

**Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik**

Band 5 (2022): *Literatur, Philosophie, Ästhetik*

Herausgegeben von Wolfgang G. Müller und Rainer Thiel

Hansen-Löve, Aage: *The Presocratics in Russian Modernism and the Avant-Garde: Parmenides – Herakleitos – Zeno.*

In: *IZfK* 5 (2022). 443-466.

DOI: 10.25353/ubtr-izfk-942f-e473

**Aage Hansen-Löve (Wien)**

## **The Presocratics in Russian Modernism and the Avant-Garde: Parmenides – Herakleitos – Zeno<sup>1</sup>**

*The Presocratics in Russian Modernism and the Avant-Garde: Parmenides – Herakleitos – Zeno*

There are astonishingly numerous and profound influences of the Pre-Socratics – especially Herakleitos and Zenon – on Russian literature between realism and the avant-garde of the 1920s. The focus here is on the concepts of Herakleitos’ “panta rhei” and his pre-dialectical thinking in polarities. From there, a bridge can be built to Leo Tolstoy’s narrative technique of the “stream of consciousness” and his speculations on time and history in the context of his novel “War and Peace.” The Russian novelist was particularly fascinated by Zenon’s time paradox (Achilles and the Tortoise). Furthermore, this contribution is concerned with Herakleitos’ model of circulations and dualities in the mytho-poetics of Russian Symbolism around 1900 (Viacheslav Ivanov, Andrey Bely, Konstantin Balmont) and, above all, with Russian poetry of the absurd (Daniil Kharms, Aleksander Vvedenskii) and the concepts of nothingness, of infinity in the context on this side of the categories of space and time (“cisfinite poetry”), and with the spirit of the time paradox of Zenon.

*Keywords: Pre-Socratic philosophy, Herakleitos, Zenon, effect on Russian Literature, Realism, Modernis, avant-garde, Tolstoj, Absurdist Poetry, Daniil Kharms.*

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was read at the international conference on “The Pre-Socratics in European Modernism and Avant-Garde: 1900-1950”, Freie Universität Berlin, 14–15 January 2016.

*Heraclitic Thinking – Pre- and Postdialectical*

Some Presocratics were very relevant for Russian modernism around 1900. Among them are Parmenides with his philosophy of being and not-being (or the “Nothing”), Zeno and his concern with a philosophy of time and motion, Pythagoras with his comprehensive ideas of cosmic, harmonic aesthetics, and, last but not least, Herakleitos with his ideas on cosmic fire and the elementary dynamics of “all-burning” (*ekpyrôsis*), so fundamental for the Russian symbolists, and also his concept of *enantiodromia* or his predialectic dualism. One of his most influential ideas in regard to (Russian) modernism was that of *panta rhei*, everything is flowing. We can find this postulate e. g. in the idea of “fluency” (Russian: *tekuchest’*) developed by the futurist Aleksandr Tufanov<sup>2</sup> and realized by the absurdist Daniil Kharms as to be explained later on.

39. (B 12) Upon those who step into the same rivers, different and again different waters flow. (Herakleitos in: Arius Didymus, fr. 39.2 = *Dox. Gr.* 471.4-5) [p. 45]

40. (B 91) [It is not possible to step twice into the same river]. ... It scatters and again comes together, and approaches and recedes. (Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 392b) [p. 45]<sup>3</sup>

Whenever a thinker or an artist in modernism or avant-garde wanted to return to a re- or progress in a postdialectical way of thinking, he referred to the ideas and fragments of Herakleitos as the “Dark”.

By diffusion or shall we say *dissemination* of Herakleitos’ ideas and sentences in so many texts and contexts, we encounter a correspondingly dispersed way of thinking, passed on through hundreds of fragments or mosaic stones that are to be connected in a process of permanent recombination and free arrangement. This is not only a way of perceiving Heraclitic ideas but also the nature of his thinking with his inclination to open, fluctuating thinking processes, and the use of succinct aphorisms.

In a way, the thoughts of Herakleitos are everywhere and nowhere, and are unsuitable for systematization or a holistic terminological system.

His famous saying that “war (*polemos*) is the father of everything” shall apply to all contradictions, which are not to be solved, but are preserved for a deeper understanding of a universe of currents and anticurrents, *rhoia* and *antirrhoia*.<sup>4</sup> There is nothing solid or steady; everything is in a permanent process of giving

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandr Tufanov (1877-1943), futurist poet and theorist of phonetic poetry in the Twenties.

<sup>3</sup> All texts by presocratic philosophers are cited from Curd (2011). The page numbers of this Reader are added in square brackets at the end of each entry. A very amusing engagement with Herakleitos is Luciano De Crescenzo’s philosophical novel *Panta rei*, Milano 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Hansen-Löve (1998: 133).

birth and being born, of agens and patiens, of living and dying. All this we discover much later in the Christian or mystic concept of *coincidentia oppositorum* (Dionysius the Areopagite, Nicolaus Cusanus), which stands for the unifying dynamics underlying all seemingly stable categories and norms. Everything is prepared to change into its complete opposite at every moment.

61. (B 51) They do not understand how, though at variance with itself, it agrees with itself. It is a *backwards-turning attunement like that of the bow and lyre*. (Hippolytus, “Refutation of All Heresies” 9.9.2) [p. 47]

66. (B 48) The name of the bow is life, but its work is death. (“Etymologium Magnum” sv *bios*) [p. 48]

In this sense (or non-sense) everything is permanently overturned, completely transformed to its opposite. The expression of the micro and macro cosmic phenomena requires not only an undialectic and dynamic approach, but also an open-minded thinking in non-final processes: „Wenn alles Bewegung ist,“ as we can read in the fine book on Herakleitos written by Ferdinand von Lassalle in the mid-19th century, „so scheint jedes Urteil, worüber es auch urteile, gleichmäßig richtig zu sein, sich so und nicht so zu verhalten“ (Lassalle 1858: 85).<sup>5</sup>

60. (B 10) Things taken together are *whole and not whole*, <something that is> being brought together and brought apart, in tune and out of tune; out of all things there comes a unity and out of a unity all things. ([Aristotle], “On the World” 5 396b20) [p. 47]

Along these lines the apophatic paradox of *Nothingness* is only thinkable as a development, as becoming, as flowing. The Kierkegaardian “Either/Or” paradox is transformed into the open formula of “either *and* or”,<sup>6</sup> the *doxa* is converted into the paradoxon.

68. (B 60) The *road up and the road down* are one and the same. (Hippolytus, “Refutation of All Heresies” 9.10.4) [p. 48]

79. (B 103) The *beginning and the end* are common on the circumference of a circle. (Porphyry, “Notes on Homer,” on “Iliad” 14.200) [p. 49]

81. (B 67) God is *day and night*, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger, but changes the way <fire,?> when mingled with perfumes, is named according to the scent of each. (Hippolytus, “Refutation of All Heresies” 9.10.8) [p. 49]

86. (B 62) *Immortal mortals*, mortal immortals, living the death of the others and dying their life. (Hippolytus, “Refutation of All Heresies” 9.10.6) [p. 50]

It is not by chance that the in his day popular Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Gerzhenson, famous pen friend of the much more celebrated symbolist Vyacheslav Ivanov, finds the incarnation of a deep current in the history of thinking in the person and the ideas of Herakleitos. In his book on Pushkin (“Golfshtram”, 1922), he understands Herakleitos as the origin of a strong “Gulf

<sup>5</sup> von Lassalle (1858/59: 37f.); comp. Hansen-Löve (2004: 360ff.)

<sup>6</sup> Groys (1996: 16, 20ff. 33). Hansen-Löve (1999: 125-183).

