

Title: Dmitri Prigov's "Shimmering": Within the Image and Without It

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Abstract:

Dmitri Prigov's concept of "shimmering" developed within the Moscow Conceptual circle during the 1970s. "Shimmering" is a counter-ideological strategy of oscillation between profound commitment to an artistic or political stance, and utter critical detachment, that preempts the consolidation of an authoritative voice. In works from the 1990s, Prigov effected shimmering between political, artistic and, as an added twist, metaphysical discourses. I argue that previous scholarship has emphasized the metaphysical content in these works, neglecting that shimmering is an intrinsically treasonous structure for representing meaning.

Prigov's 1990s series Drafts of Installations shows a ritualistic space, attended by a solid black form appearing in different shapes, as a pupil, or a hole, or just a formless shape containing a word. Notably, Prigov created such black shapes with individual strokes of the pen, an enormous investment of time and energy. Boris Groys described Prigov's process as a negotiation with existential chaos. However, this apparent negotiation masks Prigov's overarching effort to mislead the audience. Inevitably, it becomes clear that the mystery is total, offering no conclusive exegesis. The black form shifts from the ultimate signifier of the hidden truth to a mere splatter of ink muddling meaning. However, because it is not a splatter, but the product of methodical work, it again demands interpretation.

This effort to trick the audience into believing that the author holds the truth, betraying this conviction, and betraying the betrayal, constitutes shimmering, serving both to disarm the discourse it tergiversates to and away from, and to split the author from any claim to ultimate authority and power. Only here, the discourse is that of sacred communion, and thus the ultimate authorial power is disarmed through an insistent and willfully impotent quest to represent it as divinely omnipotent.