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Eugene Ostashevsky vii

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## THE IMMANENCE OF THE POLITICAL

I've been trying to work with something like phenomenology of perception of the political, that is to say work with complex political—and not only political affects. I'm interested in understanding and studying another type of political receptivity, one that is irreducible to simple, recognizable affects and images (anger, deception, the crowd, etc.) or else one that reveals multiple dimensions and meanings within these recognizable images. Political poetry imitating direct speech and immediate utterance, or absorbing the language of others, whether earnestly or ironically, no longer works for me. The same goes for the kind of poetry built on images with mobilizing power, which permit a light affective connection, and may be exploited for take-off effects: they guarantee the poem's intensity, but it's not semantic intensity. I tried all of them, but often it seemed like something important was slipping through my fingers, something having to do with the changing of our perception, with the language and the purposes of poetry, with fundamental processes that are taking place in the world today and that are bound up with such issues as "the sense of commonality," the vision of "a world in common," "new slavery," "class selection," the alteration of our species and of the planet, the alteration of languages, machines, feelings, and so on.

—Galina Rymbu<sup>1</sup>

GALINA RYMBU IS ONE OF several young writers, mostly women, reinventing Russian poetry. At the time of writing, she is the most visible among them. Born in 1990 in Omsk, in Siberia, where her mother was a teacher and her father an electrician, she experienced first-hand the blight, poverty, and criminality that affected industrial cities after the fall of Soviet Union, when salaries were not paid and there was nothing to eat. She started university in Omsk but then transferred to the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow, Russia's only creative writing program. After

graduation, she took up leadership roles in the poetry community, co-founding a prize for younger poets named after the influential experimental poet Arkadii Dragomoshchenko (1946–2012). Her main public activity today is that of the founder and co-editor of *F-pis'mo*, an online journal devoted to feminist and queer writing. A political activist focusing on gender and class inequality, erudite reader and deep thinker, willing to entertain utopian ideas in a country where idealism is taboo, Rymbu is a capable communicator outside the poetry community as well. She emigrated to Ukraine in 2018 and is currently based in Lviv.

The poetry of Rymbu and her colleagues is deeply political—political through and through—even when politics are not explicitly invoked. It is political in that it's not lone-wolf poetry, but rather emerges out of a network of informal seminars and self-education groups, where the ideas it articulates develop in the give-and-take of discussion. It therefore “represents” a particular community quite directly—the activist community (or at least an activist community) that the “we” of some of the poems invoke. The activist community is one whose defining gestures include, in addition to public protests and human-rights work, the gesture of passing books from person to person, the gesture of mutual education. So, the poetry is political already on the level of implicating other people in its production. But it is more political in other ways.

For a Russian poet to embrace being political breaks an important social taboo. Oppositional poetry in the Soviet period shied away from the political label for fear of becoming applied art. It took a tremendous cultural effort on the part of the generation that followed the fall of the Soviet Union, when political engagement suddenly became a possibility for citizens—the generation of Aleksandr Skidan, Dmitry Golyenko, Elena Fanailova, Maria Stepanova, and their peers—to see open political engagement as a possibility for poetry also. The process is still continuing, and even accelerating, in poetry, even though the possibilities of political engagement for citizens are narrowing precipitously. If poetry in the late Soviet Union was generally recognized as, in the main, a linguistic activity, or the exercise of what Roman

## HOLIDAY

\*

When unfurled into reality, dialectical movement does not bring resolution—this is not success (he knew that). because behind it is always she (he)—the one flitting back and forth between two windows—rejecting established quantities, space and time. and because *behind that* there is *one window, one meaning*

\*

poetry acquires form while feeling revulsion for form, establishing corridors of violence, covering the door, allowing the closed room of the sign to endure deeper within

\*

and the groceries hang in murky time, *all for one price*

\*

and a voice  
carries itself on its own

\*

it says: you think they live in a class ghetto, but you can't back up your claim, look for a language. language says: *but I wasn't looking for you to give you a meaning.*

\*

meat spins in the mind, turning around the holiday.  
chopped beets and baked fritters cover the table.  
the tapered tails of fish, sliced pieces  
of the framework, the circling motion of children  
tears apart preparation of the mind  
until it becomes the resewing of clothes

\*

it will say: I looked for you, but it was hardly necessary, looked for messages assimilated by cinders, wild places, where cinders can still be found. I will say: my family soaks their feet in these cinders, they wash their dishes in them, I know how to deal with cinders

for the holiday without a sign

\*

white trousers and clipped fingernails

his fingernails gathered into his palm

clothes sewn for the holiday

mother, dismembered,

stands

in the middle of the table

\*

she asks: if the thronging of forms has begun,  
then why am I here?

