Kruchenykh contra Gutenberg

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Aleksei Kruchenykh (1886–1968) still retains the reputation given him in the 1920s by his Futurist colleagues and the general public as the "wild man of Russian literature."[1] The main reason for this is his creation of the most radical form of so-called transrational language (*zaum*), which involved the production of poetry using invented or distorted words of indeterminate meaning. His first and to this day most famous poem in transrational language, "*Dyr bul shchyl*," was published in March 1913, and remains the focal point of controversy about the excesses (or achievements) of Russian Futurist verbal experimentation. The poem and similar ones by Kruchenykh and other *zaumniks* confront the boundary between meaning and meaninglessness and address the question of whether words can ever be totally meaningless or abstract. In this case, there seems to be a subliminal erotic message.[2] Kruchenykh was one of the most extreme and persistent practitioners of transrational language, outpacing even Velimir Khlebnikov, his co-inventor of the term and concept, who intended that his coinages at least eventually have a clear meaning.

Certainly *zaum* was one of the things that drew attention to the Russian Futurists. In fact it put them ahead of the Italian Futurists in radicalness and was a feature Filippo Tommaso Marinetti found hard to understand when he encountered it during his visit to Russia in February 1914. But at least as important and notable in the public's perception of the Russian Futurists' radicalism was the nature of their book production. Here, too, Kruchenykh emerged as one of the most inventive and extreme members of the Russian avant-garde.

If Kruchenykh had consciously set out to dismantle (nowadays we might say "deconstruct") the legacy of Johannes Gutenberg (c. 1397–1468), it is unlikely that he could have done it more completely. Gutenberg's legacy of linear movable type and mass-produced books is such an innate part of modern Western culture that we are almost blind to its effects on our thought patterns and cultural assumptions. Yet these effects are arguably profound. As Marshall McLuhan has speculated, "A child in any Western milieu is surrounded by an abstract explicit visual technology of uniform time and uniform continuous space in which 'cause' is efficient and sequential, and things move and happen on single planes and in successive order."[3] Print culture created a society of silent, isolated readers having their own "inner direction." "Manuscripts were altogether too slow and uneven a matter to provide either a fixed point of view or the habit of gliding steadily on single planes of thought and information. . . . [B]alanced interplay of the senses became extremely difficult after print stepped up the visual component in Western experience to extreme intensity."[4] In a series of remarkable book works of 1912 to 1920, Kruchenykh and his collaborators challenged this legacy in an unprecedentedly complete way, step-by-step departing from our European expectations about what a twentieth-century book should be.[5]
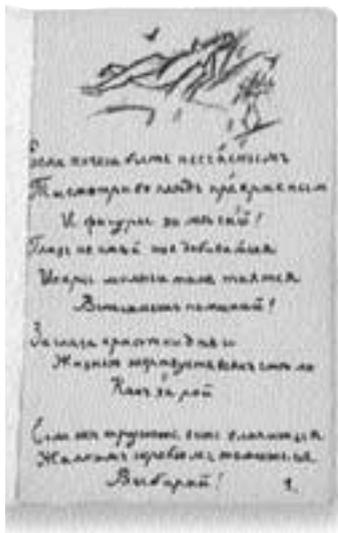
This was a time when the basic parameters for

the various arts were being questioned and reformulated by many innovators. If it was probably not quite true that, as Virginia Woolf put it, "in or about December, 1910, human character changed,"[6] nevertheless something happened to change the situation, whether this was an accumulation of technological advances or an increase in international contacts and tensions. Rather suddenly the trend in all the arts was to interrogate the nature of every art form and to establish and maximally focus on the most basic traits, goals, and means in each of them. If, for example, the essence of painting was color and shape on a surface (photography had replaced painting's purely reproductive, depictive function), then how could the artist make the best expressive use of those elements? Correspondingly, what was the essence of literature? Quite literally it was the letters of a text on a page. How can they best be made maximally expressive? Surely the traditionally printed book did not do that very well.

Kruchenykh was certainly not the only one experimenting with new or rediscovered ways of presenting texts. We can point to Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* (1897), Blaise Cendrars's and Sonia Delaunay-Terk's *La Prose du Transsibérien* (1913), Guillaume Apollinaire's *calligrammes* (1918), and the florid typography of Italian Futurism as other examples of how to escape at least in part the straitjacket of Gutenbergian printing. But Kruchenykh attacked the problem from more sides than anyone else at the time.

To begin with, let's enumerate the features of the Gutenberg legacy that were going to be challenged. The intent and result of movable type printing were to efficiently produce numerous identical copies of a given text. This technology supplanted certain features of the manuscript book: typesetting produced a rigidly linear text and did not easily permit departures from it, such as multidirectional (non-horizontal) writing or insertions; uniform typefaces resulted in uniformity of letterforms and general visual texture, and often a single typeface and point size were used throughout a large text; no handwork was possible, except as implicit in the invisible type composition process with its hidden decisions about spacing, hyphenation, etc.; there was little or no variation from copy to copy, except in the form of defects in manufacturing, and all typographical errors appeared in all copies; technically there was a problem in trying to include non-typeset materials, such as illustrations, which require separate treatment, must be isolated from the typeset text, and employ a different technology. A corollary to the uniformity of copies was that each copy in the print run of a book would have the same cover, paper, page size, typeface, and editing style. Departures from these basic format components would be considered to be defects, to be failures in quality control.

