**CHAPTER 9**

# The Body-without-a-Name

**The only thing I was sure of was my name.**
Luigi Pirandello, *The Late Mattia Pascal*

**1.**

From the early 1960s to the late 1980s, Western perceptions of Russian culture were based on a rather crude model, reduced to the opposition between Soviet orthodoxy and dissent. The triviality of this model was balanced by the fact that the dissidents' perceptions of the West were based, in turn, on a presumption of identity—which was imagined as something beyond dichotomy, devoid of the differences and contradictions that generate ideological discourses. In alternative Soviet circles, the division of the inhabitants of foreign (bourgeois) countries into liberals and conservatives, left-wing and right-wing radicals, and so on, was received skeptically and, as a rule, attributed to official propaganda.

Familiarity with Western art of the postwar era was made possible by several exhibitions of American and European painting in Moscow, and also by an influx of coffee-table books and catalogues published abroad. As was mentioned in chapter 2, the heritage of Kandinsky, Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich, Tatlin, Rodchenko, and Lissitzky had far less influence on the Soviet artists of the 1960s than did the works of Western modernists, who sheltered the specter of the Russian avant-garde unwelcome at home. Knowledge of this "ghost of Hamlet's father" was displaced from individual and institutional memory; this was equally true of cultural consciousness and of the cultural unconscious. In psychoanalysis, this kind of radical displacement is known as *foreclosure (forclusion, Verwerfung)*. Foreclosure results in paranoid ruptures in the fabric of memory and language, which generally occur in patients who, as young children, were witnesses to, participants in, or victims of a crime. Such memories evoke discomfort (horror, shame, etc.) and must be effaced, leaving irreplaceable gaps, clearances, "empty centers." Further, even though the eradication of

memory is usually analyzed in terms of individual rather than collective psychic defense, the analogy with foreclosure also works for mass, or societal, catalepsy.

The consequences of foreclosure can be traced in the example of the socialist modernists who have been repossessed from "procrastinated time" only partially, if at all. The socialist modernism of the late 1920s and 1930s, which pleased neither the pure avant-garde zealots nor the Stalinist art mavens, coexisted with the Association of Artists of the Revolution (AKhR)[1] and early socialist realism but, unlike both, was able to establish a style of its own. The architecture of Moscow's first metro stations, book and magazine design, posters, photography and photomontage, the decoration of workers' clubs—this is only a partial list of the areas in which the socialist modernists (Klutsis, Lissitzky, Rodchenko, and Stepanova in their late periods, as well as Sen'kin, Valentina Kulagina, Solomon Telengator, and many others) worked. The protopostmodernist course of their position, compared to the historical avant-garde, is in the dialectical transcendence (removal) of negation, that is, in the transition from negation to affirmation. Giving this fact due credit, socialist modernism may be viewed as an affirmative avant-garde.

Louis Althusser's reading of Marx's *Capital,* undertaken in the 1960s, makes the persuasive argument that society's economic "I" is organized according to the same principle as the psychic subject in Freud or Lacan. Althusser makes an analogy between the developmental stages of productive capacity and the developmental stages of the libido. He describes the transition from one stage to another in terms of displacement *(Verschiebung)*[2]—which does not mean that the libido is determined (or even informed) by economics. The economy only supplies a portion of referential "raw material," projected onto the inner world of the subject in the form of unconscious representations (*imagoes*). Thus, it is not a question of conversion but of (repeatedly mediated) correlation. What is also at play here is the "dangerous liaison" between the mode of production and modes of exchange—such as, for example, psychomimetic reciprocation. While Lacan regards the unconscious as the discourse of the Other, Althusserian Marxism reveals a similar subtext in the relationship between the base and the superstructure. During Khrushchev's thaw, the base and the superstructure of alternative art production were separated. Due to this "outsourcing," superstructural signifiers were imported from the West, while the infrastructure (art materials, studios, etc.) retained its local address. The gap between them—or, as Althusser would argue, between somatic and psychic dimensions of culture, between flexions and reflections—contributed to the emergence of additional blank spaces in

the artistic psyche, prone to be filled with incarnations of "procrastinated referents." Because of these gaps, non–socialist realist art differed from socialist realism not only in its creative premises but also in its diagnosis.



