

CUMMA PAPERS #14

CUMMA (CURATING, MANAGING AND MEDIATING ART) IS A TWO-YEAR, MULTIDISCIPLINARY MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMME AT AALTO UNIVERSITY FOCUSING ON CONTEMPORARY ART AND ITS PUBLICS. AALTO UNIVERSITY IS LOCATED IN HELSINKI AND ESPOO IN FINLAND.

ILYA ORLOV A REVOLUTIONARY MUSEUM AFTER IDEOLOGY

Descents into the past and appeals to history have been symptomatic of recent Russian politics, which is literally obsessed with re-enactments. It has recreated the “Soviet imperial,” the “pre-revolutionary imperial,” the “Orthodox,” and the “patriarchal” visual and rhetorical discourses. As has been recently pointed out, President Putin has become a genuine performance artist himself. He has piloted a hang glider, flying alongside rare birds; retrieved an ancient Greek amphora from depths of the Black Sea; and shown off his physically fit body. Moreover, he has transformed reality by means of mass media.¹

This political constructivism resembles an artwork. Costumed characters that should have been relegated to historical museums—Cossacks, Orthodox priests, members of the Black Hundreds, cartoonish Stalinists—have suddenly taken to streets of Russian cities in the 21st century. At the same time, the authorities have been making efforts to erase the historical memory of revolution, which no longer conforms to the official conservative state ideology. Unfortunately, the political opposition has also denounced its historical connection with the tradition of the revolution, once victorious in Russia, and has been losing the battle for both the past and the future. While historical exhibitions dedicated to tsarist dynasties have been drawing crowds, Soviet revolutionary museums—former ideological altars that once legitimised the “violence of the oppressed”—have become non-places, potential lots for redevelopment or real estate properties for sale.

The recent transition in post-Soviet society from the political apathy of past years to aggressive intolerance and a nationalist mobilisation raises anew the question of the role of artists in society and their engagement in politics.² But if the answer to Russian society’s political apathy in the 2000s was radical actionism, such as the art group Voina’s performances, the answer to the current ultra-conservative turn in Russian politics and its uncritical “re-enactments” of the past may be an art that engages with the historical memory of revolution and analytically revises its legacy.

But would the simple presentation of an alternative historical narrative be a sufficient response? What strategies for reflecting history should art have in its arsenal? How can art speak not merely about the political past but also speak about the past politically? While preparing the project *A Revolutionary Museum after Ideology*, which I produced in collaboration with artist Natasha Kraevskaya in 2014, we faced these questions, too. In this short article, I would like to enlarge on whether we managed to answer these questions and how we elaborated them during the artistic research for the project.

¹ Artist and activist Nadezhda Tolokonnikova made this point in a Facebook post, dated August 8, 2014; accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/tolokonno/posts/792897714074449>:0. Artist Arseniy Zhilyaev voiced a similar idea, which he reworked into the concept for an exhibition; accessed at http://www.kadist.org/sites/kadist.org/files/attachments/arseniy_zhilyaev_mir_presspack_eng_bd.pdf.

² The situation has been exacerbated by new crackdowns on political freedoms and freedom of speech, and by the shrinking of space for public discussion. As artist and activist Victoria Lomasko said in a recent interview, “My work Cannibal State, in support of political prisoners, today could be regarded as insulting state symbols. [The work entitled] Liberate Russia from Putin clearly rocks the boat; it’s a call for rebellion, for revolution, and this is ‘extremism.’ [...] It is impossible to know about the new laws and not to think about the consequences if you make a work about something that really concerns you. [If] I were to draw something [in a satirical way, about Fascists], I could be accused of spreading Fascist ideas. And if I put it on the Web, everyone who reposts the picture automatically becomes my accomplice”; accessed at <https://therussianreader.wordpress.com/2015/04/15/russia-vs-russia-lomasko-censorship/>.

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:
A REVOLUTIONARY MUSEUM AFTER
IDEOLOGY. THE HUT MUSEUM. 2014.
SARAI (THE "SHED") MUSEUM IN RAZLIV. 2014.
MONUMENT THE "HUT" (ARCHITECT
A.GEGELLO, 1928). 2014.



We did the project *A Revolutionary Museum after Ideology* in a museum complex located in the Petersburg suburbs of Sestroretsk and the village of Razliv. The Manifesta 10 Public Program, as curated by Joanna Warsza, commissioned the work.

