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Russia – Art Resistance and the Conservative-Authoritarian *Zeitgeist*

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by an observer or by the public, meaning that it needs trust in an archive, needs the incoherence of historic time to be masked, needs an absence that installs the surviving evidence in an assemblage to be used as instruments to explore the limits of the present.

Note

- 1 The following excerpt was published in *Khudozestvenniy Zhurnal* no. 95 (2016) (translated into English by Sergei Ogurtsov).

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12 Wartime intimacy

Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya and the Chto Delat school for engaged art

Jonathan Brooks Platt

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and, indeed, during the years of *perestroika* that preceded it, Russian radical art practices have been profoundly public and performative in orientation. Whether taking the form of street actions, gallery-based performances or longer-term social interventions, most recent additions to the canon of Russian art have involved public display or the display of the public. Such practices were bound to take centre stage in a society experiencing a deeply contested, epochal transformation, and they have shown remarkable longevity. Over the past fifteen years, even as social relations in Russia have become increasingly reified and corporatized, politically engaged artists have nonetheless continued to confront the public, demanding to be seen and heard and insisting on the fundamental malleability of what *can* be seen and heard.

Nonetheless, this public orientation has recently become increasingly untenable, and the reasons are not hard to discern. Since the Russian protests of 2011–12 and Vladimir Putin's controversial election for a third term as president, the Russian state has followed its own path of conservative radicalization. Russian actionism has lost much of its potency (Petr Pavlenskii being the exception that proves the rule); exhibition spaces invariably practise self-censorship, or find themselves overrun by neo-fascist Cossack bands; and artists are more likely to shun the newly mobilized 'people' than engage them in social projects (Platt 2018).¹

As one might expect, this situation has led many in the leftist art community to turn inward, working beneath the radar of state interests and developing practices of intimacy. In this chapter, I discuss one particular long-term pedagogical project – the Chto Delat group's School for Engaged Art, founded in 2013. With this project Chto Delat has developed its own form of intimate practice that does not simply reject the compromised public sphere. On the contrary, they have worked tirelessly to build a viable, alternative institution that can potentially serve as a public platform. And while this goal is decidedly utopian, since the inchoate counter-public they would address remains completely marginalized by mainstream officialdom, their project has nonetheless been an undeniable success. The Chto Delat school and Rosa's House of Culture (named after Rosa Luxemburg), which the

group opened in 2015, continue to grow and develop despite serious resistance from both private and state actors.² Hundreds of Petersburg artists, activists and intellectuals have participated in their activities, not to mention visitors from other Russian and foreign cities. Most importantly, the institution has contributed to the formation of a close-knit network of young artists and intellectuals who show remarkable group solidarity while pursuing a broad range of activities and focusing on diverse aspects of the leftist agenda.

In the school's inaugural year in 2013–14, I was an active participant in many of its activities. Most notably, I involved the students in a collaboration I had initiated in the summer of 2013 with Chto Delat member Natalya Pershina-Yakimanskaya (Gluklya) and Sofia Akimova, who entered the Chto Delat school that autumn. The project revolved around Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, an eighteen-year-old diversionist who was captured, tortured and executed by German forces during the battle for Moscow in 1941. After the story of Kosmodemyanskaya's gruesome death and the bravery with which she faced it appeared in *Pravda* (Lidov 1942), she received a central place in the Soviet pantheon of heroes, celebrated as a model for communist youth. The core question of our Zoya project was how the Soviet militant tradition has survived and been transformed in contemporary Russian memory. After a series of presentations and discussions in the Chto Delat school, Gluklya directed a group performance, *Becoming Zoya*, at the monument to Kosmodemyanskaya in St Petersburg's Victory Park on 18 April 2014.³

In many ways, the Zoya performance served as an early challenge to the Chto Delat school and its practices of intimacy. The spring of 2014 was a moment of great uncertainty for the New Russian Left. The Maidan Uprising in Kiev led to deep tensions and divisions, especially after the Donbass War broke out in March. The issue of militancy at the heart of our Zoya project was inevitably coloured by this context. At the same time, the question of heroism has always been at the centre of Chto Delat's own practice, and our project served as an interesting and, I think, important intervention. If Chto Delat tends to look for a core of weakness in the hero, guarding against the dangers of ideological myth production, our project instead sought to unearth a longing for heroism in contemporary society, describing the hero through the echo of her negation.

