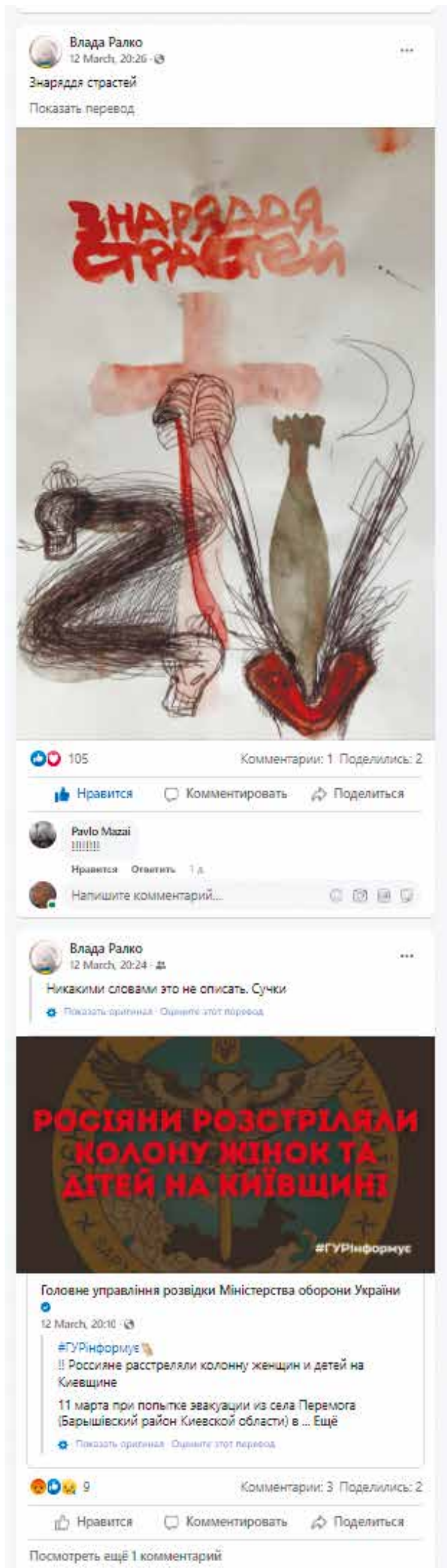


# CANARY ARCHIVES

THE EMERGENCY ISSUE OF CHTO DELAT NEWSPAPER MARCH 2022





Fragment of FB feed by Vlada Ralko

Graphic caption: Weapons of passion  
 News: Russians shot a column of women and children near Kyiv

**This project, devoted to the theme of archives, began a long time ago — in the midst of a wave of Covid, which one exactly we’re no longer sure. And so the projec it was, of course, rescheduled, postponed, like our whole life, put on pause. It was rescheduled several times. And at some point we completely forgot about it.**

What we wanted to talk about at the beginning became somehow completely incomprehensible to pursue in discussion, not because we took on an uninteresting topic, but because it was difficult to concentrate on the significance of the half-forgotten archives of the Plekhanov House and their role in the development of the labor movement. I hope that someday we will be able to return to this important topic, but at that time — amidst the sickness, in the panic of cancellations, facing the inability to plan something, in isolation from the public and watching communities collapse - we realized that we would not be able to do it.

It began to seem to us that during this whole time, the only thing we were able to manage was to record some testimony in social networks, in conversations and correspondence, in zoom sessions, to note down premonitions of the tectonic changes taking place before our eyes. This is how the canary metaphor arose\* – - the ability to anticipate and respond to something hidden from us. To anticipate danger and doom, and give signals, as in the famous Kurt Vonnegut quote.

But while working on the installation and this publication, our canary seems to have gone silent (the sharpest and clearest signal it can send), a fact we have discovered too late; and now we are locked in a shaft filled with poisonous fumes. And in this haze it is difficult to remember where the exit is and where to run.

Is it possible to do something in a situation of shock, paralysis, fear, coming in waves, rendering all exertion meaningless?

In order to talk about archives, it is necessary to believe in archives, memory, and the future. This belief, once completely unconditional and simple, the belief which has always guided us in art, now requires exceptional effort. And this emergency issue, with rewritten texts, new pictures, comments posted on social networks, compiled in between reading the military news bulletins and supporting anti-war activities (arresting friends, calling lawyers, going out to protests, buying food supplies in the Rosa House of Culture in case of supply shortages, departures of comrades) turned out to be our collective therapy, the only way not to go crazy and to believe that this will help others not to go crazy.

I really wanted to include in the publication the graphic war works of Vlada Ralko, an artist from Kyiv - her images give faith that art can show us the horror of war without subjecting us to the journalistic normalization of displays of violence. Vlada refused to publish them, saying that now is not the time and for now they can circulate only in the context of social networks. Instead, she asked to publish a screenshot of a text from FB describing the catastrophe of the blockade of Mariupol. I answered her that reports of these monstrous crimes are now being published by all the leading mass media, while her works are available only to a narrow circle of friends. But now her FB feed\*\* is an honest archive of the history of war, media and art, on a par with Brecht’s Kriegsfibel.

When cannons speak, the Muses are silent - this old rule has always been challenged by both art and thought, which retained the ability to speak, overcoming muteness. We therefore have a chance to remain human, despite the horror of violence and death, physical and symbolic.

We have all become to some extent canaries - poisoned, asleep in suspended animation. Art is a special apparatus, equipped to continue recording traces of life processes as they unfold.

Dmitry Vilensky

P.S. - this text and this publication went to press on the 22nd day of the war; all the editing was done in St. Petersburg. It is no longer possible to print these texts in Russia now, in the situation of new wartime laws, just as it is impossible to send cargo from St. Petersburg to Berlin. The sky is closed for civil aviation flights, but open over Ukraine for the bombing of cities.

This issue contains a collection of views from the anti-war position of Russian artists and critics (limited to Chto Delat collective voices and our students), and we made it as a gesture of unconditional support for the anti-colonial struggle of the Ukrainian people for their independence and dignity.

Notes:

\* The canary in the coal mine warns the miners when the oxygen level falls by ceasing to sing. It is a metaphor that can be seen as a paradigmatic image for the anthropocentric relationship to the world, the broken connection between humans and the planet and the important need for the rare sensory perception of threat indicators in current times.

\* see <https://www.facebook.com/vlada.ralko>

On February 24, I woke up earlier than usual, and somehow didn't wake up completely. I had an early train from Petersburg to Moscow. In a taxi on the way to the station I read the news: Russia had attacked Ukraine. There was a lump in my throat. On the train, video screens broadcast patriotic Soviet films about World War II, about brave young soldiers and their loving girls. We know these films from childhood, we remember from Soviet history lessons how Hitler attacked the USSR, and these soldiers and their girls, our grandparents, defended our homeland from the Nazis. Some sort of ominous repetition, only with everything turned upside down; now it is our army, and not some foreign army, that is invading the territory of another state, just as Hitler once did - in the early morning, without declaring war.

I wanted to pinch myself, rub my eyes. Maybe I still hadn't completely woken up, and this new reality was just the continuation of a dream? This happens with lucid dreams, when in a dream you suddenly realize that you are asleep - as if waking up, but not in reality, rather in some kind of a gap, a limbo between reality and a dream. This limbo has the structure of a labyrinth that stretches out into the depths. The more I wake up in my dream, the deeper I actually fall into sleep; the dreamworld sucks you in like a swamp. A dream within a dream, like an endless dizzying fall, reveals the bottomless depth of the unconscious. I descend into the depths of myself as into a coal mine, where memories of what has not yet been and a premonition of what has already been are compressed, becoming one substance.

On the morning of the 24th, many of us woke up inside a nightmare, as if we all had one shared unconscious. Everyone fell into one terrible dream, any attempt to get out of which leads even deeper into the labyrinth. I live in Petersburg. There is a large screen on the building where I live, on which advertisements are usually broadcast. Now the screen shows a huge semi-swastika - the letter Z, used as a sign of support for the war. Already many buildings are displaying half-swastikas, as are many cars, and the helmets of the National Guard, who grab those who came out with posters «For Peace».

The word «peace» can no longer be spoken, just like the word «war». It is forbidden to call things by their names. Language is subject to the logic of negation, as described by Freud in analyzing his patient's statement that the woman he saw in a dream was not his mother. Negation is the way in which truth makes its way to consciousness through the sanitary cordons of censorship. Not just any truth, but one that we would prefer not to know, because knowing it is unbearable or simply incompatible with a calm, peaceful life. Such is the truth of the war, which has been denied since 2014, when Russian soldiers were supposed to have stumbled accidentally onto the territory of Ukraine.

