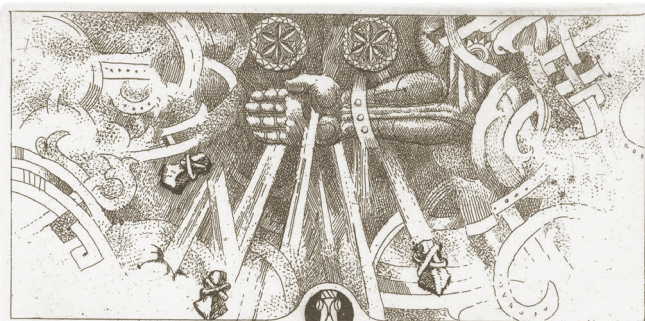


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Arvydas Každailis 86

Arvydas Každailis. *Giriose*, 1986, ofortas, 21 × 12

Alevtina Kakhidze: The Citizen is Present*

LESIA SMYRNA

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Alevtina Kakhidze's work can undoubtedly be described as transmedia. Her projects have two specific characteristics. The objects she explores are non-dominant; the methods she uses to reveal established concepts such as patriotism, citizenship and war are empirical research, observation, public discussion and performance. Kakhidze invites us to see the world through the prism of fragility, to understand its temporality and accept it as it is, without being coloured by idealisation. This article focuses on Kakhidze's participatory projects, actions and statements during the Russian–Ukrainian war (since 2014), all of which provide an insight into the socio-cultural and political metamorphosis, and the building of connections between different categories of the population in Ukraine's war-torn landscape.

Keywords: War-torn Ukraine, Arts in wartime, Alevtina Kakhidze, Participatory practices, a structure of relationality, Citizenship.

In her concept of “cruel optimism”, Lauren Berlant does not draw a demarcation line and instead leaves room for both cynicism¹ and hope. The dense structure of cruel optimism manifests itself in forms of interest that are not necessarily rational, but that rather transcend rational calculation through affects and experiences related to the ambivalent contexts of a shared histori-

cal time. Cruel optimism “at any moment [...] might feel like anything, including nothing: dread, anxiety, hunger, curiosity, the whole gamut from the sly neutrality of browsing the aisles to excitement at the prospect of ‘the change that’s gonna come. Or, the change that is not going to come...”² It appears that by wandering through non-linear corridors somehow helps to map out the trajectories of relational interaction between the destructive and the life-affirming by which the historical present defines itself.

The practice of Ukrainian media artist, performer and gardener, Alevtina Kakhidze exemplifies the complex structural relationality of complementary/exclusive forms of

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1 Elena Loizidou. “Lauren Berlant as Cynical Philosopher: An Introduction”, *Critical Legal Thinking*, 19 December 2013, <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/12/19/lauren-berlant-cynical-philosopher-introduction/>.

2 Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism*. (Duke University Press, 2011), 2.



Alevtina Kakhidze.
Photo credit: Oleksandr
Popenko.

the historical present. Working at the intersection of art and anthropology, Kakhidze illuminates complex narratives of conflict, gender, consumer culture, plant life and identity. By documenting the intensity of such discourse, which Kakhidze herself calls “alternative journalism”, her work allows us to discover grey zones, transformations, processes and ambivalences in the sometimes inconspicuous and latent structures of everyday life. Having created a kind of knowledge laboratory in her own residency, the Extended History of Muzychi, she develops her practice through empirical research and observation, which reveals itself in the form of short-story drawings, public discussions, interventions and visual performances. From an ecological perspective, Kakhidze observes subtle forms of life

and pays particular attention to details and interdependencies that link human existence to the fragile structure of the natural world. This position not only reveals the transmedia nuances of her observations but also challenges traditional repressive mechanisms, allowing us to see issues/concepts of her research, such as nation, citizenship and belonging in a new light.

Following the theoretical guidance of Berlant and the other scholars involved in this discussion, I will focus on Alevtina Kakhidze’s participatory projects, actions and statements during the Russian–Ukrainian war (since 2014), which have become a tool for building connections in the Ukrainian landscape threatened by Russian aggression. Berlant’s concept also provides us with another methodological key to understand-

ing ordinary objects that go unnoticed and that are not properly reflected in scientific discourse. To explain her understanding of citizenship and the fragility of neoliberal values, Berlant turns to popular literature, films and advertising as elements of mass culture, and considers a collective subjectivity that, despite the trauma and instability of its existence, can comprehend and influence the world. This is generally the path that paves the way for a cruel optimism – practically and metatextually – towards a more incisive understanding of the subject upon which our research focuses.

Kakhidze's identity is best illustrated by her biography. She was born in eastern Ukraine, ten kilometres from Yenakieve, the hometown of Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovych, who fled to Russia during the Revolution of Dignity. Having inherited her father's Georgian surname, Kakhidze grew up surrounded by Russian culture in its modified Soviet form. She divides her time between Kyiv, where she has lived since 1995, Maastricht, where she has lived since 2004 (studying at the Jan van Eyck Academy) and the village of Muzychi in the Kyiv region, where she has lived since 2007. These experiences result in a complex and multifaceted portrait of the artist, who embodies Ukrainian, Georgian and Western European mentalities.³

Kakhidze has had a difficult and interesting life. She has lived amidst the revolutionary upheavals in Ukraine and the war and in this tragic space has found art's capacity to restore

its disrupted meaning. The revolutionary Maidans, the war in Donbas, the annexation of Crimea and the full-scale invasion have led her to explore the "dark" sites of the historical present with its complex ideological transformations. Kakhidze reflexively measures insecurity in the face of destructive aggression, offering her own post-critical view of socio-political issues, marginalised traumatic experiences and political and ideological metamorphoses that have not been properly understood or even silenced.

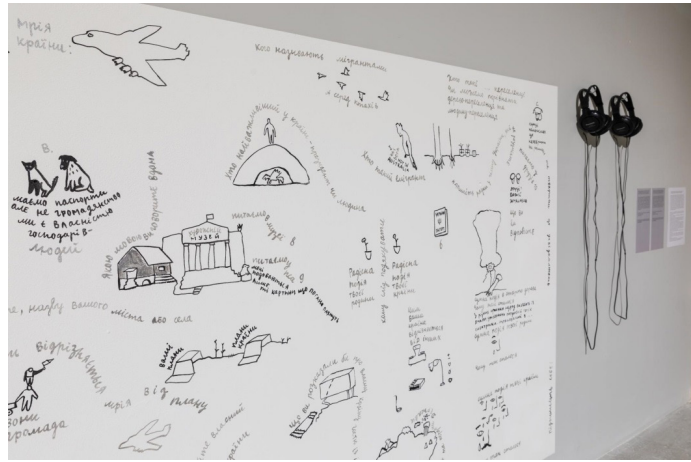
In her participatory practices, Kakhidze rethinks conventional modes and perceptions of politics and citizenship and questions the habitual, everyday ways of thinking that people tend to adopt over the course of their lives. Today, she argues that the concept of citizenship is associated with outdated and ineffective ideas that are simultaneously in the process of being formed. In autumn 2016, Kakhidze was invited to collaborate on a patriotic education stand in a local school. The concept was that every school should have such stands, in accordance with recommendations made by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine on national and patriotic education. Kakhidze devoted one of her workshops to the problem of communicating with children about citizenship and patriotism.⁴

Stand by A. Kakhidze. "To children about the citizenship of people, plants and animals", 2019, Mystetskyi Arsenal. Photo credit: Mystetskyi Arsenal.

