**Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik**
Band 2 (2021): *Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions between Genres and Media*
Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller, Henrieke Stahl
Smola, Klavdia: Political Video Poetry in Russia: Eco-Social Turn and Biopoetics. In: IZfK 2 (2021). 301-316.
DOI: 10.25353/ubtr-izfk-87a6-1b93

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# Political Video Poetry in Russia: Eco-Social Turn and Biopoetics

In this article, I analyze the most recent Russian video poetry as an amplification and semantic enrichment of the classic literature paradigm. My thesis is that new visual poetry produces a subtle, polysemous – but at the same time striking – political message within a synthetic artistic framework. I show how recent Russian social (also to be called political) poetry is developing what I call the aesthetics of environmental non-division. I focus on the art collective "The Group of Esfir' Shub," which was founded in 2017 by the artist and designer Polina Zaslavskaia. The group's synthetic method of working with poems generates a "tropic connection between the text and the video," which correlates or even confronts direct and figurative sign meanings of different media with each other. "Esfir' Shub" emphasizes one of the essential features of new social poetry – the problematization of corporeality as a phenomenon belonging to organic, living material, which affects the very character of subjectivity. The project "Esfir' Shub" is situated on the border between visual eco-art and social poetry. What is more important, it represents new trends in Russian engaged aesthetics, which I call *biopoetics* – a notion which has been intensely discussed in the last two decades.

*Keywords: video poetry, Russia, biopoetics, biopolitics, social poetry, anthropocene*

In the years 2000-2010, a rapid development of technical devices created to engender a synthetic, but first of all visual, perception of literary texts can be observed in Russia. In 2016, the literary critic Mark Lipovetsky claimed:

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> Visuality […] has not completely replaced verbal art but rather absorbed it. However, I believe that internet media underscore and 'lay bare' those features of poetic and dramaturgic texts that facilitate the political functioning of their form.[1]

To quote the term coined by the media theorist Marshall McLuhan, recent politically engaged Russian poetry uses medial "extension"[2] of lyrical text to transgress the boundaries of textuality. Yet, it often draws not only on cyber aesthetics,[3] but also on the older medium of *video poetry*, in order to convey political meaning.

In this article, I analyze the most recent video poetry as an amplification and semantic enrichment of the classic literature paradigm, which by no means causes a revolution of form, but rather makes already distinct trends in new poetry even more visible. It literally visualizes certain poetical devices and "lays them bare," to seize Lipovetsky's update of Viktor Shklovskii's famous expression.[4] My thesis is that new visual poetry produces a subtle, polysemous – but at the same time striking – political message within a synthetic artistic framework. I will also show how recent Russian social (also to be called political) poetry[5] is elaborating on the legacy of the unofficial Soviet culture and literature and is at the same time developing what I call the aesthetics of *environmental non-division*. In this respect, my subject is the aesthetics of (bio-)politics in a multimedia artefact.

Visually enhanced poetry has increasingly been institutionalized in Russia over the last few years. As a result of its new popularity, the growing variety of its genres and the fact that video poetry contests have been organized in numerous cities, it has become the subject of a dozen of significant research works.[6] Among comparable Russian platforms, the "Piataia noga" ("Fifth leg")[7] festival (2007-2016), curated by Andrei Rodionov and Ekaterina Troepol'skaia, was

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[1] Lipovetsky (2016).

[2] McLuhan (1964).

[3] Like, for example, the "101" festival of media poetry which has been held in Saint Petersburg since 2015: (http://101.ru.com).

[4] «Обнажение приема» (literally "strip of device"): cf. Шкловский (1925).

[5] The notions of 'social poetry' and 'political poetry' do not pretend to be exact designations of the literary phenomena I explore in this essay. Moreover, the terms cover a range of different styles, topics and authors of the 2000s and 2010s. Literary critics have nevertheless established these terms to analyze important trends of social and political engagement in recent Russian poetry (cf. the section "New Social Poetry" [«Новая социальная поэзия»] in the journal "New Literary Observer" [«Новое литературное обозрение»]; cf. also essays mentioned in footn. 30 and 32). Ecology, biopoetics, anthropocene and corporeality are but a few concepts that fall within this framework.

