



How to Make a Russian Salad: Food, Art and Patriotism on the Russian Internet

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Abstract: People often now ask what our food means. But what happens when our food literally spells something out? A form of popular creativity often treated with derision – namely, salads in which ingredients form pictures or words – is here read as an instructive example of the production and reproduction of patriotic ideology on the Russian internet. After a brief consideration of connections between salads and discourses of nation and class, this article considers pictorial salads in the context of postmodernism in art, architecture and politics. I propose that the way in which images of these salads are shared and discussed is typical not only of the antagonistic, politicised space of the Russophone internet, but also of the online “prosumption” of images in general, which, I ultimately suggest, does not empower and liberate, but rather replicates the constrictive scopic regime of Socialist Realism.

Keywords: prosumption, postmodernism, foodways, Russia, image sharing, Internet 2.0, ideology, patriotism

No one would now dispute that what is important about food is not just how it tastes, but also what it means. Not only are restaurants, recipes and diets an increasingly prominent part of the media landscape we inhabit, but, after about half a century of trying, scholars have finally established that food is a worthy and uncontroversial object of inquiry since, as an element of culture, it can be understood as ‘a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behavior’, and that it ‘constitutes an information; it signifies’ (Barthes 2008: 29; cf. Counihan et al. 2008, Cramer et al. 2011). As a result of this semiotic turn in gastronomy, food and foodways in many different contexts, not least Russia, have come to be scrutinised as vehicles of meaning. However, this interest in food as com-

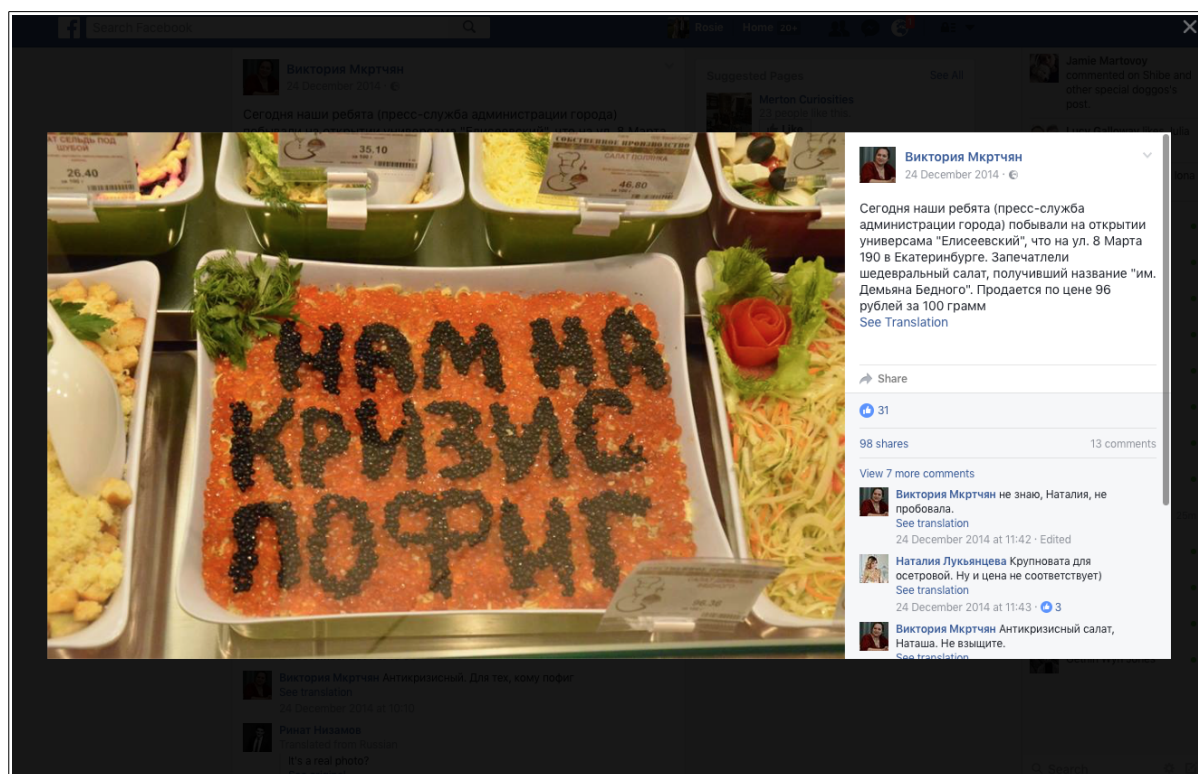
munication has largely overlooked one very obvious way in which food can say something: the arrangement of ingredients to write words or to make pictures.¹

This article will examine one instance in which food communicates not just connotatively, but also denotatively, explicitly expressing a message, and, deliberately or not, participating in the production of a particular ideology. This instance is the practice in contemporary Russia of making decorative salads for special occasions in which the ingredients spell out words, form abstract symbols (stars, flags, ribbons) or attempt a figurative rendering of a real-world object (such as a tank). As my examples suggest, my particular focus will be on the preponderance of military motifs used in these salads around the two main patriotic holidays, February 23 (Defenders of the Fatherland Day) and May 9 (Victory Day). Moreover, my interest does not lie so much in these salads' meaning in the kitchen and on the table, as in the meanings they take on when pictures of them are shared online, first on recipe-sharing websites and then when these images are reused on social media, normally with mocking intent.

It was in this latter form – as an object of amusing kitsch – that I first came across pictorial salads. Any mention of my new research interest in salad art normally provokes politely bemused sniggers. This, perhaps, is the next challenge for academia: both art brut and food culture are now considered intellectually kosher; it is time for outsider food art to enter the scholarly mainstream. More important, however, is the fact that this seemingly trivial and marginal subject offers us a possible key to understanding how patriotism is performed in contemporary Russia, especially online. Writing about the *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* [Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche, 1939], Gian Piero Piretto has argued that this oft-reprinted Soviet recipe book constituted 'an epic ... that was one of the best examples of socialist ideological architecture ... [in which] several features of Soviet ideology and culture reach maximal expression' (Piretto 2011: 84). Similarly, I would like to suggest that the production and reproduction of patriotic pictorial salads can be read as an instructive example of a certain contemporary mode of Russian patriotic ideology that occupies the intersection of online self-fashioning, populist postmodernism, nostalgia and mayonnaise.

The very existence of mimetic, symbolic and textual salad-making seems to be a rebuke to gastronomic semiotics: the act of turning of food into a statement or picture suggests that the medium is not the message, or at least not enough of a message. For the salad artist, it is not sufficient for food to have implicit meaning; it must communicate directly, with immediately understandable reference to a shared historic and symbolic context. This desire for food to be overloaded with meaning is best illustrated by an extreme but indicative example of patriotic salad sloganeering. In 2014 a new supermarket in Ekaterinburg celebrated its launch with the creation of a salad made of salmon, prawns and walnuts topped with a layer of red caviar on which was written, in black caviar, the words 'We don't give a shit about the crisis'. One can see this salad as a multi-layered response (literally and figuratively) to the economic difficulties caused by the imposition of sanctions by the US and other countries in early 2014 and the subsequent Russian government counter-sanctions on certain EU and US produce.

¹ A version of this paper was given as a talk at St Antony's College Oxford in 2016. I am grateful to Oliver Ready for inviting me to give that talk and to the members of the audience who asked me questions. I would also like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers at Digital Icons for their suggested improvements.

Image 1. The 2014 ‘anti-crisis’ salad in Ekaterinburg

Source: Mkrtchian, Viktoriia (2014) ‘Segodnia nashi rebiata...’, *Facebook*, 24 December (28.03.2017)

The salad communicated its nonchalant disdain for sanctions in numerous ways. First, the salad, which featured many premium items such as seafood, was expensive, retailing at 96 roubles for 100 grams – a good way to show indifference to straitened times and also to establish the new supermarket as a destination for wealthy shoppers. Second, although it is hard to prove that all the ingredients were Russian in origin, they were not demonstrably ‘European’, showing that luxury was still possible without the now-sanctioned imports, constituting a sort of implied patriotic *importozameshchenie* (the replacement of foreign goods with Russian ones).

Third, the upper layer of red and black caviar recalls the colouring of the orange-and-black St George Ribbon – colours which have come to be associated with the commemoration of the Great Patriotic War and with patriotism in general. Fourth, the salad was given the name ‘Dem’ian Bednyi’. This choice must have been inspired by the ironic conjunction of the adjective *bednyi* (‘poor’) with such an expensive product. However, the invocation of this Soviet poet, known for his attacks on bourgeois life and anti-Soviet elements in society, also adds to the salad’s implicit (but muddled) nostalgic-patriotic messaging.

This multi-layered temporality is further complicated by an apparent allusion to the consumerist culture of the so-called ‘New Russians’ of the 1990s in the shape of Andrei Logvin’s famous 1997 poster *Life is a Success!* (*Zhizn’ udalas’!*), which used the same technique of black caviar on red to spell out the eponymous slogan and which has been interpreted as an

ironic attack on the era's superficial valorisation of wealth and excess. As such, we must consider the possibility that the salad might represent an ironic commentary on its own invitation to luxury. It seems more likely, however, given the numerous parodies and remakes of Logvin's original over the past two decades, that the association of this caviar-writing technique with critique might have diminished in favour of a connection with humour.

