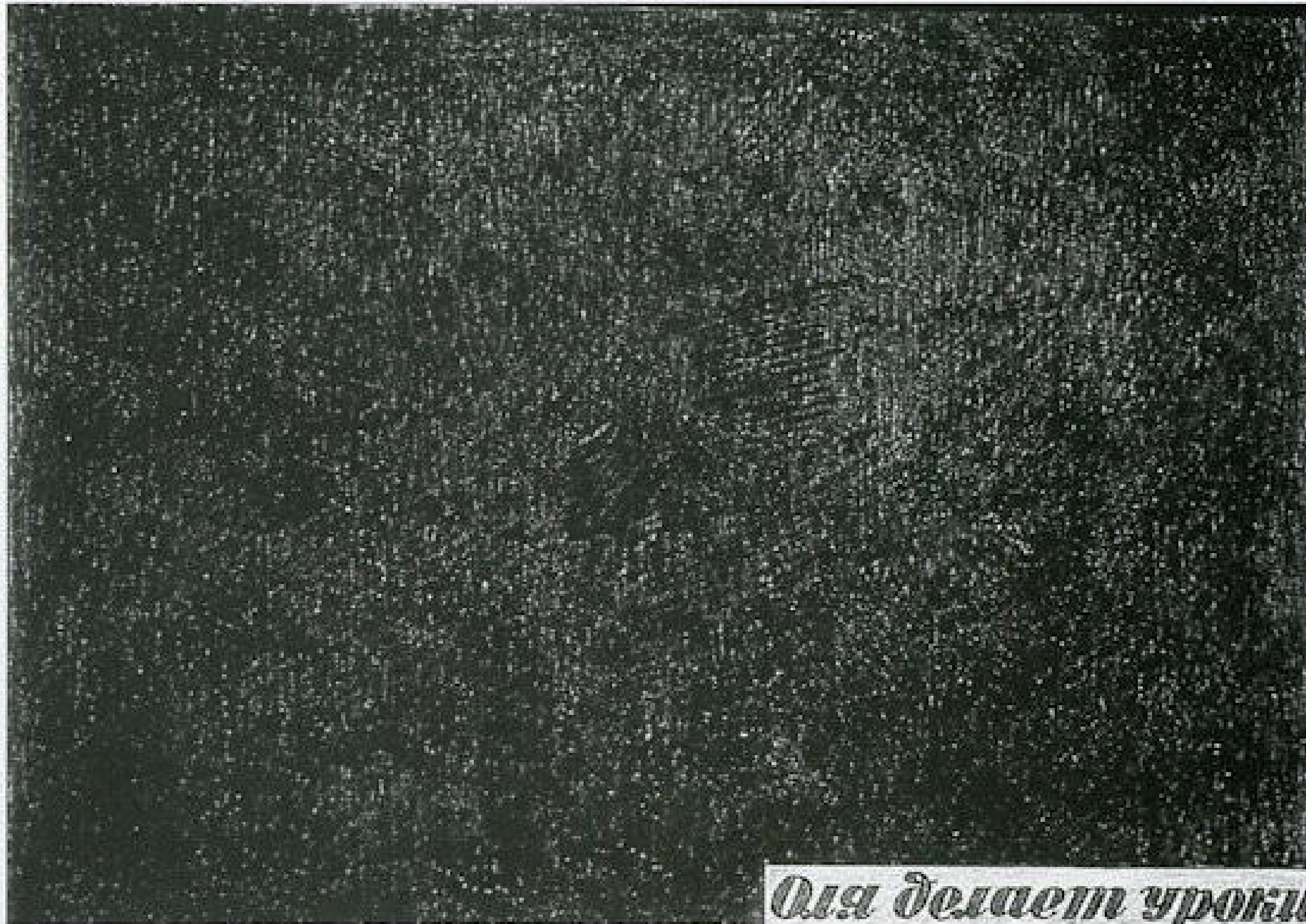
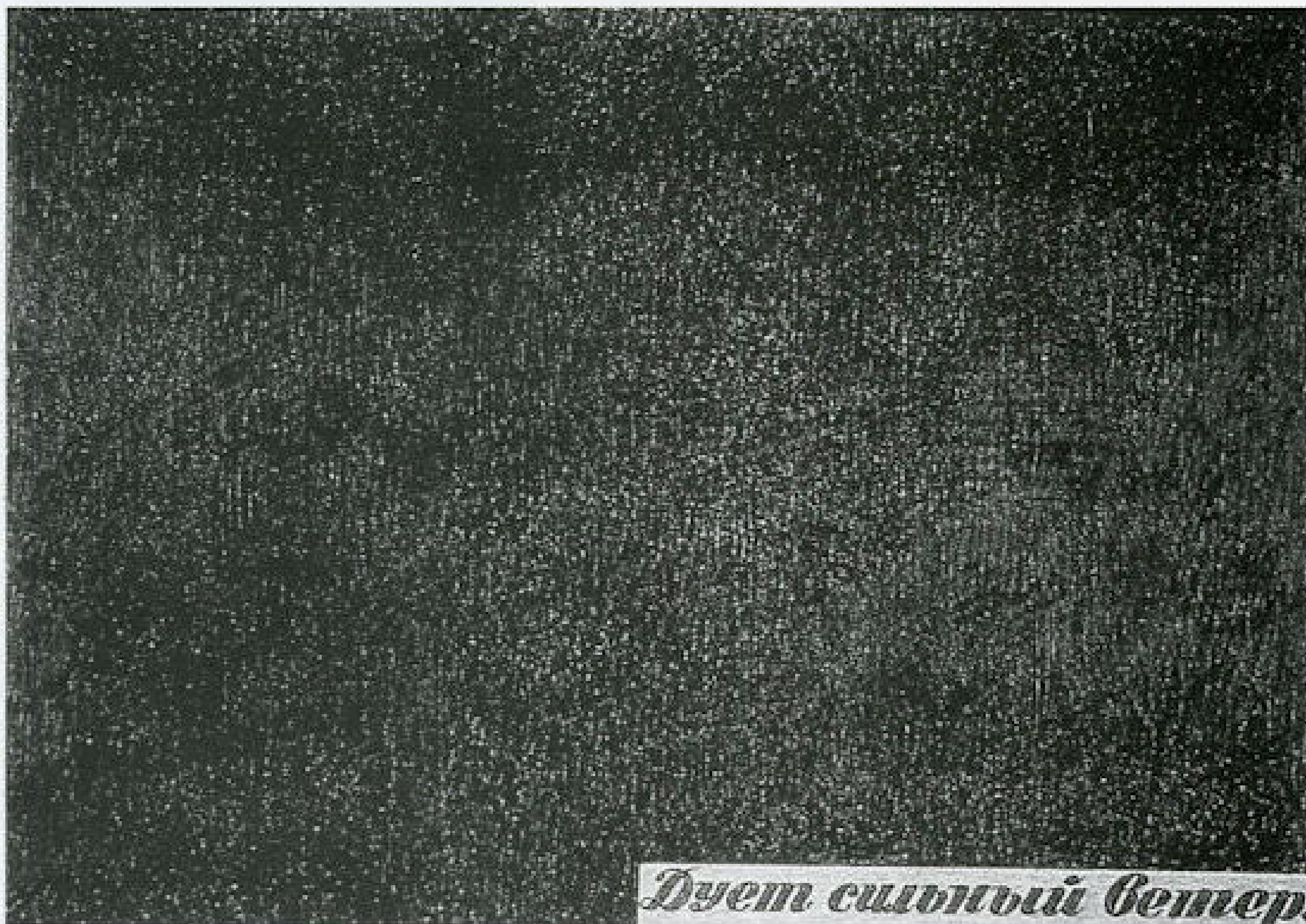

