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## INSTITUTION AS A MEDIUM IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN ART

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### Abstract:

This article examines the concept of the medium in contemporary Russian art, focusing on its role as a metaphorical structure. By analyzing how artists use institutional frameworks as their subjects and sets of methods, the article highlights the medium's function as a metaphorical tool for exploring and critiquing post-Soviet culture.

**Keywords:** post-Soviet art, Russian art, postmediality, medium specificity, transcategoriality, institutional critique

### Introduction

The concept of the medium in contemporary art has long been a subject of intense theoretical debate, with much discourse centered on the idea of art as post-medium. The post-medium condition, as articulated by theorists like Rosalind Krauss (2000), suggests that contemporary art has transcended its traditional reliance on specific materials or techniques, instead embracing a fluidity of form and content that resists categorization. However, despite the prominence of this theory, the notion of the medium persists within professional artistic circles, refusing to be entirely subsumed by postmediality. There are several reasons for it, one of which is the return to popularity of the traditional mediums of painting and sculpture, but more importantly, “medium” being integral to the ways in which art institutions organize, classify, and interpret artworks nowadays. The medium remains a productive concept in contemporary art, albeit one that requires constant re-conceptualization considering ongoing changes within its medial condition.

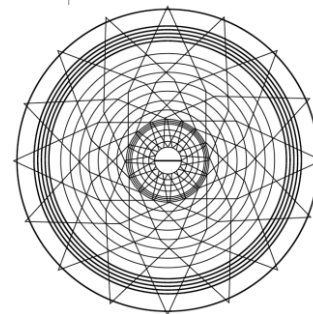
This article aims to enrich the understanding of contemporary artistic medium by examining it as a metaphorical structure that facilitates the transition between different categories of experience, knowledge, and practice. In doing so, it draws on the concept of *transcategoriality* as articulated by Peter Osborne (2013), who emphasizes the

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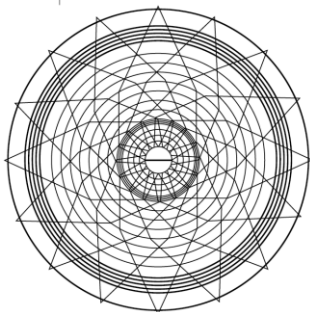


movement of contemporary artworks across various genres, forms, and fields of knowledge. This dynamism is exemplified by the works of artists like Robert Smithson, whose concept of the *non-site* represents not merely an expansion of the sculptural field but a fundamental reconfiguration of the relationships between different realms of experience and knowledge. Osborne argues that this transcategorical movement is a defining characteristic of postconceptual art, which he equates with contemporary art. In this context, postconceptual art does not adhere to a single medium or form but instead encompasses a range of practices and methodologies that cut across traditional boundaries, drawing on various temporalities and spaces to create new meanings.

This article also engages with the work of Clive Cazeaux (2017), who attempts to address the gaps in Osborne's theory by exploring how transcategoriality is produced. Cazeaux's focus on interconceptuality – the idea that contemporary art generates new meanings through the interaction of different concepts – provides a valuable framework for understanding the medium as a metaphorical structure. By conceptualizing the medium as a dynamic, metaphorical entity, this article argues that the medium in contemporary art is not merely a technical support but a cognitive experience that enables the transition between different categories of knowledge and practice.

The medium, as re-conceptualized in this article, functions as a metaphor that facilitates the movement between various categories of experience, from traditional artistic genres and materials to broader social, political, and theoretical contexts. In this sense, anything could become a medium in artistic practice, but not everything does. A choice (or invention) of the medium is historically and contextually defined. This article stipulates that for a large segment of Russian artists, old Soviet and new post-Soviet institutions became such an important medium – a metaphorical structure that enabled artists to navigate, critique and reconfigure the complex institutional landscapes of contemporary Russia.