Being funny is another way in which the Ekaterinburg salad seeks to communicate a rebuke to Russia's perceived enemies (or at least pretends to: it's unlikely that many US State Department employees would be lunching in Ekaterinburg). The makers of the salad are aware that turning caviar into text – and colloquial text at that – is amusingly incongruous. The salad's creator, supermarket chain owner Andrei Ogloblin, described its genesis as follows: 'I had the idea of making a salad with this caption myself; during the last crisis I gave a friend a cake with the same caption. And now, when everyone is talking about the crisis, we decided to make this joke during a time of plague' (See 'In Ekaterinburg' 2014). His statement is in itself semantically rich. Ogloblin alludes to Aleksandr Pushkin's play *A Feast in the Time of Plague* [*Pir vo vremia chumy*, 1830], the title of which is a byword for self-indulgence that is oblivious to hardship. Fittingly for a luxury salad released for the New Year's Eve holiday, he invokes the feasting implications of Pushkin's title, but he also avoids its potentially negative connotations by emphasising that the salad is not meant to be taken seriously. The mention of a previous iteration of the joke also draws our attention to the fact that a cake with the same slogan is funny, but not *that* funny. Sweet foods, especially those associated with children, such as cakes, seem to be given more licence to be figurative or symbolic, or to carry text, than savoury ones, so the clash of different codes is less pronounced in that case. Moreover, there is something that Ogloblin does not mention here: this joke is not only funny, but it is *shareably* funny. Whether or not it was a deliberate publicity stunt, there is no doubt that, however briefly, the salad brought some media attention to the newly opened store.

The story of the dissemination of this salad is in itself typical of the online media cycle of 'churnalism' both in Russia and elsewhere, as online 'news' sites trawl social media looking for potentially viral stories. A photograph of the 'anti-crisis salad' was posted on Facebook by the press secretary of the president of the Ekaterinburg Duma at 09:58 on 24 December 2014 (Mkrtchian 2014). As of May 2016, this picture had been liked 31 times and shared 104 times, with this traffic greatly increasing after the publication of a story about the salad on national news portal znak.com at 11:08, major national site newsru.com at 19:15, and dozens of other sites.²

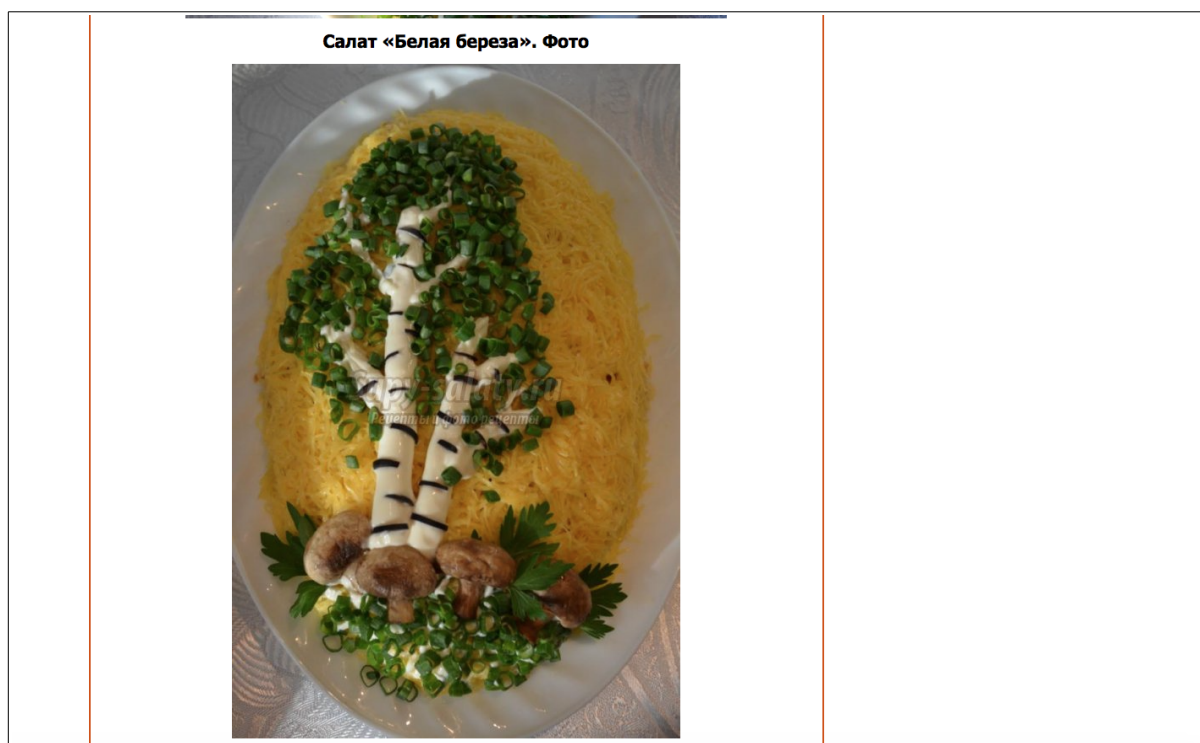
This story demonstrates how a message communicated visually by food can be spread a long way, quickly. More than this, however, it shows how shareable 'content' with patriotic messages provides an opportunity for internet users to perform their patriotism. Despite the tenuous connection to official structures, by sharing a user-generated image, users can demonstrate their sense of humour as individuals and as a nation and, implicitly, express their commitment to Russia's perceived geopolitical mission (on social media and cultural capital, see Humphreys 2016: 113-115). On social media this performance of patriotism requires minimal effort: many people shared the photograph without comment, or just with multiple

² This story is also indicative of the way in which social media is eroding the boundary between official and unofficial communications from state organs, with Facebook and Twitter increasingly popular among public figures and government representatives for the release of official or semi-official statements.

approving closing-bracket ‘smiles’ (‘))))’). Others, however, appended their own comments suggested that the humorous salad was typical of Russians’ sanguine resilience in the face of adversity, such as ‘That’s how we do things!’, or ‘Crisis, Russian style’. Still more reaffirmed the salad’s message of indifference to sanctions – ‘No one in Murmansk gives a shit about the crisis either))))’ – and its implied anti-Americanism – ‘The holidays are coming! The holidays are coming! (“Non Coca Cola”)’ (see Mkrtchian 2014).³

The Ekaterinburg crisis salad is in some ways an outlier in patriotic salad messaging both because few salads achieve such media visibility and because, with its political statement expressed verbally, it sits at one end of a continuum of legibility. At the other end of this continuum are salads which have been made with no regard to their visual appearance; in between them sit a wide variety of salads which have been subject to the art of salad-arranging (*oformlenie salatov*). You can see two examples here:

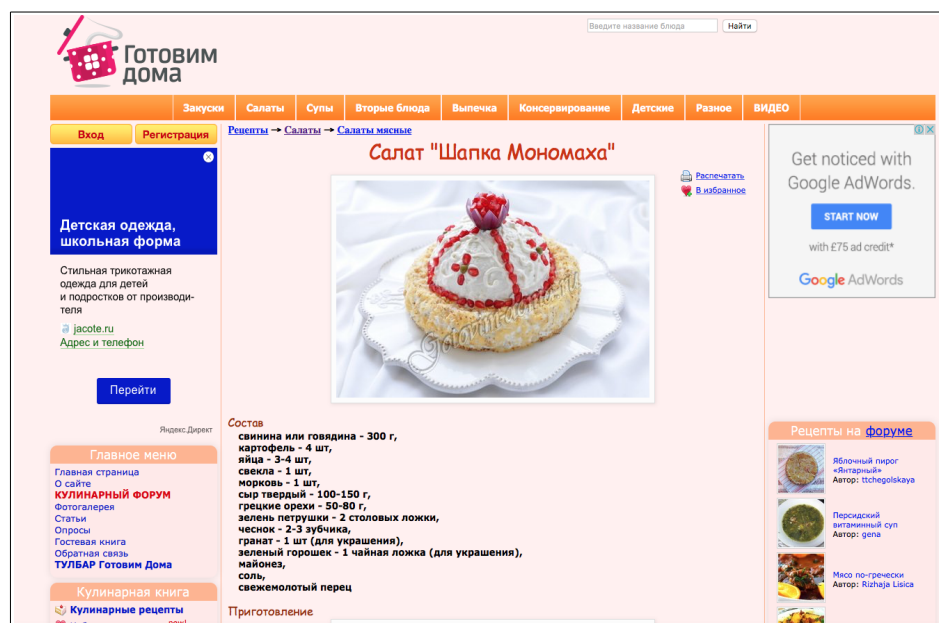
Image 2. Silver Birch Salad



Source: <http://supy-salaty.ru/4563-salat-s-kuricey-i-shampinonami-belaya-bereza-recept-s-poshagovymi-foto.html>, 20 July 2014 (28.03.2017)

³ The final comment here is a reference to an advert for the archetypal American product, Coca-Cola, whose winter campaign slogan was for a time ‘The holidays are coming.’ It is not uncommon online for statements of Russian exceptionalism to demonstrate how deeply American popular culture has penetrated into everyday language. It should be remembered that different social media sites in Russia tend to have different user bases, reflecting different constituencies, with Facebook enjoying more popularity among well-travelled urban professionals (cf. Roesen et al. 2014: 80).

