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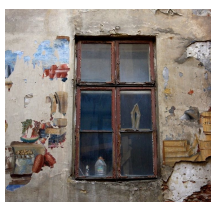
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The Battle over the Past (and the Future)

The Post-Soviet Space

Photography

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MINIMA UCRAINICA

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ON UKRAINE AND EASTERN EUROPE

EDITED BY A. ACHILLI, M.G. BARTOLINI, M. PULERI

Putting Things Back in Their Proper Places

Ars memorativa/Ars oblivionalis and Ukraine's battle over its own past

(Issue 02/2016)

MU Editorial

From antiquity, forgetting has always been a fundamental part of the art of memory. Themistocles, Mary Carruthers explains in one of her seminal studies on the medieval craft of remembering[1], supposedly asked to be taught how to forget, because his memory was already so crowded it needed refreshing. In the *Confessions*, St. Augustine elegantly writes of the power and breadth of his own memory:

"I arrive in the fields and vast mansions of memory, where are treasured innumerable images brought in there from objects of every conceivable kind perceived by the senses. There too are hidden away the modified images we produce when by our thinking we magnify or diminish or in any way alter the information our senses have reported. (…) The huge repository of the memory, with its secret and unimaginable caverns, welcomes and keeps all these things, to be recalled and brought out for use when needed; and as all of them have their particular ways into it, so all are put back again in their proper places…. This I do within myself in the immense court of my memory, for there sky and earth and sea are readily available to me, together with everything I have ever been able to perceive in them, *apart from what I have forgotten*" (emphasis mine)[2].

In the late antique culture to which Augustine belongs, to have forgotten some things was understood as a necessary condition for remembering others. And since medieval writers did not intend *ars memorativa* as rote reiteration of a

In this issue, MU will host a selection of pictures from the project "Lviv's Prewar Ghost Signs" by Areta Kovalsky, a Ukrainian-American photographer based in Lviv.

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[1] Mary J. Carruthers, "Ars oblivionalis, ars inveniendi: The Cherub Figure and the Arts of Memory", *Gesta*, 48, 2, pp. 99-117.

[2] Augustine, *Confessiones* 10.8.12-14.

memory storage, but as a tool of invention, forgetting was a necessary condition for making new thought and composition.

In an eloquent, if probably unintended, homage to ancient mnemonics, which suggested to create images of buildings and then to put in each room the things one wished to remember, Ukraine has created its own "memory palace": the Institute of Memory. The man officially in charge of administering the "secret and unimaginable caverns" of Ukraine's memory, Volodymyr Viatrovych, claims to be the right person for "putting things back in their proper places". Yet if we look at one of the most paradoxical effects of the decommunization laws – the renaming of a street from Lenin to Lennon – we will see that it is closer to the medieval notion of forgetting as an instrument for creating something new: a tool for putting things where they were not before.

Our latest issue explores Ukraine's uncomfortable position between the tenets of *ars memorativa* and *ars oblivionalis* – between the 'obsession' of remembering and the creative power of forgetting. The photo project *Lviv's Prewar Ghost Signs* by Areta Kovalsky, a Ukrainian-American photographer based in Lviv, perfectly epitomizes this hiatus by showing the many embodiments of the past and its ghosts: suffocated; restored and refreshed with a new layer of paint; lost underneath modern billboards; graffitied by individuals who no longer understand their messages; vanished into oblivion.

What is going to happen to the "fields and vast mansions" of post-Maidan Ukraine is still an unforeseen matter. The battle over the past (and the future) has just begun, but if the destiny of Lviv's prewar signs is to be any indicator, it would be an illusion to think that things "can be put back in their places", or, most importantly, that the past can be easily and objectively retrieved through some 'edifice' – be it mental, or physical. Memory – the medieval lesson is still valid – is an eminently *inventive* process and, as the heated debate over Viatrovych's Institute clearly shows, Ukraine is now *re-inventing* (not recollecting!) its past.

The editors

MU - Newsletter

Ukraine

- "*Quo vadis*: an analysis of Ukraine and its reform path <u>after two years of Poroshenko</u>

- All branches of power are in desperate need for reform, which in its turn is proving very slow, argues <u>Micheal Meyer-Resender</u>,

- What is going on in the field of constitutional reforms?, asks <u>Gwendolyn Sasse</u>.

- Kyiv government is stuck between the possible <u>uplifting of sanctions towards Russia</u> and its own mistakes.

- <u>Andrew Wilson</u> on the oligarchs' struggle to block reform in Ukraine.

- <u>Carnegie Russia</u> writes about the revolutionary potential of volunteer batallions.