3 "Alevtina Kakhidze", *Imagine Ukraine*, <https://imagineukraine.ensembles.org/actors/alevtina-kakhidze?locale=uk>

4 Speech by Alevtina Kakhidze at the Eastern Education Forum, Kyiv, 28 September 2020. https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=3432598313452335 [in Ukrainian].

Stand by A. Kakhidze, “To children about the citizenship of people, plants and animals”, 2019. Mystetskyi Arsenal. Photo credit: Mystetskyi Arsenal.



In my village's school, the stand has three sections: the first is about the flag, coat of arms and anthem; the second is about how volunteers weave nets for the ATO [Anti-Terrorist Operation] zone; and the third is about those from our village who went to the ATO. And that was it. I thought: I can criticise such a stand for hours, but can I offer a form and content that will stand up to my own criticism? [...] I thought about it for a year and a half and finally came up with thirty questions that the children can either answer themselves or follow with one of my prompts, some of which are drawn.⁵

In Kakhidze's reading, contemporary citizenship exists in a state of imbalance between old models and new possibilities, and this situation requires critical thinking, responsibility and self-awareness from all

of us. Her stand, “To children about the citizenship of people, plants and animals” (2019), illustrates her points with compelling black-and-white drawings and questions. The first question – “Who can be a citizen?” – defines who can be a citizen according to the traditional paradigm of citizenship. The second question – “Where is citizenship confirmed?” – explains how citizenship is confirmed. The third question – “Do plants and animals have passports?” – explores the notion of citizenship in the context of an Anthropocentric view of the world and of one's own identity, which in Kakhidze's practice takes on a new socio-political and cognitive dimension. The following questions: “Is someone who does not love their country also a citizen?” and “Is it possible to love several countries?” reveal complex problems within the relationship between citizenship and national identity.

Kakhidze uses a participatory approach as a tool to experiment with bringing participants together in a community to discuss an emerging form of civic awareness and potential opportunities to act in accordance

5 Asya Bazdyrieva and Alevtina Kakhidze, “V prirode net pustot: Alevtina Kakhidze i Asia Bazdyrieva. Interviu [There are no voids in nature: Alevtina Kakhidze and Asia Bazdyrieva. Interview]”, *Support Your Art*, 5 August 2019, <https://supportyourart.com/conversations/kakhidzebazdyreva/> [in Russian].



Kakhidze's workshop. "To children about the citizenship of people, plants and animals", Mystetskyi Arsenal, 12 January 2019. Photo credit: Mystetskyi Arsenal.

with their duties and morals. Judith Butler calls this approach a performative "negotiation between bodies" (Butler, 2015). In Kyiv, which experienced an outflow of refugees after the outbreak of war in Donbas and where processes of migration caused a certain social and mental instability, this productive practice contributed to new opportunities for cohesion among children from different social backgrounds, who had different preferences and orientated towards different languages.

The language in Kakhidze's project is not affirmative, but searching, motivating and interrogative, which determines how self-identity is questioned and how the civic position is manifested in the social dimension by violent signs, which, according to Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek, implies spiritual regression.⁶

6 Slavoj Žižek, S. (2010). *O nasilii* [On violence]. Moskva: Izdatelstvo "Evropa," p. 13. <https://www.rulit.me/books/o-nasilii-read-249273-13.html#c45> [in Russian].

As Kakhidze states, "my departure from the modernist line is that I do not try to impose my view of patriotism on a child, I let him or her answer questions about it." She immerses the children-interlocutors in the historical present, where the imposed regulatory normativity – according to Judith Butler – has become an everyday reality of pre-determined prescriptions, social myths and taboos, directive norms and dogmas, and suggests that patriotism should be considered in the widest possible context through dialogue and communication with a polyphony of voices. It is this kind of communicative space that forms social responsibility and collective solidarity, rather than a zombified mass consciousness.⁷ In this sense, Kakhidze tries to avoid jaded symptomatic readings by structuring causal models of normativity in which it is necessary to destroy the

7 Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), 237.

familiar, “make alternativity imaginable”⁸ and invent a new way of dealing with the challenges of civil society. As Berlant says, “it matters to fight for better normative representations of the social, not just because they provide the affective satisfaction of being-in-common but because they affect the very infrastructure that organizes time, health, care, intimacy...”⁹ Thus, we are talking about creating social relations and lifestyles in which a person in his or her post-normative dimension embodies the dynamism of both the subjective and structural sides and discards the toxicity, norms and preferences imposed on him or her.¹⁰ In one of her speeches about the project, Kakhidze says that children often talk about patriotism based on adults’ conversations or various other sources of information.

Drawing on Berlant’s concept of non-idiomatic and even depressive forms of citizenship,¹¹ I try to explain how, by performing citizenship, Kakhidze looks for answers surrounding the discourse on a situation of disrupted existence caused by the war in Ukraine. By studying the ways in which a sense of belonging to a common political sensorium is formed, Kakhidze provides examples of how to address the complex issues typically delegated to the political sphere which people are unaccustomed to seriously considering, because in their minds they have already been resolved.

Kakhidze juxtaposes the community of agency and thought with the structures of social violence that create canons of limited and stable prescriptions that are designed to marginalise, devalue and deprive alternative knowledge and worldviews of agency. For Kakhidze, it is a means of constructing a world where the inconsistency between conventional structures and those that are pushed out of sight, the “shadow” ones, are clearly visible. I consider this last point as particularly important, as Kakhidze sees citizenship as a tool for the development of identity and art as a field of activity where we can create space for many voices and a dialogue with multiple points of view, because, according to Kakhidze, contradictions make the system stable.¹²

During the winter of 2013–2014, Kakhidze was an active participant in the Maidan protests. It is worth repeating the thesis that people are often divided by the hybrid experience of war – both by its tangible presence at the epicentre and by the fact that for many, since 2014, the war in Donbas has become part of screen culture, and by absorbing this screen experience, part of civil society has become a detached consumer or voyeur of this suffering.¹³ This disjuncture, which fuels Kakhidze’s diplomatic task of capturing different, often asymmetrical points of view, was first demonstrated at Manifesta 10 in

8 Earl McCabe. “Depressive Realism: An Interview with Lauren Berlant”, *Hypocrite Reader*, June 2011, <https://hypocritereader.com/5/depressive-realism>.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press), 230.

