

**THE ICON AND THE HAND  
ACHEIROPOIESIS (‘NERUKOTVORNOST’) AS A LITERARY TECHNIQUE  
IN SHALAMOV’S *GLOVE***

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**Mini-glossary:**

Acheiropoietos / acheiropoiesis	= Not made by hand (Greek)
Nerukotvornyi / nerukotvornost’	= Not made by hand (Russian)
Netronutyi / netronutost’	= Not touched (by hand) (Russian)

**1. Introduction: Acheiropoiesis – memory – power – creativity**

In 1972 Varlam Shalamov wrote the short story “The Glove” (“Perchatka”) based on memories from his time in the gulag thirty years earlier. He describes his sicknesses in Kolyma in 1943 at a time when he finished his first term of imprisonment, but, instead of becoming liberated, was sentenced to ten more years of hard labor. During some difficult and hopeless months the physically exhausted protagonist (Shalamov’s fictional I) twice visits the hospital. The story is distinguished by intimate descriptions about how he attempts to prove to the doctors that he suffers of dysentery. In the end his disease turns out to be pellagra, i.e. a skin-disease caused by the lack of vitamins. According to the protagonist the skin peeled off his hand like the skin of a snake. In this way comes the title of his tale: a glove shaped of human skin. The glove serves Shalamov as a “document” and “fact,”<sup>1</sup> on the basis of which he develops nihilistic ethical views<sup>2</sup> and denies soteriology (=the doctrine of salvation). At the same time the glove has an operative function as a memory aid, determining the relationship between the writing hand of the author and the suffering hand of the protagonist.

I believe that the meaning of the glove is derived from its state of being “nerukotvornyi” or “acheiropoietic” (=not made by hand). It is an impress of a hand, but different from a usual glove, it is not sewn by hands. By its acheiropoietic character Shalamov’s glove reactivates elements of the Orthodox tradition of the cult-image.<sup>3</sup> In Russia the most

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<sup>1</sup> Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*, tome 2, p. 279. Further on all quotations from Shalamov will be indicated by tome- and page-number in *Sobranie sochinenii* like this (2, 279). If nothing else is indicated, all translations are by the author – FH.

<sup>2</sup> “Сначала нужно возратить пощечины и только во вторую очередь – подаяния” (2, 307).

<sup>3</sup> On terminology: The Greek word *eikon* (Latin: *imago*) has a heterogenic semantic, including such different concepts as shadow, reflection, picture, sculpture, associations, imagination, parables, prophecies, and comparisons (cf. Scholz, “Bild”). Morphologically the word *eikon* corresponds to the Russian *ikona*. *Ikona* first occurred in 1015 in the Laurentian Chronicle (*Slovar’ russkogo iazyka XI-XVII vv.*, 220). However, the Russian *ikona* refers only to the material culture of the church, like frescoes and paintings. Therefore, in my view, the semantically correct translation of the Greek *eikon* into Russian should be the word *obraz*. According to the Russian translation of the bible, Christ is the “obraz” of the invisible God (“...obraz Boga nevidimogo”), which corresponds to the original Greek term “eikon” (“ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου”) (Coll. 1, 15). In this article I will use the English word *image* for *eikon* or *obraz*, and *icon* for *ikona*.

famous acheiropoietic icon is “The Saviour not made by hand” from 12<sup>th</sup> century Novgorod, which has its genesis in a literary phenomenon: the different legends about the icon as an *imprint* of Christ’s face. At the same time the glove can be interpreted as a substitute for the absent photographs of the gulag. Georges Didi-Huberman describes photos from Nazi-concentration camps as “a possible point of *contact* (...) between the *image* and the *real* of Birkenau in August 1944.”<sup>4</sup> In the case of Shalamov’s glove this “point of contact” should be understood literally because of its original identity with the prisoner’s hand.

In Didi-Huberman’s phrase “point of contact (...) between the *image* and the *real*” I see far-reaching consequences for the understanding of both the icon and the glove. If we follow Hans Belting’s conceptual difference between art-image and cult-image, it is the aspect of *presence*, which enables us to worship an icon.<sup>5</sup> Like an acheiropoietic icon the photographic image brings itself into existence. In other words, it makes itself present. The artist is no more than a mediator, who shapes the technical, spatial and illuminative conditions for the creation of the image. Renate Lachmann therefore uses the expression “autopoetic icon.” By its “autopoiesis” the icon becomes a memory technique for the theology of the church. The icon is the social instrument which allows the church to conserve Christ’s face in a collective memory. “In a sense of auto-presentation, ‘nerukotvornyi’ means culture, representing itself, i.e. its memory” writes Lachmann.<sup>6</sup> The icon functions as a memory passed down from generation to generation of icon painters. The icon’s mnemotechnical function also gives it authority over the inner images of the human being, so that s/he abandons his/her own creative imagination of Christ. Memory and fantasy are in this case two opposite cognitive areas, mutually excluding each other.

As the son of the priest and activist Tikhon Shalamov, Varlam Shalamov knew the Orthodox culture with its visual practice as an insider. Nevertheless, in his autobiography “The Fourth Vologda,” Shalamov describes a complex personal relationship with his father, which led him to oppose both Orthodoxy and every kind of public and aesthetical authority:

You believed in god – I am not going to believe in him. For a long time I haven't believed and will never learn to believe (...) You believe in success and career. I am not going to have a career. I am going to die nameless somewhere in the east of Siberia (...) You wanted me to become a statesman. I will only be a denier. You loved The Wanderers.<sup>7</sup> I am going to hate them.<sup>8</sup>

With respect to Shalamov’s nihilism, which here transforms into anarchism (“...I will only be a denier”), I regard his tale “The Glove” to be in some aspects a denial, and in other aspects a hyperbolization or perversion of the mnemotechnical authority and soteriological meaning of the acheiropoietic icon. In his tales Shalamov mentions Orthodox icons only randomly.<sup>9</sup> Therefore this article is not so much an analysis of the

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<sup>4</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Images in spite of all*, 75. Italics Didi-Huberman.

<sup>5</sup> Belting, *Bild und Kult*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Lachmann, *Gedächtnis und Literatur*, 338.

<sup>7</sup> The Wanderers was a realist movement in Russian painting from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>8</sup> “Ты верил в бога — я в него верить не буду, давно не верю и никогда не научусь. (...) Ты веришь в успех, в карьеру — я карьеру делать не буду — безымянным умру где-нибудь в Восточной Сибири. (...) Ты хотел, чтобы я сделался общественным деятелем, я буду только опровергателем. Ты любил передвижников, я их буду ненавидеть” (4, 141).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Shalamov’s tale “Bol” (1967).

material icon as such, as a comparison between Shalamov's glove and different forms of an acheiropoietic principle, expressed by such phenomena as imprint, photo, and mirror. The principle of *being not made by hand* is, in my article, understood as a conceptual technology of memory, which after the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Russian culture dialectically interacts with another principle of *being untouched* (for instance nature as an untouched being). In this dialectic between 1) not made by hand (acheiropoiesis / nerukotvornost') and 2) untouchability (netronutost'), I am going to develop a scheme of memory, power, humiliation, and creativity. My aim is to open new perspectives both on the literary (or, following Ulrich Schmid, *non-literary*) strategies of Shalamov<sup>10</sup> and on the icon as a medium-theory.<sup>11</sup> As a memory technique I regard the problem of acheiropoiesis to be connected with the following research questions: a) How do different understandings of the creator – be it as an icon-painter, artist, author, or labor convict – become challenged by a concept of acheiropoiesis, dialectically excluding the creating hand? b) What kind of perception of the image is in the foundation of the different understandings of the creator? Is the icon perceived as a likeness, mimesis of nature, imprint, document, fact or even autonomous thing, fetish, idol or readymade?

