



13 Mansfield Avenue, Unit G, Toronto, ON, M6J 2A9 | Tel. +16474475303 | info@crutchcac.com | crutchcac.com

ZESY POWERS, ANGUS TARNAWSKY, ANTON VIDOKLE: 2020
JULY 7, 2019

Veronika has asked me to write a brief introduction to this collection of works, and for the past few weeks, I have grappled with how to approach this task. Over the last year, I have found myself struggling with the arts, with our relationship to power, and with our inability to enact change. I thought first of writing about this tension, about the support of a community, and about art's role in dreaming of new worlds. I found that I could not articulate these things with any passion because I am frustrated, burnt out, and frankly, terrified of the future. I am a proud member of this community, and I believe we can turn the arts into an effective tool in the struggle for a better life - but it is time to begin actually working, in the real world, with real people, fighting against those with power, rather than alongside them. So, instead of talking about theory, instead of lapsing into poetics, and instead of writing about the art in this exhibition, I have decided to write about our relationships with each other as community members.

I am realizing that our relationships as artists and peers are flimsy, nonexistent, or made clinical through the cooling effects of poetry and theory. We allow ourselves to think we are radical by turning our friendships and our communities into performances; we more readily support "relational art" than we do relationships among artists; rather than organize, we prefer to study organizing. We think of ourselves as researchers, and this is true, in the sense that art, like the academy, currently exists to reproduce the bourgeois class and its values. The world is burning, our institutions have always been broken, and every day people suffer under the glassy-eyed violence of neoliberal regimes. There is no longer time for gestures towards "raising consciousness" or "imagining alternatives" or "facilitating community". We must acknowledge that we have failed, and then begin working together outside of the confines capital created for us.

Where is our cut of a work's resale value? Where is our voice when galleries set our pay? Where are our advocates for housing, for healthcare, and for our human rights? We work ungodly hours because we are told our jobs are our passion. We struggle to find housing, while we make paintings for the lobbies of vacant condos. We fight each other over meager pay at jobs that we are overqualified for, hoping that one day those who keep us down might shake our hands at a fair. It is time to acknowledge reality: we do not have a seat at the table, our wages are too low, and our work conditions abysmal. We hold no political leverage, and our radical instincts are neutralized because those of us who are successful are proximate to power, and those of us who are struggling are too atomized to work together. For too long we have claimed that by some magical power artists are allowed to be radical, to experiment, or to dream when it is so clearly false. If these things were true, we would not receive funding from neoliberal governments. Our work would not be collected as a speculative investment. Our galleries would not be sites for the capitalist class to play out their fantasies. If we were truly a radical force our relationship with capital would be antagonistic, not friendly.

We have bought into the neoliberal notion that we as artists are individual actors in a market, allowing ourselves to believe that we are better alone and that organized action in the arts is either unachievable or useless. Because of this, we have ceded what power we could have held. Our imaginations and our actions are limited by funding bodies, by collectors, and by the institutions that claim to represent us. We have been made structurally ineffective in the fight that I believe we all think we are fighting. If we truly want change, we must rid ourselves of the bourgeois approval we crave, and instead honestly acknowledge the imbalance of power between us and those who profit from our labour. Our collectors are not our allies, they are our prison guards.

It is time for us to organize, to join those who work steel, who act, who write, and who make this world run, in the fight for a better world. It is time to stop signing editions and to begin signing union cards. It is time to turn on those whom we think we rely on and to realize that, in fact, they rely on us.

We are cloistered off in academies and museums, safely “playing” while our friends, families, and communities suffer. This must stop - it is time to be fearless in the face of a history that claims finality. We must tell our collectors, our funding bodies, and our employers, that no longer will our work fund their wars, aid their gentrification, or pay for their tax breaks. We believe ourselves to be capable of radical things. It is time to prove it.

GRAYSON ALABISO-CAHILL

“Perhaps contemporary art is an art to survive our contemporaneity as an artist.” — Boris Groys¹

Today the Russian philosophy known as Cosmism has been largely forgotten. Its utopian tenets – combining Western Enlightenment with Eastern philosophy, Russian Orthodox traditions with Marxism – inspired many key Soviet thinkers until they fell victim to Stalinist repression. In this three-part film project, artist Anton Vidokle probes Cosmism’s influence on the twentieth century and suggests its relevance to the present day. In Part One he returns to the foundations of Cosmist thought (*This Is Cosmos*, 2014). Part Two explores the links between cosmology and politics (*The Communist Revolution Was Caused By The Sun*, 2015) and Part Three restages the museum as a site of resurrection, a central Cosmist idea (*Immortality and Resurrection for All!*, 2017).

