By **Stefan Jonsson**
and **Galyna Kutsovska**

Introduction.

Returning to the Ukrainian Revolution of 2013–2014 ten years after

I n hindsight, a revolution can be reconstructed as a chain of causes, albeit overdetermined by multiple contingencies. This is in stark contrast to the living present of revolution, which is usually characterized by hope, potential, and danger. At once fractured by political conflicts and unified by expanding social ties, a revolution interrupts historical continuity and sets itself apart as an important event. The task of explaining such an event after the fact is different from the task of understanding its unfolding in real time. In addition, both these tasks are different from interpreting the *meaning* of the event for those who were absorbed by the action - the subjects of the revolution, its winners and losers, and its victims.

The two peer-reviewed articles that follow return to the Ukrainian Revolution of 2013–2014 ten years after.[1] They do so by analyzing artworks and cultural imaginaries created during the revolution and its aftermath. Why revisit Maidan now? For one thing, it tells us something about *the stakes* in the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Screenshot from Sergei Loznitsa's film *Maidan*, 2015.

PHOTO: ATOMS OCH & VOID

We suggest that the war can be seen as a struggle over the radical democratic aspirations that flourished in Kyiv's Square of Independence, Maidan Nezalezhnosti. It is these aspirations that we want to return to, and we do so by going to the only place where we can still explore them: the aesthetic artifacts and cultural creations in which the revolutionary event, as we argue, is preserved. This explains our approach through aesthetics and culture. As we seek to show in our articles, aesthetic

Roman Bonchuk, Iconostasis of the Heavenly Hundred Heroes. Courtesy of the Museum of the Heavenly Hundred, Ivan-Frankivsk.

Living Memorial on the Alley.

PHOTO: GALYNA KUTSOVSKA

knowledge is truthful and relevant, perhaps more so than other forms of knowledge, in the rendering of the revolution's present moment, the meaning it held for its participants, the self-understanding of Ukrainian society, and its aspirations for the future.

The contributions that follow belong primarily to the transdisciplinary fields of political aesthetics, memory studies, cultural criticism and the history of consciousness, and they are perhaps affiliated with scholarship that adopts oral history and participatory ethnography, approaches that in themselves demand modes of aesthetic creativity and composition.[2]

THE FIRST ARTICLE by Stefan Jonsson discusses how aesthetic expressions help understand the *political emergence* of the Ukrainian protest movement and the intensification of *solidarity* that characterized it. Maidan's revolutionary art presented solidarity now as open and universal, now as a patriotic and self-sacrificing nationalism.

The second article by Galyna Kutsovska demonstrates how aesthetic figurations and cultural initiatives confirm or contest what seems to be the unavoidable result of successful revolutions such as the Maidan, namely its petrification into fixed symbols and ideological representations. As an "official" view of the

"THE ART OF MAIDAN RETAINS AN ENORMOUS RELEVANCE FOR WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT DEMOCRATIC EMERGENCE."

revolution is canonized in collections and archives, or materialized in architectural blueprints for museum buildings, monuments, and memorials, will the radical experiences of popular power and self-organization vanish?

IN OUR ARTICLES we refer to the *Ukrainian Revolution of 2013–2014* as a general and noncommittal denomination, while we also use the revolution's historical names. The most common reference in late November and early December 2013 was *Euromaidan*. By mid-December and January 2014 this was replaced by *Maidan*. At the end of February, the revolution attained its heroic epithet, the *Revolution of Dignity*, today the official name in the Ukrainian context.[3]

Our articles also refer to established periodizations of the consecutive phases of the revolution.[4] From November 21–30,

2013, students and activists occupied the area of Maidan near the Monument of Independence. The second phase began with the brutal assault on the occupants by the security police on the evening of November 30, which was followed by popular outrage and an expansion of the protests across Ukraine and abroad against Viktor Yanukovych's pro-Russian government. The third phase began on January 16, 2014, with the so-called dictatorial laws, which declare the ongoing popular assemblies illegal. This phase is characterized by increasing vigilance on both parts and brutal suppression by the security police, leading to violent clashes and several deaths from January 21–22 onward. The fourth phase comprised a few days of culmination: February 18–20, "the Battle of Maidan," are days of lethal violence where snipers kill some eighty anti-government protesters.[5] This is followed by international condemnations and a partial breakdown of domestic political institutions, leading to Yanukovych's sudden escape from the country on February 22. The president's abandonment of his country effectively concludes the revolution in the strict sense. It also triggers a new chain of events and decisions, the most momentous being Russia's annexation of Crimea and orchestration of separatist militias in south-eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine's revolutionary art from the winter of 2013–2014 offer a living record

of the Ukrainian people in their effort to understand themselves, reinterpret their past and reimagine their future. Above all, the artworks ask: who are the Ukrainian people? As such, these works offer insight into the enigma of historical change and collective agency. As we argue, the art of Maidan encapsulates aesthetic knowledge of three phenomena: the political emergence of protest, the solidarity of revolt, and the collective memory of the revolution, what we also may think of as the preparation, production, and preservation of the revolution.

TEN YEARS AFTER, in the midst of an unjust and horrifying war with unpredictable outcomes, it is worth recalling what Ukrainians struggled for in 2013–2014 and how they used a range of artistic expressions to present their aspirations for the future and preserve the memory of their struggle.

In writing about the Maidan Revolution today, we are aware that we enter intellectual and academic terrain that since then has become torn and polarized, and we move under a horizon of searing uncertainty. While there is therefore no doubt that our efforts are as deeply embedded in history as is the revolutionary event that we investigate, it is just as true that the aesthetic productions at the heart of our attention are not fully reducible to historical time. They also register a dimension of interrupted temporality, collective solidarity, and human freedom. In the contemporary crisis, the art of Maidan retains an enormous relevance for what it tells us about democratic emergence, and hence also about the future of both Ukraine and Russia.

OUR ARTICLES build in part on field work conducted in Kyiv in June and July 2021, which involved visiting the Maidan Museum premises and meeting the director and staff of the Museum, as well as visiting the Maidan memory sites in Kyiv and meeting artists and scholars dealing with Maidan. The selection of artworks, material, and documentation chosen for interpretation is the result of long months of inventorying and sifting literature, artworks, music, films, and other aesthetic

artifacts produced during the Ukrainian Revolution. We are tremendously grateful to numerous people who generously shared their experience and expertise: Ihor Poshyvailo, Ola Salo, Lesya Onyshko, and their colleagues at the Maidan Museum; Matvyi Vaisberg; Oleksei Beliushenko; Nataliia Moussienko; Volodymyr Tykhyi, Andrii Kotliar, Yuliia Hontaruk, Roman Liubyi, and Denys Vorontsov of the Babylon' 13 film community; and Anton Drobovych and Olena Snihyr of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory. ❌

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Figure 3. Matviy Vaisberg, *The Wall 28/01–08/03/2014*, no. 24. Courtesy of the artist.

WHAT ART KNOWS ABOUT DEMOCRACY
The aesthetics of the Revolution in Ukraine 2013–2014

by **Stefan Jonsson**

abstract

Based in part on interviews and fieldwork, this article analyzes how artworks produced during the Ukrainian Revolution (2013–2014) present the political emergence of the Ukrainian people as a collective fused by bonds of solidarity. At first characterized by a strong universal thrust, presenting a boundless democratic anticipation, this solidarity was subsequently contained by religious-political traditions and specific forms of self-sacrificing and masculinist nationalism, often projected as a revolutionary utopia in its own right, which has been operationalized in the defense against Russia's invasion. To substantiate the argument, the text analyzes numerous artworks from the Ukrainian Revolution. These interpretations demonstrate how aesthetic acts contribute to the production of bonds of solidarity that transcend existing modes of political and cultural representation of Ukraine.

