



# The Sun without a Muzzle

**In essence cinema is a question of the sun.**

Pier Paolo Pasolini

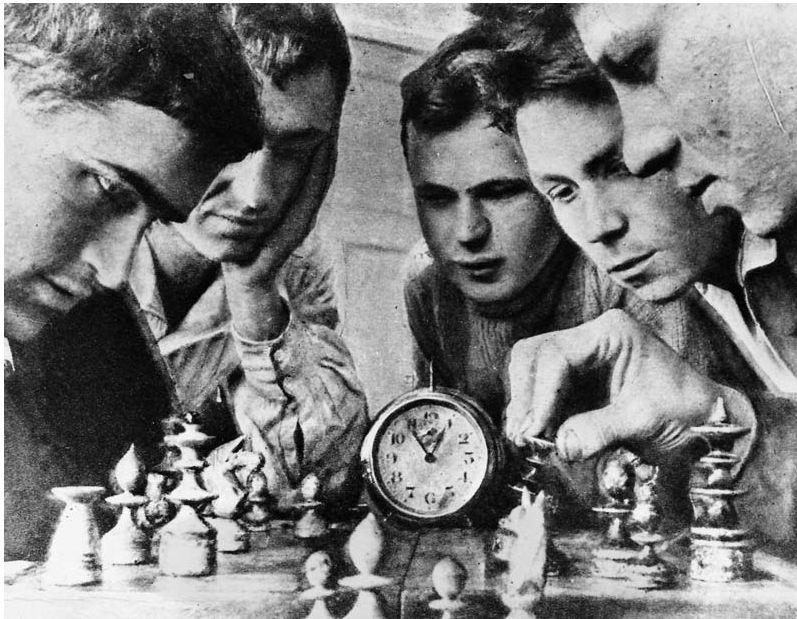
During the 1920s the collective efforts of leftist Soviet critics and photographers, affiliated with the *New Lef* magazine or the October Association, helped mass-oriented production of images assume the protagonist's position. However, it would be wrong to suppose that the throne of easel painting was usurped by photography. Until the early 1930s this seat of power had been abandoned owing to the "Jacobin terror" of postrevolutionary photography, whose functions included, *inter alia*, guarding the "empty center" from the restoration of artistic absolutism. Nature, however, abhors a vacuum, and the role of legislator of artistic fashion was annexed by the state bureaucracy responsible for implementation of Stalin's cultural revolution.<sup>1</sup> In the process, many paradigms of authorship—except those attributed to authoritarian power—became increasingly nominal. The media (including photojournalism and documentary film) were transmogrified from factographic into mythographic and, in Lyotard's words, joined in the task of "stabilization of the referent, according to a point of view which endows it with a recognizable meaning enabling the addressee to decipher images and sequences quickly ... since such structures of images and sequences constitute a communication code among all of them."<sup>2</sup>

"Photography-as-art" reclaimed its prerevolutionary role, specifically the supplementary status to which it was relegated, Cinderella-like, by its stepsisters painting, sculpture, and architecture, which rule the pantheon of the fine arts. In all likelihood, from the point of view of the Soviet mythologizing machine, photography appeared an insufficiently mythogenic form of representation. The causes of this "innate" insufficiency were photography's lack of an aura of uniqueness, its unreliability as a means of eternalizing, erecting monuments, and gilding pedestals,

or—what amounts to the same thing—the problematic nature of “photo-immortality.”<sup>3</sup>

