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THE FORM OF ART AS MEDIATION: A HISTORY AND STORYTELLING BEFORE AND AFTER MOSCOW CONCEPTUALISM

In place of an introduction: $A \neq A$, or dialectical doubt

The basic problem of art today is the search for a form that is capable of mediating the historical and political events of our time. In a wider sense the question of a new form abuts on classic discussions about how art can present the totality of an event in its relationship to lived human experience. By the mediation of historical and political events we do not mean the goal of a simple representation of an event; the modern mass media cope successfully with that goal. In presenting an event, a journalist first of all gives it a name. In a certain sense the profession of journalist is actually based on the successful search for a name that can serve as a ubiquitous explanatory mechanism for a historical reality. Thus, the protests and demonstrations in the Arab world were quickly labeled the ‘Arab Spring,’ and this landmark became a symbol of the struggle against dictatorship. The events in East Ukraine are called the Russian intervention or the American intervention

– the interpretation depends on the geopolitical stance of the interpreter. In other words, the interpretation of contemporary events is correlated with the global political situation, and at the basis of this interpretation lies the positivistic language of naked facts and their skillful manipulation: empirical accounts from the scenes of events are supposedly an expression of objectivity, they are a certain given, behind which the deft manipulation of the name is concealed. In the last three years, names like this have taken over the ambient living space, so that we think and reason about what is happening on the basis of a formal logic of names. However, thoughtful observers, and especially participants in events, remain silent, flabbergasted by the incoherence of the geopolitical linguistic operators who take the fortress of an event by storm. These false names bury the meaning of history beneath themselves and paralyze the faculty of critical judgement. The substitution of signifier-names for events turns us into consumers of ready-made interpretations.

The mediation that we have in mind is the inherent materiality of art, which lays bare the complexity of an event in a critical and dialectical manner. In other words, art should begin with doubt and negation, it should undermine the absolute identity of any given X and Z, whether they are the ‘fascism’ and ‘antifascism’ of the Maidan/Antimaidan or even the binary ideology of *pro and contra* itself. Unlike journalism, art is not obliged to provide ready-made names and clichés, its fundamental task is to establish a special position at the center of an event, from where it can reveal the event’s dialectical logic: ‘A’ is simultaneously ‘not-A,’ night is not night, because night presupposes day, and day alternates with night. As a rule, art takes its beginning from such doubts concerning the sense certainty of our experience and it abjures the mimetic function of simply denoting its subject.¹ ‘This is not a pipe’ in Magritte’s

work, this is not a bed in Rauschenberg's, and this is not a urinal, as a urinal, in Duchamp's. In Kosuth's work a chair is not simply a piece of furniture on which we sit, while the works of Yuri Albert are radically 'not' those of all the other artists in whose manner he paints.² In order to say that a thing is always something else, which repudiates its mute givenness, one must be able to tell the story of this thing, and this requires a special scrutiny of the object from all sides. Unlike journalism, art is able to speak from the viewpoint of the specific thing, taken in the totality of its relationships. However, telling the story of this thing also requires a storyteller, i.e. someone who can articulate this story in some given form.

For Peter Osborne the storyteller presents the articulation of absent otherness – in our terminology, he is the 'not' that was mentioned above. A storyteller is a narrator of the past, which is in itself the absent other in the present, the story of the otherness of other people's lives. That is to say, art can present history through storytelling when the object of art becomes the speech of people. Osborne emphasizes that telling the story cannot be reduced to the perfunctory narration of a case study or the implementation of a research project. To tell the story means to find communicative forms for presenting historical time in a fragment of that time (or of the present, of an event).³ Here Osborne is revisiting Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller." And indeed, according to this text, the storyteller is a figure who sees a fragment (a story) as the totality of history.⁴

However, Benjamin also cast doubt on this ability of art to tell the history of a thing. In "The Storyteller" he remarks that after the First World War men came back from the front struck dumb, they couldn't tell the history of that war. A war, like any other forms of capitalist shock – economic or social – leads to the erosion of speech, a kind of aphasia that

is expressed in a deprivation of experience and inability to speak.⁵ Benjamin, however, has something else in mind. In his opinion the appearance of cultural information – newsreels, newspapers and radio – removes the very need to tell the story of history, since henceforth all explanations are delegated to the mass media. Information, not storytelling, becomes their prerogative.⁶ Even experience is privatized by the media machines and subordinated to the logic of empirical life: to the statistics of dead and wounded, of ruined and restored cities. What story can anyone really tell about modern-day wars? Isn't any authentic story today a ready-made spoken or scripted godsend for the television propagandists? Hence the mistrust of any forms of discourse and criticism, definitions and concepts. This kind of reaction is generated by postshock aphasia: the right words to explain things simply don't come to mind.

