Giovanni Ercolani

The Maidan Museum

Preserving the Spirit of Maidan. Art, Identity and the Revolution of Dignity

With a foreword by Chris Farrands

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To my father and to my mother:
Dr. Mario Rosario Ercolani
Prof. Carla Carmen Pellegrini

Abstract

This research examines the relation between art produced during the so-called *Revolution of Dignity – Maidan Events* (Kyiv, Ukraine, November 21, 2013 – February 23, 2014) and the mission of the Maidan Museum (short for: 'National Memorial of the Heavenly Hundred Heroes and Revolution of Dignity Museum', Kyiv, Ukraine) born from the ashes of Euromaidan to preserve the 'Spirit of Maidan'.

The Maidan events, defined as the Maidanization process, produced a post-colonial discourse-language, a new apolitical ideology based on the concepts of dignity and Ukrainianness; generated symbols, social myths, and collective imaginary; triggered the 'Spirit of Maidan' that changed the consciousness of the participants in the demonstrations; and functioned as a ritual of intensification-aggregation-initiation-passage, in which the identity of new Ukraine was shaped.

In this transformative process, in which the human being is seen as an 'animal identitarium' struggling, defending, and fighting for his/her own identity, artists played a crucial role in assembling the main elements of the post-Maidan Ukrainian identity (homo Maidan), were able to empower the whole movement with concrete ideas, and finally reworked objects, symbols, and music already present in the Ukrainian DNA through a process of meaningization, symbolization, mythization, canonization, sacralization, and interpellation.

This volume is based on interviews with artists who dramatically participated in the Maidan events and on fieldwork at the Maidan Museum, and unfolds and identifies the main elements, emotions, expectations, and motivations of the relation of art creation and Ukrainian post-Maidan identity formation based on the 'Spirit of Maidan'.

Therefore, this research: defines 'Maidan' as a social myth; discloses and identifies those artistic elements – symbols and archetypes – which were produced during the Revolution of Dignity and played a key role in the 'Maidanization process'. By the

latter is meant the meaning the combination of the emerging mythification process with the Maidan Societal Securitization Process, which as a result created the 'Spirit of Maidan'; and examines the circumstances surrounding the creation of the mission and role of the Maidan Museum.

The conclusion confirms that Maidan is a myth and that the Maidan Musem is a unique case of a Memorial Museum dedicated to the preservation of the Revolution of Dignity's objects, to the spread of the emancipatory message of the 'Spirit of Maidan'; while remaining an active agent and cultural mediator in the definition and formation of the post-Maidan Ukrainian identity and cultural policy of Ukraine.

Key words: Maidan, art, identity, myth, ritual, animal identitarium, collective imaginaries, Spirit of Maidan, Maidanization process, anthropological gaze.

Contents

Foreword

Giovanni Ercolani's study of the Maidan Museum is in important respects an innovative study in social anthropology. It also has a wider significance, because its subject of study, the Maidan Museum in Kyiv, has taken on a greater significance even than those who created it imagined, because of the events of 2022. Ercolani explains for himself the innovations he makes in methods and philosophy of study in the book, and this Foreword will not replicate that. But it does try to set the book in wider contexts. In doing so it also makes the case that the book is more significant and less recondite than its author rather modestly suggests. Ercolani writes as a specialist in anthropology, and the book is presented as a study in that field. But he is highly qualified in both anthropology and political science and international relations, having MA and PhD degrees in both fields. And he began academic life as a linguist, with qualifications in Oriental languages specialising in Turkish; he is now fluent in more languages than I can count. Unquestionably, this book also reflects a continuing concern with the meanings and ambiguities of language and language use, including the ways in which people speaking and writing in different contexts switch codes and patterns of meanings, often without any great awareness that the code switching—as in almost all of James Joyce's writing—creates wholly new meanings in turn.

