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Marija Ćirić[1]
Faculty of Philology and Arts
University of Kragujevac

A VIEW OF CREATIVE AMBIANCES OF DANIIL KHARMS AND OBERIU

Abstract

This paper analyses particular aspects of the art of Daniil Kharms and OBERIU – whose opuses represent some of the key segments of Russian/Soviet avant-garde practises. OBERIU group was not long-lived, but their creative influence certainly extends to our days. Authors involved in the circle's activities express a need for interdisciplinary artistic language, i.e. an organic linking of various artistic discourses, for putting a sign of equivalence between art and life. In this research we cast light upon antecedents (a network of artists originating from different disciplines), contexts of formation and poetics of OBERIU, focusing on the oeuvre of Daniil Kharms, as the most remarkable figure of the "Association for Real Art". We examine Kharms's exuberant artistic expression, his synchronization of arts in the sense of the absurd, with an emphasis on musicality as the prominent characteristic of his work.

Keywords

Daniil Kharms, OBERIU, art, absurd, avant-garde

OBERIU, that is, Association for Real Art (ОБЭРИУ – Объединение реального искусства), appeared in the cultural and artistic USSR public in January 1928[2] when their Manifesto was promoted in the Leningrad *House of Press Journal* (Афиши Дома печати). It was signed by six young avant-garde artists[3]: poet

1 marija.ciric@filum.kg.ac.rs

2 This artistic group began meeting in 1925 under the informal name *Chinari* (*Чинари*). The movement's backbone was created in 1926, when it appeared as *Left Wing* (*Левый фланг*). In 1927 they were active as *Academy of Left Classics* (*Академия левых классиков*), and then – OBERIU.

3 Their (literary) action was the core of this movement; but other Soviet artists were joined to the OBERIU circle, as necessary. Close to it were stage director and poet Igor Terentyev (Игорь

and playwright Alexander Vvedensky (Алекса́ндр Введе́нский, 1904–1941), poet and novelist Konstantin Vaginov (Константи́н Ва́гинов, 1899–1934), poet and playwright Igor Bakhterev (Игорь Бахтерев, 1908–1996), poet and translator Nikolay Zabolotsky (Никола́й Заболо́цкий, 1903–1958), poet and scriptwriter Boris Levin (Борис/Дойвбер Ле́вин, 1904–1941), writer and poet Daniil Kharms (Дании́л Хармс, 1905–1942). OBERIU had "four sections – literary, art, theatre and film" (OBERIU 1982: 87). However, this was not the final creative framework, since "OBERIU was working on establishing a music section," as well (OBERIU 1982: 87). It is not difficult to notice that the need for interdisciplinary language and organic linking of different artistic discourses were at the core of OBERIU. Also, their zeal for play and alogisms of the random/accidental – a child's logic – seems to be an inevitable propaedeutic for reading Oberiutes' opuses, since "the world is not linked only by casual connections – it is also linked by ordinary connections. Things which appear in different ways and reach each other seem logical to us. But children and poets see them differently." (Šklovski 1982:15). Although they were a significant segment of the Russian/Soviet avant-garde, Oberiutes and Kharms have been largley left out of scientific-theoretic debates for a long time. However, since posthumous rehabilitation of Daniil Kharms in 1960s (*cf.* Mejlih 2002: 164), interest in them has been revived.

Though the art of Daniil Kharms and OBERIU group is the end of Russian/Soviet avant-garde, they were announced by a whole network of artistic opuses originating in different disciplines. Although Russian futuristic movement and transrational language *zaum* are usually considered to be their antecedent, the roots of Oberiutes seem to be more complex. They synthetize the occult with scientific foundations. In the case of Kharms, such an attitude will result in the co-existence of typical Russian *yurodstvo* (foolishness for Christ), a contrite way of addressing God, mathematical formulae of *zaum*, musical schemes, interference of childish, abstract and every-day speech … The sources of actions of Oberiutes can be sought in *objective music* and *inner octaves* of the mystic and prophet, spiritual teacher Gurdjieff (Гео́ргий Ива́нович Гурджи́ев); in theoretic science of Kandinsky (Васи́лий Канди́нский) and in his experiments of linking color, music and human

