from his own money inevitably) – since Khlebnikov either lost money or gave it to beggars or bought sweets with it”.

Lidia Ivanova, the daughter of Ivanov and L.D. Zinovieva-Annibal who was in Baku at the time, paints an image of the impoverished poet, decked out in a “leather sheepskin coat, wrapped in a ram’s hide with a fur hat”, wearing “some strange footwear on his feet”. M. Altman, who wrote down his conversations with Ivanov in Baku, once saw Khlebnikov there walking around tousled, shaggy, unwashed with long, uncombed hair and a matted beard. T. Vechorka (Tolstaia) also recounted the outward appearance of Khlebnikov from that period, “His appearance was odd and ridiculous, but altogether sculptural. Tall, with an enormous head and reddish, matted hair; Khlebnikov wore a quilted jacket with tape instead of buttonholes on his shoulders; and unbound gaiters on his legs. Bedraggled and underdressed, he appeared to be a deserter(...). His hair lay in clumps on his shoulders, like oakum in grease – and a weak-willed, dusky air settled on his mouth ...”. And further on she continues, “I recall an ‘eyewitness’ story about Khlebnikov’s bathing ritual. He turned the water on at the faucet and stood for a long time, watching. Then
cautiously he extended two fingers and washed his eyelashes and nose with water. Then he turned off the faucet and dried himself with a towel”. 816

In her memoirs, republished in expanded form by A.E. Parnis, 817 T. Vechorka mentioned A. Borodin’s obituary “On Velimir Khlebnikov” (*Baku Worker* [*“Бакинский Рабочий”*], July 16, 1922): “During his time in Baku from 1919 to the beginning of 1922, Khlebnikov’s condition greatly deteriorated. He walked around only partially shoed, partially dressed, unwashed, uncombed and unfailingly hungry. This kind of Diogenes-like existence was almost a matter of principle… In general, he was a towering, grown child or quasi-mendicant saint who required constant care. I recall how they once brought him to Persia ‘for feeding’. They washed and dressed him. Upon his arrival in Anzali he left for somewhere and returned in the same rags with a talisman gripped in his hand. Several hours later a beggar girl asked him for some money, and in dramatic fashion he gave her his entire fortune, in one moment becoming even more impoverished than she… In the mountains they treated him with the utmost respect, fed him and called him ‘Urus-Dervish’ (“The Russian Dervish”). 818

The basic text of “Tyrant Without the ‘T’” (alternatively known as “The Trumpet of the Gul’ Mullah”) was completed, by all indication, in a couple of months following the poet’s departure from Persia in the fall of 1921 for Piatigorsk. Like practically all of Klebnikov’s texts, this poetic work has no one single “definitive” version. 819 The poem exists in several manuscript forms. 820 One of these versions, published by Stepanov in the first volume of Khlebnikov’s “Collection of Works” 821 may be viewed as the draft redaction of a poem. Later, Stepanov acquired and published a second, more complete and “finished” manuscript. 822 The text of this final redaction, entitled “The Dervish of Anzali”, 823 is considered more accurate than the former.

816 “Видом он (Хлебников) был нелеп, но скульптурен. Высокий, с громадной головой в рыжеватых, заношенных волосах; с плеч – простеганный ватник-хаки, с тесемками вместо пуговиц; на длинных ногах – разматывающиеся обмотки. Оборванный, недоодетый, он казался дезертиром (...) Волосы лезли склоченно, как пакля в масле – и на плечах, и на рот – безвольный и тусклый... …Я вспомнила рассказ ‘очевидца’ об умывании Хлебникова: пущена вода из крана. Хлебников долго стоит и смотрит. Потом осторожно вытягивает два пальца и смачивает себе водой ресницы и нос. Потом закрывает кран и утирается платком”. See: Вечорка 1925: 22, 28.


818 “В бытность свою в Баку (в 1919– начале 1920, Хлебников сильно опустился. Он ходил полубосой, полуодетый, немытый, нечесанный и вечно голодный. Это донгостойство было почти принципиальным... В общем, это был громадный, взрослый ребенок или полусвятой бессеребренник, за которым был нужен постоянный уход. Помню, однажды его повезли в Персию “на кормежку”. Его обмыли, одели. По приезде в Энзели он ушел куда-то и вернулся в прежнем тряпье с зажатым в руке тумановиком. Несколько часов спустя нищая девочка попросила у него милостыню. Хлебников долго стоит и смотрит. Потом осторожно вытягивает два пальца и смачивает себе водой ресницы и нос. Потом закрывает кран и утирается платком”. Quoted via Парнис 1996: 98.


822 See: Хлебников 1936: 239-252.

823 See: Хлебников 1936: 491.
V.P. Grigoriev and A.E. Parnis suggested\(^824\) that the author’s work on the poem did not end in Piatigorsk and Baku in the fall of 1921, but continued in Moscow in 1922. The two researchers discovered the fragment of Khlebnikov’s final copy of the poem with the title “Tyrant Without the ‘T’” and the subtitle “Meeting”. It is relatively easy to see that the title of the poem can be deciphered as \textit{Iran} and, as much as one can judge by Khlebnikov’s drafts of the “starry language”\(^825\) the “extra” letter “T” may be taken to signify certain “pauses in movement”, accompanied by “the destruction of the ray of life”\(^826\).

The author of the poem strives to impart his impressions of the anthropological and topographical realities of an environment that is new to him. The common thread throughout the Khlebnikov narratives in “Tyrant Without the ‘T’”, in my opinion, is the unimpeded contemplation of readily tangible existence, combining therein the memory of ancient culture with the living reality of contemporary culture. The lyrical hero (apparently the author himself), dressed in tattered robes, wanders the roads of Persia and consumes what God has sent him (from berries to tiny fish). The “Aborigines”, i.e. the local Muslim inhabitants (Sufis) give Khlebnikov the nickname \textit{gul’-mullah}, which he himself translates as “saint of flowers” (The Persian word \textit{Gul’}→\textit{gol} means “flower” in general and “rose” more specifically). The local Muslims reverentially call him the “Russian Dervish” – \textit{urus dervish}. As V.F. Markov observes, what happens in the process of forming semantical structure of this autobiographical Iranian poem is the specific intertwining and detailing of metaphoric imagery, attesting to the “absorption” of the poet in that geographical and ideological material about which he writes.\(^828\) In Markov’s opinion, what aids this process from a compositional point of view is the parsing of the text into specific fragments-passages and paragraph-segments in each of which a special narrative style prevails. What is characteristic of this kind of narrative is not so much a focus on individual forms but an emphasis of a certain general sense of “movement”, the elusive “interflow” of one subject into another, which is made possible through phonetic and semantic juxtaposition.\(^829\) A distinct and most notable issue for us is the use by Khlebnikov of an “Iranian subtext” from which the poet often borrowed common Turkish expressions\(^830\) of one kind or another.

In the text of the poem, Khlebnikov accepts not without proud delight the name of \textit{urus dervish} (“urus daervis”). In his text: “From behind the fence the little boy called out to me, ‘Urus Dervish, dervish urus!’”. At the time of his voyage in the province of Gilan, Khlebnikov sold his frockcoat (which had been with him since his days in Baku) and was parted from other clothing. R.P. Abikh recalled, “Having lost his frock-coat, hat, and boots and dressed in a baggy shirt and pants worn on his bare body, he had the appearance of a harried bum. But the long hair, the spirituality

\(^{824}\) See: Хлебников 1986: 686.
\(^{825}\) On this see Перцова 2000: 359-371.
\(^{826}\) See: Хлебников 1928 V: 208-209.
\(^{828}\) See: Markov 1962: 161, 162, 163, 166.
\(^{829}\) See: Markov 1962: 172, 177.
of his face and the sight of a man not from this world led the Persians to give him the nickname, ‘dervish’ (wandering monk)”. The role of the eccentric, mendicant wanderer easily finds its place in the Iranian narrative tradition. Add to that the long hair and a typically distant, contemplative look recalling that of a poet to all his contemporaries. It is no surprise that the inhabitants of Gilan considered Khlebnikov a member of an indigent brotherhood of marginalized Sufis more commonly known as Dervishes.

The symbolic introduction of the poem recounts the descent of the “saint of flowers” – the lyrical hero of Khlebnikov – into a picturesque valley. This image is then split in two as the reader sees before him a long-haired prophet and a white swan – a bird with broken wings and a bloodied head having fallen to earth from the heavens (Poem’s Fragment № 2). Khlebnikov’s initial arrival in Anzali is extensively described in the poem. The ensuing narrative also reflects real events – the enlistment of Khlebnikov in the Red Army brigade headed for Gilan and Mazandaran, and even the episode with the Khan (Fragment 15) has a reality-based subtext. Despite the various types of description presented in different sections of the poem (from epic tableaus to miniature cameos), its unity of form is supported by a penetrating “emotional tone” and credibility of the general outline of the narrative: from the beginning – the arrival in Anzali – to the departure from Gilan on board a ship.

In Khlebnikov’s diary-style narrative strategy, A. Alexandrov observed the continuation of the poet’s long standing focus on the “chronicling” of poetic text, supported by the famous remark of Khlebnikov in 1919, “I implore future artists to keep accurate diaries of their soul: to gaze upon themselves like they would on the heavens and to keep accurate notes on the rising and setting of their spirits’ stars …”. The diary-like genre of the poem that I analyze here and the “Life-Building” principle of Khlebnikov’s Gilan sojourn are also emphasized by Stepanov: “…It was in Iran to be certain that Khlebnikov attempted to realize in a practical manner that kind of lifestyle, free from the constraints of civilization, which he constantly strove to achieve. He led the life of that ‘dervish’ (‘gul’-mullah’) which he depicted in his autobiographical poem ‘The Trumpet of Gul’-Mullah’, which Khlebnikov apparently began to write during his time in Iran as a travel journal”.

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835 See: Марков 1962: 161-162
837 “Заклинаю художников будущего вести точные дневники своего духа: смотреть на себя как на небо и вести точные записи восхода и захода звезд своего духа”. Хлебников 1986: 37. See also: Александров 1985: 176, compare 174-175.
In other sources, N.I. Khardzhiev emphasizes the use of an autobiographical leitmotif that was characteristic for Khlebnikov. What Borodin calls “Diogenesism” is described in the marginalized behavior renowned from the time of antiquity and colorfully exhibited by Diogenes the Cynic. In Arabian popular lore, this type of individual is embodied in the fabled character of Bahlul (a jester, joker, clown), having lived allegedly at the time of Harun ar-Rashid (at the beginning of the 9th Century). The individual associated with this behavioral type and having freed himself from social convention, is called mag’dub, “enraptured or drawn (to God)” [not to be confused with “mag’nun” – “deranged, crazy”]. Gripped by a mystical vision or any other ecstatic experience, the mag’dub seemingly loses control of reason and appears before people in a form that is forbidden by Law. The mag’dub can easily appear in a public place completely naked, shout obscenities or merely abuse onlookers.

One can also read about Khlebnikov’s life in Azerbaijan and Persia (Iran) in the fascinating memoirs of K.B. Tomashevsky, who wrote specifically that Khlebnikov was invited to the home of a aristocratic landlord of the region “in the capacity of a tutor”. Tomashevsky also recalled a friend of Khlebnikov, the artist-decorator and warrant officer of the Baltic Fleet, M.V. Dobrokovsky (1895-1942), with whom Khlebnikov roamed across Persia (see the passages from another poem “As down a river, across Iran…two oddballs wandered…”). Referring to the testimony of Abikh, Khlebnikov’s first biographer described the shared residence of Khlebnikov and Dobrokovsky and their arrival at the Talish Khan, Zorgam Os-Sultan, that is also reflected in the poem. “Khlebnikov arrived at the beginning of July in the village of Shahsavar and took residence there together with the artist Dobrokovsky…(the poet) was the guest of the local landowner, an event from which he probably derived this narrative scene in the khan’s home…” According to an eyewitness of the Persian trip, the Bolshevik journalist A. Kosterin, Dobrokovsky poured a dish of greasy ram’s sauce on the head of this khan as an eccentric, provocative action meant to express the artist’s disdain for the khan’s haughtiness and despotism. The stunt was also accompanied by theatrical swearing and threats made by Dobrokovsky.

The link between life-creation of Russian modernism and the topic of Eastern Islamic disenfranchised mystics does not rest solely with Khlebnikov. In the memoirs of V.P. Nikitin, the author recalls that one of his acquaintances, a Persian writer, viewed Aleksei Mikhailovich Remizov (who was well acquainted with Khlebnikov and meant a great deal to him) as a dervish. He wrote in particular, “what was most

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841 See: Loosen 1912: 184-229.
842 See: XBC: 100.
844 See: Степанов 1936: 58; compare Абих 1928: 322, where he, however, says nothing about the specific scene with the Khan.
846 For V.P. Nikitin and his Persian language article “The Russian Dervish” see the letters of A.M. Remizov to V.F. Markov (Ремизов 1982: 432-435, 439-440).
847 For Remizov’s Life-Creation see Elena Obatnina’s monograph (Обатнина 2001). For the additional link between Khlebnikov and Remizov see Данилевский 2000: 385-390.
curious, however …[was] the unexpected gesture of the Persian writer, Abd-Ol-Hussein Santi Zadeh Kermani, when he kissed Remizov’s hand upon departing and thereby confused dearest Aleksei Mikhailovich. Sanati Zadeh explained to me that in his eyes, Aleksei Mikhailovich was a kind of sheik (an elder, or spiritual leader) of the dervish order! Forsaking the material world – so appropriate for a mystical dervish – and striving for communion with the Divine, greatly impacted my Teheran friend when he saw Aleksei Mikhailovich leaving his door unlocked when we went to visit a photographer. Remizov had actually developed this habit after returning home once he was unable to open the door without the help of a locksmith…”.848 A younger friend of Remizov’s Natalia Reznikova also wrote that “there was group of old friends that often came to the Rue Boulot. One of these old friends, the Oriental scholar V.P. Nikitin came down from the seventh floor of the same building – he was translating the Persian texts of the Sufi for Remizov. Once he brought his friend, a Persian poet, and the three of them went to the photographer to have their picture taken. The poet then wrote Remizov that he was amazed how the Russian left the door to his apartment open upon leaving, ‘just like a Dervish’s cell’ in the event that a friend should stop by”.