Stream” giving birth to real “wisdom” (Russian: *mudrost’*) in contrast to mere knowledge and technical skills in the discovery of the enigmatic nature of things being great or just big.

### *Tolstoi’s theory of time*

#### “Stream of Consciousness” and the “Stream of History”

Lev Tolstoi was one of the first novelists who tried to transpose the inner monologues of his heroes, their “streams of consciousness,” into a new language of narration or, to put it more precisely, into a new performative written text that combines the spontaneous, oral discourse of the hero or narrator (the “dialogical” nature of communication in the sense of Mikhail Bakhtin)<sup>7</sup> with the written form of a novel or novella (the “monological” genre). There is no doubt that this *revolution of the narrative techniques* in performing the instant and inner processes of semi-verbal thinking and associating was deeply connected to Tolstoi’s reflections – esp. in his novel “War and Peace” – on time and the expression of inner and outer processes in the spirit of Herakleitos. In this context and in combination with the conception of *durée* developed a half-century later by Henry Bergson we can read the famous chapter titled “Texture of Time” in Nabokov’s late novel “Ada”,<sup>8</sup> where the Tolstoian revolutionary poetics of time, especially of his famous novel “War and Peace”, finds its centenary triumph.

Tolstoi pointed to the diffusion of the traditional homogenous time complexes into fragments and *microscopic moments* aiming at a new poetics of “montage” of minimal elements of sensualistic impressions with fragments of associations. The main device here is to dissipate all units of perception – cultural routines, psychological motives – into their constituents, or better into their minimal units, and to present them in a metonymic, discontinuous way. On the level of narration (or narrated time, this leads to the effect of slow motion.

Tolstoi combines the techniques of dissociation and dissemination of homogenous unities of time and space into discontinuous elements (Russian: *melochi*) or phenomena with *différance*, the postponement of perceptions and incidents (especially *thanatos*, the end of processes). In a way the totalities and the wholeness of conventional motives, the integrity of the body or that of psychic experiences, are dissipated just like soldiers on a battlefield are dissipated by shrapnel or bullets. In a sense, Tolstoi executes the Heraclitic “fatherhood of everything” literally by developing poetics of “explosion”, aesthetics of “detonation” and “disrupture”. “War is the father of all and king of all, and some he shows as

<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin (1981).

<sup>8</sup> Nabokov (1969: 535-563).

gods, others as humans; some he makes slaves, others free.” (58 (B 53) = Hippolytus, “Refutation of All Heresies” 9.9.4 [p. 47])

The *disiecta membra* of the soldiers are realized as the *disiecta membra*, the “articulations” of verbal, narrative, psychological and philosophical themes. For this purpose, Tolstoi tries to find a new concept of time and a new technique of the narrative display of processuality in the outer and inner world of his “heroes”. Tolstoi connected these questions with a revolutionary *philosophy of war* as an example of his philosophy of historical processes, depicted and reflected in his novel “War and Peace”. “If we are introducing different historical unities (battles, campagnes, periods of war) into such equations, then we receive a series of numbers, in which there have to exist certain rules.”<sup>9</sup>

In this context Tolstoi speaks of “mathematics of war” or the rules of the big game of human interactions, depicted as “natural” processes. In a way he discovered the law of the series, developed a half-century later by the biologist Paul Kammerer in his then very famous book „Gesetz der Serie“ (“The Law of the Series”, 1919).<sup>10</sup>

The thinking in *series*, the seemingly free combination of metonymic or synecdochic moments, led Tolstoi – and later on such poets and thinkers as the symbolist Andrei Bely or the absurdist Daniil Kharms – to the conclusion that it is really impossible to suppose a traditional time-space continuum as a logical successivity of elements into a “real” process, where the single moments (in the literal sense of *momentum*, i. e. the minimum unit of dynamics) are not obeying time-based causalities and historical narratives. The most famous example for the return to a paranoid model of pre-causality we find in Daniil Kharms’ absurdist “cases” (*sluchai*), especially in the case of the “falling old women”:

An old woman, from an excess of curiosity, tumbled out of the window, fell, and broke into pieces. A second old woman struck her head out of the window and began staring at the broken one, but from an excess of curiosity she also tumbled out, fell, and broke into pieces. Then a third old woman tumbled out of the window, then a fourth one and then a fifth. When it came to the sixth one I got bored looking at them and set off for the Maltsevskii Market where I heard a blind man had been given a knitted shawl.<sup>11</sup>

Only the modern novel as a revolutionary genre and later on the technique of cinematography are able to depict, or better: to present the actual instant, the reality *in flagranti*, the naked truth of the bare perception without any categories of cultural or physical cognition. For the young formalists in Russia this Tolstoian discovery of a non- or pre-cultural perception of things and processes may well

<sup>9</sup> Tolstoi (2010: 882).

<sup>10</sup> Kammerer (1919); Ritter (2010: 43-55); Hansen-Löve (2013: 147-178).

<sup>11</sup> Kharms in: Gibian (1974: 54).

have seemed to anticipate the later developed “theory of relativity” into a revolutionary psychopoetic technique of *ostranenie*, of the “new seeing” without any “vision” of ideological, theological or other epistemic knowledge and manners of understanding and judging. In this sense, the Tolstoian philosophy of war and peace was at the same time the *magna carta libertatum* of literature, especially of narration.

### Achilles and the Tortoise: Lev Tolstoi’s Zeno Complex

Against this background we can speak of Tolstoi’s pre-cinematographic technique of “slow motion”, which is the anti-velocity of historical processes as well as of psychophysiological and existential developments:

Just as in the mechanism of a clock, so in the mechanism of the military machine, an impulse once given leads to the final result. [...] Just as in a clock the result of the complicated motion of innumerable wheels and pulleys is merely a slow and regular movement of the hands which show the time, to the result of all the complicated human activities of 160,000 Russians and French [...] was only the loss of the battle of Austerlitz [...] that is to say, a slow movement of the hand on the dial of human history.<sup>12</sup>

Instead of the Hegelian philosophy of history and his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Tolstoi reflects the famous Zenonian parable “Achilles and the tortoise” aiming at the ineffability of movement and dynamics in terms of static time concepts and the medium of traditional narrative devices.

Laws of motion of any kind only become comprehensible to man when he examines arbitrarily selected elements of that motion; but at the same time, a large proportion of human error comes from the arbitrary division of continuous motion into discontinuous elements.<sup>13</sup>

In the following Tolstoi speaks explicitly of the “sophism of the ancients” and the paradox connected with the famous parable of Achilles and the tortoise by arguing that there is no continuity of time but only the succession of elementary moments. In this sense Zeno is seen as the father of *speculations on infinity* and replaces the Christian speculations on eternity and immortality. Tolstoi discusses in detail the arguments of Zeno against the assumption of the multiplicity of moments, “being at the same time little and big [...] For nothing can be a unity which has an extension (or volume) because when it has parts it cannot be only one.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Tolstoi (2010: 274).

<sup>13</sup> Tolstoi (2010: 881).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Zeno's paradox concerning the possibility to structure and punctuate distances culminates in the thesis "that it is impossible to pass through an infinite succession, because this succession would never be complete" (ibid.). In this sense, Achilles is inevitably late in overtaking the tortoise, because the tortoise is always advancing farther when the Greek hero reaches the point where he wanted to outrun the very slowly moving animal.

