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THE AFTERLIVES OF COMMUNISM:
THE HISTORICAL TURN IN CONTEMPORARY ART FROM EASTERN EUROPE

By

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A dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Art History

Written under the direction of

Jane Ashton Sharp

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October 2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Afterlives of Communism: The Historical Turn in Contemporary Art from Eastern Europe

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This dissertation examines the phenomenon of the historical turn in contemporary Eastern European art as evinced in the cross-media works of Olga Chernysheva (b. 1962), Deimantas Narkevičius (b. 1964), Paulina Ołowska (b. 1976), and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov (b. 1933, 1945). Acknowledging the heterogeneity of the communist experience, I focus my study on these five artists who have worked since 1989 both inside and outside the region in Russia, Lithuania, Poland, and the United States, respectively. Looking back at and mining the recent past through artifacts, archives, reenactments, and reconstructions, they trace the afterlives of communism by actively questioning the histories of its lived experience across the former Eastern Bloc today. They use strategies of interruption to breakdown temporal barriers and redirect the course of official and unofficial, personal and collective, national and transnational narratives that demand our renewed attention. In doing so, their many films, paintings, photographs, installations, performances, and works on paper deconstruct representations of precarity, memory, gender, and identity that are intrinsic to our global condition and respond to

widely held concerns regarding regional integrations into the art historical canon.

Extending the context-focused methodology of a social history of art and the object-based rigor of formal analysis, I argue that contemporary Eastern European artists engaging in the historical turn are not merely re-presenting the empty signs of their communist pasts or post-communist presents but are proactively shaping future histories of Eastern European art for decades to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Reflecting on the completion of this dissertation, I am humbled by the countless family members, friends, and colleagues near and far, who have served unflaggingly as resources, interlocutors, and cheerleaders over the last seven years. My journey was long and circuitous. Growing up in New York City, I rebelled against my heritage. Little did I know, it would determine my life's work. I am the beneficiary of many happy coincidences.

At Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, my research was supported financially by the Graduate School New Brunswick, the Department of Art History, and the Avenir Foundation as well as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

I am grateful to the phenomenal faculty and staff of the Department of Art History, specifically my advisor Jane Ashton Sharp, my committee members Susan Sidlauskas and Andrés Mario Zervigón, and Geralyn Colvil, who have bolstered me in my pursuits both in and outside the classroom. Amy Bryzgel, the first Dodge Fellow and now a Personal Chair in Film and Visual Culture at the University of Aberdeen, generously served as my outside reader.

I am indebted eternally to Norton Dodge and Nancy Ruyle Dodge, whose genuine passion for art and the Soviet experience produced the world's greatest collection of Soviet nonconformist art. My graduate experience was enriched by my work with the Nancy and Norton Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union at the Zimmerli Art Museum, where I collaborated with many colleagues including but not

limited to Julia Tulovsky, Irene Rybalsky, Yelena Kalinsky, Adrian Barr, Allison Leigh, Olena Martynyuk, Cristina Morandi, Corina Lucia Apostol, and Anna Rogulina.

At The Museum of Modern Art in New York, which was my second home from 2014 to 2017, I had the honor and pleasure of working across departments—first with Mitra Abbaspour, LeeAnn Daffner, and colleagues in Photography and Conservation on the Thomas Walther Collection, then with Roxana Marcoci, Jay Levenson, and the Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives (C-MAP) research program. My fellow fellows Jerónimo Duarte Riascos and Rattan Singh Johal are solid gold.

The footnotes herein would be significantly more sparse without the assistance of Jennifer Tobias at the MoMA Library, Lori Salmon at the New York Public Library, Jared Ash at the Thomas J. Watson Library, and many others comrades in arms working at libraries and archives worldwide.

The pages that follow would be blank if not for the immense creative output of five outstanding artists, whom I have grown to know and love. Olga Chernysheva, Deimantas Narkevičius, Paulina Ołowska, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov—thank you for responding to my emails, phone calls, and text messages; for answering patiently each and every question; for opening your homes, studios, and address books to me. I look forward to continuing to champion your work.

My parents Maria Szczupak and Philip Yachmetz, and my husband Bruno Nouril along with Lambchop, our French bulldog, have supported me in innumerable ways from start to finish. This is dedicated to you.

Thank you! Спасибо! Ačiū! Dziękuję!

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INTRODUCTION

Men [sic] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”

Karl Marx¹

The future is certain. It is only the past that is unpredictable.

Soviet anecdote²

The historian serves no one well by constructing a specious continuity between the present world and that which preceded it. On the contrary, we require a history that will educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity, disruption, and chaos is our lot.

Hayden V. White³

This dissertation examines the phenomenon of *the historical turn* in works produced by Eastern European artists since 1989. Facing increased homogenization as a result of the global economic forces regulating the circulation of capital, artists from Vancouver to Buenos Aires, Johannesburg to Shanghai are reasserting their unique identities by grounding their works in the histories of their local contexts.⁴ Art historians have previously identified the historical turn in recent art produced around the world but

¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteen Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Clements P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 15.

² Quoted in Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vi.

³ Hayden V. White, “The Burden of History,” *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966): 134.

⁴ My understanding of globalization as a result of the development of market economies governed by multi-national interests is informed by texts including but not limited to Joe Studwell, *How Asia Works: Success and Failure in the World's Most Dynamic Region* (London: Profile, 2014) and Robert C. Allen, *Global Economic History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For the purposes of this dissertation, I am focusing on its relevance in art history, which is explored by the following compendia: Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg, eds., *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009) and Jonathan Harris, *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). As contributors to these and other texts argue, art is yet another commodity to be produced, circulated, and consumed.

have yet to explain its particular relevance within the Eastern European context.⁵ What follows is not a survey but an examination of the historical turn that is focused on Olga Chernysheva, Deimantas Narkevičius, Paulina Ołowska, and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov—individuals who, I argue, provide unique insight into the legacies of the lived communist experience through contemporary art. Each a major artist with works circulating in the global art market, I bring them together here because their careers bridge the post-war and contemporary periods across the former Eastern Bloc. Through thorough and thoughtful analyses of key projects from their oeuvres that engage the recent past, I argue that the historical turn is specifically relevant today for artists of Eastern European origin. While communism itself is no longer a viable social, political, and economic system, its legacies endure, provoking questions about the lasting representations of its official and unofficial histories in contemporary culture. I contend that art is the medium through which we clearly can see not only the gaps but also the stitches between the communist and post-communist periods that are often historically isolated but, in fact, interdependent.

Less than thirty years after the dissolution of communist regimes across the region, the countries formerly comprising the Eastern Bloc are threatened once again by the rise of totalitarianism in the form of right-wing, ultra-conservative, nationalist movements. From their vantage points in the present day, the artists under consideration in this dissertation respond to these events by looking back at the past, revisiting the

⁵ See Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 3-22; Mark Godfrey, “The Artist as Historian,” *October* 120 (Spring 2007): 140-172; Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2009); Dieter Roelstraete, “The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art,” *e-flux journal* 4 (March 2009), accessed July 19, 2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/04/68582/the-way-of-the-shovel-on-the-archeological-imaginary-in-art/>. I will elaborate my use of this literature in the terminology section below.

positives and negatives of the communist experience. In doing so, they come up against the burden of history—decades worth of official and unofficial narratives that cannot be rebuffed or repressed but must be reassessed, rewritten, and redeployed in order to effect future change. The resulting artworks interrogate established historical narratives by radically disrupting the properties of linearity and synchronicity intrinsic to traditional historiography. They ultimately call upon us as viewers to join in questioning and reimagining our own connections to the past. Adopting this logic, I contribute toward the diversification of my field by rejecting overdetermined histories of art in favor of giving attention to a region and artists typically underrepresented in the canon to this day.⁶

Proposing a novel understanding of the practices of Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs, this dissertation re-presents them as artist-historians, who “not only mediate between past and present” but also possess the ability to actively combine different “modes of comprehending the world that would normally be unalterably separated.”⁷ Recycling, montaging, collaging, and remixing historical forms in contemporary contexts, they harness various techniques of interruption, as theorized throughout the twentieth century, to produce discontinuous histories that urgently demand our renewed attention and significantly advance a context-driven understanding of global contemporary art. Throughout this dissertation, I purposely use the word “history” or, preferably, “histories” in lower case because each artist works against an established History on multiple fronts.⁸ I do not want my language to reinforce a

⁶ As discussed in the terminology section below, Eastern Europe is difficult to define and assess. It is a liminal space—at the same time too similar and too different from Western Europe, thus often ignored. I assert that the communist experience makes the region both unique and viable in discourses of global art and cultural diversification.

⁷ White, 112.

⁸ Chapter Four is the one exception. In it, I refer to History in upper case. More so than Chernysheva, Narkevičius, and Ołowska, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov work against a single, clearly delineated, canon of art.

hegemonic hierarchy in which a certain history—that of the victor—is given unjust preference over another—that of the oppressed. This critical self-reflexivity is at the core of my writing and defines the practices of the artists addressed herein. This dissertation points to the urgency in our society today to revisit, reevaluate, and redress difficult histories before they are forgotten or, even inadvertently, repeated.

METHODOLOGY

This introduction lays the theoretical foundation for the emergence of the historical turn on a global scale while underscoring its regional import. In the chapters that follow, this will be supported with concrete examples from Eastern Europe that breakdown a teleological conception of time and challenge accepted notions of post-communist nostalgia. Here, I begin my investigation into the structures of the historical imaginary as exemplified in the work of Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs by posing a series of questions: Given the opportunity to freely choose their subject matter, why are artists compelled to mine their complex and often painful pasts? How do they use interruption as a strategy in the form and/or content of their works to breakdown temporal barriers between the past and the present? Notwithstanding the specificity, although, by no means, homogeneity, of the communist experience in Eastern Europe, to what extent does the refashioning of its historical narratives by artists speak to universal issues plaguing our contemporary global condition? In what follows, I answer these questions by viewing recent art from Eastern Europe through the lenses of labor and

I felt this specific History needed to be distinguished based on their comments made in published texts and my interview with them.

migration, individual and collective memory, gender and consumption, and finally, the historiography of art itself.

My dissertation is aligned with burgeoning scholarship on the topics of “global modernism” and “global contemporary art” within art history today.⁹ With a background in both art history and Slavic studies, I take seriously an interdisciplinary approach, reflecting on and responding to colleagues researching both in and outside Eastern Europe in the fields of anthropology, literary studies, and political science.¹⁰ In addition, the discipline of Area Studies, popularized in universities across the United States starting in the late 1940s, has rapidly expanded the subjects addressed in critical discourse over the last thirty years, allowing interdisciplinary scholars, like myself, to break down conventional Cold War binaries between East and West.¹¹ Although it has become increasingly difficult and, frankly, myopic to speak strictly in geographic (cartographic) terms, I will outline the importance of redefining Eastern Europe today in the terminology section below.

My interrogation of terms is informed by recent revisionist histories produced within and outside the field of Eastern European art, most notably art historian John J.

⁹ See note 4 and Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Paul Young, “Peripheralizing Modernity: Global Modernism and Uneven Development,” *Literature Compass* 9 (September 2012): 611-616; Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2011); Okwui Enwezor, Katy Siegel, Ulrich Wilmes, eds. *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965* (New York: Prestel, 2017); and Georg Schöllhammer and Ruben Arevshatyan, eds., *Sweet Sixties: Specters and Spirits of a Parallel Avant-Garde* (New York: Sternberg Press, 2013).

¹⁰ As cited in the forthcoming chapters: Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Douglas Robinson, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature: Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Anthony Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹¹ For a play-by-play history of the Cold War from the American perspective, see Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994). For a history of area studies and a projection of its future, see Toby Alice Volkman, *Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1999).

Curley's transnational study *A Conspiracy of Images: Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, and the Art of the Cold War*.¹² Theorizing paintings as “double agents” that actively blur and even breakdown accepted binaries, Curley rewrites a history of post-war art through the works of American artist Andy Warhol and the East-German born Gerhard Richter that embraces the contradictions inherent in the ideologies of communism and capitalism. In my scholarship, I cultivate more nuanced understandings of other, equally established dichotomies. This is essential for recognizing not only the historical range of expression within Eastern Europe but also cross-cultural confluences, which enhance our appreciation of a truly heterogeneous global world.

For example, “official” and “unofficial” are blanket terms often applied to the dichotomy of life under communism. Even though all the works considered here were produced after 1989, these terms are foundational to this study because artists like Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs were educated in this system. Official art aligned itself with the state-sanctioned style of Socialist Realism, which typically depicted positive, heroic and idealized subjects unencumbered by everyday trials and tribulations. In addition, official art was supported by state sanctioned apparatus, namely artists unions, which provided their members with material support as well as public exposure. However, many artists lived double lives, producing both official and unofficial works.¹³ The latter did not necessarily have to be dissident or motivated by

¹² John J. Curley, *A Conspiracy of Images: Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, and the Art of the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

¹³ “Nonconformist” is an alternative term applied to unofficial activities. This term is used by the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union at the Zimmerli Art Museum, which has supported my graduate studies. For more information on the self-identification of artists as official or unofficial in the Soviet Union during the second half of the twentieth-century, including Ilya Kabakov, one can consult, among other sources, Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, eds., *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews After Perestroika* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Ilya Kabakov, *60-e–70-e . . . Zapiski o neo tsial'noi zhizni v Moskve* (Moscow: NLO, 2008), 60–62; and Nadim Samman,

politics. Due to fluctuations in cultural policy across the Eastern Bloc, unofficial art was, at times, acceptable for public exhibition or publication in certain countries or during certain periods.¹⁴ Unofficial art thrived because artists not only found new ways to go around the system but also to work with it.¹⁵

The diversity of artists under consideration in this dissertation compels me to draw upon both local and global perspectives on visual culture of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In advancing my argument over the next two hundred pages, I purposely engage with secondary sources by authors writing from the perspective inside as well as outside the region. We do not live and work in bubbles, thus it is essential to acknowledge the myriad sources that consciously and subconsciously affect us on a daily basis. Communist ideologies undoubtedly shaped the languages of visual expression in Eastern Europe. However, communism was not the sole determinant in the artistic development of artists, including Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs. Claiming that would promote a distorted, one-dimensional image of Eastern European art and obscure the richness and complexity of the region not only in the tumultuous twentieth century but also in centuries prior, before the dominance of communism. Admittedly, certain texts historically have been censored, remained untranslated, or made otherwise unavailable in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, my experience has shown that internationally recognized writers, including but not limited to Hayden V. White, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel de Certeau, and Claire Bishop are just as, if not even more often,

“Between the Gulag and the Guggenheim: (post) Soviet artists and New York in the 1980s and 1990s” (PhD diss., The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2011).

¹⁴ Satellite states of the Soviet Union, including Poland, were known to be more liberal. See Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2011) and Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics in Central European Art: Reticence as Dissidence Under Post-Totalitarian Rule 1956-1989* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

¹⁵ See David Morris, “Anti-Shows,” *e-flux journal* 81 (April 2017), accessed June 19, 2018, http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_125364.pdf.

cited by local artists, curators, and other cultural workers as are writers hailing from the region, such as Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Groys, and Piotr Piotrowski—all of whom I engaged with herein. Through my diverse references, I aim to strike a delicate balance between the two. This allows me not only to critically engage with internationally accepted theories on historiography, memory, and temporality but also to rigorously advance their critical ideas through my examination of works by Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs. Bringing the work of these artists into conversation with such theoretical frameworks is not radical but logical, as they rightfully share in the same history. My emphasis on international scholarship in English underscores recent developments in the discipline: the field of Eastern European art is no longer limited to specialists but ripe for study by anyone with a passionate interest in the material. My dissertation is a testament to the opening up of discourses on an understudied and undervalued aspect of Eastern European art worthy of consideration in the local, global, and transnational contexts.¹⁶

Writing the history of art as it unfolds can be challenging, thus it is essential to foreground primary sources. I have conducted extensive archival research at public and private institutions in the United States, Russia, Lithuania, and Poland, including The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Zimmerli Art Museum in New Brunswick, the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius, and the Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw. All translations of materials cited in this

¹⁶ Recent major exhibitions include but are not limited to *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980* (September 5, 2015 – January 3, 2016; The Museum of Modern Art, New York); *Red Africa* (February 4 – April 3, 2016; Calvert 22, London); *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965* (October 14, 2016 – March 26, 2017; Haus der Kunst, Munich); *The Other Trans-Atlantic. Kinetic and Op Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America 1950s – 1970s* (March 17 – May 9, 2018; Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow).

text are my own, unless otherwise noted. Being that my professional experience is largely curatorial, I have prioritized the artist's point of view. Using methods informed by my curatorial practice, I have conducted extensive in-person interviews with all five artists at the center of this study, which are reproduced in my four appendices.¹⁷ Through our conversations, the artists have revealed intimate details about their lives and artistic practices, affording me deeper insights into their works.

“Biography means more than just a personal thing. It means the interrelationship of all processes and not the splitting of life into separate compartments: a wholeness,” said the West German artist Joseph Beuys, one of the greatest storytellers of the twentieth century who pined for connections with the East.¹⁸ Biography enlivens text, giving the reader context. It frequently serves as source material for artists, who recall and transfigure their personal life stories, bringing their pasts into dialogue with and in their presents. For art historians and curators, revising or even writing histories for the first time, biography enriches narratives, particularly those of women artists, artists of color, as well as artists of other underrepresented groups. In his book *Art as Existence: The Artist's Monograph and its Project*, Gabriele Guercio rallies for the revival of the monograph—rooted in biography—in the field of art history. Debunking the grand art historical narrative and purported objective methodologies of the twentieth century that perpetuated its decline, Guercio argues that, “The monograph model, with its obsessive focus on an individual artist, has the potential to fracture preconceived schemes of

¹⁷ I take great inspiration from the field work of Jane Ashton Sharp on Russian kinetic art and Amy Bryzgel on Eastern European performance art, both of which emphasize extensive artist interviews. See Bryzgel's online archive of interviews: “Performing the East,” accessed June 20, 2018, <http://performingtheeast.com>.

¹⁸ Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys: We Go This Way* (London: Violette Editions, 1998), n.p.

inquiry and abstract universal postulations.”¹⁹ While the lineage he constructs is firmly rooted in the Western tradition beginning with Giorgio Vasari, Guercio draws attention to how the monograph promotes multiple histories of art by allowing the art historian to account for the specificities of a given artist’s creative life. Thus, a biographic approach has proven useful for art historians and curators employing feminist, postcolonialist, and other methodologies of deconstruction.²⁰ For these reasons, each chapter includes a substantial biographical section. At the very least, biography provides salient facts on an artist’s early life and career trajectory, thus humanizing her for the reader. For Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs, their biographies also demonstrate their growing international appeal. Represented by one or more galleries internationally and already the subject of at least one solo exhibition at a major museum outside her or his home country, each artist has attained a tangible level of conventional success in the commercial art world. The increased ubiquity of their works demands an examination of their personal and professional lives. The historical turn proves to be a particularly pertinent lens through which to assess their impact as it directly intervenes in the recollection of events that have shaped their lives and careers.

This dissertation comprises four chapters, each of which is devoted to one cross-media artist, with Ilya and Emilia Kabakov considered jointly. Together, these artists draw our attention to history as a construct that is not infallible but in fact imperfectly composed of infinite holes and fissures. Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the

¹⁹ Gabriele Guercio, *Art As Existence: The Artist's Monograph and Its Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 12.

²⁰ Biography as a method was introduced to me by my advisor Jane Ashton Sharp, author of *Russian Modernism between East and West: Natal'ia Goncharova and the Moscow Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). More recent examples include but are not limited to Jenni Sorkin, *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016) and Sarah Kelly Oehler and Esther Adler, eds. *Charles White: A Retrospective* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2018).

Kabakovs use strategies of interruption to destabilize traditional historical methods used to retrospectively chronicle events in order to highlight the incongruences innate to history. In doing so, they use outmoded, discarded, decayed, degraded, suppressed, and ersatz materials lifted from their communist experiences to propose alternatives to the dominant modes of historical narration. Their artworks throw into question a teleological understanding of history as a march of progression. They reveal how the communist past is still relevant today in issues of contemporary global import, such as the politics of labor and migration, the fate of individual and collective memory, expectations of gender and consumption, and finally, the craft of historiography itself. My context-grounded analyses of their works reveal a broader cultural logic that helps us understand why the past continues to be important to us today. In purposely choosing artists not only from the former Soviet Union but also its satellite states, I acknowledge forthright the heterogeneity of communism as it once operated across the region. In my epilogue, I point to an additional example from Croatia, a now independent nation of the formerly non-aligned Yugoslavia that advances my argument and its critical frameworks, which are widely applicable across the region and even beyond.

Each chapter begins with an extended close reading of a single work of art or text by the given artist. These vignettes serve as entry points into the artist's oeuvre that is then more fully, albeit not wholly or chronologically, explored. Although the five artists dominate their respective chapters, each is considered against the backdrop of her or his unique local artistic milieu. The dozen or so paintings, sculptures, installations, films, photographs, and works on paper analyzed over the course of each chapter operate as fulcrums of history. They investigate the mechanics of historiography while entrenched

in the very narratives they aim to interrogate. Active today, Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs imbue their practices with a consciousness of past historical events and artistic movements, including the avant-gardes and post-war conceptualisms. I strategically have chosen to organize this dissertation monographically, so as to highlight the distinct contributions of these five artists and facilitate comparisons and contrasts among them, bringing about a deeper and more nuanced understanding of contemporary art from the region.²¹ While tempted by the thematic chapter structure, I purposely decided to focus on individual artists about whom there is little critical scholarship.²² While artist-focused studies like mine may risk favoring already prominent artists who already captivate our attention, monographic studies afford both the writer and the reader the space and time to become sensitized to the polemics within a given subject area. Yet, at their core, my chapters develop thematically, charting the engagement of these artists from Eastern Europe with a number of themes, including migration, labor, memory politics, and gender. My organization highlights the importance of these themes for each artist as well as the larger field of art history. As we move farther away in time from direct associations with the communist experience, my study will prove invaluable for establishing a methodology of inquiry into additional artists from the region as well as within contemporary practice at large.

Interpreting artists interpreting history, this dissertation undoubtedly reflects my personal interests and is tied irrevocably to my strong belief in the fundamental role of art

²¹ Models for this include but are not limited to Jennifer A. González, *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001); Amy Bryzgel, *Performing the East: Performance Art in Russia, Latvia and Poland since 1980* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013); and Corina Lucia Apostol, “Dissident Education” (PhD diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2017).

²² The mere existence of publications is not sufficient. For example, as I argue in Chapter Four, many have written about the Kabakovs, but few have provided informed and insightful interpretations of their works, especially within a global context.

in the advancement of society. With the aim of enriching and reshaping our understanding of Eastern European art within a global context, I do not intend this to be a systematic, comprehensive, or even definitive analysis; rather I provide a model for a critical discursive framework that advances a shared and ongoing pursuit of historical meaning now as well as into the future.

TERMINOLOGY

Eastern Europe

As art historian Bojana Pejić once noted poignantly, the writing of histories is never geographically neutral.²³ Today, “global” is a catchword often overused to describe our contemporary condition. Even though international and transnational coalitions mark many of our social, political, and economic endeavors, a regional or even a national perspective remains critical to the writing of art histories. In this introduction, I address methodological shifts across texts foundational to my field. I consider first and foremost examples of how scholars define Eastern Europe and question the ongoing relevance of its categorization in light of globalization’s homogenizing tendencies, which is seen most clearly in the capitalist economy’s control of the art market.

Once considered a marginal socio-cultural location, Eastern Europe is a construction that has become assimilated into dominant historical narratives to varying

²³ Bojana Pejić, “Proletarians of All Countries, Who Washes Your Socks?: Equality, Dominance, and Difference in Eastern European Art,” in *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, ed. Bojana Pejić, et al. (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2010), 27.

degrees since the Enlightenment.²⁴ Since 1989, several countries in Central and Southeastern Europe as well as the former Soviet Baltic states, have been integrated into the European Union as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). As these and other alliances disintegrate, what is left in their wakes? As geopolitical entities, the twenty-one countries broadly conceived as “Eastern Europe”—Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia—have been subjected to numerous reconfigurations in the name of nationalist projects.²⁵ What are the effects of these upheavals on the visual arts? How does art in the region assert cultural and other identities? Art historian Piotr Piotrowski, whose understanding of a horizontal art history is appreciated broadly across our field today, argues passionately and persuasively for a regional, rather than nation-based, approach to Eastern Europe, which embraces its position as a cultural periphery while also asserting its value in a global context. In his book *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, he claims that, despite their differences, these former communist countries share important commonalities. While inclusivity is welcomed, my extensive research into globalization and its effects on Eastern Europe has revealed that it is critical to acknowledge not only the specificity of the region but also its heterogeneity.²⁶

²⁴ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

²⁵ For one of many examples, see Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

²⁶ I present this argument in my text in the recent publication *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Ana Janevski, Roxana Marcoci, Ksenia Nouril (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018). The tensions between the local and the global, the homogenous and the heterogeneous are explored by many authors, including Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (1990): 295-310. Appadurai reminds us that,

The debate over the existence and parameters of so-called “Western” versus “non-Western” art is incredibly fraught. Within it, Eastern Europe occupies a precarious position because, while different from the “West,” it is, sometimes, not different *enough* to warrant a special distinction. After all, Eastern Europe is, at least geographically, a part of the European continent. As philosopher Keti Chukhrov has written, the West is guilty of repeated attempts to mold the East into an idealized image of neoliberal democracy after 1989.²⁷ This approach is not only neocolonial but also futile, due to key epistemological differences between the two. Instead, we should look, as Chukhrov advises, at the former Soviet Union on its own terms, which will move us beyond stereotypical Cold War binaries based on shallow readings of communist and capitalist systems. By examining the oeuvres of five significant artists from the region, my study recognizes the self-sufficiency of the specific visual and discursive concerns around the production and consumption of history as enumerated above that aligns them with other artists originating outside the Euro-American art historical canon and art market.

To the extent that they self-reflexively look Eastward instead of Westward, artists like Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs manage to counter dominant hegemonic forces of globalization, despite their enthusiasm for and participation in the

with the traditional influx from the West/First World to the East/Second World or Third World, there is also indigenization, a process through which the recipient recalibrates what is received, making it his or her own.

²⁷ See Keti Chukhrov, “Between Revisited Historical Socialism and Imported Western Discourses,” in *Post-Post Soviet?: Art, Politics in Russia at the Turn of the Decade*, eds. Marta Dziewanska, Ekaterina Degot, and Ilya Budraskis (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, 2013), 251-260; and Keti Chukhrov, “Epistemological Gaps between the Former Soviet East and The ‘Democratic’ West,” *e-flux journal* 41 (January 2013), accessed April 16, 2018, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/epistemological-gaps-between-the-former-soviet-east-and-the-%E2%80%9Cdemocratic%E2%80%9D-west/>.

global art market.²⁸ Budapest-based art historians Maja and Reuben Fowkes have elaborated the possibilities inherent in a “liberated concept of Eastern Europe.”²⁹ Although their writings chart the problematic use of the geographic designation in the wake of communism’s collapse, they maintain its relevance, specifically in the context of what they describe as a transnational solidarity among non-capitalist nations inflected by their shared historical experience of socialist internationalism. Unfortunately, the countries of Eastern Europe now also share in the increasing threat of a potential new totalitarian future. In my conclusion, I reflect on how contemporary artists from the region can continue to respond to such mounting pressure from their positions within the art world.

Cosmin Costinaş and Ekaterina Degot, two curators working both inside and outside the region, propose yet another, more cynical approach to a regionally-focused history of art, encouraging a shift away from a global or even Eurocentric perspective in favor of reconsidering Eastern Europe in and of itself.³⁰ Seeing the notion of Eastern Europe as a “building block” of the global—only one unique part of a diverse whole—Costinaş reiterates the importance of localizing discourses. Taking a slightly more polemical position, Degot warns against the essentialism and even racism of any pro-nationalist proclivities in either Eastern or Western Europe in the post-communist period. Concluding with a meditation on how the art of Eastern Europe is being incorporated into

²⁸ This is espoused by the duo Slavs and Tatars in their manifesto “The Slavs: Redeeming the East in Eastern Europe,” in *Social Medium: Artists Writing, 2000–2015*, ed. Jennifer Liese (Brooklyn: Paper Monument, 2016), 228-131.

²⁹ Maja and Reuben Fowkes, “The Post-National in East European Art: From Socialist Internationalism to Transnational Communities,” in *The History of Art History in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe*, ed. Jerzy Malinkowski (Torun: Society of Modern Art, 2012), 231-237.

³⁰ Cosmin Costinaş and Ekaterina Degot, “The Emergence of “Eastern Europe,” *springerin* 2 (2016), accessed October 2, 2018, October 2, 2018. <https://www.springerin.at/en/2016/2/osteuropa-als-operatives-konzept/>. This special issue of the Austrian art magazine featured texts aimed at finding the most appropriate label to describe artistic production in Eastern Europe.

the international art scene, Costinaş and Degot appreciate the effort while remaining skeptical of its instrumentalization on the platform of “global” art. While it is important to acknowledge that work by artists like Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs circulate as commodities on the art market, we can read other value into their works.

These more recent reconsiderations of Eastern Europe, which favor theoretical approaches, have appeared against the backdrop of earlier publications now seminal to the field. On the whole, these groundbreaking articles, books, and exhibition catalogues took on the task of mapping artistic practice geographically through concrete examples since it logistically provided a starting point from which to work outward.³¹ As Laura Hoptman explains/describes in the exhibition catalogue for *Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe*, “There has been a tremendous eagerness on the part of the West to ‘discover’ this region, as if it has somehow been lost or frozen in time... [and which has] until recently seemed for us without space, a place with a modern physical identity so unknown, and more importantly so rarely characterized, that a picture of it has to be conjured through hearsay, cliché, history, fantasy, and negative comparison.”³²

In addition to cultural geographers like Mark Bassin as well as art historians like Amy Bryzgel, who identify shared cultural preoccupations with distinct geographical

³¹ In the Russian context, Mikhail Epstein argues that geography often takes precedence in Russian studies, which is rooted in the Russian tradition of spatial imperialism. See Mikhail Epstein, “Russo-Soviet Topoi,” in *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*, eds. Evgeniy Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011). The question of access is important to consider when working with Eastern European art. Since 1989, travel to region has become increasingly easier for citizens of certain countries, like the United States of America, thanks to the Schengen Area and other visa-free borders. State archives have been opened now for almost thirty years—an entire generation—nevertheless, bureaucracy remains rampant. Language can also be an obstacle. While one may be able to get by using English in conversation, knowing the local language and sometimes even Russian is essential for reading primary source materials.

³² Laura Hoptman, “Seeing is Believing,” in *Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), 1.

locations, many Eastern European artists have taken up the task of charting their own histories.³³ Published in 2006 by the Slovenian collective IRWIN, *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* is divided into two parts.³⁴ The first comprises solicited texts by artists, art critics, and curators from Eastern Europe, enumerating what they deem to be the most important art activities in their countries.³⁵ The second transposes these people, places, and things onto a color-coded map at the back of the book. This constellation highlights the interconnected nature of work across the region. Conceived as a “(re)construction of the history of contemporary art in Eastern Europe,” *East Art Map* embraces a universalizing concept of the East in an effort to avert closed systems based on national borders. “It has been very difficult, if not impossible, to find one’s orientation in this area,” writes the group.³⁶ Almost a decade after Hoptman’s exhibition, IRWIN is still unable to locate Eastern Europe.

Additional anthologies, including *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s* (2002) edited by Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl and *Impossible Histories: Historic Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* (2006) edited by Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, as well as more medium-specific surveys, such as *Performance art in Eastern Europe since 1960* (2017) by Amy Bryzgel, have furthered immensely the study

³³ See Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Bryzgel’s online archive “Performing the East” and subsequent book, see notes 17 and 21.

³⁴ IRWIN, ed., *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006), 12. The countries included are Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, (former) East Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia. Kosovo, Belarus, and Ukraine are not included nor is the map extended to former Soviet Republics in the Caucuses or Central Asia.

³⁵ IRWIN defends their choice of experts from the region, stating that, “There is, on a local level, a memory or awareness about the events and personalities that have influenced the development of art in these territories,” 12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12. The book’s back cover features a map of the world in which the whole of Eastern Europe appears as a black hole. With its terrain and borders erased, it is a nowhere place.

of Eastern Europe in recent years. Artists working in Eastern Europe as well as in diaspora, including Alina Szapocznikow, Marina Abramović, Sanja Iveković, Dan Perjovschi, IRWIN, and the Kabakovs, have mounted major retrospectives in museums outside the region within the last decade. Group exhibitions have included *Promises of the Past: A Discontinuous History of Art in Eastern Europe* (Centre Pompidou, 2010), *Ostalgia* (New Museum, 2011), *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2016), and *Freedom is Recognized Necessity* (Stedelijk Museum, 2018), to name just a few. Despite public interest and the concerted effort among artists, gallerists, curators, and art historians alike to embrace and promote this material, there is always a need for more. Because there is still no consensus on Eastern Europe, this dissertation rejects the idea of Eastern Europe as monolithic bloc of oppressive regimes, arguing instead for a more nuanced perspective that allows for the appreciation of diverse practices from across this multivalent region.

Historical Turn

My invocation of the phrase “historical turn” denotes the act of looking back on the past, which can serve as a source of inspiration or catharsis for an individual.³⁷ As

³⁷ In the humanities, especially within art history, scholars have noted numerous “turns” or paradigmatic shifts that mark new tendencies. These include but are not limited to the social, performative, educational, and ecological turns. See Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,” *Artforum* (February 2006): 178–83; Shannon Jackson, “Performativity and Its Addressee,” in *On Performativity, Living Collections Catalogue 1*, ed. Elizabeth Carpentre (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2014), accessed June 20, 2018, <http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity>. /performativity-and-its-addressee; Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, *Curating and the Educational Turn* (London: Open Editions, 2010); Guy Cools and Pascal Gielen, eds. *The Ethics of Art: Ecological Turns in the Performing Arts* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2014). Piotrowski, cited earlier in this introduction, most famously addressed the spatial turn. This dissertation represents a shift from the spatial to the temporal turn, the latter being an umbrella term inclusive of the historical turn. I believe that the temporal turn, specifically within the context of Eastern Europe, is burgeoning and important to consider in depth in the present moment. See Piotr Piotrowski, “On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History,” *Umění / Institute of the History of Art of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic* (2008): 378–383. Architectural historian Jorge Otero-

cited on the first page of this introduction as well as below, the term has been used previously within art historical discourse; yet it has not yet been thoroughly invoked in relation to Eastern European art. Here, I have identified artists who mine official and unofficial, individual and collective, real and imagined histories. In their respective artistic practices, this allows them to consciously and conspicuously cull elements from their pasts and translate them in artworks through the use of primary and secondary sources, including artifacts, archives, and reconstructions. This dissertation makes a critical contribution to the expanding relevance of the term, as the “historical turn” in Eastern Europe designates not merely the re-presentation of the empty signs of the communist past in the post-communist present. I argue that art reconsiders and reactivates the materiality of the communist experience in order to reassert the region’s specificity in the face of a homogenizing global history of art.

My understanding of the historical turn expands upon what curator Dieter Roelstraete calls the “archaeological imaginary” in contemporary art.³⁸ For him the “artist-archaeologist” is engaged “not only in storytelling but, more specifically, history-telling” through works that deploy the artist as researcher, employ retrograde media and technology, and often serve pedagogical functions.³⁹ Capriciously identifying this trend

Pailos cites the historical turn in *Architecture's Historical Turn: Phenomenology and the Rise of the Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.). In the context of Eastern European, specifically Russian, art, it has been invoked directly by Denis Kozlov in “The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography and Doubt 1953–91,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 577-600 and Tom Cubbin in “Postmodern Propaganda? Semiotics, Environment and the Historical Turn in Soviet Design 1972–1985,” *Journal of Design History* 30, no. 1 (February 2017): 16-32.

³⁸ Nowhere in his text does Roelstraete use the phrase “historical turn.”

³⁹ Dieter Roelstraete, “The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art,” *e-flux journal* 4 (March 2009), accessed July 19, 2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/04/68582/the-way-of-the-shovel-on-the-archeological-imaginary-in-art/>. Roelstraete expanded upon these ideas in his exhibition by the same name at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (November 9, 2013 – March 9, 2014) and published a catalogue. See Dieter Roelstraete, *The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2013).

across contemporary art, Roelstraete cites artists hailing from the former communist countries of Eastern Europe as relevant because their traumatic pasts risk nostalgically eulogizing the demise of state socialism.⁴⁰ In response to Roelstraete's observations on retrospection in recent art from the region, I redress his critical omissions by deploying a more rigorous analysis of the historical circumstances that led to the rise and fall of communist regimes across Eastern Europe and its impact on artists. It is clear that he operates as a "parachute curator", dipping into content that conveniently advances his agenda. By contrast, I develop my argument through very specific examples, which I explore in-depth. Tracing how artists from the former Eastern Bloc disrupt conventional notions of linear temporality through their use of history, my scholarship enriches our understanding of the broader historical turn in art.

Before Roelstraete, others noted historical impulses in contemporary art.⁴¹ Art historians Hal Foster and Okwui Enwezor have written extensively on public and private archives, logical sources of inspiration for artists with research-based practices. Foster characterizes what he termed the "archival impulse" as not just the use of primary source material. Rather, he demonstrates how an artist's elaboration of it challenges traditional notions of authorship.⁴² The boundaries between biography and autobiography become slippery inside the archive, where one can literally weave lived experiences in and out of "history" through the rearrangement of archival documents. Enwezor, who writes

⁴⁰ In a footnote in his article, Roelstraete cites Narkevičius and Ołowska as well as other pertinent examples from Eastern Europe, such as Goshka Macuga, and artists from the "West," like Tacita Dean. His exhibition featured only Narkevičius as well as Aleksander Komarov and Anri Sala from the region along with primarily Euro-American artists, including Moyra Davey, Mark Dion, and Hito Steyerl. Of course, the choice of artists could have been led by circumstances; however, the list is disappointingly one-dimensional.

⁴¹ Whereas a turn indicates a more substantial change in orientation suggesting a longer-term commitment, an impulse is an immediate reaction, which may not be premeditated and short-lived.

⁴² Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 3-22.

specifically about the medium of photography, is more interested in the ways that artworks literally take the forms of archives as depositories for information.⁴³ By not only accumulating but also interpreting and even directly intervening in archives, artists draw our attention to the gaps in historical records.

Writing around the same time as Foster and Enwezor, curator Mark Godfrey also privileges lens-based practices as examples to define “the artist as historian.”⁴⁴ Godfrey attributes the rise of historical representation in contemporary art to the onslaught of the digital age in which traditional means of recording the past are falling under threat. While many artists engage with archives, reenactments, and even the parafiction, the true artist as historian possesses three attributes.⁴⁵ Firstly, the historical form remains just as important as the historical subject; that is, the artist is interested not only in *what* was represented but also *how*. This often leads to the exegesis of outmoded media, such as expired film stocks, VHS tapes, vinyl records, and the like. Secondly, the artist working outside the academy retains “methodological freedom and creativity” in interpreting the responsibilities as historian. This allows the artist to freely integrate multiple disciplines and modes of thinking when working. Thirdly and finally, the artist as historian responds to demands of contemporary society by “invent[ing] a language adequate to the representation of historical reality.”⁴⁶ Thus, she is able to critique master narratives and

⁴³ Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2009).

⁴⁴ Mark Godfrey, “The Artist as Historian,” *October* 120 (Spring 2007): 140-172.

⁴⁵ The following are summarized from *Ibid.*, 168-172. For more on the parafiction, see Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility,” *October* 115 (Summer 2009): 51-84. Lambert-Beatty characterizes the parafiction as “like a paramedic as opposed to a medical doctor... related to but not quite a member of the category of fiction as established in literary and dramatic art [but] remains a bit outside... [leaving] one foot in the field of the real,” 54.

⁴⁶ Godfrey, 170.

breakdown biases in the canon of art history. Deconstruction is just one of several strategies used by the artist-historians addressed herein.

Interruption

Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs are united by common modes of execution in their turns to the past, that is, through various acts of interruption in the form and content of their works. Modern theories of interruption can be traced to Viktor Shklovsky's 1917 essay "Art as Technique" in which the leading Russian formalist defines estrangement or *ostranenie* [о́стране́ние]) as an act of interruption.⁴⁷ Concerned with the increased habituation of comprehension and loss of metaphorical power in art at the turn of the twentieth century, he warned against the dangers of mechanically reproducing images. Using what he called "braked, oblique speech," writers could slow down or even halt the act of reading a text.⁴⁸ This results in sharpened perception that accentuates the role played by literary form in the reception of the world outside. It makes, in Shklovsky's famous phrase, "the stone *stoney*."⁴⁹ While an object's form remains unchanged, it is charged with renewed meaning. Through their symbolic recycling of the trappings of everyday Soviet life, Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs bridge their communist pasts with their post-communist subjectivities, leaving the viewer to parse the complicated temporalities of their works.

⁴⁷ Shklovsky inspired Bertolt Brecht, who, in 1935, used the term *Verfremdungseffekt*, which is known as the alienation effect. Brecht's use of the term is expanded upon in Chapter Two.

⁴⁸ Viktor Shklovsky, "Iskusstvo kak prijem," as quoted in Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History – Doctrine*, Third Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 76.

⁴⁹ Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.

In the decades immediately following Shklovsky's text, the German poet, playwright, and director Bertolt Brecht also advocated for interruption in art through what he defined as epic theater. Epic theater is the opposite of dramatic theater, which is a form of passive entertainment employing a linear structure and method acting meant to provoke empathy in the viewer. In contrast, epic theater is a socially conscious production that "turns [the viewer] into an observer, but arouses [the viewer's] capacity for action [and] forces [the viewer] to make decisions."⁵⁰ Interpreting Brecht, Walter Benjamin cites the goal of epic theater as "discover[ing] the conditions of life... through the interruption of happenings."⁵¹ Both in and outside the epic theater, interruption is used as a didactic tool.⁵² Interruption also produces a temporal slowing down, which allows time for reflection and, thereby, further distances the viewer from the action.⁵³ The intended result of this distancing, or in Brecht's terms alienation, is the astonishment of a viewer who is now critically self-aware. This Brechtian framework is helpful in coming to terms with the temporal discontinuities in contemporary art from Eastern Europe. Through her awareness of discontinuities in temporal boundaries, the viewer comes to acknowledge the presence of a work of art while also critically reflecting on and participating in the different contexts it stands to represent.

Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs mediate disparate histories through interruptions in the form and content of their works. Marked by temporal disjunctures, their work presents re-readings of official and unofficial,

⁵⁰ Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theater is the Epic Theater," in *Brecht on Theater*, ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 37.

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theater?," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 150.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 152.

⁵³ Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* (London: NLB, 1973), 24 and 99-100.

individual and collective, national and international histories from multiple points of view. In 1990, Arjun Appadurai argued that the quality of interruption characterizes “[t]he new global condition... a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models.”⁵⁴ Thus, these artists not only participate in an established global art dialogue but also contribute to its advancement in significant ways.

Earlier in the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin made a correlation between history and disjunction. In his 1940 treatise “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” he writes, “The history of the oppressed is a discontinuous history” while “continuity is that of the oppressors.”⁵⁵ In my study of Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs, I return to this dichotomy between historical recognition and sublimation through artworks that reverse established hierarchies of power, uplifting the oppressed by abandoning conventional temporal markers. Benjamin’s text parses different approaches to history by pitting nineteenth century empirical historicism against a more contemporary and reactionary historical materialism. Whereas the historicist closely charts the history of the victor with an isolated, teleological view on the past, the historical materialist folds multiple points of view into partial narratives on overlapping temporal planes informed by socio-economic factors. Following his logic, the historical materialist operates “against the grain of history” to “blast open the continuum of history,” which creates an interruption akin to a full-scale revolution.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Appadurai, 296.

⁵⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255. In some translations, this essay is known as “On the Concept of History.”

⁵⁶ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 261 and 262.

Benjamin's correlation between acts of discontinuity and the history of the oppressed is powerfully evocative in the context of post-communist Eastern Europe. Still haunted by the specters of totalitarian regimes, it finds itself once again in a state of political, social, and economic emergency with the rise of right-wing governments, the racist rejections of migrant populations, and severe austerity measures. For the artists considered herein, an interruption is also what theorist Marina Gržinić calls "a political act."⁵⁷ Creating ruptures in the flow of form and content, interruptions literally manifest as thresholds or borders between different parts of a work that, like in epic theater, force the viewer to stop and think. Taking on the neoliberal capitalist ethos of dissolving borders and exposing the imperialist logic underlying the multiculturalism of the 1990s dominant across Europe inclusive of the East and the West, Gržinić asserts that drawing borders is, perhaps, the only effective counter to homogenizing globalization. "[W]e need borders more than ever," she writes. "[T]o establish a border means to present, to incorporate, to take a clear political stance, to ask for a political act, to draw a line of division that can rearticulate this new world that seems to be without borders."⁵⁸ Even as conflicts over borders rage today, we still can entertain proactive ways they can be reclaimed in order to circumvent history from repeating itself.

Trauma

⁵⁷ Marina Gržinić, "Drawing a Border (Reartikulacija, Part 3 of 3)," *e-flux journal* 2 (January 2009), accessed April 14, 2018, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68505/drawing-a-border-reartikulacija-part-3-of-3/>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The relationship between art and trauma is the subject of rapidly expanding critical and theoretical writing.⁵⁹ Aiming to move away from conventional interpretations of Eastern European art, I refuse to reduce the communist experience to solely a traumatic influence on artists in the region. Although the implementation of communist ideology was imperfect at best, everyday life under communism in Eastern Europe occasionally had its redeeming qualities. Forced into getting by using what philosopher Michel de Certeau calls an ethos of “making do,” people—including the artists addressed in this dissertation—carved out alternative spaces, which existed literally or metaphorically in parallel with official social institutions.⁶⁰ Compensating for, or overcoming clichés associated with trauma, Chernysheva, identifies patterns that bridge the public space with the intimately personal landscape of her mind. Narkevičius sees the public space as multi-dimensional, reading both official and unofficial histories into the monuments and architectures that surround him. Triggered by the fanciful accouterments of the past, Ołowska cuts and pastes her way across time and place, grounding herself in the histories of culturally significant people, places, and things. Just as Ołowska operates through collage, so too do the Kabakovs. While Ilya Kabakov built other worlds around the kitchen table of his rooftop studio in the Soviet Union, now with Emilia he operates on another more universalizing plane, which is to be distinguished from his earlier, solo work. Together, they reflect on the past to project potential futures that embrace oppressed histories. The ingenuity of these artists, as expressed in the ways in

⁵⁹ Examples are legion but include Edit András, “The Trauma of Collective Memory of the Socialist Past,” *springerin* 3 (2008), accessed October 2, 2018, <https://springerin.at/en/2008/3/nachwirkungen/>. Gregg Horowitz, *Sustaining Loss: Art and Mournful Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). In literary studies, I found Cathy Caruth’s book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) particularly enlightening.

⁶⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 30.

which they “made do” is evidence of their mental fortitude and physical perseverance, despite all odds.

While I stand by my optimistic point of view, it nevertheless is necessary to establish a working definition of trauma, a concept underlying, if not essential, to the communist experience. For this, I turn to Sigmund Freud, who, in his seminal 1920 text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, describes causes and effects of traumatic neuroses, which can result from concussions, railway crashes, life-threatening accidents, the participation in or exposure to war, and other life events.⁶¹ He writes, “The chief weight in their causation seems to rest upon the factor of surprise, of fright... ‘Fright’ is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise.”⁶² In his later text *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud continues to describe the development of traumatic neurosis, starting from its origin points—a fear-inducing traumatic event—through its latency or incubation period to its final reawakening and recognition by the subject. It is at this time that trauma presents itself as a surprise, appearing “quite incomprehensible and is therefore a novel fact.”⁶³ The element of surprise as it relates to Freud’s definition of trauma is important to bear in mind, as it can be interpreted as an interruption, thus related to ideas discussed above.

Freud identifies latency, a period of intermediary for the cognitive processing of trauma, as the period most likely to be kept out of the history books. He writes, “The

⁶¹ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 10. Michael Ann Holly links Freud’s analyses of trauma and the melancholy to the visual arts in *The Melancholy Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). Through works of art, she shows how the melancholic must continually probe, returning obsessively to moments of trauma that remain unresolved.

⁶² Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Vintage Books, 1939), 11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 84.

facts which the so-called official written history purposely tried to suppress were in reality never lost.”⁶⁴ Instead, they remained silently sustained in the unconscious of humankind. Freud even calls upon the artist as the one to interrogate such gaps in memory. He writes, “Incomplete and dim memories of the past, which we call tradition, are great incentive to the artist, for he is free to fill in the gaps in the memories according to the behests of his imagination and to form after his own purpose the image of the time he has undertaken to reproduce.”⁶⁵ The work of artists like Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs disturbs this period, awakening it through acts of disruption that revive forgotten histories.

In addition, mythmaking helps to fill the gaps in the memories of traumatic experiences. Freud writes, “As often as mankind is dissatisfied with its present—and that happens often enough—it harkens back to the past and hope at last to win belief in the never forgotten dream of the golden age.”⁶⁶ Outside the context of trauma studies, de Certeau identifies myth as a kind of origin story intrinsic to the foundation of civilizations worldwide. He also links it to history, identifying its place in the gap between the past and the present where history is made. “Its [History’s] work consists in creating the absent, in making signs scattered over the surface of current times become the traces of ‘historical’ realities.”⁶⁷ There is no greater myth than the ideology of communism, which permeated individual psyches with spell-like effects similar to those of trauma: inexplicable manifestations, forgotten experiences, obsessive compulsions. Even though this dissertation is not rooted in trauma studies, exploring the relationship between

⁶⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 89.

⁶⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 49.

trauma and the historical turn contributes to a deeper understanding of the communist experience as it is processed through art from Eastern Europe today.

In studying the complex symbiotic relationship between the historical and neo-avant-gardes, art historian Hal Foster argues that the works of the avant-garde—the monochromes of Aleksandr Rodchenko and readymades of Marcel Duchamp—are points of trauma for the neo-avant-garde.⁶⁸ In plugging these “hole[s] in the symbolic order” the neo-avant-garde returns to—repeats—the avant-garde. Thus, the present gains meaning by its relationship to the past. Although Foster does not read this return as a break or disruption but a deferred action or *Nachträglichkeit*, it is nevertheless helpful in understanding the phenomenon of the historical turn in contemporary art.⁶⁹ While some artists, like Chernysheva, internalize repetition in their attention to form, others, like Ołowska, externalize it in their obsession with certain subjects. In both cases, repetitions are clearly traceable across a given artist’s oeuvre. For Eastern European artists, including Chernysheva, Ołowska as well as Narkevičius and even the Kabakovs, repetition serves as a means of reckoning with their communist pasts, which must be readdressed, in order for them to constitute their unique identities in a global art world.

Nostalgia

No discussion of Eastern Europe is complete without reference to nostalgia. Coined in 1688 by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer from the Greek words *nostos* or homecoming and *algos* or pain, nostalgia originally was considered to be a psychological

⁶⁸ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 29.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

and even physical disease.⁷⁰ Most notably the early writings of Svetlana Boym, scholars of the Soviet past have sought to define the peculiar dimensions taken by nostalgic returns to the past.⁷¹ More recently, historian Maria Todorova attributes the rise in nostalgia to the end of the post-Soviet transition, a finite period of gradual privatization and the legitimization of new socio-economic classes.⁷² She identifies a return not only to representations of the past in works of art and literature but also references to the past in journalism and politics. Anthropologist Serguei Oushakine notices a revival of nostalgia at a slightly earlier moment in the mid-1990s, when “the initial desire to draw a sharp line between the recent Soviet past and non-Soviet present gradually exhausted itself.”⁷³ He argues that, instead of rooting nostalgia in the content of an object be it a work of literature or visual art, we must retrofit rather than restore the past in the present day by reusing old forms for new purposes. Curator Viktor Misiano sees what he calls “progressive nostalgia” as a means for moving beyond the uncertainty of the immediate post-communist period, in which the newly independent nations of the former Eastern Bloc scrambled for stabilization, to a future with infinite possibilities.⁷⁴ While the manifestations of nostalgia are multifarious, its most pertinent descriptions as they pertain

⁷⁰ Helmut Illbruck, *Nostalgia: Origins and Ends of an Unenlightened Disease* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 5.

⁷¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

⁷² Todorova explores the causes and effects of nostalgia in her two research projects *Post-Communist Nostalgia* and *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe*, the findings of which were published in 2012 and 2014, respectively. See Maria Todorova, et al., *Post-communist nostalgia* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012) and Maria Todorova, et al., *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014).

⁷³ Serguei Oushakine, “‘We’re Nostalgic but We’re Not Crazy’: Retrofitting the Past in Russia,” *Russian Review* 66, no. 3 (July 2007): 452. Citing the various “academic reactions” to nostalgia in Russia today, he takes a pragmatic approach, exploring the importance of how symbolic forms change meaning over time.

⁷⁴ Viktor Misiano, “Nostalgia for the Future,” in *Progressive Nostalgia: Contemporary Art from the Former USSR* (Prato: Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci, 2007), 1. Like Oushakine, Misiano is an expatriate who, unlike those he studies, manages life in both the former East and former West. This distance from his subjects informs his framing.

to Eastern Europe will be cited here. Returning to Boym, we are reminded of the temporality of nostalgia, which is associated with a kind of loose, slow time that “desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology.”⁷⁵ Nostalgics remember history—a semblance of an objective past—only to forget it, recreating or replacing with long-lost or imaginary people, places, and things. It is “not antimodern” but “off-modern,” “not a longing for a place but actually a yearning for a different time,” and “not always retrospective.”⁷⁶ Regardless of its directional orientation, nostalgia disrupts conventional notions of teleological time.

More than just the act of dwelling on the past, nostalgia is often misunderstood and misconstrued. For example, the 2011 exhibition *Ostalgia*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni at the New Museum in New York pigeonholed nostalgia as only a means for excavating the past, of proclaiming “eulogies and requiems for a disappearing world.”⁷⁷ The exhibition, which brought together artists from both East and West, Soviet and post-Soviet generations in an effort to draw parallels among histories, ideologies, and geographies, borrowed its name from the concept derived from the German words for East (*der Ost*) and nostalgia (*die Nostalgie*) rampantly used since 1989 to describe a desire for a time before the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union. My dissertation considers how nostalgia might be activated in more innovative and progressive ways.

Artist Yevgeniy Fiks calls upon nostalgia to remind post-Soviet artists of their responsibility to “recognize the present as a ‘real time’ that require[s] critique,

⁷⁵ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

⁷⁶ Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia,” *Atlas of Transformation*, Last modified April 25, 2013, <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/n/nostalgia/nostalgia-svetlana-boym.html>.

⁷⁷ Massimiliano Gioni, “Ostalgia” in *Ostalgia* (New York: The New Museum, 2011), 25.

reformulation, and change.”⁷⁸ One way this can be achieved is by reclaiming Soviet history rather than subjecting it to denial and repression. The works of Fiks and his peers become “site[s] of active intervention,” producing a “critical nostalgia, where the work of memory becomes a tool for exposing excesses of both the past and present indiscriminately.”⁷⁹ This kind of active processing of past and present in nostalgia holds great potential for the future, toward which we all are, it is to be hoped, heading.

Temporality and the Contemporary

The projects by Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs described and analyzed throughout this dissertation challenge conventional periodization in the history of art. While not limited to Eastern Europe, this problem is particularly prevalent when considering art from this region, often because the general viewing public lacks contextual knowledge. Typically, contemporary Eastern European art is conceived in the popular press either temporally—as post-communist—or geographically—as the former Eastern Bloc.⁸⁰ Whether considered through the lens of a historical period marked by the turning points of 1989 and 1991 or a geo-political landmass comprising more than two

⁷⁸ Yevgeniy Fiks, “Otvetsstvennost’ postsovetского khudozhnika” [“Responsibilities of the Post-Soviet Artist”], *Khudozhestveniy zhurnal* 65-66 (2007), accessed March 1, 2018, <http://moscowartmagazine.com/issue/26/article/434>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ In critiquing Boris Groys, art historian Margarita Tupitsyn questions whether it is “legitimate for a critic to label [Moscow Conceptualism’s] production ‘Communist,’ when the artists steadfastly refused to be associated with that particular doctrine?” See Margarita Tupitsyn, “Conceiving Counter-Soviet Art,” *Art in America* (March 2011): 52. See also Padraic Kennedy, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and, for a specifically post-Soviet perspective, Serhii Plokhy, *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* (New York: Basic Books, 2014) and Edward C. Holland and Matthew Derrick, eds., *Questioning Post-Soviet* (Washington D.C.: The Wilson Center, 2016).

dozen successor states, Eastern European art maintains a unique relationship with temporality, namely what has been theorized as the contemporary.⁸¹

Philosopher Boris Groys defends the specificity of Eastern European art in claiming that, “Contemporary art is to the utmost degree contextual.”⁸² Living in an age when nothing and no one is neutral, viewers expect artists to engage with the social, political, and economic circumstances of their production. Confronting the solipsism that is the East-West divide, Groys refutes the idea that the East dons the hat of the “Other” to become the newest victim in the West’s selfless quest for the modern. Whereas economist Francis Fukuyama proclaimed the “end of history” in 1989 when faced with the collapse of communism and global onslaught of Western liberal democracy, Groys argues that this is a gross misrepresentation of the formerly communist Eastern Bloc because it has never been pre-modern and, therefore, needs no assistance in transitioning into the twenty-first century.⁸³ He writes that, “While the post-colonial subject proceeds from the past into the present, the post-communist enters the present from the future,” moving against the flow of linear time.⁸⁴ From this, it can be understood that the Soviet project, especially as it was conceived in the 1930s and ‘40s by Joseph Stalin, not only projected a better life for its citizens in the future than in the present but also asserted itself through social, economic, and political policies projected as already living in that

⁸¹ Here, I consider Eastern Europe inclusive of Central and Southeastern Europe. Once the largest country in the world, the Soviet Union complicates things, since its now independent states stretch into the Caucasus and Central Asia. Russia, itself, is not entirely geographically European. However, for the purposes of this discussion, I consider Russia as Eastern Europe but omit Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

⁸² Boris Groys, “Back from the Future,” in *Art Institutions of Eastern Europe*, ed. Alenka Gregoric (Karlsruhe: Badischer Kunstverein, 2008), 9

⁸³ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History,” *The National Interest* (Summer 1989): 3-18. He concludes, “The Soviet Union [effectually, all communist states in Eastern Europe], then, is at a fork in the road: it can start down the path that was staked out by Western Europe forty-five years ago, a path that most of Asia has followed, or it can realize its own uniqueness and remain stuck in history [context]....” 17.

⁸⁴ Groys, “Back from the Future,” 11.

future. Even though Stalinism perceived itself as more advanced than other cultures, it was nothing more than a fallacy—a dream factory that created “dreamers who would dream socialist dreams.”⁸⁵ Nikita Khrushchev, who denounced Stalin in 1956, continued this trend in projective thinking, declaring at the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1961 that communism will be achieved fully in the Soviet Union in twenty years. Unfortunately, that day never came to pass.

Historian Susan Buck-Morss provides a less polemical look at temporality in the Soviet Union from Bolshevism to perestroika. Unlike Groys, she considers art and politics simultaneously, disassociating the linear, cosmological time of the political vanguard from the alienating and disruptive temporalities of the cultural avant-garde in the Soviet Union at the turn of the last century. Only after art acquiesced to politics was the avant-garde forced to face “forward rather than backward, to move triumphantly into the future” instead of embracing “the lived temporality of interruption, estrangements, and arrest.”⁸⁶ Art absorbed and interpreted this fluid mixture of times. Both Groys’ and Buck-Morss’ writings are useful to my study because they establish the context out of which contemporary Eastern European art has emerged. Artists raised under communism but living under capitalism are part of a transitional generation caught between a past, which was like a future, and a future, which is more like the past they never had.

⁸⁵ Boris Groys, “Utopian Mass Culture,” in *Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Period*, eds. Boris Groys and Max Hollein (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2003), 24. The ideas explored in this exhibition are rooted in Groys’ book *The Total Art of Stalinism*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) in which he claims that, “Like the avant-garde, Stalinist culture continues to be oriented toward the future; it is projective rather than mimetic, a visualization of the collective dream of the new world and the new humanity rather than the product of an individual artist’s temperament,” 113. Groys’ theories are not without their faults. Namely, the reading of Socialist Realism as a continuation of the Russian avant-garde project remains a very controversial topic within the field. For example, see Christina Kiaer, “Was Socialist Realism Forced Labour? The Case of Aleksandr Deineka in the 1930s,” *Oxford Art Journal* 28, no. 3 (October 2005): 321-345.

⁸⁶ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 62.

This kind of temporal confusion is highlighted in the writings of anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, who identifies the paradox of late Soviet life as the experience of both “the profound feeling of the Soviet system’s permanence and immutability and the complex unexpectedness of its collapse.”⁸⁷ Although the average citizen may not have anticipated the Soviet Union’s dissolution in and around the year 1991, she was somehow prepared and even excited for this seemingly abrupt change that resulted in what Yurchak calls a “fast-forwarded history.”⁸⁸ In the twilight of the Soviet Union, people were running out of time.

This, however, as some have argued, was not always the case. The communist project inaugurated what Svetlana Boym calls “the nationalization of time.”⁸⁹ The October Revolution of 1917 was understood as “the culmination of world history to be completed with the final victory of communism and the ‘end of history,’” according to Boym.⁹⁰ By April 1989, just as Chernysheva, Narkevičius, and Ołowska were coming of age and Ilya Kabakov was resettling in the United States, Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev unfortunately was grappling with the temporal paradoxes inherent in the ideology of communism. The Soviet state’s grip over the continuum of history was faltering, as his predecessor Nikita Khrushchev’s promise of “communism in twenty years” made at the Communist Party Congress in 1956 went unfulfilled. In an attempt to

⁸⁷ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1. Also see Glennys Young, “Fetishizing the Soviet Collapse: Historical Rupture and the Historiography of (Early) Soviet Socialism,” *Russian Review* 66, no. 1 (January 2007): 95-122; Serguei Oushakine, “New Lives of Old Forms: On Returns and Repetitions in Russia,” *Genre* XLIII (Fall/Winter 2010): 409-457; and Serguei Oushakine “‘We’re Nostalgic but We’re Not Crazy’: Retrofitting the Past in Russia,” *The Russian Review* 66, no. 3 (2007): 451-482.

⁸⁸ Yurchak, 3.

⁸⁹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 59.

⁹⁰ Ibid. For more on the Soviet understanding time and history, including the Brezhnev era, which is not under direct consideration here, see Mark Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism* (London: UCL Press, 1999). This text was explored deftly by my colleague Adrian Barr in “Archaeologies of the Avant-Garde: Moscow Conceptualism and the Legacies of Soviet Modernism” (PhD diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2011).

save his country from ruin, he instated a series of political, social, and economic reforms, including glasnost (openness) and perestroika (rebuilding). In a speech, Gorbachev described perestroika in the following manner:

We in the Soviet Union began by looking at ourselves... asking ourselves the most difficult questions... set[ting] out to appraise our experience, our history, the world around us, and our own position in it... overcoming ossified dogmas and stale patterns of thinking and stereotypes...⁹¹

An act of looking at and appraising the past with the hope of changing the course of the future, perestroika can be read as a historical turn that sets a precedent for the artworks considered herein. Like the entire communist project, perestroika was temporally constructed as a hopeful projection in the future anterior, that is, a perfect or conditional tense used in certain languages, like French, to indicate something will be complete by a certain future point in time.⁹²

Keeping these ideas in mind, how does one write a history of contemporary art in Eastern Europe? Irrespective of its geographic designation, contemporary art—artwork made since 1989—that engages with the subject of history embodies multiple temporalities, requiring that it be read in and against disparate times. Understanding the temporality of contemporary art as a whole demands a definition of what *the contemporary* means for art history today. The Futurists, Dadaists, and other proponents of avant-garde art in the early decades of the twentieth century rejected history and advocated for a complete rupture with the past. In his “Theses on the Concept of History,” Benjamin describes how the present is “not a transition but [a moment] in which time stands still and has come to a stop,” creating a break that allows it to “blast

⁹¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, “The Progress of Perestroika,” *The World Today* 45, no. 6 (Jun., 1989): 94.

⁹² For example, “She will have spoken to him by tomorrow.”

open the continuum of history.”⁹³ Benjamin uses the term *Jetztzeit* or “now-time” to describe the present; he proposes a contemporary as rich with the histories of the past as it is pregnant with the potential of the future. Later in the twentieth century, George Kubler acknowledges a similar idea when he conceives of the now as the moment “when the lighthouse is dark between flashes.”⁹⁴ That flicker of darkness may be all we can know firsthand of the present; however, its other attributes are continually relayed to us secondhand as signals emanating from objects circulating with a rhizomatic or non-hierarchical networked structure of space and time.

My thinking on the contemporary advances what Claire Bishop calls “a dialectical method and a politicized project with a more radical understanding of temporality.”⁹⁵ This pits the contemporary against the outmoded notion of presentism, which denies contemporary art the rich and variable temporality I strongly argue it has. Perhaps imprecisely named, Bishop’s “dialectical contemporary” is productive because it is not limited to a certain style or period circumscribed within a rigid chronological order but is actually a flexible approach to art that causes us “to ask *why* certain temporalities appear in particular works of art at *specific* historical moments.”⁹⁶ Her approach suggests inclusivity in the sharing of multiple points of view. Like Bishop, my scholarship combines methodologies, namely formalism with social art history, to activate a definition of the contemporary that instates tangible change on the socio-political landscape without compromising art’s aesthetics.

⁹³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 262.

⁹⁴ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 14-15.

⁹⁵ Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology: or, What’s ‘Contemporary’ in Museums of Contemporary Art* (London: Koenig Books, 2013), 6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

Many publications, exhibitions, think tanks, lectures, and conferences have periodized contemporary art from 1989-1991.⁹⁷ Citing the many historical events of global import that occurred during these years, including the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Tiananmen Square protests, Terry Smith, Richard Meyer, and Peter Osborne, among others, have effectively linked aesthetic change to geopolitical shifts.⁹⁸ But what makes 1989 so different, so appealing? What is at stake in claiming this temporal specificity for contemporary Eastern European art? In considering the historical turn in the work of Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs, this dissertation interrogates the contemporary's profligate periodization from 1989-1991 by exploring the potential of a *longue durée*, which would encompass a wider range of historical events preceding and succeeding this global turning point.

CHAPTERS

My chapters are organized in order to fully examine these concepts and extrapolate a nuanced understanding of how contemporary artists engage with history. Chapter One "Tracing the Afterlives of Communism" charts the phenomenon of the

⁹⁷ One example of a think tank is the project *Former West* (2009-2016), which culminated in the publication *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017). Beyond the field of art history, the most well known text to take 1989 as its departure point is Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History." See note 83. See also Eric Hobsbawm, "The Present as History," in *On History* (New York: The New Press, 1997). "Very few people would deny that an epoch in world history ended with the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union, whatever we read into the events of 1989-91. A page of history has been turned... Whoever we are, we cannot fail to see the century as a whole differently from the way we would have done before 1989-91..." 235.

⁹⁸ Terry Smith, "'Our' Contemporaneity," in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, eds. Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012); Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013); Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013).

historical turn in the work of Russian artist Olga Chernysheva.⁹⁹ Drawing on theories of realism, rooted in the nineteenth century, and formalism, rooted in the early twentieth century avant-garde, I demonstrate how Chernysheva exhibits the scope of the historical turn. I argue that communist forms plucked from Chernysheva's lived experience collide with contemporary post-communist meanings in her films, paintings, photographs, and works on paper. As issues of labor and migration make headlines worldwide, her intimate studies of Moscow's precariat present us with new perspectives on human rights both in and outside Russia today. This chapter recasts Chernysheva as a socially conscious artist, whose work maintains a delicate balance between aesthetics and politics. Through a montage of disparate forms, her work arrests the flow of history, revealing how Russia along with Eastern Europe as a whole are caught between the past and future, embracing advancement while still standing in the shadows of communism.

Chapter Two "Marking Memories, Mediating Histories," critically positions pivotal moments in the career of Lithuanian artist Deimantas Narkevičius—from his early conceptual sculptures to his most recent stereoscopic three-dimensional film—within the fraught discourses of post-communist memory in Lithuania today. It highlights how the artist interrupts the public space, reviving, reinscribing, and rewriting history within the everyday urban landscape through his engagement with monuments and architecture. Concerned with uplifting personal rather than universal truths, Narkevičius fulfills the function of the archivist, prefacing the lived communist experience through

⁹⁹ In 2010, curators Elena Sorokina and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez organized the multi-part seminar "Communism's Afterlives" at WIELS in Brussels, Belgium. Through a series of conversations, they used specific artworks and exhibitions as examples in deconstructing the monolith that is Communism, revealing its many facets. Perhaps unintentionally, the program is listed across various websites as "Communisms," "Communism's," and "Communisms'," internalizing the heterogeneity of Communism. See "The Public School: Communisms Afterlives, accessed June 18, 2018, <http://www.wiels.org/en/events/360/The-Public-School--Communisms-Afterlives>.

individual and collective narratives that blur the line between its facts and fictions. Thus, his work questions the use of history as a document both in art as well as in society at large.

Chapter Three “Applying the Fantastic” particularizes the historical turn by focusing on the gendered experience of women in post-war and post-communist Poland as represented in the work of Polish artist Paulina Ołowska. Through a process of adaptive reuse, she reclaims lost, forgotten, neglected, overshadowed, ignored, and even purposefully erased histories through objects of popular culture, like clothing and advertisements. Rooted in the Latin verb meaning “to shout back” (*re + clamare*), reclaiming is both an act of regaining as well as exclaiming for Ołowska, whose restorative practice gathers the loose threads of history in her works to present new, imagined, and fantastic futures that empower the oppressed, particularly women, as both the producers and the consumers of their waylaid desires. As evidenced by several key moments in her career from her early works using the Polish women’s magazine *Ty i Ja* to more recent collaborative projects inflected by her life in the village of Rabka-Zdrój, Ołowska’s oeuvre allows a reconsideration of exclusions, treating history as an open form continually subject to reinterpretation.

Chapter Four “Soviet Art History in a Global Art World” tackles the dilemma of self-realization in the context of restrictive, teleological narratives of history. My exploration of decades-long projects by the Soviet-born American artists Ilya and Emilia Kabakov finds that they have maintained and even enhanced their outsider status while living and working in the West in order to successfully secure a place in the hallowed history of art. Through rigorous close readings of Ilya’s texts from the 1980s and early

1990s along with comprehensive visual analyses of five installations produced with his wife and collaborator Emilia over the last thirty years, I affirm that the duo's often-ostentatious displays are much more than what meets the eye and warrant consideration within the contexts of both local and global art historical paradigms. Paradoxically, their position on the margins has given them the authority to write and even rewrite histories through their works that comment on the past, present, and future in and beyond Russia. My argument is rooted in Ilya's own Moscow-oriented strategy of self-historicization that conceived the historian as one of many artist-characters operating in the panorama of history. Thus, the Kabakovs take us full circle, deploying the historical turn to continually reposition themselves vis-à-vis hegemonic histories.

This dissertation concludes with an epilogue, pointing to potential fields of further inquiry. Haunted by the specters of communism, artists working both in and outside Eastern Europe employ the historical turn to dissect and interrogate narratives that excavate and reassemble both individual and collective histories once repressed, erased, and neglected. As the history of the communist experience is being reconsidered and rewritten both within the region and abroad, contemporary Eastern European artists are actively participating in the way this history is preserved for posterity. Recent events, from the war in Eastern Ukraine to the repression of women's rights in Poland, have made my inquiry into the legacies of communism in Eastern Europe ever more relevant as history threatens to repeat itself.

CHAPTER ONE

OLGA CHERNYSHEVA: TRACING THE AFTERLIVES OF COMMUNISM

Olga Chernysheva's film *Trashman* [*Musorshchik*] (2011) [Figure 1-1] begins with the swelling of cymbals in a moment of darkness.¹ What follows this dramatic beginning is out of focus and indecipherable until a blurry head slowly floats into the frame from the lower right-hand corner. The film quickly centers and refocuses on a person's hands outstretched sideways with his palms up, holding open a large, blue plastic trash bag.² Other figures walk by, partially obscuring the lens as they casually dispose of bottles, wrappers, and food containers. The camera pans upward, revealing the film's subject: literally, a trash collector, an employee of the cinema responsible for collecting the detritus of middleclass leisure. This young man wears a faded orange t-shirt endorsing the American city of El Paso under his cobalt blue overalls—a standard issue uniform for janitors, builders, and other laborers. As he dutifully waits at the exit at the front of the theater, the credits for the latest Hollywood blockbuster roll behind him. As each scene fades to black, the music drastically changes in genre from classical to rock. Occurring several times throughout this six minute and thirty-one second film, these auditory shifts cue changes in mood. They impart a logistical structure, literally dividing the film into different parts, while also marking the passage of time as each score represents one of many screenings throughout a given day at the multiplex.

¹ *Trashman* is the film's English title. The Russian title *Musorshchik* could alternatively be translated as *Garbage Man*. A "Trashman" could refer not only to someone who collects garbage but also someone who is homeless or destitute, who is collecting items for reuse or even sale. By contrast, professional trash men (and women)—sanitation workers—are responsible for managing household and commercial waste as an employee of a municipality or private corporation charged with trash removal.

² His gesture mirrors that of the orant (ornas) or praying figure in works of Christian Medieval art, as well as more contemporary Russian Orthodox icons. Notwithstanding the subject's religious identification, reading his gesture as suppliant is productive. He may not be praying to a god-like figure but appealing to equally intangible forces or to humanity for mercy. Chernysheva has transposed this frame from the film into a painting now in the collection of Matthew Stephenson and Roman Aristarkhov, London. As will be shown in this chapter, the practice of transposing images across media is characteristic of her work.

With the pounding chords of heavy metal guitar riffs and the staccato rhythms of a full orchestra suite, the garbage pours in at a faster pace, filling the bag to its brim. Amidst the accumulation of Coca-Cola cups and popcorn buckets is an advertisement in Russian for the 2010 Disney film *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, giving Chernysheva's film a definite place and time. Alternating between wide-angle and close-up shots of the Trashman—literally, a man tasked with trash collection—Chernysheva adds to the visual tempo of the film. Throughout it, she pays particular attention to the Trashman's face and hands, allowing the camera to linger on these physical features for several seconds at a time as if studying their contours—his pockmarked skin of post-pubescence, closely cropped dark hair, high cheekbones, and chestnut-colored, almond-shaped eyes. As the blurred figures of people continue to shuffle past him, the Trashman remains silent, focusing his gaze outward or downward with a neutral facial expression. While he is given no voice of his own within this film, he ironically stands in for the establishment, the corporation who owns and operates the movie theater. Although his role may seem redundant—easily replaced by an inanimate trashcan—his presence is a sentient safeguard against potential hooliganism and vandalism.

Only at the very end of the film, when its credits roll, does the Trashman smile self-consciously, as if he finally acknowledges the camera's presence. At this time, we also learn the identity of our unsung hero: Eldar Usmanov, a "guest worker from Uzbekistan."³ Even for a viewer unfamiliar with the demographics of Russia today, this information should come as no surprise, as Chernysheva provides us with clues from the very beginning—his facial features, complexion, attire, and, especially, his profession.

³ From the film's credits, we also learn that its soundtrack was sampled for the various 2010 blockbusters screened at Five Stars Theater on Novokuznetskaya Street in Moscow, giving the film a definite time and place.

Chernysheva foregrounds these details that allow us to recognize Usmanov as a stereotype: a migrant employed in unskilled labor. Yet, despite this confirmation, we are still left with many unanswered questions. How did he end up in Moscow? How long has he been there? Who does he support at home, in his country of origin, with his remittances from his work abroad? Does he plan to eventually return to Uzbekistan? The answers to these questions are impossible to ascertain from the film. Presenting snapshots of a typical day in the life of the *Gastarbeiter* Usmanov, Chernysheva sutures a narrative of individually montaged units steeped in symbolic context and infused with affective value. Through her camera work, the artist does not shroud but highlights an urgent social issue that is typically masked by the monotony of our everyday lives. Coaxed into a meditative state of rhythmic sights and sounds, the viewer of *Trashman* is forced to refocus and reflect on the fate of Usmanov, who represents millions of other individuals in precarious situations worldwide.

Like the other works by Chernysheva that will be analyzed in this chapter, the film is a character study. While it provides us with a real-time glimpse into the average workday of a foreign guest worker, it is not a documentary film aimed at arming a general public with a mix of facts and opinions nor does it pass judgment on Usmanov or his predicament. It is a poetic, almost romantic, meditation on the movement of people in and out of Russia today. From it, we can only assume details, such as Usmanov's personality based on his appearance and behavior.⁴ The sole specificities attributed to him are his name and country of origin, thus he stands in for an entire group of people—economic migrants—subjugated by the demands of our global economy.

⁴ It is important to keep in mind that the film was staged with the cooperation of its subject, Usmanov.

Usmanov is an example of what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls “human waste” or “wasted humans,” the “‘excessive’ and ‘redundant,’ that is, the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay.”⁵ Thus, following Bauman’s logic, *Trashman* presents us with an ironic doubling, as Usmanov is human waste collecting the waste of humans. Because globalization has produced a planet that consumes in excess, our existence hinges upon the “dexterity and proficiency of garbage removal.”⁶ Garbage removal supports the proliferation of capitalist markets; therefore, it should be better appreciated, as the future of humankind’s existence rests on its successful operation. The film *Trashman* draws our attention to this urgency, calling us to acknowledge the invisible labor surrounding us today.

Whereas artists Deimantas Narkevičius, Paulina Ołowska, and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov rehabilitate expired film stock, old magazines, and scrap metal as materials for their works, Chernysheva is interested in the *act* of garbage collecting—rather than the garbage itself. Such mundane, unskilled labor is the subject of *Trashman* along with other

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 10. Bauman’s ideas are sympathetic to Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “bare life,” in which biological factors are given preference over lived reality. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁶ Bauman, 33. In full: “Rubbish collectors are the unsung heroes of modernity. Day in day out, they refresh and make salient again the borderline between normality and pathology, health an illness, the desirable and the repulsive, the accepted and the rejected, the *comme il faut* and *comme il ne faut pas*, the inside and the outside of the human universe. That borderline needs their constant vigilance and diligence because it is anything but a ‘natural frontier’: no sky-high mountain ranges, bottomless seas or impassable gorges separate the inside from the outside. And it is not the difference between useful products and waste that begs and plies the boundary. Quite the contrary, it is the boundary that divines, literally conjures up, the difference between them – the difference between the admitted and the rejected, the included and the excluded.” In comparison to Marina Gržinić’s understanding of borders discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, Bauman sees this border as tenuous, created arbitrarily out of practicality but now inherently necessary. Recent municipal garbage strikes, such as in Naples, Italy in 2007-2008, have shown us the importance of this labor. While artists have long used garbage as material for artworks, American conceptual artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles has developed a service-oriented practice embodied in what she calls “maintenance” art. For the performance *Touch Sanitation* (1979-1980), she shook the hands of over 8,000 sanitation workers and said, “Thank you for keeping New York City alive.” Laderman Ukeles has been Artist in Residence at the New York City Department of Sanitation since 1977. See Patricia C. Phillips, et al. *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art* (New York: Queens Museum, 2016).

projects, which bear witness to the everyday life and work of our world's so-called human waste. Her films, paintings, photographs, and works on paper manifest glimpses into the often-erratic routines of both work and leisure, visually narrating an alternative history of the oppressed. Looking to this stratum of society, Chernysheva seeks what philosopher Walter Benjamin called “the depository of historical knowledge.”⁷ In 1940, already faced with the accumulating tragedies of war-torn Europe, Benjamin understood that the physically, mentally, and emotionally enslaved classes subsisting on the margins of society could liberate themselves and future generations if, and only if, they looked back at and took charge of their past. One can rise up like a phoenix out of the ashes by learning from history.

This chapter charts the phenomenon of the historical turn in Chernysheva's studies of Moscow's precariat. Through meditations on the artist's uses of form, I trace the afterlives of communism. I argue that the historical Soviet and contemporary post-Soviet experiences collide in artwork, which presents us with new perspectives on the politics of labor and migration that shape everyday life in Russia today. Labor and migration are timely and, increasingly, very sensitive topics worldwide.⁸ But, for Chernysheva, her work is always rooted in its local context, her hometown of Moscow. “It is specific to the Russian situation that many people who are not among the ‘poor

⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 260.