- Are there <u>refugees</u> in Ukraine, or just internally displaced persons?

- The <u>LGBT community</u> enjoyed a well-developed infrastructure in Donbas, now the situation is back to Soviet times.

- Kateryna Zarembo's lengthy discussion paper offers a deep insight into the current state of <u>Ukrainian-Italian political and economic links</u>.

- Concurrence between different Orthodox Churches stimulates religious activeness in Ukraine, argues <u>Tymofii Brik</u>.

The Battle over the Past (and the Future)...

- <u>Andrii Portnov</u> on Bandera mythologies and their traps for Ukraine.

- <u>Volodymyr Viatrovych is whitewashing Ukraine's past</u>, argues Josh Cohen on <u>politico.com</u>.

- <u>Oles' Horodetskyi</u> replies to Cohen's article on Viatrovych.

- "<u>Ukrainian history is in good hands</u>": Viatrovych replies to Josh Cohen.

- In the heated battle over Ukraine's past, Volodymyr Viatrovych speculates on the need for a "<u>Communist Nuremberg</u>".

- Historian <u>Georgii Kas'ianov</u> on decommunization: its practices closely resemble Bolshevik practices.

- <u>Danylo Sudyn</u> on decommunization: changes in Ukraine's symbolic landscape should be followed by equal changes in its social landscape.

- <u>Beyond decommunization</u>: a complete list of the architectures Kiev has lost in the past 15 years.

- <u>Ukrainians are deeply skeptical</u> of the direction their country has taken since the Euromaidan Revolution.

- Petro Poroshenko is repeating Viktor Yushchenko's mistakes, argues <u>Taras Kuzio</u>.

- Per Rudling, Tarik Amar, and Jared McBride explain why <u>uncritical glorification of Ukrainian nationalism is the west's problem too</u>.

- A selection of experts answer a new question from Carnegie's Judy Dempsey: "<u>Has the West forgotten Ukraine?</u>"

...and the battle over the media

- Two years after Maidan, <u>Ukraine is falling out of international media</u>, with negative consequences for the accountability of its democratic reforms.

- In the media battle between the West and Russia over what really has been going on in Ukraine, round one went to Russia — at least among audiences in former Soviet Union republics, reports <u>Harvard International Review</u>.

- The Baltic states are now seen as the new frontline in Russia's <u>information war</u>.

The Post-Soviet Space

- Across the former Soviet Union <u>a new type of authoritarianism has become the default</u>, argues David Lewis on Open Democracy.

- Changes passed in a recent <u>referendum amending Tajikistan's constitution</u> allow President Emomali Rahmon to run for office an infinite number of times.

- Marilisa Lorusso on <u>the language of hatred</u> between Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijan.

- The <u>Nagorno-Karabakh</u> has been a risk for world security for the last three decades, but no one takes it seriously enough, argues Thomas De Waal.

Russia

-Carnegie's <u>Andrei Kolesnikov</u> explains why Eltsyn's election in 1996 set a precedent for the Putin era.

-<u>Why Russia would benefit from a stronger EU</u>.

-Vladislav Inozemtsev on sanctions and <u>the Western perception of Russia</u> as a superpower today.

-<u>Ilya Yablokov</u>, a conspiracy theory researcher, explains how conspiracy theory has won over Russian television.

-On the New York Review of Books Timothy Snyder reviews <u>three new books</u> on Putin's war in the Ukrainian east.

The Bigger Picture

- <u>Timothy Snyder</u> discusses Paul Manafort, Donald Trump's campaign manager and a former advisor to Viktor Yanukovych.

- Politico paints an unflattering portrait of Paul Manafort, "<u>the man who whispered in Viktor Yanukovych's ear</u>".

- By choosing Manafort as his senior advisor, Donald Trump is bringing <u>Eastern Europe's political 'tactics' to the US</u>, argues Ann Applebaum.

- <u>Brexit</u> is likely to have an impact on the European integration of Balkan countries.

Poland and Serbia:
Mapping Domestic Politics (and its External Projections)

- What awaits Serbia in the four years of <u>Aleksandar Vučić's mandate</u> as its Prime minister?

- Balkaninsight on the problem of "<u>Serbian exceptionalism</u>".

- An in-depth analysis of the Polish <u>Law and Justice party foreign policy</u>.

Literature and Culture

- The Paris Review takes a look at the literary output of the Strugatsky Brothers and at how it went from utopian to dystopian.

- Andrei Arkhangelsky examines twenty-five years of Russian perception of Ukrainian literature and art.

- Russian and Ukrainian cultural dialogue today: Natalia Turova on the view from Kyiv.