In an age of information and media, in what way can the form of art mediate historical and political events? We think that the experience of Moscow conceptualism is crucial here. However, in order to understand this role more clearly, it is essential to take a retrospective glance at its practices, i.e. from the position of the past in its relationship to the present. The present text is rather preliminary and only sketches out possible lines of analysis, symptomatically and genealogically rereading the storylines of Soviet conceptual art.

Benjamin's "Storyteller" and the Land of Soviets

For Benjamin, telling a story is related above all to the function of exchanging experience. A reminder is required that by experience, he means something like an existentialist narrative of life, its *formatting*, the imparting of *form* to it. Experience is the biography of a life, its molding. Experience as an empirical category – a record of sense certainty – has nothing in common

with this. However, empiricism of this kind meets with an uncritical reception in certain practices of contemporary art, which can be reminiscent of the above-mentioned journalism or positivism of the pure givenness of sensations and emotions.⁷

In order to clarify this idea further, we need to turn to the writings of Georg Lukács, who distinguishes between empirical experience as the flow of lived impressions and the experience of life as form. In his early work *Soul and Form*, Lukács separates *life as such* from *essential life*. Life is a negative category as long as we mean *life as such*, because *life as such* is the current of the formless, negative movement of empirical life, full of nondifferentiation: the indifference of sensory data and their perception. Life becomes *essential* only when it is singular, separated out and opposed to empirical experience – to the biology of pure survival and politically unaware social life.⁸ “There is no system,” writes Lukács. *Life as such* is accidental and it can only acquire its essence in the concrete and singular: “In life there is only the separate and individual, the concrete. To exist is to be different. And only the concrete, the individual phenomenon is the unambiguous, the absolute which is without nu-ance... [The] individual thing is the only thing that is; the individual is the real man.”⁹ The young Lukács links this romantic idea of life as *essential life* with the goals of art and philosophy. The artist’s job, as he sees it, is to purge life of its indifference, while at the same time not transforming life itself into a pure aesthetic form. To put this differently, the goal of art does not lie in the aestheticization of life, but in molding it dialectically: in life’s becoming form, subject to the proviso that it does not ultimately presuppose any ideal form.¹⁰

For Benjamin, storytelling is the practical molding of life into a narrative of life. Storytelling articulates and molds life when people pass on information by word of mouth, giving each

other advice. According to Benjamin, modern capitalist society is characterized precisely by the absence of the institution of ‘advice,’ which is replaced by a technology of informing.¹¹ The gradual disappearance of storytelling begins in the age of the novel, when the very experience of the written word becomes individual and isolated from people’s lives, whereas the phenomenon of the storyteller is always linked with the exchange of experience and the act of living speech. The novelist “himself lacks counsel and can give none.”¹² Storytelling molds a narrative of life in the experience of life, while information and the novel, as its harbinger, construct the plan of life artificially – its invented biography, creating something like ready-made variations of life, its absolute patterns.¹³

However, as we know, at the time when Benjamin’s “Storyteller” was being written, there existed an entire Land of Soviets – the literal meaning of the Russian word “soviet” is precisely an advice – where the exchange of information was anchored, in formal terms at least, at the level of the state and politics. Notwithstanding this, the Soviets lent meaning to the phenomenon of the storyteller at a level very far from that of the state. In 1919 the literary theoretician Boris Eichenbaum turns his attention for the first time to the phenomenon of “skaz,” demonstrating the importance of the ‘audial’ and oral principle in classical Russian literature.¹⁴ Skaz signifies a special genre of the oral form of narration in which the plot is less important than the stylistic devices used to convey the living speech of the storyteller. Here the authorial voice and intonation become an integral part of the storyline, and this creates the illusion of live storytelling. In skaz the reader’s attention is focused on the expressions, gestures and sounds or physiognomy of the language, and the storyteller and his own story are at the center of events. In Eichenbaum’s opinion, in

modern prose – the works of Andrei Bely and Boris Pilnyak – the reader is not dealing with oral narrative as such, but with an imitation or stylization of skaz: instead of the storyteller, the focus is shifted to the word itself, its sound, smell or even taste.¹⁵ As we can note, the skaz of Eichenbaum's time corresponds to what replaced Benjamin's authentic storyteller, who was an individual of an epic, oral culture.