⁸ In recent years, migration has garnered great interest in the media in the context of the war in Syria and influx of Syrians refugees into, primarily, Western Europe and North America. Other events of global import, including the war in eastern Ukraine, have also contributed to increased migration in and out of Russia, specifically. Immigration—both legal and illegal—is a heated topic of debate in the United States since the election of President Donald Trump in November 2016. His administration is taking extreme and, in certain cases, unlawful measures against immigrants under the guise of homeland security.

unemployed,’ but do have jobs, still remain quite poor,” says the artist.⁹ While her work gives testament to these liminal experiences within the post-Soviet context, it also functions as a cultural bridge that critically engages in a broader, global conversation.

Drawn directly from life, Chernysheva’s work is grounded in an unfettered commitment to realism, a historical approach to art making reconceived and redeemed in her work. This first, in-depth study of her work analyzes the formal language in several major works and series produced since the mid-1990s. Together, they narrate a compelling story of social, economic, and political precarity in contemporary Russia.¹⁰ This chapter casts Chernysheva as a socially conscious artist, whose work maintains a delicate balance between aesthetics and politics.¹¹ This duality is underappreciated and even ignored in the existing literature, which often provides one-dimensional readings of

⁹ “Annemarie Türk in an Interview with Olga Chernysheva,” in *Olga Chernysheva: Inner Dialog*, Annemarie Türk, Michaela Weiss, and Heike Eipeldauer (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2009), 36.

¹⁰ Other contemporary Russian artists and collectives espousing activist agendas, such as Olga Zhitlina, Haim Sokol, or the Factory of Found Clothes, are foils to Chernysheva’s subtler address of these same issues. For example, Sokol hired dozens of economic migrants for his *I am Spartacus* (2012). They reenacted the iconic scene from Stanley Kubrick’s 1960 Hollywood classic, *Spartacus*. As in the original, these men, who come to Moscow from Central Asia for better, yet still low-paying, manual-labor jobs, join forces in claiming to be Spartacus, the slave who led the uprising against the Roman Republic around 111 BC. They are stronger together than on their own. The two-minute-and-seven-second film is short but powerful, as the viewer is swept away in solidarity. See the artist’s website, <http://www.haimsokol.com/en/catalogue/category/videos/207/>. In 2011, Zhitlina, an associate of the St. Petersburg-based collective Chto Delat, devised the board game *Russia, The Land of Opportunity*. It provides “a means of talking about the possible ways that the destinies of the millions of immigrants who come annually to the Russian Federation from the former Soviet Central Asian republics to earn money play out.” It aims to simulate the trials and tribulations of migrant life for the player. See the artist’s statement, <https://chtodelat.wordpress.com/2011/12/18/russia-the-land-of-opportunity-a-migrant-labor-board-game/>. For general comments on this kind of art in Russian today, see Ketī Chukhrov, “Art after Primitive Accumulation: Or, On the Putin-Medvedev Cultural Politics,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 26 (Spring 2011): 135. In this review of the Third Moscow Biennial and its parallel events in 2009, Chukhrov singles out Chernysheva, the Factory of Found Clothes, Chto Delat, and “a new wave of realism in film-making” as exceptions to the status quo in Russian contemporary art, which shuns “the vulnerable and problematic zones of post-Soviet reality.”

¹¹ I purposefully consider Chernysheva as socially *conscious* not socially *engaged* because, as stated above, she is not invested in art as a form of activism. For an overview of the distinctions that inform my argument, see Nato Thompson, “Living as Form,” in *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, ed. Nato Thompson (New York: Creative Time Books, 2012), 17-33.

the artist that overlook the interwoven contexts of visual arts traditions, social commitments, and political consequences intrinsic to her practice.¹²

Soviet Eyes in a Global World

Olga Chernysheva was born in 1962 in Moscow, where she lives and works today. Her father was a teacher within the Soviet army system, and for two years, she lived with her family in Syria. While she did not have a typical Soviet childhood, Chernysheva was a part of the generation marked by transition—born in the Soviet Union, acclimated to life under communism, then thrown, within a comparably short span of time, into a burgeoning free-market economy. Not alone in this experience, all five artists under consideration in this dissertation experienced what anthropologist Alexei Yurchak identifies as a paradox: “the profound feeling of the Soviet system’s permanence and immutability and the complex unexpectedness of its collapse.”¹³ The volatile late Soviet period was strongly felt across all sectors of society, leaving people very uncertain of their futures.

Among the extreme changes to which Chernysheva responded was the burgeoning art market in early 1990s Russia. This radical opening up was covered in the

¹² Previous readings of her work have understood it as merely a one-to-one reflection of post-Soviet life or a melancholic retreat into pure beauty. As a living artist, Chernysheva is often interviewed, and because her practice is so cerebral, it can be difficult for both the artist and her interlocutors to divest it of its mystery. Selected monographs include Boris Groys and Ekaterina Andreeva, *Olga Chernysheva; The Happiness Zone* (Moscow: Stella Art Gallery, 2004); David Throp, *Olga Chernysheva* (London: Calvert 22, 2010); Maris Vitols, *Olga Chernysheva: White Lines – On the Ground – Dark Lines – In the Sky* (Riga: Association “Latvian Cultural Projects,” 2014); Boris Groys, *Olga Chernysheva: Works, 2000-2008* (Berlin: Galerie Volker Diehl, 2009); Ekaterina Andreeva and Robert Storr, *Olga Chernysheva: Acquaintances* (London: White Space Gallery, 2008); Silke Opitz, ed., *Compossibilities*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013); Elena Sudakova, ed., *Olga Chernysheva: Peripheral Visions* (London: GRAD Gallery, 2015); Nova Benway, *Vague Accent* (New York: The Drawing Center, 2016).

¹³ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1. Even though Poland was a satellite rather than a republic of the Soviet Union, and the communist experience there markedly different, Paulina Ołowska was conscious of a Soviet identity, as will be explored in my third chapter.

press, such as the state-sponsored magazines *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo* [Decorative Arts] and *Iskusstvo* [Art], which became outlets for a new generation of critics.¹⁴ Curator Elena Selina describes this period as “a surprisingly dynamic and fruitful time” in which “contemporary art entered public consciousness.”¹⁵ Fueled by ambition and hope, Selina and her peers pioneered contemporary exhibition making and the commercialization of Russian art, building the infrastructure upon which art in Russia still functions today.¹⁶ While this period is most well known for the outlandish performances of the Moscow Actionists, such as Anatoly Osmolovsky, Oleg Kulik, and Alexander Brenner, who pushed the limits of the body and the law, diverse practices were supported by institutions both public and private that developed in and outside of Moscow.

While Chernysheva participated in important group exhibitions throughout the 1990s and was even loosely associated with the Moscow Conceptual Circle, she distanced herself from these associations not only through her extensive travel and work

¹⁴ Having studied both magazines between the late 1970s through the early 1990s, I can identify distinct changes in both content and format around 1991. For example in the August 1990 issue of *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo*, Igor Shelkovsky writes about A-YA, the magazine of Soviet nonconformist art he published as an émigré in Paris. Not a decade prior, the KGB questioned artists, like Ilya Kabakov, about their relationship with this illicit magazine. Articles such as a December 1990 profile on Sots art, a movement within Soviet unofficial art led by the artist duo Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, read as belated embraces of prolific national talents. In addition, a section entitled “Rakurs” [Viewpoint] was introduced to *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo* in the late 1980s. It took up subjects from Soviet unofficial art, such as the artists of the Furmannyy Lane squat (January and February 1990). While Chernysheva is not mentioned, the work of her husband at the time, Anton Olshvang, is discussed. As the texts and accompanying photographs by Sergey Rumisntsev show, the squat was dominated by male artists.

¹⁵ Selina was curator of the two-part exhibition *Reconstruction. 1990-2000*, organized by the Ekaterina Cultural Foundation, the Garage Center for Contemporary Culture (now Museum of Contemporary Art), and XL Gallery in Moscow in 2013-2014. Elena Selina, ““Time to Gather Stones...”,” in *Reconstruction. 1990-2000* (Moscow: Ekaterina Cultural Foundation, 2013), 9. This essay describes the birth of the Russian commercial art world, stemming from its Soviet nonconformist roots. It was reproduced in Kate Fowle and Ruth Addison, eds., “Chronology of the 1990s,” in *Access Moscow: The Art Life of A City Revealed, 1990-2000* (Moscow: Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, 2016), 56-61.

¹⁶ These included Marat Guelman, Olga Sviblova, and Vladimir Levashov. Today, Sviblova is director of the Multimedia Art Museum and Levashov is involved with Stella Art Foundation, both in Moscow.

abroad but also through the intimate and independent nature of her work.¹⁷ In reflecting on this period, curator Ekaterina Degot, a longtime supporter of Chernysheva, singles out the artist, along with Anatoly Shuravlev and Maria Serebriakova, as one of the few dedicated to the “field of pure aesthetics... a certain perception, the phenomenological aspect of art.”¹⁸ Degot concludes that these esoteric prerogatives lend themselves to “work[ing] with prepared forms (photographs or reproductions),” which contain “no ideological connotations.”¹⁹ As this chapter demonstrates, there is much more to Chernysheva’s heavily nuanced work than even her most supportive critics have claimed. While undoubtedly aesthetically motivated and preoccupied with issues of form, it is not completely devoid of socio-political import, yielding productive readings rich in consequence. Her works serve as testaments to the histories of the deprived and disposed and challenge established hierarchies of power.

The complex feelings of excitement and melancholy pervasive after the fall of the Soviet Union as described by Yurchak and Selina are conspicuously present in many of Chernysheva’s films, including *Marmot* [*Surok*] (1999). It opens with a slow and steady pan of a crowd marching through the streets of Moscow carrying red communist flags and banners in celebration of an anniversary of the October Revolution [Figure 1-2]. An

¹⁷ See Fowle and Addison, *Access Moscow*, 188-249. Chernysheva has confirmed her involvement in the infamous Furmannyy Lane squat, but in multiple interviews conducted for this dissertation, she was reluctant to discuss the details of this early period in her career. The extent of her involvement is not adequately documented. First settled during *perestroika* in the mid-1980s, Furmannyy housed artists and their studios, including Konstantin Zvezdochetov, Larissa Zvezdochetova, Sergei Anufriev, Pavel Pepperstein, Vadim Fishkin, Yuri Alber, Andrei Filippov, Vadim Zakharov, Oleg Tistol, and Yuri Leiderman. According to Jean-Pierre Brossard in his book *Les Ateliers De La Rue Furmann* (La Chaux-de-Fonds: Éd. d'En-haut, 1990), Chernysheva occupied studio #70. Her then husband Anton Olshvang is listed in Brossard’s book under studio #29. For more information on Furmannyy, see Olena Martynyuk, “Postmodern Perestroika: Ukrainian Artistic Networks of the 1980s–1990s” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2018). The January 1990 issue *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo* highlighted the artists working in the Furmannyy Lane squat.

¹⁸ Ekaterina Degot, “Who’s Who in Contemporary Art in Moscow, 1993,” in Fowle and Addison, *Access Moscow*, 81-82.

¹⁹ Ibid.

intertitle tells us that it is one-thirty in the afternoon on November 7, 1999. Interrupting the linearity of the procession, Chernysheva steadily focuses her handheld camera on a woman in the foreground, who is oblivious to the artist's voyeurism [Figure 1-3]. This close attention reveals an uncanny juxtaposition between the vestiges of Russia's communist past and the signs of its capitalist contemporary, evident in the red and white Marlboro signs plastered on the kiosk in the background.

But Chernysheva elides this temporal clash, mesmerized instead by "something that caught [her] eye."²⁰ Bundled up in a large, light brown fur hat and pelt scarf, the woman is striking in appearance. In an almost zoomorphic transformation, she wears her fur like a suit of armor, but her perceived glamour is just a façade. Her clothes are outdated and a bit shabby—not expensive, like mink, but something cheaper, like marmot, a rodent of the squirrel family. Chernysheva makes this assumption in the film's title. Film and literary scholar Robert Bird laboriously highlights its multivalent meaning, which may not be apparent to the average viewer. The woman's supposed marmot fur is echoed in the soundtrack, Beethoven's *Marmotte* (1790-92), which tells the story of a beggar that Bird traces back to the painting *Savoyard with a Marmot* (1716) by Antoine Watteau in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.²¹ While obscure to some, these references are likely familiar to Chernysheva, who is well versed in both classical music and art history. This juxtaposition of high and low culture is a purposeful metaphor for the post-Soviet Russian condition—poor in its form but rich in

²⁰ Olga Chernysheva, "Marmot," in *History of Russian Video Art*, Vol. 1, ed. Antonio Geusa (Moscow: Moscow Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 172. As quoted in Robert Bird, "Mundane Virtuosity: Olga Chernysheva's Work on Video," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 35 (Spring 2014): 107.

²¹ Chernysheva is an excellent student of art history and would likely be familiar with this painting. In 2005, she produced *Russian Museum*, a film recorded on-site in St. Petersburg, which meditates on the relationship between the artwork and the viewer and includes many of the museum's masterpieces.

its content. Chernysheva revels in this dichotomy in this and other works that call our attention to the layers of histories inherent in Russian culture today.

Chernysheva's *Marmot* is evidence of what French philosopher Michel de Certeau described as "making do," a tactic in which one makes a bricolage of disparate things in order to "create for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order."²² For Chernysheva and others in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, that order was in chaos. De Certeau's theory proposes one way out: "Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he [who 'makes do'] establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity."²³ In the Soviet period, unofficial artists, like Ilya Kabakov, employed this strategy by forming alternative discursive circles and building alternative universes within the confines of their home. Now, in the post-Soviet period, Chernysheva navigates emotionally, mentally, and even physically challenging situations by drawing our attention to the ways people continue to make do in everyday life. "I like social geometry, the placement of the social body in space. I like observing how everything is in motion and changing, and how people find their place in the geometry of the *socium* [sic, social]."²⁴ Her works open up new worlds within a given reality through close observation of things or people generally overlooked. Her earliest film on record, *Marmot* established this formula for later films, including *Trashman*, which introduced this chapter.²⁵

²² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 30. Italics are in the original.

²³ Ibid., 30.

²⁴ Vitols, n.p. When speaking about her works, Chernysheva often cites the importance of geometry. This lends itself to my formal analyses of her works and the idea of repetition across her practice that I espouse in this chapter.

²⁵ See the artist's website, which approximates a catalogue raisonn  . <http://www.olgachernysheva.ru>

As *Marmot* progresses, its subject remains unremarkable. The woman fidgets with her belongings, even counting her spare change, as the crowd—a sea of bobbing hats—walks past. To this newfound dialectic between the individual and the collective, Chernysheva attributes uncertainty. Commenting on the film, she said, “[The force of collectivism] tries to encompass and absorb the entire person, but at the same time it absorbs the person’s uncertainty. And this uncertainty... enchanted me.”²⁶ What once was understood as a duty, is now a choice; yet old habits die hard. This two minute thirty second film ends with the anonymous woman walking away, out into the world, nonchalantly carrying a photographic portrait of Stalin.

Chernysheva’s *March* [*Marsh*] (2005) [Figure 1-4] is another bittersweet exploration of the dichotomies of post-Soviet life that takes place around a public demonstration of national solidarity. A marching band plays triumphantly outside the Central Academic Theatre of the Russian Army in celebration of the third annual National Sports Award “Glory.”²⁷ At this time, Moscow is in the running to host the 2012 summer Olympic Games, which the city ultimately lost to London. But there is still hope in the sea of white, blue, and red banners and balloons branded by Gazprom, Panasonic, and other corporate sponsors, which decorate the plaza in front of the theater. Adolescent boys sharply dressed in cadet uniforms listlessly stand guard, while a troupe of scantily clad cheerleaders dance robotically. Despite the fanfare, their facial expressions reveal that they perform their tasks in a complete state of ennui. Even the marching band, which seemed to be playing its patriotic anthems on repeat, eventually stops and casually

²⁶ Bird, 108.

²⁷ “Glory” [*Slava*] awards were active between 2003 and 2008. They harkened back to the Soviet sports award, Merited Master of Sport of the USSR. London won the bid for the 2012 summer Olympics, defeating Moscow, New York City, Madrid, and Paris.

disperses. At the close of the film, the young cadets chant unconvincingly, “I serve Russia!”²⁸ Like *Marmot*, *March* maintains a complex temporality as it captures an event that takes place in the present post-Soviet period that strongly embodies vestiges of the Soviet past. *March* is a film of mixed signals that exposes the post-Soviet generation—the future of Russia—as blindly maintaining tradition while faced with new temptations.

Over twenty-five years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia is still caught in between as it embraces advancements in certain sectors while continuing to stand in the shadow of its fraught history. The result is a culture clash that montages the old with the new. Thus, Chernysheva does not have to look very far back into the past to comment on the legacy of the Soviet Union. Rather she can look only to her present, as the afterlives of communism can be found all around her. Of all five artists addressed in this dissertation, Chernysheva’s mixing of contrasts is most subtle.²⁹ Faced with a bifurcated post-Soviet condition—pregnant with potentiality but plagued with what she rightfully identified as uncertainty—her work serves as a “pause,” a full stop from which she can take stock of the situation.³⁰ From there, she can rewind or fast forward, moving in and out of history as she sees fit.

Conveniently using the medium of the film or video installation, Chernysheva presents her work to viewers as, literally, a moment for contemplation. In his essay “The

²⁸ In Russian: *Ja sluzhu Rossiiu!*

²⁹ As it will be shown in the following chapters, Narkevičius literally splices old footage into new works; Ołowska collages the mixed symbols of disparate periods; and the Kabakovs amalgamate materials in constructing new worlds. In his or her own way, each artist considered herein visualizes bridges between the past and the present in order to affect future change.

³⁰ Chernysheva describes her work, namely her project for the 2015 Biennale, as a “pause”. See “Elena Sudakova in Conversation with Olga Chernysheva and Anders Kreuger,” in *Olga Chernysheva: Peripheral Visions*, 13. *Caesuras* was the title of her 2009 exhibition at Galerie Volker Diehl in Berlin. It extends the larger musical metaphor in Chernysheva’s practice. Here, she compares art with music, “The mission of an artist... [is] to make the contingency rhythmical. Thus fine arts and sound are brought together. I must always hear a photo.” See press release, <http://www.galerievolkerdiehl.com/galerie/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Press-Release-7.pdf>

Time Closure” written for the artist’s 2004 solo exhibition at Stella Art Gallery in Moscow, philosopher Boris Groys parses the differences in temporality between the feature-length film and the video installation.³¹ Whereas a film viewed in a darkened cinema immobilizes the viewer for an extended period, the video installation in a museum or gallery frees the viewer, allowing her to circulate unencumbered throughout the space.³² Thus, in its presentation, the video installation defies linear time, which is “replaced by the post-historical ritual of self-repetition” carried out by the viewer, who can casually enter and exit the installation, absorbing a patchwork of moments out of time. Taking Groys’ postulate a step further, I argue that these fragments, once collected by the nomadic viewer, are no longer in motion but operate as still images or photographs. Thus, in order to piece together meaning from the single frames of a fragmented video installation, the viewer must act like an animator, creating the illusion of motion through a sequence of images projected onto the screen of the mind. While admittedly an extrapolated analogy, the technique of animation is a central tenet in Chernysheva’s practice, which she has maintained since her student days. Thus, it is not negligent but ingenious for the artist to embrace film within a gallery setting as a productive medium, despite its potential flaws in consumption.

In 1986 during the twilight of the Soviet Union, Chernysheva graduated with a degree in animation from the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography, which was and still is the largest and most important film school in Russia.³³ While not strictly an animator in the traditional sense, she defines the primary task as, “Finding the essence of a particular

³¹ Boris Groys, “The Time Closure,” in *Olga Chernysheva: The Happiness Zone*, 7-15.

³² Even if the video is installed in a black box, there is usually limited or no seating.

³³ In Russian, the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography was known in Soviet times as the Всесоюзный государственный институт кинематографии им Герасимова (Soviet All-Union State Institute of Cinematography) (ВГИК).

situation and expressing it in image and sound.”³⁴ This definition can be applied to the entire body of her work, which acts centripetally upon the objects in her line of sight, distilling her plane of vision by bringing a central figure to the fore.³⁵

As a student at the Gerasimov Institute in the early 1980s, Chernysheva received rigorous academic training in a still very conservative system that valued drawing and painting as fundamental. This conservative stance, at least, made her practice multidisciplinary from the very start. Chernysheva describes it in a 2015 interview with curator Roxana Marcoci: “We were not trained in contemporary art at all. Even impressionism, while not forbidden, was not really appreciated because it was still considered ‘new’ and was the last period of art history covered in schools.”³⁶ Yet, in this same interview, Chernysheva cites on multiple occasions the avant-garde filmmakers Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, and Yevgeniy Dovzhenko as inspirations and montage, a cinematic technique that creates narratives through the disruption of traditional, linear sequences, as an important influence on her work.³⁷ This dichotomy—between the subjects officially taught and those unofficially absorbed—is characteristic of the Soviet educational system.³⁸

Another key figure in Chernysheva’s self-education was Mikhail Matiushin, a Russian Futurist artist and composer who, most notably, collaborated with writer Alexei

³⁴ “Annemarie Türk in an Interview with Olga Chernysheva,” 36.

³⁵ Particularly in Chernysheva’s drawings, the subject can be distilled to such a point that the surroundings are minimal if visible at all, creating a void around her subjects.

³⁶ “Olga Chernysheva in Conversation with Roxana Marcoci,” *post: notes on modern and contemporary art around the globe* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art), accessed June 26, 2017, http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/798-olga-chernysheva-in-conversation-with-roxana-marcoci.

³⁷ See Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1949). In “Methods of Montage,” Eisenstein writes, “Real cinematography begins only with the collision of various cinematic modifications of movement and vibration,” 79. As it will be seen later in this chapter, Chernysheva echoes the importance of movement and even vibrations in characterizing her works as “miracles.”

³⁸ George Costakis, *Moi avangard: Vospominaniia kollektsonera [My Avant-Garde: Memoirs of a Collector]* (Modus Graffiti, Moscow, 1993), 88-90, 101-2.

Kruchenykh and artist Kazimir Malevich on the 1913 Gesamtkunstwerk *Victory Over the Sun*. According to Chernysheva, Matiushin taught one “how to feel and how to be a part of the world” through his theories on color and space, systemized in his Seeing-Knowing (*Zor-ved* [*Zrenie-vedanie*]) program.³⁹ While Chernysheva’s intimate knowledge of the historical avant-garde seems expected by today’s standards, this material was not part of the standard curriculum in the late Soviet period but acquired independently, often through the good will of liberal-minded professors and coveted foreign interactions. Chernysheva absorbed these historical precedents into her works as she expanded her practice into media beyond film.

Today, Chernysheva still does not limit herself to a single medium; she produces paintings, drawings, photographs, and films. She is represented by galleries in New York and Berlin, and her work is in major museum collections, including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia; Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC; Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK; and the Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, NJ, to name just a few.⁴⁰ Her work has been the subject of numerous catalogues published by major art presses.⁴¹ Perhaps tediously biographical, this information is critical to asserting the importance of Chernysheva’s work within the global art world. While her subject matter remains rooted in the Soviet

³⁹ “Olga Chernysheva in Conversation with Roxana Marcoci.”

⁴⁰ Chernysheva is represented by Foxy Productions, New York and Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin. See <http://www.foxyproduction.com/artists/456> and <http://www.galerievolkerdiehl.com/en/artists/olga-chernysheva-artists/biography-olga-chernysheva-artists/>. She previously was represented by Pace, London, but is now represented in the United Kingdom by Matthew Stephenson, Inc., an independent art dealer. See <http://www.pacegallery.com/exhibitions/12712/olga-chernysheva>.

⁴¹ See note 11.

experience, its impact is felt equally in Russia and abroad.⁴² For the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, curator Okuwi Enwezor included thirty-five of her drawings, which align texts with images in uncanny combinations that often have double or ambiguous meanings [Figure 1-5]. They were installed, per Chernysheva's request, in a semi-private room with a bench that provided viewers a perch from which to see and contemplate the works amidst the chaos that is the world's largest biennial.⁴³ Since this major achievement, Chernysheva has continued to be very active, mounting solo exhibitions at The Drawing Center in New York in 2016 and Vienna Secession in 2017.

It is both appropriate and necessary to contextualize Chernysheva within the global contemporary art world not only because she is internationally recognized as a skilled and prolific artist based on established industry standards but also because she has not betrayed her local context. The Soviet past plays an important role in her work and, subsequently, its success. Unlike some post-Soviet Russian artists, she does not exploit this identity for economic gain or exaggerate it to market her work as entertainment.⁴⁴ She admits that it is simply an inextricable part of her; therefore, it is a part of her work: "I am... a person from the Soviet era. This is when my optics were installed, when I got all my classical examples, with all-too-insistent classical music coming from neighboring windows as the only thing on the radio except ideology."⁴⁵ The artists Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, who are a generation older than Chernysheva, have also identified as Soviet

⁴² As described in the introduction to this dissertation, the duality between the local and the global is critical to each artist addressed herein.

⁴³ Ekaterina Inozemtseva, "Ольга Чернышева: 'Я состою из 'негативных определений,'" (Ol'ga Chernysheva: 'Ja sostoiu iz 'negativnykh oprefelenii) ArtGid (April 6, 2015), accessed June 26, 2017, <http://artguide.com/posts/780>.

⁴⁴ "The Temporalities of Soviet and Postcommunist Visual Culture: Boris Groys and Peter Petrov in Conversation with Robert Bailey and Cristina Albu," *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture* 1 (2011): 58.

⁴⁵ Andreeva and Storr, 53.

years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As we move into the future—farther away from this historical period—artists like Chernysheva and the Kabakovs seek depositories of this knowledge, distilling its fraught history into works of art. Chernysheva allows us to view the world through her eyes and see the effects of Soviet legacies on everyday life in Russia today. Conditioned by the Soviet experience, her eyes are accustomed to recognizing certain indicative shapes and patterns, some of which have morphed while others have vanished, only to be found again within the depths of her memories.

The phrase “I would like to change places with you for a while, to look out at the world through your eyes,” [Figure 1-6] which appeared in her Venice Biennale installation, reaffirms Chernysheva’s foregrounding of the mechanics of sight. It associates sight with location, reiterating the importance of her Soviet experience in the training of her vision. It also bears repeating here that Chernysheva is a filmmaker, who looks out at the world through the *kino-glaz* or filmic eye of the camera.⁴⁶ On one hand, an apparatus, like a camera, obscures vision, coming in between the eye and the object. On the other hand, it acts as a second eye, which can, in some cases, enhance sight. Critics of Dziga Vertov who coined the term as the title for his 1924 film, considered the *kino-glaz* to be “more perfect” for creating “semantic segments of rhythm,” “a synthetic image,” and “a notion of the growth” of subjects.⁴⁷ In response to her flagrant use of

⁴⁶ Its alternative translations include “cinema eye” or “camera eye.” Vertov, another inspiration for Chernysheva’s work according to the artist’s interview with Marcoci, wrote, “I am the Cine-Eye. I create a man more perfect than Adam... I take the strongest and most agile hands from one man, the fastest and best proportioned legs from another, the most handsome and expressive head from a third, and through montage, I create a new, perfect man.” Scholar Julia Vaingurt has written on how Vertov and other avant-garde artists saw the camera as a prosthetic device, essential to the creation of the new Soviet person. See her book, *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde: Technology and the Arts in Russia of the 1920s* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 36.

⁴⁷ Naum Kaufman, “Vertov,” *Sovetskii Ekran* 45 (1928), 6-7 as translated by and reproduced in Yuri Tsivian, *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 295-297.

apparati, Chernysheva says, “I sketch from direct view, but I also use a lot of photographs, although never directly. When I see something, I try to take a photograph because some details can easily be forgotten.”⁴⁸ In her practice, photography functions as both an independent and a preparatory medium, expanding her field of vision.

Chernysheva’s experiments with sight allude to those of her predecessor and hero Matiushin, who aimed to enhance the capabilities of the average human eye, so as to achieve complete, 360-degree perception. Called *rasshirennoe zrenie* (expanded vision), it activates all five senses in “carefully observing nature and seeing beyond.”⁴⁹ This movement from object to intuition was the basis of his Seeing-Knowing (*Zor-ved [Zrenie-vedanie]*) program, which he enumerated in his 1923 manifesto “Not Art but Life” (“*Ne iskusstvo, a zhizn*”).⁵⁰ Following the proscriptions of his program, Matiushin and his devoted students went to great lengths to reach this immersive sensorial state through “animated, indefatigable observations of nature.”⁵¹ This required a literal return to nature through visits to the countryside around the burgeoning metropolis of Petrograd (St. Petersburg), where he established and taught at the Workshop for Spatial Realism at the Petrograd Academy of the Arts and in the Section on Organic Culture at GINKhUK (The State Institute of Artistic Culture).⁵² Chernysheva, who has acknowledged the

⁴⁸ See Appendix I. Published as Ksenia Nouril, “A Conversation with Olga Chernysheva,” *ARTMargins Online* (May 21, 2017), accessed June 26, 2017, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/interviews-sp-837925570/797-a-conversation-with-olga-chernysheva>.

⁴⁹ Serge-Aljosja Stommels and Albert Lemmens, *Mikhail Karasik: Colour Is Optics* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2015), 28.

⁵⁰ For more on Matiushin and his “expanded vision,” see Margareta Tillberg, *Coloured Universe and the Russian Avant-Garde* (Stockholm: Konstvetenskapliga Institute, 2003); Isabel Wünsche, “The Heritage of the Russian Avant-Garde: Vladimir Sterligov and His School,” *Zimmerli Journal* (Fall 2008): 6-25; Isabel Wünsche, *The Organic School of the Russian Avant-Garde: Nature's Creative Principles* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 83-116; and Oliver A. I. Botar and Isabel Wünsche. *Biocentrism and Modernism*. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016), 108.

⁵¹ Stommels and Lemmens, 28

⁵² Evgenii Kovtun, “The Third Path to Non-Objectivity,” in *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Gardes, 1915-1932* (New York: The Guggenheim Museum, 1992), 326.

impact of Matiushin's expanded vision on her work, interprets his methods within the context of her contemporary urban life.⁵³

By acknowledging the influence of Matiushin and other seminal figures of modern Russian culture on Chernysheva, we can come to better recognize and appreciate the breadth and depth of her practice. These discursive histories not only situate her work within the Russian context but also provide a springboard for her formal experiments. My turn to specifically Formalist theories is historically motivated, as these ideas were actively suppressed in the Soviet period and now are ripe for revival. In his essay "Art as Technique" written in the revolutionary year of 1917, the preeminent Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky defined the term estrangement (*отчужение* [*ostranenie*]) and forever changed the course of literary and visual studies.⁵⁴ Rallying against Symbolist theories popular at the turn of the twentieth century that promoted art as "thinking in images," Shklovsky warned against the dangers of habituated comprehension.⁵⁵ By passively replacing things with symbols, one sees only forms without meanings. This constrains the joy of discovery and leaves nothing open to interpretation. Habituation disappointed Shklovsky, who made an even earlier connection between the perception of art's formal qualities and that of reality. "Art exists... to make one feel things, to make the stone

⁵³ Chernysheva sketches directly from life. Depending on the circumstances, she may also use photographs to capture additional details. See Appendix I. Her use of montage complement's Matiushin's theories. According to scholar John MacKay, montage as practiced by Dziga Vertov was "a way of making the interrelationships between these disparate phenomena visible," thus "expand[ing] the boundaries of visual perception as such." See John MacKay, "Disorganized Noise: 'Enthusiasm' and the Ear of the Collective," *KinoKultura Journal* 7 (January 2005), accessed June 9, 2018, <http://www.kinokultura.com/articles/jan05-mackay.html>, as quoted in John MacKay, "Film Energy: Process and Metanarrative in Dziga Vertov's 'The Eleventh Year,'" *October* 121 (Summer 2007): 49.

⁵⁴ Bertolt Brecht was inspired by Shklovsky in 1935, when he used the term *Verfremdungseffekt*, literally "making strange effect," also known as the alienation effect. Brecht's use of the term is expanded in my chapter on the work of Lithuanian artist Deimantas Narkevičius. While Shklovsky was a linguist and primarily concerned with language as a form within literature, he did write about the other arts occasionally and his ideas are easily carried over.

⁵⁵ Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 11

stony,” he most famously wrote.⁵⁶ Through this kind of activated perception—a blatant interruption in our viewing experience—we are able to see not just the form of an object but also its artifice laid bare.

Shklovsky’s enhanced perception—a predecessor to Matiushin’s later expanded vision—and the resulting advanced comprehension require greater effort as they can be achieved only through the defamiliarization of things, which takes things out of their normal context.⁵⁷ The process of defamiliarization begins with the writer or artist, who, like Chernysheva, must think hard about and look long enough at something in order to “make forms difficult” and present something old in a new way. Then, the viewer must work equally hard to recognize and gain meaning from this work of art, whether a novel or a photograph. “Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important,” writes Shklovsky.⁵⁸ The object is only the vessel used to convey meaning, which is best attained through prolonged, individualized experiences. Like Matiushin, Shklovsky understood the interconnectedness of all forms in nature. Of course, this necessitates time and the repeated close observation of objects.

For Shklovsky, *ostranenie* or the making strange of an object depends on the material articulation of its represented form.⁵⁹ “Things rebel, they shed their old names and, with new ones, they take on new configurations,” Shklovsky writes, describing the semantic shift performed by a writer or artist in a work of art.⁶⁰ Through the process of *ostranenie*, an object’s form or structure may not physically change—a stone is still a

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁷ For Shklovsky, it is the reader. Leo Tolstoy is his example. Ibid., 13-18.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 12

⁵⁹ Ibid., 18

⁶⁰ Viktor Shklovsky, *Literatura i kinomatograf* (Berlin: Russkoe universal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1923), 12. See also Viktor Shklovsky, *Literature and Cinematography*, trans. Irina Masinovsky (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008), 14.

small piece of a larger rock made of minerals—it just is presented differently, thereby, understood in an alternative way. The form is renewed, even if it continues to embody both its old and new meanings. This multiplicity of meanings within a single form is important. As a result, no two interpretations can be exactly the same. This lends itself to art, which is perpetually reinterpreted by new viewers who encounter the work over time.

In his 1923 book *Literature and Cinematography*, Shklovsky applies the concept of *ostranenie* directly to the arts of music, painting, literature, and film. He speaks out against the use of form as ornament or applied art, which is decorative and devoid of representation or meaning. Shklovsky writes, “An artist holds on to representation, to the world, not in order to create the world but to use in his creative work more complex and rewarding material.”⁶¹ Advocating for form, he reminds us that paintings are “not windows into a different world—they are things.”⁶² Emphasizing the objecthood of painting, Shklovsky points to the responsibility of artists in representing the world around us, which we likely take for granted. In this way, *ostranenie*, which results in a hypersensitive awareness of the people, places, and things around us—and a slowing down of perception itself—paradoxically supports Chernysheva’s approach of realism, argued in this chapter.

The Shape of Miracles

Chernysheva powerfully enacts Shklovsky’s principle of *ostranenie* in *Waiting for the Miracle*, her most iconic series of photographs, produced in 2000. A large, bulbous, and fuzzy form floats in the foreground, at the very edge of the picture plane.

⁶¹ Shklovsky, *Literature and Cinematography*, 7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 7

What is it? The frayed tip of a hot pink highlighter? A post-apocalyptic neon bird's nest? A bud on a flowering coniferous shrub? Or is that the lollipop you dropped on the carpet? Faced with an abstract image devoid of immediate context, one takes consolation in what one knows, what one can see—colors, textures, patterns, forms. Shot on the streets of Moscow in the colder months, these photographs are, in fact, of the back of women's heads against the blurred cityscape [Figure 1-7]. In their composition, they reveal little about their subjects, women presumably middle-aged or even older, wearing brightly colored, richly textured, knitted hats.

The series *Waiting for the Miracle* is difficult to situate temporally because its subjects are unknown. The photographs can be read through the lens of multiple generations since it is impossible to gauge the ages of these women. The series can be interpreted as a homage to the *babushka* or grandmother, a title also ingloriously reserved for any older woman. When installed, Chernysheva's photographs give an intimate monumentality to these women, who are now often overlooked but were once the cornerstones of Soviet society. These women could also be a part of the subsequent, post-war generation. In their blossoming youth during the relatively lenient rule of Nikita Khrushchev (1958-1964), they were promised a glorious life filled with great technological advancements under communism. The miracle they anticipated never arrived, and today, they live in the shadows of those empty promises.

Yet another reading of the series can be made from the perspective of the youthful, post-Soviet generation. Armed with purchasing power in the free-market capitalist economy of Russia today, you can buy anything you desire—if you have the money to pay for it; yet this does not guarantee you complete satisfaction. This was not

always the case, as the distribution of goods in the Soviet Union operated under a closed system rife with limitations and shortages on items. While not a direct reference to the hardships faced under communism, *Waiting for the Miracle* can be read as an allusion to this traumatic past. On the surface, the series may appear to be less socially motivated than other works or series by Chernysheva, such as *Trashman*; however, it provides a sharp commentary on contemporary Russian society through aesthetics alone. The power of this series, like so many others now recognized by both critics and the market, is Chernysheva's habitual return to repetition, which enables her to produce relevant and impactful artwork without aggrandizing or instrumentalizing her personal politics. While her work could never be construed as activist art, it possesses immense social consequence for its subjects and viewers alike.

According to Chernysheva, miracles are “the small discoveries that make [one] stop and marvel... both seen and unseen... familiar and unfamiliar objects.”⁶³ Thus, the miracle for which we eagerly await is—consciously or subconsciously—right in front of our eyes. We just need a simple change in perspective or a dose of Shklovsky's *ostranenie*. In *Waiting for the Miracle*, this is manifested in how one sees the forms—“how those hats look like flowers and vice versa.”⁶⁴ The series began with a form that caught Chernysheva's eye. “I remember it very well,” she says, “It was on a trolley bus. I saw a woman in a mohair hat. She was sitting close to the window... It was such a nice combination of these two structures and I took a picture—that was when I started.”⁶⁵ In this moment, Chernysheva not only put Shklovsky's *ostranenie* to the test, seeing two

⁶³ See Appendix I.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “Olga Chernysheva's Spheres of Influence,” *Phaidon*, accessed June 26, 2017, <http://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2014/november/26/olga-chernyshevas-spheres-of-influence/>.

ordinary objects in a new way, but also challenged it. The stone did not become more “stoney” but something entirely different. By suspending belief in the known, she created a hybrid form that became the subject of her work. Despite its repetition throughout the series, she does not exhaust this form, presenting it each time with only slight deviations.

After Shklovsky and in the broader European context, this correlation among forms is activated by Henri Focillon, one of the most prolific and poetic writers on the subject in the twentieth century. Focillon defines a work of art as “form, and as form it must make itself known to us.”⁶⁶ Acting as an interruption in the viewing experience, form grabs our attention, revealing an object’s meaning independent of any later imposed by the viewer. Transgressing medium, forms create groups or hierarchies of style that systematize and regularize forms; nevertheless, a singular form continues to be independent, “a mobile life in a changing world [with its] metamorphoses endlessly begin[ing] anew.”⁶⁷ The malleability and mobility of form is central to *Waiting for a Miracle* as well as Chernysheva’s work at large.

Forms, as Focillon describes them, are tethered to the ebb and flow of the time that meters everyday life. “A work of art is motionless only in appearance... it is born of change, and it leads on to other changes.”⁶⁸ He calls this the “mobility of forms.”⁶⁹ The result is an infinite number of shapes that are “not the result of chance” but rules specific to the forms themselves.⁷⁰ Thus, an artwork is not always what it may seem to be upon first glance and requires patience on the part of the viewer in order to see its full

⁶⁶ Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles B. Hogan and George Kubler (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 33.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 52.

potential. “Things—people, places, objects—are alive and pulsate. *This* is the miracle...” says Chernysheva.⁷¹ While motion is an essential attribute of her miracles, it has its limits, namely in its reception. The artist can only provide the viewer with signposts, while the viewer must be spurred not only to read, but also to react to them. This is where Shklovsky’s *ostranenie* comes into play again, as the forms within a work of art serve as interruptions meant to shock the viewer into action, ideally both within and outside the context of the work of art.

Motion is inextricably tied to the cinematic arts, thus, Chernysheva’s intuition for movement undoubtedly stems from her background as an animator for whom “every picture has the capacity to be alive.”⁷² In her two-dimensional works, this is most clearly seen in her drawings combining text and image, which are individually framed but hung in groups that may be small in size but great in scale [Figure 1-5].⁷³ The texts operate as intertitles that, like different camera’s angles, make each image anew.⁷⁴ Seen together, the images and texts read as storyboards or montages that put into motion the people, places, and things the artist encounters daily. Achieving a kind of repetition with difference, her work rejects the notion of a singular, continuous narrative in favor of being like an “open net,” through which things can come and go.⁷⁵ This approach invokes Eisenstein, one of Chernysheva’s many idols whose “cinematism” reconceived the

⁷¹ See Appendix I.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ This recalls one of the four tenants of arche-drawings as enumerated by Yve-Alain Bois and exemplified by Henri Matisse. See Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 24-26. Matisse is quoted as saying, “The work can be large in spite of its restricted format.” While I acknowledge Bois’ idea of the “arche-drawing” as an innovative deconstructing of the creative process in the modernist era, I do not find it a particularly productive concept for Chernysheva’s work because her work is not founded on the basis of difference between drawing and painting, as her forms migrate seamlessly across media.

⁷⁴ The connection between camera angles and intertitles is observed by none other than Viktor Shklovsky. See MacKay, “Film Energy: Process and Metanarrative in Dziga Vertov’s “The Eleventh Year” (1928), 64.

⁷⁵ See Appendix I.

temporality of the static image as well as our perception of sequence in and beyond the medium of film.⁷⁶ In his writings, Eisenstein describes his process in the following manner: “When making a montage construction, you must also assemble and disassemble the segments, combining them until you reach the point where the combination ‘begins to sing out’... when the combination of sections starts to attain the regularity of a musical construct....”⁷⁷ The result is not merely the piecing together of separate sequences but a climax of images and rhythms that Eisenstein compares to an explosion. Such an interruption would be difficult, if not impossible, for the viewer to ignore. Coincidentally, Eisenstein’s biographer Richard Taylor attributes this kind of thinking to Shklovsky, a contemporary, whose idea of *ostranenie* directly influenced the filmmaker’s work.⁷⁸

Although *Waiting for the Miracle* began, seemingly, in isolation and by happenstance, its metaphorical seed was planted years before. The artist featured the same bulbous forms in *[Luk] at This* (1997) [Figure 1-8], a black and white photograph of a motley homegrown garden of budding onions. Lined up in a row on the windowsill, their formation mirrors the Moscow skyline, facing Red Square, St. Basil’s Cathedral, and the Kremlin whose towers can be seen faintly in the background. The photograph’s title is a play on words, replacing the English word “look” with the Russian word “luk,”

⁷⁶ Yve-Alain Bois, Introduction to Sergei Eisenstein, “Montage and Architecture,” *Assemblage* 10 (December 1989): 112-113. This is a prescient text in regard to my forthcoming address of ornament, as ornament was vilified by architect Adolf Loos in his 1910 lecture “Ornament and Crime.” See Ulrich Conrads, ed., *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), 19-24.

⁷⁷ Richard Taylor, ed. *The Eisenstein Reader*, trans. Richard Taylor and William Powell (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 172.

⁷⁸ See David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 136. Bordwell is another biographer of Eisenstein, who acknowledges the relationship between Eisenstein and Shklovsky, but cautions against reading it too closely. Bordwell argues that Eisenstein was more committed politically than Shklovsky. However, the connection between the two cannot be ignored, as Shklovsky wrote a biography of Eisenstein in 1976, long after the filmmaker’s death. See Viktor Shklovsky, *Eizenshtein* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976). Much like Shklovsky other biographies, for example on the nineteenth century Russian artist Pavel Fedotov, which will be discussed in the following section of this chapter, this book is a detailed, narrative account of Eisenstein’s life from birth to death.

meaning onion, which gives its name to the eponymous cathedral domes.⁷⁹ The domes are brightly colored and patterned, like the headwear of Chernysheva's ladies. This link is literalized in *Untitled (A drawing with obvious compositional technique)* [Figure 1-9], a charcoal drawing on paper from 2013. It employs a strong doubling effect by pairing the domes of St. Basil's Cathedral on Red Square with the head of a woman wearing a mohair hat. Drawing our attention to these juxtapositions, Chernysheva makes seemingly superficial visual analogies extremely profound.

These congruencies extend beyond the frame of a single work of art. Playfully embracing coincidences, the artist challenges the viewer to think beyond the parameters of the known when looking at her work. Testing our faculties of both sight and mind, she translates the same rounded, onion dome forms into figurative paintings [Figure 1-10]. While one clearly depicts a flowering prickled barrel cactus in a stone pot, the other—like the subjects in the photographs of *Waiting for the Miracle*—is cropped so closely that it creates an optical illusion, gripping the viewer with uncertainty.⁸⁰ Detached from their bodies and estranged from their contexts, the hatted heads of *Waiting for the Miracle* appear to float on air. Seen in succession, they create a topology, which, according to its principle within the field of geometry, identifies shapes as congruent despite minor changes in form. Their repetition causes these carefully yet still surreptitiously composed images to highlight their own variations in form. As a result, they sharpen our vision, which becomes honed to identify even the slightest change between two nearly identical forms.

⁷⁹ These homonyms, “look” and “luk,” reveal the malleability of language and further my argument for Chernysheva's keen interest in pairing and repeating forms in her work.

⁸⁰ Chernysheva has used cacti as a subject before. See her series of 33 light boxes entitled *Cactus Seller* (2009). These photographs were shot in the Zoological Museum at Moscow State University, where the souvenir shops include a man selling small succulents.

The root of Chernysheva's deep-seated interest in form, its variation, and its repetition is her series *The Book of Wholesome Food* (1991), which is one of her earliest works on record.⁸¹ It takes its name from the legendary Soviet cookbook [Figure 1-11], which was first published in 1939 and has been republished numerous times since.⁸² This cult classic was a cherished household staple, even in times of heightened austerity.⁸³ Chernysheva's version of *The Book of Wholesome Food* is a multi-media installation, first included in the 1991 group exhibition *V Izbah / In Rooms* at the Dom Kultury (House of Culture) in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia then in her first solo exhibition at Moscow's Gallery 1.0 in March 1992 [Figure 1-12].⁸⁴ The installation comprises two parts: several enlarged, black and white oil on unstretched canvas reproductions of images from the cookbook, which illustrate the various steps in the process of making *pirozhki* or traditional Russian stuffed hand pies, accompanied by a number of ceramic

⁸¹ Only Jo Anna Isaak—in a single paragraph without any citations—refers to this work as “the series *The Book of Wholesome Food*.” See Jo Anna Isaak, “The Future of a Disillusion: Sex, Truth, and Photography in the Former Soviet Union,” *Art Journal* 53, 2 (Summer 1994): 49. Viktor Misiano refers to it in Russian as *Cherno-belaia kniga* and in translation in English as *B/W Book*. See Viktor Misiano, “Intimnaia ontologaiia Ol’gi Chernyshevoi,” *Khudozhestvenii zhurnal* 77/78 (2010), and Viktor Misiano, “Motion Studies,” *ArtForum* 47, no.7 (March 2010): 226-231. In Misiano’s English version, the work is erroneously dated to 1992-1995. In my email correspondence with Chernysheva dated February 19, 2016, she referred to the work as “*Black and White Cookbook*” (“*Cherno-belaia kulinarnaia kniga / Черно-белая кулинарная книга*”). The work is rarely cited in writings on the artist, and when it is, no italicized title is given. See Ekaterina Degot, “Virusa Mimesisa,” *Khudozhestvenii zhurnal* 14 (1996), <http://xz.gif.ru/numbers/14/virus-mimesisa/>. In *Reconstruction. 1990-2000*, Degot refers to it as “cherno-belie ‘nagliadnykh pocobiakh’ iz kulinarpnogo uchebnika” (black and white visual aids from a cooking textbook) and “1.0 Gallery,” 7-8. In studying the *Kniga o vkusnoj i zdorovoj pishche* (*Книга о вкусной и здоровой пище*), I confirm this book is the source for Chernysheva’s artwork. See Molchanova, O. P., et al., eds., *Kniga o vkusnoj i zdorovoj pishche* (Moscow: Ministerstvo pishchevoj promyshlennosti SSSR / Pishchepromizdat, 1952), accessed July 4, 2017, <http://knigaln.ru/knigi/book-vkus-zdorov-pishe.pdf>.

⁸² See Evgeniy Dobrenko, “Gastronomicheskii kommunizm: vkysnoe vs. zdorovoe,” *Neprikosnovennyi zpas* 2, no. 64 (2009), accessed July 4, 2017, <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2009/2/do9.html>.

⁸³ This and similar books inspired artists of the previous Moscow Conceptualist generation. For example, Andrey Monastyrski cut out images from the book *Kulinarniia* (Кулинария), first published in 1955 by Ministerstvo pishchevoj promyshlennosti SSSR / Gostorgisizat, and used them in his *Elementary Poetry* #3, which is currently being translated by Yelena Kalinsky and Brian Driotcour for Ugly Duckling Press.

⁸⁴ Czechoslovakia was under communist control until 1989, dissolved in 1992, and officially separated into Czech Republic and Slovakia only in 1993. The Czechoslovak exhibition is not listed in the artist’s “Biography” on her website; however, it is listed on the Krokin Gallery website, with which she previously worked. See http://www.krokingallery.com/english/artist_17.html.

objects molded by Chernysheva [Figure 1-13]. These objects include pies, the *palochki* or tools used to make baked goods, and the book itself. Some objects are marked with abstract symbols—stand-ins for text—while others feature micro versions of Chernysheva’s paintings, achieved through some kind of direct image transfer process. In the gallery, the paintings are hung from the ceiling against a wall, like projections onto screens. The handmade “pies” and other objects are laid out on an unadorned table adjacent to the paintings.⁸⁵ The juxtaposition of the paintings and the objects are important. In photographs of the work taken in the artist’s studio before the exhibition, the two are positioned close together, as if one were the reflection of the other through a distorted mirror—the perfectly formed delicate pastries from the paintings are only crude lumps of dough in reality.

Chernysheva’s series *The Book of Wholesome Food* is more than just “the elegant story of how women’s hands craft strange plaster *pirozhki* bearing mysterious signs.”⁸⁶ The work is an exercise in translating forms across media. Just as cooking from a recipe in a book does not always produce the same results in one’s kitchen, the artwork allows room for the open interpretation of its final physical manifestation. In the exhibition’s text, curator Vladimir Levashov sees Chernysheva’s object-cakes along with her hyperrealist paintings as “not talking about the product of creation, but rather about the

⁸⁵ The format of this display is rather musicological. I first learned of the work on a visit with Chernysheva to the Egyptian galleries at the Brooklyn Museum. This conversation was not recorded.

⁸⁶ Andrey Kovalev, “Installing the ‘90s,” in *Reconstruction. 1990-2000*, 37. Reprinted in Fowle and Addison, *Access Moscow*, 38-55. According to Kovalev, Levashov, the founder and artistic director of Gallery 1.0, was invested in the work of “post-conceptual” artists. “Against the background of the rowdiness happening all around, [Levashov’s] curatorial project seemed like well-organized aestheticism.” This interest may be why Levashov gave Chernysheva her first solo exhibition in Moscow. While tempting, reading this work through a feminist lens is not true to the artist’s intent. See Degot’s lament over the lack of feminist backbone in Ekaterina Degot, “Who’s Who in Contemporary Art in Moscow, 1993,” in Fowle and Addison, *Access Moscow*, 81.

process, the secret nature of the creative gesture.”⁸⁷ In this work, cooking operates as “a metaphor for creativity,” continues Levashov, “giving form to an initially formless material.”⁸⁸ He draws attention to the discrepancy between Chernysheva’s two-dimensional reproductions and her attempts at three-dimensional replication. “The reproductions in their most practical use are visual aids and are therefore directly intended to be a model for subsequent copies, thus arises a whole chain of reproductions and reflections.”⁸⁹ Yet by embracing a lack of artifice in her crudely formed pies, Chernysheva revels in the imperfections of her *Black and White Cookbook*—the slight variations that can occur when forms repeat, underscoring the power of the creative act.

Since its inception, Chernysheva’s practice has been clearly marked by the repetition of subtly variegated forms across media as she works over, through, and into her subjects—sometimes returning to a subject after a gap of several years.⁹⁰ Her interest in form and its repetition prevents her series from ever closing, as they remain dormant, ready to be revived and reconfigured at any given point in time. For the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, repetition is conceived not as a return to something but as another

⁸⁷ “1.0 Gallery,” in *Reconstruction. 1990-2000*, 9. The excerpt from the exhibition text cites that Chernysheva is already an established artist, who has exhibited not only in the USSR but internationally as well, in Germany, Holland, Spain, Sweden, and Czechoslovakia. See “Chronology,” in Kate Fowle and Ruth Addison, eds. *Exhibit Russia: The New International Decade 1986-1996* (Moscow: Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, 2016), 572-289. Chernysheva was included in several seminal international exhibitions: *Furmannyya zaulek* (1989, Warsaw); *To the Object: Sixty Russian Avant-Garde Artists from Moscow, Paris, and New York* (1990-1994, touring Moscow, Amsterdam, and Bratislava); *Context Art: The Art of the 90s* (1993, Graz); *Flucht-Punkt Moskau* (1994, Aachen); *Kunst im Verborgenen. Non-Konformisten Russland, 1957-1995* (1995-1996, Ludwigshafen am Rhein, Kassel, and Altenburg); *Drawings from Moscow* (1995, Munich); 49th Venice Biennale (2001).

⁸⁸ “1.0 Gallery,” in *Reconstruction. 1990-2000*, 8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8

⁹⁰ Chernysheva uses multiple media to address a single subject. The utility workers from the film *White Lines—on the Ground, Dark Lines—in the Sky* (2012) reappear in the drawing *White Cable* from 2013. *The Train*, a film from 2003, pairs well with *Briefly*, a series of ten drawings from 2013. In these examples, the subjects serve as leitmotifs uniting media and time. Chernysheva does use drawings as studies before producing a full-fledged work, for example the series of 11 untitled watercolors that accompany her 2014 film *Inconsolable: The Giver of Hope at Revolution Square*.

iteration of the same something.⁹¹ Repetition maintains form, while shifting its time and context, destabilizing temporality and spatiality. Expanding upon the work of the eighteenth century Scottish philosopher David Hume, Deleuze states, “Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it.”⁹² This echoes Shklovsky’s rebellious forms in which true change is seen only in the eyes of the beholder as well as Focillon’s forms, which are always in constant flux. For Deleuze, it is one’s imagination that “draw[s] something new from repetition.”⁹³ What is renewed is meaning, which gives greater depth to the breadth of the multiplicity of forms we encounter in our everyday lives.

Common Places, Common Faces

“Russia [today] is a distorted mirror, and I am on its surface, seeing how the pieces fit together.”⁹⁴ This is how Chernysheva describes her practice in which even the most abstract compositions refer back to life in Russia today. The solution to this puzzle is self-reflexive. She says, “Basically, I search my own mind in order to figure out [how

⁹¹ Repetition as understood by Gilles Deleuze has been invoked by many art historians. Specific texts I found useful in better understanding his concepts include but are not limited to Ellen K. Levy, “Repetition and the Scientific Model in Art,” *Art Journal* 55, 1 (Spring 1996): 79-84; Branden W. Joseph, “The Play of Repetition: Andy Warhol’s ‘Sleep,’” *Grey Room* 19 (Spring 2005): 22-53. I have not turned to Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986) because Chernysheva’s work does not concern itself with authenticity or the questioning of the original versus copy. Chernysheva’s embrace of the multiplicity of forms can also relate to the rhizome, as described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). The rhizome is a form that is “reducible neither to the One nor the multiple... [but] dimensions, or rather directions in motions” that grow out of a middle, a plateau in between, 21. Acknowledging the rhizome, we can better understand how we are able to see the similar in the dissimilar across Chernysheva’s works.

⁹² Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 70. Related is Deleuze’s differentiation between cinema and painting. The latter is immobile, necessitating the mind to move, while the former presents a “psycho-mechanics” that unite body and mind, movement and thoughts. See Gilles Deleuze, “Cinema 2: The Time-Image,” trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Caleta (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 156.

⁹³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 76.

⁹⁴ Olga Chernysheva in an unrecorded conversation with the author, December 2015, New York, NY.

to piece it back together].”⁹⁵ Embedded in this post-Soviet context, Chernysheva captures in her works what the late scholar and artist Svetlana Boym calls “the everyday mythologies and rituals of ordinary life.”⁹⁶ In her book *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, Boym explores the trivialities of Soviet existence, giving voice to the rubber plants, toilets, lacquer boxes, and other overlooked objects that populated the socialist spaces of state-run department stores and communal apartments throughout the country for a majority of the twentieth century. These hallmarks of *byt* [быт] or everyday life were frowned upon during the Soviet period, whether in opposition to heroic Socialist Realism, or the more sophisticated *bytie* [бытие], or spiritual being that harkened back to messianic ideas of transcendence in the nineteenth century.⁹⁷

Despite its bad reputation, *byt* became the natural battleground for ideological debate after the Revolution, which fostered the birth of the new Soviet person. The emergence of *byt* in early Soviet discourse is explored further by art historian Christina Kiaer in her book *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*.⁹⁸ Kiaer traces the definition of *byt* to old Russian in which it denoted material possessions. Revived by Leon Trotsky in his 1923 essay *Voprosy byta* [*Questions of Everyday Life*], *byt* and its debased material persuasions were no match for the new Soviet person, who favored a higher, unencumbered existence or *novyi byt* (new everyday life).⁹⁹ Kiaer cites *byt*’s association with “folk ways,” or the backward

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 2.

⁹⁷ *Byt*’ [бытъ] with the addition of a soft sign is the verb “to be.” Boym, 29.

⁹⁸ Christina Kiaer, *Imagine no Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), 60, 31-33. Kiaer connects *byt* to *byvat*’ [бывать], meaning “to happen, to take place, to be present.”

⁹⁹ Kiaer, 53, 60. In *An Archaeology of Socialism*, Victor Buchli also discusses *byt*, focusing on the architecture of the home, linking *byt* to domesticity and women’s work. He defines it as “daily life,

existence of peasant life, as yet another negative connotation of the word well known at this time.¹⁰⁰ While Kiaer's analysis of *byt* revolves strictly around her interest in productivism and the constellations of object-things fashioned by early Soviet artists in the 1920s, her research also considers how artists, such as Vladimir Tatlin, looked at their everyday lives and made improvements upon them with new designs for ergonomic stoves, functional uniforms, multipurpose kitchenware, and the like.

Although far less practical, Chernysheva's use of *byt* or the everyday serves equally immediate aims. I disagree with Groys' description of Chernysheva's subjects as "true-life people," who do not perform for the artist but who are merely arrested in the midst of their routines. If they are truly frozen in time as Groys claims, they have "once and forever [fallen] out of the dynamics of historical life and are doomed to eternally substitute each other in an endless go-round, in a way that is hardly noticeable, neither by others nor by themselves."¹⁰¹ While her subjects may be anonymous, they are not unnoticeable. It is the viewer who is frozen by their presence on the screen or canvas.

Chernysheva's studies of the unheroic—trash collectors, migrant laborers, mini-bus drivers, cactus sellers, museum guards, street sweepers, and other blue-collar workers—situate her rightfully within significant, albeit still developing, discussions on the return of realism in Russian contemporary art. The artist even ascribes herself to this movement: "I like realism because it is not about self-expression. There are so many

domesticity, lifestyle, or way of life," 23. He looks at the reform movements of 1930s that aimed to make everyday life, particularly that of women, more comfortable. See Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 2000). See also John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography, and the Everyday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), specifically "Photography, the everyday and the Russian Revolution," 14-39. Roberts addresses the prevalent idea of the avant-garde and bringing art into life and vice versa, as well as the role of factography in documentary photography of the period.

¹⁰⁰ Kiaer, 55.

¹⁰¹ Groys, "The Time Closure," in *Olga Chernysheva: The Happiness Zone*, 11.

interesting things around, so it's not really necessary to make self-expression primary."¹⁰²

While Chernysheva is clear to remove her subjectivity from the work of art, realism, as art historian Linda Nochlin stated, is "no more a mere mirror of reality than any other style."¹⁰³ While Chernysheva may not foreground her personal opinions, she does far more than simply present her subjects at face value. She provides the viewer with the necessary clues for taking new meaning out of everyday life through her subtle depictions of its unsuspecting anti-heroes.¹⁰⁴ Using a similarly puzzle-like metaphor, curator Cosmin Costinas describes the artist's method as "decomposing the ubiquitous yet often hard-to-grasp surrounding reality and recomposing it... allow[ing] the whole to be reconfigured into a critical panorama of society."¹⁰⁵ The result is a *critical* realism that increases awareness of at-risk constituencies and their role at the interstices of society today.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Nouril, "A Conversation with Olga Chernysheva."

¹⁰³ Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 14, 182. According to Roman Jakobson, there are many forms of Realism in the arts, each with their own merits. See Roman Jakobson, "On Realism in Art," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2002), 38-46. Chernysheva's Realism is not aimed at documenting truth, per Engels, who wrote "Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances." See note 6. Nor is it the Realism of Socialist Realism, the sole official style of art in the Soviet Union that depicted positive, heroic, and idealized subjects unencumbered by the trials and tribulations of the everyday.

¹⁰⁴ Nihilist philosopher Nikolai Chernyshevsky cites the salient characteristics of Realism and reproduction and explanation, making it an intellectual and moral pursuit. See Nikolai Chernyshevsky, "The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality," in *Russian Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965).

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/chernyshevsky/1853/aesthetics-reality.htm>

¹⁰⁵ Cosmin Costinas, "Olga Chernysheva: In the Middle of Things," (Utrecht: BAK, 2011) accessed July 4, 2017, <https://bakonline.org/en/Research/Itineraries/Former-West/Exhibitions/In-The-Middle-Of-Things/Publications/Olga-Chernysheva-In-The-Middle-Of-Things>. While Costinas does not directly reference it, his use of "panorama" would make anyone familiar with Chernysheva's work think of her series *Panorama* (2005-2007). See Ekaterina Degot, "Olga Chernysheva and the Politics of the Panorama," *ARTMargins Online*, last modified May 5, 2006, accessed July 4, 2017, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/2-articles/160-olga-chernysheva-and-the-politics-of-the-panorama>.

¹⁰⁶ Bertolt Brecht, who will be invoked in later chapters of this dissertation, said, "Realism is an issue not only for literature, it is a major political, philosophical and practical issue and must be handled and explained as such—as a matter of general human interest." Bertolt Brecht, "On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism," in *Aesthetics and Politics: Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukàcs, Bertolt Brecht, Walther Benjamin, Theodor Adorno*, ed. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso: 1977), 70-76. I have chosen to relegate this comment to the margins in order to avoid going off topic, but I wish for the reader to keep its sentiments in mind.

The precedent for Chernysheva's critical realism can be traced to the nineteenth century, exemplified in works by Gustave Courbet, Honoré Daumier, and other artists responding to the social and political changes across Europe at that time.¹⁰⁷ In Imperial Russia, the *Peredvizhniki*—also known as the Wanderers or Itinerants—also rejected the saccharine Romanticism and stymied Neoclassicism of previous decades in favor of socially motivated art, which struggled to “transcend the very borders between life and art.”¹⁰⁸ Art historian Molly Brunson deftly defines realism as a transhistorical tradition of many convergent paths that “retains difference,” maintaining an inexactness in form or style.¹⁰⁹ On the wrangling of realisms across time and geographic context, I agree with Brunson, who writes, “These many manifestations of realism are united not by how they look or what they describe but by their shared awareness of the fraught yet critical task of representation.”¹¹⁰ Combining both aesthetic and socio-political motivations, Brunson gestures toward an understanding of a critical realism still applicable to Russian art today.

¹⁰⁷ See Linda Nochlin, *Realism*, specifically “The Nature of Realism,” 13-56; T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); T.J. Clark, *Absolute Bourgeois* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); and Richard Shiff, “Art History and the Nineteenth Century: Realism and Resistance,” *The Art Bulletin* 70, 1 (March 1988): 25-48.

¹⁰⁸ Molly Brunson, *Russian Realisms: Literature and Painting, 1840-1890* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2016), 4. The *Peredvizhniki* a loosely associated group, began with the Revolt of Fourteen in 1863, when students at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg advocated for the “liberation and a diffuse dedication to the moral regeneration of society.” This act was followed by the establishment of the Artists' Workshop [*Artel' khudozhnikov*], which operated as a collective, and later by the formation of the Association of Traveling Art Exhibitions in Moscow in 1870. In addition to Brunson's recent book, see Elizabeth Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art, The State and Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977), 18; Elizabeth Valkenier, “The Peredvizhniki and the Spirit of the 1860s,” *The Russian Review* 34, no. 3 (July 1975): 247-265; Rosalind P. Blakesley and Margaret Samu, eds. *From Realism to the Silver Age: New Studies in Russian Artistic Culture. Essays in Honor of Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier* (Northern Illinois University Press: DeKalb, 2014), 5-6. Although considered active through the mid-1920s, the *Peredvizhniki* drastically changed both in constitution and ambition over the years. In 1891, Tsar Alexander III reincorporated them into the Academy, making them a mouthpiece for his Russification project. See Nicolas V. Riasanovsky and Mark D. Steinberg, eds., *A History of Russia*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 351-361, and Elizabeth Valkenier, “The Art of the Wanderers in the Culture of Their Time,” in *The Wanderers: Masters of 19th Century Russian Painting*, ed. Elizabeth Valkenier (Dallas: University of Texas Press, 1990).

¹⁰⁹ Brunson, 2-3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

Recording the state of contemporary society and politics in the nineteenth century, the *Peredvizhniki* painted landscapes, portraits, and genre scenes of everyday life, focusing on the poor, the peasantry, and the wounded—subjects wholly ignored by genteel, academic painters.¹¹¹ “The pictures of those days made the viewer blush, shiver, and carefully look into himself,” wrote Ilya Repin, one of the most famous Russian realist painters.¹¹² These artists looked outward in order to force their viewers to look inward. The *Peredvizhniki* rose to provenience during a tumultuous period in Russia, marked by the abolition of serfdom by Tsar Alexander II in 1861. As described by art historian Elizabeth Valkenier, these artists were “civic-minded,” working to reform life through art that displayed socially motivated themes to viewers across Russia.¹¹³ For many people in the provinces, the traveling exhibitions organized by the *Peredvizhniki* were their first encounters with fine art. They were well received because their works embodied the qualities necessary for the universal reception: “emotional commitment, typicalness, and topicality.”¹¹⁴ Although separated by over a century, the practices of the *Peredvizhniki* and Chernysheva have such facets in common, allowing one to draw parallels between these two periods in Russian art.

But even before the *Peredvizhniki*, there was Pavel Fedotov (1815-1852), a self-trained artist known as the Russian Hogarth.¹¹⁵ In the mid-1840s, he gave up a promising

¹¹¹ The same could be said of the Western European counterparts. See Nochlin, 181-182.

¹¹² Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*, 23.

¹¹³ Elizabeth Valkenier, “Politics in Russian Art: The Case of Repin,” *The Russian Review* 37, 1 (January 1978): 14, 16.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 13. As Evgeny Steiner notes, it was the *works* not the *artists* who traveled. “There were not romantic overtones of wandering in the beloved native countryside or being a *flâneur* in the city....” See Evgeny Steiner, “A Battle for the ‘People’s Cause’ or for the Market Case: Kramskoi and the Itinerants,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 50, 5 (October – December 2009): 637.

¹¹⁵ Fedotov is also said to be a visual counterpoint to the writer Nikolai Gogol, whose moral tales are often veiled with humor. See Tamara Eidelman, “Pavel Fedotov,” trans. Nora Favorov, *Russian Life* (November – December 2012): 19-21; “Pavel Fedotov,” *Oxford Art Online*, accessed February 11, 2017,

military career for more creative pursuits. Fedotov was part of the first wave of “critical Realism” in Imperial Russia. According to art historian Dmitri V. Sarabianov, Fedotov’s works combined “powerful emotional critique” with “the spirit of protest against the world” that laid the groundwork for the ensuing decades.¹¹⁶ Critics in the period attributed to Fedotov the elevation of genre painting, previously deemed unsophisticatedly one-dimensional.¹¹⁷ *Svatovstvo maiora* [*The Major’s Courtship*] (1848) [Figure 1-14] depicts the humorously hectic scene of an improbable proposal in which the artist’s dramatic flair is as prominent as his keen attention to detail. While the painting is layered with social and political cues from the garments worn by its subjects to the furnishings that adorn the home, it also achieves a “balance, an architectonic quality and perfect harmony of the forms.”¹¹⁸ Archetypes, like the helpless maiden and the insolent major, are seen throughout Fedotov’s oeuvre and are especially prominent in his pen and watercolor drawings on paper, such as *Devushka. Golova svodnitsy* [*Girl. Head of a Madam*] (1846-48) and *Progulka* [*A Stroll*] (1837) [Figure 1-15]. These concentrated studies work through the richness of forms, comprising a catalogue of refined “types” from which the artist later drew to insert into larger works.

<http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/subscriber/article/grove/art/T027739?print=true>; Svetlana Stepanova, “Human Comedy and the Drama of Life in the Art of Pavel Fedotov,” *The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 47 (February 2015): 122-129. He was the subject of a major exhibition *Pavel Fedotov: The Theater of Life. In Honor of the 200th Anniversary of the Artist’s Birth*, at the State Tretyakov Gallery, February 25 – June 14, 2015. See T. L. Karpova, ed. *Pavel Fedotov: Teatr Zhini* (Moscow: State Tretyakov Gallery, 2015). Fedotov was also the subject of two biographies by Russian Formalist writer Viktor Shklovsky. See Viktor Shklovskiy, *Kapitan Fedotov* (Moscow: Sovetskiy pisatel’, 1936) and Viktor Shklovskiy, *Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei: Fedotov* (Moscow: TsK VLKSM “Moloia Gverdiia,” 1965).

¹¹⁶ Dmitri V. Sarabianov, *Russian Art: From Neoclassicism to the Avant Garde, 1800-1917: Painting - Sculpture - Architecture* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1990), 93. An internationally-acclaimed expert in the field, Sarabianov authored several books on Fedotov, including *P. A. Fedotov i russkaya khudozhestvennaya kul’tura 40-x gg. XIX v. [P. A. Fedotov and Russian art in the 1840s]* (Moscow, 1973) and *Pavel Andreyevich Fedotov* (Leningrad, 1985).

¹¹⁷ As quoted in Carol Adlam, “Realist Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Russian Art Writing,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 83, 4 (October 2005): 656-657.

¹¹⁸ Sarabianov, 90.

Chernysheva pays particular homage to Fedotov in her film *Russian Museum* (2003-2005) [Figure 1-16] and in a related pencil on paper drawing featuring *The Major's Courtship* [Figure 1-17]. Her visual connection to Fedotov is to be expected, as she cites him as yet another influence on her work.¹¹⁹ *Russian Museum* is a seven-minute film that captures the reflections of visitors in the protective glass over paintings in the nineteenth century galleries of the St. Petersburg museum.¹²⁰ Like many of Chernysheva's works, it is not only about the content of its subject matter but also about how it is perceived. The viewer sees many well-known nineteenth century Russian masterpieces by the *Peredvizhniki*, from the perspective of the camerawoman, whose camerawork is very unsteady and disjointed. It is as if she is trying to get closer to see the paintings more clearly but is hindered by a shallow depth of field in which everything quickly becomes out of focus. Once again in Chernysheva's work, the eye and the camera lens operate as one *kino-glaz* or cinematic eye, a kind of prosthesis that should enhance but actually hinders the viewing experience, forcing the viewer to concentrate even harder.

While I acknowledge that the literature on realism and its plethora of international manifestations over time is abundant, I identify the tradition of *critical* realism in Chernysheva's work as being distinctly Russian.¹²¹ To further define my definition of this critical realism, I turn to two contemporary Russian writers, who are influential voices in

¹¹⁹ Olga Chernysheva in an unrecorded conversation with the author, December 2015, New York, NY.

¹²⁰ The film is accompanied by a meditative soundtrack interrupted by the shuffling of visitors around the galleries as well as a guided tour, reading Russian Realism through a fiercely pro-Russian nationalist lens.

¹²¹ I also acknowledge Socialist *Realism*, another tradition of realism in Russian; however, taking my cue from Chernysheva's own words, I have focused on the influence of nineteenth century realism, as a kind of Ur-source, on her work. That said, the traditions of nineteenth century realism affected developments in Socialist Realism from its proclamation at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 through the height of Stalinism in the 1940s and early 1950s to the end of the Soviet era in 1989. For the purposes of this dissertation, I have made this demarcation, which I hope to explore in a future project.

Russian culture today and have worked closely with Chernysheva, affording them an intimate knowledge of her oeuvre. Curator Ekaterina Degot was the first to recognize the relationship between Chernysheva and Russian realism.¹²² For the Second Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2007, Degot organized the exhibition *Thinking Realism* at the State Tretyakov Gallery. It was held in the Tretyakov's main building on Lavrushinsky Pereulok, where the permanent collection of Russian art from the eleventh through nineteenth centuries resides. *Thinking Realism* paired nineteenth century masterpieces by Russian Realist painters, including but not limited to Ilya Repin, Karl Bryullov, and Ivan Kramskoy, with works by contemporary Russian artists, like Chernysheva.¹²³ In a special issue of *World Art Museum (WAM) Magazine*, Degot interviewed Chernysheva, who revealed a strong command of this period in art history. Citing paintings by Konstantin Makovsky and Vasily Vereshchagin as favorites, Chernysheva definitively states, "Russian realism is the first layer of our [post-Soviet] mental makeup... responsible for how we see the order of the world."¹²⁴ She describes these works as not only beautiful but also "just" or fair as they depict various social types while suppressing the subjective position of the artist. The result is an activation of aesthetics in the service of greater societal good.¹²⁵

In her studies of Chernysheva's work, Degot posits, "Contemporary artists see in realism the potential for criticism of contemporary art, its stereotypes, its political and

¹²² While this is now a common association with Chernysheva's work—cited in numerous press releases, articles, and interviews—it has not been unpacked or associated with larger themes in her work.

¹²³ Marcoci also acknowledges the narrativity of Chernysheva's work, associating it with nineteenth century Western European caricaturists, Honoré Daumier and William Hogarth. See "Olga Chernysheva in Conversation with Roxana Marcoci."

¹²⁴ Ekaterina Degot, "Inhabitants: A Conversation with Olga Chernysheva," in *Mysliashchii Realizm: Spetsila'nyii Proekt 2-o Moskovskoi Biennale Sovremennogo Iskusstva*, ed. Ekaterina Degot (Moscow: WAM, 2007), 93.

¹²⁵ In the context of this interview, Chernysheva also observes a possible link between the motives of Russian Realists and icon painters, who also aimed for something higher, spirituality.

aesthetic superficiality, its primitive documentalism, and its atmosphere of endless spectacle.”¹²⁶ Like their predecessors of the late nineteenth century in France as well as in Russia, who used realism as a means of acerbically critiquing the ruling elite, contemporary artists working internationally may also see the potential for veiled criticism of their governments and global geo-political order. Degot’s definition advances a basic tenet of realism as a form of representation.

As a counterpoint, philosopher Boris Groys writes, “The return to realism is the return to the psychological—and the return of a discontent with reality experienced as an oppressive force.”¹²⁷ Groys complicates Degot’s definition of realism as a direct commentary on life around us by considering the internal anxieties brought upon us, living in world constantly under threat by everything from terrorist cells and totalitarian regimes to racial and gender inequalities. Whereas Degot’s realism is directed externally, Groys’ realism is internalized. Artists are not immune from, but directly influenced by global conditions. They therefore produce works that give the viewer access to an understanding of reality as it is “psychologically experienced,” or worked through by the artist or protagonist of her work.¹²⁸ While this insight pales in comparison to lived experience, it allows the viewer some semblance of understanding that could spur them into action.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ekaterina Degot, “Thinking Realism,” in *Mysliashchii Realizm: Spetsila'nyii Proekt 2-o Moskovskoi Biennale Sovremennogo Iskusstva*, ed. Ekaterina Degot (Moscow: WAM, 2007), 7. More recently, Degot looks at commodification in Chernysheva’s work, providing a very Marxian reading of Chernysheva’s Realism. See Ekaterine Degot, “On the Humanity of Modern Life: Olga Chernysheva’s Notes and Reflections,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, context, and Enquiry* 35 (Spring 2014): 94-105.

¹²⁷ Boris Groys, “Toward the New Realism,” *e-flux Journal* 77 (November 2016), accessed June 26 2017, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/77/77109/towards-the-new-Realism/>.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ The form of that action is to be determined by the individual. Art affects change in a myriad of ways.

Chernysheva's realism corresponds to but also advances both Degot's and Groys' definitions. The types depicted in her work—from the janitors, construction workers, and cactus sellers to the security guards, bus drivers, and transportation agents—also recall Frederick Engels' definition of realism in the Western literary tradition as “the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances.”¹³⁰ Chernysheva's timeless pedestrian portraits comprise an allegory for Russia today that comments on both the status quo and the psyche of a nation. Using Benjamin's keepers of history—the oppressed—as her subjects, she has developed her own unique tradition of realism that does not necessarily pass judgment on, but chronicles the state of affairs, leaving power in the eyes of the beholder.

Inside and Beyond the Margins

“I am so interested in the appearances of things: what is shown and how and why we look,” says Chernysheva, “all those objects that generally go unnoticed, the marginal stories; they tend not to really exist; we do not really see them.”¹³¹ Through her use of a critical realism, Chernysheva takes it upon herself to make the invisible *visible*. The final section of this chapter assesses how the artist represents labor to shed light on the state of precarity in Russia today. While contemporary art is still underappreciated by the average Russian citizen, artists play an increasingly important role within Russian society as producers and, more importantly, interpreters of meaning. Since the 1990s, the conservative, right-wing Russian government has severely limited the political rights and

¹³⁰ Frederick Engels, “Engels to Margaret Harkness In London,” April 1888, accessed June 26, 2017, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1888/letters/88_04_15.htm.

¹³¹ “Elena Sudakova in conversation with Olga Chernysheva and Anders Kreuger,” in *Olga Chernysheva: Peripheral Visions*, 15.

civil liberties of its denizens—legal and illegal alike.¹³² Even in the economic depression intensified by recent international sanctions, this autocratic state has managed to establish biased government-controlled media outlets, implement strict travel restrictions, suppress the public’s right to assembly, and blacklist countless non-governmental organizations as “foreign agents” in an effort to limit their operation and impact. Deploying aesthetics, artists like Chernysheva can educate and empower themselves and their viewers as they face a diminishing quality of life in a very uncertain time.

When considered as a whole, Chernysheva’s oeuvre reveals a deep-seated interest in depicting workers and their labor. However, in her repeated variations on this theme, the artist does not choose to focus on doctors, lawyers, teachers, bankers, or other white-collar professionals, but rather those employed legally and illegally in less visible occupations. While functioning on the margins of society, these vocations form its foundation by providing our most basic needs. Chernysheva’s security guards, bus drivers, transportation agents, roadside hawkers, janitors, and construction workers keep us safe, clean, clothed, and fed with a roof over our heads. In return, Chernysheva presents these laborers and their toils as a reminder of all hard work behind the extravagant façade of Russia’s elite minority.

¹³² According to the Freedom of the World 2017 report published by Freedom House, an internationally recognized non-governmental organization, Russia is one of 49 out of 195 countries considered “not free.” In comparison to its rating in 1991 as “partly free” with a score of 4.7 out of 7, Russia was downgraded to a 7 in the latest report thanks, in part, to its flawed 2016 elections and role in the war in eastern Ukraine. See *Country Report: Russia. Freedom in the World 1999*. Rep. Freedom House, 1999, accessed July 10, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/1999/russia>; and *Country Report: Russia. Freedom in the World 2017*. Rep. Freedom House, 1999, accessed July 10, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/russia>. For qualitative, anthropologically-driven research on migrant workers in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, see Jeff Sahedee, “The Accidental Traders: Marginalization and Opportunity from the Southern Republics to Late Soviet Moscow,” *Central Asian Survey* 30, 3-4 (2011): 521-540, and Sergei Abashin, “Migration from Central Asia to Russia in the New Model of World Order,” *Russian Politics and Law* 52, 6 (November – December 2014): 8–23.