848 “Любопытнее всего, однако… неожиданный и смутивший добрейшего Алексея Михайловича жест писателя-перса (Абд-Оль-Хусейна Санти Задэ Кермани), поцеловавшего при прощании его руку. Санати Задэ объяснил мне, что в его глазах А. М. является как бы шейхом (старцем, главою) дервишеского ордена!... Отреченность от мира сего, приличествующая мистику-дервишу, стремящемуся к сближению с Божеством, поразила моего тегеранского друга при виде того, что, когда мы пошли к фотографу, А. М., выходя из квартиры, оставил дверь незапертой (как он это обычно делал, после того как, однажды, вернувшись, не мог, без помощи слесаря, открыть дверь...”). See: Никитин 1993: 294-295.
849 “…была и группа старых друзей, часто приходивших на рю Буало. Из старых друзей востоковед В.П.Никитин спускался с шестого этажа того же дома, – он переводил для Ремизова персидские тексты Суфи. Однажды он привел своего друга, персидского поэта, и они втроем пошли к фотографу, чтобы сняться. Поэт потом написал Ремизову, что его поразило, что Ремизов выходя, не запер дверь своей квартиры, а оставил ее открытой “подобно келье дервиша” на случай прихода друзей”. See: Резникова 1980: 100. For Khlebnikov as a “Dervish” see as well the chapter from the memoirs of K. Зелинского “The Dervish of Russian Poetry” (Зелинский 1957: 148-152); compare Зелинский 1960: 232-241.

850 The wandering travel of “хожение” and “Holy poverty” – was a continual theme in Russian spiritual poetry (Федотов 1991: 15, 103). Usually these poems are sung by wandering minstrels and vagabonds (see, for example, Федотов 1991: 15; Селиванов 1991: 5). For the role of holy “poverty” and Russian spiritual verses in the creative work of Khlebnikov’s elder contemporary – Andrei Belyi, see Коно 2002: 248-249. The image of a religious wanderer could have been familiar to Belyi and Khlebnikov according to the published works of P.A. Bessonov (Бессонов 1861-1863, vol. 2) and S.V. Maksimov (Максимов 1877: 181-230). The image of an indigent prophet was popular in the Arab culture of the Middle Ages. See: Grunebaum 1961: 95-110; Bonnebakker 1975: 10-12 et passim; Corbin 1977: 180-236.
851 See: Эйхенбаум 1927(1976): 183-184
852 For the “construction” of a personal biography by the author who views himself as a “character”, see such general studies as: Винокур 1927 passim; Lipking 1981 passim; Лотман 1986: 106-129; and also Freidin 1987
wandering god-seeker: five time a “prophet”, twice a “dervish” (noting as well that this word is repeated dozens of times by one of the characters of the poem), seven times a “gul’-mullah” (see also the three-time recurrence of the term, “flower priest”(священник цветов)). The direction of this life-creationist identification flows not only from the people of Gilan to Khlebnikov (it was they who upon meeting the Futurist called him gul’-mullah and urus dervish), but also from Khlebnikov to the people of Gilan. In his very first letter from Anzali to his sister Vera Khlebnikov wrote: “I told the Persians that I was a Russian prophet”.853

To better understand this point it is worth examining Khlebnikov’s behavior that led the people of Gilan to relate to him as a “Russian prophet” and treat him like a wandering dervish. The hero’s actions were well established in the canon of dervish asceticism. The poem’s main character eats “what God provides” – fish eggs and small fish (casted upon the shore). He kindly welcomes any of God’s creatures and views a stray dog as a regular dining companion, never bothering himself with “courtly” manners of “civilized” society. There exist numerous examples illustrating an abstinence from food as the most important condition in the lifestyle of Islamic adherents of Sufism and dervish philosophy.

A. Aleksandrov suggested that “there is a special value system in which precious gold and a worthless acorn, a homeless dog and a wandering poet are both found in the same rank”.854 The Sufi associative chain, “I(myself) – soothsayers/prophets – dogs” naturally leads to the “dervishes” of Ancient Greeks – the Cynics, who received the alias “dogs” for their shocking behavior. It also underscores the importance of the characterization mentioned above on the “Diogenes-kind” of life of the Avant-Garde artist. A similar example of personal behavior seems neither “strange” nor inappropriate to the author of the poem, but is actually welcomed by the narrator, whose identical character is inseparable from that of Khlebnikov.

Unlike ordinary Muslims, the dervishes needed hashish “not for a high but for the obliteration of any personal life or impulse in them and to lead them into an ecstatic state of contemplating blessed, mystical ideas that bring joy to every dervish”.855 Khlebnikov and M.V. Dobrokovsky856 both used hashish and opium regularly. One such experience almost ended with tragic results. Having smoked
some hashish, the ‘Russian dervishes’, as A. Kosterin called them, nearly perished in a common teahouse when a large fire broke out there.\footnote{See: Костерин 1966: 219.} A distinct clue to their use of narcotics exists in the text of “Tyrant Without the ‘T’” (Fragment 11):

*And everything uttered began with ‘sha’: shah, shai, shira*

*Where the silent month*

*Is given the most resonant name*

*Ai,*

*In this land I am!* \footnote{See: Хлебников 1936: 247.}

In the 1936 edition the first of these quoted lines is rendered somewhat differently:

*And everything uttered began with sha: shak, shai, shire (И все на ша: шах, шай, шира)*\footnote{See: Хлебников 1986: 354.} “Shira” or “shire” (the Persian, “sireh”) – is a narcotic grass made from the burnt dregs of opium\footnote{See: Григорьев, Парнис 1986: 687.}. A description of how it is smoked is included in a passage from Khlebnikov’s Persian poem, “Shireh Smoker”\footnote{See: Хлебников 1933, V: 34U35.}.

The numerous stories about dervishes wandering the desert in a transcendent, and perhaps even drug-added state, *tawakkul*, braving lions and bandits, all the while abstaining from all kinds of sustenance \footnote{See for example Дьяков 1990: 124U136.}, are well known. It was in such a condition that A. Kosterin found Khlebnikov: “We spied a naked fellow on a desolate sandbar along the seashore. He was standing motionless and gazing out into the opaline expanse of the sea. A light breeze caressed his long hair. Smirnov drew up his horse and sneered: ‘Well, there’s our poet. Take a look at him, like he’s strolling through the fields of his village! And yet nobody bothers him, but instead he receives food everywhere’. Mark Smirnov, twice decorated for his heroics in the Russian Civil War, previously a mere footsoldier and prior to that – a miner, was utterly uninitiated in the modern developments in poetry. He gazed upon Khlebnikov as he would upon a blissful saint, a holy jester of Christ. Honoring the traditional Russian custom, Smirnov treated Khlebnikov with utmost respect and a certain degree of amazement. We rode to the edge of the sea where his torn shirt and pants were lying on the shore. Aside from this, Khlebnikov had no other personal belongings. He saw us, and in no particular hurry, emerged from the water to greet us briefly and coyly, as if we had only parted the night before and nothing had transpired since then. – ‘What are you doing here? Where are you going?’ Mark asked him. Khlebnikov with a somewhat distant glance looked at me, then at Smirnov, and asked, ‘Where is Khudoga? I think, the word “Kurd” also starts with a “K”…’ ‘Comrade Khlebnikov’, I said with a polite frostiness, ‘Dobrokovsky and Abikh are very worried about you. You left for no reason and told nobody. Friends usually don’t do this. Wait here – in a couple hours a patrol will pass by, and I kindly advise you not to hide from the patrol or to run away from it.’ Avoiding eye contact with
me, Khlebnikov sat down in the sand exposing his matted hair and emaciated back. Silently, we took our leave from him…”

This incident can be compared with other similar “holy fool” episodes in the behavior of the poet that were recounted by Abikh which provide further details to the “provocative” aspects of Khlebnikov’s daily life-creation. The memoirist tells that “on the first day of the retreat, up to the first bivouac, Khlebnikov walked with the others, but at daybreak he began to lag behind, knowing full well that the shah’s horsemen, whose approach the retreating ‘rearguard’ fully expected, might very well overtake him. Repeated warnings did not convince him to leave with the patrol, and finally Khlebnikov veered away from the edge of the sea (along which they had been retreating), deep in thought, drawn to this place by ‘an intriguing crow with white wings that had flown over there’. And so Khlebnikov took his leave of the patrol. A day later the patrol rested in Roudsar and loaded themselves into kirzhims (flat-bottomed boats) for the crossing to Anzali. It was at this point that the tall figure of Khlebnikov, carrying an oilskin case for a typewriter on his head (a-la Catholicos of Armenia!) and the bound manuscript sheets of his latest work Doski Sud’by on a pole over his shoulder, loomed on the sandy expanses of the shore… In Anzali Khlebnikov spent several days following the return from his Teheran ‘Campaign’. He swam in the sea, took walks. Once while he swam, some people stole his clothes. Naked, he walked back to the home of the senior sea captain (on the beach), dressed and left with a group of friends for Baku.”


864 “Первый день отступления, до первой ночевки, Хлебников шел в ногу с другими, но наутро стал отставать, зная, что его могут настигнуть шахские казаки, которых ждали отступающие “в тыл”. Несколько предупреждений не убедили его ити с отрядом, и наконец В.В. пошел в сторону от берега моря (по которому отступали), глубь, мотивируя тем, что ‘в ту сторону полетела интересная ворона, с белым крылом’. Так В.В. отстал от отряда. Только через день, когда отряд отдохнул в Рудессере и уже погрузился на киржимы (плоскодонные лодки) для отплытия в Энзели, в песчаных далях берега замаячила высокая фигура Хлебникова с клеенчатым футляром от пишущей машинки на голове (a-la армянский католикос!) и взякой Досок судьбы на друше за плечом. …В Энзели Хлебников провел несколько дней после возвращения ‘из похода’ на Тегеран. Купался в море. Гулял. Тогда же во время купания у него украли одежду. Голый добрался до дома старшего морского начальника (на берегу). Одели, и В.В. уехал с группой товарищей в Баку”. See: Степанов 1936: 59; compare Абих 1928: 322-323.
An important point needs to be made with respect to Khlebnikov’s constant poverty, his total abstention from possessions, carefully nurtured by the poet at practically every stage of his life “journey”. The ideas of “predestination” and “The Path” are in fact closely tied with the dervish mystical concept of poverty. The 19th century western researcher-ethnographer, G. Brown, considered poverty (faqr) the central element in the lifestyle of the dervish. Poverty is viewed as an attribute of the Prophet himself to whom the term “poverty – my pride” (al-faqrul-fahri) is ascribed. In his time, Al Hujwiri wrote about the essence of dervish poverty, “Dervishism in all its aspects is mystical poverty, and a transcendental principle relates to it entirely. Divine secrets arise in the dervish and take hold of him so that his actions and thoughts are still controlled by him. But once, through his actions, he no longer is a slave to acquisitiveness and his actions are no longer his own, then he becomes – the Path, and not the traveler following his own will”.

The nickname for Khlebnikov, gul-mullah, that originated in Gilan is probably tied to Dervishism. The association of “dervish flower (rose)” may be evoked by the traditional shape of the dervish’s hat – the taj (taf in Persian): “Several dervish orders made this hat in the shape of a vase, and others used it as a vessel for a rose, to which the hat bore a resemblance”.

If the people of Gilan saw a dervish in Khlebnikov, then his Russian contemporaries, who knew the poet at the beginning of the 1920’s, in their turn referred to the same characteristics of unusual appearance and “holy fool” behavior in their memories about him. The Red Army soldier Smirnov was not the only one who saw a “blessed, holy fool” in the poet. Viacheslav Ivanov told Moisei Altman that “upon his (Khlebnikov’s) arrival, the room is suffused with the aroma of a Saint”. A.D. Petrovsky recalled in 1923, “I happened to be in Kharkov in 1920. I found Petnikov and found out from him that Khlebnikov was there, but I should not see him. All the same I left to find him. Khlebnikov was in nothing but his underwear of rough, homemade sackcloth and hatless. Dirty, sunburned, unshaven and shaggy, he had the appearance of a holy fool, but easily carried himself in this attire, apparently having spent months in this filth and grown accustomed to it…Khlebnikov was preparing to leave for Persia. We parted, pledging to each other ‘let’s meet without fail on this round planet’…and never saw each other again…”.

