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The Shpetian Circle in the Work on GAKhN's Encyclopedia

Abstract: The article examines a group of philosophical entries in GAKhN's *Encyclopedia of Artistic Terminology*. It focuses on authors associated with Gustav Shpet's intellectual milieu and analyses the theoretical orientation they introduced into the Encyclopedia. The study reconstructs three conceptual domains through which this orientation becomes visible. A phenomenological perspective appears in the critique of psychologism and in the analysis of aesthetic acts such as contemplation and fantasy, which opens onto the problem of myth as a broader configuration of consciousness. A hermeneutic approach become visible in reflections on interpretation, tradition, and the internal organisation of meaning, articulated through Shpet's concept of inner form. Finally, the semiotic entries on sign, meaning, and sense clarify the distinctions between these concepts and their role in the analysis of aesthetic experience.

Keywords: early Soviet aesthetics, phenomenology, hermeneutics, semiotics, inner form

The *Encyclopedia of Artistic Terminology* was conceived as a collective project, bringing together authors from different disciplinary backgrounds. At the same time, its intellectual focus is clearly associated with Gustav Shpet, who acted not merely as an institutional organiser, but as the project's ideological inspirer and driving force. Although Shpet did not author any entries himself, he formulated the program of the Encyclopedia, defined its conceptual orientation, and prepared the lists of "slovniki" ("key terms"). In addition, the philosophical section contains a considerable number of entries written by authors associated with Shpet's intellectual milieu (the so-called *Shpetian circle*), which make it possible to trace how Shpet's philosophical agenda guided the work on the Encyclopedia.

This paper does not aim to reconstruct a unified theory shared by all contributors or to present the Encyclopedia as a coherent philosophical system: the articles are marked by internal differences, shifts in emphasis, and uneven treatment of key issues. These features, however, do not exclude a recognizable conceptual design, reflected in recurring ways of posing aesthetic problems. From this perspective, the Encyclopedia can be approached as a theoretically motivated project that differs significantly from established models of encyclopedic writing. Instead of focusing on the historical reconstruction of concepts, many entries advance explicit methodological and conceptual principles, which suggests that the Encyclopedia was intended not merely as a reference work, but as a space for articulating a specific approach to aesthetic theory.

To substantiate this claim, the article examines three interconnected conceptual fields that organise the philosophical section of the Encyclopedia: phenomenological analyses of aesthetic experience, hermeneutic models of understanding and tradition, and semiotic distinctions between sign, meaning, and sense. Examining these domains makes it possible to describe the Encyclopedia as a project shaped by a shared theoretical program associated with Shpet's intellectual leadership.

Phenomenological Tendencies: The Critique of Psychologism, Contemplation, and Mythical Consciousness

Gustav Shpet can hardly be described as an orthodox phenomenologist (as will be shown below, hermeneutic interests emerge relatively early in his work) – he was nevertheless the first to introduce Edmund Husserl's philosophy into the Russian context, which makes it reasonable to expect that phenomenological motifs would play a significant role within his intellectual circle. Phenomenology, however, functions within the Encyclopedia not as a doctrinal framework, but as a conceptual resource selectively appropriated in response to specific theoretical problems. The sequence of articles discussed here moves from an exposure of the limits of psychologistic approaches in the entries "Vpechatlenie" ("Impression") and, most explicitly, "Vchuvstvovanie" ("Feeling-into"), to the analysis of acts and modes of consciousness in "Sozertsanie" ("Contemplation") and "Fantaziia" ("Fantasy"), and finally toward discussing forms of experience beyond individual acts in "Mif" ("Myth").

In this context, the “psychological” entries emerge as methodologically decisive. “Vpechatlenie” by Apollinariia Solov’eva and “Vchuvstvovanie” by Nikolai Zhinkin mark the initial point at which aesthetic experience is thematised in psychological terms, and thereby bring into view a fundamental difficulty inherent in such approaches. In both cases, aesthetic experience is reduced to the sphere of subjectivity, being located on the side of the subject in “Vpechatlenie” and projected onto the object in “Vchuvstvovanie”. Yet what is of interest in these entries is not their positive claims but the methodological problem they make explicit: the substitution of the description of aesthetic givenness with psychological explanation.

In “Vpechatlenie”, aesthetic experience is approached through the notion of impression as a subjective and affectively coloured response. Although the article itself presents this perspective in a largely descriptive and non-polemical manner, it nevertheless reveals the limitations of psychological explanation. Impression is described as an important moment of aesthetic experience, elevated in some aesthetic doctrines to the principle of artistic formation (Solov’eva 1928b: 69–70). Within this framework, the aesthetic tends to be articulated primarily in terms of the subject’s emotional state, while the aesthetic phenomenon itself recedes into the background.

