Public Art Between Authoritarianism and Democracy (The Case of the Maidan Protest in Ukraine)

Asia Bazdyrieva
CUNY City College

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!
Follow this and additional works at: http://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc_etds_theses

Part of the Contemporary Art Commons, Modern Art and Architecture Commons, Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons, and the Theory and Criticism Commons

Recommended Citation
Bazdyrieva, Asia, "Public Art Between Authoritarianism and Democracy (The Case of the Maidan Protest in Ukraine)" (2017). CUNY Academic Works.
http://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc_etds_theses/668

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the City College of New York at CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master’s Theses by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact AcademicWorks@cuny.edu.
Public Art Between Authoritarianism and Democracy

(The Case of the Maidan Protest in Ukraine)

Asia Bazdyrieva

Professor: Harriet F. Senie

May—31—2017

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts of the City College of the City University of New York
# Table of Contents

Introduction  
Chapter I: Manipulating the Historical Narrative  
Chapter II: Maidan: Between the Totalitarian Past and the Capitalist Future  
  The Soviet Model: Educating the Masses  
  Kyiv’s Center in the Turbulent Times of Soviet Ideological Shifts  
  Independent Maidan  
Chapter III: Shadows of ‘Vozhd’  
  Lenins of Maidan and What We Learned from Them  
  Inhabiting the Pedestal  
Conclusion  
Epilogue  
Appendix A: Illustrations  
Appendix B: Excerpt from the Law  
Bibliography
Introduction

This thesis explores the spatial organization and public art of Kyiv’s Independence Square to address broader social and political realities after the Maidan protests of 2013-14.\(^1\) Using theories of power and ideology, this study will demonstrate how the discourse on public art reflects the political situation of post-revolutionary Ukraine, and how public engagement with urban space signals a paradigmatic shift in the developing country’s process of self-identification.

In the 2013 Maidan protest, Kyiv’s public space was activated by the popular drive to communicate both the striving for a democratic restructuring of Ukrainian politics and frustration with Russia’s involvement in it. The demolition of the Lenin monument in the capital was followed by the subsequent process of “Leninfall” all over the country and eventual passing of the “decommunization” law designed to erase symbols of the USSR from public spaces.\(^2\) The physical attack on Soviet monuments is seen as a symbolic refusal of the totalitarian past which is now being reenacted through Russia’s military intervention and conservative imperialist politics. Yet, the decommunization law is deeply problematic in its reductionist strategy and monolithic representation of identity, militancy, and nationalist ideology. Ironically, the government’s attitude towards public art repeats the Soviet totalitarian strategy of using public space as a means to establish a dominant political, historical, and cultural narrative. Nonetheless, despite this imposition, pluralization of public life and culture that began with the Maidan has continued to play out within the city’s public space.

---

\(^1\) Maidan (also known as the Euromaidan Revolution, The Ukrainian revolution of 2014 or Revolution of Dignity) took place in Ukraine in late November 2013—February 2014. The upheaval started as a wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine, with public protests at Maidan Nezalezhnosti ("Independence Square") in the capital city Kyiv, demanding closer European integration.

\(^2\) Decommunization is a process of dismantling the legacies of the communist state establishments, culture, and psychology in the post-communist states. The term is most commonly applied to the former countries of the Eastern Bloc and the post-Soviet states to describe a number of legal and social changes during their periods of postcommunism.
spaces.

The purpose of this thesis is threefold: first, to identify the Soviet ideological approach embedded in the spatial organization of Kyiv’s administrative center (including the Maidan); second, to examine artistic interventions at the site of the former Lenin monument Kyiv to emphasize the discrepancy between state and popular approaches to public space; and third, to address the decommunization law in post-Maidan Ukraine as a reenactment of Soviet practices. Overall, this thesis will argue that the formation of a new Ukrainian subjectivity based on democratic values which reached its peak during the recent revolution continues to manifest through the popular approach to public space as opposed to both the totalitarian one of the USSR and its mirror image in the post-Maidan government’s program.

**Review of Existing Literature**

A number of statements issued by the Institute of National Memory were analyzed to illustrate the government’s reductionist decommunization strategy, which continues to manipulate national sentiment by emphasizing identity and Russia’s colonial legacy as key problems facing contemporary Ukraine. Recent historical sources were consulted to articulate the complexity of the social, political, and cultural realms that define the post-Soviet Ukrainian phenomenon. In “Post-Maidan Europe and the New Ukrainian Studies” (2015) Andrii Portnov argues that in post-Soviet Ukraine, the lack of a uniform national public consensus on memory and language issues has often been a stabilizing factor in a state characterized by significant diversity. In “Ukraine’s Postcolonial Revolution and

---


Counterrevolution” (2015), Ilya Gerasimov argues that the Maidan revolution was a complex and unprecedented phenomenon with potential for constituting a radically different type of society in the post-Soviet space. According to Gerasimov, the protest began not as an opposition to Russia’s colonial heritage, but as a “creative act of self-determination” focused on formulating and promoting new common values. And, Yaroslav Hrytsak in “Ignorance is Power” (2014) argues that despite the use of national symbols during the Maidan, the protesters’ thrust was directed at transcending fixed identities and negotiating a truly nationwide consensus.

With the use of critical geography and studies of Soviet propaganda I have analyzed the public space of Maidan as both a part of the Soviet project to educate the masses through visual symbols and as a key location for popular protest activity. This study drew upon Boris Groys’s work, Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin (1987), in which he argues that Stalin fulfilled the avant-garde’s dream of organizing reality into a uniform, total work of art. The author addresses the USSR as simultaneously constituting both a work of art and its own author, constantly aiming to shape the public and private life of its citizens into a “collective body.” I have examined the visual implementation of ideology in the public space of Kyiv’s city center through the use of Groys’s perspective and archival research of documents regarding the construction of the Administrative center under the USSR, as well as its reconstruction following the protests in 1990 and 2000.

Boris Yerofalov-Pilipchak’s Architecture of Soviet Kyiv (2010) served as a valuable

---


source of archival images and interviews with Soviet Architects. Since I was particularly
interested to find out to what extent the official ideology was translated and implemented into
practice—in spatial organization, architecture, and monumental art—I examined the entire
archives of the Soviet magazine, Architecture and Building (Архітектура і Будівництво, укр.), from 1953-1990. Even though it required reading between the lines due to its
“aesopian language,” a critical analysis of its articles provided a comprehensive sense of
both the general zeitgeist and the specific political and ideological agenda architects of the
time were obliged to follow.

This research is also largely based on fieldwork and oral history recordings. Besides
observation of the dynamics of popular engagement with Kyiv’s public space before, during,
and after the Maidan, as well as gathering visual materials and primary sources (imagery of
vernacular and grassroots creative expression found on internet blogs and in personal
archives of protesters, journalists, artists, etc.), I conducted a series of interviews with
witnesses of the communist regime and the “decommunization” events that took place
following the dissolution of the USSR, particularly those who were exposed to Soviet history
as contemporaries or as researchers, who had worked with the locations or monuments in
question, or who interacted with them in their daily routine. I was specifically interested in
gathering vernacular humor regarding three Lenin monuments (Figs. 1-3) within the
Administrative center, and in observing the popular reaction to artistic interventions at the
site of the last Lenin monument on Bessarabska Square. For analysis of the “Social Contract”
project, which I use to demonstrate the shift of grassroots attitude to public space, I
interviewed the patrons, artists, and curators of the project and observed audience responses

7 “Aesopian language” is a special type of cryptographic or allegorical writing used in literature,
   criticism, and journalism in order to circumvent censorship when such literary activity is denied
   freedom of expression. In Soviet times it was not necessarily dissident in nature, its goal was often to
   be correct in ideological terms, not in factual or discursive ones, and thus to avoid punishment.
during the period of 2016 to 2017.

**Contribution**

Through analysis of monumental art and spatial organization of Kyiv’s center, I introduce the Soviet concept of educating the masses and further question the efficiency of such an approach in the case of Maidan, which became an important location for pro democratic protests and the emergence of what historians call the new Ukrainian subjectivity. I also address the post-Maidan decommunization process and argue that despite the government’s insistence on erasing the symbols of the USSR, it remains essentially Soviet in its understanding of cultural strategies. Furthermore, I analyze recent artistic interventions at the site of the former Lenin monument in Kyiv to identify the discrepancy between an emerging grassroots process of social and cultural pluralism, and the government’s monolithic representation of identity, militancy, and nationalist ideology.

**Chapter Outline**

The Introduction provides a general overview of the work and outlines its structure.

Chapter I provides a historical context to address the postcolonial, value-oriented character of the Maidan protest and to frame the further argument regarding the tension between decommunization strategy and the emerging grassroots approach to public space.

Chapter II analyzes the spatial organization of Independence square (Maidan) and other parts of Kyiv’s Administrative Center (Bessarabska and European Squares). The symbolism of three Lenin statues on each square together with Stalinist architecture provides an image of a Soviet power hierarchy in sharp contrast with the neoliberal character of the adjacent recently built shopping malls. The Maidan protest took place against the metaphorical backdrop of this setting—between the totalitarian past and the capitalist future.

Chapter III deconstructs the symbolism of three Lenin statues and the Soviet method
of educating the masses by analyzing the audience responses from different generations of people who were exposed to Soviet history as contemporaries or as researchers, or who had worked with the locations or monuments in question. Furthermore, the chapter addresses artistic interventions at the site of a former Lenin monument in Kyiv to show the discrepancy between the official strategy regarding public space and the popular drive to diversify it. Analysis of a specific work, *Inhabiting Shadows* (Fig. 4), as a part of a pioneering project, “Social Contract,” through the aspects of patronage, temporality, and site-specificity explores the paradigm shift in popular perception of public art following the revolution. In this context I advocate the importance of temporary art projects in the process of democratizing the emerging state.

The Conclusion recaps the main argument of a drastic discrepancy between the official—both Soviet and Ukrainian—didactic approach to public space and the grassroots vision of it. Despite the “intellectual reductionism” of the media and authorities, which oversimplifies the current political, social, and cultural situations and narrows them to a primarily national agenda, the examples of recent public art and the transformation of public space in Kyiv signal that it is becoming a place for democratic communication and community engagement. The field study of individual perceptions of Soviet visual symbols of power, as well as the analysis of post-Maidan creative expressions, suggest that an anti-authoritarian approach to public space is emerging, and that the demand for “popular” art (i.e. that which is open to public participation and contributions) constitutes an alternative to the totalitarian model of public space as a vehicle of state propaganda.

Since a significant part of the study analyzes ongoing sociopolitical and cultural phenomena, the Epilogue will provide a brief up-to-date description of the current situation regarding the subject.
Chapter I: Manipulating the Historical Narrative

In late 2013, downtown Kyiv erupted in a peaceful protest that would turn into the most massive social upheaval in the history of Ukraine’s independence. This protest, initially called the “Euromaidan” (combining the protesters’ drive for integration with the European Union and “maidan,” the Ukrainian name for Independence Square where it took place), later came to be known as the Maidan or the Revolution of Dignity. After a series of violent events involving protesters, riot police, and unknown shooters, the protest culminated in the ousting of Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovych. This was immediately followed by a series of changes in Ukraine's sociopolitical system, including the formation of a new interim government, the restoration of the previous constitution, and a call to hold impromptu presidential elections within months. These historical events were often claimed to be a birth of a modern civic society in Ukraine, marking the end of a long post-communist transition period. In 1991, Ukraine had “gained independence by chance” due to the dissolution of the USSR, and after more than twenty years of transition and few significant protests, the 2013-2014 Maidan became a moment of clear articulation of Ukrainian political subjectivity. However, Russia’s military intervention and involvement with Ukrainian politics, the complexity of representing the protest in the media, and the lack of scholarship and rigorous work on developing Maidan values in post-Maidan Ukraine laid the ground for casting the protest as a nationalist revolution. In the aftermath of the Maidan (and in light of the ongoing military conflict in the Eastern part of Ukraine) such a broad manipulation of national sentiment became a convenient strategy for the Ukrainian government to propel the anti-colonial narrative and replace the anti-establishment nature of the Maidan with the false

---


idea of a nationalist one. By highlighting a few major moments in the Maidan’s timeline and placing them in historical context, this chapter emphasizes the massive grassroots involvement in the formation of a public sphere based on democratic values and its subsequent misrepresentation as a nationalistic revolution, resulting in the official politics of fixed identities that manifests itself in far-reaching decommunization laws.

