

LOMOGRAPHY &gt; MAGAZINE &gt; THE WORLD ACCORDING TO HERR WILLIE – DUGA III, THE SOUND OF THE WOODPECKER

# The World According to Herr Willie – Duga III, The Sound of the Woodpecker

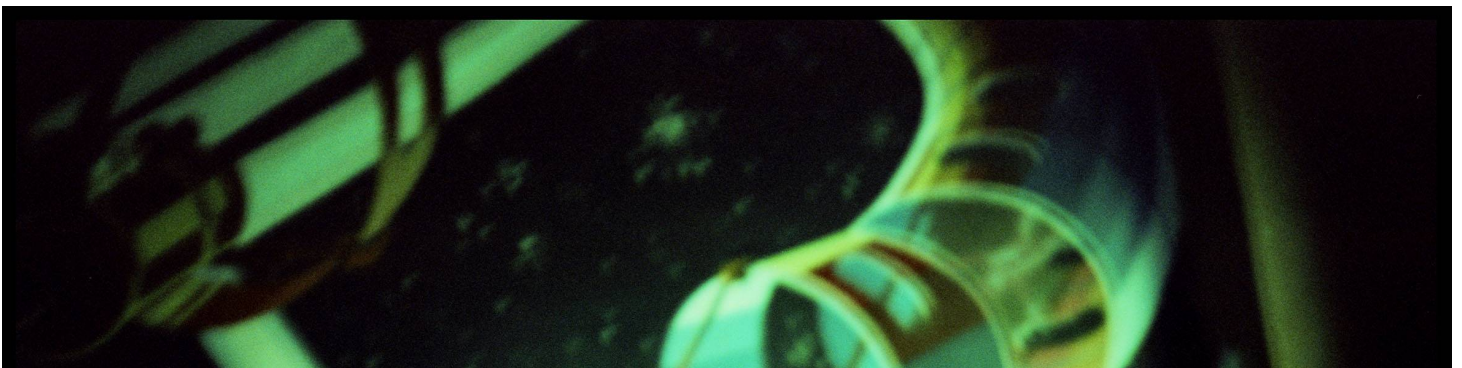
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The final chapter of my Chernobyl adventure takes us to Duga III. A super secret Rocket defense system of the CCCP, which was even unknown to most Soviet citizens. But hobby radio enthusiasts all over Europe could hear a strange repetitive knocking sound which originated from Duga III, which was dubbed Woodpecker.



Credits: wil6ka

There are things in the Chernobyl exclusion zone that you can not see anywhere else. There are man-made landscapes, re-captured by nature and abandoned buildings, in shards after the apocalypse. And there is a defense system, lost in time.







Credits: wil6ka

Flashback: We have the eighties, Cold War. Ronald Reagan and the USA challenge the Soviet Union in an insane competition for arms and rockets. Both superpowers arm up with nukes and keep the rest of the world in constant anticipation for unleashing a third world war. The Soviet Union actually doesn't have the resources to take part in the race and eventually collapses through the wrong usage of their wealth, intellectual and political power. All that remains is the memory and the ruins of that arms race.







Credits: wiléka

There was three super secret rocket defense system in the gigantic Soviet Union. Each of them at the far corners of the communist empire. One in Vladivostok and two in the Ukraine. The architecture of Duga III is incredible. It consists of a chain of fifty 150 meter high vertical antennas almost like a wall made of metal. Underneath these antennas is a giant tunnel and this tunnel leads to a collection of buildings, which represent the headquarter of DUGA III.

