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## SEMIOTICS OF URBAN SPACE AS A LINE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEFENSE

**ABSTRACT:** A study of semiotics, urban spaces, and anthropological defence in Ukraine is presented in this paper. An anthropological defence is safeguarding cultural identity and human values by studying signs and symbols. A city's urban space is a crucial arena in which cultural symbols, ideologies, and collective identities are manifested. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate how these elements contribute to the defence and preservation of the anthropological essence of a community within the Ukrainian context.

**Keywords:** military anthropology, Ukraine, anthropological defence, semiotic of space, placelessness

### INTRODUCTION



Since the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of Donbas by Russian and pro-Russian troops in 2014, the term 'hybrid warfare' has made an incredible media career. The term referred to the Russian Federation's aggressive actions in virtual and real space.

Naturally, the broadly understood culture and any semiotic sphere became the battlefield in the hybrid war. This article presents an overview of semiotic activities in urban spaces that are important for forming an anthropological defence line (see Korzeniowska-Bihun 2021). Anthropological defence and anthropological aggression are the terms that underlie the new paradigm of military anthropology (see Borocho, Korzeniowska-Bihun 2021).

Both anthropological defence and anthropological aggression may hold at the level of the semiotics of space. The surrounding urban signs and their ideological dimension become instruments of war. This is because the landscape, especially the townscape, reflects the power and policies in place (Kühne 2015: 37). This was the role that the cityscape/landscape played in the Soviet Union. Adequately modelled space became a manifestation of political dominance.

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Ilya Lezhava from the Moscow Institute of Architecture noted the symbolic significance of Russia's distinctive skyscrapers.

The building with a needle on the top appears as a reflection of Kremlin towers, which spreads around Moscow through its high rises and then goes on – in almost every major city in Russia there has to be a building with a needle as a symbol of the Kremlin. This is how architecture could be used for ideological influence. (Palace for the People 2017)

Apart from the buildings, the post-Soviet semiotic space was full of other Russian signs. There were, above all, monuments to Lenin, monuments to a 'soldier-liberator,' Soviet tanks on pedestals, and cemeteries of Red Army soldiers.

Over time, these elements of space have been part of the Russian Federation's policymaking. Any attempts to dismantle the monuments to Lenin and Soviet soldiers in now-independent countries have been met with strong protests from Moscow. The reason was simple: The erasure of the Soviet past traces from urban space contradicts the Russian historical narrative, including the cult of the Great Patriotic War.

Thus, urban ideological dominants can be a demonstration of power. But the political power can also manifest in ordinary, banal everyday architecture. When we look at the townscape of three eastern Slavic capitals, Moscow, Minsk, and Kyiv, we will see that, except for the historical parts, these cities have been built in a twin-similar way. It refers to modern residential buildings erected during the Soviet period and even, by inertia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This similarity can be treated at the level of the all-Soviet *uravnilovka* (top-down enforcement of uniformity). However, it should also be remembered that the trio of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus is particularly important to the Russian historical narrative. For this reason, the cohesion of the urban space can also be considered as a manifestation of the idea of 'One Rus', or as Vladimir Putin would put it today, 'Russky mir' (Russian World), especially if we combine identical urban space with the Russian language present on the streets of these three cities.

This phenomenon, a space with no unique characteristics, is what the geographer Edward Relph calls 'placelessness.'

Placelessness describes both an environment without significant places and the underlying attitude that does not recognize significance in places. It reaches back into the deepest levels of place, cutting roots, eroding symbols, replacing diversity with uniformity, and experiential order with conceptual order. (Relph, 1976: 143)

An urban environment with imposed political signs or devoid of any semantic references becomes fertile ground for semiotic manipulation. In short, it begins to be used as a tool of

anthropological aggression (see Boroch 2016: 84-85). This space can be filled freely with convenient signs, which can also be identical. It is no secret that the thousands of Lenin statues scattered throughout the Soviet Union were mass production, appearing in dozens of copies.

Such a composed environment can play another role as a semiotic background for other semiotic activities. National holidays, parades, meetings, and political ceremonies were organized around ideologically significant city elements. In a word, during the USRR Russian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian cities became the places where the same ceremonies were held under identical monuments to the same leaders of the same revolution.

Placelessness was not limited to the Soviet period either. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, placelessness became a background for semiotic manipulation. Due to this phenomenon, the Russian Federation, as the successor of the Soviet Union, could continue its cultural colonization. Today, placelessness penetrates deeper into the cultural fabric. Homogenized space became comfortable, e.g. for the producers of television series. Due to the semiotic barren background, television creators could give their stories a cosmopolitan character, primarily when the scripts were written in Russian.