It all started on November 21, 2013, with a brief Facebook post written by Mustafa Nayem, a well-known Ukrainian journalist, after news broke that the Ukrainian government was hesitating over signing the long-promised Association Agreement with the European Union at the upcoming summit in Vilnius, choosing instead to seek closer economic relations with Russia. Nayem invited his Facebook followers to meet him near the monument to Independence in the Maidan Square at 10:30 p.m., and further incited their action by writing, “Don’t just ‘like’ this post. Write that you are ready, and we can try to start something.”10 That night what is now referred to as “the Maidan” began with about 2,000 protesters — predominantly journalists, writers, artists, activists, and students — gathered to express their dissatisfaction with president Viktor Yanukovich’s decision. As the protest went on, the number of demonstrators demanding the resignation of the government grew, increasing sharply upon the announcement that Yanukovich had indeed rejected signing the agreement.

The situation escalated on November 30 as the Berkut special police unit violently beat protesters at 4 a.m., when the number of people in the square was minimal and there were no bypassers to see the assault. The statements made by government representatives and some well-known Ukrainians the next day suggested that there was a public need to clear the square, claiming that “because of the Euromaidan rally children will be deprived of a

---

traditional symbol of the festive season.” With the entire square cordoned off, protesters moved to the neighbouring Mykhailivska Square. A few days later the protesters had reoccupied Maidan Square, the empty carcass of the uninstalled Christmas tree becoming a key visual symbol (Fig.5). Besides being the subject of memes and jokes online, the tree also served as a place to collect and display various protest posters and flags from all over the country. At this moment Maidan gained nationwide exposure, mobilizing people who had not necessarily supported integration with the EU, but were outraged by the violence of the police; it became an anti-establishment protest, addressing widespread government corruption, abuse of power, and human rights violations in Ukraine.

The protest agenda had been widely communicated in Kyiv’s public space through street art and graffiti, posters and stickers, and various DIY banners. Messages such as “human rights above all,” “I am a drop in the ocean,” and appropriated slogans from France’s May 1968 social revolution appeared on various available surfaces with the intention of engaging more people and voicing grievances regarding the Yanukovich regime, especially the brutal police attacks on protesters that occurred again on December 1 (Figs.6-8). These complaints soon acquired an international dimension due to Russia’s immediate reaction to the revolutionary events: false news reports on Russian TV portraying Kyiv’s protest as ultra-nationalist and fascist in nature, as well as an unscheduled meeting between President Yanukovych and Russian President Vladimir Putin that took place in the southern Russian city of Sochi on December 6, followed by an announcement of Yanukovych’s subsequent visit to Moscow on December 17, where a “major agreement” would be signed.\footnote{\textit{BBC News}, “Russia and Ukraine Leaders Seek Partnership Treaty,” December 6, 2013, accessed December 19, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25267130; \textit{Reuters}, “Russia-Ukraine Talks Fuel Suspicion, Anger in Kiev,” December 7, 2013, accessed December 19, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-ukraine-idUSBRE9B606020131207; Live updates of the...}

Fueled by this disclosure, popular dissatisfaction was projected onto the Lenin monument in Kyiv, which was rapidly toppled on December 8, 2013 (Fig.1). This physical attack on the Soviet monument could be understood as a symbolic attack on the embodiment of the totalitarian past widely associated with Putin’s regime, which has been marked by the decline of democratic principles and a return to methods of political repression characteristic of Soviet times, promotions of conservative values and religious fundamentalism, and the persecution and murder of opposition leaders and journalists. Yet, the episode with the Lenin monument reveals the complexity of the situation, because even at that moment, this anti-colonial narrative did not represent the majority of protesters’ views. Even though the use of the national anthem and the blue-yellow colors of the national Ukrainian flag (often interwoven with the EU ribbon) could be easily read as symbols of nationalist protest, they had been used since the early days of the Maidan as signifiers of pro-democratic unity. When the right-wing activists destroyed the monument in an act for which the political party Svoboda claimed responsibility, the crowd of the Maidan protesters was not homogenous and had a full spectrum of political views from left to right. Even many of those who cheered the demolition did not necessarily endorse the nationalist agenda (remarkably, Svoboda gained only 4% of votes in the post-Maidan elections). Moreover, the intense reaction signaled the absence of a uniform opinion regarding Soviet monuments. Apparently, it was not the fostering of the communist regime that prompted many intellectuals to criticize the attack on a monument, but the problem of radical destruction of symbols of the past and its subsequent criminalization. However, the events at the Lenin monument provided useful images for a mass media that would frequently use a nationalist portrayal of the protest to make their reports easily comprehensible to audiences, thus planting the seeds of later distortion

regarding the nature of post-Maidan Ukraine.

The protest reached its climax on February 20, 2014, when more than a hundred protesters were killed in 48 hours, with uniformed snipers shooting at them from rooftops. On February 22, president Yanukovych fled the country to Russia after protest leaders and politicians agreed to form a new temporary government. Within a few days, Russian soldiers in unmarked uniforms took control of strategic positions and infrastructure within the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Russia then annexed the peninsula after a disputed referendum condemned by the U.S. and Europe as illegal. During the following months, pro-Russian militants seized government buildings in the eastern cities of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv, calling for a referendum on independence and claiming independent republics of “DNR” (Donetsk People’s Republic) and “LNR” (Luhansk People’s Republic). Since 2014, the conflict has killed more than 10,000 Ukrainians, wounded over 20,000 and displaced about 1.7 million people, according to estimates by the U.N. and other humanitarian aid groups. At the time of this writing, this conflict is Europe’s only ongoing land war.13

Despite Russia’s actual invasion of Ukraine, the depiction of the Maidan protests as a national or anti-colonial revolution is essentially reductionist and, thus, alarming in its misrepresentation of the grassroots formation of a democratic public sphere during the protest. The available contemporary and historical sources show that the nationalist agenda was neither primary nor dominant during the Maidan. In one of them, Ilya Gerasimov employs postcolonial theory to refute the anti-colonial paradigm and to argue that the Maidan— focused on constructing a new society rather than litigating the past colonial

13 The majority of members of the international community, as well as organizations such as Amnesty International, have condemned Russia for its actions in post-revolutionary Ukraine, accusing it of violating international law and Ukrainian sovereignty; many countries implemented economic sanctions against Russia, as well as some of its citizens and companies.
experience— was a unique event in the post-Soviet context. He emphasizes the importance of new common values that constitute the “new, hybrid and inclusive Ukrainian-ness.” It was not the past (with its reliance on nationalism or religious fundamentalism) that defined the Maidan, rather, the idea of the nation was the outcome of the protest. According to Gerasimov:

There was no real preexisting historical Ukrainian state to be restored within its original borders, and no homogenous nation in agreement about its composition. No collective or national will led to Euromaidan. On the contrary, it was Euromaidan as an event, a social structure, and a political process that stimulated the expression of individual subjectivities of people and greatly intensified and accommodated their exchange of opinions and ideas — whereas the main contribution of the preceding decade of Ukrainian history had been the elaboration of a set of common values that provided the necessary cumulative effect of community-building to the mass scale exchange of ideas….The Ukrainian nation became a product of the revolution, not its perpetrator.”

In fact, the national rhetoric during the Maidan was rather marginal, and at the subsequent election, the aforementioned nationalist party gained an insignificant amount of votes. Furthermore, the number of Ukrainian citizens sympathetic to association with Russia (40.5 percent before the Maidan) had already decreased by half immediately following the protest. Gerasimov demonstrates that such a change in public opinion was a result of the Maidan, not its cause. The historian concludes that with the metaphor of the “European choice” suggesting a set of democratic values, the Maidan became a “creative act of self-determination,” and its popular title — The Revolution of Dignity — indicated a “fundamental quality of one’s developed subjectivity (cf. Latin dignitas — worthiness).”

14 Gerasimov, “The First Postcolonial Revolution…,” 27
16 Gerasimov, “The First Postcolonial Revolution…,” 28. Gerasimov underlines the Maidan’s reliance on the European tradition of political liberalism that acknowledged the right of popular rebellion against tyranny; and notes that the protest was very Lockean in spirit in its declaration of civic
With a diversity that manifested itself through a variety of ethnicities, languages, cultures, religions, and political views, the Maidan became a multitude that unified a plethora of individuals under the same cause, yet with various agendas that resist any kind of a uniformed image. Even in artistic terms, the ‘collective body’ of Maidan, with its massive barricades made out of debris and collectively decorated for the holidays, its Tatlin-like metal carcass for the Christmas tree, and its ongoing carnivalesque atmosphere, when viewed in its entirety, becomes a Gesamtkunstwerk that eludes in-depth analysis because there is no appropriate category for it within existing systems of art. Nonetheless the images of the Maidan seemed like a “monolithic representation of identity, militancy, or the upholding of nationalist ideology, political activism of that period seemed to be value oriented, focusing on principles such as dignity, freedom, solidarity, cooperation, social responsibility and celebration of multiculturalism in a diverse land.” The public space of Kyiv’s center, shaped and defined by ongoing social practices, played a crucial role as a place for conversation and community engagement.

Despite the Maidan’s initial goals of pro-democratic change, a year after it ended and the new president Petro Poroshenko was elected, the official rhetoric and actions of the new Ukrainian government indicated that its representatives have chosen to see it as a nationalist and anti-colonial revolution. On April 9th, 2015, the Ukrainian Parliament passed a package subjectivity toward and disobedience of a government that disregarded people’s rights and interests.

17 I use Spinoza’s term multitude in its later reiteration by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri as a new model of resistance against global systems of power. The multitude is not “the people,” but rather many peoples acting in networked concert. Because of its plurality, its “innumerable internal differences”, the multitude contains the genus of true democracy.

of four controversial decommunization laws, one of which—“On the condemnation of the communist and national socialist (Nazi) regimes, and prohibition of propaganda of their symbols”—affects public space immediately. The law essentially equates the Nazi and Soviet regimes, banning “any image, anthem, symbol, monuments, memorials, slogans, quotes, and names associated with either regime, plus the visual legacy of other European countries exposed to communism” (Appendix B). According to the law, noncompliance with this ban is a criminal act. Yet its obscurity—in fact, the law negates the entire seventy years of Soviet history present in practically every aspect of private and public life—makes its scope virtually unlimited, censoring all domains of social life, including arts and education.

The explanatory note to this law stressed that it required neither public discussion nor consent of the authorized representatives of national trade and labor unions, public organizations, and so on. Ironically, such an approach repeats the Soviet model of decisionmaking in which a few people define the correct idea of use of the public sphere, make their decision behind closed doors, and announce that any disagreement may be categorized as a criminal act. The radical sweep of the law and the uncompromising attitude of the government form a drastic contrast with the inclusive openness of the Maidan, as demonstrated by regular gatherings on the square to discuss pertinent issues in ‘viche’ public assemblies that transcended fixed identities.

Remarkably, among the initiators of the decommunization law were Oleg Lyashko, a


20 ‘Viche’ (‘veche’) is an old slavic word for town’s meeting or popular assembly. In Medieval times in Kyiv Rus, viche was the prototype of the self-rule. During the Maidan, viche became a protest tradition: every Sunday thousands of people gathered at the Maidan square to hear reports from opposition leaders, opinion makers, etc., and discuss the current situation.
Radical Party leader known for his populism and highly combative behavior, and Volodymyr Vyatrovych, known for his nationalist views and collaborating with the Security Service of Ukraine (the successor to the KGB). The latter took the lead of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory soon after the Maidan, and became one of the most persistent advocates for decommunization, as well as the propagator of anti-colonial rhetoric, insisting that Ukraine’s “Sovietness” was the main cause of its economic crisis:

The unvanquished totalitarian past still keeps Ukraine from developing as a European democratic state, for it is precisely on this island of “Sovietness”, which for historical reasons has remained strongest in Donbass and Crimea, that Putin's aggression against Ukraine rests. Holders of Soviet values (and not Russians or Russian speakers, as Russian state propaganda claims) today are a major recruit reserve for terrorist groups in the so-called DNR and LNR. So the question of “decommunization” in Ukraine today is not only a matter of humanitarian policy, but also security policy.