The wider contexts this Foreword opens up are, first of all, the political and cultural situation, secondly, the historic settings which help to explain some of the ambiguities of Ukraine's situation between Europe, Poland, Russia, the Black Sea, and between various versions of Christianity. Thirdly, it asks questions about the ways in which museums and other institutions memorialise not just the past, but also the very recent present, the lived experience of men and women for whom memories are not easily captured in the serious, heavy blocks of stone and concrete which make up the traditional nineteenth century idea of how the past is summarised and re-presented. Recent efforts at creating a 'present past' in popular museums, not least in the Holocaust Museums in Berlin

and Washington DC, but also in many other institutions, provided examples from which the creators of the Maidan Museum learned. But that effort was primarily the result of a popular movement. It still encapsulates the immediacy of the first efforts to commemorate the events in 2013/2014. Then, ordinary people across Ukraine took to the streets to overthrow a government which they saw as undermining opportunities for democratic change and freedom from corruption, as well as from Moscow's heavy hand. 107 people died then: the Maidan Museum commemorates their lives. But it does much more than that, and what more it does is the main focus of Ercolani's analysis.

It may be useful to note from the start that the reader not familiar with the Maidan Museum can find a great deal of material easily available online, including material from the museum itself (at maidanmuseum.org) and on Youtube, including a lecture by Ercolani himself, as well as other explanations and debates in English and Ukrainian. Included in this material are virtual tours of the museum as it currently exists, as well as the full plans for the future permanent building.

The war in Ukraine which began on 24 February 2022 is a culture war. It is, of course, being fought with military means, and it has military and economic objectives as well as cultural goals. But the cultural aims Russia's invasion strives to achieve are at least as important as any others. The Maidan Museum stands in a central place in the cultural conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and by extension in the cultural conflicts between democratic choices and an open society on the one hand and closed, authoritarian societies on the other. Karl Popper famously made a distinction between 'The Open Society and its Enemies', linking economic organisation to fundamental values; but today (and really it was always so) fundamental values are directly on the front line in political and economic struggles against authoritarianism. The Maidan Museum has special significance in Ukraine itself, but it has a much wider global significance. While it could be said that it has a particular resonance in Europe, the conflicts of values and social practices at issue are equally in question in Myanmar, in much of Hispanic America, in every part of Africa where a struggle for a free society

and an uncorrupted democracy is unresolved, and even in that supposed bastion of democratic ideals the United States, particularly in the aftermath of the assault to overturn democracy there on 6 January 2021. That remains no less true even though in his book, Giovanni Ercolani has tried in careful forensic analysis to explore the meanings and language and emotional weight of the Museum without political rhetoric. He brings the discipline of anthropology to bear on the representations of those conflicts. The point is that the anthropological gaze leads to a sharper understanding of those wider issues, as well as to a deeper understanding of the practices, symbolism, spiritual resonances and social communication which the Museum offers. This foreword will also suggest a sense in which memory, history, memorialisation and the creation of art carry a particular weight in the constructions of identities (the plurals are important).

But first, what, more precisely, is the Maidan Museum about? From its name, many people might expect the museum to be a building, probably rather stolid, in the centre of a major town, with a particular organisation around given themes, often chronological, with a story or series of stories to tell- but above all a location, a place, devoted to memory and identity. The major museums and galleries in any great city -the Prado in Madrid, the British Museum or Museum of Childhood in London, the great museums of antiquities and national heritage in Cairo, Baghdad and Saskatchewan in Canada- all follow similar models. The Maidan Museum at once conforms and deviates from this. First of all, the museum currently does not have a permanent home. It is partly housed temporarily before a planned large-scale building is completed, a dramatic design which, when completed, would be one of the premier European museums to rank with the two Gugenheims in Bilbao and Lisbon, Daniel Libeskind's Berlin Jewish Museum, and Zaha Haddid's Riverside Museum in Glasgow. The plans for a new radical building, yet to be built, have been delayed both by internal arguments, by disputes over funding, and by the coming of war. But the museum as it exists lives on the streets, and in Maidan Square. It is also an outreach project, taken by enthusiasts to schools, regional museums and community centres

across Ukraine. It is, more than anything else, a spirit which commemorates the spirit of the events of 2012/13, an attempt, if you like, at keeping alight a flame of permanent democratic revolution. Ercolani explains the significance of this more fully in his Chapter Five.