We can now examine how Kruchenykh went about challenging these expectations. His very first publications show significant departures from the norm. Even his first, non-Futurist book, *All Kherson in Cartoons, Caricatures, and Portraits* (1910), was a set of unlabeled sketches of the leading figures of Kherson society (Kruchenykh came from the seaport city of Kherson, in Ukraine), and reflected his art-school training rather than his abilities as a writer. But it is his first Futurist books of 1912 that draw our attention for their shocking originality. *Old-Time Love,* done with Mikhail Larionov (fig. 1; p. 66), and *A Game in Hell*, with Khlebnikov (the first edition was illustrated by Natalia Goncharova; fig. 2; p. 70), are remarkable less for their poetic innovations than for their being presented in lithographed manuscript. In one fell swoop, Kruchenykh eliminated typeset printing from the picture, replacing it with manuscript culture, if employing a duplication technology—lithography—that post-dated printing, having been discovered by Alois Senefelder in 1798. In the case of *Old-Time Love*, the text and illustrations were inscribed in lithographic crayon together, and in places the pictorial components even penetrated the poem, providing a somewhat crude look with the spatial freedom of a genuine illuminated manuscript. The handwork was fully visible, and the only difference here from a true manuscript was that lithography permitted the printing of several hundred copies.

A Game in Hell looked even more like a traditional illuminated manuscript with a profusion of striking illustrations, but these were prepared independently by Goncharova and are distinctly separate from the text. If *Old-Time Love* is in a crude semi-cursive that matches the intentionally clumsy semi-literate love-note style of the poetic text, the script style here is more formal and blocky, and resembles the early typefaces used in Russian printing-press publications, which were nevertheless closely modeled on manuscript letterforms (fig. 3). In Kruchenykh's day this font style was still used for Russian Orthodox Church publications, and so its presence in this parodically irreverent work has a blasphemous element to it. The second edition of *A Game in Hell* (1914), with illustrations by Olga Rozanova and Kazimir Malevich, demonstrates yet another possible

Fig. 1. **MIKHAIL LARIONOV.** *Old-Time Love* by Aleksei Kruchenykh. 1912. Lithograph, 5⅝ x 3 11/16" (14.3 x 9.2 cm). Ed.: 300. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation

Fig. 2. **NATALIA GONCHAROVA.** *A Game in Hell* by Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh. 1912. Lithograph, 7 ¼ x 5 ¾" (18.3 x 14.6 cm). Ed.: 300. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation

relationship of text to illustration. In this case the text on many pages is made to fill the irregular space left by the illustration (pp. 80, 81). The script style itself is also rather irregular, somewhere between the more cursive letterforms of *Old-Time Love* and the block style of the first edition of *A Game in Hell*.

In these three works, Kruchenykh has demonstrated a range of possible relationships between text and illustration that are readily available when one is released from the constraints of letterpress. He also demonstrates the expressive potential of manuscript text, which was the subject of his manifesto with Khlebnikov, "The Letter as Such" (1913). There, in hyperbolic form, the main point is that the script matters: "A word written in individual longhand or composed with a particular typeface bears no resemblance at all to the same word in a different inscription."[7] In letterpress, while some recognition may be given to the effect of a particular typeface, once it is chosen, as a rule the entire text is set uniformly and each individual word looks exactly the same in every instance. In a handwritten manuscript, however, each word would be at least slightly different, and the expressive element would be maintained.

"*There are two propositions:*

1. That mood changes one's longhand during the process of writing.

2. That the longhand peculiarly modified by one's mood conveys that mood to the reader, independently of the words."[8]

As is well known in modern advertising, the script used in logos and other contexts has an effect, perhaps only subconsciously, and must be carefully chosen to create the desired image of a company (think of the very different impressions created by the simple block letters of Kmart and the elegant cursive of Lord and Taylor). Whether one's own handwriting reveals profound and complex facets of one's personality, as graphologists plausibly maintain,[9] it nevertheless produces a certain impression on the reader. A neatly articulated small script says one thing, and a broad illegible scrawl says something quite different. It is a metonymic factor of personality that characterizes one as much as the way we speak and the kinds of books we read. It is a factor eliminated by Gutenberg and restored by Kruchenykh.[10]

Kruchenykh continued to produce manuscripted books throughout his career, adding some further variations, such as change of page orientation, hand-coloring, and compositions of letters and shapes in which it was sometimes difficult to say what was a letter and what was a shape, but the essential parameters were established in 1912.[11] It should be noted, though, that whatever flexibilities of manuscript production were involved in these initial examples, they were fixed on the lithographic stone and became an invariable part of each of the copies produced. The prints of each copy of the given book were more or less unvaried, and each copy was essentially the same, except in some instances where the kind of paper it was printed on was not uniform or hand-coloring was occasionally added.

