REPEAT AFTER ME II

La Biennale di Venezia

60. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

REPEAT AFTER ME II

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2022 2024

60. Esposizione
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REPEAT AFTER ME II

Conceived by Marta Czyż & OPEN GROUP:
Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 2024

REPEAT AFTER ME II

OPEN GROUP:
Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga

curator: Marta Czyż

Polish Pavilion at the 60th International
Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia
20 April–24 November 2024

INTRODUCTION

'Refugees are everywhere.' This was what could have been, and actually was said in Poland during the first year of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Poland took in about a million people fleeing that country: half of them were women, and children represented a third of that number. Refugees were everywhere: in private homes, shelters and hotels made available to them, in church halls and numerous cultural institutions. Everyone found shelter and care, owing to the widespread mobilisation of our citizens. It was an automatic collective response, a natural impulse that no one disputed.

Refugees brought along experiences of war. A war that the Russian aggressors had unleashed on Ukrainian society. Attacks on cities, civilian buildings, blocks of flats, and cultural landmarks vital to the society's identity were all part of the planned Russian operation to wreak terror and crush the will to fight. We watched this war. They were up close, we were a distance away. We saw it in photographs. We saw it on the faces of people we passed on the street. Already relatively safe. We could look them in the eye or look away.

But a war does not happen in silence. A war means constantly listening out for approaching death — from a bullet, a mortar shell, a missile. Sometimes hundreds of kilometres from the front lines, in outwardly peaceful cities and towns. In times of war, listening is essential. It warns us of impending danger. This cannot be shown, it must be heard.

Faced with the war declared by Russia — not only on Ukraine, but also on the values that form European culture —

it was our duty to enable a group of artists from Ukraine to share their experience of trauma with the world. This is an experience that does not shock with bloodshed, but is captured in sound. That is why we have opened the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale to people whose homeland and right to live are being taken away.

Art does not stop death, art does not bring peace — it is an illusion to believe it has such power. But art can warn us, it can trigger a sense of solidarity, an unexpected collective sense of empathy. In order to understand and to oppose the evil that feeds on human indifference.

I feel honoured to have the privilege of being the commissioner of the Polish Pavilion for this particular edition of the Biennale. I would like to thank the curator of the exhibition, Marta Czyż, and artists of the Open Group: Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga, who have accepted the task of representing Poland at the 60th International Art Exhibition in Venice.

Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz

Commissioner of the Polish Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition in Venice
Minister of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland


MODULAR
MODULAR

SOUNDS OF SURVIVAL
SONGS OF APOCALYPTIC REALITY

Marta Czyż

Repetition helps us remember things we want to keep from forgetting. The *Repeat after Me II* exhibition at the Polish Pavilion gives us spoken testimonies of civilian victims/survivors of the war in Ukraine, who share their experiences with us. They recreate recalled sounds of weapons so that we can repeat after them. They pass on their means of survival, but also their trauma, which will stay with them for all their lives.

Open Group was inspired to create this project in 2022 by a brochure, *In Case of Emergency or War*, which the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and Information Policy's Centre for Strategic Security and Safety Information began distributing a few weeks before the Russian invasion. It explained how to behave in a war zone depending on whether the attack in question was machine-gun fire, artillery fire, many rocket-launchers, or an air raid. In two videos (2022 and 2024), Open Group gave the floor to war witnesses, who were able to salvage their lives through their ability to recognise the sounds of weaponry.

To acquaint the exhibition's viewers with the experiences of the video's protagonists, the artists have used karaoke, a form of pop music entertainment from Japan. At the Polish Pavilion exhibition, the films are projected on opposite walls, microphones are placed in front of the screens, and in between there is a futuristic military karaoke bar. The protagonists of either film introduce themselves, and then present their weapon of choice — the one that most lingers in their

memory. Then they imitate its sounds and invite the audience to do the same, saying 'repeat after me'. Viewers can repeat the sounds of the weapons or withdraw into the back space of the bar. Yet this is not an ordinary bar — the music here is not radio hits, but shots, rockets, howling and explosions, and the text is descriptions of lethal weapons. This is the soundtrack of a war, which the witnesses try to replicate. The audience is invited to take part in a series of repetitions, standing between the two films, in which the sounds of weapons ring out like an endless refrain. 'Repeat after me', the refugees tell us, encouraging us to step into their shoes, though of course this is impossible until we have shared their experience. Empathetic participation aims to wrench us from a state of passivity. When we learn a foreign language, we often repeat the new sounds and words out loud — 'repeat after me', the refugees tell us, and we, repeating after them, learn the language of their experience.

This work is a collective portrait of its protagonists' trials, and at the same time, a record of individual experiences of a catastrophe. At a first glance, the video looks like a social probe. We might see a distant echo of Krzysztof Kieślowski's documentary *Talking Heads* of 1980. This was the director's response to a series of articles by critic Zygmunt Kałużyński in 1971, in which he questioned the artistic value of films of the Polish School of Documentaries, accusing its adherents of using the banal 'talking heads' convention. Kieślowski proved that this convention had major power, capable of forging a special relationship between the viewer and the documentary's subjects. In *Talking Heads* people speak to the camera about a pressing need for freedom, democracy, and human respect. The protagonists of the video invited by Open Group, regardless of their age, origin, professional or

social status, also turn to face the viewer, make close contact with them, inviting them to repeat, though their position and the content of their statements are quite different. They speak of what they have encountered, and their dream is merely to survive. Kieślowski builds an atmosphere of honest conversation filled with hope, Open Group focuses on the basic value that is human life.

Repeat after Me II brings together some vital features that define Open Group's practice, based on creating 'open situations' in an interaction process whose factors are time and space, as well as relationships. The artists decided to show two similarly constructed films from different phases of the war, building a narrative that stresses the war's grim continuity. *Repeat after Me* of 2022 is a picture of war seen from the inside — here the only sense of peace comes from the summer landscape and the protagonists' static poses. 'Internal refugees' who escaped from east to west Ukraine are allowed to speak. In the video from 2024, the witnesses' stories come from an international community. The protagonists come from Ukraine and are now living abroad, in other European cities — Wrocław, Berlin, Vienna, Vilnius and Tullamore (Ireland), as well as New York — among many other refugees. The new perspective means the protagonists have a different state of mind: in Ukraine they were still in a state of readiness, of constant threat; abroad, they experience returning trauma. The change in locales in the second film expands the refugees' geography, but also shows the protagonists at a point when the war has been continuing for two years and has left its mark on our everyday lives. The protagonists' statements add information about the countries in which they have refugee contacts. This is of particular importance today, when we are simultaneously observing genocide in Gaza,

a growing conflict between China and Taiwan, and other ongoing armed conflicts, not to mention the recent vast influx of refugees to Europe from such countries as Libya, Syria, Yemen, and many others. Each of these conflicts becomes a powder keg for the planet, another crisis, a sickness of the world flaring up in many places at once.

In *Repeat after Me* of 2022, the protagonists share an experience of the war live, while the work from 2024 is more of a tale of remembering the sounds they experienced. The second video also shows a shift in the social mood. In 2022 the response to the full-scale invasion by Russia, after the initial shock, was opposition, global mobilisation and immediate assistance, a prevailing sense of power and unity in a shared goal. In 2024 the mood is different — help is delayed or fails to arrive, the lack of ammunition and support is causing hope for a quick end to the war to fade. Western countries are increasingly counting their domestic losses, giving in to pressures of societal fatigue, more conflicts are emerging and one war is beginning to obscure another.

The weaponry used in Ukraine has been used in every armed conflict since the twentieth century, and thus is an instrument of oppression familiar to all war victims over the past few decades. All the witnesses' tales come from Ukraine, but they could, and aim to serve as a universal, collective portrait of refugees from around the world, always represented by the same, shared sounds. Today the voices of these Ukrainian protagonists could be replaced by Palestinians, Yemeni, Libyans, Syrians or Haitians.[1] This is why, in the 2024 work, the Ukrainian refugees who were recorded in various parts of Europe supplement their responses from the video of 2022.

1. According to: https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch of 2 March 2024.

Sometimes the speakers mention particular countries — Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Palestine — sometimes they speak of people they've met from around the world, of the language barrier, everything that makes the geography of the refugee, the geography of the war. Refugee status has no one place of origin. Today the whole world is a zone of resettlement and flight, and shelter has no certain location. It is a world of fluid citizenship, full of emigrants and refugees. The concept of citizenship is reshaping with the influx of 'new' citizens. Yet many states are blocking access to civil rights, appealing to sovereignty and national unity. The refugee crisis has joined the climate catastrophe to become one of the urgent problems of the twenty-first century.

Repeat after Me II broadens the limits of representation by providing an opportunity to share more than personal experiences, life stories, and spaces. The 'Open' in the collective's name means limitless space, but also an openness to taking on new ideas or proposals; joined with 'Group' it adds participation and authorship of an infinite number of people. Their work questions what is perceived as the work of a defined collective, whose final effect is a completed work, and collapses the geographical boundaries defining the nationality of the artists, thus breaking down the idea of the national pavilion at the Biennale di Venezia.

***

Survivors' testimonies are documents of the crimes of the Second World War, they stand as proof in the legal sense, but they also relay individual experiences. According to Tony Kushner, hearing and writing down these reports is a form

of 'rescue archaeology',[2] authenticated by a dwindling number of survivors. Testimonies collected today are not only to meet the demands of rescue archaeology, but also to reach the largest number of people at the time of their creation, as an alternative to media reports. This is why scholars and workers in various organisations are presently driven not only by a desire to bring direct help, but also to document the experience of war and being a refugee. These actions have been taken up alongside aid initiatives, especially after the first reports of Russian crimes, such as those in Bucha and Mariupol. As it turns out, for people of the older generation who survived the Second World War, reports of war crimes are a harrowing experience. It shows how painfully far we are from learning the lessons of history. Their recollections take on a recurring pattern: often there is a description of a place, a situation, a story of hovering on the verge between life and death. Sometimes they also describe individual situations or details apprehended by the senses in a peculiar way, encoding and activating later trauma. It is in this space that sounds appear. Through collecting these testimonies of audio memories, *Repeat after Me II* is an attempt to draw individuals out of their silence.

Eyewitness statements are an essential part of shaping and recording historical truth. They are of enormous value, and not only as proof in court trials to bring crimes to justice and punish culprits. They build our knowledge of the past based on individual and collective memory. *Repeat after Me II* is a voice from the epicentre of the war. It is present-day proof of a tragedy taking place before our eyes, it gives us a

2. Tony Kushner, 'Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation', *Poetics Today*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2006, pp. 275–295.

tangible sense of the nightmare. We look at witnesses, we stand face to face with them, we look them in the eye. And they have one thing to tell us: 'Repeat after me'. The repetition becomes a performative part of the work, it permits empathy, breaks down the distance between the protagonist and the viewer as far as possible. At the same time, we glean just a shade of resistance on the protagonists' faces. As Kateryna Iakovlenko writes, 'the people have collectively refused to be victimised and have spoken out loud, in unison, about the need for accounts from their own voices, their particular political and cultural position .... This experience is a collaborative practice of presence.'[3]

***

Some day the war will end, but its echoes will remain in the memories of its witnesses for always and return when least expected. The protagonists of *Repeat after Me II* try to describe the experience that caused them to unerringly recognise the sound of rockets overhead, how different weapons sound. This ability says something not only about the reality in which Ukrainians now live, it also shows a universal experience of people living in zones of armed conflict — when life is at stake, the senses are honed, life can depend on a sharp eye or a sensitive ear. Initially, this work was created with people outside of Ukraine in mind, to communicate the atmosphere of the war. It might be conceived as instructions or a compendium of highly detailed knowledge that war

3. Kateryna Iakovlenko, 'Open Group: "Repeat after Me" at Galeria Labirynt', *Blok*, 12 December 2022, https://blokmagazine.com/open-group-repeat-after-me-at-galeria-labirynt%EF%BF%BC/ (accessed 6 March 2024).

witnesses are sharing with viewers/future users. This also makes it a warning.

From the moment we hear the first alarm and the first shot rings out, the body is in a state of readiness. We remain tense, we listen to every sound, every murmur. The sounds of war sometimes mingle with silence. In his book *Dormitory*, Serhij Zhadan describes a train station full of people waiting for a train, taking cover from gunfire: '… after the explosion the muffled howling began, then it was silent. And then again the silence burst outside the window and the howling resumed.'[4]

How many times must you hear a sound to grow accustomed to it, how many times must you repeat a syllable to tear it from its original meaning and make it become just an abstract rhythmic sound? The artists at the Polish Pavilion ask if we really want to take part in this faux-entertainment. In the pavilion's set design, the line between pop culture and the reality of war is fluid. We enter a mock-up of a karaoke bar, but in fact we enter a space of an extreme personal experience that engages all the senses. In the laid-back atmosphere of pop entertainment we gain knowledge that could serve us when war begins to fill our daily lives (not just through our television screens). Karaoke here becomes a method of communication between protagonists/witnesses of war and the public, in a situation where the former are unable to pass on their experience in any other way, and are making the effort to instruct strangers. The simulated sounds evoke ambivalent feelings. They prompt anxiety when we understand what lies behind them, but we also know that what is now recalled in the film as sounds of

4. Serhij Żadan, *Internat*, Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2019, p. 46.

trauma once saved the protagonists' lives. These various aspects of the sounds coexist in a natural way. They also contrast with the origins of the sounds as something that comes from nature and emulates it, as onomatopoeia.

The pavilion's set walks a thin line between pop culture and the reality of war. Between the screens with the microphones there is metal furniture like the kind used in the field, which is not designed to provide comfort. In the black space of the pavilion with dark-red touches, red spotlights shine. Colour becomes a crucial element, working on the senses like the tones that fill the scenery of war. Tomasz Szerszeń describes this in his book *A Guest in a Catastrophe*: 'In March and April 2023 … many photographs and recordings from the Bakhmut region. Mud and rain. The colours are grey, brown, and dark green. Fatigue.'[5] Szerszeń also mentions red against the backdrop of snow. There is also darkness, blackouts — power cuts make it difficult to function normally, but also hard to find a target during air raids. You enter the pavilion through a visual marker that can be seen from afar — a stiff curtain that blocks light from coming in, and frames the view of the garden for people leaving the experience of the exhibition.

The scenery of both films is created by spaces strange to their protagonists — a camp for internal refugees made of provisional barracks, an airport turned into a refugee camp, hotels, rented flats, public places. These are temporary shelters where our homeless protagonists have become stuck in a state of limbo.

Repeat after Me II deconstructs the iconography of the war, turning our attention to individual experiences.

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5. Tomasz Szerszeń, *Być gościem w katastrofie*, Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2024, p. 24.

The victims' portraits make a depiction of violence, stir anger, cause the stomach to ache, stick in the throat. Open Group draw from a language that is distant from the front lines, giving voice to people who have lost their homes, the spaces they identify with, and the loved ones that create it. The artists become translators of their stories, editors deciding on the form of repetition in multi-part works, inviting the viewer to repeat as well. War makes us accustomed to cruelty and destruction, which is why the iconography of the war should be based on human instincts, empathy, shared experience. Boris, one of the protagonists of *Repeat after Me* of 2022, turns to us with a direct message, which becomes a theme of the entire work: 'Repeat after me, so you hear and never forget.'

