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The Body is a Cupboard: Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin Thinking Embodiment and Sexuality between the Human and the Non-Human

By

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the role that gendered embodiment and sexuality play in the re-articulation of the human subjectivity in the texts of three authors active in late 1920s–1930s Leningrad: the poet and prose writer Daniil Kharms and philosophers Leonid Lipavsky and Yakov Druskin, who were close to the literary group OBERIU (The Association for the Real Art) and central to the informal collective conventionally referred to as *chinari*. I argue that this re-articulation of human subjectivity and human embodiment is best captured by the metaphor of a *shkap* (a cupboard, wardrobe, or closet)—a hollow object that may or may not conceal something inside. OBERIU's bold proclamation "Art is a cupboard!" (*Iskusstvo eto shkap*) has become famous as a part of the Russian avant-garde tradition of provocation, and I contend that it should not be taken as pure nonsense but rather approached as a working model of the text and the subject as Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin construct them. This figure of a *shkap* speaks to the anxiety around the unreliability of individual identity and the concern with identifying and neutralising hidden others characteristic of inter-war Stalin's Russia. In Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin's texts, however, this grows from a merely political concern into an ontological one, a question about human specificity and the extent to which one is, in fact, human, rational, and autonomous. As I argue, gendered embodiment and sexuality become important tools in addressing the concerns about the human subjectivity as inherently duplicitous, a language to express them, and a field where these anxieties can play out. While *shkap* structure and the position of the hidden other within the body of the people can be embodied by the authors themselves, misogyny serves to displace the more troubling aspects of that alterity onto gendered others.

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Table of contents

CEU eTD Collection

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Introduction

This dissertation focuses on the philosophical and personal writings of the Russian avant-garde poet and writer Daniil Kharms (1905–1942) and philosophers Leonid Lipavsky (1904–1941) and Yakov Druskin (1902–1980). Kharms was active as a writer from the second half of the 1920s and into the early 1940s, earning his living writing poetry for children; almost all of his poetry and prose for adults would remain unpublished until the 1960s. Lipavsky and Druskin were expelled from their third year at university and continued developing their theories in private. Lipavsky would earn his living writing popular-science books and prose stories for children, and Druskin worked as a schoolteacher of mathematics with a conservatory diploma of a pianist.[1] Lipavsky and Druskin had studied at the same school, and met Kharms, then an aspiring young poet, in 1925. Soon after, Kharms organised the short-lived literary group OBERIU (*Ob''edinenie Real'nogo Iskusstva*, Association for the Real Art), which included poets Aleksandr Vvedensky (1904–1941), who had also studied together with Lipavsky and Druskin, Nikolay Zabolotsky, Igor Bakhterev (1908–1996), and Konstantin Vaginov (1899–1934), playwright Aleksandr Razumovsky (1907–1980), and others.[2] They are most often listed as the group's members; however, for shorter periods it also included several other writers.[3] OBERIU strictly speaking, as an official organization, existed only for two years or less, between 1928 and 1930,[4] but its origins in other forms of artistic association can be traced as far back as 1926.[5] The group was known for its highly theatrical and provocative poetry recitals which the writers arranged wherever

[1] Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 123. Full reference details, as well as English translations for Russian titles, can be found in the Bibliography. For transliteration, I am using the simplified version of the Library of Congress scheme.
[2] For a helpful overview of OBERIU's activities, see, e.g., Roberts, *The Last Soviet Avant-Garde*, 1-21; in Russian, for a more detailed account, see Chapters 2 and 3 in Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*.
[3] Roberts, *The Last Soviet Avant-Garde*, 6, 12. See pp. 3–21 for a detailed overview of OBERIU's history.
[4] Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 229.
[5] Roberts, *The Last Soviet Avant-Garde*, 1, 5–6.

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they could, including student hostels and military barracks.[6] The playful and theatrical style of the group's performances was highly criticized in the mainstream press, until an especially aggressive review published in 1930 in the student newspaper *Smena* set off the dissolution of OBERIU.[7]

The group then continued as an unofficial philosophical and literary circle, which existed before OBERIU and parallel to it, and included Kharms, Druskin, and Lipavsky, as well as Nikolai Oleinikov (1898–1937), poet and editor of popular magazines for children in which Kharms and Vvedensky published works they wrote for a living; and Tamara Meier-Lipavskaia (1903–1982), Lipavsky's wife and the only woman in the circle, as regular participants. Occasionally, the conversations also included the poet Nikolai Zabolotsky (1903–1958), until his falling out with Vvedensky around 1934. Zabolotsky became a published Soviet poet, whereas "adult" poetry by Kharms and Vvedensky remained unpublished until the 1960s, when Yakov Druskin, who had saved their manuscripts during the siege of Leningrad, started showing them to philology students,[8] and the texts began to spread in *samizdat* and *tamizdat*.[9] Philosophical essays by Druskin and Lipavsky largely remained unpublished until the 1990s. They read and showed their texts to each other and, in the case of Kharms and Vvedensky, to their other personal acquaintances.

This second, informal group has come to be habitually referred to in scholarship as *chinari*.[10] It has become conventional to write of OBERIU poetics or *chinari*'s philosophy to refer to the common characteristics shared by the works of their different participants.[11] In scholarship and in everyday speech the terms *chinari* and *oberiuty* are sometimes used

[6] Roberts, 6.
[7] Roberts, 12–13; Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 229, 232–233.
[8] For a detailed first-person account from one of these important early publishers, see Meilakh, "Oberiutiana Historica."
[9] See, e.g., the commentary by Valerii Sazhin in Kharms, *Polnoe Sobranie* [hereinafter *PS*], 1:333.
[10] There is some debate about the appropriate naming: on the uneasy overlap between the two names, see, e.g., Meilakh, "Oberiutiana," 360-363. As Meilakh shows, the name *chinari* was not used by the broader group in the 1930s (but rather by Kharms and Aleksandr Vvedensky's in their early activity as poets), but was applied to it retroactively by Druskin, and was then taken up as a convenient shorthand in scholarship.
[11] See, e.g., Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*; and Ch. 3 of Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*.

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interchangeably, due to the significant commonality in overall style of playful and self-conscious exploration of the nonsensical and the grotesque.[12] I will be using *chinari* to refer to the three authors under consideration collectively. To avoid confusion, it is important to keep in mind that this dissertation deals with only three members of this informal circle (and not, e.g., Vvedensky nor Oleinikov, who may also be subsumed under the group name *chinari*). I will use OBERIU only to refer to the early group-specific activities (as, e.g., the 1928 performance at the House of the Press).

Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin wrote in dialogue with each other, sharing ideas and concepts into the end of the 1930s. This is the reason I am choosing to focus on the three of them together, excluding the other participants of the two groups. *Chinari* were influenced by the earlier Russian avant-garde art, literature, and philosophy, which were engaged with articulating a new model of the human subject and a new understanding of embodiment, informed by an experimental approach to gender and sexuality. OBERIU writers and participants of the *chinari* circle were the last generation of the historical Russian avant-garde and became important and influential forefathers for the unofficial literature in Soviet Russia. Studying their writings allows for understanding how these new models of subjectivity and embodiment gradually shifted and transformed from the late 1920s and into the 1930s, including what role misogyny played in these models. While Vvedensky, Oleinikov, Zabolotsky, and even Vaginov could and should be included in further research to complete this genealogy of ideas, their approaches are significantly different from those offered by Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin. It would not have been possible to give sufficient attention to each of the authors within the scope of this dissertation, and a general overview would not have adequately addressed the complexity of their thought.

[12] Roberts, *The Last Soviet Avant-Garde*, 15-17.

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This dissertation argues that the rethinking of the relationship between the human and the non-human was central for *chinari's* philosophy, and that gendered embodiment and erotic imagery became important means to articulate this changing relationship. The main research question that I aim to answer in this project is: how exactly is the human subject articulated by Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin, and what role does eroticism play in this articulation? I am especially interested in the models of subjectivity that Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin put forward, and in the way they describe the human bodies, both those of their characters as well as their own. These modes of embodiment are informed by how these bodies interact with non-human animals and objects, which raises the question of the degree to which human bodies are separate and independent from them, and in comparison to them. Finally, I am interested in how these bodies are gendered, and what role eroticism plays in articulations of this gendered human body.

To address these questions, I close-read:

1) philosophical essays by Leonid Lipavsky and his approximate record of his friends' dialogues in "Conversations" (all published as a separate volume in 2005);[13]

2) philosophical essays and longer works as well as semi-autobiographical texts by Yakov Druskin, published in 2000 as part of a two-volume collection of works by writers of the *chinari* circle.[14] Druskin's diaries have also been published in two volumes in 1999 and 2001.[15] They contain a wealth of material, especially from later years, from the early 1940s into the 1970, and include some of the works published in the 2000 collection, but due to its sheer vastness this material falls beyond the scope of this dissertation. Druskin

[13] Lipavskii, *Issledovanie Uzhasa*. All Lipavsky's works cited further are from this 2005 edition.
[14] Druskin, "Iakov Druskin," in *Sborishche*, 1:427–752. All Druskin's works cited, unless otherwise specified, are published in this section in the 2000 volume.
[15] Druskin, *Dnevniki*.

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is an elaborate thinker with a very peculiar style, and his works deserve a detailed study of their own;

3) poetry, plays, prose, and diary notes by Daniil Kharms, as published in 1997–2002 in a six-volume (four volumes of literary works, two volumes of notebooks) *Collected Works* edition.[16]

On the basis of my close reading of these works, I argue that the main theme that organises *chinari*'s thinking on the human subjectivity is the problem of duplicity. Their texts repeatedly show that any given body is characterised by a troubling overabundance of identities, both human and non-human, "individual" and "elemental," within it. This theme is captured by two emblematic figures: that of *the hidden other* (within an individual or a social body) and that of a *shkap*/cupboard/wardrobe: a hollow object that may or may not be hiding something inside. These figures appear in the texts, as well as organise the texts and the authors' self-presentation: e.g., Kharms presents himself as the hidden other within the collective body of Soviet citizens, while his texts play with surface and depth, promise hidden meanings and invite ever more elaborate forms of decoding. The texts in this way "perform" what they take as their subject.

The fact that Kharms and Lipavsky (to a lesser extent, Druskin), depict every human body and every human subject as containing something non-human within it (be it the organic matter of the body or, in Kharms, the literal non-human objects), means that every human body and every human subject are to a large extent non-autonomous, unconscious, vulnerable to sudden disintegration or possession and external control. The boundary between rational control and autonomy and lack thereof is thus placed inside every human subject and every human body. This irrational, uncontrollable, unconscious part of subjectivity is

[16] Kharms, *Polnoe Sobranie*; Kharms, *Zapisnye Knizhki* [hereinafter *ZK*]. Where the English translation is available, I use the translation from Kharms, *Today I Wrote Nothing*, by Matvei Yankelevich. Kharms's notebooks have been translated into English as a separate volume: Kharms, *"I Am a Phenomenon Quite out of the Ordinary,"* trans. Anemone and Scotto. Unless otherwise specified, I provide my own translations of entries from these notebooks, since elements important to my analysis are often lost in translation.

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imagined as a non-human presence within the body, the hidden other inside of it: what Lipavsky calls “the elements.” This structure sets the three authors apart from other avant-garde writers of the time. Where the earlier avant-garde of their teachers’ generation foregrounded the apocalyptic moment of disruption (the revolt of things) and reveled in it, *chinari* maintain in their poetics a certain illusion of normality that is always destabilised as the text unfolds. In this way, the human body and human subjectivity appear as inherently cupboard-like: they are always potentially hiding something unexpected inside.

While every body is characterised by this inherent duplicity, one can trace down through the texts continuous, although ultimately unconvincing, efforts to displace this boundary between the rational-conscious-independent (the human-proper) and the organic-material-unconscious outward: so that some subjects would appear predominantly rational and conscious, and others, irrational, defined by their own bodily matter, and unconscious. It is in this capacity that women’s bodies function in the texts: as the territory of bodily chaos and uncontrollable matter. Heterosexuality and heterosexual love work as sites of contact, where the independent rational male subject encounters the raw matter that lies underneath even his own consciousness. However, this opposition is itself never fully secured and keeps wavering, as the male body continuously shows its own potential for disruption from the inside, its infinite capacity to come undone at the seams and fall apart. In both these scenarios (the revelation of the non-human bodily matter in contact with the female body vs. the body coming apart on its own), what remains constant is the movement of revelation itself: the uncovering of hidden chaos beneath the appearance of order. The human body is defined by its potential for deception. The way in which female bodies appear in Lipavsky and Kharms’s texts is consistently informed by this preoccupation with duplicity: from fear of the hidden difference to the fantasies of laying bare and doing away with uncertainty, to disgust at the

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impossibility of clarity and stable order, and to dreams of incorporating the other, which often proves catastrophic or even fatal, in images of eating.

1. Historical context

Chinari wrote during a time of extreme uncertainty and upheaval. Historians of largely different schools tend to agree on this,[17] and it is this element of historical context which is most crucial to understanding *chinari*'s poetics and philosophy. The First World War was followed by two revolutions, a Civil War, a famine in 1921–1922, and a period of relative stabilisation during the 1920s and into the 1930s, which saw the unfolding of internal purges in the late 1920s and into the early 1930s, the widely publicised show trials of "uncovered" counterrevolutionaries and saboteurs, and later the Great Purge of the 1936-1938 (in which Nikolai Oleinikov was shot). The 1940s brought with them the start of the war with Nazi Germany in 1941 (in the beginning of which Lipavsky was killed on the front, and Vvedensky was arrested and died while being transported with other prisoners into the interior of the country from soon-to-be-occupied Kharkiv) and the siege of Leningrad with its own terrible famine (during which Kharms died in a prison psychiatric hospital). Even during the seemingly more peaceful years of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the large-scale industrialisation and forced collectivisation of the countryside were taking place, with another terrible famine in 1932–1933. A cultural revolution unfolded at the same time; literary and cultural associations were being organised and disbanded; Socialist Realism was officially endorsed as the only desirable style from 1932, the Union of Soviet Writers was established in 1934 as the sole literary organisation, and the campaign against Formalism was waged in 1936. Jörg Baberowski, one of the scholars more critical of the Bolshevik rule, stresses "fear and mistrust" and "permanent violence" which ensued from this situation of continued uncertainty, where "[t]he constant presence and threat of violence altered peoples' moral

[17] See, e.g., Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks*; Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*; and Baberowski, *Scorched Earth*.

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frame of reference, and for both victims and perpetrators a life informed by violence became the norm."[18] This assessment distances itself from the older "totalitarian" school of historiography, which, in line with the regime's own image of itself, tended to see Stalinism as a more stable order, "conveying a static image of rule and presenting society as nothing more than a passive victim of the total state."[19] *Chinari*'s philosophy was made possible by this loss of certainty and approached it as a problem that needed solution.

It was in response to this situation that anxieties about "identity and imposture" were intensified. A common character in the cultural imaginary of the time was an "alien element," a bourgeois pretending to be a worker or a clerk at a government office,[20] or a kulak passing as an honest proletarian in order to wreak havoc on the factory floor and spy on the party. The response was to continuously "unmask" the hidden class enemies by means of denunciations and internal purges within the party and individual organisations, extolling the ever-important "vigilance" of true communist citizens.[21] "[P]ractices of concealment and editing" thus "became second nature to Soviet citizens, as did the counterpractices of unmasking and denunciation,"[22] where the latter set of practices would generate a sense of reassurance and joy.[23] Being unmasked as someone of an "alien" social origin carried real material consequences—from being fired to imprisonment and death toward the end of the 1930s.[24] Based on her primary sources, Sheila Fitzpatrick concludes that practical considerations about class belonging and the "presentation of identity" far outweighed "metaphysical questions about essences":[25] put very simply, people in the early Soviet Russia were too busy surviving to worry about who one truly was as a subject. As I aim to show,

[18] Baberowski, 3, 104.
[19] Baberowski, 5.
[20] Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks*, 45.
[21] Fitzpatrick, 214, 3.
[22] Fitzpatrick, 5.
[23] Fitzpatrick, 68.
[24] Fitzpatrick, 93. On the figure of a "careerist-communist" as the next incarnation of a "masked enemy," see Thurston, *Social Dimensions of Stalinist Rule*, 554.
[25] Fitzpatrick, 6.

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chinari's writings offer an example of precisely such a worry: inspired by the vigilance of the time but by no means limited to it, they built their philosophy around the questions of essences versus appearances.

The anxieties around identity and duplicity outlined above were intimately connected to the visions of the collective social body that characterised the period. From the early 1920s onwards, the new Soviet state was haunted by the danger of "fragmentation and class dissolution," which manifested, among other things, in the sensationalist interest in various kinds of body horror.[26] In the quest for unity, as Eric Naiman argues, discourses on sexuality became an important rallying point and a site where these fears of disintegration could be confronted, and collective unity enacted, so that the public discussion of sex in itself served as a way to stave off the separation of the individual or a couple from the collective.[27] In this discursive fight, despite the commitment of the early Soviet state to women's empowerment and gender equality, "[f]emale physiology and female sexuality symbolized the disorganized corrupted body and the biological scars left by capitalism":[28] the (yet) unconquered "nature" that harboured the potential for thwarting the nascent utopia.

To address the pressures and anxieties of the time, Naiman has proposed to read the Soviet 1920s as the period where the Gothic genre, understood as a combination of narrative tropes about the return of the past coloured by a mixture of horror and excitement, re-emerged in public discourse, from political speeches and articles in press to published fiction. In line with the classic Gothic novels of the late 18th and 19th century, the Gothic corresponded to the fears that the (bourgeois) past may infect the (proletarian) present, the constant threat that the past and those who represent it are not quite dead or otherwise definitively conquered but are poised to invade the fragile present. This context offers an opportunity to read *chinari*'s texts as an example of an oppositional Soviet Gothic, with their

[26] Naiman, *Sex in Public*, 57, 83.
[27] Naiman, 59, 84, 116.
[28] Naiman, 225.

own small gallery of Gothic characters: the undead, the shapeshifters, and demons,—and to link fear and violent imagery to sex, desire, and textual pleasure, both writerly and readerly, which characterises Gothic texts.

2. Transformations of the Soviet body

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In this context of general uncertainty, the individual body of a Soviet citizen found itself caught in a network of various re-makings and projects of ordering and reordering, liberation and control. The Bolsheviks' proclaimed readiness to discipline and scientifically reshape the human to create "the New Man" has become a commonplace, both among the proponents and critics of the regime.[29] Leon Trotsky proposed a remaking of the very structure of the human psyche, by means of expanding the realm of consciousness and eliminating the "unconscious, the elemental, and the spontaneous."[30] "The elemental," "the barbarian," and "the childlike" had been associated with "the Russian character" since the beginning of the century.[31] Early Soviet culture responded to this stereotype with the ideal of a body-machine and with modernisation by means of industrialisation and rationalisation of labour, represented primarily by Taylorism and epitomised in the work of the Proletkult poet Aleksei Gastev: "the elemental" had to be conquered by rationality and technology.[32] This explicit opposition between rational control and "the elemental" was balanced, however, by the images of dismemberment and disability, pervasive in Stalinist culture.[33] One can see how, however opposed they seemed to each other, different strands of early 20th-century Russian culture were similarly preoccupied with a variety of ways to reach beyond the human (to the elemental, divine, mechanic) or to what was articulated as the modes of subjectivity

[29] Baberowski, *Scorched Earth*, 108.
[30] Etkind, *Eros Nevozmozhnogo*, 225-226.
[31] Bulgakova, *Fabrika Zhestov*, 184, 186.
[32] McCannon, "Technological and Scientific Utopias," 154–155, 159; Naiman, *Sex in Public*, 65–67; see an important overview of these approaches to embodiment in Olenina, *Psychomotor Aesthetics*.
[33] See Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade*.

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bordering the non-human (the savage, the child),[34] to find material, embodied ways to expand human perception.[35]

It is important to note that this desire to reach beyond the human and explore its limits characterised the early 20th century across Europe. Since the late 19th century, under the influence of biological and social sciences, the clarity and self-evidence of the human as a category were under stress.[36] The life sciences revealed the extent to which human exceptionalism had been an illusion and how much of their embodiment humans shared with "lower animals." This realisation both questioned the human/non-human boundary and raised the fears of degenerating "back" into the animal world.[37] The threat of degeneration was, however, unequally distributed: for theorists like Lombroso, it was clearly gendered, racialised, classed, and marked by age, so that lower-class people, people of colour, women, regardless of class, and children all shared a position on the boundary between the human and the non-human.[38] In these medicalised 19th-century discourses (influenced by but not limited to Lombroso's work), female embodiment, in particular, was understood to be, as Kelly Hurley puts it, "not-quite-human"[39] in its deviation from the male norm, and sexualisation played a primary role in this understanding: women were read as defined by their reproductive system and sexuality.[40] The fin-de-siècle Gothic responded to these concerns about uncertain boundaries and amplified them, Hurley argues, functioning as a "re-emerging" genre which appeared in times of radical social change.[41] Sexuality remained an important locus of anxiety for the Gothic genre.[42] In the context of the fin-de-siècle Victorian Britain, this resulted in the preoccupation with the "abhuman": "a not-quite-human subject,

[34] See an informative overview of this constant oscillation between the poles of radical bodily emancipation and rational control, in Bulgakova, *Fabrika zhestov*, 20, 35, 130.
[35] See more in Widdis, *Socialist Senses*, esp. 1-50.
[36] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 6.
[37] Hurley, 56.
[38] Hurley, 94-95.
[39] Hurley, 120.
[40] See also Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies*, 20, 30-31, 34.
[41] Hurley, 5.
[42] Hurley, 11.

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characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other."[43]

To their period of uncertainty and change in the late 1920s and 1930s, Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin responded with their own gallery of Gothic characters. Kharms writes of the pursuing dead; Druskin, about the demonic as that which lies inside the subject and separates it from itself into body and soul, and manifests as the accidental.[44] Lipavsky uses the figure of a shape-shifter (or a werewolf—*oboroten'*) to explain his ideas on horror; their friend Aleksandr Vvedensky writes his poems as conversations between the dying.[45] Hurley's approach has been taken up by Muireann Maguire in her exploration of the early Soviet Gothic in literature. Despite the later time period, many of the insights from the late Victorian Britain appear applicable to the Soviet 1920s and 1930s, as here, too, literature was interacting with recent developments in science that challenged the seemingly stable view of the human subject.[46] The Gothic body, disturbingly fluid and prone to degeneration and decomposition, responded to the competing visions of embodiment in the early Soviet culture: "The Soviet body," Maguire concludes, "was not monolithic; but neither was it entirely human."[47]

Meanwhile, gender politics in the early Soviet culture remained notoriously contradictory. The importance of liberation and equality of women to the Bolshevik political project, in rhetorics as well as in practice (even if the latter was not always consistent and met frequent resistance from men),[48] was counterbalanced by the continued, if implicit, misogyny in literary production. Scholars have shown the prevalence of womanless or sexless plots in literature and film of the 1920s and 1930s, where women represented the temptation and mire

[43] Hurley, 3-4.
[44] Druskin, "Teotsentricheskaia antropologiia," 671.
[45] Vvedenskii, "Chetyre opisaniia," 183-192.
[46] Maguire, *Stalin's Ghosts*, 112.
[47] Maguire, 138.
[48] See, e.g., Edele, *Stalinist Society*, 182.

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of the past to be overcome. Even in the Soviet rhetoric of women's emancipation at the time, one can see the devaluation of spheres that had been deemed feminine (the home and all that concerned the reproduction of the everyday life, *byt*) in contrast to the exultation of the masculine-coded productive labour.[49] Lilya Kaganovsky has documented the hysterical avoidance of heterosexuality in 1930s film,[50] prevalent despite the official turn to the conservative pro-family policies in the second half of the 1930s (the "great retreat," which notoriously included the ban on abortions and the criminalisation of homosexuality). As Kaganovsky and Eliot Borenstein show, the Soviet culture remained haunted by a particular type of homoerotic aesthetic, peculiar to highly militarised masculinist cultures.[51]

Chinari with their own Gothic characters, most strikingly the pursuing and infecting dead in Kharms's *The Old Woman*, responded to these concerns and deepened them beyond the questions of political power and control over the shared future, to questions of the human subjectivity. The focus on how misogyny operates in *chinari*'s writings is therefore crucial to seeing how the drama of revelation of the hidden other structures their texts. Conversely, their misogyny itself is best understood if put in the context of the inherently split human subject that *chinari* put forward, and of the social anxieties about the various hidden others in the collective body, rather than as a reflection of the general patriarchal bias of the time, separate from *chinari*'s philosophy.

3. The treacherous body and the non-human within

In an untitled text by Daniil Kharms from 1933, one Petr Mikhailovich (P. M.) is waiting for an important visit. A woman he loves, Maria Ivanovna (M. I.), is about to come to tea, and he is busy arranging the chairs in such a way as to facilitate the love confession. If

[49] Borenstein, *Men Without Women*, 17. See also, e.g., Zalkind, *Polovoi Vopros*, 57.
[50] Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade*.
[51] Borenstein, *Men Without Women*, 4, 32.

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the chairs are put right, and they are seated at the right distance, he thinks, this will give him an easy entry point to the conversation, and the dialogue will flow seamlessly. His plans are ruined, however, when Petr Mikhailovich's uncle Il'ia Semenovich (Il. Sem.) unexpectedly arrives and starts knocking things off the table, and stays when Maria Ivanovna comes too. Just when some order seems to have been achieved, the following scene ensues:

> (M. I. sits down on the sofa. The uncle takes a hammer out of his mouth)
> P. M. - What is it?
> Il. Sem. - A hammer.
> M. I. - What did you do? Did you take it out of your mouth?
> Il. Sem. - No no, it is nothing!
> M. I. - Is this a magic trick? (Silence)
> M. I. - It has become somehow uncomfortable [uncosy] here.
> [...]
> M. I. - No this is all just awful [horrible].
> P. M. - Awful! Awful! Awful!
> (Silence)
> P. M. - I awfully like all this! I like to sit with you just like this.
> M. I. - I do too.
> P. M. - You are joking, but I'm honest. I honestly like all this!
> M. I. - It is quite chilly here (takes a hammer out of her mouth)
> P. M. - What is it?
> M. I. - A hammer.
> P. M. - What did you do? You took it out of your mouth?
> M. I. - It bothered me all day right here (points to her throat)
> P. M. - In my eyes you see the oblong rays.
> they flow like braids
> and the whole garden rustles in my ears
> and the branches rub against each other.
> and their crowns are moved by the wind
> and your light eyes
> like obscure jugs
> I dream about them at night. My God![52]

The absurdity of situations described in Kharms's prose, the difficulties in communication experienced by the characters, and the difficulties the plot encounters in its progression have become the most recognisable traits of his writings. What I would like to point out in the excerpt above are the slightly less obvious elements of the text: the meticulously careful scripting of the love confession and its unavoidable failure, the unexpected revelation of the little hammers casually coming out of the bodies and the way that it is primarily this revelation which disrupts the plans and makes love impossible; and the turn to poetry and the

[52] Kharms, *PS*, 2:391-392. All translations of the texts from this edition are mine.

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dissolution of coherent speech when the emotional tension intensifies. The failure of love becomes the scene for this dissolution of rationality, simultaneously triggered and exemplified by the bodies ejecting foreign objects in the middle of a conversation. The human body exhibits here its instability.

Foregrounding this uncertain and treacherous embodiment in approaching these authors challenges certain patterns established in scholarship. Research on *chinari* and OBERIU tends to foreground fear, anxiety, and the absurd, highlighting the rational and cognitive aspects of the texts, and focusing on the negative aspects of their philosophy: the preoccupation with nothingness, the lack of meaning and cause-and-effect in their lived reality, as well as frequent disappearances and instances of bodily lack or undoing which plague Kharms's prose.[53] What this dissertation argues, however, is that the defining feature of the human body as it appears in *chinari*'s texts is not lack, but a troubling overabundance: the body dramatically appears and reveals its contents (as in the example with the little hammers above) as much as it disappears, and it is this overabundance and this potential for sudden revelation that Kharms and Lipavsky (Druskin to a lesser extent) find most concerning. Shifting the focus in this way, to the overabundance of identities and the resulting potential for deception, allows for connecting *chinari* to the broader Soviet cultural context with its widespread anxieties about hidden identities and hidden enemies without subsuming the authors into the dominant culture and reading them merely as its symptom.

Scholarship on OBERIU and *chinari* has addressed their persistent interest in the non-human as "fundamental zoo- and anthropomorphisation":[54] an equivalence between the human and the non-human, and in particular vegetative, life, the trope of doing away with the boundaries between human and animal "worlds," characteristic especially for Zabolotsky's early poetry. Kobrinskii connects this to the idea of the "life matter" out of which various

[53] Iampolski, e.g., writes of the poetics of "caesura, rupture, failure, emptiness" (Iampolski, *Bespamiatstvo*, 375); see also Smirnov, *Psikhodiachronologika*, 290-314.
[54] Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*, 126.

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beings come into being, shared among the writers of the group[55] and theorised most prominently by Lipavsky. Animalisation is counterbalanced by the interest in various human-made mechanisms, which expresses itself in the refusal to treat "the vegetative, the animal, and the inorganic worlds"[56] as separate and essentially different. Kobrinskii reads these two tendencies as stemming from the same interest in infantilist and primitivist worldview, which explains the focus on constructedness rather than usefulness in the machines dreamed up by Kharms (in contrast to the more utilitarian approach to mechanisation in the early Soviet utopian culture).

The human body as it appears in Kharms is not simply object-like. As exemplified by his text about a little old man who falls apart after various random objects spring from out of his body,[57] it is not uncommonly made up of organic matter as well as human-made things. This characteristic of embodiment in Kharms is eloquently described by Branislav Jakovljevic: it is inherently fragmented and decentred, "the human body in the state of ultimate ruin," defined by failure and yet uncannily persistent in its survival, and subject to various transformations which undo its own identity as a material body.[58] This almost-non-humanness characterises the body as Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin describe it: it is always ready to fall apart and reveal its hidden non-human nature, and when it does not do so, this generates anxiety over what is hidden, most prominent in the way Kharms writes about women.

4. *Chinari*, gender, and sexuality

Chinari's texts are marked by the murkiness of generic boundaries, and boundaries between poetic and everyday discourse, a murkiness to which erotic imagery contributes and

[55] Kobrinskii, 128-130.
[56] Kobrinskii, 134.
[57] Kharms, *Today*, 224.
[58] Jakovljevic, 227, 36.

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in which it becomes entangled. I would propose to read eroticism and instances of misogyny in *chinari* as an integral part of their creative projects, and not merely as a reflection of patriarchal bias seeping through into otherwise unrelated works. Jakovljevic has argued for accepting the fragmentary and incomplete nature of Kharms's œuvre as an integral quality of his writing, rather than as a hindrance to its understanding. It is more productive, in his view, to interpret its fragmentedness not as a remnant of a lost edifice, but as a poetic principle organising Kharms's work.[59] In line with this approach, I propose to read the frequently jarring instances of the erotic, the pornographic, and the misogynist as part of that chaotic edifice, and not an aberration in its construction.

Several studies have contextualised OBERIU and *chinari*'s treatment of sexuality and gender within the broader trends of the Russian avant-garde literature.[60] In scholarship on the two groups, there exists a widespread acknowledgment of a generally "condescendingly patriarchal view of women, women's intellect, women's creativity"[61] that characterised participants of the group, who accepted Tamara Meier-Lipavskaia as the only woman worthy to share in their intellectual conversations. Graham Roberts, e.g., reads Kharms's depictions of female bodies as a manifestation of his (cultural) patriarchal bias, where women are seen as unclean and posing the threat of pollution.[62] Individual works have addressed sexuality in the poetry of Vvedensky and Nikolai Oleinikov; Lipavsky and Druskin remain comparatively under-researched. In this overview, I am going to focus on the scholarship regarding gender and sexuality in Kharms, as this body of work is most relevant for my analysis.

There remains a notable resistance to interrogating the group's misogyny and the treatment of sexuality in Kharms's texts, voiced most strongly by Mikhail Meilakh, who has argued that the publication of Kharms's erotic poetry and personal diary notes was a mistake;

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[59] Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 7-10.
[60] See, e.g., Flaker, "Avangard i Erotika," 47–48, and Smirnov, *Psikhodiakhronologika*, 290-294.
[61] Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 365.
[62] Roberts, "Guilt Without Sex"; Roberts, "Poor Liza."

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they are expressions of personal complexes and predilections that should have been granted privacy. This criticism is directed largely against the scholarship which aims to "psychoanalyse" Kharms himself and, Meilakh argues, is drawn to sensationalism that revealing the private life of a famous person entails.[63] The primary example of such a psychoanalysing reading is Dmitrii Tokarev's study, which brings biographical information about Kharms's upbringing to bear upon his interpretation.[64] Tokarev offers probably the most detailed exploration of gender and sexuality in Kharms so far. His central argument is that the overcoming of sexuality played a central part in Kharms's creative project: the sublimation of sexual desire was necessary for transforming reality, and the failure to achieve this sublimation lead to creative failure, a spiritual project gone wrong. As attempts at the "enlightenment/illumination" (*prosvetlenie*) of sexuality turn into the "horror in the face of sex,"[65] self-repression transforms sexual energy into neurotic obsessions and accounts for Kharms's often pornographic poems and distressed personal notes on sex. This argument follows the line of reasoning inaugurated by Jean-Philippe Jaccard, which foregrounds the catastrophic nature of desire as opposed to the blissful wholeness of eternity beyond time.[66] There are multiple important parallels between Tokarev's approach and mine, most importantly in locating the source of Kharms's and Lipavsky's ambivalence regarding female physiology in their interest in the "elemental life," of which they are at the same time scared due to its imagined "lack of individuality."[67] However, I aim to show that the impossibility of a harmonious and logical explanation for Kharms's project as a whole is the central constructive feature of his poetics, and it is clearly manifested in his treatment of sexuality in the texts. I read his approach to gendered embodiment and sexuality as influenced by and responding to the cultural anxieties regarding the human subjectivity typical for his time, but

[63] Meilakh, "Oberiutiana," 414.
[64] Tokarev, *Kurs na Khudshee*, 386.
[65] Tokarev, *Kurs*, 370.
[66] Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*, 161.
[67] Tokarev, *Kurs*, 380.

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neither this influence nor response are entirely consistent; nor is the resulting ambivalence the result of a creative failure. Most importantly, being informed by feminist thought on textual as well as visual representations of female bodies, my dissertation approaches misogyny as culturally contingent and, to put it lightly, less than entirely logical, rather than an expression of a valid existential male anxiety, as Tokarev's monograph appears to suggest.

My goal is not to psychoanalyse and potentially pathologise Kharms the individual, nor Lipavsky and Druskin, but to use the texts they have left as documents of a time period during which perceptions of sexuality were rapidly changing and were charged with multiple, often conflicting, meanings and implicit values. I am interested in sexism, sexuality, and their intersections with thinking about how the human is defined and who, and to what extent, is excluded from this definition, not as a personal aberration of three long-dead men, but as an important element of their poetics and philosophy, which help illuminate the constructive principles of their work. To achieve this, I offer a close reading of their writings, approaching both diary notes and philosophical works as literary works and looking for recurrent tropes and images in them: in this respect, I am more interested in the form in which certain ideas are expressed, the metaphors and analogies used to express them, rather than in the ideas themselves.[68] What I will be tracing down in this way is instances where erotic imagery is entangled with their vision of human subjectivity as unstable and always potentially implodable from the inside by the presence of not-entirely-human matter, and identifying selected links to their cultural and historical context that help illuminate the logic of this entanglement. I am particularly interested in identifying contradicting, confusing, and ridiculous instances of how such erotic imagery appears. The texts under consideration work as a collection of unfinished attempts at a philosophical system and of echoes from their contemporary discourses, rather than an actual coherent system or an extended reflection of a

[68] A similar approach was taken in Tsivian, "Leonid Lipavskii: 'Issledovanie uzhasa.'"

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unifying psychological complex. In this, I am following Georgii Chernavin's argument for reading Druskin's writings on messengers as poetic texts that "pretend" to be philosophy instead of actually being entirely serious philosophical works but are in fact closer to a parody[69] (an argument which displaces the problem of the hidden identity onto the work itself).

5. Existing trends in research on OBERIU and Kharms

Scholarship on OBERIU has been large and varied.[70] In the earlier stages, the primary opposition seems to have been between foregrounding the comic and the entertaining in Kharms and Vvedensky, stemming from their careers as writers for children,[71] on the one hand, and reading the group as the inheritor of the avant-garde's philosophy and the Russian version of the literature of the absurd.[72] As the first approach has ceded ground, the two current main trends are the focus on the underlying philosophy and self-referentiality,[73] and the tendency to foreground resistance and criticism of the Stalinist regime in the 1930s, including but not limited to its treatment of the avant-garde creators. It is telling that, albeit not without exceptions, the former critical trend tends to roughly overlap with scholarship that is produced in Russia or by Russian scholars working abroad, while the second one appears to predominate in the Anglo-American academia.

A peculiarly Russian approach to these texts has been the prevalence of "occult" readings, focused on parallels with alchemy, numerology, or ancient mythologies found in

[69] Chernavin, "'Reduktsia, esli ona est','" 79-80.
[70] For insightful overviews, see Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 20-23, and Pratt, "Beyond the Squabbles."
[71] For an extensive critique of this tendency, see Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*. It is notable that the first dissertation defended in Russia on OBERIU dealt with "the funny": Gerasimova, "Problema smeshnogo."
[72] See, e.g., Jaccard, *Daniiil Kharms*, and Cornwell, ed. *Daniil Kharms and the Poetics of the Absurd*.
[73] For examples of this approach, see Iampolski, *Bespamiatstvo*; Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*; Lipovetsky, "A Substitute for Writing"; see also the section on Vvedensky in *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 2 (2011).

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Kharms.[74] Tokarev's book mentioned above[75] reads Kharms through elements of the alchemic tradition, psychoanalysis, and the pre-revolutionary Russian religious philosophy. Russian scholarship has also focused more on the uneasy place of politically conservative OBERIU writers in the context of the left-leaning avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s. Indeed, it may be justified to see these poets as a rather conservative phenomenon,[76] which followed and deeply challenged the artistic and intellectual tradition of the Russian avant-garde at the same time. This focus on conservatism is in stark contrast to the strong Western current of reading OBERIU and particularly Kharms's poetics as a technique of survival and resistance (subversion, protest, etc.) to power.[77]

Within all of these trends, efforts have been made to look for different ways to write OBERIU and *chinari* into the history of the Russian and European avant-gardes and modernisms, focusing on various aspects of their work: philosophy and the overarching approach to language and representation,[78] specific techniques and motifs,[79] the important tradition of infantilism and primitivism in Russian literature,[80] or the broader concerns of European philosophy, spanning from the mediaeval mystics to Deleuze and contemporary thought on performance art.[81] As can be seen from the works cited, the focus has largely been

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[74] See Sazhin's notes in Kharms, *PS*, 1:346, 348, 353; Loshchilov, "Printsip 'slovesnoi mashiny.'"
[75] Tokarev, *Kurs.*
[76] See Pratt, "The Profane Made Sacred"; Morev and Shubinskii, "" 'Pust' Menia Rasstreliaiut, No Formu Ia Ne Odenu'"; Klebanov, "The Left Classicist."
[77] E.g., Anemone, "The Anti-World of Daniil Kharms"; Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*, 156-207; Brookes, "Enclosure, Writing, and Resistance"; Aizman, "The Poor Rhymes of Hooligans." On the broader post-Cold-War politics of reading for resistance in Soviet historiography, see Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject."

It is important to acknowledge, however, how much the contemporary Russian state has contributed to this approach in its consistent treatment of Kharms and Vvedensky's work as subversive: from the persistence of the municipal officials set to remove Kharms's portrait painted on the house where he lived (Tristin, "The Portrait Of Daniil Kharms"); to the case of a schoolteacher fired for teaching Kharms and Vvedensky in class (*Moscow Times*, "Russian Teacher Forced Out"); to the prominence of absurdity in coding political messages to protest against Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, to which the police still does not fail to respond (Warner and Arkhipova, "The Scarf and the Snuffbox").

[78] Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*; Roberts, *The Last Soviet Avant-Garde*; see also, e.g., Burenina, "Filosofiia Anarhizma."
[79] Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*; Nakhimovsky, "The Ordinary, the Sacred, and the Grotesque."
[80] Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*; Morse, "Balagan is Theater Too."
[81] Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*; on theatricality in Kharms and OBERIU, see also Nikol'skaia, "The Oberiuty and the Theatricalisation of Life"; Buks, "Zametka k Risunku Daniila Kharmsa"; Bobilevich, "Plasticheskaia Representatsiia Imidzha Daniila Kharmsa."

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on Kharms. Scholarship on Zabolotsky and Vaginov has branched out into its own separate fields, and work on Vvedensky is growing in size. The discussion of these falls beyond the scope of this dissertation. Lipavsky and Druskin have been discussed primarily as a background to understanding Kharms (e.g. in Jaccard and Tokarev); new work is being done, although it is of varying quality.[82] Tamara Meier-Lipavskaia's critical work on Vvedensky has been acknowledged[83] but still awaits its own focused research.

By focusing on Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin separately from other participants of the two groups, I aim to zoom in on the close parallels and the ongoing dialogue in their works, while also being able to interrogate the important differences that mark their approaches to the problem of the hidden other and its appearances in gendered embodiment and sexuality. Such a close reading may help understand them as closely connected but independent and ultimately very different thinkers, who, addressing the same problem, devised different solutions to it. This approach may help to highlight the profound differences among the members of the two groups and thus destabilise (without entirely negating) some of the patterns of interpretation outlined above, which often depend on clustering them together and in opposition to the official, publishable and published literature of the time. What I would like to argue against is, first, the assumption of a hidden depth (occult, philosophical, or political) behind the texts, which is rather an illusion that the texts themselves produce; and, second, the focus on text-as-resistance (either as a reflection of the absurdity of Soviet politics, texts as critique, or its playfulness itself as resistance; these concerns are outlined in more detail below).

[82] There are a number of important publications by Iuliia Valieva: Valieva, "Leonid Lipavskii i Pervaia mirovaia voina"; Valieva, ""Kto on - L. S. Savel'ev?"; Valieva, "Ob istochnikakh traktata Leonida Lipavskogo 'Teoriia slov.'" See also several works in philosophy: Khamis, "Issledovanie Uzhasa"; Rostova, N. N. "'Khorror' v Sovremennoi Filosofii"; Shadrin, "Konstruirovanie Iazykovoi Real'nosti"; Zankovskiy, "Ben Vudard i Leonid Lipavskii." See more in Ch. 2. For an overview of recent scholarship on Druskin, see Ch. 6.
[83] Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 21-22.

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My analysis relies on these decades of research even as I hope to challenge some of its aspects. Among the approaches that have most informed my reading are those which have described the themes and techniques used by the writers of OBERIU and *chinari* circle that point to their interest in the human and non-human others. These themes and techniques include "a construct of the 'infant/ child' as strange other" and the subversion of everyday logic, in particular by means of "discordant elements," "the juxtaposition and conflict of verbal meanings articulated [in the OBERIU Declaration] as part of OBERIU aesthetics"[84] that creates tension between the different levels of the text and invite an Aesopian reading.[85] Kobrinskii calls this method "textual relativity,"[86] which consists in the refusal to settle on one term of any opposition: "out of two (and sometimes more) artistic definitions, forms, variants, structures, which contradict each other, one is never chosen over the other—all of them remain in the text as coexisting and equal, thus underscoring the impossibility of any kind of unambiguous fixation of reality."[87] This principle is operative on all levels of the text, from the identity of the characters and events in the plot to the more minute elements, so that everything appears suspended "in an unstable state."[88] This creates a sense of a radically fluid reality where everything exists in a causal relationship with everything else.[89] Other important consequences include challenges to linear time and causality in the plot, and the instability of the subject, e.g. in cases of confused and mistaken identity in Kharms's cycle *Events*.

[84] Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*, 161, 183.
[85] See Tumanov, "Writing for a Dual Audience."
[86] Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*, 150.
[87] Kobrinskii, 151.
[88] Kobrinskii, 146.
[89] Kobrinskii, 154-155, 206-207.

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6. Notes on theoretical framework and the method of reading: The human and the non-human

My reading of the reformulation of the human subject that *chinari* undertake is informed by posthumanist theories that have emerged in the last decades and have committed themselves to the interrogation of "the givenness of the differential categories of 'human' and 'nonhuman,' examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized."[90] The Russian avant-garde, exemplified most notably by Kazimir Malevich's thought, posed similar questions regarding the stability and the very nature of boundaries between human and non-human beings and objects, and the stability of the subject-object relationship. For Kharms, Lipavsky, and especially Druskin, these problems were also connected to questions about the work of perception and their interest in phenomenology.[91]

In *What Is Posthumanism?*, a postmodernist approach to the question of the human and the non-human, Cary Wolfe argues for posthumanist thought as centrally engaged with questioning and reinscribing the relationship between "the human" and the body, in response to understanding humanity as the result of overcoming the body and its biological determinisms.[92] This problematic, as this dissertation aims to show, is crucial for *chinari* as well, who experience and approach the inescapable "animality" of embodiedness, the presence of non-human, elemental other in the self, as a problem, and devise the tools to accept it in their philosophy, and the ways to embody the other, in their personal theatre and private writings. In addition to this "thematics of the decentering of the human in relation to

[90] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 808.
[91] Kukui, "'Stikhi, Stavshie Veshch'iu,'" 392.
[92] Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism*, xv.

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either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates,"[93] Wolfe suggests expanding the conversation to the method of thinking itself in response to that decentring. Here, posthumanist thought inherits elements of the poststructuralist toolkit, with its privileging of points of contradiction, confusion, and irresolution, or, in Wolfe's own analysis, the reading of an artistic "refusal to commit" to a clear strategy as *the* strategy, and an exploration of how a lack of a central "core" identity endows that which lacks it with a particular protean quality.[94] This kind of privileging is very important to *chinari*, and it informs the method of my reading. (There is indeed an irony in trying to contain this dissipation of the text and meaning in one central structure of a *shkap* for which I argue.)

One of the key understandings put forward by posthumanist thinkers is that of the historically contingent ways in which "the human" (via "the Man") has been articulated to exclude specific groups, or to place them on the border of humanity, as Man's "sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others."[95] The argument of feminist posthumanist theorists like Rosi Braidotti is that it is the inscription of difference from the norm (sexualisation of female embodiment, inscription of racial difference onto colonised subjects, and radical species-based difference onto non-human animals) that leads to their exclusion from full humanity, which remains the purview of white men. The stability of this opposition is, however, questioned by studies in biopolitics. Agamben, in *Homo Sacer* as well as in his study of the figure of the animal in European philosophy in *The Open*, problematises the place of biological life as an included exclusion, that is, a realm that, while being initially excluded from the sphere of politics proper (and being therefore constitutive in the definition of that sphere), in modernity increasingly becomes the focus of politics. Within this approach, sexuality becomes another site for control, another facet of the biological life that becomes politicised. Agamben writes this constitutive exclusion into the larger context of European

[93] Wolfe, xvi.
[94] Wolfe, 210, 215.
[95] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 15; see also, e.g., Taylor, "Beasts of Burden"; Nussbaum, "Limits of the Human."

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political history, marked by the gradual expansion of the realm of the political to include the biological. This approach is valuable to my research in that it shifts the focus from the specific acts of control and management of population, the biopolitics and necropolitics[96] of the state, to the structure of thought that provided a framework for them. "The fundamental biopolitical fracture" between "bare life (people) and political existence (People), exclusion and inclusion, zoe and bios"[97] is placed inside the human body, where what Agamben calls anthropological machine is at work separating the biological, and therefore animalistic, from the rational, and therefore, "purely" human.[98] This reading helps highlight to what extent the stability of the white male body as opposed to the female in the post-Enlightenment landscape of thought is relative and uncertain, with the dividing line between the human and the non-human placed always-already inside the (male) subject.

