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Title: Resisting Poetry: The Case of Alexander Skidan

Abstract:

This paper proposes to explore the poetic project of Alexander Skidan (b. 1965), using his 1995 poem *Пирсинг нижней губы* as its guiding text. A radical critic of the lyrical subject as center of poetic expression, Skidan in the 1990s is equally skeptical about the adequacy of any conceptual system to center poetry, since “the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere” (Pascal). *Пирсинг* is thus an experiment in atopia. Rooted-uprooted in the unconscious of language, *Пирсинг* is relatively long for Skidan (more than 200 lines), written largely «in a single sitting» (as he tells us), then morphing into 2000 more words of prose, written 'after' – prose that both reflects upon the preceding verse and turns the 'poem-prose' into an exploration of the poetic act itself and its relation to the metaphysical concept of presence, to the poet's biography, and to the body of language (here associated with the lips). *Пирсинг* is a work not so much fragmentary as «torn» (рванный) from that body. Polyphonic and dissonant, the poem is permeated by otherness: the English language, the European and American modernist traditions, cinema, travel, and especially eros (sex). Ground-breaking and transgressive in form and content, *Пирсинг* crosses boundaries of genre, explodes the lyric subject without devolving into collage, and replaces the unknowable God with the equally unknowable (bleeding) body. From this foundation I propose to extend my discussion to some of the intellectual and poetic sources of Skidan's project (especially Surrealism and Bataille, Alexander Vvedensky and Arkady Dragomoshchenko, and the American avant-garde tradition, much of it implicitly revealed in his formidable body of essayistic writing), and to suggest how Skidan's poetry of the 90s lays the groundwork for his more politically explicit and aesthetically ascetic work of the 2000s and 2010s.