

A banner in the background announces the panels theme: Creative Commons. David is moderating. He is flanked by Artiom and Oxana on his right and Dmitry and Alexei on his left.

DAVID: What do we have in common? How can we redefine the common without falling back on commonplaces? Or are commonplaces the path to understanding how to free the common, to think the common freely? What would you say, Artiom?

ARTIOM: The common belongs to no one. It is a res nullius. Take the many empty lots in post-Soviet space. They are totally this-sided and profane, but as zones apart, they appear strangely sacral. The sacrality of the profane isnt this the true formula of democracy? The real common, the common beyond exchange, the common without the universal, lies beneath our feet at the exact place where it belongs to no one. The real question is actually how to keep this common from being taken over by bureaucracy or capitalism, and on the other hand, how to preserve the relationship to it: after all, once they are deeply involved in their private lives, people hardly notice the common void that chases all their particular little worlds away. In order to answer the question of how we can realize and maintain the existence of the common, we need to act in common. This action will not only realize the communal-mimetic potential that we have accumulated, but will be the first step taken toward a free common, owned by none.

DAVID: So how would you describe this communal-mimetic potential? Oxana?

OXANA: Lets see. Cultural space in post-Soviet Russia is really alienated. It is made up of singularity-scenes, empty socializing and particular projects, all of them pretty paranoid of some Big Other. Creative collectivity is capable of producing a therapeutic resource to counter this alienation by working with the experience of the (intrinsic) other. This is actually were politics begin (not to be confused with the medial representations that any Situationist critique will describe in terms of total spectacularity!). It is we (and our disputes) who define the ethical (and in a sense, the political) horizon, in the process of a ceaseless revolution of consciousness. There is no Big Other of representation.

DAVID: So whats left? Group therapy? Catharsis of internal antagonism? Why dont we ask Dmitry? Dmitry, why is it important for you to work with others?

DMITRY: For me, everything that can be called creative at all can only happen only in relation to other people. So creativity always has collective dimension. From my childhood onward, I have always experienced my own insufficiency as something that needs to be overcome. What also draws me to collective creativity is a deep feeling of personal finitude and the strange urge to become more Ive always hated private property and if I possess something I feel very insecure. I think this insecurity stays around and lingers in the way you deal with ideas. If you have some vision, the most exiting moment in life is actually when youve already shared it, given it up; when your vision becomes a common. At this point, it isnt enough to say that your vision no longer belongs to you or that it belongs to everyone. Actually, it undermines the whole principal of belonging. This seems so obvious that I cant even really understand why most people do not feel like that and put that stupid sign everywhere that says all possible rights reserved.. I can hardly imagine a greater pleasure than giving something away

OXANA: Exactly

DAVID: Do we all feel better now?

Laughter.

DAVID: But seriously, if politics begin in the temporary resolution of an antagonism, doesn't this mean that we can no longer answer the question of what we have in common in any coherent form? Don't we need the Big Other of representation?

ALEXEI: What you're actually asking is: what's left when the epoch of global oppositions finally comes to a close and its biopolitical constructions finally come undone. Of course, people will still share something that is left over in common. But this something will hardly be what people call the consensus of democratic discussion. This common, much like the community in which it is shared, is no law or rule, but rather an exception that cannot be appropriated. It is impossible to control, no matter who lays claim to the reigns of power, be it in the name of restoring a proximity and warmth of companionship seemingly lost, in the name of expanding global biopolitics that soaks up the warmth of lives densely packed together by the fear of yet another threat, or even in the name of authorship. This is why discussions like our discussion today are so hard to understand: the opacity of stubborn nonconformism offers a presentiment of the community to come, a singular exception that cannot be appropriated.

ARTIOM: Thanks, Alexei.

DAVID: Thank you all.

\*This fictional panel discussion was compiled and edited heavily in retrospect by David Riff. Its actors have been retouched, but are largely still recognizable in reworked fragments taken from their respective texts. The cast of characters in order of their appearance: the philosophers Artiom Magun (Petersburg) and Oxana Timofeeva (Moscow), the artist Dmitri Vilensky (Petersburg), and the philosopher Alexei Penzin (Moscow). All are members of the workgroup Chto delat/What is to be done? Both the name and the material of the dialogue have been appropriated from the workgroups 9th newspaper.