Image 3. The Cap of the Monomakh Salad



Source: <http://gotovim-doma.ru/view.php?r=563-recept-Salat-Shapka-Monomakha>, 2 January 2008 (28.03.2017)

Even before they are imbued with decorative or semantic qualities, salads in Russia already engage with discourses of national identity. It should be remembered, first of all, that salad as a genre is a more marked component of post-Soviet cuisine than elsewhere, with salads normally occupying a whole section of menus and constituting an essential element of set meals. In her ingenious semiotic analysis of the preeminent festive salad, Olivier [*oliv'e*] Anna Kushkova has demonstrated the particular importance to Russian and late Soviet culinary identities of chopped salads containing finely diced, cooked ingredients and, very often, mayonnaise (Kushkova 2005). (In the case of Olivier, as Kushkova shows, there are innumerable personalised recipes, but in most instances mayonnaise is used to bind together boiled potato, carrot, peas, gherkins, eggs and meat, among other things.) Catriona Kelly, in a brief but extremely useful history of the rise of the salad in Soviet Russian cuisine, points out that salad of any sort was a rarity in pre-revolutionary Russia and suggests that the vogue for chopped salads may have come from America (home of the Waldorf) through the agency of Anastas Mikoyan, who travelled widely in America in the 1930s researching mass-produced food (Kelly 2013: 258)⁴. (Although it should be noted that cooked chopped salads have also long

⁴ Making use of Kelly and Kushkova's observations, I cannot resist the very speculative suggestion that Olivier and other chopped salads may have been so popular because they provide an ideal metaphor for the Soviet project. Kushkova argues that 'the main role of the mayonnaise consisted, if you will, in reconciling in one dish salad ingredients of different types and colours, "taking some colour" from their variety and contrast, turning them into a uniform mass.' In this, they embody the construction of the collective Soviet identity, with Soviet cultural identity acting as a sort of mayonnaise, binding together the various peoples and personalities of the Soviet Union into a uniform mass, dulling contrasts in favour of consistency. Indeed, the privileging of the communion of ingredients over their individual identity perhaps reflects even older cultural traditions: what is Olivier if not *sobornost'* in salad form? By way of contrast, European salads allow for ingredients to express their individuality.

been popular in nearby Finland and Sweden.) Whatever its origin, by the 1990s, chopped salad was seen as entirely indigenous, to the extent that after the end of the Soviet Union Olivier found its dominant position in the Russian salad field threatened by newcomers from the west, leading to it becoming identified as ‘Soviet’: ‘It suddenly became clear that for Olivier, which, as it had seemed, was not subject to time, the contrast between “then” and “now”, was significant’ (Kushkova 2005). I would argue that, in light of the nostalgic bent of contemporary patriotism, this temporal marking has been reinterpreted as national one, with chopped salads representing a certain perceived authentic Russianness, while salads made with large chunks of fresh vegetables (which are, after all, harder to grow in Russia climatic conditions) signal foreignness or ‘Europeanness’.

I propose that in today’s Russia one’s salad preference, indeed one’s concept of what constitutes salad, is related to class, income and geographical position, with metropolitan elites preferring to emphasise their cosmopolitanism by the conspicuous consumption of ‘European’ salads. Although these consumers probably do not exclude chopped salads from their diet, they are less likely to display consumption of them online, as they offer little cultural capital. In contrast, for many other Russians with less access to foreign travel and a less aspirational lifestyle, chopped salads remain in favour, with the evolution of content and the accrual of cultural capital coming from ever-more exotic ingredients and new decorative approaches. Some evidence for this distinction can be found by comparing the salad recipes available on websites serving different audiences: *eda.ru*, a spinoff of Moscow listings and lifestyle magazine *Afisha*, edited by celebrity chef Alexei Zimin and aimed at a metropolitan audience, features in the most part uncooked salads with bigger chunks of vegetables, more green leaves, more foreign ingredients, an emphasis on authenticity (‘real Greek salad’) and non-mimetic, non-symbolic presentation (see ‘Salad recipes’ 2016). Likewise, on Instagram, the urbanite’s choice for culinary narcissism, the hashtag ‘*salat*’ (in Cyrillic) is attached primarily to European-style salads. In contrast, *gotovim-doma.ru* (‘We Cook At Home’), a user-generated recipe-sharing forum which emphasises collaboration rather than aspiration, offers almost exclusively recipes for cooked, chopped, mayonnaise-rich salads with specific names (‘New Era’, ‘The Capercaillie’s Nest’ etc.) and an evident emphasis on the visual (see ‘The Cap of the Monomakh Salad’ above, made out of pork, potato and papaya).

A comment on *Gotovim doma* expresses such a strong a preference for chopped salads with a uniform flavour and consistency that it suggests that these qualities are definitional for salad: ‘I don’t like it when it’s all chopped up so big! That’s not a salad in the end, but crudités! What spoon could you use to try everything at once?!’ (‘Greek salad’, 2006). The opposite position can be seen in a post, from 2013, on *zadolba.li*, a site on which people can post complaints. The poster lists a number of food-based shibboleths, including salad chopping, even amongst people well-travelled in Europe:

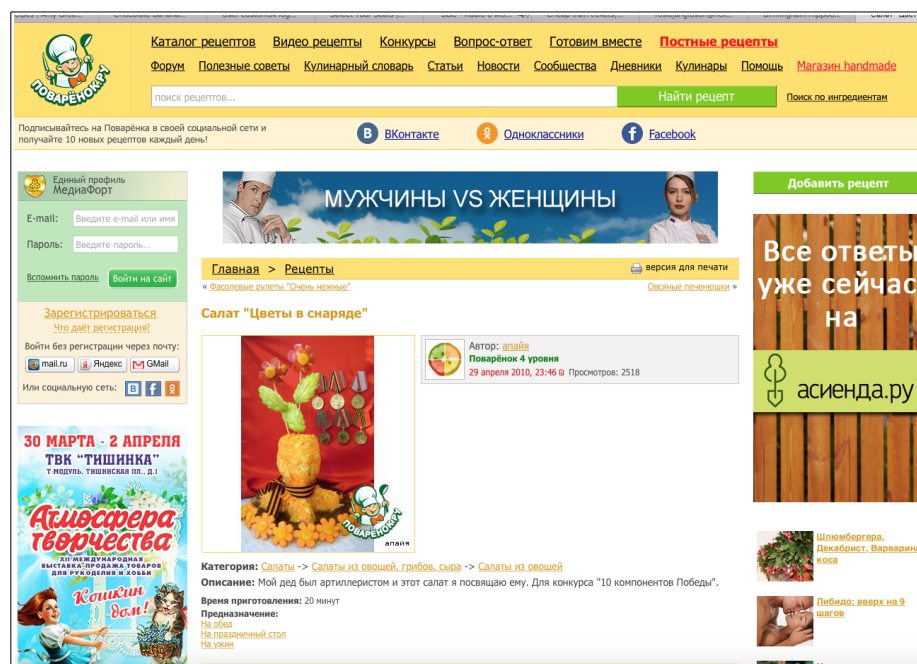
There is a category of people that give the impression in public that they are educated, cultured [*intelligentny*], fashionable and contemporary. At home they turn into typical *so-vok* [Soviet philistinism]. [...] Tell me, why when you invite me to your house all your ‘European’ salads are chopped up as if you’ve been working in Cafeteria No. 5 for twenty years? Do you know the difference between Vinaigrette, Olivier and Greek salad? Have you seen them [Europeans] chop up salad leaves into tiny two millimetre strips? No, you haven’t. (‘You are what you eat’ 2013).

This hostility to chopped salads is part of a wider disparagement of manifestations of a native culinary culture, deemed ‘Soviet’ or provincial and criticised for its lack of refinement and disregard for health. On food blogs like F’ing Mayonnaise [Mayonesa nakh] on LiveJournal the half-mocking, half-loving soubriquet for this culture is *niamka*. The object of scorn here is not only the food of *niamka* but also the discourses and practices around it. The culture of online recipe-sharing is characterised as provincial and uneducated in itself, for instance in a 2014 blog on *Snob*, a lengthy diatribe against the language used on recipe forums, in which author and commentators mock the orthographic errors and frequent diminutives used by women on forums, as a means, amongst other things, of performing their own cultural superiority online (see Beliushina 2014. On linguistic self-fashioning on Runet, see Roosen et al. 2014: 79).

These cultural factors notwithstanding, the type of salad you make also depends on what ingredients are available and their cost. While figurative salads occasionally feature expensive ingredients, their constituent parts tend to be available in provincial Russian towns, fresh or in canned form, and the ingredient lists and discussions on recipe forums suggest a greater interest in cost than on eda.ru. It could be argued, therefore, that the tendency towards extravagant decorativeness in chopped salads is a way of compensating for the ordinariness of the ingredients in order to ensure that the dish still signals a special occasion. We remember that feast days normally necessitate increased emphasis on the spectacle of the table, with special decorations and a rearrangement of furniture; in our case, this concentration on the initial visual impact of the feast extends to the food itself.

This preference for chopped salads is something of a technological prerequisite for salad art: it is simply much easier to mould mayonnaise-heavy salads into different shapes and to use finely chopped ingredients to render different colours and textures. The ‘Russian’ salad approximates the condition of paint or clay. This is a necessary condition for salad art, however, but not a sufficient one: it is possible to make a chopped salad look special without making it representational. In order to investigate this urge towards the symbolic, we shall now concentrate on the sub-genre of patriotic salads. Below are a number of examples made for 23 February and 9 May between 2010 and 2013 and taken from recipe-sharing sites. Some photographs have been uploaded by users in search of feedback while preparing for salad decorating competitions, while others have been taken from forums where they are offered as suggestions. Many of the salads were made in response to a competition on povarenok.ru called ‘The Ten Ingredients of Victory’, held in the run-up to Victory Day in 2010.

