

V. SOROKIN'S NOVEL "MARINA'S THIRTIETH LOVE" IN THE COORDINATES OF SOC-ART AND SOCIAL REALISM

^aEKATERINA ZHILENE, ^bOLGA BOGDANOVA, ^cDMITRY BOGATYREV, ^dLUDMILA BOGATYREVA

^aSt. Petersburg State Institute of Culture,
St. Petersburg, Dvortsovaya emb., 2, Russian Federation
^{b,c,d}F.M. Dostoevsky Russian Christian Humanitarian Academy,
St. Petersburg, Fontanka River Emb., 15, Russian Federation
email: ^aebibergan@yandex.ru, ^bolgabogdanova03@mail.ru,
^crector@rhga.ru, ^dbowlaka@mail.ru

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Abstract: The purpose of the study is to analyze V. Sorokin's conceptualist novel "Marina's Thirtieth Love" (1984), to identify the features of its genre-structural constructions, to trace the connection of genre features of the "Soviet novel" with the tradition of Socialist realism literature and its deconstructions in the practice of conceptual art of the 1970s–80s. The paper identifies the target settings of the conceptual novelist Sorokin to overcome the principles and techniques of Soviet socialist realist art and to establish discrediting perspectives of perception of social and ideologically stable "concepts" that developed in the post-October period. It is established that the imitation base in Sorokin's "Marina's Thirtieth Love" was the so-called "production novel", a thematic subspecies of prose of socialist realism.

Keywords: Vladimir Sorokin; novel "Marina's Thirtieth Love"; conceptualist strategies; production novel; apologetics and debunking; text and pretext.

1 Introduction

Vladimir Sorokin is one of the most prominent figures in Russian literature at the turn of the XX and XXI centuries, winner of many Russian and international prizes. The prose writer's name consistently occupies the top positions in the international ranking of writers, his books represent Russian literature at the most prestigious international book fairs and salons. Sorokin's novels are popular among readers, however, it can be assumed that Sorokin's text is not always understandable, does not immediately reveal the mechanism of plot construction and the embodiment of compositional form, therefore it becomes necessary to trace the origins and strategies of complex narrative moves of the writer's prose. The novel "Marina's Thirtieth Love" can be chosen as an "exemplary" Sorokin text, directly related to overcoming tradition and forming a new poetics.

2 Literature Review

Sorokin's novel "Marina's Thirtieth Love", created in 1982–1984 and first published in Russian in 1995 (it was published in French in Paris in 1987), has already been subjected to critical reflection and certain aspects of its analysis have been proposed by researchers. Mentioned in general reviews by M. Lipovetsky (Lipovetsky 1997), N. Leiderman (Leiderman 2003), M. Epstein (Epstein 2000), V. Kuritsyn (Kuritsyn 2001), I. Skoropanova (Skoropanova 2002), G. Nefagina (Nefagina 2005), M. Abasheva (Abasheva 2012) et al., the novel "Marina's Thirtieth Love" attracted the special attention of some domestic and foreign researchers (see: Dobrenko 1998, 2004; Kostyrko 1992; Hansen-Leve 1997; Sosland 2009; Fomenko 2010; Engstrom 2010; Novokhatsky 2010; Smirnova 2012; Genis 2018; Leitner 2018; Uffel'mann 2022), each of whom chose a specific angle of analysis (obscene vocabulary, the image of a beautiful lady, intertextual layers, discursive practices, Heidegger's philosophy, Lacan's psychoanalysis, pornographic motives, connection with the techniques of social art, etc.). Meanwhile, the general structure of the novel and its genre nature were ignored by critics. That is why the task of our research is to discover the origins of the genre-compositional form of Sorokin's novel, and not so much verbal as visual pretexts that mediated the structural strategies of a single novel whole, and analyze their modification within the framework of conceptual poetics.

Connoisseurs of the biography of Vladimir Sorokin are well aware that the early period of the future prose writer's work was associated not with literature, but with painting. In the mid-1970s, Sorokin worked as a book graphic artist, designed and illustrated books and magazines, participated in painting exhibitions, joined the avant-garde artists, the group of Moscow pictorial conceptualism led by I. Kabakov and V. Pivovarov with the participation of E. Bulatov, D. Prigov and others, was close to the artists of social art V. Komar and A. Melamid. It was the conceptual artists that Sorokin had in mind when he admitted in an interview that he was more influenced by "fine art than literature" (Sorokin 1998), and that "from the very beginning <he> considered himself an artist" (Sorokin 1992, 119), and not a writer.

