

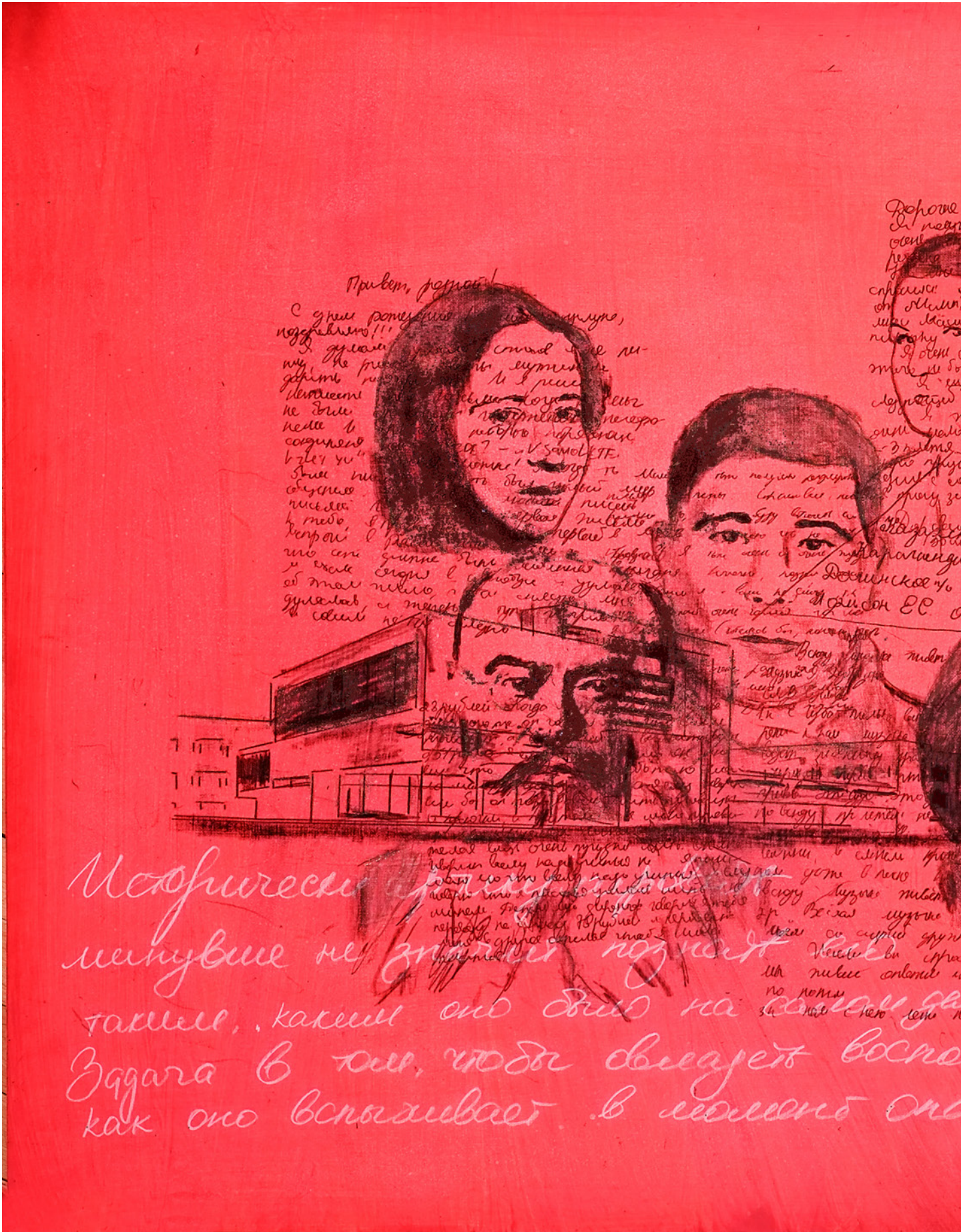
# Dictionary of Resistance for Beginners