Терентьев); playwright and children's poet Nikolay Oleynikov (Никола́й Оле́йников); writer and dramatist Evgeny Schwarz (Евге́ний Шва́рц). Associates of OBERIU group were painters Kazimir Malevich (Казими́р Мале́вич/Kazimierz Malewicz) and Pavel Filonov (Па́вел Фило́нов, also a theorist and poet); Mikhail Matyushin, an artist of renaissance broadness (Михаи́л Матю́шин), directors Sergei Eisenstein (Серге́й Эйзенште́йн) and Aleksandr Razumovsky (Александр Разумо́вский) and others.

movement[4] (*cf*, Gordon 1992: 203)[5]. In that sense, the influence of synaesthesia theory by Nikolai Kublin (Николаи Кублин) is also important[6], as well as theosophical space of synesthetic fusion of senses given by composer Alexander Scriabin (Алекса́ндр Скря́бин). Mikaloius Ciurlionis (Микало́юс Чюрлёнис), painter and composer (often compared with Kandinsky), created in the same period. He applied music forms to painting, by using mostly a *sonata cycle*[7]. Paintings by Ciurlionis are an extension of the musical effect by usage of visual means: the last phase of his work was marked by a collection of *Six sonatas*. This equalizing (sound–image) by Ciurlionis was immensely influential on Kharms, primarily in musically shaped pieces (especially in the case of *Yelizaveta Bam/Елизавета Бам*). Poetics of Oberiutes was also announced in the opuses of Natalia Goncharova (Ната́лия Гончаро́ва[8]) and Mikhail Larionov (Михаи́л Ларио́нов), whose primitivistic scenes would replace symbolistic canvases of Vrubel (Михаи́л Вру́бель) in the first decade of the past century (Roberts 2006: 23), in order to continue in the direction of cubo futurism/rayonism. Furthermore, we can draw parallels between the works of this artistic couple and OBERIU, through the elements of the mentioned creative lines. Namely, Oberiutes approve of making art understandable to all – art "that is available even to a countryside pupil in its form"[9], although they also claimed that "the demand for solely this kind of art lures into a forest of most horrible mistakes" (OBERIU 1982: 87). OBERIU does not "slide over topics and peaks of creativity, they seek a new, organic feeling of the world and approach to things[10]. OBERIU bites into the core of words,

4 In 1909, in his Munich studio, he collaborated with the Russian composer Thomas de Hartmann (Фома́ Алекса́ндрович Га́ртман, one of Gurdieff's followers), and the Russian dancer Aleksandr Sakharov (Александр Сахаров).

5 Cooperation of Kandinsky and de Hartmann, also gave the fantasy-opera *The Yellow Sound* (*Желтый звук*) in 1909, where this form is redefined, and the scope of sound means is widened (e.g. dissonance is emancipated), (*cf.* Gordon 1992: 200–203).

6 Nikolai Kublin advocated the notation of "coloured music" as well as quarter-tones music (Gordon 1992: 205).

7 In the period 1907–1909, Ciurlonis realized *Sonata of the Sun, Sonata of the Spring, Sonata of the Serpent, Sonata of the Summer, Sonata of the sea* and *Sonata of the Pyramids* (*cf.* Deppermann 1990: 169–177).

8 Interests of Goncharova were not limited to visual arts, they were multimedia-like. Involved in the actions of the futurists, she was drawn to the possibilities of (futurist) theatre and she would participate in it in her own way. In her legacy, for example, we can find „Grimaces in art. Connected to the Project of the Futurist Theatre", a poster with photos of the artist and her partner Mikhail Larionov, where Goncharova and Larionov are stylized as protagonists of the futurist theatre (Sharp 2000: 157).

9 Here a parallel with primitivism could be drawn.

10 The given qualification can be linked to (cubo)futurism.

dramatic plot and film frame. The new OBERIU artistic method is universal, it finds the way to represent any topic" (OBERIU 1982: 87)[11].

Film is definitively 'the most mysterious' segment of action of OBERIU group, as there is only one – lost – title *Film no.1 The Meat Grinder* (*Фильм Но. 1 Мясорубка*) by Aleksandr Razumovsky[12]. The film was presented within the *Three left hours* (*Три левых часа*), a promotional performance of OBERIU group in January 1928. Razumovsky was in charge of the third hour, and he opened it with "an evening consideration on film", as Daniil Kharms wrote in his diary (Хармс 2000), and this was followed by the film projection. It is an intriguing fact that Razumovsky distanced himself from the "left art" shortly afterwards (*cf*. Хармс 2000), and the cinematographic element of the group's actions remained completely in the background.