12 Asya Bazdyrieva and Alevtina Kakhidze, “V prirode net pustot: Alevtina Kakhidze i Asia Bazdyrieva. Interviu [There are no voids in nature: Alevtina Kakhidze and Asia Bazdyrieva. Interview]”, *Support Your Art*, 5 August 2019, <https://supportyourart.com/conversations/kakhidzebazdyreva/> [in Russian].

13 Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock, *Social Suffering* (University of California Press, 1997), 1–24.



Stand by A. Kakhidze, “To children about the citizenship of people, plants and animals”, 2019. Mystetskyi Arsenal. Photo credit: Mystetskyi Arsenal.

St Petersburg in the format of a performative political game called “In Africa Walking/about Ukraine under the Law of the Russian Federation”, in the middle of the information war between Russia and Ukraine which challenged optimistic scenarios and prepared the ground for artistic counter-expressions.

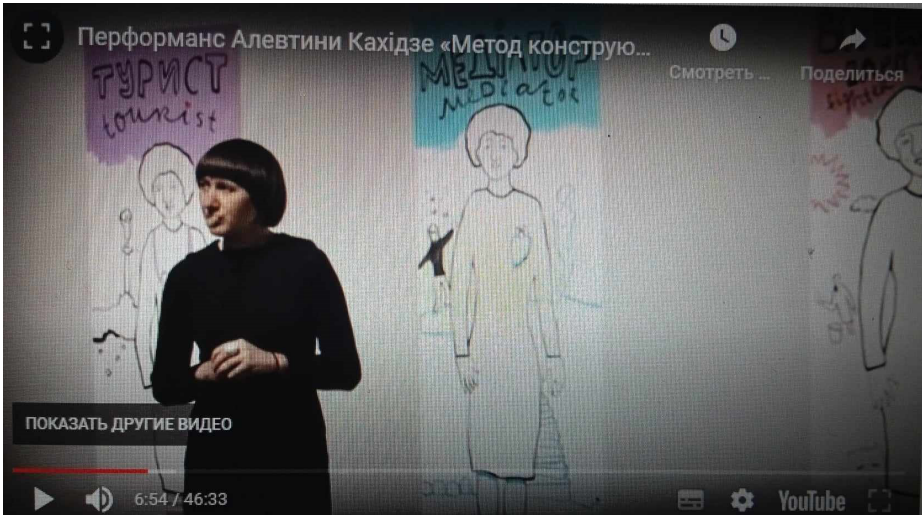
Two of the questions that Kakhidze addresses are what is “political truth” and does it exist? Drawing on the ambiguity of this concept, she makes it the target of conceptual re-engineering¹⁴ by applying “the method of constructing political truth”.¹⁵

Her task is to answer political questions from different, often antagonistic quarters, such as a “tourist” with an unbiased camera, a “mediator” who mediates between the political sensorium and political “truth” but does not worsen the conflict, a person who experiences everything first hand (a “fighter”), along with a caring “gardener”. The project originally intended to gather different points of view. By identifying the voices of supporters and opponents of the Maidan, Kakhidze turns this performative conversa-

14 Kevin Reuter and Georg Brun, “Empirical Studies on Truth and the Project of Re-engineering Truth”, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 103, no.3, 493–517.

15 The method of constructing political truth was first demonstrated at Manifesta 10 in St Petersburg in the form of a performative political game called “In

Africa Walking/about Ukraine under the Law of the Russian Federation”. For further information, see, for example, Mystetskyi Arsenal. (5 December 2018). Performans Alevtyny Kakhidze “Metod konstruyuvannya politychnoy pravdy” [Alevtina Kakhidze’s performance “The Method of constructing political truth”], YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-05F2mWHNk> [in Ukrainian].



Performance by A. Kakhidze. "The method of constructing political truth", Mystetskyi Arsenal, 5 December 2018. Photo credit: Mystetskyi Arsenal.

tion into a polemical space of action through critical reflection and reconstruction of the narratives of the Euromaidan. "The tourist wants to know about the situation, not in the future, but here and now." "I hear you are afraid," says the mediator. "Let's be afraid together," they suggest. A history teacher from Kurdiurmivka¹⁶ says, "Is this normal? Someone came in the night, took down Lenin and left him [lying on the ground]. Now there is no Lenin, no flowerbeds. Your Lenin's fall from the Maidan has reached our Kurdiurmivka." "You say there are no flowerbeds in Kurdiurmivka because Lenin was thrown down? I don't need Lenin or a garden gnome for a beautiful flowerbed," replies the gardener, commenting on the appeal of the "Leninfall" in Ukraine. "If I were

a resident of Kurdiurmivka and Viatrovych's¹⁷ right-hand man, I wouldn't leave Lenin there either. I would replace him with the same one, but made of glass so that he could be there and not be there ... so that you could look at what is in Kurdiurmivka through the transparency of this Lenin. That's how I'd like it," says the fighter.¹⁸

¹⁷ Volodymyr Viatrovych is a Ukrainian historian, publicist, politician and public figure. Head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (2014–2019). Chairman of the Academic Council of the Center for Liberation Movement Studies (Lviv), member of the Supervisory Board of the National Museum-Memorial of the Victims of Occupation Regimes, or the Prison on Łucki (Street), former Director of the Security Service of Ukraine Archive (2008–2010), Editor of the scholarly collection of articles *Ukrainian Liberation Movement* (2003–2008).

¹⁸ Mystetskyi Arsenal (5 December 2018). Performans Alevtyny Kakhidze "Metod konstruyuvannya politychnoyi pravdy" [Alevtina Kakhidze's performance "The Method of Constructing Political Truth"], YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-05F2mWHNk> [in Ukrainian].

¹⁶ Kurdiurmivka is a settlement in the Toretsk municipal community of Bakhmut District, Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine.

Different voices and different civic perspectives on the Maidan act as a narrative phenomenon and, at the same time, as an interpretative mirror, both reflect the meanings of antagonistic experiences in a context of conflicting sociopolitical dynamics. The conflicted Ukraine of the Maidan period posed particular challenges for Kakhidze herself, due to the disagreements and contradictory positions that were often disorientating or perceived as hostile. The past and its interpretation were increasingly, and openly, subject to political manipulation and were a cause of interethnic confrontation between Ukrainian citizens. The Maidan exacerbated “the apparent clash between two almost irreconcilable visions of Ukraine’s past, and indeed of its future – as an independent nation-state with its own complex history, and as an integral part of the ‘united (Soviet) motherland’, where political mythology plays the role of history.”¹⁹

The process of demolishing monuments to Vladimir Lenin has become a symptomatic phenomenon, symbolising the end of communist domination and the beginning of a new period of historical development in Ukraine. The destruction of monuments to Lenin is not only the physical destruction of symbols of the past, but also a marked psychosocial, liberation from ideological constraints. It allows in-

stitutions and civil movements to develop new strategies for the protection of citizens’ rights and civil society, thus freeing them from the burdens of communist ideology.