In contrast to Agamben, Zakiyyah Jackson has argued against the primacy of the human/animal opposition assumed in much of posthumanist thought, maintaining instead that it was blackness that has been posited as the primary other through what she calls "plasticization" of the black body—the inscription of mutability onto that body through the violence of plantation slavery.[99] Gender and sexuality were central in this process, in that stable gender was denied to black subjects,[100] and the constitution of the "norm" followed later: "the production of the 'civilized' subject of sex/gender and reproduction is a retroactive construction and dependent on modes of generating sex/gender and reproduction imagined as excessive to its proper domain or otherwise invisibilized."[101] Similarly, this construction of racial difference has, Jackson argues, preceded, or was at least contemporaneous, with the

[96] Mbembe, "Necropolitics."
[97] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 178, 177.
[98] Agamben, *The Open*, 33-38.
[99] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, 11.
[100] Jackson, 10.
[101] Jackson, 12.

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construction of human and animal as ontologically opposed to each other.[102] The liberal version of the human was articulated, primarily, not as opposed to animal, but as opposed to blackness, and importantly, to "black gender and sexuality,"[103] where blackness was articulated not as non-human, but as humanity's own lowest, most abject point. Jackson reads "anxieties about conquest, slavery, and colonial expansionism"[104] as the key context for this articulation of animal as the other of human. It could be argued that the violence of the late imperial Russia, the Civil War, and the first decades of the Soviet rule, including the Russian and Soviet imperial (re)conquest of neighbouring lands as well as its own countryside, created the context in which the variously defined racialised and classed others were similarly articulated as the lowest, abject point of the human. From this perspective, it was this conquest and colonial expansionism that supplied the similar backdrop for the intense exploration of the human's relationship with the world of non-human objects and alternative modes of perception that defined the Russian avant-garde thought, informed by Russia's own marginalised others, black and non-black.[105]

In their introduction to an edited volume on posthumanism in Russia, McQuillen and Vaingurt trace down the general outlines of what could be considered Russian and early Soviet posthumanist thought. They bring attention to the tradition of rethinking the relationship between human rationality, embodiment, and their natural environment in the works of philosophers and scientists like Nikolai Fedorov (1829-1903), Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1857-1935), and Vladimir Vernadsky (1863-1945), and address the calls to remake the human body and psyche to be more machine-like in the works of Aleksei Gastev

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[102] Jackson, 9.
[103] Jackson, 13.
[104] Jackson, 14.
[105] While the following chapters are going to point to some of the ways in which this backdrop of multidirectional social marginalisation informed *chinari*'s thought on the human and the non-human, the detailed exploration of the influence of Russian and Soviet colonial politics in this regard falls beyond the scope of this thesis. For a discussion of the links between the avant-garde and colonisation, see, e.g., Sandomirskaja, "One Sixth of the World." Benedikt Livshits's memoir *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer (Polutoraglazyi Strelec*) can serve as a good extended introduction to the centrality of Russian nationalism and late imperial politics in the early Russian Futurism. On Russian colonisation and self-colonisation, see Etkind, *Internal Colonization*.

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and Leon Trotsky.[106] Another thinker, Aleksandr Bogdanov (1873-1928), physician and author of the early Russian science-fiction novel about the life on Mars *Krasnaia Zvezda* (Red Star, 1908), was interested in modes of embodied collectivity, from factory work to his famed blood transfusions called to deter aging and extend life-span.[107] This overview concludes with the trope of overcoming the limitations of one's body by sheer willpower in Socialist realist novels, which "valorized the New Man as a socialist cyborg."[108] There were also the less theorised and less known scientific projects that troubled the human/non-human boundary. In his work on the zoologist Il'ya Ivanov, who for years pursued his attempts to create a human-ape hybrid by means of artificial insemination, Kirill Rossiianov quotes historian Nicholas Thomas to address the peculiarities of Ivanov's experience in Africa: "if one is seeking an elementary structure of colonial discourse, it is not to be found at the level of a specific attitude or policy, nor in any particular image or metaphor, but rather in the contradictory character of the colonial objectives of distancing, hierarchizing and incorporating."[109] It is this complex combination of "distancing, hierarchizing and incorporating" that one finds in Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin's work concerning the relationship between the human subject, non-human objects, and various subjects relegated to the boundary between the human and the non-human by virtue of their "incomplete" or diminished rationality (women, children, peasants, hashish-smokers, and others). Colonisation may indeed be the best way to describe the uneasy treatment of the non-human in their texts: the non-human and the boundary-human is not quite repudiated and not quite desired, but rather painstakingly classified and categorised, discussed and provisionally, incompletely and troublingly, incorporated into the subject's own self-image.

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[106] McQuillen and Vaingurt, "Introduction," 24-26.
[107] McQuillen and Vaingurt, 28.
[108] McQuillen and Vaingurt, 30.
[109] Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture*, 142, quoted in Rossiianov, "Beyond Species," 300.

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In addition to this work that has already shown the relevance that the conceptual language of contemporary posthumanist theory has in the context of the Russian avant-garde, it is worth acknowledging that posthumanist thought, while clearly indebted to the technological developments of the late 20th and early 21st century, itself has roots in turn-of-the-century philosophical approaches invested in re-evaluating the agency of matter.[110] These roots allow for approaching *chinari* as another case of the recurrent clusters of materialist thinking. While not feminist in their political investments, they similarly worked at questioning, undoing, and redrawing the relationship between human subjects and non-human objects, on the one hand; and between human rationality and human embodiment as possessing the inherent potential for opening up into non-human matter, on the other. As *chinari*'s example shows, the Russian avant-garde's rethinking of the human was not as consistently emancipatory, nor as inclusive as that of the contemporary posthumanist (and feminist posthumanist) theory; the technological and scientific challenge to anthropocentrism that informed the avant-garde's project was arguably not as profound as the one at the turn of the 21st century. However, there are also significant areas of overlap that allow for the limited and careful use of some of the posthumanist conceptual language in analysing *chinari.*

7. Beyond resistance

An important problem in reading writers who consciously distanced themselves from the mainstream of Soviet culture is gauging the extent to which their project might be read as directly (and primarily) critical of that culture and the state. I would like to position this project in the context of, but also as a movement somewhat away from, the body of scholarship that in studies of the early Soviet literature and culture foregrounded its relationship to the top-down state violence (and to a lesser extent its everyday, horizontal

[110] See, e.g., Bennett, "A Vitalist Stopover"; and Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 33.

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version).[111] The underlying assumption of this approach is that if, as in Evgeny Dobrenko's formula, Socialist realism is taken to be "entirely political,"[112] then unofficial art and literature of the Soviet period either lie entirely beyond politics (and deal with serious questions about reality and perception, as "real" art and literature should), or they are also, by implication, entirely permeated by political meaning, and evermore so in the very act of evading the openly political topics.[113] There is a temptation to read a project of resistance into the texts not only because it fits with the inherited Cold-War habits of reading Soviet writers and of assigning value to different authors, but also because, in the case of difficult texts like *chinari*'s, it helps to simply make sense of them, writing them into a pre-existing scheme of intelligibility. Such an approach inscribes agency where the authors themselves problematise it: *chinari* foreground ways of retreating into contemplative isolation instead of engaging, either actively or passively, with the political reality that excludes them.

Without aiming to depoliticise or decontextualise Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin entirely, I would like to focus on violence in general rather than the Great Terror specifically, and to refuse terror as the universal signifier, the key that opens everything, in line with an approach that views it as "a phenomenon truly awful in every aspect, but less pervasive and influential than some standard works on the subject argue."[114] This approach is not meant to exonerate the state, but to acknowledge direct political violence as "not the central fact of Soviet existence," but rather one way among many in which violence, alongside various economic hardships,[115] was present in the everyday life of Soviet citizens. Similarly, it is important to find a way to contextualise the texts as doing primarily something other, and in any case more, than criticising, subverting, or otherwise responding to the official ideology of

111 See Dobrenko, "Nadzirat' - nakazyvat' - nadzirat'"; Dobrenko, "The Entire Real World of Children'"; Ryklin, "Bodies of Terror"; Tumanov, "Writing for a Dual Audience."
112 Dobrenko, "Nadzirat' - nakazyvat' - nadzirat'," 667.
113 Tumanov, "Writing for a Dual Audience," 130-131.
114 Thurston, "Social Dimensions of Stalinist Rule," 542.
115 Thurston, 542, 554.

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the Stalin's years, and that, if what these texts perform is resistance, it is a kind of resistance that foregrounds various strategies of evasion and non-engagement.[116] This is a strategy that values and often prioritises carving out the space outside of one's relationship to the state, rather than engaging with it critically. Their project is political in that the questions of who qualifies as a human subject and to what extent are political ones; less so in how their answers to these questions are a form of engagement with Stalinism. Foregrounding resistance in reading these texts appears to be a way of conferring value in the economy of knowledge which does not know how to value these experiences otherwise, and where the discussion of complicity faces the risk of falling into victim-blaming, but also risks to promote the false dichotomy between survivors and perpetrators, resistance and acquiescence.

One of the central lines of reading I propose is that the effect of the double (or triple, or more) meaning in *chinari*'s texts has more to do with the poetics of these texts themselves and with *chinari*'s vision of subjectivity, than with the political situation in which they were written. The tendency to read an Aesopian meaning is strong and well-rooted in studies of literature from the Soviet Union and especially from Stalin's years.[117] Instead of the immediately political interpretation (Aesopian language as a form of resistance against Stalinism), I would like to approach *chinari*, and particular Kharms, as writers adept at creating *the effect of depth*, which is visible when it comes to analyses of eroticism and misogyny. These texts, in their very construction, seem to invite a reading which would look for hidden political meanings, underlying philosophical dilemmas, and symbols pointing to mythology and religion, performing the situation of "a thing being not what it seems" on a textual level. Surface thus masquerades as depth, and excess masquerades as absence (of identity, "content"), in Foucault's words, "too much rather than not enough."[118]

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[116] For a similar approach, see Brookes "Enclosure, Writing, and Resistance," 57-58.
[117] See, e.g.,Tumanov, "Writing for a Dual Audience." This work follows a classic study: Loseff, *On The Beneficence Of Censorship*.
[118] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:64.

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In view of these characteristics, it may be more productive to follow Iampolski's intuition[119] in viewing the relationship between *chinari*'s writings and more mainstream Soviet discourses of the time as parodic and parasitic, one that involves both distance and sharing, rather than being purely critical and oppositional. Shubinskii describes the strategy shared by writers of the *chinari* circle in parodying "low-brow" literary genres and speech styles as "an anthropological experiment—to identify with the consciousness of a half-idiot, a child, an illiterate everyman,"[120] in an attempt to reach beyond the conventional patterns of rational thought,—a formulation which once again points toward the interest in the modes of consciousness that are irrational and therefore imagined to open a way to less-and-more-than-human modes of perception, the exploration-exploitation of which lied at the centre of the Russian avant-garde's primitivism. Similarly to primitivism, parody itself was taken to be one of the important means of defamiliarisation, so important in the Russian avant-garde project of remaking life as well as art.[121] Ioffe and Oushakine identify "the double structure—the dual origin, so to speak—of Soviet laughter," and stress the importance of distance, "a lack of total correspondence" between the source that is being parodied and the parodic "copy."[122] This movement between copy and original, one's own voice and that which is borrowed, self and other, connects parody to the problem of duplicity which was so prominent in the changing landscape of early Soviet Russia, and the uneasiness of identifying who the speaker is and where they are located vis-a-vis their source, "capturing and representing precisely an experience of constitutive confusion" that living in that landscape entailed.[123]

[119] Iampolski, 375.
[120] Shubinskii, 192.
[121] Ioffe and Oushakine, "Introduction: The Amusing Disturbance of Soviet Laughter," 4.
[122] Ioffe and Oushakine, 4.
[123] Ioffe and Oushakine, 5.

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8. The figure of the hidden other in early Soviet culture

In scholarship on Soviet culture and literature, this focus on identity and its discontents has been reflected in a number of different ways. Fitzpatrick's analysis connects it to the fascination with theatre, both in art and in politics, in the form of the show trials, and in the notion of becoming through conscious copying of the ideal, indistinguishable from more sinister cases of impersonation.[124] The roots of this concern with appearances and what lies beneath them certainly go deeper than the particularities of the Soviet 1920s and 1930s. One can see the same drive to take a thing apart and isolate the underlying structure in Russian Formalism and later Structuralism,[125] or in the popularity of the X-ray and its influence on early cinema.[126] In scholarship on OBERIU and *chinari*, this connection has been notably made in a small and very rich article by Boris Shifrin.[127]

Enforced transparency has been most notably thematised in fiction of the period: from Evgenii Zamiatin's famous 1921 dystopian novel *My* (*We*), where citizens of the One State live in buildings made of glass and are only allowed to lower their blinds when having carefully rationed sex, to Vladimir Nabokov's 1935–1936 *Priglashenie na kazn'* (*Invitation to a Beheading*), where the protagonist is condemned to die because of his lack of transparency to others. It may be this literary tradition that, in part, influenced the "totalitarian" approach to Soviet culture, which highlighted the imperative to transparency and "externalisation" of personhood in Soviet citizens, arguably having as its aim the elimination of interiority as a potential source of disruption.[128] Later works by the school of

[124] Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks*, 13–14.
[125] E.g., Igor Smirnov reads Formalism as defined by the same "sadistic" passion for violently disassembling its objects as Russian Futurism out of which it largely grew: Smirnov, *Psikhodiakhronologika*, 184. See also Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 83.
[126] Tsivian, "Media Fantasies and Penetrating Vision."
[127] Shifrin, "Maska i iestestvo."
[128] See, e.g., Esaulov, "Ovneshneniie cheloveka pri totalitarizme."

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Soviet subjectivity in Western historiography subverted this claim, pointing to the ways in which, in line with Foucauldian understanding of power, interiority as distinct from the subject's outward self-presentation was actively produced by early Soviet techniques of subjection, among which suspicion and persecution were notable but not the only tools.[129] The body itself—and not only the soul—or rather, the body's biological "vitality" and "elementality" functioned as one of the avatars of the other, bursting out in the cataclysmic force of the popular revolutionary revolt, and having to be controlled and reigned in as society was stabilising.[130]

Smirnov has pointed out a similar anxiety over undecidability and ambivalence in Socialist realism. In his insightful work on the dominant psychological patterns in the history of Russian literature, he places Kharms and other *chinari* writers, together with Socialist realism of the 1930s, under the rubric of masochism, characterised by a certain lack of self and the consequent suspicion towards those who display an overabundance of selves: those who may be not what they seem, or who strive to be two things at the same time. I would like to complicate this account by highlighting that in *chinari*'s writings, disgust toward this troubling overabundance of selves within a body, and the ultimate impossibility to determine its precise literal and figurative contents, is paralleled by an equal measure of fascination. As Kobrinskii shows in his monograph on the poetics of the group, this latter quality of hidden essence is well captured in the objects that keep reappearing in OBERIU and *chinari*'s texts: a cupboard/wardrobe (*shkap*) and a cardboard box (or a bandbox—*kardonka*), where "semantics of a *kardonka* may be reconstructed as 'an object of uncertain shape and unclear purpose.'"[131] This uncertain object serves for *chinari* as the model of the human body and subjectivity, working as a kind of Schrödinger box containing the radically uncertain and duplicitous individual identity—not only as a strategy of self-preservation in the landscape of

[129] Halfin, "Looking into the Oppositionists' Souls."
[130] Bulgakova, *Fabrika zhestov*, 115-120.
[131] Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*, 195.

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Stalin's Russia,[132] nor merely as a quality feared and punished, but as something produced and implicitly encouraged by the early Soviet culture and politics.

This structure is reflected in how *chinari* approach the body. In Kharms's texts, bodies are "stuffed with unexpected 'objects'"[133] and may suddenly fall apart, they incorporate objects within themselves, and generally enter what Branislav Jakovljevic defines as "symbiosis with an object," with inanimate or even dead matter.[134] This is an avant-garde revolt of things internalised within the human body itself. Just like the OBERIU Manifesto proclaimed, the falling apart of a treacherous façade and the revelation of what lies beneath become the central ways of how the body comes about in *chinari*'s writings. In "Sonet" (A Sonnet, 1935), a cashier lady takes a small hammer out of her mouth;[135] in "Kassirsha" (The Cash Registry Woman, 1936), a cashier lady's corpse is placed with a mushroom in her hand to pose as a living woman.[136] The body pretends to be whole, but a random object may appear out of it. The body may pretend to be alive and be in fact dead. Little balls, squares, mice, and sticks fall out of a seemingly ordinary body of an old man in "Smert' starichka" (The Death of a Little Old Man, 1935-36), and he dies as they pop out of him and reveal themselves.[137] The human body as it appears in Kharms's and Lipavsky's texts is in this way profoundly Gothic, always hiding within it a secret presence that has the power to unmake it. This façade of the body conceals the lack of unity and continuity, and ultimately, the lack of humanity (on the most literal level) at its core.

[132] Kobrinskii, 148.
[133] Iampolski, *Bespamiatstvo*, 42.
[134] Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 36.
[135] Kharms, *PS*, 2:331.
[136] Kharms, 2:107-110.
[137] Kharms, *Today*, 224.

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9. Chapter outline

This structure of the *shkap* (cupboard/wardrobe/closet) is going to be explored in detail in Chapter 1. Here, my goal is to show how *shkap* works as a constructive principle, and how the figure of the hidden other becomes a model for writing and for subjectivity, rather than something to be feared or avoided. By tracing down how it appears in Kharms's texts and theatricalised appearances as a trope (a hollow object which may or may not be concealing something or someone inside), I show how it becomes an optical device and a textual effect (that very tendency of the reader to read depth into texts). The *shkap* structure is central for *chinari* since this is how the hidden other appears. While it can be troubling, it is not merely something to be feared—on the contrary, it is closely connected to Kharms's thinking on the thing, in which he stresses the autonomy, agency, and ultimate unknowability of everyday objects, bringing his own twist to the avant-garde trope of the revolt of things. In important ways, Kharms uses this structure as a model both for his writing and for his public persona. He constructs his own texts as hollow *shkap*-like objects, or machines that work on the readers' consciousness in insidious ways, and builds and performs his own body like such an object, echoing Druskin's vision of the messengers as benign and hidden otherworldly presences. Druskin and Kharms's projects of embodying the messenger and the hidden other can be ultimately read as exploring a way to live with it, and as an alternative to expunging or neutralising it by incorporation.

While *shkap* and the hidden other can be used as productive models, they are nonetheless far from benign. Using Lipavsky's philosophical essays, Chapter 2 interrogates how horror and sexuality (and horror *at* sexuality) become the meeting points for the hidden non-human other both outside and inside the human body. Lipavsky defines horror as the situation where the hidden other reveals itself, and explicitly links this presence to erotic attraction: what we find erotic is that which reminds us of the non-human presence in the

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human body. This link to the erotic allows Lipavsky to argue for understanding love as the site where the hidden other of the gendered body can be encountered and horror can be reworked into hope for connection. This understanding is rooted in Lipavsky, Druskin, and Kharms's cosmological vision that foregrounds the necessity and inevitability of this hidden difference. For this reason, the conclusions at which they arrive are notably different from those of the official Soviet culture: the presence of the hidden other, the non-human in the individuality, is terrifying but inevitable and ultimately cannot be controlled.

It is in these moments of encounter with the hidden other that erotic imagery appears. Sexual difference and sexuality mark the moment of meeting with the other: desire, anxiety, and disgust in Kharms, horror at the erotic and flashes of androgyny in Lipavsky and Druskin. Anxiety, disgust, and horror contribute to these instances having a distinctly misogynous tone: strong in Kharms, more oblique in Lipavsky, but barely detectable in Druskin. It is important to note, however, that these are not the only functions that misogyny performs in these texts—it is not only a sign of fear of meeting the hidden other; it also works as a boundary-making and self-positioning tool in a situation of extreme uncertainty. The *shkap* structure should not be used to explain misogyny in the texts away, but rather to help understand some of the work that it does.

Chapter 3 explores how the anxiety and uncertainty of that hidden presence revealing itself in erotic encounters impress themselves on Kharms's diary notes, and how the characteristic strategies of opacity and visibility, legibility and illegibility of the "inside" organise and structure his writings. The chapter shows how the desire for order, clarity, and knowability of the "inside" informs a vision of the female body, characterised by the same preoccupation with visibility and predictability, so that its "leakiness" becomes a positively valued trait, rather than a repudiated one. Chapter 4 is focused on one of *chinari*'s preferred ways of dealing with this sense of disorder and confusion: attempting to redraw social

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boundaries, displace the other, and keep the troubling difference outside by creating elaborate, though ultimately self-defeating classifications. This boundary-making through disgust and the attempts to reinstate the stable social structure constitute a different response to the problem of flux and uncertainty, parallel to the attempts to theorise and embody the hidden other—to push uncertainty away instead of *becoming* uncertainty.

Chapter 5 shows the stakes of this becoming by focusing on Kharms's texts centred around food and eating, particularly eating women. In these texts, Kharms works through the possibility (the desire for and the fear) of incorporating the other into one's body. They are marked by two opposed drives. On the one hand, it is the desire for consuming women or their mucus as food; on the other hand, food itself functions as a source of danger and a frequent cause of death for his characters. This ambivalence is underscored by the recurrent images of vomiting and defecation, among other violent transformations that bodies undergo in these texts, which can be read as an attempt at expunging the hidden other from the body. The accumulation of the episodes of violence in the texts, similar to the famished body gorging on food, is accompanied by the textual bodies falling apart and turning themselves inside out, which contribute to the characteristic Kharmsian stuttering of the narrative. These three Chapters, 3, 4, and 5 all showcase different textual responses to the mundane everyday violence of the first Soviet decades (rather than the targeted political violence of the state): from techniques of evasion explored in Chapter 3, to forms of textual violence felt as "retaliation" and aimed at containing the threat of violence. In both of these cases, the "retaliation" relies on a mis-recognition and displacement of the source of that threat to women, in particular lower-class, old, and Jewish ones.

While these attempts to incorporate the other prove incomplete, Chapter 6 turns to the model of resolution that Lipavsky and Druskin propose and test in their texts: that of being incorporated into matter. Lipavsky's theory of horror is counterbalanced by his argument,

recurring across several fragmentary essays, that dissolution of individuality brings pleasure and happiness. He offers non-human and boundary-human models of this happiness marked a refusal of agency: a way of becoming an object or a process. In turn, Druskin's texts explore the weird eroticism of a failing body, similar to that of Kharms's characters with various objects falling out of them, and argue for the kind of stability to be found in radical uncertainty. Here, the *shkap* structure posited by Lipavsky's work on horror and employed in Kharms's texts and personal performances finally loses its threat, but retains its protective capacities, and suspicion towards gendered embodiment turns to acceptance.

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Chapter 1. The Epistemology of *Shkap*: Wardrobe/Cupboard/Closet and the Hidden Other

Vladimir Dal's Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language defines the word *shkap* as "a kind of standing box, with locks, with shelves or hangers, etc. A wardrobe, for clothing; a cupboard [...]."[138] As "a kind of standing box," *shkap* includes the meanings of wardrobe, cupboard, and closet, but retains the meaning of a bound object rather than a space or a set of costumes and disguises one can wear. The focus of this chapter will be on the multiple ways in which *shkap* appears as a persistent structure in Kharms's and Druskin's texts, and how this structure facilitates the containment and revelation of the hidden other lying under the surface of the human body. I will start by tracing the brief genealogy of *shkap* as an erotic object (recognisable as a usual hiding place for caught or nearly caught lovers in popular jokes) in the context of the Soviet 1920s and 1930s, showing how the early Soviet *shkap* was located at the intersection of projects aimed at remaking everyday life, romance, and family, on the one hand, and anxieties about secrecy, identity, and duplicity, on the other. Following Sedgwick's work on the queer closet,[139] I read *shkap* as being connected to a cluster of important discursive nodes of the early Soviet period: the questions of secrecy and openness, permeability and opacity, connection and detachment, vulnerability and self-protection. In Kharms's texts, *shkap* reappears consistently in connection to these concerns. It functions as an example of a liberated object existing in its own right, outside of the constraints of human utility, but in later texts comes to take on the meanings of entrapment, loss of connection with others, and powerless voyeurism.

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[138] Dal', "Shkap."
[139] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*.

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My goal in the first part of the chapter will be to trace its genealogy through some of the *shkap*'s notable appearances in the early Soviet literature, theatre, film, and avant-garde thought, to show how the structure of the *shkap* was connected to the trope of the hidden other in Stalinist culture. The paradoxical figure of the *shkap* on stage, as it appears in these instances, is particularly productive for understanding the politics of visibility/invisibility and transparency/opacity in Kharms's poetry and prose, where *shkap* frequently appears as an object hiding something inside. The fears of and fascination with the hidden other also strongly mark the language in which Kharms and Vvedensky themselves, as well as the OGPU[140] investigators in charge of their case in the early 1930s, conceptualise their poetic work: as a form of imperceptible and insidious corrupting influence on the unsuspecting readers. The final section of the chapter will focus on how the figure of the hidden other is embodied by particular characters in Yakov Druskin's writing—the invisible non-human messengers who exist outside of time, or the visiting demons pretending to be his late friends in his dreams from the second half of the century—as well as by Kharms himself, who, using his Sherlock Holmes-inspired costume in 1930s Leningrad, blurs the lines between the detective and the detected, and turns *the hidden other* into a costume. Just as fear of and fascination with the hidden other are consistently present on the formal as well as thematic level in *chinari*'s writings, they consistently invoke a troubling non-human presence, engaging with the avant-garde project of liberating "the elemental" within the human subject as well as of renegotiating the relationship with human-made objects.

1. Towards the genealogy of the Soviet *shkap*

To address the place occupied by wardrobes and cupboards in the early Soviet imagination, I would like to start with one curious scene from the film *Strogii Iunosha* (A Strict Young Man, 1935), directed by Abram Room with a screenplay by Yurii Olesha, and

[140] OGPU, the Joint State Political Directorate, was the secret police in the years 1923–1934.

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banned during the anti-Formalist campaign of 1936. At the centre of the film is a love triangle between an idealised Komsomol young man Grisha Fokin, who is trying to come up with a moral code for a new Communist person (a list of traits which famously included sentimentality), beautiful young woman Masha, and her older husband, a renowned surgeon of bourgeois origins. In a scene toward the end of the film, the husband, Professor Stepanov, who is well aware of Grisha's feelings, comes to Grisha's apartment to invite him over to a party at Stepanov's home. Grisha hides in a wardrobe to avoid the meeting, and Stepanov is greeted by Grisha's friends Diskobol and Liza, a strong proponent of spontaneity and immediacy in following one's impulses. The following dialogue ensues:

> Stepanov: It's okay. It's okay. He loves Masha? I know. You told me yourself. You remember? You were naked.
> Liza: He won't come anyway. You offended him.
> Stepanov: Tell him that Masha too is asking him to come.
> Liza: Masha too? (Turns to look at the closet.) Such a shame he isn't here.
> Stepanov turns to leave.
> Liza: Ah, whatever! You want to open the closet—open it! (Opens the closet door. Grisha is standing inside.)
> Grisha: I won't come. A Komsomol member must be proud.
> Stepanov: A man stands in the closet and speaks of pride. A Komsomol member must have a sense of humour!
> Grisha: Tell Masha I won't come.[141]

The scene with the closet, with its mentions of love that is secret yet known to everyone, the apparent absurdity of hiding inside one's own home, the reference to statuesque male nudity (of the sportsman Diskobol), and the revelatory gesture of throwing the closet door wide open parallel to an admission of one's true romantic feelings, speak directly to Sedgwick's work on the epistemology of the closet. She reads it as a structure central for understanding 20th-century Western thinking around the "wider mappings of secrecy and disclosure, and of the private and the public,"[142] intimately connected to questions of gender and sexuality, and most notably and crucially to the way homosexuality has been conceptualised and lived.[143]

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[141] Room, *Strogii Iunosha*, https://youtu.be/-xNsLIDIgJc?t=4925, 1:22:05-1:23:07.
[142] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 71.
[143] Sedgwick, 68-72.

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While homoeroticism is clearly present in the film, the forbidden love in this case is heterosexual, and its status as licit or illicit, respectfully platonic or erotic, appropriate or shameful for a Komsomol member, remains uncertain.[144]

The avant-garde artist and architect Vladimir Tatlin addressed these worries about closed spaces and uncollectivised feelings several years earlier. In his short article "The Problem of the Relationship Between Man and Thing. Let Us Declare War on Chests of Drawers and Cupboards," published in 1930, Tatlin stressed the importance of utility and functionality in furniture design, combined with attention to specific characteristics of materials and to the human "organic form" that would come to the fore in how the object was to be used.[145] Following organic form would mean a return to "healthy and natural principles" in design, and therefore moving away from the bourgeois "thing of the West."[146] In particular, as the title hints, Tatlin argued against things that are used for storage: "All our life, and industry too, are burdened by things and mostly by those which store other things."[147] Julia Vaingurt suggests that the problem with cupboards for Tatlin lay in the fact that they "isolated" the things stored inside, whereas all objects in a home needed to interact with the living space and with each other, engaging in a kind of dialogue.[148]

In line with fears of separation from the collective that such an isolation could bring, a closet serves an important function in the plot of Evgeny Zamiatin's 1920 dystopian novel *My* (We), where it is connected to sexuality that posed a threat to the state. In *We*, the

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[144] Belodubrovskaya, "Abram Room, A Strict Young Man." The film's queerness was not lost on its contemporaries. Playwright Aleksandr Gladkov recorded in his diary Vsevolod Meierhold's succinct phrase "From the life of pederasts [Iz zhizni pederastov]," as his unfavourable verdict on the film. Gladkov, "Iz Dnevnikov. 1936." I am grateful to Evgenii Bershtein for pointing me to this diary note.

Furniture has famously been at the centre of the Soviet projects of remaking the everyday life to facilitate the emergence of new, liberated and equal gender and family relations. Olga Matich traces down the designs for single and especially makeshift beds that could be easily stored away and concealed (as conventional married life was seen as bourgeois and reactionary). One of the ways of concealing the bed in the anti-procreative utopian landscape of constructivist apartments was to make it convertible and thus able to double as "a cupboard, armchair, or table." Matich, "Remaking the Bed," 65, 70, 72.

[145] Tatlin, "Problema Sootnosheniia Cheloveka i Veshchi," 3:882.

[146] Tatlin, 3:883.

[147] Tatlin, 3:883.

[148] Vaingurt, "Vladimir Tatlin," 3:871.

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collectivised life of the United State flows in standardised and transparent glass buildings, and only carefully rationed "sex days" give the "right to curtains." However, as the protagonist, D-503, develops a relationship with a mysterious *femme fatale* I-330, she takes him to the Ancient House, furnished with the non-transparent furniture of bygone days which the readers recognise as their own. The closet in one of the "ancient" apartments features prominently: I-330, seducing D-503, changes there into an old-fashioned yellow dress; then mysteriously disappears in it; in D-503's feverish dream, he makes love to I-330 inside the closet, this time transported to his own room:

> Yet I got up and opened the closet door; suddenly, there behind that door, making her way through the mass of garments that hung there, was I-330! I have become so accustomed of late to most improbable things that as far as I remember I was not even surprised; I did not even ask a question. I jumped into the closet, slammed the mirror door behind me, and breathlessly, brusquely, blindly, avidly I clung to her.[149]

Eventually, it is revealed that the closet in the Ancient House serves as an elevator that takes those who know how to use it underground and beyond the Green Wall, which separates the meticulously controlled space of the City from the outside: the space of nature and freedom populated by "wild people," whom the United State failed to force into the City at the end of the Two Hundred Year's war between the city and the countryside. I-330 turns out to be a leading figure in organised resistance against the United State, which involves its disconcerted citizens as well as people from outside the wall. (As such, her seduction of D-503 itself turns out to be part of an effort to gain control of the large spacecraft that D-503 is building.)

In *We*, a strong link is established between love and desire, individuality, interiority, and imagination, which all lead to the separation from the collective. Personal feelings are imagined to create a closed-off space impenetrable for the outside gaze. (It is notable that D-

[149] Zamiatin, *We*, 95-96.

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503 refers to I-330's impenetrable face as being hidden behind the curtains;[150] the readers are also reminded multiple times of the mirror door of the closet, which, unlike regular glass, returns the gaze instead of letting it come through.) Love and desire almost literally lead the protagonist to the outside, the space beyond civilisation, marked as both wild and prehistoric, populated with people imagined to occupy the liminal position between human and animal. The closet in the Ancient House, far from a simple plot point, becomes an emblem for this situation of desire-saturated opacity, which speaks to Tatlin's indictment of separation of things from other things voiced ten years later, in "The Problem of the Relationship Between Man and Thing" cited above. Importantly, the closet is located at the centre of the general theme of things, people, and feelings turning out to be not what they seem, the gradual revelation of which pushes the plot along.

Almost exactly halfway between *We* (1920) and *The Strict Young Man* (1936), there were two consecutive appearances of the *shkap* on stage at the Leningrad House of the Press: in Igor Terent'ev production of Gogol's *Revizor* (Government Inspector) in 1927, and in OBERIU's large and most famous performance *Tri Levykh Chasa* (The Three Left Hours) in 1928. Terent'ev's *Government Inspector* stunned the audiences with elaborate costumes designed by artists of Pavel Filonov's school and by five large three-walled wardrobe-*shkaps* on wheels, plus one long stationary one, out of which the characters appeared and into which they exited; within the play, these wardrobes were sometimes used as toilets and sometimes hosted erotic encounters between the characters.[151] Gogol's *Government Inspector* hinges on its main character Khlestakov being not what the other characters think him to be; but in Terentiev's version, the play ended on Khlestakov returning now as the real government inspector: the appearance and function (if not essence) finally coinciding. One of these wardrobes on wheels was later used during the biggest and most famous poetry recital that

[150] Zamiatin, 26.
[151] Zakharova, "'Revizor' Igoria Terent'eva."

OBERIU organised in the Leningrad House of Press on January 24th in 1928.[152] Here, Kharms appeared on stage atop a black wardrobe (just like Khlestakov in Terent'ev's production), which was moved by two men hiding inside of it.[153]

> In the first literary hour Kharms rode out on a black varnished wardrobe, which was moved by my brother and his friend, located inside of it. Daniil stood on the very top slightly powdered, pale-faced, in a long dress jacket adorned by a red triangle, in his favourite little golden hat with pendants, stood there like a fantastic statue or a minstrel from unknown times. He loudly, in a slightly singsong voice read his "phonetic" poems. [...][154]

OBERIU famously proclaimed "Art is a shkap" (*Iskusstvo eto shkap*), a slogan which they may have borrowed from artist and composer Mikhail Matiushin, and through him, from his late wife Elena Guro, one of the Futurist poets active in the early 1910s,[155] but which at the time was understood to be purely nonsensical.

The theme of mistrust of appearances figured prominently in the OBERIU Manifesto of 1928, commonly known also as Declaration, written mostly by Zabolotsky but vetted by other members of the group:

> The concrete object, once its literary and everyday skin is peeled away, becomes a property of art. In poetry the collisions of verbal meanings express that object with the exactness of mechanical technology. Are you beginning to complain that it is not the same object you see in life? Come closer and touch it with your fingers. Look at the object with naked eyes, and you will see it cleansed for the first time from of decrepit literary gilding.[156]

Here, the focus is on the common avant-garde and Formalist call for renewed perception, understood to be bringing about a kind of material resurrection of the things themselves.[157] Unsurprisingly, the OBERIU Manifesto, whether intentionally or not, almost

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[152] Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 207.
[153] For a detailed discussion of Terent'ev's theatre and its influence on OBERIU, see Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*, 198-207.
[154] Bakhterev, "Kogda My Byli Molodymi," 89-90.
[155] See Sazhin's commentary in Kharms, *PS*, 1:355; Meilakh, "Oberiutiana," 400. "We started, following Guro's happy phrase, to look for the 'shkap' of a person, that is, rejected the old understanding of the real, reducing it to simplicity in form as well as in colour," Matiushin writes. Matiushin, "Russkie Kubofuturisty," 153.
[156] "The Oberiu Manifesto," 248.
[157] See, e.g., Shklovskii, "Voskreshenie slova." On this context in Manifesto, and in particular on the claim to enhanced masculinity of the renewed form, see Iampolski, *Bespamiatstvo*, 17; Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*,

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directly quotes Tatlin's article "The work ahead of us" from 1921: "Having expressed our mistrust of the eye, we put the eye under the control of the touch."[158] This text foregrounds the need to modify one's perception so that the hidden essence of things becomes visible:[159] "The world covered by the rubbish of the tongues of multitude of fools, bogged down in the mire of 'experiences' and 'emotions' is now being reborn in all the purity of concrete, bold forms [*konkretnykh muzhestvennykh form]*."[160] But the meaning uncovered is not entirely new. On the contrary, it is the truth about the object that has always been there, obscured by habitual patterns of looking and speaking. In contrast to the rhetoric of resuscitation and rescue of language and material reality, characteristic for the earlier avant-garde,[161] for the OBERIU writers, it seems, they had always been alive and independent, but it is now the task of the poet to penetrate below the surface and to reveal their aliveness and independence. Words and objects had never been deadened by unthinking use, but remained hidden, silently lying low just below the mire.

2. The OBERIU Thing: From Soaring to Containing

This avant-garde language of the independent object can be also found in a short treatise (*traktat*) "Predmety i figury, otkrytye Daniilom Ivanovichem Kharmsom" (Objects and figures discovered by Daniil Ivanovich Kharms), written half a year before the performance, in August 1927. Here, Kharms writes of the several "meanings" of every object (*predmet*): the four working meanings and the fifth real one. They are as follows:

> 1) descriptive (geometric), 2) goal-oriented (utilitarian), 3) the meaning of [its] emotional influence on the human, 4) the meaning of [its] aesthetic influence on the human. The fifth meaning is defined by

309; and Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*, 166; see also a detailed discussion in Sandomirskaia, *Blokada v Slove*, 341-351.

[158] Tatlin, "Nasha Predstoiashchaia Rabota," 3:878. On this avant-garde genealogy, see Widdis, *Socialist Senses*, 28-32, 129-31; and pp. 254-57, on how *The Strict Youth* responded to this tradition.

[159] Pratt, "The Profane," 176.

[160] "The Oberiu Manifesto," 247.

[161] See, e.g., an early manifesto by Aleksei Kruchenykh's in Lawton and Eagle, *Russian Futurism*, 67.

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> the very fact that the object exists. It lies beyond the object's relationship to the human and serves the object itself. The fifth meaning is the free will of the object.
> 3. The human, entering into interaction with an object, explores its four working meanings. With their help the object fits into the human's mind, where it lives. If a human came across a sum of objects with only three out of four working meanings, he [sic] would stop being human. Whereas the human who observes a sum of objects devoid of all four working meanings stops being an observer, having become an object, created by himself. He ascribes the fifth meaning of his existence to himself.
> 4. An object possesses its fifth, real meaning only outside of the human, that is, losing its father, home, and soil. Such an object soars. [...]
> 6. The fifth meaning of a shkap is a shkap.[162]

The "fifth, real meaning" of the object functions as its hidden essence, pure in its disconnect from how the object is approached and used by others. Yet this hidden truth of the object has the power to transform the person "coming across" it, turning them into a similarly independent, disconnected, soaring self-created object. What *shkap* conceals in this case is the possibility of radical transformation of a human into a thing, that, however, does not presuppose the loss of agency nor autonomy. The final two articles of the treatise establish a crucial connection between this vision of the object's independent existence and nonsense:

> 11. Any series of objects that interrupts the connection between their working meanings, preserves the connection of real meanings which are numbered as the fifth. Such is a non-human series, and it is the thought of the world of objects. [...]
> 12. Having transferred this series into a different system, we will get a verbal series, which will be humanly MEANINGLESS.[163]

The fifth meaning establishes the radical freedom of the object from the human.[164] At the same time, the crucial importance of different kinds of transrational or nonsensical language lies in the fact that it allows for expressing the non-human "thought of the world of objects" directly, and therefore may potentially help establish the communication between human-made objects and humans themselves on equal terms. Autonomy here does not presuppose the loss of contact: the liberation of a thing is a positive process that may be emulated by the human subject.

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[162] Kharms, *PS*, 2:305-306.
[163] Kharms, 2:307.
[164] See more in Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 55-56.

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The idea of an object freed from surface connections and restored to its original purity, and of a work of art as such an object, has been well established in earlier writings of the Russian avant-garde.[165] Moreover, an equivalence was established between the liberated thing and the liberated, transrational word, freed from its subordination to the everyday sense-making and the syntagmatic links of a sentence structure.[166] In this way, the emancipation of estranged perception was connected to doing away with the centrality of the psychologised perceiving subject.[167] The rest of this section will deal with the oscillation between these two guises of the avant-garde object in Kharms's writings: the self-contained, self-same thing and the concealing and treacherous *shkap*.

The central text for understanding Kharms's idea of an independent thing is his "A Treatise More or Less Following Emersen" (that is, Ralph Waldo Emerson—*Traktat bolee ili menee po konspektu Emersena*, 1939), where he argues that a perfect gift is the one which does not require any additional objects to complement it. An inkwell, he reasons, needs a table to stand on, just as a small round table requires a doily and a flower vase, and so on. In contrast,

> Decorations of the naked body, such as rings, bracelets, necklaces, etc. are always perfect gifts (if, of course, the birthday boy is not a cripple), or such presents as a stick, for instance, to the end of which has been attached a wooden ball and to the other end a wooden cube. Such a stick can be held in the hand, or, if one puts it down, then it doesn't matter at all where. Such a stick is no use for anything else.[168]

The next section of this short treatise is titled "The Correct Way of Surrounding Oneself With Objects," which, Kharms concludes, lies in getting rid of regular items of furniture, since they all require other things to go with them (a bed presupposes sheets, a table needs chairs), and the absence or loss of one element in the system is necessarily acutely felt. The correct thing to do for his theoretical character, "a naked authorised apartment resident," would be instead

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[165] Günther, "Veshch'," 151.
[166] Günther, 152. See also Kukui, *Kontsept "veshch,'"* 176.
[167] Günther, "Veshch'," 157-158.
[168] Kharms, *Today I Wrote Nothing*, 253.

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"to put on rings and bracelets and to surround himself with spheres and celluloid lizards," in which case "the loss of one or twenty-seven objects wouldn't make any essential difference."[169] As destroying these useless objects would not provoke "even the slightest feeling of regret," such an act of destruction may have an educational value, helping one get rid of all "taste for acquisition."[170] The two final sections deal with ways of achieving immortality, and the treatise ends with a short maxim: "Righteous is he to whom God has given life as a perfect gift."[171]

This text, oscillating, as is often the case with Kharms, between the joking light-heartedness of the first parts, centred on the "naked authorised apartment resident," and the sudden gravity of the conclusion, suggests, therefore, that the life of the righteous, that is, life as a perfect gift, is an unusable, impractical, unconnected one. It is akin to some of Tatlin's useless or impossible objects.[172] As Jakovljevic puts it, by its resistance to utilitarian everyday use and to participation in syntagmatic chains with other objects, "the OBERIU object … brings into question the very idea of the object and, consequently, the subject."[173] As the conclusion of the "Treatise" makes clear, the unusable perfect gift is the model of the subject: unattached and therefore free. Importantly, this lack of attachments still remains markedly positive.

Among Kharms's writings, the text that deals with the question of the boundary between the human subject and objects is a prose piece "Sablia" (Sabre, 1929), where he describes a joyous liberation of objects and words:

> Independently existing objects are no longer bound by the laws of logical series and leap in space where they want, just like us. Following the objects, the words of the noun kind leap too. Nouns give birth to verbs and gift the verbs free choice.[174]

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[169] Kharms, 254.
[170] Kharms, 254.
[171] Kharms, 255.
[172] Kukui, *Kontsept "veshch',"* 122. On Tatlin's highly impractical objects, see Vaingurt, "Vladimir Tatlin," 859.
[173] Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 41.
[174] Kharms, 2:299.

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In the following, verse section of the text Kharms compares the freedom of verses to the (temporary) unfreedom of the humans and the lack of clear boundaries that characterises them. The rest of the text stages an effort to gain the sense of these boundaries, and ends with a series of physical attacks on the world of objects, by which any of them can be gradually reduced to dust, which "is already unafraid of our blows."[175] It is, however, this seemingly obvious separation of the human body from the world of objects that is repeatedly problematised in Kharms's later texts. The attempt at delineating clear boundaries of the subject and the individual body, to achieve the liberation comparable to that of the new speech and the perfect gift, is destabilised by images of the treacherous, duplicitous, and easily disassemblable body, whose stability is undone by the revelation of foreign objects that have always been inside. The ideal body is to be modelled on a perfect gift, yet the body as it is appears to be more like a *shkap*: it is always potentially hiding something. It is this uncertainty that the violence of the sabre's blows is called to keep away.

Scholars have written on the importance of *shkap* to OBERIU's and Kharms' poetics, where its key characteristics are the "concreteness and at the same time the unpredictability of its contents"[176] (it is significant that a *shkap* is chosen as an example in the treatise on "Objects and figures," as it allows for conveying the idea of hiding one's true fifth meaning inside), and where there is a distinctly erotic tinge to *shkap*'s functions. Tokarev reads *shkap* primarily as a variation on a theme of the coffin (which he connects to the house, a chest, and a suitcase in which Kharms's narrator carries the dead body in *The Old Woman*)—all of which are to do therefore with the dream of resurrection and transfiguration, and, in his psychoanalytic reading of Kharms, to the fantasy of returning to the safety of the mother's body.[177] Zolotonosov also reads the wardrobe in one of Kharms's poems as standing for

[175] Kharms, 2:300.
[176] Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*, 283.
[177] Tokarev, *Kurs*, 231-232, 386-387.

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female genitalia.[178] *Shkap* appears in texts in various contexts and guises, especially in Kharms's earlier transrational poetry.[179] Through these contexts, one can trace down how the meanings and functions of *shkap* change from protective to limiting and almost carceral, transforming the sense of liberation into that of being trapped, but retaining its erotic overtones in the latter. At times a *shkap* or a closet becomes a place of hiding and a means of protection, with a strong undercurrent of fear, as in "Revenge" (*Mest'*, 1930), where Margarita asks Faust to hide her from the devil in a shkap,[180] and in a fragment "Who wants literacy" (*Gramotu kto khochet*, 1929):

> Who wants literacy?
> Who sees the truth?
> Who will open a hard wardrobe
> take out a cotton bathrobe
> surround himself with a flap
> with a long-heeled frock coat
> and will live in it all his life
> not taking it off even during the day
> he sits in a hard wardrobe
> tense with a round fear
> with a pistol at his side
> forgotten and dressed up [...][181]

In a similar drama of being forgotten inside, "Odnazhdy gospodin Kondrat'ev" (One day mister Kondrat'ev, 1933), the hero is trapped for four days in an "American wardrobe," and on the fifth day is shipped out inside the wardrobe, undiscovered, to America.[182] A trunk (*sunduk*) works as not only a substitute for a coffin but a figure of uncertainty and unknowability in an eponymous sketch from 1937, where a man hides there in an attempt to stage a battle between life and death as he slowly suffocates (at the end, neither he nor the reader are able to tell for sure whether he is alive or not).[183]

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[178] Zolotonosov, "Vina Ester," 167.
[179] See, e.g., Kharms, *PS*, 1:89; 1:100-101; 4:171
[180] Kharms, *PS*, 1:151.
[181] Kharms, 1:305-306.
[182] Kharms, 1:228-229.
[183] Kharms, 2:336; English translation in Kharms, *Today*, 55-56.