However, also in 1912, Kruchenykh introduced yet another challenge to the Gutenberg legacy: the book with variations in page order. *Worldbackwards* is a miscellany that is more than usually miscellaneous. The Russian scholar of Futurism, Evgenii Kovtun, described it like this: "From page to page the shape of the script, its graphics and rhythm change: now it is calmly rounded, now angular, broken, nervous, now precipitously flying, as if weightless, now heavily printing the words. The lines are now bunched together, filling the whole page, now are freely spaced on the page, forming harmonious relationships between black and white. Pages of text are interspersed with full-page illustrations, drawings interweave themselves into the manuscript text, now interrupting it, now positioning themselves on the margins. Every time there is a new harmony, a new plastic organization of the page. As a whole the collection is built on the alternation of contrasts which do not permit the reader's attention to wane."[12]

In this context, it is a great boon to scholarship on this subject that The Judith Rothschild Foundation was able to assemble five copies of *Worldbackwards* (pp. 68, 69*)*, and, in so doing, permitted the direct comparison of these copies and led to a clearer impression of the extent to which each copy is *different.*[13] As Kovtun and others have noted, the miscellany is remarkably heterogeneous in its general contents. There are completely independent lithographed illustrations in various styles by various artists not linked to any text; lithographed pages that combine manuscript text by either Kruchenykh or Khlebnikov in varying scripts with illustrations by various artists (Larionov, Goncharova, Nikolai Rogovin) similar to the previous examples; pages of rubber-stamped text that mix typefaces and upper and lower case letters in the same words and lines, with or without additional handwork; pages that are oriented sometimes vertically, sometimes horizonally; various weights and colors of paper; and pages not trimmed uniformly. To these features have been added a cover consisting of two main collaged elements, a lithographed title-authors panel and a generally leaf-shaped cutout.

The leaf-shaped cutout varies considerably in form, color, and type of paper, and the title sometimes appears above the leaf, sometimes below. This alone guarantees that each copy is unique. However, a comparison of the five Rothschild copies and individual copies in various other collections reveals that the order of pages in the miscellany also differs from copy to copy, and copies of individual pages may also differ. Even the lithographed pages may vary in paper color or weight. Some have been run through the printing press twice. But the most surprising differences relate to the rubber-stamped pages. Given the number of copies produced (220), one would have expected that the pages created by a rubber stamp kit would have been turned out rapidly by stamping each with the same stamp or set of stamps. If the text consisted of a number of lines and would not fit on the same stamp holder, then the spacing and orientation might be expected to differ as they do. And the ink color and letters added by potato cut (a piece of potato carved into a letter or shape,
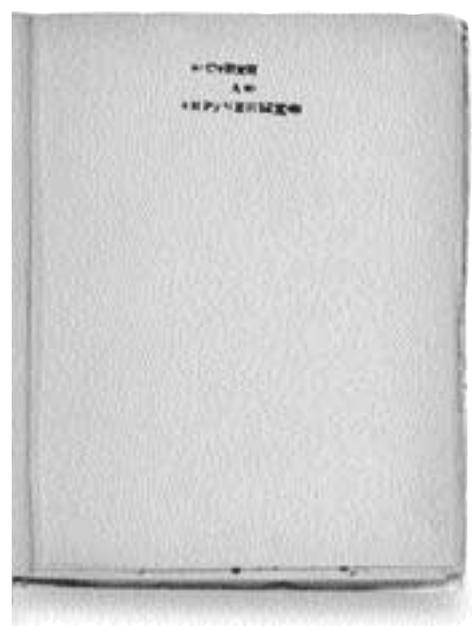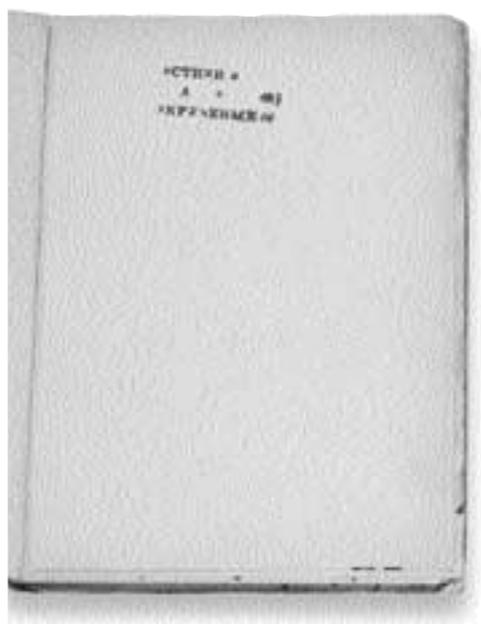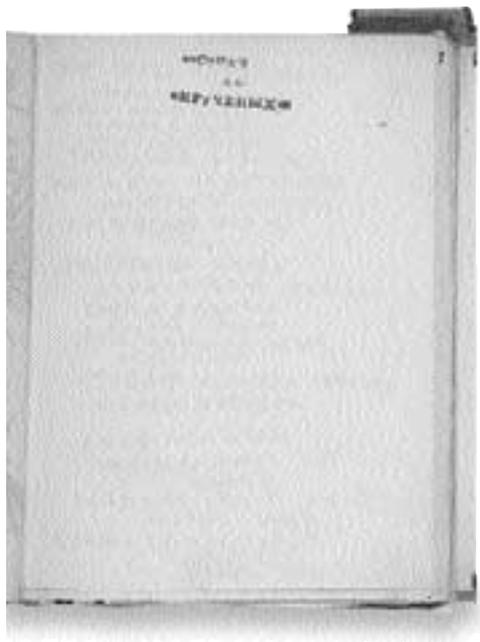
Figs. 4–6. **NATALIA GONCHAROVA, MIKHAIL LARIONOV, NIKOLAI ROGOVIN, AND VLADIMIR TATLIN.** Pages from three different copies of *Worldbackwards* by Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh. 1912. Rubber stamp and potato cut by Kruchenykh, approx. 7½ x 5½" (19 x 14 cm). Ed.: 220. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation

inked, and used like a stamp) might also vary. But most unexpectedly, even a simple, short text, such as the page "*Stikhi A. Kruchenykh*" (Poems by A. Kruchenykh),[14] varies widely in the Rothschild copies (figs. 4–6). Not only is the potato-cut *T* not always present,[15] but the stamps themselves have been composed with various upper and lower case letter combinations plus stars and other decorations, a time-consuming, unanticipated move away from mass production. And in one copy, the page is absent altogether. In other words, one must be careful about making any generalizations on the basis of a single copy of this work, since Kruchenykh has reintroduced the concept that each copy of a book will be unique.

