

Rejecting the White Cube

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REST 412: The Post-Socialist City

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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 *zaryadnyy*. 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 *pravda*. 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

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⁴ Svetlana Boym, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 147-8.

⁵ Susan Buck-Morss, (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

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 [+) ' , "] 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 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 Leiderman

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 Conceptualism in Russia: From Formalism to Systemic Critique, 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 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"

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.

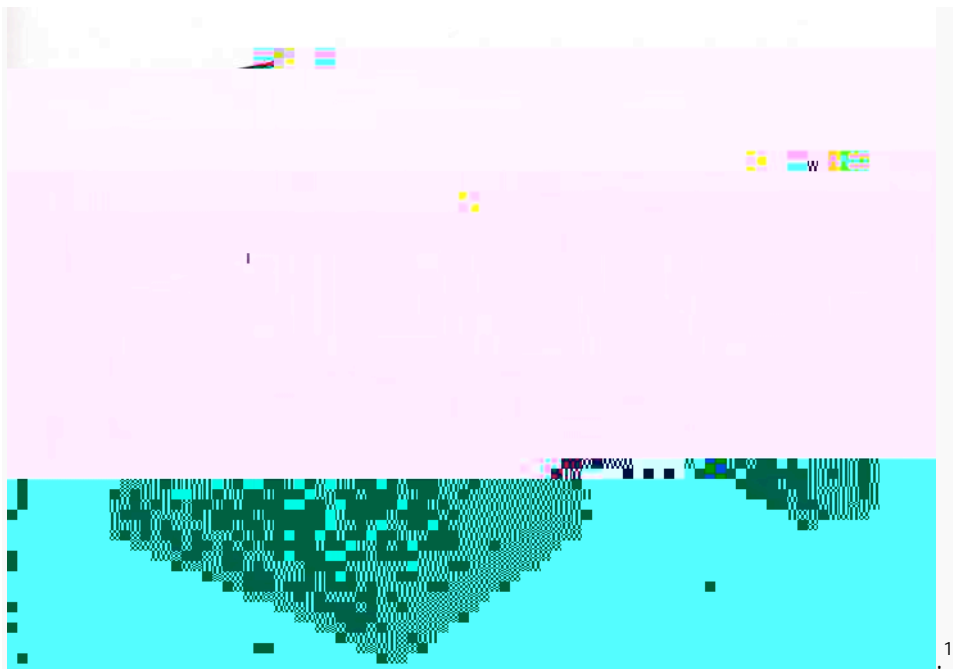
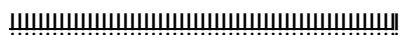


Fig. 1.
Lev Rubinstein, Ring Binders including The New Intermission [-) .% ' / , & \$ " # &], 1976-1985. Boris Groys. From: . Cambridge: MIT Press. 2010, P. 39.

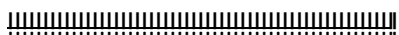
This idea states that a viewer interacting with a piece of art would yield a higher output of ideas than the individual components of the piece. In the case of Rubinstein, the individual verbal commands highlight the relationship between



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 _____, ed. Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles: Self-Published, 1978), 10.

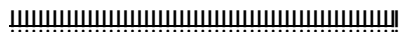
¹⁵ Groys, _____, 55.

Russianness as it existed by the 1970s and 80s contributed to the uniqueness of the Moscow Conceptualist school with two distinct concepts:

[! "##\$%& ' (#)%*] and - ./#(&%0 1.23\$. "% .¹⁶

Russian Cosmism, alternatively known as 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 .

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 [24567].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,
¹⁷ Victor Tupitsyn,
2009), 191.

- , 34-36.
(Cambridge: The MIT Press,

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.

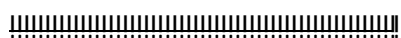
The second condition that caused the inception of the installation was the need for discretion from under the watchful eye of political censorship authorities, hardened in the Brezhnev regime at the time of Moscow Conceptualist origins.¹⁹ This pressure catalyzed the popularity of apartment exhibits in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

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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, "" #\$\$%' %() * +) ,&\$#-' . / , , -010 2#\$(1\$%3' ,&-010 4 , , - / ,&\$# 2(3*%1%\$/ (3\$, " in ! "#\$ "%&' \$(#) (#*#+ , , ed. Richard Waller (Richmond: University of Richmond Museums, 2006), 23-4.