In exploring the role of the institution as a medium in contemporary Russian art, this article will examine the works of several key artists and collectives who have made significant contributions to this field. These artists, many of whom were affiliated with the Institute of Contemporary Art (IPSI) in Moscow, developed practices that engaged with the institutional and bureaucratic structures of post-Soviet Russia, using them as a medium for artistic expression and critique. Through this examination, the article will demonstrate how the medium, far from being an obsolete concept, remains a crucial tool for artists to engage with the complexities of contemporary life. In the context of contemporary Russian art, the institution as a medium allows artists to explore the intersections of art, politics, and society, offering new ways of understanding and navigating the ever-evolving cultural landscape. By re-conceptualizing the medium as a



metaphorical structure, this article seeks to contribute to ongoing debates about the role of the medium in contemporary art, highlighting its continued relevance and potential for generating new forms of artistic expression.

### **Medium as a metaphor**

Despite the extensive theoretical analysis of the contemporary state of art as post-medium, one cannot ignore the incredible persistence of the discursive presence of the *medium* in professional artistic circles. This persistence has several reasons, from returns to modernist strategies in art to the need for a classification system, organization, and interpretation of artworks by art institutions which rely on established terms to navigate the field. I propose to not get rid of the concept medium but to re-conceptualize it considering the criticism of both medium-specificity and postmediality.

My starting point is the concept of *transcategoriality* used by Peter Osborne (2013). By this, he means the very movement of contemporary artworks between different categories, such as genres, forms, fields of knowledge and practice. Transcategoriality rhymes with the logic of *trans*- immanent to the late capitalism with transnational capital as its basis. A close concept of transdisciplinarity being connected to the new stage of capitalism is a very much researched topic, from a brilliant investigation on proximities of art and Cold War think tanks (Lee, 2020) to discussions around inherently trans-disciplinarian artistic research being part and parcel of knowledge economy (Holert, 2020; Nelund, 2015).

Osborne refers first and foremost to Robert Smithson, whom Rosalind Krauss considers in the context of "sculpture in the expanded field." Osborne stipulates that the *non-site*, the notion and the type of artwork invented by Smithson, is not an expanded sculpture but is fundamentally transcategorial since it conditions the transition between different realms of experience and knowledge, while its revision by artists in the 1990s contributed to transcategoriality becoming the basis for postconceptual art. According to Osborne, postconceptual art (which he equates to contemporary art) is inherently transcategorial: it might switch from an object to its photo or video documentation, encompassing both in a "project", that would cut through different temporalities and be presented differently in various spaces, taking something from each<sup>1</sup>.

A commentary on this topic is also provided by Clive Cazeaux (2017) who tries to make up for the fact that Osborne does not provide an explanation of how the transcategoriality is produced. Cazeaux's primary interest is the question of producing something *new* in the arts, and in artistic research. The argument is that *the new* in

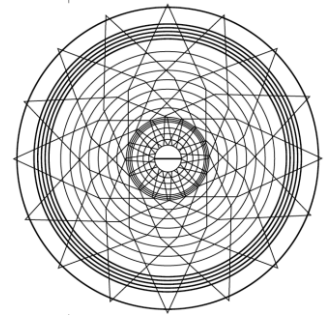
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<sup>1</sup> Osborne calls this a "distributive unity" (2013).

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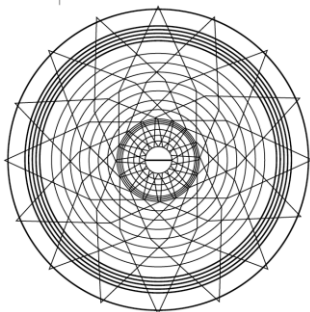


contemporary art comes from interconceptuality. By the term *concept* he, interpreting Kant, means a chunk of experience that does not necessarily have to be expressed verbally. According to Cazeaux, art launches us into a state of interconceptual play; its epistemological value lies in the fact that such play produces *metaphors* – interactions between concepts. The concept – as a fragment of experience – is also a choice that the contemporary artist makes among the multitude of material possibilities, technologies, historical and theoretical contexts. Following Cazeaux's argument, we will understand Osborne's *category* as such a concept, which is valuable because the viewer is also included in the process of forming these concepts and devising metaphors.

By *metaphor*, as Cazeaux uses it in his text, we should not understand a simple stylistic trope, but rather a way of forming connections between categories. Overall, the power of a concept lies in its ability to *metaphorically* extend to other things. It is telling that Paul Ricoeur (2003) defines linguistic metaphor as a *category mistake*, meaning the transition between unrelated conceptual categories. Transcategoriality *is* a category mistake.

