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## HOGWEED VS. SUNROOT: ZOĒMACHY OF SOVIET POSTANTHROPOCENTRISM

**Abstract:** The article addresses the issues of vegetal subjectivity, sexuality and corporeality in the context of soviet postanthropocentrism and critical posthumanism. The narrative focuses on the figure of hogweed which in Soviet times was designed to rebalance the post-war economy on a par with humans, but today has become an embodiment of trauma, a toxic monster to be destroyed. Referring to the negative consequences of soviet postanthropocentrism, flourished in the 1920s, in particular to the notion of political interpellation of the non-human and dehumanization of the human, the author considers today's ferality of post-soviet territories as a special form of the sympoetic co-existence. Such kind of sympoesis of humans, animals, plants and other species connected by different economic, political and biological relationships implies the question about the need for affirmative biopolitics (Roberto Esposito) which accepts life in all its strange and unusual for the human eye manifestations. Similarly, the hogweed—an alien that burst from the non-ecological zone and violated the harmonious order of flora and fauna—represents an inverted ecocriticism that refers to the dark side of ecology and there, on the dark side, searches for sources of harmonization. The hogweed entails environmental thought, and is monstrously affirmative.

**Keywords:** Sosnowsky's Hogweed, critical posthumanism, biopolitics, vegetal sexuality

### I. Good Old Mythology

Sosnowsky's Hogweed grows on junkyards, in industrial fields, on abandoned territories of former factories and oil exploitation areas, it spreads along the roads and deserted agricultural lands. Hogweed breaks into dachas,<sup>1</sup> occupies kitchen gardens, seizes wastelands prepared for building of new dwelling houses. It feeds on the repressed, hidden in soil or thrown shamelessly on the ground. The plant ingests all kinds of disorders and deficiencies left on depleted surface. Multiple layers of human history and non-human continuums weave in the particular fleshiness of its stems and

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<sup>1</sup> *Дача* or 'holiday house' in Russian. Widespread phenomenon in Soviet times, especially during the iron curtain period, when every decent citizen, politician and cultural figure went to the countryside in the warm season to grow plants, pick mushrooms and berries as well as to hunt.

leaves. Rusted agricultural equipment and abandoned houses live side-by-side with hogweed, together they form a landscape macabre of wasted territories. Soviet scientist and Soviet worker, tractor driver and student of agricultural college abandoned them leaving behind hords of experimental hybrids which today make the map of ecological misbalance of post-Soviet landscape.

Amidst wastelands, the non-human imagination of weeds, wild animals and technologies are swarming in an irresistible fitting of creative outrage establishing new ways of gentrification. True pioneers, they come first, before architects and engineers,<sup>2</sup> to create delicate constructions bloomed with green bridges and ropes which encircle plots once being cultural and now—being feral. Post-Soviet landscape is both postanthropocentric and postapocalyptic in its swarming ferality that broke the walls of former manufactories.<sup>3</sup> There is a productivity of entirely different breed. At former combines, highways, factories, dairy complexes, mines overground with weeds and abandoned machines the excessive vegetation operates instead of human: nettle, thistle, dandelion, burdock, hogweed spread their political and social potential; they act as the force that sweeps away authoritarian ideology of anthropo-phallogo-centrism. Ruderal flora symbolises here the liberation of oppressed species from the burden of factory. In the conditions of Five-Year Plans and excessive deworming in indigenous territories (no matter even if it was the people who were parasites) the burden of factory was expressed in figures of productivity, high yield, usefulness and gene modifications. Exploited vegetation<sup>4</sup> and moisture soaked in shame of oedipisation rebelled to unleash creeping roots, dangling shoots, tangled cables, stretched stems and umbrellas. The “outer green” or verdure imposed to margins of culture grasped humans, wrench men, parasites, cultural and “unmanaged” species in its vegetal stream of intra-active relations creating fertile ground for new subjectivities, multiple and open for heretical transformation.

<sup>2</sup> Urban Fauna Lab, K. Chuchalina, “Between the Observer and the Observed”, in: *Urban Fauna Lab: Valley of Beggars*, ed. by K. Chuchalina, V. Shapovalov, Moscow–Venice: V-A-C Foundation and Marsilio Editori, 2015, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> The idea of post-Soviet landscape as postanthropocentric naturecultural continuum was captured precisely by a group of contemporary Russian photographers in their project *The New Landscape*. Anastasia Tsayder’s works especially reflect everyday inhuman view from the windows of general citizens. Her work *Arcadia* (2016) transforms abandonment of urban and industrial territory into non-human politics of green roots, weak tentacles, concrete and traces of human activity. See more: <https://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/10976/new-russian-landscape-photography-exhibition>, accessed 24.07.2019.

<sup>4</sup> In her installation *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* presented 13 June 2018 in Peresvetov Pereulok Gallery, Anastasiya Potemkina studies urban flora and its political potential. The artist interprets feral, wild and ill urban plants as a projection of the marginal, unprotected part of the society that literally exists on roadside, or outside the class structure.