Focusing on these questions, I will show how a dynamic of complex historical ideas of acheiropoiesis are reflected in the relation of the creating and remembering author to his protagonist. Different from the author Shalamov, his fictional I had no opportunities in the camp for creativity. At the same time the fictional I was separated from the memory of his past by several limitations: Correspondence was forbidden until 1951. The convict had almost no personal belongings,<sup>12</sup> even no personal name, which had been replaced by an impersonal number. The namelessness of the Kolyma camps, where Shalamov lived, is reflected ex negativo in a superfluosity of names in his Kolyma tales. As shown by Renate Lachmann the Russian word *pamiat'* (memory) is an anagram of *imia* (name) and *ia* (I), and thus strongly connected with identity.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. The icon as a document

Shalamov refers to his glove as a “document,” and to himself as a “factographer.” A starting point for my investigation is therefore to analyse the medieval concept of acheiropoiesis from the retrospective point of view of these modern categories. I limit myself to two opposite ideas about what an acheiropoietic icon is: 1) a supernatural projection and 2) a natural trace. The first idea is *inter alia* conveyed in John of Damascus' *Three Treatises of the Divine Images*: King Abgar of Edessa sent an envoy to Jesus in order to paint a portrait of him. “Hearing this, he, who knows everything and is able of [doing] everything, took a strip of cloth close to his face and created an imprint of his image, which is saved until this day.”<sup>14</sup> Different from a painted portrait, the imprint is described as a miracle. Just one single touch to the archetype is enough to fix

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Schmid, “Nicht-Literatur ohne Moral”; Thun-Hohenstein, *Gebrochene Linien*; Thun-Hohenstein and Frank, “Varlam Šalamovs Arbeit an einer Poetik der Operativität”; Jurgenson, “Spur, Dokument, Prothese”.

<sup>11</sup> In correspondence with the research of Konrad Onasch (*Die Ikonmalerei*) and Hans Belting (*Bild und Kult*) I operate with a fundamental terminological difference between cult-image and art-image. But different from those authors, I explore the concepts of cult and art in a post-medieval context.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. “У тебя есть какие-нибудь вещи в бараке? – Все со мной” (1, 150).

<sup>13</sup> Lachmann, *Gedächtnis und Literatur*, 334.

<sup>14</sup> Translation by Niovi Zamprouka. “ὁ γνόντα τὸν πάντα εἰδότα καὶ πάντα δυνάμενον τὸ ῥάκος εἰληφέναι καὶ τῷ προσώπῳ προσενεγκάμενον ἐν τούτῳ τὸν οἰκεῖον ἐναπομάζασθαι χαρακτῆρα, ὃ καὶ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν σφύζεται”. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskus*, 146.

the portrait on the painting surface. However this idea of a supernatural projection is contradicted by the Western European legend of Veronica (= vera icona), which occurred after the Fourth Crusade of 1204:<sup>15</sup> On the way to Golgotha, sweat and blood from Christ's face left a trace on Veronica's veil. This Western version of acheiropoiesis gives a new meaning to the icon, which will be highly relevant for my interpretation of the pellagrous glove of Shalamov. Different from the Abgar legend, the image on Veronica's veil was shaped not by a miracle, but under immanent conditions as a result of humiliation and physical exhaustion of the archetype.<sup>16</sup>

In Shalamov's glove there are different levels of interaction with concepts, which, to my point of view, already were inherent in these four ideas of the acheiropoietic icon: a) negation of the subject, b) the icon as a completed and given entity, c) the icon as a document / fact, and d) the icon as a collective memory.

a) *Negation of the subject*: The effect of the above-mentioned legends on the production and cult of the icon, which expresses the ambiguity, accompanies each material icon. Being painted, the icon – like every artistic product – is a result of the technical competence of the craftsman. However, according to the legends of acheiropoiesis the icon is not created as a painting, but *caused* as an imprint or projection. Karlheinz Lüdeking writes, “images are shaped either by the subjects, using them, or by the objects, which in them become visible.”<sup>17</sup> The acheiropoietic image, be it an icon or a photograph, testifies to the truth by its *objectivity*.

This objectivity I regard as supporting the principle of the icon-painter. The image becomes its authority not only by the negation of the *hands* of the icon-painter, but also by the negation of the creative *subject* as such. Some etymological connections indicate that *a-cheiropoiesis* (*not-handmade*) could be regarded as a cultural technique, denying the very concept of the “artist”: The Gothic word *hiadog* (adroit, skilful) is the origin of both the German word *Hand* and the Russian *khudozhnik* (artist).<sup>18</sup> In Russian the word *kist'* is a homonym for both *hand* and *paintbrush*. Thus, the hand and the artist form a semantic nexus, which is dialectically rejected by the literary genesis of the icon tradition.

By the negation of creativity, the icon gets an anti-formalistic and anti-processual character. It is remarkable that John of Damascus doesn't write a single word about the icon painter, the formal aesthetics of the icon, about its techniques or what an icon looks like. Moshe Barasch writes that John of Damascus probably did not know how to make an icon, or had “no appreciation for workmanship.”<sup>19</sup> Different from Barasch, I do not regard it as possible to make conclusions about an author on the basis of something not written. The absence in Byzantine writings of descriptions of workmanship and aesthetics should rather be seen as a consequence of principles of the icon, which are diametrically opposed to the term “art” and “artist”. These are...

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Belting, *Bild und Kult*, 233.

<sup>16</sup> However, the idea that the print occurred in a natural way, by sweat and blood, also existed in Byzantium. Cf. *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs*.

<sup>17</sup> Lüdeking, *Grenzen des Sichtbaren*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Shanskii / Bobrova, *Shkol'nyi etimologicheskii slovar'*.

<sup>19</sup> Barasch, *Icon*, 203.

...b) *the icon as a completed and given entity*: The first principle – the icon as completed – can be derived from John of Damascus’ definition of the icon: “An image is therefore a likeness and pattern and impression of something, showing in itself what is depicted.”<sup>20</sup> The emphasis on “likeness” (“*homoïoma*”) leads to the conclusion that the icon is *similar* to Christ by its appearance, but, by its substance, it is only dead matter.<sup>21</sup> By the icon we worship the external expression. This definition leads to the conclusion that only the *completed* image can be recognized as an icon in a theological sense. Only by achieving the likeness (or similarity) with Christ, when the icon shows “in itself what is depicted”, is it worth being worshipped. In the painter’s study the icon is still *in process*; and therefore it doesn’t show “in itself what is depicted,” but rather an *abstraction* of spots and lines (which has no meaning in medieval thinking due to the above-mentioned anti-formalistic character of the icon).

The second corresponding principle is embedded in the phenomenology of printmaking. The image occurs instantaneously on the material surface; neither gradually nor in a process, but *ex nihilo* in one single moment. By the imprint of Christ’s face, Veronica’s veil is transformed from one condition to another, from being a veil to being an image. The icon is therefore not only a completed, but also a *given*, image. As a given image it denies its material and technical origin in the master’s study. The kenosis of the icon painter is embedded in the idea of *acheiropoiesis*. The *acheiropoietic* icon doesn’t leave any place for the painter, his study or for the technical and aesthetical methods of its production.

c) *The icon as a document / fact*: From the notion of printing, likeness does not necessarily follow in the sense of *mimesis*. A two-dimensional imprint of a three-dimensional head can only, to a limited extent, be similar to a head. In the case of the Shroud of Turin, for example, the figure is on such a high level of abstraction that it can be recognized as a human being only by a considerable effort of the observer’s gestalt psychology. To make the first principle more precise, likeness does not necessarily mean likeness in terms of our visual perception. The icon is no portrait, showing a recognizable prototype. In the icon, likeness is not achieved by *mimesis*, but by *analogy with mimesis*. Therefore I interpret the icon not so much as an image as a document. The *acheiropoietic* icon is not the visible form of God’s incarnation, but a testimony of the fact that this form has been established.

d) *The icon as a collective memory*: Being a testimony of a fact, the icon has to be preserved unchanged in its original *acheiropoietic* appearance. The connection between *acheiropoiesis* and testimony becomes confirmed in a letter, allegedly<sup>22</sup> written in 836 by the patriarchs of Antiochia, Jerusalem, and Alexandria and addressed to the iconoclastic emperor Teophilus, which describes Christ with the following characteristics: “...with eyebrows that meet, beautiful eyes, a prominent nose, curly hair, (...) black beard, His skin the color of ripe corn like His mother’s.”<sup>23</sup> They conclude: “All His personal features were shown, drawn as it were with colors, by

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<sup>20</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, 95. “Εἰκὼν μὲν οὖν ἔστιν ὁμοίωμα καὶ παράδειγμα καὶ ἐκτύπωμά τινος ἐν αὐτῷ δεικνύον τὸ εἰκονιζόμενον”. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskus*, 125.

<sup>21</sup> Onasch, *Die Ikonenmalerei*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> According to Robin Cormack (*Writing in Gold*, 122 ff., 261 ff.) the letter is a falsification from the year 843.