Translated from the Polish by Soren Gauger

pp. 8–9: Temporary camp for internally displaced persons, Lviv (Ukraine), photo by Pavlo Kovach

p. 10: Brooklyn, New York, 6 March 2024, photo by Anton Varga

p. 22: *Repeat after Me*, 2022, Kulturdrogerie, Vienna, photo by Yuriy Biley


WEEE UUUU MMM UUUUUU

REPEAT AFTER ME

director:
OPEN GROUP:
Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga

cast:
Alla, Antonina, Boris, Ekaterina, Iryna, Olena, Svitlana, Yuriy

director of photography:
Roman Bordun

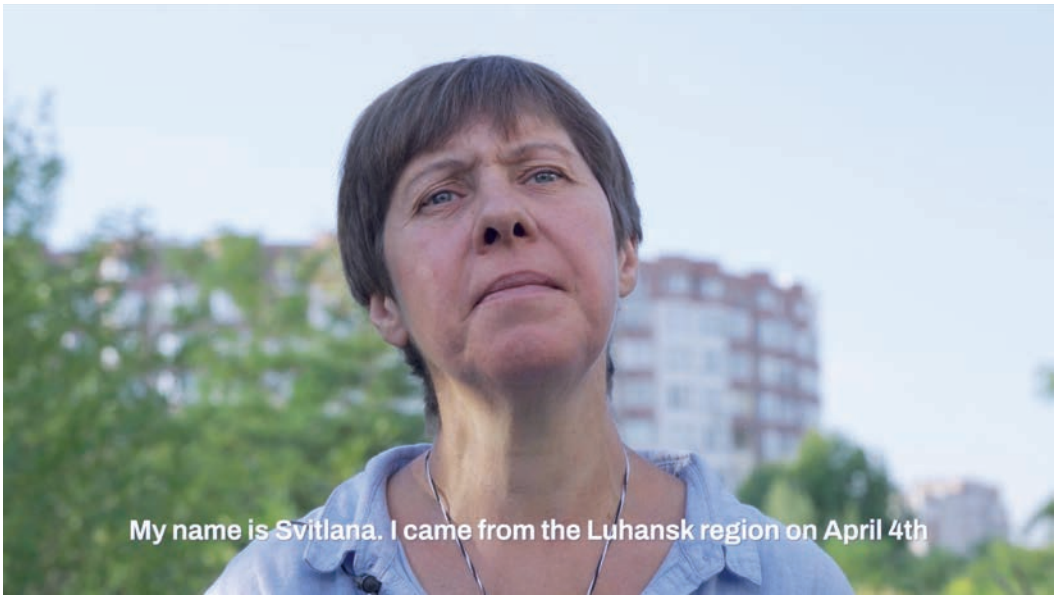
editors:
Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach,
Anton Varga

sound design:
Roman Bordun

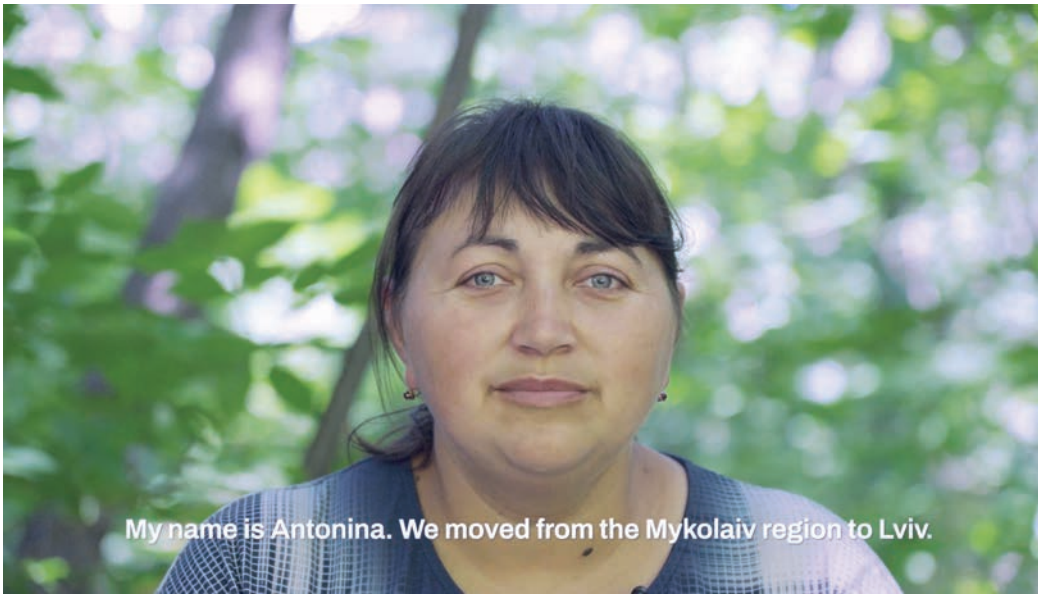
The video *Repeat after Me* 2022 was created with the involvement of refugees in Lviv (Ukraine)

Special thanks to Roman Lebed, Stepan Burban, Lika Volkova,
Miguel Abreu & Katherine Pickard (Miguel Abreu Gallery).

2022


My name is Svitlana. I came from the Luhansk region on April 4th

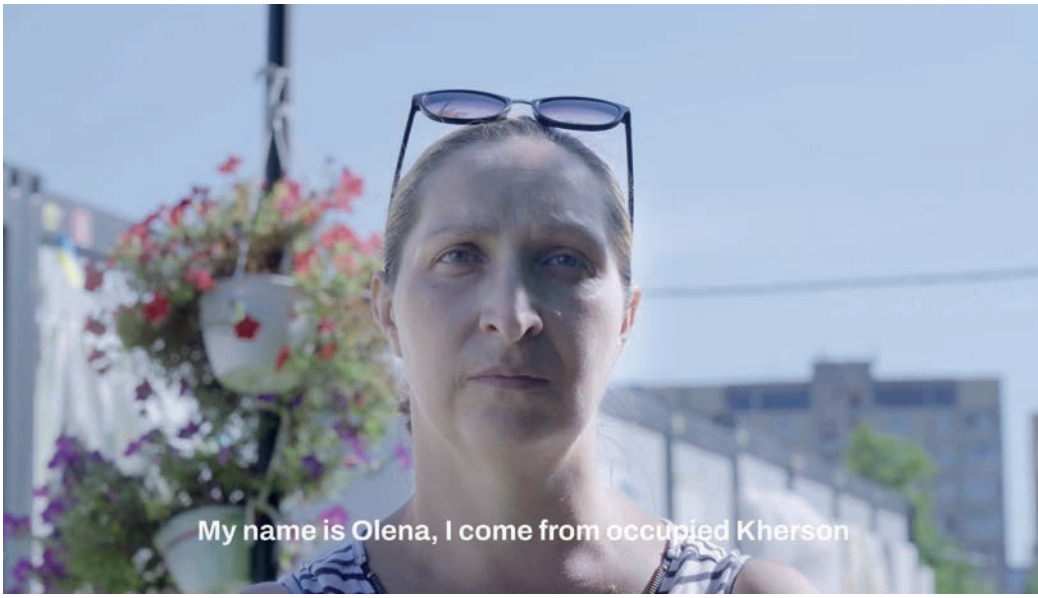

I am Yuriy. I came to Lviv on April 20th from the Dnipropetrovsk region.

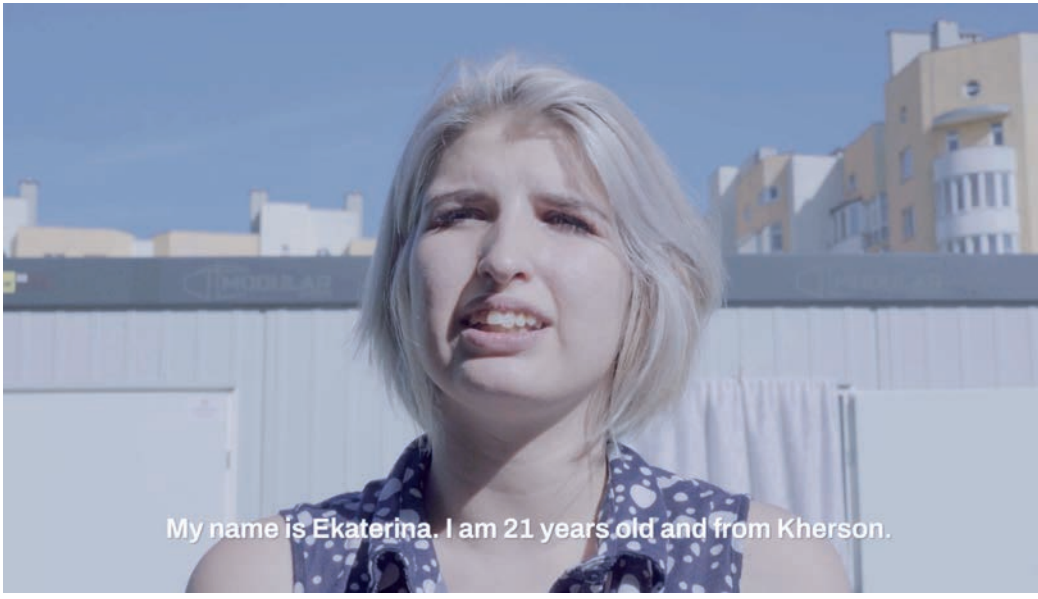

My name is Antonina. We moved from the Mykolaiv region to Lviv.


My name is Iryna. I came from the Donetsk region to Lviv in April.


My name is Alla.


My name is Boris. I am from the city of Mariupol.


My name is Olena, I come from occupied Kherson


My name is Ekaterina. I am 21 years old and from Kherson.


Air Alarm

Air alarm. The ‘air alarm’ alert activates when an enemy aircraft is flying overhead. The ‘missile strike’ alarm goes off when it is a flying missile. In the cities, sirens are engaged whenever threats are detected in the sky, even minor ones. If a **Tu-22** aircraft armed with **X-22** cruise missiles with a range of 600 kilometres takes off from the territory of Russia or Belarus, an alarm immediately goes off in all areas in the vicinity. If we are dealing with the launch of **X-101** missiles from the Caspian Sea with a range of up to 5,500 kilometres, then the alarm is sounded throughout Ukraine. In August 2022, Ukraine also approved new sounds for sirens in case of chemical and nuclear threats.


WEEEEEEEEE

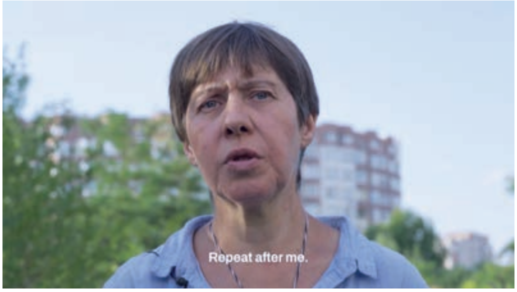

EHHEWEeee


Repeat after me.


WEEEEEEEEHHEWEeee


WEEEEEEEEEHHEWEeee


Repeat after me.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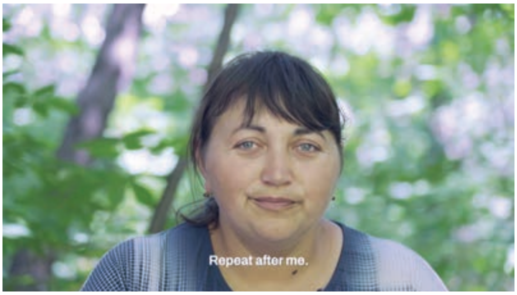
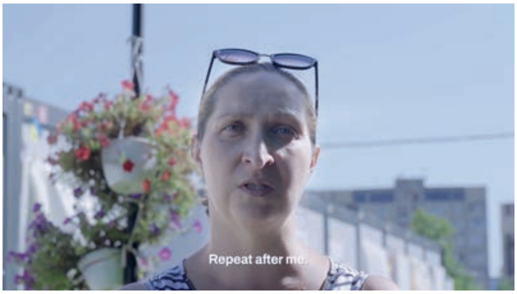

Repeat after me.

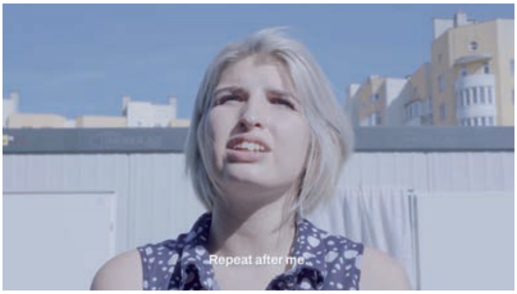

Repeat after me.


Repeat after me.


Repeat after me.


Repeat after me.


Repeat after me.


Repeat after me.


WEEEEEEEW


EHHWEEeee


BERLIN-TEGEL
P A E
B D C
TAXI
STOP

REPEAT AFTER ME

director:
OPEN GROUP:
Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga

cast:
Natalia, Hanna, Anya, Samir, Tymofii, Yana, Vlad, Anastasia,
Ira, Inna, Valerii, Maria, Halyna, Maryna, Tetiana, Taisia

producer:
Viktoriia Dorr

director of photography:
Mitya Churikov, Tomi Hazhlinsky, Justin Warsh

editors:
Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach,
Anton Varga

sound design:
Mitya Churikov

colour correction:
Artem Stretovych

sound:
Piotr Blajerski

translation:
Iryna Kurhanska

The film was produced by Zachęta — National Gallery of Art
for the *Repeat after Me II* exhibition at the Polish Pavilion in the 60th International
Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia.

The video *Repeat after Me* 2024 was created with the involvement of refugees
in Wrocław (Poland), Vienna (Austria), Berlin (Germany), Vilnius (Lithuania),
New York (USA) and Tullamore (Ireland).

Special thanks to Mark Chehodaiev, Leo Trotsenko, Vladyslav Piatin-Ponomarenko,
Kateryna Berlova, Tomas Ivanauskas (Lithuanian Culture Attaché in Ukraine and Georgia),
Krzysztof Bielaszka (Fundacja Ładne Historie), Tatiana Kit, Nadiia Owczarzak
(Fundacja Medyczna Solidarność), Anya Kurkina.

2024


My name is Hanna and I am from Merefa, Kharkiv


My name is Inna, I came from Zaporizhzhia on February 7, 2023,


My name is Samir. On March 30, I moved to Ireland


My name is Yana, I came from Hostomel, Kyiv region to New York


My name is Maria, I am from Mariupol


My name is Taisia, I came from Kharkiv to Wroclaw


Hello, I'm Anastasia, I'm from Kamianske, Dnipropetrovsk region


My name is Anya, I am from Bila Tserkva, I left Ukraine in April 2022


My name is Tetiana, I came from Druzhkivka,


My name is Vlad and I am from Mariupol.


My name is Nataliia, I am 55 years old, we came from Kyiv region


My name is Tymofii and I moved from Kyiv to Poland


My name is Ira and I am from Chernihiv.


My name is Maryna. I am 20 years old.


My name is Halyna, I came to a refugee camp in Berlin


My name is Valerii, I came from Kyiv,


X-22

Ballistic and cruise missiles. Since the beginning of the war, Russia has been actively using land-, air-, and sea-based ballistic and cruise missiles. Such ballistic missiles as the **Iskander-M, Tochka-U** and the **X-47M2 Kinjal** are short-range, but are much more difficult to shoot down, due to their extraordinary speed (8,820 km/h). Civilians have only a minute or two to save themselves, even in the event of a timely air alert. Cruise missiles are easier to shoot down because they are many times slower, which is why they produce their characteristic whistle when they fly by. At the same time, cruise missiles (the sea-based **Kalibr** and **Onyx**, **Iskander-K, X-22, X-101** and **X-555**) have an operational range of 1,000 to 5,500 km, so they can strike any point in Ukraine.

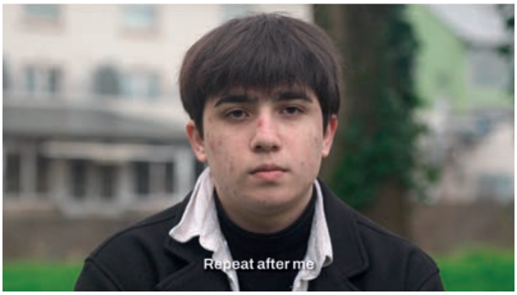
Ballistic and cruise missiles can carry various warheads, weighing up to 500 kg. These can be cassette, high-explosive or thermobaric. The first kind 'sows' an area of several hectares with sub-munitions, the second leaves behind a ravine 8–10 metres deep, the third burns all living creatures, with no chance of survival, at a diameter of more than 60 metres. By 22 February 2024, Russia officially launched more than 8,000 missiles at Ukraine.


SHHhhhhh-s


-s-shhh-sh


Repeat after me


SHHhhhh-s-s-shhh-sh


Repeat after me

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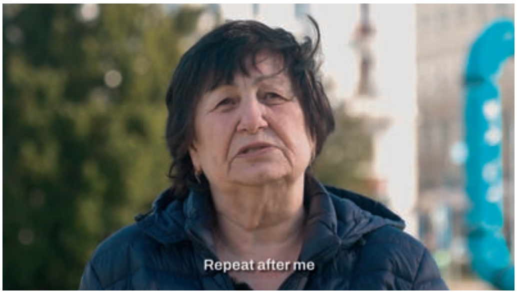
Repeat after me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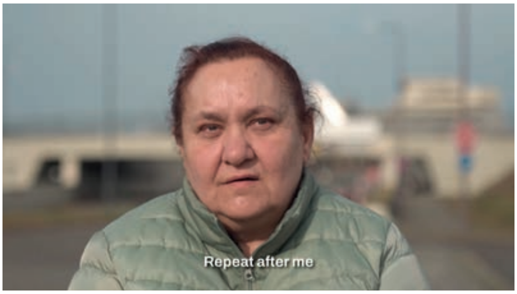
Repeat after me

Repeat after me

Repeat after me

Repeat after me


SSHHhhhhh-s-s


s-s-shhh-sssh

THE EMPTY ORCHESTRA
THE PROCESS OF CREATING *REPEAT AFTER ME* 2022

Open Group

A weekday in the summer of 2022. Morning. Our team arrived at one of the modular settlements for IDPs in Sykhiv, the largest residential area of Lviv. All around, multi-storey buildings loomed over the small residential trailers, as if observing you from above. A playground, a first-aid post and a church were just around the corner. Further on, the park began. We were asked to wait in the cafeteria, where we were to meet a volunteer who had agreed to help us communicate with the locals. Next to us, in a makeshift play area, there were classes with children: a trainer was showing the simple movements to the children, who tried to repeat them in sync. Some had wounded and bandaged limbs — this immediately struck you. The kids were laughing.