In the open vastness overgrown with hogweed we do not meet the universal man<sup>5</sup> anymore, which filled an ordered cosmos. The figure of the strong and powerful worker is replaced by creeping and poisonous tentacles of rapid greenery overflowed with a humus epistemology. The worker is a part of a naturecultural flow that carries the DNAs of weeds, humans, animals and codes. He is not the embodiment of proletarian humanism, as it was represented by Soviet mosaics which are remarkable evidences of such. Having started to spread in the 1930s, mosaics became a prevalent decoration on the walls of many factories. Usually mosaics depict how utopian working men and women live in communist symbiosis with gigantic sheaves of wheat and machineries, other species and elements. Having glanced at the walls in the Moscow Metro, in factories and houses we will easily recognise that the border separating different kinds is erased on these pictures. This may indicate the communist attempt to humanise the non-human while reducing the human and the non-human to the common indicators of productivity and fertility all-the-animal-vegetal-human comradeship.

Once having chosen the way of cultural fugivities,<sup>6</sup> Sosnowsky's Hogweed was released from the bonds of experimental laboratories to become the avenger in its post-apocalyptic universe. Like a tragic superhero derived from artificial breeding, cold-resistant and deadly survivable, it is coming back today as the embodiment of soviet trauma. Having become an invasive species that marks territories traumatised by overproduction, hogweed picked a fight with humans and ancestors of proletarian humanism. Its umbrella-like head surpasses the human head by two and perhaps is smarter by the same amount. During the long process of accumulation of poisonous potential and the experience of gene metamorphosis, the plan of domestication of agrobiologist<sup>7</sup> was hatched in hogweed's head. Soviet agrobiologist was adopted by

<sup>5</sup> The universalist and eurocentric ideal of man is the subject of posthumanist criticism which in many ways is the starting point of my article. The focus of such criticism concerns the liberal subject of humanism and its Renaissance and Enlightenment values based on the dualisms of soul (mind) and body, top and bottom, culture and nature, masculine and feminine, human and animal, etc. Moreover, the first concept in these dualistic compounds always has superiority over the second. Humanism places the man in the center of the world, who is reasonable and free. On this account Rosi Braidotti writes in *The Posthuman* that the humanist ideal is a white man complying with generally accepted notions about normality and healthy body. He embodies the Western mind. Thus, all who do not fit into this paradigm do not correspond to the normality. All the others, perceived as pathologically discharged from the norm, receive the status of abnormality, deviance and bestiality.

<sup>6</sup> Ergasiophytophyts are plant species (mainly medicinal and ornamental), previously cultivated, but gone wild later.

<sup>7</sup> I suppose that agrobiology was one of the strong instruments in the Soviet posthuman intention to create common body inhabited by new socialist hybrids and chimeras. Since the 1930s agrobiology was propagated by Trofim Lysenko who denied the existence of genes. In the Soviet Union the scientific genetics was replaced by Michurin's genetics that had funny and not so funny postulates that contradicted with common sense. Agrobiology argued that cells can spawn from a non-cellular mass; it also operated by the concept of "living matter" reviving vitalism. From many points of view, agrobiology was based on the main conviction of the early Michurin's works that postulated

hogweed for purposes of reproduction and colonisation of wast spaces where toxic greenery could install its political and social rules, as well as to reveal to mankind its military and revolutionary potential.

Today, growing its *zoē*-power in troubling times that mix up different species and carry them away in a whirlwind of chimerical flow,<sup>8</sup> feral plants, like thousands of other living beings, have been drawn into political discourse, being subjected to interpellation. Right now the real war is unfolding between strong mutants of Sosnowsky's Hogweed and the humanity. This war has become an echo of the World War II. In the late 40s, right after the war, hogweed—the biotechnologically improved being, the vegetative Heracles<sup>9</sup>—had to stand shoulder to shoulder with Soviet people and help them to replace the irreparable military losses: humans, animals and plants. Engaging in recovery of the state and its economy, hogweed served as a silage plant. It was a peculiar substitute for people and, ultimately, became a rash attempt to fill the *oikos*, devastated and outfitted by the war. Suspecting nothing, wrench men planted Sosnowsky's and Mantegazzi's Hogweed in floodplains, steppe areas and thus expanded its habitat. Tons of agricultural equipment collected tons of hogweed seeds, machines stored it and sowed new terrains with this plant virus.<sup>10</sup>

## II. Vegetal Sexuality

Having increased the possibilities of self-seeding, hogweed revealed itself in shameless, non-oedipal queer sexuality, entering a perverse relationship with the worker. Non-heteronormative, interspecific libidinal energy of weed eroded the anthropocentric myth about vegetal lifelessness and sexlessness. For plants, “there is always an outside where they form a rhizome with something else—with the wind, an animal, human beings”.<sup>11</sup> This is the wisdom of plants: they always orient to non-singular existence, they exist in multiplicity from which none can distil an autonomous indi-

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the idea that the environment had an important effect on the organism's heredity. According to this, social binds and “outer” parts of organisms were more important in conversation about heredity and production of strong and productive hybrids than the “inner” parts and their inside construction. Later we will see that such pseudo-biological thinking is associated with the notion of communism and its ideology.