## 2.

In the wake of the successful 1988 Sotheby's auction in Moscow, Russian artists began to travel regularly to the West, where they had exhibitions and sold their works to well-known and nameless collectors alike (fig. 9.1). In museums and exhibition spaces of varying caliber and importance, they hung their taciturn paintings and erected installations that attested to the impenetrability of their context. As for Western connoisseurs and sympathizers, their (fleeting) alliance with Russian art deserves special attention. In the years of perestroika, this relationship was an expression of the center's curiosity about the periphery. Russian protégés (including intellectuals capable of vocalizing their fellow artists' visual messages) were given the preassigned part of those who couldn't be denied patronage and solicitude. Their revelations were worthy of understanding only if they followed the rules of the game and did not generalize or theorize. "Man Friday" turned out to be a supplier of the raw material—of events whose discursive processing was licensed by "Robinson Crusoe." But the real paradox here is the absence (or, once again, the procrastination) of reciprocal interest in the context of art on the part of the visitors, from West to East or from East to West. When viewing foreign exhibitions, even those who can hardly be suspected of being fascinated with "pure" form invariably limited themselves to the strictly formal, aesthetic plane of artistic representation. And this is despite the fact that, for many of them, "visuality is skin stretched over the skeleton of words."[3]

When traveling abroad, a work of art from the former Soviet bloc countries is often viewed as a "part-object," an organ available for donation (with or without consent). Taken as an exotic commodity, this kind of artwork loses its critical charge and thus becomes more commercially "oriented" (in a blunt, derogatory sense) than its Western analogue. A Western artwork faces a very similar problem in Moscow, Warsaw, or Budapest. This crude aesthetic objectification is due to the critical function's procrastination, which follows migration from one context to another. Paradoxically, cultural (or multicultural)[4] exchange and the artistic colonization of the Other tend to result in the diffusion of our critical vision. However useful (e.g., as an anti-alienation pill or a medicine against stagnation), this carnivalesque diffusion seems unfit as a long-term project, for it proves to be remedy and poison at the same time. Such was the case for American and French exhibitions in Moscow at the end of the


**9.1**
Igor' Makarevich, *Sotheby's*, 1989.

1950s: on the one hand, both events carnivalized the rigid and stale art life of the Soviet capital; on the other hand, they manifested the triumph of the signifier at the expense of the referent.



In Russia, as in many other countries, the masses still strive to recognize themselves in the icon of the leader. Suffice it to recall Boris Yeltsin, who was elected to office twice, not for being uniquely qualified, but because he fit the stereotype—the "collective image" of people in their deplorable state. Although this stereotype is not fully reflective of what the Russian population is really like, it nonetheless betrays some notorious qualities—such as, for example, drunkenness, bodily ruination, and arrogance. It seems that in casting their votes for Yeltsin people displayed a variety of odd emotions, ranging from self-pity to self-hatred. In fact, although his opponents tried to emphasize the president's severe health problems in order to invalidate his candidacy, these problems only helped Yeltsin get reelected in 1996. Thus, in a desperate attempt to hold on to its vanishing *entirety,* the *entire* nation painfully, if not masochistically, revealed its sickness by identifying with their *entirely* sick leader. If Yeltsin were sober and healthy, he would probably have had to fake inebriation, a heart condition, and his consequent surgery in order to succeed.

The same was true, in part, of Bill Clinton. Regardless of (and simultaneously due to) numerous sex scandals involving him, the public's desire to identify with him was never lost: his troubles reminded people of their own. For, as long as the president's personal life is a mess, it makes him no different from most of his contemporaries all over the world, thereby erasing the gap between the powerful and the powerless. Therefore, a mess turns out to be the unifying factor. This comes as no surprise, considering that unlike other (regional) means of unification—languages, traditions, national borders, and so on—a mess is easier to globalize. Perhaps this is the only universal identity we will be left with.

Today the "body-intellect" dichotomy appears to be worn out. But there were times, to be sure, when it seemed intriguing, especially when the minds of a handful of individuals were occupied with the needs and concerns of the collective body (the masses). For an intellectual who dedicates himself or herself to thinking, the Other is the one who either lacks the same ability or is deprived of it due to social (class, racial, sexual, etc.) injustice. This is true of those historical figures whose lives were chiefly cerebral, but who nonetheless encouraged the workers and the rest of the needy to gain access to material welfare and bodily comfort. Regardless of how this comfort was envisioned by Marx, Lenin, or Mao, it subsequently turned out to be not comfort per se, but the idea of it: its replacement in the form of a "comforting" mental construct. Perhaps the failure to enjoy

