

# Editorial

01/02

As a child I really wanted to be Ukrainian. Or so I told my parents. When they asked why, I told them it's because Ukrainians are happy people who sing and dance, while Jews and Russians are sad. I'm not totally sure where I got this idea. We did spend a lot of time in Ukraine, in a city called Dnipro, where my mother is from and where a part of my family still lives. My father's family lived in an impoverished small town near Moscow that they fled to from Lithuania during World War I. The part of the family that stayed in Lithuania was later massacred during World War II. Sadly, my mother's family in Ukraine did not fare well during World War II either – their small house in Dnipro was destroyed by the Nazis in 1941. Only recently, my mother received a small and symbolic reparation of a few hundred euros from the German government, about seventy years later.

A couple weeks ago, the world turned upside down again. Dnipro has been bombed again, but not by the Nazis. It's like a bad dream one can't wake up from: while thousands of people are being killed in Ukraine and millions are being displaced by the Russian army, nobody really seems to understand the reason or goal of such violence. While Ukraine is being bombed and destroyed, the social fabric of Russia and its economy are disintegrating under sanctions and martial law, and what is rapidly emerging is an isolated, impoverished, fascist state propelled by a death drive. Putin seems to have decided to drop all pretenses – no more soft power, economic concerns, international relations, civic society, public sphere, independent judiciary, constitutionality, rights, and so forth. All that remains is the police, the secret services, the army, and repeated threats of using nuclear weapons.

Ukraine can only prevail in such a situation. The Ukrainian popular resistance has already become the kind of movement that cannot be defeated or subjugated for long, if at all. Almost everyone in the world stands with Ukraine, while Putin's Russia has no friends. One hopes that a resounding military defeat will reveal the emptiness of the Putin regime and its greedy, kleptocratic nihilism with no social ideas or proposals beyond amassing power and wealth for its own sake through lies and violence. This regime will surely collapse, or Putin's entourage – a group not known for love or loyalty – will get rid of him themselves. One hopes that what will emerge in its place will not simply replace one strongman with another, but comprehensively reconstruct the country's economic and political establishments so that the despicable actors who have enabled corruption, the persecution of opposition to the regime, and this very war on Ukraine are forced to answer for their deeds.

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The regime's utter bankruptcy makes the prospect of a post-Putin reconstruction for the region something that is possible to imagine. In one scenario, oligarchic art foundations will be replaced by artist-run and independent spaces. Russia's own Ministry of Culture and state museums will immediately fire unqualified bureaucrats and political appointees, replacing them with qualified and knowledgeable professionals: art historians, curators, artists, and administrators. With their experience and care for art, its producers, and its publics, the salaries of cultural producers will be fair, and free labor will no longer be exploited. Myriad new cultural publications will resurrect art criticism, and art education will be free and available to all. Art-market speculation and schemes like NFTs will be frowned upon and eventually abandoned. In a sovereign and independent Ukraine, a Kazimir Malevich Museum will be built in Kyiv, not only as a mausoleum to his paintings or a tourist attraction, but as a living laboratory for a new society's radical art. And in a liberated, post-Lukashenko Belarus, Minsk will become a permanent European Cultural Capital with an advanced center for digital arts.

End Russia's war on Ukraine now,  
immediately!

– Anton Vidokle, on behalf of the *e-flux journal* editors

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