CRAFTING FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY IN LATE CAPITALISM: TOWARD AN ENTANGLED HISTORY OF CRAFT / ART LABOUR AND FEMINIST HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE CULTURE INDUSTRY OF RUSSIA (1994–2019)

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Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, Natalya Antonova, candidate for the PhD degree in Comparative Gender Studies declare herewith that the present dissertation is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the dissertation infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the dissertation has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Almaty, December 2023

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Abstract

Craft labour is essential to the operation of the culture industry in late capitalism: it creates fertile environments for artists and entrepreneurs alike, manufactures unique cultural goods, sustains economies and publics, helps to advance careers in cultural and creative sectors. However, craft labour can be invisible, not least due to the persisting division of creative work between the domains of the visual arts and handicrafts. Such contradictory disposition calls for a closer consideration of the historical consciousness of contemporary craft vis-à-vis the organization creative work in the culture industry, particularly in Russia where the professionalisation of the visual arts scene in St Petersburg since the mid-1990s had been strongly associated with a heterodox—feminist—form of consciousness mediated through the craft techniques of tailoring and needlework. This thesis—born out of a 6-month field research in St Petersburg, Moscow, and Kyiv in 2018-2019—focuses on three projects run by two generations of artists / crafters emerging in the St Petersburg cultural scene. The Shop of Travelling Things (St Petersburg, 1994-2000) and the Factory of Found Clothes (St Petersburg, 1995-2014)—Generation X. The Seamstresses (St Petersburg, Kyiv, 2015-present)—Millennials. The theoretical potential of the concept of craft / art labour, in this context, affords an analysis of the question of freedom and autonomy in creative labour and an exploration of feminist historical consciousness in the culture industry / visual art sector since the mid-1990s. Toward this goal, the thesis singles out four assumptions / myths prevalent in the discourse of contemporary craft—materiality, counter-modernization, agentification, and non-alienation (Chapter 1); these assumptions are problematised from the perspective of four conceptual themes around craft / art—object (Chapter 3), temporality (Chapter 4), politicisation (Chapter 5), and craft public (Chapter 6). The thesis argues that the engagement of craft labour with the visual arts sector since the mid-1990s prepared the ground for the professionalisation of craft as an artistic occupation and politicised the craft public. The mythological discourse of craft / art foreshadowed and intensified the aspiration for freedom by the practitioners and their public, however—from within the existing arrangement of production in the culture industry—it afforded an articulation of freedom as a form of autonomy either from the repressive state ideology, or within the sector of visual arts and the economy of feminist merchandise. The thesis concludes

that the consensual qualification of the feminist historical consciousness as heterodox, epitomised by the three projects, is tenable in as much as it situates itself within the paradigm of romantic femininity.

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INTRODUCTION

The revolution will be craftivised.
Degen (2012)

Research epistemology

It has become increasingly uncontroversial to claim that we live in the Zeitgeist of craft. Apart from the intricacies of defining what craft / crafting mean today, to which I will return, the *prima facie* actuality of craft /crafting actualises the question as to its periodisation, not least vis-à-vis the contemporary industry of culture / visual art sector. What does it mean to situate craft / art labour in time and space from the perspective of the late capitalist cultural economy? An existing model of craft's periodisation "in the global West" is based on the preeminent metaphor of historical "waves"—as is, to name a notable example, Susan Luckman's (2015a): the paradigmatic Arts and Crafts Movement initiated the first breaking wave, still looming over the world of arts, making and design, and proving to have influenced and shaped, as one could observe, the latest leftist imaginary;[1] the second wave was ridden by the hippy counterculture in the 1960s-70s; the current renaissance of craft, ongoing since at least the 2010s, is associated, on the one hand, with micro entrepreneurship and home-based creative labour facilitated by social media and online platforms, most visibly, Etsy (12–44); on the other hand, Luckman (Ibid., 32–6, 126, 138) and others (e.g. McGovern 2019; Wood 2021) conceptualise craft as having being stripped of the veil of an irrelevantly archaic occupation to reveal its political—feminist and anti-capitalist—meaning / value for late capitalist modernity and, retrospectively, earlier periods.

The story that this thesis "tells" about contemporary crafts / arts is different in regards of its time-space episteme. Above all, it does not that much stem from the "global West."[2] Rather than replicating and ossifying the (new) Cold War derived

1 As concluded by Matthew Beaumont, "We need the imaginative vision of [William] Morris now" (2023, n.p.).
2 Which does not mean to say that I see that as a major "contribution" of my research—as if "making" one amounts to filling an empty space on the world map, preferably "beyond" the "North" and the "West," as tacitly implied in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist research (e.g. Connell 2014).

division of the global order into two opposing camps—the (former) East and the (former) West (e.g. Hlavajova and Sheikh 2017)—or, indeed, falling into the trap of nationalism by letting "Russia" and "Russianness" delimit and define my analytical and methodological foci, I consider it heuristically useful to align with the conceptual propositions made by historical Marxism (e.g. Trotsky 1969/1931; Lukács 1971/1923). The latter propositions can help us reevaluate the (new) Cold War space-time episteme from the standpoint of totality / world history—interconnected and contradiction infused, specific and universal, uneven and combined. Although, admittedly, the transnational, "global cultural economy" approach (De Beukelaer and Spence 2019) towards the crafts / arts initiatives in the St Petersburg cultural scene I focus on cannot be adequately developed in this thesis alone, still, opening up the debate as to the possibilities / capabilities of the standpoint of totality / world history in creative labour research is what this thesis aspires to contribute to, even if indirectly.

To do so, this thesis brings together philosophically-grounded debates around feminist historical consciousness to outline a history of thereof in Russia through the creative labour of craft by the three projects / two generations of crafters / artists who are renowned for their synthesis of making and visual arts in the St Petersburg cultural scene since 1994, including their rather self/contradictory identification with feminist ideology and disidentification from the dominant gender order[3] through the two modes of romantic femininity—sentimental femininity and proletarian femininity (see Chapter 2). These projects are the Shop of Travelling Things (*Magazin Puteshestvuiushchikh Veshchei*), Factory of Found Clothes (*Fabrika Naidennykh Odezhd*) and Seamstresses (*Shvemy*).[4]

For the purpose of this research to outline an entangled history of craft labour and feminist historical consciousness in the culture industry of Russia (the sector of

3 Gender order signifies is a historically changing and temporally, spatially and geo-culturally specific regimes of social relations patterned around labour, reproduction, ideology, identity, desire, etc. and put in relationship, dialectical or otherwise, to the concepts of Nature and its particular corporeal aspect of sex and sexuality (see Connell 2009).

4 "Shvemy" is a neologism in Russian that can be translated in English as "Seamstresses." It consists of the word shve-ya that denotes the actor participating in "sewing" (seamstress) in which the suffix -ya (-ess) that is treated as if the personal pronoun ya (I) is replaced by its "equivalent" marked for plural -my (we). The word shvemy therefore can be considered as a purposeful intervention into the grammar of the Russian language to mark the collective and horizontal character of the project's activities.

visual arts) since the 1990s I therefore use the generational rather than the waves' framework of periodisation.[5] All of the three projects, the Shop, Factory and Seamstresses, emerged chronologically and sequentially since 1994, run by Generation X and Millennials respectively; all three have a background in the workshop model of crafts / arts production and engaged what I call the "craft public"; all three share a history of collaboration, as "instructors" and "students," "commissioners" and "practitioners" (see Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6); finally, all three, in one way of another, are associated with an independent / feminist / heterodox art scene in situ (see Chapter 2).

Thesis outline

Chapter 1 situates the concept of craft in the historical context of (late) capitalism. It begins with the analysis of the existing research about the three projects I explore. The chapter argues that despite the heuristic value of the existing analyses, they betray a somewhat static approach, reducing craft / art to a matter of phenomenology, ontology, or semiotics of the "art" object. The exclusive focus on the readymade object of "art," instead of an exploration of the dynamic process of making, creating and articulating of this object by the practitioners, that of their collaborators, and publics results in the invisibility of craft / art labour for scholarship. Moreover, existing analyses of the projects reveal, to a degree, certain epistemic innocence by succumbing to a wishful construction of the self-autonomy of "craft" as an aesthetic / artistic practice, imbued with a heterodox character and set against the domination of capital in the culture industry / visual art sector. Conversely, in this thesis, a historically situated, immanent dialectical contradiction between the historical consciousness of craft / art and the late capitalist industry of culture / visual art sector is a guiding principle of analysis. In addition to that, the first chapter conceptualises four implicit elements / assumptions / myths / ideologemes permeating the discourse of contemporary craft / art labour in scholarship: materiality, counter-modernity, agentification, and non-

5 It should be acknowledges that in the light of the time-space episteme I am in conversation with (Luckman 2015b), the conceptual potential of the waves model of crafts' periodisation deserves a separate treatment and perhaps problematisation, similarly to the critical expositions (e.g. Laughlin et al. 2010) of the ways in which the history / development of feminist politics and ideology is made sense of, as if unfolding in and through waves.

alienation. The first chapter thus sets the basis for the pursuit of the aim of this research—to discern and analyse four constitutive concepts pertaining to the historical consciousness of craft / art in the St Petersburg cultural scene, 1994-2019: object (Chapter 3), temporality (Chapter 4), politicisation (Chapter 5), and craft public (Chapter 6).

Chapter 2 argues that the self-contradictory disposition of craft / art, as it were, sandwiched between the notions of heterodox / mythic consciousness and the domination of capital via the culture industry, and saturated with the logic of the division of creative labour between the classes of the "artists" and "crafters," necessitates a type of approach that will explore craft's immanence to the hierarchy of creative labour in cultural economy / visual art sector. Toward this goal, this chapter introduces the primary empirical / analytical sources and outlines their "emergence" in the "field"—ethnographic and historical.

The question of the object of craft / art, as it came about in period of the 1990s in the St Petersburg cultural scene, is analysed in Chapter 3. In conversation with the craft's essential materiality myth / assumption, the chapter shows explores the increasing "appropriation" of craft as art by the institutions of contemporary art in Russia—the Garage Museum and its Archive of Contemporary Art. Drawing on my analysis of the Shop and Factory projects (run by the practitioners who belong to the Generation X), the chapter demonstrates that during the period I designate as the long 1990s (1994–2014) craft / art has been implicated in the processes of abstraction of creative labour through the mediating mechanisms in the culture industry / visual art sector: projectification and archivisation. Consequently, I suggest, the object / aim of craft / art labour in the St Petersburg cultural scene can be conceptualized as the one of the "project-archive." Driven by the project-archive logic, the self/perception of craft / art labour during this period appears to be heavily informed by the ideology of self/objectification. Contra to the ideologeme of craft's essential materiality, craft's meaning, in the case of the Shop and Factory, takes on an increasingly discourse-driven quality.

Chapter 4 deals with the question of the temporalities of craft / art labour. It examines the self/periodisation of craft / art labour in the Factory and its sub-project, the Shop of Utopian Clothes. Against the assumption of craft's counter distinction to

modernity, the chapter suggests exploring craft / art from an immanent perspective—as a particular mode of historical self/consciousness and self/periodisation, in which the contradiction between craft / art labour and the industry of culture / visual art gives shape to secondary myths / ideologemes. Among the latter, I argue, is the Romantic Time: the time of the long-awaited attainment of "freedom"—understood by the Factory / Shop of Utopian Clothes in terms of the exchange of recrafted objects / clothes for money, affording the practitioners to express themselves artistically and self/stylise. Despite the practitioners' acknowledgement of the 1990s as the time of economic scarcity, it is perceived as a period of liberation from the repressive ideology of state socialism. In contrast to the myth of counter-modernity in the craft discourse, the Factory's sense of historicity in the 2010s takes on the appearance of the repetition and romanticisation of the 1990s—not least due to the renewed interest of the industry in the Factory itself as the "first women's art group in the post-Soviet space" (Diaconov, Lazareva, and Volovoda 2018). Accordingly, in this period, the discourse of craft / art labour becomes a retrospective discourse, organised by the particular the logic of myth. It reifies and naturalises the historical consciousness of the 1990s as the Romantic Time and renders the division of creative labour between "art" and "craft" invisible. Similarly to the assumption of counter-modernity, the Romantic Time is "driven" by the idea of romantic femininity, set against patriarchy as an eternal force of social domination.

The politicisation of craft / art is in the focus of Chapter 5. It examines the division of creative labour between the domains of "craft" and that of "art" during late 2010s through the activities of the Seamstresses (the project run by the practitioners who belong to the Millennial generation). The chapter argues that the articulation of craft as a politicised art form by the Seamstresses expresses the stratified field of creative work. "Political artists," as indirectly evidenced by the Factory's recollections, started to outsource craft as a service on a commission basis. This dynamic facilitated an emergence of what I call the "surplus labour-power of craft"—signifying a "class" of cultural workers (the Seamstresses) who were outsourced by the "artists" / "commissioners" (the ex-members of the Factory and their colleagues in affiliated projects) to perform handicraft work for a compensation. Paradoxically, while taking the commission the Seamstresses perceived the culture industry / visual art sector as a space of autonomy—the space of material sustenance and symbolic recognition of

their project as a project of art. Against the assumption craft's affordance to mediate social and political agency, the chapter suggests that the politicisation of craft as art, and its commoditization by the visual art sector, are rather two sides of the same coin. The chapter demonstrates that the professionalisation of craft in the culture industry / visual art sector since the mid-2010s, and the division of creative labour between the Gen X (the Factory's "incarnation" into What is to Be Done collective, circa early 2000s) and the Millennials (the Seamstresses), run parallel to craft's politicisation as an aesthetic and artistic vocation. In comparison to the 1990s, the discourse of craft / art undergoes a notable change throughout the 2010s. The earlier trope of the craft / art object indexing freedom in late capitalism (as, I argue, was the case with the Shop and the Factory), shifted toward craft being an expression of an ostensibly collective production of "political art" from below, as demonstrated by the activities of the Seamstresses. The chapter singles out an important paradox: the labour hierarchy between the "artists" and "crafters" was perceived by the "crafters" as affording a liminal space for asserting the autonomy of their creative work—the production of "craft" as "political art." At the same time, however, and as a consequence of the long-term self/objectification of craft / art labour via its projectification and archivisation since the mid-1990s (see Chapters 3 and 4), craft / art's function, by the late 2010s, is the production of artefacts for the exhibition / contemporary art industrial complex.

Finally, the question of the standpoint of the craft public is analysed in Chapter 6. Based on my interviews with the Seamstresses and the participants of the sewing workshops the Seamstresses organised in St Petersburg, the chapter examines the concept of the craft public. This chapter suggests that the craft public engaged by the Seamstresses developed its sense of belongingness and self/autonomy through its participation in the sewing workshops, as well as through the practice of craft consumption. What we may call "the standpoint of the craft public" is thus "brought into existence" in a rather contradictory way, mediated by both craft activism and the economy of feminist merchandise. Drawing on the analyses of my interviews with the members of the craft public engaged by the Seamstresses as well as my observations of the sewing workshops, the chapter suggests that the craft public formation coincided with the constitutions of the feminist merchandise economy towards the late 2010s. Unlike the myth / assumption of craft's non-alienation, suggesting that craft yields authentic and autonomous expression of the self (e.g. Campbell 2005), the

standpoint of the craft public is rather antinomic: this antinomy, the chapter suggests, is characterised by the Seamstresses' aspiring to make their sewing workshops a "safe space" for their public, but, at the same time, mis/construing the craft public as an abstract object reduced to the monetary resource and a bare purchasing power. However, the craft public's self-understanding proved to be equally contradictory and involved an interest in consuming craft merchandise—along with the pursuit of education in political activism and learning tailoring skills.

Terminology

Craft / art

While referring to its key actor, this research favours the terms "craft labour," "practitioner," and "crafter." The three terms are used interchangeably to signify the urban model of contemporary craft in the system of the culture industry (visual art sector specifically) and the economy of feminist merchandise—a parallel craft marketplace for the Millennial generation of artists and crafters / workshoppers. In a narrower sense, by craft I mean a technology of skilled labour that involves the work with textiles and fabric; craft, in this sense, involves techniques of sewing, tailoring, embroidery, beading and painting on fabric. The medium of craft, in my research, is twofold: one is what can be called a vestimentary medium—clothes; however, I also focus on textile panels / banners.

When both types of mediums, as it were, enter the system of the culture industry / visual art sector, they are get inscribed into a distinct "art genre"—visual art. Art, here, signifies what the industry and practitioners themselves denote as "performance art," "video art," "activist art," "feminist art," "women's art." The many names a craft object can get if framed as a piece of visual art is: textile collage, textile panel, textile art, soft sculpture, ready-made object, unready made object, clothes as an artistic medium, textile installation, etc.

For me, however, "art" is a category of value, in a sense developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1993a)—art is a symbolic good / commodity that emerges as part of / in contradiction with the "field of forces" / "struggles" between institutions, individuals (curators, art critics, journalists, and artists themselves) who promote the circulation / valorisation of

the works of art in the art system. The meaning of art per se, therefore, is a category of value that emerges within the field of cultural production. Theodor Adorno (1975/1967) remarked insightfully: "The cultural commodities of the industry are governed, as [Bertold] Brecht and [Peter] Suhrkamp expressed it thirty years ago [in the 1930s], by the principle of their value, and not by their own specific content and harmonious formation. The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms" (13).

If analysed from this critical stance, art and craft, therefore, are relational categories, both, to reiterate, function as part of the cultural production system. Relations between art and craft are ideologically motivated. In this sense, the argument about the "hostility" of "art" to "handicraft" and the "elimination of the handmade" from "art" labour (see Beech 2020)[6] tells only a partial story. Just as framing craft techniques as a justifiable reaction to the preponderance of the digital media in visual arts since the 1990s: where, as opposed to the omnipresence of technology in everyday life and in artistic production, craft expresses the unmediated / immediate quality of hand work (Hung and Magliaro 2007, 7–11). Rather, I conceptualise the dynamic between art and craft as a relationship of autonomy and dependence. For craft tends to "ascribe value to itself" by identifying with "art." Craft tends to assert its autonomy by collapsing itself into aesthetics, even if, or perhaps because it means invisibility for craft itself.

I concur with Susan Luckman's (2015a) assessment of the contested "politics" of definition around crafting at this historical juncture: as she writes, "Dialogue over what can appropriately be defined as craft is no longer a niche disciplinary debate but has overflowed into broader discussions," resembling a complex terrain (xiii). On the one hand, contemporary design craft can be identified as a sector of the "creative industries," and the one that, as far as its histories and markets are concerned, is separate from traditional folk crafts; yet, on the other hand, the distinction between the fields of design craft and the "heritage craft" can be rather uncertain, as they appear

6 As Dave Beech (2020) argues, "If there is one recurrent feature of the hostility to handicraft within the long history of the intertwinement of art and labour that secures the distinctiveness of art and the Fine Arts from both the artisanal and industrial modes of production, it is the augmentation of practice with what has come to be known as art theory. Scholarship was initially proof of the elevation of the painter and sculptor above handicraft and therefore scholar-painters and scholar-sculptors were meant to know things that could not be taught to the apprentice. Academicians taught their scholars principles not techniques" (265).

to be, for instance, in the context of craft industries in the UK (Luckman 2015a, 6; Carpenter 2021, n.p.). Either way, it can be safely assumed that the definitional uncertainties around contemporary craft stem, inter alia, from broader technological processes—the information technology facilitating the mediation of craft knowledge and craft commodities via social media (see Luckman and Andrew 2020b) as well as 3D print technologies (see Doyle, Day Fraser, and Robbins 2018). This novel, one could suggest, post-post-medium condition[7] in the crafts / arts—an expansion of the aesthetic medium into the realm of the digital—is giving rise to an explosion / "revival" of craft and making in late capitalism, and yet, at the same time, challenging the deeply ingrained, and, in my reading, distinctly Heideggerian assumptions / myths about craftsmanship (e.g. J. P. Morgan 2018; Burke and Spencer-Wood 2019) as subordinate to and thus empowered by the crude material substance of the object magnified into existence by the skill, body, and hands of the maker herself (see Chapter 1).

Importantly, therefore, I stress that the concept of craft necessarily foregrounds a set of assumptions / myths / ideologemes about crafting (see Chapter 1). The conceptual skeleton of this thesis is built on four myths about crafting, which I analyse and problematise via my chosen projects. First myth: craft is essentially a material work, the tools and the skills in craft produce and facilitate the material consciousness of both craft makers and craft consumers. Second myth: craft is a distinctly premodern / pre-capitalist phenomenon, and as such, it can serve as an antidote against the ills of the industrialisation and alienation of labour, even in the "post-industrial" and "post-Fordist" world. Third myth: craft is a medium that mediates social and political agency of craft makers and craft consumers; it is so because craft works with the material matter at hand, it is a concrete manifestation of the materiality of human activity against the sweeping abstraction of capital. Fourth myth: craft labour is inalienable, it cannot be commoditised because, as a use value, it is an immediate expression of the maker's subjectivity and their ethical / moral stance.

The thesis takes into consideration the relationship between the handmade and the digital that, I think, is especially relevant for the Millennial generation, for instance,

7 To paraphrase and build on Rosalind Krauss (1999), "In the age of the [digital] … we inhabit a [post-] post-medium condition" (32).

the Seamstresses' posting an advertisement for a sewing workshop on social media, and thus using the latter as a means to reach out to their "craft public" so as to preform and perform, discursively, the sewing workshop as a space "safe" from the "intrusion" of "cis-gender men" (see Chapter 6). For Generation X, the Shop / the Factory, the digital archiving of the contemporary art / craft practices of the 1990s by the Russian Art Archive Network (RAAN), an international online platform initiated by the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in 2018 (Garage 2023), as I observe, has forced a certain classificatory logic onto the past works of art / craft. Previously perceived as "sexless," now they bear the tag of "women's" and / or "feminist art"—"first" of its kind in what the Garage terms the "post-Soviet space" (see Chapter 4). Craft's "politics" of definition, thereby, seems to a great extent complicated and enriched along the axes of gender and aesthetics, or to be more precise, in the way how both gender and aesthetics are put into work and mediated technologically, discursively, institutionally. Not to mention the watershed moment of the perceived post-1989 "transition" of the state socialist cultural and political apparatus to the "democratic" administration opening the gates of freedom and its "new" gender order where feminist ideology is not censored and suppressed by the "party autocracy" but celebrated by the "civil society" (see Saarinen, Ekonen, and Uspenskaia 2014)—the autonomous, independent art / NGO / scenes nurtured by philanthropic capital and its emancipated cosmopolitan public.

Feminist historical consciousness

It is in the latter context where I think an analysis of the interplay between craft and art affords a meaningful exploration of the formation of feminist historical consciousness in the late capitalist industry of culture in St Petersburg, Russia. This focus shapes, and to an extent is being shaped by my research assumptions which, among other things, do not foreground contemporary craft as being exclusively based in the sphere of the domestic / oikos / the "middle-class home" and being quantitatively dominated by women's labour (Luckman 2015a, 144). I do not concur with the post-New-Left-derived rendition of the home / oikos economy and the value-producing potential of gendered reproductive labour as being fudged by classical bourgeois economy and Marx/ism—which, as some argue (e.g. Federici 2012; Luckman and Andrew 2018b), forged a dichotomy / division between the public sphere / the manufacture / the factory

and the private / domestic sphere.[8] Rather, I suggest that craft labour proves to be a rather "travelling"[9] idea and practice that, despite or due its historically specific mediation by gender (craft / material culture is mediated by gender inasmuch as gender is mediated by material culture / craft), has long traversed, if not to a great deal complicated the apparent, habitual dichotomy between the public and the private spheres / femininity and masculinity at least since the long nineteenth-century (see Kristofferson 2007). My research "cases," too, resist the domesticated / middle-class / unequivocally sexed consciousness of craft; as is, autobiographically speaking, the hi/story of handcrafting in my family in the 1960s–80s. After all, as some scholars observe, Soviet society at large, shaped by the revolutionary ideology of communism and the centrally planned economy, shared a certain universal fascination with things / objects, their making, recrafting, remodelling, and repairing (e.g. Degot 2005; Gurova 2018). To an extent, however, and especially today, the latter phenomenon appears to be a reified mythologeme / ideologeme sui generis (Gerasimova and Tchouikina 2009); it deserves a deeper examination as to its contribution towards the "craft turn" in the visual art in late Soviet modernity and its aftermath, and the extent to which it challenges the three-waves model of periodisation of craft conceptualised by Susan Luckman (2015a).

Nonetheless, that does not mean to say that craft, an idea "travelling" the ruins of Soviet post/modernity, cannot lay claim to a specifically feminist and pre-eminently self/contradictory form of historical consciousness, in which, to name a major enigma as I expose it, the aspiration for creative labour and autonomy reflect the same antagonistic dynamic in relation to the state ideology / gender order / culture industry which have given rise to this consciousness in the first place (see Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and Conclusion). My thesis seeks to explain the qualitative, historically situated

8 See Karl Marx on the family social relationship and the division of labour in the family (1978/1846).
See Friedrich Engels on The Origin of Family, Private Property, and the State (2010/1884).
See Adam Smith on the significance of the wages of labour for the family economy (1902/1776).

9 I am thankful to Jasmina Lukić for reminding me how fruitful a "travelling theory" approach can be for a critical consciousness of a historical movement of ideas / theories / practices from one context to another.
As Edward Said (1983) explains insightfully: "Indeed I would go as far as saying that it is the critic's job to provide resistances to theory, to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests, to point up those concrete instances drawn from everyday reality that lie outside or just beyond the interpretive area necessarily designated in advance and thereafter circumscribed by every theory" (242).

meaning the practitioners and institutions invest into the construction of womanness / femaleness as they come about in and through creative labour and its organisation / mediation by the culture industry's visual art sector. Thus, unlike what I would define as one of the principal approaches towards gender, class, and race in creative labour research, I do not necessarily seek to determine the proportions / numbers of women and men participating in craft / art labour, their ethnic and class origins; neither do I theorise the latter as indices of social / gender / racial underrepresentation and representation, exclusion and inclusion, inequality and equality, injustice and justice (cf. Conor 2005; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2015; Scharff 2018). In other words, the concept of gender, as it is being operated in my research, is not a statistical / demographical category per se, nor does it index subjective and / or objective identification of an individual or a social stratum. Rather, gender is the category of historical consciousness (see Chapter 2).

Teresa de Lauretis's (1990) approach to the question of historical consciousness, subject and feminist theory is relevant to my discussion of the dialectic between historical consciousness / and ideology as a contradictory process of becoming rather than a fixed and quantifiable condition. As de Lauretis writes,

> I will use the term "feminist theory," like the terms "consciousness" or "subject," in the singular, to mean not a single, unified perspective, but a process of understanding that is premised on historical specificity and the simultaneous, if often contradictory, presence of those differences in each of its instances and practices, a process that, furthermore, seeks to account for their ideological inscriptions. (116)

Accordingly, it is through the dialectic / non-identical relationship[10] between craft labour and the sector of visual art in the late capitalist industry of culture / visual art sector where we can examine the formation, specificity, limits, and potential of feminist historical consciousness in St Petersburg, Russia, while also attending to the problem of freedom, the one that, due to its fundamental nature (Adorno 2006/1964–65), traverses the narrow limits of my immediate empirical focus on the three projects / the St Petersburg cultural scene onto the terrain of broader philosophical debates about the political / transformative meaning of feminist historical consciousness in the crafts / arts (see Conclusion).

10 On the dialectic as a dynamic / processual / historically changing form of non-identical thought see Adorno (2017/1958).

Culture industry

In its methodological considerations, this thesis consults the classical / Frankfurt School critical theory, and prioritises the "culture industry" (*Kulturindustrie*) as one of its key terms. For stylistic purposes, I alternate the "culture industry" with the "cultural economy," "economy of culture" or "cultural production." In doing so, I am aware that that is a rather unconventional approach in creative labour studies, tending to inscribe craft, as a sector of economy, into a rather solid framework of "creative industries" (e.g. Luckman and Thomas 2018a; Luckman and Andrew 2020a). Here, craft is characterised as a "[s]mall-scale creative practice … undertaken by individual cultural workers" within the "global circuits of (fair) trade" (Luckman 2015a, 4, 6). My research, by contrast, "works through" the theme of craft as a technology of creative labour in the industry of culture and the sector of visual arts on the verge of the economy of feminist merchandise.

Indeed, for quite a while, the culture / cultural / creative industries / economy framework,[11] in my reading, has by and large been dominating the landscape of theorising cultural work (e.g. Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Conor, Gill, and Taylor 2015; McRobbie 2016), including the research focusing on Russia (e.g. O'Connor 2005; Ruutu, Panfilo, and Karhunen 2009; Trubina 2019).[12] As Elena Trubina (2019) notes regarding the transnational dynamic of the economy of culture today, "Transnational cultural industries have been intertwined with Russian cultural markets to the extent that it is not always possible to say which capital, the global or the local, was invested in which cultural products" (100). Doubtlessly, as far as the transnational dimension of cultural production is concerned, "The cultural industries have moved closer to the centre of the economic action in many countries and across much of the

11 Nicholas Garnham (2005) discusses the implications of the shift from "cultural industries" to "creative industries" in theoretical research, and policies in the UK.

12 Although, concurrently, scholars have been expressing doubts about the pertinence of the "creative industries" against the broader processes in society and politics: "[T]he rhetorical shifts around culture and creative were a long time in the making and we should see them as part of an attempt to re-frame social democratic nation-states in the face of a belligerent neo-conservatism and the collapse of the Soviet Union" (O'Connor 2016, 8).
Similarly, Banks and O'Connor (2009) warn about the "[N]eed to engage critically with the simplistic scenario that promotes creative industries as a contradiction-free marriage of culture and economics" (366).

world" (Hesmondhalgh 2013, 2). With that, to reiterate, craft, often professional and entrepreneurial, is either categorised as a distinct autonomous sector, however informal and small-scale, within creative industries (e.g. Luckman and Andrew 2020c; Patel 2022; Krupets and Epanova 2021); or conceptualised as a waning form of skilled labour, producing unique and exclusive objects, but assumed to be antagonistic and yet also subordinate to the sweeping industrialisation (e.g. Hesmondhalgh 2013; Kiriya 2020) that culture / art has been undergoing since the nineteenth century, as Pierre Bourdieu (1996/1992) alludes to in his research on Gustave Flaubert. Not to mention other studies of craft, where, a form of political activism sui generis and a radical "do-it-yourself" subculture, crafting apparently supersedes any economic and / or industry-related foci, broadly conceived (e.g. Kelly 2014; Stevens 2016; Myzelev 2022). "Marring craft with activism" is seen as an activity saturated with robust political capabilities. In craft activism, referred to as "craftivism," power is an effect that emerges out of craft itself; if practiced and consumed creatively and conscientiously—based on the politics of protest, aimed at raising social awareness—craft-power holds the potential for battling with social injustices and promoting human rights (Corbett and Housley 2011, 347–49).[13]

In this context, the relevance of the culture industry framework, in my view, lies in its potential / capability to critically examine the role of craft in creative /artistic labour in mature capitalism. Perhaps one of the most compelling, recent accounts on the "return of the culture industry"[14] was penned by James J. W. Cook (2008): "[T]he longer historical process of culture industry expansion has generated new forms of self-consciousness (vis-à-vis its working methods) and expertise (vis-à-vis its aesthetic practices)" (308). From this point of view, the historically changing, dynamic character of the culture industry is fruitful for exploring an entangled history of craft labour (both a form of expertise and aesthetic practice) and its self-consciousness, i.e. feminist historical consciousness, in Russia, St Petersburg in 1994–2019.

13 "Craftivists" call themselves "agitators with short clear messages, using craft in a very visual way"; they are "awareness raisers hoping to provoke people to think about global injustices and then take ownership in their own time to consider how they can fight for a just world" (Corbett and Housley 2011, 347–49).

14 A strikingly opposite point of view – "[T]he culture industry no longer exists" – can be traced in Hullot-Kentor (2008).

Adorno's research on mass culture, spanning almost forty years, has enabled, in co-authorship with Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002/1944), to grasp the "important features of the [apparently] relatively new phenomenon" in late capitalism—the culture industry (D. Cook 1996, ix–x).[15] One of these features that, I suggest, has not lost its relevance for the twenty first-century cultural / art work in the light of my "case studies" but also, arguably, in international practices in contemporary art as well (e.g. Buszek 2011; Bryan-Wilson 2017; Asavei 2019) is the significance of craft and the workshop model as a "stage" of production in creative work, synthesising both standardisation and (pseudo-) individualisation:[16] as Adorno explained in his 1941 essay with reference to popular music, "[T]he act of producing a song-hit still remains in a handicraft stage" (Adorno 2006b/1941, 77).[17] While, of course, the technological mediation of music has visibly accelerated since the 1940s, thereby, to an extent, challenging if not displacing the "individual handicraft element of popular music" (Odih 2016, 144), my research seeks to examine how / why / with what effects for creative labour the sector of visual art evidences identifiable connections, although

15 Deborah Cook (1996) specifies the au courant specificity of culture, shifting into the mode of mass production since the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and, we could add, in the post WWII world specifically, "Far from being a culture by and for the masses—as the older folk and popular cultures once were—the culture industry is geared to profitmaking, controlled by centralized interlocking corporations, and staffed with marketing and financial experts, management and production teams, technicians, 'star' reporters, writers, actors, musicians, and other creative talent" (x).

16 On the dialectic between standardisation and individualisation see on of Adorno's latest essays, Culture Industry Reconsidered (1975/1967): "Although in film, the central sector of the culture industry, the production process resembles technical modes of operation in the extensive division of labour, the employment of machines and the separation of the laborers from the means of production — expressed in the perennial conflict between artists active in the culture industry and those who control it — individual forms of production are nevertheless maintained. Each product affects an individual air; individuality itself serves to reinforce ideology, in so far as the illusion is conjured up that the completely reified and mediated is a sanctuary from immediacy and life" (14).

17 The whole quotation is: "So far standardization of popular music has been considered in structural terms — that is, as an inherent quality without explicit reference to the process of production or to the underlying causes for standardization. Though all industrial mass production necessarily eventuates in standardization, the production of popular music can be called 'industrial' only in its promotion and distribution, whereas the act of producing a song-hit still remains in a handicraft stage. The production of popular music is highly centralized in its economic organization, but still 'Individualistic' in its social mode of production. The division of labour among the composer, harmonizer, and arranger is not industrial but rather pretends industrialization, in order to look more up to date, whereas it has actually adapted industrial methods for the technique of its promotion" (Adorno 2006b/1941, 77).

In regard of the pseudo-individualisation aspect, Adorno writes: "By pseudo-individualization we mean endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself" (Ibid., 79).

prima facie invisible, to craft-based division of labour, which, to an extent, has still been "preserved" in the industry—in the St Petersburg context specifically.

One may wonder if this contradictory disposition of craft in the system of cultural production is a sign of the "underdevelopment" of the system as such. As Bill Ryan (1992) expounds in his seminal *Making Capital from Culture*, [T]he relative absence of technology and the craft-based division of labour is one of the most obvious and noteworthy features of the organisation of creation in the corporate context [of industrialized culture] …" (109). Craft labour, conceived structurally, remains essential to the functioning of creative economy in late capitalism: it creates fertile environment for combining artistic and entrepreneurial practices to produce and offer unique cultural goods and services, sustaining economies and publics, and advancing precautious careers, as has been discussed by Walker (2007), Banks (2010), Luckman and Thomas (2018), Naudin and Patel (2020). However, as far as the visual art sector is concerned, craft remains invisible and supressed, not least due to the division of creative labour between the domains of "art" and "craft." I suggest that such contradictory disposition of craft in visual arts calls for a closer consideration of the historical consciousness of craft, and how the latter is tied to feminist historical consciousness, vis-à-vis the organization and division of creative work in the culture industry, particularly in St Petersburg, where the industrialization of cultural work since the 1990s has been closely associated with the heterodox practices of artistic production using the techniques of tailoring and needlework.

Research contribution

A theorisation / theory of Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) in the context we can, in a fairly broad-brush manner, describe as a "post-Soviet context"—such as the one of St Petersburg, Russia—appears to be a field in slow motion since the 1990s, and, arguably, the one experiencing a remarkable expansion from the 2000s–2010s onwards. Early theorisations of cultural production in Russia engage, for instance, with the questions on the economy of artistic production under a "post-communist condition" and the larger transformations of the meaning of art, including an economic value of art after the "death of communist ideology" (see Reichardt and Muskens 1992). Relatively recent research is concerned, though quite optimistically, with the

contradictions facing “novel” models of “non-Western cultural industries,” like the one put forward St Petersburg in 2002—adopted and mis/framed as a project sanctioned by the seemingly external forces of “modernisation,” “globalisation,” and “transition” [sic]:[18]

> Russia has not abandoned that democratic civil society in which independent and innovative creative clusters can emerge; and the conflicts and contestations of this democratic civil society, frequently seen as Russia’s weakness in the face of globalisation, may yet provide the energy and confidence to turn it to advantage. (O’Connor 2005, 58)

Taking O’Connor’s prompt, further studies of the CCI tune into the ways that the ambiguities of the sector, on the one hand, regress further, indicating a “[L]ack of clear policies towards the creative industries sector at the federal, regional and municipal levels”—yet, at the same time, as far as the contribution of the CCI e.g. to the leisure segment, to gross domestic product and national employment is concerned demonstrate comparative “growth” in 2005 (Ruutu, Panfilo, and Karhunen 2009, 59–60). In an affirmative way, an “innovative” character of the CCI in the Russian economy, facing up the challenge of overcoming economic dependency on natural resources is suggested: What is it if not creativity itself, put into work by the urban creative clusters in cooperation with the state, that can provide a viable “model for economies in transition” (Panfilo 2011, 86–7, 90)? This pivotal interest of the CCI research focusing on Russia gets crystallised by the late 2010s. Pursuing to chart the “[T]he post-Soviet evolution of the sector of cultural organizations” and to “describe the institutional [and economic] niches they [have come to] occupy" since the early 2000s, an analysis of culture from the perspective of the Durkheimian “institutional order” and its “legitimisation ideologies” is prioritised (Safonova, Sokolova, and Barmina 2018, 751, 758, 761). In the face of deindustrialisation and gentrification, contemporary urban development in Russia relies on culture as a valuable economic / symbolic asset, and a “positive stimuli” appreciated by urban citizens (Trubina 2019, 119–20).

In the light of the above, it can be observed that a historical and temporal[19]—i.e. not evolutionary, or economistic, or presentist—analysis of organising in culture / arts / crafts remains rather peripheral to creative labour studies and the CCI research

18 For the full summary of the project see Belova et al. (2002).

19 Banks, Gill, and Taylor (2013) discuss the relevance of historicising creative labour in the CCI research.

in general. The core and problematic, in my reading, assumption of the "Russian" CCI research pertains to the question of periodisation. As it is being argued indirectly, the culture industry is a relatively recent phenomenon in Russia, emerging circa the early 2000s as a response to the consequences of deindustrialisation and as an effect of the rise of the "creative class" (Florida 2012/2002); it is, moreover, the sector of economy whose "progress" was, by and large, determined and sanctified, whether positively or negatively or both, in a top-down manner by the state, cultural policies, institutions, governors, the Kremlin, ect. What this assumption abdicates is the paradox of the double-edged / dialectical character of creative labour being a prima facie embodiment of creative autonomy and agency in late capitalism and, at the same time, a real mechanism for suppressing freedom (artistic freedom, freedom of thought, social freedom, etc.) (e.g. Conor, Gill, and Taylor 2015). It is the autonomy and agency of creative labour, hence its historical self/consciousness, that I think gets lost if succumbed to the disembodied will of power from above. The first objective of my thesis is to salvage, if you will, the historical consciousness of creative labour by studying the craft-based artistic work by the three projects whose lives are connected with the St Petersburg cultural scene, and nurtured by what comes to be articulated by the practitioners and institutions as "feminist" ideas / ideology.

A corollary theoretical gap addressed by my thesis concerns a critical theory of craft, which, in my reading, remains rather fragmented. A corpus of great studies about the craft sector in Australia (e.g. Luckman and Thomas 2018), UK (e.g. Naudin and Patel 2020a), US (e.g. Bryan-Wilson 2017), and Russia (e.g. Krupets and Epanova 2021) has been accumulated in recent decade. Undoubtedly valuable in themselves, these studies tend to be case-driven, and so make arguments about particular cases and geographical / cultural locations, rather than pursuing or problematising a theory, perhaps a critical theory even, about contemporary craft. At the same time, however, theoretically driven analyses, rooted in the philosophical tradition of pragmatism, demonstrate a certain transhistorical approach to material culture and craft as the realm of *Erfahrung* as opposed to *Erlebnis*, "The first nam[ing] an event or relationship that makes an emotional inner impress, the second an event, action, or relationship that turns one outward and requires skill rather than sensitivity" (Sennett 2008, 288). For others, "[I]t is through the aesthetic dimension that craft objects transcend the realm of simple utility and become works of art" (Risatti 2007, 273). What can be

recognised as an inherently contradictory character of contemporary craft practice permeates the theory of craft, also, for instance, in Julia Bryan-Wilson's (2013) concise outline of the paradoxes of contemporary craft—intimately connected to the art world / visual art scene and anachronistic, progressive / entrepreneurial and traditional, material / handmade and digital, gender non-conforming / feminist and masculine at the same time. And, indeed, we can add: contemporary craft, or art-through-craft as Glenn Adamson (2015, 198) called it, requires both skill and sensitivity. The emphasis on the material in crafting is put into work and fetishized by the digital technology, such is the "[I]rony of the return of the analogue in the digital age" (Luckman 2013, 251).

The pivotal question for me, rather, is with the system of labour and relations and production in the culture industry's visual art sector shaping the paradoxical consciousness of craft and thereby mediating feminist ideology and feminist historical consciousness. Craft labour, in my research, is not a descriptive but a critical category. As it is, therefore, the field of craft studies, at its particular intersection with creative labour research and gender studies, I think, indicates a certain gap as to the theorisation of craft that will not shy away from craft's paradoxical, historically accumulated luggage—mythologies and ideologemes—and the degree to which these are reproduced through discourses and practices (as I discuss in Chapter 1 and the rest of the thesis). Likewise, from my perspective, the field indexes a necessity for a theorisation of craft / art labour that will not hesitate from posing fundamental questions about the contradictory role of craft in re/creating social, gender, and artistic un/freedom in late capitalism. This is the second, admittedly ambitious yet paramount objective I hope to accomplish in this thesis.

CHAPTER 1 THEORISING CONTEMPORARY CRAFT

1.1 Introduction

This thesis explores the activities of the two generations of craft practitioners: firstly, Generation X, coming of age in the mid-1990s, and represented by such projects as the Shop of Travelling Things (St Petersburg, 1994–2000) and the Factory of Found Clothes (St Petersburg, 1995–2014), and secondly, Millennials, who have embarked upon the path of cultural labour in the mid-2010s—the Seamstresses (St Petersburg, Kyiv, 2015–present). The Shop of Travelling Things (henceforth, the Shop) and the Factory of Found Clothes (henceforth, the Factory) can be seen as sister projects: the Shop was run by Olga (Tsaplia) Egorova (1968, Khabarovsk) since 1994; a year later, the Shop has re-emerged as a project within the Factory in collaboration with Natalia (Gluklya) Pershyna-Yakimanskaia (1969, Leningrad). The Shop of Travelling Things opened its doors in 1994 in Borey Art Gallery, a beating heart of independent culture in St Petersburg (see Matveeva 2016b). In 1995-2000 the Shop was housed by Gallery 21, located in city's centre of non-conformist culture, Pushkinskaia 10 (see Matveeva 2016a). The Factory of Found Clothes was first launched in the framework of an exhibition-auction Girlfriends: Researching the Phenomenon of Clothes (*Podrugi: Issledovanie Fenomena Odezhdy*) (1995) (Figure 1). Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia belong to the Generation X (Gen X), "people born between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s and following the baby boomers" (OED 2023b). Similarly to the "last Soviet generation" (Yurchak 2005, 31–32), the generational experience of the Gen Xers is formed vis-à-vis the idea of Soviet modernity and its political constitution in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

Figure 1. Opening of the exhibition-auction *Girlfriends: Researching the Phenomenon of Clothes*, from left to right—unknown member of the public, Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia, April 1, 1995, St Petersburg (Russian Art Archive 1995).

Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia belong to the cohort of art practitioners who, I would argue, set the precedence of craft labour in the late capitalist industry of culture / visual art sector in Russia. Scholars tend to describe the Shop of Travelling Things and the Factory of Found Clothes in rather phenomenological and ontological terms—the projects are portrayed as exploring the appearances, namely, the experience of the appearances of vestimentary objects / clothes through the practice of art (see Azarkhi 2012; Bartlett 2022). The Shop / Factory have also been characterised in semiotic terms, as the projects involved in reinvesting somewhat innovative meanings into modern vestimentary codes—the re-coding results in the creation / design of the unique objects of art (see Nikolaeva 2016). Both phenomenological and semiotic approaches can be characterised in my view, as historically static due to their exclusive focus on the readymade object of art instead of the comprehensive process of creation / articulation of this object by the practitioners, that of their collaborators, and adherents, and ultimately, the culture industry and the visual arts sector itself. This results in the invisibility of craft labour for scholarship.

For the Millennial generation (OED 2023d),[20] represented by the Seamstresses project, the Shop and the Factory projects, by virtue of their work with the vestimentary medium, are a historical point of refence (see, for example, Lukianova and Melnik 2018). The Seamstresses project traces its origins back to 2015, the School of Engaged Art (St Petersburg) where it kicked off as a graduation project. Subsequently, Seamstresses developed into an independent cross-border Russian-Ukrainian project co-run by the School graduates—Anna Tereshkina (1986, Omsk), Maria Lukianova (1987, Volzhsky), Olesia Panova (1988, Novosibirsk), Tonia Melnik (1988, Kyiv) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The Seamstresses, group photograph: top left to right: Anna Tereshkina, Maria Lukianova; bottom left to right: Olesia Panova, Tonia Melnik; on the background—portrait of Che Guevara. October 9, 2018, Milan, Italy (2018)

The Seamstresses' project tends to be described in terms of an economic struggle and emancipation via cooperation and the unalienable labour of craft unfolding beyond the grasp of the hegemonic industry of culture and its institutions (see Osminkin 2016; Cherniakevich 2017). Such an approach might not be completely unwarranted—the Seamstresses themselves position their work as a "cooperative"

20 The "first post-Soviet generation" can be an alternative, synonymous expression.

response to the capitalist system of exploitation at large. However, in my view, these analyses also betray an anti-history stance towards cultural labour in general and craft labour in particular. The focus on the readymade object of art gets replaced with a wishful construction of self-autonomy. An empirical validity of this critique can be confirmed with reference to itself only.

The specificity of the aforementioned analyses of the Shop, Factory and Seamstresses (cf. Azarkhi 2012; Nikolaeva 2016; Osminkin 2016; Cherniakevich 2017) can be boiled down to a "false unity of the ideal and real" (Antonio 1981, 338)—which can be seen as one of the reasons of the invisibility of craft these analyses. Nonetheless, they provide us with an important insight—inquiring into the practice of cultural labour as an economic struggle towards emancipation via cooperation raises the question of heterodox / feminist historical consciousness—for that is precisely the question that has been suppressed by making the ideal (autonomy of craft) and the real (labour of craft) indistinguishable. Far from aspiring to collapse the ideal and real together, this research acknowledges the rift and unity between both (Ilyenkov 1977).

My guiding principle / approach in exploring the three projects is a historically situated, immanent dialectical contradiction between the historical consciousness of craft / feminist historical consciousness and the industry of culture (see Chapter 2). The goal of this chapter is to outline the historical trajectory of this contradiction vis-à-vis the problem of freedom in late / capitalism. To this goal, I discern four constitutive concepts that pertain to the historical consciousness of craft—object, temporality, politicisation, and standpoint. I conceptualise four related assumptions / myths—materiality, counter-modernity, agentification, and non-alienation.[21]

What is the operational meaning of "myth"?—The mythic character of craft / art in late capitalism can be understood, inter alia, as a "reification." According to György Lukács (1971/1923):

> Reification is … the necessary, immediate reality of every person living in capitalist society. It can be overcome only by constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely

21 Neither these concepts, not the myths, stand for a self-determining, singular characteristics of craft, but are structural elements that epitomize the development of craft as a socio-historical phenomenon.

> manifested contradictions of the total development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings of these contradictions for the total development. (197).

The discourse of contemporary craft integrates the historical assumptions / ideologemes about craft, showing a somewhat backward-looking / romantic bent—just like capitalism integrates primitive forms of capital, for example, merchant capital, philanthropic capital, into its system of production, thereby, bringing into effect the modes of consciousness that are capable of comprehending the immediate manifestations of social relations as they are, like the commodity form (Lukács 1971/1923, 93–94). The reified character of the myth-derived consciousness of craft labour, too, is clinging to the ideas of materiality, counter-modernity, agentification, and non-alienation. It does not mean to say, however true that might appear, that the phenomenon of reification simply eludes the grasp of craft studies, taking a blind eye on its self-immersion in the ideological system of the culture industry and visual art. As Lukács (Ibid.) explains, “The reified world appears henceforth quite definitively … as the only possible world, the only conceptually accessible, comprehensible world vouchsafed to us humans. Whether this gives rise to ecstasy, resignation or despair … this will do absolutely nothing to modify the situation as it is in fact” (110).

1.2 Periodisation of craft

Craft / capital dialectic

Periodisation of craft is part and parcel of the historical trajectory of capital. The dialectical—contradictory and mutually constitutive—character of the relation between craft and capital can be traced throughout the history of modern capitalism, first captured by Marx in the three forms, or stages of industrial organization of labour – handicrafts, manufacture, and large-scale industry (Marx 1982/1867, 385, 589–90). Handicrafts industries of the feudal society produced and were sustained by natural capital; as the basis of the organisation of craft labour in the guilds, natural capital consisted of a house, the tools of craft the circle of customers, and was handed down within a family (Marx and Engels 1998a/1932, 74). As far as the organisation of labour is concerned, the guild was based on the “dissection of handicraft activity into its separate components, by specialization of the instruments of labour, by the formation of specialized workers and by grouping and combining the latter into a single mechanism” (Marx 1982/1867, 486). Via an international expansion of trade, the guild

system enabled a gradual accumulation of merchant capital by individual craftsmen (Marx and Engels 1998a/1932, 40). Cosmopolitan commerce was one of the first preconditions for the "transformation of guild and rural domestic crafts into capitalist businesses," which forged the commodity market (Marx 1991/1867, 454–55) and allowed for natural capital to be superseded by a movable merchant capital, capital in the modern sense (Marx and Engels 1998a/1932, 77). The subsequent acceleration of the movable capital and commerce via manufacture caused the decline of the guilds and natural capital, and created the class of big non-guild bourgeoisie (Ibid., 78). A fortiori, the petty commodity production of artisans and craftsmen became the historical foundation of capitalist accumulation emerging circa the 16th century (Marx 1982/1867, 556, 873, 875–76, 1034).

The First Industrial Revolution "rested on a broad handicraft basis, which was at once a condition of its development" (Samuel 1977, 60). However, the guild system became a fetter to further automatization of production (Marx and Engels 1998a/1932, 82): empowered by an automatization of production, large-scale industry "abolish[es] the role of the handicraftsman as the regulating principle of social production" (Marx 1982/1867, 486, 491, 558). However, there is an important caveat to the seeming dissolution of craft labour under the weight of capital.

Large-scale industry "allowed the scattered handicrafts and domestic industries to continue to exist as a broad foundation"; the industrial revolution has brought the complex historical dynamic between craft and capital up to a point where domestic industries and the "so-called domestic workers … form[ed] an external department of the factories and warehouses" (Marx 1982/1867, 600–601). The "progressive annihilation" and transition from handicrafts to capitalist system has never become complete: for manufacture "always rests on the handicrafts of the towns and the domestic subsidiary industries of the rural districts, which stand in the background as its basis" – "If … [the industry] destroys these in one form, in particular branches at certain pints, it resurrects them again elsewhere, because it needs them to some extent for the preparation of raw material" (Marx 1982/1867, 911). Previously, one of the active vehicles of the capitalist development, craft labour turned into capital's shadow supply of labour-power. Consequently, the First Industrial Revolution did not spell doom for craft labour, neither did the Second Industrial Revolution.

Scholarship relies on at least four approaches when explaining the fate of craft during the Second Industrial Revolution: uneven and combined development approach, nation-centred approach, art-sociological approach, and techno-socialist approach. According to the uneven and combined development approach, maturing industrial capitalism not only did not hinder artisan manufactures but enabled a hybrid model of relations labour and production, in the form of "craft capitalism," for instance in 1840-1872 in Canada (see Kristofferson 2007, 3–4, 8–9, 21–22, 43, 47). Besides, in opposition to the historical narrative of the abolition of indigenous handicrafts through competition between handlooms and machine-weaving, a steady rise of craft industries and craft consumption has been pointed out – for example, in 1880-1940s in India (see Roy 2020, 3–6). According to the nation-centred approach, the practice of handicrafts in domestic industries is seen to be performed by a feminized subject, whose work was advancing the increasingly industrialising economy and at the same time served to preserve the traditional spirit of the nation, for example, in late imperial Russia (see Pallot 1991; Hilton 1996; Rusnock 2022). The art-sociological approach is mobilised to argue for an influence and productive synthesis of craft technologies with the emergent avant-garde culture, for example, in the revival of folk handicrafts in the new conceptual form of the "Suprematist embroidery" as a means to negotiate the meaning of national consciousness in the pre-revolutionary Ukraine (see Myzelev 2012), or in the porcelain manufacture in the early 1920s in the USSR, seen as the vehicle of a special medium of communist propaganda addressing the class of peasantry (see Lobanov-Rostovsky 1992; Wardropper 1992). Finally, the techno-socialist approach contends that craft technology is mainly focused on comradely relations of production and consumption in the world of mass manufactured objects in the early Soviet period revealing the socialist subject's struggle to reinvent the inalienable (see Arvatov and Kiaer 1997; Kiaer 2005).

Notwithstanding their specific claims, the four approaches share a significant insight: the inherent historicity of craft, its dynamic transformation vis-à-vis the forces and relations of production. Craft and capital/ism are argued to be dialectically intertwined: the form of craft labour has been undergoing historical change parallel to (not merely an effect of) capitalist social relations and relations of production, not beyond or in opposition to the latter. However negative was the role of craft in the context of modernization – for the handicraft industry was meant to become

superfluous just like the peasant economy in the context of modernisation (see Lenin 1974/1916)[22] – craft labour has proved to be a historical force in capital/ism. The development of craft via simple cooperation and manufacture leading to the modern factory system is a historical leap that has brought about the society as we know it today (Marx 1982/1867, 385, 589–90; Lukács 1971/1923, 171, 176).

Late capitalism and the culture industry

Periodisation of capitalism is far from being a resolved question—one could discern at least two dominant frameworks of periodizing contemporary forms / manifestations of the capitalist mode of production, "neoliberalism" and "post-Fordism." Neoliberalism is understood as an ideological regime of the capitalist enterprise culture and economy. Neoliberalism has been defined as a dominant (Matveev 2016; Gurova 2018; Yurchak 2003) although not incontestable (Ovsyannikova 2016; Kuleva 2020) theoretical framework in making sense of how society has been regulating and governing its relations of production. Alternatively, post-Fordism has been conceptualized as a regime of labour and production in the new globalized economy of "creative capitalism." Post-Fordism has been a complementary paradigm in exploring a specifically immaterial / relational logic that underpins the flexible self-management of society and its forces of production (Lazzarato 1996; Morgan 2020).[23]

This research adopts an alternative meta-framework in periodising capitalism to avoid the pitfalls of some mechanical adoption of ready-made ideas, be they economic or ideological in their character, to the organisation of the practices of creative labour in the specific form of craft / art. The alternative meta-framework in periodizing capitalism is that of "late capitalism." It allows us to pose the following set of questions that indicate the heuristic value of the "late capitalism" approach—Is capitalism still a dominating system? Can the current development of relations and forces of production render the concept of capitalism obsolete? Is the critique of capitalism viable and, ultimately, in what form—is Marx obsolete? (Adorno 2003/1969, 111). Furthermore, the "late capitalism" framework is a particular "response" to the

22 I am thankful to Liam Kenny for bringing The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution (Lenin 1974/1916) to my attention.

23 An examination of the two approaches for their merits in historicising creative labour in the "post-USSR" context is a worthwhile task, which I cannot address in this thesis due to my focus.

notorious methodological conundrum on whether we should focus on relations or forces of production. Or, to adjust this question to the current moment— should one focus on either "neoliberalism" or "post-Fordism"? However, the phenomenon of late capitalism itself is an acute expression of the contradiction between relations and forces of production, as well as between neoliberalism and post-Fordism. Adopting late capitalism as an analytical framework allows us to pursue the contradiction between relations and forces of production, implicit to the very structure of society (Adorno 2003/1969, 114).

Admittedly, however, late capitalism might convey an anachronistic assessment when referred to the formerly centralised economies.[24] If anything, "Russian capitalism" appears "nascent" (Dzarasov 2014) rather than late. This claim, nevertheless, is inaccurate if considered, (a) broadly, from the perspective of capitalism as a crisis-ridden world-historical system (e.g. Wallerstein 1996/1983, 19, 157–58); and (b) specifically, from the perspective of mature historical Marxism, acknowledging the "social character of the USSR" as not devoid of but based on elements of capitalist economic organisation (e.g. Trotsky 1933). The analytical framework of late capitalism does not undermine either specific or universal nature of capitalism after the collapse of the USSR but attempts to raise the problem of self-consciousness of history (see Chapter 2).

The historical and heuristic significance of late capitalism framework vis-à-vis the culture industry is pointed out by the Frankfurt School Critical Theory. One of the themes that go to the heart of critical theory's conception of the administered world of culture is the self-acceptance / awareness of creative labour as the commodity form. An experience of freedom in repressive society necessarily involves a tendency of self-objectivization, namely, the tendency of social subject regressing to social object (Adorno 2005/1951, 149–50). The mirage / spectacle of the commodity form—in this thesis, the craft objects and craft labour itself—is the closest reality society believes in and is able to comprehend (Adorno 2005/1951, 146–48). Cultural labour is organised by the logic of the manufacture of cultural goods, strengthening the tendency of

24 Cf. the "varieties of capitalism" debate, for example, Coates (2005); Lane and Myant (2007).

reification—the culture industry per se is an acute embodiment / symptom of the reification of historical consciousness (cf. Lukács 1971/1923, 99–100).

Contemporary craft has been enjoying an increased attention in creative labour studies despite being perceived as economically marginal, as far as its contribution to national gross domestic product is concerned (cf. Naudin 2020, 180). An accumulation of scholarship about contemporary craft economies has coincided with the institutionalisation and professionalisation of craft labour in the global design industry, entering the "art biennial circuit" at least since the early 2000s (Buszek and Robertson 2011, 198–99). Craft has been explored as a field that functions according its own particular logic and in opposition to "the rest of the creative economy"—craft constitutes a "recognized creative industry" in its own right (Luckman and Thomas 2018b, 7–8) and a specific sector of economic, cultural and policy-making activities (Mignosa and Kotipalli 2019). Craft is as a practice of micro-entrepreneurship (Luckman 2015a) and a form of self-consciousness / "self-making" borne in the arduous process of negotiating between the ethos of microenterprise and the bigger infrastructures of the art / market (Luckman and Andrew 2020a, 12). Overall, the primary focus of the creative labour research so far has been what we may call the "world of craft", a unique institutional formation, but the one that is embedded, by virtue of its autonomy, in the late capitalist configuration of the culture industry.

In late capitalism, cultural labour becomes an acute expression / embodiment of the contradiction between historical consciousness and material practice of labour—between freedom and unfreedom (cf. Rose 2009/1981, 145). Adopting the critical theory approach, creative labour studies have been exploring the contradictory character of cultural work in late capitalism. Firstly, on the level of the economic organisation of society, the bureaucratic self-regulation of creativity via policies is in contradiction with the extraction of surplus-value from workers in the sector of culture (see G. Morgan and Nelligan 2018, 3–6). Secondly, in the deep-rooted self-cultivation of desire for self-reward, self-discipline, and, ultimately, self-governance of the entrepreneurial subject is in contradiction with the subject's self/performance of creativity as a rewarding and liberating experience (see McRobbie 2016, 1–16; Taylor and Luckman 2020a, 10). Driven by the teleology of success, the phantom of career and a bright future (Taylor and Luckman 2020b), creative labour misrecognises its

self-alienation and self-commodification for the free pursuit of "freedom" (cf. Rose 2009/1981, 179). Freedom is the preeminent, yet unfulfillable ideological promise / object / aim of creative labour in late capitalism (cf. Munro and O'Kane 2022).

Craft / art labour in the culture industry

Far from drawing a distinction between the "craft world" and the "art world," this thesis explores their social dynamic and the institutionally mediated division of labour between the two (see Becker 1982, 281, 287). The basic premise in analysing craft labour this thesis makes use of is the shadow character of craft vis-a-vis the industry of culture. I conceptualise craft labour as a "reserve army of labour" (Marx 1982/1867, 798), the social subject of "support personnel" (Becker 1982, 19–28) for producing what only appears as "art" to the public eye. In its shadowy form, craft labour enables the operation of the culture industry on national and international levels. At the same time, craft labour, as a discourse, gives expression to heterodox forms of historical self/consciousness.

In other words, this research does not explore how artists use craft technology and techniques to produce certain aesthetic objects (cf. Becker 1982, 280–86).[25] For this research, and this is of utmost significance, "art" is a *necessary form of appearance*, or even a *function of craft labour in late capitalism* (cf. Rose 2009/1981, 80). In a sense, craft labour produces raw materials for the culture industry to be subsequently elevated to the status of "art" vie the division of creative labour. The division of creative labour is based on the inherent invisibility of craft. The critical approach adopted by this research upholds that to understand how "craft" and "art" contradict each other and morph into one another entails making sense of the social division of creative labour. According to this critical approach, contemporary craft is not just an independent / personal activity of self-expression; put differently, the practitioner may own the conditions of production (tools and materials), but not the product—the final product is, as it were, "owned" by the culture industry itself (cf. Marx 1982/1867, 1020, 1029). The dynamic disposition of craft technology and creative labour is a touchstone of the culture industry formation (see Naudin and Patel 2020),

25 Cf. the recent wave of recognition and re-evaluation of decorative art and fibre art, for example, woven sculptures by Magdalena Abakanowicz, Klára Kuchta, and Nora Correas. I am grateful to Vesna Vucovic, Victoria Popovic and Madeline Turner for calling the names of these artists to my attention.

at least, as I suggest, since the mid-1990s onwards. Craft labour, I argue, is central to the formation and operation of the culture industry in the "post-USSR" register—craft performs the function of an invisible labour-force that fuelled the development of the late capitalist industry of culture in Russian metropoles, and elevated craft labour to the status of a full-fledged myth. However, craft labour remains invisible in the culture industry and supressed by its internal logic of organisation and self/perception.

The historical function of craft for the culture industry in Russia, in my reading, has been consistently overlooked. One of the reasons for this omission can be that the industry of culture has been heavily theorised from a perspective of space / geopolitics, rather than the standpoint of historically grounded social relations and relations of production. According to that perspective, the industry of culture is a field that has been "strongly associated with Western economies" of the "Anglophone countries" (see Taylor and Luckman 2020a, 13–14). Consequently, a cause for the invisibility of craft as a form of creative labour-power in the "post-USSR" context is, arguably, a mechanic rendition of histories and social dynamic of creative and cultural economies as a product of "import" from "the West" and the one that ends up being regulated from above by the state actors, unconsciously enacting the Soviet-style bureaucracy (Taylor and Luckman 2020a, 14). Furthermore, creative labour is made sense via national subjectivation—there is a "British creative I" and there is a "Russian creative identity" (Kuleva 2020, 77–78). Not least symptomatic is the temporal qualification of the culture industry in Russia as "emerging"—"still undergoing transition from the Soviet cultural monopoly to a market economy" (see Kuleva 2020, 67).

These analyses, I think, betray a top-down approach to the explanation of the organisation of the culture industry, which counterposes the system / the culture industry and the agents / creative labour; it renders the latter as the passive objects set against the infrastructural backbone, the institutions and policies that had yet to be brought to action from above (see Kuleva 2020, 72–73, 75, 77–79). The changing configuration of the culture industry institutions and policies, it is assumed, directly shape and inform the subjectivities of the workers of culture (see Trubina 2020). It is rather unfortunate that the most engaging question possible in this context is—What does it mean to have a successful career in the culture industry? How can one realise

effectively one's creativity as an economic asset? (see Trubina 2020, 120–21). The conclusion that can be drawn from this reasoning is quite uncanny: thinking about and practicing creative labour in the "post-USSR" register loses all sense of historical and social agency if its inner core logic of organisation is merely imposed or effected from above by a superior power, be it an advanced capitalist core, or the signified West, or the decaying structures of cultural self-governance inherited from the Soviet time. Against this background, I must point out, one of the major gaps for creative labour studies has been history, or the formation of historical consciousness of cultural labour and cultural workers themselves, especially in the context of the former USSR creative and cultural industries, whose historical and social trajectory is yet to be explored. Indeed, a theory of creative and cultural economies in the "post-USSR" register is yet to be born.

Building on the tradition of critical theory, this thesis ask—What does it mean to write a history of creative labour in Russia? The thesis proposes to situate creative labour in conjunction, or in parallel with the historical trajectory of craft labour in the sector of visual art. This research locates Russia's late capitalism against the backdrop of industrialization and professionalisation of heterodox culture since the mid-1990s. In doing so, this research pursues to examine the problem of the role of the culture industry and that of creative labour of craft in the formation of the historical self-consciousness of freedom—feminist historical consciousness.

1.3 Object of craft

Craft's materiality myth

The first myth that surrounds craft in modern and contemporary writing is craft being a concrete manifestation of an inherent materiality of the created object. According to this myth, the production of materiality per se is the aim / object of the craft labour activity. The concept of the object / aim of labour denotes what craft labour does and how craft labour is mediated via the instruments of labour—not what craft labour is, neither the nature of the tools that craft labour uses (Marx 1982/1867, 285). The major premise of the materiality myth is the binary split between craft labour and modern post/industrial production as two essentially distinct "ways in which human beings relate to the object[ive] world"—in contrast to factory work, dominated by alienation of

labour, the practice of craft is formed around the ideas of liberation via inalienable work that serves to embody and bring forth the authentic and creative labouring subject (Campbell 2005, 39). If the consciousness of work in modern capitalism is an impersonal expression of joylessness and a fundamental lack of meaning, the labour of craft is a direct, unmediated manifestation of joy in the disenchanted world (Weber 2005/1930, 259). Modern capitalism is the effect of the domination of abstract capital that turns workers and the their labour-power into mere exchange values; whereas craft is believed to give humanity a meaning to hold onto—material skills and tools to unlock social agency in the hyper-abstract world of capital (J. P. Morgan 2018, n.p.). Accordingly, craft labour is considered a form of "material consciousness" sui generis (Sennett 2008, 120). The primordial aesthetic quality of the object of craft is associated with the tactile perception (Denicola and Wilkinson-Weber 2016, 14) through which one can get a grasp of social relations—after all, "making physical things" is equal to "making human relationship" (Sennett 2008, 289). Craft's "material consciousness" has a pragmatic character, it results in the production of the "objects of utility"—"useful objects" (J. P. Morgan 2018, n.p.). The fundamental characteristic of craft is, therefore, its instrumentality. Conceived this way, craft technology becomes a mode of revealing, a way of attaining truth (Heidegger 1977/1954, 12). Following its Germanic etymology, craft is a form of power (Bratich 2010, 303–4). The myth of materiality asserts that the labour of craft results in the production of "real tangible things" that bespeak real human existence. Craft resists the logic of abstraction upon which the capitalist system rests, and can "repurpose the capitalist system" and "rehabilitate the entire capitalist enterprise away from exploitation and toward a more responsible economic system" (J. P. Morgan 2018, n.p.). Craft's "manual ancestral techniques" are the weapons of political resistance we inherited from the pre-modern past (Seminar 'Arts, Crafts, Affects: Documenting HerStories and Worldbuilding' 2022). Craft's value can never be "eliminated or fully captured by capital," for craft is a form of praxis that valorises itself "outside of the circuits of capitalist culture" (Bratich 2010, 313).

Self-objectification of craft labour

According to the myth of craft's essential materiality, craft is a lever against modern post/industrial production immersed in the abstraction of human labour and social relations. For this thesis, the task of defining what craft labour does in late capitalism

is inseparable from the historical moment where a given theorization about craft labour unfolds. Craft labour is a historical phenomenon, a form of historical consciousness and so its theorisation. In pursuing the question—What is the meaning of craft labour in late capitalism?—this research situates craft labour in the context of social relations and relations of production, specific to the culture industry / visual art sector in since the mid-1990s and until late 2010s. This research argues that the specific historical character of craft labour in late capitalist industry of culture has been craft labour's self-objectification, as far as the linguistic and visual representations of the Shop, Factory, and Seamstresses are concerned.

The myth about craft's essential materiality indexes a gap between the subject and object of craft labour—as the myth posits, craft labour acquires its value only when passing itself off as an object. Similarly to the capitalist production transforming the worker "into a mere object of the process of production" (Lukács 1971/1923, 167–68), craft's mythic materiality is transformed by the methods of the culture industry into self-objectification. Among the key methods of the culture industry, as I discuss in Chapter 3, is project-based production, arguably, one of the dominant production paradigms in late capitalism, characterised by collective endeavours, complexity and uniqueness of labour processes, and constricted by time and budget (Doeringer et al. 2013, 103). Project-based consciousness / thinking is underlying the conception of creative labour in late capitalism.[26] While the flexibilization of labour has been an imminent theme in creative labour studies (e.g. Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011), the effects of the project-based production on the practical organisation of creative labour, especially craft labour, has attracted limited scholarly attention. To make up for this gap, I introduce a novel concept—project-archive—to conceptualize the project-based production as a distinguishing feature of craft labour in the late capitalist industry of culture in Russia (1994-2014). Craft labour acquires its historical self/consciousness via the discoursal form of myth / ideologeme, whereby the aim / object of craft labour is its self-creation / self-articulation via discursive means.

26 As Adorno (2005/1951) writes, "The more masterfully the artist expresses himself, the less he has to 'be' what he expresses, and the more what he expresses, indeed the content of subjectivity itself, becomes a mere function of the production process" (214).

Craft labour in late capitalism has a discoursal, or more precisely, metalanguage character. This research proposes that projectification and archivisation of craft in Russia has contributed toward the end-goal of the self-objectification of craft labour and its historical self/consciousness. Craft labour, to reiterate the first basic assumption of this research, can be conceptualised as a specific form of historical consciousness that cannot be disembedded from social relations and relations of production that constitute late capitalist industry of culture. The period of the 1990s, as the following analytical chapters demonstrate, was the period of building up the discourse of heterodox consciousness in creative labour, by the two chosen projects, the Shop of Travelling Things and the Factory of Found Clothes projects. The coalescing force that brought about this consciousness was the ideology of cultural feminism resourced by the globalized non-profit economy and based on the recognition / promotion of the female workforce as an ostensible agent of change (see Chapters 3 and 4).

1.4 Temporality of craft

Counter-modernization myth

The second related myth assimilated by the contemporary craft discourse is the counter-modernization myth: it asserts craft's potential to unfold beyond modernity, capital, and capitalism. The counter-modernizing conception of craft can be traced back to utopian socialism and Robert Owen (1771–1858). The 19th century Owenite movement asserted the necessity of protecting society against the market and the machine production via cooperation and unionisation of labour; the "methods" of Owenism resemble modern trade union movement, but were geared towards artisans' oppositional / critical role during the First Industrial Revolution (Polányi 2001/1944, 175–78, 183). Similarly, the Arts and Crafts Movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries emerged from the critique of modernity and industrialisation, which degraded labour to the soulless performance of the machines but, at the same time, fuelled a new anti-capitalist ("socialist") movement of artisans (Kimmel 1987, 388). One of the movement's leaders, John Ruskin (1819-1900), advocated for a radical return to the workshop of the pre-industrial era to reinvigorate society's senses to objects (Sennett

2008, 84, 108–9, 112). In pointing beyond capitalist social relations and relations of production, craft labour denotes a shift towards a more humane pre-history.

Today's mythic discourse of craft is no less immersed in the nostalgia for a tacit presence of the subject behind the object: the experience of craft is not just to satisfy the urge to create "something" with one's hands but to provide a space to suspend time / history itself (Walker 2007b, n.p.). Craft is seen as a "form of affective production" and an "ontological accumulation" that has a power to prevail—"despite the catastrophic decomposition called capitalism" (Bratich 2010, 311, 316). To that extent, the "revival" of crafts in late capitalism is not a mere matter of nostalgia for or a return to a romanticised past but an "affirmation and reversion within a fabric that was never lost"—the skilled labour of craft, as the myth goes, never disappeared but "persisted and proliferated in the cracks and interstices of capitalist culture" (Bratich 2010, 310).

In tacit agreement with earlier forms of socialist ideologies, today's mythic discourse of craft draws connection between the resurgence of craft labour in late capitalism and a consolidation of global sweatshops since the 1990s, thus, as it were, pitting craft against the machines, promoting craft as a weapon of degrowth (Bratich 2010, 309). Craft's aspirations to make a leap beyond the bounds of modern / bourgeois society are fed on the ideas of romantic socialism, promoted by William Morris (1834–1896) of the Arts and Crafts Movement: "For William Morris, the Middle Ages provided a palpable example of how pre-capitalist craftsmen experienced a fundamentally different relationship to the natural world" (Sparrow 2022, n.p.).[27] The commodity form, as bourgeois society affords it, debases human nature; and because craft labour and human nature are in proximity to each other, today's indigenous cultures are a viable source of inspiration for non-commodified practices: for instance, in the traditional Mapuche society, craft is a survival strategy that is deeply rooted in the "symbolic universe" of pre-modern cosmology (Juliano 2003, 155, 164, 166).

The mythical comprehension of craft in late capitalism stems from a paradox of historical consciousness, where primitive societies and their social relations appear, to the contemporary mythic consciousness, as flexible and capable of self-renewal,

27 I am thankful to Ryan Mickler for bringing to my attention this essay (Sparrow 2022).

whereas, by contrast, modern social relations appear rigid, static and fixed (Lukács 1971/1923, 97). Because of this contradictory distortion of historical consciousness, the pre-modern world holds image of an emancipated post-capitalist society (cf. Sparrow 2022). Hence an explicitly conflicting character of the mythic consciousness of craft: it tends to reject the "oppressive" present in its longing for the "emancipatory" past, but it cannot help but assume craft as a transhistorical type of practice, valuable beyond capitalist social relations and relations of production.

Self-periodization of craft labour

This thesis addresses the problem of the temporality of craft labour from an immanent perspective—as a problem of historical self/consciousness and self/periodization. According to this perspective, craft is emphatically not a "deviation" from the capitalist mode of production, but a form of manual labour, historically embedded within capitalism. Contrary to the discourse of "craft revival" in late capitalism, craft is not a pre-modern relic. Not only because hand-powered labour never becomes obsolete (Denicola and Wilkinson-Weber 2016, 12), but because craft itself is subject to historical change. For this research, the concept of craft facilitates the analysis of historical self/consciousness and self/activity of creative labour in the industry of culture / visual art scene in St Petersburg, Russia, since the mid-1990s.

However, one of the necessary caveats and key conditions for my analysis relates to the mediated—discoursal—character of craft labour. As a form of discourse, craft "reveals" its implicit retrospective historicity. The culture industry facilitates the conversion of craft into a speculative, self/objectifying form of practice that emerges as a project-archive (see Section 1.3). It should not come as a surprise, then, that the retrospective historicity of craft, enunciated by the discoursal community of craft / art practitioners, is organised by the particular logic of myth—re/collecting and re/articulating the past to the point of its naturalisation / romanticisation as a common sense (see Bourdieu 1990/1987, 135). The culture industry in Russia showcases such naturalisation of historical consciousness of craft—feminist historical consciousness—in what I, following Olga Tsaplia Egorova (2018b), call "Romantic Time" (see Chapter 4).

The Romantic Time asserts the long-awaited attainment of freedom: freedom to exchange craft labour for capital, symbolic and real; freedom to express oneself artistically; freedom to name the "formerly" "oppressive" social order / ideology, i.e. the USSR, by its name. Yet, the construct of Romantic Time is necessarily contradictory. When referring to the Russian 1990s, the Romantic Time contradicts the anti-modernizing character of craft by painting the artist character in the tones of economic scarcity and social destitution to be overcome in the future—craft and modernization (here, professionalisation) go hand in hand. The Romantic Time thereby embraces the pathos of unrestricted self-transformation via crafts / arts.

What is the meaning of self-transformation in this context? The Romantic Time is, if you will, a lifestyle, adopted by the practitioners of craft / art since the mid-1990s—the lifestyle in which the recrafted textile object is the pivotal signifier of freedom. The object of craft acquires its meaning in as much as it "takes part" in the transaction between the practitioner / artist and the culture industry / the economy of feminist merchandise. Following the lore of the Romantic Time, the transformation of one's own appearances and styles is equated with transformation of society as a whole.

The Romantic Time, furthermore, postulates craft labour as a vehicle of professional artistic career and upward mobility in the culture industry. As a marker of the Romantic Time, the professionalisation of craft as "visual art" re/actualises the question of the division of creative labour between the "artists" and the "practitioners of craft"—particularly, in the light of the craft / sewing workshops the Factory and the Seamstresses made use of as part of their public / artistic activities. The craft / sewing workshops afforded the formation and engagement of the craft public; as far as the Factory and its sub-project the Shop of Utopian Clothes are concerned, the craft public, referred by the name of the "Girls," had a distinctly feminized / Romantic character (see Chapters 2 and 4). The concept of the Romantic Time is underpinned by the ideological forces that run parallel to the counter-modernization myth of craft—the ideology of proto feminism, indexing the antinomy between essential femininity (the "Girls" or the Factory's imaginary heroine the "Gymnasium Girl") vis-à-vis patriarchy as an eternal force of social domination. Reading the recollections by the "Girls" themselves (see Chapter 4), the Factory / Shop's transhistorical discourse of craft / art tacitly reaffirms and reinforces another widespread myth, that of female

creative power. In the larger context of the culture industry / visual art sector in Russia today, the Factory's activities in the 1990s and early 2000s, become a full-fledged field of make-believe.

1.5 Politization of craft

Craft's politics / agentification myth

The third myth characterises craft as a means of politicization and agentification: one of its assumptions is craft representing a somewhat unique standpoint of social awareness / consciousness, emerging due to the privileged access to material consciousness that handicrafts afford vis-à-vis the intangible abstraction of capital. As J. P. Morgan (2018, n.p.) captures this assumption, "We must seek the rehabilitation of capitalism through a craft praxis"—"This is how we can navigate out of the flawed and overly abstracted world of unrestrained capitalism and into a more stable and socio-environmentally aware world." What the myth omits is how craft relates to the capitalist cultures of marketing and consumption, successfully integrating craft into the circuits of craftwashing (see Black and Burisch 2021). This craftwashing reflects the current popularity of making and re/crafted goods and garments that appeal to the desire of the (hipster / dandy) public for authenticity / agency via ethical consumption (Luckman 2015a, 38, 152). To this extent, the apparent antinomy between craft and consumption is false. Insofar as the rise of, if you will, the "new craft movement" is inextricably tied to the ethos of "doing what you love" and "following your dream" (Taylor and Luckman 2020a, 2), craft labour is immanent to the heterodox—feminist—culture of consumption (see Walker 2007b, n.p.).

On yet another level of the "political craft" myth, craft is a medium of subjectification (Denicola and Wilkinson-Weber 2016, 1). When individuals are exposed to the transformative power of craft by doing it, they step into the terrain of self-empowerment (James and Thomas 2022)—via the material labour of craft, the agentification of the labouring subject occurs. The process of crafting shapes our historical consciousness and historical will: craft per se is a full-fledged—social and affective—"mode of subjectivation" (Bratich 2010, 315). In this sense, craft is a natural remedy against the diseases of the consumer society. The union of craft and political activism is sought by "craftivism" / "craftivists."

Coined by Betsy Greer (2007, 401), craftivism "promote[s] the symbiotic relationship between craft and activism" and reclaims individual creativity for the purposes of "community building, skill sharing and action" (Buszek and Robertson 2011, 197). Scholars in material culture theorise needlework as an activity for uncovering / reimagining the political character of craft as classed, gendered, and sexed type of manual labour (see Pristash, Schaechterle, and Wood 2009; Bryan-Wilson 2017). In an indirect way, therefore, the craft activism theory assumes the historical ambivalence of craft, representing an apparatus of "heteropatriarchal" oppression and marginalisation of women's labour, whilst, at the same time, allowing "women" to construct certain contesting meanings, including the ones that are grounded in the current political moment (Parker 2010b, xii). The material culture of needlework and craftivism constitute a common ground for the struggles for democracy on the basis of feminist ideology—conceptualised as the fourth-wave feminism (Myzelev 2022). As a parallel development, at least since the early 2000s, the culture industry has increasingly become a marketplace for the "political craft" (Buszek and Robertson 2011, 198–99). It seems questionable, in this sense, whether, for instance, yarn bombing— craft-cum-street art—evades the white cube by engaging the street audience (see Myzelev 2015), and is an exception to the museumification / industrialisation of "political craft." In view of the latter, the double-edged character of social participation via craft can be pointed out: the politization of craft in late capitalism, as far as its negative impact is concerned, serves to substitute / mask social participation with consumption—DIY-ism and lifestylism. For this reason, the appropriation of "political craft" by the system of contemporary art production indirectly evidences the lingering crisis of political agency, unfolding circa since the 1970s and coming to its full realisation towards the last quarter of 2010s (see Walker 2007, n.p.).

Craft's self-abduction of agency

I conceptualise the politicisation of craft from the perspective of the culture industry and the visual arts sector—the system of relations, whose self/organisation affords certain "disguising" of the division of labour between the spheres of "art" and "craft." This thesis, however, does not rely on what can be termed as an inequality research framework (e.g. Patel 2020, 178–79) that implies that the hierarchies among creative workers exist because certain policies have been implemented unproductively by the

state / the culture industry / the sector of visual art. Rather, this research upholds an immanent critical perspective wherein the "political craft" discourse is an indispensable expression / symptom of the divided / stratified field of creative work, and the one that has been aggravating since at least the mid-1990s—as demonstrated by the activities of the Shop, Factory, and Seamstresses, representing the two generations of artists / crafters, Gen X and Millennials.

Since circa the early 2000s, the activities of the Factory take "political art" as its explicit form of appearance—a brand of a kind. As far as the relations of labour are concerned, "political artists" were outsourcing craft as a pro bono service, particularly, from the group of people who helped run the Shop of Utopian Clothes, frequently self/referred to as the "Girls." This dynamic, in my estimation, facilitated an emergence of what I call the "surplus craft labour-power" in the in the system of contemporary art that originated in the St Petersburg cultural scene. Against this background, the "surplus craft labour-power" denotes an emergent "class" of cultural workers who are outsourced by the "artists" / "patrons" to perform craft for a compensation.[28] This dynamic became explicit from the mid-2010s, with the Seamstresses project's commission from What is to be Done to sew textile banners / panels for the Creative Time Summit,[29] titled "The Curriculum," at the Venice biennale in 2015.

There is, however, an important paradox to the labour hierarchy between the "artists" and the "crafters." The latter "class" of creative workers perceive it as enabling, as the freedom and autonomy of creative expression is concerned. "Crafters" see the culture industry / the visual art sector as a space of material sustenance and symbolic recognition of their practice—in a nutshell, it allows them to be / identify as "political artists" as such. The key element of the "artists/crafters" paradox is the "politicization of art" being contingent upon the existing division of labour between the two "positions."

[28] Cf. Karl Marx's (1982/1867) definition of the surplus labour-power—as labour expended during surplus labour-time (325).

29 As the Creative Time Summit webpage (Unauthored, n.d.) specifies, "Since its inception in 2009, the Summit has functioned as a flexible, roving platform bringing together artists, activists, and other thought leaders engaging with today's most pressing issues. Having emerged alongside the definition of political art, or socially engaged art, the Summit highlighted and united artists and practitioners working beyond the traditional art market, many of whom were intervening in areas of civic life, politics, and media" (n.p.).

To this extent, the shift of the discourse towards "political art" during the 2000s-2010s —in the activities of the Factory and its new incarnation What is to Be Done— is significant. In comparison to the 1990s, the "politicisation of art / craft" in the ex/Factory and the Seamstresses' work indexes a deepening of the division of labour between the "artists" and the "crafters." At the same time, the "politicisation of art / craft," I think, marked a major change in the historical consciousness of craft / art per se—namely, a recognition of the fact that the commoditization and "politicization of art / craft" are closely interconnected phenomena. By circa 2010s, the institutionalisation of craft / art as a commission becomes systemic to the culture industry / visual art sector, and mutually productive.

Fundamentally, to return to my previous point, craft labour and capitalism are far from contradicting each other. The social character of craft labour in late capitalism acquires its explicit articulation in the object of craft labour. As a consequence of the self-objectification of craft labour via projectification and archivisation, craft's major function becomes the production of artefacts for the museum of contemporary art. The museum elevates the object to the status of cultural value. Similarly to Marx's conception of the commodity form (1982/1867, 165),[30] the ready-made object of craft abducts labour's agency, metamorphing into a mere index of agency (Gell 1998, 13–15). On the whole, this dynamic of reification of the object of craft complicates the self/perception of craft / art as politicised. As an effect of the professionalization of craft as visual art through the 1990s to 2010s, craft transforms itself into a "linguistic capital" (cf. Bourdieu 1977, 646)—the artefact whose "biography" / symbolic value is inscribed into a project continuum.[31] Whereas, as a "project," the mythic nature of craft is repeatedly re/affirmed. The historical self/consciousness of craft labour proves to be resolutely caught up inside the walls of the archive of contemporary art and the exhibition hall—reified as a bitter reminder of its self-abducted agency.

30 As Marx (1982/1867) wites, "[T]he commodity form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material [dinglich] relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (165).
31 On the value-accumulating potential a mythic language can afford see Barthes (1991/1972, 122).

1.6 Craft public standpoint

Craft's non-alienation / decommodification myth

The fourth myth is concerned with its exclusive quality of craft as an antidote against alienation and commoditization of labour in late capitalism. This myth is based on the authenticity / identity between the aim of labour, craft object and labouring subject. The myth inscribes itself onto the horizon of "history" where craft has been performed eternally as a gift-giving and care-giving custom within a community—seen this way, craft is saturated with use-value only, reproducing non-capitalist and post-capitalist social relations in perpetuum, as if unfolding beyond the commodity form (Bratich 2010, 306, 308, 309).

The drive against alienation and commoditization of labour per se does not belong to the margin of cultural work (cf. Bratich 2010, 310). The commodity form has been one of the central preoccupations for the culture industry's heterodox elements since the 1960s: the abstract art movement posed the question of de-objectification of artistic works (J. P. Morgan 2018, n.p.), seeking to bypass the circuits of the art market and the "tyranny of the commodity status" by fragmenting and dematerialising the object of art, by aspiring to change the art object into a peculiar "anti-form," by resisting the luxurisation of art in late capitalism (Lippard 2001/1973, 6, 107, 263). However, as the previous sections in this chapter have shown, the organisation and division of labour in the culture industry has increasingly become a machine of abstraction that mercilessly reifies material and immaterial substances alike (cf. Lukács 1971/1923, 92).

