

Just as in ordinary language a certain number of assertions constitute the completion of an action in addition to the act of utterance, so many literary techniques aspire to the status of phenomena valuable in and of themselves, beyond mere representation (cf. Mayakovsky, "To write not about war, but to write by and through war"). These phenomena not only carry significant illocutionary force, but often an entirely palpable perlocutionary effect as well (cf. Kharmis, "Poems should be written in such a way that if you throw a poem at a window, the glass will break"). The subject who makes a performative assertion is assumed to have a specific kind of authority and to make the assertion in a specific situation; in just the same way, the poet is the product of the specific authority of poetic utterance and is more than sensitive to the situation, not being ceaselessly and tacitly a poet (Pushkin, "And among the inconsequential children of this earth/Perhaps he is more inconsequential than all the rest./But when the Divine word/does reach his keen ears..."). Twentieth-century analytic philosophy realized that one can "do things with words," while the "poets's words" have long been intuitively equated to "his/her deeds" without any sort of theoretical underpinnings.

What is traditionally understood as "pragmatics" in linguistics and analytic philosophy — the view of the utterance as "successful" or "unsuccessful" (instead of the category of "truthfulness" or "falsity" in relation to facts and the internal consistency of the utterance) — was also at one time scandalous. The functions of language have been correlated to literature through hermeneutics and structuralism, but never through the pragmatic philosophy of language. An investigation of the pragmatics of the literary utterance (similar to linguistic's turn toward pragmatics and away from semantics and syntax) should refuse to examine the correspondence between the "depicted" and "extraliterary" worlds and also reject obsessive intertextual neuroses, in order to focus on

the act, the *gesture*, the move made by means of the literary utterance and the realization of the text in a concrete situation. It should also address the question of what position the utterance occupies within the space of literature and in relation to other such manifestations, as well as what effect it seeks to have beyond the borders of that space.

Traditionally, literary theory concerned itself with *what is actually said in literature*; meanwhile, the analysis of illocutionary meaning (what action is carried out in the word) and particularly perlocutionary effect (what kind of effect is had), including in the broader (social) sense, usually boiled down to just bringing in confused biographical material or sociological constants. Because of this disregard of the rhetorical aspects of language, "pure literary value" conflicted with or was randomly connected to "usefulness"/"practical value" — educational,

didactic or directly utilitarian — but was never understood as action or as something in and of itself directed toward concrete effect.

We find another predecessor of the pragmatic viewpoint, one focused even more on literature, in the so-called "Bakhtin circle" (Voloshinov, Yakubinsky, Medvedev), with its "metalinguistics" project.

Unlike the Oxford school of analytic philosophy, here the utterance is not equated



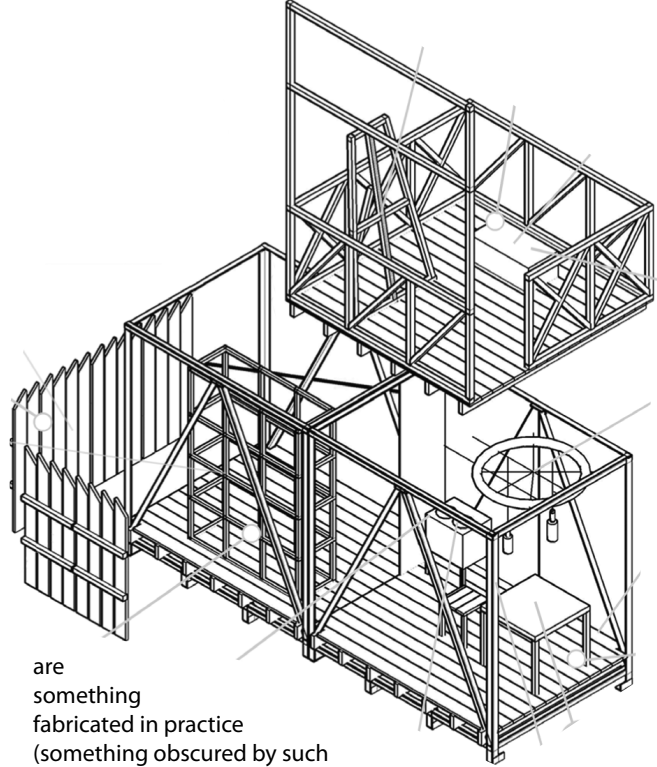
to the isolated speech act, which is initiated by an autonomous subject. Instead, it always discovers in itself traces of the views or words of some other — it is fraught, if you will, with the dialogic. Likewise, literary invention appears in response to another (preceding) invention, usually in order to challenge it. This reveals its immersion in a completely polemical context, in the perspective both of art history and its present organization. The pragmatic gesture is directed toward preceding modes of operation in literature and simultaneously seeks to overtake contemporaries and address itself to a newly invented audience.

Historical pragmatics and co-situational pragmatics. Since it is neither a calculable cell of genre morphology nor the product of an individual creative will, the event of the literary utterance directs the pragmatic task in both the diachronic redetermination of the generic system, and in the more localized co-situation of the poetic utterance. However, like the word in the metalinguistic project, the literary work is less a natural extension of the author's body than something strung on pragmatic threads pulled between significant precedents of the utterance. Without taking these directed and oppositional qualities into account, it is basically impossible to identify the orientation of the literary work, to understand the text as an utterance (speech act).

Bakhtin stipulates more than once that the utterance, which is directed not so much at its own subject as toward others' speech about it, constitutes a unit of scientific and artistic communication as well as ordinary and everyday communication (the former being stable forms of speech genres, mediated by social activity). Poststructuralist reception of Bakhtin's theory reduced these discursive interactions to the textual (in which utterances neutralize each other in the shared synchronic card-catalogue, although written responses to other texts are obviously not the same as speech acts responding to other speech acts). With the pragmatics of the artistic utterance, the accent must be shifted from the reference to the gesture made by the speaker (Bakhtin's circle affirmed the "cultural" (ideological) as something equal to the signifier, given in actions). Here the library metaphor has to be replaced by a theatrical one.

Thus pragmatics is yet another artistic and methodological move toward an externalized understanding of the artistic utterance (not the text itself, but the conditions and circumstances of its realization, included in the course of its production).

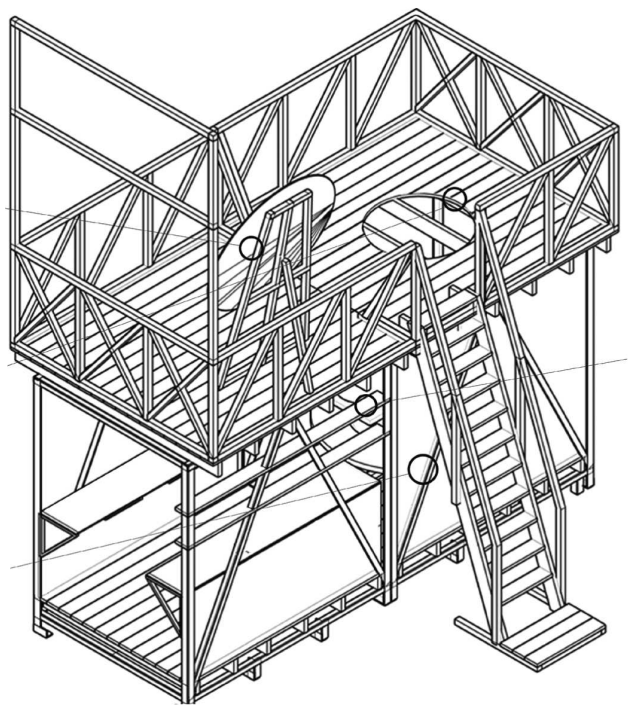
Just as meaning in language is only the potential for meaning in a specific context, literary facts



are something fabricated in practice (something obscured by such writing pragmatics as the address to "eternity"), and the meaning of a literary work is its actual mode of operation and the revealed response. Finally, the analytic formula "meaning as use" correlates directly with Genette's conditionalist criterion of literariness. This means that even one and the same literary technique can in different situations appear as different pragmatics of the utterance (the ascetic style as a consequence of depletion of the rhetorical tradition, as in Robbe-Grillet, or as a stake in the radical transformation of social communication, as in *Literature of the Fact*).

In this way, pragmatics is not the "what?" or even the "how?" of literature, but "how does it work?" (including in the sense of "how powerfully?"). With the turn to the practical, we are inevitably confronted with materiality. Institutions and communities, tools and technologies will also play a role. We can see the effect on literary pragmatics that comes out of media conditions (the difference between poetic utterances in a poem written for a private album vs. for mass publication), but we should not forget about the potential for poetic actions' figurality, which lets us examine the "suicidal quality" of Mandelstam's poems, or texts written in prison, as speech acts made in a specific autonomous way.