In “Vchuvstvovanie”, this perspective is reversed: the focus shifts to the perceived object, as aesthetic experience is described through the projection of the perceiving subject’s feelings onto it. The article, however, contains an explicit critique of this approach. The first objection concerns the explanatory principle on which the *Einfühlung* theory relies: imitation, the tendency to reproduce a perceived movement or expression (for instance, yawning when seeing someone else yawn). The second objection targets the priority of explanation over description: interpretation is introduced too early, before the aesthetic phenomenon has been adequately described (Zhinkin 1928b: 72–74). This insistence on the primacy of description already points beyond psychological aesthetics toward a phenomenological reorientation.

This methodological perspective receives its positive formulation in the entry “Sozertsanie” (“Contemplation”). For Alexander Akhmanov, this is not a first encounter with the problem of contemplation. He had already examined the question of consciousness and intellectual intuition in detail in his study *Intellektual’naia intuitsiia i ésteticheskoe vospriiatie* (*Intellectual Intuition and Aesthetic Perception*), written between 1923 and 1925 for a volume prepared

by the Kvartet (Quartet), a group of Shpet's students, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Shpet's philosophical work. In this text, Akhmanov introduces the concept of contemplation in order to show how ideal content becomes present to consciousness. The aesthetic is thereby approached as a specific mode of givenness through which the ideal is rendered accessible (for more see Akhmanov 2000: 69–91).

While the problem is not new for Akhmanov, the Encyclopedia entry proves crucial for the project as a whole, first of all, because it introduces a phenomenological register into the Encyclopedia in an explicit manner: the concept of contemplation is defined through the Husserlian determination of an act in which the object is given as present, that is, as intentionally fulfilled rather than merely meant through a representative sign (Akhmanov 1923: 237). On this basis, Akhmanov insists that the aesthetic cannot be exhausted by a sensuous fact, nor explained through psychological mechanisms that associate sensuous representations with the object. What is at stake is not the exclusion of sensuous representation as such, but the rejection of its explanatory privilege: the meaningful and expressive layer of the aesthetic object is treated as a given objectivity, rather than as a product of associative consciousness or empathic projection (*ibid.*: 241–242).

In this respect, the entry does not introduce anything new by rejecting the reduction of the aesthetic. Such distinctions belong to the standard repertoire of phenomenological approaches to art and aesthetic experience (for instance, Roman Ingarden also insists that the work of art cannot be reduced to perceptual impressions, imaginative contents, or subjective experiences; see Ingarden 1972: 3–17). What proves more distinctive in Akhmanov's treatment, however, is the way this phenomenological framework opens onto the problem of fantasy. Akhmanov argues that fantasy is not opposed to contemplation, but extends it, functioning as a non-sensuous mode of intuitive fulfillment in aesthetic experience (Akhmanov 1923: 242). In this way, the entry does not merely delimit contemplation against sensuous fact and representation, but gestures toward fantasy as a specific intentional act through which the aesthetic acquires its distinctive mode of presence.

Nikolai Zhinkin's "Fantaziia" ("Fantasy") does not simply extend phenomenological discussions of aesthetic consciousness; it approaches fantasy as an autonomous intentional mode and sets out to clarify the conditions under which it can function as such. Fantasy is treated as a form of intuition that nei-

ther posits being nor relies on prior givenness. This framework allows Zhinkin to understand fantasy as its own mode of intentional fulfillment, rather than as a deficient form of perception or thinking. Neutrality (the fact that fantasy presents objects without treating them as real or unreal), is therefore introduced as the main condition of fantasy: fantasy is intuitive and imagistic, yet it does not assert reality in the way perception does, nor does it submit to truth conditions as thinking does. On this basis, Zhinkin shows how fantasy can constitute objects of experience without affirming their existence. For Zhinkin, this explains why fantasy is productive: freed from empirical constraint and logical obligation, it can generate new configurations of meaning rather than merely reproduce given ones (Zhinkin 1928a: 285–287).

The most far-reaching implication of the entry lies in Zhinkin's concept of iterative fantasy (in Husserlian terms), where fantasy itself becomes the object of a further fantasizing act. This structure accounts for the layered constitution of artistic worlds – legendary, mythical, or fictive – experienced as internally coherent despite their unreality. Rather than producing illusion, iterative fantasy organises multiple levels of neutralisation within a single intentional complex (ibid.: 292–293).

