CHAPTER 3

Moscow Communal Conceptualism

Where are we going?
The road is narrow. Deep in the forest
the moss is slippery . . .
Below the mountain below the mountain
wind blows our red banners like a painting.[1]
Mao Zedong

"Time," said Emmanuel Levinas, "is the breath of the Spirit" ("Le temps est le souffle de l'esprit"). Breath consists of inhalation and exhalation, which hints at the existence of two modes of temporality, "positive" and "negative": time to breathe in, and time to breathe out (fig. 3.1). In 1975, I overheard a dispute between two professors from SUNY at Stony Brook. One was a literary scholar from India, the other a mathematician and an orthodox Jew. The first disputant argued that temples in India had turned into ruins long before the "beginning of time" designated in the Jewish calendar; the second responded that those temples had never been destined for completion, because the Jewish God designed or, rather, created them as ruins. The Tower of Babel seems to acutely fit this conceptual framework, a "historical" a priori as an installation, and a past as a deserted amusement park. On the level of signifier, the creation of "symbolic ruins" can be viewed as "proto-postmodernist," for it resembles what Federico Fellini once called "the hallucination of a drunken pastry chef." Clearly, "symbolic ruins" are not necessarily stone or concrete constructions; they can be mental constructs as well.

Bordering these ruins, as if it were "written" between them,[2] the evidence of transitory time is as ubiquitous as the evidence of petrified temporality. Both are traces of what Levinas attributed to a pneumatic nature of *l'esprit. Webster's* defines "breath" as not only "time to breathe" but also "delay; intermission; respite" (read: transitory moment). Taken simply, conceptual art is largely similar to a variety of artistic manifestations in which textuality acts as or substitutes for temporality. Taken seriously, it can be discussed in terms of "respiting visuality," given that conceptualism thrives on transitory thinking and writing. In this respect, one may both agree and disagree with Benjamin Buchloh, who in the

3.1
Andrei Monastyrsky,
Breathe Out Here!, 1983.

1980s enraged Joseph Kosuth by putting the term "post-minimalism" in place of "conceptualism." In truth, the latter, due to its transitory stance, is simultaneously post- and pre-.

As a conceptual artist, Ilya Kabakov welcomes the notion of conceptual art as caesural and at the same time transitional text insofar as this text is visually realized, "written" amid the ruins associated with the installation. However, Kabakov's installation by itself is not an authorial communication, and it would be a mistake to search it for one. The installations are ruins that structure his writing, akin to the way that symbolic language (the language of ruins, the language of the "father") structures the unconscious. The discourse of the Other that emerges as a result is nothing other than the "work of art" itself, the reading of which is assisted by installationary optics.

Like Kabakov, Andrei Monastyrsky belongs to the ranks of the most influential figures in alternative Russian culture. Along with Komar and Melamid, they should be regarded as the founders of Russian conceptualism. If the Kabakovian paradigm of "art as idea"[3] is based upon a metastasizing narrativity, then Monastyrsky hypostatizes conceptualism as discourse, as a theoretical enterprise. In the 1970s and 1980s Kabakov and Monastyrsky were chiefly responsible for the initiation into the alternative Muscovite art world of a new generation of conceptual artists who called themselves the Moscow Archive of New Art circle (MANA, or in a later transcription, NOMA). To designate the place of these artists in the history of Soviet conceptualism, as well as that of the Collective Actions (CA) group led by Monastyrsky,[4] we must take an excursion into the past.

In chapter 1, when discussing the origins of communal speech, I used the term "Law of the Commune." Although this term was coined in the nineteenth century, it aptly reveals the atmosphere of urban life in Soviet Russia. One should not forget that communal speech was an invader transplanted to an urban milieu from agrarian regions. As was already mentioned, in the 1920s migration into cities and industrial regions enabled a segment of Russian peasantry to avoid being drafted into collective farms. This migration engendered a housing problem of enormous proportions, thereby creating a new phenomenon—the Soviet ghetto, where alongside the communal speech the voice of power blared from the radio. On the level of artistic practices, this voice reified itself in the form of the metalinguistic structure known as socialist realism. Interrelations between socialist realism and communal speech were a variety of Bakhtin's "two-world condition." The gap that divided these "two worlds" provided a niche for a third language—the visual lexicon of "Moscow communal conceptualism."