On the one hand, the deprivation of distinctive signs facilitated the trade of cultural products in post-Soviet countries. On the other hand, such unification led to semantic confusion. The lack of specific signs created a world that each contemporary Belarusian, Ukrainian, or Russian viewer could quickly identify. But this world did not speak Belarusian or Ukrainian, but Russian,<sup>1</sup> and all associations and semiotic references were also reduced to the Russian cultural circle. The placelessness recorded by the camera, filled with cosmopolitan content, was transferred to the screens of thousands of television sets.

## **1. SEMIOTIC PALIMPSESTS OF CULTURE**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine found itself in a 'placelessness' space and a space filled with foreign signs. The effort that the young state had to make was to reorganise its cityscape/landscape semiotically. Ukraine faced the need to define the boundaries of its heritage, define familiar territories with Russian culture, and draw a line after which Russification and Russian colonial expansion began.

Historical circumstances have led to a situation in which a vast common Russian-Ukrainian field has been created. This field is as much about the cultural affiliation of many artists as it is

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<sup>1</sup> The following describes the situation before July 16, 2021, when the law 'On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language' was not yet in effect.

about shared historical experiences. The political and economic superiority of the coloniser made it much easier for Ukrainians to pursue an artistic career within the dominant culture than within the native one, especially since the native culture was subject to harsh discrimination for many years.

The issue of Ukraine's Soviet past seems to be even more complicated. Of course, Ukrainians have no problem with those Ukrainian artists who fell victim to political repression, even if the artists acted in Soviet times. However, the situation with representatives of Ukrainian culture who operated within the framework of the Soviet system is much more ambiguous. This also applies to sculptors and architects who design the urban environment.

Assuming that a place is a source of security and identity, how the sense of place and attachment to place is manifested are crucial for a community (Relph 1976: 6). In this context, it becomes clear that there had to be a change in the relationship between the new sovereign nation and a place whose semiotics alluded to a colonial past.

Several critical semantic processes have occurred in Ukraine. When these were put together, they started to resemble a palimpsest in which one layer of culture overlaps another. However, the lower layers often break through the current layers.

### **1.1. Adaptation of the Existing Space**

Adapting to existing space means semiotic reworking of monuments or other urban elements. For example, such an adaptation was demonstrated in painting Soviet symbols in Ukrainian national colours. It was the most straightforward strategy to apply and required neither potentially significant financial investments nor particularly intensive organizational efforts. Such paintings are often spontaneous and institutionally unorganized. Painting communist symbols in the national colours is also a means of resisting too slow semiotic changes. However, Ukrainian academic I. Halaktionova claims that the slow transformation and disappearance of superficial signs of the past (institutions, symbols) are a hint of change, but it is not radical change itself. The essence of the era, as well as the political culture, could remain almost unchanged for a long time. (Галактіонова 2003: 211).

The most enormous wave of repainting of Lenin's monuments in Ukraine fell in 2014. At that time, blue and yellow colours were applied to statues of the revolution leader, for example, in the town of Pobuzke in the Kirovohrad oblast (Гречка 2014). In 2014, residents of Nikopol City painted the Lenin statue yellow and blue to protest the ban on its destruction (Страшный

2014). Ukrainian colours also appeared on Lenin's monuments in liberated Sloviansk, Krematorsk, Starobilsk, Zaporizhzhia, Velyka Nowosiltsa, etc. (Тыдень 2014)

Soviet symbols painted in Ukrainian national colours cause a kind of cognitive dissonance. However, looking closely at the phenomenon, one can see the Pierre Nora discrepancy between history and memory (Nora 1989), the difference between what happened and how it was remembered, especially in eastern and southern Ukraine.

The problem of 'what is worth remembering' has been a sensitive topic in Ukraine for many years. From the beginning of its independence, Ukraine began to divide its memory into two types related to two other historical experiences (Danylenko 2016). The sentiment for the Soviet past and its visualization lasted mainly in eastern Ukraine. It is worth mentioning, for instance, that as recently as 2010, a statue of Stalin was erected in Zaporizhzhia. This explains some caution in treating communist memorabilia at the beginning of regaining public markers in Ukrainians. Ukrainian academic Oksana Danylenko thinks that 'current conflicts are closely linked to interpretations of past conflicts, particularly at the symbolic level'. (Danylenko 2016: 29) Treating this statement as a starting point, it is not difficult to understand the dynamics of the processes that were taking place in the Ukrainian urban space. Taking over or even adapting old signs was not accessible everywhere.

## **1.2. Change of Narrative**

The change in the narrative in the cityscape consists of conscious modelling of space so that its meaning corresponds to national historical interpretation. It is a process much deeper than the 'adaptation of the existing space' described above.

