

Rejecting the White Cube

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It never quite seems right to place Russian artistic culture along the same lines of development as those in the West. Without endlessly musing over the involvement of some inconceivable Russian soul or national character, this paper aims to create a narrative for the development of contemporary Russian art exhibition. By looking at the historical and contemporary societal conditions surrounding Russian art exhibition culture in the last four decades, one can assemble a sturdy sense of related causality and change beginning with the inception of the Moscow Conceptualist School in the 1970s Soviet Union. The definitive Moscow Conceptualist Andrei Monastyrsky explains the unique worldview:

And so I rode down World Prospekt like always, in complete introversion, isolation from outward reality. My brain was feverishly working; uncontrollable mental activity as always revolved around the the nature of the "layered world pie" and all of its mental levels. I tirelessly theologized on how and why my consciousness began to communicate with these layers; expounded on the nature of the continuous stream of mental perceptions that I wound up in, and from which I could not escape.¹

The quote shows inclusivity in analysis; an almost obsessive awareness of history and surroundings that has been a focal the Moscow Conceptualist mindset, which Monastyrsky helped to pioneer. It is a representation of the late, and Post-Soviet mentality that contributed to this unique Russian artistic culture.

This paper looks to create, explain, and present for further and future consideration a historical narrative. To create such a narrative across different generations of artistic movements is hardly new, but it usually takes a number of

¹ Andrei Monastyrsky, "Закрытый Город," (Monologue, Moscow Conceptualism, by Sergei Letov, 1985).

decades before contemporary art of any era begins to be academically and taxonomically classified vis-à-vis its predecessors.²

The goal is not to relate and scrutinize a number of distinctions in form or substance of artworks, but to establish a historical dialogue between various forms and subjects, and the sociological, political, economic, and ideological forces surrounding those artists, curators, exhibition space entrepreneurs and activists. The diverse artworks and the techniques they comprise often take a back seat to, or are a part of the larger modes that will be analyzed throughout. John Cotton Dana, an American turn-of-the-century librarian and museum director explained that each museum should be rooted in a community, and takes an active role in responding to that community's needs and desires.³ Art spaces, which will be loosely defined as any particular space of art exhibition, respond to the needs of a community, and ultimately the course of societal development in Russia in two distinct ways.

The similarities among different Russian modes of exhibition are rooted in the common environment, while the differences reflect waves of cultural, political, and economic upheaval. At the end of the day, these artists and art entrepreneurs are addressing the same societal conditions and precedents, and so the end results resemble one another in form. As the common Russian environment changes, strong actors appear and react to these changes, and develop new art space cultures. These two forces, a driving cultural unity, and the centrifuge of personal, charismatic interest comprise the bulk of this historical narrative.

² Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 149-150.

³ *Ibid.*, 30.

The 1970s and 80s saw the birth and rise to cultural prominence of the artistic movement known as Moscow Conceptualism in the Soviet Union. Ideological pressure was in decline, and creeping in from the West were notions of the postmodern condition. The mode of exhibition that develops as a tool of artists such as Ilya Kabakov, Sergei Bugaev, and the "Collective Action group" was the *total installation*. The form was born out of the lack of private space and war on materialistic domesticity discussed at length in sociological accounts of the Soviet lifestyle.

The total installation comprises art based on experience that fosters dialogue and features irreproducibility in order to avoid ever-suspicious commoditization contemporaneously taking hold in the West. In such a style, the notions of viewer and participant are interchangeable, in the belief that interaction with such an exhibit changes its nature. It appropriates the infamous objects and imagery that could be subject to investigation and skepticism for the ideologically alert.⁴⁵ Installation fuses the intention of the artist and his work with the hierarchical institutions that get to assert *what is art*. There is no censorship, no reinterpretation by personally motivated curators and administrators, just a conversation between community and artist. It is no surprise that this drastic change in exhibition style comes at the same time as a bloom of artist-curated spaces in the United States and the West in general, but

⁴ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 147-8.

⁵ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 192.

the uniquely Russian path of development is the subject of analysis in this paper.⁶

Even following the fall of the Soviet Union, when Moscow Conceptualists gained international recognition and the ability to showcase their installations in reputable and exclusionary museums, the core idea remained the same; to show the artistic process from start to finish, and create an irreproducible experience as a viewer is brought through the work. First born in the communal kitchen, this form of exhibition unites all four of my chapters, allowing for significant variations.

The forms and content associated with the Moscow Conceptualist School were hardly unprecedented. Some scholars even connect the associated artists of the school with a long legacy of *Russian Exceptionalism* subtly manifested throughout all generations of art there.⁷⁸ This paper does not attribute similarities in artistic movements to Russian Exceptionalism, so not to make sweeping generalizations about an assumedly homogenous Russian populous. This in mind, it will remain a recurrent theme, but used conservatively and selectively.

⁶ Guy F. Whitney, "Artist Run Spaces," in *The New Art Space*, ed. Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles: Self-Published, 1978), 7.

⁷ Russian Exceptionalism is an oft-recurring theme throughout Russian artistic culture beginning arguably with the 19th century Slavophile school of literature. Proponents of Russian Exceptionalism expound a unique path of development for Russian society, philosophy, and art, tied with an inherent spirituality, to contrast morally deficient Western Society. This spirituality is often linked with an Orthodox Christian legacy, but in this context particularly represents the willingness to believe in an intangible, benevolent source of knowledge to draw on.

⁸ Joseph C. Troncale, "Apartment Exhibitions of Underground Russian Avant-Garde Art," in *Протранство Свободы*, ed. Richard Waller (Richmond: University of Richmond Museums, 2006), 34-6.

The Moscow Conceptualist precedent of bypassing the particularly strict censoring and exclusionary official museum channels in the Soviet Union, and later, the Russian Federation, proved tenuous to the modern day. This paper juxtaposes post-Soviet modes of exhibition with the practices of the Moscow Conceptualist School to ask a number of questions. How do these modes of exhibition treat the postmodern condition of mimesis? What are some of the necessities and pressures of contemporary society that cause such a mode of exhibition to arise? How do the proponents of such a mode of exhibition view their connection to the Moscow Conceptualist legacy?

Each new exhibition style invites different questions, and requires a truly multidisciplinary batch of sources to reinforce this dialogue. Traditional museum studies theory is the backbone and purest framework for the questions asked of each section. Sociological accounts of Soviet and Post-Soviet lifestyles contextualize these theories within the Russian condition. Moscow Conceptualist theory pieces, most notably by Boris Groys, contribute to understanding the movement, its motives, and the goals of cultural creation. Online news resources, personal experiences, and interviews with individual actors appear in contemporary sections where academia has not yet gone. Such a multifaceted selection helps to create a more encompassing narrative.

The first section of the paper will be dedicated to evaluating the loosely defined constituents of the Moscow Conceptualist School, and performing close readings of some of its most iconic works. This section establishes a standard for dialogue with subsequent modes of exhibition, supported by scholars who have

dedicated themselves to the study of the Moscow Conceptualist School, unlike the relatively unstudied contemporary sections, purely by virtue of passed time.

The second section comprises the development and operation of the “hybrid art space.” These are popular museums in urban settings, established since the fall of the Soviet Union that tend to incorporate different facilities, like restaurants, hostels, event halls, educational centers, etc. These spaces may sound like a return to a more traditional museum system, and indeed there are several departures from a Moscow Conceptualist set of norms, and yet the preservation of the total installation, albeit tweaked keeps the narrative palpable.

Contemporary apartment exhibits, even if outwardly similar to the Conceptualist kitchen exhibition, arose in an entirely different context and will be the focus of the third section. The public to which these exhibits appeal differs greatly from that of the Moscow Conceptualists. Deinstitutionalized and even secretive cultural creation rings familiar, but the ultimate goals of these gatherings are brand new.

The fourth and final section breaks through the metaphorical and literal walls of what is commonly thought to define art space, but its subjects easily make up the most widely publicized mode of exhibition. Performance art in the form of political activism has taken on a crucial role in the reinterpretation of art in Russia, and artist collectives like Pussy Riot and Voina [Война] contemplate many of the same political and intellectual issues that prompted the inception Moscow Conceptualist School. Political pragmatism and reclaiming the public space as an installation component will be the focal points of discussion in this section.

With such diverse and temporally scattered modes of exhibition, it can be easy to lose track of the threads that bind them. At the same time that this paper seeks to create one string of continuous narrative about post-Soviet art spaces, exhibiting choices and their shared roots in late Soviet nonconformist culture, it pays particular attention to how the three contemporary modes of exhibition explored in the later chapters developed in dialogue with one another. That is, the narrative from Moscow Conceptualism to the present cannot be viewed as one succinct course, but as an inclusive and multi-voiced narrative representing different facets of artistic and general society. Just as the Moscow Conceptualist School cannot be viewed as a single-faceted entity, so differ the various trajectories of exhibition styles with their roots in the movement.⁹

Chapter I: Moscow Conceptualism

The second most commonly used moniker for the Moscow Conceptualist School is similar to the first, but includes the distinction of “romantic.” Groys coined the use of *Moscow Romantic Conceptualism*, which as a term has been reinterpreted to suit the whims and theories of various art historians and critics. In order to understand fully why the installation art is an extension of the Moscow Conceptualist worldview, we have to break that perspective down into its components. The first component explains why exactly the school is referred to as *Moscow* Conceptualism and not Soviet, Eastern, or Russian Conceptualism. In a discussion among Moscow Conceptualist artists Andrei Monastyrsky, Yuri

⁹ Andrei Monastyrsky, Yuri Leiderman and Vadim Zakharov, "On the Terminology of Moscow Conceptualism: A Trialogue among Andrei Monastyrsky, Yuri Leiderman, and Vadim Zakharov," in *Moscow Conceptualism in Context*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld, trans. Lynn Visson (New Brunswick: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2011), 292.

Leiderman, and Vadim Zakharov we can gather an overwhelming distaste for the association of their movement with a national identity or the implication that their train of thought is wrought with an intentional Russian exceptionalism or Soviet prerogative.¹⁰ *Moscow* in this invocation serves a simple, locative purpose and comes with the fewest ideological and theoretical associations when put in comparison with the other options. The origins of the movement are rooted in Russia, but the rush to characterize it entirely as a product of Russian incompatibility with the existing Western Conceptualist School does not give due credit to the well-documented intentions of the associated artists themselves, the social and political factors in the coincidental environment at the inception of Moscow Conceptualism, and the real manifestation of some sort of uniquely Russian character. That being said, acknowledged members of the Moscow Conceptualist School have been based in Saint Petersburg, as well as Moscow.

