

Blindness, Hypnosis, Addiction, Fetish: The Language of Holodomor Denial in Soviet Industrial Travel Narratives

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In the fall of 2017, I was invited to speak at the third annual Zaporizhia Book Fair, an event that drew thousands of visitors over a long weekend in October. The purpose of my visit was to help commemorate ninety years of Ukrainian-American cooperation in the city, for in the spring of 1927 Soviet and American engineers began construction on the majestic Dnipro Hydroelectric Station (DniproHES), which was to be largest and most powerful dam in Europe at the time. To mark the occasion, I decided to buy copies of American industrial travel narratives that represented the Dnipro Construction Project (Dniprobud) and donate them to the Zaporizhia Regional History Museum. But when I landed at Zaporizhia International Airport, I was stopped and searched by the border guards, who informed me I was bringing communist propaganda into Ukraine, a violation of the 2015 decommunization laws (“V zaporozhskom aeroportu” 2017).

To assure them that this was a big misunderstanding, I showed the guards a photograph by Margaret Bourke-White published in *Fortune* magazine (1931b) of a Ukrainian worker assembling one of DniproHES' scroll cases and explained that she made the image to demonstrate how American industry had the power to positively transform the lives of people around the world, including in Zaporizhia. But the guards were unconvinced. Ignoring the identity of the worker, they said that the photograph looked like communist propaganda, perhaps because the size and strength of the industrial object seems vastly superior to the modest, bare-backed laborer.¹ I tried again and showed them a photograph from James Abbe's *I Photograph Russia* (1934) that depicts the completed DniproHES in October 1932 but includes in the frame a long breadline forming on the right bank of the Dnipro, evidence of the terror-famine that was beginning to devastate the surrounding countryside. While Abbe's image is one of the very few that manages to visually link the triumphs of the Soviet industrial revolution with the tragedies of collectivization, the guards looked right past the indices of the Holodomor and said that even this photograph still seemed to be communist propaganda, especially since the book's title suggests that Zaporizhia is part of Russia, which it most definitely is not.

At this moment, I felt all too aware of the hypnotic aesthetic power of DniproHES, for at first glance, the guards immediately equated an artfully composed *image* of a Five-Year Plan industrial colossus with the *state* that supported its construction. In both cases, they remained fixated on the dam as a symbol of Soviet power and did not identify with the Ukrainians who

¹ In fact, this was consistent with how *Fortune*'s editors viewed the image as well, for the photograph's title, “Detail of a Dam,” mutes the human element, and its caption encourages its readers to view the industrial object strictly in terms of its technical function: “Tightening bolts preliminary to permanent riveting on one of the water distributors of the Dnieper Dam. The distributor is in the substructure of the power house and will be the largest in the world. Its function is to divert water to the turbines at an even pressure” (Bourke-White 1931b, 60).

were struggling with (and because of) its construction, as I perhaps naively expected. Thankfully, they ultimately concluded that I was not a threat and let me and my books cross the border, but this interaction caused me to return to one of the central questions that has haunted my research on artistic representations of DniproHES: why did so many of the foreign correspondents who encountered evidence of the Holodomor during the dam's opening ceremony in October 1932 seemingly fail to register what they saw with their own eyes?

Most accounts of Holodomor denials rely on ideological or functionalist explanations. In other words, the worst actors are represented as true believers in the promise of the Revolution who either did not believe in the existence of the famine or viewed the Ukrainian peasants as national or class enemies. On the other hand, other journalists, often those who on the surface seemed to be non-partisan, are portrayed as having either a personal or professional stake in reporting positively on the Soviet Union. That is, they minimized or ignored the famine because writing about it was not in their own best interests.

The psychologist Israel Charny has even proposed six general classifications for why individuals reject evidence of mass killings, including “malevolent bigotry,” “self-serving opportunism,” “innocent denials and disavowals,” “definitionalism,” “nationalistic hubris,” and “human shallowness” (Charny 2003), all of which in one way or another applied to contemporary coverage of the Holodomor. For many, Walter Duranty of *The New York Times* is the greatest villain among the foreign press corps, for his denials and attacks against his fellow correspondents bear characteristics of the bigotry of a perpetrator and opportunistic ruthlessness at maintaining his influence within Moscow's journalistic circles.² The denials of others (like Louis Fischer of *The Nation*, the freelancer Maurice Hindus, Eugene Lyons of United Press International, and William Henry Chamberlin of the *Manchester Guardian*), while also self-serving, were predicated upon a view of the Soviet Union as a just society. David C. Engerman has argued that these journalists were seduced by the “romance of economic development,” for they supported the necessary drive to modernize the country “in spite of their recognition of the tremendous human costs entailed” (2003, 242). Likewise, when touching upon the disavowals of the famine by American women writers (such as Anna Louise Strong of *The Moscow Daily News* or Margaret Bourke-White of *Fortune*), Julia Mickenberg has described their attitude as possessing a “cruel optimism,” for the Soviet Union “embodied a promise of the good life and explicitly included women's emancipation in that promise” (2017, 31).³

