

Nastya Ryabova is a Moscow based artist, teacher, researcher, and author of critical essays on contemporary art and architecture. She is a founder and builder of unplanned Star Road (*zvezdnyprospekt.com*), the initiator and editor of the brochure about city and political math Problem Book, and author and keeper of the [artistsprivatecollections.org](http://artistsprivatecollections.org) archive. She curated the exhibition False Calculations Presidium (*flscltlnsprsdm.cc*), was one of the creators of e-shop [megazine.biz](http://megazine.biz), and one of the founders of the Night Movement. She is also a participant of the exhibition action >10 (*overten.net*), and a co-author of an art manual, Introduction into profession-XXI century. The topics of her practice can be summarised by the following keywords: urban morphogenesis, aesthetic shaping, social action, unphysical material, virtual structure, information and data.

**q&y&n  
with Nastya  
Ryabova  
by Vera  
Kavaleuskaya**

For our conversation, I asked Nastya to choose an unrealised project of hers, which I then tried to reveal by asking very concrete questions that could be answered only with **Yes**, **No**, or **Yes & no**. Our talk lasted four hours in total and was divided into 5 sessions, with pauses in between sessions lasting from fifteen minutes to ten hours. Sometimes we switched to Russian, hence some of the parts of this dialogue are given in the translation.

I'll ask you questions about an artwork you keep in mind, and you should answer "yes", "no", or "yes & no."  
**Yes**

Let's start?  
**Yes**

Is your artwork an object?  
**No**

Does it involve objects?  
**No**

Is it a situation?  
**Yes**

Is it a performance?  
**No**

Does it involve participants?  
**Yes**

Are any of those participants non-human?  
**Yes & no**

Does time of day matter for your artwork?  
**No**

Is it longer than 1 hour?  
**Yes**

Is it longer than 1 day?  
**Yes**

Is it limited in time?  
**No**

Is it an archive?  
**No**

Does it involve an archive?  
**Yes**

Does your artwork exist in digital space?  
**Yes & no**

Does your artwork exist in digital space partly?  
**Yes**

Does it require any particular skills from the participants?  
**No**

Can anyone participate?  
**Yes & no**

Do you choose the participants yourself?  
**Yes & no**

Is the number of participants limited?  
**No**

Is it necessary to get an invitation to participate?  
**Yes & no**

It exists in both in digital space and physical reality?  
**Yes**

Is physical space a site of encounter?  
**Yes**

Is your project about labour?  
**No**

Is it about commonality?  
**Yes**

Does it involve crowdsourcing?  
**Yes & no**

Do participants share or exchange information?  
**Yes & no**

Do they share something within your project?  
**Yes**

Do they share time?  
**No, only indirectly**

Do they share friends?  
*In some case yes, but not only*

Do they share any resources?  
**Yes**

Do they share food?  
**Yes & no, not only**

Do they share flats?  
**Yes & no**

Do they share beds?  
**Yes & no**

Do they share living facilities?  
**Yes & no**

Do they share living conditions?  
**Yes & no**

Do they share any immaterial phenomena?  
**Yes & no**

Do you work with the topic of existence? In a broad sense?  
*In the end – yes*

Do you work with the topic of social relations?  
*Yes, but not only*

Do you work with the topic of friendship?  
**No**

Do you work with love?  
*Not exactly*

Do you reflect on contemporary communism?  
**Yes & no, partly yes, I can say yes. I think mostly yes than no**

Does the digital platform exist to announce the project and make it available to public?  
**Yes**

Is physical space a space for the exchange?  
**Yes**

Is there any other purpose of a physical space other than to function as a space for the exchange?  
*It's quite difficult to answer, I think yes & no*

Do I have to continue asking about physical space?  
**Yes & no**

Does the exchange happen only in physical space?  
**No**

Do participants share any knowledge in your project?  
*Could be, but not only, yes & no*

Is money involved?  
**Yes & no, could be involved**

Does one have to pay for anything in the project?  
**Yes & no, it depends**

...but it's not necessary?  
*In some cases it's not; but in some cases it is the only way to participate*

Does it involve any illegal or criminal activities?  
*I would say no, I think no; it is not a target*

