

Vladimir Shinkarev

(b. 1954, Leningrad)



An artist and writer. In 1984 was one of organizers of the group Mit'ki, together with the artists Dmitry Shagin, Alexander Florensky, and Olga Florenskaya. In 1985, while working in a boiler room, Shinkarev wrote the book *Mit'ki*, which played an important role in shaping the anti-ideology of the Mit'ki movement. In 1984 and 1985 the Mit'ki held annual apartment exhibitions of artwork produced by the group's members. Since 1987 they have exhibited their work in various cities in Russia and abroad. In 2008, Shinkarev broke with Shagin due to the latter's participation in the presidential campaign for the election of Dmitry Medvedev. Now, Shinkarev claims that Mit'ki was an entirely fictional movement.

FROM *MIT'KI*¹

Part One

Below you will find the beginnings of a vocabulary and rules of behavior for a new mass youth movement akin to the hippies or the punks.

I propose that the participants of the movement be called *mit'ki*, following the name and archetypal example of Dmitry SHAGIN (his image, however, is by no means thoroughly reproduced by the substance of the movement).

The *mit'ki* movement promises to be more organic than the movements named above: it is impossible to fake being a *mityok* if you are not one; outside attributes are almost nonexistent—*mit'ki* wear whatever is at hand, preferably in the beatnik style of the 50s, but nothing pop-related under any circumstances.

The *mityok's* face alternates between two affected submissive expressions: tenderness that borders on idiocy, and sentimental dejection. All his movements and intonations, although very tender, are also energetic, and therefore the *mityok* always appears to be a bit drunk.

¹ From: Vladimir Shinkarev, "Mit'ki," in *Mit'ki: Vybrannoe*, compiled by P. V. Krusanov (St. Petersburg: Kanon, 1999), 11–16, 43–50.

In general, every sign of life that the *mityok* exudes is maximally pitched so that the word or utterance sounds like an undivided growl, while his face remains just as touching.

In theory, the *mityok* is a highly moral personality; his worldview leans toward the formula "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nation," but in practice he is so thoughtless that he might appear to lack any moral anchors. However, the *mityok* never resorts to force; he does not purposefully cause others pain and is utterly nonaggressive.

If the *mityok's* feelings are hurt, he will never express indignation or displeasure directly to his offender. More likely he will tenderly, but with sadness, exclaim: "How could you, brother?" However, once out of sight he will complain, almost with tears in his eyes, that, with every accusation that was levied against him, he was "made into a shit sandwich."

Here are the words and expressions used by the *mit'ki*, based on the vocabulary of Dmitry Shagin:

DYK: a word that can be used in place of practically any other word or expression. DYK pronounced with a questioning intonation replaces the words *how*, *who*, *why*, *what for*, etc., but most often it is a sign of reproach: *how come? Why did you treat the mityok this way?* DYK with an exclamatory intonation is more often a prideful self-assurance, or agreement with his conversation partner, or it can express caution. DYK with ellipsis is an apology, an acknowledgement of having made a mistake, or committed a dirty trick, etc.

BRICKS-STICKS (usually *eh*, *bricks-sticks*; or even more often *eh*, *brickies-stickies*): second-most-used expression. Expresses insult, regret, delight, apology, fear, joy, anger, and so on. Multiple repetitions are typical. For example, while the *mityok* searches for a misplaced item, he continually exclaims, in an extremely expressive fashion: "*eh, brickies-stickies!*" Very often, it is used in tandem with "DYK." Two *mityoks* can spend an indeterminably long time talking:

—Dyk!

—Eh, brickies-stickies!

—Dyk!

or thighs and exclaiming "carnage!" "murder!" — or, by contrast, he uses sad expressions: "Dyk! How can that be?!" The choice of one type of reaction over the other is not motivated by what the mityok hears.

The mityok's way of relating to anyone he meets is characterized by extreme friendliness. He uses terms of endearment with everyone, calling them little brother, little sister, etc. (Sometimes this makes it difficult to understand who is being referred to, since the mityok will necessarily refer to Sergei Kurekhin as "Koreshok-Kureshok," and to Boris Grebenshchikov as "Grebeshochechok").²

Even when meeting people he does not know very well, the mityok is obliged to kiss their cheeks three times, and on leaving, he embraces the person, leans his head on his shoulder and stands in this pose, eyes closed, for a long time, as if in a trance.

The mityok's array of interests is rather varied; however, discussion of a topic that interests the mityok, for example a work of art, is almost entirely confined to the use of expressions "carnage," "murder," etc. To express the highest praise for a work of art, the mityok uses the exclamation "A-a-a-a!" while with his hand he makes a gesture that resembles throwing a fistful of dirt against a wall.