- Ivan Zhilin on Crimea's literary Ukrainian underground.

- How did Kyiv rock scene in the years 1986-1995 look like?

- What has been the state of Ukrainian cultural policy in Italy in the last two years? Check out Mychailo Minakov's report.

- An interview with Natalia Yakovenko on Ukrainian history, school textbooks, and national martyrology.

-A selection of short reviews of some recent publications on Ukrainian literature by the project "Chytomo".

-The edited volume "Disputed Memory: Emotions and Memory Politics in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe", edited by Tea Sindbæk Andersen and Barbara Törnquist-Plewsa, features several articles on the politics of memory in Ukraine.

-The 17th Annual Danylo Husar Struke Memorial Lecture (St. Michael College, University of Toronto, May 13, 2016) was held by Mykola Riabchuk. Its title is "Literary Criticism as Sacrilege: Turning the Iconostasis into a National Canon".

MU - *Papers*

Godhead Dethroned: Leninfall as Collective Esoteric Practice

Myroslava Hartmond

The violent toppling of the Vladimir Lenin monument in Kiev's Taras Shevchenko Boulevard by far-right extremists on the 8th December 2013 was a dramatic moment in the Euromaidan Protests, widely televised across the globe. Over a hundred Lenin statues and Soviet monuments will face destruction in the year to come, well ahead of the official start of the decommunization process in April 2015. This forceful purging of the urban and rural environment of the Communist figurehead's images would become known as *Leninopad,* or Leninfall. Although the toppling of statues of political figureheads is a common trait of regime overhauls, upon closer examination, the phenomenon of Leninfall presents a rather curious example of post-Soviet collective esoteric practice. The Mother Goddess archetype that is the Ukrainian landscape is liberated of the host of phallic columns that have sought to dominate it forevermore. The plinth, at once battleground and burial-ground, remains empty: what should replace the downcast idol?

This essay proposes that Leninfall was an act of sympathetic magic, sublimating discontent with the political present through the destruction of the image of a dead godhead, and that the process is symptomatic of a wider existential crisis that grips Ukraine today. Through exploring the mystical dimension of decommunization, I attempt to cast a burning match down the well of the Ukrainian nation's self-identification, which has historically been constructed around the image of an Other, Enemy, Colonizer, and Oppressor. We begin by examining some statistical evidence that points to the unique disjointed nature of Leninfall in Ukraine – an act unregulated by the authorities for many months, its motivation poorly articulated and inconsistent. We then look at the symbolism of the first Lenin to fall, Sergei Merkurov's statue carved of rare Karelian quartzite, and the significance of this incident as a trigger for the domino cascade of Lenins across the country in the months to come. The cult of personality of Lenin is then placed into the wider context of divine worship through the analysis of the architecture of his mausoleum and various commemorative structures that convey the Soviet chronometry of 'forevermore'. The problem of aggregating Soviet sculptures in a museum environment, as is the case in Russia, Hungary, Lithuania, is discussed with reference to the apparent lack of dialogue between different social groups regarding the matter. Finally, it is suggested that the transformation of the collective urban and rural environment remains a problem for Ukraine, and that the haphazard removal of communist symbols has left an aesthetic vacuum that must be filled. A coherent urban planning and cultural policy is yet to be elaborated.

Shabo (Ukraine) © Niels Ackermann / Lundi13

Zhytomyr (Ukraine) © Niels Ackermann / Lundi13

I.

Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, "Be gone!"

The Holy Bible, Isaiah 30:22

The removal of Soviet monuments in Ukraine is by no means new. Ukrainian writer Yurii Andrukhovych famously pointed to the regional differences in the treatment of the Lenin statue: virtually non-existent in the West of the country, unnoticed and unkempt relics in the central part, and garlanded *lieux de mémoire* in the Eastern regions. The first sculptures to Bolshevik leaders to disappear from the streets of Ukrainian cities did so before the break-up of the Soviet Union, in 1990. The Galicia local administration was the first to rule the removal of Lenins, Dzerdzhynskis & Co., and soon other towns in Western Ukraine followed suit. Another wave occurred under 'Orange' president Viktor Yuschenko, and between 2007 and 2009 over 400 memorials to Communist leaders were taken down by presidential decree, and 3000 places that bore the names of Soviet heroes were renamed. This was part of a wider series of memory laws which focused on the remembrance of Holodomor, the Kremlin-engineered Ukrainian famine which claimed the lives of 7 million people in 1932-1933.

