

Boris Groys in conversation with
Liza Lazerson

Putin: Restoration of Destruction

e-flux journal #126 — april 2022 [Boris Groys in conversation with Liza Lazerson](#)
Putin: Restoration of Destruction

01/09

Russian journalist Liza Lazerson interviewed Boris Groys for her podcast, as posted on YouTube on March 21, 2022. This is an abridged version of their conversation.

Liza Lazerson: Boris, you probably know that Instagram is being closed down in Russia, and access to Facebook has been restricted. Does this mean that the era of global corporations, and the global world in general, is over, and we are again seeing a renaissance of nation-states?

Boris Groys: I don't think that is the case. Commercial enterprises are focused on money, on earnings, on income. This means that they must be guided by the public's tastes and needs and are dependent on politics and economics. And it means, among other things, that they are not universally able to embrace all viewpoints or satisfy all segments of the public.

LL: There had been a long-running discussion about whether these corporations would become quasi-states or meta-states. But we see that, on the contrary, they have become mouthpieces for the authorities of existing states. Has it transpired that capitalism has given ground to politics and ideology in the global sense?

BG: No, you cannot say that. The fact is that capitalism has always evolved within nation-states. Utterly international stateless capitalism has never existed, generally speaking. Actually, capitalism can grow only when militaries and police control the territories in which it has been established. What exactly is capitalism? It is making money by means of exchange. But if we look at the history of mankind, making money was mainly accomplished through robbery, as during the entire Middle Ages and the whole era before that. A certain amount of security and control had to be established first. It is natural that all capitalist institutions are licensed in some way by the state and are subject to the laws of the states within which they operate. This also applies, of course, to all IT companies. They are all registered somewhere, pay taxes, and are legally liable in their countries.

LL: The latest news is that Facebook has permitted users to post calls for violence against the Russian military. For the sake of one country's politics, it is willing to violate its own corporate laws. Previously, this would have been unimaginable.

BG: The fact is that globalization reached its peak during the Cold War. All the world's



State Emblem of the Russian Empire, 18th century.

conflicts were subordinated, then, to a single conflict – the conflict between capitalism and socialism, between the West and the East, between the United States and the Soviet Union – and it dominated the entire globe. The Berlin Wall was the symbolic capital of the whole world, if you will. After the Berlin Wall fell, globalization initially – during the nineties – kept going by inertia. But since the early noughties, this one big conflict has disintegrated into loads of regional and minor conflicts. The concept of ethnic-cultural identity and religious identity has emerged. The signal was, of course, 9/11, the attack on the Twin Towers in New York. For the first time, it was clear that regional and ethno-cultural conflicts were emerging and were more important than the old Cold War–era conflicts. As this central conflict waned, minor conflicts multiplied, along with ethnic and cultural identities. If you look at what has been happening in Asia, Iran, India, China, Africa, and Latin America, ethnic and cultural identities have come to the fore. The same is true in the United States. There is no dirtier word now than “universalism,” at least in contemporary Western intellectual publications. This means that each and every cultural identity wants to be represented somehow, to control the mode in which it is represented and voices itself. Accordingly, it limits the possibilities for the large corporations to act.

There is another point that cannot be ignored. What is the internet, generally? It is a mirror that reflects you, it is a terribly narcissistic way of communicating with the world because you only get what you click. You know a word, and you click it, getting information about this word, concept, event, or whatever it is. But if something does not interest you or you don't know it, you cannot click on it and you cannot learn anything about it. The problem with the internet is that it is absolutely tautological: it basically cannot tell you anything new. It simply reacts to your existing desires, as shaped in the past. Naturally, if the internet is the dominant contemporary medium, then it constantly encourages your desire, possibility, or intention (even against your will) of staying within a rather narrow circle of existing interests, opinions, and needs. This is a rather interesting effect: so-called globalization has led to total localization. If you follow your friends or people you know on the internet, you live in a very closed and narrow world. And all the ads you receive are personalized. Meta's algorithms compute everything in such a way that you only see the things that you have already found interesting and pleasant, but you don't see anything you would find unpleasant.

03/09

e-flux journal #126 — april 2022 [Boris Groys in conversation with Liza Lazerson](#)
Putin: Restoration of Destruction

LL: You are talking about processes of decolonization and deglobalization. Vladimir Putin is trying to propagate the so-called Russian World, uniting Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and maybe even Northern Kazakhstan under its flag in some sort of imperial structure. Are his actions part of this trend or do they buck it?