As a term, "Moscow communal conceptualism" stresses not only the acute "speech receptivity" of Kabakov, Komar and Melamid, or Monastyrsky, but also the fact that each of them was the product of communal upbringing and of the circumstances that accompany "institutional" (i.e., obligatory) communality. Unlike them, second-generation conceptualists—or, to be more precise, neoconceptualists—can be linked to "contractual" (i.e., elective, voluntary) communality. This generation includes members of groups that have partially or completely collapsed: Mukhomor, sz, Champions of the World, and Medical Hermeneutics (figs. 2.35, 2.36).[5] (All the neocommunal bodies listed here deserve separate consideration and, perhaps, a separate conceptual niche, such as, for example, "Moscow neocommunal conceptualism.")

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Few of Kabakov's Western admirers realize that almost all segments of this artist's oeuvre are essentially representations of the "corporeality" of Soviet communal speech. His "rooms," Masonite panels, and albums are linguistic minefields that explode as soon as the viewer comes into contact with them or enters the site of the installation—limitless as far as the audibility of "spoken kitsch" is concerned (fig. 3.2). The communal ghetto—a *kommunalka*—is Kabakov's central subject, just as the flophouse was Maxim Gorki's in *The Lower Depths*. Kabakov explains: "The flophouse is an extraordinary successful metaphor—a glimpse, as it were, into a pit where myriads of souls swarm. There is no action in Gorki's play, only talk. I call it 'logogyration.' Our Russian life seems exactly the same to me: it gravitates toward zones of speech. Thus the communal apartment turns into [a] Soviet version of *The Lower Depths*."[6] Beyond the communal walls, Kabakov says, "out there, healthy young creatures are off to display their athletic prowess in the May Day parade through the Red Square, while in here, you, sucker, live like a dog."[7] In Kabakov words, "The degree of the helplessness of communal life before the outside world is horrifying. No one in a communal apartment will fix a loose board or a broken faucet, because all these functions from eviction to repairs are performed by *it*" (fig. 3.3).[8]

When, following its debut at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York in 1988 Kabakov's exhibition "Ten Characters" was reconstructed at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., something unexpected happened. The museum's African-American guards took an active interest in the installation. According to the artist, they enthusiastically promoted his installation and explained it to visitors "for the reason that they found it easy to identify with a representation of a communal world, a world in which they, too, were raised."[9] Their reaction attests that Kabakov is not

3.2
Ilya Kabakov, *Ten Characters,
Kitchen no. 2*, 1981–1988.

3.3
Georgii Kizeval'ter, from the series
Moscow Communal World, 1984,
used in Ilya Kabakov's albums.

merely the avenging chronicler, but also the bard, the aestheticizer of the fabric of the ghetto-centric utopia that is ruled by a communal speech ritual. Evidently, as Terry Eagleton writes, "for discourse to *refer,* even pro-testingly, is for it to become instantly complicit with what it criticizes."[10]

Although his *Ten Characters* series became engaged in a deconstruc-tive reading of Soviet communal narratives, Kabakov would always hide his authorial "I" behind legions of characters. It would be ridiculous to fault him for doing that, given the immense (state-imposed) pressure that alternative artists had to bear before perestroika. Besides, fear of identifying oneself had a positive (i.e., "uplifting") effect inasmuch as it contributed to Moscow communal conceptualism, a multimedia practice that embraces the idea of the artist as schizo-producer[11] who operates within the framework of an ephemeral (conspiratorial) authorship. This implies that the schizophrenic division of the authorial "I" can be seen as a prereq-uisite for the production of a multitude of personages. Thus Kabakov, in *Ten Characters* and in a number of his other installations or albums, seems to fit the definition of "schizo-chameleon": the polyphonic, flexible, and evasive self is, in fact, his ultimate production.

