

arts in their free time. Although members of these creative communities had direct links to the state organizations and could enjoy infrastructure provided by them, these communities rather functioned as circles of friends and like-minded people who shared an interest in the arts, literature and philosophy, and who organized their activities and “self-made” exhibitions in their own apartments or workshops. Even though the name “unofficial” hints at their opposition to the “official,” they rarely demonstrated political antagonism, rather declaring their disinterest in political life and belonging to the apolitical worlds of art and culture.⁴⁹ Much like the TRIZ community, they represented yet another version of *svoi* (Yurchak 2005), or living within and beyond mainstream cultural life.

Acquainted with foreign scholars traveling to Russia, or with journalists and diplomats serving in Moscow, non-official artists received visibility as early as the 1970s. Foreign friends encouraged them to pursue their creative work and supported artists by buying their pieces, though in many cases the artists themselves did not take their activities seriously. Back home, in Europe or in the US, these private collectors organized exhibitions, thus giving rise to an increasing interest in the “unofficial Soviet art.” The opinion, the only “genuine art” can be the unofficial art, stimulated the interests in amateurs’ work. Thus, from the late 1970s onwards, many amateurs who had not hitherto taken their production seriously suddenly appeared in the forefront of foreign attention. As art journalist Drobinina puts it,

By the 1980s, many foreigners who visited Moscow would buy the work of almost anybody who belonged to the nonconformist movement. (Drobinina 2016)

A good example of such collections in Switzerland is Arina Kowner’s private collection in Zürich. Another example is the collection of Norton Dodge, an American economist who traveled regularly to the Soviet Union to study its planned industry and the place of women in the Soviet economy. In 1977, he organized the exhibition *New Art From the USSR* in Washington DC, which was held near the Soviet embassy (Drobinina 2016). The choice of such a location demonstrates, therefore, how in the late Soviet period the art became a currency in the geopolitical game, without necessarily taking into considerations the artistic intentions and concerns that they put in their works.

⁴⁹ Indeed, as Faraday demonstrated, aspirations to obtain more creative freedom did not call into question one’s socialist attitudes, and even the strongest critics of the Soviet order, such as Andrei Tarkovsky, had little sympathy toward capitalism. Rather, they aspired to dismantle the institution of censorship without challenging the whole construction of Soviet society.

Although the phenomenon of “unofficial art” can be documented in different regions of the former Soviet Union, it received particular expressions in Moscow and, to a lesser extent Leningrad – the two capital cities being more exposed to international influences and exchanges. Once the Iron Curtain became permeable during the Perestroika period in late 1980s, the “unofficial” artists quickly obtained even more attention and access to international venues. Moreover, this attention was increasingly coupled with obvious privileges. Not only art works by amateurs were purchased and paid in foreign currency, but artists also gained a possibility for travelling abroad, which remained rare and expensive for the majority of the Soviets.

Alexei Yurchak describes similar dynamics occurring through the development of new artistic venues in St. Petersburg:

Many members of the nonofficial cultural scene in St. Petersburg were among the first to travel to the West. They were in a privileged position, because for such travel one needed a legal invitation from someone abroad to obtain a Russian exit visa and a foreign entrance visa. Many of these artists and musicians had foreign friends who traveled to the Soviet Union, including foreign art students, journalists, and even festival organizers and exhibition curators. Westerners also became increasingly interested in the newly available glimpse of Soviet nonofficial art. (Yurchak 1999, 85)

A major shift in the role and fate of the Moscow unofficial artists happened on July 7th, 1988, when,

...*Sotheby's* organized the first auction of Russian avant-garde and nonconformist works at the International Trade Centre in Moscow. The Soviet government claimed that they wanted to establish prices for this art on the international market, and hoped the auction would bring in up to \$900,000. However, six works by Grisha Bruskin alone, including his “Fundamental Lexicon” (a paneled work showing figures that together represent the collection of Soviet values or ideals: the Olympic athlete, the revolutionary, the scientist, the Pioneer, etc.), which was the most expensive work by a nonconformist artist to be sold that evening, fetched \$865,000. The sale turned out to be a spectacular event and brought in a total of \$3.4 million, a result that hardly anyone could have anticipated. Many artists who were present at the sale said that the *Sotheby's* auction shattered the existing hierarchy. The works by more established artists did not reach the record levels set by the less-known artists, i.e., those “who had been at the periphery of things for years,” as Andrew Solomon puts in his book, “The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost.” (Drobinina 2016)

I have briefly outlined this dynamic here to demonstrate how late Soviet amateur worlds, or *svoi* – communities of friends united by common interests – were gradually transformed into an “art world” included in global networks of circulations and distribution and endowed with

particular political and economic meanings. Moreover, their internal hierarchies were henceforth mediated by money, which signified the introduction of a new “convention,” as Becker calls it, which would regulate power relationships in this world.⁵⁰ Furthermore, while art works were still expected to be produced locally, their monetary price and their artistic and symbolic meanings, would be much decided from the outside, on international auctions and through the negotiations with international curators.

This development can be read on different levels: as a step in the formation of the new Russian art world, as a sign of the capitalization of art in the late Soviet Union, but also as a shift in the regulation of the global art scene. In November 1988 in London, that is only a few months later after the Sotheby’s auction in Moscow, another Sotheby’s auction marked the first climax of the contemporary global art market, “when private collections, not just famous artists, achieved record prices” (Belting 2009, 61).

The global events of 1989 and after – the reunification of Germany, the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, the rise of global trade agreements, the consolidation of the trading blocks, and the transformation of China into a partially capitalist economy – changed the character of the art world profoundly. (Stallabrass 2004, 10)

Although today we understand that the post-1989 years marked a new era in the history of the global art industry, at the time a particular interest in amateurs art from abroad was interpreted by the local perspective and in absolute terms. The years that followed were marked by a great interest in Russian post-Soviet art, and, as a result, several success stories. For instance, Ilya Kabakov, one of the Moscow artists who enjoyed much of interest and success during this time and who decided to remain in the USA, would then become an important, though challenging, success-story for his Russian contemporaries (I will come back to this case in Chapter 7).

Yet, the interest demonstrated by foreign collectors in the late 1980s and early 1990s and very much motivated by political reasons, quickly gave way to disappointment. In her 2016 article

⁵⁰ As Becker argues in his sociology of art worlds, conventions “embodied in equipment, materials, training, available facilities and sites, systems of notation, and the like” are crucial to the success of an artist: they mediate the intelligibility of a piece of art for the community and for a broader audience, as well as its integrability into the chains of production and circulation of art (Becker 1982, 32). In this perspective, conscious engagement or disengagement with conventions allows an artist to make choices and balance between following conventions in order to insure easy circulation, and breaking with convention under the assumption that circulation will be compromised in exchange for more “freedom”.

“The ups and downs of the contemporary art market,” Ekaterina Drobinina summarizes the situation in the following terms:

Thirty years ago, the prices for works by unofficial Soviet artists being sold at international auction exceeded the conservative expectations of everyone, from artists to officials. However, since then, the demand for these works has never managed to attain those heights again. (Drobinina 2016)

Not only had the political agenda of the Soviet underground artists lost its relevance after the collapse of the Soviet order, but the very structure of the public art worlds had been significantly perturbed. Yet, although the visibility of Russian art in the global contemporary art arena remained rather limited, the effects and transformations that occurred in Russian art worlds due to the opening of its borders on the one hand, and its marketization on the other hand, is hard to overestimate. In the context of post-Soviet life, many artists got lost, both aesthetically and socially, in a rapidly changing social and economic environment. Deprived of basic income at their workplaces, artists henceforth had to make decisions about their professional present and future.

6.1.2. THE CRISIS OF ARTISTIC LANGUAGE

While many Western artists developed their art as social critique inherently connected to the context of capitalism, late-Soviet critical artists mastered their visual language as a critical lens in regard to the Soviet order. Hence, just as the western artistic language of the post-war years relied on symbols of consumerism, the artistic language of the nonofficial Soviet creatives was rooted in Soviet symbols, meanings and the common sense knowledge of everyday life under socialism. For instance, the so-called Sots-Art artists played with the official Soviet visual language to produce ironic messages about Soviet reality. By the same token, the representatives of the school known as “Moscow romantic conceptualism” built on the experimental dissociation of mundane visual and textual messages from the Soviet life producing effects close to absurdity. Similarly, popular cultural forms, such as jokes and anecdotes, cabaret satire, bard songs or Soviet rock music, each fostered their own language – ranging from a rather loyal ironic criticism to sharp protest coded with allusions and metaphors – by playing with internal cultural meanings and codes that ceased to be relevant after the abolition of the Communist Party and the collapse of the Soviet state. As Yurchak explains it in his analysis of the transformations of the post-Soviet music scene,

...[the] continual public shattering [of the official ideological symbols] had in itself become a mainstream of official cultural reality [...]. This new development gradually rendered many nonofficial subcultures developed in the Soviet years irrelevant and obsolete. It was in large part responsible for the major crisis in the early 1990s in independent rock, which had been prominent in the country throughout the 1980s but suddenly found itself in a symbolic void left by the disappearance of its cultural logic. (Yurchak 1999, 91)

Thus, for many creatives, the end of socialism in fact meant the loss of their conceptual focus and artistic language – a loss that they, however, underestimated at the time. This loss questioned their cultural relevance and “contemporaneity.” At the same time, the influx of different aesthetic forms from the other side of the Iron Curtain provided Russian artists with new ideas and points of reference. Although this exchange had been long awaited – and indeed it is hard to overestimate its cultural importance – it was far from being an equal exchange. Foreign collectors and curators often arrived without the accompaniment of appropriate commentary, and the artwork they represented was therefore understood through a prism of visual and intellectual experiences nourished by a very different political, socio-economic and symbolic order. This new visual language was, however, part of the convention which defined access to exhibitions and eventual sales. Rather than being equal participants of the art scene, Russian artists and curators found themselves in the position of students, trying to “decode” forms and symbols.

Another new phenomenon, which emerged during the same period, was the rise of “cultural mediators” – translators in the literal and the figurative sense, who would play a crucial role in introducing and promoting local artists to those who decided the “quality” and relevance of art. In this context, artists with a good command of English (which was rare) who were able to provide a convincing commentary to their work had greater chances of success, while others were left at the mercy of external commentators. Even artists who were included in international networks and who consequently had more chances to speak for themselves experienced this new reality as a shift of power. Yurii Leiderman, one of the most successful artists during Perestroika and in the 1990s, recalls:

I have now recalled a funny episode: on one of our collective exhibitions in Tacoma (this is near Seattle), the organizers come to me and ask how to translate the title of one work of [our group] “Medgermenevtiki.”⁵¹ This was

⁵¹ The artistic group “Inspection Medical Hermeneutics” functioned from 1987 to 2001 in Moscow. The central characters of the group were Sergei Anufriev, Yurii Leiderman (who left the group in 1991), and Pavel Pepperstein and Vladimir Fedorov (who joined in 1991).

a very simple installation: the toys in white dresses are sitting around the New Year tree; and it was called “the New Year.” I told that, perhaps, it would make sense to translate it as “Christmas,” because the most important thing here is the atmosphere of the holiday, and the holiday for the Americans is Christmas. And then Tupitsyna comes to me with the evil eyes: “What? What a Christmas?” I have already made a feature out of it in the catalogue – that the New Year was the only non-ideological holiday in the Soviet Union!.” It didn’t occur to her [to ask herself] why the Soviet Union was [relevant] here at all. But I liked the jargon [ironically]: you are a wordless noodle here, and we are doing a feature out of you! (Monastyrskii, Zakharov, and Leiderman 2008)

The quotation also demonstrates how the language of “the Soviet” became a currency during the 1990s. Leiderman’s installation, which was intended as an ironic message about the metaphysical and “archetypical” meaning of the ritual in the contemporary society in the most general sense, was better “marketable” (at least, as the curator believed it) as a message about “the only non-ideological holiday in the Soviet Union.” Moreover, it also shows the role of the Russian kulturtraegers in presenting Russian art on the global scene as “post-Soviet,” that is necessarily in relation to the Soviet order, rather than as aesthetic messages with their own artistic value outside of a particular national context.

At the same time, this way to present Russian works of art was most probably a form of adaptation to a new reality. Foreign curators and collectors came to Russia not only with their own expectations and criteria of “good art,” but also with foreign currency. Moreover, they brought a new conceptual vocabulary which, while crucial to success, remained very much opaque. One of the main concepts in their vocabulary was encoded in the word *aktual’nost’* (from Eng. ‘actuality’), a word that was meant to combine the meanings of the words “contemporary” and “conceptual.” Although not always grounded in a serious theoretical effort, *aktual’nost’* was a key to success and could be quickly converted into dollars.⁵²

The most fortuitous – often those who were already established during the late Soviet period and were therefore well connected – quickly made sizable fortunes. In my interviews, the success of these artists is usually depicted through stories about rushed apartment purchases in Moscow and St. Petersburg, international flights in business class and fine dining in high-class restaurants. However, as I have also garnered from the interviews, many artists had difficulty explaining what the key to success actually was. The crucial term, *aktual’nost’*, remained very much non-transparent, and the sudden commercial success of some interviewees’ peers who

⁵² Because of the extremely rapid inflation of the Ruble, the US dollar became the main stable currency in the 1990s. All essential transactions were calculated in dollars.

were doing “similar things” (for some) or “nonsense” (for others) looked more like chance than a fair reward. Consequently, in the early post-Soviet context many Russian artists lost all sense of orientation in regards to what was considered “good art”; in this context, some ended up simply reproducing the patterns of their successful colleagues.

The quest for *aktual'nost'* was only one way to succeed and to escape economic misery. Another way to ensure a decent quality of life and “stay in the profession” was to produce “Russian exotics.” In the 1990s, the Russian capitals were full of tourists who were ready to pay for art and craft works such as Orthodox icons and quasi-traditional crafts. Although by that time most of the urban population consisted of secular atheists who had little knowledge about Orthodox religion, the skills they received in the Soviet art schools were sufficient to learn the basics needed to reproduce the religious art canon relatively quickly. While Western art education had been increasingly shifting its focus from skills to conceptual work since the 1960s, Soviet art schools had remained focused on the technical side of art production. Indeed, the production of religious art (not exclusively Orthodox) was also stimulated by the religious renaissance that took place during the post-Soviet period; in this context, the Russian Orthodox church, Islam, Judaism and (to a lesser extent) Buddhism were all increasingly becoming important stakeholders and potential clients on the art market.

Another economic niche of artistic production, perhaps less prestigious but still in demand, was the production of quasi-traditional Russian crafts, such as embroideries, linen, Palekh laque miniature and so on.⁵³ Although the production of crafts did not earn one an ample income, the items produced were very popular among both foreign tourists and the local population. In the context of post-Soviet identity crisis, quasi-traditional national symbols offered an apprehensible (although not always sufficient) way to reintegrate oneself into the narrative scape of a non-Soviet Russia.⁵⁴

⁵³ On Palekh craft and its role in the “forging of a Russian nation” in the late Soviet context see: (Jenks 2003)

⁵⁴ Indeed, the above mentioned craft market niche offered a second chance for some who had just lost their jobs. In 2015, during a crafts exhibition in St.Petersburg, I interviewed Elena, an art student who was selling hand-made jewelry. When I inquired as to how she had become interested in this craft, she described how, in the early 1990s, she had had to help her mother make souvenirs out of birchbark—a traditional material in Tomsk (in Siberia). When her mother lost her job overnight, the family, consisting of a single mother and two kids, found themselves without any income. Soon her mother got involved in the craft business as an out-worker. This was particularly practical because, working from home, she could rely on the help of her teenaged children. The business offered only a minimal income, but still helped the family make ends meet. In 2015, more than ten years after the fact, it still brought tears to Elena’s eyes to recall her life in the 1990s in Tomsk. Still, she says, it was then that she fell in love with traditional aesthetics and ultimately decided to enter the school of art.