During the heyday of conceptualism and social art, it was the pictorial practices of artists that revealed to Sorokin that "the Soviet world has its own unique aesthetics, which is very interesting to develop, which lives according to its own laws and is absolutely equal in the chain of the cultural process" (Sorokin 1992, 119). The aesthetics of socialist realism becomes the "foundation stone" of conceptualism and social art painting and, as a result, the (pseudo-)cult aesthetics of Sorokin the writer – it undergoes deconstruction and reinterpretation when, within the framework of Sorokin's literary project, "typical socialist realist consciousness is transferred to new planes" (Novokhatsky 2010). In this regard, the novel "Marina's Thirtieth Love" undoubtedly correlates more than other Sorokin texts with the aesthetics of socialist realism and the practice of Soviet prose (Kazarina 2018, 132–138).

As for the formal features of the novel "Marina's Thirtieth Love", the competent and respected critic A. Genis considered the novels love (female) and production to be the genre forerunner of the Sorokin text under consideration (Genis 2018). According to the critic's observations, if the first part of "Marina's Thirtieth Love" embodies the sum of the love motives of the so-called female novel (29 lesbian hobbies of the main character), then the second part is strictly focused on the labor, factory theme: "a love affair becomes a production one" (Genis 2018).

The critic's position seems quite convincing, it seems that this is how the novel narrative is built and it is these themes that replace one another: love and production. However, if we look at the genre form from a different angle, it turns out that such a representation can be refined. If we are talking about the typology of Sorokin's novel, then the literary model of "Marina's Thirtieth Love" should be recognized not as a love (female) novel, not an education novel (as suggested by A. Leitner (Leitner 2018)), not a "dissident" novel (according to M. Smirnova (Smirnova 2012, 227–228)), but the novel is a production novel, exclusively a production novel. Let's try to justify this judgment by recalling that Sorokin's literary game is completely conceptual — it is the conceptology of "Marina's Thirtieth Love" that we have to reveal.

3 The conceptual image of a heroine

Sorokin's novel tells about the life of a young heroine named Marina (Alekseeva), who in the first part of the two-part narrative works as a music teacher at the House of Culture, teaches children of proletarians to play the piano, and raises "the general musical level of the workers of the famous factory" (Sorokin 2002, 10). However, this part of the heroine's life, "a thirty-year-old woman with large, slightly slanted brown eyes", is only a superficial, external, socially mimic layer. Her real life, non-public and private, but real and essential, is the profession of a prostitute, a modern Venus (Sorokin 2002, 12, 53, 101), which ensures its existence by entering into sexual relations with various men (creative aristocrats, "aging noble offspring", musicians and pianists, dissidents and/or Soviet party

functionaries, etc.). A. Genis is right – indeed, the entire conditional first part of the novel is “female”, “love” and is connected with Marina’s sexual partnership. But this is exactly Sorokin’s conceptual move: from our point of view, the writer brings to the fore not the actual love theme, but the production activity of the heroine, professional prostitution. Sorokin describes in detail and consciously the work of the heroine Marina – where and how she works, getting in touch with men who provide her with money, things, entertainment or products. Communication with various partners, according to Sorokin, is a special kind of production activity of the thirty-year-old heroine. If as a music teacher she is (by her own admission) “professionally unsuitable” (Sorokin 2002, 22), then as a paid “lover on call” she is a professional (according to the hero Valentine, she has a “profession” (Sorokin 2002, 10)).

The episode that opens the narrative in “Marina’s Thirtieth Love” seems excessively detailed and long in the general plot of the novel, it emphatically reproduces the scene of Marina’s intercourse and Valentin who invited her “to work”. One might think that Sorokin describes exclusively the love joys of the characters (which is partly true). However, it is even more important for a conceptual novelist to present Marina’s production area in detail, to focus on her professional experience and skills. Within the framework of the general architectonics of the novel, in relation to the second conditional part of the narrative, where the heroine will be decisively and radically transformed and where the author will give a detailed description of her enthusiastic participation in the factory life of the Small-sized Compressor Plant, Sorokin establishes compositional balance, structural proportionality. With an excessively long and detailed description of the sexual intercourse of Marina and Valentin in the first part, the author equalizes the importance of various types of “production” activities of the central heroine of the novel.