<sup>8</sup> D.J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham–London: Duke University Press, 2016, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> The latin name of hogweed is the *Heracléum*.

<sup>10</sup> Read more about distribution of Sosnowsky's and Mantegazzi Hogweeds, the history of their cultivation in the article: Н.А. Озерова, Н.Г. Кривошенина, “Особенности формирования вторичных ареалов Борщевиков Сосновского и Мантегацци (*Heracléum Sosnowskyi*, *H. Mantegazzianum*) на территории России”, *Российский журнал биологических инвазий* 2018, no. 1, pp. 78–87.

<sup>11</sup> G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Book 2. A Thousand Plateaus*, transl. by B. Massumi, Minneapolis–London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p. 11.

vidual.<sup>12</sup> Many plants have both sexes, the others behave transgenderly and change their sex from time to time, depending on the need. Strictly speaking, verdure don't need sex for reproduction, it just needs a plant, even if of a different species. Sometimes, a body area is enough, often not indicated by sex. Most of the plants reproduce without participation of a partner, entering into interspecific relationships with other creatures and elements.<sup>13</sup> "Plant needs the whole world for having sex, at least, most of it consists of different creatures that belong to different orders of the non-living, other plants and animals".<sup>14</sup> The vegetative sexuality can't be reduced to one sex or species. It was perfectly described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in the "Rhizome" when the authors cited the example of symbiotic relationships between wasp and orchid where the former "becomes a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus".<sup>15</sup> Plant embodies flexible, tentacular, *zoē*-egalitarian sexuality which produces non-human and amoral politics affirming the life in all of its queer and unusual manifestations.

Invasive sexuality of hogweed in the queer alliance with the worker deterritorialise the latter, questioning the borders between the cultural and the natural. The extended phenotype<sup>16</sup> of hogweed penetrates technologies and politics, bursts into biology of other species and goes far beyond the frames of Sosnowsky's or Mantegazzi's Hogweed. Technologies, hogweed and Soviet man, covered by chimerical swarming in their close and simultaneously toxic interactions, create an extended biological species.<sup>17</sup> The species is neither taxonomical, nor a morphological concept, but a chimerical one and available for the material and discursive radical becomings.<sup>18</sup> The species—or swarming multiplicity—precedes a conversation about open ontologies

<sup>12</sup> J. Schollenberger, "Rośliny w pędzie. Darwina myślenie o granicy roślina—zwierzę", *Teksty Drugie* 2018, no. 2, p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> L. Irigaray, M. Marder, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, p. 112.

<sup>14</sup> J. Bednarek, "'Upojenie jako triumfalne wtargnięcie w nas rośliny': obietnice i niebezpieczeństwa roślinnej seksualności", *Teksty Drugie* 2018, no. 2, p. 193.

<sup>15</sup> G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> The ability of genes to go beyond the body in their influence, described by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Extended Phenotype*.

<sup>17</sup> All-the-animal-vegetal-human comradeship I mentioned earlier could be explained conceptually through the main agrobiological manipulation that questions borders between different species and individuals. I mean *grafting* (*прививка* in Russian, what literally means "inculcation" and is a homonym to the Russian word "vaccination"). Grafting as it introduced by Michurin was the basis of plant hybridisation. In agrobiology, grafting often was based on the fusion of parts of cultivated (*cultural*) and wild (*non-cultural*) plants in order to cultivate (*make cultural*) the latter as well as create more prolific and resistant species. In this a kind of barbaric fusion of nature and culture, the whole idea of communism, fraternity, work and productivity, which was laid down by the Soviet ideology in the concept of the proletarian, expresses. During the Lysenkoism period grafting and hybridisation served as the main political and ideological force which helped to created posthuman images in Soviet culture.

<sup>18</sup> D.J. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 17.

that extend between realms of the human and beyond. The species, in this case, is an affective and toxic dance combining kin and kind.<sup>19</sup> It is not only a question of biology, but also of various discourses of reality and fiction that transversally permeate relationships of humans and other creatures. Metabolism that captures assemblage consisted of soviet worker, hogweed and technologies doesn't only flow at the level of biological processes (such as activation of furocoumarins, chromosomal aberrations and mutagenic effects<sup>20</sup>), it also occurs at the level of military and post-war myths, repressions, Stalinist purges, post-Soviet narratives and historical traumas.