The eleven photographs in Chernysheva's 2007 series *On Duty* [Figure 1-18] picture nameless invigilators, who sit in the Plexiglas cubicles at the bottom of the escalators deep inside the Moscow Metro. They are meant to keep close watch on the staircases, ensuring that no passenger trips, falls, or instigates any sort of hooliganism. Even though they are technically "on duty," Chernysheva's watchmen and -women appear listless and bored. With the objects of their gazes outside the frame, their vacuous expressions can, at best, look like daydreaming. This more romantic notion would imply that they enjoy and even take pleasure in their jobs. They are a motley crew. A few are young, in the prime of their youth, while others are old, likely, pensioners supplementing their meager incomes. Some wear uniforms bearing official seals of the state-owned transit system, while others appear more casually dressed in their plain clothes. Despite their humility, Chernysheva honors these guards with epic portrait busts. Not only should they take pride in their thankless jobs that keep people safe, but they should be honored like the other ordinary men and women who worked tirelessly decades prior to build the Metro, a major monumental achievement of Soviet urban planning.¹³³ Once facets of everyday Soviet life, the invigilators are now relics of the past, as their positions are

¹³³ In 2014, Chernysheva produced the film *Inconsolable: The Giver of Hope at Revolution Square*, which takes the bronze statue of a soldier and his dog by Matvey Manizer inside the Revolution Square Metro station as its subject. For more on the Moscow Metro and its design, see John E. Bowlit, "Stalin as Isis and Ra: Socialist Realism and the Art of Design," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 24 (2002): 34-63; Karen Kettering, "An Introduction to the Design of the Moscow Metro in the Stalin Period: 'The Happiness of Life Underground,'" *Decorative Arts* 7 (Spring-Summer 2000): 2-20; Karen Kettering, "Sverdlov Square Metro Station: 'The Friendship of the Peoples' and the Stalin Constitution," *Ibid.*, 21-47; Jane Friedman, "Soviet Masters of the Skies at the Mayakovsky Metro Station," *Ibid.*, 48-64; Isabel Wünsche, "Homo Sovieticus: The Athletic Motif in the Design of the Dynamo Metro Station," *Ibid.*, 65-90. Like most major construction projects to this day, the building of the metro required an immense labor force. See David L. Hoffmann, "Moving to Moscow: Patterns of Peasant In-Migration during the First Five-Year Plan," *Slavic Review* 50,4 (Winter, 1991): 847-857.

slowly replaced by computerized surveillance systems.¹³⁴ Like an anthropological record, *On Duty* fossilizes their labor as testament for an unknown future.

Rapid privatization of the economic sector in Russia after 1991 did not usher in fiscal security but instead a state of emergency, which climaxed with a default in August 1998 under the first Russian President Boris Yeltsin. In his book *Russia's Workers in Transition: Labor, Management, and the State under Gorbachev and Yeltsin*, political scientist Paul T. Christensen considers this pivotal year of financial collapse to have deep roots within the late Soviet period.¹³⁵ The failure of Russia's smooth transition into capitalism resulted in not only a depressed economy but also a disgruntled labor force, which has yet to experience the trickledown effect of privatization. Like Christensen, fellow political scientist Ruda Sil describes how Russia in the immediate post-Soviet period was buoyed by "price liberalization, privatization, and the growth of foreign investments" *only in theory*.¹³⁶ In practice, privatization was unbridled, favoring primarily those in power. By the late 1990s, the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—the total value of goods produced by a country for use and export—was falling precipitously, and average Russians faced a significant imbalance between their wages

¹³⁴ See Tat'iana Eremina, "Babushek u eskalatora otpravliat v slesari," *Gazeta.ru* 2, February 2017, accessed July 10, 2017, <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2017/02/17/10531661.shtml>. The reorganization of these guards was scheduled to take place April 1, 2017, resulting in the loss of approximately 1000 jobs.

¹³⁵ Paul T. Christensen, *Russia's Workers in Transition: Labor, Management, and the State under Gorbachev and Yeltsin* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), 141-142. Ruda Sil chronicles the late Soviet edicts that slowly introduced privatization to the USSR and, later, Russia. Previously operating as a shadow economy under the stagnation of Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982), the private sector was promoted through Mikhail Gorbachev's (1985-1991) 1987 Law on Enterprises and 1988 Law on Cooperatives, which legalized certain activities outside of state control. See Ruda Sil, "Privatization, Labor Politics, and the Firm in Post-Soviet Russia: Non-market Norms, Market Institutions, and the Soviet Legacy," in *The Politics of Labor in a Global Age: Continuity and Change in Late-Industrializing and Post-Socialist Economies*, eds. Christopher Candland and Ruda Sil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 205-232.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

and the prices of everyday goods.¹³⁷ The consequences of this disparity include shadow and informal economies that support workers outside the official labor system.¹³⁸

This situation produces what art historian Hal Foster calls a state of precarity or “a socioeconomic insecurity.”¹³⁹ This plight of lower and even middle class workers—akin to Benjamin’s oppressed who hold the fate of history in their hands—is best described by literary theorist Judith Butler, who, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, defined precarity as “a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.”¹⁴⁰ Precarity is not a choice but a circumstance beyond control. In works like *On Duty*, Chernysheva “give[s] a form to the precarious” through direct observation of her subjects, which she then translates for the viewer through the camera’s lens, a pencil on paper, or a brush on a canvas.

Chernysheva’s watercolors, specifically the series *Blue-Yellow* (2009) [Figure 1-19] and *Citizens* (2009-2010) [Figure 1-20] strongly thematize this fraught state of labor in contemporary Russian society. *Blue-Yellow* presents twelve familiar vignettes from the local open-air market or bazaar, where independent entrepreneurs sell their wares. Some are homemade or homegrown while others are mass-produced and likely imported

¹³⁷ Albeit an oversimplification, it can be said that the 1998 financial crisis precipitated the rise of Vladimir Putin, who has served as both Prime Minister (1999-2000, 2008-2012) and President (2000-2008, 2012-). See Masha Gessen, *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012).

¹³⁸ While the Russian economy did improve briefly during Vladimir Putin’s first term as President (2000-2008), more recent events, like Russia’s role in the war in eastern Ukraine and, generally, a global economic depression, have greatly affected the country’s social, political, and economic stability.

¹³⁹ Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London: Verso Books, 2015), 100. Foster applies the term to the work of contemporary artist Thomas Hirshhorn.

¹⁴⁰ Judith Butler, “Performativity, Precarity And Sexual Politics,” *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 4, 3 (September – October 2009): ii. This text is a transcription of a lecture based on her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006). In this book, Butler meditates on precarity through the work of Emmanuel Lévinas, who ascribed precarity to his famous notion of the face-to-face encounter. See Butler, *Precarious Life*, 130-140.

cheaply, and maybe even illegally, from China. Goods are sold at a fraction of their retail prices; yet shopping here requires not only time but also a talent for bargaining. As historian Julie Hessler writes, the market or bazaar, also known as a *tolkuchki* (flea market, specifically in Central Asia) or *kolkhoz* market, was a consistent and therefore key element in the Soviet retail network that linked the many regions of this vast country.¹⁴¹ It allowed for the dissemination of local as well as more exotic goods, which could be sold person-to-person, outside of government control. These markets not only opened up the flow of goods but also opportunities for the disenfranchised, such as the elderly, the underage, and disabled, looking for self-sufficiency.¹⁴² Considered to be “private” trade in the eyes of the Soviets, markets are still a grey area in Russia today. But just like the transportation agents inside Moscow’s Metro, these markets, specifically the open-air markets, have more recently come under attack. In Moscow alone, all 240 markets were shut down between 2013 and 2015, forcing vendors to move into state-run enclosed facilities, such as the Danilovsky or Dorogomilovsky Markets.¹⁴³

Although Chernysheva’s series *Blue-Yellow* predates this major event, it foreshadows its outcome, capturing the trace of something now erased. Vendors hawk a range of goods from canned preserves and fresh fruit to gloves, hats, and underwear, neatly arranged in elaborate displays to entice the passerby. Like the women in *Waiting for the Miracle*, the proprietors also wait patiently, fussing with their merchandise,

¹⁴¹ Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 251-273. While Hessler’s book focuses on the Lenin and Stalinist periods, specifically NEP (1922-1928) and its aftereffects, she charts the supply and demands of the early Soviet planned economy, forecasting late Soviet shortages, which is helpful in the context of Chernysheva and the post-Soviet socio-economic state.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁴³ Vasilii Matskevich, “Zakryvaiut barakholki,” *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, October 31, 2013, accessed July 11, 2017, <https://rg.ru/2013/10/31/rinki.html>, and Elena Malysheva, “V Moskve do kontsa goda likvidiruyut poslednie 16 otkrytykh rynkov,” *RBK*, October 14, 2015, accessed July 11, 2017, <http://www.rbc.ru/economics/14/10/2015/561d12e79a79474b321c3d94>.

knowing that, if it does not sell, they will have to pack it up again at the end of the day. This feeling of anticipation is betrayed by the very nature of this series, produced on the perforated pages of a sketchbook. Loosely rendered pencil outlines bleed through light washes of paint. It is as if Chernysheva intended the drawings to be only first impressions and not final outcomes.¹⁴⁴ They are exercises of forms pregnant with potential.

Chernysheva gives further treatment to the precarity of everyday Russian life in *Citizens*, another series of watercolors from the same period. From sanitation workers and curbside hawkers to the furry costumed hecklers and sandwich board people, it typifies a myriad of labor. Its subjects are, once again, anonymous. Several are depicted from the side or the back, which obscures their facial features. Without much context, they become coterminous with their tasks, producing points of connection where forms seamlessly merge, melting into one another. Like in *Blue-Yellow*, they are pictured with their tools of labor—a shovel, a costume, a sign. They prop up their goods on makeshift tables of cardboard boxes and old suitcases. Their peddling invokes a sense of sympathy in the viewer, who is struck by the paucity of their conditions echoed in Chernysheva's sparse and softly rendered works on paper.

In their essay “Why work ‘off the books’? Community, household, and individual determinants of informal economic activity in post-Soviet Russia,” sociologists Caleb Southworth and Leontina Hormal help explain the many reasons that precipitate this kind of precarious labor.¹⁴⁵ On one hand, it is the result of too much, too fast. When faced with the onslaught of capitalism and all of its new rules and regulations after the fall of

¹⁴⁴ Chernysheva is known to sketch first, in the moment, then later transfer the images to larger pieces of paper in her home-studio. See Nouril, “A Conversation with Olga Chernysheva.”

¹⁴⁵ Caleb Southworth and Leontina Hormal, “Why work ‘off the books’? Community, household, and individual determinants of informal economic activity in post-Soviet Russia,” in *Russian Transformations: Challenging the global narrative*, ed. Leo McCann (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 148-172.

the Soviet Union, people resorted to self-management as a coping mechanism. On the other hand, Russia's economy is still in flux, so this marginal, unregulated labor can also come from the top down, allowing people to fill in the gaps left by corporations both large and small.¹⁴⁶ Whether morally or financially motivated, Chernysheva's street laborers continue to persevere under duress. Chernysheva, too, is hardworking and resourceful. In these and other sharply perceptive depictions of everyday life in the ever-changing context of contemporary Russia, she economizes her visual language by rooting it in repeated forms that seamlessly adapt, like chameleons, across her bodies of work.

Chernysheva has used her drawings from *Blue-Yellow*, *Citizens*, and other series as inspiration for larger-scale paintings, such as *Interpretation of Observations, Number 4* (2009) [Figure 1-21]. The example reiterates Chernysheva's pattern of repetition across media discussed earlier in this chapter, a compulsion that psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud would deem an expression of past trauma.¹⁴⁷ For Chernysheva, this is not a reference to one specific or even personal trauma but the multiple collective traumas of the Soviet past, which are still felt in Russia today. In this pseudo-post-impressionist canvas, we come full circle, returning to the original form of the onion-dome hat. It is worn by a woman, perhaps even one of the women from the series *Waiting for the Miracle*. But here in *Interpretation of Observations, Number 4*, at long last, we get the full picture, from head to toe. She stands tall, bandying her wares—a dozen brassieres in a rainbow of colors. They hang limply from her arm, like the pelts of skinned animals. This woman is a prime example of the alternative and resourceful yet unregulated and thereby precarious economies of Russia's underbelly.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 148-149.

¹⁴⁷ See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961).

Job security is one of many factors that contribute to the level of precarity faced by a given population. Another factor is migration. While migration is at the top of the global news cycle, the crisis has been strongly felt in Russia, where internal migration has been a pressing issue for over two decades. With the influx of workers from across the country as well as from the Commonwealth of Independent States—those countries of the former Soviet Union—into Russia’s already overcrowded urban centers, guest workers are an integral part of the fabric that holds together everyday life in Russia today.

There is an ironic sense of urgency in Chernysheva’s 2007 series *High Road* [Figure 1-22], which pictures day laborers huddled along the shoulder of the Yaroslavsky Chaussee where it meets the MKAD, Moscow’s larger ring road. A border demarcating the inner and outer limits of the burgeoning city of Moscow, the MKAD is a metaphor for the many boundaries that exist in our society, especially for the destitute. “Migrant labor is a necessary part of life in Moscow,” says Chernysheva. “But at the same time, this place at the city limits is a blind spot or an eyesore that does not ‘fit in’ to the city’s formal self-image.”¹⁴⁸ These migrants are operating outside the system. They are patiently waiting to be picked up by people looking for cheap and immediate off-the-books, manual labor. The men idly pass the time standing, squatting, spitting, smoking. They may not be picked up today but will try again tomorrow. They are bundled up in their coats and hats. Some but not all face the camera lens. Their stoicism is disturbed only by the occasional police frisking, which causes them to disperse in different directions before returning again when the coast is clear.

¹⁴⁸ Maria Chehonadskih, “Representing Class,” *Manifesta Journal*, accessed July 11, 2017, <http://www.manifestajournal.org/online-residencies/maria-chehonadskih/representing-class-maria-chehonadskih>.

In the eight portraits of the *High Road*, Chernysheva depicts yet scene from the economics of everyday life. As described by art historian T. J. Demos in his book *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*, contemporary artists today do not root migration in the “discourses of conventional migration theory that position it in relation to illegality and victimhood,” but instead “situate migration as bearing positive transformative potential in the current neoliberal world of control, repression, and inequality.”¹⁴⁹ Demos advocates for the migrant’s subjectivity, which is constantly being reconfigured by rapidly changing global conditions. Chernysheva’s *High Road* does not stage a special or unique scene but, on the contrary, a very common one, not only in Russia but also in other places worldwide.

According to the World Bank, Russia is a top destination for migrant workers, thus it is a major source of remittances paid out to those in home countries.¹⁵⁰ In 2011, the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation, a now defunct agency, reported 9 million economically motivated guest workers in the country.¹⁵¹ A majority provides unskilled, low-wage labor for industries such as construction, mining, and sanitation.

¹⁴⁹ T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 246.

¹⁵⁰ See “Migration and Development Brief 26,” Rep. (Washington D.C.: World Bank Group, April 2016), <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/661301460400427908/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief26.pdf>, and *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016*, 3rd edition (Washington D.C.: World Bank Group, 2016), <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1199807908806/4549025-1450455807487/Factbookpart1.pdf>

¹⁵¹ Zhanna Zaionchkovskaya, Mkrtchian Nikita, and Tyuryukanova Elena. “Russia’s Immigration Challenges,” in *Russia and East Asia: Informal and Gradual Integration*, ed. by Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva (New York: Routledge, 2014), 201. For further information, see Sergei Abashin, “Migration politics in Russia: Laws and Debates,” in *Migrant Workers in Russia: Global Challenges of the Shadow Economy in Social Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2017), 16-33. Using FMS data, Abashin cites the number at 12 million immigrants (8-9% of Russia’s population) and 11 million foreign nations, who live permanently but do not have residency or citizenship. He pinpoints these immigrants are mainly “former Soviet nationals or descendants thereof” coming from the 14 former Soviet republics. His essay charts the history of the FMS, highlighting key moments of Russian migration policy in the 2000s. Given that Chernysheva produced much of this work in the late 2000s, the policies of this decade are viable influences.

This is not counting the thousands of non-migrant workers operating within informal or shadow economies dependent on cheap and unprotected labor, which were discussed previously in this chapter. While the right course for migration regulation, particularly from the surrounding 14 former Soviet republics, was hotly debated in the 2000s, the precarity of these individuals still remains glaringly visible in Russia today. For example, the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi cost over 40 billion Euros and necessitated the labor of over 70,000 migrant workers, who faced long hours, unpaid wages, and poor accommodations.¹⁵² While Russia's practices were put under international scrutiny, the lack of labor oversight continued, thanks to the demands of completion.

In her book *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies After Socialism*, Caroline Humphrey looks at the fallout from the dismantlement of Soviet economic institutions and the ways in which the transition to free-market capitalism faltered, resulting in chaos, depression, and eventually, resourcefulness.¹⁵³ She concludes that the post-Soviet Russian economy has produced the "dispossessed" or "people who have been deprived of property, work, and entitlements," but also "people who are themselves no longer possessed," people operating outside established institutions.¹⁵⁴ The latter acknowledges the subjectivity of the precariat and gives them agency to take control of their own destinies. Humphrey's "dispossessed" include refugees, economic migrants, contract laborers, invalids, homeless, and other pariah social groups, whose statistics

¹⁵² Craig Shaw, et al. "Ghosts Of Sochi: Hundreds Killed In Olympic Construction," *Radio Free Europe*, accessed October 2, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ghosts-of-sochi-olympics-migrant-deaths/26779493.html>.

¹⁵³ Caroline Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies After Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), xvii-xxvii. Humphrey delves deep into the mechanics of racketeering, bribery, and other activities beyond the law that subsist in the indeterminate zones of Russian everyday life. See Ibid., "Chapter 5: Russian Protection Rackets and the Appropriation of Law and Order," 99-126 and "Chapter 6: Rethinking Bribery in Contemporary Russia," 127-146.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 21.

were once maintained by Russia's Federal Migration Service (FMS).¹⁵⁵ While acknowledging the “dispossessed” globally, Humphrey hones in on Russia, whose problematic migration situation is influenced by a “Soviet construction of what elsewhere might be called ‘colonial’ relations with other classes and cultures.”¹⁵⁶ This suggests a strong bias within the white, ethnic Russian community against those of other cultures, who once lived together in harmony under one Soviet flag.

Chernysheva addresses the precarity facing migrants and other dispossessed individuals by regularly returning to them as a subject in her work. “The more you draw a particular subject, the more you become part of it,” reads the text taped onto a 2015 drawing [Figure 1-23] inspired by her earlier series *High Road*. Despite its repetition, the subject is not less impactful. Six roughly sketched men squat along the roadside in an indeterminate location. They operate visually as a border for the largely empty space of the page. “You can see the struggle in my works. I like to have a frame and struggle with it,” says Chernysheva.¹⁵⁷ For her, the empty space “leave[s] the beholder room for thinking about what is depicted.”¹⁵⁸ Chernysheva destabilizes her compositions by populating the margins typically reserved for the ornamental with subjects central to her

¹⁵⁵ Contract workers are defined as those working legally but without “entitlement to job security, insurance, sick pay, housing or other benefits” with a salary, at the time of Humphrey’s writing, of approximately 6,000 RUB per month. See Humphrey, 24. The FMS was established in 1992. Its responsibilities were transferred to the Main Directorate for Migration Affairs in Russia’s Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2016.

¹⁵⁶ Humphrey, 22. While Humphrey’s research focuses on minorities living within the far reaches of the Russian Federation, it also address the lower classes—farmers, peddlers, the unemployed—who are slighted, regardless of their ethnicity, by the top down post-Soviet Russian economy.

¹⁵⁷ See Appendix I. See also the press release for *Olga Chernysheva: Person Protected by Drawing*, Galerie Volker Diehl, accessed May 28, 2018, <http://www.galerievolkerdiehl.com/galerie/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/OLGACHERNYSHEVAEN.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ Heike Eipeldauer, *Olga Chernysheva: Inner Dialog* (Nurnberg: Verlag fur modern kunst, 2009), 48.

narrative. The result catches the viewer off-guard and recalibrates her vision to extend to and beyond the borders of the picture plane.¹⁵⁹

Borders—both visible and invisible—are familiar to Chernysheva, who has lived a nomadic life. Although she identifies as a Russian artist and bases much of her work in and around Moscow, she spent two years in Syria as a child, after which she experienced an awkward transition back into everyday Soviet life.¹⁶⁰ The artist has described this period as a very difficult time in her development. As an adult, she studied at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam not long after the fall of the Soviet Union. Most recently, her October 2016 exhibition at the Drawing Center in New York began with a month-long residency the year prior, during which time she drew from life in this foreign city. She embraced this significant change to her practice, which previously had found inspiration mainly in Moscow, and continued to expand upon it in 2017 in Vienna.

Probing influences from nineteenth century Russian realism to early twentieth century Russian formalism on the work of Olga Chernysheva, I have shown how the artist pointedly narrates a compelling story of social, economic, and political precarity in Russia today, that both looks back on the past and points to prospective futures. My analyses demonstrate how she is a socially conscious artist, whose work maintains a delicate balance between aesthetics and politics in the face of homogenizing globalization.

¹⁵⁹ I am grateful to my advisor, Dr. Jane A. Sharp, for drawing my attention to ornament in Chernysheva's work.

¹⁶⁰ Olga Chernysheva in an unrecorded conversation with author, December 2015, New York, NY.

CHAPTER TWO

DEIMANTAS NARKEVIČUS: MARKING MEMORIES, MEDIATING HISTORIES

In the film *Once in the XX Century* [Figure 2-1], a larger-than-life statue of Vladimir Lenin is erected in Vilnius' main square to the cheers of a large crowd. Lithuanian artist Deimantas Narkevičius produced the work in 2004, more than a decade after the statue was taken down on August 21, 1991 and almost a half-century after it was dedicated on July 20, 1952. For this eight-minute film, Narkevičius sourced original analog Betacam footage of the statue's removal from the Lithuanian National Television Archive and a private videographer.¹ He then reversed the image sequence so that Lenin appears to be installed rather than dismantled. Thus, an action long associated with the drawing of the Iron Curtain is critically subverted, bringing our attention to the carefully constructed nature of history.

In Soviet Vilnius, Lenin stood prominently in the center of Lenin Square off Lenin Avenue.² Copies of the same monument by the decorated Russian sculptor Nikolai Tomskii still stand in the Russian cities of St. Petersburg, Voronezh, and Irkutsk.³ While the tenets of state-sanctioned Socialist Realism dictated attributes for the leader's image, artists produced variations on the Lenin theme for both the largest cities and the smallest villages of all fifteen Soviet republics. Lenin is traditionally portrayed as a stern-faced, older man—bearded, mustached, and balding—with his right arm outstretched, as if beckoning the proletariat, and his left hand clutching the lapel of his coat, his cap, a

¹ The film has no dialogue, only the ambient sound of the crowd. The work was produced in an edition of five with two artists' proofs. One is in the permanent collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

² From 1940 until the early 1950s, this street was called Stalin Avenue. It is now known as Gediminas Avenue (Gedimino prospektas). Dating from the 1850s, this square was known as Lenin Square during the Soviet period and renamed Lukiškės Square after Lithuanian independence.

³ Eglė Mikalajūnė and Rasa Antanavičiūtė, *Vilnius Monuments: A Story of Change* (Vilnius: Lietuvos dailės muziejus, 2012), 186.

newspaper, or a book. The monolithic monoculture of the Soviet period canonized the image of the Bolshevik revolutionary and first leader of the Soviet Union in monuments as well as paintings, posters, stamps, banners, and lapel pins.⁴ Unlike his successor Joseph Stalin, who was denounced for his crimes against humanity in the mid-1950s, Lenin's reputation remained untarnished throughout the Soviet Union until, and in some places, even after, its dissolution.⁵

Today, the Lenin from Vilnius' Lenin Square seen in Narkevičius film can be found in Grūto Parkas, Lithuania's graveyard for Soviet monuments.⁶ Decommunization, which began in 1990 with the establishment of the Lithuanian Ministry for Culture and Education, not only stripped Lenin's name from buildings and streets across the country, but also reframed the histories of objects from the period of Soviet occupation.⁷ This deconsecration has served as a perennial subject for artists both in and outside the region.⁸ Within the last few years, other statues of Lenin have fallen across the former

⁴ A distinction must be made between a "memorial" and a "monument." All memorials are monuments, but not all monuments are memorials. A memorial has a sacred connotation and is directly associated with the dead. Statues of Lenin are monuments because, while he is deceased, the statues commemorate his life and work not his death. Only Lenin's tomb on Red Square can be considered a memorial, since it contains his embalmed remains. See Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Examples of the cult of Lenin can be seen in *Adopt a Lenin*, an installation by contemporary Russian-American artist Yevgeniy Fiks. See Colby Chamberlain, "Yevgeniy Fiks," *Artforum* (September 16, 2008), accessed August 24, 2017, <http://yevgeniyfiks.info/Reviews/AdoptLeninartforum.pdf>.

⁵ The so-called "secret speech" by Nikita Khrushchev, then Soviet Premier, on February 25, 1956 to a closed session of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union put an end to Stalin's cult of personality. See Jan Palmer, "The Spatial Poetics of the Personality Cult," in *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*, eds. Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 19-50. Palmer discusses the centripetal force of portraits of Lenin and, specifically, Stalin.

⁶ Grūto Parkas is located on a multi-acre private estate near the spa town of Druskininkai, 130 kilometers south of Vilnius. At least forty statues are on display in this open-air museum, along with several indoor exhibitions, a café, and a souvenir shop.

⁷ Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, "Boundary Objects of Communism: Assembling the Soviet Past in Lithuanian Museums," (Paris, 2013), 1-28, accessed August 24, 2017, academia.edu.

⁸ Most notably, the émigré artist duo Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid initiated an international project *Monumental Propaganda* in 1993. The project takes its name from Lenin's official plan to promote communist ideals through large-scale commemorative plaques and sculptures after the 1917 October

Eastern Bloc in a phenomenon known as *Leninopad*, which literally translates to “Lenin falling.” During the Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine, the destruction of Lenin statues in that country surged in December 2013, when protests against former President Viktor Yanukovich peaked. The toppling of these statues was captured in countless photographs and videos that circulated in the international media. In the United States as well, monuments have come under scrutiny in recent years. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are over 1,700 monuments, place names, and other symbols honoring the Confederacy in public spaces across the United States.⁹ Citizens, including many artists, are reckoning with Confederate monuments, which are representative of a different but equally critical history of injustice.¹⁰

Through the presentation of conspicuously edited documentary footage in *Once in the XX Century*, Narkevičius conflates two disparate historical moments—the raising and the removal of the Lenin monument—in a film rife with temporal ambiguity. In what

Revolution. While Lenin’s “Monumental Propaganda” called for Tsarist monuments to be destroyed and replaced by new Soviet monuments, Komar and Melamid’s *Monumental Propaganda* called for “a creative collaboration” with Socialist Realist monuments. The result would “transform them, through art, into history lessons” and “turn Moscow into a phantasmagoric garden of ‘post-totalitarian’ art.” See Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, “What is to be Done with Monumental Propaganda,” *Artforum* (May 1992): 102-103. For more on Lenin’s project, see Christina Lodder, “Lenin’s Plan for Monumental Propaganda,” in *Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture in a one-party state, 1917-1922*, eds. Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 16-32.

⁹ Southern Poverty Law Center, “Whose Heritage? A Report on Public Symbols of the Confederacy,” released in 2016, updated in 2018, accessed June 10, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/data-projects/whose-heritage>.

¹⁰ The artist and I have discussed these events. He says, “I do not know if we can compare those Confederate monuments with our [Lithuanian] post-war sculptures. Nevertheless, people are still giving so much importance to the political figures.” Email correspondence from artist to author, May 27, 2017. Rightfully so, Narkevičius is hesitant to compare the situations. If completely removed, he emphasizes the importance of interpretive materials, otherwise, “The action is politicized and not articulated enough from historical perspective.” Email correspondence from artist to author, August 16, 2017. Examples of artists engaging with monuments are legion. Previously, I have written about the work of Thomas Hirshhorn, Tatzu Nishi, and Krzysztof Wodiczko. While Hirshhorn makes his own monuments and Nishi and Wodiczko interact with extant ones, Narkevičius takes a more subtle, indirect approach to monuments, as seen in examples throughout this chapter.

time are the actions of the film situated?¹¹ Is the film an interrogation of the past or a comment on the present? The double X in *Once in the XX Century* can be read as open ended. It could be read as the Roman numeral twenty or as a placeholder for an unknown time or for any time. In the film, the juxtaposition of the tricolor flag of an independent Lithuania with the richly patinated surface of the monument confounds any attempt to accurately situate the film temporally. The title playfully deploys the narrative structure of a fairytale, which traditionally begins with the phrase “Once upon a time...”. This cliché signals to the viewer that what is to come may not be what it seems. It is a story construed by a storyteller. Narkevičius comments on the effect of displacement in his work: “For me, it’s interesting to make it possible for film to not fix a document, for the images to be unplaceable, uncertain to some extent, for the audience to be unsure exactly when or how or who they were made by.”¹² Upending the viewer’s sense of space and time leaves room for interpretation. Narkevičius purposefully exposes and exaggerates the inconsistencies in the film’s narrative in order to parse the problematic relationship between ideology and history in Lithuania during as well as after the Soviet era.

In *Once in the XX Century*, Narkevičius employs montage, reverse play, and the viewpoint of a handheld camera, compressing an event that lasted at least an hour into a few minutes. These techniques echo the practices of Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, and other avant-garde filmmakers of the early twentieth century, whose influence on

¹¹ This question echoes that of American artist Robert Smithson, who, writing about the work of his minimalist colleague Dan Flavin in the 1960s, said, “Rather than saying, ‘What times is it?’ we should say, ‘Where is the time?’ Where is Flavin’s Monument?” Smithson saw Flavin’s work as destroying time, compressing centuries into a second. See Robert Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 11. This idea is addressed in relation to Narkevičius’ early sculptures, which are discussed later in this chapter.

¹² Martin Clark, “Deimantas Narkevičius and Martin Clark in Conversation: Starr Auditorium, Tate Modern October 24, 2004,” in *Deimantas Narkevičius: Once in the XX Century* (Bristol: Arnolfini, 2006), 51.

Narkevičius' peer Olga Chernysheva was discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. For example, in the opening sequence of Eisenstein's film *October* (1928) [Figure 2-2], the crowd violently topples a statue of Tsar Alexander III.¹³ Later in the same film, when the fate of the Revolution appears uncertain, the statue appears to reassemble itself, as if it were fighting back. Both Eisenstein and Narkevičius use monuments of political figures—symbols of power, stability, and continuity—to play with temporality in a work of art, compelling the viewer to question how history is constructed, inscribed, and recalled. Time is not proscribed and, in fact, it has already been manipulated thoroughly by ideology.¹⁴ Today, time still remains malleable, especially in the hands of artists, like Narkevičius whose practice bridges historical fissures.

The felling of Lenin—then, immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, and now, under renewed geopolitical tensions in the region—must be viewed within the larger discourse of public memory in Eastern Europe, since it provides an immediate and powerful means of breaking with the region's already fragile historical narratives. Witnessing the slow but steady disappearance of the byproducts of communism still visibly entrenched in the volatile post-Soviet ecosystem, artists like Narkevičius embrace these repeated disruptions in the normative flow of their everyday lives. Thus, it is productive to frame this film as well as Narkevičius work at large within the Brechtian concept of interruption. During the interwar period in Weimar Germany, poet,

¹³ Svetlana Boym calls the film “a war on monuments.” See Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 89. In this book, Boym describes her visit to the Park of Arts, Moscow's equivalent of Grūto Parkas.

¹⁴ See Boris Groys, “Back from the Future,” in *Arteast 2000+: The Art of Eastern Europe* (Vienna: Folio Verlag, 2001); reprinted in *Art Institutions of Eastern Europe*, ed. Alenka Gregoric (Karlsruhe: Badischer Kunstverein, 2008), 9.

playwright, and director Bertolt Brecht developed the concept of “epic theater” in opposition to dramatic theater, a form of passive entertainment employing a linear structure and method acting meant to provoke empathy in the viewer.¹⁵ Epic theater, by contrast, produces *Verfremdungseffekt* or an effect of distancing or “estrangement” that results in the viewer becoming critically conscious of her own conditions.¹⁶ Interpreting Brecht, Walter Benjamin cites the aim of epic theater as “discover[ing] the conditions of life... through the interruption of happenings.”¹⁷ Interruption characterizes epic theater and is a didactic tool that “suggests the interchange between audience and actors and vice versa... [through which] every spectator is enabled to become a participant.”¹⁸ Interruptions also produce a temporal slowing down, allowing time for reflection and, thereby, further distancing the viewer from the action. Capturing an interruption on the stage that was everyday Soviet life, Narkevičius’ film *Once in the XX Century* forces us not only to acknowledge the physical presence of Lenin’s monument in the urban landscape but also to critically reflect on its fluctuating meaning over time.

This chapter investigates and interrogates the ways Narkevičius engages with public spaces, specifically monuments and architecture, with the aims of reviving, reinscribing, and rewriting history within the everyday urban landscape. Whereas Olga Chernysheva looks at the intimate, private spaces of everyday life for inspiration,

¹⁵ See Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles, eds., *Brecht on Art and Politics* (London: Methuen, 2003), and John Willett, ed., *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1974).

¹⁶ Viktor Shklovsky, whose 1917 concept of *ostranenie* is described in the previous chapter as it pertains to the work of Russian artist Olga Chernysheva, inspired Brecht, who was exposed to Shklovsky’s work on a 1935 trip to Moscow. Brecht made Shklovsky’s *ostranenie* more politically and ideologically charged and specifically applied it to the arts of theater or performance. For an in-depth discussion of similarities and differences between the two terms, see Douglas Robinson, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature: Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, “What Is Epic Theater?,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 150.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

Narkevičius turns to shared, public spaces as a means of assessing the past. In this way, his practice relates directly to that of Paulina Ołowska, which, as elucidated in the subsequent chapter, weaves both individual and collective histories into works that critically evaluate the economics of womanhood in Poland since the Second World War. With each example examined herein, Narkevičius bridges the long forgotten original intentions of a monument or a building with contemporary notions immediate to the viewer. The result is a performative urban landscape that can be framed within the idea of interruption. A vast network of buildings, monuments, memorials, and sacred spaces, this landscape is being altered constantly. Through artist interruptions in this landscape, the viewer is forced not only to acknowledge the presence of the monument and the specific history of its production in the past, but also to critically reflect on and participate in the different types of histories and memories it stands to represent today.

Considering the effects of already fraught discourses of individual and collective memory in Lithuania and, more broadly, the post-Soviet sphere today, this chapter examines ruptures in the urban landscape of post-Soviet Lithuania through the lens of Narkevičius' work. I argue that his sustained interest in monumental forms—namely, architecture, monuments, and memorials—revives and reinscribes the Soviet past within everyday life, bridging original intentions with contemporary notions. Narkevičius reclaims, rehabilitates, and redeems lost, forgotten, neglected, overshadowed, ignored, and erased histories in his works through a process of adaptive reuse as seen from early conceptual sculptures to his more recent stereoscopic three-dimensional film.

Making Histories

Narkevičius is the most consistently and widely recognized Lithuanian artist on the international scene. He was born in 1964 in Utena, approximately sixty miles outside the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, where he lives and works today. Not an exception to the rule, Narkevičius served a compulsory two years in the Soviet army from 1984 to 1986, at the height of the Soviet-Afghan War. For the majority of this period, he was stationed in Stalingrad, today's Volgograd, in southern Russia and did not see active combat. Upon returning to Vilnius in 1987, he enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts, graduating in 1992 with a degree in sculpture. Narkevičius had several early experiences abroad that were critical in broadening his practice and establishing him in an increasingly globalized art world: a residency in Salzburg in 1990, inclusion in the group exhibition *Europe Unknown* organized by the well-known Polish curator Anda Rottenberg in 1991, and a year-long residency at the Delfina Foundation in London in 1992. Like Chernysheva, whose successes are roughly parallel, Narkevičius is no stranger to the art world circuit of blue-chip galleries, global biennials, and landmark institutions. He represented Lithuania at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001 and has work in more than two-dozen private and public collections, including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; and the French National Collection. This chapter complicates accepted notions of Narkevičius' practice by reexamining his work produced at critical moments in the history of post-Soviet Lithuanian, which critically assesses his place in both local and global histories of art.¹⁹

¹⁹ Narkevičius' bibliography is extensive. His work is the subject of two major monographic publications, related to exhibitions at Museo Marino Marini/Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb and Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, respectively: Marco Scotini, ed., *Da Capo* (Berlin: Archive Books, 2015) and Chus Martinez, ed., *The Unanimous Life* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2010). Several smaller catalogues from solo exhibitions include Māris Vītols, et al., *Deimantas Narkevičius: Archaeology of Memories* (Riga: Association Latvia Cultural Projects, 2015); Anna M. Potocka, et al., *Deimantas Narkevičius: This Is Not What You See, This Is What You Hear* (Kraków: Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej

To appreciate fully Narkevičius' practice, one must have a basic understanding of Lithuania's unique and very complicated history in the hierarchies of power in Europe since the Middle Ages. A country half the size of Ohio with a population of three million people, it was established as a kingdom in 1253, incorporated into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569, and largely annexed by the Russian Empire in the late 1700s before it declared independence in 1918 only to be later occupied by the Soviet Union from 1940 to 1990.²⁰ The first of the fifteen republics to declare itself independent from the Soviet Union on March 11, 1990, Lithuania is one of the few post-Soviet states to be both a member of the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).²¹ Poised on the border between east and west, it plays an increasingly important role in geopolitics today.

During the Soviet occupation, both official and unofficial Lithuanian art was dominated by aesthetic conservatism—in official circles, a stoic Socialist Realism, and

Bunkier Sztuki, 2006); Martin Clark, *Deimantas Narkevičius: Once in the XX Century* (Bristol: Arnolfini, 2006); Paul Barratt and Jan Verwoert, *Deimantas Narkevičius: the Role of a Lifetime* (Brighton: Art and Sacred Places, 2003). Having participated in important biennials and other multi-year exhibitions, his work is cited in the following catalogues: Kasper König, Mikhail Piotrovsky, and Hedwig Fijen, *Manifesta 10: The European Biennial of Contemporary Art: St. Petersburg* (London: Koenig Books Ltd, 2014); Brigitte Frantzen, Kasper König, and Carina Plath, *Sculpture Projects Muenster 07* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2007); Kęstutis Kuizinas and Jonas Valatkevičius, *Deimantas Narkevičius: La Biennale di Venezia 49* (Vilnius: Contemporary Art Center, 2001); Robert Fleck, Maria Lind, and Barbara Vanderlinden, *Manifesta 2: European Biennial for Contemporary Art / Luxembourg* (Amsterdam: Idea Books, 1998). Catalogues of his major group exhibitions include Kathleen Bühler, Michael Baumgartner, and Nina Zimmer, *The Revolution Is Dead. Long Live the Revolution!: From Malevich to Judd, from Deineka to Bartana* (Bern: Kunstmuseum Bern, 2017); Massimiliano Gioni, ed., *Ostalgia* (New York: New Museum, 2011); Christopher Eamon, *Rearview Mirror: New Art from Central & Eastern Europe* (Edmonton, Alta: Art Gallery of Alberta, 2011); Fabio Cavallucci, *Post Monument* (Milan: Silvana, 2010); Luc Tuymans, et al. *Luc Tuymans: The Reality of the Lowest Rank: A Vision of Central Europe* (Tiel: Lannoo, 2010); Bojana Pejić and David Elliott, eds., *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999); Susan Buck-Morss, Julian Stallabrass, and Leonidas Donskis, *Ground Control: Technology and Utopia* (London: Black Dog Pub, 1997).

²⁰ For a thorough and even poetic history of Lithuania from the period of the Grand Duchy (1569-1863) to the turn of the twenty-first century, see Timothy Synder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). A more precise timeline can be found in Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, eds., *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets, 1945-1991* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 407-445.

²¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet Premier, officially dissolved the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991.

in unofficial circles, a vibrant expressionism. The latter, as seen in the paintings and prints by Silvestras Džiauskštas, Antanas Gudaitis, Jonas Čeponis, Linas Katinas, Raimundas Martinėna, among others, gave artists a seemingly neutral outlet unburdened by extreme dissidence.²² Figurative art in unofficial practices was more direct, taking on deeply personal, psychological, spiritual, and even political themes. Incorporating found objects into abject, grotesque, and vulgar vignettes, Valentinas Antanavičius metaphorically represents the rituals of everyday life in late Soviet Lithuania. In *The Legacy* (1968-1988), the artist presents a dark and macabre portrait of a mottled and misshapen baby doll with the head of a bespectacled grown man carrying the decapitated head of Stalin in the front pocket of his leather bib. Such outright acerbic cynicism is also seen in other works of the time, like *Lenin's Room* (1972) by Arvydas Šaltenis and *Joseph Stalin* (n.d., c. 1981) by Romanas Vilkauskas, which creatively interpret the sacred portraits of Communist Party leaders.

Lithuanian art during the Soviet occupation is usually described as a grey area, oriented simultaneously toward official and unofficial discourses and less politically inclined than art in other Soviet outposts, such as Kyiv. Officially, it was subject to Socialist Realism, which depicted positive, heroic, and idealized subjects unencumbered by the trials and tribulations of everyday life. Unofficially, other styles, as described above, flourished. Like in Moscow, Tallinn, Odessa, and other centers for nonconformist art in the Soviet Union, Vilnius was home to many unofficial exhibitions. These

²² The work of legendary Lithuanian painter and composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875-1911), who is associated with Romanticism, could be a source of inspiration for these expressionist tendencies. Works by the artists listed, as well as others of their generation, are part of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union at the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum in New Brunswick, New Jersey. They are also part of the collection at the National Gallery of Art [Nacionalinė dailės galerija] in Vilnius, Lithuania, among other regional museums.

exhibitions took place not only in private apartments and studios but also within official institutions that were less closely monitored, such as the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) Writers' Union, the LSSR State Conservatory, the Urban Planning Institute, and the Vaga Publishing House.²³

Art critic Alfonsas Andriuškevičius coined the term “semi-nonconformist art” to describe Lithuanian art at that time, since it often strayed from blatant political and social motifs, as seen in certain nonconformist movements emanating from the empire's epicenter, Moscow.²⁴ Looking back on the Soviet occupation from the perspective of Lithuanian independence, Andriuškevičius describes the climate in Soviet Lithuania as tepid, if not warm, to artists maneuvering between “official” and “unofficial” worlds.²⁵ Skaidra Trilupaitytė rejects the notion of semi-nonconformism due to “an obvious lack of underground art.”²⁶ Her research pinpoints how the conditions of artistic production were vastly different from those in Soviet Russia because the relationship between the totalitarian regime and Soviet Lithuania was, literally, farther removed. This distance gave Lithuanian artists, even the official Lithuanian Artists' Union, greater freedom to produce art of a national and, in the late 1980s, independent character that deserves to be

²³ Dovile Tumpytė, “Art in non-art institutions,” *Parallel Chronologies: An Archive of East European Exhibitions*, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/art-in-non-art-institutions/>.

²⁴ Alfonsas Andriuškevičius, “The Phenomenon of Nonconformist Art,” in *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets, 1945-1991*, 25-29.

²⁵ One medium particularly fruitful for such transgressions was photography. Experimental photography in the Baltics, specifically in Lithuania, thrived during the Soviet occupation. Less stringently monitored by the censors, photographers, like Aleksandras Mačiasukas and Antanas Sutkus of an older generation and Vitas Luckus and Romualdas Požerskis of a younger generation, developed a more socially oriented practice of straight photography that gave life in the Soviet Union a human face. They simultaneously took on both official and unofficial commissions, often keeping the latter private. The Lithuanian Union of Photographers in Kaunas, which I visited in June 2016, is an invaluable resource for photography in Soviet Lithuania. See also Raminta Jurėnaitė, “Reclaiming the Salt of the Earth: Lithuanian Photography Reconsidered,” in *Beyond Memory: Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art*, ed. Diane Neumaier (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 247-257.

²⁶ Skaidra Trilupaitytė, “Totalitarianism and the Problem of Soviet Art Evaluation: The Lithuanian Case,” *Studies in East European Thought* 59, 4 (2007): 262.

appreciated on its terms alone.²⁷ Writing on the same period, art historian Elona Lubytė uses the phrase “Quiet Modernism” as “a metaphor, which refers not to the artists or works but to the nature of the process.”²⁸ In her exhibition and subsequent book *Quiet Modernism in Lithuania, 1962-1982*, she provides a post-colonial reading of the relationship between Lithuania and the Soviet Union in which Lithuanian artists were forced to develop subtle strategies to quietly subvert authority. The salient features unique to Quiet Modernism include prudence, curiosity (in the dissemination of information), respect (for the tradition of the avant-garde, particularly “Ars,” a national movement in the interwar period), abstraction, technological fetishism, and lastly, spirituality. Lubytė presents Quiet Modernism from the artists’ perspectives, preserving their voices through primary documents and detailed lists of exhibitions and art-related activities. These retrospective studies complement more recent histories of Lithuanian contemporary art, most notably, Vytautas Michelkevičius and Kęstutis Šapoka’s two volume, bi-lingual *(In)dependent Contemporary Art Histories* (2011, 2014), which surveys alternative, artist-run initiatives from 1987 through 2014.²⁹ The privately-funded Soros Center for Contemporary Art (SCCA) and the state-funded Contemporary Art Center (CAC), established in Vilnius in 1992 and 1993, respectively, were critical institutions in the advancement of Lithuanian art in the immediate post-independence

²⁷ Ibid, 261-280. Trilupaitytė distinguishes Lithuanian art from both its Russian and Western counterparts to expose how Lithuanian art is either incorrectly or too little contextualized in art historical discourses.

²⁸ Elona Lubytė, *Quiet Modernism in Lithuania, 1962-1982* (Vilnius: Contemporary Art Center, 1997), 6-24.

²⁹ The books primarily focus on activities in Vilnius. Across 991 pages, they address more artists, works, and spaces than possible here. Vytautas Michelkevičius and Kęstutis Šapoka, eds., *(In)dependent Contemporary Art Histories: Artist-Run Initiatives in Lithuania, 1987-2011* (Vilnius: Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists’ Association, 2011), and Vytautas Michelkevičius and Kęstutis Šapoka, eds., *(In)dependent Contemporary Art Histories: Artist-Run Initiatives in Lithuania, 1987-2014* (Vilnius: Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artists’ Association, 2014). Narkevičius is not a central figure in this publication; however, he is mentioned several times, both positively and negatively.

period.³⁰ These activities were further increased in 2009 by the opening of the long-awaited National Gallery of Art, a division of the Lithuanian Art Museum national network.

Coming of age in the 1980s, Narkevičius witnessed the disintegration of Soviet society during his formative years as an artist. He saw the effects of the Soviet Union's failed attempts at *perestroika* or rebuilding as well as the rise of the Lithuanian Reform Movement Sąjūdis, which championed democracy in this small nation on the Baltic Sea. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Narkevičius was part of a new generation of Lithuanian artists, who transitioned from their classical Soviet educations founded in Marxism to so-called postmodern practices of contemporary, often conceptually-motivated, art. With his fellow classmates at the Vilnius Academy of Art, Narkevičius rebelled against the established pedagogical system, which resulted in both faculty and students being divided along stalwart classical and fledgling conceptual lines.³¹ With the increased opportunity to exhibit abroad as well as the pressure to support a burgeoning infrastructure for contemporary art at home, Lithuanian artists in the immediate post-Soviet period looked both inward and outward, backward and forward, during this complex time of democracy

³⁰ For histories of SCCA and CAC, see Raminta Jurėnaitė, ed., *100 Contemporary Lithuanian Artists*. (Vilnius: R. Paknio Leidykla, 2000); Kęstutis Kuizinas, ed., *Lietuvos Daile 1989-1999: Desmit Metu [Lithuanian Art 1989-1999: The Ten Years]* (Vilnius: Šiuolaikinio meno centras, 1999); Kęstutis Kuizinas and Julija Fomina, *ŠMC 1992-2007 [CAC 1992-2007]* (Vilnius: Šiuolaikinio meno centras, 2007). The SCCA closed in 1999. Not having a permanent home, it was dependent on site-specific and traveling exhibitions. Its annual exhibition was usually held at the CAC in the former Palace of Exhibitions. The CAC's building is the subject of Narkevičius' film *Scena* discussed later in this chapter. Narkevičius doubled as a curator at the CAC from 1994 until 2011. Kęstutis Kuizinas was the first and, thus far, only director of the CAC. Raminta Jurėnaitė was the director of SCCA, which is now defunct. The archives of the SCCA can be found in the library of the National Gallery of Art, where I accessed them in June 2016 and March 2017.

³¹ On April 29, 1991, Petras Mazūras, a professor in the Department of Sculpture in the Vilnius Academy of Art, issued the following statement: "What we are witnessing here is the emergence of a new art stream. There is no use in fighting it, but we must openly state our position on it—in any case, conceptualism is not included in the Academy's programming, and we must follow the latter." As quoted in Skaidra Trilupaitytė, "Who is Counting the Decades of Independent Art," in *(In)dependent Contemporary Art Histories: Artist-Run Initiatives in Lithuania, 1987-2011* (2011), 36.

building and national reawakening.³² While his early works—sculptures in both the public and private space—address metaphysical themes and a universal history of humankind, his later works—primarily films—directly engage with the Soviet past in order to question its legacy in an independent and fiercely anti-communist Lithuania.

The first annual exhibition of the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts in 1993 embodied these sentiments. Entitled *Between Sculpture and Object*, it presented the legacy of conceptual sculpture in Lithuania through a diverse selection of twenty-two works produced between 1973 and 1993. In her catalogue essay, the curator Raminta Jurėnaitė argues that sculptors straying from figuration, employing unconventional materials, and embracing the readymade were not new phenomena but ingrained within the local cultural milieu since the 1960s. Expanding upon the three generations of conceptual sculptors exhibited, Jurėnaitė rejects the precedents and chronologies of so-called Western art history in favor of forgoing a national timeline for the development of Lithuanian contemporary art as “a bridge of a national heritage between past and future.”³³ Narkevičius’ *Tree [Medis]* (1993) [Figure 2-3], one of his earliest known works

³² For overviews of Lithuanian contemporary art with a emphasis on the specificity of Vilnius, see Kęstutis Kuizinas, “Lithuanian Art from 1988 to the Present,” in *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets, 1945-1991*, 354-361; Linara Dovydaitytė, Renata Dubinskaitė, Asta Vaičiulytė, and Simon Rees, eds., *Lithuanian Art: 2000-2010: Ten Years* (Vilnius: Contemporary Art Centre, 2010); Dovilė Tumpytė, “From Metaphorical Interpretation toward Transformation of Spacetime. On Lithuanian Artists’ Reflection on the Soviet Past,” in *Revisiting Footnotes: Footprints of the Recent Past in the Post-Socialist Region*, eds. Ieva Astahovska and Inga Lāce (Riga: Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2015), 97-112. In addition to *Art of the Baltics*, comparative historical studies include the Soros-funded exhibition and catalogue *Personal Time: Art of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, 1945-1996*, ed. Lolita Jablonskienė, et al. (Warsaw: Zachęta National Gallery, 1996). Founded in 1979, the Baltic Triennial (formerly known as Baltic Triennial of International Art) is in its thirteenth edition, bringing together works from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Today, the Baltics are part of broader dialogues within Northern Europe, along with Scandinavian countries. See Mindaugas Jurkynas, “What Do We Talk about when We Talk about Northern Europe: Regional Identities in Lithuania,” *Politeja* 51, no. 213, (December 2017): 213-234.

³³ Raminta Jurėnaitė, “Between Sculpture and Object in Lithuanian.” In *Between Sculpture and Object in Lithuanian: 1st Exhibition of the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts – Lithuania* (Vilnius: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, 1993), 6.

produced during his post-graduate residency at the Delfina Foundation in London, was included in *Between Sculpture and Object*. Instead of a verdant arbor, *Tree* is composed of a cement trunk rooted in a steel pedestal. Its branches made of thin glass shelves hold an arrangement of small tubes, each containing a marble. A bold transformation of banal object into an inorganic work of art, *Tree* delicately balances tensions between disparate textures and contrasting forms.

Narkevičius' works from the first half of the 1990s, such as *Tree*, are predominantly assisted readymades or found objects altered by conventional materials.³⁴ Narkevičius describes his early practice as “rethinking things that already existed, not introducing anything new.”³⁵ Exposed to tendencies in international sculpture while studying abroad in London, Narkevičius aimed for his work at this time to “introduce ‘a single object,’ which was a statement in itself.”³⁶ The result was a series of sculptures that reworked low-grade and low-cost chairs, desks, cribs, shoes, and other everyday items, which he nicked from his home or picked up at a local flea market. By repurposing and manipulating these objects, Narkevičius deforms them, making them appear strange to the viewer by way of a kind of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*. The work *Never Backward* [*Niekada atgal*] (1994) [Figure 2-4] is a baby's crib filled with paraffin wax, rendering it unusable. “Human beings cannot become little again and go sleeping in a baby crib,” says Narkevičius, just “like cultural development, [which] cannot go

³⁴ For a Marxist reading of the readymade in the twentieth century, see John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: Verso Books, 2007).

³⁵ Krzysztof Kościuczuk and Deimantas Narkevičius, “Deimantas Narkevičius in Conversation with Krzysztof Kościuczuk,” *Archive 1* (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2008): n.p.

³⁶ Ibid. Narkevičius cites Tony Cragg, Richard Wentworth, Richard Deacon, and even Helen Chadwick and Damien Hirst as artists of interest. The influence of Marcel Duchamp as well as Fluxus artists, including the Lithuanian-born George Maciunas, could also be read into Narkevičius' early work, which has a kind of absurdity absent from the work of more polished British art he saw while in London in the early 1990s.

backwards as it would be regression.”³⁷ Within the context of this work, he makes this impossible by shutting us out from curling up inside. *Never Backward* uses the universal stages of life as a temporal metaphor for maintaining a conventional, chronological understanding of progress.

Narkevičius complicates this temporality in *Too Long on the Plinth* (1994) [Figure 2-5] in which a pair of men’s black leather dress shoes, filled with a hardened mixture of plaster and salt, are mounted onto a white pedestal. The shoes remain firmly grounded, despite being detached from their body, and yet the sculpture is haunted by the absence of corporeality.³⁸ The viewer easily imagines the missing body because the work has adapted the traditional format of a monument honoring an individual. Without its body, Narkevičius’ plinth itself becomes a monument in and of itself, reversing the established hierarchy of monumental sculpture. As theoretician Mikhail Yampolsky keenly observes, “The preservation of a pedestal [plinth] as the carrier of special historical value is... humiliating to the monument itself.”³⁹ Plinths are accessories to monuments that allow them to hover above natural sightlines. As ideological apparatus, plinths further lionize their subjects.

Too Long on the Plinth reverses the action in Narkevičius’ later film *Once in the XX Century* in which a bronze cast of Lenin’s body flies onto a pedestal, where its feet await its placement. While the latter work reestablishes a presence through the reversal of film, the former draws attention to an absence. Narkevičius’ early sculptures engage with

³⁷ “‘Never Backwards,’ Deimantas Narkevičius, 1994,” Tate Modern, accessed October 9, 2017, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/narkevicius-never-backwards-t12779>.

³⁸ Unbeknownst to the artist, the work makes literal the American idiom “to give someone ‘a pair of cement shoes,’” that is, to discretely dispose of a dead body in water by weighing it down.

³⁹ Mikhail Yampolsky, “In the Shadow of Monuments: Notes on Iconoclasm and Time,” in *Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late Twentieth-Century Russia*, trans. John Kachur (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 107.

the concept of entropy, which, when understood beyond the field of thermodynamics, is defined as the “inevitable and steady deterioration of a system or society.” Entropy is exhibited not in their materiality, which does not physically decay or degrade as in the work of artist Joseph Beuys or even Damien Hirst, but in their temporality, which seizes time.⁴⁰ Unlike his later works, which embrace movement through the medium of film, *Too Long on the Plinth* and other sculptures from the early 1990s arrest movement. Thus, they are akin to the works of American Minimalists, who used artificial materials like neon and plastic to produce art “not built for the ages, but rather against the ages.”⁴¹ Writing about Minimalism in the 1960s, artist Robert Smithson described how the “concealed surfaces” of objects by Dan Flavin and Donald Judd became “hideouts for time.”⁴² In harnessing entropy within his early works, Narkevičius calls upon the viewer to also take pause, if even for a moment, in order to reconsider the best path forward.

Mediating Memories

While *Too Long on the Plinth* pointedly dismantles Soviet ideology in the post-independence period, it also acknowledges its ruins that remain. This acknowledgment is the first step in a process of individual and collective healing and subsequent development. Reflecting on artistic activities during the tumultuous years of the 1990s, Narkevičius says:

The ideological “orientation” that dominated [in the Soviet Union] for decades was—among other things—an attempt at creating a society above and beyond

⁴⁰ “Entropy,” *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, accessed June 5, 2018, <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=entropy>. I am grateful for Dr. Jane A. Sharp’s suggestion to consider Narkevičius’ early work in conjunction with Robert Smithson and entropy in American Minimalism.

⁴¹ Smithson, 11. For a secondary source consideration of temporality in Minimalist art, see Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 11.

history. The new political situation [after 1991] re-inserted us into the rotating circuit of history, which inevitably requires a vision. But as we started working on such a vision for ourselves, things re-emerged from the past; phenomena that had been hidden under the surfaces of ideology.⁴³

Already in his early works in which an innocuous pair of men's dress shoes is elevated to symbolism, Narkevičius establishes his practice as a means of looking back on the past in order to take stock of what the Soviets left behind. For him, history is not a burden but a responsibility.⁴⁴ "I am not exploring history from some neutral outside position—I live in it... trying to find my own place in history," he says.⁴⁵ Art provides the means to that end.

While he shirks the label of historian, Narkevičius produces artworks that historian Hayden V. White would consider to be "fictions of factual representations."⁴⁶ In this genre, the facts of the historian mix with the fictions of the novelist, breaking down the borders between temporalities, and thus, the disciplines.⁴⁷ Because the majority of histories are written in retrospect, there is no way to confirm the accuracy of all details. The past moves into the present and, undoubtedly, is altered as the historian succumbs to the literary devices of the novelist in order to tell a good, captivating story. "The facts do not speak for themselves... the historian speaks from them, speaks on their behalf, and fashions the fragments of the past into a whole whose integrity is—in its *representation*—

⁴³ Kuizinas and Valatkevičius, 16, 18. Narkevičius repeatedly identifies the early 1990s as a critical moment of self-reflection in light of the socialist past. See "Deimantas Narkevičius in Conversation with Krysztuf Kościuczuk."

⁴⁴ On the changing role of the historian, see Hayden V. White, "The Burden of History," *History and Theory* 5, 2 (1966): 111-134.

⁴⁵ Kuizinas and Valatkevičius, 14.

⁴⁶ "I emphasize—again—that the historicity of my works should not be associated with history as a scholarly discipline," says Narkevičius in Kuizinas and Valatkevičius, 16. Hayden V. White, "The Fictions of Factual Representations," in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, eds. Claire Farago and Donald Preziosi (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 22.

⁴⁷ The novelist is an aspecific role that can be replaced by any creative type, such as an artist.

a purely discursive one,” writes White.⁴⁸ For both the historian and the novelist, language is “the instrument of mediation” between fact and fiction, the past and the present that “implies and entails a specific posture before the world, which is ethical, ideological, or more generally... politically contaminated.”⁴⁹ The author of a chronicle or a novel has the freedom to negotiate rhetorical devices. No single literary device or, in White’s terminology, mode—be it metaphor or metonymy; synecdoche or irony—is better than another, and “any given linguistic protocol will obscure as much as it reveals.”⁵⁰ In short, neither the historian nor the novelist is infallible; yet the mark of success is in one’s ability to manipulate language deployed in narrative form. Applied to Narkevičius, White’s postulates help us understand how the artist navigates the past through his works, and the significance of his rhetorical choices as they pertain to meaning.

His-story (1998) [Figure 2-6] is by far Narkevičius’ most intimate film; yet through the recollection of personal memories, it presents a collective history.⁵¹ “In the film, me [sic] and some people very close to me are telling the story of my deceased parents... such a political story could not be produced at that time [in the Soviet period],” writes Narkevičius.⁵² In the first scene, Narkevičius walks along a beach with his wife and son. “That summer, I remember I got lost on the beach,” he says. Their actions reenact the past, as his son appears to wander off into the distance. Narkevičius creates a parallel between the past and present. Rather emotionless and monotone, he goes on to describes his own father’s plight—the result of a conflict at work that put him at odds

⁴⁸ White, “The Fictions of Factual Representations,” 26.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 29-30.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 30-31.

⁵¹ The gender bias of its title is not lost on me; however, I see its practicality as a title, literally pointing to the film as representative of the artist’s personal history.

⁵² Scotini, 35.

with the Communist Party. Cast out of mainstream society, the elder Narkevičius was subjected to psychological torment but eventually rehabilitated. In the following two scenes we hear from Narkevičius' siblings, Darius and Živilė, who each give their impressions of their parents. Together, they paint a portrait of a Soviet family, subjected to the harsh dictates of a faceless state.

Documentary in nature, Narkevičius' films, like *His-story*, blur the lines between fact and fiction as well as the individual and collective experience. In her essay "The Politics of Truth—Documentarism in the Art Field," artist Hito Steyerl describes how documentary practices have changed the fine arts by bringing reality, truth, and ethics to the forefront and debunking any purported neutrality of artwork. She reads documentary practices as innately political, highlighting their flexibility in working both for and against governments, sometimes simultaneously. Like ideology, the documentary can never be trusted. She writes, "Documentary forms by no means convey a universal truth of the political but, conversely, a very specific politics of truth... we cannot speak about truth but at most truth effects, not about reality but only about the discourses in which they are constructed, not about facts but only about the narratives through which they are articulated."⁵³ To speak of its authenticity would be counterproductive because documentaries are often consciously constructed to perform a certain type of propagandistic work within specific contexts. Narkevičius uses the documentary format yet another way that subverts its standard deployment, as it is described by Steyerl. He

⁵³ Hito Steyerl, "Politics of Truth—Documentarism in the Art Field," in *The Need to Document*, ed. Vit Havranek, et al. (Zurich: JP Ringier, 2005), 56, 58. Also helpful in exploring this tendency was the book *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art No.1*, eds. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), which includes "Documentary/Verité: Bio-politics, Human Rights, and the Figure of "Truth" in Contemporary Art" by Okwui Enwezor, and "The Documentary Ontology of Forms in Transforming Countries" by Vit Havranek.

produces films that blatantly reveal highly subjective “truth effects” rather than objective truths. Concerned with individual consequences rather than universal truths, Narkevičius’ works, such as *His-story*, preface lived experience, which combines subjective memories with objective histories. While not exclusive to the phenomenon of the historical turn in contemporary art from Eastern Europe, lived experience provides a reference point upon which artists can look back on the past as an impetus from driving work. Like the other artists discussed in this dissertation, Narkevičius’ story—his *his-tory*—serves as the medium through which he is able to forge a new, post-communist identity.

Landscapes of Memories

Narkevičius made his film debut with *Europe 54° 54' - 25° 19'* [*Europa 54° 54' - 25° 19'*] (1997) [Figure 2-7].⁵⁴ “It is a simple documentary of a trip I have made one morning from my former flat to the geographical center of Europe,” says the artist.⁵⁵ This cursory summary fails to capture the symbolism of this nine-minute film, which was shot with a Soviet camera on Super 8 film then printed in 16mm for exhibition. Narkevičius’

⁵⁴ While this film marks a significant departure from Narkevičius’ early works, he has continued to produce three-dimensional works with found objects. For example, *Whatever You Play, It Sounds Like the 1940s* (2009) and *Matching the TU-144* (1995, 2012) both comprise anachronistic audio equipment, such as radios, speakers, record players, and tape recorders, produced in the Soviet Union. Once heralded as the height of technology, these machines are now outdated. In the gallery, the viewer is encouraged to interact with them, thereby, “hearing” the past. A static work, *White Revenge* (2008) presents the viewer with a replica of a table designed by El Lissitzky in the 1930s. Marring its surface are bullet holes from a Mauser C96 gun, used by the White Army in the Civil War following the Russian Revolution. In 2014, gb agency, which represents the artist in Paris, exhibited this work, which is a very specific invocation of history, along with his early sculptures *Open in Six Parts* (1993) and *Game No.1* (1995) and two more recent films, *Books on Shelves and Without Letters* (2013) and *Ausgeträumt* (2010). These films feature the Vilnius-based rock band *Without Letters* and highlight the artist’s deep-seated interest in and knowledge of underground music. Here, I appreciate my advisor Dr. Jane A. Sharp’s observation that his works recall the way Russian avant-gardists (futurists), including Ilya Zdanevich, perceived the city of Tbilisi during Georgia’s brief period of independence (1918-21). They also expressed this in latitude by founding an organization that published under the name “41 degrees.” See, Stephen Bury, *Breaking the Rules: The Printed Face of the European Avant-Garde, 1900-1937* (London: The British Library, 2007), 148-150 and Tatiana Nikol’skaia, “*Fantasticheskii gorod: Russakaia kul’turnaia zhizin’ v Tbilisi (1917-1921)* [“Fantastic City”: Russian Cultural Life in Tbilisi (1917-1921)] (Moscow: Piataia strana, 2000).

⁵⁵ Scotini, 27.

use of anachronistic media would quickly become a trademark of his practice. Deployed not as a medium of convenience or necessity but in a conscious decision, these anachronistic media are found objects, continuing in the tradition of his three-dimensional sculptures. “I think that my film is sort of an extension of my sculpture,” says the artist.⁵⁶

Europe 54° 54' - 25° 19' opens with a close-up of the artist’s eleven-story apartment building. Built in 1977 on the sleepy outskirts of Vilnius’ Old Town, it met the needs of a growing Soviet empire.⁵⁷ The viewer sees the building from the perspective of the artist, who is in the passenger’s seat of a car, which moves slowly into the street, passing a parking lot of decrepit Ladas. At the traffic light, the car turns right and heads north toward Old Town. It navigates the broad street dotted with cars, buses, and trams during the busy morning commute. At this point, approximately one minute into the film, the narrator—Narkevičius himself—begins his monologue in a slow and stilted English: “One Friday morning, I got the urge to go and see the center of Europe.”⁵⁸ He tells of how he previously was disinterested in this site, discounting it as “one of the many phenomena of the ethnocentric ideology typical of a young country.” This observation is important to note, as Narkevičius’ interest in this site is propelled not by a nationalist fervor but by the need to better understand the position of Lithuania within a new

⁵⁶ Hans Ulrich Obrist and Deimantas Narkevičius, “Deimantas Narkevičius: Against Monumentality,” *Flash Art* 41, no. 261 (July/August 2008): 214-216. When he eventually succumbed to digital media, Narkevičius was called a digital sculptor. See César Antonio Molina, “The Unanimous Life,” in *Deimantas Narkevičius: The Unanimous Life*, ed. Chus Martínez.

⁵⁷ Tipped off by art critic and curator Raimundas Malasauskas, who locates the building generally on Savanorių prospektas (Savanorių Avenue) in Vilnius, I found the actual location to be Savanorių pr. 32. See Fleck, Lind, and Vanderlinden, 99-101.

⁵⁸ The script for the film is also reprinted in Scotini, 32-33.

Europe.⁵⁹ At this time, Narkevičius expressed conflicting opinions on the role of national identity in his work. “Lithuania has a long, highly dramatic history,” he said in 1992. “Our people have lost their country, their language, and their own character several times. I try to understand the grounds on which our identity has nevertheless been preserved.”⁶⁰ Yet in 1999, he distanced himself from national identity, claiming, “I do not want to call my art specifically Lithuanian, since traditionalism can be dangerous... [and] lead to isolation.”⁶¹ Although literally sited in and around Vilnius, *Europe 54° 54' - 25° 19'* metaphorically takes Narkevičius on a journey far beyond its borders.

In his book *Vilnius: City of Strangers*, cultural geographer Laimonas Briedis describes it as “a restless city” that is “always shifting, recalculating, remapping, and yet never able to reach a fixed meaning or a stable location.”⁶² He recounts the city’s numerous historical transformations from Polish Wilno and Jewish Vilne to German Wilna and Russian Vilna, diagnosing Vilnius with schizophrenia. “The city has never possessed a single identity,” writes Briedis.⁶³ This is clearly seen in its architecture, an eclectic mix of neo-Baroque, neo-classical, and modernist styles—evidence of its multiple *ancien régimes*. Despite Vilnius’ innate diversity, Briedis finds in it “centrifugal depictions of Europe” that turn this “native, familiar, and mundane place” into “a foreign,

⁵⁹ For example, Narkevičius’ work stands in contrast to that of Dainius Liškevičius’ *Museum*, a project that re-presents the history of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania through the lens of three cases of resistance: Antanas Kraujelis, who was a diehard partisan in the late 1950s and early 1960s; Romas Kalanta, who publicly self-immolated in 1972; and Bronius Maigis, who vandalized Rembrandt’s *Danaë* in the State Hermitage Museum in 1985. The project was first exhibited in 2012 at the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius then in 2015 in the Lithuanian Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale. See Agnė Narušytė and Daninius Liškevičius, *Museum* (Kaunas: Kitos Knygos, 2013).

⁶⁰ Marja-Terttu Kivirinta, “At the Meeting Point of Two Concepts of Time,” in *Mare Balticum: Kristaps Gelzis, Deimantas Narkevičius, Toivo Raidmets* (Strandkasernen: The Nordic Arts Centre, 1992), 30.

⁶¹ Kimmo Sarje, “Deimantas Narkevičius,” *Siksi* 3 (1992).

⁶² Laimonas Briedis, *Vilnius: City of Strangers* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2009), 221.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14.

strange, and even exotic locale.”⁶⁴ Like Briedis, Narkevičius meditates on the intersection of Vilnius, or more generally Lithuania, and Europe. He says, “It occurred to me that it [Lithuania] was also the center of my travels, the central point in time of the time I had spent elsewhere.”⁶⁵ This is a reference to his obligatory service in the Soviet Army during the late 1980s, which transferred him to Russia, as well as residencies in Europe in the early 1990s.

A little over halfway through *Europe 54° 54' - 25° 19'*, the car has traveled outside the city limits. Open fields have replaced buildings. After a period of driving down a rural two-lane road, the car veers off at the sign for “Europas Centras” or “Center of Europe.” The viewer rejoins Narkevičius when he is already out of the car, walking along a dirt path. “As I got closer to that place,” he says, “I got the feeling I had been there before and had seen the spot... It could have been anywhere in Europe.” However, the coordinates, 54° 54'N 25° 19'E, in the film’s title mark a precise location near the village of Purnušké, which is approximately twenty-five kilometers north of Vilnius. This location was determined to be the geographical center of Europe in 1989 using Europe’s center of gravity.⁶⁶ The news came at a time when Lithuania was fighting for its independence from the Soviet Union. Undoubtedly an honor with great potential to become a major tourist attraction in this small nation of only 2.8 million people, the center of Europe in Lithuania was commemorated in 2004 with a monument in the form of a white granite column topped by a crown of stars, design by the celebrated sculptor

⁶⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁵ In a particularly prescient moment, the car crosses the Green Bridge and the camera focuses, albeit momentarily, on two of the sculptural pairs whose dismantling is documented by Narkevičius in his film *20 July 2015* (2016), addressed later in this chapter.

⁶⁶ This study was carried out by Jean-George Affholder of the National Geographic Institute of France. It refuted the long-established center of Europe, Suchowola in northeastern Poland. Since then, several other counties in the region have laid claim to being the center of Europe by using different calculating methods.

Gediminas Jokūbonis (1927-2006).⁶⁷ When Narkevičius visited seven years prior, the area was still an undeveloped field surrounded by woods. All that marked the otherwise vacant patch of land was a boulder with a plaque inscribed with a compass, the coordinates, and the phrase “Geographic Center of Europe” in Lithuanian.

In *Europe 54° 54' - 25° 19'*, this humble monument, which claimed the spot in 1991, is part of a larger landscape of memories. “Landscape is the work of the mind... built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock,” writes historian Simon Schama.⁶⁸ With human interference, raw matter is shaped into landscapes that “carry the freight of history.”⁶⁹ Known as cultural landscapes, these “may be conditioned by geology, climate, and topography,” as described by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, but are human-made and often associated with a particular group of people whose identity is tied to a region.⁷⁰ Even deeper lies an ideological landscape, whose signs can be read and reinterpreted as regimes change.⁷¹

Kirk Savage identifies the urban memorial landscape as a vast network of buildings, monuments, memorials, and sacred spaces physically located within a metropolitan area. The relationship between these markers and citizenry wax and wane over time based on social, political, and economic conditions affecting collective consciousness. These changes are “a series of transformations wrought partly by

⁶⁷ This was the year Lithuania joined the European Union.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

⁶⁹ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 5.

⁷⁰ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 108. DaCosta Kauffmann has developed a theory of artistic geography or “a geography of art” that brings topography and historiography closer together in “an account in which location or place of origin becomes an important issue in the distinctive characterization of the work of art.” See DaCosta Kauffmann, 22.

⁷¹ See Mariusz Czepczyński, “Representations and Images of ‘Recent History’: The Transition of Post-Socialist Landscape Icons,” in *The Post-Socialist City: Continuity and Change in Urban Space and Imagery*, eds. Alfrum Kliems and Marina Dmitrieva (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2010), 16-33.

aspiration and design and partly by the unprecedented effects of human use and practice.”⁷² Savage’s book *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* is a comprehensive study of the changing attitudes toward and motives for designs and layouts of that city’s architectural and sculptural markers.⁷³ He uses them to assess how the city has functioned as a symbol of the United States through centuries of national crises. Surveying nineteenth century equestrian statues from Washington D.C.’s numerous traffic circles, Savage writes, “Statue monuments were at once high points in their own local settings and nodes in a broader, if still loosely knit, landscape of national memory.”⁷⁴ According to Savage, monuments shape not only the physical but also the mental worlds of their viewers. He writes, “By organizing the surface of the city into a meaningful pattern, the monuments enabled the eye, mind, and body together to experience a sense of command over the territory.”⁷⁵ In this way, the cartographic plane of the memorial landscape becomes a site of performance for the epic theater that is everyday life.

In 2007, Narkevičius proposed to disrupt the urban memorial landscape by temporarily relocating the head of Karl Marx from Chemnitz, a city in former East Germany, to Münster, a city in former West Germany, where the exhibition *skulptur projekte* takes place every ten years. While the monument would remain the same, its

⁷² Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 12.

⁷³ As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, I have purposely cited sources by authors from within and outside the region because the artists themselves are reading widely, looking for inspiration both at home and abroad. While perhaps a peculiar dynamic in my method, I locate specific histories and contexts for Narkevičius’ work via so-called Western writers, whose work may not directly engage the area or the historical particularities of the disintegration of the former Soviet Union. Invoking them as universals—easily recognized by anyone approaching this material—they serve to integrate Narkevičius, his work, and my intervention into a wider global art history.

⁷⁴ Savage, 90.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

meaning would be entirely different in its new, formerly West German context. Standing twenty-three feet tall and weighing forty tons, the bronze bust was cast in Leningrad by artist Lev Kerbel then broken into ninety-five pieces for transport to Karl-Marx-Stadt, where it was unveiled in 1971. Moving the colossal monument again—this time across the now invisible border between East and West—would have been not only a logistical nightmare, but also would have brought attention to the divided past of a now unified Germany. When his proposal was rejected, Narkevičius turned to the archive, sourcing photographs and footage originally aired on state television in the German Democratic Republic. The result is *The Head [Galva]* (2007) [Figure 2-8], a twelve-minute film in four scenes separated by brief interludes featuring everyday life on the streets of Leningrad.

Writing at the turn of the last century as the General Conservator for the Austro-Hungarian Imperial and Royal Central Commission for the Research and Preservation of Monuments, art historian Alois Riegl identified the importance of associating monuments with the activities of everyday life as a means of promoting historic preservation. Regarding the reuse of monuments since antiquity, he states, “The interest in specific intentional [artistic, as opposed to unintentional or historical] monuments, an interest which typically tended to vanish with the disappearance of those who created them, now was revitalized, as an entire population began to regard the achievement of earlier generations as part and parcel of their own.”⁷⁶ By taking on the responsibility of caring for monuments, we can make the past relevant again in the present. We can also reassess

⁷⁶ Alois Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin” (1903), *Oppositions: The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies Journal* 25 (Fall 1982): 19. Riegl goes on to advocate for systematizing the preservation of monuments on the basis that they are artistic and culturally significant objects. They exemplify what Riegl calls *Kunstwollen* or “artistic will,” the force driving the dominant style of a given period.

the past in light of more recent histories, allowing a more diverse range of voices to be heard. While not all monuments can or even should be preserved, those that remain not only act as mediators of the past but also make us more actively aware of our own present place and time. While Narkevičius was unable to execute his project that would have literally and figuratively repositioned the monument within contemporary society, his film, at least, points to the importance of contextualizing the monument within everyday life at its time of inception. From this, the viewer is able to draw comparisons and contrasts with the present, reflecting on the lifespan of a monument.

Narkevičius begins his film *The Head* (2007) with a clip of a 1960s Russian-language interview. In it, a group of children are asked the questions, “Who is your role model?” and “Who do you want to be when you grow up?” They enthusiastically respond: my mother, my brother, the war hero Valery Chkalov, the first woman in space Valentina Tereshkova, a sailor, a doctor, an inventor.⁷⁷ Their youthful innocence is paralleled in the second scene, when the sculptor Lev Kerbel welcomes the camera into his studio and recounts the moment when he learned Lenin was dead. At six years old, he claims to have immediately felt and understood the tremendous impact of this event: “I remember waking up when my parents came in... They were weeping... I realized: a big disaster had happened.” As it is setup within the film, his reaction foreshadows his future as one of the Soviet Union’s greatest monumental sculptors, as Kerbel would go on to produce dozens of Lenins. *The Head* again looks toward the future in its third scene. In yet another clip from the archives, children make tiny sculptures using sticks, leaves, and pinecones. Their work, albeit primitive in contrast to that of Kerbel, is lauded nevertheless as progress, since, “To see, to shape, to form, to reform is a deliberate

⁷⁷ All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the film.

development and promotion of various creative powers of the Communist [State].” This quotation from the film demonstrates hope in the building of communist futures.

Reflecting on *The Head*, Narkevičius says, “My aim was to create a documentary film... featuring the process of creating the Karl Marx monument, as well as the transformation of the physical space of a site of a significant, even exemplary, public monument of the Soviet period.”⁷⁸ While unable to create a physical interruption in the memorial landscape, he successfully highlights the monument’s potential for the contemporary viewer, who can then ponder prospective futures. Kerbel’s monument still stands in Chemnitz unchanged. A relic of the city’s past, its backdrop continues to bandy the slogan “Workers of the world, unite!” in German, English, French, and Russian. As cultural geographer David Lowenthal concludes, “We need the past... to cope with present landscapes” because “we selectively perceive what we are accustomed to seeing; features and patterns in the landscape that make sense to us because we share a history with them.”⁷⁹ Today, Marx is no longer a monument to communism but a monument to its passing.

Architectures of Memories

While monuments feature prominently in several films by Narkevičius, others, like *Energy Lithuania* (2000) and *Scena* (2003), take into account the effect of ideology on architecture dating from the period of Soviet occupation. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs observed, “Every memory unfolds within a spatial framework... We can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is... preserved in our

⁷⁸ Scotini, 163.

⁷⁹ David Lowenthal, “Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory,” *Geographical Review*, 65, 1 (Jan., 1975): 5-6.

physical surrounds.”⁸⁰ Having borne witness to history, the buildings in Narkevičius’ films help us recall the past and assess its influence today. Relics of now outmoded tendencies in architecture, these structures stand as bulwarks against time.

Energy Lithuania (2000) [Figure 2-9] tells the story of a power plant and its adjoining town Elektrėnai, which were established thirty miles outside of Vilnius in 1960 upon the return of political prisoners from Siberian labor camps. “Here they could find work and shelter,” says Pranas Noreika, the plant’s former director, as the film pauses on the façade of a stereotypical Soviet housing bloc. For the film, Narkevicius interviewed Noreika along with Rimantas Motirjūnas, who lived and worked in Elektrėnai. “There was a great enthusiasm for building... a great wish to create. Man is a creator by nature,” says Noreika. At that time, Elektrėnai, Lithuania’s first electrical power plant, was a source of great hope for a bigger and brighter future for the small Soviet Republic. With it rose the town of Elektrėnai, a site of a collective urban utopia, complete with its own schools, shops, and services. Like many projects of the Soviet era, Elektrėnai is now on the decline, slowly waning into oblivion as operations at the plant downsize. The plant’s mechanisms are now outmoded, no longer meeting the rising energy demands and cutting-edge environmental standards of Lithuania and the European Union.