Sociology re-conceptualized things as independent reality — not merely passively signifying, but also actively acting — by anatomizing the mechanics of scientific discovery. Meanwhile, the actor-network approach to literary scholarship can



demonstrate how — and with the help of which technical-rhetorical and institutional-organizational efforts — “literary discoveries” are achieved and what material and figural qualities of the sign were employed as agents in the production of literary facts.

In other words, if we understand pragmatics as a disciplinary lens (not yet a mode of operation inherent in literature itself<sup>1</sup>), then it demonstrates a fairly synthetic method, one that takes into account the logic of symbolic capital, purely textual devices for the production of meaning, the analysis of technique and the dimensions of the individual author’s accomplishment. Pragmatics is not a revision of the schoolroom question “what was the author trying to say here?”; rather, it is an attempt to grasp what act of utterance (*l’énonciation*) the author is actually making, at times despite that which is said (*énoncé*), and what gesture is being made in writing [A. Smulyansky, “The utterance as action and as act”]. The author’s individual intention is not important (likewise his/her explicit declarations regarding this intention). Instead, what is significant is the totality of conditions of the given literary-political situation and the given audience (including the social distance between them) that determined the construction of the utterance, as well as precisely how the writing itself completes the given action.

The task of pragmatics is not to lock texts into the economic statistics of the publishing industry, but to see in them the chess-game logic in which only those things are valuable whose modes of operation are different from the others [I. Kravchuk,

“The novel as social gesture: preliminary notes toward a pragmatics of early Dostoevsky”]. That which is impossible to discuss in economic terms should be examined from the point of view of wordplay on the social scale. When the class position of the artist is no longer considered relevant (because of the reshuffling of class logic itself), there still remain various moves to be made in the social space of literature and epistemological bets to be placed [D. Bresler / A. Dmitryenko, “Throwing life-giving “seeds”: the pragmatics of repeated use of verbal raw material in Vaginov’s notebooks”].

The situation today in art is such that it is no longer possible to determine “what is art” according to purely external features — one and the same action might be art or not art. Precisely for this reason, we are usually interested in art which, as a consequence of external conditions, conceals a certain epistemological schism within itself: for instance, art that denies the existence of construction and completely dedicates itself to the material, but meanwhile has systematic and obvious recourse to the deformational features of language and/or sophisticated rhetorical resources. Or cases in which art insists on one thing (the object) while deriving its whole effect from something else (the visual) [P. Arsenev, “Literature of Emergency State”].

Regardless the mass of communicative-utilitarian terminology when talking about pragmatics, our attention to the topic is not an attempt to call for or to shove literature into some kind of suspicious “effectiveness,” but rather to discover those actions that literature itself “does with words” [I. Gulin/N. Baitov, “How to do things with the reader using words”]. Just as linguistic meaning emerges in the world of human activity in connection with the aims and interests of speakers, in literature the “world of action” is not opposed to any construction, but rather makes possible its creation.

Where we find (artistic) utterances, we also find relationships (including social ones). How literature imagines them, what kind of action it feels it should take within them or with them — is this action in the more metaphorical cognitive sense, or the social-externalized performative sense? How does the appearance of these relationships and the selected mode of action enter into the actual procedure of writing (it would seem, something that has remained unchanged over the centuries)? What happens with the pen — is it really equal to the sword, or does it get transfixed by the whiteness of the paper?

In another sense, we are also interested in the modes of operation within literature that are characterized by calls for simplicity of language. What is the real pragmatics of texts that ask to

be called “simple,” “folk” or appeal to such values [P. Seriot, “The people’s language”]? How do they conceptualize themselves? Should they use language like that of Roland Barthes’ “woodcutter,” or have recourse to more sophisticated attempts to “escape language” and the mediation of the sign [A. Montlevich, “Fact as fetish: instead of a name”]? In other words, what myths and models of its own language are created by this kind of literature?

There is an even simpler case of this passion combining with real participation in politics (liberation- or oppression-oriented). When authors lay out their pragmatics, having completely identified themselves with one or another political force [N. Azarova, “On the addressee, discursive boundaries and Subcomandante Marcos”], can we always suspect this pragmatics of *antisemitism*? But what is the pragmatics of those texts that do not seem to be totally ignorant of the demands of politics and do not oppose them openly, but simultaneously select that type of “politicization” that flourishes far from the noise of the streets [T. Nikishina, “Discourse in the perspective of *écriture*”]?

How, then, is pragmatics connected with politics overall — the most immediate, public and civic politics, as well as that of literature itself (but still — politics as struggle)? And what is the connection between these two kinds of politics and literature’s own connection with that which *brings it into action* and which *actions it brings itself to* (is the strong civic tradition connected with the strong national institution of literature?) [J. Rancière, “Mute speech”]?

The translation of Rancière analyzes the classical description of literature’s mode of operation as “the expression of the *Zeitgeist*,” like any other linking of the “work with the necessity of which it is the expression.” The chapter from *Mute speech* given here addresses this particular remnant of literature’s participation in a certain processuality/duration, including in the sense that “the object of its examination is something distinct from poetics — the external relation of literary works to institutions and morals, rather than their value.”

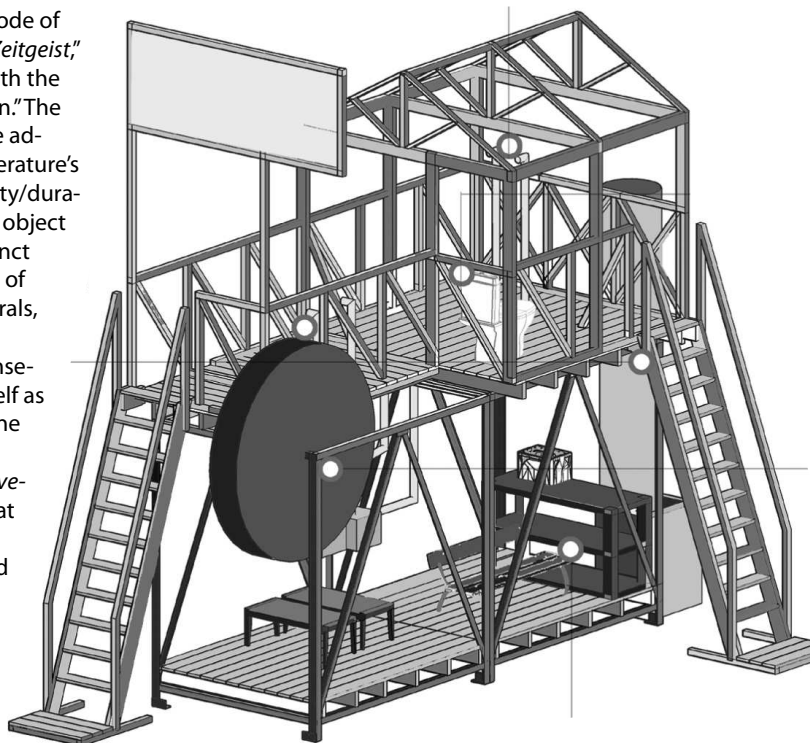
Art that understands itself as consequence and art that understands itself as cause. Is there more pragmatics in one or is the pragmatics just different in both cases (is it measured *quantitatively* or *qualitatively*)? For instance, what happens with the writing methods themselves or with a pre-determined understanding of them in the case of texts “written in blood”? What

happens to the supposedly independent object when it reveals traces of participation in one or another communicative game [N. Mironov et al., “Texts which cannot be judged by ‘purely aesthetic criteria’”]?

In the final account, pragmatics sort of leaps away from method (methods of examining literature) to the practice of literature itself (the viewpoint infects the doing), and thus it is impossible to establish a precise borderline between the viewpoint and the object.

Proceeding from all the above, this issue of Translit forces us into repeating a phrase very familiar in the humanities context: “this is more of an attempt to pose the right questions than to give answers,” which also goes for the “dialogic” quality of the materials included: collective authorship, interviews, polls. Furthermore, the issue includes illustrations from a Samara-based project involving artists and architects. The illustrations present functional models of various poetics: the poetic machines of the Lianozovo school, metarealism, conceptualism, direct utterance and the new epic come equipped — instead of manual instructions from the producer — with the reflected vision of a geographical and professional other, reported speech that penetrates and mixes with the machinery of these poetic languages [A. Ulanov, “Working models of poetic festivities”].

1. Furthermore, one could voice the reservation that not all literary works are characterized by equally obvious pragmatics; but the Formal method was, after all, more appropriate to some texts than others.