To reiterate, both theorists refer to the idea that categorial dynamism is fundamental to contemporary art – a logic of *trans-* or, in Cazeaux's case, *inter-* that applies not just to symbols and images, but to a broad range of *categories*. These categories encompass traditional artistic genres, materials, history, and other disciplines, as well as theory and various forms of everyday experience. As a useful example, Smithson's *non-site* embodies this movement between very different categories: magazine, museum, *site*, hypothetical island, tourist, artist, and so on (Osborne, 2013). At that, the epistemological endeavor for the artist is to design a metaphor—a transition between categories, that might form a category of its own; for the viewer, the critic, the theorist – to distill that metaphor or to devise a metaphor of their own (Cazeaux, 2017).

Despite Peter Osborne being an uncompromising opponent of Rosalind Krauss, we will turn to her theory for assistance, attempting to view it from a different angle to justify the use of the concept of *medium*. Interestingly, while Krauss succinctly described the *post-medium condition* – the fact that, since the 1960s, art has ceased to analyze its own material foundations, reducing them to entirely equivalent choices – in her later works, she revisits the theme of medium-specificity (2010; 2011). She refers to artists such as William Kentridge, Harun Farocki, Sophie Calle, and James Coleman as "knights of the medium." By medium, she means the technical support of a work, yet she insists that this technical foundation can and should be invented by the artist, as a new support sets a new system of rules by which the work exists. This is crucial: Krauss considers the medium as a set of rules. For Ed Ruscha, she identifies the *automobile* as such a set of rules, or medium, which dictates the specificity of the representable subject matter



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(parking lots, gas stations, car emissions, metal railings), methodologies, and materials in graphics, installations, photography, and photo books. Yet, considering our previous arguments, in contrary with Krauss' main ambition, we define the medium/*automobile* not as a technical support but, following Smithson, as an *abstract cognitive experience* – essentially, a metaphorical structure that facilitates transitions between categories or concepts (as chunks of experience). It is also worth mentioning that it is Krauss herself who conceptualizes mediums used by the artists, picking a certain technical support which she sees as establishing the set of rules, as a defining paradigm for transitioning between categories.

In other words, within the context of contemporary art, the medium can be seen as a metaphor – a metaphorical structure that ensures the transition between various categories as fragments of experience.

A similar line of thought is evident in David Joselit's notion of the *transitivity* of the medium, though he primarily applies this concept to painting. Joselit argues that contemporary conceptual painting can impart qualities and conditions to other forms of artistic expression<sup>2</sup>. For instance, the square of a painting by Jutta Koether can serve as the backdrop for her performance, shaping its conceptual and sensory dynamics, thus demonstrating its embeddedness in networks. However, today, other elements can equally become sources of transitivity within and through an artwork, i.e. everyday phenomena, theories, or methodological principles.

Take, for example, Pierre Huyghe's "Variants" (2021–), which explores the mutually enriching yet unsettling translation of signs from the real environment into the digital – and back. *Mutation* is used as a methodological principle: sensors on a small Norwegian island collect diverse data – temperature, humidity, plants, insects, animals, water levels, etc. The digital simulation of the island, projected on a screen, is controlled by a neural network that distorts it based on its own laws and procedures. Mutation also extends to physical artifacts: images generated by the neural network from the island's data are copied from the digital environment, and the resulting biodegradable pink mutants are placed among the trees and bushes. The island itself serves as an essential setting for progressive mutations: a classic example from biology textbooks, an allegory of a lab, an experimental station, or a horror movie set. Certainly, my conceptualization of mutation as a medium (a set of rules, transitioning principle) of Huyghe's work is speculative, but so is Krauss' choice of automobile for Ed Ruscha, or an invention of the *non-site* by Robert Smithson. What is liberating in this understanding, is that the ideation of a medium does

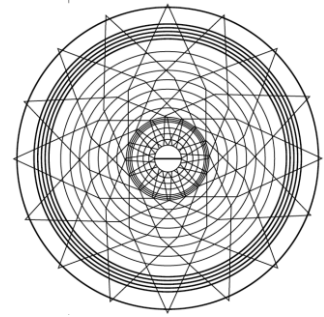
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<sup>2</sup> Joselit, D. (2009) Painting Beside Itself. October Magazine 130, Fall, 125–134.  
<https://moscowartmagazine.com/issue/105/article/2320>

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not belong exclusively to the artist – it is a common epistemological endeavor that might be shared by the artist, the theorist, the critic, and the attentive viewer (listener, participant etc.)