And yet, I have often felt that these paradigms do not fully make sense of the actions of the correspondents who attended the opening ceremony of DniproHES, where there was evidence of a widespread famine for those willing to see it. There is some surplus of meaning that cannot be explained by what these members of the press “believed” or “had to do” to protect

² Duranty often refused to believe in the existence of the famine, writing in a letter to the journalist H. R. Knickerbocker that “the famine is mostly bunk” (Duranty 1933). For an account of Duranty's actions in the early 1930s, see also Taylor 1990, 193-223. Since Duranty defended his reporting until his death in 1957, American, British, and Canadian Ukrainians launched a campaign in 2003 to strip him of his Pulitzer Prize (Luciuk 2004). The Pulitzer Prize Board, while acknowledging that Duranty's reporting did not meet “today's standards for foreign reporting,” noted that he won the award for a series of articles written in 1931. In their review of these articles they insisted that they found “no clear and convincing evidence of deliberate deception” and, therefore, did not revoke the award (Kirkpatrick 2003). With Charny's categories in mind, we can see how the board used “definitionalism” as an excuse to not retract the award, even if they expressed support for the need to draw attention to the famine.

³ Strong justified the grain-procurement campaigns and argued that only those who embraced collectivization and industrialization deserved to be fed. “I don't blame the government for taking some grain,” she writes in her autobiography *I Change Worlds* (1935): “Why should efficient workers who made good tractors die for inefficient peasants who couldn't get in the grain?” (Strong 1979, 358).

their careers, reputations, or access to valuable sources. In both their journalistic and autobiographical writings, these correspondents relied upon a variety of metaphors (blindness, hypnosis, addiction, fetish) to come to an understanding why the industrialization of Soviet Ukraine captured their imaginations but its effects on the countryside were not seen, ignored, dismissed, or covered up. As such, this paper will explore what the language of Holodomor denial reveals about the difficulty in perceiving the link between industrialization and collectivization and how the city of Zaporizhia today is finding creative ways to negotiate the ambivalent legacy of DniproHES with the memory of the victims of Holodomor.

“Go-Getters of Facts”: Dniprobud in the Soviet Industrial Travel Narrative

In 1931, America's bookshelves were invaded by what one reviewer called a “spring army of books on Russia” with eight titles on the Five-Year Plan appearing in January alone (“Where Liberty” 1931). While previous Western travelogues about the Soviet Union were often partisan in nature – either openly pro- or anti-Soviet – these accounts were distinguished by their documentary orientation, for the new wave of titles “discount prejudice and see the facts for what they are” (Wildes 1931). Many of these books were based upon the author’s tour of the monumental building projects constructed during the First Five-Year Plan. And among the sites most visited by Western journalists was Dniprobud, the centerpiece of the reorganization of southern Ukraine’s power, metallurgical, manufacturing, and agricultural industries.

One of the first American journalists to report on Dniprobud was H. R. Knickerbocker, a correspondent for *The New York Evening Post* known to be a serious journalist, or a “go-getter of facts” (“Sherwood Eddy” 1931). In the fall of 1930, Knickerbocker visited the site as part of a two-month tour around the Soviet Union, and his regular column “The Red Trade Menace” appeared in the *Post* starting in October.⁴ While many of his other articles pointed out the oftentimes absurd difficulties of crash industrialization, Knickerbocker’s feature on Dniprobud expresses great admiration for its audacity. He punctuates his text with a catalogue of positive impressions and presents the project as the most “monumental” object of the Plan, the “greatest” of the “world’s greatest” industrial sites, and a “show place, certainly, but well worth the showing.” In a land where the people express their “nationally mystic bent by the contemplation of glamorous statistics,” he concludes, Dniprobud’s “dimensions satisfy even the Russian love of superlatives” (Knickerbocker 1931, 178-180).