Reconstructing the chronology of the decommunization process in Ukraine is not an objective of the present essay – indeed, this has been covered extensively in both the national and international media. It is not an assessment of the effectiveness of this process – this too has been examined from a range of perspectives. Over the period of Leninfall stretching from the 8th December 2013 through to the present around 900 Lenin monuments were removed, as were over 130 monuments to other Bolshevik figures. Infographics and interactive maps let you follow the purging of the urban space, and immediately a startling statistic surges: as of 1991, Russia and Ukraine had 7.000 and 5.500 Lenin monuments respectively. Compare this to a mere 300 in the Trans-Caucasus and Central Asia, and 160 in the Baltic States (of which none remain installed). The sheer density of V.I. Lenin/sq km in Ukraine, is nothing to be ignored. Such industrious monumentalizing sought to bulwark Soviet authority with pertinent visual reminders, a lattice of phallic columns to the red god to claim the unbridled bounty of the Ukrainian landscape.

While the early stages of Leninfall in Ukraine were presented in the media as an expressin of the Ukrainian population's pro-European stance, on the national level it divided public opinion and showed the deep existential crisis that the fledgling democracy faced and exposed the reactionary nature of public administrations on the state, regional and municipal levels, as well as the nebulousness of the political culture within a system of government where radical voices are heard, loud and clear, above an apathetic silent majority. The actions of the authorities, both central and local displayed once again their largely reactionary nature. While the majority of Lenins were toppled in February 2014 in a vandalistic, chaotic, unregulated fashion, no attempts were made to regulate it.

The actions of nationalist groups in the Eastern regions and Crimea were captured by Russian media and utilized to reinforce the notion of Ukraine in the grips of a fascist coup. Indeed, the local populations found little consolation in seeing the defacement of local landmarks, such as they were, by an anonymous minority. Far-right Svoboda party leader Oleh Tyahnybok famously heralded the episode as the end of communist occupation in Ukraine, and described it churlishly as a 'senseless suicide'. Semantically, again, such rhetoric is suggestive of the inherent agency of the monuments.

The decommunization laws of May 2015 have received much attention, as the most comprehensive and extensive programme to date, but they were heavily criticized by international experts (including the constitutional law experts of the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR). Fabian Burkhardt points to the 'half-baked' nature of the legislation produced in the Ukrainian parliament and to the disjointed nature of the law-making process: 'Discussion of proposed laws with other political actors and interested bodies is virtually non-existent'. In another paradoxical turn, the radical MPs who were quick to instrumentalize Leninfall played a marginal in the legislative process and voting. Here, a brief definitional clarification is needed – the term 'decommunization' is now an umbrella term for the concerted efforts to officially remove Communist relics from the public space, which has absorbed the unsanctioned first stages of the process. In actual fact, decommunization in Ukraine is a complex multi-level process characterized by a heightened awareness of communist symbols and toponyms that had been largely ignored up to this date.

Leninfall became the moving force behind the need to reconsider policy in this respect, and has since been subsumed by the wider process. Yevhenia Moliar, the curator of the 'Soviet Mosaics in Ukraine' project, shares her frustrations by pointing to three levels of 'decommunization': 'ideological decommunization', whereby officials report on their progress and reform-readiness by using the destruction of communist symbols as a populist boon, 'gentle popular decommunization' where local people take the initiative into their own hands and adapt communist relics with their own artistic efforts, often replacing symbols or repainting statues, and 'commonplace decommunization', where the urban space is subjected to reconstruction by private actors who simply view the remaining mosaics and decorations as debris.

II.

**'There will never be
Another one like you.'**

The Doors, 'Shaman's Blues'

If any one of the fallen statues deserved to have been protected, it was the Bessarabka Lenin, the first to fall. Within the context of the early days of the protests, it bore the brunt of public discontent at the hands of extremists, which later allied themselves with the Svoboda ('Freedom') party. The statue was a rare example of Soviet monumental sculpture by Sergei Merkurov, fashioned of red quartzite – a rare and expensive stone, famously used for Napoleon's tomb in Les Invalides. The episode was instrumentalized by both the Russian and Western media – showing, alternatively, that Ukraine was in the grip of a fascist coup and that it was taking a decisive pro-European stance in stand-off against a totalitarian past.

Indeed, the episode was as much an expression of rage against the Soviet totalitarian past as it was a displacement of anger against Russian pressure on contemporary Ukrainian politics, and a statement of the Ukrainian people's pro-European stance. The attribution of causal relationships between actions, which cannot be justified by reason and observation, is known as magical thinking, a type of reasoning adopted by prehistoric tribesmen and grieving housewives alike. The serial, chaotic destruction of Lenin monuments in Ukraine following the Euromaidan protests, which would come to be known as Leninfall, is an example of magical thinking that pervades Ukrainian political reality.