The optimism apparent in the project of Maidan defies some current realities: it asserts an optimistic vision of the future. Above all, Maidan is different from most 'museums', including those mentioned above, because it has been made by the people it wants to remember, commemorate, celebrate. Like the Holocaust Museums in Washington DC and Berlin, it remembers the dead; but it also remembers the actions and courage of the living. And it perpetuates what its founders would say was 'Ukraine at its best'. That Ukraine stands in defiance of forces of corruption and coercive domination, as much by western capital or corporate power, as by Russian oligarchy and Putinesque nationalism. The fact that the Museum was created by people directly involved in the events whose spirit it conjures gives it a unique character. They also endow it with a diversity of meanings, a spiritual and profane weight, which is pretty much unique in any major national museum in a capital city. It is that diversity of meanings, that collision of spiritual, political and historic power, which Ercolani aims to unravel and explore. Because it is a spirit as much as a material thing, an ongoing practice as much as a presentation of the past, it is especially appropriate to use the anthropological approach of this study. As he does so, he takes the position of a stranger in a new territory which, although not wholly unfamiliar, demands a fresh eye and new ways of evaluation. What especially characterises that approach is the ways it privileges the ideas and beliefs and language and social practices of those who create it, and who continue to build its evolving meanings and significance. That understanding is based on a series of interviews, mostly in considerable depth, with key participants in the making of Maidan. Ritual, symbolism, what is sacred and what is made sacred engage together in the practices of the Museum in ways which are life-affirming and identity-creating for the people of Ukraine. The wider importance lies in the importance of an effort to practice

bottom-up popular democracy in defiance of both moneyed oligarchy and authoritarian violence. It overlaps with, but is separate and complementary to, a purely aesthetic approach or a merely political analysis of the Museum.

In their attack on Ukraine from 24 February 2022, Russian forces have systematically destroyed sites and emblems of any distinctive identity, including over 200 museums and memorials, many public buildings, and not a few churches. The cultural goals of the invasion include, but are not limited to, wiping out any history of Ukraine which denies that the country has always been in substantial measure subservient to Moscow. That project is already being actively pursued in schools that have fallen under the control of Russia's military. New textbooks have been imposed which reflect Putin's personal view of the history of Russia-Ukraine relations. His view is that Peter the Great did Ukraine a favour in re-integrating it into 'Greater Russia' that previously had mythic existence before the Russia-Ukraine connection was destroyed by the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century and the Polish invasions of the fifteenth. As already noted, this is not a historical account shared in most of Ukraine. This cultural warfare reflects a myth promoted by Tsarist governments after they conquered major parts of Ukraine in the early eighteenth century. It was sustained by the Bolshevik governments after 1917, when for a short time Ukraine became a wholly independent state, separate from Moscow, under a partly anarchist government. Bolshevik policies from 1924 onwards were reinforced by racial and ethnic policies which tried as far as possible to eliminate whole groups in Ukraine, such as the German (Saxon) settlements dating back to the thirteenth century, the. Crimean Tartar people, as well as Cossack and other communities. Western Ukraine is close culturally and historically to Poland; south western Ukraine has people with Romanian and Hungarian heritage. There are, of course, also substantial Russian communities across Ukraine, and especially in the east, but they are part of a multicultural mix with a complex, deep-rooted history. Although Russian missiles have not (so far) directly targeted the Maidan commemorations, and would find it hard to do so, given that they are so diffused, so much based in

outreach and online expressions, the Russian army would undoubtedly destroy Maidan as a space and as a spirit if they could.

The Ukrainian Orthodox church had been partially autonomous from the Moscow Metropolitan for many years. But, under personal encouragement from President Putin, the Moscow church has sought to re-establish closer control over Kyiv's orthodox community, a complicated theological story which led eventually to the Ukrainian Orthodox church declaring full autonomy from Moscow in 2018. One of the aims of the invasion in quite certainly to restore Moscow's complete religious control, and to kill or at least imprison priests and religious thinkers who defend the separateness of the two religilous communities. Although quite a good number of Ukrainian citizens are not personally religious, Ukrainian national spirit could not be corralled by Moscow without destroying Kyiv's distinctive church -which is in fact far older than that in Moscow. In the analysis which Ercolani offers of the Maidan Museum and the 'Spirit of Maidan', he gives a much fuller account of the sacred nature of the lives the Museum commemorates and the artefacts which it uses to embody a range of human experiences. He contends that there are processes of sacralization in the act of making the Museum, but also in the very ways in which one might visit and seek to understand its objects and artefacts, including music and poetry as well as art work and sculpture as well as 'found objects' from the conflicts on the streets.

