

**THE ENCHANTED WANDERER OR ANDREI ROITER'S JOURNEYMAN YEARS**

Viktor Misiano, 2013

The most obvious and enduring circle of motifs in Andrei Roiter's works refer to the realia of journeys, wanderings and travels or, if you want to use the term more commonly used by the artist himself, tourism. Suitcases, travelling bags, packed corrugated cardboard boxes, canvas tents, canoes, skis, cameras, notebooks and sketches are pervasive throughout the whole body of his work. His books are tied together in a bundle with a suitcase handle on top, transformed into a mobile library, an image of the house, i.e. a metaphor for the settled life, reduced in size, resembling a nesting box for passing migrant birds...

There is another term that Roiter often used to use to describe himself and that is *transition*. When he started his creative journey in the 80's, this term resonated with the ideas of Achille Bonito Oliva's transavantgarde that were current at the time. As a matter of fact, Roiter could also be considered one of the rare examples of the acknowledged international transavantgarde on the Russian scene. Even back in those years the transitivity of language and eclectic openness to the most varied visual sources that were proclaimed by the Transavantgarde programme were inherent in his works. The graffiti, the children's drawings, the street agitprop, the road signs, the design of commonplace objects, the graphic illustrations from popular magazines – are just some of the linguistic elements that can be distinguished in the texture of his works. His work, especially if examined from the current perspective, can indeed be identified with a type of tourism throughout the world of visual culture.

However, there was one respect in which, Roiter's work does not share the poetics of the transavantgarde (as propounded by Bonito Oliva) neither back then and even more so today. It is difficult to discern in it any definitive common cause with the Soviet-Russian *genius loci*. Belonging to a generation that had rejected the modernist position on the progression of innovation and the negation of tradition, Roiter, nevertheless felt no longing for his roots.

In those years this interest in the local was seized wholeheartedly by the Moscow School of Conceptualism and included many of its young disciples such as Konstantin Zvezdochetov, Andrei Filippov and others who were all contemporaries of Roiter. Although feeling a sincere reverence for this school, Roiter was in no hurry to join its ranks. On the contrary, in the transavantgarde movement of the 1980's he discerned the first international trends, which were realised by him on the Russian stage at exactly the same time as they were going on in the rest of the world. This pull towards the supranational soon gained social approval and amplitude in Gorbachev's Perestroika, which had broken away from the Soviet local perspective in favour of a global one. As a result tourism has become a way of life for Roiter – without severing himself from Russia, he is settled in Amsterdam, whence he has begun to split his time with New York.

Admittedly, since the beginning of the 1990's the term *transition* has acquired another extremely widespread meaning. With the end of the Soviet Union “transitional” was the moniker that came to be applied to the whole of post-Soviet society. Moreover, with the break up of the Second world, the whole of the newly united world could now be considered in transition. Hence the problem of identity, which inevitably arises during the disintegration of an existing order, turned out to be the central problem of the global world and the global arts scene. As a result, the invention of a new national or group identity has become a subject of priority interest for the majority of Moscow artists (regardless of whether they have remained living in Russia, or, like Roiter, have settled in the West).

Because the politics of identity are inseparable from the politics of memory – the difference in the projects of the Moscow artists of the 1990's were defined by the historical resource, which they called upon during the creative process. If for Andrei Filippov it was Holy Orthodox Russia, and for Anatoly Osmolovsky it was the Russia of the revolutionary avant-garde, then for Zvezdochetov it was the daily routine of the Soviet past and for Vadim Zakharov it was the vicious circle experienced by the artists of the Soviet underground of the 1960-1980's. As a result, the ornamentation of the Russian middle ages came to define Filippov's stylistics, mass produced Soviet kitsch – Zvezdochetov's, the symbols of the Russian revolution – slogans on red banners and memorials to Mayakovsky feature in the works of Osmolovsky while Zakharov has simply begun to put together a collection and archive of former unofficial art, regarding this task as a part of his creative work. Roiter is different in that he shies away from any fixed impersonal national or group sources. Defining himself as an artist-cum-tourist he employs in his work motifs that he has found on his (real or virtual) journeys. These might be objects, drawings in exercise books, photo postcards and also his own personal photographs or simply his impressions and consequent recollections. To develop the tourist theme further, one could call them souvenirs only with the following reservation that more often than not there is nothing on these finds that reveals to us their place of origin.