[6] About the history of video poetry in Russia, its single artists, artistic contests and different multimedia aesthetics cf.: Голынко-Вольфсон (2012); Семьян / Смышляев (2017); Давыдов (2011); Родионов / Троепольская (2012); Даниленко / Федоров (2018); Пога (2018); Исаев (2015); Житенев (2010); Осипова (2019).

[7] All Russian translations are mine.

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probably the best-known. The webpage *videonoga.ru*, which documents the competition, comments:

> Video poetry is a synthetic genre that exposes the techniques of poetry and video art. It combines the work of contemporary film directors with that of contemporary poets. The format is short and ultra-short films.[8]

The videos that are featured at this and other festivals of media poetry are highly diverse, not always experimental and certainly not always political. It can be said that the technical media serve as a pool of possibilities, which themselves do not contain any ideological, aesthetic or even semantic implication; still, various messages, poetics or traditions can be revived or reinvented with their help. Within the "Piataia noga," a strikingly large number of lyrical video-works process political content in an aesthetic way.

Among the poets, artists and groups who presented their video poetry at "Piataia noga," I focus on the art collective "The Group of Esfir' Shub" («Группа Эсфирь Шуб»). It was founded in 2017 by the artist and designer Polina Zaslavskaia:

> Арт-группа «Эсфирь Шуб» родилась спонтанно – из необходимости как-то обозначить стихийно возникший интерес нескольких художников, поэтов и кинематографистов к созданию коллективных экспериментальных работ, сделанных на стыке современного искусства, поэзии и кинематографа.[9]
>
> The art group came to life incidentally – out of the necessity to somehow indicate the spontaneous interest of several painters, poets and cinematographers in collectively creating experimental works of art at the intersection of modern art, poetry and cinematography.

The group is named after Esfir' Shub, the female director of early Soviet montage films, who pieced together old and partly neglected archive material from the time before the October revolution into a documentary film. She replaced material that could no longer be used with new scenes; in this way, she made compilation films like "The Great Road" («Великий путь», 1927) and "Nikolai II's Russia and Lev Tolstoi" («Россия Николая и Лев Толстой», 1928). By referring to her in the title, the collective seemingly tries to reanimate the politically charged aesthetic experiment of the early Soviet era. Moreover, this reference may underline the female perspective and – as a result – gender agency, which is pronounced in all three videos of the collective: "Experience" («Опыт», 2017, with poems by Ida Börjel and Aleksandr Averbukh), "On the Bones" («На костях», 2016, with a poem by Galina Rymbu) and "Forgive Me, Soldier" («Прости меня солдат», 2016, with a poem by Viktor Lisin).

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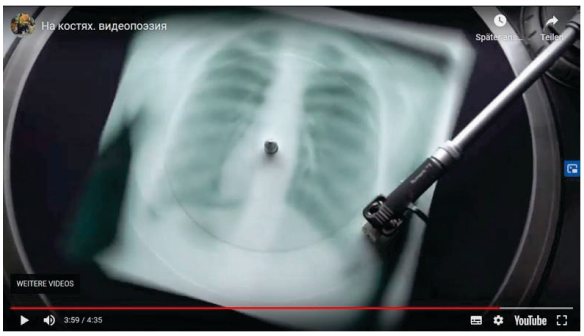
[8] «Видеопоэзия – синтетический жанр, обнажающий приёмы поэзии и видео-арта, соединяя работу современного режиссёра и современного поэта. Формат – короткий и ультракороткий метр.» (O proekte. http://videonoga.ru/about-us/).

[9] Полина Заславская. Группа Эсфирь Шуб. (https://polinazaslavskaya.wordpress.com/группа-эсфирь-шуб/).