In short, instead of addressing contemporary Ukraine’s actual problems of corruption and abuse of power, the official conversation about Ukraine’s socioeconomic, political, and cultural stagnation emphasizes the national idea that emerged as an opposition to Soviet identity in reaction to Russia’s military intervention in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

Some historians have pursued a broader problematization of decommunization. Mykhailo Gaukhman, for instance, opposed the first wave of decommunization in 1991 that targeted the Communist party and its ideology, and its recent iteration aims to erase the very mythology of the USSR embedded in the daily routine of toponymic forms, etc.

---


23 The first decommunization attempts in Ukraine took place as early as the time when Ukraine gained independence on August 25, 1991. The Monument to the Great October Revolution that was located on October Revolution Square (now Independence Square) and other major monuments to Lenin across the country were demolished according to a decision by the local city administration.
suggests that decommunization is based on conventional division of the political and public spheres — ideology and society in this case are separate entities, and in this perspective, society is a passive object of the totalitarian party. Without the consideration of “opovsykdenyuvannya” (quotidienation) of the regime and ideology in the everyday lives of people, decommunization simply repeats Soviet totalitarianism and criminalizes everyday social practices. Moreover, Gaukhman accurately points out that the law does not presuppose any mechanism to survey local communities regarding their opinion and wishes concerning what part of their communist heritage they want to keep or remove, or what would be the best substitution (if any) for them. Gaukhman implies that if the government grants itself sole legitimacy for decision-making regarding symbols, rhetoric, or history, it is engaging in the same practice against which new laws are ostensibly designed. Andrii Portnov also argues that the law is full of contradictions and reveals an ignorance of the Soviet heritage. The historian emphasizes that Ukrainian public sphere tends to reductionism in the strict dichotomy “pro-Russian communism-” vs. “pro-Ukrainian decommunization,” lacking a critique of both nationalism and the communist narrative from democratic, pluralistic positions. For example, the Communist party erected a monument to Ivan Franko, the now-praised figure in Ukrainian poetry, yet it also censored his work and adapted it to the requirements of “building communism.” Moreover, according to Portnov, these laws shift the entire post-Maidan discussion to the issues of identity and memory as the key causes of the protest, whereas in fact, it was a social phenomenon that negated constructed dichotomies. Portnov emphasizes that the cultural diversity of Ukraine was a


major factor that prevented the public sphere from being totalized under a single political agenda:

In post-Soviet Ukraine, the lack of a uniform national public consensus on these memory and language issues has often been not so much a force for division but rather a stabilizing factor in a state characterized by so much diversity. It is precisely this lack of a nation-wide consensus that has helped preserve the distinctive pluralism of post-Soviet Ukraine’s public space and has maintained ambiguity as a way of avoiding social conflict, an obstacle to the monopolization of public space in the service of one political force or another.  

Thus, by focusing on modernization and values, the Maidan expanded and articulated the pluralization of the public sphere. It transcended fixed identities to reach common consensus regarding the “European choice” as a model for future development, thus drastically differentiating the Ukrainian case from those of its neighbours, particularly Russia with its resurrection of imperial narratives and religious fundamentalism.  

Thus, the drastic attempts to erase the very presence of the Soviet past in the built environment is both misleading and autocratic in its attempts to monopolize public space. According to the Institute of National Memory’s statistics, as of December 2016, 51,493 toponymic places in Ukraine have been renamed, including 32 cities, 955 towns, and 25 districts, as well as 51,493 streets, squares, parks, and more. 1320 monuments to Lenin and 1069 other monuments of “totalitarian” era figures have been demolished. Yet, after almost two year of decommunization, Ukraine still holds a leading position in the ranking of most


corrupt countries. In the everyday expressions of Ukrainians, the constructed dichotomy between “sovietness” and “ukrainian-ness,” as well as the debates about identities and memory, overshadow debates about the actual causes of the Maidan. Apparently, rather than combatting corruption, decommunization in the hands of officials is a strategic tool for manipulating national sentiment. This strategy recreates the Soviet model of using public space as a means to disseminate fixed types of propaganda, despite the fact that Ukrainian history itself has a plethora of conflicting episodes requiring open and honest discussion instead of monumentalization.

Chapter II: Maidan: Between the Totalitarian Past and the Capitalist Future

The visual framing of the recent protest events together with the history of the place help to identify the formation of what is now designated by historians as the birth of the new “Ukrainian subjectivity.” Kyiv’s Independence Square provides a perfect visual setting for a historical overview of the city, its architecture offering a cultural snapshot of key historical events. Maidan Square is framed by epic Soviet buildings and is part of the city’s administrative center, designed and erected in the 1930s when the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic moved from Kharkiv back to Kyiv. Stalin’s Empire-style edifices meant to signal the tremendous power of the totalitarian USSR; however, with time, the square evolved into an arena for exchange of public opinions and protests such as ‘Ukraine without Kuchma’ at the turn of the millennium. In response, the government decided to redesign the square, filling it with controversial glass constructions, and building a giant shopping mall beneath it. The Maidan protest took place against this metaphorical setting—a sort of a liminal state in between the totalitarian past and the capitalist future. The shiny commercial centers remained open and undamaged throughout the revolution and served as a contrasting backdrop to the striking image of tired and dirty protesters holding paving stones in their hands. On the one hand, this new ‘Ukrainian-ness’ was surrounded on all sides by vestiges of totalitarianism, but on the other hand, European integration as the chief reason for the Maidan protests (which meant first and foremost certain economic and travel freedoms, as opposed to Soviet government control over citizens’ lives, in particular, their financial situation and freedom of movement) signalled an inevitable assimilation to the capitalist development of the West.

The spatial organization of Maidan deserves consideration, since the very existence of this specific geographical location, its occupation, and social practices of interaction within it
have been indispensable factors in the creation of a Ukrainian public forum. Moreover, the
deconstruction of ideological agendas implemented in architecture and monumental art
further illustrates the paradigmatic shift in popular perception of public space. By analyzing
the Soviet model of using public space as a means of controlling the masses as opposed to the
new capitalist model of entertaining the masses and promoting consumption, and by tracing
changes within the spatial organization of the Maidan Square and administrative center, this
chapter identifies the emergence of a new stratum, a grassroots movement that through the
practice of occupying public space refused to fit either the totalitarian or the capitalist
paradigm, laying the groundwork for a new post-colonial “Ukrainian-ness” that culminated
during the recent protests.

The Soviet Model: Educating the Masses

*If art becomes public property it will organize the consciousness and psyche of the masses by
organizing objects and ideas.*

—Alexey Babichev

The history of the USSR contains various periods that left distinct impacts on the
country’s political program, and as a direct consequence, on its architectural landscape and
public spaces. The reconstruction of Kyiv’s center, which later became a scene for the protest
actions in question, belongs to the Stalinist period, yet its heavy ideological weight has its
origins in the earlier times of the Soviet avant-garde. Although within the field of Western art
history it is common to contrast the period of the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s with the
period of Socialist Realism, which formed as a style later in the 1930s, both of these defining
Soviet art movements drew upon the idea of educating the masses through art, implemented

---

in public space through the use of monumental sculpture and architecture. Understanding the formation of this idea helps to assess the historical reconstructions of the Maidan Square and their ideological implications in a more meaningful context.

Especially relevant to this study is Boris Groys’ thesis arguing that while there were a number of formal differences between the Soviet Avant-garde and Socialist Realism, both movements in essence shared a key defining idea of using art to create and shape a society which was not only receptive to the message of that art, but also capable of engaging with it and thus becoming participants in the great socialist project. In the 1920s, avant-garde artists (including many groups and individuals such as LEF, the Constructivists, Kazimir Malevich, and others) reacted to the rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union and its dramatically new political direction. They used different methods to achieve the same goal—supporting the Soviet idea of creating a new society with a new type of citizen and transforming aesthetics to serve progressive political thinking. As Boris Groys described it, “avant-garde artists wished to create a new public, a new type of human being, who would share their own taste and see the world through their eyes. They sought to change humankind, not art. The ultimate artistic act would be not the production of new images for an old public to view with old eyes, but the creation of a new public with new eyes.”

This conception of the purpose of art was radical in merging the political with the artistic, forming a specific type of discourse in which every decision regarding a work of art was made only after weighing its political

---

31 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” *October* 30, (Autumn, 1984): 82 – 119. Western art history widely accepts the idea of a rift between the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s and the Socialist Realism of the 1930s—the latter being formed at a time when the Soviet government apparatus consolidated more and more power, and began to use art as a means of spreading the party line while simultaneously repressing artists who dared to offer opinions or ideas which contrasted with it. Many important figures from the Avant-garde movement were forced to publicly denounce their previous work and ideas, or risk being exiled or worse.

considerations.

The same idea, as shown by Groys, was present in the Soviet project, one of the biggest aims of which was the disrupting the individual’s link with nature (including ideas of human nature) in order to create a totally new social construct. Following in the avant-garde’s footsteps, Stalinist art had as its goal the creation of a new society which would be receptive to it — in essence, its own audience. In his book *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* (*Total Art of Stalinism*), Groys addressed the “Soviet space” itself both as a work of art and simultaneously as its own author; he metaphorically claimed that the Communist Party was an artist who sought to “overcome the resistance of the material”:

Soviet culture under Stalin inherited the avant-garde belief that humanity could be changed and thus was driven by the conviction that human beings are malleable. Soviet culture was a culture for masses that had yet to be created.33

Thus, the totality of the utopian Soviet project lay in this idea of the collective body meant to be created and shaped by means of art and information. For that matter, all proletarian interaction with art and science was to take place under the slogan “art as a way of life-building.”34 On April 23rd, 1932 the Central Committee issued a decree banning all kinds of artistic activity outside of the newly established “artists’ unions,” the goal of which was to control the working process of artists as well as to monitor their communication with each other. Already in 1934, Socialist Realism was declared as the mandatory method for all artists and every work of art had to meet certain criteria and fit into the social program to be “correct” in its form and content.

One might still ask, what is it about the idea of educating the masses through art that appears as unusual, if in fact the shaping of society through cultivation of taste is a method


that has existed in different cultures throughout time. The answer to this question would reveal the inner core of the Soviet project and the propaganda that was the main component of all types of Soviet art. Even though Socialist Realism was claimed to be realistic, the reality it intended to portray often constituted a broad discrepancy with people’s actual experiences. In essence, the Soviet concept of “truth” that the rule-abiding Socialist-Realist artists had to relay in their work was similar to today’s concept of “post-truth”. The ability to make the correctly ‘Socialist’ selection of current and historical facts was regarded as the most important quality of a Socialist artist. As Boris Ioganson puts it: “A fact is not the whole truth; it is merely the raw material from which the real truth of art must be smelted and extracted...”35 In practice, this meant that art had to be accessible to the masses on the level of form, although its content and goals were ideologically determined and aimed at manipulating “the masses.” The totality of a party line and the strict control over its practical implementation left no place for any kind of otherness, be it in the way of thinking or looking. Thus, all aspects of public and private life were under a total uniformity, which imitated the idea of building a happy socialist future, yet advanced the power hierarchy and maintained a drastic contrast between authorities and the people.

**Kyiv’s Center in the Turbulent Times of Soviet Ideological Shifts**

The analysis of strategic (i.e. ideological) decisions that defined spatial organization, architecture, and monumental art of Kyiv’s central city space delves into how the creation of this utopian Soviet society was meant to be carried out within the framework of the city’s main square and questions the effectiveness of such a program. As the Stalinist era dawned over the USSR, plans for the reconstruction of many major Soviet cities were already being implemented—and these plans already included provisions for the special nature and purpose

of public spaces. Remarkably, the idea of manipulating the masses by means of public space had already been partially developed in Kyiv during the Soviet avant-garde period, when two of its key figures—Kazimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin—lived and taught there. As early as 1919, Tatlin (only a year prior to the development of the legendary Monument to the III International) was already propagandizing the idea of an all-encompassing “monument of a new type.” The artist had foreshadowed the new Soviet architecture, which was to be “new” in all senses of the word, from its physical forms to its social significance. In the words of a contemporary of Tatlin, N. Punin:

The monument of a new type” was to include lecture halls and an agitation/propaganda center, from which “calls to action, proclamations, brochures would be distributed all over the city…on one of the expansive wings of the monument…an enormous screen must be placed which would broadcast by way of a cinematographic tape, in the evenings, the most up-to-date events in the world of international culture and politics. The monument will also contain a radio receptor which will broadcast frequencies from all over the world…and other various media of information. It must also possess…a projection station, which would project letters onto the clouds…; letters which could be used to compose various slogans consistent with the events of the day….it is necessary that all possible technologies which can be used for the dissemination of agitation materials and propaganda be incorporated as elements of the monument…

This idea of creating enormous architectural objects, which would simultaneously be functional constructions and means of disseminating propaganda, leads naturally to the idea of a city as organism in constant flux and development that, of course, must only proceed in accordance with party ideals. Such monumental objects, through a synthesis of the aesthetic and creative with the functional and technical, were meant to directly affect the masses, to mold and shape them.