BG: They totally fit the trend. Putin's is a regional politics: it is aimed at defending a particular region and its alleged ethno-cultural identity. Iran and the Islamist movements in general have served as the model for those seeking to banish all things Western in the hope that when you remove them, your true cultural identity (for example, an Islamic identity) will shine forth with its natural light. The same thing is gradually happening now in China and India. Cultural identity is discovered by purging the “Western abominations” that have accumulated like a dense layer on its surface. Russia has repeatedly evinced the desire to purge itself of the West – of Facebook, McDonald's, modern art, rock music, of everything that the Russian does not need and can do perfectly well without. The belief is that if this stuff is removed, the divine wisdom of the Russian spirit will shine with its own light.

The only problem is (and it is an old problem that has been around since the nineteenth century) that this process of stripping and purging Russia of everything Western can never end. There is a non-European cultural substrate in Iran, India, and China. So, when you purge everything European, something homegrown, something originally non-European, does emerge. I am not saying whether this exists in Russia or not. I can only say that all attempts to find it have proved futile and suicidal. That is, the movement back to origins and the Russian World have proved completely suicidal.

In this sense, Russia has reproduced a well-known trope of German culture. In the nineteenth century, Germans also argued that German culture was inherently different from Western civilization, that German culture should be purged of Western civilization to be manifested in all its might. Upon closer examination, however, it transpired that this power was purely negative. German thinkers reflected on this, even glorifying these suicidal, self-destructive tendencies to some extent. Russian culture did this to some extent, too. We can read about the suicidal search for one's foundations in Dostoevsky's works, for example. From a cultural perspective, the new paroxysm to purge things Western and get back to Russianness, which we

are now witnessing, is a purely suicidal operation.

LL: It's a "special operation." It is interesting that you say that Vladimir Putin's schemes are based on the Islamic world's know-how. In this context, Ramzan Kadyrov's constant involvement seems super curious. This appeal to traditional values also exists in Russia, nationally, as well as locally, in Chechnya, Dagestan, and the Caucasian republics. Based on what you say, is Kadyrov's constant involvement intentional?

BG: His involvement has a definite tactical or political benefit, of course. Generally, though, I think that the Putin regime is trying to hark back to a very large Russian tradition – searching for the Russian World's foundations by purging it of the West. In this sense, I have the distinct feeling that Western sanctions are perhaps the most important goal of this entire operation, or, at least, one of its goals: finally evicting the West from Russian territory, from the Russian World. After all, this is what Iran and many Muslim states did, what Afghanistan showed us not so long ago. But, for this to happen, of course, it is vital that all people who belong to the Russian folk [*ruskii narod*], including allegedly Ukrainians (who have been caught in the crossfire in this instance) live the same way, the "Russian way."

And yet, no one is asking people in Mali or Peru to live the "Russian way." This is the difference between today's Russia and the Soviet Union, because back in those days there were communist organizations and parties in every country of the world. They wanted everyone to live under socialism. It was a universal message aimed at the whole world. But the current "Russian message" is not universal: it is not addressed to the whole world. Second, it makes no sense to anyone. It is incomprehensible even to the Russian people, and even more incomprehensible outside of Russia, because no one understands what this Russian identity is. In the case of Islam, we can grasp this identity, but it is simply incomprehensible in Russia's case.

LL: You mean that this ideological confrontation between the West and Russia, which the regime has been trying to construe as the basis of a real conflict, does not really exist?

BG: Absolutely! What defense of traditional values? Those selfsame traditional values are defended by any conservative party in the West that opposes abortion, gays, and so on. This is just a normal Western European conservative attitude. There is nothing specifically Russian

about it.

LL: In one of your books, you argue that the absolute value of progress is not obvious and that all revolutionaries and artists fought against progress to a great extent. Can we rank Vladimir Putin among them?

BG: No, of course not. He is not combating progress in this sense at all. When artists fight progress, they are fighting against the loss of harmony with their environment. What is progress? You lived in your cherry orchard, and you ate cherries. Then a man came and chopped down all the cherry trees. When he is asked why he cut them down and there are no more cherries to eat, he says, "That's progress!" This is repulsive, naturally, and you want to go back to the countryside. Putin supposedly lives in a country house, but he is not working to turn the whole of Russia into a cherry orchard. He has no such project. His conception of Russian identity and the Russian World clearly has nothing to do with this. It is something else, something pseudo-German.