This image of Dniprobud as an awe-inspiring endeavor persisted in the early coverage of the project. Indeed, another American journalist who visited Dniprobud was Margaret Bourke-White, the star photographer of *Fortune* magazine. After touring the dam in the summer of 1930, she published the results of her trip in a photo-essay entitled “Soviet Panorama” in February 1931. The leading image of “Soviet Panorama” depicts a young, shirtless Ukrainian worker with his muscles flexed as he tightens a bolt on the shell of one of Dniprobud’s turbines. The composition of the image is structured by the geometrical figure of an arch, a feature of the dam which Bourke-White indicated gave it a “delicate” quality. The slanted camera angle creates the impression that the unnamed laborer is working on a severe incline and in immediate danger, reliant upon his wrench to keep him from falling into a potential abyss that lies beyond the frame. Since the shell is not shown in its totality, its size and scale are not known, leaving to the imagination the severity of the worker’s hypothetical fall. Also left to the imagination is the magnitude of the shell, for its surface seemingly stretches on and on in all directions.

⁴ In January 1931, Knickerbocker’s columns were collected together and published as book *The Red Trade Menace* (1931), which ultimately was nominated for and won the Pulitzer Prize for the best foreign correspondence.

Scholars have focused on “the imaginative juxtaposition of opposed, but allied, components” in the photograph (Brown 1972, 11-12). The man’s form is irregular, sensuous, slightly wild; the dam is ordered, cold, and repetitive. The man is sweaty and dirty; the dam is clean. The man is more closely allied with the natural world; by flooding the Dnipro rapids, the dam promises to conquer nature. The man is likely a Ukrainian peasant, a representative of the past; the turbine is American, the largest in the world, and representative of the future. In fact, the postal address “Amtorg New York Dnieperstroy Kichkass via Nikolaev” stamped onto the case’s exterior in English is partially visible and suggestive of an artist’s signature, perhaps implying that American engineers are the authors of Dniprobud as a project. In short, the image of a Ukrainian worker struggling to tighten a bolt on an American turbine becomes symbolic of the great civilizational struggle between the Soviet Union and United States. If he stumbles, it will bring him – and all he signifies – death and destruction. But if he is successful, the Ukrainian-American partnership will bring into being one of the most colossal industrial objects the world has ever seen.

Bourke-White also wrote about her trip in a travelogue entitled *Eyes on Russia* (1931a). In her book, she explained that she was especially struck by the fact that the such a modern dam was being built by “barefoot, bare-backed” laborers, former peasants who interacted with its technologies as if they were imbued with divine powers and gave them superhuman strength. She relates that these recruits “believed that cranes could lift anything and everything” and even “tried to pull down a thousand-ton boulder.” This enthusiasm reached a point of absurdity when “half the cranes brought over during the first six months of their use were busy lifting up the other half which had been overturned by naïve workers seeking to achieve miracles” (1931a, 80).

Bourke-White was so impressed by building projects like Dniprobud that she returned to the Soviet Union again in 1931. But when she did, she noticed that the peasant workforce had miraculously mastered the American technology in just a year’s time. “Now at Dnieperstroy,” she wrote, “the American engineers assert that cranes are operated with the utmost precision on the dizzyest heights” (1932a, 8). Similarly, Louis Fischer of the *Nation* noticed that so much progress had been made that the site’s workforce was already looking forward to even greater achievements. “Dnieperstroï is so gigantic, the task so huge, that the visitor can only gasp and reflect his amazement in monosyllabic exclamations,” he writes: “When I tried to express my astonishment to the Soviet engineer who was my guide he smiled and said: ‘H’m, next year we expect to begin the building of Volgastroï, which is to be twice as large’” (1932, 36). However, the impressive pace of construction and mastery of new technology drew attention away from the suffering of the waves of peasants who came to the site to flee collectivization.

In March 1930, the government allowed peasants to leave collective and state farms to ameliorate labor shortages on construction sites, and by the end of the year, approximately 40 to 50 million peasants fled collectivization, over half of which were from Ukraine or the North Caucasus (Conquest 1986, 166). Anne D. Rassweiler has shown that in 1930 there was a “qualitative change” in Dniprobud’s labor force as a result of these policies, for the majority of these new unskilled workers had never lived in urban areas or worked in heavy industry, much less seen the types of technologies being used in construction (Rassweiler 1988, 140). Thus, when the local Komsomol cell resolved to “tugboat” the work in August 1930, the enthusiasm of the activists was focused on overcoming the exasperation of the new arrivals from the countryside. But Knickerbocker, Bourke-White, and Fischer were more focused on the “contemplation of glamorous statistics” rather than the struggles of the site’s lowliest workers.