<sup>23</sup> “...σὺνοφρον, εὐόφταλμον, ἐπίρρινον, οὐλότριχα (...) εὐχροιον, γενειάδα μέλαιναν ἔχοντα, σιτόχροον, τῷ εἶδει κατὰ τὴν μητρόαν ἐμφάνειαν...”. *Letter of the three Patriarchs*, 30, 31.

means of His sacred energy, *preserving unaltered* His divine characteristics by this miracle on the towel.”<sup>24</sup> From these words follow two conclusions: First, as an imprint, the acheiropoietic icon is an instantaneous product, made in a moment, independent of any temporal process, and thus also independent of the concept of time. It has to be preserved “unaltered” as if time has ceased to exist. Second, an image, which is transmitted from generation to generation of icon painters, exists as a testimony to the fact of the incarnation in order to replace our presumptions, dreams, and fantasies of Christ’s face. The icon represents a sociology of the collective memory’s supremacy in relation to our individual fantasy. The technology of memory can in this sense be an instrument of power. By the icon, a selection is established of what should, and what should not, be preserved in the memory of culture.

### 3. Icon and imagination

Up to this point I have described the concepts of acheiropoiesis, supporting Shalamov’s idea of the glove as a document. These concepts include tactility, negation of the subject and memory. To Shalamov, as an author, especially challenging becomes the oxymoron of a *creation*, denying its origin in the artist’s *creativity*; or, in other words, an *image* denying *imagination*. On the one hand, his gulag experience can only be conveyed by an absolute negation of his subject. On the other hand, the creative, imaginative subject still forms the foundation for writing. I regard this oxymoron to be specific not only for Shalamov’s writing, but also for the icon in the Russian imperial culture. The Orthodox tradition contains several concepts of acheiropoiesis, which, in Shalamov’s glove, become accumulated, transformed, denied or perverted. The concepts outlined above (section 2) can be contrasted to Alexander Pushkin’s famous formula (1836): “I’ve raised a monument not made by human hand...”<sup>25</sup> Here we observe a strange transposition of the medieval meaning of acheiropoiesis. The principle of denying the hand, and therefore also the artistic subject, seems now to have become a technique for divine self-expression. In my point of view, this is also a transposition from proximity to distance, from acheiropoiesis / *nerukotvornost’* to *netronutost’*, and from document to imagination.

The contrast between acheiropoiesis in the Middle Ages and in the Russian baroque becomes obvious if we turn our attention to the letter of the patriarchs of 836 (or 843): It is written that Christ became human “...not in imagination or opinion, in shapes and enigmas, as He was for the holy Fathers of the Old Testament, but as we have heard and seen and *felt with our hands*...”<sup>26</sup> In other words, imagination is rejected in favor of an epistemology of *inter alia* tactility (“felt with our hands”). Acheiropoiesis does not imply untouchability, as indicated by Walter Benjamin, who wrote about the

<sup>24</sup> The italics are mine – FH. “Ὡς δέον εἰπεῖν· ἀπαράλλακτον αὐτὸν τὸν ἔνθεον χαρακτῆρα ἀποσφύζων τῷ ἐν τῷ σουδαρίῳ θαυματουργήματι”. *Letter of the three Patriarchs*, 32-34.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.poemsintranslation.blogspot.se/2013/10/pushkin-exegi-monumentum-from-russian.html> (5.1.2016). “Я памятник себе воздвиг нерукотворный...”. Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 382. Cf. Lachmann, *Gedächtnis und Literatur*, 328 ff.

<sup>26</sup> “Ἐπεὶ οὖν ὁ ὑπερούσιος καὶ ὑπέρθεος καὶ ὑπεράρχιος, ὁμοούσιος καὶ σύναρχος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατὴρ υἱὸς λόγος – τὸ ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, ὁ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, τὸ ἐκμαγεῖον τοῦ ἀρχετύπου, ἡ ἀπαράλλακτος εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, ἡ ἰσότυπος σφραγίς, τὸ ἀκελίδωτον ἔσοπτρον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας [...] καὶ οὐ κατὰ φαντασίαν ἢ δόκησιν ἐν σχήμασι καὶ αἰνίγμασι, ὡς τοῖς παλαιοῖς πατράσιν ἁγίοις χρηματίζων, ἀλλὰ καθὸ ἀκηκόαμεν καὶ ἐωράκαμεν καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν, θεάνθρωπον καταγγέλλοντες κύριον, ἐν μᾶ τῇ τοῦ λόγου ὑποστάσει κηρύττοντες”. *Letter of the three patriarchs*, 8, 9. My italics – FH.

“Unnahbarkeit” (lack of proximity) of the cult-image.<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, what has not been made by hand, has to be *touch*ed by hand. Tactility is implied in the very genesis of the acheiropoietic icon in the physical touch between Christ’s face and the veil, as well as in the everyday praxis of kissing and touching the icon. Nerukotvornost’ denies netronutost’.

However eight hundred years later we can observe an opposite tendency by the icon painter Simon Ushakov. For Ushakov the icon is identified with imagination, and at the same time in diametrical opposition to tactility. His treatise about icons (1667) starts with an explicit emphasis on the divine force of imagination:

The artist, wiser than all beings and things, creating the man in his image and likeness, gave him, among all beings, the spiritual force which is fantasy...<sup>28</sup>

Similar to God, the icon painter uses his imagination (*voobrazhenie*)<sup>29</sup> in order to awake the image from non-being into being. This implied sacralization of the painter has obvious western roots. In his book on painting (1436) Leon Battista Alberti compares the artist with a divine being and writes about a “divine force” in art.<sup>30</sup> This force functions as a mirror, by which the observer turns into a reflection of the painting:

In fact nature, which, to an incomparable extent, attracts to itself what is similar to it, makes it so, that we grieve with the grieving, laugh with the laughing, and suffer with the suffering.<sup>31</sup>

Thus the mirror became an acheiropoietic technique of the Renaissance. If the medieval meaning of *achieropoiesis* is built upon tactility, then the image now occurs through *distance* from the observer. What remains is the reversal of left and right, which is common both for imprint and mirror-reflection. Two hundred years later, Ushakov promotes the idea of nature as an organism of acheiropoietic creation:

Not only the Lord God himself is the creator of representations, but also everything that exists (in nature) that we can see possesses the secret and the marvellous power of this art. Every thing that stands before a mirror receives its reflection in it thanks to the wonderful way it is fashioned by God’s great wisdom. [What can be more wonderful than the wonderful image, which moves with the moving, stands with the standing, laughs with the laughing, cries with the crying, and does other things. The image appears to be living, although it does not contain any body or human soul.]<sup>32</sup> Exactly the same (reflections) of various things (we can see) *in water*, on marble and on other well-polished objects, in which images are drawn *instantaneously* and *without the application of any labour*.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, 157. Cf. Didi-Huberman, *Was wir sehen blickt uns an*, 139 ff.

<sup>28</sup> “Премудрейши всеа твари умные и вещественныя художник, сотворивый человека по образу и по подобию своему, даде ему всеа твари сии образы о душевней силе, яже есть фантазия...” Ushakov, “Slovo”, 56.

<sup>29</sup> Susanne Strätling analyzes the semantic evolution of the word *voobrazhenie* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. She shows that, before the Russian baroque, *voobrazhenie* was used in contexts like *ikonnoe voobrazhenie*, *krestnoe voobrazhenie*, *prijati angel’skoe voobrazhenie*, i.e. in the meaning of *sign* or *image*. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, this word got a new meaning of being an inner image of the mind, e.g.: “I vseгда toe pustyniu v dushi i vo ume voobrazhenu imekh, i iako vynu pred ochima zrekh” (*Slovar’ russkogo jazyka XI-XVII vv.*, 23. Strätling, *Allegorien der Imagination*, 166).

<sup>30</sup> Alberti, “De Pictura”, 235.

<sup>31</sup> “Fit namque natura, qua nihil sui similibus rapacius inveniri potest, ut lugentibus conlugeamus, ridentibus adrideamus, dolentibus condoleamus”. Alberti, *De Pictura*, 268.

<sup>32</sup> My translation – FH.