A somewhat similar situation is present in the two editions of *Explodity* (the first and second editions appeared in the spring and fall, respectively, of 1913; pp. 72, 73). While the differences between copies of each edition are evidently fewer (however, fewer copies of each were available for comparison), differences between the two editions are of significance. The second edition is billed as "expanded," leading one to believe that the original contents remain, while additions have been made. In fact, a number of rubber-stamped texts have been dropped or replaced by others, either with different poems in the same medium or the same text in new lithographed versions by Rozanova.[16] Figs. 7 (first edition) and 8 (second edition) show corresponding rubber-stamped and lithographed pages, allowing one to test the hypothesis from "The Letter as Such" about words in two different scripts or typefaces having no resemblance to each other.[17] Heterogeneity is clearly the hallmark of these productions.

On the other hand, *Pomade* (1913; p. 67), while completely lithographed, adds another dimension of manual production by having its texts and illustrations (in some copies hand-colored by the artist) mounted on gold-leafed paper, making each page a framed print and creating an ironic contrast between the primitiveness of the script and drawing and the elegance of the presentation. It also allows us to examine another challenge to the Gutenberg legacy, namely, the matter of uniformity of letterforms. As noted above and illustrated in figs. 4–7, rubber-stamped pages had used a deliberately chaotic mix of letters and spacings.[18] *Pomade* demonstrates a similar effect in manuscript form. If *Old-Time Love* and *A Game in Hell* had been rather consistent in using either cursive or block letter forms, respectively,[19] the poems in *Pomade* freely mix the two in alternating lines and even within the same line. In fig. 9, for example, in the first line the first and third words are written in cursive, while the second word is all in block letters. Throughout the page, words in cursive alternate with words in block script in no observable pattern. There are even words in which the two scripts are mixed within the same word (e.g., *serdets* at the end of line eight, which changes scripts in the middle). A similar mixture of scripts was also used in *Half-Alive* (1913; p. 83). Such inconsistency would likely prompt a psychographologist to suggest that the writer was psychologically disturbed. And, in fact, several Russian commentators at the time indeed thought this was the case.[20]

As has been suggested in regard to several previous examples, Kruchenykh and his collaborators were continually exploring various possible relationships between text and drawing ("illustration" is perhaps too restrictive a term for what is going on here). On the one extreme, there might be no connection whatsoever between a given poem and the drawings that precede or

follow it in a book (we have seen that the order of pages can even vary); on the other end of the spectrum, as above examples have shown, text and drawing might share the same visual space, interpenetrate, or be shaped to each other, creating a closer bond between the two elements than is possible in letterpress printing combined with illustrations. Kovtun also points out that in many cases in the lithographed books the drawings are an integral part of the text: "One can see a new approach to illustration which consists in the fact that the artist has ceased to retell the text by means of drawing. The illustrations are not merely tied to the text—they develop and complete the poetic images or contrast with them. Therefore there is no illustrator in the usual sense in these collections: the artist has become the coauthor of the poet or prosaist."[21]

Pomade provides at least one example in which the drawing holds a hidden key to an interpretation of the poem, namely, the famous *zaum* poem *"Dyr bul shchyl"* and its accompanying Rayist drawing by Larionov (p. 67). The drawing conceals the figure of a nude woman with her legs spread out, and this substantiates an erotic decoding of the poem-triptych.[22]

In the years 1915–17 Kruchenykh, often in close collaboration with Olga Rozanova, explored several other options. In *A Little Duck's Nest . . . of Bad Words* (1913; pp. 76, 77) and *Te li le* (1914; pp. 84, 85) color came to the fore. In *A Little Duck's Nest,* Rozanova provided hand-coloring not only for the drawings, but also for the purely textual pages, creating a more harmonious and organic effect than the Cendrars and Delaunay-Terk *Transsibérien*. In *Te li le* even the words were produced in varicolored hectography (a process similar to mimeography). In *Transrational Boog* (1915; p. 82) a consistent and brilliant series of Cubist-style linocuts with a playing-card theme is interspersed with Kruchenykh's rubber-stamped texts, mostly in *zaum* and having no notable connection with the Rozanova works. This reverses the traditional pattern in which the text provides the coherent thread and the illustrations give visual realization to individual moments in a narration.