Meanwhile, in July 1931, the young heir to the Heinz food company, H. L. “Jack” Heinz II, traveled to the Soviet Union along with the Welsh journalist Gareth Jones, who was his guide and translator. When they visited Dniprobud that summer, Jones went into the countryside to survey the state of collectivization and dekulakization and discovered that peasantry in the areas outside of the city was being brutally persecuted. As one Mennonite farmer told him, “they sent the Kulaks away from here and it was terrible. We heard in a letter that ninety children died on the way – ninety children from this district” (Heinz 1932, 222-3). While Jones did not have to travel far to encounter stories of profound suffering, few foreign correspondents managed to take note of the destructive effects of Dniprobud on the areas surrounding the dam, especially when thousands gathered in Zaporizhia to celebrate the project’s completion in 1932.

“To Serve the People”: The Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony of DniroHES took place on October 10, 1932 and had all the elements of a mass spectacle. Most of the foreign correspondents covering the Soviet Union (including James Abbe of *The New York Times*, Louis Fischer of *The Nation*, Malcolm Muggeridge of the *Manchester Guardian*, Eugene Lyons of United Press International, and Anna Louise Strong of *The Moscow Daily News*) arrived a day before on luxury trains from Moscow. Since Zaporizhia’s train station in the old town center of Oleksandrovska was located about 12 kilometers from DniroHES, the correspondents’ route to the dam began in a pre-revolutionary city built in the nineteenth century, passed through the village of Voznesenivka populated by Ukrainian peasants living in small huts with thatched roofs, and concluded in the recently erected Socialist City (*sotsmisto*), where a sweeping panoramic view opened up and revealed a brightly illuminated DniroHES. The aesthetic effect was a powerful one, and many of the correspondents were struck by the otherworldly quality of their first view of the completed dam. “On the evening of our arrival,” writes Lyons, “we were moved to ecstasy by the beauty of this great station looming against the star-studded skies” (Lyons 1937, 542). “When I saw the Dnieperstroy Dam I thought Socialism was all built,” Abbe exclaimed: “I felt like rushing to the telegraph office and shooting Stalin a wire congratulating him on having successfully industrialized the Soviet Union” (Abbe 1934, 86-87). Fischer was so deeply moved that he took off his hat as a sign of reverence or respect (Muggeridge 1934, 104).

The next morning, the festivities began. Thousands of Dniprobud’s workers and distinguished guests walked across the span of the dam, crossed the Dniro, and filed into bleachers erected at the base of the power station on the right bank. While the foreigners were awestruck by the festivities, the Soviet audience did not seem to share their enthusiasm. Lyons noted that “the mass of people in the grandstand had been on the scene too long to be thrilled by the strident poetry of the machines” (1937, 543). There was a large contingent of Soviet artists who came to the event, but they too seemed to be disinterested or disengaged. The novelist Leonid Leonov was in attendance, but “for some reason, was not interested in industrialization, but in the cactuses” in DniroHES’ powerhouse (Kirpotin 2006, 169). Leonov seems to have met Bourke-White there, for included in her Soviet portraits is an unpublished image of him, indeed, awkwardly stroking a cactus (Bourke-White 1932b). While the portrait registers this moment of distraction or discomfort, others struggled to view the ceremony as anything but absurd in view of the starvation that was crippling the surrounding countryside.

At the beginning of 1932, the government intensified the pace of its grain-procurement campaign, but many individual and collectivized households were simply unable to satisfy the required quotas. Some fled the villages for urban areas, where massive breadlines began to form, and many were forced to wait for days to receive a meager ration. Those who were left behind

began to starve to death or were forced to resort to cannibalism to survive. By June 1932, as the death toll began to rise, the government identified the regions (*raiony*) most significantly affected. While the Kyiv and Vinnitsa oblasts were the hardest hit, Dnipropetrovsk oblast – where DniproHES was located – had five regions with extraordinary losses (Pyrih 2007, 213).

In October 1932 – the same month that DniproHES was launched – nine village councils in the areas around the dam were placed on “blacklists” (*chorni doshky*), a coercive tactic used to deny the delivery of goods to underperforming areas.⁵ As a result, many peasants fled their homes and arrived to the site at the very moment that the dam was preparing to launch.