<sup>33</sup> Translated in Tarasov, *Icon and devotion*, 231. My italics. “Не точию же сам Господь Бог иконописьательства есть художник, но и всякое сущее зрение чувствия подлежащее тайную и предивную тоя хитрости имать силу; всякая бо вещь аще представится зеркалу, а в нем свой образ

In this quotation we feel what Gottfried Boehm characterizes as the “Janus face of modernity.”<sup>34</sup> On one hand, Ushakov gives aesthetics a new meaning. Beauty derives from imagination as a semi-divine force, belonging to the artist’s creativity. On the other hand, he relies on archaic acheiropoietic paradigms (mirror-reflections), denying creativity and proposing the image as a natural projection. In Baroque mirror cabinets these paradigms went through radical transformations. In the frames of this article there is no place to deal with all aspects of this multifaceted development. I am therefore going to limit my investigation to two new concepts, concerning, to an equal extent, the phenomenology of the mirror: a) transparency, and b) distance.

a) Transparency is implied in mirror metaphors, which always have been frequent both in theological, cosmological and artistic theory. However, if we compare the Byzantine and Renaissance historical contexts, the meanings of this metaphor turn out to be different. John of Damascus several times refers to the following words of St. Paul, which I quote in both the Church Slavonic and English translation:

“Vidim ubo nyne jakozhe zertsalom v gadanii...” (1. Cor. 13, 12 – Church Slavonic translation).

“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror...”

However, St. Paul does not mean mirror in the modern meaning of the word. He uses the greek word *esoptron*, referring to the surface of metal, which is polished to the extent that a person can be reflected in it. Polished metal does not give the same clarity as a modern mirror, consisting of amalgam and glass. Therefore it is remarkable that in the Synodal Russian translation of the Bible (19<sup>th</sup> century) the word “mirror” (“zertsalo”) was replaced by the formula “dimmed / dulled / matt glass” (“tuskloe steklo”):

“Teper’ my vidim kak by skvoz’ tuskloe steklo...” (1. Cor. 13, 12 – Synodal Translation).

“Now we see as if in a dimmed / dulled / matt glass” (my translation – FH).

To my point of view, this apparently incorrect translation contains an *interpretation*, which draws on the culture of the baroque. This interpretation can only be understood in relation to the development of mirror technology, by which the nature of the mirror changed in the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in Italy, masters started to produce mirrors, which gave perfect illusionary projections of nature.<sup>35</sup> On one hand the formula “dimmed glass” seems to correspond to the relative opacity of an ancient mirror (*esoptron*). On the other hand this formula does not transmit the reflective *function* of an *esoptron*.

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напишет дивным Божию премудрости устройением. Оле чудесе, кроме чудесе образ пречюдный бывает, иже движущую человеку движется, стоящу стоит, смеющуюся смеется, плачущу плачет и что-либо ино деюще деет, всячески жив является, аще ни телесе, ниже души иматъ человеческия; подобне (в) воде, на мраморе и на иных вещех добре углаженных всяких вещей образы в единой черте времени, всякого трудоположения кроме, пищи быти видим”. Ushakov, “Slovo”, 58.

<sup>34</sup> Boehm, *Studien zur Perspektivität*, 137.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hartlaub, G. F. *Zauber des Spiegels, Geschichte und Bedeutung des Spiegels in der Kunst* (Munich: Piper & Co. Verlag, 1951).



The contradiction between these translations testifies to a transformation or perversion of the principle of *acheiropoiesis*. As mentioned above the acheiropoietic icon, in its medieval sense, functions as a *document* or *fact*, and therefore does not pretend to give any visual projection or illusion. The Renaissance mirror is on the contrary a visual, illusionary double of the world. Visibility becomes absolute. According to Alberti, art shall exclusively show what can be seen. The invisible has no relevance to the artist.<sup>36</sup>

This emphasis on visibility was expressed in the quotation of Ushakov above. What can be more wonderful than a reflection, acting as a living man without possessing his soul and body (“The image appears to be living, although it does not contain any body or human soul”)? In other words, mimesis becomes a sacred attribute of painting. From now on we have the opportunity to perceive the icon in its *aesthetics*, as if we look through what Alberti described as an “open window” (“*aperta fenestra*”).<sup>37</sup> Being a “window” the image becomes completely transparent. It is as if the physical substance of the painting – the pigments, canvas, *et cetera* – becomes invisible. In other words, the painting ceases to exist in the artist’s iconoclastic intention,<sup>38</sup> and is instead replaced by an illusionary realm. Such an idea of the painting as an invisible “window” could possibly be in contradiction with the Platonic heavenly hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, according to whom the visible world is just a thin shroud, by analogy with a “dimmed glass”, covering a truth, which by its nature is invisible.

The second aspect deals with the relation between observer and image. Alberti argues against Pliny, who asserted that the first painting occurred from the contour of a shadow.<sup>39</sup> Not in the shadow, but in the mirror, Alberti sees the axiom of painting. Therefore he claims that the real founder of painting was Narcissus, who became seduced by his own reflection in the source of water.

By the comparison between painting and mirror, Alberti demonstrates the difference between the medieval cult-image and the art-image of modernity. The cult proposes a tactile proximity with the icon. Kissing and touching the icon, the believer shows the same respect to the image as to the depicted saint.<sup>40</sup> This tactile praxis also repeats the first touch between Christ and the veil. The icon and Christ exist in a tactile genealogy. Ushakov’s idea of a mirror reflection in water (“Exactly the same reflections of various things we can see in water”) on the contrary assumes *distance* between observer and image, because by the slightest touch to the surface of the water the image disappears in ripples. In the same way The Narcissus-legend supposes an insuperable border between image and human being, who turns into a bodiless observer, because they perceive the image only through the eye. The image is isolated in the visual perception of the human being. The subject takes the image as its imagination, or – in other words – as its untouchable, cognitive, private property. Out of this capitalistic thinking occurs the perspective, which, by its geometrical laws, regulates the position of the physical observers, and places them at a certain distance from the painting’s surface. In Renaissance art, distant perception is preferred to tactility. *Nerukotvornost’* (= *not being*

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<sup>36</sup> Alberti, “De Pictura”, 194-195.

<sup>37</sup> Alberti, “De Pictura”, 225.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Boehm, “Die Wiederkehr der Bilder”, 336.

<sup>39</sup> Alberti, “De Pictura”, 236-239.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Heffermehl, Fabian: “Kuss eines Zyklopen – Die umgekehrte Perspektive zwischen Weltbild und Kunstbild”, in *Dialog in der deutsch-russischen Philosophie*, ed. Carina Pape / Holger Sederström (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann), forthcoming.

*made by hand*) turns into *netronutost'* (= *not being touched by hand*). These two notions of the hand – the hand, which does not create, and the hand, which does not touch – were, in the letter of the patriarchs, (836/843) contrasted against each other. Now they have instead become synonyms.

An inner contradiction between the ideas of imagination and mirror can be traced in Ushakov's writings. His mirror contains an element of both Orthodox *acheiropoiesis* and the modern occidental, mechanistic world-view actualized by the geometrical perspective in art. The faculty of imagination is in this context another word for the penetration of the artist into the secrets of nature. Now the icon painter is recognized as an autonomous creator. The master's hand is lifted up to the status of a genius. But, at the same time, he and his painting are separated from each other by the geometry of perspective. Nevertheless, Ushakov avoids a sole mechanistic understanding of *acheiropoiesis*. If *acheiropoiesis* is identified with the untouched, then nature becomes this "virginal" *terra incognita* of the intellect, which gives a source for his inspiration. The *acheiropoietic* and untouched nature is first of all a space for creativity. In mnemotechnical terms, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century icon painters start to confuse collective memory (or tradition) with their own imagination. In this sense the *acheiropoietic* icon of Ushakov is no memory technique. Ushakov replaces the "vertical" concept of power, assuming that the archetype makes itself visible in the material, with a horizontal system of reflections *between* the elements of nature.

#### **4. Varlam Shalamov: *Acheiropoiesis* and mass-murder**

Shalamov's Kolyma is a graceless place. If Ushakov's world-view proposed a complex construction of mirrors, reflecting the man on his way to salvation, then the concentration camp is on the contrary a place without those personal mirrors, which, in the everyday life of a human being, supports him in the construction of his identity. The convict perceives himself only from his own inside, either by the *sense* of wounds and frost, or by *seeing* those parts of the body, which are always visible to their own eye. What do I actually see of myself from my own eyeholes except my headless body? First of all, I see my hands, the only part of the body, which can be seen by a human being, having them, and from every point of view. Because of his years in the camp – in Shalamov's case almost twenty – there is the view of crippling hands, which reveal for the convict his own deterioration. Intimate descriptions of suffering, diseases and degenerating hands<sup>41</sup> constitute a distinct feature of Shalamov's prose, which can be interpreted as a mnemotechnical attempt of the author to once again live inside the convict's body.