Notably, the medium is often articulated as a metaphor: the medium is the memory (Krauss, 2011, p. 3); the medium is the suspicion (Groys, 2012); the medium is the distribution of the sensible (Ranciere, 2011) (note how all these theorists, including Krauss, take an abstraction for a medium). This is not due to a theoretical whimsy but because the medium inherently represents a *transfer* (which is precisely what *metaphor* means in Greek). But what is crucial, we see the transfer of context onto the object, and material foundations onto methodological principles. On the other hand, the medium facilitates the transfer between what pertains to art and what does not directly relate to it (social phenomena, material facts, theories, and structures of feeling). In this sense, Duchamp's proto-conceptual gesture is an exemplary instance of transfer. Previously, in Clement Greenberg's view, the medium was the basis of art's autonomy<sup>3</sup> – now it simultaneously asserts its expansion to become a cluster of social facts, complicating Adorno's stance on art being autonomous as well as a social fact (Adorno, 1970/1998). The medium can be *automobile*, *lip sync*, *suspicion*, or *mutation*, serving as ways of transitioning and linking between different categories of experience, method, context, and established artistic forms.

However, it is not enough to merely discuss transcategorization, transitivity, metaphorical structures, and similar concepts. We need to ascertain what these structures are and what specific operational commentary they produce. Understanding the medium as metaphor helps to focus and narrow our search, compelling us to conceptualize specific, socially defined forms of transition.

### **Institutional habits, instituting practices**

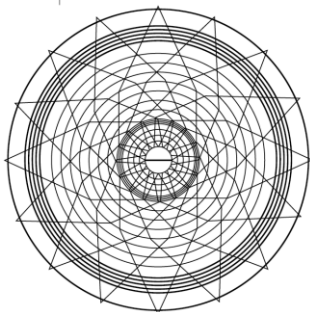
Reacting simultaneously to the explosion of various organizations and enterprises in the new capitalist Russia, the poverty of the artistic institutional landscape and *at the same time* emergence of several major institutions in Moscow, artists began to assume the role of *institutions* (often, it seems, for the sake of an attractive, ironic name, but more often genuinely reflecting new bureaucratic or corporate aesthetics or trying to configure a utopian institutional model<sup>4</sup>).

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<sup>3</sup> Greenberg, C. (1960). Modernist Painting.

[https://www.yorku.ca/yamlau/readings/greenberg\\_modernistPainting.pdf](https://www.yorku.ca/yamlau/readings/greenberg_modernistPainting.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Kononchuk, L. (2021). Parainstitucii i logika proteza [Parainstitutions and the Logics of Prosthetics]. Moscow Art Magazine, (117). <https://moscowartmagazine.com/issue/105/article/2320>



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One of the first such groups was founded as early as in 2000: ABC, or Art Business Consulting (Maxim Ilyukhin, Mikhail Kosolapov, and Natalya Struchkova – all of whom graduated from the Institute of Contemporary Art, or IPSI), who presented the artist to the public as a manager, an office worker, a clerk, and ironically staged the atmosphere of new corporate everyday life. Interest in institutions was also fueled by the liberalization of policies in 2008–2012, making the desire for civic participation and influence on urban politics more articulated. Especially since during these years Russian cultural institutions were set on a course of renewal, stimulated to improve the quality of exhibition work, activate cultural exchange, and strengthen international ties<sup>5</sup>. Cultural institutions, including art and non-art museums, were more willing than ever to host various urban and artistic initiatives. Predictably, criticism of “neoliberalized” institutional landscape became one of the major questions on the artistic agenda – not very much because Russia in the 2010s *was* a clear-cut neoliberal state but mostly since such criticism became ubiquitous and best-articulated across international art and theoretical platforms.

