

SOVIET GHOSTS: The Former Theater of the Soviet Army in L'viv and Post-Socialism as a Crisis of Infrastructure

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Introduction

Let's open with a theater performance. In March 2016 on the International Day of Theater director Pavlo Arie created a pop-up performance at Teatr Lesi in L'viv, Ukraine. The show was called *Spirit of the Theater: Operation Exorcism*. Performed in the cavernous theater to a select house of intimates, friends, and colleagues, all sitting with the actors on the stage, the performance was intended to exorcise the "evil spirit" from the company corridors (Slipchenko 2016). Or perhaps, as director Arie suggested in his interview, from the audience members themselves. This theater had a history worthy of exorcism to be sure: formerly it was the theater of the sub-Carpathian Military District [*PrikVO*, for Prikarpat'skii voennyi okrug], then the theater of the Ukrainian Army, the theater of the Western Operational Command, then the L'viv Municipal Theater and now the L'viv Dramatic Theater named after Lesia Ukrainka, or Teatr Lesi. The city's former Russian-language Soviet Army Theater is now a Ukrainian-language theater for hip L'viv youth (Davydova 1975; Romanovs'kyi 2005).

The exorcism was a one-off performance meant never to be seen again, in the genre of documentary theater. This method involves making a performance piece from theatrical and non-theatrical texts in a way that is composed, but not fixed. Actors often improvise on choreographed themes, and often interact with the audience (Prokhorova and Shamina 2014; Lipovetsky and Beumers 2003). This particular doc theater pop-up comprised a series of monologues by four generations of theater artists—from the *PrikVO* days, the post-military city theater days, and those hired in recent years. Actors made references to diva Zinaida Dekhtiareva (1927-2004), who, when she quit the company in 1994 having been put on a half-salary, cursed the theater. Or so legend has it (Vergelis 2012). Certain scenes, such as a séance calling forth the Evil Demon, were planned and rehearsed; other scenes, such as an impromptu monologue-testimony given by an older actress, were utterly unplanned. Yet in telling their stories the actors of four generations both narrated and created ties between each

other, and many of those onstage, actors and audience, seem to have ended the evening in tears of catharsis.¹

Operation Exorcism was a strange theatrical experiment to be sure, but one that raises questions about the nature of the evil demon requiring such extreme measures. In fact, the production, its players, and the theater company and building itself suggest that what required exorcism was the Soviet theatrical infrastructure.

Post-socialist Theater and the Crisis of Infrastructure

This paper argues that one of the central crises of post-socialist culture is transforming infrastructure. The arteries connecting the state, audience, and artists that were so fundamental to the Soviet regime lingered long after political collapse. Even though the Ministry of Culture of the Ukrainian state, for example, ceased its monopoly over the arts, expectations remained that the state would and should fund the arts. Huge theater buildings covered Ukraine, and local audiences were accustomed to attending the theater and having a rotating repertory available for them. Audiences were not used to supporting the arts, because the arts had been supported by the state for so long. Artists depended on *zvanie*, titles, such as "People's Artist," which were handouts from the state that came with a higher salary—and artists continued to expect that the state, not private individuals, would fund their work. Individual oligarchs stepped in for financial patronage, in some cases, but always with agendas (Chuzhynova 2015; Stefanova 2000).

The built environment, the funding for theater, and the relationship between society, the state, and artists required seismic re-tooling after the collapse of the state monopoly on the arts. Zarecor (2018) argues that “infrastructural thinking” shaped the building of socialist cities, since housing, work, and the state were all conceived as part of one entity. This “socialist scaffold” remained after collapse. I would argue the same “scaffold” existed in the arts, since buildings, artist unions, party cells, and social engineering and entertainment were all connected as part of creating and maintaining socialist culture, that is, the socialist worldview and networks of meaning. This scaffold, this infrastructural legacy from the Soviet period, reflected fundamental attitudes about state involvement in the arts. Therefore, over the last two decades the challenge has been to not only create new infrastructures, but also new attitudes towards the those connections between state, the arts, and society. This crisis of infrastructure is particularly visible in the behemoth state theaters dotting the cityscapes of the former USSR. Teatr Lesi, for example, was falling apart due to lack of state financial involvement; one reason the performance took place on the stage itself was the impossibility of heating the theater on a grand scale and fixing the roof, through which snow and

¹ Thank you to Oksana Dudko, for video of performance "Dukh teatru," trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ah-IyNrxCc>

rain fell throughout the winter. Standing on the stage one could quite literally look up and see the sky. If the state does not support the arts, who should?

