CHAPTER 2

Communal (Post)Modernism: A Short History

Nonidentity is the secret telos of identification.
Theodor W. Adorno

1. THE END OF THE 1950S, THE BEGINNING OF THE 1960S

If the artists' works featured in this chapter fall under the category of "dereified activity," it is not by virtue of their solidarity with Lukács or Adorno, but due to the political climate in the USSR that prevented such activities from being institutionalized and culturally processed in due time. This resulted in both positive and negative outcomes—positive in that the Soviet culture industry of the postwar period did not attempt to absorb unofficial (i.e., non–socialist realist) art, and negative in that for many years its body of works, still partially unaccounted for, constituted the would-be contents of an indefinitely deferred museum. The failure to obtain a museum niche made artists feel anxious and prompted them to compete collectively for inclusion, thereby triggering the formation (around this void) of a compensatory symbolic structure that alludes to the notion of "museological unconscious" discussed in chapter 10.

After the death of Stalin in 1953, a few more years were needed for the fresh air of the Khrushchev thaw to become perceptible in the art world. In the spring of 1956, immediately following the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, the artists Ullo Sooster, Boris Sveshnikov, and Lev Kropivnitskii returned from confinement. As a result of the Central Committee's resolution "On Overcoming the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences" (passed that same year on June 30), the exclusive right to the status of individuality, which had be usurped by the party's upper echelons, lost its earlier "infallibility." Now, for the first time, the creative intelligentsia—which had oscillated, until this point, between the Scylla of communality and the Charybdis of socialist realism—had a chance to decommunalize, to cease being solely the "ancient choir" in a typically Soviet "optimistic tragedy." Several exhibitions of Western modernist art

2.1
Oskar Rabin, *Barrack*, 1959.

held at the end of the 1950s[1] left an ineradicable trace on the collective psyche of Muscovite visual culture, and finally allowed Soviet artists (official and unofficial alike) to become acquainted with paradigms of individual authorship, paradigms devoid for the most part of the authoritarian individualism of the party elite.

To avoid ambiguity, a distinction should be made between the terms "unofficial" and "alternative." Unofficial artists were individuals who did not belong to the Moscow Union of Soviet Artists (MOSKh) or other official structures controlled by socialist realists. "Unofficials" (*neofitsial'nye khudozhniki*) had no right to studios or any legal means to sell their art. As for "alternative" artists, they could be either unofficial or official; to be official, they had to be silent in their refusal to adhere to socialist realism, while remaining on the margins of MOSKh as graphic designers or illustrators of children books.[2]

In 1958, the Studio School for the Improvement of Qualifications at the Moscow School of Printing, which had existed since 1954 under the direction of Eli Beliutin, passed to the protection of the Committee of Graphic Designers. In his speech at the opening of the studio, Beliutin had criticized the "wingless realism" of official art. Instead, he called for a passage through "the entire worldwide history of human culture," including modernity. At the end of 1959, having become the first private educational institution in the history of Soviet art, the Studio School found a home on Taganskaia Street. Among those who taught or were educated there were Vladimir Iankilevskii, Viktor Pivovarov, Boris Zhutovskii, and Ernst Neizvestnyi.

At about the same time, the Lianozovo group emerged, consisting of the artist/poet Evgenii Kropivnitskii and the artists Ol'ga Potapova, Valentina Kropivnitskaia, Oskar Rabin, Lev Kropivnitskii, Lidiia Masterkova, Vladimir Nemukhin, and Nikolai Vechtomov, as well as the poets Vsevolod Nekrasov, Genrikh Sapgir, and Igor' Kholin. These people did not manifest any particular unanimity on the plane of aesthetic values; their coherence as a group was based on their shared search for a new sociocultural identity. In other words, they sought to create a neocommunal body, but in a voluntary and noncoercive way.

While no aesthetic consensus could be observed among the members of the Lianozovo group, Rabin's paintings and drawings betray their debt to the poetry of Evgenii Kropivnitskii, Kholin, Sapgir, and Nekrasov. Rabin shared with these poets a taste for the social grotesque bordering on the aestheticization of misery, which is precisely what distinguishes the representatives of the declassed communal intelligentsia of the thaw era from their predecessors (the socialist realists), who created a paradisiac image

2.2
Installation view of Lidiia Masterkova's paintings from the 1960s, CRAC, New York, 1983.

of history. Stamped upon Rabin's works are crooked Moscow streets with ramshackle homes and barracks, hungry cats on roofs and beneath gates, and the claustrophobia-filled "living" spaces of communal apartments (fig. 2.1). Blame for these miserable living circumstances is laid on the absurdity of existence, or on some anonymous character who appears before communal consciousness as simply "it." This faceless, formless "it" is the chief dramatis persona of the ghetto-centric narrative championed by the forefathers of "nonconformism"—from Rabin and Ilya Kabakov to the artists of the Leningrad "Barracks School."[3] Rushing ahead of myself, I will say that it took no fewer than fifteen years for this extra-communal "it" to find, at last, the recognizable features of state and party bureaucracy. It's unmasking (the unmasking of "it") found a place in sots art,[4] whose adherents were inspired by Rabin's painting *Passport* (1964), as well as by his still lifes containing *Pravda*'s front page.

Masterkova and Nemukhin did not share Rabin's appetite for social transgression and for "talking back" to the Soviet authorities. They espoused indifference as a virtue, and with this attitude, plunging into abstraction was their logical choice. A visit in the summer of 1959 to the "National American Exhibition," displayed in the pavilions of Sokol'niki Park, and featuring works by Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, guaranteed their initial preference for abstract expressionism. Not long after, however, both artists committed themselves to semiabstract compositions. In her first abstractions, distinguished by the passion for organic forms and vivid color fields colliding with one another, Masterkova began to glue old bits of lace and fragments of ecclesiastical attire (chasubles and the like) to the surfaces of her canvases (fig. 2.2). The use of lace (which in the context of those years may be considered the antithesis of a "masculine" relation to *faktura* [texture] and to the "politics" of material selection)[5] placed the artist in an isolated position in the patriarchal world of Muscovite alternative art.

Nemukhin's choice of objects is observable in his numerous still lifes with playing cards, fighting cocks, and fragments of card tables (fig. 2.3). This entire iconography, borrowed from the sphere of competitive games, corresponds well with the vitality of his artistic character. In the majority of cases, this inventory bore a conditional semantic burden, intensifying the effect of chance, intrigue, indeterminacy—that is, everything that would contrast with the doctrines of "objectivity and the universal character of causality" espoused by the Soviet establishment. Later Nemukhin added "cuts" to his canvases in the manner of Lucio Fontana; in most cases, they were illusory, but occasionally (as, for example, in pieces executed in collaboration with Anatolii Zverev and damaged in an axe-throwing contest) they were real.

2.3
Vladimir Nemukhin,
Poker on the Beach, 1965.

The notion of being one of the "chosen" and of having a spiritual mission was not alien to many representatives of "dissident modernism."[6] Thus, for example, Oleg Tselkov considered (as he does to this day) that he "does not create, but simply executes."[7] Here, supernatural forces supplant the historic giver of orders: the party and government. Another candidate for the same post is the *Idealich* (*moi idéal*). Projected onto culture, the *Idealich* is the narcissistic ideal of omnipotence, that is, the artist as Zarathustra. At the end of the 1950s, this kind of heroic individualism was associated with the sculptors Vadim Sidur and Neizvestnyi. All "dissident modernists," to equal degrees, ignored the languages of communalism and power. They made these topics taboo and, consequently, displaced them, not only from the zone of consciousness but also (for the time being) from the sphere of the unconscious. The vacuum that was formed as a result was filled in, in Kabakov's words, "by the sweet visions, magical sights, and original worlds that had unfolded before one's eyes."[8]

However, the artists at this time knew no vision other than a cathartic one. Therefore, anything that envisaged an "alienation effect" or that might lead to the realization of the "critical function" was immediately crossed off the list of phenomena worthy of attention. This response was linked to the experience of communality, but also to memories of the Stalinization of culture. That is why in the late 1950s the very notion of a "critical function" was still identified with the verdictive language of Zhdanovism (in the 1930s, "criticism" of writers or artists often landed them in prison or labor camps). Soviet alternative art, alas, would frequently be run over by such "criticism," with some modifications, in the course of its thirty-year history.

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Reflecting on the first steps of Russian "dissident"—or, in my terminology, "communal"—modernism, one must necessarily look at such early representatives as Sveshnikov, Vladimir Veisberg, Dmitrii Krasnopevtsev, Mikhail Shvartsman, Dmitrii Plavinskii, Aleksandr Kharitonov, and Vladimir Iakovlev. After his return from the labor camps, Sveshnikov settled in Tarusa (130 kilometers from Moscow), and at the very beginning of the 1960s moved to Moscow. He brought with him from confinement a large number of sketches executed in the manner of the old masters (from Botticelli to Dürer) and in the spirit of Goya's *Los Caprichos*.

In these works, the theme of prison life acquires a certain atemporality; some of them might be confused with illustrations for Dante's *Inferno*. This type of apprehension of time and space was termed "Dantesque chronotope" or "the chronotope of vertical time" by literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin.[9] Within such a framework, the temporal distinction between

narration and what is narrated vanishes and—in exchange—the two are endowed with the status of simultaneity. And Sveshnikov's temporal response to the Stalin years was not isolated. In one of his poems, Boris Pasternak even refers to this period as "the years of timelessness." Many communal modernists applied precisely this interpretation to the period that succeeded the era of the Russian avant-garde, believing that Russia seemed to have "fallen out of culture" during that time.[10]

A similar eschatologism, which occurs in the work of a number of Sveshnikov's contemporaries, is "the death of time." Veisberg, having attempted—like Pushkin's Salieri—"to verify harmony with algebra," composed his meditative works (including his "white on white" series) from the most minuscule units of color. For the most part, he painted still lifes and portraits, reaching an ecstatic frenzy by cutting himself on his arms and chest. Veisberg admitted frequently that he selected as models only those whom he had seen in his nightmares lying in their coffins. It seems far from coincidental that, in 1973, the sculptor Sidur began to execute a series of works with the title *Coffin Art*.

Iakovlev, a painter valued in the unofficial milieu for his still lifes, abstractions, and distorted (at times, explicitly erotic) portraits, is yet another example of the paradigm of the "myth of originality"[11] (see fig. 10.3). From Goya and van Gogh to Egon Schiele and Antonin Artaud, the tradition of modernism not only legitimized but canonized the image of the madman-genius. In accordance with this tradition, insanity is considered a necessary correlate of artistic talent. In this sense, the mentally ill Iakovlev, who was almost deprived of his eyesight but "compensated" for this defect with creative vision, was and remains—for the Russians—a legendary figure.[12]

2. THE 1960S

When the lavishly reproduced books on Western modernism (the so-called coffee-table books) began to surface in the Soviet Union, it seemed that one had only to follow all of their commandments and a place in history would be guaranteed. In other words, Soviet nonconformists preferred the most modest position within the "genuine" and "pure" capitalist culture industry to the very highest pedestal in the pantheon of the "false" and "unsterile" domestic art situation. In the 1960s a number of Russian artists began to orient themselves toward foreign buyers, exhibitions outside of the USSR, and publication in the Western press. To be a member of MOSKh or embark on a career as a cultural bureaucrat ceased to be the sole means of attaining a "creative reputation" and an adequate standard of living, as had been the case previously.

In Federico Fellini's film *Amarcord* (1973), the inhabitants of a provincial seaside town learn that an American superliner is scheduled to pass within a few miles of the shore on the following night. In order to see it, the residents set off into the open sea. In the darkness there appears before them a sumptuous, twinkling giant, which at that moment—like a ghost—disappears, dissolving into the night. This allegory, similar to a hallucination, recalls the spirit of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when before the eyes of the underground artists the magic ship of modernism arose.[13]

It is worth remembering that, at one time, Western modernists (let alone postmodernists) digested and culturally processed the experience of the Russian avant-garde, adapting this experience to their own context and to their politics of the signifier. Having had no such luck, most communal modernists were barred from access to archives and museum storage rooms in which Russian works from the early twentieth century were kept. For them, access to this heritage was possible only "secondhand"—that is, through exposure to the works of those European and American artists (minimalists, for example) who were influenced by the experiments of the Russian avant-garde. Thus, their experience can be seen as yet another search for a *temps perdu* that is doomed from the start, just like, for instance, an attempt to recreate Vladimir Tatlin's context by looking at Dan Flavin's series of neon constructions titled *"Monument" for V. Tatlin*.[14]

As for the Soviet communal modernists of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the reaction to their art in the United States and in Western Europe was—for the most part—unfavorable. The artists were repeatedly criticized for *literaturnost'* (literariness) and for copying from the "original sources." Given the history of such twofold stereotypes (e.g., literariness and copying on par with "original sources"), the informed reader can trace the aforementioned criticism to Clement Greenberg who, in his famous essays "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) and "Towards a Newer Laocoön" (1940), failed to appreciate (or simply to face) the fact that art contaminated by literature cannot be separated from "pure" visuality: they are Romulus and Remus, nourished by the same she-wolf. Today, however, tirades about liberation from the dungeons of language are useless, in part because the verbal and the visual are to equal degrees clichéd, processed by the media or culture industry, and are largely coextensive. The media or culture industry is what we need to be liberated from, which is, of course, a utopian idea. But several decades ago it was still acceptable to rely on the existence of essential, extracted, and extremely pure forms of the verbal and the visual that were not blended with, or bound to, anything else.