The notion of a schizo-chameleon comes to mind when one recalls Kabakov's 1989 exhibition "He Lost His Mind, Undressed, Ran Away Naked" at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York. The explanatory wall text told the story of a man who failed to keep up with the schedule for the "Universal Order, Rules and Regulations" of the ZHEK (housing committee) that he himself had drawn up. Finally, as attested to by "wit-nesses," he ran naked from his "red corner" (the "altar" spot of the ZHEK). This narrative can be traced to the artist's past. In an interview I did with Kabakov right after the opening, he recalled: "As a child I had been beaten first by my father and then by my schoolmates so severely that one day I felt like a character from one of the Baron Munchausen stories: a fox who jumped out of its skin and ran away."[12] The subsequent journey of a "naked" man could be viewed as the artist's never-ending struggle to repos-sess his "original" skin. Hundreds of appearances and disguises have been "tried on" and "peeled off": their "retreat and return" is the main intrigue of Kabakov's oeuvre.

To elaborate on the "uplifting effect" as the byproduct of fear, one can recall Kabakov's insistence that "repression and fear are positioned in the center of the structure, where everything is rotating around panic that if I do not do something—terrible things will happen."[13] The artist's con-fession echoes both Søren Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Fear* and Harold Bloom's theory of poetic influence as defensive mechanism. In his book *Poetry and Repression,* Bloom argues that "as trope, poetic repression tends

3.4
Ilya Kabakov, *The Bridge*, 1991.

to appear as an exaggerated representation, the overthrow called hyper-bole."[14] What it attempts to overthrow is its set of referents: it is a trope's revenge against an earlier trope, the quarrel of any belated creator (read: Kabakov) with his precursor (read: communal speech). In Bloom's opinion, "art is necessarily an *aftering,* and so at best [an artist] strives for a selection, through repression, out of the traces of the language [of art]; that is, he represses some traces, and remembers others. This remembering is a *mispri-sion,* or creative misreading,"[15] which gives way to a selective, preferential vision of the world—vision synopsized by an abbreviational optics (i.e., a view of the visual phenomena as a text made up of abbreviations).[16]

Kabakov's installations are abbreviations of retrospective vision, mediated by the presence of unconscious abbreviatory structures in the recesses of language and memory. A description of these structures (albeit in different terms) can be found in the works of Vygotsky devoted to the study of internal speech.[17] His observations, in conjunction with Lacan's later revelations, confirm that the unconscious is structured like an abbre-viation ("total abbreviation").

For Kabakov repression is comparable with "clothing thrown over the skeleton of words"[18]—an allegorized image of *misprision,* conditioned by *aftering.* Both italicized terms are primarily applicable to those art-works which Kabakov has been producing in the West. He would prob-ably agree with Bloom's statement that art "is always at work imagining its own origin, or telling a persuasive lie about itself, to itself."[19] Repression is also detectable in Kabakov's vigorous promotion of an "identity frame," called *musor* (trash). Refusing "to grant speech ontological status," he does "not attribute other, higher meaning to any of the voices. From the utterances of the linguist to the muttering of Mariia Ivanovna (a commu-nal dweller)—who took out the garbage—the texts are annihilated. Noise results. Everything is a communal text, and I can treat it exactly as I do garbage."[20] Kabakov imagines the latter as the opposite of the Kantian sublime, since *musor* is the countersublime.

Kabakov's choice of psychic defense falls upon visual metaphors known as installations. Working in the West, he aims to reinstall the past that he has subjected to an act of "revisionary misinterpretation" or nostalgic "mis-prision." This was detectable in such installations as *The Bridge* (MOMA, New York, 1991) (fig. 3.4), *Water Music* (Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 1992), *In the Apartment of Nikolai Viktorovich* (Jablonka Gallery, Cologne, 1994), and "*C'est ici nous vivons*" (Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995).