One Ukrainian boy, Petro Horishnyi, came to Dniprobud with his parents, who fled to escape “the poor harvest and harassment by local authorities who took even the most meager supplies of grain” (Horishnyi 2010, 22). They settled in Pavlo-Kichkas, a village less than a kilometer away from the Socialist City, where his parents “dug an earthen hut and went to look for work” on the dam. Then seven years old, Horishnyi was forced to scavenge for food “by digging up gophers, grabbing eggs from the nests of wild birds, and picking the corn grain from the troughs of horses harnessed in the dam’s stables.” Another child Lidia Bieryna also escaped the famine by coming to Zaporizhia with her family. “There wasn’t anything to eat in the village,” she remembers: “Our neighbor advised us to go to Dniprobud, where they were building the dam. There they give you a kilo of bread” (Bieryna 2010, 21).⁶

But not everyone was as fortunate as the Horishnyi and Bieryna families. While provisions were more plentiful on blue-ribbon construction projects, those living in rural areas were left to starve. Oleksandra Radchenko, a teacher living in Kharkiv oblast, kept a diary that documented the famine. In an entry from April 1932, she describes how the celebration of industrial projects brought her to a state of rage in light of the human atrocities she saw. “When reading about [...] the completed dam at Dneprostroi, sometimes I’m overcome with such an uncontrollable hatred that I’m sick,” she writes: “What is the use of these tempos for the children and people swollen from hunger?” (Pyrih 2007, 1013). A few weeks after Radchenko penned these lines – the waters of the Dnipro for the first time passed through the turbines of the dam, which prompted *Pravda* to announce that the river is “bridled,” “conquered,” and “from now on has to serve the people” (Vinter 1932, 5). But which people the project ultimately served was a question many wrestled with as the years went by.

“Seeing, and yet Not Seeing”: Four Metaphors of Denial

Although the famine had not yet reached its most lethal levels in October 1932, many correspondents saw unusually large breadlines, starving peasants, or even corpses in the areas around the dam. Eugene Lyons remembered that the opening ceremony “had an edge of the grotesque” due to its location “in the heart of the district soon to be devastated by man-made famine.” The mood, he argued, reflected “the insanity of a junket to the hungerland, the correspondents chaperoned by official hallelujah-shouters, to dedicate a mechanical mammoth among wheatfields abandoned to weeds” (Lyons 1937, 542-543).

⁵ The majority of the villages were between 20 and 40 kilometers from the dam. They are Bilenke, Kuprianiivska, Malokaterynivka, Mar’ivka, Matviiv, Novokaterynivka, Rozumivka, Smolianka, and Stepne (Papakin 2009, 61).

⁶ Similarly, in *The Great Offensive* (1933), Maurice Hindus describes meeting a Ukrainian herdsman whose friend informed him that “there were plenty of jobs in Dneprostroi.” Since there was enough “food and tobacco and matches and sugar and good shoes,” the herdsman decided he would travel to Zaporizhia “as soon as it got too cold and wet to keep cows out in the open” (Hindus 1933, 110).

James Abbe, who remained in Zaporizhia after the event, published a photograph of the completed dam in his illustrated travelogue *I Photograph Russia* (1934). The image marginalizes the industrial monument by pushing it deep into the background in order to juxtapose it with a breadline forming on the right bank of the river, which, he indicates, began to form “long before the stores opened” (Abbe 1934, 61). Since he often was prevented from documenting some of the scenes he witnessed, Abbe also included a list of “photographs I did not take” at the conclusion of his text, two of which are connected with DniproHES. The first describes the physical intimidation of a worker suspected of sabotage:

This shot is directly on top of Dnieperstroy Dam. The long-coated individual with the revolver in his hand is a GPU man. The protesting workman at whom the revolver is pointed, I learn later, had been suspected of sabotage. Hastily drawing my camera from its holster, I was almost ready to shoot what looked like an impromptu execution – when my guide grasped my camera wrist with a grip of steel (1934, 323-324).⁷

Abbe’s second photograph is a chilling witness to the famine in the countryside:

The main street of this little Ukrainian village, some eight miles from the gorgeous Dnieperstroy Dam. A crumpled figure lying on the curb resting – in eternity. He was just too hungry (Abbe 1934, 323).

In the absence of extant images, one must be critical of the veracity of these “photographs”; however, the fact that Abbe draws attention to the connection between DniproHES and the Holodomor victims is already far more than others who attended the opening ceremony did.