Оля делает уроки


Дует сильный ветер.

Отец пришел с работы

About Early Soviet Conceptualism

Margarita Tupitsyn

Figure 68.
Ilya Kabakov, *Primakov Sitting in a Closet (Vskafusidiaschii Primakov)*, 1972, details of album. Collection of Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.

More than a decade after the appearance of Soviet dissident modernism in the late 1950s, Moscow artists Ilya Kabakov, Vitaly Komar, and Aleksandr Melamid formulated the local version of conceptual art.[1] Dissident modernists, who were the first generation of the "unofficial" art movement, originated the practical and theoretical opposition to socialist realism, the official style which held a cultural monopoly from the mid-1930s to *perestroika*. The presence of this powerful adversary unified the modernists, although their creative aspirations shared little common ground. In contrast to the one-dimensional nature of the modernists' opposition, the conceptualists Kabakov, Komar, and Melamid—who also belonged to the milieu of alternative culture—performed a dual role in resistance. First, they deviated from the modernist canons of Soviet alternative art by denying painting's privileged status and introducing elements of Soviet kitsch into their works. Second, they—particularly Komar and Melamid, who worked together as the team K/M—put themselves at odds with the Soviet cultural establishment by deconstructing its visual canons and ideological content. When considering the development of Soviet conceptualism, it is important to keep in mind this dual project of contesting the conventions of both dissident modernism and socialist realism.[2]

Unlike the first generation of alternative artists, which consisted of nonmembers of the Union of Artists, Kabakov belonged to the union's graphics division. He began his career by crystallizing his own modernist model of representation as a challenge to the familiar socialist realist canon. But, again unlike many of his Moscow colleagues, he did not adhere to any specific modernist style. Throughout the 1960s, he rapidly progressed from works that relied on purely visual sensation to those with "literal facts." Kabakov showed his distrust of pure visuality as early as 1967, when he included verbal commentaries about the image in his drawing *The Horse (Loshad')*. Then, in his drawing *Answers of the Experimental Group (Otvety eksperemental'noi gruppy*, 1969), Kabakov took a definite step toward the condition Benjamin Buchloh defined as the "withdrawal of visuality." *Answers* is a simplified rendition of a house with fragments of a landscape on either side, situated between two columns of text that in turn are divided into numbered blocks. Each block is given the name of either a female or male character who answers questions about the drawing. For example, question number 10 is attached to the presentation of a door and is connected to Vladimir Evgen'evich Markov, a "fictional beholder" of Kabakov's work, who confirms that what he sees is indeed a door.[3] In contrast to Western conceptual art, in which the operative strategy—as defined by Charles Harrison—is the "suppression of the beholder," in Soviet alternative art, the prolonged absence of the beholder caused Kabakov to invent and introduce him/her into the artwork itself.