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Finally, *shkap* is connected to sight and functions as a kind of optical device, and this is where the eroticism of *shkap* is most pronounced. In an originally untitled short dramatic piece from approximately 1933–1934 ("Fakirov"), a story of meandering and circular desire, a *shkap* once again figures as the hiding and listening-in place for a student: by jumping out of it, he interrupts one Anton Antonovich, who is sexually harassing Verochka, an inhabitant of the same apartment. The student invites Verochka to enter the *shkap* with him to escape her terrible suitor. The reader learns that the student has been regularly hiding in the *shkap* to observe Verochka for the past four years, but that at the moment he is there because the *shkap*'s owner, a learned man Fakirov, likes to put him in there to listen while Fakirov speaks to himself. In "Mal'tonius Ol'bren" (1937), the character, after months of training, manages to rise three feet above the ground and sees the old picture hanging above the wardrobe.[184] In another draft from 1938, a box becomes a means for the narrator to spy on an unsuspecting couple.[185] Here, we once again return to the erotic undertones of the wardrobe, but this time the location of the eroticism and the gaze appears to be turned inside out: the love is happening on the outside, while the observer is located inside the box-*shkap*. *Shkap* thus appears as a rather paradoxical object, serving as an example of a soaring thing liberated from its service to the human world in an earlier text, and gradually coming to be associated with uncertainty, violence, and a claustrophobic feeling of being trapped inside, simultaneously cut off from human connections and unable to achieve the self-sufficient autonomy of a perfect gift, and observing and desiring others from the inside of that trap.

3. Verbal machines: *Shkap* in motion

"The force contained in words has to be released," Kharms wrote in 1931 in one of his notebooks,

[184] Kharms, *PS*, 2:411.
[185] Kharms, 4:206-207.

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> There are combinations of words when the effect of the force becomes more noticeable. It is wrong to think that this force will make objects move. I am sure the force of the words can do this too. But the most valuable effect of the force, is almost impossible to define. We get a rough idea of this force from the rhythms of metric poems. [...] For now, I know about four types of verbal machines: poems, prayers, songs, and incantations. These machines are built not by calculation or reasoning, but by another means, the name of which is the ALPHABET.[186]

This description expands on the formulaic statement from the letter to Klavdia Poliakova (1933) that a poem should be written in such a way that, if thrown at a window, it would break the glass. Poetry is called to have a direct, if hardly definable, effect on its readers (and especially listeners) through the effect of its rhythmic force.[187] A verbal machine is a carefully constructed object able to exert influence in hidden ways. Poetry, recapturing the image from *The Three Left Hours* performance, becomes here a kind of a moving *shkap*. As such, it is linked to the fears of surreptitious political influence, but also functions as yet another version of Kharms's perfect gift, an object (and a body) independent from connections and liberated from the web of utilitarian human meanings.

Kharms, arguably, aimed at constructing his own poems as such machines. His poetry for children presents particularly vivid examples of such a concentrated rhythmic force, while his prose offers interesting examples of meaningless, self-sufficient machines that seem to illustrate the concept.[188] In memoirs of various contemporaries, Kharms was often said to keep a mysterious useless machine in his room in a communal apartment.[189] In fact, Fakirov, the owner of the student-concealing *shkap* from the 1933–1934 dramatic piece mentioned above, has constructed a complex machine made of barley. The machine is kept, predictably, in a *shkap* in his home—presumably in the same one in which the student is hiding. A useless machine in a *shkap* speaks to the desire for separation and self-sufficiency, which comes through in "A Treatise More or Less Following Emersen." In this context, *shkap* appears as

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[186] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:174.
[187] For an analysis of Kharms's verbal machines, see also Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 61; Kvashin, "Stikhotvoreniie-Zagovor"; Loshchilov, "Printsip 'slovesnoi mashiny.'" On the interest in various mechanisms in the writings of other OBERIU poets, see Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*, 133-134.
[188] Kharms, *PS*, 3:148-150.
[189] Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*, 134; Gibian, "Introduction," 7-8.

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the figure of protection and containment, providing the very separation from others of which Tatlin had accused cupboards and chests of drawers. Yet it always has the sinister potential of hiding something or someone unwanted, which, like a verbal machine, may be able to insidiously exert subconscious influence on the unsuspecting outside world.

Less than a month after writing the original entry on verbal machines, in early December 1931, Kharms, along with a number of his fellow OBERIU poets, who were also working for the *Iozh* (Hedgehog) and *Chizh* (Siskin) magazines for children, was arrested on charges of counter-revolutionary activity. The use of *zaum'* (apparently meaningless transrational language) in their poetry plays a prominent role in the case file. *Zaum'* occupied a curious place in the imagination of the 1930s Soviet law enforcement. One approach took it to be a coded message to the enemies of the Soviet rule at home and abroad; the second, milder interpretation, treated it as more passively counterrevolutionary.[190] Aleksandr Vvedensky's self-incriminating statements in the case file highlight the prominence of ideologically foreign words of the pre-revolutionary Russian life (*general*, *colonel*, *prince*, *God*, *monastery*, *Cossacs*, *heaven*) in his seemingly trans-rational poems, while the catchwords of the Soviet reality (like *sotssorevnovanie*, Socialist competition) are entirely absent from them.[191] The counterrevolutionary force of these texts, Vvedensky's statement concludes, operates therefore on the level of indirect suggestion. One of the passages brings this idea of suggestion back to the verbal machines:

> Our poetic *zaum'*, i.e., a special form of poetic creation, accepted in our anti-Soviet group of children's writers, is counter-revolutionary since it wholly grows from the mystic idealist philosophy and was actively contrasted by us to the dominance of materialism in the USSR. However, keeping with the transrational form of poetic creation, we thought that while it contradicts the sense of the word and is unclear on the surface, but it exerts a strong power of influence on the reader, achieved by a certain combination of words, in a similar way to how the Orthodox church has the enormous power of

[190] Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 319. On the similar treatment of *zaum'* as a code in the case file of Igor Terent'ev, the director of the production of *The Government Inspector* mentioned in the previous chapter, see Meilakh, "Oberiutiana," 400-401. Meilakh argues that Terent'ev's case could be the source from which this approach to zaum travelled to the case of Leningrad children's writers which included Kharms and Vvedensky.
[191] Kavin, ed., "Sledstvennoe Delo No. 4246-31," 539-540.

> influence, having its prayers and canons written in Church Slavonic, completely unclear to the contemporary mass of worshipers.[192]

Prayers, which were listed as examples of verbal machines, reappear here as analogous to *zaum'* poetry in their effect: both have "a strong power of influence on the reader," and the "unclear" "surface" of the text facilitates this effect. The particular opacity that trans-rational language has, produced either by meaningless words or by the collision of their meanings, is an essential element of this power. *Zaum'* and verbal machines are thus understood to be effective tools of subconscious counterrevolutionary agitation, a form of almost-magic thought control.

Kharms and Vvedensky were charged with 1) being organisers of an anti-Soviet literary group, 2) using children's literature to propagate "politically hostile ideas," and 3) "cultivating and spreading a special form of '*zaum''* as a means to encrypt anti-Soviet agitation."[193] After half a year in prison, they were sentenced to a temporary exile from Leningrad in Kursk, which, luckily, lasted about half a year but was an incredibly difficult time for the hypochondriac Kharms emotionally.[194] Curiously, the line of reasoning that saw their poetry for children (as well as for adults) as a covert form of counter-revolutionary propaganda continued into the sympathetic scholarship on Kharms's poetry for children. An influential work by Lev Loseff, published in 1984, suggested that these poems spoke in a double-voice and offered different messages to the young listeners and to their parents and caregivers reading aloud, concluding that "The function of Aesopian literature with respect to the former [wa]s, of course, the gradual nurturing of a future Aesopian reader."[195] What appears striking is that Kharms's texts produce the effect of depth and the impression that something is being hidden from the naive and unsuspecting reader. In this way, both in

[192] Kavin, 538.
[193] Kavin, 570.
[194] Shubinsky, *Daniil Kharms*, 330-342.
[195] Loseff, *On The Beneficence Of Censorship*, 213.

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OGPU case files and the later interpretations, these texts themselves work as a paradoxical *shkap* on the stage: a device that conceals, hints at the concealment, and eventually reveals something potentially disruptive inside of it.

4. Embodying the hidden other: Sherlock Holmes and the messengers

"Conversations" between the circle of friends that came to be known as *chinari*—Kharms, Aleksandr Vvedensky, Yakov Druskin, Nikolay Zabolotsky, Nikolay Oleinikov, Tamara Meier-Lipavskaia, and the orientalist Dmitrii Mikhailov, who joined them occasionally, recorded by Lipavsky, cover a strikingly wide range of topics. One curious exchange concerned the benefits of fasting:

> N. M. [Nikolay Makarovich Oleinikov]: Fasting is overall beneficial: it burns those remnants of food that always stay in the guts, covering them with a thick layer on the inside, and rot. Fasting frees from them.
> D. Kh. [Daniil Kharms]: But before starting to fast it is absolutely necessary to administer an enema. Experienced people in prison also told me so. Otherwise fasting is dangerous and harmful.
> L. L. [Leonid Lipavsky]: So those phenomena which are usually observed in the famished are not necessary?
> N. M.: Yes, this is the intoxication by the poisons of the gut. People die of fever. Even before that they begin to stink.
> L. L. You gave yourself regular enemas at one point, D.Kh., did you not?
> D. Kh.: Yes, I tried to apply the teaching of the yogi.[196]

The conversation goes on for some time. Then, Lipavsky records, "D. Kh. portrayed [*predstavlial*] his imaginary brother Ivan Ivanovich,"[197] formerly employed as a university professor.[198]

The discussion of happiness opens another venue for mapping the parallels between *chinari*'s writings and the "mainstream" Soviet culture of their time, which are usually

[196] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 417.
[197] Lipavskii, 418.
[198] Sazhin, "Primechaniia," 774.

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presented in opposition to each other. Reading this relationship as a parodic rather than purely oppositional one, and thus involving a certain degree of commonality and shared meanings, one could think it as akin to that between Kharms and his imaginary brother Ivan Ivanovich, where the parody involves both distancing from and embodying the other. I will focus here on this search for happiness, Kharms's practices of the body discussed in his notebooks, and his costume, with a view to how they help build a protective grid around the body which is at that same time thinned down by hunger and experienced as falling apart and failing; and on how Druskin's notion of the messengers appears to respond to this search by constructing a version of a benign hidden other existing beyond the contrasting demands of nudity (transparency) and costume (opacity).

Despite their marginalisation and the recent arrests and exile of Kharms and Vvedensky in 1930–31, and while briefly acknowledging the unpleasant and stifling reality around them, in their conversations *chinari* return again and again to the ways one can achieve happiness and live a good life. Lipavsky calls it "a science of joy" (*nauka radosti*) and argues that joy can become "a usual state" if one applies the correct techniques:

> Joy is under our hands, but in order to touch it [*oshchupat'*] one needs to shed the habits which preclude it, to go through a certain asceticism. The modern saint, he will shake off all troubles, like dust off his clothes, he will be always joyful, although not cheerful. And even pain is not an obstacle here. … Joy and woe are not opposites and indifference is not the middle between them, like there is no middle between the whole and the cracked. Joy is normal.[199]

Lipavsky does not list many more specific practices to achieve joy and live a good life, but Kharms does. His notebooks contain a range of advice he habitually gives himself and resolutions to do or not do something. They include a list of physical exercises, among them "arm-twisting according to jujutsu," "cultivation of will," and "head massage."[200] He also writes about creating and maintaining a pose: "Once I had a pose of an Indian [a Native

[199] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 315.
[200] Kharms, *ZK*, 1:90.

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American], then of Sherlock Holmes, then of a yogi, and now of an irritable neurasthenic. I would like not to keep the last one. I should think up a new pose."[201]

Meanwhile, the body that appears in Kharms's personal diary notes is similarly far from an imposing and carefully dressed Holmesian persona that he projects in public. It is a body plagued by hypochondria, with painstakingly documented symptoms and fears, by hunger, and by the horror of not being able to find money to feed himself and his wife toward the end of the 1930s. Unlike the purifying fasts and enemas, starvation produces the body which is diminishing and disappearing, like that of Kharms's characters, from "Makarov and Petersen" to the red-haired man from "The Blue Notebook no. 10" who did not have neither eyes nor ears.

It is around this failing body, then, that Kharms's famous costume of Sherlock Holmes is built.[202] It made him immediately recognisable on the streets of his native Leningrad, looking like an Englishman in his tweed suit, a cap, short pants with high woollen socks or gaiters, and smoking a pipe.[203] It worked as a mask, introducing the other into the presentation of the self and at the same time providing protection for the wearer.[204] The irony of this costume, however, is that it was worn in the social and political context where writing transrational poetry aroused suspicions of transmitting coded anti-Soviet messages, and accusations of espionage for foreign powers were quite common. Kharms walked around effectively in a costume of a suspicious, albeit obvious, foreigner. In this way, the Sherlock Holmes outfit allowed for making the feeling of non-belonging material, outwardly visible and legible. He continued to wear it into the late 1930s and the early 1940s[205]—Kharms's widow Marina Malich-Durnovo recounts that he would occasionally be brought into the

[201] Kharms, 2:128.
[202] See an extensive discussion in Sauerwald, "Daniil Kharms and Sherlock Holmes"; Bobilevich, "Plasticheskaia representatsiia imidzha," 259-260.
[203] Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 216.
[204] Bobilevich, 261, 271.
[205] Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 456.

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police station by "watchful boys [who] would take him for a spy."[206] The costume of a spy thus ironically becomes indistinguishable from the costume of a detective, the one who penetrates the dark with his gaze and reveals the hidden.[207] Kharms turns "the detective" himself into a spectacle and confuses the roles, impersonating both the one who is doing the detecting and the one who is being found out. This personal performance can be seen as the instance of embodying the figure of the hidden other in the collective body, thus transposing the Shrödingerian structure of the *shkap* onto the body of the author: like a *shkap* wheeled onto a stage, it presents itself as potentially hiding something and wears the *internal* otherness (of a foreigner, a socially alien element, a spy) as a costume.

In his essay on parody, Yuri Tynianov defines it as the transposition of an element of one system into another, and points out parody's capacity for "deceitfulness" (*obmanchivost'*) and producing "misrecognition" (*neuznanie*), due to its reliance on citation.[208] Kharms's Holmes may be read as an example of such a parody operating between multiple systems of meaning, playing on the very notions of deceit and detection, masking both as acting and as hiding. Kharms's bodily practices can be approached as a node connecting the building and purification of an individual body to the building and purification of the collective body of the Soviet people, and *chinari*'s asceticism and theatricality—to the affective regime of joy and suspicion in Stalinist culture. Without reading one as a simple symptom of another, the focus on embodiment and affect allows in this way to establish a connection between the two that is more than mere rejection, opposition, or criticism.

In 1932-1933, Druskin wrote "Razgovory vestnikov" (Conversations of Messengers), a long treatise that offered a parallel take on how the figure of the hidden other could be personified. He never defined who the messengers were (even though the parallel with angels—the name that literally means messengers—is quite prominent), but described how

[206] Glotser, *Marina Durnovo*, 99.
[207] Giblett, *Environmental Humanities and the Uncanny*, 7.
[208] Tynianov, "O Parodii," 288-289.

they lived. Messengers live "in motionlessness," in a state where events may begin but never happen.

> Messengers do not know how to connect one to the other. But they observe the original conjunction of the existing with the non-existing.
> Messengers know orders of other worlds and different ways of existing.
> [...]
> Messengers live like trees. They have no laws and no order. They have understood chance [*sluchainost'*]. Another advantage of trees and messengers is that nothing for them repeats itself and there are no [time] periods.[209]

Messengers cannot move, and this allows them to exist in this timeless, changeless state. It is also this escape from the world of change that endows them with the ability to know more than ordinary humans can:

> Messengers know the reverse direction. They know that which is located behind things.
> Messengers observe how buds open on the trees. They know the locations of trees in the forest. They have counted the number of turns.
> Messengers know the language of stones. They have reached the balance with the little error. They talk about this and that.[210]

In "O schastlivoi zhizni" (On happy life, 1933–1934), Druskin returns to the comparison between messengers and trees: "Attached to their place, they live calmly and know everything. They need no signification, and they have reached the balance with the small error. They speak slowly, pronouncing the words with great difficulty, do not remember what was said, and seemingly know no one. They are happy."[211]

Messengers re-appear in three texts addressed to Kharms. One of them, "O golom cheloveke" (On the naked person, 1936), introduces the titular character as someone who does not have any desires. In this, the naked person is a direct precursor of the naked authorised apartment resident from Kharms's "A Treatise More or Less Following Emersen." Messengers, Druskin writes, do not have neither desires, nor the freedom of will; the naked

[209] Druskin, "Razvogory vestnikov," 547-548. Messengers were first introduced as characters by Lipavsky (Sazhin in Kharms, *PS*, 4:106), but it was Druskin who developed them the most.
[210] Druskin, "Razgovory vestnikov," 548.
[211] Druskin, 694-695.

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person is a step towards being like messengers.[212] In 1937, Druskin and Kharms exchanged two texts addressed to each other: Druskin wrote "Kak menia pokinuli vestniki" (How messengers abandoned me, undated), and Kharms responded with "Kak menia posetili vestniki" (How messengers visited me, August 22, 1937). While the first text describes the feeling of their absence (characterised also by the lack of inspiration), the second endeavours to document the feeling of their presence in Kharms's playful yet straight-faced manner: they are invisible yet can be confused with water.[213]

Messengers figure in these characteristically circular and dense texts as an invisible presence, a different version of the hidden other—someone who is not hidden underneath appearances or inside the body, but *beside* reality as one experiences it. Like the naked authorised apartment resident, they are in no need of possessions nor connections and have no desires; unlike the costumed Holmesian flaneur, they do not need to worry about evading accidental detection. As an important non-human presence, messengers become a figure of knowledge and happiness, safe in their tree-like stillness. It should come as no surprise that in 1933, having read Druskin's "Messengers and Their Conversations," Kharms wrote in one of his notebooks: "I am a messenger."[214] Messengers both evade and do not evade the charge of duplicity: they do not pretend to be anything other than themselves, yet as they are not visible by the naked human eye, they embody the very principle that reality hides undetectable presences within it. One could argue that messengers are what the body of a joyous "modern saint" purified by fasting and enemas should approach: disembodied to such an extent that it no longer has to hide.

Messengers are possibly the most benign among *chinari*'s gallery of Gothic characters: from Lipavsky's werewolf to Kharms's undead old woman and frequently disappearing or dissolving characters of his prose. The most piercing version of this situation

[212] Druskin, 598.
[213] Kharms, *PS*, 4:24-25.
[214] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:58.

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of coming face to face with a Gothic apparition and having to determine its true identity offers itself in Druskin's dreams, which he recorded in the second half of the century.[215] The repeated plot of these dreams is the return of his long dead friends: Kharms, Vvedensky, and Lipavsky:

> The door opens, V[vedensky]. is at the door, with a paper in his hands. I realise: it is a release certificate [*otpusknoe svidetel'stvo*]. Finally it isn't a dream, I think,—but then, maybe, it is a dream. V. says he will not enter so as not to ruin me, and asks to call for T[amara Lipavskaia, Vvedensky's ex-wife and Lipavsky's widow]. I call her and quietly warn her that this may be a dream, so that later, if it really turns out to be a dream, she wouldn't be too upset. We go all three into the room. On the way I think: should I ask T. to try to remember this dream, tomorrow I will ask her, but instantly I realise: if it is a dream, then only I see it. We sit at the table, I want to ask V. about his poems, but hesitate if I should. V. begins to list the poems he wrote himself, but I see that he doesn't even know the titles of the things V. wrote. I get bored. He was not V., but a demon, I think, waking up.[216]

Having been taught by the fickleness of his previous dreams, Druskin focuses on trying to determine the true nature of events he experiences and the true identity of his visitor. The hidden other appears to be literal: one cannot trust one's own friends returning from their long absence, since one does not know whether they are alive or impersonated by a demon. And while in other similar Druskin's dreams it is the natural end of the dream that reveals its illusory nature, here, the illusion itself becomes part of the plot, whereas poetry serves as the true measure of a person's identity. The plot that these dreams follow is reminiscent of a classical trope of Western European as well as Russian Romantic literature: the visit from a long-dead lover who turns out to be a devil.[217] The implicit eroticism of the hidden other and subjectivity-as-*shkap* reappears here as part of an intertextual inheritance, a vague, barely noticeable trope memory. In this case, once again, even grief takes on the form of interrogating the other's identity, in line with the vision of the human subject and even reality at large as that which always includes a remainder of unassimilable difference.

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[215] See an interesting analysis of these dreams as a primary source for a historical study: Paperno, "A Philosopher's Dreams."
[216] Druskin, "Sny," 633.
[217] In 1920s literature, it most prominently featured in Mikhail Kuzmin's ballad of Anna Ray from his 1928 poem cycle *Forel' razbivaet led* (The Trout is Breaking Through the Ice)—a heterosexual mirror-subplot in a gay love story, and was used by Kharms in his 1928 play *Elizaveta Bam*. Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 199.

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5. Conclusion

Shkap, therefore, may be taken not simply as a recognisable "password"-hieroglyph in Kharms's texts,[218] but as a key to much of his poetics as well as to philosophy developed by Leonid Lipavsky and Yakov Druskin. Their *shkap* inherited much from its early Soviet predecessors and contemporaries in combining the qualities of being protective and concealing as well as scenic and performative.

The approach which foregrounds duplicity (or the impression of the hidden meaning hidden beneath the surface) as an important characteristic of Kharms's poetics may help qualify the famous and often cited phrase about a poem breaking the window. A slightly different version of this formula is given in "Conversations" recorded in early 1930s by Kharms's friend philosopher Leonid Lipavsky: "D. Kh. once used to say that art should act in such a way as to pass through walls."[219] *Shkap* as a model of poetic practice suggests an effort to make walls of perception permeable by gaze, rather than forcefully breaking them down. Importantly, coming out of one's *shkap* as well as breaking the window suggest the breaking of a barrier between one and the world, and in this way echo back to Tatlin's hatred of cupboards.

By expanding the relevant context to include different cultural artifacts from the 1920s and 1930s, one can understand "Art is a shkap" to be more than a nonsensical, provocative, and catchy slogan (which it undoubtedly was). *Shkap*, as a piece of furniture and a symbol, was located at the intersection of several large clusters of ideas and affective investments: the call for renewed perception and renewed relationship to one's material living environment, the desire for a new human-object relationship, the anxiety and fascination about hidden identities and duplicity, the anxiety about hidden others, and the feeling that love and desire may contribute to the opacity of an individual self. In Kharms and Druskin's

[218] Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*, 256-257.
[219] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 350.

writings and daily theatrics, *shkap* was taken as a model of a subject that allowed for embodying the hidden other in the collective body, responding with play and the search for alternative modes of happiness to their general situation of uncertainty and social alienation.

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Chapter 2. The Fear of a Shapeshifter: Leonid Lipavsky on horror and love of the elements

Leonid Lipavsky, one of the two philosophers in *chinari*'s group,[220] throughout the 1930s wrote a number of essays on the nature of existence, horror, and love. These texts could not be published and were written for reading and discussion in the circle of friends and family. "Issledovanie uzhasa" (Research on Horror) is an attempt to classify and systematise the instances when, in everyday life, one is overcome by it. "Traktat o vode" (Water Tractatus) is (most probably) an earlier or a parallel version of the "Research," written as a semi-fictional philosophical dialogue. "Ob''iasnenie vremeni" (Explanation of Time), "Vremia" (Time), "<O preobrazovaniiakh>" (On Transformations), "<Opredelennoe (kachestvo, kharakter izmeneniia, postoianstvo ili izmeniaemost'...>" (A Certain (Quality, character of change, constancy or variability)...), "Stroenie kachestv" (The Structure of Qualities), "Golovokruzhenie" (Vertigo), all written sometime in the 1930s, are essays on the relationship between difference as the precondition of existence, and the patterns of perception. "Teoriia slov" (Theory of Words, 1935) is a longer work where Lipavsky details his (linguistically very dubious) views on the origins of language and the rules of derivation. "Sny" (Dreams, 1932—one of the two texts with a definite date) is an exercise in self-analysis based on what Lipavsky must have known from Freud's works. "O telesnom sochetanii" (On Bodily Union), which has remained unfinished, is a classification of the

[220] Lipavsky was born in 1904 in Saint Petersburg in the family of a medical doctor, studied philosophy in the early 1920s, and in 1923 was forced to quit the university when he refused to renounce his teacher, philosopher Nikolai Lossky, who was exiled from the country. Lipavsky worked as a school teacher, as an editor in the state press house, Gosizdat, and published as a children's writer under a pen name Leonid Savel'iev. In 1941, he was killed on the front lines somewhere close to Leningrad. Sazhin, "Mysliashchii Trostnik," 438-439. For a detailed biography, see Valieva, "Leonid Lipavskii i Pervaia mirovaia voina."

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types of love, aiming to explain the contradictions of love and to systematise the innumerable awkward situations that are awaiting a lover. Finally, "Razgovory" (Conversations, 1933–1934) is a collection of Lipavsky's notes from *chinari*'s discussions, many of them touching on the same questions, and overall best characterised as debates on how one should study time interrupted by remarks on who was drinking vodka at that moment and how.

In Lipavsky's project, the figure of the *shkap*—an object of unknown, and possibly unknowable contents—is connected to the drama of the elemental lying underneath the appearances of individual bodies and objects and revealing itself unexpectedly. He captures this drama with his character of a shapeshifter, or werewolf (*oboroten'*). This character is curious in that it serves for Lipavsky as the model for all subjectivity. He argues that internal difference is a crucial precondition of life, and therefore every living being contains within itself what it is not. All of existence is thus plagued by duplicity. Both "Research on Horror" and "On Bodily Union" are texts about the experience of coming face to face with that duplicity: in horror and in love. As the intensity of the revelation in love is lower, it makes the encounter more pleasant, albeit still tinted by the tragedy of the individual's incompleteness. The erotic overtones of this drama of revelation are preserved in his reading as well: body parts that are seen as erotic, especially in women's bodies, are where one encounters "the elemental" most prominently. In this way, sexuality becomes a setting where the elemental comes to the surface and where otherness can be encountered. Reading these two texts alongside each other is important for understanding *chinari*'s ambivalence about sexuality and women, where their attitude, however misogynist, always goes beyond mere hatred, fear, and demonisation, and is always characterised by the hope for connection.

In this chapter, in order to explain the internal logic of Lipavsky's often convoluted arguments, I will focus on the close reading of the texts, only occasionally tying them back to their historical context. I will start in the first section by probing the apparent contradiction of

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Lipavsky's "Research on Horror," where horror appears to be rooted both in the lack of differentiation and the lack of identity, and in their overabundance. I will try to resolve this contradiction in the second section, by turning to Lipavsky's essays on time and space, and explaining how in his project, the world appears in the process of a gradual specialisation of amorphous matter. Difference, including internal difference, functions here as the precondition of existence, which means that every body and object contains within itself that which it is not—the remnants of the primal undifferentiated matter. These views were shared by Druskin and Kharms, as their writings on the necessity of the *little error* demonstrate. In the final section, I will read Lipavsky's essay on love, "On Bodily Union," in order to show how the structure of the universe he proposes bears on the possibility of personal connection, and how sexuality functions as the site where horror of the elements can be encountered and mitigated.

1. "Research on Horror": the petrified water and the shapeshifter

In "Research on Horror," Lipavsky starts with the premise that the capacity for arousing it is an objective quality which some things possess, and others do not, and sets for himself the task to define what specific characteristics contribute to this feeling.[221] First such characteristic is the lack of internal differentiation. Describing a walk on a quiet sunny afternoon, Lipavsky recounts a feeling of being caught in stagnant water, in a world where nothing moves, and nothing happens. The lack of difference means the lack of change, the impossibility of history and time. The horror here arises from the feeling of being trapped: "A fused world without gaps, without pores, there are no different qualities in it, nor, consequently, time, and individuality cannot exist there. Because if everything is the same,

[221] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie uzhasa," 27.

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immeasurable, then there are no differences, and nothing exists."[222] The still, "solid" water "closes above your head like stone."[223] The spell of silence breaks with an "explosion"—being called by one's name, a sign (a call) of difference.

One of the first examples of a horrifying object that Lipavsky gives is jelly, which, in "Water Tractatus," is listed alongside "a frog's belly" and "human buttocks,"[224] both similar to it in their lifelike quiver. Among other examples of frightening substances and environments, categorised according to their consistence, shape, and the way they move, Lipavsky lists "mud, swamp, fat—especially viscous fats, like fish or castor oil,—slime, saliva (spitting, spawling), blood, all products of secretion, including seminal fluid, and protoplasm in general."[225] Blood appears to be particularly horrifying:

> It leaves its home too easily, too readily, and becomes independent—a lukewarm puddle, about which it is unclear if it is alive or not. [...] Truly, there is something unnatural and disgusting in it, like a tickle not outside, but in the depths of the body, in its very insides. Slowly leaving its captivity, the blood begins its impersonal life, which is from the very beginning already alien to us, same as trees or grass—a red plant among green ones.
> This reveals that more than half of our body is a plant: all its entrails are plants.[226]

In the human body, not only bodily secretions are frightening, but "generally all the entrails… even the living meat, all juices of the body altogether."[227] Among the non-human creatures, "all elementary organisms are repugnant to the touch, especially the non-skeletal ones."[228] Organic life should, Lipavsky maintains, be characterised by "concentration and articulateness," yet these creatures seem blurred and fuzzy, "amorphous and at the same time elastic and viscous," "almost an inorganic life"[229]—in their resilient elasticity they escape any effort to categorise them as *either* alive *or* inorganic.

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[222] Lipavskii, 22.
[223] Lipavskii, 22.
[224] Lipavskii, "Traktat," 8-9; "Issledovanie uzhasa," 28.
[225] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 29.
[226] Lipavskii, 24.
[227] Lipavskii, 24.
[228] Lipavskii, 24.
[229] Lipavskii, 28.

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We are afraid, Lipavsky argues, of a "poured out, unconcentrated life,"[230] the life of emptiness"[231] lacking order and direction. The lack of direction manifests itself in different forms of symmetry: "a bubble, sprouts growing in all directions, a row (segments)."[232] Examples include blisters, spiders, octopi, frogs, caterpillars, crabs, and centipedes. All of the above have a corresponding "rocking movement of life" to them, which also appears in the form of spasms and cramps, pulsations and peristalsis, and "different kinds of crawling."[233] Some horrifying creatures that seem over-differentiated into too many parts still lack the organising principle and still produce a "spasmodic" kind of movement, like crabs or running mice. The common trait between under-differentiated creatures, like jellyfish, and over-differentiated ones, like spiders, is their apparent lack of clear structure, order, and centre.

This is the part of "Research" that has attracted most attention in scholarship, where Lipavsky's works have mostly been used to provide context for and help explain the texts of Daniil Kharms.[234] Focusing on the images of the stagnant water and the viscous amorphous mass, Jaccard reads Lipavsky's essay on horror as capturing the crisis of the Russian modernism and avant-garde, which sought to find a way to grasp and represent reality in its wholeness and fluidity, but instead encountered the terrifying oneness of death and the loss of all hope and meaning. Instead of appearing whole and fluid, reality has fallen apart into meaningless discrete objects, a "petrified," "solidified" existence where poetry turns into silence.[235] He reads Lipavsky's project as signifying a devaluation of liquidity and connects it to the crisis of the Russian modernist thought faced with acute disappointment in its dreams

[230] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 30.
[231] Lipavskii, "Traktat," 10.
[232] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 30.
[233] Lipavskii, 32.
[234] See Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*; Iampolski, *Bespamiatstvo*; Roberts, "Guilt Without Sex."
[235] Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*, 133-140.

perverted by the Stalinist reality.[236] The quest for universal knowledge ends in the abyss of nothing, where individuality cannot exist.[237]

Yet, after having described the horrors of undifferentiation, Lipavsky offers almost a diametrically opposite example of a horrifying encounter, and what seems almost like a different argument. Imagine, he writes: you are talking to a dear friend about things precious to both of you,

> and suddenly another, alien, apishly ferocious and cunning face of an idiot appears from beneath his features. We were mistaken: he is not who we took him to be. It is impossible to reason with this one because he does not even understand words, he is made completely not like us.[238]

The argument thus seems to be turned on its head: the problem is not that a horrifying thing is a diffuse mass not separated into orderly parts, but that it has certain unaccounted parts hiding beneath the surface, which suddenly reveal themselves. The face of an ape appears from beneath the intelligent face of a dear friend just like blood pours out of a body, revealing that the non-human has in fact always been there. "He is not that one [not the one we took him to be], but a shapeshifter," concludes Lipavsky, "And every fear is the fear of a shape-shifter."[239]

If the emphasis is shifted this way, the relevant historical context appears to be not the one of cultural and political unification, but the one pertaining to anxieties regarding "identity and imposture," to quote the title of Sheila Fitzpatrick's monograph. In Lipavsky, one can read an echo of these anxieties and hopes for certainty. However, unlike the official Soviet culture, Lipavsky argues for the fundamental unreliability of reality and irreducibility of the troubling multiplicity at the heart of an individual identity. The dissolution of individuality threatened by the world both liquid and petrified gives way to a fear of an invisible presence left unaccounted for, where Lipavsky's shapeshifter is only a concentrated version of what

[236] Jaccard, 136.
[237] Jaccard, 169-170.
[238] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 35.
[239] Lipavskii, 35.

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every body is.[240] In contrast to discourses that posited the necessity of controlling the elemental in the individual and bringing its unruly force to heel,[241] Lipavsky foregrounds the elemental as the keystone of both human embodiment and behaviour. In this way, social anxieties of uncertainty can be both expressed *and* sidelined by the focus on "the elements."

Disconcerting hidden and passive difference drives Lipavsky's writing on horror, including the fear of the returning dead: "In general, the fear of a dead man is a fear that maybe, he is still alive."[242] It is not a fear of death itself, he argues, but that of a hidden and threatening life: "He is alive not like us, with a dark life that is still brewing in his body, and also with another life—with decay. And we fear that these forces will raise him up, he will stand up and walk like a possessed man."[243] Lipavsky calls it "something like an unlawful or unnatural aliveness." The inability for the onlooker to differentiate between the two, for Lipavsky, defines life itself: "Life is always in its very essence viscosity and turbidity. A living matter is that about which it is impossible to say whether it is one creature or many."[244] What is frightening about the dead body is not that it is dead, but that it is still too alive for a piece of dead matter. A jellyfish looks like a clot of slime, and yet it is a living creature. A piece of jelly is inanimate, and yet it moves as if it were. We suspect that they are hiding something from us: they are not what they seem. They might all be shapeshifters.

Horror is related to the feeling of being lost in the face of cunning objects that cannot be trusted. The "shameless" nature of "southern countries," Lipavsky writes, can force a person "to cry in despair," so that colonial administrators "quickly lose their will to live."[245]

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[240] In texts of the period, the trope of the socially alien element as shapeshifter/werewolf appeared in quite literal guises as well. E.g., a textbook on uncovering foreign spies recounts a story of two hunters killing a bear in a forest, only to see a gun in the bear's paw and to realise that it was in fact a spy (saboteur, *diversant*) in a bear's hide. *O metodakh bor'by*, 23.

[241] See Naiman, 110; Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*, 22, 25; see also Toropova, "An Inexpiable Debt."

[242] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 31.

[243] Lipavskii, 31-32. The image of a decomposing corpse which is, however, somehow never dead enough, figures prominently in the Gothic discourse of NEP (Naiman, *Sex in Public*, 156-157).

[244] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 29.

[245] Lipavskii, 22-23.

In “Water Tractatus,” he calls the fear of stagnant water “the tropical feeling.”[246] This aggression of nature explains for him

> the hysteria characteristic of southern peoples: the bouts of dance and convulsive running, when a person runs without stopping with a knife in a hand,—as if he [sic] wanted to cut, to rip open the continuity of the world,—he runs, killing everything in his way, until he himself is killed or until bloody foam gushes out of his mouth.[247]

Lipavsky’s “southern peoples” share this proclivity with explorers spending winters on polar stations, as well as with “somnambulants, sleepwalkers, and idiots.”[248] As if possessed by an external force, they confound the boundary between the animate and the inanimate by not acting autonomously—and yet by not being under any apparent external influence. When a person acts as if they were controlled by an external force, we suspect, Lipavsky suggests, that we have come in contact with that disturbing “continuity of the world” which denies individuality and autonomy—we encounter someone trapped under the still water, someone inhabited by something else. In “Conversations,” Daniil Kharms adds to this list of horrifying encounters “poor peasants, Russian *banya*, bearded priests,” hysterical “fighting peasants,” and “markets that smell like a lavatory.”[249] Combined with Lipavsky’s examples, this list clearly locates the horror within the territory of classed and racialised periphery: the colonial, the provincial, and the pre-industrial. This focus on the periphery can help explain the apparently surprising equation of the imaginary “backwardness,” either colonial or cognitive, with the (no less imaginary) heroics of polar exploration, so characteristic for the Soviet 1930s—the ill-fated expedition of the steamship *Cheliuskin* and the much-publicised rescue of its crew happened in 1933–1934. The horror is provoked by the elemental, and the elemental seeps in at the boundaries of civilisation, however they are articulated at any given moment.

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[246] Lipavskii, “Traktat,” 6.
[247] Lipavskii, “Issledovanie,” 23.
[248] Lipavskii, 23, 32.
[249] Lipavskii, “Razgovory,” 342.

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However tempting it might be to read Lipavsky's fear of shapeshifters and possession as an allegory of spies or, on the contrary, secret police informers, as a direct critique of the instability of identity and the regime of routinised suspicion under Stalinism, this is the step that Lipavsky himself never takes. Instead, he displaces the horror of coming in contact with shapeshifters onto the colonial setting with the ennui of colonisers and the "hysteria" of the colonised, or onto the medicalised context of sleepwalking and cognitive disabilities, thus demarcating the area of the not-quite-human within the humanity itself. By assigning it to a dehumanised group, he is able to contain the horror, to quarantine it. This seems like a paradoxical effort given that in the same text he argues that ultimately, all living matter is internally split in two. How then would it be possible to say that certain groups of people are consistently more frightening than others, if all living matter is in fact duplicitous and thus imbued with horror? This characteristic incompleteness and indecision of his argument is central to Lipavsky's vision of subjectivity and the forces that undo it. His project seems to be constantly oscillating between externalising and internalising the split and the horror, with no resolution. His essay is itself organised as a "horrifying object" unsure of its own line of argument. Separated into multiple short sections, it runs in different directions simultaneously like a spider, ends abruptly, and never quite gives its reader the luxury of being sure if it is one argument or two. Yet, this impression of internal contradiction (rather than a fundamental incompleteness) lasts only as long as one focuses on a separate text and does not take into account the interaction between all the essays together. Lipavsky's argument is in fact distributed across several different texts, organised like a net with multiple nodes—recurring topics and images—connecting them to each other. If they are read this way, it becomes clear that Lipavsky produces in the end a fairly logical argument.[250]

[250] In Lipavsky's text, there are both striking similarities to and differences from Freud's 1919 essay on the uncanny, including some of the examples and locations of experiences, like a "hot summer afternoon" (Freud, "The Uncanny," 225, 236), and the play between the familiar and the unfamiliar (244). Nonetheless, while some of his writings are clearly indebted to psychoanalysis, Lipavsky ultimately creates his own project focused on

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2. Rotation, vertigo, and the production of difference

The most important thing is to understand that existence and nonexistence are relative.
To exist means simply to be different.
And so it can be: exists (is different) with regards to this,
but is not different (does not exist) with regards to that. While before they did not enter
the sphere of research, were taken as unshakeable givens. Nonexistence seemed,
strictly speaking, like some kind of illusion, impossible to say anything about.
They were imagined to be akin to a rock and an abyss behind it.
But really there is ripple and foam above it.[251]

Lipavsky posits relationality at the centre of his vision of the world: difference is necessary for anything to exist. This focus on internal differentiation that introduces existence into a previously amorphous elemental mass means that the elemental performs a double function. Remaining in every living being as a necessary residue of primary matter, it works as a source of internal difference that can appear unsettling when it surges from beneath the outward appearances (thus creating situations of "shapeshifting"). This very difference, however, ensures the fact that this being is in fact alive: a perfectly whole creature would not be able to exist. At the same time, awareness of the elements lying beneath all seemingly disparate things reinstates the sense of certainty, wholeness, and interconnectedness in a world that seems to be coming apart at the seams. The very unpredictability of living matter can thus be transformed into a sign of unity which exists on a deeper level.

"The world is a system of aberrations," Lipavsky writes in "<A Certain…>";[252] "...space and time are not some filling substances in which things and events are dissolved or

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the constant tension between the individual and the elemental, rather than the individual and their unconscious (although one could argue that the elements is what has been, or the awareness of which has been, repressed). There are also curious similarities between Lipavsky and Julia Kristeva's approach (e.g., Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4), yet once again the overall argument is quite different. In his focus on the elements underlying appearances, Lipavsky offers a radically different, cosmological temporality, pre-subjective and pre-human. In this, a look into, or a research on, horror is ambivalent: while provoking physical repulsion, it simultaneously offers a connection to the raw matter of the world, access to the underlying truth of its fundamental material unity.

[251] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 373.

[252] Lipavskii, "Opredelennoe," 102.

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float around, but a relation of things and events between themselves."[253] Difference is what makes separation and relation possible; in his system, it is a primary unit of world-creation. Everything depends on things "not coinciding" with each other. Lipavsky calls this process of creation through difference *rotation*—a kind of successive juxtaposition of differences: every two elements coming together produce difference, and therefore new objects and states. What we thus encounter in horror, "being caught" in the petrified water, is "the Reverse Rotation"[254]—not mere destruction, but rather the folding-back of difference that constitutes existence. It reminds us of what the world—and all of us—are really made of.

To exist, a body must be different from the elements. It must, in Lipavsky's words, "thicken," or "coagulate" (*sgushchat'sia*): "A zone of thickening can be seen as a certain individualisation of a world air (*mirovogo vozdukha*)."[255] The thickest, the most individualised area will be that on the boundary between the body and its surroundings, where it must differentiate itself from them. But within the boundaries, the density of matter will return to normal: "in other words, an individuality at its core passes into the elements—one cannot oppose them, but one should talk about higher or lower degree to which crystallisation [of] the elements is individualised."[256] An individuality, therefore, is by definition a *shkap*, a closed-off object hiding something within itself, composed of seemingly-solid, "crystallised" boundaries and liquid, amorphous, "elemental" insides. By its very nature, as Lipavsky understands it, complete individual autonomy is necessarily an illusion.

Change and difference are also central for Lipavsky's understanding of time. Time appears from the world "not coinciding with individuality."[257] Time cannot exist without "a disruption of rhythm," without "a distortion, a mismatch between the personality and the

[253] Lipavskii, 103.
[254] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 22.
[255] Lipavskii, "O telesnom sochetanii," 167.
[256] Lipavskii, 166-167.
[257] Lipavskii, "Opredelennoe," 88.

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world (the double gaze)."[258] An event needs to be "reflected in someone else's eyes"[259] in order to be meaningful: it needs an observer and a possibility of empathy. Neither time nor history, for Lipavsky, exist in themselves, without the presence of difference which makes any comparison, and thus the confirmation of change, possible. Yet somewhat paradoxically, both the world of pleasure and the world of horror are, for Lipavsky, worlds without violence. It is introduced only by difference, time, and individuality: "Time is the feeling of the foreignness of an event, the pain of the universe."[260]

Lipavsky's research is concerned with understanding the basic characteristics of different qualities and how differently we perceive them (light and dark, hot and cold, objects far away and close by, loud and quiet, etc.). Among these senses and qualities he is particularly interested in temperature. For humans, he argues, our main way of navigating the world and perceiving transformations in it is based on muscle movements. But imagining a world where only different temperatures exist is a way to think a "spaceless, objectless world [*neprostranstvennyi, bespredmetnyi mir*]."[261] This would allow one to approach "how the world is felt by a tree, a coral, a jellyfish, a fish, a worm, a baby in its mother's womb, to put together a language for each of them."[262] These non-human and not-yet-entirely-human creatures are interesting for him precisely for their proximity to the state of undifferentiation and to the objectless world. The research of which Lipavsky dreams here, and which he partly performs, is a kind of archaeology of feeling: uncovering the hidden history of change and fluctuation beneath the semblance of solid structure.

[258] Lipavskii, "Vremia," 64.
[259] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie uzhasa," 36 (55).
[260] Lipavskii, 65.
[261] Lipavsky, "Conversations," 401.
[262] Lipavsky, 401.

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Talking about the state of timelessness, Lipavsky returns again and again to the tale of the Sleeping Beauty in which the whole kingdom has fallen into sleep.[263] Like the elemental undifferentiated matter, timelessness, for Lipavsky, is not completely absent from the world. It provides the difference necessary for time to exist, and so reality contains both time and timelessness, constantly "oscillating" between the zones with varying "density" (*gustota*) of time.[264] The same rule is true for space: "pauses" are a necessary component in the fabric of reality, which means that pockets of nothingness—"something that does not in any way exist and [yet] occupies space"[265]—are more or less equally distributed across its expanse. And because time is predicated on a relation, "it is always possible to find a perspective from which it ceases to exist"[266]—a perspective from which the element which disturbs stability will not be visible. In horror, then, we are faced with precisely this perspective. We encounter "the impersonal life" that lacks those mismatches: "And it was like that and will be forever and ever, until a creator of a new irregularity suddenly comes with his electing kiss (*so svoim izbiraiushchim potseluem*), and an illusion of events happening appears again."[267] The world can only exist as long as there is difference, and difference, as long as there is irregularity and disruption. And vice versa, horror is not a result of an aberration, a certain "perversion" of nature that lets nonexistence seep in. To the contrary, nonexistence and horror are in the nature of things.

Horror is simply an instance when this lack of differentiation underneath the semblance of a solid structure is revealed. We are horrified by the sight of blood pouring out because it makes obvious the impersonal, elemental, vegetative life hidden within a body. At the very heart of the human subject lies something alien: I am not that, but a shapeshifter.

[263] Lipavskii, "Traktat," 7; "Issledovanie," 23-24; "O preobrazovaniiakh," 68.
[264] Lipavskii, "Vremia," 65.
[265] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 402. Druskin writes about this in a similar way: "Time does not go on and does not continue, it consists of moments and empty intervals" (Druskin, "Smert'," 1:703).
[266] Lipavskii, "O preobrazovaniiakh," 80.
[267] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 25.

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This is why the insides of the human body, its "living meat,"[268] are packed with horror. We are repelled by objects that, like non-skeletal marine creatures, do not have a solid core, that reveal the ability of the elements to persist inside the boundaries of a body. "Every horror is aesthetic, and it is, essentially, always one horror: a horror that the individual rhythm is always false, because it exists only on the surface, but beneath it, silencing and crushing it, there is the impersonal elemental life,"[269] a life that Lipavsky somewhat childishly calls "not ours" (*ne nasha*).[270] Every living being, for that reason, necessarily "hides something repugnant within itself."[271] Identity is always incomplete, always overabundant. There is always something else lurking inside. Given this acknowledgment of an inevitably messy nature of existence, what is remarkable is Lipavsky's effort not only to explain horror, but to re-impose a classification onto it, to produce a map of different bodies, shapes, movements, and sounds that repel us—while at the same time affirming the inescapable presence of the impersonal and the elemental, that which defies separation and classification, in every being.

In the final section of the "Research on Horror," Lipavsky writes about the fear of emptiness and falling, which in everyday life also manifests as vertigo. Vertigo is an illusion of rotation and movement, particularly of movement without any specific direction.[272] It seems like the objects are "floating away," but they do not actually move.[273] It is a "false, 'motionless movement.'"[274] Lipavsky explains it by the loss of visual fixation, in which the contours of objects become blurred like they do in motion. Vertigo stems from the feeling of not being able to hold objects firmly with one's gaze, of, quite literally, losing one's grip on reality:

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[268] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 29.
[269] Lipavskii, 34.
[270] Lipavskii, 37.
[271] Lipavskii, 29.
[272] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 39; see also Lipavskii, "Golovokruzhenie," 191.
[273] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 38.
[274] Lipavskii, 39.