### III. Rehabilitated Parasites

Planted by kolkhoznik<sup>21</sup> as a phototoxic hedge, hogweed measured the territory of grazing animals and separating the organised *bios* from the wild *zoē*. Hogweed was an instrument of control and humanisation, delineating the boundaries of cultivated species placed in the world like in a huge factory. Non-cultural and parasitic animals, plants and humans could not enter there. Hogweed stings, their toxicity was used as a hedge: an energised fence of a labour camp where dehumanised humans, interpellated with the rhetoric of parasites and weeds, were humanised by hard labour for the benefit of the communist society. In both cases, hogweed was used for creating the common territory of the common body of soviet communism. Animal, plant and human were bonded in one flow experiencing metamorphoses of one into another and forming common bodies of consumption by “common man”, “common animal” and “common plant”.

The project *Outer Green* (2014) by Urban Fauna Lab could be interpreted as a critical approach to the idea of communist post-anthropocentrism that, in its essence, humanised the non-human and de-humanised the human. In the *Outer Green* human and hogweed, who inhabit fields, factories and laboratories, easily switch their places. Their corporealities are subjected to the same exploitation, together they are experiencing the consequences of Stalinist purges and wandering between the exhibition hall *Zerno* (*Grain*), labour camps and marginal landscapes of post-Soviet Russia.

Exploring the *Outer Green*, we open interdependencies among the vegetative and the biopolitical. The project draws parallels between political prisoners in the USSR and the feral plants that have the status of pests and parasites in human culture. In the *Outer Green* the artists rehabilitate them, both the betrayed humans and the plants, presenting a crop of weeds collected in different administrative districts of Moscow on a celebration of reaping in the pavilion *Zerno* built for the opening of the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in 1939. In Soviet times the best examples of “cultural” plants were exhibited in the “Zerno”, while political dissidents were labeled as “para-

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Mentioned processes can be caused in the body when interacting with hogweed.

<sup>21</sup> *Колхозник* in Russian. One who works on kolkhoz or collective farm in the former Soviet Union.

sites” and “weeds” and were a subject to extermination. In these discourses the reaping has an eschatological dimension, and so does the process of “cultivation”, which possesses a meaning of “oedipisation/humanisation” of the non-human and “de-humanisation” of the human. This sort of biological socialism equalised the human and the non-human and erased the border between them, transforming these spheres into undifferentiated biomass. Soviet postanthropocentrism demonstrates the interdependencies that unify the human and the non-human turning each being into a naked life open to any outrage.

Rehabilitation is a frequent word in the *Outer Green*. This word is also frequent in the discourse linked to Soviet political prisoners. The artists borrow the idea of rehabilitation for weeds and feral plants. They take care of plumeless thistles, nettles, cow vetch, field milk thistle etc. bringing them into the space of home, culture and *oikos*. Weeds disturb homogeneity of the human, but at the same time they fill an emptiness of the exhausted *oikos*: vegetal brains and bodies are immediate participants of humus—they comprise a new layer of soil for it, for the emergence of subsequent organic life.

#### IV. (Post)Soviet (Post)humanity

Postanthropocentrism as a phenomenon is very closed to communist ideas flourished in the 1920s in the USSR.<sup>22</sup> Literary works by Andrey Platonov are a vivid illustration of it. The writer created a big narrative about a total intertwining, kinship and unlimited consumption of humans by animals and of animals by humans, machines, tools, things. In Platonov’s works female donkey and woman are interchangeable, as well as daughter, mother and son are flowing one into another.<sup>23</sup> Platonov’s characters embody one of the early scenarios of posthumanity. This scenario could be explained in the following demands: a rejection of gender and family stereotypes, merging with technologies, as consequences, claim for space domination (concerning the construction of the big integral in Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*) and creation of total/common body, sexuality and subjectivity. In this demands we can read how the communist seizes regions of subjectivity, like a toxic plant, killing the subject’s immunity and turning it into a common man.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of communism is rooted in the ancient Roman notion *communitas*. In the theory of affirmative biopolitics introduced by Roberto Esposito (referring to the

<sup>22</sup> More about the Soviet concept of the posthuman in the article: S. Žižek, “Sexuality in the Posthuman Age”, *Stasis* 2016, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 70–87.

<sup>23</sup> Similar configurations concern the following literary works *Chevengur*, *Soul*, or *Dzhan*, *The Foundation Pit* and others.

<sup>24</sup> The common man (*общечеловек*) is the concept developed by the dramatist Leonid Andreev. In his plays characters act happily in their “common existence” which is exposed as abstract, typical movements of common people in common existence and is associated with the loss of the “precious Self”. There is only the “outer” of characters and masks: that is *communitas* deprived of *immunitas*.

trilogy: *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community; Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life; Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*) *communitas* and *immunitas* constitute an important dialectic which aims to preserve the subject and to determine its boundaries. *Communitas* and *immunitas* are united by the common element—*munus* which means “gift”, but of a different property than *donum*. *Munus* and *donum* relate to each other as the particular to the whole. *Donum* prescribes special relationships based on gifts exchange, while *munus* indicates such gift that does not point to the fact that “someone owes me something”, but emphasises another pattern, notably “it is me owe someone something”. We could add that *munus* expresses the idea of not having anything “own” in *communion* and in its radical expression *munus* establishes the idea of “taking away” a property/subjectivity.