For Roiter souvenirs are not a conventional assortment of goods from a souvenir shop but something deeply personal and inexpressible. For him tourism is not a social phenomenon but humankind's destiny.

By identifying his work with tourism, i.e. with the search for inspiration by getting to know new places (real or virtual), Roiter expressly indicates the origins of his poetics. The subject under discussion is the European romantic tradition, which starting in the 18th century gave rise to the literary and artistic figure of the travelling artist/author. Like all the romantic traditions it is customary to link the emergence of this figure with Kant's "Critiques", which freed the subject of Cartesian cohesiveness and reduced human destiny to the discrete experience of separate moments and situations <sup>1</sup>. One could also describe this figure of the travelling artist via another system of categories that have linked it with the problem of the crisis of human experience. With the arrival of modernity humankind has begun to lose its inviolable authorities, experience has begun to take place via encounters with the extraordinary rather than the replication of the everyday routine. Therefore, if in the middle ages travellers' writings or bestiaries represented something extraordinary found beyond the bounds of human experience, then since the beginning of the modern era the collection of tourist trophies and travel notes has become a means of acquiring experience <sup>2</sup>. The collective act of viewing a slideshow of photographs collected during tourist travels, was a widespread ritual in the Moscow of the 70's and 80's and I myself saw Roiter take part in them on more than one occasion in his youth.

In the 1990's (the decade that declared itself to be the age of globalisation), the problem of the subject and its experience became linked with the main conflict of those years - the stand off between the local and the global. Having torn down the boundaries of experience, globalisation turned itself into a boundless expanse of the extraordinary. Hence, the fundamentalist backing of the local, i.e. an attempt to return the agency of authority and the cohesiveness of the subject, and also the neo-liberal stance on the global, i.e. an attempt to rationalise the extraordinary and put it into some sort of order. Just as the tourist and culture industries, capitalising on the extraordinary, subjugate the extraordinary with a harsh economic moniker, so the protective ideology of the local constructs its own strict hierarchy of values, which limits the extraordinary by means of its exclusion.

However, Roiter's souvenirs have a value that is so subjective that it is difficult to capitalise and place a fixed price on them and it is also difficult to subordinate them to a hierarchy because they are free of all conventional value. In this way, Roiter's collection of souvenirs differs from Vadim Zakharov's collection of unofficial Soviet art, whose units have a very real and ever growing symbolic and economic value.

This striving of Roiter's to bring his tourist trophies out of the sphere of conventional axiology again roots him in the romantic tradition with its constant insistence on the valorisation of the "unvalorisable". Thus, the Baudelaire era Parisian bohemian, setting himself against triumphant bourgeois empiricism, identified the artist and poet with the figure of the tinker who finds value in things, which are value-less according to common opinion<sup>3</sup>. And indeed, the subject matter that inhabits the world of Roiter's art – his souvenirs – is a world of old objects that are no longer of any empirical use. Typical of these are shabby and threadbare books and notebooks, overexposed photographs, shapeless cardboard boxes and so forth.

Moreover, the romantic tradition insisted on constructing an alternative hierarchy, the tinker did not just propose a different axiology but an ontology as well. The world of the tinker and the artist is essentially a different reality, where everyone but first and foremost the artist lives according to different laws. Hence, yet another basis for identifying the figure of the tinker with the world of art and first and foremost with the theatre, which creates an illusory alternative to real life in the forms of life itself<sup>4</sup>. Surrounding himself with the bearers of different value orders, the tinker and the artist are themselves transformed into the living embodiment of the subjectively imagined reality that they have created.

And it is also for this reason that Roiter feels the happiness of this tradition, constantly making references to the world of buffoonery and street theatre in his works. The clown-like caps and false noses are a regular leit-motif throughout his work. In one of his paintings we see a lean male figure with a long false nose, and hand written in large letters on the surface of the canvas is the inscription: "*My profession is to be Andrei Roiter*". Hence, the guise of the clown and comedian, while not exhaustively defining Andrei Roiter's profession, is one that he assumes as part of his profession.

If the figure of the tinker is linked with lampoonery, then his wanderings in search of rags and bones contains echoes of the travelling theatre or circus. Thus, Roiter, like the travelling circus performer (a favourite romantic character from Goethe to Picasso and Fellini to Wim Wenders), carries his artistic acts, his painterly tricks and graphic sleights of hand around with him on his tourist wanderings. In one of his works we encounter the image of a cardboard box taped all over with well thumbbed sticky back plastic and the hand written inscription: "*A.R.'s comedy tricks*".

