

Speak, Heart...: Vladimir Sorokin's Mystical Language

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Мы были музыкой во льду...¹

A cardiocentric culture

THE human body has undergone various refigurations in cultural history. Some thinkers have viewed the mind as the centre of human beings. Others, like Freud, considered man to be a phallogocentric creature. Plenty of cultures, however, have been centred on the heart rather than the head, or something else in their understanding of human beings. In these cultures the heart has played the main role not only in the human body, but also in human thought. Classical Latin used the heart (*cor*) as a synonym for thought, memory, mind, soul and spirit.² The heart's *shen* was a centre of personality in Taoism; the spiritual heart *hridaya* was a receptacle of *atman* in Hinduism; according to Sufism the *kalb* ("heart") was a paramount human organ that provided people with integrity of cognition. The cardiocentric theory of the mind seems to have reached its pinnacle in Buddhism, with the phenomenon of "heart cognition" (*Prajñāpāramitā*). Moreover, the "intelligent" heart also played the chief role in Hesychasm etc.³

The speaking heart in Vladimir Sorokin's *Trilogiia* (*Ice Trilogy*, 2002–2005) belongs to this tradition of "heart knowledge,"⁴ but in a very spe-

1 "We were the music in the ice." B.L. Pasternak, 1988, "Vysokaia bolezn'," *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, Moscow, p. 196. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

2 Eric Jager, 1957, *The Book of the Heart*, Chicago, Ill. & London, p. XV.

3 See also: Iu.V. Khvastunova, 2005, *Poznavatel'nye sposobnosti serdtsa: religiozno-filosofskaia traditsiia i sovremennye interpretatsii*, Barnaul.

4 "[...] the heart turns out to be the organ of cognition, superior to all other forms of

cial way, since *Ice Trilogy* in fact marks the end of cardiocentric culture. It would seem that Vladimir Sorokin is attempting to renovate the culture of the heart by inventing a sort of cardiac language, but only in order to confirm the final end of “cardiosensocentrism.”⁵

Sorokin’s interest in the mystical and the material languages of the heart is inspired by his linguistic plurality. His works are built on a polyglossia which reshuffles a multiplicity of languages, from Chinese terms to the absurd speech (*zaum’*) of Velimir Khlebnikov or Daniil Kharmis and Aleksandr Vvedenskii. It seems that in addition to discursive models of social intercourse, the protagonists of *Ice Trilogy* use another type of communication⁶ which can be traced back to the mystical language of the Middle Ages—a language of the heart in the literal sense of the

emotion evoked by the (meta-)literature of Sorokin-2.” Dirk Uffelmann, 2006, “*L’éd tronulsia: The Overlapping Periods in Vladimir Sorokin’s Work from the Materialization of Metaphors to Fantastic substantialism*,” *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Slavica Bergensia 6), eds. I. Lunde & T. Roesen, Bergen, pp. 100–25, p. 116.

- 5 In almost the same way, Jacques Derrida has confirmed the end of phallogocentrism. But for Sorokin phallogocentric culture remains topical in spite of the end of cardiosensorial culture. One can also find elements of the degraded cardiocentric culture in Sorokin’s early prose—for instance when the compressed hearts of self-murderers play dice at the end of the novel *Serdtza chetyrekh* (*Four Stout Hearts*, 1991) (cf. also Igor’ Smirnov, 1997, “Vidimyi i nevidimyi miru iumor Sorokina,” *Mesto pechati* 10, pp. 60–76): Граненные стержни вошли в их головы, плечи, животы и ноги. Завращались резцы, опустились пневмобатарей, потек жидкий фреон, головки прессов накрыли станины. Через 28 минут спрессованные в кубики и замороженные сердца четырех провалились в роллер, где были маркированы по принципу игральных костей. Через 3 минуты роллер выбросил их на ледяное поле, залитое жидкой матерью. Сердца четырех остановились: 6, 2, 5, 5. “Faceted bars entered into their heads, shoulders, stomachs and legs. Cutters began to turn, pneumatic batteries fell, liquid freon began to flow and the heads of presses covered the bedplates. After 28 minutes the compressed and frozen hearts of the four fell into the roller, where they were marked in the style of playing dice. Three minutes later, the roller threw them out onto the ice field, which was flooded with the liquid mother. The hearts of the four stopped: 6, 2, 5, 5.” V.G. Sorokin, 1998, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, Moscow, pp. 459–60.
- 6 It seems that Sorokin’s *Ice Trilogy* reflects aspects of the English version of Vladimir Nabokov’s memoirs *Speak, Memory!* (1951). Sorokin turns the speaking memory—a medium that is only faintly connected with physical reality—into a rough corporeal medium and lets it become a speaking heart, which is called to account not by means of an oral command, but with an ice hammer. In this context it is also worth mentioning the heart-centred process of recollection in St Augustine (cf. Jager, 1957, pp. 32–33).

word. In *Ice Trilogy*, blond, blue-eyed men and women scour the streets of Moscow, as well as other places around the world, for similarly blue-eyed and blond “people of light,” in order to free their hearts and enable them to “speak.” And indeed, under hammers made of cosmic ice, hearts utter their sacred names: Mokho, Ural, Diar...

Overcoming language

In her dissertation *Le texte du roman* (1970), Julia Kristeva describes the transition from symbol to sign, where the sign is an element that refers to less general and more concrete entities: “le signe renvoie à des entités moins vastes, plus CONCRÉTISÉES que le symbole—ce sont des universaux RÉIFIÉS, devenus OBJETS au sens fort du mot.”⁷ One can trace this tendency in Sorokin’s prose; strictly speaking, however, there is neither a symbol nor a sign at the centre of his prose, but something different: the corporeality of the sign which no longer refers to any reality. The widely discussed “materialization of metaphors” in Sorokin’s prose probably relates to the same process. If the absurd speech of avant-gardists goes beyond the “norm” of the language, Sorokin tries to surpass the avant-garde. In *Ice Trilogy* he overcomes the avant-gardist overcoming of language and marks the death of *zaum*’ in the language of the heart.