²¹ Groys, , 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 [redacted], 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 [redacted], as we can see almost ubiquitously in the works of [redacted] artists like Komar and Melamid, and [redacted]

²² Boris Groys, [redacted] (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2008), 51.

²³ Buck-Morss, [redacted], 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,

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(From Left to Right)
Fig. 2. Sergei Bugaev, The Worker and the Female Collective Farmer. 1991, photograph.

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 *Chernobyl* by Ilya Kabakov, and a small selection of performances done by the artists' group *Priglasenie na kazn'* ['(++,\$-%./0, I, &# - .%2], 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: *Chernobyl*, Ilya Kabakov
[1985]

Chernobyl 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,

(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.

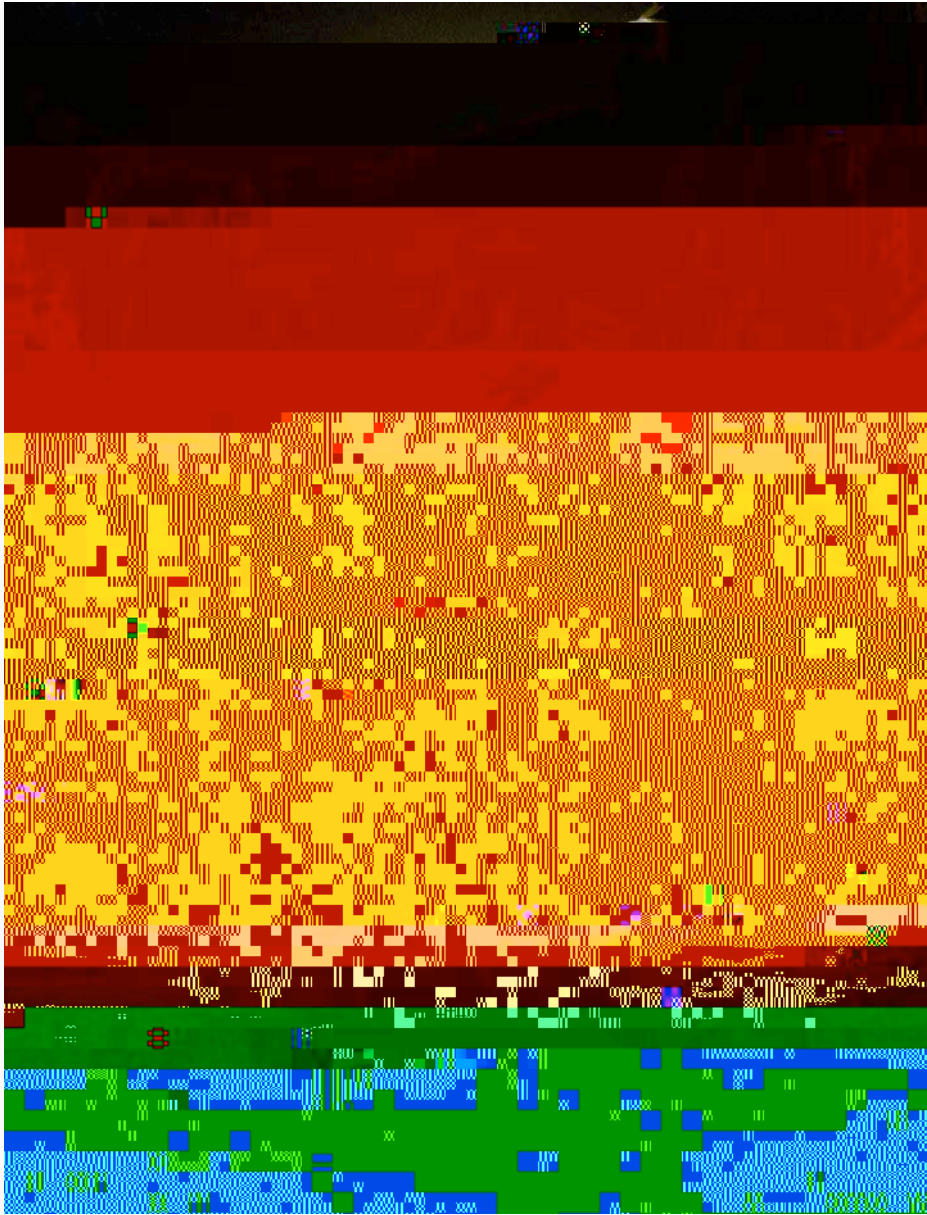


Fig. 4. Ilya Kabakov. The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment. 1985.