The Euromaidan Protests of 2013-2014 were not the first time that Vladimir Ilyich's presence caught public attention. In fact, the damaging of Communist monuments is a periodic occurrence not just in Ukraine, but Russia also, and is often done by representatives of radical groups who take responsibility for the act of vandalism. On the 30th June 2009 five nationalists armed with sledgehammers, picks, and hammers smashed off Lenin's nose and left hand. By sheer coincidence or a bout of legalistic thinking, this occurred shortly after the statue was deprived of its listed status. Indeed, aside from vandalism and periodic graffiti slogans across the plinth (for example, 'KAT', or torturer), the sculpture became a focus for protesters in the previous two revolutions.

Merkurov's Lenin has been a feature of the urban landscape of Kyiv for many decades. Raisa Bratytsia, a retired teacher of Ukrainian language and literature, remembers a moment from the first hours of the 'Revolution on Granite' in October 1990, when Ukrainian students staged a mass anti-Soviet protest and hunger-strike at the Maidan. "I was just leaving the Shevchenko Museum with a group of schoolchildren, and I noticed crowds of young people walking briskly past us towards the Khreshchatyk. Storm clouds gathered above, there was static in the air, and a strange rhythmic vibration could be felt through the ground. I made out the word *"Tyran! Tyran!"* being chanted by a group that had gathered around the Lenin monument. I remember feeling afraid, and thinking of the quickest way to get the children back to school. It wasn't until later that we found out about the protests taking place in the city centre."

What becomes of fallen idols? Many monuments disappeared to be found later in private collections at home and abroad, while others were indeed destroyed. Others still found their salvation at the bottom of the sea. In Crimean Tarkhankut, 32 sculptures of various sizes depicting Lenin, Marx and Engels, Dzerdzhynskii and Nadezhda Krupskaya, as well as a number of literary figures of the Soviet period, were brought from Simferopol, Odessa, Kyiv, and Kherson, creating an underwater hall of infamy which can be seen under 15 metres of seawater. Others yet became part of an impromptu open-air museum in a former collective farm, the quirky retirement project of a local farmer.

Swiss photojournalist Niels Ackermann is no stranger to the tectonics of Ukrainian politics and society. He initially came to Kyiv to report on the presidential elections of 2010, when the subsequently ousted Viktor Yanukovych came to power. Since then, he began a series of photographs documenting the coming-of-age of teenagers in Slavutych, a town that rose in the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster of 1986. investigative project together with Sebastien Gobert – 'After Lenin', which seeks to locate and document the fates of the fragments of Lenin statues: lying face-first in an overgrown field, hidden in a cupboard under the stairs of a municipal building, decapitated and smeared with the blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag.

Storage of Dnipropetrovsk National Historical Museum (Ukraine) © Niels Ackermann / Lundi13

Kramatorsk (Ukraine) © Niels Ackermann / Lundi13

This desire to create a taxonomy of fallen idols is reminiscent of the work of the Dusseldorf School of Photography, and is process-driven. An Arthurian quest after the holy grail of all Lenins – the very same Bessarabka Ilyich that was the first of the Lenins to fall – continues to this day. It is rumoured to be in possession of a wealthy collector of military memorabilia. The search continues.

<p style="text-align:center">III.</p>

Red granite and black diorite, with the blue

Of the labradorite crystals gleaming like precious stones

In the light reflected from the snow; and behind them

The eternal lightning of Lenin's bones.

Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Skeleton of the Future   *(At Lenin's Tomb)'*

The practice of erecting statues to reinforce conquest is an ancient one – consider the infamous statue to Zeus-Serapis in the Temple of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes following his conquest of Judea. It is Antiochus, a man of flesh and blood, who vicariously channels the power of Zeus, thus legitimizing his authority through a connection to a higher cosmic force. Lenin's Mausoleum has been compared to an Aztec teocalli, Babylonian ziggurat, and Egyptian pyramid. A recent conspiracy theory, which gained certain traction in the Russian, Ukrainian, and Georgian media, claimed that evidence presented by a certain Jacques Monroe of Denver University had evidence to show Leon Trotsky's involvement with a dangerous and powerful cult of Aztec occultists in Mexico, who offered the Soviet Union substantial financial support, but demanded human sacrifices to be made in the name of their patron deity. It has been claimed that one of the marble plaques of the Mausoleum carries the inscription in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs: "Niatomiyoteotl, in tlahtoani. Nehuatl nirusitlalpantecuhtli. Axcan nitechitoa." ("I am the Bald God, the ruler and master of Russia. Now I rule you.").

