East European Film Bulletin

PHOTO ESSAY

Everything that Comes Close to the Swamp Sticks to It

Evgeny Yufit & Contemporary Parallel Cinema

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Once upon a time in the suburbs of a big city…"

– from Evgeny Yufit's *Spring* (*Vesna*, 1987).

Buenos Aires, once a European colony, was founded in the swamps of the Río de la Plata, also known as the "River of Silver." The swampy wetlands along the river, today a densely populated, liminal zone of human existence, gave birth to **pantanosumpf** ("*pantano"* means swamp in Spanish, as does "*Sumpf*" in German), a non-conformist collective of young local filmmakers, musicians and artists. In search of new symbols and identities, the collective engages in diverse projects around the swamp's topography and its various inhabitants, from butchers and flower vendors over painters and truck drivers to musicians. In the subversive spirit of contemporary Parallel Cinema, pantanosumpf abandons the white cube to explore the swamp and its semi-urban tumors. The group of works shown here stem from the artists' engagement with the 1980s Soviet movement of Necrorealism, combining their own dystopian impressions from Río de la Plata's swamps with excerpts from Evgeny Yufit's films, among others from *Spring* (*Vesna*, 1987), *Suicide Monsters* (*Vepry suitsida*, 1988), *Knights of Heaven* (*Rytsari podnebes'ia*, 1989) and *Silver Heads* (*Serebrianye golovy*, 1998). On the occasion of our special issue on Soviet Parallel Cinema, we are publishing a selection of these works alongside stills from the Yufit films that inspired them.

Julián Bordonaba's hybrid GIFs explore limits of transformation and social oppositions. In what the artist calls "degradation layers," found images from Río de la Plata's swamps overlap with images from Yufit's first 35mm film *Knights of Heaven* (1989) and Antonio Berni's *La Saga de Juanito Laguna*

(1958-1978), a series of paintings about the life of Juanito, a young boy living in the slums of Buenos Aires. **Marco Rossi**'s digital collage *Necroconsumism* explores the urban swamp of global capitalism. By transforming a poster from an Argentinian supermarket with images from Yufit's movies, the commodity for sale becomes death itself. In Rossi's poem, the swamps of Buenos Aires are a phantasmagorical wasteland, inhabited by the degraded man who "finds himself on the thin line between life and death". In the digital collage *94N74N05UM9F (or six decomposing jars)*, artist **1134_** manipulates photographs of six jars containing different rotten fruits and vegetables. The result of this Necrorealistic experiment, conducted over the course of two years, is a posthuman reality, in which even the digital image has reached its death. **Jantus**' *Necrópolis* is a video registration, shot with a handycam, of a decomposed soup. *Necrópolis*, literally the "city of the dead," invites us to explore the microscopic beauty of decay.

Pantanosumpf's series of works opens up a ghostly, transatlantic correspondence between the underground scenes in 1980s Leningrad and contemporary Buenos Aires in times of a global pandemic. Both cities are built, to echo Saint Petersburg's legendary founding myth, "on bones and swamps." The folkloristic imagery around the swamp circles around madness, death, and feverish nightmares of decay and decomposed bodies. In its truly de-colonial spirit, this project dedicated to Yufit intervenes into our perception of Necrorealism's legacy. Through the lens of pantanosumpf's works, we can also reinvent our perception of Yufit's films and their global afterlife. The swamp is a fluid space between East and South, an eclectic universe in which tradition and trash, chaos and order, rebirth and decay become blurred. Or, to quote pantanosumpf's words: "Everything that comes close to the swamp sticks to it."

– *Isabel Jacobs*

I. We Have to Finish the Experiment Tonight



Evgeny Yufit, still from *Knights of Heaven* (1989)



Julián Bordonaba, *We have to finish the experiment tonight*, GIF, 2020



Evgeny Yufit, cover photo for Mzhalalafilm studio



Julián Bordonaba, *Digital degradation*, GIF, 2020

II. Necroconsumism



Evgeny Yufit, still from *Suicide Monsters* (1988)