We were approached by Andriy, the man responsible for organising everyday life in the camp. He led us to people who would be interested in participating in the project. He introduced us. Then we were left alone with them.

The first encounter was quite tense. There was a sense of suspicion towards people with cameras. Many refused to participate. We started to hesitate: why were we doing this, maybe it was not the right time? The sun was at its zenith, and the smell of food was spreading through the settlement. We took a short break to give everyone a chance to have lunch, think it over and decide whether to take part in the filming.

After lunch, a woman named Iryna came up to us. She had left the Donetsk region with her family. We discussed the key moments of the shooting once again and she finally agreed.

The first location we chose was near the settlement, in the park. Here, in the shade, we could hide from the scorching midday summer sun, which tired both the subjects and the film crew. The shade also adds to the video image. We managed to avoid 'over-contrasted' faces and harsh shadows and get a more diffused light with a deeper and more complex colour palette.

The sun's rays were coming through the leaves, gently swayed by the wind. This created a special shimmer — both in the background and on the faces of our subjects. The rustle of the leaves occasionally resonated with Iryna's voice, mimicking the sound of a siren. It was one of the few sounds of war that I heard almost every day (at the time), so I remembered it very well. The sirens are not sounded any more in Iryna's hometown. It makes no sense, because the shelling is constant, and the sound of the alarm just makes it difficult to recognise the kind of threat and how close the missile strike will be.

Our heroine's first take was so quiet and cautious that the background sounds 'drowned her out'. However, it seemed that inside, the sound was tearing her apart. I decided to help Iryna; we tried to mimic the siren sound together. At that moment, I felt like the trainer doing physical exercises with the temporarily displaced children. After several attempts, Iryna 'opened up' and we started the recording.

It was both strange and rewarding to see this idea become flesh. Since 2015, it has existed only in our imaginations and in the files of unrealised Open Group projects, with the working title *Sounds of War*.

After she finished with us, Iryna returned to the settlement. I don't know what she talked about with her neighbours, but after a while Antonina from the Mykolaiv region

approached us and agreed to take part in the project. We decided to keep the same location, because it was still too hot and bright in the sun.

Antonina seemed more confident, either from Iryna's recommendation, or maybe it was just my impression. She rested her hands on her lap and kept clenching her left hand or twisting her fingers in a strange way. Then her face would take on an expression of indescribable concentration. We were done after a few takes and started reviewing the footage. After a short discussion, we decided to change locations. Coming out of the thicket, I felt as if I had plunged into the warmth and a whole variety of new smells. My eyes started to get used to the sunlight. A similar, almost painful, feeling emerges when you leave one of the old townhouses which now often serve as bomb shelters.

The next location was a volleyball field covered with sand. A modular settlement was visible in the background. A park behind it. A playground on the left.

Rumours about us quickly spread around. Curious teenagers discussed our presence there. A group of elderly people, sitting in the shade of trees, were firmly against the filming. They furrowed their brows and watched us, constantly murmuring with each other. However, there were also those among them who were interested in talking to us, and who later joined the conversation.

Among them was a couple from the Dnipropetrovsk region, Yuriy and Alla. Yuriy was the first to perform. He reproduced the sounds of an AK-47 assault rifle. His lips clenched tight, he rhythmically spit out plain, voiceless sounds — TU-DU-TU-DUDU-DU-TU-TUSZ-TUSZ. Sometimes saliva came out with the sound. It was obvious his throat was getting dry, and this had a noticeable effect on the sounds he was

producing. It came out like 'T-Z-Z' — a kind of metallic and unnatural sound (I tried to repeat it several times later and failed).

Alla worked as a school teacher. She decided to try to reproduce the sound of mortar fire, but it came out a bit comical. It seemed as if she was afraid to frighten us, as if she was passing on her experience to children. With a slight inward smile, she began to reconstruct the flight of the projectile. A light whistle grew into a hiss. Sometimes it synchronised with the wind, which seemed to rise deliberately, an effect captured on video. As the hiss subsided, Alla tilted her head sharply downwards and let out a short, harsh sound — BA-BAHHH!

Our film crew was already tired; nonetheless, we decided to make the most of the time, while there was still daylight. Moreover, I had received a call from Svitlana, expressing interest in participating in the shoot. She came from Kherson, which was occupied at the time. We agreed to meet in the modular constructions, next to her temporary home. She had left her permanent home together with her three kids. The youngest girl was about five years old, and she picked her up directly from art school.

Kateryna was the next one up. She also came from Kherson and was a little shy in front of her friends, who stayed behind the camera and tried to advise her on how to properly reproduce the sound of the BM-21 'Grad' multiple rocket launcher. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a man in his fifties approaching the film crew. Greying, with a trim haircut and beard, he commented on the shoot and tried to explain something. At the end, I was told that he had been asking about our project and had said we were wrong about the sounds of war. They were completely different.

Despite being quite sceptical about our film, he gave us his contact information and we agreed to call him.

It was getting dark, and the air was filled with a long-awaited freshness. Bugs swarmed in from the park. Crickets started to chirp. A warm light lit up in the windows of the tall buildings around us, as if to signal that it was time to finish filming and return home.

The next day, we met again in Sykhiv district, whose main road artery is Chervona Kalyna Avenue. This residential area is also famous for its 'Berlin Wall' — the longest building in the district, which was mainly inhabited by immigrants from Pripyat (Chornobyl). Next to it is the 'Sykhiv Santa Barbara'. A few blocks of buildings that people jokingly named after the American 2,137-episode soap opera. Over time, the name stuck. Not far away is a church where Pope John Paul II delivered a speech to 400,000 pilgrims in 2001.

This time the location we chose for shooting was something in between the previous day's first and second locations. There were grass, trees and bushes in the frame; tall buildings could be seen in the distance. The bells of the aforementioned church were audible, but it was not in the frame.

It was from there, along a beaten path, that Svitlana approached us. Apparently, she'd been told about us the day before. For some reason she was sure we would not come back. But on her way back from mass, she saw us and decided to come over. Holding the fingers of her right hand together as if she were going to make the sign of the cross, slightly rolling her eyes (as in some icons), she monotonously began to show the trajectory of the flight of artillery from left to right, accompanied by a sound — U-U-U-U-U-U-U-H-H.

We had previously contacted Boris (the older man who had approached us the previous day). We'd found out he was from Mariupol, and before the full-scale invasion, he had worked for about thirty years as a manager at the Illich plant, and in recent years, at Azovstal. During the battles for Mariupol, he, his family and his friends' families, along with their young children, hid in the basement of their house. During the short breaks between shelling, his five-year-old daughter would run onto the porch and shout, clutching her little fist tight, 'Go away war, go away!!!' Then she repeated it: 'Go away war, go away!!!' For him, these words were the sounds of war and were forever engraved in his memory … And from now on, in ours as well.

After he told us his story, silence hung in the air. Boris broke the silence by offering us coffee. Before we could respond, he was already coming back from his house, carrying a hot pot of coffee and several cups. We drank the fragrant bitter drink and remained silent. The pause came to an end when Boris said: 'So let's shoot. Tell me what to do.' We filmed everything in two takes. In the first take, one of the cameras didn't work, I guess.

Boris was the last person we recorded for *Repeat after Me* (2022). It was still the morning of that summer day. The modular settlement for internally displaced persons was slowly waking up.

Translated from the Ukrainian by Iryna Kurhanska

p. 58: A temporary camp for internally displaced persons, Lviv (Ukraine), video, © Open Group

pp. 66–67: *Repeat after Me*, 2022, Labirynt Gallery, Lublin (Poland), photo by Bartosz Górka

p. 68: Gerosios Vilties street, Vilnius, 21 February 2024, photo by Yuriy Biley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THE CHORUS OF EMPATHY

Rasha Salti

Do children and adults who have survived war recognise each other? A commonplace sign is their reaction to fireworks. Some detest them outright and run indoors to avoid them, or cover their ears with their hands to muffle the sound. Those who refuse to display their emotions still cannot avoid a slight shudder and compensate by staring at the sky a little longer, after the sparks have gone out. The marvel or enchantment of fireworks is reserved for those who have never experienced shelling, air raids, or ground attacks while sitting in an underground shelter, or in a makeshift safe space. In war, as a child or an adult, you learn to distinguish between the sounds of incoming and outgoing missiles. You also learn to identify the sounds of different kinds of shells. Gathered in your assigned shelter with your family, neighbours, or total strangers, guessing can become like a game to distance yourself from fear.

You learn other skills too. You learn to detect whether the person — usually a man — manning the checkpoint sees in you a familiar fellow being, a sister, brother, mother, father or friend. Whether his seemingly habitual grip on his automatic rifle might be more apt to loosen or tighten. Whether you might appeal to his empathy. Another skill that a child or an adult acquires when living a war is the ability to glance at your room or your home, wonder if it might be the last time, pick one or two portable items, shut the door and walk away. All in the span of minutes. All while supressing the inner voice wondering whether you will ever return, whether your

home will be another image of wreckage on the news, in the coming news cycle about the war you are living. Letting go of your home, with all its objects, furnishings, books, mementos, accumulated over your life, which you have kept because each has value, a story. Knowing that their stories, your stories, locked in that space, might became wreckage. Or loot for the enemy. Letting go in the span of minutes, after the sounds of incoming missiles thunder too close.

Letting go and walking away. Learning to live elsewhere, in another place further away from the explosions. In another town of your country, or across the border to a town in another country. Those who have never experienced shelling, those who cannot recognise the difference between incoming and outgoing exploding missiles, identify your departure as a displacement, a movement in geography. They cannot understand it is a movement in time. Exploding missiles suspend time and expand it all at once, in a split second anything and everything turns to smithereens, while the silent minutes between two blasts feel timelessly frozen, amplifying the anticipation of horror, of inconsolable sorrow.

War overwhelms your life. It takes over and wrests control of time — of your time. It bloats your present and blinds your future. It scrambles the past and refracts a different version. The time of war is fickle. The more common expression is 'war time', but somehow it more resembles the shorthand of correspondents, diplomats, and emergency personnel. The phrase doesn't communicate how war's grip continues to hold onto those who flee it. When you escape from exploding missiles, from the predicament of imminent, indiscriminate death, you are no longer experiencing 'war time'; the time of war chases you wherever you go, no matter how far.

When the sky overhead is no longer blasted by shelling, and you begin to learn to live elsewhere, the time of war stays with you. It creeps inside you. Whether you have become a displaced person, or worse, a refugee, as you learn to live elsewhere, you do so with a double consciousness.

That is yet another skill, learning to make space for yourself wherever you have been displaced — adapting, blending in, swallowing your despair, being useful, finding a purpose, being grateful for the kindness of others until you assimilate. Until you rebuild a semblance of normalcy, before your hosts begin to resent you, and the government that opened its borders to you changes its policy. You are here and there all the time. There is where your kin have stayed behind, where most of what you love is, and where the explosions continue to thunder. Here is where you make a new life, temporarily, until you can return home, earning enough to live elsewhere, further away from the explosions. In another town in your own country, or across the border, to a town in another country. Those who have never experienced shelling cannot recognise all this.

The accomplishments to which you aspired before the war broke out had to be folded and shelved for when the aftermath would come. You make do to survive, that's imperative. The lucky ones find work that corresponds to their profession, but this is not common. All you can do to survive, now that you are no longer at risk, is to wait for the end of the war, so you can go back and resume your life. Everything is subsumed in that waiting. The time of war is made of fear, anticipation, expectation, postponement and suspension.

Until you can return, you are the carrier of the memories of your life, your family's lives, your building, neighbourhood, village, like a travelling heritage site … They survive

through you, your retelling and recollections. A living archive whose presentation and dissemination has restorative potential against the wreckage that war creates. If only for fleeting moments, this repairs your being in the world, you are no longer a war refugee, but the person you once were. This also jars the dominance of the time of war.

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The contemporary art world has paid deserved attention to the myriad sorts of archives that artists have used and showcased in their artworks. *Repeat after Me II* is an archive fabricated by artists during a time of war, at a remove from it. Although seemingly playful, the instructions of the title deliberately blur the boundary between an invitation and missive, a back-handed, though gentle provocation. Those who have never endured the horror of shelling will eventually realise the morbidity of the experience, as they imitate the sounds of missiles and shells over and over. Those who have experienced it will feel the release after having kept it within. If one were to imagine a group of people responding to the invitation of *Repeat after Me*, it would be a chorus roaring in unison, bonded by empathy.

Those displaced by war are received in other countries by decree; the empathy and solidarity of the host country's citizens are more vital than policies that allow refugees to begin getting their bearings, let alone to make a new life for themselves. Governments of host countries change and their perspectives shift, but even worse, empathy and solidarity are at the mercy of ideological manipulation. Refugees who were welcome yesterday can become

regarded as potentially subversive or disruptive. Especially as the end of the conflict recedes past the horizon.

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Sound is a physical wave that produces a vibration; once it is detected by a transmitter it becomes an acoustic wave. The wave's vibration is strongest when a sound is first emitted and then progressively fades. A sound never quite dies, it simply becomes undetectable to the human ear. While the sinister sound of military drones, fired bullets and shells may be louder than the human voice, the more we respond to the call of *Repeat after Me II*, the chorus of empathy may overpower them.

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THE SILENCE ENVELOPE

Cezary Żechowski

Two worlds. The world of war, suffering beyond imagination, executions, torture, rape, abducted children and death. Right next door, the world of peace and relative prosperity: leisurely strolling couples, open cafés and cinemas, elderly people resting on a bench, and children playing in the garden. The border separating these two worlds is narrow and not self-evident. People move between them — they escape, return, migrate, say farewell, fall in love, give birth, betray their partners, and hold funerals. These people carry the other world inside themselves: invisible, hidden, their own.

Antoni Kępiński, a Polish psychiatrist and a pioneer in researching the trauma suffered by concentration camp prisoners, wrote of the dynamic tension that exists between a person's individual space and the common space. 'Entering the common space forces us to spread ourselves too thin; that which is great, original, and extraordinary within us must be enclosed in our own space, because the common space cannot usually accept it.' The same applies to the experience of trauma. Trauma usually remains locked in one's own space, and the knowledge that it exists enters the common space with difficulty. Two forces are at work here. The force of trauma, which renders a person helpless, depriving them of the ability to communicate and shattering any belief that words could contain their experience. The other force is that of the community, which defends itself against trauma that could disrupt its balance and peace. 'The common space cannot usually accept it', wrote Kępiński.

Silence clings to trauma like a shadow. Survivors of severe trauma remain mute. It may sometimes take years for the narrative of their suffering to emerge from within them. It is a human impulse to shield oneself from the source of searing pain. However, the common space is unable to accommodate personal narratives, it dismisses them for a long time, then makes repeated attempts to spin their meaning, confusing the victim with the perpetrator, or seeks to cannibalise the victim's experience. 'In the common space', Kępiński wrote, 'many of our own structures are destroyed, transformed, and there is a great potential for destruction. If we define the process of entropy with the symbol of death, then death lurks in the common space.' Speaking out, then, becomes a perilous act for the traumatised individual — a brush with death on two fronts. They confront not only the raw pain of their trauma, but also the lethal, transformative power of the common space. The latter seeks to erase the experience they narrate and turn it against them.