Two site-specific exhibitions, supplemented by a series of lecture tours and discussions, were held at the Razliv museum complex, which consists of two small Soviet revolutionary memorial museums at two sites, the Shed Museum and the Hut Museum. Both locations were originally ordinary suburban places, and both were turned into memorial museums during Soviet times. They dealt with the episode in the 1917 revolution known as Lenin's last underground period and the site known as "Lenin's final hiding place." Vladimir Lenin and his comrade-in-arms Grigory Zinoviev hid there during the summer of 1917 to avoid arrest and prosecution by the Provisional Government.

The Shed Museum (in Russian, *Sarai*) is a real former shed where Lenin and Zinoviev hid for several days in July 1917. The shed is covered with a glass casing, and today there is still a Soviet-era permanent exhibition that recreates the interior of this shed as it looked in 1917.

The Hut Museum (in Russian, *Shalash*) is a quite large pavilion built in the mid 1960s at the rural site where Lenin and Zinoviev also lived in July 1917 in a hut fashioned from branches and hay.

Razliv means “flood” in English. The village of Razliv is part of the suburb of Sestroretsk, and is located on the shores of Razliv Lake. In fact, the lake is artificial. It was an unintended byproduct of Peter the Great’s modernisation of Russia. In the 1720s, a large munitions factory was built on the shore of the Sestra River. A levee was also built to supply the plant with mechanical energy, which was generated by a water mill. The river flooded and formed the artificial lake now known as Razliv. So we might say the landscape was shaped by modernisation.

From the late nineteenth century, Sestroretsk, as an industrial centre, was also a hotbed of the workers’ movement. It is important to keep in mind that the munitions plant workers were not former peasants, as had often been the case during the pre-revolutionary period in Russia, but were already second-generation proletarians. Therefore, many Sestroretsk workers had been involved in the first Russian Revolution of 1905; many were anarchists and social democrats. It should come as no surprise that the Bolsheviks found support among such people. At the same time, there was a fashionable bourgeois resort and a popular dacha village located near this industrial settlement. Many members of the Russian intelligentsia—writers, poets, actors, and artists—used to live or summer there.

The February Revolution was the first of two revolutions in Russia in 1917, although some historians consider them parts of a single revolutionary process. After spontaneous bread riots, mass strikes and demonstrations in Petrograd, then the capital of the Russian Empire, soldiers from the city’s garrison sided with the protesters. The revolution forced the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II. The Provisional Government came to power. Its members, mostly liberals and conservatives, were drawn from the State Duma, the former monarchy’s parliament. At the same time, local socialists formed an alternative authority, the Petrograd Soviet, which ruled alongside the Provisional Government. There were thus two centres of power, both plagued by problems of legitimacy. It was a very unstable situation, which Lenin defined later as a *diarchy* (*dvoevlastie*).

Both the Provisional Government and the socialists from the Petrograd Soviet supported the imperialist war effort. Lenin, who arrived in Petrograd from Zürich in April 1917, immediately began to undermine the situation, issuing his so-called April Theses. He insisted on an anti-war agenda and the slogan “All Power to the Soviets.” In fact, during this period, as the war between the imperialist powers raged on, Lenin was the only political figure that took a strong anti-war stance. Initially, neither Lenin nor his ideas enjoyed widespread support, not even among his fellow Bolsheviks.

By the way, this point was very important for us in terms of last summer’s political context—the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war—and it is still on the agenda today.

The next big event, the so-called “July Days”, was a failed attempt at a new revolution by anarchists with the involvement of Bolsheviks in early July 1917. It was the first

time in 1917 when the military forces of the Provisional Government attacked a demonstration (albeit one that was not entirely peaceable). Consequently, the government pursued Lenin as a German agent and ordered the arrests of other leftist oppositionists, especially Bolsheviks. Lenin and Zinoviev were forced to go underground.

Since the Bolsheviks had well-developed networks among the workers of Sestroretsk and Razliv, Lenin and Zinoviev soon found a place to hide. The person who aided them was a worker at the Sestroretsk armaments plant, Bolshevik Nikolai Emelianov. Lenin and Zinoviev lived in his shed in Razliv for a few days. When it was too dangerous to stay there any longer, Emelianov ferried them to the other side of the lake, and built a hut in a field for them. Lenin and Zinoviev lived there, disguised as Finnish peasants, for three weeks.