We should also note what Eichenbaum failed to notice. In postrevolutionary Russia, skaz in general becomes the basic form of the chronicling of the revolution, and the Soviet avant-garde constantly has recourse to the forms of skaz, the fragment, the Russian folk epic, and the fable in order to convey the experience of the participation of the masses of peasants and workers in the revolution through the figure of a storyteller from among the people. Such are the prose of Andrei Platonov, the verse of Velimir Khlebnikov, the painting of Pavel Filonov, and the cinematic experiments of Alexander Medvedkin; even the satirical opuses of the 'ROSTA Windows' propaganda posters can be regarded as an appropriation of the form of skaz. Svetlana Krasovskaya notes that skaz acquired immense significance for the artistic culture of the 1920s because the experience of the revolution needed a new historical narrative. No genre could describe the battle of the proletariat and the transformation of the world better than skaz, based on legends, folklore, the living speech of the streets and dialects.¹⁶

It might seem that the fragmentary character of works from the 1920s, with their leaning towards the forms of essay, reportage, documentation, chronicle and memoir, is entirely inappropriate for the task of describing the sheer scale of revolutionary events, but according to Benjamin, it is precisely the fragment that can express the totality of history. Dziga Vertov's 'Kino-Eye' works on precisely this principle: it glides

over reality, capturing, observing and seizing fragments of it from a viewpoint of socialism and a totality of new social relationships. Platonov's prose is also structured in a similar way.¹⁷ And all because the artists assemble their works like a mosaic: situated in the thick of events, they convey the experience of participating in a revolution of the masses by grabbing fragments of the sweeping social landscape. Precisely in this way, by the artist deliberating on what he sees around him, an event does not become objectified and freeze in a naked abstraction of fact, but is conveyed as the lived experience of people. In point of fact, Platonov's works and Vertov's films recount the story of revolutionary events in a way that no documentary film or history textbook can do. And all because we can share the experience of the revolution with them, while the dry logic of facts leaves to us only their interpretation.

The storyteller after the storyteller: the experience of Soviet conceptualism

The tradition of skaz outlived the revolution and Stalinism, to be revived in the new narrative strategies of the Moscow conceptualism of the 1970s. However, the artists of this circle were not engaged in creating an epic saga of the proletarians' struggle in an age of great revolutionary events, but in chronicling the experience of the anonymous Soviet man. This chronicling was narrated by the artist-storyteller, who was himself a fictional, nonexistent figure of 'western art' in a Soviet context that was hostile to him. In his article "Ilya Kabakov. The artist as storyteller," Boris Groys notes that the very genre of Kabakov's albums "presupposes that the viewer is dealing with a story" and the subject of this story is "the evolution of certain artistic systems" of western art, represented however, in the spirit of an allegorical epic of the life and death

of invented characters who are not living on the scale of the historical time of realism and surrealism, but of the cycle of the human journey of life (the album “Ten Characters,” 1972–5).¹⁸ As in a novel, the meaning of a character’s journey, which is a metonymy for art in general and for a specific form of life in art in particular, is only revealed after his death – at the end of the narrative of the entire album.¹⁹ However, the album does not specify a ‘model of life’ in the same way as, according to Benjamin, a novel produces one. Instead of this, Kabakov creates a kind of double fiction: an imaginary model of western art and the historical living-through of this model in a singular manner, like a ‘character,’ as if Kabakov himself is nothing other than a Soviet modification of this western history of art. In his characters, art always develops within the limits of the subjective time of one life, and this life is the life of a solitary Soviet artist. The albums pit the typical little man of classic Russian literature against big history. The dialectic of these two entities is mediated by textual commentaries that express the banality of everyday routine.