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

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

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 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 , or a widespread belief in a benevolent public realm, stemming from low levels of interpersonal

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

During this time of _____, 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 _____ 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

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 *the Russian art market*, 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 *capitalist*, 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 reimagining 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, *The Art Market*, 10, 4.

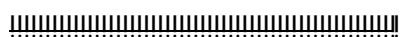
⁴⁷ This colloquial phrase refers to the concentration of expatriate Russian oligarchs who began moving to London in the mid to late 1990s.

⁴⁸ Timchenko, *The Russian Art Market*, 138-139.

artists the themes of the work they create. The corporate conceived 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," 360, no. October (2009), 360.

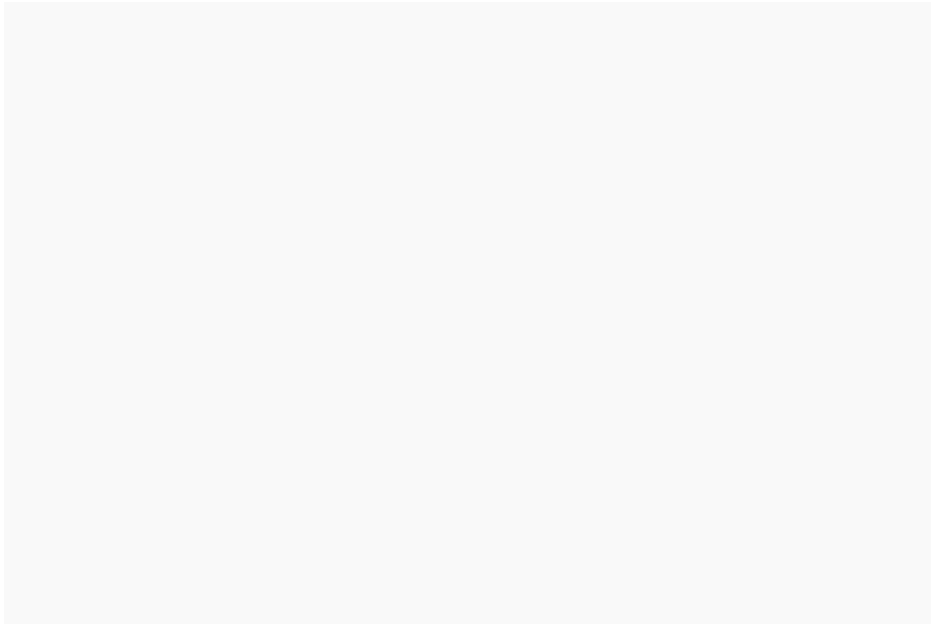
⁵⁸ Masha Gessen, (London: Verso, 1997), 180.

⁵⁹ Hewitt, , 1) 1 0.

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

It is important first to establish the similarities between a Moscow Conceptualist installation artist and an Oligarchic gallery patron in order to

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.



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 [redacted] 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 t [redacted]

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 incarnations of the event.⁷⁵ We know from Kabakov's early reflections on the West upon having moving to New York, how the plain fact thft artists exchanging solely within the institutionalizingfnd planningbounds and terms of a private gallery, thft the mode of exchange here is

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⁷³ McClellan,

, 139.

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

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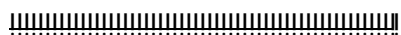
⁷⁶ Ilya Kabakov and Boris Groys, "On the West," 01231)&4#" 5)6#).6#)7) 8),94:&";31<=" (4\$="," >1&)." , <http://www.conceptualism-moscow.org/files/kabakov-groys-all.pdf> (accessed 03/15, 2013).

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 , 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," (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.