3. (B 2) For if it should be added to something else that exists, it would not make it any larger. For if it were of no size and were added, nothing it is added to could increase in size. *And so it follows immediately that what is added is nothing.* But if the other thing is no smaller when it is subtracted and it is not increased when it is added, *clearly the thing added or subtracted is nothing.* (Simplicius, "Commentary on Aristotle's Physics" 139.11–15) [p. 68]

6. (A 25) There are four of *Zeno's arguments about motion* that present difficulties for those who try to solve them. First comes the argument that says that there is no motion because that *which is moving must reach the midpoint before the end.* ... It is always necessary to traverse half the distance, but these are infinite, and it is impossible to get through things that are infinite. ... (Aristotle, "Physics" 6.9 239b9-13; "Physics" 8.8 263a5-6) [p. 68]

7. (A 26) The second <argument> is the one called the *Achilles*. This is to the effect that *the slowest as it runs will never be caught by the quickest.* For the pursuer must first reach the point from which the pursued departed, so that the slower must always be at some distance in front. This is the same argument as the Dichotomy, but it differs in not dividing the given magnitude in half. (Aristotle, "Physics" 6.9 239b14–20) [p. 68 f.]<sup>15</sup>

More than seventy years after Tolstoi's reflections about the Zenon paradoxon the main representant of Russian absurdist thinking Daniil Kharmis comes very close to Zeno's additive paradox, but in the "case" of Kharmis it works reversely: the figure is step by step subtracted until coming to an end, i. e. to zero:

Once there was a *red-haired man* who had no eyes or ears. He didn't have any hair either, so he was called red-haired only in a manner of speaking.

He wasn't able to talk because he didn't have a mouth. He didn't have a stomach and he didn't have a back and he didn't have a spine and he didn't have any other insides.

He didn't have anything! So it's hard to understand whom we are talking about.

So we'd better not talk about him anymore.<sup>16</sup>

Socrates already absolutely refused withering this paradox of movement by proving that one is not able to hit a target, if aiming only on that position where one is just seeing it.<sup>17</sup> If you are aiming at the point where the tortoise will be crawling in the moment of your shot, then Zeno is refuted. Tolstoi criticizes Zeno's

<sup>15</sup> Cp. Hughes and Brecht (1978: 26).

<sup>16</sup> D. Kharmis, in: Gibian (1974: 53).

<sup>17</sup> Platon, "Parmenides", 127d6–128a3.

assumption that there is something like a “continuous movement” which is carried out “at the same time” by Achilles and the tortoise. The same idea we find in the argument of Aristotle:

10. (A 27) The third argument is the one just stated: that *the arrow is stopped while it is moving*. This follows from assuming that time is composed of “nows.” If this is not conceded, the deduction will not go through. (Aristotle, “Physics” 6.9 239b30-33) [p. 69]

In any case, Tolstói is right in arguing against the concept of a movement that is divided into an endless series of moments. This *atomism in the thinking processes* is the main target of Tolstói’s argumentation in his philosophy of time and history.<sup>18</sup>

There is a well-known so-called sophism of the ancients consisting in this, that Achilles could never catch up with a tortoise he was following, [...] By the time Achilles has covered the distance that separated him from the tortoise, the tortoise has covered that tenth, the tortoise has covered another one-hundredth, and so on for ever. [...] the absurd answer (that Achilles could never overtake the tortoise) resulted from this: that motion was arbitrarily divided into discontinuous elements, whereas the motion both of Achilles and of the tortoise was continuous.

By adopting smaller and smaller elements of motion we only approach a solution of the problem, but never reach it. [...] A modern branch of mathematics, having achieved the art of dealing with the infinitely small, can now yield solutions in other more complex problems of motion, which used to appear insoluble.<sup>19</sup>

The *laws of motion in history* are the result of an infinite quantity of acts and interventions of the historical figures taking place “in a continuum” of temporal progressions. Thus, the main error of historiography consists in taking events out of their specific contexts and putting them in an arbitrary, gratuitously pragmatic field or pseudo-logical nexus creating the impression of coherency and causality. These haphazard series are normally translated into narrative plots pretending authenticity and plausibility.

Exactly this is what Tolstói attempts to avoid in his presentation of “life”-effects. This is the narrative aspect of his more philosophical idea of “real life” (Russian: *zhivaia zhizn*) to give the real impression of chaotic, inconsistent, illogical series of pseudo-actions without any plan and “strategy”, connected in Tolstói’s “War and Peace” with the “genius” of Napoleon. Like Theodor Lessing,<sup>20</sup> Tolstói sees the “history” or “historiography” as an attempt of giving the senselessness of historical processes the appearance of sense, meaningfulness or even significance.

<sup>18</sup> Tolstói (2010: 881).

<sup>19</sup> Tolstói (2010: 881).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Lessing (1919/1983).



Tolstoi establishes a sort of historical differential calculus concerning the exclusive capability of art and literature compared with historical scholarship or empirical factography:

A modern branch of mathematics, unknown to the ancients, when dealing with problems of motion, admits the conception of the infinitely small, and so conforms to the chief condition of motion (absolute continuity) [...] In seeking the laws of historical movement just the same thing happens. The movement of humanity, arising as it does from innumerable arbitrary human wills, is continuous. [...] Historical science in its endeavour to draw nearer to truth continually takes smaller and smaller units for examination. [...] Only in taking an infinitesimally small unit for observation (the differential of history, that is, the individual tendencies of men) and attaining to the art of integrating them (that is, finding the sum of these infinitesimals) can we hope to arrive at the laws of history.<sup>21</sup>

With this in mind, one can say that the author of “War and Peace” was not only the Herakleitos of modern novel writing but also the Anti-Zeno in the field of time philosophy.

### *Herakleitos and Russian Symbolism Around 1900*

#### Circulations and Dualities in the Micro- and Macrocosm

The mythopoetics of Russian symbolism, esp. that of Vyacheslav Ivanov, Andrei Bely or Konstantin Balmont is abundant with reminiscences of Presocratic ideas, especially of Pythagoras (which would be a topic of its own) and Herakleitos.<sup>22</sup> Pythagoras is almost omnipresent whenever the symbolists are speaking about the cosmogonic processes and the *corsi e ricorsi*, the “cycles and anticycles” of permanent growing and becoming vs. dying-off and vanishing. The central symbol which connects the idea of linearity with that of circularity was the spiral or helix – the archetype of the paradoxical nexus of repetition or recurrence and progress or evolution structuring the atomic movement of the microcosm as well as the “revolutions” of the cosmic spheres. “Eggformed atoms are skittering. Their ways are spiral circulations. / ...” (Bal’mont, “Pljaska atomov”, [“The dance of their atoms”] 1905, 208)<sup>23</sup> Here we find the Heraclitic idea of a permanent circulation connecting the initial and the final, the beginning and the ending, the origin and the eschaton. These contradictions are solved in the

<sup>21</sup> Tolstoi (2010: 882).

<sup>22</sup> The influence of Herakleitos on Russian philosophy of that time is to be found esp. in the works of Aleksej Losev, Pavel Florenskij and Gustaf Shpet. Cf. Belyj, A. ([1910] 2010: 57, 73, 74, 108, 356, 360, 361).

<sup>23</sup> Konstantin Bal’mont, “Pljaska atomov”, as cited in Bal’mont, K. (1975: 208); cf. Hansen-Löve (1998: 80). About Herakleitos and Russian symbolism cf. *ibid.* 25, 45, 122, 126, 133-134, 315-316.

mythical thinking of Herakleitos having in mind the archaic magic formula of *solve e coagula* or the mystic paradoxes of apophatic discourses.<sup>24</sup>

It is not by chance that in symbolist mythopoetics in the first years after 1900 we find numerous references to Herakleitos' formula of *panta rhei*, particularly in Bely's autobiographic novel "Kotik Letaev" (p. 67)<sup>25</sup> or in his recurrent leitmotif of *roi* and *stroi*,<sup>26</sup> i. e. of chaotic swarm and structure or "construction", destructive and constructive forces. Bely, in his unique narrative, reconstructs the mental status of early childhood with its direct access to the mythic or magic nature of archaic thinking. This primal ground in his mythopoetic understanding as *roi* is unfolded as one level of the novel (in the terminology of Herakleitos as *rhoia*), whereas the *stroi* of the commemorating processes (*pamyat' pamyati*) from the viewpoint of the adult narrator forms the *antirrhoia*. Both processes of comprehending and narrating are reciprocal and alternating.