To a greater degree, creative misreading took place at the Documenta IX (1992), where Kabakov's partiality toward "total abbreviation" prompted him to cross a public toilet with a communal living space. His recollections

Ilya Kabakov and Joseph Kosuth,
"The Corridor of Two Banalities,"
Center for Contemporary Art,
Ujazdowski Castle, 1994.

had turned surreal, psychedelic, phantasmic; the psychic defense mechanism seemed to run out of everything that fed it. This can be viewed as the consequence of the artist's (by then) six-year-long stay in the West. Evidently, the shortage of "fresh past" resulted in an urge to inflate the "origin" beyond recognition. This not only perfectly fits Bloom's definition of poetic repression as exaggerated representation, but also contributes to the surplus of anguish and fear, thereby inviting another cycle of psychic defense.

Kabakov's installation at Jablonka Gallery serves as an example of what Bloom calls "daemonization," a term based upon the idea that the daemonic is the intervening stage between the human and the divine. The artist contrasts the darkness of the communal environment (read: the human) with a brightly lit Cézannesque landscape, endowed with extracommunal lucency (read: the divine) that suggests the possibility (for one's "mental eye") of transcending the representation. But this suggestion leads to a dead end where the modern sublime is tenants with the countersublime "of belated *daemonization*." Here, if we read both Bloom and Kabakov closely—"the enigma of [artistic] authority can be resolved only in the context of [fear and] repression."[21]

An act of daemonization was staged in Ujazdowski Castle near Warsaw, Poland, where a joint exhibition of Kabakov and Joseph Kosuth took place in 1994 (fig 3.5). The show, titled "The Corridor of Two Banalities," dealt with the play of differences and/or similarities between communal and extracommunal narratives. The installation consisted of two rows of tables stuck together. On the "Eastern" side, shabby and crooked tables represented Russia; on the other side were the sleek and well-kept tables of the West. Texts were written on their tops: on one row were fragments of communal speech; on the other, authoritarian words (the maxims of famous individuals).

Kabakov's use of word "logogyration" in relation to communal speech practices suggests an association with the Wolf Man's "magic word" *tieret'* (to rub),[22] which brings to mind Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita,* charged with the mixture of cryptic *jouissance* and alienation. The confessional intensity that characterizes this novel links Humbert's narrative with Kabakov's abbreviational optic in the sense that the latter—like Nabokov's scramble of poetic images, rhymes, parodic and playful stunts—has a high "coefficient of friction." Thus, the *tieret'* of Humbert's confession seems equivalent to the *tieret'* of the installation medium, inseparable (in Kabakov's case) with the rubbing of words against words.

In Nabokov's *The Gift* is the following observation: "What, then, compels me to compose poems . . . if in spite of everything, my words go wide of the mark, or else slay both the pard and the hart with the exploding

3.6
Vitaly Komar and Aleksandr
Melamid, left: *Quotation*, 1972;
right: *Do Not Babble*, 1974.

bullet of an 'accurate' epithet?"[23] In this remark the character's creative "I" matches that of Shiva, for whom—according to the myth—one arrow is more than enough to destroy three celestial cities. The art of the "total installation," or total abbreviation, which preoccupies Kabakov, creates a similar effect. The difference, however, is that such an installation appears to be penetrated not by one but by a great many "arrows." As a result, in the installation as well as in the above quoted fragment, the shrapnel of the excessive imagery compensates for the lack of trust in the success of a single shot.