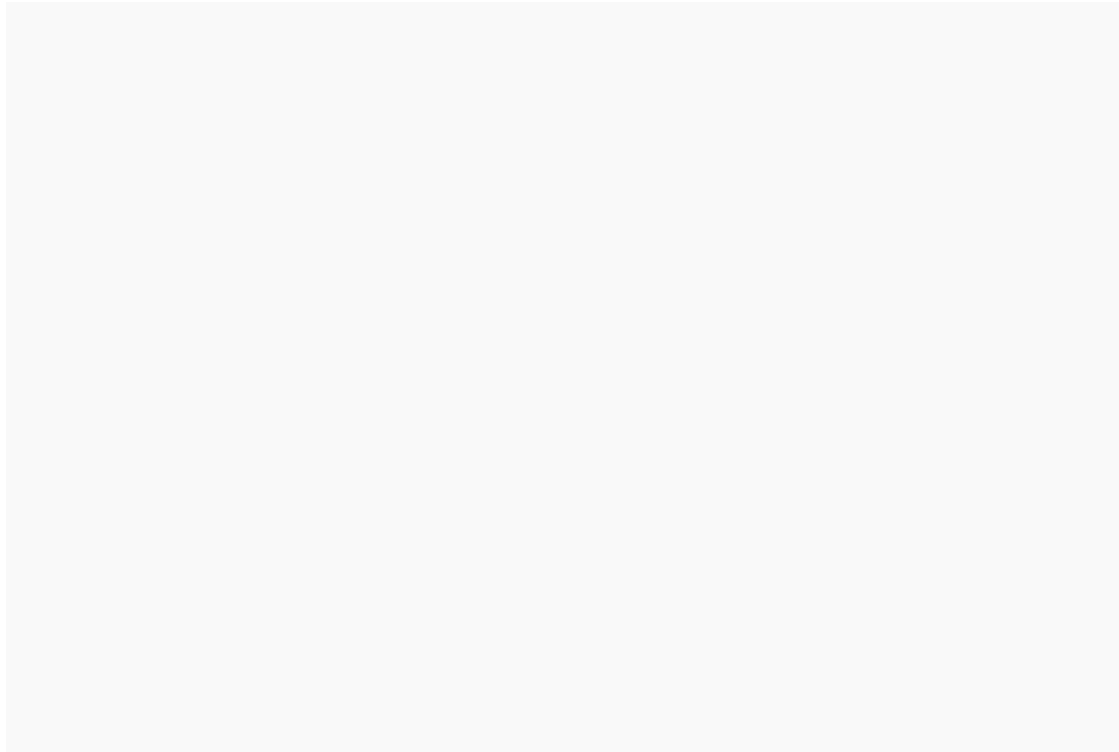
Listening to the rhetoric of the program, the common theme of transmission through experience is obvious. Burnam and Kai-Kee create a modus operandi for the educator within the museum in the context of postmodernism, saying:

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 _____, 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



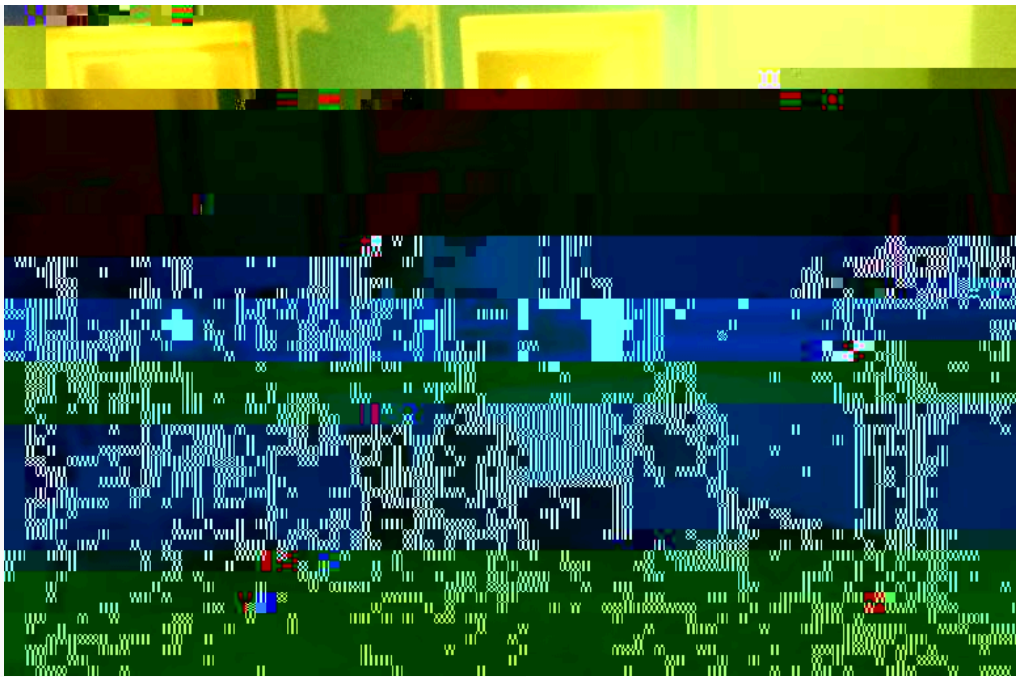
dressed but ready to engage every corner of your political alignment before they greeted us.