Explaining why the term “Moscow” enjoys such a simple agency in the moniker is crucial for precluding the misinterpretation of the second component of the title, *Romantic*. Romantic in this context does imply a willingness on behalf of the artist, the critic, and the viewer to accept an unquantifiable meaning in an artwork; expressed most commonly with the mantra that art is “greater than the sum of its parts.” Groys extensively discusses the crossover between the worlds of faith and art, both of which elucidate aspects of the real world by borrowing from a world that is impossible to explain, but able to be interpreted.¹¹ Even if unknowingly, when he analyzes the works of Lev Rubinstein he uses hermeneutics as an analog for the inexplicable quality of art that excludes itself

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Boris Groys, *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), 53-5.

from atomism of ordinary physical objects. The borrowed otherworldly information represented by the overall sense produced by Rubinstein's works is the subtractive difference between the experience of a viewer, or artist for that matter, and the simple sum of the parts that the imperative language the pieces use as a medium. The difference is cultural transmission that defies and pays no mind to instrumentalized reason.



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Fig. 1.
Lev Rubinstein, Ring Binders including *The New Intermission* [Новый Антракт], 1976-1985. Boris Groys. From: *History Becomes Form*. Cambridge: MIT Press. 2010, P. 39.

This idea states that a viewer interacting with a piece of art would yield a higher output of ideas than the individual components of the piece. In the case of Rubinstein, the individual verbal commands highlight the relationship between

¹² Small portions of text are written on pages in a three-ring binder. Rubinstein uses simple text commands, like “turn the page” that do not give any hint of the author's tone or content. By jumping from small portion to portion of text, the reader is made aware of the mechanics of language and the assumedly ubiquitous expectation of hermeneutics.

Romanticism and Conceptualism that codifies the school at hand. Romanticism contributes the ability to believe an inexplicable experience. The aspects of Conceptualism lie in the refusal to commoditize and materialize artwork, as well as the reassigning of values to appropriated components in an artwork.¹³ That is, the discourse between viewer and artist, often with the artwork as the forum, is a working part of the artwork itself. In that sense, the artist is in as direct communication as possible with his audience, precluding the intervention of a curator or censor. This represents the international notion of Conceptualism shared by Western artists and critics. A similar, universal manifestation of the artist's newfound desire for direct communication with the audience leads to the development of artist-curated spaces across Europe and North America in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁴

Artist testimonies highlight a sort of unconsciously Russian aspect of the Moscow Conceptualist School. This is evident regardless of the stated intentions of said artists, wishing to be a more integrated part of an international artistic movement. Boris Groys's analysis is a strong tool for codifying some of the subtle and esoteric points in artist testimonies that a Western-reared scholar might not pick up at first. He identifies that a viewer who takes away something transcendent from the experience of the artistic process is realizing his own historicism.¹⁵ In other words, something inherently Russian is contributing to both the design of a Moscow Conceptualist installation, and the desired response from viewers.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Alana Heiss, "Placing the Artist," in *The New Art Space*, ed. Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles: Self-Published, 1978), 10.

¹⁵ Groys, *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism*, 55.

Russianness as it existed by the 1970s and 80s contributed to the uniqueness of the Moscow Conceptualist school with two distinct concepts: *Russian Cosmism* [Русский Космизм] and *Soulful Culture* [Духовная Культура].¹⁶ Russian Cosmism, alternatively known as *Esoteric Futurism* essentially reinforces the notion of Romanticism as defined earlier; Russian people are striving towards an intangible and often mythical ideal, preordained by a higher power and defiant of traditional reason. Soulful Culture subsequently denotes that the Russian people are more willing to put their faith in such an ideal future, enough to dedicate their lives towards even a small increment of this goal, despite the likely unforeseeable attainment of idealness. In a great deal of literature this willingness is known as the *communal spirit*.

The notion of being lead by an enlightened being is reinforced by Victor Tupitsyn's representation of the Moscow Conceptualist artist as a Russian folkloric goblin figure [леший].¹⁷ This character leads the minds of his peers along a path towards a promised goal without ever actually arriving there. This metaphor characterizes those influential actors throughout this paper, following the Moscow Conceptualist precedent of leading viewers along the path ascertained by Russian Cosmism. Marek Bartelik agrees in suggesting that the Moscow Conceptualist artist has embraced the Romantic role of transmitting unique spiritual values to an on looking public, supported by Groys'

¹⁶ Troncale, *Apartment Exhibitions of Underground Russian Avant-Garde Art*, 34-36.

¹⁷ Victor Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 191.

construction of the realm of art, from which artists may borrow knowledge unattainable in the human realm.¹⁸

But now that some exposition on the character of the Moscow Conceptualist artists has been provided, the real task at hand is to address the unique modes of exhibition employed in their ongoing artistic tenure. The installation, the primary form of Moscow Conceptualist exhibition, did not entirely originate in the 1970s and 80s with the artists we associate with the movements. Tracing these influences does not alter the fact that the Moscow Conceptualist worldview is the first to provide a palpable alternate means of cultural production in the Soviet Union.

After reviewing the museological history it is safe to acknowledge that the Moscow Conceptualist installation was conceived as a unique and relatively unprecedented Russian offspring of its sociopolitical surroundings and theoretical underpinnings. The first of which, already mentioned earlier in this chapter is the requirement that an artist be in direct communication with his audience.

The second condition that caused the inception of the installation was the need for discretion from under the watchful eye of political censorship authorities, hardened in the Brezhnev regime at the time of Moscow Conceptualist origins.¹⁹ This pressure catalyzed the popularity of apartment exhibits in both Moscow and Saint Petersburg that would come to have a

¹⁸ Marek Bartelik, "The Banner without a Slogan: Definitions and Sources of Moscow Conceptualism," in *Moscow Conceptualism in Context*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld (New Brunswick: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2011), 14-15.

¹⁹ Troncale, *Apartment Exhibitions of Underground Russian Avant-Garde Art*, 28.

profound effect on how the school would continue to construct installations. In fact it is very possible to suggest that the apartment exhibit and Moscow Conceptualism as a whole had a reciprocal influence on one another.²⁰ The communal kitchen under the harness of these generations of artists was transformed from a space of forced exposure into one of willing transparency and exchange. Artists were able to share artistic processes and accept critiques in a space so unexpectedly free that Hermitage curators would frequent the occasions to discover what they could sense was the future of Russian artistic culture. In a way, the communal kitchen provided a space for the participating artists to discuss transcendent notions of art that requires belief in the otherworldliness that illuminate those truths that men come to learn about the real world that were not otherwise possible.²¹

The communal kitchen apartment gave way to the standard form of the Moscow Conceptualist installation and perhaps the notion of reproducibility of revelation. Because the creative trappings of artists surrounded a viewer at one of these apartment exhibits, he was able to take the same intellectual path that the artists themselves employed. This leads us to a third condition for the inception of the Moscow Conceptualist installation: the rejection of the commoditization of individual artworks.

The Western system of art, whose influence was trickling into the Soviet Union, particularly through pop art, and the Soviet Union both placed individual artworks on an altar in order to ascribe them desired values, be they monetary or

²⁰ Sergeo Kovalsky, "Квартирные Выставки Русского Авангардистского Искусства Андерграунда," in *Протранство Свободы*, ed. Richard Waller (Richmond: University of Richmond Museums, 2006), 23-4.

²¹ Groys, *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism*, 55.

ideological. The Moscow Conceptualist removes an image or sculpture from established context to be evaluated only in cohesion with the installation as a whole. The installation in its entirety became viewed as an artwork, not the individual components.²² In this sense, just like Rubinstein's work demonstrates, the experience of viewership is as much art as the pieces themselves, and the rejection of atomism of an artwork's elements through the cohesion of an installation preserves the mechanism of viewer-artist dialogue. Note here how the principles of Moscow Conceptualism tend to transcend distinctions between visual arts, language arts, and exhibition. The principles really constitute a worldview, not just an artistic school.

The fourth condition that brought about the expansion of installation culture for the Moscow Conceptualists was the reclamation of public goods brought about first by *Glasnost'*, and later the fall of the Soviet Union. The rapid privatization of public property, of aesthetics that belonged hitherto solely to the Soviet artistic authorities, and even of urban spaces signified a myriad of newly available styles and settings to reinterpret.²³ The opening for public criticism, and to a degree, of creative license some might say not experienced in Russia for many centuries, brought the 1980s intelligentsia face to face with the postmodern condition.

That is not to say that Moscow Conceptualist artists had not been practicing appropriation with ideological aesthetics before *Glasnost'*, as we can see almost ubiquitously in the works of *Sots* artists like Komar and Melamid, and

²² Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2008), 51.

²³ Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, 224.

Eric Bulatov.²⁴ The way that these artists juxtaposed reclaimed elements of Socialist Realism with commoditized Western figures completely undermined the utopian and sacred meaning that for the duration of the Soviet Union was untouchable in such a public format.

Sots artists distinguished themselves from the greater school of Moscow Conceptualists in that they were far more often willing to work in a non-installation format, using standalone images to express this appropriation. The Moscow Conceptualist technique for appropriation, however, is well represented in Sergei Bugaev's [Afrika's] deflowering of the iconic 1937 statue, *The Worker and the Female Collective Farmer* [Рабочий и Кольхозница].²⁵ This action was a larger representation of the post-Soviet, postmodern views on mimesis, and an example of the adaptability of the term installation art for extensive use throughout the rest of this paper.

"Entering" the female collective farm worker was a metaphor for the larger act of appropriating Soviet imagery, and literally impregnating the aesthetic with new meaning, gained from the experience of the installation as a whole, as exhibited in the Queens Museum in New York in 1991. The fact that the work was exhibited abroad, and addressed the larger postmodern condition of what to do with the remnants of an expired Communist reality, reinforces the international tone of Moscow Conceptualism that took off with *Glasnost'*. Even more importantly from this exhibition, we learn that an installation can take place even in an extremely public setting.

²⁴ Margarita Tupitsyn, "Sots Art: The Russian Deconstructive Force," in *Sots Art*, ed. Marcia Tucker (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), 14.

²⁵ Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious*, 189.



(From Left to Right)

Fig. 2. Sergei Bugaev, *The Worker and the Female Collective Farmer*. 1991, photograph. Victor Tupitsyn. From: *The Museological Unconscious*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009. P. 189.

Fig. 3. *The Worker and the Female Collective Farmer*.

True, the arrangement of Afrika's photographs and objects at the Queens Museum in 1991 is an installation, but the act of entering the statue was an act of total installation in itself, with the public surroundings as the intended components of the action. To use Clair Bishop's definition, in a work of installation art, as opposed to an installation of artworks, "the space and the ensemble of elements within it are regarded in their entirety as a singular entity. Installation art created a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality."²⁶ To put even greater context to our working definition of installation art, we can supplement this idea with a note from Ilya Kabakov who explains, "the main center toward which everything

²⁶ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6.

is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer... any of its structures is oriented only toward the impression it should make on the viewer."²⁷ Together, these ideas establish that the total installation is one with complete intention, not susceptible to an atomistic analysis, and created solely to spur dialogue among viewers and between artist and viewer.