Do participants evaluate each other?  
**Yes & no**

Are there any cases when evaluation occurs?  
**Yes**

Do participants have to evaluate those with whom they shared something?  
**No**

Do participants evaluate the shared facility?  
**Yes**

Is it a political critique?  
**Yes**

Is it a reflection upon contemporary living conditions?  
**Yes**

Is it an attempt to construct a utopia?  
**Yes**

Does it examine how one acts within the situation of an exchange?  
**Yes**

Does it examine the act of exchange itself?  
**Yes**

Does it reflect upon a sharing economy?  
**No. Honestly, probably it does, but I don't want to make a stress upon it**

Is it a critique towards neoliberalism?  
*In general yes*

Does the title of the project consist of one word?  
**No**

Two words?  
**Yes**

Is your title a quote?  
*I think yes, because it's not my creation*

Is it a quote from a song?  
**No**

Is it a meme or any other folklore?  
**No**

Is it an idiom?  
**Yes**

Is it a proverb or a saying?  
**No**

An adage?  
**No**

Do you think it comes from the Soviet times?  
**No**

Earlier?  
**Yes**

Is the first word a noun?  
**No**

Is it a verb?  
**No**

Is it an adjective?  
**Yes**

Is the second word a noun?  
**Yes**

Is it something like a "cunning owl?"  
**No**

Is there a protagonist in your title?  
**Yes & no**

So there's no owl?  
*As a human or an object, no*

Is this noun abstract?  
**No, it's very concrete**

Is it an animate noun?  
**No**

Inanimate?  
**Yes**

Gender Neutral?  
**No**

Masculine?  
**Yes**

Do we talk about the title  
in Russian or in English?  
*Its structure is almost the same*

Is the noun plural?  
**No**

Is the noun singular?  
**Yes**

Does the adjective criticise  
the noun?  
**No**

Is it a common noun?  
**No**

A proper noun?  
**No, but altogether it is**

Is the adjective qualitative?  
**Yes**

Does this word combination  
form a proper name?  
**Yes**

Is it "Flea Market?"  
**No**

Does your artwork have  
any components we haven't  
mentioned yet?  
**Yes**

Do participants give something  
away that composes individuality?  
**Yes**

Do participants give away  
their individuality?  
**No**

Does "share" in this case mean  
a temporary exchange?  
**No, it's forever**

Does "share" in this case mean  
the use of the same object  
simultaneously by an owner  
and a participant?  
**No**

So one shares something  
by giving it away forever?  
**Yes**

Do they share every aspect of their  
life, from careers and friendships  
to homes and clothes?  
*Mostly things. It means **yes & no***

Does the exchange happen  
within the pair?  
**No, it is much more complicated.**  
*But in general yes*

Are there any prerequisites  
for the participation?  
**Yes, a lot**

Does one have to be invited  
in order to participate?  
*It can be so, **yes***

Does one have to be evaluated  
in order to participate?  
**No**

Is it necessary to have gadgets with  
access to internet in order  
to participate?  
**Yes**

Is it necessary to own something  
else particular in physical space  
in order to participate?  
**Yes**

Do you work with a gift?  
**No**

And not even the notion of gift?  
*It may seem so, but it's not a gift*

Does one have to deserve anything?  
**Yes. There's one tricky unpre-  
dictable aspect, but in general, **yes****

Do participants know they have  
to give away something?  
**Yes**

Do they choose what to give  
away themselves?  
**Yes**

Are those who receive objects put in  
a situation in which they can choose  
an object and cannot choose it at  
the same time?  
**Yes**

Do participants choose  
a multitude of objects from  
which they get something?  
**Yes**

Does the algorithm decide what  
would a participant get?  
*On some level **yes**, on some level  
**no**, but to expand the idea I have to  
answer "**Yes**"*

Does the algorithm choose  
those who make decisions?  
**No**

So the algorithm doesn't distribute  
objects?  
*It doesn't*

Is the algorithm AI?  
**No**

Does it analyse any personal  
traits of participants?  
**No**

Initial cost of an object?  
**No**

The amount of those who want  
to possess an object?  
**Yes, but it is inverted**

The less amount of people want  
an object the higher rating it gets?  
**No**

Is it appropriate to mention rating  
in regards to those objects?  
**No**

Does a hierarchy between  
objects exist?  
*Let me say "**No**"*

Do you address alienation  
in your project?  
**No, but in some sense **yes**,**  
*so it's both **yes & no***