The digitalization of the visual realm has significant implications for our temporal and spatial perception. What difference, ultimately, is there between a row of dismounted granite Lenins in a dusty barn at the edge of a post-industrial city, and, say, the grandiorite statues of Sekhmet at the British Museum? The Egyptian goddess Sekhmet was associated with destruction. According to myth, she was the fiery eye of the sun god Ra, which he sent against his enemies. In this form she also appeared as the cobra on the brow of the king, rearing to protect him. Her name means 'she who is powerful'. She is represented as a lioness-headed woman, perhaps because the Egyptians observed that it is the female lion who is the hunter. The largest single group of Sekhmet statues outside Egypt is in the British Museum, where there are in excess of thirty such statues, complete or broken. Most of them were recovered from the temple of Mut at Karnak, where many are still visible. But their original provenance was without doubt the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III on the West Bank at Thebes. King Amenhotep III (1390-1352 BC) obviously especially revered Sekhmet, as he had an enormous quantity of statues of her erected in his mortuary temple in Western Thebes.

There may have originally been 730 statues (one seated and one standing for each day of the year). They might have been part of a ritual intended to pacify the fiery goddess. Nearly 600 of these statues have now been accounted for.

When memory is seriously weakened, the resulting state approximates to dementia. Memory is then, in a figure, the mortar of the architecture of the mind. The Ukrainian post-Soviet reality is one of paradoxes, it predisposes towards revisionist and synchronistic thinking. Here, oligarchic wealth coexists with abject deprivation, failing institutions buckle under the weight of atavistic bureaucracy and endemic corruption, and the population is, by and large, politically apathetic, yet capable of inordinate solidarity during its infrequent but monumental mass protests. We see in the political culture of former republics a tendency to conflate politics and cosmic forces. This post-Soviet esotericism surfaces in the rhetoric of political figures as much as it does on the pages of Pelevin and Prokhanov novels. Leninfall in Ukraine took place not in 1991, but almost three decades on, when the link between the figure of Lenin and any actual authority was further obscured in time and space. That the act should have as much symbolic force is a fascinating insight into the collective psyche of post-Soviet Ukraine.

<div align="center">IV.</div>

Museums, cemeteries!… Truly identical in the sinister jostling of bodies that do not know each other.

F.T. Marinetti, 'Futuristic Manifesto'

On the policy level, the questions that arise in the context of urban conservation are much like the wider framework of issues faced by post-Soviet administrations: the selectivity of memory, disconnectedness of the aesthetic level from the political, the absence of competent expert bodies whose decisions are respected by political powers and financially backed, as well as a weak culture of public debate. Edmund Griffiths, who initially coined the term 'post-Soviet esotericism', comments that the present decommunization process in Ukraine seemingly tries to recapture the 'Spirit of '91'. Comparisons to the experience of other republics who decommunized within the first months of independence are quite misleading. Knocking down some 'ghastly, unsightly' statues is a cheap, fast, and popular move fully embraced by officials. Indeed, Ukraine's story is not one of Memento Park or Grütas Park, and even proposals to create a new Totalitarianism Museum in Kiev are not met with equivocal approval. Donetsk native historian Olha Kovalevska dismissed the notion of creating a Museum of Communism in Ukraine to 'serve the needs of moneyed tourists', and proposed the following:

> The design of urban space should be defined by notions of beauty, aesthetics and harmony, not the political and ideological principles of government. However, this process cannot begin without liberating the symbolic space of modern towns and cities from the visual markers of past eras. We must learn to be a lizard that, when losing its tail, does not weep for it, museify [sic] it or build a monument to it, but continues to move forward, confident that a new one will eventually appear, which will equally be useful for only a certain time.

Kharkiv (Ukraine) © Niels Ackermann / Lundi13

Kharkiv (Ukraine) © Niels Ackermann / Lundi13

Such metaphors of continual 'shedding' and 'rebirth' pervade the rhetoric in many professional circles of Ukraine. In place of the 'lizard' model, one could propose one of the 'concentric tree rings', where sediments of history become part of the growing, changing whole. To reconcile oneself with the Soviet past is to betray the purity of the national ideal – an attitude that is reminiscent of political culture which all but that ceased to exist in Western Europe before the advent of totalitarianism. The empty plinth becomes an arena for contending visions of national representation, emotional baggage from a past relationship. In October 2015 Odessa unveiled to the world a monument to Star Wars villain Darth Vader, upcycled from a Lenin statue in one of its main squares – complete with a Wi-Fi modem inside his helmeted head. This fits well with the IT-savvy, progressive image that the port city strives to present to the world, and a poignant and cheeky subversion.