The language of the heart is presented by Sorokin as a language of light which is accessible only to a small number of people on earth. The ice is идеальное космическое вещество, порожденное Изначальным Светом.⁸ The “Light” is not only visual but also musical in nature: if the ice is shaken—в нем поет Музыка Света. Ударяясь о наши грудные кости, лед вибрирует. От этих вибраций пробуждаются наши сердца.⁹ While talking to sister Khram, the spiritual leader of the ice brotherhood, Bro, contrasts the principles of the “live” heart language with those of the “dead” normal language:

7 Julia Kristeva, 1970, *Le texte du roman*, The Hague, p. 33.

8 “It is an ideal Cosmic substance generated by the Primordial Light.” V.G. Sorokin, 2006, *Put’ Bro; Led; 23,000: Trilogiia*, Moscow, p. 397; Eng. Vladimir Sorokin, 2011, *Ice Trilogy*, transl. J. Gambrell, New York, p. 400.

9 “[...] the Music of the Light sings in it. In striking our breastbones, the ice vibrates. These vibrations awaken our hearts.” Sorokin, 2006, p. 397; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 400. Maybe this is a reference to Boris Pasternak’s verse “Vysokaia bolezn’,” with its blending of music and ice (see the epigraph to this article).

Он так посмотрел на меня с улыбкой и говорит:
 —Таких, как мы, очень мало. [...] мы не такие, как все. Мы умеем говорить не только ртом, но и сердцем. А остальные люди говорят только ртом. И никогда они не заговорят сердцами. [...] Потому что они живые трупы. [...] А мы живые. Мы избранные. Мы знаем, что такое язык сердца [...]. И знаем, что такое любовь. Настоящая Божественная Любовь. [...] у нас, избранных, совсем другая любовь. Она огромна, как небо, и прекрасна, как Свет Изначальный. [...] Ты, Храм, почувствовала малую толику этой любви. Ты только прикоснулась к ней. Это лишь первый луч великого Солнца, коснувшийся твоего сердца. Солнца по имени Божественная Любовь Света.¹⁰

After this explanation Bro snuggles up to Khram and talks to her in the language of the heart: Сейчас я с тобой говорил на языке сердца. Раньше все тебе говорили сердцем только несколько слов. Но всего сердечных слов двадцать три. Я их все сказал тебе. Теперь ты все знаешь.¹¹

The heart speech is frequently described with the aid of metaphors referring to various spheres of human activity: *И потекли слова сердец; [...] Сердца наши говорили. Слова неведомые бились и рвались.*¹² Talking with the heart can look like a sort of arrhythmia (как-будто это

10 “He looked at me with a smile and said, ‘There are very few people like us. [...] We aren’t like everyone else. We know how to speak not only with our mouths but with our hearts. Other humans speak only with the mouth. Their hearts will never speak. [...] Because they are living corpses. [...] But we are alive, we are the chosen. We know what the language of the heart is [...] And we know what love is. Genuine Divine Love. [...] we, the chosen ones, know an entirely different love. It is as large as the sky, and as sublime as the Primordial Light. [...] You, Khram, have felt a small dose of this love. You have barely touched it. It was but the first ray of the great Sun that touched your heart. The Sun called the Divine Love of Light.” Sorokin, 2006, pp. 391–92; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, pp. 394–95.

11 “Just now I spoke to you in the language of the heart. Previously, everyone spoke only a few words to you with the heart. There are only twenty-three heart words in all. I spoke them all to you. Now you know them all.” Sorokin, 2006, p. 393; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 396.

12 “Heart words flowed once more”; “Our hearts were speaking. The unknown words throbbed and burst.” Sorokin, 2006, p. 91; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 86.

аритмия).¹³ Often the ritual of heart speech is a mystical action that cannot be described with ordinary language at all:

Ип подвела Боренбойма к сугробу. Взобралась на него. Лицо ее оказалось вровень с лицом Боренбойма. [...]

Девочка осторожно обняла его худыми, но длинными руками, прижалась своей грудью к его. Он не противился. Их щеки соприкоснулись.

—О'кей,—он слегка отвернулся, отстраняя лицо. [...]

Но вдруг вздрогнул всем телом. И замер.

Ип тоже замерла.

Они стояли неподвижно. [...]

Прошло 23 минуты. Девочка разжала руки. Боренбойм бесильно упал на обледенелую дорогу. Ип опустила на сугроб. Всхлипнула [...]

Боренбойм зашевелился. Слабо вскрикнул. Сел. Застонал. [...]

Девочка сошла с сугроба, еле слышно хрустнув снегом. Пошла к воротам. Скрылась в них. Раздалось слабое гудение, и ворота закрылись.

Боренбойм заворочался, хрустя льдом. Встал на четвереньки. Пополз. Потом оттолкнулся руками от земли. Тяжело встал. Пошатываясь, выпрямился:

—Оооо...нет.¹⁴

This mystical scene, with its animal degradation (Borenboim has to get down on all fours), represents both the “light” and the “dark” sides of

¹³ Sorokin, 2006, p. 304; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 305.

¹⁴ “Ip led Borenboim to the snowbank. She climbed up on him. Her face was on the same level as Borenboim’s face. [...] The girl carefully embraced him with thin but long arms and pressed her chest to his. He didn’t resist. Their cheeks touched.—‘Okay’.—He turned slightly, moving his face away. [...] Suddenly, his entire body shuddered. He was rooted to the spot. Ip was, too. They stood motionless. [...] Twenty-three minutes passed. The girl released her hands. Borenboim fell weakly on the icy road. Ip slid onto the snowbank. She sniffled [...] Borenboim moved. He cried out feebly. He sat up. Moaned. [...] The girl got up off the snowbank, barely causing the snow to crack. She walked to the gates and went inside. A faint hum could be heard, and the gates closed. Borenboim turned over. The snow made a crunching sound. He got up on all fours. Crawled. He pushed his hands against the earth and rose to his feet slowly. Unsteady, he straightened up.—‘Ooooo...no.’” Sorokin, 2006, p. 295; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, pp. 295–96.

heart speech. In *Ice Trilogy* hearts and their media generate not so much the sublime “Music of the Light” as its low material excesses. According to Mikhail Ryklin, Sorokin’s language is material—it is both extreme and excremental:

Говорящих вынуждают, матерясь и давясь, съесть собственную речь, переваривать ее и испражняться ею. При этом вычисляются их естественные реакции вплоть до рвоты и происходит регрессия с оральной стадии на анальную.¹⁵

Ryklin’s notions from 1998 can also be applied to *Ice Trilogy*. The awakening of a heart competence in *Ice Trilogy* is a brutal initiation ceremony which occurs in parallel to unbelievable corporal excesses. The speaking heart is collocated with other odd modes of speech. While explaining the brutal heart ceremony to her friend, the prostitute Nikolaeva suddenly loses her speech and bursts out sobbing, so that her mouth produces sobs instead of words. Finally the sobbing turns into anal signals:

И вдруг она разрыдалась легко и сильно, словно ее вырвало. Рыдания обрушились на нее. [...]