Therefore, we are returning once more to Russian futurism, as the most certain antecedent of the OBERIU circle. This avant-garde movement joined creators of different artistic disciplines (an idea Oberiutes attempted to follow as well, although in practice they were directed primarily to literature). In 1913 Mikhail Matyushin[13] drafted the score for Kruchyonykh's (Алексе́й Кручёных) opera *Victory over the Sun* (*Победа над Солнцем*)[14]. This artist also researched correlations of sound, colour and form together with Kandinsky and Malevich. Nikolai Roslavets (Никола́й Ро́славец) also belonged to music futurism. He made an atonal overturn similar to the one worked upon at the same time by Arnold Schoenberg in Vienna (Arnold Schönberg)[15].

11 It seems that a parallel with the fourth dimension of rayonism might be drawn here.

12 Klimenty Mintz (Климентий Минц) is mentioned as co-author; he was leading the cinematographic section of OBERIU together with Razumovsky.

13 Mikhail Matyushin, a sculptor, painter, writer, theorist, violinist and composer, one of the founders of the *Hylaea* group (cubo-futurists), whose members were the Burliuk brothers (Владимир, Давид, Николай Бурлюк), Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Mayakovsky (Влади́мир Маяко́вский), Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, Alexei Kruchyonikh (who also cooperated with the Oberiutes), painter Olga Roazanova (Ольга Розанова) and others.

14 Scenography for the opera premiere was made by Malevich. Furthermore, this opera mise en scène became famous for promoting the painter's needless supremacism mirrored in the *Black square*.

15 Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) is one of the key figures in the development of music in the 20th century. With his unconventional artistic attitude, he refused compromises - throughout his career. Three periods can be observed in his opus. The first period reveals the influences of late romanticism; the second is marked by the introduction of expressionist elements and transition to atonality, and the third is defined by organization of atonality by the dodecaphonic principle. The Second Vienna School (Zweite Wiener Schule) was formed around Schoenberg. Iz was a group of composers, his close associates and students (the most prominent members were Alban Berg and Anton Webern), who worked under the influence of his creative example.

So did the anti-psychological compositions of new objectiveness in the Soviet music of Aleksandr Mosolov (Алекса́ндр Мосо́лов). Theatre director, choreographer and theatre publicist Nikolai Foregger (Николай Фореггер) founded in 1921 a theatre of urban culture in Moscow, the MASTFOR studio (МАСТФОР, Мастерскую Фореггера)[16], which will join drama theatre with elements of music hall, and draw alternative artists (director Sergei Eisenstein and composer Yury Milutin/Юрий Милютин[17]), established new performance techniques such as *machine dances* and *noise orchestra*[18]. Actually, theatre models advocated by Foregger and Sergei Radlov (Сергей Радлов) and Vsevolod Meyerhold, acted in the direction of "old psychological theatre" cancellation, emancipated carnivalization, opening toward circus, cabaret and music hall, as well as traditional patterns of Russian folk theatre, the *balagan* form (where all aspects of spectacle are mixed, from jugglers to kinds of the Far East theatres), with incessant circulation of artists through the network of genres (Picon-Vallin 1985: 112–116). All this is done in order to totally objectivize ultimate left art (Picon-Vallin 1985: 112–116), suggesting more than clearly subsequent concepts (and the poetics of the absurd) of OBERIU and Daniil Kharms.

After the aforementioned (avant-garde) predecessors, we return to literary futurism of Russia as the most evident 'pre-school' of OBERIU poetics. We shall look more closely at the *zaum* of two notable members of cubo-futuristic group *Hylaea*, Aleksei Kruchyonikh and Velimir Khlebnikov (Велими́р Хле́бников). Theorist of literature, Sergei Sigov (Сергей Сигов) states that "in literary science so far the essence of *zaum* of Russian poets of the 20th century has not been explained so far. *Zaum* is undoubtedly a new quality coming from the connection of two already affirmed ways of writing: the alogical and the phonetic" (Sigov 1990: 135). The transrational speech is considered to be the invention of Kruchyonikh (although also often linked to Mikhail Matyushin's wife Elena Guro). He wanted to create a language which returned the natural, elementary link between speech and mind; a universal language

16 One of studio MASTFOR actresses also participated in the premiere of *Yelizaveta Bam* by Daniil Kharms in the performance *Three left hours* presented to the Leningrad public by Oberiutes in January 1928.

17 Composer Yuri Milutin is the creator of numerous popular songs and operettas of his era, he also worked on musical films.