Zhanna Kadyrova's 'Monument to a Monument' comments on this uncertainty. Placed in the prosaic environment of a village square – a tangle of chain-link fences, roofing slate and wooden benches – the veiled figure seems at once incongruously elegant and intrusively officious. It is inherently ironic – statues are normally covered before the unveiling ceremony, but this is more suggestive of a body shrouded for burial. The veil shall never be lifted. Here, the plinth is not battleground, but burial-ground. Kadyrova came to prominence as a member of the Revolutionary Experimental Space (R.E.P.) artistic group, which was founded after the Orange Revolution in 2004. R.E.P.'s work began with a series of actions and performances called "Interventions", which were developed 'in reaction to the politicized public space of the 'post-orange' Ukraine', and sought to reconcile the dynamic changes that took place in Ukrainian civil society with the relative stasis of its institutions and infrastructure.

V.

**"That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange aeons even death may die."**

H.P. Lovecraft, 'The Nameless City'

Soviet town planning boasted a rich memorial vocabulary: statues, busts, memorial plaques, arches, obelisks, cenotaphs, victory columns, eternal flame monuments, decorative detailing... all of these features sought to reinforce a Soviet chronometry of forevermore. The monumentalism and gigantomania of the Soviet era were intended to testify its eternity in time and space, which was in turn supposed to lead to the belief of every citizen in the stability of their lives. The disillusionment with Soviet reality set in long before there even seemed a remote possibility that it should ever crumble. Yet, after independence, no alternative vision has been proposed, and few attempts have been made to aesthetisize the urban environment even in the capital city of Ukraine. An aesthetic vacuum soon emerged as a result of the removal of communist symbols. The familiar cast under scrutiny: the five-pointed stars on the walls of Arsenalna and the lamps of Universytetska, the the hammer and sickle panel in Beresteyska, the Great Patriotic War bronze roundels in Vokzalna and badges of Soviet troops in Heroyiv Dnipra and the Red Army Soldier mosaic of Palats Ukraina, the futuristic muse bas-relief of Politechnichny Instytut and the intricate geometric stellar compositions of Lybidska, finally, the mosaic of Shuliavska... Even where Communist symbols are clearly on display, their political leverage has long since become transmuted into period aesthetics.

The heightened importance of erasure brings to the fore the elements of the urban environment which have become ideologically irrelevant – from decorations on metro station walls and wrought-iron fences, to mosaics and memorial plaques on buildings and monumental sculptures. Reality is a complex and manifold thing, and in order to make sense of it, we must artificially reduce it to a system of symbols. Our understanding of the worldview of civilizations past is heavily reliant on the symbolic legacy that they leave behind. Symbols are epistemic units, experience condensed – from gangland tattoos to political emblems, from brand logos to sacred scripture, a single image has the power to convey the quintessence of a belief system. This power cannot be underestimated in our visual century, where the hebephrenia of postmodernism is supplemented by the existential need for a new digitalized taxonomy of the legacy of epochs past. The spectator increasingly views artefacts through the digital lens, and the virtual space plays the semantic role of a collective consciousness from which the desired image could be plucked at will. That all-seeing eye of Orwell and Tolkien, Google, serves the digital citizen well in this: through Google Street View, we tread the streets of faraway cities. Through Google Art Project, a platform that amalgamates virtual representations of the physical spaces of partner museums, we observe masterpieces in microscopic detail, unencumbered by throngs of tourists.

A paradox of Leninfall is the fact that the actual historic personality of Vladimir Lenin remains outside of the scope of interest in this entire process. He is, rather a nebulous godhead, an embodiment of evil and destruction, his every image an impressionistic collective symbol of what he represents: power, otherworldly and external. The man born in 1870 in Simbirsk (now Ulyanovsk), in the east of European Russia is but a mere reference point for the subsequent myth that would take root within the Soviet narrative. Yevgenia Belorusets's project 'Let's Put Lenin's Head Back Together Again' asked a range of uncomfortable questions at a time when no public debates took place on the matter. It took part with the support of the Pinchuk Art Centre, a contemporary art centre known for its eponymous oligarchic patron, which subsequently proceeded to sabotage the project. It consisted in presenting fragments of Lenins from small towns and villages alongside a book of quotations from Lenin, and was to be accompanied with public discussions and film screenings – a discussion platform that was suppressed by management who feared that it should be perceived as promoting extremist communist ideas. Indeed, the very choice of venue was provocative – the first Lenin fell within sight of the prestigious venue in elegant downtown Kyiv.