KEYWORDS: Political aesthetics, art and revolution, crowds, Ukraine, social movements in art and culture

Professional artists, writers, filmmakers, and musicians, as well as unknown authors of slogans, oratory, visuals, memes, posters, songs, and performances, were intimately linked to the Maidan protests from the outset. "Revolution always gives impetus to the arts," states Andrey Kurkov in his chronicle of the uprising. Commenting on the so-called "Art Barbican", a spacious tent for cultural activities that was set up in Kyiv's Independence Square during the protests, Kurkov explains that it is "an active and fully integrated part of the Maidan" which yet "has a life of its own":

> There is a permanent exhibition of revolutionary painting there, generally anarchistic and politicized, evoking the poster art of the 1918 Civil War. There are also book launches, concerts by singer-songwriters, readings by poets and writers. Revolution always gives impetus to the arts. It was the same in 1917 and after the October

Revolution, and it is the same today. Handwritten or printed poems are stuck to fences and tents, in Russian and Ukrainian. Among the Euromaidan activists, there are writers, rock singers, even publishers. In between writing articles for websites and doing interviews, they help to build barricades.[1]

Fully integrated, yet with a life of its own: Kurkov's description of the artists' position in relation to a political movement that they both participate in and record, hints of an understanding of the epistemological privilege enjoyed by aesthetics in periods of revolutionary change. In his diaries Kurkov adopts the perspective of the participant observer. While participating, he commits to paper what he hears, sees, smells, and feels. He takes down notes which he then stores for subsequent revision and reuse. In doing so, and although the process entails a remodeling and reinterpretation of the uprising, he usually proceeds in a documentary mode and does not compromise the authority of the witness.

There are several examples of such a perspective from Maidan in 2013–2014. Natalya Vorozhbit, one of Ukraine's leading playwrights, went to Maidan with her colleagues with the conviction that they should participate, not just as citizens, but also as professional theater workers. Already in early December she realized that "something definitive, something historic" was in the making:

> So, we went to Maidan, where the protestors were camping out and we asked them to tell us about their experiences of the day-to-day and about key events that had taken place. We recorded all of the interviews on video or on Dictaphones. Then, in March, we started compiling the interviews. We transcribed and edited them to compose a script for the play. The basic idea was to try to capture the event, to capture the emotions.[2]

Vorozhbit emphasizes the authority that stems from the immediacy of the recorded statements. She and her colleagues caught history in the making: "What we collected were fresh and unaltered reactions."[3] The collection of interviews were converted into drama form: *Maidan: Voices from the Uprising*, a verbatim play based on witness stories, is a major artwork of the Maidan revolution.

FILMMAKER SERGEI LOZNITSA urged his cameraman and sound technician to join him in Maidan. From December 2013 to February 2014, they moved their equipment from place to place to record for hours on end the unfolding of the protest. The footage and sound recordings turned into a film that virtually situates the viewer inside the everyday activities of the revolutionary collective. Bluntly entitled *Maidan*, the film renders the protest movement in ethnographic detail while at the same time inserting it into a filmic drama which is primarily structured by its soundtrack. With neither voiceover nor interviews, the film challenges the viewer to attend only to the plural voice of the upris-

Figure 1. Sergei Loznitsa, *Maidan*, 2015. Screenshot. Courtesy ATOMS & VOID..

ing, or, better, to the uprising's choral voice: now megaphonic, now joyful, now militant, now melancholic, now solemn. This voice has a function in the film similar to that of a choir in classical drama. Loznitsa offers no commentary on the action other than that provided by the revolutionary collective itself: the film being edited as if the speeches and songs emerge directly from within the pictures (figure 1).

The film's visual dimension is also thoroughly collective. The viewer is slowly moved from one camera position to the other, observing the revolution like a sequence of history paintings in which the totality of the revolution and the insurrectionary masses traverse the cinematic frame. Loznitsa's *Maidan* has neither hero, nor protagonist, nor even any main plot. The narrative center being dispersed, we see bodies swarming or moving with determination across the screen yet never quite coming into focus or entering the foreground. A major preoccupation of Loznitsa is apparently what Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, in capturing another kind of social movement, forced migration, has called *Human Flow*: a decentered and anonymous collective whose bodies and faces exit and enter the field of vision according to a logic that the filmmaker neither directs nor fully controls. Loznitsa has expressed the awe he felt upon entering Maidan's radicalized crowds. Like a present-day ghost of Dziga Vertov's photographer in *Man with a Movie Camera* – a film also shot and produced in Kyiv – he seized the opportunity to witness the revolution in real time:

> I was also surprised that almost no other professional filmmaker except myself had filmed in the square. What a chance missed! *Maidan* has cost a bit more than 100 000 euro; if you wanted to reconstruct such events afterwards to make a feature film, you would have to spend dozens of millions: thousands of extras, explosions in the middle of a European capital, and so on. It would be expensive. Anthropologists and other researchers would also have found it insanely interesting to come to the square. I mean, when will you next get the opportunity to make a live observation of such a revolution?[4]

Figure 2. Matviy Vaisberg, *The Wall 28/01–08/03/2014*. Courtesy of the artist.

Visual artist Matviy Vaisberg also remained at Maidan for days and nights on end, capturing the drama with his camera. He posted the photos on Facebook as a running visual chronicle: shattering episodes of violence, shelling of teargas, exploding Molotov cocktails, rolling flames, undulating crowd waves of attack and retreat, and between the outbursts, long periods of waiting when people huddle together, stand watch, and try to anticipate everybody's next move. After the events on Hrushevsky Street in late January, he began to paint, at first for therapeutic reasons and then increasingly as possessed by affects elicited by the experience of the escalating violence. He reworked some of the camera snapshots, creating twenty-eight small-size oils, as many as he could fit on the wall of his studio. The resulting artwork, entitled *The Wall 28/01 – 08/03/2014*, is a somber panorama in front of which the viewer is stunned silent by Vaisberg's compression of the revolution into complex constellations of color, form, and light (figure 2).

At a distance, the 28 images appear like blurry snapshots pinned to the wall. Up close, they give off an abstract and non-figurative expression. Events, actions, and actors that were recognizable in the photographic image disappear into the materiality of the painting and find a hiding place somewhere in the sheets and spots of oil and pigment. A tiny, elongated spot of gold suggests a brass trumpet. A line scraped in a surface of black paint is what remains as an outline of a human crowd. Such are the sole remnants of the image's representational features, whereas most areas of the painting appear to depict social matter in various stages of congelation or liquefication, the fluid character of the surface offering an allegory of revolutionary transformation (figure 3).

THUS, WHILE VAISBERG'S aesthetic practice is a fully integrated part of Maidan and takes documentary photographs as a point of departure, it soon takes on a life of its own, sidelining the docu-

mentary account so as to heighten the emotional charge and existential weight of the event. Everything that to the artist's mind is non-essential to the experience of the revolution is filtered out. What remains is the volatile and explosive nature of the antagonism between popular power and its militarized opponent.

In this way Vaisberg produced a visual and material equivalent to something transient and imaginary: the horizon of hopes, fears, ideals, and values that animated Maidan throughout these days and nights, the atmosphere that united people into a revolutionary collective, as it were. Having been an eyewitness to a radical historical opening – "something definitive, something historic" as Vorozhbit put it – Vaisberg visualized political emergence as such, the constituent power of the revolution, something which by nature is intermittent and resistant to aesthetic as well as political representation, but which is here peculiarly spatialized, visualized and crystallized in a montage of 28 pictures.

The quartet I have just mentioned – Kurkov, Vorozhbit, Loznitsa, Vaisberg – is but a small group in a larger crowd of artists, writers, and intellectuals who prepared and produced Maidan through aesthetic expressions. If revolutions always give impetus to the arts, as Kurkov asserted, the Maidan revolution is notable because of the high quality as well as the sheer quantity of the artistic expressions that fueled and responded to the protests. The square that hosted the political occupation also became an art factory.

The aesthetics and politics of democratic emergence

My general theoretical assumption in this article is that artistic representations – such as the works by Kurkov, Vorozhbit, Loznitsa, and Vaisberg – know something about crowds and democratic action that other forms of knowledge barely comprehend. This assumption makes sense only if we regard democracy not primarily as a mode of representation–for instance, liberal

parliamentarianism with a multiparty system and constitutional rights and freedoms – but as the ability of people to question each mode of representation. The assumption is inspired by political ontology rather than political science. While the latter is primarily concerned with politics as a system of representation, the former is concerned with how such systems are instituted, consolidated, transformed, and destroyed. "The political" here indicates the primal scene of society: how people join together by drawing a boundary with the rest of the world; how this community then draws a boundary across itself, so that one or a few (a king or a national assembly) are elevated to represent all; how these boundaries are constitutionally walled in and maintained by consensus or repression; and how they are periodically contested by social movements, demonstrations, and uprisings that do not recognize existing politics as representing their interests. Democracy, in this perspective, is the inherent potential of people to demolish existing political representations and create new ones, a process that repeatedly asserts itself in history and can be seen as a driving force of democracy.[5] With this perspective, we apprehend the close link of democracy to crowds and collective agency.