In fact, Abbe was particularly critical of his colleagues’ failure to recognize their complicity in the famine. “The men of the press are given free sleeping-car trips to flowering Soviet industrial plants,” he writes: “When their train, often a ‘special,’ halts beside some scene of rural poverty, they sit looking out the windows and, their mouths stuffed with government caviar, deplore the plight of the starving peasant” (Abbe 1934, 190). Here, Abbe represents the disconnect not as the result of bigotry or opportunism but as a sensorial and cognitive disruption, a failure to both apprehend and comprehend the link between their privilege and the depravity of in countryside.

This scene resonates with a similar account described by Malcom Muggeridge, who also recalled seeing “bedraggled looking peasants” at a train station en route to DniproHES:

A large German correspondent carelessly threw out of the window a leg of chicken he had been gnawing at. There was a concerted move to pick it up. The gesture and the response have stayed with me through the intervening years like stigmata. It seemed somehow symbolic of our whole situation that we, the reporters, should thus be coursing so cosily through this vast country that was our territory. Seeing, and yet not seeing (1972, 245).

This capacity to “see” the majesty of DniproHES but “not see” its catastrophic human costs, I argue, is one of the pervasive symptoms of the Soviet industrial revolution. In Freud’s sense of the term, a symptom is an abnormality in behavior or impairment in bodily function that is a “sign of, and substitute for” something that is repressed, often manifesting itself as a form of self-punishment or as a defense mechanism to avoid danger (Freud 1927, 91). In other words,

⁷ While it is impossible to verify if Abbe truly saw what he describes in this “photograph,” one of Dniprobud’s workers Boris Weide also witnessed a wave of arrests leading up to the opening ceremony. “On the eve of the opening,” he writes, “there were a number of people who were arrested, obviously during the night between the 8th and 9th of October 1932” – that is, the night before the foreign press corps arrived (Weide 2012, 71).

that Abbe and Muggeridge both evoke the experience of being “blind” to the Holodomor does not indicate that foreign correspondents did not see evidence of the famine. On the contrary, the very *metaphor of blindness*, in this formulation, would be a sign of their unconscious awareness of the suffering of the peasantry, a symptom of their struggle to come to terms with what they saw but did not respond to.

Abbe and Muggeridge were not alone in observing that the dam’s symbolic power had impaired foreigners from registering the war against the peasantry, even when they observed it with their own eyes. In *The Yogi and the Commissar*, the Hungarian writer Arthur Koestler, who was living in Kharkiv in 1932, remembered that the train stations were overrun by “begging peasants with swollen hands and feet.” To force travelers to confront the horror of starvation, mothers held up to train windows their “infants with enormous wobbling heads,” “sticklike limbs,” and “swollen pointed bellies” (Koestler 1946, 137). Yet, Koestler described how foreigners visiting the Five-Year Plan’s industrial landscapes traveled between sites in a state of “hypnosis,” their senses exclusively focused on projects like DniproHES. Fischer also admitted feeling what he called “the hypnotic effect” the industrial revolution had on his ability to take into account the human tragedy left in its wake (Fischer 1949, 205).

If the metaphor of blindness might suggest that repressed images of starvation interfered with journalists’ ability to see the suffering of the peasants, this second image of “hypnosis” generates a different constellation of associations: an unconscious submission to an external power, an overabundance of attention focused on one object at the expense of all others, a dreamlike state with a heightened degree of suggestibility. Most importantly, *the metaphor of hypnosis*, transfers much of the responsibility for Holodomor denials from the unconscious to the power of hypnotizing force, whether the industrial object itself, the party officials, or the “great dream” of the Soviet industrial revolution writ large (Fischer 1949, 205).

Similarly, Koestler described how the industrial colossi of the Plan attracted a certain type of “addict of the Soviet myth” (Koestler 1946, 140), which introduces a third image for Holodomor denials. Like hypnosis, *the metaphor of addiction* also deflects the responsibility to an external object, whose effect on its consumer is overwhelmingly stimulating (like caffeine or nicotine) or intoxicating (like alcohol or drugs). Furthermore, the language of addiction implies that the correspondents experienced a dependency upon reporting on Dniprobud again and again as well as a loss of agency in selecting DniproHES as an object of desire.

In fact, Fischer described how one of the sources of his attraction to these buildings projects was the feeling that he had become part of their history by covering them. “I was present at the birth of the mammoth tractor factory in Kharkov when the ground was being cleared, and I visited the construction site once a year. Later, I toured the plant annually. I felt related to it,” he writes: “Similarly, the Dnieperstroy Dam. [...] When the Nazis blew up a section of that dam, it hurt me” (Fischer 1949, 207).