In what follows I first examine the Chto Delat school and its practices of intimacy; I then turn to the theme of heroism in Chto Delat's own work; and, finally, I consider the Zoya performance and the questions it raised about both these aspects of Chto Delat's practice.

The Chto Delat school: alternative institution and intimate counter-public

As an alternative institution, the Chto Delat school aspires to a form of emancipatory practice that does not require the confrontational ethos of actionism

to sustain a publicly oriented position. Instead of hurling itself against the wall dividing it from the hegemonic culture, an institutional project asserts a public presence while accepting its unavoidably marginal status. Participants are not obsessed with 'peak experiences' that guarantee a place in art-historical memory. Instead, their work and the cultivation of intimacy it promotes are subtler and more concrete – such as the occupation and inhabitation of collective spaces, the pursuit of long-term, small-scale projects and the supplementing of direct activism with the production of group solidarity. When involved in such practices, the temporality of political engagement is doubled. It simultaneously anticipates a future of active resistance (instead of merely staging provocations in the streets), while also constructing a genuinely emancipatory present founded on patient, self-organized, collective labour, in contrast to more radical communities, which typically collapse under the pressure of their own aspirations. The builders of alternative institutions are thus involved in a form of utopian projection – imagining and longing for a viable counter-public – while concretely working to sustain one another here and now, maintaining enthusiasm, fidelity and solidarity through mutual support and collaboration.

In terms of its philosophy, the Chto Delat school adheres to the traditional leftist paradigm outlined in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. While more recent radical pedagogy tends to focus on the dissolution of authority and hierarchy, Chto Delat sides with Freire in the basic assumption that 'without leadership, discipline, determination, and objectives [...] an organization cannot survive, and revolutionary action is thereby diluted'. The key is to forge a balance – or, more precisely, to sustain a dialectic – between authority and freedom, such that 'no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught' (Freire 1968: 178, 67).⁴ The methods Chto Delat uses in pursuit of these ends have been developed over nearly a decade of conducting short-term pedagogical projects (Chto Delat 2015, 2016). The most prototypical of these are their intensive seminars that culminate in the staging of a 'learning play', which the participants write and perform under the direction of Olga Egorova (Tsaplya), who possesses an uncanny ability to unite an unruly collective around a common cause. These plays also make extensive use of the contemporary dance techniques of Nina Gasteva, who describes her area of responsibility as cultivating the group's 'collective body'. While these projects are of course far from Freire's work with the illiterate poor, they can be seen as fostering community and empowerment among the creative workers who participate in them. It hardly needs to be stated that young people interested in forms of labour that do not produce marketable commodities (whether material or immaterial) often live precarious lives and run the risk of slipping into conditions of deep alienation. The blitzkrieg of intimacy Chto Delat brings to these projects, with its heavy orientation on public performance and politicized speech, provides a tangible form of resistance to such problems.

Chto Delat's pedagogical method is not uncontroversial, and it raises a number of questions familiar to readers of Claire Bishop's influential survey of participatory art in *Artificial Hells* (Bishop 2012). What are the spectatorial

The Chto Delat school operates at a safer distance from the state machinery, and its tutors are much less optimistic about symbolic forms of heroic intervention. In *The Excluded*, the ninth scene ('In which a Sublime Union of the Excluded is formed, but one of its members disrupts the harmony') depicts the collective body of marginalized youth humming different tones to produce an ominous chord. One of their members then rises in discontent:

I feel good with you. But I can't be happy when people out there suffer from injustice and perish in the war. To talk with society, it's necessary to go to the people. That's why I go out to protest alone – the only way it is allowed.

The final scenes of the film revolve around the beating the young protester receives after appearing on the streets with a sign that reads, 'Russia Kills'.⁸ The group imagines all the different social types who might have attacked her, and the film closes with a long shot of the 'public' walking down St Petersburg's Nevskii Prospect.