## #14 [Translit] : *Poetry Selections*

### Khamdam Zakirov

Sense of the world at 5.15, Finland time

Last night I slept waking constantly, or even didn't sleep at all,  
taking note of the dawning outside the window that came with changes of pose.  
I dreamed of Navalny in a small northern town,  
he was walking around and asking passers-by:  
"Hey man! How are things around here? Should we come immigrate?  
It's OK, not that many of us will come: it is known that 40% of all Tajik men  
live in Moscow, plus the same number of women, also children and old people,  
and their president manages the Russian border guards, no one else left for him to order around."  
Afterwards I dreamed of some poet talking about weight loss and  
the pointless kilometers he's covered, some musician on food preparation,  
some litterateur on the changed image of the average Muscovite,  
some journalist on closing the southern borders and opening the western ones,  
or this old acquaintance of mine, once a hip poetess,  
now writing articles blind with hatred,  
newly a jew- and homo-phobe, having long since sniffed out who's who behind the scenes,  
Orthodox protectress of the Muslims, bitter enemy of the gay liberals, lesbo blasphemers etc.,  
and all the while a lioness of the scene, selling off her couture dresses worn once or twice  
and swearing as she stumbles over a new-laid Sobyenin flagstone...  
Then I woke up and repeated to myself over and over: you need to stop reading facebook,  
you need to stop reading facebook, you need... You need to read,  
it's better to ruin your eyes and brains with books, I said to myself, then sat down  
to write all this down and entitle it "My Facebook newsfeed is replacing my dreams."  
But not you, my love, although you weren't there.

### Nikita Sungatov

\* \* \*

*realpolitik on the picture*  
and know that he who fell like ash to earth

*slums awash in flames*  
who was so long oppressed

*the quotes open the loss*  
*pieces of earth knock against the concrete*  
he will stand taller than the great mountains

*you take off your dress we go to the theater*  
*catharsis was experienced there*  
given wings by bright hope

The moral:

together striding gladly forth,  
together we sing in chorus, of course!

## Kirill Adibekov

Karl-Marx-Allee (excerpt)

*And life was real, it was summer, the tower, the clock on the tower, birds walked along the  
clock's orbit, conversations about parachutes, the park for culture and recreation.  
Moscow, other capitals, structures, herds in the fields, thoughts of war.*

promenade along the embankment, opposite the south Moscow side,  
the water in two, in three hours

through the islands and all enormous Moscow,  
*à pas lentes*

Up along  
Tverskaya with the crosses and banners —  
a religious promenade, graced  
with the goodwill of the sovereign.  
Up along  
Tverskaya — the clear air of a Sunday  
morning /  
the onerous rheumatism  
of an alley in the very  
center of the summer city.  
Further — a railing, further —  
a cathedral; a run along the boulevards, further on the river.  
The horizontal line of water and red  
brick.  
[...]  
Motionless, in squares — your canonical face of a Madonna.  
Momentary forms. Silence. Laughter. A tall cold building. The hard  
soft scent of firewood. 27, morning. Or the tenth, the pink light fading  
above the arch, on  
the steep wall  
here there is only the horizontal line of river, the horizontal line of the bed, the verti-  
cal  
line of the belltower, in the distance. Here there is only light  
through unabashed blinds.

## Gleb Simonov

\*\*\*

the inevitable land of three  
beyond the unnamed pass —  
needing itself as little  
as time,  
in slow streams  
waiting for a white clean wind  
from windless places,  
where  
the three  
not speaking to each other  
sit at a distance  
waiting  
for their interpreters.

# Galina Rymbu

\* \* \*

the all-elucidating blood of animals

politics: animals in a hut deciding how to be

a breeze in the hair of darkskinned animals

the belly cries of white elephants

moving within economic systems,

shedding skin, dropping fur

the *critique of pure reason* cleft by claw

sex acts in the lagoon, dark liquid, sobs...

death on the knife-edge of memory

the old leader in a heated coffin carried through the Siberian steppe

darkblue doublets bear fragmentary traces of the hunt, the savage flowering of phonemes

sensual wounds on warm flesh in the muffled consciousness of a gadfly

in the cold winters we gathered on our own  
phoned absent friends from the hut  
created a forest of soviets, harems of regimes  
and only one made it out alive

ethics: they want to eat  
finishing in dead signs

Summary and poems translated by Ainsley Morse

The artistic act is one type of the performative. As is well known, there are no rules in art (it cannot be true or false), except for the rule whereby he who manages to suggest his own rules will triumph.

Some artworks evoke responses like “I could do that.” The simplest answer to this retrospective reproach is “You could, but you didn’t.” In some sense, this kind of talking about art assumes a certain preference for the strategic “what is made in art” over the mystical process of “making of the object.”<sup>1</sup> In this case, however, the logic of *ostranenie* is not overturned, just transferred from the creation/reception of the concrete work to the history of significant precedents in art, i.e. the uncle-nephew relationship [touted by the Formalists — trans.]. When inheritance is no longer handed down in a line of direct descent, it is the honorable family itself who experiences astonishment, rather than the one looking at the fruits of this family scene from the side. “What is made” in art is like an utterance which is made. Like the successful speech act.

Another possible answer to the confusion over an apparent deficit of skill could lie in the fact that this scandalous circumstance, unmasked in typical statements about not understanding art (“They drew it that way because they don’t actually know how to draw/draw *normally*”), is absolutely essential. In some sense one needs to not know how to draw or write *normally*, that is, to suffer from a deficit of technique, in order to avoid turning into a craftsman, a slave to the routine of art, and also to *play up* the ruling conventions. That which the bourgeois Philistine perceives as an appropriate dollop of artistry (and for which he might even be prepared to pay money) is absent in avant-garde work; and this is what the workshop calls the lack of technique (i.e. the grammar of art), the bluffing of ambitious bohemian youth. But these “impartial circumstances” are exactly what is needed for genuine invention in art.

1. Of all people, Shklovsky — who came up with both the formula “experience the making of the object; what is made in art doesn’t matter” and the expression “the knight’s move” — ought to be sufficiently sensitive to both of this.

2. Benjamin’s theses “On the concept of history” can probably be applied to the history of art itself.

3. The entirely applicable gesture of Munchausen, often evoked in the analysis of artistic biographies.

Meanwhile, considering these inessential and simultaneously detractive circumstances to be of first-order importance can in its turn become the theoretical invention appropriate to this way of understanding art. Less carelessness and greater ambition should cease to be the “dark truth” of art and become an analytical argument. It is ultimately necessary to move from the analysis of artworks’ formal structure to a diagnosis of the *pragmatics* of artistic acts.

Acknowledged by the avant-garde as methodologically legitimate and politically salutary, the rejection of the artwork (even more so the “valuable” one, the Work with a capital W) led to the appearance of a whole gallery celebrating the glory of weakness; indeed, art can be completely repositioned as a sort of weakness, one that boasts the indubitable and particular strength of weakness. Paradoxically effective thanks to its failure, this art regularly celebrates its demise and thus continues to thrive. Artists who declare the impossibility of art and at the same time manage to get around the prohibition they themselves have performatively asserted.

The weakness of (avant-garde) art is closely tied to history. This is art trying simultaneously to leap into the last car of the departing train, and to overtake the same train. The paradoxical time of art is the pluperfect (“in the year N it *had already become unacceptable* to draw like that”), combining with the temporality of alternative history. There are dead-ends in the history of art; if foreseen, attempts can be made to avert them (Man Ray: “Everything in art went the wrong way”). Other dead-ends have already had their effect, but can be returned to in order to play out the same, constantly repeating scene.<sup>2</sup> This scene is host to paradoxical interpretations of the past and present moment, proceeding from an as yet unfulfilled future; and metaleptic movements provided by an authority which they themselves have yet to establish.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the avant-garde strives to overtake the train of history (the Russian version might feature the “downtrodden nag” according to Mayakovsky), using the train’s own speed and seeking to go even faster. The trivial rhetorical figure of the artist “ahead of his time” must be subjected to narratological analysis: what kind of grammatical time



(tense) is he trying to get ahead of, and through what grammatical means is he fulfilling this speech task? We know that time can be gotten ahead of by contorting space, through non-classical topology. To overtake history, one has to get across the field of art by nontrivial means, by *cutting corners*.

A successfully commenced attempt to overtake leads to an understanding of the need for a dodge that will allow for avoiding participation in quantitative competition; the greater suitability of logic than physics for successful maneuvers in art. Thus, rejected even by his fellow *avant-gardistes*, Duchamp returned to chess, feeling out a theory of the check whereby to conquer his rival with no direct conflict between pawns. Saussure and Wittgenstein compared the rules of language to those of chess, in which each piece moves in a particular way, due to the fact that no other piece moves thusly. At the same time, the piece's moves are in no way connected with the material from which it itself is made. The history of art read as a chess game or a language game allows Duchamp to performatively put art in check (art cannot be checkmated).<sup>4</sup>

A similar linguo-pragmatic viewpoint is supported by the movement of art toward textual logic: Duchamp subjects painting to cybernetization or, more precisely, he radicalizes the revealed tendency that came of age in modernism. If the image becomes less and less *traced*, in Seurat already approaching a binary code (literature) and requiring the cooperation of the viewer, then why on earth would anyone need to continue basing one's choices on natural referents and the innate quality of technique?