Image 4. Flowers in a Shell



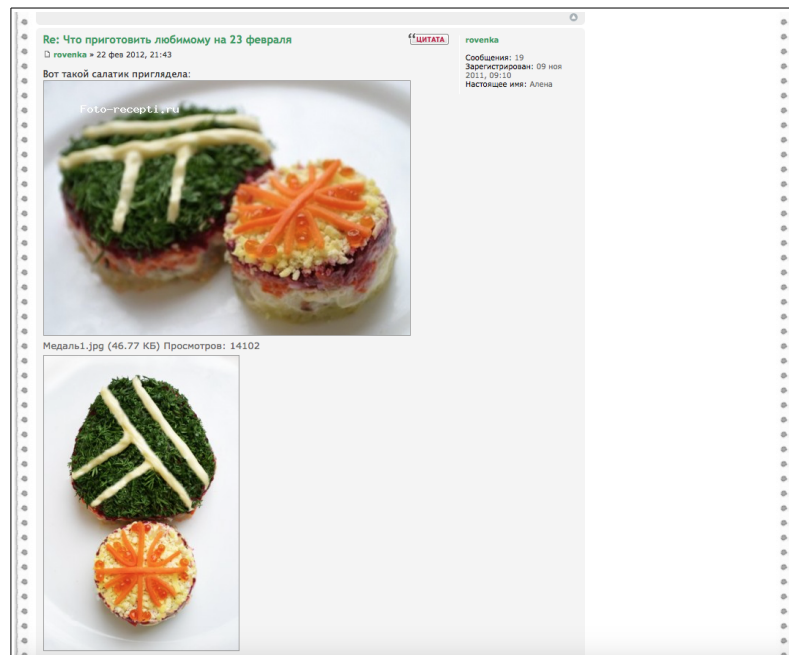
Source: <http://www.povarenok.ru/recipes/show/44193/>, 29 April 2010 (28.03.2016)

Image 5. Flames of Victory



Source: <http://www.povarenok.ru/recipes/show/43451/>, 3 April 2010 (28.03.2017)

Image 6. Medal



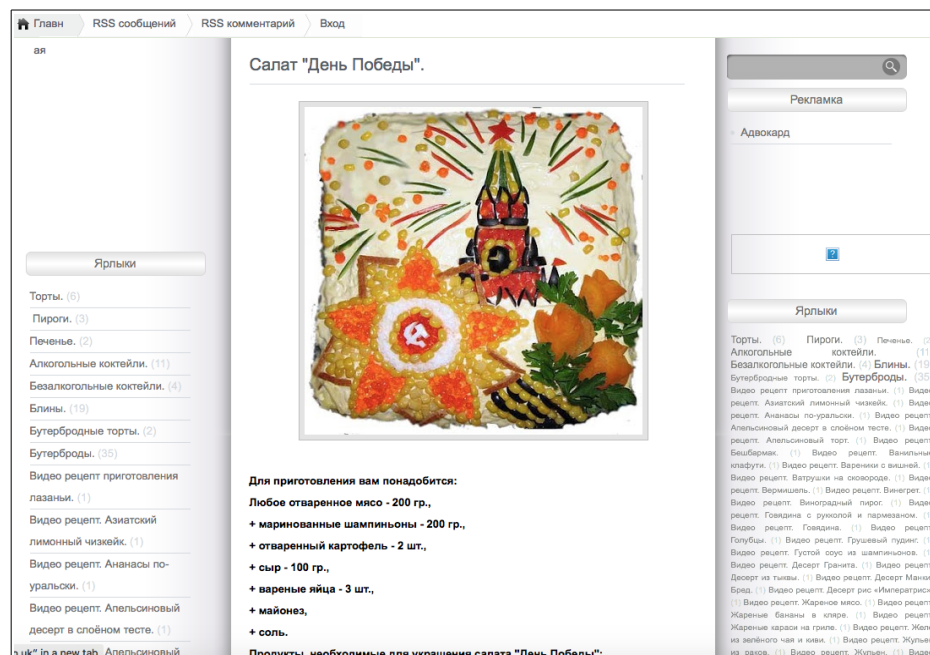
Source: <http://foto-recepti.ru/forum/chto-prigotovit-lubimomu-fevralya-t390.html>, 22 February 2012 (28.03.2017)

Image 7. Victory Day



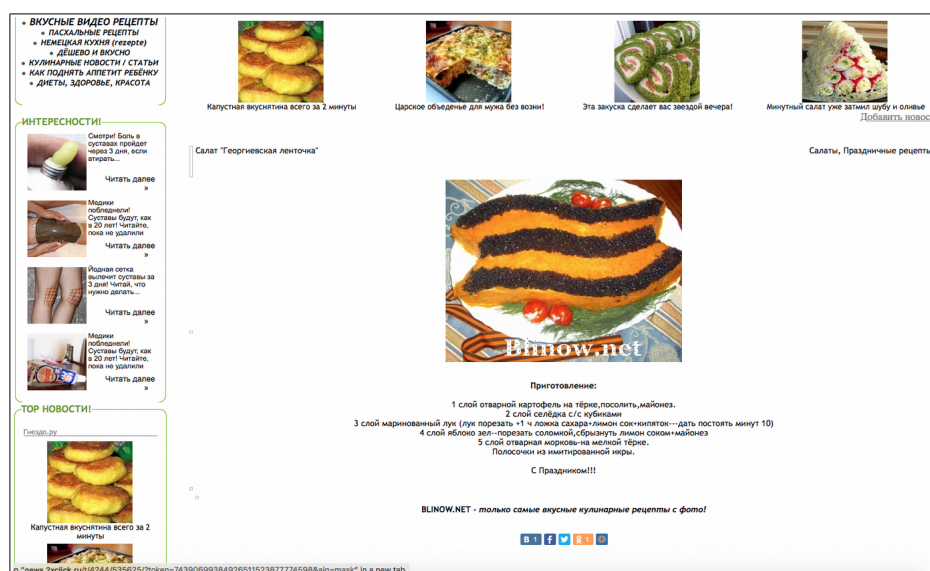
Source: <http://foto-recepti.ru/forum/chto-prigotovit-lubimomu-fevralya-t390.html>, 22 February 2012 (28.03.2017)

Image 7. Victory Day



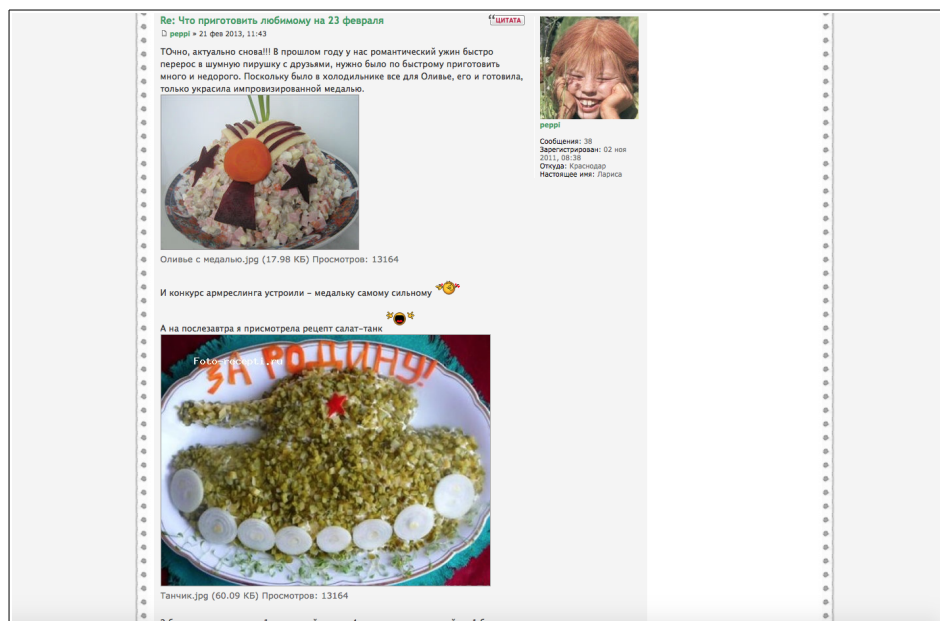
Source: http://vkusnoblog.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/blog-post_7027.html, undated (28.03.2016)

Image 8. The St George Ribbon



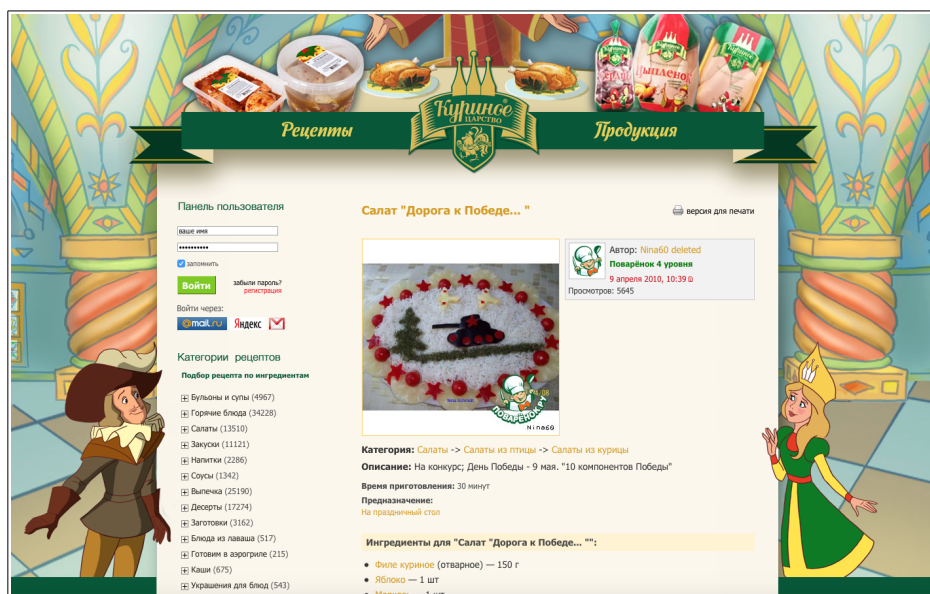
Source: <http://blinow.net/salaty/695-salat-georgievskaya-lentochka.html>, undated (28.03.2017)

Image 9. Olivier with Medal and The Little Tank



Source: <http://foto-recepti.ru/forum/chto-prigotovit-lubimomu-fevralya-t390.html>, 21 February 2013 (09.05.2016)

Image 10. The Road to Victory. The recipe is accompanied with a patriotic poem



Source: <http://www.povarenok.ru/recipes/show/43231/>, 9 April 2010 (28.03.2016)

What motivates someone to make patriotic salads like those above? In part, the answer must be that a thematic salad requiring considerable extra work is a means of demonstrating both the importance of the holiday and the maker's commitment to those who will eat the dish. However, why is this art form much more popular in the Russian-speaking world than anywhere else?⁵ Russia has a long tradition of decorative food, for instance painted Easter eggs, but what is it that gives today's salad-maker the confidence to tackle very serious subjects such as war, death, memory in a form that seems so whimsical? Some answers to these question lie, I suggest, in the spread of aspects of a postmodern relationship to image and ideology (initially a feature of high culture) into popular creativity and taste in contemporary Russia. In short, I will argue that these salads can be seen as a typical manifestation a sort a populist postmodern patriotism, now regnant in Russia, which displays numerous elements of postmodernism proper (the valorisation of kitsch, of multiple authorship, of empty signifiers) and which is further invigorated in part by the mass reproduction capabilities of the internet, but which ultimately contributes not to creative play and a subversive challenge to centrally formulated notions of Russian identity, but rather to a homogenisation of the visual field and a narrowing of possibilities for individual subjectivity.