18 *Machine dances* are machine-like constructions, "live machines" demonstrating the mechanized world of the industrial revolution in the context of a wish to industrialize the young Soviet regime (different to the completely opposite interpretation of the same theme in the Western European futurism), while the *noise orchestra* was their musical accompaniment, a sound support to the machine-like illusion (Gordon 1992: 222).

which abolished national vocabularies. Velimir Khlebnikov (*cf.* Khlebnikov 1998) went even further. Since he studied sciences (apart from philology) at the University of Kazan, he established linguistic-mathematical regularities of speech (even very correct predictions of future events, in which he will be inherited by Daniil Kharms), and he sought an emotional Esperanto, an alphabet of stars (Gordon 1992: 212). Khlebnikov gives a "point-number" which denotes sound the task to break through into untouched space/time (*cf.* Kocić 1998: 108).

The change of social climate, however, lead to the dusk of futurism and not at all optimistic surroundings of OBERIU. Although the word of Oberiutes seems to slide into grinning humour, it is just a sharp, although apolitical, response to the culture of social command which followed the initial thrill with achievements of the first proletarian state in the world. This is the reason why Oberiutes insisted on the term "left art", in the sense of freedom for every artistic behaviour, without the privileged status of the central petit bourgeois art tendency in which the newly established dictatorship was already drowning. OBERIU overtook the components of *zaum*, but in a different context. Reality as a changeable value is the basis of the creative ambiances of the Oberiutes and Kharms. They are sober from futuristic utopianism; they are in an existential gorge where word is the only affirmation of their existence. As long as they speak – in neologisms, alogisms, unconnected syllables or pure phonemes – they exist. They are the *chinari*[19] of the new art in putting a sign of equation between art and life, in reaching the theatricalization of life begun by the futurists (*cf.* Nikoljska 1990: 145-166). From the futurists they took childish insolence, ellipticalness in the function of motoric incessant speech, fragmentation, but not in the sense of destruction of existing language as futurists had attempted, but of its deconstruction. Such an occurrence has the root in the nonsense literature of Vladimir Solovyov (Влади́мир Соловьёв), Alexei Tolstoy (Алексе́й Толсто́й), even beyond the borders of Russia[20]. Similarities can be found even in the alogical actions of pre-suprematist Malevich, games of covering and blending of objects[21].

19 Oberiutes intentionally avoided to call themselves *artists*, since the term *chinari* (*chinar* - someone who is doing something) defines the reality of their creation more straightforwardly.

20 We are concretely making a comparison to Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll; it is enough to compare the verses of these two British artists to the poetry of Kharms, Vaginov or Bakhterev.

21 Kazimir Malevich inspired Oberiutes with his texts, too: he was the author of the article "On poetry" which immediately preceded their manifesto (Sigov 1990: 137).

The extremely sideline position of OBERIU (even in relation to other avant-garde tendencies[22]) enabled them to touch „some of the fundamental issues that art would deal with in the following decades" (Donat 1985: 192). Daniil Kharms will particularly use the techniques that (today) we find under the names of collage, happening, performance, fluxus. By *augmented observation,* a kind of absurd-abstract metaspeech (author of this theory is Mikhail Matyushin), Oberiutes - especially Daniil Kharms - would shape *artistic behaviour* which would be incorporated into domains of everyday rituals (clothing, communication etc.).

Daniil Kharms is a *composer* of absurd[23]. Different from Khlebnikov's panlinguistic vocabulary whose aim is the creation of a global language, Kharms made his own *Jabberwockies*[24]. He uses parody, aimed eclecticism and auto-citation; mirror-like technique of duplicating, that is, tautology reaching grotesque and futility/senselessness … Again, this would be too simple. Daniil Kharms synchronizes arts in the sense of the absurd: determinism is absent, the chain of causality breaks and results in incessant elliptical solutions (which enter into the domain of *music language* of Daniil Kharms). Jean-Philippe Jacquard observed characteristic constants in Harms's oeuvre: the existence of common memory and informativeness, truthfulness as relativity, incompleteness of description, use of generally known truths, world fragmentation, splitting of language into sound shells (*cf.* Jaccard 1990: 147; Jaccard 1991: 49-58). The category of time is abolished, time is ever-present: fundamental premises of time are *trans-finitum* and *cis-finitum* as the outer and inner border of the infinite. *Cis-finite* logic of Daniil Kharms is "an affirmation of the unknown and the other", writes Branislav Jakovljević (Jakovljević 2002: 9). Using the "Universe Knot", that is, the trinity of *trans-finitum*, *cis-finitum* and *partition* (*partitions* which were put between *trans-finitum* and *cis-finitum* were often erased, with the goal of subversion of official ideological discourse, in order for *evil* 'to feel at home' and equalize it with the *good*), Kharms tried to solve issues which would be contemplated several decades later[25]: "And so the foundation of existence is made up of three ele-

22 There are data that, contrary to Oberiutes, Soviet avant garde representatives did manage to enter media space, such as radio. These were Russian futurists and constructivists in the 1920s, for example, some innovative directions of Meyerhold in the 1930s. (Gordon 1992: 242).