From this understanding of democracy follows a second theoretical assumption, which we may conceptualize as political emergence. Political emergence designates a process whereby a shared experience of objective constraint or oppression is dialectically transformed into practices of collective resistance. If we adopt an expression by Alain Badiou, this issue concerns "the rise of the inexistent," that is, the slow or sudden rise of new kinds of social and political agency that materialize in the breach of an existing order of representation.[6] Political emergence applies to popular forces that appear outside established political formations or are generated by contradictions and conflicts within these formations. If established channels of representation and communication cease to function, people scramble for new ways to assemble, protest, and resist, and new ways to narrate, enact and perform social transformation. Such movements may not be immediately recognizable as political entities. Often, they are ignored, demonized as "masses," or regarded as immature and disorderly by political institutions, journalism, and research. Notwithstanding such rejections, these movements remain political in that they create new ways of sharing, embodying, enacting, and imagining society. Although their demands may not be acknowledged by established political institutions, their political dimension resounds all the more strongly in the cultural and aesthetic dimension. In this context, put simply, the aesthetic gesture or aesthetic work becomes a prime instrument, both a mode of understanding for registering political emergence and a practice for its realization.[7] The brief examples above suggest that aesthetic figurations give access to deep dimensions of the Maidan uprising.

As I argue, these aesthetic presentations and performances

"WITH THIS PERSPECTIVE, WE APPREHEND THE CLOSE LINK OF DEMOCRACY TO CROWDS AND COLLECTIVE AGENCY."

offer unique ways of knowing the Ukrainian Revolution, the civil protests that forced it to happen, and the democratic aspirations of those who made it happen. To avoid misunderstanding, I should underline that I use aesthetics not in its conventional, watered-down sense, as referring to some exclusive quality of certain texts, images, or objects usually called high art, but rather in its rigorous epistemological meaning: as understanding acquired through sensory perception and imagination–in other words, how we make *sense* of the world, how the world is made intelligible or *sensible* through acts of hearing and seeing, as in fiction, poetry, visual arts, film, and theater, but also in masks, songs, slogans, and graffiti. Such presentations enable us to comprehend political emergence because they register sociopolitical transformation through voice, embodied experience, and subjective expression in ways comparable to the testimonial mode of the participant and the witness. Put differently, aesthetic works can absorb the phenomenological experience generated by participation in collective protest and revolt.

MY ANALYSIS IS NOT primarily concerned with what today is often discussed as art activism, that is, intentionally mobilizing artistic and cultural creativity and institutions as tools for social and cultural change. To be sure, Maidan contained many examples of art activism in this sense. However, I am interested in the other end of the process: how political emergence inevitably articulates itself aesthetically as it claims voice and presence in public space, and how the collective agency formed in this process presents itself through a variety of aesthetic modes and media, thereby enabling all who share this agency to understand the meaning of their actions. In other words, I am not primarily interested in art activism as a specific modality or genre by which artists and art institutions energize politics by injecting a dose of art into it, as it were, but more so in what I call the political aesthetics of democratic emergence, a broader category encompassing the ways in which political and aesthetic expression are at first indistinguishable and interchangeable as new collective actors and movements make their appearance in the public sphere. Aesthetics and politics, beauty and communal deliberation-action, are here two components or aspects of one and the same emergence of people rising toward freedom. Taken separately, the aesthetic aspect appears as the mode and medium through which the actors make sense of what they do and bring this into the realm of experience. As we shall see in the following section, this perspective has significant consequences for our interpretation of the Maidan uprising as an exercise in democracy.

Social and historical causes of the revolution

National politicians and their party symbols and flags were not welcome at Kyiv's Maidan.[8] On the evening of November 30, 2013, Andrey Kurkov noted in his diary that a record had been

set: "Yes, nine days of protest without the involvement of any party, even an opposition party: that's a new record."[9] A couple of days before, upon learning that students protesting in Lviv had chased members of the rightwing Svoboda party off the stage, Kurkov asked: "Why do politicians have such difficulty imagining that people can go out on their own and protest when something in the government gets them angry?"[10]

Polls made among the participants in the Maidan protests substantiate Kurkov's impression. Among people asked on December 7 by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, nine out of ten, or 91.2 percent, said they did not belong to any organization, while only 3.9 percent said they belonged to a political party.[11] The result was confirmed by another poll made by Olga Onuch and colleagues.[12] While commentators thus agree that party loyalty or ideological affiliation neither represents nor explains the Maidan events of 2013–2014, they ascribe greater explanatory weight to a generational collective.[13] Maidan is often described as being spearheaded by the "contemporaries of independence," the generation born after 1991 and the Soviet era. In January 2014, an overwhelming 73 precent of Ukrainians aged 16–29 supported association with the EU. It was their pro-European spirit that rose up in the first week. Inspired by occupations and uprisings elsewhere in the world, and with similar savvy in networking on digital platforms, cohorts of young pro-European activists set the tone for what was to follow.

However, the number of activists in the occupation was at first small. Those who stayed overnight were a few hundred at most. By the end of November, after a week of intensive protests that had failed to change the government's intention concerning the EU association, the occupants were set to pack up and disperse. Had it not been for a misguided intervention at this very moment by the infamous special police forces, Berkut, which on the night between November 30 and December 1 attacked the occupants and severely injured several of them, Ukrainian history, would have taken "a different turn," as political scientist Mychail Wynnyckyj puts it.[14]

WHEN THE ARMED units descended on the square – with the official pretext that the space had to be cleared for the erection of the *yolka*, the New Year Tree – they breached what Igor Lyubashenko calls "an unwritten rule of Ukrainian politics": that peaceful protests are not to be suppressed by force.[15] Outraged by the unprovoked brutality, many more now rose in protest in order "to protect the young," as the phrase went. As hundreds of thousands walked to the square the following day, the police forces, seeing themselves outnumbered, abandoned the site. Soon, new tents went up, as well as a big stage, while the metal framing of the *yolka* was repurposed into a symbol of protest. The adjacent Trade Unions' building and the building of the Kyiv City Administration were also occupied the same day.

The assault by the security forces on the young occupants thus catalyzed a process whereby the spontaneous protest

against the cancellation of the EU association fused with broader popular passions – of discouragement, dissatisfaction, betrayal, and frustrated ambition – concerning the situation in Ukraine.[16] According to Myroslav Shkandrij, on November 30 the Euromaidan was transformed into "a struggle conducted under the national flag, against tyranny."[17] Resulting from this was the political emergence of a new collective agency that stubbornly resisted the existing system of political representation and ultimately defeated it.

OVER SEVERAL MONTHS, from December 2013 to the spring of 2014, this emergent collective conjured up radical ideas of national and democratic rebirth.[18] The vast majority participated in the Maidan Revolution as citizens and did not see themselves as part of any official structure or organization. They showed up because of their loyalty to the collective event itself. While the uprising thus entertained porous boundaries to Ukrainian society at large, with people entering and exiting the occupation much at their own ease, the borders against the special police forces and government troops were attentively guarded. They were patrolled by spontaneously formed militias, organized into so-called *sotni*, or squads (more on this below). Borders were fortified by barricades built of metal sheets, furniture, boards, planks, sacks of sand, tires, rocks, construction material, urban debris, and blocks of snow and ice. Creations of collective effort and ingenuity, some barricades resembled artistic assemblages in their own right. Within the confines marked by these mounds, Maidan formed a large community and served as a basis for transformational social and national movements. In this sense, Maidan was a manifestation of popular power, or the democracy of the street.