In *Answers*, Kabakov undermined the practice of socialist realist painters who, in their concentration on constructing strict ideological

Figure 69.
Ilya Kabakov, *Primakov Sitting in a Closet (Vskafusidiaschii Primakov)*, 1972, album. Collection of Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.

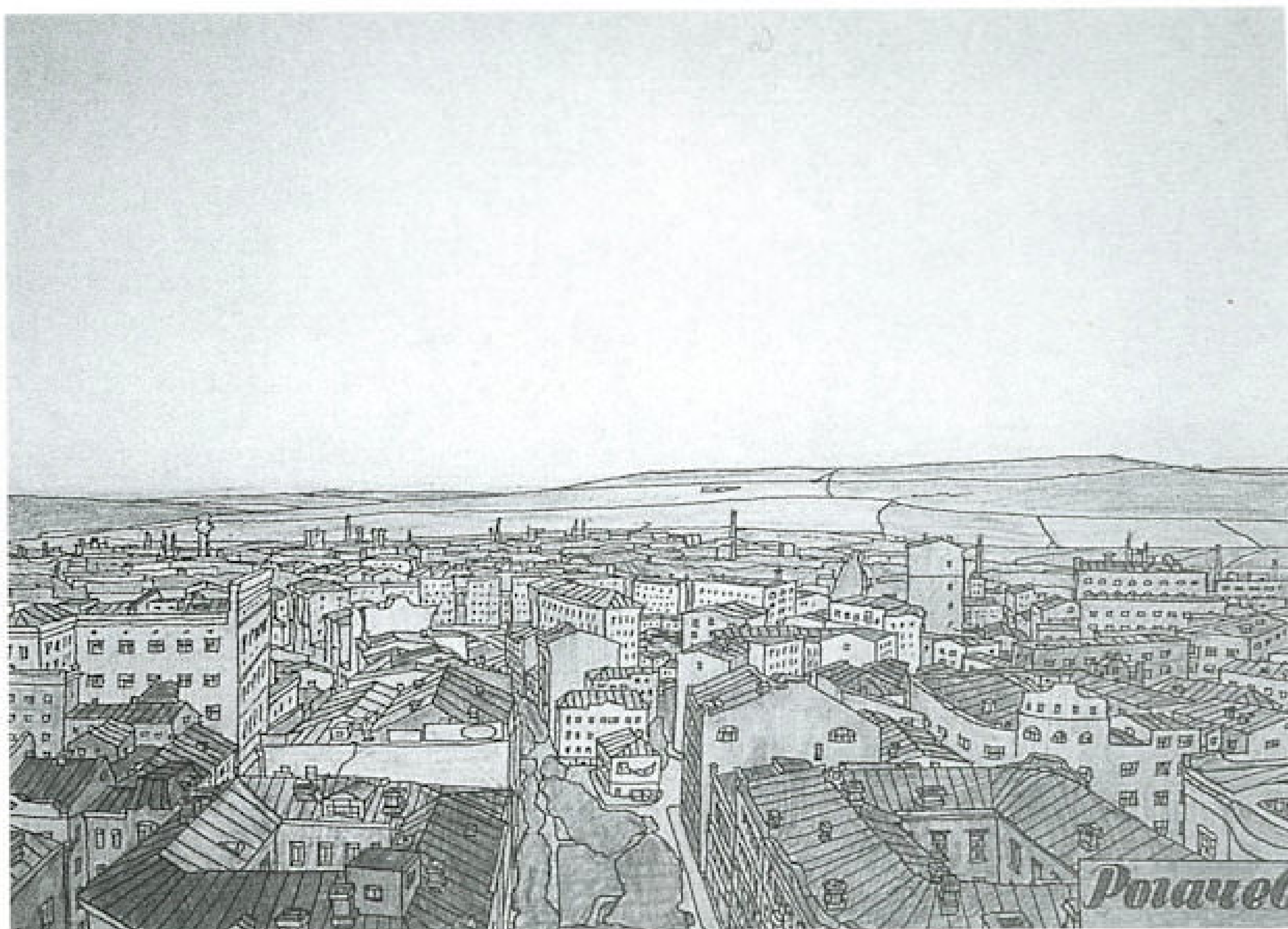
narratives, produced a nonretinal art but continued to operate through a visual apparatus. His next version of *Answers* (1970–71), made of enamel and masonite, eliminates pictorial images altogether. Covered with sentences imitating the language and themes of ordinary Soviet people, the work can be defined as the "aesthetic of communal babble." In another painting from the same year with the same title (fig. 166), Kabakov reintroduced pictorial images with a group of readymades—a hanger, a nail puncturing the painting's lower surface, and a toy train—all situated on the right side of the work. On the left side Kabakov employed a group of characters to discuss, comment on, and criticize his pictorial arsenal rather than simply affirming it with verbal statements. Challenging painting's exceptional status, Kabakov finally broke with the canons of Soviet alternative art. In addition to saturating his paintings with the "speech" of communal kitchens, he appropriated the shabby textures of communal interiors and the awkward, dysfunctional, and deaestheticized objects of Soviet communal households. The insertion of linguistic interpretive devices into the visual field provided the critical dialogue lacking in the Soviet alternative art movement from its inception.[4] As Kabakov points out, "The game consisted in showing on the surface the picture itself and the thoughts of the [fictional] viewers about it."[5] If the foundation of Western conceptualism was built in reaction to the overpresence of the beholder and the critic, then Soviet conceptualism was a reaction to the absence of both.