The dissolution of the Soviet order dramatically changed their everyday life as citizens. From the beginning of the 1990s onward, artists who had hitherto formed a state-sponsored professional group found themselves in a very new socio-economic situation. On the one hand, they were freed of censorship and external aesthetic guidelines and restrictions; on the other hand, they had to finance their art by themselves and, therefore, to learn about an economics of the arts that had never previously been an issue to such a great extent. As Faraday demonstrated in regard to the filmmaking industry, none of the artists aspiring to creative autonomy expected that the introduction of the market would rapidly destroy the whole industry. In contrast, most of them (as well as many other members of *intelligentsia*) tended to see the arrival of capitalism as a “restoration of normal life.” One important aspect of this imagined West was the idealized understanding of capitalism as an honest competition amongst equals.

The socio-economic context of the 1990s challenged and perturbed the art worlds as they existed in the Soviet era: old hierarchies were no longer relevant, the criteria were unclear and perspectives uncertain. In many cases, in light of the radical devaluation of the Ruble and the misery of the 1990s, the satisfaction of “the taste of the client” presented itself as a simpler option than, and eventually overtook, the individual struggle to create original art for those who identified themselves professionally with the art sector. After some time, most of the international curators left Russia, turning their attention toward China. The Russian art scene was labeled as outdated and irrelevant.

6.1.3. *RUSSIAN POVERA* AS AN ATTEMPT TO RESTORE RUSSIAN ARTISTIC IDENTITY

By addressing the international audience in 2008, therefore, Marat Guelman and the *Russian Povera* exhibition aimed to demonstrate the actual existence of contemporary art (understood as conceptual rather than craft-based) in Russia and to thus contest those opinions established in the art world of the 1990s that cast aside the country’s creative production.

Moreover, as a commercial project targeting the global (though mainly Western) art community, *Russian Povera* attempted to capitalize on both the texture of “Russian exotics” and discourses of political criticism. Crude raw materials were to embody the “Russianness” (if not the “Russian tradition”) that was previously marketed via “traditional arts and crafts”; and, simultaneously, the “authenticity,” “deepness” and the “real miracle” of the exhibited objects were significant in their timeliness: these qualities performed “social responsibility” and engendered a post-colonial criticism of contemporary Russian neoliberalism.

While essentially targeting the global contemporary art market, Marat Guelman worked, at the same time, to foster a new art agenda on the national scale. Though essentially equivalent, the English and the Russian versions of the catalogue's introductory text contain certain differences. A close reading of the Russian version highlights some of the nuances of these two different agendas of the curators. It contains, for example, the following paragraph, which I find to be noteworthy:

The project contests the alternative [sic]⁵⁵ which is being imposed upon us: either contemporary (*sovremennyi*) or Russian. The exhibition shows Russian art as both serious work on social and national identity, and a topical artistic search. "Russian Povera" is a manner of life for contemporary art in Russia... (Russian Povera 2008)

Bearing in mind Herzfeld's comparison of his own translation with that of an official interpreter who systematically omits local expressions that seemingly have only ethnographic value, I am inclined to suggest that this particular mismatch in translation is a source of "productive ethical anxiety" (Herzfeld 1996, 214).

While the concept of "contemporary art" was developed in the western culture specifically in the opposition to terms such as "modernism" and "modern art," in Russian both terms equally correspond to the adjective *sovremennyi*. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons, why art critics and curators of the 1990s applied the qualifier "actual" (*aktual'nyi*) when they needed to refer to "contemporary." This paragraph, while containing the seemingly absurd opposition of "either contemporary or Russian" is, however, very instructive in explaining the major dilemma that many post-Soviet artists (though not exclusively artists) faced after the collapse of the Soviet state. This dilemma can be briefly paraphrased in the question of how to remain "modern" (and "contemporary" – both words equally correspond to the Russian *sovremennyi*), while not being "Western" – or, alternatively, "how to stay Russian" without being "backwards" ("traditional"). The main issue at stake is the clash between different regimes of temporality and the symbolical hierarchies of knowledge underlying these regimes.

Another crucial issue emerging from this paragraph is its reflection upon the very reason for this temporal clash: "the choice between two alternatives," to be either contemporary or Russian, "is being imposed upon us."

⁵⁵ *Al'ternativa* in the original. I am aware that in English *alternative* would refer to either ("contemporary" or "Russian"), but not to the binary (contemporary as opposed to Russian).

Although using the passive voice and, therefore, avoiding the naming of subjects responsible for “imposing” this “alternative,” the authors of the catalogue clearly hint at an anonymous “them,” an external force imposing a conceptual set of categories shaping knowledge of Russian art and Russia in a broader sense. This hint, however, is not so much a criticism of a hidden “hegemonic voice” as such, but rather an attempt to help Russian artists recognize themselves as “modern subjects,” those performing “serious work on social and national identity and a topical artistic search” and, therefore, to support them in the pursuit of having a place in the realm of contemporary art (hegemonic as that realm might be).

Thus, what the curators of the exhibition *Russian Povera* had in mind when inviting Russian artists to recognize themselves as simultaneously “contemporary” and “Russian” was, in fact, an entreaty to take part in a kind of moral emancipation and conceptual self-decolonization (though, perhaps, coupled with the hope to be economically colonized, that is, invested in by global capital). By exhibiting arts produced with the help of basic raw materials, the curators suggested a recoding of material simplicity in terms of (Western) contemporary art aesthetics and, therefore, a means of “catching up” with the times. Being poor in Russia in 2008 was *contemporary* and, therefore, modern. Moreover, by naming *Russian Povera* as “a manner of life for contemporary art in Russia...,” they not only endowed the exhibition with the value of *aktual’nost’*, but also imbued it with an additional moral value, echoing a sense of solidarity with the pain and loss experienced by millions of Russians. Thus, on the national scale, *Russian Povera* was designed as kind of therapeutic technology on Russian post-Soviet identity in the world of art.

The *Russian Povera* case is telling, as it exemplifies the use of DIY aesthetics to mobilize the stereotype of Russian poverty and backwardness for cultural and economic purposes. The secondary materials and raw texture of the artifacts was to represent inherently Russian characteristics, which, at the same time, provided access to the “miracle.” Importantly, DIY raw aesthetics as applied to Russia was thought to be an effective sign, intelligible to both insider and outsider publics. Yet, while Russians would read the stereotype through the affective lens of cultural intimacy, international beholders recognized the familiar picture of “poor Russia.” Ironically, however, this time “poor Russia” was to be sold at a high price and, in this respect, can be read as an example of “nation branding,” a phenomenon rapidly developing on the global scale since the 2000s and equally practiced on the contemporary art market (Avgita 2009).

6.2. ARKHIPOV'S ARTISTIC TRAJECTORY AS A PATH TO SELF-DECOLONIZATION

In this part of the chapter I come back to Arkhipov's project, introduced in Chapter 1. I approach it in two different ways. On the one hand, I follow a particular creative project rooted in the Soviet amateur art culture as it becomes a part of the global art scene. On the other hand, I analyze how Arkhipov mobilizes DIY aesthetics to conceptualize his project and to produce and/or contest different conceptions of national belonging.

6.2.1. PROFESSIONAL DYNAMICS: FROM SOVIET ENGINEER TO POST-SOVIET ARTIST

Born in 1961, Arkhipov grew up in Kolomna, a small provincial city neighboring Moscow. He was the child of a doctor and an engineer, both of whom came from the village and owed their social status and Soviet "middle class" professions to state-sponsored public access to higher education and social mobility. By the late Soviet period, both parents were successful professionals, quite satisfied with their social and economic careers. They had been allocated a two-room apartment and had a car.

Following the professional track of his father, Arkhipov graduated as an electronic engineer and started working in one of the closed Soviet research institutes (so called "mailboxes" – *pochtovyi iashhik*) dealing with aircraft engineering; here he worked on electric and electronic airplane equipment. Such employment guaranteed a socially respectable and economically stable professional situation and, in the eyes of Arkhipov's father, was the perfect step for further life-building. This professional choice was, however, largely unreflected on Arkhipov's part. In my interview with him, Arkhipov explains that as a high school student he didn't have any clear ideas about his occupational inclinations and simply looked to his parents and planned, "either to become a doctor, like my mother, or an engineer, like my father." He quickly realized, however, that the world of technology could not make him happy. Arkhipov found his professional life in the Institute profoundly boring. Moreover, Perestroika's winds of change made him dream of alternative venues for self-realization outside of the predictable career track of a Soviet engineer.

Throughout the 1980s, in parallel with his work as an engineer, Arkhipov developed a growing interest in the arts: during his after-work hours, he took a number of classes in sculpture and painting and started participating in youth exhibitions. Early on, he was interested in the

aesthetics of everyday life and created compositions made with quotidian objects. As he explains in the interview,

This was an attempt to make art out of the everyday... It seems that I was lacking some beauty of the everyday. And that's why I wanted to see it in the realm of the everyday thing. So, it was a kind of reflection specifically through things. Not just painting pictures or taking photos, but [making] some plastic and even, in my view, metaphysical [forms].

By the mid-1980s, during Perestroika, the number of exhibitions openly inviting non-professional young artists grew. At the same time, as I have explained earlier in this chapter, this moment was the time when many international art collectors and curators expressed enthusiastic interest in Russian art, which remained a *terra incognita* because of the Iron Curtain. As Arkhipov explains,

When Perestroika started, it appeared that the most interesting artists were non-professionals, like Leiderman, Albert...

In this context, “the most interesting artists” meant “the most successful,” those who received more appreciation among foreign curators and Russian curators who mediated this communication. As I have shown in the first part of this chapter, back then, the expectations placed upon non-official artists were high. The borders of the USSR were becoming increasingly permeable and connoisseurs of contemporary art were looking for unknown alternative Soviet art, different from the pieces made according to the canon of Socialist Realism that officially represented the USSR in both domestic and international venues.

It is not insignificant that the arrival of the foreign collectors drastically restructured the whole of the artistic field in Russia. As Arkhipov put it, “the tables of ranks emerged” (*voznikli tabeli o rangakh*). He alludes to the formal list of positions and ranks – the so called “Table of Ranks” – introduced in Russia by the emperor Peter the Great in 1722. This Table challenged the old social and economic hierarchies based on the hereditary principal of reproduction of nobility and founded a new form of social mobility based on individual service in the military, governance, or court, rather than on birth and family wealth. Yet, while Peter’s Table of Ranks made individual careers dependent on personal service to the tsar (promotion for the highest ranks required his personal approval), the new “tables of ranks” described by Arkhipov created symbolical connections between individual success in the art world and the exchange value of their artistic production. Suddenly, it was demonstrated that the quality of work could be equated with the price established by a gallery or on auction. Thus, in the end of the 1980s-

beginning of the 1990s, the sphere of art which had previously been largely understood as “culture,” that is the public realm of the of “people’s heritage” (*narodnoe dostoianie*) socially embodied in public institutions, such as museums and schools of arts, and limited to individuals with formal education, became a potentially open domain. Moreover, this domain promised a new style of life, including international travel, a new social environment of creative people and (potentially) rapid financial benefits.

For Arkhipov, a young person disappointed in his engineering profession and trying himself out in the arts, this particular context was also an opportunity to find a new professional niche in a rapidly changing society – a niche, which was, moreover, “modern” and promising.

6.2.2. FIRST STEPS IN ART: FROM PRODUCTION TO COLLECTION

As I have explained in the previous section, Arkhipov started his artistic career relatively late and, most importantly, as an autodidact. His first art installations echo the spirit of the time. For instance, in the late 1980s, he learned about Stalin’s purges and the horrors of the Gulags and was shocked by this history, which remained unknown to many Soviets. One of his early installations expresses feelings of national suffering and victimhood. However, during that same early period, Arkhipov demonstrated a sensibility towards minimalist and quotidian sculptural forms and criticized the “pathetic” language used by some of the big-name artists. For instance, he comments on the monument by Ernst Neizvestny (1925-2016), a Russian-American sculptor, saying:

There is Ernst Neizvestny, a sculptor. And I remember, his project was published in some magazine. I remember, this was a completely crazy project. Cyclopean. He could imagine that this problem could be represented only through cyclopean sizes. This means, some extraordinary bronze cliffs should be here, some victims should lay there. Well, some nonsense in my view, because... of course it is possible to show it somehow through size. But I believed that it all should be done very simply. Simple and symbolic, through the thing. Yes. And this is my proposal, my version... Although I sent it somewhere, to some competitions, I guess, it has never been realized... But this is a very simple proposal. One takes a piece of rail, I mean a piece of railway which transported people to these zones. I mean a real piece of railway, concretely, you understand? And it can be done very simply: you cut a piece of rail with a cross-tie and you put it vertically. And that’s all. And then some imitation of wire or some real [barbed] wire. Yes. And this somehow preceded my searches for self-made things.

Arkhipov's idea was to imbue the symbolically charged sign of the cross with the documentary "truth" and aesthetic simplicity of a piece of rail. The poetics would emerge through a particular combination of visual simplicity and temporal and sensual density, embodied in the factual evidence of the rail, a mundane element of landscape and a routine means of mobility across the country. This familiarity would allow a spectator to recognize him or herself in the composition and perhaps imagine or even physically "try on" the Gulag as his or her personal destination. The familiar experience of traveling by rail – common amongst Russians – would be transformed here as a means to join the experience of suffering, both national (collective) and individual.

In my interview with him, Arkhipov reminisces about this early period of his artistic career as a painful search for his own artistic language. He was looking for his own visual style and approach and hated himself for it if he ever imitated someone else's work. Moreover, the observation of successful art sales suddenly making an artist a fortune provided a seductive temptation to follow "successful patterns" and, at the same time, rendered the whole engagement in the arts morally doubtful and emotionally repulsive.

Finally, a chance was his savor. According to Arkhipov's often-repeated narrative – which he reproduced frequently for journalists and, once, to me during my interview of him – the "aha" moment came to him when he saw a hook-shaped hanger made from a toothbrush:

In 1994 I saw, on an acquaintance dacha, an unusual hook on which clothes were hung. It was made from an old toothbrush, without bristles, and had been bent; it was obvious, over a fire. There was something strange in the moment of the recognition of that thing. I immediately saw the light, as it were, and recalled tens of similar things that I knew belonged to my relatives, friends, acquaintances, or acquaintances of acquaintances. Before I hadn't really noticed them. (Arkhipov 2003, IV)

In the mid-1990s Arkhipov made a radical shift in his artistic approach and decided to collect self-made functional everyday objects rather than creating art-objects himself. The idea of collecting self-made objects made by other people solved all of his dilemmas at once. He was henceforth free to follow his subjective inclination to celebrate the everyday object and material simplicity and, at the same time, to leave the aesthetic and economic competition to other artists. Importantly, for Arkhipov self-made objects symbolized "pure creativity," free of the necessity to compete and to catch up to *aktual'nost'*. Arkhipov explains,

How did I arrive there? On the one hand, yeah [I observed] my father.., but on the other hand, there are thousands of people [spread] over the whole

country, all of the time, but I did not notice that before, and did not understand, what value it might present for the art, for instance. [Because] what kind of value can be there? Someone simply made a fridge... How would the majority of people see it? – ok, he made [a fridge], and ok... But I get my insight from the site of the art, you know? I mean, why was I so happy? Now I understand that these people, they are real creators, who do not intend to be “contemporary” [*aktual’nyimi*], to be recognized, and so on... They do not want any of this, and this is why, as I understand it, they are real creators so to say... who do what they find good, without a backward glance. [...] And what happens is that this thing appears independently of me, and this was exactly what I needed, this was not my artistic search [for a form]. I mean, I am not responsible for, how...[good] it is. But, interestingly, in the aesthetics of the thing one can read, so to say, the intention or the lack of intention to please somebody. One can see it with an unaided eye, you know. Well. And the less the thing is meant to please, the less the author thought about pleasing somebody, the more interesting it is in the artistic sense.