Sorokin travests the genre features of the Soviet production novel, overturns its problematic-thematic angles, translates the principles and techniques of socialist realist narrative into unexpected and absurd spheres. By equalizing the two fields of professional activity of the title character, Sorokin not declaratively, not journalistically, but figuratively and artistically explicates the one-sided nature of traditional socialist realist genre education, demonstrates the thematic emasculation of the Soviet type of novel, fundamentally and programmatically devoid of erotic and naturalistic components.

Sex and eroticism, even “vague erotic overtones” (Sorokin 2002, 12) were not and could not become the subject of a Soviet production novel due to the taboo nature of the topic in the Soviet state (especially considering that the time of Sorokin’s narrative is the early 1980s, the period of the reign of the politically literate and morally stable Secretary General Yu. Andropov leading his family tree from the depths of the State Security Committee). But Sorokin makes professional sex the object of a new “produced” text, writing out in detail the scene of Marina’s sexual intercourse or discussing the penis size of one of the characters on the pages of the novel (Sorokin 2002, 15). By addressing such realities, the conceptual writer transforms and ironically “edits” the genre features and specific features of the socialist realist production novel, depriving the factory theme of the right of exclusivity and dominance. Paid professional love is recognized by Sorokin, the author, as a worthy topic of the latest production novel.

4 The soc-art origins of Sorokin’s genre form

The conceptual and conceptualist “shifter” comes into force within the framework of the narrative system of Sorokin’s novel, forcing one to think about the roots and recall the soc-artistic paintings-posters by V. Komar and A. Melamid, when the heroes of labor who deserve a mosaic profile or recreation on the relief of the award mark turn out to be not only ordinary, but not heroic people, but also cartoon characters (see: Rubinstein 1991; Pozdnyakov 2003; Bogdanova 2005). Sorokin expropriates the pictorial strategy of soc-artists and masterfully and wittily

transfers their moves to the field of literary text, transforming the visual into the verbal. Within the framework of a literary text, the writer demonstrates the techniques and principles of pictorial soc-art, when the external apologetics of Sovietism and socialist realism turns into their simultaneous debunking and annihilation. Sorokin adopts the artistic experience of Komar and Melamid, therefore M. Lipovetsky is right when he believes that “the only soc-art prose writer in the full sense is Vladimir Sorokin” (Lipovetsky 1997, 252).

In “Marina’s Thirtieth Love”, Sorokin, on the external level, consistently builds a novel in the tradition of the usual socialist realist narrative, but brings to the text details, signs and qualities that the Soviet novel was deprived of. So, if in Soviet prose the hero traditionally became a Soviet man, completely immersed in the traditionally Soviet atmosphere (according to the well-known formula: a traditional hero in traditional circumstances, with clarification: a Soviet hero in Soviet circumstances), whose environment was obviously Soviet, then Sorokin intentionally every object and thing (for example, in the apartment of the hero Valentin) accompanies by the epithet of exclusivity, foreignness, non-Sovietism: a Persian carpet, an Arab sheet, an Indian bedside table, a Viennese chair, a Cuban sugar, a Japanese tape recorder, an Estonian trinket, a Magyar bottle (Sorokin 2002, 11, 12, 15, 17, 61, 86, 100, 113) and others. Outwardly, Sorokin paints familiar Soviet life with signs-epithets of the non-Soviet world, features of deliberately emphasized foreignness, explicating, on the one hand, signs of a financially secure way of life and mentality of the Soviet establishment, overstocked at special bases (or in stores like the famous Eliseevsky or currency “Birch”). On the other hand, it actualizes the features of the communal life of representatives of dissidence, which are directly and firmly connected with the mechanisms of farce and speculation in foreign goods. Even a spacious knitted sweater with a wide neck (Sorokin 2002, 10, 11, 16, 92, 112, 125) in imitation of the photographic E. Hemingway, the idol of the intellectual youth of the 1970s, it becomes an atypical feature of the characterization of the novel heroine and the quasi-Soviet novel itself.