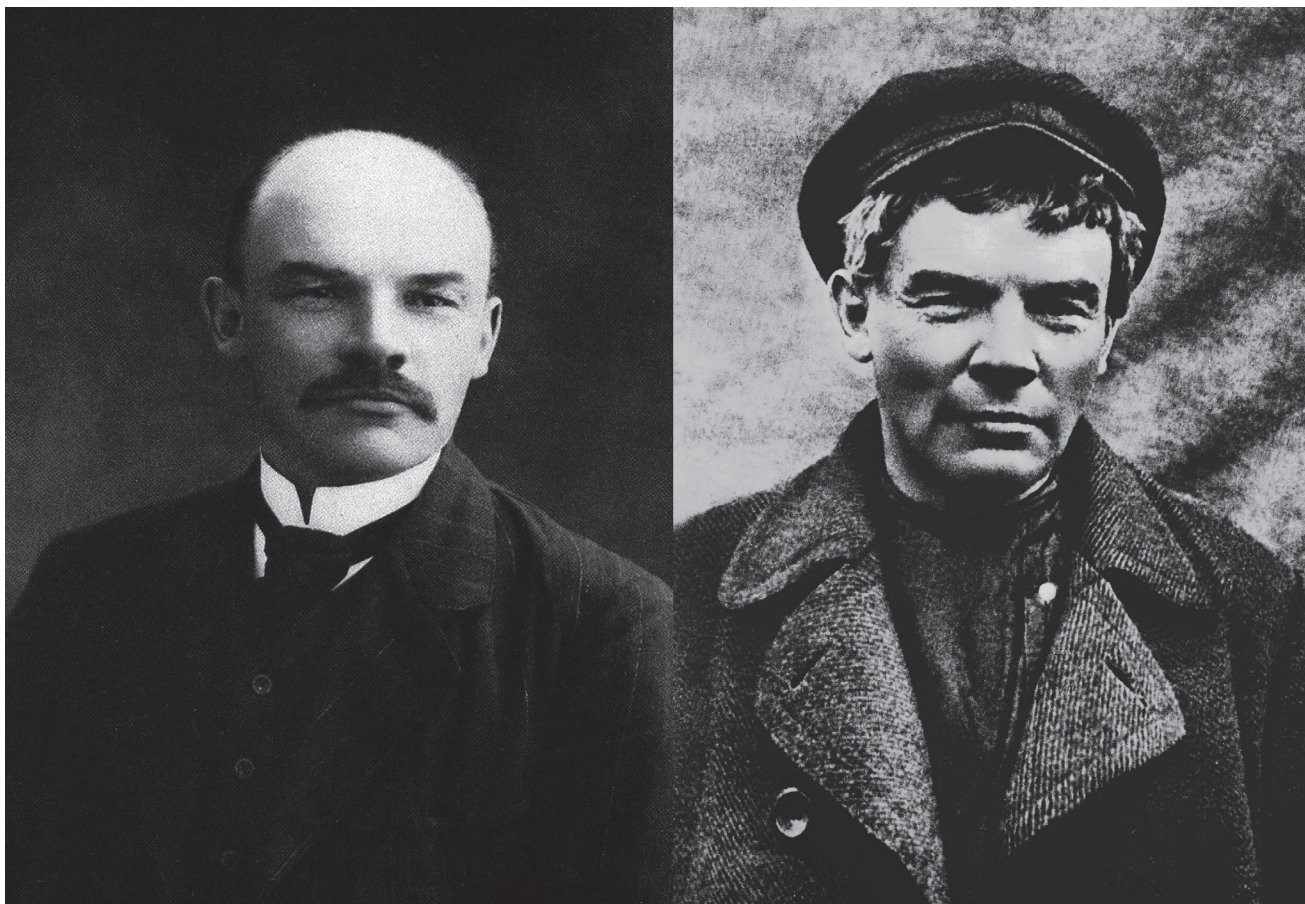
According to the so-called Leniniana—the informal corpus of popular Soviet biographies and myths about Lenin, during his time in hiding—Lenin remained in contact with the Party in Petrograd through networks of liaisons, read newspapers, which were delivered hot from the presses by comrades, and wrote articles.

Moreover, as Soviet legend has it, it was in Razliv where Lenin elaborated his theory of revolution, his doctrine of armed rebellion, and finished one of his most subversive and prominent works, *The State and Revolution*.