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However audioclastic,[24] Kabakov's handling of communal speech has always been rather intimate. "It is like caressing"—in this form Levinas's phrase about seeing can be adapted here. Komar and Melamid are artists who also have an audioclastic orientation. In contradistinction to Kabakov, however, they subject not communal but authoritarian discourse to a deconstructive reading. The target of their hunt is the "mythical [extracommunal] speech"[25] that functioned either explicitly or implicitly in the visual clichés of the socialist realist tradition. In the early 1970s, their conceptual projects addressed the problem of logocentrism as manifested in the Soviet painterly canon. Examples of this are *Do Not Babble* (1974)(fig. 3.6), an easel painting in the style of a poster, and the "anonymous" slogans of mass propaganda (painted on red fabric and signed by Komar and Melamid), *Our Aim Is Communism* and *We Are Born to Turn Dreams into Reality* (1972). For all its parodic quality, the gesture of this signing was a phenomenon unique to alternative art. For the first time the communal had encroached on the authorial rights reserved for the extracommunal "it." In the work known as *Quotation* (1972) (fig. 3.6), we see even rows of white quadrangles sketched on a red background and placed within quotation marks. In all, these empty spaces, suitable for the insertion of pearls of authoritarian speech, form the semblance of a minimalist painting. Nonetheless, its eidetic (speech) structure, even without a specific concretized message, is perceived as an incarnation of the will to power and control.

Among the issues most frequently discussed in relation to Moscow communal conceptualism, the approach to the idea of "character" occupies a special place. In the works of Monastyrsky and of the CA group, the "character" is psychologized; he or she is an agent of speech bisected into its image and likeness. During the performance, the character's will to speak is repressed while the "verbal time" is filled with action. Speech has its turn after action—at the moment of "compensatory" verbal acts, such as interpretation, description, and recollection. As a result of this time delay, the "character" becomes the subject of speech, in the process

3.7
Collective Actions group,
Ten Appearances, Kievy Gorki,
February 1, 1981.

of realizing a posteriori that he or she is its object. In the performance *Ten Appearances* on February 1, 1981, at Kievy Gorki (fig. 3.67), Monastyrsky and his colleagues in the group asked ten viewers to pull ropes from the center of a snowbound field toward the surrounding wood. When these ten people had moved a considerable distance from each other and from the CA members who were observing them, they were photographed. When they returned, they were offered a chance to look at the photographs. Although the photographs were taken with a regular camera and not a Polaroid Instamatic, no one questioned their authenticity. In fact, the photographs were of the CA members themselves, who had visited the field previously and had taken pictures of each other. The distance that made the figures practically indistinguishable contributed to the success of this falsification.[26] The truth was exposed much later, which was the planned culmination of *Ten Appearances*. The truth, which triumphed ex post facto, turned out to be nothing more than a signifier that made explicit the phenomenon of losing tempo and/or *différance* between verbal vacuum and verbal compensation.

For Komar and Melamid, the character is the incarnation of the extra-communal text, either the canonical (Lenin and Stalin) or the apocryphal (Apelles Ziablov and Nikolai Buchumov).[27] For these artists, identification with such Apollonic figures is a form of individuation, an attempt to separate themselves from the faceless, anonymous mass. Unlike them, however, Kabakov has no interest in a carnivalesque rivalry with symbolic "fathers." He usually hides behind the character, breaking up his authorial "I" into a multitude of communal voices, which Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music,* identified with the chorus of satyrs. In ancient Greek tragedy, Dionysus, wearing the mask of Apollo, takes a step forward, in the understanding that to achieve self-realization he must invest his ambitions into the Other (into the god of illusion and simulation). And that is precisely where Komar and Melamid are leaning when they abolish the dichotomy between the authorial and the authoritarian. The alternative to this reading of character's nature is Kabakov's version of *The Birth of Tragedy.* His Dionysus takes a step back, leaving the heroes of his narratives, the "satyrs," who appear to us wearing the mask of Apollo, in the foreground. One reason for this retreat is fear of retribution: one need only remember Midas and his donkey ears, or the terrible fate of the satyr Marsyas, skinned alive by Apollo because he dared compete against him in the musical arts.
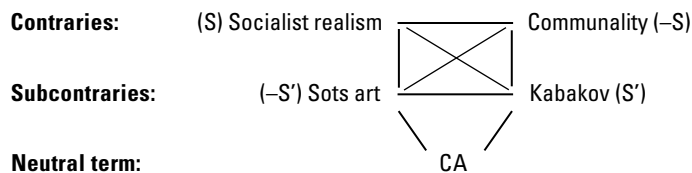
As cultural texts, socialist realism and communality constitute the USSR's weightiest deposit in what can be defined as *abbreviarium*—a compendium of speech-visions synopsized by an abbreviational optics.[28] It

follows, of course, that this should be supplemented with the visual heritage of the revolutionary art of the 1920s that was eradicated in the 1930s by the two aforementioned linguistic dominants. One way or another, having stepped onto a path of self-identification and self-legitimation, post-Stalinist art culture could not avoid a period of overcoming Soviet-style phonocentrism. In this sense the Muscovite alternative artistic milieu of the 1970s and 1980s seems hypostasized by two audioclastic enterprises and one that is audiotherapeutic:

1. Sots art, which identifies itself with an oppositional language and with the travestied deconstruction of state-bureaucratic logos on the stage of individual speech (Komar and Melamid, Erik Bulatov, Aleksandr Kosolapov, Leonid Sokov, Dmitrii Prigov, and others).

2. Idioms of representation of the communal speech-vision aimed at unfolding its noncorrespondence or—in Adorno's terms—"nonidentitiy with itself" (Kabakov).

3. A refusal to take part in the orgy of voices plus a schizoid reaction to the hegemony of dominant speech practices. *Trips outside the City* [29] in search of a common alternative to the language of communality and the language of power (the group CA).

Thus, if sots artists and Kabakov proved to be "deconstructionists" of the basic "dialects" of the Soviet linguistic *oikumenë,* socialist realism and communality, then Monastyrsky and the group CA, having rejected iconoclastic gestures and strategies, undertook the reconstruction of the language of art. They revisited the primordially agrarian space from which the expansion of the "Law of the Commune" toward the cities had begun.

It is remarkable that the discourse of CA oscillates not so much in the interspeech of the basic "dialects" (contraries) discussed here as in the gap between their audioclastic alternatives (subcontraries).[30] The position occupied by CA appears to correspond to the "neutral term" of the Greimasian semantic rectangle below, which serves as an illustration of what has been said:

Contraries: (S) Socialist realism   Communality (–S)

Subcontraries: (–S') Sots art   Kabakov (S')

Neutral term: CA

3.8
Boris Mikhailov, page from the
album *Unfinished Dissertation*,
1980s.

In a certain sense, the discourse of CA is reminiscent of the strategies of the Art-Language group, whose essential discovery was that a literary sequence exhibited in a gallery context on par with (or instead of) a painting automatically loses the property of legibility while obtaining a visual dimension. This similarity dovetails nicely with Monastyrsky's assertion that "in the actions of CA language manifests itself [is formed] in an utterly unexpected [for the viewers] place,"[31] thereby weakening their "will" to read.

Kabakov has made an installation called *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*. Monastyrsky would seem to be precisely this Kabakovian character, as he has driven a hole in the ceiling of two types of speech.[32] Thus, in Monastyrsky's case, the pleasure of being in*text*icated is radically altered by switching gears from text-as-an-overdose to text-as-a-remedy. Whereas Komar and Melamid are convinced that visuality is *already always* infected with authoritarian speech, Kabakov refuses to believe in the existence of "communal-free" narratives, for "they all belong to one common trash can."[33]

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If Western conceptualism positioned itself as a "text," then in the Soviet case, it was repeatedly identified with a communal text (or communal speech). This identification, albeit in different manifestations, is directly related to both Kabakov and his protégé, the photographer Boris Mikhailov, who regards photographic representation "as a part of the text" not in order to exempt it from comparison with other photographs, but "to impart it with yet another meaning."[34] For both of them, mimetic reciprocation between the visual and the verbal is always a possibility, provided that they represent diverse (perhaps mutually deferred), but not entirely different "regimes of phrases" (communal speech acts, communal *faktura,* etc.). In Kabakov's albums, for example, characters are featured as textual allegories, whereas in Mikhailov's photographs, the same personages are introduced as "real" people, whose visual status is secured by the alleged immediacy of the medium. While Kabakov combines photographic imagery with highly impersonal (clichéd) narratives, Mikhailov's authorial inscriptions near the photograph (such as on its margins) tend to be personal and idiomatic (fig. 3.8).[35]