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866 For a detailed analysis of the dervish concept of “poverty” (faqr) from original sources in a broad historical context see Нурбахш 2000 passim. Principles of living in poverty as a cornerstone of the Sufi worldview were established by a Muslim philosopher from the end of the 12th Century by Ibn al-Arabi (See Ибн Араби 1998 passim).
867 Quoted via Шиммель 1999: 102.
870 “В 20-м году летом попал я случайно в Харьков. Нашел Петникова и от него узнал, что Хлебников тут, но видет его не интересно. Пошел я и все-таки разыскал его. Хлебников был в одном нижнем белье из грубого крестьянского холста, без шапки. Грязный, загорелый, обросший и взлохмаченный, он видом походил на юродивого. Держался он в этом костюме свободно, очевидно долго месяцы ходил в этих отрехнях и привык к ним... Хлебников собирался в Персию. Мы расстались, сказав друг другу: “непременно встретимся на круглом шаре”... и больше не встретились…”. See: Петровский 1923: 169.
These idiosyncrasies of the Avant-Garde poet hardly impressed all of the poet’s contemporaries. T. Vechorka recounted the disgust and even hostility that Khlebnikov evoked from her father-in-law, D.E. Tolstoi, “‘A poet, you say, ah? A renowned poet? Just as I believed! He’s a holy fool and an insolent one to be sure! A poet!... at one time poets were aristocrats, then the hoi-polloi wheedled their way in, and now these (Maxim) Gorky types’... ...there were further inquiries: ‘Who are his parents? Why don’t they place him in the mental asylum? How do they let someone like that walk the streets? And his eyes seem unnaturally blue as if he has colored them...’”

Rita Wright recalled the extremely curious eating habit of Khlebnikov which had a boldly eccentric, and somewhat otherworldly basis, “we were getting ready for bed, hanging stockings to dry and burrowing deeper into the hay. I awoke in the middle of the night from the bright light of the moon shining through the door. A ruffled and disheveled Khlebnikov sat on the threshold with clumps of hay sticking out of his hair. ‘Why aren’t you sleeping?’, I asked him. He slowly turned his head and said, “We’ll be getting up soon anyway. Let’s walk through the forest. We can boil some swampwater on a campfire and have some bug soup...”

Debating A.K. Zholkovsky’s paper at the Amsterdam symposium devoted to the 100th anniversary of Khlebnikov’s birthday (in 1986), A. Flaker developed the idea on the similarity of Khlebnikov’s biography to the behavioral model of holy fools. However, it would be premature to defend the premise that the poet’s behavior directly corresponds to the behavioral norm of the Russian holy fool. If one sees a certain complex of ideas and practices relating to the radical asceticism in the holy fool tradition, then it won’t be so easy to make analogies between Khlebnikov’s actions and this particular paradigm.

The tradition of the holy fool includes the impulse of focused aggression (throwing stones at monks, breaking into ladies bathhouses, public defecation, etc.). It is distinguished by provocative contempt for social order and total enmity to the real world. All of this behavior does not fully cleave to the well-known life principles of Khlebnikov. The individualistic contemplative behavior of the poet was oriented, in large part, to meditative, metaphysical visions, to hermetically sealed internal labor

872 “...– Поэт, говорите?! Замечательный поэт? Так я и поверил! Юродивый он, да еще наглый! Поэт!... Раньше поэтами были аристократы, потом поползли разночинцы, а теперь – Горьковские персонажи... Дальше шли расспросы: А кто его родители? Да, почему его не сдают в желтый дом? Разве можно одного его по улице пускать? И глаза неприлично-голубые, наверно крашенные””. See: Вечорка 1925: 3

873 “Мы улеглись, развесив чулки на просушку и зарывшись поглубже в сено. Ночью я проснулась от светившей прямо в дверь яркой луны. На пороге сидел нахохлившийся, взвешенный Хлебников с торчащими в волосах ключами сена. - Чего вы не сните? - спросила я. Он медленно повернул голову: - Все равно скоро встать. Пойдем по лесу. Вскипятим воду на костре, из болота... Будет суп из микроорганизмов”. See: Райт 2007: 189.

874 “I won’t use the word ‘insanity’; it is better perhaps to say ‘holy folly’ (юродство)” (“Я не употребил бы слово сумасшествие; лучше, кажется, юродство”). See: Жолковский 1986: 591. It is unclear if Khlebnikov was familiar with the book by father Ioann Kovalevsky (Ковалевский 1895) on holy fools of the Eastern Orthodox and Russian churches. Regarding the Orthodox and Byzantine holy fools that might have influenced him see (passim) Challis, Dewey 1977; Saward 1980: 12-30; Ryden 1981; 1995; Gorayanooff 1983; Thompson 1987; Ivanov 1994; Mollodon 2000; Kovets 2000: 367-389.
of mind instead of the rather simplistic brutality of a clearly expressed public activity. Such form of behavior was more a frequent trait of Vladimir Mayakovsky. Forgoing yellow coats, Khlebnikov wore torn robes not just from a desire to “shock the bourgeoisie” but also in large part because at times he could not afford to wear more fashionable clothes. To a certain extent, his mind was preoccupied with somewhat different ideas then those of his fellow Futurists.

At practically all stages of his life existence, but especially in the later revolutionary period, Khlebnikov clearly neglected conventional standards and norms of ordinary behavior. That being said, it is difficult to maintain that deliberate *epatage* became the central, predominate theme of his public persona. (The concept of “public persona” may be narrowly applied to Khlebnikov despite the fact that he disdained conspicuous “performance for an audience”). In future it would be necessary to indicate several not quite coinciding traits (along with the widely known coinciding ones) in the ideology of pragmatics of the Russian Futurist life-creators.

### 1.3 Vladimir Mayakovsky: Observations on the Unconventionality of Poet’s Behavior

The unique persona of Vladimir Mayakovsky represents a certain *semantic watershed*, a kind of ideological “bridge” between the “historical Avant-Garde” of Russian Futurism and the age of the Bolshevik-Soviet “literary order”. The persona of this poet may intrigue us as much, as Mayakovsky with his scandalous yellow coats amassed in himself a complex combination of methods and phenomena of Avant-Garde pragmatics, with its goal of shocking and offending the accursed “bourgeoisie”. The Avant-Garde pragmatics of behavior, which intrigued Maksim Shapir for its semiotics, is displayed, I think, with rather great acuity in the multi-faceted creative activity of Mayakovsky.

When investigating any historical name for the purpose of fathoming Avant-Garde esthetics of action and pragmatics which defy the standard norm of behavior, the testimonies of contemporaries and associates turn to be exceptionally important. Without question, the most known and “notorious” artifact of Mayakovsky’s Avant-Garde behavioral epatage was his famous coat. Regarding this item, Victor Shklovsky wrote, “Publishing his work was out of the question, but it was still possible for him to perform. But performing required that there be a sign. Nikolai Kulbin taught us how to compose our mottos, the kind of mottos that would be used if the Turks had occupied the city and the news had to be broadcast with a drumbeat. Mayakovsky put on his yellow coat. There were two coats actually: the first was yellow, which was considered the color of the Avant-Garde. It was wide at the bottom with a turned down collar. The fabric was so fine that the yellow coat seemed transparent. It was rather long and one could see that he was wearing dark trousers. The second coat was striped – yellow and black”.

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875 The ambivalent attitude of the Soviet regime to the “living Mayakovsky” is best symbolized by the figure of Vladimir Lenin with his famous political essay “Party Organization and Party Literature” in which he expressed his dissatisfaction with Mayakovsky’s poetry. This did not however prevent Lenin from publicly praising Mayakovsky’s poem “Worn out From Sitting” (Прозаседавшиеся) as it suited Lenin’s political agenda. 876 “О том, чтобы печататься не было и разговора, но можно было и выступать. А для выступления нужна была вывеска. Тезисы научили делать Николай Кульбин, такие тезисы как
Another witness to those early years of the Russian Avant-Garde, Benedict Livshits, expanded upon this subject in his memoirs devoted to the history of the Futurist movement, “After buying two fashionable ring gelds in straw cases, Volodia suggested that we go smoke. We began to walk accompanied by a crowd of gawkers who were amazed at the bright orange coat and the ensemble of a top hat with a bare neck. Mayakovsky acted like a fish in water”.

Livshits links the external aspects of Mayakovsky’s appearance to the painted faces of his acquaintances from the same Avant-Garde esthetic, the members of Mikhail Larionov’s circle, “…feeling out of place, he feared with uncertain intonation tearing down the picture of a charming game, even though one month prior to this Larionov had already stunned Moscow audiences by appearing with a painted face on Kuznetsky. Moscow however still had not grown accustomed to such street theater performances and a crowd of idlers began to grow around us…we visited some of Volodia’s pals then the others, again and again. We went anywhere Mayakovsky felt necessary to show off his Avant-Garde magnificence”.

Livshits devotes special attention to how unprecedented and “shocking” were Mayakovsky’s stunts, his whole external look, and his unique way of presenting himself in the strict environment of the academic institute where his education and formation as an artist began. Livshits recounts Mayakovsky’s process of “personal quests” and the elaboration of an external image of his appearance. He also addresses the particular importance of that same “blouse” for “The Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture”, where Mayakovsky was enrolled as a student. Livshits tells that “an orange blouse on the backdrop of state officialdom was an unprecedented challenge to the barracks-like regimen of the school. Mayakovsky’s stunt was met with applause and success. Having decided that he had discovered his sartorial style, Mayakovsky dragged me to the textile stores where startled shop-assistants brought down the brightest samples from the shelves for us… After long searches, he honed in on a black and yellow striped fabric of unknown origin at Cindel’s and decided upon this one. Having calmed down finally, he grandly proposed that we ‘freshen up just a spot’ my own wardrobe. I selected a ‘half-length’ (аршин = 0,71 м), wildly motley, printed fabric from which, to my judgment, we

“Купив две шикарных маниллы в соломенных чехлах, Володя предложил мне закурить. Сопровождаемые толпою любопытных, пораженных оранжевой кофтой и комбинацией цилиндра с голой шеей, мы стали прогуливаться. Маяковский чувствовал себя как рыба в воде”.

“Боялся неверной, невпопад, интонацией сбить рисунок замечательной игры. Хотя за месяц до этого Ларионов уже ошарашивал москвичей, появившийся с раскрашенным лицом на Кузнецком, однако Москва еще не привыкла к подобным зрелищам, и вокруг нас разрасталась толпа зевак. ... Заглянули к каким-то Володиным знакомым, потом к другим, еще и еще, заходили всюду, куда Маяковский считал нужным показаться в своем футуристическом великолепии”. Ibid.
could fashion a rather flamboyant tie and handkerchief… Volodia’s mother sewed his striped blouse.”

Another close acquaintance of the poet, L.F. Zhegin, talked about the special importance and extraordinary significance the concept “I” held for Mayakovsky. He also spoke about the poet’s obsession with developing a peculiar way of depicting his external appearance, “It took an interminably long time to design the cover to his book ‘I!’”. This spot which may be simply viewed as an errant ink blot, at its core has a real prototype: the bowtie which Mayakovsky liked to wear at the time. In the photographs of him from that time, there is always a bowtie fixed permanently in place. Mayakovsky next affected the ‘vagabond’ style for a little while: the Byronesque poet-pirate, a ‘Corsair’ with a black, wide-brimmed hat set back on his forehead, a black shirt (quickly replaced with a bright yellow one), a black necktie and in general an all black outfit – such was the external appearance of the poet during his period of great internal work, when the general outline of his creative individuality was beginning to take shape”.

This description forces us to notice the relevance for Mayakovsky of the more profound levels of romantic Life Creation in the fully contrived image of the poet-adventurer and romantic lover of multiple women, which are linked with the symbolically important figure of Byron.

L.F. Zhegin recounted interesting details about Mayakovsky’s peculiar version of social behavior, intended in one or another of its facets to be “noticed” by the people around him. The semiotics of these aspects of the poet’s actions was related to the concept of defamiliarization. This notion of defamiliarization was focused on making all ordinary details of his external appearance and many of his body motions look “strange” and “remarkable”, “…‘Careful, Vladimir Vladimirovich! A tramway!’ – ‘It’s nothing, don’t worry, it will jump back’.

Mayakovskv did not walk, he loomed. You could recognize him a mile away, not only because of his height, but in large part, because of his bold, sweeping body movement and to a lesser extent his gnarled and heavy gait. … Restriction, clarity, even aridity – all these qualities were developed later, when the black and then yellow shirt, or in contrast to them, the short lived top hat and frock coat buttoned all the way to the top,
were replaced with a new external style: crew cut hair, a jersey sweater or a basic grey suit. But even then Mayakovsky still maintained the image of a ‘poet with long hair’.”

The renowned actor A.A. Mgebrov paid special attention in his memoirs to the contrivance of scandal in early Futurist performances, in which Mayakovsky played a large and important role. Discussing the same kind of controversial nature of the yellow coat, Mgebrov wrote specifically, “…But it was impossible for a scandal not to occur. All the tickets had been snatched up and the people who had bought them, at least many of them, went intentionally to see and be part of a scandal. One way or another people brought money to the Futurists and supported them. …Mayakovsky emerged and ascended the platform dressed in simple clothes and not wearing any make-up. It was as if he was above the crowd, above the city; he was in fact a son of the city and the city had erected a monument to him. For what? If for nothing else, for the fact that he was a poet. ‘Ridicule me!’, Mayakovsky seemed to say, ‘I stand like a monument among you. Laugh, I am a poet. I am a pauper and prince in one at the same time’. …Mayakovsky was in his famous yellow blouse…”

Mgebrov strongly emphasizes the aggressive nature of Mayakovsky’s verbal behavior when his physical behavior seemed to correspond harmoniously with the explosive semantic content of his verbal ripostes. According to Mgebrov, Mayakovsky, “…really used to say [to the audience]: ‘You are rats…’ And the people laughed in reply, but their laughter seemed like the timid scratching of rats on open doors then. ‘Don’t leave, Mayakovsky’, the audience cried mockingly when in a state of confusion he agitatedly collected his tears, and newspaper sheets, and cardboard toys, and the guffaws of the hall in a great bag, in a great sackcloth bag…”

The translator and writer Rita Wright-Kovaleva recalled an utterly extraordinary and frivolous aspect of Mayakovsky’s many performances before an
audience. Specifically, she mentioned a distinct physiological aspect of the poet’s image, recording how remarkably his voice in particular functioned, “Some posters appeared on the streets one time. The poet-Futurist, Alexei Chicherin promised to read Vladimir Mayakovsky’s poem, ‘Man’ (‘Человек’) in the ‘mellifluous tone of his voice’. We went to the performance in a large group and took over the entire front row by way of some complimentary tickets. It was difficult to act seriously when a tall man with unnaturally slanted and wild eyes beneath a lush expanse of eyebrows emerged on stage dressed in a lady’s white patterned kimono and a large bow on his chest. But he sneered in response to our grins and crossed his partially exposed, muscular arms across his chest. He inhaled and then his shallow, truly mellifluous and wonderfully modulated voice began to roar like an organ…”.