Another motif that also regularly makes an appearance in Roiter's works is that of a human figure in a long night cap, imprisoned in a cage-like construction knocked up out of planks. Art is presented here as an autonomous conditional sphere that imprisons its disciples. This equivocal apology for the autonomy of art is also evident in the way that the artist exhibits his works. Having rejected the traditional modernist *white cube*, he prefers to paint the walls in other colours - and more often than not his trade mark green.

Thus the exhibition space is transformed into a stage and the exhibition a scenography. Finally, the artist also has his own very characteristic way of producing his exhibition catalogues. They look like a traditional book contained in an old fashioned hand made design that reminds one of the rare second hand tomes that often appear in his works. It is as if Roiter is excluding himself from the conventions of the representation of the professional artist, because his profession is not that of the artist but Andrei Roiter.

Moreover, the indication that Roiter's profession boils down to just "being Andrei Roiter", is also one of the definitive restrictions of his *comedy tricks*. The fact that his theatre is a theatre of one with all the roles played by the artist himself, is indicated by other textual statements included by him in his works. Thus, on one of them we read: "*Please don't help me to be you!*", while on another there is: "*Why do I feel you're laughing at me?*". By means of this cautious distancing from other identities he continues to insist on his non-engagement in the politics of collective memory, i.e. not wanting to tie his work to a certain pre-specified supra-personal culturo-ideological reservoir of images. But in addition to these declarations Roiter also refrains from making a direct criticism of the art of collective memory. "Being Andrei Roiter" means not being, for example, "an ancient Greek", "Norman", "Viking", or "European" etc., i.e. that kaleidoscope of roles, which are piled high in the work of Yury Leiderman, who was motivated by the implacable criticism of the politics of identity. For Roiter appealing to a non-personal source is always an acknowledgement of external authority and the tourist industry, i.e. journeying along a route that has not been organised by oneself (even if the journey takes you into the past). And the fact that Ilya Kabakov's total installations bear witness to the fact that the agendas of the local and global might coincide, is, in its own way, an industry of the production of extraordinary scenographies of the Soviet local hierarchies that have receded into history.

Therefore, the main thing that distinguishes Roiter from the majority of Russian artists of our times is the fact that he has no fixed source of expressive motifs. He does not take them from a previously known place, he finds them! It is practically impossible to be more efficient in terms of guessing ahead where these finds might be and setting out in search of them because Roiter never knows *a priori* what exactly he is looking for. The transformation of a certain visual impression into an image is always a subjective act, akin to an earthquake or a shock. This experience was first described by the German romantics who gave it the definitions (*Witzl*) meaning of the highest intuition or wit and (*Einfall*) meaning an idea that unexpectedly befalls a person. However, the person who comes closest to describing this experience of Roiter's is Walter Benjamin in his definition: "profane illuminations". As is well known, Benjamin linked these flashes of enlightenment with "flanerie": walks taken without any particular goal/purpose, during which boundless and amazing knowledge is discovered as the result of a chance glance directed at an everyday object in an unexpected perspective.

The thing that the figure of the flaneur and tourist have most in common is the fact that they are both observers, i.e. both their experiences are rooted in equal measure in the practice of looking at things. It would be impossible for the flaneur or tourist to experience these “profane illuminations” without being constantly visually immersed in the world. Incidentally, the tinker is also undoubtedly an observer, capable of spotting a real diamond in a large pile of glass beads. Hence also the whole chain of other identifications presented by the romantic culture of the artist-observer – who is detective, spy, voyeur and ultimately thief<sup>5</sup>. For all of them in equal measure there is no indubitable and a priori picture of the world, for all of them their intellectual horizon is constructed during the empirical experience of searching and this horizon slips away from all of them drifting with the ever shifting field of view. Having said that, for all of them social well being or even survival in the chaos of the world that surrounds them is linked with their ability to perceive the authentic, although not always obvious essence and phenomena that are concealed behind the deceptive appearance of individual things. To refute the presence of concealed symbolic meaning in the motifs of Roiter’s art, is to leave no explanation of what it is that has moved him, when he captured them with his tourist’s camera – a machine that stares intently and objectively and which creates fragments of reality that are devoid of any obvious meaning.