In this scenario, society's indifference to the school's inchoate counter-public of resistance serves as the outer limit for the collective body. Any extension of this body or its individual parts across this limit means facing violence, since society's indifference is always ready to explode into open hostility if its norms are transgressed more directly. And so the transgression is ritually staged, allowing the body to renew the intensity that gathers along its intimate, internal borders. This does not mean fragmentation into individualities. Much as the external view on the collective can never swallow up the intersubjective exposure it frames, the members of this intimate collective are not individuals but what Nancy calls singularities:

A singular being does not emerge or rise up against the background of a chaotic, undifferentiated identity of beings, or against the background of their unitary assumption, or that of a becoming, or that of a will. A singular being appears, as finitude itself: at the end (or at the beginning), with the contact of the skin (or the heart) of another singular being, at the confines of the same singularity that is, as such, always other, always shared, always exposed.

(Nancy 1991: 27–8)

Indeed, shared exposure is not only a fitting description of Chto Delat's pedagogical practice. It is also a key device in its films and learning plays. For example, one of Gasteva's fundamental techniques involves placing one hand on your own body and one hand on the other's – a perfect image of Nancy's collective of singular beings.

In this way, the public and the intimate are suspended in tense, dialectical interplay. Each approach to the threshold of violence re-founds the alternative institution and, most importantly, invites others to join its intimate practices.



Figure 12.1 Chto Delat, still from *The Excluded*.

Courtesy of Chto Delat.

This is where 'reality' lies for them – in the community of shared finitude and its potential for creating a more sustainable counter-public.

Chto Delat and the dialectic of weakness and heroism

The introduction of the Zoya project into this environment was bound to trigger conflicting reactions. On the one hand, there is the story of Zoya's heroic act – *podvig* in Russian – in which she refuses to divulge information under torture but then finds the strength to address the villagers gathered to watch her execution with words of fiery resistance. This heroic image – mixing stoic silence with impassioned speech – resonates powerfully with the actionist tradition of risk-fraught public display. In other words, precisely the tradition the Chto Delat school is trying to move beyond. Yet, at the same time, the deep tenderness of Soviet depictions of Zoya – epitomized by Sergei Strunnikov's photograph of her mutilated but beautiful corpse in *Pravda* – elicits a sense of intimacy at the threshold of death that recalls the school's own collective projects.

Before examining the results of our collaboration, it is important to note the central place of heroism in the work of Chto Delat itself. Founded in 2003, the group's artistic core originally consisted of Dmitrii Vilenskii, the group's producer and main ideological strategist; Nikolai Oleinikov, known for his militant, erotically charged graphic and textile works; and Gluklya and Tsaplya, who began their own intimate partnership as the Factory of Found Clothes (FFC) in 1995.⁹ In 2002, FFC announced a turn in their work

towards more social projects with a manifesto (subsequently printed in the first issue of the *Chto Delat Newspaper*) that declared that artists must take 'the side of the weak', engaging people in collaborations that 'give birth to heroes' (Chto Delat 2003). The dialectic of heroism and weakness (not unlike that of public and intimate exposure) has persisted as a guiding principle in Chto Delat's work. Most importantly, it has inherited from FFC the concept of participatory art as a form of *podvig*, in which the group constructs conditions that allow student or non-artists to draw strength from their own precarious position within the social fabric and produce a political utterance that is at once collective and internally heterogeneous.¹⁰ Gasteva refers to this process as oriented on the 'weak beat' (*slabaya dolya*, the unaccented 'back' or 'off' beat) inside the participants' personal rhythms.

Related concerns occupy the group at the thematic level as well. For example, in their 2009 film *Partisan Songspiel: A Belgrade Story*, a monument to the communist militants of the Second World War comes to life in the form of a ghostly choir, or tragic chorus, urging a return to their noble ideals amid neo-liberal (racist, ageist, homophobic) efforts to 'clean up' Belgrade and make it an attractive site for investment (see Figure 12.2). The choir thus emerges from the monument – a traditional figure of national greatness and strength – as an impotent voice from the past, ever calling towards a utopian future, while lamenting that their great sacrifice is fast becoming meaningless.