The very use of the term “photography-as-art” when applied to the Soviet context of the 1920s and 1930s is problematic. This is because of the ambivalent function of the photographic image, which could be seen both as a communication code (“stabilizing the referent”) and as an idiomatic narrative to be read in an aesthetic context. Thus, the photo stills of Aleksandr Rodchenko, Boris Ignatovich, or Elizar Langman, which were intended for the mass media, also possessed unquestionable artistic value as individual photographic prints (fig. 5.1). Yet for these photographers, neither the prints nor the negatives were the final product. For them, quality was to a large extent that into which (in accordance with the laws of dialectics) quantity was transformed, as measured in tens of thousands of newspaper and magazine reproductions. With the rise of socialist realism, the aforementioned idiomatic narratives had gradually dissolved into the swamp of a metanarrative. As a result, photographic language degenerated into what Kabakov defines as the lyrical speech of ideology, albeit in a somewhat different context—that of mythological service, where the primary role was again reserved for the fine arts. All of these, especially painting, were granted the honor of being put to work not only in the sphere of “the stabilization of the referent” but also on the path of its incarnation. Under Stalinism, easel art repossessed its pre-Petrovian role, the role of sacred icon. Accordingly, museums became cathedrals, and albums of Soviet painting took the place of illustrated editions of the Gospels. Monumentalism was the most appropriate form for the total artistic project (Soviet-style), inasmuch as the “parasitic dependence on ritual,”<sup>4</sup> for which Walter Benjamin indicted traditional means of representation, became a *modus operandi* of socialist realism’s symbolic economy. As for the latter, there is something sublimely priapic about it: even a cursory acquaintance with the monuments of the 1930s through 1950s suggests that the erection of a monument is a monument to erection. Kant’s sublime and Freud’s sublimated, which Jean-François Lyotard faults Jürgen Habermas for failing to differentiate, merged into one under the canopy of “high” socialist realism.

In “*Civitas Solis: Ghetto as Paradise*” (an allusion to Tommaso Campanella’s utopian work *City of the Sun*), the principles of *nalozhenie* (analogous to double exposure in photography) were used to “expose” the similarity between the “solar myth” and official Soviet mythology. There was hardly any intention on my part to endow Soviet mythology with a legitimate “historical *a priori*”—legitimate in the sense that various modifications of heliotrope and its rhetorics have always been an



The Sun without a Muzzle

5.1  
Elizar Langman, *Commune*  
“*Dynamo*,” 1930.

integral part of both religious and secular traditions. My objective was to figure out how the use of these rhetorics has led to what Habermas called “refeudalization of the public sphere.”<sup>5</sup>

As was mentioned in chapter 1, for many Russian thinkers, artists, and poets heliotrope was a sense-of-life metaphor, a means for understanding the image of history within the framework of some unifying (albeit radial) principle. If one looks at the photograph from that perspective, it becomes disappointingly obvious that it relegates the sun to the humble role of natural signifier, of concrete (rather than metaphorical) luminescence, shedding light on fragments as well as on the whole (totality). It is the source of light energy and radial shining, without the mediation of mythological lenses or mirrors, which affects (without the mediation of mythological lenses and mirrors) the sensitive surface of film or the mix of gelatin and silver salts laid on paper or glass.

This “immediate” contact with the real sun (the sun without muzzle) rather than with its allegory was quite acceptable to the postrevolutionary photographers of the 1920s. With the ascendancy of socialist realism, the situation changed drastically: reality was annulled. Both the *Polis* and its Leporello—art—began to draw on an inventory of metaphorical clichés subject to the jurisdiction of the solar myth. Direct reference to the sun, technologically intrinsic to the photo genre, became politically incorrect, not to mention the fact that in the Soviet model of *Civitas Solis*, the status of solar icon was most often attributed to Stalin. Consequently, the utopian paradigm associated with postrevolutionary culture underwent a number of modifications in the 1930s. The presumption of the proximity of *utopos* became a “moral imperative”; therefore, the symptoms of pre-paradisaal anxiety became an inalienable part of any artistic project. Here we should remember that when a ship approaches a pier, it slows down to avoid a wreck. That is why the “speed of time” in the situation perceived as “five minutes to paradise” is far lower than it was in the first two Five Year Plans (1928–1937): the instantaneousness related to the desire to “capture” a rapidly changing reality had ceased to be an urgent necessity. Moreover, since utopianism, paradisaal, and other varieties of apocalyptic discourse are hysterical phenomena, the incarnations of their corresponding referents no longer “look good” in black and white; they demand polychromatic, festive, psychedelic representation. It is possible that the color hallucinations produced by the communal unconscious in the years of terror and purges (which escalated as the desired goal drew nearer) motivated the “engineers of human souls”—as Stalin called artists—to abide religiously by the painterly principles appropriate to the nature of these hallucinations. The colors of the hysterical became the

colors of the historical. Because of this—and also because, in those years, color photography was not yet technologically feasible<sup>6</sup>—the victory of the fine arts over photo discourse can be seen as determined by both economic and symbolic factors (the “symbolic” economy).