In *War* (1916; pp. 100–102), a letterpress table of contents lists not only the titles to Rozanova's woodcuts, but also provides *zaum* texts to go along with some of the Rozanova works. In other words, some of the poems appear only in the table of contents. Other poems, however, appear as separate woodcut text pages in the body of the book, and are listed in the table of contents only as "Poem by A. Kruchenykh." In addition, some of Rozanova's pictures include related texts introduced as "Excerpt from a Newspaper Bulletin," for which the picture is an illustration. Thus we have multiple forms of text-illustration combination and separation. In *Universal War* (1916; pp. 103–05), on the other hand, we have complete separation between text and illustration, a move within a single work from literature to the purely visual. The letterpress table of contents provides both titles and *zaum* texts for Kruchenykh's brilliant collages, which are totally textless and abstract. At the same time, we have a maximum contrast between typographic reproduction and handmade original collages, each of which is thereby slightly different.[23]

The book *1918* (1917; pp. 107–110), done in collaboration with Kirill Zdanevich, provides yet another variant. Its broad-page format allows the juxtaposition of what might be a full-page text with a full-page illustration (p. 109). Though the two are separated by the brown wrapping-paper background on which they are mounted, one can view them at the same time. The Cubist drawings and the angular script harmonize well, the thin lines of both seeming to be at once letters and abstract shapes. In a similar vein, pages in *Learn, Artists! Poems* (1917; p. 111) obliterate the distinction between writing and drawing. In fig. 10, individual letters become part of an abstract composition, while in fig. 11, the title and artist's signature become part of the rhythmic strokes of the drawing.

Kruchenykh's final assault on Gutenberg may have been particularly motivated by economic and physical necessity. The method of production that went into the works that Kruchenykh labeled "Autographic Books (Hectograph)," 1917–20[24] must have been dictated in large part by lack of both money and available printing resources. Essentially each was a booklet or chapbook consisting of a small set of pages (typically ten to twenty leaves) produced in various ways not requiring a printing press or lithography. Most often they are hectography, but there is also carbon copy, rubber stamp, typescript, and simple penciled manuscript. The paper used was whatever was at hand, ranging from stationery to lined school-notebook paper and graph paper. In other words, Kruchenykh basically made use of office supplies available to someone working as a draftsman for the Erzrum Railway, as he was at the time. Since hectography could create a goodly number of copies from a single original before the stencil wore out and the copies became too
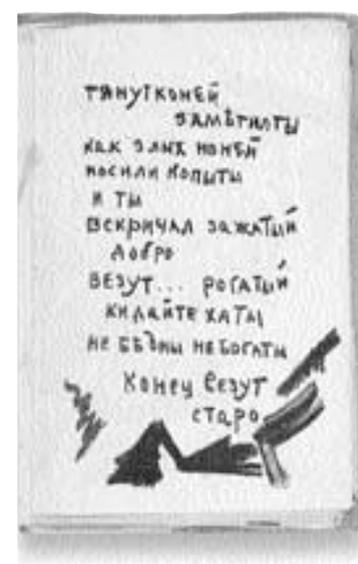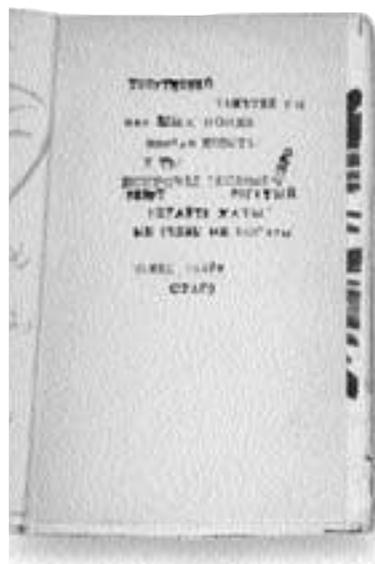
Figs. 7, 8. **NATAN AL'TMAN, NATALIA GONCHAROVA, NIKOLAI KUL'BIN, KAZIMIR MALEVICH, AND OLGA ROZANOVA**. Pages from two different copies of *Explodity* by Aleksei Kruchenykh. 1913. Rubber stamp by Kruchenykh (fig. 7); lithograph by Rozanova (fig. 8), 6 7/8 x 4 5/8" (17.4 x 11.8 cm) (irreg.). Ed.: 350 and 450 (2nd ed.). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation.
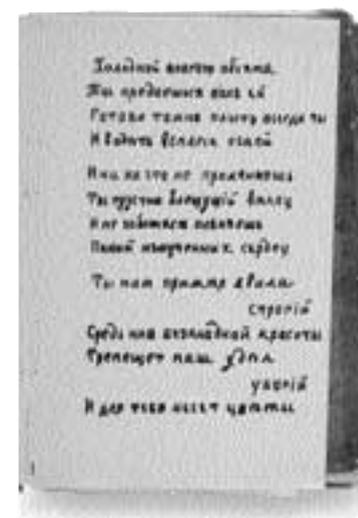

Fig. 9. **MIKHAIL LARIONOV.** *Pomade* by Aleksei Kruchenykh. 1913. Lithograph, 5 3/4 x 3 7/8" (14.7 x 9.9 cm). Ed.: 480. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation

Figs. 10, 11. **ALEKSEI KRUCHENYKH AND KIRILL ZDANEVICH. *Learn, Artists! Poems*** by Aleksei Kruchenykh. 1917. Lithograph by Kruchenykh (fig. 10) and Zdanevich (fig. 11), 9 5/16 x 7 1/4" (23.6 x 18.5 cm). Ed.: approx. 250. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation

light to be usable, pages produced this way turn up constantly. Carbon copies, of course, are limited to five to ten copies at most, the top one of which is the original manuscript and the backmost copies of which are faint and fuzzy to the point of illegibility.