These definitions are important to bear in mind throughout the remainder of the paper, but particularly as close readings of two Moscow Conceptualist installations, the iconic *The Man Who Flew Into Space from his Apartment* by Ilya Kabakov, and a small selection of performances done by the artists' group *Collective Actions* [Коллективные Действия], formed and lead by the philologist turned artist and theoretician Andrei Monastyrsky. These close readings will show the Moscow Conceptualist mindset in action, and just how diverse a set of experiences result from any given total installation.

Focus on: *The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment*, Ilya Kabakov [1985]

The Man Who Flew Into Space from his Apartment is easily the most recognized installation from the Moscow Conceptualist School, and Ilya Kabakov easily the most recognized artist. He first assembled the installation in Moscow in 1985 and exhibited it in an official setting for the first time in the Feldman fine Arts Gallery in New York in 1988. In terms of the materials left in the installation, there is an unimposing catapult-like contraption assumedly used to launch our

²⁷ Ilya Kabakov, *On The "Total" Installation* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cants, 1997), 275.

absent hero into the cosmos. The walls are plastered with prototype designs for the machine along with tessellated and overlapping posters of old Soviet propaganda and aeronautical heroes.

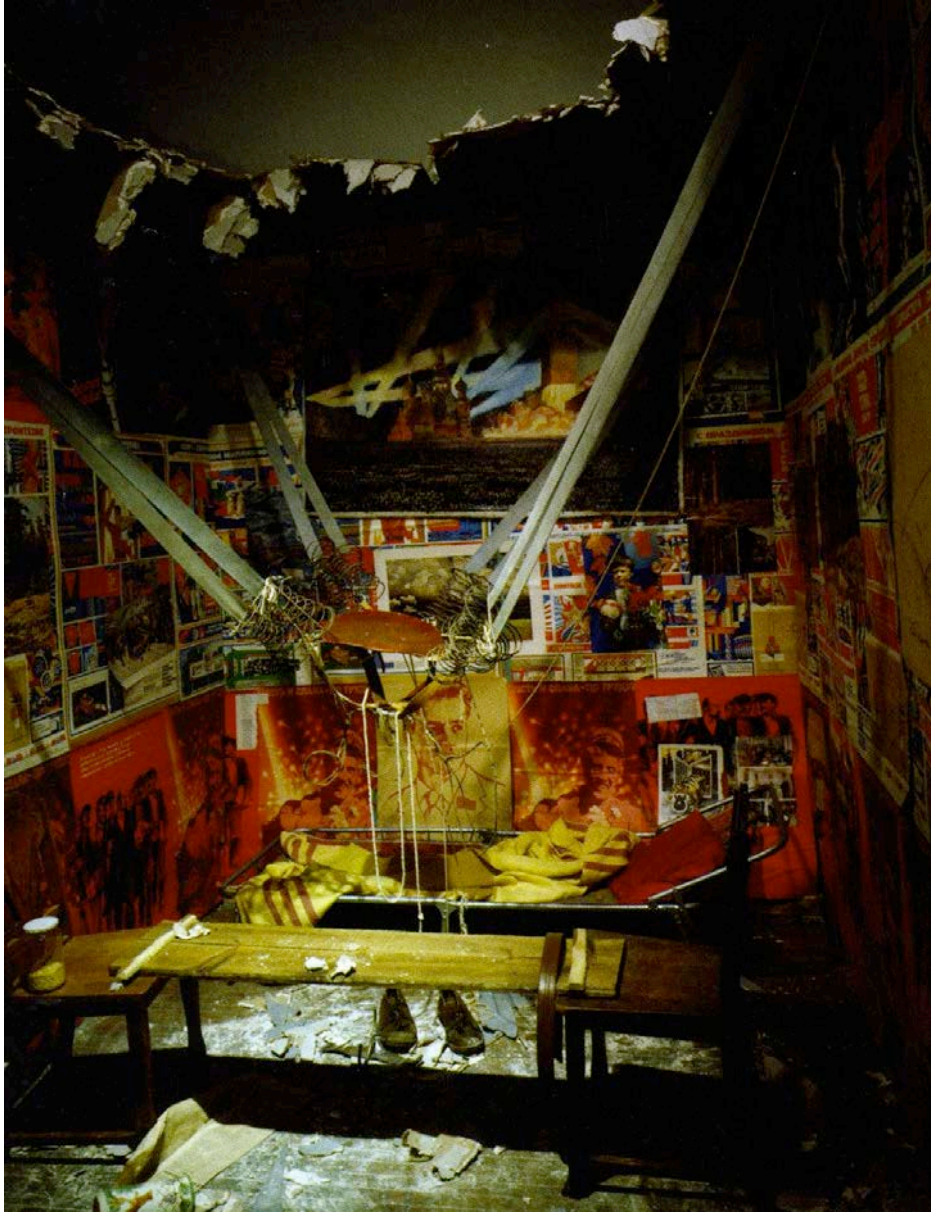


Fig. 4. Ilya Kabakov. The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment. 1985.

Much scholarly contemplation of the installation focused on the difference, as political scientists would put it, between *communism* (the idyllic end-goal focused, theoretical construct where rushing through the stages of

building utopia is taken on as quickly as possible, having already declared an end to history) and *Communism* (the real-world manifestations of the original theory and interpreted and twisted by Lenin and Stalin, also known as Marxism-Leninism).²⁸ The protagonist of the installation has ignored the realities of Communist society and pursued his own slice of communist utopia in the cosmos, still preoccupied with the aspirant goals of a young Soviet Union.

For our purposes though, the more important argument that Groys highlights is the linguistic difference between the Russian and English titles of the installation. While the English title uses *space*, a largely physical and even scientific term, the Russian title, uses the word cosmos [*космос*], which innately has considerably more philosophic and theoretical associations.²⁹ In fact this cosmos is the very object that Russian Cosmism, and its proponents were fixated on. It is a sort of secular, corporeal location described by those Russian Cosmists at the end of the 19th century as a substitute for heaven while still accepting the capacity to believe the inexplicable.

There are two facets of the piece to consider here. The first of these is the identity of the protagonist and whether he succeeds. As in many of his installations, Kabakov has not left us with the remains of his own, even hypothetical actions, as if the viewers stumbled upon this scene in some abandoned apartment. Further, we are left with the remnants of the protagonist's experiment, but not any proof of his success. This is a prime example of the goblinry that Tupitsyn associates with the Moscow Conceptualist artist. The

²⁸ Boris Groys, *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*, trans. Fiona Elliott (London: Afterall Books, 2006), 9.

²⁹ Ibid.

viewer is left with the experience and the contemplation of Utopia, while Kabakov has washed his hands of responsibility for an explanation or even results.

The second important facet to consider is the metaphor of the installation as a whole. The process that the protagonist takes on is the same venture that a Romantic Conceptualist attempts each and every time he presents an installation. A truthful, otherworldly utopia awaits our protagonist, just like the romantic conceptualist visits the paradise world from which he borrows. He then proceeds to use detailed, reproducible steps, with simple physical means imbued with cosmic energy of belief and circumstance to make the journey, surely a metaphor for a romantic conceptualist designing his installation. Substitute the world of spiritual, enlightenment that Groys details as inherently Romantic for that of the communist utopia and the design, and execution for the protagonist's apparatus, and we are left with a stunning allegory.

Kabakov's goblinry has a lot more influence than simply to convince ordinary viewers to be led astray. By acting in the romantic tradition as a purveyor of spiritual wisdom, he can influence those newly liberated minds of the post-Soviet public. A Romantic Conceptualist assertion states how the Russian Cosmic otherworld drives a viewer to continue perceiving experiences as revelatory because, "Even the act of waiting for a utopia is intrinsically utopian because this waiting already has the capacity to change the reality of the person who is waiting."³⁰ In other words, reality hinges on perception and belief;

³⁰ Utopia here does not necessary refer to the Marxist or socialist Utopia towards which those societies struggle. While that may be the desired destination for the protagonist of the installation, the viewer being shown a glimpse of utopia through experience awaits an ideal world being shown to them by Kabakov.

Kabakov is aware that art, like ideology and religion, can allow a glimpse into utopia, in an attempt to steer societal development following the influence of experience. With this understanding, Kabakov and Moscow Conceptualists conquered the forces that spurred their school's inception, and the understanding of a free utopia, even if conceived in a filthy communal kitchen, overtook the imposition of ideology.

Focus on: The *Collective Actions* Group [1970s-present]

Considering that experience of the viewer is the driving factor behind the mechanisms of art and mimesis in general in the Moscow Conceptualist worldview, it is no surprise that theatricality would come to play a large role in how these artists exhibit. Kabakov himself explains theatricality as a crucial component of a Romantic installation, defining it as an experience of coming into contact with another world.³¹ In this sense, theatricality is the core tenet of Moscow Conceptualist installation, but differs from traditional theater in that the artist strives for all participants, audience and actors alike, to accumulate the same experience from a work, and that there should be no security like the back of a chair or the divide between stage and audience.

Long before Kabakov and Groys were able to articulate these points, many early Moscow Conceptualists in the 1970s were devising new means of theatrical installations, most famously achieved by the *Collective Actions* group

Again acting like a goblin figure à la Tupitsyn, Kabakov never gives us a clear definition or image of this utopia., Ibid.

³¹ Ilya Kabakov and Boris Groys, "The Theatricality of the Installation and the Installation of the Theatrical," in *Installation & Theater*, ed. Isabel Sibel (Munich: Prestel, 2006), 15.

conceived by Andrei Monastyrsky. Monastyrsky came from a background in philology, and much like Lev Rubinstein, used the mechanics of linguistics as a tool to produce a certain experience for a viewer. Viewers were tasked with individual actions in works like the *Thirty-Three-Minute Kron-Act* [*Тридцатитрехминутный Кронакт*]. They watch each other as they obey simple imperative tasks written in simple language. As a result they experience a comprehensive perception of the irreproducible installation as participants and not spectators, carrying out the reproducible tasks of an outside, predetermining figure.³² Another important technique that Monastyrsky repeats throughout *Collective Actions* exhibitions in this installation is the use of time as a component for manipulation when assembling components of his total installation. By simultaneously issuing tasks at different intervals, he highlights the importance of history, how we can tweak our perception of history in order to understand our surroundings.

For some of *Collective Actions*' most famous exhibitions, *The Slogan* [*Слогун*] (1977), *The Time of Action* [*Время Действия*] (1978), and *Balloon* [*Шар*] (1977), all compiled in the collection *Journeys to the Outskirts of the City* [*Поездки за Город*] (1998), the setting is a markedly different situation than the communal kitchen installation. Kabakov in his discussion with Groys on the theatricality of an installation explains how the ideal installation is one where the author is as

³² Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, "Moscow Conceptual Performance Art in the 1970s," in *Moscow Conceptualism in Context*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld (New Brunswick: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2011), 156.

invisible as possible.³³ In this sense, Collective Actions devised the ideal installation long before Kabakov codified it.



Fig. 5. Collective Actions Group. *Slogan*. 1977.