The idea of a communist society over exploits *munus* and its understanding as

a gift that one gives because one must give and because one cannot not give. It has a tone so clearly of being obliged [*doverosita*] as to modify or even to interrupt the one-to-one correspondence of the relation between the gift giver [*donatore*] and the recipient [*donatario*].<sup>25</sup>

*Munus* contains the element of a sort of coercion and puts the subject in a weak position leaving it destined to the destruction and expropriation by the social. In its extreme, *munus* means the death of the subject. The negative side of postanthropocentrism appears as a result of exploitation of *communitas* and lack of immunisation when the boundaries of the subject are blurred. As Esposito writes, the experience of the community is related to explosion of the subject and violation of the boundaries separating the inner from the outer. The negativity of *communitas* itself, if it is not accompanied by mechanisms that protect the subject (the immunity in biological and legal sense), means uncontrollable danger of death. *Communitas* and *immunitas* bond an act of communication that entails the danger of infection and the loss of individual boundaries. The dialog with the other is always toxic, this is a risk able of causing indigestion<sup>26</sup> or activation of furocoumarins.

Immunisation of individual as well as an answer of human immunity to burns caused by hogweed are not only a manifestation of a defensive reaction aimed at something alien. Rather, immunisation should be considered as a process of recogni-

<sup>25</sup> R. Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, transl. by T. Campbell, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> We refer to the companion species approach invented by Haraway. The word ‘companions’ (lat. *cum panis*—“with bread”) here assign to the idea of immune system as a special communicational process between living beings, the process founded on the reciprocal digestions (inclusion) and sometimes—indigestions (or exclusion by inclusion). Developing the concept of compost-ability as the need of being eaten and share a table with the companion species, the philosopher describes the world development driven by both the human and the non-human agents through a long chain of mutual becomings based on digestion, indigestion and transformation of the external into the internal and vice versa.

tion<sup>27</sup>—when organism learns to recognise, distinguish and construct flexible boundaries between what it is and what it is not. For this reason, an external danger is not a real threat in contrast to the autoimmune disease when the body attacks itself. In the Esposito’s affirmative biopolitics, relations between communisation and immunisation are not reducible to elevating the protection from the dangerous negativity (or impossibility of gift). The mechanism of individual creation demands incorporation of “negative elements” which threat identity and the existence of the subject:

The dialectical figure that thus emerges is that of exclusionary inclusion or exclusion by inclusion. The body defeats a poison not by expending it outside the organism, but by making it somehow part of the body. As we were saying: the immunitary logic is based more on a non-negation, on the negation of a negation, than on an affirmation.<sup>28</sup>

The attempt to get in touch with “outer green”, to experience becoming plant as radicalisation of boundaries between the human and vegetal, to give into the vegetative sexuality—is a way to rehabilitate weeds, finding “vegetal brains”<sup>29</sup> in yourself and disturbing human homogeneity. Subsequently, like vegetative brains and bodies, to become a participant of humus—to be a weed, which, settling in the injured and toxic areas, forms a new layer of soil to restore organic life. Rough, spiky and tenacious hogweed embodies exclusionary inclusion. Weed, absorbing toxins and becoming thick-skinned and toxic itself, inclusions the chemically alien, thus excluding it from the soil. In result, the alien is included in the soil as humus.

Hogweed, or ergasiophygot, or rising against culture, is “a protector of nature from dacha dwellers”.<sup>30</sup> It stings like the soviet trauma, like an abscess which no one cures, however, this weed protects nature from the anthropocene and its consequences preventing the exploitation of the vegetal. In mythology created by local media hogweed is a terrible murderer of children and small animals, it is a monster, alien, having burst out of the non-ecological zone and violating the harmonious flora and fauna order. It is hard to imagine, but hogweed is an inverted ecocriticism, facing the

<sup>27</sup> See: J. Klein, *Immunology: The Science of Self-Nonsel Discrimination*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982.

<sup>28</sup> R. Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, transl. by Z. Hanafi, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> See: M. Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> The Alexey Buldakov’s artistic projects—the sculptures, tools and the other things made of a dried hogweed—represent an affirmative experience of work with the toxic other. This experience shows that ecological and symbiotal relationships between human species and hogweed species can be found. Buldakov creates a myth of Hogweed not as of a toxic monster that destroys flora and fauna of urban and suburban landscapes, but as of a “conservationist”, the Dark Knight of dark ecologies. In conversation with me, the artist shares his ideas about the ecological usage of toxic greenery: “Heracleum Sosnowskyi is the totemic plant of Moscow Region. Hogweed protects nature from dacha dwellers. Dried out, the plant can’t harm none. Using dry stems of it, humans can build self-supporting structures and volumetric triangulated forms. The plant produces so much biomass that it can be used for production of building blocks and cardboards”.

dark side of ecology and looking for sources of harmonisation. Hogweed plants an ecological thought and it is monstrously affirmative like a criticism from the mouth of the Frankenstein's monster directed against "Nature" with the capital "n".<sup>31</sup> Hogweed burn is a reminder that, addressing abstraction and reducing variety of nature to conventional narrative, we infantilise natural world and build patriarchal/paternalistic/patronising relationships with it. We follow the prejudice that nature needs our care, depends on us and at the same time the human salvation is covered in her fictional purity.