Kabakov's *Answers* series was complemented in 1972 with his work in what he called an "album" format, reminiscent of Soviet propaganda albums or portfolios designed throughout the 1930s by El Lissitzky, Varvara Stepanova, and Aleksandr Rodchenko. Each of Kabakov's ten albums, produced between 1972 and 1975, consists of a minimum of thirty-five cardboard pages of drawings and handwritten texts stacked in boxes. Each album is linked to a story about a specific Soviet character, and is intended for both viewing and reading by turning the pages. In this way, Kabakov undermined the familiar experience of optically perceiving the artwork. The first album, *Primakov Sitting in a Closet (Vskafusidiaschii Primakov*, 1972; figs. 68–70), is particularly significant in the context of conceptual art's withdrawal of visuality. It consists of forty-seven pages on which is related the story of a fictional character named Primakov, consigned to a closet in order to suppress his ability to see. Depriving him of sight and thus enhancing his ability to hear, Kabakov makes Primakov "see words instead of objects."[6] Rosalind Krauss's clarification of visual modernism as "the im/pulse to see"[7] is sacrificed for Kabakov's "im/pulse to hear." To convey the condition of "visual impairment," Kabakov begins *Primakov* with the familiar modernist model of pure visuality, the flat monochrome surface, in this case a black rectangle. By combining black rectangles with fragments of "literal facts"—"Olya Is Doing Homework," "A Strong Wind Is Blowing," "Father Came Home from Work"—Kabakov underscores Primakov's inability to optically perceive the events. Instead, he offers Primakov as an unusual beholder who, blind to the images, is concerned only with the words.

The year Kabakov began *Primakov Sitting in a Closet*, Komar and Melamid stated, "we are not artists, we are conversationalists." They later wrote that "the constant method of our work is based on conversations with each other, during which the imaginary phenomenon of art is born."[8] With these claims, K/M revealed a commitment to the operative strategy defined by Kabakov as "seeing words instead of objects." Unlike Kabakov, however, who illustrates the supremacy of the verbal with texts drawn from the reservoir of communal interactions, K/M violated the status quo of Soviet narrative (found in mass media or in bureaucratic papers) by ousting the text and altering the familiar format of its presentation. Their performance *Hamburgers "Pravda" (Kotlety "Pravda,"* 1975; fig. 4) explicitly demonstrated this process. During the performance, K/M ground up pages of the newspaper *Pravda* ("Truth"), collected its pulverized

Он говорит:

В детстве я подолгу сидел в шкафу, где меня никто не тревожил, а по звукам, проникающим сквозь стенки, я представлял все, что происходит в комнате.
Сидя там, я воображал себе, как я вылетаю из шкафа, поднимаюсь над городом и над всей землей и исчезаю в небе...
Я сидел там так долго, что, когда я открыл дверцу, я не мог ничего различать из-за ослепительного света.



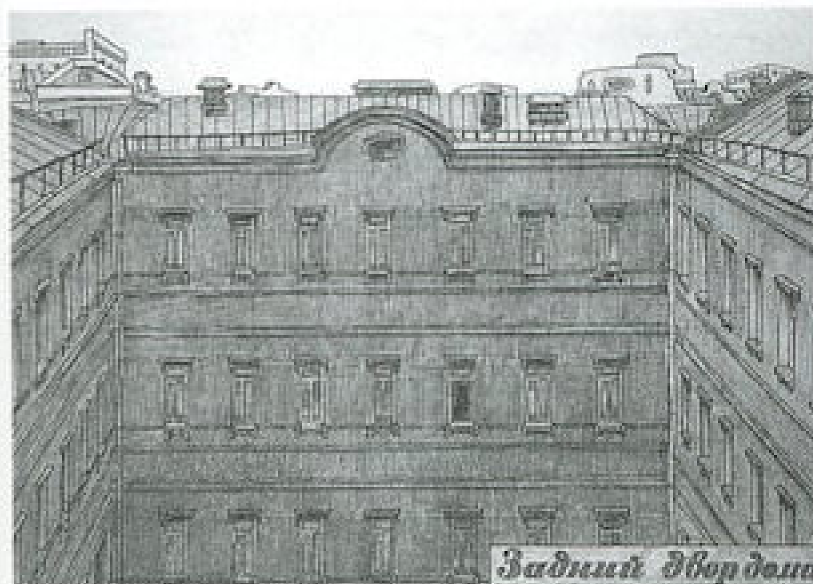


FIGURE 70.
Ilya Kabakov, *Primakov Sitting in a Closet (Vskafusidiaschii Primakov)*, 1972, details of album. Collection of Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.