Lenin hid in Razliv for three weeks, until the end of July 1917. Emelianov then fabricated papers for him, a false passport under the name of worker Konstantin Ivanov. Lenin illegally traveled to Finland, where he continued with his theoretical and coordinating work in preparation for a rebellion in Petrograd. When the rebellion was crowned with success in October 1917, Lenin moved to the Smolny and headed the new Bolshevik government.³

³ See, for example, V.I. Startsev, *Ot Razliva do Smolnogo* [From Razliv to Smolny], Moscow, 1977; V.T. Loginov, *Neizvestnyi Lenin* [The unknown Lenin], Moscow, 2010.

V.I. LENIN. PARIS, 1915; V.I. LENIN. RAZLIV, 1917.





RAZLIV. YOUNG PIONEERS AND LENIN'S FIREPLACE. [POSTCARD]. PHOTO BY P.V.MELNIKOV. 1970S.

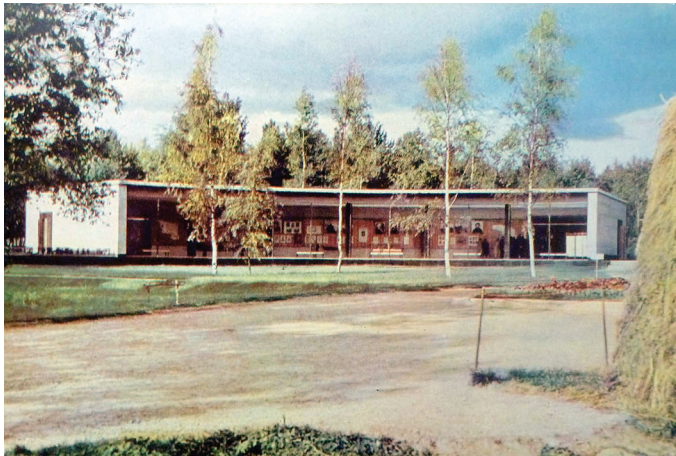
⁴ See, for example, Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*, Cambridge, Mass., 1997.

After Lenin's death in 1924, there ensued what American Slavists later defined as the Lenin cult or even the "deification of Lenin."⁴ Memorial sites, museums, and monuments were constructed throughout the Soviet Union in huge numbers.

The museum in Razliv was among the first. It opened in 1925. Emelianov's shed was turned into a sightseeing attraction, with its humble cabin interior on permanent display. In 1928, a monument designed by architect Alexander Gegello in the form of the hut, albeit with a touch of constructivism, was built in the field on the other side of the lake, at the site where, as the legend goes, Lenin lived in his branch and hay shelter.

During the Stalinist period, despite the erection of a monumental granite mausoleum for the late Bolshevik leader on Red Square, Stalin overshadowed Lenin's figure.

The renaissance of the Lenin cult in the 1960s was the partly unintentional aftermath of de-Stalinisation. Along the way, the authorities were forced to rename streets that had previously been named in honour of Stalin. And indeed they were



RAZLIV. PAVILION OF THE
LENIN MEMORIAL
MUSEUM SHALASH
(THE "HUT"). [POSTCARD].
LENINGRAD, 1967.

renamed—in memory of Lenin, of course. Monuments of Stalin were also replaced—by monuments of Lenin, of course.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Revolution, in 1967, there was almost nothing left to name after Lenin. Thus, by the mid 1960s, the Lenin cult had gone a little over the top. But there was more to come. In 1970, during the centenary celebration of Lenin's birth, there was a new wave of renaming and mass commemorations. It was the year that Emelianov's shed was covered with a glass casing. By this period, the Lenin cult was reduced to the point of absurdity. There were plenty of funny stories about this naming and renaming of all and sundry—factories, mills, workers' clubs, streets, ships, etc.—in memory of Lenin in the late 1960s, but the facts speak for themselves: it was then that the Leningrad (!) subway was even named after Lenin (!) and awarded the Order of Lenin (!)⁵

Meanwhile, during this period, memorial sites of the revolutionary movement, and Lenin memorial sites and museums were transformed into ideological altars of sorts. The same was true of the Lenin museums in Razliv. Both sites were visited by hundreds of thousands of people annually. The museums were known worldwide and were visited by numerous international delegations. Young people were sworn into the Young Pioneer youth movement there. This was the main ideological ritual for Soviet youth, a mode of political initiation, and a commemoration of Lenin and the Revolution as well. Schoolchildren and university students were also taken to such places on class trips. Guidebooks and postcards featuring the museums were printed in huge quantities.