It is ironic that while late-Soviet artists hoped to achieve freedom by leaving the officialdom of the Soviet order and censorship (Faraday 2000), they ended up facing the dictate of the market and new forms of censorship they had not previously been aware of. Arkhipov’s decision to collect objects rather than producing them was a means to escape this new form of “non-freedom.” Much like early Soviet Marxist artists, Arkhipov admired the human free will and creativity invested in the production of the mundane transformation of life. A simple everyday motivation, an honest gesture, produced an honest object, an object that would help people without pretensions of being extraordinary. The very ordinariness of such a creative act made a miracle possible.

Raised in the family of an engineer and trained as an engineer himself, Arkhipov had a particular sensibility toward the material world and the skills required to transform it. In his artistic approach, Arkhipov was more an engineer than a user, more a creative producer imbued with constructive imagination than a consumer. The juncture between engineering and artistic approaches in Arkhipov’s project, however, rendered him both original and marginal in the world of art.

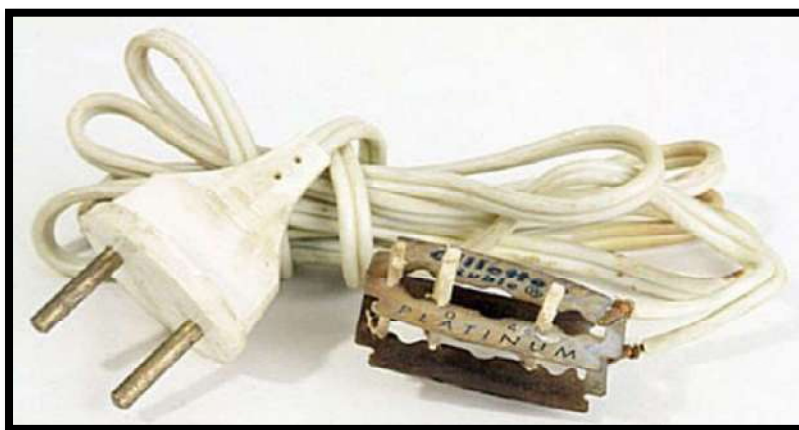
6.2.3. ARKHIPOV’S COLLECTION: “MIRACLES OF WIT”

As I explained in the previous section, Arkhipov's decision to collect self-made objects was in line with his artistic search for an individual style and unique artistic voice. Yet, while self-made objects offered him visual forms by themselves, the whole project required conceptualization. Originally, his intention was to perform a kind of social mission – to save the vanishing Soviet landscape. In 2002, he wrote:

Today, there are still hundreds of thousands of such things throughout the country; and if they are not collected now, then later on nobody will believe that soldiers (as well as students and prisoners) boiled [water] using razors, that a garage could move on its own wheels, that the bodies of ballistic missiles could have been transformed into root cellars, while their other elements are good for building fences, garages, motorbikes, pumps, outboard engines [...] The problem is the following: we have a very little time to find and collect the invaluable, unique samples of popular material culture of the Soviet period.

Arkhipov's definition of DIY objects as "popular material culture of the Soviet period" echoes the mainstream language of the 1990s, which described the "Soviet thing" as inherently different.

Before offering an analysis of Arkhipov's artistic conception, I would like to comment on this passage in order to explain exactly what kind of objects he refers to and collects as pieces of art. Arkhipov alludes to the "miracles of people's wit" (*chudesa narodnoi smekalki*) that he encountered during his travels across Russia since 1994. For instance, a self-made immersion heater for boiling water made out of two razor blades, two matches and a piece of electric cable was a self-made alternative to standard domestic immersion heaters meant for temporal use, typically during travels, but also popular among those living in uncomfortable communal conditions. Contemporary online forums commonly refer to it as a device for military service but also for dormitories and prisons. The Russian Internet is full of photos, videos and detailed descriptions of this basic technology and explications of its eventual risks, as well as related memories.



*Figure 37. Self-made immersion heater for boiling water made out of two razor blades, matches, wire, and a plug. Author: Oleg Baichurin. Saransk. Around 1989
Reproduced in: Arkhipov 2003, 14*



*Figure 38. Garage “moving on its own wheels.”
Photo: Vladimir Arkhipov. Courtesy of the author*

In contrast, the garage “moving on its own wheels” that Arkhipov mentions was a unique solution that he discovered in 1998 in the town of Mitchurinsk, in the Tambov region, about 400 km from Moscow. This solution was a creative response to and a “weapon of the weak” (Scott 1985) against the irregular municipal campaigns against unauthorized individual garages: each time the “owner” of the garage was met with yet another reclamation from the authorities, he just moved his garage to a different place, thus avoiding confrontation but pursuing his own personal interest. While the solution itself – to put the garage on wheels – may be unique, it is representative of the conflicts between citizens and the state that followed the marketization process.

Due to the drastic economic crises, by 1997, federal revenues constituted only 33,4% (in relation to GDP) while budget expenditures remained at 51% (Osadchaia 1999). Under these circumstances, state agencies looked for any possibility to cover up the budget “holes.” On the other hand citizens, who were often left almost without any means of subsistence due to the rapid inflation and delayed salaries and who were thus disappointed with the reforms, boycotted any additional charges. Although the eventual revenues from the land lease for individual garages were “little fish” in comparison with the fiscal debts of big stakeholders, this “hunt” remained in the collective memory as one of the state-organized “robberies” of its citizens’ time. Thus, the so called “inventory” campaigns (*inventarizatsia*) targeting garages (and later on dachas) that were organized across the country at different moments between the late 1990s

and the late 2000s met a strong resistance from the local population, who had enjoyed their garages for many years previous and, therefore, considered the structures to be “theirs.”

Some people “inherited” garages from their parents, others had erected them themselves in the not-so-distant past; regardless of how far back their garage went, all agreed that the actions of the municipal authorities were illegitimate and immoral, motivated exclusively by the avarice of the administrative officials. In megapolises like Moscow, the responsibility for the campaign was also extended to local businesses interested in the commercialization of parking (which had remained free since the Soviet period) and the building of parking centers. Although the process of individual resistance is not well documented for small towns such as Mitchurinks, it is abundantly for big cities like Moscow. The protest action organized by Moscow drivers in 2006, one well-known example, was emblematically entitled “Let’s protect “shells” (rus. *rakushka*, the cheapest type of individual garages) against the abuse of the bureaucrats” (*zashhitim rakushki ot proizvola chinovnikov!*).⁵⁶



Figure 39: Self-made “rakushka” garage
Source: https://vk.com/@stroim_svoi_dom-garazh-rakushka-svoimi-rukami
Accessed January 3, 2019

Most of the old individual garages (like the one documented by Arkhipov, shown above) were constructed in the late Soviet period, usually on the basis of short-term land lease agreements. Back then, the automobilization of the USSR was still limited and publicly considered a sign of

⁵⁶ In the early 2000s in Moscow, municipal authorities started a large-scale campaign against unauthorized individual garages, known in Russian as “shells”. Shells represented the most common and the cheapest model of the urban garage, which can be described as a metal “slipcover”, or tent, for a car: its construction does not require any foundation and can be assembled with basic materials and tools.

social distinction rather than a norm.⁵⁷ Initially, specific social groups, such as individuals with physical disabilities or veterans of the Second World War, were given priority in vehicle purchases. Some groups of people had priority in contracting short-term land lease agreements and were thus able to build a garage. In the post-Soviet years such agreements formally became available to larger audiences; however, rumor had it that this implied additional expenses in the form of bribery. In the beginning of the 2000s the authorities stopped delivering and prolongating land-lease agreements, so most of them were invalid by the middle of the 2000s, when the official campaign against shells started.

In fact, some residents sided with the authorities. The opening of borders in 1991 and the subsequent rapid growth of individual entrepreneurship allowed for the relatively easy importation of used vehicles from Western Europe, notably from Germany (through Finland and Poland to the European part of Russia), and from Japan (to the Eastern part of the country). The growing automobilization promptly increased the number of “shells” that sometimes literally occupied the entire space between apartment blocks and became a frequent object of criticism, especially among elderlies, young parents and pet owners who complained about the lack of space for walking, the pollution and the ugliness (as some argued) of the shells. In contrast, drivers argued that shells were, in fact, a minimalist solution for yards, as they hardly occupied more territory than the vehicles themselves. In other words, drivers did not consider shells to be “real garages,” but rather minimal protections of their cars against rain, snow and vandalism. As one driver wondered, “Why demolish them? I would still park my car on this place. But there will be no roof over it” (kp.ru 2012).

The battle around the shells resulted in a series of official “cleanings” (*zachistki*) of the city, during which most of them were bulldozed away. In response to these campaigns, one of Arkhipov’s interlocutors found an original solution: he added wheels to his shell, making his garage a kind of mobile “cameo shell,” able to move as soon as danger was near.

Arkhipov’s collection, much like any other collection, is not a coherent narrative, but rather a mosaic of cases in which individual struggle, historical circumstances, social, economic and emotional motivations and technical skills find their incarnation in a single entity. It is not my intention here to build a meta-narrative for this collection and thus create a kind of “screen” on

⁵⁷ For more on the history and culture of automobilization in the USSR and the Eastern bloc see: (Siegelbaum 2011)

which to project a segment of Soviet and post-Soviet material culture animated by a historical and cultural commentary; I mean rather to analyze Arkhipov's collection as an individual manifestation (in this case his own) of a particular vision and sensibility. This vision was, on the one hand, unique, as it valorized a particular type of materiality that was rejected by most of people at that time; on the other hand, this vision was an early bird of the larger intellectual trend of reflecting on the material "ruins of Socialism" that remained on the post-Soviet surface, which became particularly obvious in the early 2000s.

The relevant question here, however, is not how good or bad, advanced or primitive, reliable or risky, this technology is and why, or where and when it was used, but rather how it was that Arkhipov recognized in it a piece of art and brought it into his collection.

6.2.4. FROM *SELF-MADE RUSSIA* TO *SELF-MADE GLOBE*

Going back to Arkhipov's quotation and his call for an emergent preservation of "the continent of Soviet material culture," one can see that at the beginning of the 2000s, Arkhipov still considered the objects he collected to be phenomena specific to Soviet material culture and, therefore, phenomena on the verge of extinction, "a vanishing nature" (*ischezaiushchaia natura*), as he says in the interview. This appeal can be compared to what anthropologists refer to as "salvage ethnography." Witness to the rapid change of material landscape around him, Vladimir Arkhipov compared the material remains of everyday Soviet culture with something like the tip of an iceberg which goes inevitably under the water. Contrary to many others who were in a hurry to forget and leave this culture behind, Arkhipov thought of self-made things as a kind of national heritage that was to be cared for and conserved for future generations. However, in order to appreciate the exclusiveness and, at the same time, strangeness and marginality of his appeal, one must understand the scale of the socio-economic transformations under way in the 1990s-2000s. At the time, Russia was undergoing a capitalist economic shift and entering into the mass consumption era. Standard imported commodities, along with their colorful bright packaging and images, rapidly invaded the newly-opened Russian market and triumphantly entered urban living rooms and apartments. These new imported ready-mades looked "beautiful" and were often considered to be "of a good quality." Most importantly, they were new, different and came "from the West," a largely idealized "El Dorado land" produced by the late Soviet imaginary. Set against these new ready-made goods, multiple self-made objects and gizmos, which had long been domesticated in the household, became increasingly marginal, like annoying atavisms that no longer had cause to stay in urban residential spaces.

Moreover, suddenly contrasted with prefabricated and marketed commodities, they were assigned a new very measurable and “objective” characteristic – price. When juxtaposed with “expensive” marketable goods, self-made objects became “cheap” and non-prestigious. The marketization processes brought about new and previously unknown scales of social stratification and hierarchy. The aesthetic and technological simplicity of such objects would henceforth be indicative of the small budget of their owners, rather than of their inventiveness and skillfulness. Throughout the 1990s, self-made objects were increasingly allocated to the periphery of social life: to garages, to dachas and, finally, to the garbage.

Given the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Arkhipov’s anxiety about the dissolution of Soviet material culture found few supporters. By the late 1970s, national Soviet production was rather unpopular and typically associated with the monotony of standardized products, lack of commodities and uncomfortable everyday life. However, in Vladimir Arkhipov’s eyes, the naïve DIY artifacts and assemblages were not signs of poverty and shame; the son of an engineer who was constantly producing something from nothing, Arkhipov had an understanding of the creative engineering process as an intellectual puzzle, and of the empowerment and joy of seeing a broken technology fixed. Thus, rather than exemplifying backwardness, self-made objects and technologies meant for him local knowledge, ingenuity, and the manageability of materiality, as experienced and performed by individuals in their everyday life. As he says in the interview,

I was so happy to see that these people, they are true creators, they don’t try to be like somebody else (an expert), they are true creators. But they don’t have aesthetic reflection, which I have. So I put their work in a white cube.

Originally, Arkhipov developed his collection as a documentary endeavor and started his enterprise with a series of trips across Russia. Guided by the idea of preservation, he looked for functional items produced by ordinary people and attempted to document the histories of their creation. Typically, he conducted small interviews with the creators or owners of the objects he was collecting. The term “folkforms,” which remains the title of his website to date, goes back to that quasi-ethnographic period.

The idea to build a website itself was also motivated by the desire to archive data and make a catalogue. With the help of a friend, he created an electronic platform www.folkforms.ru, which came to serve as both catalogue of and multilayered device. Site users first see the image of an object, and can then choose which additional information to access: a map locating the place in which the object was found, an audio fragment of the interview with its creator, sometimes

video. Visually all of these layers overlap, thus deliberately producing a visual noise effect, which Arkhipov interpreted as the “complexity and simultaneity of everyday life.” Though a studious ethnographer might challenge the abundance of Arkhipov’s documentation and contextualization, his effort is very instructive. In his work, Arkhipov has always balanced a sort of ethnography (collection and documentation) with a visual approach.

In parallel to the process of collecting and documenting things, Arkhipov took his time to meditate upon how to present his collection. His ultimate dream was, and still is, to create a “live museum,” where objects would travel from their original places to a temporary exhibition space and then back home. The difficulty of obtaining spaces for an exhibition made him, however, consider less ambitious formats. Moreover, his familiarity with the theories and practice of contemporary art made him think seriously about his place as an artist in relation to his documentary project.

In 2010, when we first met, he put a strong emphasis on his own role as a mediator who selects new pieces, helps to exhibit them, and thus participates in the recognition of artists in the piece’s creators. For instance, in one of his texts, entitled “HE (sic!) is an artist,” Arkhipov inscribes himself in the conceptual tradition of Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol:

By signing empty pieces of paper Salvador Dali attained the top of the paradigm “I am an artist!” Joseph Beuys understood art differently and believed in the power of a universal human creativity. Beuys’s most famous phrase (borrowed from Novalis), “Everyone is an artist,” stated that every person could contribute creatively. Around the same time, Andy Warhol promised everybody “15 minutes of fame.” In spite of these early visionaries, we are still looking for these anonymous artists. In order to find him or her, we have to shift our attention from the “I” to a concrete person, to a real “HIM.” (Arkhipov 2010)

Thus, the timeframe of the exhibition was to become a unique moment of transformation, which would render a non-suspecting anonymous handyman an artist: the very presence of an object within the walls of an art-gallery would create the moment of public recognition. The ideal format of circulating objects was, therefore, substituted in a way by the circulation of social roles and statuses, thus opening the borders of the field of art and rendering it accessible to lay people. In 2012, he made an experiment and supplemented exhibited objects with the telephone numbers of their creators, thus inviting visitors to contact them.

Being an autodidact, Arkhipov lacked “the professional artistic language” and, in many respects, was incapable of building a convincing, but also marketable, commentary on his work and therefore had to rely on those “professionals” who happened to be around. On the other

hand, contrary to professional artists, he was rather free from the expectations and evaluations that necessarily applied to artists who passed through the conventional path of socialization.