### The Stream of Time – Panta Rhei in the Mythopoetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov

Very often Vyacheslav Ivanov, the scholarly representative of symbolist mythopoetics, uses the Heraclitean motive of "cross currents", *enantiodromia*,<sup>27</sup> the streams and counterstreams of processes in the bio- and semiosphere, frequently in connection with the archetype of the *ouroboros*, the snake biting its own tail.<sup>28</sup> This central symbol of eternity, of eternal circulation and recurrency is rooted in the Presocratic concept of processuality emerging from contradictions or, as Herakleitos' famous formula says, from *polemos*: struggle, fight. The micro- and macrocosmic processes are not linear, but a sequence of breakings and upheavals, of shifts and overtures. For this Herakleitos has the concept of *metabolê*, that means a form of sudden conversion, a metamorphosis in the sphere of macrocosmic or existential transformations of phenomena into their contrary.<sup>29</sup>

### Cosmic Fire and Burning Heart

Much more than the elements of air and water, that of fire preoccupies the mythopoetics of Bely and Ivanov. Contrary to the normally abstract motives of "light" and "radiance" (*svet, luch*) the *fire and burning* (Russian: *ogon', plamya*)

<sup>24</sup> A. Hansen-Löve, *ibid.*, 125; Poulet (1961: 11ff); Murašov (1999); Pyman (1994: 183-225).

<sup>25</sup> Kotik Letaev, Bely ([1922] 1999); Berberova (1978).

<sup>26</sup> *Roi* means 'swarm' and *stroi* 'building', 'structure' (cp. Mayr 2001: 308ff).

<sup>27</sup> Barnes (1982: 57-81); The cosmology of Herakleitos W. Windelband, [1923] 1963: 32f. und von Thimus (1868: 276ff).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ivanov (1974: 229, 294, 300); Hansen-Löve (1998: 84-89).

<sup>29</sup> Lassalle (1858: 90).

is much more intense and able to transform the sphere of materiality and *phenomena* into that of energy and *noumena*. No doubt the Dionysian symbols “fire” and “burning” are dominant in the mythopoetics of symbolism, overbalancing the more Apollonian motives of “light” and “illumination”.<sup>30</sup>

49. (B 90) All things are an exchange for fire and *fire for all things*, as goods for gold and gold for goods. (Plutarch, “On the E at Delphi” 338d-e) [p. 46]

51. (B 76) *Fire* lives the death of earth and *aēr* lives the death of fire, water lives the death of *aēr*, earth that of water. (Maximus of Tyre, 41.4) [p. 46]

In this sense, especially the predominance of fire symbols in the poetry and the philosophical essays of Vyacheslav Ivanov testifies to the archaic and even neo-primitivistic intention of his predilection for the *predionysiac* (*pradionisiistvo*) and prehistoric times. This cosmic fire is affiliated with the *ekpyrōsis* in the archaic thinking of Herakleitos, his *pyr aei zōon*, the ever living fire, melting all the contradictions and antinomies of nature (of men). We can trace back many of the mystic and hermetic terminology, especially the *coincidentia oppositorum*, to the Heraclitean thinking in paradoxes: «Lapis noster hic est *ignis ex igne* creatus et in ignem vertitur». <sup>31</sup>

The Heraclitean *ekpyrōsis* is nothing final or eschatological (as in the thinking of the stoics): Herakleitos understands “burning” as a permanent process (*pyr aei zōon*),<sup>32</sup> something like a “permanent revolution” in the sense of *corsi e ricorsi*. In succession to Herakleitos, Vyacheslav Ivanov sees the *ekpyrōsis* not as an ontological state, but far more as a “mere process”<sup>33</sup>, the total self-consumption of all material, understood as an objective being negativity. For Ivanov, “the fire has his being only in its not-being.”<sup>34</sup>

### *Herakleitos and the Russian Poets of the Absurd*

#### Zero Discourses à la Parmenides – the Unwillingly Absurdist Style of Philosophical Arguing

The late-avant-gardist group of the “Oberiuty”, i. e. the poets of the “Society of Real Art” (*Obedinenie real'nogo iskusstva*) mark the end of the avant-garde

<sup>30</sup> Hansen-Löve (1998: 328ff.).

<sup>31</sup> Jung (1975: 147ff). About the analogies between the archetypical psychology of C. G. Jung and the mythopoetics of Vacheslav Ivanov cf. Hansen-Löve (2014: 16-19, 223-230, 267-271, 282-285, 621-624).

<sup>32</sup> Ivanov (1974: 146).

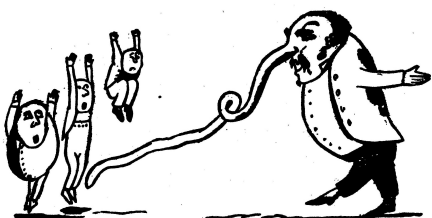
<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 28.

period in Soviet culture at the end of the twenties.<sup>35</sup> The poet thinkers Daniil Kharms and Alexander Vvedensky are the main figures of this group, writing and discussing in their underground meetings from the end of the twenties in the most severe epoch of Stalinism and totalitarianism.

Contrary to the early avant-garde with its optimistic, utopian projections, the late avant-garde is oriented towards the decline of all utopian hopes and towards the empty spaces of *arte povera*,<sup>36</sup> where the exuberant processes of the unfolding and proliferation of poetic worlds is replaced by an involution of all creative and erotic motives and motivations.

Unlike the spirit of revolutionary awakening and breakup, the late avant-garde is no longer fighting for something but against everything, or better,



There was an Old Man with a nose,  
Who said, "If you choose to suppose  
That my nose is too long,  
You are certainly wrong!"  
That remarkable man with a nose.

Figure 3: Lear (1943: 31)

against the great Nothing of a totally closed wor(l)d. The late avant-garde makes use of techniques of subversion and passive resistance; it is engaged in a rulebook slowdown in the eyes of the predominance of state power and the omnipotent and omnipresent control from part of the "system". An absurdist notion of *overfulfilling the "plan"* in an ironic way is combined with a sarcastic gesture of nonviolence and masochistic non-resistance. Kharms uses the devices of ostensible affirmation of the demanded kinds of behaviour and manners: The futurists were masters of hyperbolic self-styling in the sense of *ostranenie* and *épater le bourgeois*, while the absurdist were mas-

ters of the English art of understatement.<sup>37</sup>

Whereas the futurists worked with new codes and new words in the field of „Wortspiele“, „wordplays“, puns or paronomasias (*kalambur*; the paradigmatic level), the late avant-garde reduced these poetic instruments to the abuse of commonplaces and rhetoric or *discursive stereotypes* (the pragmatic level). It is the realm of „Sprachspiele“ in a sense that Wittgenstein used in his later works, similar to the techniques of „defamiliarizing“ (*ostranenie*) on the level of pragmatic and communicative speech acts.

<sup>35</sup> Cornwell (1991); Cornwell (2006); Roberts (1997); Jaccard (1991); Hansen-Löve (1994: 308-373); Lehmann (2010).

<sup>36</sup> Celant (1969).