37 Ibid., 140.
As mentioned earlier, this radical attempt to write the political narrative through the use of everyday life and public space was overtaken by Stalinism and, as a result, took on different dimensions altogether starting in the 1930s. The exemplary model for creation of symbols of power in the public space of Soviet cities was the competition for the design of the future Palace of Soviets—a government centre in the middle of Moscow, which was meant to become the tallest building in the world at the time. The winning project, designed by Boris Iofan, became a canonical example of Utopian Totalitarian architecture: a building 1378 feet in height, to be crowned with a grandiose monument to Vladimir Lenin. The outer appearance of the building was to resemble a pyramid, the apex of which would be the figure of “vozhd” (the leader) as Lenin was known in Soviet times (Fig. 9). As such, the project is a lasting visual illustration to the Soviet concept of the “power vertical.” According to plans, the building was meant to be clearly visible from a distance of up to 22 miles. That is to say, even from a great distance, the people were to be able to gaze up from the ground at the figure of their supreme leader—a symbolic manifestation of Soviet power dynamics between the people and the government.

Moscow’s contest became a prototype for other Soviet cities. Thus, a similar process took place in Kyiv, which again became the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic and seat of the government in 1934. Previously, in 1919-1934, Kharkiv had been the capital because Kyiv was considered anti-Soviet and Moscow officials would not risk to have a government there until all Ukrainian independence movements had been brutally repressed. At this time Kyiv was in a state of overall decline due to the ravages of collectivization as well the

---

38 D.V. Sarabyanov, ed., История русского и советского искусства (History of Russian and Soviet Art) (Высшая школа, 1979), 321.

39 In order to construct the Palace of Soviets, the Church of Christ the Savior was demolished and the foundation for the Palace laid in its place. The project was abruptly brought to a halt by World War II.
Holodomor famine, orchestrated by Stalin to take place in Ukraine from 1932 to 1933.\(^{40}\) Within the framework of rebuilding the city, the government announced a contest for the design of a government center and received many grandiose submissions, much like the Moscow contest (Figs. 10-14). One of the main points on the reconstruction agenda was the creation of “a central government square in the Soviet capital—a goal not just of a technical but a deeply political nature, since the square’s future architectural complex was to become a living example of those enormous creative achievements which characterize our unstoppable growth in all areas of Socialist construction.”\(^{41}\) The winning project by I. Langbard was meant to be located in the square neighboring today’s Maidan and would require the demolition of the Mikhaylovsky Zlatoverkhy Monastery (Fig. 15). The project’s construction was also halted by World War II, and the monastery was rebuilt in the 1990s, when the challenge of reconstructing Ukrainian identity emerged in a newly independent country.\(^{42}\) Even though the Central Committee building was initially meant to be part of a complex together with a Council of People’s Commissars building and a monument to Lenin between the two, the only completed part of the grand totalitarian project was the construction of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Headquarters (which currently serves as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in 1938. The rest of the project was halted first by the dissatisfaction with Langbard and then by the Second World War.\(^{43}\)

\(^{40}\) The Holodomor (Ukrainian: Голодомор) was a man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine in 1932-1933 that in a peacetime catastrophe killed an officially estimated 7 million to 10 million people, the majority of whom were ethnic Ukrainians. Since 2006, the Holodomor has been recognized by Ukraine and 15 other countries as a genocide of the Ukrainian people carried out by the Soviet government.


\(^{42}\) During the events of the Maidan protests the monastery served as a safe haven for protesters after they became the subjects of attacks by police and government forces. It also became an improvised soup kitchen, first aid station and field hospital; the bodies of murdered protesters were also brought here.

From 1935 on, the Maidan was known as Kalinin Square and after World War II it became an important part of the ambitious post-war Khreshchatyk reconstruction plans, which lasted from the late 1940s to the late 1950s.\(^{44}\) Most entries to the contest, announced in 1944, used the classical format of combining multiple purposes in one architectural complex. As a result, the winner was a synthesis of projects which suggested a filling of the square with monumental constructions, their style based upon classical Western European architecture and utilizing Ukrainian folk elements\(^{16}\).\(^{45}\) Khreshchatyk’s new appearance was an integral architectural ensemble 4000 feet long and averaging 245 feet wide, with three squares (Besarabska, Kalinin, and Stalin (Fig. 17)), broad sidewalks, and buildings from various periods. It was during this time also that Khreschatyk was declared the main street of the city, and Kalinina Square the main square. A giant Hotel Moskva was erected in 1961 at the Southern side of the square, reminiscent of Moscow State University (Fig. 18). This was an essentially ideological decision intended to demonstrate that Kyiv’s main square derived its role of the ideological center from Moscow as the center of the empire.\(^{46}\) As one of the highest buildings in Kyiv at a time, it was both distanced from city life, yet visible from afar, implementing the vertical of power. Khreschatyk Street thus assumed the function of the procedural axis of Kyiv. Soviet architects were also tasked with functioning as “social architects” of the regime and, as such, creating ceremonial monuments and parade squares,

\(^{44}\) Up to the 1830s, a large part of the current Maidan space was known as “Goats’ Swamp” since many local families took their goats out to graze there. It was also an important location because it connected three main parts of the city: Verkhny Gorod (the seat of political power), Nizhny Gorod (commercial center) and Pechersky Hills (spiritual center). In the 1850s, the city expanded and what is now the Maidan became one of the main city squares with a main bourgeois boulevard (analogous to many European cities of the time) running through it. That thoroughfare would become today’s Khreschatyk Street. In 1876, the city parliament or Duma was built on the square, and the square was renamed Dumskaya.


public spaces that, under the slogan of “All belongs to the people” were actually meant to appropriate the public experiences of citizens through amassing large numbers of people within the public space and allowing the government to monitor and assess citizens en masse. In this context, totalitarian and authoritarian regimes use of the concept of “masses” not so much in order to create a feeling of belonging and interconnectedness among citizens based on shared memories, traditions, and history as to establish a mechanism of “belonging” to the extraterritorial, incorporeal Soviet “collective body.” Remarkably, in his notes for the reconstruction of the square (1976-1981), the architect A. Komarovsky mentions that the square was intended for ceremonial uses such as taking the military oath, Young Pioneer induction ceremonies, and so on — indispensable parts of the ideological conditioning of Soviet youth.

Kalinin Square was indeed made twice as large during the reconstruction, however, it was meant for “anything but mass protests” and the space itself was meant to fulfill a “policing function” (Figs. 19-20). It is visible (and, as follows, can be shot at) from every angle and accessible from multiple streets, each of which in turn has access to a large number of administrative buildings. The grandeur of this endeavor immediately calls to mind Haussmann’s project for the reconstruction of Paris and presupposed the creation of free lines

---

47. Ihor Tyshchenko and Svitlana Shlipchenko, “Maidan: vid prostoru protestu do ‘urbanistychnoho spilnoho’.” Yak tvorylasya urbanistychna evtopiya (“Maidan: from the protest space to ‘urban commons.’ How the urban utopy had been created”) in (Ne)zadovolennya publichnimi prostoramy ((Dis)satisfaction with public spaces) (Kyiv: Vsesvit, 2017): 98.


49. Yerofalov-Pilipchak, Architecture of Soviet Kyiv, 148-149. Pilipchak also emphasizes that the governmental buildings, located within walking distance from the square, are all interconnected by a secret network of underground tunnels corresponding to metro stations, government offices, and special shelters. Yet, he does not provide sources and probably repeats the popular urban legend regarding the underground tunnels. According to contemporary researchers of Kyiv’s Soviet architecture, such as Semen Shyrochyn and Oleksandr Burlaka, there is no proof or declassified information about such a network (private conversation, May 2017).
of fire and mechanisms for discouraging the making of barricades. The irony is that despite Marxism-Leninism being a founding philosophy of the USSR, Stalin, who “resembled a particularly despotic student of Haussmann” ignored Marx’s loathing for the planner who “replaced historic Paris with the Paris of the sightseer.”\(^{50}\) In the actual square, one really does have the feeling of being placed in a panopticon. Even during the Maidan events of 2014, when all entrances to the square were barricaded off, there was a distinct feeling of having nowhere to hide and nowhere to run. Eventually, this space did perform its policing function when after several months of revolution and physical confrontation between the protesters and government forces at the barricades, dozens of protesters were shot by snipers who were positioned on the roof of one of the government buildings and could thus survey the entire square.

Besides the ideological implication of spatial organization and of architecture, monumental art, which would fulfill the didactic and legitimizing function sought by the Soviet government, was necessary to public spaces of such importance. Thus the entire post-war administrative center anticipated “leaders” to take over its most visible spots. The first Lenin monument was erected in 1946 on Bessarabska Square, the second one on Kalinin square in 1977 (when it was renamed, once more, to Great October Revolution Square), and the third inside the newly constructed Lenin Museum on Stalin square (which was in early 1961 renamed Lenin Komsomol Square) in 1982 (Figs.1-3). Having considered the party’s particular concerns with public space, this raises the question: why had it taken almost four decades between the mid 1940’s and the early 80’s to make these decisions regarding the placement of monuments? Despite the the seemingly rapid course of monumentalization,

which began with the installation of a Lenin monument on the peripheral Bessarabska square and dedication of the pre-war III International Square to Stalin (likely a backlash to the German decision to name it Adolf Hitler square during the occupation in 1941-43), the main square had remained empty.

Although the reactionary post-war plan envisioned the intensification of the cult of Stalin through the grandeur of WWII victory, the further indecision regarding monuments becomes self-evident. Apparently there had been a loss of direction and clarity in the political and ideological agendas following the death of Stalin in 1953 and the subsequent process of dismantling his legacy that began in 1956 with Nikita Khrushchev’s speech “On the Personality Cult and its Consequences” at the 20th Party Congress of The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Studying the archives of the Architecture and Building magazine for the 1950s provides several clues. In the vague language used by architects and journalists of the time to avoid risking wrong interpretations and subsequent discipline or repression, there is a sense of circumventing ideological issues. For instance, authors would address the grand scale of post-war mass constructions of residential complexes (a project announced by the party at the beginning of the 1950s) as well as the party’s 1956 resolution “On Removing Excessive Elements in Architecture” (A&B 4 (18), 1955); or poor financial management due to which construction is failing to fit into deadlines set by the party (A&B 4 (16), 1955). Probably, the ideological situation became even more unstable: articles from this time are often full of harsh criticism, including towards the newly constructed buildings in Kyiv’s center. Only one author, O. Kasiyanov, within the entire decade addressed the monumental sculpture by firstly mentioning the need to install a monument to Stalin on the Stalin Square to complement Bessarabska Square’s Lenin statue, yet suggesting that the geographic specificities of Kyiv (the city is built on hills) is an
obstacle to implementing the plan. Kasiyanov first rhetorically questions whether Stalin Square is actually a square and points out that since it is rather an intersection of roads, it would not be appropriate to house an ideologically important monument to Stalin—it is simply too small for such a massive and meaningful figure. Moreover, to expand the space and make it into a “real square” it would be necessary to level the hills, which is a “time consuming and improbable project.” Thus, the idea was abandoned; eventually, in 1982, the square became home to an expansive Lenin Museum and a large indoor monument to Lenin (Figs. 21, 3).

What was specifically remarkable about this period as reflected in scholarly articles on architecture is that by the end the 1950’s, the Soviet people had learned to adjust to political narratives, and since this was never consistently clear (especially after the public denunciation of the previously sacred Stalin figure), to avoid decision-making that could be interpreted as a clear statement of ideology. This leads to a question: if in the period of rapid ideological shifts there was no truth for people to follow, what was the role of those later Lenin monuments? What ideological weight could they have at a time when ideology itself was becoming a simulacrum? Chapter III of this study, which focuses on audience responses and grassroots reactions to these monuments, will question their didactic ideological efficacy.