Fischer was not the only one who implied that the attachment to DniproHES acquired a libidinous character. Koestler noted that the dam was one of the main industrial objects that “assumed the fetish-character of a lock from the hair of the beloved” for many in the foreign press corps (Koestler 1946, 140). And here, he introduces a fourth image for the sensorial and cognitive disruptions experienced by the attendees of the opening of DniproHES, and *the metaphor of fetishism* immediately suggests comparisons with Marx and Freud. In Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, the form of a commodity – its sensuousness, its materiality, its use-value – conceals its immaterial content, or its value as socially necessary labor time (Marx 1977, 163-164). In this sense, we can see how the form of DniproHES – its sensuous form of concrete,

glass, and steel; its materiality linking right and left bank and brute force damming the mighty river, its use-value as a generator of electricity and beacon of light and enlightenment – concealed the exploitation and starvation of the countryside. For Freud, the fetish emerges as a replacement for an object of desire; in his original formulation, it is a “substitute” for female genitalia, or the “lack” of a penis, but what should be an source of attraction causes “fright of castration,” a “horror” which sets up “a memorial to itself in the creation of this substitute” (Freud 1927, 152-154). Again, in exploring the implications the image, we can sense how DniproHES as fetish becomes a replacement object of desire, a new form that at once memorializes and “remains a token of triumph over” the terror and horror that produced it.

Blindness. Hypnosis. Addiction. Fetish. The metaphors vary, but the effect was largely the same. Fischer, for one, explains – and apologizes for – how his language of denial led to him blaming the Holodomor victims for their own suffering.⁸ He says the power of building projects so thoroughly enchanted him that he often projected his attitude onto all Soviet citizens. “Wouldn’t you forego butter for Dnieperstroy and Magnitogorsk?” he asks (Fischer 1949, 205, 207).⁹ It was only with time that he came to realize he was “glorifying steel and kilowatts and forgetting the human being” (Fischer 1949, 209).¹⁰

Similarly, Lyons described how the emphasis on the utopian future that the Soviet industrial revolution would bring into being disrupted his ability to acknowledge the horrors of the present. “You look at the new factories, the collectivized acreage, the figures for tractor building in close-up in the here and now,” he writes: “Then you step back a few generations or centuries and look at the human costs of these achievements through the telescope of posterity; naturally they seem small and unimportant at that distance” (Lyons 1937, 197). While it took many years for them to admit it in writing, Lyons recalls that he and his colleagues were “ashamed of the goose-stepping into which the press corps had been maneuvered” in the fall of 1932: “We talked of little else than the hunger and the terror about which we did not write or wrote in misty circumlocutions.” (Lyons 1937, 542).

In short, it is these “misty circumlocutions,” including the metaphors of blindness, hypnosis, addiction, and fetish, that structure the language of Holodomor denial and reveal its underlying logic. But that these Western correspondents found a language and logic to explain away the suffering of the peasantry raises crucial questions about why the Holodomor failed to produce strong emotional or psychological effects in real time while other mass tragedies are experienced as incomprehensible, unimaginable, and challenge the supremacy of reason. One

⁸ Fischer saw the human cost of the famine firsthand after he traveled through the countryside after the opening of DniproHES. However, in the 1930s, he shared Duranty and Strong’s view that the peasants were primarily the guilty party. “The peasants brought the calamity upon themselves,” he argued in *Soviet Journey*: “All over the countryside I saw grain which the peasants had left on the fields. It had rotted. It was their winter’s food. Then those same peasants starved” (Fischer 1935, 171).

⁹ Likewise, Hindus describes a conversation he had with a museum director in the Poltava region, whose understanding of DniproHES’ future promise is quite similar to Fischer’s discourse. “Everything comes in time, if only people are cultured enough to understand it,” the director told him: “In time peasants would have everything – how could they help it with Magnitogorsk and Kuznetsk and Dneprostroy and all the other vast building projects coming to a finish? But ah, this peasant! He had no eyes to see, and all because he had absorbed so little of the new culture” (Hindus 1933, 132).