23 And not only that. He was also an excellent draftsman, as evidenced by Kharms' surviving drawings.

24 Here we refer to the poem from the book *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll (*cf.* Carroll 2000: 101).

25 Here we refer to the (fluctuating) relationship of the Signifier and signified in post-structuralist/postmodern theories.

ments, *this, partition* and *that* [...] *Partitions* represent the creator, who creates 'something' out of 'nothing'" (Harms 2002c: 41). In studying Kharms's poetics, depending on the understanding of the artist's texts, theorists use various prefixes: meta-[26], anti-[27] or beside- (mimo- in Serbian)[28]. It would be inappropriate to declare which one is the most correct – in a letter-dedication to his wife Esther Rusakova (Эстер Русакова) with the copy of the drama *Gvidon* (*Гвидон*), on December 22nd 1930, Kharms 'signed' a permission for any interpretation of his texts: "Everyone might understand it in their way. That is the Reader's right" (Harms 2002a: 33). Daniil Kharms joins his condensed verbal space simultaneously with his environment's cultural context and reorganizes it in the sense of affirmation of the aforementioned postulates, thus getting an intertextual conglomerate of the absurd – to transport it again into the context (of poetically organized structure), that is, into texts of his 'scores'. Namely, Kharms's structures imply the existence of sound/music signs, which opens the possibility of perceiving his opus according to the principles of music analysis.

Musicality of Kharms's language lies in his need to put the acoustic qualities of words into the foreground. Exposing of words (as sound) is present in the entire Kharms's opus because he builds into his *music* the parts of tradition that he deems referent. Daniil Kharms often uses classical music form when conceptualizing his texts – *Symphony* (*Симфония*), *Passacaglia* (*Пассакалия*), *Suite* (*Сюита*). He also uses the procedures of musical composition in his theatre pieces, poetry and prose miniatures. Influences that can be felt are those of baroque music, to some extent romanticism, coexisting expressionism and Russian folk music creations (the impact of folklore music is noticeable primarily in simple shapes, such as *The Mathematician and Andrey Semyonovich / Математик и Адрей Семенович, Four Illustrations / Четыре иллюстрации*). In accordance with Kharms's omnipresence of time, elements of future tendencies can be heard – such as minimalism in music[29].

26 Prefix meta- we find with Nina Perlina (Perlina 1991: 176).

27 Prefix anti- we find with Anthony Anemone (Anemone, 1991: 77).

28 Prefix mimo/beside- we find with Vladimir Gerić (Gerić 1983: 141–142).

29 Typical examples of Kharms' (musical) minimalism are *Metro* (*Метро,* Harms 1995: 87), with completely reduced (aphoristically conceived) thematic material, and two short stories, *Before I Come to You* (*Прежде чем прийти к тебе*, Harms 2007: 18) and *Chase/One man chased after another* (*Один человек гнался за другим*, Harms 1995: 120): in addition to minimal thematic material, they include repetition of key words – "me", "you" (*Before I come to you*) and "rushed" (*Chase*).

Baroque perpetuum, continuance of movement is an unavoidable dramaturgical element of Kharms's works. As voices in a choral fugue, contrapuntal lines provide melodic and rhythmic continuity (*Meeting/Встреча, Yelizaveta Bam, The Baroness and an Inkpot/Баронесса и Чернильница, Gvidon, Measurement of things/Измерение вещей*), as a possible break would mean the end of existence, "I cease to hang out with you. The end." (Harms 2002b: 39–41). Such a manner of *composing* could be compared with neobaroque tendencies in music, significant at the time of Kharms's activity – as it figures like an authentic response to satiety with subjectivity of (late) romanticism. By searching the source of sound, Kharms reaches new objectiveness of man's mechanized everyday life[30].