A difference between the experiments of Soviet unofficial artists of the 1960s and the museo-commercial shrines of Western modernism was manifested, as a rule, on the register of the "secondary signs," or in the space of signification, in relation to which "primary signs" play the role of the signifier. Here one and the same visual stereotype, in the case of contextual change, transfer, or rupture, can become a springboard for dissimilar interpretations—literary, philosophical, and political. Thus, as a result of their brief, but "direct" encounter with European and American art, and also the stream of coffee-table books, Soviet artists suddenly began to project themselves onto the Other, thereby endowing "it" with a totally different content. The result turned out to be utterly estranged from its wellspring: for the local unofficial artists, who armed themselves with signifiers of Western modernism, its vital context and its living history remained incomprehensible, vague, and inessential. In the majority of cases they insisted on art's ritualistic dimension, hitherto "buried" by Tret'iakov and Benjamin, thereby attesting to the fact that the communal modernists epitomize not continuity, but a break with the postrevolutionary Soviet avant-garde ("socialist modernism") of the 1920s.

The above does not in any way diminish the significance of the artifacts of the post-Stalin underground. On the contrary, it gives them (from the standpoint of contemporary theories) a more interesting angle. Likewise, these artists' insufficient knowledge of the "original sources" should not be viewed as their greatest misfortune, for it left room for fantasy and creative distortion. Taking into account the aberrancy of their interpretation of Western (and, for that matter, of "their own," pre- and postrevolutionary) art, one must assume that this very aberrancy is the greatest contribution of communal modernists to what we (zealously) call "world culture." What's more, it is such a cliché to think of art in terms of a single contextual frame or a single descriptive narrative. The existing tendency to globalize artistic contexts, histories, and sensibilities is, in fact, suffocating and counterproductive. Luckily, many such contexts, including those which are considered to be "similar" and "synchronous," are both different and deferred.

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The 1960s mark the decommunalization of a remarkably broad mass of Soviet citizens. This was due to the sweep of Khrushchev's building programs, which were charged with resettling people from the communal apartments of Stalin's time. The "new lands" program (in Siberia and Kazakhstan)—which provided for the migration of "productive forces" to rural localities—also helped to lessen the population density in the nation's cities. A few years later, Khrushchev, already removed from power,

admitted to a journalist that his chief service to the nation had been to improve housing conditions, in order to "let people live."[15]

The spread of decommunalization significantly affected the lives of alternative artists. At this time, many of them quit their communal abodes and began to work in studios, which became the incubators for developing new forms of relations in the art world. In the studios, shows were arranged, poems recited, theoretical texts presented, opinions and books—including those on Western art—exchanged. For the most part, these artists earned their living by making children's books (for example, Sooster, Kabakov, Pivovarov, Erik Bulatov, Oleg Vasil'ev, and Eduard Gorokhovskii) or by collaborating with popular-science journals (as did Sobolev and Nemukhin). Such a minimal form of participation in the Soviet culture industry at least gave the alternative painters and sculptors the right to studios. In the framework of these studios, all sorts of groupings took shape, held together if not by a unity of artistic purposes, then by shared opposition to the establishment. These fellowships served as laboratories for the rediscovery and recreation of the paradigms of individual authorship usurped (in the "years of timelessness") by the authoritarian "I" of state power.

Alongside the contacts in studios there arose other, previously unheard-of phenomena: the arrangement of shows of non–socialist realist art in clubs, scientific research institutes, youth cafés (such as the Aelita and the Blue Bird), and in private apartments (such as those of composer Andrei Volkonskii, art critic Il'ia Tsirlin, pianist Sviatoslav Rikhter, and dissident Aleksandr Ginzburg). Jazz clubs and literary or artistic salons arose, connected with the names of Sooster, Sobolev, Iurii Mamleev, Alena Basilova, and Mikhail Grobman. All of the musical performances, theatrical productions, and literary publications which helped to counter socialist realism's "symbol of faith" deserve their own investigations, as do other cultural phenomena from the early 1960s.

On December 1, 1962, an exhibition at the Manezh Exhibition Hall opened and displayed—amid typically Soviet productions—the works of Sooster, Sobolev, Neizvestnyi, Beliutin, Zhutovskii, and Iankilevskii. The leaders of official culture invited Khrushchev and the upper echelons of the party to the opening with the aim of stirring them up against their enemies, the alternative artists. The scandal that erupted at the opening and the subsequent persecution of "deviant" art marked a watershed in the history of unofficial art.[16] Like a mollusk extricating itself from its shell, the communal body of Muscovite dissident modernism worked itself free of the ghetto's limits for the first time. The infantile phase, or "mirror stage," of alternative art drew to a close. The artists recognized the

utopianism of their hopes for linearity and continuity in the process of the convalescence of cultural life. To grasp the severity of the situation generated by Khrushchev's condemnation of the Manezh events, it suffices to cite his angry words at the show's opening: "Just give me a list of those of you who want to go abroad, to the so-called 'free world.' We'll give you foreign passports tomorrow, and you can get out. Your prospects here are zero. What's hung here is simply anti-Soviet. It's immoral. . . . Are you pederasts or normal people? . . . As long as I am Chairman of the Council of Ministers we are going to . . . maintain a strict policy in art."[17]

At the meeting of party and government representatives and the artistic intelligentsia in January 1963, at the House of Receptions in the Lenin Hills, Khrushchev summarized the discussion of the so-called nonconformists. He said, in effect, "They needn't be put in jail, but rather into the madhouse." Later, under Brezhnev, Khrushchev's words were made literal: madhouses became laboratories for the forcible "reeducation" and reformation of aesthetic views. As had once been the case in Stalin's camps, in the nuthouses, communal experiences were reinscribed: along with doses of insulin, patients received injections of communal psychology. In 1993, the St. Petersburg artist Afrika (Sergei Bugaev), having spent a month in a psychiatric hospital as part of an artistic project, informed me that he had "nowhere before experienced such a degree of imperativity to merge with the communal body."

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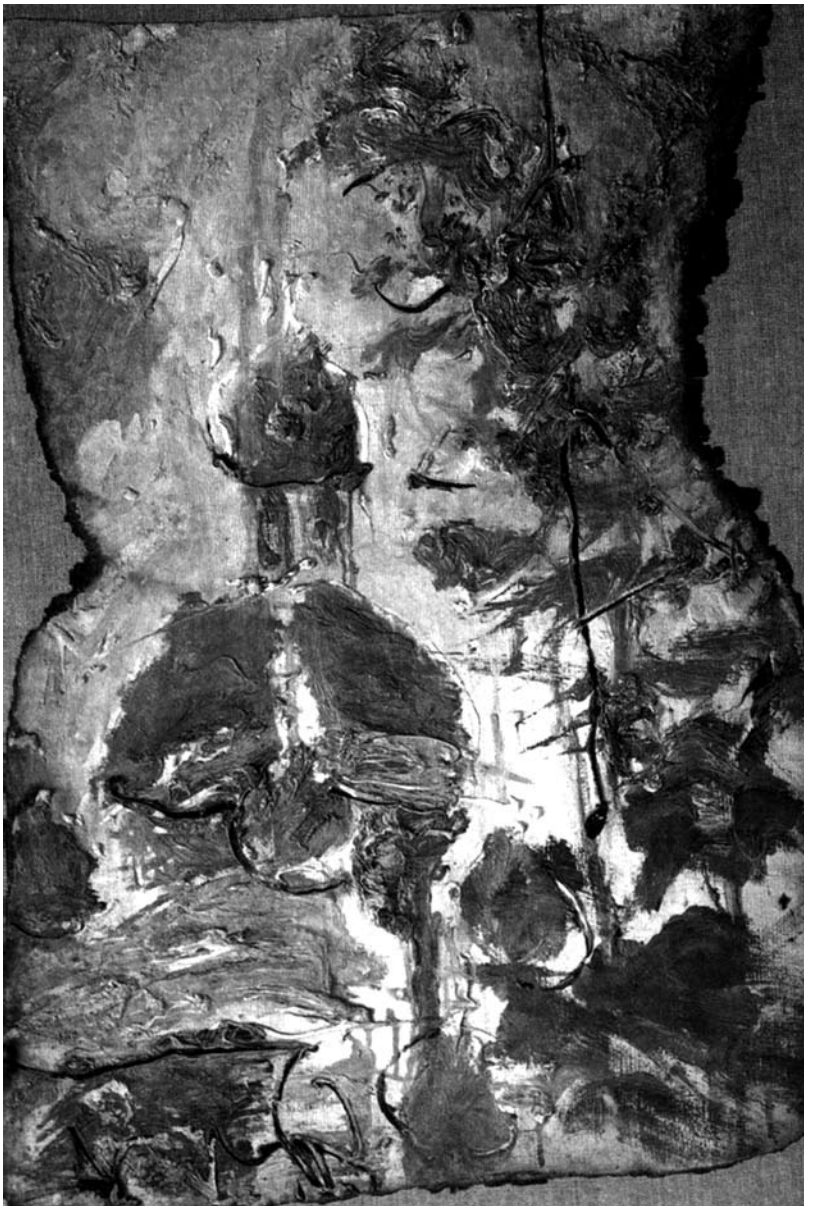
To the list of the characteristics that constitute the image of the communal modernist, I would like to add four more types: the hobo, the "holy fool," the hippie, and the schizoid. The first type, which was taking shape already at the end of the 1950s, is identified first and foremost with Anatolii Zverev, who became the talk of the town thanks to his spontaneity and knack for improvisation. These skills were demonstrated in many genres, styles, and tendencies, from animalism and impromptu portraits to abstract compositions (fig. 2.4). The chief novelty that Zverev introduced to the Moscow art world was his abolition of distinctions between life and the artistic act. Once, for instance, while working on a series of portraits, he used, along with paints squeezed from tubes, toothpaste and cigarette butts, and accompanied his "action painting" with medleys on the piano and improvising in verse. A fragment of one of these verses went, as I recall, "A Tatar boy shoots from a bow. 'Fu-u-u-ck' sings the bowstring after the arrow flies off." Drunkenness and vagrancy (which brought about his premature death in 1986), together with his gift for improvisation, won Zverev the reputation of the muse's beloved, and added a number of supplementary features to the Muscovite paradigm of the "myth of originality."



2.4
Anatolii Zverev, *Church in Peredelkino*, 1960.

The role of the holy fool, like that of the hobo, is inseparable from the Russian tradition of opposition to the establishment. An intolerance of power, characteristic of all periods of Russian history, developed to the point that alternative individuality was forced to resort to camouflage. The drunkard and the holy fool were permitted forms of social (or, to be precise, asocial) expression forbidden to ordinary members of society. Like Zverev, Vasilii Sitnikov had a virtuous command of methods of "playing the fool." His bag of holy fool's tricks included both jocular manners and a passion for folkloric articulations. Sitnikov wore an untucked shirt and work boots, collected icons, and gave painting lessons to numerous pupils, who were hypnotized by their teacher's Rasputinesque charm and intensity. Shocking his charges, he painted with a boot brush, attaining precise enough visual effects nonetheless. Sitnikov's subjects varied from folkish representations of Russian churches powdered with New Year's snow to caricatured nudes and grotesque genre scenes executed in a pale palette. In 1980—having emigrated to New York—Sitnikov made the acquaintance of two or three gallery dealers (with my help), promising that "for prison fare and accommodations in barracks" he would paint for them a number of epochal pictures over several years. It goes without saying that no contracts were signed. Not long before his death in 1987, I ran into him in the East Village. In his hands he held a huge brush for washing the floors of corporate lobbies. "Finally I have obtained a brush suitable for the scale of my painterly grandeur," he said in parting.

The artist Vladimir Piatnitskii, who died in 1978 of a drug overdose, can be considered the Russian incarnation of self-destructive tendencies in the mold of the Beat generation (Jack Kerouac and others). In his oils and works on paper, the swarms of communal freaks are subordinated to a psychedelic logic, which is also not alien to the heroes of the underground writer Mamleev's stories (see fig. 2.24). It's no accident, for example, that in one of Piatnitskii's paintings a character, resembling the artist himself, holds in his hands a then-unpublished volume of Mamleev's texts. In the 1960s, Mamleev's salon on Iuzhinskii Lane 13 was a crucial factor in the formation of yet another paradigm of artistic and bohemian behavior, the "schizoid." Interestingly, this concept arose and became popular in Moscow more than a decade before Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus,* in which "schizoidness" and "schizoanalysis" are developed into a means of theoretical enterprise.