Not only their own face is hidden for the convict. If the icon represents the face of Christ, then Shalamov interprets the life in the camps as a system without faces. In the icon the size of the eyes is often exaggerated and thus provided with a special emphasis. Shalamov for his part dims the eyes, thus stripping the personality of his protagonists: "In Kolyma there were no people who had color in their eyes – and this is no aberration of my memory, but the essence of life then."<sup>42</sup> This faceless anonymity is contrasted against a superfluousness of different names, which is typical for Shalamov's tales. The

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Shalamov's tales "Sherrri-brendi" (1958), "Grafit" (1967), "Perchatka" (1972) and "Galina Pavlovna Zyalova" (1971).

<sup>42</sup> "На Колыме не было людей, у которых был бы цвет глаз, и это не абберация моей памяти, а существо жизни тогдашней" (4, 380).

name is the only individual feature of the human being which can be transmitted in literature without transformation of the medium. In this sense the name functions as a textual ready-made. By the *presence of names* and the *absence of faces* Shalamov makes an effective contrast to the icon, where name and portrait are integrated into a whole. By this contrast Shalamov, first, underlines the specific medium of literature, and therefore also its principal difference from the icon. Second, he demonstrates the disappearance of two and a half million lives<sup>43</sup> in the gulag. His tales remind one of the “medium” of the graveyard, which also, in its essence, is a list of names without faces, and therefore always a sign of loss.

Shalamov’s glove is both a symbol of anonymity and an acheiropoietic impress of his hand, which occurred as a trace of humiliation and disease. At the same time his glove sharpens the concept of the acheiropoietic icon, by orienting it not towards the main element of the icon – the face – but towards the smallest unit of what acheiropoiesis denies – the hand. The negation of the creative hand is an integrated part of the camp’s system. Therefore it becomes even more important for Shalamov to underline the tremendous sacrifice provided by those hands, which in fact built the infrastructure of the gulag:

All these milliards of cubic meters of exploded rocks, all these roads, entrances, ways, washing instruments, establishment of villages and graveyards – all this was made *by hand*, by wheelbarrows and hacks.<sup>44</sup>

The depiction of faces in Kolyma has become impossible because the worth of a human being is limited to state-directed economic parameters where the price of man is equated with the price of his hand. For the camp bureaucracy, it was enough to register a corpse by its fingerprint. Shalamov writes about a fugitive, who was shot in the taiga by a young lieutenant. The corpse was too heavy to be carried back to the camp. Therefore the lieutenant chopped off the corpse’s hands, and put them into his bag for accounting reasons... “...and the fugitive got up and came to our barracks by night. He was pale and had lost a lot of blood, couldn’t speak, and just stretched out his arms”.<sup>45</sup>

The terrible image of the fugitive without hands should in this context be interpreted as a grotesque of the not-by-hand creating icon painter, with the doubling of the grotesque genre. On one hand, the grotesque transforms its prototype into something else, and therefore perverts the prototype’s idea. On the other hand, the grotesque hyperbolizes aspects of the prototype, which in another genre would have escaped our attention. It should be mentioned that, also in the Orthodox tradition, there exists the narrative of the icon painter without hands. According to the vita of John of Damascus (10<sup>th</sup> century), John’s hand was cut off by the caliph, but later was restored while he prayed in front of the icon of the Holy Mother.<sup>46</sup> Salvation through obedience is a principle in

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<sup>43</sup> Jessipow, “Über die Wahrheit der Erzählungen aus Kolyma”, 177.

<sup>44</sup> “Все эти миллиарды кубометров взорванных скал, все эти дороги, подъезды, пути, установка промывочных приборов, возведение поселков и кладбищ – все это сделано от руки, от тачки и кайла” (2, 350). *My italics* – FH.

<sup>45</sup> “А беглец встал и ночью пришел в наш барак, бледный, потерявший много крови, говорить он не мог, а только протягивал руки” (2, 318).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Ivan Bentchev, “Die ‘Dreihändige’ Gottesmutterikone im Hilandar-Kloster auf Athos”, in *Hermeneia, Zeitschrift für Ostkirchliche Kunst* (Bochum: 1993), [www.icon-art.info](http://www.icon-art.info). The Arabic vitae of John of Damascus is available in Russian on: [http://www.portal-slovo.ru/theology/37667.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=37667&SHOWALL\\_1=1](http://www.portal-slovo.ru/theology/37667.php?ELEMENT_ID=37667&SHOWALL_1=1), 22.01.2015.

Orthodox soteriology. Shalamov's perversion of this principle lies in his denial of salvation. Resurrection is reduced to a problem of health recovery: "The day came when my skin was renewed completely. However, the soul remained unrenewed."<sup>47</sup>

The denial of soteriology hyperbolizes the concept of vertical power. Shalamov's glove reveals a despotic potential in the sociology of the acheiropoietic icon, which is realized in the moment when belief is reduced to an attribute of psychology, theology, a phenomenon of culture and the name of the convict, by some processes of abstraction, to an arithmetic number. The human being is recognized not by his or her face, but by a genetic code "inscribed" in their fingerprint. Because Shalamov's use of theological metaphors represents not a true, but perverted theology, his nihilism does not prevent him from admiring sincere believers, or expressing himself as a believer in salvation via poetry.<sup>48</sup> But, therefore, Shalamov's confrontation with the cruelties he experienced in the camp is also a confrontation with himself. Ulrich Schmid shows how paradoxes in Shalamov's methodology, to some extent, undermine his own conceptual foundation. Shalamov condemns the concept of art and the classic canon of Russian literature, and even denies his own prose as a product of literary creativity.<sup>49</sup> After almost twenty years' imprisonment, his world view is to such an extent associated with the cruelties of the gulag, that his nihilism reflects resignation both in relation to the Stalinist system and to himself. This leads to a split between the creative author and his fictional I in the shape of the suffering convict, the instrument for others' collective creativity, without any of its own agency. His glove is a doppelgänger of the hand, which, after thirty years, writes the tale:

Even the dactyloscopic imprint is the same on that dead glove, and on the contemporary, living [hand] now holding the pencil (...). My gloves are two human beings, two doppelgängers with one and the same dactyloscopic pattern – a wonder of science, and an object worth consideration of the whole world's criminalists, philosophers, historians and doctors.<sup>50</sup>

By the abstract, dactyloscopic pattern, uniting the two doppelgängers, Shalamov shows the fragility of memory, which allows the living hand to write about the dead. The Stalinist society as a whole testifies to subordination of individual memory to a gigantic mnemotechnical program, including censorship of photography, public displays of penitence for non-existing crimes and a private vulnerability to write diaries, because every diary could serve as evidence in a criminal investigation. Shalamov asks, "did we exist?"<sup>51</sup> The question contains both a fear of the potential loss of individual memory and a motivation for further writing. Immediately after the question follows "...I answer: 'we did' – with all the expressivity of a protocol, and the responsibility and

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<sup>47</sup> "Настал день, когда кожа моя обновилась вся – а душа не обновилась" (2, 306).

<sup>48</sup> "Я знаю, что у каждого человека здесь было свое *самое последнее*, самое важное – то, что помогало жить, цепляться за жизнь, которую так настойчиво и упорно у нас отнимали. Если у Замятина этим последним была литургия Иоанна Златоуста, то моим спасительным последним были стихи – чужие любимые стихи, которые удивительным образом помнились там, где все остальное было давно забыто, выброшено, изгнано из памяти" (1, 117).

<sup>49</sup> Schmid, "Nicht-Literatur ohne Moral," 94.

<sup>50</sup> "Даже дактилоскопический оттиск один и тот же на той, мертвой, перчатке, и на нынешней, живой, держащей сейчас карандаш (...) Мои перчатки – это два человека, два двойника с одним и тем же дактилоскопическим узором – чудо науки. Достойный предмет размышлений криминалистов всего мира, философов, историков и врачей" (2, 280).