Although Narkevičius shot the footage for *Energy Lithuania* around the year 2000, he manages to capture Elektrėnai in its prime. The film begins with a voiceover of Narkevičius: “Everything took place in bright light... What I remember most distinctly was the sense of security in a large but limited space....” However, Narkevičius never

⁸⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (New York, 1980): 140. Not sure what this is? A published translation in book form? But who is publisher? Translator? Here is citation info for a 1992 translated edition, but I’m not sure what your page number would be for this edition. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

lived or worked in Elektrėnai. At best, he passed through or visited the city in his travels across the country. In *Energy Lithuania*, the city is a metaphor for Soviet Lithuania or the Soviet Union as a whole. “The economic flourishing... and the overall industrialization of Lithuania coincided with the political thaw in the Soviet Union,” say Narkevičius.⁸¹ The country took advantage of this boom to become “one of the most dynamic and developed republics in the Soviet Union.” The confusion of temporality is furthered by the artist’s use of Super-8 and 16mm film, some of which was sourced from Soviet stock, and a vintage movie camera.⁸² He does not appropriate found footage from an archive, but shoots the film in the present, as if mimicking the past. Recalling his training as a sculptor, Narkevičius expertly crafted the film, carefully working over its texture and color.⁸³ This aesthetic often results in incomplete and indeterminate images, which force the viewer to question the format of Narkevičius’ work. Is it a documentary or an art film?

Like *His-story*, which was discussed earlier in this chapter, *Energy Lithuania* is a subjective documentary in which he complicates the traditional art of storytelling by shifting back and forth between the past and present in narratives.⁸⁴ The film reveals the two faces of Elektrėnai: the professional—the mechanical landscapes and plant’s interior—are buffered by poetic interludes of the everyday—children at play, passersby in the streets, a deserted department store. Such interludes are characteristic of Narkevičius’ work, as seen in *The Head*. They pause the narrative and usually signal the

⁸¹ Kuizinas and Valatkevičius, 29.

⁸² Vivian Rehberg, “Historical Experience,” *Artpress*, No. 354, March 2009, Online, Last modified April 19, 2013, http://www.gbagency.fr/docs/DN_Artpress_march09-1242307518.pdf.

⁸³ Obrist, 214-216.

⁸⁴ Rehberg; Cecilia Caziani, “Reconstructing Reality: The Subjective Documentaries on Deimantas Narkevičius,” *Kaléidoscope*, No. 3, September – October 2009, Online, Last modified April 19, 2013, http://www.gbagency.fr/docs/Deimantas_Kaleidoscope_09-1271771937.pdf.

beginning of a new scene. This gives the viewer time to meditate on the meaning of the preceding scene. For example, the factory's former director speaks of Elektrėnai's thirst for energy while walking through its current eerily vacant modernist interior. This juxtaposition is contrasted in the interlude by a bustling dance studio where bodies produce and use energy through movement. This brings up the question of efficiency, as *Energy Lithuania* is very much a film about labor and the ways it is facilitated by the environment. While it references the glories of its Soviet past, Elektrėnai actually looks into and eulogizes its future, anticipating the power plant's eventual demise.

Narkevičius presents another architectural portrait in *Scena* (2003) [Figure 2-10], a close study of Vilnius' Contemporary Art Center (CAC). Opened in 1967 in honor of the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, the building was the Palace of Exhibitions for officially sanctioned works of art during the Soviet occupation. While it is still funded by the state, the CAC has positioned itself as a burgeoning locus for both regional and international art in northern Europe since 1992. The film features three monologues by Aneta Raževaitė, curator, Kestutis Kuizinas, the CAC's director, and Vita Zaman, a local gallerist. They each impart a different perspective on the building and its changes over the years.

Today, the depoliticized CAC has become a playground for elites, alienating the very audiences—the masses—for which it was originally constructed. While *Scena* is not autobiographical like *His-Story*, it is very personal. Narkevičius worked on-and-off as a curator at the CAC for almost ten years. "I could say that the situation around the CAC is utopia," says Narkevičius, noting that the former utopia of Soviet unity is now experienced as a utopia in the future anterior, a temporality marked in reality by class

structure, economic tensions, and intellectual pretentions.⁸⁵ This is symptomatic of the cultural infrastructure in many post-Soviet nations, which became highly impressionable when faced with the onslaught of mass-market media and capitalism in the 1990s.⁸⁶ Narkevičius laments these societal changes, calling us to acknowledge the multiplicities of modernism in stating, “Europe is still culturally distinguished because of its different modern(ist) pasts. The former East is still marked by the totalitarian social experiment that defines the cultural background of one or the other side’s past. Perhaps we cannot automatically apply the occidental modernist experience to the whole continent.”⁸⁷ The multiplicities of modernism as well as its maintenance as a viable tradition come to the fore in *Scena*.

However, the current that runs through all three narratives in *Scena* is the building—a “relic of communist ideology,” a prime example of what he calls “Soviet functional modernism” that looks like a knockoff of Le Corbusier.⁸⁸ Its structural features are highlighted in the film through long pauses and sweeping panoramas of its cavernous white halls, expansive glass curtains, and crisp clean outlines. Each narrator makes mention of the largess of space, even suggesting it may be “too big.” In the Soviet Union, bigger was better, and no one dared to question its purpose or its monetary and physical costs. Having lost its ideological foundation, the CAC no longer has its original potency.

⁸⁵ Obrist, 214-216. In certain languages, the future-anterior or future perfect tense is used to indicate an action will have happened by a certain future point in time. For example, “I will have finished by tomorrow.”

⁸⁶ This can be noted throughout the region, though in the past I have researched this phenomenon in Ukraine, where the art scene is dominated by the figure of billionaire Viktor Pinchuk. In Moscow, the equivalent is Dasha Zhukova.

⁸⁷ Larissa Harris, “A Conversation between Deimantas Narkevičius and Larissa Harris,” *A Prior Magazine*, Nov. 14, 2007, Last modified April 19, 2013, http://www.gbagency.fr/docs/Deimantas_aprior-1242307227.pdf.

⁸⁸ The first quote is from the film. For the second, see Deimantas Narkevičius, Brochure for *The Unanimous Life* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2010).

In focusing on what it once was, *Scena* opens up new opportunities for what it could be. There is a redeeming quality in Narkevičius' studies of the outmoded that reveals the potential for reviving the obsolete, discarded, and discontinued, if not now then in the not too distant future.

Marked Memories, Mediated Histories

Narkevičius captured a significant interruption in the urban landscape of his native Lithuania in his most recent film *20 July 2015*. This fifteen-minute, three-dimensional stereoscopic film features the removal of four pairs of Socialist Realist statues from Vilnius' Green Bridge [Žaliasis tiltas].⁸⁹ One of several crossings over the Neris River, this bridge separates the New City on the north from the Old Town on the south. Cast in iron by prominent Lithuanian sculptors of the Soviet period, the statues [Figure 2-11] represent universal communist themes in a hyper-naturalist style: agriculture (Bernardas Bučas, Petras Vaivada), industry and construction (Napoleonas Petrulis, and Bronius Vyšniauskas), education (Juozas Mikėnas, Juozas Kėdainis), and the military (Bronius Pundzius).⁹⁰ The statues, each approximately 10 feet tall, were dedicated in 1952, along with the bridge, which was then named after World War II General Ivan Chernyakhovsky.⁹¹ As art historian Viktoras Liutkus notes, "These groups... presented stereotypical figures, or in the period's terminology, 'a typical hero in

⁸⁹ The bridge takes its name from its green-painted steel guardrails and side panels. In a three-dimensional stereoscopic film, the image is recorded from two perspectives that are then merged in projection through the use of special glasses.

⁹⁰ In Lithuanian, the students are known as "Akademinis jaunimas" or "academic youth," and soldiers are known as "Taikos sargyboje," literally "Guiding Peace." Marija Drėmaitė, Rūta Leitanaitė, and Julija Reklaitė, eds. *Vilnius, 1900-2016: An Architectural Guide* (Vilnius: Leidykla Lapas and Architektūros fondas, 2016), 112 and Jolanta Marcišauskytė-Jurašienė, *Vilnius Sculpture Walks: A Guide to the Outdoor Statues of Lithuania's Capital*, trans. Darius Sužiedėlis (Vilnius: Modernaus meno centras, 2013), 76-79.

⁹¹ The Lenin statue in Narkevičius' film *Once in the XX Century* was dedicated in this same year.

typical circumstances,’ rather than an individualistic interpretation.”⁹² During the Soviet occupation, the statues reminded passersby of the nation’s achievements on the path to real socialism. On one hand, the statues were propaganda tools aimed at influencing the local population. On the other hand, they were representative of mainstream Soviet culture. The Green Bridge was first registered as a protected (literally, *nekilnojamas* or immovable) object of cultural value in 1993.⁹³ It was re-registered in 1997, along with each of the four pairs of statues, which were previously unlisted.⁹⁴ Thus, in the immediate post-Soviet period, the Green Bridge and its statues were spared from demolition, remaining frozen in time until the night of July 20, 2015.

Narkevičius’ film has two parts. The first, a prelude for the removal, begins with slow and steady pans of the statues in situ [Figure 2-12]. These sharply focused close-ups expose their severely corroded surfaces. Integral features of Vilnius’ urban landscape for over sixty years, the statues weathered harsh environmental conditions and occasional hooliganism. Their parts have been patched and soldered together over the years. After a few minutes, a male voice speaks: “If a splinter piece falls down, it could kill a fish.”⁹⁵

⁹² Viktoras Liutkus, “Breaking the Barriers: Art under the Pressure of Soviet Ideology from World War II to Glasnost,” in *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets, 1945-1991*, 306. Liutkus is quoting Frederick Engels, who defined Realism as, “the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances.” See Frederick Engels, “Engels to Margaret Harkness In London,” April 1888, accessed June 26, 2017,

https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1888/letters/88_04_15.htm. While Liutkus states that sculpture was more liberal than other media during the Soviet period, Lithuanian sculptors were very active on the All-Union circuit of exhibitions and prizes governed by Moscow, which included numerous commissions for monumental sculptures of party leaders in Lithuania and across the Soviet Union.

⁹³ The Department of Cultural Heritage, which is part of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, is responsible for restoration and preservation. See <http://www.kpd.lt>.

⁹⁴ Kultūros Ministerijos Kultūros Vertybių Apsaugos Departamentas Įsakymas Dėl Nr. 380 Objektų Įrašymo į Registrą, 1997 m. gruodžio 31 d. [The Ministry of Culture, The Department of Cultural Values Protection: Order No. 380 on the Registration of Objects in the Register, December 31, 1997], accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.DE6550C6E655>. The codices were updated in 2005.

⁹⁵ This is likely a direct or extrapolated quote from those in favor of the statues’ removal. It is similar to a statement made by Vilnius’ Mayor Remigijus Šimašius: “The sculptures are simply in critical condition and, from a gust of wind, could fall at any moment on the head of passersby.” It circulated in the Russian

This unattributed quotation, likely referring to the abysmal state of the statues, is overly dramatic. Are the statues in such disrepair that they threaten not only passersby but also the fish that swim underneath the bridge? If they are literally falling apart, why have they not been conserved or removed sooner? Why only now has attention been so urgently directed to Green Bridge statues?

A scruffy, middle-aged man [Figure 2-13] enters the frame and flails his hands: clap, clap, clap. He punctuates the first part of the film with this action several times—in the early morning when the bridge is empty of pedestrians and vehicles; during rush hour when the bridge is clogged with people, cars, and buses. We later see the same man enter a shot to clean a camera lens [Figure 2-14]. A member of Narkevičius’ crew, this man is calibrating the static, twin stereoscopic cameras, so they are in sync, literally in time, with one another, in order to create the phenomenal three-dimensional effect achieved in this film. Although Narkevičius has employed teams of camera operators, sound engineers, and other technicians in the production of previous films, they have never had a visible role within the films. This man’s interruptions easily could have been cut; however, they now serve to disturb the viewer, bringing greater awareness to this already hyper-sensory filmic experience.⁹⁶ *20 July 2015* is Narkevičius’ most technically advanced and logistically complicated film. Unlike his prior films, which can be viewed in a black box or on a monitor, this film has strict installation requirements and viewing procedures. Without the use of 3D glasses, the image appears blurry, as if the footage from both

media, translated from Lithuanian as: “Просто скульптуры находятся в критическом состоянии и от порыва ветра могут в любой момент упасть на голову прохожим.” See Власти Москвы восстановят памятник воинам-освободителям в Вильнюсе, February 2, 2010, accessed October 7, 2017, <https://ria.ru/moscow/20100204/207702835.html>.

⁹⁶ While I appreciate my advisor Dr. Jane A. Sharp’s observation that this also serves as a kind of authentic link between the artist and the historical event, it serves my argument best to consider it as an interruption in the narrative.

cameras was partially separated or exactly overlaid. Necessary for viewing the film properly, the glasses also serve to interrupt the viewer's experience, like the footage of the cameraman.

The pace of *20 July 2015* is plodding. Perched atop scaffolding, workers with hardhats and safety vests use blowtorches to separate the statues from their pedestals, which will remain in place. The film's ambient sound grows louder with construction noises. The majority of passersby do not stop to look or ask questions. Out of curiosity, a few gather along the guardrails, where they watch and wait while tinkering on their mobile phones. The workers methodically encase the statues in steel frames. These frames may provide some protection for the statues in transport; however, their role is also practical. On the night of July 20, 2015, the workers attach straps to the frames, and the crane swoops in, lifting the statues one by one onto the flatbed of a truck [Figure 2-15]. For a moment, each two to three ton statue delicately balances in the air. The scene recalls Narkevičius' earlier film *Once in the XX Century* in which a similar statue also appeared to fly—straight into the dustbin of history.

With the fate of the Green Bridge statues in the news, Narkevičius began filming *20 July 2015* more than a week prior to the statues' actual removal. The result reduces countless hours of starts and stops into fifteen minutes. The statues' removal was captured not only by Narkevičius but also by a crowd of international reporters and photographers. Their presence was visibly greater than that of passersby, who were, on the whole, apathetic. Reflecting upon the event, Narkevičius commented, "There was no public interest. People were totally not interested. All of its importance was

mediatized...”.⁹⁷ In the film, someone takes advantage of the media’s attention by parading a scarf emblazoned with the slogan “Glory to Ukraine,” boldly acknowledging another post-Soviet country still battling, literally, with its Soviet past. Another waving a Lithuanian flag appears briefly. Their passion pales in comparison to that of the boisterous crowds gathered for the removal of Vilnius’ Lenin in 1991, as seen in Narkevičius’ *Once in the XX Century*.⁹⁸

While public interest in this historic event remained low, it garnered significant media attention. Toward the end of *20 July 2015*, a flustered reporter from Rossiya, the Russian state-owned television station, makes several failed attempts to record a clip for the morning news.⁹⁹ With the final statue’s removal as a backdrop, she describes the statues as being “in a state of emergency” and dismally projects that they “will not be returned to the bridge” once removed. Her outtakes are interruptions of an interruption in the urban landscape and make Narkevičius’ film a meta-commentary on the mediatization of history. Like the crewmember calibrating the cameras cameras, her broadcast could have easily been cut; yet she remains, narrating the night’s events.

Although claimed as the last standing Soviet statues in Vilnius, the Green Bridge statues rarely made the news until the winter of 2010, when Yuri Luzhkov, then the mayor of Moscow, offered to restore the statues in honor of the upcoming 65th anniversary of the Soviet defeat of Nazi Germany and even sent a team of experts to

⁹⁷ *BALTIC Bites: Deimantas Narkevičius*, October 17, 2016, accessed October 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKkSP5yjP80>.

⁹⁸ For example, a Russian-language headline read: “Tonight in Vilnius, an event went almost unnoticed by the city’s inhabitants,” read headlines the next day.” *Власти Москвы восстановят памятник воинам-освободителям в Вильнюсе*, February 4, 2010, accessed October 7, 2017, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1446036/>.

⁹⁹ *На Зеленом мосту в Вильнюсе демонтировали знаменитые скульптуры*, *Rossiia*, July 22, 2016, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ee9jqI0tnCE>.

assess the damage.¹⁰⁰ Despite the prohibitively expensive cost of restoration, the city of Vilnius refused Luzhkov's offer, claiming that more than just the Green Bridge statues needed attention. With this unprompted Russian intervention, the statues quickly became the focus of heated debates over history and memory in this fledgling post-Soviet state. Opinion on the fate of the statues ranged among officials and citizens alike. Some felt the statues should be destroyed. Others acknowledged the statues' need for repair but hoped they would remain. While yet another faction suggested the statues be relocated to Grūto Parkas, where they could still be seen but in the company of other divested Soviet monuments.

The statue of the two soldiers has become particularly contentious in recent years. For Russia, they represent the liberation of Lithuania from the fascists in 1944, while for Lithuania, they represent the subsequent colonization of Lithuania by the Soviet Union.¹⁰¹ Long after the fall of the Soviet Union, the two soldiers continued to don their Red Army uniforms and hold a Soviet flag topped with a hammer and sickle, a symbol banned since 2008 by Lithuania's strict anti-communist laws. In 2013, buoyed by movements of renewed nationalism across Europe, the Vilnius city government with artist Gitenis Umbrasas rededicated the soldiers to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from

¹⁰⁰ Maskvos valdžia ketina restauruoti skulptūras ant Žaliojo tilto Vilniuje, February 4, 2010, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/maskvos-valdzia-ketina-restauruoti-skulpturas-ant-zaliojo-tilto-vilniuje.d?id=28611043#ixzz3M8iihFCe>, and published the following summer in the same publication but in Russian: Скульптуры на Зеленом мосту придется отлить заново? August 4, 2011, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://ru.delfi.lt/news/live/skulptury-na-zelenom-mostu-pridetsya-otlit-zanovo.d?id=48263845>.

¹⁰¹ The soldiers are represented on the new five-ruble coin, which began minting in August 2016. See Литва раскритиковала выпущенные в России монеты со скульптурами из Вильнюса, August 3, 2016, accessed October 7, 2017, <https://russian.rt.com/article/315131-litva-raskritikovala-vypuschnyye-v-rossii-monety-so>.

Lithuania in 1993.¹⁰² This act—pointedly political yet covertly artistic—reframed the statue’s history, blatantly reversing its original intention.

Other works of public art installed after Lithuanian independence have also come under scrutiny.¹⁰³ Vladas Urbanavičius’ *Embankment Arch* [*Krantių arka*] [Figure 2-17] was built in commemoration of Vilnius as the 2009 European Capital of Culture. Made from a rusted 12-ton piece of the “Druzhba” (Friendship) pipeline that once carried the natural resource from Russia to Western Europe, this arch has been criticized as an eyesore and vandalized with graffiti.¹⁰⁴ In 1996 under incredulous circumstances, a bust of the American rock musician Frank Zappa [Figure 2-18] was placed in Vilnius’ historic Old Town.¹⁰⁵ Zappa, despite never visiting Vilnius, rapidly became a popular symbol of post-independence freedom. Vilnius’ Monument to Frank Zappa is a prime example of what Serbian artist Aleksandra Domanović terms “turbo sculpture,” monuments that synthesize traditional and contemporary styles in exaggerated commemorations of living or dead celebrities.¹⁰⁶ Simultaneously embracing high and low taste, global and local

¹⁰² This story was picked up by *The New York Times*. See James Kanter, “Silent Sentinels at Center of Lithuanian Debate on Bygone Era,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 2013, accessed October 2, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/12/world/europe/silent-sentinels-at-center-of-lithuanian-debate-on-bygone-era.html?mcubz=0>.

¹⁰³ As Svetlana Boym noted, “The iconoclastic destruction of monuments go hand in hand with a nostalgia for new idols.” She comes to the serious conclusion that the most important monument to *glasnost*’ or a period of openness during the 1980s is the chain restaurant McDonald’s, which first opened on Moscow’s Pushkin Square in 1990. See Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 230, 233.

¹⁰⁴ For more on the negative reception of this work of art, see Marcišauskytė-Jurašienė, 64-67.

¹⁰⁵ Contemporary artist Saulius Paukštys, who claimed to have met Zappa on a trip to the United States in 1991, initiated the idea. Although it’s doubtful the two met, Paukštys embraced Zappa’s spirit and commissioned Konstantinas Bogdanas, a Lithuanian sculptor best known for his Socialist Realist works, to make the bust. See Marcišauskytė-Jurašienė, 272-275.

¹⁰⁶ *Turbo Sculpture* (2010-2013) is the title of a lecture-film by Aleksandra Domanović. In the context of former Yugoslavia, Domanović attributes turbo sculpture’s popularity to an identity crisis caused by the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s. Aleksandra Domanović, *Turbo Sculpture* (2010-2013), accessed October 2, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/95907707>. The term derives from “turbo-folk,” a style of music popular in the 1980s that combines traditional songs with new electronic beats.

values, turbo sculpture produces a new, international pantheon of gods and goddesses unencumbered by the region's communist past.

As art historian Skaidra Trilupaitytė observes, the Green Bridge statues—more precisely, *sculptures*—are not memorial markers of a burial site but decorative works of art.¹⁰⁷ Thus, they should be judged firstly for their aesthetic, then for their political value. In 1995, the Green Bridge statues even became part of a public art project. Gediminas Urbonas, a contemporary of Narkevičius, incorporated the statue of agriculture—a farmer and peasant—into his work *Coming or Going* [*Ateini ir išeini*] [Figure 2-19]. With their heads encased in mirrors, the statues were metaphorically blind to the past and, at the same time, reflecting the present as it unfolds.¹⁰⁸ *Coming or Going* was one of fifteen site-specific projects in the exhibition *Mundane Language* [*Kasdienybės kalba*], organized by the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts. The exhibition challenged artists to make connections between the past and present by engaging with the relics of Vilnius' Soviet past.¹⁰⁹ The result was “not only the rehabilitation of the mundane reality and its language but [also] the very rediscovery of the city.”¹¹⁰ Additional works in this exhibition included *Identified Object*, a wooden sculpture in the shape of a UFO installed on the former site of a monument to Soviet partisans, and Narkevičius' own *Game No. 1* [*Žaidimas No. 1*], a soccer ball sculpted from concrete. The latter was intended for the

¹⁰⁷ Skaidra Trilupaitytė, “Monuments, Memory, and Mutating Public Sphere: Some Initiatives in Vilnius,” *Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences* 60 no. 2 (Summer 2014), accessed October 2, 2017, http://www.lituanus.org/2014/14_2_02Trilupaityte.html. In this way, the situation differs from that of the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn. Originally named the “Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn,” it is now known as “Monument to the Fallen in the Second World War,” since the bodies of Soviet soldiers were exhumed and relocated in 2007. Unlike in Lithuania, the response to this event by ethnic Russians in Estonia was violent.

¹⁰⁸ Too high for passersby, the mirrors actually reflected the changing weather conditions of the sky.

¹⁰⁹ Algis Lankelis, *Mundane Language* (Vilnius: Soroso siuolaikinio meno centras Lietuvoje, 1996). The exhibition was open from October 16-29, 1995.

¹¹⁰ Leonidas Donskis, “An Outline of the Mundane Language: Between Imagination and Reality,” in *Mundane Language*, ed. Algis Lankelis (Vilnius: Soroso siuolaikinio meno centras Lietuvoje, 1996): n.p.

lobby of the Lithuanian Court of Appeals; however, Narkevičius was denied permission to install *Game No. 1* in this government building.

Several years prior to *Mundane Language*, Mindaugas Navakas set the precedent for artistic interventions in the public space in Lithuania. Best known for his minimalist objects made of industrial grade concrete, iron, and steel, Navakas has produced countless commissions, special exhibitions, and academic symposia since the late 1980s that have encouraged artists to see to public space as an open field for the interrogation of ideology.¹¹¹ Navakas' first foray into the public space was hypothetical. Black and white zincographic prints produced from drawings and photographs originally inspired by a series of small, bronze, biomorphic maquettes, his *Vilnius Notebooks* (1981-1994) [Figure 2-20] project disparate architectural and sculptural juxtapositions directly onto the urban landscape using a collage aesthetic.¹¹² The scenes propose fantastical public art projects for prominent locations, such as the Opera and Ballet Theater, the Hotel Lietuva, the Pedagogical Institute, and the Gariunai Market.¹¹³ As noted by a contemporary reviewer, it was the combination of Navakas' previously exhibited sculptures with well-

¹¹¹ Navakas was born in 1952. Although he is not much older than Narkevičius, they are part of different generations, as Navakas was already established as an artist when Narkevičius was just beginning his studies. Laima Kreivytė cites Navakas' Symposium of Concrete Sculpture in 1985 as "the first successful attempt to reconfigure an industrial public space" in Lithuania. See Laima Kreivytė, "Going Public: Strategies of Intervention in Lithuania," in *Interventions: Advances in Art and Urban Futures*, Volume 4 (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005): 121.

¹¹² *Vilnius Notebook 1* includes twelve prints based on drawings, as described above, from 1981-1986 and was published as a limited edition artist's book in 1988. *Vilnius Notebook 2* includes twelve prints based on photomontages from 1988-1994 and was published as a limited edition artist's book in 1995. The former was on view at the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius in June 2016. The latter is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art Library. See Inesa Brašiškė, "Mindaugas Navakas' Things," and Elona Lyubtė, "The Reality of Artistic Autonomy," in *Mindaugas Navakas: Glory was at the Fingertips*, ed. Elona Lyubtė (Vilnius: Lithuanian Art Museum, 2015): 84-85, 111.

¹¹³ Navakas' *The Hook [Kablys]* (1994), a permanent installation on the façade of the former Railways Workers Palace in Vilnius, is the closest approximation to what the proposals from the *Vilnius Notebooks* would have looked like in real life. Navakas notes the multi-layered history inherent to architecture: "It is not just a classical façade, but a Stalinist imitation of Classicism... *The Hook* introduces a sense of menace; it is an intuitive reference." See Lyubtė, ed. *Mindaugas Navakas: Glory was at the Fingertips*, 152.

known sites that made the work so contentious.¹¹⁴ The combination exposed vulnerability in the built environment. Art historian Laima Kreivytė describes Navakas' *Vilnius Notebooks* as "creating a shock-experience, an interruption of normal perceptions and codes" that undermines traditional power structures within art, between the object and the viewer, and society, between the individual and the state.¹¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, authorities censored *Vilnius Notebook I* in the artist's first solo exhibition at the House of Architects in 1986.¹¹⁶

The contested fate of the Green Bridge statues resurfaced during the spring 2015 campaigns for mayor of Vilnius. Coincidentally, the statues' removal took place within Remigijus Šimašius' first months in office. At the time, the newly elected mayor said, "The statues represent a lie... a mockery of the real people who had to live during the Soviet period...".¹¹⁷ Others, like Larisa Dmitriyeva, a representative of the Lithuanian Union of Russians, disagreed: "This is our history and there's no way we can change it...".¹¹⁸ Once again, both sides of the argument played out in the news.

¹¹⁴ Familiar with both the sculptures and the sites albeit in separate contexts, viewers were shocked by their combination. Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, "M. Navako cinkografija," *Pergalė* 7 (1986): 184-185, as cited in Lyubtė, "The Reality of Artistic Autonomy," 84-85, 111. The reviewer writes, "The artist forces the viewer to abandon the usual logic of evaluating the environment by exposing the conditional nature of certain plastic convention, and reminding us of our poor knowledge of the world of things we have created." The reviewer calls the work "paper 'sculpture,'" reminiscent of "paper architecture," or elaborate, imaginary three-dimensional projects in two-dimensional form designed with the knowledge that they could never be built in the restrictive aesthetic environment of the Soviet Union. See John S. Weber and Prudence F. Roberts. *Brodsky & Utkin: Paper Architecture in the Real World* (Portland: Portland Art Museum, 1993). In Soviet Russia, Alexander Brodsky, Ilya Utkin, and Yuri Avvakumov were pioneers of paper architecture.

¹¹⁵ Kreivytė, "Going Public," 121-131.

¹¹⁶ Scholars now consider this event as the beginning of conceptual sculpture in Lithuania. See Laima Kreivytė, "Plastinės raiškos alternatyvų paieškos," in *Skulptūra: 1975–1990*, eds. Giedrė Jankevičiūtė and Elona Lubyte (Vilnius: Aidai, 1997), 35 as cited in Lyubtė, "The Reality of Artistic Autonomy," 111.

¹¹⁷ "Last major Soviet statues come down in Lithuanian capital," *Reuters*, July 20, 2015, accessed October 2, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lithuania-statues-idUSKCN0PU0OW20150720>.

¹¹⁸ Šarūnas Černiauskas, "Russian-speaking Lithuanians upset at plans to remove Soviet-era monument," *The Guardian*, July 16, 2015, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/16/russian-speaking-lithuanians-upset-plans-remove-soviet-era-monuments>.

Narkevičius' film *20 July 2015* does not pass judgment on the removal of the Green Bridge statues but presents the events as they unfolded, albeit enhanced or even distorted by 3D technology. "I do not think there are good or bad monuments. We need to develop correct and clear articulation of our history. Monuments are just silent artifacts," says the artist.¹¹⁹ In reflecting on his film, he characterized the removal as "outdated revenge on our past in a quite destructive form."¹²⁰ Narkevičius clearly sees the statues as works of art that, albeit being politically charged, deserve to be seen from many perspectives. "If we were to look at art objects as relics of political regimes, we would need to remove a lot of art from museums," he says.¹²¹ Having long dealt with such objects in his work, he is acutely aware of the multiplicities in meaning. Socialist Realist statues, like those previously found on the Green Bridge, are evidence of the existence of a certain place and time. Noting that the bridge itself is of Soviet design, Narkevičius questions whether a true purging of history is even realistic. "When there are no marks of the former occupation," he says, "people are probably not learning from the past, and they repeat the past."¹²² In March 2016, the Department of Cultural Heritage in the

¹¹⁹ Email to author, August 16, 2017.

¹²⁰ Alessandro Vincentelli, wall text, *Deimantas Narkevičius: Double Youth*, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, October 14, 2016 – January 8, 2017.

¹²¹ "Deimantas Narkevičius in Conversation with Krzysztof Kościuczuk."

¹²² *BALTIC Bites: Deimantas Narkevičius*. Certain statues from the Soviet period still remain in situ in Vilnius and across Lithuania. Only those ideologically charged were removed—the majority in and around the years 1990–1991. For example, the monument to author Petras Cvirka (1959) by Juozas Mikėnas and the monument to author Julija Beniuševičiūtė-Žemaitė (1971) by Petras Aleksandravičius remain, as well as the more allegorical statue *First Swallows* [*Pirmosios kregždės*] (1987), also by Juozas Mikėnas. The latter is an example of how meanings of monuments can change: erected after the artist's death as a metaphor for the "new Soviet person," it quickly became a symbol of independence, as Mikėnas' was reinscribed an ardent nationalist. There are countless buildings still standing, which were built in the Soviet period. While the Vilnius Railway Station, Vilnius Airport, and the Pergalė Cinema are all built in the Neoclassical style of high Stalinism, many modernist buildings are still extant, including the Art Exhibition House (now, Contemporary Art Center), Vilnius Concert and Sports Hall, and the Lietuva Hotel. As Vilnius globalizes, all historical architectural forms are under threat. As of March 2017, the famous Lietuva Cinema, built between 1959 and 1965 in the modernist style on the edge of the city's Old Town, was bulldozed to make room for a new contemporary art museum designed by Daniel Libeskind. See

Lithuanian Ministry of Culture approved the reevaluation of the Green Bridge and its statues based on the recommendation of an expert committee convened the previous spring.¹²³ The Lithuanian Cultural Heritage Register still lists the bridge and its statues as protected but notes that, “The procedure for cancelling its status as a State Protected Object has been started.”¹²⁴ Officially removed under the pretense of restoration, the statues have yet to be returned [Figure 2-21].¹²⁵

Vulnerable to the fluctuating environment to which they are bound, monuments provide us with a false sense of historical closure. Although made of stone or metal, a monument is only as permanent as the consensus that built it. Today, both in and outside Eastern Europe, we are reckoning with monuments and the histories they have written as well as erased. Through works that directly engage with monuments as well as architectures, Narkevičius stakes a claim to their creative reuse, which, in turn, reinvests the viewer in acknowledging the multiplicity of histories. Following his lead, we are called to critically deconstruct and reconstruct established histories in order to build new monuments for the future. By seeking out already inscribed sites of memory and

Marcišauskytė-Jurašienė, *Sculpture Walks*, 76-79, 90-93, 138-141, 276-279 and Drėmaitė, Leitanaitė, and Reklaitė, eds. *Vilnius, 1900-2016*, 113, 116, 117, 128, 140-141, 146-147, 155.

¹²³ The committee was formed in May 2015 and led by Romas Pakalnis, Chair of the Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO. Решена судьба скульптур Зеленого моста в Вильнюсе, March 2, 2016, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/02032016-skulptury-zelenogo-mosta/>. This article speaks of the shame associated the statues.

¹²⁴ <https://kvr.kpd.lt/#/static-heritage-detail/37722b8c-14da-4970-8c06-e99613685e99>

¹²⁵ Flowerpots were installed in place of the statues, which are stored on the site of the Vilnius City Municipality Construction Company Grinda. This article notes that the mayor said the statues will not return: Мэр Вильнюса: советские скульптуры на Зеленый мост не вернутся, January 20, 2016, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://ru.delfi.lt/news/politics/mer-vilnyusa-sovetskie-skulptury-na-zelenyj-most-ne-vernutsya.d?id=70172530>. This article mentioned that they may be transferred into the collection of the Lithuanian Art Museum, and thus, be unregistered: Советские скульптуры с Зеленого моста в Вильнюсе хотят передать музею. February 17, 2017, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://ru.delfi.lt/news/live/sovetskie-skulptury-s-zelenogo-mosta-v-vilnyuse-hotyat-peredat-muzeyu.d?id=73783622>.

highlighting them in works of art, artists, like Narkevičius, do the work of remembering by never allowing us to forget.

CHAPTER THREE

PAULINA OŁOWSKA: APPLYING THE FANTASTIC

In 2008, the artist Paulina Ołowska re-presented the work of fellow Polish artist Zofia Stryjeńska (1891-1976) in two Berlin exhibitions. For the Fifth Berlin Biennial, Ołowska produced a new portrait of Stryjeńska and five enlarged, grayscale, painted reproductions of her works from the 1920s, 1940s, and 1960s.¹ Comprising the series *Zofia Stryjeńska* (2008) [Figure 3-1], they hung in the foyer of the Neue Nationalgalerie, along the back wall of one of its cloakrooms.² From the sidewalk on Potsdamer Straße, one could see them through the museum's iconic glass curtain façade, the signature of its world-renowned German-American architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Since opening in 1968, the Neue Nationalgalerie has housed a collection of European and North American twentieth-century art, including works by Max Beckmann, Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, Gerhard Richter, and Andy Warhol.³

¹ Ołowska previously painted a series of large-scale portraits of powerful but often overlooked historical women, such as the artist Vanessa Bell and the writer Virginia Woolf, for her solo exhibition *Sie mußte die Idee eines Hauses als Metapher verwerfen* [She had to reject the idea of a house as a metaphor] at Kunstverein Braunschweig in 2004. Ołowska's portrait of Stryjeńska, which was based on a photograph, depicts the artist sporting a chic bob haircut and a loosely fitted, embroidered blouse. With her face in partial profile, her curly locks obscure the left side of her face. With a melancholic gaze, she stares beyond the canvas's frame. Curated by Adam Szymczyk and Elena Filipovic, the fifth Berlin Biennial *When things cast no shadow* took place in two parts. During the day, works by fifty artists could be seen in four venues around the center of Berlin. At night, sixty-three events, including performances, took place in the city. In addition, Szymczyk and Filipovic enlisted five artists, including Ołowska, to curate exhibitions in the Schinkel Pavilion before, during, and after the biennial, which ran from April 5 to June 15, 2008. Ołowska's exhibition at the Schinkel ran from June 13 to June 29, 2008.

² The foyer of the Neue Nationalgalerie is considered a part of its larger exhibition space, but Ołowska's use of the functional walls of one of its cloakrooms is atypical. While not taking pride of place—in the inner sanctum of the museum's underground main gallery—it is a very visible space, due to the building's architecture. The exhibition took place in summer, but the cloakrooms are undoubtedly well used to store large bags year-round as well as coats in winter.

³ The museum is part of Berlin's Kulturforum, then West Berlin's response to East Berlin's Museumsinsel. These artists are highlighted on the museum's website. While they represented diverse styles, they are all men. Women artists are part of the collection, but none are listed here in the museum's virtual interface. "About the collection," accessed June 13, 2018, <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/neue-nationalgalerie/collections-research/about-the-collection.html>.

Although better known in Poland than abroad, Stryjeńska was a veritable pioneer, cross-dressing as a man in order to enroll in Munich's Academy of Fine Arts in 1912.⁴ Despite the gender bias she faced throughout her career, Stryjeńska led the revival of an iconic Polish national style while still following the development of international modernism. "In the way she collages images and in how dynamic they were, Stryjeńska was definitely reflecting on modernism," says Ołowska.⁵ Stryjeńska did not mimic modernism but internalized and translated it into her own visual language, which continued to flourish throughout the communist period. Her thick lines, sharp shadows, and flat fields of bold colors were particularly beloved in the decorative arts and interior design circles. Unfortunately, the anachronistic domesticity of her output from posters and postcards to plates and pitchers only further distanced Stryjeńska from the upper echelons of fine art. According to Ołowska, who has immersed herself in Stryjeńska's biography, the elder artist was even "dismissed (in Poland) because hers was not a modernism in the pure sense, such as the idea of 'pure art' expressed in Władysław Strzemiński's manifesto of Unism."⁶ In her lifetime, Stryjeńska, who died the year Ołowska was born, did not simply reject proscribed parameters but also broke them down, just as the younger artist does in her work today.

⁴ For information on Stryjeńska in Polish, see her diaries, Zofia Stryjeńska, *Cleb prawie ze powszedni*, ed. Maria Gronska (Warsaw: Warsaw Gebethner, 1995) and the exhibition catalogue, Światosław Lenartowicz, ed., *Zofia Stryjeńska: Wystawa w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie* (Kraków: Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie, 2008). In English, Danuta Bartorska, "Zofia Stryjeńska: Princess of Polish Painting," *Woman's Art Journal* 19, 2 (Autumn 1998 – Winter 1999): 24-29.

⁵ Zofia Stryjeńska, Paulina Ołowska, and Monika Szewczyk, "Correspondence," *Paulina Ołowska: Zofia Stryjeńska* (Ghent: A Prior Magazine, 2008), n.p.

⁶ Ibid. Of course, this cannot be taken for granted in "Western" art history, since Strzemiński and his personal and professional partner Katarzyna Kobro were relatively unknown until after 1989. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Strzemiński and Kobro: In Search of Motivation," *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), 123-156.

Into the beacon of Western modernism that is the Neue Nationalgalerie, Ołowska literally inserted not only her own artwork, which typically would not be shown within the confines of this museum, but also figuratively that of Stryjeńska, whose provincial epics of mythological proportions might have been shown there if they were not unjustly relegated from the art historical canon.⁷ The confines of van der Rohe's glass cube provided the perfect setting for Ołowska's infiltration into the history of art, as its "transparency disrupts distinctions in viewing between inside the building and outside and offers a counter to the neutral posture of conventional museum's white cubes."⁸ She exploited the natural interruption of this architectural feature by permeating the museum's walls, thus creating a radical disturbance in its genteel understanding of history. The series *Zofia Stryjeńska* is indicative of Ołowska's oeuvre, which blasts open the continua of predetermined histories in order to reclaim what has been excluded, lost, or forgotten. Rooted in the Latin verb meaning "to shout back" (*re + clamare*), reclaiming is both an act of regaining as well as exclaiming for Ołowska, whose restorative practice gathers the loose threads of history—whether an overlooked biography or an outmoded fashion—as mediums for directing the new, imagined, and fantastic futures. Weaving these disparate strands, Ołowska mines and manages the resources of our fleeting culture.

Unlike artists whose practices seamlessly coopt the work of real or imagined personages in order to make conceptual gestures about the contested nature of authorship,

⁷ For my understanding of East and West, see the terminology section in the introduction to this dissertation. As it will be shown, Stryjeńska faces a double bind—she is neglected not only because of her gender but also because of the subjectmatter and style of her work.

⁸ "Announcement of Venues: 5th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art, April 5 – June 15, 2008," November 22, 2007, accessed June 13, 2018, http://universes-in-universe.de/car/berlin/eng/2008/txt/bb5_pmnov_251107_en.pdf.

Ołowska purposely altered her copies of Stryjeńska's work in both size and color.⁹ While creating and copying might seem antithetical acts, copying has been intrinsic to artistic practice whether manifested as an exercise or a forgery from the Renaissance through the contemporary period. As elucidated by philosopher Walter Benjamin, the subject of copying became more fraught as technology developed, when the copy could be perfected to the point where it was virtually indistinguishable from the original. Yet, as Benjamin points out, "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be... the history to which its was subject through the time of its existence."¹⁰ Herein lies originality or, in Benjaminian terms, "aura," which subsequent theorists have fetishized throughout the twentieth century.¹¹ While Ołowska does not purport originality, her body of work entitled *Zofia Stryjeńska* remains "imbedded in the fabric of tradition."¹² Ołowska uses her paintings as a medium to not only channel but also intervene in Stryjeńska's legacy, which has been passed down from generation to generation within the family that is womanhood.

The clear distinctions between Ołowska and Stryjeńska's works were best seen in Ołowska's second Berlin exhibition, which took place at the Schinkel Pavilion upon the closing of the Berlin Biennial.¹³ Entitled *Collaged Stryjeńska*, the smaller and brightly

⁹ A prevalent phenomenon in contemporary art, this practice is seen in the works of Goran Đorđević (whose pseudonyms include the Doorman and the Technical Assistant of the Museum of American Art in Berlin), Walid Raad/The Atlas Group and Francis Alÿs, among others.

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 220.

¹¹ See Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), 151-170.

¹² Benjamin, 223.

¹³ Today, the Pavilion is a kunsthalle for contemporary art. Situated in the garden of the Kronprinzenpalais (Crown Prince's Palace), it functioned as an art museum until National Socialism. Badly damaged during

colored original works by Stryjeńska were hung side-by-side Ołowska's larger black-and-white reproductions. "Because of the size of her studio and the vagaries of transport... her paintings were often sewn together; really, in a way, they are collages—open compositions that could be much larger," says Ołowska.¹⁴ With the paintings by both women hanging from the ceiling in a cascade formation [Figure 3-2], the viewer was able to meander through the octagonal gallery without the impediment of walls. Ołowska further enhanced the space by installing temporary floorboards, a historical reference to those used by Stryjeńska and her compatriots for the design of the Polish Pavilion at the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris.¹⁵ While the visual dissonance between the Neue Nationalgalerie's sleek international style and Stryjeńska's Art Deco-inspired folk was echoed in the Schinkel Pavilion with its neo-classical exterior and sparse but highly functional interior, Ołowska described the result more harmoniously, like a "creative dialogue, that combines our own personal experience and practice with the idea of having another artist as a metaphor for our struggles now... the idea of a companion that shares our experiences."¹⁶ At the Schinkel Pavilion, their dialogue produced not a nostalgic homage but a veritable link between the experiences of two women living and working in disparate times.

The installation *Collaged Stryjeńska* is more accurately identified as *bricolage*.

Defined by the French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, *bricolage* is a

World War II, it was rebuilt by Richard Paulick in 1969. Located within the borders of East Berlin, it became a popular site for communist party social functions.

¹⁴ Stryjeńska, Ołowska, and Szewczyk, n.p.

¹⁵ Małgorzata Sears, "Negotiating Modernism: The 1925 Paris Exhibition and the Formation of New State Patronage in Re-Born Poland," Presentation at the Annual Association of Art Historians Conference, Norwich, United Kingdom (April 2015).

¹⁶ Paulina Ołowska quoted in Sue Tate, "Making History in the Feminine: Genealogical Encounters at the Berlin Biennial 2008," Association of Art Historians Annual Conference, Manchester University, April 2009, accessed June 12, 2018, <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/12743>.

technique of assembling and interpreting signs. In art, it is technically distinguished from collage, which is two-dimensional rather than three-dimensional in form.¹⁷ In its most basic form, *bricolage* is an assemblage in which elements possessing pre-determined meanings come together in an infinite number of possible permutations that, in turn, impart new meanings.¹⁸ *Bricolage* is “a liberator against the idea that anything can be meaningless” because it is founded not on the limits and logic of scientific empiricism, but on the creativity and unbounded capacity of mythical thought.¹⁹

In comparison to Olga Chernysheva and Deimantas Narkevičius, whose practices are discussed in the preceding two chapters, Paulina Ołowska takes a more obstinate position toward the biases inherent in history. While not quite an artist-activist, her practice is founded upon debunking gender stereotypes, namely that women are commodities to be bought and sold. As the primary subjects of Ołowska’s work, women are empowered as the producers as well as also the consumers of desires. They are no longer the desired but the desiring. This revelation is particularly poignant in the patriarchal society of both post-war and post-communist Poland in which gender and the economy were intimately intertwined.²⁰ Armed with the power of fantasy and her decidedly feminist agenda, Ołowska as *bricoleuse* makes connections between the

¹⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. George Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd, 1966), 19-20. In this book, Lévi-Strauss considers how thoughts are expressed in different languages based on the unique knowledge of each particular group. Unlike scholars before him, Lévi-Strauss draws a parallel and not a distinction between the “civilized” (scientific) and “primitive” (magical) minds. He determines that, while the means of expression may vary, one is not better than another.

¹⁸ See Anne Dezeuze, “Assemblage, *Bricolage*, and the Practice of Everyday Life,” *Art Journal* 67, 1 (Spring 2008): 31-37. By using found objects (in the archives) or leftovers (old neons) Ołowska operates on the border between the made and the unmade. “What do you do with the found objects? What do you do with something in between the made and the unmade?” she asks. See Appendix III.

¹⁹ Lévi-Strauss, 22.

²⁰ Changes in power dynamics among men and women in Europe and North America changed dramatically during and after World War II. See Cecilia Gowdy-Wygant, *Cultivating Victory: the Women's Land Army and the Victory Garden Movement* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013) and Alan M. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A.: America During World War II*, 3rd edition (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

experiences of the Polish woman in these two periods as she sifts through the dustbin of history, picking out “the remains and debris of events... *des bribes et des morceaux*... [the] odds and ends... [of] fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or society.”²¹

A Third Way Her Way

Ołowska uses *bricolage* as a technique as well as an overall strategy for her work. Claiming that the immediacy of *bricolage* suits her “impatient” personality—a restlessness that characterizes the mechanics of her practice, echoed in the broad brushstrokes, bold colors swatches, and loose outlines of her many larger-than-life portraits on canvas—does not carryover to her subject matter.²² To choose her subjects, she culls from “an already existent set of tools and materials” that comprises “the heterogeneous objects of [her] treasury.”²³ She works thoroughly through and returns repeatedly to the trappings of the communist experience and its enduring effects on Poland today. “After all, my works are not limited to revitalizing bygone forms. Essentially, they are an attempt at establishing a dialogue with the past,” says Ołowska.²⁴ Retaining the inimitable power of the *bricoleuse*, she “speaks not only *with* things” but also “through the medium of things.”²⁵ Like the other artists discussed in this dissertation, Ołowska traces the afterlives of communism through its material forms as a means of remembering and reclaiming this experience against the fleeting annals of history.

²¹ Lévi-Stauss, 22.

²² Paulina Ołowska and Adam Szymczyk, “I Lived Around the Corner from Modernism: Paulina Ołowska in Conversation with Adam Szymczyk,” in *Paulina Ołowska*, ed. Lionel Bovier (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2013), 84. Ołowska uses collage for both preparatory as well as final works. The versatility of the medium is undoubtedly attractive to this energetic and perpetually busy artist.

²³ Lévi-Strauss, 18.

²⁴ Ołowska and Szymczyk, 83.

²⁵ Lévi-Stauss, 19.

In 2004, Paulina Ołowska distilled her pantheon of creative muses in the series *Accidental Collages*. These sixteen distinct but related collages juxtapose carefully cut and neatly pasted images with printed and painted texts on paper.²⁶ While the majority of images sourced from family albums or public archives are reproduced in black-and-white, some, such as the precisely trimmed silhouettes of female models lifted from old fashion magazines or the miniaturized renditions of Ołowska's own paintings of female sitters, appear in color. Several collages include full or partial texts and hand painted symbols. Individually, the collages are aesthetically pleasing, if not enigmatic. Together, they represent a veritable "autobiographical autopsy" of the artist.²⁷ Although meticulously cut and pasted, extensively sampled and pastiched, the collages are presented as sutured and finished. By dissecting the contents of even just one collage, we come to understand not only Ołowska's methods but also the influences, fascinations, and desires that continue to dominate her practice today.

Although she claims to prefer "personal history to History with a capital H," not all the people, places, and products pictured are contemporaneous to Ołowska, who was born in 1976.²⁸ The series is also a good portrait of Polish life in the period known as the Thaw (1953-1964), when restrictions under communism, particularly in the realm of culture, were relaxed after the death and denunciation of Joseph Stalin in Moscow. Thus, Ołowska's *Accidental Collages* not only tell her personal history as a woman living in post-communist Poland, but simultaneously look back at the histories of her foremothers,

²⁶ Editions of Ołowska's *Accidental Collages* circulate as inkjet prints and are found in both private and public collections, including the Stedelijk Museum, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, and the Collection of Thea Wagner Westreich and Ethan Wagner. Ołowska continues to use the term "accidental collage," applying it to later works, such as *Malevich Class*, 2013 in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum. In 2013, Ołowska was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Stedelijk. *Paulina Ołowska: Au Bonheur des Dames*, curated by Leontine Coelewijn, was the artist's first solo exhibition at a major museum.

²⁷ Ołowska Szymczyk, 84.

²⁸ Ibid., 83.

women living in Poland since the Second World War. The result is a critical reassessment of female subjectivity against the hegemonic discourses that constitute the oppressive, patriarchal society that is Poland today.

With its bilateral composition, *Accidental Collage 7* [Figure 3-3] is a particularly interesting example from the series. A portrait of the artist Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935) appears at the center of the top layer.²⁹ Born Kazimierz Malewicz to a Polish family living on Ukrainian land, he was active as a painter and pedagogue in the Russian Empire, working in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Vitebsk. He was a central figure in the history of the avant-garde, advancing abstraction through his pioneering philosophy on the relationships among form, color, and feeling known as Suprematism.³⁰ In Ołowska's collage, he is pictured against his Suprematist paintings of the 1910s. Adjacent to this black-and-white photograph is the embellished Art Nouveau logo of the fashion label Biba, which was known for its bold patterned dresses, billowy scarves, and wide-collared blouses. Owned and operated by Polish-born Barbara Hulanicki in London from 1964 to 1975, Biba grew from a local mail-order business to one of Europe's largest but still affordable high-street fashion retailers.³¹ Below these icons of high and popular culture stands a young woman—perhaps a Biba model herself—sporting a classic 1970s look, wearing a large buttoned, doubled breasted pea coat over a nearly invisible miniskirt with

²⁹ The legacy of Malevich was revived during the Thaw in Poland, according to art historian David Crowley. As discussed later in this chapter, abstraction also thrived at this time. See David Crowley, "Staging for the End of History: Avant-Garde Visions at the Beginning and the End of Communism in Eastern Europe," in *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War: Exploring the Second World War*, eds. Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersild (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 113.

³⁰ Among the many publications on the artist, see Irina A. Vakar, Tatiana N. Mikhienko, eds., *Kazimir Malevich: Letters, Documents, Memoirs, Criticism*, Vols. 1 and 2 (London: Tate Publishing: 2015).

³¹ For a history of Biba, see Barbara Hulanicki, *From A to Biba: The Autobiography of Barbara Hulanicki* (London: V&A Publications, 2009).

knee-high leather boots. Crisply cut from her context, she awkwardly stands pigeon-toed with her elbows raised in the air, as if she were dancing or celebrating.

In between this trifecta of imagery is a text rendered in a sans-serif font with a faint purplish hue as if produced by a mimeograph machine. It reads:

The combination of unusual people and unconventional interior proved a magnet for young people.
It wanted to become a meeting place.
It wanted to become a meeting place.
The artist's [sic] honestly prompted to withdraw from any work which is not giving, for joyful [sic] is only giving substantial shapes to one's visions.

What and where is this hot spot? Like the images, these lines are taken out of context.

They could be clumsily translated excerpts from an entry in Leopold Tyrmand's *Diary 1954* or an article in an issue of the women's magazine *Ty i Ja*, two sources Ołowska has relied heavily upon, as will be examined later in this chapter. According to the artist, "The text [in *Accidental Collage 7* and the series as a whole] was a collage itself, broken into pieces" and put back together in new and sometimes strange ways.³² While Ołowska does not remember its exact source, she says that, when it finally came together on the page, it felt "good." My numerous conversations with Ołowska as well as my observations of her works in progress reveal that what looks haphazardly thrown together is actually deeply resonant. Despite her momentary lapse in memory, she has proven herself a proficient archivist, meticulously cataloguing her career by year and by project in dozens of acid-free binders stored in her studio outside Kraków.³³ "I am so old

³² Paulina Ołowska, email to author, December 6, 2017.

³³ In October 2017, I visited Ołowska at her home-studio in Rabka, a village outside Kraków. Ołowska's activities in Rabka, which have been ongoing for ten years, will be addressed in the final section of this chapter.

school,” she says. “I would go to the archives back in the day and then get copies of the films on VHS,” revealing her passion for the outmoded.³⁴

It was in the archives that Ołowska discovered the architectural blueprint that appears as a backdrop to the three central images of *Accidental Collage 7*. This blueprint is also incorporated into the bottom layer of the collage, connecting its two parts. It sketches the façade of a neo-classical building with a wall of scaled archways and colonnades that merges baroque ornamentation with a Brutalist austerity.³⁵ This building of formidable girth and heft is located on Warsaw’s Constitution Square (*Plac Konstytucji*), the focal point of the city’s iconic Marszałkowska Residential District (*Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa*), colloquially known as MDM. Built in the image of Berlin’s Stalinallee, MDM was a large-scale renovation project initiated in 1950 by General Secretary Bolesław Beirut. It reconfigured the city center along the north-south axis of Ulica Marszałkowska (Marshall Street).³⁶ As noted by architectural historian Owen Hatherley, streets like Marszałkowska were very important because they appealed to the communist aesthetic. Categorized as “magistrale,” these wide, straight boulevards cut through cities and typically connected two major squares, making them the perfect routes for parades and military exercises.³⁷ Designed by a team of Polish

³⁴ Paulina Ołowska, email to author, December 2, 2017.

³⁵ Sculptures, reliefs, and mosaics decorate the architecture of MDM. For example, six reliefs in the Socialist Realist style depict the history of MDM from its planning to its construction on the frieze along the north side of Constitution Square.

³⁶ Like parts of East Berlin as well as Moscow, Kyiv, Vilnius, and other major cities behind the Iron Curtain, Warsaw was left in ruins after World War II. In the 1950s, the state sought not only to rebuild but also redesign the city according to its new communist outlook. East Berlin’s Stalinallee, which began construction in 1949, was renamed Karl-Marx-Allee in 1961. The streets in Moscow, Kyiv, and Vilnius are known as Ulitsia Tverskaya, Vulytsia Khreshchatyk, and Vokiečių gatvė, respectively.

³⁷ See Owen Hatherley, *Landscapes of Communism: A History Through Buildings* (New York: The New Press, 2016), 38. What the Soviets did not anticipate was that those same streets would later host revolutions, including most recently Ukraine’s Euromaidan in 2013. Hatherley makes a clear distinction between magistrale and *Ringenstrasse* as in cities like Vienna, Pest, Kraków, or even Moscow, where the streets trace the circular foundations of medieval walls.

architects led by Jozef Sigalin (1909-1983), MDM aimed to revitalize Warsaw with an influx of new housing units along with schools, libraries, clinics, theaters, cafes, and other public facilities catering to the new communist lifestyle of its citizens.³⁸ After two years of construction and concerted pushback from academics, architects, and urban planners, MDM's first section at Constitution Square was unveiled with great fanfare on July 22, 1952. On this date, the Constitution of the People's Republic of Poland (*Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej* or PRL) was ratified.³⁹ Today, MDM remains one of the most visible markers of the communist period in Poland.⁴⁰

The architecture of MDM is the focal point of the bottom layer in *Accidental Collage 7*. The underlying blueprints are obscured by a series of bold, black, painted arrows pointing to a black-and-white photograph of the building in situ. A fragment of a sentence—"the 'Gymnast girl' was placed"—helps to identify the building, which is located on the corner of Ulica Koszykowa and Constitution Square.⁴¹ In 1961, the artist

³⁸ Nikolas Drosos, "Building Together: Construction Sites in a Divided Europe During the 1950s," in *Re-Humanizing Architecture: New Forms of Community, 1950-1970*, eds. Ákos Moravánszky and Judith Hopfengärtner (Basel: Birkhauser Verlag GmbH, 2017), 116. Sigalin's team included Stanisław Jankowski (1911-2002), Jan Knothe (1912-1977), and Zygmunt Stępiński (1908-1982).

³⁹ The Constitution was based on the Constitution of the Soviet Union, a symbolic extension of brotherhood among fellow communist nations. See documentary photographs in Bohdan Garliński, *Architektura Polska, 1950-1951* (Warsaw: Instytut Urbanistyki Architektury, 1955), 73-74. This rich catalogue also provides blueprints for MDM and twenty-one additional post-war sites. Garliński describes the challenges posed by MDM's scale and style in the face of new directives from the epicenter, Moscow: "The essence of this difficulty was the full novelty in terms of scale, requiring, for the first time in the history of Warsaw, to shape in a planned and homogeneous way the metropolitan foundations, and in the search for a form based on historical achievements, express the spirit of the era of building socialism." ["*Istotą tej trudności była pełna nowość zjawiska tak pod względem skali, wymagającej po raz pierwszy w historii Warszawy kształtowania w sposób planowy i jednorodny założenia wielkomiejskiego, jak i pod względem poszukiwania formy opartej o dorobek historyczny i wyrażającej budowy ducha epoki budowy socjalizmu.*"] Garliński, 9.

⁴⁰ When I conducted research in Warsaw in June 2016, MDM was impossible to avoid. Zachęta National Gallery, where I accessed the archives, is located off Marszałkowska on its north end.

⁴¹ The sentence begins at the bottom right-hand corner of *Accidental Collage 6*, "This is were [sic] the Neon of." This collage also includes the blueprint and a corner of the black-and-white photograph of the building. While *Accidental Collage 6* and 7 are closely connected through their images and texts, not all collages in the series are so closely related. However, the collages do not need to be hung in order, as seen in her 2010 solo exhibition *Accidental Collages* at Tramway in Glasgow.

Jan Mucharski, working for the state-run advertising agency Reklama, designed an animated neon sign for its roof.⁴² Known as the *Siatkarka (Volleyball Player)* [Figure 3-4], a female athlete in a red bodysuit rendered spread-eagle spikes a ball that flies into the air and cascades down the side of the building, which, at the time, housed a sporting goods store.⁴³ It is not a coincidence that this neon should factor into this collage as, for Ołowska, the neon “demonstrates a lust for life, optimism about the future, reaching for new horizons.”⁴⁴ These sentiments are just as, if not even more, important in Poland today than they were decades ago.

By the 1960s, the *Volleyball Player* was one of many neons overlooking the vast open space of Constitution Square. Writer Jarosław Anders recalls the omnipresence of neons in the Warsaw of his childhood:

I remember they [the neons] were constantly blinking... and this blinking seemed to mock and make darkness even more visible... I remember one sign I saw constantly over the rooftops from my mother's kitchen window. It advertised a sports goods store (with hardly any sports goods inside) and showed a volleyball player throwing a ball that made a circle in the air and fell to the ground. (Obviously, the player missed.) I still see it, rising and falling, rising and falling with Sisyphean persistence and futility.⁴⁵

Today, the center of Constitution Square has been repurposed as a car park, and after years of disrepair, the *Volleyball Player* is illuminated again thanks to Ołowska. Only now, it competes with new, large, and even flashier billboards, banners, and LCD screens for the attention of passersby. “The rapid urban modernization in Poland is based on consumerism and is indifferent toward art that is fragile and that expresses an aesthetic

⁴² Ironically, Leopold Tyrmand, who described the architecture of MDM as “monotonous and appallingly boring” could not envision neons illuminating its sidewalks. As quoted in David Crowley, “Life After Dark,” in *Warszawa: Polski Neon / Polish Neon*, ed. Ilona Karwińska (Warsaw: Agora, 2008), 12.

⁴³ In 2006, when Ołowska unveiled the refurbished neon, the store was selling Italian shoes.

⁴⁴ Paulina Ołowska and Dominic van der Boogerd, “Work in Progress: An Interview with Paulina Ołowska,” *Stedelijk Museum Bulletin* 5 (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2004): 62.

⁴⁵ As quoted in Marius Kociejowski, “The Blue Coat at Reklama,” in *Warszawa: Polski Neon / Polish Neon*, 17.

from the past,” says Ołowska.⁴⁶ Concerned with the future of the past, her works reanimate this and other objects plucked from the dustbin of history.

The restoration of the *Volleyball Player* was part of a larger project Ołowska began in 2005 with Reklama and the Warsaw-based Foksal Gallery Foundation (FGF).⁴⁷ “They [the neons] are public works of art that should be protected in an environment that’s becoming ever more capitalist,” says Ołowska.⁴⁸ This collaboration prompted her to produce her own series of neons for the exhibition *Painting – Exchange – Neon*, which opened in 2006 at FGF. Works included *Warsaw Belongs to the Bourgeoisies* (2006), an oil painting of Warsaw’s illuminated skyline dotted with collaged elements, and *Palimpsest* (2006), an installation of neons designed by Ołowska. Like the *Volleyball Player*, the neons were fastened to the exterior of the gallery’s building. While they demarcated liminal space between inside (a commercial space) and outside (a public space), this distinction is hardly perceptible today in a contemporary culture saturated by consumerism.

Founded in 1956 and privatized in 1993, Reklama, officially known as the Capital Light Installation Advertising Firm (*Stoleczne Przedsiębiorstwo Instalacji Reklam Świetlnych*), is responsible for the design and manufacture of over 5000 neons in and outside Warsaw.⁴⁹ Although, in the communist period, neons were subject to censorship by the office of Warsaw’s Chief Graphic Designer (*Naczelny Platyk Warszawy*), the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁷ FGF is a commercial gallery that represents Ołowska in Poland. Also related to this project is a 2013 series of hand painted ceramic sculptures of the *Volleyball Player*. Ołowska made these in an edition of fifty with ten artists proofs for the now defunct magazine *Parkett*.

⁴⁸ Ołowska and van der Boogerd, 62.

⁴⁹ Jacek Wyczółkowski, Reklama’s Director, gifted the archive of the firm’s work between 1956 and 1993 to the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. It comprises 300 linear meters. Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, “Archiwum Firmy Reklama,” accessed December 11, 2017, <https://artmuseum.pl/pl/kolekcja/artysci/archiwum-firmy-reklama>.

medium gave artists great freedom. “The neon comes from an exceptional time when, thanks to a policy set out to brighten the city, it was possible to achieve great advertising, often abstract, by renowned artists,” says Ołowska.⁵⁰ These delicate glass tubes containing colored gases could be shaped into a myriad of forms that ranged from the playful to the iconic.⁵¹

Beginning in the late 1950s, neons in Warsaw advertised a variety of goods and services from jewelry, shoes, and perfumes to cinemas, cocktail bars, and travel agencies. Unlike the billboards of American capitalism that could be stripped and repainted daily, neons provided long-term, static and tacitly didactic signage. Neons were both practical and entertaining. They marked the city’s newfound cosmopolitan modernity—department stores, Chinese restaurants, dance clubs—while providing a complimentary nightly spectacle to passersby. As art historian David Crowley argues, this lively neon lightscape was integral to the rejuvenation of Poland in the tumultuous period after World War II.⁵²

Using her work as a tool to critically comment on both feminine mystique and consumerist power, Ołowska produced the series *Accidental Collages* for the 2004 group exhibition *Who If Not We...? Episode 2: Time and Again* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.⁵³ Part of a larger, multi-national research project fostering cross-cultural

⁵⁰ As quoted in David Crowley, “Life After Dark,” 13.

⁵¹ The following is a list of gases and the colors they produce: noble – orange, hydrogen – red, helium – yellow, carbon dioxide – white, mercury – blue.

⁵² David Crowley, *Warsaw* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), 125. The magazine *Stolica* (Capital) campaigned for neons. Prominent articles published include Andrzej Koźmiński, “Neony Warszawy” [“Neons of Warsaw”], *Stolica* 43 (1954) and Hannah Jarzęcka, “Neony, Neony, Neony” [“Neons, Neons, Neons”], *Stolica* 36 (1956).

⁵³ For an overview of the exhibition, see Leontine Coelewijn, “Time and Again,” *Stedelijk Museum Bulletin* 5 (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2004): 58-59. It also included new and recent works by the Lithuanian artist Deimantas Narkevičius, the Polish artist Willem Sasnal, the Slovak artist Roman Ondák, the Czech artist Jan Macuška, the Slovenian artist Tadej Pogacar, and the Hungarian collective Little Warsaw. It was here that Narkevičius premiered his film *Once in the XX Century*. For an analysis of this work, see the introduction to my chapter “Deimantas Narkevičius: Marking Memories, Mediating Histories” in this dissertation.

dialogues in the wake of European Union expansion, the exhibition highlighted the continued importance of local histories in the context of this global growth.⁵⁴ “I wanted to do something with the idea of history as a collage,” says Ołowska, ultimately finding a way “to accommodate history within contemporary art by means of quoting from the collection.”⁵⁵ Seeing Malevich’s well-known Suprematist abstractions alongside his later figurative paintings in the Stedelijk’s collection and archive, she was struck by the artist’s “symbiotic way of seeing abstraction and figuration, of seeing a world that is much more simple and logical.”⁵⁶ His equality of forms instinctively appealed to Ołowska, whose work transcends the borders of traditional media and often takes on the qualities of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total work of art.⁵⁷

In their form as well as their content, Ołowska’s *Accidental Collages* take after Malevich’s own *Analytical Charts* [Figure 3-5], which he produced between 1924 and 1927 with his students at the State Institute of Artistic Culture (GINKhUK) in Leningrad.⁵⁸ Entitled *Issledovanie zhivopisnoi kul’tury kak formy povedeniia khudozhnika* (Study of Painterly Culture as the Artist’s Mode of Behavior), the twenty-

⁵⁴ On May 1, 2004, ten, predominantly former communist countries—Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia—joined the European Union. For an overview of the project, see Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder, eds. *Who If Not We Should At Least Try To Imagine the Future Of All This?* (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2004).

⁵⁵ Ołowska and van der Boogerd, 61-62.

⁵⁶ “Paulina Ołowska on Malevich,” *Tate Etc.* 31 (Summer 2014), accessed November 22, 2017, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/paulina-olowska-on-malevich>.

⁵⁷ On several occasions, Ołowska has produced immersive and often interactive environments that synthesize multiple media, such as painting, sculpture, performance, thus falling into the category of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Works include *Nova Popularna* (2003), *Asymmetric Display* (2004), and *Café Bar* (2011). While Ołowska’s intermediality is not the subject of this chapter, it is a rich topic ripe for future exploration.

⁵⁸ However, Ołowska has stated that the series is not a direct response to Malevich’s charts alone but to the context in and for which they were made as described by art historian Andrzej Turowski in his book *Malevich in Warsaw (Malewicz w Warszawie: rekonstrukcje i symulacje)* (Krakow: TAiWPN Universitas, 2002). It involved Malevich’s place within the Polish art scene at the time as well as, more generally, ideas about abstract painting and exhibition making in the first decades of the twentieth century. Ołowska and van der Boogerd, 61.

two charts clearly and systematically illustrate the trajectory of avant-garde art from French Impressionism to Russian Suprematism, situating Malevich within the canon of so-called Western art history. The charts served as visual aids to lectures Malevich gave in Poland and Germany in 1927. That year, they also were displayed as self-contained works of art in the artist's solo exhibition in Berlin.⁵⁹ The charts reveal Malevich's interest in how developments in art parallel developments in society, forming patterns and systems.⁶⁰ "Using his diagrammatic method of comparing [and contrasting] forms and styles, I wanted to spell out my paradigm of an upcoming change of reality," says Ołowska.⁶¹

While the impact of Poland's entrance into the European Union in 2004 was undoubtedly felt by citizens throughout this fledgling nation, Ołowska is no stranger to change, having lived through multiple political, social, and economic upheavals throughout the 1980s and 1990s as Poland transitioned from a communist to a democratic state. The youngest artist addressed in this dissertation, Ołowska was raised in a time when history was not sacred but unabashedly subjective and infinitely adaptable. Thus, she sees her works like the *Accidental Collages* as "a series of proposals" that present potential histories in the forms of questions."⁶² Deeply affected by the way in which

⁵⁹ In 1935 while traveling in Europe, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the founding director of The Museum of Modern Art in New York, acquired four of the charts along with several paintings by Malevich from Alexander Dorner. The charts were included in the seminal 1936 exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* for which Barr made his own infamous "torpedo" of modernism. See Leah Dickerman, "Abstraction in 1936: Cubism and Abstract Art at the Museum of Modern Art," in *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art*, eds. Leah Dickerman and Matthew Affron (New York: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2013), 368.

⁶⁰ As science historian Peter Galison describes, Malevich, who led what he called the Department of Bacteriology of Art at GINKhUK, saw each successive movement in art as the result of simply one additional element that operates like a pathogen, affecting the body either positively or negatively. For more on Malevich's scientific approach to art, see Peter Galison, "Concrete Abstraction," in *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art*, 354-356.

⁶¹ Paulina Ołowska, "Paulina Ołowska on Malevich."

⁶² Ołowska and van der Boogerd, 62.

subsequent decommunization campaigns sought to erase the traces of this period in both public space and private consciousness, Ołowska contends, “It is only natural that I should explore these fields that lost their voice to history.”⁶³ Whereas Malevich turned to the history of art, Ołowska looks to histories closer to home in her works that juxtapose feminine ideals with the realities of womanhood in Poland in the second half of the twentieth century.⁶⁴

Like the subject of Olga Chernysheva’s film *Marmot* discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the women in Ołowska’s works demonstrate how to “make do” when faced with the constraints of everyday life, whether under communism or capitalism. Philosopher Michel de Certeau describes this strategy as a slapdash approach to survival under duress.⁶⁵ “Without leaving the place where [she] has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for [her],” says de Certeau, “[she] establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity.”⁶⁶ Within a closed system, it enables one to claim one’s own space and adapt without necessarily compromising one’s own morals. This is reflected not only in Ołowska’s practice, which is the product of two divergent systems, but also in her choice of subjects.

De Certeau’s “making do” parallels what is defined in sociology and applied to economics as a “Third Way,” a liminal space carved between communism and capitalism, a welfare state and libertarianism, societal expectations and individual aspirations. The concept of the Third Way, as outlined by Anthony Giddens, was born

⁶³ Ołowska and Szymczyk, 83.

⁶⁴ Like Malevich, Ołowska is a pedagogue, teaching seminars in the Work.Master program at the Haute Ecole d’art et de design de Genève (HEAD) in Switzerland. See “Paulina Ołowska: Theater as Canvas,” accessed December 20, 2017, <http://www.workmaster.cc/noise/index.php?id=166>.

⁶⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 30.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 30. Italics are in the original.

out of the so-called “death of socialism” in Europe and is most closely associated with New Labour in Britain or the New Democrats in the United States; however, its general idea and the freedoms it affords are duly applicable to Ołowska and the Polish context since 1989.⁶⁷ Postulated as the end of history, the post-communist period was forced to reconcile many opposing factions.

In his study of resistance movements in post-war Poland, historian David Ost cites the importance of a “third road,” which encourages ad-hoc, do-it-yourself initiatives, such as open forums and samizdat publishing, in society that are “based neither in the state nor in the marketplace, but in a vibrant political public sphere.”⁶⁸ This utopic alternative born out of the resistance of average citizens produced, both in theory as well as in practice, a civil society that neither controlled nor focused on the state or market but rather on critical interpersonal interaction.⁶⁹ By breaking barriers between historical epochs and rejecting determinism in her works, Ołowska empowers the act of “making do,” forging a third way for her female subjects to fulfill their potentials as both the producers and the consumers of their waylaid desires.

Stories, Spells, and *Starocie*

⁶⁷ See Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Philip B. Whyman, *Third Way Economics: Theory and Evaluation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Philip Arestis and Malcolm Sawyer, eds. *The Economics of the Third Way: Experiences from Around the World* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2001). I am not interested in directly ascribing the socio-economic understanding of the Third Way to Ołowska and her situation in Poland but would like to invoke a third way as an alternative to mainstream Polish society, which today is divided between a global universalism and an ultra-rightwing conservatism.

⁶⁸ David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 30-31.

⁶⁹ Ost’s concept of civil society is inflected by “anti-politics,” a phrase coined by Hungarian writer György Konrád in 1984 as an intellectual or conceptual and not physical form of resistance. See György Konrád, *Antipolitics: An Essay*, trans. Richard E. Allen (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987). Anti-politics is at the core of art historian Klara Kemp-Welch’s first book, *Antipolitics in Central European Art 1956-1989. Reticence as Dissidence under Post-Totalitarian Rule* (London: IB Tauris, 2014).

Ołowska's self-reflexive *Accidental Collages* parlay into a deeper consideration of the artist's background. As in previous chapters, the artist's biography is essential to foreground because it provides the social, political, and economic context for her work. Like Chernysheva and Narkevičius, Ołowska mines the communist experience to produce works that engage its out-of-date, decayed, degraded, oppressed, suppressed, and ersatz materiality. Whereas Chernysheva bares witness to the burdens of the Soviet past in the forms of physical and emotional labor and Narkevičius hones in on its visible traces in existing monumental forms, Ołowska draws on the female experience under communism and in its shadow. While not a comprehensive study of her oeuvre, this chapter will analyze several key moments in her career, from her early works using the Polish women's magazine *Ty i Ja*, to more recent collaborative projects inflected by her life in the village of Rabka-Zdrój.⁷⁰

Ołowska was born in 1976 in Gdańsk, Poland. A port city on the Baltic Sea, Gdańsk was the epicenter of the Solidarity movement (*Solidarność*) in summer 1980. More than just another workers' protest, it created the first independent labor union in the Eastern Bloc and revived anti-communist sentiments throughout Poland, which would eventually lead to the country's transformation into a democratic state beginning in 1989.⁷¹ Ołowska's father joined Solidarity and became a speechwriter for its leader Lech

⁷⁰ Aside from her monograph, Ołowska's work has been treated only in short essays and magazine articles. See Lionel Bovier, ed. *Paulina Ołowska* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2013) and "Selected Bibliography," Metro Pictures, accessed December 21, 2017, <http://www.metropictures.com/attachment/en/58986e4c5a4091a0008b4568/TextTwoColumnsWithFile/58986e535a4091a0008b48ad>. For a conventional interpretation of her work as a revival of modernist traditions, see Claire Bishop, "Reactivating Modernism," *Parkett* 92 (2013): 146-153.

⁷¹ Earlier workers' protests include Poznań in 1956; Gdańsk, Szczecin, and Gdynia in 1970; and Radom in 1974. For a timeline of these and other events surrounding Solidarity, see Committee in Support of Solidarity, "A Chronology, 1772-1982," *World Affairs* 145, 1 (Summer 1982): 6-10. For detailed studies of Solidarity and its effects on the Polish post-communist transition, see Bartłomiej Kamiński, *The Collapse of State Socialism: The Case of Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Anthony Kemp-

Wałęsa.⁷² Due to mounting pressures during a state imposed period of martial law (1981-1983), her father sought political asylum, immigrating to the United States in 1984. A year later, Ołowska with her brother and mother joined him in Chicago, a city that continues to boast a strong Polish diaspora today.⁷³

A precocious child, Ołowska immediately felt the contrast between living under communism in Poland and living under another equally oppressive system—capitalism—in the United States. She was struck by the novelty of American consumerism targeted at impressionable children eager for Barbie dolls, Madonna records, and fast food. Unfortunately, Ołowska did not have much time to learn the customs of her new home, as her parents divorced, and she returned to Poland in 1986. In the early 1990s, Ołowska relocated once again to Chicago, where she lived with her father and completed her high school education. She enrolled in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, graduating in 1996 with a BFA in painting. Although Ołowska moved back to Europe thereafter, obtaining her MFA in 2000 from the Academy of Fine Arts in her hometown of Gdańsk, she cites her time living in the United States—even “working in a McDonald’s in a shopping mall”—as a significant influence on her work. “I learned history growing up

Welch, *The Birth of Solidarity*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991); Michael D. Kennedy, *Professionals, Power and Solidarity in Poland: A Critical Sociology of Soviet-type Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); Jacek Tittenbrun, *The Collapse of Real Socialism in Poland* (London: Janus Publishing Company, 1993).

⁷² While Ołowska and I have casually discussed her biography, the following details are confirmed in Emily Witt, “Poland’s Most Optimistic, Backward-Looking Artist,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 2016, accessed December 2, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/t-magazine/paulina-olowska-artist-poland.html?_r=0.

⁷³ Ołowska addresses this in her work *Suspicious?* (2004), a site-specific billboard installed in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood. It featured a mix of enlarged black-and-white archival photographs and bold graphic prints submitted to the 1980s competition for the revitalization of Sopot, a resort town on the Baltic Sea. Originally entitled *Functional Collage*, Ołowska retitled the work because it “refer[s] to the fragility of such visions, and the general skepticism toward optimistic, functional modernism today.” See “Billboard Project: Suspicious?—Functional Collage,” December 10, 2004, Metro Pictures Archive.

from two points of view,” she says. At this very young age, Ołowska felt responsible for cobbling together her own history, an amalgamation of communist and capitalist notions and Western and Eastern traditions.

Over the last twenty years, Ołowska has developed a dynamic and multidimensional practice that incorporates painting, sculpture, photography, installation, performance, puppetry, and textile design. Ołowska’s work began to receive international recognition in the late 1990s, when she participated in residencies at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague and the Arts and Visual Communication Center in Lisbon, Portugal in 1998, followed by a residency at the Center for Contemporary Art in Kitakyushu, Japan in 1999. Today, her work can be found in numerous private and public collections, including the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburg, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg, and Tate Modern in London. While acclaimed by galleries, museums, art fairs, and biennials abroad, Ołowska remains beloved at home in Poland, a country whose history is central to her work.⁷⁴

While Ołowska does not limit herself in the depth and breadth of histories she addresses, the Second World War can be identified as a major turning point for her work.⁷⁵ The heights of Polish power—the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795) and the Second Polish Republic (1918-1939)—were all but faint memories as a result of the war and atrocities committed on Polish soil. Poland’s geopolitical fate was sealed in 1945 when Allies Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Franklin D. Roosevelt

⁷⁴ Poland’s conservative and patriarchal society can be mirrored in its art scene, which is dominated by male artists, like Piotr Uklański and Wilhelm Sasnal. They stand in contrast to Ołowska and an informal group of strong, mid-career female artists, which includes but is not limited to Goshka Macuga, Agnieszka Polska, Joanna Rajkowska, and Monika Sosnowska.

⁷⁵ For a thorough consideration of the Polish fate during World War II, see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

redrew the borders of this German-occupied land from the Curzon Line to the Oder River.⁷⁶ With blessings from Moscow, the Communist Party of Poland, known as the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), consolidated power soon thereafter, becoming a satellite—not republic—of the Soviet Union.⁷⁷ As highlighted in the introduction to this dissertation, this distinction is important, as Ołowska diversifies our understanding of communism's effects on visual production in Eastern Europe today.

Economic restructuring was an almost immediate effect of the communist takeover of Poland. In May 1947, the PZRP sought to nationalize all commercial activity—retail and wholesale—and fight the rampant corruption in the marketplace. Known as the “Battle of Trade,” this period conveniently coincided with rapid post-war urbanization not only in the capital of Warsaw but also in other large cities across Poland, as examined in the work of anthropologist Kacper Pobłocki. A boom in urban collective consumption materialized in the form of increased housing, cutting-edge home appliances, and newfound social mobility, which peaked in the 1960s.⁷⁸ In the planned

⁷⁶ As a border, the Curzon Line, named after British Foreign Secretary George Curzon, dates to World War I. As a result, cities like Vilnius (Wilno), now in Lithuania, and L'viv (Lwow), now in Ukraine, became part of the Soviet Union. Poland, in turn, was granted Wrocław (Breslau) in the west and Gdańsk (Danzig) in the north.