At this point, “Fantaziia” prepares the ground for the problem of myth. The stratified structure of fantasy already points beyond isolated imaginative acts toward a more comprehensive configuration of consciousness. It is therefore unsurprising that the entry “Mif” (“Myth”) in the Encyclopedia is likewise authored by Zhinkin.

In “Myf”, Zhinkin shifts the analysis from the internal dynamics of imaginative acts to a symbolic configuration of consciousness. Drawing on Ernst Cassirer's account of myth, he treats mythical consciousness as operating on the same experiential material as scientific knowledge while organizing it according to a distinct internal logic. This logic suspends the strict separation between image and thing, representation and reality, causal relation and effective force (Zhinkin 1924: 1–3).

Immediately after this, Zhinkin explicitly distances himself from Cassirer's position. While accepting the comparative framework that places myth alongside science, he rejects Cassirer's tendency to treat myth primarily as an archaic or pre-scientific stage of cognition. For Zhinkin, such a view unduly narrows the scope of myth. Myth, understood as a form of worldview, is not confined to early or “primitive” cultures but remains operative in modernity.

Differences between so-called primitive and modern cultures are therefore to be sought not in the form of myth-making as such, but in the content of the myths produced within specific historical contexts (ibid.: 3–4).

The same argument is articulated in his unpublished 1924 essay “Forma mificheskogo soznaniia” (“The Form of Mythical Consciousness”), where he also critically engages with Cassirer. Here, Zhinkin appears to formulate for the first time the idea that myth, astrology, and science should not be understood as mutually exclusive forms of cognition, but as distinct cultural formations coexisting within the same historical horizon. Moreover, myth is also brought into close proximity with worldview (for more see Zhinkin 2023: 343–350).

Zhinkin’s critique of Cassirer proves particularly productive for the analysis of art. Approached as a specific type of worldview, myth can be seen as shaping the internal relations within an artistic work. It can help explain a unified horizon of intelligibility within which the elements of an artistic world – figures, events, images, and value structures – are mutually related. Their significance thus need not require external justification, since it is secured by the internal logic of the world itself. This applies not only to narrative coherence, but also to the stylistic stability of the artistic world as a whole, for example when the elements of a work are stylistically disparate. Through such mythic grounding, the work does not disintegrate into a mere sequence of episodes or effects. The reader or viewer is thereby able to recognise the artistic world as remaining “the same” throughout the work, even in the absence of strict compositional symmetry.

In this perspective, myth also allows an artistic world to be experienced as possessing a certain degree of ontological density. The world of the work presents itself as a mode of experience in which elements and relations carry a particular force and conviction. In this qualified sense, one may speak of an artistic world as an expressive whole constituted through its internal relations and effects.

Hermeneutics and the Internal Organisation of Meaning

Shpet’s hermeneutic orientation does not arise suddenly in his later writings; it develops gradually out of the problems he identifies in early phenomenology. His turn toward hermeneutics can already be traced in 1914, when he publishes

Iavlenie i smysl (Appearance and Sense) – a work that marks his first systematic attempt to address phenomenological questions in Russian. In *Iavlenie i smysl*, Shpet critically examines Husserl's understanding of sense, arguing that Husserl tends to treat it primarily as meaning. While acknowledging the legitimacy of this usage in grammatical and semantic contexts, Shpet insists that in relation to things, ideas, and objects, sense cannot be reduced to signification (i.e., “meaning” in the linguistic-semantic sense) and must be understood as an inner, ontological articulation of the object (Shpet 1914: 197–198).

Alexander Haardt offers a detailed analysis of how Shpet develops Husserl's concept of noematic sense into the principle of inner sense. In his reading of Ideas I, Shpet argues that the intuitive fulfillment of the noematic core (*noematischer Kern*) – that is, the object's being given in concrete intuitive experience – does not yet provide the concreteness required for an adequate account of meaning. Instead, Shpet shifts the focus toward “polnota smysla” (“fullness of sense”) as the comprehensive unity of an object's meanings. Building on this analysis, Shpet reinterprets Husserl's “phenomenology of reason” (*Phänomenologie der Vernunft*) as a return to the question of objectivity grounded in “razumnaia motivirovannost'” (“rational motivation”). While physical objects are necessarily given through an infinite series of profiles, their essence is oriented toward an ideal of complete manifestation conceived as an “idea” in the Kantian sense. Adequate givenness thus becomes accessible only through reference to an object's “inner sense”, understood as the central source of its unity, so that the object functions as a sign of its inner meaning (Haardt 1992: 105–108).