Concerning the textual levels of photography, one may agree that the most elementary (eidetic) level is when the text is photographed, so that it exists "inside" the photograph in the form of an announcement, slogan, heading, poster, advertisement, notice, etc., which—because of its repetitive and clichéd appearance—exerts a certain hypnotic influence over the viewer. The second level concerns the desire to make the verbal coextensive

to the visual: in such cases the photographer (or artist borrowing photographic imagery) writes a commentary on the photograph, on its margins (however extended), etc. The third level could be called "staged": having been conceived of by the photographer prior to the moment of taking a picture, the photograph a priori appeals to a certain score or plan that can be expressed in the form of an utterance, even if post facto. Obviously, we are talking about gaze and voice in terms of their mutual predisposition toward convertibility. An example of the fourth level is the socialist realist photograph read as a didactic narrative, a guide to action, a rhetorical figure, etc. The attachment of the word to the image resembles that in a schoolbook, where a specific visual stereotype is consolidated behind each elementary (eidetic) concept. At the fifth level, the photographs and texts are arranged on a wall or in a showcase—whether an album or a series—so that the selection of the links, and their order in the composition, influences the phenomenology of reading. If the photograph is placed in an album, then the very leafing through the pages becomes an exercise that forms the text in the sense that the story unfolds via the transition from one episode to another, from one depiction or photo image to the next. An example of the sixth level is the "indexical" photograph. Some of these perform a service role, which doesn't void their involvement with a text. The sixth level envisages not so much the presence of gaps between the word and the image, as much as the mutual intentionality of the text and the photograph—their *being-toward-each-other*. However, the seventh level has to do with the concept of "communicating vessels" capable of relocating the brunt of the signifying operation from text to image, and—coextensively—from voice to gaze.

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One hundred and seventy years ago, in an attempt to grasp the essence of Russia, Prince Viazemskii remarked, "from thought to thought [in his country] one must gallop hundreds of miles." This idea confirms that the perception of space in Russia has always gravitated to the extremes, with total disregard toward what lies in between. After the revolution this polarity acquired a hysterogenic dimension, caused on the one hand by the suffocating closeness in the relationships between the tenants of overcrowded communal apartments and on the other by the overwhelming presence of the vast caesural territories. In the former USSR, notions relating to a sense of space (such as migration and travel) would frequently be substituted for or confused with those connected to temporality (be it futuristic sentiment or searching for *temps perdu*). Reflecting upon this phenomenon, Monastyrsky places Kabakov's model of "art as idea" within what he calls the ontology of surface (space). He contrasts this with

Western conceptualism, which for him evolves within the framework of ontology of action (time). Now that it is no longer unthinkable for Russian artists to travel abroad, the dichotomy between Western and Eastern European paradigms of conceptualism seems to be losing its rigidity and sharpness. The withering of this dichotomy is revealed in Kabakov's "communalizing" treatment of both aforementioned ontologies as he unites them under the canopy of what Bakhtin defines as "chronotope."[36] The artist's aim is to create an impression that "from thought to thought one must" *not* "gallop hundreds of miles," because these thoughts can be drawn nearer by welding their visual representations into a (neo)Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* set out as "total installation."[37]

In conclusion, a few words about "conceptualism in general." Apparently, it has long been impossible to "separate" out a pure form of conceptualism. As a component of multimedia artistic practices, conceptualism has overcome the initial antitextural thrust that was its reaction to the commodity fetishism of the 1960s pop culture. In the 1970s and 1980s, the theoretical text became a commodity. The expansion of commodity fetishism into the sphere of text production, into the realm of knowledge, ideas, and documentation, has reached such a point that the dichotomy of object versus text now seems outdated. As for conceptualism in Russia, its eclecticism and omnivorousness, its ability to live peacefully with other genres and styles—easel painting, photography, etc.—make it a communal phenomenon. It would be a mistake to treat it as something separate, something divided from everything else: conceptualism is a tenant living in the communal ghetto of art.