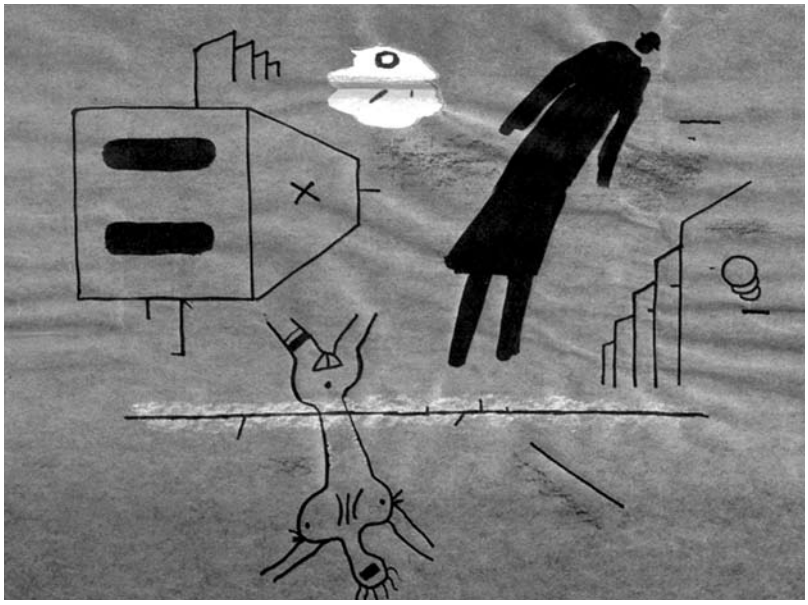
As I have already noted, the 1960s were associated not only with artistic alternatives but with social experimentation. This was often connected to the search for new forms of camaraderie, intellectual and creative alike. Like the Lianozovo group, artists associated with Sretenskii Boulevard

cannot be linked with any specific theoretical model or stylistic persuasion. Instead, it was another link in the reinterpretation and redefinition of communal language games and their rules. After all, every citizen of the USSR who has studied in a Soviet school, graduated from an institute, or served in the army, even if he was lucky enough to have his own apartment or studio, is nonetheless a product of this communal education. Kabakov was correct in stating that "he knows himself insofar as he is a communal dweller" and that "to transcend the boundaries of the communal is to become an angel."[18]

What took place in the unofficial art world in the 1960s was linked to a changeover from institutional forms of communality to "contractual" ones. It was "contractual" communality, or neocommunality, based on the principle of optional communalization, that became the ecological niche for Muscovite alternative art over the course of three decades—right up to perestroika. Among the artists generally borne in mind when the words "Sretenskii Boulevard" are pronounced, one may list Sooster, Kabakov, Bulatov, Pivovarov, Sobolev, Eduard Shteinberg, and Iankilevskii.

Iankilevskii's sketches, paintings, and triptychs may be considered incarnations of the communal unconscious, not in a Jungian sense, but rather as that which has been conditioned by *statistics,* including the unprecedented scope of stereotyping and depersonalization characteristic of speech acts and the perception thereof, of behavioral norms, and of the very tenor of Soviet life. And, on the strength of the clichéd nature of communal verbal exchange, almost everything that is displaced into the unconscious—save for the prelingual (the infantile period of life)—coincides to a significant degree for the majority of communal dwellers. When gazing at Iankilevskii's compositions, in which foreshortenings of a deformed anthropomorphism are laid atop a rigid structure of communications nets and aggregates in the spirit of Francis Picabia and Max Ernst, Nietzsche's words "Dionysus the crucified" spring to mind (fig. 2.5).

For Shteinberg, the "communal unconscious" revealed itself during his search for a symbolic father. This quest was preceded by a number of circumstances that emancipated consciousness but broke the familiar rhythm of unconscious identification. Among them was the unmasking of the cult of personality at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress and the removal of Stalin's mummy from Lenin's mausoleum in 1961; these were dramatic, national-scale examples of what psychoanalysis defines as "the death of the father." With Shteinberg, the lost paternal icon was supplanted by the patriarch of the Russian avant-garde, Kazimir Malevich. Shteinberg not only appropriated Malevich's visual language, but also to some extent "corrected" his legacy, developing the messianic potential of



2.5
Vladimir Iankilevskii, *Kafkaesque Atmosphere*, 1969.

2.6
Lev Nussberg and Movement group,
Shift of Times, performance, 1971.

Malevich's abstractions to their extreme and truncating their secular signification. The Neoplatonists—Plotinus, Proclus, and others—did more or less the same with Plato's philosophy. In the 1980s, Shteinberg wrote a letter to "the beloved Kazimir Severinovich" (Malevich), which became a manifestation of symbolic authority delegated to the paternal metaphor. Since any symbolic father is a symptom ("the return of the repressed"), this Name-of-the-Father turns out to be "more father than father himself."[19]

Curiously, a few years before Shteinberg wrote his letter, Lev Nussberg, who founded the Movement group in 1962, had staged a similar correspondence with Malevich.[20] Besides Nussberg, the Movement group included Francesco Infante, Vladimir Akulinin, and Galina Bitt, among others. The group focused on the propagation and development of kinetic art, the design of artificial environments, and the staging of outdoor spectacles comparable with Western happenings and body art (fig. 2.6).

For Nussberg, the task of art boiled down to the symbiosis of the natural and the artificial; in the era of Sputniks and cosmic euphoria, he was able to convince Soviet officialdom of the actuality of his pop-science fantasies, which gravitated—at the level of design and architectural forms—toward the aesthetics of the 1920s (from Malevich and Lissitzky to Tatlin and Pevsner). Like many of his compatriots (for example, Neizvestnyi in *The Tree of Life*), Nussberg believed that the world's progress could be assured under the aegis of a single artistic project. Incidentally, he enriched the domestic version of the "myth of originality" with yet another Zarathustrian facet—the "will" to leadership and tutorship.

In 1970, Infante broke off from the Movement group, having created, along with Nonna Goriunova, his own collective under the name ARGO. The group's aim was, in Infante's words, "to bring to fruition planned projects for artificed spaces."[21] For many, Infante's "artefacts" are associated with fragments of nature reflected in mirrors. This doubling, like the installations with mirrors themselves, is somewhat reminiscent of the earlier works of Robert Smithson.

Among those who, along with Shteinberg, Nussberg, and Infante, had affection for geometric and organic abstraction were the students of Vladimir Sterligov in Leningrad and Mikhail Chernyshov in Moscow. Chernyshov socialized frequently with and exhibited works alongside Mikhail Roginskii, who included in his visual lexicon representations of everyday objects—primus stoves, irons, matchboxes, and the like. A few pieces merit special consideration: *Red Door,* a readymade from 1965, and *Fuck You* and *Ass,* 1966, both featuring pants hung off a stool (fig. 2.7).

2.7
Mikhail Roginskii, *Ass*, 1966.

It might seem that this inventory of objects is similar to those employed by Rabin in his barracks motifs. In fact, however, Roginskii's works herald another apprehension of the selfsame iconography. If Rabin's objects serve as witnesses for the prosecution, wailing about the crimes of an extracommunal "it," then with Roginskii the objects' self-sufficiency is returned to them. In their unsightly everydayness, the artist found his own theme, amortized to no one else: the theme of coexistence with things, or—and this is just the same—the ability of the ghetto residents to relinquish their hostility toward things and to "accept their misery as your own."[22] The argument that Roginskii created a Russian version of pop art (i.e., "communal pop art") is mistaken: in contrast to the West, where the fetishization of consumer culture could not fail to be reflected in art, in the USSR, this fetishization remained utopian.

▪▪

In the 1960s, the first art collectors and art collections appeared. At the beginning, they included Aleksandr Rusanov, Evgenii Nutovich, Nina Stevens (the Russian wife of an American journalist), and Leonid Talochkin. Later came Aleksandr Glezer and Tat'iana Kolodzei. Georgii Kostakis filled an important role by collecting works of the earlier Russian avant-garde alongside works by contemporary artists. In the same decade, the American economics professor Norton Dodge began collecting unofficial Soviet art. Overall, the sale of works to foreigners became in the 1960s an economic factor that played an increasingly important role in the infrastructure of "communal modernism." However, as such sales were illegal, the purchasers—primarily diplomats and journalists accredited in Moscow—for the most part acquired works of small dimensions so they could export them in their suitcases. From this practice the term "suitcase style" arose to denote modestly scaled artworks destined for export.

Far from fulfilling a mission of "enlightenment," foreigners in the USSR, with rare exceptions, had only vague notions of the actual issues of vanguard art in their own countries. All they could offer their Russian friends in the guise of *Kulturträger* were books or catalogues of museum shows promoting art that had already become synonymous with *die Kulturindustrie*. Contemporary trends in American and European art proved to be beyond the reach of these types of publications. In those times almost no one in Russia knew about Beat culture, minimalism, Arte Povera, the Situationist International, or Fluxus, or about such artists as John Cage, Yves Klein, Joseph Beuys, Eva Hesse, Marcel Broodthaers, Gordon Matta-Clark, Edward Kienholz, and Hans Haacke, although precisely these artists constituted Western "nonconformism" of the 1960s. Thus, the Soviet "nonconformists" accidentally identified themselves not

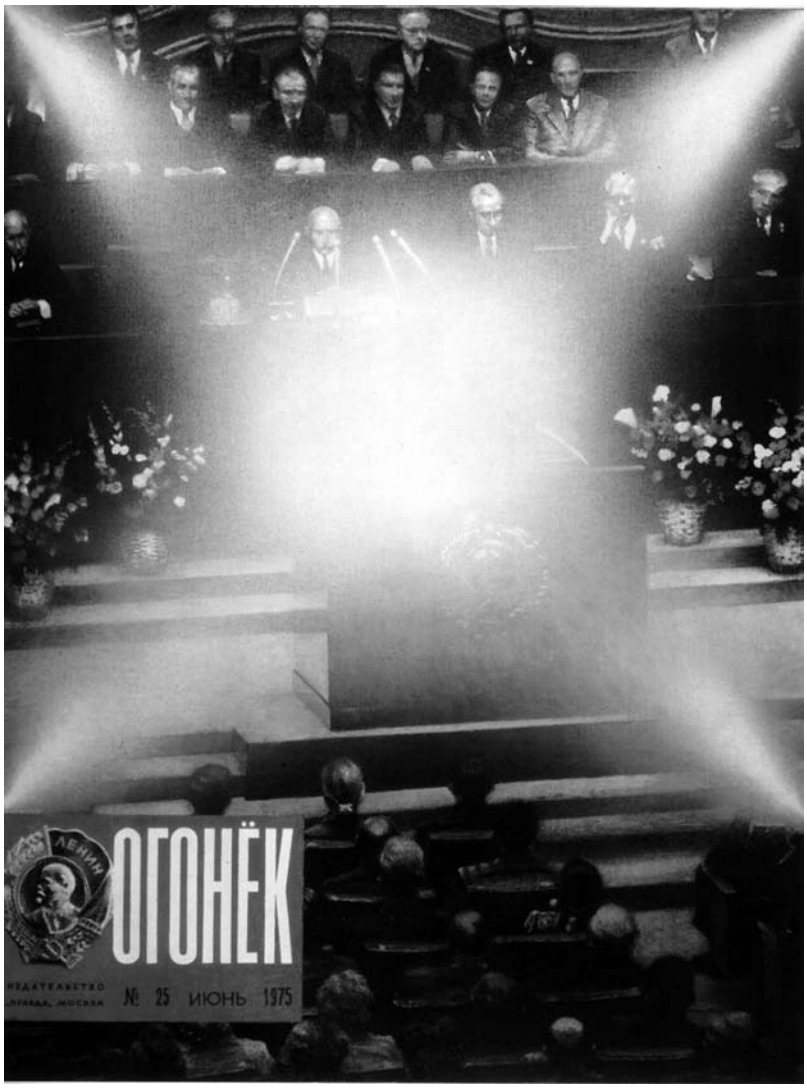
with marginal activities or iconoclastic gestures of their Western contemporaries, but with "ascendant" culture, that which had already been tamed, assimilated, and, in the final analysis, endorsed by the institutions of power. As a result, Soviet alternative artists, while remaining in opposition to domestic officialdom, served unwittingly as apologists for the Western cultural establishment. This circumstance to a certain extent explains the unfavorable reactions of leftist critics to exhibitions of the nonconformists' work abroad.

After Brezhnev came to power in 1964, the organization of alternative exhibitions in Moscow turned into its own sort of Russian roulette. Thus, for example, the exhibition of the Lianozovo group (with the addition of several pieces by Plavinskii, Shteinberg, and Zverev) at the Friendship Club on the Enthusiasts' Highway in 1967 was called off by the authorities two hours after it opened. This failed initiative was officially accused of "ideological sabotage" and provoked an irate reaction in the Soviet press. Meanwhile, other important shows of alternative art passed without any particular action by the authorities. Among these was a whole sequence of short-running events in the Blue Bird café, including Vitaly Komar and Aleksandr Melamid's exposition "Retrospectivism" (spring 1967), Kabakov and Bulatov's joint show (summer 1968), and solo shows by Vagrich Bakhchanian and Vasil'ev that followed right after.