Some of the items have printed covers evidently produced in Tiflis (Tbilisi) by 41° with the help of Il'ia Zdanevich and showing the influence of his typographic styling (*Melancholy in a Robe* [1919; p. 118], and the series *Zamaul* [1919; pp. 112, 113], numbered 1–4, and *Mutiny* [1920], numbered 1–10); but most have covers that are handmade. A complete set of the entire hectographic series has yet to be assembled, but analysis of a number of them has revealed that they have been organized in a unique way. The principle of somewhat haphazard assembly had been established already in *Worldbackwards*, but here it is taken much farther. In the Gutenberg context, one tends to assume that there is a distinction to be made between a book and a manuscript, that is, a manuscript exists in a single handwritten copy while a book exists in multiple (numerous) identical copies, and one copy of a work with a given title will have the same contents as another. What if a title was merely the rubric for an ad-hoc assemblage of miscellaneous pages from an available stock? What if many different titles contained a similar assemblage of pages from the same stock? What if only a single copy of a given title was made?

Another factor is that these essentially handmade booklets were most often composed of a set of leaves folded in half and bound in the middle by a thread. If the given leaf was hectographed to have two pages of text on it (left and right halves on one side of the leaf), then, depending on its position in the booklet, the right page might appear in recto followed by a blank

page, while the left page would appear in verso preceded by a blank page in recto, or vice versa. Moreover, the second page would have to appear in the sequence in the book dictated by the position of the first in the given assemblage. In addition, the kinds of texts so arranged might be quite various, from prose statements to abstract compositions. Rarely, however, was there anything we might be inclined to call an illustration. Whatever purely graphic elements there might be were usually limited to simple lines added to a composition of words or letters. Thus, as book productions these works are quite minimalist in essence. The result is an unprecedented degree of unpredictability in which pages of text, blank pages, manuscript, hectographs, carbons, etc., appear in haphazard order. Copies of some pages appear under many titles, while other pages are unique handwritten originals.

Let's briefly look at some examples. The Judith Rothschild Foundation collection contains three copies of *Melancholy in a Robe*, each of which is different. Two of the copies are nearly identical, except for a few pages that are hectographed in one, typewritten carbon in the other, and the pages are assembled in a slightly different order. The third copy (p. 118) is quite different and is mostly done in original pencil. It also includes a series of seven additional pages of quotes illustrating the hidden "anal eroticism" of Russian literature in various famous authors. These additional pages toward the beginning of the book provide page space for a similar number of additional texts symmetrically positioned later in the book, making this copy almost twice the size of the other two copies. This third copy is a second edition, made in 1919,[25] when Kruchenykh had gathered more quotes but evidently had run out of copies of many of the original pages and had to create new ones by hand.

With *Zamaul II* (1919) we have a more extreme example. As has been previously discussed and illustrated,[26] whole other books can appear as components of a given item. The case discussed was a copy of *Transrational Language* (1921) from the Institute of Russian Literature in St. Peterburg, which contained, in *matreshka*-like form (that is, in a form reminiscent of Russian wooden dolls nesting one inside the other) *From All Books* (1918), inside of which was *F/nagt* (1918), inside of which, at the center sideways and folded in half, was a typeset copy of the flyer "Declaration of Transrational Language." Again, given the nature of the situation we have discovered in these works, one must always be sure to specify precisely which copy of a title one is referring to, since other copies are likely to differ significantly.[27] Such is the case with *Zamaul II*. Like the copy of *Transrational Language* just described, the copy of *Zamaul II* in the Rothschild Foundation collection opens with the title page of *From All Books*, but thereafter follow pages entirely different from those in the *Zaum* copy. And the next layer of the *matreshka* is not *F/nagt*, but a complete copy of *Kachildaz* (1918; pp. 114, 115), an entirely different work,[28] but there is no printed "Declaration." On the other hand, a second copy[29] of *Zamaul II* (both have the same typeset cover[30]

so one would expect them to have the same contents) has no reference to *From All Books* but some of the same pages as the first copy, though each copy also has pages the other one does not have. However, the core is once again a complete copy of *F/nagt* (with the one rubber-stamped page replaced by a handwritten carbon copy), in the middle of which is a page with the hectographed text "*Chardzhuinyi/A. Kruchenykh*" (From Chardzhui/A. Kruchenykh), something none of the other copies have.

If all this sounds confusing and hard to keep track of, it is. Gone is the sense that any of these assemblages form anything like an intentionally organized unity. One would be on very shaky ground indeed, if one were to attempt an interpretation based on the order or content of the pages gathered under a given title. At best, one might comment on individual pages as units. Admittedly, many of the pages are similar, consisting of a few letters or *zaum* words variously positioned in combination with a few straight or curved lines. Some pages have only lines, some only words. In any case, this reduces the nature of the book in Kruchenykh's hands to a minimal level: a group of pages bound together on the left and given a title.

Further than this Kruchenykh did not go, however. He did not challenge the codex format (though he roughed its edges a bit), and he did not turn the book into a book object, as has happened in more recent decades in the West and in Russia.[31] For Kruchenykh the book remained an object one could hold, turn the pages of, and read at least on an elementary level. Nevertheless he challenged nearly all the other expectations we have about the nature of books.