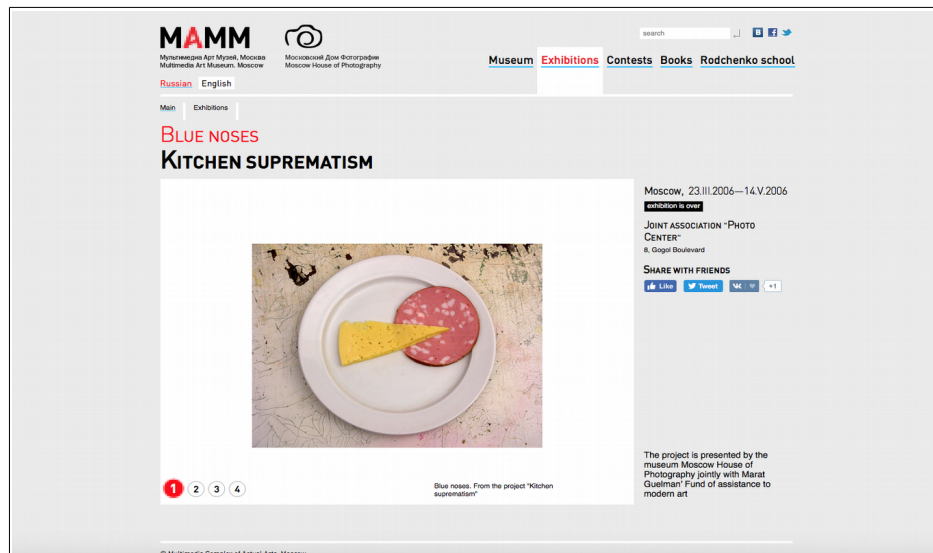
The use of loaded terms such as postmodernism in regard to salad pictures inevitably raises the classic question: 'But is it art?' Maybe not, but I think these edible pictures can profitably considered using approaches taken from both fine and applied art. In his famous essay on kitsch, Clement Greenberg contrasts Repin and Picasso. The latter represents the avant-garde, for whom '[c]ontent is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself' (Greenberg 1961: 6). Repin, on the other hand, enjoys popularity with the masses as an object of kitsch, because 'identifications are self-evident immediately and without any effort on the part of the spectator – that is miraculous. The peasant is also pleased by the wealth of self-evident meanings which he finds in the picture: "it tells a story"' (Greenberg 1961: 14). We can see how this dichotomy maps onto salad decoration culture, in which abstract, non-figurative salads, in which content and form are not distinguished, are considered more sophisticated than salads which attempt to 'tell a story'.

While there are problems with Greenberg's diagnosis, he is surely right that one of the things that define kitsch is a tendency towards an over-abundance of 'story-telling' – the invasion of the narrative or the symbolic, in easily decodable form, into areas in which it is not deemed necessary. Nothing is more kitsch than a doll-shaped toilet roll holder or a Dachsund salt-and-pepper shaker. Greenberg uses this distinction between avant-garde and kitsch primarily as a means of defining the nature of modernist art. It is no surprise, therefore, that later in the century one of the things that marks the difference between modernism and postmodernism is the latter's embrace of kitsch – of the mass-produced, the over-decorated, the consumerist and the banal – and its borrowing of popular culture's enthusiasm for ornament,

⁵ This is not to say that there are no symbolic salads in the European tradition: the Italian Caprese salad (tomato, basil, mozzarella) is sometimes known as 'Tricolore Salad' and interpreted as a representation of the Italian flag. It seems likely, however, that the Caprese predates the red-white-and-green: as the saying goes, history repeats itself, first as salad leaves, then as flags. This notwithstanding, this phenomenon seems to be very rare outside of the former Soviet Union. Regrettably, there is not space here to consider the history of salad arranging in Russia. I am very grateful, however, to Olga Smolyak for informing me that, at least from the 1960s onwards, salad arrangement was encouraged as befitting a good hostess in magazines such as *Krest'ianka* and *Rabotnitsa*. See, for instance, 'Decorating the table' 1976: 31.

for obvious symbolism and over-communication (see Genis 1999: 201-02 for the Russian context of this).

Image 11. A ham and cheese homage to El Lissitzky by the Blue Noses



Source: <http://www.mamm-mdf.ru/en/exhibitions/blue-noses-kitchen-suprematism/>, undated (28.03.2017)

As a consequence of this, food plays a significant role in the history of postmodernism, with Andy Warhol's soup cans or Claes Oldenburg's fast food sculptures being only the start. The consumerist banality of mass-produced food provides a counterpoint to the auratic work of art. A recent Russian iteration of this trend of relevance here is *Kitchen Suprematism* [Kukhonnyi suprematism, 2006], a work by conceptualist art group the Blue Noses, exhibited at the Multimedia Art Museum Moscow in 2006, which consists of a series of photographs in which slices of cheese, bread and salami have been rearranged to make replicas of famous abstract works by the Russian avant-garde, such as El Lissitzky's *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* [Bei belykh krasnym klinom, 1919; see Image 13].⁶ Typically for the Blue Noses, and for postmodernist art in general, it engages with humour, but also raises some serious questions: about the status of the avant-garde in contemporary Russia as an object of mass consumption; about the age-old conflict between spiritual integrity and material sustenance (freedom or bread); and about the transformation of the internationalist avant-garde into a 'brand' for Russia. Both the patriotic salads and Kitchen Suprematism engage with images of Russianness taken from the past and provoke a clash between the incongruous categories of food and art. The difference, however, is that the Blue Noses do this knowingly. In fact, one could say that the main message communicated by Kitchen Suprematism, is little more than the statement 'we know'; we get it, everyone gets it. By contrast, patriotic salad art appears

⁶ The Blue Noses and Andrei Logvin are not the only Russian artists working with representational food: Dagestan-based artist Taus Makhacheva has recently produced a cake in the shape of Russia and cakes in the shape of designer handbags (see Stallard 2016).

entirely naive and sincere: it seems to lack the self-awareness and irony which characterises postmodern art.

However, these salads can still be postmodern without being postmodern art. As befits a postmodernism that belongs to the masses, not the elite, they represent a style more than a sensibility. The most useful analogues for discussing postmodernism in food can be found not in art, but in architecture and fashion; after all, our salads have a utilitarian function – sustenance – as well as a decorative one (cf. McWilliam 2006: 310). Likewise, buildings and clothes also fulfil a basic human need but are also imbued with a wider range of cultural meanings. In their influential work *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour distinguish between two types of buildings: ducks and decorated sheds. In the case of the former, which they characterise as bad, the form of the building follows directly from its function; the design of the building itself becomes a sign of the purpose of the building. Their example is a duck-shaped building which sells ducks. While such a building seems to enter the realm of the kitsch because of the obviousness of its signing, Venturi and his co-authors also categorise as ducks most of the buildings of the high modernist International Style, which Greenberg, and most people in fact, would never call kitsch because of their seeming semiotic restraint and aura of professionalism. However, these buildings are still ‘ducks’ because they are signs of themselves; form follows function. In contrast, in the case of decorated sheds, which the authors prefer, the function of the building is announced not by its form, but by a sign appended to it. As they put it: ‘The duck is the special building that is a symbol; the decorated shed is the conventional shelter that *applies* symbols’ (Venturi et al. 1977: 87). This move towards communication not through form but through ornamentation and signage has been seen as a hallmark of the postmodern style in architecture.

I hope it is obvious that patriotic salad art is an example of the postmodern decorated shed in edible form. The function of the salad (not so much its function as sustenance, but its function as a comestible celebration of a patriotic holiday) is communicated not through its form – the ingredients – but by a sign announcing this – the picture on the top. This can be contrasted with more duck-like expressions of patriotic nostalgia in Russian cuisine, such as the search for the rediscovery of ‘authentic’ Russian cuisine pioneered by chefs such as Maksim Syrnikov and now modernised under the influence of western food localism at restaurants like Moscow’s LavkaLavka.⁷

The postmodern tendency to communicate popular patriotism through signs and ornamentation rather than form is, I argue, typical of other manifestations contemporary patriotism. In fashion, the postmodernism of designers like Franco Moschino in the 1980s expressed itself not only in playfulness, but also in the extensive use of logos, slogans and brands; that is to say, the transformation of clothes into ‘decorated sheds’. While the era of logo obsession is perhaps over in high-end Russian fashion, this postmodern emphasis on obvious signage has lingered in popular patriotic clothing. Any visitor to Russia, or to holiday destinations fre-

⁷ The trend for localism in itself partakes of a different aspect of postmodernism evident in global food culture: resistance to the homogenising effects of modernity in food culture, or at least the performance of this rejection (see Budra 2000: 236). Another definition of modernism in food is offered by Anna Marie Fisker, who compares chef Nikolai Kirk’s food to an archetypal modernist school, Cubism: ‘They broke down the totality into its component parts: lines, surfaces and colours. This is exactly Kirk’s motif in his composition “Hake baked with smoked peppers served with warm lamb’s lettuce (mâche) and macaroni in lemon oil”’ (Fisker 2006: 198).

quented by Russians, will notice the preponderance of clothing with the word 'Russia' printed on it, either in Russian or English. Unlike couture designers like Ulyana Sergeenko, who have recently demonstrated patriotism by engaging with traditional Russian dress, in popular fashion Russianness is manifested in clothes by writing the word 'Russia' in large letters, as can be seen in, for instance, the official collection for the Rio Olympics in 2016 by Bosco.⁸

The case of architecture itself is more complicated: unlike fashion or food, architecture is not a populist form. Nevertheless, it still partakes in 'decorated shed' postmodern patriotism has taken the form of a return to the aesthetics of Stalinism. As Vladimir Paperny has argued, the high Stalinist style is really Venturian postmodernism *avant la lettre*, with its façadism and emphasis on ornament and symbol (1990: 233). In the past twenty years, pastiche decorated sheds have enjoyed some popularity, such as the Triumph Palace apartment building or the Tatlin-meets-Stalin mash-up of the Dom Patriarkh in central Moscow. Stalinist playground VDNKh, where the national pavilions communicate more through ornament than through form, has also been refurbished, rebranded and relaunched. This is a different, more oblique way of communicating patriotism, however, in which the messaging is less blatant than a T-shirt with Vladimir Putin's face on it.