Paul Connerton, analysing the formation of societies' memory, points out that images of the past commonly legitimize a present social order (Connerton 1989: 3). Therefore, the Ukrainian state had to ensure that all cultural and social elements worked together to create a common national narrative. However, any changes in the semantics of urban space must be consistent with the 'primordial narratives'<sup>2</sup> of the inhabitants because only then do the semantics strengthen the community's perception of itself.

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<sup>2</sup> The term was coined by Kazimierz Wóycicki to describe a specific type of primary narrative that refers to the founding myth of a given community and its basic stories (fairy tales, legends, tales, proverbs). These are narratives that emphasize the legendary beginning of a given political community. See: Wóycicki, Kazimierz 2020. „Szwajcaria Wschodu”. O procesie narodotwórczym i narracjach przeszłości Białorusi’, -- *Akademia Wschód* Aug. 14, [https://akademia-wschod.domwschodni.org/szwajcaria-wschodu-o-procesie-narodotwórczym-i-narracjach-przeslosci-bialorusi/#\\_ftnref1](https://akademia-wschod.domwschodni.org/szwajcaria-wschodu-o-procesie-narodotwórczym-i-narracjach-przeslosci-bialorusi/#_ftnref1) (09 February 2023).

In creating its modern narrative, Ukraine had to overcome two steps. The first was the problem of the imposed Russian heritage. The second is the internal differences in interpreting historical and political phenomena, which had an impact on the readiness of the inhabitants to carry out semiotic changes and the speed of these changes. Nevertheless, the starting point was common, Ukraine's colonial past.

The russification and colonization of Ukraine took place in two planes important from the point of view of the semiotics of space: cultural memory and historical memory. The first was treating Ukrainian culture as secondary and provincial and, therefore, not deserving of distinction in the urban fabric. The latter consisted of attributing everyday achievements to the Russian discourse.

### **1.2.1. Cultural Memory**

The process of recovering and changing historical memory in urban space is easy to trace from the example of Kharkiv. Kharkiv is a unique city for Ukrainian culture. It was here that the first national revival of Ukrainian culture and language occurred. In the 1830s and 1840s, a young poet group was active there. Later, the group would be called the Kharkiv Romantic School. As Romantics, they began to go back to folk sources that spoke Ukrainian, even in the Russian Empire. Thus, the poets introduced the Ukrainian language and folklore to literary salons. In 1900, Mykola Mikhnovskii, a lawyer and activist, created the first concept of independent Ukraine in Kharkiv. Moreover, Kharkiv was the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the site of the second Ukrainian cultural upheaval, the Executed Renaissance. The greatest reformer of the Ukrainian theatre, Les Kurbas, moved to Kharkiv with his troupe in the 1930s.

Nevertheless, looking for monuments to the above-mentioned people in Kharkiv is in vain. There are also no streets named after them or other urbanonyms. Meanwhile, on the square opposite the theatre where Kurbas worked, there are two other monuments to Nikolai Gogol and Aleksandr Pushkin. But suppose Gogol is part of Ukrainian efforts to restore his affiliation to their own culture (although it is doubtful that the founders of the monument thought this way). In that case, Pushkin is a foreign body to Ukraine. His memorial in Kharkiv is the result of the Russian homogenization policy and the treatment of Ukraine as a periphery of Russia with no right to its own dominant culture.

Such a cultural cityscape existed in Kharkov for over thirty years after Ukraine's independence. However, after the outbreak of the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022,

the issue of marking the line of separation between the own and the foreign culture has become very urgent. In the new reality, the Kharkiv city council renamed 18 toponyms. Although neither the streets have been named after the greats of Ukrainian culture mentioned above nor have any monuments been erected in their honor (Цьомик 2023). Nevertheless, there has been an unquestionable evolution in the approach to own/foreign signs. The selection of monuments secured by the inhabitants of Kharkiv against Russian bombings after 24 February 2022 is a fascinating phenomenon. There was the Shevchenko monument, the Independence monument and the City Founders monument (Жуков 2022). These symbols are associated with Ukrainian culture and Ukraine's status as a state. The concern for them revealed the hidden processes that had been going on in Kharkiv for years.

### **1.2.2. Historical Memory**

The change in historical memory in Ukraine was closely related to the historical paradigm shift. This issue will be discussed using the example of the approach to World War II.

The way of interpreting this war inflamed emotions in Ukraine even before the start of the Russian aggression in 2014. For several years, there has been an apparent erosion of the cult of the Great Patriotic War (hereinafter referred to as GPW) in Ukrainian historical and political discourse, progressively replacing it with World War II (hereinafter referred to as WWII).