**Haim Sokol**

## **Artists' strike (common places)**

Suppose a miracle happened, and a general artists' strike began. But what kind of work does the artist cease to perform during the strike? In the case of railway workers, metallurgists, teachers, the answer is obvious. However, what does the artists' strike mean? Let's say that this is a refusal to create art works. In this case, we reduce the artist's work to the work of an artisan, and the work to a commodity. Despite all the non-obviousness of this (however, very common) identification, we can, nevertheless, draw from it a useful conclusion regarding the legal side of the artist's activity. If an artwork is a product produced by an artist, then the exhibition for which this work is done is a production. This means that the invitation of the artist to the exhibition is equal to hiring an employee for the enterprise and must be carried out according to all the norms of the labor code. That is, not only the creation of work, the technical part (after all, the budget of the exhibition is the capital that its owner invests in a certain way, and this investment has no relation to the artist, just like the purchase of new machines by the owner of the plant does not concern the hired workers). The artist's time spent on the production and installation of the work must be paid for. If you consider the artist as an individual entrepreneur, then in the case of inviting them to the exhibition they as such provides an inviting institution their creation for an exhibition or loans their already finished work. This is the only way to consistently understand the identification of the artist's work with the labor of the proletarian or artisan. A strike based on this understanding can lead to a collapse or to a radical transformation of the existing institutional system.

Unfortunately, artists are looking for solutions to their problems not through the law, but through art. For a long time already the refusal to create a work has turned into a form of work. Thus, it seems, this clearly demonstrates the impossibility of the cessation of the artist's work in this context. This brings us back to the question of what an artists' strike is. If we insist on the answer to this question that the artist's work is not material, then what exactly is it and how can we stop it? Does



English translation:

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize "how it really was." It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger.



Doublepages:

**Haim Sokol, “On the concept of History”**

The series is titled “On the concept of History” after Walter Benjamin’s last text written in 1940 not long before his death. I decided to turn these theses into a material of agitation. It can be printed out and used on rallies, pickets, etc. I mix different historical figures like Benjamin, Hanna Arendt, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg with Russian activists like Anastasia Baburova which was killed by neo-nazis in Moscow in 2009, together with constructivist buildings and anonymous people. I also depicted Kazakh poet Abay Kunanbaev because the Occupy Moscow movement was located near the monument to Abay in the center of Moscow in 2011 and was also called “Occupy Abay”. Along with Abay I depicted Kazakh women-heroes of the WWII Aliya Maldagulova and Manshuk Mamatova with anonymous people from the Kazakh town Zhanaozen where in 2011 a big strike of oil miners took place which was brutally suppressed by military forces. All this people meet in the poetical dimension of History. Above the drawings I wrote by hand quotes from Benjamin’s “Theses” translated into Russian.

*Haim Sokol is an installation, sculpture, and video-based artist whose practice addresses the dramatic social histories of Russia and Eastern Europe. Sokol roots his use of literary allusion in historical reality and the legacy of major 20th century uprisings, revolutions, massacres and genocides. Sokol has exhibited in solo exhibitions at the M&J Guelman Gallery, Triumph Gallery, Anna Nova Gallery and other galleries in Russia. He has participated in the First Indian Biennale (2012), the Third Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2009), the Second Biennale of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki (2009), the First Moscow Biennial for Young Artists (2008), School of Kyiv – the 2nd Kyiv Biennial (2015).*

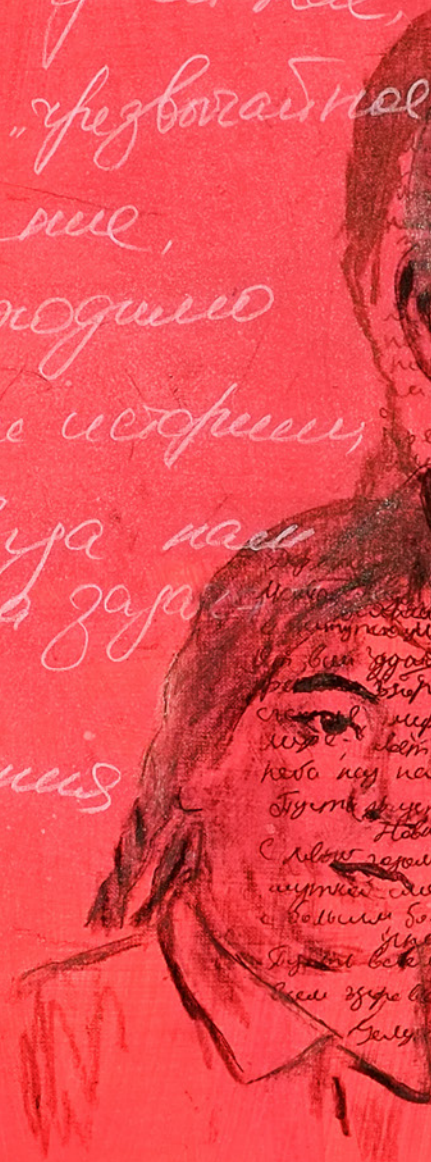
this mean a rejection of intellectual activity? And even if such a refusal is possible, what impact can it have on the world? In other words, can there be a material stop of immaterial labor? Will not this be another mental exercise, a kind of intellectual product?