As he explains in the interview, in his original approach to documenting self-made objects he also followed some advice:

You know, in the beginning different people pushed me in different directions. Some were saying, “you have a collection, you should systematize it, classify it, and so on.” Yes. But, as I say, first of all, the collection itself was not the goal [...]. Second, this collection... it is impossible to collect. Why? Because new things come up all the time.

Regardless of the obvious difficulties with conceptualization that Arkhipov met in the art scene, his lack of art education rendered him, in a way, more free in his experiments than some other artists who had to reinvent (as opposed to invent) themselves completely under the new conditions. His experiments with the language of contemporary art went hand in hand with probing strategies of self-marketization, as the organization of expeditions to collect objects and negotiations about eventual exhibitions demanded significant entrepreneurial skills. Moreover, contrary to many artists of the period, he had experience in managing projects, as he had left the research institute in the early 1990s to work in the construction business.

For some time, the strategy of exhibiting DIY under the title *Self-Made Russia* proved to be successful. Arkhipov organized a number of exhibitions in Russia and gained important visibility abroad. This approach proved to be relatively efficient economically and even somewhat successful in terms of self-representation on the artistic scene.

Yet, at some point, Arkhipov faced a new conceptual problem. After having traveled a lot around the world he realized that self-made objects were, in fact, not unique to Russian or Soviet culture. This realization became even more articulated after his experience of preparing an exhibition in the UK in the beginning of the 2000s. Arkhipov narrates,

They gave me a tour in the British museum. The British library is also there. Egyptian treasures are there and all these treasures... And somehow, when I've seen all this – India, China, Egypt – I got such a feeling, that if I [...] would bring my Russian things there, this would be something very similar to the continuation of the colonial politic. And that these [Russian] things would be perceived absolutely so, just like some native things. You understand? And I somehow did not want to play this game, to the extent that I was ready to renounce that exhibition. I mean they [the British curators] wanted it, but I didn't.

A coincidence helped him to find an alternative solution,

Once, we were in a car, and we're waiting at a red traffic light there, and I see that on the neighboring car there is a metal hanger instead of the antenna, on the back, where there should be a telescopic antenna. This [metal hanger] was curved in a way and stuck into the jack. I say, "Holy cats! Look, it appears that in England there are such things too. Let's try to collect English things." They say, "But such things do not exist in England. Only Russians can invent such things." I say, "Why only Russians, if [there is] this antenna? Or do you think someone came from Russia and stuck it into the jack? Someone has obviously done this." Well, finally [we decided] to make a test. The administration of the gallery says, "Well, we don't know where you are going to look for such things, but, of course, we can help you. We can give you a week: if you'll find at least something, then the next year you can come and collect extensively. And if you don't find anything, we still propose that you make an exhibition with Russian things. And if you don't want it, there will be no exhibition.

This fragment is particularly important, as it demonstrate to what extent Russian "low modernity" (if not to say backwardness) functions as both a self-stereotype and an external stereotype, a topic that I discuss in Chapter 2. The reluctance of the British curators in Arkhipov's story to believe they can find self-made objects in their home country was simply an effect of "common sense" reasoning, which figured the mere idea of discovering "backwardness" in the modern first world as nonsense. While I unfortunately lack the ethnography of this case from the other side, I can guess that the same project would not seem so unlikely to British curators if Arkhipov were to present his collection as ecological, or somehow conceptualized such that it could be smoothly integrated into the discursive scape of First World self-representation. Moreover, on a more abstract level, this case demonstrates that the modern imagination does not notice these kinds of objects, though they are omnipresent.

Nevertheless, the British colleagues proved to be cooperative, assisting Arkhipov with his endeavor as best they could: first, they called mobile libraries and local associations, but without success. Ultimately, Arkhipov convinced the curators to make it easy on themselves by just visiting their families and friends, and collected a number of objects made by people from the West Midlands, which were finally presented at the Ikon Gallery in 2002.

Since then, Arkhipov has grown increasingly reluctant to exhibit Russian DIY objects abroad without putting them side by side with local DIY creations. In years following the UK exhibition, he collected DIY artifacts in Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Switzerland, and other (mostly European) countries. Moreover, he prepared a two-volume edition in English: *Home-Made: Contemporary Russian Folk Artifacts* (Arkhipov

2006) and *Home-Made Europe: Contemporary Folk Artifacts* (Arkhipov 2012a). Although both books were published with the same editing house and the same rate of printed copies, the two volumes enjoy very disparate popularity. Arkhipov confessed that while the Russian collection was sold out within a few months, the European one is still on sale. The question remains: is this an effect of the stereotype or a meaningless volatility of the market?



Figure 40. Objects collected by Vladimir Arkhipov in 2001 in the West Midlands, UK and presented in the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, UK Source: <https://www.ikon-gallery.org/event/post-folk-archive/>. Accessed January 3, 2019

The transformation of Arkhipov's artistic work from being an amateur *samodeiatel'nost'*, an activity performed after his working hours as an engineer, to becoming a creative project recognized on the global contemporary art scene, can be analyzed as an example of what Nathalie Heinich and Roberta Shapiro suggest to term the process of "artification" (Heinich and Shapiro 2012).

... l'artification, c'est la résultante de l'ensemble des opérations, pratiques et symboliques, organisationnelles et discursives, par lesquelles les acteurs s'accordent pour considérer un objet ou une activité comme de l'art. C'est un processus qui institutionnalise l'objet comme l'oeuvre, la pratique comme art, les pratiquants comme artistes, les observateurs comme publiques, bref qui tend à faire advenir un monde de l'art. (Shapiro 2012, 21)

Yet, what particularly interests me in this process is the conceptual transformation of the project. The transition from *Self-Made Russia* to *Self-Made Globe* can be read as Arkhipov's conceptual deconstruction of DIY material culture as being a Soviet and Russian stereotype.

6.3. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I addressed the DIY realm from two different perspectives. On the one hand, I describe how late Soviet amateur artistic activities, originally preconfigured by the Soviet institutions of culture, shifted from the realm of *samodeiatel'nost'* into a global "art world," Arkhipov's artistic career is an example of such a transition, which I suggest can be interpreted as a process of "artification" (Heinich and Shapiro 2012).

On the other hand, I demonstrate that DIY aesthetics might function as a materialized national stereotype on national and international arenas. Both artistic projects – Arkhipov's *Self-Made Russia* and Marat Guelman's *Russian Povera* exhibition – mobilize DIY aesthetics to represent Russia and its unique "brut" character. Moreover, the success of this strategy proves the effectiveness of the stereotype at home and abroad. Yet, while Arkhipov's essentialization of DIY as a Russian/Soviet feature was informed by the late Soviet discourses of shortage, the aesthetic discourse of "utility" and his own particular material sensibility, *Russian Povera*'s conceptual frame is an example of a rather strategic mobilization of the geopolitical sensibilities applied for artistic and commercial purposes.

Although the epistemologies that prompted these two artistic endeavors may well be very different, I suggest that, in sum, both artistic projects contributed to the stabilization of the meanings of poverty and backwardness as they are applied to both internal and external interpretations of Russia as a state and as a particular culture. Thus, the "art worlds" provided yet another interpretational framework to host national stereotypes.

CHAPTER 7

“CULTURAL RECYCLING” IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

In this chapter I explore the ways in which individual engagement with DIY-like artistic and quasi-artistic practices are informed by their subjective experiences of social abandonment. Some of my interlocutors have demonstrated clear parallels between the cognitive and emotional work of “recycling” their recent pasts. I suggest that such practices can be understood as performances of “cultural repair,” which aims at the restoration of the social fabric that was damaged with the collapse of socialism. In this chapter, I will show how manual practices of recycling and DIY inform subjective efforts to “repair” life and extend practices of care to include one’s material world and immediate environment. Although one of my cases is an example of artistic work, work that is supposed to be reflective and conceptual *per se* (as opposed to “naïve”), I propose that one think about this conceptual work as fundamentally shaped by individual experiences. According to this perspective, all cases discussed in this chapter, while coming from different social worlds, exemplify how the manual practice of recycling may stand for a “materialized response” to social change.

The chapter consists of two parts. In the first part, I address the creative biography of Vladimir Kozin, a professional sculptor who in the late 1980s to early 1990s switched completely to the use of old materials to produce his works. In the second part of the chapter I provide further examples that demonstrate a similar pattern and that are performed by non-artists. By simultaneously addressing artists and non-artists without considering essential differences in their artistic reflection, I follow the approach of “methodological philistinism” taken by Alfred Gell, who reminded us that divisions between the different activities of people producing material objects is nothing but an effect of recent secular modern thinking (Gell 1992). Thus, in this chapter, I approach all of my interlocutors, independent of their professional activities, primarily as individuals performing creative work with their own hands and I take interest in how their personal experiences have informed this creative work.

7.1. KOZIN: ARTISTIC TRAJECTORY AS AN EXPRESSION OF “CULTURAL RECYCLING”

I met Vladimir Kozin in 2010 when I was in St.Petersburg doing fieldwork. That year, he prepared the exhibition *Eternal Values*, which was run in a small private gallery called Kvadrat

(Eng. the ‘quadrate’); the local TV news broadcasted a short reportage on it. The reporters were inspired by the poetics of Kozin’s sculptures and, furthermore, by the material selected to make them: Kozin constructs his artifacts out of pieces of old rubber collected on the street. Although there is nothing unusual in the fact that a contemporary artist works with recycled materials, what attracted my attention were the objects Kozin chose to make out of rubber: a kettle, a man’s shirt, an electric lightbulb (known in Russia as a *lampochka Il’icha*, Eng. ‘Ilich [Lenin’s] little lamp’), a chicken, a lock, etc. All these objects were familiar, but somehow “from the past”: they were neither provocative nor ironic.



Figure 41. In Kozin’s Workshop. Photo: Zinaida Vasilyeva

Today, Vladimir Kozin (born 1953) is a rather well-known artist living and working in Saint-Petersburg. Some of his pieces belong to the collections of the State Russian Museum, the Perm Museum of Modern Arts PERMM, the British Library in London, the Saxon State Library in Dresden and other collections in Russia and abroad. However, despite the evident recognition of his art, in my interview Kozin says that his artistic work is merely a hobby. For many years now, Vladimir Kozin has been working as a teacher in an art school for children — the job that he considers his real work.

In what follows I recount the story of Kozin’s artistic trajectory and his discovery of old rubber as the primary material for his sculptures. I argue that the story of his professional and artistic development informs and contextualizes social fragmentation, conflicts and misunderstandings typical of the post-Soviet years. I suggest that the transformations in Kozin’s self-nomination

(art as a hobby) can be interpreted as an effect of the “cultural recycling” of discourses and personal experiences, and a moral response to the commercialization and commodification of contemporary art in Russia.

For the interview, Kozin invited me to his workshop, a semi underground space, belonging to the Russian Union of artists, which Kozin shares with another painter. In the workshop, big black scraps of inner-tubes were sewn together with metal wire, emphasizing seams and connections. The blackness of the rubber and an echo of urban, outdoor, and industrial connotations contrasted with the intimate character of the objects that hinted at the coziness and routine of everyday life.

7.1.1. LATE SOVIET ARTISTIC TRAJECTORY AND THE DISCOVERY OF WASTE AESTHETICS

Kozin’s artistic career started in the late 1970s in a more or less conventional manner for the time. Born in 1953 in Lvov (in what today is Ukraine), Kozin attended an art school for children, where he was very successful. After high school he left Lvov for Leningrad where, in 1980, he successfully graduated as a sculptor from the famous Academy of Art and Design, better known as *Mukha* (literally ‘a fly’), as it was called for many years, after the legendary Soviet sculptor Vera Mukhina, author of *The Worker and the Kolkhoz Woman*.⁵⁸ After graduation, in accordance with the state labor distribution program, Kozin went to Mordovia, where he gained extensive experience working with traditional sculpture materials such as stone, bronze and wood. In 1984 he was accepted to join the Leningrad Union of Artists, an important step in any artistic career during the Soviet period, but particularly so for Kozin because it meant having access to state-sponsored resources such as workshops, allowing the sculptor to work on a large scale with bulky and sometimes “dirty” materials. In 1987 Kozin returned definitively to Leningrad, where the winds of change of the Perestroika era offered new ideas and opportunities.

Soon after his return, Kozin became involved in a private creative cooperative called “Synthesis,” organized by another artist from the same graduating class who told him,

⁵⁸ In 1992 the school’s name was changed to Stieglitz, after its founder.

Well, Volodia, get over here, here is the plan: there are the people who will support us and we will be able to improvise and make some funny and interesting things.

Those who were ready to offer support were, in fact, employees of one of the municipal REDs⁵⁹. Among other duties, they were responsible for the beautification and refurbishment of local playgrounds (*blagoustroistvo*), and received a budget for the task. The RED team was young and imaginative and liked the idea of working with “true artists” able to “make some funny interesting things,” rather than routinely repainting fences, slides and sandboxes and replanting greenery. Thus, the cooperative Synthesis was contracted to perform all “beautification” tasks except for planting, and was given complete freedom to improvise and make fun objects.

Within a few years, the team of two sculptors and one architect refurbished several playgrounds and erected unusual sculptures that were well-received among local residents. Among the most successful were the sculptures of a fantastic space-ship “pepelats,”⁶⁰ a diver and a janitor, the latter of which was selected for publication in a book.

⁵⁹ RED is Repairs and Exploitation Department. It is a municipal service responsible for a city district refurbishment.

⁶⁰ The term *pepelats* was used for the first time in the comedy by Georgii Danielia *Kin-dza-dza!* (1986), and later became a household name. In everyday speech it is often used ironically to refer to old vehicles and futuristic models of transport.



Figure 42. The Sculpture of the janitor. Artist: Vladimir Kozin and the Cooperative "Synthesis." 1990. Photo: Zinaida Vasilyeva

Kozin remembers this period as a very emancipatory and happy experience. The young artists had great creative freedom, something they often perceived as lacking when executing orders from state-sponsored enterprises; at the same time, they enjoyed economic welfare, as the format of the cooperative allowed for the prices of artwork to be negotiated with clients as opposed to the artists' income being determined by fixed state contracts.

Moreover, being funded through honorariums offered additional freedom in terms of budget management. Decisions concerning the materials to be used and how to purchase them were left to the artists. Thus, the cheaper it was to produce the work, the more money was left for individual salaries. To save on time and cost of materials, artists started to use ready-made objects available at the Vtorchermet, a warehouse used for storing scrap metals, such as garbage cans or wrenches.

We understood that we were doing this quickly and easily and that is why it was necessary to have an imagination in order to be able to do it. It would be one thing if we just welded it [an object] ourselves... we would just buy some iron and make a can from it. This is one way. But if we take a finished can, it's another thing. We, of course, saved ourselves energy, but we were also getting some artistic expressiveness out of it.

Although this kind of “art out of trash” has long been a common phenomenon in western countries, where the post-modern aesthetics of deconstruction has become the main aesthetic paradigm since the post-war time, in the Soviet Union it was practiced occasionally, yet remained experimental rather than normative, and was not commonly accepted. For instance, Vladimir Kozin says that his first encounter with trash-art happened in 1980, in the workshops of the Soviet sculptors Levon Lazarev and Konstantin Simun, during a visit with other university students:

... Konstantin Simun just made sculptures out of everything he had. [...] He could combine something from a bit of wire, some scrap-metal or automobile springs. And I suddenly saw in his workshop just a bundle of wire. And suddenly this bundle was transformed into an image, a composition... And then I realized that an artist is not just a contrived thing and that he bore it, nurtured it, and he made sketches and was waiting for a moment for the material to appear, for example, canvas, paints, I do not know, a wooden log or a block... and he took a chisel or brushes and began creating something that was in his head... But the artist is a person who can see something that is nearby and that nobody else sees. And the artist can convey this image, he can imagine something, he can anticipate something... That is, this brink is so artistic... I was impressed by that.