Everyone focused on the historical part of Putin's history lecture, but I was struck by something else entirely. Maybe it is my German way of looking at things. When he said that history's main motive force is the will and that they who have the will are triumphant, and when their will weakens, they are defeated, I immediately recalled Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. The theme of tension, power, and will is tantamount to this same theme of progress, if you like. Because will conceived this way is always manifested in terms of missiles and airplanes, in terms of something quite literally ironclad. And the will itself must be like iron. This is quite remote from the protest against progress that began in Europe in the late nineteenth century and continues to this day.

LL: If we rise above this entire situation, which today appears to be a catastrophe, how do you see the situation in Ukraine from a historical point of view? To what historical tendency does it conform?

BG: First of all, we don't know yet, because we don't know how this whole story will end. We are only at the beginning of this entire adventure. Hegel said that Minerva's owl must fly first, and then something can be understood. But it hasn't flown yet. One thing can be said, however. Russia has greatly discredited itself. It has caused a huge number of different misfortunes and suffering, and all of them have been documented. They are being watched in real time

04/09

e-flux journal #126 — april 2022 Boris Groys in conversation with Liza Lazerson
Putin: Restoration of Destruction

all around the world. So, we can say for sure that Russia will not be able to fully recover morally for a long time, and maybe it will never be able to recover.

LL: Really?

BG: Yes, I think so. Because it's all too obvious and it's happening in plain view. And at the same time, it is inexplicable. I must say that all the texts written in the West on this topic have asked the same questions: Why? What is the goal? Why have they done it? Any explanation would suit people, in a sense. But there is no explanation, no one can find one. We can talk about a psychodrama of some sort, looking for similarly self-destructive impulses and suicidal behaviors in the past, as I did now. But it is impossible to detect any practical rationale in all of this. It is unclear how it might end. It is unclear what the goal is and how it can be achieved.

LL: Russians seem to be illogical people who could really push the red button, for lack of a better word. Any Russian is capable of doing it, practically.

BG: They have already pushed it. They started a war with the West on Ukrainian territory, but the war's purpose is unclear. The only explanation I would offer is that it is an attempt to draw a border between themselves and the West; moreover, a border that would no longer be possible to cross. It would not be a border in the military sense, but a border that would make it impossible for Westerners to come to Russia and sell goods that corrupt the Russian populace, and for Russians to go to the West and pick up harmful ideas there. It would be a border between the West and Russia at the level of human interaction that no one would want to cross it.

LL: When this border between the West and Russia or the Soviet Union existed in the past, it was built by the Soviet authorities. But now it seems that the West is lowering this [new] Iron Curtain. It is Western companies that are leaving the [Russian] market, Western universities refusing to enroll Russian students. Basically, it's the Iron Curtain in reverse. How did it happen? How rational is it?

BG: I think you're wrong on both counts. Because Soviet Russia was very much integrated into global processes. There were communist parties everywhere; there was an international communist movement, and there were national liberation movements. Russians were ubiquitous. Maybe they were not the Russians

who would have liked to study at Harvard. But those Russians who wanted to go to fight in Angola, or who wanted to help the Communist Party in Italy or France, they had the opportunity to do so.

LL: I mean, at the level of private life, foreigners always brought records and jeans to the Soviet Union, sold ties at Intourist, and treated Soviet citizens quite well. But now it is as if all Russians are being told, "Goodbye! We don't want to let you drink Coca-Cola anymore."

BG: No, it's not like that. Back then, there was an ideological standoff. But this confrontation was comprehensible. Everyone in the West understood what socialism was, what kind of economic system it was. Everyone knew about Marx, and Lenin and Trotsky were also read. The communist ideology was comprehensible and well-known, so when people from the West came to Russia, they came to a country that they understood theoretically. They would then, let's say, make friends with some Russians but not others, establish relationships, bring jeans, and so on. That's another matter. But everything was clear to them. Now we are dealing with an explosion of uncontrolled irrational violence that has come from this country.

When they see Russians in the West, people now don't know what their stance is. Are they agents of this violence? And so they give them wide berth. People are generally cautious. They don't want to get mixed up with something that may be dangerous to them, and Russia is something that has revealed that it is a danger to the rest of the world. It is the same with regions where there is flooding or volcanic eruptions. You wouldn't go there, but not because you have a bad attitude toward volcanoes. You just don't want something falling on your head. Western sanctions are targeted at Russia, not at Russians. They are directed against Russia as a state for the simple purpose of weakening Russian military power. Since Russians are implicated in the actions of the country in which they live, they have naturally also become victims of these sanctions. To be honest, it's hard to object to that.