\*

A. says: I do color correction, examining hundreds of hours, years of films, frames, and I change their color (to what?), because they (the ones who produce them) are no longer interested in color as such, I don't think they see it, don't distinguish colors, they live after color.

\*

he drinks everything that moves investigating each as an opportunity to get water

\*

we no longer move backwards, instruments stretched over with skin. we eat the night and chew the earth, and the night eats from us, pushing us away from every direction

\*

the slots of the horizon are covered in the foam of ore, the blood space went curving over itself to roam the earth

the neighborhood twisted: now you can see how in the wet fire of time  
the cramped folds of beings  
fell onto the bus

\*

today poverty doesn't give us the keys to history, there are keys in the  
limbo of autonomous practices, illusory politics, expanded production,  
and the parallel constructivist self-organizing break-through, fuck-up,  
the author of a repeating text at the station, gathering the plasticity of  
consciousness into his shoulder bag.

\*

the edge of the night is class selection: the world of one meaning, from  
which the language wreckers take their tools

\*

the work of poetry is becoming ever more discernible, like labor, like a  
mixture of the forms of labor, occurring without dominance. I dream  
that we never learn what it is, *writing accessible to all*.

\*

the production of details. they lie beside details. arms fly up and down,  
irrespective of our position in relation to their movements. the earth is  
dug up as usual. access to the miners is closed. where are your head-  
lamps of language to illuminate this darkness with direction? but the  
forehead is tensed even without light, frothing up a different darkness  
beside the garrulous

\*

being located in "history," you sink your hands into a sharp bucket

*whose hands are these?*

giant pieces of mud flow along the Irtysh, raised up by the water

Ust-Ishim man holds the iron of a purpose past  
on the bank

\*

when blood becomes matte, and the womb magic, and the earth is covered with its fruits—fruit and vegetables, frozen into the earth, we will gather and carry them to the oil derrick, where instead of drilling, our friends are playing music and drinking, I'll slice the fruit, and seeds of meaning will fall in multitude, I'll offer them to my girlfriend to eat, and she'll say: "what, are you trying to hurt my feelings?"

no, here's a different apple and pepper, without seeds, take them



## TO MY SON

this strange and shabby life...

we look at each other and wait  
for something better to come.

I'll smoke out the window and I'm still waiting,  
and the shutters are creaking in the wind.

down below a security guard is standing on the steps of The Beerhaus  
and he's smoking, too, and the road beside him shines gray.

your hand is so small,  
when I hold it, and on mine  
the veins are swollen from time  
without end, time we bought,  
like that strange toy in the plastic machine  
in the "Magnet" supermarket on Romanenko—  
for a tenner—a little lilac tiger that grows in water.

he'll grow while we're sleeping, tonight,  
and the noise from Cosmic Prospect is steady, leading nowhere—  
it's the last street in our neighborhood  
and our building is the next to last, number 105,  
then it's just root cellars; and the trees, covered in industrial dust,  
stand in the yard, changing in small movements,  
here it's late when the people step off the factory buses.

you say: he'll grow, he'll get huge, this cool lilac tiger;  
and we'll grow in our sleep, transforming, while at night  
I'll wake again because you put your hot hands and legs  
on me, snoring a bit and laughing,  
and figures of light move quickly along the wall...

on the floor in the kitchen small onions are drying—red and white,  
and my father bumps his head on them in his shallow sleep...

and down below, again I hear  
the sharp knock of cars crashing into each other  
and the shouts of drunk boys fighting, tired of working  
for an unclear world, tired of carrying this life inside,  
but I can feel it, and you, as in a dream, see the intricacy of things...