The war was already going on then, but secret, undeclared. What happened on February 24 was the moment of its revelation, the apocalypse in the biblical sense - the moment when that which is hidden becomes visible, when murderous power can no longer solve its main problem - how to hide the corpses, these material traces of the war they are denying. What was developing latently suddenly exploded in such a blast that cities are turned to ruins. The city of Kharkov, which I once had a chance to see in all its glory, is in ruins. Burnt-black eye sockets of windows. And all the while, they repeat like an incantation: this is not a war, this is not a war. A mass grave is being dug in Mariupol - dead bodies are being stored in the archives of the earth that will preserve our memory.

In a nightmare we descend into the archives of the earth, where civilians and soldiers are buried, becoming matter, becoming part of nature. The earth also archives the living: those hiding from the war in bomb shelters, but also the murderers, who entomb themselves bunkers. Underground serves as a hiding place in times of war, just as retreating into the depths of a dream serves as a hiding place, protecting us from a more traumatic reality. Since the war began, I have been descending into the bomb shelter of my dreams every night, while my neighbors in Ukraine descend into real bomb shelters, hiding from what it is forbidden to call war in Russia. And each morning I awaken within a nightmare, in an irreversible situation: the home that haunts the dreams of the refugee from Mariupol is no more, but the earth remains, and remembers everything.

written on 15.03.2022 (19 days after beginning of the war)

*Oxana Timofeeva is a philosopher from St. Petersburg, member of the artistic collective «Chto Delat», and the author of books Solar Politics (2022), How to Love a Homeland (2020), History of Animals (2018), Introduction to the Erotic Philosophy of Georges Bataille (2009), and other writings.*





# What do canaries in coal mines dream of

## Collective dialogue of the members of collective Chto Delat

*A few days before war has started*

Lately we have become more acutely aware of (co) dependence on events in which we do not seem to be directly involved: we do not get sick alone, our illness is a link in a chain of more complex processes: if a natural anomaly occurs somewhere nearby, it is not only a local disaster but also a manifestation of general destruction at the planetary level; our dreams have come to resemble each other, possibly because we share a common anxiety. Both familiar and new dangers are creating a kind of global archive, and we supplement and shape it with our posts on social networks, research, on-board notes, symptoms, and art works.

What will happen to the growing array of data large and small, how will future generations be able to read and relate to the accumulated knowledge? What is our responsibility to them: not to miss anything and not to forget, or, on the contrary, to imagine alternative scenarios of “the past that did not happen”? It was these thoughts that became the impetus for our collective project, the “Canary Archive.” For centuries, canaries faithfully warned miners of danger, sacrificing themselves in the process. Now that the exploitation of their lives has ceased to be a necessity, we have taken this image as a metaphor for a being/agency/relay not yet known to us, capable of giving signals that we will need to learn to decipher.

**1. Where earlier we perceived the state of anxiety as something transient, lately this feeling has become permanent; we have to learn to live in a state of increasing anxiety. How do you deal with this feeling?**

**Nina Gasteva:** We [Misha Ivanov and I] have been trying to understand how the body works, what is happening with the body, in a situation of anxiety. When you experience anxiety, you become tense, your sphincter tightens, sitting becomes uncomfortable, and you, in the process of contracting, are listening; your breathing changes, and at a certain moment you tell yourself, “No, no, no.” You shake the anxiety off, as it were. Your muscles need to be freed, and this happens differently for everyone. But we are still only in the early stages of research.

**Gluklya:** Drawing helps me, as does writing poetic texts. I try to get focused and meet with people who I deeply love and respect; obviously it's related to the increased need to turn towards tradition, towards something that has put down roots. At the same time, since there is nothing to lose anymore, there is a desire to open up to all kinds of innovations, to embark on whatever adventures and explorations might present themselves.

**Oxana Timofeeva:** For me the reverse is true; lately I have been feeling much less anxious. My job involves multitasking, having to respond to a lot of different requests - participating in public events, writing texts, working with students, meeting people. I am an introvert, and I am able to keep this rhythm only at the cost of tremendous effort. By the beginning of the pandemic, I had managed to burn out so much that I experienced panic-horror at any signal from my smartphone, and did all the work literally with tears in my eyes, overcoming anxiety, fatigue and heaviness in my whole body. In 2020 the pandemic began and with it came quarantining, putting an end to forced socializing. For me it meant I had permission not to go anywhere. Finally I could focus on something important for a change, and I began to recover my strength. The collective experience of the disease as an involuntary strike against the general burnout of souls and bodies driven by the capitalist machine (in our case, the academic, culture-industry machine). Sometimes only illness can force a person to stop working. For example, hands recoil, unwilling to type out the hated texts on the computer any longer; the brain refuses to work, the memory, etc. A pandemic is this great unplanned refusal at the level of all of humanity.

**Nikolay Oleynikov:** It's curious how differently the work process is perceived from the perspective of academic production (through compulsion and routine) and from that of art (through joy, thirst, curiosity that needs to be satisfied and repeated at all costs, similar to the joy of a love affair). That is why the state of anxiety is felt so acutely for the Chto Delat artistic cell - not so much because of the disruption of all our plans, but due to the lost joy in creating spaces for meeting, relationships and mutual exchange of healing extracts - vital fluids. We never felt stability in all the almost twenty years of working together; on the contrary, we plunged headlong into it and never saw our situation in terms of the Protestant logic of forced labor and dull everyday life in exchange for a future eternal life. But with the advent of the crisis, we realized how thin the thread is and how easily this euphoria, possible only in conditions of physical closeness and collectivity, can break. During the first, most unsettling lockdown, when we were forced to practice solitude in an extreme form, I was able, for the first time in a very long period, to do “studio work”, that is, just sit and draw. As Gluklya says, it was both a form of therapy from the anxiety and an attempt to find formal expression for it-- for it, and the heightened sense of loneliness.

**Dmitry Vilensky:** Against the background of the military escalation of the past month, the problems of the pandemic seem less significant than before. For us, artists who did not have a permanent place of work, the pandemic left almost no opportunity to make one's living. I remember when the cancellations of projects began and it became clear that there was very little chance of pulling through. In such situations, a fighting instinct is activated in me. And everything had to be started almost anew, but it seems to me that life in a situation of ongoing catastrophe gave a good hardening. Did you quote Benjamin? Well, here you go, please be so kind as to answer for your Benjamin.

**Alexander Skidan:** We seem to have forgotten the kind of world we grew up in. We were told about nuclear winter in grade school; at political information and military lessons we were shown maps with the location of US and NATO military bases. Mutual Assured Destruction is the official doctrine of nuclear deterrence. I remember that in the second or third grade we were taken to the Military Medical Museum, where mannequins, posters and diagrams clearly showed the stages of a nuclear explosion, the consequences of radiation sickness, the force of destruction depending on distance from the

epicenter, etc. It was a terrible shock for a child's consciousness, but we gradually learned to live with the thought of the possible destruction of the Earth. This thought, and thus both fear and anxiety, was constantly present in the background until perestroika. I think it was ultimately a powerful existential inoculation - to live as if you were immortal, at the same time knowing that everything could end at any moment.

**Artemy Magun:** I agree with Agamben that the dispositive of anxiety, constant panic, and fear of one's neighbor preceded the pandemic. This is a dispositive that grows out of a specific, primarily Protestant, religiosity. We see it constantly advertised on TV and in movies in the leading genre of American cinema, “thrillers.” It's some kind of forced affectation imposed on modern man in order to keep him responsible and lonely. And I also agree with Sasha: it was worse in the Cold War.

**Tsaplya:** [How] do I cope with the sense of anxiety? Perhaps like this: I try to accept my life as it is. I have only this life, there will be no other. Here I am looking out the window: in the garden, it is snowing. There are big snowflakes. Then spring will come and I will have a lot to do in the garden. I make plans, this is a kind of hook that I throw into the future. I know for sure that spring will come, and this keeps me alive. And if anxiety is a constant background to our life, then we must develop ways to deal with it, which consistently work. The change of seasons helps a lot with that.

**2. Anxiety is associated with uncertainty: maybe the pandemic will end, or maybe a new strain of the virus will come. Maybe a war will start, or maybe tensions will continue to escalate with the risk of a military conflict breaking out at any unforeseeable moment. Perhaps we will be able to continue our professional activity as we get older, or perhaps new circumstances (and generations) will exclude us from professional activity. How do we create a situation of certainty? Or is it worthwhile to open ourselves up to the unknown?**

**Gluklya:** To open ourselves up to the unknown is to create a situation of certainty. There is no contradiction here; one thing flows out of the other, and vice versa.