The government’s slow decommunisation initiatives provoked conflict, particularly in eastern Ukraine, where officials interpreted decommunisation as “an act of distortion of history and memory of the heroic past of our homeland” that would be the catalyst for a divided country and civil strife.²⁰ The absence of a decommunisation policy in Ukraine after the declaration of independence was one of the reasons that Ukraine’s development as a European democratic state was hindered and islands of “Sovietness” were preserved. For historical reasons, these islands remained largely in Donbas and Crimea²¹ and they became the basis for the evolution of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Kakhidze’s crucial task is not to seek consensus, but sense in a contradictory whirlwind of events while drawing attention to different readings of “political truth”. She sees identity and citizenship as a phenomenon that correlates with various structures, including those of politics and power. As Kakhidze herself admits, the difference in

19 Oleksandr Hrytsenko, *Dekomunizatsiya v Ukraini yak derzhavna polityka i yak sotsiokulturne yavyshe* [Decommunisation in Ukraine as a state policy and as a socio-cultural phenomenon] (Kuras Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine; Institute for Cultural Research of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, 42) [in Ukrainian].

20 “Doneckij oblsoviet schitaet, chto demontazh sovetskih pamjatnikov mozhet raskolot stranu [Donetsk regional council believes that the dismantling of Soviet monuments may divide the country]”, *Korrespondent.net*, 28 April 2009, <https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/820250-doneckij-oblsoviet-schitaet-cto-demontazh-sovetskih-pamyatnikov-mozhet-raskolot-stranu> [in Russian].

21 Volodymyr Viatrovych, “‘Decommunization’ and Academic Discussion”, *Krytyka*, April 2015, <https://krytyka.com/en/articles/decommunization-and-academic-discussion>.

experience is very difficult to communicate; it cannot be described, but it can be “transformed.” She resorts to a methodology of transformation marked by a fundamental openness that emerges from unstable foundations and a lack of consensus.

For Kakhidze, the discussion about the content of the common historical present is deeply eco-centric because it concerns the formation of natural existence around humans, which is in different dimensions: affirmative and interrogative, reactive, proactive and depressive, that is, full of catastrophic threats, the clash of ideologies, imperial ambitions and encroachment on other people’s territories, as in the case of Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine. The eco-centrism of Kakhidze’s practices and projects also represents a distancing from conventional ideas and the formation of fundamentally different cognitive models among young people, particularly in their perceptions of the political and social and the civic and environmental, all of which exist in a unity of multiple transitions and configurations and do not have a stable consensus but become a tool for creating new meanings.

In the workshop “Access to Water” (2018), Kakhidze reviews her belief in narratives that, despite their conflict, form a field of possibilities. By using tools and strategies of authenticity and empathy, she transforms conflict into communication.

I work a lot with children now. And my classes are all about getting them to negotiate. And in one class I divided them into two groups, took a sheet of paper and drew areas on each. With my

eyes closed, I drew rivers and lakes. And they had to negotiate and build bridges to get to the water. It was very interesting to watch, a fantastic experience. In one class, a child started drawing rocket launchers because his neighbour would not give him access to water. And some children also did not want to negotiate and drew swimming pools. ... What is my point? We need to have this general concept of how to live. It’s not just our country that’s at war. This is a global problem. Maybe it’s time we developed non-violent communication?

Kakhidze, 2018

Kakhidze transfers the concept of attachment to existing ideas and norms and to what is and to what could or should happen. She sees this relationship as a movement from the status quo to transformation, which is the defining feature of her worldview and the eco-social concepts she creates. We must first deal with a collective experience or an established pool of attachments to imagine other possibilities. In the words of Sara Ahmed, Kakhidze makes the conscious choice to explore “the costs and potential of what we come up against, how we can be shattered by histories that are hard, but also how we become inventive, *how we create other ways of being when we have to struggle to be. The history of creativity, of bonds made and forged, of what we move toward as well as away from, is a history that we need to keep in front of us* [emphasis my own].”²²

²² Sara Ahmed. *Living a Feminist Life*, (Duke University Press, 2017), 18.



Alevtina Kakhidze
at a workshop for
Ukrainian children
in the Netherlands,
2023. Photo credit:
MediaSapiens.

Kakhidze tries to neutralise the existing “contact lines” of different experiences and histories and instead draws “desire lines”²³ of non-violent communication. Can non-violent communication enable transformation, and how can a practice based on mutual understanding contribute to imagining the other – our capacity to live with choice, meaning and connection, to share resources so that everyone has life-giving access to water? The gnosiological potential of her projects is realised through the rhetorical rather than the affirmative, and through the search for meaning rather than choosing tools by consensus. This is the fundamental uniqueness of her work, which has different configurative manifestations and varying strategies of implementation in the collective field of experience.

With the outbreak of the war in Donbas, the tension in Kakhidze’s aesthetic search increases. The catastrophic

experience pushed Kakhidze to expand her physical and emotional comprehension and focus on the epicentre of the conflict, the contact line. The *Seeds of Ukraine* project became a long-term performative action that allows us to see the war as if in cross-section. Kakhidze clearly demonstrates a critical attitude towards the consequences of social division within one country. The project has a prehistory and begins with a poignant story about her mother’s courage. From the outset of the war, Alevtina’s mother lived in what is now the occupied part of Donbas. Throughout the conflict, the artist portrayed her mother in drawings under the fictional name of “Klubnyka Andriivna”, and depicted real stories of her life at the heart of the war.

In 2019, Alevtina’s mother died at a checkpoint in territory that was not controlled by the Ukrainian army: and then the connection between daughter and mother was broken. This project is also about the vicissitudes that are not typically spoken about in public space, and which

²³ Sara Ahmed. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), 19.

Alevtina Kakhidze's
drawing from the series
"The Uncontrollable Life
of Klubnyka Andriivna."



can mainly be heard from residents of the frontline territories. Kakhidze diligently documents these stories in detail and presents them in participatory actions.²⁴ "The Uncontrolled Life of Klubnyka Andriivna" is over, but the artist continues to work with the theme of separation at the intersection of time and explores lost relationships and their significance to narrative flow.²⁵

When my mother was alive [Alevtina Kakhidze's mother died in January 2019 at a checkpoint on the "DPR" side – ed.], she always came to visit me in Kyiv and would always buy seeds. As it turned out, many companies producing seeds were scattered all over Ukraine, and with the beginning of the occupation, people

living in the uncontrolled territory lost access to them. My mother used to come to me and order seeds for herself and her friends. When she died, all her friends called me and asked me to do it for them. And I realised that this **channel of communication through seeds is very important**. It is open, it is on the surface. Take it and use it. These people don't want anything else from me, just these seeds.²⁶

Kakhidze, 2020

Seeds of Ukraine is Kakhidze's participatory project intended to regenerate a lost channel of communication.²⁷ It

24 The performance by Alevtina Kakhidze (Zhdanivka-Muzychi) as part of the Set Art Laboratory project took place on 25 February 2020 at the National Center for Folk Culture "Ivan Honchar Museum" (Kyiv).