The controversy of interpreting Mayakovsky in relation to Velimir Khlebnikov, his main colleague in the early stage of Russian Futurism who died prematurely, represents a distinct layer of Futurist Life Creation (the episode with Miturich, Alvēk, etc.). In one of the surviving accounts, Mayakovsky performs the role of a kind of malefactor, who allegedly has usurped some notable texts of Khlebnikov’s literary legacy, claiming them as his own “discoveries”, his rhythms and rhymes. All this was accompanied with an atmosphere of controversy and the unconventional behavior of the Avant-Garde artists that endured into the relatively late Soviet period. Viktor Slavinsky described one such paragon of “scandal-mongering”, “…Mayakovsky was reading a note that had been handed to him from the audience. ‘Is it true that Khlebnikov is a brilliant poet whereas you, Mayakovsky, are mere scum in comparison to him?’ This caused quite a stir in the audience. Several people laughed and many became agitated. Mayakovsky replied, ‘I do not compete or compare myself to poets. That would be silly…”.

Khlebnikov’s bitter verse from the Supersaga “Zangezi” corresponds somewhat to this Post-Futurist scandal and relates, one can assume, directly to Mayakovsky:

“The wide, iron sedge
Cuts through his life waters, he’s no more...
The reason being the destruction of
Manuscripts by the wicked
Scoundrels with lantern jaw

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884 “Однажды на улицах появились афиши. Поэт-футурист Алексей Чичерин обещал ‘бархатным благовестом голоса’ прочесть поэму Владимира Маяковского ‘Человек’. Мы пошли большой компанией, заняли весь первый ряд, по каким-то контрамаркам. Трудно было настроиться серьезно, когда на эстраду вышел высокий человек с неправдоподобно раскосыми дикими глазами под великолепным размахом бровей, в дамском белом кимоно с узорами и большим бантом на груди. Но он нахмурился в ответ нашим улыбкам, скрестил на груди полулотные мускулистые руки; набрал воздуху, и низкий, действительно бархатный, прекрасно поставленный голос, как орган, зарокотал”. See: Райт 2007: 189.

And a smacking, chomping pair of lips”. 886

A lantern jaw and smacking, chomping lips of the unnamed scoundrels clearly refer to Mayakovsky, for whom the feature of “lips” 887 played a significant role. The recollections of Marusia Burliuk, are also highly relevant here, “...Mayakovsky’s head was crowned with thick dark hair, which he began to shear only later. His face had yellow cheeks and a big, fat mouth, greedy for kisses, jam and tobacco, slanting to one side and covered with enormous lips. The lower twisted to the left when he spoke. It gave his speech the outward appearance of taunting and insolence. His lips were always pressed tight together…”. 888

It was in all likelihood precisely these lips that Khlebnikov had in mind when writing this text of Zangezi. One episode of a staged, post-Futurist scandal, connected with the relationship between Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky, is recounted in the memoirs of the young contemporary of the Futurists, Varlam Shalamov, “At the first reading of the poem ‘Good!’ (Хороша) in the Polytechnic Museum”, recalled Shalamov, “there was, as always, a large audience. The reading took place and there was lots of warm applause. Mayakovsky approached the front of the stage, bent down and took some notes that had been handed to him. He read the notes, smoothed them out in his palms and folded them in half. Having done this, he crumpled the notes and shoved them into his pocket. Suddenly a dark-haired man of average height wearing pince-nez glasses stood up at the end of the sixth row.

‘Comrade Mayakovsky, you have not answered my note’.

‘And I do not intend to’.

A murmur rose in the hall. The desired scandal had ripened. But what kind of scandal could there be, it seemed, after the reading of a long, serious poem? What a strange thing!

‘You are mistaken. You should have responded to my note’.

‘You are an extortionist!’

‘And you, Mayakovsky…’, but the voice of the man in the pince-nez glasses drowned in a hail of shouts: ‘Tell us what your point is’....Mayakovsky extended his arm and deepened his heavy, bass voice – ‘Allow me, I shall explain. This man’ – Mayakovsky pointed in the direction of the man in the pince-nez glasses with his index finger. The latter placed his hands behind his back. – ‘This man – his surname is Alvék. He accuses me of having stolen some manuscripts of Khlebnikov, keeping them to myself and occasionally publishing them. Well, in fact I did have some manuscripts of Khlebnikov, Ladomir (Ладомир) and some others. I handed over all these manuscripts to Roman Jakobson at the Institute of Russian Literature in Prague.


887 One should not forget the early Futurist euphony of Mayakovsky “the Flute of Sewer Pipes”(флейта водосточных труб) and “appeals from new lips” (зовы новых губ).

888 “Голова Маяковского увенчана густыми темными волосами, стричь которые он начал много позже; лицо его с желтыми щеками отягощено крупным, жадным к поцелуям, варенью и табаку ртом, прикрытым большими губами, нижняя во время разговора кривилась на левую сторону. Это придавало его речи внешние характер издевки и наглости. Губы всегда были плотно сжаты”. See: Бурлюк 1993: 47.
I have the receipt from Jakobson. This man is stalking me. He wrote a small book in which he tried to smear me’. – The pale Alvék raised both hands up, trying to say something. An unknown man with light brown hair stood up from his seat. Yelling something, he approached Alvék. People began to push him away from Alvék. Then the man pulled out a small brochure from his pocket, tore it to shreds and, managing to throw it in the face of Alvék, shouted, ‘Here’s your book! Here’s your book!’…A fight broke out. The very same militia about which the poem had just been recited arrived on the scene and dragged Alvék from the hall”.

In this remarkable biographical narrative we notice the continual staging of “scandal-mongering” performance which Mayakovsky and his Futurist colleagues created. In a sense, it was a kind of artistic “afterlife” – a way of preserving Futurist behavioral pragmatics focused on any type of scandal. At a time when Futurism itself did not even exist as such in the sense of organization, publication, manifestos, etc., the contrived method of scandal-mongering performance still served as a means of establishing the movement within the new Soviet society.

In her memoirs, Elsa Triolet illuminated new incidents of the Futurist experience that emphasize an aspect of the grotesque, excessiveness and a premise of surprising the spectator with something extraordinary, something truly ‘exceptional’. She recalled the perception of Mayakovsky in the eyes of his fellow contemporaries, describing how grotesque his calling cards looked together with his famous coat. The sister of Lili Brik, she wrote in particular: “…Not catching me at home, Volodia left his calling card, approximately 15cm in width, on which was printed boldly across the entire card in yellow and white: Vladimir Mayakovsky. My mother immediately

889 “На первой читке поэмы Хорошо в Политехническом музее народу было, как всегда, много. Чтение шло, аплодировали дружно и много. Маяковский подходил к краю эстрады, сгибался, брал протянутые ему записки, читал, разглаживал в ладонях, складывал пополам. Ответив, комкал, прятал в карман. Внезапно с краю шестого ряда встал человек – невысокий, темноволосый, в пенсне.
— Товарищ Маяковский, вы не ответили на мою записку.
— И отвечать не буду.
Зал загудел. Желанный скандал назревал. Казалось, какой может быть скандал после читки большой серьезной поэмы? Что за притча?
— Напрасно. Вам бы следовало ответить на мою записку.
— Вы – шантажист!
— А вы, Маяковский..., – но голос человека в пенсне потонул шуме выкриков:
returned it to him and promptly said, ‘Vladimir Vladimirovich, you forgot your billboard’. Volodia bowed, snickered and placed the card back in his pocket. Surprisingly, nothing that Mayakovsky did actually shock me. Everything about him – the calling cards, the yellow coat, the continual mumbling – all seemed completely natural to me. When we went out somewhere together, it did not bother me at all that all decent people stared bug-eyed at him. I did not focus on this and looked upon his strange behavior, unusual appearance and dress with complete indifference. The performances, the press, ‘Futurism’, all the noise and scandal surrounding him had no impact on me’.

Regarding the shocking and “defamiliarizing” performative aspects of Mayakovsky’s stage work, the renowned literary critic and children’s writer, Kornei Chukovsky, placed an especial emphasis in his memoirs on the importance of interpreting the yellow coat’s role in the process of creating Mayakovsky’s poetic performances. Addressing the topic of this coat, Chukovsky noted, “…I brought this yellow blouse to the Polytechnic Museum as if it were contraband. The police had forbidden Mayakovsky to appear before an audience in his yellow blouse. A police officer stood at the entrance and allowed him to pass only after checking that Mayakovsky was only wearing a jacket. Meanwhile the coat was wrapped in paper and tucked under my arm. I gave it to Vladimir Vladimirovich on the stairs where he secretly put it on and stepped out on stages before the audience. Despite all this his fulminous rant rained down on me”.

A close associate of Mayakovsky, the poet Nikolai Aseev, recalled many instances of his friend’s extreme and transgressive eccentricity. This was linked in one way or another with the public appearances of Mayakovsky, who effortlessly introduced many attendees to be physically and emotionally engaged into his performing work. Describing one such controversial event which demonstrates the scandal-mongering effect on the physical behavior of the audience that evening, Aseev observed, “…I recall how some time before the revolution, during one of his performances in the notorious yellow jacket, a respectable grey-haired lady in the front row tried to strike Mayakovsky with the stopper from a carafe that was on the stage. What was it he had done to upset her so with his unconventionality that she...”

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890 “…не застав меня дома, Володя оставлял свою визитную карточку, сантиметров в пятнадцать ширины, на которой желтым по белому во всю ширину и высоту было напечатано: Владимир Маяковский. Моя мать неизменно ее ему возвращала и неизменно ему говорила: ‘Владимир Владимирович, вы забыли вашу вывеску’. Володя расшаркивался, ухмылялся и клал вывеску в карман. … Удивительно то, что меня ничего в Маяковском не удивляло, что мне все казалось вполне естественным - и визитные карточки, и желтая кофта, и постоянное бормотанье. Когда мы бывали где-нибудь вместе, меня нисколько не смущало, что на него весь честной народ таращил глаза, я на этом как-то не останавливаясь и его странное иной раз поведение, необычную внешность и костюм воспринимала с полным равнодушием. Выступления, пресса, ‘футуризм’, шум и скандал до меня не доходили’”. See the memoirs of Elza Triolet (Триолет 1993: 59).

891 “…эту желтую кофту я пронес в Политехнический музей контрабандой. Полиция запретила Маяковскому появляться в желтой кофте перед публикой. У входа стоял пристав и впускал Маяковского только тогда, когда убеждался, что на нем был пиджак. А кофта, завернутая в газету, была у меня под мышкой. На лестнице я отдал ее Владимиру Владимировичу, он тайком облакивался в нее и, эффектно появившись среди публики, высыпал на меня свои громы”. See: Чуковский 2007: 153.
would sacrifice her own respectability to grapple with a Futurist? Continuing to antagonize the audience, Mayakovsky just leaned back evading the lady’s hand that was armed with the crystal stopper. I know that the lady’s children honored the family tradition of their matriarch and continued to harbor, if not enmity, then some kind of hostility when recalling this confrontation.”

Several aspects of the literary and personal behavior of Mayakovsky conform to the “decadent life creation” models existing at that time. The aspect of a “lethal”, tragic Life-Creation love which was mentioned in relation to Briusov and the death of his lover, Nadezhda L’vova is one such example. Something similar happened with Mayakovsky. Elsa Triolet recalled one dramatic instance that is less quoted in the literature on Mayakovsky, “…I recall a woman, who did not spare herself. It was 1917. Her name was Tonya – a solid, heavy set, unattractive, unusual and yet at the same time plain. She was articulate and accurate. I was drawn to her immediately. Tonya was an artist, and a talented one it seemed to me. Mayakovsky, his acquaintances and Tonya herself were depicted in all her small paintings. I recall there was a ‘Last Supper’ in which Mayakovsky played the role of Christ. In another Mayakovsky was standing at a window and he had hoofs instead of feet. In the background there was a squalid room with a bed on which the artist herself sat dressed in a shirt. I vaguely recall as well that Tonya wrote either prose or poetry, I’m not sure. She spoke about her love for Mayakovsky with the kind of casualness that one would say ‘today is sunny’ or ‘the sea is wide’. Tonya threw herself from a window one year, I don’t recall which exactly”.