From the late 1930s, the paradisaical and the colorful could not be imagined separately. However, in those rare cases where there would arise a need for nonaffirmative iconography, for capturing the painfully instantaneous state of things or for the use of a factographic approach, socialist realist painting (particularly in scenes of the unmasking or condemnation of enemies of the people) reverted (suddenly!) to black and white.<sup>7</sup> Through such “nonaffirmative” manifestations, painting yet again underscored everything that was characteristic of its usual (affirmative) state: its uncritical and paradisaical quality and its appetite for totalization.

On one hand, the deficit of reality, characteristic of that era, stemmed from the corruption of the factual by the mythic. Photojournalism was ideally supposed to “shed light” on such a course of events, but—as Henri Cartier-Bresson pointed out—“documentary photography” is the wrong term; the right one is documentary-style photography. On the other hand, the preference for the optical over the metaphorical was not free of phenomenological bias. This bias was the result of the reductionist attitude toward the referents (i.e., economic facts). The referents were believed to be capable of entering the realm of representation “devoid of all theory” and “any judgment.”<sup>8</sup> The *mythical speech* of industrial photography, documentary film, newspaper, or radio reporting rested on the assumption that the sum of all possible representations constituted (like Leibnizian monads) the total panorama of context. This illusion was skillfully used by apologists of socialist realism, who believed that the “victory” over reality belonged to those who controlled its representation and neutralized suspicions of the existence of its Other (i.e., the Other of representation). Such suspicions were “cured,” and are still being “cured,” by hypnotizing us with the magic of repetition inherent in mass printing. Our inferiority complex in the face of huge numbers, large scales, and long distances manifests itself in the inability to distinguish between “much” and “all.” Consequently, the accumulation of “quantity turning into quality” became so all-encompassing that it seemed as if things could no longer hide from the light of representation.

■

In the 1970s and 1980s, some Moscow artists, particularly members of the Collective Actions group (CA), became involved in the creation of an extensive photographic dossier by documenting the events of alternative art life for the Moscow Archive of New Art (MANA). Among these artists



were Igor' Makarevich, Andrei Abramov, Georgii Kizeval'ter, and Andrei Monastyrsky, who were later joined by Sergei Volkov, Andrei Roiter, and Mariia Serebriakova.<sup>9</sup> They all shared interests with Kabakov, who served as a connecting link between them and his long-time friend Boris Mikhailov. But whereas the members of the MANA circle were largely amateur photographers, Mikhailov represented the group of professionals who, like him, dwelled on the margins of Soviet photographic practice. This latter group consisted of Vladimir Kupriianov, Igor' Mukhin (fig. 5.2), Igor' Savchenko, Sergei Borisov, Valerii Shchekoldin, Galina Moskaleva, Sergei Kozhemiakin, Sergei Leontiev, Nikolai Bakharev, and Vasilii Kravchuk. Their photographic oeuvre could be defined as neofactography. Its distinctive characteristic is that, unlike the productions of the October Association or the Revolutionary Society of Proletarian Photographers (ROPF), which serviced the Soviet mainstream in the 1930s, the neofactographers of the 1970s and 1980s documented manifestations of marginal practices and activities. Moreover, if the fixation of the events of the 1920s and 1930s can be described in terms of "factography as affirmation," then the neofactography under discussion here is "factography as resistance."

The word "factography" has multiple connotations. In 1929, the contributors to *Lef* magazine published a collection of essays, *The Literature of Fact*, that propagandized the idea of "extra-artistic subject matter." The editor of the collection, Nikolai Chuzhak, asserted that "one need not be afraid of uninteresting content. The only thing that is required is the ability to present the uninteresting in an interesting way."<sup>10</sup> Actually, in addition to the "factoviks," the inspiration for factographic discourse can be traced to Mikhail Bakhtin. In his *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, he revealed filiations between the topics of "answerability," "oughtness," and active "participation in once-occurred being in an emotional-volitional, affirmed manner."<sup>11</sup> In this text, worked on during his stay in Vitebsk (1920–1924), Bakhtin insisted that there was "no alibi in existence," and advocated bridging the difference between experience and representation of experience, between the motif of the "actually performed act" or deed and its product.<sup>12</sup> Bakhtin's *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*—which preceded treatises on the same subject undertaken in the late 1920s by Sergei Tret'iakov, Osip Brik, Chuzhak, and Walter Benjamin—comes closest to the idea of factography.<sup>13</sup> Anticipating the question of which facts are valuable and which are not, Bakhtin argues that there is no contradiction between unique and "affirmed value-context." He writes: "the unique 'I' must assume a particular emotional-volitional attitude toward all historical mankind: I must affirm it as really valuable to me, and when I do



The Sun without a Muzzle

5.2

Igor' Mukhin, *Research Investigation of Soviet Monumental Arts*, 1989.