25 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage, 2005), 37.

26 Asya Bazdyrieva and Alevtina Kakhidze, "V prirode net pustot: Alevtina Kakhidze i Asya Bazdyrieva. Interviu [There are no voids in nature: Alevtina Kakhidze and Asya Bazdyrieva. Interview]", *Support Your Art*, 5 August 2019, <https://supportyourart.com/conversations/kahidzebazdyreva/> [in Russian].

27 Nasinnia Ukrainy [Seeds of Ukraine], *Mitec*, 5 March 2020, <https://mitec.ua/nasinnia-ukrayini/> [in Ukrainian].



Alevtina Kakhidze's drawing from the series "The Uncontrollable Life of Klubnyka Andriivna".

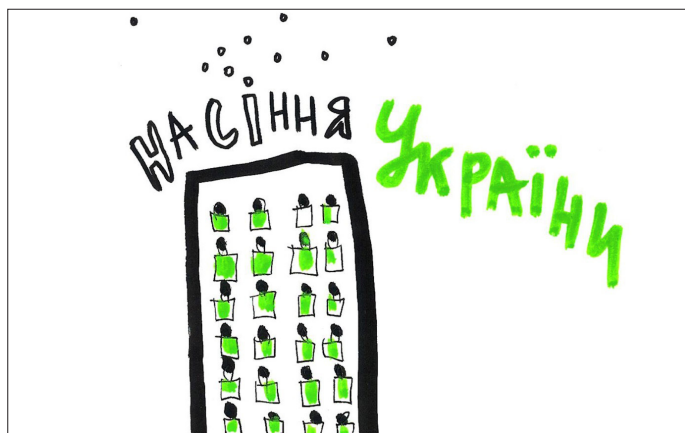
was then that she set up a mobile seed collection stand so that in the early days of spring, when it was time to plant, the stand would be closer to the "contact line". Seed collection began at the Ivan Honchar Museum in Kyiv. In exchange for the seeds she gathered to bring to the occupied territory of Donbas, the artist offered to order something from that area, after which she travelled to the border area (Stanytsia Luhanska) to exchange some of the seeds for the ordered items.²⁸ This place was a tense and dangerous grey zone on the "contact line". The areas where people could live and work were clearly divided into "here"

and "there". This space of lost homeland is balanced between the culmination of an imaginative approach to the *Self*: safe, native and comfortable, and at the same time becomes a tense symbolic battleground for the right to connect with this place. For Kakhidze, however, "here" and "there" appear as a single space consisting of home, both in terms of representation and nostalgic identification with the territory with which both Kakhidze and the viewer cannot connect. Through her interaction with space/place, Kakhidze is driven by the desire to transform them into a locus of return and a place of shared belonging. This territorial divide and breakdown in communication is difficult, if not impossible, to bridge today. It seems to me that the importance of Kakhidze's project lies primarily in her ability to recognise this catastrophic chasm.

All of this brings us to Kakhidze's relationship with space. Feminist geographer

28 A. Kakhidze and V. Bulatchik, V., "Hudozhnica Alevtina Kakhidze: Ja by poehala v Doneck, no ne stala by nichego rasskazyvat. Ja by slushala [Artist Alevtina Kakhidze: I would go to Donetsk, but I wouldn't say anything. I would listen]", *Ostrov*, 20 August 2020, <https://www.ostro.org/ru/articles/hudozhnitsa-alevtyna-kahydze-ya-by-poehala-v-donetsk-no-ne-stala-by-nychego-rasskazyvat-ya-by-i310700> [in Russian].

From Alevtina
Kakhidze's project
"Seeds of Ukraine".



Doreen Massey (2005) discusses the idea of space as an interplay of practices, relations and histories that operate as an open system and are constantly reconstituted. In her projective understanding, space appears not so much as a static construct, but as an intertwining of the politics of space and sociality. This conceptual lever proved useful when analysing Alevtina Kakhidze's artistic practice, particularly her projection of seeing the space of practical explication as a "product of interconnections"; as one that is formed through interaction, from the immensity of the global to the intimacy of the tiny.²⁹ And in this sense, Kakhidze's practice focuses closely on non-dominant forms of life and social identities/communities.³⁰ The objects that nourish her thoughts and acute analysis can also be described as latent. For many years, plants,

animals, pensioners, children and women have been constitutively interacting in her practice.³¹ Land, body, drawing, word and text then become transmedial means of embodying the material and allow Kakhidze to overcome old stereotypes and reveal the remnants of hardened ideologies that need to be carefully rethought and redefined in relational terms in order to avoid repeating the country's previous mistakes.³² In this sense, Kakhidze's space/place has to be stitched together from various origins, where ideas, identities and connections are relationally conceptualised.

The implicit interaction with space in Kakhidze's practice is extremely "grounded" – both literally and symbolically. It is in this open space that she cultivates her garden, which outlines the geography of her continuing social responsibility;³³ the ongoing event of place which has to be addressed.³⁴ In her reading, the metaphor of

²⁹ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage, 2005), 9.

³⁰ Asya Bazdyrieva and Alevtina Kakhidze, "V prirode net pustot: Alevtina Kakhidze i Asya Bazdyrieva. Interviu [There are no voids in nature: Alevtina Kakhidze and Asya Bazdyrieva. Interview]", *Support Your Art*, 5 August 2019, <https://supportyourart.com/conversations/kakhidzebazdyreva/> [in Russian].

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage, 2005), 9.

³⁴ Cited in Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage, 2005), pp. 179–80.



Alevtina Kakhidze's artistic residence in the village of Muzychi, Kyiv region. Photo credit: Korydor.

the “garden” becomes a symbol of resilience in the middle of a space of cruelty and human resistance to oppression. For Kakhidze, the space and, simultaneously, the creative laboratory she established in the village of Muzychi in the Kyiv region, with its cottage and garden, seem to embody an escape from globalisation and a return to local security. However, the invisible blurring of boundaries (between art laboratory and home, house and garden, global and local) is at work here and the laboratory space itself is articulated as an entwining of paths with a wide geographical scope – artists from all over the world come here to experience this oasis in all its geographical and cultural dimensions.³⁵ Referring to

Aldo van Eyck's statement, Doreen Massey writes that “a house must be like a small city if it's to be a real home; a city like a large house if it's to be a real home.”³⁶ It would seem then that this characterisation of the spatial accurately captures space in its material objectivity.