> Our body, prolonged in every direction, our imaginary, projected hands somehow start shaking, become weaker, and can no longer hold objects firmly; the world slips out of them.
> We were holding the world in a grip of a fist, but the fingers lost their strength, and the world, previously compressed into a tight lump, started crawling, leaking, melting [*popolz, potek, stal rastekat'sia*], and losing its certainty.
> Objects losing stability, the feeling of their unsteadiness, their melting, this is what vertigo is.

Objects themselves slip out of one's grip, not engulfing, but abandoning the subject. The solidity of the object that the OBERIU Manifesto invited the reader to touch and see with naked eyes, is now gone. In "Conversations," Lipavsky connects this loss of certainty with technological advances that have rapidly expanded the horizons of human life, spatially as well as temporally and conceptually. The sheer enormity of the world breaks the feeling of intimate connection with it that humans—arguably—previously had. "Most people are now afraid and uncomfortable [*strashno i neuiutno*]" writes Lipavsky, with the centrality of individual life gone.[275] To this predicament, he responds by "watching carefully where others' gazes slip,"[276] and devising an ontology in which the horror of the realisation that the human subject has been dethroned for good, can be reconciled with the need for knowledge and certainty.

Lipavsky's recognition that pushing the horror away is never enough, and his effort to nonetheless do precisely that in understanding and classifying instances of horror, is informed by his cosmological vision of a world coming to be through rotation and successive combination of differences. From this perspective, his project, while undoubtedly informed by his context, appears to be not so much an outcry of an individual trapped within the solid waters of the repressive state, and not limited to a criticism on the "petrified utopia" of Stalinism, but rather a recognition that there is timelessness underlying all semblance of time, and the elemental life roaring behind the façade of independent individuality. Every individuality and every body is a cupboard, a *shkap*: in the blink of an eye, they can shed their human skin and reveal the horrifying plant of blood blooming indifferently underneath.

[275] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 383-384.
[276] Lipavskii, 394.

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Yet the presence of internal difference is ultimately reassuring: it guarantees the existence of the world and testifies to the underlying unity of reality.

3. The balance with a little error: Druskin and Kharms on the role of difference in the coming together of the world

The understanding of existence as requiring the presence of difference is shared in *chinari*'s writings: both Druskin and Kharms respond to Lipavsky's natural history-oriented essays with their own, more theologically coloured texts. In their writings, the *hidden otherness* similarly comes to be coloured positively: as that which powers existence and allows the world to unfold. And while Kharms endows his cosmological vision with a degree of clarity, Druskin's texts remain focused on arbitrariness of thought as it tries to approach reality, and, crucially, on the inevitable mismatch between appearances and the real essence of things.

In "Conversations of Messengers," Druskin foregrounds the importance of naming in identifying things as existing: "Something exists before the name. Having said something, I said this, this exists only in the name."[277] Naming brings about the little error and gives rise to the accidental, as it is always to some extent accidental, arbitrary: a different name could be given. Druskin stresses the inevitable disconnect between *something* and the name given to it. The accidental word that names *this* or *that* becomes "a certain place of the error,"[278] which is, itself, also accidental. Even more, the error cannot be precisely located, as "it is present everywhere like a soul in a body," "it is present everywhere and has no place."[279] This accidental nature leads to "hesitation and oscillation" (*somnenie i kolebanie*) that marks the choice of a name: "Something is hesitation and oscillation between that and not that, the

[277] Druskin, "Razgovory vestnikov," 550.
[278] Druskin, 567.
[279] Druskin, 568.

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saying of a certain name, an accident, the absence of a definite and absolute name and title. In the oscillation between that and not that you will notice a certain balance. But there is a little error here."[280] Druskin echoes Lipavsky in stressing that separately, neither *this* nor *that* "signify anything."[281] Druskin's prose is very different from Lipavsky's. It is difficult, winding, and poetic, and it always borders on theology and always remains as flickering and uncertain as its own subject. Repetitive, dense, and esoteric, it has the quality of an incantation or a baroque fugue—a different kind of a verbal machine,[282] and very effectively creates the impression of being caught in the sway of "hesitation and oscillation." His key argument is echoing Lipavsky: nothing can truly exist before separation, and any kind of a complete whole cannot be separated into parts that make existence possible.

In 1940, Kharms writes a short "treatise" "O sushchestvovanii, o vremeni, o prostranstve" (On existence, on time, on space), where he encapsulates views very similar to those of his friends in a concise and almost formulaic way. He starts with the familiar premise:

> 2. A world that is made of something uniform, homogenous, and continuous, cannot be called existing, because, in this world, there are no parts, and if there are no parts, there is no whole.
> 3. An existing world should be heterogenous and should have parts.
> 4. Every two parts differ between themselves, because one part will always be *this*, and the other *that*.[283]

Furthermore, these two elements need something to function as a barrier between them, to prevent them from mixing and becoming one, and thus falling into nonexistence. Kharms proposes to call this third element, "not that and not this," an *obstacle* (*prepiatstvie*). All together they constitute "the trinity of existence."[284] Their interaction, by which they come to be, is by no means peaceful: one of the two initial elements "is the obstacle for the other one,

[280] Druskin, 551.
[281] Druskin, 552.
[282] I am grateful to Sashko Podoliak for this analogy.
[283] Kharms, *PS*, 4:30.
[284] Kharms, 4:31.

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tearing it apart and becoming itself part of the other."[285] The two initial elements, for Kharms, are space and time: neither exists on its own, but in their interaction they generate obstacles for each other and each split into three. This way time breaks into the past, present, and future, where the present works as the obstacle between the other two (which explains both its infinitely fleeing nature and the fact that neither the past nor the future can be said to actually exist, as one is no more and the other is not yet). In turn, space splits into *there*, *here*, and *there*, with *here* as the obstacle. And as space and time are obstacles to each other, the present is equated with space, and *here*, with time. In this scheme, the elements of the world are literally split and brought into existence by the presence of that which they are not. Space is the hidden other at the very heart of time; time is the hidden other in the middle of space. And as the two intersect in these points (the present, *here*), the very obstacle that allows everything to exist is located at the precise intersection between *here* and the present, separating them from each other.[286] This one final thing is matter, which, intersecting with time and space, creates what Kharms calls "the Knot of the Universe": "By saying about myself, 'I am,' I place myself in the Knot of the Universe."[287] In this text, one finds the same key ideas: nothing can exist without difference, interaction, connection, and comparison, and this difference needs to be placed inside the original elements of existence in order to "power" them. The poet himself, and every speaker and subject by extension, find themselves at every given moment in the Knot of the Universe, which, like Druskin's "little error," is everywhere at once.[288]

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[285] Kharms, 4:31.

[286] See also similar considerations in Kharms's treatise on zero from 1932, where it is seen as the obstacle in the middle of the numerical row that gives negative and positive numbers their meaning. Kharms stresses the paradoxical nature of this situation, since zero itself signifies exactly nothing, yet it is the presence of such nothingness that makes the infinity of numbers stretching both ways from it possible (Kharms, *PS*, 4:14).

[287] Kharms, 4:34.

[288] On the authorial body as the obstacle, see Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 166; Kukui, *Kontsept 'veshch','* 170; Iampolski, *Bespamiatstvo*, 272-273. Kharms was interested in the little error as well. In a separate text from mid-1930s, he lists examples of it. These include "a beautifully made marble wart on the beautiful leg" of an ancient statue of Venus; a word that stylistically disrupts a poem by Kuzma Prutkov; a sudden pianissimo after a gradually growing volume in a choir performance; a list of architectural examples with drawings, which feature

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Importantly, Druskin writes on "a kind of duplicity" (*kakaia-to dvoistvennost'*) in the nature of things, and in particular in the relationship between "meaning and sign":

> It appears there is a kind of duplicity, one cannot derive everything from one principle. While this and that are connected and their meanings coincide, there is no life yet, this is before the creation of the world. Then I set the correspondence between meaning and sign. Thus I have moved already to the created world, as before the creation there was no such distinction. So where am I? I am in the created, but it was me who found the correspondence between meaning and sign, so the meaning relates to me. Then I see the limitedness of the created. But life began beyond the line of the circle, I have found myself outside of life. Life, a certain order and correspondence are more related to meaning, than my understanding is. I am looking for a way to get beyond the line of the circle. How should I do it? I choose a certain order—a movement of a hand, a turn of the head—of life,—I want to set a correspondence between the life in the circle and my own life, but I cannot do it. Ever since I have set the correspondence, the real correspondence or the link have been torn.[289]

In other words, in naming, which brings things into existence, one establishes the link between the name (sign) and that which is being named (meaning). In this gesture, the one who gives the name separates themselves from "life," the realm connected to meaning. The subject, the one who names, attempts to restore the connection between the two by organising their own life in a particular way, but this attempt is futile. The very action by which the connection between meaning and sign, thing and name, is established in thought, severs the real, living connection between them and gives rise to the "duplicity principle" (*printsip dvoistvennosti*).[290] For this reason, Druskin writes, "There is a kind of discrepancy or bewilderment in one's imagination of an object, there is more reality in this bewilderment than in the imagination of an object."[291] He thus continues to explore the line of reasoning of the Russian avant-garde that problematised the disconnect between words (sign) and objects (meaning), and approached objects of everyday life with ever-present suspicion. Like Lipavsky, Druskin takes this thinking to bear on his view of how the world as we know it comes to be, writing the disconnect, discrepancy, suspicion, and bewilderment into its very foundation. It is in this situation, where everything is always necessarily that which it is not,

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various instances of disrupted symmetry; and, finally, a coat of arms depicting an ankh and a tapir. Kharms, *PS*, 4:17-18.

[289] Druskin, "Okrestnosti veshchei," 608.

[290] Druskin, 608.

[291] Druskin, 627.

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that *chinari* come up with *flickering* (*mertsanie*) as a term that captures this state of radical uncertainty.[292]

Chinari are not thinkers who shun duplicity, uncertainty, and indeterminacy; on the contrary, their works show intense fascination with "the little error" that characterises all things, as well as their reflection in human thought (the duplicity principle described by Druskin). This almost obsessive focus on the productive role of that which disrupts order and contaminates balance is important for understanding *chinari*'s unruly intellectual project. Uncertainty, ambivalence, and the presence in any self or substance of something other than itself are theorised here as necessary preconditions for that self or substance's existence. However, Lipavsky and Kharms's writings on sexuality demonstrate how uneasy this vision proves to be when it comes to the gendered human body and sexual difference, and how crucial this uneasiness with sexuality is to their understanding of the nature of existence. Sexuality complicates the picture and remains the territory where ambivalence and disorder remain a troubling, anxiety-inducing presence, to which Lipavsky and Kharms respond with texts displacing that anxiety over the incomplete humanity onto the female bodies, used as temporary and unstable reservoirs for containing the "little error" of the human, but never entirely human, body. The centrality of the human subject, for Lipavsky, cannot be salvaged, but can be rethought in terms of pleasure. The grounds for this rethinking are offered by sexuality and love, which function as sites of coming in contact with the elemental in everyday life, where it can be tolerated—if not contained.

[292] Vvedensky uses this term to talk about the feeling of disconnect that pervades one's sense of reality: Vvedenskii, "Seraia tetrad'," 177.

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4. Theory of words

Lipavsky created his own homespun Khlebnikovian theory of language[293] that was informed by his interest in the elements. At its core, it has the desire to do away with the mismatch between sign and meaning: "words mean only what they really are—tension and release; that is why they do not have object [*predmetnogo*] meaning, but signify changes of an environment akin to liquid."[294] The basic meanings are all variations of "reaching for, pulling, and grasping."[295] The key element in this theory of language is the muscle effort involved in producing sounds, which comes in various shapes from a push to forceful penetration:

> And so, the voice opens up before us in three series of characteristics:
> 1. flowing out, spreading out, fading out, release, levelling out, stretching out;
> 2. grasping, taking possession of, squeezing, devouring;
> 3. reaching for, emission, generation, push, flow [current, *tok*], punch.
>
> This is the essence of the voice, if one forgets about its external qualities; and it is also the essence of generally every kind of human action on the world, every activity.
> [...] The voice is a kind of a model of the world.[296]

At its start, language works like breathing, and its meanings are "unsteady objectless environments—the elements."[297] The first stage in its development is "a projection onto liquid," where the words are set apart by their "density, viscosity," the intensity and characteristics of their flow.[298] At this point, there are no separate parts of speech, and no separation between actions and objects, nor between subject and object.[299] A remnant of this stage is to be found, Lipavsky argues, in words like "bread, millet, earth, grass, forest."[300]

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[293] On the links between Lipavsky's "Theory of words" and *zaum'*, see Jaccard, "Krisis tekuchesti," 127; for a detailed comparison with Bachelard and Khlebnikov, Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 64-67. An insightful recent article points out the sources of Lipavsky's approach not only in Khlebnikov, but also in agrarian biology, chemistry, and reflexology of the time, as well as contemporary linguistics: Valiieva, "Ob istochnikakh traktata Leonida Lipavskogo."
[294] Lipavskii, 324.
[295] Lipavskii, 324.
[296] Lipavskii, "Teoriia slov," 225-226.
[297] Lipavskii, 227.
[298] Lipavskii, 227.
[299] Lipavskii, 228.
[300] Lipavskii, 229.

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Objectlessness therefore means the proximity to that early liquid stage, rather than, he stresses, abstractness. As the range of meanings expands, and their nature changes, the world itself changes. One's experience of the world is defined by the type of actions they are able to perform in and on the world, and these, in turn, by the precise construction of their bodies.[301] Here, Lipavsky suggests that reaching into the early stages of the history of language opens the door to experiencing the world as "a butterfly, a fish, an infant, a savage" do.[302]

Lipavsky offers in this way a version of a muscle history of language, where meanings at this first, "liquid" stage are vague yet specific, and gradually come to acquire hardness and precision as they become attached to separate objects.[303] More specialised meanings are produced through combination, juxtaposition, and "rotation": a technical particle is attached to preexisting "seeds of words" once, then again, in the process creating more and more new words.[304] From being "a natural conclusion of nature, its breath, life, or song," language turns into a tool for "cut[ting] the world into chunks and, therefore, subjugat[ing] it."[305] But here, too, there are "deceptive," or "misleading cases" (*obmanchivye sluchai*): words that seem to contradict these foundational rules of derivation.[306] Lipavsky calls them "petrified" and "maimed" by speech – by everyday use in which their origins get forgotten, and their true form, lost.[307] What is striking in his approach is the emphasis on deception. It is not simply that language, through excessive use and structuration, loses its vitality, but that its true structure becomes obscured and changed so much that words appear to be not what they are.[308] Crystallisation shapes elements into objects, splits subject apart from object, and deceives. Language, at its root, corresponds perfectly to the human body that

[301] Lipavskii, 227.
[302] Lipavskii, 226.
[303] Lipavskii, 226.
[304] Lipavskii, "Teoriia slov," 213, 217.
[305] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 326-327.
[306] Lipavskii, "Teoriia slov," 217.
[307] Lipavskii, 217.
[308] Lipavsky's description of "petrification" seems indebted to Viktor Shklovsky's 1914 account of the automatisation of language and artistic form that he gives in his essay "Resurrection of the Word": see Shklovskii, "Voskresheniie slova."

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produces it, but becomes ossified with time. And, as the following section will show, the human body undergoing crystallisation suffers much the same fate.

5. Love and monsters: Horror and the erotic

In his long essay "On Bodily Union," Lipavsky sets out to map, categorise, and explain multiple paradoxes and misunderstandings of love. He describes it as "a chimaera"[309] which needs to be seen clearly and understood in all the apparent contradictions of its parts, its monstrous nature to be measured and grasped. Love and particularly sexuality are important in Lipavsky's project as they mediate the relationship between the individual and the elements. In this project, the primary object of desire, the feminine, becomes a contact zone where the elements can be encountered and where they can be at least provisionally contained instead of spilling onto the male subject. In this contact zone, the elements lose some of their horror—or rather, it becomes mitigated by tenderness. A loved one is a person in whom we do not fear but welcome the shapeshifter. The illusory uniqueness of their individuality and of the feeling itself protects against the overwhelming feeling of dissolution that one is threatened with in horror.

"On Bodily Union" can be read as a revisiting of the "Research on Horror," where Lipavsky starts mapping out the relationship between horror and the erotic. In "Research," he argues that what is frightening about erotic parts of the body is their supposed autonomy: "female legs, we would say, are not just a means of transportation, but also a end in itself, living shamelessly for themselves."[310] This autonomy is, for Lipavsky, connected to the lack of a clear function, which hides from us a body part's "own life."[311] "This is why," he concludes, "the female body is more frightening than the male one; feet are more frightening

[309] Lipavskii, "O telesnom sochetanii," 161.
[310] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 34. On the particular coding of female legs and feet as erotic in pre-revolutionary culture, see, e.g., Bulgakova, *Fabrika zhestov*, 66.
[311] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 34.

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than hands, and it's especially visible with toes."[312] Where the body is not clearly shaped by its particular function is where "the living tissue remains… true to itself," which usually results in it forming something like a bubble.[313] And these, Lipavsky states, happen to be the most erotic parts.

Horror in Lipavsky's essays is itself erotically coded throughout, and the erotic is consistently characterised as the refuge of shapeshifting elements within the human body. In the "Water Tractatus," in the scene where the petrified afternoon world in its "dead bloom" is revealed to the onlooker, Lipavsky describes it as "the world stand[ing] before you like a phallus"[314] (in "Research on Horror, he changes it to "a muscle contracted by a spasm").[315] But the lack of tension is equally horrifying: "swelling and smoothness of a body, its pliancy and elasticity" are both attractive and repulsive.[316] Bellies, buttocks, and female breasts are all listed as examples of jelly-like objects, alongside tumours and abscesses.[317] The living matter being "true to itself" means that it remains always ready to turn into something else. Sexual friction in its rolling movement resembles the peristalsis and the crawling of a centipede;[318] in turn, the movement with which "an earthworm, cut in two, crawls in two different directions" is characterised as "extremely obscene."[319] A little girl who runs out of a dining room in tears, frightened by the quiver of a jelly on a plate, would, Lipavsky writes, be even more terrified if she found "a maid with her [the little girl's] brother," as in sex "human bodies are like two underwater monsters meeting each other after a long time apart. And their movements are the movements of a caterpillar before pupation."[320] The erotic turns into the monstrous; the monstrous, into the erotic.

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[312] Lipavskii, 34.
[313] Lipavskii, 31.
[314] Lipavskii, "Traktat," 6.
[315] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 21.
[316] Lipavskii, 34.
[317] Lipavskii, 30, 33.
[318] Lipavskii, 32.
[319] Lipavskii, 31.
[320] Lipavskii, "Traktat," 9.

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"The erotic in the human body," Lipavsky sums up, "is that which is frightening."[321] The constant slippage between the feminine, the erotic, the pathological, the animalistic, and the monstrous, creates links between all of them and does not let any of them a moment of fixity. Their signification is mutually dependent, circular: the erotic reminds us of a caterpillar; the worm reminds us of obscenity. They keep slipping away in different directions like earthworms cut into pieces, and yet they are all characterised by a pull to unity: like sea monsters who have been separated for a long time, the living matter of human bodies longs to return to the state when it was one. However, while always placing the horrifying and the feminine in proximity to each other, Lipavsky never quite polarises the genders either. They differ in degree but not in quality. The feminine is marked by the same presence of the elemental as the masculine is, only more so.[322] While female embodiment can be almost demonised here, it cannot be erased, as it works as an important container of, and a contact zone with, the elemental in Lipavsky's system, allowing for symbolically draining the horror, diverting it away from the male subject, making it manageable.

This ability of femininity to act as a kind of transmitter for the elements becomes central in "On Bodily Union." Here, Lipavsky explains the connection between eroticism and horror by the fact that in eroticism, we come face to face with the elemental in others, which is counterbalanced by our desire to preserve the illusion of difference and individuality.[323]

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[321] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie," 33.

[322] In Lipavsky's "Dreams," interestingly, the instances when horror or eroticism appears are mostly marked by the masculine presence, androgyny, or gender confusion. The first erotic dream from his childhood that he recounts involves "a savage man" holding him, small, frightened, and powerless, up in the air ("Sny," 196 – Lipavsky never explains what exactly was erotic about that dream). Other dreams marked by "erotic tenderness" include "some furry animal" and tsar Nikolay II holding the dreamer in his lap (197). Lipavsky remarks that he can barely remember similar dreams involving women, and those that he can are usually marked by disgust (197). He lists multiple dreams about caressing men, who are, in the dream logic, really women (200) or women with animal-looking phalluses (208). He confesses to not knowing how to interpret these dreams (205), until he remembers his childhood "groundless fantasies" about kissing or killing certain men (207). In one section of the "Water Tractatus," Lipavsky humanises horror and puts it, as a young man, into a fairy-tale setting. Horror lives in a small house on the edge of a village in the middle of a steppe. He sings and tells stories while he spins on a spindle, and "animals, plants, and lines" come to listen to him. Lipavsky asks himself why it is that a young man is doing "a young woman's work," but does not give any answer ("Tractat," 10). Eroticism and horror appear in situations of powerlessness and contact with an alien power – which are often masculine.

[323] Lipavskii, "O telesnom sochetanii," 150.

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This contradiction between the individuality and the elemental, "object-ness" and "objectless-ness" (*ob''ektnost' i bezob''ektnost'*)[324] creates the tension resulting in the ambivalence of love, so that it provokes equally strong fascination and disgust.[325] The internal tension between the autonomy of the elemental and the appearance of individuality means that love always remains a chimaera, frightening in its incongruity: "like a waterfowl on the waterside. Or like a fish with its eyes rolled out and a burst bladder. Because there is something monstrous in it."[326] Like a worm cut in two, it is "inappropriate, obscene."[327] Love itself is a horrifying object, one among many other sea creatures, because it is a combination of two distinct feelings: sensual attraction and sympathy,[328] where the former is anchored to the impersonal, "elemental" drive, and the latter, to the individuality of a loved one. Lipavsky calls it the principle of "selectivity"—the fact that the object of love has to be seen as unique, the illusion of the ultimate irreplaceability of the beloved.[329] Despite this, love, and sexuality even more so, plunge the subject into the reverse rotation:

> Sexual attraction is a longing for de-individualisation, a longing to get rid of the aberration of individuality. Therefore: 1) It is deeper and already exists before the separation of the sexes; 2) Only one sex exists—the female one (the male one is the reduced, the specialised one, like, for example, a working bee or a dog-bee among bees); 3) The sexual feeling—is simply a feeling; 4) Sexual organs are simply organs (unspecialised; therefore lower, especially marine creatures, are somehow obscene).[330]

It is the encounter with this de-individualised reality that brings about the "sudden pause of life" which overcomes a person after intercourse[331] and in which one can recognise a smaller version of the timeless state before existence.

On the other hand, it is precisely this encounter with the fragility of individuality in love that results in tenderness. The play of the elemental and the individual in a person, which

[324] Lipavskii, 167.
[325] Lipavskii, 148.
[326] Lipavskii, 149-150.
[327] Lipavskii, 150.
[328] Lipavskii, 151.
[329] Lipavskii, 175.
[330] Lipavskii, "Opredelennoe," 103-104.
[331] Lipavskii, "O telesnom sochetanii," 149.

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Lipavsky calls “a play with monstrosity”, where the elemental seems to “shine through” for a moment and then hides again,[332] creates its own excitement. What could otherwise be repulsive invites fascination mixed with sadness.[333] Its beauty is akin to that of Aphrodite, born between water and air, where the two elements meet each other, “partly anthropomorphised, crystallised, partly—an elemental ripple.”[334] Love is thus essentially the activity of guessing what underlies the appearances, seeing the elemental under the individual and beauty under the apparent “distortion”:

> ...the suspicion that beneath this distorted appearance there lies another one, engenders love; and love gives insight, and he is turned, at least in the eyes of one living being, into a real prince; and then how could one not love him? But it is clear that it is essential to what extent he is under a spell, this determines the probability of the emergence of love.[335]

Returning here once again to the logic of *shkap* and to the language of a fairy-tale, Lipavsky describes a loved one as a reverse shapeshifter: one in whom we guess the presence of another and whom we love *for* that presence. The prince under a spell is someone who has been turned into a monster but in whom the loving gaze can make out the truth of hidden beauty and nobility. The disgusting and the beautiful switch places, but the game of guessing remains the same. The presence of the elemental persists, while tenderness and fascination with the fragility of an individuality make it bearable. A loved one is the result of the elements crystallising, first, into an individual body, and then, into a personality. It is as if, Lipavsky writes, “we breathe in the delicate aroma of an appearance, and through it, reach into its base, the strong aroma of a body, and through it, into its base, the deep aroma of the impersonal living tissue, the elements.”[336] In love, the elemental can safely come to the surface. Just like erotic tickle is a safe and generally pleasant version of disorientation in

[332] Lipavskii, 106.
[333] Lipavskii, 168.
[334] Lipavskii, 168.
[335] Lipavskii, 184.
[336] Lipavskii, 168.

one's body, the horrifying counterpart of which is vertigo,[337] guessing the underlying reality of a loved person becomes a tender version of an encounter with horror at the untrustworthiness of the world.

There are, however, two darker consequences following from this internal split inherent in love. The first is that there is necessarily something tragic about its "selectivity": "it cannot exist, and at the same time, it must exist."[338] Even though the root of it is mere human vanity,[339] "the world without it becomes uninteresting, loses its meaningfulness and charm."[340] The reality of individuality is an illusion that must be upheld. From the revelations of horror and everyday life, it is clear that an individuality is not in any way irreplaceable: "people remarry, forgetting their dead."[341] The prevalence of the elemental in life is unavoidable, yet acknowledging it gets in the way of happiness and meaning. We always know that love pretends to be what it is not: to be focused on one particular person while we know that it always chooses "the unsuitable object simply because the more suitable ones are unavailable."[342] Love is a *shkap*, always an illusion and necessarily a disappointment, and we all know this but collectively pretend that we do not.

Lipavsky returns here to the uneasiness provoked by dead bodies. He argues that all human feelings which are conventionally thought as exclusive and bound to specific people, are in fact superficial: a dead body of a close relative or a loved one still makes it unclear "how one should behave at a funeral."[343] "The obscene vitality" of survivors[344] outweighs the tragedy of loss. Like a city that had to sacrifice its sons and daughters to the Minotaurus, everyone is struck by pain and grief for some time, and then goes on as if nothing has happened: "...the most sensitive ones would, having received the fatal news, fall to the

[337] Lipavskii, "Opredelennoe," 113-114.
[338] Lipavskii, "O telesnom sochetanii," 179.
[339] Lipavskii, 180-181,
[340] Lipavskii, 176.
[341] Lipavskii, 176.
[342] Lipavskii, 177-178.
[343] Lipavskii, 176.
[344] Lipavskii, 176.

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ground and grasp for air, like an animal that was kicked in the belly, but then would come to their senses and run away carrying on with their business."[345] The ties of personal feelings prove to be insufficiently strong to overpower this relentless, indifferent vitality of the body.

Druskin explicitly connects horror to grief in his very personal account of his father's dying days and their aftermath in his text "Smert'" (Death, 1934-1935). Here, grief is seen as the defining emotional tone of the time and the overall feeling that "now there is no and cannot be any feeling of calm and improvement."[346] It is what powers the work of categorisation and ordering, since the death of a loved one calls into question one's sense of order in the world, and calls for the adjustment of once logical system so that death would fit into it.[347] Death creates "the abomination of desolation" (*merzost' zapusteniia*), which is "like tentacles from beyond the grave" (*shchupal'tsy s togo sveta*).[348] In this text, Druskin echoes Lipavsky in writing about horror provoked by large natural spaces: "Ebb and tide, the sound of the sea or forest, the periodicity of nature—all this provokes a certain horror."[349] The loss that he describes is felt like one's own. He writes about "a dead man on the bank of the river of oblivion"[350] who misses his lost dead body: "the hand was beautiful, warm, white. The belly was beautiful, rounded, soft. The chest and neck were beautiful. [...] I am interested in a dead man in a grave, how he lies there, and where his soul is."[351]

Through grief, horror is connected to this sense of bodily loss. The combination of the elemental and the individual in a person is, however, also fragile and subject to all kinds of threats. Lipavsky explains all bodily "defects" as a result of an intrusion of a foreign force—be it an illness or "a falling stone"—that had interfered in the process while the matter of the

[345] Lipavskii, 177.
[346] Druskin, "Smert'," 1:698.
[347] Druskin, 698.
[348] Druskin, 699.
[349] Druskin, 700. Lipavsky writes about the horror of vast natural expanses in "O telesnom sochetanii," 179.
[350] Druskin, "Smert'," 703.
[351] Druskin, 704.

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body was crystallising, "distorting" and "contaminating" it.[352] "Ugly" people (or, to be more precise, the plain ones, those lacking beauty—*nekrasivye* as opposed to *urodlivye*) are those in whom crystallisation was not complete,[353] so that they turned out "flabby," having "deviated from [their] way like an arrow that had met the wind."[354] Paradoxically, the incomplete crystallisation in this scheme is caused by the elemental life not being strong enough—and not the opposite. When forming into an individuality, the elements have to be able to develop according to their own rules. But in response to obstacles they "swell up," creating a knot or an outgrowth, and thus, a deformity.[355] Deformity, in turn, provokes horror: it signifies not just a lack of crystallisation, but an active presence of something else. "Plain" people are wrong, he writes, when they say that one should not judge them by their outward appearance, treating it as if it were "clothing pulled on by external force."[356] In truth, Lipavsky argues, their ugliness really testifies to the weakness of their boundaries and their low ability to resist external pressure. What we love in beauty, Lipavsky thus argues, is the proper autonomy of matter in the process of its crystallisation. Any body from the very beginning contains the necessary internal difference, the elements beyond all rational control; but it should not let the external obstacles shape it, developing uninterrupted, by means of its own rotation.

These considerations bring about the second consequence of the paradox at the heart of love. In the end, true selectivity is ultimately impossible, as what people look for in a loved one is just a piece of healthy living matter. As their wife, Lipavsky writes, most people want simply someone who is not too skinny, is generally "correctly" shaped, has all front teeth intact, and does not emit a rotten smell.[357] This arguably low bar is explained by the fact that

[352] Lipavskii, "O telesnom sochetanii," 183.
[353] Lipavskii, 185.
[354] Lipavskii, 184.
[355] Lipavskii, 185.
[356] Lipavskii, 187.
[357] Lipavskii, 182.

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the vast majority of people do not satisfy even these requirements, are "variously crooked, stripped, gnawed by malnutrition or constant irritation, disfigured and stupefied, with poisoned blood coursing through their veins."[358] This is one of the most disturbing parts of Lipavsky's essays, where he writes of disability as horrifying. A disability, for him, is repulsive because it always presupposes an incorporation of additional, external life, of "new coarse meat,"[359] and brings to light the stubborn independent vitality of matter:

> A legless man, while he sits or lies down, is not beautiful. He becomes ugly when he starts moving. Oh this horrible, obscene vitality that does not give a damn about anything! Half a person is not a person anymore, but some other impermissible creature, a crayfish claw. He will run about briskly on his crutches or roll on little wheels attached to his body, rowing with his arms, or he will crawl like an adder on his belly, on his side, on his shoulder, any other way, so that he does not die, does not get stuck in one place, is not left alone.[360]

An essay on love turns to deformity, horror, and horrifying de-humanisation as easily as the one on horror keeps returning to eroticism and pleasure. This passage underscores the difference between the strength of an original elemental matter of a body and the "impermissible," "improper" overabundance of life that rushes in once that original strength is shaken. The "impropriety" here, for Lipavsky, is caused by the fact that the body no longer hides its enmeshment with the nonhuman, with what it is not.

Love, therefore, appears as both a necessity and an impossibility. Defined by its foundational tension between the personal and the impersonal, the individual and the elemental, the platonic and the sexual, it becomes a territory where the subject encounters the superficiality of its own constitution. Feelings for specific people turn out shallow and short-lived, with unrelenting and cruel desire for properly crystallised matter underneath the appearances of a romantic love. And yet love remains necessary in its double task: as a means to mask the prevalence of the impersonal and to ameliorate the indifference of the hostile

[358] Lipavskii, 182.
[359] Lipavskii, 186.
[360] Lipavskii, 186.

world, and as a grounds on which duplicity can be encountered as pleasure and play, and thus domesticated and made peace with.

6. Conclusion

In these texts, Lipavsky offers a vision of the world in which the main actor is not the human subject but the elemental matter—a raw vital force that remains active even after its "specialisation" into individual bodies and objects. It is frightening: it shatters the illusions of anthropocentrism. Yet it also offers pleasure; it lies at the core of erotic attraction. Eroticism and the feminine as its primary object, for Lipavsky, become important for mediating the boundaries of the individual and the elemental, and providing the grounds where the two can meet. While love itself is read in this way as an adventure of the vital force rather than that of an individual, it also provides a way for that de-centering of the human subject to be mitigated. This ambivalence at the heart of Lipavsky's project allows it to be read both as a fearful masculine fantasy of the loss of control, and as the experimental opening up of the boundaries of the subject: a vision in which it is a plaything of the elemental forces, and is not, and cannot hope to be, their master, but can learn to live with the horror without battling it.

Reading Lipavsky's texts in this circular fashion is useful for understanding how the eroticism and anxiety of *shkap* structure the way in which misogyny works in his project and what function it performs in his vision of the human subject. The subject itself is *shkap*-like: Lipavsky, Druskin, and Kharms all write internal difference into the centre of their cosmological vision of how the world comes to exist and how it operates, thus effectively writing horror into its every cell. All of existence is inherently duplicitous. The internal difference means existence at the cost of full autonomy and of the illusion of bound and unique individuality. Misogyny here becomes entangled with the articulation of love as a

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coping mechanism able to protect the subject from the horror of encountering the elements. Love is called for as an instrument that can repair the *shkap* and restore the invisibility of the hidden other by constructing the myth of romance over the cruelty of physiological attraction to well-formed matter. But it also becomes a way to re-create the *shkap* and to re-stage the encounter with a shape-shifting matter as a romantic one: a fairy-tale informed by the hope of overcoming the constraints of individuality.

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Chapter 3. The anxiety of looking: Kharms and the politics of opacity and visibility

> I also remember that [Kharms] used to say that, to write poems like his (vzir'-zaum'), one has to climb onto a *shkap* and look at the room from up there: "Then you will see everything differently."[361]

In the summer of the 1933, Daniil Kharms writes in his notebook:

> the Peter and Paul beach.
> all women are disgusted by my body.
> I am lying [1 unclear] of a greenish scarlet colour. if I were bright green it would be prettier.
> it is so pleasant to lie in the sun
> sun let your sacred force into me.
> well maybe I am just very erotic!
> there was a good-looking Jewess lying on the beach. but she is a whore.
> she went to whore: to look for a suitor. she'll bring someone with her.[362]

In a different notebook, but most probably during the same summer months, he leaves a similar note, apparently capturing another experience at the beach:

> a military man sat down next to me. he is with a lady. it looks like he needs to leave but he's afraid to leave his lady next to me. how should I calm him down.
> I see a woman who is rather naked.
> I want to make the acquaintance of a young woman who is next to me, lying a bit higher from me.
> nothing comes about. I want women to look at my dick closely and to admire it and to get aroused from looking at it and that it will make them leak out of their cunts. and my dick would rise huge and beautiful. I want a woman beautiful and sweet to offer me her moist genitalia for sucking and licking.
> ~~Professor Trubochkin is in danger.~~[363]
> I despise all proletarian women.
> it is very ugly when women wear bathing hats like bonnets.[364]

These notes from the beach capture some of the recurrent themes in Kharms' diaries: the search for erotic encounters in public; looking and desiring to be looked at; the feeling of being disgusting and the desire to become even weirder; the fixation on female sensuality and

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[361] Zegzhda, "Vospominaniia," 45.
[362] Kharms, *ZK*, 1:474.
[363] Professor Trubochkin is a character in Kharms' short stories for children. This is an example of how in his notebooks, personal diary notes exist alongside drafts for future texts and sometimes even seem to flow one into another (see, e.g., Kharms, *ZK*, 1:19, and a commentary by Sazhin in Kharms, *ZK*, 2:240, which I discuss further in more detail).
[364] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:26.

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very detailed fantasies focused on bodily fluids and oral sex. As this chapter will show, these themes, with their focus on looking, seeing, and accessing the hidden, are all organised by the structure of the *shkap* with the treacherous façade and the hidden other inside. In Kharms' diary notes, this structure of the *shkap* and the different ways of mobilising it operate as a means of imaginary reclaiming of control over who can see him and what he sees himself, thus working as a counterbalance to both everyday practices of surveillance and the feeling of being painfully invisible.

As I have shown in the previous chapters, the cupboard organizes Lipavsky and Kharms' thinking on embodiment, permeated by anxieties about duplicity and fascination with what the appearance of an individuality conceals. A number of scholars have shown how various discourses of the Stalinist 1930s focus on the compulsive search for the hidden other inside, and the fear of otherness that lies within: either within the social body (spies, secret counterrevolutionaries, enemies of the people dispersed and working undercover among the population, etc.), or within the individual body.[365] In the case of the individual, this other has been conceived as irrational, impersonal, automatic, and reactionary life of the body which needs to be consciously mastered and overcome by the mind, and whose unruly desires, in Lilya Kaganovsky's words, "return[ed] to haunt the New Soviet Man."[366] The exact techniques of this taming and overcoming are subject of numerous hygienic discourses and biopolitical efforts of the state in the 1920s and 1930s.[367] In the face of this challenge, discourses of Socialist realism demand consistency, personal integrity and unity; what these discourses articulate as most fearsome is ambivalence understood in moral terms as duplicity. The hidden, treacherous, and carnal other inside, or, to put it differently, the otherness of the inside, is therefore at once produced and ritualistically repudiated by discourses that

[365] See Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*; Smirnov, *Psikhodiakhronologika*; Halfin, "Looking into the Oppositionists' Souls."
[366] Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*, 22, 25.
[367] See Starks, *The Body Soviet*; Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 75-79.

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compulsively seek to locate and destroy it.[368] Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin offer a glimpse into how other-than-Stalinist subjectivities are articulated and structured within this framework. The previous chapters have focused on the exploration of the relationship with the non-human and the elemental within the human body and outside of it—the different incarnations of the hidden other in *chinari*'s texts. Here, I will look into how these same themes are addressed in the context of Kharms's personal life project, and how the fear of the hidden other inside and the related concerns about visibility organise his visions of the public space and the female body.

My analysis of Kharms' diaries will thus be structured around the search for emotional patterns, repeated affectively charged utterances, affective genres that structure, and practices that frame them.[369] In this chapter, I outline a number of such genres and practices which all in different ways relate to the theme of engaging with the hidden other within the human body. In section 2, I will address the specificities of his diaries, and outline how the questions that they raise are structured around the concerns regarding opacity and visibility, legibility and illegibility of the "inside." In the following section, I will focus on Kharms' reports of his erotic search in the city, with the accompanying hope and disappointment, and his project of re-organisation of the public space that would make it more ordered, transparent, and unambiguous (and unambiguously heterosexualised). The final section will be centered around the desire to look and be looked at: in the streets, on the beach, at the window, and in his fantasies, and the desire for female bodies that openly display their desire. Approaching this passion for looking through Laura Mulvey's work on the male gaze will help understanding it in its relationship to power and perceived, as well as real, powerlessness. Using Susan Sontag's essay on Camp, I argue for the profound campiness of Kharms's life project as it comes together in his diary notes. Camp, with its

[368] Smirnov, *Psikhodiakhronologika*, 264-265.
[369] On affective genres and practices, see Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion*, 22-23. On affective politics of Stalinism, see Toropova, *Feeling Revolution*.

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combination of pathos and playfulness, offers a way to address this complicated attitude to the hidden otherness: the anxiety about it, the passionate pull towards possessing and embodying it, and the fantasies of its revelation—and therefore, neutralisation.

1. Visibility and legibility: The subject and his texts

In his study of early Soviet discourses, Eric Naiman places textual voyeurism that characterised a number of influential novels that dealt with sex and morality, among other techniques of "textual seduction" employed by the state institutions in their effort to bring the private into the public.[370] The always positively marked spying on another's private life within the texts, paralleled by "spying" on the private lives of literary characters that the audience participated in, for Naiman, performed the role of penetration of the private by the public that was thus achieved—and aimed at that very audience.[371] The early Soviet state actively enticed speaking about sex in public, not denying it but aiming to bring it into the light of collective discourse, aiming to master the threatening otherness within the individual body by making it no longer hidden.[372] Kharms's diaries are structured by his constant oscillation between the pleasure of remaining disconnected and the desire for connection, the efforts to preserve a certain privacy of a diary and to bring sexuality into the light of his own solitary discourse, with which his personal project seems to evade the early Soviet disciplinary techniques, while remaining profoundly informed by them.[373] Like the anonymous nineteenth-century author of *My Secret Life*, whom Foucault describes in his *History of Sexuality*, driven by both the external "injunction to talk about sex" and the pleasure that writing about sex provided and amplified, Kharms's diaries serve the function

[370] Naiman, *Sex in Public*, 104.
[371] Naiman, 105.
[372] Naiman, 120.
[373] On the contradictory Soviet politics of diary-writing as usefully self-structuring yet suspiciously private, see Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, ch. 2.

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of "repeat[ing], prolong[ing], and stimulat[ing]" (as well as simulating) erotic encounters, of "displacing, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself."[374]

The relationship between visibility, suspicion, and surveillance in Stalinist culture, on the one hand, and the desire for transparency, accompanied by the production of opacity, in Kharms, on the other, is rather indirect and symptomatic than unidirectionally causal. It is difficult to claim that it was the biopolitical logic of the state that was the primary reason behind Kharms' poetic strategies and choices. It is equally difficult, however, to ignore that in his concern for seeing and being seen, he relies not so much on the same language as on the same vocabulary, on the same themes and affective patterns, arranged this time by a different grammar.[375] It is a similar worry about not being able to see through others and remaining opaque to a hostile gaze, yet it is used in a different way: offering a fantasy of protection and even power for the individual. Transparency can serve as a useful example here. Kharms turns to this theme in the notes on his short military service in 1928:

> Take away all marks of distinction, folding away the blades and having hastily swallowed a prickly fish. (A zander is unusable.) Boast if someone even only seems like a cad, now sit like a piece of glass don't melt and don't accept the scratches, do not be transparent for everyone. They say me "you" [in a familiar singular form], therefore be arrogant. God save me from washing the lavatory. I must soon soon leave. It is very not good here. Everyone is against me.[376]

The lack of distinctive markers produces the writing subject as a smooth and fragile surface repealing invasion—a piece of glass which refuses further markings that attempt to attack its integrity and wholeness. A look, piercing through, would in this respect work similarly to a scratch. A peculiar grammar of the original (literally "be transparent not for everyone") does not suggest a complete protective opacity, but rather a differential access to seeing through. This short paragraph itself works as an example of opaque, prickly writing, which, like a fish, refuses to be readily digestible.

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[374] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:22, 23.
[375] See a similar argument concerning the language of liquids, esp. sexual liquids, in Vinokour, "Daniil Kharms and the Liquid Language of Stalinism."
[376] Kharms, *ZK*, 1:201.

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Writing primarily on Zabolotsky, another important poet of the OBERIU circle, Irina Sandomirskaja foregrounds complete blindness as a poetic strategy, and OBERIU's opting for gesture and tactility instead: "groping the surface of the world, unmediated by concepts and meanings."[377] But this move is driven by the same motive: suspicion toward the meaning that *seems*, and the determination to reach beneath it.[378] In this project, the writers produce texts that are, like "muttering", impossible to hear, "crumpled" in texture[379] which does not allow to see through it. This purposefully complicated speech is opposed to "smoothness" of language and of the unthreatened embodiment[380] of a phantasmatic normal, obedient and protected, citizen. In Sandomirskaja's reading, this poetic blindness and the turn to difficult "texture" serve as a way to evade the imperative for perfect transparency of meaning in official Stalinist culture. In the case of Kharms, however, one finds alternative regimes of visibility instead, characterised by a certain flickering—the constant switching between transparency and opacity—that are central to his strategies of writing and personal performance. He keeps oscillating between the fantasies of taking control over the visibility of others while remaining hidden, on the one hand, and the anxious urge to be finally seen, on the other. It is this oscillation that precludes one from confidently defining these regimes of visibility as subversive with regards to the gaze of the state or mimicking and jealous of its power.[381] (This oscillation, while expressed in his notebooks in the context of erotic desires, speaks to the contradictory situation of an oppositional writer in the 1930s Leningrad: wanting to be read yet being wary of unwanted attention.) Kharms as a persona and a myth has by now become canonised in part precisely for the efficiency of his—creative, if not physical—self-preservation, self-protection, and self-display strategies, for his ability, in a place and time where everyone seems to be consumed by one project, to keep doing

[377] Sandomirskaia, *Blokada v Slove*, 350-351.
[378] Sandomirskaia, 342.
[379] Sandomirskaia, 347.
[380] Sandomirskaia, 193, 212.
[381] On mimicry in later Soviet oppositional culture, see Oushakine, "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat."

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something completely different. Drawing inward and into the private, the interpersonal, the life of the body, are integral parts of these strategies. The *shkap* appears here as something that can be entered, exited, and re-entered at will, causing the subject to flicker before the eyes of the onlookers. The *shkap* becomes an improvised counter-surveillance measure, a figure of protection from the outside (not so much from the state as from fellow citizens), as much as of a hidden threat from the inside, especially when it protects and hides someone else, who happens to be an object of desire.

These strategies come to the fore in Kharms's notebooks. They are not diaries per se, but they do contain diary notes among many other kinds of information covering various spheres of life, including

> lists of books for reading and impressions from what he read, drafts of poetry and prose, lists of debts and expenses, chess games he was playing, notes for his studies on maths, occultism, history of Ancient Egypt, and hinduism. He took these notes under all kinds of circumstances, at home, at literary recitals, when visiting friends, in a park, at a symphony concert, at a beach, during watching a woman in an opposite window and even during a quarrel with his wife.[382]

These notes span the whole of his literary career, from 1925 to the end of the 1930s. In what concerns the themes of visibility and looking, and Kharms' accounts of his erotic life, there is not much change throughout the years. For this reason, in this chapter I will group and discuss the notes thematically rather than chronologically; the majority of those discussed here belongs to the first half of the 1930s. After Kharms's death during the Leningrad siege, the notebooks were saved by Yakov Druskin, together with the majority of his literary texts. They were published in their entirety in 2002, as a two-volume addition to the four volumes of Kharms's complete works.

Kharms' diaries pose a number of theoretical and methodological questions. First, there is little discrimination between different genres of notes that appear here: texts of different origins, of different authors, and in different registers appear together and flow one

[382] Sazhin, "Obyknovennyi Kharms," 1:5.

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into another. One example of this was the appearance of Professor Trubochkin from Kharms's stories for children amidst the fantasies about naked women on the beach. In his commentary to the two-volume publication of these notebooks, Sazhin remarks on how "erotic irritation"[383] from a diary note almost literally produces a transrational poem: after describing a failed erotic adventure which ends with him being "doomed to writing,"[384] Kharms proceeds with a poem of an uncertain meaning where erotically marked vocabulary clearly surfaces among otherwise apparently meaningless words.[385] What appears as a result, Sazhin argues, is a "generic structure diffuse in its contours (or a[n entirely] new one)."[386] This "genre confusion" means that it becomes increasingly difficult to tell *what exactly* one is reading when it comes to his texts narrated in the first person, to tell wholeheartedly held opinions apart from the literary play, and therefore to distinguish between different layers of meaning. As a result, Kharms' notebooks themselves appear as Lipavsky's horrific objects: objects of uncertain character and lacking sufficient internal differentiation, which seem to possess too many identities for the subject to be able to categorise them as one or the other. The undecidability of the genre translates into the undecidability of the meaning, and the impossibility to securely decide what any given text is, to safely pin it down as autobiographical or fictional, "authentic" or self-consciously theatrical, libidinal or detached (or rather, libidinal *and* pretending to be detached).