<sup>51</sup> "Были ли мы?" (2, 279).

precision of a document.”<sup>52</sup> The gulag for Shalamov is no basis for an “artistic idea” or “literary creation”<sup>53</sup>:

It is possible and necessary to write a tale identical to a document. The author ought to investigate his material with the proper pelt (shkura) – not only by the intellect, not only by the heart, but by every pore of skin (kozha), by every nerve.<sup>54</sup>

In this perspective pellagra is not the topic of his tale, but its methodology. His strategy requires that the distance between writer and literary work becomes reduced to zero. As between the human being and his skin, there is no space between the writer and his fictional reality. As shown by Franziska Thun-Hohenstein, to survivors from concentration camps, writing means to confront death again; “to live it through” once more.<sup>55</sup> What Shalamov denies is the tradition of the distanced observer, who, like Narcissus, cannot touch the image without destroying it:

The new prose rejects this principle of tourism. The author is no observer, no spectator, but a participant in the drama of life – a participant and not in the writer’s appearance, not in the writer’s role, Pluto ascending from hell, and not Orpheus descending into hell.<sup>56</sup>

It is in this respect that the fingerprint of the author and that of the convict are identical. Therefore Shalamov represents himself as “factographer” (2, 279), i.e. a collector of documents within a reality, only existing in his memory. The identification of the writer with the protagonist reaches such a level that he shares the most intimate details about excrements necessary to provide as evidence for the diagnosis of dysentery (2, 281).

Shalamov’s glove is a “somatic, material concretization,”<sup>57</sup> which does not depict or tell anything: “with a dead glove I couldn’t write good poems or prose. The very glove was prose, charge, document and protocol.”<sup>58</sup> Exceeding every possibility of imagination, the cruelties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century require new concepts of art and literature, which do not *re-present* the reality, but rather create *presence* in the shape of traces and prints of the real. In this sense the glove shows similarities with the phenomenology of four photos from Auschwitz<sup>59</sup> in the interpretation of Georges Didi-Huberman. In August 1944 these photos (figure 1 and figure 2) were taken illegally and under high risk by members of the Jewish “Sonderkommando” (=a unit of prisoners, who *i.a.* conducted the cremation of dead bodies). These extreme conditions are reflected in the photographic quality. The photos were shot from a hidden camera, two of them probably during walking. Therefore they are unclear. The very cremation of prisoners occupies only a small place in the “composition.” Foremost the black walls of the gas

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<sup>52</sup> “...отвечаю: ‘были’ – со всей выразительностью протокола, ответственностью, отчетливостью документа” (2, 279).

<sup>53</sup> Thun-Hohenstein, “Warlam Schalamow und Alexandr Solschenizyn”, 217.

<sup>54</sup> “Нужно и можно написать рассказ, который неотличим от документа. Только автор должен исследовать свой материал собственной шкурой – не только умом, не только сердцем, а каждой порой кожи, каждым нервом своим” (4, 362).

<sup>55</sup> Thun-Hohenstein, *Gebrochene Linien*, 275.

<sup>56</sup> “Новая проза отрицает этот принцип туризма. Писатель – не наблюдатель, не зритель, а участник драмы жизни, участник и не в писательском обличье, не в писательской роли. Плутон, поднявшийся из ада, а не Орфей, спускавшийся в ад” (4, 365).

<sup>57</sup> Jurgenson, “Spur, Dokument, Prothese”, 173.

<sup>58</sup> “Мертвой перчаткой нельзя было написать хорошие стихи или прозу. Сама перчатка была прозой, обвинением, документом, протоколом” (2, 306).

<sup>59</sup> The photos are online on: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonderkommando\\_photographs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonderkommando_photographs), 2.3.2015.

chamber and the surrounding trees dominate the pictorial space. The last photograph does not depict anything except the tree crowns of Birkenau. The historian Jean-Claude Pressac therefore characterized this picture as “useless.”<sup>60</sup> This apparent “uselessness” actually means that the picture does not depict anything connected with the crimes. However, as in the case of Shalamov’s glove, the phenomenological worth of the image does not consist in the mimetical transmission of the events, but in being a material document or “fact” capturing the situation as a whole.<sup>61</sup> In this way the phenomenological implications of Veronica’s veil, as a document and not mimesis, become transformed in the context of mass murder.



Figure 1: One of the four Sonderkommando photographs taken by an inmate inside Auschwitz, August 1944, and smuggled out of the camp by the Polish underground. This is photograph number 283.

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<sup>60</sup> Pressac, *Auschwitz*, 422.

<sup>61</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 73.



Fig. 2: Number 281 of the Sonderkommando photographs.

However, in my opinion, Shalamov's glove is an even more radical concept than the photography. "Where are you now my *challenge* to the time, my knight's glove, thrown down into the snow, into the face of the Kolymean ice in 1943?"<sup>62</sup> By this anthropomorphization of nature ("face of the... ice") Shalamov reveals a whole range of implications from the glove. A glove can be a product of consumption. It is a thing, which can be worn, taken off, thrown to the ground or into someone's face as a challenge to a duel. The glove is both a relic of the obsolete aristocratic culture and an avant-gardist object in the militaristic etymology of the word "avant-garde". Different from the Auschwitz photos in Didi-Huberman's interpretation, the glove has a challenging potential for the activation of the reader within the reality of the concentration camp.

The problem of a comparison between the Auschwitz photos, the glove, and the acheiropoietic icon is the proximity to idolatry. This is inherent in what Horst Bredekamp characterizes as "substitutability" ("Austauschbarkeit") of the acheiropoietic icon: the image is treated as body and vice versa.<sup>63</sup> Gerard Wajcman and Elisabeth Pagnoux have accused Didi-Huberman of fetishism, among other things because he writes that the Auschwitz photos "are the *survivors*,"<sup>64</sup> thus apparently equalizing the photograph with an Auschwitz convict. In his polemical answer Didi-Huberman rejects the widespread idea of non-representability or non-imaginability of the Holocaust. In the framework of this article there is no place for any analysis of Didi-Huberman's defence against the accusation of being a fetishist. Such an analysis would require a detailed reflection about modern iconoclastic phenomenology, which is not

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<sup>62</sup> "Где ты сейчас мой вызов времени, рыцарская моя перчатка, брошенная на снег, в лицо колымского льда в 1943 году?" (2, 279). My italics – FH.

<sup>63</sup> Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakts*, 173.

<sup>64</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 46. Italics Didi-Huberman.

that far from the Mosaic prohibition of making fetishes or idols. The fetish is, in this context, a false negation of absence similar to the *Golden Calf* in Sinai's desert, which is a delusive compensation for the absence of a visible God.<sup>65</sup> Where there are no photos, for instance inside the gas chamber, such a film as *Schindler's List* becomes another attractive surrogate for our eyes. Thus perception by the eyes is placed under suspicion. Didi-Huberman connects the formal aspects of the photos – black spots, lack of clearness and extreme perspectives – with the *factuality* and not *aesthetics* of the photos.<sup>66</sup> Like the imprint of Christ's face, the photos are documents or extracts of reality. Their meaning is not in their visual perceptibility.

As far as Shalamov's glove can be regarded as a substitute for the prisoner's body, fetishism can be interpreted as an instrument, which is used against established authorities, be it the church, the state, or even Shalamov's own father. The miserable life of the convict is accompanied by the highest symbols of religion, culture, and civilization, for instance, by such titles of his tales as "Apostle Paul," "Athenian Nights," and "Tie." Spiritual metaphors transform into concrete things and the icon converts into an idol. In "The Glove" the protagonist is covered by tarpaulin tents (brezent), reminding about the fugacity (brennost') of the world. Tarpaulin is compared with a different heaven "...than in the Gospel's places."<sup>67</sup> Not without irony he writes about the "tarpaulin border of my being."<sup>68</sup> Tarpaulins give poor protection from cold and death in Kolyma, where there is no hope for a future life in heaven. At the same time the tarpaulin represents an analogy with the skin, which, by pellagra, can be peeled off the body, and make the person who is about to die even more naked, than if he was without clothes. It should be mentioned that Shalamov also describes tarpaulin as the material of his father's – the priest's – mackintosh, when he died blind and in deep poverty (1, 445). The attributes of his father's person and theology (heaven, gospel etc.) are substituted with some cheap and not very suitable material things.