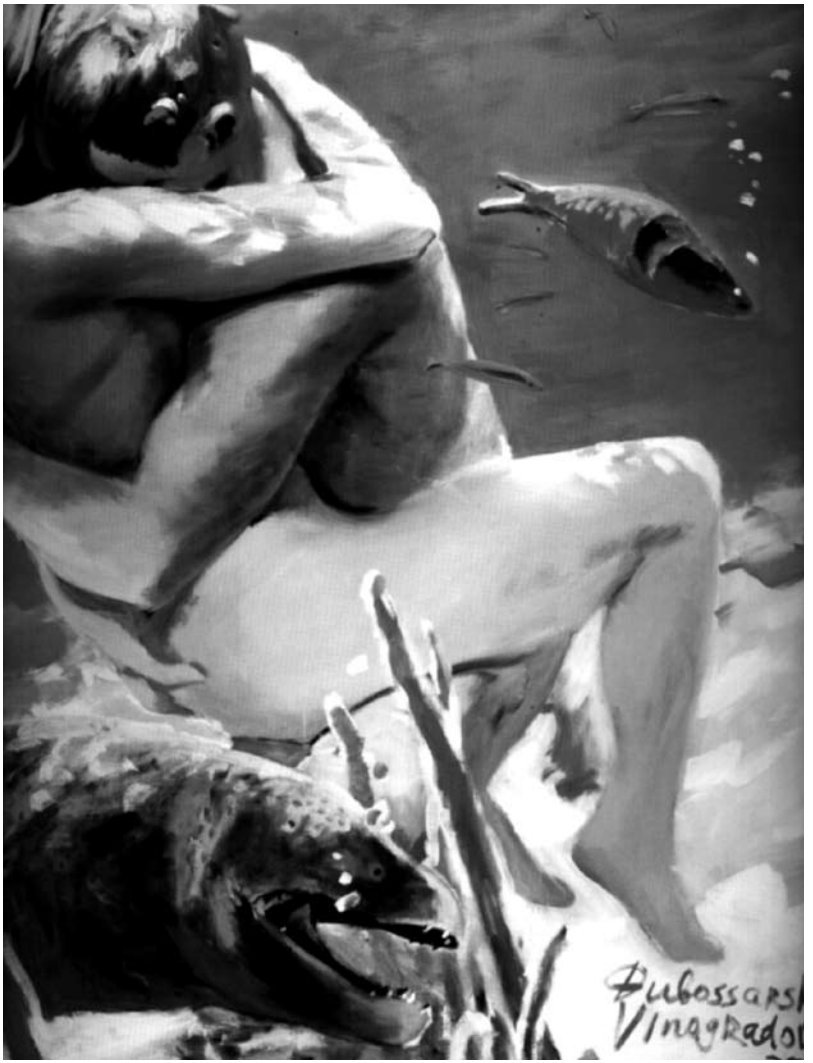
bodily wholeness and totality in a visual image, which we all experience in early childhood (the mirror stage), prompts some of us to compensate. Sometimes the compensatory effort takes a disastrous form, as history bears witness.

The bodily is far from being a harmless figure of identity. In light of the perturbations (called the "Thermidor" in chapter 8) to which Russian life was subjected in the 1990s, those in the art world who defend the right of art to be autochthonic can be compared to the pillars of affirmation: the caryatids and atlantes who uphold the status quo. Even though "the bodily" is now interpreted as "national in form," it was almost completely absent from socialist realism, which, in turn, had nothing to do with socially engaged art. This assertion also applies to the *telesniks*[5] (Oleg Kulik, Vladimir Dubossarskii and Aleksandr Vinogradov, etc.) who have been mislabeled as social artists despite being cheered on by the nouveau riche in a country swept by corruption and mercantilism (fig 9.2).

To the extent that a utopia which gravitates toward the creation of artificial superbodies is subordinated to the Cartesian (i.e., mental) eye, dystopia is governed by corporal (dis)charges. This includes impulses whose de-procrastination can occur only when utopian time has elapsed. Under the impact of these impulses, utopian superbodies begin to disintegrate in order to come together again—on the basis of a different, autochthonic logic, in accordance with which the "Thermidor" of the bodily, in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, is accompanied by an increasingly vicious partiality. The body of Eastern Europe has been dispersing nomadically. In some cases (Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya), the separation of republics and regions can be compared to a surgical intervention. And in this sense, the former Russian president's surgery (the severing of arteries, the grafting of new veins, etc.) suits these events perfectly, as if attesting to the fact that in Russia the process of immersion in autochthony parallels the contortions and agonies of territorial secession. Thus, establishing its position in the culture, the bodily becomes a protagonist in the geopolitical arena.