Just as the artistic experience for Moscow Conceptualists is often compared to religious faith, so can the exhibitions of Collective Actions be described as a meditative process. The setting for their installations was always in the middle of a field or forest, most often in the winter. The trek on foot to the remote installation site invokes the experience of collective sacrifice, an important facet of the utopian struggle the participants were about to indulge in.³⁴ Once they arrive, the complete seclusion of the stark surroundings gives a clear perspective of the demonstrative experience intended for the viewer by the artists. The "stumbled upon" context devised by the very group participating is absolved of all authorship. The participants would arrive at the installations and

³³ Kabakov and Groys, *The Theatricality of the Installation and the Installation of the Theatrical*, 16-17.

³⁴ Groys, *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism*, 148.

meet them as if there was no knowledge of intention, carrying on with normal habits like smoking and chatting, experiencing the installation equipped with only memory of their cultural identity, and a heightened awareness of their societal preconditions. Removing themselves from an urban setting is crucial, because like a set of prayer beads, induced seclusion helps participants to focus on the very experience of coming into contact with another world, the very raw, ancient theater that Kabakov desired.

A pertinent question comes from juxtaposing the installation settings of Kabakov with those of the Collective Actions group. Seclusion in order to achieve cleaner, higher levels of awareness is hardly a new concept, easily seen throughout scripture and history in most every world religion. However, despite often willing to compare the potential of art and the utopian form with religion, Kabakov did not care to leave his urban domains when creating total installation.

The cosmopolitan, glamorous exhibitions that Kabakov and many other Moscow Conceptualists put on in years near and after the collapse of the Soviet Union show the innate desire of one who claims to understand a utopia (in this case through art, but also from religion, ideology, etc.), to proselytize. Expanding membership for the continued existence of their worldview takes on a new, more potent role with the liberating of the public consciousness that occurs with *Glasnost*. That is, despite how these artists describe their processes as a constant struggle for a greater degree of contact with utopia through personal experience, the urges to claim or influence a slice of the privatized world might just be an unavoidable part of human nature. This is more easily taken on in an urban setting, where ideas can be subjected to the marketplace of private, or in the Russian case, newly privatized mind space. This is crucial to bear in mind to

understand just why other modes of exhibition were formed, continue to operate, and how pure a worldview can remain when it is exposed to the privatized, postmodern world.

Chapter II: Contemporary Hybrid Art Spaces

While chapter one was dedicated to development of the Moscow Conceptualist total installation, and then the theoretical underpinnings that catalyzed the exhibition form, chapter two represents an analysis of what happened, and is happening as these extremely conceptual artists met face-to-face with the realities of global society, privatization and the collapse of Communist ideology as an operational framework. These realities will highlight firstly some fallacies of the proclaimed theory of these artists, and the new modes of exhibition that developed as a result of these theoretical gaps. The chapter will go on to analyze how artists and museums within this new framework have acted along new theoretical guidelines to answer some of the same questions of postmodernism, commoditization of art, and most importantly experience as a transmitter of information. Moscow Conceptualists sought to achieve this process of experience in small milieus of artistic achievement and active viewership. The connected public of the new, privatized Russian Federation, however, can only be conquered with big, shiny incarnations of such a model.

The historical event that plunged the Moscow Conceptualist School into a direct dialogue with free market society took place in 1988, even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, where a landmark £2 million was generated in a

Sotheby's auction of contemporary Russian art.³⁵ The commoditization of nonconformist art would continue for the next two decades, with another notable event in 2008, the unprecedentedly lavish sale of Kabakov's *Beetle* for £2.93 million. Russian oligarchs, having recently profited from the uneven distribution of previously state controlled assets, bankrolled the vast majority of these purchases.

This clearly violates the often-proclaimed tenet of Moscow Conceptualism, even as a loosely defined movement, that the commoditization of art must be rejected. Considering how esoteric and lofty their worldview, it was no surprise that the theoretical conviction of these artists would falter when confronted with the possibility of material comfort, and so the pertinent question is where these artworks were going after sale. A quote from Peter Aven, banker, economist, and former Minister of Foreign Economic Relations for the Russian Federation sums up the attitude of these collectors for the first two decades of this newfound profitability, "I would establish a museum only if Russia becomes a normal country, where the normal existence of a private museum is possible."³⁶ This leads us to wonder just what a normal country is, and what is the reasoning behind this blatant distrust of one's own people.

This phenomenon is what Sonia Hirt coined as *privatism*, or a widespread belief in a benevolent public realm, stemming from low levels of interpersonal trust in society.³⁷ The rapid advent of private property in the Soviet Union drove

³⁵ Simon Hewitt, "What Makes A Market?: The State of Russian Contemporary Art," *Art & Auction*, no. September (2010), 77.

³⁶ Konstantin Akinsha, "The Intellectual Oligarch," *ARTnews* 104, no. Summer 2005 (2005), 181.

³⁷ Sonia A. Hirt, *Iron Curtains: Gates, Suburbs and Privatization of Space in the Post-Socialist City* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 4; 22-23.

these collectors to snatch up every bit of art they could at the auction house, as well as the bloom of fenced in suburban estates and lack of private gallery development. Many say the sheer presence of large sums of money in the hands of lavish individuals was enough to jumpstart a contemporary Russian art market.³⁸ Others might assert a cultural remnant from the Soviet era, which is to turn the apartment into a figurative *wunderkammer* in the fear that the opportunity to obtain those items will not last.³⁹ Regardless of reasoning, oligarchs cunningly took advantage of personal connections and a public that did not know how to maneuver a free market in order to capture large swaths of the Russian economy as well as newly liberated cultural capital.

In amassing large collections under a corporate name, we see these Russian oligarchs behaving a lot like their executive counterparts in the U.K. and U.S.A., as Chin-tao Wu calls *cultural managerial capitalists*.⁴⁰ These figures view themselves as being able to influence the social practices of the public by controlling cultural capital, in this case artwork, in that society.

For newly Post-Soviet Russia, the market for influencing public consciousness was huge, having just lost the binds of the Communist social contract.⁴¹ The prompt seizure and hoarding of cultural capital represents a symptom of privatism, and the rampant distrust of the public, but would soon give way to the realization that society can be influenced not only by

³⁸ Svetlana Yankina, "Contemporary Art: Fashionable with the Few," *The Art Newspaper*, no. 240 (2012), 16.

³⁹ Elizabeth Gaynor, "Private Russia," *Connoisseur* 221, no. 948 (1991), 106.

⁴⁰ Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s* (London: Verso, 2002), 11.

⁴¹ Groys, *Art Power*, 167.

commoditizing and allocating the presence of existing artwork, but by altering art institutions altogether.

During this time of *privatism*, from the early 1990s through to the late 2000s, contemporary Russian artists were left with few choices for exhibition. The more established names in the Moscow Conceptualist School like Kabakov and Prigov enjoyed largely publicized exhibition tours through European and North American galleries, private and public alike. This is most likely due to the overwhelming tide of foreign stylistic appropriation in artist groups and museums alike throughout the West out of the perceived need for political correctness.⁴² Particularly in the U.S. this internalization of the postmodern condition became the need for *polystylistic* considerations in an exhibition regime, borne of both public and critical cries for cultural inclusion. The remainder of young, lesser-known contemporary artists was faced with the persistent hierarchical rigidity, and a rather ubiquitous distrust of young talent in the Russian public museum system.⁴³ Leading into the late 2000s, however, there was an almost simultaneous drop in international sales of Russian contemporary art, and a bloom of new, unique private galleries in Russia that will come to be the focus of this chapter.⁴⁴⁵

The fusing of commercial and artistic culture is what makes up the backbone of this chapter, and the origins of the process deserve due analysis. Corporate patronage of artists and museums appears in the U.K. and U.S.

⁴² Marina Timchenko, "Transition: The State of Contemporary Artistic Culture," in *Re-Entering the Sign: Articulating New Russian Culture*, eds. Ellen E. Berry and Anesa Miller-Pogacar (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 136.

⁴³ Hewitt, *What Makes A Market?: The State of Russian Contemporary Art*, 77.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁵ Yuliya Tikhonova, "Do-it-Yourself Museums," *Flash Art* 43, no. 275 (2010), 42.

beginning in the 1980s with the policy shifts towards greater privatization and smaller government spending in civil society respectively under Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.⁴⁶ Years later in the 1990s, as Russian oligarchs were moving to London to create what is now known as *Moscow on the Thames*, the practice of corporate art sponsorship was well in place.⁴⁷

While it is difficult to derive the precise temporal impetus of the radical shift in the Russian art market in the late 2000s, it is likely that the advent of Internet use had a profound effect by immersing Russia in Western capitalist culture enough so that men like Pyotr Aven consider the society *normal*, that is, capitalist with strong rule of law and property rights. Timchenko describes a process of Western commercialized cultural expansion ironically similar to the international marketing concepts of globalization and localization in tandem.⁴⁸ In other words, Western, and particularly American cultural archetypes and ideas are presented to an international audience, and subsequently in receiver countries cultural institutions and private enterprises reinterpret the ideas and adjust them to fit local cultural languages. In this way, there is no palpable cultural takeover, but an injection of cultural influence.

It is precisely the reimaging and restructuring through localization of a Western, corporate-sponsored gallery that results in the uniquely Russian hybrid art galleries of this chapter. The individual aspects of these galleries, both related to and differing from their Western counterparts will be detailed throughout.

⁴⁶ Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*, 4.

⁴⁷ This colloquial phrase refers to the concentration of expatriate Russian oligarchs who began moving to London in the mid to late 1990s.

⁴⁸ Timchenko, *Transition: The State of Contemporary Artistic Culture*, 138-139.

The overarching historical dialogue is quite evident in the compatibility between the spatialities and organization of the hybrid gallery with the exhibition norms as established by the Moscow Conceptualist School. That is, the layout of these hybrid galleries strongly resembles in form the principles of the total installation.

The growth of capitalism in Russia is not an organic process considering the fact that such an economic framework never existed in the country in its entire history. The fact that there is no capitalist status quo implies that there was some agency in the process, to compliment the effects of American cultural expansion.⁴⁹ In order to create a stable, *normal*, capitalist society institutions tied to the rules of capitalism need to be in place. In this case capitalist art institutions are the prescription to define a new hierarchy. Repurposing Soviet art institutions such as museums, exhibition spaces, and teaching venues would be inefficient and troublesome, not to mention damaging to a tourist industry and Soviet-reared populous fixated on nostalgia.⁵⁰ Hybrid gallery spaces would become not only completely autonomous from existing institutions, bypassing the rigidity of ancient curators and teachers, but intrinsically tied to market culture in their operation and organization.

Procuring physical space for these new galleries would be no arbitrary task. There are two main objectives in deciding what sort of space would be used for the construction of these spaces, taking cues from new exhibition spaces in the West, namely the *Documenta* exhibit series in Kassel, Germany in the 1950s.⁵¹ The first consideration is symbolic space, which in most cases for Moscow and

⁴⁹ Groys, *Art Power*, 166-7.