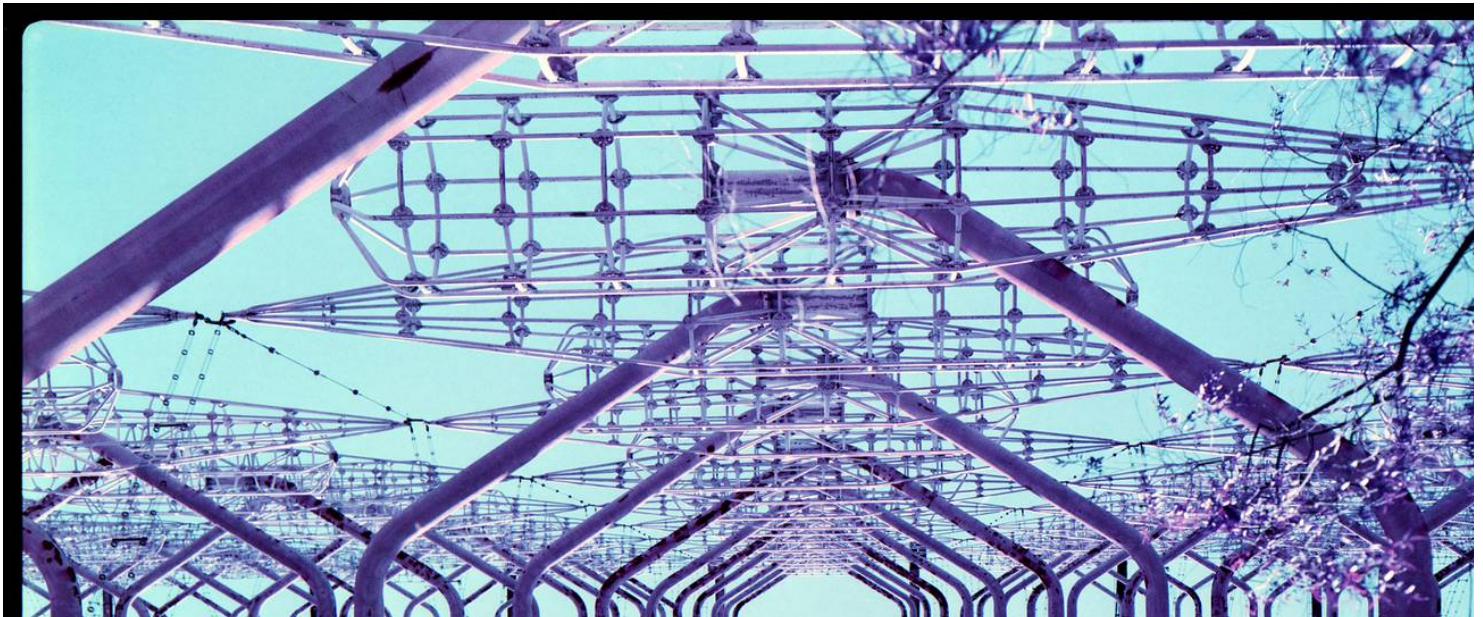
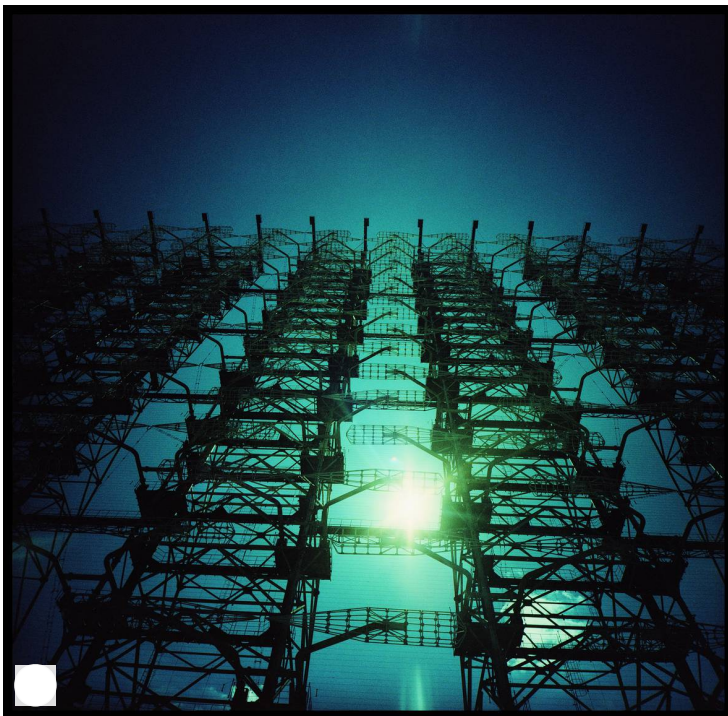






Credits: wil6ka

The structure is in astonishing shape, little to no rust.  
But nature intervened with it by now, as tree branches grew into the antennas and made it their own.







Credits: wil6ka

The purpose of DUGA was so secret there is little to none information, about the function of most elements, so there is much left to one's own imagination. The antennas are an almost poetic grid of engineered creation. The surface still looks impeccable, little to no rust. And it was there, that I saw fruit trees with the most popping colors. Of course, you mustn't eat them after the fallout, but it's incredible, how nature heals itself.



Credits: wil6ka



The existence of DUGA three was so secret, that the Soviet citizens did not even know about it. As it was in a military zone and the forests of Ukraine are huge, few people ever saw it. All the people working there, like scientists or military personnel were not allowed to talk about it. And therefore they were located with their families yet to another secret town. And buckle up, I kid you not, this town was called Chernobyl Dwa – the second Chernobyl. Very practical and secretive.