Contending Histories and Memories

One of the roles of the Maidan Museum is, therefore, to hold and protect memories of recent events and the people who made them, suffered for them, and in some cases, around one hundred individuals, died. They memorialize the present, not some distant past, and they do so in order to suspend time and keep those events and people in the present. Anthropology recognizes that it is quite common, perhaps even indispensable, for peoples to engage in rituals and practices which suspend time and create meanings out of those actions. And here it is important to add that while in the not so distant past, anthropology was a part of a colonial enterprise

which purported to study a 'primitive other', as a subject it has battled that stereotype (perhaps that battle continues, but that is not the issue here). At the same time, anthropologists have turned their attention to the societies immediately around them, to the self-understandings of Japanese business executives, to European football ultras, to the daily lives of prisoners, to women's shared experience of menopause, and to the rituals of teenage fandom (to cite just a few examples). Where communities in the global south are studied, the methods assumptions and language are certainly very different from the 1920s and 1930s, when anthropology established itself in the academy.

Earlier, I compared the Maidan Museum in some important respects to the various Holocaust museums which have been created, mostly only in the last thirty years: the Washington Museum opened in 1994; the Jewish Museum in Berlin in 2001; only Yad Vashem was opened earlier in Jerusalem, in 1953. The comparison is apt in several ways. Each of these institutions raises questions about how the past can be represented, and who can do so. The answer to those questions in each of those cases is that this particular past cannot be 'represented' and perhaps must not be: it can only be *presented*: as Emmanuel Levinas argued, it can be shown, and born witness to, but not 're-presented' without distortion and dishonesty. It helps that there is testimony from survivors, and there are many such testimonies, but much of the weight of the Holocaust memorials lies in a simple showing of evidence - family letters, photographs, short film clips, piles of shoes or hair or toys left along a trip to the crematorium. Through this evidence, the museum curators try to reach out to the visitor and give them an experience in which they (the curators) seem to have mediated as little as possible, to let those people speak directly to each of us. Visiting the Washington Museum in 1994, I was asked from first entering to carry a card showing the name and age of an individual woman who died in Theresienstadt to root my experience witnessing a whole body of physical evidence, narratives, images and film, History with a capital 'H', an overwhelming two hours emotional and factual bombardment, related in this way to the life and death of a single, recognizable

named human being. I still have it on my desk. Maidan makes that connection between individuals; at the same time, it *presents* the 'big History' through the evidence of individuals who took part in events, through the use of personal memorials from children or family, photographs and clips (now recorded on phones and tablets), as well as personal biographies. And it invites visitors to make their own interpretations and conclusions.

There is a kind of sentimentality here, but in saying it is a kind of sentimentality, I do not mean anything cheap or unimportant. Philosophy, feminist thinking, theatre and a great deal more remind us of the importance of emotion alongside other human reasoning and human passions. Even in the supposed 'rationalist' business of academic economics, recent work, including that of at least two Nobel prize winners, emphasizes the importance of emotion alongside calculation in economic decision making. How we integrate an understanding of our own emotions and reactions to events which are a great burden, even if they are not as overwhelming as the Holocaust, is an important question for anyone who tries to understand the recent past and to memorialize histories we have lived through. This integration of emotion and reasoned argument was clearly important for the founders of the Maidan Museum. Interrogating it is a theme which runs through much of Giovanni Ercolani's work, noting that emotional responses to the Museum are very important just so long as the visitor -or here the reader- does not allow their responses to be reduced to emotion alone. The evidence of Ercolani's various witnesses and interviewees demonstrates how central this is to the experience of Maidan. What the book shows is how an account can sensitively draw together a reasoned account of myths, rituals and passionate emotions in the creation of a world of life and identity understood through the sacrifice of others.