<sup>37</sup> Nakhimovsky (1982, e-book 1991).

Especially for Daniil Kharms the global and ancient Great Questions, what is being and not-being, what is everything and what is *nothing* (*nichto*),<sup>38</sup> what is infinite and what has an end etc., all of these questions are posed in a quasi-naive way whereby one does not know the pragmatic intention and the discursive status of the statements: Are they serious and in a way profound and deep, or are they idiotic, childish or simply mad?

This makes it absolutely understandable that the main author of English nonsense verse, Edward Lear, was one of Kharms' favorites: As in the following era of postmodernism, the discourses of Kharms, Vvedensky and the others of the group are neither philosophical *nor* poetical, there is no difference between speaking about objects or taking part of metapositions. The "co-s-mic" graveness of the symbolists is distorted and parodied in a "co-mic" way, as in the ironic and carnivalized late symbolism itself (Blok, Bely). But the absurdist texts and performances of the Oberiuts often make it impossible and indistinguishable whether the (speech) act should be *taken seriously* or not. Not the philosophical ideas or contents are satirized, but the abstract discourse itself is devaluated to a senseless, or better, nonsense series of empty statements (*bessmyslicy*) or declarations of the emptiness or nothingness of the wor(l)d.

In the following text the meta-meta-communicative technique of speech act paradoxes serves as the main theme of the "sketch":

Philosopher!

1. I am writing to you in answer to your letter which you are about to write to me in answer to my letter I wrote to you.
2. A violinist bought a magnet and was carrying it home. Along the way, hoods jumped him and knocked his cap off his head. The wind picked up the cap and carried it down the street.<sup>39</sup>

Whereas the Presocratic fragments are involuntarily monolithic and laconic, the same style of *declarative monumentality* and monological conviction in the short stories or short cuts of Kharms appears extremely funny and queer. Philosophy in this regard is not a question of themes and arguments, but a habit or genre of speaking, not so much the finding of genial questions as the giving of answers to questions which apparently have never been asked.

One day a man set off for work, but on the way, he met another man who had bought a loaf of Polish bread and was on his way home, to his own place. That's about it.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Hansen-Löve (1994, 26. Band, H. 3-4; 308-373)

<sup>39</sup> Daniil Kharms, "The Connection", in: Gibian 1974: 80.

<sup>40</sup> Daniil Kharms, "A Meeting", *ibid.*, 59.

The technique of combining the very abstract with the concrete of everyday life, high-flowing ideas and definitions with absolutely *dilettantish and trivial statements* – this device of mixing up heterogeneous styles in a hybrid genre is not the main point of Oberiut writing. The striking feature is not the point as such, but the “pointlessness”, the zero ending of a story or the disability to end a story or to find the “conclusion” in a series of arguments. This technique of reducing something or everything to the absurd (*ad absurdum*) is connecting the discourses of Daniil Kharmis with those of Samuel Beckett – esp. in his “Waiting for Godot”.<sup>41</sup>

The non-professional, dilettantish reading or speaking in the context of philosophical, theoretical discourses, is not as much a question of knowledge as a radical avoidance of logical or empirical de- or inductions: In a very mundane way we are reading texts in the spirit of a “docta ignorantia”,<sup>42</sup> but we can never know exactly where the serious part of the speech ends and the non-serious, nonsensical or comical part starts or vice versa.

This point becomes clear by reading the following quotes of Heraclitic fragments or the famous definitions of Being and Non-being in the fragments of Parmenides. Maybe in Platon’s dialogue “Parmenides” we can find a parody of this style of arguing and defining very abstract questions:<sup>43</sup>

If the One should be a nonbeing, then this bond should connect it with the non-being: the being of nonbeing likewise as the being, in order to be completely on his part, should have the unexistence of the nonbeing. Because of this it could most likely be the being and not be the nonbeing, of on the one side the being. (“Parmenides”, 161d-162a).

We can find the same effect in Hegel’s “Phenomenology” or in Wittgenstein’s “Tractatus”: both we can read and enjoy on the surface of the text without following the argumentation until the last consequences.

Especially the philosophy of the “*existing Nothing*” or “*Non-Being*”<sup>44</sup> and the two forms of negation (*ouk on* and *mê on*), between the absolute negation or annihilation on the one hand and the inversion of values on the other (“Verneinung”), had a deep influence on Russian philosophy (see the “meonism” developed by Nikolai Minski at the end of the 19th century) and were reassumed by the Russian “absurdists”.

For Herakleitos, the philosophy of “becoming” (German: *Werden*) is, as we already know, deeply connected to the idea of paradoxical *metabolê*,<sup>45</sup> which is

<sup>41</sup> About Beckett and Kharmis see: Tokarev (2002); States (1978).

<sup>42</sup> Nicolaus Cusanus (von Kues) (1989: 199-297).

<sup>43</sup> Parmenides (1986: 19, 107); cf. also Platon’s dialogue “Parmenides”.

<sup>44</sup> Lassalle (1858: 294). Tugendhat (1970: 132-161, 142ff).

<sup>45</sup> Lassalle (1858: 8ff., 38, 66ff., 288); the idea of pure “processuality” cf. 71ff.; Hansen-Löve (1999: 125-183).

also fundamental for the idea of “Zero” (“Nul’ i Nol”) in the “private philosophy” of Daniil Kharmis and his friends Lipavskii and Druskin. Their paradoxical strategy in developing discourses or arguments is the consequence of an “apophatic” tradition in expressing the absolute and the non-“unspeakability” of God, the sublime or the “eschaton” of the world and the person.<sup>46</sup>

All this is rooted in the argument of Herakleitos, namely that in a sense “everything is true” insofar as nothing is expressible or predictable as an object of the speech acts in question, the themes of which are permanently disappearing. For Herakleitos, one does not need to express or say anything, because every being is vanishing at the moment of its emergence. Correspondingly, Platon’s *Kratylos* is only moving his fingertip to signify an object in the sense of Ch. S. Peirce’s “sign index”.<sup>47</sup>

This argument is the background of the absurdist predilection for evident and tautological situations, indicated only by the “sign-index”, as C. S. Peirce has it: manifestations, symptoms, pointers of something absolutely evident and present.

### Thinking “fluently”

Under the sign of “evidence” and absolute “presence” the difference between the “part” (*pars*) and the “whole” (*totum*) is disappearing. This is expressed by Kharmis in his idea of “thinking fluently”, having in mind the Heraclitean principle of *panta rhei*:

In the “Eleven statements by Daniil Ivanovich Kharmis” we can read that “the objects got lost” and in this post-objective situation we are forced to “think fluently”.<sup>48</sup> Here are several of these statements:

I. Statement

The objects got lost.

VI. Statement

The object is unarmed. It is a capsule. Armed is only the bulk.

IX. Statement

A new human thinking started to flow. It began to be flowing. The old thinking says about the new, it has “moved”. For this the Bolsheviks for some are madmen.

X. Statement

One man solo thinks logically: many men are thinking fluently.

XI. Statement

Despite the fact that I am alone I am *thinking fluently*. Over

It is typical for the absurdist “definitions” of objects or situations that there are no fixed notions or concepts but only *tautological series*, since the principle of

<sup>46</sup> Sauerwald (2010).

<sup>47</sup> In a sense Plato’s *Kratylos* seems to follow the ideas of Herakleitos (Lassalle 1858: 295).

<sup>48</sup> Kharmis (1997: 304-305).

difference or non-identity is not located *between* the objects, but inside of them. This interior contains a “nothing”, a void, like the place of the absent nose in Gogol’s eponymic story.