Another question is that of the audience. Kharms, most likely, never intended his diary notes for reading, let alone publication, which makes them, in a way, uniquely "authentic." Compared to diaries that explicitly anticipate future reading, either oral by the author themselves or by readers on their own, or those fashioned as semi-historical

[383] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:240.
[384] Kharms, 1:18.
[385] "Там пляшут полены | головочным | меном | и миги мигают | минет" (Kharms, 1:19)—which could be roughly and very provisionally translated as "There logss dance | in a headily | changy | and jiffies twinkle | a blowjob."
[386] Kharms, *PS*, 2:473-474.

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testaments,[387] Kharms' notebooks seem to be addressed only to himself, which would, at least on the surface level, mean that there had been fewer layers of editing through which the text had to pass. The claim that there was no audience intended is supported by the fact that many of the notes, especially those describing his feelings for his first wife Esther Rusakova, or prayers that he writes down, are in German, and many notes about his erotic adventures and fantasies are written in a cipher—which has been, of course, deciphered by scholars.[388] The very use of cipher also, of course, means the exact opposite—the fact that Kharms anticipated at least an attempt at reading, expected a reader's gaze and tried to ward it off, symbolically if not practically. (The use of cipher means that there has been an attempt to make a text unreadable, not that the text has been made effectively unreadable.) There is also a more ambivalent case when Kharms notes down a table of how letters of the Georgian alphabet correspond to Cyrillic ones, and then a couple of pages later writes a similar erotic note using it as a cipher. This proximity of the "key" calls into question the very secretness of what is being ciphered—as if the text is asking to be decoded and read. At the same time, some of the notes point to the fact that they are made outside of home (at friends' apartments[389] or on the beach). This fact may explain an additional reason for using cipher: not for the note to be never decoded at all, but rather for it to be opaque for the people who are around Kharms at that moment.

Writing a diary therefore figures as an everyday practice happening in various locations where it needs to be protected from unwanted attention. This protection opens up different temporalities and different potential, even if repudiated, audiences: those from

[387] Cf., for example, Mikhail Kuzmin's 1934 diary written as authobiographical prose, or the diaries of Zinaida Gippius.
[388] Nikitaev, "Tainopis' Daniila Kharmsa." One such note simply says, "I want women" (Kharms, *ZK*, 1:268), another—"Nothing will work out with this bitch, and therefore don't even try. You have to forget about it. Dina Vasilyevna will never be able to be mine. She will be someone else's. I want to give her a blowjob" (1:276). Another striking example of such use of cipher is the following, where it seems as if Kharms was just training to write in it and wrote everything that came to his mind: "daniil | kharms | daniil ivanovich kharms | kharmsfont | a good one. want women. | wet cunt. | a bouquet of brunnettes. | my wife is a voluptuous brunnette | with wet and odorous | genitalia" (2:25).
[389] E.g., Kharms, 1:276.

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whom the text should be hidden for now, those who may be separated from it by their education, or lack thereof (their insufficient command of German), and those for whom it must remain unreadable and undecipherable at any time. There are, as Sazhin points out, certain tendencies in how Kharms resorts to these additional means: he uses German "in moment[s] of special irritation and nervous tension," and cipher, for expressing his romantic and erotic feelings, as well as for his especially aggressive opinions on society and the politics.[390] However, even in this he is not entirely consistent (i.e., not all erotic notes are ciphered, and not all emotionally charged prayers are in German), and this creates folds and rifts in the textual body of his notebooks. The notes appear as a text that "flickers" between transparency and opacity, between purposeful illegibility and offering itself for reading. The murkiness of authorial "intention" behind them works, once again, to secure the undecidability of their "nature," characteristic of a horrifying—albeit this time textual—body. In his case, the reader's inability to definitively decide on the seriousness of the text is precisely the point. And in the cultural and political context where ambivalence is framed as a moral evil, this refusal of consistency itself becomes a politicised choice. Kharms's notebooks thus become a site where implicitly oppositional affective genres and practices can unfold without quite crystallising into resistance.

In this way, the notebooks themselves appear as a sort of a *shkap*, an opaque horrifying object, amorphous, insufficiently differentiated, and containing "too much" for the reader to be able to categorise them as this or that. Being inconsistently coded and ciphered for various differentially repudiated audiences, they appear as a flickering text, uncertain of its own legibility or illegibility. This confusion is even further amplified by the complicity of the writing subject in misogynist conservative politics, complemented by the reader's complicity in the violation of the author's privacy. This very uncertainty allows for a way to

[390] Sazhin, "Obyknovennyi Kharms," 10.

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think the politics of Kharms's notebooks. His refusal of consistency, of choosing either clarity or purposeful self-concealment, constitutes them as an inherently, if unwillingly, oppositional form of writing and being in the context that demands unambiguous self-alignment. The impossibility to distinguish authenticity from theatricality, to "see through" these texts, stands at the center of this writing as a poetic practice.

2. "Looking for a woman who is looking for me": The search for intimacy in public

> I am looking for a girl who is lonely in her walk, intelligent,
> young, healthy, fresh, beautiful, lovely, and gorgeous.
> I am looking for someone like myself.[391]

Many of Kharms' entries in his notebooks are accounts of his walks in parks and public gardens and his visits to the beach, where he went hoping to start an erotic acquaintance with one of the women passing there. This habit, along with the habit of documenting it, produces the public space as fraught with desire and erotic possibilities, but at the same time, as Sazhin poignantly stresses, with disappointment and suffering when the search proves futile—which is practically always the case.[392] The only notes that suggest any kind of erotic "success" pertain to Kharms's acquaintances, women he already knew and had friendly relationships with. As Kharms wrote down after one such expedition in 1932, "I go to look for her every day and every day I don't find her, and well, she doesn't exist."[393] At times this search is very specific: "a yesterday's girl from the tram with transparent eyes,"[394] or "a girl who was here the day before yesterday, wearing a green dress and with a doberman puppy."[395] At times, Kharms' search is more abstract and framed almost like a religious quest:

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[391] Kharms, *ZK*, 1:462.
[392] Sazhin, "Obyknovennyi Kharms," 6.
[393] Kharms, *ZK*, 1:409.
[394] Kharms, 1:449.
[395] Kharms, 1:452.

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> Again I am looking for a beauty
> I am looking for that beauty who is looking for me.
> Is the beauty looking for me?
> Yes, maybe she does.[396]

Beautiful women can be encountered in many places: in lines at stores, in a small window of a cashier desk—there is a cashier lady with whom, Kharms writes, "it is interesting to exchange glances."[397] Similarly, the futility of this search can also be framed in lofty or more mundane terms: "Look for something that is higher than what you can find / Do not write words in vain," he sums up on one such occasion.[398] On another, Kharms gives himself a much more practical advice:

> sit down and think about beautiful women.
> 1. they are unattainable for you.
> 2. this is all you can say about them.
> leave the canteen. you will not meet anyone here anyway.
> go and sit at home.[399]

Erotic search turns into an effort to inhabit and, occasionally, remap the uncomfortable public space by finding or imagining ways to open possibilities for intimacy where there are few.[400] The desiring body is lost in the unwelcoming social space, aching to be found, met, recognized—to be penetrated by the desiring female gaze of a woman who is also looking for him. In these accounts of his search in the city, Kharms, it might be said, is literally *looking for* his place in the social body, trying to find a sense of connection through a romantic encounter. The very mobility of these promenades suggests gendered privilege and leisure, but also the lack of attachment to a permanent working place, which makes his status at the publishing house and his earnings uncertain.

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[396] Kharms, *ZK*, 1:464.
[397] Kharms, 2:200.
[398] Kharms, 2:200.
[399] Kharms, 2:32.
[400] While painful non-belonging is an important theme in Kharms' diaries, it is also an affective state rather characteristic for members of intelligentsia in the 1920s. See, e.g., Borenstein, *Men Without Women*, 4-5.

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While many spaces, at least at first, seem ripe with erotic possibilities, it is the "natural" spaces in the city that attract Kharms's attention the most: parks, gardens, the beach, and even the zoo.[401] Interestingly, all of these "natural" spaces are also those where nature is carefully ordered and rationally organised, which seems to be exactly what Kharms likes about them—although, to be precise, he finds them to be organised not rationally enough. With meticulousness that is so characteristic of him, he notes down projects of how public parks should be re-organised to facilitate heterosexual acquaintances. This fantasy includes arranging "two-person" benches located precisely two meters from each other, with thick bushes in between, preventing unwanted attention from a neighbouring bench. Under no circumstances should children be admitted into these parks—mainly because he perceives them as a source of noise and loud talking, which should also be strictly prohibited. Most importantly, there are rules regarding who can sit on a bench with whom: only a woman can join a man on his bench, and vice versa. Silent ways to signal that one does not want any company are also available: it is enough to place a hand or an object on the free spot.[402] It is desirable for Kharms to meet women but not to mingle among the crowd, so in a different notebook he also imagines narrow alleys "for lonely walks, with armchairs for one person," with bushes separating these chairs from one another, no entry for children, and similar strict regulations against "talking loudly."[403] He dreams of efficiently organised and unambiguously sexualised spaces which would primarily function as a way to verify that everyone's interests and intentions in these spaces are very clear. The tamed urban nature in this case facilitates the resolution of ambiguity in the human nature and the neutralisation of a possibility of rejection. The paradox of artifice and authenticity here lies in the fact that an elaborate code must be developed in order to ensure that everything is what it seems.

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[401] The latter becomes a scene of a peculiar encounter with an ape that strongly reminds Kharms of one of his close acquaintances, Tamara Meier, with whom he seems to be infatuated at the time. Kharms, *ZK*, 2:269.
[402] Kharms, 2:202.
[403] Kharms, 2:183.

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In their focus on transparency of heterosexual courtship in public, Kharms' visions use the vocabulary close to that of Stalinist biopolitics to directly oppose Soviet projects of public parks at the time. In his study of eroticism underlying the Soviet park sculpture, Zolotonosov, reading Stalinist public parks as sites of "utopian socialisation,"[404] directly links their spatial organisation to the creation of the common body of the Soviet people and the production of erotic energy. While Kharms' imaginary park falls under the category of a romantic one, centered around thoughtful loneliness and contemplation, Soviet parks of the 1930s were first and foremost collective spaces where visitors would be constantly in a crowd. Parks were to foster "collective forms of rest," while individual leisure remained "suspicious" and did not qualify as proper relaxation.[405] This emphasis on collectivity meant that in terms of spatial organisation, the preference was given to open planes where everyone would be physically together and able to see everyone else. This included not just open areas for collective sunbathing but also long benches for ten-twelve people and public bathrooms with no doors for individual stalls—which was justified primarily by the necessity to "curb" homosexual activity.[406] This collective space was, however, profoundly eroticised, and sculpture was one means of achieving this eroticisation; other included mass sport-related events and public pools and beaches in the parks—in other words, the proliferation of naked and almost naked bodies on display. The parks were understood as unambiguously sexual spaces, to the extent that their visitors would complain that the explicitness of nude statues hinders actual romantic courtship.[407] As much as to this process of eroticising the space, Zolotonosov connects the pervasive nudity in Soviet parks to the project of "exteriorisation" (*ovneshnenie*) of the individual—the insistence on openness and infantile innocence of the

[404] Zolotonosov, "Filosofiia Obshchego Tela," 28.
[405] Zolotonosov, 29.
[406] Zolotonosov, 56.
[407] Zolotonosov, 33.

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proper Soviet citizen.[408] In the case of nudity this symbolic repudiation of the hidden inside takes on the form of the rejection of the outside—the clothing obstructing the view. The inside thus can only be tolerated if it is completely visible.

In this context, Kharms offers a vision of a spatial and social arrangement where the "I" must be protected from view by the *shkap* and complex rituals of comportment, while everyone else is to be made transparent. The social space as it is is too smooth, there are not enough folds and links for him to attach himself to it. Instead, he imagines compartments and orderly ruptures in the spatial fabric of the urban nature, like in that of a diary, which would create protected relatively private areas where heterosexual courtship can flourish. At the same time, everyone else's intentions should be made as clear as possible. Kharms's sense of his own fragility commands that the *shkap* needs to happen, and needs to be prevented from happening. What is specific about the Stalinist context here is that the gaze of the other is randomized rather than being equally omnipresent. It is not like one knows that "the state" is always watching; instead, one never knows *who exactly* among their acquaintances, neighbours, and passers-by is watching at any given moment,[409] what is visible and what is not, what is being looked at and what is being ignored. Kharms's compartments in this context appear to be a symptom of the desire for certainty of looking and not looking rather than complete opacity.

The price of heterosexualising the public, for Kharms as well as for the Soviet urban planners, seems to be to subject them both to intense reordering so as to make them (more) transparent. For Kharms, however, the ritualistic, ceremonial transparency of intent takes precedence over the purely visual one, and is thought to operate in the service not of state surveillance, but of confused and disoriented citizens. Moreover, it aims at making the very

[408] Zolotonosov, 42.
[409] See, e.g., Nunan, "Ecologies of Socialism: Soviet Gradostroitel'stvo and Late Soviet Socialism," 111. Kharms's prose sketches are filled with idle onlookers and gapers witnessing various violent accidents and brawls: see, e.g., *PS*, 2:478.

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eroticisation of the public space transparent and acknowledged. Kharms' imaginary "re-territorialisation" of the public offers, in contrast to this confusion of intent, an ever-receding sense of adventure and freedom, a "male fantasy"[410] of exercising one's masculinity in the act of ordering, and therefore conquering and controlling, the space: a kind of heterotopia. Matthew Gandy bases his study of queer heterotopias on Lefebvre, who defines heterotopy [sic] as "the place of the other, simultaneously excluded and interwoven,"[411] central to the very existence of the urban space, defined as "the freedom to produce differences (to differ and invent that which differs)."[412] Foucault treats heterotopias even more specifically, as "counter-sites" containing "a kind of effectively enacted utopia."[413] Both "isolated" and "penetrable,"[414] regulated by specific rules of access, Kharms's imaginary *shkap*-space thus appears as what Foucault calls a "heterotopia… of compensation,"[415] where what is inacessible in the rest of social space can be practiced. But unlike the queer heterotopies of public sex Gandy writes about, Kharms' vision (and practice, from what one can tell from his diaries) is, however dissident, in no way egalitarian. Anonymity that Leningrad parks, beaches, and the zoo provide does not translate into equality, as these spaces remain punctuated by intensely classed codes of comportment. Kharms' dreams of clarity and order have as their aim the accentuation and solidification of differences in class and upbringing in the world where, as he perceives it, they have become too chaotic—the production of folds on the surface that is perceived to be almost painfully smooth.

This desire for order and classification that would facilitate heterosexual acquaintances and bring rational organisation into the terrifying realm of interpersonal relationships manifests itself in other similar endeavours. An extensive list of sexological

[410] Gandy, "Queer Ecology," 740.
[411] Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 128.
[412] Lefebvre, 174.
[413] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.
[414] Foucault, 26.
[415] Foucault, 27.

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literature that young Kharms notes down in 1925 consists of 16 positions, including Veininger's *Sex and Character,* Russian "forbidden" (extremely graphic) folktales gathered by Afanasiev, and a number of educational books by various other authors.[416] Kharms also proposes a way to categorise people's faces by numbering their features, and includes a rather off-putting comparative table listing different features of women he finds attractive, with numbers which should signify how attractive each part of the body is.[417] Objectification, in this case, presents itself as a desire for order and clarity. However consistently Kharms writes himself as opposing the mainstream culture of the Soviet 1930s, in this respect his efforts to understand his own desire remain profoundly informed by the intellectual vogue of the time: the fascination with efficiency, scientificity, and rational control over nature.[418] This "rational" approach to desire allows for the pleasure of having the imaginary power to cartograph the social space and taxonomise female bodies, writing boundaries and subcategories onto both, creating ruptures and compartments in an imaginary act of disobediently taking the power back.

This fantasy of power is captured in the figure of a distant observer, which appears in several Kharms's poems as well. In an untitled 1928 poem, this character, with his pipe, reads like the poet's alter ego:

> On Tuesdays above the roadway
> The empty air balloon would fly.
> It would quietly float in the air;
> In it, someone would be smoking a little pipe,
> Looking at squares, gardens,
> Looking calmly until Wednesday,
> And on Wednesday, having blown out the lamp,

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[416] See the full list in the English translation of the notebooks: "The Sexual Question: Beard and Rockwell, *Sexual Exhaustion as a Type of Neurasthenia*. Iwan Bloch. *The Sexual Life of our Time*. L. M. Vasilevsky, *Towards a Healthy Sex Life*. Vasilevsky, *Sexual Deviance*. Otto Weininger, *On Henrik Ibsen and his Works*. Weininger, *Sex and Character*. Weininger. *Last Words*. Afanasiev, *Erotic Folktales* "The Bashful Noblewoman." A. Hegar, *The Sex Drive*. Professor Gertsegi, *Woman in her Physiological, Pathological and Moral Aspects*. L. Levenfeld, *Sexual Problems*. A. K. Lentz, *Shame and its Meaning for Sexual Feeling*. A. Meyer, *Hygiene of the Childless Marriage*.
Freud, *Theory of the Sex Drive*. Kovalevsky. *Sexual Psychology*." Kharms, *Phenomenon,* 63. See the original list in Russian in Kharms, *ZK*, 1:23-24.
[417] Kharms, 1:326.
[418] See, e.g, Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*.

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He would say: Well, the city's alive.[419]

The silent observer on the balloon, similarly to a project for OBERIU's roof guards described in another note,[420] is interesting in that he is a figure of both control and inactivity. His very presence is flickering: the balloon is said to be empty, yet someone is smoking a pipe in it. Visually controlling the space, he is physically disconnected from it, which is accentuated by his relative invisibility and silence. Yet this invisibility is also ironic, as the mysterious observer is hiding in a basket of a hot air balloon—probably the most conspicuous thing possible, whose extraordinariness stands in stark contrast to the weekly regularity of his flight. In an ending of another 1930 poem, it is the God in the form of an icon that watches those below:

above the bed the God holds his Look.
Come on, let's break it open!
Let's see what's there under the board
taming the human glance.
The God is hanging above the bed
we ask the God for mercy [pity].
The God lowers his eyelashes
hiding his gazes in the darkness
he is looking at our frolicking.
And we are already not as we were[421]

This poem stages a kind of a battle of glances: the defiant "scientific" gaze of the humans is defeated and shamed by the silent look of God, receding into itself, into the darkness under his eyelashes. Yet, with his gaze being invisible, he is still capable of watching over the infantile erotic human "frolicking" on the bed. The "we" of the poem, the frolicking notwithstanding, is, either as a result of this encounter or in general, marked by lack—"we are already not as we were" (*uzhe ne te*). The invisibly looking God of this poem brings to mind a second meaning that surfaces through the character of the nameless observer in a balloon, which was likely not intended originally but which imposes itself retroactively.

[419] Kharms, *PS*, 1:84.
[420] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:168-170.
[421] Kharms, *PS*, 1:124.

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Kharms is not the only one who smokes the pipe; in Stalinist culture, calmly sitting above everyone else and silently watching, there is always another pipe-smoker, the one who sees and knows everything and whose gaze cannot be countered by anyone's from below. In writing the fantasies where everything must be rendered transparent while the looking "I" may remain opaque, Kharms create a space where he himself can be similarly God-like. This is yet another example of Kharms's parodic, rather than purely oppositional relationship to the mainstream culture of his time.

3. The desire to be looked at: Bodies on display

Predictably, these interventions into the public space are structured around looking—but for Kharms, it is the desiring female gaze, rather than his own, that is the propelling force in this endeavour. "How I want a woman!" he exclaims in one note, "I want to have a woman very much. There are now no women who would be able to fall in love with me from the first sight, so much that she [sic] would approach me and initiate the acquaintance herself."[422] The power of the admiring and loving gaze is necessary to draw a woman toward him—somehow he cannot approach her himself. What Kharms is after seems to be not conquest, but another's desire. His promenades are therefore organised as self-display, accompanied by the almost inevitable failure and disappointment, for which the bad times of the "now," as in the example above, or Kharms himself may be blamed interchangeably: "Ladies are not looking here. Don't hold your breath, young ladies will never look at you. <...> Now they will be looking at you!!!"[423] In line with the same inability to decide if he is extremely attractive or if all hope to attract any attention is lost, in another diary entry he notes: "I produce destruction in lines of visual directions of various young ladies."[424] "Producing destruction" might mean

[422] Kharms, *ZK*, 1:474.
[423] Kharms, 1:143.
[424] "Я произвожу разрушение в рядах зрительных направлений разных девиц." Kharms, 1:330.

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that the young ladies are absolutely smitten—or that their gazes are interrupted by Kharms's presence and forced to turn away, as if from a repulsive, disgusting, or frightening object.

The beach becomes an important space insofar as it works as a "natural" stage for this kind of spectacle. Here Kharms can legitimately lie amongst "beautiful ladies": "It is very pleasant for me to be among naked women. Only if these women find me handsome and interesting."[425] The beach acts as a space that can accommodate both his spectacle and the moments of intimacy found in possible shared glances and bodily proximity. The spectacle that he offers, however, is a disastrous or a failing one, for women to observe, in his peculiar self-feminising gesture of turning himself into an image to be gazed upon, and possibly to be repelled by. Like the *shkap* which was brought on stage in the House of Press in 1928, and on top of which Kharms was sitting, he is a weird object on display, whose weirdness wins for him the right to be looked at.

While the public space for Kharms becomes fraught with possibilities of intimacy, the boundaries of his own private home also implode, turning into a stage for the erotic spectacle. He leaves a number of notes recounting his habit of standing or sitting in front of the window naked, waiting for women in the opposite house to notice him. The window as a symbol of the boundary and its crossing figures prominently in his writings.[426] One of the central texts on the symbolism of the window among Kharms' writings is his love letter to Raisa Poliakovskaia. Kharms tells her how his ex-wife Esther had been for him both the star far up in the sky, and the window through which he had been looking at it (he explains this connection by complex symbolic manipulations: Esther becomes connected to the stars through the pseudo-etymological connection that her name shares with the Latin *astra,* and Kharms had arranged the letters of her name into a window-like monogram). But now, after his relationship with Esther is over, he does not know what he is looking at anymore: he is

[425] Kharms, 2:16, 2:25, see also 2:20.
[426] A very detailed account of the cluster of meanings associated with the window in Kharms can be found in Iampolski, *Bespamiatstvo*, 42-73.

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left without a guiding star. And at that moment, Kharms writes, "...I saw you. You approached your window in a bathing suit. This was how I first saw you. Saw you through the window."[427] Instead of the star, Kharms concludes, he is now looking at/towards the paradise, as the short form of Raisa's name, Raia, closely resembles the Russian word for the paradise—*rai*. While in the text of this letter, his love figures in the purified form of aspiration toward the distant heaven, it is still very typical of Kharms that the vision of the paradise appears to him in the form of a woman in a bathing suit standing in front of her window.

In this way, along with this elaborate play with letters and images, and the whole cluster of meanings pointing to Kharms' interest in mysticism and the occult, the window, especially in his diaries, retains its everyday, "obscene" meaning of a stage for acts of exhibitionism that transform the boundary between the inside and the outside of the home into a space that is simultaneously theatrical and intimate in its eroticism. This habit is linked for Kharms with the feeling of impotence, both physical and creative, about which he complains in numerous places throughout his notebooks:

> I am completely stupefied. This is frightening. Complete impotence in all senses. The laxity is visible even in my handwriting. | But what a crazy persistence there is in me toward the vice. I sit out for hours day after day to have it my way and cannot have it, but sit out anyway. See what a sincere interest can do![428]

In other notes, this desire to be noticed is fictionalised:

> Gimmelkumov was looking at a girl in the opposite window. But the girl in the opposite window did not look at Gimmelkumov a single time. "This is because she is shy," Gimmelkumov thought.
> Gimmelkumov painted his face with green ink and came to the window. "Let everyone think: how weird he is," Gimmelkumov said to himself.[429]

[427] Kharms, *PS*, 4:139.
[428] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:193. Sazhin argues that it is this exhibitionist habit that is implied here (2:314).
[429] Kharms, 2:10.

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The familiar themes of being weird on purpose in order to finally attract attention, and of being green as an imagined way to do this, reappear in this note. There is very little of provocation or the desire to shock the "philistines," as one would expect in case of an avant-garde author. Rather, these notes betray a desire for recognition and even an impossible intimacy—but accompanied, so it seems, by no actual knowledge of how people normally obtain them, or not being able to use this knowledge, for whatever reason.

Quite predictably, when he finally *is* noticed, Kharms encounters problems. A note from 1938 recounts that after standing at the window naked again he was visited by "a policeman, a yardman, and someone else. Claimed I'd been scandalizing people in the opposite house for three years now. I've put curtains up."[430] In response, he exclaims in his note that if old women are allowed to be seen in their undershirts, then a naked young man should be as well, as he is "more pleasant for the eyes."[431] Kharms also (most probably) projects his own passion for this form of exhibitionism onto his first wife Esther, when in a fit of jealousy he accuses her of exchanging glances with someone through the window, standing in front of the window in her swimming suit, and sitting there without her drawers "with her legs up, so that, if desired, everything could be seen from the opposite house."[432] Kharms puts himself on display like a work of art, and he is very attentive to the same passion for self-display in women, both when it comes to abusive control and when negotiating mutual desire.

Pragmatically, women displayed and displaying themselves in Kharms' texts may serve as an additional way to establish a connection, a commonality with the readership. As Laura Mulvey argues in her foundational essay on the male gaze and visual pleasure in cinema, the spectator (in this case, the reader) shares in the pleasure of watching a woman

[430] Kharms, 2:198.
[431] Kharms, 2:198.
[432] Kharms, 1:219.

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displayed "as erotic object for the characters."[433] The active male character, let alone the author himself, cannot, however,—must not—function as an erotic object. As "the representative of power" and "the bearer of the look of the spectator," the one who will be used as a screen on which the readers identifications will be projected,[434] he cannot assume the position of a spectacle, an inactive object to be looked upon. This might explain the averted gaze of scholarship which for the most part prefers to acknowledge Kharms' exhibitionism with a quick passing remark.[435] We are looking with him, but we cannot look at him. For Kharms himself, however, these sessions in front of the window are permeated with a fantasy of control: making another look and directing another's gaze.

Kharms is very specific about what the woman he is looking for should be like. This image is implicitly classed and marked as different from the majority of "modern" women:

> Her QUALITIES:
> She is religious and ~~Orthodox~~ maybe Christian. She likes the strange and the unexpected, but is absolutely unlike modern women. She is passionate but always composed. She is refined and lewd, but not dissolute. Her genitals are very moist when aroused.
> She is looking for me. She is my Eve.
> Her CHARACTERISTICS:
> She never is where I am.
> Her THOUGHT:
> Where am I?[436]

Among other requirements, she should be dressed "well and tastefully," be "well mannered and stern-looking," "slender but plump, of a biblical type."[437] Kharms writes a fantasy of a woman out of place and out of time, to the point of not being able to coincide with her in time and place himself. This description is full of characteristics bordering on contradictions: "slender but plump," religious and lewd, "passionate but always composed," "lewd, but not dissolute" (which probably stands for a combination of interest in sexual experimentation and monogamy). Kharms dreams up an impossible woman whose most consistent characteristic

[433] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 62.
[434] Mulvey, 63.
[435] See, e.g., Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 397, and Sazhin's commentary in Kharms, *ZK*, 2:314.
[436] Kharms, 1:410.
[437] Kharms, 1:409.

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seems to be that she is drastically different from ordinary women he meets, both in her piety and aristocratism, and in her openness toward sex in an environment that he sees as mostly asexual.

Moisture is extremely important for Kharms and surfaces in his other notes as well. Similarly to Lipavsky, he is drawn to thinking about what he childishly calls "the yuckies" (*gadosti*) in the human body, but only partly agrees with Lipavsky in his approach to them. Heterosexual attraction makes the disgusting in the body appealing, which is why, in Kharms's opinion, men cannot be appalled by female mucus. But they most certainly should be appalled, on the contrary, by its lack:

> A woman who is too clean is physiologically more disgusting [2 illegible] than the one who is a bit unkempt.
> If a woman's genitals are washed too cleanly, dry and do not have any smell—this is just disgusting.
> Everything that is pleasant is at once a little disgusting.
> A clean child and a clean old man are always a little disgusting.[438]

Kristeva approaches the abject as a "non-object" which provokes horror and disgust in that it "violates the border and the order"[439]—including those bodily secretions and functions that disturb the bodily boundaries. For Kharms, however, these secretions function to reconfirm them. Kristeva describes this mechanism as characteristic for cases where "The body's inside... shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's 'own and clean self' but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents."[440] The desire for such reconfirmation is thus directly related to transparency and invisibility, and the inability to establish the boundaries of the inside. The need for the "revelation" of the other results from one's painful (even if only perceived) openness to the sight, as another gesture of control over looking that has gotten out of hand.

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[438] Kharms, 2:12.
[439] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[440] Kristeva, 53.

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Closely related to this desire for visibility is Kharms's insistence on the fact that female desire should be manifest and exposed, primarily to sight and smell. A woman whose genitals do not smell is, quite predictably, declared "disgusting."[441] Women in general, he argues, should never wash "the inside" (*vnutrennost'*) of their genitals in order to preserve their "beautiful smell" (*prekrasnyi zapakh*).[442] Kharms loves categorizing women into types, and one of the divisions he offers is that between the "passionate" and the "sensual" ones. A passionate woman is only interested in satisfying her desire, which comes at the cost of satisfying the senses: her pleasure is "blind," "she has no time to show her genitals, to examine, touch with her hand, and kiss your genitals," and hers are, of course, dry. She is, Kharms concludes, "always manlike in one respect or another."[443] A sensual woman, in contrast, is interested in the slow pleasures of mutual observation. Moreover, her genitals leak aromatic "juice" so much that she, Kharms imagines, has to wear a bandage under her clothes to absorb the moisture, and in the evening it is "so wet that you could wring it."[444] Like Lipavsky, he is interested in what appears to be the uncontrollable, unconscious, and not-quite-human in the body, and in particular in bringing it into the open, where it can be met with scrupulous examination and admiration, much like a work of art.

The fantasy of control over looking and seeing is once again central here. As Mulvey argues, both "investigati[on of] the woman" and her fetishisation are responses to the castration anxiety triggered by her sexual difference.[445] In that way, the investigation serves as a "re-enactment of the original trauma."[446] This trauma is related to the discovery of one's own powerlessness, and indeed, as I have shown throughout this chapter, for Kharms, this powerlessness is bound up with the painful feeling of imposed transparency. In his

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[441] Kharms, 1:128.
[442] Kharms, 2:12. In some of his notes and poems dedicated to Tamara Meier, Kharms codes her as "AROMAT" (aroma)—her name spelled backwards, with only a one-letter difference.
[443] Kharms, 2:175.
[444] Kharms, 2:175.
[445] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 64.
[446] Mulvey, 64.

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fantasizing about looking at women and women looking at him, he reworks this powerlessness into a sense of power. This is what is at stake in objectification, in bodies-as-matter and bodies-as-objects: the neutralisation of interiority and the docility in being displayed. Objectification of women becomes instrumental in establishing a regime of visibility that redistributes the right to looking and seeing, being transparent and remaining opaque.

What glimmers through these examples, from the anxious promenades and dreams of carefully arranged public parks to the many fantasies of looking and being admiringly looked at, is the profound and unselfconscious campiness of Kharms.[447] In her now classic essay on Camp as a sensibility, Sontag stresses the intimate connection between Camp and duplicity. In this case, duplicity has to do with the focus on "pure artifice" that disregards the very notion of a hidden meaning (a work of art as pure surface), but also with one's "private" way to engage with it.[448] Camp "is the love of the exaggerated, the 'off,' of things-being-what-they-are-not."[449] As his diary notes show, Kharms the person did not, in many cases, share this love; but Kharms the persona and the oeuvre, especially when the notebooks are included in it, is quite Camp. He is reveling in cringe. Moreover, both the persona and the person share what Sontag calls "a state of continual incandescence—a person being one, very intense thing," which contributes to the theatricalisation of that character into a persona.[450] It is Kharms's apparent inability to be anything else than entirely, and ridiculously, himself, disregarding the practical demands of everyday life and political situation, that grants his personal writings this "incandescence." In Sontag's classification, this is the case of naive

[447] I am grateful for Irina Sandomirskaja for suggesting this line of reading.
[448] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 281.
[449] Sontag, 279.
[450] Sontag, 285-286. Sontag assigns Camp the role of "modern dandyism" (279), and indeed Kharms has been read as a "the last Petersburg dandy"—see, e.g., Meilakh, "Daniil Kharms: Poslednii Peterburgskii 'dendi.'"

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Camp, marked by "a seriousness that fails,"[451] a passion discernible even through the generic confusion of the notes.[452]

Kharms is, of course, even as an oeuvre, not all Camp. The knowledge of his fate does colour how one tends to read his texts, and his life, like that of many of his friends, was lived in poverty and worry and ended in untimely death. This suffering lends the sense of tragedy to even the more innocuous texts, and Camp does not really accommodate the tragic.[453] Moreover, his prose does share in that tradition of the European avant-garde which Sontag outlines as a parallel, very different sensibility, that of "anguish, cruelty, derangement,"[454] serious and disruptive in its ambition, from expressionism and existentialism to the absurd. It may be that some of the scholarly resistance to interrogating the personal in Kharms comes from the prestige implicit in a belonging to this tradition, rather than to that of Camp, which carries strong connotations of bad taste. This split in his work is best described by Kharms himself in one of his diary entries: "With my mind, I want to become a genius, yet with my feelings I want to be naked among the naked volumptious young women, who would smell strongly of their genitals, and I want these women to get aroused from looking at me."[455] Approaching these notes as Camp may help resolve some of the tension implicit in acknowledging these intimate, uncomfortable, and often misogynist confessions. As Sontag concludes, "Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of 'character.' … Camp is a tender feeling."[456] A degree of tenderness is indeed helpful in approaching these more problematic notes with a critical yet non-judgemental eye.

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[451] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 283.
[452] This seriousness distinguishes Kharms from Konstantin Vaginov, whose writings are very self-consciously and self-referentially Camp, and from the playfulness of Mikhail Kuzmin, whose texts share with Kharms's diary notes some of the qualities of the "urban pastoral" (Sontag, 279).
[453] Sontag, 287.
[454] Sontag, 287.
[455] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:128-129.
[456] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 291-292.

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4. Conclusion

The figure of the hidden other, which, I argue, is central to Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin's writing, is logically bound up with notions of looking and seeing, transparency and opacity. Kharms's notebooks are profoundly informed by his preoccupation with looking, being looked at and seen, being legible or remaining illegible for the other's gaze. In their very organisation, they work as a space where generic as well as affective boundaries become blurred, thus making it often impossible to read specific notes as biographical or fictional, serious or playful. This confusion results in the fact that authenticity becomes not so much unattainable as always uncertain. The notebooks function like Lipavsky's horrifying objects, lacking internal differentiation and boundaries that would structure their textual body; containing "too much" within themselves, and for this reason uncategorisable. Employing various forms of coding and ciphering, different languages and emotional registers, being potentially differentially accessible to different audiences, and layered by different temporalities of writing and reading, the notebook becomes a flickering text refusing any consistent way to be read, and remaining neither consistently clear nor opaque for the reader.

The same structure repeats itself in Kharms's accounts of his erotic search in the city and his fantasies of the ideal woman he is looking for. These accounts are affectively framed by hope and disappointment of the promenades and the exhibitionist self-display in front of the window, and despair and suspicious jealousy at the impossibility of this quest. One of the most characteristic aspects of Kharms's walks in the city are his dreams of reorganising the public space so that the intentions of everyone participating in the promenade are as clear as possible, which would as a result make the public space unambiguously heterosexualised. The paradox of these visions is that they promise to bring about order and clarity, and to provide freedom and peace by means of intensified regulation and codification of the everyday, in part by making the public space not accessible to all and thus effectively less

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democratic. The ultimate goal of this regulation is to ensure that everything is what it seems, and people (specifically, women) act predictably in similar situations. The theme of seeing and seeming is central here. Kharms' erotic search is propelled by the desire to be looked at, either in public, in the streets, in parks or on the beach, or in private (or on the boundary between two private spaces)—in front of the window, where he can be seen from the window in the opposite building. All of these settings are expected to provide a stage where spontaneous intimacy can be found.

Like in the case of an admiring gaze that Kharms hopes to find in the streets or in the window of the opposite house, the female body he imagines is reaching out of itself towards him with its liquids, its moisture and smell, which should both indicate an imagined constant state of arousal. This is the incessantly desiring body without boundaries—like the horrifying bodies and body parts imagined by Lipavsky. This time, however, this body is unambiguously positively valued, with no trace of horror left in its descriptions. In part this is because, just like the elaborate codes for public parks that Kharms composes, moisture and smell are needed as unequivocal signs of desire, and of the body's obedience to the power of the onlooker's deciphering gaze. But in his search for this reassurance Kharms imagines a body that is almost turned inside out, not hiding what Lipavsky would call its "elemental" life, but putting it on display. The hidden other of the female body and female desire, while admired and cherished, needs to be made unambiguously visible. This body is a *shkap* with its doors flung open. The specific forms in which this openness is manifested—fluids and smell—disregard the boundaries of individual bodies: by being able to be consumed, fluids and smell offer possibilities for material connection beyond those boundaries, for a meeting that can happen in between, like a meeting of gazes.

The alternative regime of visibility that Kharms devises contains contradictory pulls: toward the visibility and transparency of the other and the other's inside, toward the display

of one's own "façade," and toward the concealment and protection of the inside, which comes through in a play of revelations and silences, where we know that someone has been concealed only because something else had just been revealed. The *shkap* remains a protective shell around the writing subject; all other kinds of *shkap* provoke anxiety. Objectification of women in this process becomes instrumentalised in the taking back of the power to look and see the other, and to willfully display oneself. However, it is not only sexualised female embodiment that provokes Kharms's thinking and writing on the hidden other. Constantly oscillating between theatricality and authenticity, clarity and dissimulation, opacity and desire for immediate connection, he as well comes to performatively embody the figure of the alien within the social body.

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Chapter 4. Ridiculous classifications and the work of disgust

I have already mentioned the optical effect of depth characteristic of Kharms' writings, which produces a curious dynamic of evasion in his erotic texts and seems to, so to say, "infect" the scholarship aiming to address them. Works which set out to question Kharms' use of erotic imagery tend to foreground the explanations for hatred and disgust directed at women, be they personal, philosophical, or socio-political.[457] In the process of such a reading, however, misogyny itself and the ways in which it manifests in text tend to disappear into the background. It is as if the gaze slides off that imagery, unable to focus on it for long enough and tempted to probe into an imagined depth beneath it. This is one the ways in which Kharms's texts are organised and function as a *shkap*: inviting one to assume the hidden depth behind the appearances and thus providing a refuge from an interrogative gaze directed at the surface.

Following the same strategy of looking for contexts (rather than explanations, sources, or roots) of misogyny to understand how it is intertwined with the new model of human subjectivity that Lipavsky, Druskin, and Kharms are intermittently developing in their circular conversations, this chapter is going to focus on one such context (and, one might say, a genre) in which misogyny surfaces: their often ridiculous classifications. I argue that disgust and misogyny as its subspecies become the means of upholding the slippery boundaries that their classificatory activity appears no longer able to maintain. Disgust thus directed, in writing, against a particular kind of women becomes a way to perform a boundary, or a number of boundaries. As it, in its turn, fails as well, *chinari*'s texts stage a kind of unmaking of the classification as a genre from within—an unmaking that is both

[457] E.g., Tokarev, "Poetika nasiliia"; Roberts, "Guilt without Sex."

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aesthetically pleasing and ridiculous, and works as a step towards an acceptance of bodily, social, and epistemological disorder.

In their conversations noted down by Lipavsky, *chinari*, when giving a list of their interests, echo each other in mentioning, among multiple other things, women and questions of dirt and cleanliness alongside questions of general rules of life:

> N. M. [Oleinikov] said: ...eating; women; organisation of a home; rules of life; [...]; liquidation of squeamishness; tolerance; pity; cleanliness and dirt; kinds of boasting; conservatism; some conversations with women.
> D. Kh[arms].: [...] Destruction of squeamishness. Washing one's face, body, a bath. Cleanliness and dirt. Food. Cooking of some dishes. Dressing of a dinner table. Organisation of a home, flat, and room. Clothing, male and female. Notebooks. Everyday recording of events. Women, but only of my favourite type. Sexual physiology of women. Silence.
> L. L[ipavsky]: [...] Types of women. Reasons for sexual attraction.[458]

What appears quite clearly in their long whimsical lists is the persistent interest in matters of purity and dirt, the fascination with order and ordering and the desire to find their rules, and the interest in female physiology, accompanied by a belief in the existence of different types of women. As Lipavsky does in his essays on horror and sexual attraction, where he directs his impulse for classification and ordering to precisely those parts of reality which seem most overwhelming, uncontrollable, and fraught with threat, *chinari* here approach femininity with a quasi-scientific seriousness. It is this quasi-scientific mode of approach that I want to foreground in this chapter. The first section is going to address Kharms's classifications as a boundary-making tool, showing how his propensity for thinking in "female types" works as a means of articulating his own position in a rapidly changing society. The second section will focus on disgust at classed others and sexual taste as a means to express political discontents. This section will focus on how misogyny is performed and articulated, and most importantly, what its functions are: what misogyny does in Kharms's texts. In this sense, I want to read misogyny as productive—not in the sense that it is in any way "good" (it most definitely is not), but in the sense that it helps Kharms achieve something in the text, rather than being

[458] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 307-309.

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merely borrowed from culture or an unfortunate leftover from childhood. I will use Sara Ahmed's approach to feelings as shaping the surfaces of bodies to talk about how disgust in Kharms is classed and political, and how it informs his narrative performance of perseverance against the hostile and unwelcoming body of the people. The third section will address the failure of the boundary performed through disgust when it comes to characters of Kharms's prose that function as marginal and often dehumanised: children and the elderly. The final section will then contrast this with the other route taken by Lipavsky and Druskin: from increasingly ambitious and ridiculous classifications to dissolving the boundaries they attempt to register from within.

1. The work of classifications: ordering social reality on a page

Kharms appears to have had a particular propensity for putting together comparative tables with damning assessments of contemporary culture and tastes, sometimes possessing a characteristically nonsensical air. One diary note includes a table comparing things that are, in his view, good and bad:

GOOD	BAD
Mozart.	Tchaikovsky, Skriabin.
Big-boned women.	Fine-boned women.
Big-bosomed women.	Flat-chested ones.
Young, healthy, fresh, plump, juicy women.	Stylish, lean, lithe, pampered, even demonic women.
Meat, milk.	Spicy dishes, with vinegar.
Humour.	Mood.
Dress—simple, comfortable, emphasising the strength in the posture	Fashionable dress, with small thingies in the form of trimmings, with a pretension for luxury.

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The difference between opposing female types here has to do with cultural fashion. Kharms scorns that which is modern, and which conforms to the refined intellectual cultural taste of the turn of the century. The devalued type is easily recognisable as a combination of the two implicitly and sometimes contradictorily classed female figures: the Silver-Age *femme fatale* and the Soviet variation on *la garçonne* of the 1920s–1930s—the "boyish" female comrade of the early Socialist realism, as described, e.g., by Lilya Kaganovsky.[460] The female type in the left column, in contrast, is associated with noble simplicity: that of classical music, humour, and functional dress. (While positioned as going against the grain, it curiously echoes the changing ways in which women were increasingly depicted in Socialist Realist art: in fact, Kharms' big-boned, big-bosomed, healthy and strong women in simple dress very much echo popular paintings of the time.)[461] The right-hand column has clear markers of time and fashion, whereas the left column appears to be on the side of the timeless—especially when one remembers his note describing an ideal woman as that of a "biblical type."[462] In another undated note, Kharms again draws an analogy between "thin women" and "contemporary cultural taste":

> Here are the things that are bad [*vot chto plokho*].
> Contemporary cultural taste.
> [...]
> Academia publishing house.
> Slanted pockets.
> Broad lapels on men's suit coats.
> The vogue for slim women.

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[459] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:93.
[460] Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*, 73.
[461] See, e.g., Goscilo, "Post-Ing the Soviet Body," 254-259, especially in the discussion of Aleksandr Deineka's paintings. A detailed discussion of "female types" can be found in scholarship on the visual culture and film of the period. E.g., Zolotonosov writes about several female types represented in the Soviet 1930s visual arts: the "European" (*la garconne*, short-haired and skinny), the "American" (sporty and muscular), the "traditional" female type with "soft rounded female forms," and the "Herculean" (*bogatyrskii*) type of Deineka's paintings, for which the most immediate example are the monumental statues of the Motherland (Zolotonosov, "Filosofiia obshchego tela," 65, nt 45). See also an illuminating account of this change in female "types," from refined "women victims" to peasant "stars" in early Soviet cinema in the same volume: Turovskaia, "Zhenskaia Tema v Kinematografe 20-kh Godov," 111.
[462] Kharms, *ZK*, 1:409.

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> Tango.
> Cinema.
> The tone of the girls: Leave me alone!
> Ray Noble's orchestra.
> Gramophone, Jazz.
> Word contraction from metropoliten into "metro."[463]

The following page features an addition: "One of the fundamental points at which people's roads separate is the predilection for thin or plump women."[464] An example of a similar attempt at classification with a clear class agenda is a short note on the types of laughter:

> There are several kinds of laughter. There is a medium kind of laughter, where the whole audience [the whole concert hall] is laughing, but not with its full strength. There is a strong kind of laughter, when only one or another part of the audience [the concert hall] is laughing, but this time with its full strength, and the other part of the room is silent, it does not, in this case, get the laughter at all. The first kind of laughter is what the performance committee demands from a variety performer, but the second kind of laughter is better. The brutes should not laugh. [1933][465]

Laughter becomes a tool of performative social stratification: it draws the distinction between those who "get it" and those who do not. As with performative disgust directed at working-class women, this operation of separating the audience becomes, for Kharms, necessary precisely in a situation in which the old ways of social distinction in a concert hall (who is admitted inside, who sits where, who stands, etc.) are no longer in effect. These homespun class distinctions speak to "the chaotic and amorphous condition of the society" of which Fitzpatrick writes, where class categories have inevitably become very fluid and to an extent phantasmatic in an agrarian but rapidly industrialising country.[466]

What is curious about these classifications is how their outwardly impassive form of an "objective" judgement clashes with the intense clearly perceptible disgust they radiate. The classification, of course, is a pretence: the point is to deliver a damning judgement in the

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[463] Kharms, 2:201-202. On how the cultural taste Kharms devalues refers most directly to the pre-First world war "decadent" style, having already gone out of fashion in 1920-1930s, and how the table echoes the rejection of "old intelligentsia values and traditional intelligentsia ethics," see Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 357, 370.
[464] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:202.
[465] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:179.
[466] Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks*, 33, 55, 30. On the blurring of easily recognisable markers of class belonging in bodily practices, see also Bulgakova, *Fabrika Zhestov*, 11, 22. What these classifications aim at achieving is performed, in a different way, in a section from Kharms's early 1929 prose text "Sablia" (Sabre), where Kharms's narrator demarcates the clear boundaries between his body and external objects. Kharms, *PS*, 2:300.