## 3.

As conveyed in chapter 6, the feeling of resentment toward feminism on the part of both male and female artists in Russia can also be analyzed in terms of procrastination. Feminism is suspected of a desire to expand beyond the boundaries of the communal "body-without-organs."[6] The latter is tolerant only toward the "bodily optic," which I previously called the "caressing" vision. In such bodies, critical responsibility is procrastinated: it gives way to an affirmative responsibility and abstention from



**9.2**
Vladimir Dubossarskii and Aleksandr Vinogradov, *Underwater,* 2002.

judgments, which lie outside communal identity. This, in turn, does not preclude internal conflicts: on the path of confession, everything is permitted—from the repentance of one's own sins to accusations against one's neighbor—in order to avoid a critical distance from the principle of confessionality itself. (A similar position, related to the "modern black Diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness," is characterized by Cornel West as "moralistic in content and communal in character.")[7] In other words, we are talking about responsibility from within, which does not allow either *ostranenie* or *Verfremdungs-effekt* (alienation effect).[8] If the "alienation effect," for example, is rife with the potential of apology for averted vision, in the world of communal traditions such vision is viewed as irresponsible. This world is bodily and homogeneous; it does not allow clearances for critical maneuvers whose purpose is to divert attention from interpersonal evaluation to the extrapersonal critique of institutions.

In the communal world, speech is constantly in motion: one has to leap into it as one would jump onto a moving streetcar. Considering the instantaneous nature of speech acts, the communal "I" aspires not toward maximum ethical adequacy (which would be impossible) but toward a behavioral strategy that minimizes responsibility for irresponsible moral judgments—from labels to personality cults. The combination of the immediacy of ethical intervention with its inevitable procrastination (delay, loss of tempo) challenges the effectiveness of spontaneous moral decisions formulated in terms of *maxima moralia*.

The subject of communal speech is speech itself. It is also the object of speech acts. That is why there is something hermaphroditic in the relationship between the subject and object of "logogyration," or "texturbation." This is confirmed by the permanent use of impersonal and indefinite forms ("it," "as if"), and also by the figures of blocking the referent, or silencing, through which one can see the silhouettes of displaced traumas and unfulfilled or procrastinated desires. The sphere of the conspiratorial, coded "it" (*ono* in Russian) also includes the unknown, a category exploited exclusively by Moscow's communal conceptualism—the apotheosis of impersonality, nonbindingness, diffuse sexuality, of "hermaphrodism." This last term should not be confused with "androgyny": androgynes are adepts of the sadistic superego, while hermaphrodites are representatives of masochistic discourse.[9]

Whereas the concept of androgyny is offered here as a utopian construct, as the triumph of unity over contradictions—extending to the possibility of symbolic copulation with "oneself," necessary to the reproduction of the totality—the hermaphroditic libido suffers defeat in the attempt to invest itself in itself, since it is unable to overcome the crisis of

identification. Unlike socialist modernism, which managed to retain some links with the international modernist project until the mid-1930s and from which Moscow conceptualism inherited its hermaphroditic incompleteness, androgyny is akin to the Stalinist cultural heritage.[10]



**4.**

The "Thermidor" of the bodily, which I discussed in chapter 8, is accompanied by attacks on intellectualism. This is true not only in Russia: the same is happening in Western Europe and North America, albeit in different forms and on a somewhat different scale. Critical theory and critically engaged cultural practices are being expelled from the art scene and from the pages of the art press. Apparently, an affirmation of the body and affirmation through the body is what characterizes the present situation in Russia and beyond. Accordingly, the texts written about Russian art at home are not criticism but affirmation. The diagnosis leaves much to be desired: the procrastination of critical responsibility continues, and the revival of interest in the critical function is yet to occur. So far, references to Brecht, Adorno, or Benjamin do not resonate in the "collective soul" of critics in Moscow or St. Petersburg. "Responsibility for what? Art is a completely useless thing," one Moscow artist declared in a conversation with me. Another opined that the important thing about any ("true") work of art is that "it cannot be used in any other way." The infantilism of such declarations is explained by the extreme childishness of the male half of the Russian population, including the artistic intelligentsia. This phenomenon can be described as a procrastination of adulthood. In the words of Kabakov:

> A person who feels like a child is able to escape the canons and boundaries of being in which he or she is, as it were, assigned a place. You develop an entirely different attitude toward reality. It is perceived as a theft, even though it is, in fact, not limited by anyone and therefore belongs to you in unlimited quantities. This is space without dimensions: it can be shortened but can also be expanded. What starts from such attitudes (or criteria) is the prospect of complete happiness and eternal childhood.[11]

"Be ye therefore as children," Christ urged his followers, "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Verily I say unto you: whosoever does not accept the Kingdom of God as a child will not enter the Kingdom of God." Self-perception as an eternal child (a phenomenon that demonstrates the similarity of Soviet traditions not only to Christianity, but to Zen Buddhism) harks back to a time when the burden of adulthood was placed on government bureaucracy. Everyone else was inculcated with the idea that "the

only privileged class in the USSR is children." Therefore, the prospect of the loss of such (class) privileges, anticipated by the "communal unconscious," caused the tempo of maturation to slow down.[12] Something similar is happening in today's art world, the difference being that the role of MOSKh's art councils and purchasing committees has been taken over by curators, critics, and art dealers. It would seem that if the creative personality is an *enfant terrible*, to enter a professional relationship with such a person is to engage in the exploitation of child labor, and therefore to violate both moral and legal norms. That is why relations between the child (*enfant*) and the adult do not usually go beyond the "symbolic economy": the child is expected to be diligent and well behaved in exchange for gifts and praise from adults. Such, in general terms, is the "compulsory assortment" of sociocultural infantilism. Nonetheless, the inconveniences that burden permanent childhood are more than adequately compensated by the conveniences acquired as a result of abdicating social responsibility.

An infantile vision of reality is conservative and, in a sense, reactionary, especially when held by adults. Paraphrasing Ryklin's term "terrorologic," one can introduce the idea of a "terroro-optic."[13] The child, after all, is simultaneously a prince and a pauper, a sovereign and a vassal, persecutor and persecuted. The infantile model of communal subjectivity rests on the presumption of the wholeness of the world, on belief in the totality and continuity of being, while representing, at the same time, an example of aggressive egocentrism. Following Lacan, one can maintain that "the characteristic modes of the agency of the [communal] *moi* in dialogue are the aggressive reactions,"[14] and that "aggressivity is the correlative tendency of a mode of identification that we call narcissistic."[15] From this aggressive egocentrism arises the notion of a "worldwide" cultural context as a quasi-syntagmatic chain of events, combined with a naive longing for accidents—accidents equated with de-procrastination of *le réel*—as normative events.[16] Among the paradigms of childishness is the carnival-like (festive) perception of acts of violence, best illustrated by the conviction that "even dying is good if the world is watching." Translated into the language of urban problems, immaturity is the ghetto, whose contribution to culture is nothing other than kitsch (contrary to Clement Greenberg's belief, it is not avant-garde). Those who came out of the ghetto often turned out to be the most zealous guard dogs of convention and orthodoxy, the angelic host entrusted with sentineling the authoritarian power. As a psychodrome of forcible territorialization regulated from the outside, childhood is a machine of retribution, a compressed spring of de-procrastination. Among the side effects is the criminalization of the

Russian infrastructure; from this standpoint, the post-Soviet mafia, despite its lawlessness, is the lawful heir to communal tradition.[17]

Despite their chronological proximity, childhood and youth are not metonymically close: unlike childhood, youth does not feel comfortable in the position of onlooker fascinated by the conflict and the unity of opposites. Rather, youth is characterized by social altruism, rebellion, and an intolerance toward everything invested with "paternal" prerogatives. On the other hand, the iconoclastic gesture does not befit childhood (eternal, stagnant childhood), for which inertia and a taste for an apocalyptic vision of the world are "appropriate"—whereas youth is aflame with a desire to alter the existing order of things. In other words, both youth and the youthful are missing from present-day Russia, where childhood and adulthood remain the principal psychosocial niches.