Similarly to the myth of political power, the historicization of craft labour beyond capitalist logic of valorisation construes both craft labour—and craft consumption—as a non-alienated form of practice that yields authentic expression of the self in late capitalism (Campbell 2005, 39–40). The craft consumer "[B]ring[s] skill, knowledge, judgement, love and passion to their consuming in much the same way that it has always been assumed that traditional craftsmen and craftswomen approach their work"—the chain of the "decommodifying reaction" (Campbell 2005, 24, 27). Following the logic of craft's non-alienation myth, craft consumption is a creative act, it is aimed at creating an ethical stance towards the existing society and a pathos of Saving the

Environment / Economy—after all, the future of this planet, the myth runs, depends on "you" (Walker 2007a, n.p.; Walker 2007b, n.p.). The myth of non-alienation and decommodification thus posits craft consumption as a form of self-consciousness in which historical agency is, if you will, bestowed upon an autonomous individual. In doing so, however, the myth tacitly endorses this self-conscious subject—the crafter and the craft public—as a commodity in itself. The myth renders the consumer as the sole "product of individual consumption" (Marx 1982/1867, 290)—it is relentlessly collapsing the subject / of craft labour into the object / of craft labour.

This research addresses craft labour from an angle of the formation of the collective standpoint, captured by the concept of craft public. In addressing the formation of the craft public as the problem of historical consciousness—feminist historical consciousness—and its "reified existence" (Lukács 1971/1923, 136) in culture industry and the economy of feminist merchandise, this research develops the concept of the standpoint of craft public.

Craft public's commoditization of craft labour

This research adopts a dynamic approach to the category of commoditization of craft labour, which requires a dynamic conceptualisation of the commodity form (see Hart 2009, 40, 43–44, 48). The standpoint of craft's collective self/consciousness, as I discuss in Chapter 6, comes about in the period of the 2010s (2015–2019). Contra to craft's non-alienation and anti-commodification myth, it is not an individual craft consumer who is at the centre of my inquiry, but craft public as a collective formation / collective actor. For this research, craft public represents the standpoint[32] of collective historical consciousness.

The question of craft public, including the question of the self-understanding of the members of the public, has been increasingly addressed in creative labour studies (see, for example, Luckman and Thomas Forthcoming). However, this question has been framed vis-à-vis the "third wave" of craft—relatively recent trend facilitated by the valorisation / promotion of craft labour via social media and online marketplaces like Etsy. Based on my interviews with the crafters—participants of the sewing workshops

[32] For a discussion of Feminist Standpoint Theory, see Chapter 2.

organised by the Seamstresses in St Petersburg in 2018—this research addresses a set of meta-questions: What is the identity of craft public in the eyes of craft /art practitioners—Seamstresses? What is the self-perception of the craft public?

In line with my pervious line of argumentation on the self-referential, abstract character of craft / art—having its self/representation and self/archivisation as an aim and goal of work—the identity of the craft public proves to elude the grasp of the craft labour discourse, at least in the Seamstresses' activities until 2019. On the one hand, from their perspective, the craft public is an abstract "social position" that transforms the subject, assuming it, into a matter of social resource—the craft public is thus positioned as a passive object of contemplation. It is in this sense that we can speak of the abstract standpoint of the practitioners vis-a-via their public: the practitioners conceive of their public as contributing to the attainment and preservation of the sewing workshops as a "safe space." Paradoxically, then, the political meaning of the discourse of craft is borne via creating, retaining and preserving crafters' / artists' autonomy vis-à-vis extraneous forces like society. To this extent, the standpoint of craft public stems from the logic of negation: because the ultimate goal of craft / art labour is to attain freedom from / despite the forces of the culture industry.

On the other hand, the craft public is an abstract construction, reduced to a monetary resource with a purchasing power—as the Seamstresses' interviews show. The purchasing power, accordingly, is a principle that delineates the "boundaries" of the craft public as an addressee of the Seamstresses. In other words, the standpoint of craft public is equated with the one of craft consumer. And indeed, the 2010s becomes the period of an increasing shift of craft / art labour discourse towards the theme of consumption.[33] This thesis, therefore, suggests that the period of the 2010s, finally, brings the theme of consumption to the historical consciousness of craft / art labour in the St Petersburg art scene.

The tendency of consumption, being one of the central logics of the operation of craft labour in the culture industry in the 2010s, gives rise to what this thesis defines as the feminist merchandise economy. As an effect of the gentrification and

[33] Cf. craft / art labour in the 1990s—the Factory—where consumption was rather an implicit theme, "hidden" behind the proposition of the freedom of self/expression via sartorial means, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

proliferation of creative spaces, the 2010s witnessed the formation of the activist merchandise economy in St Petersburg. The collaboration of the Seamstresses with the economy of feminist merchandise in the 2010s bring the commoditization of craft / art labour to its ultimate expression. The commoditization of craft labour as a feminist merchandise enables the creative expression—for both the practitioners and their public—contributing to a sense of belonging in the craft public through craft consumption. For this reason, it makes sense to argue for a meaningful role of the commodity form / the craft object—as a consolidating force shaping and bringing forth the collective standpoint / historical self-consciousness of the craft public in St Petersburg by the end of the 2010s.

1.7 Conclusion

The long historical trajectory of craft is intertwined with that of capital/ism. Craft and myth are deeply immersed into each other—this chapter has aimed to show how craft / art labour is mediated by its mythology / ideologeme. This thesis does not set the goal of letting craft free of its self/mythologising force. In late capitalism, myth—a reified discourse—is the necessary form of the appearance of the historical consciousness of craft / art labour. Late capitalism redefines the function of craft in a specific way—it becomes formative but invisible for the industry of culture / visual art sector. Craft creates fertile environment for combining artistic and entrepreneurial practices to produce and trade unique cultural goods, sustain merchandise economies and craft publics, advance precarious careers in the visual art sector.

The fourfold structure of craft mythology / ideologeme—materiality, counter-modernization, agentification, and non-alienation—cannot be transcended, if at all, but only reflected upon critically, to address the question of freedom in the late capitalist society in a meaningful way. Against this background, the following chapters set four elements / concepts constituting the consciousness of craft labour—feminist historical consciousness—in Russia in 1994-2019: object, temporality, politicization, and standpoint. Via these concepts, the thesis develops the following argument: craft / art labour's engagement with the culture industry / visual art sector over nearly three decades (a) provided a fragile ground for professionalisation of creative labour and politicization of the crafters / artists and their craft public, yet (b) severely constrained

craft / art labour's ideological horizon of thought and practice. The mythic discourse of craft labour foreshadowed and intensified craft / art labour's longing for freedom but eventually afforded a limited articulation of freedom as mere autonomy either from repressive state ideology (for the Shop / Factory—Gen X), or the capitalist industry of culture (for Seamstresses—Millennials). The consensual and mythic qualification of the historical consciousness of craft labour as heterodox—feminist—is tenable only inasmuch as it posits the negation of freedom via autonomy.

CHAPTER 2 RESEARCH METHOD/OLOGY

There is a point at which methods devour themselves.
I should like to start from there.
Franz Fanon—Black Skin, White Masks (2008/1952, 5)

2.1 Begin from the beginning: an "emergence of the field"

The epigraph from Franz Fanon's enigmatic work guides my reflection about the method/ology of my research. To engage with my past assumptions and work through them in a self/critical manner, I shall begin with the slippery question on how my research method/ology came about in the first place. One, perhaps, risks losing the sight of the method "pathway," if one reflects back upon itself. Conscious of the risk, I shall begin from the beginning, the pre-fieldwork moment of 2016-18—my scholarly efforts to make sense of the workings of feminist consciousness in the system of art.

Before my field research in 2018–2019, I designed this research to investigate the phenomenon of "feminist activist art," which I understood as a "post-dissident" way of organising creative work in the creative economy—specifically, in the Russian society under a "hybrid authoritarian regime" of Putinism.[34] Initially, my analytical focus was dedicated to one group—the Seamstresses, which, at that point, was functioning both as a local sewing initiative in St Petersburg and a Russian-Ukrainian art project[35]—and the respective milieus and infrastructures the group emerged and thrived in. I have designed this research project as an attempt to examine "feminist activist art" as a particular transcendence of what I had conceptualised, at that preparatory stage, as the historical logic of dissidence. It was thus hypothesised in my mid-2018 research plan: "[U]nlike the logic of dissidence, which amplifies the dominant dichotomy [between] culture and politics, post-dissidence cuts across that divide by introducing the material-economic aspect of work"— the latter "material-economic

34 On the stakes of the hybrid authoritarian regime of power and contentious/protest politics in Russia, see Robertson (2011).

35 Whilst I am working on this manuscript (2023), the Seamstresses project has been "off the radar" since circa 2020.

aspect" that, eventually, came to be, albeit somewhat retailored, one of the central concepts of the thesis, craft / art labour.36

Among the challenges of ethnographic research, some argue, is the lived experience itself, casting a "shadow" over the constructed "ethnographic real" (Jarvie 1983) and shedding a new light to the drawbacks of research frameworks and methodologies. After all, "Shadows"—"[T]he[se] painful, protected, or secretive elements" dwell in the realm of the lived experience of a fieldwork (McLean and Leibing 2007, 1–2). Technically, the elements the lived experience, as this thesis narrates it, include semi-structured interviews with craft / art practitioners,37 members of the craft public38 and an art curator;39 I draw on my notes and (participant) observations,40 audio recordings of the events in the field, 41 visual and textual materials from personal 42 and public 43 archives. 44 The "ethnographic real" (Jarvie 1983) I encountered in the field made me realise that my argument about the particular reworking of dissidence into post-dissidence in the Seamstresses "sewing cooperative" in its micro/system of "horizontal labour" is, ultimately, conceptually flawed. Even though I strived to rethink the "radical" collapsing of the "political" into the "cultural" that, as I was suggesting before the fieldwork, is carried out in the present by the "remnants" of the historical logic of dissidence / the Seamstresses project, my argument, still, emulated the same dichotomous and undialectical reasoning. This time only, it was based on an opposition between the concepts of "power" and

36 As I wrote in my 2018 research proposal, [A]mong the practical aspects of a post-dissident stance are: (a) an engagement of the audience, bringing about a horizontal formation together with activists-artists; (b) a social system of self-organization determining the type of venues and institutional settings where such horizontal formation can evolve; (c) an utilization of art-activist work not as a means for expressing the political but rather as an act of doing the political in the process of art-activist work."
37 See Egorova (2018b; 2018a); Lukianova (2018); Lukianova and Melnik (2018); Melnik (2018); Panova and Tereshkina (2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d); Denisova (2020); Kusainova (2020).
38 See Anonymous Crafter One (2018); Anonymous Crafter Two (2018); Anonymous Crafter Three (2018); Anonymous Crafter Four (2018); Anonymous Crafter Five (2018); Anonymous Crafter Six (2018); Anonymous Crafter Seven (2018); Anonymous Crafter Eight (2018).
39 See Aktuganova (2018).
40 See Antonova (2018; 2019).
41 See Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia (2019); Tereshkina (2020).
42 See Olga Egorova's Archive (ca. 1994; 1995; 1996); Olga Denisova's Archive (ca. 2003).
43 See Rets (2003); Trofimova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia (2004); Russian Art Archive (1995).
44 All translations of interview transcripts, and other primary materials from Russian into English are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

“resistance”—Putinism / creative economy versus “feminist activist art” / post-dissidence.

Thus, one of my central post/fieldwork insights has to do with my rather problematic treatment of the category of feminism itself. I used to employ it in a descriptive manner to refer to a type of art practice that, as I saw it back then, was breaking the boundaries of the cultural status quo—the (ideological) limits of was acceptable to say or exhibit in the walls of a museum of contemporary art, to name what has appeared to me as the most noticeable field of cultural production where the Seamstresses were gaining traction and recognition as the representatives of “feminist activist art” prior to 2019 (e.g. Volkova 2017). Relatedly, the category of feminism stood for a normative category of analysis, holding, in a somewhat conclusive manner, that the Seamstresses made art politically and subversively—that feminist consciousness is an inherent part of the Seamstresses project and its valorization in / by the visual arts sector. This initial misconception, however, was underpinned by my preliminary reading of the existing materials / texts about the group, framing the Seamstresses as a project dedicated, primarily, to the arts—as though their practice of craft is a sheer function of their artistic self/expression aimed as an intervention into the texture of the quotidian. I do not mean to say that my past self has fallen a victim of the all-embracing myth of unbridled artistic genius who assigns the manual labour of craft to the place of low genre instead of seeing the art-craft hierarchy as a socially created phenomenon that need not be reproduced unconsciously but made sense of. Rather, as far as my further reading of the texts about the Seamstresses project is concerned, the art-craft dichotomy “originated” in an implicit sense from within the discourse of “feminist activist art” per se.

A feminist character of the Seamstresses project has been foregrounded in a number of sources (interviews with the group and pieces of art criticism); so has the dichotomy between fine art and craft in their work. Some of the earlier interviews by the group carry a strong connotation of heterodoxy, particularly at the level of self-articulation by the members of the group, positing their work in terms of “non-alienated labour” (neotchuzhdennyi trud) that synthesizes sewing, tailoring and fashion design, and is geared towards the goal of doing activism and maintaining creative freedom (Seamstresses and Vepreva 2016). Later interviews seem to draw distinction between

how the project emerged originally and what it eventually came to be. First was a practical need for an “alternative,” i.e. “horizontal organisation of production and labour” that resulted in a year-long work of the Seamstresses as a sewing cooperative in 2015–16. By 2019, the Seamstresses adopted an identity of an art group / artistic cooperative whose core principles included consensus, nonviolent communication and horizontal cooperation among each other; the group accumulated what one of the participants, Maria Lukianova, called “social capital” (sotsyalnyi kapital) that gave the group the voice and artistic authority to bring to the public eye certain themes it assumed responsible to represent and considers socially significant, such as the themes of the operating conditions for artistic work in the culture industry and fashion industry (Seamstresses 2019). Turning the reflecting mirror on the art world, the Seamstresses were thus seen by the art critics, and were positioning themselves, as a project centred around the ideas of labour and freedom; the project, as it were, posed the question: How does one work through the conditions of unfreedom—the inequalities, hierarchies and divisions among the workers of culture (as well as the workers of the fashion industry) in their pursuit of free and autonomous labour? One can leave this important question stand on its own, as some art critics do (Osminkin 2019, n.p.), comparing the Seamstresses with “The Soviet avant-garde artists of the 1920s and early 1930s [who] sought to intervene directly into life by doing an art that can be useful for an advancement of the unprecedentedly revolutionary society”—accordingly, the Seamstresses project “inherited” the experience of their avant-garde “predecessors” Liubov Popova (1889-1924) and Varvara Stepanova (1894-1958). Following the foregoing interpretation of the Seamstresses, their “advocacy” of free and autonomous labour, allows us to locate a certain feminist standpoint of interpretation furnished by the existing discourse around the project. The “universal image of the precarious woman worker”—the artists and the seamstress—acts as a magnetic force collating the artistic, the economic and the activist; as a sewing cooperative and an art project in one, the Seamstresses project is ostensibly immune to the romantic nostalgia for pre-modern craft (Ibid.); the Seamstresses put forward an “anti-authoritarian” political agenda (Nizhnik 2018, n.p.).

The change in that particular narrative was what I had noticed during my field research in 2018–2019. At the end of 2018, the Seamstresses gravitated towards describing their project in artistic terms; with the project members based in different

countries, Russia and Ukraine, managing the sewing cooperative was practically unfeasible. On a subjective level, too, my understanding of the Seamstresses project was continuously morphing throughout the stages of transcription, coding and analysis of data, and writing of first drafts. It has become apparent to me with time that the significance of the question of free and autonomous labour raised by the Seamstresses, cannot be grasped fully within the aforementioned anticapitalist framework of feminist interpretation (e.g. Seamstresses and Vepreva 2016; Nizhnik 2018; Osminkin and Seamstresses 2019), because this framework works as part of the field of cultural production where ideologies and beliefs—anticapitalist, dissident and heterodox ones—are continuously reproduced and generated (e.g. Bourdieu 1980; Dimitrakaki and Perry 2013).

Aware of this dynamic, this thesis, as it stands today, treats “feminist activist art” as a critical category to explore how, in however contradictory ways, feminist ideology is raised to a form of historical consciousness through the material practices of making / craft and production of artistic value in the industry of culture / sector of visual art. Why are my pre-fieldwork assumptions relevant?—The overall trajectory my thesis traversed since the pre-fieldwork moment of 2016–18 is, by and large, part and parcel of its existing mindset, however transcended as a result of my self/reflection, or “backgrounded” and suppressed as “irrelevant” or “disclaimed” by my fieldwork experience. Eventually, the themes that I have chosen not to address explicitly in the final manuscript, the themes of dissidence and cultural resistance by artists / crafters, were superseded or transformed into a somewhat more ecumenical, fundamental problem of feminist historical consciousness mediated in the art / craft practices of the Seamstresses and other important / related projects.

Firstly, therefore, the epistemological shift in my research from “feminist activist art” to feminist historical consciousness has been affected by my decision to situate the Seamstresses in a broader scene / milieu, and enabled me to pursue an analysis of the historical / generational dynamic between the Seamstresses—belonging to the Millennial generation who, so far, seem to have reached the peak of their artistic career by the end of the 2010s—and the practitioners whose coming of age can be traced since the mid-1990s. They are represented by Generation X, and two respective projects: the Shop of Travelling Things (1994–2000) and the Factory of Found Clothes

(1995–2014). The biographies of the Shop and the Factory are closely tied, even sometimes, as some secondary sources about the projects imply, to the point of indistinction (e.g. Azarkhi 2012; Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2008). The Shop was run by one practitioner, Olga Egorova; the Factory was a duet (Olga Egorova, Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia) which, with time, adopted the workshop model of creative production (inviting Olga Denisova, Zhanar Kusainova, and many more), the Seamstresses (Anna Tereshkina, Maria Lukianova, Olesia Panova, Tonia Melnik) were outsourced by the ex-Factory members, now working in the framework of What is to Be Done (chto delat) "creative platform" (2003–present), to tailor textile panels / banners for the Creative Time Summit "The Curriculum" at the Venice biennale in 2015.

Secondly, the epistemological shift in my research framework from "feminist activist art" to feminist historical consciousness has broadened my analytical focalization. Above all, it motivated me to include the 1990s into the historical constellation of artistic making, and with it, to make the Shop and the Factory a part of my research constellation. The 1990s can be perceived as a period that marks the climax in internationalization and professionalization of heterodox culture in Russia. I posit the processes of internationalization and professionalization to be one of the key conditions of the possibility for feminist historical consciousness in the post-1989 art world. (The Leningrad's / St Petersburg's heterodox art scene, in comparison to the Moscow one, appears to have gained much less scholarly attention, as far as the production mechanisms of culture are concerned.)45 Overall, however, the post-1989 art scene, preceded by Gorbachev's policies of glasnost (1985–1991), is characterised by an increasing tendency of Soviet artists exhibiting their works, as it is often put, "in the West." My understanding of this period does not entail a mere "advent" of "market economics" onto the virgin soil of state socialism, as some cultural studies of "post-Soviet-transition" in the arts and aesthetics suggest (see Eşanu 2013). For that would mean to assume, inter alia, that socialism affords a complete transcendence of capital/ism—i.e. commodity production, productive labour and extraction of surplus-value and so on (cf. Lenin 1953/1918); and that capitalism means the opposite, with

45 The dynamic of internationalization and professionalization of non-official art scene in Moscow has been elucidated, for example, in Exhibit Russia: the New International Decade (1986–1996) (Fowle and Addison 2016a).

an added bonus of the flourishing laissez faire economy beyond the grip of the state (cf. Lenin 2020/1917). These assumptions, in my view, reveal the methodological premise of historicism, 46 which assumes that the worldwide expansion of the economy of arts after the fall of the Berlin Wall, described in rather economistic terms, is an embodiment of the "cultural transition" from non-official art to contemporary art (Eşanu 2013), driven by George Soros's philanthropic mission of the "Open Society" since 1984 (Eşanu 2021). My thesis does not intend to posit certain "post-Soviet teleology" in the development of the market for contemporary arts and crafts, although the reader might notice some chronological arc in the narrative of the thesis. However, similarly to cultural studies in "post-Soviet-transition" in the sphere of art and aesthetics (Eşanu 2013; 2021), my focus on feminist historical consciousness in the arts / crafts is partly shaped by my interest in the question of its continuity and discontinuity vis-à-vis the Soviet non-official / dissident culture. To what extant did the Soviet non-official art gaining monetary value—"assum[ing] a natural place [emphasis added] within the world art market" (Solomon 1991, n.p.)—shatter the de facto stratification of Soviet arts / crafts into two parallel modi operandi: one merged with the Leviathanic Soviet state, e.g. the Artists Union, and the other, counterposing itself to the state and state-affiliated institutions, e.g. underground culture?—Has this twofold regime of conduct been continuously shaping feminist historical consciousness and its pursuits of antinomical autonomy, or indeed dissidence and heterodoxy, in relation to capitalist system of cultural production since the mid-1990s? In the light of these questions, the importance of the 1990s—yet another significant "beginning" foregrounding my thesis—cannot be overstated. From my point of view, the post-1989 transformations of the "Soviet art world" are a necessary historical basis for tracing the development / regression of feminist historical consciousness in the arts / crafts henceforth.

Thereupon, my intention behind "choosing" the three projects—the Shop, Factory and Seamstresses—and combining them into a single inquiry acquires a historical character: the "career trajectories" of the three projects are interrelated in a somewhat consequential and generational sense. The Shop was run by one

46 Sigfried Kracauer (1993/1927) compares historicism with a photography of time: "According to historicism the complete mirroring of a temporal sequence simultaneously contains the meaning of all that occurred within that time. … Historicism is concerned with the photography of time. The equivalent of its temporal photography would be a giant film depicting the temporally interconnected events from every vantage point" (425).

practitioner (Olga Egorova); the Factory was a duet (Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia) which, with time, adopted the workshop model of creative production, and invited Olga Denisova, Zhanar Kusainova, and many more to collarbone and help run the Shop of Utopian Clothes; the Seamstresses (Anna Tereshkina, Maria Lukianova, Olesia Panova, Tonia Melnik) were "outsourced" by the ex-Factory members to tailor textile objects for their artistic / exhibition projects. Although St Peterburg was a point of "emergence" for the Shop, Factory and Seamstresses—for all three share an experience of the St Peterburg "counter-cultural" milieu— the "City of the Three Revolutions"47 was also a point of rupture. Although the "space coordinates" of the Seamstresses have been "redrawn" since August 2016—two of the Seamstresses' members have relocated from Saint Petersburg to Kiev, Ukraine, where they have initiated ReSew sewing cooperative48—at least until 2019 the Seamstresses were working both as a local initiative in Saint Petersburg as well as a cross border Russian-Ukrainian project. (Hence, an expansion of my fieldwork activities towards Kiev, an essential location for interviewing the two, at the time, Kiev-based Seamstresses, Mariya Lukyanova and Tonya Melnik.) What makes the three projects unique is also in their use of the workshop model of creative work, to be explored, as far as the younger generation is concerned, ethnographically—my primary field "location" for the participant observation were the sewing workshops, in Egorka Communal Gallery, organized by the two Seamstresses, Anna Tereshkina and Olesia Panova, based at the time in St Petersburg. The Shop / Factory's work, in my view, proved to be significant for the Millennial generation of practitioners constituting by the 2010s the craftivist full-fledged craftivist scene in St Petersburg, and broadly, in Russia.49 The Seamstresses (Melnik 2018) saw the Factory as "The first example of the political artists who worked with textiles." This perspectivisation was shared by Nadenka Creative Association50 who also saw the Factory as their "inspirator," along

47 An idiomatic description of Petrograd / Leningrad / St Petersburg, the city of the 1905 Revolution. the March 1917 Revolution and the October 1917 Revolution.

48 More on the cooperative see ReSew (2022).

49 Among the members of the craftivist scene, as it appeared to me in 2018-2019, were Nadenka Creative Association (Omsk) and Artel Kanitel (St Petersburg); Kresty (Moscow) and 1Shtuka (St Petersburg), already dissolved by that time.

50 Creative Association Nadenka was established in 2014 in Omsk and is co-run, for the most part and similarly to the Seamstresses, by the graduates of What is to Be Done School of Engaged Art (St Petersburg, Rosa's House of Culture)—Anastasia Makarenko, Maria Rybka, Nadezhda Nikiforova, Maria Aleksandrova, Aliona Isakhanian, and

with the Seamstresses, in working with handicrafts as a kind of an artistic and activist tool (Nadenka 2019). It seems notable that both the Seamstresses and Nadenka enjoy the recognition of the graduates of the School of Engaged Art run by What is to Be Done in St Petersburg until 2022. Biographically, the School was also the place where I had a chance to get acquainted with these individuals and groups. Thus, this research is born out of my proximity to the cultural leftist milieux I am analysing and my knowledge of the scene through my earlier artistic-educational engagements in the role of the student the School of Engaged Art in 2015-2016. My core of my analysis is based on the 6-month fieldwork in Kyiv, St Petersburg, and Moscow in 2018-2019.

In the light of my pre- and post-fieldwork experience, the operational meaning of the concept of fieldwork requires clarification. My goal, as far as the time-space episteme of this research is concerned, is to explore how a sense of historicity figure in the formation of the consciousness of craft / art labour as a collective and therefore geographically and temporally dispersed agent. Here, however, arises a spatial limitation to my inquiry: all of the three projects, although geographically and temporally dispersed by the end of 2019, were initially launched in the urban setting of St Petersburg and were grounded in the respective cultural milieux that, at some point, sustained them culturally and economically. Towards the goal of exploring the historical consciousness of craft / art labour—feminist historical consciousness—my research engages with philosophical / theoretical ideas via my fieldwork experience and conversations with my interlocutors. Although ethnographically driven, the fieldwork paradigm this thesis finds itself in can be termed a “fieldwork in philosophy” (Austin 1956, 9; Bourdieu 1990/1987, 28–29) and a “fieldwork in culture” (B. Nicholas and Szeman 2000). One more negative clarification is needed in this regard: the spatial qualification of my field research is not a “fieldwork at home.” Being a Kazakhstani citizen, neither Russia, nor Ukraine are “too close to [my] home” (C. Nicholas and Sarroub 2021). My interlocutors did not articulate us sharing a “common culture” or, perhaps, a “subjectivity,” something that would have been cherished by a

Oksana Usoltseva. Nadenka’s creative methods include tailoring and handicrafts, installations and self/education sessions for the public (e.g. focusing on the theme of feminist art history) (see Souch 2016; Volkova 2017a). Nadenka, to my knowledge, has not run public sewing workshops, which is the reason why including Nadenka, undoubtedly a significant project on its own, in my thesis was not pertinent to my goal of understanding craft public and its principles of self/constitution vis-à-vis the industry of culture and the economy of feminist merchandise.

post-Soviet generational sensibility, including my own. In other words, this thesis cannot be inscribed into the rubric of endogenous field research—"One post-Soviet subject studying other post-Soviet subject,"51 conceivably, beyond the intrusion of the signified "West" and its "universalizing" gaze (cf. Tlostanova 2010). Such a view, in a fundamental sense, risks to naturalise post-soviet-ness as an ontological condition rather than problematising post-soviet-ness as a historically specific phenomenon (cf. Tlostanova 2018). My encounters in the field did not prove either the "post-Soviet condition" (Buck-Morss 2008), or my biography as a person born, socialised, culturalized in Central Asia, Kazakhstan, to be a determining factor, as far as my positionality in the field is concerned. In fact, what counted, firstly, was the perception of my age. The Gen X practitioners saw me as someone who did not have the experience of living in the Soviet Union, let alone seeing it disassemble, and who therefore was a deluded romantic, if not a naïve infant, when it came to the assessment of the scale of unfreedom the Soviet society endured (see Chapter 4). On the other hand, the Millennials weighed my positionality against my institutional affiliation with the university based in the European Union, identifiable, from their point of view, with my economic status and social class / privilege—their leverage to assess the dynamic of power in the field (see Chapter 5 and 6).

2.2 An entangled periodisation of the St Petersburg cultural scene and feminist historical consciousness

Formative for my research epistemology / methodology is the theory of structuration (Giddens 1986/1984; 1990) I adopt for my analysis of craft / art labour as a form of practical consciousness (What does craft labour do?) and a form of discursive consciousness (What do crafters and the members of the craft public say / do not say they do?). As far as the distinction between the two "layers" of consciousness is concerned, "Between discursive and practical consciousness there is no bar; there are only the differences between what can be said and what is characteristically simply done. However, there are barriers, centred principally upon repression [the unsaid], between discursive consciousness and the unconscious" (Giddens 1986/1984, 7). The

51 I owe thanks to Natalia Chermalykh for this insight.

principle of distinction / dialectic between a practical and a discursive consciousness bears the mark of diachrony and historicity. This where one of my central concepts—the concept of feminist historical consciousness—comes to the fore, although, at first, rather marginally: for when immersed in the shadow of Cold War, some perceive feminist historical consciousness as an inherent part of (the myth of) dissident art—a "symbolically laden cri de coeur," "distorted by the lack of a free exchange of ideas" and "aesthetically stunted" (Rosler 1994, 23–24). The record of feminist historical consciousness has been meticulously updated after the "fall of totalitarianism"—as though it has heretofore barely existed due to the persistence of "patriarchal unconscious" 52 adopted by artists and intellectuals during Nikita Khrushchev's leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1953–1964; Margarita Tupitsyn (1994) argues that "[Feminist] consciousness has surfaced [sic] in the perestroika-era work of both male and female artists, who attempt to begin to articulate a theory of socialist patriarchy [sic] not unlike the discourse of western feminism on capitalist patriarchy" (9–10, 12). 53 By way of contrast to its eternal historical antagonist—socialist feminism, 54 represented, most prominently, by Aleksandra Kollontai (1872–1952), Nadezhda Krupskaya (1869–1939), and Inessa Armand (1874–1920), deemed to be "[I]nstrumental in the promotion of political propaganda that contributed to the success of Bolshevism's patriarchy and its despotic machine" and who, supposedly, have contributed to a general "corrosion" of the sense of sisterhood among Soviet women (Tupitsyn 1994, 12–13)—the perestroika-era feminist historical consciousness puts history, along its subject / agent, on trial. After all, as many have noted (e.g. András 1999, 6; Tupitsyn 1994, 19; Rosler 1994, 27), the early days of the 1900s-era feminism were marked with disdain and / or avoidance on the side of artistic intelligentsia, including the stratum of society generally referred to in this context with an abstract collective noun—"women."

52 That is so say that, according to Margarita Tupitsyn (1994), "Soviet women artists adhered to the idea that, in order to speak, they had to assume a masculine position; thus, almost invariably, they met any attempt to analyse their work from a feminist point of view with unconcealed scepticism or indifference" (12).

53 It seems unfortunate that, here, Margarita Tupitsyn (1994) does not specify the names of the artists who initiated a "theory of socialist patriarchy," or else, how a "socialist patriarchy" can be articulated in artistic practices as a "theory."

54 In addition to Socialist Realism.

Despite the latter caveat, however, heterodox / feminist historical consciousness permeated the perestroika-era bohemian subcultures under the cloak of celebratory individualism, or at times, the tongue-in-cheek narcissism and theatrical self-absorption. Indeed, one of the ways in which the perestroika-era St Petersburg culture existed and articulated itself—and this is of importance for my task of delineating the St Petersburg cultural scene to situate the Shop / Factory / Seamstresses along its lines—occurred on the level of an aesthetic/ist play with gender, sexuality, and sex (pol). Indeed, the interventions to the texture of pol via playful overidentification[55] with femininity, masculinity, queerness, or gayness, by sartorial means or the means of self/stylisation, can be seen as a of kind method, although at times subliminal and contradictory, for the artistic milieux that formed around the Leningrad non-conformist culture's rebellious offspring, Neoacademism, "[O]ne of the most important artistic movements to take shape during Russia's wild nineties" that is considered influential for contemporary art practices yet fairly understudied (Cassiday, Goscilo, and Platt 2019, 183). Jonathan Brooks Platt (2019) thus describes the strategy of a somewhat homoerotic overidentification that was prevalent among the Neoacademism milieu, "The individual artists occupied images crafted like personal brands," and brings the examples of "Oleg Maslov [born 1965] and Viktor Kuznetsov's [born 1960] classicist sex-romps, Vladislav Mamyshev's [1969–2013] drag-queen impersonation of Marilyn Monroe, and Georgii Gurianov [1961–2013] in the guise of a Socialist Realist sailor" (210) (Figure 3).

55 Slavoj Žižek, who has coined the concept of overidentification (Boie and Pauwels 2007, 22), or at least first applied it to contemporary art / culture, thus explains its meaning on the example of Laibach, Slovenian music project, established in 1980, that led to the foundation of a multi-disciplinary artistic collective NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) in 1984: "The first reaction of the enlightened Leftist critics was to conceive of Laibach as the ironic imitation of totalitarian rituals; however, their support of Laibach was always accompanied by an uneasy feeling: 'What if they really mean it? What if they truly identify with the totalitarian ritual?'—or, a more cunning version of it, transferring one's own doubt onto the other: 'What if Laibach overestimates their public? What if the public takes seriously what Laibach mockingly imitates, so that Laibach actually strengthens what it purports to undermine?' This uneasy feeling is fed on the assumption that ironic distance is automatically a subversive attitude. What if, on the contrary, the dominant attitude of the contemporary 'postideological' universe is precisely the cynical distance toward public values? What if this distance, far from posing any threat to the system, designates the supreme form of conformism, since the normal function of the system requires cynical distance? In this sense the strategy of Laibach appears in a new light: it 'frustrates' the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but over-identification with it – by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the system, over-identification suspends its efficiency" (Žižek 1993, n.p.).

Figure 3. Author's collage, based on Jonathan Brooks Platt (2019, 210), ratio of original images changed. (1) Fourteen black and white postcards "Satyricon," 15x19 cm (Maslov and Kuznetsov 1994). (2) Mamyshev-Monroe poses against his self-portrait in the studio of Sergei Borisov. Inscription on the photograph: "To dear Lena, from no less dear Marilyn Monroe. Vladik Mamyshev." Hand-printed photography and acrylic paint, 29,5x23,5 cm. (Borisov and Mamyshev-Monroe 1990). (3) "Sailors" by Georgy Guryanov (2003), canvas, acrylic paint, graphite pencil, 170x170 cm.

At times, however, the object / subject of overidentification had a rather mercurial quality and involved the existing symbolic / gender order in toto, enacted by the state and culture. With the collapse of state socialism, the latter symbolic order was the aesthetics of Classicism, Neoacademism's significant interlocutor since the late 1980s (see Platt 2019, 212). Much like with the personal images, over which the Neoacademists aspired to have total control, so, as Platt points out (Ibid., 211), was the institution of art itself. Neo-academism's "hub" or its imaginary institution since 1989, run under the aegis of its guru Timur Novikov (1958–2002), was the New Academy of Fine Arts (a rebrand of the earlier Academy of All Sorts of Arts, 1985), whose permanent home, similarly to the Shop and the Factory, was the legendary squat Pushkinskaia 10. Olga Tobreluts, an artist-cum-professor at the Academy, created a video manifesto, featuring a dialogue between the dead spirits of Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) and Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966):

> – How fares art on the earth nowadays? – It happily passed away under the postmodernism's knife. – No! There is salvation! Neoacademism!!! – What is Neoacademism? – Neoacademism is the last bulwark of art, that which bears the ideas of goodness and beauty ... Neoacademism has roused Russia from slumber. – What are the criteria of beautiful?" – Beauty is Love; love is God. (Tobreluts 1998b)

The fictional conversation between the canonical figures of Russian literature bears the essence of what can be termed Neoacademism's desired effect of overidentification with the aesthetics of Classicism, i.e. stiob—one of the closest English translations of which is "to poke fun at somebody or something." 56 Neoacademism was not the only movement emerging in late Soviet Leningrad that mobilises stiob as a method of artistic work; among these, as is acknowledged, was also the Necrorealism movement57 and many more (see Yurchak 2005; Fomenko 2007). What seems to draw the various threads and practices together, in my view, is their historical consciousness prevalent among both Gen X as well as the Baby Boomers / the "last Soviet generation"—late Soviet modernity is the time "[W]hen the authoritative representations of reality became immutable, ubiquitous, and hypernormalized, and when their straightforward support or criticism smacked of idiocy, narcissism, and bad taste" (Yurchak 2005, 252–53); hence, the apparent historical necessity of overidentification, perhaps a peculiar symptom obscuring the agonies of a newly born social and creative freedom. For example, to return to the video manifesto of Neoacademism (Tobreluts 1998), even though, as the statement goes, "Neoacademism is the last bulwark of art," it contains semiotic ambiguity typically characterising stiob as a genre of humorous discourse that evades "direct confrontation" (Fomenko 2007, 24), being a marker of both ironic distance (the spirits of the dead prophesying their will) and a collapsing of thereof through a meta-

56 According to Alexey Yurchak (2005), stiob can be understood as a phenomenon specific to late socialism and its culture, conceived in a narrow and a broad sense; a genre of irony and an aesthetic, stiob was based on an overidentification with an authoritative discourse, e.g. the discourse of party reports and political slogans, the iconography of socialist realism and popular culture (105, 250).
In a technical sense, "Stiob was a peculiar form of irony that differed from sarcasm, cynicism, derision, or any of the more familiar genres of absurd humour. It required such a degree of overidentification with the object, person, or idea at which this stiob was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two. The practitioners of stiob themselves refused to draw a line between these sentiments, producing an incredible combination of seriousness and irony, with no suggestive signs of whether it should be interpreted as the former or the latter, refusing the very dichotomy between the two" (Ibid., 149–50).
Furthermore, "By the early 1980s, stiob became an aesthetic common to many artistic groups in the Soviet Union and socialist countries of Eastern Europe" – especially among the last Soviet generation – people born between the 1950s and early 1970s (Yurchak 2005, 31, 253, 259).
57 Necrorealism emerged circa late 1980s in Leningrad and have seemingly petered out by the time of its leader, Evgeniy Yufit's (1961–2016) passing away, at least in its original form as a bare life itself and an everyday existence (see Yurchak 2008) objectified in a monochrome film and visual artworks-postmortem examinations by Konstantinov (Trupyr) Leonid (date of birth / death unknown), Andrey Mertvyi (born 1959), and Vladmir Kustov (born 1959), to name a few.

discursive imitation of imitation (Neoacademism "bearing the ideas of goodness and beauty"), aesthetics of aesthetics (sublime "salvation" devised by Neoacademism to save the country) and totality of totality (Neoacademism's "criteria of beautiful" is Love, whereas "Love is God").

In this context of enunciation, the Shop / Factory, to a greater degree than the Seamstresses, as I discuss below, can be seen through a lens of continuity with the historical consciousness of stiob. A conflicting "inheritance" for the Shop / Factory, stiob, not unlike previously in the practices of Neoacademism, is never acknowledged and admitted—this type of irony excludes the possibility of metacommentary and metareflection,58 at least on the side of those who engage in stiob, as though thereby fettering the (art) critic and historian herself in her attempts to evaluate stiob holistically and dialectically,59 endeavouring, as it were, to look behind the veil. "Neoacademism is not art, but a properly created myth about art"—a quote Timur Novikov (1996, n.p.) attributes to art critic and historian Ekaterina Degot (born 1958). (Novikov's text does not mention any references to texts other than by Novikov himself, as if, via stiob, the artist can redeem aesthetic judgement or indeed become the art critic himself.)60 Similarly to Necrorealists (Yurchak 2005, 251), Neoclassicism's stiob was not innocent of its grotesqueness, absurdity and senselessness, the magnitude of which, I think, was only exacerbated by the aspired scale of the artists' individualistic yet ecumenical consciousness that sought to dissolve life into art / the realm of Beauty itself. In a technical sense, of course, Beauty was mediated – digitally, as was the case, for instance, with Olga Tobreluts's graphics (Figure 3), but also via craft; one can recall Timur's late 1980s-early 1990s textile panels / collages he fondly called his fine tatters (triapochki) as well as his garment designs (see Andreeva 2023) (Figure 4).

58 Yurchak (2005) discusses the relevance of a zero metacommentary in the work of Necrorealists, particularly, Evgeniy Yufit (250–52). See Berry and Miller-Pogacar (1996) on Necrorealism's "necro-aesthetics" as an inversion and parody of Socialist Realism.

59 As Adorno (2002/1970) writes, "Like art itself, knowledge of it is consummated dialectically" (175) – "By emphatically separating themselves from the empirical world, their other, [all artworks] bear witness that that world itself should be other than it is; they are the unconscious schemata of that world's transformation" (177).

60 In this sense, the claims that Neoacademist's method of stiob is premised on the position of a zero-subject, a corollary of the total desubjectivisation of the artist and the viewer herself caught up in the fatal loop of aesthetic self/objectification (e.g. Platt 2019; Cassiday, Goscilo, and Platt 2019) are, in my view, flawed.

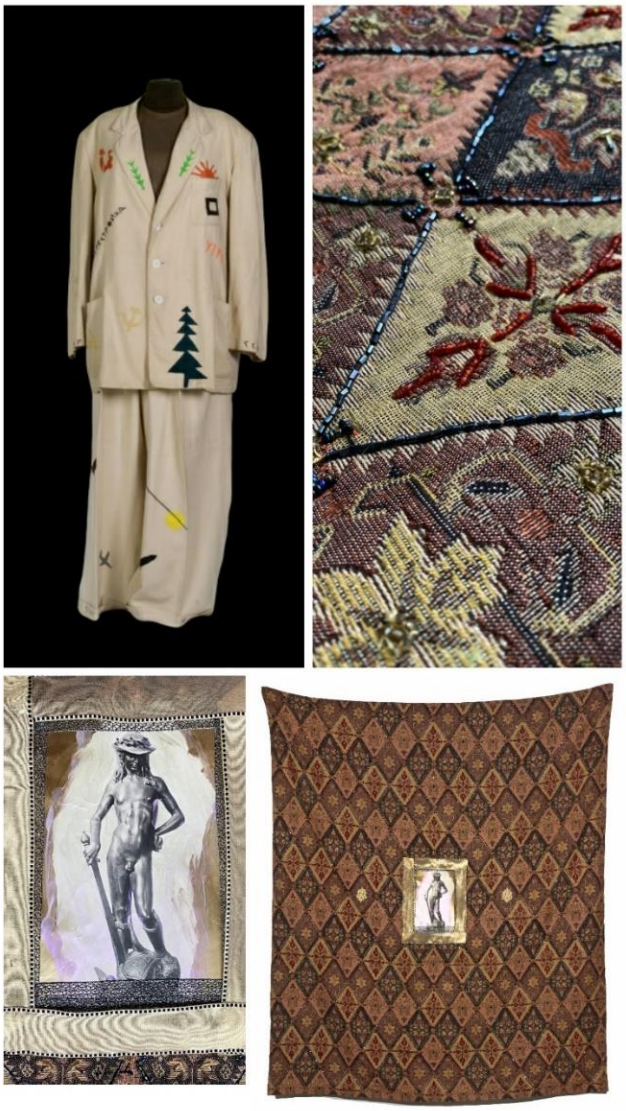

Figure 4. Author's collage, ratio of original images changed. (1) “Suit” by Timur Novikov. Acrylic paint on fabric, size unknown (1988). (2, 3, 4) "David" textile panel. Fabric, bead embroidery, monochrome photography, acrylic paint, 147x124,5 cm (1991).

The stylisation of an adopted artistic persona / identity, and a necessary labour of craft involved in that process, appears as the golden formula of stiob in Neoacademism—as well as in the Shop / Factory / Seamstresses; indeed, style / lifestyle, to borrow Teresa de Lauretis’s (1987) concept, was a core element helping to animate the culture industry’s visual art sector as a particular “technology of gender”61 which these three generations of artists / practitioners represent—Boomers

61 To problematise the notion of gender and sexual difference, considered central to the critique of representation yet constrained by its assumption of the universal / ahistorical sex opposition, Teresa de Lauretis (1987, 1–3, 5, 9, 24) proposes, as a starting point, Michel Foucault’s (1978/1976) theory of sexuality as a “technology of sex”—gender, accordingly, works as representation and self-representation / a mode of consciousness, and is an effect of a number of “social technologies” that mediate the

(Neoacademists and Necrorealists), Generation X (Shop and Factory), and Millennials (Seamstresses). For the first two generations, however, their self/stylisation was corollary to their celebratory, one could say, theatrical carnivalization of the quotidian among the ruins of Soviet modernity62—arguably, an acutely self-aware aesthetic incarnation of the negation of what the Boomers and Generation X perceived as the nucleus of Soviet consciousness and Soviet identity (see Chapter 4), the phenomena seemingly "imposed" from above by the state machine and presumably "lost for good" with the collapse of the USSR (e.g. Yurchak 2005; Cassiday, Goscilo, and Platt 2019).