**Oxana Timofeeva:** I have begun to like the situation of uncertainty, since it brings with it a certain openness. I fly somewhere, knowing that I may end up staying not for a day but for a week or a month. It becomes difficult to make plans. I stopped following the calendar, or writing down events, each of which may not take place. An element of risk appears in each action, even the simplest (for example, going to work or to a party); you begin to filter and find it easier to say no to the less important, the optional things. Everything feels as though it could be for the last time, and is therefore much more interesting than before, when life was more routine.

**Alexander Skidan:** To open ourselves up to the unknown sounds inspiring, of course, but it is only possible in conditions where we have a certain minimum of (household, financial) security; otherwise you face a daily struggle for existence, for “rude material things,” that leaves no time or energy for anything else. The pandemic exposed a new, perhaps biopolitical level of inequality: there are privileged layers, able to fully isolate themselves and receive all necessities through delivery services, and there is the vast majority of those who are forced to expose themselves to the risk of infection every day, working in factories, in stores, hospitals, schools, or indeed as those very couriers who ensure the first group's comfortable isolation. For them, opening up to the unknown is not a personal, free choice, but a necessity, difficult to separate from economic coercion.

**Artemy Magun:** I didn't really understand the question, because on the contrary, since everything is closed and you are sitting at home, the certainty increases! Only trips, business trips, and public events are in question. So in my case, I planned last summer very badly, I failed to rent the necessary dacha on time, etc. But you face much more uncertainty in a collision with the Russian state or with Russian business: the bureaucracy deliberately confuses you, and the virus, clearly, is volatile.

**Mikhail Ivanov:** I always look with surprise and delight at our dog when he gets into situations where he knows what to do and does it. When, for example, Nina pours food into his bowl, the dog turns its head to the left, to the right, follows what is happening, wags his tail wags, that is, he has an ebullient life inside, and Nina stops him, saying: sit, lie down, bark. And the dog does all those things, despite the fact that he does not like to follow commands. And then he goes and chomps it down. He does it with great conviction, until he has eaten it all. And when I find myself in a situation in which I am uncomfortable, in which I do not know what to do, I think, what





certainty can I grasp onto within myself? I recently watched a film about Navalny and peered into his face. This is a person who carried certainty in himself and he gave it to many people around him.

**Tsaplya:** I try to worry only in a place where I can change something. And in those places where I can't, I don't worry. But here you always need to clearly weigh: I can vs. I cannot. Because if I can, then I must act. Well, and if I can't, then let go and trust in life.

**Nina Gasteva:** It would be nice to go into the unknown together with gravity. Stop your chaotic antics and jumping around and just lie down and concentrate on the force of gravity in your body.

**3. Many note that we live in a situation where we have less and less access to real events – the “post-truth” information policy, conspiracy theories, expert opinions that constantly contradict each other, the virtualization of communication and presence ... What helps you keep from getting lost in this new world How do you find landmarks or guiding lights for yourself? What signals do you trust? And how do you decipher them?**

**Gluklya:** There is a certain sound in the body-consciousness that helps navigate - intuition. Unfortunately, it is difficult to describe, as these processes resist verbalization. There is a secret that you want to protect, but if possible, you want to explain its edges, since a secret very often causes anxiety; this is a kind of clot, with no transparency or lightness in it.

**Oxana Timofeeva:** Navigating the unknown is a collective affair. I'm looking for my own people, with whom I can cooperate, who can be trusted and relied on. The search for one's own is a bodily-spiritual practice; here rational arguments alone are really not enough, co-tuning and some kind of animal instinct are needed. Virtualization is not for me. Precisely under the influence of quarantine, I began to realize the value of meeting in person, eye contact, hugs, handshakes and touch in general. We meet and discuss what is happening to us, trying together to determine where we are now, why and wherefore.

**Alexander Skidan:** We live in different temporal streams; “objective” calendar time does not correspond to the internal, existential time of memories, dreams, reflections, and desires. It's important to be able to fend off and dispel the “news” time, captured by the political agenda. As for “post-truth”... Let's remember Antonioni's “Blow-Up” with its famous finale - playing tennis with an imaginary ball. At the time, this finale provoked an angry rebuke from Shklovsky: “Get the ball back in the game!” Shklovsky meant a real, actual ball, Meaning with a capital M. But already then, in the '60s, Antonioni apprehended the post-information - suspended – truth regime. In this brave new world, the world of photo, film and other forms of reproduction and media mediation, it's perfectly possible to dispense with meaning (truth, reliable reality); the main thing is to pick up the imaginary ball thrown by others, even if it is the effect of the “optical unconscious,” technical reproducibility – that's not so important. On the one hand, the ground is slipping away from under our feet; on the other hand, the finale leaves us with a strange feeling of lightness and liberation.

**Artemy Magun:** Well, some, like Yoel Regev, suggest divining by coincidences, but I don't really like this method, since it can make you dependent on phantoms (after all, the sign can just as well be a bad “omen”). But, as Oksana says above, illness can often be a sign for us, some kind of bodily symptom or a neurotic, emotional one. In our time, this is a sign that something is going wrong, and du mußt dein Leben ändern.

**Tsaplya:** Common sense-- that's what helps navigate the world. Common sense and my love of detective stories allow me to think that the descriptions of reality offered to me do not always correspond to reality. That they are corrected and improved in favor of the speaker. This happens even against the will of the speaker - few of us can remain objective towards ourselves, and that's nothing compared to when big professionals in the matter of distorting reality get down to business. Therefore, for my part, I have decided to avoid getting caught up in information flows and listening to the cries of other people's canaries. I try to keep in my mind a simple model of the situation that worries me – from looking at it, one can see the dynamic at work. These are, of course, the lessons of Miss Marple, who solves the most sophisticated crimes by drawing on the experience of life in her small village of St. Mary Mead: the motives of the maid who stole the master's brooch may be the same as the motives of the president who starts the war.

**Nina Gasteva:** I trust young people. They are the most powerful rediscoverers. They are still going through processes of growth and maturation, and those are related to powerful cognitive practices of grasping reality. This faith in youth lives in me and sets up guiding lights. But I think that we are all now learning to navigate the new reality, because earlier we got to live in a safe, sweet, comfortable, privileged world, and we do not know how to live during wars, pandemics, or disasters; and people in many countries are constantly living in such a state. And the fear that we have just begun to feel, fear and disbelief that all of this will end, has always been present in their lives.

**4. We increasingly seek to reconsider the anthropocentric picture of the world and find the keys to understanding more complex processes on a planetary and cosmic scale and our co-dependence with them. Is there anything else we can learn from Earth's disappearing archives? How can we decipher the messages from the past that are stored in them? Is it possible to mobilize the labor of nature against the greed of capital?**

**Oxana Timofeeva:** The work of nature is as universal as the work of man. The energy that is released from the combustion of substances extracted from the bowels of the earth can be compared with the labor force of people and animals - it also has the property of running out, and rest is needed to replenish it. In Marxism, we have the concept of the alienation of labor, and, accordingly, the idea that labor can be alienated or unalienated. Alienated labor is work for money aimed at the production of profit, at the growth of capital. Contrary to popular belief, work in the art or academic worlds in a capitalist system is just as alienated as any other – the various kinds of grants and projects for which we need to account keep many of us permanently busy with meaningless nonsense (what David Graber called “bullshit work”). Unalienated labor is that small part that we do out of love, with a pure heart (often we simply lack time or energy for such work). So, the labor of non-human beings, the labor of nature, is also alienated by capital (the bowels of the earth and the lives of animals are appropriated, become commodities), but it can also be free, unalienated. For example, the singing of a bird is free labor. A canary in a cage or in a coal mine falls silent - first freedom dies, then life.

**Alexander Skidan:** Something in me resists talking about labor in relation to nature. At the other end of this chain, exploitation, profit, and capital will certainly appear. Yes, man exploits nature and its resources. But does nature perform labor? Does a river work when it flows? Does the singing bird labor? Is our heart, when it pumps blood, doing work? Perhaps it is the underlying feeling that they are not working, but are doing something else, and I too, when I write, am not working, that gives hope that the utilitarian scheme does not encompass all phenomena, that beyond production and profit is

there something else? And perhaps it is precisely this “something” that allows us to maintain faith in the communist hypothesis, which moves beyond the horizon of the emancipation of labor and goes even further - towards overcoming and “removing” labor as such (as a curse on the species: “By the sweat of your brow you will earn your bread”).

**Artemy Magun:** It's hard to say, but in general, these archives of the earth have always been seen as demonic, cthonic, supernatural forces. We live, warm ourselves, and move by means of them. But what kind of demons they are, or where these forces in themselves are pulling us, has not been thought through. It is nonetheless incorrect to take a position of strict reverence and sacralization towards them. They are demons, after all.