Sometimes in the course of a conversation, one surprises oneself by saying or agreeing with something that contradicts one's convictions. The compartmentalization of viewpoints and principles characteristic of verbal interaction does not apply to the written word, which, as we know, once written, cannot be erased. This happens, primarily, because oral contact reserves for itself the privileges and exemptions granted to "the only privileged class," the residents of "neverland," and secondly, because of the communal engagement of the audile signifier. In contrast to the nonbinding and immediate nature of the latter, the written and printed word cry out for responsibility, political correctness, and the necessity to connect infantile speech acts with a mature textuality. One example of this can be found in the census taken to measure the passenger load on the Moscow metro in the early 1970s. At the entrance, everyone was handed a printed form explaining the census, which had to be presented upon exiting. One passenger, in a state of extreme inebriation, staggered, balancing miraculously on the edge of the platform. Nonetheless, he did not suffer the fate of Anna Karenina and the train did not become the hero of this tale. At the end of the line, the drunken passenger had to be assisted out of the car by others. However, on ascending the escalator and seeing the representatives of the registration service, he was instantly sobered up and produced the document in question, thereby successfully performing a "socially responsible act." The return from childhood to adulthood transpired in seconds (the "de-procrastination effect"). The printed word of the form was a sobering (maturing) factor.

For many representatives of alternative art, from Kabakov to Viktor Pivovarov, illustrating children's literature was not just a matter of earning a living. The force lines that ensure the metabolism of the "body-without-organs" go through this genre. One can discuss the experience of working

in *Detgiz* (Children's State Publishing) or the *Malysh* (Little One) publishing house in terms of schizotherapy; without this experience, contemporary Russian art would look very different. The infantilization of iconography which also characterizes these artists' "grown-up" drawings is in fact a symptom of the dulling of the will to representation. The same can be said of the textual heritage of "Moscow communal conceptualism" with its characteristic borrowing of names and terms from children's books or Russian folktales (*kolobkovost', Neznaika,* etc.). In other words, infantilism is not an ornament or a carnival suit, but the defining aspect (*point de capiton*) of communal subjectivity.

In the space of communal speech, one feels like Gulliver among the Lilliputians. This effect is due in part to the infantile babble of adults, filled with words like *smertushka* (little death), *mogilka* (little grave), *bozehn'ka* (little God), *tvorozhok so smetankoi* (little cheese with little sour cream), and the like. On the lips of grown-ups, babyish lexicon manifests itself in diminutive suffixes as well as borrowings, imitations, and repetitions. "Repetition is the mother of learning," states the well-known truism imported from the scholastic practice of memorizing the sayings of great men, slogans, and literary texts. Part of the same tradition is our ability to merge with our *objet petit a* (be it a real or fictional object of love, envy, fear, or fascination), to "move in" with him or her, "move him or her in" with us, and so forth—right up to "moving in" with one's own self as a literary character. Continuing on the subject of borrowing, imitation, and repetition as attributes of schoolboy manners and infantilism, one has to mention postmodernism, for which these are key concepts. Regardless of the borders, any "spectacle order" that presently exists in the West (including Russia) can be contemplated as the play of similarities and differences between postmodern infantilism and its transcendence (the youth paradigm).

## 5.

If we agree that in the 1990s, following the euphoria of perestroika, "all things Russian" were out of fashion or going out of fashion in the West, we must recognize another and no less obvious fact: the dwindling of interest in the Russian social and cultural experiment outside its territorial boundaries is the sad culmination of the drawn-out love affair between the Soviet regime and its fans in Europe and the United States. It's enough to look at the reminiscences of intellectuals intoxicated with Russia (from René Etiemble and André Gide to Benjamin and Althusser)[18]

to understand to what extent the pre- and postwar Western intelligentsia was mesmerized, not only by the chronicles, but by the artistic representation of Soviet life; and by each triumph of socialist construction, by each unmasking of the "enemies of the people," by each nuance of the ideological struggle. In the 1990s it became clear to everyone that Russia was a sunken *Titanic* (the *Titanic* of Utopia), and the intellectual elite began shrinking from it the way a vampire shrinks from the cross. This coldness and haughtiness were payback for seventy years of bottomless spiritual and mental investment in the Soviet utopian project, which had collapsed. Once, those who looked to the future also looked to Moscow; now that life in Moscow increasingly reminds Americans and Europeans of their own past, it is mainly the would-be guardians of time gone by—that is, essentially, retrogrades—who are interested in it.