Kharms would demonstrate his thrill with music patterns of classicism in the most represented form of the epoch, in the *sonata cycle (Symphonies*), while romanticism would be present only through application of the *cyclic principle* in reaching continuity in the presentation of (a)thematic material (*The Baroness and an Inkpot, Yelizaveta Bam*)[31]. He even reaches expressionism[32] of Schoenberg and partly Webern (Anton Webern) type.

30 Apart from the baroque perpetuum of Kharms' (voice) lines (which we hear as a kind of melodic-rhythmic lines), we notice the neobaroque 'mechanization' of these voices in the use of certain words as linguistic-musical signs. In *Pushkin and Gogol*, two writers always end their lines by stumbling over a 'rival' – through two acoustically opposed acoustic motifs – 'wheezy' Pushkin or 'throaty' Gogol, (Harms 1995: 11–12). Mathematician and Andrei Semyonovich (in the miniature of the same name) repeat each line (mechanically) three or four times ("I took a ball out of my head. I took a ball out of my head. I took a ball out of my head. I took a ball out of my head", Harms 1995 : 16), and this kind of repetitiveness can also be interpreted as an anticipation of minimalism (in music).

31 Unlike Kharms' neobaroque (mechanized) objectivity, the features of his musical classicism and romanticism are not obvious in the use of characteristic words in the function of linguistic/musical signs, but in procedures typical of the *sonata cycle* and *cyclic principle* present in the (formal) structure of the piece. In *Yelizaveta Bam*, for example, the *cyclic principle* is ensured by the constancy of *radix*; in *The Baroness and an Inkpot* Kharms achieves the *cyclic principle* by interweaving particular lines of (a)thematic material throughout the piece. Perhaps, in the *Optical Deception* (*Оптический обман*, Harms 1983: 15), we can talk about specific sign/melody embodied in the consistent repetition of the name of the main/only hero - "Semyon Semyonovich (puts on his glasses/takes off his glasses)" – at the beginning of each segment of this short story. *Optical Deception* might therefore be considered a kind of *rondo* (which could be one of the movements of the *sonata cycle*).

32 Expressionism is hinted at in Kharms' oeuvre in several ways. We find it in the dark (dissonant) colors of sound lines and the unexpected tempo changes of the *Old Woman* (*Старуха*, Harms 1995: 153–176), *Rehabilitation* (*Реабилитация*, Harms 1995: 131–132), or *Hindrance* (Harms 1995:126–128). *Yelizaveta Bam* is based on the extreme use of dissonance (and the ultimate state of excitement, which arises from that dissonance), (Harms 1995: 177–200), as well as *Four Illustrations* (Harms 1983: 29–30), but with characteristic rhythmic twitches; *The Fairytale* (*Сказка*, Harms 2007: 17) is an atonal (music) piece, with broken lines, etc.

Kharms's *music* can be compared primarily to Schoenberg's, although in the context of Russian musical avant-garde other interesting opuses may be noticed (Roslavets, Mosolov, Obukhov/Николай Обухов[33]). Both Kharms and Schoenberg used the auto-didactic method to make their opinion independent from parallel artistic tendencies and established standards of relations between autonomous and politically engaged art (it is enough to compare *Three Satires/Drei Satiren* op. 28 by Arnold Schoenberg and *Hindrance/Помеха* by Daniil Kharms). Kharms, just like Schoenberg, advocates emancipation of *dissonance*, *atonality*[34] (and subsequent systematization of atonality formulated through series of acoustic frequences[35]); he makes his heroes *athematic* – defaces them, turning them into speaking 'sound shells'. He grinds and crushes their speech to the plane of points of Webern's punctualism[36]. He retains aphorism of expression even in, conditionally speaking, larger structures[37].

Kharms's favourite method of *composing* is parody: of opera style, folk theatre, conventional way of thinking. He intentionally uses the shabbiest *cadences* and then uses *ellipses* of varied (perhaps *dodecaphonic*?[38]) sound series,[39] he delays the outcome until or beyond the Reader's border of endurance. His

33 Creative work of Obukhov (his miniatures, primarily) shows the most similarities with that of Schoenberg (atonality, series), although in the early period he was influenced by Scriabin.

34 Atonality in music means the absence of (tonal) functions that strive for the same center; implies the equality of all twelve tones of the scale achieved by abandoning the principle of classical harmony. The commencement of atonality in the space of music is connected to Schoenberg.