At the same time, there was a growing interest in the “old” institutions, that is, in the unrealized potential of early Soviet, revolutionary establishments, on the one hand, and (critique of) the more recent state policy appealing to late Stalinist rhetoric and imperial greatness, on the other. The eclecticism of institutional landscape, such as the combination of capitalist and socialist bureaucracy and language (with a whole variety of discourses within socialist heritage), formed fecund soil for artistic investigation.

Institutional reflexivity in Russia does not have a direct lineage to Conceptualism, however, a certain mixture of artistic traditions, international art trends alongside socio-political background produced a very similar effect. The new generation of artists working in that vein was closely tied to the Institute of Contemporary Art (IPSI), which for a long time gathered in Ilya Kabakov's studio. In the 1990s and early 2000s IPSI teachers and most students did not intentionally investigate Conceptualism, either Moscow or American or European, as a source for inspiration<sup>6</sup>; however, the presence of Kabakov's works – with their bitterly-ironic commentary on the Soviet life – have had its toll, with his influence more palpable in the 2010s. The school placed its emphasis not on technical skills or working with materials, but on the study of art theory and history, philosophy, and

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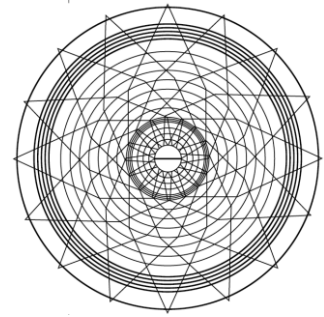
<sup>5</sup> According to the Federal Target Program “The Culture of Russia”, <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901959919>

<sup>6</sup> In a private conversation curator Victor Misiano phrased Conceptualism as “utterly unfashionable” in the 1990s. Artist Arseny Zhilyaev recalls how, while still living in Voronezh, he accidentally came across the works of Moscow Conceptualists and was completely captivated by them. When he came to study at the Institute of Contemporary Art (IPSI) in 2006, Conceptualists were still being dismissed as irrelevant (Interview to the author, July 28, 2023).

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the history of ideas. From their very beginning, the Institute was very much inclined to integrate artists into the international art scene by organizing their exhibitions abroad and helping them to enroll in the Academy of Art and Design in Valand, Sweden.

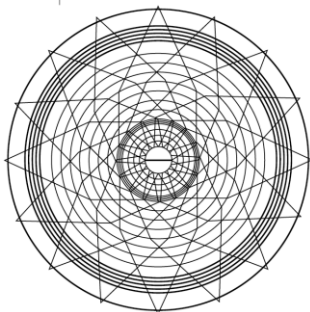
So, it comes as no surprise that in the first half–middle of the 2010s, it was primarily graduates of IPSI who worked most with the hot topic of all international biennales, that is, the archival turn as well as the explorations of different modernities of which the Soviet project was a crucial part. The artists investigated the Soviet past and its institutions: archives, museums, publishing houses. Alexandra Sukhareva explored World War II archives, particularly Leningrad blockade diaries, integrating that material into narratives built around Soviet underground mysticism and, for instance, making special library stalls (*Comb in the Grass*, 2016–ongoing). Mikhail Tolmachev managed to construct a parallel – highly critical – exhibition within the Museum of Armed Forces, designing new display stands for the archival materials he had found, which primarily highlighted the specificity of the military gaze (*Beyond Visual Range*, 2014). Kirill Gluschenko, by representing a fictional publishing house "Gluschenkoizdat", researched the architecture of Brezhnevian Stagnation. One of his projects was dedicated to the Venets hotel in Ulyanovsk, constructed to celebrate 100 years since Lenin's birth. He published a book on it and reconstructed one of its best rooms (*The Venets Hotel. Welcome to the Real*, 2017). Maksim Spivakov dissected Soviet design and its forgotten experimental institutes (*Marks*, 2013)<sup>7</sup>.