Perhaps we can begin to answer these questions if we refuse to understand the strike as a complete (albeit temporary) termination of work. In the case of art, this means stopping to function in a normal mode. Art is the dream of the revolution. And if this is so, then we must get rid of such art to wake up the revolution or, more precisely, to invent a new art that will no longer distract our mind and our senses. In place of the pictorial regime, when the text dominates the image, and the aesthetic mode, when the form contains a ciphered text, a performative (political) regime should occur in which word, image and action are equal. There are times when the canvas turns into a banner. And such times have come.

## Defeat

Of course, there is a lot of talk about historical defeat. There is something total, final and hopeless in defeat. In comparison with defeat, failure or error is easy, almost weightless. Failure is fraught with a second chance, a mistake - hope for correction. But defeat is hard like a fist, and crushing like a knockout. It strikes like a blow, throwing the enemy on the ground. In the story "The City Coat of Arms" Kafka describes a city, whose inhabitants are mired in destructive wars, and who forget about the construction of the tower, the main purpose of its existence. A giant fist on the emblem serves as a warning to them that one day it will fall upon them and destroy the city, punishing the inhabitants for inaction. Historical defeat - forgetfulness of purpose, betrayal of truth. Hence, being associated with oblivion, defeat is rooted in the past. Only there it is possible. We do not suffer defeat, we who live here and now, but our predecessors, generations who lived before us do. Every time, recognizing our own defeat, we inflict a powerful blow on our predecessors, helping their winners. Therefore, our task - regardless of anything, is not to admit defeat. This is the key to a historic victory, which is non-defeat. This also means that historical victory is inextricably linked with the past. Revenge, a thirst for revenge, resentment have nothing to do with it, because they belong entirely to the present. We keep our account in history. Going to the demonstration in defense of migrants, we continue the fight in the Warsaw ghetto, joining the trade union, we join the general strike of 1905, and by raising tents in the streets of our cities, we are defending the Paris Commune. We fail in our ways, make mistakes, but we do not give up.

Традиция угнетенных учит нас,  
что переживаемое нами "чрезвычайное  
положение" - не исключение,  
а правило. Нам необходимо  
выработать такое понятие истории,  
которое этому отвечает. Тогда нам  
станет ясно, что наша задача -  
создание действительно  
чрезвычайного положения.



English translation:

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "emergency situation" in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this. Then it will become clear that the task before us is the introduction of a real state of emergency.



## Garden-City

Nothing blooms in the sand or between pavements, except words.

Jaques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*, 1967

If this is so, we will plow the asphalt and sow it with letters. Our words will spread around the city like poplar fluff. We'll open the windows wide. And our feelings will cease to break on the glass monitors. They will again nest in the shady crowns of trees. But for now we will save the seed letters in the alphabets. Our children will grow a garden city. We must win for them our right to this city. For this we need to return to the Gutenberg press. But only to remove the capital letters and cast bullets out of them.

## Occupy

"Do not demand anything, occupy everything!" This is the psychology of the virus. The motto of a bare life. In it, all the weakness of contemporary art. Why do we need everything, if we do not want anything? Or we want, but do not demand? We are already everywhere, and we are silent. And how can we occupy what is rightfully ours? Our streets, our freedom, our future? They can only be defended or won. Because our cities have long been captured.

Occupy - what fascinated us with this word? A ringing diphthong or an iron taste of militarism? Why are we so careless in our choice of words? And if we have already opened a dictionary of war, why do not we find other words there - for example, *résistance* or *partisans*? The sound of metal can also be heard in the combination of "-an" sounds. But this is the ringing of the alarm, it is the blow of the iron pipe into the rail. Why are we so unconscious? Maybe because the iPad cannot be brushed against the grain. But the revolution is not done with the iPad in hand.