**Independent Maidan**

In the 1980s, as the programs of perestroika and glasnost took hold in the USSR, ideological controls were greatly relaxed and the October Revolution Squares became a regular meeting place for intellectuals who would eagerly come together to discuss current political events (something previously subject to punishment). A re-conceptualization of the space through appropriation in Lefebvre’s sense—that is, modification of the space by a

---

group of people to serve their own needs and possibilities—also took place; its new nature was shaped by the social practices produced and regulated by this space itself.\(^{52}\) From this moment in history, in the minds of citizens, the Maidan became an arena for publicly voicing one’s opinion. Since then it has also witnessed several important protests, some of which have led to changes in government, if not the overall structure. The first of these was the student Revolution on Granite in 1990, which anticipated the collapse of the USSR. Later, to break up another of those protests—2000’s Ukraine Against Kuchma—the government decided to redesign the square and announced that the purpose of this reconstruction was the upcoming tenth anniversary of Ukraine’s independence. As a result, it was filled with controversial glass structures and a giant shopping mall was constructed beneath it (Fig. 22). The period of Leonid Kuchma’s presidency (1994-2005) — the era of “building crony capitalism” (Yekelchik: 2007, 250) — is eloquently reflected in the words of architects hired by the former government to rebuild the square. When discussing the reconstruction of the Maidan, Sergey Babushkin, businessman and main Kyiv architect from 1996 to 2003, said that the square and especially its subterranean areas had massive potential as a commercial and entertainment complex. He also noted that both Ukrainian and foreign investors were enlisted in order to rebuild the square and construct a shopping mall, adding that the possibility of using the Khreschatyk to earn money should serve as a motivating factor for citizens.\(^{53}\) Babushkin himself is scandalously known for his involvement in illegal construction and criminal property takeovers in Kyiv.\(^{54}\) Thus, the small protest that was


unknown in Ukraine’s regions due to the absence of independent news media at the time (the internet was not yet widely used in Ukraine), was suffocated and rebranded as the government’s architectural “gift to the city,” the main agenda of which was entertainment and consumption.

The commercialization of the public space as government strategy eclipsed the previous Soviet strategy of control and education of an ideologically “correct” collective body using the public space as a tool. This commercialization generally reflects broader processes occurring throughout the nation: following in Russia’s footsteps early in the 1990’s, Ukraine passed a series of laws regarding the privatization of residential and government buildings. Groys ironically refers to this phenomenon as a new ideology: while the construction of a Communist society was brought about through mass collectivization, the building of a capitalist society is done in reverse – through mass privatization.55 At the same time, the protests mentioned above make it clear that beginning in the 1980s, grassroots movements have been regularly arising in Kyiv – protests which do not fit into any of the usual political categories and thus find themselves somewhere in between, struggling to articulate a social paradigm that does not yet exist. Starting with the Revolution of Granite, these protests attempt to establish a new “Ukrainian-ness” with democratic values at its core. In 2004, the Orange Revolution established the “occupational” nature of these protests and cemented the Maidan as a symbol of the public voice.

With the outbreak of the protest events of 2013-2014 the Maidan square was quickly transformed into an extemporaneous town protected by improvised barricades made of debris, tires, sandbags, and paving stones (Fig. 23). One of the first articulated demands of protesters was for the right to use the city and its public places to assemble and express their

55 Boris Groys, “Privatizations, or Artificial Paradises of Post-Communism,” in Art Power, 165.
opinions freely, moreover, to be “politically present and visible” in the city center. This also meant claiming their right to define the agenda of the space; since the early 2000s they had been limited to a passive consumption of goods or entertainment due to the vast commercialization of the area. Moreover, as the protest expanded in response to police attacks, the protester claimed access to the administrative buildings of the center and occupied them one by one—Kyiv City State Administration, House of Unions, October Palace, and Ukrainian House—to make places for rest, soup-kitchens, medical centers, etc. Yet, the Maidan did not have a coordinator at large; it grew as a rhizome, with self-organized initiatives defined by what was important for a particular group.

Remarkably, the Ukrainian House (former Lenin Museum) became an exemplary case of pluralism in public life. Numerous communities (“feminist hundred,” “creative hundred,” “student hundred,” Open University, Open Library, etc) self-organized there and collaborated to vocalize their agenda by means of arts and information. The distribution of resources within the Ukrainian house (the Maidan in general was supported by people who could either bring goods or donate to the initiative/location they prefered) and its administration occurred through the grassroots self-rule of “gromada of Ukrainian house.” The very place that housed the giant Lenin statue was now an improvised movie theater with an ongoing program of documentaries and lectures regarding issues of human rights; the House welcomed all the citizens with the banner “The space that is free from discrimination” (Figs.24-25). In the case of the Maidan, such a re-appropriation of public space, in which plurality of social life and thought manifested itself through means of creative expression and forms of cooperation in the city, became a country-wide phenomenon that signalled a paradigm shift in popular engagement with social and political issues. The fully functioning and diverse entity of the

56 Tyshchenko, “Maidan: vid prostoru protestu…,” 98.
Maidan formed a background for the emergence of a public sphere in the Habermasian sense—as a place where citizens could assemble and unite, express and publicize their opinion freely, and as a regulatory institution against the authority of the state.
Chapter III: Shadows of ‘Vozhd’

By rendering an anti-Soviet narrative and emphasizing the danger of the presence of monuments in the public sphere, Ukrainian officials have followed the steps of their Soviet predecessors, who believed that public space had primarily didactic and patronizing functions. The idea that “Sovietness” is threatening Ukraine’s sovereignty and that the promotion of “Ukrainian” values will advance the process of democratization may merely substitute the content of propaganda without either questioning the relevance of the method in a contemporary context or reckoning with the cultural makeup of Post-Soviet Ukraine. Moreover, the drastic ban of Soviet monumental art, together with the renaming of cities and streets and attempts to make existing monuments and their empty pedestals look more “Ukrainian” neither responds to the Maidan’s anti-establishment motives, nor advances the vision of Ukraine as a country with democratic values. Thus, the question this chapter considers is whether the decommunization process initiated by the new government after the revolution reflects the grassroots approach towards public space demonstrated during the protest as a means to open discussion and fostering community engagement. Given that since the collapse of the USSR, Ukrainians would barely pay attention to political or commercial imagery encountered in public space, another question emerges: was the Soviet idea of educating the masses relevant in the post-Soviet context, and to what extent was it effective even in its own time? To answer these questions, the chapter focuses on the three Lenin monuments within the administrative center and then on the post-Maidan artistic interventions at the site of the Lenin monument at Bessarabska Square.

Lenins of Maidan and What We Learned from Them

The previous chapter introduced the idea of the USSR as a Gesamtkunstwerk, whose duty was to shape the collective body by influencing people's consciousness. In the case of
Kyiv’s administrative center, the construction and transformation of which was also analyzed above, the ideological function was partially embedded in the omnipresence of Lenin figures that “guarded” the three squares — Bessarabska, October Revolution, and Lenin Komsomol. Moreover, within this short stretch of the city center, there was also a street bearing Lenin’s name, the Lenin memorial desk on ЦУМ (TsUM — Central Universal Department Store), and the Lenin Museum on Vladimirska street (later moved to Lenin Komsomol Square). The dense concentration of Lenin’s presence in a relatively small area meant to signify the importance of the “leader” and saturate the urban space with Soviet mythology. However, if one leaves aside the idea of a collective psyche propagated by official Soviet culture, the impact that the built environment of Kyiv’s center has had on individuals is questionable.

To deconstruct the individual impact of the Soviet myth-makers’ mass education efforts, I conducted a series of interviews with Soviet citizens of different generations and social strata: those who were exposed to Soviet history as contemporaries or as researchers, those who had worked with the locations or monuments in question, and those who had somehow interacted with them because the Gesamtkunstwerk of Soviet routine was simply unavoidable. My key questions were as follows: Were there any jokes or unusual stories about the three monuments? How did the interviewees or their peers perceive the public space of the Maidan and nearby squares with Lenin monuments? Did public space in the administrative center have a didactic effect or other specific impact on them?\(^{57}\) The various responses revealed some interesting observations and a certain discrepancy between the authoritarian intent behind the use of public space and its results in practice.

---

\(^{57}\) Starting in April, 2017, I first began emailing questions to 11 Ukrainian professionals working in the arts, which led to several extended interviews via email and Skype; later on, I posted the same questions on my Facebook page, resulting in an ongoing survey that has had 98 responses to date. Approximately 20% of respondents were over 35 and thus had direct memories of Soviet life, while the rest shared stories told by their parents and grandparents.
The question related to jokes resulted in a collection of jokes and humorous anecdotes, suggesting that at least some part of the USSR’s mythical collective body did not necessarily share in the sacralization of the leader. There were plenty of comments regarding the shape of the monuments and buildings and their awkward artistic qualities. For example, the Lenin monument on Bessarabska square was called “a thermos” for the shape of its pedestal, and the sculptural agglomerate beneath the back of the monument provoked ironic comments suggesting that Lenin was hiding or was ashamed of something. Moreover, Lenin’s hand was directed toward the Besarabsky market as if to say: “Everyone to the market.” The irony was that the entire county lived in a permanent condition of deficit and shortage; thus, the only stratum who could afford to buy food at Besarabsky market were Soviet “apparatchiks”, and the resident housing in the square itself was reserved for KGB officers. The monument to the October Revolution on Maidan was popularly called “Gulliver in the Lilliput Land” because the Lenin statue was significantly bigger than four small bronze figures: the male worker, the female worker, the peasant, and the sailor (Fig. 2). The figure of Lenin dominated the composition and stood apart from the masses in size and in medium: his likeness was made of red granite, suggesting that he belonged to a different, transcendent mode of being. And the Lenin Museum on Stalin Square (the third Lenin statue was installed indoors) was oftentimes called “a coffer” or “saccharine with margarine” for its rectangular shape and inappropriate placement — a beloved ancient hill that had been a favorite promenade for Kyivans was leveled to make space for construction of the museum (Fig. 21). There were also some anecdotal stories shared by respondents, for example, when

58 Interview with Olena Borimska, April 7, 2017.

kids somehow felt that their parents or grandparents “did not like Grandpa Lenin” even though Soviet people (even dissidents) generally avoided expressing their critique of the state.\footnote{Dmitrii Gorbachev, cited by Tetyana Filevska in her email response, April 8, 2016.}

None of these jokes would have been safe to say in public until the Perestrojka of the 1980’s, when the now famous “Soviet kitchens” became hotbeds of dissent and culture due to government control of public space. One of the respondents, art historian Olena Borimska, shared a number of stories about when she and her peers had approached Soviet monuments under construction to ask basic questions, to inquire about some historical information regarding Lenin, or simply to observe, only to be detained for “abnormal behavior.” Borimska explained that Kyiv’s intelligentsia understood the absurdity of the political propaganda embodied by the large number of Lenin figures and mythology everywhere, but learned to live by double standards: to be quiet and follow the rules in public spaces, and curse the government in their kitchens. Borimska concluded that other Soviet generations and her own can identify with one another through this idea of not taking actions further than the kitchen-critique of the state. The Maidan and its protest town with open dialogues and discussions served as a sort of expansion of the ’kitchen critique space’ into an occupied public space, thus, signalling a paradigm change from totalitarian to democratic.

While commenting on the spatial impression of the squares, administrative center buildings, and monuments, art historian Tetyana Filevska spoke about the horror and oppression that one would feel in such places because of their sheer scale and dominance. She described her feelings when she visited the President’s Administration (a part of the administrative center) for the first time:

... You just feel this pressure physically, you are lost in endless corridors, you feel some strange security behind these walls, as if you can do everything and you will not
get any punishment—no one can reach you. I often see how normal people are changing while working there. Those secret underground tunnels, the power hierarchy embedded in buildings and streets, overindulgence of power—all this still directly affects our society. The reconstruction of Khreshchatyk in the 1950s was an ideal embodiment of the Stalinist ideology. All the historically important sites of other epochs—Sofia, Lavra—were blocked ... Stalin ordered to block the view of all the churches from Khreshchatyk and Maidan.