The *(para-)institution and its habits* works as a medium in all these projects. In this sense, it is not surprising that many artists, especially those mentioned in the previous paragraph, are interested in the exhibition itself – as a form of expression. Arseny Zhilyaev uses the *museum* as an artistic medium, phrasing and problematizing it as such (Zhilyaev, 2015, p. 56). Not just any museum, but one playing a specific role: of a space for mastering time and immortality. Zhilyaev refers to the history of Soviet avant-garde museology and Russian Cosmism, employing such an articulation of the past, present, and future that could produce a new historical trajectory. For instance, Zhilyaev implements an original variation on the Soviet exhibitions of the late 1920s and early 1930s, namely, the unrealized, revolutionary project – the total installation of the curator Alexey Fedorov-Davydov *Experimental Complex Marxist Exhibition*, which represented the history of art from the class struggle perspective (*Museum of Proletarian Culture*,

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<sup>7</sup> The work was part of a very tongue-in-cheek project within the framework of the Bergen Assembly curated by Ekaterina Degot and David Riff, named after a famous fantastical and whimsical book by Soviet writers, brothers Strugatsky, "Mondays Begins on Saturday". The project spread across several buildings in Bergen, each of which had a name of a made-up institution. Spivakov's work was shown in KODE 1 which was called "The Institute of Imaginary States".





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2012). His later projects became significantly more ironic, with a stronger speculative side<sup>8</sup>, yet institutional habits continue to dictate the logic of his entire practice. In one of his projects, an AI from a distant future – personalized in “scientist Robert Pasternak” – returns to Earth to find material evidence of his origin. He discovers, or rather, institutes and museifies these artifacts with a gesture quite understandable within the institutionalized Western culture: drawing a timeline of technological development and placing on pedestals the fragments of his material proto-forms – satellites, rockets, spaceships – in their blinding whiteness, reminiscent of the equally deceptive, historically inaccurate whiteness of ancient statues (*The Return*, Winzavod Contemporary Art Center, 2018).

The Agency of Singular Investigations, a duo made up of artist and IPSI director Stanislav Shuripa and artist Anna Titova (2014–ongoing), investigates (per)versions of narratives and images that form contemporary informational space, including conspiracy theories as well as those that were part of para-scientific discourses of numerous Soviet research institutes. They explore them performatively through the fictional activities of their own para-institution. Their exhibition strategies mimic the operations of a small business with all the attendant features – information stands, caps with logos, and other merchandise; or appropriate the classic museum display (showcases, pedestals, timeline), where they place the products of their secretive activities. One of their exhibitions was entirely dedicated to the whimsical narrative, supported by a timeline, stipulating that many significant historical events were driven by the activities of a secret organization whose members communicated with each other through the language of flowers (*Flower Power. Archive*, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, 2018). The photo collage technique they used in the project was painfully *institutional*: in USSR there was a tradition of erasing enemies from documentary photos. Shuripa and Titova have maintained a conspiratorial tone in interviews<sup>9</sup>, playing the role of “agents,” which is entirely understandable: they are primarily interested in the language itself – written, spoken, visual, administrative – of the Soviet and post-Soviet bureaucratic institutions (including research institutes and museums), its similarities and discrepancies with contemporary corporate speak as well as with delusional media narratives – the possibilities and limitations of this language, expressed in the “found” archive, collages, schemes, and constructed artifacts.

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<sup>8</sup> Such as, for example, M.I.R. Polite Guests from the Future, 2014 in Kadist Art Foundation, Paris. It showed an imaginary museum of Russian history in future. Zhilyaev dwelled on the fact that the authorities might appropriate the ideology of Cosmism as well as radical Moscow actionism.

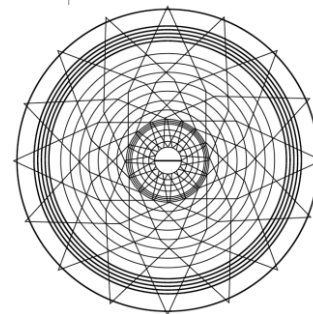
<sup>9</sup> Shestakova, S. (2015) Anna Titova i Stanislav Shuripa: “Byurokraty sozdayut real'nost', prosto nazyvaya veshchi” [Anna Titova and Stanislav Shuripa: “Bureaucrats create reality just by naming things.”] Aroundart. <http://aroundart.org/2015/12/09/titova-shuripa-interview/>