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relative safety of one's notebook. But the form of a classification, be it a comparative table or a simple list, not only lends it an air of academic clarity, but asserts, in its very form, the knowability of the social and cultural reality one inhabits. This is true even, and especially, where these classifications have a humorous, self-consciously nonsensical air to them—as the discussion of Kharms's notebooks in the previous chapter suggested, it is wise not to take them entirely at face value. The logic of the genre may be accomplishing this work irrespective of the authorial intention. Kristeva posits exclusion and division as activities of a mind confronting the abject: "the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never one, nor homogeneous, nor totalizable, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic a deviser of territories, languages, works, the deject never stops demarcating his universe whole fluid confines... constantly question his solidity."[467] While Kristeva seems to argue here about an individual predilection, independent of the context in which said individual exists, Hurley suggests that there is a link between the intensity of the need to categorise and the instability of societies "under stress to the point of dysfunctionality, unable to manage disorder."[468] She thus interprets such "pollution behaviors" "as compulsive or hysterical."[469] Passion for classification and categorisation thus becomes a sign of extreme anxiety about the lack of order and clarity, "one aware of the futility of its endeavor even as it seeks mastery by specifying an 'order of things.'"[470] Kharms's tables, as well as Lipavsky's attempts to list all kinds of horrible creatures, seem to offer an example of precisely such a compulsion, trying to order reality into "a set of co-ordinated and managed differences."[471] Writing about the management of differences in the discursive links between femininity, illness, and disability, Shildrik posits the female body as that which remains constantly beyond the grasp of the

[467] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 8.
[468] Hurley, *Gothic Body*, 27.
[469] Hurley, 28.
[470] Hurley, 27-28.
[471] Shildrik, *Leaky Bodies*, 51.

attempts to normalise it and make it conform to the ideal of the bound autonomous subject.[472] While she argues about this being the case "in the phallocentric order,"[473] Kharms and Lipavsky show how female bodies become indices of the ungraspable and unruly social space, to be repeatedly demarcated into zones and divided into differentially valued groups, in the "phallocentric disorder."

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2. The work of disgust: Narrating the absent social boundaries

It is in the context of this classificatory urge and passion for unattainable order that one can best understand Kharms's numerous notebook entries marked by an almost violent disgust. These entries concern crowds of people, lower-class women he sees in public places, and particularly "Soviet" and "proletarian" women. "In the evening walked in C. and A. parks. Oh how dismal it is there! I didn't see one young lady there, one gentlewoman; only common girls and old biddies. Came back home full of sorrow" (1933);[474] "I am surrounded with such crappy women on the beach that I don't even want to stay. There are almost no intelligent women on the beach only boors [*khamki*]. I am constantly afraid that a woman would suddenly think ah oh! now he'll start trying to make my acquaintance. So I always lie on the beach with an angry face. (The weather is shit)" (1933).[475] Another day at the beach inspires a particularly vitriolic note about Jewish women[476]—a topic which would return again and again, and in which anti-Semitic tropes of the time mix with Kharms' feelings for his Jewish ex-wife Esther Rusakova. Other ventures into public places inspire similar outbursts of disgust: "Observing terrible broads at the hairdresser's. Ludicrous mugs, making

[472] Shildrik, 56-58.
[473] Shildrik, 56.
[474] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:13.
[475] Kharms, 2:22.
[476] Kharms 2:23.

faces, giggling. Awful women!" (n.d.);[477] "Sitting at 'Cinema for the Masses.' And of course there is not one intelligent face here" (1933);[478] "How disgusting it is to stand in a line, even when getting money. Despise all other people" (1934).[479]

The notes on "Soviet" women give an even more emotional account:

> One whore here wants to sit on my seat, and I don't want to let her, a snub-nosed slut, a Soviet boor, a proletarian high-ranking wench, a sweaty tart, pig and scum, a boor is a boor." (1928)[480]
> Oh these unfriendy stupid and rude Soviet women! where should I run from you? Among 478 dimwits and boneheads there is only one nice and beautiful. Only one! (1933)[481]
> I know many men who prefer democrat wenches. Excuse me, but I do not like them. And even if I liked them, nothing would work out for me with them either way. I have noticed how they always run away from me.
> They are always silly, stupid, hasty, shy where it's not needed, cynical, vengeful, and touchy. A clever democrat wench is always vulgar and imprudent to the highest extent.
> Run run away from democrat wenches!
> The only thing that is sometimes good in them, is their body and health.
> Sitting in the Alexander Park I was observing the people and noticed that the walking public goes in different directions. (1933)[482]
> How often it is that with an exceptional figure, an amazing bust and wonderful legs, there happens to be such a boorish proletarian mug that if feels like such a pity (in cipher, 1933).[483]

Aside from the telling slippage from "they run away from me" to "run away from them," the most instructive detail is the adjective "high-ranking" attached to a "proletarian" woman. It suggests that it is likely not lower-class women per se that bother Kharms so much, but women of lower-class origins in positions of power, or imagined to be in positions of power. In the often-quoted words of Mary Douglas, "proletarian" women for Kharms are "matter out of place."[484] They are not where they should be, just as a "proletarian" face happens to a good-looking body, as if in a matter of chance, and disrupts it. The familiar trope of the treacherous body takes on in this case a prosaic twist yet retains its power. The body is that which disappoints.

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[477] Kharms, 2:201.
[478] Kharms, 2:36.
[479] Kharms, 2:85.
[480] Kharms, 1:240.
[481] Kharms, 2:32.
[482] Kharms, 1:461.
[483] Kharms, 1:477.
[484] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 36.

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Kharms's conservatism and disgust toward the Soviet reality in which he lived have been well documented and discussed by scholars at some length.[485] As Klebanov and Shubinskii point out, Kharms' feelings were largely triggered by the masses of peasants who kept arriving in Leningrad in search of work and accommodation throughout the 1920s and the 1930s.[486] What is interesting, however, is that the political conservatism of Kharms and his immediate circle of friends[487] is used to clear him of the charges of misogyny based on the fact that he clearly disliked all proletarians, and not only women. At the same time, Klebanov suggests that Kharms's conservatism had less to do with his political views and more with his personality that was "evidently quite asocial at its core."[488] Oscillating between pointing out specific historical circumstances to trigger or justify his political leanings, yet also arriving at the conclusion that they mattered less due to his inherent asociality, Klebanov introduces the language of suffering in relation to it.[489] It supports the slippage that is at work in Kharms's own notes: between him being victimised by the literary system that made it difficult for him to survive financially and by the state organs which imprisoned, exiled, and eventually killed him, on the one hand,—and him being the victim of proletarians and peasant women, whom that state claimed to represent.[490]

However, rather than simply indicative of a pre-existing conservatism or asociality, this kind of feeling-writing could be read as a practice which helps produce a subject as a conservative one, first and foremost for himself, and produce "asociality" as a variation of a social mask, rather than as an essence lying beneath it. This way, the notebooks can be read as a machine Kharms uses to produce himself as a subject, and as different from—and

[485] Aesthetically, too, Kharms turns from the radical experimentation of "left art" with plot and sense in mid-to-late-1920s, to a version of neo-classicism in his work with classical metres and more conventional narrative structures in the second half of the 1930s. In this way, he responds to the conservative turn in Stalin's politics in the form of his work, while taking care to remain oppositional on the level of content. Cf.: Clark, "The Avant-Garde and the Retrospectivists."
[486] Klebanov, "The Left Classicist," 44.
[487] Klebanov, 49-50.
[488] Klebanov, 47.
[489] Klebanov, 51.
[490] See an insightful article on these fears and fantasies at the time: Halfin, "The Rape of the Intelligentsia."

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standing in a moral sense higher than—those whom he writes as repulsive. Sara Ahmed's understanding of the work that emotions do can be particularly useful for such a reading. Emotions, she argues, are not something objects and bodies provoke, but rather forces that, through circulation and repetition, "shape the very surfaces of bodies,"[491] make them "surface," create them as recognisable bounded objects that later can be claimed to have produced the emotion in the first place. In other words, Ahmed's argument is that, quite counterintuitively, it is not objects and bodies that make us feel how we feel about them, but rather our feelings turn them into objects and bodies they are.[492] Disgust, Ahmed stresses, works as a crucial tool of boundary-making for an individual and a group, through the physical movement of recoil from something that is felt to be too close. Most intensely experienced through the extreme proximity of eating, disgust draws attention to the permeability of boundaries between the disgusted and the disgusting, calling for their solidification.[493] This approach to emotions as "social and cultural practices"[494] is helpful in trying to avoid the optical trick of Kharms' texts, forcing one to hunt for the underlying meanings and motivations in the depth beneath the textual surface, and to focus instead on the very practice of writing disgust, and on the work of surface-making that disgust is doing.[495]

Linking this surface-work of disgust to Kristeva's understanding of abjection, Ahmed picks up her argument that abjection felt toward something outside of the body and the anxiety about preserving the boundary between the inside and the outside bring forward the abject-ness of one's own bodily contents: "It is not that the abject has got inside us; the abject turns us inside out, as well outside in."[496] Kharms' notes on "proletarian" women offer an example of this back-and-forth movement between the inside and the outside through his

[491] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 4.
[492] Ahmed, 10.
[493] Ahmed, 83.
[494] Ahmed, 9.
[495] Ahmed, 85.
[496] Ahmed, 86.

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particular choice of words. Coming home "full of sorrow" (*opechalennyi*) after a fruitless walk in a park, rather than simply "sad" (or "down in the dumps," proposed by the translators of Kharms notebooks into English),[497] works to underscore his imagined aristocratism through the loftiness and certain out-of-placeness of its style. In contrast, the heavy cursing ("semiwhores!"—*polubliad'e*) directed at girls on a tram falls from under his pen right as he tries to portray himself as cultured and refined, and betrays the ironic cultural proximity: he is not in fact as cultured nor refined as he would like to appear. This expression of disgust works to bring the *shkap*-subject in motion, expelling that which is inside and projecting it outward, establishing, in the very moment of denial, the uncomfortable proximity between the other outside and the hidden other within. Ahmed calls this the "maintenance-through-transgression"[498] of boundaries, which calls upon "border objects" that come to signal the boundary. "Proletarian" women seem to function like such a border object for Kharms. It is not their moving into the city and not even into positions of power that conjures them as such on object, but the need for the boundary to appear more solid (object-ive).

The fact that these are "proletarian" *women* is instructive: it underscores that the solidification of the boundary is felt to be necessary along the lines of both class and gender. The previous chapter addressed some feminine aspects of Kharms' performances of the self, with his body positioned as the object of the outside gaze. As Lipavsky posits female embodiment as a reservoir of the non-human that is nonetheless present in all human bodies, women function as reminders of its presence. From this perspective, it is not that their "primitive" or "primal" amorphous presence threatens to engulf the subject—rather, as in the case with the three girls on the tram, they bring out the presence of the same (the uncultured, idiotic, promiscuous,[499] but also relatively powerless, relatively objectified) which already

[497] Kharms, *"Phenomenon,"* 371.
[498] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 87.
[499] One of the most important primary sources to complicate the narrative of victimisation by women is the small book of memoirs by Marina Malich-Durnovo, Kharms's second wife and widow, who talks about his

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lies within the male observer. “Disgust hence operates as a contact zone; it is about how things come into contact with other things”:[500] in Kharms’ case, disgust also clearly signals moments of the observing and writing body coming in contact with itself through its encounters with others and working to solidify itself against them. Ahmed describes the movement of disgust as consisting of “a metonymic slide” and the stickiness, by which the memory of previous contact and association between objects and bodies comes into repeated circulation.[501] These two modes of movement and attachment of the affect help to manage and order the social space: separating the “above” from “below”[502] at the cost of it being necessary to repeat the encounter, recoiling in revulsion again and again[503]—to keep being disgusted in order to maintain the border—and thus “at the cost of a certain vulnerability”[504] in coming into proximity with those deemed disgusting. It is therefore not that the brave male subject opposes the amorphous, generative, and unthinking feminine mass and feels disgusted and frightened by the contact and the threat of dissolution, as, e.g., Tokarev suggests in his monograph.[505] The subject feels disgusted and frightened because he is, in fact, already feminine (and, whether he wishes it or not, at least to some extent Soviet) himself, and he

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obsession with sex, to the point of there being something “wrong,” or “amiss” (*neladnoe*) about his relationship to sexuality: Glotser, *Marina Durnovo*, 76. In her memories, which in no way seem to be driven by an animosity against him, he appears as a controlling and manipulative husband, who found ways to discourage her from earning her own living—at the time when both of them were starving—and made a point of not hiding his frequent affairs (Glotser, 81-83, 91-92; see also Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 396). Kharms’s biographer Shubinskii stresses that one should not readily accept the truthfulness of her memories: at the time when the interviews happened, she was already eighty-four, and kept switching between Russian, Spanish, English, and French, so that it might be “difficult to tell reliable testimony apart from painful fantasies” and “‘false memories,’ which happen to older people” (Shubinskii, 385). One might however claim with a certain degree of confidence that the way his widow portrays Kharms’s hardly differs from the person one can glimpse from his own diary notes. What I want to stress here is not whether Kharms is a good or bad person; but rather the circular structure of misattribution of cause and effect, victimisation and suffering, its grammar. Marina Malich-Durnovo’s life story is quite fascinating on its own, and the pages of the tiny book of her memories which describe her life before and after her marriage with Kharms might actually be more interesting than the ones concerning him. After many events worthy of an adventure novel, she ended her life in Argentina, having opened her own bookshop specialising in esoteric literature, renowned as one of the best of its kind (Glotser, *Marina Durnovo*, 185).

[500] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 87.
[501] Ahmed, 87.
[502] Ahmed, 89.
[503] Ahmed, 98.
[504] Ahmed, 89.
[505] Tokarev, *Kurs na khudshee*, 64-65.

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needs to keep returning to the border—to keep writing about the revulsion he feels at "Soviet" women—in order for the border to remain in place.

It is in this sense that Kharms's misogyny is "productive" or "generative." By delineating a space marked by disgust out of which he expels himself, he cordons off a space where he, and others like himself, can stay. The male intellectual who feels victimised by uneducated working-class or peasant women from the provinces reflects the paradoxical, uncertain, and protean character of the early Soviet class system, where women as a group could be imagined as "petty bourgeois."[506] Kharms thus continues the early avant-garde tradition of *épater les bourgeois* with its defiance of the accepted "good taste"—with the crucial difference that the bourgeois are now proletarians, and the current version of "good taste" is embodied by the nascent proletarian culture as much as by anything "petit-bourgeois." In this situation of a class system in flux, disgust directed at "proletarian," or "Soviet," women performs the work of establishing boundaries of class where they are not felt to be sufficient. The stickiness of affect that Ahmed describes as a "blocking" and "binding" tool,[507] works to fix both the disgusting and the disgusted in place. It also helps Kharms employ a version of the modernist "masculinist mystique,"[508] projecting onto himself the myth of a lonely genius, autonomous and sovereign, opposing the scattered feminine "mob."

This displacement of political and classed anxieties onto gender, to be presented as a matter of erotic taste, or the seemingly reverse tendency to ideologise sexuality, has a history in Russian thought.[509] Naiman concludes that "Early Soviet Gothic, in fact, may be the product of a dialectics of disgust, in which particular ideological or class fears interact with

[506] Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks*, 34.
[507] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 92.
[508] Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 55.
[509] Naiman, *Sex in Public*, 45.

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the terror of the female body endemic in many patriarchal societies."[510] The early Soviet utopian aspirations aimed at "self-purification" of the collective targeted both the feminine and the bourgeois as synonymous—or, as Naiman puts it, metonymic.[511] Women were habitually associated with matter and "flesh" in Russian thinking from 19th century onwards, and very prominently in Russian early 20th-century religious philosophy;[512] the fact that this repulsion toward women coincided with the influx of women into the workforce had been noted by Bolshevik critics already in 1909.[513] In Kharms, therefore, one can see the case where the opposite, but related class fears, experienced by people the early Soviet culture would deem precisely the remnants of the past, rely on this already existing metonymic language for expression. And as Lipavsky's philosophy shows, these class fears are entangled not only with patriarchal terror of the living matter and of the female body that gets associated with it, but with the epistemological anxiety of not being able to know what things and bodies—the writing subject included—truly are, which goes deeper than the uncertainty of one's class origins, and does not easily yield to self-purification.

The analysis of the role and meaning of gender in Kharms's writings, including its relationship to the boundaries of the human and the non-human, cannot be separated from class and the context of the broader concern with the instability of boundaries in general, the lines of inside and outside, the "ours" and the alien. This discussion of "class in Kharms" cannot be complete without acknowledging that women function as the focal point of his dislike of "proletarians." Similarly, the purely "philosophical" discussion that leaves class out misses the point: it is not just about fear of or attraction to "the elemental" or "matter" in women; it is women of particular classes who play the role of the elemental. The very situation of the threat is made possible by the uncertainty and flux characterising the

[510] Naiman, 248.
[511] Naiman, 17.
[512] Naiman, 37.
[513] Naiman, 41.

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boundaries of class and gender, which, in the early Soviet Russia, accompanied the questions of human specificity and the dream of human remaking.

3. Violence and victimhood: the failure of the boundary

The hatred for children and the elderly proclaimed in Kharms's various prose texts has been well documented and extensively discussed.[514] One pronounced example is a short piece "Article" written between 1936 and 1938, where his narrator argues that children are disgusting since they are not much different from foeti, and foeti, from excrement.[515] His texts are rife with various imaginative ways children can be eliminated and hurt, including a rarely discussed but strikingly explicit prose piece about a young girl Lidochka who is kidnapped by a paedophile but soon rescued by vigilant citizens.[516] While the nature of the relationship between the author and the narrator of these prose pieces remains murky, what is more interesting is the association Kharms establishes between these liminal subjects and himself. E.g., in the description of the unkempt old man who kidnaps Lidochka one can clearly recognize Kharms's signature Sherlock Holmes-inspired look: a chequered jacket and short trousers with high socks.[517] In "Conversations," Kharms tells a story closely related to these topics, a story which keeps reappearing, changing shape and its key events, in his prose as well: the story of how he was born.

> D. Kh. I myself was born from caviar. There almost happened a tragic misunderstanding there. My uncle came in to give his greetings, it was right after the spawning, and my mom was lying still ill. And so he sees: a cradle full of caviar. And my uncle liked to eat. He spread me on a toast and had already poured a shot of vodka. Luckily, they managed to stop him in time; they had to gather me for a long time after that.
> T[amara] A[leksandrovna]: And how did it feel to be in this form?
> D. Kh.: To be honest, I cannot recall, as I was in an unconscious state. I only know that my parents avoided standing me in the corner for a long time, because I would stick to the wall.
> T. A.: And did you remain in the unconscious state for long?

[514] See, e.g., Tokarev, "Poetika nasiliia," and Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*, 161-164.
[515] Kharms, *PS*, 4:23.
[516] "Lidochka sidela na kortochkakh" (Lidochka was crouching, 1935), in Kharms, *PS*, 3:77-82.
[517] Kharms, 78.

D. Kh.: Until I finished the gymnasium.[518]

Jakovljevic calls a vision of subjectivity that Kharms presents in this narrative a "granular self."[519] Not only is it unconscious and unhuman: it exists in a multiplicity of tiny slimy spheres which need to be gathered together in order for the subject to be possible. In another one of his birth stories, Kharms recounts the time he spent as a premature baby sitting on soft cotton in an incubator, having been born before he quite stopped being a "foetus."[520] In a gesture very characteristic of him, he both posits something or someone as disgusting and takes on its role. Children are one of his favourite subjects in this respect, as the figure of the child allows for this oscillation between "me" and "not me," the disgusted subject and the repulsive other.

In this respect, scholars foreground the relationship to power and powerlessness as an important dimension of Kharms's proclaimed hatred for children and the elderly. It is, they argue, weakness that unites "animals, children, and the elderly" in Kharms's prose: "Helpless and speechless, they all reside at the border of the livable. The granular self is mute and defenseless."[521] The border of the livable is the space where the human and the non-human collide almost into non-recognition. Sara Weld focuses on the links between the figure of the child and its voicelessness and vulnerability to violence, which, she argues, in the 1930s becomes a predicament that the avant-garde also shares. Kharms's writings about children thus allow him to explore that predicament "of a preverbal subjectivity trapped in the state of a powerless object."[522] They also work as a provocation against the celebratory "cult of childhood" as the epitome of innocence, prominent in Russian culture from the 19th century

[518] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 330-331.
[519] Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 173.
[520] See Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*, 172-173, for the discussion of the gender politics of these birth narratives.
[521] Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 173.
[522] Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*, 170.

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onwards.[523] As Shubinskii notes, this cult acquired darker undertones of martyrdom in the early Soviet literature.[524] It is therefore possible to argue that Kharms responds to, and makes explicit, a certain sadistic approach to children as symbolic victims that already existed in Soviet culture, and a certain sadism inherent in childhood itself.[525]

Both children and the elderly in Kharms figure in contexts of extreme, and often grotesque, violence, as in a fragment from "They call me a Capuchin" from 1938:

> What I know for sure about children is that they should not be swaddled, they should be exterminated. For this, I would create a central pit in the town and throw children in there. And to ensure that the stench of decay does not spread from the pit, quicklime could be poured over it every week. I would push all German shepherds into the same pit.[526]

Old people who would try to interfere in younger people's lives, the narrator suggests, should be killed with an axe and thrown into the same pit. In this way, the association between children and the elderly, marked by the same repulsion and violence directed at them, is established. In a story from 1939, the narrator has to run away from a zombie-like mob made up of children and old men and women, and in his escape, he tramples some of them to death.[527] Both children and old people appear here as a pursuing and at the same time ultimately vulnerable mass, threatening to overrun the narrator yet incredibly fragile.

The most prominent link connecting children with old people for Kharms therefore is the shared indirect association with violence: the one they are imagined to inflict and the one to which they are very vulnerable by virtue of their marginal societal position (exemplified with particular force in a short story "Rytsari" (Knights, 1940) about a terrible collectively-approved murder in a retirement home). This position thus mirrors and provides a ground for their proximity to death, which analyses like Jaccard's emphasise.[528] Disgust in this case, as

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[523] Weld, 161, 163.
[524] Shubinskii, *Daniil Kharms*, 248.
[525] Nedel', "Razmeshchaias' v Neizbezhnom"; Dobrenko, "Vse Luchshee—Detiam."
[526] Kharms, *PS*, 2:134.
[527] Kharms, 2:138-139.
[528] Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*, 385, nt256.

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before, belies the discomfort of proximity on multiple levels: as a children's writer, who is, moreover, not involved in organised production and spends his days at home, and as someone who, from his first arrest in 1931 and until his second and last in 1941, was increasingly aware of his own vulnerability to violence. Weld foregrounds this aspect of Kharms's interest in old people as well as children in his writings: "the existentially marginal subjects he purportedly hates—children, old men, and old women—serve as some of the most typical dramatic subjects in the Kharmsian text."[529] They occupy the position of "symbolic victims" in the "cruel comedy"[530] which his texts stage, and comedy becomes a way to cope with vulnerability and disgust at proximity, the infantile drama of an avant-garde auteur with life-creating ambitions finding himself powerless to provide for himself. This is another way in which the laughter in Kharms's "cruel comedy" proves to be not absurd but Gothic: at the realisation not of the ultimate meaninglessness of existence, but of his own fragility in the face of prevailing forces.

In this case, performative disgust appears to be insufficient to support the sense of difference between the author-narrator and these unfortunate subjects. As physical disability and weakness translate in these texts into a vulnerability to violence, the weak become themselves confused with the source of violence, and need to be repeatedly banished by compulsive acts of textual violence. It could be argued that this failure of disgust as a distancing tool is one of the reasons why these acts become increasingly terrible and compulsive. With the associations established between these characters and the non-human—the zombie-like persistence of the pursuing elderly, the self-contained unconsciousness of the caviar-infant—the disgusted subject himself is faced with his own proximity to such an unconscious existence and the vulnerability it entails. The walls of comparative tables and the

[529] Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*, 162.
[530] Weld, 162.

force of disgust prove to be too weak to maintain the boundary between “me” and “not me.” Other means to restore the order or to deal with its impossibility have to be employed.

4. Attempts at reconstituting order: Ridiculous classifications and their dissolution

In Lipavsky and Druskin’s thought, this drive toward organisation and classification of the body and the physical reality meets the uncertainty and disorder of matter, which becomes one of the central plots of their texts. In “A Certain (quality, character of change, permanence or variability,” Lipavsky starts out echoing Kharms’s “Sabre”: “Where is the boundary between one’s own body and the world around?,” but complicates it: “the signs of difference [alienation, *chuzhdosti*] may vary,” and can include foreign movement as well as a different temperature.[531] The body becomes an immediate means of knowing the world in the most fundamental ways: its “muscle” experience creates the focus on the play of hardness with pockets of emptiness in it—the same emptiness that generates horror.[532] For human beings, he argues, the key parameter of difference is movement in combination with control: that which moves when I will it to, is my own body, that which moves of its own accord is not. His interest lies with creatures, especially those who live in water or who barely or never actively move, and who therefore may perceive their own boundaries differently: “if a tree feels, then for it its body coincides, perhaps, with the world.”[533] Thus, “...space is not given but is worked out.”[534] This opens a possibility of consciously approximating other beings’ experiences of the world, putting the habitual boundaries of one’s body on hold. In “Stroenie kachestv” (The construction of qualities), Lipavsky appears to have been in a process of

[531] Lipavskii, “Opredelennoe,” 110.
[532] Lipavskii, “Razgovory,” 402.
[533] Lipavskii, “Opredelennoe,” 111.
[534] Lipavskii, “Razgovory,” 404.

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developing a kind of domestic science focused on testing bodily perception involving various everyday objects:

> An experiment with a brush
> with cold dumbbells
> with pointed burn
> with taps in the bathroom [...]
> with different areas of skin [...]
> with the lightest touches [...]
> with habitual pressures
> with a [drawing] compass [*s tsirkulem*]
> with toes [...][535]

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In "Conversations," he pitched some of these ideas to his friends, suggesting that one could approximate the experience of animals whose body is not stable in its size by wearing rubber gloves filled with water; or to try to experiment with one-eyed vision by using glasses with different prescriptions.[536] Similar ideas appear in "Sozertsanie dvizheniia" (Contemplation of movement), where Lipavsky writes about "'slowing down' sneezing, laughing, walking, juggling, a leap of a flea [...],"[537] and observing the changes in one's pupils and facial expressions in response to "sound, pain, horror, tickling, imagining light."[538] These hypothetical experiments appear to be part of a project of domesticating the elements by means of zooming into various bodily automatisms: not so much unmaking the automatism, but questioning its precise mechanism.[539]

Questions of order, boundaries, and clear structure show up repeatedly in "Conversations": as the theme of "laws of building big things [in art]" raised by Zabolotsky,[540] or the longing for structure in the discussion of how mediaeval towns and villages (as well as cosmologies) were organised around a centre, in contrast to the

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[535] Lipavskii, "Stroenie kachestv," 135.
[536] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 405. He goes on to admit that his friends did not show any interest in these thoughts, but did enjoy joking about the rubber gloves for some time to come.
[537] Lipavskii, "Sozertsanie dvizheniia," 143.
[538] Lipavskii, 145.
[539] An insightful overview of the widespread contemporary interest in similar experiments can be found in Olenina, *Psychomotor Aesthetics*.
[540] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 320.

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contemporary feeling of the universe as "endless and structureless."[541] It is the same longing for order that appears to guide Kharms's "exercises in classic metres"—a series of poems written to follow pre-defined metric structures,[542] or to put together schemas of tales as numbered lists of elements like "A hero has left home," "Overcoming an obstacle," "The hero's failure," and "Escape."[543] These lists bring to mind Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Fairytale*, written and developed in the 1930s as well, if are not influenced by Propp directly. Propp's participation is recorded in one of *chinari*'s conversations, where he lays out his theory of the fairytale structure and its historic roots to Lipavsky, to the latter's rather critical feedback.[544]

Most prominently, however, this passion for ordering shows itself in Lipavsky's idea for an "alphabet of things." "I have always been interested in putting together an alphabet of things with their meanings," he says in "Conversations," "As things do not contain neither symbols nor allegories. But they themselves are crystallisations of world principles."[545] Later, he connects this idea to his "Theory of words":

> Words mean the fundamental—elements; only then do they become names for objects, actions, and qualities. … Some of them are born from others. And they are embodied in things, like courage in a lion, so that things are hieroglyphs of the elements. I want to say that a facial expression comes before the face itself, the face is a solidified expression. I wanted to find elements through words, to bare this way the souls of things, to learn their hierarchy. I would like to put together a deck of hieroglyphs, akin to a deck of cards.[546]

Here, the familiar movement of Lipavsky's writings on crystallising matter meets the passion for classification: while raw matter lies beneath separate phenomena, its various expressions, like those of a face, can be recorded and organised into a deck of cards, or an alphabet. The key principle—that movement and relationship to the world (expression) come before the

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[541] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 332.
[542] See Kharms, *PS*, 1:267-269, 4:41-44, 114-124.
[543] Kharms, 4:123.
[544] Lipavsky proceeded to to lay out to Propp the main points of his theory of horror, in discussion of the symbolism of snakes and dragons in folk tales. Lipavsky, *Issledovanie uzhasa*, 365-368.
[545] Lipavskii, *Issledovanie uzhasa*, 368.
[546] Lipavskii, 382.

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body as bound and discrete—defines Lipavsky's vision of how bodies come to be. They are "solidifications" of the most basic instincts, like "grabbing and pulling in," which is "a variant of the general world law of spreading or flowing out, the destruction of the difference in levels or, rather, simply of differences."[547] A body is thus "an action settled down into flesh."[548] In this way, while speaking a very different conceptual language, Lipavsky curiously echoes Sara Ahmed: bodies come to surface as a result of their affects, movements, and ways of perceiving the world, and not the other way around. In his characteristic way, he is interested in penetrating beneath the level of appearances to identify these underlying lines of tension and elemental movements (spreading out, being heavy or viscous); and then, in categorising them into a system.

Arguably the most daring is Lipavsky's attempt to theorise love this way. In "On Bodily Union," he starts by establishing the opposition of its two components, "tenderness and sensuality [*sladostrastie*], and suggests measuring love by introducing a kind of numbered scale for the intensity of each.[549] Other components are respect and compassion; together with tenderness and sensuality, they combine with one or the other of them dominating in a given relationship. Focusing on what feelings are involved and which of them dominates makes it possible to talk about love in terms of "only two parameters: coverage and overbalance [*okhvat i pereves*]."[550] Thus love, which has been described as horrific and monstrous chimaera, can be measured and grasped. Running into further difficulties and having to explain specific shapes love can take, Lipavsky introduces new parameters, like intensity and omissions (of some of the basic feelings listed above), object-centredness or non-object-centredness (*ob'ektnost' i bezob'ektnost'*, standing for the extent to

[547] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 395.
[548] Lipavskii, 396.
[549] Lipavskii, "O telesnom sochetanii," 157, 158.
[550] Lipavskii, 159.

which a specific individual is the target of the feeling), selectivity of the sympathy and non-selectivity of sensuality.[551]

His passion for classification leads him to produce a long list of possible mishaps in love that stem from its complex nature involving several contradictory feelings:

> These misunderstandings can be distributed across the following rubrics: one feeling, one's own or another's, is mistakenly taken to be a different one (in its composition or intensity); the existing feeling, one's own or another's, does not match the desired one (in its composition or intensity); the existing feeling, one's own or another's, does not match an appropriate one under the given circumstances (in its composition or intensity); a combination of misunderstandings.
> Someone mistakenly takes their own sensuality to be love, or sympathy to be love, or sensuality to be sympathy, or sympathy to be sensuality, or love to be sympathy, or love to be sensuality. Or someone takes another's sensuality to be love, or sympathy to be love, or sensuality to be sympathy, or sympathy to be sensuality, or love to be sympathy, or love to be sensuality. [...]
> In total: thirty consequences of the first contradiction of love, and all of them can be proved with examples.[552]

One finds here, essentially, a classification of accidents: something that appears to escape order and meaning is to be trapped by a system of possible combinations. Interestingly, Kharms's notebooks also feature a similar list of situations influencing marriage and love life: from marital status and having or not having a lover, to whether "he" or "she" are earning money, who leaves, and who stays behind.[553] In both cases, there is a similar desire to put together an inventory of all possible twists and turns of a process notorious for its unpredictability and fickleness.

There is, however, a growing sense that a truly exhaustive and adequate classification in matters such as these is impossible. In "Conversations," Lipavsky is contradicted by Druskin, who reminds him that every categorisation is bound to fail to address all phenomena, which is why it is better to separate them into "like this and not like this [*takoe i ne takoe*]."[554] The impossibility of classification provokes two responses. One focuses on the accidental and looks for the hidden connection between events that seem outwardly random:

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[551] Lipavskii, 162, 171-172.
[552] Lipavskii, 162-163.
[553] Kharms, *ZK*, 1:152.
[554] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 316.

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as Lipavsky puts it in "Conversations," "the real connection between things is not visible in their causal progression."[555] This response can be found in Druskin's writings on the accidental, as well as in Kharms's prose, and in particular in his text "Sviaz'" (Connection, 1937), which is written as a letter in a chain of exchange with Druskin and lists a number of unfortunate and sometimes violent events that, unbeknownst to their participants, have all given rise to each other in a sequence.[556] The second response to the problem of the unclassifiable and ultimately unknowable reality is the turn to thinking in elements, qualities, and states instead of objects, bodies, or individual words. As Lipavsky argues in "The Construction of Qualities," "no one has ever perceived objects—the carriers of qualities, but always only noticed the qualities, their combinations. And no one has ever perceived space, but only felt muscle efforts and fatigue [...]."[557] Qualities are characterised by varying degrees of intensity, which is measured by the degree of muscle effort connected with them.[558] Bodily sensations, like muscle fatigue, come here to be thought as the most fundamental way of knowing the world.

It appears that Lipavsky's thinking on individual states, like "clarity, distance, meaningfulness, embarrassment, reconciliation,"[559] is similarly informed by his interest in qualities rather than objects. He describes the attendant feelings and patterns in which they arise: e.g., clarity feels like being surrounded by "silently and precisely working mechanisms; or in a clean tiled pool."[560] Both meaningfulness and embarrassment are also marked by links to Lipavsky's writings on horror and the elements: the former is understood as a feeling that things mean more than they outwardly appear to mean; the latter, as "the distance from one's

[555] Lipavskii, 320.
[556] Kharms, *PS*, 4:25-26; Kharms, *Today I Wrote Nothing*, 242-243.
[557] Lipavskii, "Stroenie kachestv," 123.
[558] Lipavskii, 124.
[559] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 377.
[560] Lipavskii, 377.

own individuality"[561]—a kind of alienation from oneself, the feeling of "is this me?." In a similar way, Lipavsky attempts to pinpoint the nature of inspiration as another state that is just as difficult to define and that carries similar characteristics of disconnect from one's individuality: "...tenderness [*umilenie*], vertigo at the vast open space, forgetting oneself are close to it."[562]

His thinking in elements may have influenced Kharms in at least one respect. In one entry in his notebooks, Kharms develops a system in which all works of art and literature (and, by extension, their creators in different periods in their lives) are separated into "fiery" and "water" ones: Cranach, Holbein, Pushkin, Hamsun, and Mozart are water [*vodianoi*]; Spanish art (presumably, Baroque) and early Gogol are fiery; Bach is both.[563] In a stark contrast to the other comparative tables Kharms puts together in his notebooks, this one does not explicitly present one guiding element as superior (it also notably does not include any women). Thinking in elements appears to be a way to engage in a self-soothing ordering activity with value judgements suspended.

Druskin takes thinking in bodily and mental states even further. His most interesting and extensive classification is presented in a text from 1939-1940 titled "O sostoianiiakh zhizni" (On states of life) and dedicated to T. L. (Tamara Lipavskaia, one of the participants in *chinari*'s conversations and Leonid Lipavsky's wife). The text starts thus:

> Let us find separations of nature, states of life, let us connect like to like.
> I will call the first state: trees, and it will include: a garden, a rain, messengers, sincerity, a part. The other I will call: the sky. It will include: breathing, night and light, a sphere and a circle, a certain balance with a little error. The third I will call: water, and it will include: a field and a flower, depth and permeability, smell, colour, something, this and that. This is the state of the flat plane. The fourth I will call: midday, and it will include: a field on a hot noon and the blue sky, summer, sea and the forest. This is the second sky. The fifth I will call: night, and it will include: rules and laws of behaviours, the calm awakening, nature. The sixth I will call: the road, and it will include: sleep, the neighbouring world, beetles and butterflies. The seventh I will call: seaside dwellers, and it will include: the border of time, happiness, law, and omens. The eighth I will call: breathing, and it will include: a moment, animals that do not have a stable form, bubbles, overflowing, fear. This is the third sky and it is close to midday. The ninth I will call: the morning, and it will include: a reminiscence, a dream in a dream, the

[561] Lipavskii, 378.
[562] Lipavskii, 347.
[563] Kharms, *ZK*, 2:190 (1935-1936).

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> repetition of identical dreams and times. The tenth I will call: touch, and it will include: a flower's petal, the pleasure complete and empty, faith and faithlessness, and also other opposites. The eleventh I will call: the wilting, and it will include the difference in places, the lack of understanding, the event, pity, and sadness. The twelfth I will call: an evening in nature, and it will include: the absence of places, time, mist and moisture, the sleep of animals. The thirteenth I will call: silence, and it will include: the change in place, light and silence, the rustle of leaves and the sound of the sea, and it is the fourth sky. The eleventh I will call: ___ [an empty space], and it will include: shadows and systems of shadows, variety, indifference and sameness, feeling and absence of feeling, thoughts and their absence.
> And so there are fourteen states, fourteen states of life.[564]

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The text goes on in much the same way, adding clarifications and specifying where things not previously mentioned (like "an irregular flight of a bee")[565] belong. Several of the states and their components listed throughout the text speak directly to Lipavsky's "Research on Horror," yet fall into different categories. This classification is profoundly counterintuitive: among other things, it goes on to list several different kinds of happiness corresponding to different states, and two of them are "dying" and "death."[566] What Druskin creates in his beautiful poetic prose is an unusable, useless yet potentially entirely correct classification whose all-encompassing reach could hardly be disproven. It documents an activity of a mind separating its experiences into "layers"[567] and then organising them into this circling and sprawling system, both parody and the most serious analysis and synthesis. Ultimately, it succeeds in reconciling the passion for order(ing) and its impossibility, and takes *chinari*'s fascination with classifications and clarity, but also with the ultimately unpredictable and uncontainable nature of reality, to its logical extreme. It is a classification that dissolves in front of the reader's very eyes, and yet stubbornly maintains its form.

5. Conclusion

Chinari are thinkers of order. Approaching them this way, one can be little surprised at Kharms's political conservatism, which had, on a surface level, set him apart from his avant-garde predecessors. Classification-making is one of the main tools in thinking this

[564] Druskin, "O sostoianiiakh zhizni," 618-619.
[565] Druskin, 619.
[566] Druskin, 621.
[567] Druskin, 622.

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missing, deficient, but desired order. And while in Kharms, one finds the neurotic maintenance of order through disgust, despite the signs of its imminent failure, Lipavsky and Druskin stage the gradual and careful unmaking of the clear structure and of the habitual human "muscle-based" way of experiencing the world as that of hard surfaces with hard edges and zones of emptiness between distinct bound objects. Gradually and consistently, they mix the classification as a form (a genre of thought) with things that resist any clear delimitation: elements, qualities, and vague physical, mental, and natural states.

For Kharms, the female body provides a language for speaking about political belonging and non-belonging. It is in this respect that class as well as gender prove to be important axes of analysis and allow for seeing the work that disgust does. It is the work of mediating class boundaries in a situation where most social boundaries are in flux, establishing thus at least some semblance of certainty for the subject. Misogynist ways of writing women become instrumental in the production of his auto-mythology of non-belonging, vulnerability, and perseverance. It is by focusing on the surface of the text and the context in which misogyny appears that one can de-naturalise it: there is little in either female physiology or contemporary norms of femininity that serves as grounds for it. This disgust has more to do with disorder and the discomfort it provokes than with women or matter, or even "the elements" themselves. While often disturbing, overall his disgusted diary notes tend to be funny to read: there is enjoyment in reading the ravings of a misanthropic recluse who passionately and eloquently hates everything and everyone around him. There is an important pleasure to be found in disgust, which often gets lost in readings which stress Kharms's fear of or anxiety around women.

Tracing down the lines of disgust helps to see what happens to the lines separating the human from the not-quite- or non-human. In Kharms, disgust is directed at those who, in earlier avant-garde thought, used to be imagined as repositories of irrational immediacy,

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especially children. Part of the reason for this disgust appears to be the fact that they are now worryingly close to the writer himself, both literally and in the vulnerability to social exclusion and violence that they represent. Here, boundaries of the civilised and uncivilised, rational and irrational become part of the broader concern with boundaries: the lines of inside and outside, "ours" and alien. The drawing and maintenance of these lines is the work that disgust, including its hyperbolic and humorous forms, does here. Similarly to Kharms's dreams of a perfectly ordered and appropriately transparent social space, one encounters here an attempt at control by means of classification. As if often happens with *chinari*'s texts, however, the semblance of order that classification by its nature purports to impose gradually disintegrates in their thinking about mental and physical states and the elements. Kharms's writings that anxiously focus on his variously liminal and occasionally dehumanised others—"proletarian" women, old people, and children—dramatise the failed attempt at ordering reality and the constantly oscillating distance between them and the writer: from flight or casting away to acknowledgement of proximity and, eventually, incorporation. This dream of incorporation of the other functions as his version of acceptance, parallel to Lipavsky and Druskin's opening up of the subject to dissolution in the elements and "states of life."

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Chapter 5. Pleasures and horrors of incorporation: consuming, vomiting, and becoming the other

In this chapter, I aim to show how the problem of the hidden other and the body as a *shkap* helps to understand Kharms's frequent imagery of consuming women. By putting this imagery in the context of his texts about food, marked by a pronounced anxiety and suspicion about contamination, one can see the opposing desires at work here. In Kharms's texts, consuming food means admitting an other into the body, which results in this body coming apart at the seams and turning itself inside out in violent bouts of vomiting, in an effort to expunge the alien presence. Rather than being a small side trope, this succession of events—starvation, incorporation, accumulation, poisoning, purging—structures the narrative in his later prose. The subjectivity and the body that Kharms posits in this way are constantly under threat of infiltration and destruction from the inside by non-human and less-than-human forces. Yet these bodies also repeatedly confirm the hidden alien presence within them, as the bodily matter takes over. In this drama of infiltration and revelation, female characters are split into two aspects that characterise food: they either stand for unattainable plentitude and satiation and have the power to starve the narrator, or they have the power to poison and contaminate him with non-human, "not our life" of the dead.

While Lipavsky has shown the links between horror, disgust, and the erotic, one of *chinari*'s conversations extends this associative chain to include eating:

> D. D.: There is something unpleasantly sweetish in dove meat; perhaps, human meat has this taste too.
> D. Kh.: It so happens that I like everything with this taste. Beef knuckles, which are given softness and sweetishness by serous liquid; oysters, I like them for their sliminess. I know: most people are disgusted by everything bloated, soft, unsteady. Meanwhile, this is the essence of physiology. And I am not averse to it. I can calmly put a spider or a jellyfish up to my lips.

> L. L.: Things of this consistency are remarkable in that they simultaneously arouse disgust and promise pleasure. This duality is present in that which arouses the sexual feeling. As if every strong pleasure lies in the destruction of structure.
> D. D.: This is the essence of the ingestion instinct.
> L. L.: Ingestion and sexual union are two consequences of the same principle.
> D. Kh.: And yet we understand this precisely through the sexual feeling, through physiology.
> L. L.: The thing here is, apparently, in the liberation from certain limitations of individuality, from its tension, the return to the elements.[568]

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Both eating and sex are actions that provide relief from the tension of contradictions brought about by individuality: the strain of structure holding down the elemental magma. While this line of thought is not surprising when it comes to sexuality, approaching eating as a similarly intense and liberating experience is less common. This special attention to food is no doubt due to several waves of famine and ongoing shortages that accompanied the Soviet life of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as to poverty that was a constant presence in the lives of Kharms and his friends.[569] For Kharms, as well as for Lipavsky, eating thus becomes another space of encounter with the non-human other inside one's body, and the gendered other outside of it. In this chapter, I will focus on the other side of disgust and the passion for classification and categorisation—the desire to incorporate the other and the fear and attraction of the body falling apart. The first section will be focused on the push and pull between hunger and disgust, the desire for incorporation and the urge to repel the offending proximity of the abject. For Kharms, both hunger and disgust are centred on different images of women; however, these images are often presented as emphatically opposed to each other, not least by class and sometimes by ethnicity. I will try to show how images of food and consumption work for him as a site where early Soviet and avant-garde ideas of the border between the human and the non-human morph and mutate, oscillating between the desire for the suturing

[568] Lipavsky, "Razgovory," 409-410.
[569] In a later echo to Lipavsky, Druskin records one particular post-war dream in which he sees his mother prepare scolopendras and earwigs as a treat for his sister: "Mom is preparing scolopendras and earwigs for the celebration for Lida, peels off their antennae and dismembers [them]. Offers to me too. I say that I don't like dismembering—analysing, but remember that I like dismembering concepts" (Druskin, "Sny," 636). All three of them had survived the Siege of Leningrad, which may explain why a holiday family meal would be marked by the presence of distinctly horrifying creatures. Druskin's proclivity for "dismembering concepts" figures as a response to this horror, as it did in reality (he spent the terrifying 1941–1942 busy writing his "Logical treatise"). Druskina, "Khronograf Zhizni i Tvorchestva Ia. S. Druskina," 536.

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of boundaries and an establishment of stable order, on the one hand, and the opening of the subject to otherness through pleasure and the overcoming of disgust, on the other. Kharms positions women as sites of nourishment and deprivation, which therefore need to be constantly present and subjected to repetitive slapstick violence in his prose and poetry—continually punished, like the little old women who keep falling out of the window in an endless succession in the "Events" cycle. The final section of the chapter will be devoted to the ways in which violence in its relationship with the body and the food that the body consumes and disgorges, structures Kharms's writings on the formal level: how the dismembered, stuttering, and vomiting body subjected to multiple rearrangements becomes the model for text.

1. Disgust, eating, and sex

Overall, in Kharms's sketches of everyday Soviet life in communal apartments and shared urban spaces, food and eating function as a focal point which gathers and centres disgust and baseness of communal living as he sees it: from the hero of "Fedya Davidovich" (1939), who hides butter in his mouth to steal it from his wife and exchange it for drinking money,[570] to a sketch about an intellectual Alekseiev, who, ordered to take the trash out by a neighbour madame Gorokhova, does not want to obey and decides to eat the contents instead.[571] In these sketches, the proximity of controlling and dominating women curiously accompanies a kind of conjuring of contact disgust in the reader by recounting an experience of eating which brings one too close to one's neighbours: just as butter should not be carried in one's mouth if it is to be passed on to another person, eating out of the communal trash bin is intimacy taken a step too far. Consumption appears here as concealment (e.g. of the fact

[570] Kharms, *Today I Wrote Nothing*, 80-81.
[571] Kharms, *PS*, 2:117. Other examples can be found in "Story" (1935) (2:72), "Lapa" (1930) (2:135), "The beginning of a very good summer day. A symphony" (1939) (2:358-59).

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that someone has disobeyed the direct orders) and ridiculous rebellion—the most frequent kind of rebellion in Kharms's prose.