**Dmitry Vilensky:** I, of course, understand the importance of reconsidering the anthropocentric view of the world. On the other hand, the basis for any kind of emancipatory practice has always involved a dream-image of the emancipated world, and humanity or the human acquired meaning in it through subtle and complex interactions with nature and technology. I confess to being skeptical towards speculation about the non-human. Yes, with the proliferation of apocalyptic moods, it becomes fairly easy to imagine such a world. But I don't find inspiration in relationships where the person is excluded.

**Tsaplya:** I don't entirely understand what the archives of the Earth and processes at the cosmic scale are. But as for studying with teachers who depend on us, that seems important to me. For example, when our daughter was born, she taught me a lot. Especially when she was a baby. When she was most dependent and vulnerable, and could not speak. Attuning yourself to such a person is very helpful for training your inner canary. Or our cat. A great teacher! I consider my biggest accomplishment last year to be having figured out why our cat, the best cat in the world, started peeing in our bed. I puzzled over it for a long time, but in the end I figured out what she needed. To do this, I had to put myself in her place, but at the same time give up the idea that a cat thinks like a person. I have to say, this is quite a difficult balancing exercise.

**5. An archive implies the possibility of a continuing history. Actually, archives are the creation of the historical memory of mankind. The collecting of materials that are important for the future. Now the concept of the future, as we knew it before, is in question - a future without people or a future of people transformed into digital platforms, a future of hundreds of thousands of different thought forms without a collective life, without a memory of the past. On what is our belief that archives can be useful to someone based?**

**Gluklya:** On faith in the belief that they will be useful.

**Oxana Timofeeva:** Archives are needed so that, if there is a future, the past can be resurrected in it. For example, it is possible to restore from DNA fragments some form of life archived in the ground or permafrost. It is the same with human history - the archives provide a chance to rehabilitate the past, to maintain what Walter Benjamin called the “tradition of the oppressed,” an alternative view of history that is not written by the victors of today, those with weapons and money, but by those who were unjustly consigned to oblivion. Not all of them even have names.

**Alexander Skidan:** Libraries, museums, and archives are a secularized ersatz of the religion of salvation. Not the immortality of the soul, but the material immortality of texts and images, the resurrection of dead signs in the memory of future generations. Small consolation in the prospect of one's own disappearance. Again, "Blow-Up" comes to mind, or rather, another parable about a ball game. In the 16th century there was this ascetic, Saint Louis de Gonzago. During the plague, he nursed the sick in Rome; he died at the age of twenty-two. According to legend, once in his childhood he was playing ball with his peers. A monk approached him and asked: “What would you do, if you knew that the end of the world was at hand?” To which the boy replied: “I would continue to play ball.”

**Artemy Magun:** I think, first of all, it is necessary to walk back the apocalyptic tone and engage in the study and understanding of reality; by no means is all of this an archive, where does this memorializing, conservative position come from?

**Nina Gasteva:** I don't believe in archives. The amount of information is increasing exponentially and soon the scanning of the past will be carried out using some other technologies, without mentioning names and surnames. Information layers will be read by some sort of tentacles from the array [or massif?] of some iceberg, according to some other criteria.

**Nikolay Oleynikov:** First, the memorializing position in our case has nothing to do with conservative nostalgia. On the contrary, “remembering” for us means to fight, to mourn in a furious dance. Dancing a macabre life-affirming boogie slam on the coffins of loved ones is an unbearably complex kind of art. And second, instead of the term “apocalyptic” I would use “pre-catastrophic.” In anticipation of the impending threat, political memory, the archives of the earth and the ocean, and the archives of humanity signal to us from the future. I am reminded of our experiments with time capsules and messages to the future, shortly after the mass protests in Russia, during the previous Russian colonial expansion in Ukraine in 2013-2015. It seemed to us necessary to send something meaningful into the future, to tell about current events in the first person to a distant comrade, with the belief that it will be useful to him, as it was useful and important for us to read the messages from Komsomol members written in the 1950s and 60s, laid into the foundations of “buildings of communism,” these archives of “golden dreams” about a world without wars, colonialism, or empires, created in a country that collapsed thirty years ago. Now, at the end of February 2022, we are talking on the eve of war.

POSTSCRIPT (4 days after beginning of the war):

Until the last moment, we could not believe that the war would begin, and none of us could imagine the scale of the catastrophe, the destruction, suffering and horrors of this war. We have all been thrown back into the archaic military operations of the twentieth century. And in general, into archaic relations of violence and our own impotence in the face of violence. We may constantly repeat that our life will never be the same, that we have lost almost everything.

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POSTSCRIPT by Alexander Skidan  
04.03.2022 - 8 days after beginning of the war

you remember  
reading Benjamin’s angel of history in 2014

you bullshit

you remember  
watching Benjamin’s angel of history

you bullshit some more

you remember  
picking apart Benjamin’s angel of history by the pixel

you bullshit some more

you remember  
the Pyrénées reading the angel of history in 1940

you bullshit some more

you remember  
he couldn’t fold his wings

you bullshit some more

you remember

the messiah will enter through any narrow gate

you bullshit some more

you remember



I dream about a Ukrainian soldier  
I dream about the soldier's mother  
I dream about a child running behind after his parents and he can't keep up  
I dream of a house hit by a missile and especially the dangling balcony  
I dream of a Russian soldier's mother,  
frozen with a telephone in her hands,  
where a message on WhatsApp informed her of her son's death  
I dream about the mother of a Ukrainian soldier  
who sits sobbing in the basement  
I dream about a woman journalist reporting live on EuroNews,  
standing next to a bombed-out building  
I dream of a female student at the Fine Arts Academy  
who yells Close the sky  
I dream of the fiancé of the young woman yelling Close the sky  
He grabs her by the hand and says  
Stop, you know if NATO gets involved we will immediately all die.  
I dream about a woman pregnant with twins,  
shaking from the cold in the metro  
I dream about a girl  
who has decided to be like Vera Zasulich.  
I dream about fireflies dancing above a tank  
I dream about the shadow  
of the trees on the Andriivskyy Descent  
I dream that in the basement  
you are deafened by an explosion.  
I dream about my facebook friend  
who is crossing the border from Ukraine to Rumania with two dogs  
I dream about  
a seven year old boy caressing his grandmother's hair  
I dream about a crushed sparrow  
I dream about a box of bones  
I dream that Putin  
got down on his knees before the people of Ukraine  
I dream of a Russian general who quietly declares  
that he will not fight  
I dream of a Russian soldier  
being beaten but he is joyful since he knows what's at stake  
I dream of an old woman  
who is crying in a bombed-out hospital  
I dream of a sergeant  
pissing his pants from fear after an attack  
I dream of a little girl who saved a kitten  
and herself is dying from loss of blood  
I dream of embroidery on the shirt of a bride  
who has lost her mind  
I dream of the sky over Kiev

*Gluklya Pershina Yakimanskaya*  
16.03.2022  
20 days since the war has started





# Alexei Penzin | Dreams of the Earth

\*

In his posthumously published book *Michel Foucault. An Archaeology of Modernity*, the outstanding post-Soviet philosopher Valery Podoroga (1946-2020) offered an arresting interpretation of the archive. In Podoroga’s reading, the concept of the archive in Foucault can be better understood through the experience of dreaming. Podoroga notes that Foucault repeatedly thought about oneiric experience since his first published work, an introduction to Ludwig Binswanger’s essay ‘Dream and Existence’ (1954) that exceeded the length of the latter’s original text. The main claim of this early work was its opposition to the psychoanalytical perception of dreaming as a site that produces symptoms, then to be identified and interpreted by the analyst. This perception reduces the oneiric experience to some intelligible or structural contents, and thus erases its immediate sensuous surface of images, assemblages of words, and bizarre juxtapositions.

The young Foucault claimed the use-value of dreams, so to say, against their psychoanalytical exchange value. Indeed, the very surface of the oneiric experience provides, perhaps, the most unique and valuable aspects of our mental life; it is liberated both from the waking subject (together with its precious troubles and desires), and the forces of external reality, such as gravitation and other physical laws. Their suspension creates, sometimes, breath-taking effects that express the core modalities of our existence. In the same way, Foucault’s concept of the archive is based on the presumed transcendental subject’s suspension of controlling and ordering activity. Like in a dream, words, enunciations, images float up from their dark and heavy historical ground to the surface, to reveal their contingent and whimsical becoming. As Podoroga writes,

*Foucault sees each historical epoch through its dreaming, through the inert surfaces of the oneiric experience, when nothing is won and nothing is lost, nobody is a victor and nobody is a loser, when everything is only being born and nothing is born... When it is not possible to establish an origin, a cause, a source, when everything strives towards each other but never merges into the One, that is, when the Event endures. [1]*

Podoroga refers to Foucault’s observation that the function of his archaeology ‘...is not to awaken texts from their present sleep, and, by reciting the marks still legible on their surface, to rediscover the flash of their birth; on the contrary, its function is to follow them through their sleep, or rather to take up the related themes of sleep, oblivion, and lost origin...’. [2] Foucault’s archaeology does not aim at endowing the archive with a kind of spectral life and efficacy in the present. Instead, it enquires into their dormant existence, releasing their materiality and revealing the forces that shaped them.