In the context of a conceptual framework set up by Walter Benjamin in 1936, we can say that Kruchenykh confronted the issue of "art in the age of mechanical reproduction"[32] in an original way. Kruchenykh attempted to dismantle a legacy that had been in place for a lot longer than photography and film, which were Benjamin's chief concern. But some of the same rules apply: "That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. . . . the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence."[33] Kruchenykh instead exploded the Gutenberg tradition from within. In the disguise of a profoundly reproductive medium, he created books that were in fact unique. In contrast to obviously and intentionally unique book works, Kruchenykh's works have the appearance of multiplicity; and in contrast to elegant *livres d'artistes* with hand-coloring, etc., Kruchenykh's works have the appearance of sloppiness and disorder. Their aura as artworks is paradoxically hidden in an overtly anti-market stance that makes them all the more valuable today.[34]

At the same time, Kruchenykh was one of the early pioneers in returning to us the physicality and activeness of the book and of writing: "Writing can't be an object because the world is a world of verbs and to write is a thing that someone does. Writing is an action in the world. Writing is the mind, any mind with language in its mind, and active in the world."[35] Writing is action, drawing is action, writing is drawing. Restoration of the physical presence of the book and the text is a major aspect of European modernism, as Jerome McGann's *Black Riders* and others have argued in recent years.[36] Kruchenykh shared "the view that meaning invests a work at the level of its physical appearance and linguistic signifiers."[37]

In a discussion of Emily Dickinson's manuscript fascicles with their lineation, various scripts, and variant readings, McGann notes: "In a poetry that has imagined and executed itself as a scriptural rather than a typographical event, all these matters fall under the work's initial horizon of finality."[38] Hence the argument applied to Dickinson and others applies to Kruchenykh as well: the scripted and hectographed (or lithographed or rubber-stamped or whatever) original version of a poem is its true embodiment, and facsimile reproduction, rather than typographic presentation, is what is required.[39] If, as Ronald Silliman puts it, "Gutenberg's moveable type erased gesturality from the graphemic dimension of books,"[40] then Kruchenykh was one of the modernists who restored gesture to the text.

By dismantling the Gutenberg legacy, by opening the space of the page and the space of the book, by returning to the book its gestural physicality, by deconstructing its rigid linearity, Kruchenykh opened the mind to the post-Gutenberg era that is upon us.

NOTES

1 This is the title of a collection of articles about him, *Buka russkoi literatury*, edited by Sergei Tret'iakov in 1923.

2 For a discussion of *zaum* in general and of this poem in greater detail see Gerald Janecek, *Zaum: The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1996).

3 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (New York: Signet, 1969), p. 28.

4 Ibid., p. 39.

5 Perhaps this occurred in Russia because, as McLuhan points out (ibid., pp. 30–31), at the time it was still a "profoundly oral" society where eighty percent of the population was illiterate. As he further observes: "Just in the degree to which we penetrate the lowest layers of non-literate awareness we encounter the most advanced and sophisticated ideas of twentieth-century art and science" (p. 37).

6 Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" [1924], in *Collected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), vol. 1, p. 320.

7 V. Khlebnikov and A. Kruchenykh, "The Letter as Such," in Anna Lawton and Herbert Eagle, eds., *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes, 1912–1928* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 63.

8 Ibid.

9 For instance, Dr. Herry O. Teltscher on the first page of his book *Handwriting— Revelation of Self: A Source Book of Psychographology* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1971), makes the following statements: "Handwriting is a permanent record of personality, a mirror in which are reflected character traits, abilities, emotions; orientation toward the environment and people in general; intellect; approach to tasks; values; strong points and weak ones; even past experiences and present state of development; the amount of physical strength and resilience—all are set down by the stroke of the pen. . . . Samples from school days bear little resemblance to present-day writing. Similarly, a letter during a happy, healthy period looks quite different from one that was penned when the writer was sad, depressed, or ill. . . . The hand merely holds the pen or the pencil; it is the brain that directs the movements of the hand, which is responsible for the manner in which the letters are formed or the lines are spaced."

10 While it is clear that Kruchenykh was the main moving force behind these lithographed books, there is good evidence that often the artists, rather than Kruchenykh himself, were responsible for scripting the texts. This accounts for a certain consistency in the look of texts illustrated by Larionov (*Old-Time Love*, *Pomade*, *Half-Alive*), as contrasted to those illustrated by Goncharova (*A Game in Hell* [1st ed.], *Desert Dwellers*), Nikolai Kul'bin (*Explodity*, *Te li le*), or Rozanova (*A Little Duck's Nest . . . of Bad Words, Te li le*). The manifesto "The Letter as Such" allows for, even encourages, this: "Of course, it is not mandatory that the wordwright be also the copyist of a handwritten book: indeed, it would be better if the wordwright entrusted this job to an artist" (Lawton and Eagle, eds., *Russian Futurism*, p. 64).

11 A set of facsimile reproductions of six manuscript books produced by Kruchenykh (*Worldbackwards*, *Hermits*, *Half-Alive*, *Explodity*, *A Game in Hell* [2nd ed.], and *Selected Poems*, with Khlebnikov) was issued by La Hune (Paris) and Avant-Garde (Moscow) in 1993, edited by Nina Gurianova, using copies of the books in the Central State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow. For further discussion and illustrations of Kruchenykh's manuscript books see Vladimir Poliakov, *Knigi russkogo futurizma* (Moscow: Gileia, 1998), esp. pp. 200–27.