Victor Pivovarov’s album series and cycles lay bare this conflict between big history and an unattractive little Soviet life even more powerfully, accentuating to the limit the existential ennui of the anonymous biography of the statistically average individual. Such is his cycle “Projects for a Lonely Man” (1975), which frugally spells out the bio-political regimen of the life of a typical member of the intelligentsia in the typical circumstances of the time: a nondescript view from the window, ascetic furniture in a Khrushchev-era, five-storey, panel-built apartment block, work until six in the evening, lots of free time and a daily routine that doesn’t change for years. Pivovarov’s project of a life can be understood as the romantic ideal of an artist’s life in the conditions of the

Soviet period, but the paradox is that the banality of this life is typical, that it actually expresses the materiality of late-Soviet life in general. The dry, perfunctory language seems to be a comment on the impervious ennui of social stagnation, frozen in the subjects, objects and urban landscapes. In the Soviet conceptual art the anonymous language of everyday speech is a narrative of the banality of existence in general. The prose of this language permeates every corner of life, and an artist's life is no exception here, because this life in no way differs from a million other Soviet lives. The artist is just as banal as the municipal housing maintenance office, with all its dramas. This is an expression of the Soviet, classless principle of life, as declared by the October Revolution and mangled somewhat by Stalinism. The tacky anonymity of 'Anna Petrovna,' trying to identify the owner of a grater that has gone missing (Ilya Kabakov, "Olga Ilichnina Zuiko: Whose grater is this?" 1982) is an integral image of the entire late-Soviet experience, concisely expressed in one single phrase, written in neat handwriting on a board that is painted the green color of a Soviet entrance hall. 'Anna Petrovna' is not merely communal speech and discourse (in the poststructuralist sense),²⁰ she is facticity, grasped in language, but possessing an extralinguistic, material substantiality. Her image, impossible to grasp entirely, was nonetheless probably best grasped by the 1920s writer Leonid Dobychin in another, similarly brief phrase, mentioned in passing, in the way that he does, in the story "Konopatchikova": "Polushalchikha came in from the kitchen and stood there, priding herself."²¹ 'Anna Petrovna' is not simply a phrase, she's not even a woman, she's an entire story, perhaps even an entire world, which prides itself as it displays its monolithic solidity to the view of everyone who has arrived too late to see more than its ruins. What is she?

She is the Soviet form of life, with its patriarchal order and authoritarian husbands, festive tables at New Year in kitchens crammed to bursting point, apartment building lobbies and squeaking swings in children's play areas. She is a kind of fragment of the Soviet world, through which its totality is grasped. The same function is performed by Mikhail Roginsky's unexpressive objects – a stove, an iron, a door, matches. This is the reincarnation of the “comrade-thing,”²² which has ended up in an adventure epic of the Brezhnev period. Behind it, too, stands the bewildered ‘Anna Petrovna’.

In the age of the internet, it is hard for us to imagine the live, oral, transmission of experience, but we can recall those not-too-distant times when a provincial would make his or her way up to Moscow and then, when he or she came back, gather a circle of friends to tell them stories from the life of the capital. In late Soviet times, this was the exact way in which information was passed on about forbidden exhibitions, books, film screenings and other events, because the ‘grapevine’ merges to some extent into the epic genre: any inaccessible information becomes a storytelling, since the object of desire is imagined more than presented as something real. As a result, the information itself is transformed into a mythological narrative. This is why Kabakov accompanies a showing of his albums with a kind of poetic performance: he reads the textual commentaries of the albums in a monotonous and methodical voice, transforming the work itself into a genre of oral history, and himself into a storyteller rendered wise by experience, inviting only a circle of the chosen to listen to his story. To some extent the same thing occurs in the actions of the Collective Actions group, which are essentially an exchange of experience. As we know, the actual activity of the group's actions is often accompanied by the wearisome anticipation of a certain event,

and this event becomes the subject of the commentaries to “Trips to the Countryside” – the collections of documentation on the actions. The exchange of impressions between the participants lends meaning and form to the action itself. The self-mythologization of the milieu of Moscow conceptualism is similar in nature, with its special esoteric language, dictionary of terms, hierarchies and various ritual objects such as, for instance, the famous cigarette holder of Andrei Monastyrsky, the leader of the group. The artists of this circle created not only imaginary characters, but also their own imaginary group identity. By an irony of history, this storytelling eventually led to the journalistic mythologization of their own name and the appearance of the “false name” of “Moscow conceptualism,”²³ which in its time startled the western public and perplexed the conceptualists themselves.