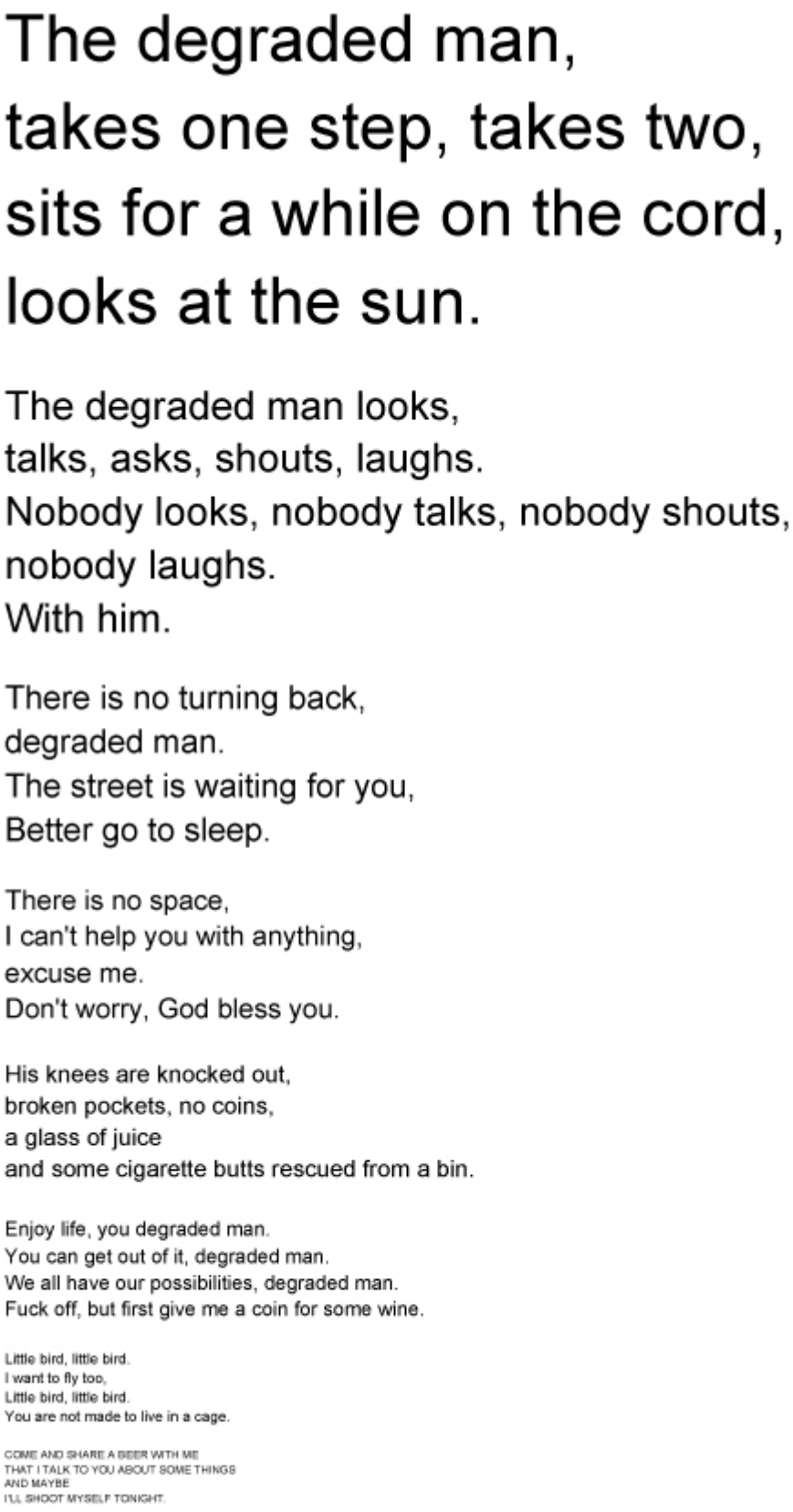


Marco Rossi, Necroconsumism, digital collage, 2020

III. The Degraded Man



Evgeny Yufit, still from *Spring* (1987)



The degraded man,
takes one step, takes two,
sits for a while on the cord,
looks at the sun.

The degraded man looks,
talks, asks, shouts, laughs.
Nobody looks, nobody talks, nobody shouts,
nobody laughs.
With him.

There is no turning back,
degraded man.
The street is waiting for you,
Better go to sleep.

There is no space,
I can't help you with anything,
excuse me.
Don't worry, God bless you.

His knees are knocked out,
broken pockets, no coins,
a glass of juice
and some cigarette butts rescued from a bin.

Enjoy life, you degraded man.
You can get out of it, degraded man.
We all have our possibilities, degraded man.
Fuck off, but first give me a coin for some wine.