Food is thus connected to often undesirable intimacy and to the banal and the everyday. In "On Bodily Union," Lipavsky explicitly compares love to food when he acknowledges that most people are prevented by constant labour and poverty, or simply by being busy with other things, from experiencing a truly selective love. Instead, their choice of love object resembles "a choice of lunch at a railway station: one has to eat, it does not matter so much what exactly."[572] Love and sex are thus marked by haste and disillusionment. In contrast to the mystification of sex in Russian symbolism, here, sex is the most prosaic event possible. They are drawn to thinking about it precisely because the prosaic and the everyday are of the utmost interest to them. In Kharms, this connecton between food and love is most prominent in his persistent interest in cunnilingus. It is useful to keep in mind Krafft-Ebing's characterisation of it as a subset of masochism, akin to coprophilia.[573] This perspective helps to put Kharms's apparent obsession with it, constantly displayed in his texts, in the context of flaunting his proclivity for what others find repulsive, as in the example with dove meat and kissing a jellyfish. See, for example, the following poem from 1931:

> You are sewing. But that's rubbish.
> I like your cunt
> It is moist and has a strong smell.
> Another would look at it, yelp, gasp,
> and run away holding his nose.
> and wiping the moisture off his hands
> whether he'll return. an open question
> nothing happens overnight.
> Whereas to me your juice is an absolute joy.
> you think it is disgusting,
> but I am ready to lick and lick your cunt without respite
> and swallow the slime til I belch.[574]

[572] Lipavsky, "O telesnom sochetanii," 180.
[573] Kraft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 136; cited in Hurley, *Gothic Body*, 179.
[574] Kharms, *PS*, 1:223-224.

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The invocation of another's disgust is necessary here (in a gesture of a kind of anti-mimetic desire), as the whole text hinges on the contrast between emphatic disgust and happy consumption, that imaginary other man and the "I" of the poem. It is as much about liking to swallow mucus as about not being like other men.

In "Foma Bobrov and his Spouse. A comedy in three parts," Bobrov's grandmother complains about his new wife: the young woman walks around naked covering only her "indecent place" with a hand and uses that same hand to touch bread at lunch. We also learn that she never "properly" washes "where she should" to preserve her smell. She never holds her legs together when sitting either, so that everyone can observe how wet she always is. Her breasts are, we are informed, "large to the point of indecency."[575] The grandmother, another of Kharms's old women, acts here as the guardian of hygienje and propriety, flaunted by the young wife. Her erotic attractiveness to her husband and the disgust that the grandmother feels at it are brought together again into the proximity of food—the bread that the family shares. By putting these criticisms into the mouth of a cantankerous old woman, Kharms mobilises the association of women with slime and of slime with disgust—not to subvert it, exactly, but to push the reader into the choice between the grimace of imagining the events and sights described, on the one hand, and, on the other, to not wanting to identify with the old woman's perspective.[576] In a very similar short fragment from 1936, Kharms gives a dialogue between one person, who deduces that a woman had been sitting in a chair because they sniff it and the chair "smells of a broad," while the other confirms that a young woman who had been sitting there went now to another room to "arrange her wardrobe."[577] One might recognise in this interaction another appearance of Kharms's favourite Sherlock

[575] Kharms, *PS*, 2:387.
[576] A similar scene plays out in a prose fragment from the mid-1930s where a company of art students are painting a model placed onto a table: Kharms, *PS*, 2:405.
[577] Kharms, *PS*, 2:106.

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Holmes, fashioned here as an erotic parody. The woman is a trace, her smell a sign of her vanishing presence, while she herself retires into the wardrobe.

Kharms thus modifies Lipavsky's formula of the erotic being that which is frightening, turning it into "What is attractive to me is that which is disgusting to others." In feminist thought on the links in modern partiarchal cultures between women and the "leakiness" of their bodies, it is often read as a negative characteristic in context of the male-dominated order: "as evidence of women's inherent lack of control of the body and, by extension, of the self," in contrast to "the self-contained and self-containing men."[578] Kharms mobilises disgust seemingly to overturn it, while at the same time reconfirming its normality in the very gesture of proclaiming himself above philistine revulsion. Moisture and slime stand in for the overflowing and abundance of the body's materiality, which produces both the desire for the body and the desire to replicate that abundance by consuming the other. A woman who does not leak, in contrast, threatens the very physical existence of the subject—she starves him.

2. Women as nourishment

One of the most pronounced examples of the "women as nourishment" trope in Kharms is his poem "Zhene"[579] (To My Wife, 1930), where he describes cunnilingus in great detail. In the poem, lovemaking with his first wife Ester interrupts the poet's fruitless attempts to write, and ends abruptly when he suddenly finds inspiration.[580] Starting with the lines, "It has been a long time since I sat down and wrote, I have been relaxed and drooping," it establishes a link between creative and sexual impotence. (Sexual impotence, in itself and due to this link, deeply terrified him, and he hypochondriacally chronicled its (perceived) onset in his diaries.[581]) Oral sex thus appears not only as a means to bypass the physical

[578] Shildrik, *Leaky Bodies*, 34.
[579] See also the dreamlike narrative of "I did not close my ears" from 1940 (Kharms, *PS*, 2:158-159).
[580] Kharms, *PS*, 114-115.
[581] See, e.g., Kharms, *ZS*, 2:179.

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impotence, but as nourishing and restoring the poet's creative powers. Female "fluids" work as a material realisation of fluidity and unity, which both are immensely important themes in Kharms' creative practice. As if nourished by his wife's "juices" that he avidly swallows, he is finally able to push her away and instantly jump to writing which had been stifled before.[582]

Further into the second half of the 1930s, as Kharms's situation in life worsens, while the framework of "consumption" of female bodies remains, it becomes focused more on hunger and lack rather than nourishment. A striking example of this can be found in his 1938 poem "No skol'ko raznykh dvizhenii" (But how many different movements).[583] In this poem, Kharms lists different kinds of food that he craves (wine, meat, vegetables, beer and vodka), and that he despises (porridge and dough). In the same sequence he mentions, "I do not like Russian women. <...> I like plump Jewish women!"—which effectively works to associate both with food. The women here are once again separated into two categories, this time based on ethnicity and body type, as a devalued Russian woman is also a "thinned down one" (*pokhudevshaia*). The whole poem is framed as a complaint about acute hunger, and the plentitude of nourishing "Jewish" female bodies remains unattainable.[584] Erotic encounters and female bodies are thus imagined as raw material for the writer to "feed off," both physically and creatively:

> There it is a day
> Full of suffering. No food,
> no food, no food.
> Want to eat. Ouch ouch ouch!
> Want to eat. Want to eat.
> Here is my word.
> Want to feed my
> wife. Want to feed
> my wife. We are very much

[582] Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*, 382-383; Jaccard, "L'impossible Éternité," 215. In contrast, Tokarev reads this poem as a scene where "the male creative element" overcomes the crushing force of female sexuality (Tokarev, *Kurs*, 60-61). An insightful analysis of the poem is provided by Jakovljevic: *Daniil Kharms*, 90-91.
[583] Kharms, *PS*, 1:293-295.
[584] A similar complaint resurfaces in one of Kharms' diary entries, where he recounts a visit to his ex-wife Esther: "I gave Esther a blowjob, but it was not tasty and not interesting" (Kharms, *ZK*, 2:218).

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starving.
Oh how many wonderful
things there are there! Oh how many
wonderful things there are there!
Wine and meat. Wine and meat.
Wine is nicer than porridge.
Fuck fuck fuck!
Wine is nicer than porridge.
Berim berig cherikonflin'!
Meat is better than dough!
Meat is better than dough!
I eat only meat and vegetables.
I drink only beer and vodka.
Chiaki riaki!
I do not like Russian women.
And a Russian woman, especially a thinned down one,
especially a thinned down one
Firin't' perekrint'!
Especially a thinned down one, -
It is rubbish!
Phew! phew! phew!
It is yucky!
I like plump Jewish women!
Now that's delightful!
Now that's delightful!
That's,
That's,
Now that's delightful!
Impudently I conduct myself,
I conduct myself so impudently.
[...] (Jump over the barrel!)[585]

Sara Ahmed's argument about the power of emotions in shaping objects and their boundaries is particularly useful here. In Kharms's poem, this is precisely what happens to "plump Jewish women." It is not that he *represents* some specific Jewish women, who exist in their objective reality, by turning them into a literary image. Rather, he conjures up an almost abstract object of desire that takes the shape as a "plump Jewish woman." It is a surface of the body—signified only by its name with a modifier "plump"—constituted by, and filled with, desire and hunger for its imagined fullness. This body is produced as a site of difference, sexual, ethnic and racialised, and difference in satiation: as the authorial body,

[585] However unsettling the blunt association between women and food may be, this text is in no way atypical for Kharms. It is firmly located within the contextual cloud of other poems and prose sketches on desire, sex, hunger, and the charms of Jewish women. It also fits into "the general avant-garde propensity for expressing one sequence through another, a parallel one," so that "passion for women" is expressed as "passion for food," as Kobrinskii characterises OBERIU's techniques (Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*, 300). The poem echoes the early Soviet tendency to associate all kinds of excess with each other, which allowed for unashamed enjoyment of sexual pleasure and food to be "routinely lumped together as signs of social corruption" (Naiman, *Sex in Public*, 209). See also Bulgakova, *Fabrika zhestov*, 155, 221-222.

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through the same hunger and desire, is articulated as lacking, the bodies of "plump Jewish women" stand in for fullness, the abundance of vitality. The paradox, however, is that the authorial figure is overflowing with speech while these "plump" female bodies appear as an empty sign of plentitude. In Margrit Shildrik's words, "Corporeality and absence are coincidental."[586] This contrast suggests that among other emotions fuelling this imagining, there is also jealousy. It is accompanied by emphatic performative disgust towards a "thinned down" Russian woman, encapsulated in exclamations of repulsion: "It is rubbish! | Phew! phew! phew! | It is yucky!" Through disgust, the body of a Russian woman is therefore produced as being near—and indeed, although it is never quite spelled out, we guess that this figure refers back to the wife mentioned in the beginning in the poem, who is "very much | starving" together with the narrator. The hunger is thus shared, but when it translates into the erotic, it forks into the desire for "plump" women and the disgust towards "thinned down" ones. Just like these feelings, the plentitude of a "plump" body is similarly ambiguous: it connotes the abundance and internal fullness, but is in fact a mere surface projected by love of the desiring body.

These bodies are produced, paradoxically, through the sliding of certain characteristics off their surfaces, and never through direct attribution. It is through the sliding of the text that the bodies of (implicitly racialised) "plump Jewish women" are articulated as a site of nourishment, as substance to be consumed—as meat. It is by the syntactic analogy between the statements, "Wine is nicer than porridge," "Meat is better than dough," "I do not like Russian women," and "I like plump Jewish women," that the association between them and meat is produced. Here, the analogy between women and certain kinds of food from one of Kharms's comparative tables from the previous chapter is put to work. The sliding of these statements obliquely conjures a conclusion that "plump Jewish women" are a source of

[586] Shildrik, *Leaky Bodies*, 25.

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pleasure; they are made for consumption, for eating and drinking. This operation is similar to what Sara Ahmed defines as "stickiness": a "sticky sign" is that which through surfacing next to certain words and feelings has absorbed them into its own surface.[587] There is therefore no need to say that "plump Jewish women" are meat, or even are like meat; the surfacing of these words next to each other does its work independently. This combination of sticking with sliding creates an effect of undeniable certainty and uncertainty at the same time: there can be little doubt that we are dealing with a form of anti-Semitism, but it operates in a manner that makes it almost impossible to point at one specific statement. The bodies of "Jewish women," in particular through their "plumpness" and association with fat, are produced here as non-bodies, bordering on amorphous, boundless, and bountiful flesh, always ready to disintegrate into meat and the flow of wine. Similarly, however, the voice that speaks in this poem is hardly that of an individual, be it an actual empirical author or his narratorial mask. It is rather the voice of the devalued bodily matter which, in Kaganovsky's words, "returns to haunt the New Soviet Man."[588] The text itself disintegrates into repetitive, self-absorbed, impersonal matter: it, too, is a horrifying object. Among its repetitiveness, one line that does not repeat itself is, of course, "I like plump Jewish women!," which stands out rhythmically as well as in its "impropriety."

3. The dangers of food and the fear of contamination

The entanglement of food, eating, sex, love, disgust, and starvation is complemented by the trope of treacherous food and of death from food. These fears of contamination are often accompanied by the presence of imposing female characters who have the power of poisoning the male protagonists. These tropes are most prominent in Kharms's texts from the

[587] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 11.
[588] Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade*, 22.

second half of the 1930s, which were also the most hungry years for him. Examples range from jocular to more sinister, where a character dies after eating something, or someone is killed or injured by food or a food-related object.[589] A closer look shows that usually it is because something is secretly wrong with the food: it is either made out of inappropriate raw materials, or poisoned, as in "Horrible death" from 1935:

> Once upon a time one man, feeling hungry, was sitting at the table and eating cutlets,
> While his spouse was standing next to him and saying again and again that
> there is little pork in the cutlets.
> But he would eat and eat and eat and eat and eat, until
> He felt a deathly heaviness somewhere in his stomach.
> Then, having pushed the treacherous food away, he started trembling and crying;
> The golden watch in his pocket stopped ticking;
> His hair lightened, his gaze lit up;
> His ears fell off to the floor, like yellow leaves fall off a poplar in autumn;
> And he suddenly died.[590]

"Treacherous food" is an object that contains something other than itself ("too little pork" is a sinister hint to that), which the eater unknowingly consumes. It thus appears to be a drama of allowing the hidden other into oneself as much as a simple story of a domestic poisoning. The death, brought about by a woman, is accompanied by sudden changes, which make the victim akin to a tree, in a stylised version of a folkloric parallelism.

Hunger being a prominent presence in early Soviet Russia and Kharms and Druskin's life since at least mid-1930s, it is interesting that food is marked by this ambivalence. While desired, food has a power to kill, either on its own or as a tool in someone's hands, and objects metonymically connected to eating, like kitchen utensils and jaws, take on a sinister tint. Just as female bodies are narrated as nourishing or lacking matter and meat, food itself appears marked by dangerous, treacherous agency. Conversely, it is in this context of vague threat emanating from food and suspicion about it that tropes of consuming women should be placed. Incorporating the other is both appealing and terrifying: the love and aggression of

[589] A milder version of the trope is a poem from 1937 where a poor jelly made out of hooves prevents the possibility of love between a woman and her guest (Kharms, *PS*, 1:284). For darker cases, see 2:128-129, 2:330, 2:337, 2:348-349

[590] Kharms, *PS*, 1:271-272.

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incorporating the other into one's body are counterbalanced by the threat of contamination that such incorporation may precipitate.

In *Starukha* (The Old Woman, 1939), these themes—hunger, disgust, eating, infection/contamination, and death—come together most instructively. Kharms' longest prose work, it can be read as the pinnacle of his explorations into the poetics of absurd by means of a formally conventional prose narrative. The plot of this short story is simple. An old woman comes to the protagonist's room in his communal flat, orders him around, sits into his armchair, and dies. The protagonist (and narrator) is then stuck with the body. He cannot report it to the police as he fears he will be the main suspect. The whole story then unfolds around trying to dispose of the body while being increasingly puzzled and anxious. The protagonist goes to visit his friend in search of relief and starts a conversation about the dead, proclaiming his hatred of them, up to the point of wanting to "give [them] a boot right in the muzzle,"[591] but without revealing what actually is going on. This friend, Sakerdon Mikhailovich, is, as it is accepted in scholarship,[592] based on Kharms's friend Nikolai Oleinikov, who had been arrested and shot two years before, in 1937. Sakerdon Mikhailovich admits he is afraid of the dead, and agrees that children are repulsive as well. When asked to compare them, he says children are worse, as the dead do not "barge into our life"[593] as unceremoniously—to which the protagonist, of course, loudly disagrees. This is then precisely the problem with the dead: the fact that they barge into one's life like children do. It is this suddenness of their appearance that adds to the disturbing "shapeshifting" quality described by Lipavsky: the fear that the dead body is only pretending to be truly dead. For the same reason, *The Old Woman*'s protagonist postulates the need to always be able to observe the corpse: he does not want to look at the dead woman but refuses to cover her with a

[591] Kharms, *Today I Wrote Nothing*, 100.
[592] Sazhin, "Primechaniia," Kharms, *PS*, 460; Heinonen, *Eto i to v Povesti Starukha*, 64.
[593] Kharms, *PS*, 2:175.

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newspaper "because who knows what can happen under the newspaper."[594] The dead bodies' potential for disruption and unruliness translates into the desire for control.

When the narrator comes back to his room after drinking with his friend, he opens the door and sees the dead old woman crawling towards him on all fours. He then quickly shuts the door and pauses for some time in the corridor, trying to reason with his fear:

> "Dead people," my own thoughts were explaining to me, "are a no-good lot. It's wrong to call them deceased, because they are, rather, un-deceased. They have to be watched, and carefully. Ask any watchman at the mortuary. Why do you think he's been posted there? For one thing only—to keep watch so that the dead people don't crawl away. There have been, in this regard, some curious cases. One dead man, while the watchman was at the public baths on executive orders, crawled out of the mortuary and into the disinfection chamber, and there he ate a bunch of linens. The sanitation crew gave him an excellent thrashing, but they had to pay for the ruined linen out of their own pockets. And another dead man crawled into the maternity ward and scared everyone to the point that one of the mothers-to-be manufactured a premature miscarriage and the dead man threw himself onto the ejected fetus and, chewing loudly, set to consuming it. And when one nurse struck the dead man on the back with a wooden stool he bit the brave nurse in the leg and she was infected with corpse poisoning and died soon thereafter. So, dead people—a no-good lot. You can't let down your guard."[595]

Driven on by an inert residual life force, "not our life," in Lipavsky's words, the violent mechanics of decay interrupt the scientifically and "naturally" sanctioned timing of pregnancy and childbirth, provoking a miscarriage by the appearance of horror—an irrational affective force powerful enough to break the schedule of procreation. As in Lipavsky's reading, death does not necessarily presuppose inaction, but does give the dead the possibility to fall out of the rational order, which they no longer have any obligation to respect. In death, the hidden other inside of the human body can finally come out.

Starukha may indeed be read as a story about eating and the adventures of food. It starts with the protagonist starving before the arrival of the old woman. He drinks vodka and eats and uncooked sausages with Sakerdon Mikhailovich, which prove to behave in exactly the manner in which the food of the dead would, causing terrible stomach ache. Scholars have argued that the old woman herself stands for matter, and by eating the raw uncooked

[594] Kharms, 2:166.
[595] Kharms, *Today I Wrote Nothing*, 104–105.

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food, Kharms's protagonist partakes of it.[596] On the train, he is caught by a sudden and violent bout of diarrhoea, and has to rush to the toilet; when he comes back, the suitcase with the corpse is stolen. Food becomes a parodic down-to-earth other hidden inside a body, along with the desire for its incorporation, its troubling agency, and climactic, pleasant, and catastrophic dejection. Moreover, the narrator seems fixated on the old woman's mouth. He worries that she might bite him and infect him with poisoned dead blood. He remembers that her jaws are lying on the floor in the corner, after he kicked her in the chin, but is unable to find them there and conjectures that the old woman could have crawled across the room "in search of her teeth"[597] and had possibly managed to find them and put them back in. The old and dead woman's mouth becomes the nodal point on which violence is concentrated, but is also a site of troubling agency, linked to the fear of contagion.

It is no wonder that hygiene, the practices aimed at ordering and domesticating the independent life of the body, becomes one of the main targets that the creeping dead attack. The first incident that Kharms's narrator recounts happens "while the guard was in the public baths on orders from his superiors," which suggests that he would not go to wash himself if it were not ordered. It is thus precisely the overlap between the requirements of educating and caring for the living population, and guarding the dead, that opens the possibility for the dead to invade the realm of the living. The sterile space of the disinfecting chamber becomes the target of contamination in the both abject and comic act of eating disinfected—or possibly still dirty—linen. Similarly, the nurse who becomes the victim of the second dead man dies of an even more radical form of contamination from her body being invaded—of blood poisoning after he bites her. This pattern of disruption of the living present by the dead past allows for reading *Starukha* as a Gothic story, as Muireann Maguire does convincingly in her book on Gothic patterns in early Soviet literature, putting it in dialogue with several roughly

[596] Tokarev, *Kurs*, 93.
[597] Kharms, *PS*, 2:182.

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contemporaneous literary works. Maguire reads the story as a "parody of Soviet immortality myths": death as an unruly space that defies both earthly attempts to control it and any dream of transcendence, where corpses, as "an actively malign social group," are mobilised to help the text deliver a "wholesale condemnation of the social mores of Stalin's Russia."[598]

The boundaries between the living and the dead are not settled at all, however. The protagonist's friend Sakerdon Mikhailovich meets him "in a robe thrown over his bare body, in Russian boots with the tops cut off and a fur hat with ear flaps, but the earflaps were turned up and tied in a bow on top."[599] It has been pointed out[600] that this dress strongly resembles a camp uniform. It makes sense that at the time of writing in 1939, Kharms knew that his friend Nikolai Oleinikov had been arrested, but did not know for sure whether he had been shot (as was the case), or alive in a camp. About two years later, after Kharms's arrest, his wife Marina Malich would write to their friends of this news in a kind of code: "Dania went to Nikolai Makarovich."[601] Going to Sakerdon Mikhailovich thus takes on clear characteristics of visiting the world beyond that of the living—be it the land of the dead or the liminal space of the camp. In this case, we are faced in *Starukha* with two kinds of the dead: the grotesque crawling ones, animated by their blatant disregard for order and societal conventions, and the wise and supportive ones, like Sakerdon Mikhailovich. About neither of the two can one be truly sure whether they are truly dead—although for very different reasons. What is even more interesting, if one remembers the conversation about dead people "barging in" on the living, is the fact that it is Kharms's protagonist who barges in on Sakerdon Mikhailovich, a living person barging in on the dead. This makes very clear the uncomfortable proximity at

[598] Maguire, *Stalin's Ghosts*, 161, 162, 164. In Naiman's reading of early Soviet discourses on sexuality as Gothic, he shows how the assault of the past on the present and future was imagined to happen primarily in the private sphere, in the realm of sex (Naiman, *Sex in Public*, 161). The uncanny undead in this case was the "incompletely repressed *historical* past" (162), so that the efforts to protect the present took the shape of "a ritualized, collective exorcism of sex and of the past" (162).
[599] Kharms, *Today*, 97.
[600] Kobrinskii, *Poetika OBERIU*, 277.
[601] Glotser, *Marina Durnovo*, 114.

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the centre of the text—that between the narrator (and the author himself) and the dead he is dealing with.

The Old Woman maybe be read by a Gothic tale that stages both the disruption of the present by the past, and an unsuccessful attempt at a ritual sacrifice of the past. The old woman comes into the narrator's apartment of her own accord and dies on her own; he plans to throw the suitcase with the corpse into a bog in a forest, but the suitcase is stolen. The narrator gets off the train, kneels in front of a crawling caterpillar, and prays to god. Throwing the old woman into a bog could be seen as a kind of bloodless sacrifice, yet even it cannot happen.[602] The divine power of chance shows its face in a crawling peristaltic movement of a caterpillar; the sacrifice is staged and disrupted by the unruliness of base matter. In *The Old Woman*, the divine power, showing itself in fate and accidents, and the chaotic power of organic matter, are superimposed onto each other and flicker, appearing to be the same, but in such a way that one can never be sure if they truly are.

Dark abject forces lurking underneath the chaos of everyday life keep preventing the protagonist from disposing of the old woman's body. He decides to put the corpse into the suitcase, get on a train which goes outside of the city, get off on a little station in the forest, and throw the suitcase into the bog—the plan he remembers from detective novels and crime reports. When he empties the suitcase, the things he throws out of it are "several books, an old felt hat, and some ragged underclothes."[603] The felt hat belongs, of course, to Kharms's famed Sherlock Holmes-inspired costume, which echoes the detective novels as the organising principle of his protagonist's actions. The suitcase thus offers a play on the wardrobe/cupboard meanings of *shkap*: it can contain a series of outfits or a dead body; the whole problem is that one can never be sure which one it is at any given moment.

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[602] It is a parody of the compulsive ritual sacrifice of the "old woman" of which Naiman (*Sex in Public*, 200) writes—and of the bourgeois or aristocratic "woman-victim" (Turovskaia, "Zhenskaia Tema v Kinematografe," 105–16) of the Russian fin de siècle, opposed to the "new woman."
[603] Kharms, *PS*, 2:182.

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He is trying to trap her with the narrative logic of popular literature, but the narrative is poorly equipped to contain the dead old woman, who might at any moment crawl out of it (rather than violently disrupting it, as other dead people in this story). In Maguire's words, "A corpse defies assimilation by conventional realist plot."[604] This is an effort to impose a literary plot onto a series of events, in order to produce a rational intentional action. In this way the story, which proves these efforts futile, itself falls into the long series of Kharms's projects of ordering reality, which this time is acknowledged to be an impossible hope. The imposed order of the literary plot is disrupted from below, by uncontrollable events that happen on their own: death, birth, the hidden organic life of the body, or crime. Unruly bodily matter keeps invading and contaminating the order of events, with the dead body refusing to return to where it belongs—to the dark, de/receptive, and uncannily alive substance of the marshes. What we would read now as a zombie apocalypse—dead people crawling around, biting, and eating children and state-owned goods—is presented with a nonchalant air of ordinariness: "there have been some curious cases." The important result of this disruption, however, is the reworking of disgust into laughter and amusement at slurping, crawling, biting, and beaten corpses—while the readers can also laugh at and sympathise with the fright and confusion of the protagonist.

Hurley connects the Gothic to fantastic literature, "parasitic" and subversive towards the mainstream narratives of a culture in its ability to make evident its silences and contradictions.[605] Kharms's "absurd" may be read as a case of fantastic literature of this kind, both parasitic and oppositional, with its tropes of vomiting and stuttering as hysterical utterances, letting the body erupt where language stops. The central character of Kharms's texts may thus be understood as not speech nor language, but the body itself: undergoing multiple transformations, sucking others into itself and falling apart in vomit and excrement,

[604] Maguire, *Stalin's Ghosts*, 155.
[605] Hurley, *Gothic Body*, 7.

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in repetitive series whose very length produces a kind of soothing effect. The unfinished nature and radical openness of the body to forceful rearrangement, echoing Bakhtin yet distinct from his joyful grotesque, appears here as a predicament rather than celebration of unity. The body of me-as-other, the body as a *shkap*, asserts through these transformations its frightening, unruly, and powerful vitality even in its vulnerability: as the case of *The Old Woman* shows, even the dead body is hardly ever really, safely, dead.

4. Violence and the stuttering narrative: The body disrupting the text

As the examples in the previous section have shown, the relationship between the gendered body and food in Kharms's prose is often accompanied by images and stories of violence. Crucially, both external violence and seemingly endogenous trials and tribulations of textual bodies are marked by particular transformations of speech and narrative. While violence works to reorganise, disassemble, and reassemble bodies in Kharms's texts, on the level of narrative it produces a double effect. Violence tends to accumulate into series, which by their very length undermine their own emotional impact. A classic example of this accumulation is a short text "Events" from the eponymous cycle, which lists a number of ridiculous deaths, including falling off a cupboard and a death from eating too much mashed peas, and other misfortunes.[606] These series are typically accompanied by a particular stuttering of the text and/or the speech in it. This argument is not in itself new: Iampolski has written on repeated stuttering beginnings, Tokarev on Kharms's "poetics of violence" aimed against the text itself, and Jakovljevic on stuttering as an eruption of the body into speech, a "somatization of language," the materiality of text and the violence of writing.[607] What I aim to add to this conversation is the particular relationship between this narrative stuttering and

[606] Kharms, *Today*, 46.
[607] Iampolski, *Bespamiatstvo*, 142; Tokarev, *Kurs*, 48, see also Tokarev, "Poetika nasiliia"; Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 203, 166; Lipovetsky, "A Substitute for Writing."

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violence, between the text and the body within it. In her work on the late Victorian Gothic, Hurley foregrounds, among the ways in which the anxieties about human specificity could be expressed, the fantastic and the "hysterical utterance,"[608] one which signifies by means of a horrified silence that ruptures the narrative, and by involuntary bodily reactions (sweating, paleness, nausea, among others). This focus allows for reading Kharms's texts as stories of the mostly unhappy adventures of bodily matter, with food, the other in the body, as one of the major characters in them.

The accumulation of similar episodes produces a kind of stuttering in text and often results in literal stuttering-like speech *in* the texts, often interrupted by vomiting or other imagery of the body falling apart. Texts that conform to this pattern form a category of their own; however, one can also see it at work in the examples discussed above. In "Horrible death," the character "would eat and eat and eat and eat and eat, until"[609] a series of bodily transformations announce his death, from graying hair to ears falling off. In the poem about plump Jewish women, the "gorging" is purely textual, accomplished as the accumulation of imaginary food and drink, and accompanied by compulsive repetitions with sentences running over line breaks, and the narrator interrupting himself by cursing and celebratory exclamations, which all create the effect of a stuttering yet unending text. In *Starukha,* one finds the accumulation of repetitive episodes, as the narrator is going out, coming back, looking for food, and observing the same people passing by on the street; the stuttering effect can be found in the story about a miracle-worker that he cannot write and in the series of unsuccessful attempts to find the way to dispose of the body. Finally, these are followed by the climactic diarrhoea on the train, accompanied by the loss of the corpse and the abrupt ending. In a number of texts, the connection between this succession and sexuality or femininity becomes blurred, but remains present: examples can be found in a fragment about

[608] Hurley, *Gothic Body*, 7.
[609] Kharms, *PS*, 1:271.

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women biting each other;[610] stories that feature sexual violence;[611] or stories involving violence directed at lovers or at sexual organs.[612] Finally, there is a number of texts where this pattern is mostly disconnected from the association with women as threatening, and where gorging is accomplished on a formal level, and falling apart on both formal level and thematic levels. An informative example is a prose piece "Lektsiia" (Lecture, 1940), where the attempt to give a public lecture on "What is a woman?" is interrupted by a series of heckles and eventually punches from the audience. This does not prevent the lecturer from speaking, but fragments his speech into a series of progressively more obscene exclamantions, until he is knocked out.[613] In this particular case, it is not femininity but its discussion that attracts violence. The verbal and physical interruptions constitute the entire plot of the sketch.

Echoing this disintegration of speech, bodies in Kharms's prose are subject to falling apart, being torn apart, and various kinds of dismemberments and rearrangements. In "Okhotniki" (Hunters, 1933), a leg is torn off, and the victim of the attack, having lost his ability for coherent speech, is eventually smothered by his companions out of pity;[614] in "Sud Lincha" (Lynch Law, n.d.) an angry mob tears off the head of a random victim, which "rolls down the street and gets stuck in the hatch of a sewer drain."[615] In "Lidochka sidela na kortochkakh" (Lidochka was crouching, 1935), the old man assaulting little Lidochka repeatedly threatens that if she cries out for help he will "tear [her] little head off" and "start to tear her apart."[616] In all these cases, violence accompanies or brings about the interruption of speech and writing: the conversation of murderous hunters disintegrates into pained cries and grunts of the stranglers, the killing of a passerby in "Lynch Law" calms down the crowd

[610] Kharms, *PS*, 2:397.
[611] "Reabilitatsiia" (Rehabilitation, 1941), in Kharms, *Today*, 271; and a sketch about Elizaveta Platonovna, Kharms, *PS*, 2:157-158.
[612] "Pomekha" (The Interference, 1940), in Kharms, *Today*, 261; "Rytsar'" ("A Knight," 1934-36), Kharms, 210-212.
[613] Kharms, *Today*, 258-259.
[614] Kharms, 40–41.
[615] Kharms, 345.
[616] Kharms, *PS*, 4:81.

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which had been listening to an utopian speech. Violence is used here to calm grief and unrest. Kharms's draft of the story about Lidochka is interrupted by his own comment: "Wanted to write something disgusting and wrote it. But will not write further: it is too disgusting altogether."[617] Disgust generates the writing and the refusal to write.

"Pakin and Rakukin" (1939) dramatises the accumulation of control over another's body, which, under this rising pressure and the threats of violence, drops its head backwards and dies on its own.

> [...] Pakin said:
> "If you don't immediately stop blinking, Rakukin, I'll kick you in the boobs."
> In order not to blink, Rakukin screwed up his jaw and stretched his neck out even further, tipping his head back.
> "Ugh, you look absolutely vile," said Pakin. "A mug like a chicken's, and his neck is blue. Nasty!"
> Meanwhile, Rakukin's head was tipping further and further back and finally, losing tension, collapsed onto his back.
> "What the hell!" exclaimed Pakin. "What kind of dirty trick is that?"
> If one were to look at Rakukin from Pakin's perspective, one would think that Rakukin was sitting there without a head at all. His Adam's apple stuck straight up. One couldn't help thinking that it was Rakukin's nose.[618]

This text dramatises a sinister take on avant-garde principle of *sdvig*, the shift, and its combinatorial poetics. One part of the dead body freely replaces another; as if the body shifts and rearranges itself, its parts losing their fixed place and identity. Jakovljevic points to the important links between such shifts in body and language, where "the disintegration and fragmentation"[619] of the one "jumbles" the other (as in, e.g., "Hunters"). Violence thus becomes an entry point into trans-rationality which, in the earlier texts, was connected to the world of children, peasants, and various magical or ethereal beings.[620] The suffering or dead body in Kharms, as in the case of *Starukha*, shows its potential for recomposition, rearrangement, recombination, and revenge. It is the ever-presence of barely motivated

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[617] Kharms, 4:442.
[618] Kharms, *Today*, 85-86.
[619] Jakovljevic, *Daniil Kharms*, 225.
[620] See, e.g., Kharms's play *Lapa*. Important parallels to these violently dismembered characters can be found in various genres of Soviet literature and press of the period. See, e.g., Naiman, *Sex in Public*, 121; Maguire, *Stalin's Ghosts*, 105; and Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*.

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violence that keeps the body in the state of uncomfortable flux in Kharms's prose, open to multiple transformations and metamorphoses, shifts and recombinations. They echo the lack of stability on the part of both the human body and the human subject, which in the Soviet context is due as much to the intellectual challenges to humanist and the avant-garde projects of new perception, as to the threat of being remade by force.

Defecation, as well as vomiting, frequently appears in Kharms's texts as a kind of counterpoint to accumulation: the dejection of the body's contents parallels the stringing together of repeated instances of violence. Or, rather, its accumulation is a response to the lack of the body which cannot contain itself anymore. The stringing together of violence thus corresponds to the body's gradual stringing-apart and dismemberment.[621] The roundabout, circular structure of a number of such stories brings attention to the pleasure produced in reading (as, e.g., in "A Dirty Character").[622] The accumulation of episodes dampens their emotional impact and instead invites laughter and a kind of complicity: a joy in recounting the absurd gamut of unfortunate and unnecessary, and frequently terrifying events. This pleasure is captured in a text from 1939–1940, where Kharms's narrator proclaims: "When I see a person, I want to hit him on the muzzle. It is so pleasant to hit a person on the muzzle!."[623]

The stuttering and circling of narrative, as if stumbling and falling apart, comes to mirror the falling-apart of the body *in* the narrative. The accumulation of violence and injury becomes mechanistic, a pure function of the text rather than in any way intentional. The structure is chain-like, metonymic, the characters chasing after each other in a circle, like Pushkin and Gogol who keep stumbling and falling one over the other. It replicates the

[621] In his analysis of "Reabilitatsiia" (Rehabilitation, 1941), Tokarev writes of this violent opening up of another's body as an act in which "a different, convulsing, unhuman body" comes to the surface (Tokarev, *Kurs*, 257). This is where my approach is very close to Tokarev's and where I would like to take his conclusions a step further: from existential angst at this revelation to the active questioning of human boundaries and human subjectivity.
[622] Kharms, *PS*, 2:128-129.
[623] Kharms, 2:139.

stumbling of speech and of the text. In "Neudachnyi spektakl'" (An Unsuccessful Play, 1934), the accumulation of episodes and stuttering of speech literally accompanies the emptying of the bodies turned out by contagious vomiting:

> Petrakov-Gorbunov comes out on stage, tries to say something, but hiccups. He begins to feel sick. He leaves.
> Enter Pritykin.
> PRITYKIN: His honor, Petrakov-Gorbunov, asked me to excu… (Begins to vomit and runs away.)
> Enter Makarov.
> MAKAROV: Egor Pritykin… (Makarov vomits. He runs away.)
> Enter Serpukhov.
> SERPUKHOV: So as not to… (He vomits and runs away.)
> Enter Kurova.
> KUROVA: I would be… (She vomits and runs away.)
> Enter Little Girl, running.
> LITTLE GIRL: Daddy asked me to tell all of you that the theater is closing. All of us are getting sick!
> CURTAIN.[624]

In this case, it is vomiting that causes the stuttering of speech and the stumbling of the text. "Somatization" encompasses both the narrative and the events described within it: the chain-vomiting prevents both the play and the text from unfolding in an orderly manner. The body takes over language and replaces it as the central concern of the text. As Hurley writes, responding to Julia Kristeva's argument that nausea, with its recoiling of disgust, helps to support the sense of the subject's separation from that which threatens the sense of the body's boundedness:

> The Gothic, however, disallows even this, most tentative, identity construct, for it is precisely the human body that it reveals as phantasmic and changeful. [...] Nausea throws the subject back into the immediate and unmistakable experience of his own body, affording the subject concrete proof of his own reality, his own undeniable, material Thing-ness, if not of his meaningfulness. As the outlines of the human body dissolve—indeed, as the whole universe around it threatens to dissolve into Thing-ness—the reader is consoled with bodily sensation, however fleeting, however nauseating.[625]

Nausea and vomiting make visible and literal the always-already-there presence of the hidden other in the human body. And, just as tropes of vomiting and defecation take on an additional layer of meaning when one considers Kharms's texts marked by the desire to consume the

[624] Kharms, *Today*, 70.
[625] Hurley, *Gothic Body*, 51.

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other and the tropes of treacherous death-bringing food, Kharms's diary notes allow for seeing how he repeatedly gives the least pleasant characters in his texts his own features. The killer Fed'ka from "A Dirty Character" uses his job at a women's lingerie store to look at women who are undressing in front of him and to feel how moist their genitals are when taking their measurements.[626] Peasant Khariton from "The beginning of a very good summer day. A symphony" (1939) is an exhibitionist who stands in front of women in line for sugar with unbuttoned pants.[627] The old paedophile from "Lidochka" is dressed in a way that made Kharms recognisable on the streets—like an "English gentleman."[628] More than troubling the boundary between "text" and "life," the authorial and the narratorial, these instances add to the effect of flickering depth that Kharms's texts produce. The author and the character are incorporated into one another, the result being something like a performative overcoming of disgust that horrible objects (and subjects) provoke.

The reader encounters here different facets of orality: speech, consumption of food, biting one's enemies, and vomiting appear as variants of each other. Blurring the distinction between ejecting the other and the body rejecting itself and turning itself inside out, vomiting functions as the reverse of the drive for consuming the other. Kharms's discussion of regular enemas as a practice that brings one closer to happy saintly life in "Conversations" can be read as another facet of the desire for expunging the other from one's body. The yearning for the body's unattainable plentitude turns into frustration and resentment from it never being there and never being enough (and appears to follow the logic of binge-eating performed entirely in writing); into fantasies of being poisoned or assaulted by the other in one's body; and into nearly compulsive practices of self-purification, be it through textual vomiting or real-life enemas as part of one's yogic practice.

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[626] Kharms, *PS*, 2:453.
[627] Kharms, 2:359.
[628] Kharms, 2:80.

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5. Conclusion

When Kharms's texts are read as adventures of food and bodily matter, one can see how they are marked by a whole host of affective relationships to this matter and by conflicting drives for incorporation and dejection. While Lipavsky evokes bodily boundary-fluids to question the body's identity in an encounter which provokes horror, Kharms returns again and again to slime, vomit, and excrement, often in texts which are themselves almost obsessively repetitive, as sources of pleasure: erotic, textual, or both. Kharms's Gothic somatises the sliding of desire, between bodies and off bodies, the accumulation of tension and its release in a radically deconstructable body ready to expel its contents and fall apart. Laughter, like vomiting and diarrhoea, appears as another way to fall out of itself, excreting and exiling the other. Women's bodies figure as food and come to be imagined as sites of nourishment and deprivation, either overabundant or lacking, and thus having the potential to "starve" the male subject. Food, however, also plays the role of the invading and treacherous other in one's body: it can be poisoned or of low quality, and in addition to there being too little, there can also be too much of it. One can see how the presence of violence in Kharms's text and the frequent imagery of dismembered and re-arranged bodies translates into dismembered, stuttering narratives. These texts show a curious parallel between violence, speech, and food: as violence accumulates in absurd series, the characters' bodies start falling apart either literally, or by ejecting their contents in vomiting, which is often accompanied by a stuttering of speech inside the text and of the narrative itself.

These adventures of food inside and outside of the body reveal a peculiar play of accumulation and expenditure. The body that appears in these texts is one under constant assault and the threat of starvation. And yet, the affective response they produce is at the very least mixed: these texts are not tragic, they invite enjoyment and laughter. This response is partly due to the techniques Kharms uses: the slipping and sliding of repetitive fragments of

text and the accumulation of violence into series produce a merry-go-round effect of a dance or a joyous folk song. And partly, these texts invoke some of the pleasure from the destruction of structure mentioned by Lipavsky, of “the liberation from certain limitations of individuality” from the conversation about the taste of dove meat, and from the always incomplete displacement of disgust and horror somewhere else. Laughter may be another form of falling out that these texts engage, inviting the reader in and producing a kind of complicity in enjoying the violence aimed at the characters’ infinitely dis- and re-assemblable bodies.

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Chapter 6. Pleasures of dissolution: reworking radical uncertainty into hope

This final chapter returns to the images of dissolution, passivity, and the dreams of leaving one's human individuality behind in Lipavsky, and the acceptance of radical uncertainty in Druskin's philosophy, which both suggest a rethinking of the relationship with the unavoidable hidden other. Whereas, in Kharms, that other is accepted into the body in dangerous and catastrophic acts of consumption, Lipavsky and Druskin's works point instead to a dream of one's individuality dissolving either in the elements whence it came, or in the otherworldly divine, as it flickers into presence in this world. Most importantly, one can see how the problem of the hidden other is reworked through a kind of colonisation of the non-human, and how in this reworking, eroticism turns onto the writing subject themselves and onto their embodied but solitary and non-sexual experiences of the world. It is this "colonisation" of the non-human that opens the way to acceptance of uncertainty, rather than anxiety about it.

As was already mentioned, the established pattern in scholarship has been to approach Lipavsky and Druskin as fairly serious thinkers of the absurd.[629] Druskin is read through his religious philosophy influenced by phenomenology and Kierkegaard's existentialism, as well as through his lifelong interest in Bach.[630] Meanwhile, Lipavsky is contextualised as reflecting the political horror of the period:[631] individual dissolution in the elements is approached as an allegory of the political threat to an independent thinker in Stalin's Russia.

[629] Jaccard's *Daniil Kharms* and Cornwell's *Daniil Kharms and the Poetics of the Absurd* are key examples here; See Meilakh, "Oberiutiana," as a good way to contextualise this approach.
[630] Avdeenkov, "Fenomenologicheskoie izmerenie"; Slobozhanin, "Znachenie gnoseologicheskikh idei Ya. S. Druskina"; Lupishko, "Music and Rhetoric in the USSR"; idem., "When Bach Meets Russian Formalism"; idem., "In Search of Hieroglyphs."
[631] Tsivian, Leonid Lipavskii"; Zlydneva, "The Terrifying in Late Avant-Garde Painting."

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In this chapter, I would like to offer a reading of both philosophers as thinkers of happiness, pleasure, and hope.

This overview of the ways *chinari* approached the dissolution of the subject may help understand Lipavsky's statements in "On Transformations," which appear to contradict some of the arguments of the "Research on Horror" by suggesting a link between the loss of individual agency, non-existence, and happiness: "14. For those who do not have a choice (freedom) there is no time (no accident). [...] 20. Timelessness—non-existence—happiness."[632] What is more, in a Bergsonian approach to reality, he argues that timelessness characterises "even processes," and processes encompass everything that exists: "the category of object-ness [*predmetnosti*] is fictitious, only processes exist in the world. A table is also a process, a fountain of a motor resistance, maintaining a certain constant shape and of a permanent force."[633] Thus an object, due to the constancy of its form, becomes a figure of happiness. This brings the discussion back to the avant-garde and post-avant-garde thinking on the object discussed in Chapter 1: one can approach happiness by fashioning oneself to be *like* an object. The same evenness of a process is shared by more ephemeral, less bound, non-objectlike phenomena, like temperature and smell.[634]

Lipavsky consistently offers non-human models of happiness. They appear to be attractive to him in their passivity, which functions as the most important component of their proximity to "the elements." For Druskin, this openness to an experience that reaches beyond the boundaries of the human is connected to his exploration and documentation of his solitary mystic practice. The openness to the catastrophic ruptures in the fabric of reality, through which the divine flickers into the subject's awareness, as he describes it, is marked by a peculiar weird eroticism. For both authors, animal figures, as well as human characters in variously altered states of mind, appear as emblematic of a direct, unmediated contact with

[632] Lipavskii, "O preobrazovaniiakh," 65.
[633] Lipavskii, 78.
[634] Lipavskii, 79.

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that second divine reality. This chapter is going to explore these topics in circles rather than in succession: starting from the pleasurable modes of disappearace well-documented in Kharms but most lovingly written about by Lipavsky, to the eroticism of a passive and failing body as it appears in both Lipavsky and Druskin in the moments of approaching individual dissolution, to Druskin's paradoxical philosophy of doubt as the true, and the only available, certainty, and back to the question of what individual dissolution means for the hope for connection with others, especially as time passes and these others become loved ones lost to death. In this final instance, Lipavsky and Druskin's writings simultaneously echo and contradict each other, which likely has to do less with their philosophical approaches and more with their roles in life, with Druskin surviving his friends and working to preserve their memory.

1. Ways to disappear

To submerge into the kissel of the world.[635]

A dreamed-of yet ultimately unachieved dissolution in a bog from *The Old Woman* fits into a line of frequent, varied in their form, and often remarked-on disappearances in Kharms's poems and prose,[636] from the man who falls apart at the thought of large and fragrant women ("O tom, kak rassypalsia odin chelovek"—How One Man Fell Apart, 1936),[637] to the dream of a peaceful disappearance in "Iz doma vyshel chelovek" (One man once walked out of his house, 1937), which was re-read by the contemporaries as well as by later scholars as a nod to those disappeared in the wave of repressions.[638] One finds escapes

[635] Lipavskii, "Opredelennoe," 107.
[636] Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*, 86; Jakovljevic 40, 45.
[637] Kharms, *РЫ*, 2:106; see the discussion of this text in Jaccard, "L'impossible Éternité," 217.
[638] See Tumanov, "Writing for a Dual Audience," 142. See also Sazhin, "Primechaniia," in Kharms, *PS*, 3:290. Marina Malich-Durnovo remembers how Kharms would dream of walking away and disappearing—away from the state violence, rather than into it (Glotser, *Marina Durnovo*, 93). The oscillation between this poem as a document of fear and grief, on the one hand, and as a dream of escape, on the other, reflects the principal uncertainty of Kharms's poetics.