Such sensational events in the city's cultural life as the Tutankhamun or the Thyssen-Bornemisza exhibit elicit in the mityok only a studiously indifferent reaction.

The mityok likes to engage in self-affirmation by interacting with people who are not part of the mityok movement. Here, for example, is a typical telephone conversation between Dmitry Shagin and Alexander Florensky.

FLORENSKY (lifting the receiver): Hello.

SHAGIN (sadly and tentatively, after a long pause and inarticulate groaning): Shurka? Shurochek?

² Boris Grebenshchikov is a famous rock singer known for his solo work as well as his work with his group Aquarium.

FLORENSKY: Hello, Mitya.

SHAGIN (tenderly): Shurenochek . . . Shurka . . . A-a-a- . . . (after a pause, with alarm). How are you? Well, how are you over there?!!

FLORENSKY: Not bad, Kuzya's here, he dropped by.

SHAGIN (with an inexpressible tenderness toward Kuzya, whom he does not know very well): Kuzya! Kuzyunchik . . . Kuzyarushka's over at your house . . . (Pause). Kuzya's over?

FLORENSKY (with irritation): Yes.

SHAGIN: A-a-a . . . You're kicking back with Kuzya then, right? (Pause. Suddenly, with emotion) And my sister, where's my little sister?

FLORENSKY (with a bit of ill feeling, guessing that it is his wife, Olga Florensky, that is being referred to): What little sister?

SHAGIN: This sister that I have . . . Olen'ka.

FLORENSKY: Olya is at work.

SHAGIN: Olen'ka . . . (deeply and seriously, as if sharing a deep mystery). She's a sister to me . . .

FLORENSKY: Mitya, what are you calling about?

SHAGIN: Dyk! Brickies-stickies! Dyk! brickies-stickies! . . . Dyk . . . brickies-stickies!

FLORENSKY (irritated): Mitya, enough already.

SHAGIN (tenderly, reproachfully): Shurenok, bricks-sticks . . . You cardboard fool you . . .

FLORENSKY (with undisguised irritation): Enough!

adventures of the movie's plot as if they were the entertaining behavior of exotic animals (characteristic in connection with this is the use of the term "landed" from animal husbandry).

TO LAND (someone): . . .

With the same curiosity and joy, Mitya would have watched how, for example, an elephant could have eaten, incredibly, several quintals of cabbage at one sitting.

—Ho! He's picking up another head of cabbage! Now he's going to eat it! Look, look . . . Yeah, for sure! He ate it!

And who would not have shown a joyful interest in that ability! But even though I'm fond of cabbage I personally do not envy that elephant. A person who has a good life will not turn all his thoughts to cabbage or girls. Properly speaking, ethics has nothing to do with it.

—Yeah he's slick, this "dear friend." But I feel bad for him . . . Poor guy! He's bored, nothing interests him . . .

The mityok delivers himself from sin not by hysterically turning away, not with the foam of melancholy, but with laughter and compassion.

And let the movement's undecided neophytes get spooked by this, but not for nothing was Fil's chapter "Mit'ki and sex" so short: "The mit'ki are not sexual." This not a condemnation; it is simply a not very interesting fact.

What is there that's more interesting? Drinking cheap wine, while tearing the bottle out of each other's hands?

Yes, reader, of course I've exposed the mityok to criticism of the most severe sort—here, make him into a shit sandwich!—but it's one of the most charming aspects of the movement: the sin of the mityok is visible to all!

Somewhere I heard a wonderful thought about the ethics of Soviet punks: there's morality, and there's decency. To be moral is to refrain from swearing, whereas to be decent is to refrain from betraying your friends. The punks have no morality, but they do have decency. If that were really so, the mit'ki would be ready to befriend the punks (although if one were to take this proposition literally, it would turn out that mit'ki have not only decency but also morals—they never swear. What for? When one has such a large arsenal of expressive means, swear words are pale and primitive).

Morality is something artificial; it's a toll gate that warns of some possible unpleasantness. But dwarves easily slip under it, while giants jump over it without noticing—and is such a toll gate, one that's always closed, needed? Morality is necessary for those for whom everything needs to be tip-top, open-closed, clear eyes, pleasant conversations and, daily—a knife in the back.

No, the mityok wears his sin on his sleeve. Did not drop off the laundry at the laundromat, drank away two rubles, got home late—but in exchange, these and all his sins, are visible to the whole world. Everyone blames the mityok, and the first one to blame him is the mityok himself.

Would you, reader, go with the mityok on a reconnaissance mission? He won't betray you, but he'll come to the task with a tender submissive smile, that's the problem. In any case, not everyone can be a scout; reconnaissance—it's completely out of the mityok's character.