The “Gulliver” Lenin evoked similar feelings. The monument dominated the square so much that it exerted a quite literal “suffocating” influence over the surrounding space, its grandiose mass towering over every person who happened to pass through the square, to the extent that people did not want to spend their time on that part of Maidan and would often prefer to meet and walk across the wide street of Khreschatyk instead. Due to this overwhelming presence, the square was divided in two not only physically by the Khreschatyk but also symbolically—its “official” section surrounding the monument and the “unofficial”, everyday, human section on the opposite side. Similar responses addressed the interior of the Lenin Museum, where the third monument used to stand. It was compared to a cemetery: a giant white marble sculpture standing in an atrium, the quotes from Lenin’s manuscripts surrounding the space, flowers always near the sculpture. It was an “idol in the well” — the space was always empty, horrifying and paralyzing— as Borimska stated, “one would not even want to move inside that hall” (Fig. 26). Yet, most respondents did not recall negative feelings regarding the space of Kyiv’s center, and two even noted that for them it was a “normal and well planned architectural ensemble” that evoked the “feeling of security.” Gallerist Evgen Karas, however, concluded that one could not fully comprehend the influence of the architecture and monuments while they stood — it was only after their demolition that one could feel the

61 Tyshchenko, “Maidan: vid prostoru protestu…,” 98.
“cancerous” “white noise” was gone.\textsuperscript{62}

However, some respondents suggested that most Soviet people never questioned or reflected on the ideology and its monumentalized vision in public space. Borimska assumed that this was not only achieved through the persecution of intellectuals and the overall idea that thinking, as opposed to working, was “social parasitism,” but also through better treatment (both rhetorical and financial) of workers and through the encouragement to drink alcohol after work, so that the workers could “relax and not ask questions.” For many individuals who would neither critique nor glorify the state, the three Lenin monuments served as “landmarks” in the course of their lifetime. Even though it was the party who had decided that communist leaders, the revolution, and WWII were to be commemorated on every occasion, for individuals, photos taken near Lenin monuments maintained memories of all important life events—an initiation into Komsomol, a graduation day, a wedding, etc. (Figs. 27-28). That is, photographing these rituals became a mirror, in which people saw nothing but their youth and happy moments, something they wanted to remember.\textsuperscript{63} Two respondents mentioned that either they or their parents had proposed marriage near the Lenin monument; thus, its presence remained connected to a very personal memory. Another respondent, Oxana Grishyna, displayed a medal with the engraved “Gulliver” Lenin monument on the backdrop of the administrative center (Fig. 29)—such medals would be given to babies born in Kyiv together with their birth certificate (in a pink case if it was a girl, and a blue one for a boy). Grishyna said: “This was one of two first most important presents in my life. This medal and Ivan Kotlyarevsky’s \textit{Eneïda}, presented by my grandfather with the inscription about love to Ukraine. Ideology? No, this was a mark, a reminder that I was a

\textsuperscript{62} Interview with Evgen Karas, May 5, 2017.

\textsuperscript{63} Natalia Adamskaya, cited by Filevska in her email response, April 8, 2017.
Alexey Shevchuk recalled a story of his grandfather, Georgii Lisitsya, whose family was harshly repressed by the Stalinist regime and who “longed neither for the communist regime nor for Lenin,” yet who was against the demolishing of the monument because this is where he would come with his two daughters to commemorate Victory day and enjoy the parade on Khreshchatik—this place was significant for their history as a family. Remarkably, every other respondent was positive in their memories of parades and commemoration days, comparable to holidays, fun, and a sense of community.

The destiny of the fallen monuments after the dissolution of the USSR demonstrates that commercial profit was more important than the communist myth. As soon as independence was announced in 1991, the “Gulliver” Lenin was vandalized with obscene words and swastikas (Fig.30). The Monument to the Great October Revolution was soon demolished according to a decision by KCSA and taken to the yard of the Republican Association "Ukrrestavratsiya"—since the organization was privatized in the early 90s, the location of the monument was unknown. The situation with the monument at the Lenin Museum was even more telling. In 1993 when the museum was liquidated (it was later renamed as Ukrainian House), the statue was smashed with jackhammers at night. This statue was made of a special very expensive marble—a cool shade with high luminosity. Such marble, one without cracks, was chosen because “the leader has no flaws.” The precious stone was quietly and without authorization transported to the same factory where it was produced, and the workers who dismantled it are still secretly selling off the pieces today. The last Lenin—the one on Besarabsky Market was standing until the recent revolution, when it was toppled by the crowd and smashed with hammers. Pieces of it still occasionally

64 Responses recorded in May, 2017.

65 Filevska, interview.
appear on internet auctions. The cult of Lenin vanished quickly, as there were no longer “Komsomol meetings” or weekly “political information” hours in every institution ranging from primary schools to factories—no need for performative commitment to the Party. Instead, images of the previously untouchable figure of Lenin, and all sorts of communist memorabilia, when offered to tourists, became marketable sources of income.

The weak ideological influence that the great myth of the USSR had exercised through the built environment of public space, architecture, and monuments was even less present in independent Ukraine. The remaining monuments and memorial sites—every square, park, or boulevard that had them incorporated into their design—would be automatically maintained, yet “invisible” both in professional and media discourse, as well as to the public. Aside from wreath-laying ceremonies commemorating WWII, or as part of official visit rituals, the only regular audiences at these sites were young skateboarders, attracted by spacious surfaces covered by granite flagstones suitable for riding. Remarkably, one of the prominent Ukrainian street artists, Vova Vorotniov, made a “Deckommunization series” in 2016, in which he documented the sites of the administrative center and its monuments “appropriated” by skateboarders (Figure 31). In a conversation about the decommunization process in Ukraine, the artist said that “the decommunization already happened in the mind of Ukrainians, who do not take these sites seriously, do not notice them on a daily basis, or appropriate them for other purposes.”

In this case, the young skateboarders signify a Post-Soviet generation of Ukrainians because skateboarding culture came to Ukraine in the 1990’s, with the “westernization” of the Post-USSR countries.

Thus, the ideological influence on people through public space and monumental art was a constructed idea that was not entirely effective. While in the USSR it was impossible to express publicly the criticism of power or its embodiment in monistic images, in post-Soviet Ukraine, people typically did not care about any unified idea being embodied in public space. The emergence of occupational protest practices and, in particular, the Maidan—with its national scale and grassroots creative expression—is evidence that among Ukrainians there is a growing need to use public space as a place for communication of values related to the needs of people, not power. However, the initiators of large-scale decommunization continue to articulate the idea that the presence of Soviet symbols is a hindrance to "Ukrainian identity." Attempts to remodel monuments by decorating them with traditional Ukrainian elements or by covering them with the Ukrainian flag, as well as the replacing Soviet leaders with figures from Ukrainian history or Orthodox religion, propagate the politics of fixed identities and do not respond to contemporary visions of public space. In the following section, I narrow my focus to the post-Maidan situation at the site of the Lenin monument on Bessarabska Square to analyze grassroots creative initiatives and the reconceptualization of public space.

**Inhabiting the Pedestal**

Since the protest waves of the revolutionary Maidan washed away the last Lenin of Kyiv, its pedestal has been standing empty, open to interventions and internet memes. Objects, flags, or inscriptions appear without sanction, manifest themselves for a couple of hours, and are quickly removed by the city administration. Among them have been a golden toilet (an anonymous ironic reference to the corrupt regime of the former president, whose palace was mocked for its kitschy opulence), an installation made of a hundred plastic mannequins painted gold, and a psychedelic garden sculpture figure of the Virgin Mary (Figs.
Be it a monument to Jedi Master Yoda or a toilet made of gold, what is common to all of these interventions are the irony and fearless occupation of public space in contrast to the restrictive and almost sacralized Soviet approach to the monuments.

It is against this background the first fully institutionally developed artistic project, Cynthia Gutierrez’s temporary installation *Inhabiting Shadows* (2016), was installed there by the charitable art foundation IZOLYATSIA: Platform for Cultural Initiatives as a part of the “Social Contract” project (July 2016—ongoing) (Fig.4). *Inhabiting Shadows*, an art installation built over the pedestal that once held Kyiv’s last Lenin monument, was made as a scaffolding with stairs allowing viewers to climb on top of the postament. Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, Cynthia Gutierrez, whose submission was selected among twenty one applications from artists and art collectives around the globe (eight from Ukraine, two from Mexico, and one each from Poland, Bulgaria, Chile, Spain, Belgium, Latvia, Thailand, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Netherlands, and Switzerland), had in her previous work addressed memory and oblivion, in limitations on and conflicts of spaces defined by their history.67

The audience’s reaction to the work is especially significant as it indicates not only the pluralization of public opinion and Kyivans’ engagement in the debate about public space, but also reveals a confusion when it comes to a critical discussion on public art. *Inhabiting Shadows* triggered a massive conversation on Facebook (which became an important type of public space in Ukraine during the revolution). Comments on the popular Club of Native Kyivans Facebook group (approx. 120), posts with the hashtag (approx. 200),

67 The *Inhabiting Shadows* installation was selected by an international jury consisting of: Anna Bondar, interim director of the Department for Urban Planning and Architecture of the Kyiv City State Administration (Ukraine); Evgeniya Kuleba – co-founder of the Heavenly Hundred Garden, head of the Garden City project (Ukraine); Rick Rowbotham, architect, urban designer (UK); Oksana Barslynova, curator, head of the XX – XXI century art department at the Ukrainian National Art Museum (Ukraine); Kateryna Filyuk, curator of the Social Contract project (Ukraine – Netherlands); Cynthia Gutiérrez, interview by Anastasiia Gerasimova, “I am always in a search while working,” ART UKRAINE, April 6, 2017, accessed May 25, 2017, http://artukraine.com.ua/eng/a/sintiya-guterres–ya-brosayu-vyzov-miru/#.WSuDPfrysdU.
and reactions to mass media coverage (approx. 25 publications) provided a general idea of how the work was accepted. Gutierrez’s simple and meaningful idea led to an appreciation of the work as something radically new to the city, but also provoked strong criticism among artistic circles and citizens, who voiced opinions that the project was “horrible” and had “raped the city.” Critics’ arguments were generally related either to aesthetics or to ideology. For instance, journalist Anna Parovatkina believed that the work was not beautiful or even “ugly,” that the construction was not visually connected to the Besarabsky market’s building, or that its ugliness highlighted the decline of the city and did not popularize contemporary art. Others expressed the view that it did not connote the past presence of Lenin or the history of recent years, or that not everybody deserved to stand on the pedestal. And a few questioned the procedure behind the installation of the work and blamed IZOLYATSIA or KCSA for monopolization of decisions regarding public space.

Thus, beyond the public’s desire to communicate its ideas through public space, the broad negative reaction signifies the absence of a common language to analyze and appreciate public art works. For decades, monumental art had served as a way to strengthen the political agenda, and the significance of the monumentalized figure had never been publicly questioned. In this light, Gutierrez’s project marked the current understanding of how public art functions and emphasized the shifting paradigm of popular engagement with monumental art. While public art in Ukraine had been the government’s prerogative—the reason why the audience was rather confused and lacked a proper consensus on how to discuss it—it had emerged in Western countries as a separate category in the discipline of art


69 Anna Parovatkina’s comment on Viktor Marushchenko’s Facebook post, July 10, 2016.
history. In interpreting *Inhabiting Shadows* as a marker of the pluralization of thought, the following section borrows Western methodology and deconstructs the work by analyzing it through three key factors: temporality, site-specificity, and patronage.

The formal analysis of *Inhabiting Shadows* helps to contextualize it within the Soviet tradition of monumentalizing the verticality of power. The work is composed of a conventional metal scaffolding staircase ascending and descending the pedestal where Lenin statue once stood. The entire construction is almost transparent, but one can see that its shape resembles a Mexican pyramid or a Mesopotamian ziggurat—an ancient monumental structure that was a source of inspiration for the totalitarian aesthetics of the twentieth century in Europe. Climbing a ziggurat (a Babylonian word meaning “to build on a raised area”) symbolically signifies the higher position of the one who has climbed it and his special closeness to God, or even suggests that one has replaced God. In fact, the latter might be seen as a reference to the USSR, where the cult of leaders required almost sacred worship and essentially replaced the religion that had been eliminated by the Party. The Communist regime had religious overtones from the start with the cult of Lenin and the Bolsheviks’ striving for a ‘vozhd’, whose personal leadership was critical of the movement. Despite the emancipatory potential of the revolution, it relied heavily on a ‘traditional peasant mentality’ developed through monarchist respect to personal authority “whether it emanated from immediate boss or from the head of the party and state.”