35 Atonal sound sequences can be recognized in the *Blue Notebook №10* (*Голубая тетрадь №10*, Harms 1982: 7), implicitly suggested in the negations of utterance/tonality – "no", "(it is) not", "neither", "nor", "nothing"... - which form the backbone of this 'anecdote' about a red-haired man without hair.

36 Some elements of punctualism are found in Kharms's miniatures *Knock* (*Тюк,* Harms 1983: 23-24), and *Four Illustrations*. The voices of the characters are placed like sparingly scattered dots in the score, the (melodic) material is asceticized, denuded, diluted by avoiding dense textures. We will mention that the lines of Yevdokim Osipovich (*Knock*) were literally reduced to one syllable (whose color may change depending on the intensity of the ax hitting the log).

37 The reason is that even Kharms's longer forms are not big in size.

38 Dodecaphony is a twelve-tone music that implies the constant and exclusive use of a series concieved of twelve tones of a chromatic scale, without repetition. It belongs to the field of atonality. Dodecaphony is based on the application of certain constructivist compositional procedures with the aim of introducing the principles of an aesthetic order and organization into the amorphous atonal structure.

39 Dodecaphonic series are percieved in *Cases* (*Случаи,* Harms 1995: 9), where they are set in an elliptical acoustic sequence.

speech is so *aleatoric*[40] that it allows addition to the text and its free/random rearrangement[41].

Daniil Kharms certainly had a solid musical education. His words confirm that: „This fugue (Handel's second fugue) has pride of place in my repertoire. For a month I have been playing it twice each day, but as a result, I can now play it fluently. Marina is not very favourably disposed towards my practicing, and since she hardly ever leaves the flat I practice not more than an hour a day, which is very little". And he continues to list titles from his repertoire: "Apart from the fugue, I play Palestrina's 'Stabat mater' in the choral arrangement, a minuet by John Blow (18th century), 'Oh , the field, the field' from Ruslan, E-major chorale from 'The St John Passion' and now I'm learning the C-minor aria from a Bach Partita" (Aleksandrov 1991: 43). In the same text ("Kharms's chronology" by Aleksandrov), music evenings organized in the Kharms apartment are mentioned.

Diary notes of Daniil Kharms also reveal a vivid interest (and delight) for certain works of music literature and regular practice of attending concerts. Pondering upon the performance of Emil Gilels (Эмиль Гилельс) in Leningrad on 19th February 1939, Kharms exposed – unconsciously, perhaps – the principles of musicality in his theatre pieces and scene miniatures (*Yelizaveta Bam*, *Gvidon*, *Temptation/Искушение, Peter Mihailovich/Петр Михайлович*, *Makarov and Peterson/Макаров и Петерсен*, *Baroness and the Inkpot*). What was not said about theatre in the OBERIU theatre chapter in the Oberiutes' Manifesto, was said in the essay/critique of Gilels's concert (Harms 2002d: 47–49). We can even say that this is an 'instruction' for reading the "black miniaturist", as he was called by Neil Cornwell (Cornwell 1991: 3–22). Namely, a suggestion for the interpretation of Frédéric Chopin[42], which Kharms wrote while prompted by Gilels's performance, was not only the principle by which to interpret Chopin, but Kharms himself (and Kharms's absurd). Kharms pointed to the necessity of three important phases: *accumulation, cutting off, free breathing* (*cf*, Harms 2002d: 47–49). With them, *tuning* is inevitable. Let us clarify, *tuning* "determines the whole tone", *accumulation* is a

40 Here we make a comparison with the aleatory in music. Aleatoric music is a technique of composing, in which a certain part of the process of creating a musical composition (including its realization) is more or less left to controlled chance. This enables greater freedom in the work of composers and performers.

41 The aleatorics in Kharms' opus is evident in *Optical Deception*, whose segments can be placed in any order.

42 With a *flash* which should follow Scarlatti and Schubert (more detailed in Harms 2002d: 47–49).

gradual thickening of emotions and meanings given by the text; *cutting off*, a path to the next *accumulation* or *free breathing*, "similar to stair landing: firstly, to offer a rest, and secondly, to make a turn" (Harms 2002d: 47–49). Finally, *free breathing* is a space saturated by *accumulation* where the listener is expecting "the real thing to begin" (Harms 2002d: 47–49). At the very moment of the opening of "the real thing", the need for a new solution appears: just another delay typical for Kharms. Even the suggested piece – *Mazurka* op. 17. no. 4 by Chopin, ends in first beats of *tuning* (the same will happen in *Yelizaveta Bam*). Whereby, it is the artist's "duty to clearly divide the sense of each part and make the listener feel the transitions from one part to another" (Harms 2002d: 49).