Does it rethink the notion  
of privacy?  
**Yes**

Does it rethink the notion  
of personal boundaries?  
**Yes**

Do you work with awkwardness and  
embarrassment in this case?  
*Could be, but **no***

Do you work with carnivals  
or any other kind of festivity?  
*In some cases **yes**, and I like this  
interpretation*

Does participation require full  
dedication and self-denial?  
**Yes & no. In some sense **yes**,**  
*but a person is not equal to the object  
they give away*

Does your project involve  
destruction of any material objects?  
**No, the opposite**

Do you mean that there's something to be built within this project?  
**Yes**

Is there something to be built on the basis of objects which are given away?  
**Yes, you are getting closer and closer**

Does it involve any kind of risk?  
*In some cases yes, quite particular risk, which is not anything like physical injury*

Is it some kind of economic risk?  
**Yes**

Does one have to pay for the right to participate?  
**Yes & no, it could be "Yes"; but usually it's a "No"; there's an option when one could pay**

Does one have to buy anything in order to participate?  
*In most of the cases no, it's not a prerequisite for the participation; but it can emerge as a necessity in certain situations*

Does this project deal with the public space?  
**Yes**

Do participants construct new public spaces?  
**Yes, kind of**

Does the project add something to public spaces?  
**Yes**

Does it have to work with already existing public spaces?  
**Yes & no**

Do you mean that the public space can be created during the project?  
*Somehow, yes*

Do you try to test an alternative economic system?  
**Yes**

Let's move back to the title. Does an adjective in your title describe colour?  
**No**

Size?  
**No**

Material?  
**No**

Does it have any temporal dimension?  
*Close to it, but it's not a characteristic of time*

Does it have to do anything with speed?  
**No**

Anything like "everlasting", "deadly"?  
**No**

Does the adjective describe something immanent only to immaterial objects?  
**No**

Does it denote any tactile quality?  
**No**

Are you bored?  
**No**

Does it denote age?  
*It is about age, but it is not applied to a human; though you can say that about human somehow*

Can it denote an origin from some certain age?  
*Also yes*

Is it "Prehistoric"?  
**No, quite the opposite**

Associated with the future?  
**No**

Well, associated with the present then. Contemporaneity?  
*Close*

Modernity?  
**No**

Something similar to contemporaneity but not exactly?  
*Something inherent to it*

Does it deal with the speed of modernity?  
**No, it's neutral**

Does it describe contemporaneity?  
**Yes**

Neutrality?  
**No**

Positively?  
**Yes & no**

"Relevant?"  
*Very close*

"Urgent?"  
*Very close*

"Critical?"  
**No**

Does this word have two syllables?  
**No**

"New?"  
**Yes!**

Novy Urengoy!  
*Actually it's quite close*

New York?  
*Something like that*

Is it a toponym?  
*It is!*

Does it label any existing place?  
**Yes & no**

Babylon?  
**No**

Jerusalem?  
**No**

Does it label a place which existed physically?  
**Yes**

Is this place destroyed now?  
**No**

Did this place change its name?  
**Yes**

Is this place in Russia?  
*Both yes & no, it's more likely a description of a place*

"Eden?"  
**No, but close**

Is it connected with some kind of utopia?  
*I don't know historical examples, so probably no*

Can this place belong to different geographical locations?  
**Yes, one could say that about different locations. Now it's more complicated**

Does it have to do anything with the community?  
**No**

Any mythology?  
**No, I don't think so**

Does this notion exist only in Russian?  
**Yes**

Was this notion invented in Russian?  
**No**

“New World?”  
*Very close, but no*

“New Land?”  
*Close*

“New Horizon?”  
*Very close, but no*

“New Landmark?”  
**No**

“New Order?”  
*Very close, it was one of the possible titles. The project is about order, but it's not the most important aspect of it*

Is this term connected with the Western culture?  
*Closer to it, yes*

With colonialism?  
**Yes**

“Newfound Land?”  
*Very close*

“New Continent?”  
*Well, yes! I guess you unriddled about 55% of the project for now.*

Is your project connected to the construction of a new world?  
**No, only quite generally**