As Thierry de Duve demonstrates, art accepted the technical consequences of industrialization all the more enthusiastically, the more this acceptance allowed it to oust the epistemological consequences (this is also true for the postindustrialization of art).<sup>5</sup> Unrecognized mechanization very often allows for the continuation and even perfection of the practice of *painting sunsets*.

To be an artist as producer of technical innovation is less about deploying new forces of production (which, it stands to reason, could be used non-reflexively) than about problematizing the production relations of art (the range of which include not only who pays whom and for what

and how the original/copy is distributed, but also the decision as to where the work of synthesizing the image takes place — on canvas, on the retina, in the viewer's imagination; and the decision as to whether there even exists any division of labor between the artist and the viewer). In accepting the industrialization (of the process of the creation) of art, the artist finds himself amidst contemporary conditions of production, while art reveals its ancestral function: to always illustrate its own impossibility, (as) the impossibility of its former self. In this way, the struggle today to acknowledge the invalidity of digital photography, to call it non- or post-photography, discloses the reincarnation of the phantasm of authenticity (an earlier manifestation of which, in painting, had been killed by that selfsame photography).

Any binary code, any system of random signs at all puts significant pressure on organic individuality, requires its conceptual rearmament against the threat of nonexistence. While literature has always been mechanized because of its medium, visual art held onto its organicist illusion much longer. But it is not only art that at some point asks itself where the synthesis of signifiers takes place (bringing them ever deeper into the human body); literature too reveals a similar dynamic: old literature in comparison to contemporary always seems more prescribed by its demiurgic author, who never lets the hero or the reader stumble into an under-programmed back-alley (cf. Bakhtin's musings on the author/hero relationship).

And yet, changes in the technical side of production conditions make an unavoidable conflict imminent in production relations as well: when paints cease to be made by hand and begin to be produced in factories, the secret of the trade ceases to be passed from the teacher to the apprentice (which had precipitated the latter's dependence on the former), and the craft to a significant extent becomes the craft of rejecting the craft. Meanwhile painting goes *rhetorical* once and for all and the tradition begins to be passed down through different channels: from the uncle to the quickwitted nephew, rather than the expected skilled craftsman.<sup>6</sup> This is a good example of how the Marxist link between the forces of production and production relations does not enslave but rather liberates stylistic and epistemological experiment (usually it is thought that Marxist analysis can only subordinate art to an economic basis, but in reality it aims only at institutional and media conventions of art, emancipating (through the gesture of its analysis) art itself. Meanwhile, insensitivity to the logic of conflict leads to an overall slackening and a purely stylistic struggle for the definition of art between

4. As a rule, this gesture works in cases when art turns out to be sensitive to epistemological conflicts, e.g. between the object and vision (Cezanne, Duchamp, Literature of the Fact, Shalamov — see below).

5. Thierry de Duve, *Nominalisme pictural, Marcel Duchamp, la peinture et la modernité* (Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1984).

rival schools, which ultimately turns out to be a denigration or loss of sensibility for art overall).

If the phenomenon of “*painting nominalism*” (de Duve) or the *rhetoricization of art* brings us so close to the logic of performative acts of art, then what are the ways we could potentially apply this intuitively sensed method to literature?

One of the earliest formulas we know for reflecting artistic strategy in Russian literature lies in the lines “No, I am not Byron, I am someone else”, written by Lermontov. Obviously, the concrete difference that legitimizes the author and places him side-by-side with Byron remains essentially unknown. But this is precisely where we find the first rule of artistic invention: distancing (from the ruling example). The second rule, sketched out in general terms above, can be formulated as tactical defeat or even exemplary-demonstrative failure. Let us pause here and discuss a few examples of *literary pragmatics* in greater detail.

6. The difference between this and Shklovsky’s formula lies in the fact that the nephew is aware of his heritage and consciously enters into the struggle with his cousins, and to a certain extent conducts himself as if the desired inheritance scenario had already taken place.

7. The reasons for the initial radical gamble (the replacement of a literary code with an imaginary one) are found, as was often the case in the history of Russian literature, outside the literary system *per se*, and correspond chronologically to the moment at which the overall sense of automatization of the available means of expression began to resonate with the claims of a certain social group insisting on a new definition of the functions of literature.

8. Renate Lachmann, *Die Zerstörung der schönen Rede. Rhetorische Tradition und Konzepte des Poetischen* (München, 1994)

9. I.e. “black” or anti-rhetoric as consciously oriented against ruling rhetorical regulations of communicative practice.

10. Which got its name, as is often the case with artistic movements, from a castigating opponent — Bulgárin, who criticized the “exclusion of the senses and of pathos in favor of dark and dirty scenes.”

## The “*Natural School*” and its heirs

In opposing Sentimentalist cliché for its falsification of depictions (or “reality”), Russian realism demanded that *language be constantly brought into contact with the senses*. Readers who had acquired a taste for immediacy, in no small part due to Sentimentalism, now saw the latter as tainted by the sin of inauthenticity (found, of course, in the same stylistic means that until recently had been considered an important stake in the mad dash for immediacy). But since the ideal of authenticity had been preserved, it was simply transferred from the compromised region of the senses to the region of social reality.

Realism declared this project to be a process of *demedialization*, a striving to overcome any and all kinds of conventionality, to radically curtail literary methods and to effectively abolish the distance between the one depicting and the thing depicted in the interest of approximating “reality itself.”<sup>7</sup>

It is characteristic, however, that rhetoricism began to be recognized as a hindrance on the path to artistic well-being and to this approximation of social reality as such. This followed *de facto* from the new definition of the social functions of literature, but the problem lay in the fact that the scale for evaluation itself was an attribute of this state of affairs, which had still to be confirmed in the struggle for the “*demontage of eloquence*.”<sup>8</sup> Thence follows the paradoxical demand for a *nonliterary literariness*.

By emphasizing the transition from the “authentic” (with regard to the senses) to the “real” (with regard to social reality), the *Natural School* turned to the gold standard of all revolutions — the as-yet-non-rhetorized “low style,” which, naturally, looks like a rejection of style out of hand. The eloquence latent in the rejection of eloquence is usually perceived as a long-awaited liberation from conventionality generally.<sup>9</sup> The *vulgarity and simplicity* discovered in the 1820s would by the 1840s be considered indicative of stylistic perfection. Naturalism owes its invention to the situation expertly constructed by Belinsky, wherein the “natural” was opposed to the “rhetorical”;<sup>10</sup> this rhetorical move beat down adherents of Sentimentalism, but only with the help of an argument that had previously been used by them against their opponents (the archaists, who had fought for a return to eighteenth-century classicist rhetoric, and who had at one time also been at odds with the “new word” of the Sentimentalists). Thus Belinsky razed both preceding camps in one fell swoop and strategically averted the possibility of a revanche, previously guaranteed by the alternation of the two sides.

In this way, the realism of the *Natural School* made rhetoric synonymous with both the routine use of existing devices and with social conserva-

tism. But while Belinsky himself still believed fervently in the possibility of rejecting rhetoric out of hand (as a practice of the ruling classes), later modernist calls for a rapprochement with reality would express ever greater doubts in the possibility of a total rejection of all filters. This would nevertheless make their calls for rejecting all mediation only more ambiguous.

The documentary approach, as an argument and a euphemism for *authenticity*, appears regularly on the horizon of literary history at moments of radical breaks in the literary canon, often in accordance with revolutionary politics. May be the most interesting incarnation of this tendency in the history of Russian literature was the radical project of overcoming “fictions and prettiness” in writing, usually linked to the *Literature of the Fact* school and the review “*Novyi LEF*”. Just as the Constructivists had proclaimed a transition from the forms of easel painting to the production of real objects, *Literature of the Fact* (henceforth — LF) was aimed at liquidating the “life-descriptive” forms of literature and transitioning to a literature of “life-building” or a “productive-utilitarian” literature, in which facts themselves would appear as real, non-abstract objects.

What can literature do to participate in the formation of a new everyday reality and a new human being? Put simply: it can stop being merely itself. That is, literature should not simply narrate the new, but should work to destroy the “inert literary forms” of utterance and thought (the LF theoreticians understood ideology as form, and (literary) form as a derivative of ideology).

As in any *rejection of a former self*, however, this literature of facts left a gap open for ambiguity: “We believe that the old forms of literature are useless for the formation of new material and that today’s stance overall favors material, fact and message.”<sup>11</sup> This kind of formulation is obscure: either literature as a whole (with all of its old forms) is not useful, or it is only the old forms of literature that are useless (which would imply a demand for the invention of new forms).

11. Victor Shklovsky, “V zaciuchenie”, *Literatura fakta: Pervyi sbornik materialov rabotnikov LEF’a* (Moscow: Zaharov, 2000), 192.