Thus, for students who were previously trained to master technical artistic skills and apply them upon realistic forms and compositions, such a visit to the intimate space of the workshop of a famous contemporary sculptor was an opportunity to touch upon something new and inspiring. Kozin narrates this episode as a turning point in his understanding of artistic work and means of expression. Yet, though impressed, Kozin did not have a chance to come back to this visual language until he was employed by the cooperative.

As I have explained, Socialist Realism was not a homogeneous and strictly codified system; during the later Soviet period, artists wishing to experiment with the visual language, techniques and materials could do so, while remaining within a reasonably realistic way of representation. Yet, this creative freedom was much easier to obtain for painters, working with rather un-expansive materials, than it was for sculptors, whose choice of materials and forms was always a result of negotiations with customers, be it an enterprise or a local municipality. Thus,

Syntheses offered these young artists a radically new environment, which, for Vladimir and his colleagues, meant a new quality of creative freedom that they hadn't known before.

In addition to that, it is not insignificant that Vladimir and his peers were not familiar with similar western examples and, therefore, perceived their own work as artistically innovative. Indeed, this was very much the case, considering the very different epistemologies of seemingly similar aesthetics. While western artists discovered waste aesthetics and ready-made as a result of the post-war disappointment in big narratives of modernity and the critique of science, technology and consumerism, Soviet artists did so while remaining within the socialist logic and future-oriented narrative. As Tom Cubbin demonstrates in his article about late Soviet design, even criticism of the “official futurology” and “historical turn” characteristic of the 1960s-1970s, were examples of a “future-oriented rather than a retrospective use of history” (Cubbin 2016, 26). Thus, while creating their sculptures out of scrap metals, young artists did create artistic messages that pushed the boundaries of Socialist realism, yet they did so without necessarily “protesting” against it. Ultimately, the very genre of creating sculptures for urban yards and children’s playgrounds implied producing a positive urban environment, rather than critical political statements. From this perspective, the work of the cooperative was closer to the program of the Soviet conceptual architects of the 1960s-70s, who intended to produce urban spaces in a way that would allow for the construction of more inclusive and harmonious ways of living together, rather than pertaining to the pervasive ironic culture of the Soviet “nonconformist art” (Cubbin 2016).

As many other cooperatives reliant on municipal commands, the Synthesis cooperative did not last long. After the withdrawal of the state from the economy and the introduction of the free market and privatization process in the beginning of the 1990s, the decor of playgrounds was no longer a matter of state concern, and the budgets of municipal REDs, like those of many other social services, were reduced to almost nothing.

7.1.2. *NOVYE TUPYE* AS AN ARTISTIC EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL DISORIENTATION

Notably, the era following the collaboration with Synthesis is hardly articulated in Kozin's narrative, something that is typical for periods in which subjects are disoriented and lost in their attempts to nourish themselves. The creative expression of this disorientation came in the second part of the 1990s, after Kozin joined an artistic group called "The New Dulls" (*Novye Tupye*, which means more or less, 'new blockheads', but literally translates to 'new dulls') in 1996. The name of the group expressed the inability of its members to make sense of what was happening around them and, at the same time, parodied the timely discourse of "new," which ranged from the "new Russians" to the New Academy of Fine Arts.

On the one hand, the New Dulls collective alluded to and contrasted with the newly emerged social category of "New Russians" applied to the *nouveaux-riche*, who were "smart" (as opposed to stupid, dull). In this particular context, one can see how the collective used this juxtaposition to place themselves in a new social and economic environment. However, "new Russians" also connoted criminality, low moral standards and obsession with profit, the combination of which Kozin formulated as a "downgraded bar of humanity" (*zanizhennaia planka chelovecheskogo*); in collective memory and mass culture, "new Russians" would continue to be depicted by images of cynical and aggressive men with big mobile phones and red jackets (Humphrey 1995, 61-64; Ries 2002, 283-286). At the same time, the New Dulls provided a sort of aesthetic answer to "neoacademim," an artistic movement initiated and promoted in the 1990s in St. Petersburg by Timur Novikov (Nemenko 2013; Stodolsky 2011).

Aesthetically, neoacademicians were self-proclaimed proponents of classical "beauty" as opposed to the aesthetic pluralism of post-modernism, and were focused on the technical perfectionism of art. The movement quickly became mainstream and proved to be economically successful. In his interview, Kozin regularly refers to Novikov and the neoacademicians as his aesthetic opponents. For instance, in the middle of the 1990s Novikov worked increasingly with textiles, including luxury fabrics such as velvet, brocade with weaving and beadwork. In response, in 1996, Kozin made a series of works called the "Naphthalene Ballet," where he placed paper figures of ballerinas, cut from the photos published in the magazine *Soviet Ballet* on a background of old fabrics. He used, for instance, the lining of an old coat or a piece of a partly burned fabric that he had found "somewhere at the dump," as he told me in the interview.



Figure 43. Artwork from the series "Naphtalin Ballet"
Artist: Vladimir Kozin. 1996 Photo: Vladimir Kozin. Courtesy of the author



Figure 44. Artwork from the series "Naphtalin Ballet"
Artist: Vladimir Kozin. 1996 Photo: Vladimir Kozin. Courtesy of the author

Contrary to the work Kozin produced while he was in the Synthesis cooperative, these pieces were, indeed, in dialogue with the artistic method of the former Soviet Sots-artists. Setting virtuous ballerinas – symbols of the Soviet “academism” – against old fabric was exactly the type of the re-contextualization of official symbols that the Sots-artists used to produce ironic messages about Soviet officialdom. Yet, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the public renunciation of its values and ideals, this language produced not so much irony about the past, but rather a bitter expression of the absurdity that it was to celebrate academism in a context of social destruction and misery. Indeed, back then many of the Soviet ballerinas, employees of the state-sponsored theaters, that is, the “budget sector,” had nothing to wear but old scraps of fabric found “somewhere at the dump.”

Thus, Kozin’s interest in rubbish aesthetics developed as a reaction to the growing glamorization and marketization of life and art. By calling themselves “dulls,” these artists expressed their inability and, perhaps, refusal to understand emerging practices, tastes and values. At the same time, they were thinking hard about what kind of art, and what kind of artist as its vehicle, would be adequate for contemporary society. As Kozin put it,

New Dulls was about how to perform something with nothing. An alternative to all of this “new”: New Academy, new Russians, new... I felt my own dullness in relation to what was happening in the field of art. I wondered how to work without brushes, without money, without anything... I could not pay for my workshop anymore. I inured myself to do something in the kitchen, I started using a camera... How one can relate to something that is still unintelligible? How does an artist appear in an empty place? Perhaps he does not represent anything, but everybody is happy as a pig in shit (*pisat’ kipiátkom*)... I don’t understand it. There was an aggression, but an aggression not against somebody, but against ourselves.

Kozin experimented with different secondary materials. The artist narrates:

In fact, I don’t know... There are no materials I didn’t use. I used rubbish, I used roaches... I used to smoke a lot... I used rusty wire... And there was also rubber [...] I picked some rubbish up, picked some iron things up, some numbers... I went to dumps... There was a period when I took some material from the dump and made different configurations. There were figures, the figures of janitors. [...] I like to find things, well, things that could be used in a work of art, such as old boots, some fabric, etc.

When I was writing or practicing painting, some rubbish, roaches, etc. remained... I put it in duct-tape, wrapped it in duct-tape, well. And I got some fixations, some day-by-day diaries, i.e. day one, day two... And it turned out that this rubbish, it was not just rubbish, it also had some artistic expressiveness i.e. it resulted in some compositions, some pieces of

something and so on and so on. I even made a collage, collages with art cards. I will show it to you later [...] Well. I glued something based on some postcards, I just glued something, wrapped it in duct-tape and it resulted in collages.

However, it would be wrong to imagine Timur Novikov, a symbolic opponent of Kozin, as a mere tasteless and opportunistic artist. Born in 1958 in Leningrad, Novikov was, in fact, a charismatic character of the late-Soviet alternative art scene there (Stodolsky 2011). Contrary to Kozin, he never received higher education in the arts and thus avoided the Soviet fabric of artistic education.⁶¹ Instead he was, from an early age, well integrated in informal artistic circles both in Leningrad and in Moscow. Free from academic convention but well informed about art history, Novikov experimented with different arts and styles with his friends, who have today become legends of late Soviet “unofficial” music, cinema, and visual arts⁶² – the likes of composer Sergei Kurekhin, film director Sergeuei Soloviev, rock-musician Viktor Tsoi, to name just a few. Notably, this circle of “non-official” artists was well-informed of Western cultural trends and was well connected. As early as in the mid 1980s (during Perestroika), these artists started to travel abroad and to make contact with important figures of the Western art world.

As Ivor Stodolsky describes in his article devoted to the artistic trajectory of Timur Novikov,

While the young Leningrad milieu of the early 1980s developed in parallel to Western trends, perestroika made the Western world accessible in the flesh. During this transition period, the New Artists [group of Novikov from 1985 to 1989] nurtured exchanges with renowned artists, including Andy Warhol, John Cage, and Robert Rauschenberg. They acquired a taste for Pop Art, and an understanding of Western conceptualism and postmodern practices. They also gained first-hand experience by traveling to the West, a rare opportunity for Soviet citizens. The circle which developed out of the New Artists in the early 1990s imported and popularized the latest Western trends at home. Novikov’s network of friends and associates developed the infrastructure of a new youth style: from raves (Gagarin pati 1991) and clubs (Tunel’ 1993) to drugs, clothes, and restaurants. (Stodolsky 2011, 139)

⁶¹ However, as a teenager, Novikov attended the Young Art Critics club at the State Russian Museum, and then the Young Amateurs of Art club at the State Hermitage Museum. Such clubs served as important nodes of social networking under late Socialism (Gladarev 2004).

⁶² As Stodolsky put it, “self-designated ‘unofficial culture’ [*neofitsial’naia kul’tura*] was excluded from major venues, but tolerated by the KGB in accordance with the latter’s policy of ‘co-option and integration of ‘deviations’” (Stodolsky 2011, 136).

Thus, while formally belonging to the same generation,⁶³ Novikov and Kozin were parts of different art worlds and social milieus, what Yurchak defines for the late Soviet context as *svoi*. While Novikov was among those who enjoyed the social and economic transformations of the late 1980s-beginning of the 1990s relatively early on, Kozin, who came to Leningrad from Lvov – an important but still a rather provincial city of the USSR – shared the fate of the millions who did not belong to the late Soviet elite, whatever their political views or preferences.

From the perspective of Novikov's personal artistic trajectory, the turn to neoacademism was nothing but an extravagant shift and, perhaps, a strategic step forward after many years of experiments with alternative arts and underground life.⁶⁴ In a way, after having had his fill of playing with post-modern aesthetics, he entered a quasi Socialist Realism, but at a moment when its historical and moral framework was definitely over. Under these circumstances, neoacademism could be interpreted as an exquisite playful art, yet an art escaping critical political vision and social responsibility. However, for outsiders, Novikov's choice "to steer the course towards the classics" (*berem kurs na klassiku*), which was pronounced as early as 1989 (that is, at the very end of the perestroika period), carried very different connotations in the context of the 1990s. Under conditions of rapid mass impoverishment and social economic segregation, Novikov's perfectly executed works made out of expensive materials and elaborated techniques looked like an open flirtation with the commercial aesthetics of glamour and consumerism; moreover, the "aristocratic" style of the New Academia of the Fine Arts, founded by Novikov in 1993, was seasoned with the reactionary flavor of pre-Revolutionary imperial art and culture. Unsurprisingly, Novikov successfully capitalized on this aesthetic during the period of the "big return," and his art enjoyed generous sponsorship from those who wanted to imagine themselves as a new aristocracy of a New Russia.

In order to exemplify Novikov's influence at that time, I can only reference his *Neoacademism* exhibition organized in 1991 in the Marble palace, a venue belonging to the network of the Russian museum, the biggest depository of Russian art. In addition to the mere prestige of the exhibition and its host venue, the event marked one of the first times in which contemporary artists were shown in the main national art scene.

⁶³ Kozin (born 1953) is in fact older than Novikov (born 1958).

⁶⁴ Building on Bourdieu, Stodolsky also pays attention to the strategy of "non-alienation" which allowed Novikov to build successful partnerships in national and international arenas. Stodolsky also hints at Novikov's partial failure in the West: "In the case of Novikov, the lack of 'room at the top' for more Russians in the international art scene seems to have been crucial reason for his next strategic shift, in which he broadly turned his back on contemporary trends" (Stodolsky 2011, 140).

In his interview, Kozin refers critically to New Academia on several occasions as yet another “new” which he “duly” could not comprehend. For Kozin, who was a graduate from one of the best Soviet schools of art and who, indeed, routinely acquired skills and techniques of academic art but found them not to be helpful in making sense of the turbulent contemporary times, the incredible success of Novikov’s neoacademism seemed aesthetically disgusting and, importantly, morally doubtful. Although Kozin avoids open moral judgments and articulates his recognition of Novikov’s early works, one can draw conclusions about his position based on how he talks about the movement.⁶⁵ For instance, commenting on one of Novikov’s performances, Kozin says,

They [Novikov’s team] organized the performance of burning pieces of art on the forts [bastions of the Peter and Paul fortress in the center of the city]⁶⁶; they decided to burn their own, as they considered, “dirty, doubtful works”; to separate from them and publicly punish themselves for the digression from the classical canon. Katia Andreeva allegedly saved some of Timur’s early works on her breast, as she writes in her book, although she, at the same time, participated in the performance with a great enthusiasm. Such an ambiguity... of a not very good quality, in my view. And so, at the same time, Serezha Spirikhin [a member of the New Dulls group] collected on Pushkinskaia⁶⁷ some canvases, made a fire on the backstreet with these scraps of paintings, and fried eggs on a pan. He successfully ate his eggs and then went to “Borei”⁶⁸... This was our collective performance, but we were all busy that day. He wanted very much to fry eggs on their “neoacademic” fire, but he was not allowed in. They would feel insulted, of course. They were with Savonarola there, [making] a supreme sacrifice, and he was with his eggs. But in fact, every artist burns and destroys something without making a fanfare out of it, for the sake of the inner ecology. (Kozin, as cited in Degot 2009)

The neoacademic grotesque and glamour of Timur Novikov, accompanied by a pathetic and quasi-religious rhetoric of sacrifice, is contrasted here with the New Dulls’ performance enacted through the aesthetics of everyday banality. Novikov’s baroque aesthetics and grotesque are incomprehensible to the New Dulls, who are hungry and jobless, but who care nonetheless about their inner ecology as artists. In the context of radical social crisis, a hyper emphasis on form seems morally ambiguous and ethically doubtful (ecologically unclean).

⁶⁵ Such careful articulation can be partly explained by the fact that Novikov, in fact, passed away in 2002; the Russian cultural code prescribes that one speak about the deceased in a manner that is “either good, or nothing”.

⁶⁶ This performance, known as “The Memorial Performance to the 500 Years of Girolamo Savonarola”, was held in the Kronstadt fort, 23 may 1998.

⁶⁷ Pushkinskaia street 10, an important center of alternative art in St. Petersburg.

⁶⁸ The name of an art-gallery in St.Petersburg.