As we can see, Moscow conceptualism’s turn to the figure of the storyteller is the result of a deficit of public artistic life, as well as a deficit of information, which is replaced here by narrative strategies of various kinds (within the limits of this essay we have limited ourselves to only the most obvious examples). But have not information and technology, and the activities of analysts and journalists become the dominant forms of culture and art today, just as Benjamin anticipated?

This is precisely why, in Russian art of the 1990s, and then of the 2000s, discursive conceptual art was displaced by actionism – the art of pure action. If we analyze the key actions of Alexander Brener or Oleg Kulik, we can come to a curious conclusion, in the given context, ‘action’ should be understood as a nondiscursive act, such as throwing a boxing glove at Yeltsin on the platform of the *Lobnoye mesto* in Red Square (Alexander Brener, “The First Glove,” 1995), or turning into a dog (a series of performances by Oleg Kulik, given in

1994–8). We can regard as an intermediate link between Soviet discursiveness and post-Soviet aphasia an action by the ETA. (Expropriation of the Territory of Art) movement, who depicted an obscene word with their own bodies on Red Square several months before the collapse of the USSR (ETA, “KhUI,” 1991). Having begun with poetry readings, ETA ended the Soviet era of their activity with a gesture that transformed the ‘Soviet logos’ (of poetry and literature) into the abusive invective of the streets, while Brener and Kulik pushed the ‘muteness’ of post-Soviet actionism to the limit. According to Lev Vygotsky, in an individual’s development, action always precedes speech, and even when speech arises, for instance, at the age of three, action and thinking are logically at variance rather than in agreement, or they run parallel to each other. The same situation is characteristic of several aspects of adult human life, in which an image of an action does not necessarily precede the action itself. The nonalignment of act and speech is specifically characteristic of actionism, which expresses the impossibility of saying anything, since the reality of original accumulation outstrips any speech, for after all, an utterance that has not yet arisen already no longer corresponds to the logic of events of the historical moment. In our opinion the dialectical struggle between act and speech is expressed literally here.²⁴ And this is precisely why the mass media occupy a key role in action art – they mediate naked acts and impart form to the action, illuminating and disseminating the scandalous image of the dog-man or the boxer-man in their various outlets. While storytelling itself actually *mediates* lived experience and history, information is all about the direct mimetic reflection of the veracity of the fact and the empiricism of the case study. Action art is anti-storytelling.

Does this mean that the figure of the storyteller finally disappears, together with the Soviet Union? In point of fact,

the album arises as a specifically Soviet form of art, which is impossible to reproduce in an institutional context, even if Kabakov were to agree to repeat the performance of his page-turning in front of a group of outsiders, although this is to some extent what is done today by artists like Walid Raad and Hito Steyerl: they often accompany a showing of their works with a performative action, cladding political commentaries on one or another set of political events in the genre of oral history.²⁵ In this sense the narrative methods of these artists come close to the figure and function of the storyteller in Moscow conceptualism. Of course, in the practices of Raad and Steyerl the storyteller often acts as a mediator between the form of a work and its political context. Consequently, storytelling in the age of information is the reworking of information as such through the means of storytelling. Arseny Zhilyaev develops the traditions of total installation and literary narration in his works. The form of total installation, which emerged during the international period of Kabakov's work, can also be understood as a narrational technology. It replaces the intimacy of the albums and the friendly exchange of experience with a subjectless narrative about the past from the position of the present (of an internationally recognized Soviet artist). It is a story that objectifies Soviet and Kabakov's experience, or an *informational story*. It informs the western public about the recent and exotic Soviet past. Zhilyaev complicates this gesture. His imaginary characters become epistemes of Soviet artistic culture and history as such: he goes back to an interpretation of museology, the practices of the Proletkult and the avant-garde, using the actual medium of the museum for narrativizing ideas of the Soviet past, so that these ideas are personified and transformed into the storyline of a tangled story, expressed in dry, expository language. His anthology of the museum avant-

garde – a collection of texts by prerevolutionary and Soviet philosophers, artists, art historians and writers – can be regarded as a kind of conceptual object that blurs the boundaries between a real historical document and the invented narrative fervour of his ‘museological’ utopianism.²⁶ In this sense Zhilyaev’s projects are a critical development of the *informational story*, located conceptually and aesthetically between the projects of Raad and Steyerl and those of Kabakov himself.