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I will preface the analysis of the above-mentioned video works with a preliminary remark on the aesthetic appeal of "Esfir' Shub"'s approach to multimedia art. The group's synthetic method of working with poems generates a "tropic connection between the text and the video,"[10] which correlates or even confronts direct and figurative sign meanings of different media with each other. This is precisely the case when the concrete, material nature of visual images on one side, and the symbolic nature (i.e., the abstractness of a language sign) on the other side, both interact – thus creating new semantics.[11] In doing so, "Esfir' Shub" emphasizes one of the essential features of new social poetry – the problematization of corporeality as a phenomenon belonging to organic, living material, which affects the very character of subjectivity. Could this be considered as a specific genre input of the visual "extension"? Perhaps. Pertaining to video poetry as a genre, Iulia Danilenko and Vasilii Fedorov write about "new possibilities of semiotization of corporeality."[12]

In the video "On the Bones" (authored by Polina Zaslavskaia, Konstantin Shavlovskii, Anton Gromov, Mikhail Zraichenko, and Sesil' Gabeskiria),[13] Galina Rymbu reads her poem «мы двигались в тесноту возраста…» ("We Moved into the Narrowness of the Age…"):







*Video 1.*

In an interview with her English translator, Jonathan Brooks Platt, Galina Rymbu commented on her poetic and political language:

> It can seem like the oppressed have a simple language, that we should employ a series of reductions to work with this language in order to be comprehensible as

[10] Житенев (2010: 79).

[11] Cf. the answer of the poet Pavel Arseniev's to the question "Which of the creators of video poetry are close to you?" – "Those who are engaged in the film adaptation of the signifier, rather than arranging costume performances 'based on motifs'" («Кто из создателей видеопоэзии вам близок?» — «Те, кто занимается экранизацией означающего, а не устраивает ряженые постановки "по мотивам"»). (Лаборатория поэтического акционизма. Интервью «Московским новостям»; https://poetryactionism.wordpress.com/2013/03/03/интервью-московским-новостям/).

[12] Даниленко / Федоров (2018: 167).

[13] Полина Заславская. Группа Эсфирь Шуб. (https://polinazaslavskaya.wordpress.com/группа-эсфирь-шуб/).


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> poets and artists. But there is no such thing as a simple language, just as there are no simple emotions. Here everything is even more complex – a real rat's nest of complexity made up of the languages of violence, ideological pressures, propaganda, biopolitical manipulations, survivals of the past, fantasies, hopes, and even certain seeds of "emancipation" – meaning, partially violent concepts that provide an intuition of what might lead the "simple people" to freedom. In this sense, *the idea of "simple language" is really just a total syntactic, lexical, and discursive collapse, and it's very hard to work with it*, almost impossible.[14]

The poem unfolds a complex poetics of corporeality with connotations that form a circle of death, destruction of the body and physical love. Here, physical life and organic material merge with objects and urban locations, which themselves turn into bodies and can therefore experience suffering. The earth is dug with the lover's body («вот оно землю роет телом твоим» / "it [the movement] is digging the earth with your body"); the hands that touch each other transform into nails («мы взялись за руки, но они превратились в гвозди» / "we held hands, but they turned into nails"); "the podium is woven out of blood vessels and eyeballs" («на кафедру, свитую из сосудов и глазных яблок»).[15] The line «письмо темнеет, как ногти голодных» ("the letter darkens like the fingernails of the starving") turns the writing itself into a performative, suffering, dying body. Before Rymbu begins to recite her poem on video, we see how an x-ray image is taken of a young woman's skeleton at the hospital, then a spinning record of "music on bones" appears, and we see the poet herself sitting next to the record player and reading her text aloud. Throughout the video, we hear her reciting the poem. At the end of the video, one can spot how a man's hands form a record out of x-ray images (one of the man's fingers is half cut off). These episodes evoke the illegal distribution of prohibited music in the Soviet Union, and are reminiscent of the practice of underground resistance under a dictatorship. Famously, in the archives of the Soviet hospitals, there were old x-ray images that were of no use: images of broken hands, feet, ribs, skulls and hip bones – medical film material that was used in the Soviet-era practice of magnitizdat to record forbidden music.[16] In the video, an unexpected literalization, or an "archaeological" unfolding of the metaphor "music on bones" or "x-ray rock" is undertaken – i.e., an unfolding of the trope, which has become conventional in the niche of the underground and beyond, today a sort of cultural myth. The spectator experiences a "re-em*body*ment" of resistant, clandestine political and cultural activity here. The "insignificant" and "recycled" construction material (bones) – a biological, organic medium that was quasi *flattened* by the recording medium (disc) – are semantically brought to the surface and rethought. In this video poem, the traces of the damaged skeletons become the object of performative and aesthetic exploration. This shift – a kind of reversed movement, from cultural representation

[14] Platt (2016). My italics.