Yevgenia Belorusets recalls the highjacking of the political message of the Euromaidan protests by radical groups, who chanted slogans such as 'FREEDOM OR DEATH' and 'DEATH TO OUR ENEMIES', displayed logos of nationalistic groups who collaborated with Nazi troops, and displayed a portrait of Stepan Bandera near the stage. These elements did not represent the political sentiments of the peaceful civil majority, and the smashing of the Lenin statue is the apogee of this marginal action. She experienced first-hand the reactionism of local administrations waiting for instructions from the top, afraid to provide information about the whereabouts of Lenin statues when asked, as well as the distress of local citizens who witnessed the unsanctioned Leninfalls of those early months, complete with chanting and gesturing by 'useful idiots for the Putin regime'. [Yevgenia Belorusets Interview transcript, 03/01/2016]

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Kiev (Ukraine) © Niels Ackermann / Lundi13

In Conclusion.

Leninfall, as collective performative action, is ecstatic, cathartic, depersonalized. An act of vengeance waged by Us in the Present against Them in the Past (Soviet oppressors) and Them in the Present (the Putin regime). An abnegation of Communist heritage is, in effect, a sublimation of the fear of death – forcible forgetting a violent process aimed at remembering *that which came before*. This revisionist retrospective reasoning prevails in nations who did not transition into the twentieth century as nation-states. Yet the 'Soviet past' is not a surface tattoo, but muscle memory, it lingers in the very brickwork of society at large on the institutional, political, social, cultural, and even anthropological levels.

Volodymyr Viatrovych, director of Ukraine's Institute of National Memory, defended the decommunization laws and insisted that their radical, procrustean nature was justified:

A lot of people think we don't need to do anything with the Soviet past, that it will disappear of its own accord and a new generation will appear who don't remember it, but the example of Russia shows us that if you don't do anything with your Soviet past, it will resurrect itself. And we see a lot of people, even of the younger generation who were born after the Soviet Union collapsed, but they are absolutely Soviet and have a totally Soviet world view.

Once again, the 'Soviet past' is imbued with a mystical agency, an inherent dangerousness which is nothing short of supernatural. 'It' will 'resurrect itself', a statement which transfers responsibility from those political agents who actually instrumentalize it – in the case of Putin's Russia, a considerable apparatus of public officials, media professionals, courtly experts at home and abroad, trolls. Consider this extract from Aleksandr Prokhanov's 'Mr Semtex', an example of post-Soviet esoteric literature, which takes the farcical notion to its orgiastic liturgical extreme:

There are many people in the world working on the problem of immortality: in India, in China, in the Arab countries. We know about each other's work. The resurrection of Lenin will take place in spring, in Russia, on Orthodox Easter, or the First of May, or Victory Day. The weather will be wonderful, a blue sky, trees and flowers in blossom. The bells will ring out and a prayerful cry will rise from the crowds gathered on Red Square, beneath the sacred walls of the Kremlin. The sun will play and sparkle in the sky, wondrous rainbows will flow all around it, and he will step forth from the doors of the Mausoleum: Lenin, alive, bearing light, 'by his death having healed our death'. Emperors and princes will arise from their white stone sarcophagi. Resurrected pilots, cosmonauts, and heroes will step forth from the Kremlin wall. Across the world, billions of people restored to life will rise from the grave. The universal miracle of resurrection will be accomplished. The 'red meaning' will return to our lives, and the Soviet Union will be reconstituted.

Symbols, then, are tools in the hands of magicians who imbue them with meaning and power. The Ukrainian nation stands on the threshold of individuation from a Soviet past, wondering whether going forward is going to lead to its demise – for the Soviet myth, and indeed, the myth of resilience in the wake of oppression is central to Ukrainian nationhood. A black spot lingers where Lenin once stood, and his likeness is the numinous dark God image at the core of the new faith that is Ukrainian post-totalitarian national identity.

Myroslava Hartmond (Halushka) is a researcher, entrepreneur, and art collector. Her current work with the Centre for International Studies at the University of Oxford explores the role of visual culture in the emergence of a new Ukrainian national identity, and seeks to outline a cultural-diplomatic strategy for Ukraine. In February 2016, Myroslava was nominated among the Cultural Leaders of the EU-Eastern Partnership Culture & Creativity Programme. Uniquely, her own practice in the cultural sector forms the basis of her research: in September 2014, she rebranded her family's historic gallery in Kyiv (est. 1988) to T-GAW [Triptych: Global Arts Workshop]. T-GAW engages with both the local and international community through exhibitions, events, and publications.

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Odessa (Ukraine)