This approach was essential for Ukraine due to the creation of its national narrative. Thinking in terms of WWII, instead of GPW expanded the territory of hostilities to western Ukraine and the time of events to September 1939. It also changed the roles of military operations actors. In this context, the USSR becomes not only a conqueror of Nazi Germany but also its collaborator and, as a result, an aggressor against the Ukrainian population.

The Soviet discourse around the GPW was intended to reinforce an ideologically crucial issue. Since Russia declared itself the heir of the Soviet Union and cherished Soviet traditions, Russianness and Sovietness have been mixed up in a conglomerate that is difficult to separate. The constant emphasis on Soviet achievements and sacrifices during GPW demonstrated Soviet victory over fascism, but not so much as Russia's dominance over the USSR. The over ethnic identity of the 'Soviet man' was based on 'the dominance of the Russian language and culture, the Soviet historical discourse, the reign of authoritarian-paternalistic orientation, the sacralization of power and ideology, the cult of power' (Лозовий 2018: 148). In short, the victory of the Soviet Union was treated only as the victory of Russia, although 95% of the military operations took place in Ukraine and Belarus.

Along with the change in political awareness, Ukrainian citizens began to realize more and more that the victory in WWII (or GPW) was also their heritage. In this way, they prevented the monopolization of the common history by the Russian Federation. They tried to stop the Russian attempts to turn the ideological aspects of WWII against Ukraine. In addition, Ukrainians recognized that since they had their share in this military effort, they also had the right to interpret the victory and consequences of the war according to Ukrainian historical and political interests.

A semiotic manifestation of this process was revealed, for example, in the decoration of monuments to Red Army soldiers with Ukrainian national colours. Among others, such a palimpsest was created in Kharkiv, where the Monument to the Soldier-Liberator was dressed in a blue and yellow scarf.

### **1.3. Creating a New Hero**

In 2015, the Supreme Council of Ukraine passed the law *On the condemnation of communist and national socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and the prohibition of propaganda of their symbols* (Верховна Рада України 2015). This triggered an avalanche of attempts to remove communist symbols from urban space. But the process of changing urbanonyms began much earlier. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, citizens of independent Ukraine started to discuss events and people previously forbidden or unwanted in the communist reality. The expansion of national consciousness resulted, among other things, in a reevaluation of the pantheon of national heroes. In the wave of these changes, old names of urbanonyms began to be restored or new ones were given.

According to architect Varvara Podnos:

The names of urban space objects are no longer just signs whose function is to simplify human orientation in space. [...] now they are acquiring a new meaning and function, the consolidation of certain ideas, facts, and, in a broader context, the interests of social groups, institutions, and society as a whole. (Поднос 2016)

The distant historical memories between the east and west of Ukraine impeded this process. The breakthrough moment that united Ukraine in a common experience was the Revolution of Dignity. Although the inhabitants of eastern and western Ukraine differed in the temperature of emotions and the degree of involvement, the streets named after the Heavenly Hundred began to appear throughout the country. It can be hypothesized that the heroes of the Revolution of Dignity and the Ukrainian soldiers who fell on the front during the ongoing



Russian-Ukrainian war will create a new pantheon of heroes common to eastern and western Ukraine.

The outbreak of a full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war contributed to the creation of the next new hero, a soldier of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. This figure has already begun to replace the soldiers of the Red Army. This happened, for example, in Kopanky village in the Ivano-Frankivsk oblast. The Soviet memorial there was turned into a monument to the heroes of the AFU (Пенкалюк 2022).

Actions such as renaming streets or transforming monuments are well-known practices. Every political change entails a change in semiotic markers in space or, to put it in the words of Yuriy Lotman and Boris Uspensky: 'It is significant that a change in culture (...) is usually accompanied by a sharp increase in the degree of semiotic behavior'. This process 'may be expressed by the changing names and designations' (Lotman, Uspensky 1978: 211-212), what has just happened to Ukrainian streets (changing of names) and Ukrainian monuments (varying of designations).

#### **1.4. 'Museumification' and 'Museumization' of the Soviet Past**

With the decommunization of urban space, the problem of what to do with unwanted monuments arose. Some were transformed into heroes important to Ukrainian culture and/or history. In some Ukrainian cities, Lenin became Taras Shevchenko. In Chernihiv, Pushkin was converted to become a Ukrainian poet. (Ославська 2014)

The problem started when a given monument was deemed historically or artistically valuable. Such doubts were raised, for example, in the case of the Chekist monument in Kyiv, which is considered an essential example of monumentalism in art. (Олійник 2014)

For the Kyiv sculptor Oleksyi Zolotaryov, a monument is, first of all, a work of art, and not the person it depicts. In his opinion, when evaluating this or that monument, it is worth first appointing it with the author and not with the historical context. (Олійник 2014)

The discussion ignited emotions in Ukraine. Monuments were not only defended by people personally or sentimentally connected with the Soviet past. Artists and academics also joined the dispute.