...with some certain fragment of it?  
*If we talk about economics – yes, if we talk about the space – it's not about the world after all*

Does the title have to do anything with New Zealand?  
**No**

With a hotel in Moscow?  
**No**

With conspiracy theories?  
**No**

So, you are sure that this term is used somehow now?  
**Yes**

Is it used ironically?  
**Yes, but maybe as a metaphor**

Are the participants colonisers?  
**No**

Are rules the same for every project participant?  
**Yes, initially everyone is equal**

Do rules change over the course of the project?  
*Depending on how a participant reacts, the rules may change*

Does each participant know about the existence of the other participants?  
**Yes, the project is an open resource**

Does the anonymity of participants play any role in this project?  
**No, participants have to know each other in order to share objects**

But is there any kind of anonymity at all?  
*In the end – yes, some sort of selflessness*

Do all participants have to spend the same amount of time in your project?  
**No**

Is there any situation in which any damage done would need to be reimbursed?  
**No**

Do participants need to do something to receive an object?  
**No, on the contrary**

So to get rid of an object is the aim of this project?  
**Yes!**

Is this the main plot twist you mentioned earlier?  
**Yes, it is one of the most important details**

Is disposal related to the transformation of an object?  
**Yes, but all transformations are applied to all of the objects**

Does an object change its meaning?  
**Yes**

Does this transformation happen in public sphere?  
**Yes**

Is it somehow connected to the transformation of public sphere with those objects?  
*Not really, yes & no*

Is it a collective transformation?  
**Yes**

Simultaneous?  
*Not synchronous but gradual*

Is the map of public spaces provided in the project?  
**Yes & no**

The list of objects?  
**Yes**

The list of participants?  
**Yes**

Is there any final outcome for this project?  
**No**

Does perpetual movement lie at the core of this project?  
**Yes**

Should the project become a self-reproducing structure?  
**Yes**

Is there any “general plan,” in which participants are responsible for the execution of particular fragments?  
*I can say yes*

Are those fragments distributed randomly?  
**No, they are distributed following the algorithm. There's particular logic inherent to the project which organizes everything**

Is this project based on the disposal of some objects in favour of self-organized community, and the transformation of those objects in public space?  
**Yes**

Is it a collective transformation?  
**Yes**

Only individual transformation?  
**Yes & no**

Are objects used collectively?  
**Yes & no**

Only individually?  
**Yes & no**

Only in public space?  
**No**

Is it important to specify what kind of objects they are?  
**Yes**

Is receiving an object a reward itself?  
**No & yes**

Is there any particular sequence of activities which leads to getting a specific object?  
**Yes**

So a participant can choose a strategy depending on which object they want to get?  
**Yes**

How many parameters form the algorithm? More than five?  
**No**

Five?  
**Yes**

Do I understand correctly that the most important thing is to guess the algorithm?

*In details – no, but it has one particular nuance which you haven't guessed yet. As soon as you understand it, you understand the project*

Do I have to find the condition for getting rid of the objects?  
**Yes**

Does a participant, who gives away objects, have to receive something back?  
**No**

Do participants leave objects in the public space?  
**Yes, and this is an important point. Mostly – on the internet**

Oh, so by public space you also mean the internet?  
**Yes**

Can those, who are in the public space but don't give away anything, be considered participants as well?  
*There are actors except those who give away, so yes*

Do those, who receive objects, know that they participate in the project?  
**Yes, of course. There's no mystery in it**

Is this project a provocation?  
*To some degree yes*

Is there any dichotomy that describes the objects which is crucial for understanding the algorithmic principles?  
*I think yes*

Is it "useful–useless?"  
*Very close*

"Utilized–out of use?"  
**No**

"Decorative–utilitarian?"  
**No**

"Convenient–inconvenient?"  
*Partly yes, but no. Generally, these are qualities relative to the dichotomy I have in mind, but there's one more particular*

"Helpful–harmful?"  
**No**

Does it have any judgemental undertone?  
**No, it's more neutral**

"Applicable?"  
*I would say yes if another word wouldn't exist*

"Suitable?"  
**No**

"Utilizable?"  
**No**

"Practical?"  
**No**

"Handy?"  
**No**

"Needed–needless?"  
**Yes**

Does a person receive an object they need least of all?  
*For the first time – yes, but there's a chance to get what you need*