[15] Quoted here and below from: Рымбу (эл. ресурс).

[16] Cf. Glanc (2015).

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(music) to the body (organic material) – turns poetry itself into a biopolitical event, where the memory of the Soviet underground is also reconceptualized. The word "underground" is no longer only a metaphor, since it "excavates" the bio-material and at the same time brings the soil and the body together in the poem: «вот оно землю роет телом твоим» ("it is digging the earth with your body"). Cultural politics of repression and taboo in the Soviet Union blend with the remembrance of bygone corporeal life.

Biopolitics of extinction and destruction is the topic guiding the works of the "Esfir' Shub" group. In a further video, authored by Polina Zaslavskaia, Konstantin Shavlovskii and Mariia Shchadrina, the young poet Viktor Lisin reads his poem «Прости меня солдат» ("Forgive Me, Soldier"). We only hear the poet's voice; we do not see him.




*Video 2.*

In 2014, Lisin was named on the longlist of the Arkady Dragomoshchenko Prize; on this occasion, the poet and literary critic Evgenii Proshchin wrote about Lisin's poetry:

> Очень часто за основу берется некий природный, как кажется, феномен, но в пределах текста он живет двойной жизнью, функционирует по закону сложно устроенной метафоры, инверсированной от внутреннего к внешнему. Эта перемена слагаемых позволяет говорить и об учете традиции метареализма с его сложным механизмом *«мерцания» культурного в природном как художественной онтологии объекта.* [...] Иными словами, дело не только и не столько в интериоризации или, наоборот, объективации, но совмещении этих, обычно противоположных друг другу процессов [...].[17]
>
> Very frequently, for the basis a seemingly natural phenomenon is taken, however within the boundaries of text it lives a double life and functions according to the laws of a complex metaphor that is inverted from the interior to the exterior. This change of the components allows us to speak of a complex mechanism, when *the cultural is "glimmering" in the natural as an artistic ontology of the object.* In other words, it is not so much about the internalisation or externalisation, but rather about merging both otherwise opposing processes.

[17] Прощин (2014). My italics.


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In the video, meatballs are fried in a pan. However, they do not visually change during the video: they are being fried, but remain raw. Thus, the moment at which the real substance of meat is still visible is prolonged: meat is the body and the blood. The meat balls are labelled with scraps of paper featuring single lines of the poem we hear: «солдат встал и ушел в насекомое» ("the soldier got up and left into an insect"), «сидели за столом солдаты медали их» ("the soldier's medals sat around the table"), «ревели насекомое старело» ("the ageing insect they roared"), «Из Николая смотрит Анатолий» ("out of Nicolai, Anatolii is looking out"), «взгляд коровы перед сном» ("the look of the cow before it falls asleep"), «убежала» ("it ran away"). And this again, as in the video with Galina Rymbu, creates a spatial, non-textual contiguity between the organic and the text, which is about mutilation, consumption of the body and death. This war poem was written in 2014, at the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The suggested formula 'flesh=meat' refers to the animal and human body – it is 'processed' – utilized by war and by the food industry. Visually, the poem's text is also dismembered and fragmented into individual lines. The intertwined tropes of the living and the inanimate, of the organic and the object, which constitute Lisin's text, are transferred into one relatively static visual image. This image becomes nothing but a literal 'realization' of these tropes: The meat remains raw, yet the lines on the pieces of paper are folded and erased. *The 'body' of the text is thus transient, mortal and spatially merged with the food.*

In Lisin's poetical ontology, a human being, an insect, medals, light, a dog, a cow and water are identified and they are changing places – the soldier transforms into an insect and flies to his family; the cow stares at the water and the tree; the horse kills its owner so that he doesn't have to suffer anymore; out of the soldier's torso, the missing limbs regrow in spring; the plant eats the cow. Lisin does not use commas or full stops, and through this the words, syntactical items and sentences all melt into one – just like plants, animals and humans. Proshchin speaks of the "flickering of the cultural in the natural"[18] in Lisin's poetry. In this poem, the semantics are supplemented by the fact that the machine, the animal and the human are utterly and tragically equated: the objects we are accustomed to in every-day life become the subject of action. And all this in a poem about war: «Растение в огороде ест корову» ("the plant in the garden eats the cow") and «и танк чистит ружье» ("and the tank cleans the gun").