Contrary to the publicly successful and intellectually sophisticated neoacademicians, the New Dulls resisted commodification. Namely, they rarely documented their performances and never worked with people who could potentially mediatize their art. In their position against commodification, they went so far as to almost downgrade the idea of authorship. In a published interview with Ekaterina Degot in 2009 Kozin explains,

In general, we were not focused on the creation of a final product that could be shown at an exhibition. It was rather a situation of a common cultural experience, of a quick reaction to the ongoing events, in different forms. Spirikhin, for example, was a writer; Raiskin, an art criticist, published six issues of the magazine *Maksimka* with a run of 100-200 copies. We all worked not so much together, but rather spotting each other. Anyone had the right to perform on behalf of the group. We were somehow all on the same level. Today there is a big segregation, perhaps in the life of art too. [Back then] we were a single team, it was unimportant for us who signed a work, where it was exhibited. We had an internal need to express ourselves. And now [we live in] such cynical times. (Kozin, as cited in Degot 2009)

Thus, the development of Kozin's artistic engagement with rubbish can be interpreted not only as his artistic search for a language adequate for the new times, but also as an expression of his individual struggle to deal with an increasingly fragmented and disorganized social fabric, where habitual moral standards and social coordinates were no longer confirmed by acquired implicit logics and practices. While trying to survive and, simultaneously, to make sense of the changes happening around him as a citizen, Kozin looked for new expressive means in the realm of art. While many of his colleagues changed professions or went abroad with the hope of finding a better life there, Kozin remained in St. Petersburg where many people from his environment, including himself, were more and more reduced to rubbish. In this context, the New Dulls' performances were deliberate and demonstrative acts of self-downgrading and marginalization, expressive and sometimes desperate articulations of social disorientation and loneliness and, at the same time, they embodied a critical regard towards powers and hierarchies, both old and new. For instance, during one performance called "Van'ka-Vstan'ka" (literally 'Van'ka-Stand-Up', the Russian name for the wobbly doll), a naked man [Vadim Fliagin] lay across four chairs and rolled onto the floor every time he was about "to fall asleep," stubbornly standing up each time to lie down again on the chairs. This performance continued non-stop for about four hours, until the body of the performer became covered with bruises and the cameramen became too tired to hold the camera. Another performance questioned the notion of masterpieces:

Petersburg is a city of masterpieces, it is full of them, beyond all measure. And so, we brought the head of a pig to the Akhmatova museum.⁶⁹ There was a conference going on there, and we set the head to cooking. So, it had been cooking [there] for three hours and absorbed clever thoughts. The conference was so vivid; I think, such conferences don't exist even in Moscow today. Everybody wanted to say something, everything was so lively and spontaneous... (Kozin, as cited in Degot 2009)

In spite of the fact that the performances were technically public, or at least performed in public spaces, the New Dulls were making a kind of introverted, and introvert-*ing*, art. Rather than trying to attract attention and gain a reputation, they consistently ignored any kind of advertisement. By so doing, the artists attempted to “banalize” their performances and make them a routine part of their everyday lives. Contrary to contemporary political performances, the New Dulls rarely documented their actions. As Kozin explains,

many [in the group] thought it was unnecessary, that the work has to be done against all odds. Whether there were spectators or there were no spectators, we worked. If there were documentation, or there were no documentation [it didn't matter], we still know that it happened. This was a priority for us. We did not have a bureaucratic approach. This is why all this information is so scarce, but still there are some archives, there is VHS video which is peeling off already... (Kozin, as cited in Degot 2009)

Although the New Dulls was a performance group and they did not actually work with materials and scraps, many of their actions (including the name of the group) reveal the experience of failure, uncertainty, disorientation and marginalization. In a way, the New Dulls was about people who were close to becoming waste, but who at the same time remained conscious about the process of such wastage and attempt to anticipate it by making a statement about their wastage themselves. Such a statement would manifest their presence (although, mainly for themselves only),⁷⁰ allowing for a transgression of self-degradation, for a maintenance of humanity in a situation of radical dehumanization. Thus, the decision to be the “new dulls” becomes for them the only way to stay conscious, to not go insane, in the context of radical non-sense increasingly being considered “normal.”

⁶⁹ Anna Akhmatova is a Russian and Soviet poet. From the 1950s to the 1960s she lived in a small outbuilding of the Shuvalovsky palace in St.Petersburg. The St.Petersburg office of the National Center for Contemporary Art was located in the same yard.

⁷⁰ Compare in Sennett 2008: the claim of the presence on bricks made by the Roman slaves (Sennett 2008, 134).

7.1.3. ARTISTIC IDENTITY CRISIS

A sort of artistic competition with Novikov is also a sign of Kozin's uncertainty about his place as an artist under the new social and economic circumstances. Trained as an artist and having a strong professional identity as creative, Kozin struggled to understand his purpose at a moment when old conventions ceased to play any important role and new ones were too close to the market.

The unintelligibility of the value of artistic works within the contemporary art world is particularly articulated in his series entitled "Why am I worse than...?" (*Chem ia khuzhe?*). In this series Kozin made a series of photos of himself sitting on the toilet – in the "thinking room," as he calls it – each connoting the work of a recognized artist. In my interview with him, Kozin explains the emergence of this series as a sign of protest against the incomprehensible conventions of contemporary art:

Which contemporary art? What is contemporary art? Why do people pay so much money for it? Why is the shark by Hirst possible, you know this shark? This is an artist who, so to speak, put it in alcohol. Well, not in alcohol but in a kind of formaldehyde. And this is a shark, five-meters long, it costs a lot of money. But never mind. I mean something constantly happens, and you are immersed in a dialogue with this process. And you think on that. You agree with something, and you disagree with something else. You like something and you don't like something. And this can also be a source of creativity. I wanted to make an exhibition "Why am I worse than...?" This was a series of photos, like a protest. Because, in fact, this shark is put in a glass box. This box is an aquarium. This aquarium is huge, it is unwieldy. The shark sometimes gets spoiled in there and is replaced with another one. But it costs crazy money. It was demonstrated in Kiev, at the Pintchuk Center.⁷¹ [...] And still he is in amongst the top 10 artists.

What raises Kozin's protest is the fact that the work of Hirst is an assemblage of ready-made elements, moreover, elements that don't form a stable unity and need regular "maintenance," all of which forms a lack of authenticity and uniqueness in his eyes. Creativity and artistic transgression is replaced with the size of the aquarium and the body of a shark, which "gets spoiled" from time to time. The lack of creative solution, as Kozin understands it, together with the inadequately high price, makes the whole enterprise doubtful for him. Indeed, Belting, a

⁷¹ PinchukArtCentre is a private gallery of contemporary art in Kiev, Ukraine: <http://new.pinchukartcentre.org/en/>. Founded in 2006 by Fedor Pinchuk, a Ukrainian multimillionaire, it is a major gallery of contemporary art in Eastern Europe.

historian and anthropologist of art, discusses Hirst's case as a new phase of functioning of the contemporary art market, in which an artist "bypasses" his gallerists:

The famous Damian Hirst sale in London, on September 15 and 16, 2008, where the artist bypassed his gallerists, began a few hours before the credit markets in New York started to collapse. It seems like a coincidence but it may not be. As a matter of fact, the sale had been prepared on a global scale with previews in other parts of the world also including a show in a five star Hotel in New Delhi. (Belting 2009, 62)

One of the artists who Kozin included in his series "Why am I worse than...?" is Ilya Kabakov, whose artistic and commercial success and his consequent emigration to the USA resonated in the post-Soviet art world. Indeed, one of Kabakov's works was his installation entitled *The Toilet*, representing a small two-room apartment made within the walls of a public toilet. This installation was first presented in 1992 in Kassel during the *Documenta IX* exhibition, and later on became a powerful metaphor to refer to the place of the individual in the Soviet Union.



Figure 45. Artwork "The Toilet." 1992. Artist: Ilya Kabakov
Source: <https://ilya-emilia-kabakov.com/installations/the-toilet/> Accessed January 3, 2019

As Kabakov's description of the installation explains,

...Each of us is familiar with these dreary small stone structures, smeared outside and inside with white lime, with filthy curses written on the walls, soiled and neglected. The sight alone invokes loathing and vomiting. There are broken windows beneath a low roof. [...] Such a toilet, almost exactly, is built at *Documenta*. But the viewers, standing in two lines (women and men separately), once they are inside, see a totally different picture. [...] It is a typical Soviet two-room apartment (in the men's half is the living room, in the women's half is the bedroom) with normal furniture: a table covered with a tablecloth, a buffet, a couch, chairs, wall-unit with books; in the bedroom is a bed, a children's corner with a small rug with toys, paintings on the walls. Everything has a normal, lived-in, "everyday" appearance: dishes are still on the table from dinner, a jacket is hanging on the chair ... Life is going on here normally. [...] And this is 'normal' life in a toilet ... (Kabakov 2018)

The paradox of the cultural meaning of this installation is that while it is an expression of "cultural intimacy" when presented or discussed within the home-culture, it becomes a sign of shame and even a political statement when exhibited abroad. Unsurprisingly, the installation developed a rather scandalous reputation in Russia. Although Kabakov himself said that all of his installations lose their meanings outside of the context of Soviet culture, his works did receive a lot of attention and made him an international celebrity. And while placing himself in the toilet and wondering "Why am I worse than Kabakov?," Kozin wonders about the new conventions of the art world, the conventions that define artistic success and value.

A strong critic of the Soviet order in the recent past, Kozin now refers to his experiences from that time as a critical stand point. While speaking with me about his sculptures built for the *Eternal Values* exhibition he speculates:

Me for example, I remember the former Soviet shops and counters. I understood that there was sausage of one kind, or two, or three kinds, and that was enough. I could buy a sort of yogurt... When I enter a shop now, I see several dozens of sausages varieties. When I see that, I do not know, why in fact? I understand, it can be very good [to have many varieties], perhaps, more than good. But there is too much somehow, something is happening, because there should be some [other] essential values. But sausage refilled with this pepper or also with some fat or something else, I think it is excessive. [...] That is why, of course, such an inner reaction to this, it exists for me. I like an ordinary kettle.



Figure 46. Artwork "Why Am I Worse than Kabakov?"
Artist: Vladimir Kozin. 2006. Source:
<http://www.guelman.ru/culture/images/doc/a014a-13.jpg>
Accessed January 3, 2019

Just as it is for one of the commentators of Arkhipov's exhibition who I cite in the first chapter, the abundance of material goods in the shops signals a kind of oblivion of the most simple and yet essential values, which he knows from his past but hardly recognizes in the present. A kettle, a hen, a light bulb...

... each object characterizes a moment in human life. This means that the light bulb characterizes the birth of a person. [The first thing that] he sees is a light bulb and the last thing he stops seeing, he stops seeing light once again, the light that comes from this light bulb. Well. Then, there are booties, children's footwear – they symbolize the first steps. A razor blade is the symbol of the initiation of a youth – when a boy becomes a man, and his beard starts growing. A lock is a symbol of keeping different goods. Yes, a hen, I didn't have any hens [unclear] that symbolize a sort of full life. Well, was there a hen once? There was a hen, it was, in fact, everything. It was a symbol of prosperity. On the other hand, the current index of prosperity has nothing to do with something like a hen, or even caviar. It deals with supercars and super-cottages. Well. That's why it is a sort of an ordinary person's biography in things. That was the idea.

Kozin's participation in the New Dulls collective and his discovery of used rubber as a primary material for sculpture were different elements of the same process. Facing a situation of radical

misery, Kozin looked for a material that would help him to stay in the field of art without being dependent on the client. The “cheapness” of the work became for Kozin a sort of a protest against the commercial glamour art that had filled the mass cultural space, on the one hand, and against the commercialization of contemporary art, on the other hand.

After losing the support, but also the pressure of the Soviet art system, he didn't want to work on the orders of the new rich clients of post-Soviet Russia. He wanted to find a way to practice art that would not depend on either the political or the commercial order.

And, well, I think that there is some motivation in the things I make from rubber. For example, I do not make sculpture from classical materials now, such as wood, say, or bronze, stone... At first, it was because it is a difficult time now. It was also because it is necessary to be Michelangelo to process marble. It is necessary to have a command [over the material]. It is necessary to have a rich dad behind you. It is necessary to have rich customers... To mine the stone, it is necessary for a team to go to the quarry, to cut it all... It should be done in a serious and a professional manner. And if we imitate it – take a piece of stone and sculpt it – it turns out to be unconvincing. It is unconvincing.

His art became free of the influence of external tastes and the need for the sponsorship of eventual clients. Furthermore, the discovery of rubber as a primary material for his art offered him a way to make it economically free and, therefore, available at any time, independent of external circumstances:

[Rubber] means independence from both the customer and even from the circumstances. It is because the circumstances are like this: I can come to any Road-Construction Department or to the highway, take a piece of tire there that was thrown away... At first I did it like this ... and so on ... The only thing that I do is buying wire, because it is soft. It is used for the framework, and so, yes, well... And for me, this material is of no cost, it costs 0 rubles, 00 kopeks. Only my work is valuable. I haven't a car, but I take a bag, put two tires into it and bring it, and that is all. And it is fun, because when you haven't spent a penny and you understand that you have done a thing that costs ... or costs nothing, being rubbish, it suddenly becomes a piece of art that costs something: it costs both the critics' attention and also something in the monetary equivalent... So, it is another feeling.

Thus, adopting rubber as a material was a way for Kozin to gain creative independence and, at the same time, to respond artistically, but also politically, to the social change around him. Another means to these ends was his decision to withdraw himself from the “professional scene” and become a teacher in an art school for children, where he works with children who attend after their regular classes.

And then I somehow made it. I practiced teaching. And I have been practicing teaching. It gives me money for living. And this is my creativity, it is free for me. If it gives me some dividends, it is somehow good. But I am so free, that if it stops bringing me dividends, it will not decrease my artistic desire, I can say. Well, it is interesting for me, it has always been interesting...⁷²

This decision affords Kozin a modest but stable income and, most importantly, the time to make the art which he now calls his “hobby”:

My work is there [at school] for me, and I treat it as work. And here [in the workshop] I work for myself, and I treat it as a hobby.

Such a decision is reminiscent of what Caroline Humphrey termed “neosocialism,” “because socialism (as indigenously defined) is not dead in Russia” (Humphrey 2002, 75). Humphrey uses the adjective “neosocialist” to define a type of post-Soviet enterprises that, in a way, reproduce the socialist-like structures of life in the post-Soviet period:

...in the post-Soviet economic collapse these enterprises are not dominated primarily by the profit motive but rather are concerned with survival and the social protection of their members. (Humphrey 2002, 75)

This context informs, for instance, what Larisa meant when she said that in Zerkal’nyi camp, where she worked, “socialism lasted longer.” The difficulty to find himself professionally (economically) and morally supported in a new socio-economic context pushed Kozin to find a professional niche, which would allow him to gain a certain economic stability and social security and, at the same time, to maintain his moral dignity without subjecting himself to the volatile tastes of the contemporary art market.

Yet, this choice came at the price of his artistic identity. Speaking of his work at school and of his art in the workshop, Kozin says:

... being a professional artist, I practice just an amateur activity. Well. I have arrived at the following formula: from love to art. And for ... well, say, so, I can’t do anything else. I am not interested in anything else. I am not interested in cars; I am not going to buy islands... I am keen on doing something by hand, and not just to work with my hands, but also to think about something. And to have [a material] result on the topic. That is all, in fact.

⁷² Similarly, in the interview with Degot, Kozin explains, “A half of my salary pays the state and another half is completed by my parents [...]. I am a non-commercial artist. If some sales happen, I am glad. If not – I don’t depend on this. I remained free and I am very glad about it” (Kozin, as cited in Degot 2009).

Although Kozin's definition of his art as being an "amateur activity" is, perhaps, an exaggeration, there is, indeed, an important message in it: Kozin refuses to be an artist in the contemporary art fabric as it arrived in Russia in the 1990-2000s. The conventions of this art world happened to be incompatible with the artistic morality he acquired as a young artist. Ironically, while being an unconditional critic of the Soviet ideology and the Soviet regime, in the post-Soviet context he found himself an adept of socialist morality.