12. “Vague symbolism, reticence, Aesop-like muddle [...] gave the writer the opportunity to push through certain forbidden little notions even under the harshest censorship of Tsar Nicholas’ reign. [...] People experienced “real life” in novels, and this was a comfort to them. [...] It was as if people had silently agreed to take this innocent counterfeit as real life, and in essence everyone gave themselves a conditional sort of break to imagine things as they wished. So-called realism was a conventional language for them [...] and no one to this day has yet exposed its conventionality.” N. Chuzhak, “Pisatel’ skaia pamiatka”, *Ibid.*, 5

13. *Ibid.*, 15.

14. P. Neznamov, “Derevnia krasivogo operenii”, *Novyi LEF*, №8, 1928, 8.

For the LF theoreticians, however, this was dialectic rather than ambiguity: even an imaginary plot is not understood to be an error *per se*, but rather a historically obsolete device. Thus during Nicholas’ reign historical necessity turned social activists toward the path of *belles-lettres* as the most viable form available at the time.<sup>12</sup> But the “literature of idle imagination” ceased to be an “abstractly-progressive” phenomenon as the social atmosphere changed.

The life-building pathos of production literature led to a rejection of the thesis about the activity of the superstructure, within which it had previously had to operate: “The revolution fundamentally abolished those prerequisites that had driven the writer away from facts and forced him into invention. All need for the imaginary fell away and in its place there grew a demand for facts.”<sup>13</sup> In the context of these new “practical tasks of the new literary culture, which have nothing in common with the aesthetic influence of literary classics,” priority is given to “sketches as truthful as reflexes.”<sup>14</sup>

Thus the very designation “Literature of the Fact” is already somewhat inconvenient in connection with the epistemological status of the type of discourse described. This genitive assumes:

1) literature immediately striving to be fact, i.e. a literature that proclaims factualness as a *property* of a certain kind of *writing* that is moving away from literature “as such” toward the documentary (in this case “of the fact” plays the role of an adjective — literature of what? i.e. what kind of literature?),

2) and simultaneously the activity of the fact itself, taking literature’s place, i.e. a literature that the actual fact is producing *reflexively*, while the fact is registered — importantly — by a *non-professional author* (while still striving to abandon its status and move toward a sort of legitimate literary existence).

This ambiguity is quite significant given that our epistemological perspective depends on the choice of what we see as the authority that provides the impetus to a literature of the fact: we will assume either a *reality that speaks for itself* (which is ultimately free from all the limitations of tsarist censorship and thus can replace imperfect and bureaucratized literature), or a particular *documentary viewpoint*, which enables us to view and constitute reality thanks to its specific construction (just as Vertov’s kino-eye enables viewing processes otherwise hidden to the human eye). The way we understand the status of LF in its struggle with the “old literary relationship to objects” will also depend on the epistemological perspective: LF can be either an avant-garde literary movement or a gnoseological challenge (addressed to the very figurality of language).

On the one hand, this was a defense of the new socialist material from the danger of spoilage and deformation (“...it is becoming clear that

this Party man came out of the literary tradition rather than the local committee";<sup>15</sup> "the complex is being built up north according to the laws of a very special kind of engineering: the laws of the A. Bely school").<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, given that half the editorial board was made up of Formalists, they were aware that in order to let new material live, they needed to abandon old plot and stylistic constructions and construct new ones.<sup>17</sup>

The factographer, whose efforts were previously directed wholly toward the precise registration of facts (despite all of the aforementioned ambiguity of this procedure), is now expected to engage in practice as well, in production. "We do not conceive of a break between the writer and the object he is writing about."<sup>18</sup> This thesis seems to pretend to refuting the entire modern European metaphysics of the subject-object. The efforts of authors exploiting the revolutionary theme and even experimenting with form appeared insufficient to the editors of "Novyi LEF" since "they are only observing, but not participating in the building of life."<sup>19</sup> Mere thematic and stylistic loyalty to the revolution was not enough; artists must swear allegiance on *pragmatic* grounds, that is, they should speak only after having become a part of what they describe.

Having recognized that the category they proposed was theoretically problematic and ideologically ambiguous, the LF theoreticians shifted or complicated the linguistic pragmatics of

utterances about "facts" by means of the imperative "to reorient literature toward action."<sup>20</sup> But the performative quality of language, all the more so literary or quasi-literary language, is fraught with still more epistemological paradoxes.

Since presenting facts "as they are" was no longer adequate, LF rearranged things as it went along: "for us, the fact-men, there cannot exist facts as such";<sup>21</sup> "a person does not merely see a defect, he is already thinking about this defect and making a suggestion as to how it can be amended."<sup>22</sup> In this way LF approached the realm of practical activity (which brought it closer to Vygotsky, according to whom meaning emerges in the world of human actions in connection with the aims and interests of speakers (and in relation to them) and, consequently, has a pragmatic aspect).

Thus, in a fairly roundabout way (through the idea of a transitive language), LF arrived at the idea that things do not have their "own names," just as there are no things outside of a certain — practical — relationship to them; and that facts are fabricated in (linguistic) interaction. LF rejected an objectivist epistemology of language, but not its own dream of bringing facts into literature. If there are no facts that can be impartially registered, then they must be *fabricated* — on the one hand through the factographer's direct participation in production, and on the other through special linguistic technique. "Factual material can be introduced into literature only by means of the LEF devices of selection and montage of facts."<sup>23</sup> This technique, consisting exclusively of selection and montage (combination), does not differ at all from Roman Jakobson's description of linguistic action. The factographer works with reality like a native speaker with her paradigmatic and syntagmatic toolbox. The method of LF coincides, as it were, with the most natural sign system known, speaking through the snippets themselves of reality.

In this way, transitioning from the production of representations of reality to the latter's immediate transformation, not only is old form rediscovered (along with the conservative social practice of being a writer), but also the obstacle of language itself. To duly acknowledge the theoretical intuition of the factographers, it should be said that they were fully aware of this circumstance.<sup>24</sup> This is precisely why we are interested in the inventive doctrine within which the LEF theoreticians conceived the utterance as a locutionary event, which either exposes its speculative nature or gets cosy with the language of ideology in its pragmatics. Regardless the fact that this linguo-pragmatic orientation toward a "mobilization of facts" seems to indicate the starting point of a movement leading to the speculative language of Soviet bureaucracy,

15. P. Neznamov, "Dradedamovyi byt", *Novyi LEF*, №6, 1928, 23.

16. V. Trenin, "Intelligentnyye partizany", *Literatura fakta*, 101.

17. Of course, in order to perceive or formulate something, that something must be deformed. Thus, backed up by the Formalists, the LEF artists would never speak out against Constructivist principles, but merely clarified that the deformation necessary for perception should be conditioned by technique rather than psychology.

18. N. Chuzhak, *Ibid.*, 15.

19. N. Chuzhak, *Ibid.*, 16.

20. N. Chuzhak, *Ibid.*, 21.

21. S. Tretiakov, "Prodolzhenie sleduet", *Literatura fakta*, 282.

22. *Ibid.*, 223. Cf. another statement by a leading LF theoretician: "...there cannot be a single artwork that does not aim to register facts. [...] Only two things can be done with facts: they can be used in reports or in proclamations. The report does not distort the facts — it registers them in all their reality. The proclamation does not register facts, but rather uses them and distorts them in the direction most useful to it." O. Brik, "Blizhe k faktu", *Literatura fakta*, 81.

23. V. Trenin, "Nuzhno predosterech", *Literatura fakta*, 217.

24. "Can there exist a 'living' person in literature? We think that there can — allowing for the deformational qualities of the word. Even the most objective photograph does not register the object with absolute accuracy, since by its very nature it is two-dimensional and thus distorts the three-dimensionality of things. The word too has its own particular "two-dimensionality," and it is only by taking into account the degree of deformation of this lexical "two-dimensionality" that we can talk about "objective" methods of depiction." T. Gritc, "Mertvyi shtamp i zhivoi chelovek", *Literatura fakta*, 134.

it actually conceals a peculiar technique for the security of linguistic representation. The refusal to naturalize facts uttered (*énoncé*) and the objectivization of the fact of utterance (*énonciation*) might suggest propaganda, but it would be a propaganda that “exposes the devices of influence rather than obscuring them.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus LF, as a paradoxical refutation and radicalization of the ideas of the *Natural School*, acknowledging both the suspension of the referential status of all that has been written and the inescapable figurality of language, moves from a search for a guiltless language and transparent communication to a maximally speculative reworking of Brecht’s realism, emphasizing the very conditions of seeing and understanding.

We cannot avoid mentioning Platonov as well, as an example of a no less paradoxical *interception* of the realist tradition by means of a *realism of language*: one that preserves socialist construction as a referent, but that also demonstrates the deconstructive effect a self-criticism of language can have on it. At the same time, Platonov shifts the communist ideal from the content of the utterance into the construction of the act of utterance itself, laying out the only possible communism, a *communism of speech* (the interconnection of all functional styles and voices) in his writing (cf. Benjamin, exporting communism in his *Moscow Diary*).