⁵⁰ Viktor Misiano, "Back to Russia, without the USSR," *Artpress* 360 (2009), 52.

⁵¹ Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 188; 206.

Saint Petersburg means a large, vacant old factory or warehouse. This facilitates a living allegory for the postmodern condition, by appropriating old physical space and its history and subsequently reclaiming it for inclusive new purposes. These buildings also tend to have large windows, which establish a sense of surrounding geography for the viewer, expanding and contextualizing the experience of the exhibition. Since the established form of exhibition for contemporary Russian artists has remained the installation, this historical and geographic context enhances the viewer experience, and also explains the other requirement for new gallery space: large rooms without fixed partitions, to accommodate a desired flow of an installation.

The prevalence of the installation as the go-to mode of exhibition has not just manifested in Russia, but globally. It can also be seen as a convergence of the traditional roles of curator and artist. In the development of these hybrid gallery spaces, curators were all but left out from the original organization. Just like a camp of Western artists objects to the influence of a curator as foreign, censoring, and out of touch, so do contemporary Russian artists reject the institution outright. They doubt the ability to appropriate fragments of their own works in the context of a curator's vision.⁵²

By a simple scan of past exhibitions in galleries like Vinzavod, Etazhi, and Garazh you will extremely rarely see a group exhibition, implying that the author demands direct control over the dialogue between his work and the viewer, which stands to differ a great deal from both Western artist-curated spaces, which often feature a democratic system of representation among

⁵² Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), 98.

participants, and the collective experiences of the Moscow Conceptualist apartment exhibit. To unpack the rather ubiquitous mode of exhibition in contemporary private galleries, artist and curator Paul O'Neill explains:

In terms of cultural production, the convergence of artistic and curatorial practice can be seen as an opportunity to engage in a critique within the field of cultural production as a whole. In the process, the emergence of the figure of the artist-curator can be seen as an attempt to move beyond the dominant roles within the normal division of the art world.⁵³

This is important to consider because it is not only the artist-curator himself using this channel of cultural creation but also those oligarchic agents of capitalism.

As corporate patronage developed in the 1970s and 80s in the U.K. and U.S., events plastered with corporate advertisements and donation announcements heralded by the corporate sponsors and galleries alike became the meat of the social art scene.⁵⁴ In both Western galleries, and Russian hybrid galleries, the inner workings of corporate sponsorship are difficult to trace, and participating gallery owners and businessmen alike rarely issue comments on the subject.⁵⁵ The clandestine nature of political-economic entities in Russia further facilitates this outlet into the new concept of the cultural industry. Specifically, "Legal entities are created in which public money mixes with private, making these enterprises very opaque and liable to elude all control."⁵⁶ Aside from organizing the venues, these streams of corporate influence often dictate to

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*, 150.

⁵⁵ While it may be well known, for example, that Boris Abramovich helps to bankroll the *Garazh* Center for Contemporary Culture, the true nature of his involvement and intentions are never disclosed in a public statement. The purchase of individual collections may be announced, but never overarching plans for the space.

⁵⁶ Misiano, *Back to Russia, without the USSR*, 52.

artists the themes of the work they create. The corporate conceived *art funds* often oblige censorship and influence over content in exchange for exhibition space.⁵⁷

This process of “risk management” on behalf of corporate planners extends into the realm of art education as well. Young artists in Russia are faced with a catch twenty-two of constraint. The old art education institutions, like the renowned Repin Academy in Saint-Petersburg, are directed by curators marked by classism and staunch rejection of new forms but protected by lifelong terms of service. Such institutions became considerably less attractive after Perestroika, no longer propped up with ideological value when arts education dropped to a fraction of the applicants it once had.⁵⁸ The other option remains the corporate sponsorship outlets.⁵⁹ This forces aspirant artists with any desire for critical or contemporary ideas to submit to the influence of those corporate sponsors who have begun to dictate artistic content by means of a monopoly on exhibition space.

While this does not account for positively all means of exhibition in Russian cities, as the third chapter will explain, and there is always the opportunity to exhibit abroad, ironically the restrictions on creating cultural influence have not liberalized much from Soviet times, as curator and critic Viktor Misiano puts it, art must be “global in its form and commercial in its content,” as opposed to “national in its form and socialist in its content.”⁶⁰ The desired output of these sponsors is morphing into the unofficial praxis of the

⁵⁷ Ekaterina Degot, “I had a Dream/ Sinking in: Art in the Age of Putin,” *Art Press* 360, no. October (2009), 360.

⁵⁸ Masha Gessen, *Dead again: The Russian Intelligentsia After Communism* (London: Verso, 1997), 180.

⁵⁹ Hewitt, *What Makes A Market?: The State of Russian Contemporary Art*, 77.

⁶⁰ Misiano, *Back to Russia, without the USSR*, 52.

new generations out of sheer necessity. That is, to reinforce, and produce works within the framework of a *normal* capitalist society.

It is important first to establish the similarities between a Moscow Conceptualist installation artist and an Oligarchic gallery patron in order to understand how these influential actors take on their surroundings. Kabakov for example considered every aspect of an installation to work in tandem, and that each component had very little ascribed to it, as the overall experience gave a total installation its meaning. For a corporate gallery sponsor, the analog is slightly more perplexing, but altogether relatable. There are individual artworks and installations exhibited in a hybrid gallery, but artworks themselves make up only a fraction of the experience of a hybrid gallery. The other components include the food, lodging, event halls, spatial flow, and even the surrounding geography of the hybrid gallery space. This unity of eclectic, and yet individually mundane services and influences, distinguishes a hybrid gallery from any other gallery, or for that matter a restaurant, hostel, or abandoned warehouse social venue (more common in contemporary Moscow and Saint-Petersburg than one might expect).

In a more esoteric sense, we can view both the Moscow Conceptualist apartment exhibit, or say the works of the Collective Actions group, and the hybrid art gallery as an oasis of unique society, where the influences of their surroundings do not penetrate.⁶¹ Considering how the Moscow Conceptualists saw the communal apartment as a gateway to higher thinking and greater understanding of knowledge in the universe, it is shallow analysis to discredit

⁶¹ Kovalsky, *Квартирные Выставки Русского авангардского искусства андерграунда*, 23-24.

the business model of the hybrid gallery space, and its inclusion of shops, food, and social gatherings as nothing but a commercial necessity which so many critics love to do.⁶² Both types of spaces evolve over time, and both act as a microcosm of the desired society that its designers hope to inject into the public consciousness. The communal apartment exhibit capitalized on the exchange of ideas and artistic achievement among likeminded and piercingly brilliant artists, while the hybrid gallery represents the reappropriation of Soviet and Imperial space to create new institutions of a shiny new capitalist society.⁶³

Creating this societal snow globe goes along with the belief that the rest of the public will appropriate bits of the lifestyle into their every day activities. Marina Timchenko highlights the importance of this self appointed leadership, even while doubting its effectiveness:

Acceptance as a model for the entire population of the breadth and structure of cultural consumption on the part of representative of the *most advanced* groups assumes a fairly strict cause and effect relationship between people's activity in the cultural sphere and their activity in other social spheres. However, this thesis has never been proven.⁶⁴

The question is not whether any of these institutions are effective in their goals to influence society at large, and scholars of political science and history may well deny this ability. The point to analyze is the intention of these institutional architects, and how their goals drive them to exhibit art, and go about cultural creation.

Where the two differ most notably are in the attitudes toward education. The Moscow Conceptualist approach to education remained largely within self-discovery and natural experience through viewership with other artists, an

⁶² McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao*, 224-225.

⁶³ Troncale, *Apartment Exhibitions of Underground Russian Avant-Garde Art*, 30.

⁶⁴ Timchenko, *Transition: The State of Contemporary Artistic Culture*, 131.

activity devoid of institutional formality.⁶⁵⁶⁶ Since the Moscow Conceptualist School also saw culture as a self-editing entity, they do not see the need to actively educate artists or the public beyond their own personal experiences through dialogue and criticism.⁶⁷

Because the engineers of the hybrid art gallery have a more active stake in influencing surrounding culture, naturally they want to educate artists, curators, and viewers like to continue the propagation of the capitalist ideas that drove the institutional inception in the first place. In fact, in an interview with Arslan Chekhov and Mikhail Ovchinnik, respectively the owner of the Novy Museum, and curator of the Erarta Museum, both in Saint-Petersburg, when asked to identify the mission of their enterprises, both confirmed their intentions to create new educational institutions for the development of young artists, as yet another institutional addition to the societal microcosm within a hybrid art space.⁶⁸ How better to continue the cycle of capitalist cultural creation, bypassing old, undesirable institutions, than to promote capitalist ideals among the creators of culture when they are most easily influenced?

The hybrid art space focuses on experience of the viewer beyond individual artworks just as much as an esoteric Moscow Conceptualist installation. By closely analyzing two of these galleries as they operate today, we can see how they evolve over time to better suit their needs of cultural creation and to a degree, just like the apartment exhibit, ideological and mimetic freedom.

⁶⁵ Troncale, *Apartment Exhibitions of Underground Russian Avant-Garde Art*, 28.

⁶⁶ Monastyrsky, Leiderman and Zakharov, *On the Terminology of Moscow Conceptualism: A Trialogue among Andrei Monastyrsky, Yuri Leiderman, and Vadim Zakharov*, 293.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Tikhonova, *Do-it-Yourself Museums*, 42.

Focus on: Artplay Design Center, Moscow

As mentioned before it is extremely difficult to acquire specific information regarding the patterns of corporate sponsorship and influence as they function among the inner workings of these hybrid spaces. However, there is no tone of animosity or reaction against the notion of these galleries as transmitters of cultural influence. What we can observe is the efficacy of these spaces to act as transmitters of cultural production, regardless of the content, motives and message. We can draw some capitalist content from the structure of the hybrid gallery and its organization, but the intent from their trustees and directors is unfortunately clandestine, especially when approaching a number of different hybrid spaces.

The working definition of hybrid gallery as established above highlights a number of aspects that these types of spaces share. These can include hostels or housing space, food and drink options, event halls, nightclubs, shops and of course exhibition space. In selecting Artplay na Yauze as a particularly demonstrative example, one term came to mind: encompassing. Another, more practical reasoning behind selecting old industrial buildings is the fact that they provide massive amounts of space, and thanks to Soviet planning, often in a centralized and otherwise extremely expensive portion of real estate. To comprehend the facets of cultural immersion that Artplay offers, it is important to consider the scale of the whole operation; 8,000 square meters of artistic exhibition space in a 75,000 square meter art building, 300 showrooms for design

exhibits, two bars, a café, movie theater, event hall, design school, children's studio and bookstore, all on one campus.⁶⁹



Fig. 6. Map of ArtPlay Moscow Territory. From: [www. Artplay.ru](http://www.artplay.ru).