This culminated with the drastic emergence of Joseph Stalin's cult of personality after a lavish celebration of Stalin's 50th birthday in December 1929. The Soviet press presented Stalin as an all-powerful,

---


all-knowing leader, and Stalin's name and image became omnipresent; cities, villages, 
collectives, schools, factories, and institutions were named after him (as after Lenin). From 
1936, Soviet journalism started to refer to Joseph Stalin as the Father of Nations; enormous 
portraits of Lenin and Stalin were, like icons, an integral part of massive demonstrations and 
public space in general. As described in Chapter II, these idolized figures were visualized 
through colossal sculptures, detached from masses both in scale and material—be it the 
aforementioned Lenin on the Palace of Soviets or the one in the Maidan’s monument to the 
Great October Revolution, where the size difference between Lenin and the workers reached 
the aforementioned comic proportions.

Gutierrez chose the method of deconstruction to create a moment for contemplating 
history with all its ambiguity. She offered every passerby the opportunity to climb up; to 
occupy the patch where Lenin’s figure stood for the sixty-seven preceding years; to look at 
Bessarabska Square; to take a selfie; and, potentially, to think about who or what might or 
should occupy this place and why. By being so inclusive—the audience literally becomes 
part of the composition—the artist makes visible the mechanism of an individual’s 
participation in the process of constructing history. The viewers’ experiences vary: one 
person might easily climb up out of curiosity regarding the urban landscape, another person 
could be horrified to be standing in a place that served as a gallows during the Second World 
War, while a third might be amused by the power of the place and begin to imagine him- or 
herself as a leader, hero, or prophet, confirming the idea that individuals rapidly adopt social 
roles according to a given position. For one person, such as the pensioner Volodimyr, who 
brought a Ukrainian flag, that was a moment of triumph—“I am standing on Ukraine’s past,” 
he said—whereas for his partner, Lyudmila, the moment was full of nostalgia as she recalled 
giving an oath at the spot as a young Soviet pioneer. There is an endless combination of
personal experiences and choices, and this plurality is a direct reference to democratic society and its diversity. Thus, the meaning of the work emerges out of these acts of inclusion, multiplying experiences and breaking down the monolithic imagery of “history,” “hero,” and “identity.” This uncomplicated collapsible construction gains symbolic value in showing the possibility of applying the same collapsible approach to the past, the shadows of which are more ambiguous than is generally allowed by the official discourse about Ukrainian identity.

Yet another connection of this work to the Soviet artistic tradition reveals itself when examining Gutierrez’s work through the lens of Latin American conceptual art—a tradition in whose context the artist developed her practice in Mexico. The form originated from Mexican muralism of the first half of the twentieth century, similarly to the cultural paradigms of the early USSR. There is a surprising parallel between artistic processes in early-20th century Mexico and the Soviet avant-garde in the early years of the USSR, when artists such as Alexander Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, and their peers strongly supported the Soviet project. As mentioned in the previous chapter, for some time these avant-gardists believed that art should have an educational function and improve the taste of the proletariat, yet the Soviet authorities quickly appropriated artistic methods for disseminating propaganda instead of knowledge. A similar context motivated Mexican artists to abandon the practice of muralism, which had become a means of government-commissioned propaganda, and turn instead to creating non-material, non-object art. One of the characteristics of such art was didacticism. The educational potential of art is, indeed a significant component of *Inhabiting Shadows*, nonetheless it remains a friendly didacticism that offers an egalitarian

---


approach by facilitating critical conversation. In a Facebook discussion about the work, the project curator, Kateryna Filiyk, also underlined the conceptual, formative aspect of the piece:

One should not treat the work as an object....It was necessary to emphasize its temporary nature, openness to different interpretations. And the scaffolding is a good solution because you always erect it in order to build something new. Since there is still no consensus on what will replace the current pedestal, we are stopping at this preparatory stage and inviting all who are interested to join the process of discussion. The most important thing is to enable the construction to engage people, their movement, their feelings. The stairs are not the art object, not a final product; they are only a tool.74

Instead of giving viewers a predesigned set of meanings for passive contemplation,

Gutierrez’s conceptual, non-object-oriented work, offers a DIY toolkit for the creation of meaning.

Site Specificity

The specificity of this particular place at Bessarabska has many layers, some of which have been indirectly addressed earlier. Firstly, this is the place where “Leninfall” began, thus giving rise to the government’s decommunization program, as well as sparking a broader discussion about its relevance and seducing artists and creative passersby with its empty pedestal. Historical information about the place discloses its even broader ambiguity.

According to Istoriychna Pravda, at the time of the Nazi occupation, the site of the former monument was a place of public execution where Germans hanged hostages on the boulevard lamps and forced Kyivans to watch the process.75 There is also a rumor that after winning the war, the Soviet militants hung Ukrainians who had fought against the Soviet government for the independence of Ukraine. Such a layering of historical contexts suggests that history is

74 Kateryna Filiyk, comment on Viktor Marushenko’s Facebook post, July 10, 2016.

rather conflicting and does not fit into a singular framework. Even its title, *Inhabiting Shadows* addressed this multiplicity of possible historical narratives.

In response to comments that the work did not fit with the urban landscape (particularly the Besarabsky Market building in front of it), it is also possible to argue that the aesthetic component, as partially demonstrated in the above analysis, shows visual forethought and specificity to the site. Just as the Lenin monument was visually coherent with the seemingly endless narrow boulevard behind it, framed by the two rows of peaked poplars, *Inhabiting Shadows* was in dialogue with the preceding monument both visually and conceptually: the eternal prospects of the Socialist future, unfolding under guidance of the *vozhd*, were now replaced with the narrow ladder, a passage that everybody could come and go through, embodying the essence of time (and history) as a constant flow of changing events and figures. This successful grasping of historical context gives the work a coherent meaning that allows it to deconstruct the idea of a single historical perspective.

**Temporality**

Temporary public art projects became popular in the U.S. in the late 1980s and early 90s. In her article “Temporality and Public Art”—one of the first texts about the emerging practice—art historian Patricia Phillips argued the importance of temporary art projects for local communities. Phillips suggests that the construction of permanent monuments requires the consideration of many factors that are simply impossible to collect, examine, and combine in one work. Therefore, any permanent work is a “grand solution,” which represents the decision or interest of a specific person or ideology. Instead, temporary work is more open to experimentation because the same space can serve as a platform and a background for the creation of many works, each of which addresses different issues and acknowledges

---

different viewers and contexts. Phillips argues, that temporary projects, deploy a field laboratory for the production of a plethora of experiences—aesthetic or intellectual—and it is the temporal aspect of the work that allows experimentation with decisions that may not necessarily end up being “good” ones:

A temporary public art may not offer broad proclamations; it may stir controversy and rage; it may cause confusion; it may occur in nontraditional, marginal, and private places. In such an art the conceptual takes precedence over the more obvious circumstantial.  

As opposed to massive Soviet monuments designed to set the communist truth in stone for eternity, Inhabiting Shadows, an ephemeral work that lasted only two weeks, was indeed a laboratory for generating experiences ranging from the contemplation of the problematic past to simple entertainment, thus for laying the groundwork for acknowledging the diversity of Ukrainian society.

Given that this particular place is so charged politically and historically, is it at all possible to find a grand solution that would have the capacity to represent all of contemporary Ukrainians in an old monumental tradition? Could there be a monument that takes into account the interests of all these groups? What would it be? What are its functions? What are the alternatives? The Maidan, which in many ways galvanized these questions, involved completely opposite political views ranging from anarcho-communist to ultra right, not to mention the hundreds of people who could not identify themselves politically but were outraged by violations of human rights; those who could be at the square when the revolution became a commoditized image they wanted to identify with; or those who were there to vocalize their desire to join the visa-free zone with the EU so they could leave Ukraine more easily. Clearly, a unified image of all those Ukrainians does not exist, yet the Institute of

77 Ibid., 332.
National Memory is advancing the politics of fixed identities based on ethnic and religious grounds. At a time of rapid decommunization and the replacement of Soviet “grand solutions” with Ukrainian ones, *Inhabiting Shadows*— and the “Social Contract” project at large, which to this date presented three temporary installations at the spot— signals an alternative mode of interaction with the public realm and promotes public art in its primary, popular sense by embracing people in all their diversity. Such a shift from a dominant single idea to a variety of ideas reflects the painful process of self-identification and transition from authoritarianism to democracy that is now taking place in Ukraine in particular.

**Patronage**

As opposed to the Soviet establishment, which sought to legitimize ideological decisions and actions through public art, “Social Contract” shifts the function of authorities to merely administrative ones. As the first work commissioned by a third party and authorized by KCSA to be installed at a site of such symbolic significance, *Inhabiting Shadows* both revealed the lack of an exact procedure of approval for temporary artworks proposed by independent institutions, and set an important precedent for forthcoming projects of that kind. According to Filiyk, the patron of the work, IZOLYATSIA, sent a number of official letters to the KCSA, which took more than two months to circulate between departments whose representatives claimed that “this was not their responsibility.”[^78] After persistent communication (the institution has provided a table with a detailed description of requests, names of departments and KCSA representatives, timeline, etc.), IZOLYATSIA got the necessary permission and proceeded with their commission. Such an example constitutes a direct contrast to authoritarian decisions “from above” regarding public space.

Furthermore, “Social Contract” advances the grassroots movement of the Maidan,

[^78]: Private conversation with the curator, July 2016.
which claimed popular right to the city through the practice of occupation and appropriation of Kyiv’s public spaces, taken to the next level of constructing an independent functional democracy. Within the history of independent Ukraine, Kyiv City State Administration is an exemplary case of the drastic Soviet “power vs. people” dichotomy. Early in 2013, KSCA had employed special police units who brutally attacked journalists and civil activists in response to their attempt to be present at the city administration’s session to reveal the corrupted mechanisms of land redistribution by deputies. During the Maidan, KSCA was one of the very first state institutions occupied by protesters and reappropriated as shelters, soup-kitchen, and field hospital. “Social Contract” mediates the binary opposition between power and the people into a visible precedent of realization of civic initiative through the state apparatus.

The process of selecting an artwork for each new rendering of a temporary installation within “Social Contract” also demonstrates the acceleration of popular engagement with public space. For the first project (which resulted in Inhabiting Shadows) IZOLYATSIA announced an open call for artists and involved a jury to make a selection; they followed the same mechanism for the second round (resulting in Mahmoud Bakhshi’s Endless Celebration (November, 2016) and also conducted a survey to collect audience responses to the work. For the third round (resulting in Isa Carillo’s Ritual of Self-Nature (May, 2017) the jury made a shortlist of four proposals and let the people choose one of them in an online vote. Such public involvement constitutes a dramatic difference with the official

---

79 Tyshchenko, “Maidan: vid prostoru protestu...,” 100.
80 The Inhabiting Shadows installation was selected by an international jury consisting of: Anna Bondar – interim director of the Department for Urban Planning and Architecture of the Kyiv City State Administration (Ukraine); Evgeniya Kuleba – co-founder of the Heavenly Hundred Garden, head of the Garden City project (Ukraine); Rick Rowbotham – architect, urban designer (UK); Oksana Barsynova – curator, head of the XX – XXI century art department at the Ukrainian National Art Museum (Ukraine); Kateryna Filyuk – curator of the Social Contract project (Ukraine – Netherlands).
strategy of decommunization. While “Social Contract”—even with its title—presupposes an invitation to participation and finding consensus, decommunization imposes bans and restrictions, and postulates that no social conversation is necessary for making decisions regarding public art.\textsuperscript{81}

Last but not least, IZOLYATSIA’s background and mission demonstrate its enthusiasm in galvanizing democratic processes. It is a non-profit non-governmental platform for contemporary culture founded in 2010 by a local businesswoman and philanthrope Lubov Mikhailova, on the site of a former insulation materials factory in Donetsk, Ukraine. It was one of the first institutions in Ukraine (and the first in its East) that focused on enhancing local communities by means of art and information, and the creation of artistic spaces, labs, and workshops for the development of creative industries; one of the first to host international art residencies with the goal of researching Donbass with and for locals. In June of 2014, the territory was seized by Russian-backed separatists (they later destroyed art-installations and labs, transforming the location into a military site and using the factory's basements to detain hostages), and the institution moved to Kyiv. Many displaced people from Donetsk, for whom the new location is now a meeting place, still refer to IZOLYATSIA as a place that changed their lives by giving the only cultural alternative to ordinary life in the depressed industrial region of Donbass. Within the last three years that have marked Ukraine, IZOLYATSIA’s program gained an even greater reputation for grassroots involvement and providing a platform for conversations about human rights, identity, history, and their manifestation in artistic and public spaces.