First: Let us recall the beginning of our argument. I said that yesterday I was at your place, and you said that yesterday I wasn’t at your place. To prove my point, I said that yesterday I was talking with you, and to prove your point you said that yesterday I wasn’t talking with you.

Each of them was solemnly stroking his cat. Outside it was evening. A candle was burning in the window. Music played. etc. etc.<sup>49</sup>

This means that the *absurdist definitions* are generally apophatic in the sense, that they are unfolding not like qualities or attributes, but evidently, i. e. as self-explaining statements. Kharms’ text is an example for this: “The Art Is a Wardrobe (or Locker)”:<sup>50</sup>

Every object (animated or created by human beings) has four functional meanings and one fifth essential meaning. The first four are the following: 1) the representable (geometrical) meaning, 2) the utilitarian meaning, 3) the meaning of the emotional impression, 4) the meaning of the aesthetic effect on human beings. The fifth meaning is defined by *the mere fact of existence of the object*. This meaning stands beyond any relation between object and human being and serves only the object. The fifth meaning is something like the free will of the object. [...] *The fifth meaning of a cupboard is cupboard.*

If you only look at the first page of Wittgenstein’s “Tractatus”, you’ll find an astonishing similarity with the paraphilosophical discourses of Kharms and the more or less “serious” “Tractatus” of Wittgenstein where the irony, so typical for the absurdist, is “vaporized” in the structure of arguments and their subversive tendencies:<sup>51</sup>

1. The world is everything that is the case.

1.1. The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by these being *all* the facts.

Another very impressive example of the way of absurdist thinking and arguing is Daniil Kharms’ famous Text “Myr”, unfolding a hybrid anagram of the lexemes *mir* (world) and *my* (we) into a pseudo-philosophical series of apophatic statements without any logical reasoning or foundation. In the end of the text the sentences or definitions crumble down into their component parts, i. e. the sentences are reduced to a mere series of lexemes without any analogy combining them neither into a paradigm nor a semantic class. Nor is there a causal chain:

MYR (*my+mir* = Werld = We+world)

<sup>49</sup> A. Vvedenskii, Cit. by Nakhimovsky (1982: 137).

<sup>50</sup> Today I Wrote Nothing: Kharms 2007: 74.

<sup>51</sup> Wittgenstein ([1922] 1951: 31).



I said to me that I am seeing the world. But the whole world was passed from view, I saw only parts of the world. And all I could see I declared *parts of the world*. [...] And there existed parts of the world which were able to think. And these parts were watching me. And these parts resembled each other, and also I resembled them. [...] And then I discovered that I didn't see the parts apart, but all of them simultaneously. At first, I thought that this was the NOTHING. But then I understood that this was the world, and that, what I have seen earlier was the NON-world. [...] And then there was nothing left to look at.

At this moment he “understood that, until there existed something where one could look at”, there had “been my world around. But now, however, it no longer existed.”

There I understood that I am the world.  
 But the world is not me.  
 Although at the same time I am the world.  
 But the world is not me.  
 But I am the world.  
 But the world is not me.  
 But I am the world.  
 Further I didn't think anything.<sup>52</sup>

Sometimes the series of serious deductions is followed by an abrupt and in any case *inappropriate* “conclusion” without any clear connection to the theme of the text. This abrupt finale gives the impression as if the consequential line of thinking and arguing would be suddenly abandoned and followed by an „Übersprungshandlung“ (displacement activity), an act of an involuntary shift of the homogeneous succession of words and arguments by a crude or very common or trivial finale without any finish.<sup>53</sup>

I looked for a long time at the green trees.  
 Peace filled my mind.  
 As before, I still don't have any great, extraordinary ideas.  
 [...]
 Then maybe my mind will wake up,  
 And I will wake up, and my intense life will start beating  
 inside me.<sup>54</sup>

For Kharm's an object does not represent anything, the words have no meaning at all and the thinking should be open to “evidences” and the *total phenomenality* of all appearances and situations. Thereby the main point of the speech act is not the character of things, but the intensity of their presence consisting of a process of permanent flowing and changing. The sheer phenomenality is not to be confused

<sup>52</sup> Kharm's, “The world”, in: <http://tarafallon.blogspot.com/2010/10/werld-by-daniil-kharm's.html>, 15.10.2020.

<sup>53</sup> Gibian (1974: 8-9).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

with the phenomenology of aspects and acceptance of *things* in the philosophy of E. Husserl in Germany or Gustaf Shpet in Russia: Kharms and the other absurdists rather deal with a pre-phenomenological view of the world/word, not in the way of neo-primitivism or archaism in the context of the (Russian) avant-garde (Malevich, Khlebnikov etc.), but without their archaic/utopian projections and optimistic intentions. The absurdist world is almost empty; the things are paltry and reduced to an unrelated assembly in non-communicative spaces.

This more or less abstract status of the *absurd object* or body is combined with a very provoking attempt to find out about the absolutely particular case in its *haecceitas*<sup>55</sup> (Duns Scotus), i. e. his *suchness* regardless of its belonging to a cultural paradigm (as a *realia*) or a practical or pragmatic context.

This unique, singular, non-recurring “thing as such” in the absurdist world corresponds with a “*thinking as such*”, whereas in the early, still utopian avant-garde ten to fifteen years earlier the main concern was directed toward the “*word as such*”, toward the verbal reality of the creative language culminating in neologistic poetics (Velimir Khlebnikov in Roman Jakobson’s epochal analysis of 1921). Although the absurdists were aware of the universally recognized fact that there is no such (cultural or verbal) thing that would be totally “unique” or a singularity, Kharms and his group produced a lot of texts where the theme or central motive is not as much a fictitious or an imaginative one than an impossible, unthinkable object or narrative motive.

Once there was a crow with four legs. Actually it had even five legs, but it isn’t worth speaking about this.

Once the four-legged crow bought coffee and thought:

“Allright, I bought coffee for me, but what can I do with it just now?”

Unfortunately a fox came around. He saw the crow and shouted to her:

Hey, – he shouts, – you crow!

And the crow shouted back:

Crow yourself!

The fox shouts back:

– And you, crow, are a pig!

There the crow spilled with rage the whole coffee. And the fox ran away. But the crow climbed down to earth and went with her four, more precisely, five legs into her wretched house.<sup>56</sup>

We are dealing with words as things (and vice versa) but not in the sense of early avant-garde, where the “*zaum*” word fulfilled the status of non-comprehensibility; the absurdist word or phrase is more or less clear and understandable on the level of semantics, but on the level of pragmatic understanding it represents sheer “nonsens(e)”. The optimistic, archaic-utopian “*non-understanding*”

<sup>55</sup> Heidegger (1916); Pöggeler (1990: 19).

<sup>56</sup> Kharms (2009).

(German: *Nichtverstehen*, Russian: *neponimanie*) is transformed into a sort of “misunderstanding” (German: *Missverstehen*, Russian: *nedorazumenie*) and “misreading”, i. e. in a pragma-linguistic case study of the processes and presuppositions of understanding and communication acts in general. In a way we are dealing with “pragma-plays” and not with the futurist/archaist “calembourgs” or “paronymies” (“play on words”, “puns”).

The adequate type of signification of such an unthinkable “thing” or impossible “referent” is the “sign-index”, which is located as a border (or marginal?) *case* in between the systems of probability or expectance. For this Kharmis uses “cases” as a title of his very famous short texts (“Sluchai”), where the involuntary fragmentation of the verbal remnants of Herakleitos and the other Presocratics is presented as a pseudo-voluntary act of “too short”, “undersized” narrations or “cases” without causes and manipulated strategies of communication and understanding. Whereas the postmodernist technique of “misreading” is aiming for a dominance of reception and reading over the writing and production of messages, the absurdist “misreading”, still belonging to the project of avant-garde, is intended to be a *nonsense thinking* that continues to maintain the potentiality of an alogical, “cis-finite” meaning or a virtual reality of non-metaphysical and non-hermetic hermeneutics.