Several historians, political scientists and sociologists have remarked as much. Olga Bertelsen in her introduction to a significant collection of articles asserts that "the Euromaidan" affirmed "the paramount role of human agency in history."[19] She goes on to describe the Revolution as "the beginning of a new history."[20] Stefan Auer speaks of the Maidan revolution as belonging to those events that "transform the people and their political culture."[21] Igor Torbakov explains: "the implications of the Euromaidan have been tremendously important: the world observed dramatic changes in Ukraine in 2013–2014 – the dismissal of the authoritarian political regime and the emergence of a new Ukrainian civic nation."[22] Ilya Gerasimov goes one step farther, asserting that Kyiv and Ukraine in 2014 displayed "the first postcolonial revolution." It deserves this designation, Gerasimov claims, because the revolution was "all about the people acquiring their own voice, and in the process of this self-assertive act they forge[d] a new Ukrainian nation as a community of negotiated solidary action by self-conscious individuals."[23]

While there may be no reason to doubt these assertions, it is interesting that the authors offer little in the way of substance and

> **"MAIDAN WAS A MANIFESTATION OF POPULAR POWER, OR THE DEMOCRACY OF THE STREET."**

explanation to back up such epochal claims. Between the brazen assertions (the rise of a new nation; the emergence of a collective subjectivity) and the empirical observations made to support them, there is a disconnect and lack of proportion. Few if any scholarly and intellectual accounts of the Maidan Revolution actually examine the emergence of the revolutionary movement. More modestly, they analyze the discourses, practices, and actions of Maidan in 2013–2014 as manifestations of the remote or recent past of Ukraine.[24] In this way, they infer the revolution from a set of representations of various facets of Ukraine's society, history, culture, and politics, which are then posited as so many causes contributing to the different phases and outcomes of the revolution. Because revolutions are by nature complex, compressed, and conflictual, such explanations *a posteriori* can always be further amended, nuanced, enriched, or questioned by any number of additional details and observations. The historical accounts thereby grow thicker, richer, and more reliable. Simultaneously, however, the historical accounts thereby analytically dismantle and retrospectively collapse the revolution into a myriad of social, political, individual, psychic, and ideological causes, among which we are at pains to make out the contours of that "emergent collective subjectivity," or "new nation," or "New Ukraine," which these very accounts were supposed to explain and define for us. Despite the seeming clarity introduced by such explanations, the revolutionary emergence of the collective agent will thus remain as obscure as before, or even more so.

AS A RESULT, the revolution appears as a black box, an enigmatic transformation or interruption beyond understanding. Even if we identify the contributing forces that came before and piece out the consequences that followed afterwards, the event itself still remains concealed and unknown. In this way, representational epistemology fails to account for what we for lack of better words may call the revolutionary character of the revolution: the *destruction* of existent systems of political and cultural representations, the *emergence* of collective political agency, and the *release* of democratic imagination. In a word, it fails to shed light on the *monstrous* nature of the transformative event.[25] An understanding of *these* processes necessitates an in-depth investigation of the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of the revolution. We need to open the box and discern the meaning of its content, which perhaps is the very meaning of democracy.

A multiform people

In the absence of representation by established political parties and organizations, people assembled for Maidan invented or discovered ways to present themselves in various repertoires of imagination. Political aspirations expressed themselves in aesthetic figuration and fantasy. Artistic expressions served as circuits of communication and signposts to the future, powering the protests, enabling its participants to present themselves as an emergent political force, thereby making manifest a *people* in the process of realizing themselves

as a subject of history. For these reasons, aesthetic expressions help understand what historical meaning the Maidan uprising held for those who were absorbed by and contributed to its formidable agency.

The witness accounts by Andrey Kurkov, Natalya Vorozhbit, Sergei Loznitsa, and Matvyi Vaisberg introduced above testify to the strong presence of an artistic spirit in the revolution that left an imprint on participants and onlookers from the first. Tamara Hundorova describes the Maidan as a cultural performance with at least four different themes or codes: Carnival, apocalypse, performance, and Cossack encampment. Quoting one of the protesters, she states that the Maidan was "a true art space," a "cornucopia of opportunities."[26] Nazar Kozak interestingly compares Maidan art to what Joseph Beuys once called a "social sculpture." Aesthetic expressivity here served as an invisible substance or energy that integrated and resurrected the people as a political agency and thereby blew new life into the social body.[27] Dmytro Shevchuk and Maksym Karpovets also emphasize the performative nature of Maidan, its unexpected release of "creativity and collective imagination" whereby it offered "an alternative version of social reality." That the demonstrators prevailed, they argue, is coupled to the fact that it "was an experience on the edge of human capabilities": "Maidan managed to 'blow up' politics, offering a unique experience of the extraordinary."[28]

> ## "THE QUESTION BEING ASKED HERE CONCERNS ART'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE REALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY."

As these writers also argue, the task of producing aesthetic presentations of the revolution that capture and preserve its explosive and experiential freshness, its horizontal and democratic multiplicity, its popular surplus and social multiformity, is different from the task of producing a political representation, sociological explanation, or historical interpretation of the event. In the latter case, we deal with the question of how to make an accurate representation of the revolution as an event in social and political history by identifying its underlying causes, central interests, and main agents. The question being asked is: what or whom does the revolutionary process represent? In the former case, we are dealing with the ways in which aesthetic expressions intervene into the revolution and capture and record the political emergence of the people as a collective agency, or even a new political sovereign, or agent of power. The question being asked here concerns art's contribution to the realization of democracy – to its preparation, production, and preservation: what or who present themselves in the emergence and unfolding of the revolutionary process?

WHEN SEARCHING FOR answers to such questions, we should note how Maidan artworks often perform an aesthetic balancing act. They present or even perform the sociopolitical force of the multiform people, while they also seek to represent the people in a compelling form. In the following two sections I analyze some iconic artifacts that illuminate how the revolutionary crowd oscillates between the multiform and the uniform.

Figure 4. Pavel Klubnikin and Strayk-Plakat, *R kraplya v okeani* (I'm a drop in the ocean). 2013.

From an ordinary drop to the universal ocean

A drop of water, a piano, and a New Year's spruce – the people behind the Maidan revolution operationalized ordinary things, repurposing them into political weapons. A whole gamut of revolutionary folk art saw the day during the three months of conflict as people painted, carved, crafted, chiseled, scribbled, sew, embroidered, and in other ways designed and decorated their political outfits and accessories. Though these decorated objects may seem crude from an artistic point of view, they demonstrate the sheer enthusiasm with which the nameless collective supported and produced the revolution. Several initiatives led to remarkable performance pieces, many of them produced by known individuals, and many other by ordinary, anonymous citizens.

Our first example is the drop (figure 4). This symbol was introduced via a poster designed by Pavel Klubnikin, one of eight graphic designers who on December 1, 2013, launched the Facebook group *Strayk Plakat* [Strike Poster], which published posters that could be downloaded and printed for use in the demonstrations.[29] Klubnikin's poster immediately became emblematic. In simple conceptualist or neo-functionalist style, its upper part shows a yellow drop against a blue background, and its lower part depicts a rippled yellow area symbolizing a water surface. The text in bold black is as simple: "I Am a Drop in the Ocean" (*Ia kraplia v okeani*).

If Klubnikin's poster was the first piece of political lore from Kyiv's Maidan to be sanctified as an expression of the sovereign people, this was for good reason. The poster's message is existential rather than political. It can be claimed by everybody and excludes no one. "A drop in the ocean" is a common expression in many languages. It typically serves as a synecdoche, a figure of the relation of part to whole, of individual to collective. Most often, the saying is used to express one's insignificance in rela-

tion to overwhelming social and political forces: "What does it matter what I do? I'm just a drop in the ocean" (*Ia tilky kraplia v okeani*). By omitting the "just" or "only" in the proverbial saying and by finding an iconography to match it, the designer struck a chord that transformed the message from a statement on the hopelessness and futility of all action into a piece of agitation: "I am a drop in the ocean. It matters what I do!" Or, as in a later version of the same poster: "I am a drop in the ocean that will change Ukraine."