The understanding of sense as an immanent structure of the object anticipates Shpet's later account of *inner form*. Shpet's philosophical writings repeatedly return to the notion of inner form, which eventually becomes a signature of his broader intellectual project. He uses this concept to explain how a word acquires “predmetnoe soderzhanie” (“object-directed content”) and thus becomes a bearer of meaning. Inner form here is neither a technical linguistic label nor a metaphor of a hidden meaning, but a way of designating the structural organisation of semantic content that makes a word – or any other cultural phenomenon, including a work of art – available for understanding.

The concept of inner form in early twentieth-century humanities is, however, methodologically problematic for both the literary and linguistic contexts in which it appears. It is consistently tied to the promise of whole-

ness: inner form was expected to counteract the perceived fragmentation of analytic approaches and to present the object as a unified whole (Axer 2022: 197–198). This promise carries “ein metaphysischer Überschuss” (“a metaphysical surplus”), insofar as the unity it posits is often grounded in ideal notions such as idea, vitality, or life (ibid.: 198–199). Another problem concerns the way in which the orientation toward larger ideal entities tended to push questions of form into the background, allowing inner form to blur the distinction between form and content in favor of a spiritualised notion of content – a shift that made the concept susceptible to more or less subtle forms of political appropriation (ibid.: 199–200).

Shpet’s use of inner form shows similar conceptual difficulties. His insistence on inner form as the structural organisation of “predmetnoe soderzhanie” retains the traditional expectation that there must be some unifying factor binding elements together. Although Shpet distances himself from metaphysical speculations in the traditional sense, his approach nonetheless carries its own version of the metaphysical surplus, most notably in the assumption that meaning possesses an intrinsic, internally articulated configuration prior to its material (linguistic) realisation. A further difficulty becomes visible in his treatment of form and content: Shpet insists on their interdependence and describes content as a series of “lower” forms in relation to a “higher” one (Shpet 1989: 424). On the one hand, this is theoretically productive, because it rejects a rigid binary between form and content; on the other hand, this model reproduces the same collapse of levels that historically troubled the concept of inner form and once again subordinates form to content.

Taken together, these difficulties reveal a paradox: Shpet seeks to refine the notion of inner form, yet his approach remains marked by the same tensions that shaped its earlier uses.

This methodological fragility becomes especially clear in attempts to apply the notion of inner form to particular artistic genres. In Boris Gornung’s article “Dramaturgiia” (“Dramaturgy”), for example, inner form is invoked to describe the structural and ontological layers of drama, which results in the conceptual strain produced by the expanded methodological use of the notion.

At first sight, it is difficult to tell what Gornung intends by the term *inner form*; the density with which he introduces key notions leaves the meaning of the term unclear. As his argument unfolds, however, it becomes apparent that he uses inner form to refer to what he elsewhere calls the formal-onto-

logical layer of drama – the level at which drama presents itself as a distinct artistic object (Gornung 1928a: 111). When Gornung turns to the analysis of inner form, he is therefore not addressing stylistic or generic features, but the basic structure of drama itself. This structure comprises two interrelated moments: the “predmetnaia forma” (“objective form”), understood as “koliziia” (“collision”), the principle that organises the action, and the “soderzhatel'nost” (“content”), which may take the shape of either a “drama polozheniia” (“situation-based drama”) or a “drama kharaktera” (“character-based drama”). Taken together, these two moments constitute the inner form of drama, the internal structure of the dramatic work independent of genre classifications or literary history (ibid.: 111–112).

Once this structure is laid out, however, a methodological tension in Gornung's use of the term comes into view. Because he applies inner form to both the “predmetnaia forma” that drives the action and the “soderzhatel'nost” revealed through that action, he makes the term bear too many different structural and semantic roles at once. It comes to name simultaneously the structural organisation of the drama, its semantic orientation, the mode of its ontological presence, and even the trajectory of its unfolding. In concentrating these different levels into a single explanatory category, Gornung reproduces a familiar difficulty: inner form drifts toward a content-centred account of dramatic structure, in which form is continually pulled back into what is taken to be the drama's “deeper” semantic core. This is precisely what enables the term to shift between naming the conflict that organises the action and identifying the situation or character disclosed through that action, leaving the distinction between structure and meaning insufficiently clear.

The point becomes especially evident when Gornung turns to “koli-ziia”. Instead of treating koliziia as a strictly structural principle, he allows it to absorb functions that belong to quite different analytical levels. Koliziia becomes, at once, the mechanism that governs the dramatic progression, the form in which the work's content “soderzhatel'nost” takes shape, and the structural configuration through which the drama's artistic object – situation or character – comes into view (ibid.: 111–112). Under this pressure, the concept ceases to operate as a structural category in the strict sense: it begins to serve as the hinge through which the drama's semantic and formal dimensions are continually folded back into one another. What drops out in this arrange-

ment is a stable distinction between the structure that enables the action and the meaning that the action discloses.