The concept of two spaces appears in the writings of the French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, who sought to describe the boundary between the self and the non-self, the self and the other, the self and the world. He called this boundary an envelope. The envelope is like a skin (the Skin Ego) that contains the inner world, separating it from and communicating with the outer world. The outermost layer of the envelope is a zone of intense exchange, intimate communication, and the most personal experiences, such as a mother's touch and the physical closeness of another person. More primary than the skin envelope, according to Anzieu, is the sound envelope. The child is immersed in sounds, as in a bath. 'This sound bath prefigures the Skin Ego with its double face, one half turned towards the outer

world, the other towards the inner, since the sound envelope is composed of sounds emitted either by the baby or by the environment. The combination of these sounds therefore produces a common space-volume permitting bilateral exchange … ; a first spatio-auditory image of one's own body; and a bond of actual fused reality with the mother ….' Anzieu's concept of the sound envelope is somewhat reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan's concept of acoustic space or Colwyn Trevarthen's concept of communicative musicality. In the sound bath, which Anzieu sometimes calls the bath of melody, the mother's voice plays a vital role. It works as a sound mirror, which means calming, soothing, easing pain, restoring security, playing or animating the child's inner world. The envelopes described by Anzieu are the foundations which support a person's whole existence and mental life.

Trauma disrupts the natural boundaries of the self. Something violently forces its way inside. When the environment is too violent, intrusive, penetrating, the envelope hardens and the boundary becomes impermeable. The self thus protects itself from excessive pain and suffering. Traumatic experiences become embodied. Babette Rothschild writes about sensory memory and the somatic memory of trauma. Sounds associated with fear, terror and danger are situated in the inner world and surrounded by an impermeable envelope. These experiences do not easily return to the common space. All the more in that a similar process is occurring on the outside. The envelope also hardens from the outside, as the common space is reluctant to accept back the living experience of trauma, as well as the processed narrative. 'Death lurks in the common space', wrote Kępiński.

This is how the silence envelope comes into being. Silence accompanies trauma. When trauma occurs, the common space shuts off channels of communication. The thin, invisible boundary becomes an impassable border. On the one side, there may be people's cries, death, terror and fear, on the other, a summer afternoon, a bit sleepy and boring, like the one during the Srebrenica massacre or the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when the merry-go-round was spinning by the ghetto wall and couples were strolling past. The same goes for rape, sexual child abuse and domestic violence, which are usually shrouded in mute silence. We repress trauma from the common space. I work as a psychiatrist and psychotherapist for children and adolescents. It is thought-provoking that, with so many refugees traumatised by war in Ukraine, Chechnya and other parts of the world, so few people find help, and so few people can share what they have been through. However, when a narrative does begin to emerge, the environment is often not open to the message.

Further on in his text, Kępiński writes: 'However, there are situations in the common space that force us to make fundamental decisions, and we have to speak out. The reverse then happens: this situation is beyond us, we cannot bring ourselves to cast the extraordinary task we face into a functional structure. We feel too small, reality overwhelms us, we lack courage, sometimes death seems to be the only way out. And it sometimes happens that what a person leaves behind is a gesture, a word, an act, or another functional structure thrown into the common space. And this sign thrown into the environment becomes immortal. Therefore, the common space does not always lower the value of functional structures, it sometimes forces a person

to go beyond their own limits, to prove themselves greater than they would have supposed.'

What does Kępiński mean by 'sometimes death seems to be the only way out'? Is he referring to acts of altruism, when someone abandons a safe space to go to a place where there is no more safety, peace and comfort? Is he thinking of acts of solidarity and identification with victims, living and dead? Or does he mean gestures that definitively destroy the hypocrisy and well-being of the common space, opening up feeling and empathy for what has happened? Is he thinking of people who reveal their trauma or others', exposing themselves to 'civil death' and exclusion?

Katarzyna Prot-Klinger, a psychiatrist and group analyst, has led groups for Holocaust survivors in Poland for many years. In her book, *Życie po Zagładzie. Skutki traumy u ocalałych z Holocaustu. Świadectwa z Polski i Rumunii* [Life after the Holocaust: The effects of trauma on Holocaust survivors. Testimonies from Poland and Romania], she writes: 'After the war, the survivors did not talk about their experiences. On the one hand, they wanted to forget, on the other hand, they felt they would not be listened to … It is important for survivors to have their stories of traumatic experiences heard by others.'

What does it mean to listen? To penetrate the silence envelope? To force your way through the common space to where death lurks? To have time? To somehow share the experience of the storyteller? This work by the Open Group collective confronts us with the helplessness we feel when confronted by the gravity of trauma and death.

Translated from the Polish by Łukasz Mojsak

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pp. 74–75: *Repeat after Me*, 2022, Labirynt Gallery, Lublin (Poland), photo by Emilia Lipa

p. 76: Temporary hotel for refugees, Tullamore (Ireland), 10 March 2024, photo by Anton Varga

pp. 84–85: *Repeat after Me*, 2022, Kulturdrogerie, Vienna, photo by Yuriy Biley

p. 86: Temporary shelter for refugees in Wrocław (Poland), 16 February 2024, photo by Yuriy Biley


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REPEAT AFTER ME II: ECHOING THE WAR

Svitlana Biedarieva

DOCUMENTATION

The focus of *Repeat after Me II* (2024) by the Ukrainian Open Group (Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach and Anton Varga) is to reconstruct war events through otherwise peripheral evidence, pointing toward the situation but not fully speaking of it. The interviewees in the videos do not narrate their experience. Instead, they imitate a variety of sounds the war has brought: the noises produced by different types of military equipment, shelling, weapons, anti-aircraft defence and drones. At first glance, it seems ironic when repeated by eyewitnesses; yet this practical knowledge can be a condition for survival in a war. After more than a year of full-scale invasion, Ukrainian society has gained expertise in distinguishing between sounds that indicate varying degrees of danger. This base of knowledge helps to understand the ongoing events without seeing their cause.

The video has an interactive component, inviting the audience to repeat these sounds, thus sharing knowledge that is not common in times of peace, but is crucial and life-saving in wartime. The new epistemology formed in this work shows how a shift in perception and expression occurs, as the new knowledge is validated through life-threatening circumstances. A decolonial process takes place through the production of a new narrative actualised only by the context of the situation, and which looks redundant on the outside. The dialogue this work establishes with the

audience outside the war zone aims to recontextualise this knowledge, to extend its foundations beyond the territory of the war's immediate impact. This goes parallel with what the current decolonial processes in Ukraine propose: the creation and distribution of new knowledge as a disentangled epistemology, fostering local change and reaching an expanded audience through documentation of the war. My further analysis will be in line with Piotr Piotrowski's 'horizonal art history' as a non-linear, diffuse and polyphonic model which asks us to consider every local art scene individually, in its own social and political context, yet it will also draw on selected strands of postcolonial and decolonial theories to explore how the wartime effects of neocolonialism are expanded to reach a wider audience.

This project is indicative of the documentary turn in Ukrainian art after 2014 as a response to Russia's occupation of Crimea and part of eastern Ukraine. At that time, the need to record the traumatic events forced artists, many of them displaced from the east and south of the country, to become conduits for the situation unfolding in the occupied parts of the country. At first, their work embraced post-colonial ideas of hybridity and ambivalence proper to this early stage of war; yet this ambivalence fully dissolved when Russia's direct neocolonialist aggression emerged with the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022. The process of disentanglement, however, had already begun, with the first documentary works addressing Russia's war in Ukraine. Artists used multimedia, audiovisual and reportage techniques and worked with historical archives. These included projects by Piotr Armianovski, Alevtina Kakhidze, Yevgenia Belorusets, Mykola Ridnyi, Olia Mykhailiuk, Dana Kavelina and many others, who

recorded and reflected both the long-standing and short-term effects of Russian violence.

The documentary turn coincided with the first impulses to the decolonial turn. If, between 2014 and 2022, art became a kind of reported speech to convey the situation on the front line and in the occupied territories to the rest of Ukraine through the extensive use of documentary practices, in 2022, nearly all Ukrainians were made into eyewitnesses of violence and crimes against civilians, and the discourse turned to direct speech. The art after the invasion began, therefore, aims not so much to transmit distant traumatic events to a wider public and to establish a dialogue with them as external observers, but to emphatically reflect upon the audience's own traumatic life experiences, including destruction and human loss, through the artists' experiences of the war. The year 2022 brought about a significant shift, from reportage in its broadest definition to artists' diaries and eyewitnesses' direct accounts of the invasion.

This turn from the detached observation of the war to the fully immersed chronicles of the war is the most characteristic trait of Ukrainian art after 2022. Artistic diaries became a prominent genre in the works of Kakhidze, Belorusets, Vlada Ralko and others. The turn to the production of new knowledge by giving witnesses a direct means of expression is found in Olia Mykhailiuk. Here the documentation becomes a decolonial gesture unfolded further, as it produces a new disentangled epistemology, rooted not in the trauma of the past, but in the resistance in the present. Directly facing war witnesses and entering an empathic beyond-words dialogue with them places *Repeat after Me II* in the same conceptual framework, reflecting the underlying empathetic change in Ukrainian society and passing

it on to an international audience. This is yet another type of documentation, of participatory and first-hand physical experiences, expressed through interaction, with audio repetition and varying acoustic pressure.

Repeat after Me II spatialises and expands the experience offered by the artists' first version of the project in 2022. The multitude of voices, belonging to the video's protagonists and the visitors to the pavilion, alert us to the danger of being colonised; the invisible becomes real not only through audio response, but also through the bodily perception of low- and high-pressure sound waves, imitating the impact of missiles. The viewer's enclosure in a simulated karaoke bar aims to emulate the collective experience of being in a safe and detached environment, as observers, not direct participants in the events, while still facing the repercussions of relentless danger. The project fosters an understanding of the conditions in which Ukrainian society has been living since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

REPETITION AS MIMICRY

The new format of *Repeat after Me II*, expanded for the Polish Pavilion at the 60th Biennale Arte in Venice, aims to immerse the viewer in a space of encounter with the war by creating a simulated environment where the reality of the war is both confronted and contemplated by the pavilion's visitors. Repetition performs a multifaceted function here, emerging simultaneously as imitation, dialogue and, paradoxically, disruption.

The imitative power of repetition fosters a symbolic connection between spaces of trauma and peaceful everyday life.

Visitors to the pavilion can access experiences of the war through the act of replicating its audio effects, uttering the sounds of the lethal war machinery. This imitation symbolically immerses them in the context of imminent danger and prompts them to share their knowledge of its recognition. Repetition as dialogue acts through the audiovisual communication of the traumatic experience and gives viewers the chance to respond through a microphone. In the absence of an interlocutor who is real, and not virtual, this mimicking contributes to the other visitors' collective experience. When we view repetition as disruption, transmitting the embedded logic of war expressed in sound shares trauma that is not passed on in real-life circumstances and acts as a preventive narrative, aiming to avert future aggression through the echoes of the present atrocity.

The logic of absences in *Repeat after Me II* is important, as the project engages the direct speech of the witnesses one at a time, leaving blank spaces for others and emphasising the gaps in the narrative and the individuality of experiences within the collective memory of the war. These separate voices provide evidence of Russia's atrocities in the invasion of Ukraine and highlight the importance of each person's subjective experience. Mimicking their voices permits viewers to symbolically appropriate each interviewee's personal story. This is a reversal of what postcolonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha calls 'mimicry', which is the capacity of the oppressed to adapt the language and cultural traits of the oppressors. The further transmission of the 'language' of the war displays the profound susceptibility to colonialism embedded in the seemingly emancipated space of the Biennale.

Open Group's project demonstrates that beyond the obvious effects of the war, such as the deaths from its violence and destruction, one of its main negative results is that it strips its subjects of comprehensibility; its dehumanising action denies them their significance. The repetition of sounds outside the context of the war may turn into merely a nonsensical replication, denying agency to those who utter them. Yet within the conceptual framework of this project and through the employment of its translational power, the repetition of war sounds becomes a profound act of acknowledgement, remembrance and resistance, ensuring that the experiences of those affected by war are neither forgotten nor dismissed. The lone voices turn into a choir.

ECHOING COLONIALITY

In the video interviews with the displaced people, the echoing quality of individual suffering transforms into the audio repetition of seemingly innocent sounds that, when contextualised as the sound of Russia's war machinery, signifies death and ruination. This reminds us that the war resonates in the most unexpected places, and that art is a powerful tool for creating these echoes — both conceptually (addressing the repercussions of trauma) and technically (employing sound equipment).

I employ the Deleuzian notion of the 'fold' to describe the continuous and non-linear destruction of Russian neocolonialism into zones just outside its reach. This fold, as a result of a chain reaction triggered by the war (within the workings of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call a 'war machine') envelops the war zone in a logic of atrocity,

violence, trauma and neocolonial aggression, capturing the entire area of the oppressive impact. The fold presupposes an 'unfold', an expanding and infinitely replicating zone where the effects of the war reach, illustrating how the impact of the war's violence extends beyond physical borders. The extended action of trauma into each person's life highlights the long-term effects of the war, not only upon those who experience it directly, but also upon those who are geographically distant from it, as well as those who are within temporal range, such as subsequent generations.

In *Repeat after Me II*, the disorientation and chaos of war are replaced by a shareable experience beyond words and languages, creating a common space for understanding and empathy that transcends the individual experience. The resonating quality of the 'unfolding' narrative of Russia's atrocities becomes key to awareness and engagement, transforming passive observation into active, empathetic understanding. This project also reminds us that violence can be reproduced by a variety of means, highlighting the pervasive nature of war's impact, from its direct physical repercussions to the sensorial effects embedded in memory. This 'unfolding' is precisely what decolonial scholars refer to as 'coloniality', emphasising that the extended effect of any colonialism is never-ending, and has no geographical limits.

The unfolding narrative of Russia's neocolonialism has already triggered responses from extended art scenes in Eastern Europe and beyond, marking the final dissolution of post-Soviet and postsocialist spaces. This is particularly visible in the immersive projects by Polish artist Robert Kuśmirowski. His recent work, *DUSTribute* (2022), emulates the space of unfulfillable desires and premonition of a catastrophe from the Soviet film *Stalker* (1973) by Russian film

director Andrei Tarkovsky. Yet Kuśmirowski's obscure reconstruction of this space is staged in the post-apocalyptic world that comes 'after', where the disaster has already occurred but reality is still filled with desire, be it for power or possession. Past illusions and affects have been passed on to the present in a grotesque, exaggerated form. Even so, this approximation, like works by other artists from Eastern Europe, still goes through the conceptualisation of a shared past and is rooted in its disputes. Ukrainian art breaks with this retrospective view and looks at the present and the future.

The unbridgeable gap between those who experience the war and those who observe it from a distance is narrowed through the project's interactive elements, forging a deeper connection between disparate experiences. The microphones the artists have put in the exhibition space offer an opportunity to speak back, to put oneself in the shoes of a direct witness through the repetition of sound. In the Deleuzian fold, as in coloniality, the inside and outside are not separate, they are part of the same continuum. This means the external forces of neocolonial aggression and the internal responses of individuals and communities are intertwined and can be projected on a simulated situation, such as an exhibition in a Biennale pavilion. Entering this continuum through the senses leaves no space for an 'external' observation of the war. The invisibility of the war's danger, though we are certainly able to hear and feel it, is addressed as the imminent risk every person faces of themselves being struck by war.

Initiating a dialogue means joining the continuous process of unfolding and refolding; it mirrors the violent impact of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine that permeates

different layers of society, collective behaviour and individual consciousness, and time. The fold suggests that there are no discrete events or effects; rather, everything is interconnected through the logic of cause and effect. To quote Marta Czyż, the curator of Open Group's project at the Biennale: 'The war will eventually end, but its echoes will remain in its witnesses' memories forever.' These memory repercussions constitute the war's lasting personal and public impact. Transmitting this traumatic memory underscores the importance of remembering and learning from these experiences. We all feel this echo.

LIMINALITY AND DISENTANGLEMENT

The innovation of this amplified version of *Repeat after Me II* is that the artists have constructed a transitory, liminal space, a 'total installation' that immerses the viewers in the environment of an improvised performance whose theatricality challenges the physical experience of displacement and the overarching threat of an aerial attack. Open Group give the project space the look of an old-fashioned karaoke bar with a stage. This is a liminal space in many senses. In the context of the pavilion, it provides a bridge to reality, a virtual link to the zone of danger. The connection between the refugee shelter in Lviv, recorded as a setting for the interviews in the 2022 version of *Repeat after Me*, and the karaoke bar look of the new project, is immanent. In real-life conditions, the shelter protects people from danger, but is still within the zone of vulnerability, as the city of Lviv has been continuously shelled by Russia since 2022. No building in Ukraine is protected from the war's unpredictable

and omnipresent reach. *Repeat after Me II* departs from the thematic focus of the initial project, adding the stories of displaced Ukrainians scattered throughout Europe today, still haunted by memories of the war's sounds and able to pass on these recollections. The acoustic waves felt in the bar, combined with the stories of the invisible danger, distinguishable only by its sounds, illustrate the precariousness of existence and the relativity of safety, even in seemingly peaceful conditions.