Goethe was the first to describe the process of revealing the world’s concealed symbolism in his “theory of correspondence”. For him this process was also represented by something intimate based on subjective experience. He believed that this had to emanate from personal and intimate past experiences, starting, for example with the view from your window or of a town square that you have known since childhood and so forth. Subsequent to these impressions acquired in the artist’s consciousness by means of personal yet universal thoughts, new ones are added, facilitating him on his way to creating a symbolic totality<sup>6</sup>. Something similar to this takes place in Roiter’s work. Having started his creative journey in the region of Belyaev on the periphery of Moscow, it was precisely here that he started his work on the symbolisation of the world. “My Belyaev” is the definitive title given to one of the artist’s early works. Moreover, moved by the logic of the construct of correspondence, he dedicated this work to Dmitry Prigov, his neighbour in Belyaev, a prominent poet and artist whose creative work consisted of a grandiose symbolic totality.

Roiter’s work on the symbolisation of the world has already been covered in the analysis of his creative work established above. Thus the results of this work can be perceived in the tenacity of the types occurring in his motifs, which contain a certain common thematic thread and a mutual conceptual coherence. It stands to reason that the pivot of this work is his personal mythologisation, represented in his role as the artist-tourist with the whole chain of symbolic guises that stands behind it. Finally, the consummation of this Roiteresque symbolic construction is his reference to costume and scenography, i.e. the

enclosure of his artistic world in a system of artistic conventions. However, it is no coincidence that the artist's mythologizing personifies Roiter in the image of a comedian, locked in a planked up construction of his own making. The hand made and delicate nature of this construction bears witness to just how far Roiter's mythology is from symbolic totality (especially in comparison with the mythological system created by Prigov that Roiter is referring to). Despite being a shield for the artist this mythology is also a prison and his passion for the wanderings of a tourist enjoins him to escape from it.

It is important to mention that in the contemporary era several new guises have been added to the figure of the observer. In particular – the refugee, the migrant and the émigré. Emigration – as Bertholt Brecht put it – is the true school of dialectics and the emigrant is in essence a natural dialectician. What is dialectic in the view of the émigré, and his experience of existing “on the margins of the unfamiliar” is also inseparable from the steadfastness of his gaze and the fact that he is simultaneously looking at the reality that surrounds him from several points of view. This reality is frighteningly unfamiliar and only comprehensible by means of a constant comparison with the homeland that he has lost. Moreover, the more he becomes settled in the new place, the more the retrospective view of “promised land” begins to change.

This complex dialectic began to be fully assimilated by the so called “Post-diaspora” artists: Russian artists who had settled in the West during the post-Soviet decades <sup>7</sup>. Moreover, it was specifically this natural faculty for the dialectic that distinguishes the post-diaspora from the diaspora of the Soviet era, who to a large extent turned out to be incapable of realising the complex play of prospective and retrospective views in their art. The émigré artists of the Soviet period either preserved the sacred untouchable image of the homeland, i.e. they only cultivated their retrospective view, or tried to fully identify themselves with their new context, i.e. they summoned up a prospective view or – like V. Komar and A. Melamid – they hurled together both realities and both differently directed ways of seeing in direct counterpoint to each other. The post-diaspora's faculty for dialectics lay in the fact that these artists were trying to present in their work the value of the discoveries, pregnant in the way that the émigré sees things, giving them the ability to notice in their new reality and surroundings that which is not visible to the native inhabitant. It is in exactly the same way that they perceived the significance of a perspective on their homeland, which was discovered from the vantage point of their new country of residence <sup>8</sup>. One could put this another way, by approximating the post-diaspora émigré experience to the tourist experience. Unlike the artists of the Soviet diaspora, who were trying to identify themselves with the ordinary, having preserved as a norm a commonplace that they had brought with them from their homeland, or having accepted as the norm the commonplaces of their new country of residence, - contemporary artists were striving like tourists to encounter the extraordinary.

They easily identified the extraordinary in the new reality that they found themselves in, which seemed commonplace to the native inhabitants, or they saw the homeland that they had left behind with new eyes, discovering there for themselves many things that are indeed extraordinary.