For all these difficulties, Gornung's approach has a genuine interpretive strength. By insisting that the drama must be understood through the interplay of conflict and content, he rejects purely formalist accounts that reduce dramatic structure to external compositional schemes. What he captures, instead, is the sense that dramatic form emerges only in relation to what the action discloses – whether a situation or a character – and that structure is inseparable from the dynamics of disclosure that define the artwork as a dramatic object. This intuition allows him to articulate aspects of dramatic organisation that would remain invisible in a strictly morphological or stylistic analysis and brings into view a level of structural coherence that is irreducible to genre categories or historical typologies.

At the same time, the very features that make Gornung's account compelling also point toward its inherent instability. Because his reading ties the drama's structural unity so closely to the processes through which its meaning is disclosed, the concept of inner form begins to slip between the levels it is meant to distinguish. The result is a framework that illuminates crucial aspects of dramatic construction, yet strains under the weight of the functions it is asked to perform.

Shpet's influence within the institutional projects of the State Academy for Artistic Research (GAKhN) was not confined to the concept of inner form – it can also be seen in the way hermeneutics as a general theoretical framework is presented in the Encyclopedia. The entry "Germenevtika" ("Hermeneutics"), written by Apollinariia Solov'eva, marks the degree to which the concept had become part of GAKhN's theoretical vocabulary.

The entry stands in marked contrast to contemporary philosophical dictionaries of its time. For example, in Rudolf Eisler's *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe* (*Dictionary of Philosophical Terms*, 1904), the entry "Hermeneutik" is reduced to a single line (Eisler 1910: 188). By contrast, Solov'eva's article offers a historically extensive treatment that traces the development of hermeneutics from classical and biblical exegesis through Renaissance philology and nineteenth-century scholarship (Solov'eva 1928a: 77–81). The very presence of such a comprehensive entry indicates that hermeneutics was understood as far more than a marginal interpretive technique.

Another advocate of the hermeneutic tradition within the Encyclopedia is Boris Gornung, whose entry “Dramaturgiia” was discussed above; here we turn to his article “Vliianie”. Whereas Solov’eva’s entry introduces hermeneutics into the terminological apparatus of the Encyclopedia, Gornung’s work shows how it can be applied in practice.

Before turning to the article “Vliianie” (“Influence”), it is important to note that Gornung had already formulated a clearly hermeneutic orientation in his earlier writings. In his programmatic essay published in *Hermes* (1922), he explicitly stresses the need for both philosophical and “philological-hermeneutic” interpretation of art: «При таком положении новых движений исключительную важность приобретает как философское и филолого-герменевтическое истолкование художественных фактов, так и культурно-историческое их освещение»¹ (Gornung 2001: 207). In this context, hermeneutics is presented not as an abstract theory but as a practical method for understanding new artistic movements.

Gornung’s entry in the Encyclopedia does not aim to define the term; instead, it uses it as a point of departure for reconsidering the methodology of how relations between artworks are understood. The article’s opening gesture – surveying the contradictory and often undisciplined uses of “influence” – serves primarily to show that the term, as inherited from nineteenth-century scholarship, is conceptually unstable (Gornung 1928b: 54–56).

For Gornung, this points to a deeper problem: the absence of a coherent framework for understanding relations between artistic phenomena. His critical target is the genetic model, which treats influence as a chain of borrowings: genetic explanations presuppose criteria for establishing “who influenced whom”, yet such criteria are in principle unattainable. Even the most careful reconstruction of sources can yield only probabilistic claims. Crucially, he argues that genetic analysis misunderstands the nature of artistic meaning by reducing interpretive structures to biographical or historical mechanics (*ibid.*: 58–59).

The decisive step of the article is, therefore, a conceptual shift: influence should not be treated as a causal relation but as a hermeneutic condition. In

1 “Under such conditions of emerging movements, both the philosophical and philological-hermeneutic interpretation of artistic facts and their cultural-historical clarification acquire exceptional importance.” Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are mine. – A. A.

this reformulated sense, influence designates the context within which an artistic phenomenon becomes intelligible. Rather than asking “from where” a motif or form originates, the historian must ask: within what historically constituted horizon does this phenomenon take on meaning? With this move, Gornung aligns the study of influence with the hermeneutic model of understanding where context is not a background but the very medium through which meaning is disclosed (ibid.: 59–63).