In the 1990s, Moscow conceptualism was criticized as asocial and autistic, and for its dependence on its own subculture and ethic of escapism. For this reason the attitudes of contemporary post-Soviet artists have been based on the rejection or transcendence of conceptualism. However, invented characters, along with invented collectives, activities or even historical events and the ability to tell a story – in other words, the notorious literocentricity – are exactly what was lacking in mute actionism, which could not find the words to express what was happening and preferred to act. Words, discourses and stories lost all their authority and meaning in a situation of shock therapy and the original accumulation of capital. However, the time arrives when the ability to speak returns, and consequently the individual who wants to and has to tell his story appears. And this story must be, among other things, the story of the reinterpretation of conceptual art in its actual interaction with the context of art today

Notes

The author thanks Arseny Zhilyaev for his valuable remarks and commentaries on the text.

- 1 Here we paraphrase the critique of the immediacy and the given experience in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. See: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller, with a foreword by J. N. Findlay, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 58–66.

- 2 Here we refer to the following works: Rene Magritte, “The Treachery of Images” (“La Trahison des images”), 1929; Marcel Duchamp, “Fountain” (“Fontaine”), 1917; Robert Rauschenberg, “Bed,” 1955; Joseph Kosuth, “One and Three Chairs,” 1965; and a series of works by Yuri Albert “I am not ...” (1980-2006). Robert Rauschenberg’s “Bed” consists of a pillow and a padded quilt, attached to a wooden frame and hung on the wall, so that the bed is transformed into a painterly object. In the context of a consideration of dialectics and mimesis, it is appropriate here to adduce Arthur Danto’s comment on this work. He writes that we can easily imagine a situation in which a layman, examining Rauschenberg’s “Bed,” imagines that it is an object for sleeping on. And all because the layman imagines that art is a copy of reality, so all the artist is doing is trying to get us to buy this futuristic bed. However, the world of mimesis is a thing of the past, a bed is no longer a bed, as a real object it becomes a piece of art. See: A. Danto, “The Artworld” in *Journal of Philosophy*, 1964, vol. 16, no. 19, pp. 575–80. It should be added that art has always been a luxury item and, as we can see from the example of “Bed,” the theory of mimesis can only support commodity fetishism and empower the consumerist imagination with regard to art.
- 3 Peter Osborne, *What Makes Contemporary Art contemporary? Or, Other Peoples’ Lives* (an electronic resource) in *Art & Education*. Available at www.artandeducation.net/videos/peter-osborne-what-makes-contemporary-art-contemporary-or-other-peoples-lives (accessed on: 05.05.2016). This is a lecture, given in 2014 at the Centre for Critical Theory of the University of Nottingham in Great Britain.
- 4 Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller” in *Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, translated by Harry Zohn, Cambridge: Massachusetts, London: The Belknap Press, 2002, pp. 143-166.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 143–4.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 147–8.
- 7 Just as Hollywood orchestrates the physiological economy of soap operas, provoking the viewer into hysterical tears or laughter, the performance artist Tino Segal believes that a collective emotional experience can be encoded in exactly the same way by means of recurring rhythmical patterns and specially organized aesthetic space – darkness, strident, rhythmically recurring sounds and choreographed movement (in this respect his performance “This Variation” is indicative. It was given at the exhibition “dOCUMENTA (13)” in Kassel in 2014.) The positivist reliance on the authenticity of experience reduces affective states, emotions and other manifestations of feelings to physiological reactions of the organism. Belief in the sensory veracity of experience