Nevertheless, the revival of Stalinist architecture is an example of one of the dominant features of contemporary Russian society, encouraged by the government, closely related to popular postmodernism and also central to patriotic salad art: nostalgia. As has been widely discussed, in the past decade or so, all areas of popular and official culture in Russia have been ever more preoccupied with the past. Mikhail Iampolskii, among others, has criticised this obsession as a product of people's inability to affect the present; such an obsession also ultimately destroys the present, which becomes only 'a stimulus to remembering the past' (Iampolskii 2007). He argues that contemporary Russian society is no longer oriented towards the future (its 'telos'), as it was both in the Soviet era and in the 1990s, but towards a mythologised point of origin (its 'arkhe'). Moreover, because of the loss of the telos, the past becomes fetishised, emptied of any real meaning; the origin becomes a 'metaphysical fiction':

Paradoxically, the orientation towards the past is accompanied by a total loss of interest in it, directly connected with the loss of telos. One can happily describe this condition as postmodern. The origin replaces the absence of goal, but the absence of goal also makes the origin itself meaningless. The result is a faint interest in the past as an indistinct curiosity. (Iampolskii 2007)

The procedure of memory in patriotic salads clearly matches this description. As the predominance of Soviet symbols and slogans and references to World War Two demonstrate, these salads are oriented towards the past. But this past is itself empty, a curiosity: nothing is communicated about the past, nothing is learned. What the pictures on these salads signify is not the past as an object of memory, but the act of remembering itself.

This emphasis on spectacle over substance calls to mind those commentators who have argued that the exercise of power in Russia today is based on a cynical manipulation of a

⁸ The popularity of 'decorated shed' patriotism in popular fashion has, very recently, been reappropriated by high fashion, with a semi-ironic sensibility, in the work of Gosha Rubchinskiy. The Bosco Olympic collection also engages with famous Russian forms, not labels, by referencing Constructivist design.

postmodern approach to historical narratives, which strips postmodern philosophy of its critical content and uses its emphasis on multiplicity of meaning to manufacture an endless series of Baudrillardian simulacra which project a fictive version of reality in order to hoodwink the public (cf. Lipovetsky 2015, Pomerantsev 2014). Within this play of significations, the past is, as Iampolski suggests, emptied of content and reduced to a series of endlessly flexible names and symbols with little connection to historical realities (cf. Iampolskii 2007; one thinks of contemporary usages of ‘fascist’ and ‘Novorossia’). As befits postmodernism proper, there is also pronounced ludic element: our salads recall children’s cakes and the commemoration of military victory is now often accompanied by children and babies dressed up as soldiers (see, for instance, ‘Children on Victory Day’ 2016).

We can see that patriotic salads share some of the same features of this weaponised postmodernism: they seem to over-communicate their performance of remembering at the same time as emptying the past, their supposed referent, of any meaning. They are decorated sheds with nothing inside. But do I really want to suggest that a gherkin tank made in a provincial kitchen is part of the ideological hardware of the Russian government?

Without wishing to forget the benefits the ruling elite accrues from these practices, it is perhaps profitable, following Sergei Oushakine, to understand the practice of contemporary memory, in an emotional, not political, key and to recognise the possibility of popular authorship and ownership of acts of patriotic display. Oushakine, like Iampolskii, recognises that contemporary commemoration has become ‘timeless’ and that its symbols often have only a notional connection to historical reality; however, he argues that ‘the affective management of history’, the set of practices of memory initiated by the government but performed by the public, actually serves to bind people together in the present: ‘[t]he point of affective management of history is not to match a symbol with its content, possibly forgotten or even unknown. The goal is to link remembering people together, to provide them with social space and symbolic tools that could help to make such linkage tangible’ (Oushakine 2013: 275).

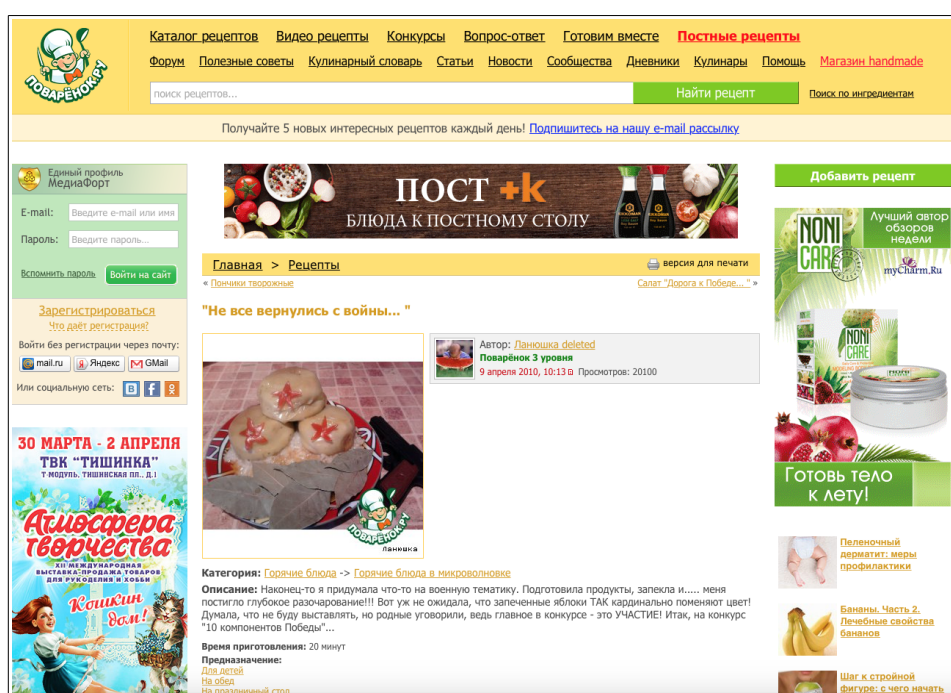
Contemporary forms of commemoration like the St George Ribbon, despite their lack of historical referent, help to produce a personal, emotional connection both between people and to the idea of the past. The ribbon does so, in the first place, because it has a materiality which official history lacks and, secondly, because it is reproduced and widely distributed: its ‘significance was achieved mainly through its mechanical reproduction, dissemination, and exposure, not through its interpretation’ (Oushakine 2013: 291, 288).

A similar function can be detected in patriotic salads: while the symbols that feature in the salad pictures (stars, ribbons, medals) may have (distant) origins in the Kremlin, what is important about them as contemporary vectors of memory is not their interpretation but rather: first, the universality of these symbols; second, their shift into a sphere of materiality and personal connection which is absent from official histories; third, their mechanical reproduction and dissemination over the internet. Inside the home, the patriotic salad is evidently often a very personal object: some salads come with dedications to particular family members, such as ‘Flowers in a Shell’ (see Image 5), dedicated to a grandfather who served in the artillery. Forum discussions often reveal that, particularly for 23 February, the use of military and patriotic themes are a way of paying tribute to a male relative.⁹ The handmade collage-like

⁹ The production of decorative salads is, unsurprisingly, extremely gendered, with women as producers and men as the visual and gustatory addressees of the salads.

construction of the pictorial salads, as well as many of leitmotifs (tanks, medals, stars), recall the postcards that children traditionally make for their parents and other relatives on Defenders of the Fatherland Day and International Women's Day. For both these postcards and their edible counterparts (which are often referred to as 'postcard salads') the national meaning of patriotic symbolism coexists with a more local significance. Furthermore, even once the image of a salad is uploaded to recipe-sharing sites, commentators make scant reference to a national community of memory, instead referring either to their own families (especially on advice forums) or using encouraging language and emoticons to strengthen the sense of a mutually reinforcing community of forum-users.

Image 12. Not Everyone Returned from the War. The user proposes an alternative title in the comments: Mass Grave



Source: <http://www.povarenok.ru/recipes/show/43230/>, 9 April 2010 (28.03.2017)

Moreover, although there are instances of the simple expression of patriotic remembrances when commemoration is considered on a national scale, it is most often as part of discussions of what constitutes an appropriate display of commemoration and allegiance. This is particularly evident in the cases in which these salads are criticised for trivialising the sacrifice of veterans or for misuse of the St George Ribbon. This debate is most marked in the case of the highly controversial salad *Not Everyone Returned from the War*. In this instance, microwaved apples, chicken and mozzarella were used to represent the stacked helmets of soldiers who died at the front. The comments below reveal a heated debate – many comments had to be deleted by moderators – about what is appropriate for Victory Day: should we only commemorate victory joyously, or is grief acceptable? And, what is more, is it not indecent to render this sorrow in salad? User Raiia is appalled: ‘What next “the Ashes of Auschwitz”? You’d be

better off lighting a candle in church. Complete kitsch. And you're getting a kid involved.' This provokes a response from another user, Annychka, which well illustrates the hypothesis that the memory of war in Russia today is about the act, not the object, of remembering: 'So, what, you think that a kid shouldn't know about that?! Nonsense! Everyone has to know history!' (See 'Not Everyone Returned...' 2010).¹⁰ She does not tell us how this particular meal would help anyone know anything about history.