In the past few years, many significant Russian poets have alluded to the image of living meat/flesh, where the meat industry and human death are direct neighbors or metonymically adjacent identities. The pseudonym of the social poet Elena Mikhailik – «молчаливая тварь антрекот» ("the taciturn beast entrecôte") – is a reinterpretation of a line of poetry by Mikhail Svetlov: "entrecôte – the taciturn beast." Mikhailik reminds the reader of the dead (silent, taciturn) animal that

[18] See footnote 17.

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becomes a meat dish. Very similar to Lisin's text is the imagery of Iulii Gugolev's poem «Всякий раз пытаюсь рассмеяться…» ("Every Time I Try to Laugh..."):

Мама просит прокрутить ей мясо,
жарить собирается котлеты. […]

Жир скворчит, скворчит на сковородке,
в нём котлет безропотные тушки. […]

Эх, вы мои трупы-трупы-трупики.
В животах всё бинтики да трубки.
На котлетах ромбики да кубики.
Капельки воды на мясорубке.[19]

Mom asks to mince the meat for her,
She wants to fry the meat balls […]

The fat is sizzling, sizzling in the frying pan,
In it are cutlet small corpses that do not complain […]

Oh, my dearest corpses, corpses, tiny corpses.
In the bellies nothing but bandages and tubes.
On the cutlets all rhombuses and cubes.
Droplets of water on the meat grinder.

When discussing the results of the festival «Пятая нога» in 2017, Dmitrii Kuz'min noted that a large number of works submitted for the competition were "about soldiers," including the ones dealing with the topic of death.[20] In his recent article, Kirill Korchagin connects "cinematic optics" in avant-garde poetry of the First World War with the emergence of montage techniques, "which in a sense also dismembers the sequence of images similar to how new methods of mass destruction dismember the bodies, constantly subjecting them to various painful modifications."[21] This is where Korchagin analyzes the development of such film optics and the striking presence of severed bodies in contemporary Russian poetry as well. In our case, both videos work with the performative exploration of tropes such as "cannon fodder" and "music on the bones," i.e., with the given cultural, symbolic transformation of concrete, object-like meanings in the language. The multi-media artefacts make literal meanings of some seminal word signs 'clash' with their metaphorical metamorphosis in order to *lay bare 'buried,' forgotten or blurred corporeal semantics.* As Stephanie Sandler phrased it concerning the genre of video poetry in general: "materiality and the inner form [of words] come to the forefront," whereas "words themselves become visual objects."[22] The poetical

[19] Гуголев (2020).

[20] Фанайлова (2017).

[21] Корчагин (2019: 241).

[22] Сандлер (2013: 156).

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work with language and visuality becomes political by transferring complex associative chains in poems onto one or several simple, even allegorical, image situations and objects (a young woman's skeleton, a spinning record, meat balls in the pan). The video amplifies and reinforces the performativity of the poetry, but also reduces the complexity of the poetical texture. Moreover, the videos medially expand what is already characteristic of both poems: their focus on the environment and objects as an emotional unity with the text.

"Esfir' Shub"'s first and longest video, «Опыт» ("Experience," authored by Anastasiia Braiko, Anastasiia Veber, Polina Zaslavskaiia and Konstantin Shavlovskii), consists of two lyrical parts. In the first, we hear the Swedish poet Ida Börjel read from her book "Ma," with the Russian translation by Nadezhda Voinova and Alesha Prokop'ev in the subtitles. In the second, Aleksandr Averbukh's voice recites fragments of his lyrical cycle «Временные, но исправимые неудачи» ("Temporary but Reparable Calamities"). The texts are accompanied chiefly by a video recording, «Движение крови» ("Blood Movement"), made in 1970 by the Institute of Experimental Medicine in Petersburg, and a piece of music, "Deta," by the experimental Petersburg musician Kluge. Börjel's reading of the poem begins after the famous black and white video of the crashing, flaming zeppelin. Afterward, an enlarged image appears of a pulsating heart and blood vessels through which blood flows.