A CLOSE READING of Klubnikin's poster shows that this rhetorical recoding mirrors the process of political emergence. As mentioned, the text and image interpellate the individual as a drop. The drop is apparently small and superfluous. However, the acts whereby many individuals simultaneously advertise to each other their insignificance as mere drops also entail recognition of their shared condition as drops. Between them, there is now equivalence. But the recognition of their equivalent condition is also a discovery that they together make up a new entity; as drops make up an ocean, individuals make up a collective. What the poster shows, then, are the ties between individuals that come into being when they understand that they share a common identity (all are drops). Insofar as they recognize this identity, they also recognize that they constitute a collectivity that previously did not exist. In one stroke, the poster thus makes visible the individual, "the drop," inasmuch as each embodies what everybody has in common with others, while it also makes visible the collective, "the ocean," as existing through the recognition by individuals of this same commonality.

Such is the process of political emergence that Jean-Paul Sartre once described as the transformation of *seriality* into a *fused* group.[30] The process presupposes what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe theorize as democratic equivalence: the recognition that people, as drops, or citizens, are equivalent in relation to power.[31] Gayatri Spivak designates this process as one of synecdochization: a person recognizes herself as being part of a whole, which enables her participation in a collective movement and offers her a share in the common.[32] This also explains how, in its historical present, the constellation of words, forms, and colors on Klubnikin's poster can be seen as a performance of democracy in the deep sense. Individuals discover and affirm their individual agency inasmuch as they become parts of the collective, and the collective discovers and affirms its collective agency inasmuch as it enables individuality.

IN THE AESTHETIC and rhetorical register, the poster establishes the concurrence of individuality and collectivity through three tropes. One is synecdoche, the relation of part to whole; drops are connected to one another by being placed in relation to the whole of which they are part. The second is metonym, close association, or nearness; the single drop is associated with larger bodies of water such as the ocean. The synecdochical and metonymical relation is then reinforced by the third trope, metaphor, as the meaning of the relation of drop and ocean is transferred to the relation of the individual to the social totality.

As a result, just as the drop *is* (a synecdochical and metonymical representation of) the ocean, so the individual *is* the political whole; every "I" is a representative of the collective and is responsible for its well-being.

To note, the poster does not *represent* this confluence of individuality and collectivity. The point is rather the following: in the unfolding of the uprising the poster rhetorically and aesthetically performs democratic equivalence and agency. The poster is in this sense what Horst Bredekamp calls an "image act" (*Bildakt*), wherein an image can be seen as a "speaking" subject.[33] In speaking and acting, the poster prepares and produces the revolution. The poster is therefore a historical index of the political rupture that it helped bring into being.

Interestingly, the drop soon started to live a life of its own in the culture of Ukraine's revolution, undergoing a series of visual transformations. In one version, the drop is imprisoned. In another, it bends the bars of a prison to escape. In yet another, it rises as David against Goliath (figure 5). The drop is frozen or freezing; it transforms itself into fire (or a Molotov cocktail) (figure 6); it infiltrates the stars of the EU flag; it drips as tears from a woman's cheeks. Thus, the drop generated its own sign language to address the various phases of the struggle. In mid-March 2014, finally, another version emerged, now with a yellow and blue drop against the colors of Russia's flag (figure 7). The artist who uploaded this image stated that he wanted to thank all the Russians who supported the revolution.

IN THE IMAGES of Strayk Plakat remain traces or impressions of a political act that redistributed political meaning and visibility–or sensibility, to use Jacques Rancière's term.[34] In the presence of the revolution, the drop posters made people see their impotence as individuals vis-à-vis the existing power structure, while also enabling them to see their potency as they joined in the creation of an oceanic force able to challenge that structure.

Collective emergence of this kind intensifies people's emotional investment in social interactions, and it thereby accounts for the common feeling of solidarity that characterizes such political events. Such an emergence also changes the constellation of political forces. If before there was an established regime governing a mass of atomized persons, as isolated as drops, now there is a tangible antagonism between the regime and an emergent, oceanic popular force. This process tends to dismantle hierarchies and erase social alienation, to the effect that people trust the collective, that is, they trust one another, as they make up a safe space and a source of meaning that emancipate people by realizing their individual agency.

A point can here be made of the fact that Klubnikin's poster did not state "We are drops in the ocean" but "*I am* a drop in the ocean." The revolution seems not to have stifled individual creativity but rather to have asserted it. Any contribution was of importance. Everyone was welcome – to cook, build barricades, donate money, or sing – and everyone fulfilled their self-imposed duties to represent and care for all others. This led to an outburst of both modest and extreme initiatives.

On December 5, 2013, for instance, Markyian Matsekh and

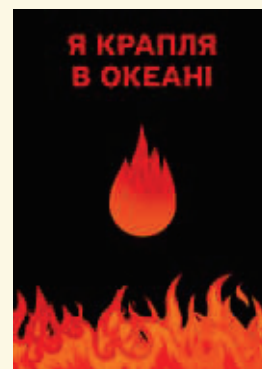Figure 5. Strayk-Plakat, The drop fights against the Goliath of the security forces. 2014.

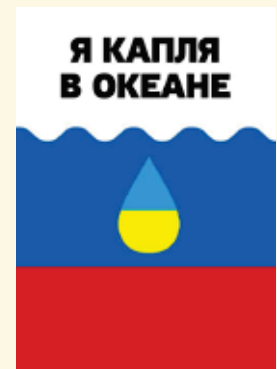Figure 6. Strayk-Plakat, The drop transforms itself into a Molotov cocktail. 2014.

Figure 7. Strayk-Plakat, The Ukrainian drop in a Russian ocean. March 15, 2014.

some of his friends painted their piano in the national colors of blue and yellow, hauled it to the square and placed it right in front of the riot police line. Matsekh then sat down on the stool and began playing Chopin's Waltz in C sharp minor until his fingers went numb in the cold. Photos of Matsekh playing Chopin's Waltz to the riot police immediately became iconic (figure 8). In interviews, the amateur pianist and IT worker from Lviv confessed that these performances had given a new meaning to his life. His intention was to show that, unlike the police and security forces, the Maidan occupants were peaceful. Even so, Matsekh's choice of Chopin spoke for itself. Chopin's music resonates with the sentiments of the composer and pianist whose native Poland was cut up between three European empires, and its main part dominated by Russian tsarism. The composer Robert Schumann described the music of his good friend Chopin as a force for national liberation, a "cannon buried in flowers," as he put it.[35] Incidentally, the Walz that Matsekh chose to perform was composed a year before the revolutions of 1848 that upset the political landscape of Europe, a historical event sometimes called *the spring of nations*.

MARKYIAN MATSEKH is an example of the ways in which Maidan's collective encouraged micro-heroism that asserted individual agency. At the other end of the spectrum, we detect equally inventive aesthetic practices without individual authorship. The foremost example of such anonymous or collective popular art is the *Yolka*, the great New Year's Tree that traditionally was erected on Kyiv's Maidan for the Christmas and New Year holidays. It was under the pretext of clearing ground for the scaffolding of the artificial tree that police assaulted the occupants on November 30. As the enormous crowd the next day chased the police off the site, the abandoned scaffolding was deployed for new purposes. The metal frame designed to be decked by plastic garlands, glitter, and electric lights turned out to be an ideal framework to which the revolution's symbols, messages, posters, flags, banners, paintings, and icons could be attached. Reportedly, the political decking of the *yolka* began as a young man climbed the structure to affix an EU flag at its top, after which others followed suit and tied their various banners and posters to the metal rods.

What the city authorities envisioned as an official symbol for the holiday season thus became an anti-monument, seized by the people from their government and now transformed into a symbol of their own plurality (figure 9). As the third main symbol of Maidan, alongside the drop and the piano, the tree was infinitely reproduced in photos, pictures, postcards, stickers, and kitchen magnets. Manuals on how to make miniature "Maidan yolkas" as Christmas gifts by using cardboard, wood, and paper circulated on the internet.

The *Yolka* was a bulletin board, scrapbook, and wardrobe, holder and hanger for the tags and colors of the protesting people. As such, it was a piece of street art or accidental art. Intended as a giant crinoline that would serve as support for a fake tree, the scaffolding now displayed different tissues and materials, and it made the voice of the people *stand out*. What was hung on, strung to, and draped over the metal bars was a collective garment: "the tattered clothing of the people," to use Victor Hugo's words about similar phenomena in the June 1848 uprising in Paris.