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Here, one can recall a similar train of thought in Walter Benjamin’s ‘Arcades Project’ (1927-1940): ‘The dream – it is the *earth* in which the find is made that testifies to the primal history of the nineteenth century’. [3] The space of dreaming is the ‘earth’, the ground of the archival as such. Benjamin writes about ‘the collective dream energy’ objectified in the phantasmagoria of commodities and their circulation through the architectural arrangements of the city. [4] He works through an enormous and fragmentary archive of the quotations and excerpts collected for his research project on the transformations of Paris in the nineteenth century deemed to be a paradigm of capitalist modernity.

As Benjamin notes, ‘capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces.’ [5] We could disagree with Benjamin about this claim. The 24/7 dynamics of capitalist production and value metamorphosis was, perhaps, less perceptible in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than it is now. Capitalism can be grasped as an imposition of sleepless and relentless activity on all social forms and relations, rather than being associated with the calmness of dream-filled sleep. [6] The experience of dreaming belongs to a continuity of human history that is much longer than capitalist modernity. Here we can agree with Benjamin that the experience of dreaming had been transformed in modernity, being objectified in the incessant advertisement-filled phantasmagoria of commodity exchange and pop culture.

So, labour sedimented in commodities is resurrected in the dreamy mental life of their consumers. But dreaming also feeds archival existence, according to a little-noticed thread of Benjamin’s thinking in the ‘Arcades Project’. Benjamin’s scattered remarks present the museums as ‘dream houses’. [7] For example, he notes the ‘sleep state, hypnotic, of the dusty figures in the Musée Grévin’ (a museum of wax figures in Paris). [8] Perhaps, the text of ‘Arcades Project’ not only contains some elements for a theory of the dreaming archive

but itself, being loosely arranged into convolutes with collages of quotations and commentaries, is a conscious imitation of it.

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Can we imagine an archive of our present? The digital ‘revolution’ of the last decades produced an enormous mass of data that includes even the ephemeral backups of chats from social media. Everything is recorded and stored. What would the dreams of such an archive be, as imagined by a Foucault or Benjamin of the future? An audio, visual and textual archive of the contemporary would perhaps overwhelm anyone who could try to make sense of it or make it dream: the transcendence of the global social structure in relation to the individual now takes not qualitative, but rather the quantitative, numerical form of ‘big data’.

The current disastrous scale of environmental pollution is echoed in no less toxic immaterial pollution that affects our ‘ecology of mind’ (to use Gregory Bateson’s expression). We are besieged by the virulent and constantly multiplying information sequences that look more like an accumulation of digital waste than an archive. This digital waste is generated by today’s 24/7 capitalist production and its ‘communicative’ or ‘cognitive’ component. The enormous pool of information stored on the internet is made of the dead empty shells of those living interactions and mental operations that previously were productive or reproductive parts of the overall value metamorphosis. At the same time, the current climate emergency is revealing new and previously unheard forms of the archive. As glaciers and permafrost melt, they reveal all the past forms of life caught, encapsulated, and preserved in them. It is as if the archives of the Earth itself had been recently unsealed. This raises a crucial though speculative question: if the glaciers and permafrost are the Earth’s archives, could the Earth have dreams?

Of course, besides a speculative playfulness of this question, from the viewpoint of theoretical rigour, there are many critical distinctions that need to be addressed here. The question would have nothing to do with the New-Age theories that mystify the Earth as some personified divinity, or ‘Gaia’. Another distinction would point out that the dreaming archive is rather a heuristic model of a radical epistemology that does not base itself in an individual dreaming – not to mention the hypothetical dreaming of such a nonhuman entity as the Earth – but sees it only from the viewpoint of analogies with its own procedures that suspend the vigilant rationality of the sleepless subject of capitalism.

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Still, this question allows us to put the current dark and gloomy predicament in a large-scale and, perhaps, slightly more elevating perspective. By delving again in the history of thought, we encounter the following beautiful passage in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*:

*Formerly, history applied to the Earth, but now it has come to a halt: a life which, inwardly fermenting, had Time within its own self; the Earth-spirit which has not yet reached the stage of opposition—the movement and dreaming of one asleep, until it awakes and receives its consciousness in man, and so confronts itself as a stabilized (ruhige) formation. [9]*

In this quote, Hegel indeed is talking about the dreams of the Earth-spirit (Erdegeist), whose terraforming events such as volcanic eruptions and shifts of the tectonic plates he compares to the movements of a sleeper. The Earth-spirit enjoyed her sleep before the emergence of humans, this tendentially sleepless species, a new bearer of *Geist*, its bio-cognitive platform. The Earth, according to Hegel, had a history that led to the formation of continents, plants and animals, but with the emergence of the human species, this history came to an end.

The end of history is commonly understood as a more specific philosophical hypothesis advanced by Alexander Kojève in the 1930s in his reading of Hegel, and then re-functioned by Francis Fukuyama into an ideological legitimization of the triumph of liberal democracy in the 1990s. Whilst the debates on the Left after the collapse of ‘real socialism’ attempted to challenge the hegemonic liberal version of the end of history, now we are confronted with a much more fundamental challenge. This challenge could be even more intense than the worst-case scenario within the dominating capitalist social universe. Its regular crises have devastating consequences, such as the populist, neoconservative, and neo-authoritarian turns of the past decade. In the light of Hegel’s speculative remark that we pointed out, the end of history seems to be a much broader concept than just a peaceful end of human history, as famously emphasized by Kojève. There could be a whole series of the ‘ends of history’, including the one already happened, as the end of the Earth’s formation. However, the history of the Earth may well resume itself as the Earth begins to

respond to the unfolding ecological emergency, by waking up from the peaceful dreams-filled sleep. This process could bring about an enormous event of a ‘de-platforming’ of the human species, together with its capitalist stage of the expansive and destructive metabolism.

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Did humanity betray the dreams of the Earth? As a response to the possibility of the new and unprecedented sequence of the ‘dialectic of nature’, new radical movements emerge. One could call them ‘planetary movements’, with the examples of the Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives Matter and other recent radical movements.[10]

‘Planetary movements’, unlike movements of previous decades opposing neoliberal globalisation, no longer necessarily entail a global or transnational character of a movement and its scale of mobilisation. Rather, the planetary ‘...is not a scale but a stage of politics’. [11] These movements, presenting themselves through the concentrated political performances of their active protagonists on the Earth’s stage, could also necessitate a return to a neo-avant-garde political and cultural model. It might act as an alternative to the endless de-centralised ‘networking’ that absorbs and ossifies the energies of protest by channelling them through the social media and digital platforms.

Moreover, as in Hegel’s passage, aren’t those movements exactly the movements of the dreaming Earth that constitute our future archive?

## Postscript.

Dreams can turn into nightmares. Stephen Dedalus’ famous line from Joyce’s *Ulysses* says: ‘History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake’.

This essay was drafted right before 24 February 2022, when the Russian Army brought on a catastrophe and invaded Ukraine. The devastating war in Ukraine has caused immense shock, sorrow, and indignation among those Russian citizens who opposed this insane war in different ways, just as they opposed the whole neo-imperialist regime that unleashed it, amid the global crisis caused by the pandemic. This catastrophic shock, in a retroactive way, triggers a belated understanding of a past that was not yet fully legible until that moment. The idea of retroactivity flashes out at many places in Marx and Benjamin, and it emerged as a term in the early Freud’s work as *Nachträglichkeit*, that is, ‘afterwardsness’ or ‘deferred action’. Retroactively, even the Kojève’s idea of the end of history as history’s ‘falling asleep’, together with all its enormous violence and bloody struggles, mentioned in the essay and revisited against the new background of the current disaster and war, begins to look not so bad. After all, Kojève himself, at least in the 1930s, considered the very idea of communism as the final appeasement of history’s violent nightmare. Now, one becomes even more acutely aware of what were the background and motivations for such statements and ideas: Joyce wrote *Ulysses* during the First World War, and Kojève invented the end of history in the 1930s, between the two wars. Now, the Earth again dreams of peace.