If Didi-Huberman distances himself from fetishism *inter alia* by referring to the etymological nexus between *fetishism* and *fiction*, Shalamov instrumentalizes the fetish in order to provide the fictional thing with real presence. The glove is a thing and an impress of crimes against humanity. But different from the Auschwitz-photos this thing exists only as a literary fiction. How else can skin in one big piece peel off the hand? At any rate the glove exists only for the reader's imagination, as far as it did not remain after the gulag. In other words, Didi-Huberman conceptualizes the material relic as a surviving witness, while the surviving witness Shalamov imagines the glove as a material relic. This staging of memory gives the opportunity to characterize the glove as a fetish in a double sense of the word. The first sense is the traditional Christian understanding of the fetish as a perversion of the icon – in this case the acheiropoietic icon.<sup>69</sup> The second sense has its origin in Karl Marx' theory of the independent life of the capitalistic good, i.e. the ability of the good to gain an artificial value, which denies the value of the handwork, by which the good was produced. As shown by Karl-Heinz Kohl both meanings contain an element of anthropomorphization, which provides the

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<sup>65</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 74.

<sup>66</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 76.

<sup>67</sup> "...чем в евангельских местах" (2, 292)

<sup>68</sup> "...брезентовой стене своего бытия" (2, 295)

<sup>69</sup> The word *fetish* comes from Latin *facies*: "deos conflatas non facies tibi" ("Do not make idols"). Exodus 34, 17. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese missionaries characterized western-African statuettes as *fetiço*. Cf. Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge*, 95.



thing with human features, but usually with negative associations.<sup>70</sup> In different ideas from the Old Testament to Marx and Freud the fetish becomes connected with blasphemy, market exploitation, or sexual perversion.

However, in its negation of norms and established truths, the glove fetish can gain a positive status as an expression of social critique. The glove makes present the nameless convicts, whose hands built the infrastructure of the gulag, and at the same time the glove is a replacement for destroyed evidence of the crimes against humanity. The glove is both a document of the profanation of the icon, and it reveals the cynicism of Stalinism: if Marx understood the fetish as an attribute of capitalism, then the glove fetish functions as a testimony of denied slave labor within the communist system. In the end, as a literary ready-made, the glove is autonomous from representation, and thus denies the socialist realistic mimesis of an ideologically ideal state of being.

The meaning of the glove as a mnemotechnical object becomes visible in the multitude of variants, concerning its further fate. The glove becomes an exhibit of a museum under different names: “Museum of Sanitary Administration”<sup>71</sup> or “Museum of Local History, at least of Local History of Public Health.”<sup>72</sup> The proximity of the glove to fetishism – at least in respect of Siberian shamanism – becomes obvious in the idea of a “Museum of Local History.” Nevertheless, Shalamov does not give any clear explanation of what happened to the glove, and whether it was one glove or two: “They sent only leggings and one glove, and the second I left by myself together with my quite timid prose and some uncertain poems.”<sup>73</sup> In another place he assumes that the glove disappeared: “But the glove perished in Kolyma. That’s why this tale was written.”<sup>74</sup> However, Shalamov also expresses a complete uncertainty about the fate of the glove: “Where are you now my challenge to the time, my knight’s glove, thrown to the snow, into the face of the Kolymean ice in 1943?”<sup>75</sup> The implicit attempt to suggest the time for a duel (“challenge to the time”) supposes the possibility of defeating time. The glove can be conserved in the timeless zone of permafrost: “These gloves live in the museum ice...”<sup>76</sup> In a multitude of different narratives the glove does not so much constitute a story as a model of memory. Memory is fragile and equivocal. Single memories can rise to the surface without context. Real experience is confused with fantasies about the past, and leaves the author protagonist in complete uncertainty about which events “acheiropoietically” went into his perception, and which memories he produced by his imagination. The glove of the writing, creating author reflects the glove of the suffering protagonist.

## 5. Archive and apocalypse

With the idea that “These gloves live in the museum ice...”<sup>77</sup> Shalamov establishes a connection with nature as an archive. In the tales “On Lend Lease” and “Permafrost”

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<sup>70</sup> Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge*, 95.

<sup>71</sup> “Санитарного управления” (2, 281)

<sup>72</sup> “...[музеем] истории края, по крайней мере [музеем] истории здравоохранения края” (2, 306)

<sup>73</sup> “Послали только ноговицы и одну перчатку, а вторую хранил я у себя вместе с моей тогдашней прозой, довольно робкой, и нерешительными стихами” (2, 306).

<sup>74</sup> “Но перчатка погибла на Колыме – потому-то и пишется этот рассказ” (2, 306).

<sup>75</sup> “Где ты сейчас мой вызов времени, рыцарская моя перчатка, брошенная на снег, в лицо колымского льда в 1943 году?” (2, 279).

<sup>76</sup> “Перчатки эти живут в музейном льду...” (2, 279).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Fn. 76.

Shalamov describes how the Siberian frost and stones conceal human bodies. “Defeated, humbled, retreating, stone promised to forget nothing, to wait and preserve its secret.”<sup>78</sup> In the gulag the frost is one of the main reasons for the death of a human being, but, at the same time, a medium and condition for the body’s further existence in nature’s memory. Susanne Frank therefore compares Shalamov with Pavel Florenskii – the most distinguished Russian-Orthodox theoretician of the icon of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who shared a similar faith as a victim of the gulag.<sup>79</sup> To Florenskii the frost “...conceals in itself both creative and destructive forces.”<sup>80</sup> Florenskii associates this meaning of the frost as a memory technique with the sacralisation of nature, forbidding the human being to touch it: “Permafrost destroys when people try to ‘habit’ and ‘master’ it. From here [follows] the Orochons’ [saying]: ‘don’t touch the frost’”.<sup>81</sup>

This article demonstrates how the terms of *acheiropoiesis* (*nerukotvornost’*) and *untouchability* (*netronutost’*) constitute a dialectic couple, determining the icon’s meaning between creativity and negation of creativity. Originally, the idea of *nerukotvornost’* excludes *netronutost’* because the icon occurred in a *tactile touch* with Christ’s face. Also the practice of the icon cult is based on *tactility*. By kissing and touching the icon the believer enters a tactile relationship with his/her own *acheiropoietic* basis as God’s creation. Therefore *tactility* constructs a complex system of analogies--the touch of the human being to the icon, Christ to the veil and God to the human being--construct a cosmological model. In this model the whole universe is created *acheiropoietically* and completely in the very first moment of its existence; like a graphic print, not by handcraft, but by touch. From this notion of a given creation – or *creation without creativity* – follows the idea of the icon’s *unchangeability* and *timelessness*. What is not created in a temporal *process* does not obey the laws of time. *Acheiropoiesis* is a technique of constant memory – or tradition.

However, by interaction with western art, Ushakov in the 17<sup>th</sup> century defines *untouchability*, and therefore also *distance*, as a condition for aesthetic delight. From now on what is not created by hand is also not touched by hand. The icon as *vision* is preferred instead of the *tactile* approach to the icon. This primacy of the eye allows Florenskii to write that in accordance with church teaching, “...every icon must be *miracle made*, that means that they can be windows to eternity.”<sup>82</sup> The word “*miracle made*” (“*chudotvornyi*”) is a replacement for “*not-by-hand-created*” (“*nerukotvornyi*”). However, Florenskii follows up with a definition of “*miracle made*” by using the formula of Alberti about painting as a “*window*.”<sup>83</sup> Thus Florenskii proposes a relationship of a human being to the icon based on *distanced optic perception* and *perspective* – which, although reversed, is still a term meaning “*to look through*” – while the icon in its original meaning proposes a relationship based on the sense of

<sup>78</sup> Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 281. “Камень, уступавший, побежденный, униженный, обещал ничего не забывать, обещал ждать и беречь тайну” (1, 356).

<sup>79</sup> Frank, “The Semantics of Ice and Permafrost”.

<sup>80</sup> “...гаит в себе силы творческие и разрушительные”, Florenskii, *Oro*, 34.

<sup>81</sup> “Вечная мерзлота разрушает, когда ее начинают ‘обживать’ и ‘освоять’. Отсюда – ‘не трогай мерзлоты’ орочонов”. Florenskii, *Oro*, 34.