I introduce the "carnival" parallelism advisedly, its presence is marked in the lived / historical discourses of cultural work that refer, most significantly, to the post/perestroika time (see especially Chapters 3 and 4). Much like its "post-Soviet" incarnation, "Soviet stiob was not limited to temporally and spatially bounded and publicly sanctioned 'carnivals.' Rather, it functioned in a much broader array of contexts, literally as an everyday aesthetic of living" (Yurchak 2005, 250) that included, importantly, the aesthetics of gender, sexuality and sex. The notion of Beauty, in this sense, "acts out" gender, sexuality and sex. In Neoacademism, Beauty tends to transpire in "delicate homoerotic tones," as Platt (2019, 212) elucidates in their analysis of Olga Tobreluts's digital collages, and as one can observe in other (archival) materials, illustrating, for instance, the activity of the Strict Young Man (strogii yunosha)63 fashion gallery co-run circa late 1980s by artists-designers Konstantin

"sex/gender system" (Rubin 1975) as both a sociocultural phenomenon and a semiotic / discursive apparatus, for instance, the culture industry, to name the technology of gender that is most relevant for my discussion.

62 See Platt (2019): "The tragic consciousness of these early Soviet authors reflects an awareness that their revolution could not overleap the temporality of modernity. The second rupture remained far over the horizon. And when it did finally arrive, it took the unanticipated form of a revolution against revolution itself—the neoliberal revolution, outsourced by the First World to the Second, which managed to consume the globe in the span of a single generation. The dominant aesthetic form of this outsourced revolution was late/post-Soviet stiob, as the Russian Empire once again strutted onto the world stage, now playing farce instead of tragedy. What this last generation of Soviet artists ultimately proved in their exuberant undermining of modern aesthetics, collaging enthrallment and estrangement upon the flat field of their desubjectivized ignorance—a flatness that emerges from modernist aesthetics but eschews its criticality—was that modernity cannot be consummated but only abandoned and forgotten. Occupying the ruins of Soviet modernity, the stiob militants of the 1980s and 1990s revelled in the slackening of modern power, which could no longer be either witnessed or withheld" (215–16).

63 The gallery's name is a direct reference to a homonymous movie directed by Abram Room (1935). Cassiday et al. (2019) explain the overall relevance of the Strict Young Man movie for Neoacademism:

Goncharov (1969–1998) and Alexey Sokolov (dates of birth / death unknown), other intimate participants of the Neoacademism milieu who contributed to raising the latter from an art movement to a subculture tout court (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Author's collage, ratio of original images changed. (1) Monochrome photo portrait of Konstantin Goncharov wearing his design (Niyazov 1993), on the background is the mannequin in Goncharov's silver-coloured dress-coat and a headpiece created circa 1990-91 (Udovydchenko 2020). (2) Logotype of the Strict Young Man fashion gallery designed by Sergey Spitsyn (Goschitskaia and Kotov 2014) and featuring an image of an Ancient Greek athlete, printed on an invitation card to the gallery's anniversary party (Author unknown 1994). (3) Olga Tobreluts's (1998a) digital collage "Showman Hermes dressed by Dolce Gabbana," print on canvas, 80x63 cm. (4) "Strict Young Man," Georgy Guryanov's portrait by Timur Novikov. Acrylic on canvas, 170x130 cm (1987).

The Millennials' "carnival," per contra, occurred in lieu or as a means of a distinctly self-aware, although not devoid of internal contradictions, feminist activism, gravitating beyond the grip of the totality of gender order, and situating itself, as it were, on a different timeline. In comparison to their "predecessors," the Seamstresses preferred to "converse" with the tradition of Soviet avant-garde rather than the one of their immediate collaborators, ex-Factory members as well as What is to be Done, with the exception of their earliest statement of purpose written in 2015 (see Chapter 5). (In the eyes of the Seamstresses, much like in the case of the Millennial generation "craftivists" like the Creative Association Nadenka, it seems, Neoacademism, which, as far as I recall, is never mentioned in their interviews, published or otherwise, had

"Not only did Novikov borrow Room's title for his painting of Guryanov as a naked athlete with an oar (1987), but the Neoacademists collectively fetishized the Stalin-era movie, presumably at least in part because of its extravagant depiction of decadent luxury and fixation on male bodies repeatedly shot in arrested poses that transform them into statues" (Figure 3) (188).

had a zero impression on their conception of their work.) And indeed, by late 2000s, the dissolution of the Neoacademism momentum, weakened by the passing away of its inspirators, had become publicly apparent; in addition to a progressive industrialisation and rebranding of the spaces, previously displaying "anarchist" / semi-legal allure, into art museums or centres of contemporary culture, as was the case with Pushkinskaia 10 squat, the home for the Neoacademists for over two decades (Cassiday, Goscilo, and Platt 2019, 189–90). However, as tempting as it is to declare the end of stiob with the fading away of its significant ideational interlocutors, modern ideas of Beauty and Love, as well as the Soviet state itself, my thesis suggests that the stiob idiom has not only survived the heroic "era" of Neoacademism, but found its new-for-old style / aesthetics in the work of the Shop / Factory / Seamstresses, namely, the style / aesthetics of Romanticism.

Stiob's fascination with form and style—dandyism—the tradition the Shop / Factory, in a distinctly self-conscious manner than the Seamstresses, will leap into, maintaining, up to the present day, that Tsaplia and Gliuklia, the Factory's core members, were "dandies" (dendi). Yet, in contrast to the Neoacademism style, in all appearance, painted in the undertones of queer masculinity bordering the aesthetics of kitsch (see Cassiday, Goscilo, and Platt 2019, 192), the Shop / Factory's stiob consciousness thrusts itself into the aesthetics of a somewhat stereotypical and no less ambivalent—ideal and worldly, unadulterated and social, tormented and heroic, virgin-like and transgressive femininity, so characteristic of Romanticism's conflictual anti/bourgeois sub/conscious64 that, despite its prima facie outdatedness, continues to occupy the imaginarium of contemporary critical theory (Clemens 2016/2003), visual culture (Johnson 2016), and art / craft labour, as my analysis of the Shop, Factory and Seamstresses shows. An ambiguous category, "Romanticism is allowed to emerge and mutate with capitalism and modernity" insofar as Romanticism is a deep-rooted, implicit manifestation of the desired triumph of pre-capitalist / pre-modern values – conceived as inherently anti-capitalist—over alienation and reification constituting capitalism / modernity and leading to its exigencies-ridden self-destruction

64 See Lynda Nead's (1988) insightful analysis of visual representations of women in Victorian Britain; one of the general organising principles of female sexuality in the nineteenth century visual culture, as the author argues, was the (problematic) dichotomy of virgin and whore, virtuousness and viciousness, continence and incontinence, respectability and degradation (6).

(Livingston 1997, 9–11). Romanticism and Romantic ideas continue to re/emerge in the twentieth-century and beyond it—trespassing the habitual limits of an aesthetic style from the world of images and letters—as a worldview (Weltanschauung) and a general phenomenon of modern / contemporary counter culture (Sayre and Löwy 1984, 42–43, 51–52). The Shop / Factory's Romantic worldview is notable in its fascination, Tsaplia and Gliuklia explain, with the "Romantic Hero[ine]"[65] and her "Heroic Deeds" (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2008, n.p.). The "Romantic Heroine," as far the Shop / Factory's narrative identity is concerned, is epitomised by the character of the "Gymnasium Girl / Boarding School Girl" (gimnazistka),[66] the projects' imaginary persona enacted by the artists themselves, for instance, in their iconic performance In memoriam Poor Liza (1996),[67] but also by their collaborators / participants of the Factory / Shop from without, frequently self/described as the "Girls / Maidens" (devushki). Reminiscent of Gustave Doré's seminal depiction of the tragic female character from Thomas Hood's poem "Bridge of Sighs" (1868, 129–33), the Shop / Factory's "Romantic Heroine" is engrossed in the decadent aesthetics / poetics of fall, decline and collapse—according to which the immolation of the self leads to self-transformation (Figure 6).

65 Even Necrorealism, from this point of view, appears like an obscene play with personification where Death herself is an objectified "heroine" (see Turkina and Mazin, n.d., 1, 3).

66 The Shop / Factory's self/narrative (Andreeva Undated; Matveeva 2014; Abdulkhakova and Napreenko 2016) describes the "Gymnasium Girl / Boarding School Girl" character as an incarnation of the Russian art / poetry Silver Age canon (circa mid-1890s-1917), however, without a further indication of the source.

See, for instance, Marina Tsvetaeva's (circa 1913) poem Gimnazistka: "I today all night long could not sleep / From the magickal month-of-May noise! / Quietly pulled on the pantyhose / And to the window slipped. / I'm a rebel with whirlwind in the blood, / Only passion and cold matter to me."

67 The conception of the performance goes as follows: "Poor Liza is a protagonist of Karamzin, … famous Russian novelist of the 18th century. … [A]bandoned by her sweetheart, [Liza] … drowned herself [in] despair. The [performance] [is] dedicated to all those who died of love and, in general, to all those who know the tortures of love" (The Factory of Found Clothes Undated).

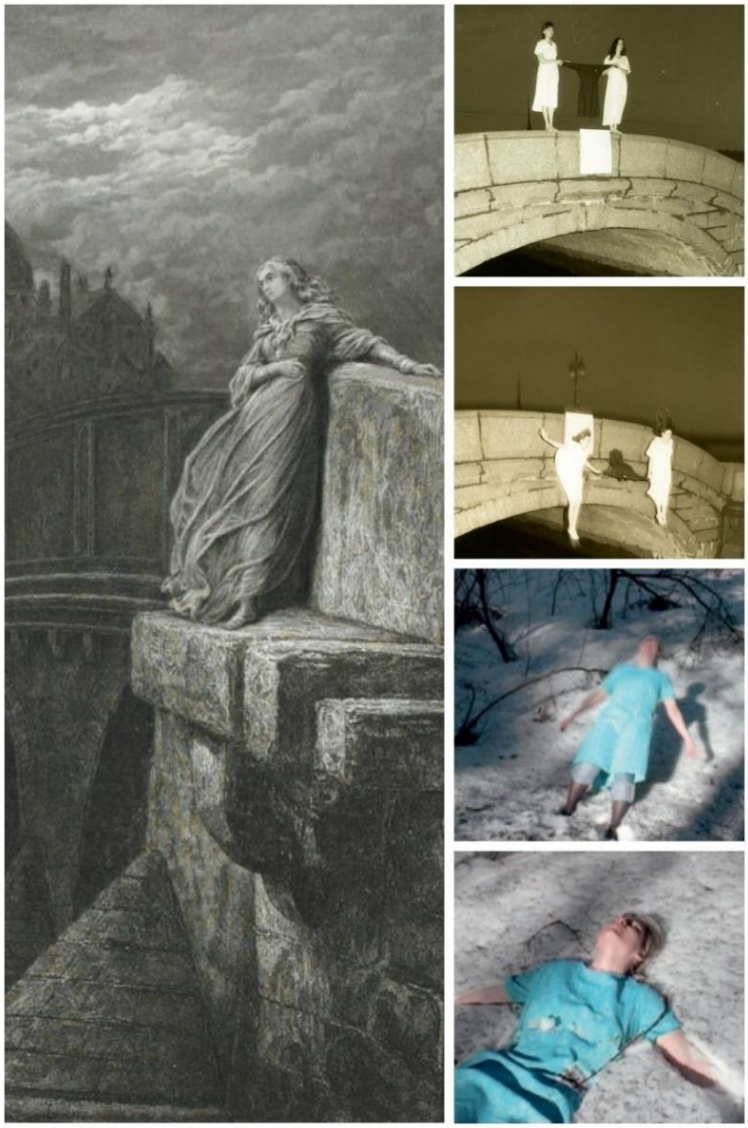

Figure 6. Author's collage, ratio of original images changed. (1) Gustave Doré's (1872) illustration for "The Bridge of Sighs" (Hood 1868) is considered an "important referent for visual representations of the mythology [of femininity / fallen womanhood]" (Nead 1988, 169). (2 and 3) Tsaplia and Gliuklia jumping off the Winter Canal bridge while holding a black dress in their hands—"In memoriam Poor Liza" performance, 20 June 1996, St Petersburg (The Factory of Found Clothes 1996). (4 and 5) Stills from "Light Breathing" video installation, participants and parameters unknown, images featured in an edition accompanying the exhibition "Factory of Found Clothes/FFC. Utopian Unions" held at Moscow Museum of Modern Art in 2013, curated by Karina Karaeva (see Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2005, 51–51).

The mid-1990s spirit of the St Petersburg scene evicts the stiob carnivalesque-like nihilism, perhaps as a reaction to it, for the sake of new seriousness—the reverse side of stiob—which instead of ridiculing and mocking its significant interlocutor (e.g. the aforesaid aesthetics of Classicism), embraces the latter, completely immersing itself into it. It is in this sense that we can speak of the Shop / Factory's mimesis / imitation / repetition of its own significant interlocutor—Romantic femininity, consumed by sentimentality, melancholy, and longing for the past in the face of the turbulent yet

liberating present as well as the future full of promise. As Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia explains in one of the Factory's interviews,

> Our main theme is the adventure of the romantic hero. The 'performance state' [i.e. a performative stance] means feeling like a hero, like a scout carrying out an important mission. The hero always overcomes his [sic] fear. We were unhappy with the whole situation—with how we lived, with what was happening in the country! We wanted to go forward, to live like heroes, not like dishrags. We had already outgrown the euphoria of the Petersburg scene, and the moment came when asked ourselves what was next. Who could we work with? Where were the curators? What should we do? There are no art structures in Russia. In Europe there are institutions that support projects like ours. Here at home there is nothing. But we wanted to live worthy lives. To live like heroes, to save people, to aspire to something. (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2008, n.p.).

The Shop / Factory's Romantic femininity embraces the risk of the sentimental feeling ascribed to feminine difference, which was marginalized historically, as far as the nineteenth-century writerly culture in the Russian Empire is concerned, vis-à-vis the "learned," manifestly revolutionary[68] ideas / types of womanhood supposed to "absorb the romantic erroneous delusions into the new ideal of rational perfectibility" (Rosenholm and Savkina 2012, 179). Stiob's method of play with identities "like personal brands" (Platt 2019, 210), however, is still maintained, particularly, in the mediating object for the Romantic femininity. The "Heroine" resides in and transforms herself by means of an iconic sign of apparel—i.e. dress (*platie*), an "outfit worn by either sex" and / or a "one-piece garment designed for a woman or girl, typically covering the body and extending down over the legs in a skirt" (OED 2023a). Dress is, in a way, a medium of the mimesis—and "Mimesis is never a homogeneous term, and if its basic movement is towards similarity it is always open to the opposite" (Melberg 1995, 3).

The Romantic shift, embodied by the Shop / Factory's imagery of femininity, suspends and abdicates the stiob's disengaged laughter and the tongue-in-cheek disbelief, and thereby, by believing its own innocence, dressed up in the sensible objectified form of "dress," regresses into a backward-looking proto feminism as its subconscious ideological drive (see Chapter 3 and 4). With the Seamstresses as well, the stiob method, as it was conceived during the late Soviet fin de siècle, does not fade away but changes—this time, towards the working-class femininity, still—in the

68 See, for instance, Sofya Kovalevskaya's novella Nihilist Girl [Nigilistka] (2001/1892).

register of Romanticism, drawing inspiration from the past, the aesthetics of Soviet avant-garde and the Constructivism movement, as I discuss later in Chapter 6.

The sentimental, elegiac and fragile character, suffering from lovesickness but cherishing her affliction as a wellspring of her power to overcome her fears and anxieties and become the heroine of the quotidian, gave way to the proletarian mode of femininity. The Seamstresses' visual documentation of their performances is evocative of the early Soviet pre-Stakhanovite iconography—the Seamstresses show to their public the heroine assiduously given in to the spell of work, for hours, keeping her eyes glued to the working tool, the sewing machine. Labour, here, is beholden by itself—even if it wants to uphold a distance of irony / stiob about the liberating faculty of labour. "The Romantic vision is characterized by the painful conviction that present reality lacks certain essential human values, values which have been 'alienated.' This sharp sense of alienation in the present is often experienced as an exile" (Sayre and Löwy 1984a, 55). Exiled in the alienated present, the Seamstresses' proletarian femininity knows all too painstakingly that "Labour liberates" (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Author's collage, ratio of original images changed. (1) Photomontage poster by Natalia Pinus—"Delegate, labourer, shock worker: when fighting for the victorious accomplishment of the five-year plan, be at the forefront with the shock workers of the brigade, workshop, factory" (1931). (2) "Labour liberates," from a series of posters featured in the "Twelve-Hour Shift" performance presented at the Garage Triennial of Russian Contemporary Art (March 10 - May 14, 2017) (Seamstresses 2017). (3, 4, 5) The Seamstresses at work / performing craft labour (Seamstresses and Vepreva 2016; Seamstresses and Nadoritsky 2017; Osminkin and Seamstresses 2019).

There is, however, an ambivalence to the Seamstresses' idea of labour—after all, the Seamstresses project was initially branded as a "sewing cooperative," a project pursuing "non-alienated labour" and geared towards the goal of doing activism and maintaining creative freedom, the culture industry's commodification of creative work notwithstanding (Seamstresses and Vepreva 2016). In the Seamstresses case, the double sword of irony / stiob cuts both ways. It mimics what it regards as the proletarian femininity naïveté, yet is driven by the anarchist ethos of organising, nostalgic for the pre-capitalist / pre-modern cooperative work (sewing, tailoring and fashion design), seeking to ascertain an ambiguous "way out" of the alienated world.

By the late 2010s, the stiob irony dissolved in an idealised and Romanticised notions of freedom and autonomy—the utopian side of this vision enchanted and attracted the craft public, nourishing the economy of feminist merchandise that feeds on and breeds that belief, that the "non-alienated labour" is possible and viable via craft and cooperation (see Chapter 5 and 6). Akin to its historical predecessor, the Romantic subjectivity / femininity, epitomised by the Shop, Factory, and Seamstresses, "[R]epresents the revolt of the repressed, manipulated and deformed subjectivity, and of the 'magic' of imagination banished from the capitalist world" (Sayre and Löwy 1984a, 58). The Shop, Factory, and Seamstresses, found their imagination captured by the world of letters—the Shop / Factory by the Silver Age, the Seamstresses by Nikolay Chernyshevsky's novel What is to Be Done? (1984/1863). Akin to its historical predecessor, the Shop, Factory, and Seamstresses, reached out to the prima facie pre-capitalist / pre-modern forms of labour—craft labour—as a means of resisting the subsumption of creative work under capital. The specific in this constellation is the Shop, Factory, and Seamstresses' historical consciousness of craft / art labour at its particular intersection with feminist ideology, a general significance of which is in pointing to the question of freedom and autonomy of creative work.

2.3 Toward a method/ology of feminist historical consciousness

As a methodology in social sciences and humanities, the historical consciousness inquiry has developed within a continental tradition of philosophy, concerned with the dialectics of historicity and human experience (Grever 2019, 225; Gadamer 2006/1960).[69] Historical consciousness has been mobilized to tackle the problems of the development and decline of historical culture, historical memory, historical thinking, historical methodologies and historical didactics at least since the 1970s and 80s onwards (Clark and Grever 2018, 177, 179, 183; Clark and Peck 2019, 1-3). The historical consciousness approach falls into the domain of "metahistorical" analyses (Clark and Grever 2018, 184) that put forth the question of meaning-making as a fundamentally constitutive practice of social being and becoming (Popa 2022). In this

69 At least, two approaches to historical consciousness can be discerned: a historiographical approach (exploring the dynamic of historicity in society and how it articulates itself in temporal and spatial terms) and a didactic approach (exploring the educational development, application and transfer of historical competences through teaching and learning) (Clark and Grever 2018, 182; Popa 2022, 172–73).

broader sense, historical consciousness is a dynamic process—the process of self-understanding and self-positioning of the subject vis-à-vis past, present, future (Popa 2022, 172). The concept of historical consciousness, was developed, inter alia, in the field of memory studies, examining museums, archives, monuments and other institutions as "sites" where collective memory is constructed (Seixas 2004, 5–6). For instance, the problematization of the relationship between the concepts of modernity and progress has been one of the critical foci of these analyses (see Seixas 2004, 8–9; Clark and Grever 2018, 179). My research, too, incorporates the analysis of the prima facie premodern forms of historical consciousness—Romantic femininity—in the self/rationalisation of craft labour and the division of creative work in the work of Shop, Factory, and Seamstresses.

The historical consciousness inquiry has been challenging the primacy of the written word, and asserting the necessity of exploring the non-textual, non-discursive, and, in general, vernacular, informal forms of expression as sources of meaning-making (Clark and Grever 2018, 178–81, 186; Grever 2019, 227). My research draws on spoken and written texts, as well as visual images to explore craft / art labour as a specific form of historical consciousness—feminist historical consciousness. The culture industry and creative labour are positioned as hotbeds / sites of mediation of spontaneous historical reasoning and consciousness from below by the labourers of craft / art and their public. My thesis mobilises the historical consciousness method/ology to analyse the meaning of social agency in creative work. This thesis is thus not an inquiry into how the actors of craft / art labour and their public "use the past" as passive consumers of "historical content" (Clark and Grever 2018, 181, 186)—but rather how the actors of craft / art labour and their public ascertain their social agency by positioning themselves in time and space, how they navigate the continuous and contradictory flow of historical becoming, and what "historical [self-]identity" they adopt while situating themselves in the system of social relations like the culture industry and the visual art sector (Clark and Grever 2018, 182, 183). Hence, the importance of the notion of historical agency for this research, as a "continuous flow of conduct" (Giddens 1990/1979, 39–40, 55–56) by the self-reflexive and self-conscious actors of the late capitalist society, craft / art practitioners and their public. While I do not analyse the unconscious elements of the discourse of craft labour, leaving aside the potentially fruitful psychoanalytic rationalisation of the discourse, this

does not mean, however, that the “unintended consequences” of discoursing are omitted from my analysis—on the contrary, both “the said” and “the unsaid” elements of the discourse of craft / art are systemic to process of reproduction and institution of creative labour and its division through a “tacitly employed mutual knowledge” (Giddens 1990/1979, 57–59)—for instance, the perception of the hierarchy between “commissioners” and “practitioners” (see Chapter 5).

To shed light on the relations between structure / the culture industry, and agents / craft labour / craft public, structure / the culture industry and the system / late capitalism, my analysis coheres around the concept of feminist historical consciousness to explore the question that lies at the core of my thesis—the question of social, gender and creative un/freedom permeating the notion of cultural labour in capitalist modernity and yet at the same time putting limitations on how creative un/freedom can come about in discourse and practice, in the St Petersburg visual art scene that gave prominence to the Shop, Factory and Seamstresses since the mid-1990s and until 2019. One of the core ideas of the theory of structuration is that “[E]very social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he or she is a member” (Giddens 1990/1979, 5). This thesis assumes the heuristic / scholarly value of spontaneous individual / collective accounts of historical consciousness in the interest of questioning a certain tendency of mistrust in social agency / social actor, that, in my view, persists, in an implicit way, in theorisations on feminist historical consciousness—most prominently, in feminist standpoint theory.

Feminist standpoint theory, also referred to as feminist critical theory or feminist historical materialism, has emerged circa the 1970s and 1980s, and describes itself as a Marxian project that values marginal experiences and empowers oppressed groups by pointing towards a potential development of oppositional forms of knowledge, experience, and consciousness (Harding 2004, 1–4; Hartsock 2004, 35). Feminist critical theory originally stemmed from the New Left [70] (-informed) interpretations of György Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in*

70 As Sandra Harding (2004b) points out, “[M]ost (perhaps all) of the … early standpoint authors, had been active in New Left political movements and the emerging women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s” (18).

Marxist Dialectics (1923), the work that, accordingly, envisioned the conditions of possibility of overcoming / transcending the object position of the proletariat in society (Jameson 2004, 144). A certain "objective" of feminist standpoint theory has been associated with discerning and challenging the system of sex / gender oppression—"male-biased representations" of society—via critical research of the "female construction of self" (Jaggar 2004, 56, 62; Hartsock 2004, 45). Subsequently, the idea or a concept of "woman" has been theorised as a particular social "location" (Harding 2004a, 4–5), a "position" in society that affords to construct an "ontology of relations" from a "marginal" and "limited," yet "autonomous epistemological standpoint" (Jaggar 2004, 59; hooks 2004). The crux of the problem, however, as Alison Jaggar (2004) explains, is with the division of labour in which "[W]omen's domestic work mediates much of men's contact with natural substances; women cook the food that men eat and wash the toilet bowls that men use" (58). The division of labour, argues Jaggar, "[H]ardly permits women to think in abstractions [sic], such as the abstraction of human beings from the non-human world, and instead requires women [sic] to focus on the sensuous and ever-changing qualities of the material world" (ibid.). Nancy Hartsock (2004) registers a related dynamic in the "sexual division of labour" constituting women's standpoint as a form of class consciousness vis-à-vis "abstract masculinity"—"partial and fundamentally perverse" (46):

> [I]f life itself consists of sensuous activity, the vantage point available to women on the basis of their contribution to subsistence represents an intensification and deepening of the materialist worldview and consciousness available to the producers of commodities in capitalism, an intensification of class consciousness. (42–43)

Uncannily, however, the only one who has a bona fide agency (equated with rationality) in this context are feminist intellectuals, whose task is to "[B]uild on women's experience and insights in order to develop a systematic account of the world, together with its potentialities for change, as it appears from the standpoint of women" (Jaggar 2004, 59). A comparable insight, made not by a standpoint theorist but by an artist Martha Rosler commenting on what she registered as an apparently unripe quality of feminist consciousness in Russia during perestroika: "[I]t is safe to

say that the attitudes of most Russians are already innocent of twentieth-century gender theorizing" (27).[71]

I think that such uneasy apprehension towards women / society's ability to reason and theorise in abstractions stands in sharp contrast to Anthony Giddens's (1986/1984) "stratification model" of social analysis he develops as part of his structuration theory in which "Every competent social actor … is *ipso facto* a social theorist on the level of discursive consciousness and a 'methodological specialist' on the levels of both discursive and practical consciousness" (18, 376). The paternalistic tone in feminist critical theory, enveloping women's *Weltanschauung*, a manifestation of the crudely materialist, oppositional consciousness from below, is where what I, following Giddens (1990/1979, 38–39, 44–45), see the mistrust in social agency and social actor lurking. Whilst recognised as a powerful project of dissident "ontology" (Weeks 2004, 189), feminist critical theory has been adopted as an "epistemology" for artistic and curatorial production, and in this quality, scholars argue, have brought about a certain flattening out of the historicity of feminist consciousness in the name of wokeism and Donna Haraway's (1988) "situated knowledges"—reduced, however, to a mere location / standpoint in space, on the margin or otherwise. As Angela Dimitrakaki (2022) puts it concisely,

> [T]he spatial logic of diversity is flawed. The margins-and-centre metaphor is wrong. What we are told are "margins" and "centre" are not "locations" at all. Rather, they are antagonistic relations the current appearance of which can only be grasped if we think of their interwoven histories, because it is these histories that construct the agents of the antagonism as often vastly unequal. (10)

Feminist standpoint theory asserts feminist consciousness as a function of resistance / opposition to dominant ideology—occurring from without capitalist social relations and relations of production (Sandoval 2004, 197; Jaggar 2004, 61, 62). Rather than adopting feminist critical theory's dissident ontology of space, this thesis is interested in exploring the ideological effects of enacting and mediating feminist historical consciousness by craft / art labour and craft public. I think it will not be an exaggeration to say that an immanent critical analysis of feminist historical

71 Rosler's comment is significant in this regard, even if a negative way, since her essay Some Observations on Women as Subjects in Russia has been featured in an exhibition catalogue After Perestroika: Kitchenmaids or Stateswomen (Tupitsyn and Rosler 1994) focusing on women's iconography in Soviet visual culture as well as women's art labour in the Russian 1990s.

consciousness and ideology in cultural production in Russia since the 1990s has been a marginal topic,[72] superseded by rather dissident in their antinomian logic arguments on how one can, for instance, work through / against masculine culture and stereotypes (Alchuk 2010/2006, 231), re/claim feminine subjectivity against the repressive myth of the Soviet woman (Bredikhina 2010/2002, 304–8), do creative labor as a direct activist response to certain politically incongruous situations so as to raise social awareness (Plungian 2015, 212–14). Undeniably valuable in their contribution to feminist theory / cultural studies, what these analyses, in my view, tacitly accomplish is hypostatize / attribute real identity (Merriam-Webster 2023) to feminist standpoint as an ideology. Feminist ideology is reserved to signify "reason" fighting against the "unreason" (i.e. masculine culture, the myth of Soviet woman, gender oppression, ect.), thereby unwittingly exposing the unconscious desire of feminist intellectuals to abide to, if not be the source of disciplinary power from above by virtue of their "privileged access to reason."[73]

It is not a coincidence, then, that according to the standpoint theory, "[C]onsciousness raising operates as feminism's epistemologically positivist moment" (Brown 1991, 72). Indeed, even though feminist standpoint theory has rarely been addressed explicitly in feminist art critique / art history, perhaps with an exception of Dimitrakaki (2022), its spirit / logic / epistemology survives in the dissident / antinomian logic of argumentation. As with the standpoint theory, the dissident / antinomical theory of feminist cultural work demonstrates its "[U]nwillingness to shift into the terrain of uncertainty by questioning the foundations from which they speak," thus "preempt[ing]

72 A notable exception (e.g. Pejić 2008) foregrounds the East Central European region.

73 See Zygmunt Bauman's (1983) analysis of the concept of ideology: "The perception of the world as a battle between reason and error – as a "civilising" struggle of reason against passion, of true against false interests, of needs against wants – reserves the word "ideology" for either side of the barricade and articulates men and women as bundles of motives. These motives are represented as the principal objects of social action. Action upon motives, aimed at their alteration, is articulated as the main lever of social change as such, indeed – for all practical intents and purposes – as social change itself. By the same token, individuals, groups or institutions devoted to the dissemination of ideas and thus acting upon motives, are cast in the role of the subjects of change – as its principal initiators and agents. Among such individuals, groups or institutions a special role is allocated to those who have a privileged access to reason and operate reliable methods of correcting erroneous judgments" (115).

See Liz Philipose's (1999) apt critique of standpoint feminism: "The contradictory aspect of standpoint feminism is the aim of replacing traditional foundations with 'objectivity redefined' and feminist foundations for knowing, what Wendy Brown [1991, 67–68] calls 'reactionary foundationalism,' which in many ways replicates the power and domination of traditional knowledges rather than repudiating the domination of moral claims to know" (3).

an investigation into the function of foundations themselves" (Philipose 1999, 12). A meta-philosophical, and, admittedly, in no way uncontroversial question that guides my reflection is: What does it mean to do a gender analysis of creative labour and the culture industry / visual art sector without hypostasizing feminist ideology, or prescribing it as a solution, let alone immersing it in a flat / locatable space? My research, following the method of dialectical critique, takes up the risk of self-reflexivity that recognises the immanence of feminist historical consciousness to history—to existing social relations, and relations of production in the culture industry / exhibition industrial complex.

The discourse of craft / art labour evolves on the level of several "semiotic resources" (Jewitt, Bezemer, and O'Halloran 2016)—craft objects, their linguistic and visual representations. My interest is with the transfer of meanings, their change across the three modes of signification, and the transgression of these modes toward the extra-semiotic sphere of labour in the culture industry / visual art sector. The practices of craft / art, explored in this thesis are underpinned by what I call "feminist ideology," mediated by discourse (see van Dijk 2013, 175). Conceived this way, the concept of ideology does not signify an apparatus of oppression and domination by the ruling class to be confronted in the struggle by the working class (cf. Althusser 1971/1970). Instead, my operational understanding is that

> Ideologies form the shared socio-cognitive foundations of social groups and their social practices. They are organized by schemas consisting of fundamental categories for the existence and reproduction of social groups, such as their identity, activities, goals, norms and values, reference groups, and resources. Conversely, therefore, ideologies are generally acquired by text, talk, and other forms of communication. (van Dijk 2013, 194).

Van Dijk's conception refutes the notion of ideology as a form of false consciousness, a misconception, or a deliberate deceit; on the contrary, it is through the social practice of discourse that ideologies, representing collective systems of beliefs, are shaped and reproduced (2013, 176–77). Ultimately, therefore, language (visual, textual, or verbal) is the productive medium (Giddens 1990/1979, 40) that expresses society on both discursive and ideological level (van Dijk 2013, 195). Ideology, from this perspective, is an equivalent symbolic system (Giddens 1990/1979, 192). The content of the critique of ideology in the culture economy / visual art is not class domination per se but division of creative labour between "crafters" and "artists."

I am interested in how both "classes" of cultural producers construct themselves and their practices as valuable; what meanings of art, ideology and politics they thereby make up; how these meanings intermediate the disposition of craft in the field of cultural production.

Classical critical theory / Marxist philosophy is an indispensable element of my inquiry, not least due to its appreciation of the significance of the question of historical consciousness: "If there is one thing that Marxist philosophy should make necessary, it is close attention to the history (and the historicity) of the concepts that we use to think about history" (Bourdieu 1990/1987, 17). The problem of craft / art's historical consciousness reappears with all urgency once we set out to self-reflectively entertain the possibility for going beyond the initial assumptions / mythology formed around craft. As I have asked previously—Is it possible to overcome the myths craft's materiality, counter-modernization, agentification, and non-alienation via critique? While it is tempting to assume that the historical consciousness and myth are antinomies, my analysis suggests that both are not only written into the pages of craft studies and creative labour research, but also are enacted in the practices of the Shop, Factory and Seamstresses. The aim of my research is not to resolve the problem of truthfulness or falseness of the given from of consciousness, as if it were possible, but to analyse the contradictory becoming of the consciousness of creative labour—craft / art labour—in history. The mythic discourse of craft / art is not inscribed by this thesis into the category of false consciousness—the "social explanation of false consciousness becomes the sabotage of consciousness in general" (Adorno 2022/1972, 26–27). When craft / art labour becomes a "problem of method," the apparently immediate character of craft / art—isolated from its relations of production by the mythologized language of description—becomes the problem of history and historical consciousness (Lukács 1971/1923, 186). By refusing to affirm individual phenomena like craft / art in their immediate and isolated form, the dialectical method[74]

74 Admittedly, however, for Lukács, the dialectical method means a method as a real historical force, and the one "reserved for the class which was able to discover within itself on the basis of its life-experience the identical subject-object, the subject of action … namely the proletariat" (Lukács 1971/1923, 148–49). This research theorises the dialectical method in a narrow sense, as an analytical device only, but the one that holds the potential of exploring craft labour not as an isolated aspect of the process of cultural production but as the process itself (Ibid., 179–80). The "Marxian dialectical process [is] where the objective forms of the objects are themselves transformed into a process, a flux" (Ibid., 180).

seeks to interrogate them as an immanent part of the destructive cycle of reification of social relations in late capitalism (Adorno 2005/1951, 71)—a problem that is considered to be "key to a Marxist or neo-Marxist analysis of culture" (Jay 1976/1973, 174).

2.4 Conclusion

This thesis pursues to study the historical consciousness of craft labour—particularly, its feminist aspects—in the context of the visual arts sector of the culture industry in St Petersburg, Russia, in the period between 1994 and 2019. These 25 cumulative years can be seen as notable at least in one respect—the internationalisation and globalisation of cultural production; this period was preceded by glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) (1985–1991), contributing to an increasing tendency of Soviet artists exhibiting their works, as is often put, "in the West" (e.g. Solomon 1991, n.p.). The turn of the late Soviet modernity offers a unique perspective on how feminist historical consciousness in the arts / crafts had developed and regressed. This chapter has carried out the periodisation of the St Petersburg's cultural scene in three consecutive steps: the biography of the Neoacademism's late 1980s-early 1990s stiob as a sardonically homoerotic mocking of Classicism; the Shop / Factory's mid-1990s-early 2000s imaginative, gentle and somewhat naïve stiob leading to an reemergence of the tragic yet brave Romantic Heroine; the remarkable persistence of Romantic stiob, reminiscent of its waning away throughout the 2010s in the Seamstresses' imagery of the "proletarian" femininity. Having argued for the significance and specificity of craft / art as a form of historical consciousness, I did not mean to, as it were, imbue the social group of crafters and craft public with an "epistemic privilege" (Bar On 1993).[75] The overall intention of this chapter has been to develop an analytic strategy of triangulation between, on the one hand, the historical consciousness of craft, mediated, firstly, by discourses and ideologies and, secondly, interceded by the tacit rules for the division of creative labour in the process of cultural production. To make sense of craft / art's historical consciousness, I have proposed to adopt the perspective of classical critical theory which, while examining the processes of

75 Cf. the readings of Lukács supposing that the task of the social activity of the working class is to provide a "true" or "authentic" viewpoint in society—for example, Jameson (2004, 143).

industrialization of creative and cultural work, does not give up an epistemic self/awareness of cultural production being part of the social system that is re/creating the existing relations between the spheres “art” and “craft” as ideologically motivated relations of autonomy and dependence.

CHAPTER 3 SELF/OBJECTIFICATION OF THE SUBJECT OF CRAFT / ART LABOUR

This chapter analyses craft / art labour in the timeframe I designate as the long 1990s (1994–2014). The overarching aim of the chapter is to situate and conceptualise the discourse of craft / art labour in the culture industry / visual art sector in St Petersburg, Russia. The two following questions are at the heart of the chapter analysis: How does craft / art labour operate in the industry of culture / visual art sector that had emerged in St Petersburg since the mid-1990s?—What does the concept of craft / art labour mean vis-à-vis the organisation of social relations and relations of production fostered at this historical juncture? With these questions in mind, I delineate the constellation of discourses that characterise the historical consciousness of craft / art labour—feminist historical consciousness—during the long 1990s. The chapter unfolds around three central nodes-concepts: object, ideology, and mythology of craft. This threefold constellation enable this chapter to designate the 1990s as a "cultural time" (cf. Wegner 2009) which "generated," or else contributed to the formation of what I call the romantically pre/disposed feminist historical consciousness.

Firstly, the chapter introduces the Shop of Travelling Things, henceforth the Shop (1994–2000). The Shop performed, we can say, a double function—positioning itself both as an "art project" and a microenterprise recrafting and selling second-hand clothes. The chapter identifies the Shop as one of the earliest ventures of the kind in the St Petersburg art scene, "preceded" by the Strict Young Man Fashion Gallery co-run since circa late 1980s by artists-designers Konstantin Goncharov and Alexey Sokolov (see Chapter 2). The specificity of Shop is its form of organising—I will conceptualise it as a project-archive, and suggest that it predisposed an abstraction and self/objectification of the subject of craft labour—the practitioner of craft / art (cf. Adorno 2005/1963, 248, 250-252). Secondly, the chapter proceeds to examine the Shop's sister project—the Factory of Found Clothes, henceforth the Factory (1995–2014). Based on my analysis the Shop, Factory and their hosting institution—Gallery 21—I tackle the question of the role of ideology formation in creative labour. The chapter argues that from the mid-1990s onwards, the alliance / collaboration of the Shop and Factory's craft / art labour with the local and transnational industry of culture

/ visual art sector was mediated by a particular ideology—cultural feminism. Thirdly, the chapter concludes by demonstrating the organizational form of the project-archive—underpinned by the analysis of the activities of the Shop, Factory and Gallery 21—contributed to the mythologisation / romanticisation of the discourse of craft / art. This disposition, in a broader sense, raises the question of the possibility of agency and autonomy in creative labour and the late capitalist industry of culture. The chapter's primary materials include: (a) my interviews with Olga Egorova, the organizer of the Shop, and Irina Aktuganova, the curator of Gallery 21 that hosted the Shop and Factory in the period between 1994 and 2014; (b) archival documents from Olga Egorova's and Garage Archive Collection.

3.1 Object of craft / art labour under projectification and archivisation of creative labour

The Shop of Travelling Things as a project

The concept of the object per se promotes ambiguity and is stubborn to definition (Adorno 2005/1963, 246). In craft studies, the object of craft / art labour—in its contemporary / late capitalist phase—connotes materiality: essential, universal, and transhistorical quality (see Chapter 1). In my reading, however, the meaning of the object of craft / art labour overlaps with that of its aim, and can signify what craft / art labour does—how it is mediated via the instruments of labour (e.g. the needle) (see Marx 1982/1867, 285). To problematise, or else complicate, the materiality discourse, this chapter focuses on the Shop of Travelling Things. The chapter develops a working framework of the project-archive—a mode of creative work and a principle of organisation that, in my view, was shaping the discourse of craft / art labour from 1994 until 2014 in the St Petersburg cultural scene.

I would like to begin my analysis by situating the Shop of Travelling Things in the horizon of historical interpretation (Gadamer 2006/1960). The Shop of Travelling Things was launched by Olga Egorova— the practitioner known by the nom de guerre Tsaplia (heron)—in Borey art gallery in 1994. The "birth" of the project has been eloquently described by Sophia Azarkhi (2012):

> [Olga Egorova] got a small room [in Borey]. People—young women but also men—were coming by a prior arrangement. The customers, who were, as a rule, Tsaplia's close contacts, were telling her about their life dilemmas while having a cup of tea. During these conversations, Olga was offering to her visitors the new attires she had made of the old ones. (321)

In contrast to this short vignette, Olga barely mentioned Borey in conversations with me. Rather, according to the latter, the story of the Shop began once it opened its doors in Gallery 21 (Egorova 2018b)—located in the legendary centre of dissident culture Pushkinskaia 10: a squad since 1989, and a non-profit organisation "Association 'Free Culture'" since 1992. While I will discuss Pushkinskaia 10 in more detail further in this chapter, what interests me now is the choice Olga made in laying out her story—from where to begin her recollections. This choice, in my view, should not be seen as merely arbitrary but rather shaped / organised according to the logic of the discourse—the discourse of craft / art labour. In this sense, Olga's recollections are, if you will, re-enact / produce / situate the discourse socially and historically (see Ricoeur 1984). That does not mean to say, however, that the "construction" of memory via interview recollections supersedes / determines meaning-making itself. But rather—that the enactment of memory is subordinate to the speaker's motivation to render / present herself aware / self-conscious.

Now, according to Olga Egorova, the Shop of Travelling Things "was a sort of a project where everyone was dressing up" (2018b). This statement, however short, and indexed by Olga's choice of the descriptor "project" helps to bring forward the Shop's self-understanding as an organisation. As a linguistic strategy, the "project" opens a Pandora's box. After all, in late capitalism, the "project" has a totalising character—everything and everyone can potentially become a project. And because we live in a "projectified society" (Lundin and Soderholm 1998), "projects define who we are and what we can become" (Jensen, Geraldi, and Thuesen 2017, 2). For this reason, the "project" embodies the tension between the universal (capitalism) and the particular (the organisation of creative labour in capitalism). To recognise this tension means to grasp the complexity of the object of craft / art labour, transpired in the Shop, Factory, and Seamstresses.