- and the possibility of undergoing it collectively and directly and the economy of affective states that accompany this given logic are a big aesthetic problem. See my analysis of a performance by Tino Segal: Maria Chehonadskih, “‘DOCUMENTA (13)’ and the Blind Horror of the Meteorite’s Point of View,” *Moscow Art Magazine (Khudozhestvenny zhurnal)*, 2014, Digest 2007–2014, pp. 198–208.
- 8 György Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. by Anna Bostock, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1974.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
 - 10 On essential life and form in this sense, see *ibid.*, pp. 28–41.
 - 11 Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” p. 149.
 - 12 *Ibid.*, p. 146.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 156.
 - 14 Boris Mikhailovich Eichenbaum, “How Gogol’s ‘Overcoat’ Is Made,” in *On Prose: Collected Articles*. Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1969, pp. 306–26 (in Russian). See English translation in: Boris Mikhailovich Eikhenbaum, *Russian Prose*, Ardis, August 28, 1985. Translated by Ray Parrott.
 - 15 Boris Mikhailovich Eichenbaum, “Leskov and Contemporary Prose,” in *On Literature. Works from Various Years*. Moscow: Soviety Pисatel, 1987, pp. 409–24 (in Russian). See English translation in: Boris Mikhailovich Eikhenbaum, *Russian Prose*, Ardis, August 28, 1985. Translated by Ray Parrott.
 - 16 Svetlana Krasovskaya, *The Prose of A. P. Platonov: Genres and Genre Processes*. Blagoveshchensk: VGPU Press, 2005, pp. 67–70 (in Russian).
 - 17 See Valery Podoroga’s comparison of Vertov’s cine-eye and the “eunuch of the soul” in Valery Podoroga, “The Eunuch of the Soul: Positions of Reading and the World of Platonov,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 90, no. 2 (1991), pp. 357–408 (pp. 379–380).
 - 18 Boris Groys, “Ilya Kabakov: the Artist as Storyteller,” in: *History Becomes Form: Moscow conceptualism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010, pp. 88–9.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
 - 20 Here we have in mind the poststructuralist interpretations of conceptual art that were popular in the 1980s and 1990s, the most well-known of which was written by Victor Tupitsyn. See a recent English version of his work in: Victor Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious. Communal (Post) Modernism in Russia*, Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2009.
 - 21 Leonid Dobyichin, “Konopatchikova,” in: *The Town of N. Stories*. Moscow, Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1989, p. 176 (in Russian). See English edition: *Leonid Dobyichin, The Town of N*, Northwestern University Press’ July 22, 1998. Translated by Richard C. Borden.

- 22 On the concept of ‘comrade-thing’ see: Ekaterina Degot, “Performing Objects, Narrating Installations: Moscow Conceptualism and the Rediscovery of the Art Object,” in *e-flux journal*, #29, November 2011 (a digital resource). Available at www.e-flux.com/journal/29/68067/performing-objects-narrating-installations-moscow-conceptualism-and-the-rediscovery-of-the-art-object (accessed on 05.05.2016).
- 23 For criticism of the term ‘Moscow conceptualism’ see Peter Osborne, “The Kabakov Effect: ‘Moscow Conceptualism’ in the History of Contemporary Art,” in *Afterall*, 42 (Autumn/Winter 2016), pp. 108–15.
- 24 See: Lev Vygotsky, “Thinking and Speech” in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by N. Minick, R. W. Rieber and A. S. Carton, vol. 1, New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987, pp. 39–285; see also my article with a critique of Russian action art of the 2000s: M. Chekhonadskikh, “What is Pussy Riot’s ‘Idea?’” in *Radical Philosophy*, 2012, no. 176, pp. 2–7.
- 25 This is precisely why Raad’s performances, which often include objects and installations, are nonetheless easily translated into the form of a written narrative. See: Walid Raad, “Walkthrough, Part 1” (a digital resource) in *e-flux journal*. Available at www.e-flux.com/journal/walkthrough-part-i (accessed on 05.05.2016)
- 26 See Arseny Zhilyaev, ed., *Avant-Garde Museology*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015; see his text: Arseny Zhilyaev, *Conceptual Realism: The Vulgar Freedom of Avant-Garde Museum Work* (a digital resource) in *e-flux journal*. Available at www.e-flux.com/journal/conceptual-realism-the-vulgar-freedom-of-avant-garde-museology (accessed on 05.05.2016).