—We know, we know! In character for him is to rip the bottle of cheap wine out of his friend's hands!

Yes, reader, one can rip a bottle of cheap wine out of a friend's hands; there are times even when it's necessary. But what's to be said! Reconnaissance is reconnaissance, a bottle is a bottle, but if I need to defend myself against the whole world, I would like to lean my back against the dirty body of a mityok . . .

Mityok culture has not as yet spread by leaps and bounds, and the frightening image of the bottle ripped from a friend's hands does not exhaust the complex image of the mityok.

There's a holiday—Day of the Mityok Equinox (this incomprehensible name came about in the course of history). The holiday is not celebrated on any particular date; it can be celebrated once a month, once a week, or every day. Often it coincides with the showing on TV of mityok TV favorites (however, these days also have their own, separate holidays. For example, "His Excellency's aide-de-camp is dry"—movie-watching without drinking; or "His Excellency's aide-de-camp is wet"—movie-watching while drinking).

Let's imagine the meeting of three mityok friends (A, B, and C), who've gotten together to celebrate the Day of the Mityok Equinox.

C (in a voice that breaks from emotion): Always! From now on you'll always drink your fill, we've hurt you enough!

A: (hitting the floor and choking on tenderness, drinks).

B and C (together): Finish it! Finish it!

And so on until the end of the get-together.

That's how good, how kind the mit'ki are! But how many absurd, mean rumors are spread about them—essentially because people cannot separate historical reality from the mit'ki's mythological symbolism.

There's talk even of the sexual libertinism of the mit'ki, but that is already beyond all measure. The mit'ki, as is well known, are so asexual that they pride themselves on it. Dmitry Shagin, for example, proudly asserts that he has never in his life known a woman. These discussions bring him both pride and pain; he pets his three daughters on the head and sorrowfully bites his lip. And it is all so high and so noble that the tongue does not dare ask—where did the three daughters come from, then? I once decided to ask: under the weight of facts D. Shagin admitted that after all yes, three times in his life he had known women (it's emblematic that in spite of their love of freedom, the mit'ki are as fertile as rabbits).

So, a question: where do the rumors that besmirch the public's estimation of the moral image of the mit'ki come from? Answer: from the mythology of the mit'ki. The consciousness of the undeveloped listener gathers from the myth not the suggestive layers, not even the moral of the story, but what the undeveloped consciousness takes as fact. Let's examine this and disprove it on the evidence of two myths formed in the mit'ki sphere at about the same time.

THE BRIDE: Fil's tale

Once Fil decided to show off his bride (named Olen'ka, of course) to Florenych: have a bride-show.

He spent a long time with her walking the streets, could not commit himself, doubt assailed him—will Florenych like the bride?

Frozen like a dog, poor, sick, hadn't eaten anything since morning. Finally buys a bottle of wine—comes over to Florenych's place.

Florenych sits there. Piss-drunk, red-faced, putting away scrambled eggs and ham. Fil sits down across from him on a stool puts a bottle of wine on the table, worries, waits to find out what Florenych is going to say.

Florenych gobbles up the eggs and ham, drinks all the wine that Fil brought, then moves over to the bride and starts feeling her up: touches her breasts, gropes under her dress. Apparently, plans to use the right of the first wedding night.

USE THE RIGHT OF THE FIRST WEDDING NIGHT (mythological): A. Florenych's mode of conducting himself with his friends' girlfriends.

For Fil everything went dark; he lowered his head, clenched his teeth, only his little legs stick out.

But the heart is not a stone—he grabs a knife from the table, throws it at Florenych. But either Fil was shaking so badly, or Florenych was so unsteady on his feet—the knife hit the bride instead, just barely grazed her cheek—left a little scar. Small, white. Under the eye.

THE BRIDE: Florenych's tale

One time Florenych—poor, sick, cold—was sitting around. Came home from work, hadn't eaten all day, his back hurts, his head is about to explode; sits on his stool, only his little legs are sticking out.

Made himself eggs and ham—let me, he thinks, just once in my life eat in peace.

Fil comes over. Piss-drunk, red-faced, two chicks with him, one under each arm. One of these, Olen'ka, he says, jokingly, is his bride.

Fil sits down at the table, gobbles up Florenych's eggs and ham, drinks the bottle of wine that Florenych had hidden away. Puts down the glass, lays down the fork, and starts to feel up one of the chicks (not the bride, the other one). Touches her breasts, gropes under her dress.

Poor Florenych sits across from him on a stool, staring, while Fil's bride has only her poor little legs sticking out. Hangs her