The staggering scale of the estate is important for a number of reasons. The Moscow Conceptualist legacy tells us that a total installation with the most desirable and efficient means of transmitting esoteric information is one where the artist, or in this case the planners and directors of Artplay, are able to control every variable and component of an installation. Remembering that this analysis of hybrid galleries characterizes them as an analog the total installation, it is understandable that the architects of the galleries would want this effect. Just like how the members of the Collective Actions group would remove themselves to create an ideal situation in the wilderness, as do the hybrid galleries create an isolated space of experience a short metro ride from its visitors' homes. There is even a reason along the same line of thought as to why these spaces have been clustered in the two largest cities in Russia, and just beginning to appear in even the few close following cities in terms of population.

Obviously, the desire to attract frequently visiting patrons who can afford luxuries like frequent shopping, entry fees for concerts and other events would make a case to open shop in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg. There is a question

⁶⁹ "Official Artplay Website." www.artplay.ru (accessed 03/25, 2013).

though, as to why they do not locate them in the outskirts of the city, where a similar effect can be achieved as the Collective Actions metaphorical trudge. The hybrid gallery espouses new modes of urban lifestyle, and this is most attainable when a visitor to these galleries sees how capable this ideal, capitalist society is, so frequent and convenient patronage is crucial. The communal social contract is broken, and replaced with the gospel of convenience, inclusion, and most notably, accessibility. In this sense, geographic location is a means to an ends. Hybrid art space designers are not subject to the ideological rigor of a Moscow Conceptualist goblin figure.



Fig. 7. Scene from within ArtPlay Moscow. From: www.artplay.ru/about.

The scale of such an entity as the hybrid gallery is also crucial when it comes to dispelling the ever-present desire to account all of the motivation behind these entities as purely commercial. In terms of feasibility for the costly renovations of these massive spaces, the principal investment is massive, far beyond that of what any individual would be offered from a bank loan. This all

but guarantees corporate financing, and most always, corporate involvement in operations.⁷⁰ In the case of Artplay, there are two suspicious pathways for this involvement, publicly available on the gallery's website in the *partners* section. These partners are the Moscow Department of Culture, and Alltech Group, a direct investment firm with projects in Siberian oil and gas fields, as well as mineral extraction projects.⁷¹ Considering that the investigative resources to properly examine the financial and influential activities along these channels, for the former through the clandestine legal entities, and for the latter, the desires of the cultural managerial capitalists (both terms coined by Wu) are far beyond the resources for this paper, a direct correlation for the case study cannot be made, but the precedent has surely been set in the West for such involvement.⁷² In other words, these hybrid art spaces are not idly operating for the sake of art, but most definitely representing the interests of some corporate and political entities.

Working with this understanding of corporate involvement at Artplay, the cultural influence they wish to make is the next logical step. The description of a societal microcosm was already laid out earlier in the chapter, but how does Artplay interpret the model uniquely? The diversity of events at the galleries is unparalleled. Aside from all the venues mentioned above, there are two key differences between Artplay and its similar hybrid galleries.

The first is the inclusion of decorative, fine, and functional arts, or design, all under one location. The thematic period exhibits of the early 20th century in Western galleries as well as the communal apartment exhibit all created a greater

⁷⁰ Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*, 7.

⁷¹ "Official Alltech Group Website." <http://www.alltech.ru/eng/about/> (accessed 03/27, 2013).

⁷² Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*, 11; 150.

experience through the mixing of decorative and fine arts, as well as found objects, but the former never had an intended esoteric message, and neither sought to redefine domestic lifestyle for the greater public.⁷³ Just like the 1959 Moscow Kitchen Conference, which shocked Soviet citizens with the stark differences between domestic style and mechanized functionality in the home in the U.S. and U.S.S.R., so does the inclusion of countless Western design firms puncture the metaphorical walls of the contemporary Russian apartment.⁷⁴ That is, the influence of this cultural creation goes beyond the public society, but to the home as well. This is simply another level of immersive, encompassing influence.

The second somewhat unique aspect of Artplay na Yauze is the international breadth of its exhibits and events. A large percent of the design firms featured in the gallery's showrooms and musicians performing in the concert hall are not Russian. This foreign presence is multiplied greatly every two years with the presence of the Moscow Biennale. The exposition attracts artists and designers from a host of other countries, and the facilities at Artplay have been used at the past two incarnations of the event.⁷⁵ We know from Kabakov's early reflections on the West upon having moved to New York, how the plain fact that artists exchanging solely within the institutionalized and planned bounds and terms of a private gallery, that the mode of exchange here is

⁷³ McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao*, 139.

⁷⁴ Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, 202-3.

⁷⁵ "Official Artplay Website."

decidedly Western, particularly from a Russian perspective.⁷⁶ Besides the organization, we see from the international participation that the content is also Western.

The evidence that Artplay behaves as an exemplary purveyor of cultural creation with Capitalist overtones is astoundingly easy to stumble upon. All of the international aspects, the demonstrative exhibitions of domestic and public life, as well as the sheer scale and encompassing nature of the project serve to legitimize Artplay as an institution, far beyond a business or simple gallery. While Artplay influences through esoteric transmission from its organization and demonstration, from its functional and decorative exhibition, it does not directly educate, or at least to the same capacity like many other hybrid galleries. This more direct mode of cultural transmission undoubtedly needs to be examined.

Focus on: Educational Program at Strelka Institute, Moscow

The Strelka Institute is a unique entity for the study of design and art in Russia, and would be considered progressive in any Western city all the same. The educational program there is the most notable aspect, along with the exhibition space, bar, and shops we associate with all of these hybrid art spaces, all in the familiar setting of an abandoned chocolate factory. A number of components of the program are notable, the first of which is purely because information about the goals and methods of the program are readily available

⁷⁶ Илья Кабаков and Boris Groys, "On the West," Библиотека Московского Концептуализма Германа Титова, <http://www.conceptualism-moscow.org/files/kabakov-groys-all.pdf> (accessed 03/15, 2013).

online, along with interviews from its designers, namely Ilya Oskolkov-Tsentsiper, the institute's president. He says of the program,

Strelka is a tool of generating and broadcasting ideas and knowledge and people... but I think that in order to change the physical landscape you should start with the mental landscape, the ideas landscape...we are trying to contribute by bringing people from all around the world with ideas and experiences.⁷⁷

It is this broad definition of the educational program that makes it valuable in the context of this study. That is, they have embraced openly the role of cultural creator, clearly disgruntled with the current state of Russian urban planning and education. They educate on architecture, art, design, media, and seemingly endless components of a transdisciplinary approach to contemporary issues of urban life.⁷⁸ They seek to reshape Russian society in a top down fashion, that is, by steering normative change among a scholarly population to trickle down into widespread usage.

The second reason to note the educational program is, similarly to Artplay, the tone of internationalism throughout. The program specifically and outwardly reaches out to international students in order to help shape the future of Russian cities.⁷⁹ The program is conducted entirely in English in order to facilitate this international presence. The students at Strelka draw possible scenarios for a new Russian position in regards to the global economy, and most often seek greater integration. Like ArtPlay, the Strelka Institute is preoccupied with a pragmatic path to the end goal of urban restructuring, leaving the unclear

⁷⁷ *Strelka Institute*, Online Film, directed by Rachel Morarjee (Toronto: Monocle, 2011).

⁷⁸ Elena Vanina, "Studies at "Strelka": An Average Day among Students of the most Unusual Architectural Institute in Russia," *Afisha* (2010), <http://www.afisha.ru/article/7980/> (accessed 3/30).

⁷⁹ "Official Strelka Institute Website." www.strelka.com (accessed 03/27, 2013).

goblinry of the Moscow Conceptualist teacher behind.⁸⁰ These two aspects, the transdisciplinary approach and internationalism together solidify the notion that the Strelka Institute is determined to reshape contemporary Russia in a way that it has never seen before through cultural production.

Listening to the rhetoric of the program, the common theme of transmission through experience is obvious. Burnam and Kai-Kee create a *modus operandi* for the educator within the museum in the context of postmodernism, saying:

The question is not so much how to craft pedagogy that reflects what is current as how to craft pedagogy that makes apparent and available to the public a broad range of interpretative approaches... A good museum instructor brings to her task many resources, including her own experience with the objects, the experience of previous visitors, and knowledge of art history and criticism.⁸¹ This inclusive form of pedagogy, referred to as *guided interpretation*, wrought with historical awareness and a personal connection between viewer and instructor is similar to the process of a Moscow Conceptualist artist bringing his or her viewers through the process of a total installation; a controlled environment with room for individual interpretation and esoteric transmission through individual contemplation. It serves to reinforce the idea that this legacy of cultural transmission has remained pertinent even when wielded by a corporate environment, among a populous that may be totally unaware of romantic conceptualism.

The Strelka institute shows us how corporate influence does not always imply a push for rampant commercialization in the context of hybrid galleries. In

⁸⁰ Alisa Tazhnaya, "Straight Talk: Seven Graduates from Strelka," *Look at Me* (2011), http://www.lookatme.ru/mag/art-design/other_art/127849-pryamaya-rech-vypusniki-strelki

⁸¹ Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee, *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2011), 48.

fact, a great deal of Strelka's approach to guided interpretation provokes participants in the educational program to consider new solutions to the issues of underutilized public space in the aftermath of the Russian 1990s, characterized by a that vicious attitude of privatism and lack of public trust. All that said, it is the finances of billionaire oligarch Aleksandr Mamut that maintains the program's free tuition.⁸² It would be generalizing to say that the dialogue of restructuring Russian urbanity in Strelka's education program will conclusively benefit its corporate benefactors in the long run. That being said, Strelka relies on the very same modes of cultural transmission that the Moscow Conceptualist school began using three decades prior, even if the formalization of education was something Kabakov and crew rejected.

Chapter III: Rebirth of Salon Culture & Apartment Exhibits

At the inception of this project, I was most excited to write about a phenomenon I witnessed during my time abroad in Saint Petersburg in the spring of 2012. As a foreigner in a socially adept and well-dressed crowd of other foreigners, I was able to attend a number of private apartment exhibits, deinstitutionalized, absurd, vulgar, and viciously critical of the current state of Russian politics and business. Since there is no real available scholarship and hardly any mainstream documentation of this phenomenon, an account of my personal experiences will contextualize the later analysis.

⁸² Sophia Kishkovsky, "In Moscow, and Island Village for the Arts," *The New York Times* (2010), http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/13/arts/13iht-scmoscow.html?_r=2&

We had been sitting around the hostel that served as student housing for our time in Saint-Petersburg, three friends and I. One of them had just recently become acquainted with a small-time artist/musician Misha who insisted that we all join them for an exhibition just a short walk from Palace Square in one of those imperial built, pastel painted row houses we only got to visit thanks to the fact that a few had been converted into museums or restaurants.