"Do not demand anything" - why do we start all the slogans and end up with nothing? Why this shyness? Our will has become entangled in social networks. We are afraid to legitimize power by making demands on it. But who said that you need to make demands that the authorities are able to fulfill?

In Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, one of the witnesses, a former prisoner of Auschwitz and a member of the underground, tells the following story. The German prisoners who headed the underground were against the uprising and fought for an overall improvement in conditions in the camps. To some extent they succeeded. Conditions have become slightly better, mortality has decreased. But a decrease in the death rate caused a shortage of space. Therefore, upon arrival in the camp, whole echelons of people were, without discrimination, without selection, sending no one to work, sent directly to the gas chambers. Only an uprising could have stopped



the machine of death, something which never happened in Auschwitz. We have a chance to fix something. It does not matter that more than eighty years have passed since then. People, time, life have changed. But for us there is still an actual choice - the struggle for better conditions or insurrection?

## **Pity**

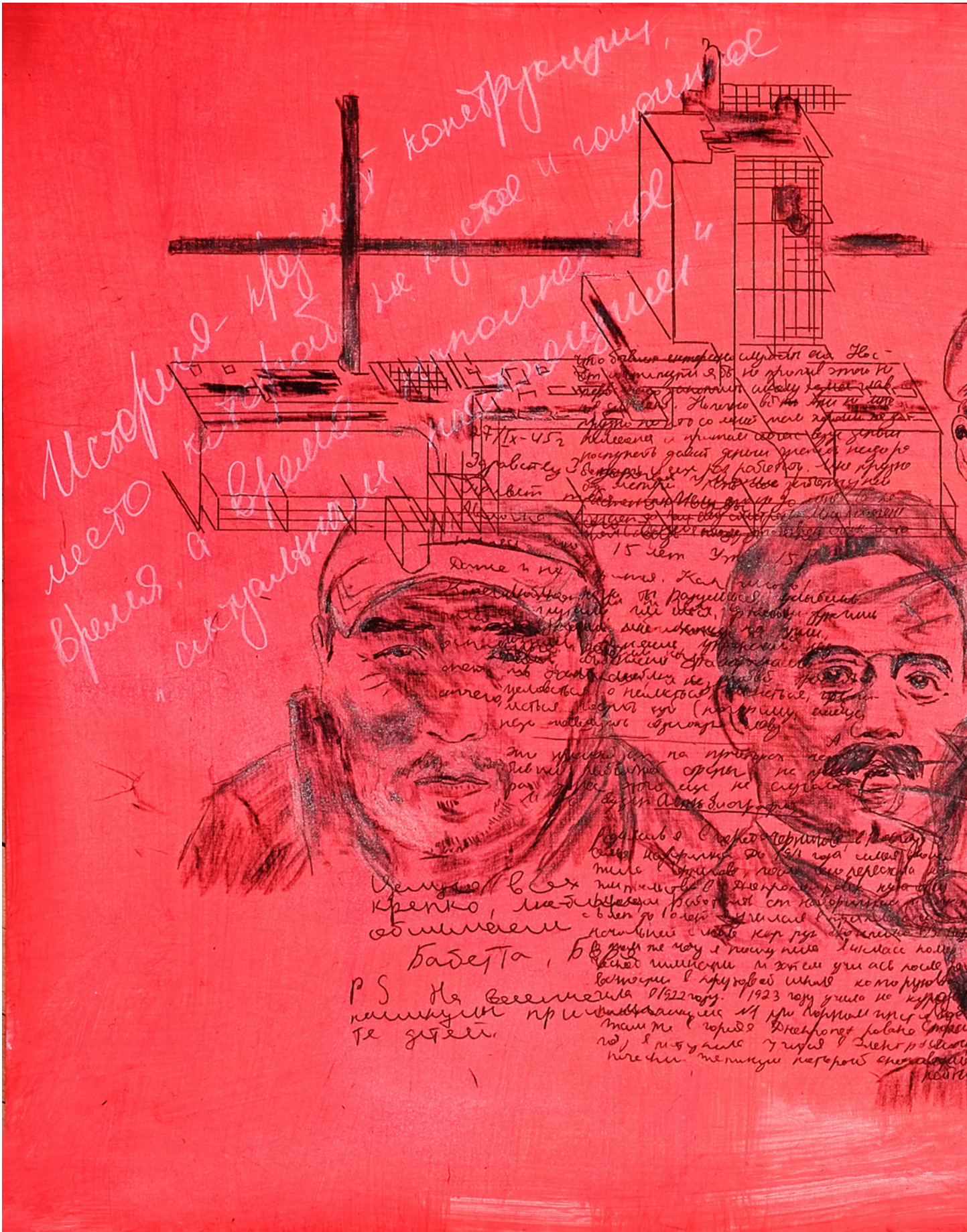
We have forgotten what solidarity is. All we have left is pity. Rejecting politics and history, we have condemned ourselves to loneliness. Pity is the lot of the lonely, a refuge for the lonely. Pity is in essence an emotion, and as such is predominately private. A collective feeling of pity sounds like nonsense. To pity, to feed, to blame. Who? It does not matter! For pity you merely need an object in the accusative case. In Hebrew, the word “rachamim”, meaning pity or compassion, is the plural form of “racham”, meaning womb or uterus (the plural, however, emphasizes the capacity for this emotion in both parents). To pity someone is to treat them as a parent would treat a child, as a superior would treat a subordinate, as the strong would treat the weak. Pity always lives in the here and now. It does not know the past. The dead are not pitied. In the best case scenario, they are mourned. So a world filled with pity is also a world filled with evil. Pity, especially self-pity, is always subservient to evil.