⁷⁷ In recent years, the immediate post-war period, approximately 1945 to 1949, has become a popular subject of study for Polish academics and curators alike. See Joanna Kordjak and Agnieszka Szewczyk, eds., *Zaraz po Wojnie* [After the War] (Warsaw: Zachęta National Gallery, 2015). This publication and its accompanying exhibition question whether 1945 was a decisive break that ushered in something completely different or if it was, in fact, a moment of revival that brought back the spirit of earlier movements from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through the lens of art, it pits feelings of immediate post-war euphoria against deep-seated fear, a notion extrapolated by historian Marcin Zaremba in his book *Wielka Trwoga: Polska 1944–1947* [The Great Fear: Poland, 1944–1947] (Kraków: Znak, 2012).

⁷⁸ An example of this, MDM, was discussed in the introduction to this chapter. See Kacper Pobłocki, “‘Knife in the Water’: The Struggle over Collective Consumption in Urbanizing Poland,” in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, eds. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 68–86. Bren and Neuberger's introduction provides a particularly cogent history of consumption across the Eastern Bloc, revealing geographical and temporal nuances.

economies of Poland and other Eastern Bloc countries, there existed a double standard.⁷⁹ Such conspicuous consumption was both desired—signs of a new socialist modernity—and derided—an ideological quagmire that pitted everyday necessities against the abstracted Marxist theory.⁸⁰

Faced with widespread destruction, high inflation and unemployment rates, and sustained ethnic tensions in the aftermath of World War II, Władysław Gomułka, the self-educated son of a laborer from the poor provincial region of Galicia, rose to power. According to his biographer Andrzej Werblan, Gomułka aimed for “a gradual, evolutionary shaping of the socialist system... without the dictatorship of the proletariat typical of the Soviet experience.”⁸¹ Unfortunately, his interpretation of party policies—known as “the Polish road to socialism”—was unwelcomed by the Central Committee, and by the early 1950s, Gomułka was expelled from the party and imprisoned. He was rehabilitated in 1956 as a repercussion of Stalin’s death and eventual denunciation by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. As first secretary of the PZPR, Gomułka instated a series of changes. While the prices for some goods went down, the prices for everyday necessities went up.⁸² Life under Gomułka became increasingly difficult. In 1970, strikes erupted in the shipyards of Gdańsk, which predated and, ultimately, foreshadowed the Solidarity movement of the following decade. Once again, Gomułka was ousted from

⁷⁹ Anna Tikhomirova, “Soviet Women and Fur Consumption in the Brezhnev Era,” in *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 283-308. As Tikhomirova points out in the Soviet context, excessive consumerism (*veshchizm*) and philistinism (*meshchanstvo*) were denounced in favor of divestment (*razveshchestvlenie*). Nevertheless, the *nomenklatura* or ruling elite as well as the less privileged intelligentsia (educated class) benefited from the influx of goods during the thaw.

⁸⁰ For a study of consumption, primarily foodstuffs, in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, see Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin’s Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

⁸¹ Andrzej Werblan, “Władysław Gomułka and the Dilemma of Polish Communism,” *International Political Science Review* 9, 2 (April 1988): 149. Werblan summarizes Gomułka principles, which included full support for the Catholic Church.

⁸² Kennedy, 35.

power and replaced by Edward Gierek, under whom standards of living and consumption seemed to improve at the detrimental expense of accruing major foreign debts.⁸³ While consumption increased by 50 percent and wages rose by 59 percent between 1970 and 1975, rationing of sugar, meat, shoes, and even cigarettes had begun.⁸⁴ Under these tense economic circumstances, Solidarity was born, demanding the establishment of a free trade union, the right to strike, release of political prisoners, and major economic recompenses and reforms.⁸⁵ Throughout the 1980s, both during and after the period of martial law (December 13, 1981–July 22, 1983), Poland was precariously positioned between Western (American) and Eastern (Soviet) interests.

Despite his inglorious reputation, Gomułka remains a key figure in the Polish collective consciousness. Around the same time when Ołowska turned to the Thaw period for inspiration, there was a wider interest in reviving the memory of mid-century Poland. The exhibition *Szare w Kolorze: Kultura Okresu Gomułkowskiego, 1956-1970* [Grey in Color: The Culture of the Gomułka Era, 1956-1970] [Figure 3-6] opened in July 2000 at the Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw. Curator Anda Rottenberg recalls, “People were talking about the communist period as being terrible, so we thought why not show them its other side.”⁸⁶ Situating the works of period artists within recreations of ten eclectic interiors, including an apartment art gallery, underground jazz club, and a

⁸³ For an indepth statistical analysis of Solidarity and its causes, see Tittenbrun, 1-20, 66. Tittenbrun also addresses the second economy, namely the goods and services illegally bought and sold. He argues that Poland’s shadow economies undermined the state, as demands on the unofficial market resulted in pressures on the official market that could never have been met, and thus drove up inflation and limited the purchasing power of the average Polish citizen. See Tittenbrun, 148-159.

⁸⁴ Małgorzata Mazurek, “Keeping it Close to Home: Resourcefulness and Scarcity in Late Socialist and Postsocialist Poland,” in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, 299.

⁸⁵ For a list of the twenty-one points of Solidarity, see Anthony Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁸⁶ Anda Rottenberg in an unrecorded conversation with the author, June 2, 2016. The exhibition’s press release claims to “recreate the aura of the time” [*Postanowiliśmy spróbować odtworzyć aure tego czasu*], Zachęta National Gallery Archives. While the exhibition sought to “remind” visitors of their favorite things and places from the past, it also aimed to introduce these to a newer generation.

multi-purpose student center, *Szare w Kolorze* put its viewers under the spell of the past. A cornerstone of the exhibition was a fully operational milk bar or cafeteria, where one could buy a cheap but satiating meal comprising traditional Polish dishes, including stuffed cabbage, beet soup, and dumplings. “You could really feel the atmosphere in each room,” says Rottenberg, who cites the exhibition as “the beginning of a turning back” to history in Poland since 1989. The Polish press, which extensively reviewed the exhibition, picked up on Rottenberg’s cue, sentimentalizing the past in its headlines.⁸⁷ Romanticizing the era as a beacon of popular culture, *Szare w kolorze* was a major success, attracting 72,000 visitors in its seven-week run.⁸⁸

For visitors of a certain generation, the exhibition revived memories of the period known across the former communist bloc as the Thaw, when certain repressions were eased in the wake of Stalin’s death and denunciation. Distanced from Moscow, Gomułka’s fairly liberal rule precipitated a reevaluation of Polish society that became known as the Polish October. In the realm of aesthetics, it resulted in a complete backlash against state-sanctioned Socialist Realism in favor of abstraction and other modernist tendencies that revived the subjectivity of the artist.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, as art historian

⁸⁷ “To były czasy... Wystawa o polskich latach sześćdziesiątych [“Those Were the Days... An Exhibition of the Polish ‘60s], *Slowo ludu*, 29-30 July 2000; “Chimery za mlecznym barem” [Ghosts Behind the Milk Bar], *Rzeczpospolita*, July 27, 2000; “Podróż sentymalna: Wystawa w Zachęcie idealizuje obraz PRL-u” [Sentimental journey: Exhibition w Zachęcie idealizes the image of the PRL], *Życie*, July 25, 2000. All newspaper articles are found in the Zachęta National Gallery Archives. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

⁸⁸ Monika Malkowska, “Siła legendy” [The Strength of Legends], *Rzeczpospolita*, November 11, 2002, Zachęta National Archives. Out of all the exhibitions open in Warsaw between 1998 and 2002, *Szare w kolorze* ranked sixth, behind five monographic exhibitions on Gauguin, Reubens, Warhol, Jacek Malczewski, and Picasso, respectively. Out of the top six exhibitions, it had the shortest run. The exhibition coincided with the hundredth anniversary of the opening of Zachęta National Gallery in its current building, making it even more of a celebration.

⁸⁹ While Socialist Realism was decreed at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in August 1934, it was not officially adopted by the PZPR until 1949. For more information on the key artists and works from this period, see Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-*

Andrzej Turowski describes, Polish art during and after the Thaw was still under the influence of an *ideosis* or the “dominant political opinions [that] hold sway over individual choices... formulated from the position of a political power.”⁹⁰ While the Polish cultural sphere was significantly more open than that in the Soviet Union or other satellite states, it was still carefully managed from above. Experimentation was acceptable only in formal terms. While the immediate benefits of the Thaw were short-lived, its long-term effects were felt in Poland well into the 1970s, as certain artists became forces of subtle resistance.⁹¹

While Turowski claims that, even if an artist had no political intention, her work passively took on political meaning solely because it was technically subject to censorship by the state, art historian Łukasz Ronduda offers another, more self-motivated perspective on Polish art of the 1970s. Thirty-five years Turowski’s junior, Ronduda classifies what he calls the “Polish neo-avant-garde” into two distinct factions—postessentialist and pragmatist. While the postessentialists were isolated in their focus on the artistic and immaterial aspects of creative production, the pragmatists revived the early twentieth-century avant-garde’s aim of bridging art with life by directly engaging with the realities of Polish life under communism.⁹² Ronduda’s pragmatists represented a

1989, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2009): 74-78, 116-124, 190-204, 288-303, 338-340, 342-353.

⁹⁰ Andrzej Turowski, “Krzysztof Wodiczko and Polish Art of the 1970s,” in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 154.

⁹¹ Turowski, born in 1941, is of a different generation than Ronduda, born, like Ołowska, in 1976. Andrzej Turowski, “The Greatness of Desire: On the Feminist Conceptualism of Ewa Partum in the 1970s,” in *Ewa Partum*, ed. Aneta Szyłak, et al. (Gdańsk: Instytut Sztuki Wyspa, 2012), 52. Łukasz Ronduda, *Polish Art of the 70s* (Warsaw: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, 2010), 8-15.

⁹² An example of the latter is Ewa Partum’s *Active Poetry* (1971). The artist scattered hundreds of block letters typical of communist party banners in public spaces, producing a series of random poems. That same year, Partum also staged the performance *Legality of Space* in Łódź in which she placed dozens of signs—some official and others self-made—in an empty lot. The work questioned authority as well as the official and unofficial uses of space.

triumphant return of utopian, critical, and even transgressive practices that had been overshadowed by the rise of an innocuous modernism since the Thaw.⁹³

This historical turn in the 1970s and the subversive practices it fostered were formative for Ołowska, who has adopted its tactics for her own work since the early 2000s. In March 2014, Ołowska opened her solo exhibition *Czar Warszawy* [The Spell of Warsaw] at Zachęta National Gallery. Because she had not visited *Szare w Kolorze* fourteen years prior, she failed to see the serendipitous connection between the earlier exhibition and hers, which included a functioning café and a pop-up clothing store by the German fashion label Clemens en August. However, Ołowska's critique of Polish consumer culture was far from coincidental. She took the exhibition's name *Czar Warszawy* from a perfumery once located on the corner of Krucza and Żurawia Streets. "I didn't romanticize it [this reference to the past]," she says. "It wasn't about appropriation [of the past] but about how the '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s, and 2000s clash today."⁹⁴ These references are not subsumed into her works but remain on their surface in perceptible friction.

Ołowska often uses glaringly anachronistic harbingers of the past to haunt the present. In 2003, she and the Scottish artist Lucy McKenzie were proprietors of a pop-up bar called *Nova Popularna* [New Popular] [Figure 3-7], which was located in Warsaw's National Arts Club.⁹⁵ Modeled on the salons and speakeasies of the late nineteenth and

⁹³ Piotr Piotrowski (1952-2015) argues that modernism simply replaced Socialist Realism in mid-century Poland. Modernist tendencies, such as abstraction, should not be seen as radical but, in fact, apolitical. See Piotr Piotrowski, "Modernism and Socialist Culture: Polish Art in the Late 1950s," in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, eds. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 133-147.

⁹⁴ See Appedix III.

⁹⁵ Lucy McKenzie, Paulina Ołowska, Ken Okiishi, Nick Mauss, "K/L/M/N/O/P – A Conversation via Email, January 2007," in *Noël sur le balcon/Hold the Color: Paulina Ołowska/Lucy McKenzie*, eds. Jan Seewald and Stephan Urbaschek (Munich: Kunstverlag Ingvild Goetz, GmbH, 2007), 93-95 and Magda

early twentieth centuries, it was both a collaborative installation and a performance. In Ołowska's words, it was "an experiment in revitalizing and investigating the idea of an art salon, but also a three-dimensional painting" that combined aesthetic elements of Art Nouveau and Polish folk art.⁹⁶ *Nova Popularna* was manifested as a *bricolage*, functioning simultaneously as a café, a bar, a music venue, a gallery, a gathering space, and a bonafide artwork. It was not only a destination for visitors but also an experience. Throughout its month-long run, it struck a balance between promoting the atmosphere of underground speakeasy and that of a popular nightclub. Designed by Ołowska and McKenzie and stocked with *starocie* or old things painstakingly sourced in antique stores, the bar was an amalgamation of both local and global cultural references that suspended temporality, playfully ushering unsuspecting patrons from the present into the past.

After its closure, the artists recapitulated the spirit of this meeting place in a series of nine collages, also entitled *Nova Popularna* [Figure 3-8].⁹⁷ Although they incorporate archival materials, such as photographs taken during the bar's operation, the collages also function as creative mood boards, aggregating materials that inspired Ołowska and McKenzie in the process of the bar's planning. For example, in one of Ołowska's collages [Figure 3-9], a photograph of her tending bar in an elaborate costume is sandwiched between a reproduction of an Impressionist painting and a portrait of the artist Zofia Stryjeńska, who, as discussed at the start of this chapter, has been a major influence in Ołowska's work. This *bricolage* of disparate images is once again the

Dragowska, "Nova Popularna," *Issue 7* (Fall 2003): 144-149. This was not the first time Ołowska worked with McKenzie. They collaborated previously on the exhibitions *Shake the Diseases* (1999) in Dundee, Scotland; *Dream of A Provincial Girl* (2000) in Sopot, Poland; and *Heavy Duty* in Edinburgh, Scotland.

⁹⁶ Lucy McKenzie, Paulina Ołowska, Ken Okiishi, Nick Mauss, 95.

⁹⁷ Four out of nine are attributed to Ołowska.

product of her astute combinations of known and unknown, personal and collective histories. In McKenzie's complementary collages [Figure 3-10], she also makes pointed references to Impressionism, using the image of the barmaid from the painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) by Édouard Manet's (1832-1883). Infamous for its unconventional composition of a figure standing against what appears to be a mirror, this painting, like McKenzie's collage, unsettles the position of both its subject and its viewer. Like *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, the café-bar *Nova Popularna* is much more than a tempered critique of blasé modern urban life.⁹⁸ It is another temporal clash aimed at disrupting the status quo.⁹⁹

Fashioning the Fantastic

Although Ołowska keeps a keen eye on society at large, she is ultimately concerned with changes in the perception of femininity over time. Thus, she makes the female figure the central focus of her work. She accepts the call of legendary feminist Hélène Cixous for woman to "write her self" by swapping *écriture* for *peinture féminine*. Developing her own unique and independent visual language, Ołowska paints women back into history.¹⁰⁰ Although Cixous rejects the past in order to move into a new era, she

⁹⁸ This painting has been subject to countless studies. See Bradford R. Collins, ed. *Twelve Views of Manet's Bar* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Here, I reference T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985) and subsequent feminist re-readings, including Griselda Pollock, "The Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 50-90.

⁹⁹ The café-bar, which operated illegally and without a working lavatory, was subject to many official complaints from neighbors.

¹⁰⁰ Ołowska cites Cixous as an important figure. Paulina Ołowska in an unrecorded conversation with the author, Rabka, Poland, October 21, 2017. Cixous states that woman "must write about women... must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement." Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, 4 (Summer, 1976): 875.

“does not deny that the effects of the past are still with us.” Knowledge of the past can empower women, like Ołowska, in their writing and rewriting histories of their own.

One consistent historical source of inspiration for Ołowska is the women’s illustrated monthly magazine *Ty i Ja* [*You and I*], which was published by the *Liga Kobiet Polskich* (LKP) [Polish Women’s League] between 1960 and 1973.¹⁰¹ A quasi-governmental organization, the LKP dictated the public and private norms of women through educational workshops, social services, and publications like *Ty i Ja*.¹⁰² While not a feminist organization, the LKP mediated the fine line between women’s desires and state directives.¹⁰³ Some of the LKP’s most popular courses advised women on personal appearance from applying make-up to styling hair. Through state-sanctioned organizations like the LKP, consumerism was acceptable in moderation, as fashion became a power tool for socialism.¹⁰⁴

Each fifty to seventy page issue of *Ty i Ja* included recipes, film reviews, short stories, decorating tips, self-help columns, and fashion spreads featuring both domestic and international designers. A product of Gomułka’s Thaw, the publication attracted a roster of prominent and progressive writers and artists. Among them was Roman Cieśliewicz, the well-known graphic designer who later immigrated to Paris, where he

¹⁰¹ It sold for 12 złoty and had a print run of 50,000 copies.

¹⁰² Jean Robinson, “Women, the State, and the Need for Civil Society: The *Liga Kobiet* in Poland,” in *Comparative State Feminism*, eds. Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy Mazur (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1995), 203. The LKP still functions today.

¹⁰³ Barbara A. Nowak, “Serving Women and the State: The League of Women in Communist Poland” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2004) 10-11, accessed November 23, 2017, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=osu1091553624&disposition=inline.

¹⁰⁴ Studies of fashion across the Eastern Bloc are legion. In addition to Reid and Crowley, *Style and Socialism*, see Malgorzata Fidelis, “Art You a Modern Girl? Consumerism and Young Women in 1960s Poland,” in *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*, eds. Shana Penn and Jill Massino (New York: Pelgrave, 2009), 171-184; Jill Massino, “From Black Caviar to Blackouts: Gender, Consumption, and Lifestyle in Ceaușescu’s Romania,” in *Communism Unwrapped*, 226-249; Susan Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union Under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (2002): 211-25; Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

worked for the arts magazine *Opus International*. As Ołowska rightfully asserts, “It [*Ty i Ja*] had much higher aspirations than other women’s magazines—the desire to be educational and illuminating in times of discomfort.”¹⁰⁵ For example, in the April 1964 issue, three spreads entitled “Paris Fashion Collection” [“*Kolekcja Moda Paryskiej*”] [Figure 3-11] follow an article about the groundbreaking work of two female scientists. That studious text is abutted with the images of models donning the latest day and evening wears by Yves Saint-Laurent, Dior, and Chanel. Carefully excised by graphic designers like Cieślewicz from the pages of *Elle* and *Vogue*, these lavishly seductive silhouettes appear somewhat contrived against solid backgrounds. Captioned “Beautiful Hypocrites,” the spreads’ text describes how, “In the daytime, they [Parisian women] are covered up to their neck... but at night, they reveal a lot.”¹⁰⁶ This is clearly a judgment leveled against the Western woman, whose choice of clothing is indicative of her morals and intentions. Despite this, a small icon of a sewing machine curiously appears in the top left-hand corner of each spread. Is this promoting the self-fashioning of clothing in the style of the West? Sewing patterns typically were not included in *Ty i Ja*, unlike in other state-sanctioned periodicals of the period like *Świat* [World] or *Świat Mody* [World of Fashion].¹⁰⁷ “Through the medium of paper patterns, the [socialist] regimes favored the traditional aesthetics that conformed to the rules of socialist good taste,” writes

¹⁰⁵ “Enigmatic Girls: Lucy McKenzie and Paulina Ołowska In Conversation,” *Untitled* (Summer 2001): 17.

¹⁰⁶ “*W dzień zapięle szczególnie pod szyję... po wieczór odsłaniają bardzo dużo.*” “*Kolekcja Moda Paryskiej*,” *Ty i Ja* 4 (1964): 24.

¹⁰⁷ Only in 1960, the first year of its publication, did *Ty i Ja* include patterns through a series entitled “Cutting and Sewing Course” [“*Kurs kroju i szycia*”]. In March 2015, at the Herman B. Wells Library at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, I accessed over seventy-five issues of *Ty i Ja* dating from 1960 to 1973. Unfortunately, I had access to only one issue from 1960, which included the fifth lesson on the shirt blouse (*bluzka koszulowa*). Given the size of my sample, I can only assume there were at least five lessons in this series, covering the basic pattern for different types of clothing. I had access to issues 9-12 from 1961, none of which included such lessons.

Bartlett.¹⁰⁸ This is just one of many examples from the pages of *Ty i Ja* that highlights the many tensions that can be read into its spreads that waver between a yearning for and a rejection of “the forbidden pleasures of the consumer society.”¹⁰⁹

Ty i Ja was *almost* like any other lifestyle magazine of its time. The main difference between an issue of the Polish *Ty i Ja* and an issue of the French *Elle* or the American *Glamour* is found in the advertisements [Figure 3-12]. Whereas Western magazines presented a cornucopia of items ranging from blouses and home appliances to liqueurs and wrinkle creams that could be bought at any nearby shop, *Ty i Ja* touted locally made products of inferior quality or foreign-made goods often unavailable in the Polish command economy at mid-century.¹¹⁰ What appeared on the runways in Paris or Milan and on the shelves in London or Frankfurt was completely unattainable in Warsaw or Łódź. Fantasy and reality merged in the pages *Ty i Ja*, which allowed Polish women to look but not touch. The magazine became the object of the communist woman’s deepest and most insatiable material desires—an outlet for and of what they simulated to be modern life.

¹⁰⁸ Djurdja Bartlett, *FashionEast: The Specter That Haunted Socialism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), 12. Bartlett claims that only every now and then would Western-inspired patterns appear as calculated ploys to placate populations in times of social, economic, or political tension. Her book surveys fashion through the lens of over two dozens magazines published in Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union from the 1950s through the 1980s.

¹⁰⁹ David Crowley, “Applied Fantastic: On the Women’s Magazine *Ty i Ja*,” *dot.dot.dot* (April 2005): 42. Crowley argues that the magazine was published by, and essentially for, the satisfaction of the Polish intelligentsia, who in the post-war period found themselves at the crossroads between compliance with and critique of official culture. Even though its content was at times a pure fantasy, the mere presence of such transgressive imagery within a state-sanctioned journal provided its readers with a sense of smug satisfaction.

¹¹⁰ I am not claiming that all of the products advertised in Western magazines were actually attainable by all readers. In fact, many higher end Western magazines, like *Elle*, advertised luxury goods; however, in theory, its readers *could* purchase the items if sufficient funds were available.

Lacking at times even the everyday necessities afforded by Western capitalism, Polish women were forced to be resourceful.¹¹¹ They compensated for their material deficiencies with the “applied fantastic” (*fantastykę użytkową*). This “make do” strategy of self-preservation produces a makeshift object that is *almost* but *not quite* the real thing. Like the *bricoleuse*, those who “applied fantastic” to last season’s boots or a shabby dress cobbled together whatever was at hand to make the item not only functional but also somewhat attractive. This, like the act of *bricolage*, is “limited by the particular history of each piece and... its features which are already determined by the use for which it was originally intended or the modifications it has undergone for other purposes.”¹¹² One of the most astute observers of everyday life in post-war Poland, writer Leopold Tyrmand coined the phrase “applied fantastic” in 1954 in reference to the sincere creativity of a devastated and impoverished post-war Polish society.¹¹³ This situation, which Tyrmand describes across three months of entries later published as *Dziennik 1954* [*Diary 1954*], shares similarities with Poland during and immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, during the transition from communism to free market capitalism.

By applying the fantastic to her works inspired by the magazine *Ty i Ja*, Ołowska stages an interruption, or what the Marxist art historian Griselda Pollock calls a “feminist

¹¹¹ As of 1961, the section “Wybraliśmy dla Ciebie” [“We Chose for You”] was included toward the end of each issue. It featured items with descriptions and prices. Most were domestically produced. I am not claiming that Polish women were alone in their resourcefulness. Women then and now living around the world continue to be resourceful, especially when under social, economic, and political pressures. In fact, reading this condition through Ołowska’s works is testament to how it persists today. For a discussion of American magazine advertisements, see Mike Featherstone, “The Body in Consumer Culture,” in *The American Body in Context: An Anthology*, ed. Jessica R. Johnston (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2001), 79-102 and Ellen McCracken, *Decoding Women’s Magazines: From Mademoiselle to Ms.* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

¹¹² Lévi-Strauss, 19. Within the field of art history, this recalls Ernst Gombrich’s ideas on the image, which “cannot be divorced from its purpose and requirements of the society in which the given visual language gains currency.” See E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusions: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 9.

¹¹³ Leopold Tyrmand, *Dziennik 1954* (London: Polonia Book Fund, 1980), 43. See also Leopold Tyrmand, *Diary 1954*, trans. Anita Shelton and A.J. Wrobel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 43.

intervention,” which shifts established paradigms by “much more than adding new materials—women and their history—to existing categories and methods... [but also] wholly new ways of conceptualizing what it is we study and how we do it.”¹¹⁴ This interruption ushers in an entirely new paradigm, suggestive of Cixous’ *écriture féminine*. Even before Pollock, Luce Irigaray, whose pioneering feminist scholarship has led to the articulation of female subjectivity in the fields of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and linguistics, addressed the systematic subjugation of women. Using Marxism, she deconstructed the exchange of women within our male-dominated economy. In our patriarchal society, women are commodities exchanged by men—circulated among fathers, brothers, husbands, and male lovers whose desires dictate economic activity.¹¹⁵ Women artists working behind the Iron Curtain internalized these ideas. At the height of Gierek’s economic reforms, Polish artist Natalia L. L. (Natalia Lach-Lachowicz) produced *Consumer Art* (1972, 1974, 1975). In this series of photographs, she cast a female model to provocatively eat various foods, including a sausage and a banana—the latter being a desirable but rare import. The work draws a parallel between her consumption of food and the viewer’s consumption of her sexuality. Although the artist herself does not identify the work as feminist, it is a document of her suggestive

¹¹⁴ Griselda Pollock, “Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art: An Introduction,” in *Vision and Difference*, reprinted in Eric Fernie, *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Phaidon Press, Inc., 2010), 303. In this text, Pollock gives credit to art historian Linda Nochlin for boldly introducing this paradigm shift in her essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” *ARTNews* (January 1971).

¹¹⁵ Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 171. The book was first Published in French in 1977.

transgression of the accepted feminine ideal of the time.¹¹⁶ Decades later, Ołowska would also revert stereotypes by putting women in charge of commodity circulation.

Marx defines a commodity as “an extremely obvious, trivial thing” that, through the establishment of certain relationships, becomes “a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”¹¹⁷ It, like woman according to Irigaray, is fetishized. Adopting from anthropology the concept of fetishism, which imbues inanimate objects with animate powers, Marx formulated the idea of “commodity fetishism” as the transformation of an object with use-value to an object of monetary exchange.¹¹⁸ Whereas the former is clearly associated with the labor of its production, the latter severs that relationship in favor of “the fantastic form of a relation between things.”¹¹⁹ Irigaray also acknowledges the “super-natural” or “phenomenal” property of women as commodities.¹²⁰ Tyrmand and Ołowska invoke a similar property in the “applied fantastic.”

In the Eastern Bloc, communism shaped feminism.¹²¹ While some argue that feminism was unnecessary because communism championed gender equality, at least in

¹¹⁶ For more on this and other transgressive feminist performances in Poland and across the Eastern Bloc during and after communism, see Amy Bryzgel, *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 166, 185-186.

¹¹⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, Trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 163.

¹¹⁸ For a history of fetishism, see Robert Pool, “Fetishism Deconstructed,” *Etnofoor* 3, 1 (1990): 114-27.

¹¹⁹ Marx, 165.

¹²⁰ Irigaray, 180. According to literary critic Tzvetan Todorov, the fantastic is characterized by uncertainty. It is “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.” Citing examples from across cultures, Todorov demonstrates how the fantastic is an effect created between a real and an imaginary situation, which may be experienced by a character in the story or a reader. It distinguishes itself from the extremes of the marvelous, which is akin to science fiction, as well as the uncanny, which is strange but true. While Todorov’s in-depth analysis is specific to literary examples, his definitions remain useful here. See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: The Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 25.

¹²¹ See Bojana Pejić, ed. *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009).

theory, others recognize it as another double standard.¹²² The state claimed to support women in their quests for equal opportunity employment and provided generous social services. Yet, whether by choice or circumstance, women often bore the double burden of holding down a job and running a household in a planned economy riddled with material shortages.¹²³

The dichotomy faced by the average post-war Polish woman is seen in *Postaci* [*Figures*], a painting by Wojciech Fangor (1922-2015) from 1950 [Figures 3-13 and 3-14].¹²⁴ It boldly represents the stark contrast between what was expected and what was desired of women in everyday Polish life under communism. On the left, a young woman with jet-black hair, lightly rouged cheeks, and flaming red lips directly faces the viewer. There is little definition in her supple face and décolletage. She confidently stares outward through her large, yellow sunglasses. Her shoulders are back, allowing her pale, slender arms to be gracefully poised at her sides. She wears a cap-sleeved dress, which is loosely draped across her voluminous chest while tightly synched around her waist. It boasts a colorful pattern of postcards and international catchphrases: Coca-Cola, New

¹²² Looking back in the 1990s on the everyday life of women under communism, journalist Slavenka Drakulić found the idea of feminism in Eastern Europe laughable. In *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*, she writes, “Women don’t have any influence; they barely have a voice... All we could talk about is the *absence* of influence.” See Slavenka Drakulić, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 127.

¹²³ For the twenty-first century woman, this could be perceived as a glaring gender gap; however, women living under communism claim to have been satisfied, at least sexually. Kristen R. Ghodsee, “Why Women Had Better Sex Under Socialism,” *The New York Times*, August 12, 2017, accessed December 21, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/opinion/why-women-had-better-sex-under-socialism.html?_r=0.

¹²⁴ In June 2016, I had the opportunity to study this painting at the Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi. My brief analysis of Fangor’s painting is not meant to be comprehensive, but illustrative of the depictions and, thereby, opinions of women in post-war Poland. For in-depth studies of Fangor’s work, see Iwona Ziętkiewicz and Bartłomiej Luniewicz, *Wojciech Fangor: Malarstwo* [Wojciech Fangor: Painting] (Gdańsk: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych, 2015); Stefan von Szydlow-Szydlowski, *Wojciech Fangor: Przestrzeń jako gra* [Wojciech Fangor: Space as Play] (Krakow: Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, 2012); and the forthcoming Magdalena Dabrowski, ed. *Wojciech Fangor* (Milan: Skira, 2017). For feminist readings of Fangor’s *Figures* and other Polish works, see Ewa Toniak, *Olbrzymki: Kobiety I Socrealizm* [Giants: Women and Socialist Realism] (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2009).

York, Wall Street, London, Casablanca. Her delicate hands with their slender fingers and manicured nails lightly grip her turquoise handbag, which she holds in front of her, like a shield. She is the epitome of femininity. On the right, a man and a woman appear dressed in nearly identical workers' overalls made of heavy monochrome fabric now wrinkled and muddled from use. Taller and denser than their counterpart, they tower over the petite woman. The stern looks on their chiseled faces betray their feelings toward her. As if only pausing from their task, their weathered hands firmly grip the wooden handles of their shovels. While the female worker is far from glamorous in appearance, she stands in profile, revealing the voluptuous curves of her body. Rendered in the style of Socialist Realism, which was decreed in Poland just one year prior, the workers are archetypes of the ideal Socialist citizen.¹²⁵

Close examination of this painting reveals that its *femme fatale* is wedged between the two workers forming a zigzag down the center of this otherwise orderly composition in which the vertical figures are balanced by the horizontal landscape. This zigzag creates a fissure in the composition, separating it into two distinct but connected parts. Whereas the woman stands against the ruins of a city and an ominously dark sky, the workers stand under a blue sky against the façade of a new building in the Brutalist style. Like the images proliferating the pages of *Ty i Ja*, Fangor presents his viewer with a moral conundrum. Which lifestyle is a woman to choose? It is interesting to note that neither representation falls in line with what art historian Izabela Kowalczyk describes as

¹²⁵ In the Soviet Union, this concept was known as the “new Soviet man,” personified in Aleksei Grigorievich Stakhanov, a worker who set a record mining 227 tons of coal in one shift—over twenty times his quota—in 1935. This ideal stood in opposition to *homo sovieticus*. Coined by sociologist and dissident Aleksandr Zinoviev in the 1980s, the term *homo sovieticus* refers to the weakness of the Soviet citizen, modeled by the state to the point at which he and the state become coterminous. See Aleksandr Zinoviev, *Homo sovieticus* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1985). Masha Gessen gives a different genealogy for the term in her book, *The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 58-66.

the ideal women in the PRL. “Traditionally, women were represented as the ‘pathetic’ figure of the Polish mother (*matka Polka*), who looked after the Polish home and was the guardian of national values,” writes Kowalczyk.¹²⁶ Steeped in nationalist rhetoric, this archetype likely proved complicated in the 1950s, when Poland was negotiating its relationship with the Soviet Union.

Ołowska directly responded to Fangor’s painting in 2007 with the work *Collage After Fangor* [Figure 3-15]. Using a color reproduction of the painting from an art history textbook, she violently separates the composition into two parts. This actualizes the fissure Fangor insinuates between the new Polish woman and her compatriots. Typically considered a relatively minor work within her oeuvre, *Collage After Fangor* is very important. After the fall of communism, the newly democratic Polish state joined forces with the Catholic Church in dictating accepted ideals of femininity.¹²⁷ Having come of age under these conditions, Ołowska turned to her work as a means of charting her own feminine history and asserting her own feminine ideal.

Applied Fantastic

Ołowska first used images of women and commodities cut from the pages of the magazine *Ty i Ja* in the late 1990s. An emerging artist looking to carve a niche for herself, it proved to be as much a matter of fortuitous circumstance as it was genuine interest:

¹²⁶ As quoted in Cornelia Butler, “Soft Body/Soft Sculpture: The Gendered Surrealism of Alina Szapocznikow,” in *Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone, 1955-1972* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2011), 39.

¹²⁷ See Amy Bryzgel, “Filming Young Girls and Older Men: Performing Gender in Poland,” in *Performing the East: Performance Art in Russia, Latvia and Poland since 1980* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 157-221 and Elżbieta Matynia, “Feminist Art and Democratic Culture: Debates on the New Poland,” *Polish Art Journal* 79 (2005): 1-20.

Somehow, I ended up on a residency in Portugal in 1998-1999 with a bag of *Ty i Ja* from my grandmother. Before I left, she was trying to get rid of them, so I took them as a souvenir, as something I could have in the studio, as something that connected me to the past. I thought that this was brilliant, and that this is what I wanted to touch upon: women and the kinds of representation of women in these kinds of magazines in the 1960s and '70s. But it was only from a distance that I came to this realization.¹²⁸

The result was a series of paintings entitled *Utopian Optimism*, which mimic the layout of fashion spreads in *Ty i Ja*. Instead of using the hyper-realist detail afforded by photography, Ołowska opts for an expressionist style that renders the women more abstractly. With their facial features obscured, their clothes grab the viewer's attention. These paintings, like *Looking Up Not Down* [Figure 3-16], would be the first of several works inspired by the magazine. At that time, *Ty i Ja* not only had the overall retro aesthetic that Ołowska wanted to achieve, but also spoke of and to the very subjects that she so passionately wanted to address in her work. "Fashion, and clothes, and all the applied arts [interested me], maybe because they stray away from the pretentiousness or iconicity [of masterpieces, of the fine arts]."¹²⁹ In Polish, the word "applied" (*użytkowa*) used in the "applied fantastic" can be translated also as useful. The same word denotes the "applied" arts, such as industrial and textile design as well as the folk arts and handicrafts—media traditionally considered secondary to the *finer* arts of academic painting and sculpture within the hierarchy of art history.

Ołowska returned to this history of women and consumerism in her 2010 exhibition at Metro Pictures in New York [Figure 3-17]. Entitled *Applied Fantastic*, it

¹²⁸ See Appendix III. But it was only at a distance—from Portugal and Japan and later from The Netherlands—that Ołowska was able to make these connections meaningful. When the Belgian painter Luc Tuymans interviewed Ołowska at the Rijksakademie in 2001, he asked her, "What is nostalgia?" Recalling her first encounter with the magazine *Ty i Ja*, she confessed, "I started to see nostalgia only when I stepped outside of it."

¹²⁹ Ibid.

directly addressed the fissure between the two economic systems of capitalism and communism. Once again inspired by and even directly sampled from the pages of *Ty i Ja* [Figure 3-18], the works in this exhibition included several large-scale expressionist canvases in which both men and women wearing oversized wool sweaters casually stand against anonymous backdrops [Figure 3-19].

For other works in the exhibition, Ołowska produced copies of copies. On one level, she copied onto her canvas [Figure 3-20] the patterns for clothing handmade by Polish women during the communist period. On another level, those styles were already appropriated to begin with by these women from magazines, like *Ty i Ja*, and pattern books, which they used to sew and knit clothing in styles that could be seen only on runways and in fashion magazines in the so-called “West.” As described by historian Malgorzata Fidelis, the “new female textile proletariat” and the textile industry specifically were seen as the post-industrial continuation, and even enhancement of, women’s pre-industrial familial duties and marked as feminine, even if their contexts and environments had changed.¹³⁰ Ołowska’s large-scale paintings as well as three-dimensional sculptures, such as *Sweater 2 (Klaun)* [Figure 3-21], monumentalize these homespun goods, *re-applying* the fantastic in the post-socialist, hyper-capitalist context of the commercial art gallery. When made for personal use only, these items circulate outside the market, valuable only to those who use them. By placing these objects within the gallery setting, the artist questions their inherent functions.

This series of women wearing sweaters is fascinating in its self-conscious treading of the line between the original and copy, as the works embody the “applied

¹³⁰ Malgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 105-106.

fantastic”—presented here as *almost* but *not quite* the real thing. Ołowska’s manipulation of objects—sweaters and paintings alike—works to destabilize the viewer’s perception of time as well as his or her ability to mark time in and through the works included in the exhibition *Applied Fantastic*. Sewing and knitting patterns gave women the power to produce what they lacked. As fashion historian Djurdja Barlett states, these patterns “hinted that the strange impasse between the fantasy worlds and dysfunctional socialist consumer reality could be overcome through self-provision,” or what de Certeau called “making do.”¹³¹

In *Applied Fantastic*, Ołowska puts pressure on the traditional definitions of the handmade and the homemade, as many critics refer to her works as *rękodzieło* or handicraft. She is acutely conscious of what this label implies—that this kind of work is distinguished from a *dzieło* or a masterpiece, because a masterpiece is made without any intervention of the hand or *ręka*. These sentiments are expressed directly in Ołowska’s work *Woolly Jumpers* [Figure 3-22] from 2010, where the term “*roboty ręczne*” or handmade is boldly painted across the top of the canvas in the style of the masthead of *Ty i Ja*.

Ołowska continued to address the makeshift, do-it-yourself aesthetic of the “applied fantastic” in later works, like the painting *Improvised Necessity* [Figure 3-23] from 2011, which is a loosely outlined portrait of a young woman washed in a palette of pastel pink, yellow, and orange. Her supple ivory face framed with her billowy flavescent hair is partly obfuscated by a quotation from Tyrmand’s diary. It reads, “Lunch at the Writer’s Café. Marta sat next to me... Then two of her friends joined us, both of them elegant in art student style. In fact, this is the style of the young in the West, copied from

¹³¹ Bartlett, 12.

movies and illustrated magazines, but deepened by a sense of improvised necessity.”¹³²

Although they flaunt only cheap imitations of Western fashions, these women set the standards to which others aspire. Tyrmand’s *Diary 1954* maps the sartorial hierarchy of Warsaw’s “communist, grey poverty,” in which women as well as men sought to satiate their most illicit materialist desires through sheer gumption.

As in much of Ołowska’s work, *Improvised Necessity* combines the sensibilities of both international conceptualism and pop art, employing strategies that bridge banal images and texts in order to convey biting criticism. Measuring roughly five feet in height by four feet in width, this oversized portrait mimics the vernacular of a poster or billboard advertisement. Instead of promoting a product, it is promoting the image of a woman as a commodity. “We never had pop culture; we never had pop art because there was no commodity culture... [In Poland] there was no reference to an object with a sense of distance. There is a level of thinking of objects as icons.”¹³³

This episode at the Writer’s Café on January 9 follows Tyrmand’s encounter with Mr. Dyszkiewicz, a tailor who was the proprietor of one of Warsaw’s most refined outlets for men’s bespoke apparel before the Second World War. Although now reduced to working out of his home, Mr. Dyszkiewicz managed to maintain the quality of both his services and products through his resourcefulness. “Then, fresh silks and poplins were brought to or purchased in his shop. Today, heavily worn and laundered shirts come back to be altered, to have drayed collars turned, or to be otherwise shamefully recycled,”

¹³² “Obiad u Literatów. Przysiadła się Marta, jakby szukała kontaktu po owej rozmowie, jej zdaniem obrzydliwej. Dołączyły dwie jej koleżanki z Akademii Sztuk Pięknych, obie efektownie i w stylu ASP, bardzo w Warszawie specjalnym, modnymi naśladowanym przez kobiety z innych środowisk. Jest to w gruncie rzeczy styl studenckiej młodzieży Zachodu, podchwytywany z filmów i ilustrowanych pism, lecz jakby pogłębiony przez rdzennic warszawski zmysł inspirowanej konieczności, rezez neidostatek środków uruchamiający w dziewczętach jakaś fantastykę użytkowa, która objawiła się po wojnie w komu nistycznym, ubóstwie.” Tyrmand, *Dziennik 1954*, 43 and Tyrmand, *Diary 1954*, 43.

¹³³ Author in conversation with the artist, Paris, May 2014.

writes Trymand, himself a client of Mr. Dyszkiewicz.¹³⁴ Once embarrassed to be repurposing a shirt he bought in Copenhagen over a decade ago, Tyrmand is now acclimated to this new way of life, bringing cheap locally bought shirts to Mr. Dyszkiewicz for redesigning. “Everyone’s doing that these days,” says the tailor.¹³⁵ This act of “making do” is normalized as a common survival strategy that breathes some semblance of joy into an otherwise banal existence.

Homemade goods were supplemented by *ciuchy* or used clothing sent to Poland by relatives and relief organizations in the West.¹³⁶ The recipients of these care packages would often keep some of the clothes but sell the rest, as the hand-me-downs were extremely coveted but still imperfect and mismatched.¹³⁷ In the 1980s, this practice informed anthropologist Janine R. Wedel’s classification of Poland as a “familial society,” in which subsistence required informal economic activities accomplished through a vast network of relationships.¹³⁸ *Bikiniarze* and party dignitaries alike coveted *ciuchy*, despite its illegal circulation on the black market.¹³⁹

Although sociologist George Simmel considered fashion the hallmark of modernity, he associated it with imitation. “Whenever we imitate, we transfer not only

¹³⁴ Tyrmand, *Diary 1954*, 42-43.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹³⁶ There is no direct translation of *chiuchy*. As noted by translators Anita Shelton and A. J. Wrobel, its pronunciation (*choo-hee*) “sounds warm and cozy to the Polish ear.” They cite the English “glad rags” as a potential equivalent. Tyrmand, *Diary 1954*, 131.

¹³⁷ My family emigrated from Ukraine in the 1950s. To this day, we send *ciuchy* to relatives in Ukraine. I have been in Ukraine with them upon receipt of such parcels. “Second-hand” (секонд-хенд) shops in which clothing is typically sold by weight are still prevalent in the region, although in metropolitan areas, like Kyiv and Moscow, the concept of “vintage” has also appeared. See Kathy Burrell, “Managing, Learning and Sending: The Material Lives and Journeys of Polish Women in Britain,” *Journal of Material Culture* 13, 1 (March 2008): 63-83. See also Barlett, 267 for a discussion of fashion and second hand as well as hard current stores.

¹³⁸ Janine R. Wedel, *The Private Poland* (New York: Facts on File, 1986), 2.

¹³⁹ *Bikiniarze* are the Polish equivalent of Russian *stilyagi* or dandies. According to Tyrmand, they took their name from neck ties patterned with the mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb exploding on Bikini Atoll in 1946. Tyrmand, *Diary 1954*, 133.

the demand for creative activity, but also the responsibility for the action from ourselves to another,” he states.¹⁴⁰ Following his logic, the embrace of fashion as self-expression produces the opposite effect by subsuming one into the collective. Fashion is built upon class distinctions: the upper echelons of society first seize upon the newest trend or the latest fad, then it trickles down to the hoi polloi. But how does fashion operate in a communist society that, theoretically, has abolished class distinctions? Writing at the turn of the last century before the Bolshevik Revolution, Simmel refers to “primitive peoples” as example when assessing the “widespread predilection for importing fashions from without.”¹⁴¹ These coveted wares create a “special and specific socialization” that produces not only new economic activity but new relationships.¹⁴²

Tyrmand describes how, even nine years after the end of the war, parts of Warsaw remained in ruins. Alternative modes of commerce thrived as illegal international goods from cosmetics to clothing were hawked at exorbitant prices.¹⁴³ It is not that state enterprises lacked these products; however, they were of much lower quality. Everyone knew that Polish factories produced two kinds of goods: higher quality goods for export and lower quality goods for domestic sale.¹⁴⁴ The exception was the infamous hard currency Pewex (*Przedsiębiorstwo Eksportu Wewnętrzznego*) or internal export shops

¹⁴⁰ Georg Simmel, “Fashion,” *International Quarterly* (October 1904) as reprinted in *The American Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 6 (May 1957): 541.

¹⁴¹ Simmel, 545.

¹⁴² Ibid., 546. Simmel also had questionable views on women. In reference to the role of gender in fashion, he claims that women use fashion to compensate for inequality in other fields. “Fashion becomes her playground for experimentation and constant change,” he writes. Thus, only an emancipated woman rejects fashion, taking on the masculine attribute of indifference.

¹⁴³ Tyrmand, *Diary 1954*, 272-273. Tyrmand cites that an administrative assistant working in Warsaw in 1954 is paid approximately 800 zloty per month, while a toothbrush on the black market costs 80 zloty, or 10% of her monthly income, and an imported lipstick costs 175 zloty, or 21% of her monthly income. While these products are disposable, their purchase would be a significant commitment on the part of the consumer.

¹⁴⁴ Tyrmand, *Diary 1954*, 196. Hard currency shops could also be found in other socialist countries, such as Intershop in East Germany or Tuzex in Czechoslovakia.

launched under Gierek's reforms in 1972. They sold Western goods as well as higher quality Polish-made goods for American dollars or their equivalent in Polish bank checks.

Consider this in relation to the painting *Her English Is Far From Perfect...* [Figure 3-24] from 2013, executed in the same style as *Improvised Necessity*. The text reads: "Her English is far from perfect, learned 'from movies and in bed with lovers.'" Ołowska pictures another young woman, this time a brunette wearing a floppy, wide-brimmed black hat, sitting like a Bohemian in a café. The artist's choice of composition and subject matter immediately brings to mind a legacy of lonely girls in bars, such as Pablo Picasso's *Femme au café (Absinthe Drinker)* of 1901-1902 and Edgar Degas' *L'absinthe* of 1876. While a more delicate, even prettier picture framed by real flowers in the foreground and painted flowers in the background, Ołowska's painting *Her English Is Far From Perfect...* exudes a similar sense of loneliness and melancholy. Again, the sitter's language ability, much like the clothes of the girls in the *Writer's Café* of *Improvised Necessity*, is lifted from her seemingly scandalous encounters with underground urban culture. In an act of liberation, she uses these experiences to pastiche together a new identity.

Fantastic Slavicness

Living in the city, it is difficult for one to maintain individuality in the face of the collective. The metropolis is paradoxical because it is simultaneously oppressive and liberating, while the small town is both its anathema and antidote. While one can be more anonymous in a city, the constant interruptions in everyday city life overwork and dull

one's mind and body to the point of exhaustion. The result, as Simmel already argued at the turn of the twentieth century, is a blasé outlook through which everything takes on a homogeneous, flat, grey color.¹⁴⁵

City life also wore on Ołowska, who now lives and works in Rabka-Zdroj, a village nestled in a picturesque valley of the Gorce Mountains approximately forty-five miles south of Kraków in southern Poland.¹⁴⁶ Rabka is well known for its salt mines and spas, making it a popular tourist destination, especially for local Poles. But, with less than 13,000 year-round inhabitants, Rabka is a far cry from the hustle and bustle of Warsaw. What would possess an artist whose works garner attention in exhibitions, biennials, and auctions worldwide to relocate from a major metropolitan city to the backwoods of Poland? As Ołowska's work gained mainstream traction, she recognized the need for a major shift in her practice.¹⁴⁷ No longer finding Warsaw as interesting and inspiring, she says, "In the end, we are here [in Rabka] because I know what I can make work about and around."¹⁴⁸ In Rabka, Ołowska was made privy not only to the history of ancient Polish folk culture but also to its reinterpretation during the communist period.

Upon relocating, Ołowska restored Willa Kadenówka, an old wooden house designed in the Zakopane style (*styl Zakopiański*) with a tiered structure, sharply gabled roof, and intricately decorative trimmings. "This was something that was very natural to me, as I saw them [these houses] disappearing, and I wanted to mediate their form."¹⁴⁹

Considered to be a "national style" (*styl narodowy*), the Zakopane style originates in the

¹⁴⁵ Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *The Child in the Physical Environment: The Development of Spatial Knowledge and Spatial Cognition*, ed. Christopher Spender, et al. (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1989). Greyness is often invoked as the color of communist life.

¹⁴⁶ In Polish, *zdroj* means spa.

¹⁴⁷ See Appendix III.

¹⁴⁸ Paulina Ołowska in an unrecorded conversation with the author, October 20, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ See Appendix III. This led to her project at Tate as well as her collaboration with Fiorucci Art Trust and her gatherings at Kadynówka, creating a parallel society and taking care of this old wooden house.

northern Tatra Mountains, which historically were home to the *Goralé* or Highland people, a distinct ethnic group within Poland.¹⁵⁰ Centuries of isolation produced a unique vernacular visual culture, which Polish nationalists coopted in the time of national rebirth at the turn of the twentieth century. While Rabka is not in the Zakopane region of Poland, the presence of the Zakopane style in Rabka is evidence of its wider appeal. As design historian David Crowley argues, the Zakopane style symbolized escape not only from the city but also from colonial rule—first by the Austro-Hungarian then by the Soviet Empire.

In Rabka, Ołowska found a creative outlet through her study of the Zakopane style. It was around this time that she became inspired by the legacy of Zofia Stryjeńska and her tradition of Polish folk art discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Over the course of the intervening decade, Ołowska expanded her practice in form and content around reclaiming excluded, lost, or forgotten histories of traditional Polish folk culture. This included her 2008 representation of Stryjeńska's work in Berlin discussed at the start of this chapter.

Most recently, Ołowska's research culminated in a major work beyond painting. The performance *Slavic Goddesses—A Wreath of Ceremonies* [Figure 3-25] premiered in January 2017 at The Kitchen in New York. It was inspired by Stryjeńska, who wrote that, "Painting does not give me the kind of satisfaction or the potential for vitality that comes with singing, dancing, the stage."¹⁵¹ Collaborating with choreographer Katy Pyle, Ołowska used Stryjeńska's texts and costume designs from a 1918 series of prints to create an almost hour-long performance, which featured six pagan goddesses—winter

¹⁵⁰ David Crowley, "Zakopane Style – National Style," *autoportret* 3, 32 (2010): 32-33.

¹⁵¹ Stryjeńska, Ołowska, and Szewczyk, n.p.

and death (Morena), mischief (Lelum), fatalism and magic (Wolas), spring and romance (Dzydzilelya), the skies (Perkum), and prosperity (Pepperuga). In 1938, Stryjeńska wrote about this pantheon of deities, claiming that she revived these “symbols of the great mysteries of nature” from the past.¹⁵² Their interpretive dances in elaborate costumes including extravagant headdresses were accompanied by the sounds of experimental instrumental music by the New York-based composer Sergei Tcherepnin. Taking Stryjeńska’s lead, Ołowska reclaims traditional Polish folk culture in *Slavic Goddesses*, a performance that is not anachronistic but decidedly futuristic in its outlook. Using a bit of magic and mysticism, she is not afraid to apply the fantastic to her work, and that is a welcomed addition under the duress of our current time.

¹⁵² Zofia Stryjeńska, “A Portfolio of Gods: Commentary on the Publication,” reprinted in the program for *Slavic Goddesses—A Wreath of Ceremonies*, The Kitchen (January 26-28, 2017).

CHAPTER FOUR

ILYA AND EMILIA KABAKOV: SOVIET ART HISTORY IN A GLOBAL ART WORLD

“Not everyone will be taken into the future,” declares Ilya Kabakov in an eponymous text [Figure 4-1], first published in 1983 in the magazine *A-Ya*.¹ In this short allegorical text, he explains that, based on the fortitude of their character, people fall into one of three groups: those who take, those who are taken, and those who are left behind. Whether among the living or the dead, the haves are always separated from the have-nots. Those who make the cut end up in the future by way of history books while the remainder fall by the wayside, omitted even from History’s footnotes.

Kabakov, an artist who worked in both official and unofficial capacities in the Soviet Union throughout the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s, formulated this perspective in response to the legacy of the avant-garde artist Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935).² In his text, Kabakov narrates a version of the Last Judgment story in which the banality of his everyday life parallels the dynamism of art history. He constructs his argument around two parallel stories. In the first, a boy—Kabakov himself—longs to secure one of the few coveted places at his school’s Young Pioneer summer camp. He is stricken with anxiety

¹ Ilya Kabakov, “Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future” / “V budyshchee vos’mut ne vsekh,” trans. K. G. Hammond, *A-Ya* 5 (1983): 34-35. *A-Ya* was a magazine dedicated to Russian nonconformist art. Artist Igor Shelkovsky, then living in France, edited its eight issues published between 1976 and 1986. Reporting on activities in Moscow, Paris, and New York, it was one of the few international outlets for nonconformist artists. Unfortunately, it also caught the attention of Soviet authorities, putting some artists at risk. For a complete history of the magazine, see Elizaveta Butakova, “*A-Ya* Magazine: Soviet Unofficial Art Between Moscow, Paris and New York, 1976-1986” (PhD diss., The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2015).

² For *A-Ya*, Boris Groys asked Kabakov, along with Erik Bulatov and Oleg Vassiliev, to respond to Malevich. Although working independently, the three artists were close friends and frequent interlocutors. In the interview, Bulatov addresses Malevich’s use of space in painting. While he appreciates Malevich’s advancement in art, he claims to not be directly influenced by the artist, distinguishing his own approaches to the composition and the relationship among objects within it. Vassiliev provides a more poetic assessment of Malevich, who monopolized his imagination, despite his lack of exposure to Malevich’s works. Now more critical of Malevich as an adult, Vassiliev postulates how this great artist foreshadowed in his abstractions the atrocities to come. “*Moskovskie khudozhniki o Maleviche*” [“Moscow Artists On Malevich”], *A-Ya* 5 (1983): 25-35.

as he anticipates the harsh judgment of his headmaster, who inspires both fear and respect. Recalling this traumatic incident from childhood, Kabakov writes, “Everything depends on the boss. He can—I cannot. He knows—I do not know. He knows how—I do not.”³ In addition to his headmaster, Kabakov cites several historically important personages, including the poet Aleksandr Pushkin, the artists Kazimir Malevich, Ilya Repin and Vasily Surikov, and the composers Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Petr Tchaikovsky, whose authority must be respected and obeyed. It is insinuated that, with discipline, even the poorest of souls can live up to the image of these celebrated individuals, thus share in their glorious fate.

In the second story, Kabakov uses the symbol of the boss to express his crippling reverence for Malevich, who, at the turn of the twentieth century, altered the course of modern art with his new style of non-objective painting known as Suprematism. “The entire past history of mankind, all its affairs, its art has ended right here and now... Ahead is the ‘new’ land, the breath of the cosmos, a new class of being,” says Malevich before he valiantly leads the chosen ones—the “new men”—into the future.⁴ Faced with living up to this display of unflagging confidence, Kabakov regresses to a child-like state, spiraling into a circle of self-doubt. “How is a ticket to be bought for the departing train?” he asks.⁵ Securing passage is very straightforward: one must sincerely understand the transcendental qualities of Malevich’s Suprematism in which a square is not just a four-

³ Kabakov, “Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future,” 34.

⁴ Ibid., 35. This scene is set in 1913, the same year Malevich, with Mikhail Matyushin, Alexei Kruchenykh, and Velimir Khlebnikov, staged the Futurist opera *Pobeda nad Solntsem* (*Victory Over the Sun*). Like the character of Malevich in Kabakov’s story, the characters in the opera usher in a new era. Violently disposing the sun and taking it hostage, they live in a new world, free of the past. The rejection of the past through the destruction of museums and other anarchist acts was a key tenet of both Russian and Italian Futurism. See Aleksandra Shatskikh, *Black Square: Malevich and the Origin of Suprematism*, trans. Marian Schwartz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

⁵ Kabakov, “Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future,” 35.

sided polygon but “signs of the new spiritual space, the gates beyond which lie the ‘new land,’ the koan whose solution is on a new, unprecedented plane.”⁶ Through such innovation in which the ordinary becomes the extraordinary, Malevich triumphs in showing other artists, like Kabakov, the way forward. This path, which appears beyond reason, is not hopeless but attainable if, and only if, one follows intuition with bold confidence.

The specter of Malevich will haunt Kabakov throughout his career. As if stricken with Imposter Syndrome, a debilitating psychological affliction that suppresses the recognition of one’s well-earned accomplishments, Kabakov will repeatedly attest to his vulnerabilities—a deep-seated insecurity and fear of failure—in both his works and his words.⁷ He searches for its antidote in established histories, specifically those of the Soviet Union and Western art, which he constructs and deconstructs in many of his paintings, installations, and works on paper. Although Malevich is just one of the many historical characters whom Kabakov blasts out of the continuum of history in his quest for self-realization, Malevich is important because he represents the history of a non-Western, Russian modernism.⁸ While assumed to be the logical foundation for Kabakov’s work, it is, in fact, the very method of historical causality that he pushes against. Rooted in the Soviet experience but laying claim to the Western tradition, Kabakov filters these strains of competing modernisms in forging his own path into and through History.⁹

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kabakov expressed similar vulnerabilities in other texts he has written as well as in interviews, which will be cited throughout this chapter.

⁸ My understanding of “the continuum of history” is indebted to Walter Benjamin. See Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 261.

⁹ For my understanding of history as a broad concept, see the introduction to this dissertation. In this chapter, I have purposely chosen to emphasize history with a capital H because of Ilya Kabakov’s reverence toward a specifically delineated, but not necessarily official, narrative of events and personages.

This chapter shifts focus from Kabakov's early works, conceived in Moscow before his immigration in 1987, to more recent works, produced since his resettlement in the United States and collaboration with his wife Emilia. As a historian of contemporary art, I accept the challenge of periodizing the latter half of the Kabakovs' career. In doing so, I contend that their often ostentatious displays are more than what meets the eye and warrant rigorous consideration within the context of both local and global art historical paradigms. Referring to his own career, Kabakov expresses the belief that, "History shows us an artist makes his most important works not in his early period but later in life. This is the case if you look at [Mark] Rothko, [Jackson] Pollock, [Arshile] Gorky, and many other artists."¹⁰ Early works can lack the techniques and themes refined in later works, which come to attribute an artist's practice to the proscribed styles and movements within the hierarchy of art history. This separation between an artist's early and late periods puts Kabakov in an interesting position because his early works are collected, arguably, as much as or even more than his later works.¹¹

While Matthew Jesse Jackson has produced the definitive study of Kabakov's early career, I purposely focus on its latter half. In concluding his survey of the artist and his milieu, Jackson asks, "How could Kabakov convert his Moscow-oriented art strategies into tactics that would 'succeed' in the arena of World Art History."¹² Based on rigorous close readings of Ilya's texts from the 1980s and early 1990s along with

¹⁰ See Appendix IV. Although aware of my knowledge of twentieth-century Russian and Soviet art, Kabakov was quick to reference and even compare himself to North American and Western European artists.

¹¹ For example, the world-renowned collector of Soviet non-conformist art Norton Dodge insisted on purchasing only work produced before 1991.

¹² Matthew Jesse Jackson, *The Experimental Group: Ilya Kabakov, Moscow Conceptualism, Soviet Avant-Gardes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 243. World art history is an interdisciplinary methodology that substantiates the study of global art. See John Onians, "World Art Studies and the Need for a New Natural History of Art," *Art Bulletin* 78, 2 (1996): 206-209 and Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme, *World art studies: exploring concepts and approaches* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008).

comprehensive visual analyses of five installations produced with Emilia over the last thirty years, I demonstrate how the Kabakovs maintained and even enhanced their outsider status while living and working in the West in order to successfully secure a place in the hallowed history of art. Paradoxically, their position on the margins has given them the authority to write and even rewrite histories through their works that comment on the past, present, and future in and beyond Russia. The root of my argument lies in Ilya's Moscow-oriented strategy of self-historicization, which conceived history as a panorama and the historian as the artist-character. While I draw on the writings of Walter Benjamin, Piotr Piotrowski, Michel de Certeau, Svetlana Boym, and others in this chapter, my primary theorist is Ilya Kabakov himself. To this end, I use terminology, such as "Western" and "non-Western" in reference to art, and "East" and "West" in reference to geographical locations, as employed by the artist in his texts and interviews cited throughout this chapter.

Since Ilya and Emilia Kabakov began their collaboration almost three decades ago, they have produced dozens of large-scale installations, many of which foreground the materiality of the socialist experience. No longer encumbered by creative restrictions under the Soviet regime, why do these artists choose to return to this complex and often painful past, writing and even rewriting this history through their works? Today, the Kabakovs, who can be identified as both Russian and American, conformist and nonconformist, local and global, mediate these many borders with their works, drawing our attention to the spaces in between. Through their use of symbols, bric-a-brac, and other tangible references to the collective Soviet past, the Kabakovs generate a greater consciousness of the sensitive subjectivities that extend far beyond the parameters of that

period as well as their projects. At a time when art privileges spectacular experience within the global arena of the monetized art world, it is important not to lose sight of the details cultivated by artists like the Kabakovs who invite us to be present within the worlds their works so generously create.

Panoramas of Histories

In *A-Ya*, the text “Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future” is accompanied by two images: a page from the album *Anna Petrovna Is Seeing a Dream* (1972-1975) and a documentary photograph of Kabakov in his Moscow studio standing in front of *Zapis' na Dzhokundu* [*Signing up for La Gioconda*] (1980), an oil and enamel on Masonite painting. Despite the precarious nature of the magazine's production, it was an important publication for artists like Kabakov who worked outside the prescriptions for acceptable art in the Soviet Union. Its circulation internationally was one of the few opportunities for exposure beyond the confines of their tightly knit unofficial circles. While it is difficult to read meaning into their juxtaposition, the two works featured are excellent representations of Kabakov's practice at the time.¹³ The former image is a page from one of ten albums dedicated to distinct but fictional characters, each experiencing their own existential crisis as Soviet citizens.¹⁴ These along with other works containing

¹³ Due to the unconventional nature of *A-Ya*'s production, it is difficult to discern whether or not the text was submitted with the images or if the editor paired the text with these images as a matter of personal choice or convenience. See Igor Shelkovsky and David Platzker, “Igor Shelkovsky in Conversation with David Platzker,” post: notes on modern and contemporary around the globe, April 12, 2016, accessed February 11, 2018, http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/773-igor-shelkovsky-in-conversation-with-david-platzker.

¹⁴ *Anna Petrova Has a Dream* (1972-1975, misdated 1973 in *A-YA*) is the fifth of ten albums. The remaining albums are *Looking-out-the-Window Arkipov* (1970-1974), *Sitting-in-the-Closet Primakov* (1972), *The Agonizing Surikov* (1970-1974), *The Decorator Malagin* (1972), *The Flying Komarov* (1970), *The Generous Barmin* (1972-1975), *The Joker Gorokhov* (1972), *The Mathematical Gorsky*, and *The Released Gavrilov* (1970-1974). They range from 50 to 32 pages each and measure 20 ¼ x 13 ¾ in (51.5 x

what are now Kabakov's infamous characters are testaments to the various strategies of survival under the Soviet regime. Employed officially as a children's book illustrator, Kabakov developed the medium of the album in response to the limitations of everyday Soviet life, namely the lack of materials, a functioning art market, and the space for self-motivated, creative activities. The latter image is one in a series of large panel paintings made in the style of *nastennye stendy*, or bulletin boards commonly used for posting news in Soviet housing blocks.¹⁵ It refers to the system for queuing to visit Leonard da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, which was on view at the Pushkin Museum in 1974. The demand to see this masterpiece was so great that one had to sign up in advance to join a group tour. While not yet evident in 1983, these humble works would help define the Kabakovs' overwhelming presence on the international art market and within the history of global art.

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov came from humble beginnings. Ilya Josefovich Kabakov was born in 1933 in Dnipropetrovsk, an industrial city in what was then Soviet Ukraine, which had just experienced the Holodomor, a devastating state-orchestrated famine that took the lives of several million citizens, including his maternal grandfather.¹⁶ Not long after, World War II wreaked havoc on the Kabakovs. His father joined the Red Army,

35 cm). In the mid-1990s, the ten albums were reissued as facsimile editions available as a boxed portfolio. Each album begins with a frontispiece followed by a couple of pages of text. The remainder is dominated by images. The characters from these albums inspired Kabakov's *Ten Characters*, an installation exhibited in 1988 at Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York. While *Ten Characters* is only briefly mentioned in this chapter, it is arguably Kabakov's most well known work.

¹⁵ Other panel paintings by Kabakov include but are not limited to *Sobakin* (1980), *Za chystotu* [*For Cleanliness*, also known as *The Schedule for Taking Out the Garbage Can*] (1980), *Den' nashei rodynoi* [*Day of Our Homeland*] (1981), and *Malen'kii vodiano* [*Little Merman*]. Kabakov reproduced these works in his 1981 artist book *V Nashem ZhEK* [*In Our ZhEK*], which was republished in 2011 as a facsimile by the Biblioteka Moskovskogo Kontseptualisma Germana Titiova [German Titov's Library of Moscow Conceptualism]. ZhEK [*Zhilishchno-ekspluatatsionnaya kontora*] is the acronym for the Soviet-era housing office, or the equivalent of a building management company. Kabakov's book mirrors a kind of manual for a ZhEK, chronicling his life in his studio and among his friends.

¹⁶ In 2016, as part of Ukraine's recent de-Communization campaigns, the city was renamed Dnipro—the name of the river on which it is located.

choosing not to return to his family after the war. Meanwhile, during the war, Ilya and his mother were forced to relocate to Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Fortunately, the Institute of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture of the All-Russian Academy of Arts in Leningrad was also displaced to this ancient city along the Silk Road. Claiming interest in art, Kabakov was admitted to the school. His studies would continue in Moscow and conclude in 1957, upon his graduation from the department of Graphic Design and Book Illustration at the Surikov Art Institute. The late 1950s and early 1960s were exciting times in the Soviet Union. After Joseph Stalin's death in 1953 and his denunciation in 1956, Soviet society experienced a brief thaw in the state policies that regulated everyday life.¹⁷ Kabakov entered this period—the start of his adult life as an artist—divided. He officially was employed as an illustrator for the State Children's Publishing House (Detgiz), but in the privacy of his studio, he produced works of art both abstract and conceptual in nature for consumption by his closest friends and occasional foreign collectors.

By the time Kabakov discovered art, Emilia Lekach, a distant paternal cousin, was born in 1945 back home in Dnipropetrovsk. Lekach also pursued a creative path, studying music and later Spanish in Moscow. Her first attempt at immigration with her family in 1958 failed, resulting in the arrest of her parents. Later, in 1973, after marrying and giving birth to her first child, she emigrated from the Soviet Union as a Jewish refugee, eventually settling in the United States. Ilya Kabakov and Emilia Lekach were acquainted prior to their meeting again in New York in 1988. Working as a curator and

¹⁷ For more information on the Thaw and its effects on Soviet culture, see Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, eds., *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Susan Reid, "The Soviet Art World in the Early Thaw," *Third Text* 20, 2 (March 2006): 161-175; Tatiana Karpova, ed. *Ottepel'* (Moscow: State Tretyakov Gallery, 2017).

art advisor, Lekach was poised to support Kabakov's fledgling career as an international artist. Her gregarious nature and pragmatic business sensibilities complement his introverted personality and philosophical proclivities. They have collaborated on projects since 1989 and were married in 1992.¹⁸

Biographical information on the Kabakovs is abundant. Knowing their personal pasts proves useful in understanding the symbolic meaning of their works. In addition to the many scholarly publications cited throughout this chapter, the Kabakovs themselves have overseen the writing and circulation of their biographies through their many autobiographical works.¹⁹ As is the case for many artists from Eastern Europe, biography often is foregrounded in analyses of their works. Even though this methodology risks stereotyping the artist, it is useful because, especially in an art world where limited critical perspectives are offered, an artist's personal experience is integral to shaping her practice. By geographically and temporally contextualizing the four case studies in this dissertation, I have traced how the past—specifically, the vestiges of the socialist experience—remains a fixture in the works and, more broadly, the lives of artists working in Eastern Europe today.

The Kabakovs complicate this rationalization for autobiographical inference in several ways. Although born and raised in the Soviet Union, they immigrated prior to its collapse, which ultimately precluded any possibility of return. The Soviet Union ceased

¹⁸ After living among many other Soviet émigré artists in TriBeCa, they relocated in 1996 to Mattituck, on the North Fork of Long Island, where their property includes a studio with an archive and a viewing room built to museum standards.

¹⁹ For photographs and transcriptions of oral histories in *On the Roof* (1996), see Ilya Kabakov, *On the Roof* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1997). For the letter written by Kabakov's mother Bertha Urievna Solodukhina recounting her family history and life story in *Labyrinth (My Mother's Album)* (1990), see Ilya Kabakov, *My Mother's Album* (Paris: Flies France, 1995). Sharing in the purportedly universal Soviet experience, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov's biographies are mirrored across the cast of characters created in their works.

to exist on a map, but it remained a part of their consciousness. “I consider myself a Soviet artist... I am a Soviet person... My texts are Soviet texts,” claims Ilya.²⁰ Although the Kabakovs do not exclusively focus on Soviet themes, this chapter reveals how their representation of its everyday life and its official discourse in the 1990s and 2000s was critical to the development of their career in the West as well as the East. In this study, the Kabakovs are the oldest artists—two generations older than the youngest, Paulina Ołowska, who was born in 1976. Ilya Kabakov lived longer in the Soviet Union than he has outside it. Despite the passage of time, his Soviet identity remains strong. Yet another distinction is that the Kabakovs work collaboratively, cosigning projects. While their cooperation has been perceived as mysterious, it is very straightforward: they share ideas and develop concepts that Ilya executes with Emilia’s support.²¹ In recent years, Ilya has become frailer and rarely makes public appearances. He dedicates his energy to painting and producing works, leaving Emilia to take care of the logistics and execution. Complementing each other’s skills, they strike a symbiosis in life and work that is both efficient and beautiful.²²

Today, the Kabakovs’ oeuvre has been considered and reconsidered hundreds of times by art historians, curators, and critics, who have produced several bookshelves’

²⁰ Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews After Perestroika* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 147. “My mentality is Soviet... I did feel I was Soviet,” Kabakov repeats in an interview with David Ross. Ilya Kabakov and David A. Ross, “Interview with Ilya Kabakov,” *Ilya Kabakov*, ed. David Ross, et al. (London: Phaidon, 1998), 8. In contrast, Emilia prefers the identification of “American artists born in the Soviet Union.” Email to author, December 25, 2017. In a 2015 conversation with the author, when asked how they identify, Emilia claims, “We have a very ambivalent position, in respect to ourselves as well as the international art world.” See appendix IV.

²¹ In a video made for Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Emilia says that they are often asked about how they work together. She says, “We don’t answer. It’s a secret.” Her coy response only adds to the mystique of their collaboration. Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, “Ilya & Emilia Kabakov, *The Appearance of the Collage*, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, 2012,” accessed March 3, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmBvcnzwLpo>.

²² Examples of artist couples are legion: Coosje van Bruggen and Claes Oldenburg, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, Dorothy Dehner and Tony Smith, Igor Makarevich and Elena Elagina. While not every couple maintains a professional relationship, their personal partnership can influence their work in even the subtlest ways.

worth of publications on the artists, including a six-volume *catalogue raisonné*.²³ In *Exhibit Russia: The New International Decade, 1986-1990*, curator Kate Fowle easily gets caught up in the numbers: between 1988 and 1999 alone, Ilya Kabakov participated in an average of thirteen shows per year—twenty-three in 1993 alone—on five out of the seven continents.²⁴ Kabakov's *Beetle* (1985) is the most expensive painting by a living Russian artist, realizing 2.9 million pounds at auction in 2008.²⁵ In 2013, Roman Abramovich and Dasha Zhukova, founders of Moscow's Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, spent an estimated 60 million dollars on one of the largest private collections of Kabakov's early works, including the series *Holiday*.²⁶ These paintings, which were made not long before his immigration, feature saccharine Socialist Realist scenes overlaid with crinkled candy wrappers tacked onto the surface of the canvas. While works from Kabakov's Moscow period are most sought after by collectors today, he and Emilia have built themselves a veritable brand in recent decades thanks to a

²³ For the definitive history of Ilya and Emilia Kabakov see *Ilya Kabakov: Installations, 1983-2003*, vol. 1, ed. Toni Stooss (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2003); *Ilya Kabakov: Installations, 2004-2000*, vol. 2, ed. Matthias Haldemann (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2003); *Ilya Kabakov: Installations, 2001-2017*, vol. 3, ed. Matthias Haldemann (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2017); *Ilya Kabakov: Paintings, 1957-1997*, vol. 1, ed. Renate Petzinger, et al. (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2009); *Ilya Kabakov: Paintings, 1998-2008*, vol. 2, ed. Renate Petzinger, et al. (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2009); *Ilya Kabakov: Paintings, 1999-2013*, vol. 3, ed. Renate Petzinger, et al. (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2013); *Ilya Kabakov: Artist Books, 1958-2009*, ed. Matthias Haldemann (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2010). While Kabakov has served as subject for many scholars, including but not limited to Margarita Tupitsyn, Anthony Gardner, Gregg M. Horowitz, and Amei Wallach, who will be cited throughout this chapter, Boris Groys undoubtedly holds the record for the most publications on the artist. Among them, see Boris Groys, *Stat' I ob Il'e Kabakove* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 2016). Several of these essays were translated into English and published in Boris Groys, *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010).

²⁴ Kate Fowle, "The New International Decade, 1986-1996," in *Exhibit Russia: The New International Decade 1986-1996*, eds. Ruth Addison and Kate Fowle (Moscow: Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, 2016), 17. Emilia Kabakov cites that, by 2008, they had made over 400 installations and participated in over 600 exhibitions. *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Enter Here*, DVD, directed by Amei Wallach (New York: First Run Features, 2013).

²⁵ Phillips, "Contemporary Russian Art, London, February 28, 2008, Lot 14, Ilya Kabakov, *Beetle*," accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.phillips.com/detail/ILYA-KABAKOV/UK010008/14>.

²⁶ This was the collection of John L. Stewart. Katya Kazkina, "Billionaire Abramovich Buys Historic Kabakov Collection," Bloomberg.com, January 28, 2013, accessed February 11, 2018, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-01-29/billionaire-abramovich-buys-major-collection-by-russian-kabakov>.

seemingly endless stream of international public projects, museum commissions, print editions, and charitable works.²⁷

Writing critically about the Kabakovs is challenging due to the great fanfare that accompanies their highly celebrated and often monumental works in exhibitions at museums, kunsthallen, galleries, and biennials worldwide. Within the context of Eastern European art, the Kabakovs are the most universally recognized artists from the region; yet they live in diaspora. While academics, curators, dealers, and collectors from New York to Tokyo have embraced the Kabakovs into the expanding art historical canon creeping slowly into textbooks and reinstallations of permanent collections, there is still a lot to say and even more to understand about their intricate, multi-layered works that deserve better informed and more nuanced interpretations.

Although my methodology throughout this dissertation privileges the artist's voice, it does not take it at face value but critically deconstructs it. When asked about the connections between his early and late works, specifically between his albums and installations, Kabakov responded by giving a lengthy "periodization" of his career.²⁸ He thinks it is important to see these connections—or lack thereof—as the products of chain reactions within a larger narrative. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation and demonstrated herein, self-historicization, of which this is a prime example, has become a salient strategy for many artists from Eastern Europe coping with a lack or loss

²⁷ In my conversation with Kabakov, he expressed frustration over what he feels are the misplaced desires of his collectors. See Appendix IV. In 2005, the Kabakovs launched *The Ship of Tolerance*, which has docked in Siwa, Venice, St. Moritz, Sharjah, Miami, Havana, Moscow, New York, London, and Rome. The project promotes cross-cultural understanding and fosters transnational dialogues by bringing together groups of children, who produce drawings that are then sewn into the ship's mast.

²⁸ See Appendix IV.

of representation.²⁹ During the Soviet period, official art had established networks of support, including art academies, artist unions, state museums, traveling exhibitions, and even art critics. Artists who chose to work in unofficial capacities were deprived not only of certain freedoms of expression but also these coveted resources.³⁰ As a result, Kabakov and his contemporaries across the socialist sphere took on the responsibility of writing their own histories and building independent infrastructures for art, including apartment exhibitions, samizdat journals, and personal archives.³¹ They developed what French philosopher Michel Foucault calls “heterotopias” or “counter-sites” within the spaces of their everyday lives.³² Writing in the early 2000s, Kabakov described how these conditions produced “a unique genre of ‘self-description’” in which

the author would imitate, recreate that very same ‘outside’ perspective of which he was deprived in actual reality. He became simultaneously an author and an observer. Deprived of a genuine viewer, critic, or historian, the author unwittingly became them himself, trying to guess what his works meant ‘objectively.’ He attempted to ‘imagine’ that very ‘History’ in which he was functioning and which

²⁹ See Zdenka Badovinac, “Interrupted Histories,” in *Interrupted Histories*, ed. Zdenka Badovinac, et al. (Ljubljana: Museum of Modern Art, 2006). Self-historicization has been explored thoroughly through the lens of the archive. See Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, “Innovative Forms of Archives, Part One: Exhibitions, Events, Books, Museums, and Lia Perjovschi’s Contemporary Art Archive,” *e-flux* 13 (February 2010), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/13/61328/innovative-forms-of-archives-part-one-exhibitions-events-books-museums-and-lia-perjovschi-s-contemporary-art-archive/> and “Innovative Forms of Archives, Part Two: IRWIN’s East Art Map and Tamás St. Auby’s Portable Intelligence Increase Museum,” *e-flux* 16 (May 2010), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61282/innovative-forms-of-archives-part-two-irwin-s-east-art-map-and-tams-st-auby-s-portable-intelligence-increase-museum/>.

³⁰ While considered unofficial in the Soviet Union, such artists in the satellite or non-aligned states are categorized as the “neo-avant-garde.” For example, see Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2011) and Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, eds., *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003).

³¹ See Margarita Tupitsyn, Victor Tupitsyn, and David Morris, eds., *APTART, 1982-1984* (London: Afterall, 2017); Juliane Fürst and Josie McLellan, eds., *Dropping Out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017); Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008).

³² Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopia and Heterotopias,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture/Movement/Continuité* (October 1984): 3, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>.

was ‘looking’ at him. Obviously, this ‘History’ existed only in his imagination and had its own image for each artist....”³³

Among unofficial artists infiltrating established narratives, History was not singularly defined. For some, it was contemporary Western art; for others, it was the Italian Renaissance or even the forbidden Soviet avant-garde. The possibilities were endless for these amateur historians whose mental calisthenics eluded official censors.