Eager to see exactly what was meant by an exhibition in someone's apartment, and thrilled to break the cycle of the same thumping-bass night venues we frequented purely out of ease and not knowing any better, we disembarked. We stumbled and huddled through the frigid March evening up to a green house right on the Neva embankment we had passed a million times, near a few embassies and some sort of ministerial headquarters. Slinky, disaffected women were smoking on the balcony overhead, which immediately reminded us of the time honored Russian tradition of *face control*.⁸³ Misha negotiated our entry with the doorman, a rather short process once he found out we were Americans.

We came to the second floor where the bulk of the guests were mulling around. It seemed like there were a handful of archetypes there, as if several groups had coordinated personas that day. There was the bearded thinker, having gone days without showering and still wearing his wide-brimmed hat indoors. The ex-model was in attendance, in a floor length gown and neon, geometric makeup patterns. Then there were the artists themselves, more plainly

⁸³ Face Control denotes the tendency for doormen at exclusive nightlife venues or parties to consider attractiveness when deciding which letting guests in.

dressed but ready to engage every corner of your political alignment before they greeted us.



(From Left to Right) Photographs courtesy of Betty Rothstein
Fig. 8. Betty Rothstein in borrowed dress, March 2012.
Fig. 9. Assorted garbage and kitsch, March 2012.

On one end of the big room, with dilapidated parquet floors and pastel walls to match the exterior, stood a few changing screens, and some racks of outrageous outfits available to borrow, courtesy of some friendly local designer who wanted guests to escape ordinary life for the evening, and slip into something absurd. Big, white, plaster sculptures jutted from the walls and occupied the corners. A collection of garbage and kitschy figurines littered the original mantle, and I at the time, unfamiliar with the principles of installation art, assumed the host had simply forgotten to tidy up beforehand (which I still suspect might actually be the case).

We mingled, shared the omnipresent hundred-ruble champagne with strangers, and tried not to seem like the awkward and shell-shocked young students we were. Soon the guests all gathered for a series of performance pieces. The first involved acrobats in fuzzy suits running around the room and shouting. This continued for some time, leaving us clueless. Most of them would continue like this, absurd and difficult for us to pick up without more context. The final piece however, stuck with us tremendously. Three performers came out, dressed in nuns' habits. They prostrated themselves, and proceeded to strip naked, and writhe around on the floor, calling out the names "Putin" and "Medvedev" in mock ecstasy. Just like in their small talk, these artists were set on a one-way course for disruption in Russia. It could have been the patriarchy, the government, the dominated business world, and likely some combination of the three.



Photograph Courtesy of Betty Rothstein.
Fig. 10. Performance Art Piece: Three Nuns, March 2012.

The event was exactly what it needed to be. It was inexpensive, secretive, and a slap in the face of those sleeping bureaucrats on either side of this historic building, situated in the heart of three centuries of historical and cultural context. I asked Misha if he knew who was responsible for planning this, to no avail. Everyone seemed to give me the same answer, that a friend had mentioned it to him. I could not tell if this was out of discretion or genuine lack of information. The former seemed more appropriate as we attended a few other such exhibitions, and seemed to receive the same response time and time again.

In the future an expanded study, particularly with time and resources on the ground in Petersburg and presumably Moscow, could be extremely fruitful in helping to characterize a counter-institutional subculture, and a similar sentiment in larger society. It could also give due attention to the hosts of these apartment exhibits, in order to gain a first-hand account of their intentions. In the meantime, we can view the contemporary apartment exhibit as an exercise in generating cultural capital, and using the awareness of that capital to enhance an experience of cultural creation.

In the same time as the inception of Russian hybrid art spaces, in the late 2000s, artists are faced with a decision: to participate in archaic institutions like the Repin Academy, jump on board with newer private institutions like the hybrid galleries, or to reject those institutions outright. The artists that choose the third option are the very same ones choosing to participate in these new apartment exhibits, not only out of a distaste for art institutions in general, but fearing or not wanting to deal with censorship, notably from religious or political public figures. Another reason for such a bloom of nonconformist contemporary

artists could be a generation gap. Those raised in the 70s and 80s, with an unshakable faith in the permanence of society and stagnation [*зачмоў*], had grown up with a jaded Soviet ethos. Now, an idealistic and well-connected generation of post-Soviet raised young artists appeared on the art scene.⁸⁴

This pressure and artists' dilemma is similar to that of dissident artists in the Soviet Era, even if with considerably fewer consequences for public exhibition, and the outlet ended up being the same: the apartment exhibit. It is no mystery that the bulk of these exhibitions took place in Saint Petersburg, as a symbol of Western-looking thinkers and subversion, some seven hundred kilometers from the watchful eye of Soviet agencies in Moscow, or today, the patriarchy.⁸⁵

So the desire to avoid censorship, a new generation of thinkers and artists, and a bastion of private space all set the stage for both contemporary apartment exhibits and those of the Moscow Conceptualists. These hard and quantifiable conditions are somewhat obvious, and there seems to be something more in regards to the process, highlighted to me in my own experiences, by the desire for these exhibits to attract well-dressed, culturally savvy, and foreign viewers. Essentially, how can we dissect *coolness*, or the cultural capital in exclusivity in the case of contemporary apartment exhibits? Urban Geographer Rob Shields describes how any city has *affordances*, or intangible qualities arising from

⁸⁴ Gessen, *Dead again: The Russian Intelligentsia After Communism*, 169.

⁸⁵ Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious*, 197.

spatiality and cultural histories in a given place.⁸⁶ Consider, along with this quote, the apartment exhibits of Saint Petersburg as such an affordance, These affordances summon, unexpectedly perhaps, the art historical concept of site-specificity, which understands “sites” to be particular both in their physical or material conditions, but also particular in terms of the social and cultural relationships that occur within them. The mutuality of site and action become apparent.⁸⁷

With the aid of this definition it is not difficult to imagine how the salon culture of imperial times, or the Moscow Conceptualist apartment exhibit would be reincarnated into its contemporary form. And just like in those previous eras, there seems to be an inexplicable sense of cultural weight surrounding the goings on in these central, posh apartments along the Neva. It is the differences between contemporary apartment exhibits and their previous lives that will show how the affordance manifests itself along changing lines of societal pressures and needs.

The two main aspects of contemporary apartment exhibits that discern them from predecessors are the value placed on youth and specific brand of exclusivity. The desire to attract youthful artists is a completely understandable one. The demographic of apartment exhibit patrons are surely not the same oligarchic individuals, who would suffer too much press from such subversive and outlandish parties in their own homes. Likely, they are part of a well-to-do contemporary intelligentsia, who has just as much to gain from new institutions and societal restructuring to support a middle class, as do the young artists

⁸⁶ Cynthia Imogen Hammond, "Urban "Truths": Artistic Intervention in Post-Socialist Space," in *The Post Socialist City: Continuity and Change in Urban Space and Imagery*, eds. Alfrun Kliems and Marina Dmitrieva (Leipzig: Jovis, 2010), 77.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

themselves.⁸⁸ Cultivating a young generation of outspoken and reform-minded artists is something that cannot happen without criminal penalty, as evidenced by the legal actions taken against protest art groups in Russia. In fact, the more outrageous the artwork, the more accepted it seemed to be among this community of apartment exhibitioners. It is no surprise that in order to preserve this intentionally provocative, expressive, and bizarre oasis that a particularly open-minded and receptive audience would be necessary.

Exclusivity is a chief difference when comparing the contemporary apartment exhibit with its Moscow Conceptualist roots, where inclusion was part of the content as well as the form. It is understandable that these events would want a crowd sensitive to the overall experience, one that breeds critical thinking for established artistic, political, and economic institutions. In that sense it is like the conceptualist apartment in that a collective of like-minded artists seeking a common enlightened perspective would share radical ideas. The main difference is characterized by the familiar concept in urban Russian nightlife of face control. That is, people were judged at the door of these exhibitions for their appearance. On one hand, it could be viewed as the orchestrators of these events providing a sort of total installation, where the artists are critical and the crowd is socially savvy and part of some sort of nightlife elite. In other words, in a shallow and privatized Russia, physical looks translate into cultural capital, arguably more prominently than elsewhere, the amassing of which means greater influence for those who wish to create a new source of cultural production outside the bounds of established institutions.

⁸⁸ Gessen, *Dead again: The Russian Intelligentsia After Communism*, 185-187.

The complete control over each aspect of such an exhibition certainly harkens back to the concept of total installation, where every facet of an experience must be tailored to the artists', or in this case, planners' demands. The result is a pertinent, exciting destination where visitors want to test themselves in order to become a part of the experience at hand. Admittance to such exhibits as either an artist or viewer is complimentary and a challenge. Performance and wearable art play a particularly familiar role in making the experience esoteric and personal. The absurd and conceptual works and performances are simply not reproducible. Finally, exclusivity of the event signifies to its viewers that the ideas espoused during the event have a hierarchical advantage over those artists participating in institutions.

Some questions for further study of apartment exhibits include their position in a constantly shifting institutional framework. How strict can the rules of admission and participation become before the apartment exhibit becomes somewhat of a standardized institution in itself, merely competing alongside hybrid galleries. Further, is there any crossover in personages between the public protest displays in chapter IV and the apartment exhibits here? A politically subversive subculture is clearly a common banner among young Russians, and perhaps between the influence of apartment exhibits and public protest art, there may one day be a legal and publicly accepted mode of exhibition for such artists. Much like the hybrid galleries, these apartment exhibits are a very new phenomenon, and could only be studied in proper thoroughness there, where it is happening and changing today.

Chapter IV: Public Protest Art

Dissident artists in the late Soviet Union like the Moscow Conceptualists saw art as a medium to reclaim expression from Socialist Realism. Since art for so long had been controlled for political purposes, they were apt to use it for more lofty goals and deeper questions. Chapters II-IV show how in the modern day, the ability to influence politics through art has been reclaimed to forward a host of different ideas, all through esoteric transmission and the power of experience. The Moscow Conceptualist legacy that art begins with the dialogue surrounding a work, or in these cases, an installation serves a particularly useful purpose for those looking to influence politics on a larger scale. This idea is no more evident and well publicized than in the buzz surrounding protest art groups active in Moscow and Petersburg today.

While the news coverage of such groups as Voina and Pussy Riot has focused on the radical and threatening nature of their actions, the whole process of their exhibition style is to highlight the fallibility of an overarching and censoring political system through reclaiming public space and consciousness. Unlike the subjects of the two previous chapters, who focused on creating institutions or quasi-institutions to act independently as constant sources of influence, public art protestors act on penchant for disruption. They are similarly the only party mentioned in this paper who have taken full advantage of the widest means of transition possible today, the mainstream media.⁸⁹ While the content is radically different, the form can be easily related to methods

⁸⁹ Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, 134.

developed in activism, namely the notion of *media mind bombs* conceived by the environmental organization Greenpeace in the mid-1970s.⁹⁰ The motive is not to subtly change society by providing an exemplary social structure or educational influence, but to create a direct assault on public consciousness using the power of modern media. Some of the specific tactics of Russian protest art do not follow the same rules of nonviolence that Greenpeace and similar organizations have taken on, specifically in regards to property destruction, but the general idea remains the same.