Chto Delat further developed its approach to heroism during the mass protests that ignited around the world in 2011. In a programmatic article in the *Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal* (*Moscow Art Magazine*), Vilenskii criticizes the

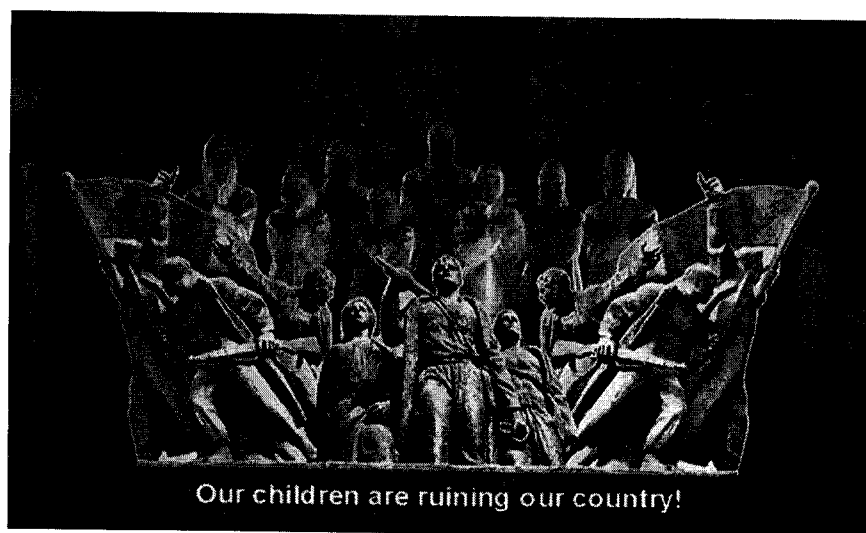


Figure 12.2 Chto Delat, still from *Partisan Songspiel, A Belgrade Story*, 2009. Courtesy of Chto Delat.

actionist practice of Voina for drawing on the tradition of the Russian holy fool. While Voina's actions are undoubtedly successful, they are also dangerous, Vilenskii argues, since they eschew the reflective consciousness and delicate social work necessary for concrete political change. In the work of Voina, 'it is clear that the only figure who can break the chains that bind us is an inhuman hero, someone who has turned his back on 'the world' of money, home, and language, someone garbed in sackcloth and mortifying his flesh' (Vilenskii 2011: 72).

In early 2013, Vilenskii and Tsaplya reasserted their own, more ambivalent position with regard to heroism in the lecture-performance, *The Flaming Heart of Danko, or Looking for the Hero of Our Time*. Here, the artists describe the tragic structure of their songspiels with a familiar twist. The tragic hero's hubris is replaced by weakness:

In general, the heroes of our songspiels aren't heroes at all. They're just people, often weak people, whom we rouse to take up the position of heroes. We create situations for them in which they have to act and show their strength, which then gives material for the commentary of the chorus.

The artists go on to discuss various incarnations of modern heroes, from dictators to the anonymous protester, always flirting with the possibility that heroism has become an obsolete or, again, dangerous category. Tsaplya is the more reluctant to abandon the idea, referring to a powerful image from her Soviet childhood – the writer Maksim Gorkii's character Danko from one of the tales in his 1894 'Old Woman Izergil' series. Tsaplya paraphrases the Danko tale:

A long time ago there lived a people. But one day evil men came and drove the people from their historical lands deep into the dark forest. In this dark forest the people were frightened, lost, and they didn't know what to do. Some of them even suggested selling themselves into slavery. But then Danko appeared (when I was a child I imagined him very young and beautiful). And he said: 'I will lead you out of the dark forest. Follow me and don't be afraid.' And the people followed him. And the journey was long and arduous, and it soon became too much to bear. And then the people said: 'We don't want you anymore. We don't believe in you anymore. We're going to kill you.' And then Danko tore his heart from his breast and raised it above his head. And this heart burned like a torch and lit the way. And Danko led his people to a wonderful meadow where the sun was shining and the birds were singing and the flowers bloomed. The people ran out onto the meadow, and Danko fell down and died.

Tsaplya recognizes the problems such images create in contemporary conditions, but she is still enthralled by their romantic power. This now takes on a

negative or, perhaps, 'weak' form of longing – *toska* in Russian – which carries a broad semantic range including boredom, melancholy, pining and anguish:

This is how we lived (or, more precisely, this is how ideology assumed we should live), always ready for a *podvig*. And, taught by Gorkii, we thought that a *podvig* is a great form of overcoming oneself, one's weakness and finitude. By overcoming the fear of death, you cast a challenge to fate, to your small place in life. In the moment of the *podvig* a human being is equal to his or her true self. And despite the fact that progressive humanity has decided to reject the idea of the *podvig*, there remains a longing [*toska*] for that lofty realization of the self.