Is there anything to be done to get an object needed?  
**Yes, although it's not an extra activity but an activity within this situation of exchange. It's anyhow a utopian exchange, so there is a space for some unconventional pragmatism**

Does one have to accept a present in order not to get it?  
*To accept is not enough*

Do participants always give away something they don't need?  
**Yes**

Is it always necessary to give away several objects?  
**Yes**

Is there a minimum amount of objects in a bunch which is to be given away?  
**Yes**

Three?  
**Yes**

Is there any common quality that those objects share, except that they are not in use?  
**Yes, and it's one of the aesthetic undertones of my project**

There are several categories of objects which one may give away, but do all of the objects have to belong to the same category?  
**Yes**

Does one who receive objects assign the category?  
**No, but it would be great**

Does one who gives away objects assign the category?  
**Yes. This person always has to find a characteristic that is shared between all objects**

Can this characteristic be anything?  
**Yes**

Does one have to invent how to combine objects in order to receive them?  
**No**

Does one have to invent a new purpose for the objects?  
**No**

Is there any open list of objects online?  
**Yes**

Are objects always given away all together?  
**Yes**

Does a participant announce publicly what type of object they need?  
**Yes, but the role of a giver is not to fulfil the request of a desire, but to get rid of needless objects**

There are two types of participants, givers and takers?  
**Yes**

So is the task for a giver to get rid of the maximum amount of objects by exploiting the will of someone else to get only one of those things?  
**Yes**

And are all objects combined by some random principle they share?  
**Yes**

Can it be anything?  
**Yes, literally anything, from colour to brand**

Can a taker throw away the received objects?  
**Yes, but under certain conditions**



There's something crucial I don't understand, right?

**Yes**

I'm confused, give me a tip.

*What can be the most difficult aspect in receiving needless objects?*

To pick them up?..

**Yes**

Does your title "New Continent" refer to the continent of garbage?

**Yes**

So is this project about ecology?

**Yes**

Is the idea something like this: a giver wants to get rid of some objects, so in order to do that they group them according to some principle, and it's impossible to refuse getting all of them if a taker wants to get only one of them?

**Yes, this is the most important principle**

Is there an option which would help a taker not get needless objects?

**Yes & no**

So there are several options which would help a taker not get needless objects?

**Yes**

Should a taker bring those objects to some certain place?

**No. The rules are set in order to keep this system working**

Should those objects be foisted upon other participants?

**Yes, and it is one of the several options**

Does a taker know about the whole bunch they are picking up?

**Yes**

Do they see that if they need to pick up shoes they have to pick up a refrigerator and a sofa as well?

**Yes**

Are all of the rules designed in order to maintain the system, so that the circulation of objects lies in its basis?

**Yes. It is also important to regroup objects**

...to regroup in order to get rid of them?

**Yes**

So one can add needless objects to already existing groups if they match this shared characteristic?

**Yes**

Does regrouping objects form this New Continent?

**Yes. It becomes a waste deposit**

Does one need to buy an object in order to get rid of it?

**No, because I employ the logic which is alternative to the logic of conventional pragmatic exchange**

Does one need to donate money for the platform maintenance in order to get rid of needless objects?

**Yes, it is one of the options if one doesn't want to pick up the whole pile**

Are there any other rules?

**Yes, and I would add more later, because I cannot predict every situation while the platform is not yet in use**

Is there an option to get rid of extra stuff by involving new participants?

**Yes**

So if you refer a friend, does it help you to not to pick up needless objects?

**Yes**

There's another principle?

**Yes**

Is it related to the evaluation process?

**Yes & no, more like no. This rule is quite traditional, almost like Couchsurfing and such**

Does one have to make his or her own set of objects in this case?

**Yes**

Does one have to exchange this pile with the person from whom they want to get something?

**No**

Does one have to list this pile on the platform?

**Yes**

Is there anything else I need to guess?

**Yes, but we discussed the most important principles**

Do I need to continue guessing?

**No. I want to mention an epigraph for the project: "There is no God, but it would appear if everything belongs to one person."**

It seems that the God wouldn't appear if there's an enormous stack of useless things somewhere?

**Yes, exactly**