For example, in the opinion of historian Tymur Bobrovskiy, 'some monuments may well remain in place.' As an example, Bobrovskiy gave the statue of Nikolai Vatutin (Олійник 2014). Vatutin is an excellent example of the Ukrainian memory conflict. Bobrovskiy believes that Vatutin 'is a person who died in the battles for the liberation of Ukraine from German invaders

and had nothing to do with the repressions' (Олійник 2014). But the truth is that Vatutin was killed by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which recognized him as an enemy of Ukraine. Therefore, again, the various regions of Ukraine differed in their assessment of the situation. It should be noted that in Kyiv it was the Museum of Russian Art that became the advocate for communist monuments (Олійник 2014), thus confirming the thesis on the sources of the Ukrainian urban space politicization.

After 1991, one can also observe the situation where it is not the artifacts of communism that change, but the outside world. One of the communist monuments in Chernivtsi was the so-called Nikitin's tank. Originally, its barrel was pointed at countries hostile to the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR, these countries became allies of independent Ukraine (Чміль 2022). As a result, the dismantling of the tank was of international importance. Therefore, the fate of the tank memorial has become a marker of new trends in Ukrainian foreign policy. It can be said that the symbolic 'disarmament' of Soviet triumphalism occurred in Chernivtsi.

Ukrainian law prohibits the display of communist symbols in public spaces. Still, it allows them to be displayed in museums (Верховна Рада України 2015: 4.3.). Therefore, Ukraine, following the example of other Eastern Bloc countries, began to create historical reserves in which unwanted or controversial relics of the past were placed. In Ukraine, two strategies have been adopted: 'museumification' and 'museumization'.

#### **1.4.1. Museumification**

Museumification gives scientific and cognitive value to remembrances of the past. Museumification involves the thoughtful organisation of an exhibition, academic comments, and the educational dimension of the entire project (Хархун 2014).

This definition corresponds to the activity of the Park of the Soviet Era. The park is part of the Putivla State Historical and Cultural Reserve. Its goals are clearly defined as scientific and research on the reserve website: 'The purpose of the creation of this museum was, in fact, the formation of a modern and scientific view of the Soviet era for the present and future generations of Ukrainians' (Державний с.а.). The scientific nature of the exhibition is also confirmed by conferences and publications in which the reserve was involved.

The museum of communist monuments is a form of isolation of the past (Гайдай, 2018) but also a kind of storage room. This was the idea of the founders of the Soviet Monumental Art Collection at the Memorial Museum of Totalitarian Regimes 'Territory of Terror' in Lviv. The exhibition consists of memorabilia that are the subject of discussion, either because of their

value or because of the tragic fate of their authors. The very name of the museum imposes the interpretative context – Territory of Terror.<sup>3</sup>

Such places do not evoke positive emotions. In contrast, they often serve as a kind of *memento*. Ukrainian journalist Oksana Chmil thinks that 'the exhibits in such a park should remind us of the totalitarian past that Ukrainians went through, because not only good things can be written in history' (Чміль 2022).

#### **1.4.2. Museumization**

Museumization is a term introduced by Edward Relph. In his understanding, it is creating an artificial 'placelessness' space. The 'museumization' is aimed at 'preservation, reconstruction, and idealisation of history' (Relph 1976: 101). Relph cites the reconstruction of pioneer villages, restored castles, or reconstructed forts as an example of such action. 'Museumization' gives the impression of the immutability of history.

This term may be extended to describe phenomena occurring in Ukraine. Another Ukrainian tactic to treat communist symbols in urban space was moving Soviet monuments to specific reserves, which are devoid of scientific and museum dimensions. For Relph, 'museumization' means pretending to be history. The places he mentions become an imaginary copy of the past.

Therefore, Ukrainian reserves are only a 'condensation' of the past. Such places have never existed, even in the human imagination.

Ukrainian 'museumization' tactic deprives objects of their original semantic context. Monuments to communism cease to be a natural urban background and become an element of an amusement park. Accumulated in one place, set in unnatural scenery, marble Lenins and other revolution leaders evoke emotions reminiscent of old-fashioned 'freak shows'. These 'folk museums' (Гайдай 2018: 33) put the viewer in a state of fear, loathing, and unhealthy fascination.

An example of such an approach to the problem is the Park Museum of Socrealism in the village of Frumushika-Nova in the Odessa oblast. The exposition description on the village website is contained in two sentences.

Currently, the open-air museum houses about 120 sculptures, monuments, busts, bas-reliefs of Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Mikhail Kalinin, and other Soviet statesmen. Exhibits are brought not only from the Odessa region but also from all over Ukraine. (Frumushika-Nova s.a.)