Тело Николаевой корчило и содрогалось. Лицо побагровело. Подошел официант. Рыдания рвались изо рта Николаевой вместе со слюной, она трясла головой, слезы летели в стороны. [...]

Официант склонился, стал гладить Николаеву. Она яростно выпустила газы. Зарыдала с новой силой.¹⁶

Nikolaeva begins to use corporal signals instead of words, but their message has no sense. In some cases such senseless corporal speech can re-

15 “Cursing and gagging, the speakers are forced to eat up their own speech, digest it and defecate it. Their natural reactions are calculated right up to retching, and a regression from the oral stage to the anal one takes place.” M.K. Ryklin, 1998, “Medium i avtor,” *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, V.G. Sorokin, Moscow, pp. 737–51; p. 737.

16 “And suddenly she began sobbing, readily and intensely, as though she’d vomited. The sobs overwhelmed her. [...] Nikolaeva’s body writhed and shuddered. Her face turned red. The waiter came over. Sobs burst from Nikolaeva’s mouth along with saliva, her head shook and tears spurted on all sides. [...] The waiter leaned over and stroked Nikolaeva. She passed a violent stream of gas and began sobbing with renewed force.” Sorokin, 2006, pp. 341–42; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, pp. 343–44.

place everyday communication: sister Fer from the Evenk lineage hardly speaks in the text but “growls.”

The “dialogue” with the ice hammer can take two directions: either the heart of the victim speaks the mystical language or it keeps silent (*pustoi orekh*, “empty nut”), but in both cases the body itself can growl,¹⁷ snarl etc. as if possessed by an alien spirit:

Мужчина залепил ему рот клейкой лентой. Дибич расстегнула сумку. В ней лежал продолговатый мини-холодильник. Она открыла его. Вынула ледяной молот.

Мужчина расстегнул Боренбойму жилетку и рубашку на груди. Разорвал майку. [...]—Говори сердцем! [...]

Боренбойм зарычал.

Дибич приложила ухо к его груди:

—Говори, говори, говори...

Боренбойм рычал. Дергался.

Дибич отшагнула. Размахнулась. Ударила. [...]

Боренбойм застонал. Повис на веревках. Голова упала на грудь.

Дибич приникла:

—Говори, говори, говори...

В грудине возник звук.

Дибич вслушалась. [...]

—Его зовут Мохо.¹⁸

The same growling is let out by those whose hearts keep silent:

17 Cf. the text produced by the clone of Andrei Platonov in *Blue Lard*: Его товарищ тоже собрался сказать что-то сердечное, но только зарычал из-за бедности человеческого языка. “His comrade wanted to say something hearty as well, but he could only growl because of the poorness of human language.” Vladimir Sorokin, 1999, *Goluboe salo*, Moscow, p. 62.

18 “The man taped his mouth shut. Dibich unfastened the bag. An oblong mini refrigerator lay in it. She opened it. Took out an ice hammer. The man unbuttoned Borenboim’s vest and shirt, ripped open his undershirt. [...] ‘Speak with the heart!’ [...] Borenboim growled. Dibich placed her ear to his chest. ‘Speak, speak, speak...’ Borenboim *groaned*. He jerked. Dibich stepped back. Swung back. Hit him—with all her might. [...] Borenboim *moaned*. He hung limp on the rope. His head slumped down on his chest. Dibich pressed close. ‘Speak, speak, speak...’ A sound arose in his chest. Dibich listened carefully. [...] ‘His name is Mokho.’” Sorokin 2006, pp. 287–88; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, pp. 288–89. Emphasis is mine.

—Отзовись!—Уранов ударил сильнее.

Мужчина рычал и мычал. Тело тряслось. На груди проступили три круглых кровоподтека.¹⁹

The growling of victims can be interpreted in various contexts: first, it is similar to the mystical “grunting” of the spirit in *Aurora, oder Morgenröte im Aufgang* (1612) by Jakob Böhme (see “Das Wort ‘Nacht’ fasset sich erstlich auf dem Herzen und der Geist grunzet mit der herben Qualität”²⁰); second, as the last example highlights, the growling resembles futurists’ *zaum*’ speech (*prostoe kak mychanie*, “simple as mooing”). But even in its futuristic/mystical implementations, Sorokin considers human speech to be imperfect: the absurd is not the task of people of light²¹—corporal excesses are only a collateral product of the initiation ceremony. The real aim of the brotherhood is to break through beyond absurd speech in order to find its way to the new language of the heart.²²

19 “—Respond! Uranov hit him again, harder. The man *moaned* and *wailed* inside. His body shook. Three round bruises appeared on his chest.” Sorokin, 2006, p. 236; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 234. Emphasis is mine.