In Sorokin’s text, the external outline of the socialist realist novel narrative is apparently preserved and carefully imitated, but its semantic content is radically and conceptually changed, intentionally and fundamentally deformed.

5 Tsvetaeva’s precedent name and its function in the novel

The conditional first part of the novel “Marina’s Thirtieth Love” is the most interesting in terms of imagery, content and associative motivation. In it, especially in connection with the accentuation of the theme of lesbian love, the image of the heroine, or rather her name, Marina Ivanovna, attracts special attention. In the mind of an informed recipient, in connection with such a “non-random” choice of a patronymic name, the silhouette of Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva is undoubtedly contoured in the space of the novel. Critics drew attention to this, and some of them even seriously immersed themselves in the textual identification of the intertextual connections between Sorokin’s novel and Tsvetaeva’s poetry (and epistolary), establishing visible intersections in the course of comparisons.

So, M. Smirnova finds that Sorokin’s novel contains numerous references not only to creativity, but also to Tsvetaeva’s biography. According to the critic, “the names of the heroes serve as a signal <...> the full name of the heroine of V. Sorokin is Marina Ivanovna (compare: Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva), and the name of the first real man in Marina’s life is Sergey (like Sergey Efron)” (Smirnova 2012, 228). Specialist M. Smirnova cites other judgments and facts – introduces the names of Tsvetaeva’s first lesbian love, Maria Bashkirtseva (Maria, like Marina in the text) and her friend, the poetess Sofia Parnok (like Marina of Sorokin, the “real” last love) (Smirnova 2012, 229).

The question arises: why does Sorokin play so freely with the name and facts of the biography of the talented poetess Marina Tsvetaeva in the text of a conceptual (conceptualist) novel?

According to M. Smirnova, this is how Sorokin “solves one of the problems of gender: the transmission of a female voice by a male writer” (Smirnova 2012, 229). The critic’s considerations are well-founded, but, in our opinion, they should be recognized as excessively local. It can be assumed that Sorokin would have the talent to speak not just in a female voice, but in the voice of a “Lolita-child” or a “little ballet dancer” (the heroines of D. Prigov’s lyrics, Sorokin’s older friend and mentor in conceptual practices). Already in the early novel “The Queue”, “the novel of direct speech” (Dobrenko 2004, 34), Sorokin demonstrated a vivid gift of speech and language stylization – the voices of his characters, male and female, deprived of figurative status, are distinguishable and individualized (and in gender terms too), endowed with expressive signs of personalization. In addition, in the second conditional part of the novel “Marina’s Thirtieth Love”, the “gender problem” disappears altogether (as discussed below). That is, it is hardly acceptable to agree with the critic that Tsvetaeva’s name (not poetry) was needed by the prose writer to solve the “gender problem”. Rather, the matter is different.

Sorokin, a conceptualist, needed a non-Soviet, “forbidden” topic to implement his conceptualist project – and access to it was provided by non-public facts of M. Tsvetaeva’s private life: a fairly open and quite frank allusion projected on the lesbian hobbies of the poetess. In our opinion, Sorokin conceptually “overthrows” the former Soviet prohibitions and puts new ideals, norms and principles on a pedestal. The point is that the name of Marina Tsvetaeva, known today to any student (her poetry is included in the school program), was under an unofficial ban in the post-war period of the mid-twentieth century. The education authorities “tacitly” avoided the question of acquaintance with Tsvetaeva’s poetry and its study (as well as the works of S. Yesenin or F. Dostoevsky, and a little later A. Solzhenitsyn).

At the sub-plot level, Tsvetaeva turns out to be a significant background character who creates the atmosphere of the first part of the novel. Real Tsvetaeva is the antagonist of the leading character of the second conditional part of the novel “secretary of the party committee of the plant” (Sorokin 2002, 155) Sergei Nikolaevich Rummyantsev. Tsvetaeva’s image marks the opposite and antithetical pole of Sorokin’s narrative: a decadent Silver Age against an optimistic and confident socialism looking to the future. The off-stage image of sapphic Tsvetaeva, a lesbian poet, compositionally balances the image of the factory party organizer Rummyantsev, a Soviet heterosexual man with the correct sexual orientation.