## **Presentiment**

Historical events do not have directors.

Osip Mandelstam

A premonition is a visit the day before. This state is between anxiety and expectation. Experience the future experience, knowledge to knowledge. Presentiments do not lead us to action. They torture us and often deceive us. But foreboding is the beginning, the promise. If there is pre-feeling, there will be a feeling. This is the first sign of healing from blind-deaf-dumbness. So, perhaps, this is the beginning of a sense of justice, solidarity, a sense of freedom. A premonition eats signs. As the approach of a thunderstorm can be seen before the first appearance of clouds, so future events are felt in the changed walk of people, in the noise of ventilation, in the excitement of puddles, in the alarming trolley call, in the whispers of monuments. You just have to see, listen, wake up. And, maybe, then the curtain will open in the Theater of History, and we will all go on stage.

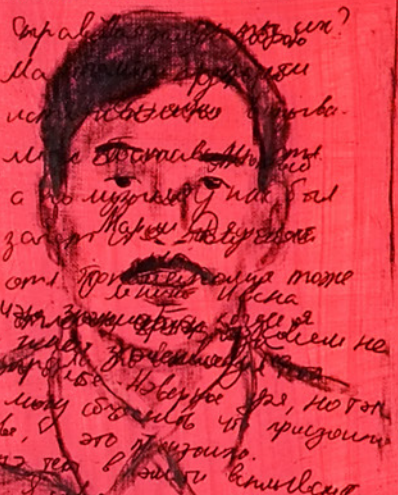


English translation:

History is the object of a construction whose place is formed not in homogenous and empty time, but in that which is fulfilled by the here-and-now [Jetztzeit].



30/1.  
 Дорогая мамочка!  
 Поздравляю тебя с рождением  
 моего именинника  
 Счастливого тебе здоровья?  
 Мама, я тебе пишу  
 и не забываю тебе  
 о том, как я люблю тебя  
 и как ты любишь меня  
 от твоего сына  
 и сына

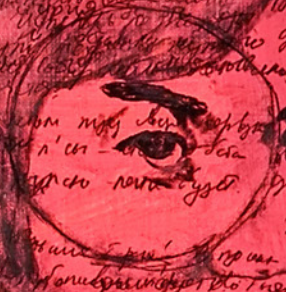


Я по тебе скучаю, мамочка,  
 и не знаю, когда тебе  
 все будет хорошо. Не забудь  
 про меня, пожалуйста, и  
 когда увидишь папу, скажи  
 ему, что я люблю его и  
 маму. Я люблю вас обоих  
 и надеюсь, что вы тоже  
 любите меня.