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and disappearances in many different guises in Kharms's poetry and prose, from the long dramatic poem "Gvidon," where the eponymous character admits: "thoughts of a horse / enter into me," and the Witch beckons Liza to escape with her to the forest, to kill a woodpecker, suck his blood, and hide away together in a warm cosy hollow of a tree,[639] to "Makarov and Petersen" from the "Events" cycle, where one of the characters disappears into a parallel world of perfect spheres, so that only his voice can be faintly heard by the remaining Makarov, who reads of his comrade's fate in an esoteric book Makarov had just brought to show to the other.[640] Scholars have connected this theme to Kharms's interest in infinity[641] and his attraction to "the elemental" and the dissolution of individuality that it appears to promise.[642]

Jaccard has written on the importance of deformation as a tool of representing reality in its genuine wholeness and interconnectedness, which one can see in Kharms's essays on zero. In a text titled "Nul' i nol'" (Zero and null, 1931), Kharms writes of a perfect aberration of a straight line, which, being "steady and constant," would break the line at its every point and thus transform it into a circle.[643] In this text, straddling the border between quasi-science and mysticism, and quite unconvincing and ridiculous to the reader, an aberration becomes a structuring, productive principle creating a perfect all-encompassing void of a circle-zero and facilitating its understanding. However, as communicating with the whole of existence makes one face one's individual nonexistence, aberration as a productive tool of understanding thus also brings one closer to the void. This approach is close to Druskin's various writings on the little error, in one of which he mentions that the very difference between words is a kind of a little error: "The existence of different words, the substitution of one word for another, the possibility of choice—this is what a little error is. This explains the necessity of

[639] Kharms, *PS*, 2:270, 271.
[640] Kharms, 2:343.
[641] See Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*, chapter 2.
[642] Tokarev, *Kurs*, 257–258.
[643] Kharms, *PS*, 2:313.

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recording."[644] Writing is a practice of producing a small error, the constant displacement of meaning that choice brings about.

Lipavsky in his works shows a consistent interest in various forms of "nonexistence and objectless existence (e.g., smell, warmth, weather). The study of death. How an isolated incident is possible. The body, growth, breathing, pulse. Shining, transparency, fog. [...] Happiness and its connection to certain substances and consistencies."[645] In "Research on Horror," the language used to mark horrifying objects, substances, and situations, with the fear of dissolution that they evoke, is also employed in writing about love and the yearning for connection, as, e.g., in "Water Tractatus," the earlier version of the same text:

> "Were you liquids, you would know what to do: you would simply mix together."
> [...] Then I came back into the room and turned away the blanket before switching the light off… the body lay before me, what am I even saying, the very soul. A wave, a soul, a petal, a sunbeam [*svetovoi zaichik*], the very soul lay on the bedsheet before me, blooming with hair, the rays of legs and arms, the pegs of breasts, stems, reedpipes of blood vessels. The soul lay thus before me like a seashell…[646]

The body of a loved person resembles delicate and fragile, unstable objects—a wave, a flower petal, a flickering reflection of sunlight, where its limbs and blood vessels bring to mind sea creatures and the vacillating stems of sea grass. In another fragment, he mentions "The maddening fluidity of lines. Truly, it can drive one to frenzy, to extreme tenderness [*umileniia*], to rapture."[647] It is not just that that which is horrifying in a body is also erotic; but even more broadly, that which is fluid, uncrystallised, has the power to bring about, in the observer, affective states marked by a loss of control and a sense of dissolving boundaries.

In "On Bodily Union," the purest form of sensuality is described as the feeling of dissolution of one's body in space:

> the one lying with his eyes closed in the sun experiences a bodily tenderness [*umilenie*], a delightful languor, a rush of sensuality. Doubtless, a beetle sitting motionless for hours in a flower feels real

[644] Druskin, "Razgovory vestnikov" [Conversations of Messengers], 1:544.
[645] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 309.
[646] Lipavskii, "Traktat o vode," 11.
[647] Lipavskii, "Opredelennoe," 115.

> voluptuousness. So, too, a hashish smoker, when his heart skips a beat and he [feels as if he] loses his weight and density and dissolves into the air. So, too, an infant, flushed after feeding, listening for his growth. All of them, and many others in other cases, experience stupor, bliss, and a quiver of sensuality, the delight of it in its pure, unadulterated form.[648]

The joy of pure sensuality, in this vision, is connected to losing the sense of one's boundaries and to the passivity and proximity to non-being: the sensation of being filled by the elemental life, dissolving into it. The list of subjects experiencing this pure sensuality is telling: a person lying in the sun, a beetle, a hashish smoker, and an infant—the familiar collection of states on the border of or beyond rational thought, overlooking the fragile border of human specificity. This is what nonobjectivity of love means for Lipavsky: it is not aroused by nor has as its object anything or anyone outside of the body, but arises inside of it, as the quality of the living matter itself: "voluptuousness can be an expression of the internal growth of a living tissue, its special arousal, its overflowing with its own existence."[649] The joy of sensuality brings one in contact with the living tissue of one's own body and thus also opens the body up, underscoring its ultimate non-humanity. Lipavsky brings more "examples that fall beyond the scope of human experience": "simple organisms" that can be prompted to reproduce non-sexually by placing them in a more concentrated solution, and a fish braving the river against the flow in spawning season, offer additional cases of "nonobjective sensuality [*bezob'ektnoe sladostrastie*]."[650] Having mentioned them, Lipavsky returns to his characters—a person lying in the sun, a "drug addict"—and, adding to the list the "limitless and unbearable joy" of one feeling the approach of an epileptic fit, sums up:

> In all these and similar cases, there is a characteristic acute sense of the harmony and beauty of the world that cannot be compared to anything, of its rhythm [*ritmichnosti*] and unity. The one caught by it as if hears the impulse of the world or, if we were to use ancient expressions, the music of its spheres, the "soul" of the world. All this is too unclear for it to be possible to make a final conclusion. But it makes one suspect beneath the living elemental tissue, even deeper, the sign of which it [the elemental tissue] is only an expanded image. In love itself there can be moments approaching this, and only they are remembered for a long time, as far as we can measure, forever. It is strange, however, that the road to these states does not lie through voluptuousness or, at least, not primarily through it, but rather to the

[648] Lipavskii, "O telesnom sochetanii," 152.
[649] Lipavskii, 164.
[650] Lipavskii, 169.

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> contrary, through the renunciation of sensuality, through selfless and objectless passionate respect. Still, it can grow out of tenderness, and out of sympathy too. Does this not hint to the fact that the spectrum of love has also an invisible part, which connects both its ends and thus closes it up?[651]

Such states bordering on individual dissolution open therefore a way beyond sensuality, and have the potential to bring together and reconcile the apparent opposition of sensuality and respect for another as an individual. The familiar suspicion is deployed here to allow for the feeling of interconnectedness, a rhythmic balance of the world, to appear as the "sign" of unity underneath the appearance of material elemental chaos, the latter thus functioning as the signifier of a deeper order.[652]

In relation to the pleasures of dissolution, Lipavsky repeatedly underscores the importance of rhythm and music:

> Music somehow cleanses the person from the mistakes, the poisons that have accumulated in him. It is like water for a withering plant. It generally resembles a liquid more than anything, its flow. Its effect is also similar to the effect of copulation: after it one feels calmed and freed; whereas in large amounts it [music] intoxicates and relaxes. Vibration and rhythm, the breath of an instrument, wooden or brass. The correct breathing, which changes the breathing of the listener too, dissolves it in itself, penetrates into the life of muscles and tissues with rhythm. This is a liberation from the curvature of individuality in relation to the world, dissolution and discharge, the play with time that boils down to its destruction. This is the essence of art.[653]

Music and rhythm in their healing properties approach the effect of sexual intercourse. They are like water and, by imbuing a listener with their liquid quality, they bring about a "corrective," "straightening" effect on one's improperly crystallised individuality through dissolution and a playful destruction-suspension of time.[654] Such "liquid," passive states serve as the model for happiness, e.g. in Lipavsky's thoughts on neurasthenia:

> What is neurasthenia? A constant deep-seated worry, as if something inside is cramped by a spasm, a petrified readiness for defense. Before I thought: it can be cured by only one thing—by happiness. But happiness is present in substances, too, and in forces. [...]

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[651] Lipavskii, 169-170.
[652] See a similar argument about the unity of an "alogical" order below the chaotic surface of Kharms's texts, in Tokarev, *Kurs*, 276-277.
[653] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 385.
[654] Cf. Druskin's complex elaborations on rhythm as a way to think the play of sameness of difference in human relationships after the Fall: Druskin, "Teotsentricheskaia antropologiia," 1:669-670.

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> It is usually thought: a person is his [sic] body. But it is the same if a weighman thought: the scales are that scalepan with which I constantly work, onto which I put my the weights; actually, the scales are the relationship of the both scalepans. A person is a relationship between the body and the world, he rests, so to say, on two waves. Their mutual vacillation—that's what a person is.
> The point I am making is that the vacillation can be straightened from different sides.
> Nature cures neurasthenia, and air and water do, one gets a person, so to say, blowed through: his blood vessels, his respiratory and other tubules. And the short light slumber, when the breathing lengthens, and the weightlessness when swimming, and the wide variegated space, and music, and massage, every kind of rhythm in general. Why does work cure neurasthenia? It brings the person out from a stagnant armlet of the water into the watercourse, renews the exchange of forces between the person and the world. It is known that a tic is not treated by an effort to overcome it, but by the art of relaxation. Discharge makes the lump disappear, the pure correct rhythm is freed from its deformation.[655]

Reactivating the contact between one's body and the world helps undo the effects of the wrong, unfortunate crystallisation of matter that has become too strenuous. Accepting a degree of dissolution in the elemental quiet of floating in water and gentle slumber proves therapeutic in that it helps soften the structure that has begun to bring discomfort, reestablishing the appropriate relationship between the world and the individual body. A quality of the body and the individuality when it matches the world and the elements around it, their mutual congruence, is what Lipavsky calls "streamlining [*obtekaemost'*]":[656] the shape of a body that allows it to pass through space with the least effort. In his further essays, Lipavsky defines art as "an evocation [*vyzyvanie*] of rhythmic states" and "a hierarchy of rhythms."[657] It allows for a degree of organisation and control of the elemental matter in the service of the individuals consuming the art. The peristaltic rhythm of the bowels or of a crawling caterpillar referenced in "Research on Horror" is complicated and evoked with a particular goal and a healing effect. Through a rhythmic "flicker of nonexistence [*miganie nesushchestvovaniia*]),"[658] the threatening and engulfing elements can be, it appears, harnessed to serve people.

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[655] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 385–386. See also an interesting parallel in positing dance or the collective ecstatic movement of popular sects as the cure against neurasthenia in Silver-Age thought, in Bulgakova 2005, 96. Overall, Lipavsky's texts on the pleasures of dissolution are "remembering" the earlier Russian Symbolist writings on the Dionysian generative abyss of chaos (see e.g. Viacheslav Ivanov's articles discussed in Etkind, *Khlyst*, 202–203). For a more detailed discussion of this earlier context of Lipavsky's thought, see Jaccard, "Krizis 'tekuchesti.'"
[656] Lipavskii, "Opredelennoe," 106.
[657] Lipavskii, 94, 96.
[658] Lipavskii, 112.

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Lipavsky characterises his own research as a kind of "untangling of the body [*rasputyvanie tela*],"[659] which effectively performs a version of the reverse rotation: undoing of the solid structure to reach for the elements underneath, but this time not as a work of horror. The body is to be "untangled" just as time and the world are: in "Conversations," writing about untangling the latter, Lipavsky writes about wanting to see "as if we are not constrained by the body, do not live."[660] Once the body and the individuality are untangled, the drop into nonexistence appears necessary, and the death and dissolution—that "unalive" state from which the rules of existence can finally be understood—appear as a vantage point.

2. The eroticism of a failing body

An indecisive person turns around often.

He walks gropingly and fears everything.[661]

Druskin revisits in his writings the notions of the neighbouring world, and in a number of ways complicates Kharms's approach to the different *shkap* figures mentioned in Chapter 1. His texts attempt to approach and enact the messengers' way of thinking in writing: his whirling prose with its peculiar use of purposely simplified terminology recreates the experience of being a messenger, or among messengers, for the reader. His writing style can be approached as a parallel form of a verbal machine: marked by almost compulsive circular repetitions, it evokes the feeling of a prayer or an incantation and of Kharmsian series. Here, this verbal accumulation is similarly accompanied by images of bodily failure. However, the way in which they are coloured is very different: this coming-apart of the body is welcome. In this respect, Druskin echoes Lipavsky, who would jokingly assume the pose of passivity and helplessness in "Conversations":

[659] Lipavskii, 89.
[660] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 422.
[661] Druskin, "Razgovory vestnikov," 1:542.

> L. L.: I am meek [*bezotvetnyi*]. The other day they opened a fan, and I was pulled into it. It is good that T. A. [Tamara Aleksandrovna Meier, Lipavsky's wife] noticed when I was already under the ceiling, and caught me by the foot [*za nozhku*]. And then also: I was bathing and, lost in thought, not realising myself what I was doing, pulled out the plug of the tub. The ensuing whirlpool caught me. In vain did I cling to the smooth borders of the bathtub, in vain called for help. Luckily, the [other] tenants heard my cry, forced the door and rescued me in the last moment.[662]

The incidents described mirror encounters with the horror and attraction of the elements that Lipavsky investigates in his essays. In this self-parodic version of such encounters, he narrates a masculinity in which frailty, fragility, and reliance on strong women and neighbours are at the forefront. The diminutive form of the word "foot" underscores the childlike nature of the narrator. Druskin, in turn, in his diaristic prose piece "Shchel' i gran'" (The Crevice and the Edge, 1928), writes, in great detail, the body that grows into itself, cracks, and falls apart in its encounter with the divine erupting into the world through a crevice opening in the sky and connected to his body by a kind of plane, a surface trembling with vibrations.[663] In both these accounts, a catastrophic eroticism of passivity takes centre stage, where the feminine-marked presence, either as a celestial cleft or one's wife, looms large and powerful over the meek body of the narrator.

Both Druskin and Lipavsky rely in important ways on the concept of the neighbouring world: the otherworldly divine order making itself visible in our reality, or a radically different way of being and perceiving reality, as in Lipavsky's examples of foetuses, infants, beetles, and jellyfish. One of the earliest occurrences of this concept in Druskin's writings is in a diaristic text titled "Dushevnyi prazdnik" (The holiday of the soul, 1928), where he calls it "that world":

> That world opened itself to me in other forms, too, when the earthly causal links faded away and lost their necessity, the usual objects became new, beautiful and joyous—they retained that which is always lost with us—the permanent novelty: they always were and stayed new. And this was real, like the table at which I am sitting now, and many times more real.
> That world with all its objects, people, with everything that is impossible even to name, was in me, this was the true real world, truly real. Out on a walk, visiting friends, talking to people, fulfilling unpleasant difficult responsibilities, alone with myself, I was in it—in that world, and it was in me.

[662] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 344.
[663] Druskin, "Shchel' i gran'," 1:466.

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> And when God sent me the second world, and it was in me and I in it, although in space and separated from me,—there was no space.
> I contemplated that world: I was in it, I was it, and it was in me. It was as if I were in a ship made of glass.[664]

Further on, he continues the thought from this excerpt: "I am connected to everything, and I am everything. And what about my soul? There isn't one, once again there isn't one, because everything is one, and I am everything. Again I have leaped out of the world, and therefore my soul doesn't exist: I am a part of everything, and I am everything."[665] *That* world allows for this intense feeling of connection with others and with the world as a whole, to the point of interpenetration. Yet, characteristically for *chinari*, this feeling is captured in a metaphor of a glass ship, which offers protection from others in *this* world just as it grants the experience of interconnectedness. The parallel existence which *that* world presents relies on the play of unity and separation, in which the present space is cancelled out seemingly in the very moment as the material reality of objects is activated and reinvested with novelty, beauty, and joy. The language of renewed perception of the early Russian avant-garde meets here *chinari*'s usual need to articulate distance and some protective, albeit transparent boundary, to be contained in yet another version of a *shkap*.

In "Proiskhozhdenie vtorogo mira v sviazi s novoi teoriei vremeni" (The Origin of the Second World in Connection to the New Theory of Time) from the late 1920s, Druskin writes of the same presence of a parallel world experienced as "an eternal longing for the absolute."[666] This longing shows itself through many personal idiosyncrasies and situations, among them:

> The shining little sphere [at the bedpost] on the bed, which had provoked in you unchaste feelings in a moment of intoxication with hashish, the unnatural proclivity for an object or the first love for a woman, when the novelty passes and the judgment comes into force: it was and it isn't, open before

[664] Druskin, "Dushevnyi prazdnik," 1:431.
[665] Druskin, 1:432.
[666] Druskin, "Proiskhozhdenie vtorogo mira v sviazi s novoi teoriei vremeni" [The origin of the second world in connection to the new theory of time], 1:434.

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> you a new world, which I have named the second world, if the true one is the first, and the appearing one, the zero world.[667]

Druskin's characteristically weird eroticism signals here the presence of *that*, or second, world. His examples all stand for situations of "it was and now it is gone," the slightest shift in perception that changes the way things look, sometimes in very unexpected ways, as with the metal sphere decorating a bed. They all serve to preface the extremely brief "Treatise on time," the centrepiece of this essay, whose single argument consists in the fact that neither the past nor the future exist, but only the precise moment of *now* does.[668] "This is why I know the second world only when it is already gone, because it is only then that it exists,"[669] Druskin concludes. The second world flickers: the awareness of it appears in the brief moments when it is already gone.[670] He adds in a later text that such a "touch of eternity" (*prikasanie k vechnosti*) may last any number of seconds or hours, and a saint is the one for whom it does not end until their very death: "he [sic] … sees and lives in a miracle and can work miracles."[671] The contact with the neighbouring world fundamentally changes how one experiences the world and who one is. Here, Druskin's Orthodox Christianity curiously echoes Lipavsky's interest in expanding human perception.

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[667] Druskin, 1:435.

[668] In 1968, Druskin returns to this thought in his book *Son i iav'* (Dream and Reality), where the same understanding of time appears to characterise a particular psychological state, and through it, the political situation: "There was no future. The present had sucked the past into itself, and had become hopeless [*besperspektivnym*]. I felt the reality of the past in the present; it *was* not, but *is* in the present" (my emphasis; Druskin, "Sny. Iz knigi Son i Iav'," 1:629).

[669] Druskin, "Proiskhozhdenie vtorogo mira," 1:436.

[670] Druskin returns to the similar notions in his later writings that attempt to approach reality phenomenologically and relationally, reconciling these approaches with his theology, to account for the multiplicity of perspectives and the dialogicality of *I* and *you* that makes up one's lived experience. See, e.g., "Sushchestvuiut li drugie liudi pomimo menia" (Whether people other than me exist, 1929). The concept of a flickering glimpse of eternity is developed further in "Priznaki vechnosti" (Signs of eternity, 1934), addressed to Lipavsky (Druskin, 595-597), and in a later work titled "Teotsentricheskaia antropologiia" (Theocentric Anthropology, 1964) (665). Druskin echoes Lipavsky in noting that some "narcotic" states may resemble these glimpses ("touches"), just as "some natural panteistic states" do (666).

[671] Druskin, 1:666.

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In his later writings, Druskin argues that not only is the non-existent real; it may even be more real "as compared to the existing."[672] The existing is determined by belonging to something else, and this belonging (e.g. to a broader category) grants it the possibility of being named.[673] In contrast, the non-existent is that which does not belong to anything nor anyone else: in this respect, it is reminiscent of Kharms's perfect gift and the naked responsible apartment resident, falling out of chains of connection and exchange. Independence from connections translates into non-existence: the naked responsible apartment resident flickers. Druskin concludes this line of thought with hope: that of joining that new mode of existence in the crevice and the edge and of acquiring radically new knowledge, unavailable to anyone still on this side.[674] God shows himself through these openings in the fabric of reality, "flow[s] from the crevice [*vytekaiushchii iz shcheli*]."[675] As do Kharms and Lipavsky, in his texts on the neighbouring world Druskin finds the mode of writing that is profoundly, and weirdly, erotic, and which helps him bridge the challenging affective space between horror and hope that the neighbouring world provokes.

While Lipavsky is interested in "untangling the body," in Druskin's prose one finds persistent imagery of the body falling apart and the narrator dissolving in the second world, e.g., in "The Crevice and the Edge" and "Sdokh mir" (The world is dead, 1929):

> Here I have walked out of the crevice and edge and went across the planes of this world, and further into co-presence, and beyond the co-presence I melted away, pulverised. I spread out in concentric circles—the edge tossed me, I fell apart, spread out. Thus I have disappeared, thus I got lost. And in the rotten world was I found, in a dead one. And so it happened: I swelled and burst—the crevice opened, the crevice opened—and the yellow light, and two more dots pendants, and the edge. The edge came together and came apart, and two planes and the plane and spread apart and the co-presence appeared, and beyond it—behind the co-presence and entirely it spread out, pulverised and is no longer beyond the co-presence, but some kind of a novel.[676]

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[672] Druskin, "O ponimanii" [On understanding], 1:611.
[673] Druskin, "Sistema ogranichivaet oblast' sushchestvovaniia…" [The system limits the area of existence…], 1:627.
[674] Druskin, "Chto budet, kogda ia umru?," 500.
[675] Druskin, 501.
[676] Druskin, "Sdokh mir," 1:470.

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Druskin writes in a similar way on his attempts at describing "co-presence" (*soprisutstvie*), offering a formula that captures well the general situation *chinari* were addressing: "Everything is possible. And there is no order."[677] These fantasies of the disassembled body in Druskin's texts complement the theme of striving to comprehend the world as a whole while being only a part of it, expressed in Kharms's "Myr" (The Werld, 1930),[678] as well as in Druskin's reasoning on the "suprasensible" (*sverkhchuvstvennoe*): "I was an arm or a leg of the whole and reasoned from the perspective of an arm or a leg, let me become the whole itself."[679] One can see how Lipavsky's work, with its persistent focus on the relationship between individuality, the individual body, and the world, exists in this context of his friends' parallel preoccupations: how a body comes to be just that—a seemingly bound individual body, what separates, or fails to separate it, from the rest of matter. Reading *chinari*'s texts alongside one another allows one to see the impact of their own close-knit intellectual community on their ideas.

In "O prostranstve zhizni" (On the space of life, 1939), Druskin offers a detailed response to Lipavsky's "Research on Horror":

> Imagine the simplest creature: a half-liquid amoeba or a Hydra polyp that reproduces by budding, a small piece of a living jelly. Where are the boundaries of the body here, the boundaries of the soul? When an old creature dies, when is the new one born? So it is with life. It flows out of one creature into another, almost unbound by death. This life is not bound by individuality. In this way death is united with individuality. [...]
> I felt in myself the life flow out, [my] soul became unindividual, the soul became like an amoeba, a Hydra, a polyp that reproduces by budding, like a piece of a living jelly.
> What is life to be compared with? What is the soul of life to be compared with? The actions of the day, like a dead surface of the skin, hide the skin of life, but the more feelings there are in them, the stronger the effect of death. The juice of a tree trunk, hidden by bark,—this is what the soul of life is, but the more feelings there are in them, the stronger the effect of death. The juice of a tree trunk, hidden by bark,—this is what the soul of life is, a subterranean stream passing through the dead sand and stones. So when does death come? When does the stream of life dry out? Or the actions of the day stop? Since it can be that the subterranean stream breaks through the barriers and floods the whole surface of the earth.[680]

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[677] Druskin, "Soprisutstvie" [Co-presence], 1:464. While Vvedensky was interested in refuting the accepted ideas on the nature of time and reality, Lipavsky criticised him for stopping at this step, and at the nihilism that it logically entails: new laws and patterns had to be worked out (Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 393).
[678] See also the detailed discussion in Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms*, pp. 35-39.
[679] Druskin, "Sushchestvuiut li drugie liudi," 1:494-495.
[680] Druskin, "O prostranstve zhizni" [On the space of life], 1:615-616.

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Starting with Lipavsky's example of an amoeba who does not have clear boundaries to separate it from its environment and is not "bound by individuality," Druskin then goes on to take these qualities on, and to compare his soul to the same amoeba, "a small piece of living jelly." The difference between himself and an amoeb herea, as he explains further on, is that an amoeba exists in pure space and in an absence of meaningful actions; whereas a human subject "is bound by the immaterial action and time," and it is this bondage to time (including the awareness of one's own mortality) and choice that creates individuality.[681] Finally, Druskin uses this text to bridge Lipavsky's interest in biology with his own preoccupation with living intentionally and in a heightened awareness of the divine meaning. Here, he uses Lipavsky's imagery of a gurgling underground magma, a hidden stream, to talk about the "soul of life," concealed by the trivial everyday events and errands, like sap in a tree trunk. The logic of a hidden presence reattaches itself in Druskin's writings to the divine, to be sought after, while remaining anchored in Lipavsky's language of plants and streams, sea creatures and living jelly.

> Individuality, growth, rather than deliquescence, will and death—these are the surroundings of time. [...] One can also add to the signs of time: suicide—this comes from will; individuality, growth, will, suicide, death—this is the environment of time. But then one would have to add some other words: feeling, desire, love. And so the system of the words that surround time will grow until it fills the whole space of life—the space of death. And the boundary between these two spaces is in every place, in every part, because the space of death penetrates into the space of life, the space of death fills all the space of life, it has entered like a foreign organism, grown out and filled everything with itself, and the boundary between the two spaces is in every place, in every part—time. You think time is an uninterrupted line which breaks nowhere and has neither a beginning, nor an end? It passes between the two spaces, fills the invisible intervals, plugs the invisible crevices, breaks off at some points, returns, closes into a circle, makes loops and leaps. Fragments of different times are located between the two spaces where their contact is not tight, in every moment they pass between life and death, delimit life, create individuality. Fragments of times, patterns and loops of time are only the boundary of the two spaces. This is why time is evasive—there is no time, it does not exist, just as a geometric line, the boundary of a given surface, does not exist, like the surface, the boundary of a body, does not.[682]

The imagery of a foreign organism invading the body, taking up all the space, and the paradoxical result where both exist and neighbour each other in every point, is similar to how

[681] Druskin, 1:616.
[682] Druskin, 1:616-617.

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Druskin describes his own embodiment in "The Crevice and the Edge" ten years earlier: the body growing in on itself, bursting and falling out of itself. The catastrophic air of the earlier text appears replaced by a calmer tone, detailing the intricate leaps, loops, and patterns of time as it snakes into "invisible crevices" between life and death.

The sliding of the gaze from the horrifying creature to himself is typical for Druskin, as Lipavsky underscores in "Conversations:

> Ia. S. [Iakov Semenovich Druskin] read out "In what ways I am disgusting."
> L. L.: There are national features here, and also, to use your cipher, prtr. This is the aversion to individuality, to its inevitable uncleanness. This feeling comes usually after a sexual union, it has been long noticed as the special anguish of this event, the feeling of the aimlessness of the action. But for you it is liberated from the circumstances and the object, and therefore directed at everything and primarily at yourself.[683]

At a different point, when discussing why exactly inebriation is pleasant, Druskin argues that the pleasure lies "in the liberation from the personal, the most unpleasant out of everything in the world," to which Lipavsky adds: "The eye catches objects more precisely, more wholly. It is as if they grow or prepare for flight. Yes, they are flying. A person loses his place among the objects, his bondage to them. It is this that grants the liberation from individuality."[684] While in "Research on Horror," he explained vertigo as the feeling of losing one's grip on surrounding objects, here, the subject, having lost their individuality, is themselves liberated, like Kharms's soaring *shkap*, and can join them in their flight. Individuality thus appears to be an uncertain lot: while for Druskin, it seemingly marks the human subject as existing in the realm of time, and therefore, of ethical choice, for Lipavsky, it is also a burden: the weight of a crystallised structure.

3. Druskin in defence of doubt

Is not everything certain? Does not everything take its place, have a solid standing?
But here I do not occupy any place, do not have a solid standing. …

[683] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 327.
[684] Lipavskii, 312.

The one who does not have a solid standing goes beyond the certain.
He looks here and there.[685]

In "Razgovory Vestnikov" (Conversations of Messengers, 1932–1933), Druskin ultimately constructs an approach where uncertainty functions as the only kind of stability available. He speaks of *that* as a particular state of oscillation in the middle of a choice:

> That is a kind of unrest—a transition, an uncertainty, an oscillation between a name and an absence of a name, between my name and his name, between an affirmation and a negation, that is a kind of calmness—the calmness before my naming and before my affirmation. That is a kind of doubt. A kind of doubt, but it is an entirely certain doubt, but one cannot say "certain" about it, it will cease to be doubt. A kind of doubt, and this means that everything is questioned, and the doubt has no limits.[686]

He then goes on to compare "complete doubt" and "partial doubt," concluding that since complete doubt affirms itself, "Partial doubt is fuller, not an absolute one, not an all-encompassing one and not in everything, it has no limits."[687] The oscillation in the moment of choice and the refusal (or impossibility) of choice creates this space of suspension. Ultimately, the doubt itself becomes a form of certainty and refuge: "a kind of calmness in the unrest."[688] It allows for a re-appropriation of indeterminacy as a space where the subject can find himself and a degree of calm amid the boundless doubt—in the doubt itself. In connection to this, Druskin introduces the question of the hopeless non-coincidence between name and essence:

> But its name is in it and not named, and the naming not uttered, and then it is named many times and by many names, and they are not in it, but in the one who names, and the one who names gives his own names to that, because he does not know the name of that. Then there will be parts and the whole, and the appearance—not that. What is not that? But even in this way it cannot be asked, not that is not something, not that does not exist. But everything ours is in it—you and me, and everything else, and the boundary will be everything. Here, too, lies the transition from existence to means, a kind of unrest and a kind of calmness. My name will be its name, and every naming will be one naming, and the name is not named, the naming is not uttered. We name that by its name, and the name is one, one name and like many and his, like mine.[689]

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[685] Druskin, "Razgovory vestnikov," 1:537-538.
[686] Druskin, 533.
[687] Druskin, 533-534.
[688] Druskin, 535-537.
[689] Druskin, 536.

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That and its name break down the boundary between the subject (naming it) and the object (being named), displacing the boundary everywhere, into every point. The naming itself is a process that combines precision with approximation, which he calls finding "the surroundings of a thing" (*okrestnost' veshchi*): "If I point precisely the place of a tree in a garden during the rain and the surrounding will be the rain, death, the smooth, then this is a naming."[690] Ultimately, this winding and fundamentally uncertain text points to the impossibility of reliably approaching reality through language (yet the necessity of it), given the constant mismatch between *that* which should be named and the name that is given, and between *that* as it is and its appearance.

"Conversations of Messengers" continues as a text written (as many other Druskin's works) in the language of the messengers themselves, describing in painstaking detail their reality by specifying the qualities of *that* and *not that*, the existence on the very boundary between things. The uncertain, Druskin, argues, is "higher" than the certain and known ("If no question can be answered, one sees the other side.").[691] The very "indifference, lack of order and certain well-being are themselves order and certain well-being [*blagopoluchie*]. What is more, the order is already there."[692] Similarly, Druskin returns to the concept of a little error in a balance to argue that the little error *is* itself a form of balance.[693] In its explicit acceptance of uncertainty and the gap between name and essence, the text speaks to Kharms's five meanings of a *shkap*, where the fifth meaning remained the hidden, non-human and not humanly comprehensible, true identity of a thing. "Messengers" make a step into that non-human territory but bring back the absence of the very possibility of a fixed truth in how things are named, defined, or categorised.

[690] Druskin, 1:545.
[691] Druskin, 1:540.
[692] Druskin, 1:543.
[693] Druskin, 1:543.

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There is a slight shift, a displacement in the scheme of things that prevents the perfect coincidence between word and meaning, appearance and essence. This situation, Druskin argues, is not an aberration from how the world should work, but is a kind of balance in itself: a kind of order, similar to the unknowable order in which trees grow in a garden. This order cannot be captured in a logical system, which is why Druskin argues that every system of thought will have a "remainder" that will fall outside of it, and that will have the potential to refute the system and give rise to a new one, just as limited as the original system in its ability to grasp all of reality adequately.[694] He writes in a similar way about one's idea [*predstavlenie*] of an object: there always remains a gap between the idea and the object itself, "a certain discrepancy or perplexity, and in this perplexity there is more reality than in the idea of the object."[695]

4. Dissolution of identity and individuality

> That which concerns me is a kind of absence. Events do not concern me, I avoid them.
> Continuous existence has lost its stability and solidity for me,
> I do not see that which connects.
> Opinions and beliefs do not interest me, I have no thoughts.[696]

The troubling dissolution of identity figures most prominently in Druskin's dreams of the dead, which he recorded well into the second half of the century, and in which his long-lost friends return, again and again, so that he learns to doubt their identity. The dead multiply and flicker, and it is impossible to tell which one of them is real; sometimes even to identify who that person with a new surname is:

> We were all together again, and I was preparing the treat: the sparkling water. We looked at each other and laughed. Look at us! Here is L. He and I—we have changed more than others. But here is another L.—this one almost does not look like himself at all. Here is the third L., and I would never say that it is L. And D. I. [Daniil Ivanovich Kharms]? I would not have recognised him either, maybe it is not

[694] Druskin, "O ponimanii," 1:611.
[695] Druskin, 1:627.
[696] Druskin, "Iz dnevnikov" [From diaries], 686.

> even D. I., but it has to be D. I. There were more people, one of them was Shura [Aleksandr Vvedensky], but who? There was also Pulkanov. This one had even a new surname.[697]

Death blurs the identity of the departed, and the futility of one's efforts to re-establish this identity underscores the longing to be reunited with them. In one dream, this flickering is captured literally: "You appear and disappear so suddenly that I doubt whether you exist."[698] In other dreams, as well, Druskin tells his friends how he has already dreamt of their return before, and tries, within the dream itself, to find clues as to whether this time it is true.[699] In this context, *that* world appears populated by demon pretenders whom it sends forth and whose real identity is betrayed by their poetic mediocrity as compared to Vvedensky when they are trying to impersonate him.[700] The hope for meeting long-gone friends takes, appropriately, the form of a creed of faith. In one of the dreams, Druskin wants to ask Lipavsky whether Kharms is also alive: "I pose him this question in a strange way: 'And does Kharms exist?' He is not surprised and confirms: Kharms exists."[701]

Lipavsky described this feeling back in early 1930s in his "Research on Horror," echoing the earlier versions of this feeling from "The Water Tractatus":

> The yearning for the dear ones, untimely departed, gives me no peace.
> Oh, this constant inexhaustible pain, a loss that cannot be made up by anything! We are separated by space and time, forever, entirely [*naglukho*].
> But an insane curiosity is burning me up. We want to be all objects and creatures—a temperature, a wave, a transformation. An inexhaustible thirst to meet again is not leaving me."[702]

This excerpt is peculiarly important in how it postulates the possibility of dissolution and being something other than oneself not as a reason for horror, but as supporting one's hope for connection. While death, in Druskin's writings, blurs individual identity, the loss of that identity in matter opens the possibility of meeting each other beyond death—in a materialist

[697] Druskin, "Sny," 1:632.
[698] Druskin, "Sny," 1:633.
[699] Druskin, 1:633-635.
[700] Druskin, 1:633, 636.
[701] Druskin, 1:637.
[702] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie uzhasa," 20; "Traktat," 5–6.

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worldview where the immortality of the soul is no longer felt to be a sufficient guarantee for that. Becoming an object, a temperature, or a wave means that death and the separation it entails could be overcome. It is to this argument that Vvedensky may be responding with his "Rug Hydrangea," where he complains:

> I regret that I'm not a beast [...]
> I regret that I'm not a star [...]
> And then there's this grudge that I bear,
> that I'm not a rug, nor a hydrangea.
> I regret I'm not a roof
> falling apart little by little,
> which the rain soaks and softens,
> whose death is not sudden.
> I don't like the fact that I'm mortal,
> I regret that I am not perfect.[703]

"The Crevice and the Edge," the text about the catastrophic opening of the divine into the everyday world, contains a suddenly peaceful segment where Druskin writes about the "pure duration" contained in the young buds on a tree: the pure potential and time that is yet to unfold. "A sheep partaking of the buds"[704] has thus more direct access to the world and more wisdom than a man like Druskin, trying to achieve enlightenment through a personal mystical experience or logical understanding. While time is still "tangled," archived, as it were, into little green buds, an animal eating them appears as a figure of unmediated access to the reality of the world. This characteristic desire for a combination of passivity and for being other appears also in "Research on Horror":

> Is it not enough, for example, to simply look in turns through a small piece of glass, then into another: through a green glass all things appear as cast out of a rich living liquor; through a yellow one—as a tender orange slice. And what if glasses change their colour too, as the day ripens? I will live like a little fly with a golden glint, between two window panes, like a landowner, free from any trouble, like a tiny spider amid the web spread across a colourful garden bower. And the whole world will flow through, sift through me, like sand through the narrow neck of an hourglass.[705]

[703] Vvedensky, "Rug/Hydrangea."
[704] Druskin, "Shchel' i gran'," 1:460.
[705] Lipavskii, "Issledovanie uzhasa," 19.

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A vision of happiness is that of looking through two coloured pieces of glass all day, immobile like a spider in the middle of the web, the whole world pouring through it. "...happiness is in sandy and unsteady environments,"[706] and the joy they offer is that of sharing in their unsteadiness, in the temporary unmaking of individuality. Druskin's "co-presence," the possibility of experiencing and witnessing one's contact with the rest of the world, with others in it, flickers and glitters, like Lipavsky's colourful pieces of glass: "Maybe it exists, and maybe it does not."[707]

5. Conclusion

Lipavsky and Druskin both develop approaches to the elemental and the non-human which aim to resolve the problem of the hidden other and the separation of appearances from essences that lies at the heart of the construct of the subject as a *shkap*. They accomplish this by what one could call colonisation of the non-human—temporarily assuming the position of a jellyfish, a beetle, a fish, a temperature, a tree, or a messenger. This approach opens the possibility for "synchronising" with the elemental in order to help free one's body from the burden of excessive and imperfect crystallisation, ultimately, enjoying the elements. Curiously, in Lipavsky's case, these possibilities are often expressed in the very same texts that pose the problem of the elemental as horrifying, contributing to the sense of constant oscillation and uncertainty that the texts provoke and embody. For Druskin, assuming the non-human perspective of a messenger allows for thinking the mismatch between essence and appearance, essence and name as unavoidable and ultimately non-threatening. Read this way, the elements take on a very different function—that of offering the hope of connection with others, which the strong undercurrent of grief, and a presentiment of grief, in Lipavsky's texts. In this way, horror and anxiety over the identities of bodies and things are resolved,

[706] Lipavskii, "Traktat," 13.
[707] Druskin, "Soprisutstvie," 1:464.

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transformed into frustration at demonic visitors impersonating long-lost friends. Ultimately, the elemental changes one's relationships with others. Women all but disappear in these instances as erotic objects, but eroticism remains, now as an objectless sensuality of a beetle in a flower cup or a mystic's terrifying experience of the divine.

In this imagined dissolution of individuality, masculinity is allowed to shift and flicker. Both Lipavsky and Druskin offer images where the loss of control, passivity, and powerlessness are pleasurable and welcome. The eroticism turns on the subject himself, with the images of prenatal floating and catastrophic and climactic disintegration in the moments when the second world shows its presence in the regularly observable first one. The focus here is consistently on the narratorial body and its feelings and sensations. This disintegration is pleasurable as well as hopeful: the presentiment of future losses and of being separated from the loved ones by time and death suggests, for Lipavsky, that the dissolution in matter may mean meeting again in a different form—as a wave, a flicker of light, an uncertain amoebic life-form. The real-life grief, when it arrives for Druskin, changes things, and remembrance of those who were lost takes the form of vigilantly guarding their true identity from the invasive doubling and tripling into various pretenders in his dreams—a struggle of memory playing out in literal terms.

The hidden presence of the other takes here the form of the neighbouring world, a kind of parallel reality felt in flashes and glimpses. The contact with it is exciting and frightening at once, and the flashes of eternity threaten the subject with individual disintegration, similar to how ingesting the other as food is felt to threaten and undermine the subject's body from within in Kharms. This otherness, experienced either as the enveloping pulsating matter in which one can dissolve, as the crevice in the sky, or as messengers and trees in a garden, is hidden in the sense that it is not readily available to anyone, but is desirable and sought after rather than an insidious and vaguely subversive presence. More

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importantly, it is the contact with this parallel invisible reality that grants one a sense of protection from the regular, everyday one: in pushing back against the fear of death and loss, and in the figure of the glass ship in which the modern saint can remain in their interaction with the world. The figure of *shkap* takes on its protective function once again. Having shifted and flickered through its many incarnations, and taken the form of a performative wardrobe on the stage of the House of Press and of the literary suitcase with the no less literary dead old woman in it, the *shkap* finally becomes the suitcase on top of a bookcase in which Druskin will save and preserve his friends' texts.

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Conclusion

Reading for bodies and matter and following their various permutations in Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin, offers a way to think the philosophy and practice of the late Russian avant-garde differently. This difference in findings lies in three key areas: the emotional tone in how the relationship with the bodily matter and objects outside of the human body are approached; the role of misogyny both in the relationship with the body and external objects and in the construction of the texts themselves; and the peculiar position of the authors vis-a-vis the mainstream discourses of the Soviet 1920s and 1930s.

It is following the adventures of the body and the points of contact between the human subject and the non-human, that allows for the problem of the hidden other in the texts to come to the fore, alongside with the anxiety and pleasure that accompany it, and for the structure of *shkap* to become discernible. In Kharms's prose and poetry, the bodies that variously fall apart and reveal foreign objects capture this anxiety of a hidden presence and its catastrophic and inevitable revelation. The *shkap* structure, however, allows for going beyond thinking the hidden other as a dormant but ever-present threat—importantly, it allows for modelling situations where the authors themselves embody that hidden other. This way, they can themselves occupy the position of the kernel of uncertainty within the not-quite-transparent body of the people, an independent object free from the chains of use and meanings, or a horrifying under-differentiated thing, like Kharms in his story of being born as caviar and having remained that way until his high-school graduation.[708] The texts, in their construction, similarly take on the structure of the *shkap* and/or Lipavsky's horrifying object, akin to a jellyfish or a scolopendra. The figure of the hidden other thus allows for bringing together several apparently disconnected elements of Kharms, Lipavsky, and Druskin's

[708] Lipavskii, "Razgovory," 330-331.

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creative practice (from Kharms's erotic notes and his Sherlock Holmes costume, to the notion of the little error important in Druskin's philosophy). Yet these new links between disparate concepts and practices do not produce a stable coherent system, preserving the ambiguity, uncertainty, and confusion of *chinari*'s fragmentary and/or conceptually evasive oeuvre, which remains governed by the same logic of flickering and dissipation, like a horrifying living matter about which one cannot tell whether it is one creature or more.

Reading Lipavsky's essay on horror alongside his and Druskin's writings on happiness helps to destabilise the simple assumption of these horrifying objects being approached as unambiguously negative. Instead, one sees how much Lipavsky's models of happiness rely on experiences of dissolution similar to those that appear terrifying in horror, and on similar human and non-human characters (persons under influence, little spiders and bugs, infants or embryos—beings in various states of under-differentiation). When visible and embodied by the writing subject, the hidden other brings pleasure, and *shkap* offers a feeling of protection and a promise of freedom. Ultimately, *chinari* propose models of subjectivity that variously embody either the non-human (an independent object, a *shkap*, a beetle or a jellyfish) or the human in altered states of perception that drastically reduce their autonomy and rationality, from a very small baby to a mystic experiencing the eruption of the divine. These are all models of relative powerlessness rethought as pleasurable and offering hope for connection with others.

It is by foregrounding this problematic of the hidden other that one can understand the complex functions that erotic imagery fulfills in *chinari*'s texts. Lipavsky is a paradigmatic case here, as he produces an apology of (hetero)sexuality and love as mediating the inevitable horror of the elements and the means to maintain the vain illusion that we are, each one of us, after all, special, and entirely human. Love and sexuality offer possible ways to coexist with horror provoked by the revelation of the elemental underneath the ruse of individuality.

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Rather than being mere expressions of the widespread patriarchal bias of the time, phobias of difference, primarily in the form of misogyny, perform an important function mediating horror and pleasure, the elemental and the individual, the impersonal and the selective. Being assigned to the border between the human and the non-human, the figures embodying these phobias—the colonised other, the physical or mentally disabled person, the woman—are employed to contain both self and other, thus diverting that otherness away from the able male body and simultaneously domesticating the horror of the elements.

In Kharms, female bodies are used as a tool of self-positioning, in part as a gesture of revolt against the official norm, working to scandalise some readers as much as to establish a common ground with others (or both). These imaginary, phantasmatic bodies allow for the playing out of anxieties about control and one's ability to effectively decipher social reality. A female body is imagined as a paradigmatic *shkap*, and as Kharms focuses on its evasiveness, the actual humanity of the women he describes slips away, so that they become defined by their opacity. The very explicit nature of his diary notes regarding his search for an ideal woman or his own self-display should not distract from the fact that they speak to the same cluster of concerns about uncertainty: in this dream of the female body that puts its own "inside" on display, it is the familiar desire for order, clarity, and predictability that is the propelling force. On the one hand, this visibility, as well as the literal fluidity of the desiring female body, are imagined to promise a reassurance of mutual desire and a possibility of extracorporeal connection, below the surface level of separation and alienation of the everyday life. The goal of gaining control over who sees whom explains here how self-display does not contradict this desire for power in seeing others—on the contrary, erotic self-display becomes a means to be a spectacle, the *shkap* on stage, the hidden other made visible in its alterity. On the other hand, the imagery that speaks of the desire to incorporate women, the trope of treacherous food, and the frequent instances of vomiting, defecation, and

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bodies falling apart work together to structure the narrative of Kharms's prose around the adventures of bodily matter and the anxieties around the hidden other within one's own body, displaced onto gendered others.

Parallel to mediation and displacement, there is classification of horrifying objects and female bodies as the means to ensure a sense of control in a situation of extreme uncertainty. It does appear, however, that classification (employed by all three authors, but especially consistently by Lipavsky) and misogynistic boundary-making through disgust (characteristic primarily of Kharms) are two different tools used for responding to the need for certainty. This, in turn, would be the reason why misogyny is so prominent in Kharms, much less so in Lipavsky, and nearly undetectable in Druskin, who created his own elaborate philosophical system that foregrounded uncertainty as the only certainty truly available, and staged the glorious failure of his own classifications, where the notion of clear and well-justified boundaries between phenomena is imploded. This comparison is helpful in de-naturalising and de-culturalising misogyny: instead of an in-built trait of a given cultural context or a particular upbringing, it can be thought as a tool chosen among other tools, and therefore avoidable.

Finally, this focus on misogyny and the figure of the hidden other as organising *chinari*'s creative practice allows for re-reading their relationship to the mainstream discourses of the time as parody and a kind of parasitism, echoing the colonisation of the non-human that is accomplished in their texts, rather than simple opposition, resistance, or subversion. The effect of the hidden depth that is created in the texts invites suspicious readings both from the agents of state power, in the 1930s as well as in Putin's Russia, and from much of scholarship interested in decoding the hidden meanings, political or otherwise. Either way, the texts are taken to be saying not quite what they are saying—there is a feeling that there is always more going on. These parasitic, parodic strategies, involving a playful

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taking-on of the contemporary political discourses and concerns, will become productive in the later waves of the unofficial Soviet culture, with the more problematic elements of these strategies, from misogyny to performative conservatism, also retained and gradually amplified.[709]

What I hope this dissertation has managed to accomplish is a reading of personal and erotic texts that helps arrive at a different understanding of these authors' practice, without disqualifying it, nor vilifying or pathologising them. This understanding takes into account not only the important place that thinking about happiness and pleasure occupies in their texts, but also instances of campiness (rather than simply self-conscious avant-garde playfulness) and what one might call queer-adjacent sensibilities. This acknowledgment of queer-adjacent sensibilities has little to do with an ambition to uncover the heretofore not guessed latent homosexuality of the writers. Rather, it speaks to the prominence of techniques of evasion and a form of parallel existence, parallel both to the official culture and to the configurations of gendered subjectivities and gender relations endorsed by that culture. Often weird eroticism and embodied, gendered pleasure play an important part in this parallel existence. Reading "in circles," responding to the uninterrupted circuit of talk and text that *chinari* create and reading *through* and *for* the body and for the alternative, not-quite-human modes of existence and perception, allows for giving these techniques their due.

[709] Yurchak, "A Parasite from Outer Space."

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