By 1968, Vasil'ev had already turned out a number of key devices (such as pass keys) and "ramming" contrivances permitting a passage through the walls of planar "fortifications." Having reinterpreted the legacy of his teachers, Vladimir Favorskii and Robert Fal'k, Vasil'ev conceptualized painterly space by "positing axonometry as its sublation,"[23] that is, by embedding rectilinear surfaces in it and by supercharging the pressure of light. Vasil'ev's methods of creating "high and deep spaces" give rise to effects reminiscent simultaneously of X-rays and visual aids on spectral analysis. Even though some story is always told in Vasil'ev's pictures, narrative is optional in them. The true subject of these works is going through the purgatory of visuality. Years later, this approach was summed up in *Ogonek* (1980), in which streams of light epitomizing "pure visuality" and issuing from the painting's corners incinerate a source of speech, in this case an orator located in the center (fig. 2.8).[24]

3. THE 1970S

Understandably, the accenting of problems of visuality in a country enthralled by speech practices, whether communal speech or the language of power, is a classical example of Don Quixotism, which Vasil'ev's case definitely relates to. Nonetheless, a few other artists were able to realize



2.8
Oleg Vasil'ev, *Ogonek no. 25, 1975*, 1980.

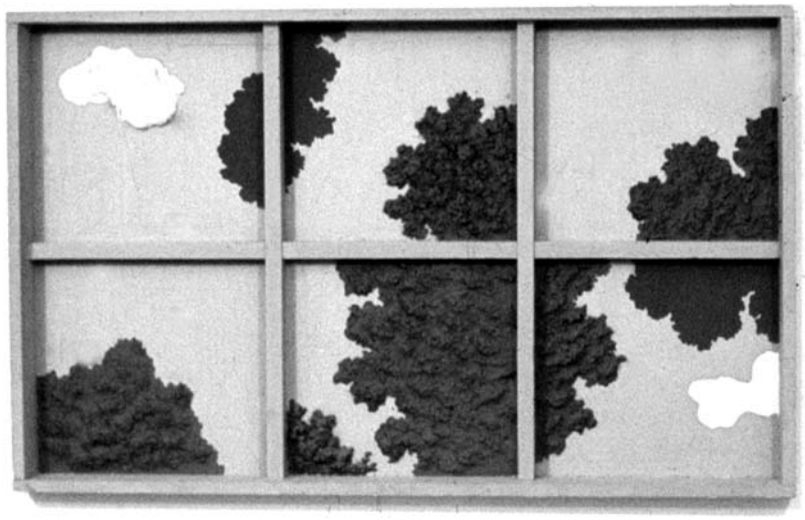
the cost price of this problematic, including Bulatov and Ivan Chuikov. More than the others, Chuikov is concerned with the epistemological examination of the visual. For him, visuality is an antinomy arising from the "collision of reality and fiction."[25] In his words, it is "the result of the operation of turning the relations of the subject and object of apprehension inside out."[26] Chuikov is famed for his series of "window frames" with images drawn on them, which carry to its limit the conflict between the presumption of spatial reality (behind the window) and flat representation (on its surface) (fig. 2.9). Each of these representations, done in the mid-1970s, can be seen as a poster for a show that has been postponed—the show of contemplating *reality as it is*. "We'll ha't [the play] tomorrow night"—these words spoken by Hamlet could be endorsed by anyone for whom the delayed reality is replaced by its painted copy.

The place Bulatov has staked out for his easel in the sociocultural cosmos is the border between the "cave" (e.g., Plato's cave) and the light-bearing agency positioned outside it. "It is on this border that I work," he writes.[27] And even though vision, in his case, is guaranteed by the source of light positioned outside the picture, one can see it only from the inside (the "cave"). Concerning the nature of such extrapictorial radiance that imparts visibility to being, nothing is known except for the fact that identification with it (that is, with the "light of truth") is dangerous,[28] and Bulatov's canvas *Dangerous* (1972) warns us of the side effects of light-seeking (fig. 2.10).

▪

Curiously, every communal modernist of the 1960s or 1970s would always choose a famous artist from the past to identify with. For Kabakov, it was Vermeer; for Bulatov and Vasil'ev, it was Velázquez; for Masterkova, it was El Greco; and for Nemukhin, it was Zurbarán. Perhaps the experience of being socially displaced (discharged from the "now-and-here") prompted them to seek spiritual identification with past lives, thoughts, and things. The vacancy of their own situation was filled by a Western European past "displaced" (or deferred) by "natural causes," whether chronological, territorial, or historical. Allegorically speaking, communal modernists trapped themselves in the double bind of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Proust's *Temps perdu:* they viewed art history as if it were a sort of paradise in which one could establish tenancy. This is understandable, considering that any museum of fine arts is—in a way—a *kommunalka,* where artists from different epochs end up "living" together.

In the 1970s, finally, the infantile play of the "it" came to a close. Its ubiquity and dominance were not in doubt, yet no one wanted to get into details. Nevertheless, the fact that the "it" was an authoritarian Other



2. 9
Ivan Chuikov, *Window IV,* 1974.

2.10
Erik Bulatov, *Dangerous*, 1972–1973.

whose language structured the communal unconscious attested to the necessity of studying the "it." In turn, the description of the authoritarian vocabulary—verbal or visual—was impossible without knowledge of the mechanisms of communal perception and communal communication through words or images. Moreover, without analysis and (in some cases) adaptation of the language of communality and the language of power (including artistic forms of adaptation and interaction with these languages), the chances of overcoming such languages were problematic.

Although Kabakov is the chief chronicler and challenger of the communal world order, it would be rash to suppose that his art is a punitive expedition or crusade against communality. There is a paradox in the fact that, being the destroyer of the Bastille of speech, he nevertheless did not cease to be its captive. His installations[29] can be interpreted as acoustic structures through which one may listen to the author's inner voice (which, in Bakhtin's opinion, acts as a surrogate of the unconscious). This "voice" is possessed by a passion for telling stories of an autobiographical nature, impersonating, through these narrations, legions of characters, populating a labyrinth of both personal and communal memory.

As an illustrator of children's books since the 1960s, Kabakov came to understand that this genre corresponded entirely with infantilism and the illustrational nature of the communal vision of the world. The devices and skills of illustrative drawing, probed and selected by Kabakov over ten years, proved acceptable for rereading in the context of a "grown-up" thematic. This discovery gave him a powerful stimulus to his evolution as a conceptual artist. Of course, to the informed reader this should appear as nothing other than a regular instance of the literariness proper to the Russian artistic tradition as such. However, one should not submit to the temptation of synopsizing (referring) communal-speech vision into social realism of *Peredvizhniki* (popular in the second part of the nineteenth century) or socialist realism, the imagery of which corresponds either to the slogans of prerevolutionary egalitarianism or to the "mythical speech" of Stalinist culture. In contrast to both of these, the language of the communal apartment is based on psycholinguistics differing in kind.

In 1971, Kabakov started working on a series of albums with the title *Ten Characters;* these related the lives of various dwellers in a building partitioned into overcrowded communal apartments (fig. 2.11). Having ten heroes endows the author's imagination with a number of optical advantages (similar to the ones described by Leibniz in his *Monadology*). One of them is a variability of perspectives. The "monadic" optic makes it possible to cover the full spectrum of relational clichés, speech acts, and behavioral stereotypes, which sketch out an existential profile of

2.11
Pages from Ilya Kabakov's album *Shower, a Comedy,* late 1960s–early 1970s, displayed on the floor of his studio, Moscow, 1988. Photo Igor' Makarevich.

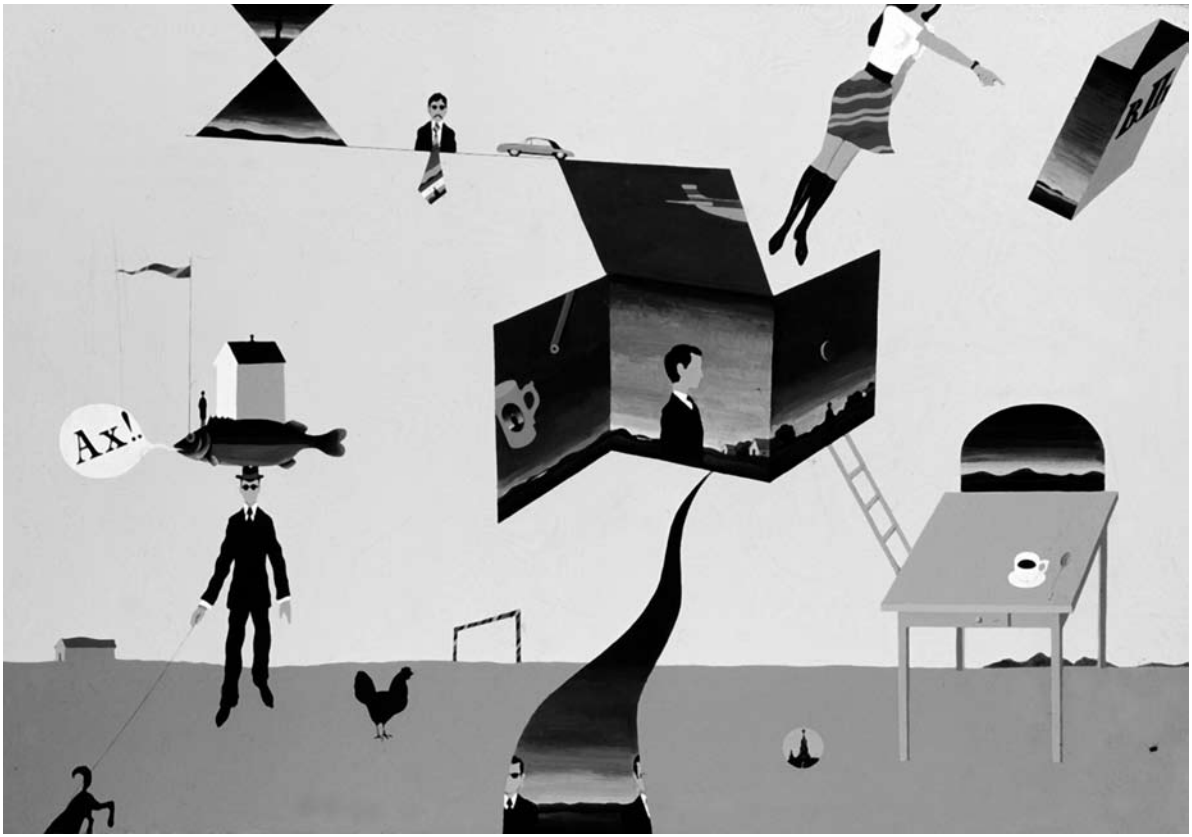
communality. In Kabakov's albums, the author himself is the eleventh character, possessed with the passion to tell stories of an autobiographical nature; the other ten are the artist's imaginary neighbors residing in the communal apartment of his memory and fantasy. It is interesting that the camouflaging of the authorial "I" behind a screen of characters became, thanks to Kabakov, Komar and Melamid, and also to Pivovarov, a phenomenon rather typical for Moscow communal conceptualism (fig. 2.12).[30]

▪

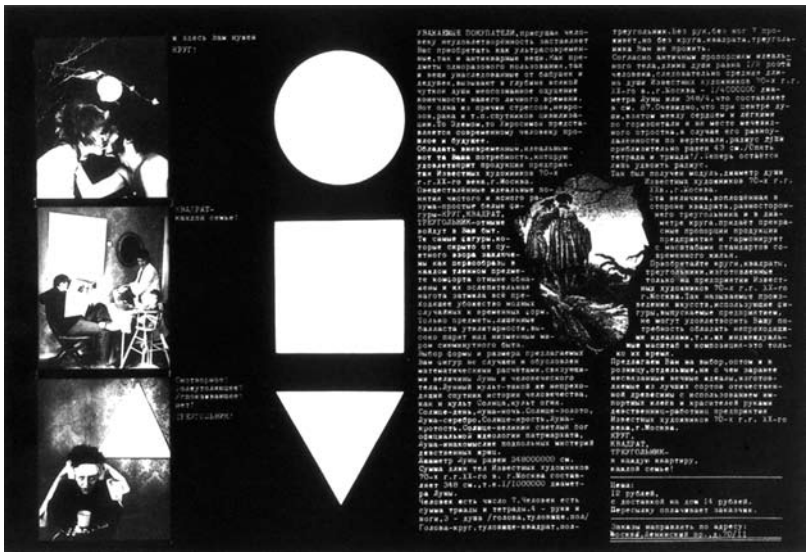
The term "sots art" was coined in 1972 by Komar and Melamid, who share responsibility with Kabakov, Bulatov, Pivovarov and Chuikov for the initiation of Soviet ("communal") postmodernism. Sots art can be characterized by its striving toward a break with the familiar tradition of recontextualizing visual clichés of the early Russian avant-garde or Western modernism. In their search for a "new false identity," the choice fell to socialist realism—a gesture "of posing the problem of the status of the discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself."[31]

In Komar and Melamid's conceptual project *A Circle, a Square, a Triangle—For Every Home, for Every Family* (1975), the artists construct a parallel between the Platonic eternal ideas "linked *a priori* to nothing" and the ideology of socialist realism, which—regardless of the fact that it operates with "sensible objects"—also dwells on nothing (fig. 2.13). The latter is an eidetic dimension of both conceptual and official art, their anonymous referent, hidden under the layers of myths, personages, slogans, and other representations of the transient and the relative. This eidetic dimension, according to "the famous artists of the beginning of the 1970s,"[32] is always vacant for communication (home delivery) of codes of status and authority, whose speech character is also commented upon in the 1975 work titled *The Essence of Truth (Grinding Pravda)*.[33]

In winter 1976, Komar and Melamid became the first alternative artists to have a comprehensive exhibition at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts (New York). Titled "Color Is a Mighty Power," it allowed American viewers to familiarize themselves with Komar and Melamid's concept of sots art. Several years later, following their emigration from the USSR in 1977, these artists in 1981 announced their new version of sots art, which they termed "nostalgic socialist realism." Alongside a deconstruction, that is, "overturning and displacing the conceptual order"[34] of Stalinist art, "nostalgic socialist realism" renewed (on a postmodern level, of course) the search for "lost fatherhood" undertaken by Shteinberg and Nussberg in the 1960s.