In 1964, a new exhibition pavilion was built near the Hut Monument to hold and display the museum's collection. It is an elegant minimalist building, made of concrete and glass, designed by architect V.D. Kirkhoglani. In the 1960s, most of the museums dedicated to Lenin and his hideouts were decked out in keeping with the latest trends in exhibition design, featuring genuinely modern exhibits created by leading museum curators. The same was true of the Museum in Razliv, whose exhibition and design

⁵ I.e., the V.I. Lenin Order of Lenin Leningrad Metro. See Tumarkin, *op. cit.* See also the recent article by anthropologist Alexei Yurchak in which he considers the practice of preserving of Lenin's body (and the Lenin cult) as an instance of "neotraditional sovereignty" within the Soviet political system. Alexei Yurchak, "Bodies of Lenin: The Hidden Science of Communist Sovereignty," *Representations* 129 (Winter 2015): 116–57.



THE NEW PERMANENT EXHIBITION OF THE HUT MUSEUM. PHOTO BY KIDSREVIEW.

were excellent. Unfortunately, this permanent exhibition was dismantled and lost in 2006.

After perestroika, the Museum in Razliv shared the same fate as other Lenin and revolution museums. The buildings fell into disrepair, and the permanent exhibitions were on the verge of closing. As for the museums that have survived, their main strategy in the 2000s and beyond has been to try and organise new permanent exhibitions, which have been self-described as “de-ideologised” and have tended to implement the doctrine of the so-called restoration of historical justice.

The Museum in Razliv is a good example of such de-ideologisation. In fact, after the Soviet-era exhibition was dismantled in 2006, with support from a local businessman, the owner of a nearby restaurant, the museum’s curators organised a new permanent exhibition that combined, on the one hand, an attempt to function as a local ethnographic museum, and, on the other, a slightly veiled narrative of the “fatal role” played by the (imagined) conspiracy of Bolsheviks and Germans in the October Revolution of 1917.

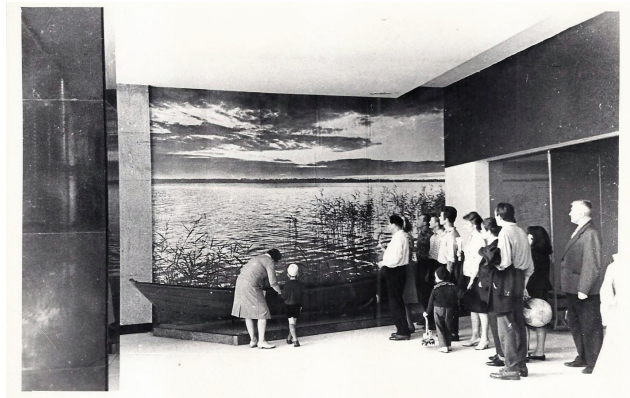
Thus, a popular post-Soviet cultural doctrine and the discourse of the “restoration of historical justice” proved to be a euphemism for the counter-revolutionary conservative ideology that, under the Putin regime, has replaced Soviet dogmatism and the deification of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party. Such were the conditions in which we worked while doing our project for Manifesta in Razliv.

The starting point and main inspiration for our artistic research were photos and postcards we had found in the museum’s archive. Primarily, these were photographs of the museum and its visitors from the 1960s and 1970s. On the one hand, we can see in these photos a quite international, advanced, genuinely progressive exhibition design, resembling a European museum exhibition during the same period.

On the other hand, there is the interesting reaction on part of visitors. We discovered that these archival photographs of the museum’s exhibitions from the late 1960s



RAZLIV. PAVILION OF THE LENIN MEMORIAL MUSEUM SHALASH (THE "HUT"). INTERIOR. [POSTCARD]. PHOTO BY I. NAROVLYANSKY. AURORA PUBLISHING. LENINGRAD, 1969.



RAZLIV. PAVILION OF THE LENIN MEMORIAL MUSEUM SHALASH (THE "HUT"). INTERIOR. PHOTO FROM RAZLIV MUSEUM ARCHIVE, 1960S.

were surprisingly similar to photos taken at European biennales. Soviet tourists examined an old tin teapot and bundle of wood in the Hut Museum or an ordinary tree stump in Lenin's "outdoor office," the so-called "Green Study", much as European audiences of the 1970s stared in fascination at objects they were equally unaccustomed to seeing in museums.

Here are some examples: pictures of Harald Szeeman's curatorial project *When Attitudes Become Form*, in 1969 at Kunsthalle Bern, contrasted with photos from the Museum in Razliv from the same year.