(Chto Delat 2013)

During our discussions about the Zoya project in the spring of 2014, Tsaplya and Vilenskii presented the lecture-performance to their students. The tutors were clearly uneasy about it, describing the performance as possibly already out of date – a sentiment that reflected the darkening mood in both Russia and around the world.¹¹ At the same time, Chto Delat was planning a new film about the nineteenth-century revolutionary Ippolit Myshkin. Myshkin interested the group as a model of what they call the 'unlucky' or 'failed' hero (*geroi-neudachnik*), a militant subject who displays incredible passion and will but who receives too little support from the people they are trying to liberate. Ultimately, this is a more tragic version of the Danko tale, emphasizing the last moments of Gorkii's story, left out of Tsaplya's retelling in the *Flaming Heart* lecture. After Danko dies,

the people, joyous and full of hope, did not notice his death and did not see the brave heart still smouldering beside Danko's corpse. Only one careful man noticed it and, afraid of something, stamped on the proud heart with his foot ... And so, it broke apart into sparks and went out.

(Gorkii 1968: 96)

Such unhappy ends mark the 'weak beat' of the hero's rhythm, which preserves the humanity of the *podvig* and prevents it from growing cold in the bronze of a monument.

The Myshkin film was never realized, however. Tsaplya says they did not simply abandon the project; rather, the more urgent questions of the present forced a transformation of the historical subject. For example, one element of the Myshkin film involved building a monument to the unlucky hero in the form of a giant ear. Such a monument then became the centrepiece of *The Excluded*. But the historical past only appears in *The Excluded* in a few select moments: when the young actors 'register' their position in time and space, one of Gasteva's techniques in which the performer marks their spatial and/or temporal distance from a past or future event; when they inscribe 'points of no return' on the wall of the set (the violent dispersal of Russian

protesters on 6 May 2012, the terrorist act in the Nord-Ost Theatre in October 2002, etc.); and in short narratives about the performers' personal unlucky heroes – Antonio Gramsci, Guy Fawkes, Ulrike Meinhoff, Andrei Sakharov and others, including Myshkin. While these moments in the film ensure that its abstract *mise en scène* remains charged with historicity, the idea of a fuller treatment of a specific episode or figure from the historical past remained on the shelf.

The performance at the monument to Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya took place precisely at the moment Chto Delat was moving away from the Myshkin project towards *The Excluded*. Our own insistence on a historical subject proved to be highly controversial, perhaps indicating a certain blockage in the school's relationship to the Russian revolutionary tradition and its distorted post-revolutionary development.

A place for militancy? Enter Zoya

My collaboration with Gluklya and Sofia Akimova on the Zoya project began in July 2013, when we made a series of trips to Moscow and Tambov to visit various centres for the preservation of Zoya's memory: Osino-Gai, the village where she was born; her school in the Voikovskii region in Moscow; and the site of her execution in the village of Petrishchevo. By April 2014, the original context in which we began the project had drastically changed. Russia was now effectively at war with Ukraine, and its propaganda machine was in overdrive, deploying a stream of symbols from the Second World War to frame the hostilities as a renewal of the struggle with fascism. As a result, our appeal to the Chto Delat students to join our engagement with Zoya's image came with great ambivalence and risk. If rebel 'volunteer' units in the Donbass were only distinguishing their uniforms with the St George Ribbon, which has become the main symbol of the 1945 victory, and if the Russian media were repeatedly referring to the new Ukrainian government as 'Banderovites' (Ukrainian nationalists who collaborated with the Nazis), there seemed to be little hope that an artistic statement could salvage any of the authentic historical power of the first Soviet generation's defeat of the Third Reich.

In the discussions that preceded the performance, we addressed the historical issues that inform my scholarly interest in Kosmodemyanskaya: the militant socialist tradition and its exhaustion in the exterminatory violence of the Nazi-Soviet war (Platt 2013). However, the central focus clearly fell on the urgencies of the present day. Several students were close to rejecting the assignment, calling the theme of heroism reactionary and all patriotic symbols repulsive. Many rejected the notion that Zoya's *podvig* displays any fidelity to the revolutionary event of 1917, arguing that she was nothing but a brainwashed fanatic, closer to today's suicide bombers than nineteenth-century militants like Vera Zasulich, who fought for a universal emancipatory truth. A good part of the latter discussion revolved around the dubiousness

of Zoya's actions, particularly her role in Stalin's scorched-earth policy, burning villages in the occupied territories west of Moscow.