Kakhidze perceives space as material. Space is a “place”, a geographical reference point. It is a reminder that we physically interact with space and occupy a certain place in it. To remind us of materiality through presence is to affirm the naturalness of physical limitation, to come down from “heaven” to “earth”. In the context of the historical present, with its coloured by catastrophe, the notion of the locality of place has acquired a totemic meaning.³⁷ For Kakhidze, place is a geographical source linked to the sphere of everyday life and real and value-based practices. It is vital to hold on to it for as long as war weaves its viscous

35 Alevtina Kakhidze and Anna Khayetska, A., “Vybir zhinky maye buty vlasnym, a ne navyazanym suspilstvom.” Intervyu z Alevtynoyu Kakhidze [“A woman's choice should be her own, not imposed by society”. Interview with Alevtina Kakhidze, *Wonderzine*, 30 July 2020, <https://www.wonderzine.me/wonderzine/life/podcast/1445-alevtina-kahidze-women-in-arts> [in Ukrainian].

36 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage, 2005), 179.

37 Ibid.

Alevtina Kakhidze's
artistic residence in the
village of Muzychi, Kyiv
region. Photo credit:
Korydor.



web, compressing and localising us in the space of place. In times of war, place must be defended by presence because war changes and sharpens our sense of time and space.

The contours of time are damaged. The landscape is inscribed in the space of death, the space of catastrophe³⁸ and the feeling of security instead borders on a state of danger.³⁹ Kakhidze insists that, over time, space is capable of regenerating damaged “tissue” or an entire organism if fragments are artificially separated from them. What would happen if we tried to abandon this particular idea of space? The ability to tame the challenges of spatiality, to protect the locality of a place from the destructive space outside, becomes a challenge for Kakhidze herself.

The symbolic significance of Kakhidze's space/garden correlates with the wider context, which feeds and supports broader ideas of understanding the world. This space is an extension of our own trajectories until we are thrown onto other trajectories that may propel us into a state of uncertainty. Weed chauvinism and plant pacifism fight their invisible battle in the garden. Kakhidze does not even try to free herself from the “barbarism” of invasive plant communities, tending to her own creation with a sense of pacifism and authenticity.⁴⁰ She is aware that “you have to get the idea of filling in your head. There are no voids in nature.”⁴¹ Kakhidze sees the garden as a deeply micro-

38 Serhiy Zhadan, “Khay tse bude tekst ne pro viynu [Let it not be a text about war] (Speech by Serhiy Zhadan at the awarding of the Peace Prize in Frankfurt), *Bukvoid*, 23 October 2022, <http://bukvoid.com.ua/events/ukraine/2022/10/23/211534.html> [in Ukrainian].

39 Oksana Dovgopolova, “Viyna ta spokusy metafor [War and the temptations of metaphors]”, *Mynule/Maibutne/Mystetstvo*, 25 December 2022, <https://pastfutureart.org/war-and-the-temptations-of-metaphors/> [in Ukrainian].

40 See: Oksana Semenyk, “People want to see a world without wars, but some still like to see violence”: An interview with the artist Alevtina Kakhidze (Y. Vervoort & H. Leliv, Trans.), *Vogue UA*, 17 May 2023, <https://vogue.ua/article/vogueuainenglish/people-want-to-see-a-world-without-wars-but-some-still-like-to-see-violence-an-interview-with-the-artist-alevtina-kakhidze-52292.html>.

41 Asya Bazdyrieva and Alevtina Kakhidze, “V prirode net pustot: Alevtina Kakhidze i Asya Bazdyrieva. Interviu [There are no voids in nature: Alevtina Kakhidze and Asya Bazdyrieva. Interview]”, *Support Your Art*, 5 August 2019, <https://supportyourart.com/conversations/kakhidzebazdyreva/> [in Russian].



From Alevtina Kakhidze's project *Invasions* 1. 2. 3., 2022. Photo credit: Korydor.

political space that functions as a special zone for the common discussion of social change, social experimentation, the critical rejection of certain aspects of society, and even confrontation with authority.⁴² Part of Kakhidze's argument is that as a political object, space can change the way sensitive political issues are framed.

A full-scale invasion transforms the "garden" cultivated by the meticulous gardener Kakhidze into a combat-ready site that can withstand the challenges of aggressive encroachment and enable resistance to it. Kakhidze envisages even more radical means of resistance and defines her activism as a movement "from a state of security to a state of struggle."⁴³

42 George McKay, *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden*, (Frances Lincoln Limited Publishers, 2011), 12.

43 Alevtina Kakhidze, "Vid stanu bezpeky do stanu borotby. Yak ukrayinskiy khudozhnytsi (ne) vzayemodiyaty z rosiyskymy [From a state of security to a state of struggle." [How a Ukrainian artist should (not) interact with Russian artists], *Ukrainska Pravda*. Zhyttia, 22 January 2023, <https://life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2024/01/22/258966/> [in Ukrainian].

"War [...] can also be linked to the garden: if the garden is too dependent on the gardener, its order can easily be destroyed," Kakhidze said in an interview. Considering common interpretations of gardening, she offers a very different perspective in which even the idea of the garden as an innocent space seems to be a smoke screen for unbridled political tension, subversion and rebellion: "Sticking a trowel in the ground and collecting soil around tulip bulbs has never sounded so dangerous," says Kashmiri Gander in her article "Why gardening has become more political than ever".

Kakhidze's increasingly radical position after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is evidence of a meaningful connection to a deeply traumatised place and time as a medium of resistance to all kinds of violence. At the beginning of the invasion, Kakhidze gave speeches saying that by unleashing a bloody war against Ukraine, the Russians stole our symbolic capital: time. This was a vital statement of fact, and her reaction to the collapse of the protective symbolic walls is quite natural. For her, "a structure

of relationality”⁴⁴ is still important because it is not only necessary to identify historical experience and relate it to the catastrophic historical present, but also to understand how our collective and individual consciousnesses “arrive at the places we do”.⁴⁵ Kakhidze’s metaphor of “stolen time” aptly conveys a broader narrative of loss and resistance that is manifested in the Ukrainian cultural space that focuses on the decolonial topography of the contemporary landscape of war (the concept of “stolen spring” as stolen time is present in contemporary Ukrainian fiction, for example, in Maria Miniailo’s book *Stolen Spring* (2022)). In this scenario, war is not only a spatial, but also a temporal, theft and is nothing other than the deprivation of human viability. It is a “space of imprisonment” in its cruellest form.⁴⁶ War destroys the vision of a better future, stunts future plans and makes them impossible and creates an “interruption” in each stage of the life cycle. Along with Foucault’s concept of surveillance and the disciplined society, which functions by imprisoning and oppressing bodies, and desubjectifies and denormalises them to destroy the individual,⁴⁷ this regime of violent time theft is also associated with the society of control. Deleuze writes that when

a person is always in a state of “non-arrival”, the mechanism of violent “interruption” throws him or her to the margins of life and forces them to return to the starting point of “zero”.⁴⁸

After the criminal acts performed by the Russian army in Bucha, Kakhidze’s participatory practice could no longer be repeated as a form of tolerant cooperation or the search for understanding. Her artistic “peace mission” ended and the artist turned to the heavy task of articulating the truth about the war, realising that peaceful pre-war constructions of language would not work here. Kakhidze tried to mobilise the full defensive potential of civic agency to restore what the poet Serhiy Zhadan called the broken ability to communicate clearly with the world about the war:

How can one talk about war? How can one manage all the desperation, fury, and rancor in one’s tone, as well as all the energy and eagerness to stick by your fellows, not to retreat? I think we aren’t the only ones struggling to convey what matters most. The world listening to us isn’t always capable of understanding one simple thing—when we speak, the degrees of our linguistic tension, linguistic sincerity, and linguistic emotionality differ too drastically. Ukrainians shouldn’t have to justify their emotions, but unpacking these emotions is worthwhile. What for? So as not to keep all this pain and all this anger bottled up, at the very least. We

44 Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), 13.