Toxic vegetation of this genetically modified creature disturbs the limits of the human threatening to seize it, to replace human with a stream of uncontrollable and unconscious *zoē*.<sup>32</sup> Creeping mobility of feral hogweed, which colonises post-Soviet territories, confronts with anthropocentric understanding of verdure as passive and irrational greenery. Hogweed not only rules over flora and fauna capturing it and turning it into monstrous poisonous humus. Being the product of agrobiological experiments, the plant questions the boundaries between "natural" and "cultural", crossing the lines between life as the prerogative of anthropos<sup>33</sup> (*bios*) and *zoē*<sup>34</sup> as life of non-humans, as life both over and beyond the human law. In the phase of flowering and seed ripening hogweed is particularly dangerous. Its inflorescences celebrate expelled and toxic flows of demonologies of non-normativity. He fiercely defends what has absorbed the stigma of marginality and patriarchal teratology. Inhabiting abandoned territories, former factories and agricultural lands, this weed cultivates cheerfully its poisonous anarcho-zoe-egalitarianism instead of (post)Soviet bio-egalitarianism based on cruel tyranny of biopower.

<sup>31</sup> In the article "Frankenstein and Ecocriticism" Timothy Morton writes about an ecocritical and affirmatively ecological meaning of the Frankenstein's monster and the novel by Mary Shelley in general.

<sup>32</sup> According to Braidotti, *zoē* attacks the essence of the phallogocentric subject that was produced by the world propelled by the Christian values. Through declaring the existence of indissoluble link between different, non-homogeneous, technological bodies, *zoē* opens the way for new relationships with non-human beings. *Zoē* symbolises the transition from unified subjectivity to unstable and nomadic one. In the work "Posthuman Critical Theory" Braidotti argues that nomadic subjectivity cannot be associated with particular individuals, "but rather takes place transversally, in between nature and technology, male and female, black and white, local and global assemblages that flow across and displace the binaries. These in-between states defy the logic of excluded middle". R. Braidotti, "Posthuman Critical Theory", *Journal of Posthuman Studies* 2017, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 11–12.

<sup>33</sup> See: "*Anthrōpos* has content and properties, both of which produce obligations. *Logos* (as language, speech and logic) attributed exclusively to *ánthropos*, creates the obligation for inductive thought that sets it apart from animal language; *hexis* (as agential habit, engagement with acts that are recognized and shared by the social environment) creates ethics; *to koinōnikon* (the social) creates and demands politics". N. Panourgía, "Anthrōpos", in: *Posthuman Glossary*, ed. by R. Braidotti, M. Hlavajova, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, p. 54.

<sup>34</sup> *Zoē* is a sphere that is initially symbiotically inhabited by animals, women, children, humans with non-white skin tones, slaves and plants including weeds.

## V. Eat and Colonise

Sunroot is an ordering plant. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this plant was a habitué of young naturalists' stations. The value of sunroot may not only be considered in the context of agriculture, the earth apple could also be interpreted as an ideological plant sharing ideas of communist ecology with young pioneers and little octobrists.<sup>35</sup> The USSR had a number of children's institutions for little lovers of nature. In the 1930s children came there to study the foundations of botanic, biology and so-called Michurin's agrobiolgy which was one of the conductors of communist ideas.<sup>36</sup> In the environment of fields, seedlings and school experiments on plant breeding the famous motto *Proletarians of all countries, unite!* acquired posthuman colours. As we remember, communist ideology united just exactly all proletarians, let us emphasise—not humans, but proletarians—something more than the human, i.e. creatures or rather true workers grasped beyond gender, race and species. Ironically, such a loud issue for contemporary humanities as anthropocentrism was not a question in early Soviet times when revolution had just happened.

Young naturalists' stations as well as their animal and plant inhabitants survived the Soviet period with various losses and became a part of educational process of modern children in small provinces. I visited such station when I was a child. There I met such vegetal creatures as sunroot, kombucha or hogweed. I learned how to grow them and how to eat them. Many years later they became my companion species for historical and philosophical investigation, my friends for artistic discoveries that shed light on human-non-human relations, they forced me to rethink human subjectivity, soviet humanism and territory we collectively inhabit.

Today we plant sunroot on junkyards and industrial fields, on abandoned territories of former factories and oil exploitation areas, it spreads along the roads and abandoned agricultural lands. Sunroot helps to clean the soil and the air. In a short time, it creates environmentally friendly zones around industrial centers, highways, in places contaminated with radionuclides and chemicals. “The harvest doesn't have any illness”, nor enemies, but “one hundred per cent viability, yield and quality of crops”.<sup>37</sup> Heads of agricultural farms are pleased, the Potato Genetic Resources De-

<sup>35</sup> *Октябрия* in Russian. It is the name of a youth organization for children between seven and nine years of age. After the age of nine little octobrists were usually modified into young pioneers.