This karaoke space in the Biennale pavilion is Homi K. Bhabha's iconic 'third space', where the dichotomies of dangerous/safe, real/virtual, logical/intuitive and even life/death blend and blur, offering new meanings and understandings to transcend the profound binarism of the war. The virtual 'undistancing' of viewers from these perilous events and their immersion through repetition are still a simulation of reality, yet it serves as a critical tool for empathy, allowing participants to bridge the gap between detached observation and physical experience. The physical vibrations found in the zone of low and high acoustic pressure generated by the soundtrack for the video interviews bring this experience to a corporeal level.

The artists dwell further on this embodied liminality by reminding us that our place is still that of spectators (and occasionally, performers) and not direct witnesses. The externalised observation of atrocities from a safe distance can mean viewing the war as entertainment, an immersive spectacle situated between real, though unlived, experience and recreation. The artists challenge the viewers to reflect on their own positions as distant observers of and commentators on the war and the ethical implications thereof. The spatial arrangement of the new edition of *Repeat after Me II*

is of the utmost importance, as it merges two disparate, or even opposed spaces: a space for dialogue and a space for entertainment, challenging conventional perceptions of war and its representation. This situation of being trapped 'in-between' a simulation of safety and a harsh reality is presented here as a reminder that we all are subject to the violent and ambiguous situation of unprovoked military aggression.

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The coloniality of Russia's neocolonial war on Ukraine extended into the Biennale Arte is precisely this liminal space, in which the tragic personal histories of the displaced people resonate, even if they are condensed to the repetition of decontextualised and incoherent sounds. Visitors to the Polish Pavilion are made witnesses to this transformation of sensorial feeling and memory into a tangible physical experience. They have a chance to symbolically assess the extended force of neocolonial violence. Their temporary belonging to a simulated space equips them with a new knowledge of how war aggression can manifest itself beyond its immediate reach, in a place where war and peace, participation and spectatorship, and sentience and simulation collide.

The new knowledge makes a decolonial perspective which, in conditions of external aggression, ushers in new sensibilities and helps us reconsider our approach to memory. The necessity of new and varied epistemologies being produced and transmitted in wartime implies an extended documentation process to initiate the production of

new knowledge, free of colonial influences. In contrast to the 2014–2022 stage of the war, when Ukrainian art largely turned to reinterpretations of the contested history as part of the postcolonial recombination process, the post-2022 situation is marked by an active focus on producing works that narrate the first-hand experiences of witnesses of the atrocities and engage audiences in a dialogue, aiming to record a completely new stage in Ukrainian history, without extensive reference to the past.

The increased production of these epistemologies as a collective movement helps challenge the centre-periphery model. These tectonic shifts mark the final dismantling of the post-Soviet space with Russia's aggressive actions and, apart from the internal transformation, constitute a profound external change for Ukraine, for which decolonial disentanglement signals it is ceasing to be a blind spot in international visibility.

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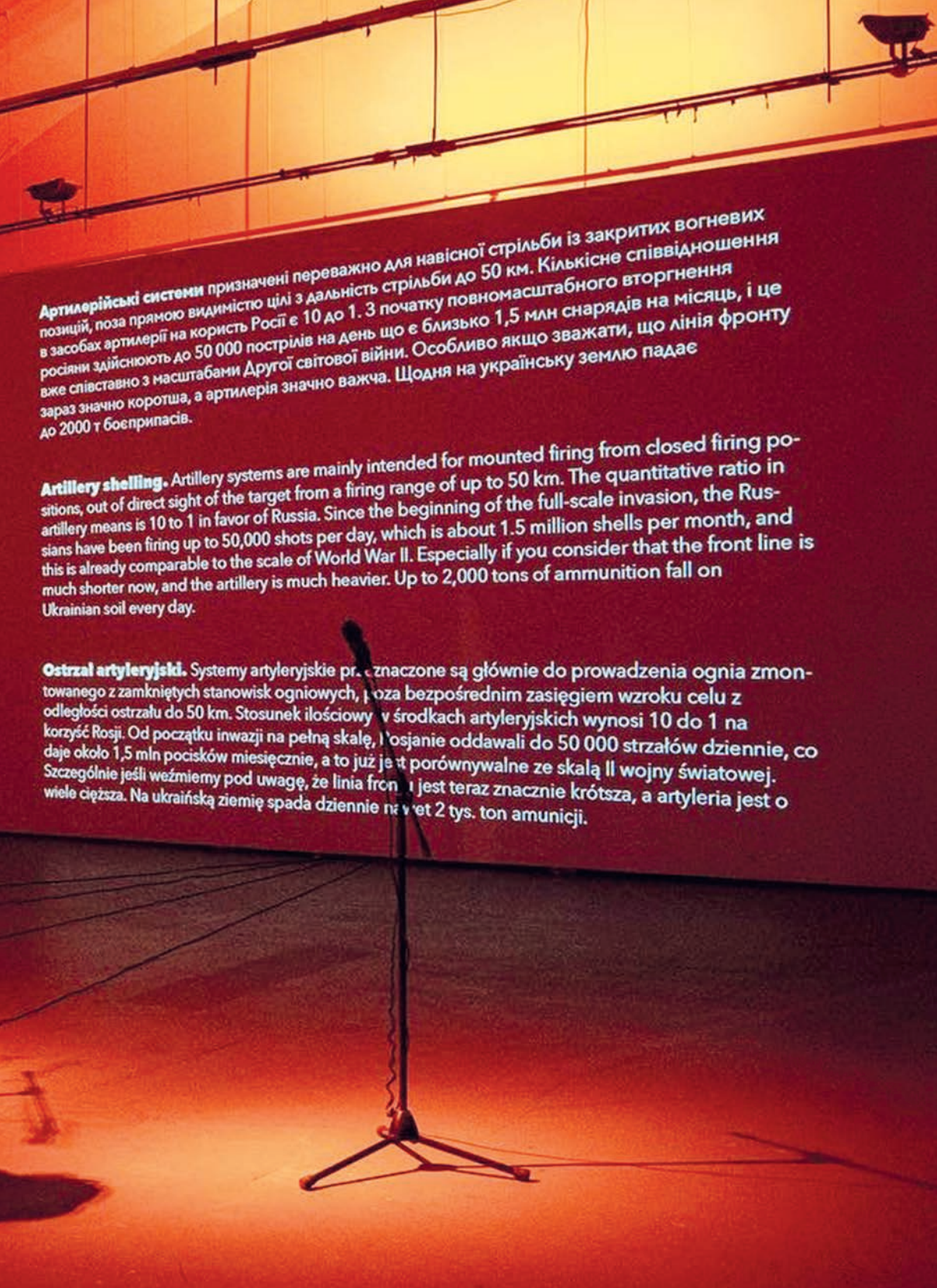
pp. 100–101: *Repeat after Me*, 2022, Labirynt Gallery, Lublin (Poland), photo by Emilia Lipa

p. 102: Vingis Park, Vilnius, 21 February 2024, photo by Yuriy Biley



Артилерійські системи призначені переважно для навісної стрільби із закритих вогневих позицій, поза прямою видимістю цілі з дальність стрільби до 50 км. Кількісне співвідношення в засобах артилерії на користь Росії є 10 до 1. З початку повномасштабного вторгнення росіяни здійснюють до 50 000 пострілів на день що є близько 1,5 млн снарядів на місяць, і це вже співставно з масштабами Другої світової війни. Особливо якщо зважати, що лінія фронту зараз значно коротша, а артилерія значно важча. Щодня на українську землю падає до 2000 т боєприпасів.

Artillery shelling. Artillery systems are mainly intended for mounted firing from closed firing positions, out of direct sight of the target from a firing range of up to 50 km. The quantitative ratio in artillery means is 10 to 1 in favor of Russia. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the Russians have been firing up to 50,000 shots per day, which is about 1.5 million shells per month, and this is already comparable to the scale of World War II. Especially if you consider that the front line is much shorter now, and the artillery is much heavier. Up to 2,000 tons of ammunition fall on Ukrainian soil every day.

Ostrzał artyleryjski. Systemy artyleryjskie pr. znaczone są głównie do prowadzenia ognia zmontowanego z zamkniętych stanowisk ogniowych, poza bezpośrednim zasięgiem wzroku celu z odległości ostrzału do 50 km. Stosunek ilościowy w środkach artyleryjskich wynosi 10 do 1 na korzyść Rosji. Od początku inwazji na pełną skalę, Rosjanie oddawali do 50 000 strzałów dziennie, co daje około 1,5 mln pocisków miesięcznie, a to już jest porównywalne ze skalą II wojny światowej. Szczególnie jeśli weźmiemy pod uwagę, że linia frontu jest teraz znacznie krótsza, a artyleria jest o wiele cięższa. Na ukraińską ziemię spada dziennie nawet 2 tys. ton amunicji.

MANUAL
BEFORE AND DURING THE FULL-SCALE INVASION

Open Group

The idea to work with the sounds of war emerged in 2015, but we only got around to it after the full-scale invasion in 2022, and continued it in 2024. In 2015, times were different; today, we can see and acutely feel this from a historical distance. It was a complete different feeling — war was in our country for the first time and we were at the Venice Biennale for the first time. 2024 is different; the bombing of cities has become normal, the front line has stretched to 1,000 kilometres, there are hundreds of thousands of victims, millions of displaced people, and those who have left the country, possibly for good. The country and population are shrinking, while the number of works about the war, about the experience of the war and on its outskirts, is only growing. A special connection between the loss of the physical body and the acquisition of knowledge can be strangely traced through recent events, our artistic practice, the experience of these spectacular biennials, and observing the experience of people during the war.

We have participated in the Biennale Arte in Venice twice. The first time was the *Hope!* group exhibition in the Ukrainian Pavilion at the 56th edition (2015). In the piece *Synonym for 'Wait'*, each of us starved for about three weeks, losing weight every day, in order to gain knowledge about unbearably waiting for something crucial, an understanding that was otherwise beyond us. By this I mean understanding a true equivalent of waiting for a loved one to return from the war. The second group exhibition we joined

was *Dispossession*.[1] There we contributed our work *Backyard*, which consisted of two witnesses of war giving a detailed recollection and reconstruction of their homes, with eighty years separating their experiences. In that work, we literally built models of houses from memories, we were interested in the reverse process, creating a physical medium from a memory that was barely alive or, on the contrary, still pulsating and fresh. In 2017, at the Future Generation Art Prize,[2] we exhibited *Untitled*. Back in 2015, we agreed to keep a record of the new people we met, so that one day we could try to match the number of people killed in the war and understand the physical reality and the simultaneous abstraction of war statistics. At the time of the exhibition in Venice in 2017, according to the UN Human Rights Mission in Ukraine, the number of people killed in the war had reached 9,940. We hoped to catch up to this number before the end of the war, which had already become another frozen conflict on the Russian border. Today, in the third year of the full-scale war, accurate casualty statistics are unavailable for various reasons, but we know that our project has become more and more impossible to complete. In 2019, as curators of the Ukrainian Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition in Venice, we decided to put materiality at the heart of the whole pavilion. The explicit materiality of the world's largest aircraft, whose shadow was supposed to be revealed to the world at noon over Venice, eventually crystallised into a clumsy but simple myth. The awareness of this myth became the sole value for the artists involved and

1. *Dispossession*, 2015, organised by European Capital of Culture Wrocław 2016, an accompanying event of the 56th International Art Exhibition in Venice.
2. Future Generation Art Prize, 2017, an accompanying event of the 57th International Art Exhibition in Venice.

the audience of *The Shadow of Dream* Cast upon Giardini della Biennale*. In the first days of a full-scale invasion in 2022, this world's largest aircraft was destroyed by Russian troops near Kyiv. The war has encroached so far that it calls into question the preservation of any myth, any history, and any archive. Along the same lines, in 2022, *Repeat after Me* became almost a handbook, a perverse method of transmitting experience and secret knowledge. And this time, the price of gaining this knowledge is loss and trauma. Physical and psychological trauma, loss of homes, loss of parts of yourself, and for many, the loss of their nearest and dearest as well.

Before the full-scale invasion, we came across a leaflet titled *In Case of Emergency or War*, published by the Centre for Strategic Communication and Information Security run by the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine. This was a twenty-five-page manual with practical tips to help in an emergency or during a war. In this leaflet, we were interested in the various tips that were directly related to the types of weapons used in the vicinity. Different actions were required in different situations: after receiving the 'Attention' signal (sirens, intermittent horns or loudspeaker sounds lasting for several minutes), during artillery shelling with multiple rocket launchers, during small arms fire, during artillery shelling (artillery or mortar fire), or during an air raid. This manual repeatedly emphasised that the most efficient way to distinguish weapons was to learn to recognise their sound. This was our cue to resume work on the project. A few weeks after the publication of this leaflet, a full-scale invasion began, and people began listening to the sounds of war to stay safe, as the leaflet advised.

A translation of excerpts from the Ukrainian brochure *In Case of Emergency or War*, released in February 2022 before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Published by the Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy in cooperation with the State Emergency Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, the Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and civil society organisations. Illustrations: Oleksandr Grekhov.

1.
WHAT ELSE SHOULD YOU KNOW WHEN UNDER FIRE?
For more information, see the Appendix, pp. 22–25

IN CASE OF FIREARMS

IN CASE OF ARTILLERY SHELLING

IN CASE OF SHELLING BY ARTILLERY ROCKET SYSTEMS

2.
pp. 22–23, APPENDIX

IN CASE OF FIREARMS:
• In the event of shooting, it is best to hide in a sheltered space (i.e. in the bathroom or even in the bathtub). If this is not possible, lie down and cover yourself with objects to shield you from debris and bullets.
• In the event of shooting in an open area, it is best to fall to the ground and cover your head with your hands. Any protrusion, even a pavement, a depression in the ground or a ditch, can serve as effective protection. A concrete rubbish bin or porch steps can also provide shelter. Do not try to hide behind cars or kiosks, as they are often targets.
• Wherever you are, your body should be in the safest possible position. Huddle your body and adopt the foetal position. Point your feet towards the shooting with your hands behind your head and your mouth open to prevent nearby explosions from damaging your eardrums. Wait until the shooting has stopped and there has been no gunfire for at least five minutes.
• If your house is located in an area of regular armed conflict, you should reinforce your windows (with adhesive film, for instance) to prevent the glass from shattering. It is advisable to cover windows, with sandbags or large pieces of furniture, for example.

IN CASE OF ARTILLERY SHELLING:
• Do not remain in doorways, under arches or on staircases during artillery and mortar shelling or air raids. It is also unsafe to hide in the basements of concrete panel buildings, or close to vehicles, petrol stations or walls of lightweight construction. These structures are not sturdy, and you may be trapped under rubble or injured.
• If you are caught by artillery fire, mortar shelling or aerial bombardment while in transit, immediately lie on the ground, beneath an outcropping, or at least in a small depression. Concrete structures (except for those that may collapse or catch fire), trenches, shallow underground wells, wide drainage pipes and ditches may protect you.
• Cover your ears with the palms of your hands and open your mouth — this will save you from post-concussion syndrome (PCS) and prevent barotrauma.
• Do not start clearing debris by yourself, wait for sappers and emergency services to arrive.

1.

ЩО ЩЕ ВАРТО ЗНАТИ, ОПИНИВШИСЬ В ЗОНІ ОБСТРІЛУ?

Детальніша інформація – в Додатку на **ст. 22-25.**

- ОБСТРІЛІВ ІЗ ЗАСТОСУВАННЯМ СТРІЛЕЦЬКОЇ ЗБРОЇ
- АРТОБСТРІЛІВ
- АРТИЛЕРІЙСЬКИХ ОБСТРІЛІВ ІЗ ЗАСТОСУВАННЯМ СИСТЕМ ЗАЛПОВОГО ВОГНЮ

2.

ПІД ЧАС ОБСТРІЛУ СТРІЛЕЦЬКОЮ ЗБРОЄЮ:

- Під час стрілянини найкраще сховатися у захищеному приміщенні (наприклад, у ванній кімнаті або навіть у самій ванні). Коли це неможливо, варто лягти, прикривши предметами, які здатні захистити вас від уламків і куль.
- Якщо ви потрапили під стрілянину на відкритому місці, краще впасти на землю та закрити голову руками. Ефективним захистом буде будь-який виступ, навіть тротуар, заглиблення в землі або канава. Укриттям також може стати бетонна сміттєва урна або сходинки ґанку. Не намагайтеся сховатися за автомобілями або кіосками — вони часто стають мішенями.
- Де б ви не знаходились, тіло повинне бути у максимально безпечному положенні. Згрупуйтеся, ляжте в позу ембріона. Розверніться ногами у бік стрілянини, прикривши голову руками та відкривши рот, щоб близький вибух не завдав шкоди барабанним перетинкам. Чекайте, поки стрілянина не вщухне, а постріли не буде бодай протягом 5 хвилин.
- Якщо ваше житло перебуває в зоні регулярних збройних зіткнень, потрібно зміцнити вікна (наприклад, клейкою плівкою) — це допоможе уникнути розльоту уламків скла. Бажано закрити вікна, наприклад, мішками з піском або масивними меблями.