The content of public protest art is similarly as direct as the means of communication. While the end goals may not be so clear for these groups, the specific methods of creating these mind bombs is worth examining for the Moscow Conceptualist legacy and a unique take on it. Like a conceptualist artist, the protest artist is constantly striving to create dialogue surrounding their work. Groys highlights in a negative tone how the advent of digitized video has robbed a viewer of his sovereignty in regards to the amount of time he or she wants to spend contemplating an artwork, engaging in that dialogue.⁹¹ This is precisely the goal of the protest artist, however. He wants to capture the viewer's consciousness and contemplation for as long as possible, forcing the viewer to become aware of the message at hand, usually pertaining to political surroundings. This differs greatly from the Moscow Conceptualist idea of voluntary, open-minded participation.⁹²

⁹⁰ Rex Wyler, *Greenpeace: How a Group of Ecologists, Journalists, and Visionaries Changed the World* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004), 76.

⁹¹ Groys, *Art Power*, 87.

⁹² Kabakov and Groys, *The Theatricality of the Installation and the Installation of the Theatrical*, 17.

There are two main means that the Russian protest artist has manipulated to stage these assaults. The first of these is geographic location, namely in extremely public spaces. Alongside monuments, infrastructure, and the very institutions that these protest artists hope to illuminate as fallible, protest art can help re-contextualize Soviet and Western visual icons for an older generation, raised on a particular interpretation, and create new, desired associations for the youth.⁹³ This occurs through the process of defacing, either physically or semantically, or a combination of the two. A semantic defacing would be the example of the Occupy Abai movement, a group of anti-Putin protestors, who gather to share poetry and engage in collective communication with authorities around a statue of the late 19th, early 20th century Kazakh nationalist poet Abai Kunanbayev.⁹⁴ In this instance, the participants appropriated the images, and eventually, his poetry as well, from a century-old nationalist context into a 21st century populist one. A physical defacing would be Voina's 2008 action, "Fuck for the Heir Puppy Bear!" [Ебись за наслединка Медвежонка] where several members of the group engaged in public sex acts within a biological museum after picketing outside with signs detailing what they were about to do.⁹⁵

This type of defacing creates a definite shock value, as onlookers see how the institutions that maintain working order in society are not as immovable as they once thought, leading to questioning their necessity. "Puppy Bear," is also a

⁹³ Mariusz Czepczyński, "Representations and Images of "Recent History": The Transition of Post-Socialist Landscape Icons," in *The Post-Socialist City: Continuity and Change in Urban Space and Imagery* (Leipzig: Jovis, 2010)29.

⁹⁴ Latitude: Views from around the world, 5-14-2012, 2012, <http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/14/the-anti-putin-protest-movement-takes-to-moscows-parks/>.

⁹⁵ Ilya Prokudin, "Action in the Biological Museum had a Political Tone," *Political News Agency*03-19-2008, 2008.

good demonstrator of the second key component to a great deal of contemporary activist art in Russia: vulgarity. This does not necessarily mean nudity, public sex, and foul language, but can take the shape of any behavior that goes strongly against a cultural norm. Take for example the infamous February 21, 2013 Pussy Riot performance at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior, and subsequent trial. While such an action may well be considered rude and inappropriate, the continued trial of Pussy Riot members highlights the relative vulgarity of their actions in a Russian context, which does not value as strongly freedom of speech, and public property rights, and does not explicitly separate church and state.⁹⁶

The instant sensory recognition with obscene acts and imagery, particularly when superimposed on those institutional symbols the public is wired to remember grants precedence to the intended contemplation of an activist artwork. In Russia, a strongly entrenched Orthodox sentiment in society helps to exacerbate the commotion surrounding such art events. While such reactionary and shocking behavior is exactly what these activist artists search for, it is a long term, and thoughtful contemplation of standing political, artistic, and economic institutions that they hope to inspire.

One last point puts the general goals of such activist artists in a different dialogue with the Moscow Conceptualist legacy than the movements of the previous two chapters. A survey of these activist groups puts the majority within a realm of leftist or anarchist dialogue. This comes from a low level of trust for institutions, and understandably from their perspective, not wanting to be censored while still engaging in proper dialogue with political authorities. This

⁹⁶ Julia Ioffe, "Pussy Riot V. Putin: A Front Row Seat at a Russian Dark Comedy," *New Republic* 8-6-2012, 2012.

lack of institutional trust puts these contemporary artists in the same ideological persuasion, as Moscow Conceptualists, arising from an oppressive Soviet creative regime. Both groups used the content of their artworks to ignore institutional pressure, and embrace the communal spirit often described as uniquely and timelessly Russian.

The chief difference however, as mentioned above is the use of imposed experience, as opposed to willing participation. Kabakov himself expressed distaste for vulgarity, and the effect of shock value, specifically in the context of fellow conceptualist Oleg Kulik, but in regards to more contemporary artists as well, preferring instead for a quiet, contemplative approach to expressive enlightenment.⁹⁷

Considering the similarities in content for these two movements, there is likely a sensible reason for the disconnect between them. While some may chalk up such a reaction to Kabakov's Christ-like self-image, there is also a case to be made that activist artists are simply more apt at becoming more well known, and have largely overshadowed the Moscow Conceptualist position in the global cosmopolitan art world, where Kabakov once found himself novel and darling. If efficiency is determined by the amount of support garnered behind a cause, and in societal awareness of an art community, Russian activist artists certainly trump those in the earlier chapters of this paper. The question of whether the attracted audience supports the artists is an entirely different story. In an ideal world, this study would include a statistical analysis to attempt to determine some sort of progress, or calculate the total sum of each movement's cultural

⁹⁷ Bartelik, *The Banner without a Slogan: Definitions and Sources of Moscow Conceptualism*, 11.

capital. Since the expertise and resources for such an analysis are far beyond me, a detailed qualitative analysis of one particular contemporary activist artwork can provide the closest approximate of such a result.

Focus on: A Dick Captured by the FSB, Saint Petersburg, 2010

The reasoning behind choosing this action to analyze in detail is focused around arguably the most powerful weapon that activist artists have at their disposal: humor. The artists' group Voina used humor and humility on the eve of June 15th, 2010 to undermine the legal and political institutions of contemporary Russia, all while espousing humanist, anarchist, and reformist values with a few liters of white paint.

On this evening, five members of Voina, who had been practicing for several weeks, waited by the edge of the Liteiny Bridge [Литейный Мост] in Saint-Petersburg for the scheduled 1:40 AM raising of the bridge. In the short period, 23 seconds precisely, between the closing of turnpikes to prevent vehicles from entering the bridge road, and the actual physical raising of the bridge, to paint a giant white penis on the road, which soon was almost entirely vertical, and directly facing the headquarters of the Federal Security Service [FSB], better known as the inheritors of the Soviet KGB responsibilities since 1995.⁹⁸

So packed with satire, this action could only be met with shock and awe from the nearby forces who arrested the artists. In keeping with the activist tendency for vulgarity, sexual acts like this are particularly uproarious for traditionally prude Russian society. Better yet, the painting itself is so

⁹⁸ Alexey Plutser-Sarno, "Towering Penis Graffiti Startles St. Petersburg Residents," *France 24*, sec. International, 6-22-2010, 2010.

rudimentary it resembled a scrawling on a bathroom wall more than any accomplished work of art. This all has to be taken into geographic context for its real pertinence. The FSB, and its predecessor, the KGB, have been responsible for the arrest, jailing, and even death of countless subversive and dissident artists throughout the last one hundred years. All of this aside, the agency could not stop an intentionally childish act of phallic graffiti several stories high from being quite metaphorically erected right next to its headquarters. Not only does it reclaim the right for free expression, but humiliates and spits in the face of one of the most feared institutions in Russian society, both past and present.



Photos Courtesy of France 24.
Members of Voina appreciate the aforementioned graffiti, June, 2010.

The most impressive act of undermining Russian political institutions came with later consequences of the action. The following year, the action was nominated for, and won the Ministry of Culture and National Center for

Contemporary Art's "Innovation Award," a 400,000 rub. (\$14,000) prize awarded for excellence in contemporary art, beating out established artists like Andrei Monastyrsky.⁹⁹ It is safe to argue that this achievement, even if for a while rejected as patronizing by some members of Voina, is the single most convincing evidence of the efficacy of the activist artist's methods, and the subsequent capacity to acquire cultural capital both domestically and abroad, among various social spectra. The corruption and bureaucracy of the current Russian government and its extensions are the very targets of almost all of Voina's actions, and yet when all came to fruition, the government proved its ineptitude by failing to stack or influence the panel for this award enough to prevent some of its most violently critical opponents, all taking place in the posh, oligarch-funded Garazh Center for Contemporary Culture, yet another institution Voina might criticize. It is also safe to say without much research that higher-ranked officials in the Ministry of Culture thought this an outlet to show the government's humility, just due to the ubiquitous machismo among Russian politicians. Influencing the ranks of one's opponents must prove the persuasiveness and influence of these activist-artists.

Conclusion

The Moscow Conceptualist legacy has been argued here to have remained in various capacities throughout different movements. The most lasting

⁹⁹ "Police-Baiting Penis Graffiti by Radical Voina Collective Wins \$14K Russian "Innovation" Prize." *ArtInfo* (2013c), <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/37437/police-baiting-penis-graffiti-by-radical-voina-collective-wins-14k-russian-innovation-prize>

contribution, it seems is the idea of the total installation. In all four of the chapters throughout the piece we can see that those artists, designers, architects, businessmen, and activists all have a strong sense of creating an immersive experience out of art, not simply a single painting on a wall with little context for its surroundings. This technique of total installation is important because it serves as the most efficient and demonstrative means of transmitting cultural influence to the general public, or even a generation of artists. Some might argue that the exact roots of contemporary art exhibition styles cannot be traced to any particular movement. I would have to agree with them, and stress that the Moscow Conceptualist total installation is a natural course of development for the Post-Socialist, postmodern Russian society of today. Kabakov and Groys have explained a great deal of the mechanics and theory behind the practice, which may have facilitated its pervasiveness in contemporary exhibition, but sheer lack of domestic exposure for the school would indeed make the case of sole invention difficult.

I find it personally hard to believe that quantifiable evidence of societal influence from art exhibition would be attainable, and yet my statistical skills are certainly less than stellar. This would be a great outlet to expand the study of every chapter of this paper. Again, Chapters II, III, and IV could all benefit from several months of study on the ground in Russia where personal contacts with some of the architects of these exhibition styles could be consulted for reliable and insightful comment on some of the narratives presented here today.

All of that being said, this paper has accomplished what I hoped it would do from the very beginning: establish a historical narrative, along which societal, artistic, political, and economic influences both across time and

contemporaneously interact to give rise to largely understudied contemporary forms of exhibition. I hope to be able to expand the work some day, to create an even more comprehensive picture, and perhaps investigate and weave new modes of exhibition into the narrative as they arise in the future.

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