У меня попросили  
 написать тебе  
 и сказать тебе  
 как я люблю тебя  
 и маму. Я люблю  
 вас обоих и надеюсь,  
 что вы тоже любите  
 меня.

Что я тебе пишу,  
 мамочка, и папа,  
 как я люблю вас  
 и как вы любите  
 меня. Я надеюсь,  
 что вы тоже любите  
 меня.

Мамочка! Как тебе  
 здоровье? Я тебе пишу  
 и не забываю тебе  
 о том, как я люблю  
 тебя и маму. Я люблю  
 вас обоих и надеюсь,  
 что вы тоже любите  
 меня. Я надеюсь,  
 что вы тоже любите  
 меня.



Мамочка! Как тебе  
 здоровье? Я тебе пишу  
 и не забываю тебе  
 о том, как я люблю  
 тебя и маму. Я люблю  
 вас обоих и надеюсь,  
 что вы тоже любите  
 меня.

Мамочка! Как тебе  
 здоровье? Я тебе пишу  
 и не забываю тебе  
 о том, как я люблю  
 тебя и маму. Я люблю  
 вас обоих и надеюсь,  
 что вы тоже любите  
 меня.

## Solidarity

Solidarity is a state. It has no verb, just like the words “hunger” or “happiness”. Solidarity can only be. But, unlike hunger, this state is open, this is a state of openness. This is a state of multiplicity. To be solidary is to always be with someone. To be solidary means to be in the instrumental case. But more than “to be with someone”, solidarity means to be someone. There is no “they”, there are “we”. There is no “other”, there is “the same.” “For the real and incredibly difficult task is to find the Same,” wrote Alain Badiou in his *Ethics*. To be “the same” does not mean to be the same, but to be greater than you. It means being both yourself and the one with whom you are in solidarity. This means that the strike of the overseer’s whip, falling on the slave’s back, leaves a scar on your skin, the flesh of the rapist, who is torturing his victim, tears your organs, the neo-Nazi knife that attacked the migrant, stabs into your heart. And when your comrade is arrested, the iron door slams behind you. But it also means to be the one who is now in battle, on barricades, in demonstrations. This means that at the moment of truth you will rise and loudly say “I’m Spartacus!”. And thousands of voices will echo “I’m Spartacus!”. Solidarity is the roar of an angel of history. And the words “roar” and “speech” come from one root. And if solidarity has connected you to someone in the word “pain”, become a gentle sign to alleviate this pain. But in the word “fury” become the first. Always like this. Solidarity has no statute of limitations. Solidarity knows no death.