For those leading double lives in the Soviet Union, self-historicization was one of many defense mechanisms. Kabakov first describes the nature of this schizophrenic state in his text “Artist-Character.” Penned in 1985 in response to the APTART exhibitions organized by Nikita Alekseev in the early 1980s, the text addresses the split between authorship and subjectivity in works of unofficial art, including his own. While he spends the bulk of his text examining facets of the artist-character—topoi made famous in literary studies—he also introduces the panorama as a metaphor for history, a form that not only demonstrates but also helps us to make sense of History, specifically alternative histories. Unofficial artists like Kabakov were at a double disadvantage: they operated outside the parameters of both official Soviet as well as Western art. “Yanked away” from “the normal artistic cycle (artist–painting–exhibition–viewer),” they were left to their own devices, imagining their life and work as a panorama of “isolated, immobile ‘painting-images’ ... ripped out of their historical flow... all equally visible and equally radiant.”³⁴ The panorama of History is the magnum opus of the artist-character, who takes on a multi-perspectival view as its maker, subject, and spectator. This subdivision

³³ Ilya Kabakov, “Forward,” in *Primary Documents: A sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 7-8. The writings included in this anthology were attempts by artists to view themselves as if from the outside. While this helped form communities, like that of Moscow Conceptualism, it also produced frustration over the incongruences between imagination and reality.

³⁴ Ilya Kabakov, “Artist-Character,” trans. Cynthia Martin, in *Anti-Shows: APTART, 1982-1984*, eds. Margarita Tupitsyn, Victor Tupitsyn, and David Morris (London: Afterall, 2017), 215.

of self is like looking into the mirror between a utopia and heterotopia. “In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space,” writes Foucault.³⁵ Like the panorama, the mirror is a “placeless place” that is “at once absolutely real... and absolutely unreal.”³⁶

The temporality of the panorama is also duplicitous, existing as a memory of the past, a record of the present, and a projection of the future. “That very same imagination that ‘sees’ before it the whole panorama of art is capable of ‘seeing’ its own yet-to-be-made painting, and of placing it next to the works of others that already exist in reality, of placing it in the general order of things, into the panorama as though it is already finished,” writes Kabakov.³⁷ In this way, their work finally could be judged against internationally accepted standards. Just as Kabakov craved this inclusion, he also feared it, since it could result in harsh and even damning criticism. “For me, the art world is like a huge river... I was always dreaming about coming to this river and being able to swim in it... [but] the two scary possibilities were either of being too far away to dive in or of sitting on its banks, only watching the others swim,” says Kabakov.³⁸ Using the strategy of self-historicization that transformed him into an artist-character within his own panorama of History, Kabakov ensured himself a valid ticket into the future.

Patented in 1787 by the British painter Robert Barker and swiftly adopted across Europe in the nineteenth century as a spectacular new way of seeing, the panorama was a beacon of modernity.³⁹ Etymologically derived from the Greek words *pan* [all] and

³⁵ Foucault, 4.

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

³⁷ Kabakov, *On the Total Installation*, 215.

³⁸ See Kabakov and Ross, 22.

³⁹ Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of A Mass Media* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 5-7, 22. For more information on the panorama and a new vision, see Jonathan Crary, “Géricault, the Panorama, and Sites of Reality in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Grey Room* 9 (Autumn 2002): 5-25. The panorama is

horama [view], a panorama is a larger-than-life horizontal painting typically depicting a natural or urban landscape in the round. Faced with a nearly unobstructed three-hundred-sixty degree view, the viewer is able to “‘get a grip’ on things, a grip that leaves what is observed undamaged, but surrounds and seizes the whole.”⁴⁰ To properly absorb this immense visual impact, the viewer must ascend a centrally located platform. This immersive environment draws her into the scene; yet she remains firmly and fully outside it. From the vantage point of the viewing platform, she is unable to see the very top or bottom of the painting, which creates the effect of it continuing infinitely, nor its artificial light source, which streams from above. Her position simultaneously inside—literally at the center of the panorama—and outside mirrors that of Kabakov, both before and after his immigration, as well as that of the historian who “see[s] the past through the eyes of the present.”⁴¹ As a chronicler of events, the historian not only objectively conveys facts but also subjectively interprets them.⁴² Kabakov returns to the panorama as a metaphor for History throughout his career. He fully realized this metaphor in the 1990s when he painted *Panorama of the Future*. Depicting a communist utopia, it was the central element of the installation *Red Wagon* (1991), which will be discussed later in this chapter.

a contemporary of another modern invention, the steam engine, designed by the British engineer James Watts and put into production in 1776.

⁴⁰ I say nearly because, in a traditional circular panorama, one’s back is always toward a part of the painting, thus the view is more like one-hundred-eighty degrees. Of course, the panorama’s control over vision made it attractive to the correctional system as evinced by Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon of 1812. Otterman, 40-41.

⁴¹ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 21. See also my discussion of history in the work of Hayden V. White in the Introduction and Chapter Two of this dissertation.

⁴² In addition to Carr’s book cited above, writings on the art of history are legion and are discussed at length in the introduction to this dissertation. See Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft: Reflections on the Nature and Uses of History and the Techniques and Methods of Those Who Write It*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Vintage Books, 1953); and Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

During his early years in Moscow, Kabakov likely visited the Circular Kinopanorama (*Krugovaya Kinopanorama*) at the Exhibition of National Economic Achievements (*Vystavka Dostizheniy Narodnogo Khozyaystva*, VDNKh) in Moscow. It opened in 1959, coinciding with the American Exhibition, which featured *Glimpses of the U.S.A.*, a film by Ray and Charles Eames projected onto seven twenty-by-thirty foot screens inside the two hundred fifty foot diameter geodesic dome by Buckminster Fuller. Long after the American Exhibition closed, the Circular Kinopanorama continued to screen its unique films, which were shot across the Soviet Union using an eleven-lens camera. Viewers would stand still in the center, absorbing the propaganda rotating around them.

Moscow's Circular Kinopanorama also inspired the artist Olga Chernysheva to create a series of paintings entitled *Panorama* (2004-2006). Whereas Chernysheva directly transposes scenes from one of the Kinopanorama's looped films into her paintings, forever freezing its frames, Kabakov envisions his panorama as dynamic, adeptly adapting History based on developments in the artist-character and his career. These divergent interpretations of the panorama can be traced back to each artist's understanding of the Soviet experience. In her panorama, Chernysheva captures the immutability of this experience, while Kabakov uses his to signal a dramatic shift in the late-Soviet period and the trauma of its impact.

Reflecting on the 1980s, Kabakov identifies three experiences that defined the decade: an unexpected stabilization of social life that seemed like it would “last forever” [будет навеки]; the establishment of an everyday rhythm that took into account one's official and unofficial activities; and the founding of new collectives of younger artists,

including the groups Mukhomor and Medical Hermeneutics.⁴³ His impression of stability, which is also expressed by Chernysheva through her works, captures what anthropologist Alexei Yurchak calls the paradox of late Soviet life. In 1991, the average citizen, like Kabakov, simultaneously experienced “the profound feeling of the Soviet system’s permanence and immutability and the complex unexpectedness of its collapse.”⁴⁴ However, Kabakov and his contemporaries embraced this change, albeit trepidatiously.

In Kabakov’s opinion, the decade can be divided into two parts. The first—1980 to 1985—was infused with great optimism but turned out to be hopeless [безнадежным]. The turning point was 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and soon thereafter instated numerous political, social, and economic reforms, including *perestroika* (rebuilding) and *glasnost* (openness). These led to the Soviet Union’s ultimate rupture in 1991. “Then something important happened: the never-ending hopelessness gave way to anxiety; in the air there was hope, shifts began to occur,” says Kabakov.⁴⁵ These shifts included an influx of foreigners, specifically dealers and collectors, which peaked in 1988 with the Sotheby’s auction of modern and contemporary Russian art in Moscow, the mass immigration of artists to the West, and the birth of a new genre—installation art—which Kabakov heralded himself. Based on his assessment of this decade, it is not coincidental that he formalized his ideas on the artist-character and the expanding panorama of History in 1985.

⁴³ Il’ya Kabakov and Georgiy Kizeval’tser, “Il’ya Kabakov: O vosmozhnosti prostoeniia raia v otel’no vziatom adu [Ilya Kabakov: On the Possibility of Building a Paradise in a Collective Hell], in *Perelomnye vos’midesiatye v neofitsial’nom iskusstve SSSR* [The Broken 1980s in Soviet Unofficial Art], ed. Georgiy Kizeval’tser (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2014), 248-250, 252. Translations of foreign-language texts are my own unless otherwise noted. Kabakov published his reflections on the previous twenty years in *60-70e... Zapiski o neofitsialnoi zhizni v Moskve* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2008).

⁴⁴ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 1.

⁴⁵ Il’ya Kabakov and Georgiy Kizeval’tser, 251.

Around this time, Kabakov, still living in Moscow, began exhibiting regularly in the West—first at the Kunsthalle in Bern then at museums across Europe. “From the start, we jumped into museums. We skipped the normal evolutionary path of an artist, who begins with galleries then moves onto collectors, finally slowly moving into museums,” he says.⁴⁶ For Kabakov and many of his contemporaries active in unofficial artistic circles during the post-Stalinist period, participating in the art world in the West was an elusive desire fed by translations of foreign-language publications, visits from foreign guests, and reports from friends lucky enough to secure exit visas.⁴⁷ “I had big dreams, big fantasies about the art world in the West... a paradise for the artist, for art,” recounts Kabakov.⁴⁸ His Western “utopian fantasy” was pitted against the reality of Soviet stagnation, which was permeated by the feeling of “emptiness” [*pustota*].⁴⁹ By defining his Soviet experience as emptiness, Kabakov gives it a framework in which to exist. This framework could then demarcate or marginalize his past experience once settled in the West.

Yet, Kabakov first articulates this notion of emptiness in the text written after a 1981 trip to Czechoslovakia.⁵⁰ He does not interpret emptiness passively, as a vacuum

⁴⁶ See Appendix IV. Although not working with Emilia at this time, he uses the plural pronoun “we.” This is a sign that today their cooperation is so ingrained, and while he can distinguish between the two halves of his career when discussing his early paintings and works on paper, his attribution of works, particularly installations, in the mid to late 1980s is already part of their collective production.

⁴⁷ For a study of Kabakov and his role within Moscow Conceptualism, see Matthew Jesse Jackson, *The Experimental Group*. For wider perspectives on Moscow Conceptualism, see Jane A. Sharp, ed., *Thinking Pictures: The Visual Field of Moscow Conceptualism* (New Brunswick: Zimmerli Art Museum, 2016); Alla Rosenfeld, ed., *Moscow Conceptualism in Context* (Munch: Prestel, 2011); Yuri Albert, ed., *Moskovskii kontseptualizm: Nachalo* (Moscow: National Center for Contemporary Arts, 2014).

⁴⁸ Wallach, *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Enter Here*. This is echoed in Kabakov, *The Red Pavilion*, 69.

⁴⁹ Kabakov claims emptiness as the root of his works. See the work Ilya Kabakov, *General Diagram of All Works* from 1984, which is reproduced in Jackson, 202.

⁵⁰ In Russian, it is titled “O nyctore” (*O pustote*). Ilya Kabakov, “On Emptiness,” trans. Clark Troy, in *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, ed. David A. Ross (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), 53-59. For an alternative translation, see Ilya Kabakov, “On the Subject of ‘The Void,’” trans. Cynthia Martin, in *Total Enlightenment: Conceptual Art in Moscow, 1960-*

with the potential of being filled, but actively, as a way of functioning that is “the absolute antipode of any living existence.”⁵¹ The text is a parable of Soviet life, highlighting its salient qualities of duplicity and isolation.⁵² Emptiness is not only a metaphor for the double lives of many unofficial artists, like Kabakov, but also what fellow artist Andrei Monastyrsky called “the condition of our Empire,” an emptiness that rotted away the center, sparing only the edges.⁵³ This poetic formulation, characteristic of Monastyrsky’s rhetoric evidenced in his texts and works, including the performances of the group Collective Actions, describes the peripheral position of Kabakov and his contemporaries, living and working on the edge.

Although Czechoslovakia was a satellite of the Soviet Union, it afforded Kabakov an even greater distance, thereby a new and refreshing perspective, when looking at his homeland from the outside.⁵⁴ Kabakov describes this process of observation as

akin to riding in a train, riding for an interminable length of time, sitting all the time in the compartment without exiting and then, all of a sudden, getting out at a stop, walking out onto the platform of the station, and from that platform, from

1990 (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 366-374. For a closer reading of the full text, see Anthony Gardner, “An Aesthetic of Emptiness,” in *Politically Unbecoming: Postsocialist Art against Democracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 55-97. Interpreting emptiness as critical engagement in the tradition of post-war activist art, Gardner claims that Kabakov’s work, namely his installation *Ten Characters* (1988), embodies a democratic power for both artist and viewer. I appreciate Gardner’s analysis of Kabakov as one of the more recent and refreshingly critical; however, Gardner’s politically motivated interest is tangential to my argument here.

⁵¹ Kabakov, “On Emptiness,” 54.

⁵² Although not directly related to my argument, it is interesting to note Kabakov’s extensive use of topographic metaphor throughout this text. He evocatively describes how emptiness is a place within another place: “The very dimensions of the territory—its invisibility, endlessness, unencloseability, immeasurability—are not simply a large space, which one could calculate, comprehend, and assimilate, but rather a groundless, indeterminable blending-together with emptiness, a moving over into emptiness.” *Ibid.*, 56. Regarding history remembered topographically (metaphorically), see Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7-2.

⁵³ Ilya Kabakov and Andrei Monastyrsky, “Zritel’-Personazh,” a conversation recorded August 1988, in *Sborniki MANI: Moskovskii arkhiv novogo iskusstva* (Volgoda: BMK, 2010), 497, as quoted in Margarita Tupitsyn, *Moscow Vanguard Art, 1922-1992* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 135.

⁵⁴ This was Kabakov’s first trip outside the Soviet Union. Prior to being awarded a residency at the Kunstverein in Salzburg in 1986, which led to the approval of his exit visa and immigration in 1987, he applied to immigrate three times but was denied. He returned to the Soviet Union briefly in 1988, upon the death of his mother. See Kabakov and Ross, 17.

the outside, looking through the window to the very same compartment in which one had just sat.⁵⁵

The rider experiences what Viktor Shklovsky called *ostranenie* and Bertolt Brecht called *Verfremdungseffekt*, that is, an intense feeling of estrangement produced by an interruption in an otherwise familiar situation. As a result, one becomes not only more conscious but also critical of the situation. This perspective, which is echoed by the artist-character, ultimately would become permanent after Kabakov's emigration later that decade. That break, which nearly coincided with the breakup of the Soviet Union, was a culmination of the events of the late 1980s and ushered in the second half of Kabakov's career in the West.

From Totalitarianism to the "Total" Installation

Interruptions are integral to the historical process. Traditionally divided chronologically into distinct periods, History is a series of ruptures. "Breakage," writes Michel de Certeau, "is therefore the postulate of interpretation (which is constructed as of the present time) and its object (divisions organizing representations that must be reinterpreted)."⁵⁶ Thus, the historian must consider not only his given period but also all the periods that came before it, which are encased within it, like the fitted parts of a *matryoshka* or Russian nesting doll. This allows for what was once deemed irrelevant and left out of History to "come back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse."⁵⁷

No longer living and working under a totalitarian regime, the Kabakovs began to slowly move from the edges to the center of discourse in the 1990s. "There was a great

⁵⁵ Kabakov, "On Emptiness," 53.

⁵⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

interest in Russia at that time because the Soviet power has just ended, and museums wanted to exhibit the ideas that came out of this context as well as the artists who came from there,” recounts Ilya.⁵⁸ Their works, specifically their installations produced in the first decade after their immigration, focused on Soviet themes.⁵⁹ Kabakov attributes this to an internal desire as well as an external expectation. “I had the insane desire to tell about that disgusting prison [the Soviet Union], in which we lived—like Sinbad the Sailor, returning from his travels, has the irresistible desire to recount the terrible conditions from which he escaped,” he says.⁶⁰ For the West, their work was unique as it “could describe the Soviet world [описать мир советский], which was not accessible and lesser known [in the West].”⁶¹ Despite competing pressures, the Kabakovs embraced Soviet themes, processing both its individual and collective experiences in their works.

In April 1991, they participated in *BiNationale Israel/UdSSR: Sowjetische Kunst um 1990* [Soviet Art Around 1990], a group exhibition at the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle that traveled to Jerusalem and Moscow.⁶² Organized in the West, it presented a Western perspective on the East through examples from recent unofficial art from the Republics of Russia, Ukraine and Estonia. Although greatly anticipated in Moscow, to what extent would its reception be affected by its acceptance abroad? Curator Jürgen Harten pinpoints

⁵⁸ See Appendix IV.

⁵⁹ According to Ilya’s periodization of their career, they worked through the Soviet themes by 2000. They continued making installations through the 2000s, although painting became important again after 2007. See Appendix IV.

⁶⁰ Kabakov and Kizeval’ter, 256.

⁶¹ See Appendix IV.

⁶² Other artists in the exhibition include Pavel Pepperstein, Vadim Zakharov, and Andrei Filippov from Moscow, Yevgeniy Yufit, Timur Novikov, and Sergei Bugaev from Leningrad, and Svetlana and Igor Kopistiansky from L’viv. See Jürgen Harten, *Sowjetische Kunst um 1990* (Düsseldorf: Städtische Kunsthalle, 1991). The installation was later included in the 1994 group exhibition *Tyrannie des Schönen – Architektur der Stalin-Zeit* at the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst in Vienna; the 1999 solo exhibition *Der Rote Waggon* at the Museum Wiesbaden in Wiesbaden, Germany; the 2008 solo exhibition *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: The Alternative History of Art* at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, which traveled to the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg in 2009. In 2001, it became part of the permanent collection of the Museum Wiesbaden.

the challenges faced by such a transnational endeavor. “They [the artists] insist on their artistic identity [as Soviet], but they want to discover it with the help of Western criteria,” writes Harten.⁶³ Paradoxically, what previously marginalized these artists ends up serving them so well. No longer castaways of History, artists like the Kabakovs get folded back into its narrative.

In the midst of establishing their identity in the West, the Kabakovs took this opportunity to look back at the history of the Soviet Union. For *BiNationale*, the Kabakovs produced *The Red Wagon* [Figure 4-2], a monument to the Soviet era.⁶⁴ An installation in three parts, each represents a period of the great Soviet century.⁶⁵ Describing the installation as “an arch or a ‘bridge’” that traces the development of three disparate but interconnected historical epochs, Ilya originally conceived of the idea in the summer of 1989 while on residency in West Berlin.⁶⁶ “It became extremely important to realize this ‘Soviet time’ from its first to its last moment, and somehow to reflect, depict,

⁶³ Jürgen Harten, “Vosem’ pechatei v pasporte ili ‘Tam chudesa, tam leshii brodit’ [“Eight Stamps in the Passport, or It’s Beautiful There Where the Goblin Roams], in *Sowjetische Kunst um 1990*, 6.

⁶⁴ To say the Kabakovs make monumental work is an understatement. While they do not claim their works in both the public and private (museum) space as monuments in the traditional sense, they have proposed several, which have gone unrealized. Taking the form of two trains awaiting departure from a railway station, *A Monument to Emigrants* (2001-2002) would have allowed the viewer to peer into the coupés transformed into domestic interiors. Emigrants themselves, the Kabakovs know first-hand the feeling of being in limbo. Other examples include but are not limited to *The Ditch: A Holocaust Memorial for Vienna* (1996) and *Memorial to a Tryant* (2001). In contrast to Deimantas Narkevičius’s film *Once in the XX Century* discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, the latter disposes a tyrannical figurehead not by destroying the statue but by placing it on the ground in front of its pedestal. See Thomas Kellein and Björn Egging, eds., *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: The Utopian City and Other Projects* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2004), 212-2017, 226-229. This book also includes *Monument to a Lost Civilization* (1999), thirty-eight installations, including *Ten Characters*, brought together in honor of those who survived totalitarianism, which “is still preserved in the consciousness and subconscious of people who survived it and experienced its influence.” Kellein and Egging, 316.

⁶⁵ The work also included music, composed by Vladimir Tarasov.

⁶⁶ Ilya Kabakov, “*The Red Wagon: History*,” in *Ilya Kabakov: The Red Wagon*, ed. Renate Petzinger (Nürnberg: Verlag für modern Kunst, 1999), 21. This text, which is dated autumn 1991, describes the making of the installation from the first sketches completed in October 1989 to its initial assembly in Kabakov’s Paris studio in March 1991. Prior to its purchase by the Museum Wiesbaden, Kabakov states that the installation was property of his Parisian gallery Dina Vierny, who likely sponsored or assembled the sponsors to fund the production of this mammoth work.

and ‘memorize’ it, as nothing like it ever had been or will be in human history,” he says.⁶⁷

The Red Wagon’s first period begins in 1917 and ends in 1932, the year before Ilya was born. It takes the shape of a wooden armature composed of staircases and platforms rising toward the sky. Sketches for *The Red Wagon* reveal its source of inspiration: Constructivist artist Vladimir Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International*.⁶⁸ Conceived in 1920, this 1,300 foot glass and iron tower commemorating the 1917 October Revolution unfortunately was never built on the banks of the Neva River in St. Petersburg (then Petrograd).⁶⁹ The Kabakovs’ rendition of this unrealized utopian project forms the entryway to the second and central portion of the installation, the red wagon itself.

Spanning from 1932 to 1963, the second period coincides with Ilya’s youth and formative years as an artist and almost exactly recapitulates his own stylistic evolution from academic to modernist painting. These decades saw both the highs and lows of Stalinism—from ambitious industrialization to coldblooded purges. It ends in roughly the final year of the Thaw, a brief softening of restrictions under Stalin’s successor Nikita Khrushchev, which revived hope in the everyday lives of Soviet citizens.⁷⁰ Two friezes of paintings along the sides of the wagon depict scenes of this euphoria—lines of handsome men in army uniforms, smiling young lovers riding bikes in the countryside, a young boy

⁶⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁶⁸ At the time, Tatlin was in charge of carrying out Lenin’s plan for “Monumental Propaganda.” For a discussion of the plan, see the second chapter of this dissertation on the work of artist Deimantas Narkevičius.

⁶⁹ Maria Gough, “Model Exhibition,” *October* 150 (Fall 2014): 9-26.

⁷⁰ The idea of the Soviet Union as a dreamworld and dream factory has been explored by Susan Buck-Morss in her book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000) and Boris Groys and Max Hollein in *Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2000).

and an old man hovering intently over a game of chess, a farmer harvesting a field. Rendered with muted colors in soft brushstrokes reminiscent of Paul Cézanne, the paintings are undoubtedly socialist realist in content.⁷¹ These culminate in an interior panorama that captures an expansive view of the Soviet dreamland replete with bustling factories, verdant farmlands, and a strong military presence. Although blocked from approaching the panorama with a hip-height barrier, the viewer is welcome to sit on a bench opposite the painting and contemplate this purported paradise, which extends through the horizon line. As historian Stephan Oettermann writes, the horizon “reflects the historical experience that the known world is contained within it and an unknown world begins beyond it.”⁷² The hot air balloon, which appears several times along with a blimp in the Kabakovs’ panorama, was one vehicle well suited for exploring the edges of this horizon.

The years 1963 and 1985 demarcate the third and final period in *The Red Wagon*, which corresponds to Ilya’s time working as an artist in Moscow. Beginning at the wagon’s exit, it is, literally, a heap of rubbish—broken boxes, leaky trash bags, dirty tarps, and scraps of bubble wrap. A train car without wheels, *The Red Wagon* was going nowhere fast. Ilya acknowledges how this relates to his perception of temporality in the late Soviet period:

Around 1985... Some sort of new, already “nonhistorical” time had begun. But for me, it also seemed clear that not only a particular period but all of it—the “Soviet history” which began in October 1917 and ended that year—had gone

⁷¹ In 1995, in the Parisian newspaper *Libération*, Kabakov wrote about Cézanne. Although he influenced Kabakov’s generation, Cézanne was virtually outlawed, as Kabakov says, in favor of “the style of Courbet and the Barbizon school.” See Ilya Kabakov, “Cézanne,” in *Ilya Kabakov*, ed. Ross, et al., 122-123.

⁷² Oettermann, 13.

away and would never return. That which seemed destined to last for eternity had quietly burst and leaked out, like an old painful, purulent boil.⁷³

Like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, the Kabakovs turned to the past only to find its wreckage at their feet. "A storm is blowing from Paradise... This storm is what we call progress," declares Benjamin.⁷⁴ The Kabakovs convey this urgency in *The Red Wagon* through a new genre of art that they would eventually call the "total" installation. More than just an amalgamation of objects in a given space that would act as a stand-in for the Soviet experience, this installation aimed to be "a three-dimensional polygon-field" in which "the viewer could correctly recognize and interpret, from [the artists'] point of view, what was shown."⁷⁵ Describing the work, Ilya says, "I exported, in essence, a cube of Soviet air."⁷⁶

In 1992, he gave a series of fifteen lectures collectively titled "On the 'Total' Installation" at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, Germany. Addressing a range of topics from this new genre's relationship to space and time to its use of objects, light, color, and music, the lectures were translated by Emilia and published in 1995. They define a "total" installation as a "type of installation... constructed in such a way that the viewer (in addition to the various components participating in it) finds himself inside of it, engrossed in it."⁷⁷ Because the "total" installation includes its surrounding space, the viewer is not detached but "finds himself controlled by the installation."⁷⁸ This kind of

⁷³ Amei Wallach, *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away* (New York: Harry S. Abrams, Inc., 1996), 181. For an alternative translation, see Ilya Kabakov, "The Concept of *The Red Wagon*," in *Ilya Kabakov: The Red Wagon*, 30-31.

⁷⁴ Walter, 257-258.

⁷⁵ Ilya Kabakov and Boris Groys, "The Red Wagon: A Conversation between Ilya Kabakov and Boris Groys," in *Ilya Kabakov: The Red Wagon*, ed. Renate Petzinger (Nürnberg: Verlag für modern Kunst, 1999), 85.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷⁷ Ilya Kabakov, *On the Total Installation* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1995), 243.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 245.

all-encompassing installation differs from other, sculpture-based installations, which maintain an ambiguous relationship with the viewer, who can move more freely into, around, and out of the work. The Kabakovs' "total" installation completely transforms a given space, evading what art critic and artist Brian O'Doherty classified in 1976 as the "white cube" or a gallery space so pristine that it blocks out all semblance of the real world.⁷⁹

The Kabakovs' "total" installation is a part of the larger global history of installation art. Art historian Claire Bishop defines installation art as "a term that loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as 'theatrical,' 'immersive,' or 'experiential'... [that] has now expanded to describe any arrangement of objects in any given space...".⁸⁰ Drawing the majority of her examples from North American and Western European artists active in the last fifty years, her authoritative book categorizes various types of installations based on their formal compositions, the physical and psychological strategies of their authors, and their intended effects on the viewer.⁸¹ Bishop argues that some works, like those by Ilya Kabakov, Paul Thek, and Ann Hamilton, transport the viewer into a "dream scene" or a

⁷⁹ Brian O'Doherty, "Notes on the Gallery Space," in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 15.

⁸⁰ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6. Bishop provides the most substantial global survey of installation art. Other overviews are cursory at best. See Mark Rosenthal, *Understanding Installation Art: From Duchamp to Holzer* (Munich: Prestel, 2003) and Nicholas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley, and Michael Petry, *Installation Art in the New Millennium: The Empire of the Senses* (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 2003). The transition from 1960s happenings to post-1990s installation art and the role played by minimalist sculpture is thoroughly presented in Julie H. Reiss, *From Margins to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999). For a more incisive look at installation through the lens of institutional critique and race in the United States in the 1990s, see Jennifer A. González, *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008). For a philosophically-driven approach to installation art engaging with affect and the writings of Theodor W. Adorno, Jacques Derrida, and others, see Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012).

⁸¹ Brief citations of both Lissitzky and Schwitters are Bishop's most historical examples. She roots the historical foundation of her version of installation art in the 1960s and 1970s, with Alan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Marcel Broodthaers, Michael Asher, and Robert Morris.

site-specific fantasy, while others, like those by Olafur Eliasson, Hélio Oiticica, and Dan Graham, assault the viewer by inundating the senses. Interpreting the installation as a dream through the work of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, she claims that Kabakov's *The Man Who Flew Into Space from His Apartment* (1988) is "characterized both by psychological absorption and by physical immersion" that could "rupture and destabilize conventional patterns of thought" in the viewer.⁸² While Bishop notes that Kabakov's installation holds important cultural significance, her cursory analysis neglects its historical and geographical specificity. Like most accounts of installation art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it places its primary emphasis on the viewer and theories of reception. It fails to recognize the materiality of installation art and the nature of its construction—prerequisites for its consumption.

The roots of Kabakov's "total" installation can be traced to the first decades of the twentieth century, when Russian avant-garde artists pushed the boundaries of what constituted an appropriate material for art.⁸³ They produced dynamic composites of found materials that shed their identities as traditional sculptures by abandoning their plinths.⁸⁴ For example, the constructions presented at ObMoKhu (1921) considered space as a material.⁸⁵ Art historian Maria Gough argues that, "While all sculpture occupies space, the spatial construction advances space itself, so-called empty space, as 'concrete'"

⁸² Bishop, 47.

⁸³ This teleological understanding is taken up by Margarita Tupitsyn in *Moscow Vanguard Art, 1922-1992*. The chapter "The Raison d'Etre of Installation Art" (131-166) provides an overview of unofficial Soviet installation-based practices in Moscow in the 1970s and '80s.

⁸⁴ I refer to these works in the past tense because many are no longer extant and only available for study via documentary photographs and contemporary recreations.

⁸⁵ Similar ideas about sculpture and space were prevalent in Polish Constructivism, which took shape in the late 1920s and early 1930s under artists Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro, and was later revived in the Neo-Constructivist movements of the 1950s and 1960s by Henryk Stażewski and Edward Krasiński.

material.”⁸⁶ A spatial construction is distinct from other sculptural forms, such as a relief or monument, because “it orchestrates this material [of space] but does not fill it; it declares it as volume with recourse to neither mass nor weight; and it dissolves the customary distinction between the exterior and interior of form.”⁸⁷ The spatial construction is recognizable by the radical non-hierarchy of material within its composition and no separation between its exterior and interior.

El Lissitzky made some of the most significant advancements in using space as material.⁸⁸ In order to bridge the opticality of two-dimensional painting with the tactility of three-dimensional materials in the pursuit of the production of space, Lissitzky began to make what he called Prouns or Projects for the Affirmation of the New. As art historian Yve-Alain Bois explains, these seemingly banal formal exercises in line and color are actually innovative schemata that require types of construction and reception foreign to art up until that time.⁸⁹ Bois identifies these schemata as axonometric, that is, “being or prepared by the projection of objects on the drawing surface so that they appear inclined with three sides showing and with horizontal and vertical distances drawn to scale but diagonal and curved lines distorted.”⁹⁰ The forward and backward movements or the projection and depth produced by axonometry, which seems to extend directionals

⁸⁶ Maria Gough, “In the Laboratory of Constructivism: Karl Ioganson’s Cold Structures,” *October* 84 (Spring 1998): 95.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ For this reason, Lissitzky does not figure prominently in Christina Lodder’s book *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). Lodder considers him to be a second generation Constructivist—more of an international disseminator of Constructivists ideas. While this may be true from the Russian perspective of “first” generation Constructivists like Rodchenko, from the non-Russian (namely Western European) perspective, this distinction could have been less apparent at the time. Here, I have in mind Lissitzky’s influence on his contemporary Kurt Schwitters. The relationship between Lissitzky and his predecessor Malevich (1879-1935) is discussed at length in T. J. Clark’s *Farwell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (Yale University Press, 1999).

⁸⁹ Yves-Alain Bois, “El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility,” *Art in America* 76, 4 (April 1988): 171-172.

⁹⁰ “Axonometric,” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Online (2 Dec 2013) <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/axonometric>>.

both inward and outward, is clearly seen in *Proun IE The City* (1919-1920).⁹¹ Lissitzky makes the work's axonometric and other multiple perspective schemes apparent through rich textures powerfully rendered in two-dimensions through gradations of black to white as well as differing densities. While the main element of the composition—a multi-part structure comprising a speckled black square and several thin white rectangles—is more or less centered atop a large opaque white circle, the relationship among the circle and additional rectangles crisscrossing it above and below is ambiguous. Texture is the only guide to navigating its complex composition.

The Proun's all-over composition, which disrupts the continuity of the visual field, is not only the result of Lissitzky's working methods, which involved multiple rotations of the two-dimensional paper or canvas in increments of ninety degrees, but also his aspirations for emancipating the viewer.⁹² Viewing a Proun is like seeing theater in the round, where all sides of the action are visible at all times; yet unlike the theater, where the viewer is firmly positioned outside of the action around the parameter, the Proun completely disorients the viewer by negating any stable viewing position.⁹³ This instability effectively agitates the viewer, disturbing the relationship between the viewer and the work of art.

Lissitzky's exhibition designs between 1928 and 1930, including that for the International Press Exhibition [*Pressa*] in Cologne, departed drastically from his earlier work produced within the confines of the museum. They directly engaged not only the

⁹¹ This work measures 23.3 x 28.3 cm.

⁹² Bois, 173-175.

⁹³ Although he briefly touches upon the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in "Radical Reversibility," with its concerns over experience and the relationships among bodies and objects in space, Bois does not push exactly how Lissitzky achieved his goal and does not discuss Lissitzky's later exhibition designs in any great detail. *Ibid.*, 174.

viewer's mind but also her body through functional designs that foregrounded the social and political urgency of building a new Soviet world. Art historian Jorge Ribalta characterizes Lissitzky's exhibition designs as not only "representing or giving shape to a new mass subject" but also "intervening in the psychic process of perception by providing a space and a mechanism for a public reading of images."⁹⁴ Art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in his essay "From Faktura to Factography," links intentionality to consequence, by emphasizing the naïveté and optimism of Soviet avant-garde artists like Lissitzky. "What in Lissitzky's hands had been a tool for instruction, political education, and the raising of consciousness was rapidly transformed into an instrument for prescribing the silence of conformity and obedience," writes Buchloh.⁹⁵

While this lineage may be clear to us today, Kabakov has cited varying degrees of exposure to the early Soviet avant-garde during the late Soviet period. "I found out about them when I was almost forty," says Kabakov, "and by that time, they were dead for me."⁹⁶ While avant-garde works were rarely exhibited in state institutions, there were exceptions to this rule. The writer and collector Nikolai Khardzhiev organized several exhibitions of the avant-garde at the Mayakovsky Museum in Moscow. They also could be seen in private collections, most notably that of George Costakis. Despite access to these works, Kabakov still expresses disenchantment with the avant-garde. "The art of

⁹⁴ Jorge Ribalta, "Introduction," in *Public Photographic Spaces: Exhibitions of Propaganda from Pressa to The Family of Man, 1928-55* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2008), 16.

⁹⁵ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October* 30 (Autumn 1984): 109. Benjamin Buchloh specifically acknowledges the Pressa Exhibition as one of the major turning points when "faktura, an essential feature of the modernist paradigm that underlay the production of the Soviet avant-garde until 1923" became factography, "supposedly rendering aspects of reality visible without interference or mediation," 103. In his book *Farewell to an Idea*, art historian T.J. Clark also picks up on this slippage between Lissitzky's early and late phases as evinced in his *Pressa* installation.

⁹⁶ Kabakov and Ross, 13. Kabakov also denies his exposure to the work of the early Soviet avant-garde in his interview with the Baigells. "We did not see it [art of the Russian avant-garde], and it was not exhibited.... We did get some from magazines, from photographs, from George Costakis' collection, which we often visited. So, we had contact with avant-garde art." See Baigell and Baigell, 146.

the 1920s occurred near the beginning of the century... Our time is an end-time. So, those earlier artists, great though they may be, belong to a different epoch, which has nothing to do with us. It is the same as with Raphael—great, but he has nothing to do with us.”⁹⁷ Although he deflects this legacy, perhaps as a defense mechanism, Kabakov still yearned to find his place in relation to the avant-garde, Raphael, and ultimately, Art History proper. As a result, the art historical canon bears hugely on Kabakov’s notions of historical succession and its consequence as discussed throughout this chapter.

Soviet Spaces on Global Display

The Kabakovs’ “total” installation is closer to what art historian Miwon Kwon calls site-specific art. An alternative to Bishop’s traditional understanding of installation art displayed within the confines of the museum or gallery, site-specific art is a type of “‘urban aesthetic’ or ‘spatial-cultural’ discourse that combines ‘ideas about art, architecture, and urban design, on the one hand, with theories of the city, social space, and public sphere, on the other.’”⁹⁸ Citing examples of public artworks in the United States and Europe, Kwon pinpoints “the intensifying conditions of spatial indifferenciation and departicularization” that “exacerbate the sense of alienation and fragmentation in contemporary life,” especially after the Second World War. She argues that, “Site specificity finds new importance because it supplies distinction of place and uniqueness of locational identity, highly seductive qualities... within the competitive

⁹⁷ Baigell and Baigell, 146.

⁹⁸ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), 2-3. The Kabakovs produce installations for institutional and public space. Both types of installation are grouped together in their catalogue raisonné.

restructuring of the global economic hierarchy.”⁹⁹ Therefore, place is a particularly critical factor when mapping the work of the Kabakovs, whose complicated identity with Russia and Eastern Europe at large is magnified when their installations are presented outside the region.

In his article “On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History,” the late Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski wrote, “We do not write our statements in the middle of nowhere, but rather in specific locations.”¹⁰⁰ His scholarship was dedicated to making the periphery productive by reconfiguring the geographical orientation of the discipline. For centuries, the Western canon has been accepted universally as a vertical history of art. Organized hierarchically, it flows from the center outward, imposing itself on the periphery. In contrast, a horizontal history of art levels the field so that examples of non-Western art are no longer addendums to, but equally integrated parts of, an expanded history of art. Calling for multiple, interrelated histories of art, Piotrowski made clear that, “The task is not to present the ‘other voice of art history,’ but to establish another paradigm for the writing of art history.”¹⁰¹ This burden of developing this more nimble paradigm does not fall solely on the West. The East must not only reevaluate its relationship to the West but also “take a fresh look at itself, defin[ing] its position and the place from which it speaks.”¹⁰² Invoking the spirit of post-colonial studies, Piotrowski

⁹⁹ Ibid. 54.

¹⁰⁰ Piotr Piotrowski, “On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History,” *Art* (Prague), Vol. 56, No. 5 (2008): 381. Piotrowski died in 2015, but his legacy lives on. See the forthcoming volume *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Part and Present*, eds. Béata Hock and Anu Allas (New York: Routledge, 2018). Mapping is a prevalent strategy in the writing of Central and Eastern European art history. See Anna Brzyski, “Introduction: Canons and Art History,” in *Partisan Canons* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 18, and IRWIN, ed., *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006).

¹⁰¹ Piotrowski, “On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History,” 379

¹⁰² Ibid., 381. For my understanding of the terms East and West, see the introduction to this dissertation.

highlighted how the East can leverage the West, turning a formerly one-way street into a two-lane highway.¹⁰³

While no authority on Kabakov, Piotrowski in his lifetime penned a few words on the artist. In his book *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, Piotrowski questions the typical readings of Kabakov through the lens of the Western art market. “We must be much more inclusive and active in our interpretations as we contemplate the ‘frame’ of the work,” wrote Piotrowski. “The language of Bałka and Kabakov is only superficially similar to the language used in the center. But if we read it through the frame, if we consider the relationship text-con-text, then we will see its actual meaning to be completely different from that found in ‘the Western art idiom.’”¹⁰⁴ Piotrowski called us back to the peripheries so as to appreciate the specificities of an artist’s work in the face of homogenizing globalization.

Advocating for a horizontal history of art, Piotrowski was not trying to erase or replace established narratives but create more regionally based parallels. Eastern Europe must not only reevaluate its relationship with the West, but “must also take a fresh look at itself, defin[ing] its position and the place from which it speaks.”¹⁰⁵ Despite this encroachment of globalism, Piotrowski defended the agency of place by stating that, “The lifting of frontiers and the globalization of art institutions (e.g., the Biennale) on the one hand weakened artists’ ties to place, while on the other hand, given newly shared access to the same markets, it made them paradoxically even stronger, creating a kind of

¹⁰³ In “Decentering Modernism: Art History and the Avant-Garde from the Periphery,” Partha Mitter writes, “Colonial mentality deems cultural transmissions to be a one-way process flowing from the Occident, but fascination with the East has periodically surfaced in the West in different guises.” The connection between ‘West’ and ‘East’ is more than a one-way street. See Mitter, “Decentering Modernism: Art History and the Avant-Garde from the Periphery,” *The Art Bulletin* (December 2008): 538.

¹⁰⁴ Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, 25.

¹⁰⁵ Piotrowski, “On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History,” 381.

local identities for sale.”¹⁰⁶ Non-Western artists can perform subjectivity in ways now denied to Western—specifically white, male—artists. The biennial is one exhibition structure that provides a stage on which locality is played. There is also the location of the biennial itself to consider, as it usually promotes a locality in which the exhibition is rooted. Having already pinpointed the biennial structure as a stage on which localities are played, Piotrowski provided an excellent segue into a discussion of how place is both literally and figuratively foregrounded at such events.¹⁰⁷ For artists who produce site-specific projects, like the Kabakovs, biennials, triennials, and other multi-year art events provide them with a third, new, liminal place for their work that is connected to, but not exclusive to, either local or global subjectivities. Through the work of artists and interpretations of curators, shape is given to spaces that become places of significance within the growing network of a global history of art.

Biennials, triennials, and quinquennial surveys like documenta are integral to the functioning of the so-called “global” art world.¹⁰⁸ As of February 2018, the directory of the Biennial Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to increasing the knowledge of and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ For this history, see Anthony Green and Charles Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016).

¹⁰⁸ Parsing the term “global” and its related terms “globalism” and “globalization” is challenging. The terms presuppose an unbounded flow of capital in the forms of goods (like artworks) and services (like human labor). The term global also assumes that markets and access to markets are even across geographical and cultural boundaries. An economic term, the global is not rooted in nationhood, as is the “international” or the “transnational,” but in systems. Unfortunately, although it bypasses traditional hierarchies, the global is by no means equitable. In fact, it is neo-colonialist, as the flow of capital is neither direct nor reciprocal. Backlash against it can also be seen in the rise of right-wing nationalism in the United States and in Europe. Theorist Frederic Jameson summarizes globalization as “the sense of an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as of a horizon of a world market.” See Frederic Jameson, “Preface,” in *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds. Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), xi. Ascribing a concrete, spatial dimension to this abstract term, Jameson’s definition materializes how the production, display, and exchange of artworks through cultural events in centers big and small has changed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The biennial is a direct product of the globalization of art. See Tim Griffen, “Worlds Apart: Contemporary Art, Globalization, and the Rise of Biennials,” in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, eds. Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 7-16.

support for such endeavors, lists two hundred twenty-seven perennial exhibitions that have taken place in venues large and small worldwide.¹⁰⁹ They are meant to distill the most popular themes and sought-after artists of the given years for an adoring public of curators, collectors, critics, cultural professionals, and the occasional tourist. Although they require long-term research and, ideally, an understanding of a given location, biennials, on the whole, are not scholarly pursuits but fall somewhere between art fairs and museums.¹¹⁰ The Venice Biennale is unique because of the national pavilions located in and outside the Giardini, one of the exhibition's primary venues. With this structure, the Biennale epitomizes the phrase "All the world's a stage," as artists work within the confines of their national pavilions in a performance of place.¹¹¹ This produces a dual geographic identity that is both the physical location of the pavilions in Venice and the

¹⁰⁹ Biennial Foundation, "Directory of Biennials," accessed February 7, 2018, <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/home/biennial-map/>. For a chronology of biennial development, see Sabine B. Vogel, *Biennials—Art on a Global Scale* (Vienna: Springer Verlag, 2010). Vogel begins with Venice then goes on to highlight several examples of significant biennials in each decade from the 1950s to the 1980s, before addressing the effects of globalization and the biennials of the 1990s and early 2000s. Biennials have been heavily theorized, specifically the increasingly important role of biennial curators. See Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, Solveig Øvstebø, *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010) and the more recent book by Gardner and Green, cited above. Whereas *The Biennial Reader* is divided into thematic sections on the history, function, curatorship, format, and politics of biennials with diverse contributions from over twenty-five leading scholars, Gardner and Green take a more chronological approach, beginning with biennials in the 1970s, which the authors identify as the turning point between modern and contemporary art in the process of globalization.

¹¹⁰ Journalist Sarah Thornton compares the Venice Biennial to a "three-hundred ring circus" with each ring vying for your undivided attention. As if the artworks alone are not overwhelming enough, the exhibition's opening days atmosphere is dramatized by a veritable who's who of contemporary art. See Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (New York: W. W Norton & Company, 2008), 225.

¹¹¹ For more on the connection between biennials and their predecessors, see Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969) and the more recent Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017). In recent years, the relationship between the national pavilion and its artists has grown tenuous; however, there is always at least some connection between the two. For example, Sharon Lockhart, an American artist who lives and works in Los Angeles, represented Poland at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017. Her project *Little Review* (2017) comprises translations, photographs, and a film produced with women at the Youth Sociotherapy Center in Rudzienko, Poland.

metaphorical location of the pavilions as extensions of their countries.¹¹² The Biennale compresses these two disparate spaces to produce a third space that is neither here nor there, both present and absent.

In 1992, visitors to documenta IX were met with an unexpected freestanding structure in the courtyard of Kassel's Fridericianum: an outhouse [Figure 4-3]. While not a traditional biennial, documenta is a large-scale multi-national exhibition that takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany. *The Toilet* made by the Kabakovs specifically for documenta IX was not functional but a *mise en scène* in the form of a standard Soviet-style communal apartment [Figure 4-4], cluttered with period furniture, appliances, clothing, and bric-a-brac.¹¹³ Although more humble than their subsequent installations at other venues, including the Park Avenue Armory in New York, the Grand Palais in Paris, or the Tate Modern in London, *The Toilet* is an early but important installation in their oeuvre, as it was commissioned just one year after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

With works by 190 artists from almost 40 countries, curator Jan Hoet produced a "documenta of locations; the topography [of the works] is the framework that holds everything together."¹¹⁴ His conception of the exhibition spoke to its role as a liminal space that brought together both the local and the global. Its theme was "From body to body to bodies," reflecting on the physical effects of "such dangers as AIDS and

¹¹² A national pavilion is like an embassy, an exclave deemed a legal part of the given country.

¹¹³ *The Toilet* is in the permanent collection of S.M.A.K., the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, Belgium. *The Toilet* was recreated in 2004 for the exhibition *The Incident in the Museum and Other Installations* at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and in 2008 at Winzavod Contemporary Art Center in Moscow. The former marked Ilya's return to Russia. The latter, which was also heralded as the Kabakovs' return to Russia, took place concurrently with their exhibition at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art. For documentation of the Kabakovs' 2008 exhibitions in Russia, see Wallach, *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Enter Here*.

¹¹⁴ Jan Hoet, "An Introduction," *documenta IX*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1992), 17-18.

multinational wars, nuclear catastrophes, and global climate disasters.”¹¹⁵ A lot had happened around the world in the preceding five years—the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Tiananmen Square massacre, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the beginnings of Yugoslav and Gulf Wars, the Los Angeles Rodney King riots, and the invention of the World Wide Web, to name just a few.

Against this backdrop, Ilya describes the overwhelming feeling of participating in this much-anticipated international exhibition: “With my usual nervousness, I had the impression that I had been invited to see the Queen or to the palace where the fate of the arts is decided. For the artist, [documenta] is a kind of Olympic Games... The poor soul of a Russian impostor was in agony in front of these legitimate representatives of great contemporary art.”¹¹⁶ This familiar insecurity, which has haunted the artist throughout his career, proved to be constructive. Exoticized by the West, like animals on display at a zoo, the Kabakovs took this opportunity of new and increased exposure to make a statement about everyday Soviet life. *The Toilet* demonstratively laid bare a stereotypical Soviet identity for the world—at least, the art world—to see and judge.

Despite negative apprehensions, *The Toilet* at documenta IX was successful. As an immersive environment or “total” installation, it unexpectedly dislocated the genteel viewer by redeploying traces of the recent Soviet past. Those objects reinscribed but not ossified the Soviet legacy in the eyes of the viewer at the pivotal moment of global reconfiguration that was the early 1990s. *The Toilet*, as its name suggests, was an outhouse, measuring thirty-six feet wide and eleven feet deep or just a little under 400

¹¹⁵ Official documenta website: https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_ix. All that said, many critics argued that documenta IX was a failure—just as Eurocentric as the previous editions.

¹¹⁶ As quoted in Svetlana Boym, “On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Home,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, 2 (Winter 1998): 508.

square feet.¹¹⁷ This installation was not located in the Orangerie, the city's central park, or in the Fridericianum, the main exhibition hall, but behind it—outside in the courtyard.¹¹⁸ With a team of construction workers, the Kabakovs erected the rough gray concrete walls of this squat, rectangular, flat-roofed structure based on numerous detailed drawings. *The Toilet*'s façade remained bare save for two large hand-painted Cyrillic letters indicating the left side for men and the right side for women.¹¹⁹ Even if most viewers did not recognize these symbols, some could have guessed its purpose, since its exterior mimicked the primitive design of public toilets across the Soviet Union and still in Russia today.¹²⁰ For a viewer less familiar with the Soviet context, *The Toilet* would have been identified as an art object within the confines of an exhibition.¹²¹ Although its materials were simple, *The Toilet* took great time, planning, and resources to produce. While not credited for the project in the documenta catalogue, Emilia was on site and involved in the logistics of its execution.

Inside *The Toilet*, a total of six doorless stalls, which were nothing more than large holes cut into platforms separated by thin partitions, lined the back wall. Unfortunately for those who waited in the queue to enter the structure, these were not functional. Instead, they were incorporated into the overcrowded interior of what resembled a two-room Soviet apartment, cluttered with furniture, housewares, clothing, and everyday bric-a-brac: underwear drying on a makeshift line; books piled up on the

¹¹⁷ Measurements were obtained from a diagram reproduced in Wallach, *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, 223. *The Toilet* measured roughly 44 square meters or 475 square feet. Micro apartments, which are popular in metropolitan areas, now range from 200 to 400 square feet.

¹¹⁸ I appreciate my advisor Jane A. Sharp's observation that the courtyard was once a frequent location for outhouses in Central Asia, such as at the Nukus Museum of Art in Uzbekistan.

¹¹⁹ The letters were M for *мужской* or male and Ж for *женский* or female.

¹²⁰ Ilya Kabakov, *The Toilet* (1993), 5. This is a limited edition notebook from a self-published series. Arguably, this style of toilet is still prevalent in many second and third world nations, thus, while important to note its existence in Russia today, it should not be essentialized as solely Russian.

¹²¹ The security guard could also remind one of a bathroom attendant.

desk; dishes covering the table. Based on documentary photographs, it looked as if it would have been very difficult to navigate this claustrophobic space without bumping into someone or something. The living room was on the men's side, while the bedroom was on the women's side, and a small opening in the wall allowed for the viewer to cross over. The only natural light and ventilation came from long, narrow windows at the top of the walls.

Like many of the installations executed by the Kabakovs since the late 1980s, *The Toilet* is immersive: a “total” installation. Objects play an important role in a total installation. As Kabakov observes in his lectures on the topic, it is important to distinguish between the status of objects in the West and East. Whereas the West privileges the object, the East privileges space, concerning itself with the position of objects and not with their materiality. Kabakov explains, “The very same objects which in the West live independently: tables, chairs, etc., in our country [Russia] become merely accessories of the general atmosphere, are engulfed by it. They play a role assigned by this atmosphere, serving merely as insignificant parts of a mysterious but powerful and persuasive ‘whole.’”¹²² Nevertheless, great value is placed on objects in total installations because they are signifiers of a specific time and place. For example, when *The Toilet* was recreated at the Winzavod Centre for Contemporary Art in 2008, the artists painstakingly sourced Soviet kitsch in antiques stores and markets as well as from the personal collections of the staff at the hotel where they were staying.¹²³ With their outmoded patinas, these objects key the viewer into a certain time and place marked as different from the present. Referencing the Soviet Union, a place that no longer exists,

¹²² Kabakov, *On the Total Installation*, 244. “West” and “East” are terms used by Kabakov.

¹²³ This is well documented in Wallach, *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Enter Here*.

they—like the *starocie* is Paulina Ołowska’s café-bar *Nova Popularna*—give presence to an absence. In *The Toilet* Kabakovs use these emotive objects as mediums to channel history.

The Toilet at documenta IX followed in the tradition of the total installation established by Kabakov’s *Ten Characters*, which was exhibited in 1988 at Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York. Like *Ten Characters*, which presented a series of thematic rooms within the confines of a standard white cube gallery, *The Toilet* also hinges upon a non-correspondence between the exterior and the interior. Where one expects to find a toilet, one finds an apartment. While this literal *en suite* may be a little ironic, it is made with the utmost respect because it is culled from the artist’s biography. When Kabakov was an art student in Moscow, his mother defied Soviet protocols in order to be closer to him, working as a cleaning lady and discreetly living without the proper residency permit in the school’s defunct lavatory. Through *The Toilet*’s multi-sensorial, object-based environment, the Kabakovs draws subtle attention to how people managed in the Soviet period. In opening up their memories of lived experiences to a wider audience, the works transgress the fine line between the public and the private in everyday Soviet life.

For certain artists in the Soviet Union, such as Kabakov, who identified with and practiced within an unofficial, nonconformist culture, one of the main tactics of what Michel de Certeau calls “making do” was internal immigration, or a kind of isolation that was not absolute but limited to a small group or *kruzhok* centered around the apartment.¹²⁴ As Matthew Jesse Jackson explains, the *kruzhok* is a nineteenth century

¹²⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 30. Italics are in the original.

concept that, when revived in the late Soviet period, denoted not only a group of people, but also “an informal semiprivate/semipublic meeting place for theory and praxis among writers and artists.”¹²⁵ This second definition is crucial because it allowed the *kruzhok*, which typically met around tables in apartments or artists’ studios, to be an autonomous place within another space. The *kruzhok* gave unofficial artists an exhibition forum, albeit one without an established market or professional art criticism.¹²⁶ It was, perhaps, the only place the artist-character could be himself, as he was among other artist-characters. Maintaining a vague and frustrating position between the public and the private, this “catacomb culture” was concurrently a refuge from official culture and an outlet for unofficial interpersonal communication.¹²⁷ Of course, these established configurations of private and public places began to breakdown during *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The entire landscape seemed to change in an instant thanks to the infamous 1988 Sotheby’s auction of modern and contemporary Russian art in Moscow. This and other commercial art activities at the time brought the art market to where it had never gone before, taking dealers, collectors, critics, and curators along for the ride.

¹²⁵ Jackson, 2.

¹²⁶ Boris Groys has talked a lot about the lack of market in the USSR. See Boris Groys, “Communist Conceptual Art,” in *Total Enlightenment* among other sources.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 54. Doublings like this permeated Soviet life. For example, it is well known that Kabakov was an official artist by day, illustrating children’s books, and an unofficial artist by night, making art often seen only by his most intimate acquaintances. The artist’s studio was an intensely contested space, not only because of a general housing shortage. While the USSR Union of Artists provided its members with work spaces, art supplies, and exhibition opportunities, these privileges were under constant threat, as even the mere suspicion of illegal activity would be grounds for expulsion. In the case of unofficial artists, many would make art “for the drawer” or, in Kabakov’s case, “for the studio,” acknowledging that their works may never make it beyond. In this, I am referencing and reworking for the art historical context the Russian idioms *писать в стол* [write for the table] and *писать в ящик* [write for the drawer], which are well known expressions in regard to Soviet literature. The situation of soviet housing under Khrushchev is fascinating but too large a topic to fold into this essay at this time. See Iurii Gerchuk, “The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the USSR (1954-1964),” in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, eds. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000): 81-99. Gerchuk discusses the developments made during the Thaw to apartment blocks, which included replacing the yard or *dvor* with more flowing and social communal areas without strict divisions. Kabakov’s attic studio at 6/1 Sretensky Boulevard, Moscow was legendary. See: <http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/ilya-kabakovs/>.

Literary scholar Svetlana Boym eloquently describes the complexity of spaces—local and global, public and private—and how they relate to the collective and individual in the Soviet Union.¹²⁸ Communal apartments disrupted the private realm of the conjugal family, and there was no system of commodity exchange to constitute civil society.¹²⁹ Sociological interviews reveal the “feelings of humiliation, discomfort, and tension” experienced by cohabiters in everyday situations, such as when devising a bathroom schedule for twenty people.¹³⁰ With the toilet commonly located near the kitchen, the communal apartment debased an act that is valued, at least in certain cultures, as personal and intimate. In 1984, Kabakov commissioned his friend and photographer Georgy Kizeval’ter to capture these scenes of cluttered countertops, haphazardly arranged furniture, dark and grimy lavatories, and eerily empty corridors in the series *Moscow Communal World*.¹³¹ Years later, the Kabakovs attempted to recreate these same feelings in *The Toilet* for an innocently naïve international art world audience by fostering a direct affective relationship between the objects and the viewer within a confined space. Although he rarely used Kabakov as example, Piotrowski in 2010 identified him as “one of the main chroniclers and deconstructionists of this ‘communal world’s order’... [who] has not freed himself of this system, and therefore could be considered its ‘prisoner.’”¹³²

¹²⁸ Svetlana Boym, *Commonplaces: Mythologies of Every Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 73 and 101, and Katerina Gerasimova, “Public Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment,” in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 207.

¹²⁹ Boym, *Commonplaces*, 30.

¹³⁰ Gerasimova, 207, 217-218.

¹³¹ Photographs from the series are part of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union. Kabakov used the photographs in his artist book, *In the Communal Kitchen: New Documents and Materials*, ed. Luc Derycke (Paris: Galerie Dian Verny, 1993).

¹³² Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 231-2.

This speaks to the continued pressure placed on the Kabakovs to perform their Soviet identities.

Just one year after they appeared in documenta, the Kabakovs represented Russia at the 45th Venice Biennale. Russia has a long history at the Biennale, dating back to 1895 when three Russian artists participated in the inaugural exhibition. A Russian section was included within the main international exhibition in each subsequent edition of the Biennale. Although the first national pavilions broke ground in 1907, the Russian Pavilion [Figure 4-5] did not open until 1914.¹³³ Upon the order of Tsar Nicholas II, architect Alexei Shchusev designed the originally lagune blue stucco, three-story pavilion centered by a large, glass-enclosed skylight in the Russian Revival style.¹³⁴ Popular in the second half of the nineteenth century, this style is characterized by ornate Byzantine and indigenous Slavic motifs, which branded the pavilion as visibly Russian.¹³⁵ When the Kabakovs took over the Russian Pavilion in 1993, it had just been transferred back to Russia after serving as the Soviet Pavilion since 1924.¹³⁶

¹³³ The pavilion is located in the southern part of the Giardini. Its entrance faces north, into the garden. Behind the pavilion facing south is the lagoon. Today, it stands between the national pavilions of Venezuela and Japan.

¹³⁴ Shchusev would go on to build Vladimir Lenin's mausoleum on Red Square. He was a beloved architect by Imperial and Communist regimes alike. The State Museum of Architecture is named in his honor. For more information on the Pavilion and its architect, see Marianna Evstratova and Sergey Koluzakov, eds., *Russian Pavilion in Venice: A. V. Shchusev* (Moscow: Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, 2014).

¹³⁵ This is a decidedly conservative style that would appear outmoded after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the dawning of a new era in architecture, namely Constructivism. For more information on the Russian Revival and other styles, see James Cracraft and Daniel B. Rowland, *Architectures of Russian Identity: 1500 to the present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹³⁶ Due to the fighting of World War I, there were no Biennales between 1915 and 1920. At the 12th Venice Biennale in 1920, the Russian Pavilion was dubbed the White Pavilion, as it represented the deposed Tsarist and new Communist orientation of the Soviet Union. The Russian Pavilion was closed in 1922 and reopened as the Soviet Pavilion in 1924, as a result of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Italy and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. For more information on Russia's participation in the Venice Biennale, see Nikolai Molok, ed., *Russian Artists at the Venice Biennale: 1895-2013* (Moscow: Stella Art Foundation, 2013).

Much like the fledgling Russian Federation, the pavilion was in crisis. Its newly appointed commissioner Leonid Bazhanov was under great economic pressure but still obliged to choose the artist or artists who would best represent Russia in the battle of nations that is the Biennale. Thus, he extended the invitation to the Kabakovs as more than just a matter of convenience. Since Ilya's immigration six years prior, he and Emilia enjoyed the cachet that came from a seemingly endless stream of exhibitions in museums and kunsthallen across the United States and Western Europe.¹³⁷ "It was clear to everyone doing contemporary art in Russia that [Ilya] Kabakov was the number one figure... They [the Kabakovs and their gallerist Peter Pakesch] assumed all the costs. There was no money [in the Ministry of Culture], and the pavilion was in a state of semi-collapse."¹³⁸ Bestowed with this great honor, the Kabakovs may have solved Bazhanov's logistical problems, but they did not necessarily rebrand the Russian Pavilion as expected.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ "We found ourselves in the very best period of European-American museum activity... There was an exhibition in 1985 in Bern in the Kunsthalle organized by the Jolles family [art historian Claudia Jolles], and it pushed us to mount museum exhibitions in Marseille, Frankfurt, Paris, and so forth. That is, from the start, we jumped onto the museum level," says Kabakov. See Appendix IV. However, this was not his first exhibition abroad. He participated in the 1965 group exhibition *Contemporary Alternatives II* at Castello Spagnolo in L'Aquila, Italy. See Kabakov and Ross, 15.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 520. According to *The New York Times*, the Kabakov's project cost \$250,000 and was paid for by numerous sponsors, including a Milan-based engineering company. Emilia, cited as "the artist's wife," is quoted saying, "We sold paintings to subsidize things and got help from private donations." Carol Vogel, *The Venice Biennale: An Art Bazaar Abuzz*, *The New York Times*, June 12, 1993, accessed February 6, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/12/arts/the-venice-biennale-an-art-bazaar-abuzz.html?pagewanted=all>. Kabakov's general impression of this period, the 1990s, is rather different: "Large installations at that time, up until the year 2000, were very easy to make due to a variety of reasons. Money was given out in any amount... How much did it cost? We did not even know. There were sponsors... It was a very happy time... You did want you wanted, and there were no conversations about how it was expensive or how sponsors needed to be found." See Appendix IV. These remarks speak to the Kabakovs' desire to spare no expense in the creation of their vision. While a testament to their belief in creativity, it undoubtedly requires a lot of hard work and perseverance, namely on the part of Emilia as the manager of their activities.

¹³⁹ Despite this, the Biennale's jury awarded the pavilion a *Menzione d'Onore* (honorable mention).

Entitled *The Red Pavilion*, their installation was heavily symbolic, directly referencing its Soviet legacy.¹⁴⁰

Inspired by the pavilion's state of disrepair, the Kabakovs used its ruins as the foundation for their project. With a team of workers, they built a wooden fence around the perimeter of the building, as if it were condemned [Figure 4-6]. They created a second barrier by haphazardly scattering piles of construction debris between the Giardini's gravel pathway and fence, obstructing the pavilion's entrance. This produced a jarring interruption in the orderly and peaceful flow of the garden's bucolic landscape.¹⁴¹ Inside the dimly lit pavilion, they exaggerated its already dismal condition by erecting a web of scaffolding. Disused paint cans, stacks of bricks, dirty rags, and heaps of broken plywood boards were strewn throughout the space. The Kabakovs intentionally transformed the pavilion into a construction site, which still appeared as if it were active upon the Biennale's opening. "One could see that something is not right... And many visitors, certain that the pavilion was not ready... didn't even turn in there," writes Kabakov in his description of the installation.¹⁴² This first impression was so prevalent that a sign was made, directing visitors to the entrance.

However, the Kabakovs anticipated this reaction. As with all their works, they meticulously planned *The Red Pavilion* from execution to reception. "I tend to collect

¹⁴⁰ Based on a photograph, the pavilion still bore the letters URSS, identifying it as the Soviet Pavilion—in Italian, L'Unione delle Repubbliche Socialiste Sovietiche. See Molok, 525. *The Red Pavilion* was acquired in 1993 by the Museum Ludwig in Cologne. It was exhibited that year in the group exhibition *Von Malewitsch bis Kabakov: Russische Avantgarde im 20. Jahrhundert*, Die Sammlung Ludwig at the Josef-Haubrich-Kunsthalle.

¹⁴¹ At the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009, Roman Ondák representing Slovakia in the joint Czech and Slovak Pavilion exhibited *Loop*, an installation that extended the gardens and paths of the Giardini into and through the pavilion. To produce the immersive installation, Ondák used soil, plants, rocks, twigs, and leaves from the Giardini. Like with the Kabakovs' installation over a decade prior, his gesture was not perceptible to all. See Kathrin Rhomberg, "Czech Republic and Slovak Republic: *Loop*," in *Making Worlds / Fare Mondi: Participating Countries and Collateral Events*, eds. Daniel Birnbaum and Jochen Volz (Venice: Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia, 2009), 110.

¹⁴² Ilya Kabakov, *The Red Pavilion* (self-pub., 1993), 12.

more and more material about the installations,” says Ilya, “on the one hand, out of a fear that the installations themselves may one day no longer exist but, on the other hand, also with regard to the viewer,” says Kabakov.¹⁴³ Drawings [Figure 4-7] by Ilya not only provide fabrication information, such as dimensions, but also plot the viewer’s experience as she moves through the installation.¹⁴⁴ Wanting to make a big impression, the Kabakovs counterbalanced the initial obstacles that frustrated the viewer’s expectations with the mellifluous sound of triumphal music emanating from within the pavilion’s grounds.¹⁴⁵ Composed by Vladimir Tarasov, this compellation of archival audio recordings from the Soviet period included clips from orchestral performances, May Day speeches, and military parades.¹⁴⁶ Like a siren, it drew the viewer into the

¹⁴³ Ilya Kabakov and Barbara Wally, “Conversation between Ilya Kabakov and Barbara Wally,” *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future*, ed. Arne Ehmann and Dietgard Grimmer (Paris: Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, 2002), n.p.

¹⁴⁴ In his description of the work, Kabakov projects that the viewer will miss the connection between what is inside and outside the pavilion. He surmises that the viewer erroneously will dismiss what is inside the pavilion, which he refers to as “everyday, ‘non-artistic’ space.” *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future*, 14, 17.

¹⁴⁵ In an interview with Boris Groys, Kabakov states, “I wanted to make an impression... I had to make an impression, and this is too difficult at festivals of such scale as the Biennale, with its deadly heterogeneity.” He attributes this need to Venice itself. Whereas documenta, held in a small German town, “appears rather ambiguous and quite austere, if not to say gloomy, depressing,” the Venice Biennale captures the excitement of a holiday or celebration full of great pleasure. He had hoped to make an impression by postponing or deferring this pleasure. Kabakov, *The Red Pavilion*, 60-62.

¹⁴⁶ Tarasov had collaborated with the Kabakovs before on *The Red Wagon* (1991), addressed earlier in this chapter, and more recently on *Incident at the Museum, or Water Music*, which was exhibited at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in 1992. That installation was later exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary in Chicago (1993), the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt (1994), Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona (1995), Centro de Arte Moderna (José de Azeredo Perdigão), da Fundação Gulbenkian in Lisbon (1995), and the Grand Palais in Paris (2001). It comprises two rooms in the style of a nineteenth century picture gallery. The ceiling has sprung a leak, threatening the paintings hanging on the walls. Tarps lay across the floor and buckets are positioned throughout the rooms. The silence typical of a museum is replaced with the sound of water dripping to the score composed by Tarasov. The paintings, which are on loan from the Barnaul Art Museum, are rendered in a Socialist Realist style. They are attributed to Stepan Yakolevich Koshelev, whose oeuvre has been rediscovered and rightfully place among “the renowned names... of this ‘heroic generation,’” including Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, and Vasily Kandinsky. By this time, Kabakov is already known for the production of works attributed to other—fictional—artists; however, this installation is one of the first to place the oeuvre of a canonically Soviet artist in a traditional museum setting. This is seen in later installations, such as the *Life and Creativity of Charles Rosenthal*, first exhibited in 1999 at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Mito, Japan and later developed into *The Alternative History of Art*, which is discussed later in this chapter. For more on *Incident at the Museum, or Water*

pavilion. Kabakov compares the feeling of curiosity, which overtakes the viewer, to buying a ticket for an amusement park after merely hearing but not seeing the fun and games it has to offer.¹⁴⁷ In both cases, entry gives one access to an otherwise alluringly exclusive and mysterious world.

Once amidst the chaos inside the Russian Pavilion, the viewer's attention was directed toward a brightly lit corridor along the pavilion's back wall. It led the viewer to a doorway that opened onto a balcony overlooking the fenced-in backyard. Here, the viewer finally found the source of the music: three horn speakers affixed to a flagpole rising from a "totalitarian monster" [Figure 4-8].¹⁴⁸ A three-tiered, squared structure approximately six meters high and three meters wide, it was no more than a "little shed."¹⁴⁹ Standing in the shadows of Shchusev's massive Russian Pavilion, it sounded much bigger than its size. Once again, the Kabakovs presented the viewer with yet another stark, deliberately anticlimactic, contrast—clean and dirty, dark and light, big and small. Painted pink with red and gold accents and adorned with red stars, red flags, and the official seal of the Soviet Union, the Kabakovs' pavilion comically appropriated a distinctly Stalinist, neo-classical style of architecture.¹⁵⁰ Although equipped with a door

Music, see Toni Stooss, ed., *Ilya Kabakov: Installations, 1983-2000. Catalogue Raisonné*, Volume 1 (Dusseldorf: Richter Verlag), 394-401.

¹⁴⁷ In a footnote to the Russian introduction, Kabakov writes, "Это состояние напряженного любопытство знает последние каждый кто слышал на ярмарочной площади подобные звуки из-за глухого Забора и хотел было поскорее купить билет чтобы про кинут в этот таинственный и загадочный мир." ["This state of intense curiosity is known to all who have heard such sounds at the fairground behind the dense fence and wanted to quickly buy a ticket so that they could throw themselves into this secret and mysterious world."] Kabakov, *The Red Pavilion*, 1.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, 2. Kabakov uses the word "сарайчик," a diminutive of "сарай," a Russian word borrowed from Persian denoting a small wooden construction. In colloquial speech, it can be used to denote an ugly or messy room or building, imparting a negative connotation. The pavilion speakers are reminiscent of the designs for propaganda kiosks, loudspeakers, and radio announcers made in the 1920s by avant-garde artist Gustavs Klucis.

¹⁵⁰ With its triangular profile, it could be compared to Moscow's Seven Sisters skyscrapers or Lenin's tomb, which was designed by Shchusev. For the Russian Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, artist

and two windows, the pavilion was hermetically sealed. Even if the viewer were able to approach the pavilion, she could not enter. A modestly constructed red wooden bench was placed at a distance from the pavilion, as if taunting the viewer with a space to contemplate its grandeur.

The Russian Pavilion's balcony served as a viewing platform for a vista that stretched far beyond the parameters of the Russian Pavilion, past the lagoon and into the horizon dotted by the many tiny islands off the southern coast of Venice. Kabakov compares the viewer's experience of this vista to that of watching a play or looking at a painting. "[The planes] unfold just like a theater (or in a painting which is a theater) where the viewer is immobile and the motion—even, calm, and smooth—takes places in the measured movement of the eyes from plane to plane," he writes.¹⁵¹ This added another layer of contrast to *The Red Pavilion*. Whereas the first part foregrounded the viewer's mobility, here the viewer was effectually debilitated, forced into passive absorption of the remainder of the artwork.

Given the Kabakovs' history, namely Ilya's experience as an artist working in both official and unofficial capacities in the Soviet Union, the viewer's frustration mirrors that of nonconformist artists during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Through their occasional exposure to Western publications and guests, they could observe but only imagine experiencing this alternative way of life. In *The Red Pavilion*, the viewer had the luxury of exiting off the balcony back into the Giardini, leaving behind the Kabakovs'

Irina Nakhova presented *The Green Pavilion*, a multi-part project in response to both Shchuev's and Kabakov's pavilions. By painting the exterior of the pavilion forest green, Nakhova returned it to its original color. As curator Margarita Tupitsyn points out, green, which Nakhova used throughout her exhibition inside, was associated with both the Soviet communal apartment and perestroika. Nakhova used this color to bridge these associations along with the multiple periods of her own career. See Margarita Tupitsyn, "Introduction and Acknowledgements: The Russian World: A Hare or a Bear?," in *The Green Pavilion* (Moscow: Stella Art Foundation, 2015).

¹⁵¹ Kabakov, *The Red Pavilion*, 14.

world. *The Red Pavilion* was foreboding, drawing attention to a corrupt ideology that had only recently passed but still threatened to return. Kabakov warns that, “The ‘little pavilion’ is the territory of a world which has not disappeared anywhere but has only hidden, concealing itself behind the back of another... waiting for its hour, so it may return.”¹⁵² While not at all nostalgic for the Soviet era, *The Red Pavilion* was another representation of Soviet reality by the Kabakovs—different in form from *The Toilet* but similar in meaning. More than just a “brooded-about political piece” or a “swan song of an era, which has come to an end,” as some critics claimed, the Kabakovs’ pavilion, in fact, both inside and out drew attention to what was beyond the horizon line: another ideology, that of capitalism.¹⁵³

The Kabakovs returned to Venice for the 49th Biennale in 2001, this time not in the Russian Pavilion, but in the Arsenale, where they produced a work included in Harald Szeemann’s exhibition *Plateau of Humankind*. The exhibition staged a “place which one looks at and from which one will be seen, a place in which the public onlooker is the protagonist and the measurer of things, a place of encounter between artist, work and spectator.”¹⁵⁴ For their contribution, the Kabakovs revisited Ilya’s 1983 text “Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future” in an eponymous installation. Upon entering *Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future* [Figure 4-9], the viewer is met with a tall

¹⁵² Ibid., 3.

¹⁵³ Michael Kimmelman, “Art View: Death in Venice (at the Beinnale),” *The New York Times*, June 27, 1993, accessed February 7, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/27/arts/art-view-death-in-venice-at-the-biennale.html?pagewanted=all>; Michael Hübl, “Lärm und Lähmung an der Lagune. 45 Biennale di Venezia: Eindrücke aus den Giardini,” *Kunstforum International* 124 (1993): 236, as quoted in Molok, 521. The Russian press reported on the installation, dismissing it as “simple” and “Straightforward.” Mikhail Yur’evich Bode, “Venetsia s nadezhdoi smotrit na Vostok i razmyshliaet o sud’bakh Zapada” [“With Hope, Venice Looks to East and Reflects on the Destinies of the West”], *Kommersant*, June 24, 1992, accessed February 6, 2018, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/51570>.

¹⁵⁴ Harald Szeemann, “The Timeless, Grand Narration of Human Existence in Its Time,” in *La Biennale di Venezia* (Venice: Electa, 2001), xvii.

wooden fence, similar to that constructed by the Kabakovs around the Russian Pavilion in 1993.¹⁵⁵ In order to see over this fence, the viewer must climb a set of stairs onto a bridge that arches over the width of the fenced-in area. From this viewing platform, she is able to see a train pulling out of a station. The artists describe the viewer as “a bird in flight” who sees the scene “from ‘another space,’ from the future,” as the departed train is nearly out of sight.¹⁵⁶ The windows of the train’s caboose emit a warm, fiery orange-red light. The phrase “Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future” in big, red, digital letters scrolls slowly across its rear destination screen. The station’s left-hand platform is empty, but on the right-hand platform, a number of discarded canvases propped up against the wall have cascaded down onto the tracks, where they lay in a haphazard pile. Although they were undamaged by the departing train, they have been left behind, thus deemed invaluable. They are the works of artists who have not been taken into the future but condemned to the dustbin of history.

In the text accompanying the installation *Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future*, Ilya claims these abandoned works as his own. In fact, the paintings, made in 2001 for inclusion in this installation, are immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with his oeuvre since they replicate his early conceptual style.¹⁵⁷ Just as Ilya did in 1983, he again admits to agonizing over his legacy, despite the intense pressure to live in the

¹⁵⁵ This installation was exhibited again in 2002 at Galerie im Traklhaus in Salzburg and later that year at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Paris. In 2017, the installation, which is on permanent loan from the Geyer & Geyer Collection to the MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Art in Vienna, was the focal point of the Kabakovs’ eponymous exhibition at Tate Modern in London, which will be addressed in the last section of this chapter.

¹⁵⁶ Ilya Kabakov, “Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future,” *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future*, n.p.

¹⁵⁷ They include the paintings *By the Edge*, *The Cyclist*, *The Fly*, *Elena Pavlovna Riss: Whose Grater is This?*, *Anna Lvovna Loeva: Whose Ladle is This?*, and *Ivan Trofimovich Goes for Firewood*.

moment.¹⁵⁸ He attributes this insatiable desire for immortality to a nineteenth century sensibility. He writes, “This problem today is masked by the dominant reality, the demand to be ‘contemporary’ no matter what! The demand ‘to exist today’ overwhelms the question: What will happen to these works tomorrow?”¹⁵⁹ It appears as if he lacks faith in the contemporary artist, who is not “like a prophet discovering the future” (as were the artists of the avant-garde), but “the product of mass media influence” in which artwork is merely an “illustration of your life-style.”¹⁶⁰ However, artists do not control their fates in the annals of art history. Instead, art history is like “a train, where each artist is a station, which takes up a fixed period in the timetable.”¹⁶¹ The train of art history travels across space and time to these stations. While it may bypass some, it may return to others. “There is a main track of art history, and there are side tracks,” says Ilya.¹⁶² According to him, this train is steered by museums, the ultimate arbiters of history.

In the installation *Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future*, the Kabakovs attempt to transcend the conventional parameters of time and space, identifying a fissure between today—the present—and tomorrow—the future. The fulcrum between these two disparate temporalities is the past, represented by his body of early works recreated (repainted) for this installation. Ilya’s use of the train as a metaphor for the passage of time, which he returns to throughout his writings, culminates in this installation. Trains share with time a past or point of departure, a present or stops along the way, and a future or a destination. While trains are a pre-modern invention, they came to symbolize

¹⁵⁸ It is customary for each installation to be accompanied by a text written by Kabakov or jointly, with Emilia. For excerpts from these texts along with sketches for and images of installations, see his three-volume installation catalogue raisonné cited earlier in this chapter.

¹⁵⁹ Ilya Kabakov, “Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future,” *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future*, n.p.

¹⁶⁰ Kabakov and Wally, n.p.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., n.p.

¹⁶² Ibid., n.p.

modernity, industrialization, and technological advancement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries after the introduction of the steam-powered locomotive. Trains cross borders and decrease the literal distances between two places at great speeds, providing riders with a sense of unfettered freedom. Although looking into the train from the platform can be isolating, for the Kabakovs it was a familiar place, “in the corner, on the margin, a very Russian position.”¹⁶³ It provided them a distance from which they could take back control of their narrative. Even though you can best assess the continuum of History as represented by a train from its platform, only a ticket onto that train guarantees your participation in it.¹⁶⁴

Alternative Histories of Art

For their 2004 exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, the Kabakovs united all their ideas on History in their magnum opus *The Alternative History of Art*.¹⁶⁵ It is an installation comprising three parts, that is, three oeuvres of three artists who are said to have lived, worked, and crossed paths in the twentieth century: Charles Rosenthal (1898-1933), Ilya Kabakov (1933-), and Igor Spivak (1970-) [Figure 4-10].

¹⁶³ Ibid., n.p.

¹⁶⁴ It would be remiss not to note that Ilya was intimately familiar with trains, having worked at a rail yard to support himself in the mid-1950s. Katy Wan, “Chronology,” *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into The Future*, 206. According to Victor Tupitsyn, Kabakov authored “Two Railway Men” in 1981 regarding Erik Bulatov’s work and friendship. In it, Tupitsyn claims, Kabakov attributes the text in Bulatov’s famous *Danger* to a railway sign and states that both men were fond of railway posters. See Victor Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious: Communal (Post)Modernism in Russia* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 305 n28.

¹⁶⁵ The three-part installation began in 1999 with the exhibition *Life and Creativity of Charles Rosenthal*, at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Mito, Japan. It was subsequently reinstalled twice in Germany in 2000 and 2001. Its three parts came together in 2004 in Cleveland and again in 2008 in Moscow at Garage Center for Contemporary Art, now Garage Museum of Contemporary Art. See Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *An Alternative History of Art: Rosenthal, Kabakov, Spivak* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2005). This work is also the subject of two short articles, which focus on themes (the viewer and Jewish heritage) tangential to my argument here: Wendy Koenig, “The Heroic Generation: Fictional Socialist Realist Painters in the Work of Ilya Kabakov,” *SECAC Review* XV, 4: 448-455, and Harriet Murav, “Ilya Kabakov and the (Traumatic) Void of Soviet History,” *Slavonica* 17, 2 (November 2011): 123-133.