<sup>82</sup> “...все иконы чудотворны, т. е. могут быть окнами в вечность”. Florenskii, “*Ikonostas*”, 450.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. fn. 37.

touch. It is therefore symptomatic that the acheiropoietic icon, which is fundamental in the icon tradition, almost never occurs in Florenskii's writings.<sup>84</sup>

If discontinuity in the history of king Abgar or Veronica means the discontinually, instant creation of the image in the moment of the imprint, then discontinuity for Florenskii means that the icon becomes a window by a *discontinuous form*, manifested by the visual appearance of the medieval icon with its "reverse perspective." The discontinuity means that the world of the spirit, in one moment, – like in a window – appears to the icon painter.<sup>85</sup> The icon is an instant vision of the heavenly realm and is therefore described by modern theories as a synthesis of points of disappearance.<sup>86</sup> The contemporaries of Florenskii – Nikolai Tarabukin and Lev Zhegin – represent the icon as a microcosm, which discontinually contract the form of the macrocosm: "The icon painter of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, whom I refer to as an example, expressed in his compositional structure the idea of macrocosm, which is whole in its closedness and closed in its unity."<sup>87</sup> Boris Uspenskii makes a similar interpretation of the icon as microcosm: "Not a single fragment of the picture corresponds to a similar object in the reality, but the whole world of the image corresponds to the real world".<sup>88</sup> In my point of view, such an instant, almost apocalyptic view of everything in one moment, which is implicit in the idea of the icon as a microcosm, is first of all a result of the new aesthetical paradigms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the development of photography happened to be almost contemporaneous with the rejection of mimesis in painting. In the 1920s Alexander Rodchenko argued for photography on the basis of the idea that a photo can *be* reality, and *not* the faculty of photography to *depict* reality (which is probably the main condition for the commercial success of photography).<sup>89</sup> Thus the main expectation of a photo lies not in mimesis but in its documentality. Walter Benjamin writes that the true image occurs in a "flash."<sup>90</sup> With reference to Benjamin, Didi-Huberman asserts that the photos from Auschwitz are a "possible point of contact (...) between the *image* and the *real* of Birkenau in August 1944".<sup>91</sup>

The ontological expectancy of a photo as a "true" document of an event, is principally not very different from the ontology of the discontinuous, acheiropoietic image of Christ. The historical context of the crimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can in this sense be

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<sup>84</sup> There are two exemptions. The first is the quotation "The highest prototype of depictions *en face* is the image not made by hand" ("Верховный прототип фасовых изображений – это Нерукотворенный Образ"). Florenskii, *Analiz prostranstvennosti*, 144. The second is a reflection on the Turin shroud in Florenskii, "Ob istoricheskom poznanii", 31-32.

<sup>85</sup> "Окно есть окно, и доска иконы — доска, краски, олифа. А за окном созерцается Сама Божия Матерь; а за окном — видение Пречистой. Иконописец показал мне Ее, да; но не создал: он отверз завесу, а Та, Кто за завесой, — предстоит объективной реальностью не только мне, но равно — и ему, им обретается, ему является, но не сочиняется им, хотя бы и в порыве самого высокого вдохновения". Florenskii, "Iconostas", 447.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Clemena Antonova, *Space, Time and Presence in the Icon, Seeing the World with the Eyes of God* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>87</sup> "Иконописец XIV-XV столетий, которого я имею в виду в качестве образца, в своем композиционном строе выражал идею макрокосма целостного в своей замкнутости и замкнутого в своем единстве". Nikolai Tarabukin, *Filosofia ikony*, 58.

<sup>88</sup> "Соотносится прежде всего не некоторый фрагмент картины со соответствующим объектом реальности, но целый мир картины с реальным миром". Uskenskii, "K issledovaniuu iazyka", 18.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Schahadat, "Fotografiestreit und Formalismusvorwurf", 391.

<sup>90</sup> "Das wahre Bild der Vergangenheit *huscht* vorbei. Nur als Bild, das auf Nimmerwiedersehen im Augenblick seiner Erkennbarkeit eben aufblitzt, ist die Vergangenheit festzuhalten". Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, 95.

<sup>91</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 75.

interpreted in analogy to how the crucifixion in the Veronica legend produced an image. The image is a trace of suffering, sweat and blood. In the gulag and Auschwitz historically unprecedented crimes were accompanied by unprecedented opportunities to document them – opportunities, which never became realized. Different from, for instance, the everyday executions in Paris during the French Revolution, we could have had an almost limitless amount of documentary photos from the Holocaust. But we have only these four.<sup>92</sup>

In the context of a not realized technology of memory, Shalamov's glove is an act of resistance. His glove occurs in a fight with double limits. First, the conditions of the camp do not allow the recording of crimes in documents. Second, even if the document exists, it has to remain unseen and unheard.<sup>93</sup> According to Claude Lanzmann the Holocaust is both destruction and destruction of the destruction, that means the destruction of the evidences of destruction.<sup>94</sup> The writer's feebleness in front of the destruction of the destruction is expressed by Shalamov in the following words: "There are no personal cases, no archives, no reports of the disease... The documents about our past are destroyed, the watch towers are sawn down, the barracks are exterminated from the earth, the rusty thorny wires are wounded up and brought somewhere to another place. On the ruins of Serpantinka prospered Ivan-Chaj – the flower of fire and forgetting, the enemy of archives and human memory."<sup>95</sup> It should be mentioned that Serpantinka is a place close to the village of Khatynny, where mass executions took place in the 1930s.<sup>96</sup> Like Veronica's veil Shalamov's glove is documentary evidence of crimes against humanity. Therefore, Shalamov hints at the glove's potential for the detective genre:

Even the dactyloscopic imprint is the same on that dead glove, and on the contemporary, living [hand] now holding the pencil. A true wonder of criminology – these glove doppelgängers. One day I will write a detective story on this glove topic and give my contribution to that literary genre. But now there is no place for detectives.<sup>97</sup>

These lines can be read on both a self-ironic and an apocalyptic level. It is as if Shalamov writes for a future court. "...now there is no place..." could mean now not, but later yes. In his tale "On lend lease" the mnemotechnical motive of conserving history in permafrost is combined with apocalyptic expectancy: "These human bodies crept along the slope, maybe intending to resurrect."<sup>98</sup> Apocalyptic expectancy is also embedded in "The Glove": "These gloves live in museum ice. The testimony, document, and exhibit of the fantastic realism of my then reality, wait their time, like

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<sup>92</sup> Here I do not consider the photos made by German soldiers, which do not show the processes of the mass killings.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 105.

<sup>94</sup> Lanzmann, "Das unnennbare benennen".

<sup>95</sup> "Нет личных дел, нет архивов, нет историй болезни... Документы нашего прошлого уничтожены, караульные вышки спилены, бараки сровнены с землей, ржавая колючая проволока смотана и увезена куда-то в другое место. На развалинах Серпантинки процвел иван-чай – цветок пожара, забвения, враг архивов и человеческой памяти" (2, 279).

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Jurgenson, "Spur, Dokumente, Prothese".

<sup>97</sup> "Даже дактилоскопический отпечаток один и тот же на той, мертвой, перчатке и на нынешней, живой, держащей сейчас карандаш. Вот истинное чудо науки криминалистики. Эти двойники перчатки. Когда-нибудь я напишу детектив с таким перчаточным сюжетом и внесу вклад в этот литературный жанр. Но сейчас не до жанра детектива" (2, 280).

<sup>98</sup> "Эти человеческие тела ползли по склону, может быть собираясь воскреснуть" (1, 356).

newts and coelacanths to become a latimeria of coelacanthi.”<sup>99</sup> The anthropomorphization of the glove becomes evident when Shalamov expects his glove to start to speak: “My fingers still haven’t said their last word.”<sup>100</sup>

If the untouchability of nature to Ushakov and Florenskii secures a distance for aesthetical delight, then to Shalamov the distance between a human being and nature corresponds to the distance between man and apocalypse. Different from the expectation of a soon-to-come apocalypse, which was typical for the time when Ushakov wrote his tract about the icon,<sup>101</sup> Shalamov postpones the highest court into a distant, but not guaranteed future. Finally, Shalamov’s glove could be illustrated by two of the most significant hands from the history of painting. The first is the out-stretched hand of God, which in an instant touch with Adam, creates man on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The second is, in the same chapel on the altar wall, Christ’s judging hand, rising over the whole mankind.

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<sup>99</sup> “Перчатки эти живут в музейном льду – свидетельство, документ, экспонат фантастического реализма моей тогдашней действительности, ждут своей очереди, как тритоны или целоканты, чтобы стать латимерией из целокантов” (2, 279).

<sup>100</sup> “Пальцы мои не сказали еще последнего слова” (2, 305).

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Tarasov, *Icon and devotion*, ch. 3.

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