20 Jacob Böhme, 1860, *Sämtliche Werke in 2 Bdn.* 2, ed. K.W. Schiebler, Leipzig, p. 225.

21 The destruction of absurd speech was also characteristic of some of Sorokin’s early works. For example, the novel *Four Stout Hearts* revises the experience of various types of absurd languages, bringing them to a level of absurdity beyond the absurd through serial multiplying: Штаубе откашлялся и заговорил:—54, 18, 76, 92, 31, 72, 72, 82, 35, 41, 87, 55, 81, 44, 49, 38, 55, 55, 31, 84, 46, 54, 21, 13, 78, 19, 63, 20, 76, 42, 71, 39, 86, 24, 91, 23, 17, 11, 73, 82, 18, 68, 93, 44, 72, 13, 22, 58, 72, 91, 83, 24, 66, 71, 62, 82, 12, 74, 48, 55, 81, 24, 83, 77, 62, 72, 29, 33, 71, 99, 26, 83, 32, 94, 57, 44, 64, 21, 78, 42, 98, 53, 55, 72, 21, 15, 76, 18, 18, 44, 69, 72, 98, 20. Затем заговорила Ольга:—Ste, ипу, аро, сте, чае, пои, сте, гое, ува, сте, ого, ано, сте, зае, хеу, сте, ача, лое, сте, эжэ, ити, сте, аву, убо, сте, ене, оло, сте, одо, аве, сте, иже, аса, сте, уко, лао, сте, шуя, сая, се, нае, яко, сте, диа, сая, сте, ира, сию, сте, ява, юко, сте, зао, мю, сте, хуо, дыа, сте. “Staube cleared his throat and began to speak:—54, 18, 76, 92, 31, 72, 72, 82, 35, 41, 87, 55, 81, 44, 49, 38, 55, 55, 31, 84, 46, 54, 21, 13, 78, 19, 63, 20, 76, 42, 71, 39, 86, 24, 91, 23, 17, 11, 73, 82, 18, 68, 93, 44, 72, 13, 22, 58, 72, 91, 83, 24, 66, 71, 62, 82, 12, 74, 48, 55, 81, 24, 83, 77, 62, 72, 29, 33, 71, 99, 26, 83, 32, 94, 57, 44, 64, 21, 78, 42, 98, 53, 55, 72, 21, 15, 76, 18, 18, 44, 69, 72, 98, 20. After that Ol’ga began to speak:—Ste, ipu, aro, ste, chae, poi, ste, goe, uva, ste, ogo, ano, ste, zae, kheu, ste, acha, loe, ste, ezhe, iti, ste, avu, ubo, ste, ene, olo, ste, odo, ave, ste, izhe, asa, ste, uko, lao, ste, shuia, sai, se, nae, iako, ste, dia, sae, ste, ira, sio, ste, iava, iuko, ste, zao, mio, ste, khuo, dya, ste.” Sorokin, 1998, p. 365.

22 The language of the heart is also, of course, a kind of corporal language. In the seventeenth century, John Bulwer, a physician and Baconian who studied the language of the deaf, supposed that “speech and writing are only part of the signifying resources of human beings, and not the most reliable part of that, for language is notoriously

The centre of Sorokin's text, however, is built not only around heart speech, but also around the obtrusive reproduction of the cardiac initiation ceremony. The ice hammer splits a bloody inscription on the breastbones of the victims during the awakening of their hearts. In the trilogy, the ritual of waking a speaking heart is reproduced 32 times in full, and there are also plenty of other cases where the names of the talking hearts are just briefly reported to the reader.

The brutal and bloody rituals associated with waking up hearts in *Ice Trilogy* are reminiscent of the universal language of sacred wounds²³ in Christianity: some men and women in the Middle Ages longed for Christ to inscribe his truth on their bodies and, in particular, on their hearts. One of the main adherents of this ecstatic pleasure was the German mystic Heinrich Seuse, who engraved Jesus' name on his own heart:

He began to jab into the flesh above the heart with the stylus in a straight line. He jabbed back and forth, up and down, until he had drawn the name HIS right over his heart. Because of the sharp stabs blood poured profusely from his flesh and ran over his body down his chest. Because of his burning love he enjoyed seeing this and hardly noticed the pain.²⁴

slippery, deceptive, and unstable,—notoriously, from the point of view of both theology and science.” See: Stephen Greenblatt, 1997, “Mutilation and Meaning,” *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. D. Hillman & C. Mazzio, New York; London, pp. 221–43; p. 231. Besides his practical investigation of manual rhetoric, Bulwer sought the primordial language. In Bulwer's opinion, muscular movement is a universal and natural expression of the mind, a “common language of mankind.” In his book *Pathomyotomia*, Bulwer maintains that “a Muscle is the proper and adequate Agent of the voluntary and pathetic motions of the mind.” John Bulwer, 1649, *Pathomyotomia, or, A Dissection of the Significant Muscles of the Affections of the Minde Being an Essay to a New Method of Observing the Most Important Movings of the Muscles of the Head*, London, p. 3. Bulwer develops his theory from studies of the facial muscles and the muscles which set the head in motion (inter alia muscles of the neck). It seems as if Sorokin takes Bulwer's ideas to the limit by turning the (invisible) heart muscle into an organ of language. Borenboim's joke “speak, heart... speak, mitral valve” appears to be more than serious in this context.

23 Cf. Greenblatt, 1997, pp. 222–30. See also: V.V. Savchuk, 1995, *Krov' i kul'tura*, St Petersburg.

24 Heinrich Suso, 1989, *The Exemplar: With Two German Sermons*, ed. & transl. F. Tobin, New York, p. 70. Cf. the original: “Und fing an und stach da mit dem Griffel in das Fleisch an der Stelle über dem Herzen, und stach also hin und her und auf und ab, bis er den Namen IHS genau auf sein Herz gezeichnet hatte. Von den

The European tradition of interpreting the language of the heart as a universal one was the reverse side of the search for a word that could build a true language. Scepticism about language as a medium of knowledge was a frequent theme, for example, in St Augustine's writings.²⁵ Bonaventura's aphorism "cognitio Dei experimentalis"²⁶ also highlights the deficiency of human language in its being (un)able to communicate with God, and provides a substantial definition of mystical speech.²⁷

The same aspiration for a mystical language which would be understood by all men is at the core of some of Sorokin's works. But if Seuse's heart emerges as the locus of a written language,²⁸ for Sorokin it is a place of audio-communication. As a modern scholar remarks, Seuse risked discovering on himself the truth of the warning that letters kill.²⁹ In *Ice Trilogy* the inscription (the strokes of the ice hammer) has the function of instigating an awakening: the main purpose of the writing on the heart in *Ice Trilogy* resides not in the message itself but in the activation of non-written heart speech.

The difference between the ice ritual and a mystical one also revolves around the attitude toward self-destruction. Self-destruction usually

schwarzen Stichen strömte das Blut stark aus dem Fleisch und rann über den Leib herab in den Bußen. Das war ihm in seiner feurigen Liebe ein so lieblicher Anblick, dass er der Schmerzen nicht viel achtete." Heinrich Seuse, 1911, *Deutsche Schriften* 1, transl. W. Lehmann, Jena, p. 15.