The individual, isolated case (*otdel'noe*) does not follow any rules or standards; in the sense of Wittgenstein’s “The world is everything what is the case”, we find in the Oberiuty the pure thinking of evident states of affairs or things without any explanation of their context and purpose: we are dealing (or are not dealing) with “this” and/or “that” (*vot eto vot*) (mis)understood as pure “condition” or “status” of impossible worlds.

#### Paradoxes of the Infinite or “Cis-finite” and Zeno’s Movement Paradox

It is hardly surprising that the *arrow-paradox of Zeno*<sup>57</sup> described above finds its apogee and most convincing realization in the absurdist noetics/poetics. In this context the *paradox of processuality* and (dis-)continuity (of objects in motion) is combined with aspects of Henri Bergson’s then also in Russia very popular philosophy of time, esp. the idea of *durée* and the rejection of spatial time concepts that are common in every day thinking and common sense (“conventional realism”).<sup>58</sup>

Instead of this common sense, Kharmis and his friends were using the techniques of reducing all conventional forms of understanding and reasoning to

<sup>57</sup> Hughes/Brecht (1978: 19ff.); Hansen-Löve (1994: 308-373 (Anm. 100)); Carroll, “The Mock Turtle’s Story”. In: Carroll, L. ([1865] 1960: 119-130); Wallace (2003 (2007)); Niederbudde (2006: 184-202).

<sup>58</sup> Steiner (1982: 165).

absurdity. This sort of thinking, or rather pondering, does not lead to any reasonable conclusion, but provokes astonishing and sometimes brutal insights into a world contemplated on without the usual spectacles of common sense and the resilience of every day thinking. The main thing here is the “*processuality of thinking*” and the “becoming of thoughts” (Russian: *stanovlenie mysli*) in the sense of Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>59</sup>

Whereas in early futurism/formalism semiotically speaking the significant are generating the signifieds or referents (i. e. a verbal reality, see Jacobson), in the late avant-garde or the *arrière* of very late modernity the statement that the pragmatic processes are self-sufficient is the main thing. Or as Marshal McLuhan has it later on: “The medium is the message”. But the Oberiuty were exceeding this idea in stating that it is not sufficient to say that “the way is the goal” but to realize that there is nothing like a goal or a purpose anyhow: “This semantic dialectic is the very essence of nonsense, and in Eschers’ [or Carroll’s] case it focuses on the tension between process and stasis – the classical boundary between the verbal and visual arts.”<sup>60</sup>

Actually absurdist thinking is rather *anti-* than *post-dialectic*, because there is nothing like a Hegelian suspension of the contradictory poles (thesis-antithesis), *tertium non datur*; there are no metaphors as imaginative motives or mental illustrations of reality aspects; there is only the evidence of antinomy but without the ontological or metaphysical perspectives of hermetic symbolism or mysticism. There is nothing like a reconciliation of antagonisms in the unifying complementarity of symbols or archetypes, as is the case in the mythopoetics and metaphysical philosophy of art in Russian symbolism.

To the contrary – at the end of avant-garde – we are confronted with the principle of thinking and writing *quia absurdum*.<sup>61</sup> Following the aesthetics of *obryv*, i. e. abyss (established by Ivan Goncharov in his last novel *The Precipice*) or the “mystic gulf” of apophatic cases of enthusiasm or ecstasy, we can register an inclination of the Oberiuty to *proclaim the leap* (in the Kierkegaardian sense) as the “normal” case of movement and flowing: «Hic Rhodos, hic salta». In German, „Sprung“ means likewise the abrupt motion of an “agens” or the result of such a motion or violence on the surface of an object as a “patiens”.

Whereas Kierkegaard connects the seemingly active principle of “jumping” as a general situation of existing where the poles of action and non-action, of immediacy (Unmittelbarkeit) and “reflexion” of the consciousness (*uslovnost*, Mittelbarkeit) are suspended („aufgehoben“), the absurdists conceive the *leap*

<sup>59</sup> Bakhtin (1981); Hansen-Löve (1978: 441).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>61</sup> Hansen-Löve (1998: 160-203).

(German: *Sprung*), the Heraclitian *metabolê* as a physical, unconscious motion, in the sense of an action as such. Here the old anarchist principle of *action directe* finds a literal realization in a world where there is no difference between action and non-action, sadism and masochism, truth and lie.

Whereas in early futurism/formalism we have a tendency to provocative “*shifts*” (r. *sdvigi*), now in the late avant-garde we are confronted with a world in the “state of emergency” where the exceptions are dominating the rules of pragmatics or probability. This is the realm of Kharms’ *cis-finitum*, which is opposed to the *trans-finitum* of the metaphysics of cognition or a utopian status of anticipated futures. The *cis-finitum* replaces the “other side” or the “after life” by a permanent presence of things and situations perfectly obvious and absolutely apparent. We observe the same idea of *cis-finitum* in the Suprematism of Malevich in contrast to artists such as Kandinsky following the traditional metaphysical line in discerning the inner and the outer world, the spiritual and the material, etc. The connections between Kharms and Malevich are obvious and historically well reconstructed.

Like the concept of *durée* in the Bergsonian philosophy of time, the idea of *cis-finitum* represents the 5th dimension of absolute irreality and absurdity. There is no significance in the state of the mind or the world treated under this point of view, because there is no beginning or ending of a movement divided into innumerable moments of transition and evidence. Just as in the poetics of realism of the 19th century and in contrast to the spatial poetics of the futurist/archaic avant-garde, the an-aesthetics of the Russian Absurdists Khars or Vvedenski is time-oriented or rather interested in the suspension of a linear and target-oriented perception of time processes. The “Big Time” functions as a dissipation of objects in the sense of *bespredmetnost’* in Suprematism.

Like Herakleitos, Zeno suspects the existence of a homogenous being and pushes the idea of dissociation and fragmentation of time continua. In contrast to the ontologies of homogeneous successive developments, the movement paradox of Zeno emphasizes the paradoxes of synchronicity and of the unity of things and impressions.

The absurdist thinking is oriented towards looking with the help of the “blind spot”, an anti-viewpoint on this side of the dynamic perception.<sup>62</sup> Here the paradoxes of Zeno with the aporias of the dividing paradox do not work. On the contrary the absurdists are not interested in the result of the race between

<sup>62</sup> Hofstadter (1980: 720-724).