Figure 71. (TOP AND BOTTOM)
Andrei Monastyrskii and Collective Actions Group, *Appearance* (*Poiavlenie*), March 13, 1976.

bits and pieces, and produced a round, grayish object. The oppressive body of textual abundance had been replaced by a compact, nonthreatening geometric shape.

This neutralization of ideological objects is carried into the realm of Soviet bureaucracy with *Documents: Ideal Document* (*Dokumenty: Ideal'ny dokument*, 1975; fig. 167), in which K/M appropriated twelve types of official papers, ranging from a domestic passport and a trade-union book to marriage and birth certificates. The passport, a particularly oppressive tool, enabled the government to control the vast population by registering each citizen at a specific address, called a *propiska*. This registration, not only by city but also by specific apartment or room, made it virtually impossible for citizens to move and made them easily traceable. The trade-union card also functioned as a method of surveillance, recording every job ever held by its owner.

In *Documents: Ideal Document*, K/M negated the verbal by eliminating the text of each item. They also destroyed the documents' distinctive visual characteristics. Each document was measured, its surface area counted, and the sizes used to make twelve rectangular Plexiglas panels. A thirteenth panel completed the work, an "ideal square" (ideal document) painted red. Its size was arrived at by computing the total surface area of all the documents and dividing by twelve, which produced the arithmetic mean of the total surface area. The square root of this sum provided the measurements for the red square. This combination of specific content and abstract form served as a comment on the geometric art produced by the Soviet historical avant-garde, suggesting that postrevolutionary abstraction was constantly intruded upon by various political contents. For example, K/M's "ideal square" invokes Kazimir Malevich's *Red Square* of 1915, which appears to be a purely abstract object but in fact—as its subtitle, *Painterly Realism: Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions*, indicates—refers to a concrete image.[9] More generally, K/M allude to the fact that Malevich, Lissitzky, and Sergei Sen'kin introduced agita-

tional slogans into their abstract canvases or posters and, later on, Stepanova, Rodchenko, and Gustav Klutsis returned to figuration in the form of photographic imagery. K/M's ironic games with political content and geometric form, recalling the two aspects of Soviet art-making since the Revolution, and their conspicuous subversion of the historical avant-garde's social ambitions and formal strategies, clashed with both Western minimalists' admiration for the Soviet nonobjective tradition and Western conceptualists' fascination with the political radicalism of Soviet culture.[30]

In *Music "Passport" (Muzyka "Pasport,"* 1976; fig. 72), from the *Codes* series, K/M further "dissected" this notorious Soviet document. The artists asked a professional musician to compose a musical piece in which each note would correspond to a letter drawn from the passport's ten regulations. By constructing a bridge between a concrete bureaucratic text and a musical composition, K/M disputed the myth (upheld by many early modernist painters) that music is the most abstract of all art forms. On the other hand, their translation of the passport's specialized rhetoric into the universal language of a musical score was, perhaps, the sharpest critique of Soviet mechanisms of control. K/M's substitution of words with notes returns us to Kabakov's "im/pulse to hear," as a substitute for the "im/pulse to see."

After the production of Kabakov and K/M's conceptual works, the homogeneity of Moscow's alternative art community radically disintegrated. Kabakov and K/M had questioned this community's prolonged devotion to easel painting as the ultimate mode of expression, and its obsession with the purely visual aspects of artmaking. Furthermore, they had crossed the carefully guarded line separating the upholder of the avant-garde spirit (Soviet dissident modernism) and the epitome of kitsch, socialist realism. Nevertheless, Kabakov and K/M continued to produce commodifiable objects in a country with no market for their consumption and no spaces for their exhibition.

FIGURE 72.
Vitaly Komar and Aleksandr Melamid, *Music "Passport"* (*Muzyka "Pasport"*), from the *Codes* (*Kody*) series, 1976, score (left), installation with photographs, texts, audiotapes, musicstands, electric lights. Komar and Melamid Studio, New York.

Figure 73.
Boris Mikhailov, *Unfinished Dissertation (Nezakonchennaia dissertatsiia)*, 1984, one of 180 photographs. Collection of the artist.