6 The two-faced novelistic image of Solzhenitsyn

Note that the name and textual outline of Alexander Solzhenitsyn also do not directly appear in the text of Sorokin’s novel, but, as in the case of Tsvetaeva, this outline is clearly and projectively outlined. The photo of the mentally mythologized lover of the heroine Marina, hanging on the wall of her room (“hanging over the table”), recognizably recreates the portrait of the author of the “brand new volume of the recently released Gulag” (Sorokin 2002, 131). “Broad-browed, with narrow cheeks framed by a skipper’s beard, a small, tightly compressed mouth and fiercely blue eyes”, with a characteristic portrait “a barely noticeable vertical scar on a high wrinkled forehead” (Sorokin 2002, 99).

Next to the guessed outline of M. Tsvetaeva, the shadow of A. Solzhenitsyn, who served time in the Kazakh camps, becomes another symbol of new industrial relations – the professionalism of not only the Soviet dissident heteroera, but also the selfless hard work of a prisoner of the Soviet Gulag. The camp motif allows us to emphasize once again that Sorokin does not imitate the features of a “female” novel (according to A. Genis), and a new “production” novel mixing the features of the erotic decadent text of the early twentieth century and genre variants of the camp theme, taboo in Soviet literature (“Kolyma Stories” by V. Shalamov, “Faithful Ruslan” by G. Vladimov, “Black Stones” by A. Zhigulin, “Faculty of Unnecessary Things” by Yu. Dombrovsky, etc.).

Solzhenitsyn is an image, he is an imaginary and coveted lover of the heroine Marina. You can add a dreamlike one, since all dialogues with Marina’s mental lover take place in a dream. However, Sorokin does not create an idol for the heroine. Unlike Tsvetaeva, the image of an unpersonalized Solzhenitsyn is ambivalent and ambiguous (and largely ironic).

On the one hand, the author of “The Gulag Archipelago” is the coveted lover of the lesbian heroine and dissident Marina: “She often imagined this acquaintance, either in the past, before her expulsion, or in the future, after that very meeting in Sheremeteyvo-Vnukovo...” (Sorokin 2002, 99).

On the other hand, Solzhenitsyn is superreal. He is not a person, but a mystical Russia: “Marina is looking more closely... yes, this is Russia! The Ural Ridge reared up, the deep line of the mind flashed with the Volga, the line of Life with the Yenisei, Fate with Lena, the Caucasus Mountains rose below...” (Sorokin 2002, 121).

The scale of Solzhenitsyn’s image in the novel is prohibitively large, huge, epic. Sorokin seems to be playing with the role (concept) of a writer-prophet, intending not just to speak on behalf of Russia, but to be it, he himself is Russia (almost according to D. Andreev — “heavenly Russia”, mentioned in the text of the novel). The instructions of the mystical Solzhenitsyn to Marina reflect the speech and language style of an omniscient prophet who is able to clearly foresee the future and offer the only true instructions that require precise execution (see “How to equip Russia”, 1990). Solzhenitsyn in Sorokin’s novel is a superman of the “superpower” (Sorokin 2002, 167), although on a different level it is an image both travestied and ironic.

It is noteworthy that the portrait of Marina’s mystical lover is similar to the portrait of party organizer Sergei Rummyantsev from the second part of the novel to the last physiognomic line. “Marina was more and more amazed by the similarity. “Yeah. This is how he <Solzhenitsyn> came from exile thirty years ago... this is how ‘Denisych’ wrote...” (Sorokin 2002, 155).

The Solzhenitsyn image appears to be on the border of two spaces, but he does not localize this border, does not draw it, but, on the contrary, blurs and opens it, thereby marking the diffuse achievability of immersion in any of the border toposes (conditionally ideals of the first or second reality). At the same time, if the dominant conceptual principle of soc-art is the total and absolute inversion of the poles, the replacement of plus with minus, then Sorokin leads to the idea that the ideal vector of movement to the right can easily turn into a roll to the left, the forward direction can be replaced by a backward movement, the top will take the position of the bottom and vice versa. “It doesn’t matter” in Sorokin’s novel (Sorokin 2002, 133). The “reverse principle” of pictorial soc-art is complemented by the writer’s lax principle of Brownian motion, its disorder and chaotic nature, the permissibility of a random change of the desired “religions”.