Despite these tense debates, we went forward with the performance. Gluklya asked the students to make dolls of Zoya, which they would then bring – as a kind of offering – to Matvei Manizer's monument to the diversionist in Victory Park. Although many of the students rejected this idea, the significance of the gesture was clear. Gluklya hoped to shift the public monument towards the more 'archaic' spheres of fetishism, voodoo, child's play, ritual and theatre. In this way, we would soften the statue's hard phallic authority, introducing flexibility and the potential for directed motion. In typical FFC fashion, the power asymmetry between the statue's sublimity and our own weakness would be inverted – invoking the very different, more matriarchal, horizontal and quotidian authority of sympathetic magic and its interventions into the uncanny.

The assignment also actualized existing tensions in the site. Manizer's statue depicts Zoya in a heroic pose – clenched fist, striding boot, rifle slung over her shoulder, eyes steely and determined – eschewing her alternative image as the feminine victim of Nazi atrocities (as in the barefoot Petrishchevo statue). This militant figure is somewhat out of place in the park, however. Standing beside a pond, hidden from the bustling Moscow Avenue by tree-lined alleys and playgrounds, the statue is not a meeting place for fiery demonstrations and speeches. Instead, the site is contemplative, suited mostly for individual encounters, even if the size of the statue and the height of its pedestal require one to look up, while Zoya gazes into the sublime distance of her *podvig*.

It is also significant that Victory Park was built on the site of a brick factory that was converted into as a mass crematorium during the Leningrad blockade. The monument's link to funerary sculpture and its traditional function of domesticating death is thus taken to the extreme. In contrast to the soul-wrenching memorial that marks the mass graves at the Piskarevskoe Cemetery, in Victory Park the horrors of the blockade are thoroughly veiled by representations of military glory.

The performance thus revolved around the tension between Manizer's monument and what it veils and domesticates in the context of Victory Park: the conceptually unwieldy and, for many of the students, emotionally irredeemable realities of exterminatory war. The statue marked a place of fixity, order and consummation in death and memory – but also silence and the shadow cast by power over the living, forcing them into a subaltern position of chaos and precarity. If public monuments transform dead flesh into bronze permanence and then gather the living, ever-renewable attention of the collective around it, alienation from this process endows the monument with a vampiric quality. One of the Chto Delat students, Anna Isidis, offered a 'doll' that brutally illustrated this effect – a paper cut-out of a zombie Zoya, disembowelled to reveal the Young Pioneer children she has devoured.

Overall, the students presented individuated performative gestures that could not be subsumed into a single utterance. Nonetheless, taken together,

these gestures traversed a continuum of possible reactions to Zoya's statue in the specificity of its spatial and temporal context, elaborating the question at the core of the performance: what does the Soviet militant mean to us today?

At one extreme, there were gestures like that of Isidis, which addressed the statue from a position of total alienation. Ilya Yakovenko took the most aggressive posture, facing the statue and shouting at it, associating Manizer's image with the current patriotic fervour propagated in Russia. By ironically thanking Zoya for Russia's current 'anti-fascist' campaign of imperial expansion, he made it clear that appeals to great-power nostalgia typically run slipshod over history. Leaving a small bundle of notes about Zoya's 'union with the absolute', Maria Maraeva described how the bronze militant's life in the 'kingdom of order' is incompatible with the false starts, rough drafts, sketches and revisions of the artistic process. Viktoria Kalinina was among those who took up the suggestion to make a doll, crafting a faceless, footless image of a female corpse adorned with a mock crucifix – a screw tied to a noose made by Anna Tereshkina, symbolizing the image of Zoya as a mere 'screw' in the totalitarian machine. Kalinina accompanied her doll with a poem, which again questioned the black-and-white simplicity of historical myths – specifically, the version of Zoya's story in which she withstands torture, but one of her comrades gives her up to the Nazis to save his own life. This narrative was particularly compelling in the spring of 2014, when Putin was warning of a 'fifth column' of 'national traitors'. Kalinina ironically sides with such rhetoric in her poem:

Don't give anyone up, and you are a hero.
Climbing up on the scaffold,
The anti-fascist battle ...
Time will have its reckoning!
Time will have its reckoning!
Time will show who is one of us.
The traitor will be damned.
Don't give anyone up, and you are a hero.