45 Sara Ahmed. *Queer Phenomenology* (Duke University Press, 2006), 2.

46 Gilles Deleuze. *Suspilstvo kontroliu: PostScriptum* [Postscript on the Societies of Control] (V. Skovronska, Trans.). *Ji Magazine*, 34 (2004), <https://www.ji.lviv.ua/n34texts/deleuze.htm> [in Ukrainian].

47 Michel Foucault. “Psychiatric Power”, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (The New Press, 1994), 39–50.

48 Gilles Deleuze. “Suspilstvo kontroliu: PostScriptum” [Postscript on the Societies of Control] (V. Skovronska, Trans.). *Ji Magazine*, 34 (2004), <https://www.ji.lviv.ua/n34texts/deleuze.htm> [in Ukrainian].

can articulate it; we can vocalize everything that has and will happen to us. We simply have to be ready for the fact that this won't be an easy conversation. Nevertheless, we have to begin it today. Serhiy Zhadan, from his speech at the German Booktrade peace prize award ceremony, 2022.⁴⁹

Kakhidze subverts the hitherto “inflationary” potential of the Ukrainian presence into a global artistic context and discusses everything that has happened to us, explaining the nature of her anger at numerous international mega venues and forums, such as the Venice Biennale and the Malta Biennale, etc. In this way, art helps her to act creatively and politically and to build emotional bridges between different worlds, which she believes to be a method of generating genetic memories of past catastrophes and fractures.

Like the vast majority of Ukrainians, Kakhidze is arming herself with a more radical, transcritical position and publicly warning the world about Russia's potential future revanchism, describing it as an object that will be subject to a long confrontation on the cultural and humanitarian front. “The metaphor of the ‘great humanistic Russian culture’ finally exhausted itself on 24 February 2022, when the first bombs fell on Ukrainian cities. However,

the sentiment for Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Shostakovich or the so-called ‘Russian avant-garde’ flourishes in the minds of millions of foreigners who still believe that culture can be separated from politics and that the responsibility for the war can be placed on a single dictator,” said Director of the Ukrainian Institute, Volodymyr Sheiko, in a statement on behalf of the organisation.

Contemporary civilisation uses many metrics, according to which certain artistic phenomena occupy valuable positions in world culture that are unable to be questioned or denied; simultaneously, in post-war Europe, the position and activities of some writers, such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Knut Hamsun and Ezra Pound were condemned (even in the form of lawsuits) for their loyalty to occupying German regimes during the Second World War, which significantly affected their creative achievements in the eyes of the European and global community. The conflict between the art and the artist's beliefs can be traced back to the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. A brilliant observer of the “mysterious Russian soul”, his diary also reveals him to be a staunch supporter of Russia's imperial mission: “And this unity is not for the purpose of conquest, or for the purpose of violence, nor for the purpose of destroying the Slavic personalities before the Russian colossus, but this unity is to recreate these personalities and put them in a proper relationship with Europe and humanity, to give them at last the opportunity to calm down and rest after their innumerable centuries of suffering; to gather their courage and, feeling new strength, to make a contribution to the treasury of the human spirit, to say

49 Serhiy Zhadan. “Poetry After Bucha: Serhiy Zhadan on Ukraine, Russia, and the Demands War Makes of Language (Speech by Serhiy Zhadan at the awarding of the Peace Prize on October 23, 2022, in Frankfurt)”, *Bukvoid*, 23 October 2022, <https://lithub.com/poetry-after-bucha-serhiy-zhadan-on-ukraine-russia-and-the-demands-war-makes-of-language/> [in English].

Alevtina Kakhidze at the Venice Biennale, 17 April 2024. Photo credit: Suspilne Kultura/ Yulia Tkachuk.



their own word in civilisation.”⁵⁰ The fate of the peoples enslaved by Russia, especially the Ukrainian people, who have suffered millions of casualties over many centuries and been subjected to cruel attacks by the “Russian colossus” since the beginning of the twenty-first century, shows what Russia’s “civilising” mission really was.

In the context of war, Kakhidze’s systemic critique creates a state of liminality amongst Westerners – a cognitive dissonance, a borderline situation between awareness of the contradictions it arouses: compassion or even outright irritation by, and objection to, the positions expressed. This leads to disorientation and requires new models to respond to uncomfortable narratives, because Kakhidze touches on a painful fragment – a system of values and an established attitude, including towards Russian culture – that “has created an image both in Russia and abroad (I think even primarily abroad) that justifies the aggressive actions that the Russian Empire

has been carrying out for centuries.”⁵¹ This view continues to exist today, but it can no longer be a dominant force.

Kakhidze also continued her “cancel culture” activism with the research project *State of Security* (2022), on which she collaborated with the co-founder of the “Other Education” association, Alona Karavai, and in which she recorded the period of transition from the strategy of avoidance to the strategy of struggle. Her research constituted a sociological survey and asked respondents – fellow artists – about their interaction or non-interaction with Russian artists outside the Ukrainian context. The study found that “one third of the foreign curators did not understand the Ukrainians’ desire to avoid a common space and joint projects with Russians. And after their refusal, they changed their friendly tone

50 Fyodor Dostoevsky. “Dnevnik pisatel’ia (iun 1876 goda)” [The Writer’s Diary (June 1876)] in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 30 tomah* 22, (Nauka Publishing House), 304 [in Russian].