## Footnotes

- [1] Valery Podoroga, ‘Michel Foucault. An Archaeology of Modernity’, Moscow: Canon +, 2021, p. 82 (the translation from Russian is my own).
- [2] Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 139.
- [3] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999, p. 88. Italics added.
- [4] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 64.
- [5] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 391.
- [6] See my discussion of ‘always-on capitalism’ in Rebecca Carson, Benjamin Halligan, Alexei Penzin, Stefano Pippa (eds.), *Political of the Many. Contemporary Radical Thought and the Crisis of Agency*, London: Bloomsbury, 2021.
- [7] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 407.
- [8] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 838.
- [9] Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. by A.V. Miller, Oxford: OUP, 2004, p. 282.
- [10] Engin Isin, ‘Planetary Movements: Willing, Knowing, Acting’, *Theory in Crisis Seminar*, 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZDJj2nQDwI>
- [11] Ibid.

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# Alexey Sergienko (taste the waste collective)

## Strange navigation out of subterranean existence

**The tradition of using canaries and other “domesticated” animals (such as cats and ponies) to improve the conditions of human labor in the coal industry was initiated in England at the end of the 19th century, when extractive drilling machines plunged deeper and deeper underground. Earth greeted telluric pilgrims not with the generosity of open arms, but with the emission of toxic gases. The more intensive human influence on geohistorical stratification grew, the more dynamic its gas-kinetic reactions became. There is too little humanity underground, and too many secrets seeping through the repressed silence and darkness. Earth’s underground space is an interiorized cosmos.**

“God does not exist outside of matter and cannot be freed from it”; such is the law of materialistic theology, as formulated by Stanislaw Lem. Modern petropoliticians argue that the industrial revolution made possible the return of God, his synthesis from the products of time, from oil. In the processes of decay and decomposition of organic and inorganic beings, matter becomes the accumulation of time, encoded in the substantial archives of the Earth. The extraction of “mineral resources” is an attempt, first and foremost, to free time from the gravity of the Earth, to wrest it from the determining matrix of geomorphism. After all, who is a miner if not Orpheus? and isn’t the entrance to Hades what extractive economics is seeking--, the volcanic crater Avernus, as described by the poet Virgil in the Aeneid. “Avernus,” from the ancient Greek aornos, means “no birds.”

The canary’s organism, sensitive, due to the speed of its metabolic processes, to the content of methane and carbon monoxide in the air, has become a model of the apnoeic politics of language. When the canary stopped singing and fell silent, the miners understood without words that their lives were in danger. Non-local counterpoint of song and breath: what does the silence of a canary mean?

In ethology, the phenomenon of bird songs is explained through the concept of the inherited imprinting of the sound semantics of the environment on the individual’s way of life. In other words, the song of the canary is the sonic capacity of the Earth, the resonance of its surface. The appropriation of the expressive abilities of animal life to a complex system of extra-industrial complexes launched the process of industrialization of the organism, the transformation of the musical bird into a biopolitical signaling system. Under the Earth, the body of a canary becomes the abstract flesh of human death, but also a techno-teratological apparatus that extracts the surplus matter of life - survival - at the cost of maximizing its affective potencies. Songs of the Earth, refrains of vital murmurization, become death fugues, breathtaking in their extractive being-towards-death and ready to burst into undifferentiated darkness in a matter of seconds. The silence of the canary is a deafening expressiveness that connects the matter of a living human body with the chemical matter of a gas, literally embodying life in a non-contact synthesis of its final forms.

Nothing connects the diversity of the living in the way that death does, in the vicinity of which, as we know, “salvation is also found.” As the German philosopher Friedrich Schelling writes in his treatise On the Soul of the World: “The cause that destroys mountains and raises an island from the depths of the sea also excites the breathing chests of animals.” This sense of anticipation points to the “universal continuity of all natural causes and their common environment.”

The canary is a kind of “guardian angel” of the miners. This is not so much a beautiful metaphor, however, as an extreme form of speciesism. The use of animals in scientific experiments or in production is a persistent form of exploitation of residual non-human lives in favor of benefits to fully-privileged human life. In 1987, BBC News reported that the British government proposed to replace animal labor with new, smaller and more accurate detectors (which would be “cheaper in the long run”). Long-awaited liberation? Far from it. The new resolution was met by the miners with anything but gratitude for the government’s concern for the safety of their lives. The only part of the workers’ subterranean existence from which they were not alienated were the still-resonant dreams of the earth, the existential solidarity of human and animal, their mutual substantiation of life for each other, the un-imprinting of hardness in proximity to death. The tendencies of the morphogenesis of oil-coal capital, its Bildungstrieb, have an anti-somatic character, the negation of bodies: the worker, the canary, the Earth—all of them must dissolve in the eruption of life’s surplus materials. But placing the paradigm of wage labor, its interspecies and vital aspects, at the critical focus of our attention, we should notice the demonic union of the miner and the canary against the alienation of their concerted bodies, their strange navigation that goes beyond the relations of production.

The canary of the archaeologist Norman Hanold in the novel *Gradiva* by Jonas Jensen, taking the hero on a transhistorical journey to the ruins of Pompeii: “the impulse [...] arose from an inexpressible feeling in him,” turns out in Freud’s psychoanalytic interpretation to be the key to unlocking the archaeology of the unconscious, which stratifies the present and the past, the hallucinatory and the “ghostly,” the delusional and the dreamlike, the libidinal and the repressed. The canary in the coal mine navigates the return to the rejected knowledge of the Earth, where the depth of the strata is restored in the consciousness of interaction. Hypnotic gnosis, the strato-facts of time; though they conceal themselves in the groundless, the answers are always waiting for us at the surface.

As Kurt Vonnegut once said, “A writer on this planet is like a canary in a coal mine, [...] a hypersensitive cell in a social organism.” The metaphorical nature of this statement is deceptive, but the silence speaks for itself. In fact, it is precisely in this isomorphism of existences that we must find the grounds for reassembling our relationship with the depth and surface of the Earth, both at the level of production and at the level of new forms of communion between person and animal.





Mine-Rescue Worker, Equipped with New  
Oxygen-Making Machine and Canary  
Birds, About to Enter a Mine after  
Explosion



# The Minotaur's Nightmare

Dispatches from the Mineshaft and Other Lullabies

Nikolay Oleynikov

This night began on the day when Putin called the Security Council to take a decision about the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk, until then provinces of the Ukrainian territory.

Alarmed blog entries, endless live streamings, and furiously posting on social media from comrades whose opinion I trust more than my own.

It got dark quickly, my pupils dilated, grains of sand crunching in my eyes, my cornea cracking with rage.

On the elevator door it is written **SRETNO!** (good luck!)<sup>1</sup> on the “down” button.

The miners of the soul sing their goodbye to Tanya, as she leaves them forever:

We are the miners of your heart  
We dig the ore of your soul  
We deliver up on top from your depths  
Your songs, Tanya<sup>2</sup>

**ATTENTION! ENTRY INTO THE ELEVATOR SHAFT IS DANGEROUS TO LIFE!**

The cabin shook and began to slide down with a cautious metal crackle.

We have already worked in mines, bunkers, labyrinths and catacombs.

We are not inexperienced.

LEVEL -1

2014 Nuremberg, nearly 70 years after WWII. We are in a bunker<sup>3</sup>. On the walls we are drawing the story of the minotaur lost underneath the earth, and building a time-capsule out of bricks, reminiscent of Lenin's mausoleum shrunken to the size of a headstone. In the capsule we insert the following short inscription:

Fragile truce between Palestine and Israel.  
War between Ukraine and Russia. German Nazi Past...  
We are underground, where it's usually dark [...]  
[...] underground is a dwelling not exclusively for cadavers, but also spirits, and animals, and monsters, and shadows, but also dead soldiers, and poets, and sisters.  
But who's the one keeping the gate to the seventh hell?  
It's a weird creature, we call him Minotaur. One of that legendary trio called The Soldier, The Woman, and The Beast. Sometimes the trio turns solo and we see Theseus, the warrior, the soldier—alone, headless, naked. Sometimes it's a duo: a soldier and his bride, who happen to be a sister of his enemy.  
Senseless macabre and violent dance strobes the darkness. It is only our collective imagination. Based on reality.

at the same moment Donetsk switches to the Moscow time zone, UTC +3, so as to outpace Kyiv time by one hour in the winter.

at the same moment The New York post-minimalist composer *Julia Wolfe* is working on her oratorio *Anthracite Fields*, an hour-long composition on the living and working conditions of the miners in Pennsylvania, where anthracite, a form of coal, has been extracted since the 19th century.

At the beginning, the *Choir of Trinity Wall Street* recites the names of the miners perished from 1869 to 1916. The number of corpses was so high that Wolfe decided to pick up only Johns with monosyllabic surnames: *John Ace, John Art, John Ash, John Ayers, John Bab, John Backs, John Bail...* the recitative lasts about twenty minutes.