Each of these three performances thus strove to problematize the interpretive matrix that reduces the complexities of war to simple oppositions – conviction and doubt, hero and traitor, friend and foe. Significantly, however, none disturbed the power differential between monument and man. Instead they confirmed it from a position of alienated pessimism.

Another group of gestures formulated an alienated address less as a challenge to the statue and more as a way to reveal problems in the present. As a result, they allowed for the possibility of a rapprochement with the sculptural image – albeit on their own terms. Natalya Tseluba made a rough bed in the grass in front of the monument, resting her head on a stack of books about Zoya and the war. Responding to the statue's indifference with her own sleepiness, she thus transformed the asymmetrical relation into a comment on



Figure 12.3 Chto Delat School of Engaged Art (directed by Natalya Pershina-Yakimanskaya/Gluklya), Prop from *Becoming Zoya* (text: 'I regret nothing' and 'Maybe I carried out this savage order of Stalin in vain').

Courtesy of Chto Delat.

human resilience and spaces of comfort at the edges of power. Olga Kuracheva positioned two 'Zoya-believers' – myself and Nikolai Oleinikov – across from one another in front of the statue, each holding a card that undermined our fidelity with ambivalence. On one side, Zoya appears – through the image of her ecstatic corpse – as a relentless militant hero. On the other side – now a fragmentary collage of Zoya as a schoolgirl before the war – she appears as a tool of Stalinist cruelty, who might have thought twice about obeying the order to burn villages, driving Soviet citizens into the cold along with the occupying forces. Kuracheva's oscillation between the two positions – identifying with each in turn as we rotated the cards – culminated in a silent, tearful gaze up at the statue (see Figure 12.3).

While these two performances appropriated the stasis of the monument, or allowed it to suppress their own potential movement, Liya Gusein-Zade expressed her own ambivalence by bringing movement into dialectical tension with monumental fixity. As she vainly lit match after match in the wind, hoping to feel the hot cinders on her fingers (referring again to Zoya's mission), a crowd began to gather not around the statue but in a disorderly mass in front of it. Abandoning the matches, Gusein-Zade began pushing the inert collective toward the pond behind the monument, as if impelling us to embrace militant self-abnegation. In this way the gesture dramatically realized the metaphorical



Figure 12.4 Chto Delat School of Engaged Art (directed by Natalya Pershina-Yakimanskaya/Gluklya), still from *Looking for Zoya, I*.

Courtesy of Chto Delat.

semantics of the word *podvig* (etymologically related to the verb 'to move'), and the desperate shuffling and strain of this awkward movement provided a stark contrast to the stillness and poise of Manizer's image (see Figure 12.4).

A final group of performances abandoned the position of alienation for identification, reducing the tension between motion and fixity until each complemented the other. Natalya Nikulenkova interpolated Zoya's *podvig* into a narrative of personal history, telling the story of her great-grandmother's sacrifice of a beloved shirt – the only possession saved from a burning house – to bind the wounded leg of a soldier during the war. As Natasha laboriously made a rag-doll at the base of the statue from her own shirt, embroidered with the word 'Antifa', she forged a link between Zoya's militant violence and the life-preserving acts of self-sacrifice performed by so many other participants in the war. Karina Shcherbakova scattered sugar around the pedestal and offered a bag of the commodity – always coveted in wartime – as her doll of Zoya. The white sugar transformed the snow of Zoya's torments during her barefoot march into an image of 'the sweet life' promised to the victors. Finally, Sofia Akimova marked out the eighty tortured steps Zoya took to the gallows from the peasant's hut in which she was interrogated. Dropping a piece of black bread – the antipode of Karina's refined sugar – for each step, Akimova produced an ephemeral (disappearing as pigeons erased the steps), emotional supplement to the statue's steely fixity (see Figure 12.5).