2.12
Viktor Pivovarov, *Ah!*, 1971.



2.13
Vitaly Komar and Aleksandr Melamid,
A Circle, a Square, a Triangle, 1975.

Although borrowing phrases from the "verbarium" of an extracommunal "it" is characteristic of Bulatov's work, his approach differs from Komar and Melamid's sots art in that, from his point of view, the extracommunal "it" is not exhausted by "mythical speech" alone, but entails the presence of an ontological horizon. The specific character of his reading of the socialist realist representational canon lies in the discrediting of the ontological ambitions of authoritarian speech (e.g., its claim to the status of Ur-text). This takes place not in a fit of destructive fervor, as is sometimes the case with Komar and Melamid, but rather with the aim of sweeping away obstacles on the "path to truth." In Husserl's philosophy this sort of sweeping away is identified with the procedure of "bracketing" (the phenomenological *epoché*). In this connection, Bulatov's method may be termed phenomenological sots art.

Until the mid-1980s, Bulatov's visual inventory consisted of a limited number of textbook images: charming countrysides, cityscapes, blue skies, clouds, etc. These were culturally and ideologically processed clichés, indistinguishable from the familiar socialist realist representations, with the only difference being that they were no longer affirmative. Such transformations were due to the intrusion of words into pictorial space, a clash of the titans responsible for turning positively anxious images into negatively anxious pictures. In the end, anxiety—regardless of its role reversal—remained intact, as if reaffirming itself as an unalienable part of the Russian cultural tradition—visual or literary. One wonders whether the creator of *Dangerous* (1972–1973), *Caution* (1973), *and Glory to the Communist Party* (1975) was aware of yet another danger—the "condition of spectacle," which anxious pictures often epitomize or contribute to.

Apparently, all the aforementioned paradigms of deconstruction have suffered from one-sidedness. Whereas Kabakov, in his attempt to place the heritage of the ghetto-centric utopia under erasure, has never directly challenged the ambitions of the powers that be, sots art aimed at the subversion of the state's "mythical speech," but took a rather tolerant position toward the "speech-vision" of the communal.[35] The same is true of many conceptual artists from Kabakov's circle.[36]

Sots art is sometimes spoken of as a variety of pop art,[37] even though the latter was in large measure a reaction to the $14 billion that the United States government spent to create a "middle class" in the postwar years. I am referring to the G.I. Bill passed by Congress in 1944, which gave low-interest loans or subsidies to citizens who had been directly or indirectly involved in military action. Many members of the lower classes were able to receive a college education, as well as loans that enabled them to acquire comfortable homes. The growth of the middle class led to

growth in the production of consumer goods, the sale of which required effective advertising. It was in this period that mass euphoria about material goods and high living standards reached its peak. A new round of consumer fetishism engendered new aesthetic clichés. The aesthetic of the elite gave way to the aesthetic of the middle class, with its interest in practical and convenient household items, inexpensive automobiles, kitchen sets, home design, clothes, and furniture. Great numbers of artists worked in advertising. Some of them were able to maintain an ironic distance from what they had to produce, while (nevertheless) retaining the external signs of fascination with such material. Andy Warhol was one of them.

Unlike pop art, socialist realism advertised political ideology rather than consumer products, even though narratives that pass off wishful thinking as reality are an essential ingredient of political and commercial rhetoric alike. If one forgets about the specificity of the product being advertised and considers solely the sphere of its representation, at this level sots artists can indeed be confused with pop artists. However, this is certainly not true of everyone. Just like pop art, sots art exhibited a fair amount of variety.

In fact, when Aleksandr Kosolapov showed his first experiments with ideological material to Komar and Melamid in 1973, he was surprised to hear them respond, "This is no sort of Sots art, but American consumer stuff." In Kosolapov's work *Study, Sonny* (1975), an assiduous schoolboy and a policeman who encourages him are depersonified to the level of comic book heroes or advertisement panels. From 1972 to 1975, along with appropriations of political iconography, Kosolapov produced pop objects in the spirit of Claes Oldenburg: padlocks sewn of rags, a hand pressing a doorbell button, and yogurt being poured into a glass (all executed in wood). Kosolapov's contribution to sots art lies in his discovery of points of resemblance between the mechanisms of depersonalization that Soviet power applied with regard to communality and those that are still used by capitalists with the aim of controlling the mass of consumers (fig. 2.14).

Leonid Sokov's sculptural baggage from the 1970s includes *Threatening Finger* (1975), a mobile which moves as if giving a warning (fig. 2.15), and *Project to Construct Glasses for Every Soviet Citizen* (1976), a painted wood sculpture that pays tribute (in a mock-heroic way) to viewing the world through red stars. Sokov wanted to connect sots art with folkloric thematics. In his sculptural compositions, executed in the genre of political *skazka* (fairy tale), the protagonists of socialist realist myth become crude toys, characters in medieval marketplace dramas, or heroes in a pulp novel bestiary. In one work, Stalin has a bear's paw and beastly claws, Khrushchev turns into a "weeble,"[38] and Yuri Andropov's ears start to move.[39] Like

2.14
Aleksandr Kosolapov, from the series *North*, 1974.

2.15
Leonid Sokov, *Threatening Finger,* 1974.

many of Sokov's works, this one takes up a tradition of popular humor and suggests that the version of sots art he favors derives from the heart of the "urban peasantry," from the depths of communality.

In the *Luriki* series (1971–1985), Boris Mikhailov appropriated the old-fashioned technique of making hand-colored prints, a skill he learned while working as a retoucher of family photographs. Snatched from communal debris or found in a garbage heap, these black-and-white pictures were not intended for public view. Thanks, however, to Mikhailov's intervention, they were made public. By coloring the faces of his "faceless" compatriots, the photographer added the zest of artificial festivity peculiar to the socialist realist palette. This brings to mind Kumar and Melamid's first piece of sots art, where the two artists decided to paint a portrait of Melamid's father in the bombastic style of Soviet visual propaganda. Unlike *Luriki,* which dwells on private memories, Mikhailov's *Sots Art* series (1975–1985) deals with "unauthorized" recollections of public events:[40] jubilant demonstrations, law-abiding citizens at the voting booth, military training routines, and so forth (fig. 2.16). There are also paired representations. For example, in one picture two young tennis players pose near a river with their racquets stretched high like the hammer and sickle in Vera Mukhina's *The Worker and the Female Collective Farmer.* In the second snapshot the same couple is shown playing tennis. The photographs look as if they could have been featured in the mass-circulated media, provided they had earned the approval of the authorities. The author's plot reveals itself in the metaphor of "bringing justice" back to politically loyal and "well-behaved" narratives bastardized by the "Great Myth." By toning and hand-coloring these slightly anemic prints, Mikhailov reenergizes them to the degree that they become (almost) acceptable to the mainstream of state mythology. Another aspect of Mikhailov's *Sots Art* series is that it functions as a meet commentary in regard to socialist realist praxes.

Sots art culminated in an exhibition in New York at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, organized by Margarita Tupitsyn in 1986 (fig. 2.17). The show included works by Komar and Melamid, Sokov, Bulatov, Kosolapov, Leonid Lamm, and the Kazimir Passion performance group (Aleksandr Driuchin, Kosolapov, Vladimir Urban, and Victor Tupitsyn) (fig. 2.18).[41] That this movement continued to agonize until the end of the 1980s is evidenced by Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov's newspaper installations or the sculptures of Grisha Bruskin (fig. 2.19). From 1986 to 1988, Gorokhovskii, who earlier had been known for his semiconceptual silk screens, created a series of post–sots art paintings, including a divisionist portrait of Stalin in which each of the 2,488 elements of color ("strokes") prove to be, upon closer examination, a stenciled image of Lenin.

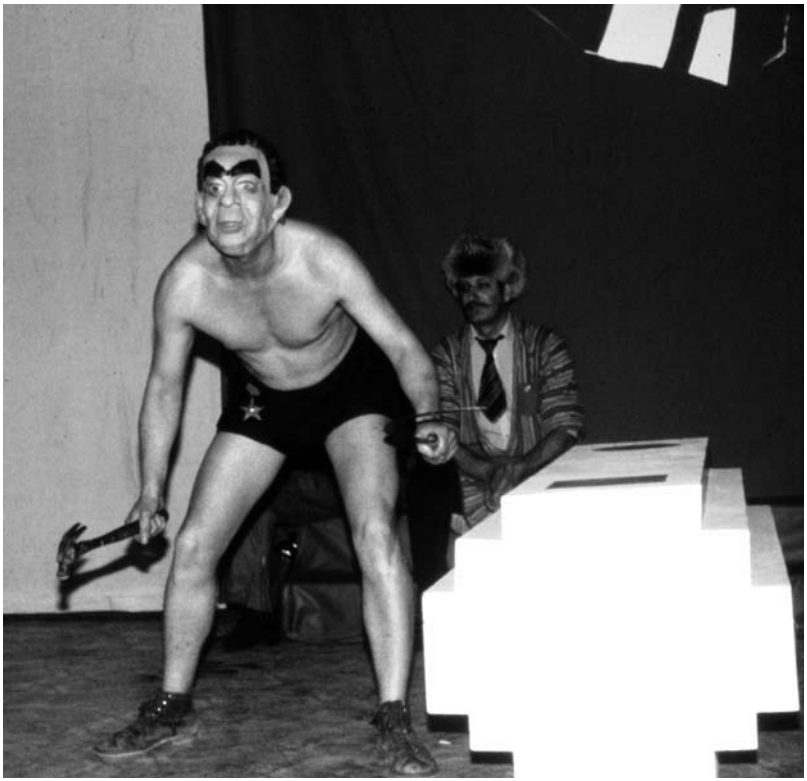
2.16
Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Red*, 1970s.

2.17
Installation view, "Sots Art,"
New Museum of Contemporary Art,
New York, 1986.

Andrei Monastyrsky and the Collective Actions group (CA), which formed in 1976, are linked with the concept of "trips outside the city."[42] Many representatives of the alternative art world were involved in numerous actions that resulted from these trips over the years, some as viewers, some as participants. Among the key group members, along with Monastyrsky, were artists Nikita Alekseev, Nikolai Panitkov, Georgii Kizeval'ter, Igor' Makarevich, and Elena Elagina, and philologists Sergei Romashko and Sabina Haensgen. These artists' search for a common alternative to both the language of communality and the language of power resulted in their escape from the urban environment. Staged outdoors, their performances greatly contributed to the formation of an alternative artistic milieu in Moscow. They demonstrated rather effectively that "contractual" (i.e., noninstitutional) aesthetic activity can be a unifying factor as well as a pastime for a number of individuals. The group's adherence to the so-called factographic discourse has been underscored repeatedly by the use of *photography* and *verbal* (tape-recorded) documentation. To fully appreciate the impact of the CA group's performances on the Moscow alternative art world, it is useful to cite Ilya Kabakov's recollection of those events. "From the moment I got on the train" (all viewers had to take a train to some country site to see the action), admits Kabakov, "my goals, the questions and affairs that constantly preoccupied me, my fears of myself and others, were all, as it were, taken away from me. The most remarkable thing, however, was that those who led us had no goals either! And, of course, there is something else: for the first time in my life, I was among 'my own'; we had our own world, parallel to the real one, and this world had been created and compressed by the CA group until it had achieved complete materiality, or, one might say, tangibility—if this notion is at all applicable to something absolutely ethereal and elusive."[43]

Monastyrsky and the CA group are discussed in more detail in chapter 3. I shall limit myself here to quoting from Monastyrsky's own description of CA's performance *For G. Kizeval'ter (The Slogan—1980)*, which took place on April 13, 1980 (fig. 2.20):

> Kizeval'ter, our group member in Iakutiia, receives a parcel from us containing a package with an accompanying letter. The letter tells Kizeval'ter that he has to go off to an isolated place out of town—to a field surrounded by forest, and it must be a pretty desolate place. Obviously, he has to take the package with him so as to open it there, in the middle of the field and completely alone. He'll find a ready-made slogan in the package, except that the surface of the slogan (where the caption is) is covered with a black cloth. This black cloth is attached to the



2.18
Kazimir Passion group, *The 28th Party Congress of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,* performance, The Kitchen, New York, November 7, 1982.

2.19
Installation view, "Perspectives of Conceptualism," Moscow, 1989. Left: work by Andrei Filippov; right: work by Dmitrii Prigov.