On the one hand, when placed under the signifier of the "project," the Shop may appear to "marry" craft / art labour and entrepreneurship, thereby pointing to a curious resurgence of artisanal production in late capitalism (as I discuss in Chapter 1). On

the other hand, as a project, the Shop implies that it may not be a “shop” in a usual sense of the word—not a place for exchanging goods for money—but a faux venture, whose object / aim of activity is nothing else than its mimicking. Indeed, the project-based thinking betrays the ruse of imitation that typifies the organisation of cultural production in late capitalism. As noted by Gregory Sholette (2011),

> The past 30 years have indeed witnessed a curious mimicry at work within the shoals and shallows of enterprise culture. As if responding to the ruined public landscape of enterprise culture, an assortment of ersatz institutes, centers, schools, bureaus, offices, laboratories, leagues, departments, societies, clubs, and bogus corporations have inserted themselves into the deterritoralized space of the spectacular global marketplace. (153)

Caught in the logic of mimicry, creative workers imitate the “administrative, affective, and intellectual power of institutions”—the “product particular to the post-industrial economy” (Sholette 2011b, 152–53). This capability to implement the functions of the “post-industrial enterprise culture” Sholette terms “mockinstitutionalism”—a framework within which the object / aim of creative work is signified by “mockstitutions” (Ibid.). However, prompted by Olga Egorova’s (2018) choice of wording—the Shop “was a sort of a project where everyone was dressing up”—I find the “mockstitutions” thesis rather narrow when “applied” to the culture industry / visual art sector in St Petersburg.

In my reading, the “mockstitutions” thesis assumes an existence of a material reality external to the comprehension of the subject / the worker of culture / the art critic. By externalising the subject vis-à-vis the administrative / affective / intellectual “power of institutions” as the object of imitation, the “mockstitutions” thesis divorces social phenomena and material reality—it treats social phenomena and material reality as fixed categories beyond the (dialectical) intertwinement of meaning-making (discourse) and the object it pursues (creative work). Therefore, there are two reasons why the “mockstitutions” thesis can be problematised when considered in the context of the visual art scene in St Petersburg, since the mid-1990s. The “project,” as far as the Shop is concerned, indexes two functions: labour function[76] (see Szreder 2021) and discourse function—the notion of the Shop gets mitigated / reworked into a kind of metalanguage that turns craft / art labour into linguistic abstraction.

[76] This question will be addressed in Chapter 4 also.

Focusing on the “project” as the linguistic modifier of the Shop of Travelling Things its sister project Factory of Found Clothes can help us problematise the notion of institution-building that renders the formation a creative microenterprise via mimicry an end-goal of creative work (cf. Sholette 2011b). Capturing / exploring the Shop “project” as a contradiction-ridden / dialectical process, I would like to pose the following questions: (a) With what effects did the “project” discourse evolve in the Shop and Factory—what ideological work was carried out in the decisions, choices, and outcomes? (b) For what reasons something became part of the projectified craft / art discourse and what was omitted? These questions, and the possible answers / hypotheses they may allude to, lead me to consider affinity between the project and the archive.

The projectivisation of craft / art labour via the archive

From the perspective of my field research in 2018-19, a significant affinity between the project-driven thinking in craft / art labour and an archive-formation can be ascertained. Indeed, the “project” and the “archive” can be seen as two intertwining modes of creative work if we take into consideration the archivisation of the early “post-Soviet” art during the late 2010s—carried out by the Garage Archive Collection and the Russian Art Archive Network (RAAN). “In 2018, [Garage Museum of Contemporary Art] began acquiring archives related to the history of underground and contemporary art in Leningrad and St. Petersburg” (Garage 2023, n.p.).

However, as I was able to observe back in 2018-19, the archivisation of the early “post-Soviet” art was “set in motion” by the private archives as well. One these archives was created by Olga Egorova, who, unexpectedly for me, kindly invited me to have a look at her archive collection: “I can show you some of the texts we [Olga and her collaborator in the Factory Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia] wrote”—“This stuff, already, has the value of rarity now” (2018b). Grateful for the opportunity, I anticipated an unmediated experience of the archive—it was tempting to see the private archive as an encounter with the materials that are perhaps too treasured to be handed down to the archive public. In other words, I expected “experiencing the archive” differently. As though “giving away” an ephemera bearing the meaning of one’s past to the public archive is a radical gesture of withdrawal of the personal value

and instalment of the value public—as part of the administrative recordkeeping by the culture economy (Hobbs 2001).

However, the border between the personal archive and the public archive is more porous than it appeared to me at first (McKemmish 1996)—or than Olga Egorova, the holder of the collection, was willing to acknowledge. In fact, the archive documents, even privately owned, do not dwell / circulate outside the economy of culture. In fact, archivisation itself is an element of creative work. In fact, it can be hypothesised that in late capitalism, the archive is a "living embodiment" of contemporary craft / art. By means of the documentation / the medium of images / texts, Olga Egorova meticulously created "biographies" for the textile objects she recrafted and sold—even though I did not notice Olga calling the collection of the documents she had for herself an "archive," the very way how the files and "passports" were arranged in the separate folders and files inspired the name (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. “All the things had ‘passports.’ Each one of them had ‘names,’ photo portraits…” (Egorova 2018b). Eight monochrome photographs / “passports” depict and describe the items of clothes sold at the Shop of Travelling Things (Olga Egorova’s Archive 1996-1998).

The passage from Olga Egorova’s interview reiterates the significance of the documentation practice for the Shop of Travelling Things:

> So, the Shop. There I had the things, with [biographies] of [their] travelling. I used to think that new things are dumb and uninteresting.
>
> The [things] come into being. Then, their life begins, and they begin to … “change hands.” The [things] lose collars, get patched, lose buttons. And, so, the “traces” of this “life” do transmute the thing into a work of art. At the end of [their] life, the [things] become a total work [of art].
>
> All the things [in the Shop] had “passports.” Each one of [the things] had “names,” photo portraits …. In general, there was a documentation, a pretty serious one [see Figure 3]. (Egorova 2018b)

The documentation focus encompassed not only the items of clothes Olga recrafted and sold, but the Shop of Travelling Things—the "project" itself. An undated photograph of the Shop interior depicts a room of about 12 square meters. Cramped by clothes and shoes, the image gives away a sharp lack of space. Although the room may seem tightly packed and spaceless, it is empty and lifeless at the same time—this photograph is a still life (Olga Egorova's Archive ca. 1994) (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Interior of the Shop of Travelling Things, Borey Art Gallery, St Petersburg, Olga Egorova's Archive (ca. 1994).

What / who were these photographs of the clothes made for, what motivated the Shop's visual discourse?—Could an appeal to what Theodor Adorno once called the "primacy of the object" be a motive (2005b/1963, 249–51)? Both figures 8 and 9, impelled by the urge to depict the object of craft / art as desirable, single out the clothes / objects for the onlooker's scrutiny and contemplation. Perhaps, for that reason, in Figure 9, another half of the room remains invisible—the photograph was made from a spot in the space that is not visible to the eye of the spectator-consumer. From the "primacy of the object" perspective (Ibid.), the Shop's visual discourse afforded the archive / documentation to become a "vehicle" for the discourse of craft / art labour in the Russian 1990s—at least when it comes to Olga Egorova's interview recollections in 2018; in addition to the "archive fever" (Derrida 1996/1995), propelled by the Garage archive in the same year (Garage 2023, n.p.).

In this light, one may find tempting to compare the Shop, "[D]ivest[s] [the] things of their commodity character by taking possession of them," with Walter Benjamin's "collector" (2002/1982): like the Collector character, the Shop bestows upon the object its "connoisseur value"; unlike the Collector, however, who detaches the object from its "functional relations" to free it "from the drudgery of being useful" (9), the Shop documentation is uncannily reminiscent of what György Lukács described as a "reified existence," saturated by the consciousness of self/alienation and self/objectification (1971/1923, 136). Inasmuch as the object of craft / art appears desirable to an addressee-consumer, the object may "lay claim" to its surplus-value in the culture industry / visual art sector. Indeed, as Olga Egorova elucidated, "At the end of [their] life, the [things] become a total work [of art]" (2018b). The latter status does not preclude the things acquiring the one of total commodities—depicted as an object of desire, the object materialises through the surface of the photograph / text as a fetish.

Although the extract above speaks about the value of the found object in contradistinction to the one that is bought—"New things are dumb and uninteresting" (Ibid.), I think it is important to note that prior to the archive / documentation, the found object had a history of its own. Through the eyes of the art / craft practitioner, it might seem as if the second-hand clothes languish in the zone of indistinction, beneath any notice or contempt until they are spotted by her—and once discovered, revealed, and put on display and documented / achieved, the object becomes a complete manifestation of its own "work of art" character. However, the "work of art" status is not static, or else unproblematic due to the "biography" of the found object, manufactured, exchanged for money or bartered (see Appadurai 2013/1986, 17). As much as the category of "art," "Commoditization … is best looked upon as a process of becoming rather than as an all-or-none state of being" (Kopytoff 2013/1986, 73). In this light, the dynamic and transmutable object / aim of craft / art labour can be characterised as an act of its continuous self/creation in discourse, visual and textual. This raises, with all inevitability, the question of the craft / art labour agent / subject.

3.2 Ideology of craft / art labour: the subject's self/abolition

The Factory of Found Clothes: "We weren't feminists—we were sexless"

The previous section has suggested that the object of contemporary craft / art labour is the very act of its self/creation. As the next step in the analysis, this section "locates" the subject of craft / art and focuses on the Shop's "sister project"—the Factory of Found Clothes. From 1995 onwards, the Shop was "submerged" under the Factory as an umbrella project, at times to the degree of invisibility (e.g. The Factory of Found Clothes 1995). The evidence of the "submersion" can be found, for instance, in Olga Egorova's archive collection (ca. 1995). Figure 10 shows the Shop's statement of purpose. It also depicts a logotype stitched onto the centre of the plastic file: two dresses along with two abbreviations, the FFC (the Factory of Found Clothes) on the upper side, and the STT (the Shop of Travelling Things) at the bottom. Handwritten at the very bottom of the file is the "Trademark of the Shop of Travelling Things and the Factory of Found Clothes." The sub/merging of two sister projects is carried out in this particular visualisation.

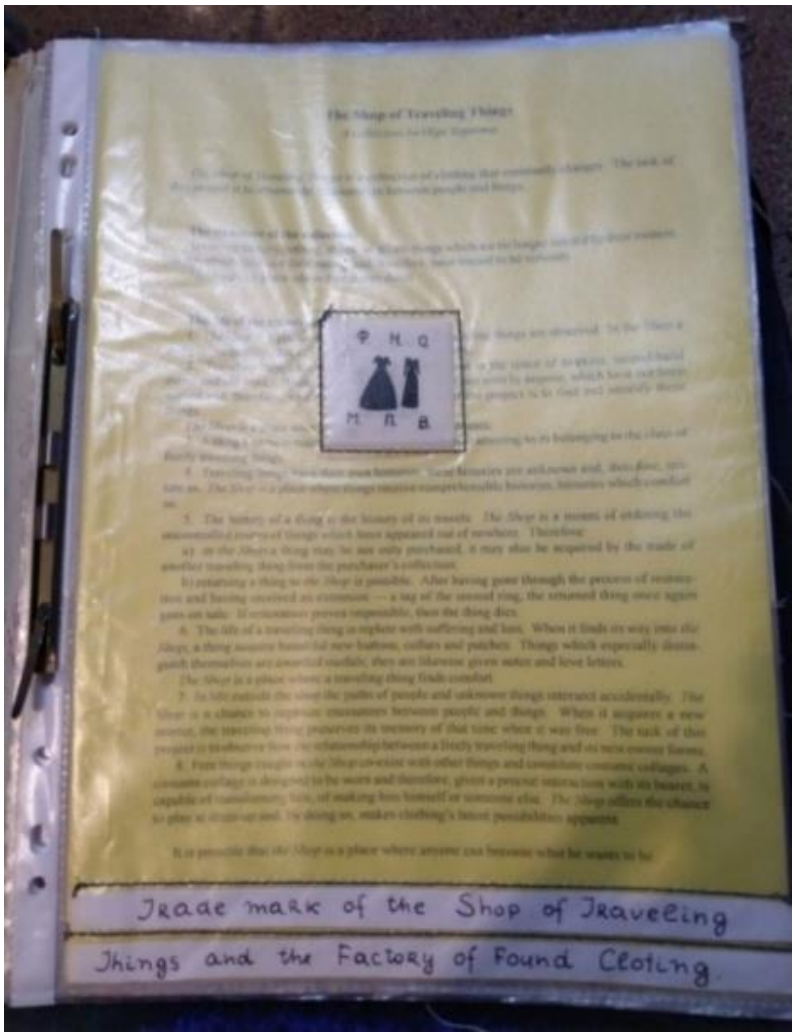

Figure 10. The Shop of Travelling Things, project description. Inscription at the bottom: the trademark of the Shop of Travelling Things and the Factory of Found Clothes (Olga Egorova's Archive ca. 1995)

For textual evidence of the merging, one could read the 1997 interview of Olga Egorova and her colleague in the Factory, Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia. To the interviewer's question "What is the relationship between The Shop and The Factory?," Natalia replied: "The Shop is the beloved child of the Factory, and the Factory is the project that conceals us under a single name, for one is tempted to change a name, just like a dress" (Pilikin, Egorova, and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 1997). Similarly to the logotype on Figure 10, this quotation achieves the "submersion" of the Shop and the Factory under a single signifier—the "project." Natalia's turn of the phrase confirms my initial suggestion that the object of craft / art labour is not given, as it were, "at once" but reproduces and changes its meaning continuously. Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia's phrasing "drives home" a subsequent development in the Factory—by "concealing itself" under the cloak of the "project," the subject of craft / art labour is prone to apparent disappearance. This is one of the central problematics this section will attempt to tackle. To locate the subject of craft / art labour, I suggest exploring the "horizon of ideology" wherein the subject of craft / art labour locates itself and makes opaque.

The Shop and Factory's self/location in terms of ideology involves an auxiliary concept of "feminism" with which the two projects had had a somewhat complicated relationship. According to Olga Egorova, neither the Shop nor the Factory projects had an explicitly feminist character: "We weren't feminists back then—we were sexless" (Egorova 2018b). This phrase shows a specific understanding of feminism where "we weren't feminists" and "we were sexless"—put together—can be read as a withdrawal from the implied marker of sex / gender—namely, femininity. It seems that for Olga Egorova, one's sex / gender (*pol*) is identifiable on the level of ontology, hence her bringing together of "feminism" and "sex." For her, it seems, to identify as a feminist, one has to be female. Framed this way, femininity becomes a positive marker of feminist worldview / ideology—yet an ontological marker only, akin to a condition of being, whose narrow particularity is prone to a necessary transgression. The movement of transgression was visible in Olga's following locution: neither the Shop nor the Factory, as she put it, pursued a "women-related art"—rather, both projects were concerned with what she called a "universal" character of the practice (Egorova 2018b) (cf. the subsequent framing of the Factory project in the Garage Museum of

Contemporary Art as the “first women’s art group in the post-Soviet space” in Chapter 4).

The aspiration of the Shop and the Factory towards the “universal”—above and beyond the apparently narrow domain of the sex / gender system (Harding 1983) sets the necessary limits on the understanding of the Shop and the Factory’s practice of craft / art. These limits express themselves in what I would define as the extraneous character of feminist ideology, eventually adopted in by the two sister projects by circa late 1990s. Olga Egorova described the Shop and the Factory’s adoption of the standpoint of feminist ideology as an effect of external recognition. As she said: “To be honest, [our feminism] did not emerge, you know, organically, because we started to read books” (Egorova 2018b). Rather, as she admitted, the projects’ feminist character was defined by two persons / actors, who were by and large external to the projects’ work but who helped their growth since the mid-1990s—Irina Aktuganova and Alla Mitrofanova. “Aktuganova called us [feminists], Mitrofanova confirmed. If they say so, then okay, that will do” (Ibid.). Thereby, the extraneous character of feminist ideology in Olga’s interview accounts is expressed via the discursive strategy of indirect self-referencing[77] (see Lee 2001)—“They told us that we are feminists, end of story” (Egorova 2018b).

“Politics” versus “feminism”: the non-commercial sector setting the limits to feminist ideology in cultural production

The Shop of Travelling Things and the Factory of Found Clothes were housed by a self-described non-commercial venue Gallery 21 (until circa 2014). The gallery, co-run and co-curated by a cultural entrepreneur Irina Aktuganova, was located in Pushkinskaia 10. Pushkinskaia 10 had functioned as a squat until 1992, a moment when a non-profit “Association Free Culture” was established. According to Irina Aktuganova’s (2018) interview account, in 1995, she, in collaboration with Alla Mitrofanova and Viacheslav Busov, registered a legal entity: a non-commercial organisation “Techno Art Centre.” As Irina recollects, this non-commercial organisation turned out to be reasonably “successful” in operating on grant funding by “western” foundations, and no less “successful” (Aktuganova 2018) in becoming what

[77] I am grateful to Erzsébet Barát for drawing this concept to my attention.

I would describe as a hotbed for feminist ideology in the culture economy, and in craft labour in particular, under the name of the Cyber-Femin-Club.

What should interest us here in not the quantitative expression of “success” in culture, but a qualitative transformation, the historical change in the institutional configuration of craft labour vis-à-vis the totality of late capitalism. Building on section 3.2, the criterion of the “success” of the projects of craft in the long 1990s was their capability to produce and maintain the discourse of their own, propelled by the organisational forms of the project and the archive. Just as these qualitative transformations in the organisation of cultural labour point to the question of the material effects of discoursing (see Beetz and Schwab 2018), so too Olga Egorova’s choice of the strategy of indirect self-refencing was perhaps instigated by the material character of ideology in capitalism (Reich 1993).

The particular way in which the material character of ideology in capitalism manifests itself can be seen in the culture economy’s systematic linkage with the non-profit sector (e.g. Yúdice 1999): this dynamic was enabled, above all, by the change in the forces of production in the industry of culture, that is, in the growth of non-profit sector and the influx of foreign philanthropic capital since the 1990s in Russia, and subsequently, by the change in the relations of production in the culture economy (see Kuleva 2020, 74–75). Admittedly, it remains to be explored how the economic functioning of the third sector, and distribution of funding to authorised bodies of culture contributed to the formation of the craft labour milieus in locally in St Petersburg and in a broader historical configuration. What should interest us at this point is the motivation for creating such authorised bodies like the non-commercial organisation Techno Art Centre, whose activities were supported, among others, by Women’s Foundation California (Russian Art Archive, n.d.), an organisation whose mission is to “advance gender, racial, and economic justice … by providing grants to community-led organizations” (WFC 2023).

Financial support for projects that reportedly target societal transformation and “advance gender, racial, and economic justice” though cultural production was arguably seen by cultural entrepreneurs like Irina Aktuganova as an economic opportunity and was met with enthusiasm (hence, Irina’s earlier connection of “success” and “grant funding”). This interest does not seem to be one-sided: indeed,

supporting socially conscious culture can be seen as a priority for the third sector economy of the day (cf. Livshin and Weitz 2006). The preponderance of the philanthropic capital for the actors of the culture industry / visual art sector in St Petersburg was aggravated by the capitalist state that was withholding its management of society and delegating the social function to the economy of culture (Yúdice 1999). With the state, restructuring its modus operandi, the question of what constitutes "public good" is a matter of an informal negotiation between the civil society, the corporate sector embodied by the culture industry / visual art sector and the government (Ibid., 26).

To attend to this triangulation between the civil society, the corporate sector embodied by the culture industry and the government a meaningful way, the mediated effects of late capitalism on the practice of craft labour may be explored relative to the sphere of ideology. One of such mediated effects of late capitalism upon craft labour, I would suggest, was expressed in the specific character that the ideology of feminism took in the activities of Shop and the Factory, namely, cultural feminism (see Alcoff 1988). It was, I would argue, the productive configuration of the culture industry and the non-profit sector (represented by Gallery 21 and Women's Foundation California) that foregrounded the formation of the ideology of cultural feminism in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR. Indeed, under the auspices of the globalising art market launched at the threshold of glasnost in the 1980s (see Berkowitz 1991; Fowle and Addison 2016) and the third sector economy in the 1990s (see Funk 2006) the ideological configuration of gender-sexuality as essential characteristics of cultural labour in the context of creative and cultural economies comes to be explicit and articulate as it never was before. Cultural production sustained by the non-profit sector was a pivotal site for producing the ideology of cultural feminism during the long 1990s, with Irina Aktuganova and Alla Mitrofanova being the key figures of this ideology in Russia, as was recollected by Olga Egorova in her interviews (2018b; 2018a).

As Irina Aktuganova (2018) recollected, when she and Alla Mitrofanova were attending an international meeting for new media practitioners in Ljubljana in 1997, they realised that the culture economy of the time was offering them only two options for success—"Either going for politics or feminism." Accordingly, as Irina explained, it was during that meeting when the two collaborators made a decision to announce the

launching of the Cyber-Femin-Club project—choosing "feminism" as opposed to "politics." The logic of this formulation ("either politics or feminism") deliberately draws a line of distinction between the two, excluding the possibility of "feminist politics" as a potentially coherent whole. This fractured historical consciousness reflects a larger tendency, namely, the abyss lying between "politics" and "feminism" (see Alcoff 1988) in post-Soviet late capitalist Russia (see Ghodsee 2004). Inasmuch as the non-commercial sector, represented by the "Techno Art Centre," Gallery 21 and the Cyber-Femin-Club, set the limits to feminist ideology in cultural production in the period of the long 1990s, it also effected the non/heterodox character of the discourse of craft / art labour by the Shop and the Factory.

3.3 Mythology of craft / art labour: economies of barter and desire

Gallery 21: objectifying the subject of craft / art labour

Previous sections have analysed the questions of the object and ideology of craft / art labour during the long 1990s. Craft / art labour, represented by the Shop of Travelling Things and the Factory of Found Clothes, took up the organisational form of the project-archive, and located itself in the ideological horizon of cultural feminism. The consequential proposal this section will pursue concerns the somewhat mythic / reified character of the practice of craft / art labour as it was evolving during that period. The institutional organisation of craft / art labour during the long 1990s exposes the discourse of craft / art labour as a contradictory formation. As Irina Aktuganova's recollections about the work of Gallery 21 show, officially registered non-commercial organisations can carry on their businesses as commercial entities. Or, as demonstrated by the case of Pushkinskaia 10, housing the gallery between 1995 and 2001, an officially registered NGO can influence public / scholarly imagination as a squat—a "Temporary Autonomous Zone" ensouled by the anarchist politics of organisation and inhabited by radical elements of cultural resistance (cf. Sterling 1998, n.p.; Yurchak 1999, 107). From this, follows the necessity of understanding and critique of the myth,[78] propelled by the practices of institutionalisation of craft / art labour during the long 1990s. One of the ways in which the logic of myth, as it were,

[78] As Roland Barthes (1991/1957) explains, "Myth is a language," written, spoken and pictorial, we use "in our bourgeois world" (10).

enforces itself upon the discourse of craft / art labour is by objectifying the subject of craft / art labour. This discursive strategy is warranted by Irina Aktuganova's stance on the gallery hosting the Shop and the Factory as a "mutually beneficial collaboration" where workspace is exchanged for programme content:

> What were we actually assisting [the Shop and the Factory] with?
>
> We were assisting them with the space for exhibiting [their work], or the space to work with young women [that is, the "Girls," discussed in Chapter 4], [the space] to operate as a shop. That lasted for quite a long time. See. And they provided us with the program content …
>
> There was no altruism whatsoever. It was a mutually beneficial collaboration, that's what it was. (Aktuganova 2018)

The extract exhibits a certain rationale of cultural production, based on a reasonable transaction of services (Adorno 2005/1963, 253). The objectification of the subject of craft / art labour manifests itself through the logic of barter ("work and exhibition space in exchange for programme content"), replacing social relations for the economy of exchange. However, the principles of the gallery's operation, Irina addresses in the following quotation, reveal that the gallery's work combined rather contradictory functions—the one of "commerce" and "non-commerce." As Irina explained in response to my question about the gallery's economic principles of work,

> As for the economy … well, say, Gallery 21 was operating like that: because we did not pay the rent, nor the utilities, [and] all was stolen—stolen by Pushkinskaia 10 which was a squat—we only needed money for the production [and] maintenance.
>
> But I invested the money I had earned before … before that, I was running a commercial gallery. I was selling paintings on Nevskii [Avenue]. I saved some … money … and invested it in Gallery 21, and, for some time, the money worked.
>
> With that money, exhibition projects were done …. Well, I also, like, well, through the back door … so all the galleries were operating in the 1990s … all were selling things through the back door. See.
>
> Because a non-commercial gallery has to exist on something. So, everyone was peddling either antiques, or … some kind of takeaway commercial art. And of course, that wasn't advertised … and [had] no meaning [whatsoever]. It was just [for] money. On this [money], the non-commercial … artistic projects were produced. (Aktuganova 2018)

Despite being registered as a non-commercial organisation, Gallery 21 did not cease to perform a commercial function, "selling things through the back door." This points to the paradox lying at the heart of the organisation of cultural production in the St Petrersburg scene. I would like to call this paradox the "commerce of non-commerce." The upsurge of the art market and the culture economy since the 1990s

appeared to be of a major influence and driving force for Gallery 21 and the projects it assisted—the Shop of the Travelling Things and the Factory of Found Clothes. This historical disposition does not problematise the manifestly non-commercial character of the organising gallery but adds another layer of meaning to it. That is to say that insofar as the logic of economic organisation is concerned, at the root of the non-commercial sector of cultural production is the non-monetary economy of barter.

The paradox of the "commerce of non-commerce" proved to accommodate the seeming antinomy between the handicrafts and digital media. It was, I would argue, precisely the paradox of the "commerce of non-commerce" that did not prevent Gallery 21, St Peterburg's "foremost venue for digital art" (Sterling 1998, n.p.), from hosting the Shop and the Factory, arguably, two of the most successful projects supported by the gallery which pursued artistic production via craft means. Indeed, in this sense, one can speculate that it was craft was one of the core elements of the gallery's "programme content" (Aktuganova 2018). The emergence of the tendency where the subject of craft / art labour is objectified can be attributed to the paradox of the "commerce of non-commerce" and its non-monetary economy of barter.

Historical consciousness of craft / art labour and the consciousness of myth / reification

As narrated by my interviewees, the historical consciousness of creative labour appears as a result of retrospective invention, where the 1990s is imagined as a golden age to return to. The extract below, describing an exhibition co-curated by Irina Aktuganova in 2019, states that

> Culture of popular laughter, carnivalesque, desire for self-transformation and disguise have permeated all the lived culture of the 1990s in St Petersburg … sessions for clothes try-on in Olga Egorova's Shop of the Travelling Things where all the prominent figures of the culture participated … all of this was creating an atmosphere of uninterrupted noctidial festivity where everyone befriended one another. It was precisely friendship, love and family ties that held the majority of artistic collaborations in the 1990s together … Much of the 1990s evolved under the sign of inner heroism, inquiry into delicate conditions, expansion of consciousness, enchantment with the new mediums. Because the 1990s is, after all, the time when the artists adopt new media—video cameras, computers and the internet. The sphere of the electronic media was categorically non-commercial and imbued with a creative hope, and, to a great extent, bound up with the feminist project in the format of cyberfeminism which had been new in Russia. (Aktuganova and Strelkov 2019)

As the quotation suggests, the discourse formed around the culture industry / visual art in the 1990s has been enmeshed with mythmaking. This is mostly visible in the description of this period, driven by some inner harmony, synergy between individuals, friendships and partnerships. This stands in sharp contrast to the economy of barter ("work and exhibition space in exchange for programme content") in my interview with Irina Aktuganova (2018). Indeed, by the late 2010s, craft / art labour is surrounded by myths and legends in the making. The myth infused self/historicization of craft / art labour and cultural production has been expanding to the extreme, involving the practitioners themselves. In Olga Egorova's interview about her running the Shop, the objects of craft / art have value in so far as they represent an object of desire. In the Shop, as Olga told me,

> One can buy whatever one likes. Well, obviously, well … one has to pay. You know, [pay] like for a dog.
>
> You cannot just gift a dog to someone … you have to sell it, for a penny … The same [goes] for clothes. The more so because this penny meant a lot for me—economically, see.
>
> Aktuganova was providing the space free of charge. So, I was finding the things [clothes], as a rule, very cheaply, very … but was selling it somewhat more expensively. (Egorova 2018b)

This quotation expresses the specificity of the discourse of craft labour during the long 1990s. In contrast to the Millennial generation practitioners (specifically, the Seamstresses project I will discuss in Chapter 5 and 6), the discourse of craft / art labour by Generation X (the Shop / Factory) betrays the consciousness of myth as a historical consciousness. According to the myth, it is not enough for the practitioner, for example, to re-tailor a dress and sell it—that would arguably be meaningless in the eyes of the practitioner. The "thing" must be endowed with an identity, if not personality, and thus turned into a "subject" sui generis—more than an object of trade and exchange, a "comradely thing" (Kiaer 2005; Kravets 2013). Buying such an object is, therefore, not a simple purchase but a positive transformation of the subject / consumer herself. In the universe forged by the Shop of Travelling Things, the construction of the object of desire, thereby, appears as one of the central elements. This is evidenced by the texts about the Factory and the Shop which portrayed the consumption of textile objects as a particular act of power and agency. For instance, in one of her earlier interviews, Olga Egorova claimed that her decision to run the Shop was inspired by the following idea—"[P]eople must purchase things to feel their power

over the things. [When] you buy them, you are the master" (Pilikin, Egorova, and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 1997). Olga's conversation with me about the everyday life in the Shop sheds some light on this particular cycle of value-power:

> So, it all looked like that. A have a thing, okay. Which I found by dumpster diving.
>
> Then I washed it …. Then ironed [it]. Then I … stitched on some totally weird buttons. You know … I somehow shifted [the thing] a bit …. [I added] some kind of details which [changed] the thing from, you know, trash.
>
> And out of the blue, it was turning out to be such [a thing], you know, that people [gestures to express excitement]… (2018b)

"Wanted the thing?" I suggested. Olga agreed, "Wanted the thing, yes" (2018b). She continued, "All community members came by … because [the Shop] was quite an adventure, just one for person, see—the entire shop is only for you, whatever you desire, everything is here" (2018b). Following this line of thought, freedom to "want" is equated with the freedom of choice—consumerism. The quotation above has fundamental implications for our understanding of the problem of the self/objectification of the subject of craft labour. Freedom to "want" / possess is part and parcel of the discourse of craft / art labour—it points to the internalised captivity by the subject of craft / art labour, imprisoned in the world of reification / myth by misrecognising her "desire to want" for "freedom" (see Adorno 2005/1963, 252).

3.4 Conclusion: the limit of freedom in the historical consciousness of craft / art

This chapter explored the discourse of craft labour based on the projects of the Shop of Travelling Things, the Factory of Found Clothes, and their hosting gallery, Gallery 21. I discerned and analysed three levels of the discourse of craft labour—object (section 3.q), ideology (section 3.2), and mythology (section 3.3)—all three constituting the historical "career" of the discourse of craft / art labour during the long 1990s. The chapter has suggested that the discourse of craft / art labour cannot be disembedded from the social relations of labour and relations of production in the culture industry / visual art production in St Petersburg. Indeed, as Pierre Bourdieu (1993) explains,

> The source of 'creative' power, the ineffable mana or charisma celebrated by the tradition [here, myth], need not be sought anywhere other than in the field, i.e. in

> the system of objective relations which constitute it, in the struggles of which it is the site and the specific form of energy or capital which is generated there. (81)

The chapter has argued that the organisational form of the "project," used as a linguistic modifier of the Shop in Olga Egorova's recollections, was the result of the deconstruction of the subject of craft / art labour through its self/objectification, propelled by the organisational forms of cultural production—the project and the archive. My contention has been that, for Olga Egorova (2018a; 2018b), the Shop discourse was a means to tell the story of how the Shop may function as a social and economic organisation—in other words, the "how" superseded the "what," by becoming an object of reproduction and contemplation in an act of discoursing. The practice of discourse thus goes beyond the notion of mimetic activity in a narrow sense only—an imitation—but becomes a "site" for the prefiguration of craft / art labour via its self/historicization (the theme I will explore further in Chapter 4). I have suggested, therefore, that it makes sense to explore the discourse of craft / art labour, represented by the Shop and the Factory, as embedded in the project- and archive-driven thinking. Drawing on the latter point, I have proposed that the subject of craft / art labour "betrays" the idea / practice of social agency by succumbing to the contradictory symbiosis of non-commercial and commercial values, propelled by the industry of culture in partnership with the global non-profit sector (as an example of Gallery 21 has shown). Permeated by the logic of reification, the discourse of craft / art labour develops and exposes its historical consciousness as the one of myth. However, to what extent does myth passes itself off as the limit of freedom—feminist ideology—in the historical consciousness of craft / art?

CHAPTER 4 TEMPORALITIES OF CRAFT / ART LABOUR

The central question for this chapter is the historicity of craft / art labour—the self/perceptions of the practitioners vis-à-vis the horizon of the past (lived and imagined) as well as the future. The question of craft / art labour's self/periodisation acquires its importance in the light of the historical perceptions enacted in the system of relations in the industry of culture / visual art sector—paradoxically enough, craft / art labour discourse builds its sense of historicity vis-a-vis the 1990s, perhaps so as to claim its value in the industry of culture / visual art sector itself.

As this chapter discusses, the period of the 1990s was rendered in the accounts of the practitioners (the Factory) as well as art institutions (the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art) as a heroic period of "reclaiming" and "regaining" freedom in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR, representing "oppression" and "unfreedom." Yet another paradox, however, is that in making this claim, neither the practitioners nor the art institutions turn to the conditions of the possibility of freedom in the present—strangely enough, the present remains unrecognised and ignored. Put differently, the practitioners' perceptions of the present takes on the appearance of the repetition of the 1990s in the 2010s (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019; Egorova 2018b). The most fundamental sense in which the apparent repetition of the 1990s on the level of the historical self/consciousness of art / craft is important is the possibility of progress in late capitalism (see Adorno 2005b/1963, 153)[79]. Indeed, what I have discussed previously as the Shop / Factory's "substitution" of freedom for the consumer desire via "art" (see Chapter 3) indexes a regression of feminist historical consciousness.

The chapter begins with a proposition of the necessity to address the theme of temporality and repetition in the discourse of craft / art labour. I analyse it meta-analytically, asking—How do the practitioners talk about craft / art labour? How do the practitioners recollect what craft / art labour meant to them at the beginning of their careers in the mid-1900s? These questions seem pertinent considering the temporal revival of the Factory project in the framework of The Fabric of Felicity exhibition in the

[79] I am thankful to Liam Kenny for bringing this essay to my attention.

Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in 2018-2019. Here, the Factory was identified as the “First women’s art group in the post-Soviet space” (Diaconov, Lazareva, and Volovoda 2018); the Factory’s core members, Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia held their artist talk, emphasizing the formative role of the 1990s for their artistic careers. The first thus section attempts to trace the logic underpinning the latter instance of self/historicization. This section poses a question—Why and with what effects, in the aftermath of a rather painful and spectacular closure of the Factory of Found clothes in 2014 (to be discussed in the chapter), the project’s engagement with the culture industry builds the discourse of craft / art in a retrospective way? I contend that similar to my interviews with the Factory in the autumn of 2018, the Garage events demonstrate not a “documentary snapshot” of the long 1990s (if it were possible at all), but a recollection of events whose appearance is contingent upon the immediate—ideologically motivated—configuration of social relations. I propose, as it were, to pause this process of history-making and analyse what surfaces in discourse in the shape of historical consciousness of craft / art labour—feminist historical consciousness. After all, “Historical knowledge begins with the way in which we enter into possession of them” (Ricoeur 1984, 11), especially if self/historicization is driven by the reified consciousness of myth.

The second section addresses the ideological configuration of the Factory myth via its construction of the 1990s as a time of economic scarcity, saturated with deliriousness and social liberation. By grounding itself in the temporality of the 1990s—Romantic Time—the Factory counterweights itself to what it sees as an oppressive Soviet ideology. The Factory’s contraposition to the Soviet project, I argue, is itself ideologically driven—by the ideology of consumption. According to the latter, the object of craft / art was the medium of “freedom,” for it afforded direct consumption, unmediated by the state and formal / informal markets (cf. Gurova 2018a). The medium of “freedom” called for a boundless satisfaction of the needs and wants of the new human being who is caught in the perpetual design of the self, in counterweight to the stale image of Homo Sovieticus.

The third section explores the Factory’s practice of craft / art in terms of the division of creative labour. This focus is confirmed by the launching of a sub-project within the Factory in 2003—the Shop of Utopian Clothes—for which a group of

crafters, young women in their early 20s, were recruited. The conditions of this recruitment, as recollected by the "participants of the Factory from without" Olga Denisova and Zhanar Kusainova, included creative collaboration with the Factory, revolving around a single collective signifier, a social phenomenon sui generis— the "Girls" (cf. Abramova 2013). Having been an integral part of the Factory's discourse of romantic femininity since the mid-1990s (see Chapter 2), the trope of the "Girls" was not only devised by the Factory as an intervention into the texture of the oppressive Soviet ideology (hence, the emergence of the ideological phenomenon that I call the Factory's proto feminism). To an extent, I suggest, the "Girls" trope was an effect of an expansion of the culture economy: the shadow character of the Girls' labour-power was proportional to the degree of the Factory's integration into the culture industry / visual art sector (cf. Sholette 2011b); by 2020, some of the "Factory's members from without," according to their description, pursued independent careers in fashion and culture. Thus, while the beginning of the 2000s marks the deepening of the division of labour between the Factory's core members and the Girls' anonymous labour-power of craft, by the mid-2010s, the Girls' collective signifier has been emptied out of its original meaning and turned into a pure representation that once used to mean craft— the "dead labour"[80] of cultural production.

Despite scholars' calls to attend to the historical specificity of creative labour (Banks, Gill, and Taylor 2013, 9), the industry of culture in Russia—at its intersection with feminist historical consciousness—seems an exceptional object of analysis and critique. Here, we encounter the figure of the "post-Socialist creative worker," whose self-positioning in history is characterised by a hopeful resignation to an open-ended temporality of utopia (Alacovska 2018); by contrast, some recent analyses tend to periodize the culture industry in Russia as "still undergoing transition"—the transition "from the Soviet cultural monopoly to a market economy" (Kuleva 2020, 67); others tend to consider the culture industry in Russia as a kind of deus ex machina, if not merely a post-factum phenomenon that, by the 2010-20s, had made the "Russian" creative labour-power an organic part of the global creative industry (Gurova and Morozova 2018; Trubina 2020). To bring the major scholarly contribution that this chapter hopes to make to the fore, neither of these analyses draw a long-term

[80] See Karl Marx (1982/1867, 342, 548–49).

historical trajectory of the culture industry / visual art sector via the analysis of historical self/consciousness of creative labour during such an eventful period as the 1990s in the former USSR; nor do these analyses focus on shadow divisions within the culture industry itself, such as craft / art labour. How the labour of culture situates itself in time and history is a question of significance—inasmuch as it sheds light onto the inner structuration of labour relations in the industry of culture / visual art sector. In that sense, the Factory is a noteworthy case, which registers the transformations of the objective and subjective aspects of creative labour in Russia in the timespan of nearly 20 years. And these are extremely crucial years that have witnessed the unfolding of what we may call the crisis of freedom in the sphere of culture and cultural work. It is the unfolding of the crisis of freedom that is the core reason why craft / art, as a form of creative labour-power, must be explored.

This chapter is based on the following primary sources: my interviews with Olga Egorova (2018b), the founding member of the two "sister projects"—the Shop of Travelling Things (1994–2000) and the Factory of Found Clothes (1995–2014); interviews with the participants of the Factory (in circa 2003-2004) Olga Denisova (2020) and Zhanar Kusainova (2020). This chapter will draw on observation notes I made during my field research in St Petersburg and Moscow in the winter of 2018-2019 (Antonova 2018; 2019), in addition to my audio recording of the Factory's artist talk in the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in January 2019 (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019).

4.1 Craft / art labour as a retrospective discourse

The Factory—"The first women's art group in the post-Soviet space"

This first section addresses the question of temporality in craft / art labour discourse and discerns the theme of repetition—the Factory re-enacting its past practices in the present. Such retrospective consciousness seem to emerge after 2014, the moment when the Factory has announced, or rather performed its "closure." I witnessed the Factory's retrospective consciousness "in action" at the beginning of 2019, when the Factory reunited once again to take part in the Fabric of Felicity exhibition in the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in 2018-2019.

The relevance of the retrospective temporality in craft / art discourse can be understood via Olga Egorova's (2018b) insightful remark she made during our conversation: "The 1990s are repeating themselves." While the context of our conversation referred to a new generation of practitioners (mostly, I think Millennial generation), there is a greater depth and significance to Olga's observation. The recurring nature of the 1990s in the 2010s indicated the apparent repetition of the 1990s in historical consciousness. A re/consideration and re/evaluation of the significance of the 1990s for the present, for example, can be found in the 2019 exhibition The Fabric of Felicity, where the Factory was identified as the "first women's art group in the post-Soviet space" (Diaconov, Lazareva, and Volovoda 2018). To make sense of the implications of this claim, we can examine its context of enunciation.

Firstly, I would like to turn to my notes from the field I took on January 18, 2019. I was finalising my archival work in Moscow, and there was one more event to attend: a talk by the Factory of Found Clothes in the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art. I was all in anticipation: when I was interviewing the Factory's members just a month and a half before, we talked about the Factory as it used to be—in past tense. However, the Factory's participation in the exhibition seemed to index a particular actuality of the Factory's project in 2019. The description of the event said the artist talk "will acquaint the audience with the first women's art group in the post-Soviet space" (The Factory of Found Clothes 2019). Earlier on the day of the talk, I accidentally bumped into Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna in the Garage's library; I took this as an opportunity to ask them about such framing of the Factory's oeuvre: "The first women's art group in the post-Soviet space." Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia replied: "So what about it? We absolutely agree with it. Do you disagree?" (Antonova 2019). Back then, I did not find a way to respond; however, I do think that Natalia's question is not without significance—it points to the problem of the will and power to signify, classify, and assign a historical value to "firstness" retrospectively.

The act of discerning instances of historical precedence of practices in their evolution from one form to another seems to pursue a particular goal: the goal to imbue past craft practices with value and recognition in the eyes of the cultural economy. Following Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia (Antonova 2019), the formulation "the first

women's art group in the post-Soviet space" forces one to take a position, either agreeing with the claim or disagreeing with it. It is so because the validity of "the first women's art group in the post-Soviet space" can be neither approved nor denied. It can be merely complied with (cf. Bourdieu 1990/1987, 110, analysing the "interest in disinterestedness" promoted in and by the "artistic field"). This is exactly what makes "firstness" a category of value used by both practitioners and institutions as a category of history / historicization, and the one that seems profoundly speculative and self-contradictory—for example, other sources written by the Garage identify the Cyber-Femin-Club I discussed in the previous chapter as the "St Petersburg's first feminist art group" (Ledenev et al. 2020). From here, stems my understanding that the will and power to signify, classify, and assign "firstness" from the standpoint of a retrospective historicization is ensouled by the culture industry's rationale to valorize past practices of craft *as an art form*. This is exactly what drove the reproduction of "the 1990s" in the late 2010s despite the apparent gap in physical time.

Fabricating the historical consciousness of the 1990s in the late 2010s

To inquire into the fabrication of historical consciousness of the 1990s in the late 2010s, I analyse the accounts and recollections of craft / art practitioners, to grasp the configuration of social relations that structure and reflect discourses. One could analyse a retrospective talk about craft / art labour by focusing on emotional responses during or before the interviewing. As I discovered when I was interviewing Olga Egorova, telling the story about her work can be a challenging task enmeshed with complex emotions (Antonova 2018). Emotional expressions, though subjective and circumstantial, unravel the complexity of relations that had been structuring the Factory discourse, especially when seen as part of the whole—the field of cultural production. For instance, when planning interviews with Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia, it was made clear to me by both Olga and Natalia that they could not be interviewed together (Antonova 2018). Their refusal made visible the distance between the two individuals who shared almost two decades of work from 1995 until 2014, and who seemed to be completely drifted apart by the end of 2018. Olga described the Factory's closure as follows:

> We had this performance in Moscow in 2014—The Split[81] … We are, sort of, sitting, on two chairs, tied up with ropes. [It was] like an illusion of sp[litting] … it was a big performance … We arranged everything, officially closed [the project] [see Figure 11]. (Egorova 2018b)

Figure 11. Documentation of performance by the Factory of Found Clothes, The Final Cut, photo by Valerii Ledenev, Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (February 5, 2014).