51 Anastasia Levkova, “Ewa Thompson: ‘Rosyiske suspilstvo ne produkuye svobodolyubyvykh’ [“Ewa Thompson: Russian society does not produce freedom-loving people”], *Local History*, 20 February 2024, <https://localhistory.org.ua/texts/interviu/eva-tompson-peremoga-ukrayini-zmusit-rosiian-perepisati-svoiu-istoriiu/> [in Ukrainian].

to a cold and irritated one.”⁵² The logic of cancelling Russian art, exhibitions and culture was opposed, and essentially, the “commercial” potential of the protest art from Russia and Belarus was emphasised, and its systemic critiques were described as acceptable and capable of being shared without harming others. These criticisms and what they meant culminated in using art to narrativize the strategies behind Russian propaganda: the repression of modern authoritarian regimes and the “ideals of democracy, anti-war, opposition, science and ecology” that are censored or persecuted in Russia.⁵³ If the state cannot become a “safe chamber” for such artistic expression, then European platforms allowing people to speak out will assume that role. Kakhidze makes specific reference to the thematic focus of the joint project between Ars Electronica (the cultural, educational and scientific institute) and the Austrian Foreign Ministry in 2022:

Out of respect for Ukrainian participants of the State of Art(ist) Award, no Russian projects should stand next to a Ukrainian winner. However, it should always be possible to engage with the

content of system-critical, oppositional art from Russia or Belarus. As a result, the idea for research on the topic of “What is Risk?” was born in order to showcase artists advocating for democracy and peace from the two aforementioned countries as a separate endeavor outside of the State of the Art(ist) Award.⁵⁴

It was then that the project *Invasions 1.2.3.* (2022), created by Kakhidze in collaboration with Piotr Armianowski, Alexander Krolkowski and Anatol Stepanenko and commissioned by the *Manifesta 14* Biennial of Contemporary Art, was nominated for the Ars Electronica digital art prize. In her essay, Kakhidze captures the loss of a sense of security, which was caused by the presence of Russian artists at every venue and uncertainty about their critical positions on the socio-political circumstances of the peoples colonised by Russia:

Can these stories be seen as a state of struggle, a continuation of the Russian–Ukrainian War in peaceful Europe? Is there a threat from the romanticisation of songs glorifying weapons in Russian? Or exhibitions about Russian colonialism that do not take into account the different political contexts of the societies that were colonised? [...] I am convinced that this is a great threat and must be fought. The Ukrainian commu-

52 Alevtina Kakhidze, “Vid stanu bezpeky do stanu borotby. Yak ukrayinskiy khudozhnyi (ne) vzayemodiyat z rosiyskymy” [From a state of security to a state of struggle. How a Ukrainian artist should (not) interact with Russian artists], 22 January 2022, *Ukrainska Pravda*. Zhyttia, <https://life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2024/01/22/258966/> [in Ukrainian].

53 Simon Mraz, “State of the Art(ist) – Research”, Ars Electronica (AT), Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AT), *Ars Electronica*, 2022, <https://ars.electronica.art/who-owns-the-truth/en/state-of-the-artist-research/>.

54 Simon Mraz, “State of the Art(ist) – Research”, Ars Electronica (AT), Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AT), *Ars Electronica*, 2022, <https://ars.electronica.art/who-owns-the-truth/en/state-of-the-artist-research/>.

A still from the project *Invasions 1.2.3* (2022). Created by Alevtina Kakhidze in collaboration with Piotr Armianowski, Alexander Krolikowski and Anatol Stepanenko. Photo credit: <https://life.pravda.com.ua/>.



nity has agreed that this is not a war front, but it is definitely an intellectual battle or struggle. But why does it seem that the Ukrainians are fighting this battle alone? Because it is the absence of a state of danger for each and every Russian in the conventional Western world that does not create a state of struggle in them.

Alevtina Kakhidze, 2022⁵⁵

For Kakhidze, as one who expresses disturbed meanings and disturbed language,⁵⁶ to speak is to be in danger, but it is also

to seek a state of security. To speak of a catastrophic existence and simultaneously distrust the inexhaustible potential of language is to break the usual linguistic constructions and meanings, but also to reach an impasse. In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant describes an impasse as “a holding station that doesn’t hold securely but opens into anxiety ... it marks a delay that demands activity”.⁵⁷ The impasse is a period in which life requires hypervigilance, the gathering of material that can help to clarify the situation, the reconciliation of crises with those processes that, according to Berlant, have not yet found their narrative “genre” or necessary tactics.⁵⁸ It seems that Kakhidze is looking for ways of “managing the meanwhile within damaged life’s perduration”.⁵⁹ An existential element emerges in these

55 Alevtina Kakhidze, “Vid stanu bezpeky do stanu borotby. Yak ukrayinskyi khudozhnytsi (ne) vzayemodiyaty z rosiyskymy [From a state of security to a state of struggle. How a Ukrainian artist should (not) interact with Russian artists]”, *Ukrainska Pravda. Zhyttia*, 22 January 2022, <https://life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2024/01/22/258966/> [in Ukrainian].

56 Serhiy Zhadan, “Khay tse bude tekst ne pro viynu [Let it not be a text about war]” (Speech by Serhiy Zhadan at the awarding of the Peace Prize on 23 October 2022 in Frankfurt), *Bukvoid*, 23 October 2022, <http://bukvoid.com.ua/events/ukraine/2022/10/23/211534.html> [in Ukrainian].

57 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), p. 199.

58 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), 4.

59 Lauren Berlant, “The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 34, no.3 (2016): 393–419, 394. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816645989>.



A still from the project *Invasions 1.2.3* (2022). Created by Alevtina Kakhidze in collaboration with Piotr Armianowski, Alexander Krolikowski and Anatol Stepanenko. Photo credit: Lesia Smyrna.

unstable meanings. Language begins to express the antagonistic movements of human existence which is coloured by catastrophe. For Western audiences, Kakhidze's view is still difficult to adapt to and requires understanding and comprehension from both the artist and viewers.

In this sense, the project *Invasions 1.2.3* is an exemplary example of testimony to the devastation caused by the Russian army's invasion of the Kyiv region, in which the camera captures the collective present in the dimension of trauma and tragedy and documents the catastrophic to form a kind of archive, placing it in the temporal form of a twenty-minute video.

The film takes on some of the characteristics of a chronotope: on the one hand, it is a temporal line through her attempt to define the "body" of the war in eastern Ukraine and through the story of her mother; on the other hand, it is a spatial line through a series of recorded ruins. To a certain extent, Kakhidze

becomes the unifying principle of this spatio-temporal chronotope, looking at the duration of the war comprehending it through the prism of life's inevitability. Here, she documents a destroyed bridge and houses. On the right there are children playing in the playground, a happy dog, Chuck, running around his owner and a newly planted garden bed being watered by Kakhidze.

She captures collective trauma through autonomous stories of experience. The first story in the film takes place at her mother's grave, where the inscription on the stone reads "now you are here" and "your home is here, which held you so tightly". Throughout the film, Kakhidze refers to her mother's refusal to leave her home. She says, "I decided not to run away from the war. In fact, I did what my mother did." This is what the camera shows and "hears", which is a way for Kakhidze to affectively and mentally imprint her mother's experience "in herself".

Along with her friends, Kakhidze tracks traumatised spatial landscapes and houses that have been torn apart, trying to comprehend the cataclysmic through the experience of presence. The scale of the destruction is too great, however, and requires the camera to “defocus the gaze”,

to instead pan across life with its wounds, but also capture its desire for healing. The “stabilised” catastrophe appears as an incessant quest for a way out of the impasse. As a human present at this conjuncture, Kakhidze is called upon to search for such an escape.

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Serhiy Zhadan. "Poetry
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