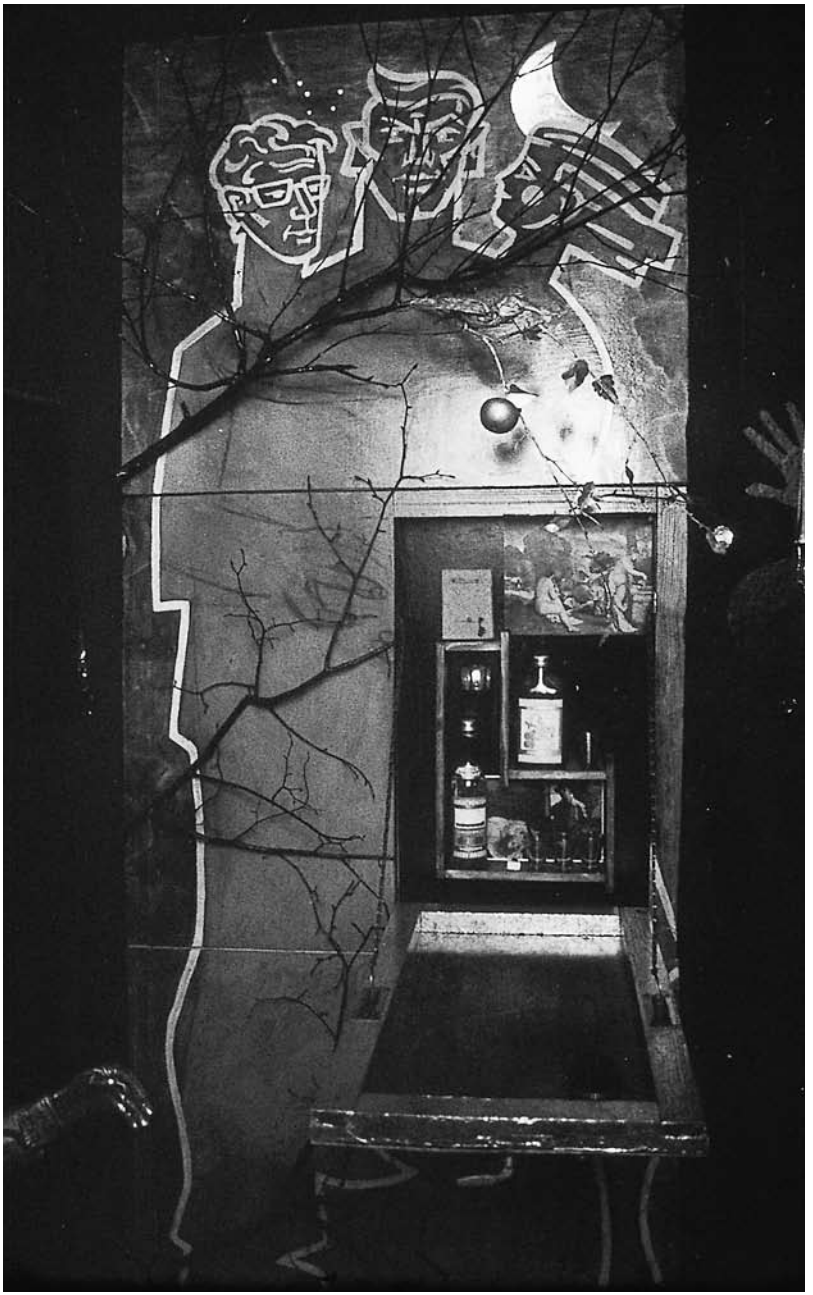
2.20
Collective Actions group, *For G. Kizeval'ter (The Slogan—1980)*, April 13, 1980.

entire length of the slogan by two strings, top and bottom. The top string, which is on the left, is 70 meters long, the bottom string, on the right, is also 70 meters long. Kizeval'ter will also find instructions in the package telling him what to do: that he must hang up the slogan between two trees, facing the field and still uncovered, he mustn't remove the black cloth at any cost. He must then thread the top string behind the tree to the left of the slogan and do the same with the bottom string on the right tree; he must take hold of both ends and walk off into the field as far as the strings allow. After proceeding 70 meters from the slogan, he must face the slogan and first pull the bottom string towards him (it will stretch taut and loosen the bottom edge of the black cloth). He'll then have to pull the top string whereupon the black cloth will fall to reveal the caption on the slogan. But the whole point is that the caption will be visible, but it will be impossible to make it out (because of the distance). And here is the most important: the instructions will tell him that under no circumstances must he approach the slogan to try to read it. He must simply photograph it from where he is, turn round and go away, never to return. So the result must be a powerful psychological struggle with oneself . . . That's the general idea of this project. Still, what will be written on the slogan? A descriptive text: "In winter, on the edge of a field where he couldn't make out a thing, Kizeval'ter hung up a white, 10 x 1 meter sheet with a caption in red letters." [44]

▪

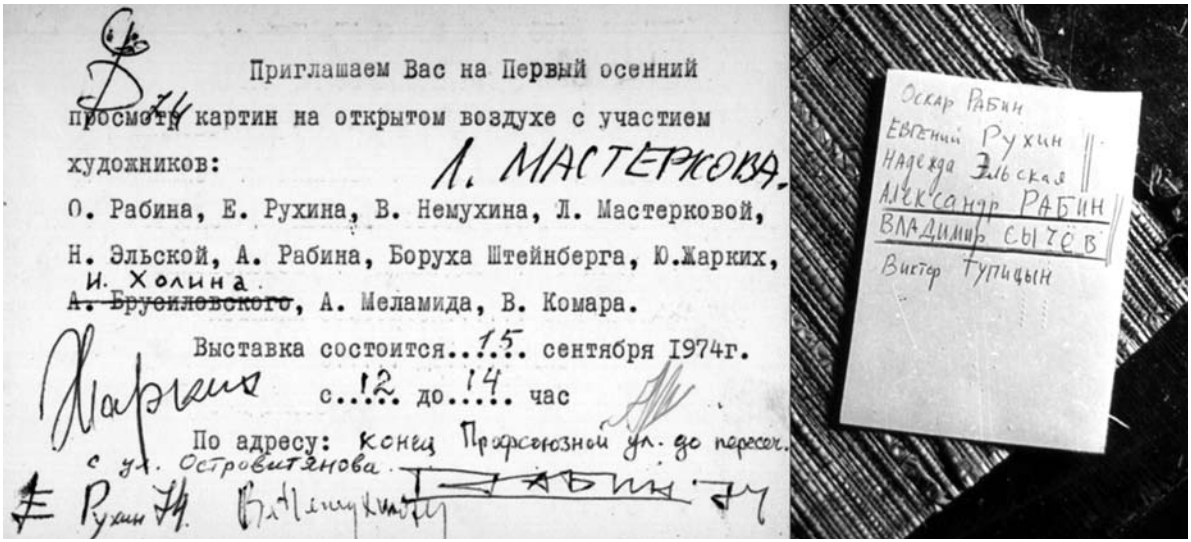
Several shows, which took place at the beginning of the 1970s, are of particular importance: the kineticists' exhibition in the Artist's House on Kuznetskii Most (1973); and—in the same year—Komar and Melamid's installation and performance entitled *Paradise* in a private apartment in Kolomenskoe (fig. 2.21). But the culmination of the exhibition activity of the 1960s and 1970s was the so-called "Bulldozer Show." On September 1, 1974, two weeks prior to the show, my wife Margarita and I were visited by Nemukhin, Masterkova, Evgenii Rukhin, and Rabin, who let us in on their plan to organize an outdoor exhibition. In their opinion, the empty lot alongside our house seemed the most suitable place for this type of event. In accordance with their plan, our apartment on Ostrovitianov Street (in Beliaevo) would become a repository for works to be exhibited, and also a place for the artists to sleep the day before the show so that they might avoid arrest on the way to the lot. Naturally, we had no objections, and everything went forward as planned, with one important exception.

In contrast to the primarily oral confrontations of the Manezh era, the show in the empty field on September 15 resulted in serious physical reprisals by the authorities, who used bulldozers, fire trucks, and policemen in civilian clothes (figs. 2.22, 2.23). Many of the works on display were destroyed or confiscated, while the artists and their sympathizers were



2.21
Vitaly Komar and Aleksandr Melamid, detail from the installation *Paradise,* private apartment, Moscow, 1973.

2.22
View of the "Bulldozer Show," Moscow, September 15, 1974. Left to right: Margarita Tupitsyn, Vladimir Nemukhin, Victor Tupitsyn, Sergei Bordachev. Photo Vladimir Sychev.



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с..12. до..14. час
По адресу: конец Профсоюзной ул. до пересеч.
с ул. Островитянова.

Оскар Рабин
Евгений Рухин
Надежда Эльская
Александр Рабин
Владимир Сычев
Виктор Тупицын

2.23
Invitation to the "Bulldozer Show" and a note listing the arrested participants.

2.24
View of the exhibition at Izmailovskii Park with Vladimir Piatnitskii showing his paintings, September 29, 1974.

beaten, arrested, or subjected to administrative sanctions. The "Bulldozer" event, fraught with violations of the Helsinki Accords on Human Rights, seriously damaged the already dubious reputation of the Soviet government in the West.

A desire on the part of the party bureaucracy to set its image aright in the eyes of "world society" led to the organization of a second outdoor exhibition two weeks after the first one. Although this event was, in essence, foisted upon the artists by the government, the intensity of the negotiations and compromises connected with it had no precedent in the history of relations between unofficial culture and officialdom. In the fourteen-day period following the "Bulldozer Show," during which time its participants were subjected to unceasing pressure from the authorities, Rabin's organizational talents manifested themselves. He demonstrated not only an enviable sangfroid, but also a thorough knowledge of the Soviet system. However, his authoritarian inclinations were no less in evidence. Whenever a decision needed to be made, it was always articulated by Rabin. As I recall, only Nemukhin and I ever dared contradict him—and even then, not on the essential points but more to create the atmosphere of a democratic forum. In one such instance, Rabin declared that since I was not an artist, I did not have the right to cast a decisive vote. And he immediately put the issue to a vote. As a result, the possibility of a different opinion was nipped in the bud. None of this diminishes Rabin's merit. Like him, we are all products of a Soviet upbringing, in the sense that each of us is able to express himself or herself in either a communal way or an authoritarian one. This duality is difficult to overcome even for those who, like me, have lived abroad for many years.

However, Rabin's strategy was completely vindicated: the strong of this world made concessions, and an officially sanctioned "unofficial" exhibition took place on September 29, 1974, in Izmailovskii Park (fig. 2.24). No provisions were made for censorship, and no limitations on the number of participants were imposed. As for viewers, the four-hour exhibition broke all attendance records.

The events described above forced the party leadership to reconsider its interrelations with the artistic intelligentsia. A decision was reached to do away with unsolicited and uncensored art, but by peaceful means. To this end, the artists were quite literally "shoved" into official creative organizations, one of which turned out to be the Gorkom (Grafikov), otherwise known as MOGKh (the Moscow Joint Committee of Graphic Artists). An alternative to this type of job placement was enforcement of the law on "parasitism," and therefore few of the "venerable" unofficial artists were able to avoid recruitment into MOGKh.

2.25
Installation view, exhibition of alternative art at the Beekeeping Pavilion, VDNKh, Moscow, February 1976.

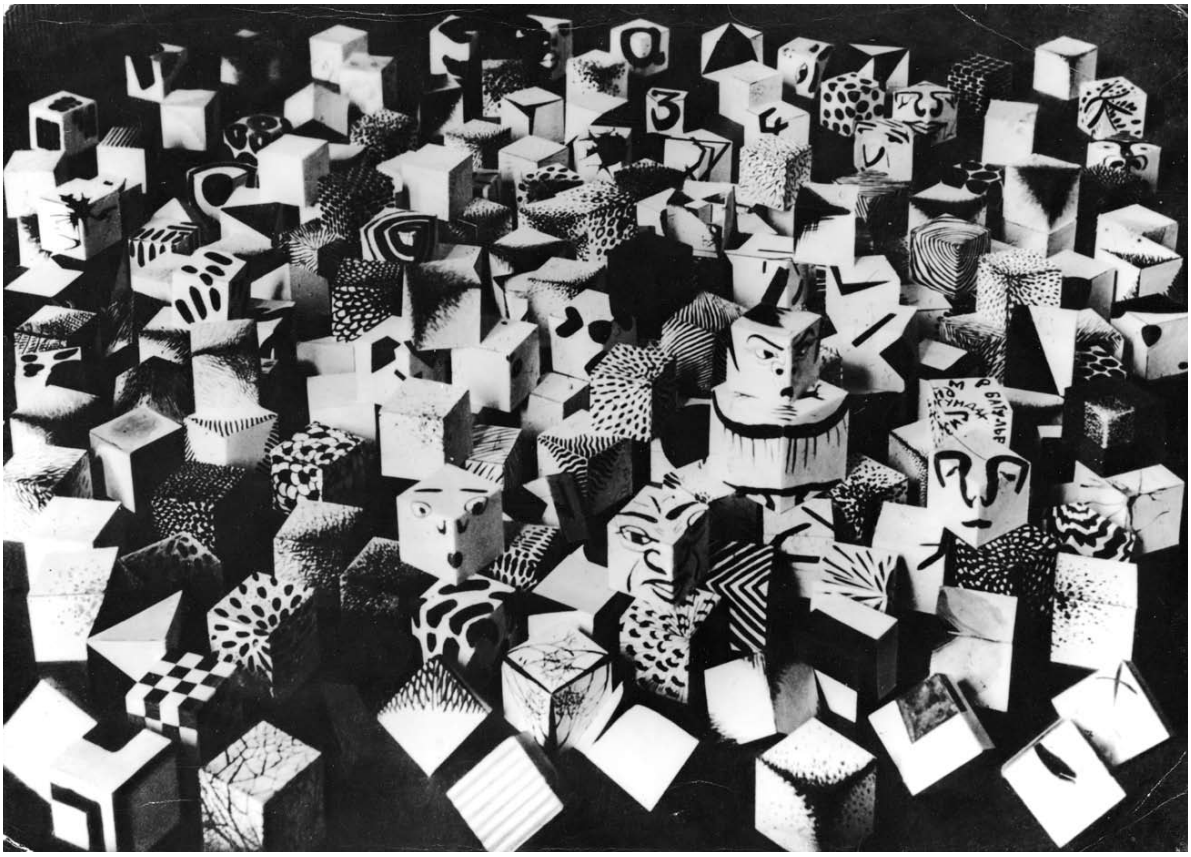
Besides the liquidation of unofficial art as a social phenomenon, the authorities also envisioned the establishment of control over alternative artists by means of the Gorkom and other similar institutions. In brief, the extracommunal "it" in due time set about institutionalizing "contractual" corporality. The next permitted exhibition under the aegis of Gorkom took place at the VDNKh's Beekeeping Pavilion in February 1975 (fig. 2.25).[45] A group show in the MOSKh Exhibition Hall on Kuznetskii Most in May 1976 can be listed along with other examples of the successful assimilation of communal modernism within the framework of official institutions. One should not, however, consider the cultural politics of the Soviet authorities one hundred percent effective. As Foucault has written, "There exists no concrete, fixed place which is the seat of rebellions, just as there is not a single formula of revolution. There are various points where all this arises, and various forms of resistance."[46]