Considering the Factory's subsequent reunion in 2019 for the exhibition and artist talk in the Garage, Olga's description of the project's closure in 2014 as an "illusion" (*illiuzia*) appears to be sharply true and distinctive. The "illusion of splitting" unravels that the fragility of creative partnership notwithstanding, the established pattern of role-playing has to be maintained and completed according to its internal logic. In an ambivalent manner, the "illusion of splitting" implicates an aspiration to restore the apparent cohesiveness of the discourse of creative labour through the act of its performance (see Matveeva 2014; cf. Egorova and Pershyna 2019). It should not come as a surprise then that the "act of staging" was not the last one and found its further continuation in 2019: for such is the logic of the project-archive, discussed in the previous chapter—the arrest of temporalty depends on the demand by the culture industry / visual art sector and, hypothetically, can unfold infinitely. Olga continued than her previous train of thought in a higher tonality (2018b): "Well, now [we have] some sort of continuation … The Garage invited us to lecture." In line with the logic of

[81] Here, Olga Egorova uses the notion of split (*razryv*) when referring to the performance's title. The original title of the performance in English is The Final Cut.

“the illusion of splitting,” no discrepancy but only continuity should be seen in the Factory reuniting after its dissolution in 2014 in the Garage.

The Garage Museum of Contemporary Art is an institution known for its oligarchic pedigree—it was founded in 2008 in Moscow by Dasha Zhukova and Roman Abramovich, and is described as the “first philanthropic institution” of contemporary art in the Russian Federation (Russian Art Archive 2023c). In 2016, the Garage launched the archive of contemporary art in Moscow (Russian Art Archive, n.d.), and in 2018, its St Petersburg branch was opened. The Garage has been maintaining a presence beyond Russia as well: since 2020, the museum has been collaborating with a centre of contemporary culture in Almaty, Kazakhstan (Unauthored 2020). The Garage, branded as a network of institutions of culture and research, is a peculiar institutional “incarnation” of the philanthropic capital itself (cf. Barman 2017). From this networked configuration stems the affordance of the philanthropic capital to assign historical meaning and value retrospectively—the meaning and value of one or another project being “the first” in a historical sequence, or being “feminist” in its ideological character.

The institutional standpoint from which the retrospective talk about craft / art unfolds—be it the standpoint of the museum of contemporary art, or that of the archive of contemporary art—is of utmost significance. The Factory, relaunched at the beginning of 2019 in the Garage can be seen as paradoxical, and with this paradox, the Garage’s mission as an institution of culture and research comes to the fore—the mission to write “art history” and present it authoritatively to the public. According to the Garage Archive of Contemporary Art and its system of data classification, both the Shop of Travelling Things (Russian Art Archive 2023b) and the Factory of Found Clothes (Russian Art Archive 2023a) are categorised as “feminist” projects. The museum and the archive of contemporary art re/create the historical discourse of craft labour as “art historical” discourse, suffused with feminist consciousness.

The meaning of “firstness” and myth, in this case, overlap. “The first women’s art group in the post-Soviet space” is an attempt at historical classification without verification. Enunciated from the position of “the most substantial” (MacFarquhar 2015), large-scale and arguably the richest private art institution in the Russian Federation (Antsiperova 2018; Kishkovsky 2018), this version of history can only be

but a myth—warranted in reference to itself only. The history of "the first women's art group in the post-Soviet space" is the history written from the viewpoint myth and is therefore ideologically motivated.

4.2 Scarcity and freedom: inhabiting the Romantic 1990s

The Factory "wrestling with Soviet ideology"

To address the question of the ideology of the Factory's myth, I focus on the practitioners' self-periodization / self-positioning in time. Based on my interviews with Olga Egorova and the Factory's artist talk in the Garage, I suggest that according to the Factory logic, myth operates in a specific regime of temporality—Romantic Time. Indeed, it seems part of the scholarly convention to construe the 1990s as a historical episode (cf. Rossman 2022), characterised by new horizons of social freedoms and liberty (cf. Khlobystin 2020). The endurance of this convention—corroborated by my conversations with the Factory of Found Clothes—warrants my argument about the repetition of the 1990s in the historical consciousness of craft / art labour.

I shall begin by addressing the "material configuration" of Romantic Time. Olga Egorova's recollections about her running the Shop of Travelling Things in the 1990s are grounded in the experience of scarcity:

> First of all, we didn't have any money. But the Shop was operating … we were given several times … grants from Soros …
>
> I understand, you want [to hear] about the economy. But it is just that … in the 1990s the economy was very … you see … there is nothing even to be spoken about. Because it was all extremely incidental money. Really.
>
> The economy like something sustainable, … some kind of work that you do, and you know that you will be paid for it—nothing like that whatsoever … There was … no principle … you didn't even know where from and whether you will get the money, did not know at all …
>
> But … let's not forget that we were starving… we literally, virtually had no money. Literally. Literally, there was no … I don't even know what we were eating. Don't know at all. (Egorova 2018b)

The kernel of the quotation above, in my reading, is the conflict between the two poles: on the one hand, the 1990s are marked by the lack of resources, extreme poverty and scarcity; on the other hand, this period holds a new potential that emerged not least due to the assistance by the philanthropic capital—"grants from Soros." The

clash of the experience appears to be entrenched in the language of scarcity and unpredictability. However, there is a dialectical twist to it: the Factory's recollections actually become a negative expression of scarcity—a successful artistic career. In this way, the scarcity figure of discourse has a direct bearing on the configuration of the Romantic Time.

To demonstrate the latter point, I would like to return to the Factory's artist talk. As it was evoked by Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia, the 1990s was the time that was "open to the experiment," and, in that sense, the 1990s period had shaped the project in a significant way. The formative quality of this period is adequate to its unstable, turbulent, and "delirious" nature (*sumaschedshyie devianostye*) (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019). The practitioners' recollections are a negation of the lived experience of scarcity in the 1990s—they paint the 1990s in the colours of nostalgia and hopefulness for the forthcoming future. This can be sensed in Olga Egorova's response to my admittedly prosaic question about her daytime job at the time:

> We were not employed. No, we were working from morning till night. But it … was some other kind of work. We did not work on jobs. … it was out of the convention.
>
> We were preparing ourselves for the … the Great Future. Are you kidding me? No one was having a job … No one. See. Unlike now. Most certainly. We didn't have that [habit, or necessity] at all… We did not have that …
>
> So it was a very happy time … if I put my hand on my heart – then, of course, we lived more happily then … Starving was … kind of rom[antic]. It was a romantic time. (Egorova 2018b)

What seems crucial to highlight in this quotation is the naturalisation of the discourse of craft / art labour as a common sense (Fairclough 1996/1989, 91–93). Indeed, it is by way of the naturalisation of discourse that the semiological system of myth becomes a factual system (Barthes 1991/1957, 130)—the factual system in which the practitioners are extremely poor yet crave for the Great Future. Not once I heard Olga sharing her romanticised memories of her youth when I was one of the students at the School of Engaged Art in 2016 (St Petersburg): she was starving and yet paradoxically happy, not questing once the practitioner's life as a matter of starving—for her, it appeared natural to be the artist and starve. Therefore, it must be contended that the period of the 1990s did not escape the drive of naturalisation. The discourse of nostalgia endows the 1990s with the quality of the Romantic Time. The

profound lack of financial resources and general poverty of society is negatively proportional to its degree of happiness in the present and potentially—in the Great Future. What Olga Egorova had termed Romantic Time encompasses, in my reading, the myth about the precarious lived experience of the practitioner as an Artist during the period of societal transformation. Thus, the lived and recounted confrontation of scarcity and freedom are the two poles, enacting the Romantic Time in late capitalism. As Olga Egorova was recounting during the artist talk:

> Of course, we [the Factory] were the children of perestroika, and therefore … we worked … we were wrestling with that Soviet ideology, which was constituting this ideal human being (*idealnyi chelovek*) of a kind—who does not suffer, does not doubt, and who, in general, is by no means fragile / precarious, and not sensible at all, but strong-willed … Do you remember the Soviet person, the ideal Soviet person?
>
> And so, to some degree, our Gymnasium Girl was to counterweight this ideal and utterly not individual-like character. We used to say that it is only fragility / precarity that makes a person individual-like. (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019)

Striking in this quotation above is the particular understanding of Soviet ideology as a mode of subjectification—to be rethought by and overcome in the Factory project. Contra to Soviet ideology, the Factory "missiomn" is to bring to life a new kind of subjectivity—the Gymnasium Girl,[82] self-consciously precarious and deliberately fragile. The quotation is seeking to attest that the character of the Gymnasium Girl could have only been created by the "Children of Perestroika"—who vehemently reject the oppressive past and can redeem what was buried under the vestiges of Soviet ideology. This act of negation appears to endorse and warrant craft / art labour's self-positioning in time and history.

What seems to emerge, herewith, in opposition to the Soviet ideology, is the Factory's own ideology—embodied by the ideal and otherworldly character of the Gymnasium Girl. I will return to this character in the following section, her emergence seems rather significant, especially given that, in the course of the long 1990s, the Factory will assign the role of the Gymnasium Girl, albeit in a changed form, to the crafters who were assisting to run the project. What is of primary concern, at the moment, is the Factory's positioning and self/ understanding in the historical

[82] Rus. *gimnazistka* (obsolete). The notion of gymnasium, in this context, means a "school of the highest grade designed to prepare students for the universities" (OED 2023c). My chosen translation of *gimnazistka* as a gymnasium girl is backed by the obsoleteness of the notion, both in Russian and English.

perspective, and more specifically, the Factory's opposition to "Sovietness." According to Olga Egorova,

> … the aftermath of perestroika – 1994-1995 (strictly speaking, perestroika hadn't still been finished by then) … was the time when everything Soviet was sent to the trash bin …
>
> [I asked to clarify: for you as well?] … For everyone. … At the time [the Factory] was emerging, definitely, it was a powerful opposition to everything Soviet.
>
> Well, you're not getting it, of course, you were a child back when it had all ended. There was a great deal of unfreedom in that Soviet Union. And for artists, there was a great deal of unfreedom.
>
> Which is why we had to stand for our freedom, to distance ourselves from what was. Which is why we were throwing a bridge across everything Soviet, towards the [Association of Real Art, OBERIU]. (Egorova 2018b)

Accordingly, to transcend and overcome the unfreedom, prevalent in the lived experience of Soviet ideology, the Factory needed to reach back towards the past—the past that, at least presumably, fell beyond the reach of the Soviet ideology. For Olga, the OBERIU—the Association of Real Art, the "last Soviet avant-garde" of the 1920-30s (Roberts 1997)—was the key point of inspiration on the "art historical horizon" that afforded the Factory to channel the "revolutionary potential" of the past, and stand for "freedom" in the post-Soviet present. This quotation is telling in another sense—anchoring the Factory project in history and time means actively rewriting history from the standpoint of myth. (As far as chronology is concerned, the Union of Real Art cannot be conceived as falling beyond the Soviet project but an inherent, organic part of the historical movement of Soviet modernity.)

Craft / art as the signifier of freedom

The latter point brings me back to the problem of the myth / reification and its mode of periodisation—Romantic Time. Periodising the Factory's myth as the Romantic Time vis-à-vis the Soviet ideology becomes meaningful at least in one sense—it is the mode of periodisation in which the practitioners can authorise themselves as self-conscious, free agents of history.

It is perhaps for this reason that the ideology of exchange is complicit in the Romantic Time: a powerful element of the mythogenesis of Romantic Time is the search for agency and joy, redemption and unity re/gained via performing / realising consumer behaviour and commodity exchange (e.g. Campbell 2018/1987). The Shop

and Factory projects were not merely creating art / objects, but a kind of a space for social relations, created via the exchange of recrafted and remodelled clothes: textile objects were passed over from one owner to another, constituting the spatial continuum of relations (Egorova 2018b). But even more—in their capacity of being recrafted and initiated to become objects of exchange, clothes became a signifier of freedom sui generis (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019). As it was pointed out in Olga Egorova's opening remarks at the artist talk,

> Our golden age, of course, is connected with the delirious nineties. When … —I don't even know how to put it—it was a never-ending carnival, when we all dressed up and changed our images. And working with clothes, it was, well, you know, bang-on …
>
> It's not a coincidence that our group is called the Factory of Found Clothes—because [the dress], clothes were our main "heroine" of sorts. (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019)

This quotation attests to the particular sensibility of the 1990s—as the time when dressing up and the design of one's own appearance in an allegedly ceaseless and never-ending play was an organic part of quotidian life. Clothes were occupying the position of an object that holds the will of its own, and in this capacity of the assumed agency, clothes lend their agency to art / labour and the craft / art public. The core of the Shop and the Factory's mythogenesis is the tale of the recrafted textile object, ensouled in and through its movement in society, at the time when Soviet ideology was dead. Positioning recrafted clothes as the leading protagonist of craft / art can be seen as another element of its self/objectification.

As I will discuss in the following section, the romanticization of the 1990s holds a conundrum: the fetishization of the object of clothes and turning it into a central dramatis personae forecloses a significant share of labour involved in the process of making and exchange. When the image of the 1990s is saturated with Bakhtinian carnivalesque (see Aktuganova and Strelkov 2019)—as if time itself dictates changing appearances as much as dressing up—the transformation of individual appearances is equated with the transformation of society as a whole. The centrality of such fetish-centric consciousness can be traced in Olga Egorova's interview recollections:

> It was the clothes that interested us most. Well, back then, of course, clothes interested people a lot …
>
> [I asked to clarify: Why? It is interesting why.]

> Well, because people were thinking themselves as … sort of, artists of life, you see. That is, they woke up in the morning … [they] were artists all day long and went to sleep as artists.
>
> Which is why … they … were, like, they were creating, day by day, [they] were creating an image [*obraz*] of their own. And which is why, of course, they had to think more about clothes.
>
> Because it was, in a way, a kind of mask … a never-ending carnival of sorts. (Egorova 2018b)

This quotation magnifies the role that the practitioners ascribed to the objects they recrafted and sold—for them, clothes mediated the historical consciousness of society; clothes mediated individual dreams and aspirations (see Artiukh, Egorova, and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2008). However, the Factory's dreams can rather be described in terms of a professional career in the culture industry / visual art. By comparison to the latter quotation, the artist's life is not a noumenon dwelling outside the industry of culture; on the contrary, the former falls into the latter. As Olga Egorova recounted:

> Around our thirties,[83] we stepped into a normal professional life. It turned out that it is possible to get paid for what you do. That is to say, we didn't go to another place [get employed] in order to make money, it's just that what we do is in demand and generates some kind of income. (Artiukh, Egorova, and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2008)

The Romantic Time paved the way towards the professionalisation of craft / art labour as an art practice in the culture industry. The Factory ideology rejected the "dead shell" of unfreedom that had reigned in the Soviet time and embraced creativity. Somewhat similarly to historical Romanticism, the Romantic Time of the 1990s sustained itself by cultivating and nurturing the desire to design and stylize the self (cf. Campbell 2018/1987, 289). As the latter quotation confirms, the practitioners were aspiring to become professional—indeed, organic—workers in the global industry of culture in the face of the purported absence of the culture economy in the early "post-Soviet" St Petersburg (see Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2008). The Romantic Time draws a particular line of progression from the condition of scarcity and poverty towards an ultimate accomplishment—the practitioners reaching the pinnacle of the Great Future. To accomplish this peculiar "transition," however, craft /

[83] See Chapter 1—Olga Egorova was born in 1968, Khabarovsk, Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Natalia Pershyna was born in 1969, Leningrad, Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

art labour had to undergo a transformation of its own—it had to be distributed and divided.

While the Factory's ideology grounds itself in the Romantic Time—the ostensible "end of ideology" (Skidan 2007; Bell 1966/1960)—it is somewhat different from romantic worldviews characteristic of modernity and state socialism. The Factory's Romantic Time, in my view, did not reject reality for the sake of dissident daydreaming (Campbell 2018/1987, 289) or inside/outside-ness (*vnyenakhodimost*) (Yurchak 2005, 133–34). On the contrary, the Factory's Romantic Time appears as a way of thinking and a way of embracing entrepreneurship to pave way towards the professional class of artists.

4.3 Girls' Time: the division of creative labour between the "artists" and the "crafters"

Girls as labour-power in the Factory

How craft labour was distributed and divided in the Factory is a crucial question, inasmuch as it is premised upon the work of an invisible labour force, whose very character of invisibility and informality is immanent to the smooth and successful functioning of the culture industry on a local scale (cf. Becker 1982). The problem of the division of labour in the Factory is integral to the self-periodisation of craft / art labour during the Romantic Time. As this section will demonstrate, underlying the Factory's myth is the shadow labour force, bearing the name of the "Girls" (*devushki*)—the lingering legacy of the Factory's Gymnasium Girl character I discussed earlier in Chapter 2.

It was since 2003 that the signifier of the Gymnasium Girl was superseded by the "Girls"—effectively, the labour force of craft. The key event that marked this "transition" from the semiotic persona of the Gymnasium Girl towards the anonymised grouping of the Girls, took place on 8 March, on a day when the Shop of Utopian Clothes—the particular "reincarnation" of the Shop of Travelling Things—opened its doors in Gallery 21, Pushkinskaia 10. Depicted by some as the volunteers in the Factory (Azarkhi 2012, 327), Factory assistants, models, students, shop assistants and fashion designers (Skidan 2007), the Girls mark a new stage of

professionalisation—the recruitment of “craft labour from without” by the now professional artists. The Girls embody the division of labour in the culture industry / visual art sector where the practitioners remain in the shadow of the artist (cf. Sholette 2011). I would like to bring in the perspectives of the Girls, or at least two of them—Zhanar Kusainova and Olga Denisova (Figure 12). My aim is to analyse the division of craft labour in the Factory vis-à-vis the historical consciousness of the crafters / Girls themselves.

Figure 12. Zhanar Kusainova and Olga Denisova in a café, St Petersburg, Olga Denisova's personal archive (Unauthored circa 2003-2004).

Indeed, the Shop of Utopian Clothes was the last attempt to revamp the Shop of Travelling Things, and the one, as my interviews with Zhanar Kusainova and Olga Denisova attest (Kusainova 2020; Denisova 2020), that was primarily led and curated by Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia. However, the key difference between the two projects is the organisation of cultural labour itself: while in the Shop of Travelling Things, Olga Egorova was the only “productive unit” (collector, designer, crafter and salesperson in one) (see Chapter 3), the Shop of Utopian Clothes marks a definite shift in the organisation of labour—it was a project that was driven by the workshop-based production. Hence the centrality of the Girls’ labour-power for the project and my analysis.

I shall begin by outlining the nature of the Factory’s “employment” of the “craft labour from without”—the logic of the Girls’ recruitment. Back in the early 2000s,

Zhanar Kusainova (2020) was a student of dramaturgy, who found out about the Factory of Found Clothes via one of her acquaintances on Pushkinskaia 10, Zhanar was invited to the Factory by its founding members after she had read her writings at an open mic event at Pushkinskaia. Olga Denisova (2020), back in the day, a student of fashion and design, was reached out by her acquaintance from the Factory milieu (in fact, by one of the Factory's Girls, Polina Zaslavskaia), who invited Olga to contribute to the project with her tailoring and needlework skills. Other potential Girls were recruited by the Factory via advertisements (Trofimova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2004), distributed, for example, at the Factory's exhibitions (The Shop of Utopian Clothes 2011). Other would-be Girls approached Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna directly (Kusainova 2020). The Girls' average age was 20 years old (Kusainova 2020). The field of activities the Girls were involved in the Factory, based on my interviews with Olga Denisova (2020) and Zhanar Kusainova (2020), can be broken down into four levels of practice: (1) organisation and maintenance of space; (2) procurement of textile materials and second-hand clothes from flea markets; (3) redesigning and recrafting these object using the techniques of needlework, embroidery, beading and painting; and (4) selling the recrafted objects in the Shop of Utopian Clothes. This logic of structuration of the labour processes in the Factory, both of my interviewees admitted that these were based on the Girls' volunteering in the Factory in their free time; accordingly, both Denisova (2020) and Kusainova (2020) highlight a purely symbolic nature of payment out of the revenue of the objects they helped to recraft were sold. Other crafters, occasional participants in the Factory's activities, were working pro bono (Denisova 2020). Despite this implicit hierarchy among the Girls, the role of Pershyna-Yakimanskaia—the "chief curator" of the Shop of Utopian Clothes—in the eyes of my research participants, was to organise the process of labour in the spirit of autonomous self-organisation (Denisova 2020) without leaders or outsiders (Kusainova 2020).

Figure 13. “The Girl's World” performance by the Factory of Found Clothes, participants: Olga Denisova, Polina Zaslavskaia, Zhanar Kusainova, Tatiana Larina, Olga Markovich, Mariia Fedorova, Gallery 21, St Petersburg (December 30, 2003).

In fact, both Denisova (2020) and Kusainova (2020) confirmed that their membership in the Factory was based on a sense of affinity, community and creative collaboration: it was what mattered most to them. Due to that, the logic of membership was unfixed and contingent, and at times traversed the symbolic walls of the Factory itself: the participants “were flowing from one grouping to another but sooner or later returning to the Factory” (Kusainova 2020). Accordingly, the logic of membership in the Factory resembled a borderline condition: the ostensible “lack of ideology” in the Factory required no organizational hierarchy either. Thus, the Girls were finding themselves in the state of a free-floating, and as they were stressing in interviews, unlimited freedom; neither there was a fixed Factory “cadre” – with Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna as the core members, the Girls were coming in and leaving (Kusainova 2020).

Romantic femininity: powerlessness as the source of power / heroism

Despite the tendency of the revolving door, there is a sense in which the Girls can be considered a collective signifier: and that is the sense of the importance of the communal creative collaboration and the freedom that the latter safeguarded for both Denisova (2020) and Kusainova (2020). The meaning that this concept of freedom is

taking upon is shaped by the retrospective logic of enunciation – is it a kind of freedom that cannot realise itself – come to its consciousness – in the domain of the present and is therefore striving backwards, in order to realise itself in a retrospective way. As this chapter has been arguing, the only way in which craft labour can develop its sense of self-historicity is through the discourse of myth. This is acutely demonstrated in the way in which the participants of the Factory from without frame their self-understanding of the Factory project.

For Zhanar Kusainova (2020), the Factory was continuing the tradition of the "Poor Girl" (*bednaia devushka*) from the Russian Sentimentalist literature, in particular, Nikolai Karamzin's piece *Poor Liza* (*Bednaya Liza*) (2013/1792). On a descriptive level, *Poor Liza* is a story of unrequited love between a young peasant (Liza) and an aristocrat (Orest), and this is a story that ends in tragedy – Liza drowning herself after being betrayed and abandoned by Orest; on a more fundamental level, *Poor Liza* can be read as a story of the perfectibility of modern society, written by a devoted student of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Tussing Orwin 2007, 14–17). For the Factory, however, the Poor Girl becomes a literary device, affording the trope of longing for the past—the foregone romantic femininity—vis-à-vis the construct of Soviet ideology as a mechanism of oppression.[84] Counterposing itself against the construct of Soviet ideology, the Factory's trope of the Poor Girl is, I would argue, an expression of the retrogression of historical self-consciousness of craft / art labour. The Factory's signifier of the Girls resembles the structure of myth—the Girls' sign is meaningful insofar as it is a projection onto the mythic Beginning of the foregone past (cf. Adorno and Horkheimer 1989/1947, 8)—the late 18th-century romantic femininity. It marks a specific kind of temporality of craft / art that I would like to term Girls' Time.

Locating Girls' Time and its romantic femininity in the texture of the myth forces us to return to the question tackled in the previous chapter—the question of feminist ideology. My interest is with the way how feminist ideology was conceived by the "Factory's participants from without." For Zhanar Kusainova, one of the central corollaries of her engagement with the Factory was exactly her, as it were, discovery, of feminist ideology as such: she claimed to have learned for the first time about

[84] Also see Azarkhi's (2012, 301) argument that the Factory's construction of the "poor girl" was a signifier of social oppression.

feminism—in her understanding, women's rights and struggle with "patriarchy"—in the early 2000s in the Factory of Found Clothes (Kusainova 2020). The concept of patriarchy occupied the central place in Zhanar's perceptions of the ideology of feminism that she had encountered in the Factory, and, presumably, internalised; concurrently, Olga Denisova's account of this period depicts feminism in terms of an intrinsic, profoundly spiritual sense of female precariousness—the Girls, going through the somewhat tangled and tortuous period of self-transformation so as to finally come to a form of self-consciousness (Denisova 2020).

The peculiarity of feminist ideology in the case of the Factory reveals itself through the participants' accounts, and as such was warranted by the 18th-century vision of female fragility and precariousness in early modernity. Apart from that, however, the memories of the atmosphere of sisterhood and mutual trust among the participants of the Factory seem to have been especially vivid in the accounts of Zhanar Kusainova: this reciprocal affinity was, in essence, what sparked Zhanar's interest in the Factory project in the first place (Kusainova 2020).

Zhanar and Olga's accounts of their engagement with the Factory's ideology undoubtedly bear on a broader problem of feminist politics in late capitalism. It thus might be tempting to see the Factory's paradoxical reinvention of feminist ideology via the literary tradition of Sentimentalism as falling into the strand of post-feminism—after all, the Girls were a central signifier and a self-referential addressee of craft labour. Yet, the principal message was not the post-feminist empowerment and success of Girls in consumer society (cf. McRobbie 2008) but a celebration of the Girls' inherent fragility, precariousness and powerlessness against the domination of capitalist patriarchal society. Therefore, it is not consumer feminism or post-feminism that is at stake in the Factory ideology, but categorically, pre or proto feminism. Hence, it can be argued that the Factory project is an example of craft / art labour, whose ideological articulation is contingent upon falling back into prehistory of feminism during the long 1990s. Moreover, the Factory's proto feminism expressed itself antinomically: similar to the cultural theory that hinges upon the reification of female experience, the Factory's proto feminism places the Girls vis-à-vis "patriarchy" (cf. Ebert 1988), but grants the Girls nothing more but their fragile power—bordering an essential yet fixed human nature—to be mobilised against the forces of social domination (cf. Kusainova

2020). While on the surface level of reading, the Factory's treatment of human nature might have the late 18th-century pre-Romantic overtones to it, the discourse of craft / art becomes meaningful in the Girls' eyes via their experience of the division of creative work in the culture industry.

Girls as "dead labour" in the culture industry

The Factory's ideology of proto feminism, reified in the construct of the Girls, had been shaping the historical self/consciousness in craft / art labour in the long 1990s, and by virtue of the latter, legitimised the division of labour between professional artists (the Factory) and directly—the Girls—the invisible labour force in the culture industry / visual art sector (Kusainova 2020; Denisova 2020). This division of labour found its phenomenal expression in the way how the participants of the Factory apprehended their practices of craft: as recalled by Zhanar Kusainova (2020), the "participants of the Factory from without" did not take their labour "seriously enough," and there was on the whole, according to Zhanar, a "folkloristic" kind of attitude (*folklernoe otnoshenie*) towards the Girls' work, not least on the side of the Girls themselves. It was, in a way, self-evident and taken for granted that these objects were made under the supervision of the Factory's core members, most centrally, Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia; the Girls were unknown and unremembered—anonymous (Kusainova 2020). And for a while, as Zhanar Kusainova (2020) put it succinctly, "poor girls remain[ed] the poor girls." At the same time, however, the Girls were also "growing up"—the transitory nature of the Girls phenomenon in the long 1990s proved to be an essential limitation of the seamless expansion of the division of craft labour in the culture industry (Kusainova 2020).

In light of the aforementioned tendencies of anonymisation of craft / art labour, self-suppression of craft labour (cf. Kusainova 2020), and infantilization of the Girls by The Factory's milieu (see The Factory of Found Clothes 2006; Skidan 2007), the collective signifier of the Girls began to crumble. While disassembling, the Girls were to integrate and become an organic part of the culture industry. It can be suggested that similarly to Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna's career trajectories, the Girls' professional careers in culture were contingent upon them starting as crafters first. Especially in the case of Olga Denisova (2020), who, starting as a low-paid tailor, designer and embroiderer in the Factory, by the time of interviewing, was still in close

collaboration with Pershyna-Yakimanskaia, yet now in the role of “creative co-producer/maker” (*tvorcheskii inspolnitel*). Like Olga Denisova and Polina Zaslavskaia (Denisova 2020), other “participants of the Factory from without” have found their creative pathways in fashion and design (see Kusainova 2020; Denisova and Zaslavskaia, n.d.). Zhanar Kusainova has become a professional playwright and writer (see Kusainova and Romashkina 2015).

Overall, this section has attempted to map out and problematise a divided field of craft labour: the Girls as makers vis-à-vis the artists as professionals in the culture industry. The existing accounts about the history of the Factory project (see Egorova, Pershyna-Yakimanskaia, and Deepwell 2011; The Factory of Found Clothes 2013; Bartlett 2022) tend to collapse its craft labour into art, leaving the Girls neglected and forgotten. This must be seen as yet another confirmation of the unrecognised, invisible, and even self-suppressed character of craft (cf. Luckman 2015a) in the eyes of the culture industry and most paradoxically—former crafters themselves.

Figure 14. “Debates About the Split” performance, Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia, participants unknown, St Petersburg (July 13, 2013).

Based on what becomes public in the form of an “art” object and its visual representation, the division of labour between an artisan and an artist, between manual and mental labour, is still a given, and this division of labour leaves the artisan’s name invisible against the figure of the artist: for example, some of the images of objects produced in the Factory in the period of the Shop of Utopian Clothes (2004-

2013) indicate the name of the crafter who had made the object, while others not (see The Factory of Found Clothes 2013). Likewise, the Garage archive materials about the Factory only demonstrate interest in the Girls only inasmuch as they were participants in the Factory's performance projects, most prominently *The Girl's World* (Figure 13) (see Rets and The Factory of Found Clothes 2003). Therefore, in the eyes of the culture industry, the role of the Girls as a labour force in the Factory of Found Clothes has so far remained obscure.

The phenomenon of the Girls—faceless and nameless craftworkers, employees recruited by the salient figures of visual art—indexes the irrevocable integration of the Factory of Found Clothes into the culture industry. The Factory appears to have been fertile soil for the Girls' careers as well, helping the Girls to transform themselves into a creative workforce, transcending the inconspicuous domain of craft, and joining a class of professional workers of culture. The spectre of the Girls, however, even without their live presence and live labour, continued to be mobilised and used by Natalia Pershyna in her later exhibitions and projects (see The Factory of Found Clothes 2013; Ledenev 2014). Thus, by the beginning of the 2010s, the Girls had become "dead labour"—capital for the culture industry; the Girls' craft labour confronts them, the workers of culture, as an alienated and abstracted object of art (cf. Marx 1982/1867, 342, 548–49).[85]

The Girls' Time—having had the late 18th-century canon of Sentimentalism literature (Karamzin) as its point of departure and the Romantic 1990s as a formative historical juncture—will last until craft / art labour's productive capacities are exhausted by the culture industry / visual art sector. In that sense, the Girls' Time promises to last as long as capital lasts. The Factory's post-dissolution projects acutely demonstrate (Figure 14) that any anonymous subject can enact itself as a Girl without doing the actual labour of craft / art, but merely perform girl-ness (cf. Ledenev 2014). This seems to warrant that the collective signifier of the Girls by the 2010s had become akin to an empty signifier, embodying a contradiction between the creative practice of signification and its imminent impotence in the face of the dead capital (cf. Laclau

[85] "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him" (Marx 1982/1867, 342).

2007/1996, 36, 39–40). However, this contradiction is not devoid of potential (Ibid., 46): if anyone can take the place of the anonymous dead labour-power, then the horizon of self-periodisation of craft / art in cultural production remains open-ended.

4.4 Conclusion: the unity of self/historicization and self/valorization of craft / art labour

This chapter has been exploring the phenomenon of craft / art labour during the long 1990s (1994–2014) in the St Petersburg cultural scene. I have argued that this setting necessitates a specific approach to craft / art, whose historical self-consciousness manifested itself via the discourse of retrospection. This discourse of retrospection, motivated by inter alia the ideology of anti-Sovietism (the USSR as an embodiment of the suppression of freedom), hinges upon the affirmation of the firstness (glorification of freedom): for example, the Factory of Found Clothes being rendered as the "first women's art group in the post-Soviet space" by the Garage (Diaconov, Lazareva, and Volovoda 2018). The discourse of craft / art labour, wherever it was finding itself—whether the Archive of Contemporary Art or the Museum of Contemporary Art—had been continuing to re-enact and reconstruct itself vis-à-vis the historical past, lived and imagined. My interest has been with the ideological forces that had been driving the making of the historical self-consciousness of craft / art in a retrospective manner, such as the objective forces of the culture industry in the Russian metropoles (The Garage Museum, The Garage Archive), assigning the category of "feminism" onto the Factory project rather than problematising or re/conceptualising "feminism" itself.

I have been also addressing the subjective forces that had been driving the making of the historical self-consciousness of craft / art in a retrospective way, such as the desire to maintain the internal coherence of the discourse of craft /art labour in the eyes of the culture industry / visual art sector and the researcher. Both the subjective and objective forces make a critical analysis of craft / art an uneasy task: because both, as the Factory's case has demonstrated, want to eliminate the temporal gap, or else to instrumentalise time and obscure the meaning of the lived historical practices and non-synchronic nature of our recollections and interpretations of the past.

As the next move of my argument, I have proposed that the Factory's rendition of the period of the 1990s as the Romantic Time is caught in the semiological system of myth (cf. Barthes 1991/1957, 130). The Factory's mythic discourse, I have contended, presents itself as naturalised common sense (Fairclough 1996/1989, 91–93), and, therefore, must be taken seriously in its own terms: the production of discourse about creative labour (in interviews and artist talks), and creative labour itself, cannot be divorced since they constitute the field of cultural production: "The production of discourse … about the work of art is one of the conditions of production of the work" (Bourdieu 1993a, 37). Olga Egorova's recollections about the 1990s rendered the past, and history itself, innocent: by juxtaposing itself to the project of Soviet modernity, the Factory, according to its mythology, redeemed what was buried under the vestiges of Soviet ideology—an image of a delicate feminine character, the Gymnasium Girl. The Factory's recrafted clothes, veiled in the myth of femininity, had become the objects of commodity exchange: such, I have suggested, was the synthesis of artistic and entrepreneurial practices that aggregated the regime of craft / art labour during the long 1990s in St Petersburg.

I have argued that in the course of the long 1990s craft / art labour was gradually becoming an organic part of the global culture industry, particularly in the way in which new division of labour was emerging, such as the division of labour between the professional artists and the "recruited labour-power from without" to recraft and market textile objects, to stage performances of romantic femininity and dressing-up. Focusing on the discourse of self-historicization by the "Factory's participants from without," Olga Denisova and Zhanar Kusainova, I have attempted to map out the shifting meaning of femininity in the Factory's re-enactment of feminist ideology in the early 2000s. I have problematised the Factory's feminist ideology as falling back into proto feminism; the latter disposition, to a certain extent, served as a corollary for the invisibility of the Girls' labour-power for the culture industry / visual art economy.

So, when is craft / art labour? Craft / art labour's self-periodisation is inextricably linked to its ideologically motivated desire to ascribe value to itself: the self-positioning of craft / art in time is contingent upon its incessant self-historicization driven by the principle of value accumulation. This argument mirrors but arguably does not resolve the problem, addressed earlier in Chapter 3—the problem of the self/objectified

subject of craft / art, embodying the function of exchange as its only mode of self-conduct (cf. Adorno 2005/1963, 248).

By situating itself vis-à-vis the project of Soviet modernity, the Factory project has set a high watermark of opposition. Taking a retrospective look, the Factory's discourse of "throwing a bridge across everything Soviet" (Egorova 2018b) to re-claim freedom during Russia's long 1990s proved to be a challenge inasmuch as it is accompanied and bolstered by the commodification of craft / art labour as an art form in the culture industry / visual art sector. Being the true offspring of perestroika, the Factory ascertained "wrestling with Soviet ideology" as its calling (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019). As a result, the Factory misrecognised their new "post-Soviet" freedom for lifestyle and cultural entrepreneurship (cf. Yurchak 2002). It is in this sense that the period of the long 1990s in Russia can be seen as a contradictory period: the period of progress / growth, in terms of the professionalisation of craft / art labour as an artistic occupation; the period of concurrent regression, in terms of the romantically predisposed feminist historical consciousness falling back into the past—proto feminism.

CHAPTER 5 POLITICISATION OF CRAFT AS ART VIA THE DIVISION OF CREATIVE LABOUR

This chapter develops the concepts of the "surplus labour-power of craft"—a "class" / group of creative workers outsourced by "artists" / "patrons" to perform the manual labour of craft for a compensation. This concept marks an emergence of the hierarchy and division of labour between the "artists" and "crafters" in the St Petersburg cultural scene in the 2010s (2015-2019)—the surplus labour-power of craft is a kind of a reserve pool of work force that can be temporarily employed to produce and/or recraft textile objects as art objects for display. In this role, surplus labour-power of craft is embedded in the culture industry's unequal distribution of resources and power between "commissioners" and "practitioners." With that, the aim of the chapter is to explore the contradictory politicisation of craft labour as art via the division of creative labour during the 2010s.

The chapter begins with the particular "turn" toward "political art" in the mid-2010s, coinciding with an expansion of the surplus labour-power of craft in the culture industry / visual art sector. Drawing on the artist talk by the Factory at the Fabric of Felicity exhibition in the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art (Moscow, 2019), as well as my semi-structured interviews with Olga Egorova (2018), the chapter suggests that the regime of the discourse of craft / art labour underwent certain transformation by the 2010s. The earlier trope of the trade and exchange of the objects / recrafted clothes as an expression of "post-Soviet freedom," as I discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, had shifted toward a collective making / production of "political art" from below. By the early 2000s, the Factory's Shop of Utopian Clothes was in the position to delegate, and at times commission, handicraft work from the "Girls," the group of volunteers who helped run the Shop under the guidance of its curator-artist Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia. Whereas by the mid-2010s, the Factory's new "incarnation," What is to Be Done group (St Petersburg, 2003–present), commissioned the manual labour of craft to an ever more expanding "field" comprising the practitioners from without the immediate bounds of group itself—I call them the surplus craft labour, represented in this chapter by the Seamstresses project (St Petersburg, Kyiv, 2015–present). This particular "expansion of the field," in my view, contributed to a relatively "uncharted"

development in the St Petersburg art scene—the hierarchy of creative labour between the "artists" / commissioners and the "crafters" / practitioners.

To attend to the question of the division of labour between the two, the chapter explores the discourse-historical position (Wodak 2001; Reisigl 2018) of the participants of the Seamstresses project vis-à-vis the milieu where it initially emerged from—What Is to Be Done collective and its School of Engaged Art (St Petersburg, 2013–present). The chapter's primary materials include my semi-structured interviews with the Seamstresses: Anna Tereshkina, Olesia Panova, Tonia Melnik, Masha Lukianova as well as my field notes (August–December 2018). With these primary materials, the chapter pursues to uncover how the Seamstresses project adopts the discourse of "art" / aesthetics as a means to navigate the hierarchy of creative work.

5.1 The shift towards "political art" in the Factory

Politicisation of creative work: "The place of the artist is on the side of the powerless"

As Chapters 3 and 4 have discussed, during the 1990s the Shop and Factory's practice of recrafting and selling textile objects / second-hand clothes overlapped with the one of the search for agency, power and freedom among the class of creative workers (cf. Campbell 2018/1987). The Factory's quest for freedom and power via the realisation of an entrepreneurial behaviour was registered in the following extract from one the earlier interviews: "A person has to buy things to feel their power over these things. [Once] you buy [the thing], you are the Master" (Pilikin, Egorova, and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 1997). I have suggested that the narrative about the self-transformation via the pursuit of artistic lifestyle and realisation of craft consumption was the red thread in the Factory and the Shop's discourse.

This section registers a shift away from the earlier discourse celebrating individual consumption as a means of social emancipation in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the USSR. I would like to conceptualise this shift as a movement of the sign of the object of craft across the discursive space of craft / art (cf. Keating 2015). It is important to note that this movement should not be understood as a movement across different modes of signification, textual or visual, but the movement

across different positions of productions, such as the ones of the “artist” and “crafter.” “Art” and “craft,” as hierarchically located positions of productions in the culture industry / visual art sector, arrange and orchestrate the incipient meanings of both categories since the mid-1990s and until the late 2010s (cf. Kress 2010). This movement of the sign of the object of craft / art, in my reading, cannot be fully explained by the career trajectories of Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia (who both started off as crafters in the Shop and Factory but gradually abandoned the manual labour of craft for the creation of an “art form”).

There is, I would like to emphasise, more to the discourse movement the sign of the object of craft / art than meets the eye. While the Factory performed its dissolution in 2014, as Chapter 4 has shown, the objects of craft / art the Factory had previously “produced” (whether in the form of artefacts or their visual representations) did not cease to circulate in the cultural industry. While the system is contingent upon the craft labour power to make unique cultural goods (Banks 2010, 306), the question that this chapter aims to pursue is how the labour power of craft is distributed between the participants of the culture economy—between those who have chosen to pursue the vocation of “arts” professionally and the one of “crafts.” To address this question, the chapter analyses the particular discourse-movement of the object of craft / art labour (see Appadurai 2013/1986).

To begin with, I would like to return to the event I have discussed earlier in Chapter 4 the Factory’s artist talk at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, the Fabric of Felicity exhibition in 2018-2019. During the event, Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia read aloud the manifesto of the Factory of the Found Clothes, entitled “The Place of the Artist is on the Side of the Powerless” (*Mesto Khudozhnika na Storone Slabykh*) (2002). The final lines of the manifesto echoed the Factory’s earlier trope of self-transformation (“Once you buy the thing, you are the Master”) adding some layer of social change: “Helping individuals to choose the path of self-transformation, we will change society. There is no other way for us” (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019). This line from the manifesto, in my view, represents an emerging dynamic in the discourse of craft / art—the dynamic between the collective subject (“the powerless”) and “the artist” who “helps” “the powerless” on their path of an open-ended self-improvement.

Stemming on from this particular dynamic between “the powerless” and “the artist,” the 1990s regime of the discourse as a rather narrowly positioned enterprise for self/stylisation becomes negotiable—inviting “the political” as a wider connotation. The connotation of “the political,” as it was presented during the artist talk event, intertwined with the one of “the history.” The “storyline” of the emergence of “the political” was carefully punctuated along these lines: the manifesto, Pershyna-Yakimanskaia noted, was written one year before the key turning point of 2003, the year when the Factory project reorganised into a new formation, “What Is to Be Done” (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019). In that sense, the manifesto signified a “transit bridge” (Ibid.). As the artist talk implicitly suggested, the writing of “The Place of the Artist is on the Side of the Powerless” indexed a radical change of the discourse of creative work of the Factory towards its politicisation. Olga Egorova added: “After we created … What is to Be Done, … we set out with … these, kind of, real political projects, political, social” (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019).

The seeming disappearance of the object of craft / art labour

The framing of the transition from the Factory towards What is to Be Done presented during the artist talk at the Garage seem thereby to exclude the Factory from the rubric of “political art projects,” tempting one to think that the notion of “political art” had reconfigured the Factory’s previous regime of craft / art, substituting the formerly prominent logic of the object for a different one—the logic of the relational aesthetics (see Bourriaud 2002). After all, during the artist talk, there was no mention of the object of craft / art labour as a constitutive element in production and exchange (with the exception of the “dress” / clothes being the Factory’s “heroine”). I would suggest that the seeming disappearance of the object—a cultural good / commodity—from the horizon of the artist talk can be seen as an effect of the movement of the sign of the object of craft / art in discourse. The apparent disappearance of the object of craft / art is facilitated by the logic of myth / reification—this time, under the signifier of “the tradition.” Olga Egorova’s concluding words at the artist talk were:

> That is all what we wanted to tell you [pauses]. Well, sort of, about our … about what we were doing together with Gliuklia.
>
> Because … then, eventually, we decided [pauses], that is to say … that the life [pauses], the life was changing, okay.