Credits: wil6ka

Chernobyl Dwa was very young. I think two or so years. So after the evacuation, the state of the buildings and institution was quite a bit better than in the original Chernobyl. When we walked one of the schools, there were extensive English educational materials still in the classrooms. Maybe the lectures for this secretive and protégée community was much more open and better than in the rest of the country?!





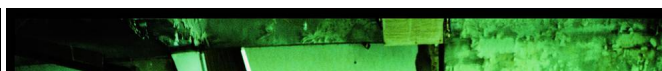
Credits: wil6ka

To reach the headquarter was quite a challenge. There is not such a straight way anymore, or has it ever been. We had to climb through a series of tunnels and ladders. It was actually quite dangerous, as free-standing, sharp metal pieces were marking our way.



Credits: wil6ka

Arriving there was a real sensation for me. There were lots of computer screens on the ground in vast commando structures. Back in the Soviet era personal computers were such a rarity. But of course, they were extensively used in military operations. On the walls were lots of kosmos and star references, which I am very fond of.

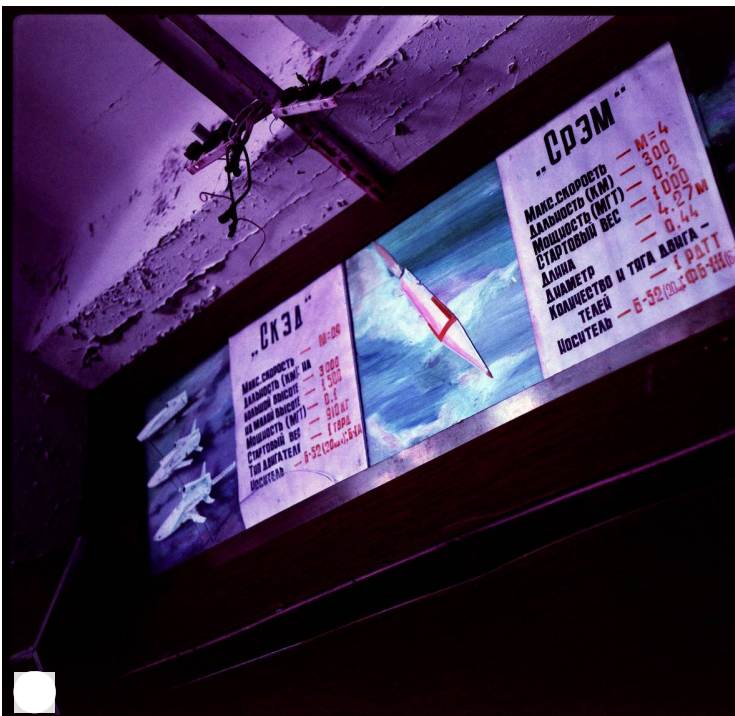
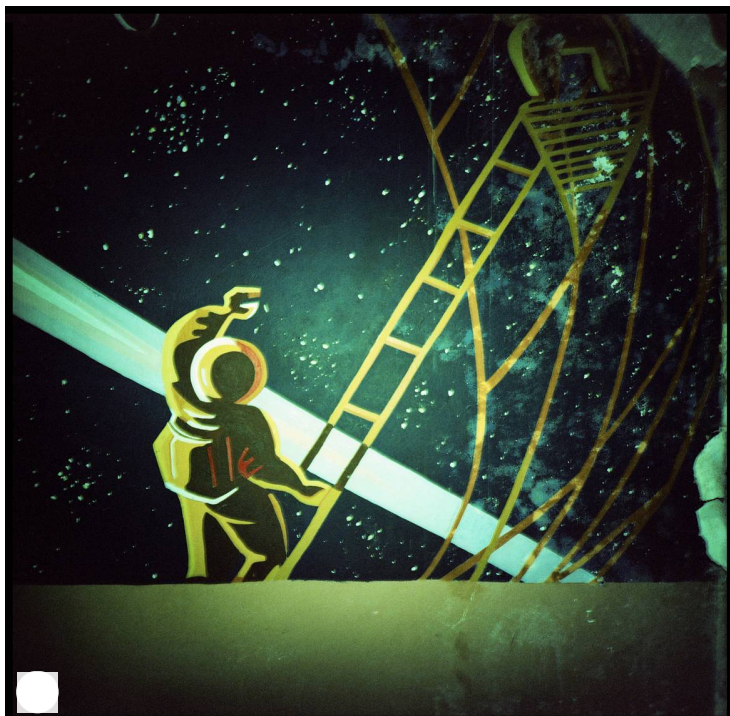






Credits: wil6ka

One of my favorite murals was a kosmonaut climbing space with a ladder. How random and mystical is that? I really felt like in a Sci-Fi Movie or maybe more realistically in a James Bond flick with space elements: Moonraker in Ukraine.

