

Deimantas Narkevičius

Galerie Jan Mot, Brussels, Belgium

'The fundamental contradiction of contemporary man is that he still does not have an experience of time adequate to his idea of history, and is therefore painfully split between being-in-time as an elusive flow of instants and his being-in-history.' When Giorgio Agamben wrote *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience* in 1978, Lithuania was under the conservative rule of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and artist Deimantas Narkevičius had just begun to study sculpture in Vilnius. A year later, Brezhnev's administration would invade Afghanistan, ending its decade-long *détente* with the United States. In the meantime, the self-immolation of 19-year-old Romas Kalanta had become iconic of the Lithuanian nationalist movement, and, 13 years later, Lithuania would be the first Baltic state to claim independence.

That same summer of '78, the Plokštinė launching site of four of Soviet Lithuania's R-12 thermonuclear missiles was shut down and its stationed officers relocated. In *The Dud Effect* (2008), Narkevičius' most recent film, Evgeny Terentiev, a former Russian officer who served at a similar military base in Lithuania, is in character, playing the typical day of one such officer. The only exceptional difference: the order to detonate.



Blip. A geometric drawing flashes on the screen. A high-pitched whistle ascends. A series of black and white photographs appear, one after the other: a missile launcher; the blurred ghost of swift movement; night scenes of officers unloading equipment. Not an explosion, but the clinking of cups and saucers end the kettle's scream. Terentiev contextualizes his re-enactment with a briefing in sparse phrases recited to the sounds of children playing football. The layered beginning of Narkevičius' 15-minute film is emblematic of the cinematographic assemblage he employs,

About this review

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not simply to change history, but to change time.

Using archival material, rudimentary film collage, tailored audio tracks and his own footage, Narkevičius works beyond the circular or linear temporality which are often seen as characterizing contemporary experience, adopting instead what Agamben calls a 'broken line', that is, 'without expecting anything from the future.' There is no anticipated end to this trajectory, and, in traveling it, time is arrested at each and every moment. It is incoherent and fragmentary if experienced consciously but the perfect mirage of narrative continuity, if lived passively. The apocalyptic scenario recalls Hegel's 'end of history', as though to stress that the post-Communist condition is the passage from one state after-the-end-of-history into another, as Boris Groys writes, 'from real Socialism into postmodern capitalism; or, from the idyll of universal expropriation following the end of the class struggle into the ultimate resignation.' The hollow of one missile's massive cradle, cracked and crumbling, resonates with both memory and premonition.



In *Once in the XX Century* (2004), Narkevičius appropriated footage of Lenin's monument being pulled down and reversed it: with his cloak billowing behind him, the bronze Lenin seems to fly onto his pedestal. Narkevičius sculpts in time, liberating the contemporary both from the angst of progress and from resignation to the cyclical, leading instead into a chronology of action: conscious direct experience of simultaneous being and becoming.

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