The validity of this observation is supported by the unceasing apartment and studio shows at the end of the 1970s. Among them, a 1976 exhibition in Sokov's studio became a noteworthy event. Along with Sokov, artists of different generations including Chuikov, Igor' Shelkovskii, and the Gerlovins took part in the show. Rimma Gerlovina was represented there by her "cubelets" (fig. 2.26). Externally reminiscent of Petr Miturich's *Graphic Dictionary* of 1919 (fig. 2.27),[47] these cubes, on closer inspection, turned out to be agents of speech: on their faces (both from the outside and inside) could be read fragments of communal conversations in the spirit of Kabakov or the poet Lev Rubinshtein. Rephrasing an old definition of socialist realism, we may say that these art objects were modernist in form and communal in content. Valerii Gerlovin's metallic structures (like, for example, *Spermatozoid*) were put together from modules used by children in edifying play. The painted reliefs of Shelkovskii also made a strong impression; they skillfully managed to transfer divisionist technique from painting to sculpture. After emigrating to Paris, Shelkovskii put out—between the end of 1979 and the mid-1980s—seven issues of the art magazine *A-Ya,* which played a significant role in familiarizing Soviet and Western audiences with the history of alternative art.

Emigration from the USSR began in the early 1970s. Within ten years, the list of Soviet artists who emigrated included forty-five to fifty names.[48] Rabin's 1978 trip outside the country resulted in his expulsion: a decree from the president of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR deprived him of his Soviet citizenship.[49] As a result, he and his wife, artist Valentina Kropivnitskaia, received political asylum in France.

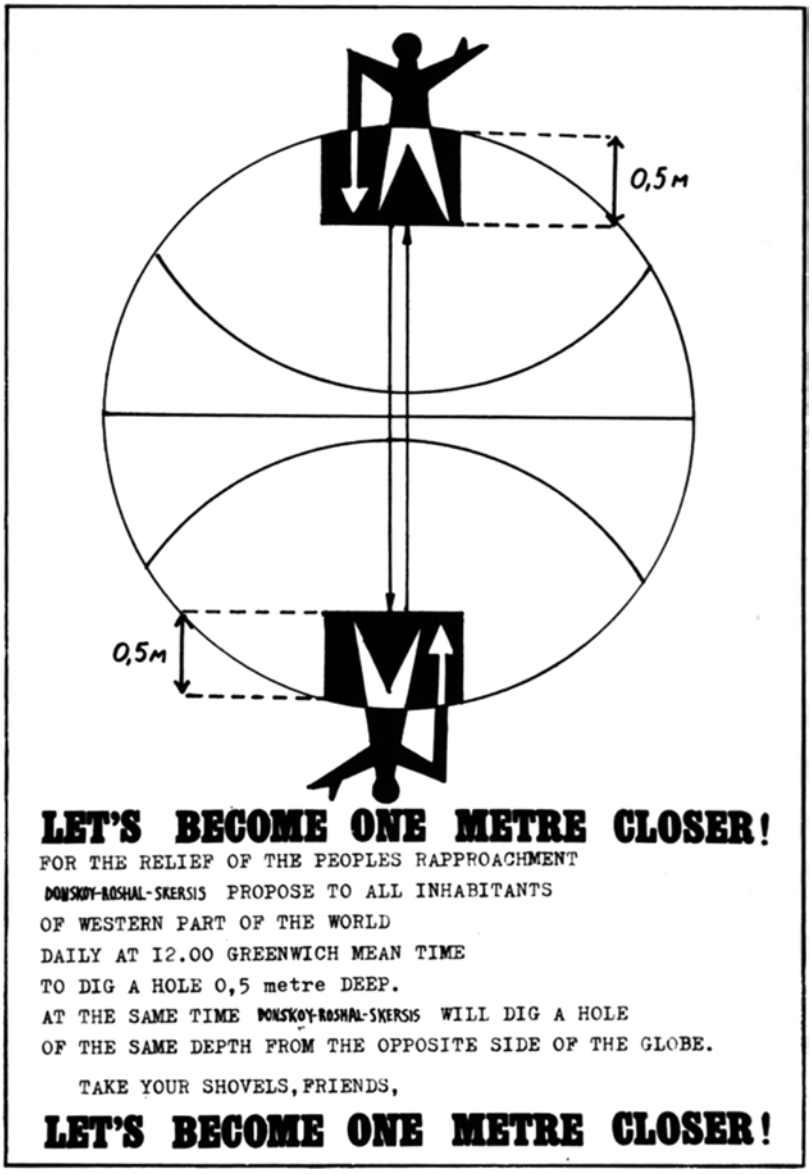
After moving to the West, many of these artists experienced the shock of dual "orphanhood" prompted by the simultaneous loss of both their

2.26
Rimma Gerlovina, *Cubes,*
1975–1976.



2.27
Petr Miturich, *Graphic Dictionary,* 1919.

2.28
Nest group, *Let's Become One Metre Closer,* 1976.



parental languages: the "paternal" (authoritarian speech) and the "maternal" (communal speech).[50] This psycholinguistic drama was sharply coexperienced by those who remained in the homeland. Correspondence and information exchanges reached an incredible incandescence in the 1970s and early 1980s,[51] which to a significant degree set aright the image of the West in the eyes of the Soviet intelligentsia. A performance by the Nest group (Gennadii Donskoi, Mikhail Roshal', and Viktor Skersis) titled *Let's Become One Metre Closer* (1976) may be considered a reaction to these circumstances (fig. 2.28), as might Makarevich's conceptual project *Traveling Gallery of Russian Artists,* in which the author asked emigrating artists for their fingerprints, which were then blown up and put on display, becoming a symbol of a sociocultural identity in the process of being lost.

4. THE 1980S

In 1979, the Mukhomor (Toadstools) group was started in Moscow. It consisted of recent art college graduates—Sven Gundlakh, Sergei and Vladimir Mironenko, Konstantin Zvezdochetov, and Aleksis Kamenskii. In the beginning, they were influenced by Monastyrsky, who described in a letter one of their early performances (fig. 2.29):

> The Mukhomors recently conducted the action *Pour.* The action was staged by dividing an empty room with a screen of white paper. The viewers took their seats, not knowing that the Mukhomors were on the other side, adjacent to the bathroom. Then the Mukhomors began to slowly cut openings in the screen—first with a razor and then with a needle. After that, they poured water through the slits and rips, and dropped pieces of paper and small objects through them. Simultaneously, while this was taking place, the water in the shower, which was on the same side as the Mukhomors, was turned on. Then, from their side, they projected a slide with the image of a seascape on the screen, and after a while, they began to cut the part of the screen where the slide was reflected so that the seascape would be projected directly onto the audience. Through the opening in the screen, one could see a table—it was obscured by the light from the projector and therefore looked like an altar. This table was littered with Pepsi-Cola bottles, dirty ashtrays, cigarettes butts, etc.—that is, no unique or distinct objects, but merely those which are used on a daily basis. At that point, the audience was invited into the bathroom where they saw that the faucet had been turned on, leaving the water running. Each audience member was presented with a jar labeled "containing this water." Afterwards, several boxes were made from the pieces of the screen and handed to the viewers. The entire performance was accompanied by a tape recording of different sounds like mooing, burping, huffing and puffing, and random, unrelated words. The sounds had been recorded at noon, while the two Mukhomors had sonorously basked in

2.29
Mukhomor group, *Pour,* performance, July 7, 1981.

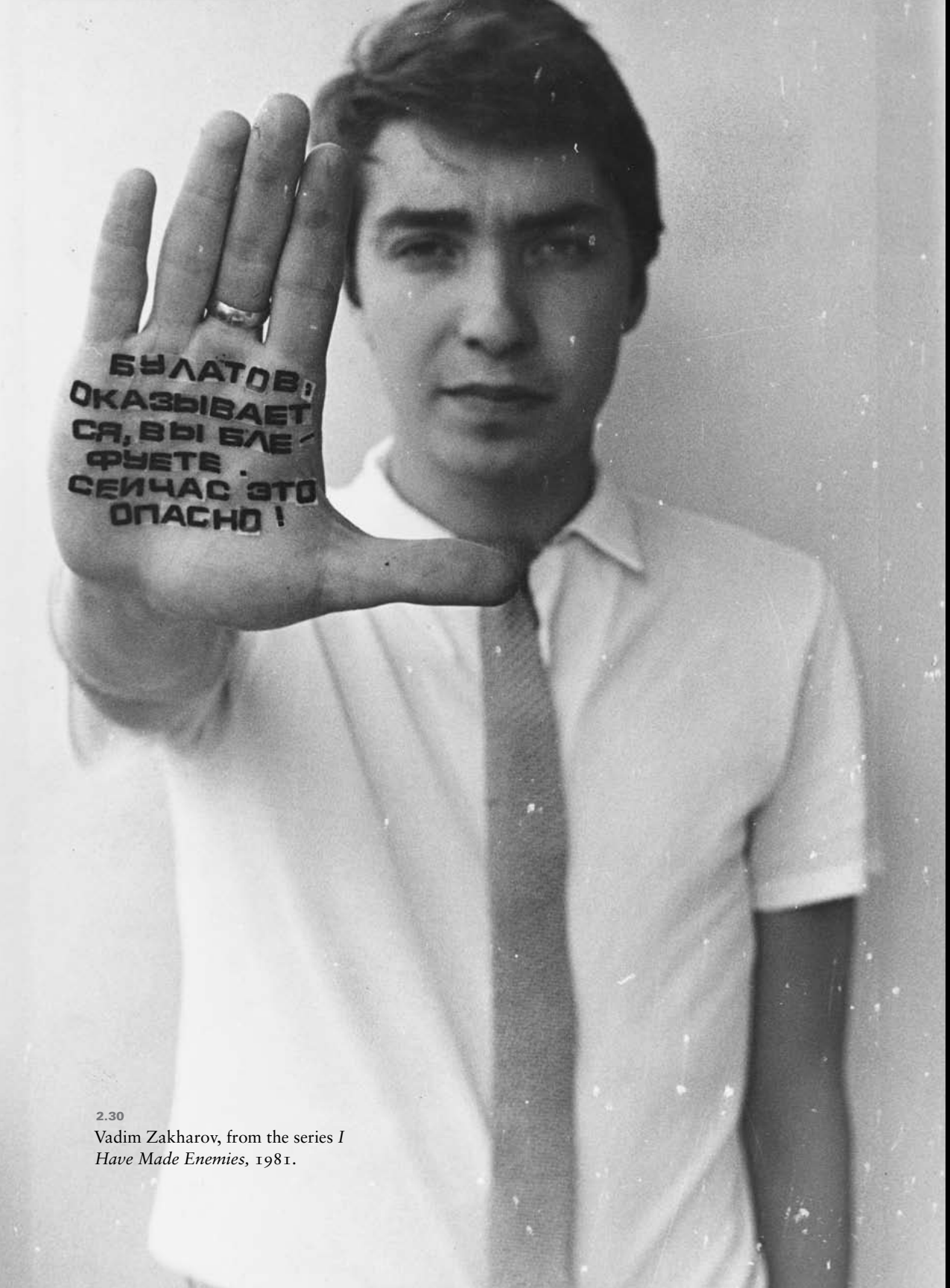
the heat. This mindless ocean was created on such a low key that it was pleasant to lose oneself in it.[52]

▪▪

In the 1980s, "contractual" communality ceased to be only a means of "subcultural survival" and became an object of aesthetic reflection as well. On this plane, apt art may be considered the most precise copy of its era. Apt art (a series of apartment shows as well as *plein air* exhibitions in and outside Moscow between 1982 and 1984) happened to be the next postmodernist strain which it made sense to speak of as a "movement." Although there had been apartment and studio shows previously, to exhibit under the aegis of apt art became a style and not simply a "grudging necessity,"[53] as it had been in the 1960s and 1970s. It also manifested a desire to reenact the *kommunalka,* but only as a playground instead of as a stage for "logical investigation."