Recognizing Russians and the West in All This

The current government is Moscow initially set about what it called a 'special military operation' claiming it was 'liberating' parts of Ukraine from 'Nazis', seeming to mean the present parties in

power. Since the invasion began in February 2022, it has imprisoned thousands of its own people for protesting against the war, some merely for calling it a 'war' rather than the required public vocabulary of 'special military operation'. But as the conflict unfolded, Russian intentions have become more sweeping -to 'liberate' all of Ukraine, to define all Ukrainian nationalism as 'Nazi' and so to eliminate the spirit and identity of the people. After months of unsuccessful warfare, Putin's agents now point more to the west as having 'occupied' Ukraine as a justification for their invasion. As in many wars, the war aims shifted, not necessarily under the full control of the protagonists. By 'Nazi', Putin and his acolytes appear now to mean (nonsensically) anyone with a sense of the distinctive identity of Ukraine and Ukrainians. Yet many people who identify as ethnic Russians and Russian speakers living in Ukraine have joined the war of resistance against the invasion, and Putin has only succeeded in unifying the country more than any other action might have done. Putin has compared himself to the Tsar Peter the Great, who conquered large parts of the Polish/Lithuanian Commonwealth as well as largely destroying the previously dominant Swedish Empire in the Great Northern War (1700-1721), including much of modern Ukraine. The culminating battle of that war was fought at Poltava, now in Ukraine between Kyiv and the Russian city of Belgorod. Peter succeeded in destroying a republican and partially democratic system of government which had linked Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and parts of what are now the Baltic states for nearly four hundred years, and which give Ukraine longstanding links to Europe rather than to Russia. Those links have never disappeared, especially among the largely catholic population of western Ukraine. But the events of 2013-4 were a powerful drive towards reorienting all of Ukraine more towards the European Union and the west and away from both Russia and the Soviet past. After heavy losses and grave international embarrassments, Putin's aims seem to have extended to the extinction of Ukrainian independence. I say 'seems to have' because Putin has mostly tried to couch his actual aims in such woolly terms, probably so that he could claim victory pretty much whatever the final outcome of the

war might be. But it does not seem mistaken to conclude that we know from actions on the battlefield, from their treatment of civilians, from their forced deportation of tens of thousands of people, that Russian ambitions are to extinguish a distinctive identity as well as a sovereign nation. That this breaks international law and a whole raft of treaties to which the Russian Federation has acceded does not matter to Putin, who has declared more than once that his underlying aim is also to re-shape the post Cold War international order in a manner of his choosing. The Museum might be taken to represent a 'special cultural operation' in defiance of Putin's 'special military operation', and this articulation of a counter to remnants of soviet culture as well as to Putin's imperial project is developed much more fully, especially by some of the key interviewees in the book.

But it is important, I think, to make three comments about Putin's view of the world. First of all, not all Russian people share it, and many Russian people, especially those with close family or other ties to Ukraine, will be deeply opposed to it, even if they have been terrified into silence by the apparatus of the Russian state. Nothing in Ercolani's book, or in this Foreword, should be taken to suggest a crude binary opposition between Russia and Ukraine, and that is not the main thrust of the Museum's exhibits and spirit either. Many other Russian people are victims of state violence for other reasons, many others might see themselves more as entitled to western levels of human rights and dignity, not to mention the higher standards of living which European Union member countries enjoy. The limited media coverage of Russian society suggests that the government has worked very hard to suppress any organization among mothers of war casualties, who were one of the most powerful opponents of the (much more limited) Russian war in Afghanistan, but which played a key role in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 after the Afghan defeat. But most Russians clearly support their government because they have no choice, because they are victims of a corrupted media, because they are bombarded with propaganda and have been for a generation, and because they have no access to alternative media whether online or broadcast which might

challenge the monolith of Moscow-speak. And those people too are victims, although they themselves might not accept that description right now.

The second thing it is important to say about Putin's view of the world is that it is, in a limited sense, correct. It is not 'right' -this is not a justification for the violence of the attack on Ukraine. But Russian leaders were promised that NATO would not expand (a promise that perhaps should not have been given). They were, or seem to have been, promised that East Germany would not be absorbed into NATO when it was merged with the former West Germany (a dishonest promise from the start that quite certainly should not have been made). They were also promised a much greater deal of consultation through post Cold War diplomatic machinery than became the actual practice: the leading EU and G7 governments basked in what was foolishly seen as a 'triumph of the west' in the 1990s, while the losers could be relegated to a second division of global players. Again, this does not justify current Russian aggression. But it is a key element in the current conflict, as western government officials understand very well. Russia's status as a great power diplomatically was relegated as much as its military capability or economic strengths. Putin came to power in 2000 resolved to overturn this state of affairs and has consistently followed through on his ambition to restore Russian standing. However disgusting his behaviour, this is a part of his project, which appears to be popular in the eyes of many, but not all, Russians.