I address Kozin's creative biography in great detail not only because it makes for extremely rich and multifaceted material, but more importantly because it represents a well documented and reflected case for similar responses I get from other interlocutors who are less eloquent and experienced in making narratives. What attracted me most in Kozin's trajectory was a clear correlation between his social reflection about the changing social and economic context and his artistic decision to address secondary materials. I suggest that his subjective experience of humiliation and self-downgrading reinforced his sensibility toward "wasted" materials that, indeed, were still "useful non-fossils," rejected and thrown away, but still able to serve for something good.

In the second part of this chapter I provide examples from other interviews that are less detailed, yet still supply my interpretation with further parallel examples.

7.2. OTHER EXAMPLES OF "CULTURAL RECYCLING"

7.2.1. ARKHIPOV

Although it was not a central line of Arkhipov's narrative, at some point, while explaining his doubts and anxieties about how to find his creative voice without losing himself in the attempts to "decode" the puzzle of success, he suddenly made a strong parallel between the dynamics of his social environment and his project.

There was a problem. There was a social stratification amongst my friends, my acquaintances, my [potential] visitors figuratively speaking. Some of my former colleagues, engineers, educated people who were capable of doing something, lived absolutely miserably. They were unlucky, [because] they worked in research institutes that the state had abandoned. They didn't give a hoot, and that was all. Those who were smart were able to reorient themselves, to find work within cooperatives, other businesses, somewhere else. But there are also people of another kind. Those who were used to the state taking care of them. And they kept working in these institutes. They

were not paid anymore, the salaries were delayed forever. These people just didn't know how to live any further. What's the hell with art? They didn't understand how to live basically.

Why I actually moved from making such things, from [making] my own art-objects? Well, on the one hand, I wanted to see people from both groups at the exhibitions. Both those who were left behind and those who, generally speaking, suddenly became rich. These people started being interested in other sort of things, such as Ferraris and other attributes of rich life. I was so eager to gather them in one area and to make art the place for communication. But it is possible at the level just of individual practice, as it was [during the] time when people were together, and then, one-day people became fragmented. Well.

And then again, in a different moment:

You know, I think, perhaps, I lacked some kind of beauty of everyday life. And this is why I wanted to see this beauty in the sphere of the everyday thing. So, this was a kind of reflection through things. Not just painting pictures or making photos, but to make some plastic (from plasticity) [things], even metaphysical [things] in my view. So, this is a kind of metaphor of life.

There emerges from these passages a clear parallel between the reflection on the fragmentation of the post-Soviet Russian society, and that on the fragility and fluidity of DIY material culture. The beauty that Arkhipov was able to recognize in the self-made objects was the beauty of solidarity and mutual help lacking in contemporary Russia.

Indeed, having experience working in construction, where he made decent money, Arkhipov did not have prejudices against the "new Russians." In contrast, he recognized among them the same Soviet engineers who continued working, unpaid, in the post-Soviet research institutes. Contrary to many others, he still remembered that all of them were from the same "basket," from the same family of the Soviet engineers who suddenly, often by chance, received very different life opportunities, inadvertently creating segregation. Yet, he still hoped to bring them together around those "useful non-fossils" that were still familiar to all of them.

7.2.2. ELENA

Unlike Kozin and Arkhipov, Elena does not consider herself an artist. She was trained as an economist and has worked as chef accountant, and thus, her identity is mainly connected with this profession. In strictly economic terms, she is part of that group of the Russian population who benefited from the reforms and economic transformations in Russia, as her profession

quickly made her part of a new middle-class. Yet, alongside her primary occupation, Elena developed a rather original and “old-fashioned” hobby: she knit rugs out of old textiles.

Although Elena herself considers her rug-knitting “a hobby” (e.g. this is how she presented her work to me and how she named her electronic album with photos of her rugs displayed on her personal page in the social network *Vkontakte*), she developed it in a rather systematic and time-consuming way: not only does she produce rugs by herself, but she also exhibits her works. For the last 10 years, Elena has taken part in many exhibition-fairs on ethno-design. Moreover, Elena agreed to exhibit her rugs at the stands of the Craft School (*Shkola remesel*), an initiative affiliated with the Russian Ethnography Museum and aimed at maintaining “traditional crafts.” Yet, regardless these affiliations, Elena herself insists that her rugs are not “traditional,” but made according to an original technology which she developed:

When somebody tells me: “Well, my granny knitted like this,” or “my mother knitted like this” ... [I say] they knitted not like this. My way of knitting differs from how it can be seen in everyday life, it is rather original. Its peculiarity is that there was a tricot cord, and I knitted it round with thread remainders [...] but as it was tricot, especially thin tricot, it had a feature of twisting, especially if I used nylon tights. I cut it, pulled it and it became very flat, no edge like this... And I put two pieces of cord on each other and there was no junction in result.

Although the very topic on how new technologies and forms may smoothly be integrated within the contemporary discourse of “ethnic” and “traditional” design (Makovicky 2009) deserves special attention, in this section I would like to focus on Elena’s motivation to knit out of the old.

Recycling old textiles is an important element of Elena’s craft and creativity: “only remnants,” she says, “this is my philosophy on this matter.” Elena explains her hobby as a participation in the endless “circulation of things in nature.” Moreover, she believes that while transferring old fabric from rubbish into a different category, this is something that “brings joy to people” [*prinosit radost’ liudiam*]. In other words, recycling for Elena is an activity which does good.

Although Elena’s first experiences with rugs date back to the 1970s, the hobby evolved at a different scale during the 1990s, when she worked as an accountant in a textile cooperative and for some time got knit fabrics instead of her salary, due to a significant monetary deficit. The accumulation of unwanted textile at home prompted her to “make something out of it.”

With time, colleagues and friends appreciating her hobby, started to supply Elena with raw material. She says, “they bring it to me and, at the same time, get rid of unnecessary things.”

Moreover, visitors of the exhibitions who are impressed by her project, bring her their old textiles.

[at the exhibition] people constantly come and when they see rugs, they like them and they say: “Can we bring you some threads?” – Some people have threads because they were left by their mothers. Somebody stopped practicing needlework. But they are mainly adult women who have now problems with their hands or maybe with eyes, but they want to take part in the process in any case.

Elena rationalizes her activity in several ways. First, she emphasizes her subjective pleasure and the realization of a subjective drive for creativity:

It is more for soul, than for work. And there remains some pull, some unsatisfied craving for creativity and it was transformed into rugs knitting.

Second, she articulates her hobby as a rational transformation of unwanted things into production of something useful:

As I say, when [I need to explain what] is [mine] on some photo: everything of round shape is mine. I knit only round things, because I have two aims: I do not want a piece to be wasted, and the second aim is relaxation: when I am knitting in a circle, it is not necessary for me to count...

Yet, there is one more dimension to her work, which is not openly articulated in its narrative yet emerges during the interview. In addition to her professional activity and to her hobby, Elena is involved in charity work, which is not very widespread in Russia and perceived as a new phenomenon associated with a new reality of drastic economic segregation. During the Soviet period, social care of orphans and individuals with disabilities was understood as, primarily, a business of the state and specialized institutions and families, when it came to the elderly people. Although in practice, the state-sponsored social care programs were not always accurately executed and the criticism of the respective institutions was an important part of the discourse in the late 1980s-1990s. Generally speaking, citizens did not feel personally responsible for this structural malfunctioning. The concept of charity reemerged then in the 1990s as part of the “restoration discourse,” often referring to the pre-revolutionary practices of privileged classes and owners of the big national industries (*promyshlenniki*) to sponsor arts and charity institutions, mainly orphan schools and public hospitals. Although it might well be that this discourse contributed to Elena’s identity as a member of a new economically successful class, I would like to focus on a different interpretation.

In her interview, Elena says that she had experiences with social work in the late 1970s. It began when she was a student and read an announcement that a humanitarian organization needed volunteers. Elena went there and volunteered: she went to people's homes and brought some things to people in need. This did not last long, however, as Elena did not like the administrative side of her duties: reports took more time than charity itself.

What particularly attracted my attention is the parallel between her way to explain recycling textile and doing charity. An important part of her charity activity consists of collecting unwanted things from her acquaintances and distributing them among residents of an orphanage in the Leningrad region. Elena herself says that she “organizes chaos, tames it and turns it into harmony both in creativity and in practice.” A closed production cycle i.e. zero waste production – and redistribution goods among people who need them – is imagined as producing beautiful things and harmonic relations production.

Moreover, from her narrative, one can understand, that “chaos” produces better and more beautiful things, than pre-planned and well organized “order.” While remembering her mother Elena speculates:

I even always laughed at my mum, because she got an even more interesting product from old things than from the whole piece of cloth. Because, if we take a big piece of cloth, it's too bad to cut it into small pieces. And we can receive a very beautiful product in result, but it is such an integral one, you see... And I remember her to have sewn me a sundress, I was a schoolgirl, I studied at the 5th grade, I think. There was such a sundress, there were so many small pocket parts, wedges, yokes, and each one was stitched, it had some decorative stitching, it was just a masterpiece gathered from small pieces! It means, here, once again, well, there was a moment that these pieces could be thrown away, but it had resulted in something... As if, it is like something turns out from nothing, and some moral satisfaction is felt. And maybe it is the essence of the joy of creativity.

Elena's case, with all its originality and richness echoes the main idea of this chapter. Elena's material activity of knitting rugs out of recycled textiles correlates to her social ideas of redistributing goods and “bringing joy to people.” Moreover, her project is clearly informed by her personal experiences during the years of crises. Although she herself did pretty well during this time, she was an observer of transformations and reflected on the randomness of the distribution of wealth among people in the post-Soviet years. Thus, her hobby as well as her charity project represent her personal attempts to “organize chaos” and to bring more beauty, harmony and social justice into the world.

7.2.3. NADEZHDA

My final example results from my encounter with Nadezhda, a professional ethnomusicologist born in 1940. During the 1990s, she lived through a long period of hardship, when she had to work too much, taking any possible job to make ends meet and provide for her son and herself. This resulted in cancer, which she, fortunately, survived. Nevertheless, during her sickness, she discovered a particular “material consciousness”: not only did she develop a kind of intimate relationship with her close material environment (e.g. furniture and everyday objects), but she started making things by herself, mostly lamps. I would like to show how the necessity to take care of herself (her body, her health) lead her to rediscover the material world in what follows.

When you lay down and understand that you are one feet there [in a different world] , you start thinking about some other things... A serious reevaluation happened. [...] Among other things, the attitude toward objects changed. Because at some point you understand that it’s a great happiness when you just walk home on your own legs and you see an ordinary tree, perhaps not very nice even, and this is already very good. And this is how you start understanding that all these [small things] is great, is very good. This is good and that is very good too.

The experience of sickness and personal suffering prompted Nadezhda to understand herself as being involved in the relationships with natural and artificial material objects. Moreover, she had to recognize that material objects which routinely constitute her environment have a direct influence on her well-being.



Figure 47. Lamps made by Nadezhda out of different old elements. Photo: Zinaida Vasilyeva

Nadezhda explains:

One good day I came home from work or from somewhere else, absolutely washed-out and so on, and I suddenly realized that it [kitchen cupboard] was absolutely rectangular, it had only right angles, such a quite minimalist construction. And this was all, I suddenly realized... I had a feeling as if I always brushed these corners against my knees, while in fact this was not the case because there were no corners at the level of my knees... It [he] began disturbing me, all this construction rectangularity, all his rectilinearity or whatever... It [he] began disturbing me, and I understood: I am not comfortable, it [he] is... not my thing. I am bored, it does not fit, it is not nice... And that's it... And this is how it started [since that times].⁷³

Soon Nadezhda found a friend who agreed to exchange her old cupboard against Nadezhda's kitchen case. Little by little, she eliminated objects that disturbed her and replaced them with others which in many cases were even older than her own. Nadezhda explains:

I need somewhat intimate relationships with every object which is at my home. Now, I have practically no such things that would be unpleasant to me, that would disturb some of my inner harmony. I am fine with them, I fill cozy with them.

Nadezhda's sensibility toward the objects surrounding her resulted in the phenomenon, which Richard Sennett termed as "anthropomorphise," that is investment of "inanimate things with human qualities" (Sennett 2005, 135). While speaking of material objects, Nadezhda consistently applies terms appropriate to humans, particularly when it comes to old and damaged things. For instance, this is how Nadezhda describes one of her lamps made out of different old elements found somewhere on the street:

This is some plastic, a tube, found on the damp, I liked it [her], yeah, and I brought it [her] home, and that's it. Yeah, I brought this tube home without knowing why do I need it [her]... This was long ago, [I brought it] not because of this lamp, absolutely not. And then... something came to mind. That I need to fit/accommodate/find a good use it somehow (*prisposobit'*). And at this moment, my neighbors thrown chairs away. And I had a petty to the [chair] legs, [because] I brake [legs] too. And finally this is how this [lamp] appeared out of this.

⁷³ It should be explained, that in Russian the pronouns refer to grammatical genders, masculine, feminine and neutral, which do not specifically distinguish animate and inanimate nouns. Thus, on the level of language there is no hierarchy between animate subjects and inanimate objects. For example, a kitchen cupboard (*shkaf*) will be referred as "he", a shelf (*polka*) as "she", and a window (*okno*) as "it." This grammatical feature contributes to the linguistic easiness to generate sentences like "This is my favorite cap. She always lives on my table."

A parallel between chairs' legs and her own is one example of the "anthropomorphise." In a different moment of the interview, she describes an old cupboard thrown away to the street using the Russian word *kaleka* (Eng. 'cripple', 'disabled'). Finally, this is how Nadezhda introduced her kitchen today, furnished with old but repaired cabinets and tables and introduces to me each item to me:

Look, and if I had a standard kitchen, for instance, [if I had] all these wall hanging cupboards, a table, when you need to put on your knees to access the lowest shelf and get out a pot... (...) dishwashings machine and what else, I don't know... what would I do among all this? Nothing! And look what happens here: here is a lady-cook [an old buffet], she is a kind of ungainly, rugged or whatever, I don't know. And here is her daughter, she is a *jardinière*, a flower stand. The cook-lady is very proud of her daughter. And here is a made and her daughter, she even knows playing the piano, the Oginski polonaise or Beethoven's *Für Elise*. These are... kinds of domestic servants [laughing], of different class, different level... I have fun with them.

I suggest that Nadezhda's case demonstrates how a subjective experience of suffering is transferred to the material world. The realization of her own vulnerability made Nadezhda recognize the whole world as being vulnerable and in need of care.

Although Nadezhda's story may appear very personal and unique as it is very much shaped by her experience of sickness, many elements of her narrative resonate with other interviews I conducted. The collection of the old things that eventually can serve for something else, the feeling of petty towards "abandoned" objects left on the street, the motivation to make something just in order "to accommodate" and put in a good use some other old stuff, I have documented all these narrative tropes in my fieldwork.



Figure 48. "Lady Cook" in Nadezhda's kitchen
Photo: Zinaida Vasilyeva



Figure 49. "... and her daughter." Photo: Zinaida Vasilyeva

7.3. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I demonstrated how individuals express through DIY-like artistic and quasi-artistic practices their personal experiences of social and subjective disorientation typical for the the early post-Soviet period. I intentionally analyze side by side creative work by professional artists and lay people, as my main focus here is not on the conceptual work which might stay behind manual practices but rather on anthropological similarities of their experiences.

I suggest that personal experiences of disorientation, humiliation and suffering which happened to some of my interlocutors and/or to people from their close environment reinforced their sensibilities toward wasted objects and materials. In other words, the subjective feeling of “being wasted” is metonymically transferred to the material environment, which is interpreted as requiring care and repair. I suggest, that DIY-work understood an assembling of available, though secondary “useful non-fossils,” substitutes for an effort to repair damaged social fabric and an attempt to “reassemble the social.” The choice to use old material elements and reassemble them in a new piece of work can be interpreted as an attempt to contribute to the “repair” of the social fabric which was broken as a result of the collapse of socialism and, therefore, performs the work of “cultural recycling.” Rather than interpreting these practices as performances of “nostalgia,” I suggest that these are results of subjective work, which combines the acceptance (rather than the refusal) of the past with a performance of “critical resistance” to the contemporary order.