## Solitude

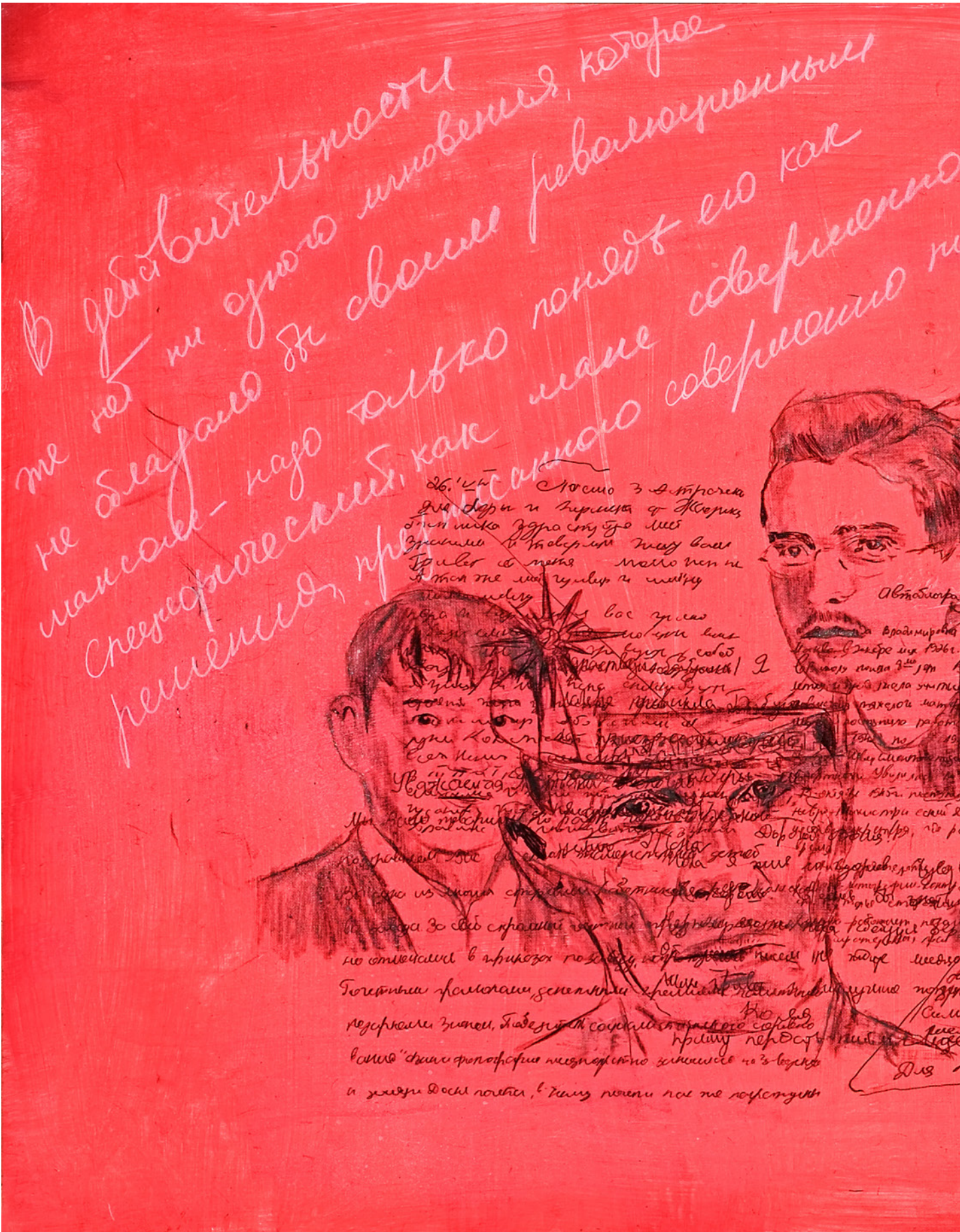
True solitude is not measured by the absence of people around someone. It should not be confused with isolation or seclusion. True solitude is measured by the preposition “instead of” rather than the adverb “together with”. Thus the degree of solitude is determined by proximity to death. In death solitude is intrinsic and absolute. Closest to the limit, it is found in experiences that accompany it (death): pain, suffering, illness, torture, as well as giving birth, being in love, or even in dream. However, solitude is not solely a physical experience. Rather, it is an experience of the body, i.e. a body as a body is always solitary. And so it is not necessary to die or suffer to experience true solitude. It is sufficient for body to remain merely a body, a “bare life.” To achieve that, a person must be formally taken out beyond the borders of life. That is the essence of exclusion. A person condemned to death is extremely alone. The Jews, walking in a line into the nearest forest to be shot, were alone not because no one could or would not save them, but because, legally speaking, they were already dead. The simple act of resurrection would not save them from solitude or bring them back to life. It is necessary to abolish those laws or formalities that took them beyond the borders of life.

## **Urban nomadism (Tents against the Tower of Babel)**

Revolutionary nomadism of a new type. Not psycho-geography as a movement of loners who used their own subjectivities to study space, but the procession of the masses through the streets as the new Psyche of the city. "A city without a soul is unthinkable," Mandelstam wrote of the revived Petersburg in 1905. The city is dry bones. To revive them, you need to clothe them with flesh, breathe in your breath. The tent occupies not so much land as air. Many tents - lungs of the city. But we need air not only to breathe. We need it to speak, to shout. We need a new decree on language. Remove all frozen, dumb graphemes! The city is constrained by morphology. Towers are the obstacles that air strikes from our lungs, turning into consonants. But for songs you need vowels. Our squares, our streets and alleys, like our lips, will give them a shape, stretching or curling. And these sounds will breathe new fathoms into petrified root structures.

This text was first published in Russian in: Moscow Art Magazine # 91, 2013.

Translated by Corina L. Apostol.



English translation:  
In reality, there is not a moment that would not carry with it its revolutionary chance—provided only that it is defined in a specific way, namely as the chance for a completely new resolution of a completely new problem.