The next chapter, *Breaker Boys*, brings the witnessing of an underaged worker, one of those climbing into the most dangerous and narrow sections of the mine to plant explosives for the further laying of tunnels and shafts. The testimony of the breaker boy is alternated with children's counting rhymes about the king of the mountain; set to a special vibrating metallic sound—a percussionist playing on a bicycle wheel—the spine-chilling flutter of the little boys' sparrow hearts reverberate in my ears. The elevator's winch chain pulsates in the murky air.

Following, the choir sings a fragment of *John L. Lewis'* speech. The head of the United Mine Workers addresses the House Labor subcommittee in the early 1920s:

If we must grind up human flesh and bones  
in the industrial machine that we call modern America,  
then before God I assert  
that those who consume the coal  
and you and I who benefit from that service  
because we live in comfort,  
we owe protection to those men and we owe the security to  
their families if they die.  
I say it, I voice it, I proclaim it  
and I care not who in heaven or hell opposes it.  
That is what I believe.  
That is what I believe, I believe, I believe.

And the miners believe that.

Right after, female voices in the choir sing the reminiscences of an elderly woman from the mining dynasty: *We all had flowers. We all had gardens. Flowers, flowers, flowers, flowers. Roses and lilies and violets and asters and [...] forget-me-not, forget-me-not, forget me, forget me, forget, forget me not.*

Short pause: breath-in—breath-out.

The choir sings staccato: *Bake a cake. Heat your house. Go to the gym. Blast your guitar. Toast a slice. Grind the beans. Listen to your*

*Listen to your favorite song. Mince some meat.*

A long list of trivial actions we take in our everyday life extracting from the Earth. Electric guitars and electric irons, coffee-grinders and meat-grinders. The song continues with just imperatives of the verbs: *Grind, blast, mince!*

Phoebe Snow, the character in the 1900 railways' advertisements, waves her snow-white handkerchief goodbye from a locomotive:

*My gown stays white from morn till night. My gown stays white. On the road to Anthracite.*

On that note, the oratorio ends.

at the same moment

Donetsk and Luhansk named their territories as 'New Russia'.

The cockpit shook, the metallic crackling stopped.

**WATCH OUT, THE DOORS ARE OPENING!**

**REMEMBER, MINER: DESCENDING INTO THE MINE WITHOUT YOUR ESCAPE APPARATUS AND LAMP IS PROHIBITED!**

LEVEL -2

2015 A secret bunker half an hour from Sarajevo was built for Marshal Tito between the 1950s and 70s in case of a nuclear attack. 300 people could hold out in the underground for a couple of months. Now there is no one there, only guards from the Ministry of Defense. And a lonely, doomed middle-aged erotomaniac wandering the dark corridors, furiously and hopelessly jerking off in the engine room, pissing into the washstand in *Jovanka's*<sup>4</sup> private bedroom. Wearing nothing but a ridiculous bull mask made from newspapers and sticks. He claims that he is the lost son of Tito; that in the mountains, he was adopted and raised by a family of three bulls; that one was called Partisan, the other Voltaire, and the third Mother, and that he will soon find a secret passage from the bunker leading directly to the Swiss Alps, and from there to *Cabaret Voltaire*. And then, according to predictions, he will finally be liberated. All will be liberated.<sup>5</sup>

at the same moment

on the Ukrainian territory controlled by the Donetsk Republic, in the Zasyadko mine, 1230 meters down, a methane explosion occurred, killing 33 miners.

2018 On the territory of the former *Labin Miners' Republic* (founded by revolutionary miners in the early spring of 1921 in Istria, lasted for one month) a small catacomb burlesque-museum<sup>6</sup> was built to honor the minotaur; it preserves the few artifacts and suppositions about his origin and fate, as well as archival materials such as a collection of late Yugoslavian erotica, and fragments of songs he sang while wandering naked in the dark:

I'm out of this blues  
Dirty coal black blues  
Out of this blues  
We'll lay off tomorrow<sup>7</sup>

And then, in the voice of *Mark Bernes*<sup>8</sup>:

I wanna know just one bloody thing  
We all want to know  
How's it gonna end<sup>9</sup>

The intrusive membrane-piercing metallic crackling interrupts with a clang, the doors crawl apart:

**IN UNDERGROUND PASSAGES AND THROUGHOUT THE MINE IT IS FORBIDDEN TO SLEEP, DRINK ALCOHOL, OR USE DRUGS AND TOXIC SUBSTANCES!**

LEVEL -3

2021 On November 25 at 8:00 AM in the Listvyazhnaya mine (Kemerovo province, Russia) at a depth of 250 meters, in the ventilation tunnel no. 823, an explosion occurred, killing 51 people. The mine, until recently owned by the State Duma deputy Vladimir Gridin of the United Russia Party—now yields a private company up to 900,400,000,000 rubles per year.

at the same moment

In the vaulted cellar of the former 19th century barracks in Petersburg, a group of artists, researchers, and students from Russia and France are creating together a collective fresco/altar—as a result of their study on the “canary effect”<sup>10</sup>. The canary is a sentinel bird with fast metabolism. In reaction to high methane content in a coal mine, the canary dies, giving the miners the signal to evacuate immediately. In the former barracks' cellar, the core element of the fresco are those hyper sensitive beings, both real and imaginary, warning about fast approaching danger. In this cellar there is an underground self-organized cultural center residing.

Meanwhile, the building officially belongs to the Ministry of Defense.

Allerta is on all the time.

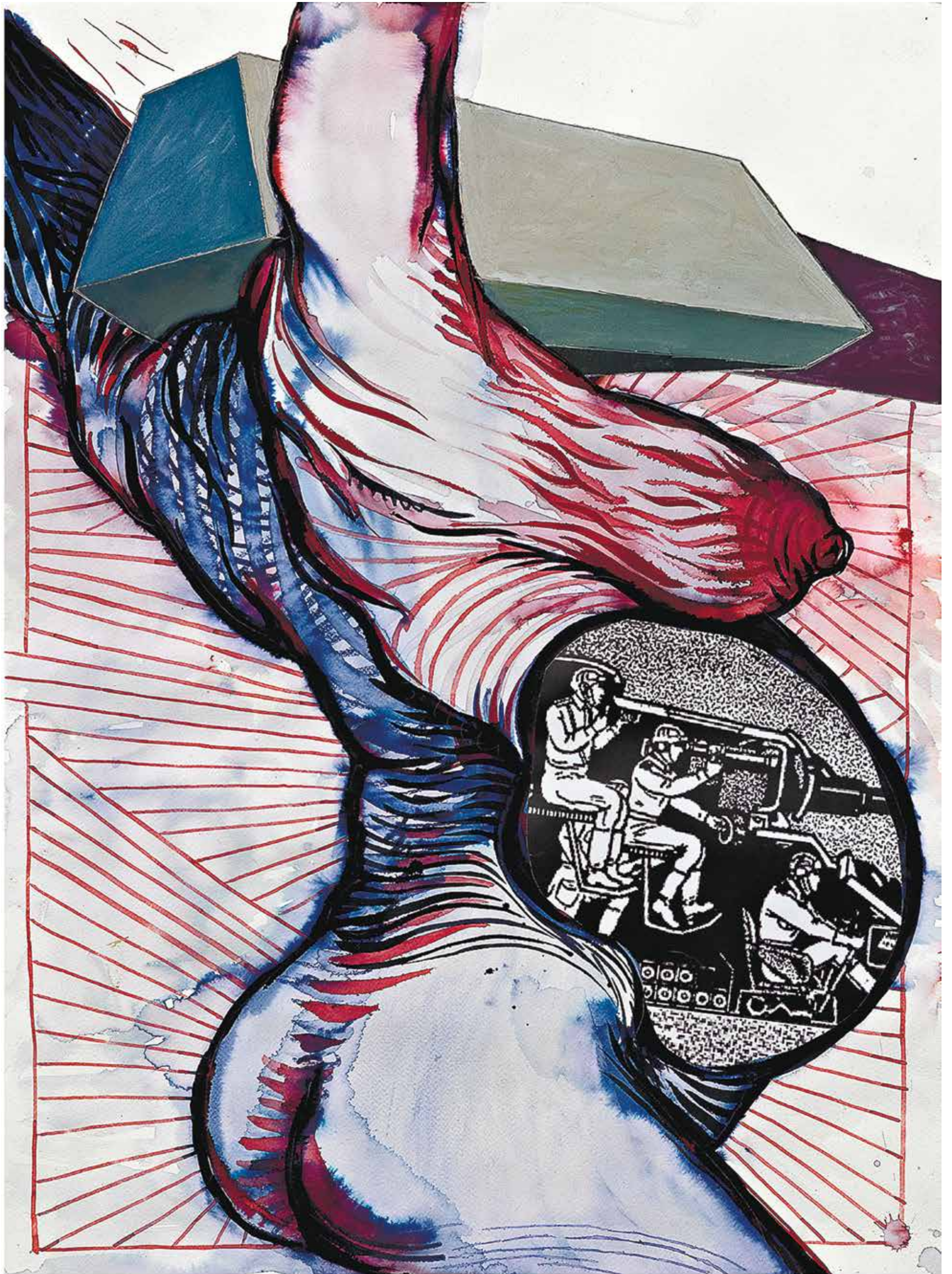
The elevator stops suddenly.