5.3

Andrei Abramov, *Skyscraper*,  
1978.



so everything valued by historical mankind will become valuable for me as well.”<sup>14</sup> However, the factographers (most notably the members of the October Association) radically altered Bakhtin’s “event-ness of Being” and “universality of the ought” as they narrowed the boundaries of “historical mankind” to contemporary, socialist ones, or, more precisely, to the reality of Stalin’s Five Year Plans.

In essence, the neofactography of the 1970s and 1980s was an attempt to provide new answers to the questions: What is fact and what is reality? Is it whatever has received the grace of mass representation, or can phenomena pinned down by means of amateur snapshots, typewritten descriptive texts, letters, diary notes, and so forth, be referred to as true factuality? Adopting the latter viewpoint, factography-as-resistance set out to implement the principle that, in becoming facts of linguistic reality and therefore communicable, idiomatic narratives are endowed with a destabilizing potential capable of shaking faith in the invincibility of the affirmative culture of socialist realism and in the totality of its self-representation.

From time to time photographers from the MANA circle acted as deconstructionists unmasking the Soviet utopia. In the mid-1980s Makarevich shot several rolls of film depicting the subterranean friezes of Moscow’s metro stations, especially those that included socialist realist iconographic and narrative clichés. At the time, special permission was needed to photograph in the metro,<sup>15</sup> an indication that the authorities regarded this space as sacred. The transgressive nature of Makarevich’s action was embodied in the expansion of private factography into public space, which (from the authorities’ point of view) meant infringing on the rights reserved for the official media. A similar approach to the same subject matter can be found in Abramov’s and Shchekoldin’s photographs of Moscow’s skyscrapers, one of which is “draped” (Christo-style) in a giant portrait of Lenin, another, in that of Brezhnev; one can only imagine the frustration of civil servants forced to work in such conditions (fig. 5.3).

To be precise, Abramov’s photograph depicts Lenin’s portrait on a skyscraper, whereas Shchekoldin’s Brezhnev was installed on the wall of a tall building. Both taken in 1978, the photographs were framed in the tradition of Rodchenko, at an angle creating a “worm’s-eye view.” Such an avant-garde representation of kitsch (Stalin’s architecture) unambiguously brings Abramov’s and Shchekoldin’s photography into the neofactographic genre. Generally speaking, the ogling of authoritarian iconography through the lens of individual authorship as manifested by Makarevich with the metro’s baroque interior, and by Abramov and Shchekoldin with Soviet skyscrapers, completes the deconstructive odyssey initiated in