This dialectic can also be found in full measure in Roiter's work. Because in his work the ever returning "Russian" motifs encounter those inserted into his created world along with "the everyday flashes of enlightenment" experienced by him during his travels as a tourist. Moreover, chronologically speaking Roiter's poetics could be considered the predecessor and precursor of the post-diaspora programme having been formed almost ten years before the promulgation of the latter.

Nevertheless there remains a substantial difference between Roiter's work and those of the artists of the 2000's. Unlike these young artists, his view of the world, bears an inherent element, which, taking its lead from Jean-Paul Sartre a philosopher who had a very serious influence on the Roiter's world view, might be called "panoramicity". What is being described here is a way of seeing that attempts to keep as many objects as possible within one's field of vision so that no single one of them receives priority attention. This Sartre-like "Panoramic view" stands in contradistinction to bourgeois consciousness, which is inclined to look at things in a biased, selfish and mercenary way. Likewise, Roiter, by striving to prevent his souvenirs from being reduced to a commercial or ideological value, tries to cultivate a detached, "panoramic" view. The whole body of his works unfold before us in a wide panorama of visual impressions that are captured by him in an arbitrary and unsystematic way. His motifs, which are unexpectedly plucked from the common flow by "everyday flashes of enlightenment", become the focus of his attention for short while before then sinking back into oblivion. And even if they appear again in his works in new variations, they do not succeed in cluttering up his personal mythology with complex, multi-layered symbolic meanings, in other words they do not succeed in becoming authentic mythologemes. Roiter's mythology is deliberately left extremely undeveloped and incomplete.

And therefore, by not lending themselves to a strict interpretation do the motifs in Roiter's works return the viewer to the same question that moved their creator, when he selected them for this very piece of work? This question is of the utmost importance to Roiter's poetics. After all the most typical characteristic of "the panoramic view" is not only where it is directed at but also who is directing it. Sliding over the surface of the world, this view never lets the figure of the person who is doing the looking out of its field of vision, i.e. it doesn't so much strive to see into the depths of that which is being seen as acutely experiences the process of seeing itself. To put it another way, to the prospective and retrospective views inherent in the artists of the post-diaspora, Roiter adds yet another view, a view that is directed at the viewer himself.

Thus, having embarked on his tourist travels with the aim of acquiring experience, Roiter reaches some paradoxical conclusions. Motivated by a search for the extraordinary he finds it in ordinary things, and not allowing this thing to take root in a new status, once again returns it to the commonplace before setting out on a new search. Penetrating into the secret essence of things with the help of these “profane illuminations”, he is in no hurry to illuminate or put these essences in to any order for fear of creating authoritarian hierarchies. Like Wilhelm Meister, Roiter is motivated to travel not so much by the desire to discover new places as the desire to discover himself. Roiter disowns perception, as it can only lead to the acquisition of an entire subjectivity. In other words, the whole of Andrei Roiter’s creative adventure is the story of his constant acquisitions and the constant losses of himself.

The theme of loss is yet another feature that unites the tourist and the flaneur. For both of these experiences are pregnant with melancholy. Moreover, melancholy is something that unites Roiter with the majority of the Russian artists of his generation, whose art to some degree or other is dedicated to loss. For Dmitry Gutov it is the loss of culture of the Soviet Intelligentsia, for Leonid Tishkov it is the loss of his roots and family, for Vladimir Kupriyakov it is the loss of the secure foundations that underpin life<sup>9</sup> and for Olga Chernysheva it is the loss of human community. What Chernysheva has said about herself bears a relation to the whole of her generation: the work of these artists is born out of “a phantom pain, which continues to ache in a limb that is no more”<sup>10</sup>.

The whole of this generation, which lived through the historical wreckage at the end of the 80’s and the beginning of the 90’s, suddenly found itself in a reality that was completely unfamiliar to it and which they were involuntarily forced to look at with the eyes of an émigré, tourist or flaneur. They could only understand this new life by comparing it with the past, by means of a “work of memory”, which - as Freud asserted - is inseparable from melancholy. The past in the reality of the present, as Benjamin in his turn asserted, is visibly present in the form of “the ruin” - “an allegory” of a large historical form that has been lost. Contemplating them we break into the realm of timelessness and the absolute, which fills us with a feeling of “the inconsolability of the world’s existence”<sup>11</sup>. This “inconsolable nature” manifests itself in art in the way that it unchangingly shows “the Non-existence of that which it depicts” and talks about its own “inherent artificiality”<sup>12</sup>. Like the majority of artists of his generation Andrei Roiter could be defined as an artist-ruin. All the motifs in his works inevitably bear the mark of time. After all it’s no coincidence that the artist-tourist recognises in himself the figure of the tinker, and his motifs are dressed in shabby old rags. Moreover, the artificiality and non-existence of these motifs largely arises out of the fact that these are not authentic objects but their moulds, copies or scale models. Alongside this, his motifs are none other than a depiction of other depictions such as photographs, pictures, posters and sign boards.