ДОДАТОК

22

ПІД ЧАС АРТОБСТРІЛІВ:

- Під час артилерійського, мінометного обстрілу або авіаційного нальоту не залишайтеся в під'їздах, під арками та на сходових клітках. Також небезпечно ховатися у підвалах панельних будинків, біля автомобільної техніки, автозаправних станцій і під стінами будинків із легких конструкцій. Такі об'єкти неміцні, ви можете опинитись під завалом або травмуватися.
- Якщо вогонь артилерії, мінометний обстріл, авіаційне бомбардування застали вас на шляху, негайно лягайте на землю, туди, де є виступ або хоча б у невелике заглиблення. Захист можуть надати бетонні конструкції (окрім тих, які можуть обвалитися або загорітися), траншеї, неглибокі підземні колодязі, широкі труби водостоку і канави.
- Закривайте долонями вуха та відкривайте рот — це врятує від контузії, убереже від баротравми.
- Не приступайте до розбору завалів самостійно, чекайте фахівців з розмінування та представників аварійно-рятувальної служби.

ДОДАТОК

23

At the end of his book *Sonic Warfare* from 2009, Steve Goodman paraphrases a famous quote by Deleuze, swapping 'to look' for 'to listen': 'There is no need to fear or hope, but only to … [listen] … for new weapons.'[3] It would be hard to find a better synopsis for this artwork, though here it takes on an eerie literalness. The participants in this project really did find themselves beyond hope and fear, at one point coming to terms with the war and its sounds nearby, with the possibility of being killed by the next rocket attack (here, the countdown takes seconds) and the chance of survival. When it comes to recognising the future of war by its sounds, in the two years since the start of the war, the entire population of Ukraine has been listening closely to the new weapons used against them with the aim of terror and extermination. One of the new sounds we had to add to the new part of the project was the infamous Iranian Shahed-136 kamikaze drones. Since the early autumn of 2022, these drones have been used by Russia for massive attacks to destroy civilian, energy and critical infrastructure (by the end of February 2024, a total of 4,588 Shahed-136s had been launched against Ukraine). Many Ukrainians will forever remember the distinctive loud hum of the Shahed's engines in the night sky and the disturbing sudden silence just before they are ready to land on their target.

However, the sounds of war are not only the sounds of weapons. Other sounds include emergency services arriving at the site of a residential building that has been struck by a ballistic missile, the sounds of commemoration, the anthem and funeral songs that have seemingly become

3. Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2009, p. 296.

intense daily routines across the country; the sound of war is also the minutes of silence that have become its inaudible infrasound. The sounds of war include the Russian national anthem and Russian patriotic music, which, according to testimonies, are used to torture prisoners of war and civilians in detention. Even the already familiar warning siren is somewhere in between, because it is not literally the sound of a weapon, yet no less frightening; the sound of a countdown and the sound of chance, your game of luck, the sound of a ticket for a lottery that you did not buy into, but play regularly. The bizarre feeling of this sound was extremely accurately conveyed in poem by Victoria Amelina:

Air-raid sirens across the country
It feels like everyone is brought out
For execution
But only one person gets targeted
Usually the one at the edge
This time not you; all clear[4]

In 2023, Victoria went to Kramatorsk with a delegation of journalists and writers. While they were having dinner in a restaurant in the city centre, the Russian occupiers launched a missile attack on the building, as a result of which Amelina was seriously injured and later died in hospital.

The war is unfolding at an unpredictable pace and demands everyone who is able to do so must clearly verbalise what cannot be described. It quickly becomes clear that art, as well as deep reflection, is becoming a luxury only for those who are in a safer place — in Ukraine itself or just abroad.

4. Translated by Anatoly Kudryavitsky.

The theme of a 'safe place' is a thread that runs through the visual component of the artwork. The first part was filmed in the summer in Lviv in a new modular camp for internally displaced persons. People with different experiences agreed to participate, people coming from different occupied parts of Ukraine, of different ages, social status, and levels of understanding of what was happening in the places they fled from, and what sounds were heard there. The locations of the second part of the film — Poland, Austria, Germany, Lithuania and Ireland — make quite a contrast and are definitely safe: camps, hotels, dormitories, all temporary places for refugees, which hosted displaced people from Ukraine. These people with traumatic experiences are all around us, scattered all over Europe, maybe a witness is right next to you now. Being in a situation of constant stress, a person with PTSD can experience severe emotional reactions and feelings of panic even from ordinary sounds, smells or other stimuli.

The first part of the artwork can be described as recalling fresh memories, the second as recalling memories from a safe place in a country that is not at war. Both parts speak about memory, the 'memory of the ongoing war'. A good definition here is a 'communicative memory', a concept proposed by Jan Assman. It describes a part of collective memory based on the transmission of information from witnesses to other people, and lasts for three or four generations (80–100 years).[5]

In our artwork, karaoke is a method of exchange and learning between witnesses of war and an audience who may witness the same thing in a dystopian future. Along with

5. 'Glossary', *Past / Future / Art*, https://pastfutureart.org/en/glossary/ (accessed 6 March 2024).

the attempt to instruct strangers, there is also a sense of the impossibility of conveying personal experience; if the reticence of our subjects is appealing, the experience behind their simulations of sounds is disturbing. It is depressing to see how the loss of a home or a loved one ultimately turns into a set of stories and grim knowledge that we would rather did not exist. Most likely, the process of making the recording was a difficult one for the participants. It is comforting to think that for them, this strange karaoke may have been an attempt to transform experience into something new, something potentially important and physically present. Heavy, private, yet collective knowledge slowly forms the static image of the videos, ripens into the yellow karaoke subtitles of weapon sounds, and eventually transforms into the pavilion. Repeat after them.

Translated from the Polish by Łukasz Mojsak

pp. 112–113: *Repeat after Me*, 2022, *Stolen Sun* group exhibition, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

p. 114: Hotel de France temporary home for refugees, Vienna, 16 February 2024, photo by Yuriy Biley


WZWFFF BU BUUHH!

A COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF WAR

Marta Czyż

The artists of Open Group join conceptual practice with relational aesthetics, and their works are often extended projects with a set development and open-ended finale. The principle of open-endedness and performativity is key to understanding the sense and focus of their activities, as well as their conscious tackling of discussions on the basic paradigms of art, such as authorship, the work or the exhibition. Collectivity in art demands the ultimate compromise — the sacrifice of individuality. The creation of an object or concept 'for all' is an ambitious task, and perhaps a futile one from the point of view of classical modern art. But let us not forget about the traditions of avant-garde or non-conformist artists and their collectives. The mantra of individuality, seen as an inextricable part of creative artwork, might be shifted to the background in favour of working together and seeing the results. The art of Open Group often turns out to be an open-ended script, whose content is filled by various people at various stages of a project's development. Performativity is always part of it, because the artists presume the participation of others who, over the course of a project, become full-fledged members of the group. Their works almost never involve pictures, many of them serve as documentation, which is sometimes the only way to show the project's presence.

The idea of collectivity is not only a part of Open Group's work, it is also one method setting the Ukrainian arts community apart. In 2016 the members of Open Group were curators of the *Dependence Degree: Collective Practices of Young*

Ukrainian Artists 2000–2016 exhibition at the BWA Awangarda Gallery in Wrocław, part of the European Capital of Culture Wrocław 2016. They wrote in the catalogue: 'In recent years, the phenomena of "collaborating", "unity" and "co-operation" are among the most alive in the territory of Ukraine. The flourishing of self-organisation during Maidan 2013–2014 and the volunteer service in the unofficial war in the east of Ukraine have stirred powerful emotions and become a decisive factor in the events of recent years.'[1]

In their practice, the artists devote special attention to relationships in time and space. Time is crucial in their works about the war since 2015. It gets hijacked and turns into the time of catastrophe, losing its ordinary framework. How does a war come to us? First there are its symptoms: vague reports or rumours that are dismissed or repressed from the consciousness. When it comes, there is shock, incomprehension, and a sense of unreality, because wars happen in other places and affect other people, not us. We can see them in the media, but not out our window. Everyday images of war on our television screens, computers and smartphones paradoxically make us feel even more remote and allow us to minimise our interest, not to mention our involvement. An active approach demands we look deeper into the abyss, listen to the voices coming from it, hold uncomfortable and painful discussions.

Art is an alternate language for recounting the war. The conviction that every concept can be conveyed through a picture was important in creating a modern iconography and emblems. Up until the First World War, war iconography always

1. *Stopień zależności. Kolektywne praktyki młodych ukraińskich artystów 2000–2016*, Wrocław: Biuro Festiwalowe Impart, 2016, p. 8.

looked the same — a weapon, a hero, a victim, the victor, blood, wounds. Modernity paved the way for other forms, for new depictions of war and narratives of catastrophe — partly to expand the field of representation, to meet the expectations we now have of art.

How, then, to speak of a war and express the trauma of millions of people? Can art help us to understand an experience in which we have not taken part? The only way is to use hard, brutal facts. Open Group does not insert the tragedy of war in a single picture. They show it as a process, a thing riddled with shock, pain, uncertainty, a sense of loss and interruption. The end of the war will come, but who knows when, or how it will look. The artists' works stretched over time are an attempt to show the catastrophe as it happens, in its various renditions, to stir emotions in the viewer.

A symbolic transition from poetic gestures to political involvement is visible in such Open Group works as *Ars longa vita brevis* (2013–2014) created for the PinchukArtCenterPrize. Its point of departure was the idea of the Open Gallery — activities to determine a temporarily active space of art, for instance by drawing the plan of a gallery or describing it. The artists do not control what goes on in this space, but they account for it in their work. The Open Gallery becomes a self-sufficient creation that operates both in and without the artists' presence. The artists ask if a gallery needs to have an exhibition to be considered a gallery. The same goes for the presence of the artists and their works. In *Ars longa vita brevis*, the cameras on the artists' heads recorded everything that happened around them for the fifty-nine days of the exhibition. These pictures were transmitted online in the art centre during its opening hours. In this way, the artists created a new every day, indeed, new works.

Open Group (Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Yevgen Samborskiy, Stanislav Turina, Anton Varga), *Ars longa vita brevis*, 2013–2014, PinchukArtCentre Prize shortlist exhibition, Kyiv, photo by Sergey Illin

Open Group, *Occupied Territory*, day 32 (5 December 2013); *Fire*, day 31 (4 December 2013); *Borderline* (*Barricade*), day 37 (11 December 2013); from the *Ars longa vita brevis* project, 2013–2014, video, © Open Group

Open Group, first day (30 October 2013) of the *Ars longa vita brevis* project, 2013–2014, PinchukArtCentre, Kyiv; from the left: Yevgen Samborskiy, Anton Varga, Pavlo Kovach, Stanislav Turina; photo by Yuriy Biley

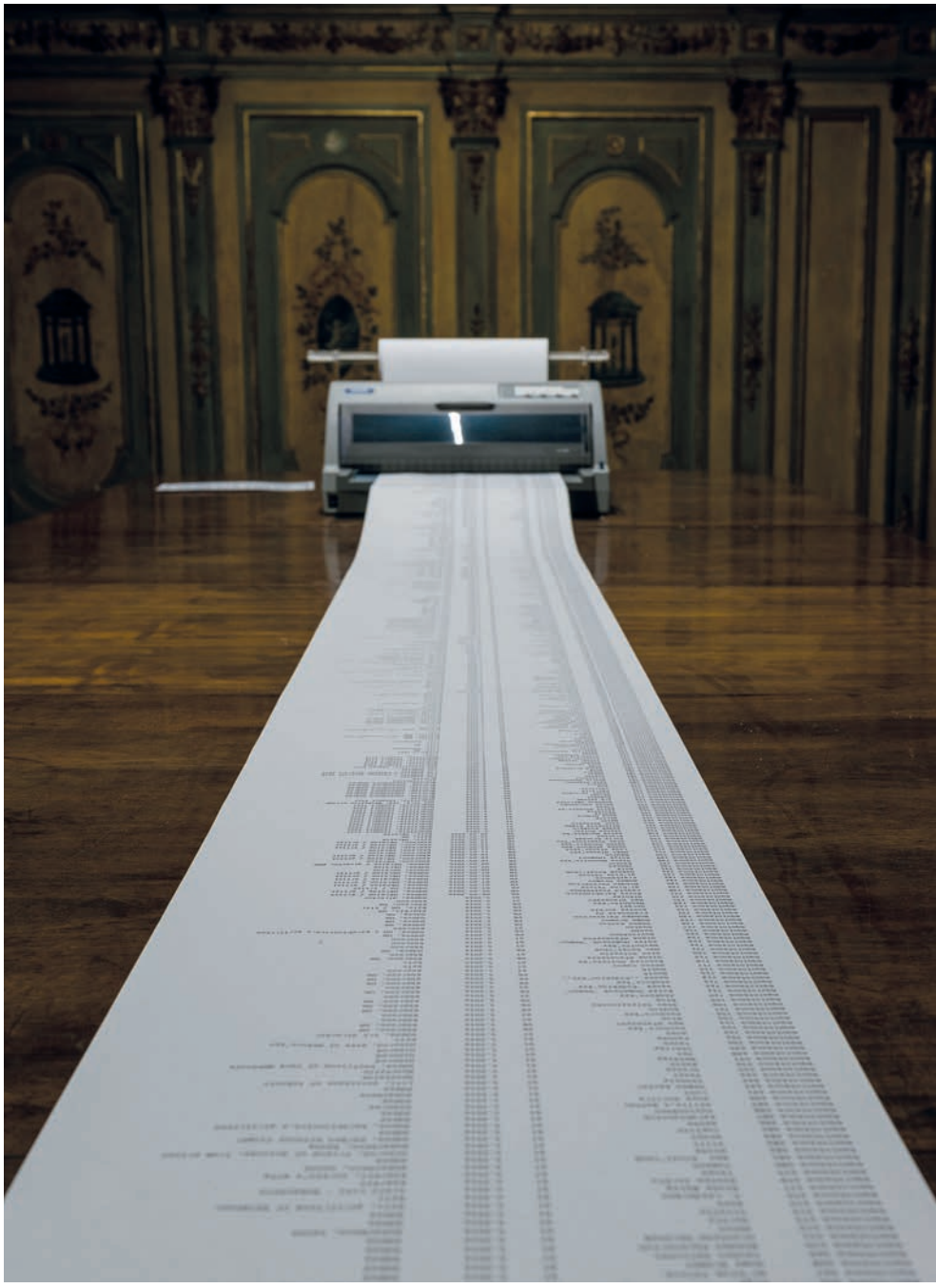
These pieces did not have material forms, sometimes they existed for literally a few seconds. During the course of the project in Kyiv, on 21 November 2013, Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign a European Union Association Agreement. The citizens took to the streets and began mass protests, known as Euromaidan. Online streaming carried out as part of the *Ars longa vita brevis* project was the first work in digitised form to show the social unrest that sparked the revolution.

In works they made in 2015, the artists shared their first reflections on the war and openly demonstrated their dissent. The participants in these pieces were the first victims. No object is capable of expressing so much sadness as tear-filled eyes and a tale of loss. In spite of everything, Open Group artists took up the challenge, and in *Untitled* they translated the statistics of their new acquaintances into the statistics of victims.

In January 2015, when they began carrying out the project, the number of victims in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine had reached 5,358. This encompassed people on either side of the conflict, including civilians (according to UN data). To illustrate the physicality of this statistic and recall the subjecthood of the victims behind the numbers, the artists recorded the people they met every day. These names, after being put online, were immediately printed alongside the ever-growing number of victims. The app collecting the archive of new acquaintances is still going strong. In 2017, when the project was shown at the *Due to Circumstances* exhibition[2] in Białystok, the number of casualties (according to the UN Human Rights

2. *Open Group: Due to Circumstances*, Arsenał Gallery, Białystok, 2 September–6 October 2017, https://galeria-arsenal.pl/exhibition/open-group-due-to-circumstances-as-a-part-of-festival-the-rise-of-eastern-culture-another-dimension (accessed 6 March 2024).

