

Andrei Tarkovskii's existential ruminations. A man and a woman are on the run from an oppressive government. An inspector is hot on their trail. Time travel is involved (or is it?) Character motivations remain ambiguous, as do plot developments. These separate textual and visual elements are all masterfully composed (and/or composited), but their meaning and the links in between remain stubbornly enigmatic even upon repeat viewings.

Despite the absence of a straightforward narrative, the film's eccentric, dryly comical script is one of its strongest points. Barić's philosophical musings, non sequiturs, and deadpan humor come together into a genuinely amusing, occasionally profound, and surprising contemplation of topics such as the future, identity, alienation, and persecution. The results are oddly quotable—a rarity for a piece so relentlessly experimental. Seemingly, throwaway one-liners such as “the future is an abandoned construction site, cancelled due to lack of funds” are likely to resonate, especially in the present pandemic moment.

Accidental Luxuriance is directed, written, animated, and scored by Barić. This could have easily doomed the feature as a creative ego trip, but the Croatian artist remains self-assured throughout without becoming self-indulgent. In fact, the skillful intermingling of visual styles and techniques is infused with a degree of playfulness that offsets the complexity of the animation and the dynamic speed of the editing. This element of play is evident in the title itself, which turns out to be surprisingly apt despite (or perhaps because of) its apparent randomness. The film actually is a rebus—a puzzle presenting concepts through inventive combinations of word and image. It is certainly both translucent and watery in its elusiveness, elliptical storytelling, and ever-morphing animated shapes that flow into each other both between and within frames. It is only the luxuriance that turns out to be decidedly not accidental.

I recommend this film highly, if not widely. This is experimental animation at its most unbridled, challenging, infuriating, and mesmerizing. For audiences unaccustomed to such an unapologetic, almost taunting embrace of the medium's avant-garde potential, this film may prove a tedious chore. For the adventurous viewer, however, it is a tantalizing provocation that both demands and rewards puzzling over.

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Belarus as Media, Part II: Enter the Cyber Partisans. www.youtube.com/c/cpartisans.

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The headlines from Minsk have been horrifying of late: in August 2020 presidential election results awarded Aliaksandar Lukashenka his sixth term by literally unbelievable margins. Hundreds of thousands flooded the streets of Minsk in protest, to be met in turn with a brutal crackdown from the state police, killing at least ten and torturing many, many more. In response to sanctions from the European Union, the regime began weaponizing the bodies of immigrants, recruiting and then violently driving twenty thousand innocent people against the Polish border on the eve of winter months. The situation is untenable: what is to be done in Belarus? One group is offering new means to an old answer: revolution, by means of hacking, to execute a comprehensive plan of revolutionary media events to both hack and topple the regime. The Belarus Cyber Partisans are perfecting perhaps the next generation of what anthropologist Gabriella Coleman has called the public-interest hack, or “a

computer infiltration for the purpose of leaking documents that will have political consequence.”¹ We appear to be witnessing a new genre of media events profound political multiplier effects.

The Belarus Cyber Partisans are no joke. Fact-checked by the *Washington Post* in September 2021, the hacker group appears to have wreaked havoc on Lukashenka’s regime through an unprecedented series of hacks. Reportedly initially composed of fifteen members with backgrounds in entirely legal IT, the group claims no centralized leadership and has grown in ranks likely working outside of Belarus for safety: the Cyber Partisans have successfully hacked into 5.3 million recordings of phone taps, insider documentation of state-ordered violence, the identities and addresses of police informants and enforcers, and the entire national passport database. They have disclosed how the regime underreported COVID mortality rates by a factor of at least fifteen, and are monitoring the regime’s abuse of immigrants. Their plan is to slowly release over six terabytes of sensitive data, sustaining and focusing media attention on the plight of Belarus all the while. Coleman, known for her work with Anonymous, has called the Cyber Partisans the most comprehensive hack of a state by a group of hacktivists to date. The group’s agenda, available on Telegram and other social media, outlines a comprehensive plan to continue to hack the Lukashenka regime to pieces. When the international criminal court comes calling, this group has the receipts.

In an anonymous interview with Coleman, Benjamin Peters, and Marijeta Bozovic in November 2021, at least three representatives of the Cyber Partisans claimed as collaborators resistance groups on the ground as well former members of the state police. They also alleged no foreign involvement with their activities to date while appearing ready to accept help from any quarter. Summoning a political philosophy of self-defense, they assert that in the face of such violent oppression the Belarussian people have a moral duty and a legal right to take up arms against the regime. For now, those arms are code—code with teeth that pilots rocket-launching drones, mobilizes resistance fighters, and targets vulnerabilities across the regime’s defenses.

The Cyber Partisans’ plan reads like a twenty-first century page out of Vladimir Lenin’s handbook: seize the means of communication, plan strategic and tactical ground war, and win over enough public good will to topple the regime. The group’s manifesto video clip is currently making the rounds across YouTube, Telegram, and other social networks. The aesthetics—voice camouflaging, jarring montage, anarchic energy, and rage against the machine—resonate with any number of films or series glamorizing the not-so-secret allure of hackers. Form and style harken back to the gritty tech optimism of the 1990s and early 2000s: think hoodies and Guy Pierce masks, squats in East Berlin, Robin Hood ethics, and a vision for a radically horizontal world—not the bots and state-paid influencers of more recent years. It is the aesthetics of a fantasy, but an oddly potent and enduring one: the manifesto inspires shivers of disconcerting *deja-vu* as well as all-new awe and wonder.

Will the Cyber Partisans speed regime change in Belarus? Will they be caught and prosecuted for violating international law? Will their blueprint for regime change spread elsewhere? How will Moscow and Washington respond? What happens *after* Lukashenka? All eyes on Minsk.

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1. E. Gabriella Coleman, “The Public Interest Hack,” a special issue of *Limn*, “Hacks, Leaks and Breaches,” no. 8, February 2017, <https://limn.it/issues/hacks-leaks-and-breaches/>.