“Achilles and the tortoise”, they are rather following the nightmare of a wild chase or the persecutory delusion of a failed “pursuit of happiness”. Vsyo!<sup>63</sup>

## Bibliography

- Bakhtin, M. (1981): *The Dialogic Imagination*. In: Holquist, Michael (ed.). Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin and London.
- Bal'mont, K. (1975): *Pljaska atomov*. In: Markov, V. (ed.): *Izbrannye stichotvorenija i poemy*. München.
- Barnes, J. (1982): *The Presocratic Philosophers*. London/Boston etc.
- Belyj, A. ([1910] 2010): *Simvolizm. Kniga statej*. Moscow.
- Bely, A. ([1922] 1999): *Kotik Letaev*, transl. and ed. by G. Janecek. Evanston.
- Berberova, N. (1978): The “Circle” of Petersburg. In: Janecek (1978: 115-120).
- Carroll, L. ([1865] 1960): *The Annotated Alice*. Illustrated by John Tenniel. Cleveland/New York.
- Celant, G. (1969): *Ars povera*. Tübingen.
- Crescenzo, L. de (1994): *Panta rei*, Milano.
- Cornwell, N. (1991): *Daniil Kharm's and their Poetics of the Absurd: Essays and Materials*, London.
- Cornwell, N. (2006): *The absurd in literature*. Manchester.
- Curd, P. (ed.) (2011): *A Presocratics Reader. Selected Fragments and Testimonia*. 2nd ed. Indianapolis.
- Cusanus (von Kues), Nicolaus (1989): *De docta ignorantia*. In: Nikolaus von Kues: *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*. Band I. Wien. 191-297.
- Diels, H./Kranz, W. (1951): *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 6th ed. Berlin. [DK].
- Gibian, G. (1974): *Russia's Lost Literature of the Absurd. Selected works of Daniil Kharm's and Alexander Vvedensky*, transl. and ed. by George Gibian, New York.
- Groys, B. (1996): *Über Kierkegaard*. In: Groys, S. (Hg.). *Kierkegaard*. München, 15-47.
- Hansen-Löve, A. (1978): *Der russische Formalismus*. Wien.
- Hansen-Löve, A. (1994): *Konzepte des Nichts im Kunstdenken der russischen Dichter des Absurden (Obëriu)*. In: *Poetika*. Band 26. Heft 3-4. 308-373.
- Hansen-Löve, A. (1998): *Der russische Symbolismus. System und Entfaltung der poetischen Motive*. Band II: *Mythopoetischer Symbolismus. Kosmische Symbolik*. Wien.
- Hansen-Löve, A. (1999): *Paradoxien des Endlichen. Unsinnfiguren im Kunstdenken der russischen Dichter des Absurden*. In: *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*. Band 44. 125-183.
- Hansen-Löve, A. (2004): *Die Kunst ist nicht gestürzt. Das suprematistische Jahrzehnt*. In: *Kazimir Malevič: Gott ist nicht gestürzt! Schriften zu Kunst, Kirche, Fabrik*. Hg., eingeleitet und kommentiert von Aage Hansen-Löve. München. 255-603.
- Hansen-Löve, A. (2013): *Vom Paradigma zur Serie: Zwischen früher und später Avantgarde*. In: Plotnikov, N. (ed.): *Kunst als Sprache. Sonderband Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine*

<sup>63</sup> Kharm's uses this conventional final formula very often in his short texts – vsyo means “that’s all”, “over”.

- Kunstwissenschaft, Russische Ästhetik und Kunsttheorie der 1920er Jahre in der europäischen Diskussion. Band 12. 147-178.
- Hansen-Löve, A. (2014): *Der russische Symbolismus*. Band 3. Wien.
- Heidegger, M. (1916): *Die Kategorien- und Bedeutungslehre des Duns Scotus*. Tübingen.
- Hofstadter, D. R. (1980): *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles*. By Lewis Carroll. In: Hofstadter, D. R.: *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. New York.
- Hughes, P./Brecht, G. (1978): *Die Scheinwelt des Paradoxons*. Eine kommentierte Anthologie in Wort und Bild. Braunschweig.
- Ivanov, Vj. (1974): *Cor ardens*. *Sobranie sočinenij v 4 tt*. Volume 2. Bruxelles.
- Jaccard, J.-Ph. (1991): *Daniil Harms et la fin de l'avant-garde russe*. Bern et al.
- Janecek, G. (1978): *Andrey Bely. A Critical Review*. Lexington, Kentucky.
- Jung, C. G. (1975): *Psychologie und Alchemie*. Olten/Freiburg.
- Kammerer, P. (1919): *Das Gesetz der Serie*. Eine Lehre von den Wiederholungen im Lebens- und im Weltgeschehen. Stuttgart/Berlin.
- Kharms, D. "The world", in: <http://tarafallon.blogspot.com/2010/10/world-by-daniil-kharms.html>.
- Kharms, D./Vvedensky, A. (1974): *Russia's lost literature of the Absurd*. Selected Works of Daniil Kharms and Alexander Vvedensky. Translated and ed. George Gibian. New York.
- Kharms, D. (1997): *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*. Volume 2. Petersburg.
- Kharms, D. (2009): *Today I Wrote Nothing: the Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms*. Trans. Matvei Yankelevich. New York.
- Lassalle, F. v. (1858): *Die Philosophie Herakleitos des Dunklen von Ephesos*. Band 1. Berlin.
- Lear, E. (1943): *Nonsense Omnibus*. London/New York.
- Lehmann, G. (2010): *Fallen und Verschwinden*. Daniil Charms. *Leben und Werk*. Wuppertal.
- Lessing, Th. (1919/1983): *Geschichte als Sinnggebung des Sinnlosen*. München.
- Mayr, M. (2001): *Ut pictura descriptio*. *Poetik und Praxis künstlerischer Beschreibung*. Tübingen.
- Murašov, J. (1999): *Im Zeichen des Dionysos*. *Zur Mythopoetik in der russischen Moderne am Beispiel von Vjačeslav Ivanov*. München.
- Nabokov, V. (1969): *Ada Or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*. London.
- Nakhimovsky, A. (1982; e-book 1991): *Laughter in the Void*. An introduction to the writings of D. Kharms and A. Vvedenskii. Wien.
- Niederbudde, A. (2006): *Mathematische Konzeptionen in der russischen Moderne*. Florenskij – Chlebnikov – Charms. München.
- Parmenides (1986): *Vom Wesen des Seienden*. Frankfurt a. M.
- Platon, „Parmenides“ (1988). In: *Platon*. *Sämtliche Dialoge*. Band IV. Hamburg 1988. 51-134.
- Pöggeler, O. (1990): *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers*. Pfullingen.
- Poulet, G. (1961): *Metamorphosen des Kreises in der Dichtung*. Paris 1961. [Frankfurt a. M./Berlin/Wien].
- Pyman, A. (1994): *A History of Russian Symbolism*. Cambridge.
- Ritter, H. (2010): *Der Zufallsjäger*. Paul Kammerer und das Gesetz der Serie. In: Blättler, Ch. (ed.): *Kunst der Serie*. *Die Serie in den Künsten*. München. 43-55.
- Roberts, G. (1997): *The Last Soviet Avant-Garde*. OBERIU – fact, fiction, metafiction. Cambridge.
- Sauerwald, L. (2010): *Mystisch-hermetische Aspekte im Kunstdenken der russischen Dichter des Absurden*. Würzburg.

- States, B. O. (1978): *The Shape of Paradox. An Essay on "Waiting for Godot"*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London.
- Steiner, W. (1982): *The Colors of Rhetoric. Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting*, Chicago/London.
- Thimus, A. Freiherr von (1868): *Die harmonikale Symbolik des Alterthums. Vol. 2*. Köln.
- Tokarev, D. V. (2002): *Kurs na chudšee: Absurd kak kategorija teksta u Daniila Charmsa i S. Bekketa*. Moskow.
- Tolstoi, L. (2010): *War and Peace*. Transl. Louise and Aylmer Maude. Oxford World's Classics. Rev. ed. Amy Mandelker. Oxford.
- Tugendhat, E. (1970): *Das Sein und das Nichts*. In: *Durchblicke. Martin Heidegger zum 80. Geburtstag*. Frankfurt a. M. 132-161.
- Wallace, D. F. ([2003] 2007): *Everything and More. A compact History of  $\infty$* . New York/London 2003, Munich 2007.
- Windelband, W. ([1923] 1963): *Geschichte der abendländischen Philosophie im Altertum*. München. (Nachdruck 1963).
- Wittgenstein, L. ([1922] 1951): *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.
- Yankelevich, M. (2007): *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms*. Ed. and trans. Matvei Yankelevich. New York.