Graffiti and a "Santa Claus aesthetics," together with a subversive appropriation of the accessories of the Soviet communal objecthood and an immeasurable carnival energy, were the baggage of this Soviet variety of the New Wave. Being an elemental rebellion against intellectualism, the new movement took on the same role that humor, in Kierkegaard's view, plays in relation to romantic irony. Apt artists did not share the eschatological anxiety of the communal modernists, the "fear of death" that, according to Kabakov, "shaped their consciousness." Having declared its "nonidentity within identity" (that is, its *otherness* within the alternative milieu as a whole), the new movement established its own neocommunal image by means of a "generational conflict." The best example is the photo series by Vadim Zakharov titled *I Have Made Enemies* (1982), in which the artist subjects the "patriarchy" of Moscow alternative art to what one may refer to as "kommunalnaia razborka" (the malicious dressing-down of one's neighbors in conversation). For instance, he confronts Bulatov with a slogan, stenciled on his palm, "Bulatov, you're bluffing. It is dangerous!" (fig. 2.30).

The first showing of apt art, called "Autumn Exhibition," opened in the Moscow apartment of Nikita Alekseev on October 20, 1982, and lasted for twelve days (fig. 2.31). Its participants included Monastyrsky, the Mukhomor group, Alekseev, Nataliia Abalakova, Anatolii Zhigalov, Zakharov, Skersis, Roshal', Sergei Anufriev, Kizeval'ter, Rubinshtein, and Nikolai Panitkov. In 1983 the artists organized two open-air exhibitions: "Apt Art en Plein Air" on May 29, and "Apt Art beyond the Fence" on September 25 (figs. 2.32, 2.33). In addition to all of the first apt art participants except Monastyrsky, these two included Iurii Al'bert, Iurii Leiderman, Larisa Rezun, Leonid Voitsekhov, and Andrei Filippov. At the same time as sots art was demythologizing the mythical speech



2.30
Vadim Zakharov, from the series *I Have Made Enemies,* 1981.

of socialist realism, apt art was able to do the same thing in relation to the communal modernism of the 1960s and 1970s.[54] Moreover, the carnivalesque aspects of apt art hinted at the ability of its participants to acknowledge their communal heritage: unlike their predecessors—who lived and worked in denial of their communal psyche (i.e., in conflict with their communal sensibility)—the apt artists had finally come to terms with what (or who) they really were. The following excerpt from a 1987 conversation reveals their acceptance of communal speech as the *pharmakon* that provides the means to transfigure frustration into therapy and therapy into frustration:

> Zakharov: It is time to grow up, but instead, like before,
> we get together and yak …
> Gundlakh: Yakking is our pastime …
> Al'bert: That is what we are really good at, right?[55]

The authorities' assault on the "Apt Art Gallery" took place on February 18, 1983, and was violent. As Alekseev reported: "Early in the morning of that day, the employees of 'well-known' organization came with a search warrant and smashed the exhibition of Skersis and Zakharov, confiscated some of the works along with other materials. . . . From the employee's remarks it was clear that they tend to interpret all works if not as anti-Soviet then pornographic or both."[56]

Fortunately, the movement was able to escape disintegration, and was reborn under glasnost and perestroika. The so-called Kindergarten group,[57] which included Garik Vinogradov, Nikolai Filatov, and Andrei Roiter, together with the occupants of the Furmannyi Lane Studios, instigated a new phase of apt art activities, based on cooperation and mutual sympathy between young alternative artists (fig. 2.34). The youngest representatives of this coterie were Champions of the World (Guram Abramishvili, Boris Matrosov, Andrei Iakhnin, and Konstantin Latyshev)[58] (fig. 2.35) and the Medical Hermeneutics (Anufriev, Pavel Pepperstein, and Leiderman), who, in their texts, performances, and installations, relied on the strategy of "inspection"—an epistemological plot needed to detect and explore what they call "the Unknown" (fig. 2.36).

It is worth noting that the Furmannyi Lane Studios were situated in an abandoned building where there had earlier been a school for the blind, while the Kindergarten group was housed on premises where there had once been a kindergarten. These two facts, by some strange confluence of circumstances, bring together the psycholinguistic characteristics of communal corporality, its "blindness" (that is, the speech rather than visual

2.31
Installation view, first "Autumn Exhibition" of apt art, 1982.

character of its "vision") and its infantility. By 1990, the Furmannyi Lane Studios had ceased to exist, and their denizens migrated to the deserted communal apartments on Trekhprudnyi Lane. In the late 1980s, there were several important exhibitions involving members of these groups both in Russia and abroad (figs. 12.1, 2.37).[59] The first (and only) issue of the Russian edition of *Flash Art* appeared in 1989.[60] The exhibitions at the famous Sandunov steam baths (1988) and at the notorious Butyrskaia prison (1992) were the last echoes of communalism.

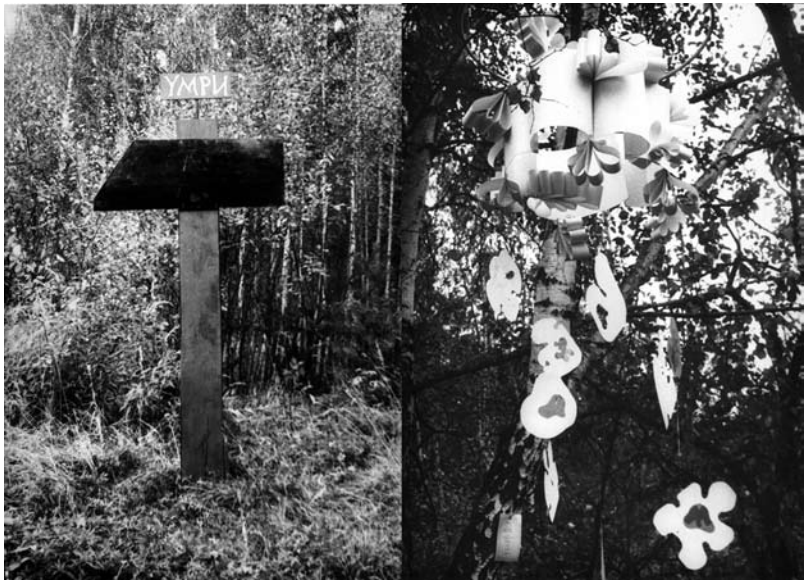
▪

I would also like to draw attention to the fates of some of those artists who emigrated from the USSR. As I have already noted, they were forced to experience the shock of dual orphanhood connected to the loss of that which structured their lives in their homeland, namely, the will to communality and the will to authoritarian power. Having turned up abroad, many tried at first to reproduce one or the other structure, cohering into communal bodies and simultaneously attempting to totally control (in the spirit of Soviet leaders) the process of the West's familiarization with the alternative "image" of Soviet culture. The publication of the journal *A-Ya* constitutes an exception to this rule: it was made possible for the most part by the resources of Moscow communal conceptualism. For instance, Bulatov's painting *Dangerous* was acquired by Norton Dodge in 1984, and this profit covered the publication of four issues of the journal.

The activities of Russian émigrés in New York reached their peak in 1981, when Dodge opened the Contemporary Russian Art Center of America (CRAC) at 599 Broadway in Soho. Margarita Tupitsyn became this institution's curator. In the two and a half years of its existence, the CRAC organized a number of important group exhibitions. These exhibitions attracted swarms of viewers and generated a significant number of reviews in the New York art press, as did the catalogues the CRAC published. As a result of the CRAC's efforts, the American public was able to receive a fuller understanding of both the Moscow communal modernism of the 1960s and 1970s and (more importantly) the Russian postmodernism of the 1980s. Following the loss of its home in Soho at the end of 1983, the CRAC's activities were reoriented: it began to sponsor Russian shows in other exhibition spaces. Of particular note are two sots art exhibitions in New York at the Semaphore Gallery in January 1984 and at The New Museum of Contemporary Art in April 1986 (fig. 2.17). In the latter show, apt art was displayed alongside sots art. Throughout the 1980s, a solid groundwork was laid for a theoretical discourse focusing on Russian art using various (at times, even conflicting) methodologies, such as critical theory (Frankfurt School) and the French poststructuralism of the 1960s

2.32
Installation view, "Apt Art en Plein Air," Kalistovo, 1983. Left: work by Iurii Al'bert; right: work by Konstantin Zvezdochetov.

2.33
Installation view, "Apt Art beyond the Fence," 1983. Left: work by Andrei Filippov; right: work by Larisa Rezun-Zvezdochetova.



2.34
Installation view, exhibition of the Kindergarten group, Moscow, 1987.

and 1970s.[61] Alongside these exterior forms of reflection, there existed another, internal form of the apocryphal description of Soviet cultural ecology. This language was developed in the late 1970s and mid-1980s by Kabakov and Monastyrsky, who were joined at the end of the 1980s by Pepperstein, Anufriev, Leiderman, and Mikhail Ryklin. In Leningrad, the same role was played by the critics Olesia Turkina and Viktor Mazin.

I should say a few words about an event which took place in the heat of perestroika and which, to a significant degree, drew the Odyssey of the underground visual culture to a close. I am referring to the 1988 Sotheby's auction in Moscow, which brought to realization a successful sale of the works of Soviet alternative artists on their own territory. The triumph of hard (Western) currency over local ideology heralded not only an end to the "two-world" condition between the (neo)communal body of Moscow bohemia and the Soviet establishment, but also the beginning of the disintegration of both.

5. THE 1990S

The list of exhibitions organized in the 1990s both inside and outside Russia is overwhelming.[62] However, the "artistic image of history" was formed in those years on the basis of different expository principles, from the material of different events. Chief among them was the abolition of the USSR in 1991.

The year after, Anatolii Osmolovskii organized an "animalistic project" titled *Leopards Overrun the Temple* at the Regina Gallery in Moscow.[63] Following in Osmolovskii's footsteps, Oleg Kulik—in his 1992 "action" titled *Piglet Makes Gifts*—was the next to enter what Gilles Deleuze calls a "metaphoric relationship with animals."[64] In "Becoming-Animal," Deleuze writes that for "a child that was abandoned or lost . . . and even [for] many adults, . . . there is a reality of becoming-animal, even though one does not in reality become animal."[65] Given the chronic infantilism peculiar to the Soviet population in general and to communal (post)modernists in particular, it is reasonable to assume that in the beginning of the 1990s they were "abandoned and lost" as a result of the disappearance of authoritarian (parental) power, which—de facto—disappeared immediately after the first cue.[66]

On July 15, 1989, a performance by the Collective Actions group, *Tent Number 2,* took place in the Sokol'niki Park in Moscow. As usual, the longest portion of the production turned out to be the one-and-a-half-hour-long stroll in the direction of the place of the action. It was necessary for all of us, both viewers and participants, to walk at a considerable distance from one another until such time as we (in a manner similar to that

2.35
Champions of the World,
Miscalculations of an Immature Idea,
performance, September 26, 1988.
Photo Sergei Borisov.

2.36
Installation view, "Perspectives of Conceptualism," Moscow, 1989. Against the wall: works by Medical Hermeneutics; foreground: Mariia Konstantinova's *MKKM (Black Square)*.

of Dante at the very beginning of the *Divine Comedy*) "found ourselves in the dark forest." While waiting there for futher instructions, one was able to witness a certain mysterious twinkling—in all probability about three hundred meters away. A half hour later, having received permission to move forward, we at long last approached the epicenter of the events, and discovered there a polyethylene tent, inside which a lantern burned, shedding light on the round space below it. In this arena, blinking with fires, two toy jeeps drove around, incessantly bumping into one another and giving off indistinct sounds. In American stores like Toys "R" Us or FAO Schwarz, the hallucinatory mise-en-scène described here would be perceived as an advertisement trick, aimed at imposing consumer fantasies and desires on an immature customer. In Sokol'niki Park, these children's fantasies and desires were transplanted into a principally different environment, filled with indifference and alienation. It was hard to believe that around this tent from who knows where and this arena in the round there extended the familiar, entirely ordinary darkness and these rather inconspicuous trees. Something that might be defined as the incompatibility between *hereness* and *thereness* was felt with an incredible sharpness.

It seemed as if the border between the East and the West lay directly before us. The miniature arena identified itself with the gap between fiction and reality, and the Westernized Muscovite counterculture—with two blind jeeps, selflessly transmitting (in an unfamiliar language) a message addressed to no one. "The ecstasy of miscommunication," as Jean Baudrillard might have said. "In a zone of nondifferentiation,"[67] Monastyrsky would add. It is no accident that the direct sum of these two statements has a chance of becoming the best definition of "communal (post)modernism."

2.37
Installation view, "Schizo-China: Hallucination in Power," Moscow, 1990. Foreground: installation by Nikolai Panitkov.