In contrast, Andrei Monastyrskii, theoretician of the Collective Actions Group (Kollektivnye Deistviia), was committed to finding alternative spaces for alternative culture, and promoted the idea that action is a sufficient creative gesture. The group argued that it was absurd to play the role of urban artist in a country where the space for urban art was occupied by socialist realism. With the intention of moving the nucleus of alternative art from small city apartments and humble studios to the vast spaces of the countryside, the group initiated a process that inserted culture into nature, and began converting the rural no-man's land into a limitless exhibition space. Another member of the Collective Actions Group, Nikita Alekseev, explains: "If the wild life in the West is a small island among the achievements and mistakes of the culture, in Russia it is the other way around."[11]

A brief discussion of the Collective Actions Group cannot begin to convey the complexity of its theoretical background or the depth of its influence on other Moscow conceptualists. The group was formed in 1976 and originally included Monastyrskii, Alekseev, Georgii Kizeval'ter, and Nikolai Panitkov. They were later joined by Igor Makarevich, Elena Elagina, and Sergei Romashko. In the introduction to their first self-published volume, entitled *Trips to the Countryside (Poezdki za gorod,* 1980), the group's members stated:

> Most of [our] actions evolve from a scenario in which a group of people is called by us to participate in some activity unknown to them. Everything that happens in this kind of setting can be divided into two parts. The first consists of things that occur in the empirical zone (which is arranged according to the preliminary plan of the group). The second part deals with effects occurring in the realm of the psyche, that is, with the emotions arising in response to what is happening in the participants' visual field during the performance, and the emotions in regards to what precedes and accompanies the action.[12]

Furthermore, the group noted in 1983, "All our activities can be briefly characterized as a kind of 'trip in the direction of nothingness' armed with equipment of an aesthetic/psychological nature. The means for this we receive from the existence of a very closed (but permanent) circle of engaged people."[13] This circle included Moscow alternative artists and poets of several generations who were periodically asked to travel by train to the country, then walk to an enormous empty field to blow up balloons, appear and disappear in a forest, or lie down in a ditch. On the way to the performance site,

they often encountered physical difficulties (deep snow or heavy rain), an ordeal intended to help them shed their urban orientation as preparation for the action.

The group's early performances illustrate the blunt simplicity and aching brevity of their plots. In *Appearance (Poiavlenie,* March 13, 1976; fig. 71), thirty invitees traveled to the field to witness two members of the group emerge from the forest, cross the field toward the spectators, and give them a "documentary certificate" confirming their presence at the event. *Liblikh* (April 2, 1976) involved twenty-five spectators who came to the same field to hear the sound of a bell, hidden underground before their arrival. The bell continued to sound after they left.[14] Each performance featured three categories of participant: author, co-author, and performer. The third category subsumed the first two: the author determined the concept of each happening, which the co-authors were required to accept. Weather conditions might also change the course of a performance and thus constituted a form of co-author. Staging these communal gatherings to fulfill the "empty actions" of their performances, the group identified emptiness as the main characteristic of Soviet existence throughout the Brezhnev era.[15]

By the late 1980s, at the end of the *perestroika* period, Collective Actions' performances, which depended on the participation of other members of the alternative cultural milieu and on the group's subsequent verbal and written analysis, became unrealistic. The climate of market-oriented values and exhibition opportunities at home and abroad eroded the communal sensibility of Soviet alternative artists. They became preoccupied with individual goals that were, as a rule, directed toward making careers in the West. At the same time, the infamous "field" site of most of the group's performances was subdivided and sold to nouveau riche clients, thus ending the "trips in the direction of nothingness."

FIGURE 74.
Irina Nakhova,
Room (Komnata) No. 2,
Moscow, 1984, documentary photograph.
Collection of the artist.

Two years before *perestroika,* in 1984, Irina Nakhova—at the time, the only woman artist in the Moscow conceptual circle—responded to the ideas developed by her male colleagues.[16] Unlike the members of the Collective Actions Group, she considered her studio an adequate exhibition space. (Kabakov also built his first installation, *16 Strings* [1984], in his studio.) And contrary to Kabakov and K/M's "submission" to the power of speech practices, she insisted—through the construction of an installation series entitled *Rooms (Komnaty,* 1984–87; figs. 74, 168, 211)—that visual rather than verbal information should dominate the viewer's experience of art. In each of the four elaborately constructed "rooms," Nakhova covered the walls, ceiling, and floor with cutouts (ranging from handmade abstract shapes to reproductions from popular magazines) and manipulated the lighting to create unexpected visual effects. Nakhova's aim was to transgress the limits of painting's two-dimensionality and place the viewer within the pictorial space itself in order to expose her or him (so little accustomed to nonverbal experiences)[17] to an avalanche of visual information. This effect was comparable to the overwhelming nature of Soviet official texts and speeches.

However, Nakhova's project acquired a different meaning and format when her husband, critic Joseph Bakshtein, interviewed a number

of visitors and used the resulting dialogues along with photographs of the installations as documentation of her experiments. The dialogues focused on *Room No. 2* (1984; fig. 74), and were almost exclusively limited to conversations with Moscow male conceptual artists, including Kabakov, Eduard Gorokhovskii, Makarevich, and Ivan Chuikov. By becoming an integral part of the project and constructing an additional meaning, the male voices shifted Nakhova's work from its concern with the hegemony of the visual to their own speech-based discourse. According to Makarevich, for instance, Nakhova's installation was "such a strong concentration of representation" that it was "pressing." Gorokhovskii was similarly disturbed. "Stay a little bit in this room," he complained, "and you can go out of your mind."[18] Such visual elements as turning the lights on and off were perceived as "psychological" and "metaphysical" experiences. Significantly, Nakhova was (voluntarily) absent during these conversations. Other women's voices were represented by the artists' wives, whose comments were limited to empty epithets such as "beautiful" and later presented parenthetically in the self-published volume. Therefore, the visual (here female) was effectively suppressed first by speech (here male) and then by its documentation, a text destined to become the final record of Nakhova's installations.