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<sup>3</sup> Oleksandra Hayday describes how museum names become a means of institutionalizing memory. See: Олександра Гайдай, *Кам'яний гість. Ленін у центральній Україні*, Київ 2018, с. 34.

It is in vain to look for information on an in-depth research goal, scientific publications, or conferences here. The museum was founded by the Ukrainian businessman Oleksandr Palariev. His *idée fixe* was to revive his family village, which had been destroyed after WWII. It must be admitted that Palariev did it with great panache and no less eclecticism. 'On the site where his family once lived, Palariev built the largest sheep farm in Europe' (Руденко 2019). Then, he built the wine cellar and the ethnocomplex with a hotel, guest houses, a restaurant, a swimming pool, and a church. Then, Palariev bought and installed two Soviet aircraft in the steppe and erected the world's most giant statue of a shepherd. The statue was included in the Guinness Book of Records in 2017. Not forgetting the botanical gardens where various sculptures were placed. The above-mentioned Soviet Monument Museum completes all this. (Руденко 2019)

This is perhaps the best visualisation of what Relph calls 'museumization'. Artifacts from various historical and cultural plans have been collected in one place. The only thing they have in common is their sentimental value. The exhibition in Frumushika-Nova is a kind of 'sentimental journey' of the farm owner to his childhood. It is an idealised world that has never existed in this form. The statues of the revolution leaders placed in such a context do not acquire the character of a warning like in the Lviv museum. They become a factor that is supposed to arouse Soviet nostalgia.

An underwater exhibit, 'Alley of Leaders', near the Crimean Tarkhnkut peninsula, is also associated with the amusement park. The museum was founded by Volodymyr Broumynskyi in 1991. He aimed to save the statue of Lenin, which was beheaded by 'unknown perpetrators'. The depths of the sea seemed to be the perfect place. Over time, busts of Lenin, Dzerzhynskiy, and Kirov appeared there. Then, the revolution's leaders were joined by statues of Russian poets and musicians: Yesenin, Blok, Mayakovskii, Pushkin, Tchaikovskii, and Vysotskii. Later, the collection was supplemented with an international company, e.g., Beethoven. The eclecticism of the place was enhanced by miniatures of the French Eiffel Tower, the American twin towers, a Moldovan wine barrel and a 30 kg monument of a Soviet KrAZ car (Апрелева 2011).

Although the museum founder believes that 'the Bolsheviks would be calmer under water' (Апрелева 2011), it is hard to escape the feeling that such procedures serve to reinterpret the communist past.

## **2. URBAN PROTEST SPACE**

The Ukrainian urban space became a semiotic struggle long before the Russian kinetic attack. The need for a radical change in the city iconosphere dates back to the Euromaidan

times when all political and social life spilt out onto the streets. Protests in urban space took place on two levels: symbolic and semiotic behaviour.

### **2.1. Symbols and Memory**

During the Revolution of Dignity in 2013/14, the Ukrainian streets have become unquestionably politicized. The places of action were modelled by demonstrators, not only by erecting barricades and displaying national flags. Graffiti, murals, and numerous posters appeared on the walls of Kyiv buildings. Polish researcher Włodzimierz Moch believes that painting graffiti is to mark one's presence in an area and, over time, even to demonstrate dominance (Moch 2016: 51). This observation can be extended to all street art activities. Demonstrators began to take over public space with signs of revolution. They produced markers that disrupted the continuity of power over public space (Moch 2016: 23). The participants took over the space of the revolution.

Euromaidan was a protest that took place simultaneously in two dimensions, real on the streets of Ukrainian cities and virtual on social networks. Similarly, these two dimensions were also spaces where the art of protests intersected. Signs posted on the Internet appeared on the street and vice versa. Virtual reality was also a place to exchange information and propaganda materials.

One such material, playing an interesting semiotic role, was political posters. Created on the Internet by Euromaidan activists, the posters could be printed by everyone and adhere to the walls, giving a special semiotic meaning to the place. For example, posters showed the way to an event (Korzeniowska-Bihun 2014).

Some of Euromaidan's street art has become entrenched in Ukrainian culture as cult symbols of the 2013/14 protests. In the case of posters, the slogan 'I am a drop in the ocean' became viral in various configurations on a blue and yellow background. A simple text and visual message were used to stimulate the appropriate emotional states of the recipients. The multitude of variants of the poster is undoubtedly an indicator of the popularity of this slogan.