CONCLUSION

I opened this work by describing the emotional contradictions and interpretational discrepancies that I encountered while doing fieldwork between 2010 and 2013. In responding to my interview questions about do-it-yourself practices in the Soviet past, my subjects – men and women born between 1924 and 1978 living in the two biggest cities of Russia – were reluctant to recognize themselves in DIY material culture. Many expressed contradictory emotions ranging from joy and pride to sorrow and shame. Another aspect of these conversations that attracted my attention was the temporal dimension of the narratives delivered by my interlocutors. While sharing their experiences of making objects and creating technologies by themselves, my subjects often switched between the past and the present, and tended to explain their Soviet experiences by using counterexamples from the even more distant past or the present. Moreover, in some cases, they derived pragmatic, moral, or historiosophical conclusions in regard to particular periods of time.

Thus, although I began my field work with the intention of studying “late Soviet DIY practices,” I ended up not so much inquiring into Soviet DIY, but rather uncovering how social identities were mediated and collective affiliations in contemporary Russia imagined through DIY material culture. I wanted to understand why the widespread and publicly appreciated Soviet practice of making objects and technologies was problematic for my post-Soviet interlocutors. Taking the example described in the Introduction, I was meditating upon why repairing a car’s disc brake rotor with the help of a razor-tip was a “smart solution” for my mother’s uncle in the 1980s, but a rare and curious example of old-time craftsmanship for a mechanic of the late 2000s.

In order to answer this question I had to inquire into the epistemologies of Russian and Soviet discourses of do-it-yourself on the one hand, and the contexts that mobilized “Soviet DIY” objects and practices in the recent past – all of which informed the narratives of my interlocutors – on the other hand. Importantly, I was to reveal the ways in which the economic, political and social transformations that occurred in Russia in the late 1980s to 1990s, and the individual experiences lived during this period of time, reframed the discourse around DIY material culture and DIY as a social phenomenon, and produced the moral and temporal confusions that I encountered during my fieldwork.

Thus, in my dissertation I explore certain aspects of do-it-yourself material culture in Russia, and the place of the DIY phenomenon in post-Soviet narratives. I demonstrate that regardless of the apparent stability and “objectivity” of DIY as it is expressed in material artifacts and DIY practices as an arguably universal phenomenon, the cultural and social meanings of these objects and practices remain historically contingent on and submitted to the discursive volatilities of time. While they may provide individuals with immediate opportunities for pragmatic problem-solving and creative self-expression, DIY practices remain immersed in multiple discourses bearing different and, at times, contradictory meanings.

Over the course of this work, I approach the DIY phenomenon in four different ways: 1) as a set of individual practices ranging from everyday material problem solving (making do) to crafts and the fabrication of technological devices; 2) as an infrastructure of knowledge that allows individuals to experience manual work and technologies in practical and/or imaginative ways and to express their subjectivities through DIY skills; 3) and as a particular type of aesthetic and material sensibility, which emphasizes the raw characteristics of the materials and objects produced. Finally, I use the very concept of “do-it-yourself” as a critical lens through which to address the contemporary mainstream logic of growth economy, and suggest a rethinking of the Soviet experience as an alternative perspective from which to understand modernity. Indeed, Soviet modernity successfully accommodated the idea of life with limited resources within its imagery and celebrated the ethics of moderated consumption culture. In the following sections, I will briefly summarize my results.

DIY AND SOVIET “LOW-TECH” MODERNITY

The Russian Revolution and the Soviet modern project were inspired by the same set of images and ideas that animated European minds at the end of the 19th century, and that aspired to the attainment of democracy and prosperity. In this respect, the Bolsheviks followed a broader European leftist agenda and believed that the mobilization of the masses and their involvement in the construction of a new society was the only way to build a better future. Moreover, like other modern projects, the Soviet project was progressivist. As such, it implied a constant development toward a better future, a linear evolutionary progression. Again, much like other modern projects it was obsessed with industrialization and the production of a materiality. These ideas placed a premium on the emergence of a new type of subject: the New Soviet Man –

politically conscious, self-governed, proactive and creative. This subject's creativity was to emerge from his and her freedom from "tradition" and inherited social condition, finding its roots in his and her own knowledge and skills, self-sufficiency, and drive towards self-realization.

While Marxist analysis and his critique of alienation played an important role in early global modern imageries, it has increasingly lost its relevance in capitalist societies since the late 1920s. As Jean-Pierre Warnier suggests, the crisis of Marxism corresponded "to the big crisis of 1929, to Keynesianism and to the emergence of mass consumption after the Second World War" (Warnier 1999, 114). Contrary to Marxist analysis, which places an emphasis on the process of production and the agency of workers and engineers, the Keynesian economic logic prioritized the agency of the market. As a result, the market became the main subject of the capitalist economy, and the role reserved for the individual was that of consumer. Indeed, this shift in the Western modern imagination was facilitated by the documentation of state-sponsored violence in the Soviet Union, which helped to dismiss and devalue Marxism as a political philosophy, in the post-war Western world in particular.

In contrast, Soviet modern imaginary never ruptured with Marxism. Regardless of the many contradictions and complexities of Soviet history, the Communist utopia was considered attainable only with the production and input of conscious "creative producers," eager to build and equally distribute a material and an immaterial reality. Certainly the realization of this utopia introduced many new elements into this project and shifted its focal point. Still, the fundamental dialectical analysis of the relationship between the subject and their environment remained essential in interpreting the Soviet citizen as creative and eager for self-realization through engagement with materiality until the very end of the Soviet period. Both the early discourse of *samodeiatel'nost'* and the late discourse of "technical creativity" are empirical examples of this imaginary. Indeed, the importance of the theorization of the Soviet creative subject, and the discourses supporting and disseminating this theorization, juxtaposed with the domination of centrally organized economics and politics, inform one of the main paradoxes of Soviet society.

Moreover, the emphasis on manual work and the production of material things by single individuals was smoothly integrated within the Soviet project of modernity. The official ideology claimed workers and peasants to be the main political basis of the Soviet rule. Individuals directly involved in manual labor and processes of production therefore did possess a particular symbolical capital that they would not have had access to in western societies.

Significantly, the emphasis on work as the essential process for transforming the average human into a subject and citizen allowed for the accommodation of manual work and everyday making-do practices within the imaginary of industrialized modernity. As a result, the Soviet modern project combined the drive towards industrialization and technological advance with the continuous symbolical appreciation of manual work and practices of recycling and repair. This assemblage produced the phenomenon that I call “low-tech modernity” – that is, modernity relying not only on advanced technology and innovation, but also on the maintenance and repair of the old. Importantly, Soviet “low-technological” modernity made science and technology an “open box” calling for the everyday inventiveness of ordinary people who, by virtue of their creativity, might participate in and “improve” the whole process of economic development.

Although the logic of industrialization still introduced mass production and distribution of goods and rendered money an important mediator within the Soviet “system of provision,” other forms of self-provisioning have never ceased to exist – neither in practice nor in discourse. Soviet popular magazines provided citizens with ideas and recipes on how to make things by themselves, and the Soviet educational system continuously promoted the creative, self-reliable subject, who was capable of solving everyday material and technical problems by him or herself. Moreover, the infrastructure of manual knowledge and “technical creativity” allowed Soviet subjects to experience modernity precisely through their involvement in DIY “low-tech” skills and activities. Indeed, in some cases subjects did accommodate this project, rendering the social sphere of DIY a part of their intimate world. Importantly, the very establishment of DIY as an infrastructure of knowledge was possible due to the contributions of concrete individuals who shared the Socialist understanding of modernity and enthusiastically consecrated their efforts towards its realization.

Finally, the Soviet system of values linked self-expression through work as broadly understood, and through manual work in particular, to the image of the Soviet ideal subject – well-educated, self-reliable, creative and responsible for others. The example of TRIZ as a personal project of Altshuller and his moral philosophy underlying “socially useful invention” is a telling example of how this system of values was internalized and shared by some individuals who deliberately put their efforts into its further advancement.

DIY AESTHETICS AND MEANINGS OF MODERNITY

In modern societies, material objects operate as important signs that mediate social interactions and the meanings attributed to individuals and collectives. Immersed in the mundanity of everyday life, however, such meanings remain invisible to the subjects negotiating them, and therefore constitute elements of the cultural “grids” applied to decision making or the construction of opinions. As I have shown in my work, the Soviet modern project successfully accommodated DIY practices under the umbrella of particular concepts, such as *samodeiatel’nost’* and “technical creativity,” thus characterizing them as unproblematic and even positively integrating them into the public discourse. The rapid economic and discursive change that took place in the late 1980s to 1990s, on the other hand, disrupted the existing cultural grids and re-articulated self-made objects and the whole realm of material DIY culture as examples of the “Soviet thing,” a new analytical category that was meant to identify and “objectively represent” the economic inefficiency and backwardness of the Soviet planned economy. Moreover, this discourse discredited the very system of values underlying Soviet DIY practices, interpreting them at best as ridiculous and kitschy and at worst as a means of survival under conditions of poverty.

Although the arrival of a new economic logic and new economic language is certainly a factor of Cold War dynamics, it found a breeding ground within Russian society itself. As I have demonstrated in this work, meanings of “poverty” and “backwardness” constitute not only an external stereotype about Russia, but also a longstanding Russian national self-stereotype. Yet, in the Russian context, this self-stereotype co-exists with and is paradoxically co-produced by conceptions of “skillfulness,” “inventiveness,” and everyday “smartness” and “creativity.” This striking combination of negative and positive self-characteristics renders practices of making-do and DIY objects and skills in the Russian cultural space a particular phenomenon, one which leads people to recognize themselves as a collective. Throughout my fieldwork, I often observed different ways in which this stereotype might just as well be mobilized to speculate about national strength and sovereignty in one context as, in another, used to deplore Russian “poverty” and Russians’ “being doomed” to an uncomfortable life.

Thus, while focusing on the DIY phenomenon in the Soviet Union and Russia as the object of my study, I also address it as a material medium for conveying messages about Russia and the Russian people. An important element of this study is the attention to how different artistic projects developed in the 1990s-2000s mobilized this stereotype to visually represent Russia and/or Russian experiences.

Finally, I have observed how DIY practices allow individuals to express themselves and are involved in the process of meaning production. My work suggests that manual creative practices of DIY not only contribute to the subjective work of self-development and self-valorization, but also may perform individual attempts to improve social relations and social order as broadly understood.

POST-SCRIPTUM

The contemporary trajectories of Russian DIY culture are, of course, not limited to the repertoire of practices discussed in this work. Today, DIY culture is actively developed within different contexts of craft and ethno-design, ranging from craft-beer bars to Orthodox exhibitions. Although often presented in reference to “Russian traditions,” these developments clearly reproduce patterns that can be observed all over the world. They are characterized by a combination of the neoliberal discourse of entrepreneurship, precarious conditions of unemployment pushing individuals to look for alternative economic tracks, and the commodification of what is vaguely understood as, or associated with, “national heritage.”

Another global tendency with a particularly local face is the development of the maker-culture (in Russian *meikery*), which embraces many elements of Soviet “technical creativity” but actively uses global imaginaries and vocabulary. Indeed, during the last ten years, these new forms of “technical creativity” have once again been supported by the state. Elite technical universities host FabLabs, hackerspaces and innovation incubators; the city of Moscow distributes grants for youth initiatives in technical innovations; and the Ministry of Education regularly organizes competitions among “young innovators.” Moreover, official experts report to the Russian government on the “best practices” in supporting these initiatives, based on experiences in China, Brazil, and the USA. Indeed, Russia finds itself in the midst of yet another period of “modernization.”

The main ambition of this work has been, however, to offer an alternative perspective on modernity, a modernity that might reach beyond languages and the imaginaries shaped by the Cold War binaries, and that might open a new way of thinking about economy and relationships between humans and things. The Soviet project is gone, but it would be petty to think that all political alternatives to the neoliberal capitalism are gone together with it. Thirty years after the end of the Socialist utopia, we find ourselves in urgent need of new utopias and new ideas directed at “remodeling the house of economics” (Gudeman 1992).

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ANNEX

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

City	Name of the subject ⁷⁴	Year of Birth	Occupation, educational background
Saint Petersburg	Sergei	1979	Entrepreneur, no degree
Saint Petersburg	Nina	1978	Housewife, trained as an engineer
Saint Petersburg	Antonina	1930	Engineer, trained as a chemist
Saint Petersburg	Liudmila	1930	Technician
Saint Petersburg	Boris	1938	Military engineer
Saint Petersburg	Maia	1978	Economist, DIY practitioner
Saint Petersburg	Vasilisa	1955	Translator
Saint Petersburg	Ekaterina	1946	Worker
Saint Petersburg	Konstantin	1955	Mechanic, DIY practitioner
Saint Petersburg	Kirill	1952	Entrepreneur, former KGB officer
Saint Petersburg	Lilia	1942	Engineer, programmer
Saint Petersburg	Marina	1958	Dentist
Saint Petersburg	Valentina	1937	Engineer, TRIZ instructor, trained as a physicist
Saint Petersburg	Nikolai	1925	Technical club leader, trained as a military engineer, TRIZ follower
Saint Petersburg	Alexander	1959	Engineer, TRIZ instructor
Saint Petersburg	Anna	1952	Technical club teacher, trained as an engineer, DIY practitioner
Saint Petersburg	Anastasia	1956	Youth club director, trained as a teacher
Saint Petersburg	Larisa	1955	School teacher, DIY practitioner
Saint Petersburg	Ksenia	1952	DIY practitioner
Saint Petersburg	Olga	1976	Analyst, trained in Political Science, DIY practitioner
Saint Petersburg	Olesya	1979	Historian, DIY practitioner
Saint Petersburg	Voliuslav Mitrofanov	1928	Engineer with manual working background, TRIZ instructor
Saint Petersburg	Marianna	1961	Artist, trained as an artist
Saint Petersburg	Timofei	1939	Technical club leader, trained as a technician
Saint Petersburg	Alena	1952	Engineer, school teacher

⁷⁴ Most of names are fictional, except for public figures who are listed with full names.

Saint Petersburg	Tamara	1941	School teacher, TRIZ instructor, trained as an engineer
Saint Petersburg	Tatiana	1954	Translator, trained as a school teacher
Saint Petersburg	Elena	1956	Chef accountant, trained as an economist
Saint Petersburg	Inna	1964	Printer, trained as an engineer
Saint Petersburg	Vladimir Kozin	1953	Artist, trained as an artist
Saint Petersburg	Igor	1963	Engineer with manual working background
Saint Petersburg	Afanasii	1941	Journalist
Moscow	Vladimir Arkhipov	1961	Artist, trained as an engineer
Moscow	Pavel	1947	Executive of VOIR, trained as a physicist
Moscow	Egor	1937	Journalist with manual working background
Moscow	Natalia	1940	Journalist, trained as an engineer
Moscow	Galina	1943	Conservator in a museum , trained as an engineer
Moscow	Grigorii	1959	Conservator in a museum, trained as an engineer
Moscow	Vasilii	1937	Engineer, DIY practitioner
Moscow	Liubov	1938	Medical doctor, DIY practitioner
Moscow	Yurii Stoliarov	1932	Journalist with manual working background
Moscow	Vladislav	1945	Engineer, DIY practitioner
Moscow	Valentin	1958	Journalist, trained as an engineer
Moscow	Ivan	1957	Journalist, trained as a military engineer
Moscow	Anatolii	1953	Journalist, trained as a physicist
Moscow	Mark	1949	Journalist, trained as a biologist
Moscow	Anton	1963	Journalist
Moscow	Nadezhda	1940	Ethnomusicologist, DIY practitioner
Moscow	Alexei	1982	Programmer, DIY practitioner
Obninsk	Yurii	1951	Engineer, DIY practitioner