Combining essay, documentary and performance, Vidokle quotes from the writings of Cosmism’s founder Nikolai Fedorov and other philosophers and poets. His wandering camera searches for traces of Cosmist influence in the remains of Soviet-era art, architecture and engineering, moving from the steppes of Kazakhstan to the museums of Moscow. Music by John Cale and Éliane Radigue accompanies these haunting images, conjuring up the yearning for connectedness, social equality, material transformation and immortality at the heart of Cosmist thought.

Shot in Siberia and Kazakhstan, as well as Moscow and Archangelsk regions, the first film² in the trilogy on Russian Cosmism comprises a collage of ideas from the movement’s diverse protagonists, including founding philosopher Nikolai Fedorov. Fedorov, among others, believed that death was a mistake—a flaw in the overall design of the human, “because the energy of cosmos is indestructible, because true religion is a cult of ancestors, because true social equality is immortality for all.” For the Russian cosmists, the definition of cosmos was not limited to outer space: rather, they set out to create “cosmos,” or harmonious and eternal life, on Earth. The ultimate goal, as illuminated in the short film, was “to construct a new reality, free of hunger, disease, violence, death, need, inequality—like communism.”

The second part of the trilogy³ looks at the poetic dimension of solar cosmology of Soviet biophysicist, Alexander Chizhevsky. Shot in Kazakhstan, where Chizhevsky was imprisoned and later exiled, the film introduces Chizhevsky’s research into the impact of solar emissions on human sociology, psychology, politics and economics in the form of wars, revolutions, epidemics and other upheavals. The film aligns the life of post-soviet rural residents and the futurological projects of

¹ Anton Vidokle, “Art without Market, Art without Education: Political Economy of Art” *e-flux journal* #43, March 2013.

² Anton Vidokle, *This Is Cosmos* (2014) 28’10 min. HD Video, Russian with English subtitles.

³ Anton Vidokle, *The Communist Revolution Was Caused By The Sun* (2015) 33’36 min. HD Video, Russian with English subtitles.

Russian cosmism to emphasize that the goal of the early Soviet breakthroughs aimed at the conquest of outer space was not so much technical acceleration, but the common cause of humankind in their struggle against limitations of earthly life.

The trilogy's last part⁴ is a meditation on a museum as the site of resurrection — a central idea for many Cosmist thinkers, scientists and avant-garde artists. Filmed at the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow Zoological Museum, the Lenin Library and the Museum of Revolution, the film looks at museological and archival techniques of collection, restoration and conservation as a means of the material restoration of life, following an essay penned by Nikolai Fedorov on this subject in 1880s. The film follows a cast comprised of present-day followers of Fedorov, several actors, artists and a Pharaoh Hound that playfully enact the resurrection of a mummy, a close examination of Malevich' Black Square, Rodchenko's spatial constructions, taxidermied animals, artifacts of the Russian Revolution, skeletons, and mannequins in tableau vivant-like scenes, in order to create a contemporary visualization for the poetry implicit in Fedorov's writings.

Anton Vidokle is an artist and editor of e-flux journal. He was born in Moscow and lives in New York and Berlin. Vidokle's work has been exhibited internationally at Documenta 13 and the 56th Venice Biennale. Vidokle's films have been presented at Bergen Assembly, Shanghai Biennale, the 65th and 66th Berlinale International Film Festival, Forum Expanded, Gwangju Biennale, Center Pompidou, Tate Modern, Garage Museum, Istanbul Biennial, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Tensta Konsthall, Blaffer Art Museum, Stedelijk Museum, and others.

Zeesy Powers was the 2017 National Artist-in-Residence at the Toronto Animated Image Society, for which she produced "This Could be You,"⁵ an interactive piece exploring practices of confinement in VR. Powers has been an invited observer and participant in international telecommunications and cybersecurity conferences for military-industrial, corporate and activist realms. Powers is a 2018 Chalmers Fellow, through this she continues her research into how our digital tools shape the ways we relate to ourselves and others.

Angus Tarnawsky is an Australian artist and musician. His work⁶ considers perceptions of sound and space, existing in many hybrid forms across composition, performance, relational aesthetics, and installation. Recent exhibitions and presentations have been hosted by Pioneer Works, Fridman Gallery, and Wave Farm (New York), and Het Nieuwe Instituut (Rotterdam/New York). Originally from Tasmania, he studied improvisation and electroacoustic music at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne before relocating to North America in 2010.