<sup>36</sup> It should be stressed that 1920–30s in soviet genetics, until it was replaced by agrobiolgy, were dedicated to finding material carrier of heredity. This in turn excellently fit into Soviet materialistic ideology. As Loren R. Graham noticed in his book *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union*, many works written in that period used the language of Marxist and dialectical materialism to explain processes of genetic mutation and evolution in general. However, due to repressions, so-called Stalinist purges and growing ignorance in science as a result, fundamental Marxist theory in the USSR, or genetics, was paradoxically rejected on behalf of materialism. Due to this, Lysenkoism took a form of religious mysticism and organicism, but not materialism.

<sup>37</sup> Т. Можаява, “«Скороспелка» победила борщевик в Гатчинском районе”, Гатчинская правда. ру, <https://gtm-pravda.ru/2016/11/07/skorospelka-pobedila-borschewik-v-gatchinskoy-rayone.html>, accessed 1.05.2019.

partment is proud of possessing a large seed collection and “rich genetic resources” for the productive exchange with China. The results of the conference *Sunroot and Its Potential* indicated that sunroot can stop the growth of hogweed if planted into the heart of the poisonous monster bushes.<sup>38</sup> Now dacha dwellers can sleep peacefully.<sup>39</sup> Sunroot, or so-called *skorospelka*<sup>40</sup> is a new three-meter high green giant which protects their earth from toxic hogweed, guards their economical interests and nourishes organisms with such essential vitamins B and C. Local media humanises sunroot and its properties creating a myth about a new guardian of culture, a caretaker that has been employed by human agriculture and farm economy to quell the barbarism of its antagonist—*Heracleum sosnowskyi*. The mankind of Gatchina places its hopes in precocious sunroot which will stand near the farmer to win back intoxicated territories for new buildings and farms where the business of improving efficiency of other plants and animals’ usage will take place.

Sunroot can digest hogweed, we can digest sunroot. We also can easily apply preventive measures against the latter, because this verdure is not poisonous. Possibly, one day sunroot will realise its oppression by biogenetical capitalism<sup>41</sup> and will rebel as a new, strong and genetically modified product against the human. Like its antagonist, sunroot will rebel to break out of science labs and join the feral atlas of post-Soviet spaces. Perhaps its peaceful nature will be reduced to getting into a human, into his mouth, letting itself be eaten and thereby prolonging its vegetal existence.

After all, unlike feral species of Sosnowsky’s Hogweed, sunroot can be fried, backed and boiled. Shelves of local shops and health food stores full up with new goods made from rhizomes, leaves, stables and flowers of this plant—breakfast cereals, syrups, ready-made food, crisps, etc. Sunroot reminds us that humans should eat vegetables for good health. Vegetativeness is one of the numerous tentacular units between humans and plants which is a necessary condition of our emerging and surviving as a species. All in all, plants produce oxygen and form nourishing humus for our growth, becoming and spreading. We are vegetative,<sup>42</sup> but reckless in our omission of the fact that by and large humans are the result of rhizomatic thinking of green tenta-

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Recently, the Russian government has obliged to fine unscrupulous dacha dwellers for hogweeds which grow and flourish on their poorly cultivated territories.

<sup>40</sup> Literally translating from the Russian: “Something that ripens very quickly”.

<sup>41</sup> In *The Posthuman* Braidotti describes biogenetical capitalism in the terms of a source for the negative postantropocentrism. She argues that biogenetical structure of contemporary capitalism concerns the human genome decoding project, the stem cell research and many biotechnological interventions in animal and floral organisms. Braidotti writes: “[...] the opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic capitalism induces, if not the actual erasure, at least the blurring of the distinction between the human and other species when it comes to profiting from them. Seeds, plants, animals and bacteria fit into this logic of insatiable consumption alongside various specimens of humanity”. R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013, p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> According to Haraway, we have never been humans in the biological sense. According to Anna Tsing, we have been domesticated by cereals, umbellifers, nightshades, mushrooms, algae, etc. Plants, along

cles, roots, tendrils and stems. During the long evolutionary period all the useless and useful plants have been inventing a multitude of ways of how to be eaten by humans and other animals and thereby survive, spread, co-evolute and not disappear at the expense of us. They have been changing human social and political structure as well as influencing the ways of human settlement. However, the evolutionary processes of mutual digestions and de-/re-/compositions, which enabled animals and plants to get into us and us to get into them, founded the basis of multiple becomings-with among human-non-human creatures, the basis of their communist-immunologic reactions.