12 E. F. Kovtun, *Russkaia futuristicheskaia kniga* (Moscow: Izd. Kniga, 1989), p. 79.

13 These differences had been mentioned already in 1928 by Kruchenykh's friend and supporter Andrei Shemshurin: "It often happened that one and the same publication had all the copies completely varied." Shemshurin explained that Kruchenykh resorted to publishing by hand in part for lack of financial means to produce printed books, in part because printers refused to publish such "rubbish." A. Shemshurin, "Slishkom zemnoi chelovek," in S. Sukhoparov, ed., *Aleksei Kruchenykh v svidetel'stvakh sovremennikov* (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1994), p. 62.

14 In some copies these introductory pages are misplaced and what follows is someone else's work, or there are two such pages in a row.

15 The copy reproduced in the Gurianova set (see note 11) has a potato cut *T*, as does one of the copies in the Rothschild Foundation.

16 For more details see Gerald Janecek, *The Look of Russian Literature: Avant-Garde Visual Experiments, 1900–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 94–96; and Poliakov, *Knigi russkogo futurizma*, pp. 254–55.

17 See a similar juxtaposition in Susan P. Compton, *The World Backwards: Russian Futurist Books 1912–16* (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), p. 77, with accompanying discussion.

18 One detail to note is that letters that were positioned above the baseline of the given word are only those Cyrillic letters that are invertible (*o, i, n*) and that this effect was easy to produce in a rubber-stamp kit. It merely involved inverting a lower-case letter in the composing stick; no special spacing devices were needed, as they would have been for other letters.

19 It should be noted that a few pages in the first edition of *A Game in Hell* use cursive script instead of its prevailing block lettering.

20 On this see Janecek, *Zaum*, pp. 153–61.

21 Kovtun, *Russkaia futuristicheskaia kniga*, pp. 127, 130.

22 For a detailed interpretation of the poem see Janecek, *Zaum*, pp. 49–69.

23 For a detailed interpretation

of this work see Juliette Stapanian, "*Universal War 'b'* and the Development of *Zaum'*: Abstraction Towards a New Pictorial and Literary Realism," *Slavic and East European Journal* 29, no. 1 (1985): 18–38.

24 A. Kruchenykh, *Zaumnyi iazyk u Seifullinnoi, Vs. Ivanova, Leonova, Babelia, I. Sel'vinskogo, A. Veselogo i dr.* (Moscow: VSP, 1925), p. 61.

25 See Tat'iana Nikol'skaia, *"Fantasticheskii gorod": Russkaia kul'turnaia zhizn' v Tbilisi (1917–1921)* (Moscow: Piataia strana, 2000), pp. 81, 124.

26 Janecek, *Look*, pp. 108–11. These pages also provide a complete reproduction of one hectographic book, *F/nagt* (1918), fig. 89. Additional illustrations and interpretation of pages from these works can be found in my *Zaum*, pp. 235–50.

27 For instance, the Foundation's copy of *Zaum* differs significantly from the copy just described.

28 A copy of *Kachildaz* with the same pages as found in this copy of *Zamaul II* is located in the Institute of Russian Literature in St. Petersburg.

29 This copy belongs to a private collector, who graciously allowed me to obtain a color copy of it.

30 Very likely the printed covers were in greatest supply and had to be filled with varying pages, of which there were significantly fewer copies.

31 For a recent collection of articles on the nature of the book see Jerome Rothenberg and Steven Clay, eds., *A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections About the Book & Writing* (New York: Granary Books, 2000). For a discussion of Russian book objects see M. Karasik, ed., *Bukhkamera ili Kniga i stikhii* (St. Petersburg: Izd. M. K., 1997).

32 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 217–51.

33 Ibid., p. 221.

34 Their current marketability can be measured by rising prices as the uniqueness of each copy becomes increasingly evident. It can also be measured by the growing occurrence of forgery. Paradoxically, the crude handwork involved increases opportunities to falsify. If each copy is different, then the fact that a newly "discovered" copy is different from a copy of known authenticity might be seen as a plus, not a minus.

35 Alan Davies, *Signage* (New York: Roof Books, 1987), p. 132, as quoted in Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 138.

36 In addition to books already referred to, a few others to mention are Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Steve McCaffery and bpNichol, *Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book-Machine. The Collected Research Reports of the Toronto Research Group, 1973–1982* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1992); Johanna Drucker, *Figuring the Word: Essays on Books, Writing, and Visual Poetics* (New York: Granary Books, 1998) and her essay "Visual Performance of the Poetic Text" in Charles Bernstein, ed., *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 131–61; and Jay Sanders and Charles Bernstein, *Poetry Plastique* (New York: Marianne Boesky Gallery and Granary Books, 2001).

37 McGann, *Black Riders*, p. 12.

38 Ibid., p. 38.

39 Vladimir Markov's anthology, A. E. Kruchenykh, *Izbrannoe* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1973), was a pioneering event in this area by providing all the selections in photocopy form. The facsimile set of works edited by Nina Gurianova (see note 11) is another valuable step which adds scale, color, and variation of paper type. Notably, Kruchenykh's poem-triptych "*Dyr bul shchyl*" is given in photocopy of the original with translation in Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris, eds., *Poems for the Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 232–33. However, the Kruchenykh selections in V. N. Al'fonsov and S. R. Krasitskii, eds., *Poeziia russkogo futurizma* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1999), pp. 206–37, have all been reset in type, though a few items by other poets are given in photocopy. Krasitskii's new edition of the collected poetry, Aleksei Kruchenykh, *Stikhotvoreniia, Poemy, Romany, Opera* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2001), is also entirely typeset.

40 Ronald Silliman, *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books, 1995), p. 41.