> Gliuklia … she continues the Factory's traditions now. I, myself, continue [the traditions], too. (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019)

The extract frames the closure of the Factory project as a consequence of life's inherent change yet grounded in the continuity and inheritance of some traditions developed by the project. By contrast to that, in private conversation with me in 2018 Olga decisively indicated that the Factory project was closed (Egorova 2018b). Even though we both knew, at that moment, that Olga and Natalia will reunite again in January 2019 in the framework of the Fabric of Felicity exhibition. In light of my interviews with Olga Egorova in 2018, the truth of the Factory's shutdown appears to be personal truth rather than something to be spoken publicly. And so, at the artist talk, it is not spoken of. Because myths, just as traditions, do not die out, but live continually if they are spoken of, listened to, and remembered. Saying otherwise—that "the project is over" in the walls of the museum which, as it were, brought back to life the project otherwise shut-off for about a decade—would mean to kill the tradition, kill the myth, and overall, perhaps diminish the value of the Factory's creative practice (cf. the value accumulating potential of mythic language in Barthes 1991/1972, 122).

Following the logic of "the tradition" in Olga Egorova's narrative, then, what she and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia were doing by 2019, as part of What Is to Be Done, may be weaved into an everlasting continuum of the Factory's myth (see Chapter 3 and 4). The turn toward "political art," therefore, "should" be perceived as if immanent to the Factory project since the mid-1990s. However, this continuity does hold up contradictions. My encounter with Olga Egorova (2018) prior to the artist talk shows a rather different side of the coin, where the continuity of traditions voiced at the artist talk meets its opposite—conflicts, ruptures, terminations. These were powerful elements in Olga's recollections but were somewhat momentary and most of the time boiled down to the arguably constituent narrative theme in the Factory—change but continuity. Thus, although by 2019, the Factory project was no longer engaged in recrafting and selling textile objects as commodities, Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia, the former crafters, still held a "linguistic capital" (Bourdieu 1977, 646) that encompassed the symbolic value of the past artefacts whose biographies the Factory members continuously inscribed into the project's career.

The next move of the artist talk brought in an additional time punctuation into the story and introduced a historical perspective on the production of “political art” in Russia in the 2010s. The period between 2009 and 2012, Olga Egorova clarified, was perceived by the Factory as a “blessed” one—it was the time when it was “crystal evident” to the practitioners how the workings of the power can be explored by them—likewise, it was the period when significant “resources” for the exploration were available (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019). However, after 2012 (perhaps in connection with the decline of civil and political mobilisation after 2012 as discussed by Gelman 2015), it became clear that “exploring how power works in Russia” “was not that simple”—as Olga said, “We no longer knew how this power works” (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019). Olga added in a higher-pitched voice,

> Now we have The School of Engaged Art. I’m happy to see the beloved faces [of] our students and graduates [smiles].
>
> Now we work a lot … together with our young comrades.
>
> Because … well, because, as it seems to us, now it’s the time when we can do something only together. (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019)

This quotation does the job of establishing the logical connection between “political art” and the emergence of the group of practitioners who I call the surplus labour-power of craft. By 2019, both Olga Egorova and Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia, the members of What Is to Be Done, not only no longer practiced handicraft work (at least based on what becomes public as their artistic work), but commissioned practitioners to make / tailor the objects to be exhibited as “art works” under the authorship of What is to Be Done. It was, perhaps, not incidental that the School of Engaged Art, launched in 2013, was the place where this cohort of practitioners emerged. It was the School, I argue next, where the surplus labour-power of craft gets “accumulated.” The discourse of the craft / art object, thereby, had changed relative to the change in labour relations between the makers—former and present. By the 2010s, these two “classes” of creative workers occupied two differential positions in the sector—the one of commissioners and practitioners: the former, seeking to reclaim the continuum of the tradition in the flow of history and time; the latter, relegated to the margins of cultural work.

5.2 The Seamstresses: the ambivalent division of creative labour

The discourse-historical position of the Seamstresses vis-à-vis the Factory

The previous section has demonstrated the implicit movement of the sign of the object of craft toward the form of "political art." By the 2010s, the object of craft / art did not become redundant, but shifted onto a different regime of semiosis—firstly, the regime of tradition ("the Factory's traditions"), and secondly, the regime of collaboration ("only together we can do something") (Egorova and Pershyna-Yakimanskaia 2019). Both regimes, as this section shows, index a hierarchy of labour between commissioners and practitioners. Through the analysis of the relationship between the two positions of production in the culture industry / visual art sector the section traces a further movement of the sign of the craft / art object "across the discourse" of creative work in the Russian mid-2010s.

The Seamstresses project was launched as a graduation project in the School of Engaged Art in 2015 in St Petersburg. Subsequently, Seamstresses developed into a full-fledged Russian-Ukrainian project co-run by Anna Tereshkina (1986, Omsk), Maria Lukianova (1987, Volzhsky), Olesia Panova (1988, Novosibirsk), Tonia Melnik (1988, Kyiv). According to Anna Tereshkina, it was the final exhibition of the student works that marked the project's emergence:

> I always, sort of, write that [the Seamstresses] [was] a utopian graduate project. Well, by and large, it is.
>
> The idea belongs to Tonia Melnik. She and Masha [Lukianova] were the students of the second admission of the School of Engaged Art. And I … was in the first admission. (Panova and Tereshkina 2018c)

Maria Lukianova recalled a somewhat similar "sequence" of the project's history: first there was the graduate project, afterwards—a commission from What Is to Be Done. "The Seamstresses emerged from the idea … to present, to make this project of a sewing cooperative for the exhibition. And then [unclear] [was] the commission" (Lukianova and Melnik 2018). This narrative of sequencing the story of the Seamstresses—firstly, as a graduate project, and secondly, as a result of the commission (to which I will return in the following section)—is my major perspective in exploring / conceptualising the phenomenon I have termed the surplus labour-power of craft.

As a first step of analysis, I would like to focus on a visual representation of the Seamstresses graduate project in 2015so as to set up an explanatory framework. A visual and textual description of the Seamstresses' project (Unauthored 2015a) consists of a collage and a text. On a descriptive level, the collage (Figure 15) depicts the artists of the Soviet avant-garde, Liubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova, the seamstresses in the factories, the collective and individual portraits of women workers. The text in the collage says: "To speak about the revolution through textiles. The artel for modelling a new society. The sewing cooperative. The Seamstresses collective" (Melnik et al. 2015, 7). On an analytical level, adopting the discourse-historical approach (see Wodak 2001; Reisigl 2018), one can discern a certain "message" and a "strategy of communication" the collage contains / depicts.

Figure 15. The Seamstresses: "To speak about the revolution through textiles. The artel for modelling a new society. The sewing cooperative. The Seamstresses collective." Collage from What Is to Be Done and the School of Engaged Art Bulletin, N4: "Nowhere: Six Collective Exercises in Utopias" (2015).

The first strategy is the one of nomination (Reisigl 2018, 52): the discursive construction of textiles / clothes as objects through which the subject can "speak"—about what otherwise is arguably unspeakable. The textual description of the collage warrants this interpretation: "Clothes transform, describe and define us … Clothes can be used as a means of political protest, as a means to make one's voice heard or more articulate. (Melnik et al. 2015, 6). The second strategy is perspectivisation, namely, the discursive expression of a distance or proximity (Reisigl 2018, 52) between the members of the Seamstresses project and the historical actors depicted in the collage.

> To speak about the revolution through textiles … such was [the goal of producing] clothing for the figures of the Russian avant-garde Varvara Stepanova and Liubov Popova …
>
> For the organizers of the Factory of Found Clothes, this is not merely [a matter of] clothing but art activism sui generis—the [textile] object [becomes] a banner or a placard. (Melnik et al. 2015, 6)

The extract from the text accompanying the collage positions the Factory of Found Clothes as well as the artists of the Soviet avant-garde in discursive proximity with the Seamstresses project. This discourse-historical positionality of the Seamstresses in 2015 did not seem to change by the time of my research encounter with them in 2018. For Tonia Melnik, the Factory was "Rather the first example of the political artists who worked with textiles" (Lukianova and Melnik 2018). This phrasing made we wonder in which sense my interviewee mobilised the term of the "political." As Tonia clarified, "That was how the Factory's work appeared to me at the time" (Ibid.). Similarly, Anna Tereshkina's (2020a) recollections did not shed light on the meaning of the "political" but sought to maintain that both the Factory's and the Seamstresses pursue a common interest—"clothes." Both accounts indexed a particular discursive proximity between the Seamstresses and the Factory; both warranted the proximity by nominating clothes / textiles as a medium for "artistic expression." A rather different strategy of nomination was employed by Maria Lukianova:

> The Factory is an interesting [unclear] starting point from which we have acquainted ourselves …
>
> But for me, for instance, it's highly questionable how they make their projects … in the sense that Gliuklia [Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaia] and Tsaplia [Olga Egorova] remain [in the position of] the artists who create hierarchies … [between] participants of the project and … the artists who run the project. (Lukianova and Melnik 2018)

I asked Maria Lukianova if she could clarify whether she had had some specific Factory piece / art work in mind.

> When they were creating these objects, like, dresses of sorts. Well, when they were working with people, invited people, like, to participate in this.
>
> These people embroidered something, or tailored …, like, and [these objects] were always left, like, for instance, with Gliuklia [who presumably ascribed the ownership and authorship of these objects to herself] ….
>
> Like, sort of, these objects, made by someone else, were left to the artist … I wouldn't like to work like that. (Lukianova and Melnik 2018)

Maria Lukianova's strategy of nomination rendered textile objects as "objects of labour relations" between the artists and the practitioners. With that, the discursive distance between the Seamstresses and the Factory increases ("I wouldn't like to work like that"). Following the Seamstresses' logic of perspectivisation in 2015 and 2018 respectively, when the object of craft / clothes is referred to as a means for "artistic expression," the Seamstresses and the Factory share much in common. Yet when it comes to the labour relations between the "artists" and the "makers," the proximity between the two projects dwindles.

The hierarchy between the "artists" and the "makers"

The Seamstresses' (Lukianova and Melnik 2018) criticisms of the labour hierarchy between the artists and makers is significant but is not devoid of internal contradictions. As I demonstrate in this section, it can be seen as paradoxical that the Seamstresses mirror, perhaps unconsciously, a rather similar dynamic of power when the Seamstresses ascribe to themselves the role of the manual labour of craft. This paradox becomes explicit when the project participants describe their collaboration with What Is to Be Done collective. I would like to return to the analytical device of perspectivisation to explore the discourse-historical positionality of the Seamstresses project vis-à-vis What Is to Be Done. According to Tonia Melnik (2018), the "role" of What Is to Be Done for the Seamstresses project was "merely … [in] the fact that [the project participants] were studying in the School of Engaged Art, that [the Seamstresses] met each other [there]. … That is all there is to the whole story" (Ibid.). The latter phrase signalled to me an intention to draw a discursive boundary between the Seamstresses and What Is to Be Done.

> We just happened to be working with [What is to be Done], because we received commissions from them. The big banners, in particular [Figure 11]. And we were working in the space that What Is to Be Done … got on the grant [money].
>
> But they are not … this is not the case when … they … play the role of schoolmasters or inspirators or whatever. (Lukianova and Melnik 2018)

Although the initial intention of my question was to understand the "discourse-historical positionality" of the Seamstresses, this extract indexes more than that. It shows the hierarchy of creative labour between the Seamstresses as crafters and What Is to Be Done as commissioners. This point, in an interesting way, compares to Olga Egorova's earlier trope of "collaboration" of What Is to Be Done with the students at the School of Engaged Art—between "schoolmasters" and "students," this extract points to the dynamic of labour relations between the commissioners and practitioners and the perceived hierarchical distinction between the two positions of production in the culture industry / visual art sector.

Indeed, the commissioners-practitioners distinction was the theme that pertained to the interview recollection by all of the Seamstresses. As Maria Lukianova explained (Lukianova and Melnik 2018), Anna Tereshkina and Olesia Panova, two of the members based at the time in St Petersburg, were getting commissions from Nikolay Oleynikov, a member of What is to Be Done collective: "Ania and Olesia still often collaborate with Kolia [Oleynikov], [they] sew [textile] banners [for him]." When talking with Anna and Olesia (2018a), I wondered to what extent these commissions from Oleynikov required their imagination and creativity, or perhaps neither, with the exception of crafting and tailoring only. Olesia confirmed the latter. Anna clarified: "Kolia, by and large, cuts out [the fabric] himself or draws a scheme for a cut out." "And then he likes everything, it's simple"—added Olesia. Anna echoed: "It's simple, it's not clothing, so not a scrupulous work; the main thing is that [the object] looks [good] from a distance."

Figure 16. Textile banners sewn by the Seamstresses, commission by What Is to Be Done, Creative Time Summit, Venice, Italy (2015).

In light of this exchange, the terms of the collaboration between the commissioners and practitioners become more articulate—the crafter, quite prosaically, is the one who performs the simple manual labour, sewing and tailoring. The paradox, the contours of which I have delineated earlier finally comes to the fore. The hierarchical distinction between the commissioners and practitioners is the one that afforded the position of autonomy of creative work by the Seamstresses—despite their criticism of the division of creative work in the Factory (see Lukianova and Melnik 2018). To explore the commissioners-practitioners distinction more closely, I shall turn to the second sequential step of the emergence of the Seamstresses project—the commission of textile banners by What is to Be Done for the Creative Time Summit in 2015 (Figure 16) (Enwezor 2015; Balena 2015).

The division of creative labour: the birth of autonomy as oppositionality

This section analyses the distinction between the commissioners / artists and practitioners / manual labourers; it explores the extent to which the distinction allowed the Seamstresses, according to my interpretation of their interviews, to occupy the position of autonomy and identify as political artists. With that, let me return to the event of the graduate exhibition where the Seamstresses project was kicked off in 2015. As recounted by Anna Tereshkina, back in the day, the Seamstresses

> …still had the sewing machines [we had] borrowed from our friends.

> Tonia is in Kyiv. I and Masha have decided to simply sew some stuff …. We started to come to the Rosa House of Culture [run by What is to Be Done and their students] and worked there. …
>
> Then [the members of] What is to Be Done appear on the horizon and say that they have a massive commission for the Seamstresses. (Panova and Tereshkina 2018c)

"The one for The Creative [Time] Summit?" I asked. Anna confirmed and added: "Tonia returns to start the commission. … also, Nadia Kaliamina and Sasha Kachko [join us]" (Panova and Tereshkina 2018c). Analytically, these details are crucial since they allow me to suggest that the commission of the textile banners from What Is to Be Done might have had, above all, a unifying impact on the Seamstresses in 2015. And secondly, as the following extract shows, the commission brough about certain "rules" and "principles" of work that the Seamstresses incorporated into their work as a "sewing cooperative." As Anna Tereshkina continued her earlier train of thought:

> … we begin to do this [commission]. We have been doing it for one month and one week … and while doing so, we start to become conscious of ourselves as a sewing cooperative.
>
> [We] start to develop some principles based on which we communicate.
>
> We come up with an idea of [sewing] workshops. The first workshop begins … during this first commission [from What is to Be Done]. … then, Tonia stays [in St Petersburg] … and we continue to work. (Panova and Tereshkina 2018c)

This quotation builds on what this chapter has initially began with. The process of work on the commission by What is to Be Done, though firmly grounded in the labour division between the "artists" doing creative work and the "crafters" performing manual labour, was one of the key sequencing trajectories in the Seamstresses' interview accounts. It is important to highlight, however, that this dynamic, unfortunately, was not reflected on the level of public discourse. Though the Seamstresses framed this commission in interviews with me as a significant event for the development of the project, the public programme and materials of the Creative Time Summit had a zero mention of the Seamstresses' contribution to the production of the textile banners. Instead, it was claimed that "Nikolay Oleynikov and Dmitry Vilensky from [What Is to Be Done] … created the series of banners" for the Summit (Unauthored 2015b, 86). The Summit's programme warrants the fact that even by the mid-2010s craft had been necessary but invisible for the global cultural production. Not surprisingly, the persisting antinomy between "craft" and "art" in the 21st century did not fail to shape the way in which the Seamstresses positioned themselves in interviewing. I

demonstrate next that a would-be position of the participants of the Seamstresses project was the one of autonomy. For instance, as Maria Lukianova commented:

> I think [the Seamstresses] are very, soft of, situational. That is, we can react. But … you know, there are no literal linchpins that set the bars for us ….
>
> Well, even our relations with … Tsaplia [Olga Egorova from the Shop and Factory], they are not … We love Tsaplia in our own way, but she is not our, sort of, inspirer.
>
> The Factory—they have interesting and quirky projects, but, they are … not prompting us to pursue some of our … projects, ideas. (Lukianova 2018)

The extract reinforces the theme of the immediate and spontaneous reaction—however, it does so without a context or object the Seamstresses "react" to. I could not help but to ask Maria to unpack what she meant exactly: "Is it a social situation [to which one can react]?" (Ibid.). Maria echoed my guess, but eventually seemed to have slipped away:

> A social situation, or, well, sometimes it is … some kind of a problem, on which one wants to react.
>
> And … well, and you also try, in a way, sort of, to balance between … between some sort of a serious statement, and at the same time, some kind of ….
>
> Not so much a serious one, but, in short, simply to find … an expression of one's own feelings … as much as possible. (Lukianova 2018)

Indicating more than mere misunderstanding during an interview, the quotation seems to "dance around" the idea of self-expression. The extract indexes the autonomy of the subject / enunciator as the one of opposition. Indeed, the dynamic of autonomy as opposition characterised how the members of the Seamstresses reacted to my questions during interviewing. Suffice it to say that frequently during interviews my questions at times were dismissed; at times I was questioned back in a somewhat sarcastic manner. The Seamstresses, using an interview is a situation to reclaim their autonomy as oppositionality vis-à-vis the researcher precluded our communication, and, not less importantly, made the Seamstresses contradict their own statements. Beyond this questionable situation in the field, what really matters, in this case, is the symbolic weight the project participants gave to the self-expression of the subject as an oppositional "reaction" (to an abstract object, as the quotation shows). I believe that the rhetoric of autonomy as oppositionality had broader implications pointing beyond the immediate context of the interview. It served as a means to transcend the established hierarchical distinction between mental labour and manual labour,

"creating" and "making," "art" and "craft." Perhaps it was not a coincidence that the would-be position of the Seamstresses as the one of autonomy dovetailed the two poles of the hierarchy in an attempt to overcome it.

5.3 A "sewing cooperative" and an "art group"

Ambiguous nominations: the object of craft / art as an iconic sign and index

This section continues to analyse the would-be position of the Seamstresses as the one of autonomy. The section suggests that the position of self-autonomy dovetailed the two poles of the hierarchy (manual labour and mental labour) in an attempt to overcome it. This particular dialectic of the surplus labour-power of craft by the Seamstresses project, I would argue, can be examined through the engagement of the surplus labour-power of craft with the cultural industry / visual art sector in the role of professional artists. It may also be explored in conjunction with the discursive strategy of nomination (Reisigl 2018)—the nomination of the object of craft / art as an iconic sign and an index.

Figure 17. Performance/anti-fashion show "Dressed Vaginas," participants: Maria Lukyanova, Nadezhda Kalyamina, Aliona Isakhanyan, Alexandra Kachko, Antonina Melnik, Anna Tereshkina, Valentina Petrova, Natalia Pankova, Sofya Akimova, St Petersburg, Russian Federation (2015)

The red thread connecting the Seamstresses with the Factory, in my reading, is the construction of the object of craft / art as having an agency of its own (cf. the title of the Factory's sister-projects, the Shop of Travelling Things, the Shop of Utopian Clothes). The object of craft / art was seen as "lending its agential power" to its possessor. In that capacity, as I was arguing in Chapter 4, the object of craft /art was conceived by the practitioners as a marker of "freedom." One of the earliest (art) pieces created by the Seamstresses—the performance/anti-fashion show Dressed Vaginas (Unauthored and The Seamstresses 2015; Unauthored 2015c)—is an example of such nomination of the object of craft / art as an iconic sign indexing "freedom" (Figure 17). As Anna Tereshkina (2018b) recollected, the dresses for the performance were co-created by the participants of the performance in the framework of the graduate exhibition as well as the Vagina Monologues play, an event that run parallel to the exhibition in 2015. Important for my analysis is the title of the performance/anti-fashion show. The title demonstrates a strategy of semiotic nomination where the signifiers of the dresses and their wearers merge into one iconic sign (Peirce 1955)—the so-called "Dressed Vaginas." The idea of the dress as a function of a "frontier between the self and the not-self" (Wilson 2003, 3) is dissolved here. The "dressed vagina" is total in its meaning. It is an iconic sign that denotes an object imbued with consciousness and will. In the context of the performance, the dress is an agent and actor. This nomination of the object, however, proves to be ambiguous when analysed from the standpoint of the culture industry / visual art sector internalised by the members of the Seamstresses as "professional artists" by the late 2010s.

Adopting the role of "professional artists," the Seamstresses enact the strategy of nomination of the object of craft / art that turned the icon of the object of craft into an index—an example of that is a photograph from the Seamstresses' professional artistic portfolio (2018). The photograph (Figure 18) depicts the dresses from the "Dressed Vaginas" performance (Figure 17). The photograph shows the selection of dresses: 17 dresses, according to Anna Tereshkina (2018b), were initially tailored. The dresses are hanging, somewhat passively, on racks, exposed to the onlooker's eye. Indeed, the situation in the photograph resembles the one called by Alfred Gell (1998, 269) "art-like relations with things."

Figure 18. The Seamstresses, dresses-objects from the “Dressed Vaginas” performance, graduate exhibition, the School of Engaged Art, The Rosa’s House of Culture, St Petersburg (2015).

The agency the dresses were once bestowed upon (the “dressed vaginas”) is abducted—these objects of craft are artefactual indices of the previous objects-agents, now they are art objects (Ibid., 13–15). In leu of active interaction with the objects, the onlooker is offered an experience of aesthetic contemplation of the objects produced under the brand name of “The Seamstresses.” The portfolio, rather curiously, does not mention the names of the actresses who contributed to the process of tailoring and design (cf. Panova and Tereshkina 2018b). Adopting the role of an exposition material, the object of craft becomes an indication or index (Peirce 1998) of the past activities the “dressed vaginas” were engaged in. The two strategies of nomination of the object of craft—as icon and index—reduce the object of craft / art labour to the one of the art object, artefact in the culture industry.

The dynamic between the object of “craft” and “art”

This section continues to analyse the dynamic between the object of craft labour and an art object in the practices of the Seamstresses project in the late 2010s. The following quotation by Anna Tereshkina warrants the tension, or the contradiction embodied by the Seamstresses project—the contradiction between “craft” (the

Seamstresses as a “sewing cooperative”) and “art” (the Seamstresses as an “art group”).

> As a [sewing] business [the Seamstresses is] a totally disastrous idea. I mean, we’re not a real sewing cooperative, but … just the name.
>
> I mean, as an art group, we’re fairly successful, because [this success] is not measurable by the payback.
>
> But as a cooperative … we have nothing to give. (Panova and Tereshkina 2018e)

After hearing that, I asked Anna about her understanding of the “success” as an “art group.” As she explained, the Seamstresses “Have some kind of portfolio we’re not ashamed to show. There’s … a number … of works … a number of practices … that we have mastered: banners, … workshops, … performances, … videos” (Panova and Tereshkina 2018e). According to this quotation, the artistic portfolio of the Seamstresses serves as evidence of recognition of the Seamstresses project as “art group.” This extract invokes the previous 1990s’ trope of the object of craft as an agent sui generis. Only here, the object of craft, in order to fully become a legitimate intermediary of the Seamstress with the cultural economy / visual art sector, transforms itself into an “object of art”—its value is beyond the monetary equivalent (“not measurable by the payback”). A critical example of that dialectic between “art” and “craft” in the Seamstresses project are their textile banners. As Anna Tereshkina explained at her artist talk held at the Central European University in Budapest (2020b), the Seamstresses “make banners to inspire the people in the street.” However, in my view, that claim is incomplete, for it silences the “route” the banners “travel” (Appadurai 2013/1986). The end point of the “route,” so to speak, was never “the street” or “the people”—but the exhibition of art.

Anna Tereshkina and Olesia Panova (2018c) informed me back in 2018 that the banners “were exhibited in Aachen [Germany] … on an exhibition about the Russian activist art” (Figure 15). I could not help but wonder if there was a case when the banners, as it were, “went out” onto the street after having been exhibited, or whether the art exhibition was the final point after which the banners no longer “travel” in the public sphere. Both Anna and Olesia confirmed the latter—that the art exhibition was, so far, the “point of no return.” The sequence of the movement of textile banners is space had a linear character: the street was the beginning, but, crucially, the exhibition hall was the final destination.

Figure 19. Pride Parade, textile banner by the Seamstresses: “Make Love, Go Queer, Denaturalise!”, Kyiv, Ukraine (2017).

Figures 14 and 15 are also examples of the two strategies of nomination of the object of craft / art as an icon and an index. Figure 19 is from latest professional artistic portfolio of the Seamstresses project (the Seamstresses 2020). The banner was tailored by Maria Lukianova and Tonia Melnik in 2017 for the Kyiv Pride parade and the queer-anarcha-feminist coalition in particular (Melnik 2017). The banner’s slogan says: “Make Love, Go Queer, Denaturalise!” According to an anonymous source, the slogan was coined by an Ukrainian activist initiative Frau (see Unauthored, n.d.). Similarly to the interaction between performers and dresses on Figure 17, Figure 19 depicts certain synergy between the textile object and those holding it, this synergy is intensified by the anonymity of activists turning their faces away from the eye of the camera. The interaction between the banner and the anonymous marchers, as it were, lets the banner to speak and act for itself. Similarly to Figure 17, Figure 19 is a visual expression of an iconic sign (Peirce 1955) which denotes the object as an actual participant and an actor of the event.

Figure 20. Exhibition space: on the right: textile banner by the Seamstresses: “Make Love, Go Queer, Denaturalise.” Dis/order: Art and Activism in Russia since 2000. Curators: Holger Otten and Tatiana Volkova. The Ludwig Forum for International Art. Aachen, Germany (November 2017-February 2018).

Similarly to the photograph of the dresses’ exposition on Figure 18, the banner’s agency is only resembled on the photograph depicting the banners shown at the Aachen exhibition of the activist art of Russia in 2017–2018 (Figure 20) (Brunn 2017; Otten and Volkova 2018). Similarly to the dresses, indifferently hanging on racks, the banner hangs from the ceiling, like a trophy, a mere semblance of the battles of the past. The banner is flipped over, as through its message “Make Love, Go Queer, Denaturalise!” is less significant in comparison to the sheer decorative effect of this time-honoured object. The semiotic indexicality of the banner points towards the past (Peirce 1998) and in doing so abducts the agency that the banner once possessed while “marching” the streets of Kyiv. The semiotic indexicality of the banner turns it into an artefact caught in the form of the object, the so-called “activist art” (Gell 1998, 13–15). It is as though Figure 15 “wants” to say (Mitchell 1996): the past is being preserved, it is ready to be contemplated by the onlooker, wandering through the exposition, browsing through the objects with accomplished biographies.

Indeed, the destination of the exhibition hall was seen by the Seamstresses as an accomplishment in its own right. For this reason, for instance, the banners could not have been sold on the art market. Anna Tereshkina (2018c) admitted that

> [We] don't sell [the textile banners]. Why selling [them]? They can be shown on exhibitions. …
>
> I don't know, the only place where we could've sold them is on the public sale [names the organisation] in support of that space.
>
> But, yet again, what are we going to show on exhibitions? Well, yeah, it seems … there're not so many [textile banners] to sell them.

The banners, though initially made for the streets, seem to have been consciously incorporated by the practitioners of craft in their artistic portfolios thereby displaying the banners as the objects of "art." This rendered the institutions of the cultural industry, such as art museums, as the fullest realisation of the potential agentivity of the object of craft, made the apparent transition between "craft" and "art" smooth. It appears, therefore, as though the real independence and autonomy of craft labour can only be asserted in and by the field of art. For this reason, I suggest, the culture industry figured in the discourse by the Seamstresses project as the desired destination for the object of craft. Following on from the problem of the dialectical relationship of "art" and "craft" in the activities of the Seamstresses project, a corollary question to consider is why the culture industry becomes the desired destination for the object of craft.

My interviews with the project participants exposed that one of the factors contributing to that dynamic was, on the one hand, the access of the project participants to the public (audiences) to raise questions about politics and society, and on the other hand, access to financial (money) resources (see Panova and Tereshkina 2018a). Indeed, access to these resources—money and audiences—seemed to have played a vital role in how the Seamstresses navigated the culture industry as the practitioners of "craft" and "art." The narrative theme about the art field offering a scene for articulating politically charged statements can be encountered in artistic portfolio of the Seamstresses as well. "We use", says the art portfolio, "the field of contemporary art to tell people about … the problems of exploitation, low wages in garment industry, invisibility of women's labour" (the Seamstresses ca. 2020).

5.4 Conclusion: the culture industry as an ultimate limit of autonomy

The Seamstresses' adoption of the standpoint of "artists" in their portfolios, their aspiration toward the recognition of the culture industry / visual art sector, can be seen

as examples of the practitioners' aspiration to tackle and navigate the challenges of the existing hierarchy of creative labour. For the participants of the project, the culture industry / visual art sector appears as the ultimate limit of autonomy precisely because of their believe that it should not have been that way. The engagement of the practitioners with the system in the role of artists—and the surplus labour-power of craft—redefined the object of craft labour in the 2010s. The biography of the object might have started in the street but became resolutely caught in the walls of the exhibition hall and entrapped in the infrastructural hierarchy between professional "art" and "craft." As an effect of the practitioners' negotiations of the existing hierarchy of creative labour via self-autonomy, the ostensible agency of the object of craft labour as an instrument of freedom was prone to abduction. The object of craft / art labour, as exemplified in the activities of the Seamstresses project in the 2010s, was an artefactual index of "freedom."

CHAPTER 6 THE CRAFT PUBLIC STANDPOINT

This chapter explores the question of commoditization (see Hart 2009) of the object of craft / art and the consciousness of craft public in the late 2010s. Toward this goal, the chapter develops the concept of the standpoint of craft public. My empirical materials include interviews with the members of the Seamstresses project and its craft public—the participants of sewing workshops in St Petersburg. This chapter conceptualises craft public as a particular collective actor imbued with historical consciousness—that is standpoint. The chapter gives preference to the notion of public rather than community that is tended to be characterised by its deliberate self-confinement in atomised circles of interest (Davies 2017, 56). By contrast, the standpoint of the craft public, building on Lukács (1971/1923, 160–61) and his "standpoint of the proletariat," refers to a dynamic relationship between a public formation with society as a whole—or, more specifically, with one of its social constituents that emerged in the St Petersburg cultural scene towards the late 2010s—feminist merchandise economy.

The chapter registers a paradox between the abstract and social character of the craft public. On the level of the discourse of craft labour, represented by the Seamstresses, the craft public concept escapes categorical definition. Likewise, the question of the public formation on the basis of craft labour remains elusive in scholarship (perhaps with an exception of Luckman and Thomas Forthcoming). However, as the Seamstresses project demonstrates, it was precisely the apparent elusiveness of the craft public concept in their interviews that allowed the practitioners to instil the connotations of sociality and collectivity in their discourse of creative work and autonomy. To explore the paradox between the abstract and social character of the craft public, this chapter focuses on how the meaning of the production and consumption of craft commodities figures in the Seamstresses' interviews (August-December 2018). The chapter discerns the central character of the discourse of craft commodity in these interview accounts, and suggest to examine it from the perspective of reification—the reification of the craft labour and craft public's historical consciousness (cf. Lukács 1971/1923). The chapter thus shows how the commoditization of craft in the economy of feminist merchandise enabled the expression of autonomy for both the practitioners and their public.

6.1 The "craft public" through the eyes of the Seamstresses

The Seamstresses "speaking as an oppressed group"

This section focuses on how the members of the Seamstresses project frame / understand their public. I would like to begin my analysis with a statement that captured the self-perception of the project in 2017 (Setsko et al.): "It's extremely revolutionary." At the moment of my conversation with the members of the Seamstresses project in 2018, I asked them if that perception of their craft / art activities as "revolutionary" from 2017 had changed. "It's complicated," admitted Anna Tereshkina after a pause. She observed that while doing the craft labour full time would, for sure, have been "revolutionary," what they did by the end of 2018 was rather passive practice (Panova and Tereshkina 2018e). Anna, nevertheless, pointed out that exemplary of this "revolutionary" tendency were sewing workshops which, according to her, held up the group, keeping, as it were, "the fire burning" (Ibid.).

What, I want to point out, is catching the eye in the above quote is the abstract character of the craft public. That is to say that the framing of the craft practice through the contrast between "it's extremely revolutionary" versus "it's complicated" my question initially elicits can be seen partly as an index of the reduction of the craft public to a "resource" that is preventing the project from dissolving ("keeping the fire burning"). Moreover, the contrast-ridden formulation of the Seamstresses project, as potentially "extremely revolutionary" but nonetheless "complicated," indicates a crisis in the consciousness of craft public by the practitioners, the crisis that was bolstered up by the apparent crisis of the Seamstresses project in the first place. This chapter thus pursues to analyse how the abstract character of the craft public emerges and how it is collapsing into what I would call "a zero identity" in the perception of the Seamstresses and what that reveals about the limits to craft / art labour in the culture economy around the Seamstresses project.

Other element of the abstraction, in my reading, is the principle the members of the Seamstresses project used in describing their practice of craft / art—the principle of "Doing what they love." I suggest that the attribution of the ethos of "Doing what you love" to the practice of craft / art can be seen as a mechanism facilitating the abstraction of the craft public concept from the discourse of craft / art labour. After all,

the ethos of love, as one of the elements of the mythology of creative labour in late capitalism (Tokumitsu 2015, 4), is, I suggest, fundamentally subject-centred and self-referential.

I placed the question of the public in the focus of my conversation with the Seamstresses. One of my interview questions to them was: Who is your public in your understanding? However, instead of answering, the practitioners asked back in response: “How are we able to know when we are “not savvy in management” and do not target anyone specifically?” (Panova and Tereshkina 2018a). Freed from the “forces of the market,” the Seamstresses may assert that they simply “do what they love” (Ibid.), claiming unconditioned freedom for artistic expression and creative labour. In the light of the Seamstresses’ response to the question of the public, “Doing what one loves” works as a discursive device affording the creative freedom to the artist subject at the expense of the abstraction of the public as a category. Moreover, I would argue, this discursive device may be part of the whole meta-discursive mechanism, making the very concept of the craft public into a sweeping abstraction.

I think, it also relevant to point out the moralising effect of “Doing what one loves” in discourse of craft / art by the Seamstresses. In relation to their imaginary public, “Doing what one loves” produces a self-perceived identification of craft / art labour as an “ethical” and “feminist” activity. As I will demonstrate below, even though a degree of contingency is acknowledged in the articulation of the “craft public” in the Seamstresses’ discourse—as if anyone can enter the circle—the terms of relations between the crafters-organisers and the crafters-audience seem to be defined by the former. For example, the “revolutionary” character of the Seamstresses (Setsko et al. 2017) I evoked in my question, was conditioned by the self-identification of the project members as those “speaking” through their work as an “oppressed group” (Panova and Tereshkina 2018e). The Seamstresses “speaking” as an “oppressed group” indicated a standpoint that privileged speaking or discoursing as a form of action. This action, according to the members of the Seamstresses project, must be based on what they saw as “feminist methods and ethics”—the practitioners’ collaboration with each other and their public in the space of the sewing workshop (Ibid.).

In other words, the discursive representation of the craft public in the interviews by the Seamstresses was bounded with fostering what may appear as an “inclusive,”

"ethical" and "feminist" relationship with the members of the craft public. This articulation of the relationship between the members of craft labour and their public, however, falls within the self-referential logic of the discourse by the Seamstresses, grounded in the ethos of "doing what one loves."

Exclusion as a logic of "safe space"

There is another necessary complication to the meaning of the "craft public" regarding the practitioners' representation of their relationship to the public. I contend that the ethics of engaging the public by the Seamstresses project can also be seen as fundamentally exclusive and selective (even though the criteria of exclusion and selection might not always be clear for the practitioners themselves). As far as I could see in 2018, their ethics of engaging what they saw as the "craft public" denotes a conscious process of choice and negotiation. As far as my interaction with the members of the Seamstresses project in Kyiv is concerned, my position as a researcher was at times rendered by the practitioners as a frontier intruder. Some of my interview questions were ignored by the members, who, in our recorded conversation, switched into talking with each other in the Ukrainian language. This code-switching in interviewing was not only instrumental to excluding me as a researcher from the dialogue. In my opinion, the code-switching highlighted the limits of the practitioners' understanding of ethics and safeness with regard to me. Most crucially, the code-switching may also serve as an indirect proof of the Seamstresses' ethics regarding their audiences and public.

The question of how the members of the Seamstresses created the space of their workshop activities as a "safe space" can be considered on the example of sewing workshops, following on the aforementioned lead by Anna Tereshkina (2018e) on the instrumental importance of sewing workshops for the group. As admitted by the Seamstresses (Lukianova and Melnik 2018), creating "safe space" during sewing workshops involved a great deal of labour of negotiation before the actual event. In practical terms, it meant writing a textual description for a sewing workshop and its theme; the description in the genre of an "event" on social media platforms, Facebook and/or VKontakte presents the group as one "denouncing any form of discrimination," thereby spelling out who is welcome to take part in workshops (Ibid.). Therefore, in my understanding, what safeness can mean in the case of the Seamstresses project is a

constitution of a space where one can “be oneself” in the sense of “being authentic,” and specifically, as the members of the project put it, not being “interrupted” by anyone during a talk, being “respected,” and, most crucially, not being in the company of “cisgender men” (Lukianova and Melnik 2018). Put differently, the Seamstresses project constructed the space for craft labour through the discourse-labour of an event description on social media. The Seamstresses positioned themselves as if knowing in advance whom they wanted to avoid entering the space or not. Following this logic of safe space as the one exclusion, it seems striking that sewing workshops surfaced in the discourse as a form of “activism”—as a kind of practice that must be a “safe” and yet retain political meaning (cf. hooks 1984 on the problematic character of the ethos of safe space in political organising).

The paradox of the apparently political character of “safe space” in the discourse craft by the Seamstresses was particularly visible from the perspective of the researcher. For example, during my field research at the end of 2018 in St Petersburg, Anna Tereshkina and Olesia Panova kindly invited me to take part in a workshop, a crafts initiative and a circle (*kruzhok*), as it was called, devoted to “feminist mutual aid” and needlework (Panova and Tereshkina 2018e). As Anna explained, the circle run a chat on a social media platform VKontakte, involving approximately 12 members who meet to sew, read literature and discuss feminist art (Ibid.). Anna, then, kindly added me to the circle’s chat so I could follow the discussion and perhaps attend one of the upcoming meetings. On the day she did so, however, another member of the circle voiced a concern of safeness: “No outsiders should be added.” Naturally, it was me who was seen as an “outsider.” That participant did not change her mind when Anna explained in the chat that I was also a student at the School of Engaged Art (like Anna Tereshkina herself and the person concerned), that, in other words, I am not a complete stranger to the milieu. The person, though, was uncompromising. Ironically, once again, I learned it first-hand: not everyone can hope to get into the circle of safeness, mutual aid and feminist solidarity. Someone is always undesired to become part the craft public from the very beginning; this time, me as a researcher. This experience was not devoid of analytical potential. The practitioners’ shaping the conditions of our interaction in the course of interviewing was not only driven by the logic of exclusion. At times, inclusion was radical, allowing me to develop an etic perspective on the craft public formation.

An etic perspective on the craft public formation—between reciprocity and pragmatism

I would like to begin the exploration of an etic perspective on the formation of the public with a vignette describing my fieldwork experience in St Petersburg. My meetings with the Seamstresses in November of 2018 took place in a "communal gallery" Egorka, also a home for Anna Tereshkina and her neighbours. The architecture of the place had a certain post-soviet vibe to it: a wide corridor coloured in bright tones of blue reminded me of housing halls in Almaty and Bishkek. Either way, one key condition for collective activities and the inclusion of the participants under the conditions of "safety" was to have a common space, this time a "home gallery." When I came first time, assuming that there would be a workshop later, Anna Tereshkina, Olesia Panova and I went to the kitchen at the end of the hall, Anna put the kettle on, unpacked the pastry and tea that I had brought with me. I began describing my research. A long conversation went on until the very moment when Anna stopped us, voicing a concern that the workshoppers may arrive soon. But alas, no one came by. When we moved on into a bigger room – a bedroom and the workshop at the same time – Olesia took out a piece of black textile and sat on the bed to sew, Anna took out her brown vintage coat and a textile patch in the shape of a red rose to mend a hole in the coat. The conversation was flowing. The fact that Olesia and Anna were sewing while we were talking – and I think that was something they have decided for themselves in advance – made me realize that even though no workshop-public came by, the workshop has successfully taken place. It was as if we, Anna, Olesia and myself, who became the actual craft public – the craft public in and for itself.

On a conceptual level, therefore, the notion of the craft public came to bear on an immanent character: shaped within the limits of the Seamstresses project itself. Precisely because no potential crafters came by on that November day in 2018, my interlocutors and I were positioned to become the craft public in and for ourselves. The three sewing workshops that followed the one described above were organized by Anna Tereshkina and Olesia Panova with a seeming rationale in mind: the Seamstresses seemed to have scheduled our interviews to coincide with sewing workshops. The sewing workshops can be seen as a necessary background wherein my interlocutors positioned me, the researcher, and themselves to interact. Thus, the

conceptual boundaries of the concept of craft public are imminently negotiated and driven, in the particular case of the Seamstresses, by their considerations of reciprocity, safeness, and requests of safeness by those (who happen to be) the craft public at the particular moment and in the particular space of the sewing workshop.

The next ethnographic vignette from my first visit demonstrates the change in the practitioners' performance when there arrives eventually a workshop participant. When Anna Tereshkina, Olesia Panova and I were still talking in the kitchen, an acquaintance came by accompanied by her little son to mend some trousers for him. As soon as the acquaintance and her child left, the doorbell rang again. Anna admitted upfront: she hoped no one will come by (indeed, after a couple of sessions of interviews, a feeling of exhaustion was palpable among us). A smiling young person came in; Anna made some fresh tea, and the sewing workshop began. Anna took out trousers to mend, Olesia spent almost the whole evening by her smartphone, or searching for a fabric to sew new tote bags. The workshopper brought with her a white fluffy vintage coat. She found out about the event from a social media group in VKontakte "Sis[ter's] fist!" (Anonymous Crafter One 2018). She wanted to narrow and shorten the sleeves of the coat: "It's a men's coat" she explained (Ibid.). It was her first time with the Seamstresses. The crafter asked Anna about the technicalities of tailoring and how to use the sewing machine. Anna patiently explained. The participant's interest in the workshop seemed to be driven by a practical interest of mending the coat: the Seamstresses had the necessary equipment as well as the technical knowledge. Analytically, it therefore makes sense to infer that the Seamstresses can emerge at times, in spite of their self-description, as a formation in a reciprocal yet pragmatic relationship with the workshop participants.

The Seamstresses' enactment of craft public in practice and discourse can be seen as a particular social space (Keating 2015), which, however imaginary, is nonetheless limited. One of such limitations for the Seamstresses had an explicitly economic character and was related to funding. As Anna Tereshkina clarified, earlier in the year, the Seamstresses sent a project proposal to FRIDA (The Young Feminist Fund), a proposal for research about contemporary sewing factories in Russia and Ukraine, and collaboration with the workers of the sewing factories. Yet, the Seamstresses did not get the funding (Panova and Tereshkina 2018a). Anna's

reflection on the project indicated their limited access to the public. As she formulated, the Seamstresses did not have the resources to realise a project that would have helped them to reach out for a broader public (Ibid.). Economic resources seem to have been the key limitation for the Seamstresses to imagine the craft public otherwise than through the principle of "Doing what one loves." Another important limitation in the Seamstresses' formation of an active craft public is the potential purchasing power of the craft public. This will lead me to discuss the question of feminist merchandise and its economy.