↑ → Open Group, *Untitled*, 2015–present, Future Generation Art Prize@Venice, 57th International Art Exhibition in Venice, 2017, photo by Sergey Illin



Monitoring Mission in Ukraine) had grown to 9,940. When *Untitled* was presented at the *Früchte des Zorns — Versuch einer Annäherung: Ukraine* exhibition at Haus am Lützowplatz in Berlin in 2023, the number no longer appeared. The phrase 'in progress' applied to the years-long project automatically turns into 'unending'.

Uncertainty and fear are the overriding emotions of war victims. The drama of their experiences is rendered by works that can visualise a state of endless uncertainty. In 2015, at the *Hope!* exhibition at the Ukrainian Pavilion of the 56th International Art Exhibition in Venice,[3] Open Group created *Synonym for 'Wait'*. Between 6 May and 30 July each of the four artists in the group at the time took turns sitting in front of nine screens transmitting the entrances to nine family homes of Ukrainian volunteer soldiers, live. The artists observed the screens, waiting for their return, for the soldiers to come home. They did not accept any food, trying to transfer the feeling of anticipation and longing into a physical realm. The piece emanates a sense of helplessness and hope all at once.

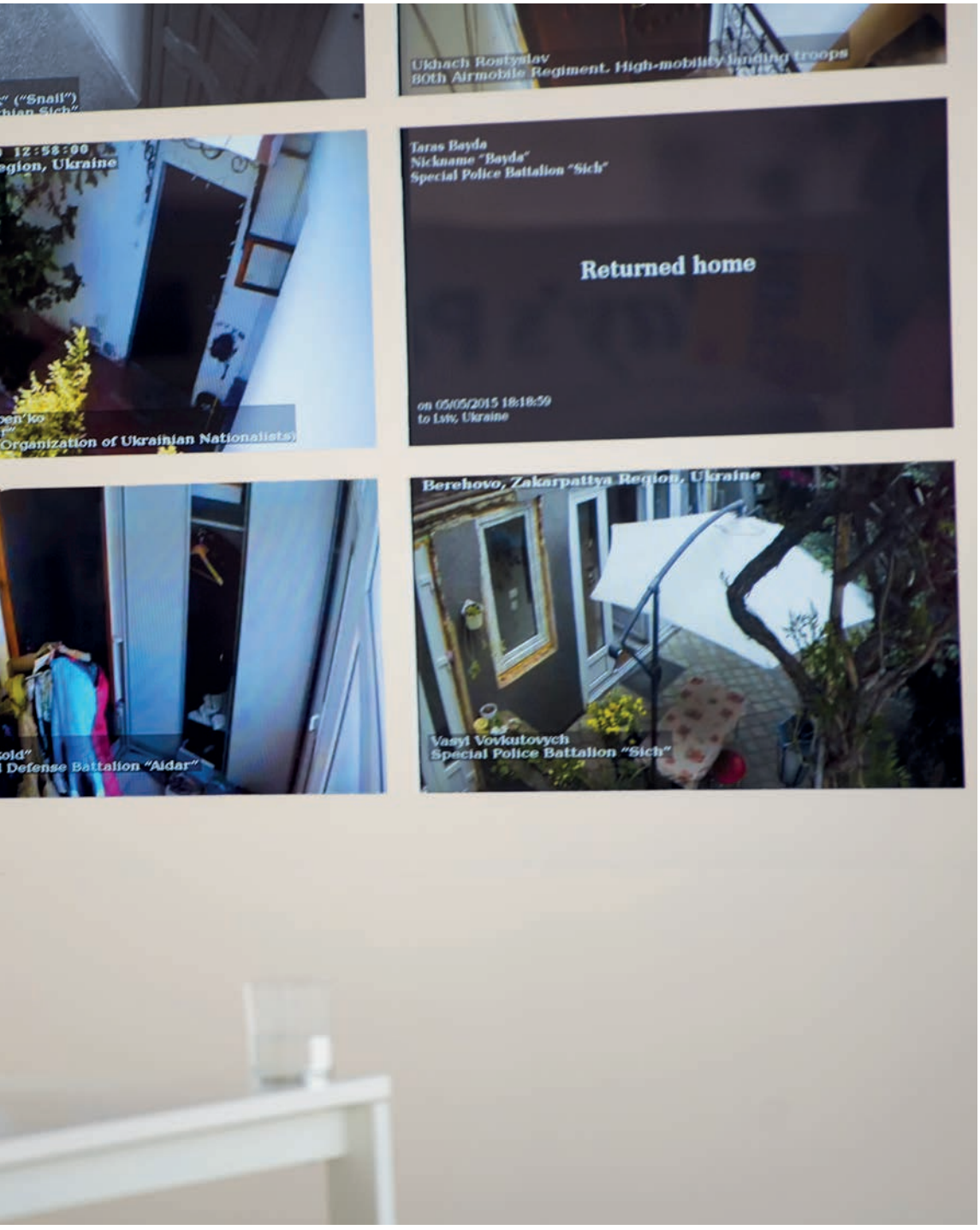
Open Group's work from a decade ago was created with a belief in a swift resolution to the conflict. Today we see it more as a forerunner of a nightmare and loss whose scale, at the time, no one could have imagined. *Backyard* (2015) is a historical reconstruction of destroyed houses, based on the recollections of their inhabitants. Filomena Kuriata lost her home during the Second World War, and Svietlana Sysoyeva during the Russian armed intervention in eastern Ukraine. The women recreate the details of the insides and outsides of their homes from memory. On this basis, the artists prepared

3. *Hope! Pavilion of Ukraine at the 56th International Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia*, https://pinchukartcentre.org/en/exhibitions/28178 (accessed 6 March 2024).

Open Group (Yuriy Biley, Stanislav Turina, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga), *Tables from the Homes of Ukrainian Soldiers*, from the *Synonym for 'Wait'* project, photo by Yuriy Biley

Open Group, *Synonym for 'Wait'*, 2015, *Hope!* exhibition, Ukraine National Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition in Venice, photo by Sergey Illin


Taras Kitura
Nickname "Ravlyk
Battalion "Carpa
2015/05/06 WE
Boyarka, Kyiv R
Oleksandr Potel
Nickname "Boya
Battalion OUN
Kyiv, Ukraine
Pavlo Pavlov
Nickname "Ash
24th Detached


Ukhach Rostyslav
80th Airmobile Regiment, High-mobility landing troops
Taras Bayda
Nickname "Bayda"
Special Police Battalion "Sich"
Returned home
on 05/05/2015 18:18:59
to Lviv, Ukraine
Berehovo, Zakarpattya Region, Ukraine
Vasyl Vovkutovych
Special Police Battalion "Sich"

mock-up reconstructions, supplemented with sketches like those made when architects design mock-ups based on descriptions. The protagonists' stories show the experience of war from an individual perspective — they make us see that it takes away our sense of security, our privacy, and what belongs to us: objects and places, and above all, a home. Art can salvage individual voices, cull them from the chaos of the catastrophe. By drawing from the history of the previous war, *Backyard* shows how the present conflict overwrites it and repeats its pattern. While the events of 2015 could have been a warning of sorts, today, in 2024, we can only speak of a continuity of the experience of catastrophe.

In works by Open Group between 2022 and 2024, there is no more room for the illusion that a swift end to the many-year conflict is possible. Ever since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine has been in the sights of Russia, which, having survived the weakness and crises tied to the fall of the Soviet Union, is trying to regain its territory. Initially, after 2000, it attempted underhanded forms of taking power, which became increasingly aggressive over time. Faced with the fierce resistance of the Ukrainian society, they fell back on a show of force, backed by global media propaganda. The works of these artists give voice to inhabitants of a country under attack, they are a kind of testimony, but also a clear message that imperialism gives rise to evil, it is a relic of the past with which the contemporary world should part ways, once and for all.

Culture is also a battlefield, as the aggressor knows. In times of the Soviet Union, avant-garde art was created in secret, and its makers were oppressed. Ukrainian culture developed alongside political cataclysms and humanitarian catastrophes that were direct or indirect consequences of Russian occupation and Soviet oppression. The art of

Open Group (Anton Varga, Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Stanislav Turina), *Backyard*, 2015, *Dispossession* exhibition, organised by Wrocław European Capital of Culture 2016, an official event at the 56th International Art Exhibition in Venice, photo by Małgorzata Kujda

contemporary Ukraine in the twentieth century was crushed by political realities, war and economic collapse. In 1934, the doctrine of Socialist Realism became the official ideology of art, and soon thereafter, in 1936–1938, a whole generation of Ukrainian artists, writers and poets was totally eliminated by the secret service (NKWD), later described as the Executed Renaissance. The doctrine of Socialist Realism became a safe haven for some artists and a curse for most. Obligatory in the visual artists' education, it was a constant in all further artistic explorations. The 1960s brought another renaissance of Ukrainian culture, but this time too it swiftly ended with orders from Moscow. Luckily, art is not so easily silenced. The harder the times, the more interesting the art — this is a grim summation of the steadfastness of Ukrainian artists over the decades, from the visual arts to literature. In 2017, two years after the annexation of the Crimea, the world slowly began forgetting about the fraught situation between Ukraine and Russia, and artists' messages were heard less and less. The situation in the east of Ukraine became a painful everyday reality, seldom featured in the pages of the world's newspapers. But the war, which really began in 2014 with the annexation of the Crimea, could only lead to one thing — to total war, victory or defeat for all of Ukraine.

Most Open Group projects after 2015 involve art practices that show the war's direct impact on society. They affect the public's sensitivity more powerfully than media images. In 2022 they made *Repeat after Me*, made up of video footage from an internal refugee camp near Lviv. In this video installation, the artists opted for a direct confrontation with a specific viewer — it is the result of years of actions to give voice to witnesses. The viewers are meant to repeat sounds of various kinds of weapons used in Ukraine. The karaoke aesthetic is

on purpose: here too we have a microphone and activities resembling entertainment, except that none of us truly wants to take part in the fun. This would mean taking the place of the victims. Confronting their experience prompts resistance, but is also a chance to put ourselves in their shoes without risking our lives, in a gallery space which stirs our senses with a range of stimuli, making us feel the horror of war.

In 2023 another work was created using viewer participation and tying in to this Open Gallery project, titled *1972–2022 / 1981–2022 / 1995–2022* and featured at the Autostrada Biennale in Kosovo. In a nation that gained independence in 2007, the spirit of war still hovers over the old NATO hangars in the town of Prizren, the main site of the Biennale. In a parking lot for tanks and oversized weapons, the artists recreated blueprints of three museums destroyed during the Russian invasion of Ukraine on a 1 : 1 scale: the National Museum of Literature in the Kharkiv region, the Museum of History and Local History in Ivankovo and the Municipal Museum of Local History in Okhtyrka. Every blueprint was marked in a different colour. Viewers walking over the sketch outlines of the destroyed buildings were accompanied by a phantom sensation, as if their movements might bring the buildings back to life. The lines and title of this work containing years of the museums' existences create a symbolic tomb for hundreds of cultural artifacts that have vanished from the face of the earth.

The collective returned to witnesses of the war in the *Waiting Room* installation, created in 2023 for the *How River Roars*[4] exhibition in Wrocław. The artists made a mock-up of a waiting room of a destroyed train station in Mariupol, with

4. *How River Roars*, Krupa Art Foundation, Wrocław, 23 September–12 November 2023, https://krupaartfoundation.pl/jak-plynie-rwaco/ (accessed 6 March 2024).

Open Group (Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga), *1972–2022 / 1981–2022 / 1995–2022*, 2023, 4th Autostrada Biennale, Prizren (Kosovo), photo by Ardi Shishko

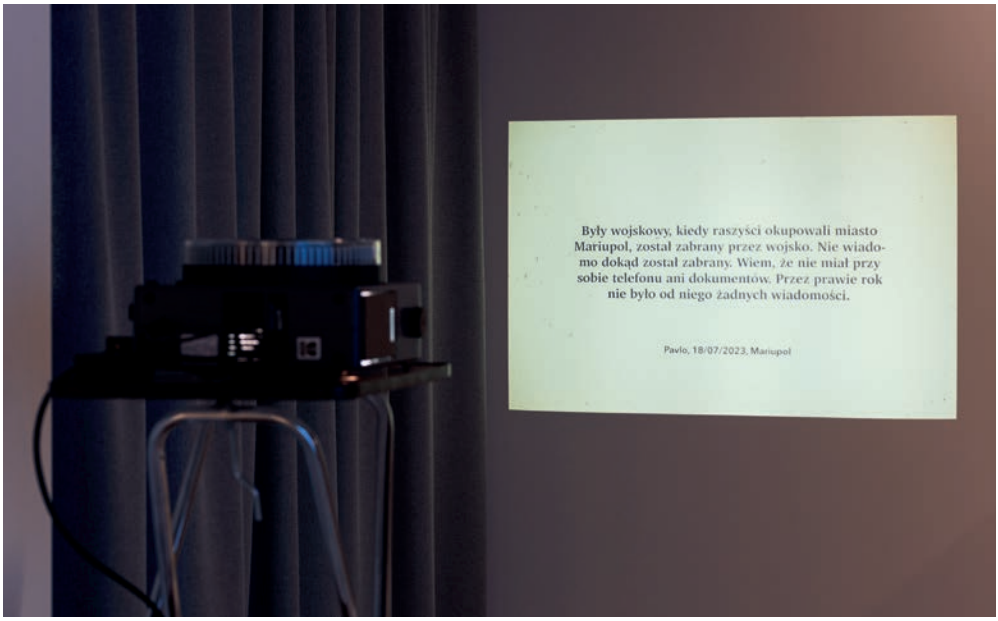
its characteristic Socialist Modernist architecture. Here the waiting room is a metaphor for a state of anticipation. It is filled with hundreds of slide projections with ads from the Telegram channel, detailing the circumstances in which people have vanished. 'A former soldier was enlisted by the army when the racists occupied the city of Mariupol, no idea where he was taken to. I know he had neither a telephone nor papers with him. For nearly a year there has been no word from him. Pavlo, 18/07/2023, Mariupol', reads one of them. Apart from hope and the tension of waiting for news, the posted texts communicate a dramatic anxiety. The anonymous selection and the endless descriptions stress the vast and constantly rising number of missing people. A work based on individual stories transforms into a lament for the collective.

The omnipresence of armed conflicts in the media makes us accustomed to images of war, desensitises us, generating the need for more stories. The works of Open Group have a major impact on changing the paradigm of war iconography — they abandon hackneyed symbols, break down formulae, replacing the impersonal form of objects with eyewitness reports that do not allow viewers to remain indifferent.

If we were to point to an object Open Group uses in their work, one that may serve as a symbol of the history of the struggle for Ukrainian independence, this would be the An-225 Mriya. This is the world's largest aeroplane, designed in Kyiv by the Antonova construction company as part of the programme to build the Soviet Buran space ship. When the programme was aborted, the Mriya began to be useful in transporting oversized cargo. In Ukrainian, Mriya means 'dream', it is a feminine noun. From its creation in 1988, this machine was the pride and symbol of Ukraine, it was broadcast on television in the background during all the national holidays.

Its every flight was an event. During the pandemic, in April 2020, when the plane landed at Warsaw's Chopin Airport with a load of medical supplies, nearly 100,000 Poles watched the transmission live. On 27 February 2022, three days after the Russian invasion, the thirty-three-year-old machine was destroyed by the Russians during an attack on the Hostomel airport. With this they destroyed another symbol of the twentieth century, a symbol of the conquest of outer space.