The identifying of the poet with the Messiah, the merging of his face with Christ bears implicit theodicean and religio-mystical aspects of Mayakovsky’s poetic style. In the later stages of his life Mayakovsky’s behavior displayed a certain, transgressive eccentricity, especially in the context of physical proximity with female friends and intimates. Veronika Polonskaia (who was mentioned in the final note written by the poet) recalled, “…After several days (I had been with him at his place on Lubianka every day) – we became [intimately] close. I recall how that particular night he walked me home along Lubianka Square, when suddenly, and to the amazement of onlookers, he began to dance the Mazurka right on the square, alone, so tall and

892 “…я помню, как еще до революции, во время выступления его в пресловутой желтой кофте, почтенная седая дама из первого ряда пыталась ударить Маяковского пробкой от графина, стоявшего на трибуне. До чего ж, значит, он ее возмутил своей непривычностью, что она не пожалела собственной респектабельности, вступая в драку с футуристом, который, продолжая полемизировать с аудиторией, только уклонялся, отшатываясь от ее вооруженной стеклянной пробкой руки. Знаю, что и дети этой дамы сохранили семейную традицию их родоначальницы, продолжая питать если не ненависть, то неприязнь в память этого сражения”. See: Асеев 1963: 205.

893 “…я помню женщину, которая себя не пожалела... Это было году в 17-м. Звали ее Тоней – крепкая, тяжеловатая, некрасивая, особенная и простая, четкая, аккуратная, она мне сразу полюбилась. Тоня была художницей, кажется мне – талантливой, и на всех ее небольших картинах был изображен Маяковский, его знакомые и она сама. Запомнилась ‘Тайная вечеря’, где место Христа занимал Маяковский; на другой – Маяковский стоит у окна, ноги у него с копытцами, за ним убогая комната, кровать, на кровати сидит сама художница в рубашке. Смутно помню, что Тоня также и писала, не знаю, прозу или стихи. О своей любви к Маяковскому она говорила с той естественностью, с какой говорят, что ‘сегодня солнечно’ или что ‘море большое’. Тоня выбросилась из окна, не знаю в каком году”. See: Триоле 1993: 59.
clumsy, and yet he danced quite lithely and comically all the same. As a rule it was always about extremes with him.  

Maksim Shapir analyzed Mayakovsky as the ribald, foul-mouthed man and shocking blasphemer. He outlined what we may call the “phallic aesthetic” in the creative work of the poet. Together with the common, trivial form of parody, of transforming the decent into the indecent – in other words, “changing Lenten fare into meals containing meat and milk” – Mayakovsky mastered another form that is much rarer. Just as Batiushkov had done before him, he “made the indecent decent, but in a way that anyone familiar with the obscene source would easily recognize it”. The final goal was, of course, to impress and shock the wide community of readers.

Shapir further links the erotic, shock-generating pragmatics of expression with another composite form of “scandal-mongering” and in this case, blatantly anti-Semitic rhetoric against which the poet struggled. The prototype for this palimpsest was actually the so-called first “Soviet’ ABC’s” (September 1919), which Mayakovsky had edited along with R. Jakobson and Y. Gurian. This ABC has such lines as: “An Anti-Semite – Entente’s Dear Friend, Entente is Nothing But a Band of Thugs” (“Антисемит Антанте мил. Антанта – сборище громил), etc. Shapir also observed that in one of his final performances, about three weeks before the tragic death, March 25, 1930, “Mayakovsky touched upon the history of creating this new kind of primer: ‘It was written to be perceived as a parody of its prototype, as a kind of porno-literary primer...’”. For this reason, the full text of this playful “Azbuka” has never been published. Shapir quotes a few “shocking” lines: “A watermelon loves to warm itself in the sun, An Armenian loves to be shtumpted in the rear; Giraffes graze in Africa, Kikes love to fuck on Fridays; \( \pi^2 \) is the square of the circle, a woman’s muff is better than a friend’...etc...”

In addition to the most complete and laconic answer (posed by A. Kobrinsky) to the question “What is the Avant Garde?” (and if a witness of this conference is correct, it is “Mudischev lifting weights with his penis”), one may recall Shapir’s essay on this tricky subject whose approach I entirely support. Avant-Garde-oriented pragmatics may be also seen in the early poem by A.S. Pushkin, Shades of Barkov (Тень Баркова). The related experimental Pragmatics of the Avant-Garde was researched by Shapir in several essays (“From the History of ‘satirical ballad poetry’. ‘He wields the pen like a prick’”). This Avant-Garde topic which was initiated by Shapir, related to the ‘phallic subtext’ of Mayakovsky deserves a separate discussion. To a large extent Shapir uncovered this subject matter in his second article included in the same collection of scholarly papers printed by the Moscow publisher

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894 “…Через несколько дней (я бывала у него на Лубянке ежедневно) – мы стали близки. Помню, как в этот вечер он провожал меня домой по Лубянской площади и вдруг, к удивлению прохожих, пустился на площади танцевать мазурку, один, такой большой и неуклюжий, а танцевал очень легко и комично в то же время. Вообще у него всегда были крайности”. See Полонская 1990: 192.
896 See: Ibid.
897 “…Арбуз на солнце любит греться, Армяшка в жопу любит еться; Жирафы в Африке пасутся, Жиды по пятницам едутся; Πr^2 is the square of the circle, Пизда утешит лучше друга.. и проч... ”. See: Ibid.
“Ladomir”: ‘From the History of ‘Satirical Ballad Poetry’. ‘The Scarlet Sun was rising’”.

To a certain degree, Mayakovsky himself is associated in the everyday reader’s subconsciousness with a kind of “sculptural phallicism” (a propos Exegi monumentum). Besides the well known “phallic” Don Juanism of the Russian-Soviet poet which constitutes an obvious and perhaps even basic part of his Life Creation, Shapir provides additional phallicentric interpretations of the poet’s famous works. What is particularly valuable for me in the current topic is the new phallic interpretation of the sun and all its radiant luminescence which Shapir offers: the heavenly body accordingly “…rises, in order to flood the world. It enters a chink and each time it gradually drops itself and sinks into every hole on Earth…The sexual excitation of the sun apparently are based with Mayakovsky in his personal psycho-physical experience, “<…>for me it is utter sexual blackmail, he crawls like the sun under a dress…” [From his address at the forum ‘Gender and Marriage Issues in Life and Literature’ 6.3. 1927]”.

Speaking more precisely about how solar symbolism is often tied to phallic imagery for Mayakovsky, Shapir observes that in “Unusual Incident” this kind of what he calls as “archetypal symbolism”, supported, in all probability, by Balmont’s “Let Us Be Like The Sun” (Будем как солнце) which according to Shapir originated first “from Pushkin’s comparison of the membrum virile to the sun”. Shapir observes how the author of Shades of Barkov approached this comparison: “Who screws more passionately than all others? In the pitched battle, whose prick pounds the curly Cunt, burning like a crimson shaft?…”.

Shapir noticed that in stanza X the sunrise bears direct resemblance to an erection: ‘‘And now the daylight brightens; like a purple bald spot, the sun appears over the mountain amidst the bluish heaven’…Description of the sunrise and sunset in terms of the sex act also has its basis in the pornographic burlesque of the 18th century. In Ode to a Cunt M. Chulkov praises the dawning and ending of the day: ‘From morning’s calm waters of the Dawn, rising Phoebus appears to us in a crimson chariot, gripping his balls-of-manhood in his hand…and draws Phoebus’ prick into Pont, so that he might illuminate the horizon…”.

900 Pushkin’s verse looks rather provocative and suggestive in English translation: “I have erected a monument to myself…”.
902 “Кто всех задорнее ебет? Чей хуй средь битвы рьяной Пизду кудрявую дерет, Горя как столб багряный?”. See the note below.
903 “… восход солнца прямо уподоблен эрекции: ‘И вот яснеет свет дневной; Как будто плесть багрова, Явились солнце над горой Средь неба голубова’… Описание солнечного восхода и заката в терминах полового акта также берет начало в порнографическом бурлеске 18го века. В Оде Пизде М. Чулков воспевает начало дня и его конец: ‘От утренних спокойных вод Заря на алой колеснице Являет Фебов нам восход, Держа его муде в деснице... И тянет захуй Феба в Понт, Чтоб он светил наш горизонт’…” See: Ibid.
Another pragmatically phallic subject related to “Verses on a Soviet Passport” (Стихи о советском паспорте) must also be juxtaposed with this imagery according to Shapir. The late scholar justifiably insists upon the distinct phallic subtext of the primary semantic structure of this text, he reveals the hidden “naked audacity of Mayakovsky’s Verses on a Soviet Passport”. Quoting from the famous lines Shapir proceeds: “I pull from my wide trousers a replica of the priceless load’… According to Omry Ronen, the scene with its object pulled ‘from wide trousers’ – between other red skins and resembling a six-foot long snake – was inspired by a letter of Turgenev in which he declared that he was departing for Leipzig with his ‘pashport in pocket and prick in pants, nothing else’… One year earlier Mayakovsky equated the loss of membership in the Communist Party to losing one’s virginity: ‘…A membership card is like a hymen. Rid yourself of it (Break your hymen). Feasting for evenings with Kotia.’ Interestingly, Sumarokov linked ‘pashport’ and ‘trousers’ in the verses of ‘Origin of a State Clerk, or an Explanation on the Habit of Taking Them to Work’: ‘I have my cock, just like a pen with a cartridge. I am the chief justice here in the woods. I will add in your passport any mark that you desire And apply the stamp. Permit yourself to be a crab! The clerk bowed. He was unbuttoning his trousers …’ etc.”. 904

The “phallic taboo” and in general all “pornographic” subjects which have such a widespread literary tradition in Russia provide a wonderful opportunity to discuss the concept of the “act” including its most literal meaning. The previous examples allow one to see with exceptional clarity the complete organization, or as Ernst Jünger would say “mobilization”, of radical modernism (Avant-Gardism) determined to cause controversy. These examples also demonstrate the careful structuring of Avant-Garde pragmatics for the total semiosis of épatage focused on the recipient Shapir probably had in mind precisely this emphasis on the “holistic” all-embracing pragmatics of the Avant-Garde when he developed his ideas on the functionality of this aesthetic historical development of the 20th century. Avant-Garde here is understood primarily as “scandal”, as “shock-generating” mode of discourse.

Shapir’s ideas regarding Avant-Garde pragmatics and semiotics represented a scholarly way of analyzing the techniques of transcending the rigid boundaries of a “closed” verbal text. These ideas would merit special attention and it would be appropriate here to provide a few examples, which may include the characterization of a Russian Avant-Garde Futurist Igor’ Terentiev: “…When words don’t suffice, when the power of sound loses its strength, then gesticulation begins: the frenzied flight, the jump, wallowing in mud and mire!” 905

904 “…Я достаю из широких штанин дупликатом бесценного груза’... ... По мнению О.Ронена, сюжет с извлекаемым ‘из широких штанин’ предметом – между прочим краснокожим и похожим на двухметровую змею – был навеян письмом Тургенева, в котором тот извещал, что направляется в Лейпциг с ‘пашпортом в кармане и хуем в штанах и только’... Годом раньше лишение партийной книжки Маяковский приравнивал к дефлорации: ‘А билет партийный – девственная плева. Лишайтесь. С Коти пируя вечерочками.’ ... Любопытно, что хуй, пашпорт и штаны связал еще Сумароков в стансах ‘Происхождение подьячева, или Извъяснение привычки их брать за работу’: ‘А у меня мой хуй, так как перо с очином. Я главной здесь судья в лесу. В пашпорт тебя внесу Каким изволишь чином И приложу печать, Изволь-ка раком стать! Подъячей наклонился. Отстегивал штаны …’ и т.д.”. See: Ibid.: 373.

Shapir expressed his ideas on the Avant-Grade pragmatics for the first time in a liberal Soviet journal *Daugava* (in 1989). This modus of thinking preoccupied the minds of many scholars of the new generation. Yuri Lotman’s disciple Vadim Rudnev once had voiced similar ideas (at that time maintaining a certain interest for a strict scholarship – something that he as it seems has subsequently lost). Rudnev observed, “…the very sense of aesthetic positioning of the Avant-Garde is the active, and as a rule, aggressive influence on an audience which should lead to shock, epatage, scandal. All of this unites Futurism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Oberiu and allows us to call these tendencies Avant-Garde art”.906

In their entirety, all these remaining personal testimonies and other research materials support the premise that Mayakovsky firmly belonged to the main trajectory of Russian deictic Life-Creation pragmatics. The poet led a life structured on the basis of work principles for creative and esthetic modes of consciousness. A recently published German monograph devoted to the matter of grouping the persona of Mayakovsky with two major Russian lyrical Life-Creators, Alexander Pushkin and Alexander Blok is useful in this regard.907

The author of this monograph, W. Kissel, brings up an interesting concept of *Kenosis* which can be translated into Russian as “опустошение” or “devastation” in English.908 The modernist and Avant-Garde manipulation of ideas of “artificial death”, i.e. suicide,909 may be viewed from the author’s perspective through the prism of this complex of religious and Life-Creation ideologies. It was illustrated above how Mayakovsky was depicted and even immortalized in the portrait by his female contemporary as a tragic Avant-Garde type of “New Christ”.

One of the most remarkable insights of Kissel’s research on the subject of my own work concerns the important issue of experimental probing of human memory, which is a composite of many artistic exponents from the period of international modernism. “Recollection” itself for Kissel here means the process of mental and verbal performativity, not just figuratively but literally, in the guise of the painted form of *Memoria* that is also symbolized as a culture in itself.910 This observation by Kissel is a subtexted reference to the work of Bergson (*Matter and Memory*) which was mentioned in the previous chapter. In this way memory appears to be seemingly identified as a cultural basis of all the currents and cross-currents of international modernism.