Along this continuum from irony and frustration to sympathy and identification, a specific tension recurred again and again. Each performative gesture in its own way sought to oppose or at least soften the authoritative stillness of the statue with figures of motion and temporality, uncertainty and disorderliness. In Mikhail Bakhtin's terms the performances punctured the statue's 'encirclement' (*okruzhenie*) with the energies of a living 'horizon' (*krugozor*). As living beings, we act within the limits of a specific horizon – weighing risks,



Figure 12.5 Chto Delat School of Engaged Art (directed by Natalya Pershina-Yakimanskaya/Gluklya), still from *Looking for Zoya, II*. Courtesy of Chto Delat.

making decisions, anticipating a future of meaning (what our life 'will have meant'), all based on the internal directedness of our activity. But the future of meaning can only exist outside our horizon – in the past, as perceived from the perspective of an encircling, consuming gaze. This contradiction can be a source of both freedom and alienation, since the final meaning of my life and actions can and must always be deferred. You cannot tell me who I am and what my life means until all my inner force is exhausted. The meaning of 'my' life is never really mine, since it is ultimately only accessible from a position beyond my death (Bakhtin 1990).

Zoya's monument stands encircled, full of meaning, but it also stands in place of the living, now dead, eighteen-year-old girl, closing her horizon. The statue does not expect to be challenged by the living people who approach it in the park. Rather, their task is to honour Zoya's memory, supplementing the statue's fixity with their living motion, in turn borrowing its meaning as a rhythmic ideological supplement to their own risk-fraught life. The statue anchors a homogeneous, collective identity with the great moment it symbolizes. Meanwhile the collective that gathers around the statue endows it with a surrogate horizon – a metaphorical afterlife in collective memory.

The performance as a whole remained faithful to the Chto Delat school's interpretation of public exposure – the moment of encirclement – not as the consummation of a collective but as the reaffirmation of its intimacy within an evolving, risk-fraught horizon. The students thus preserved Nancy's sense of community as the sharing of finitude, rather than its reinvestment

by some higher subject – be it the nation, empire, or 'socialism in one country'. At the same time, however, only Gusein-Zade addressed the logic of the *podvig* and its specific relation between horizon and encirclement, which in fact inverts the monumentalist logic of ideological myth. Working at a remove from the statue, Gusein-Zade depicted the collective as the static body and the militant as the one seeking to introduce motion and risk, insisting on the potential for change and emergent meaning. To actualize this inversion requires a decision, an existential leap of volition, seizing a moment of exceptional danger in which the subject is confronted with an irrevocable, world-defining threat, announcing a time of reckoning here and now. The subject's living force persists through this moment as if she is paradoxically encircled with meaning and yet still moving through the limited horizon of her life.

Gorkii's story of Danko offers another powerful image of this moment of decision. The lost tribe is about to slip away from the moment of danger into slavery when Danko seizes the moment and makes his decision. By ripping out his burning heart and holding it aloft, Danko effectively splits in two. He embraces the tension between horizon and encirclement and takes control of it through inversion, making his living power – the burning heart – into a sign full of meaning. He dies on reaching the end of the forest, but this is no mere expiration of life. It is the closure of a space of death that has been traversed and transformed, claimed and authored as his own.

However, the collective addressed by any *podvig* is only offered the fact and image of this decision – which ideally, as in the case of Danko, delivers them from the moment of danger and removes the conditions in which such a decision can be made. The collective is left then with a weaker variant of the decision. They can immortalize Danko as a monument, domesticating the power of his *podvig* and its uncanny inversion of horizon and encirclement. Or they can remain faithful to it, facing the new conditions it produces from its own unsettling perspective, rejecting any collapse into the old stability. In Gorkii's story, the collective chooses neither of these options and indifferently stamps out the fire of Danko's heart. The result is that the reader's sympathy for Danko allows a secondary, allegorical level of fidelity, in which the collective prepares itself for such decisive moments in the future.

This is the model of weak or unlucky heroism that has been so important in the practice of Chto Delat, as it was in that of FFC before them. One can say that it represents a kind of compromise with the *podvig*, allowing the artists to resist ideological monuments and preserve the conditions of intimate exposure for a moment of decision to come. In this way it recalls the distinction between what Walter Benjamin calls a 'weak Messianic' moment and the authentic revolutionary event – the 'strait gate' of radical rupture through which the Messiah enters (Benjamin 1969: 254, 264). The unlucky hero model also reflects Chto Delat's honest and pragmatic attitude to the political efficacy of art. Yes, we are already in a moment of danger, a state of emergency, but

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