Solzhenitsyn in Sorokin is like a two-faced Janus. In the structure of the novel narrative, he turns out to be an “intermediate”, bipolar image, a bridge from Tsvetaeva to Rummyantsev, from Marina the dissident to Marina the machine operator. From the image of a dream lover, Solzhenitsyn in Sorokin’s narration easily transforms into the image of a proletarian party organizer, a heterosexual lover and a production mentor, adopting and developing the style of the prophetic speech of the author of the “Gulag Archipelago” Rummyantsev: “I am speaking to you on behalf of all the people” (Sorokin 2002, 163).

There are no authorities or forbidden spheres for Sorokin, the previous literature is the sphere of a total game devoid of the author’s axiology. “I have never felt anything like what a Russian writer feels, I have no responsibility for Russian spirituality, nor for the Russian people, nor for the future of Russia. I have only a responsibility to myself for my texts” (Sorokin 1994, 40). The ethical component is conceptually outside the scope of the aesthetics of “Marina’s Thirtieth Love”.

7 Soc-art narrative scrapping

The researchers noticed that Sorokin's novel "Marina's Thirtieth Love" almost mathematically precisely splits into two conditional parts – out of 58 unnumbered chapters, after the 30th, Sorokin's characteristic method of "breaking the narrative" comes into force (Erofeev 1996, 5). According to V. Rudnev, there is a soc-art "shifter": "At first there is an ordinary, slightly excessively juicy parody soc-art text: a narrative about hunting, a Komsomol meeting, a meeting of the party committee – but suddenly, quite unexpectedly and unmotivated, a pragmatic breakthrough occurs into something terrible, which, according to Sorokin, is the reality" (Rudnev 1999, 138).

The critic P. Weil clarifies that the techniques used by Sorokin "are not reducible <...> to soc-art" (Weil 2012, 167). And it really is. Conceptualist painters I. Kabakov, V. Pivovarov, E. Bulatov also used partially similar techniques. Thus, Kabakov's paintings often have two equal terms separated on a plane: for example, a landscape is depicted on half of the canvas, and its verbal (literal) description is given on the other (see: Rubinstein 1991; Bogdanova 2005). In the same strategy, the well-known "two-part" works of Bulatov were performed: "Sky – Sea", "Black Wind – White Snow", etc. The plane of Bulatov's conceptualist painting is clearly divided into two parts, outwardly correlating with each other, but ironically and conceptually opposed ("Horizon") upon careful examination. Authoritatively important for the formation of Sorokin, the pictorial practices of conceptual artists turn out to be an exemplary visual pretext (in fact, a metatext) for expropriation and its introduction into the space of literary (written) text. It is no coincidence that the quoted image of Bulatov's "Sky – Sea" flashes in the delusional dream of the heroine Marina ("boundless sky-sea" (Sorokin 2002, 171)).

In "Marina's Thirtieth Love", Sorokin's "scrapping of the narrative" is motivated by the lesbian heroine Marina's orgasm with a man. "An orgasm, and even what an orgasm – unprecedented in strength and duration" (Sorokin 2002, 172) to the beat of the Kremlin chimes sounding from the radio, and the anthem of the USSR. "Marina feels the joy that she has lacked all her life" (Sorokin 2002, 173). The scrapping of the narrative marks the awakening of the civil and political maturity of a Soviet man in the egocentric dissident heroine, the birth and formation of an exemplary collectivist personality of a Soviet woman worker.

A former dissident, "newborn" Marina (who has just celebrated her thirtieth birthday) burns bridges behind her (metaphor), or rather burns a bag with more recent sacred shrines: "The Bible, Chukovskaya, Gulag, everything tumbled open, flashing photos and lines <...> the flame engulfed them" (Sorokin 2002, 179). Acquaintance with the production workshops of the plant awakens the previously unfamiliar delight of the heroine: "Marina watched, forgetting about everything in the world. <...> Something very important was happening in front of her, she felt it with her whole being <...> with her heart" (Sorokin 2002, 189). In the text of Sorokin's novel, the "decadent" motifs of the Silver Age give way to the stylistics of Soviet cinema (according to the prose writer, who seriously influenced him), and the novel's narrative is colored by the optimistically brisk dialect of factory machine workers, clearly copied (conceptually projected) from the Chulyukinsky film "Girls" (1962), and the spring landscape creates the dominant of the surrounding natural atmosphere, clearly borrowed from the Khutsievsky film "Spring on Zarechnaya Street" (1956). "Sublimation of erotic energy into mechanical energy", as proposed to consider this process of rebirth critics A. Genis [Genis 2018], E. Dobrenko [Dobrenko 2004], etc., is not happening. In the conceptualist Sorokin text, the heroine becomes truly – typologically – different.