This reframing leads to the second analytical claim: tradition becomes the primary object of analysis. Influence is no longer the transmission of discrete elements but the ongoing reinterpretation of prior artistic material. The historian’s task is to reconstruct the constellation of earlier works, styles, and ideas that a new artistic phenomenon presupposes as the conditions of its intelligibility. At the same time, factual connections between authors are secondary to the intellectual atmosphere of an epoch. This is demonstrated by an example: even in the absence of any direct influence, Mallarmé’s poetics can be placed within an interpretive horizon that includes, on the one hand, late Roman poetry, Gongorism, and the Lyon school, and on the other, the reception of Hegel in French thought (ibid.).

What the article ultimately proposes is a methodological shift: the study of influence becomes the preliminary stage of understanding any artistic phenomenon. Instead of a positivist search for origins, the historian reconstructs the interpretive horizon that makes the work meaningful. In this sense, “Vliane” translates Gornung’s early programmatic position in *Hermes* into the methodological language of the Encyclopedia.

The Semiotic Perspective: Sign, Meaning, Sense

Shpet’s semiotics is rooted into his broader phenomenological and hermeneutic orientation. He does not treat the sign as a purely formal or material unit, but as an ontologically structured phenomenon whose significance emerges through its relation to *lektón* (*sense*). The word functions as a primary form of meaningful communication, in which nominative meaning becomes intelligible only within concrete contexts of use. Linguistic elements acquire semiotic value not in isolation but through their integration into communicative and intentional structures. In this way, Shpet develops an “ontological semiotics”

that links the analysis of signs to questions of meaning, objectivity, and understanding (Hansen-Löve 2022: 68–69).

The semiotics entries of the Encyclopedia, however, appear more restrained in their theoretical scope. As the following analysis will show, the treatments of sign, meaning, and sense tend to remain within the bounds of semiotic definition and phenomenological clarification without fully extending the concept of the sign toward Shpet's ontology of sense.

In the Encyclopedia, the problem of signification is articulated through a set of entries devoted to the concepts traditionally associated with the Fregean semantic triangle: sign ("Znak", A. Guber), meaning ("Znachenie", A. Akhmanov), and sense ("Smysl", A. Akhmanov). These entries do not amount to a unified theoretical model of meaning. Rather, guided by the aims and genres of encyclopedic writing, they reflect different analytical approaches within a broader semiotic field. At the same time, the very presence of a differentiation between meaning and sense in the *Encyclopedia of Artistic Terminology* is itself significant. This is particularly notable when set against Husserl's phenomenology, where *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* are closely aligned and not treated as strictly distinct concepts of meaning; by contrast, the Encyclopedia presents meaning and sense as separate entries.

Let us begin with the concept of the sign as a point of departure. The sign is treated explicitly in Guber's entry "Znak" ("Sign") and is also taken up again in Akhmanov's entry "Znachenie" ("Meaning"). The two treatments proceed differently.

Guber approaches the concept of the sign through a broad historical reconstruction: his entry shows how different traditions (ancient, scholastic, rationalist, and linguistic) articulated what a sign is and how it operates. The sign is treated as a general logical form, a structure in which the relation between signifier and signified can be differentiated and historically varied (Guber 1928: 132–133).

By contrast, Akhmanov's text is radically selective and methodologically minimalist: he restricts himself to the most elementary, "narrow" notion of sign – a physical indicator pointing to a fact. From this restricted starting point he performs a phenomenological dissolution of the sign into expression, drawing directly on Husserl's distinction between *Zeichen* and *Ausdruck*. The sign, in this view, ceases to be an autonomous semiotic unit and serves to sep-

arate mere indication from expression as the bearer of meaning (Akhmanov 1928: 143–144).

What ultimately differentiates Guber's and Akhmanov's approaches is not merely the breadth of their analyses, but the conceptual level at which the sign is analysed – a difference that can be clarified through Husserl's distinction between *Zeichen* and *Anzeichen*. In Husserl's terminology, *Zeichen* functions as a broad umbrella term that covers heterogeneous sign phenomena, whereas *Anzeichen* designates a specific, reduced type of sign: an indication that does not possess meaning (*Bedeutung*) in itself and operates only by pointing beyond itself through associative or contextual motivation (Husserl 1913: 23–24). Akhmanov explicitly adopts this framework. By deliberately narrowing the concept of the sign, he arrives at what Husserl calls *Anzeichen*: a sign that establishes neither meaning nor logical necessity, but merely motivates a belief about an object or event. Guber's analysis, by contrast, remains on the level of *Zeichen* in the broad sense, where different types of sign-relations – natural, conventional, symbolic, and artistic – can be historically differentiated and systematically described. The two entries thus operate on different conceptual planes: Guber addresses the sign as *Zeichen*, while Akhmanov restricts it to *Anzeichen* in order to separate indication from meaningful expression.