In 2019, the plane was the main protagonist of an Open Group project, *The Shadow of Dream* Cast upon Giardini della Biennale* carried out at the Ukrainian Pavilion for the 58th International Art Exhibition in Venice. At noon on 9 May 2019 it was to fly over Venice, casting its shadow on the Giardini della Biennale. The history of the planned flight served as a pretext to critique the power structure and to create a multilayered tale of Soviet history. Casting a shadow on the Venetian gardens filled with national pavilions was meant to be a symbolic gesture marking equal presence in the world, in Europe and at the Biennale. The date was not chosen by accident — it was the day the Biennale opened, but 9 May was also the Soviet Victory Day in the Second World War. The flight did not ultimately come about, becoming another mythical tale of the dream-plane, and a point of departure for a six-month performance in the Ukrainian Pavilion. An important part of the project was an invitation to all the artists who responded to the collective's open call (their names appeared in the catalogue and on the memory card placed in the aeroplane). As such, Open Group questioned the logic of creating national representations at the Biennale, deconstructing its very idea. As Kateryna Botanova put it: '*The Shadow of Dream* was a strong critique of the power structures in place in the global art world and their seductiveness. The curators played with the dream of being



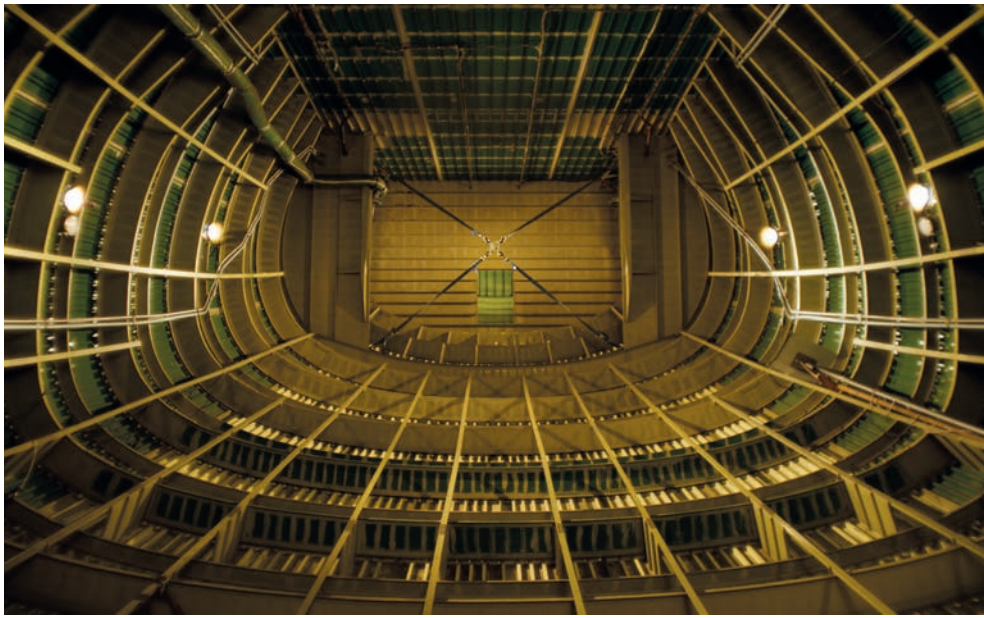
↑ → Open Group (Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga), *Waiting Room*, 2023, *How River Roars* exhibition, Krupa Art Foundation, Wrocław (Poland), photo by Alicja Kielan

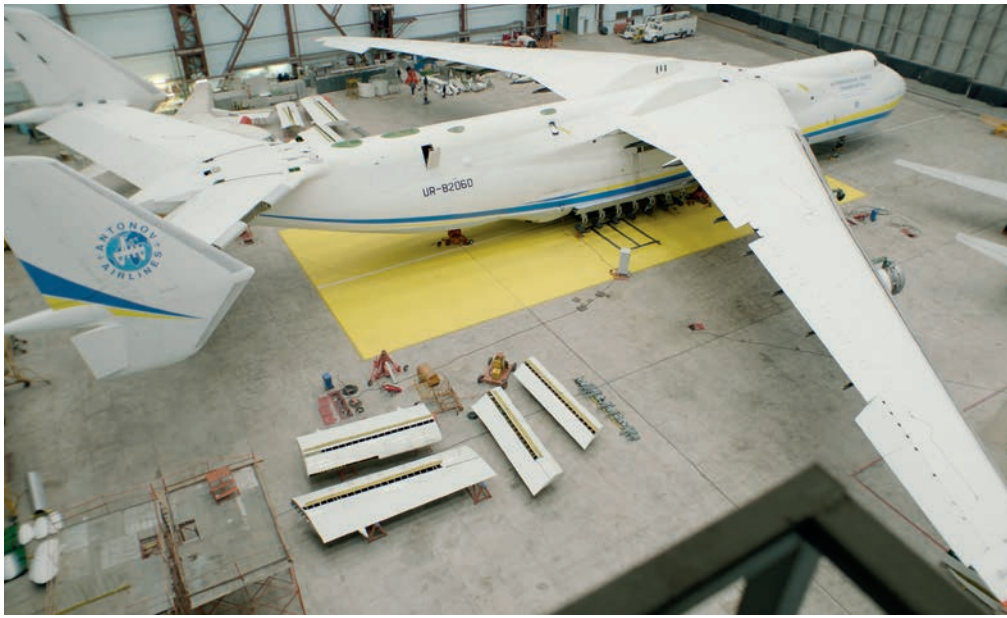
from an important and recognised country, even if it was only because of the production of the biggest cargo plane or just through "casting a shadow"; the dream of having one's proper, even if elusive, place in a row of all other countries whose pavilions have been a part of the Biennale for a hundred years; the dream of writing the country and its artists' names into the history of world art. At the same time, the long list of 1,143 artists deconstructed both the idea of "national representation" and bestowed symbolic value upon them.'[5]

Five years later, Open Group is again taking part in the Biennale, this time representing Poland. The dream of a safe, European Ukraine continues. Now there is no place for a language that is not universal and uniting, for a message other than that which appeals directly to people's consciences. Open Group's work on the war has built symbols whose point of gravity has shifted from the object to the witness. Creating a community and exploring interpersonal relationships has become a part of global communication, without divisions into nationalities and languages. In the face of the present war in Ukraine and other conflicts erupting every other moment in various corners of the world, we look at the work of Open Group not just as an audience; we are beginning to participate in it ourselves. They have become part of the global discourse. These works are like a history lesson each of us is obliged to learn. They teach a civic attitude and humanitarianism as guarantees of a safe future, as opposed to destructive imperial policies that bring nothing but death and emptiness.

Translated from the Polish by Soren Gauger

5. Kateryna Botanova, 'A Blanket of Snow', *Various Artists*, 2 June 2024, https://various-artists.com/a-blanket-of-snow/?fbclid=IWAR2C4YJAehDVR7reS967qlIybUq6mAz5AW6FSXMf-zw6VjTtIap51wsNd4Mw (accessed 6 March 2024).





Open Group (Yuriy Biley, Anton Varga, Pavlo Kovach, Stanislav Turina), *The Shadow of a Dream* Cast upon the Giardini della Biennale*, 2019, video, © Open Group

→ Remnants of Russian armoured vehicles in the background of a Mriya AN-225 destroyed on Hostomel airfield during the Russian invasion on Ukraine, 8 April 2022, photo by Dmytro Larin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Marta Czyż, an art historian, independent curator and critic, lives and works in Warsaw.

Her practice draws on archives and recent developments in art history to influence culture and social movements. She explores the history of exhibitions in Poland and the curatorial profession.

She has prepared exhibitions in Poland at the CCA Ujazdowski Castle and Zachęta — National Gallery of Art in Warsaw, BWA Zielona Góra; MOS Gorzów; the National Museum in Szczecin; and elsewhere. In 2020, she curated the 10th Contexts Festival of Ephemeral Arts in Sokołowsko and the 9th Youth Triennale at the Centre for Polish Sculpture in Orońsko. In 2022, she joined Yuriy Biley in putting together the *Society of Discouragement* exhibition at the History Meeting House in Warsaw. She regularly publishes in the art-related press (*Dwutygodnik*, *Vogue Polska*, *Polityka*, miejmiejsce, *Wysokie Obcasy*, *Camera Austria*, follow.art). In 2015, she and Julia Wielgus released a Polish-language book called *In the Frame of the Exhibition — Conversations with Curators*. She has been granted a scholarship from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland. She is a member of the Board of the Polish Section of the AICA.

photo by Piotr Czyż

Open Group was founded in August 2012 in Lviv by six Ukrainian artists: Yuriy Biley (2012–present), Pavlo Kovach (2012–present), Oleg Perkovskiy (2012–2013), Yevgen Samborskiy (2012–2014), Stanislav Turina (2012–2019) and Anton Varga (2012–present). The group's structure has changed over the years. Its present members are: Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach and Anton Varga.

The structure of Open Group is built around the idea of collective work, involving people from different fields for a period of time to work on collaborative projects.

Their work is based on exploring interactions between people and contextual spaces, creating 'open situations'.

The group's members have run independent art spaces, such as Detenpyla Gallery (since 2011) or Efremova26 Gallery (2013–2014) in Lviv.

Open Group won the Special Distinction at the PinchukArtCentre Prize in 2013, and the Main Prize in 2015. Their works were featured at the Ukrainian Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition in Venice. In 2016, Open Group curated a show called *Dependence Degree, Collective Practices of Young Ukrainian Artists 2000–2016* at the BWA Awangarda Gallery (Wrocław, Poland). In 2017, their work was presented as part of the Future Generation Art Prize@Venice 2017 (an event to accompany the 57th Biennale). In 2019, Open Group curated the Ukrainian Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition in Venice.

Open Group's works have been exhibited by such institutions as the 8th Yokohama Triennale; Albertinum, Dresden; Ludwig Museum, Budapest; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; National Art Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv; Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle (Netherlands); Belvedere 21 Museum of Contemporary Art, Vienna; Labirynt Gallery, Lublin (Poland); Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York; PinchukArtCentre, Kyiv; Jam Factory Art Center, Lviv (Ukraine); 4th Autostrada Biennale, Prizren (Kosovo); The School of

Kyiv — Kyiv Biennial 2015; Ars Aevi Museum of Contemporary Art, Sarajevo.

The artists' works are held in the collections of the KADIST, Paris and San Francisco; Ars Aevi Museum of Contemporary Art, Sarajevo; MOCA NGO/ Ukrainian Museum of Contemporary Art (UMCA), Kyiv; National Art Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv; Museum of Contemporary Art in Kherson (Ukraine); and in private collections.

www.open-group.org.ua

Yuriy Biley was born in 1988 in Uzhhorod (Zakarpatian region, Ukraine). In 2011 he graduated from the National Academy of Arts in Lviv. Since 2015, he has lived and worked in Wrocław (Poland). Since 2022, he has been living between Berlin and Wrocław.

A visual artist and curator and a co-founder of the Open Group (since 2012), Biley has also curated and co-founded two galleries, Detenpyla in Lviv (since 2011) and New Golden in Wrocław (since 2019).

The artist's practice focuses on themes related to the experience of emigration. Most of his projects are based on personal experiences, which he constructs through borrowings and quotations. He creates post-art installations, collages and works. Beyond the theme of emigration, the works are a reflection on current social and political events. They contain images of a world oblivious to today's fundamental problems. He is interested in text and the impact of language as a cultural factor. His announcements communicate a civic attitude, constantly rooted in the artist's identity.

Biley's works are held in the collections of the Stadtmuseum, Berlin; Labirynt Gallery, Lublin (Poland); Museum of Contemporary Art, Kherson (Ukraine); and in private collections.

www.yuriy-biley.com

Anton Varga was born in 1989 in Uzhhorod (Zakarpatian region, Ukraine). He studied at the Zakarpatia Art Institute (BFA, 2010), Kharkiv State Academy of Art & Design (2012) and Rutgers University (MFA, 2024). He is a co-founding member of Open Group (since 2012). He is also a co-founder of the *Sorry No Rooms Available* art residency in his hometown, Uzhhorod (running since 2016). Since 2015 he has lived and worked in New York and Poznań (Poland).

Anton Varga's practice deals with temporary, archival, scrolling, pictorial, video and celluloid film images. His recent interests hover around war consumption, the politics of light, the light in parking lots, institutional light, the light in Youtube videos, Ultimate Master, immortality, collaboration, labour, the Kojèvian End of History, pain, painting, landscapes, Socialist Realism, narrative, nostalgia, dialogues and hope.

www.antonvarga.com

Pavlo Kovach was born in 1987 in Uzhhorod (Zakarpatian region, Ukraine). He studied at the A. Erdeli Uzhgorod Art College and at the Lviv National Academy of Arts, where he received his BA and MA. He lives and works in Lviv, Ukraine.

He is a co-founder of the Detenpyla Gallery and Efremova26 Gallery artist-run spaces, and since 2022 he has been the curator of the Lviv Municipal Art Centre; Kovach is also a co-founder and participant of the Open Group arts collective.

In his artistic practice, Pavlo Kovach is interested in creating the mythological image of a real person. The concept of his work is held in the statement that a person's image is based in the real-life story which the artist develops. Pavlo Kovach fills a fictional character's life with stories, artifacts and artworks, which (might) have been produced by the character themselves.

wwww.pavlokovach.weebly.com

EXHIBITION HISTORY FOR *REPEAT AFTER ME* 2022

Solo exhibitions
2023 *Open Group. Repeat after Me*, Kulturdrogerie, Vienna

2023 *Open Group: We Were Somewhere Among You*, HB Station, Guangzhou (China)

2022 *Open Group — Repeat after Me*, Labirynt Gallery, Lublin (Poland)

2022 *Repeat after Me by Open Group*, Theater of Hopes and Expectations, Düsseldorf (Germany)

Selected group exhibitions and festivals
2024 *Wild Grass: Our Lives*, 8th Yokohama Triennale

2024 *Listening for Traces: Conflict, Sound and Memory*, Leaf Tower, Al Reem Island, Abu Dhabi

2024 *Forever and a Day*, Melkweg Expo, Amsterdam

2023 *Our Years, Our Words, Our Losses, Our Search, Our Us*, Jam Factory Art Center, Lviv (Ukraine)

2023 *Talking about Myself? Talking about You*, Stadtkino, Vienna

2023 *A Short Story of Tension, Resistance and Love*, Art Station Dubulti, Jūrmala (Latvia)

2023 *Kaleidoscope of (Hi)stories: Ukrainian Art 1912–2023*, Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle (Netherlands)

2023 *Talking about Myself? Talking about You*, daadgalerie, Berlin

2023 *Talking about Myself? Talking about You*, Voloshyn Gallery, Kyiv

2023 *When the Inconceivable Takes Form*, Cité internationale des arts, Paris

2023 *Unexpected Care*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Sofia

2023 *Kaleidoscope of (Hi)stories. Ukrainian Art 1912–2023*, Albertinum, Dresden (Germany)

2023 *Sonya: Art for Ukrainian Aid*, Century Park, Los Angeles

2022 *Stolen Sun*, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

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KADIST, Paris and San Francisco

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EXHIBITION

REPEAT AFTER ME II
Open Group: Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga
Polish Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia
20 April–24 November 2024
curator: Marta Czyż

Polish Pavilion commissioner:
Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz, Minister of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland

Polish Pavilion office: Anna Kowalska, Michał Kubiak (deputy commissioner), Aga Mandziuk

exhibition organiser:

ZACHĘTA

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zacheta.art.pl, labiennale.art.pl
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exhibition design: CENTRALA — Małgorzata Kuciewicz, Simone de Iacobis
exhibition communication: Zofia Koźniewska, Milena Liebe, Justyna Wydra and Lightbox
PR strategy: Zofia Bugajna-Kasdepke
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ZACHĘTA — NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art is an institution whose mission is to popularise art in all its current manifestations as a vital part of culture and society.

The gallery organises temporary exhibitions, presenting the most interesting developments in twentieth and twenty-first century art, with both solo exhibitions and widely-discussed thematic exhibitions. It also promotes the work of young artists, who are displayed, in part, at the Zachęta Project Room, a laboratory space for art experiments.

One of the foremost tasks in Zachęta's social mission is to promote contemporary art, and thus provide contact with it for viewers from all walks of life. Pictures of works from the Zachęta collection, documentary and educational materials, and most of the publications are made available on Creative Commons licences on the gallery web site. This is part of the Open Zachęta project, ongoing since 2011, within which the gallery conducts its openness policy.

Zachęta runs educational activities geared toward children, young people, and adult viewers as well. It also organises series of accessible events, taking into account viewers' diverse needs. It releases publications on contemporary art and gathers information on the present-day Polish art scene.

Zachęta holds a collection of nearly 3,700 works of painting, sculpture, installations, video, graphic art, and performance.

The gallery is also tasked with overseeing the content and organisation of the exhibition for the Polish Pavilion in Venice at Biennale Arte and Biennale Architettura.

ZACHĘTA

ADAM MICKIEWICZ INSTITUTE

The Adam Mickiewicz Institute is a national cultural institution established to create an interest in Polish culture worldwide. The Institute collaborates with foreign partners to initiate international cultural dialogue, aligning with the goals and objectives of Polish foreign policy. The Institute has organised cultural projects in seventy countries across six continents and has received awards at international festivals and exhibitions, confirming the high quality of its projects.

The Adam Mickiewicz Institute is funded by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland.

CULTURE.PL is the Institute's flagship brand and provides up-to-date cultural news, covering the most interesting events and phenomena related to Polish culture. The news service offers articles and news in three languages: Polish, English, and Ukrainian.

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REPEAT AFTER ME 2022

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