Little bird, little bird.
I want to fly too,
Little bird, little bird.
You are not made to live in a cage.

COME AND SHARE A BEER WITH ME
THAT I TALK TO YOU ABOUT SOME THINGS
AND MAYBE
I'LL SHOOT MYSELF TONIGHT.

Marco Rossi, *Man on the Margins*, 2020

IV. We Have Reached the Death of Our Image



Evgeny Yufit, still from *Knights of Heaven* (1989)

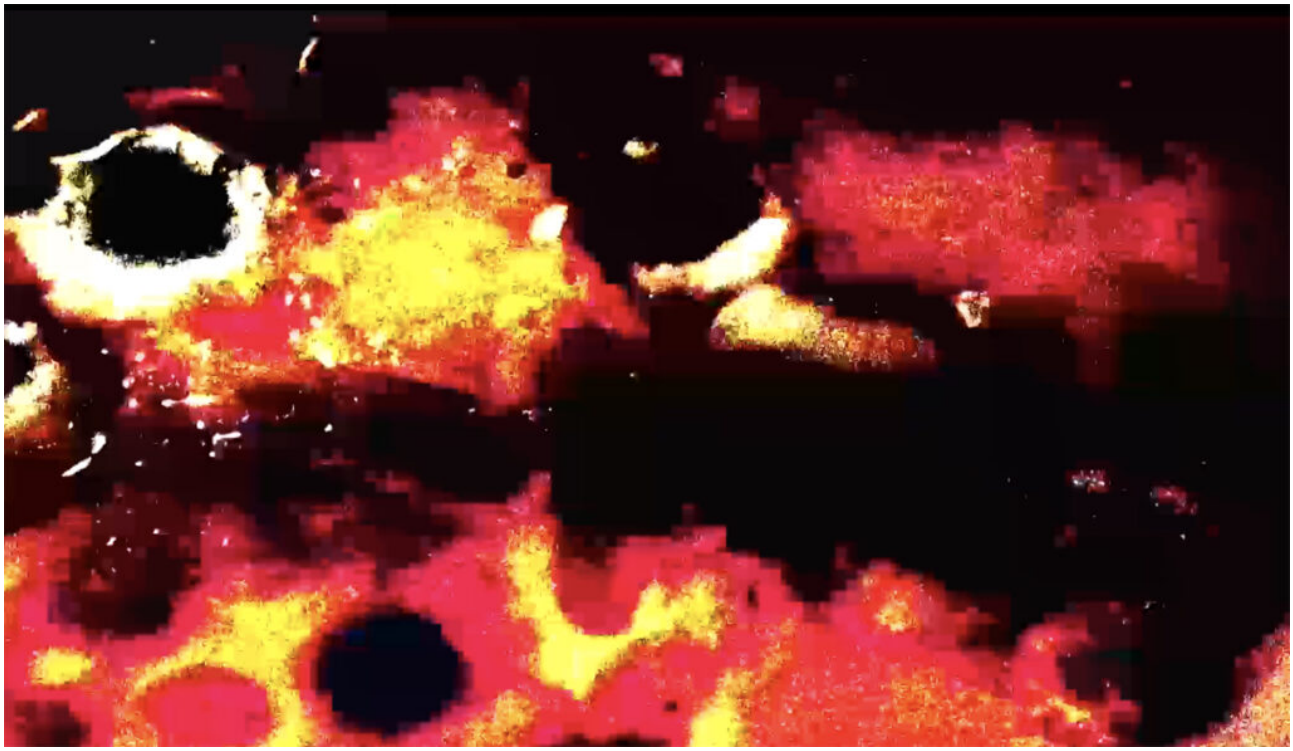


1134_, *94N74N05UM9F* (or six decomposing jars),
digital photography and collage, 2019-2020

V. Necrópolis



Evgeny Yufit, still from *Suicide Monsters* (1988)



Jantus, still from Necrópolis,
video recording of decomposed soup with posterization processing, 2020

Credits

Artworks: Julián Bordonaba, Marco Rossi, 1134_ and Jantus (pantanosumpf)

Introduction and Translation: Isabel Jacobs

Sources:

Ia: https://youtu.be/AE-aqUO61QI

Ib: https://youtu.be/90Qke2mCb7M

III: audio recording of Spanish version

IV: https://archive.org/details/a-00-a-0505

V: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqRzO7mxj0c