6.2 The Seamstresses in the economy of feminist merchandise

Craft labour in the economy of feminist merchandise: four scenarios

This section is based on my interviews with the Seamstresses and participants of their sewing workshops. I focus on the formation of the craft public in the 2010s, discussing it in terms of the commoditization (Hart 2009) of craft objects in the form of merchandise. I explore the extent to which the commoditization of the craft public is an intrinsic element of its abstract character. As Section 6.1 has showed, the very understanding of the Seamstresses addressee—for whom the sewing workshops organised and were meant to be attractive—appeared to elude the interview accounts by the members of the project.

The section delineates the processes of commoditization of the craft public in the context of the economy of feminist merchandise. The theme of craft commodities and their merchandising appeared quite prominent in the interviews I made with the Seamstresses in 2018, and in St Petersburg especially. In comparison with the Shop of Travelling Things and the Factory of Found Clothes in the 1990s, the activities of the Seamstresses in the late 2010s witnessed the formation of the merchandise economy on a broader scale, not least due to the gentrification and proliferation of creative spaces in big cities as well as the use of social media platforms (VKontakte, Instagram, Facebook) by home-based craft enterprises (cf. Luckman 2013). From the point of view of these social, historical transformations, the Seamstresses, at the particular moment of my field research in the late 2010s, can be seen as a home-based craft enterprise.

The following passages will demonstrate how the merchandise economy worked in the case of the Seamstresses based on their recollections in my interviews. What follows, specifically, are four scenarios from the interviews by the Seamstresses about their engagement with the merchandise economy in St Petersburg in the late 2010s. Through the analysis of these scenarios I will discern four elements of the merchandise economy: (1) “craft entrepreneur” as an identity of crafters, (2) “craft entrepreneurship” as a business model, (3) “craft entrepreneurship” as an infrastructure based on the rules of informal economic relations, (4) “craft entrepreneurship” reifying feminist consciousness and ecological awareness via the object of craft and transforming the politics of feminism into a matter of self-stylisation. Based on these four elements, I will argue that the infrastructure of the merchandise economy in St Petersburg falls within the logic of late capitalism.

Scenario one is about the Seamstresses renting a shelf in a shop of a creative loft in the centre of St Petersburg. As Anna Tereshkina and Olesia Panova recollected, in 2016, the Seamstresses rented a shelf in a shop in a creative hub, formerly, a bread factory. The shop offered to sell various merchandise ranging from second-hand clothes to accessories. The Seamstresses tried to sell, in their words, “radical things/objects.” Anna designed and created a series of skirts with slogans about masturbation embroidered on them, such as, for instance, “Masturbation helps to save friendship” (Panova and Tereshkina 2018d). The Seamstresses paid 1000 roubles for the rent during a week or two, but alas nothing was sold (Ibid.). Anna and Olesia guessed that one of the reasons could be that prices they set were too expensive for the customers. A skirt, they explained, could cost around 2000 or 3000 roubles. (Ibid.). This scenario describes the aspiration of the members of the Seamstresses project for an identity of the craft entrepreneur.

Scenario two is about the Seamstresses making a deal with a shop to sell “activist merchandise.” The shop self-identified as an anarchist enterprise, and a place that distributed goods, mainly apparel, produced by independent DIY initiatives. Olesia Panova reminisced how she had, literally, to write an application to the shop to be able to sell the goods by the Seamstresses, for instance, textile bags, in this shop. Anna Tereshkina added that the shop people were grumbling if not swearing at herself and Olesia about their “things” being too expensive, i.e. not buyable. Eventually, the shop

people have agreed to display for sale the two bags with Aleksandra Kollontai's portrait, but in two weeks, the shop let the Seamstresses know that "no one bought the bags, and they can take them back" (Panova and Tereshkina 2018d). That experience was utterly demotivating for the Seamstresses, especially so, given the anarchist self-branding of the said enterprise (Ibid.). Another place the Seamstresses tried to collaborate with was a shop "based on principles of social entrepreneurship" (Ibid.). Despite the latter self-branding, the shop doubled the initial price, as Anna explained. Perhaps for this reason, only a couple of bags were sold, while "the rest of the bags are still there, lying like some 'dead weight'" (Ibid.). The second scenario about the Seamstresses' engagement with the merchandise economy points to craft entrepreneurship as a competitive field where those with best (lowest) prices win. Ideologically motivated branding aside, selling "anarchist/activist merchandise" means "business as usual."

Scenario three is about the Seamstresses selling their goods in book shops. There was another selling spot, a book shop in St Petersburg where some of the Seamstresses textile bags were on display (Panova and Tereshkina 2018d). As Anna and Olesia confessed to me, labour relations between them and the book shop were semi-official, everything was organised in good faith (Ibid.). In the week I was making the interviews, a sell happened, and Anna and Olesia said that they had sent the money to the Seamstress members in Kyiv. However, that sale, as I understood, was a lucky occasion, for in fact the last time the book shop took their merchandise for sale was several months before, in the summer of 2018 (Ibid.). Anna added that their merchandise was also sold in a book store in Moscow, "placed even in the shop window" which was exceptional as other places tended to sell the Seamstresses' merchandise from under the counter (Ibid.). This scenario demonstrates that the infrastructure of selling craft objects is governed by the rules of informal relations in accordance with the logic in merchandise economy.

Scenario four tells the story of the Seamstresses selling their goods in a "feminist merchandise" shop. Olesia recollected that a local initiative in St Petersburg opened an online shop for "feminist merchandise" in 2018 (Panova and Tereshkina 2018c). Olesia handed over to the shop their "eco-bags" to be put on sale. I wondered if the emergence of the feminist shop initiative affected the Seamstresses project in

some ways. Reluctantly, Olesia responded: “Yes, in a way, perhaps there is a positive implication, after all – it motivated us to keep on doing our work” (Ibid.). Anna and Olesia shared with me after our initial conversation that the shop asked them to change the design of the “eco-bags,” “presumably, because the bags [or rather their appearance] didn’t seem ‘feminist enough’ for those who run the shop” (Panova and Tereshkina 2018a). Olesia agreed to change the design and embroidered on them: “Fight sexism and plastic!” (Ibid.). I contend that the particular motivation by the online shop of “feminist merchandise” in redesigning the bag meant the Seamstresses to do craft objects that could be made visible as “feminist” objects, and hence was used as a means for building “feminist” consciousness through “feminist” style. This final scenario illustrates the reification/thingification of “feminist” consciousness via craft commodities. It also shows the limits of doing “feminist politics” in the case of the Seamstresses’ activities of craft labour in the merchandise economy, where the consciousness of politics and ecology is collapsed into style.

The economy of feminist merchandise—the standpoint of the craft public

The Seamstresses’ discourse on doing and circulating craft commodities “ethically” and “politically” does not transcend the logic of late capitalism (see Chapter 1). When the Seamstresses highlighted the futility and the lack of success of their merchandise on the market, they turned to the possibility of an “ethical” and “political” “way of doing things” for explanation. However, one may ask: what made the Seamstresses claim this position of “ethical” and “political” producers of craft commodities when, as the four scenarios of their past engagement with the merchandise economy above have exposed, their own discourse of craft labour reiterates that of capitalism?

The major point of difference the St Petersburg “chapter” of the Seamstresses project (Anna Tereshkina and Olesia Panova) saw between themselves and the other participants of the merchandise economy lied in the others ordering ready-made articles, for example, t-shirts instead of sewing them, printing, in their view, only allegedly political inscriptions such as “girl power,” and tagging these garments “activist” or “feminist”, and thereby taking part in the “capitalist system of exploitation” of the working-class labour in the Global South (Panova and Tereshkina 2018e). However, this difference, then, is argued to be the key impact on their own price formation: “No wonder their prime costs are so low” (Ibid.), safely precluding any self-

critical reflection on their own participation in the merchandise economy. This self-justification makes me formulate a hypothesis of the underlying role of the standpoint of craft public in the Seamstresses' understanding of the feminist merchandise economy. Therefore, in the last extract of my data in this section, I analyse the experience of a member of the craft public (Anonymous Crafter Two 2018), someone who participated in a sewing workshop organised by the Seamstresses project and engaged with the merchandise economy in St Petersburg in the role of craft consumer (Campbell 2005).

I met this member of the craft public at one of the sewing workshops, during which I approached her and later interviewed. She worked as a blue-collar worker, a manager in an advertising agency; she learned about the Seamstresses through social media, the Facebook page of the Rosa's House of Culture[86] (Anonymous Crafter Two 2018). I asked her about her expectations and why she fancied an idea of sewing workshop, in short, what brought her there. Recrafting old apparel was the main goal: "I wanted to mend, remodel, refashion some of my clothes: the workshop seemed like a good opportunity to do that" (Ibid.). Similarly to other members of the craft public discussed in this chapter, her interest in the sewing workshop was pragmatic: mending her old garments or re-purposing garments to forge a personal style.

I asked my interlocutor how she saw the sewing workshop—as I was interested in finding out her perception of the event. She drew a parallel between the workshops and what she called "shmatte-parties" (*shmotkopati*)[87] in the shop of "feminist merchandise" where the Seamstresses were selling their textile bags. Both events, in her opinion, were mostly attended by the "female public" (Anonymous Crafter Two 2018). The "shmatte-party" event, however, adopted the format of some free market: "one brings their garments and in exchange can pick up someone else's" (Ibid.). At some point of our talk, my interviewee commented on the exchange of clothes in the shop of "feminist merchandise": "Note that there is nothing particularly feminist in that!" (Ibid.). The crafter, however, saw a "feminist" connection between the "shmatte-parties" and the sewing workshop: "[It is the] idea that women, in some third-world

[86] See Rosa's House of Culture (2023).

[87] Linguistically, the *shmotkopati* concept consists of two parts: *shmotko* is a neologism in Russian based on a noun *shmotki*, a jocular concept for clothes in Russian, and an anglicism *parti*.

factories, are working for pennies to make fast fashion garments: so, let's not 'be' fast fashion, let's 'be' slow, let's [ex]change, let's not consume" (Ibid.). I could not fail to notice, though, some scepticism in the crafter's tone and I asked her to clarify what she meant to say. "No, this is not to say that I am sceptical, it's just that I am pursuing consumption. It's just my consumerist attitude. Feminism has no place in my life" (Anonymous Crafter Two 2018). This part of our conversation highlights the self-conscious consumerist attitude of the craft public member, to the extent that it seems that she was readily taking the standpoint of "craft capital" (Jakob and Thomas 2017): an equation of consumption and being mediated by barter and exchange of the object of craft.

I also asked Crafter 2 whether she had any political expectations in taking part in these initiatives, that is, "shmatte-parties" and the sewing workshop, or whether there was any social agenda that underpinned her participation. She said: "Theoretically, perhaps, it is not very good that resources are waisted; the stuff that was already produced must continue to be useful for society" (Anonymous Crafter Two 2018). She thought the "shmatte-parties" and the sewing workshop are similar: "both engage with the themes of sustainable development, sustainable fashion – 'sustainable everything' is seen as fashionable" (Ibid.). In this connection, the crafter recalled zero-waste lifestyle: "Don't throw away any stuff, re-use, mend – refuse, reuse, recycle" (Ibid.). For her, therefore, recycling and upcycling seemed to be a "very convenient way of shopping by not doing any shopping" at all (Ibid.).

The ideological work of appealing to fashion or "style" is further elaborated when Crafter 2 admitted: "I love second-hand shops, and I love to find new reading for an old garment" – "It's not good when old stuff is thrown away" (Anonymous Crafter Two 2018). The crafter was attending the so-called "cross-dressing" event in the "shmatte party format" running for four years at the time. I asked Crafter 2 to tell me more about it as I had never heard of the event. She explained that the "cross-dressing" event was available for an entrance fee of around 300 rubles. "The other event I love attending is called a 'thing-crossing' (*veshch-crossing*) these are quite regular [laughing], I like that stuff!" (Ibid.). Assuming the standpoint of "craft capital" (Jakob and Thomas 2017) entails an association with the merchandise economy:

finding a “new reading” for an old garment collapses the anti-ethics of consumerism into a matter of self-stylization.

Finally, I wanted to explore how the members of craft public see themselves as social subjects. I asked Crafter 2 if she had taken part in recent protests. The crafter immediately responded: “Not once in my lifetime” (Anonymous Crafter Two 2018). I inferred and said to her that perhaps her interests might have with intersected with culturalized, artistic-activist milieus as she tended to take part in sewing workshops, “shmatte-parties.” Crafter 2 agreed and went on:

> I always had this ill feeling about activism and such: it’s okay when activism takes the form of ‘let’s teach people how to do things *right*,’ some kind of pedagogical form of activism.
>
> But when activism turns out to be about barricades, marches, protests, these – *always* – seemed to me [sighs] unproportionally senseless in the current Russian reality.
>
> It’s just hard to believe that these will actually bring about any social change. (Anonymous Crafter Two 2018)

This quotation indexes a particular sense of the social futility and isolation bordering anti-politics (“protests are futile”). Anti-politics, in the context of my conversation with Crafter 2, is overlapping with anti-ethics of consumerism, even if eventually understood as a matter of fashionable trend. In other words, anti-politics indicates a consciousness of the impasse of history (“the Russian reality”) expressed on the level of the crafter’s own habit of consumerism and self-awareness as a craft consumer. This standpoint is the exact opposite of an alleged “redemption” ethical consumption offers to consumers in late capitalism (cf. Žižek 2014). Crafter 2 has nothing to “redeem,” because she does not “assume guilt,” neither “for the threats to our environment” (Ibid.), nor for the impossibility of social politics in the late 2010s in Russia. The merchandise economy, as it appeared from the standpoint of craft public in the 2010s, affords the consciousness of craft public as the one of craft capital. In contrast to the progressive vision of capital as a transformative historical force (Marx and Engels 1998b/1848), in contrast to the Seamstresses’ aspiration of ethical “way of doing things politically,” the logic of craft capital, as formulated by Crafter 2, defies any potential for social change through the exchange of re/crafted objects.

6.3 The craft public's self/perception

An emic perspective on the craft public formation via sewing workshops

This section discusses the interviews with six members of the craft public who took part in the sewing workshops organised by the Seamstresses since 2016 until late 2018. I was able to reach out to five members of craft public out of six, thanks to the kind assistance by the Seamstresses in St Petersburg, Anna Tereshkina and Olesia Panova, who gave me the names and contacts. All interviews were made in late 2018. Four interviews was conducted via a video chat, one was conducted live, and one via a text chat in the social media platform VKontakte. As for the video and live interviews, I asked the members of craft public to allow me to do a voice recording. All six interviewees were anonymised. I call them "Crafter 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8" (Crafter 1 and Crafter 2 have been introduced in the sections 6.2.3 and 6.3.2 respectively). As for the demographics of the target group, four crafters were women, two were men; five crafters belonged to the Millennial generation, one was a GenXer. The aim of this section is to problematise the self-perception of the members of craft public and explore if that self-perception is in a contradictory relationship with the logic of craft capital (as outlined in the previous section) at all and in what ways.

The first question I addressed to my interviewees was about the source of their information, where they had learned about the Seamstresses and their sewing workshops. Crafter 3 learned first about the sewing workshops via the shop of "feminist merchandise," namely, the shop's social media group in VKontakte (Anonymous Crafter Three 2018). Another crafter found it difficult to recall when she learned first about sewing workshops, perhaps two or three years before, at the time when she started her "desk research" about feminism and feminist politics; it was the "feminist merchandise" shop that posted an advert about a sewing workshop (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018). When the Seamstresses were launching their school of sewing cooperative in 2017, Crafter 4, as she recalled, felt an immediate interest and applied to participate in the school; alternatively, however, the crafter might have taken part in a sewing workshop first (Ibid.). Thus, two major channels were recalled by the two members of the craft public for learning about the possibility of doing craft with the

Seamstresses: social media and the merchandise shop; the other four participants found out about the project via their acquaintances.

Secondly, I was interested to learn about (a sense of) class positionality among the craft public. Three among my five interviewees were, at the time of our conversation in 2018, unemployed. I noticed high occupational mobility among them that had got to do with their precarious job positions. One crafter worked as a teacher, factory worker, shop administrator in different periods of her life, allowing time for doing some craft labour in-between her jobs (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018). Crafter 4 considered doing craft labour as a job option, but, eventually, decided to pursue a different career track: getting trained in psychology (Ibid.). A crafter, who described his occupation as an "unemployed industrial worker," expressed his desire in wanting to learn tailoring skills (Anonymous Crafter Five 2018). This speaks to the actual objects the three crafters were working on during the sewing workshops with the Seamstresses: old garments. The other two crafters who described themselves as employed at the time of our conversation in 2018 were: a social worker (Anonymous Crafter Three 2018) and a self-identified artist (Anonymous Crafter Six 2018). The three unemployed crafters were pursuing the workshop activities to prolong the "lives" of their garments – so their "practical" orientation in fact indexed their precarity. Two crafters admitted they were at that time in difficult periods of their lives, yet they were holding out hope for the future (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018; Anonymous Crafter Seven 2018).

The craft public members recalled repairing a significant number of old worn-out t-shirts (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018), re-sizing found garments, a pair of unfit trousers and a jacket (Anonymous Crafter Eight 2018), mending a vintage military coat, cutting off shiny golden-coloured buttons and sewing down the black buttons instead (Anonymous Crafter Five 2018), recutting a vintage jeans jacket (Anonymous Crafter Seven 2018). In addition to pursuing craft labour to expand the "lifetime" of the garments, there was a certain socio-political discourse to their recollections of doing craft. The members of craft public recalled: sewing textile patches to be pinned on protestors' apparel as a means of expressing themselves "politically" during street actions and/or demonstrations (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018), sewing textile eco-bags (Anonymous Crafter Seven 2018), colouring textile banners using ready-made

stencils (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018), sewing and donating pillowcases for a cats' retreat (Anonymous Crafter Seven 2018).

In that context, the discourse theme of seeing sewing workshops as a space of comfort, a space for collaboration with other members of the craft workshop emerged. As Crafter 8 recalled in the text chat interview: "We entered a one storey brick building and so we were there, in a room-full of sewing machines (smile sign)" (Anonymous Crafter Eight 2018). This crafter explained that he had never worked on a sewing machine before. The Seamstresses ("the girls") "patiently" helped him to figure everything out, and the crafter managed to re-tailor his trousers and jacket ("smile sign") (Ibid.). "It was a top workshop," he highlighted, "Outside was a whizzy riffraff but inside – cosiness, tranquillity and labour" (Anonymous Crafter Eight 2018). Another crafter raised the themes of skill sharing and mutual help, learning more about "activism" and "socialising with the like-minded folks" as being key for her in taking part in the sewing workshops (Anonymous Crafter Seven 2018).

Internal contradictions in the craft public self-perception

The next aspect of the interviews in terms of the crafters' self-consciousness was the internal dynamics of the actual groups at the particular sewing workshops. One of the most visible aspects of this dynamic mentioned was concerned with the participants' age. Age discrepancy, as the GenX crafter explained, had, in her view, complicated her "integration" into the Seamstresses' activities and the respective milieu amongst the participants. Crafter 4 admitted that she felt, at some point, her lack of "political knowledge and experience," this made her surmise that "I wouldn't be able to be as free as them, I would have 'to catch up,' and literally have to re-build my consciousness from scratch" through self-education (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018). This did sound striking to me and asked her to clarify in what sense did the Millennial crafters seem to be "more free." In an explanatory move, the crafter used the image of herself as an angular object that tries to embed itself into the system, "yet the object's very shapes and angles, awkwardly, get in the way of integration and synthesis" (Ibid.).

Similarly, crafter 7 expressed another source of internal dynamics, the fear of "saying rubbish" during the sewing workshops: "They are all feminists, I'll say something [that will be seen as] wrong or insulting" (Anonymous Crafter Seven 2018).

Crafter 4, at the same time, saw her "lack of proper knowledge" as the expression of her "age": she recalled that "I knew from the reactions of the younger members that I said was perceived as 'wrong' by them" (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018). However, she saw the other public members of the workshop as "free in their self-expression," in their way of thinking and action (Ibid.). I could not fail to note that this point of internal dynamics was a very emotional and important part of our conversation. It was implicated as a point of antagonisms within the craft public, not least because "age" and whatever it was to index was seen by Crafter 4 to "prove" that she needed "political education." Thus, due to the self-perceived lack of knowledge and freedom, Crafter 4 sought to acquire "political education" through the Seamstresses and their sewing workshops.

The corollary of my participants' concern about "political education" was communication within the group. Crafter 4 brought up an example of feeling herself, as it were, "backward" when she was asked by which pronoun she wanted to go; she admitted that she was struck by the question, yet, as she narrated, later she realised the extent to which the pronoun question was an important aspect of building communication in the Seamstresses' circle (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018). Especially if one wants to somehow tackle this linguistic alienation from within craft public, if one aspires to become or pass as an insider among the craft public. It was hard for me not to notice how important it was for Crafter 4 to become an "insider" (*svoia*) to craft public, despite the difficulty of, as it were, "embedding" herself into that public as an "alien object" (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018). Where does your necessity to feel part of this public come from? – I asked her. The crafter's response seemed a bit discontinuous, a chain of short and disconnected statements: what was clear is that she spoke of reaching out for people of her own: comrades and friends (Ibid.).

In respect of that insider-outsider dynamic among the members of the craft public, it is crucial to reflect on an underlying assumption of the formation of craft public, the assumption concerning the perception of the participants in the workshops and the relevance of feminism as a marker of political self-consciousness for their inclusion in the events. "Hell yeah," Crafter 7 exclaimed while sharing her perception of the public, "Feminists were in high stand!" (Anonymous Crafter Seven 2018). That crafter also recalled she was wary of not saying anything offensive toward the

workshoppers, not to “spit out some bullshit” unintentionally (Ibid.). “That did not happen, luckily,” she giggled. “I am not a sexist,” she said, “but I do not know much [about feminism]” (Ibid.). Precisely for that reason Crafter 7, as she reflected, was attending sewing workshops – to learn more about “feminist politics” (as well as to work on a sewing machine free of charge) (Ibid.).

The perception of the Seamstresses (and their practice of craft labour) among the workshoppers/crafters is the next aspect of their self-understanding as political subjects I wanted to focus on in the interviews. The self-understanding of the craft public as a political subject, as the two following examples will show, is based on the interpretation of the idea of craft labour, first, as a practical labour of sewing, and second, as a political discourse. Crafter 7 was, to my knowledge, the most active participant the sewing workshops organised by the Seamstresses in St Petersburg, who, in her own recollection, took part in about seven sewing workshops. I expressed my amazement when hearing that number, since other crafters, as I infer from the interviews, did not return after more than one or maximum two workshops. The crafter giggled and responded, “There was no place I could use a sewing machine, and, additionally, I lived close to the site [The Rosa’s House of Culture]. It wasn’t a big deal” (Anonymous Crafter Seven 2018).

For Crafter 7, however, there was something more to coming regularly to the workshops: the idea of craft labour. Sewing was seen as her natural bent and a vocation: “I was born in a sewing workshop, sewing is in my blood” (Ibid.). For Crafter 4, on the other hand, the idea of craft labour seemed to have changed from the concrete activity of sewing into that of the “political.” Crafter 4 mentioned the lectures organized during the school of the sewing cooperative run by the Seamstresses in 2017: the process of learning comprised lectures on “consensus” and “horizontal structures,” the lectures that eventually turned out to serve, in the crafter’s perception, as a “gateway into a political and economic discourse” (Anonymous Crafter Four 2018). In my reading, the perception of craft labour as a form of political discourse moves the practical labour of sewing towards the more abstract sphere of “political knowledge,” acquired in an instrumental manner, yet without a clear sense of goal with regards to the political discourse.

By contrast, the following aspect of the crafters' understanding of their self is what I would call their distance from political discourse. Crafter 5, in response to my question about the political engagement of the participants of the sewing workshops, replied: "I will voice a simple conformist position, maybe close to the majority of the workers: don't thrust your nose, or they'll put you behind the bars, you won't change anything …. I wouldn't say that I am really taking part in anything, rather I'm taking part in nothing" (Anonymous Crafter Five 2018). Likewise, Crafter 8 said that she had never taken part in any social or political movements (Anonymous Crafter Eight 2018). Both crafters 5 and 8 voiced a pronounced stance of anti-politics.

6.4 Conclusion: three notions of the craft public

This chapter has pursued an analysis of the contradictory formation of the standpoint of the craft public on three analytical levels. Firstly, on the level of how craft public is articulated by the Seamstresses in their interviews (section 6.1). Secondly, on the level of how craft public is enacted by the Seamstresses via their distribution of craft objects in the merchandise economy and how craft public perceives itself in the context of the merchandise economy (section 6.2). And thirdly, on the level of how craft public expressed its self-perception in its interview accounts about its participation in the sewing workshops organised by the Seamstresses (section 6.3).

Section 6.1 has posed a meta-question: How do the craft labourers (the Seamstresses) perceive their public? I argued that the way the Seamstresses practitioners make sense of craft public is to be understood through the practitioners' perception of their labour as a "revolutionary" activity at the beginning of their career in 2015. By 2018, however, the craft public was seen as a resource for Seamstresses' own self-affirmation during the "complicated," "post-revolutionary" period of the late 2010s.

Section 6.2 analysed the extent to which the commoditization of the craft public was an intrinsic element of its abstract character in the discourse of craft labour by the Seamstresses. I have argued that the engagement of the Seamstresses project with the merchandise economy in St Petersburg in late 2010s articulated craft public in terms of its buying power, in the role of the consumer of the objects of craft. I suggested that the merchandise economy afforded the Seamstresses' identification

as craft entrepreneurs. In this role, the Seamstresses project was integrated in what I called an infrastructure of feminist merchandise in St Petersburg (along with the global / local culture industry, as Chapter 5 has pointed out)—a niche in the market that was specialising in the distribution of the objects imbued with “feminist” meaning and “feminist” consciousness.

Section 6.3 has focused on the self-perception, that is, self-consciousness of the craft public. My central claim in this section has been a mediated character of the politics of craft labour. The members of the craft public preferred to articulate their participation in the sewing workshops, as it were, through the objects of craft, re-crafted, or worn, or donated. Mending and recrafting old garments was one of the key narrative themes underlying the self-engagement of the craft public in the sewing workshops. The ideological meaning that underpinned the remaking of these objects was contradictory and varied from the misidentification of craft labour from any political discourse whatsoever to articulation of craft labour as a basis for pursuing educational goals, learning about “politics,” “activism,” gaining tailoring skills.

The three threads point to the formation of the collective standpoint of the craft public in late 2010 as the one rooted in the paradox of the abstract and social character of the craft public vis-à-vis the economy of feminist merchandise. The apparent elusiveness of the craft public concept for the Seamstresses allowed them to instil certain ethical and political connotations in their discourse of craft / art labour despite the project’s engagement with the feminist merchandise economy—resulting in the reification of feminist consciousness via craft merchandise.

Taking the standpoint of the craft public in late 2010s meant combining the following four contradictory, but not mutually exclusive, elements: the ethos of self-education, activism, consumption, and anti-ethics of consumerism. All four aspects can be seen as reworked by the craft public into a coherent stance through denouncing or appealing to the ideology of feminism. Thereby, in contradistinction to the Seamstresses’ own conscious implication in the economy of feminist merchandise, the craft public assumed a point of view of autonomy, as if above and beyond the forces of the commoditization of creativity.

CONCLUSION

Some crafters are proud of neat backs.
The backs of mine look like madness.
Roz Chast—Interview (2021, n.p.)

Thesis argument / contribution

This thesis have proposed that the field of creative labour research and craft studies, at times, seems to be implicated in rather mythic / romantic discourse—a rationalized and naturalised system of its own making (Barthes 1991/1957, 129–30) where the concept of craft is to signify the prima facie qualities of materiality, counter-modernization, agentification, and non-alienation. To the goal of analysing and problematising craft's mythic / romantic / reified discourse, the holistic methodology of the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory (see Jay 1984b; 1984a) has been indispensable, since it offers a conception of critique—immanent dialectical critique—to examine the contradictory character of contemporary craft as, in fact, both material and immaterial (see Section 1.3 and Chapter 3), premodern and contemporary (see Section 1.4 and Chapter 4), agential and fetishising (see Section 1.5 and Chapter 5), de-commodifying and commodifying (see Section 1.6 and Chapter 6).

The thesis has argued that even though artisanal economy predates modern capitalism and industrial relations of production (Marx 1982/1867; Morris 1969/1884), craft technology and craft techniques appear necessary and viable to the late capitalist economy (Munro and O'Kane 2022), creative industries (Luckman and Andrew 2020), and contemporary visual arts (Gould 2013). The thesis has analysed how the viability of craft—for the division of creative labour in the visual arts sector in St Petersburg, Russia—tends to express itself only implicitly, and why carrying out the manual labour of craft for an artistic project is akin to joining the ranks of transnationally dispersed yet invisible "Dark Matter,"[88] feeding off an incessant reproduction / reification of belief

88 Gregory Sholette's (2011) concept of an "artistic Dark Matter" encompasses "all work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world" and done in the "makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized" frameworks of production from below—thus, although "Dark Matter" is structurally invisible to the art world establishment, its inconspicuous position of marginality is essential insofar as it creates and sustains existing divisions of creative labour in the culture industry (1–3).

/ myth / ideologeme that espouses the value of artmaking as a heterodox—feminist—type of practice / ideology at the expense of making / craft itself.

The thesis method/ology posited that such a contradictory disposition of craft in the St Petersburg art scene as an invisible, yet a necessary type of creative labour, calls for a methodology that can examine craft's immanence the system of cultural production, geared to facilitate the mis/recognition of craft for contemporary visual art, and animated by somewhat romantically pre/disposed mode of historical consciousness—feminist historical consciousness and its romantic femininity—as the activities of the Shop, Factory, and Seamstresses demonstrate. It is in the light of this focus where a local / global significance of my chosen projects of craft / art comes to the fore—expressing what I, following Michael Löwy,[89] call "romantic anticapitalism," or more precisely—its new incarnation in the St Petersburg cultural scene since the mid-1990s. The Factory's sentimental heroine from the Silver Age—the Gymnasium Girl, or the Seamstresses' performances / representations of the proletarian femininity epitomise, I argue, the romantic feminist historical consciousness. "Yearning" to be fulfilled in the arts and crafts, and looking for its "inspiration" in the past, the romantic feminist historical consciousness finds itself caught in the self/alienating cycle created by the culture industry and the economy of feminist merchandise: this disposition subsequently shapes the apprehension of the nature of freedom and autonomy by the three projects. The romantic / mythic discourse of craft foreshadowed and intensified the longing for freedom expressed by the crafters / artists and their public but afforded a limited articulation of freedom as mere autonomy either from the repressive state ideology or the capitalist industry of culture. It therefore makes sense to conclude that the consensual—mythic / romantic—qualification of the historical consciousness of craft labour as heterodox / feminist is tenable inasmuch as it posits the particular negation of freedom via autonomy, the position taken by the craft / art practitioners but also by their "heroines"—real and imaginary, animate and inanimate—the "Girls" in the

[89] As Michael Löwy writes, "Romantic anticapitalism is one of the main styles of thought in modern times, one of the most influential Weltanschauungen in European culture since the end of the 17th century. During [György] Lukács's initial development—the early 20th century—it was the dominant world view in German and Central European intellectual life" (Löwy 1987a, 17). It is interesting also that the romantic anticapitalism worldview has been diagnosed, in an oblique way, as no longer relevant—perhaps by circa the beginning of WWII (e.g. Fehér 1977).

Factory's Shop of Utopian Clothes, or the Dresses ("Dressed Vaginas") in the Seamstresses' performance / installation.

The fundamental, though not the sole scholarly contribution this research has been pursuing is a historicization of cultural production and cultural work from an angle of the project-ridden, invisible, and divided labour of craft in the enigmatic cultural scene of St Petersburg. The engagement of craft labour with the culture industry over two decades provided a fragile ground for the professionalisation of creative work and politicization of the crafters and the craft public, yet severely constrained the ideological horizon of thought and practice where the crafters and the craft public were able to locate / articulate themselves via their discourses and practices of craft / art. The particular negation of freedom via autonomy, in my view, affects the reduction of the concept of creative freedom to the level of Bourdieusian "position-takings"—i.e. doing feminist activist art / craft professionally under the watchful eye of its interlocutor, the culture industry / visual art sector and the feminist merchandise economy,[90] away from a (dialectical) recognition of the objective[91] aspect of freedom that extends well beyond an expression of an individual / collective, or the creative / consumptive self—but becomes social / total in its character.

Michael Löwy's (1987b) conclusion regarding the historical value of "romantic anticapitalism" seems pertinent to understanding the limits of creative freedom, premised on the romantic worldview, an essential component of heterodox / dissident / feminist culture[92] in the late capitalist modernity—it seeks to envision a *"new way of life*, where labour would become (again) like art—that is, *the free expression of human*

90 Pierre Bourdieu (1993/1983) frames the question of "position-takings" as a "consciously or unconsciously oriented strategy" vis-à-vis the hierarchy-ridden field of cultural production and circulation of symbolic goods (131–41) – "If the relations which make the cultural field into a field of (intellectual, artistic or scientific) position-takings only reveal their meaning and function in the light of the relations among cultural subjects who are holding specific positions in this field, it is because intellectual or artistic position-takings are also always semi-conscious strategies in a game in which the conquest of cultural legitimacy and of the concomitant power of legitimate symbolic violence is at stake" (Ibid., 137).

91 On the dialectic between the subjective and objective aspects of freedom see, for example, Adorno (2006/1964-65, 204–5).

92 Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy (1984b) assess the importance of Romanticism at the dawn of the 20th century: "One cannot … avoid facing the hypothesis that, far from being a purely 19th-century phenomenon, Romanticism is an essential component of modern culture, and its importance is in fact growing" (42–43).

creativity" (903). Concurrently, the romantic worldview encompassed in the discourses and practices of craft / art of the Shop, Factory, Seamstresses is affected by the concerns of professional growth / development and appears rather close to the notion of "progressive instrumental reason," as discussed by Theodor Adorno (2006/1964-65): "[T]his progressive instrumental reason is the embodiment of the antagonism that consists in the relation between the supposedly free human subject, who for that very reason is in fact not yet free at all, and the things on which [its] freedom is built" (17). I do not mean to say, however, that the Shop, Factory, Seamstresses' misrecognition of freedom for autonomy is purely a matter of their own, possibly moral and ethical decisions. Rather, their work and its perceptions by the practitioners and their public is a concrete manifestation / form through which the question of un/freedom can be experienced and examined—I have conceptualised it as feminist historical consciousness.[93] In other words, although feminist historical consciousness may appear prima facie as expressively individualist, it is "weaved" into what Karl Marx (1988/1932) calls the "social fabric" (105)[94]—the structurally mediated field of social relations, relations of production, and circulation of craft / art objects in the global culture industry and the local sector of visual art emerging from within the "time-space coordinates" of St Petersburg, 1994–2019.

This thesis has sought to explore craft labour as a phenomenon that has been continually shaped and reshaped in the late capitalist industry of culture (e.g. Walker 2007; Banks 2010; Luckman 2015; Luckman and Thomas 2018; Naudin and Patel 2020). Against the mythic—romantic— discourse of craft, conceptualising craft as an antidote to capital's domination, craft continues to be invented and reinvented within late capitalist modernity. One of the goals of this thesis has been to test the limits of the concept of craft, cemented in the perennial locus of such premodern notions as materiality, counter-modernity, agentification, and non-alienation. What craft labour

[93] Cf. Theodor Adorno (2006/1964-65) who theorises "formal freedom"—e.g. "administrative duties" or "unavoidable chores"—as the "concrete form in which we experience the question of freedom and unfreedom today" (205).

94 As Marx (1988/1932) explains, the social / total character of an individual subject and its consciousness, "Man [i.e. human being], much as he may therefore be a particular individual (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real individual social being), is just as much the totality—the ideal totality—the subjective existence of thought and experienced society present for itself; just as he exists also in the real world as the awareness and the real enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of human life-activity" (105).

means and how it functions in the system of contemporary art should not be taken for granted.

The art / craft relationship, in the period between 1994 and 2019 in St Petersburg, had a spectrum / dynamic character. In the case of the Shop / Factory, “craft” appeared, and still appears to its public as a “project” of “art”—visual art and performance art. The Shop / Factory practitioners could only, as it were, reveal the craft aspect of their artistic work when only asked directly—"What did you do with the clothes you found? How exactly did you make those objects-clothes?” Only when “interrogated,” will the practitioners admit—"Oh, I changed buttons, cut collars, replaced some elements in the garment, etc.” Individual recollections aide, there is, at the same time, a general implication to the Shop / Factory’s “hostility to handicraft”[95]—the Garage Archive Collection, for example, describes the Factory is an “art group that was interested in collecting and making clothes” (Russian Art Archive 2023, n.p.). Such a discourse for the Shop / Factory’s work erases the significance of making / crafting from the scene (and, in fact, abolishes history itself) by eliminating the contributions by those, for instance, who did pro bono craft work for the Factory’s sub-project, the Shop of Utopian Clothes, since circa early 2000s —the "Girls.” Inside the Archive zone of invisibility, the work of the crafters / the “Girls” in the Shop of Utopian Clothes unfolded somewhat similarly to the guild organisation of labour, where craft is a specialised work, performed by a largely anonymous group of people, procuring materials and contributing to the creation of the objects of “art”—sewing, doing embroidery, beading, etc. The photographs of these “art” objects are now, inter alia, in the Garage archive of contemporary art; but—in the manner of the Archive zone of invisibility, none of these photographs mention the “Girls” (*devushki*), let alone their names. The members of the Factory from without have been out of sight of the culture industry system.

95 Dave Beech (2020) thus describes the “hostility to handicraft” phenomenon: “Capitalism augments relative surplus value with the introduction of machinery and the conversion of skilled labour into unskilled labour, but art’s hostility to handicraft is older than this assault by capital and consists, rather, in the affirmation of the scholarly, the intellectual, the discursive and the theoretical” (267)—“If there is one recurrent feature of the hostility to handicraft within the long history of the intertwinement of art and labour that secures the distinctiveness of art and the Fine Arts from both the artisanal and industrial modes of production, it is the augmentation of practice with what has come to be known as art theory” (265).

By the mid-2010s, the "regroupment" of the Factory into What is to Be Done, occurring since the early 2000s, reconfigured the meaning of craft in the St Petersburg art scene into a niche service, performed as a commission by a group of specialized skilled workers—in particular, the Seamstresses. For the Seamstresses, however, their performance of craft labour has had a double significance, being, strictly speaking, their day job—especially when the Seamstresses "worked as" a sewing cooperative (circa before 2016); at the same time, and well beyond 2016, the project "worked with" craft—it was a means for artistic self/expression and activism.

For the public the Seamstresses project had been engaging in St Petersburg, prior to and after 2016, craft was a skill viable for mending old clothes, and, generally, making "useful things," for example, cushions for a cat retreat. Craft was "useful" for making what the public called "political things" also—for instance, textile patches. At the same time, the public perceived craft as a heterodox form of consumption—an inalienable activity that allows authentic creative expression (see Campbell 2005, 39–40). It is perhaps in this connection that the craft public tended to identify the Seamstresses as an "art group," and felt influenced and inspired by the Seamstresses doing "what they love."

Thesis limitations / potential

Immanent dialectical critique, according to Max Horkheimer (1978/1974), is not concerned with making prescriptive claims, "[W]hat should be done now" to resolve a contradiction from without its historical forces is not its vocation (148)—rather, what cannot be done now in the light of the contradictions that emerge from within the historical forces and historical consciousness. Herein lies what I believe to be a constructive limit of the "hermeneutic anarchy"—messiness, if you will—that heralds the Marxist method, as Gillian Rose described it (2009/1981, 31).[96]

96 The "hermeneutic anarchy" refers to György Lukács (1971/1923) and his, following Gillian Rose (2009/1981, 31–32), "invitation" to consider "Marxism as a 'method'" which was meant to reopen a horizon of critical thought and practice in the moment when Marxism has become somewhat a lifeless doctrine, a totalising scientific approach mobilised to justify the pertinency the "Marxist method" in the face of the world historical defeats of socialist politics.

The first limitation of this research that must be acknowledged, not least due to swirl of events that marked recent years, is the historical framework of this research. It does not extend beyond 2019. As far as the situation in the "field" appeared to me after 2019, the milieux I have outlined and analysed in this thesis have been consistently falling apart under the destructive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a crackdown on the civil society and a witch-hunt among independent cultural organisations in Russia (see Budraitskis and Vilensky 2022), and, of course, the war in Ukraine. These events seem to challenge the field of creative labour research with new questions: What does it mean to explore the history of cultural and creative economies in the aftermath of the world-historical events that, as it were, reconfigure and resurface the present in such a significant way? How to attend to the "antinomies of freedom" (Adorno 2006/1964-65, 208)—namely, the pursuit of freedom in the unfree society, in the age of the apparent death of political consciousness, when everything and everyone appear to be excessively "politicised" apart from politics itself?

Indeed, is it under the shadow of these events that the picture of the pre-2020 historical consciousness of craft labour, outlined in this research, might seem like a relic of the distant past (with me ending up being both an art historian and a critical theorist of craft / art and culture). I could not help but wonder while writing this conclusion: What can be savoured and retained in the pre-2020 historical consciousness of craft labour that ceases to be merely frozen in the past but is continually shedding light on the regressing configuration of the present? With this question in mind, I would like to frame my conclusion as an apprehension of the profound gap between the past (the pre-2020 moment) and what comes afterwards. It is, hopefully, for the future research to address or problematise it. This is the place for this thesis to take a step back and reflect on how the necessary analytical and methodological limitations of the established framework might point beyond themselves and act as potential indices for subsequent studies of creative labour in Russia, across the "post-Soviet space," and perhaps beyond it.

As far as the methodology is concerned, one of the most pronounced limitations of this thesis has been its qualitative basis and an absence of a quantitative warranting in my argumentation. To clarify the empirical patters of the development of cultural industries in the post-USSR register, further mining and exploration of statistical

data—for instance, the numbers of exhibitions organised home and abroad, budgets distributed, etc.—seems essential for the future research to develop a comprehensive understanding of the historical change mediated by the mechanisms of cultural production in the face of the declining state socialism and its stratified regimes of creative work, dissident or otherwise. However, it does seem that when it comes to the specific labour of craft—often invisible to the eye of the art system yet integral to it—the added research value of a statistical analysis may require further clarification (cf. UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012).

Neither has this research focused on the transformation of the culture industry through the lens of cultural policies in Russia. The policy-driven methodology can be potentially advantageous in situating the forms of historical consciousness manifested by cultural labour in relation to state apparatuses as well as capital, and the ways in which these two can format and classify the logics of cultural production locally as well as internationally. Positioning cultural labour vis-à-vis the state and capital can deepen our understanding of the historical transformations of cultural labour, perhaps especially its professionalisation and industrialization since the 1990s onwards. Nonetheless, it should be emphasised that a policy-driven approach is not without constraints. Neglecting the question of how the formation of policies is being raised to and enacted on the level of collective/individual consciousness, the policy-driven approach betrays a mechanistic understanding of historical dynamic, and a top-down view on the organisation of society mediated by the state and capital as the sole actors of transformation (cf. O'Connor 2005).

Apropos the relatively "uncharted" terrain of craft / art beyond Russia, the qualitative inquiry adopted by this research can be extended to explore, inter alia, the work of an Uzbekistani interdisciplinary artist Dilyara Kaipova (born 1967, Tashkent) (see Kaipova and Gyul 2019; Antonova 2023). The temporal and spatial scale of the future research holds potential to expand towards Central Eurasia, promising to enhance our understanding of the generational and historic dynamic of craft as a form of artistic occupation. The wells of the historical consciousness of craft—feminist historical consciousness—are as deep as what comes to be historically possible and re/cognisable via the mediating mechanisms of the culture industry, itself, since global, a form of social totality. I think that recognising the culture industry as a form of totality

can enable craft and creative labour studies to move beyond the often taken for granted framework of the nation-state (cf. Comunian and England 2022; Patel 2022) and envision a transnational approach for examining the multiple divisions of creative labour-power on a global scale.

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