Finally, Roiter very often depicts a certain fragment that has been plucked out of reality and then enlarges it. Thus a commonplace thing acquires an allegorical significance that it did not possess previously, in other words it becomes a ruin.

Hence, it is no coincidence that unlike most Russian artists, Roiter's motifs are commonplace things, which contain no direct references to legendary history. For him the destruction of history is not only about the loss of external supports but the loss of internal ones as well. It is not so much the disintegration of an object in history, as the disintegration of its subject. And therefore having lost our subjectivity, we can not know to the end precisely what it is that we have lost, which is precisely the type of loss that reminds one of the phantom pain suffered by an amputee. Roiter's work is an expression of the experience of loss as it is, in other words of loss in its purest form.

Finally, Roiter had one more device in his arsenal that is peculiarly characteristic of him. He not only enlarges fragments of reality in his works but also reduces them in size as well, i.e. he is continually using the effect of minimisation. Therefore, in his works models of huge buildings are often reduced to the size of small toys, for example, the grandiose ensemble of sky-scrappers that make up the Moscow University buildings. However, the motif of the toy and the theme of play and childhood are also constantly present in his works in their own right. The hand written texts in his works are usually written in a childish hand, and indeed it is as if his descriptive stylistics have been produced by a rather clumsy child's hands. Indeed, it would be apropos here to recall in this regard, that Roiter began his creative journey at the end of the 80's as a member of an artistic group that called itself "The Kindergarten"<sup>13</sup>, whose definitive position was its openness to spontaneous creativity and the playful dissipation of art in life.

It stands to reason that there are deeper reasons why Roiter likens his melancholy allegories to toys. You will recall that the motifs in Roiter's work are born out of his "profane illuminations", thanks to which a commonplace thing is transformed into something that it had not been before. After all the nature of any toy is the same, being "that, which at some time was something which now it is no more"<sup>14</sup>. Historical documents, monuments and memorials to the past – and it is precisely these things that appear in the works of the majority of the artists of the 1990's- 2000's – are merely witnesses of a history that is past. The toy, being a bearer of temporal displacement, bears within itself the mechanism of history.

However, as has already been noted above, play in Roiter's work also has other allusions – to the theatre, to mumming and clowning, to the travelling circus and so on. Both of these types of play - the play embarked on by a child and that of the comedian, share common ancient origins - in the myth. To be more precise they originate out of rituals that are intended to re-enact myths and their sacred ideas.

As Emile Benevist noted – a play on the stage, based on the reproduction of a certain enduring drama, preserves the link with the sacred ideas of ritual, while at the same time a child's game “preserves only the form of the sacred drama”, because in this game “everything always happens afresh”<sup>15</sup>. In his turn Claude Levi-Strauss provided yet another virtually identical definition – “ritual organises time, transforming an event into structure, a game on the contrary transforms a structure into an event”<sup>16</sup>.

Thus it is in Roiter's work: if on the one hand the numerous motifs and devices are references in his works to the world of the game, of unreflecting impulsiveness and forgetfulness, then on the other hand his identification of himself with the world of lampoonery, the travelling player, the circus performer, the clown, in essence supports the link between ritual and its sacred idea. Hence also his tourism, which is in essence the ritualised practice of collecting “profane illuminations”, which bring him closer to the commonplace to the experience of the myth and the sacred. And hence the definitive, for him, image of the comedian, a playful event imprisoned by a wooden structure. After all, these two poles in the concept of art have already been declared in Roiter's very first works. At the end of the 80's he would often shrink graffiti sprayed on walls by teenagers and football fans - which was impulsive and playful. In those years he would create a series of enlarged objects of commonplace radio sets, which once hung up on the walls were dazzling with their significant and sacred silence.