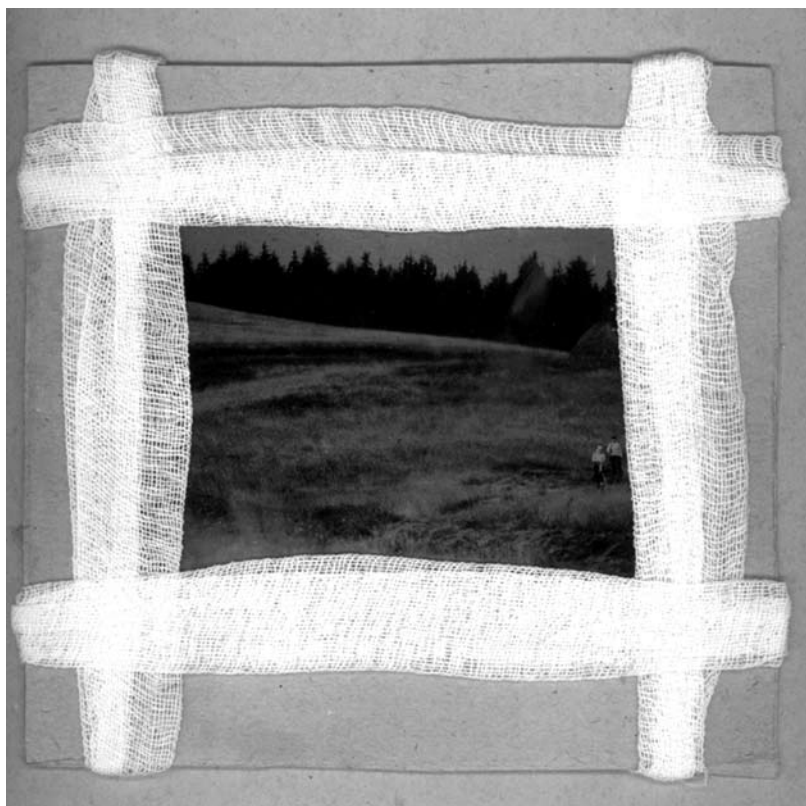
5.4

Sergei Kozhemiakin, from the  
series *Presence*, 1990.

the early 1970s by Komar and Melamid with regard to easel art, and by Mikhailov with regard to photography.

One cannot bypass the apologists for “backward vision” who attempt to reconstruct the image of the past by revisiting its “lacunae” and “marginalia”—that is, everything that has dropped out of the official media’s scope of vision. Such revisitation is not directly nostalgic or retro. Rather, what is at issue here is an epistemological project of the reassessment of values that is related to the revision of the institutional version of the past, and to a heightened interest in apocrypha. It is from this angle that one can interpret the use of somebody else’s amateur photographs (“archival waste”) by Kozhemiakin (fig. 5.4), Kravchuk, Savchenko, and Moskaeva, as well as the use of the photographic readymade in the collages of Serebriakova (fig. 5.5) and Aleksei Shulgin. History as traditionally conceived (with a capital *H*) is an inventory of names, events, and dates “deserving of attention.” Knowing that the selection and presentation of this inventory is the prerogative of the powers that be, alternative artists and photographers question the authenticity of the historical heritage imposed on them, and give preference to the *other*. The *other*, in this instance, is the photo archive of accidentally preserved testimonials to an unofficially recorded, anonymous past, whose recording falls to neofactography. Thus, post facto, in the process of an a posteriori repossession of the truth—a truth that was unacceptable to the mythographers of the 1940s or 1950s—the prosaic realities of those years are reclaimed from oblivion: fragments of everyday life; the haggard faces of heavy-drinking war veterans caught unaware in moments of “leisure”; portraits of relatives and friends; unremarkable landscapes; street and backyard scenes; casual, pathos-stripped scenes of a de-heroized yesterday. The generosity with which these artists search for the lost and ordinary time of others leads one to think that *das Sein* cannot lay claim to authenticity without compassion for *Dasein*.

In some instances, this generosity does not stretch to encompass the ethics of representing human misery and degradation. At times, concern for humanity-as-a-whole triumphs over compassion for an individual. This reproach, however, cannot be addressed to Mikhailov, who once admitted to American photographer Diane Neumaier that he would never let his camera take advantage of humiliating moments or aspects of human existence, unless these moments and aspects are engendered by social causes. His *Salt Lakes* series (1985) perfectly illustrates Mikhailov’s ethical vision. While showing hundreds of sick and elderly people bathing in a salty and polluted swamp next to a deserted water-freshening plant, he remains



5.5  
Mariia Serebriakova, *Untitled*, 1989.

hopelessly unable to capitalize on the “apocalyptic” *plaisir* of witnessing pain and suffering.

In the photographic section of the 1995 exhibition “Damaged Utopia,”<sup>16</sup> Mikhailov’s photographs (from *By Land*) (fig. 5.6) were placed next to Anatolii Skurikhin’s *Harvest* (1937) (fig. 5.7) and Boris Kudoiarov’s *At the Glass Factory* (1950). The objective was to juxtapose the rhetoric of anticipation (peculiar to the Soviet mass media of the 1930s) with the current tendency to present evidence of unfulfilled anticipation. Among the contemporary photographers who participated in the exhibition were Shchekoldin, Volkov, Borisov, and Makarevich. Their contribution to “Damaged Utopia” consisted of *nonaffirmative* images examined vis-à-vis the *affirmative* photography endorsed by the state from the 1930s through the early 1950s. The themes of the nonaffirmative photographs ranged from damaged infrastructure to crowds of exhausted and depressed people, and accentuated the phenomenon of decaying utopia. Mikhailov and his colleagues also attempted to demonstrate the transformations that had occurred in the politics of representation of the human body as it shifted from the heroic, healthy, and youthful to the mundane, sickly, and aged. This approach leads one to pose the question: Can our lost and falsified past be recaptured, or is it just another dream, seen backward?