Their biographies and bodies of work are figments of the Kabakovs' imagination. Born in the Russian Empire, Rosenthal [Figure 4-11] studied under Kazimir Malevich and other legendary artists of the Soviet avant-garde in Petrograd, Vitebsk, and Paris, where he eventually resettled. While his works are clearly influenced by the transcendental geometric abstraction characteristic of this period, they remain indebted to the Impressionistic tendencies of the previous century. In the 1970s, long after Rosenthal's death in France, Ilya Kabakov [Figure 4-12], whose lifespan mirrors that of the real Ilya Josefovich Kabakov, discovered Rosenthal's work and began to emulate it, learning from him like a student would from a teacher. However, where Rosenthal saw lightness, or hopefulness, in his works, communicated in his use of large swatches of white paint, Kabakov saw only darkness, or hopelessness, in his late Soviet works, illustrated by black voids. Finally, Igor Spivak [Figure 4-13] is fashioned as a rather stereotypical young, post-Soviet artist who is tempted by the market's allure yet sabotaged by a lack of self-reflexivity and self-control. Producing elegiac works that nostalgically mourn not the fallen Soviet state but the lifestyle it purported to create, Spivak appears to be related to Rosenthal and Kabakov by heritage only; yet, their connection is once again found in the fine balance between lightness and darkness, hopefulness and hopelessness across their works. "Rosenthal is full of hope, he strives toward the future; Kabakov is caught up in the endless, unchanging present of today; and for Spivak, 'brightness' (whiteness) opens up once again, only this time it is a light in the depths of the century, in its past," write the Kabakovs.¹⁶⁶ Collectively, the three artists constitute a distinctly local—that is,

¹⁶⁶ Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, "An Alternative History of Art: C. Rosenthal, I. Kabakov, I. Spivak," in *An Alternative History of Art*, 225.

Russian—art history marked by “Soviet life as if it were a fog—always partially disappearing.”¹⁶⁷

Curated by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *The Alternative History of Art* is presented as a multi-room, museum-quality exhibition, bringing approximately two hundred eighty works by these fictitious artists into dialogue with one another. “The entire installation should speak about the eternal, serene current of History flowing inside these rooms,” write the Kabakovs.¹⁶⁸ As a result, one not only perceives the similarities and differences among the artists but is able to trace a history of twentieth century art that deviates from the accepted canon. Evident in the Kabakovs’ parallel trajectory of twentieth-century art is a reverence for the past as well as an attention to locality. “What worries me is that when the artist throws away tradition so radically, he arrives at a void [*toten Punkt*],” says Ilya.¹⁶⁹

The Kabakovs locate the roots of tradition in the museum. “I, from the other side [the Soviet Union], dreamed of falling [*popast*] into the history of art... for me, the museum was the only form of historical existence when I lived in the Soviet Union,” says Ilya.¹⁷⁰ Thinking back to that time, he recalls visiting museums, like the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow and the State Hermitage Museum in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), and spending hours in their galleries to the point of exhaustion. “For me, the museum was the image of immortality [*obraz bessmertie*],” he says.¹⁷¹ The idea that once one is canonized in the museum, one can never be thrown out is naïve, even though it unfortunately holds some truth. More often than not, the museum excludes artists who

¹⁶⁷ See Appendix IV.

¹⁶⁸ Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, “An Alternative History of Art: C. Rosenthal, I. Kabakov, I. Spivak,” 7.

¹⁶⁹ Kabakov and Wally, n.p.

¹⁷⁰ See Appendix IV.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

deserve a rightful place in its hallowed halls. What is important in the installation *An Alternative History of Art* is that it elides the building of the museum with the narrative of art history, making them one and the same.

Having grown into their role as artists in the arena of World Art History by the early 2000s, the Kabakovs concertedly began moving away from Soviet themes in favor of the more universalizing concept of utopia. “For almost eight years [in the 1990s], I felt like an airplane that was fuelled up with gasoline... these endless stories about Soviet civilization. Now I feel that the gasoline tanks are empty, as though the Soviet theme is almost over for me,” remarked Ilya in a 1998 interview.¹⁷² Despite this disavowal, Soviet themes have clearly persisted in their works, particularly after their return to painting in the late 2000s. The series *Collage of Spaces* (2010) and *The Appearance of the Collage* (2012) use individual and collective memories culled from the Soviet experience as fodder for large-scale, museum-ready oil paintings executed in a realist style.¹⁷³ These memories are part of an archive containing the Kabakovs’ own works; in their paintings, it is common to see familiar images remade or reconfigured then redeployed in new contexts.

In *Collage of Spaces* #6 [Figure 4-14], snippets of an indoor and an outdoor scene are combined like pieces of a puzzle. The first depicts a group of people gathered around a woman playing the piano. They appear to be in a refined environment with parquet floors, velvety curtains, and paintings framed in gold. High above their heads hangs a portrait of Joseph Stalin, setting the scene in what is likely the early 1950s. The other depicts a group of people waiting or watching something or someone. Tightly bundled up

¹⁷² Kabakov and Ross, 24

¹⁷³ Ilya declares that they only “think about museums” today. All their work is made with the aim of entering the museum. See Appendix IV.

in their parkas and hats, they stare out into the distance, beyond the picture plane.

Another portion containing a tree and its branches suggests the group is outside in a rural setting. Thin slivers of white paint demarcate the edges of each piece in this collage; yet, juxtaposed to one another, it is difficult to discern the fore- from the background. The two spaces appear to be at once together and separate, moving inward and outward in equilibrium. In regard to this series, Ilya claims that he always experienced “revulsion” toward the trappings of his everyday life, while he felt “unbelievably positive emotions” toward any kind of space. “Apparently, I liked the fact that everything was happening at a distance and not right next to me,” he says.¹⁷⁴

The Kabakovs also create this illusion of great temporal and spatial distance in the series *The Appearance of the Collage* through the collision of two starkly contrasting styles—the Italian Baroque and Socialist Realism. For example, in the painting *The Appearance of the Collage #10* [Figure 4-15], a conventional image of a monumental statue of a stern-faced Vladimir Lenin is abutted and overlaid by a theatrical scene from a Baroque painting. Although both the Italian Baroque and Socialist Realism are figurative in style, they have vastly different understandings of the painterly in terms of space, light, shape, and other aspects of composition. The result is a tension that revives a sense of drama within the canvas. Ilya pragmatically explains this most recent turn to the past.¹⁷⁵

“Since I lost interest in contemporary art—about 5 years ago [2010]—I have been very

¹⁷⁴ Ilya Kabakov, *Ilya Kabakov: Collage of Spaces*, ed. Wolfgang Roth (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2011), n.p. Coincidentally, the title for what is arguably his most famous installation *The Man Who Flew Into Space from His Apartment* [Человек, улетевший в космос из своей комнаты / Chelovek, uletevskii v kosmos iz svoei komanty] (1988), which is part of *Ten Characters* of the same year, is usually the subject of mistranslation. In Russian, *kosmos* is “Cosmos” and *komnata* is “room,” thus a more accurate translation of the title would be *The Man Who Flew Into the Cosmos from His Apartment*. Margarita Tupitsyn mentions this mistranslation in Tupitsyn, *Moscow Vanguard Art*, 159-160, but does not explore it further.

¹⁷⁵ The Kabakovs describe this in Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, “Ilya & Emilia Kabakov, *The Appearance of the Collage*, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, 2012.”

interested in old paintings, specifically those of the Baroque period,” says Ilya.¹⁷⁶ What draws him to these works are their “darkness” and “depth of space,” elements that he feels have been lost in the twentieth century and that he aims to regain.¹⁷⁷

These two paintings as well as several other works across media discussed in this chapter were included in the Kabakovs’ 2017 retrospective at Tate Modern in London. Entitled *Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future*, the exhibition was inspired by both the preceding text and installation, which is part of the Tate’s permanent collection. Divided into ten rooms, the exhibition not only paid homage to the configuration of their first installation *Ten Characters* (1988), but also their larger trajectory from Ilya’s early works in Moscow to their most recent collaborations. Bonafide masters of their craft, they finally find themselves next to Malevich on the precipice into the future only to find that, “There is no future; the future will always repeat the past.”¹⁷⁸ Unlike Benjamin’s Angel of History, who faces the past with his back against the future seeing everything as a complete catastrophe, the Kabakovs now see potential in the past for greatness, kindness, modesty, resourcefulness, and most importantly, tolerance.¹⁷⁹ This outlook is reflected in the many worlds both big and small that they have created over the last three decades. Their return to the past not only recalls its long-lasting effects today, but also reconsiders the potency of its legacy for the future.

¹⁷⁶ See Appendix IV.

¹⁷⁷ Should I further address these paintings in article or book format, I could take a different direction, exploring their connections to Cubist collage with its use of the real to complicate notions of representation and “truth.” I am indebted to my advisor Jane A. Sharp for this suggestion.

¹⁷⁸ This statement was reproduced as a wall text in the Kabakovs’ exhibition *The Utopian Projects* at the Hirshhorn Museum (September 7, 2017 – April 29, 2018).

¹⁷⁹ Benjamin’s Angel of History inspired the 2005 exhibition *Angels of History – Moscow Conceptualism and its Influence*, curated by Joseph Backstein at M HKA – Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp in Belgium. See Joseph Backstein, “History of Angels,” in *Angels of History – Moscow Conceptualism and its Influence*, ed. Joseph Backstein (Brussels: Europalia, 2005), 16-25, reprinted in *Cosmic Shift: Russian Contemporary Art Writing*, eds. Elena Zaytseva and Alex Anikina (London: Zed Books, Ltd., 2017), 111-125.

EPILOGUE

How did we get here? This dissertation asks and answers this question by examining recent work by Eastern European artists who reflect on the past in order to revise and redress histories for the present. Their historical turns do not merely re-present the empty signs of their communist pasts or post-communist presents but proactively shape future histories of art in and outside of Eastern Europe for decades to come. In chronicling aspects of the lived experience in Russia, Lithuania, and Poland during the second half of the twentieth century, Olga Chernysheva, Deimantas Narkevičius, Paulina Ołowska, and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov discover the depth and breadth to which these histories remain entrenched in the interstices of our contemporary society.

The artists studied herein trace the afterlives of communism through their works, which engage issues of global import, such as immigration, memory politics, and feminism, while debunking established hierarchies of power using various strategies of interruption. For Chernysheva, communist forms plucked from lived experience collide with contemporary meanings refashioned in Russia today. Drawing on theories of realism, rooted in the nineteenth century, and formalism, rooted in the early twentieth century avant-garde, she brings attention to global issues of labor and migration as they play out on the streets of Moscow. By montaging disparate forms, Chernysheva arrests the flow of history, revealing how Russia is caught between the past and future, embracing advancement while still standing in the shadows of its past. Narkevičius employs ideological markers of the past in his early sculptures and later films that address the fraught discourses of post-communist memory in an independent Lithuania. His work is rooted in the intersection of personal and collective memories that blur the line

between facts and fictions. Even more directly than Narkevičius, Ołowska resorts to adaptive reuse in her works. This restorative practice gathers the loose threads of history to present new, imagined, and fantastic futures that empower the oppressed, particularly women. Finally, the Kabakovs break free of the restrictive, teleological narratives of History thanks to self-historicization. In their decades of production, their outsider status has afforded them the ideal angle from which to write and rewrite histories.

While clearly manifested in the work of Chernysheva, Narkevičius, Ołowska, and the Kabakovs, the historical turn is a pervasive trend across practices in global contemporary art that points to a wider interest in the shared consequences of history for artists and viewers alike. In 2015, The Museum of Modern Art in New York opened *Scenes for a New Heritage: Contemporary Art from the Collection* (March 8, 2015–April 11, 2016). This ambitious reinstallation, which was curated by a cross-departmental team of curators, featured thirty-eight artists whose works were acquired by the museum within the last thirty years.¹ *Scenes for a New Heritage* represented a significant shift in the practice of this storied institution, which is seeking increasingly to diversify its collection and programming beyond the sterilized narrative of a Western-centric modernism. It reiterated MoMA's commitment to not only collecting, but also exhibiting works outside the Euro-American canon. At the museum, this activity is supported by several long-term initiatives, most notably the Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives Program (C-MAP) dedicated to researching histories of art outside North America and Western Europe. MoMA along with the Guggenheim also in New York, Tate Modern in London, and Centre Pompidou in Paris are among the world's leading

¹ "Exhibition Checklist: *Scenes for a New Heritage: Contemporary Works from the Collection*," February 27, 2015, accessed June 22, 2018, http://press.moma.org/wp-content/files_mf/checklist_final_3.2.15.pdf.

museums attempting to breakdown the established parameters of the art historical canon and rethink what constitutes modern and contemporary art in the context of the twenty-first century. While imperfect, their efforts are a step in the right direction and support long-term efforts within academia to bring this material to the fore.

The artworks exhibited in *Scenes for a New Heritage* were as varied in style as they were in national origin—from Nalini Malani's video installation *Game Pieces* (2003/2009), which uses shadow play to recast stories from both Indian and European mythology, to Doris Salcedo's *Atrabiliarios* (1992-1993), which marks the decades of violence in her native Colombia with an installation of shoes that serve as memento mori in honor of the countless disappeared. Works by Cady Nolan, Kara Walker, and Mark Bradford addressed the fraught bifurcation in American race relations, while Rirkrit Tiravanija stared down an uncertain future in his painting *untitled (the days of this society is numbered / December 7, 2012)* (2014), which uses a mistranslation of Guy Debord in conjunction with spreads from a Thai newspaper as a backhanded tribute to Bhumibol Adulyadej, the former king of Thailand who ruled from 1946 until his death in 2016. Even though the collective presentation of such disparate, contextually driven pieces may have bordered on tokenism, it was a mutual interest in history that ultimately united and guided this exhibition of seemingly anachronistic works of contemporary art.

MoMA's exhibition took its name from *Scene for New Heritage* (2004-2006), a series of short films by the Croatian artist David Maljković that stages a return to the past from the future. As the centerpiece of the exhibition, it also asked viewers, "How did we get here?" The answer, naturally, can be found along the winding and unpredictable path of history. Set in 2045, the first of the three films begins with a journey. A group of

explorers on a quest to find their heritage set out in a pseudo-futuristic aluminum-clad vehicle. Although they drive forward both in space and time, they are haunted by the “the feeling of counting backward.” Finally, they conveniently stumble across a dilapidated building amidst a field of overgrown weeds and rubble. Although designed in the international modernist style, which was perceived as forward thinking at the time of its inception in the mid-twentieth century, the structure appears outmoded to the explorers. Nevertheless, it attracts their curiosity like a magnet, prompting them to disembark from their vehicle and explore the abandoned property.

The actions of the three films center on the now abandoned Monument to the Uprising of the People of Kordun and Banija [Spomenik ustanku naroda Banije i Korduna] [Figure 5-1] in Petrova Gora Memorial Park located south of Zagreb, Croatia. Dedicated to the groups of Croatian and Serbian partisans who banded together in the fight against fascism during World War II, this monument commemorates not only the victory of communism over fascism but also the unification of a non-Soviet aligned Yugoslavia. Once banded together as a single nation, this federation of six republics comprising present day Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia, and Slovenia dissolved violently in the early 1990s.² Although the monument in Petrova Gora stands in very poor condition today, it beckoned a bright future when it opened in 1982. Sculptor Vojin Bakić encased the multi-floor, amoeba-shaped concrete pavilion in stainless steel panels.³ When the sun reflected off its undulating curves, the building would shine light onto the Yugoslav people who had the brave partisans to thank for their freedom.

² In Yugoslavia, Kosovo was an autonomous province of the Republic of Serbia.

³ Bakić was a member EXAT-51, an experimental collective active in Zagreb in the early 1950s and participated in the New Tendencies (*Nove tendencije*) exhibitions in the 1960s.

While *Scene for New Heritage 1* and its subsequent films set in the years 2063 and 2071 do little to physically refurbish the monument, they mentally restore it in the collective consciousness. “It is clear that the new generations cannot establish contact with the forgotten place and its historic structure but that every new visit, no matter how much it fails to be comprehended, will create new possibilities and relationships which are welcome in the formation of a rebirth of the monument,” says Maljković.⁴ His films revive the monument as a site of leisure with people eating hotdogs, playing football, and lounging on its grounds. Prior to its decay, the monument even housed a museum to the Yugoslav partisan movement. While this history is no longer visible to the explorers who rediscover the monument in 2045, they bring a renewed meaning to it, which make the monument relevant again.

In the exhibition *Scenes for a New Heritage*, Maljković’s films were looped on a screen situated inside a viewing platform composed of unpainted sheetrock. Not installed in a traditional black box, they are inserted into a frame that operates as a sculpture within the gallery space. They were accompanied by selections from *Scene for a New Heritage – A New Possibility Series A*, a group of eight works on paper produced in 2004.⁵ One of them reads, “Your moment is your heritage” [Figure 5-2]. It pictures five figures leaning against a ramp with a rough rendition of Bakić’s Petrova Gora monument to their left. This sketch echoes the ethos of Maljković’s films: history is what you make of it. There is no singular narrative and only false truths, as the rules of historiography are subjective and infinitely malleable. While we would like to find comfort in

⁴ David Maljković, Yilmaz Dziewior, Anselm Franke, and Nataša Ilić, *David Maljković: Almost Here* (Hamburg: Hamburg Kunstverein, 2007), 106.

⁵ In other installations of the work, he has exhibited them alongside archival research on the life and work of Bakić.

authoritative documents, histories inherited from the past and handed down into the future are not immune to the biases of our present moment. May we find inspiration in the artists who lend themselves to the pursuit of history, so that we, too, may cast our judgments responsibly.

FIGURES
CHAPTER ONE



Figure 1-1: Olga Chernysheva. Frames from *Trashman*, 2011. Video (color, sound), 6:31 min. Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.



Figure 1-2: Olga Chernysheva. Frame from *Marmot*, 1999. Video (color, sound), 2:30 min. Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.



Figure 1-3: Olga Chernysheva. Frames from *Marmot*, 1999. Video (color, sound), 2:30 min. Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.

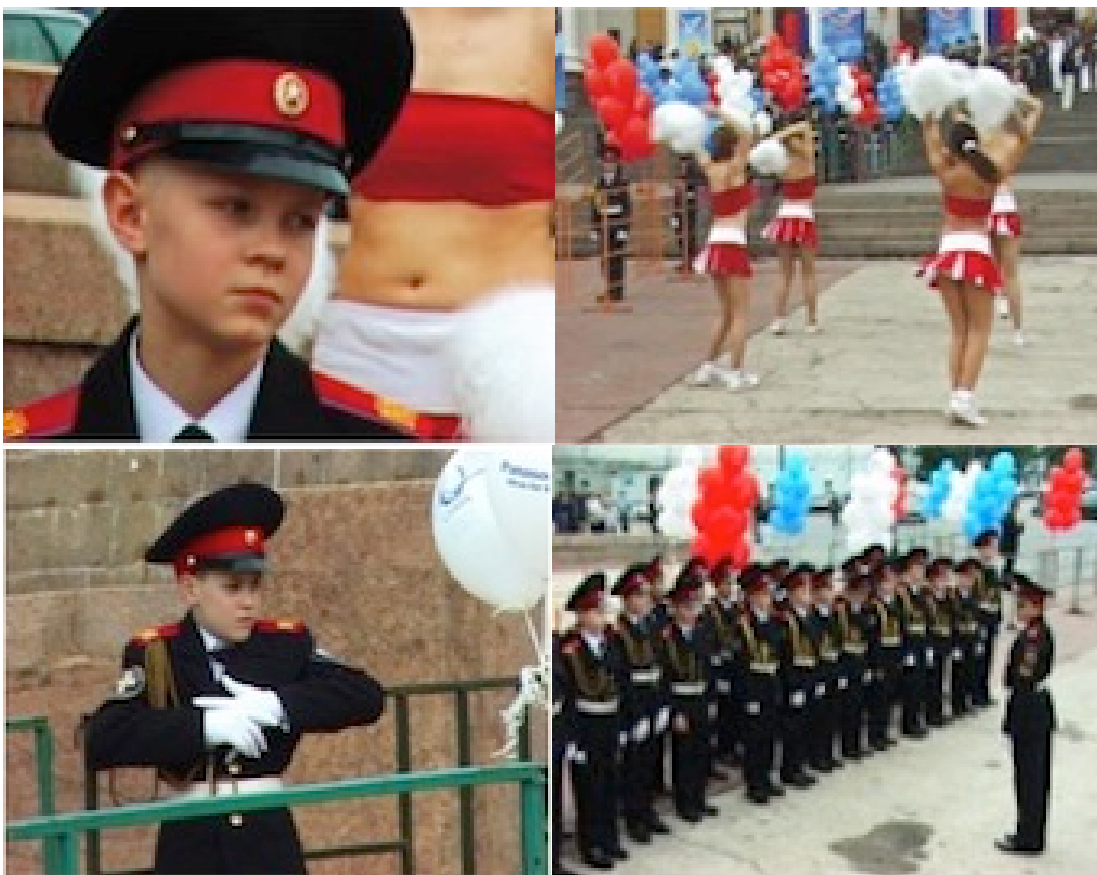


Figure 1-4: Olga Chernysheva. Frames from *March*, 2005. Video (color, sound), 7:30 min. Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.



Figure 1-5: Installation view of Olga Chernysheva's series of untitled drawings produced in 2015 for the 56th Venice Biennale (May 9 – November 22, 2015). Photographed by the author.

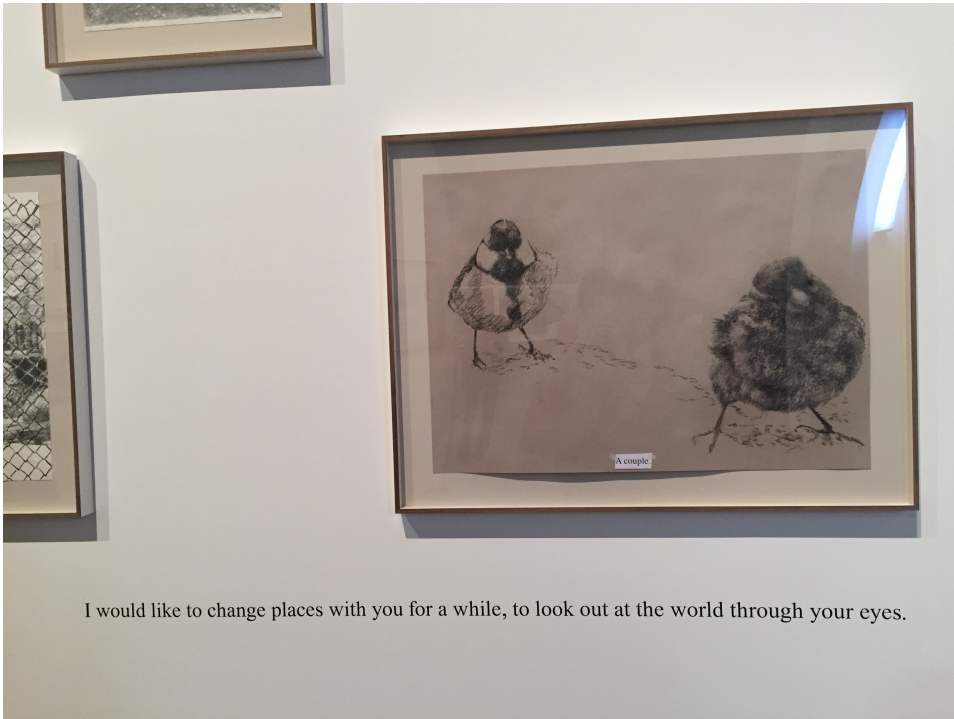


Figure 1-6: Detail of Olga Chernysheva's series of untitled drawings produced in 2015 for the 56th Venice Biennale (May 9 – November 22, 2015). Photographed by the author.



Figure 1-7: Olga Chernysheva. From the series *Waiting for the Miracle*, 2000. C-prints, 21.7 x 31.5 in. (55 x 80 cm). Courtesy Pace Gallery, London.



Figure 1-8: Olga Chernysheva. *[Luk] at This*, 1997. Gelatin silver print, 37.4 x 53.1 in. (98 x 135 cm). Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.



Figure 1-9: Olga Chernysheva. *Untitled (A drawing with obvious compositional technique)*, 2013. Charcoal on paper, 33.9 x 24 in. (86 x 61 cm). Courtesy Pace Gallery, London.

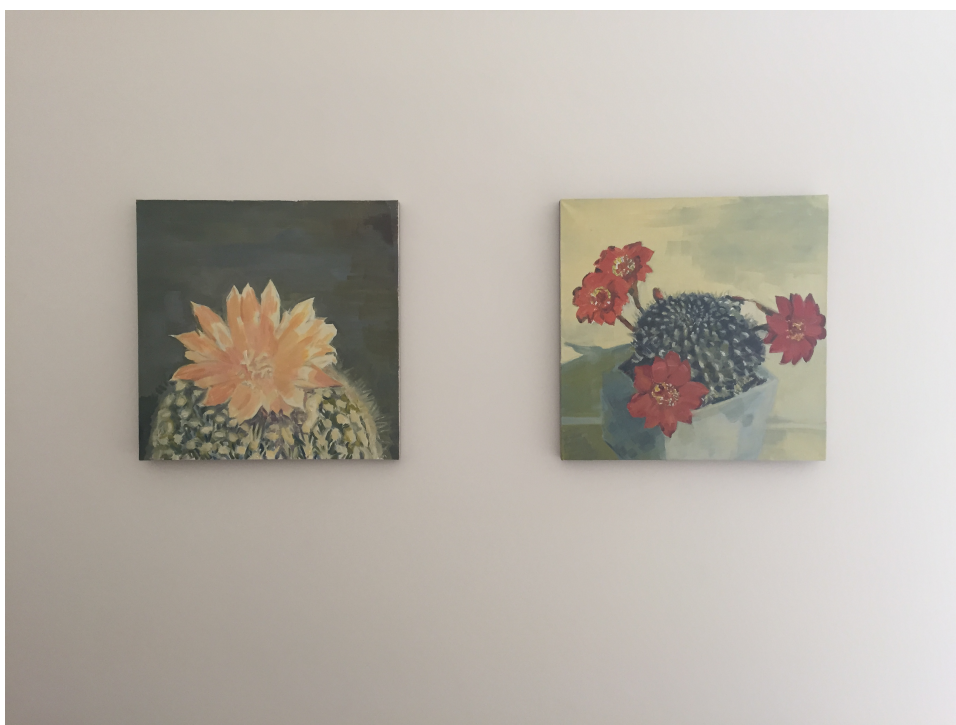


Figure 1-10: Olga Chernysheva. Two untitled oil paintings at Pace Gallery, London. April 2015. Photographed by the author.

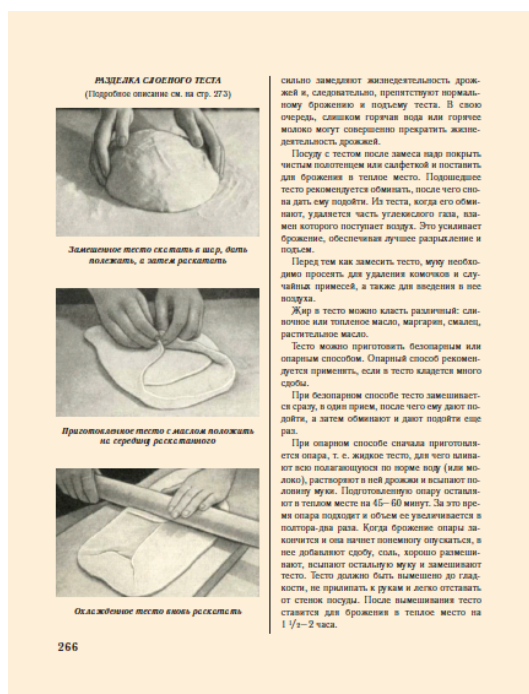


Figure 1-11: Page from O. P. Molchanova, et al., eds, *Kniga o vkusnoj i zdorovoj pishche* (Moscow: Ministerstvo pishchevoj promyshlennosti SSSR / Pishchepromizdat, 1952).



Figure 1-12: Olga Chernysheva. *The Book of Wholesome Food*, 1991. Installed in Bratislava in 1991 and in Moscow in 1992. Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.



Figure 1-13: Olga Chernysheva, *The Book of Wholesome Food*, 1991. Details. Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.



Figure 1-14: Pavel Fedotov. *Svatovstvo maiora* [*The Major's Courtship*], 1848. Oil on canvas, 23 x 29.6 in. (58.3 x 75.3 cm). State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

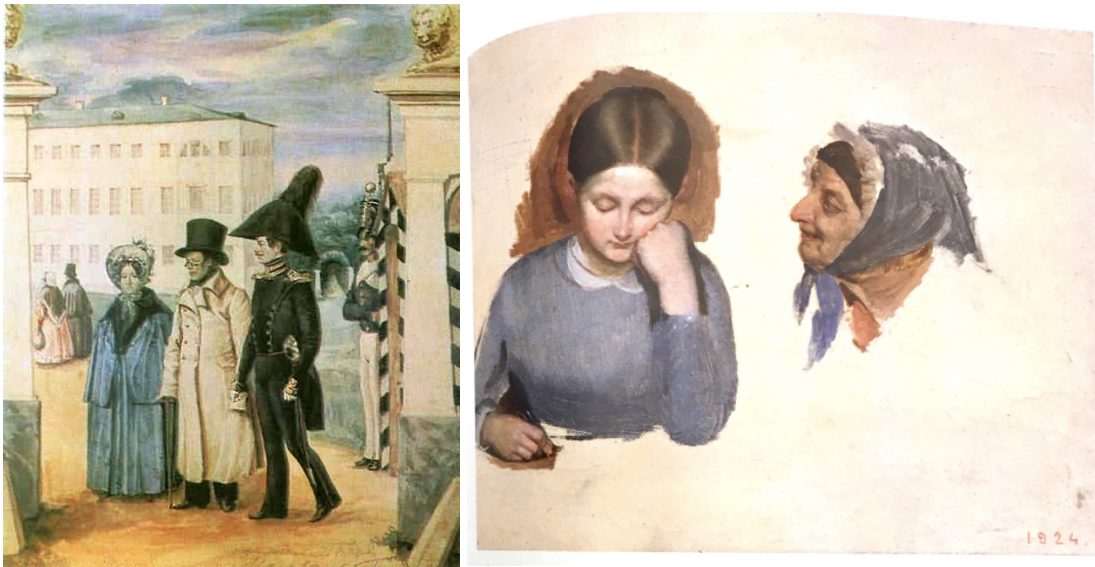


Figure 1-15: Pavel Fedotov. *Devushka. Golova svodnitsy* [Girl. Head of a Madam], 1846-48. Oil on canvas, 7.4 x 9.6 in. (19 x 24.5 cm). *Progulka* [A Stroll], 1837. Pencil and watercolor on board, 10.4 x 8.4 in. (26.6 x 21.5 cm). Both State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

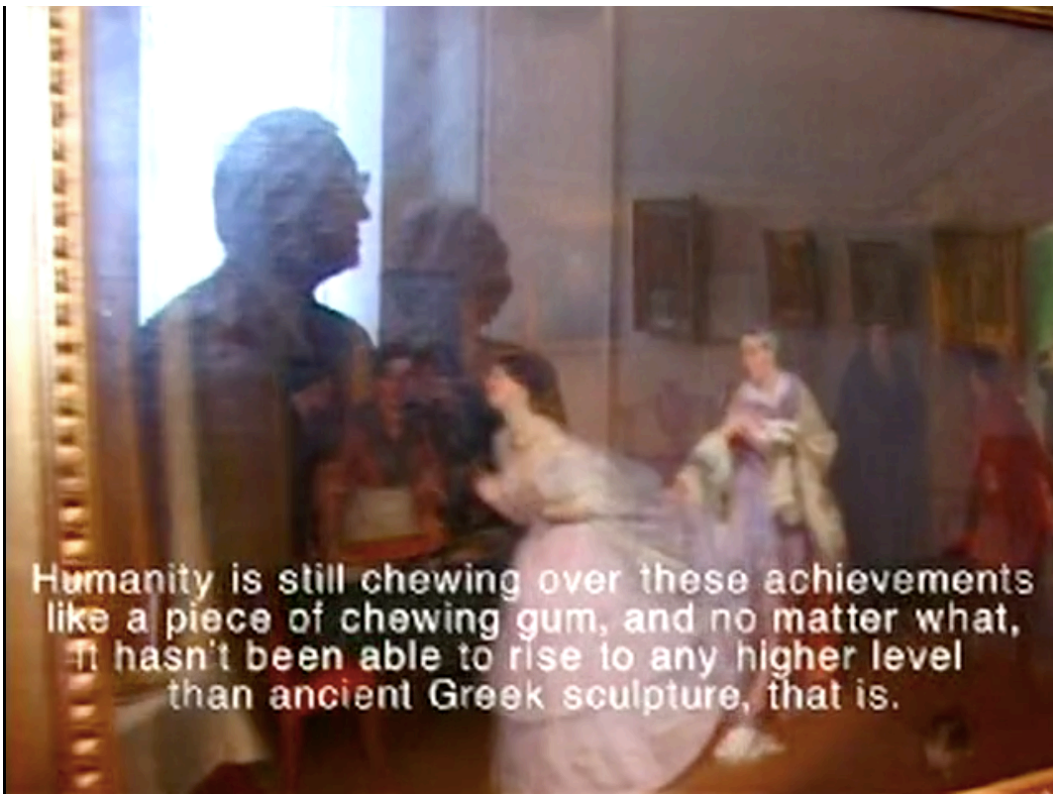


Figure 1-16: Olga Chernysheva. Frame from *Russian Museum*, 2003. Video (color, sound), 6:11 min. Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.



Figure 1-17: Olga Chernysheva. From the series *Russian Museum*, 2003. Pencil on paper, 11.6 x 16.5 in. (29.5 x 42 cm). Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.



Figure 1-18: Olga Chernysheva. From the series *On Duty*, 2007. Gelatin silver fiber print, 53.5 x 35.5 in. (136 x 90 cm). Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.



Figure 1-19: Olga Chernysheva. From the series *Blue-Yellow*, 2009. Watercolor on paper, 11.4 x 13.3 in. (29 x 34 cm). Reproduced in Silke Opitz, ed., *Compossibilities* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013).



Figure 1-20: Olga Chernysheva. From the series *Citizens*, 2009-10. Watercolor on paper, dimensions variable. Reproduced in Silke Opitz, ed., *Compossibilities* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013).



Figure 1-21: Olga Chernysheva. *Interpretation of Observations, Number 4*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 31.5 x 15.5 in. (80 x 40 cm). Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.



Figure 1-22: Olga Chernysheva. From the series *High Road*, 2007 Optical gelatin silver fiber prints, 39.5 x 59 in. (100 x 150 cm). Courtesy Olga Chernysheva.



Figure 1-23: Olga Chernysheva. Untitled (*The more you draw a particular subject, the more you become part of it*), 2015. Charcoal on paper, 23.1 x 33 in. (58.8 x 84 cm). Reproduced in Elena Sudakova, ed., *Olga Chernysheva: Peripheral Visions* (London: GRAD Gallery, 2015).

CHAPTER TWO

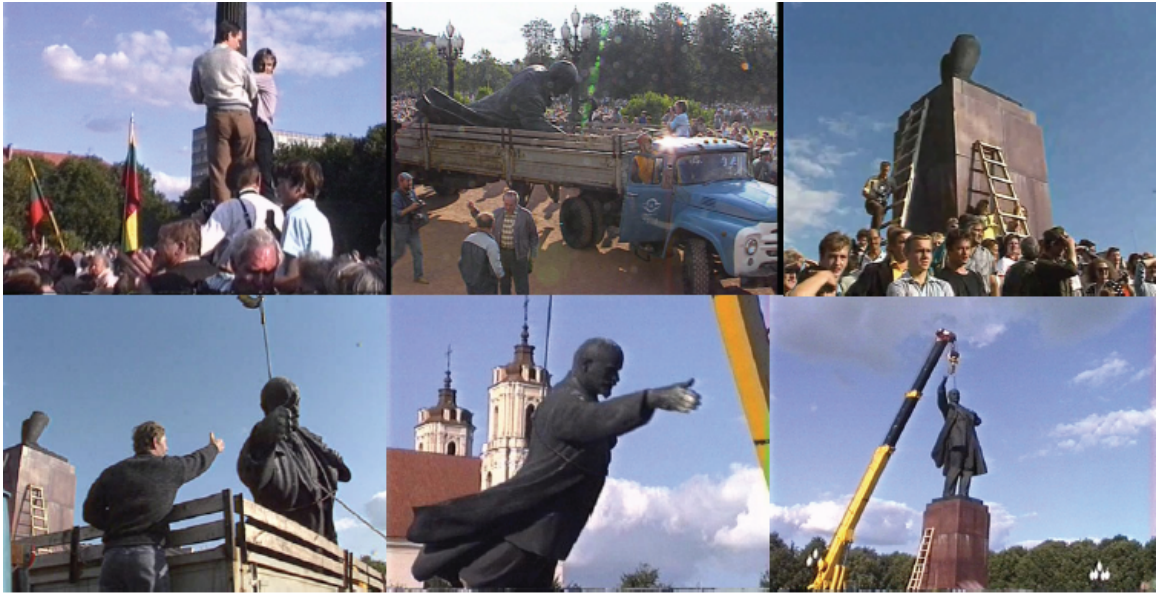


Figure 2-1: Deimantas Narkevičius. *Once in the XX Century*, 2004. 16mm film transferred to video (color, sound), 8 min. Courtesy Deimantas Narkevičius.



Figure 2-2: Sergei Eisenstein. Frame from *Oktyabr'* [*October*], 1928. 35mm film (black and white, silent) 103 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

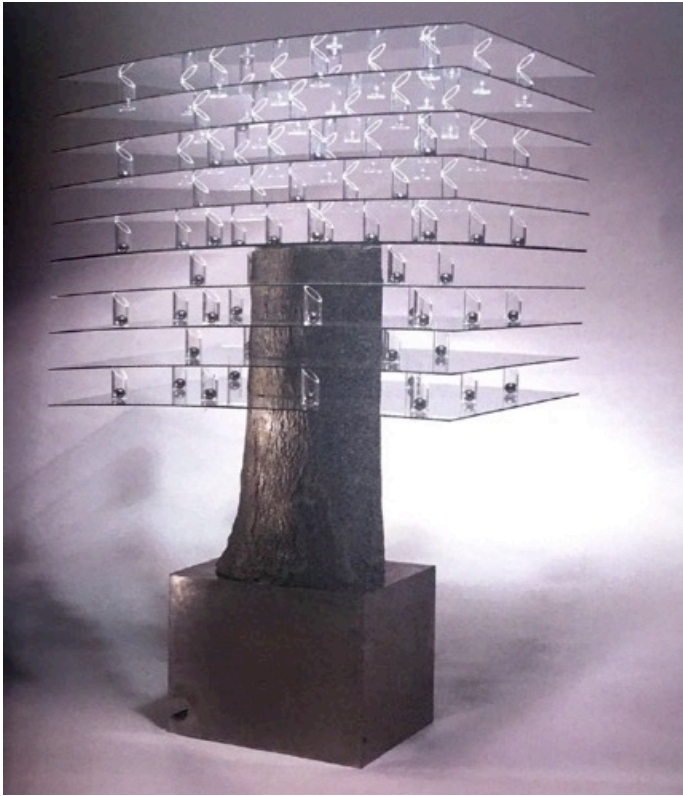


Figure 2-3: Deimantas Narkevičius. *Tree*, 1993. Cement, glass, and steel, 55 x 31 x 23.6 in. (140 x 80 x 60 cm). Archives of the National Gallery of Art, Vilnius.



Figure 2-4: Deimantas Narkevičius. *Never Backward*, 1994. Wood and paraffin, 31 x 46.8 x 25.5 in. (78 x 118.8 x 64.7 cm). Tate Modern, London.



Figure 2-5: Deimantas Narkevičius. *Too Long on the Plinth*, 1994. Shoes and salt, 3.9 x 11.8 x 9 in. (10 x 30 x 24 cm). National Gallery of Art, Vilnius. Photographed by the author.



Figure 2-6: Deimantas Narkevičius. Frames from *His-Story*, 1998. 35mm and 16mm film (black and white, sound), 7:30 min. Courtesy Deimantas Narkevičius.



Figure 2-7: Deimantas Narkevičius. Frames from *Europe 54° 54' - 25° 19'*, 1997. 16mm film (color, sound), 9 min. Courtesy Deimantas Narkevičius.



Figure 2-8: Deimantas Narkevičius. Frame from *The Head*, 2007. 35mm film (color and back and white, sound), 12 min. Courtesy Deimantas Narkevičius.



Figure 2-9: Deimantas Narkevičius. Frames from *Energy Lithuania*, 2000. Super 8mm film (color, sound), 17 min. Courtesy Deimantas Narkevičius.

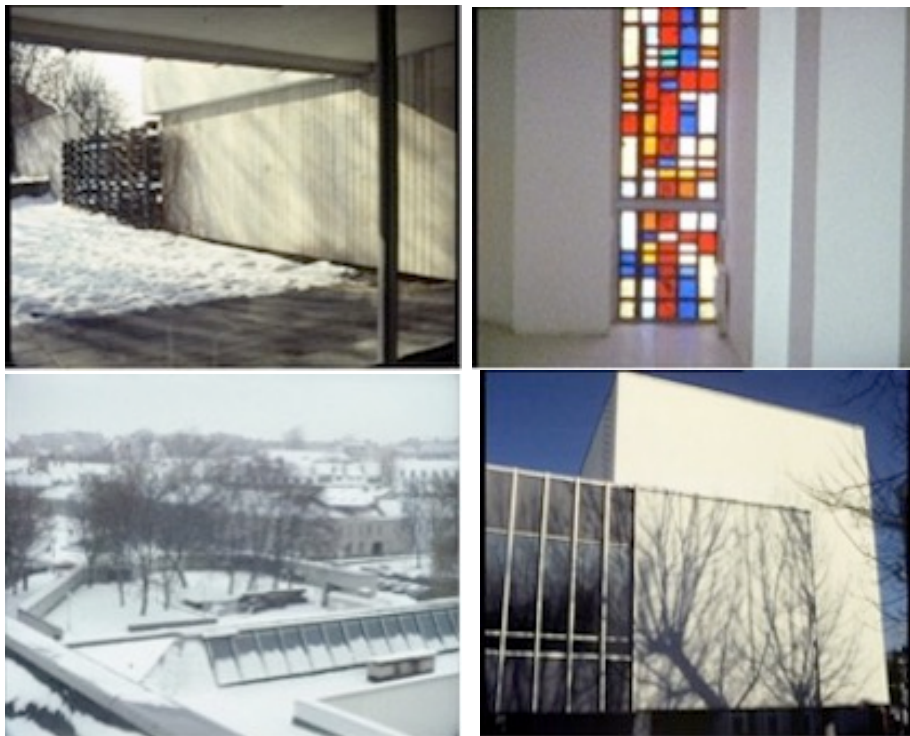


Figure 2-10: Deimantas Narkevičius. Frames from *Scena*, 2003. Super 8mm film (color, sound), 9:30 min. Courtesy Deimantas Narkevičius.



Figure 2-11: Bronze statues previously mounted on Vilnius' Green Bridge. Clockwise from top left: Bernardas Bučas and Petras Vaivada, *Žemės ūkis* [Agriculture]; Bronius Vyšniauskas and Napoleonas Petrulis, *Pramonė ir statyba* [Industry and Construction]; Juozas Mikėnas and Juozas Kėdainis, *Mokslo jaunimas* [Youth of Education]; Bronius Pundzius, *Taikos sargyboje* [Guarding Peace, Soviet soldiers].



Figure 2-12: Deimantas Narkevičius. Frames from *20 July 2015, 2016*. 3D video, 15:08 min. Photographed by the author.

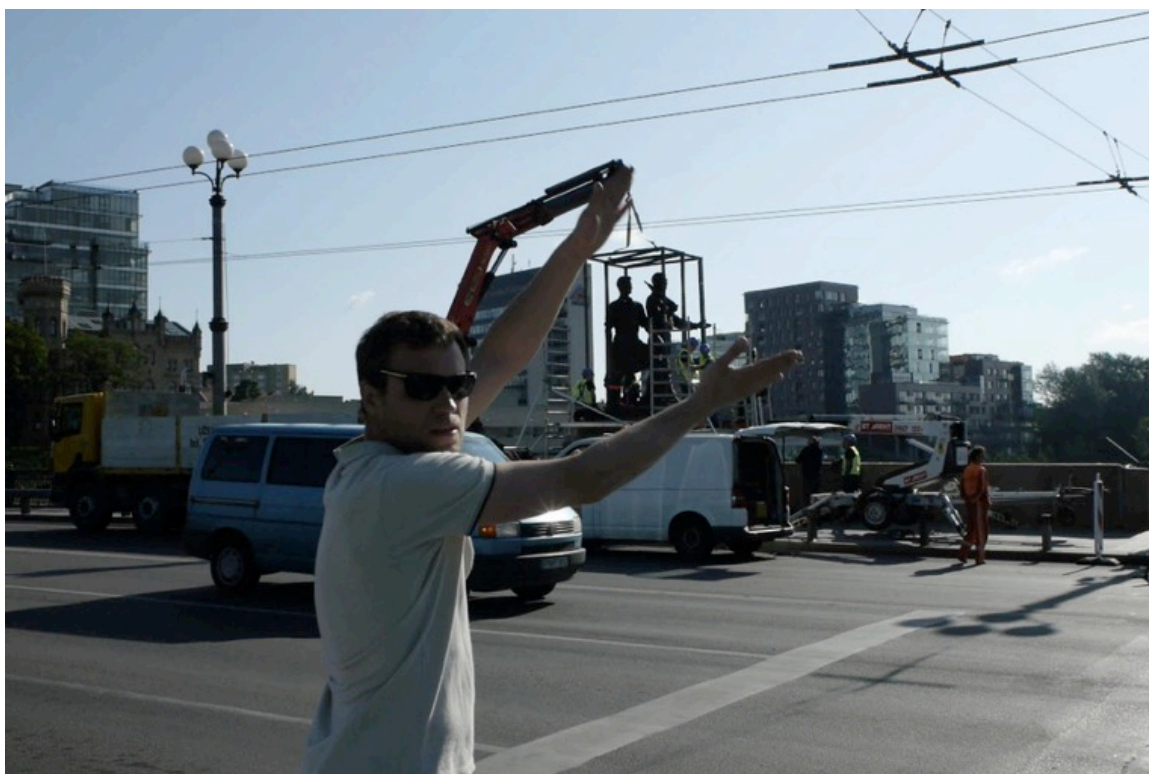


Figure 2-13: Deimantas Narkevičius. Frame from *20 July 2015, 2016*. 3D video, 15:08 min. Courtesy Deimantas Narkevičius.



Figure 2-14: Deimantas Narkevičius. Frame from *20 July 2015, 2016*. 3D video, 15:08 min. Photographed by the author.



Figure 2-15: Deimantas Narkevičius. Frame from *20 July 2015, 2016*. 3D video, 15:08 min. Courtesy Deimantas Narkevičius.



Figure 2-16: Deimantas Narkevičius. Frames from 20 July 2015, 2016. 3D video, 15:08 min. Courtesy Deimantas Narkevičius.

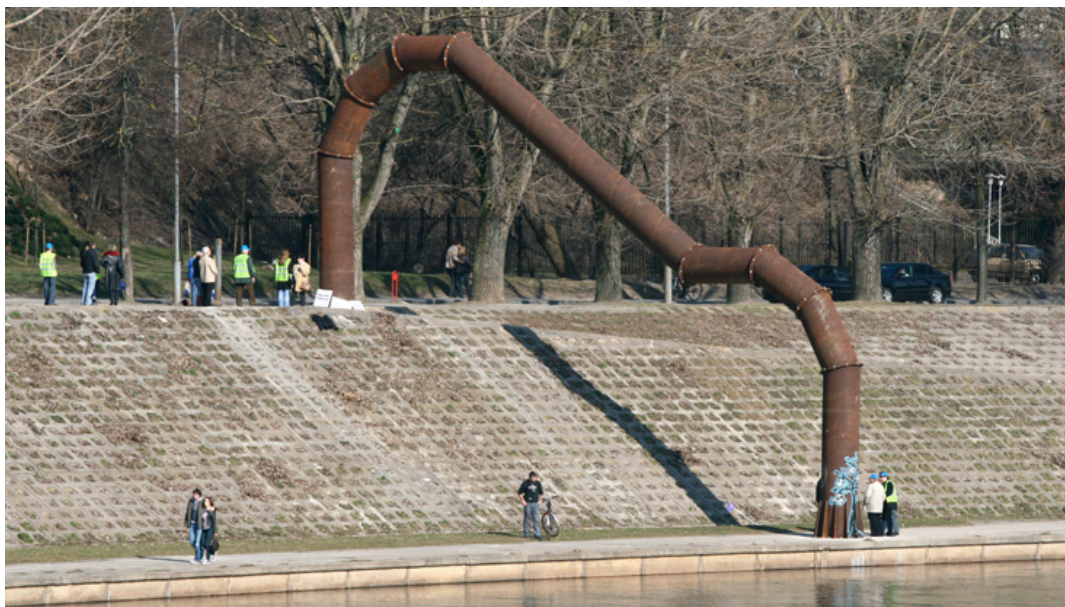


Figure 2-17: Vladas Urbanavičius. *Krantinės arka* [The Embankment Arch], 2009.



Figure 2-18: Valdas Ozarinskas. Monument to Frank Zappa located on K. Kalinausko gatvė in Vilnius.



Figure 2-19: Gediminas Urbonas, *Ateini ar išeini* [Coming or Going], 1995. Sculptures on the Green Bridge encased in metal and mirrors. Archives of the National Gallery of Art, Vilnius.



Figure 2-20: Mindaugas Navakas. *Vilniaus Sėsiuvinis I* [Vilnius Notebook I], 1981–1986. Album with 12 sheets, zincography. National Gallery of Art, Vilnius.



Figure 2-21: Vilnius' Green Bridge over the Neris River after July 20, 2015.

CHAPTER THREE



Figure 3-1: Paulina Ołowska. Installation view of *Zofia Stryjeńska*, 2008. Reproduced in Paulina Ołowska and Monika Szewczyk, eds. *Paulina Ołowska: Zofia Stryjeńska* (Ghent: A Prior Magazine, 2008).



Figure 3-2: Paulina Ołowska. Installation view of *Collaged Stryjeńska*, 2008. Reproduced in Lionel Bovier, ed., *Paulina Ołowska* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2013).



Figure 3-3: Paulina Ołowska. *Accidental Collage 7*, 2004. Inkjet color print on paper, 37 x 27.5 in. (94 x 70 cm). Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.



Figure 3-4: Jan Mucharski. *Siatkarka* [Volleyball Player], 1961.



Figure 3-5: Kazimir Malevich. *Analytical Charts*, 1924-1927. Cut-and-pasted printed and painted paper, gelatin silver prints, ink, and crayon on paper with ink and pencil, 28 1/2 x 38 3/4 in. (72.4 x 98.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 3-6: Installation views of *Szare w Kolorze* at Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw in 2000. Archives of the Zachęta National Gallery, Warsaw.



Figure 3-7: Paulina Ołowska and Lucie McKenzie tending bar, *Nova Popularna*, Warsaw, 2003. Archives of the Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.

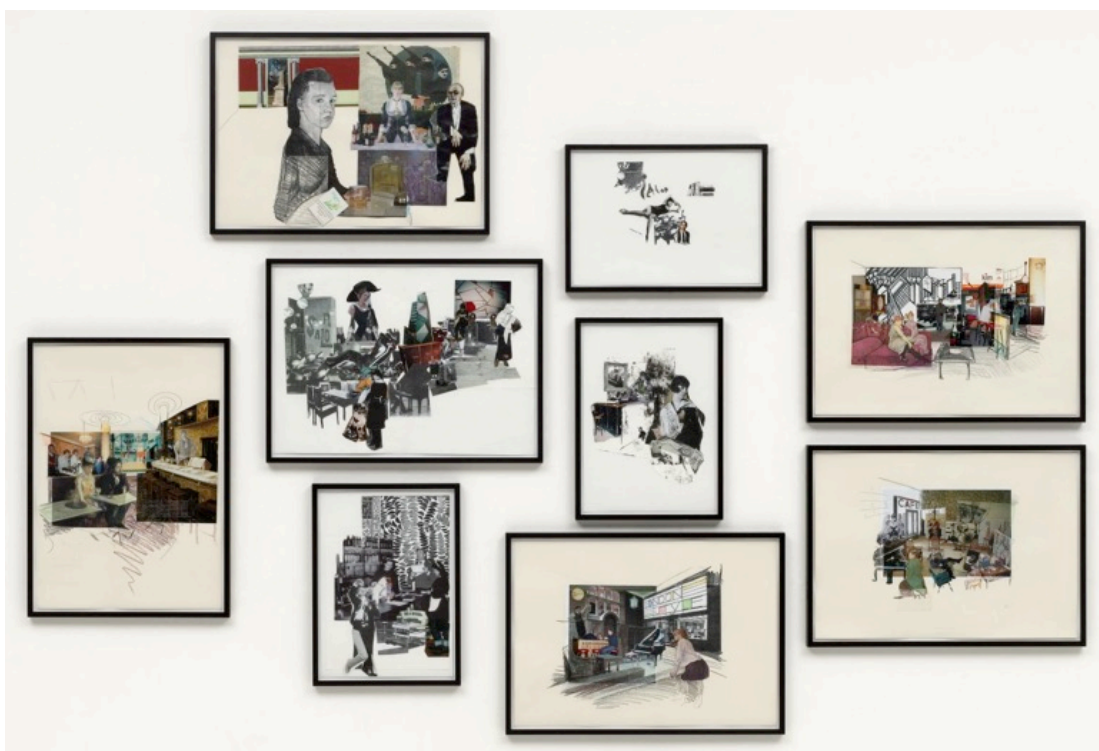


Figure 3-8: Paulina Ołowska and Lucie McKenzie, *Nova Popularna*, 2003. Cut-and-pasted printed paper, cut-and-pasted chromogenic color prints, crayon, ink, colored pencil, and pencil on paper, dimensions variable. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 3-9: Paulina Ołowska. From the series *Nova Popularna*, 2003. Cut-and-pasted printed paper, cut-and-pasted chromogenic color prints, cut-and-pasted painted paper, and ink on paper 16 1/2 x 11 5/8 in. (41.9 x 29.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 3-10: Lucie McKenzie. From the series *Nova Popularna*, 2003. Cut-and-pasted printed paper, cut-and-pasted chromogenic color prints, crayon, colored pencil, and pencil on paper, 16 1/2 x 23 1/2 in. (41.9 x 59.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 3-11: Spreads from the magazine *Ty i Ja*. Issue no. 4 (48), April 1964. University of Indiana Bloomington Libraries. Photographed by the author.



Figure 3-12: Left: Advertisement in the magazines *Ty i Ja*, Issue No. 12 (56), December 1964. University of Indiana Bloomington Libraries. Photographed by the author. Right: Advertisement in the magazine *Glamour*, 1965.



Figure 3-13: Wojciech Fangor. *Postaci*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 39 x 49 in. (100 x 125 cm). Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. Photographed by the author.



Figure 3-14: Wojciech Fangor. *Postaci*, 1950. Details. Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. Photographed by the author.



Figure 3-15: Paulina Ołowska. *Collage After Fangor*, 2007. Collage, spray paint, acrylic, 11.4 x 13.6 in. (29 x 34.5 cm). Courtesy Galerie Buchholz.



Figure 3-16: Paulina Ołowska. *Looking Up Not Down*, 1998-1999. Oil on canvas. Reproduced in Lionel Bovier, ed., *Paulina Ołowska* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2013).



Figure 3-17: Paulina Ołowska. Installation view of *Applied Fantastic*, 2010. Courtesy Metro Pictures.

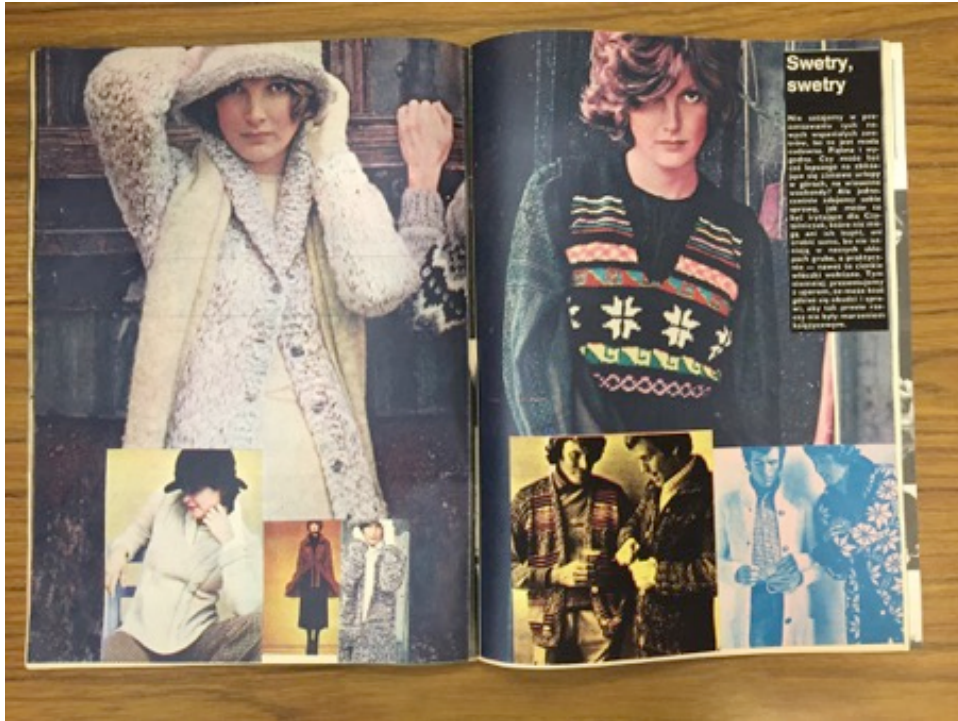


Figure 3-18: Spread from the magazine *Ty i Ja*, Issue no. 12 (164) December 1973. University of Indiana Bloomington Libraries. Photographed by the author.



Figure 3-19: Left: Paulina Ołowska. *Jacket Oktawia*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 76.77 x 55.12 in. (195 x 140 cm); Right: Paulina Ołowska. *Male Sheepskin Coat Feliks*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 28.35 x 19.69 in. (72 cm x 50 cm). Courtesy Metro Pictures.



Figure 3-20: Paulina Ołowska. *Klaun*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 69 x 49 in. (175.2 x 124.4 cm). Courtesy Metro Pictures.



Figure 3-21: Paulina Ołowska. *Sweater 2 (Klaun)*, 2010. Wool sweater, 35 x 60.5 x 3.75 in. (88 x 153.6 x 9.5 cm). Courtesy Metro Pictures.

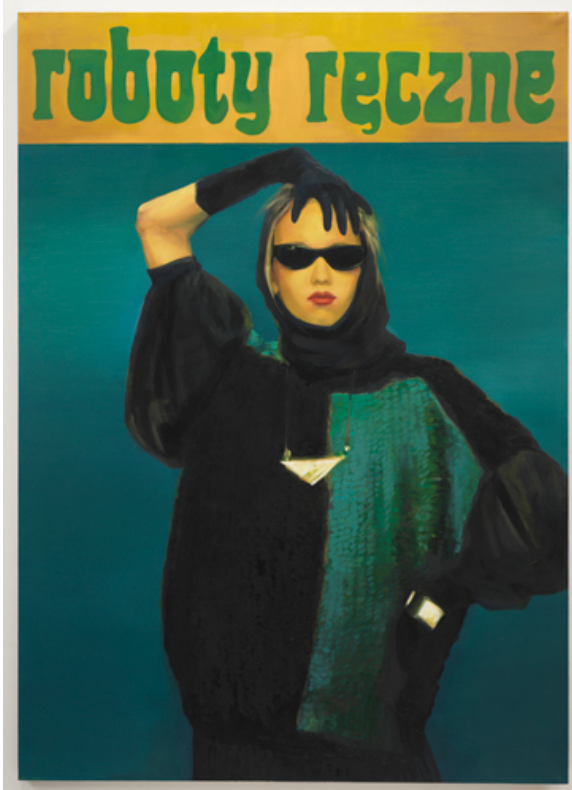


Figure 3-22: Paulina Ołowska. *Woolly Jumpers*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 68.9 x 49.21 in. (175 x 125 cm). Courtesy Metro Pictures.

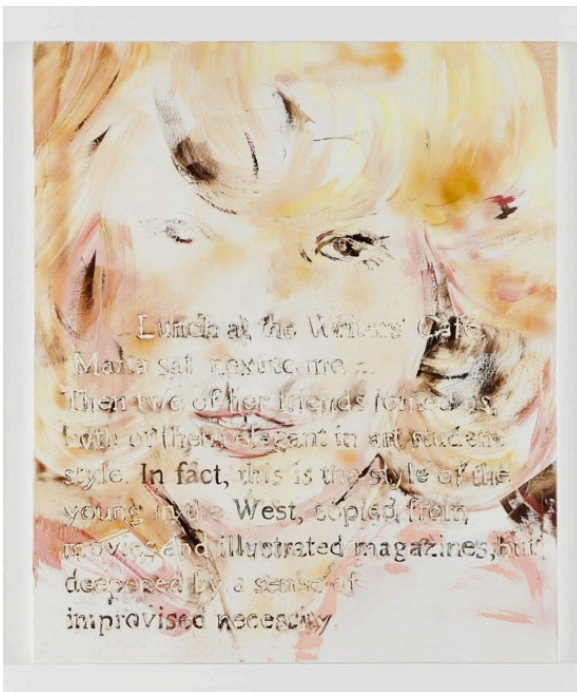


Figure 3-23: Paulina Ołowska. *Improvised Necessity*, 2011. Oil on canvas, 63 x 5 in. (160 x 134.6 cm). Courtesy Metro Pictures.



Figure 3-24: Paulina Ołowska. *Her English Is Far From Perfect...*, 2013. Oil on canvas, 79 x 59 in. (200 x 150 cm). Courtesy Metro Pictures.



Figure 3-25: Paulina Ołowska. Performance of *Slavic Goddesses—A Wreath of Ceremonies*, 2017. Courtesy The Kitchen.

CHAPTER FOUR



Figure 4-1: Left: cover of *A-Ya* 5, 1983; Right: First page of Ilya Kabakov, “V budyshchee vos’mut ne vsek” (“Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future”), in *A-Ya* 5, 1983. Zimmerli Art Museum, Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art of the Soviet Union.

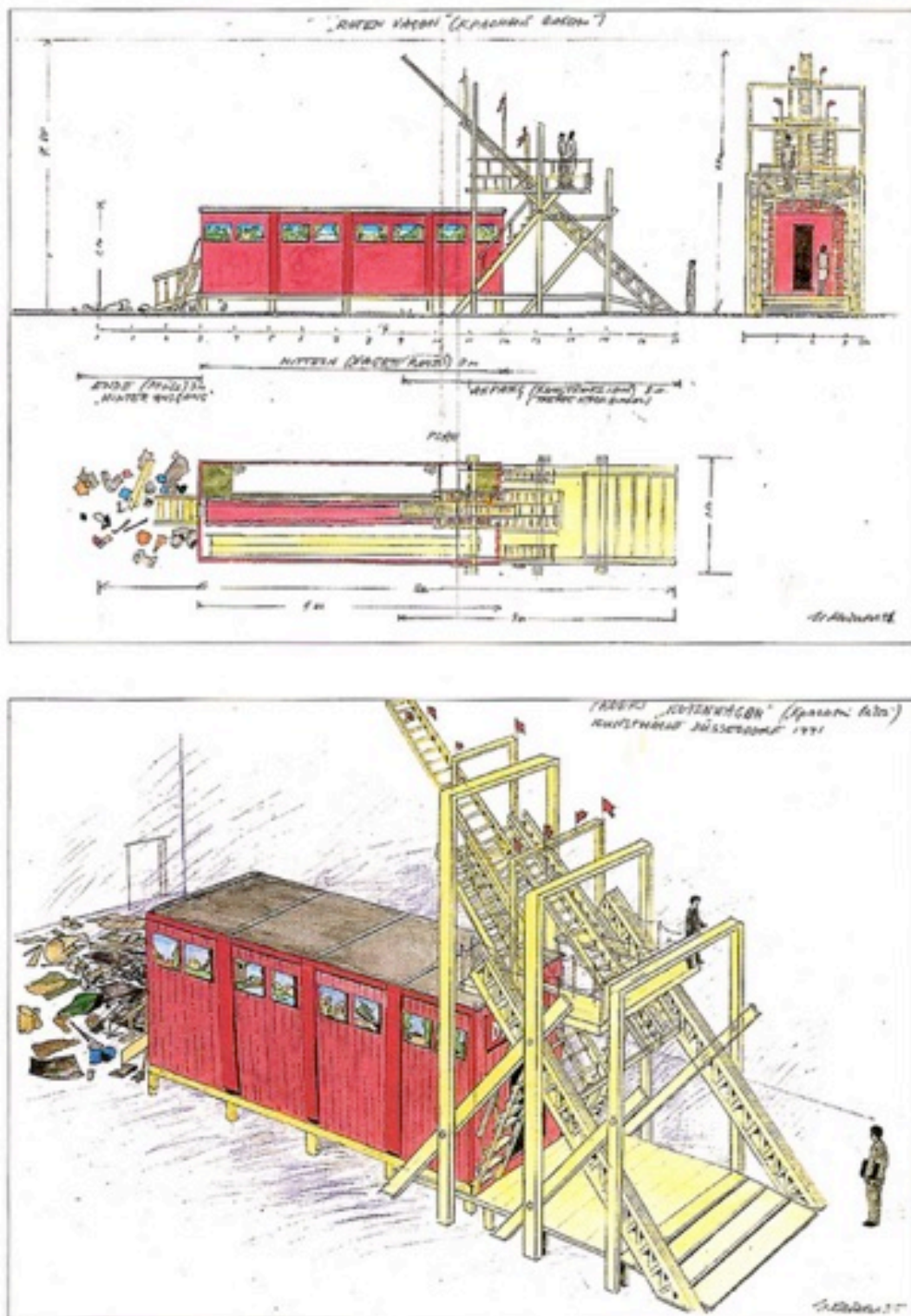


Figure 4-2: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. Sketches for *The Red Wagon*, 1991. Reproduced in Renate Petzinger, ed., *Ilya Kabakov: The Red Wagon* (Nürnberg: Verlag für modern Kunst, 1999).

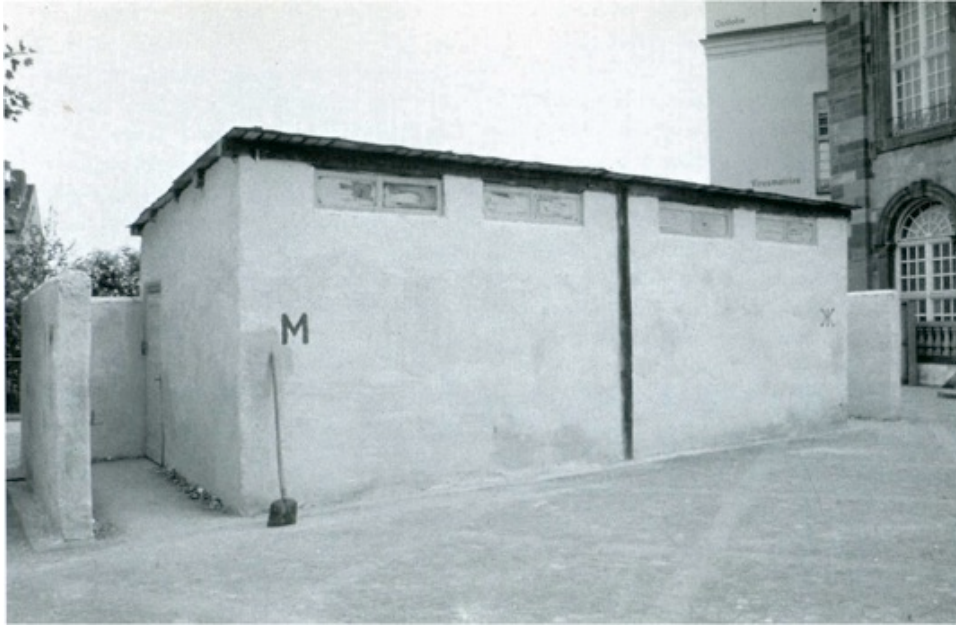


Figure 4-3: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. *The Toilet*, 1992. Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Exterior view. Reproduced in *Ilya Kabakov: Installations, 1983-1995* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995).



Figure 4-4: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. *The Toilet*, 1992. Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Interior view. Reproduced in *Ilya Kabakov: Installations, 1983-1995* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995).



Figure 4-5: Russian Pavilion in Venice, Italy. Exterior view.



Figure: 4-6: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov., *The Red Pavilion*, 1993. Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Reproduced in Ilya Kabakov, *The Red Pavilion* (self-published, 1993).

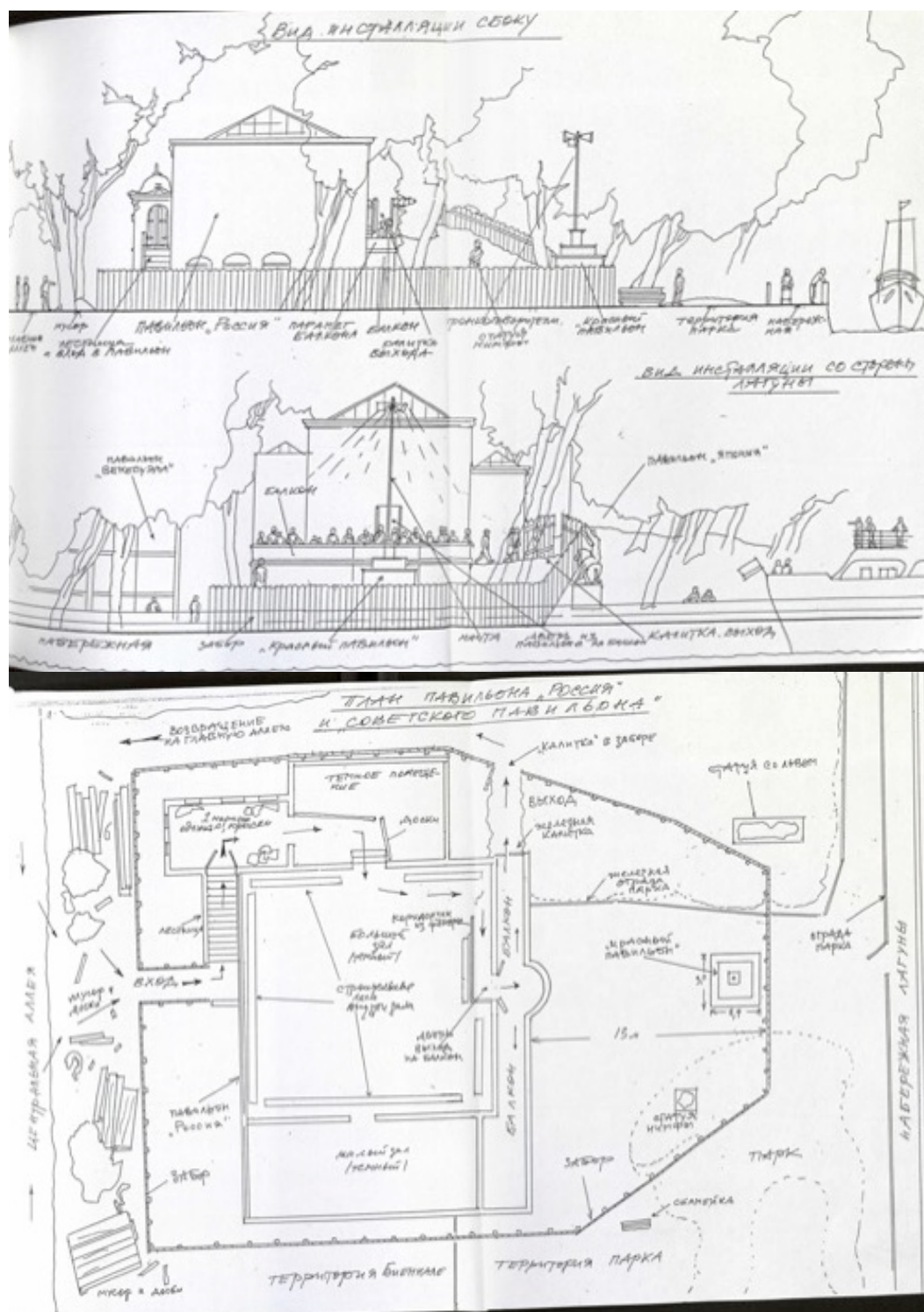


Figure 4-7: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. Sketches for *The Red Pavilion*, 1993. Reproduced in Ilya Kabakov, *The Red Pavilion* (self-published, 1993).



Figure 4-8: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. *The Red Pavilion*, 1993. Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Reproduced in Ilya Kabakov, *The Red Pavilion* (self-published, 1993).



Figure 4-9: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. *Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future*, 2001. Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art, Vienna.

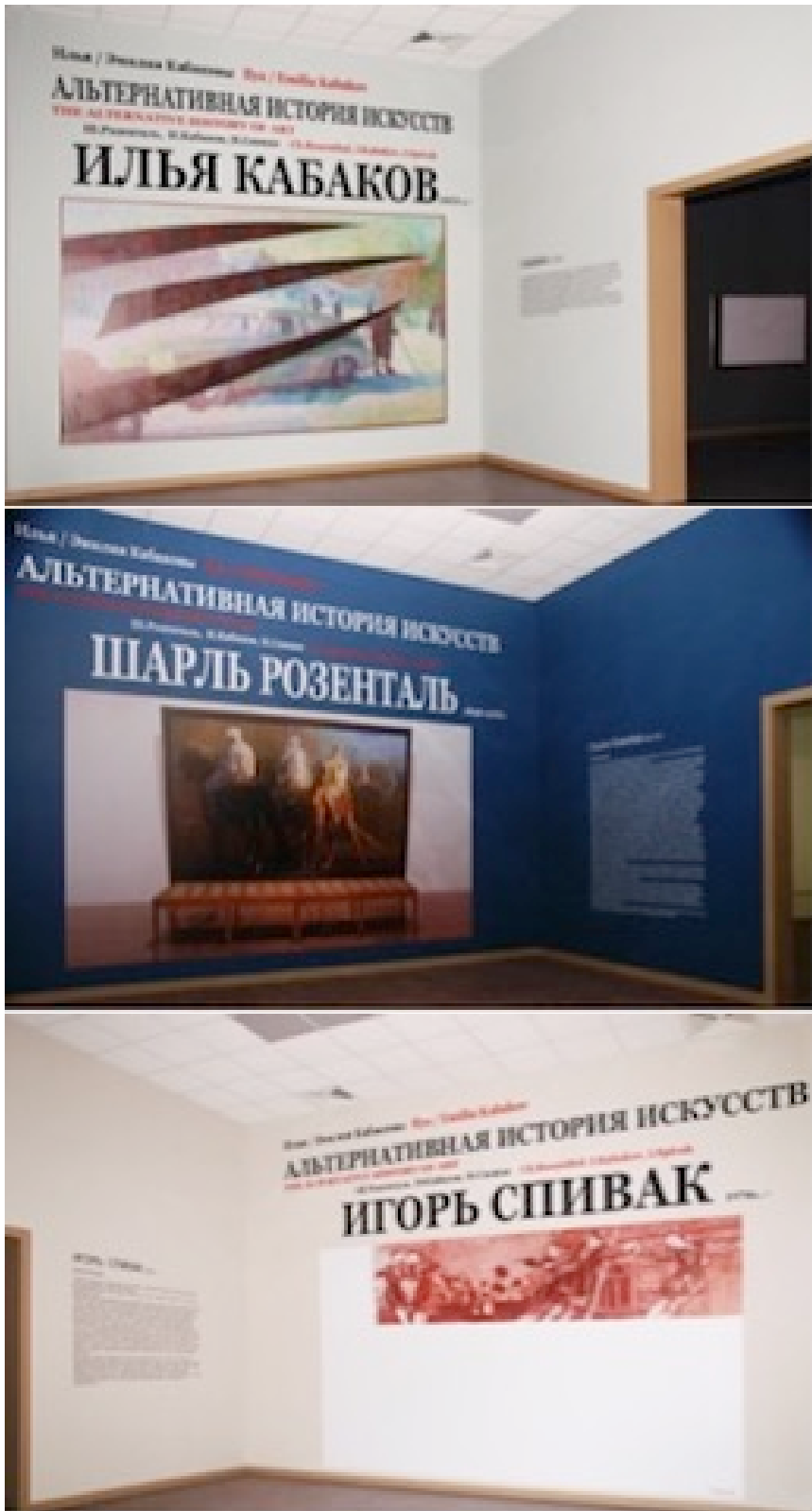


Figure 4-10: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. Installation view of *An Alternative History of Art* at the Garage Center for Contemporary Art, 2008. Archives of the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow.



Figure 4-11: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. *Charles Rosenthal: Landscape*, 1926, 1999. Oil on canvas, 152.7 x 256 in. (388 x 650.5 cm). Reproduced in Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *An Alternative History of Art: Rosenthal, Kabakov, Spivak* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2005).

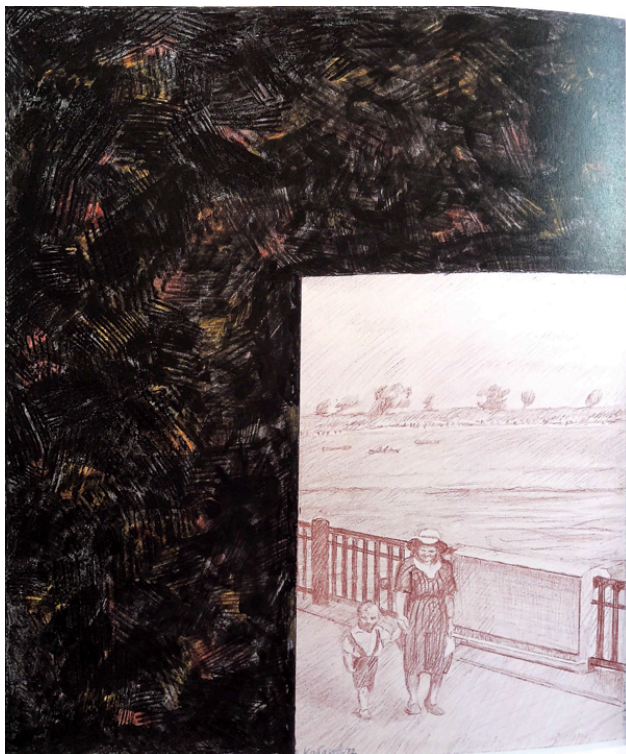


Figure 4-12: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. *I. Kabakov: On the Embankment*, 1972, 2003. Watercolor and pencil, 14.5 x 11.8 in. (37 x 30 cm). Reproduced in Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *An Alternative History of Art: Rosenthal, Kabakov, Spivak* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2005).



Figure 4-13: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. *I. Spivak: An Aviation Parade*, 1997, 2004. Oil on canvas, 111 x 74 in. (282 x 188 cm). Reproduced in Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *An Alternative History of Art: Rosenthal, Kabakov, Spivak* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2005).



Figure 4-14: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. *Collage of Spaces #6*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 63.9 x 73 in. (162.5 x 185.5 cm). Courtesy Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.