- 25 St Augustine's Confessions were actually recognized and reproduced in the Middle Ages as a "book of the heart" (see Jager, 1957, p. 40).
- 26 Bonaventura: III Sent. d.35 q.2 corp.
- 27 Jörg Seelhorst, 2003, *Autoreferentialität und Transformation: Zur Funktion mystischen Sprechens bei Mechthild von Magdeburg, Meister Eckhart und Heinrich Seuse*, Tübingen, Basel, p. 13.
- 28 For more on Seuse's heart as a place of print, see: Marcus Beling, 2000, "Der Körper als Pergament der Seele: Gedächtnis, Schrift und Körperlichkeit bei Mechthild von Magdeburg und Heinrich Seuse," *Körper mit Geschichte: Der menschliche Körper als Ort der Selbst- und Weltdeutung*, eds. C. Wischermann & S. Haas, Stuttgart, pp. 109–32. The tattoo on Seuse's heart serves as a place of meeting with God and has a healing force (cf. Sandra Fenten, 2007, *Mystik und Körperlichkeit: Eine komplementär-vergleichende Lektüre von Heinrich Seuses geistlichen Schriften*, Würzburg). For Stephen Greenblatt the first advantage of the language of wounds was its universality: "For Christians God's flesh was itself a text written upon with universal characters, inscribed with a language that all men could understand since it was a language in and of the body itself, independent of any particular forms of speech." Greenblatt, 1997, p. 223; and the second advantage was the absence of blanks: such a persistent text, where all the elements play their part, was to be read with an ecstatic delight.
- 29 Greenblatt, 1997, p. 224.

takes place in religious customs and is deeply rooted in tradition, whereas in *Ice Trilogy* a person is pulled out from everyday life, knowing nothing about the motivation of the aggressors who force him to become accustomed to the mystical heart language.

From Hesychasm to Moscow conceptual art

The epigraph from Gregory Palamas—Итак, отложим, братие, дела темная, и станем делать дела света.³⁰—accentuates the affinity of *Ice Trilogy* with another mystical tradition—the Byzantine heritage of Hesychasm. Palamas' *Triads for the Defense of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude* (Ἐπερ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζόντων) probably served as a mystical source for *Ice Trilogy*. Hesychasm questions the value of intellect and tries to elaborate a doctrine of supra-intellectual “spiritual knowledge”—i.e. knowledge beyond knowledge—which implies the participation of the *body* in the cognitive process. According to Palamas, the heart was “the first rational organ of the body”;³¹ Hesychasts were called upon to put their mind into the heart.

The motif of a “Brotherhood of the Primordial Light” can also be traced to the Palamite doctrine on the divine nature of the light: Palamas depicts “the supernatural union with the superluminous light,”³² which “shone on Thabor”³³ and was “superior to the light of knowledge.”³⁴ For Palamas, however, “the mystical union with the light” is rather the individual ritual of a monk³⁵ (“each eye sees a different light, invisible to the other eye”),³⁶ while Sorokin describes the yearning of a collective body

30 “And so, brethren, let us lay aside works of darkness and turn to works of light.” Sorokin, 2006, p. 5; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. vii.

31 Gregory Palamas, 1983, *The Triads*, ed. J. Meyendorff, transl. N. Gendle, Mahwah, N.J., p. 42.

32 Palamas, 1983, p. 67.

33 Palamas, 1983, p. 76.

34 Palamas, 1983, p. 62.

35 Maybe only the pose of “those who practise sacred quietude” does not coincide with the pose of the brotherhood members. A Hesychast should fix his eye on his breast or on his navel (see Palamas, 1983, p. 45). This means that he takes on an embryonic pose to lock his mind into his heart, while the heroes of the *Ice Trilogy* should nestle next to each other and merge with their partner for a heart conversation, building up a collective body.

36 Palamas, 1983, p. 59.

for the light. Since all the light brothers are destroyed in the end, they are in fact seeking the light in order to be deceived by the light.

The heritage of Hesychasm was first appropriated in Moscow conceptualism by Andrei Monastyrskii, who genuinely did try to “speak with his heart.”³⁷ In his autobiographical novel *Kashirskoe shosse* (*Kashira Avenue*), Monastyrskii describes in detail his attempts to achieve what he calls *svedenie uma v serdtse*:

Внутренняя алхимия православной аскезы [...] состоит в том, что [...] «ум» должен быть сведен «в сердце», [...] предварительно очищенное путем тяжелейших истязаний и обузданий. С этого этапа православная аскеза перестает отличаться от индуистского, буддистского или даосского духовных путей, ибо во всех этих традициях «сведение ума в сердце» считается целью аскезы. Раньше всего именно в выражении «свести ум в сердце» эта цель была сформулирована в одной из «Упанишад».³⁸

The praxis of Hesychasm was a “heart prayer” which undoubtedly had counterparts in other cultures. Monastyrskii compares Hesychasm to Taoism and the Upanishads, where the heart was conceived as “the organ of the mind.” Monastyrskii, however, is closer to the Orthodox tradition; it seems as if he implicitly recites Palamas: молился я сердцем, то есть слова молитвы произносились мной и воспринимались не в голове, а в груди, в сердце.³⁹ Moscow conceptual art continues the tradition and

37 For more on the connections between the performance art group “Kollektivnye deistivii” (Collective Actions) and Ice Trilogy, see: M.P. Marusenko, 2012, *Absurdopediia russkoi zhizni Vladimira Sorokina: zaum', grotesk i absurd*, St Petersburg, pp. 253–58. As a possible intertext one should also mention Iurii Mamleev: this writer and philosopher has tried to connect Oriental philosophy with the Orthodox tradition.

38 “The inner alchemy of Orthodox asceticism [...] is that [...] ‘the mind’ should be brought ‘to the heart’, [...] which has been preliminarily cleansed through very considerable tortures and restraints. From this stage onwards, Orthodox asceticism no longer differs from Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist spiritual ways, because all these traditions consider ‘bringing the mind into the heart’ as an aim of asceticism. This expression, ‘to bring the mind into the heart’, was formulated for the first time in one of the Upanishads.” Andrei Monastyrskii, 1998, “Kashirskoe shosse,” *Poezdki za gorod*, ed. A. Monastyrskii, Moscow, pp. 562–665; p. 625.