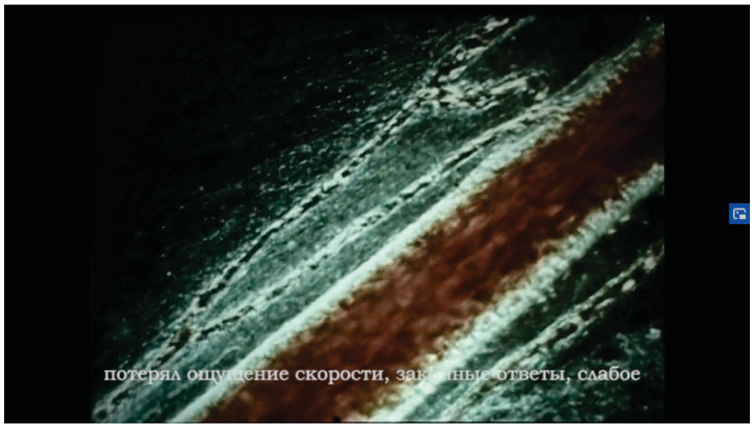
Из Пангеи – Лавразия
Ма всё распалось на части
Пангея была
И Гондвана отошла от Пангеи
вселенная раздвинулась
условная
пустота, замкнутая
во времени, ввинченное в
человеческую меру одиночество
земли́, пустота, сиротливое
одинокое безумие земли
время, человеческая цивилизация антропоцен[23]

from Pangaea Laurasia
Ma all was broken into pieces
Pangea was
and Gondwana was broken from Pangaea
the universe expands
the conditional
void, locked
in time, twisted in
the human measurement earth's
loneliness, emptiness, earth's

[23] Бёрьел (2017).


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abandoned lonely lunacy
time, the human era the anthropocene[24]




*Video 3.*

Börjel's apocalyptic poetry stages the view from space. Her reading aloud – monotonous, enraptured, sometimes quiet, sometimes whispering – is reminiscent of shamanic speech or the encrypted prophecies of a Cassandra. In an interview with Galina Rymbu, translator Nadezhda Voinova talked about Börjel's verse novel, the fragments of which are read in the video:

> Это такая энциклопедия катастроф от сотворения мира до наших дней. […] Само название «Ма» — многозначно. Это и японский иероглиф, означающий негативную пустоту […]. И имя древней каппадокийской богини, требующей кровавых человеческих жертв […]. «Ма» — это одновременно и космогония, начинающаяся с движения земных пластов, и политическая история недалёкого прошлого […] — от […] аварии на АЭС в Фукусиме до современной работорговли и сирийских детей, поставленных живым щитом вокруг танков.[25]
>
> This is a kind of encyclopedia of catastrophes from the creation of the world to the present. Even the title "Ma" is ambiguous: It is a Japanese hieroglyph that denotes a negative emptiness […]. And also the name of an ancient Cappadocian goddess who demanded human blood sacrifices. […] "Ma" is at once the cosmogony that begins with the movement of the earth's layers, and political history of the recent past and present […] – from the accident of the nuclear power plant in Fukushima to the contemporary slave trade and the Syrian children who are placed around the tanks like a living shield.

In "Experience," the image of blood flowing through vessels and veins, magnified several times, is transformed into an almost earthly landscape with rivers crossing, flowing into each other or branching off. Brown, black or grey colors, and also the past tense, which is continuously used throughout the text (распалось, была, отошла), convey the finished state of the catastrophe. Through this parallelization of the microscopically small within the human body on the one hand, and the macro world (geography and cosmos) on the other hand, the otherwise imperceptible – because so immense – differences in the dimensions of existence

[24] Börjel (s.a.).

[25] Рымбу (2019).