Nationalism is certainly a reference in the three artworks of the revolution that I have discussed. But the patriotic allusion is faint and open to question. In Klubnikin's poster, the nation is present in the color scheme, as is also the case in Markyian Matsekh's piano performances. In Matsekh's performances, the nation is also alluded to by the political edge of Chopin's music, as it presumably asserts a Polish identity trampled by neighboring empires. In the case of the New Year's tree, the nation is present only in a vague folkloristic sense. When turned into an artwork, the *Yolka* becomes collective and indeterminable: a universal frame for whatever you attach to it.

The *Yolka* is a case of collective iconoclasm, a conquest from below of state-imposed traditions and celebrations. Smashing the symbolism of the state, the tree in this sense corresponds to the numerous assaults on public monuments and particularly those representing the Soviet heritage, such as the destruction of the Lenin statue in Kyiv on December 9, 2013. This demolition, and similar acts before and after, made clear that Lenin's figure was no longer acceptable as an embodiment of society.

This brings us to a new level of the argument. With all the representations of the current political order being symbolically destroyed and emptied of meaning, what could serve as a new image of the radicalized people? While the drop and the ocean certainly offered an idea of the social cohesion and civic loyalty that connected individuals to the protesting collective, they did not in themselves offer any representation of the people except in the form of an oceanic universality. As for the *Yolka*, its patchwork outfit was continuously restyled and restitched, and underneath the crinoline of steel there was just hollow space, waiting, as it were, for a political body to fill it.

THE SEARCH FOR a truthful representation of the Ukrainian people took on many forms. One of the major ones was established by Babylon'13, a film collective which early in the protests established itself as the "Voice of Maidan" and a "Cinema of a Civil Protest." The community of filmmakers was first called together by the documentarist Volodymyr Tykhyi, who understood that radical filmmakers owned the tools needed to provide Ukrainians and the entire world with a view of the revolution from the ground. With short films and chronicles uploaded to the group's YouTube channel only hours after shooting, Babylon'13 soon became a dissident alternative to official media,

> **"THE *YOLKA* IS A CASE OF COLLECTIVE ICONOCLASM, A CONQUEST FROM BELOW OF STATE-IMPOSED TRADITIONS AND CELEBRATIONS."**

Figure 8. Markyian Matsekh playing the blue-and-yellow piano on Maidan, February 2014.

Figure 9. The Yolka, the New Year's Tree on Maidan. Early February 2014.

Figure 10. Roti, "New Ukraine". Sculpture in rose marble placed on Maidan on January 7, 2014.

which was restrained by government control. Babylon'13 was an eminently collective undertaking to which any person with adequate cinematic skills and revolutionary sentiment could contribute. Rather than conveying a specific perspective or idea of the revolution, it encouraged rapid coverage mainly in documentary and journalistic form.[36] All of the films were published anonymously; the film collective itself took responsibility for what each of its individual film makers published. This collective organization, in addition to the documentary format, made it possible for Babylon'13 to preserve the multiform and multivocal nature of the Maidan revolution. As a running news reel of the revolution, presenting it from within several perspectives and facets at once, Babylon'13 adopted something of the decentered aesthetics of the *yolka*; a changing assemblage of statements, voices, and views formatted only by the constraints of their YouTube platform. It is likely that no other revolution or uprising in history can provide such a complete and diverse filmic record of its unfolding day by day, and from a perspective matching the perception of the revolutionaries themselves.

Allegories of the new Ukraine

The search for an embodiment and visual representation of the people was provisionally resolved by the street artist Roti, a Frenchman with close links to Kyiv's art community. On Janu-

ary 7, after two weeks of intensive stone-carving, he unveiled on Maidan nothing less than the *New Ukraine*, a two-meter-long horizontal sculpture in rose marble that represents a woman's body horizontally submerged in water with only her face, hands and feet sticking out and rippling the surface (figure 10).

THE AESTHETIC IMPACT of Roti's sculpture is due largely to the fact that it captures an undecidable instant of appearance. Judging from the sculptural expression only, it is impossible to tell whether the female body is floating, sinking, or rising. With context and title added, the symbolism is unequivocal. What we see is the new body of Ukraine, emerging from the depths of the waters and breaking the surface in the form of a beautiful woman. The sculpture prompts the viewer to undertake a veritable act of creation, to bring the submerged woman into being through a leap of political will, by *imagining* her slow rise from the depths of the water or the rock to full visibility and representation. Thus, the sculpture does not so much represent the New Ukraine as it exhorts the viewer to participate in its creation.

Roti's sculpture at once demonstrates and enacts political emergence. It demonstrates it, through its figuration in marble, and enacts it, through its performative mode of production and display. This dual quality, being simultaneously demonstrative and performative, accounts for the sculpture's considerable im-

Figure 11. Cover artwork for Tetiana Domashenko's poetry *Heavenly Hundred Maidan Warriors*. Published by The Spiritual Axis, Kyiv, 2014.

Figure 12. Roman Bonchuk, Iconostasis of the Heavenly Hundred Heroes. Courtesy of the Museum of the Heavenly Hundred, Ivan-Frankivsk.

pact on the Maidan occupants and the broad public, their almost instinctive recognition that the sculpture expressed who they were and the meaning of their action, an identity and meaning now codified and anchored in the here and now by being carved in stone and given a name, *New Ukraine*. No wonder this artwork, too, was soon canonized as an iconic expression of the revolution.

Roti's sculpture is thus another of Maidan's absorbing image acts. Yet, the semiotic status of this artwork, as a material sign of the revolution's very meaning, does not prevent us from recognizing its conventional character. Female allegories are commonplace in the history of nationalism and political revolutions. In one sense, Roti achieved just another version of the brand, and from a stylistic point of view a rather trivial one. His sculpture of the New Ukraine alludes to the Slavic myth of the feminine spirit *Berehynia*, a female keeper of the hearth and the homeland, of water sources and riverbanks, whose popularity surged in the late 1980s when writers and artists transformed her into an idea of authentic Ukrainian femininity and national culture. Since 1991, she has been reproduced in numerous statues, murals, and popular prints, most notoriously as the gilded sculpture atop the Monument of Independence in Kyiv's Maidan.[37] Apparently, Roti's *New Ukraine* could not express its newness except by reconnecting to the old.

On the one hand, the sculpture evokes the people as a non-representable mass, a rectangular rock of pure potentiality because it can assume many shapes and forms. On the other hand, it shows the people as united and sovereign, embodied by the female figure who is about to step into history. Attempts to describe revolutionary agency unavoidably vacillate between these two, as the politically activated people will strive for an articulation that, however, negates their collective movement by binding it to a particular representation or form.

Through its title, Roti's sculpture provides the revolution

with a decidedly national character. The allusion to the mythic Berehynia turns it into a female incarnation of Ukrainian identity. As a result, the sculpture will unify the occupants and protesters only insofar as they identify themselves with Ukraine, thereby also separating themselves from any non-Ukrainian others, the most significant of which is of course Russia, which typically occupies the place of the rejected Other in Ukrainian culture and propaganda. With this closure of aesthetic signification, Maidan's universal Ocean is diminished to a Ukrainian Sea. The emotional register of nationalism, which has no firm hold on the drop, the piano, the *Yolka*, or Babylon'13's cinema of protest, appears in earnest in Roti's sculpture, devoted as it is to the imagined community of the nation.

Creating national martyrs

The first fatalities in the battles against riot police happened on Hrushevsky Street on 21 January. Many more followed, culminating a month later with the mass killings on the slopes along Institutskaya Street. It cannot be overlooked that the birth of the new Ukraine took place in a public space haunted by death. As the Revolution unfolded, the political emergence of the people was increasingly rendered through fiery nationalist iconography – patriotic and combative, grievous, and sacral. The poet Tetiana Domashenko codified this tendency. On February 21, 2014, the day of the public memorial service for the victims, she published a new poem, *Heavenly Hundred Maidan Warriors*, which sanctified the fallen ones, the "heavenly hundred" (in Ukrainian, *nebesna sotnia*).[38]

IN MANY REVOLUTIONS, aesthetic and cultural representations have been deflected in this manner. Revolutionary movements cultivate their legacies by honoring those who died for the cause. Yet, the Maidan Revolution is perhaps unique in the ways the cultural, aesthetic, and religious adulation of the dead heroes

has largely occluded the remembrance of Maidan as an experience of radical democracy.