39 “I was praying with my heart, so that the words of my prayer were articulated and perceived not in my head, but in my breast, in my heart.” Monastyrskii, 1998, p. 607.

even provides it with its own terminology (*Geistpaarung*), but replaces the dialogue between man and God with a private, physiological and erotic space between human beings:

И опять меня подхватила волна этого странного, внутреннего ветра, опять я почувствовал, что куда-то лечу, падаю, отделяюсь от реальности. Таково было мое первое знакомство с *гайстпарунгом*, с суггестией Аниной «сердечной» молитвы, дающей такой странный физиологический эффект.⁴⁰

According to Monastyrskii, the language of the heart includes two poles: “prayer” (*molitva*) and “swearing” (*bran*). The heart “swearing” (*serdechnaia ‘bran*”) is the reverse side of the heart prayer.⁴¹ Another important speech-genre of the heart in *Kashira Avenue* is the so-called “*serdechnyi telegraf*.”⁴² But all these speech manifestations by Monastyrskii can be

40 “And again I was caught up on the wave of this strange inner wind, once again I had the feeling that I was flying somewhere, falling, separating from reality. Such was my first encounter with *Geistpaarung*, with the suggestion of Ania’s ‘heart’ prayer, which exerted such a strange physiological effect.” Monastyrskii, 1998, p. 564. [Emphasis is mine.] *Gaistparung* (*Geistpaarung*) is a term from the Moscow conceptual school which means “spiritual pairing” (*dukhovnoe sparivanie*).

41 Очень интересные эффекты взаимодействия возникали между моим «говорящим», гиперсенсоризованным сердцем и внешним поведением Ани. [...] как только сердце начинало бурлить бранью, Аня резко отскакивала. “Very interesting effects of interaction appeared between my ‘speaking’, hypersensitive heart and Ania’s external behaviour. [...] As soon as my heart began to boil up with swearing, Ania immediately jumped aside.” Monastyrskii, 1988, p. 643.

42 Однажды вечером я лежал у себя на диване и мучился своим «говорящим» сердцем—оно у меня само по себе молилось иисусовой молитвой, то есть в ритме сердцебиения у меня по слогам в сердце складывались слова молитвы. [...] Вдруг среди иисусовой молитвы стали пробиваться какие-то другие слоги, складывающиеся в странные слова [...] Я сделал волевое усилие сознанием и «спустил» на это молящееся и телеграфирующее сердечное колесо вопрос: «Это-кто-соб-ствен-но?». И тут же получил тем же способом, внутри своего сердца, ответ: «Аня». “One evening I was lying on the sofa and suffering with my ‘speaking’ heart—it was praying of its own accord using the Jesus prayer, that is, the words of the prayer were being formed in my heart from syllables, in rhythm to my heartbeat. [...] Suddenly some other syllables began to break through the Jesus prayer, forming strange words [...] I made a conscious effort with my mind and ‘pulled down’ a question to the praying and wiring heart wheel: ‘Who-is-it?’ Inside my heart, in just the same way, I immediately received the reply: ‘Ania.’” Monastyrskii, 1998, p. 654.

classified as obsession. In the works of this conceptual artist, the cardio-centric culture appears as the delirium of a mentally sick man: its effects disappear in a “healthy” condition. For Sorokin cardiosensocentrism is a remedy against the “sick” culture itself, but it does not manage to cure the sickness—it disappears at the end of the text as a fatal mistake.

Cor ardens of literature

In *Ice Trilogy*, the language of the heart has not only mystical but also secular—that is, literary—intertexts. It is enough to remember Aleksandr Pushkin’s poem *Prorok* (*The Prophet*, 1826), where the lyric subject turns into a carrier of a “fiery fireball” which is meant to “burn the hearts of people” with “the word” (глаголом жги сердца людей).⁴³ The motif of fire is significant in this tradition. But what about ice?

According to Igor’ Smirnov (1997), Sorokin actually polemicizes with Maksim Gor’kii, when, in *Serdtza chetyrekh* (*Four Stout Hearts*, 1991), he lets the fiery heart of Danko turn into an icy heart capable of multiplying. However, the cocktail of heart mixed with ice was not discovered by Sorokin. Traces of this combination can be found before: in the Renaissance period it was Rabelais, with his “Frozen Words Adventure” (“les paroles gelées”) from *La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel* (*Gargantua and Pantagruel*), who could serve as a predecessor of awakening heart language with ice. During their journey across a frozen sea, Pantagruel and his companion Panurg find some frozen words which look like “dragées perlées de diverses couleurs.” The words froze in winter and are now melting in the spring, making strange senseless sounds, “un langage barbare” that could be one of the pretexts for the heart language in *Ice Trilogy*:

Lorsque elles eurent fondu toutes ensemble, nous entendîmes hin, hin, hin, hin, his, tic, torche, lorgne, brededin, brededac, frr, frrr, frrr,

43 The significance of the heart is evident in romanticism. Cf. Lermontov’s verse Таинственным я занят разговором,/Но не с тобой я сердцем говорю. “I am occupied with a mysterious conversation,/But it is not to you that I am talking with my heart.” M. Iu. Lermontov, 1936, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, Moscow, Leningrad, p. 120; or Batiushkov’s О память сердца! ты сильнее/Рассудка памяти печальной. “O memory of the heart! You are stronger/than reason’s wistful memory.” K. N. Batiushkov, 1977, *Opyty v stikhakh i proze*, Moscow, p. 220.

bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, tracc, trac, trr, trr, trr, trrr, trrrrr, on, on, on, on, ououououon, goth, magoth, [...] ⁴⁴

There were also “ice hearts” in the fairy tales of Romanticism: from Wilhelm Hauff’s *Das kalte Herz* to Hans Christian Andersen’s *Sneedronningen* (*The Snow Queen*, 1845). The live hearts from Hauff’s *Das kalte Herz* are collected in a special place:

Auf mehreren Gesimsen von Holz standen Gläser, mit durchsichtiger Flüssigkeit gefüllt, und in jedem dieser Gläser lag ein Herz, auch waren an den Gläsern Zettel angeklebt und Namen darauf geschrieben, die Peter neugierig las; das war das Herz des Amtmanns in F., das Herz des dicken Ezechiel, das Herz des Tanzbodenkönigs, das Herz des Oberförsters; da waren sechs Herzen von Kornwucherern, acht von Werbeoffizieren, drei von Geldmäklern—kurz, es war eine Sammlung der angesehensten Herzen in der Umgegend von zwanzig Stunden. ⁴⁵

Instead of living, beating hearts, the protagonists in Hauff’s story carry cold hearts of marble in their breasts. The motif of “the cold heart” is also modified by Andersen, who depicts how an icy heart can be melted by hot human tears:

Then little Gerda wept hot tears, that fell upon his breast: they penetrated into his heart, they thawed the lump of ice, and consumed the little pieces of glass in it. [...] Then Kay burst into tears; he wept so that the splinter of glass came out of his eye. ⁴⁶

44 François Rabelais, 1995, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, p. 1075.

45 Wilhelm Hauff, 1842, *Märchen*, Stuttgart, p. 303.

46 Hans Christian Andersen, 1997, “The Snow Queen,” *The Complete Fairy Tales*, transl. H.P. Paull (revised and partly re-translated by W.A. & J.K. Craigie), London, pp. 259–93; pp. 290–91. “—da græd den lille Gerda hede Taarer, de faldt paa hans Bryst, de trængte ind i hans Hjerte, de optøede Iisklumpen og fortærede den lille Speilstump derinde [...] Da brast Kay i Graad; han græd, saa Speilkornet trillede ud af Øinene [...]” H.C. Andersen, 1980 (1845), “Sneedronningen,” *Eventyr og Historier* (Gyldendals Bibliotek), ed. Erling Nielsen, Copenhagen, pp. 143–71; pp. 169–70; emphasis in the original.

Apart from European fairy tales, Sorokin seems to have used the heritage of Russian symbolism in his *Ice Trilogy*, namely the poetry of Bal'mont, Blok and Ivanov. It is also significant that Sorokin's Ice begins to form itself on 30 June 1908, during the age of Symbolism. In Konstantin Bal'mont's poetic cycle *Budem kak solntse* (*Let Us Be like the Sun*, 1903), there is a poem, "L'diny" ("Ice floe"), which describes the process of hearing with the heart in the middle of *ice floes*. In the poetic cycle *Snezhnaia maska* (*The Snow Mask*, 1907), Aleksandr Blok writes about the transformation of the poet's heart into ice, in connection with his "second christening" ("vtoroe kreshchenie"): И гордость нового крещения / Мне сердце обратила в лед.⁴⁷ The same process can be found in his poem "Serdtshe predano meteli" from the same poetic cycle:

Я всех забыл, кого любил,
Я сердце вьюгой закрутил,
Я бросил сердце с белых гор,
Оно лежит на дне!⁴⁸

The connection of the heart with the language of mystical visions is also typical of Viacheslav Ivanov's poetry. It seems that Sorokin's cardiocentric "brotherhood of light" can be traced back to Ivanov's *Cor ardens* (1911), with its "psalms" to the "fiery heart" (тебе мой псалом, огневое Сердце!)⁴⁹, and its sacred cordial "wounds," which constitute a prerequisite for the advent of light rays. It is not so easy to sort out the combination of heart and ice in Ivanov. At first glance, it seems that the heart from Ivanov's *Cor ardens* is a sun-heart (*solntse-serdtse*), which is mainly associated with motifs of fire and flame: it can melt, relax in "ardent beating" (*mlet' v plamennom bienii*), heatedly shudder (*zharko sodrogat'sia*). The poet portrays "a God's angel with a melted heart in the yawning breast" (ангел Божий с расплавленным сердцем в разверстой груди).⁵⁰

47 "And the pride of the second christening/has turned my heart into ice." A.A. Blok, 1946, *Sochineniia*, Moscow, p. 140.

48 "I have forgotten all those whom I loved,/I have twisted my heart into a snowstorm,/I have thrown my heart from the white cliffs,/It now lies at the bottom!" Blok, 1946, p. 148.

49 "I dedicate my psalm to you, fiery heart!," V.I. Ivanov, 1995, "Cor ardens," *Stikhotvoreniia, poemy, tragedii*, vol. 1, St Petersburg, pp. 221-425; p. 227.

50 Ivanov, 1995, p. 223. Pamela Davidson (1989, *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav*

But Ivanov connected some motifs with ice as well: one of the parts of *Cor ardens* is called “Snega” (“Snow”). In this passage, the phantom of Lidiia Zinov’eva-Annibal comes to the poet wearing clothes shining like snow (снежный блеск одежд).⁵¹ It is indicative that the task of the phantom is to actualize in the poet the memory of the “Light”: Тебя вотще ль / Я наставленьем долгим наставляла / В доверьи цельном Свету?⁵²

In *Ice Trilogy* one can find several intertextual signals which point in the direction of *Cor ardens*. The “charred tree trunks” (*obyglennye stvoly*) that Bro passes on the way to the Ice correlate with the poem “My, dva grozoi zazhzhennye stvola” (“We are two trunks ignited by lightning”) from *Cor ardens*. But while Ivanov writes about the “unconstrained confluence of two hearts” (О двух сердец слияньи безусловном),⁵³ Sorokin takes the lyric from an intimate to a universal scale when he focuses his story on the confluence of initially two but subsequently many hearts. It looks as if he is trying to implement Ivanov’s dream: the conciliatory unity of people (*sobornost’*). The moment of the heart confluence, according to Sorokin, is preceded by a rupture of the flesh, signifying, as it were, a second birth.