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disappear. At the same time, the poem mourns the lost unity of Pangaea and "orchestrates" a series of semantic and acoustic equivalences between the existence of the earth, man, animals and plants:

матрица в отливочной форме
в материнском звере материнское древо
бабочки были
тяжелая вода[26]

in the mould the matrix
in the mother animal mother tree
butterflies were, heavy water[27]

As in the other two video texts, yet different, «эхо-камеры» ("echo chambers") are created here between diverse types and stages of life. The boundaries between organic life forms are blurred, with the inanimate (earth, stone, water) also becoming part of this life. Here, too, images of war and death appear, which, as it were, continue the leading metaphor of separation and secession, and transfer it from the cosmogonic to social reality:

сирийские соединения знали, как поднять
боеспособность использовали
человеческие щиты и расставляли
детей вокруг танка чтобы не
расстреливали в упор[28]

the Syrian troop's human shields
a fine wreath of children
clinging to the tanks to not
be shot into the head[29]

The video shows connections invisible to the human eye: the Anthropocene manifests itself in the globality of the fragile.

A lot has been written about the dispersion and plurality of the subject in social poetry of the 2010s.[30] This subject frequently gives up the center of poetic speech in favor of the objective and the natural environment's 'voices.' This lyric can be (inexactly) designated as poetry of the Anthropocene, vegetarianism, or

[26] Полина Заславская. Группа Эсфирь Шуб.
(https://polinazaslavskaya.wordpress.com/группа-эсфирь-шуб/).

[27] Börjel (2018). In the Russian translation, the number of lines does not correspond to the Swedish original and its English translation, since the third line has been broken, creating two new lines.

[28] Ида Бёрьел «Ма.» Полина Заславская. Группа Эсфирь Шуб.
(https://polinazaslavskaya.wordpress.com/группа-эсфирь-шуб/).

[29] Börjel (s.a.). In the Russian translation, the number of lines does not correspond to the Swedish original and its English translation.

[30] Cf. for example: Кузьмин (2002); Корчагин (2013).

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pacifism. In the case of poems that emphasize the subject of gender, the difference between male and female is often also blurred, or simply no longer existent. It is the poetry of fusion, or, in other words, of transformation. These tendencies have been reflected on in several articles: Aleksandr Zhitenev observes "becoming-thing and reduction of subjectivity" as well as constant changeability of the subject in poetry in the 2000s and 2010s.[31] At a recent roundtable discussion organized by the «Знамя» ("Banner") magazine on the topic of "Sociality in Literature: A New Turn?," Vitalii Lekhtsier observed that social poetry had substantially changed by the mid-2010s: "[...] the figure of the poet as a political subject is giving way to new – object-oriented – pursuits in writing."[32] In recent years, there has also been an increased scholarly interest in the phenomenon of amalgamation and/or inversion of the subject and object in Russian poetry.[33]

"The novel pragma-/eco-/media poetics"[34] of Russian political poetry, which for several years has been manifested and analyzed in, among others, the «Транслит» ("Translit") journal,[35] obtains an additional dimension in video poetry. It engenders a new, *environmental political mediality*, which "Translit" theorists and poets call "symmetrical anthropology," following Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway – theoreticians who are widely-read and vividly discussed in Russian intellectual milieus of the 2000s and 2010s: «[...] после долгого спора между внутренним устройством и внешними факторами литературы заключается экологическое перемирие» ("[...] after a long dispute between the internal realm and external factors of literature, an environmental truce is put in place").[36] Indeed, a paradigm shift in poetic thinking, as well as in thinking *by means* of poetry, is directly related to similar trends in philosophy, the arts and research. Moreover, poetry has been strongly nourished by disciplines that benefit from synergetic effects of different areas of knowledge (such as biology, cultural anthropology, literary studies and medicine) in the last decades. When I speak of a biopoetics of new Russian poetry, I mean the above-mentioned literary poetics of fusion, of the subject-becoming of the non-human and of animation. At the same time, this term evokes the hybrid (semi-)science called biopoetics of the last 30 or so years, which has been working on very heterogeneous discourses on the line of encounter between the humanities and natural sciences.[37] Interestingly, the Russian philosopher Mikhail Epstein puts forward the notion of "bio-

[31] Житенев (2019: 96).