XX

In the dim light, a naked man with stick-horns attached to his head is visible. The man resembles *Stakhanov*<sup>11</sup>. Before him, a bicycle wheel turns on a stool. He passes a wrench over the spokes and sings in the voice of *Kirill Medvedev*<sup>12</sup>:

On the day of June twenty-second  
Precisely at four AM  
Kiev was bombed and we were told  
That the war had begun<sup>13</sup>





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- <sup>1</sup> **SRETNO!** [good luck]: in the Yugoslav mining workers' tradition the expression is used as a parting word before descending into the mine.

<sup>2</sup> **The Border Musical**, a film by Chto Delat (dir: Olga Tsaplya Egorova), 2013. Tanya, main protagonist of this melodrama is a school choirmaster who leaves her little mining hometown to migrate to Norway. Quartet of imaginary miners try to warn her about new dangers.

<sup>3</sup> **Underground**, 2014 an exhibition project by Chto Delat at *Kunstbunker*, Nuremberg.

<sup>4</sup> **Jovanka Broz** was the First Lady of Yugoslavia, wife of Yugoslavia's leader Josip Broz Tito.
- <sup>5</sup> **Oslobodenje** [liberation]: site specific installation by Nikolay Oleynikov for the *Project Biennial D-0 ARK Underground*, Konjic, 2015. An antifascist resistance newspaper by the same title was established by the partisans in the mining area of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the WWII.

<sup>6</sup> **Dear Heart, Where Does this Mine Lead?** — a total installation by Nikolay Oleynikov produced for the 2nd edition of the *Labin Industrial Art Biennale* in Istria (Croatia).

<sup>7</sup> **Coal Black Minin' Blues** — bluegrass classical tune written by a singer/songwriter Nimrod Workman.
- <sup>8</sup> **Mark Bernes** — Soviet Ukrainian Jewish singer and actor who performed poignant songs emerging from World War II, including *Dark Night* and *On the Day of June Twenty-second*.

<sup>11</sup> **Alexey Stakhanov** was a Soviet jackhammer operator in the coal mine industry in Donbass, Ukraine, a shock-worker who in 1935 set up a record of productivity in the coal production, and kept overcoming his own accomplishments. He gained the honor of Hero of Socialist Labor, and gave the name to the broader Stakhanovist movement.
- <sup>9</sup> **How's it Gonna End** — a song by Tom Waits from the album *Real Gone*, 2004

<sup>10</sup> **Canary Testimonies**, an artistic research project led by Chto Delat both in *Rosa School of Engaged Art* and *L'ecole superieure d'art et design de Saint-Etienne*. The learning mural was realized in St-Petersburg by the participants of both schools as an avant-post project for *La Biennale Internationale Design Saint-Etienne* in December 2021.

<sup>12</sup> **Kirill Medvedev** is a Muscovite poet, translator, singer, songwriter and co-ordinator of the combat folk-punk *Arkadiy Kots Band*. Medvedev is a front-line anti authoritarian activist standing for workers' rights, eco-defence, anti-gentrification, and anti-war movements. On the day of the beginning of the war against Ukraine he was detained by police for single-picketing against Russia's invasion at the door of a central office of the Putin government.

<sup>13</sup> **On the Day of June Twenty-second** is a Soviet song of the WWII times written by the poet B. Kovynev in June 1941, adapted the melody of a popular tango by Polish composer and band leader Jerzy Petersburski. In a time-line manner the song tells about the first days of the invasion of the German nazi forces in the USSR, and early calls for mobilisation. Ever since, the song became part of the vernacular day-to-day soviet and post-soviet mind-set.

drawing by Nikolay Oleynikov: from the series Nightmare of the Burning Soldier, 2014-15, eight years before the war



# Artemy Magun | Haunted by disaster

## Has this been just a coincidence, this consequence from COVID to the Russian war on Ukraine and NATO?

In a way, yes, because the war had obviously in preparation for a long time. But in a way, as the Israeli-Russian thinker Yoel Regev likes to say, no coincidence is just a coincidence. Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek\*, on his part, justly notes that from today's view "there is almost a nostalgia for the good old two years of fighting the pandemic". But, he also says that the change from Covid to war was accidental, arguing against the unnamed "conspiracy theorists". But was it so accidental?

**Not only did Covid create a chronic background of emergency and fear**, in which the Russian chicken game with US led to an affective escalation. It also interrupted the pace of everyone's lives, broke the routine international ties, thus shifting and blurring the reality in a way that anything, it would seem, could happen. And this "anything" happened, something from the universe of taboos and nightmares: a classic war in the style of 1941. The medical emergency was a foot-in-the-door that facilitated the military emergency.

**There are both continuities and dialectical inversions here.** Panic and the escape mood intensified. Covid masks become protections during the protest demonstrations. The ubiquitous zoom conferences turned life into a videogame, and gave it a hallucinatory nature. The closures of borders and the senseless competition of vaccines intensified and normalized nationalism. But here a dialectical moment is important: this war is not only a hallucination from the Soviet war cinema, it is also a result of impatience with videos: what happens is a large scale *devirtualization* of war games orchestrated by someone who spent too much time in isolation while hiding, in fear, from the invisible enemy, and mastering the world through war maps. What Russian president thus approached was the "Real", in the Lacanian sense of an embodied fantasy that is normally supposed to stay covered. The war is literalization of a metaphor that the pandemic was. In a similar way, in Thucydides, an outbreak of plague in Athens is an omen of military defeat.

Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben was ridiculed by all, two years ago, when he resolutely spoke against the quarantine measures during the pandemic. Indeed, he clearly underestimated the danger. But, given the real threat of WWII that we are now witnessing, partly as a result of the frenzy of the pandemic, we have to return and say that maybe Agamben did have a point!

**First**, he notes the readiness to throw away the freedoms and to subdue reality to management.

**Second**, he observes that this is being done in defense of bare life only.

**Third**, he describes the pandemic as a "Manichaean" war against a demonic invisible enemy: the virus.

Now, the Russian militarists take the first principle up while inverting the other two. They show to the West, which had behaved so cowardly during Covid, that Russian soldiers were real "masters", prepared to die and "go to paradise". They pick up on the Manichaean world "us-them" but behave themselves from a demonic point of view, as though they reenacted the part of viruses and took up the demonic position themselves. Not by chance, the COVID "portrait" looked like a sea mine. Those are variations on the *same* theme as the Covid.

So maybe one should have weighed twice whether to introduce an apocalyptic panic and misanthropy into society, for years, for anything short of plague. Human affects are often more intense and more pathological than viruses.

\* see here [What Will Grow Out of a Pocket Full of Sunflower Seeds?](#) - The Philosophical Salon

*Artemy Magun - author of: Negative Revolution (Bloomsbury 2013), Editor of "The Future of the State" (Rowman and Littlefield 2020), author of many articles including "Hysterical Machivellianism" (Theory and Event 2016).*







# Alisa\_Mak | Viscera

**THE CANARY IS THE MINERS.** Because killing canaries is as inhumane as mining is. Because mines are methane and litmus tests of reality. Because precisely in the mines, neoliberalism is powerless.

**THE MINE IS THE MOTHER.** Because the earth devours its children in fear. Because the earth protects its child, preventing it from returning to the hardened surface. Because the earth kills for salvation.

**THE SIGNAL IS A SCREAM.** Because a scream has always been frightening. Because now the scream is cluttered with all kinds of interpretations. Because now the scream is not heard and has faded into a sea of thousands of the same daily screams.

**THE RECIPIENT IS ALL OF US.** Because we have never been in the mines. Because we can't make out the scream. Because for us, the miners remained in legends and expressions. Because we are suffocating and do not have time to realize it.

The Canary Altar installation was realized by Alisa Mak at the exhibition Dangerous Zone at "ETOZDES" (Saint Petersburg) and It dedicated to the miners of the Listvyazhnaya mine. The disaster occurred on 25 November 2021 in Kemerovo Oblast, Russia and caused death of over 40 miners from suffocation.

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page 6 - fragment of Pinturas Negras by Francisco Goya  
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