The collapse of cardiocentric culture

Since Ivanov, the motif of the heart has not only assumed an important place in Russian culture, but also generated a new (metaphorical) concep-

Ivanov, Cambridge, pp. 195–99) has compared the images of the fiery heart as conceived by Ivanov and Dante. She cites a diary entry, dated 15 June 1908 [two weeks before the Tunguska meteorite fell!], in which Ivanov describes a vision of Lidiia: “I saw Lidiya with enormous swan’s wings. In her hands she was holding a glowing heart [pylaiushchee serdtse] of which we both partook: she—painlessly, and I—with pain from the fire [...] Lidiya placed the fiery heart [ognennoe serdtse] from which we had eaten into her breast...” Davidson considers that Ivanov’s account of his dream closely echoes a passage from the third chapter of the *Vita Nuova* in which Dante describes a vision of Beatrice. An angel appears to Dante, holding the sleeping Beatrice in his arms. In one of his hands he holds “an object which was burning all over”; he tells Dante that this is his heart and wakes Beatrice in order to make her eat part of the glowing heart. Dante wakes up and composes a sonnet about his vision in which he refers to his heart as a core ardeno (“burning heart”). Davidson (see 1989, p. 199) points out that the two dreams are remarkably similar. See also: Aleksandr Shishkin, 1996, “Plameneiushchee serdtse’ v poezii Viacheslava Ivanova,” *Viacheslav Ivanov: materialy i issledovaniia*, Moscow, p. 333–52.

51 Ivanov, 1995, p. 362.

52 “Have I taught you in vain to trust the Light completely?” Ivanov, 1995, p. 363.

53 Ivanov, 1995, p. 364.

tion of (cultural) crisis. The same collapse of cardiocentric culture that we see in *Ice Trilogy* can already be found in the 1930s in the writings of Russian philosophers: Boris Vysheslavtsev and Ivan Il'in compared the crisis of culture with a crisis of the heart. In his essay "Znachenie serdtsa v religii" ("The Meaning of the Heart in Religion," 1925), Vysheslavtsev depicted the crisis of culture as a neglect of the heart:

Потеря культуры сердца в современной жизни есть потеря жизненной силы, наше существование превращается в постоянное умирание, засыхание, какой-то склероз сердца, которым поражена вся современная цивилизация. [...] Чувство пустоты, чувство ничтожества происходит от того, что иссякла центральная сила личности, засохла ее сердцевина и тогда не поможет никакой временный расцвет периферических и внешних сил.⁵⁴

At first sight it may seem that the protagonists of *Ice Trilogy* eventually find their way out of the crisis: in trying to awaken the heart in order to make it speak, they invent a new mystical language, which breaks through barriers in the crystallizing culture. The final apocalypse of *Ice Trilogy*, however, demonstrates the vanity of these efforts.

Ivan Il'in's philosophy of the heart seems even closer to Sorokin's *Ice Trilogy*. The philosopher examined the heart as an organ not only of contemplation (following Taoism and Hesychasm), but first and foremost of expression. The level of expression of the heart is situated beyond language—in the realm of singing. In his tractate *Poiushchee serdtse* (*The singing heart*), Il'in wrote: Есть только одно истинное «счастье» на земле—пение человеческого сердца.⁵⁵ This is reminiscent of the mono-

54 "The loss of heart culture in modern life is the loss of vital force, our existence is being transformed into a constant dying, drying, into a cardiosclerosis, affecting modern civilization as a whole. [...] The sense of emptiness, the sense of smallness, comes from the fact that the central force of personality has expired, its core has dried up, and no temporary blooming of peripheral and external forces can help in this situation." B.P. Vysheslavtsev, 1925, "Znachenie serdtsa v religii," *Put' 1*, pp. 79–98; p. 91.

55 "There is only one sort of true "happiness" on Earth—the singing of the human heart." I.A. Il'in, 1994, "Poiushchee serdtse," in I.A. Il'in, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, Moscow, p. 375. The book *Poiushchee* was first published in German under another title: Iwan Iljin, 1943, *Das verschollene Herz: Buch der stillen Betrachtungen*, Bern. It is rather unlikely that the author of *Ice Trilogy* has read Il'in and Vysheslavtsev, but all these authors take into consideration the general Russian Hesychast tradition,

logue of Bro when he says: Сердце мое пело, переключаясь со Льдом и вспоминая мое истинное имя.⁵⁶ According to Il'in, the singing of the heart is based on love—not on terrestrial love but on divine love:

Земная влюбленность угасает и прекращается в чувственном удовлетворении, [...] и сердце смолкает, не пропев ни единого гимна. Часто, слишком часто, влюбленное сердце вздыхает бесплодно, [...] не понимает, что его счастье [...] не более чем отблеск настоящего блаженства. И сердце теряет и этот отблеск, не научившись ни пению, ни созерцанию, не испытав ни радости, ни любви, не начав своего просветления.⁵⁷

Il'in speculates about the irradiation and the “spiritual eye” of the heart, just as Sorokin describes the clairvoyance of his people of light. According to Il'in, people with a singing heart form a kind of elite group that can be a medium of God:

Каждый божественный миг жизни, каждый звук поющего сердца влияет на мировую историю [...] Нам надо увидеть и признать, [...] что человек с поющим сердцем есть остров Божий—Его маяк. Его посредник.⁵⁸

Sorokin's people of light are such “God's islands” because they possess “singing hearts,” but they also demonstrate the powerlessness of such singing: the musical vibration of the heart muscle does not help them to escape the final collapse. It is remarkable that the meat machines stay

which performs a significant function in their texts. That is why one can find so many common motifs in texts by Russian philosophers and in Sorokin's works.

56 “My heart sang, calling out to the Ice and remembering my true name.” Sorokin, 2006, p. 87; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 81.

57 “The earthly state of being in love dies out and comes to an end in sensory satisfaction, [...] and the heart falls silent without singing any hymn. Often, too often, the heart in love sighs in vain, [...] it does not understand that its happiness [...] is no more than a reflection of true bliss. However, the heart also loses this reflection having been taught neither singing nor contemplation, having felt neither joy nor love, and without embarking on enlightenment” Il'in, 1994, p. 376.

58 “Every divine moment of life, every sound of the singing heart influences world history. [...] We should see and acknowledge [...] that a man with a singing heart is God's island—His lighthouse. His mediator.” Il'in, 1994, p. 380.

alive and that the apocalypse affects only the elite—those who were expected to live forever in a mystical union with rays of light. The mystical Brotherhood lives to see the final tragedy—the triumph of the (language) “norm.”