The way in which these recipe forums become sites for the negotiation of the meanings of patriotism and patriotic symbols, as well as the fact that they valorise outsider creativity, could perhaps be seen as evidence that ideology in contemporary Russia is not made at the centre to be consumed by the masses, but is the product of multiple authors. A similar decentring of ideological production has been observed by Julie A. Cassiday and Emily D. Johnson in their work on the Putin cult. They argue that the combination of the consumerist free market and the internet have created a situation in which, in distinction to the Soviet period, the cult of personality around the leader is not 'monolithic and static' but 'inherently polysemantic, highly mobile, and easily individualized' because it gives Russian citizens 'a far greater degree of creative agency than did earlier Soviet leader cults' (Cassiday et al., 2013: 40). The visual symbols of Putinism are, they argue, subject to a postmodern appropriation by ordinary citizens, who can find in them potentially subversive new meanings. In a similar vein, but in the particular context of historical memory, Elena Trubina has argued that the multiple authorship of discourses of memory on blogs has prompted 'the emergence of cosmopolitan memory on the Russian Internet [which] points to the growing disidentification with the state-imposed versions of the past and practices of remembering [and] shows people desire a more inclusive understanding of history' (Trubina 2010: 77).

These researchers are surely right to want to disrupt a binary model of the producers and consumption of ideology in contemporary Russia, particularly online. To borrow a term used both in marketing jargon and in scholarly discussions of 'the sharing economy', contemporary internet users become 'prosumers' of ideology, both producing it and consuming it (cf. Ritzer et al. 2010). In blogs, forums and in social media content of all sorts is uploaded and then copied by different users, potentially infinitely. However, in contrast to the relative optimism of Cassiday, Johnson and Trubina, I would like to use the example of patriotic salad art to argue that the transformation of the contemporary internet user into both a prosumer of memory and of ideology does not necessarily result in a postmodern free play of creativity, but rather in the homogenisation both of the visual landscape of the internet and of the types of subjectivity expressed therein. This happens for two reasons: first, the polarised nature of debates around national identity in Russia (cf. Rutten 2014); second, the way in which the image-sharing capabilities of today's internet promotes plagiaristic self-fashioning rather than individuality.

As many observers have noted, discourse on social media in Russia is marked by a high degree of antagonism between groups with different political, social and cultural affiliations, not least when the past is discussed (see Roesen et al. 2014; Zvereva 2011). In certain spaces on Runet, particularly on social media and on LiveJournal, the rise in instances of conspicuous displays of patriotism in the past few years (the posting of patriotic slogans, the sharing

¹⁰ It is not unlikely that the debate on povarenok.ru only became contentious after this image became a minor *cause célèbre*.

of videos and songs, the trolling of supposed ‘fifth columnists’) has been met with a response from other internet users who seek to distance themselves from pro-war patriots and who criticise patriotic displays not only as morally suspect, but also as examples of bad taste, as kitsch. In so doing, these users seek to exploit the increasingly rigid binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’ to reinforce their identity as members of a community of cultured liberals (cf. Zvereva 2011: 2).

In the case of patriotic salad art, the ground was already prepared for this polarisation, thanks to the existing salad schism in Russian society discussed above. Although my sample size is limited, I would suggest that one can detect some intensification of divisive language in the discourse around images of patriotic salads after the invasion of Crimea. Blogs reusing pictures of patriotic salad in the years after 2010 (the year of the ‘Ten Ingredients of Victory’ competition) feature comments which are hostile but which do not tend to make generalisations about a whole class of people, reserving their judgment for individual salad authors, who are condemned not so much for their patriotism, as their lack of respect for the sacrifices made in war. For instance, a LiveJournal blog, from 2011, says: ‘I would give the organisers [of the competition] a life sentence and definitely a ceremonial public whipping for the participants’ (see ZabavaPutatihna 2011); another says: ‘They’ve lost their conscience :-(’ (littelpolly89 2011); while a third, a Russian-speaking Latvian, argues that this sort of hyperbolic patriotism is typical of all Russia since 1917 (facondespenser 2011). The comment exchange on a 2011 reposting of patriotic salad images on F’ing Mayonnaise features many users bemoaning the state of the country, regretting the rise of ostentatious patriotic display, questioning who could make such things and even calling for their deaths. Nevertheless, the object of this criticism is either the authors of these salads specifically or an imagined category of ‘housewivesies’ [*khoziaushki*], not patriots in general (kittycarma 2011).

After the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, kitsch patriotic food art comes to be connected with support for Russian involvement in the war in Ukraine. In April 2014, influential blogger Rustem Adagamov tweeted a screenshot of ‘Not Everyone Returned from the War’, which by then had been doing the rounds for four years (Adagamov 2014). One retweet describes the picture as coming from the ‘our *niamka* section’; another repeats a common liberal catchphrase bemoaning the state of Russia: ‘Idiocy has got stronger’; a third, from a Kiev-based user, implies that the salad is evidence that the Russian people are brainwashed: ‘A typical recipe from a resident of North Korea’; others directly related the salad to the recent Russian takeover of Crimea, mentioning the famous ‘polite people’ and ironically using the popular slogan ‘Crimea is ours’ in the form of the hashtag ‘#butcrimeaisours (see Adagamov 2014).¹¹

The photograph of ‘Not Everyone Returned from the War’ was tweeted again by news agency Flash Siberia in April 2015. Comments made in response again demonstrated hostility not only towards the person who made the salad, but also a whole class of people allegedly responsible for acts of mindless and tasteless patriotism. ‘They’ve got darkness and emptiness in their heads! How can people have been brought to such idiocy?’ Representative food was also directly identified with jingoistic support for military intervention in Ukraine, by the use of the derisive slang term *vatniki* or *vata* (‘cotton-padded jackets’ or ‘cotton wool’) for its

¹¹ ‘#zatokrymnash’. The word ‘our’ [nash] to indicate Russianness, here used ironically, carries implications of pro-Kremlin patriotism, especially after the pro-Kremlin youth movement Nashi and the popular legend ‘Crimea is ours’ [Krym – nash].

proponents: ‘since the cotton wool scoff cakes with eternal flames on them, you shouldn’t be surprised’ (See Flash Siberia 2015). The grouping together of *niamka* culture and militaristic patriotism in the popular consciousness is evident in the ‘Cotton-wool *niamka*’ section of meme website JoyReactor.

The politicisation of kitsch food can also extend to other issues which supposedly divide ‘patriots’ from ‘liberals’, such as gay rights: under a recipe for a St George Ribbon salad tagged as ‘Cotton-wool *niamka*’, commenter Partenofobiia says of the recipe, ironically: ‘it’s missing the fascists’ tears and gay men’s hearts’, referring to the infamous statement by Dmitry Kiselev, figurehead of the pro-Kremlin media, that gay men’s hearts should be burned (‘St George Ribbon salad’ 2014).

The divisiveness of popular patriotic kitsch, and the importance of rejecting it to prove one’s liberal credentials, is evident in the fact that, although images are shared with humour and irony, this humour is mostly aimed at a perceived other, rather than used as part of a culture-wide self-deprecation. I have found little evidence of the sort of reclamation and ironic celebration of patriotic kitsch by individuals with higher cultural capital that might qualify as camp, with the possible exception of ‘Cotton-wool *niamka*’. Even a blog like F’ing Mayonnaise, which might seem like a celebration of *niamka* – their self-description includes the line ‘We look for and collect mayonnaise pearls’ – is actually prescriptive, even didactic: ‘This community uses counterexamples to propagandise common sense and a sense of proportion when using mayonnaise and other surrogate products’ (‘About the community’ 2012). Although it is not necessarily representative of the feelings of the general population, in online discourse it appears that kitchen kitsch is something that divides, not unites; despite its post-modern trappings patriotic culinary identity is not ‘highly mobile, and easily individualized’, but increasingly entrenched.

Furthermore, the online culture around patriotic salads in Russia shows that the image-sharing capabilities of today’s internet do not necessarily foster diversity and personalisation, but in fact lead to a less varied online environment. Much of the rhetoric around Web 2.0 – which is to say, the internet understood as a participatory platform for users sharing with each other – has emphasised its anti-hegemonic and de-centring potential: in the era of YouTube, people are no longer reliant on centrally produced media but can rather learn from and amuse each other, emancipating their own creativity. In her work on internet memes, Limor Shifman, who wisely counsels against the hyperbole that surrounds emergent digital cultures (2014: 6), acknowledges the possibility for homogeneity inherent in the infinite reproduction capabilities of the user-generated internet, but nevertheless emphasises the creative potentials offered by memes:

In the digital age, however, people do not have to repackage memes: they can spread content as is by forwarding, linking, or copying. Yet a quick look at any Web 2.0 environment reveals that people do choose to create their own versions of Internet memes, and in startling volumes (2013: 20).¹²

¹² Images of patriotic pictorial salads do not exactly meet Shifman’s criteria for being a meme (viz. ‘a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form and/or stance; that were created with awareness of each other; and were circulated, imitated and/or transformed via the Internet by many users’), because the images of the salads were not created with an awareness of a patriotic food meme, but rather with awareness of salad-arranging as a genre (2014: 7-8). Nor do they qualify for Shifman’s definition of ‘virality’, because unlike the viral, which she describes as ‘a single cultural unit (such as a video, photo, or joke) that propagates in many

Shifman's very reasonable argument for the importance of memes fails to recognise that exact reduplication (which, thanks to the algorithmic logic of sites like Facebook, can be accomplished simply by 'liking' something) is much more prevalent than creative repackaging, not least because the "'digitally literate" netizens' she describes (2013:20) are far outnumbered by lurkers, likers and copy-pasters who do not engage in 'remixing' of content (cf. Hargittai et al. 2008). A more realistic position is, I believe, adopted by Paul Frosh in his discussion of crowdsourced image banks, in which he argues that the participatory internet, with its infinite reproduction of images, has not prompted a change in the logics and power dynamics of the scopic regime of the web (Frosh 2013: 140); rather, the aggregating powers of contemporary search capabilities have exposed the way in which Web 2.0 facilitates 'extensive reproduction of [...] repressive inanity [...] making Leviathan observable beneath the routine banality of its millions and millions of images' (Frosh 2013: 145).