LL: Yes, Boris, it is clear that there is a war going on and that this too is a way of impacting the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, the most expensive thing that the West buys from us is energy. There was a news item today about the nine billion euros that the European Union has paid for importing our oil and gas. In this light, some of the other sanctions look like plain old

05/09

e-flux journal #126 — april 2022 [Boris Groys in conversation with Liza Lazerson](#)
Putin: Restoration of Destruction

cancel culture. [Oil and gas imports], which can go a good long way toward fattening the military power of Russia (I was about to say the Soviet Union), have not been canceled, but, for example, the online learning platform Coursera, the IELTS English-language exam for university applicants, and some apps for cyclists – all are leaving the country. Those are lifestyle products that definitely will not affect the power of the Russian Federation in any way. These companies are all leaving just to make a gesture. Doesn't this look like cancel culture?

BG: Maybe it looks like it, maybe it doesn't. But, you see, people are comparing in this case the lifestyle of Russians and the lifestyle of Ukrainians. They believe that since bombs are not falling on Russians, their lifestyle is generally better, even if they don't have those apps. We can say that Russians have mostly lucked out. That is the first consideration. The second consideration is that the whole situation with oil has been cause for lamentation here [in the West]. There have been a million articles on the West's lack of foresight, that it did not foresee this possibility and prepare for it. This is really the case, and everyone here is quite unhappy about it.

LL: Maybe you know that the University of Tartu [in Estonia] has decided this year not to accept applicants from Russia and Belarus at all. Screenings of Sergei Eisenstein, conferences on Velimir Khlebnikov, and other cultural events have been canceled at some other universities. An Italian university canceled a conference on Dostoevsky. These are such direct instances of cancel culture. Russian people are being cancelled retroactively. How is Dostoevsky to blame for Vladimir Putin's self-destructive stance?

BG: Dostoevsky himself is not to blame and canceling yet another conference on Dostoevsky will do no harm to Dostoevsky personally, from my point of view. But in the current geopolitical circumstances, holding a conference on Dostoevsky or something else like it is tantamount, in the eyes of Western society, to public solidarity with Russia.

LL: It's clear that "caution" is such a delicate word, but in practice it means isolation. One way or another, Russians have become social and cultural outcasts. This is how it looks from Russia, in any case.

BG: It is self-isolation, Liza. Russia is engaged in self-isolation. It is not that someone is canceling it; it has canceled itself. Cancel culture is a peacetime notion. We are not in

peacetime right now. Another logic has taken effect.

LL: One gets the sense that since brands are used to operating within this cancel-culture paradigm, they have to say so-long to Russia to maintain their reputations. Some companies are definitely acting on this basis, it seems. There is the example of Uniqlo, a Japanese clothing brand, which at first said that it would definitely not leave, because clothes are essential goods and Russians are not rapists and murderers. But then, apparently, they were pressured and changed their minds, deciding that they would leave after all.¹

BG: There is no such mechanism as "they were pressured." This is commercial culture, capitalism. You use the word "capitalism," but you must understand what it is. Capitalism is when companies depend on sales and consumption. Contemporary capitalism is consumer capitalism. In this case, consumption is more important than production. For corporations to stay afloat, they have to come across as pleasant to consumers. It does not generate a pleasant buzz when rockets are raining down on people's heads. That is the whole point. There is no deliberate conspiracy or peculiar decisions being made here. This is just the logic of capitalism.

LL: You have probably heard about the [new Russian] law on "fake news."² It is forbidden in our country to say the word "war" [this word has been bleeped out in the podcast – Trans.], but this is not news. Some time ago, politically correct language and strange euphemisms came to be used in Russian news reports. Instead of the words "explosion" (*vzryv*), "fire" (*pozhar*), and "quarantine" (*karantin*), the words "bang" (*khlopok*), "conflagration" (*vozgoranie*), and "non-working days" (*nerabochie dni*) were used. Those are the politically correct terms. What are the possible effects of language control?

BG: I don't think it can lead to anything in the long run because language evolves of its own accord. The Russian language has become quite Americanized, by the way. This is due not only to the large number of English words in usage, but also grammatical and syntactic constructions that are quite reminiscent of American English. This shows that the language develops on its own. You can try to control it and create an artificial official language – by forbidding obscenities, for example. But such control won't make them disappear from the language. Nor will other forms of the language disappear due to such control, either. Overall, the language will

06/09

e-flux journal #126 — april 2022 Boris Groys in conversation with Liza Lazerson
Putin: Restoration of Destruction

become more parodic, perhaps. That's how it was under Soviet rule.