In this context, Shalamov — henceforth our main topic of interest — represents a different type of a way out of the LF paradox: a *realism of the body*. The subject of Shalamov’s prose is more of an extended than a thinking object, nearly naked life, lacking the catastrophe of the history of conceptual mechanisms of mediation but also placing a taboo on any kind of didacticism in literature overall. The “report-like” quality of Shalamov’s writing not only spurns the factographic “epic of the newspaper,”<sup>26</sup> but also Platonov’s “bureaucratic” language.<sup>27</sup> For Shalamov, speaking is performed by the ruined body of history, and the reporting style is used to register it. This is an obvious conflict between functional styles: the confession and the interrogation report (the Soviet Nuremberg that never happened), the blood-stained document that nevertheless still carries juridical force (as is usually the case with documents that bear the traces of bystanders), and actually only intensifies it.

The document is a genre of testimony of certain facts in a maximally unambiguous form, and in some sense also a material object, all the more so as it is not subject to rhetorical redistribution. In any case, the document is maximally protected from the aberrations of individual readings. It can be personal, i.e. identify its subject, but it cannot be understood subjectively. Everything subjective,

emotionally colored, etc. belongs to a diametrically opposed means of using language. These lexical observations are necessary in order to feel the full ambiguity of the following statement: “The *documentary* prose of the future is *emotionally colored*, a memoir document stained by *blood and the soul*, where the whole thing is document and at the same time represents emotional prose. The task here is simple: to find a *verbatim report* of the protagonists and specialists involved, about one’s own work and *one’s own soul*.”<sup>29</sup> If something secondary to the simple registration of facts (including the performative) slips into the document, then the latter drops out, as it were, of its genre, ceasing to be a document. On the other hand, if something gets blood-stained or people start talking about things like “the soul,” then we can forget about any objectivity. This is evident at the level of linguistic logic, and yet in Shalamov the legal perspective on writing gets systematically mixed up with the spiritualist perspective.

Furthermore, this kind of prose seems to exclude the question of “How was it made?” A tale about a little man and a titular counselor demonstrates its own stylistic accentuation and calls for Formalist deconstruction; but such “big” topics as the siege, war and labor camps place a prohibition on dismantling the construction, while also hinting that there is nothing there to dismantle, one should just pay attention. But in truth, rather than the state of emergency represented in such literature, attention should be paid to the state of emergency instituted in literature itself through such gestures.

25. B. Arvatov, “Agit-kino i kino-glaz”, *Kino-zhurnal A.R.K.*, 1925 (№8), 3.

26. Shalamov was familiar with the LF project and always associated himself with it: “Sergei Mikhailovich Tretyakov tried to consolidate the newspaper, to give it priority. Neither Tretyakov or Mayakovsky ever managed to make anything out of this attempt. [...] Literature of the Fact is not literature of the document. It is just an isolated incident inside of the big documentary doctrine. The LEF artists produced a whole series of articles recommending “documenting facts,” “collecting facts.” [...] But that is a calculated distortion. There is no fact without its being presented, without the form of its registration.” V. Shalamov <O moei proze>. *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Hudlit, 1998).

27. Besides constant references to this kind of official-business genre as a report, we can also point to the story “The Snake Charmer,” which tells the tale of a screenwriter, Platonov, and his life in the labor camp. This Platonov demonstrates something Shalamov himself found unacceptable: the illusion that he would acquaint the thieves and criminals with real literature. We can see in this a hint of a no less ambitious task set by Shalamov himself: to acquaint the world of literature with the camps.

28. Platonov passes his time “on both sides of utopia,” thanks to the level of the sign’s figural quality; Shalamov meanwhile invents his own type of duality at the level of the pragmatics of the artistic utterance: he feels himself to be both victim (thus “blood-stained”) and guilty before the judgment of history (thus the obsessive reporting of the underground Trotskyite unable to stop the Thermidor).

29. V. Shalamov, *Ibid*.

## The epistemology of emergency: hesitation

Shalamov was constrained by an extremely equivocal relationship not only to some dictionary meanings but also to such constitutive definitions of literariness as *fiction* and *style*. To compare him with LF as a point of negative reference: LF stood both “against fiction” and “against prettiness,” transforming this from declarations into linguistic facts. They may have blundered to some extent with regard to the real linguistic possibilities of such a demarche and the finality of the solution to the problem (art, as we know, prefers to rework and embrace first and foremost its critics and destroyers), but in any case we understand what they meant. In Shalamov’s case, we know that such meta-utterances about the nonfictional character, the “precision of the blood-stained report” and other rhetorical structures calling for a rejection of rhetorical structures are necessary because the author suffered from crushing doubts as to the possibility of bringing writing to bear on this kind of state of emergency.<sup>30</sup> On the one hand, Shalamov assumes that the referential world of his prose has the right to be concerned with style; on the other hand, this world is not only uttered before our very eyes, but also equipped with an additional emergency quality ingrained in the very act of such an utterance. In other words, while Western European modernism experimented with the fragmentation of narrative conventions and referential instability, Shalamov, the Soviet convict, is allowed to not worry about even the bare minimum of formal proficiency and rhetorical knowledge; all he has to do is give testimony, fill out a “blood-stained” report. And yet Shalamov does demonstrate this proficiency and this knowledge.

It might sound like a truism to say that Shalamov is no adherent of Formalism or of the Ornamentalist understanding of writing. But look at how he himself sums up the ancient dispute

connecting the technical to the thematic: “A new, unusual form for registering a unique condition and unique circumstances.”<sup>31</sup> This surfeit of the unusual and the unique prevents us from determining what is going on here: is this about form performing the decisive work of novelty, or about the unique state that will have all the more impact the less literary processing it is subjected to? Obviously, new referential objects entail a redistribution of expressive means, while new form by definition has a weakness for contemporary material. But in any of these cases the obviousness of the *initial* initiative is preserved, and Shalamov meanwhile consistently avoids verb copulas: “a form for a state.” If form “was necessary,” then it would follow the material and yield to it; if form itself “made demands,” then it would be possible to estimate the referential object of Shalamov’s prose — only as an “occurrence of style.” But while the ode could still be described as belonging to the *oratorical genre* as something paradoxically required by external series and at the same time requiring them itself merely as motivators of its form,<sup>32</sup> this kind of perspective on Shalamov’s writing seems prohibited by the distinctly extreme, “emergency” quality of the referent, which as it were exceeds the ontological horizon of any and all literature. We do not intend to doubt the legality of this prohibition, but nevertheless are compelled to analyze the conditions under which excellent literature is still produced by means of the rejection of literature. “*The Kolyma Tales* lie outside of art, and nevertheless they possess both artistic and documentary force.”<sup>33</sup> Owing to this paradoxical situation, when something is breaking out of its own cage and simultaneously striving to arrange it in its own image, Shalamov is forced to stand up for the priority both of the material and of its artistic quality at the same time, while also observing the rules of art. At the same time, he seeks to establish his own rules, called upon to refute art (the “leaky pot” strategy). This is why it is possible to speak with the same seriousness about both Shalamov’s formalism and his anti-formalism.

“I had such reserves of novelty that I had no fear of any repetitions.”<sup>34</sup> Once again something external feeds the agent’s movement inside the space of literature, lending him less professional finesse than confidence in his strength to stand against it. Evidently, if you have something new to say (hitherto still *external* to literature), you need not fear repetition. But perhaps this tautology should be understood as a declaration of the absence of fear in the face of intentionally weak form, rather than the triviality of the material? And even as an indirect confirmation of that form’s “peculiar richness” given the material’s particular “reserves of novelty.”

30. Cf. “The astonishing union of rhetorical figures and antirhetorical utterances demand attention” (E. Volkova, “Teksty «Kolym-skikh rasskazov» Varlana Shalamova v rakurse neoritoricheskikh i antiritoricheskikh mysloporozhdenii J. M. Lotmana”, *K stoletiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Varlana Shalamova. Materialy konferencii* (Moscow, 2007), 25–32.

31. Cf. “The Kolyma Tales are a registration of the exclusive in a state of exclusion...” (V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*).

32. Tynianov J. “Oda kak oratorskii zhanr”, *Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino* (Moscow, 1977), 227–252.

33. V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*

34. Note that Shalamov acknowledges the impending contradiction and strives to avert it: “My material would rescue any repetitions, but there were no repetitions, for my qualifications and training proved their worth, I simply had no need to use anyone else’s models, similes, plots or ideas.” (V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*).