8 The rebirth of the "newborn" heroine

The stamps of Soviet prose and Soviet cinema powerfully permeate the text of the second part of the novel. "An elderly worker with a big white mustache was sitting next to Marina.

<...> Marina liked his strong working hands, calm intelligent eyes and the same calm face with regular facial features..." (Sorokin 2002, 194). Sorokin does not mask the impression of the heroine: "He somewhat resembled one actor who played personnel workers in many Soviet films" (Sorokin 2002, 194). The appearance, demeanor, and speech of factory (= Soviet) characters are saturated with recognizable formulas of Soviet art, whether it is the characterological replica of party member hero Davydov from M. Sholokhov's "Raised Virgin Land" ("Fact!") or the human ("with a human face") speech formula of addressing the heroine and her new acquaintances – "daughter", "girlfriend", "girls" (Sorokin 2002, 194, 195, 207, 213, 214 and others).

The realities of Marina's private apartment in the first part of the novel are decisively replaced by the signs of dorm life ("A bathtub is not our way. Whether it's a shower"). Personal love interest is replaced by the approved program of the "All-Union Communist Clean-up" (Sorokin 2002, 202). The heroine now goes to the House of Culture for a festive concert of factory amateur performances, and even more desirable – for a "lecture on the international situation" (Sorokin 2002, 208). The musical taste of the heroine has been transformed: Chopin's previously beloved Thirteenth Nocturne has been forgotten for the sake of the symbolic song lines "And the dawn is already becoming more noticeable..." (Sorokin 2002, 216). The subjectivized "I" of the heroine is replaced by the objectified Soviet "we": "We do all this – the workers" (Sorokin 2002, 196), "We? So it's me! Me too?" (Sorokin 2002, 197). There is a consistent and confident dissolution of the heroine Marina in a healthy Soviet team, the "newborn machine operator" soberly (and conceptually) realizes that "she did not live before, but simply existed" (Sorokin 2002, 206).

Gradually, the appeal to the heroine by name is replaced by the appeal by surname — Alekseeva (Sorokin 2002, 219–221, etc.) and "honorary" — comrade Alekseeva (Sorokin 2002, 182, 195, etc.). If in the first part Marina's lovers Valentin and Tony in the "affectionately diminutive" name acquired the "vocative" form of Valechka and Ton'ka (graphic design according to the type of a feminine noun), then in the second part of the novel, Comrade Alekseeva is increasingly represented by masculine nominatives — "our new true friend" (Sorokin 2002, 213). Aesthetically labeled and different in atmosphere, the halves of the novel seem to stabilize each other, equalize and balance, while conceptually forcing us to think about the sum of "+" and "–", which tend to zero in their convergence.

Newspaper and poster formulas and clichés penetrate into the speech of the heroine Alekseeva. In a conversation over a friendly cup of tea among the "girls", the heroine already expresses her opinion in a special way: "And I, in turn, want to touch on the issue of mittens <...> The fact is that mittens, despite the ability to protect hands from chips, constrain finger movements, and this in some way affects the speed fixing the part <etc.>" (Sorokin 2002, 217–218). As it becomes clear, the judgment is of a collectivist nature – it is not hers, not her own, but a collective, common labor one, formulated by her in a Soviet way and declared in a friendly way "over tea". Therefore, the subsequent development of Sorokin's text in the style of a Soviet newspaper editorial, the minutes of a production meeting or administrative and state resolutions is no longer surprising, but becomes an expected "equilibrium", zeroing out the extreme points of the novel opposition.

Gradually, the replicas of Sorokin's characters lose their personality, the author's speech is withdrawn from the textual narrative, the paragraph division eventually transforms into a single and indistinguishable text, metaphorically similar to the flow of collective Soviet consciousness, more precisely the unconscious. In one of the interviews, Sorokin's idea about the loss of Marina's individuality by the heroine finds its textual embodiment – the metaphor is realized: not only the central heroine is depersonalized, but also the entire system of novel characters, as well as the narrative reality itself, which turns into a set of words devoid of meaning.