Although Mikhailov’s urban landscapes are entirely inhabitable, one cannot “enter” them: the eye can only glide over the surface of the print. Entrance into the no-exit predicament, to which Mikhailov’s photographs attest, is problematic because of the increased psychological, rather than demographic, density of the image. The photographer’s desire to give it weight makes it akin to diving into mercury, where immersing oneself is as difficult as surfacing. This observation, however, applies less to the hand-colored prints than it does to the toned photographs from the blue and the brown series—*Murk*<sup>17</sup> (or *At Dusk*), of 1991, and *By Land*, of 1993. While socialist realist art has frequently been discussed in terms of enticement, cathartic merging, and so on, *Murk* evokes the phenomenon of repulsion (the mercury phenomenon). The strategy employed by Mikhailov to identify and record this phenomenon is close to the kind of neofactographic genre that could be described as the factography of decathartization.

The murky mood of *Murk* is also present in the works of Leontiev and Bakharev (fig. 5.8). What distinguishes them from Mikhailov is that in their photographs—regardless of how depressive they are—the center of gravity shifts from the urban landscape to the personage, which is not true of *Murk*, where the hopelessness is impersonal. All these deviations are attained at the price of crashing through Mikhailov’s “mercury barrier”

The Sun without a Muzzle





5.6  
Boris Mikhailov, *By Land*, 1991.

5.7  
Anatolii Skurikhin, *Harvest*, 1937.







5.8

Nikolai Bakharev, from the series  
*Our Life Is Not a Castle*, 1989.

that protects us not simply from confronting the horrors of reality, but—to some extent—from the discomforts of enjoying them (i.e., from experiencing an “apocalyptic” *plaisir*). With the brutality and naturalism typical of their method, Leontiev and Bakharev put on display the “seamy side” that remains hidden in the background in Mikhailov’s photographs. This allows the “respectable public” to see desperate people crushed by the hardships of day-to-day existence. Among the shortcomings of such excessive empiricism is its tendency to take a voyeuristic stance or to have a didactic attitude toward people’s miseries. Here, one can think of Diane Arbus and Garry Winogrand, as well as of Richard Billingham’s *Untitled, 27 Tales* (1993–1997) or Donigan Cumming’s photographic series *Pretty Ribbons* (1993). Cumming’s works, in their nerve-wracking pitch and lack of spontaneity, are comparable to the revelations of Leontiev and Bakharev.

Borisov has a photograph in which Vera Mukhina’s cyclops-like sculpture *The Worker and the Female Collective Farmer* literally blocks out the sun, while a plane’s Apelles’ line (vapor trail) slices the sky. The allegory is transparent: the earth, nature, and the sky belong not to Physis but to Mythos. The abolished reality creates a state of weightlessness, or rather a situation in which metaphors alone possess weight; they cause a monstrous hysterogenic pressure, compensated for by rare moments of equally unbearable happiness. The series of photographs in which Borisov recreates the lightness of the movements, demonstrated by Champions of the World, vividly illustrates the above (see fig. 2.35). The Champions’ record-setting jumps, their flight in the air against a background of bulky Stalinist architecture, exacerbate the contrast between the weight of petrified metaphor and the ephemeral quality of existence. In this respect, Borisov’s series recalls Kabakov’s album entitled *They Fly* (1972–1975).

Another important part of Borisov’s oeuvre conveys the texture of daily life (*byt*) in the time of perestroika, with its incestuous relationship between the old and the new unfolding amid the ruins of Civitas Solis. In each of these photographs, the sense of internal ruin is attained with a selection of tourist-poster views of run-down fountains, monuments, the Kremlin towers, or the Moscow River embankments as background. The “underhandedness” of this choice lies in the fact that this entire set of architectural codes, meant to attest to the indestructibility of the solar myth, has long been ruined; moreover, it was not stone or concrete constructions that were destroyed but rather mental constructs, that is, “solarly engaged” metaphors. This debacle, which consisted of the collapse of the heliotrope rooted in the communal psyche, is the main subject of Borisov’s photo narratives.