Kissel’s central ideas on the vital importance of memory may correspond to the memoirs of Vladislav Khodasevich (written in 1939 under the title *Necropolis*).906

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906 “…самый смысл эстетической позиции авангардиста – это активное и, как правило, агрессивное воздействие на толпу, которое должно приводить к шоку, эпатажу, скандалу. Все это объединяет футуризм, сюрреализм, дадаизм, обэриу и позволяет назвать эти течения авангардным искусством”. See: Руднев 1993: 190.


908 Kissel 2004: 17. The Greek word κένωσις (kénōsis) means “emptying”, or “devastating”, deriving from κενός (kenos) = “empty”. This important theological term is usually used to designate the so to say “self-annihilation” of Christ through *incarnation* and the voluntary acceptance of his physical death. This is mentioned in *Philippians* 2:7 (“Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave…”). “Kenosis” means “emptying” of one’s own will and the complete submission to the will of God.

909 For the role of suicide in Russian and European Modernism see comparative work by Svetlana Boym (1991).

910 See for example, Kissel: 123-124.
Некрополь), a text that first lead to a critical assessment of the Russian decadent Life-Creation. Kissel’s understanding of the culture-as-memory concept utilizes the semiotic views of Yuri Lotman, who in his turn in quite a similar way was theorizing culture as memory above all else. The high Modernist concepts of Post-Durkheimian “collective memory” elaborated by Maurice Halbwachs911 are also relevant here.

Mayakovsky’s tragic death represents indisputably a central and conceptually orchestrated concluding stage of his Life-Creation.912 His funeral is invested, in addition to everything else, with a quasi-religious subtext in the consciousness of “collective representation” as well as “collective memory” announcing the death of a unique individual who took upon himself the sins of the ordinary Soviet people. It is far from coincidental as well that the death of Mayakovsky in the collective consciousness of many contemporaries was later associated with the end of heroic, romantic and somewhat liberal times and de facto signaled the beginning of a new, brutal era of Stalinist cannibalistic repression. It is also interesting that since the time of Mayakovsky’s death, his persona in many Soviet memorials has been portrayed as a kind of new heroic deity, a titan endowed with a mighty appearance and magical power of public oration delivered for the Soviet nation.

As Kissel has observed, Vladimir Mayakovsky deliberately strove to create an artificial, self-fashioned persona for himself that partially corresponded to the image which subsequently crystallized in the people’s consciousness following his death. In life, Mayakovsky obviously succeeded in creating a special post-romantic “legend” of his own kind. From his perspective this new legend was a distinctly Avant-Garde one, moving with his own lyrical heroic “I”dentity, describing his entire life in self-reflective texts, such as “Cloud in Pants” (Облако в штанах)913 that is both self-critical and poetic. The German researcher traces similar pragmatics of Life-Creational intentions in Mayakovsky’s literary predecessors such as Pushkin and Blok.914

1.4. Daniil Kharms – The Wonder Worker of Life Creation Pragmatics

The “last”915 Russian Avant-Garde writer, Daniil Kharms, is of special interest for the “Shapirian approach” to the Avant-Garde because of the multifarious types of his sign-creating eccentric behavior. Several intriguing examples of Kharmsian life-

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911 See: Halbwachs 1980. Halbwachs’ approach and critical response is distinct from the traditional “individual” memory in that collective memory belongs to and is defined by a large number of diverse people inhabiting the social and cultural realm of Modernism. With regard to Halbwachs’ concept of “collective memory”, see also Assmann who worked out the issues of “communicative memory” (the diversity of collective memory based on daily communication). Worth noting too is the contribution of the cultural anthropologist James E. Young, who introduced the concept of “collected memory”, founded on the fragmentation and uniqueness of any “recollection”, fixed in any kind of defined form. See: Assmann 1992 and Young 1993.

912 For this see the recently published compilation of documentary materials including manuscripts and diaries, confirming the fact of the poet’s suicide (despite other conspiracy theories): Маяковский 2005.

913 See the common discourse of declarations like “I am a Poet. This should be the main interest about me” (“Я – поэт. Этим и интересен”), as well as many others.

914 It is no coincidence that Mayakovsky maintained very ambivalent attitude to both of these poets.

915 If to follow the approach developed by J.-F. Jaccard.
creation pragmatics have already been researched.\textsuperscript{916} The issue here is to give a preliminary systematization of the most characteristic points related to the life creational/eccentrically decorated behavior of Kharms. In his quasi-fictional memoirs\textsuperscript{917} Svetozar Shishman describes (in this case, however, one must seriously doubt the credibility of his entire narrative), in the words of his father, the “semitic” atmosphere of a meeting between Kharms and his lady acquaintance, “… Nora waited for Kharms near the steps of the City Duma. He was supposed to be coming from the House of the Book. Kharms was exceptionally pedantic and punctual. If he set a date for a certain time, one could bet that with the first peal of the Duma Clock-chimes he would appear before you with a deep bow… Nora saw that the crowd was parting to let someone pass. It was Kharms.”\textsuperscript{918}

Irrespective of the credibility of his narrative which apparently and justifiably has caused doubt among many scholars, it is clear that Shishman nonetheless notices something very important in the persona of Kharms, what one would call “orientation on defamiliarized representation” or more broadly, on Avant-Garde pragmatics of physical behavior. Shishman recounts in the words of his father and “Nora”, “how extravagantly, impulsively and astoundingly Kharms dressed”. Shishman continues his memoir “…I can clearly imagine and warmly smile, ‘What an oddball-rascal!’ Short pants, knee breeches, an English coat, snow-white shirt and a beautiful, elegantly tied necktie, a bowler and cane or a cap and a bright flower fixed at an inappropriate spot, a gargantuan pocket watch (Kharms always stopped regularly to glance at the dial), an enormous hooked pipe of gigantic proportions and along with all this an unflappable, impenetrable gaze of his large blue eyes. Towering over the people around him, Kharms would not look down on them, oh no, he simply ignored everyone. Kharms approached Nora, smiled, took the girl by the hand and led her somewhere… Nora could not raise her eyes, she felt that Kharms said something but she did not hear. And of course she could not hear – it seemed to her that all of Nevsky Avenue, all of Liteiny and Vladimirsky Avenues were running toward them and gawking, pointing with fingers, howling in derision, not at them, not at him, but at her. It was really terrifying.”\textsuperscript{919}

\textsuperscript{916} See: Иоффе 2006-б: 325-347. See also Komaromi 2002: 419-437.
\textsuperscript{917} For the same kind of stories about Kharms see also Никитин 2006.
\textsuperscript{918} “Нюра ждала Хармса около лестницы Думы. Он должен был подойти со стороны Дома книги. Хармс был необыкновенно педантичен и точен, если он назначил свидание на какое-то время, то можно было не сомневаться, с первым ударом Думских курантов он склонится перед вами в изящном поклоне. ... Нюра увидела, что толпа расступается, освобождая кому-то дорогу. Это шел Хармс”. See: Шишман 1991: 21.
\textsuperscript{919} “…можно образно представить и мило улыбнуться: Экий чудак-озорник! – Короткие брюки, гольфы, английская куртка, белоснежная рубашка и красивый элегантно завязанный галстук, котелок и трость или кепи и яркий цветок, прикрепленный на неподобающем месте, карманные часы с чайное блюдце (Хармс всегда останавливался, чтобы взглянуть на циферблат), огромная, гигантских размеров кривая трубка и при всем этом невоззятый, непроницаемый взгляд больших голубых глаз. Возвращаясь над окружающими, он не смотрел свысока, нет, он просто никого не замечал… Хармс подошел к Нюр, улыбнулся, взял девушку под руку и куда-то повел… Нюра не могла поднять глаз, чувствовала, что Хармс что-то говорит, но не слышала, да и не могла слышать – ей казалось, что весь Невский Проспект, весь Литейный, весь Владимирский сбегаются и смотрят, тычут пальцами, улюлюкают на ней, не над ним, а над ней. Было страшно до ужаса”. See: Шишман 1991: 21.
Kharms arranged all his even most extraordinary stunts with constant nonchalance: “…‘Well, and so what of it?’ asked Kharms, ‘What do you mean, what of it?’”, murmured Nora. ‘Poetry’. ‘I heard nothing!’ – ‘Get used to it Nora, lift up your head’, Kharms said while propping her chin with a bent index finger, ‘Nose up, like this. Don’t forget that I am the mighty Vizier of this Geosphere, and you are with me’. He mischievously laughed, seized Nora by her hand and dragged her along, all the while humming some tune and swinging his cane…”.

In this narrative delivered by Shishman, the descriptive style of portraying Daniil Kharms is interesting most of all for its “imaginative”, that is to say its “deceptive” and teasing aspect. What is especially important to note is the transgressive feeling of universal horror which accompanied Kharms’ “performance” on Nevski Avenue. It is important to observe that many witnesses then, but in particular, the “horrified” Nora naturally, noticed the extravagant signs which Kharms presented as a means of, as we may see, additional deitical context to the declaration of his own poetry. The problem perhaps at times was that Kharms tended to exaggerate things, and thus the same Nora was already “unable to hear” his own poetry because of the life-creationist performative behavior of the poet which “gushed over” his own verbal lyrics.

It would make sense here to continue by investigating the role of “playful pragmatics” for Daniil Kharms as an explanation of the archetypal “person at play”. Because as we know, it is precisely the pragmatics of play, the pragmatics of engaging the recipient in the aesthetic “event” of a new Avant-Garde text that serves as the central motive for this new experimental art which the Russian Avant-Garde represented. In her article “Homo Soveticus jako homo ludens, On the Prose of Daniil Kharms”, the Polish (Kraków) Slavic scholar Katarzyna Makowetska demonstrated how Daniil Kharms was shaping his narrative based on the mysterious “life-incidents” he created. It was an era when under the conditions “contrived” by the new revolutionary regime the so-called homo soveticus sought within himself the vital and creative energies to play inspiredly, to play in all the semantic hypostases of this multi-dimensional term. Makowetska highlights the unique and dynamic passion of Kharms which one should call total “theatricalization of life”, that creative and behavioral process which is the poet’s case was found in the postulation of “real existence” as utter absurdity. This was the premise in which both everyday and occasionally intimate events turn to be truly remarkable theater. Here I am referring to what Alexander Blok in his time called “anatomical theater” or “theater for one’s own self”. According to Blok, there was a necessity for a “true artist” of

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Symbolism to accomplish his art in relation to the new bodily performed theatricality. In his essay “About the current state of Russian Symbolism” (О современном состоянии русского символизма) Blok remarked that: “my private magical world became a new stage of my personal actions, it turned into a certain anatomical theatre, or may be a Balagan, where I myself play together with all my wondrous puppets”. 923

According to a kharmsian viewpoint, Soviet citizens appear to be at constant play, partially neglecting themselves and their personal wellbeing, given that one does not observe true, carefree happiness in their play. I will illustrate this idea by two fragments from the notes of Kharms’ diary dating from the second half of 1932, “There were days when I did not eat anything. Then I would try to put myself in a happy mood. I would lie on the bed and begin to smile. I would smile continually for twenty minutes, but my smile would turn into a yawn. It was very unpleasant. I would open my mouth just enough so that I could only smile, but it would open wider and I would start to yawn. I would begin to dream. I would see before me a clay pitcher with milk and pieces of fresh bread. I would sit at a table and eat quickly. On the table and chairs and on the bed there were sheets of paper with handwriting. And I would write further, winking and smiling at my thoughts”. 924

Another fragment, from August 1937, shows how the poet recommended engaging into the stream of life with the intention of reforming and taming it, “Life is a sea, fate is a wind and man is a ship. And like a good helmsman can navigate a head wind and even sail against the wind without changing course, so too a wise man can use the blows of fate and with each blow draw closer to his goal. For example, a man wanted to become a public speaker, but fate cut out his tongue. The man was mute. Still, he did not relent but taught himself how to use boards with phrases in capital letters. Moreover, the boards had a greater effect on his audience when he needed to snarl or needed to erupt than if he had delivered the words by common speech”.

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924 “Были дни, когда я ничего не ел. Тогда я старался создать себе радостное настроение. Я ложился на кровать и начинал улыбаться. Я улыбался по двадцати минут за раз, но потом улыбка переходила в зевоту. Это было очень неприятно. Я приоткрывал рот настолько, чтобы только улыбнуться, а он открывался шире, и я зевал. Я начинал мечтать. Я видел перед собой глиняный кувшин с молоком и куски свежего хлеба. Я сам сижу за столом и быстро пишу. На столе, на стульях и на кровати лежат листы исписанной бумаги. А я пишу дальше, подмигиваю, и улыбаюсь своим мыслям”. See: Устинов, Кобринский 1991: 456-457.
925 “Жизнь это море, судьба это ветер, а человек это корабль. И как хороший рулевой может использовать противный ветер и даже идти против ветра, не меняя курса, так и умный человек может использовать удары судьбы, и с каждым ударом приближаться к своей цели. Пример: Человек хотел стать оратором, а судьба отрезала ему язык, человек онемел. Но он не сдался, а научился показывать дощечки с фразами, написанными большими буквами, и при этом, где нужно рычать, а где нужно подывать, и этим воздействовать на слушателей еще более, чем это можно сделать обыкновенной речью”. See: Ibid.
It would be useful to examine the role of *ludism* in Kharms’ activity\(^926\) and to go further with the culturological legacy of Johan Huizinga. These ideas on ludism were anticipated in the 1910’s and the middle of the 1920’s by the Russian playwright and theater theoretician, Nikolai Evreinov, who developed the general concept of “theatricalization of life”. Evreinov also was embroiled in a certain polemic with Viacheslav Ivanov over the Dionysian concept of tragedy understood as a sort of ‘total art’. In his programmatic treatise “The Theatricalization of Life” first published in his book *Theater As Such* in St. Petersburg in 1912, Nikolai Evreinov argued, that “this instinct” – the theatrical one, is absolutely “essential to humans” and despite its inexhaustible vitality, according to him, “neither history nor psychology nor aesthetics has spoken a single meaningful word about it”. Evreinov had in mind “the instinct of transformation, the instinct of juxtaposition of forms, taken from beyond, of shapes arbitrarily created by man, the instinct of transformation of Nature’s appearances sufficiently and clearly unveiling its essence in the concept of theatricality”\(^927\).