\textsuperscript{81} Explanatory note to the LAW OF UKRAINE “On the condemnation of the communist and national socialist (Nazi) regimes, and prohibition of propaganda of their symbols.”
Conclusion

By emphasizing the urgency of erasing all traces of the USSR from public space the current Ukrainian government is essentially upholding the Soviet idea that public space is crucial for construction of the collective psyche. Yet the analysis of Soviet attempts to write a political narrative by means of spatial organization of public space and monumental art, as well as the public’s reaction to them reveal that the strategy did not have the desired impact. Decades of numerous reconstructions and renamings of Kyiv’s central area demonstrate that public space mirrored various stages of Soviet history, from the utopian desire to create a new state, to the colossal attempt to construct a new cult, and, at last, the official necessity to merely toe the Party line and avoid repercussions rather than to fulfill a belief in the ideals of communism.

The drastic gap between the manifestation of ideology in public spaces and the personal attitude of the late Soviet public, whose responses reveal little ideological engagement, demonstrate that spatial organization and public art have limited influence on people’s consciousness. Even though the central parts of Kyiv were designed following Haussmann’s principles, with the idea of wide open areas in which the masses are easy to shoot and to control, it did not prevent the Maidan from becoming a crucial place for generating anti-authoritarian protest actions and for the subsequent development of the public sphere. What historians now call the new Ukrainian subjectivity, new Ukrainian-ness, or the birth of civic society developed due to the presence and history of the particular square, which became a place where citizens claimed their right to assemble, unite, and express their opinions freely.

It was this striving for democratic values and diversification of public life that constituted the opposition to the Soviet era of normalization and censorship. But the
post-Maidan debate regarding the protest movement became a subject for misrepresentation and nationalist manipulation, for which the Russian intervention in the course of Ukrainian politics and the strong anti-colonial sentiment among right-wing politicians provided fertile ground. Despite the reductionism of authorities, which narrows the current political, social, and cultural situation to a primarily nationalist agenda, the examples of recent public art in Kyiv signal the diversification of social life in a public space that is becoming a place for communication and community engagement. The case of the first temporary project, *Inhabiting Shadows*, commissioned by an independent art foundation for the site of the former Lenin monument, demonstrates both Kyivans’ growing involvement in the discussion about public space and the lack of critical tools for generating a productive dialogue. Nonetheless, placing the work in its historical context and analyzing its temporality, site-specificity, and patronage suggest that a democratic approach to public space is emerging in opposition to the authoritarian one, and that the demand for “popular” or truly public art, i.e. that which is available for public participation and contribution, constitutes an alternative to the old totalitarian model of using public space as a dominant vehicle for state propaganda.
Epilogue

Almost three years after the Revolution of Dignity, Kyiv’s public sphere oscillates between propaganda and indifference, with the intensified commercialization and patriotic decoration of public space accompanied by public reactions ranging from appreciation to rejection. Since the implementation of decommunization laws, some monuments were destroyed on site, some were covered with Ukrainian flags, and others were slightly vandalized, thus losing their status of protected heritage and allowing for their further demolition. In parallel, KSCA commissioned dozens of murals that cover Soviet tower-blocks with traditional Ukrainian motifs, heroic or patriotic imagery, or simply with apolitical colorful drawings, which many Kievan find a beautiful and appropriate change to the grey post-Soviet urban landscape. The Institute of National Memory has played a major role in advancing the anti-Soviet narrative and a general conservative course: Vyatrovych’s last initiative to date is a new law that eliminates a number of national holidays (including International Women’s Day and International Worker’s Day) and substitutes them with Mother’s Day, Defender’s Day, and Family Day— all of which reinvent tradition through the model of patriarchal society. Even though March 8 and May 1 did not originate in the USSR and their agenda has advanced human rights throughout the world, Vyatrovych insists on their “Sovietness” and thus their negative impact on the minds of Ukrainians. Given that within these three years Ukraine has lost territories and is still losing lives on a daily basis in the Russian-backed military conflict in the country’s East, the patriotic rhetoric and its embodiment in artistic forms is often justified and welcomed by Ukrainians, whereas critical discussion is rather marginal even in artistic and academic circles. The ongoing corruption and abuse of power multiplied by the deepening economic crisis have led to a mood of post-revolutionary despair claiming that the Maidan as a metaphor for the birth of the civic
society failed. The most exemplary case of such frustration was Davis Chichkan’s exhibition “Lost Opportunity,” which expressed the Maidan’s failure, and which was in the end brutally destroyed by unknown right-wing vandals.

At the same time, the public sphere of Kyiv is birthing and witnessing a number of initiatives—from individual artistic projects to relatively massive “marches of equality” and intense discussions on Facebook (still an important part of public sphere since the Maidan)—that advance the pluralism of social life. Speaking of such initiatives, as this epilogue is being written, the empty pedestal of the Lenin monument on Bessarabka Square is undergoing the next episode of the “Social Contract” project—*Ritual of Self-Nature* by Isa Carillo, who covered the granite postament with rosemary plants, known for their healing capacities, as a way of neutralising the ideological tension around the vacant pedestal (Fig. 36). In a way, the work serves as its own epilogue to the thesis: as opposed to the Soviet project of disrupting the individual’s link with nature in order to create artificial social constructs, the installation metaphorically resumes the connection. Yet it does not offer new heroes, avoiding the very idea of given narratives and “grand solutions.” It simply invites people to acknowledge their history and calmly meditate on their surroundings. At the end of the project, the rosemary plants will be given away to passers-by who wish to adopt them.
Appendix A

Illustrations

Figure 1. Sergey Merkurov, Monument to Vladimir Lenin, 1946. Sculpture, red Karelian stone, 11.32 ft. Photograph: 1960, Courtesy Tetyana Filevska.

Erected on Bessarabska Square (Khreshchatyk Street at the intersection with Taras Shevchenko Boulevard) on 5 December 1946. Toppled from its pedestal and crushed on December 8, 2013.
The monument had a form of a granite pylon with a figure of Vladimir Lenin out of red granite (29 ft). In front of the pylon there were four bronze figures of male and female workers, peasant and sailor, each 17.2 ft in height. The whole composition was located on a granite stylobate.
Figure 3. V. Borisenko, Monument to Vladimir Lenin in the interior of Lenin Museum, 1982. Sculpture, marble. Photograph: Viktor Marushchenko, 1984, Courtesy Tetyana Filevska.
Figure 4. Cynthia Gutierrez, *Inhabiting Shadows*, 2016. Installation, metal scaffolding staircase, 20.7 x 4.92 x 45.6 ft. Photograph by Valery Miloserdov, Courtesy IZOLYATSIA.Platform for Cultural Initiatives.

Figure 5. Boris Iofan, Palace of Soviets, All-Union Competition, 1933.
Figures 6-7. All-Union Competition, Administrative Center in Kyiv: Valerian Rykov architecture group submission, Kyiv, 1935 (top); Dmitry Chechulin and Georgy Orlov submission, Moscow, 1935 (bottom). Reproduced from *Architecture of Soviet Kyiv*, 2010.
Figures 8-10. All-Union Competition, Administrative Center in Kyiv (top to bottom): Ivan Fomin group submission, Moscow, 1935; Viktor and Aleksandr Vesnin brothers, Moscow, 1934; K. Alabyan’s submission, Moscow, 1935. Reproduced from Architecture of Soviet Kyiv, 2010.
Figure 11. All-Union Competition, Administrative Center in Kyiv

Figure 12. All-Union Competition, Reconstruction of Khreshchatyk
Figure 13. Maquette for the post-war reconstruction of Khreshchatik with the Maidan square at the center, Besarabska square at far right and Stalin square far left. Reproduced from Architecture of Soviet Kyiv, 2010.

Figure 14. Hotel Moscow designed by A.Dobrovolsky for Kalinin Square, Kyiv, 1959.
Figures 15-16. Kalinin Square, 1960s
Figure 17: Lenin Museum in Kyiv, designed by Valentin Gopkalo, 1980s. Central State G.S. Pshenychnyy CinePhotoPhono Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv.
Figure 18. Independence Square after the reconstruction, early 2000s.

Figure 20. Interior of Lenin Museum. Photograph: Viktor Marushchenko, 1984, Courtesy Tetyana Filevska.

Figure 21. Open University at the Ukrainian House (former Lenin Museum) during the Maidan protest, 2014.

Figures 23-24. Photos from Tetyana Filevska’s and Bohdan Gdal’s family archives respectively, approx. 1987-88.

Figure 27. Vova Vorotniov, *Deckomunnization* series, 2016. Photo, dimensions variable. Courtesy BWA Awangarda, Wroclaw, PL.
Figures 28-31. Unauthorized artistic interventions (*left to right*): *Golden Toilet* (anonymous); *Determination* (Tetyana Voitovich); *Rise of Mary* (Yanka Bachynska); internet meme— at the site of former Lenin monument, 2014.
Appendix B
Excerpt from the LAW OF UKRAINE “On the condemnation of the communist and national socialist (Nazi) regimes, and prohibition of propaganda of their symbols”

4) symbols of communist totalitarian regime – symbols, which contain:
   a. any image of state flags, coats of arms and other symbols of the USSR, Ukrainian SSR (USRR), other union or autonomous Soviet Republics of the USSR, the so-called “people’s democracies”: People’s Republic of Albania (Socialist People’s Republic of Albania), People’s Republic of Bulgaria, German Democratic Republic, People’s Republic of Romania (Socialist Republic of Romania), Hungarian People’s Republic, Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia) and socialist republics in its composition, except those which are effective (valid) flags or coats of arms of the countries;
   b. anthems of the USSR, Ukrainian SSR (USRR), other union or autonomous Soviet republics or their fragments;
   c. flags, symbols, images or other attributes reproducing the combination of a sickle and a hammer, a sickle, a hammer and a five-pointed star, a plough, a hammer and a five-pointed star;
   d. symbols of the communist party or its elements;
   e. images, monuments, memorial signs, inscriptions dedicated to the persons, who held key management positions in the communist party (office of District Committee Secretary and higher), the persons, who held key management positions in the higher governmental and management bodies of the USSR, Ukrainian SSR (USRR), other union or autonomous Soviet republics, regional public authorities and governing boards, cities of republican status, staff of Soviet state security service bodies of all levels;
   f. images, monuments, memorial signs, inscriptions dedicated to the events related to the communist party’s activities, exercising the Soviet authority over the territory of Ukraine or its individual administrative areas, persecution of fighters for independence of Ukraine in XX century (except the monuments and memorial signs related to resistance and driving the Nazi invaders from Ukraine or development of Ukrainian science and culture);
   g. representations of communist party’s slogans, quotations of the persons, who held key management positions in the communist party (office of District Committee Secretary and higher), the persons, who held key management positions in the higher governmental and management bodies of the USSR, Ukrainian SSR (USRR), other union or autonomous Soviet republics, regional public authorities and governing boards, cities of republican status (except the quotations related to the development of Ukrainian science and culture), staff of Soviet state security service bodies of all levels;
h. names of the regions, districts, settlements, districts of cities/towns, parks, boulevards, streets, alleys, descents, lanes, prospects, squares, embankments, bridges, other place names in settlements, names of enterprises, institutions, organizations, containing names or nicknames of the persons, who held key management positions in the communist party (office of District Committee Secretary and higher), the persons, who held key management positions in the higher governmental and management bodies of the USSR, Ukrainian SSR (USRR), other union or autonomous Soviet republics, regional public authorities and governing boards, cities of republican status, staff of Soviet state security service bodies, as well as names of USSR, Ukrainian SSR (USRR), other union or autonomous Soviet republics and their derivatives, names related to the communist party activities (including assemblies of the party), anniversaries of the October coup of 25 October (7 November) 1917, exercising of Soviet authority over the territory of Ukraine or its individual administrative territorial units, persecution of the fighters for independence of Ukraine in XX century (except the names related to the resistance and driving the Nazi invaders from Ukraine or development of Ukrainian science and culture).

Full text:
“On the condemnation of the communist and national socialist (Nazi) regimes, and prohibition of propaganda of their symbols,” Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, accessed May 13, 2017,
Bibliography

Archives

Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine, Kyiv.

Central State Archives of Higher Authorities and Management of Ukraine, Kyiv.

Central State G.S. Pshenychnyy CinePhotoPhono Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv.

Maidan Museum initiative, Kyiv.

The Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture archives (Architecture and Building magazine).

Articles and Books