⁴ Anton Vidokle, *Immortality and Resurrection for All!* (2017) 34'17 min. HD Video, Russian with English subtitles.

⁵ Zeesy Powers, "This Could Be You" (2018) Virtual reality, 20:00 duration.

⁶ Angus Tarnawsky, "No Way Around It" (2019) Improvisational electroacoustic performance, 30:00 duration.

I recently ran into the poet Lvovsky
whose poems I like
(and he likes mine back)
on an escalator;
Lvovsky was going down and I was going up
I was chewing gum
and at the moment
we saw each other
I was blowing
a giant bubble;
our eyes met
and we smiled at one another;
I was curious what he thought
looking at me;
I was later told that on that very day
maybe
a day before or a day after that
people were discussing my poetry
on some website
and Lvovsky went on there with them
people were saying things like
when medvedev was young
his father sold off his huge collection of books
and the boy was left
without a good education
without an awareness for the
history of russian free verse
I was told
that Lvovsky
in a very subtle and restrained manner
talked to these people
and told them where to get off;
this stuff really gets to me;
I'm not a star
I'm not some diva poet
I'm not a disturber of the peace
I'm not *a professional*
I can't understand
why everything has been charged in this way—
"I stand among jokes and caresses"
as one of my favourite poets, Leonid Gubanov, once wrote;
the story of how and why my dad sold his books
should be its own poem sometime;
another story that needs to be told
is about how a pet rat bit my penis;
when people ask me
whether everything I write is true
I usually say
"yes, of course it's all true
do you really think
that I would make
this shit up?"—
the most important thing is
the most important thing is for a person to know their worth;

a person who knows their worth
a man who knows his worth
a woman
who knows her worth
that's what interests me the most
at this moment
in this place we have ended up
it's essential to know
your own worth;
in the world that we live in
it is very important
(it is completely imperative)
to be complete and whole
like a poplar tree, birch, oak, like fuzz or an axe
or like an animal—
cat or rooster
or like an elephant
or a dog
dying in the metro
when we're coming back
from somebody's house
tired, beautiful, tipsy,
dressed absurdly
aging
immortal
I can't understand
why the fuck everyone is so upset
anonymous internet trolls
critics
journalists
lousy little poets
("lousy little poets," in the words of Leonard Cohen
little poets crawling with lice)
dull
(*gray*; or as they would say about themselves
gray as the lining of a coat—I don't like metaphors) critics
who write
that what's lacking in my poems
according to them
is some kind of depth of experience
jesus christ
depth of experience
(I think that wanting depth of experience from a poem
means not having any inkling of your own worth)
I want everyone to calm down, come to their senses
and the issue here isn't that I, for example, imagine I am
IMAGINE I AM
MAYAKOVSKY
BIG POWERFUL BEAST
NAGGED AT BY MY PATHETIC
CONTEMPORARIES
it feels like I've
somehow or other told everyone or a lot of people that
they are shit

(or something along those lines)
and I said it
in some strange manner
inadvertently
and I said it
because it turns out that I am also pathetic, powerless, weak
I think
that my poems are some kind of test;
a trial
for perfection or rather a test
to determine
THE CAPACITY
to see and accept yourself
as you are;
miserable, ugly, worthless,
vain, selfish,
head hanging low over a vast space
over some sparkling stinking abyss
(I think that for somebody hanging over a stinking abyss—
and the majority of people are—
“deep thought” are
besides the point)
excuse me for talking about myself so much
I think that soon I will probably stop talking about myself so
much
I even have some idea, more or less, of how to kick
this habit
and sorry too for swearing
I really try not to swear in my poems because
I think that everything you want to express
can be done without swearing
this text should be dedicated to the problem of
communication
and the core of this composition should have been the bubble
the bubble-gum bubble
but everything got shifted somehow
and got mixed up
here's what I wanted to say:
sometimes the lack of human interaction can make a person
physically ill
but sometimes human interaction is even worse than that
and since not all is lost yet
since some people still believe in us
and because some still consider us
the voice of our generation
(and because we are, in the end, still standing)
I would really like once more to emphasize that:

*we are lonely
very few people believe in us
we are reluctant to show our poems
to our parents, to our close friends, our acquaintances
no one believes in us
after a good day at work
no one will go have a beer with us
no one will teach us loneliness⁷*

⁷ Kirill Medvedev, *It's No Good* (2016) Translated from the Russian by Bela Shayevich and Keith Gessen. Originally published in "Incursion," (2002) Argo-Risk.