[32] Лехциер (2019).

[33] Liudmila Zubova offers a masterful linguistic analysis of cases of such inversions – on the grammar and syntax level – in poetry of the second half of the 20th century: Зубова (2018).

[34] Арсеньев (2018: 3).

[35] Cf. in particular: Арсеньев (2018: 3-6).

[36] Ibid., 4.

[37] On biopoetics in literary studies see Cooke (2001: 1-8).

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poetics,"[38] which he lists alongside "cosmo-poetics" and "techno-poetics." However, Epstein rather conventionally places the human individual at the center of "poetic" transformation of the world. In the same year (2016), the book "Biopoetics Towards an Existential Ecology" by the philosopher and Andreas Weber's was published, which asserts:

> Meaning, feeling and expression – the experience of inwardness – matter most in human existence. The perspective of biopoetics shows that this experience is shared by all organisms. Being alive means to exist through relations that have existential concern, and to express these dimensions through the body and its gestures. All life takes place within one poetic space which is shared between all beings [...].[39]

Although Weber first used the term 'biopoetics' in the title of a major study only a few years ago, he has been researching and popularizing the phenomenon for a decade and a half. In Russia, especially since the 2010s, the number of art projects which analytically re-use designations of biology (such as bioArt), the Anthropocene and ecology in aesthetic actions has grown strongly.[40] Compared to both Russian visual art and non-artistic activism since 2000, ecological reflection in Russian poetry remains conspicuously rare. But even in this niche status, environmental topics and what we might call anthropocene poetics have nevertheless managed to account for some of the most striking elements of this period's socio-poetical agenda. In other words, ecology has become a seminal trope in performing contemporary crises of subject, policy, body and gender.

The project "Esfir' Shub" is situated on the border between visual eco-art and social poetry. Here, ecology, war, the Anthropocene and hunger are *inscribed into the human, animal, plant or object body of the literary text* and are at the same time indexically present in the video. From this perspective, eco-social (video-) literature *no longer represents, but rather presents, materiality, and thus becomes its medium.* In this way, artefacts virtually become signifier and signified of the new global political message. In a broader sense, this art project realizes the transfer "from biopolitics to biopoetics," which Julieta Yelin describes as an intervention in the dominant (also literary) modes of representation of power over life:

> The work we envision as biopoetics, whether materialized in literary writings or in critiques, could be identified with what Foucault called "counter-conducts": forms of resistance to biopolitical regulation that guide the search for unique ways to lead one's life. […] Biopoetics […] conside[r] all artistic work as an exploration of the links between the human and the animal or, in other words, as an investigation of the living away from the classifications imposed by the anthropocentric discourses. It is an investigation based on the premise that the artist is not a subject that has been superimposed onto its animal condition but rather an animal that is capable of creating, in spite of the process of humanization which is always disci-

[38] Эпштейн (2016: 382).

[39] Weber (2016; cf. the text included in the annotation).

[40] Cf. over ten exhibitions on the Anthropocene and ecology that took place in Moscow in 2019: Афиша (2019).

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> plining – naming, individualizing, organizing hierarchies – their particular way of life. […] In this sense, Biopoetics represents the conscious or unconscious strategies of resistance to the knowledge that a society has about life.[41]

Undoubtedly, neither these object-like poetics nor video poetics are quite new. These traditions go back to the American objectivism of the 1920s and 1930s, or to the concrete poetry of the Soviet underground of the 1950s-1970s (as acted for example by the members of the legendary Lianozovo group Vsevolod Nekrasov, Genrikh Sapgir or Ian Satunovskii). Video-poetic experiments in Russian, but also Czech and Polish, underground culture of the Communist era may certainly also serve as a multi-media pretext and inspiration for recent socially engaged visual poetry. Today, these traditions are being updated and applied to the current social and political reality, as well as revived within a new political agenda. The poetry of Galina Rymbu, Viktor Lisin, Oksana Vasiakina and Elena Mikhailik re-invents performativity, which becomes a hallmark of posthumanism.

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[41] Yelin (2018).

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