It is worth noting that neither of the two Encyclopedia entries follows Shpet's line of thought. Shpet's engagement with semiotics ultimately leads beyond the analysis of sign-functions toward a more radical claim: essence itself comes to be understood as sign-like and, therefore, as something that demands interpretation. This claim rests on a structural analogy between sign and *eidos*: in both cases, one moves from an empirically given, externally accessible form toward an inner, non-contingent core that cannot be grasped directly but only through interpretive articulation. Signs, accordingly, function as prototypes for eidetic objects, providing a model for how essence can be grasped (Seifrid 2009: 184–185). Against this Shpetian expansion of semiotics into an ontology of sense, Akhmanov and Guber address the sign exclusively at the level of semiotic definition and analysis, without extending the concept of the sign toward this question of essence.

Akhmanov's understanding of “znachenie” (“meaning”) likewise remains within the bounds of semiotic analysis. However, rather than treating meaning as a derivative function of sign-use, Akhmanov constructs a stratified conceptual field in which heterogeneous notions of “meaning” are carefully

disentangled. He begins by separating meaning as the recognised significance of an event or fact within a given historical or practical context (e.g. the meaning of the Napoleonic wars for the subsequent political development of Europe), from meaning as value or importance in itself (e.g. the cognitive or aesthetic value of a thesis or a work of art), before finally isolating meaning in the strict semantic sense – as the content of an expression. By successively excluding both factual and axiological interpretations of meaning, Akhmanov clears the conceptual space for a phenomenologically grounded account of meaning as ideal content, irreducible to empirical or evaluative attribution (Akhmanov 1928: 140–143).

This cleared conceptual space is further specified through an appeal to Shpet's distinction between the "nominativnaia funktsiia" ("nominative function") and the "smyslovaia funktsiia" ("meaning function") of the word and, more generally, to Husserl's distinction between „Ausdruck als bedeutsames Zeichen“ ("expression as a meaningful sign") and „anzeigendes Zeichen“ ("indicating sign") (ibid.: 142–143). In both cases, these distinctions are used not to develop a theory of meaning, but to set a minimal criterion for what can count as meaning at all. Overall, Akhmanov specifies meaning negatively: as something that cannot be reduced to mere „gegenständliche Beziehung“ ("reference to an object"), to the speaker's „kundgebende Funktion“ ("psychological state"), or to contextual associations external to the expression (ibid.: 144). This negative specification, thus, stabilises the concept of meaning as a strictly semiotic notion, fixing its scope and function within the analysis of signification.

This negatively stabilised concept of meaning provides the point of departure for Akhmanov's treatment of "sense" ("smysl"). In the article of that name, the focus shifts from the conditions of semantic validity to the structure of intentional content. It is here that Akhmanov demonstrates his strongest methodological commitment to Husserl's phenomenology.

Akhmanov conceptualises "sense" by adopting Husserl's distinction between act, intentional object, „gegenständlicher Sinn“ ("objectual sense"), and noema. In the strict, technical meaning that organises the entry, sense is identified with „gegenständlicher Sinn": it names the way in which an object is given as something within a particular intentional structure and differs from both the act (as a temporal psychological occurrence) and the intentional object (as what the act is directed toward). On this level, sense is deliber-

ately abstracted from the character or modality of consciousness. Changes in act-quality or in whether the object is affirmed, doubted, imagined, or recalled do not by themselves alter sense in this narrow meaning, because they concern the manner in which consciousness relates to the object rather than the determinate content that articulates it. At the same time, Akhmanov explicitly introduces the noema to mark the limits of this strict definition: „gegenständlicher Sinn“ is only the core of the full intentional correlate of experience, whereas the noema comprises this core together with additional layers shaped by the act's character and mode of givenness. It is important to note that when the noema is referred to as “sense”, this does not introduce a second concept, but indicates a shift from the minimal determination of the object to the fully articulated content of a particular act (Akhmanov 1929: 65–66). The analytic payoff of this two-level usage is that it lets Akhmanov keep sense non-psychological and non-ontological while still accounting for the richness of intentional life that cannot be captured by objectual determination alone.