## VI. Flower-with Feral

Soviet postanthropocentrism has been replaced by post-soviet ferality of people and territories in which these people and their companion species are situatively immersed, embodied and embedded. Among big and small human settlements and villages, inside flats and housing complexes, the country—drenched with unseen living, economical and political activity of feral flora and fauna—unfolds. On landfill, in compost heaps, on the boundaries between “nature” and “culture” the peculiar nature comes and manages to live among different forms of global capitalism; remnants of soviet economical models, anthropocene, plantatiocene, plasticene and other temporalities have assembled many opportunities for the future. This nature rises from the temporal polyphony, mixing within itself the geological rhythms of the Earth and of human history. The nature does not look like paradise. Equally, its inhabitants clothed in plastic waste and wires, rooted in polluted soil, do not look like those who came out of paradise or once belonged to this place either. Being the “creatures of the mud, not the sky”,<sup>43</sup> they inhabit one planet, share one destiny and face the same issues. Transversally crossing multiple discourses that both unite and divide spheres of *bios* and *zoē*, humans and non-humans form a part of a global and technologically mediated continuum, the “Naturecultures”. It is based on concrete, close, material-discursive relationships between creatures that are embedded into destroyed landscapes and situative bodily *knowledges* about connections with each other. Naturecultures as a political practice of location grows on the ruins of injury, it has nothing in common with general narratives concerning interconnections of everything with everything. As Haraway noticed, “Nobody lives everywhere; everybody lives somewhere. Nothing is connected to everything; everything is connected to something”.<sup>44</sup> The mentioned “concreteness” was lost during the attempt to build communism, when concrete lands and locations were turned into utopian territories, today destroyed and poisonous. The demand of the concreteness, which we propose to ourselves in the conversation

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with different geological factors “have explored” humans, affecting their settlement, social structure and way of life.

<sup>43</sup> D.J. Haraway, *When Species Meet...*, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> D.J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble...*, p. 31.

about living beings and their damaged habitats, is connected with the attempt to create an affirmative narration (on the molecular, sub-atomic, biome, etc. level) aimed at building more elastic boundaries and sympoetic relations between humans, animals, plants and technologies.

Multiple and intra-active subjectivities dwell naturecultures, taking place in material-discursive flows and reconfigurations of postanthropocentric landfills, technologically mediated humus which breeds new forms of symbiogenesis. Postanthropocentric landscapes of post-Soviet territories are filled with such queerifying forms. Humans, animals and plants, living near abandoned deposits, not leaving their homes situated by gaping holes in the earth, possess a special everyday ferality. Ferality is a latent part of daily life of Russian people. It brings them closer to other creatures with whom they coexist on the territories marked by Soviet trauma. We depend on collection of wildberries and mushrooms. Most of us live inside the non-human streams of cows, horses and goats that fill the urban spaces of small provinces as well as inside the stream of irresponse-ability that causes mass killings of feral cats and dogs and mass replenishment of their ranks. It leads to the exploitation of hogweed, oil, soil, animals, humans and prisoners. Despite its dehumanising potential,<sup>45</sup> such kind of ferality must be called a special form of sympoetic co-existence of humans, animals, strawberries, blueberries, wild garlic and other species which are economically, politically, biologically linked.<sup>46</sup> In the case of humans, the sympoesis manifests itself as not quite “human”, but rather vegetal (even weedy) willingness to emerge in blasted landscapes. Swarmings or sproutings in a poisonous compost heap uncover the politics of ruderal flora that appears to be close to human destiny.

At the same time, flowering-with<sup>47</sup> ruderal flora, all kinds of cultural fugivities, ferality of post-Soviet territories and huge wastelands that have arisen after a shutdown of production, requires posing the issue of finite flourishing that brings humans and plants together on different levels, bears a situated, mortal, germinal wisdom

<sup>45</sup> Accordingly with Michael Marder’s philosophy, it is impossible to talk about plants as companion species for which we have ethical responsibilities without questioning different concepts of humanity and human subjectivity, in other words, not “dehumanising the human thinking”. M. Marder, *Plant-Thinking...*, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> One could write many books developing the Tsing’s idea about precar economic models and spreading it on the Russian provincial discourse. In many cases the economy of entire villages and small towns depends on harvesting wild berries and mushrooms, hunting and the fur trade. Most often the official statistics are not aware of this kind of human-non-human cooperation. About 40 percent of rural Russia’s population are involved in chimerical, natural-cultural, socio-economic flows. (See: “Пусть думают, что нас мало и мы вымираем”. Социологи о невидимой стороне социально-экономической жизни российской провинции”, *Лента.ру*, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2015/10/24/government/>, accessed 13.04.2019).

<sup>47</sup> In the book *Through Vegetal Being* Luce Irigaray introduces the concept of *flowering-with* to emphasise the ontological bonds between humans and the plant world. Greenery surrounding the man could be interpreted in terms of their nutrient cradle and an obligatory condition of human’s presence, as well as an endless source of philosophizing.

necessary for overcoming the crisis of thinking, living, making and believing in better times. It matters what concepts we think with. To continue speaking Haraway's words, flowering—with demands from us “to reseed our souls and our home worlds in order to flourish—again, or maybe just for the first time—on a vulnerable planet that is not yet murdered”.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> D.J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble...*, p. 117.

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