The third point I would make about the present conflict is that from 1992 to February 2022, Ukraine had been caught in an economic struggle which was as harmful as it was self-interested. That self-interest was commercial and financial. Western financial interests vied with Russian oligarchs and others to seize Ukraine's assets, to entrench Ukrainian indebtedness, to take over companies and control the minerals and agricultural strengths on which much of the country's economy is grounded. This is a murky story, but it is beyond dispute that Ukraine was scarred by corruption which threatened to undermine what popular democracy was possible, and which was characterized also by struggles for media

ownership. Some western interests were heavily involved in these conflicts, which included grabs for mineral and agricultural resources as well as for control of the banking system. This was a contested field which led to the rise of now President Zelensky: Zelensky was elected in large part to try to move the country more towards EU membership by a popular movement which was rightly suspicious of the levels of corporate power and corruption in Ukraine. And the 'Spirit of Maidan' has sought to challenge this western subversion of democracy as it has sought to overturn Russian leverage and the remnants of soviet thinking. Again, none of this justifies the Russian invasion. The radical democrats who wanted to change the government in 2013-14 were as conscious of the level of corruption as they were of the threat of Russian military power, and that is explicit in many of the memorials in the Museum. Maidan is thus intended to represent the better parts of the Ukrainian people, and it takes a stand as much against the corporate corruption of the previous twenty years as against specific politicians and political cabals. This is an assertion of a popular imagination of a better world in which citizens in many would-be democracies that are blighted by corrupt media ownership and behind-the-scenes corporate manipulation can respect. For the Maidan Museum does not reflect what Ukraine is today so much as what Ukrainians would wish all democratic countries to be, an example to learn from even in much older so-called democracies.

The Aesthetics of Maidan

Ercolani is explicit that his is a study the practice of an aesthetics using anthropology as the means of exploration. That is, the Maidan Museum creates objects of beauty, experiences which inspire awe and dread, which provoke judgment and debate, which challenge the senses and one's judgment. This is to talk of aesthetics in a contemporary sense. It does not necessarily refer to any 'classical' model of 'beauty' where the object is the creation of a sense of a contested 'sublime' of the form advanced especially in 1757 by Edmund Gibbon (1998), as well as by Kant and the

eighteenth-century enlightenment. In the contemporary argument, beauty is neither static nor fixed in a formula, although it can be taught and shared. But its quality may lie in its elusiveness, in fluidity, and in the ways in which each authorial voice (in Maidan a collective as well as a series of individuals) makes their own aesthetics. As the musicians Pussy Riot showed in their various performances, this can be equally a political and an aesthetic path. Jacques Rancière (2014) has compared the importance of the conversations which take place between the political and the aesthetic, 'emplotments of autonomy and heteronomy' (p.115). Maidan is very obviously a deliberate political provocation as well as a record of experience in which the viewer/visitor is invited to join. Rancière continues: 'the autonomy is the autonomy of the experience, not of the work of art. In other words, the artwork participates in the sensorium of autonomy inasmuch as it is not a work of art' (p.117). In this sense it is not what the artist or author or photographer intends to say but what the viewer or listener or participant in a performance experience which has priority in interpreting artwork which is always, whatever else, both political and personal. This poses a problem of problem of democracy and democratization of meaning: meanings are created, and dismantled, by viewers and listeners and readers, but how that happens and how that is controlled is in itself an important political question. That Maidan is created by those whose experience it narrates and contextualizes is of special importance.

Drawing on Rancière's discussion of the relationship between politics and art helps to make sense of the diversity of the objects and representations in the Maidan Museum, some of which are entirely personal, some addressed to a son or brother or father, some more ambitious in intended audience, but not first of all intended as 'public art', whereas others look outward to embrace the wider public of the city and the community of viewers and visitors.