Akhmanov's phenomenological account of sense provides the conceptual basis for describing aesthetic experience as a distinct type of intentional act. On this basis, aesthetic sense emerges from a specific organisation of sense in which the logical layer (the capacity of an expression to be grasped as an intelligible utterance) remains indispensable. Aesthetic experience presupposes logical articulation as its necessary condition – this is why Akhmanov can insist that poetic expression must be accessible as a logically articulated utterance (*ibid.*: 70). At this point, the influence of Gustav Shpet's conception of inner form as primarily a logical form becomes clearly visible. Like Shpet, Akhmanov treats the logical form of poetic expression not as something external or an auxiliary layer, but as a necessary moment of its aesthetic constitution: without logical articulation, poetic expression cannot enter aesthetic experience at all (a claim that stands in implicit tension with early formalist accounts, such as Roman Jakobson's characterisation of poetry as an utterance oriented toward expression rather than communication) (Jakobson 2000: 27).

Beyond logical articulation, Akhmanov conceptualises aesthetic experience as grounded in a plurality of content-layers that are internally differentiated by their function within the act. Aesthetic experience is anchored, first, in sensuous perception, whose intentional content provides the material basis of expression. This sensuous layer, however, does not function in isolation: it is apprehended as expressive, that is, as bearing a content articulated through

language or other symbolic means. Within this expressive dimension, logical sense secures the intelligibility of the utterance, while poetic formation reconfigures this sense through tropes, rhythm, and syntactic play, yielding the poetic image. Each of these layers plays a constitutive role in aesthetic experience, yet none of them, taken on its own, can be identified with aesthetic sense. Aesthetic sense does not reside in sensuous givenness, logical meaning, or poetic imagery as such, nor does it emerge from their mere accumulation. Rather, it arises from the way these heterogeneous layers are structurally related within the expressive whole (Akhmanov 1929: 70–71).

Taken together, the analyses of “znak” (“sign”), “znachenie” (“meaning”), and “smysl” (“sense”) within the Encyclopedia reveal a displacement of the theoretical center of gravity from sign-relations to the internal articulation of intentional content. Meaning and sense are not treated as derivative moments of sign-use; on the contrary, the analysis of the sign is progressively weakened in order to secure a non-empirical, non-psychological domain in which meaning can be stabilised (held as a minimal ideal content) and sense can be structurally described. In this perspective, semiotics functions as a clearing operation: it eliminates misleading identifications of meaning with reference, value, or expression of subjective states, thereby making room for an account of aesthetic experience as a specific configuration of sense. The result is a conception of the aesthetic that no longer depends on the sign as its primary explanatory category.

Conclusion

A close reading of the texts discussed here brings into focus a specific way of handling aesthetic problems – one that does not begin with predefined objects (forms, styles, genres) or explanatory models, but with the conditions under which artistic phenomena become intelligible in analysis. This approach is characterised by a sensitivity to how meaning in art is articulated, maintained, and transformed across different levels of experience and interpretation. In practice, it appears in the way the structure of experience, expressive articulation, and historically available modes of understanding are considered together as interrelated aspects of meaning formation. Context, in this sense, does not function as an explanatory background; it delineates the horizon of intelligibility within which an artwork can be grasped.

Another important conclusion concerns the consistent attention the entries examined here give to how different layers of experience – sensuous, expressive, logical, and imaginative – are articulated within the artwork itself. These layers are approached as analytically distinguishable, yet internally related dimensions of artistic articulation, which makes it possible to address aesthetic phenomena at different levels. This orientation is evident in Akhmanov's analysis of aesthetic sense, which traces how it emerges from the interplay of logical articulation, poetic formation, and sensuous givenness. A similar logic informs Zhinkin's account of fantasy, understood as a mode of intuition that can be iterated and thereby give rise to the internally differentiated structure of fictional worlds. In both cases, analysis moves between these levels in order to show how meaning is built up and sustained across different experiential and expressive registers. Moving between these levels keeps analysis responsive to the internal complexity of artistic phenomena.

The Shpetian circle's work on the Encyclopedia reflects a moment in which phenomenological, hermeneutic, and semiotic approaches were not treated as mutually exclusive. The authors could draw on Husserl's analysis of intentional acts, engage with hermeneutic notions of understanding and tradition, and employ semiotic distinctions between sign and expression without treating these as rival theoretical commitments. The result is a methodologically flexible approach that shifts between analytical registers in response to the demands of specific problems.

The research is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation), project number 386757512: „Zwischen Wissensutopie und Archiv. Das Projekt einer ‚Enzyklopädie der künstlerischen Terminologie‘ an der Staatlichen Akademie für künstlerische Forschung in Moskau (1921–1930). Erschließung neuer Quellen“.

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