Masks, bands, and helmets were probably Euromaidan's most famous iconic symbols. These props were used, for example, by the street artist hiding under the pseudonym Sociopath in the wall composition entitled 'Icons of the Revolution'. Sociopath created three graffiti that depict three significant figures in Ukrainian literature: Taras Shevchenko, Lesia Ukrainka, and Ivan Franko. Each portrait was equipped with an attribute of the Ukrainian Revolution:

a mask, a scarf, or a helmet. In other words, three icons of Ukrainian literature were presented with three icons of the Revolution of Dignity. This accumulation of iconicity was intended not only to emphasise the vitality of national symbols but also to initiate a debate on the social role of the artist social role. Graffitied portraits of the 'holy trinity of Ukrainian literature' served to deglamorise the school image of the poet/poetess, to shake his/her figure from the dust of libraries and to place him/her in the fire of revolution. This is the only way to recall that each poet was revolutionary in their way.

Once the battle dust settled, the question arose of who had the right to post-revolutionary works of art in public space. The visual symbols of the revolution began to have their own lives. First, their semantic context is changing. The barricades and all the surroundings into which the wall drawings were originally inscribed are disappearing. At the same time, the process of privatization and museumification of these works begins.

The process of privatization comes from the fact that street art has been painted on walls that belong to someone. It happens that the content of the paintings does not correspond to the purpose of the building, or simply the facade needs to be renewed. The laws of the free market govern the process. It may also reflect the private aesthetic preferences of the owners of the medium in which the street artworks were created.

The museumification process is a political decision and triggers political repercussions. Museumification begins when street art is treated as a public good and, as such, is subject to protection and conservation. The question is who has the right to decide on protection and preservation, and to what extent this person or institution can stop the privatization decisions or interfere in the intellectual property of the creator, even if unknown? Decision makers who govern public space determine which revolutionary murals and graffiti are worth preserving.

The privatization process of the sign and its museumification can be traced to the example of the aforementioned triptych 'Icons of the Revolution'. Poets' portraits were painted on the facade of the 'Emporium' furniture store on famous Hrushevskyi Street.<sup>4</sup> In September 2017 the store manager removed the graffiti, explaining that it was 'typical street art that is erased from time to time by municipal services' (Пешкова 2017).

The triptych has been restored by an informal group called 'Novyi Vohon' (New Fire). The action of the group had all the characteristics of a 'semiotic guerrilla'; in addition to the

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<sup>4</sup> In January 2014 there were mass clashes between Euromaidan demonstrators and units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on Hrushevskyi Street. During those fights the first Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred were killed.

renovated paintings, the perpetrators left an inscription on the building: 'The Maidan was here, and it will be here forever' (Ларута 2017). The problem is that the author did not like the new graffiti, calling it 'stains that have nothing to do with the real revolutionary symbols' (Слюсаренко 2017). In his opinion, it was 'an act of vandalism, which finally destroyed the possibility of any restoration of the original Maidan symbols' (Слюсаренко 2017)

The fuss around the triptych shows what remains in the urban space after significant historical events and what shape it takes. Therefore, so important from the point of view of anthropological defence is the question of who has the right to shape the common space and, thus, to shape the community's memory. Whose political views and tastes will be reflected in the cityscape. The consequences of the decisions related to the urban symbolic elements (graffiti, murals, monuments) may be dire for the general narrative of the nation. Lotman and Uspensky claim that culture is 'a record in memory of what the community has experienced' (Lotman, Uspensky 1978: 214) Paul Connerton adds that what is remembered and how it is remembered 'conditions the hierarchy of power' (Connerton 1989: 1).

## **2.2. Semiotic Behavior**

Political changes in Ukraine have triggered numerous bottom-up actions that have forced specific semiotic changes in space. These actions were well thought out and planned, and the activity of their participants can be described as semiotic behaviour due to the awareness and purposefulness of semiotic gestures.

### **2.2.1. Destroying Enemy Symbols**

The strategy of repainting Soviet monuments in Ukrainian national colours was something that could reconcile the proverbial 'fire with water', that is, things with conflicting semiotic meanings. But at the same time, it was a prelude to more invasive changes in semiotic space, including the ritual demolition of inconvenient monuments, which in Ukraine became known as Leninopad (Leninfall).

The most significant wave of communist monument destruction began after the Revolution of Dignity. However, it should be remembered that this phenomenon originated at the end of the Soviet Union. The first demolition of a monument to Lenin took place on 1 August 1990 in Chervonohrad, western Ukraine. The Soviet authorities were afraid to suppress the grassroots rebellion. As a result, it sparked a more extensive campaign to remove Soviet monuments from urban space that swept western Ukraine (5 канал 2020). In the fall of 1991, just after Ukraine gained independence, the Kyiv authorities dismantled the monument to the October

Revolution in the downtown. The monument depicted the figures of a he worker, a she worker, a peasant, and a sailor. The nine-meter-tall figure of Lenin carved out of red granite towered above them. Near the monument, was a tribune from which Soviet leaders took parades and made speeches. The whole was 'the main place of representation of communist power in the republic' (Гайдай 2018: 70). The destruction of these elements became a symbolic takeover of power over space.