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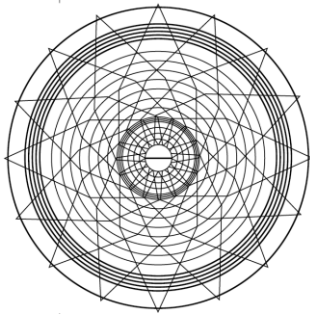
Another duo, Laboratory of Urban Fauna (Alexey Buldakov, Anastasia Potemkina) approached the city as a space of coexistence for various marginal creatures – primarily cats and pigeons, but also invasive plants (like nettle, burdock, and hogweed). In this sense, they represented more of a para- than an institution, but their artistic gestures often served as a distorted mirror to the constitutive logic of Moscow's urban planning and ironic twist to the new, institutionally supported focus on the ecological agenda. Buldakov and Potemkina conducted field trips to collect samples of weed flora, placing them in post-minimalist shelves, presenting real and speculative archives, creating video and audio installations. The architectural “minimalism” of Laboratory artworks seemed self-critical and projected awareness of modernist institutional conventions that suddenly seemed unavoidable.

In all these projects, the institution as the medium served as a formative, metaphorical structure in the sense that it provides a range of practices, methodologies, and the image of the result, connected to specific institutional customs, their critique, speculative parody, and the form of their presentation. *Institution*, be it a museum, a publishing house, a secret agency; or its function – forming narratives, creating spaces of inclusion or of exclusion – works as a transcategorializing metaphor that enables artists to dive into and connect the whole variety of knowledge areas and practices, methods and speculations associated with it. As mentioned above, most artists interested in such a medium taught or studied at IPSI and at a certain point actively began to engage with the Conceptualist tradition with its focus on institutional and infrastructural foundations, but mostly mediated through Western postconceptualism. Their presentational repertoire – from the quite familiar Conceptualist toolkit – included schemes, graphs, the display itself, as well as the archive, real or fictional.

Certainly, this practice was not limited to IPSI graduates. For example, in Nizhny Novgorod, where a rich, vibrant environment also developed in the 2010s, and the processes of institutionalization were particularly active, artists could also take on the instituting function. For instance, the project *Garden named after* (2019–ongoing) by Artem Filatov and Alexey Korsi is made of an installation in the inner courtyard of a private crematorium and a specially designed audio speaker emitting a chant listing human organs in Latin. The plants in flowerbeds can be dedicated by anyone to their closest ones. According to Korsi, the Garden is a place where a new, healing ritual, new mechanism of dealing with trauma is created, but the Sublime is dis-located from the Heavens to the body and its organs<sup>10</sup>. The institutional environment and its customs are contextually transformed by the artists, acquiring a more complex character; the private

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<sup>10</sup> Streltsova, A. (2020). “Sad im.” Artyoma Filatova i Alekseya Korsi [“Garden named after” by Artem Filatov and Alexey Korsi]. *Iskusstvo*. <https://iskusstvo-info.ru/sad-im-artyoma-filatova-i-alekseya-korsi/>



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crematorium becomes a space of grief, terror, but also of contemplation, relaxation, and participation, obviously not without insidious thoughts of finitude, spurred by the contrast of the elevated melody of the chant and the scientific nature of the spoken text.

The medium as a system of transfers ensured the transitions between the *institution* as a Conceptualist focus and the system of rules – and the newly organized reality: new and old urban spaces, public self-presentation of museums, rhetoric of conspiracy broadcast on central television channels, archives primarily testifying to their own blind spots, neoliberal institutions and undying relics of Soviet bureaucracy. The state institutional system, which serves as the context for the activities of the artists, is embodied in various forms: the Soviet avant-garde museum-exhibition program; closed Soviet research institutes with their almost esoteric activities provoking conspiracy theories; Stalin's agricultural plan, or the modern garden-park program.