¹⁰ These remarks appear in a confessional essay in *The God That Failed* (1949), an anti-Soviet collection of essays written by former Communists. Since the collection appeared during the Red Scare, one must be skeptical of how these individuals represented their enthusiasm for and disillusionment with the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, many of the journalists who later recanted their reporting portrayed the opening ceremony of DniproHES as one of the moments when they began to question their faith in Communism.

possible framework is proposed by the philosopher Christine Battersby, who observes that most of the paradigmatic examples of the “aesthetic of the sublime in politics,” or what Jean-François Lyotard has called the “postmodern sublime” (Lyotard 1992, 71) are drawn from Western mass tragedies and tend to ignore atrocities endured by communities living beyond the conceptual and geographic boundaries of the West, such as the Middle Passage or genocides against aboriginal populations. “What gets counted as sublime is that which ‘we’ (Western) subjects find hardest to cover over or ‘screen’ out through fantasy imagery or metaphors that contain the horror within manageable bounds,” Battersby argues. “Historical distance [and] the geography of [...] the West have helped shape the bounds of what is – and what is not – fundamentally disturbing to a civilization that conceives of its own modernity in terms of consensual rationality” (Battersby 2007, 43). As a result, Western subjects often “consign to the limbo of the ‘non-modern’ or the ‘pre-modern’” those societies who do not share or participate in European or American models of modernity. And in this respect, the promise of the Five-Year Plan was an immediate jump of centuries, a leap from a “pre-modern,” “barbaric” Ukrainian past into a modern industrial present that was brought into being with Western technology and the support of approving American specialists. One of the tragic consequences of the aesthetic power of DniproHES is that it proved to be all too effective in screening out the suffering of the peasantry, who, in the view of both Soviet and foreign observers alike, failed to keep pace with – or senselessly resisted – the drive towards a bright, enlightened, industrialized future.

Zaporizhzhia Today

Today, the city of Zaporizhzhia continues to grapple with celebrating the city’s Soviet industrial legacy and memorializing the individuals who, directly or indirectly, lost their lives in pursuit of industrial development. After Ukraine was torn between pro-Russian and pro-Western camps in the wake of the Euromaidan, Zaporizhzhia charted a middle course. When protestors seemed poised to tear down Mykhailo Lysenko’s *Monument to Lenin* (1964) that was erected at the entrance to DniproHES, many residents who felt a strong attachment to the city’s Soviet industrial legacy formed a barricade around the monument to prevent its demolition. But they did allow a crane to clothe Lenin in a Ukrainian *vyshyvanka* and permitted protestors to bedazzle its base in a blue and yellow trim. The monument, once a symbol of the Soviet mastery of Ukraine, was thus modified to express Zaporizhzhia’s playful appropriation of its Soviet past, a sign of the residents’ recognition that, yes, the Soviets brought power and light to the land beyond the rapids but that the enlightened city was now free to use this power as it saw fit.

When the federal government passed a series of decommunization laws in 2015 outlawing symbols that glorified the Soviet Union, a crane returned to Lysenko’s monument, this time to carry Lenin away. The pedestal, however, was left intact, which has served as a site for citizens to imagine new legacies for the city. By August 2016, the barricades had been taken away, and in Lenin’s place four Ukrainian flags fluttered in the breeze. Where Lenin’s slogan “Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the entire country” was once spelled out in bronze, a flyer pasted to the pedestal proclaimed: “Remember the crime! On August 18, 1941, the NKVD blew up DneproGES.” The flyer, hung by the nationalist party Svoboda, served as a reminder that it was the Soviets, not the Nazis, who destroyed the dam, a fact which Russian sources to this day rarely acknowledge. On August 24, 2016, Zaporizhzhia celebrated the 25th anniversary of Ukrainian independence, and the pedestal of the monument was transformed again. The city government covered the reminder about the Soviet destruction of the dam with a brightly colored image of a Zaporizhian Cossack. While the region’s Cossack past was once

viewed as a marker of Ukraine's backwardness and primitivism, it is celebrated today as one of the distinctive features of the city.

If you turn away from the dam and head back up the bank of the river on the city's main thoroughfare *Sobornyi prospekt*, you soon pass beneath the mammoth humming power lines that run from DniproHES to the Donbass. Rows of flower beds lead into a small grove of pine and birch trees. Under the massive white towers, there stands a white, marble cross, the central figure of the *Monument to the Victims of the Holodomor (Pam'iatnyk zhertvam Holodomoru, 2007)*. While the monument forces viewers to confront the role that DniproHES played in the starvation of the countryside, it also resignifies the dam as an industrial monument, if viewed from the right point of view. After a few steps towards the monument, you reach a point where the white cross, the symbol of those who died from starvation, visually echoes the power lines, an index of the structure that indirectly led to many of their deaths. Here, the juxtaposition of the cross and DniproHES calls attention to the tragically squandered "power" of those who lost their lives in the famine. More importantly, upon seeing the monument, it's hard not to view the thousands of electrical towers, which travel for miles and miles throughout southern Ukraine, as anything other than gravestones for the dead.

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