"I considered the novelty of the material the primary and sole quality that gave it the right to live." It would seem again that this utterance lies completely on the side of the referential; it particularly recalls Schopenhauer's phrase, "In essence the primary and sole prerequisite for good style is the situation in which you have something to say." However, just as in this famous simpletons' slogan, the self-sufficient state of "having something to say" or possessing "reserves of novelty" — theatrically tearing down the criteria of (Ornamental) literariness — is nevertheless forced to justify its existence within the bounds of literature (evidently, what Shalamov has in mind but characteristically leaves out of the phrase "the right to life" is *in literature* — after all, one doesn't need any reserves of novelty for physical survival). This is where the contamination in Shalamov becomes evident: the "living" qualities are brought forth before the court of literature, presented as preparations of writing and not anything else that might be utterly unable to submit to a *Hamburg reckoning*. But in literature itself they bring about a *state of emergency*.

In a word, all of these epistemological contradictions in Shalamov's testimonies (collected for the most part in his manifestos and notes on literature, but sometimes peeking out of the stories as well) show that his prose need not be examined on the thematic and formal levels between which thought usually flits, but rather on the level of the *pragmatics of the artistic utterance*.

### Emergency pragmatics: mixing

As Mikhail Ryklin demonstrates on two stories by Shalamov, war is that which can only be interesting to someone spared the extreme experience of the camps: "Andreev has more important things to do: get bread, buy sacks, rest on his hospital cot after the punishing labor of the camps. If the inhabitants of the camp underworld noticed

the impact of the war at all, it was only through increases in the strictness of the regime and the manufacturing norms and cuts in their already miserly rations."<sup>35</sup> Along with the epistemological, the pragmatic level of Shalamov's prose is immediately evident in this light.

Shalamov's prose has "more important things" to do than just witnessing extreme anthropological circumstances too. "The camp theme, broadly interpreted and fundamentally understood: this is the main, the most important question of our time. [...] This question is much more important than the theme of war. War in some sense plays the role of psychological camouflage (history tells us that during wartime the tyrant grows closer to his people). There are attempts to hide the camp theme... behind war statistics."<sup>36</sup> Establishing a hierarchy of degrees of emergency in what is described, Shalamov makes a sovereign decision regarding literature, even if he doesn't want to. Appealing to the documentary quality appears as a regularly repeating gesture of laying claim (to the establishment of rules) to new art, but in Shalamov's case, this intention has a paradoxically mixed character, since it gets combined with undisguised linguistic arbitrary. But in the given case, alongside the confusions described (the very experience that generates the radical claim of Shalamov's literature), he speaks in nearly Bourdieusian terms, emphasizing his understanding of this experience's *value*: "...the experience in prison will not go to waste. Regardless all circumstances that experience will be my moral capital, the incommutable ruble of life to come."<sup>37</sup>

We thus realize that Shalamov's claim (unlike the claim of LF) works not so much on the level of an ultimatum for the documentary quality of the new material or the strange cogency of weak form, but rather on some third level. This is why it is tempting to extend Schmidt's famous formulation about the sovereign as one "who makes decisions about emergencies"<sup>38</sup> to the sphere of narrative imagination that Shalamov belongs to bibliographically. Within this sphere, Shalamov manages to extend the description of *extreme experience leading to writing to the state of emergency of the very experience of writing*, thereby suspending the laws of artistic circulation. In this way literature, going outside the bounds of the law of language's fictive and rhetorical qualities in cases of serious internal or external threat (diagnosed by the selfsame literature), turns out to be *literature that establishes a state of emergency*. It is no longer literature talking to us, but Necessity itself. Independently of how self-aware literature is, we still have to clarify a few more characteristic features of this kind of specific formation.

35. From "The camp and the war. A history of the defeated from Varlam Shalamov," given at the conference "The fate and work of Varlam Shalamov in the context of world literature and Soviet history." See: <http://shalamov.ru/events/23/9.html>

36. Varlam Shalamov, *Über Prosa* (Berlin: Matthes und Seitz, 2009), 30.

37. V. Shalamov, "Butyrskaja tiumra", *Ibid*.

38. K. Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. George D. Schwab, trans. (University of Chicago edition, 2004).

39. Shalamov assumed the didactic function of literature, which cannot teach anyone anything and thus should not aspire to a didactic pose. But just as there are a huge number of indirect speech acts (the question "Could you perhaps shut the window?" is actually a request), it is probably possible to imagine the contrivances whereby one could declaratively reject the pedagogical ambitions of preserving the mechanism of literature, which is

The new writing, pointing out both the inadmissible didacticism and the unforgivable remoteness of old literature,<sup>39</sup> seeks not just to present extreme material or suggest extreme stylistic solutions but to establish a certain emergency method of action, a special *pragmatics of writing*.<sup>40</sup> As a result of this search, “new prose” gets distanced from both the old order of writing and, more generally, the order of writing *per se*, thus approaching an existential act: “Descriptions are not enough for our times. The new prose is the event itself, the battle and not its description. That is, a document, the author’s direct participation in life events. Prose experienced as document.”<sup>41</sup> Shalamov seems to extend the emergency from the *referential* to the *pragmatic* level of his prose.

Manifestos constitute one of the most public spaces for the expression of artistic pragmatics: marked by a type of subordination to tradition and contemporaries, manifestos also lay down the foundation for how things should look in the future. Just as in the above-discussed questions regarding the relationship between material and construction, here there is a strategic blurring of the relationship between predecessors and contemporaries. Shalamov’s symbolic gamble lies in the simultaneous adherence to and demarche of tradition: “After all, I write documentary prose, and in some sense I am a direct descendent of the Russian realist school — documentary like realism. My stories criticize and refute the very essence of literature, such as is studied in textbooks.”<sup>42</sup>

called upon to accomplish certain teaching actions with regard to its audience: to enlighten and inform. This is what allows Shalamov’s prose to maintain the contradiction of its rejection of didacticism and its moralizing reference to reality, which should independently promote ethical progress simply by being there. Roughly speaking, the rejection proceeds from the idea of crowning the fable with a moral, but not from the convention of the fable itself. At some point the absence of moralite becomes more eloquent.

40. The particular existential circumstances sketched out place strategic stylistic limitations onto writing itself as well. “And the pattern has no time to bloom/To keep the meter/For the old Sermon on the Mount/Is a daunting example.”

41. V. Shalamov, “O ‘novoi poze,” *Sobranie sochinenii*, 157–160.

42. V. Shalamov, “O moei proze,” *Ibid*.

43. The ethics of writing potentially subject to Shalamov’s criticism are also found in Platonov: “The literate man works magic with his mind, while the illiterate one works on his with his hands” (Chevengur).

44. “...the Russian writer is not attention to his own profession, his own activity. The topic of writer is only important for Chernyshevsky or Belinsky. Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov. In journalistic terms, each of them understood nothing about literature, and if they evaluated it, it was in application to the previously given political usefulness of the author” (V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*).

45. “In prose of the Kolyma Tales type, however, this correction stays beyond the tongue, the gullet, even beyond thought” (V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*).

46. V. Shalamov, *Ibid*.

Shalamov amazingly manages to combine his crusade against the “common sense” of literature with statements presenting himself as its only heir. In this way, “new prose” becomes synonymous with the documentary; the latter paradoxically emerges from both the extremely traumatic experience that increases the value and logic of the purely literary, and from a maximally precise understanding of the rules of literary succession and prevalence.

And thus Shalamov’s suggested construction of relations between material and technique and between convention and innovation is distinguished by a captivating inconsistency. We could try to explain it by means of such as yet uncoordinated factors as Shalamov’s being a professional literary figure and yet having had experiences that deny all possible literature. On the one hand, Shalamov was always wary of the literary-intellectual betrayal of unbearable reality;<sup>43</sup> on the other hand, he was also irritated by the populist approach to questions of art.<sup>44</sup> Both his particular perspective in writing and unprecedented hybrid of *realist modernism* (using these terms in Lifshits’s sense, implying mutual exclusion) are rooted in these nearly *physically* incompatible circumstances.

On the one hand, Shalamov seems to be a writer who scorns excessive attention to language, denies the value of careful editing and literary frills;<sup>45</sup> on the other hand, he is enchanted by the very idea of language, inspired by all of its legends and concerns. To start with the most obvious, we should say something about the speculative rapprochement of the act of writing with physical labor, which is characteristic of other representatives of this kind of “linguistics of labor”: “Inspiration as a miracle, as an illumination, does not happen every day; when it does you are utterly powerless to stop writing, you only stop when forced to by the purely muscular exhaustion of the hand holding the pencil. The muscles ache just as they do after felling trees or chopping wood.”<sup>46</sup> With one movement of a fountain pen, the subtle and free labor of artistic creation is likened to crude, forced manual labor.

This kind of seemingly innocuous comparison conceals a whole program of philosophy of language, while the physical metaphor it contains acts simultaneously as an epistemological argument and a pragmatic gesture. Shalamov talks about creative labor as physical not in order to explain the degree of its difficulty, but to contrast himself with the adepts of other writing doctrines within literature itself. Every time the movement of the pen and the spade (the axe, the bayonet, etc.) draw close, innocent language gets targeted and Shalamov declares his loyalty to the “language of the lumberman.” In his constant insistence on the similarity between the writing-table and the camp



saw-bench,<sup>47</sup> Shalamov declares himself a close colleague of the lumberman Roland Barthes.