The metaphorical structure of transferring context into method and form of presentation works here both critically and epistemologically: the context turns into a resource from which artists pull out, mirroring, flipping, and transforming, the necessary *habits* to offer a humorous or a quite serious version, an interpretation of a separate dis/organized part of the world order, merging it with a contrasting approach or narrative. It is also not surprising that artists, making projects in independent spaces, often willingly cooperated with large art institutions, even if they felt a certain skepticism towards them – both because research required financial and organizational resources, and because the institution itself was their medium, that is, a field for activity and imagination, an object of research and criticism, a repertoire of necessary methodologies<sup>11</sup>. Large and medium-sized art institutions, themselves in search of their identity in the changing world, also readily invited such para-institutions.

### Conclusion

The exploration of the institution as a medium in contemporary Russian art underscores the continued relevance of the medium as a conceptual tool, even in the face of theories that emphasize the post-medium condition. By examining the works of artists who engage with institutional structures as both subject and medium, this article has demonstrated how the medium, re-conceptualized as an 'abstract cognitive experience' and metaphorical structure, facilitates the transition between different categories of knowledge, practice, and experience.

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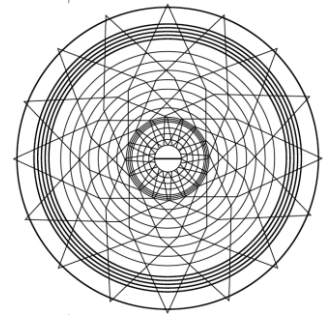
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## [Scientific Articles]

Kononchuk L.

*Institution as a Medium*

*in Contemporary Russian Art*



The artists and collectives discussed in this article – many of whom were associated with the Institute of Contemporary Art (IPSI) in Moscow – exemplify the ways in which contemporary Russian art engages with the institution as a medium. By adopting and subverting the bureaucratic and corporate aesthetics that have come to dominate the cultural landscape in contemporary Russia, these artists use the institution as a site of artistic experimentation and critique. Their works revealed how the medium, as a metaphorical structure, could be employed to navigate and reconfigure complex institutional landscapes of their respective time, offering new insights into the intersections of art, politics, and society.

One of the key insights of this article is the recognition that the medium, understood as a metaphorical structure, encompasses a broader range of practices, methodologies, and conceptual frameworks that enable artists to engage with and critique the social, political, and institutional contexts in which they operate. This understanding of the medium as a dynamic and fluid entity aligns with Peter Osborne's concept of transcategoriality, which emphasizes the movement of contemporary art across different 'categories' of experience and knowledge – habits, activities, roles, genres, methods, rituals, and aesthetics.

The analysis of the medium as a metaphorical structure also highlights the ways in which contemporary art can generate new meanings through the interaction of different concepts, as articulated by Clive Cazeaux. By conceptualizing the medium as a cognitive experience that facilitates the transition between different categories, this article strived to show how the medium can function as a tool for both artists and viewers to navigate the complexities of contemporary life. This approach not only reaffirms the relevance of the medium in contemporary art but also suggests new possibilities for its application in the critique and reimagination of institutional structures.

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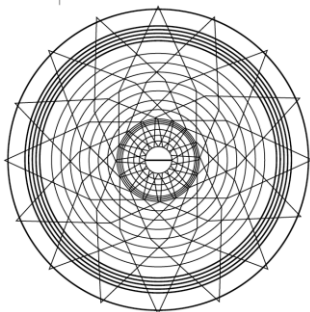
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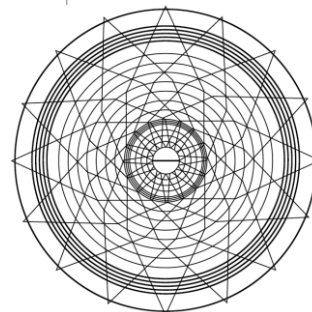
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## ИНСТИТУЦИЯ КАК МЕДИУМ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ РОССИЙСКОМ ИСКУССТВЕ

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### **Аннотация:**

В статье рассматриваются российские художественные проекты, которые используют институцию в качестве медиума. Понятие “медиум” концептуализируется как метафорическая (транскатегориальная) структура, что позволяет проанализировать использование институциональных рамок как темы, системы правил и инструмента исследования и критики художниками постсоветской культуры.

**Ключевые слова:** постсоветское искусство, российское искусство, художественный медиум, постмедиальность, транскатегориальность, метафора, институциональная критика