Domashenko's poem sanctified the killed demonstrators as martyrs who had given their life and blood for the nation (figure 11). However, "heavenly hundred" is an insufficient translation of *nebesna sotnia*. It is worth dwelling on the connotations of this expression. A homonym with layered references, *sotnia* refers not just to the number 100. As mentioned above, it also designates a social, military, and administrative unit, somewhat like the Latin *centuria*, which refers to a military unit of roughly 100 men, as well as a voting unit in the assembly of the Roman Republic in antiquity and a land measurement unit. Although the etymology is tangled, it seems that the term for the cardinal number 100 at some point and in several languages–the old English *hundred* (a subdivision of a county), the German *Hundertschaft*, the Swedish *hundare*, the Ukrainian *sotnia*–extended its reference to also denote a geographical area or administrative unit consisting of 100 homesteads that could mobilize 100 men. In Ukrainian and Russian contexts, the word has been used as an organizational unit in military and civil administration, but it is also a way of naming any group involved in some kind of struggle or committed to a specific task. During Maidan in 2013–2014, demonstrators organized themselves in *sotni* tasked with self-defense and related logistics.[39]

THE GROUP OF KILLED activists mourned by the poem's "Ukrainian mother" is thus essentially a combat unit. A similar iconography – blending saintliness, martyrdom, military heroism, and Cossack allusions – characterizes several of the many paintings made in honor of Maidan's victims. Roman Bonchuk, a prominent visual artist, has devoted murals, an iconostasis, and an entire museum to the Heavenly Hundred heroes (figure 12). While Domashenko's eulogium is generally recognized for coining *nebesna sotnia*, or the "heavenly hundred," Bonchuk's paintings have been acknowledged for transforming the killed activists into Christian icons. Their respective artworks situate the dead in a religious-nationalist martyrology.[40]

Many Ukrainians have preferred to connect the revolution's tragic ending to a simple, heartbreaking folksong, *A Duck Floats on the Tisza* (*Plyve kacha po Tysyni*), which was performed during the Maidan memorial on February 21, 2014 and became an unofficial requiem for the victims. This old song of lamentation, first recorded in Lemkovina, Transcarpathia, in the 1940s, describes a mother duck bidding farewell to her offspring, who float down a dangerous river, never to be seen again and to be buried by "strangers" in a "foreign land." The lyrics about "Mother Duck" and her duckling are more modest than the zealotry of Domashenko's poem and Bonchuk's paintings. The standard reading of the folksong is that it is about a young soldier who goes off to war, leaving his mother in tears. But it is a song about *any* mother and *any* child: a recognition that departure and possible death are facts of life. Domashenko's allegory of

the Ukrainian mother speaks on behalf of Ukrainians, against enemies who kill her sons; "Mother Duck" speaks for everybody regardless of nationality.

This material thus presents us with two ideas of the Maidan Revolution that are at odds. In the perspective offered by the folksong "Plyve kacha," the revolution retains its universality even (or especially) in the face of disappearance and death. In the perspective offered by Domashenko's and Bonchuk's works, by contrast, the Maidan Revolution comes across as the realization of a heroic Ukrainian nationhood inscribed in Christian eschatology. This version of Maidan's legacy emphasizes its soldierly and self-sacrificial dimension, often rendered in idealized political iconography that ironically smacks of socialist realism. Meanwhile, it marginalizes most of the Maidan demonstrators, especially its female constituents who were advised to keep away from the barricades. In this register the Maidan Revolution is ultimately represented by the Heavenly Hundred, who through death dared complete a "pilgrimage from fear to dignity," and who voluntarily shed their "holy blood" to "sanctif[y] the freedom of Ukraine," according to Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.[41]

My point is that the aesthetic figure of the Heavenly Hundred helps us understand the process by which the nonviolent emergence of collective democracy during Maidan gradually gave way to a vigorous nationalist ideology, thus preparing itself for geopolitical conflict, Russian aggression, foreign occupation, and civil war. Put simply, the prevalent aesthetic figure of the Heavenly Hundred entailed what we may call an ideological containment, in which the democratic imagination that animated the Maidan Revolution was foreclosed or framed to fit a particular ideology.

> ## "REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS CULTIVATE THEIR LEGACIES BY HONORING THOSE WHO DIED FOR THE CAUSE."

THIS IS ONLY ONE SIDE of the process, however, for it must be recognized that the figure of the Heavenly Hundred is also a utopian figure that holds the promise of a community that offers the individual citizen a place within a larger whole. As Fredric Jameson once emphasized, no ideology can function unless it presents some utopian promise or reward to those who are interpellated by the ideology.[42] The popular embrace of the poetic figure of the Heavenly Hundred indicates that it resonates with people's experience. And although this experience goes far beyond the masculine and military ethos of the *sotnia*, it apparently still needs the mythic aura of fraternal solidarity and resistance to authority to make sense of itself. To cite one among thousands of similar statements, a female student said:

> **There were people from all parts of Ukraine. The collaboration was fantastic. It didn't matter what language you spoke. People did not think about themselves but about the other. They were willing to sacrifice their lives, so strong was the sense of community.[43]**

Testimony and artwork from Maidan express this sense of community sometimes as a mystical experience, a magnetic forcefield, an all-encompassing devotion, or, in the words of Jurko Prochasko, an "enormous human solidarity."[44] As we revisit such testimonies and their multiform aesthetic articulations, we realize that the representation of the Heavenly Hundred as the epitome of the Ukrainian revolution is precisely an ideological figure that displaces the democratic universality of the revolution and highlights its nationalist elements, while at the same time embodying a revolutionary utopia of community and solidarity. As genuine as the Heavenly Hundred appears as an expression of the strength of the revolution, it is false as a description of its reality. We glimpse a more adequate description in a Facebook posting from late January 2014:

> **We have a Sambir sotnia, "Afghan" sotnia, "Vidsich" sotnia. There is a Gandhi's sotnia (followers of the father of non-violent resistance – Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi) that protects civilians. How can we explain that to you, our European friends, that we have a Gandhi's sotnia? That we have priests, ultras [soccer fans], students, Cossacks, Afghans, left-wing-radicals, poets, alpinists, Buddhists, Hutsuls, Crimean Tatars – and they are all together!**[45]

Most of Maidan's *sotni* took part in the organized self-defense against the security forces, and some were responsible for cooking, emergency health care, fuel, supplies, and information. Artists and cultural workers also founded a *sotnia*, which organized art workshops and confronted the lines of riot police with poetry recitals. Other groups avoided or ignored the term, however. The graphic artists in *Strayk Plakat* did not identify as a *sotnia*. The members of the film community Babylon'13 considered the label irrelevant.[46]

IN LATE FEBRUARY there were 42 *sotni* on Kyiv's Independence Square.[47] Impressive as this is, it still means that most demonstrators were not members of any *sotnia* but contributed in countless other ways to the Revolution – another sign of its leaderless and multiform character. Meanwhile, it is telling that there had to be a Women's *sotnia*, for the simple reason that women were excluded from most other units of self-defense. A hand-written poster near the field-kitchen became infamous: "Women! If you see garbage – clean it up, the revolutionaries will be pleased." The *sotnia* is a mode of organization that tends toward a male homosocial and military ethos, in relation to which women are traditionally the keepers of the homeland, in accord with the gendered nationalism epitomized by the figure of Berehynia. The founders of the Olha Kobylianska Women's Sotnia saw

their initiative as a feminist critique of patriarchy, a counter-hegemonic intervention that promoted non-violent resistance and Ukraine's right to self-determination, while at the same time shunning nationalist symbolism.[48]

Again, this indicates how contrary notions of solidarity play against each other in the cultural imaginary of the revolution. Yet another understanding of solidarity is evoked in one of the films by Babylon'13, *The Citizen* (Hromadianyn). According to the members of the collective, it sums up the meaning of the Ukrainian revolution.[49] *The Citizen* consists of statements by activists (eight men and two women), each explaining why they joined the protests or, to be precise, "what they contribute to Maidan." A female IT worker explains: "I feel the reloading of human consciousness. I contribute to Maidan seven hours." A male entrepreneur asserts, "People have stopped looking for Messiah. We are ready to do everything ourselves," adding, "I contribute to Maidan all I have." Next, a builder, sculptor, retired soldier, agent of the Ministry of Emergency Situations, recreation therapist, designer, and filmmaker also state their reasons and display their contributions. One by one they lay down wooden signs on which they have written their professions and pledges, and at the end of the film the camera captures from above the mosaic of all the wooden signs that together form a map of Ukraine (figure 13). The seven-minute film closes with the summation, "Profession Citizen," and a quote from Dante: "The hottest fires in hell are reserved for those who remain neutral in times of moral crisis."