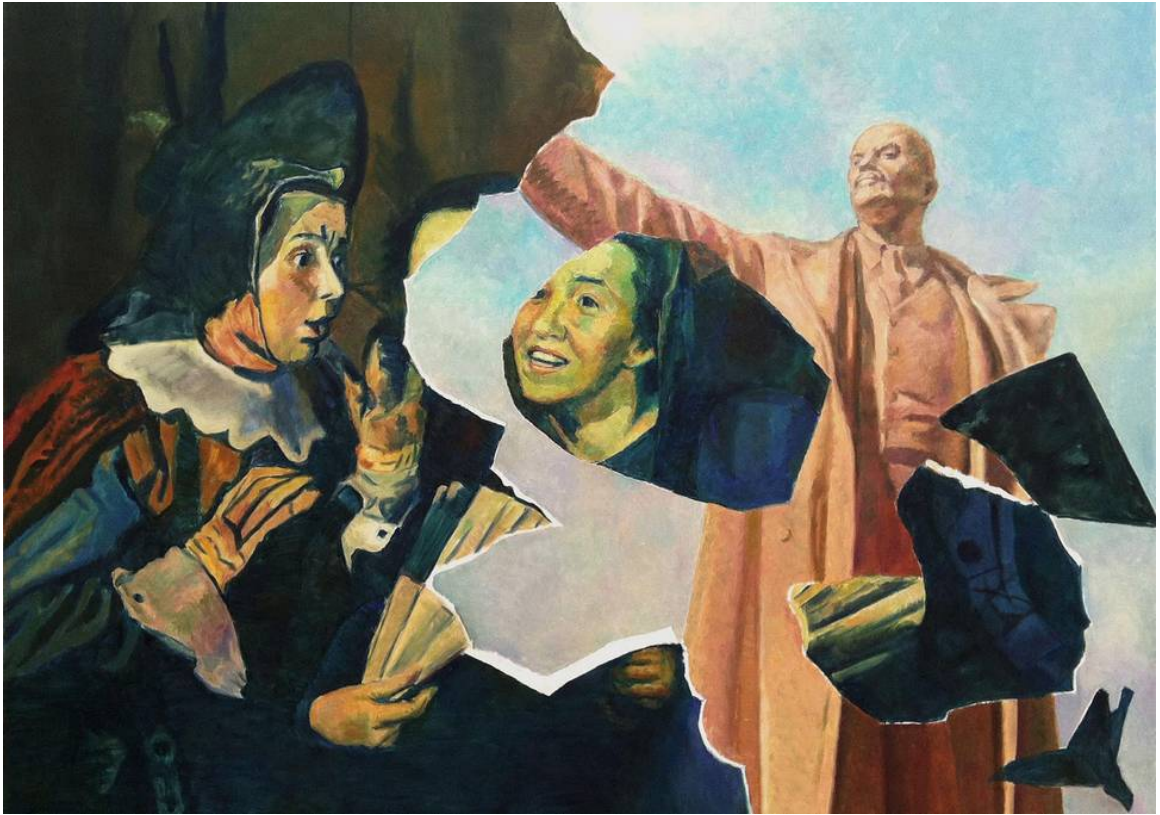


Figure 4-15: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. *The Appearance of the Collage #10*, 2012. Oil on canvas, 80.7 x 107.7 in. (205.1 x 273.7 cm). Courtesy Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.

EPILOGUE



Figure 5-1: David Maljković. Frame from *Scene for a New Heritage*, 2004. Video (color, sound), 4:33 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

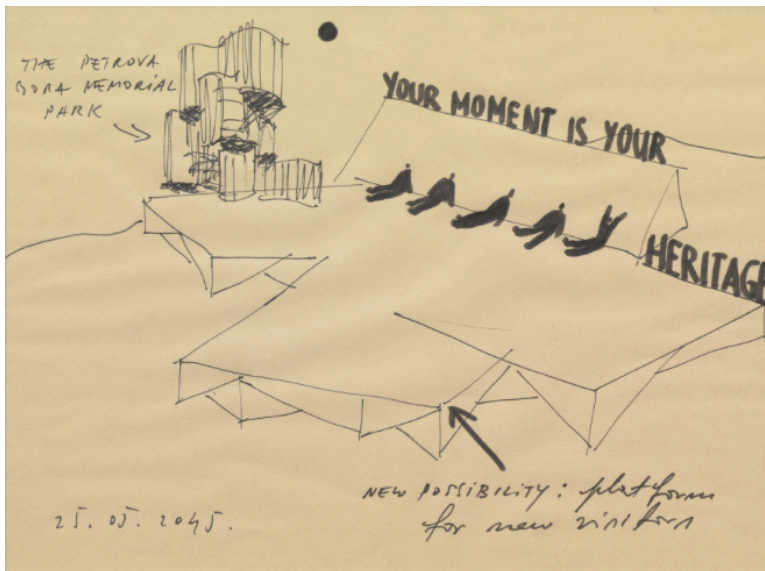


Figure 5-2: David Maljković. From the series *Scene for a New Heritage – New Possibilities Series, A*, 2004. Cut-and-pasted paper and printed paper and felt-tip pen on paper, 12 3/4 x 19 1/8 in. (32.4 x 48.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

APPENDIX I

Transcript of interview with Olga Chernysheva
New York, New York
October 7, 2016

N.B. The interview was conducted in Russian and English. It previously was published. See Ksenia Nouril. "A Conversation with Olga Chernysheva." *ARTMargins Online*. Last modified May 21, 2017. Accessed June 26, 2017.

<http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/interviews-sp-837925570/797-a-conversation-with-olga-chernysheva>

Ksenia Nouril: Your exhibition *Vague Accent* presented new drawings made after a month-long residency in New York with The Drawing Center in 2015. What were your motivations behind the exhibition?

Olga Chernysheva: It's quite difficult for me to step outside of myself and describe the exhibition. It's about relations. Life consists of resonances. The works in the exhibition talked to one another, sometimes in ways I never imagined. I wanted the exhibition to look ordinary—to compare it to a casual conversation or even a whisper. I did not want the viewer to enter with any predisposed notions. I simply wanted to show what makes me happy, what I call "miracles"—small discoveries that make me stop and marvel. The works are about humanity and the ability of a person to be open to these miracles that occur when things shift. Things—people, places, objects—are alive and pulsate. This is the miracle that I try to capture in my drawings. Ideally, I want people to see this pulsation, the living system. It's interesting for me to think about what sounds these pulsating things make, and what other forms they take within my drawings. These

miracles or little discoveries are both seen and unseen. I wanted the exhibition to create for the viewer a sensation of familiar and unfamiliar objects.

KN: Miracles seem to be a thread within your practice. Is this a reference to your earlier series *Waiting for the Miracle* (2000)? What is the relationship between these new drawings and your earlier works?

OC: People often ask me about the series *Waiting for the Miracle*. What do I mean by “miracle”? The women, who are photographed from the back wearing winter hats, look like flowers or butterflies. I want to know, what is the miracle that will change our lives? For me, the miracle is how these hats look like flowers and vice versa. How an image, something simple and so straight forward, can look different when viewed from another perspective.

KN: While a visual artist, you are also very interested in language. What is the meaning of the exhibition’s title, *Vague Accent*?

OC: I thought of the title, because I still feel like a guest in New York. When I was there on residency, I felt like I understood the language and the culture but found I could only come to terms with certain things within the context of my art. When I look at the drawings, they look differently, as if they were made by someone of a different background—not by someone from New York. There is an accent, like I have an accent. *Vague Accent* is connected to the works, to how you can combine language with image.

When I am working, I am thinking of how to approach an image. I try to reduce everything, but in the end, nothing would be understandable without a slight accent.

KN: This is not the first time texts have appeared with images in your works. You combined text and image in your previous drawings as well as your earlier series *Clippings* and *Screens*. Can you talk about the relationship between image and text in these particular drawings?

OC: I wrote these texts in Russian then translated them with the exhibition's curator, Nova Benway. After that, there was a lot of editing. Sometimes the texts come first, sometimes after. I started to write sometime ago, which is when I started to combine text with image, namely video. It came out of the problem that some images are missed, but in my drawings it is different. I liked this method because these texts are one more filter I can apply to the works to claim that they are not reality but pictures. They are like hieroglyphs, which can disappear someday, when I can then remake them. For someone educated in the Socialist Realist school of painting in the Soviet Union, the distance between image and reality is shorter than in the American school of art.

KN: Why did you translate them? Why not leave them in the original Russian?

OC: Because then it wouldn't have a vague accent. It would be a total accent.

KN: It sounds like your time on residency in New York was short and very intense. Could you describe your work process?

OC: While in New York, I just made the sketches. I did not complete any drawings. I decided which subjects I liked and which subjects I'd further develop. When working, I like to hang onto one subject for a while and work it over, producing multiple drawings. However, I did not include many of these multiples in this exhibition. I like to find a situation that embodies a kind of internal quietness. I always listen to the silence. I try to find the silence. There are some ideas that are always bothering me. I would say I am very sensitive. All my drawings are connected to the floating condition of my life. They are very close to things they depict, like cartoons. As a student in film school, I was trained as a cartoonist, which allows me to mix things up. This is how I like to work. What I like, maybe it's just technical, when you're working, what I usually do is imagine small as big or big and small—opposites—it always brings you an understanding of how to draw the subject. It's important to add the contrary or supplemental image. If you draw an interior, think about an exterior. Then your drawing will have a character. Our mind is constructed—if you concentrate on something, our mind becomes less shapeful. It's difficult for the brain to stay sharp. Usually you just concentrate on what is shown to you. When I was in New York, I was looking for something that your memory can catch—strange things, that can be the point of your attention.

KN: Did you work differently in New York than you usually do in Moscow? Is there anything about the images inspired by your time in New York that sets them apart as quintessentially “New York”?

OC: I am afraid that New York did not affect me so much. Its landscape and landmarks are rather well known. I was on my own the whole time, because I know when I talk I don’t see well. So I was hanging around, not always feeling very comfortable. Though, I wouldn’t say it brought a new way or method into my work. Maybe I feel more concentrated now. In 2015 at the 56th Venice Biennale, I had an installation of drawings about things you can touch. The subjects were very diverse and not necessarily rooted in one location. I wanted the drawings from New York to be happy memories of the city, but in the end, they turned out to be signals, a kind of doubling—how something personal can come out of a public place.

KN: How do you choose what you draw?

OC: The subjects shouldn’t be exotic. They should also have potential. When I feel this potential, I can draw it. Before I start, I already have the idea of what size, what proportion. Sometimes I mix it up. I ask, how to express it, how to display it. I know what it should look like. Usually, I am searching for the image and not the reality. It’s the kind of potential reality. For example, I know I don’t need to show how the shoes are standing in the shop. I depicted a New York that is always being built and transforming

itself. I like this concept of eternal creation. New York itself is unfinished, its details are always changing.

KN: You are very well known for your photographs. What role did photography play in these drawings?

OC: I do sketches from direct view, but I also use a lot of photographs, although never directly. When I see something, I try to take a photograph because some details can easily be forgotten. To take a simple picture, I use an iPhone. The iPhone has an extremely aggressive lens, but it's easy.

KN: It seems like your work is inflected by a kind of filmic vision. Some drawings appear to be framed within the frame. Some have an excess of negative space while others could bleed into one another.

OC: You can see the struggle in my works. I like to have a frame and struggle with it. I build up the frames enough in order to do this. Sometimes you see a line I wanted to cut, but then I decided against it. I try hard so that there is no difference between the fore- and background in my work.

KN: Is this a holdover from your student days, studying animation?

OC: Educated as an animator, every picture has the capacity to be made alive. This is how I feel very often about the objects I see, about my drawings. This is how I construct them. It's not direct documentary. My drawings have the potential to move. I think how they should move and where. They are not stories in one, long, unbroken narrative. I would like them to be like an open net.

KN: Are all of these drawings part of one series? How do they relate to your previous sets of drawings?

OC: I don't want to divide the works based on when and where I exhibited them. I am still thinking about how to make them into a single body of work, just divided by time and space. I am thinking of a name, so they can be together, but I don't think this is the most important principle for my work. All of the works are united by their focus on their subjects. I insist that they are all still drawings, depictions of people, places, and things—they are not reality.

KN: What is your relationship with realism? Do you see yourself as reviving a kind of new realism?

OC: I like realism because it is not about self-expression. There are so many interesting things around, so it's not really necessary to make self-expression primary. But I love Japanese prints, and they are not about realism. They are all about how images are constructed.

KN: The drawings are not arranged chronologically but vaguely thematically; yet there is a beginning and an end, marked by your self-portraits: from “First self-portrait after passport control” to an image of home. What made you introduce self-portraits to this exhibition?

OC: This exhibition is about being alone somewhere, which is why this is how it starts and ends. The trip had a beginning and an end. They are not traditional self-portraits but are a reflection of reality or circumstance. They look so funny these objects—they are part of the architecture of the airport. An object that looks like a body. And it’s not such a recognizable portrait. You need it to move in order to recognize it. There was still one more self-portrait, but it wasn’t a reflection, and that was important. You can make a lot of kinds of self-portraits that don’t have to be reflections or reveal that they are. In the dryer, there is one of a thousands reflections.

KN: On one hand, it seems natural that, in New York, you would be surrounded by other art in galleries and museums. These institutions show up a few times across your drawings. Why?

OC: When I visited MoMA for the Picasso show, I was admiring the sculptures, but at the same time I heard a voice singing. First, it seemed like I was hallucinating, but then I heard it again, and so I moved close and searched for the sound. Then I saw that it was a guard, a man of Caribbean origin, singing a native song in a very beautiful manner. The

acoustics in the museum were good. I started to talk to him, asked if I could record it, but he said no, because he was on duty. For me, this was a hidden moment, a treasure, which I thought about when making this work. I was very happy because it seemed to me like this sound birthed this exhibition.

KN: Did these drawings generate an idea in your mind, for the future? What is to come?

OC: It's very boring, but you go to different places, but you see the same thing, so I don't know if they are a new idea or they are part of you. They always are screaming; they are calling; they are inviting; and they are asking for your attention. I think we all struggle to know, to see some model that we belong to. For the future, yes, I am hoping to transfer some drawings from this show to my next show in Vienna. It would be interesting to build up the unit, add drawings all over the world, but they cannot directly point to where they are from. You can recognize it's a certain place but not through kitschy, touristy landmarks. I have some ideas, at least in theory, of how to do this. I like this, because for me this was a fresh unexpected invitation. I was told, use your mental construction here in New York, as you work in Moscow, but just do it here. I was very worried, but I felt like provoked, moved. I am glad to keep this principle going. It won't be a traveling show, but I want to keep some emerita or speed or possibility to work like that, for example, in Vienna.

APPENDIX II

Transcript of interview with Deimantas Narkevičius
Vilnius, Lithuania
June 6, 2016

Ksenia Nouril: There are a few points I would like to clarify without repeating certain questions that I know you're often asked in interviews.

Deimantas Narkevičius: I'm used to that. Don't worry about that.

KN: Could you speak more about your early work in sculpture and its relationship with your work today in film? You have a very traditional background in the production of three-dimensional objects, but today, arguably, you sculpt with film. It is very sculptural in the way you work with material and the way you are metaphorically sculpting a history of your own life and the communist experience in Lithuania.

DN: You mean, why I have moved from one medium to another? I've answered such questions a few times, but each time, it's always different. The reason why I moved from sculpture, from object to sound and image is because the environment was changing. It was so dynamic during the '90s—here [in Vilnius, in Lithuania] and everywhere in the former socialist world. Everything was changing so rapidly, and I thought, I was interested in narratives, and moving image and voice-overs or recordings were easier for me to reflect on in this dynamic environment. So, that's one reason why I switched. Another reason is that around 1997, I made my first film. In the beginning of the '90s, it

was very difficult to start to reflect on the era, which had just gone. It was still everywhere—all the marks. In the '90s, we were still living in the same sort of way we used to live in the '80s. It needed five or, in my case, seven years to start to reflect these changes. Without these changes, the understanding of the recent past would not have been possible, or I would not have been able to see something is kind of already something else, no longer a part of me. I got distance to that.

KN: Do you think there is ever a time of too much distance?

DN: When? Now?

KN: Yes, I think people challenge an interest in the Soviet period with a more international or global outlook. So, why are you so interested in the Soviet past as you move farther and father away from it, as it become less present?

DN: Well, some people, I think, around the same time, were interested in this sort of reflection on the recent past, and some of them, as you said, really kind of joined this sort of global aesthetics with global concepts in colleges and universities, like what is the white cube, what is conceptual art. They started to operate with these ideas and some particularity of their own, and I don't know, that's one thing.

KN: I think it's also an identity question. Why identify something as post-Soviet or Eastern European as we move farther away from its time?

DN: Now, we are talking in 2016. I started to reflect on this recent past back in 1996. Twenty years ago, there was a different urgency or different needs. At that time, this kind of identity or, in a way—I never liked this kind of identity, because it is searching for something very specific, which is what I don't do—because even through this interest, through my focus on the remains of Soviet life, especially look through media, film, television, architecture, public space, planning, I was searching for what is *in common* between former Soviet modernity and non-Soviet modernity. So, I was looking for this sort of kind of visual vocabulary, so that something could be in common, understandable, or communicative.

KN: Do you feel that, as you've moved farther and farther away from that period, it is still as relevant as it was then?

DN: Well, it's less, probably because I cannot demand or expect this constant interest into their sort of identity of Eastern Europe because there are other regions in the world that have a very regional or particular way of looking—in Africa or Brazil—and this is understandable, and they are more exciting probably—or China or whatever. This is a sort of local issue that goes from local to global. I think, in a way, it is repeated by many different artists in different places, of course, in different forms and in different periods. And you cannot expect this. So, naturally, artists of a younger generation start to operate with a global aesthetics or whatever. I don't know. I personally don't do this. I probably don't need to do so. I am still enjoying this kind of reflection on the remains of socialism

or communism because even now it is changing. It's not the same as it was five, ten, fifteen, or twenty years ago. For example, talking politically, this turn to the right in terms of politics in Russia, Poland, Hungary, and everywhere—the socialist period seems like a miracle. Not a miracle, but how can these countries change so radically? What does it mean? What happened to these people that they have gone from one extreme to another one? Also there is the political identification with certain histories in these countries, the hyper-historicization of their national concepts. It starts to be scary.

KN: Do you see this happening in Lithuania, if not now, then in the near future?

DN: It's not that extreme, but also there is this kind of historicization, also a looking into historical trauma—maybe not as much as in Poland, but anyway. What I am saying this common ideology—whatever it was, the common sense or feeling of society that was not as identified with a certain nationality—looks like something earlier [seems as if it were from another time], but it was really just twenty-five years ago and near here. So, if the turn or reflection on the former socialist period, like in the '90s meant something, like a not implemented utopia, let's say. Now, it seems like it never happened, utopia. In the '90s it was incomplete utopia, but now it seems like so far away, where we are not in this region sometimes.

KN: Yet, you mention modernity and you make a distinction between Soviet modernity and former Soviet modernity, so there is a difference between these modernisms or modernities. There is a Soviet modernity that manifested itself through Constructivism in

the earlier period and, in the later period, Socialist Realism or a kind of realism that can be understood now as modernity. There are some people who argue this. What is your relationship to those modernisms? How is that manifested in your work?

DN: Well, first of all, basically, it's with the architecture, filming architecture. These architecture sites, whatever they are, whether an electrical power station or...

KN: Where is it?

DN: It is its own city, between Vilnius and Kaunas.

KN: I think I passed it while on the train.

DN: The first question: is it very particular or unique, this kind of identity thing? Exceptional? Or is it part of a kind of common discourse? This very particular traumatic past was not that traumatic or, at least, mixed, and it probably was not that unique.

KN: Traumatic is a very dangerous word. One thing I push against is the application of trauma or nostalgia to art from Eastern Europe in ways that are not very productive. I would be cautious in using that word.

DN: These words were *applied* in a way to my work.

KN: By people like me—art historians.

DN: I wasn't necessarily looking for trauma but dramatic modernization. Some writers used to say that Soviet modernization was traumatic modernization, a brutal destruction of society, like resettled people from one place to another, taking people's houses and forcing them to move to the city, nationalizing the land. Of course, it was very traumatic, but at the same time, it was modernization. It was very difficult for people to accept. Especially in the '90s, specifically the beginning of the '90s, the Soviet period was seen as a total failure, an imprisonment.

KN: But those are sensationalist narratives. I don't personally know what it was like or what the art scene was like, but I think in a larger Soviet or post-Soviet context, a lot of it gets sensationalized, represented in its extreme, which promotes stereotypical readings of trauma and nostalgia.

DN: I don't think it was that traumatic. I was looking even through propaganda eyes, especially when coming to cinema and newsreels. The purpose was the advertisement of a certain lifestyle and ideology. But I was looking through the documents or remains or whatever as an act of creativity. This I thought was a creative period, especially in the liberation of certain social sectors of community to become involved, to be able to express themselves through labor, education, whatever. I think it was, in a way, changing in that sense. Of course, some sectors were very restricted, like art. There was no

possibility to travel or operate with concepts outside the understanding of Socialist Realism.

KN: So, the situation in Lithuania was closer to that in the other Soviet Republics than in the satellite states, like Poland, where forms of abstraction were more acceptable.

DN: Well, it was much more liberal in Poland. To be in a Warsaw Pact country is one thing, but to be in a region in the Soviet Union was another thing.

KN: But was it as strict as it was in Moscow or slightly more free?

DN: Well, in Moscow, I think, in a way, you were more observed, there was less control, but self-control was working here. But at the same time...

KN: You mean, self-censorship?

DN: Yes, but in Moscow, there were more possibilities, in some sense, because the discourse was deep there. We didn't have the conceptual practices they did since the late '70s. We don't have Kabakov. Even Kabakov and Emilia used to come—what I heard from my colleagues—they really liked to come here in the summer, stay in Lithuania, in the '80s. But Lithuanian artists were not part of these Moscow conceptual groups. It was not really connected.

KN: And not as connected as the Estonians, through the Tartu School and semiotics?

DN: No, I think not. There definitely were certain discourses, but I don't know if they were really realized. They took a certain form of expression. Well, photography was strong, especially here in Lithuania.

KN: Yes, Lithuanian photography is very well known, namely the photographers Antanas Sutkus and Vitas Luckus.

DN: Luckus is dead, but he was very influential, especially on Boris Mikhailov. Because, I think, in Lithuania, starting in the late '60s and early '70s, they established photography as visual art, not as just a profession. This is what was inspiring for photographers in Moscow and Ukraine. But, yeah, anyway, so, I don't think it was so traumatic up to the level where it would block people's creativity—of course, it was not a democratic regime, but it was possible for people to express themselves and realize themselves, and it was this kind of potentiality, which was then inspiring me to make this work, revisiting sites of great industrial achievement. The other thing is, I am not nostalgic about the period. Neither of these expressions [trauma or nostalgia] are, I think, really relevant to my work or the way I see.

KN: If you are not nostalgic, why revisit it?

DN: Well, I'll quote something someone I recently read said: it is a form of passive resistance.

KN: Someone wrote that about your work or about looking at the past, in general?

DN: In general, I think. I have to double check. But, I think my reflection on the past was not for nostalgic aspirations but more about understanding what's going on now.

KN: Resistance has a political connotation for me, but I wouldn't consider your work political, first and foremost.

DN: No, it isn't. Of course, just simply being interested in socialist architecture is already political in a way.

KN: But in a very subtle and sophisticated way, one that is more social or sociological than political.

DN: Possibly, yes. It's not passive resistance but it's a kind of... I didn't think about this when I started because it was not so evident but all these localist views and hyper-historicization already began in the '90s, and probably intuitively, I was thinking, we don't have to artificially erase certain periods of our history to be really looking at this development as possibly a development or period that gave us something positive. I was even saying that the basis of our modernity was created during the Soviet period,

especially in Lithuania. It's not totally true but partly because this traumatic modernization was modernization. Society was being shaped and reshaped. The landscape was changed. Maybe not this part of the city [Old Town], but even this [my studio] is a socialist flat, you know.

KN: You say that this has made itself evident now in your work but what else has made itself evident in your practice as you look back on it now? Looking back is not only a part of your practice, but you are looking back *at* your practice, as it is changing.

DN: I think it is changing. I think, first of all, when I started to be interested in this recent past it was a relatively new position. I was not alone as an artist, but I managed to bring this local view onto a global scale, but again always from a local point of view.

KN: Right. Not to mention, socialism is a global phenomenon.

DN: In 1997 or 1998, we brought a different perspective to this main trend of what is contemporary art. It was open. You could bring other narratives into it. It was possible; it was exciting. And this is what I did. This issue of the former socialist experience was implemented by many other artists. There were many exhibitions. There were many different, creative ways of doing it. Polish artists were very creative. Roman Ondák did it in a Slovakian way. Jirí Kovanda did it to, in the '70s in Prague. Unfortunately, Július Koller is gone. So, I did my bit from my perspective on how these changes, trends, or modern developments affected us. What was particular? What was a little bit different in

a way? How I was dealing with this, what I rejected, how I constructed this work. Yeah, I think this was something. I brought back narrative. The films had beginnings and ends. There were stories, a kind of modernist approach again. I was conscious of this, of bringing back modernist forms in looking back to this modernist period. It was poignant. I really enjoyed it. We had broken a canon a little bit.

KN: You?

DN: I mean, artists in the late '90s coming from Eastern Europe, but we didn't have this conceptual approach as artists from Croatia or Serbia had because their possibilities were very different. First of all, they could travel. It was a completely different cultural environment. But on the other hand, they easily were accepted by the canon.

KN: Which canon? What canon?

DN: I would say canon...

KN: What is your canon?

DN: My canon is, well, I am not a canonic person. I mean, what is accepted by art history, what is narrated.

KN: What is accepted?

DN: Let's say, global, which is basically European and American, in a way.

KN: A true global canon does not exist.

DN: Of course it cannot, but there are certain things more accepted, certain things less accepted, and certain things are not seen at all.

KN: So you feel that, in Yugoslavia, they broke into the canon, but do you feel you have broken into it?

DN: If I broke in? Well, I don't know. I have been exhibiting with artists of *that* canon. I don't know if it is a break or not, but at least my work was seriously considered. I don't know what it means to break. Let's call it tradition. That's better. Canon is a number of artists. It's not necessarily the right expression, especially when it's used outside of a precise context. I wanted to find a certain visual vocabulary to understand, to be accessible for my colleagues and friends to understand or enjoy the particular moment of transition.

KN: Don't you think you are also reusing the vocabulary of the Soviet past?

DN: Including, sure, but I think I change it a little bit. I articulate it in a different way. It looks similar.

KN: On the surface?

DN: Yes. For example, I have some films that look as if they are made in the '70s. They look like they are from a different time, but they are structured in a way that would have been impossible back then.

KN: I think your work has many temporalities. What do you think about associating your work with anachronism?

DN: Anachronism is also another word I'm not sure about.

KN: Is this [pointing to a recent sculptural work repurposing a set of Soviet speakers in the studio] found or constructed?

DN: No, these are from a cinema. They are original but reworked. There is a digital-analog converter, but it is made according to the schematics of the period. I work with engineers to reconstruct them, so they are useable again.

KN: Would you consider this your sculptural practice now?

DN: This I would consider a set for a performance.

KN: Maybe that's a better term to categorize your more recent work because your hand is farther removed from the object?

DN: This what I started back in the '90s, when I was making readymades. Of course, I probably combined them and probably did something to them. But if I were using shoes or boots, I did not make them, so in a way it is kind of the same. I combine things. But particularly with anachronistic technologies of sound production, I knew people would want to get involved and see difference. Subconsciously, they would understand the politicization of the sound from the past. The readymade or the anachronistic technologies are necessary to be involved in the recreation or creation; it still has to incorporate something from the past.

KN: As in, it holds on to that past?

DN: This is fun because, if someone is playing a recent vinyl record to connect a computer and choose something from Spotify, then it sounds like something from the 1960s. The main goal is not the manifestation of the past, but the perception of the now through the juxtaposition of the present and the past. You choose a song from Spotify, and maybe we will hear or not [hear] the difference. It is about the perception of today through the technology of the past. These speakers are from 1964, the exact same time I was born. They were made in Tashkent.

APPENDIX III

Transcript of interview with Paulina Ołowska: Part I

Paris, France

May 25, 2014

Paulina Ołowska: I love Paris. You find people here—artists—living in the classical way. They [this couple I recently interviewed who are marionnetters] live in this house provided by the government. It's this Bloomsbury house, which looks like the '70s. It is a studio and living space. She's a marionette player. He's a Chilean, bit Picasso-esque painter, a bit political. I interviewed them because I am starting this magazine *Pavilionesque*. I had a proposal for a book, but I just did this book with JP Ringer, and I think it's enough retrospecting into my work, and I want to do something vivid, as I am entering this new platform, which is opening and understanding the idea of the object, which leads to marionettes, which leads to telling a story, which leads to narration, but also a kind of— it's in the same field, as well. Sometimes, when I talk to Bartek [Bartosz Przybył Ołowski, my husband], we have these discussions as well because he says, as a philosopher, looking into the past is a bit, it's not very, not a very philosophical approach, a very Marxist, let's change the world, modernist approach, but that's many things I don't agree with, as it's being misinterpreted or layered by this one generic way of seeing art, which was made by men and one type of discourse. I am interested in being this person who sits in conversations and says, "What do you think of this?" or "Let's look at this from another perspective, so we have a slightly side view of a thing or move it upside down to put it to the side or look at this object in relation to another."

Ksenia Nouril: And you think that necessitates a looking into the past?

PO: Well, I think this is what we can do. I am involved a lot in these conversations, especially as it is a very current theme right now, and I wonder what you think of it. There is discussion in Poland right now, for example, and perhaps the same is in Russia and Ukraine as well, that art objects are too formalist. That we cannot discuss objects but do theory and be social. But I think that's a very interesting approach, but why is it so dominant? It's also like leading the same patterns for me as all the systems, like patriarchy. For me, I was discussing that objects are a language. You can deal with objects, not an homage thing but a real thing. This is maybe why fashion, and clothes, and all the applied arts attract me because they don't have this pretentiousness, this iconicness of art proper.

KN: I'm happy to hear this. In Russia and Ukraine, where I also work, actions dominate contemporary art. Many artists I work with there produce actions. Maybe it's because of the politics. In my work, I am about the object. I want to combine a formalist approach, which has been made passé, with that of social art history. The latter is very important when writing about Central and Eastern Europe, especially in the American context, where you need to contextualize the socio-historical. For this, I have theorized what I call the operative object, which like a secret agent maintains neither stable meaning nor material as it is translated across space and time.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

PO: Sometimes [in relation to upcoming exhibitions], I put a pressure on myself, you're doing too much, trying out too many things. You can see this in the shows, as some are stronger than others, but it permits me to go on a little sidetrack, a little bit like a dance, just as Irigaray wrote. One that is kind of spiritual. It's good to forget the reason, and this is good for making shows. There has to be this flow. Some of the images, theories or concepts are coming very early, but they are in the very early stages of life, like a baby talk or a drunken talk, and it's hard to tell if they are making sense.

KN: Or you are coming back to it much later and its more advanced?

PO: Sometimes I feel like people think I am very privileged, that I can do this dance, that I can make a bad show, that I can make a good show. I thought about this when I was doing the show in Warsaw [*The Spell of Warsaw* at Zachęta National Gallery, March 1 – April 27, 2014], which, of course, gives me this other reflection because all my professors came from Gdnask, and [Zbigniew] Libera was there—the crème de la crème—and they were looking, and I could see that they were like, “Yeah, we get it, but why her?” It's a kind of competition. It's not an understanding of the work, but a really personal thing. Why her? The language I am talking about is so thin, still so transparent that there are not a lot of references.

KN: Which language—yours, in your work, or that of the critics?

PO: The language of the critics, those who are looking at my work. And this is my new thing that I am starting to understand, that because it was so close to the core of the origin, that it was not understood. I remember when I had the interview with Rijksakademie twelve, no, fourteen years ago with Luc Tuymans, it was for the first time that someone asked me, How do you deal with nostalgia? Why do you deal with nostalgia? Being really young, I said I deal with it because I am outside of it, so I can judge it and then I can juxtapose it with what I see there. So, it was a way of seeing things, a way of seeing the change in a system, and all the objects that go with it—architecture, design, way of speaking, way of dressing, way of acting in a way, a way of taste—because this all went with the change of system.

KN: Do you still see yourself as being on the outside?

PO: I have always been on the outside of that, which is why I am this limbo artist. It's a little bit like Hélène Cixous, who asks, "Why am I writer?" I have everything wrong. I am not French, so French is not my original language. I am Jewish—at least, I think she was Jewish. I am a woman. Why am I dealing with these things? I don't love modernism. I don't love this aesthetic. I don't even think modernist, as well. It is a more poignant, layered way of thinking. My modernism is a vision, a utopic vision of modernism. My modernism was wearing clothes that look like Stepanova and Malevich. And that was my modernism. So, I kind of feel like I am in this artwork of a language. I guess the break for me was... the interesting part about me is that I am looking from the outside, that I am neither, or because first I studied at the art institute [the Art Institute of Chicago], and

then I was 17, and I was studying with the top—it was not Judy Chicago—but an American women artist who was into feminist work, Charles Ray was a visiting artist, Paula Rego, and I saw that their work can be quite capricious because how they discuss their work, as Charles was saying, “I was sitting smoking pot, and then I made this table and objects started moving, and then the table was moving.” Then, for various reasons—financial and family—I moved back, and I entered this system [the Polish post-communist system] with this [American] knowledge, which is very particular. It was like I flew in from Mars.

KN: Interesting, so you feel like you’re an outsider even in your own culture?

PO: Completely. Sometimes when I travel to America and speak with Americans, like you, I think I have a better understanding than I do with Poles, I guess when it comes to art, because I started making art outside of the Polish context. I was making work referring to modernism in the very beginnings of the 2000s, the time of the Rijksakademie, thinking that there needs to be a moment of coming back to the core, coming back to the ideas or things that could be so easily neglected. And I saw that all in front of my eyes [in Poland]. It was coming to really surreal situations. My school in Gdansk was in a beautiful archery house from the sixteenth century, the golden times of Poland. The school—it’s a sad story; I might have too many of those sad stories—after WWII, the communist turned it into a new free academy of fine arts. After communism, the school could not afford it, so they gave the main floor instead of a gallery [over] to a supermarket, then I was invited to the National Gallery in Sopot, near Gdansk. During the

[communist] regime, each city had a supported national gallery, so they [the state] had to know what they were supporting, so there had to be a plan. Artists found ways to work. For example, the magazine *Ty i Ja*, which I use. I thought, this is so fantastic! It's a gang of great artists that boomed this woman's magazine.

KN: Where did you access these magazines?

PO: My grannie's house! But going back to Sopot. I am seeing this surreal situation with the National Gallery show, for example, saying to me that they want me to do a show, but that I need to do it quickly because they are remodeling the gallery. This is in 2001. The new system does not permit the idea of sponsorship of national galleries. They wanted me to do a show because the gallery would eventually be turned into a spa. I thought, "Wow! This is an amazing moment—galleries being turned into spas." When capitalism entered Poland, people were so excited. They thought they could do everything. This was very bizarre. For me, a person who worked in a shopping mall in Chicago, I knew that capitalism is a very tricky partner to have, a very maneuvering partner that can maneuver you in so many ways. Contrary to what others think, I think you can find ways to sidetrack capitalism. Back then, I was making work, and I thought I'm going to be a small-town artist in Gdansk, maybe work in a gallery. I come from a family of artists, completely bohemian, no money. They [my family] were a part of the fall of the system. My step-father was an amber jewelry maker. So, when I went back to Gdansk for that exhibition, I knew what I wanted to do, figurative painting. By that time, I knew a bit of Western figurative painters—[Elizabeth] Peyton, [Lucian] Freud, and so on—a little bit

[from my time abroad] was sinking in but not a lot. It's the moment of [Zbigniew] Libera and [Katarzyna] Kozyra in Poland, so painting was not so hot. But I was really into painting because it is the oldest form and was really into the figurative. What I am working on now [in 2014] is a show that I have crudely called "Figurative." It's not the best title. One of the reasons why my art was not understood was because I was learning from another source. My source of inspiration and being brought up was American high school, which I attended for three years in the suburbs of Chicago. I was working in McDonald's there and in a shopping mall. I was meant to live in the States, but I kind of ran away from it. I was done with the idea of living there and being a part of it. Growing up, I learned history from two points of view. I very quickly learned that it doesn't make sense; that it is all untrue. You learn about the first of May... and then I pass my exams on the American Constitution. If you are 17, you see that something is fake, and you stop believing.

Transcript of interview with Paulina Ołowska: Part II
Paris, France
May 25, 2014

Paulina Ołowska: Now, I want to get back to the root of what is the portrait representation of a woman. I am going to bring it to this glamorous version of a woman as the Holy Mary, as a saint. Throughout history, it's the women with a child that is the most purified image.

Ksenia Nouril: Are you preparing for a show?

PO: Yes, with Simon Lee Gallery in Hong Kong in September, with images of women with child. I am reading this book *Real Desires* about portraits of nuns. On one hand, it is super sexualized, and on the other, it is the purity of sexual experience. In the end I am interested in the sexiness of an object because sexiness is what Lacan describes, via Žižek. He writes about this omelet, the moment of the other, the libido—an anti-object in between things. In my kind of research, I’m trying to say libido is one thing, between man and woman, between anything, but what I am trying to say is that in the end, it can be an object, too.

KN: In my work, the rewriting of narratives is very important. How can we talk about nostalgia or trauma in a more productive way?

PO: In the West, there is a hangover culture, in which everything is blasé. You go on but are slightly kind of dazed. In Poland, there is no blasé. There is still a fight, and that is why I still live there and make work there. Because making work here [in the West, outside Poland] means that the work becomes a commodity. As I argue in my exhibition at Zachęta National Gallery, we [in Poland] never had pop culture; we never had pop art, in a way, because there was no commodity culture. [In Poland], there is no reference to an object with a sense of distance. There is a level of thinking of objects as icons. This is why, when Maurizio Cattelan installs a sculpture of the Pope in Poland, people think it’s real, and they want to save him. My argument, which is completely new, is because there is no sense of dealing with the everyday object. My exhibition in Amsterdam was different. It was received better. It was installed next to [Kazimir] Malevich. It was a

show by a woman who looks at female subjects and struggled against two systems. The only thing they didn't like was the graffiti. It was fine, but for me its what's most interesting what happens with the exhibitions after. Take, for example, Alina Szapocznikow, who lived in Paris, was dealing with making the Rolls Royce. She was one of the first women in Poland to make fun of pop—bellies as pillows, lips as a lamp. For me, she is one of the few that deals with it. In the 1980s, there was the group Luxus—playing on the name Fluxus—but again it goes to Mickey Mouse, describing very iconic imagery. It's not describing what you wear, what you are, and so on. It's still so old fashioned, but there is this word in Polish: *rękodzieło*. For example, I am always arguing with this fashion designer, who always considers my work to be “*rękodzieło*.” *Dzieło* is masterpiece. It comes from the verb “to make.” But it is not “work”—*praca*. And *rękodzieło* is handwork. So, the real *dzieło* is made without hands, by God. *Rękodzieło* is all the crafts.

KN: And you try to avoid that word? You don't like that word?

PO: Yes, because I think it is entering into very complicated mode of what is this *dzieło*, first of all? I want to be the artist who says that “made by hand” means not only the lesser or applied arts. I like the word “applied” because I think you apply it to the art, patch it to the art, make an extra patch to the art.

KN: As if there is something there to begin with?

PO: Yes, that there is something there, and that something exists, but it is not entering art history but applied art history and then adding it to the canon of art history. It is coming from this double language because it is made by hand.

KN: This reminds me of the difference between the artist and the school or studio of the artist. There is a big difference between the two, when it comes to connoisseurship.

PO: It is not about the real hand. For me, it is about the making of the thing—craftsmanship and not in the traditional way. I am not interested in traditional gesture but in the language of making, using gesture to discuss things.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

PO: Here, we have my old works, my collages. The more you make art, the more you see how things from the past address something as opposed to things from today.

KN: You are interested in resurrecting histories, specifically women's histories. Art historically, one might want to think about the polemics of the original and copy. Your approach feels reminiscent of Medieval artists. What does Christ look like and how did Medieval artists depict Christ and the image of man? How was the first image repeated by unnamed artisans across Europe? Maybe this is a helpful idea to consider in relation to your work.

PO: The language I am trying to speak from my perspective is a female language. All women artists are treated as crazy women. There is very little respect. Some become celebrities, but... I think I am going to make a show about it. When men get older, they get respect, but with women, it goes down. With Kozyra, for example, she made this strong statement, but now she is considered passé. The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw is doing a really good job in rectifying this. I remember six years ago I saw Narkevičius there, and he told me that this museum will be the first museum, the closest museum to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, and Russia for art. And, to think, it doesn't even have a building yet!

KN: It is interesting you mention him, as I am also working with him.

PO: He has this very peculiar and sensitive way of looking at things. He's good. I like his work. Completely different era, completely different take, but I think, pretty sensitive.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

PO: So, I wanted to ask you something about the figurative and my way of thinking about an object, an animated object because this is what I got into... so one of the strongest impressions of discussing my way of thinking, I think it was done in a way, in writing by Hélène Cixous and *écriture féminine*, feminine writing and her-story and not history. When I was reading *Laugh of the Medusa*, I was thinking this is exactly what I

am trying to do in my work. Her object versus her thing. Writing for me is like making objects. It starts to become a story.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

KN: Let's talk about agency. In these objects you're making, are you giving them agency?

PO: I want to put them on the table and have them change the course of the situation. So, yes, they have agency. They change the course of conversation, in a way. But for me, the word agency is complicated. In Polish, it's *agencja*, and connotes a few people working on the same subject. This is how I understand agency.

KN: For me, I am coming to agency as a tool for wielding power.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

PO: I was part of a group of people involved in Warsaw actionism—action through formalism, on my side. I did the neon project; I was part of discussions. Anda Rottenberg and Artur Żmijewski were there—10, 12 years ago. Anyway, this was so tiring, and I left the scene. I was tired of having to speak the same language as them. This was before *Krytyka Polityczna* was founded. I am doing modernism sideways, and this is what Jan Verwoert suggested in one of his texts. I left the city for them to focus on, and I moved

sideways to take a school in the province, let's say, and create my case study on what modernism is or the real broken modernism.

KN: Modernism—is that to which you look back? What about communism? Is it right to say you're looking back at that, too?

PO: Yes. But I am not sure about modernism anymore.

KN: Me, too. I'm skeptical and try to avoid it.

PO: I liked it, and I talk about it. It's like my poster, "Reconstucting Modernism" (2001/2013), when I made it, I made a spelling mistake—*reconstucting* not reconstructing. I showed it to Lucie McKenzie and said, "Oh my god, I just spent 200 Euros on this poster and have to print it again," and she said, "No, it's great! Leave it." For me, there have been a few cases in trying to negotiate between modernism and postmodernism because in the 1980s there was so much discussion of postmodernism, then in the 1990s, it was color, Malevich, the avant-garde, rejecting this jambalaya soup. In the Rijksakademie, I was trying to tackle them. They were saying this to me, and I responded by saying I was interested in modernism. They thought it wasn't possible to reference modernism nowadays and bring it alive. For example, there is this one critic who wrote that I am not working with modernism but Sots modernism.

KN: You describe yourself as being in between, and I think this is evident in your work. It is useful to think of modernisms—plural—in relation to your work.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

PO: When I started using the word modernism, nobody was using it. It was a tool, useful at the moment. I thought it was cheeky to use it as an object on the table. What is this modernism? You couldn't use the word communism. That's why the work is so difficult to understand because you have to know that I am not coming from an academic background. While my work is very academic in a formal sense, I never formally studied theory or art history. I like it that my work has my way of envisioning things. It has the passion of my initial love of things. For example, if I am reading a play by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, I'm not reading it from the point of view of being in high school [as most Polish people would have read him while in high school] because I was in high school in the States, so I have this complete gap of understanding culture, so too, I have this gap in understanding modernisms.

KN: You have said that you have a preference for personal histories rather than history with a capital H. How does this relate to your more recent works?

PO: Right now, I am thinking of the animated object, the uncanny object—in a Freudian sense. But I am also seeing it in terms of Mike Kelly that he did on the uncanny—objects that are figurative but pretend that they are alive but are really dead. How can you turn it

around? How to make the dead objects alive? I am making a painting, and it is a dead object, but I am pretending that this woman [my subject] is alive. It's creating this fantasy that it's alive. This is why I am interested in puppetry because it has this vision, but it's killed by grown-ups. Children believe that it's alive.

KN: Is history dead? If so, can it be reanimated?

PO: Her-story. History. I think history as a fantasy, as a story. It's alive. I think it's alive. It's alive because there are so many points and abstract connections of how it can be interpreted or said. For example, my French teacher translated Tadeusz Kantor, but no one would ever ask her to write a book about her life—going to Poland in 1968 and working with artists like Kantor. What makes her story more or less interesting than that of others? For me, her story is more layered, and for me, more layered means more interpretation you give to the viewer.

KN: History with a capital H is one narrative, but there are always parallel narratives. They exist and need to be brought out.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

PO: I am trying to make a metaphor for the possibility of animation. An object can be animated—sleep, talk, move, make you have emotions, have a cognitive experience, like a person. This is what I really hope and why I am intrigued by marionnetters. I want to go

back to the language of the cabaret—a language that has been lost to performance and happenings, specifically political happenings, and not the idea of object making or what the object and what kind of stories it could tell. In a way, when I do the Applied Fantastic paintings, which come from the postcards that I find at markets—I just find them so emblematic of a meaning. We have a woman, who is not even a model, who is being circulated as a model but wearing a self-made thing, so she is promoting a self-made thing that is branded by a term, like “landscape.” This for me was talking about this moment, when we are looking into something that cannot be described—capitalist and communism but also something in-between, a split. Somebody took a word, a color, and form that previously couldn’t speak to one another and made one thing. This is why I raise it to painting because I want to raise to another language. To raise it to a language that says, “Look at it.” My paintings are not about virtuosity. I try to use the technique for the reason of just the technique. This is why some people think I cannot paint or say it is too kitschy. I am not into virtuosity—to closing myself in the studio and listening to Jim Morrison. That is only one way of thinking what painting can be.

KN: It sounds like you appreciate painting for its status as an object.

PO: Exactly. And I always say it’s a *praca*, a work—not *dzieło*, a masterpiece.

KN: In studying your work, one can focus on your handling of color or line, but it’s much more than that and maybe not even about that at all. This is why I often think of your work in relation to advertisements, graphic design, and posters.

PO: Exactly. There's this preconceived notion that, in order to be a good painter, one has to study painting for a long time. I was in that school, and they did not want to let me go. I was very lucky because I won this painting competition, an honorary mention. Yet, they still said I had to practice. All my teachers said I wasn't concentrating, but all I wanted to do was a little bit of everything—painting, performance, ceramics. What I love about painting is the way you are not attached to a certain gesture, that you don't know the trickery. It's about the economy of painting. How quickly you can tell the viewer about the subject. For me the subject is a manifestation of an idea, what a painting can be, how a figure can be represented, how as a woman I can represent another woman and so on. If I do gesture, then I play with it a little. I definitely am not into questioning it for this idea of kitsch and where painting is good.

Transcript of interview with Paulina Ołowska
Via Skype
March 17, 2015

Ksenia Nouril: It's been a while since we last spoke. Tell me about your recent work.
 What's going on?

Paulina Ołowska: It's kind of intriguing. I was wondering what you'd think about it. Because of the environment where I live [in Rabka] and my interest in the archetypes of the women, I've touched upon figures of the saints. This work went to my show at Simon Lee Gallery in Hong Kong.

KN: Ah, yes. We spoke about that in Paris. How did that go?

PO: It went... strange. Sometimes we as an artist have an obsession. We have to figure it out. We have to let it out. And then you show it and see what kind of response you get. I thought the response would be much more open-minded. I thought there would be a feminist reading of the work not a religious reading—a representation of a woman and a child, a woman in ecstasy. I think with the presentation of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's *The Mother* at Tate and the exhibition in Aachen [for the Aachen Prize], it's very much about form, but also a representation of a form that is incapable, about the absence and kind of overflowing of matter. I'm trying to be as least representative in the work [as possible]. I have a couple representative, figurative paintings, but there are more tapestries. For me tapestry is working on a very different symbolic level, which is the guts, the inside, the obsessions.

KN: But you have exhibited tapestries before, in Poland.

PO: Yes, this is specific to this region of Zakopane, where it was more for art holidays, plein air. I played with this history. Here, I am reworking it, making a large tapestry with leftover plastic neons. For me it will be a sense of discussing the leftovers, the creation of the work from the studio with leftovers, completely the opposite of the masterpiece. What do you do with the found objects? What do you do with something in between the made and the unmade? Things like this. It's a very touching, beautiful, and poignant show. I was inspired by the Ludwig's previous exhibition of works from the pattern and

decoration movement, and American movement in the 1970s very close to feminism and anti-conceptual—people like Miriam Schapiro, Robert Kushner, Kim McConnel. They use amazing collaging techniques, like [Schapiro] taking Mary Cassatt but gluing it onto the tapestry, so it's appropriation with a sense of a history. So, when I saw this, I thought this is great—a continuation of this topic. I'm really looking forward to it, although it won't be a grand show like the Stedelijk. Then *The Mother* should also take on, for me, this representation of getting a little bit away from the sense of the communist. As usual, *je ne sais pas!* I don't know where they're going, but it's going somewhere, but I like this direction of weightiness, much more the interior, psychological interpretations of the work, but also the psychodrama of things.

KN: The play is definitely a psychodrama.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

KN: Could you tell me more about your new magazine *Pavilionesque*?

PO: Because I often think, and there needs to be a shift to my work a little bit. The subject of my works have become, more or less, mainstream, or an occupation of a younger generation. My friends have started to teach, there is a foundation for Andrzej Wróblewski, there are two foundations for taking care of the neons and so on, so of course I feel great. This is what I was hoping for—a conversation with my artwork. Of course, connecting to politics. And artworks are usually not that fast working, but this is

all already evolving. In a way I thought, how would I shift, what am I interested now in? What can be done and rethought in the subjects I am interested in, which is still modernism. As a model I took Zofia Stryjeńska, since she was a modernist but a particular kind of modernist. Okay, so maybe looking into folk art could be a way of revisiting modernism, looking into religious art, looking for a sense of purity in any form and also looking into things that are more or less in the general movement of modernism and post-Soviet culture, which there was no ground for 10 years ago in Poland. So I had my little inspirations from wooden architecture because I started to work more in ceramic, and now I have a ceramic studio with a professional kiln. In Miami, for example, and in the new Kantor museum in Kraków, I showed a few wooden houses that are being destroyed. When we showed them in the art fair in Miami [Art Basel], it raised also a voice within the Jewish community, who remembered them. Basically, this was something that was very natural to me, as I saw them disappearing, I wanted to meditate on their form. This is also connected to the idea of the house, what is the definition of the house, home, homeland. In this respect, I started to be interested in the surrealist readings of the house, thinking of the gallery space as a house, the idea of homeness and so on. This is what I am doing in the Tate. They are taking one of the galleries, the realist gallery along with expressionists. I am turning this into a Witkiewicz hut. What happens inside the house? What kinds of situations and dramas are happening inside of the house. This led me also to a new artist gathering. You know how much I was also into gatherings. Together with Ferrucci Trust, we created in the fall, maybe I mentioned it in Paris, but then I was still a little shy.

KN: Yes, I read about it.

PO: It was so, so magical. It was the best thing I did in the last year. Mycorial, it was called. Well, because, it led to this idea of a community of artists, of creations of thoughts, rather than ideas, and the idea of the group and bohème, and that we can create parallel worlds and societies and be outside the art system. It was really great. We were hiking for three days. We had all these discussions about what could mycology mean to us? We took mycology as a metaphor. Things happen as the mycelium, growing naturally. It created this interest in a new aura of possibilities. How much can we create a parallel society of meetings that still connect artists?

KN: Where the participants from Poland or International?

PO: They were from all over. In a sense, I started to be a caretaker of these wooden houses, turning one into a foundation.

KN: So, you're still based in Rabka, outside Krakow. Are you in Warsaw often?

PO: No, Warsaw I don't find much interesting. It's just a different sociality of how I think of subjects and art, maybe gladly, because I still have an urge to make it. The shows I am seeing are not inspiring to me. I am working on a show in 2016 winter at Foksal Foundation.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

KN: Did you see the 2001 exhibition *Szare w kolorze* at Zachęta?

PO: No I have not seen it, but I learned about it from Foksal Gallery Foundation. I don't know which year it was or how it was connected to my exhibition in Sopot, *Romancing with Avant-Garde*.

KN: I don't think it's related. I just came across it, while researching *Ty i Ja*

PO: Interesting enough, when I did the show at Zachęta, although I had the café, and the shop, but I think my subject or really what kind of teased people were a couple of things: the idea of calling something the spell of Warsaw, not romanticizing it but showing it rare, like a tartar. And collaborating with a German contemporary designer selling pristine suits, like a secretary art look, which people found very strange. It was a little bit how the '60s, '80s, '90s, clashed, and the 2000s of course. It was the combination of it all. It was interesting because I didn't think of it as the reference of that show, which could be a very good reference.

KN: It very conveniently seems to support my argument for the importance of the historical turn in Poland in the 1990s and 2000s.

PO: You see, in that year, in the early 2000s, I was studying abroad in Portugal and the Netherlands. *Romancing with Avant-Garde* and my work around that time came out of conversations with people, like Charles Esche. When I had the interview for the Rijksakademie, when I had the interview with Luc Tuymans, the question was what is nostalgia for you? I said, I started to see nostalgia when I stepped outside of it and somehow I ended up in Portugal with a bag of *Ty i Ja* from my grandmother, who was trying to get rid of them or had too much of them, and I took them as a souvenir with me, as a thing I had in the studio, as a thing that connected me, and I thought this is brilliant, this is what I want to touch up, the women, the kind of representation in these kinds of magazines in the 1970s. But it was only from a distance that I came to this idea of a topic of comparisons. But in the meantime, looking at John Currin inspired me, thinking of painting, and in the beginning, I was very interested, how can this moment of a change be projected onto painting, so that painting can still be political. And then when I started to think about the *Romancing with Avant-Garde* exhibition, it was me thinking from the outside, of paradoxes, of me getting an invitation, that you have to hurry up because the gallery will be turning into a shopping mall and a spa... but wait a moment, what are you going to do with your collections? I saw everything falling apart.

PO: And then I am bringing this shitty stuff back, it was 2001, and I am calling it *Romancing with Avant-Garde*, and they all thought it would be all nice, and then you have Mayakovsky portraits and Stalin's head and so on and painting turned backwards and so on. As with the art, they stayed really quiet until one of the first texts was published. It was the first show of a curated show by an artist—the artist-curator, which

is now more popular. It was very much about this likeness that *Ty i Ja* has—the art of playfulness. In *Ty i Ja*, they have this “Collection not Garbage” section. David Crowley talks about it often. What does it mean to have a collection of *starocie* or *old things*? What are the old things? So I took this phrase *Romancing wth Avant-Garde*, and it just teased the tastemakers so much. They asked me, “What do I think of this garbage?” [Here, she shows me *Collaged Fangor*.] It was this struggle. For me all the paintings became not paintings, but very quickly had to become posters, manifestations, quick, collaged, pasted, then swish, otherwise it will be taken away and destroyed or forgotten and hidden by the urge of the new system.

APPENDIX IV

Transcript of interview with Ilya and Emilia Kabakov
Mattituck, New York
July 14, 2015

N.B. The interview was conducted in Russian and translated by the author.

Ilya Kabakov: There especially exists a presumption that the most important works are the early works. We see collectors and museums who primarily seek out the early works—not necessarily the most important but the earliest works. History shows us that an artist makes his most important works not in his early period but later in life. This is the case if you look at Rothko, Pollock, Gorky, and many other artists. It's clear that the early works are completely standard, sometimes interesting, but actually, they are not Rothko, not Gorky, not anyone. It goes to show that one should be interested in the second or later part of an artist's career.

Ksenia Nouril: It seems to me that when people see only the early period, it is hard for them to tie the various periods together. They have trouble understanding how the early period is connected with the later period. For me, it is interesting to see how your later installations are connected to your early albums. Of course, certain scholars have already written about this, but it seems like today your later works—your installations—are very well known and highly prized, but they lack critical analysis.

IK: Of course, it is important here to write a periodization [периодика]. In Russia, I made paintings, and a few installations were already conceived [задуманные]. In the

Soviet Union, one could not make installations, and there were no exhibition spaces, no materials. That's why some installations were already conceived, and even *The Man Who Flew Into Space* was made, but other installations like *Boat* and *Garbage Man* were only planned. In Moscow, I made paintings, albums, and works on paper and with garbage—what you could call Soviet garbage—and I wrote a lot. When I was able to leave the Soviet Union in Fall 1987, we quickly realized that making installations was possible. We found ourselves in the very best period of European-American museum activity. It was a fantastic period when museum activities were of very high caliber and curators like Pontus Hultén, Jean-Hubert Martin, and others who are now very famous set the tone and agenda for museums. And that's how it happened, how we started to make works not in galleries—as galleries were considered second tier—but made works primarily in only museums. There was a great interest in Russia at that time because the Soviet power had just ended, and museums wanted to exhibit the ideas that came out of this context as well as the artists who came from there. True, there are some works that I made while still in Moscow. There was an exhibition in 1985 in Bern in the Kunsthalle organized by the Jolles family [art historian Claudia Jolles], and it pushed us to mount museum exhibitions in Marseille, Frankfurt, Paris, and so forth. From the start, we jumped into museums [onto the museum level (уровень)]. We skipped the normal evolutionary path of an artist, who begins with exhibitions in galleries, then moves onto collectors, finally, slowly moving into museums. We started with museums, completing the pyramid of the artist. For ten years, up until the year 2000, we exhibited in a lot of museums, but it must be said, mainly European museums, though we also worked in Japan.

Emilia Kabakov: But also in the United States. Then there were many exhibitions. Not long ago I looked at the list, and there were plenty.

IK: Should I get into that? Okay, yes, in a minute. So, it can be said that we made our way through an entire class of international museums.

KN: What was the first project you worked on together?

IK: What was that? After I immigrated? In a gallery or museum? The first gallery exhibition was Feldman.

EK: In California [Fred Hoffman Gallery, Santa Monica, CA, *The Rope of Life & Other Installations*]. Feldman and then California then Feldman again and then all the museums.

IK: It began in 1989. In 1988, I was still in Paris and made an exhibition at a gallery.

EK: I was already traveling with you when you were working in Germany.

IK: Okay, so, we can say that our collaboration began in 1989. But we worked for a time still in Europe. In the States, it so happened, that we were not doing very much, as the majority of our work was already going on in Europe.

KN: That's interesting, I would say that to this day, interest in Russia and the former Soviet Union is stronger in Europe than in the United States.

IK: Yes, yes, there was great interest, especially in Germany. Every city in Germany has a museum or a kunsthalle. We worked in many great museums there, especially kunsthallen, because they supported society. In almost every city, we made an exhibition, and not only exhibitions. We also made many public projects—from the very north in Bremen and Hamburg to the very south in Munich. We traveled all over Germany.

KN: Well, you lucked out, since you speak very good German.

IK: Ah, but I barely speak any English. So, maybe I am not lucky.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

IK: I will continue, and then I will go back to the studio.

EK: Of course, of course.

IK: Large installations at the time, up until the year 2000, were very easy to make due to a variety of reasons. Money was given out in any amount. Everything you could imagine doing was fulfilled. How much did it cost? We did not even know. There were sponsors. There was a dawning of an idealistic [идеалистического] or a romantic interest in

installations and the artists who made them. We literally went from museum to museum. That is, we would finish at one museum and we were already invited to another museum. And that is how we went [переплывали] from Paris right to the Stedelijk and then to other cities. I don't know. It was a very happy time [счастливое время]. The entire time, you did what you wanted, and there were no conversations about how it was expensive or how sponsors needed to be found. Or for example, how the director means nothing but the board of directors [trustees] means everything with the director just following along. But that's another story. At that time, to the end of that century, up until the year 2000, there was great interest in my work.

KN: This is exactly what interests me. My dissertation is about how artists, like you, write and rewrite histories and why that is important today, in a global world. For example, I will analyze your project *An Alternative History of Art* on the artists Rosenthal, Kabakov, and Spivak. I find it fascinating how you suggest that, like you, the curators at these various institutions are also writing their own histories.

IK: Yes, I was the son of good parents. [laughter] They loved art history—in fact many of them were art historians, like Jean-Hubert Martin. And I, from the other side, dreamed of falling [попасть] into the history of art. The fact is that the nature of getting into the museum [природа попадания в музей] takes on a few forms. For example, avant-garde ideas—Italian, Russian—thought the museum was like a cemetery and not useful or at all needed. And, as a result, the artist should go out into the streets, destroy the museum, and be anti-museum. This resulted in all those people who fought against the museum ending

up inside it. That is, art history is inevitable regardless of whether or not the artist likes or dislikes the museum. He falls into the museum by the strength of its historical obligation [Он попадает в музей силу свое историческое необходимости]. And the fact is, for me the museum was the only form of historical existence when I lived in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union and its artistic life presented itself as the absolute form of wildness, beastliness, and savagery [одичание, звероподобие, и дикости]. For me, it was like the images of Mowgli, and I saw myself as Mowgli, who in the forest suddenly saw unexpectedly some kind of abandoned castles... and he was overcome with the idea that this means something I was this kind of Mowgli, who had to escape from this Soviet filth [мерзости, гадости, тоски] and find myself [попасть] in the museum. I visited these museums—the Pushkin Museum, the Hermitage Museum—and sat there for hours, until I fell asleep because important to me was not what hung on the walls but the atmosphere of the museum. For me, the museum was the image of immortality [образ бессмертия]. It is difficult to confess, but the image of immortality pursues a person—how to live so as to not die. The museum presents itself as that phenomenal place where if you land in the museum [in its collection], you've achieved immortality. That's why the museum is one of the most important lifeboats. Why do artists, like Benois and Rembrandt, hang in museums and never leave? No one will throw them out [никто их оттуда не выкинет]. They are a part of something. They are a part of art history. This phenomenon is interesting to me because it's not only about how one gets into the museum but also gets into art history. Every time, in every era, this art history takes on certain artists that represent their epoch, but at the same time, it is part of the evolution of art history that is passed on from the past to this generation, and then this generation will

pass it on to another. It's like railroad tracks. At every station, the train [вагон] takes on certain passengers, who give their tickets, as I'd say, to the next passengers. I desperately wanted to know how one gets onto such a train and becomes a permanent part of art history from which they cannot throw one out because of the fear they will throw you out. The fear of being thrown out has haunted me since childhood. When I was in school, they could throw me out because I did not meet their demands [requirements, требование]. The demand—the hope that I will draw so well that I will not be thrown out of history—has motivated many of my artistic pursuits. I intuitively feel that certain works belong in that history, while others do not. That's another story because that institution works. It is not a calculated action [расчет] but an intuition. Art makes introverts but also extroverts. I consider myself an introvert, and introverts work in three ways: first of all, they have strong memories—memories of the past; they want to be a part of that past; they do not only exist today but also within the context of the past.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

KN: I am interested in Eastern European or post-socialist art—whatever term you want to use, but in a global context. This is why I am interested specifically in your practice.

EK: I would call it international. Russian and Eastern Europe make up only a small percentage.

KN: Yes, you work, undeniably, on a global or international platform, but people still speak of a Russian or an Eastern European art. How do they relate? How can one be Eastern European and global or international? At The Museum of Modern Art in New York there is a program for global art [...]

EK: This global art you speak of, with which museums like MoMA engage—Asia, Latin America, Russia—this is art of the third world. Global means considering the whole world, but if you take it on one level, it is western, eastern, and third world. India, Arabia, South America, that's the third world, and Russia and Eastern Europe are included in that.

IK: You've come to the topic that is most painful for Russians.

EK: Not only, Russians. Also, the Chinese. We had an interview.

IK: Yes, we just had an interview with the Chinese on this very topic. Here is the situation: there are schools, national schools, which are often traditional. There is a Chinese school [of art, of painting], a Russian school, a Czech school—we were in the Czech Republic. Each of these countries has its own national phobia in coming to terms with its own national school. What is a Czech school? A Polish school? And the global system [globalism] got itself mixed up in this. For example, what does this debate look like in Russia? How can Russian art become so strongly Russian that it is recognized as

such by the international art community, so that international curators perceive and respect it as such? This sort of thing happened within music. It's difficult.

KN: Yes, it is difficult.

IK: I remember, we visited an exhibition of Japanese contemporary art at the Guggenheim. Five or six artists were exhibited. People saw the show, and from Japan, there was an outcry over the fact that the artists chosen were not those beloved in Japan. The artists the Japanese considered to be great were ignored, and the curator chose those who weren't all that. This immediately brought up the question: to what extent does an international curator [a Westerner] have the right to judge our national culture, when we [the Japanese] know who we are and know what we like.

KN: They also accused Jean-Hubert Martin of this, when he curated *Magiciens de la terre*.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

EK: Nevertheless, it was a fantastic exhibition that completely changed people's point of view. Today, when you look at the most recent Venice Biennale, the curator [Massimiliano Gioni] also followed the principle of Jean-Hubert [that of the international outlook].

[There is a break in the conversation.]

EK: The Chinese are dealing with the same questions: how does the world look at us? Why don't they choose our artists? How do we showcase ourselves? They are treated like the third world, not as individuals.

KN: How does this apply to you? How do you identify yourself? Russian? American?

EK: We have a very ambivalent position, in respect to ourselves as well as the international art world. We've been in the West for a long time. Only in the last ten years have we returned to working in Russia. Before, this absolutely wasn't the case. All the exhibitions were Western. The West took us, and the total installation was new and made here, for the West. Certain critics and scholars are starting to write, "American artists born in Russia..." They are no longer writing, "Russian artists living in the United States."

KN: I have read somewhere that you, Ilya, claim to be a Soviet artist—not a Russian artist.

IK: Yes.

EK: Yes, Soviet not Russian.

KN: Do you still feel this way?

IK: No, not at this time. Not since the time when I exhausted the Soviet thematic in my work.

KN: You're already over it?

IK: Yes.

EK: For a long time now.

IK: But something else is interesting. The material I use, it is only Soviet, Russian-Soviet. So, some of these roots remain in the materials I use. But the way in which they are used is not Soviet or anti-Soviet. They are used for other reasons. If you speak of time, of the moment in which I immigrated [crossed the border], then you could say that a piece of my life connected with the Soviet theme. The installations illustrate Soviet life and stimulate the appearance of images, especially at the beginning. There was the feeling that one could describe the Soviet world [описать мир советский], which was not accessible and lesser known [in the West], [as] a variety of aspects, the everyday, the historical.

KN: Did you feel like this was expected of you?

IK: Yes, you felt required. I think of it like the story of Sinbad the Sailor, who arrives in the West and tells stories about his homeland. Unfortunately, many Sinbads appeared, and their stories were no longer unique.

EK: I see this differently. At the time, that moment was an unveiling, an opening, but that moment passed, and that country and its conditions disappeared. In comparison to what is going on today [in Russia], that is not your [Ilya's] situation, your country, your history that is interesting for others because others already know that history. It has already been discovered. It is visible. Before it wasn't visible. It was hidden, but today everything is known. Everyone understands. Even if they don't understand, they can still see it.

IK: Visible but not understandable. That's one thing. Another thing is that we made a lot of public projects. They are rooted in an entirely different foundation because, at the time, we were traveling to various countries, various cities. Many artists don't care about the aura—the context—of a place. They make something that they would make for any location. For example, Sol Lewitt—whatever he installs in Japan is the same that he installs in The Netherlands. It's not important where it is or to whom it is directed.

EK: The same goes for Anish Kapoor. He is absolutely oblivious as to where he is and what he is doing. It's a scandal. How could you do something like this in a place with history? For every work, there should be a specific context that responds to why you have installed this particular work in this particular place.

IK: There was this strong feeling that you should feel the aura of a place and make it so that your work grows out of that aura or context naturally. This is what the Germans call *Geist zur plats*, the spirit of a place. When you feel the spirit of the place, then the images you can make appear. This is very important for the viewer. In the museum, the viewer is prepared. He has come to the museum to see art. But the viewer is not prepared to look at a public project. The average person, denizen of the place, sees this project in the city. And it gets interesting because, if you have truly felt the spirit of the place, the viewer will look at your work and think that it always was there because it is so organically enmeshed into the structure of the place. Then your work will never be vandalized.

EK: Our works have never been vandalized.

IK: But if an artist ignores the spirit of a place then he receives negative criticism and his work is vandalized.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

KN: Could you speak on your experience mounting an exhibition at Garage in 2008?

IK: The experience was fantastic. It could have been very risky.

EK: When we first visited Garage [at the Bakhmetevsky Bus Garage] with curator Joseph Backstein, the space was a complete mess. There were no walls, no roof, no floor. We looked and wondered how it would all work out. But they promised it would all be renovated. Then Backstein with Dasha Zhukova informed us that Roman Abramovich had found another space [in Gorky Park], where he will build his museum, but our plans were already set for the original location. So, they agreed to stick to our plans, and construction began. We absolutely wouldn't have gotten it done without their support. It quickly became apparent that the restoration of Garage was more difficult than anticipated.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

EK: We lucked out with a great construction crew. When we installed the *Alternative History of Art*, we practically built a museum with the idea that it would show an alternative art history. I can't say if everyone who saw it understood this because I heard some people say, "What a nice museum Dasha [Zhukova] made just for Kabakov." They did not understand that it was a total installation. They thought it was built to house a retrospective. But it was not a retrospective, but a fictional story of something that could have happened in Russia. You [Ilya] continue.

IK: It is a problem with the viewer, who is not at all prepared to view installation art.

KN: You mean, in Russia?

IK: It's hard to say. Yes, in Russia.

EK: In that moment.

IK: Because this viewer does not grasp the plan, the composition, or the context. It was difficult to understand why the artist devised characters. Why are there two Kabakovs: the artist and the character? We collided with the limits of understanding.

EK: A lack of understanding. There was a total lack of desire to think of the works in context. They knew it was an exhibition by Kabakov. They looked around. That's it. They thought it was a retrospective.

IK: It was a fantastical story of Russian art—three periods within a single century. The first period, one finds the immigrant Rosenthal, who knew Malevich and, at the same time, he saw photographs of new Soviet life. Thus, his primary characteristic is denunciation—he very much liked Malevich, but why did Malevich have to throw out the entirety of nineteenth century art? His idea was to connect realism of the nineteenth century with radicalism of the Russian avant-garde. It is a very paradoxical idea that, to this day, is not very understandable or well liked.

KN: And these characters, like Rosenthal, represent your ideas?

IK: Yes, they represent our ideas. Yes, you can connect art of the nineteenth century with geometric abstraction. When they talk about the postmodern in which anything goes, then this idea is obviously postmodern. But, we're seeing this mixture of various epochs, artists, and tendencies is well-known and repeated often. The second artist, Kabakov, from the middle period of Soviet life, which lacked hope, was dark, and was full of pain.

EK: He is disappointed by Soviet life.

IK: While Rosenthal was charmed by this life.

EK: Rosenthal believed in the utopia, in what was to come—the construction of an unimaginable world. Just as the Constructivists had believed. But Kabakov already lived after this, in the result of it, so he was disappointed because it was dark and dismal. The brightness was before this time, up until this time.

IK: The utopia passed, and all that was left was reality. In the end, after these two artists, is Spivak. For him, the Soviet period was the past, and he looked back on the past, on Soviet life as if it were in a fog—always partially disappearing.

KN: This work, *Alternative History of Art*, was previously installed in Cleveland, right?

EK: Yes, but it was first in Germany.

IK: And in Japan.

EK: No, in Japan was only Rosenthal. We installed some of it in Frankfurt, then more of it in Cleveland.

KN: So, it developed little by little.

EK: Yes, the idea grew bigger and bigger until it captured the global history of Russian art if it had not gone in the direction it went—toward Socialist Realism—but if it went in the direction of Rosenthal’s idea to connect different elements and styles, a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. And at the same time with this there was another idea—the belief in utopia, in the ability to change the world, disappointment in utopia, disappointment in reality, and in the end, an incredible twist that, the utopia had passed and is now seen through rose colored glasses. But it’s hard to see it because it’s partially disappearing. One only sees part of it.

IK: This mirrors today’s situation in which there is nostalgia for the Soviet period, which was a great time of happiness and strength.

EK: If you globalize this, humanity always everywhere looks back at the past in wonderment. At first, utopia is in the future, but when it fails, it unexpectedly is perceived as in the past. That there was utopia, but we lost it. Today, the Soviet Union is

seen as a utopia, but we lost it. Egypt, is another example. In Cuba, today, for example, if caught in between [...]

[EK, recently returned from Cuba, discusses the Cuban context in greater detail]

IK: It is also about an attitude toward the future. It is important to note that utopias are future-oriented and construct various pictures as to how that future will be.

EK: And when the utopia is disturbed, reality seeps in, and once again one looks back on the utopia behind them.

KN: It is interesting how you tie utopia to temporality. We've been talking about geography for a long time, and I think it's time we start thinking more about time.

IK: Geography is strongly tied to ethnography. It's very simple to say that in China there is this kind of ethnography, in Russian this kind of ethnography.

EK: It is very interesting because we live in the contemporary moment. The world is experiencing political changes—not ideological but political and religious. Every period has its specific nature. The previous period witnessed many political voices. The world was divided by politics. Today, the world is divided by religion and ethnicity.

IK: Nevertheless, if we look at the big picture, we can't forget the fissures in European culture. This is very interesting. Notwithstanding the Soviet regime and its horrible abuses, the Soviet regime considered itself the inheritor of human culture. Unfortunately, this took on a terrible form. In the humanities, it produced a very strong reaction in writers, artists, and musicians, like Shostakovich. It was the art of underground artists and artists of the older generation like Falk and Favorsky. I just want to say that the tendency of cultural evolution was extremely important for the existence of this Soviet reality. The same situation was seen in Czechoslovakia, in Poland. They felt they were the inheritors of centuries of culture, thus the museums in these countries were filled with this apotheosis, this pathos that they are continuing this cultural life that is connected to European culture. This was the nationalist culture that was espoused by Hitler, but not by Stalin. Stalin did not have this nationalist perspective. Everyone was equally Soviet. Everyone was integrated.

EK: That is because there was not nationalism.

IK: Everyone was a Soviet person, following in the tradition of European culture. They understood the Soviet variant to be the best.

EK: In their opinion.

IK: It bears repeating that internally there was a very strong flow of culture. Today's problem—today's cultural problem—[is that] very little remains of European structures

as well as of that dreadful Soviet Union. They have been replaced by religious and ethnic phenomena.

KN: Yes, it is difficult to say what is to come.

EK: These very strong nationalist tendencies are scary.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

EK: Today, artists in Russia are faced with the decision: to leave or to stay. The majority will leave, 80%, and once again Russia is losing its great mind.

KN: To return to your work, I am interested in your more recent works because they are strong. It happens that artists immigrate, and their work changes. Of course, your work has also changed, but it only keeps on growing to greater heights.

IK: On one hand, it's not hard. After 2000, we started to do fewer installations for many reasons. First of all, we have already traveled through many countries. Also, we are now in a time with many new, great artists.

EK: I wouldn't say after 2000 but after 2007.

IK: It was a kind of inertia.

EK: That's how it seems to you today.

IK: In place of installations came paintings. And these paintings are a continuation of those made up in Moscow until my immigration. These paintings are connected with a conviction to leave the modernist program.

EK: This has only occurred in the last four years—not earlier.

IK: Okay, fine.

EK: There's a difference between what it seems like and reality.

IK: It seems to me...

KN: You are writing your own art history. This is clear.

EK: We made many installations in 2007, in 2008. But at this time, there were also a lot of paintings. They often are installed in different variations, but they are still paintings. Now, in the last five or six years, the situation is clear—I don't want to do installations, I want to concentrate on painting.

IK: Yes, and that's an interesting question: what are these painting, and how do they appear? The paintings appear in groups, in series, we call them. Some series are gigantic.

IK: Others are very large. For example, *Under the Snow*. To understand the paintings as a series means that you cannot understand everything about them immediately. They all relate to one theme. As a whole, one can see in them something. These are the requirements for serial works.

KN: These works appear to use photographs or some kind of archive.

IK: Yes, I use an archive; I recycle (переработать) an archive. The archive comprises very old materials.

KN: Is it an extant archive or an archive of memories?

IK: Part extant, but it's recycled. It's a kind of recycling of old materials. And those materials are very old—as old as the 1950s. They are recycled, so that from them the paintings can appear. That is, the use of the archive is very interesting because it is not just the material itself that is used. It is like Rosenthal. He uses materials—Constructivist materials—and somehow transforms them through a kind of improvisation. That improvisation is founded in either the archive or fantasy. For example, the series *Flying* (Летающий) is made from the archive, but *Under the Snow* (Под снегом) is fantasy. The handling dictates the kind of images that are produced out of consciousness and

creativity. There is still a subsection, three sections: archive, fantasy, and half-graphic. The work is somehow partly graphic. The combination of images is always oriented toward one of these. Sometimes subjects appear from below that are difficult to understand. Since I lost interest in contemporary art—about 5 years ago—I’ve been very interested in old paintings, specifically those of the Baroque period. I am not necessarily interested in the composition but in the Baroque darkness, the depth of space. Because, as it is well known, modern art is two-dimensional, thus ignores depth. It doesn’t exist in the works of any of the great modern artists—not even Matisse. This big jump into the past, in the direction of the Baroque space...

KN: Are you specifically influenced by the Italian Baroque?

IK: Yes, of course, a little. I always think about the Italian Baroque, without a doubt. The result is the large paintings—three of which are now hanging in the studio, which you will see. There are nine in total; three triptychs that make a large exhibition hall.

KN: Are these similar to the ones I saw in Monumenta? Was that mean to mimic your studio?

IK: That wasn’t supposed to be a studio...

EK: [listening in from afar] Yes, two buildings within that installation were meant to mimic the way in which we exhibit the paintings here, but the way in which we exhibit the paintings here mimics a...

IK: A chapel.

KN: I see.

IK: There is the Rothko Chapel...

KN: I remember there being music in part of the Monumenta installation.

IK: Yes, in the white chapel, there was music. The reason for constructing it in this way—we'll see this when we visit the chapel—is that, when you paint in the studio, the studio influences you. A part of that studio remains in your work. This is very clear in the work, the sculptures, of Giacometti—the tone, the dirt of that studio. You'll see this if you look at photographs of his studio.

KN: Yes, this is a very common theme of research for art historians—the relationship between the artist and his studio. You can see it blatantly in the works of many artists, like Pollock, whose studio is not far from here.

IK: Yes! When a painting is taken out of the studio to an exhibition, the artist can be disappointed because he did not want to make this kind of work. The painting isn't finished, is too dark, it is somehow strange. Typically, he gets upset. For example, when we read about Turner, when he exhibited his works in an exhibition, he would see that they were too pale, so he would take paint and paint right there at the exhibition. I am familiar with this. And because I love the museum and love a nicely finished museum exhibition and also so that I would never ask why I poorly painted such works, we built a museum space here. This is our museum. So once I am finished working in the studio, we immediately bring the work over to the museum, so we can see what it will look like in a museum. Often, we fix the paintings, so they will look good in the museum.

KN: So, you are always thinking ahead, to future exhibitions.

IK: I only think about the museum, only museums. My work should look good in a museum. Many paintings are made in a way that they already look like they belong in a museum. They are made in a museum format or size that is appropriate for the museum. We have problems with collectors because these paintings are difficult to hang in homes. They're very big. The normal format, the French format, was used by everything from Cezanne to Degas—it's a size that a collector can easily hang on his wall. In the Soviet Union, this wasn't important—whether or not people bought your works. You made your money in other ways. So, you made paintings like the ones you saw in museums—that's the museum format. Very big paintings, so you could see them within the museum space—close to five meters.

[There is a break in the conversation.]

IK: There was a desire for these paintings to eventually land in a museum. I always think of how they can possess a kind of faktura or material... We can look at them and at the models as well as photographs of paintings in the catalogue raisonnées. After the big dark paintings, we started to make smaller works, also dark and light, so that some kind of evolution would happen, so that the darkness would be at the end and at the beginning would be a few series that would lead into the darkness. That's how these works were made. All the time you expect there will be an end and no more time, so that you must complete this big evolution.

KN: And are you still working on that evolution?

IK: No, I've already finished, but I am still alive, so I've started to do other work, other series.

KN: Similar ones?

IK: No, every time it's something different. Emilia knows that this is a problem for collectors because they can't ever figure out the essence of this artist. One could trace the thread and ask, why am I here. The artist jumps through various styles and techniques. The result is a kind of corridor. A normal, Western artist, he looks for his identity, and his

identity lies in his works that fill the entire corridor. A collector can purchase his works. For me, this isn't interesting.

KN: Although, you are aware of that path, you forge your own.

IK: Yes, that's what I want, and that's how it will be. All my works happen intuitively. When I come to the end of a series, the next series appears. The worst fear is that after the completion of a series, one will have no more ideas. Thus far, it's going okay for me. After the end, another idea comes to me.

KN: You don't seem worried.

IK: Well, I worry, I fear, that there won't be a next one, but each time, the next one appears. There is just one thing: the work must be uninterrupted. We never rest because if you rest, even 10 days or a week, that motor stops working.

KN: What about when you travel.

IK: We don't travel. When we travel for an exhibition, it is risky because your mind starts to wander. You must always been in a kind of hot state. This is problematic because there are illnesses tied to this kind of lifestyle.

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