Most of these examples of early Soviet conceptualism used photography to document ephemeral projects or performances. This use of the photographic image transgressed the medium's sole function, since the late 1930s, of fulfilling the tasks of official journalism. (The only other realm in which photography was actively practiced was family life.) However, even in its capacity as a document for conceptual work, photography remained subordinate. It still held the position from which it had tried to escape in the early 20th century, namely that of handmaiden to the fine arts.

Boris Mikhailov, a photographer from Kharkov, reempowered the camera by once again directing its lens at scenes of Soviet reality, now caught without the "mythographic decor." Defining his then-unique position, Mikhailov noted in 1984: "As a photographer endowed with unofficial authority, I in some way track down, spy, sneak. Most importantly is to define after whom."[19] Like the founders of Soviet factography (Aleksandr Rodchenko, Boris Ignatovich, Elizar Langman, etc.), Mikhailov viewed the function of a photo image not as a single pictorial record of reality but as one of a series of fragmentary photo stills valid only when seen all together and supported by linguistic additions.

Unfinished Dissertation (Nezakonchennaia dissertatsiia; figs. 73, 169) is Mikhailov's earliest and longest series. It consists of several hundred photographs all taken during one dreary winter month in 1984. According to Mikhailov, this was the moment he broke from an interest in Western cultural production and began searching for local subject matter. In its final version, *Unfinished Dissertation* consists of approximately 180 sheets of cheap drawing paper, with one or two photographs casually glued to the surface. The texts that follow the images were either composed by Mikhailov or drawn from a variety of published sources, including Soviet scientific literature and books on philosophy and art. Whole paragraphs and short sentences are scribbled chaotically in the margins.

In addition to adhering to the series format, Mikhailov appropriated such primary compositional tools of the early Soviet factographers as extreme fragmentation, cropping, and capturing subjects from behind. For *Unfinished Dissertation's* subject matter, Mikhailov "revisited" monuments, landscapes, and cityscapes conceived in the 1920s and '30s, and tracked down the people who constructed them. *Unfinished Dissertation's* pictures are of a reality that might be called the "double after": it is postutopian with respect to 1920s factography, and postmythographic with respect to the photo-staging of subsequent decades.[20] Similarly, Mikhailov's individualized and philosophizing comments bypass both the dry, utilitarian language of the factographic photo images and the bureaucratic narrations attached to photo images of the later period.

Here, we are once again faced with the urge common to all Soviet conceptualists to construct and read the visual with substantial support from the verbal. In Mikhailov's case, the randomness and abundance of the verbal attests to the displaced status of his photos—or, as he calls them, *kartochki*. They are not for mass-media consumption, not for exhibition, not for appropriation by other artists. Mikhailov's inquiry "after whom" he is "spying" while taking his snapshots is investigated through the literary dimension of the photo visuals.

Komar and Melamid left the Soviet Union in 1976 and, since then, have been able to realize their projects, whereas artists like Kabakov, Nakhova, and Mikhailov waited another decade, until *perestroika* opened the "window to Europe."[21] Thus the political breakdown of the Soviet Union had a direct impact on the history of Soviet conceptualism. Kabakov, Nakhova, and Mikhailov, as well as younger representatives of Moscow conceptualism—Igor and Svetlana Kopystianskii, Elagina, Makarevich, the Medical Hermeneutics Group (Meditsinskaia Germeneftika), and the Peppers (Pertsy)—were finally able to realize their conceptual installations in Western galleries and museums. However, in the West the textual parameters of their works were lost to a large degree, which resulted in Soviet culture's reception by Western viewers on an essentially visual level. Thus Kabakov's postulate "seeing words instead of objects" was ironically fulfilled in a refractive form when the Western viewer was subjected to "seeing" rather than "reading" the language-saturated works of Soviet conceptualism.

Notes

1. For a detailed and broader history of Soviet conceptualism, see my "On Some Sources of Soviet Conceptualism," in *Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience*, ed. Norton Dodge and Anna Rosenfeld (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 303–33, in which I connect the Soviet conceptualists' use of text to similar practices of the Soviet historical avant-garde. Here I would like to add that this linguistic element, intrinsic to both eras of Soviet culture, is not based on the conceptualists' knowledge of the constructivist/productivist tradition. Rather, it illustrates the prolonged dependence of Russian and Soviet culture on textual rather than visual mechanisms of artmaking. For the most part, as in the case with dissident modernists who in the late 1950s possessed no substantial knowledge of the local historical avant-garde and discovered abstraction through Western exhibitions, the Soviet conceptualists' knowledge of their domestic cultural legacy was sparse and relied primarily on visual perception or on distorted theoretical premises.