5.9  
Andrei Roiter, *Untitled*, 1988.



A similar motif can be traced in the works of Volkov and Roiter, both of whom were involved in the factographing of chaos, withering, and disintegration (fig 5.9). Later, their thanatological palette of neglected garages, fences, and trash heaps became integrated, by them and by others, into paintings, installations, and three-dimensional objects. With Makarevich, the representation of this subject matter takes us back to the concept of “inner speech” proposed by Vygotsky: photography captures the neon letters of the slogan “GLORY” reflected in the window of a slum building—in such a way, moreover, as if it were coming from deep inside the room rather than from across the street. Makarevich’s fellow CA member Kizeval’ter paid his own tribute to the documentation of Soviet *byt* in a series of photographs commissioned by Kabakov and representing the environment of the communal apartment (see fig. 3.3). If the evolution of the Russian avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s can be perceived as movement from *faktura* to factography,<sup>18</sup> the 1980s marked a merging of the two within the framework of the deconstructive paradigm defined as “factographic *faktura*,” that is, factography by means of *faktura*.

Mikhailov’s “factographic *faktura*” is saturated with intertextuality: some of the pictures are crowded with his own hand-written remarks about the images or reflecting upon recent conversations with friends. In one of the pieces from his *Sots Art* series (1975–1985), he writes a typically Soviet song on the margins of the photograph: “The armor is stiff, and our tanks are fast.” Beside the text is an image of a playground with the “skeleton” of a make-believe tank for children, painted red. The juxtaposed narratives—verbal and visual—are lethal in relation to one another: their rhetorics become deconstructed, which seems to be the author’s intention. In *Unfinished Dissertation* (1984), photographs with Mikhailov’s writings on their margins are glued to the back of pages of a doctoral thesis by an unknown scholar who had vanished before the dissertation was completed (see fig. 3.8). In this conceptual work Mikhailov reenacts the making of a palimpsest, which serves as an analogy of the ruthless overcoding immanent to our cultural and historical “Being-toward-death.”<sup>19</sup>

To follow up on the notion of factography, I will cite Derrida’s essay “Back from Moscow, in the USSR,” in which he comments on Walter Benjamin’s letter to Martin Buber, written a few days after Benjamin’s return from the USSR, on February 23, 1927, and rife with what Derrida calls its author’s “desire to present his diaries in such a way that it would appear as the referent’s self-description, without being—as the phenomenologist would put it—‘constituted’ by Benjamin.”<sup>20</sup> The deconstructionist’s target here is Benjamin’s promise “to succeed in allowing the creatural

to speak for itself” and “to write a description of Moscow at the present moment, . . . which would thereby refrain from any deductive abstraction, from any prognostication and even within certain limits from all judgments—all of which . . . cannot be formulated in this case on the basis of spiritual ‘data’ but only on the basis of economic facts.”<sup>21</sup> In Derrida’s view, there is a philosophical claim of enormous proportions in these lines, where “the interpretive content is endowed with pre-interpretive status.”<sup>22</sup>

Regardless of who takes responsibility for drawing the line between “truth about lies” and “lies about truth,” the criteria governing factographic discourse have never been clear-cut. The mystery of factography is that it can be both the labyrinth and an Ariadne’s thread, and when the latter takes turn, it gives hope that despite its phenomenological bias, (neo) factography is still capable of resisting forces that impose on us their vision of past and present.

■ ■

The critique of representation, as articulated in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, found new expression in a performance by the CA group called *Ten Appearances*, described in chapter 3 (see fig. 3.7). In this project, ten spectators were invited to participate in the action, and were then given the opportunity to look at what were presented as photographs of themselves taken from a considerable distance and therefore not easily identifiable. No one doubted the authenticity of the pictures, though in fact they had been taken several days prior to the performance.<sup>23</sup> *Ten Appearances* demonstrated the fragility of the border between representation of fact and the fact of representation. Incidentally, rather convincing critiques of both the pictorial and factographic ambitions of photography were offered by Shulgin in his *Rotating Landscapes* (1991) and by Andrei Filippov. Shulgin mounted color photographs on plywood with a small electric motor on the back of the frame; due to rotation, everything was out of focus, which distorted both the aesthetic and factographic dimensions of the representation. Filippov—in order to fill the vacancy of the “historical a priori”<sup>24</sup>—ironically appropriated photographs from CA’s *Ten Appearances* in order to “invade” them with his trademark images—double-headed eagles, the symbol of Russian monarchy.