9 The perspective of conceptualist perception

Along with the fact that the implementation of metaphor is one of the most common techniques of conceptual artists. Recall, for example, I. Kabakov's installation "Ruisdael's Hand", which includes a reproduction of a painting by Jacob van Ruisdael and a mannequin's hand placed next to it, "objectifying" a metaphorical formula (see: Bogdanova 2005), the nature of the incoherent text raises the question that make up a significant part (more than 30 pages) of "Marina's Thirtieth Love". As in a number of other cases, artistic practices of Moscow conceptualism can offer decoding of the reception. However, in this case, we should be talking about "junior conceptualists" – in particular, about the projects of Andrei Monastyrsky, about his "Trips out of town" (Monastyrsky 2009–2016), in which Sorokin was also a participant.

In the performance actions invented and embodied by A. Monastyrsky, the important link was not the act of any action itself, but its perception. Monastyrsky invited a group of friends to take a "trip out of town", during which the most inexplicable events took place. For example, 20 performance participants pulled a rope for three hours, the coil of which was hidden in a thicket of trees, waiting for what would end up at the end of the rope. But in the end, there was nothing at the end of the rope — it was not the result, not the meaning of the action that was important to the Monastery, but the nature of the perception of this monotonously prolonged and incomprehensible action for the participants of the performance. Monastyrsky was fascinated not by the trip out of town itself, but by its subsequent pronouncing, an apartment discussion of the behavior of intrigued participants and a demonstration of photographic documents from the "scene of action" (the name of a number of Monastyrsky's performances is "Place of action", "Time of action", "Appearance of the hero", etc.).

Sorokin, an indispensable participant in "trips out of town", exploits the monastic reception – the action of his novel also does not reveal the meaning, outcome, completion. Like Monastyrsky, it is important for Sorokin to break up the recipients' usual ideas about the familiar and understandable, to make them look at the familiar from an unusual point of view. Sorokin destroys the stereotypes of the Soviet way of life and, as a result, breaks the canons of the socialist realist novel, forcing the reader to face the deliberate lack of purpose of the narrative, with the deliberate lack of ideas and thoughtlessness of the epic narrative. If the theory of socialist realism dictated the requirement of a high ideological character of the Soviet novel (Timofeev 1997, 365-370), then Sorokin does not have such an attitude, it is intentionally – conceptually – reduced, annihilated. The skeleton of the realist novel is destroyed by Sorokin, turning into a set of meaningless non-contextual phrases. In fact, the author of "Marina's Thirtieth Love" uses a move repeatedly demonstrated by D. Prigov, when his texts ended with only the letter "a" (cf. Sorokin's "Norm"). The same technique is embodied at the visual level by V. Komar and A. Melamid in their "Quote". For Monastyrsky, this move is consistent with his well-known love for a white, clean, snow-covered field, a kind of blank text sheet that allows you to visually or mentally put one or another meaning into it.

Sorokin creatively transfers this "spatial" conceptual technique to the pages of the novel he is creating, forcing the reader, like the character in L. Rubinstein's poem "The Appearance of a Hero", to "stop and think" (Rubinstein 2012, 56). As it is clear from the "open finale" of Sorokin's novel, it is not about the meaning of what is written, but about the meaning of the unwritten, which remains outside the sheets of paper covered with letters. Or, as another conceptual option, to withdraw oneself from the futile search for meaning.

10 Results and prospects

Thus, it can be concluded that Vladimir Sorokin actively uses the artistic strategies and tactics of Moscow conceptualism in his literary work, skillfully transferring the techniques of visual

experience to the verbal field. The novelist masterfully rethinks the practical moves of Ilya Kabakov, Eric Bulatov, Dmitry Prigov, Lev Rubinstein, playfully uses the socio-artistic finds of Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, focuses on "Trips out of Town" by Andrei Monastyrsky. In all cases, the imitative basis for conceptual reflection is the art of socialist realism, in the case of Sorokin's novel "Marina's Thirtieth Love" – the art of the so-called *production* novel, the thematic prose of socialist realism.

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