Another discovery, as well as an important source for further research, was photographs and postcards of so-called "Lenin's places", his secret hideouts or places he was known to have frequented. We were especially interested in postcards printed in the 1960s in large editions. If it were not for the captions on the verso of these postcards, identifying them as Lenin's places, they could have been taken for ordinary rural views or banal suburban landscapes, pictures of fields, forests or lakeshores. It is remarkable that there is almost nothing picturesque, no intentional "beauty" in these pictures. They seem deliberately discreet and artless.

The captions on the verso of these pictures and postcards turn an ordinary forest into Lenin's forest, an ordinary field into Lenin's field, a plain hut into a sacred place of memory. In this way, the banality of these views and the artlessness of these photographs lend them the quality of truly conceptual images. Soviet underground art of the 1970s, such as Sots Art or Moscow conceptualism, could probably spoof this manner of depiction *vis-à-vis* their ironical, mildly iconoclastic subversion of Soviet ideology. But the ideology has been already dethroned, revealed, discredited, and dishonoured. So we have applied other methods and have found something out in the process: namely, a parallel with conceptualism itself. The postcards of Lenin's places bear a strong resemblance to the documentary photographs of performances by the



KUNSTHALLE BERN. WHEN ATTITUDES
BECOME FORM. 1969.



art group Collective Actions,⁶ whose underground secret happenings in the Moscow countryside during the 1970s turned run-of-the-mill rural landscapes into special, ritualistic spaces by means of similar mental and discursive operations, which could be defined as conceptual nominalism.

Thus, during our research in the museum's archive, we discovered unexpected parallels between the function of ideology in Soviet museum commemorations and contemporary art practices, which gave us a clue about how we should proceed with our own project.

Given that the contemporary art exhibition is not such an up-to-date concept itself, it always needs elements or approaches that undermine or at least question it from within. A possible method of undermining involves blurring the boundaries of the art exhibition genre, for example, by means of mixing two different exhibition practices: a temporary thematic display in a historical museum and an exhibition of contemporary art.

This was just what we did. For the project, we worked out our own rules. We decided to make an exhibition bereft of any manifestly "authorial" artworks, without resorting to artistic self-expression. Rather, we would re-conceptualise photographs and objects from the museum's collections, recreate items that had been lost, and restore the Soviet minimalist exhibition design of the 1970s. This naturally implied our employing a strategy of subtle shifts that would supplement the exhibition by rearranging elements and thus provoke viewers to reflect on and question the current status and significance of the revolutionary museum.

Our slide installation at the Shed Museum was based on postcards from the late 1960s, which depict the mass rituals of political commemoration that took place at Razliv during the Soviet period.

⁶ See the website *Kollektivnye Deystviya (Collective Actions)*. The descriptions, photo, video and audio of all the actions; accessed at <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-ACTIONS.htm>.

RAZLIV. THE FIELD THERE LENIN LIVED IN 1917
[POSTCARD]. 1970S.



RAZLIV. THE SO-CALLED "GREEN STUDY". IN 1917
LENIN WORKED HERE ON HIS BOOK THE STATE
AND REVOLUTION. [POSTCARD]. 1970S.

COLLECTIVE ACTIONS.
COMEDY PERFORMANCE. 1977.

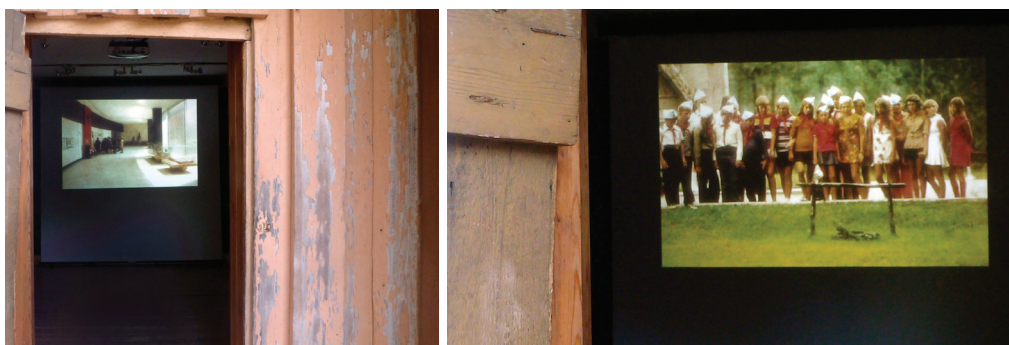


COLLECTIVE ACTIONS.
PLACE OF ACTION PERFORMANCE. 1979.