An Anthropological Gaze

There are obvious and important political questions, including fundamental problems in European political theory, in the untangling of the significance of Maidan -the museum and the events of 2012/13 as well as its changed meanings today. What Ercolani's anthropological gaze turns to are the rituals and practices which underpin the 'performance' of Maidan, or the memorialization of the events of 2013-14, and of their changing meanings in the present to those who created the Museum and those who take part in it either in personal visits or online experience. He borrows the language of aesthetics and aestheticization –how an object or practice which might not at first resonate as an art object or practice becomes invested with an aesthetic value- from a contemporary literature, including Rancière. He treats the notion of myth as central to the purpose of the Museum, and brings the important recent work of the Canadian scholar Gerard Bouchard (2017) on myths and social rituals to bear to understand more fully what the importance of Maidan is. In doing so, he also extends some key ideas in recent social anthropology. To a non-anthropologist reader, this may seem quaint: when I was growing up, to say that what another boy said was a myth was a slightly polite way of saying he was lying. But myths are not lies, and if they embody deliberate untruths they are unlikely to survive for very long. Rather, myths are non-literal truths. They are stories which capture a reality of lived experience for the communities which share them. They have power because they offer a kind of explanation which is consistent with other ways in which the world is understood, whether they are about the creation of the world, a people's relations with the natural environment or how one faces basic problems of life, death, morality and possible societal collapse. This is as much the case with classic myths such as the Greek narratives of the gods or the earliest known epic, The Story of Gilgamesh, as it is of contemporary myths and mythologizing. They encompass much of what the philosopher Wittgenstein calls 'a form of life', a way of living within and in relation to a specific language.

Maidan does not *create* the mythology of Ukrainian independence, but it sustains and elaborates it, and it creates a language within which the sacrifice of individuals' lives becomes intelligible and praiseworthy. At the same time, it carries the set of meanings over to a wider sense. Again, the Museum does not *create* the modern sense of national identity, which derives primarily from folklorists, historians, politicians and writers in the nineteenth century, as it does for most other European countries. Rather, it deepens and defines that sense of identity in the particular context of the twenty-first century. That engages with a kind of religious or at least spiritual power: what is sacred, what can be spoken of, what is true within the rituals and social exchanges of Maidan, in the memorialization of painful and joyful shared events. Ercolani's main aim, drawing importantly on Bouchard's (2011) work (among others) is to show how that sense of the sacred intertwines with the myths and memories in order to form a broadly coherent whole on which national identity can be grounded, but on which, at the same time, individuals and families can find meaning as they grieve and celebrate.

Translations

Any discussion of the significance of a museum such as Maidan requires a number of stages of translation. Most obviously, we translate from natural languages -English, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, French and so on. But we also translate from the distinctiveness of what, as I noted already, Ludwig Wittgenstein called 'forms of life', ways of being and relating to each other which give the essentially social and shared character of language its force and meanings. What the individuals who fought and sometimes died for in the independence struggles in Czech, Polish, Romanian or Ukrainian contexts have a lot in common; but in each case it is also different, distinctive. One 'velvet revolution' is not the same as any other, and some have little of the smoothness of velvet about them. Some linguistic theorists might suggest that we cannot translate the experience, feelings and meanings of one struggle to another, just as we cannot translate the untranslatable depth of

meaning in poetry. I beg to differ. First, one might present the great translations of Seamus Heaney or Simon Armitage, or the extraordinary achievement of Edith Hall's translations of classic Greek drama. Disputes about translation also revolve around the translation of Paul Celan's poetry or the writing of Ingeborg Bachmann or Nelly Sachs. Different and more difficult questions arise translating classical or modern Chinese and Japanese literature. But great translations of these European poets work exist. This quickly leads to a second argument. Heaney, Armitage and Hall have all written extensively about their understanding of translation, and each emphasizes their agreement that they *cannot fully* translate the exact meanings - denotations and connotations, metaphor and force of symbolic meaning- of the words they deploy. The translator chooses the words and rhythms they use to capture what they think is critical to an understanding; but they know that just as a contemporary reading of Beowulf, Pearl or Antigone in the original language will not mean the same to a contemporary audience, however linguistically gifted, as they did to their original audiences, so the translation will lose something. Another translation, another story, is always possible. But at the same time, it will gain something, and in the hands of a gifted writer, especially one as gifted as any of these three examples, a text becomes reanimated, acquires new meanings and relates to contemporary sensibilities and priorities, even if it inevitably loses others in the process. So translating is itself an act of creation, although it must also be as precise as possible to stand as a valid piece of work.