LL: What do you think about the term “post-truth”?

BG: I think that it's a pretty stupid term because there has never been any truth, actually. If by “truth” you mean conformity to the facts, then different people see different facts. Each person will cite you a thousand “facts” in proof of what they mean. I don't think that it is a matter of truth or post-truth at all, but rather that when you talk to a person, you have to understand what they mean. I would like to return to that point. Nobody understands what Russia means to achieve.

LL: So, the fact is that the whole world talks about it this way, but inside Russia, in our informational bubble, we have an alternative version of reality, and people believe in it. Meaning, that there really is no truth. For millions of people, that is, the truth is still the one supplied by official propaganda.

BG: That's right. Because they want to think this, this is what they will think. And they will interpret all the facts and pictures they see in this vein. People simply believe that this [“special military”] operation is justified. To change their point of view, they must become disenchanted with it. If people think that the Russian World is a good thing and needs to be propagated, they will interpret absolutely everything accordingly. No facts, post-facts, or fake news will change their minds. They must become disillusioned with the war's goals and causes. Then they will change their point of view.

LL: Do I understand correctly that if the special operation is successful, and the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic are liberated and annexed to Russia, the Russian Federation will continue to live this truth? Will it be in our history books?

BG: Yes, of course. But what would it mean? Russia would be isolated from the whole world. We don't know whether it would be able to control those territories even after winning this war. It would live amid increasing repression. And at some point, people would grow tired of it.

LL: The law on fake news implies, among other things, that people in Russia cannot go to anti-war demonstrations. And yet, we remember that anti-war demonstrations were a driver of popular culture in the late sixties; recall the peace buttons. Most of the popular culture in the

seventies – hippie culture, art rock – was based on such symbols of liberation and the struggle against the regime. Why does none of this exist in Russia, in your opinion? What has to happen for a body of art and culture to grow up in Russia around what is happening, in circumstances in which we cannot even say the word “war” and go out to demonstrate?

BG: All those laws and prohibitions are meant to strengthen the repressive regime, and nothing more. In America, the movement against the Vietnam War arose in the sixties amid the crisis of the old political and social system and the emergence of a new one. It was a revolutionary situation. There is no revolutionary situation in Russia. But it is possible that fatigue will set in. I don't know whether you remember the end of the Soviet regime. People just stopped working, nobody did anything. And they constantly said that they were tired.

LL: So, there was a collective national depression?

BG: People would drink coffee or beer during work hours. They would chat or talk on the phone. But they didn't do any work at all. And yet, they would say constantly that they were awfully tired. Everything failed, because all these apparatuses – bureaucratic, industrial, etc. – feed on living flesh and blood. They feed on the energy of the masses, as Lenin said.

But when I look at today's Russians, I don't get the feeling that they have huge reserves of energy. Therefore, you can stage *Triumph of the Will* as you like, but you cannot force the masses to mobilize. If they don't mobilize and invest their energy, it will fail by itself, not because anyone protests against it. The Russian Empire failed in this way, and so did the Soviet Union. It failed due to fatigue; people lost their energy.

LL: It's quite interesting, because there is a sense of a rolling total depression on a national scale. But I'm also interested that many Ukrainians on social media at the everyday level often point out that Russian people are inert and lazy, and that is why such things happen to us. Is this a national trait, or are we just in a low energy flow right now?

BG: Russians have been in different phases, including very energetic ones. In particular, the phase at the beginning of the Soviet regime, the nineteen twenties, and so on. Those were terrible years, of course, but quite energetic. Working at the limit of their strength and capabilities, people did a lot during that time. It was an

07/09

e-flux journal #126 — april 2022 Boris Groys in conversation with Liza Lazerson
Putin: Restoration of Destruction

incredible cultural explosion, and a huge country was built. But there is no such energy now. This is a senseless suicidal adventure amid a total depression. I have no idea what the point is.

LL: There has been a particular reverence towards socialist realism in Russia in recent years. State-sponsored films – a huge number of patriotic war films – have been literally shot in the socialist-realist style. How effective has it been to invoke and try to resurrect socialist realism, thus making it serve [the post-Soviet state]?

BG: What is socialist realism, generally? It seems to me that socialist realism was something that existed in the nineteen thirties. Post-Stalinist art ceased to be socialist realist. The zeal for building a new world was no longer present. Post-Stalinist art described a world that had already been created, a world in which people actually lived. It often depicted that world ironically, as borne out by all the film comedies from the period.