Focused on European eccentric Dandyism, Evreinov was, as it seems, extremely interested in describing and highlighting a certain general component of the mysterious, primordial and archaic “instinct” responsible for theatrical activity of *homo sapiens*. Going into the European history Evreinov was posing a series of meaningful rhetorical questions intended to elucidate his set of ideas: “is it not the very same Dandyism, the very same theatrical instinct that evoked the urge to ‘showboat in dress’ and impelled other scholars of modernity in the twilight age of theatricality to convert their lives into a staged performance? If the opposite is true, then what is the significance of the monk’s cassock of Balzac and his cane with the turquoise handle, the red velvet jacket and beret of Richard Wagner, the Byzantine black and blue clothes of Joseph Peladan, …the outmoded horseman’s dress of Gabriel D’Annuzio, the haircut a la Nero and sunflower in the commode of Oscar

\(^926\) Four years before the work of K. Makowetska appeared, T. Nikolskaia published “The Role of Life Theatricalization in the Russian Avant-Garde” (Никольская 1988: 71-75). It was republished in English three years later in 1991 in a slightly modified version in an anthology of international studies on Kharms *Daniil Kharms and the Poetics of the Absurd* (Никольская 1991: 195-200). Nikolskaia’s, as far as I know, is one of the first essays which analytically describes Daniil Kharms’ creative work within the context of modernist Life Creation. Along with other authors of the preceding Futurist generation including Mayakovskiy, Khlebnikov, Larionov, Goncharova, the Burliuk Brothers, Zdanovich and others, Nikolskaia associates Kharms with the political left, the artistic tradition which embraced the Constructivism promoted by Nikolai Chuzhak and Sergei Tretyakov. A valuable collection of materials, *The ‘Play Space’ of Culture*, was published in 2002 in Sankt Petersburg. Among the many articles on diverse aspects of global play *sub specie ludi* is a short piece by Sergei Shishkov “The Phenomenon of Play in the Life and Creative Work of Daniil Kharms” (Шишков 2002: 297-300) which is an invitation for further reflection on the importance of a “play” principle in the texts and behavior of the poet.

\(^927\) “Человеку присущ инстинкт, о котором, несмотря на его неиссякаемую жизненность, ни история, ни психология, ни эстетика не говорил до сих пор значимого слова. Я имею в виду инстинкт преображения, инстинкт противопоставления образам, принимаемым извне, образов, произвольно творимых человеком, инстинкт трансформации видимостей Природы, достаточно ясно раскрывающих свою сущность в понятии ‘театральность’”. See: Евреинов 2002: 49.
Wilde, the raspberry lining of D’Aurevilly’s cloak, the red and green sock on Pietro Mascagni’s foot, etc.”.  

Evreinov did not limit himself to a general affirmation of the conceptual importance of the phenomenon of theatricality in the culture of any other social organizations. Instead he considers it expedient to assert the idea of so-called “theatrical life creation” that interested him at that moment. To his mind, to excuse oneself “with a laugh” on account of these idiosyncrasies is one way to avoid the problem of theatricality. For him a serious attitude to life is by no means exhausted by investigation of only that which the consensus of people deems “serious”. Evreinov spoke about the “trifles” and “non-trifles” which according to his view hardly qualify in that capacity a priori. He believes that “comparing such ‘trifles’” you begin to clearly understand in particular Wilde’s notion of a person’s obligation of self-transformation into a work of art, an idea undoubtedly “evoked by Flaubert who maintained that ‘art is greater than life’ and that ‘man is nothing, a work of art is everything’.”

Evreinov’s quest for a “continuum of life theatricalization” led him to the important motto that was in clear agreement with the deep aspirations of Andrei Belyi and Aleksandr Blok, “one becomes a work of art unto oneself!... Does this strictly theatrical imperative motivate a Greek man to place a statue of Hermes or Phoebus in his wife’s room, in order to have children similar to these works of art and does not this same imperative result in the flight of young boys to the America of Mayne Reid, investigation a la Sherlock Holmes…the transformation into ‘noble bandits’ of Schiller’s romantic vision?”.  

One of Kharms’ first allies who in writing tied the image of this author to the world view of Life Creation and the important role of play was Yakov Druskin. According to Druskin, there are two kinds of writers. The first category includes those whose creative work seemingly bears no direct relation to their personal life, whereas the second category consists of the writers whose creative work is so closely tied to their personal life that it is impossible to understand their work without knowing the details of their lives. The internal and external aspects of their lives and creative work are directly intertwined in this case.
According to Druskin, Vvedenskii belonged to the first category of writers and Kharms to the second. Druskin observes that both Vvedensky and Kharms knew of this distinction and even somehow sensed it. At the end of the 1920’s Vvedenskii said that Kharms “did not create art, but was art himself”. Kharms himself said that it “was life, not art that was most important to him, to structure his life as art”. “The creation of life as art” for Kharms was a category not of an aesthetic nature but an existential one as we would say today. For Vvedenskii art and life were two parallel lines, which only intersected in infinity. In a practical sense Vvedensky achieved this infinite point in “Elegy” (written presumably in 1940) and in “Where. When” (1941) that may be seen as his farewell to life. In these two works Vvedenskii demonstrated that “his art is tied to life but not as intimately as in Kharms’ case”.

Several characteristic episodes from Kharms’ life may illustrate my discussion. The first of these is his imaginative treatise known as “Life Principles” ("Правила жизни") inscribed in a diary from November 1927 that bear witness to the poet’s clear intention to organize his life and personal behavior in accordance with a certain aesthetic program and certain regulations. As Ustinov and Kobrinsky, the editors of Kharms diary, observed: “Deliberate autobiographism is becoming a way to create a new style and consequently introducing literature into everyday life existence which proposes the defamiliarization and parodying of the established regulations and conventional order”.

Kharms is also widely famous for many distinct, quasi-anecdotal episodes, such as when he simulated a mental illness and presented himself to a medical commission in an elegant necktie on a bare neck, top hat, with a large cross on his chest, a cane and pince-nez, completely naked; or when he appeared on the main streets of St. Petersburg with a fisherman’s net in his hands, one minute juggling celluloid balls and the next suddenly squatting on the street curb apparently to “catch his breath”. Alisa Poret spoke about the famous incident with the rotten cabbage stalks which Kharms showed to a doctor who had come on a professional call at the behest of the poet. Nina Noskovich recalled how Kharms brought a fat, imposing man in a straw hat with a thick accountant’s ledger under his arm to Alisa Poret’s. The man was an accountant and Kharms had brought him to read aloud the man’s novel. Noskovich continued the story, “Everyone sat down. The accountant opened his ledger and began to read. The group burst out laughing within a few lines of the reading. Then the accountant took offense and decided to leave […] Kharms loved these kinds of games”.

Another chronicler, Maria Blok, discussed Kharms’ project for a real circus performance and a certain “carpet-jester” dwarf, “The Clown Artamonov”, “I thought that Daniil Ivanovich had deliberately chosen precisely this extremely odd, unusual, grotesquely shocking individual from among all the amateur artists that I had

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932 See: Ibid.
933 “Намеренный автобиографизм становится приемом создания нового стиля и соответственного внесения литературы в быт, которое предполагало остранение и пародирование узаконенных условностей и установленного порядка”. See: Устинов, Кобринский 1991: 422.
The material from the recently published Venezuelan memoirs of Kharms's last wife, Marina Malich, and the myth-creating “Collection of Petersburg Cranks” ("Коллекция петербургских чудаков") of Kharms provides many instances of playful life-creation in the behavior of the poet. We find some remarkable descriptions of such behavior in the diary writings of the poet from November, 1932: “I sat with Frau Rene in view of everyone. And suddenly I saw that I had on worn and moth-eaten gaiters, rather dirty fingernails, a wrinkled jacket, and most frightful of all, an unzipped fly on full display for everyone. I assumed the most unnatural sitting pose to conceal all these shortcomings and sat like this for the entire first part of the concert. When the concert was over, I accompanied Frau Rene home and drank tea at her place until two in the morning. On the way back I fortuitously happened upon a stray tramway. I stood in the empty car and sang, praising God and Esther. Suddenly I saw that another man was standing behind me in the tramway and listening. I became embarrassed and began to sing in German, and then in English, finally switching to Foxtrot tunes. But once the man had slipped away, I began to sing again, about God and Esther. I sang write up to the gates of my home: All the world is a Window – Esther”.

Or this note from October, 1933: “More than anything, a woman loves to be noticed. As an experiment, let her stand in front of you and pretend that you do not hear or see a thing and act as if there is no one else in the room. Your behavior will terribly pique her curiosity... One time I deliberately slipped my hand into my pocket with a cryptic look and this woman so intently fixed her eyes on me as if to say, ‘what is that?’ And then I took...and deliberately pulled from my pocket...a coaster...The woman virtually CONVULSED from curiosity!”.

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935 “...я подумала, что Даниил Иванович не случайно из всех безрепертуарных артистов, о которых я ему рассказывала, выбрал именно этого, самого странного, необычного, удивительного как гротеск...”. See: Maria Blok (Блок 1995: 123).

936 For a historical context of the concept of “chudak” as depicted in Kharms’ “Collection of Russian Oddballs” see the recent essay by the Harvard Slavic scholar Julie A. Buckler (2006: 299-319). Buckler’s essay helps one understand the nature of eccentric behavior and ‘cultural memory’, displayed in the collective and individual “consciousness” of the related period of Russian history. The author places the reader in the unique world of Russian “oddballs”, the so-called “hommes a la mode”. The Harvard scholar mentions Vladimir Burnashev (the “First-Born Bohemian in Russia” in the pithy words of Nikolai Leskov) and his extremely curious creative work of which the book “Our Miracle Workers. Chronicle of Oddities and Eccentricities of Any Sort” is particularly entertaining (St. Petersburg, 1875, published under the pseudonym “Kasian Kasianov”; See Касьянов, (Бурнашев) 1875). It should be mentioned along with this also M.I. Pyliaev’s book “Notable Oddballs and Characters”. (See Пыляев 1898).

937 “Я сидел с Frau Rene, на виду у всех. И вдруг я вижу, что у меня напоказ, совершенно драные и изъеденные молью гетры, не очень чистые ногти, мятый пиджак, и что самое страшное, расстегнута прорешка. Я сел в самую неестественную позу, чтобы скрыть все эти недостатки, и так просидел всю первую часть концерта. После концерта я провожал Frau Rene домой и пил у нее час до двух часов ночи. На обратном пути случайно попал на запоздавший трамвай. Я стоял на пустой площадке и пел, прославляя Бога и Эстер. Вдруг я увидел, что на площадке за мной стоит еще человек и слушает. Я смутился и запел по-немецки, а потом по-английски, а потом перешел на фокстротные мотивы. Но когда человек слез, я запел опять, о Боге и о Эстер. До самых ворот дома я пел: Весь мир Окно – Эстер”. See: Устинов, Кобринский 1991: 461.