Notably, the plot of *The Citizen* has the same performative structure as Klubnikin's poster *I Am a Drop in the Ocean*. The aesthetic work represents what it performs, a pledge of allegiance to the collective. Individuals add themselves to the collective, identifying themselves as parts of a totality that they are in the process of reinventing by acting on it, and acting *in* it, together with others. Let us ask: Who or what is the beneficiary of their contributions? The people in the film give a straightforward answer: "Maidan."

What, then, is "Maidan"? In this context, it apparently signifies the emergence of the people as a democratic force outside existing systems of representation. Put differently, the term denominates a collective being and process that exist only so long as people give to it. It follows that Maidan was a being that was nothing more—and nothing less—than a collective of people unified by bonds of solidarity.

"PERHAPS THE ONLY tangible political idea that everyone involved in the Maidan had in common was the square itself," states Jessica Zychowicz in regard to Maidan's feminist movement.[50] She goes on to argue that the square emerged as a transparent space, or a negative space, which drew everyone into its center for what it might become. The square was a negative space of potentiality,

> "TESTIMONY AND ARTWORK FROM MAIDAN EXPRESS THIS SENSE OF COMMUNITY SOMETIMES AS A MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE, A MAGNETIC FORCEFIELD, AN ALL-ENCOMPASSING DEVOTION."

contesting the positive spaces of established power. "The square was sought, shared, and contested because of its polysemy. The defining measure of the moment was the square itself."[51]

This description contains an insight concerning the multiform collective of Maidan and how it became a magnet for political projects that otherwise shared little in terms of their respective political agendas. Yet, what the remark fails to observe is that "the square" is here a placeholder for democracy, not only in its fundamental sense, but also in literal terms: a place of assembly. Thus, what Zychowicz really refers to is perhaps not so much the square as a "political idea," but as a *practice* and *experience* of democracy expressed in numerous microhistories of solidarity. In retrospect, these histories are incompatible; in the moment of the uprising, they were not. What unites the microhistories is a profound sense of indebtedness, which prompts an urge to give, contribute, and make sacrifices. Such sacrifices are the fuel of revolution, consolidating and accelerating the collective movement. A speaker in Vorozhbit's *Maidan Voices* explains:

> There shouldn't have been anyone there, logically, but there were so many people there ... These people were busier than ants in a nest. I saw a disabled man, shoveling snow from his wheelchair. With a spade. And I decided to take an active part, because I felt so very thankful. I wanted to say how thankful I felt towards all these people. First of all I carried water, then sacks of snow, and I saw this man, he was limping, and holding a stick in one hand and a 12-litre bottle of water in the other. Although I was carrying 10–20 litres of water, my arms were falling off by the end. And again I felt tears in my eyes. I realized I'd chosen my position. That's exactly it: I wanted to give thanks to these people.[52]

The aesthetic expressions of the Revolution show how solidarity expands and contracts: on the one hand, a flurry of examples of Maidan's horizontal, leaderless, multiform, and spontaneous modes of articulation, its *heterarchic*–as opposed to hierarchic– pattern of action and expression;[53] on the other, and especially in the revolution's violent and tragic finale, a revival of historical heroes of Ukrainian culture and the Cossack myth, a recycling of martial imaginary in the form of homemade weaponry, combat gear, and militaristic emblems, and an iconography of nationalism and religion.

INTERPRETATIONS OF the Maidan revolution will therefore hinge on the question of the limits of solidarity. As Serhiy Kvit argues, no such limit existed at first. The revolution knew no boundaries: "The Euromaidan was ideologically friendly and open to everyone. There was no division based on language or ethnicity." Kvit even asserts that "[n]ot only were Russian-speaking Ukrainians welcome on the Maidan, but so were Russians and Russian flags."[54] Be this true or not for the first phases of the uprising, there then came a point where "the act of giving to Maidan" began to translate into an act of fundraising to support the armed *sotni* and other volunteers who in March transferred to Donbas

Figure 13. Babylon 13, *The Citizen*, 2014. Screenshot.

in order to fight the Russia-supported militias who had backed Yanukovych. In this process, Russian flags swiftly disappeared, as the "enormous human solidarity" which initially characterized Ukraine's democratic uprising transformed itself into that more ordinary yet enigmatic phenomenon which we call nationalism.

Concluding Remarks: **Solidarity between the Multiform and the Uniform**

According to political sociologist Robin Wagner-Pacifici, disruptive social events generate a continuous articulation of signifying practices through which the participants recognize the meaning of what they do together, and which gradually assume the form of a representation of the revolutionary event and process. The aesthetic works and testimonials that I have discussed in this article are cases or moments in such a cumulative process – which Wagner-Pacifici calls "political semiosis" – that infuse meaning into the collective experience, delineate the contours of the revolutionary community, testify to the revolution's significance for its participants, and contribute to its legacy. Cultural and aesthetic expressions that partake in this process of political semiosis enable those who participate to understand themselves as an emergent collective and sense the meaning of their actions. By giving form and meaning to what is multiform, such aesthetic acts also "organize" what appears to lack order, for instance, by privileging certain revolutionary agents and events over others.

If we briefly return to Sergei Loznitsa's film *Maidan*, we find a stunning illustration of such tensions between the multiform and egalitarian democratic praxis of the assembled people and what we perhaps too bluntly may call their ideological streamlining. The film is rhythmically sequenced – now displaying a profusion of everyday activities without central command and yet mysteriously coordinated, now conveying in powerful imagery how everybody is animated by a single collective will. As mentioned, the film's moments of unification have a particular acoustic quality as they are accompanied or even aroused by music, thus showing that aesthetic expressivity momentarily can turn many voices

into one, the multiform into the uniform. In this way, Loznitsa ultimately embeds all the sounds, noises, and explosions of the uprising into one song, the national anthem (see page 55).

Powerful aesthetic expressions are thus able to arrest the continuous process of political semiosis, capture the revolutionary event, and affix it to an image, story, ritual, or song. Such articulations inevitably inflect collective passions toward certain values and ideals. Arguably, this is what happened on Maidan beginning on February 21 as the myth and image of the Heavenly *sotnia* were put in place as an immovable figure and master narrative that re-oriented the Revolution toward past moments of nationalism, and which subsequently could be recoded for present purposes and help mobilize people in the revolution's violent and military aftermath. As Mychailo Wynnyckyj submits, "nationalist rhetoric and symbolism became the 'semiotic glue' for an *imagined community* formed and located in the *present* – not in the past."[55]

CAN WE CONCLUDE, then, that the Maidan revolutionaries eventually drew too much of their poetry from the past, to paraphrase Karl Marx? In the same text, Marx famously stated that people act and make history "under circumstances encountered, given and transmitted from their past."[56] Despite the cultural creativity, polyvocal aesthetics, universalist imagination, and democratic ingenuity by which the Ukrainian revolutionaries made themselves known in its present moment, and despite all the energy spent on creating something that did not exist before, they also conjured up, as Marx phrased it, "the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language".[57] Should we conclude, in other words, that the emergence of democracy in Maidan was overtaken by Cossack myths and national cults of male heroism and martyrdom? If so, how much of this is attributed to Russian aggression, and how much to a radical nationalism internal to Ukraine? Or will the future show that Maidan's return to traditions was preparatory, a run-up to the realization by Ukraine's people of more adequate models of democracy?

The answer will largely depend on the meaning Ukraine's historians and historical institutions ascribe to the Maidan Revolution in the long run. Ten years after the event, the choice between universalist and nationalist conceptions of solidarity remains a real one. Although the war today necessarily favors a narrow interpretation of war-time patriotism, future generations are likely to reopen the case and return to the Maidan that was: the political emergence of democracy and the struggle over its meaning. ❎

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