We recall the repetition of images both in online 'churnalism' and through social media shares in the case of the Ekaterinburg 'anti-crisis' salad. The image here is not remixed, but reused as a means of gaining clicks or of demonstrating allegiance to a shared group identity. Similarly, in the particular context of historical memory in Eurasia, social media has been shown to facilitate the formation of communities founded on antagonistic identities (Zvereva 2011). In the culture of patriotic salads, there is an instance of genuine imagination: the much derided creativity of the salad makers. But after that initial moment of the creation of 'content', all we see is the multiple, instant reproduction of the same image, not as a means of articulating a unique identity, but of belonging to a pre-existing group defined against a negative other. Even when it is outside of government control, there are strong limiting factors on the potential varieties of creative self-expression in online patriotism.

By way of a conclusion, I would like to suggest a (perhaps speculative) parallel for this model of the interaction of ideology and image. In the frustration of multiplicity, the postmodernist presumption of contemporary patriotic ideology recalls, in a diluted form, the ideological production of the 1930s. Mark Lipovetsky has suggested that the relationship between Russian postmodernism (as a cultural movement) and the visual culture of present-day Russia can be seen as a new iteration of the relationship between the avant-garde and Stalinism famously imputed by Boris Groys: in both instances, an emancipatory worldview created by artists and writers lays the foundation for a culture promoted by a self-serving ruling elite which valorises militarism and nationalism (Lipovetsky 2015). To oversimplify, the avant-garde wanted to break down the barrier between art and life and under Stalin 'the life of society was organized in monolithic artistic forms' (Groys 1992: 9); postmodernists sought to challenge hegemonic notions of a single, unified 'truth' and under Putin the very concept of truth is no longer relevant.

This parallel is complicated by the fact that one of the favourite objects of the nostalgic pick-and-choose postmodernism of the present is the narratives and styles of Stalinism, which manifest themselves not only in the resurrection of leader cults and military parades (which are indeed multi-centred and, in the best postmodern fashion, not without irony) but also in

copies', because, as aggregating tags such as 'Cotton-wool *niamka*' show, photographs acquire some of their popularity from being situated within a wider generic and intertextual context (Shifman 56). Instead, they sit somewhere on the 'dynamic spectrum' between meme and viral that Shifman describes (56). Furthermore, their status as a meme is context-dependent: a patriotic salad on a recipe forum is not part of a meme; in a sarcastic Tweet, it forms part of a 'tasteless patriotism meme'.

the revisiting of the overproduction of figuration and symbolism which typified socialist realism. The 1930s saw the end of a period of abstraction in art and a strict insistence that art must be legible, both narratively and ideologically: the socialist realist painting has to be both of something and *about* something. Our salads – although postmodern in their playfulness, their kitsch and their multiple authorship – recapitulate not only this drive towards obvious symbolism, but also the socialist realist insistence on sincerity. As we have discussed, the symbols that adorn patriotic salads often have no actual ‘real life’ referent. In this, of course, they are even more reminiscent of socialist realism, which, as has often been argued, combined an insistence on the representation of reality with a refusal to do so, replacing naturalism with utopian scenes of a non-existent Soviet Union overflowing with smiling workers and meaningful bits of red cloth.

In a concrete example of the familiar argument that socialist realism encodes not the present, but the future (albeit an illusory, utopian one), Helena Goscilo describes how during the hungry 1930s the art of socialist realism insistently depicted an imagined future of abundant crops and food (Goscilo 2011a). The patriotic salad can be seen as the inverse of this: it encodes not the present, but an illusory, idealised past. What is more, whereas socialist realist paintings, made during a time of famine and death, use art to depict a future of abundant food and leisure, patriotic salads use the present’s relative abundance of food and time to depict a time of death, austerity and virtuous struggle.¹³

The idea that the production of patriotic salads thus fits with idea that current Russian patriotism is a postmodern, crowdsourced re-enactment of socialist realism can be extended to the conditions of the salads’ reproduction and consumption. The similarity here is technological: in their rhetoric, the avant-garde called for the destruction of the distinctions between the consumer and the producer of art and between the artistic object and the object of mass production, making full use of the technological possibilities of modernity – photography, film, industrial machines.¹⁴ This dream, however, foundered in the early 1930s, when socialist realism exerted enormous central control over the visual sphere, partly by ruthlessly policing the boundary between amateur and professional and by limiting the means of the reproduction of art only to the latter. Is the user-generated internet – where not only can anyone create, but also communicate their creation globally and instantly – not then a delayed realisation of the avant-garde dream of the universal, omnipresent artist? And, indeed, at the same time a reali-

¹³ Pictures made of food were not unknown to socialist realism: what better way to suggest the abundance of grain than making pictures out of it? Viktor Margolin discusses the example of a composite picture made of wheat in *USSR Under Construction* in 1939, suggesting that the subordination of individual elements to the whole that the composite picture necessitates is emblematic of the subjugation of the individual in Stalinism, much as I suggested above that Olivier also represents communal identity (see Margolin 2003: 16). One can profitably compare this wheat Stalin to the chocolate portrait of Putin made in 2001, discussed in another article by Goscilo. Not only has the age of sustaining wheat given way to the luxury world of chocolate, but now the portrait of the leader has become a commodity up for sale (see Goscilo 2011b: 31). There is, of course, a wider inversion at work here also: food is of course one of the most traditional objects of art, in the still life, not least as a meditation on the juxtaposition of perishable food and eternal art: *ars longa, vita brevis*. Salad art, by contrast, makes art perishable and temporary.

¹⁴ Compare Boris Arvatov: ‘The main task of the proletariat, as a collectivist class is to make it so that art is creation of forms existing outside of life, but of the forms of life itself. To create a joyful, wonderful life and not “reflect” it, to build, to merge the artist with the producer, to unfold the riches of the human collective in its actual reality, to shape the materials by which people live in their everyday practice – this is a truly great ideal, worthy of the working class’ (1923: 87).

sation of the postmodernists' subsequent dream of multiplicity, of their ambition to dismantle art-world pieties and hierarchies?

Alas not, I think: the triumph of image-sharing, with its multiple replications of the same content, as exemplified by our salads, shows the triumph not of the avant-garde (who might like the food, but not the folksy figuration), nor really of the postmodernists (who might enjoy the kitsch but recoil at the naivety), but of socialist realist principles. People on the internet are not painting new pictures every day, they are hanging more pictures on their wall; they are not creating afresh, but performing idealised versions of themselves and displaying their ideological affiliation by manipulating the reproduced image. Groys has argued that while western art was structured around the Greenbergian distinction between high art and kitsch, socialist realism was based on the binary of Soviet and non-Soviet. Socialist realist art both reflected and produced this distinction by flooding the country with images, mostly in reproduction, filled with symbols of Sovietness: 'it is precisely its saturation with signs of Sovietness which creates the distinction of the Soviet space of life from the non-Soviet: the artistic transformation of life turns out to mean filling the space of life with objects of art' (Groys 2002: 49). For Groys, Soviet reality was constituted by symbols disseminated within art, which was ubiquitous, but which at the same time ceased to be perceived as art: 'the eye of the Soviet person usually did not register art as a specific phenomenon, since it everywhere met one and the same thing. The whole field of their perception becomes filled with tautologous, repetitious, visually indistinct art, made to a set template' (Groys 2002: 50).

This diagnosis of socialist realist art obtains to some extent in regard to the sphere of on-line user-generated patriotism as exemplified by our salads: the question of art or not is made irrelevant, subordinated to questions of national identity; the patriotic image can be repeated infinitely; the image is in itself tautologous, restating the same message again and again. Of course, there are differences: the images may follow templates created at the centre, but they are made and distributed by multiple authors; the reception of the images of online patriotism is much more expressive, and more divided, than was possible or permitted under Stalinism. But the end result is the same: the inundation of the visual field, be it on the kitchen table or the computer desktop, with repetitious symbols.

Food is often used as a metaphor for propaganda: we talk of spoon-feeding, of bread and circuses; Boris Pasternak memorably said that Vladimir Maiakovskii was forced on the Russian people like the potato under Catherine the Great.

This analogy is perhaps misleading: while governments do have some control over what we eat, breakfasts, lunches and dinners are not made in government offices, but rather produced and consumed every day in private. Food is always already in a state of multiple authorship and of evanescence. In this way, it is primed for postmodernism. And yet, whether in the form of the fast-food chain or the *Book of Tasty and Nutritious Food*, this multiplicity has come under the sway of centralising, homogenising impulses. The recipes approved by the Soviet system found their way into every home and canteen. But, like the images of socialist realism, these recipes projected an unachieved, unachievable ideal – who knows what

relation they had to the food people actually ate? As Kushkova shows, every family had their own Olivier.

In the era of online recipe-sharing people can do more than just ignore or tweak the recipe: they can and do create their own original dishes and share them with everyone. Kitchen shall speak peace unto kitchen. But this does not necessarily lead to diversity and creativity: a single recipe can be (and often is) cut and pasted, repeated with a few clicks. What's more, strong cultural and societal pressures remain in place that determine the way people write, read and make these recipes.

This is, as you have guessed, a metaphor for patriotic ideology. In contemporary Russia there is no big book of recipes any more – the imagery and language of patriotism is not centrally controlled, as it was in the Soviet Union; people are formulating, disseminating and debating their own takes on memory and national identity. But does this really lead to creativity and freedom? It doesn't matter if you wrote your own recipe if, ultimately, you are still swallowing the same thing.

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