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A REVOLUTIONARY MUSEUM AFTER IDEOLOGY. THE SHED MUSEUM. 2014.

One of Lenin’s favourite songs, “The Workers’ Marseillaise,” provided the soundtrack. But we assembled this recording in a particular way. We removed the consonants from the choir’s vocal performance. By In doing this, we removed an element that supported the form of the song’s words, leaving only the sublime, inspiring, and solemn pathos of the vowels. We did this in order to achieve the effect of the disappearance of the song’s original sense and also to show the loss of revolutionary ideas in such ideological museum practices, both in Soviet times and nowadays. For us, it was a self-referential metaphor for the function of ideology.

At the Hut Museum, we recreated the most famous part of the museum’s classic 1964 Soviet exhibition, dismantled in 2006 but widely known from numerous photos: the minimalist glass cube showcase containing objects from Lenin’s secret hideout in



A REVOLUTIONARY MUSEUM AFTER IDEOLOGY. THE HUT MUSEUM. 2014.

Razliv. We did not simply recreate this showcase; we reproduced three identical versions of the same thing.

This was not a mere restoration and thus similar to a re-enactment, but rather a conceptual restoration or deconstruction, since this reproduction was supplemented by the strategy of the shift. The shift in question here was repetition, the restoration of an object in three exactly identical versions. In the slides, you can see that we actually reproduced not only the glass showcases of 1964 but also re-enacted in a different way the very situation of visiting the exhibition in the mid 1960s. We thus made it possible to compare Soviet tourists with Manifesta 10 visitors.

The next part of the exhibition dealt with ideological practices of erasing historical memory. On the wall was a photocopy from the museum's archive of a cutting from an unidentified newspaper, published in the late 1920s, which was censored, presumably in latter years. An unknown museum employee had cut out the name, presumably,

A REVOLUTIONARY MUSEUM AFTER IDEOLOGY. THE SHED MUSEUM. 2014 AND 1969.



of Grigory Zinoviev, with whom Lenin had hid in Razliv in 1917. He had cut out it from the caption underneath the photo, as it was prohibited to mention Zinoviev or his time with Lenin following Zinoviev's execution in 1936 during the Stalinist purges.⁷

The following section—Soviet postcards and photographs of Lenin's hideouts on the opposite wall—led visitors to consider the current process by which historical memory is eroded. Devoid of their captions, which are on the reverse side of the postcards, Lenin's hideouts become ordinary rural landscapes and banal interiors, potential parcels of land or properties for sale.

⁷ Not only Zinoviev but also worker Bolshevik Nikolai Emelianov, who had concealed Lenin and Zinoviev in his shed, was prosecuted in the 1930s as counter-revolutionary. Emelianov was jailed for ten years and then exiled to Kazakhstan. He was released and allowed to come back home to Razliv only in 1954, after Stalin's death.



THE CAPTION READS, "THE FOREST IN WHICH THE HUT WAS LOCATED WHERE COMRADES [SIC] LENIN [BLANK] LIVED." PHOTO FROM THE RAZLIV MUSEUM ARCHIVE.





A series of lecture tours from the Hermitage Museum to the Lenin museums in Razliv were an intrinsic part of the project. During Manifesta 10, we organised several such tours and discussions.

The first tour opened with a lecture by historian Ilya Budraitskis, “De-Ideologization: Revolutionary Museums and Their Place in the Present.” We also organised a lecture by Alexander Semyonov, a local professor of history, and the co-founder and co-editor of the international scholarly journal *Ab Imperio*, who provided a very interesting comparison of the crises of 1917 and 2014 in their complex historical combination of imperial background and revolution.

A further tour to Razliv was entitled “Mimesis and Revolution.” The point there was the interesting parallels between the conspiratorial practices of professional revolutionaries and certain artistic strategies. There are ample legends, well known from the extensive Soviet biographies of Lenin, about his fantastic impersonations during the period when he was hiding from the Provisional Government, stories involving wigs, greasepaint, and actors from the Finnish workers’ theatre who taught and helped him to impersonate peasants and workers. In connection with this, I discussed not only plasticity as a quality of revolution but also the mimetic nature of revolution itself, the mechanism of repetition at work in revolutions throughout history.

In conclusion, I return to a point I mentioned at the beginning: the question of possible methods of artistic reflection on historical memory and the history of revolution in particular.