Daniil Kharms became known to the wider audience of readers (in the USSR) mostly as children's author. He wrote fourteen books for children. Although such information seems absurd, inevitable in all segments of this artist's life, it is not so. After numerous bans of Oberiutes' activities at the beginning of 1930s, he found himself on the verge of existence and turned to writing for children. Kharms thus reached a familiar, friendly environment[43]. Childish (a)logic and insolence, dreams in color[44] – all these are the things he had always lived with. Let us mention just a few typical details. He invented that he had had a brother, a doctor and a docent. He would glue a moustache before he went to theatre (since it was indecent to go to the theatre without a moustache). He invited his fellow-citizens to Oberiutes' actions while walking on windowsills of five-story buildings, calmly smoking a pipe (as Charms, Shardam or Horms – all assumed Leningrad identities of Sherlock Holmes used by the writer). It could be said that throughout his life he wanted to point out "how people often marvel at something not even slightly unusual, but still accept something absurd, incomprehensible or horrible without any surprise or consternation" (Gerić 1983: 141). He was "a tall man in short pants and colourful, fishnet knee-high socks" (Šklovski 1982: 14), the one who went into the forest "and immediately vanished" (Harms 1995: 225)[45].

43 Kharms never stopped writing poetry and prose for adult readers.
44 Shklovsky spoke of Kharms's poetics as "dreams in color" (*cf*, Šklovski 1982: 14–15).
45 This motive („and immediately vanished") is borrowed from the poem "A Man Once Walked out of His House" by Daniil Kharms, published in 1937 (Harms 1995: 225).

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OBERIU was a short-lived artistic movement, due to extremely unfavourable political circumstances. Their intensive activities lasted between 1927–1930, and from 1931 the group had no more public performances and presentations. Repression and control were growing, and most of them found themselves in the way of Stalin's regime purges. Zabolotsky spent seven years in Siberia, from 1938–1945[46]. Vaginov died in 1934 of tuberculosis (actually of exhaustion). Levin died (accidentally?) on the Leningrad front at the beginning of the war . Vvedensky and Kharms ended their lives in Soviet prisons. Only Bakhterev lived to see the end of the communist system – and of the USSR.

Again, creative ambiances of OBERIU circle, although on the utmost margin of their time, are an important cultural topic, not only as testimony to the brave avant-garde strivings in the context of leftist dictatorship, but as an anticipation of the (primarily post-modern) tendencies that were yet to come. Opus of Daniil Kharms, a paradigm for OBERIU group actions, is still relevant today, almost a century later. Kharms made a detailed inventory of everything "mimed in art", that is, instead "of identification, he started from negation […] Negation is not rejection, but only checking those things which once became a metaphor for an experience." (Donat 1985: 193). Perhaps this is the reason why Kharms's oeuvre remains so intriguing.

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46 Although Zabolotsky will outlive Stalin.

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Marija Ćirić
Filološko-umetnički fakultet
Univerzitet u Kragujevcu

JEDAN POGLED NA STVARALAČKE AMBIJENTE DANILA HARMSA I GRUPE OBERIU

Apstrakt

Rad analizira pojedine aspekte delovanja Danila Harmsa i grupe OBERIU – umetničkih opusa koji reprezentuju neke od ključnih segmenata ruskih/sovjetskih avangardnih praksi. Delovanje oberiuta jeste bilo kratkog veka, ali se njihov kreativni uticaj izvesno proteže do naših dana. Stvaraoci uključeni u aktivnosti ovog umetničkog kruga iskazuju potrebu za interdisciplinarnim jezikom, odnosno za organskim povezivanjem raznorodnih umetničkih diskursa, za postavljanjem znaka ekvivalencije između umetnosti i života. Naše istraživanje osvetljava prethodnice (čitavu mrežu umetnika iz različitih oblasti stvaralaštva), kontekste formiranja i poetiku grupe OBERIU, da bi se potom fokusiralo na Danila Harmsa, svakako najizrazitiju figuru „Udruženja realne umetnosti". Razmatrali smo Harmsov bujan i živ izraz, sinhronizovanje umetnosti koje je sprovodio u smeru dosezanja apsurda – izdvojivši muzikalnost kao važnu karakteristiku delovanja ruskog umetnika.

Ključne reči

Danil Harms, OBERIU, umetnost, apsurd, avangarda

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