2. The conceptual movement began to actively manifest itself at the time when dissident modernism was institutionalized by the Soviet government. For a further discussion of the nature of Soviet dissident modernism, see my "Avant-garde and Kitsch," in *Margins of Soviet Art: Socialist Realism to the Present* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1989), 23–37, and Victor Tupitsyn, "'Nonidentity Within Identity': Moscow Communal Modernism, 1950s–1980s," in *Nonconformist Art*, ed. Dodge and Rosenfeld, 64–100.

3. On the visual level, Kabakov's colleagues often compared him with René Magritte. It seems, however, that in his early works he pursued a rather different goal. Instead of confounding pictorial reality with contradictory verbal messages, Kabakov affirmed or narrated what was already represented by pictorial means.

4. Beginning in the late 1950s, Soviet alternative artists functioned as both creators and beholders of their art. The function of the interpreter (critic) did not exist.

5. Ilya Kabakov and Yuri Kuper, *52 entretiens dans la cuisine communautaire* (Marseilles: Art Transit, Ateliers Municipaux d'Artistes, 1992), 16.

6. From a videotaped interview with Sergei Borisov, Moscow, 1986.

7. Rosalind Krauss, "The Im/Pulse to See," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 52.

8. K/M, "In Search of the Ideal," unpub. ms., 1974.

9. K/M's making of the red square by means of a precise calculation corresponds to John Milner's interpretation of Malevich's paintings as objects of carefully planned proportions. See John Milner, *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). Carter Ratcliff makes a parallel between K/M's red square in *Documents* and Malevich's canvas, then distinguishes them thus: "Unlike a Malevich canvas, Komar and Melamid's patterns of line, color, can be decoded if one has a key." Ratcliff fails to recognize that Malevich added a narrative subtitle to *Red Square* and thus decoded its content as well. See Carter Ratcliff, *Komar and Melamid* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 99.

10. According to Benjamin Buchloh, some Western conceptualists were inspired by Camilla Grey's book *The Great Experiment: Russian Art, 1863–1922*, published in 1962, and were particularly influenced by this art's political aspirations and productivist theory. In contrast, K/M—as demonstrated in *Documents: Ideal Document* and in such other early works as *Circle, Square, Triangle* (1974)—responded to the formal and ideological strategies of constructivism/suprematism with an explicit irony and cynicism. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969," *October* (Winter 1990): 140–41.

11. Nikita Alekseev, from a letter to Victor and Margarita Tupitsyn, 1983, Tupitsyn Archive, New York.

12. Collective Actions Group (Nikita Alekseev, Georgii Kizeval'ter, Andrei Monastyrskii, and Nikolai Panitkov), *Poezdki za gorod* (Moscow: Self-published, 1980), Tupitsyn Archive, New York.

13. Collective Actions Group (Andrei Monastyrskii, Georgii Kizeval'ter, Nikolai Panitkov, Igor Makarevich, Nikita Alekseev, Sergei Romashko, and Elena Elagina), *Poezdki i vosproizvedeniia* (Moscow: Self-published, 1983), Tupitsyn Archive, New York.

14. According to Monastyrskii, the group was initially influenced by the musical experiments of John Cage, especially his concept of "sounding silence" as expressed in *4'33"*. In 1978 Monastyrskii wrote to Cage and later received a response in which Cage was interested in a collaborative project. The letter was torn up by Monastyrskii's mother, who was frightened by the foreign address, but he managed to salvage it from the garbage.

15. In 1981, after a trip to Czechoslovakia, Kabakov wrote an essay entitled "O pustote" (On Emptiness), in which he thoroughly developed his ideas on a particular Soviet model of emptiness, distinguishing it from the European concept. See Ilya Kabakov, "On Emptiness," in *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, ed. David Ross (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 53–59.

16. Nakhova was particularly influenced by Victor Pivovarov, a close colleague of Ilya Kabakov. Like Kabakov, in the early 1970s Pivovarov adopted the album format and attempted the process of verbalizing the visual.

17. For decades the Soviet public was exposed primarily to socialist realist works in museums and official galleries. Although these works did not employ texts and offered a variety of imitated realist styles (including late 19th-century realism and French impressionism), viewers were in fact "reading" paintings and receiving ideological instruction from them.

18. For the comments by Makarevich, Gorokhovskii, and others, see *MANI: Komnaty* (Moscow: Self-published, 1987), 143, 145, Tupitsyn Archive, New York.

19. Boris Mikhailov, *Unfinished Dissertation*.

20. For a history of the development of factography and mythography, see my *The Soviet Photograph, 1924–1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). I derive the term "double after" from a popular '20s and '30s photo theme of "before and after," where "before" referred to the prerevolutionary reality and "after" the postrevolutionary one.

21. Among the important exhibitions of Soviet conceptual art in the U.S. are *Russian New Wave* (New York: Contemporary Russian Art Center, 1981); *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism* (Boston: ICA, 1990); *The Green Show* (New York: Exit Art, 1990); and *Perspectives of Conceptualism* (New York: Clock Tower, 1991).