Returning to those Soviet standards is a commercial strategy at its core. When you appeal to a large audience, you inevitably have to use the standards of speech, image, plot, and so on that are familiar to that audience. If you don't, the audience will reject what you produce. Naturally, the Russian audience knows Soviet films, Hollywood films, and video games. And so, when I see new Russian films intended for a popular audience, I see a combination of those three styles, with the battle scenes modeled on video games.

Consequently, a new type of mass art has appeared, which claims to cater to the public, but it is difficult for me to say how much the public actually responds to it. I would be surprised if it reacted particularly positively, because these films – unlike, for example, *Jolly Fellows* (1934), or *Circus* (1936), or something like that – are completely devoid of energy. They're not sexy.

LL: Besides the resurrected socialist realism 2.0, there has also been a very broad turn to classic socialist realism per se. When you wrote *The Total Art of Stalinism*, it was such a revolutionary work, maybe even countercultural, because it opposed the generally accepted point of view in academic circles that socialist realism was not genuine art. Some curators (for example, Andrei Yerofeyev³) said that socialist realist art should be relegated to storerooms or even burned. But now, after so much time has passed, the socialist realism of which you spoke so many

years ago has been officially returned to its rightful pedestal. How do you feel about this?

BG: I think the problem is that when people return in their minds to the USSR, they forget that it was a socialist state. Contemporary Russia is a capitalist country, a money-driven country. People in Russia work to make money. No one wants to go back to socialism, including the current Russian leadership.

What did I argue in *The Total Art of Stalinism*? That there was still a life-building impulse in Stalinist culture, a desire to remake life completely, rather than leave it the way it was – using the methods at the disposal of the authorities. But this life-building energy was completely absent after Stalin's death. It disappeared. Soviet art after Stalin is a petty bourgeois paradise. It is absolutely devoid of utopian projects and life-building energy. The people we see on screen in the films from that era do not want to build world communism, but to get their hands on a two- or three-room flat. This was already underway in the sixties – the new housing estates filled with khrushchovki and all that.⁴ It continues to this day.

What is the main thrust of twentieth-century Russian history? It is a very long story of restoration in the aftermath of revolution. It is the story of the French Revolution, which took twenty years to complete in France, but which has taken a hundred years in Russia. First there was the revolution, then there was the Thermidorian Reaction – that is, the New Economic Policy. After the Thermidorian Reaction, there was Napoleon – that is, the Stalinist dictatorship and imperialist wars. Then the slow restoration process began. It started in the late Stalinist period and ended, in fact, in the nineties. First, all the Suvorovs, Kutuzovs, czars, palaces, and double-headed eagles – the whole aesthetic of prerevolutionary Russia – were revamped and repainted, and then capitalism was restored. The process dragged on for many years. Anything could be bought and sold in Russia as early as the late seventies and eighties. In fact, the marketplace was already present in the country then. It simply resurfaced when the socialist superstructure collapsed. Marx describes this typical situation: the base can no longer sustain the superstructure, so it falls apart.

LL: It is curious that you say that Russia spent the entire twentieth century recovering from the Revolution. Does this mean that the current special operation is also a kind of unfinished war?

08/09

e-flux journal #126 — april 2022 Boris Groys in conversation with Liza Lazerson
Putin: Restoration of Destruction

BG: It is a continuation of the restoration. When a restoration process begins, the impulse is to restore everything. Just as when the process of revolution begins, one wants to revolutionize everything. As part of this restoration, the question arises as to where it should happen, geographically speaking. Solzhenitsyn, who outlined the program of the restoration, as we know, argued that Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Northern Kazakhstan were a single, coherent region in which restoration should take place. Restoration is also a violent process, in fact. It is often said that revolution breeds violence, but so does restoration. For example, the restoration that kicked off after Napoleon's defeat engendered a period of endless colonial wars. When the process was launched, it immediately turned quite violent – and immediately led to wars. It is now being repeated in Russia. This is a restoration that has taken a violent military turn. And since it is not a revolution, but a restoration, it is also dismal and depressing in spirit.

×

Translated from the Russian by Thomas H. Campbell

e-flux journal #126 — april 2022 [Boris Groys in conversation with Liza Lazerson](#)
Putin: Restoration of Destruction

09/09

1

See <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/business/uniqlo-fast-retailing-russia.html>.

2

See <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-introduce-jail-terms-spreading-fake-information-about-army-2022-03-04/>.

3

See https://www.rferl.org/a/Russians_Risk_Jail_In_Forbidden_Art_Trial/2097267.html.

4

See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khrushchyovka>.