In a similar counterpoint two treatments of expressive motifs can be found in Roiter's work. On the one hand he endows many of his images with a transparent nature – which are distinguished by their monochrome instability and blurred contours. The basis for these images are often formed out of old over-exposed photographs. However, people who are in reality alive appear to be ghosts from the past and the realm of the dead. At the same time, many of his images bear a markedly material character, they are distinguished by their tangibility and the distinctness of their outlines and colour. Often, cases, boxes, manuscripts, cameras (photo and cine cameras and other) are used as the basis for these images, i.e. certain hollow shapes with tactile shells. However, in many cultures ancestors who departed for the world of the dead are preserved in the present by hollow shell-like funeral masks.

The most remarkable thing is that both of these motifs are extremely ambivalent. Ghosts come from a timeless place in order to disturb the peace of the present, reminding us of the past and historical temporality. But at the same time by visiting us they violate the flow of time, reminding us that the past remains with us in the present. In the same way, funeral masks are put on display among the living thus preserving the presence of the dead in the present. But at the same time the mask – could also be perceived as a toy, speaking about the fact that that which is before us was once a living person, but is now something else, in this case it is a sign of death.

However, the ambivalence guaranteed to Roiter's motifs although are in some way already invoked in his art by "profane illuminations", they bear within themselves a stamp of the sacred, for example of a myth or a structure, but being also attributes of the world of child's play, they reveal their complicity in an event and history. Incidentally, silence is a quality that is not only sacred but also childlike. For it is not only the sacred that is silent, bereft of the means to describe the indescribable, but also the child who lacks language and verbalisation skills. In other words, this is an alignment of structure and event, synchrony and diachrony are not just the mere nature of Andrei Roiter's poetics but also the basic things that define any society and its layout in time and history <sup>17</sup>.

However, the basis that defines time and history usually remains outside the close attention of people and artists, who are dragged along in the natural ebb of time and history. They only enter into our focus of attention when history undergoes an upheaval, when it ceases, when the mechanisms that define it become apparent. In his art Andrei Roiter has done his uttermost to attempt to use the chance offered him by time to strip history down to its component parts, and having enclosed it in a playful "time capsule", show how it works.

Viktor Misiano, *January 2010, Mandrem, India*  
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#### NOTES

1. See: Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe & Jean-Luc Nancy «L'absolute litteraire: Theorie de la litterature du romantisme allemand»,. Seuil, Paris, 1978
2. See: Giorgio Agamben «Infanzia e storia. Distruzione dell'esperienza e origine della storia», Giulio Einaudi editore, Torino, 1978 e 2001, p. 6
3. For more detail on this see: Mikhail Yampolsky "The observer. Essays on the history of seeing", Ad Marginem, Moscow , 2000, pp. 13-44
4. Typically in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century London and Paris tinkers and rag and bone men's stalls could be found very close to theatres. See: M. Yampolsky, op.cit., as above.
5. See: Above.
6. See: Above pp. 87-90
7. See: Yevgeniy Fiks «Post-diaspora: Statement and Premonition», Moscow Art Magazine", Digest 1993-2005, Moscow,2005, p.80-83 (<http://xz.gif.ru/numbers/moscow-art-magazine/>)

8. See my texts on the post-diaspora artists: Olga Kisseleva: "I see, therefore I am", in: Istheme edition, Paris, 2007; The Existential Anthropology of Anastasia Khoroshilova, in: *The Narrow Circle. Photographs by Anastasia Khoroshilova*, Contrasto, Roma, 2008
9. See my text about Vladimir Kupriyanov: Vladimir Kupriyanov's Sublime Historical Experience, in: *Vladimir Kupriyanov "Cast Me Not Away From Your Presence"*, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milano 2008
10. See: Viktor Misiano "Progressive Nostalgia", Agey-Tomesh, Moscow, 2008, p. 23
11. See: Walter Benjamin "The origins of German baroque drama", M., Agraf, 2002, p. 69
12. As above: p. 249
13. See my text: Ein "Kindergarten" für Kinder vorgerueckten Alters (A "Kindergarten" for Aged Children). *Durch*, Graz, N.2, 1987
14. See: Giorgio Agamben «Infanzia e storia. Distruzione dell'esperienza e origine della storia», Giulio Einaudi editore, Torino, 1978 e 2001, p. 74
15. See: Above, p. 72
16. See: Above, p. 77
17. See: Above, pp. 77-82