This takes us to the entirely recognizable *morality of form*, which can be boiled down to certain recommendations of writing skills. But it is much more interesting to stay at the level of the pragmatics of writing displayed in the rapprochements of the creative act with rather dangerous existential actions: "They have no finishing touches, but there is closure: a story like 'The Cross,' written in one sitting, in a state of nervous excitement, *for immortality and death* — from the first to the final phrase."<sup>48</sup> The state-of-emergency circumstances inherited by the act of utterance from that utterance's content place a prohibition on both stylistic procedures such as "finishing touches" and compositional elements such as the suspiciously self-sufficient description: "At one point I took a pencil to one of Babel's stories and crossed out all of the beauty, all of the fires that resembled resurrections, and then looked at what was left. Not much Babel was left, and absolutely no Larisa Reisner."<sup>49</sup>

Pragmatics is always encoded in the model of a tool (or weapon)<sup>50</sup> the action of which is tantamount to writing: this is Kharm's poem that breaks the window when it strikes, and Mayakovsky's demand to *write by means of war*. The tool always assumes one or another stage of writing — "stage" more in the theatrical than the psychoanalytical sense. In Shalamov's case this is the staging of an interrogation, perhaps even of torture: the report will be spattered with the "living blood of history," while the document will be torn from the paws of oblivion. In any event, it will bear the traces of quick but well thought-out actions: "Every one of my stories is a slap in the face of Stalinism and, like every slap, has laws of a purely muscular character"; "Another piece of advice — there are no unnecessary phrases in the story... A slap should be short and resonant."<sup>51</sup> The slap as a pragmatic metaphor, also ultimately boiling down to its "muscular character." Following the slap formula, Shalamov analyzes a few other means of action in writing, revealing a sensitivity to the perspective of pragmatics of the artistic utterance: "A phrase can be measured according to Flaubert's measure — the length of a breath — and there is some physiological ground for this. Literary scholars have often said that the tradition of Russian prose is a shovel that needs to be stuck in the ground and then wrenched upward, to extract the deepest layers. We can let economists busy themselves with digging up those layers, but not writers and *litterateurs*. For the latter this kind of digging up seems like strange advice."<sup>52</sup> Shalamov usually manages metaphors of literary tools, like the shovel, more gracefully than the nineteenth-century realists he

criticizes. This is what conceals a feature of his that remains stubbornly unacknowledged by "human-rights"-oriented Shalamov studies. He is usually reduced to an impartial mechanism of recording horrors, a transparent registrar, but his key self-definitions always reveal a paradoxical enchantment with the opposite: the deforming activity of this apparatus: "My story — a document — is also an improvisation. And still it remains a document, a personal testimony, a personal bias. I am the chronicler of my own soul. No more."<sup>53</sup> The biased recording apparatus and, moreover, its internal processes — this is the ideal (rather dissonant with the era of scientific progress he constantly refers to) of the machine of Shalamovian inspiration. In general, Shalamov's dialogue with the hard sciences (which he understands to encompass both the science of matter and in terms of cybernetics and structuralism) is no less polemical than that with the tradition of nineteenth-century realism. Ultimately, Shalamov does not oppose "normal literature" to *expressive documentalism*, but literature in general (which Shalamov simultaneously repudiates and takes forward) to scientific epistemology ("The scientist cannot quote from a work of poetry, for these are different worlds").<sup>54</sup> Though all of his prose relates to both the history of realism as literary tradition and to realism as an epistemological principle of a number of scientific traditions. Alternating the roles of the plaintiff and the defendant, the two parties in this dispute are raw facts and the viewpoint that forms them, reality and the transcendental apparatus, extralinguistic reality and speech activity.

Along with other objects of the physical world, Shalamov uses the stone (featured on the banners of formalists as well) to oppose something non-resident, speculative, seeking always to violate the borders of fact: "If it is a person's hand [doing the writing] — then my work is imitation, unoriginal. If it is a stone's hand, a fish's or cloud's — then I give myself over to that other sphere, perhaps without having any say in the matter. How can anyone check to see where my will ends and where the

47. "Thus there is an inspector in the brain, a selector who pushes the unnecessary log on the raft toward the narrow neck of the factory power saws" (V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*).

48. V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*

49. V. Shalamov, *Ibid.* This reminds us that Shalamov had graduated at *Literature of the Fact* school.

50. In total agreement with the idea of one thing transforming into another during wartime.

51. V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*

52. V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*

53. V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*

54. V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*

boundary of the stone's authority lies?"<sup>55</sup> However, the traditional gnoseological skepticism reappears in the very next sentence, in the context of a purely practical literary task: "But logs are often selected, hooked into the neck of the timber mill, the power-saw, before which all kinds of other standard logs are floating, all of which have the right to turn into phrases."<sup>56</sup>

In other words, the mystery of Shalamov's "depth" lies in the fact that the notorious state of emergency of the described circumstances turns out to be furthermore faced with another war — linguistic, epistemological (but no longer just literary). This would seem to be blasphemy if it did not also advertise the emergency state of the writing itself. When pondered, reducing the camp experience to a metaphor about the cognitive processes going on during the creative linguistic act can turn out to be no less radical than wishing to acquaint the world with the horrors of the Stalinist labor camps. This is why the "human-rights literary critics" have immured this line of thought, but it goes on slyly peeking out of virtually every one of Shalamov's phrases; his prose attracts people for whom the camps and Soviet history are far from topics of primary interest. Certainly, Shalamov himself never makes this explicit, but it sits on the surface of all of his statements, like a stamped but unsent letter lying on the table. One need only describe the "emergency conditions" in slightly greater detail and they immediately take on the attributes and features of a purely linguistic catastrophe, a rout of/by language itself.

For instance, the story "Through the snow," which opens the *Kolyma Tales*, provides an entirely transparent hint toward the pragmatic gesture, in which the emergency of the experience described turns out to be a metaphor for the emergency experience of writing itself and of artistic invention. In two short paragraphs (which make up the entire piece), describing in detail and with practical recommendations how the convicts dig out a road through unbroken snow, in a landscape against which the rest of the *Kolyma Tales* will take place, Shalamov closes the text with words that unexpectedly take us into the context of literary pioneering: "It is not writers riding on the tractors and horses, but readers."<sup>57</sup>

Thus at every stage the corruption of representation leads to the actualization of the idea of the material and indexical quality of expression: with the *Natural School* it was the project, erected in the name of social progress, of radical demedialization, the rejection of the fracturing of representation that separated the signifier from the signified; with early *Literature of the Fact* it was the positivist

project of direct registration of facts in the rawest form possible for the needs of the revolution; and finally, with Shalamov, it is "life itself" taking on the features of *naked life* (in Agamben's sense). He is testing that life's ability to speak on its own when he establishes a state of emergency in literary history and simultaneously "saves [literature] from the Auschwitz of scrap-paper."<sup>58</sup>

In a certain sense, *state-of-emergency literature* does not so much connote the historical and anthropological circumstances that generate it as much as the modernist convention of the emergency state of literature and art themselves. After a certain point they are summoned to live in a mode of renewed self-abnegation. Aesthetic significance has been wedded once and for all with the procedure of its own demarche and of a reassessment of its foundations (excluding the principle of self-abnegation itself, which becomes a meta-criterion). Having become autonomous, art develops (reproduces) through performative acts, which paradoxically reject the right of everything (or almost everything) to call itself art. This preceded the author of the new act, which simultaneously expropriates from everyone the category of art itself.<sup>59</sup> The paradox here is rooted in the fact that the struggle unfolds around an "empty name" or empty term: for if everything that belongs to its history is refuted on the basis of its not (any longer?) corresponding to its essence, then wherein does that essence actually lie? If it has no historical precedents of a correct realization, then in the name of what is it even possible to struggle? It is astonishing that in order to be faithful to art today, one must refute all of the precedents of art, wherein consists its only negative essence.<sup>60</sup>

55. V. Shalamov, *Ibid.* There are other formulations that recall the LEF program even more strongly: "The thing about influence more dangerous than influence (itself) — to fall prisoner to someone against one's own will — the precious material is wasted and it turns out that it recalls someone else's work, which is to say it kills the story" (*Ibid.*).

56. V. Shalamov, *Ibid.*

57. V. Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 7-7.

58. V. Shalamov, "O moei proze," *Ibid.*

59. Cf. footnote 42.

60. It is also important to take into account the fact that even the responses that sound forth against this logic of self-undermining, insisting that "this is not art," ultimately strengthen the very logic of the theory of performative acts of art, but in a negative mode. They say, as it were: "this is an unsuccessful speech act," thereby unwittingly becoming hostages to the category of agreement.