The reason why this argument about translation is important here is because actually we engage in translation all the time in everyday life. We may not be as great a writer as Heaney or as powerful a scholar as Hall, but when we talk to others we reach out to them across barriers of different experience and different expectations. Every conversation is in this sense a translation, even between users of the same natural language. But even within the same natural language, we often do not speak in the same register, and each register reflects a distinctive form of life: for example, in lecturing I might use one register, in speaking to my mother

another, and in standing on the football terraces I might use quite a different mode of speech: the routine obscenities of football or the parade ground would get me fired if I used them in class, and deeply condemned if speaking to my mother. Each person uses different languages and different modes of address all the time, unless, they live in a single capsule. As an aging academic, I have to make sure I understand the language used by nineteen year old students, much of which would have been as foreign to my nineteen year old self as Spanish or Italian (languages of which I have a thin, but only a thin, grasp). So the Maidan Museum reflects distinctive experiences, struggles, anxieties, deaths, threats and triumphs of which most people reading this book will only be dimly aware. My point is that everything we engage in socially involves translation, and yet that translation is, with good will and careful attention to the other person, possible, albeit not perfectly. This argument that social exchange is a dialogue is elaborated more technically in Farrands, 2000 (see also Moore and Farrands, 2012 and Ricoeur, 1992). Translation is a dialogue; sense making, the core practice of anthropology and of all of the humanities, is dialogic. It is not just the responsibility of the speaker to make herself plain. It is equally the listener who reaches out to her. It is through the dialogue of exchange, not through the 'purity' of speech or intentions of the speaker or the listener's knowledge and skill, that translations are achieved. And although he never makes that claim, what Ercolani does is to show us more clearly how we can make sense of the experience of those who established the Maidan Museum and those who maintain its flame even in the face of war. He enters a dialogue, an archaeology of Maidan in the present. It is quite an achievement, although he would be the first to say it is imperfect. But like all translation, that is unavoidable.

Fluidities and Fixtures

Throughout his study, Ercolani refers to 'Maidanization'. By that he means the process of establishing a mythology that holds as a central truth the messages of both the past and the present conflicts as central to Ukrainian identity. But it is also a mythology that

establishes Ukrainian experience as central to European identity. That is to say that the Museum and the spirit it represents is about much more than a desire on the part of many most? Ukrainians to join the European Union. It is more an assertion of the continuity of a sense that Ukraine has always been much more part of Europe than the counter myth that it is part of Russia would argue. This is not straightforward. I am sure I would not be alone in thinking that Russia itself is, for all the political divisions which have existed from time to time, also a part of Europe. That may be a 'fact' geographically for the western part of Russia. But I mean much more that, intellectually and historically, Russia is European: try to imagine the trajectory of European music without Tchaikovsky or Stravinsky, the European novel without Tolstoy and Bulgakov, poetry without Akhmatova and Pushkin, or history without Russia's roles in the Napoleonic wars and World War Two. Equally, all these distinctively Russian voices owe something to European predecessors. And Russian anarchism owes a great deal to France, while Marxism, although dissimilar in many respects from what turned out to be Russian communism, was conceived in Germany and Britain. Russian industrialization after 1921 followed the model set by Henry Ford as often as it did anything written in the dank, derivative theories of Lenin and his colleagues. Russian capitalism after 1991 derives from an imposed western, mainly US, model, and not a small share of Russia's technology was bought or stolen from the west. One could go on, but for the moment I rest the case that Russia is also in significant ways, not all of them pretty, closely linked to Europe and the 'West'. Museums fix something - in both senses. They create and then try to cement a vision of reality, the spirit which holds an identity through a narrative of the past. At the same time, they try to fix a problem, to engineer a solution of a kind, even if the 'problem' they identify is not one which many people outside the curation team would see as an issue, a doubt about identity, memory and story. The Maidan Museum was designed to do much of this, but also to recognize that Ukrainian identities, histories and memories are fractured and fluid, contested, and yet have sufficient common grounds to draw a people together.