(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

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.

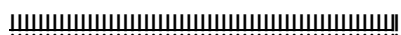
The event was exactly what it needed to be. It was inexpensive, secretive, and a slap in the face of those sleeping bureaucrats on either side of this historic building, situated in the heart of three centuries of historical and cultural context. I asked Misha if he knew who was responsible for planning 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

artists could be a generation gap. Those raised in the 70s and 80s, with an unshakable faith in the permanence of society and stagnation [7# - (&)], 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 , or the cultural capital in exclusivity in the case of contemporary apartment exhibits? Urban Geographer Rob Shields describes how any city has , or intangible qualities arising from



⁸⁴ Gessen, , 169.


⁸⁵ Tupitsyn, , 197.

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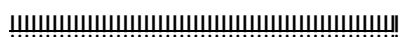
The complete control over each aspect of such an exhibition certainly harkens back to the concept of total installation, where every facet of an experience must be tailored to the artists', or in this case, planners' demands. The result is a pertinent, exciting destination where visitors want to test 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

developed in activism, namely the notion of  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, *Art and the Bomb* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004), 76.

⁹¹ Groys, *Art and the Bomb*, 87.

⁹² Kabakov and Groys, *Art and the Bomb*, 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

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

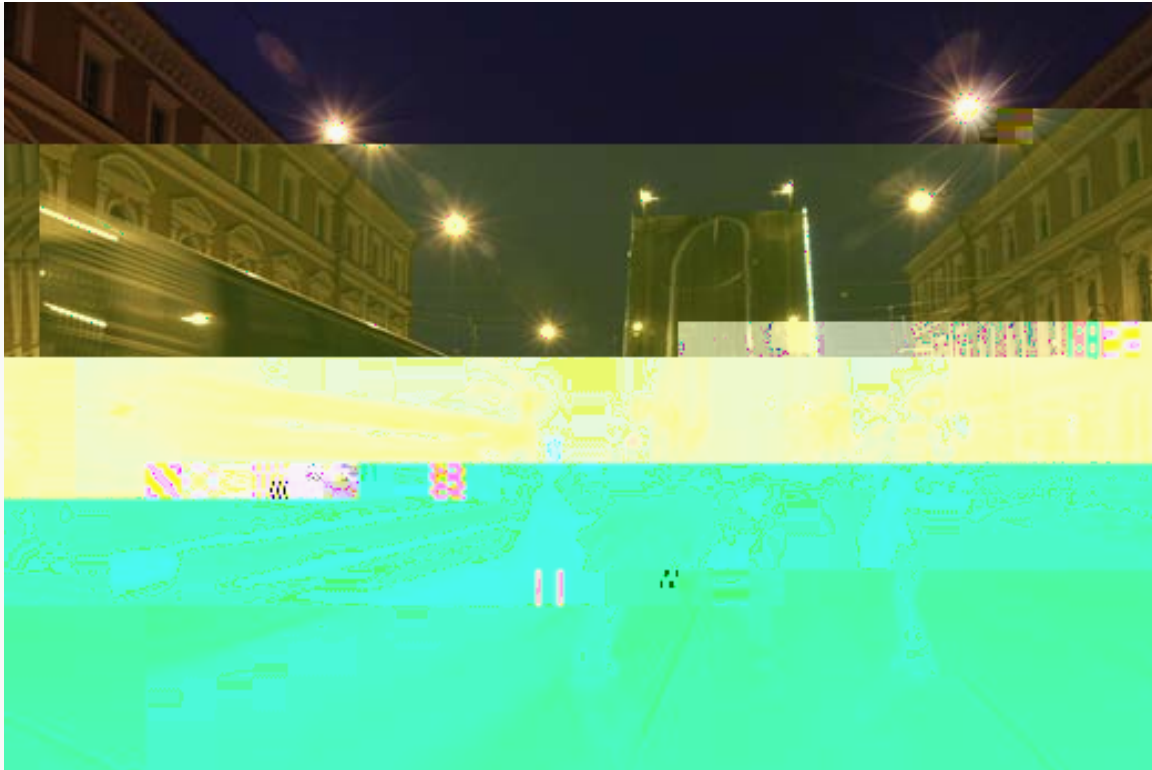
capital. Since the expertise and resources for such an analysis are far beyond me, a detailed qualitative analysis of one particular contemporary activist artwork can provide the closest approximate of such a result.

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 [B1&4' , 1' 5)6&] 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

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 s

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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