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**Art As a Form of Life: Artistic Practices of the Moscow Conceptualism
in the 1970s – First Half of the 1980s**

My PhD research focuses on the specific artistic practices developed within the artistic milieu known as the Moscow conceptualism. Emerged in the Soviet Union in the context of the Late Socialism, these practices are interwoven in a complex of social, cultural, political relations and processes particular to this context. Though, the most frequent ways to describe the Moscow conceptualism as a “non-conformist” art or as a local version of the global trend of conceptual art are not capable to reveal the complexity of its interconnection with the Soviet society and ideology and, thus, the specificity of this art. That is why I suggest the concept of form of life as the analytical frame: in my opinion it will permit to capture and comprehend the particular mechanisms of the Moscow conceptualists’ practices in their social and artistic dimensions.

Unfolding outside the established institutional system, artistic practices of the Moscow conceptualism engender specific art forms, for instance, I. Kabakov’s albums, L. Rubinstein card-catalogues, “Collective Actions” group’s journeys outside the city. Activated through an act of demonstration, reading, move, these works embrace not just an image, a text or an action, but also mental and behavioural reactions to them. In fact, they create situations for a common experience. They frame and reorganise the process of everyday life within their social and artistic milieu, its logic, its habits, its values. Indeed, these artworks produce a particular spatio-temporal continuum where the ordinary communication and interaction could take new forms. Blurring a clear distinction between the author and the audience, these practices include commenting into the work’s structure; they reveal the transition between different mental states; they explore means and limits of action and expression.

In order to realize the specificity of these artistic practices, my methodology involves three analytical operations. Firstly, I study the history of institutionalisation of the Moscow conceptualism. I consider the evolution of the artists’ own terms of self-description as well as the discourses which were used to describe their art by Russian and, later, international art critics.

Secondly, I build my own analytical optics. Following A. Yurchak's remark that various phenomena of the Soviet culture could not be fully understood in their complexity and plurality through the system of binary opposition (official / non-official, repression / resistance etc.), I formulate the concept of form of life which will allow to articulate the multiple connexions and influences between the structure of the Soviet political power, its institutions, its discourse and the everyday life practices which are framed by it but which constantly tend to escape from it. Relying on the theoretical investigations of forms of life by authors such as A. Wechsler, L. Wittgenstein, E. Sprangler, G. Agamben among others, I distinguish the particular problems within the general problem of form of life, that is the constitution of subjectivity, the limits of autonomy, the usage, the relation to the common. Thirdly, I apply this theoretical framework to suggest a new interpretation of the Moscow conceptualism's art. It aims to reveal the specific art forms produced by the Moscow conceptualism, to understand how they are rooted in the social and cultural processes immanent in the Soviet society and marked by the constant presence of the ideology, to comprehend their functioning within the Soviet context in general as well as within the narrow milieu of these artists.

In the end, this analysis will help to address broader questions related to contemporary art and the new physical and semantic fields it operates in. These questions include the mechanisms of social and political life and how they reconfigure artistic forms and practices, the place of art and its impact on aesthetics, the correlation between ethics and aesthetics.