It appears that in the project I have described we were guided not only by intuition. I think the methods we have applied, as well as the methods of artistic research on history and memory in general, are not so distant from the methods of the social sciences and historiography. Thus, the tradition of social sciences would be very important to artists who engage with material such as we have. One of its main origins was the French intellectual scene of the 1930s, when historical studies had been given new impetus by the sociology of Émile Durkheim. I am referring primarily to the Annales School, a highly influential tradition and intellectual platform that formulated and proposed modern methods of historical research. Its co-founders historians Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, when discussing how to work with historical sources, taught their disciples to peruse “the human facts which [sociologists] condemn as the most superficial and capricious of all,”⁸ which also means perusing the seemingly trivial and insignificant, perusing the margins. This resonated in a certain way with the methods of psychoanalysis, which was evolving increasingly in the same period and influenced the social sciences as well. Thus, as regards our own project, a well-known text of Soviet ideology and mass culture was given a new reading and conceptualisation. It was especially tempting for us, since both intellectual traditions, the sociology of Durkheim and Freudianism, had been almost completely rejected and ignored by Soviet academia.

⁸ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, Manchester, 2004, p. 17.

Febvre and Bloch insisted as well on being critical towards facts, on questioning the equation of facts with truth. Febvre argued that the historian creates facts on his own, by discovering them, and he constructs his own narrative with them. He also emphasised the point that researchers should first develop their own theories, the conceptual frames for their further research.⁹

⁹ Lucien Febvre, *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Febvre*, ed. Peter Burke, trans. K. Folca, London, 1973.

Another important theoretical background for an artistic reflection on history is certainly the concept of so-called history and memory, or memory studies. In the 1980s, historical studies experienced a crisis and revised their conceptions of scholarly rigour. Therefore, an interest in what had previously not engaged historians—memory and memories—emerged. *The Collective Memory* (1950), a posthumous book by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who had been a disciple of Émile Durkheim, was the key influence. It was republished in the early 1980s, giving a boost to the new methodological turn in historical studies. French historian Pierre Nora elaborated Halbwachs's ideas and reshaped his approach to history and memory in his own concepts of commemoration and “places of memory.” Historians and researchers now examine not only historical events but also memories of historical events. Memory and commemoration have become key notions.

It is true we could not have avoided these theoretical approaches in our project,

either. When dealing with a Lenin museum and Lenin's underground period of 1917, we paid attention to things that were somewhat peripheral and, at the same time, trivial: postcards featuring exhibition views and commemorations in the museum during the 1960s, and amateur snapshots of the museum made during Soviet times. It was certainly deliberate on our part that, when speaking of Lenin and 1917, we approached, first of all, the history of commemoration, in the way current historians would have done. In all fairness, it is extremely difficult today to reflect such a figure as Lenin in art, since his image has been turned into a mass culture icon and has been subversively used many times in pop art, as well as in its Soviet underground versions, the Sots Arts and Moscow conceptualism of the 1970s and 1980s, and especially in perestroika-era kitsch art. That is why we chose the opposite method and strategies. We used the optics of contemporary conceptualism or, as it were, post-conceptualism, as well as strategies of engaging the audience by means of a series of lecture tours to the museum, talks, and discussions.

Finally, this artistic reflection on history makes a difference only if it is done politically. Lenin's renewed significance was proven in the spring of 2014. Ukrainians had begun demolishing Soviet monuments to Lenin (for a lack of monuments to Stalin to destroy, as someone aptly remarked), and they are still engaged in this process of wholesale demolition today. But in fact, Lenin was the only major political figure in 1917, in the midst of a full-scale war among the imperial powers, who insisted on a radical, uncompromising anti-war agenda. Lenin's stance was the immediate cause of his prosecution by the Provisional Government, and the reason he took refuge in Razliv.

We intended our project to shed light on a historical period when this anti-war stance was in the underground, on the periphery of public politics, as it is today. It was important for us not simply to represent an alternative historical narrative but also to approach history in a way opposed to current official cultural policy, to critically revise rather than re-enact, to deconstruct rather than recreate.

CuMMA PAPERS #14

A Revolutionary Museum After Ideology
by Ilya Orlov

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EDITORIAL WORK AND PROOFREADING

The Russian Reader
therussianreader.wordpress.com
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GRAPHIC DESIGN

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DEPARTMENT OF ART
AALTO UNIVERSITY
HELSINKI 2015

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