In the West, the tendencies related to the critique of representation are realized in the genre of ironic imitation of the processes immanent to metanarrativity itself. The photogenic nature of these processes is a phenomenon that has not escaped the attention of post-photographers

(post-factographers) whose ranks include Kupriianov, along with Barbara Krueger, Richard Prince, Louise Lawler, and Jeff Wall. At the level of the “politics of the signifier,” the distinctions between him and his American colleagues are insignificant. Each uses a strategy that condones the expansion of the textual (verbal) into the territory of the visual. In Kupriianov’s 1982 photo album *A Work after Pushkin*, (fig. 5.10) two kinds of public property—cultural heritage and mass propaganda—are brought together with riveting persuasiveness. Here, lines from Pushkin’s poetry are juxtaposed with portraits of the Soviet heroines of the labor front, photographs made from street displays or “boards of honor.” As a result, the present parachutes into the past, while the past receives the right to reside in the present. In the process, an act of deconstruction takes place that unmasks the extratemporal ambitions of Soviet cultural thinking, full of the “metaphysics of presence.”

In 1984, Kizeval’ter made his *Umbrella Album*, consisting of photographs of Moscow’s alternative artists. Each of those who posed—whether indoors or out—was photographed with an umbrella, whose presence (if one forgets about rain) could be interpreted as a preventive measure against two evils: the searing rays of the physical sun, and the light pressure of *heliocracy*.<sup>25</sup> Umbrellas, especially open ones, resemble parentheses, suggesting an association with the phenomenological bracketing (*epoché*) of that variety, which centers on the so-called ontico-ontological difference and, in this instance, the difference between sun-as-such and sun-as-metaphor.

The mystery of the “true purpose” of the umbrella was, in all likelihood, revealed to Nietzsche. Otherwise, his note in the *Nachlass*, “I have forgotten my umbrella,”<sup>26</sup> would not have generated such an abundance of interpretations in philosophical literature. One of the numerous solutions to this puzzle is that the umbrella, in accordance with the tradition of Nietzschean poetics, can be easily interpreted as a fragment of the veil of Maya, which camouflages the “unattractive” factual state of things. Therefore, to forget one’s umbrella is a choice equivalent (particularly for the author of *The Birth of Tragedy*) to a preference for the Dionysian over the Apollonian. A fundamentally different solution to the same problem is framed by James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*: the injunction “Love me, love my umbrella” hints at the possibility of reading it as “love my Dionysian hypostasis, love the Apollonian one”—and in particular, the latter is that individualized version of the veil of Maya for which the umbrella serves as a metaphor.





5.10  
Vladimir Kupriianov, *A Work after  
Pushkin*, 1982.

“Rats are the doves of the cellars,” the Leningrad poet Vladimir Burich wrote in the late 1950s. For him—as for his peers—reality was associated with something frightening, corporate, toxic, possessing ratlike qualities and habits. “Fate prowls in dovelike steps,” said Nietzsche, for whom the contrast between the Apollonian and the Dionysian boiled down to the distinction between anesthetizing stability guaranteed by myth and the absence of all guarantees on the part of that which “prowls in dovelike steps”—of circumstance, identified with fate. Hence, the sense of horror we experience when encountering reality—expressed in the fear of rats, which was exploited by O’Brien in George Orwell’s 1984 to break down Winston’s resistance. In essence, the latter feared rats (i.e., *la réalité*) more than he feared his adversary.

In Lyotard’s opinion, the abjectness of reality is explained by the shortage of it (“peu de réalité”)<sup>27</sup> caused by the overabundance of metaphor. This conclusion is correct with regard to the half-century of Soviet history dating from the early 1930s to the late 1980s. In the 1990s, the situation was turned inside out in the sense that the shortage of reality gave way to its metastases. The post-perestroika *byt* spread out before the camera lens has become more Dionysian than before. The fragmentation of the Apollonian, whose veil of Maya once gave the illusion of a communal (total) umbrella, has led to the emergence of a multitude of individual small umbrellas, attesting to the fact that an *authoritarian* ideology has disintegrated into a myriad of *authorial* ideologies. Their legitimation requires new structures and institutions, including artistic ones. While these are at an embryonic stage, the features of the new metanarrative are as yet unformed. Therefore, the question of the status of factography in the post-perestroika era remains open.