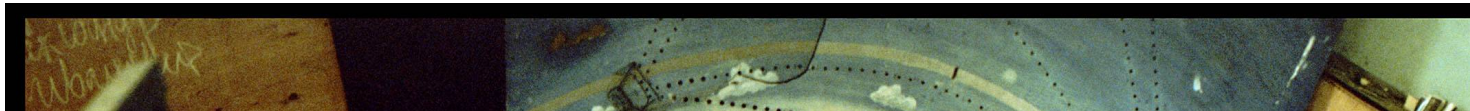






Credits: wil6ka

And again something similar to Chernobyl and Pripjat was other elements of architecture and city planning. Even in the headquarter were gyms and theatres. I guess for one to entertain, educate and politically inform all of the Duga III workers. But maybe in a lockdown to make there stay there as pleasant as possible.







Credits: wil6ka

Now, with only natural light to guide your way, some of the structures are really eerie. And it is even easier getting lost, than in the rest of the Exclusion zone. I was always falling behind because I wanted to photograph the room without anyone from my group. And a few times I really got lost afterward, which wasn't very amusing to our guide Ivan. But hey, there have to be priorities.

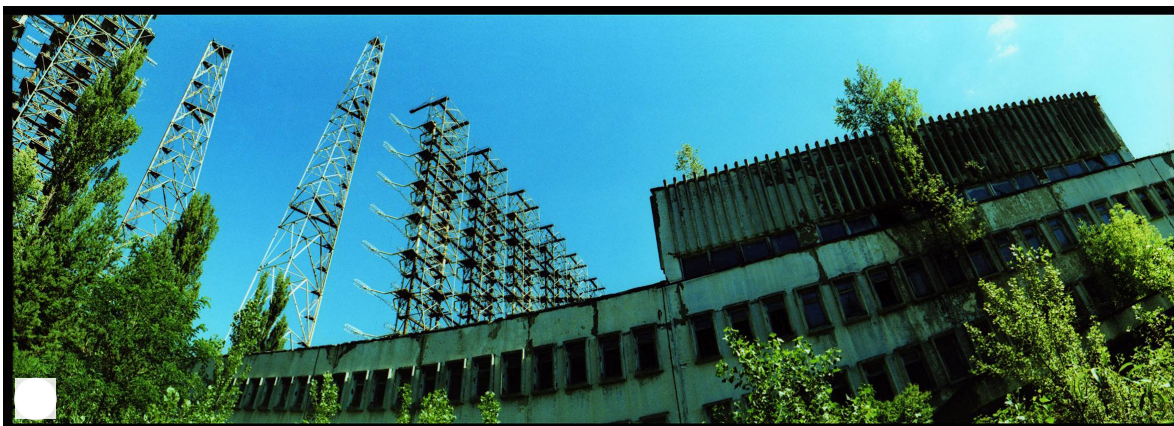






Credits: wil6ka

So coming back to the question why DUGA existed. There is a lot of speculation, but most likely it was the borderline control-check to indicate flying nukes toward Moscow. Compared to the defense system the US wants to build now around Poland it actually had no firing or defense power. It was all about communication.



Credits: wil6ka



But then again, there was this strange repetitive knocking sound, that had its origin in DUGA III. Tok, Tok, Tok. Receivable on radio devices on shortwave radio bands in all



Europe from July 1976 until December 1989. The signal hopped randomly from frequency to frequency and was heard as far as 9.000 km from its origin. There are voices that say, that it was sent to manipulate and brainwash people. As the information politic of the CCCP was pretty scarce and everybody knew somebody, who told an outrageous story about the authority, that didn't even seem unlikely. There could also have been secret messages like morse or so on the channel at certain times or with a deciphering tool.



Credits: wil6ka

But eventually, it just helped to enhance the mystique of the superpower. Disguising, that it was less powerful than it would have liked to be and extending its actual existence.

It definitely makes me talk about it almost 40 years after. Another theory could be, that the authorities simply wanted to annoy the hell of the people, who got lost on their radio channel. Therefore being one of the early disruptive urban hackers in the radosphere.