938 “Прежде всего, женщина любит, чтобы ее замечали. Пусть она стоит перед тобой или станет, а ты делай вид, что ничего не слышишь и не видишь, и веди себя так, будто и нет никого в комнате. Это страшно разжигает женское любопытство... Я другой раз на речке полез в карман
There is an interesting diary note from August, 1937 recounting the myth-making pattern of the “Rodrigo Marquis of Posa”, Dandyism and other patterns of aestheticized personal behavior.\textsuperscript{939} The concept of a “mask” for example may be also aptly labeled a “pose” for Kharms. Once Kharms made a declaration, “Create a pose for yourself and have the will to retain it. “One time I had the pose of an Indian, then of Sherlock Holmes, next of a Yogi and now of a short-tempered paranoid. This final pose I would not like to retain for myself. I need to think up a new pose”.\textsuperscript{940} For this “new pose” Kharms assumed all kinds of imaginary names. As Branislav Jakovljevic has noted, “this proliferation of alternate identities became comparable to Fernando Pessoa’s heteronymity: he signed his poems, prose pieces, dramas, and even diary entries with pseudonyms, such as Charms or Chorms. Some of these pseudonymic personae, such as Daniil Dandan and Daniil Shardam, have entire opuses ascribed to them”.\textsuperscript{941}

I would like to point out here again the potential symbiosis which could arise between the author and his main \textit{dramatis personae} which correspond to the principle of “kinetic characters” mentioned earlier. It is clear that the issue of theatricalized play\textsuperscript{942} becomes a natural Modernist feature for Kharms who was one of the obvious agents of this experimental literary milieu. The daunting subject of Kharms’ “sexual” life-creation which I have discussed in another essay is beyond the scope of the present discussion.\textsuperscript{943}

In summarizing this discussion of the play-oriented Life-Creation of Daniil Kharms, one may note the exceptionally high frequency of frivolous impulses in the personal behavior of Kharms. It seems completely justified to include Daniil Kharms in the category of artists who are \textit{indistinguishable} from their creative work. It is only through a careful study of the real events and milestones of the lives of these artists that one will understand their cultural output. This may be accomplished through the use of diaries, letters and select memoirs of friends and contemporaries of the life experiences of each specific cultural figure.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{939} On Kharms as “dandy” see a recent essay by Mikhail Meilakh: Мейлах 2007: 411-439.
  \item \textsuperscript{940} “Создай себе позу и имей характер выдержать ее. Когда-то у меня была поза индейца, потом Шерлока Холмса, потом йога, а теперь – раздражительного неврастеника. Последнюю позу я бы не хотел удерживать за собой. Надо выдумать новую позу”. See Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{941} See: Jakovljevic 2005: 171-72. Neil Carrick in his essay “A Familiar Story: Insurgent narratives and Generic Refugees in Daniil Kharms” (1995: 707-721) tries to identify the possible differences between the figure of “the main narrator” and the personality of the author (Daniil Yuvachev). We can point out the potential symbiosis which could arise between the author and some of his main \textit{dramatis personae} which correspond to the principle of “kinetic characters” mentioned earlier. It is clear that the issue of theatricalized play becomes a dominant Modernist feature for Kharms who was one of the obvious agents of this experimental literary milieu. On the meaningful content of Kharms’ “invented” name see the an article by Mikhail Meilakh (see: Мейлах 2009). See also Остроухова, Кувшинов 2002.
  \item \textsuperscript{942} Regarding Kharms’ carnivalism see the survey article by Y. Rogov, “Carnival Traditions in the Creative Work of Daniil Kharms”, \url{http://xarms.lipetsk.ru/texts/rog3.html}.
  \item \textsuperscript{943} See: Иоффе 2008-а: 232-249.
\end{itemize}

\[c таинственным видом, а женщина так и уставится глазами, мол, дескать, что это такое? А я возьм… и выну из кармана нарочно какой-нибудь... подстаканник... Женщина так и ВЗДРОГНЕТ от любопытства!”. See Ibid.
2.0. Transgressive Aesthetics of Avant-Garde Life-Creation

2.1. The Avant-Garde Theatricality and Synaesthesia

One of the most important life aspects of Avant-Garde art is the multi-dimensional theatricality which has already been mentioned above in the context of Kharms. It is a topic that is worth examining for better understanding the larger subject of Life-Creational pragmatics. Several collections of papers have been devoted to the scholarly meditation on the Avant-Garde theatre. Vsevolod Meyerhold’s quests and experiments in theater may serve here as a general example of experimental theatricality in the Russian Avant-Garde. Of particular interest for understanding the concept of transgressive corporeality are Meyerhold’s projects related to biomechanics. Interesting is also the comparatively unfamiliar figure of the Ukrainian theatre-director Boris Glagolin, the author of “Life-Creation of Theater” (Жизнетворчество театра), a brochure published in 1922. One production of Glagolin’s that employs the shock aesthetic of Avant-Garde pragmatics is his 1919 production “Naked Ballet” with a completely nude cast. A second one is his 1924 play “MOB” with the character Relfus (a Russian palindrome that means stage prompter when reversed: “sufler”) who jumped out on the stage with a pistol in his hand and realistically fired upon the audience. The horrified theatergoers hid behind the backs of the chairs. It would seem that “shock” pragmatics reaches its apogee in this kind of Avant-Garde public performativity.

The “Modernist” notion of expressive dance deserves a significant place in the pragmatics of all Avant-Garde performative praxis. Ekaterina Bobrinskaia notes that Viktor Shklovsky called Futurist poetry “the ballet of speech organs” (балет для органов речи), and Kul’bin “preached the ‘danceability’ of all life”. Bobrinskaia examines in great detail how Mikhail Larionov compares Futurist facepainting with the dance of Tango. In her line of thought, the dance is interpreted as “the most natural form of creative work since it is not hobbled by the stale conceptual structure of language”. This is because of the close association between dance and the entire human body. The Russian scholar maintains that all the so-called “sound-gestures” in which Futurist poetry is so rich, and more broadly, the “gestures of writing and drawing (particularly on the pages of lithographic or hectographic books)” have strong, dancelike characteristics.

In her recent article “Futurist Make-Up” (Футуристический грим) Bobrinskaia points out that the astounding face-painting used by Larionov’s circle is

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944 See above all others such valuable collections as: Коваленко 2000 and Коваленко 2008. From the previous periods of scholarship see, for example, Нинов 1988 passim.
945 See Braun 1995. More extensive discussion of this particular issue is beyond the scope of the present study, but this will be examined in future.
946 On Glagolin see Иванов 2008: 4-19
948 A recent fascinating semiotic presentation by Marina Akimova focused on hieroglyphically expressed “dance-ability” (“танцеволизация”) of Valentin Parnakh was devoted to this topic.
949 “…наиболее органичная (в частности, и в смысле связи с телом, со всем организмом человека) форма творчества, не скованная застывшей понятийной структурой языка”. See Бобринская 1998: 51.
closely integrated with the Luchist aesthetic in general. She views Luchist imagery as “a kind of bundle, a concentration of beams or colored dust, scattered throughout the space of life” and speaks of a new kind of interaction between art and life which Mikhail Larionov demonstrated in his career: “the new style suggested penetrability, mutual porosity for various art forms in relation to one another and in the broadest sense an openness of art and life”.

In a joint publication Larionov and Zdanevich have stated: “We combined art with life. After a long seclusion of the masters, we booming summoned life and life infiltrated art. It is now time for art to infiltrate life. Face painting is the start of this process and our heartbeats are set to it”. In this way, the authors declare an open principle for restructuring life according to the laws of their art. “We paint ourselves since the face alone is repulsive and because we want to celebrate the unknown. We will restructure life and elevate the variegated spirit of man to its pinnacle”.

The shocking face-painting of the Russian Avant-Garde was relevant not only for Larionov but for David Burliuk as well. In the case of Burliuk, Bobrinskaia feels that face painting in general does not extend beyond the framework of carnival, theatrical effects or as he had put it, “unconcealed epatage”. In Burliuk’s case the hieroglyphical face-painting signified an initial gesture, aimed at repeatedly “changing the context of the pictorial representation” in its immediate setting. The Luchist type of gesture offered a reform of the very character of the pictorial representation as such. In the case of Luchist face-decoration that was developed by Larionov and Zdanevich their abstract drawings on parts of the face and at time on the body “were always weaved into the overall style of their general system of art and life’s interaction”.

The Futurist make-up of Larionov bodypainting and face-drawing become key elements in a new form of artistic experimentation. The drawing on the human body or face becomes distorted and altered when moving, it becomes an original extension of the body, a new somatic part of the human organism. It is worth mentioning here that the founder of international Futurism, Marinetti, wrote that “art is an extension of our veins, unfurling beyond the body into the infinity of space and time”. One can easily agree with the premise that in the Luchist painting of Larionov, Goncharova and Zdanevich there exists a connection with a permanent fickleness,

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950 See the pioneering essay by John E. Bowlt devoted to this topic: Bowlt 1991: 67-88.
952 “…новый стиль предполагал проницаемость, взаимную открытость как отдельных видов искусства по отношению к друг другу, так и в более широком смысле – открытость искусства и жизни”. See: Бобринская 2006: 149.
954 “…мы раскрашиваемся – ибо чистое лицо противно, ибо хотим глашатайствовать о неведомом, перестраиваем жизнь и несем на верховья бытия умноженную душу человека”. See Ibid.
955 See: Бобринская 2006: 150.
956 For the connection between face painting and pragmatical theatricality of masks, see Илюхина 2008: 357-402. On the group’s theatricality see also Bowlt 1990: 44-51.
“with a mortality, temporality of the human body”. These motives “inform Futurist art and facepainting, as well as biologism and even physiologism”.  

As a result of using this kind of “make-up” decoration that shocked the audience, a new kind of space is born in which there are no clear boundaries, a “corporeal and reflecting” one as Bobrinskaia writes. As a result of the Futurist dynamization of life, a world is born where everything began to slide away, to move away from fixed positions. “Physiology, substance, the human body are nourished by secret rhythms which deprive them of uniformity and clarity”.

The general context of producing a corporal, material “locomotion”, as part of the work of the new art, may constitute the central “semantic” motive of Russian Avant-Garde action. “The motive of motion”, notices Bobrinskaia, together with the “motive of action” is present in Larionov’s way of mixing “Futurist violent make-up together with the pattern of dancing”. Here it is worth quoting the manifesto of Larionov’s group, “Like the wail of a tramway, alerting hasty pedestrians, like the drunken sounds of a great Tango – so too is our face”. Bobrinskaia pays close attention to several expressions of the Avant-Garde manifestors, underscoring the importance and popularity of the “expressive” and “dramatic” Tango which horrified much of their public. It is here that one sees the central connection between all physiological motivation for movement, dance and the arbitrarily painted “pictorial signs” of Larionov’s colleagues and followers. Bobrinskaia supposes that with its close relation to the Tango, her term “Futurist make-up” should be interpreted as sacral hieroglyphics or multi-dimensional and multi-allegorical symbolism of signs. As Bobrinskaia notes, “rhythmic handwriting expresses the breath of a new lifestyle giving visible form to hidden rhythms of modernity”.

Infiltration of art into the physical space of life, promoting a playful art that teased and provoked the audience, was by all means an important element of Larionov’s work. The entire strategy of his group was predicated upon the involvement of the audience in Futurist action and “was built upon the acute confrontation of art and life”. Many of Larionov’s theatrical performances meant occasional interventions into the life of the ordinary public. Larionov always strove to modify all the “traditional”, and in his eyes, humdrum existing lifestyles of the surrounding cultural reality. He proposed doing this by exploiting the intriguing and less-known aspects driven from folklore and by using the provocative “Balagan” buffoonery, absorbing the burlesque culture of laughter. Manipulating all these cultural layers and molding them into a single aesthetic whole, Larionov proposed for several of his theatrical productions sketching his characters with several noses, two or three pairs of eyes as well as several ears on the painted faces of his animated actors. It is obvious that this particular milieu of Russian Avant-Garde activity exercised the principle of the radically shocking semiotic pragmatics. The implied purpose of this kind of behavior was to destroy the routine “familiar” way of

958 See: Ibid.
959 Ibid.
apprehending art. It was important to mention this aspect, since it turns to be consonant for my major point of study – stressing the clear “defamiliarizing” effect of Larionov’s experimental performances (physical intrusion into public), mentioning the common cultural root of traditional Balagan and also showing that Larionov was using the tactics of “painted faces” in theater as well, and not only on the streets.

Just like “Futurist make-up”, the art form of dance may be equated with a certain type of suggestive, sense-producing “gesture”. This is especially true for the total, all-consuming Futurist performance of rhythmic movement, enhanced by the use of “body painting” and mechanics of locomotion. Avant-Garde pragmatics in itself may be reduced to the concept of “effect” which is achieved by means of various applications of gestural activity by the actant/doer in relation to the recipient. In this context, I would like to return to the ideas of Karl Bühler, in particular his theory of gesture. Bühler focuses on the distinctions among such kinds of “verbal gestures” as: *Geste to-deiktische, Geste sinnliche, Fingergeste, Armgeste, symbolische, Hinweisende, Gebärde stumme, Lautgebrade, Ausdrucksgebrade* et cetera. Moreover, Bühler devotes a great deal of his research to the cinematic language of gesture, through the pragmatic depiction of a real performance. It was somewhat unusual for the linguist and psychologist to devote his attention to cinematic language at such an early stage of this discipline. In particular Bühler’s treatise provides a wealth of cases involving various gestures and their semiotics in his essay “Synaesthetical semantics of pictorial objects in a painting” as well as a series of others.

As concluding remarks on the role of pragmatics in the process of clarifying Avant-Garde theory I would also like to bridge the textual/performative pragmatics theorized by Karl Bühler with those of Maxim Shapir. It might be possible, moreover, to apply these views to the relatively young discipline of film-studies, particularly the field of experimental Avant-Garde cinema where the motive of *action* and “pragmatics of interpretation” plays a central role.

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963 See: Бюлер 2000: 139-147.
964 See Ibid.
965 To this particular topic is devoted a forthcoming monograph by the Chicago Slavic scholar Yuri Tzivian.
Concluding summary of chapter 4.

The concluding fourth chapter of my dissertation is devoted to the Avant-Garde “pragmatics of action”. Proceeding from the scholarly approach formulated by the late Maksim Shapir I deal with some of the matters related to the semiotics of pragmatics. Putting aside the concrete literary work of the discussed authors I focus on their eccentric behavior documented in various life-writing accounts of their contemporaries. My main concern amounts to bringing together the most vivid instances of the avant-gardists’ creative preoccupation with the “aesthetics of the shock”, “épâlage” of the surrounding audience/public. In my view this kind of disturbing and “non-conventional”, “deviant” appearances must comply with the corresponding qualities of their art. This “correspondence” between the “shock” of the text and “extremity” of behavior is particularly striking in the cases of Kruchenykh, Mayakovskii, Kharms, and, de-facto also Khlebnikov (though his intentions were considerably different from those of the others). I analyze the life-writing accounts dealing with the eccentric “shocking” conduct of the most prominent figures of Russian Avant-Garde. I start my discussion with the eccentric behavior of Kruchenykh, proceeding with Khlebnikov, Mayakovskii and Kharms. Special attention is paid to the theatricality of the “gesture” of Russian Avant-Garde, relying on the information available via the main life-writing sources I use.