In Europe and in America, "art for art's sake," as well as its corollary myths, are, to a large extent, depreciated. However, all who professed such beliefs in the USSR were drawn into resistance to the giant machine of depersonalization by the very fact of their existence, and often against their will. And even though, compared to the legions of devotees of "socially disengaged" art in the West, their numbers in the Soviet Union were minuscule, the idiom of the artistic language they cultivated was a stumbling block on the road to the total stereotyping of culture, to "monolexism." In other words, the denizens of the "ivory tower" were paradoxically healing a world that was trying to corrupt them.

The history of oppositional modernism echoes the myth of Ulysses, who was able to blind his imprisoner, the Cyclops Polyphemus, not only literally but figuratively: to Polyphemus's question, "Who are you?" Ulysses had responded with his usual foresight, replying that his name was "Nobody." After being blinded, Polyphemus turned to his seeing brethren for help; but when they asked the name of his offender and he replied, "Nobody,"[19] the collective sanctions did not follow. Commenting on this subject, Peter Sloterdijk—in his book *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* (1983)—credits the positive aspect of physical survival, which, in the case of Ulysses, was made possible by a "negative" aspect, that is, at the price of repudiating the definition (naming) of one's identity.[20]

For Ulysses, convincing Polyphemus of his namelessness was a "minimum goal," while the "maximum goal" was to exit the cave. To discover "Being-as-Nobody" in the context of the Cyclops's optic does not equal liberation, since the cave itself serves as a metaphor for form, for definition, for naming, and, ultimately, for identification. Insofar as naming

imitates what is proper to it, Ulysses' "nobody" becomes "nobody from the cave of Polyphemus," essentially acquiring a name and address defined by a place, by circumstance, and by limitations. Thus, in the context of extracavital (beyond-the-cave) vision, uncontested by Soviet or post-Soviet homegrown myths, "nobody" is read as "nobody from the USSR," "nobody from Russia," "nobody from the Moscow art underground," etc. The fact that these names are provisional makes them eligible for future corrections, which brings to mind Socrates, for whom the act of (re)naming makes no sense unless it is permanent.[21] The first thing to note is that the Cyclops wouldn't let his "nameless" captive out of the cave, as if knowing that the locus of meaning is the name/thing relation. Is this what Polyphemus was supposed to watch over and shield from daylight? It is possible that "rumors" of the physical blinding of Polyphemus by Ulysses are the result of mythological banalization. The defect of mental vision is another matter: here, it is useful to refer to the Cartesian allegory of blindness and, accordingly, of the cave. Criticizing the new science antagonists, Descartes compared them to the militant blind man who lures his opponents into the darkness of the cave and thus deprives them of their sole advantage—vision. The repudiation of (self-) naming is remarkable in that, under the influence of such denominalization, the "body-without-organs" becomes a "body-without-a-name." This is precisely what happened to the Polyphemus of totalitarian power, discouraged by the Ulyssean cunning of three generations of Russian unofficial artists, who, until the early 1990s, avoided social identification. The procrastination of the moment of self-naming enabled them to dodge contact with society and with authorities. Ironically, in the year 2000, "*nobody* for president" was the winning strategy for Vladimir Putin. This strategy—given the Russian population's annoyance with all the usual faces—enabled Putin to take charge of the Kremlin cave. Apparently, "nobodiness" is a two-way ticket—to get out (Ulysses) and to get in (Putin).

In the post-perestroika years, the situation changed radically. The apologetic motivations that reconcile us to the "politics of nonpoliticality," attributable (in Russia) to the alternative art of the 1960s through 1980s, do not extend to the present generation of creatively engaged people. The overabundance of metaphor has given way to an overabundance of reality. And yet the death of ideologies announced by Lyotard seems to be an exaggeration, especially in the midst of stabilization of capitalism and all its corollary structures and institutions. It is precisely in these extremely complex conditions that the "body-without-a-name" loses the "buffer zone," or "isolation belt," that protects both the avant-garde and its Other from mutual aggression. In the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years, this "isolation

belt" was formed by members of the Moscow or St. Petersburg scientific and literary milieu, who comprised a significant portion of the alternative art audience. Their present-day impoverishment has deprived these artists of a supportive environment. For these and other reasons, the world of reflections has found itself pressed up against the world of flexions, face to face with the destitute population and the nouveau riche.[22] Given that "nobodiness" has ceased to be a viable niche for the post-Soviet art milieu, one is left wondering who (or what) will be its new name-maker.