The poetics of personal behaviour: the interaction of life and art in Russian modernism (1890-1920)

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In the course of my dissertation I intended to delineate the phenomenon of life creation with respect to Russian Modernism. As it became obvious to me during the years of study of Russian Modernism and Russian Lebenskunst, the main facts of Russian Modernism are in one way or another connected with self-writing. The only channel through which we can construct the “picture” of someone’s personal behavior relies either on the self-writing of the studied hero himself or on the same sort of source written by the informed contemporaries. This is why I decided to dedicate a special chapter of my dissertation to the analytical meditation on the entire problem of life-writing. In my historiographical overview I brought into discussion all the major contributing scholars who left their imprint in this field of humanities. I started with Philippe Lejeune and his heuristically influential notion of the “autobiographical pact” and continued with the other major theorists of the autobiographical studies. I have discussed two major exponents of European self-writing, namely St. Augustine and Rousseau and compared their self-revealing genre of Confession to the similar texts of Maksim Gorky. I conclude my first chapter with a discussion dedicated to the most influential exponent of the life-writing in the 19th century Russia, Aleksandr Gercen. The second chapter is devoted to the methodology of studying Russian Lebenskunst. I deal with the concept of Modernism, trying to substantiate the existence of close relations between the movement of Symbolism and the Avant-garde. I use the theoretical standpoints of Moscow-Tartu semiotics in order to “explain” the text of behavior ideas of Russian Modernism. Concluding the chapter I offer the summarizing remarks that deal with the preliminary typology of Russian Lebenskunst. The third chapter of the dissertation represents the main survey of the “case-studies” of Russian Symbolist life-creation. Starting with the philosophical legacies of Nikolai Fedorov and Vladimir Soloviev I go back to the principal instances of life-creation of Briusov, Bal’mont, Gippius, Sologub, Belyi, Blok, Viacheslav Ivanov and Maksimilian Voloshin. I conclude the chapter with a preliminary typology of Russian life-creationist art. The fourth chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to the pragmatics of life-creation available through the survey of life-writing describing the main heroes of the Russian Avant-Garde. I narrate the story of eccentric behavior of Aleksei Kruchenykh, Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Daniil Kharms.