Looking closely at this phenomenon, one can see that the removal of communist monuments was more than a mere interference in the semiotics of the city. Analyzing the dynamics of the protests in Kharkiv, the Ukrainian researcher Ihor Rushchenko drew attention to the division of urban space between supporters and opponents of Euromaidan. First, each group tried to take over (even temporarily) the central squares or streets of the city. Connerton defined this as a "ritual space" (Connerton 1989: 51). Second, they took care of an expressive and symbolic meeting place. Ukrainian activists gathered around the Shevchenko monument and pro-Russian forces around the Lenin monument to Lenin (Рущенко 2020: 409). These statues became clear urban demonstrator markers. That is why destroying monuments to Lenin meant not only taking over the ritual space and changing its meaning but also depriving opponents of the symbolic protest places.

The post-Euromaidan Leninfall was proceeding under a strict 'ritualization' rule described by Lotman and Uspensky, who claimed that 'even the fight against the old rituals may itself be 'ritualized' (Lotman, Uspensky 1978: 212). Each time a Soviet monument was knocked down, enthusiastic crowds gathered, jumped on the fallen idol, and took selfies against its remains. Semiotic behaviour was also observed in national flags, the singing of the national anthem, and the raising of patriotic shouts by demonstrators (TCH 2016).

The collective destruction of Soviet monuments developed a sense of community and set common goals for demonstrators. Such activities can also take on a cathartic and therapeutic dimension because:

Images of shattered statues and paintings torn apart provide relief after a long period of oppression and testify to the superiority of the new power over the old, which is no longer in a position to protect its symbols from the power of its enemies. (Christen 2007: 52)

In short, the new state triumphed over the symbolic ruins of the old state.



### **2.2.2. Urban Space Painting**

Revolutionary and post-revolutionary changes in public space can also be considered from the point of view of the overlapping of cultures or the displacement of the old culture by the new one. As already mentioned, years of Russian/Soviet colonisation led to a situation where Ukrainians found themselves in a space filled with foreign symbols or utterly devoid of individuality (placelessness). To distinguish semiotically from other parts of the post-Soviet world, but mainly from the Russian centre, Ukrainian residents began to paint the whole swathes of public space in national colours.

The phenomenon began with painting fences, walls, and bridge railings. Ukrainian activists intended to cover the post-Soviet grey space with blue and yellow. Their actions often took the form of happenings in which activists raised money for supplies and tools and gathered a painting team through social networks.

According to the social psychologist Viktor Pushkar, in a war context, Ukrainians see painting anything yellow and blue as marking territory, as if a space filled with these colours would give the feeling that 'the enemy will not pass this way' (Полянська 2014).

Painting architectural elements created a welcoming space and served as an art therapy tool. The best example of such semiotic behaviour is Elementary School No. 21 in Popasna. In 2014, during the shelling of the city, children went to school due to the naive faith of their parents that schools would not be bombed. Their teacher, wanting to keep the children busy, bought them paints and focused their attention on the artistic activity. In this way, pupils created murals that reflect the dreams of the children and their vision of the ideal world (Суспільне Донбас 2020).

### **2.2.3. Semiotics Sabotage**

Semiotic sabotage is any action behind enemy lines that aims to change the semiotic landscape ideologically. Since the beginning of the war, Ukrainian activists have been systematically carrying out semiotic actions on the territory of the Russian Federation or Ukrainian territories occupied by Russian troops.

One of the most spectacular examples of semiotic sabotage was painting a star on a Moscow skyscraper in the colours of the Ukrainian flag. Roofer Mustang Wanted did this feat on August 21, 2014. His action not only lifted the spirits of Ukrainians but also multiplied in the form of numerous memes that circulate on the Internet (Давидюк 2016: 142-143)

Currently, the graphic symbol used by the Ukrainian resistance movement in the occupied territories has become the Ukrainian letter ĭ. Unambiguous in its message as a symbol of the Ukrainian alphabet and easy to perform, the letter began to be painted on walls, sidewalks, fences, etc. (Хотин, 2022)

## CONCLUSIONS

Intervention in the public semiotic space is a social and political act. It gains particular importance during the war when it becomes an element of the anthropological defence of the attacked country. In Ukraine, semiotic changes in the landscape and cityscape have become a one-time political gesture and a foundation for much more profound cultural and civilizational transformations. However, a variety of motivations may be behind the semiotic intervention. Therefore, studying the mechanisms governing the semiotics of space and semiotic behaviour is essential to the newly understood military anthropology.

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