Indeed, in its funding and creation—the arteries connecting the finished theatrical product with state and society-- "Operation Exorcism" represented a move away from the Soviet. This particular pop-up was part of a residency partnership between the theater, several local theatrical institutions, and EEPAP, the East European Performing Arts Platform, whose financial support facilitated the project. "Operation Exorcism" was a product of foreign and local monies, resulted from interdisciplinary exploration, and was not intended to become part of any repertory. Historian Oksana Dudko gathered research, Polish curator Joanna Wichowska managed the residency, and director Arie worked with all the actors in long sessions to create theatrical content (Otrishchenko 2016; Dudko 2016). Creating a new, non-Soviet relationship between the money and the muse requires exorcising the Soviet ghosts.

The Crisis of Infrastructure: From State to Public

This crisis of infrastructure lies in the general understanding of which institutions should fund theater, how theaters should be managed, and to whom artists should be accountable. At the heart of this crisis, I suggest, is a question over to whom theater belongs: the state or the public. Ultimately, the crisis in post-socialist culture involves moving from a state-centered to a "public"-centered model, one that draws on the public for support, and that draws in public desires for repertory, style, and vision. The Soviet cultural infrastructure involved a full state monopoly over the arts, managing theaters heavily, but also offering heavy subsidies. Theater that might create an independent arena apart from the state, however, was almost impossible to create. Moreover, the concept of the theater "public" was tricky, since single ticket sales were not a crucial factor in theater solvency, and because audiences were considered, by state officials and artists alike, as objects for entertainment, education, or social engineering, not as agents in creating the theatrical product. At first glance, the collapse of a state monopoly over the arts might seem to offer a flourishing of post-censorship opportunities, an ability to "speak truth" in a way previously not possible. But in fact Soviet artists were protected from the market and guaranteed audiences and salaries; the transition away from state monopoly posed unexpected challenges.

This crisis resulting from the collapse of state monopoly resounded across the socialist bloc and Soviet Union. Rueschemeyer (1991) shows how the collapse of communism in East Germany shocked artists; suddenly exposed to the market and the whim of public taste, they struggled to find their voice. David Hughes (2007) argued that theaters in East Germany nearly twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall still oriented themselves towards the state as opposed to the general public; protests at Berlin's Volksbuehne Theater reveal how the question of "whose theater?" is still relevant today. Protesters felt the theater---the "people's stage," quite literally--had a mission to fulfill as a beacon of social justice, not as a hub for international performing arts collaborations that might

have nothing to do with the concerns of those who considered themselves the theater's "public," even if these new projects brought profit and acclaim to the storied stage (<https://www.dw.com/en/chris-dercon-resigns-as-volksb%C3%BChne-director-after-short-and-stormy-reign/a-43369519>).

Jakobson, Rudnik, and Toepler (2018) demonstrate that the Russian public failed to materialize as a funder for theater in post-Soviet Russia, so the Kremlin stepped back in as the primary financial patron of the arts—with consequences for cultural production, of course. Writers for a 2017 issue of *Polish Theater Journal* titled a forum, "The Curse: Who Does the Public Theater Belong To?", referring to Oliver Frjlic's production of a scandalous and protest-provoking anti-Catholic play (*The Curse*, or *Klątwa*) at Warsaw's state-funded *Teatr Powszechny*, or Public Theater. Put simply: whose is the public theater, and does a pro-Catholic audience have a voice? There are still over 113 theaters in Ukraine, funded at the state and local level, as well as over 100 independent theater groups in Kyiv alone

(<http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>; http://nlu.org.ua/storage/files/Infocentr/Tematchi_ogliadi/2018/teatr18.pdf). The Soviet state spent a sizeable chunk of cash on theater; post-Soviet Ukraine does not. So what of the arts, out from under state monopoly? Who should fund these 113 theaters, not to mention the independents, and to whom do they belong? What role should the 6.2 million people who saw shows at state theaters play in the production of art?²

Christopher Balme's (2007) exploration of the changing fortunes of the theater argues that the power of the "theatrical public sphere" in the 21st century lies precisely outside the theater, that is, in the theater's ability to draw in a larger public than simply the several-hundred audience members who buy tickets to a certain performance. Theater can be a public sphere in the Habermasian sense, of creating a place of discourse and debate apart from the state, but only by re-thinking the nature of theater itself. But how does Balme's argument apply to post-socialist and post-Soviet spaces? He operates on a Western European dichotomy between public and private institutions. In Western Europe "public" is conflated with "state," that is, these are institutions connected to the public financially (funded by public monies from taxes, for example), and socially (funded by the state to make them accessible to the general population). These state/public institutions are therefore not "private," funded by private individuals or entities. Yet this conflation of the categories of public and state becomes confused in an Eastern European context, where the dichotomy is more often presented as state vs. independent, that is, those institutions funded by the state, and those institutions operating outside state support. Lost in this dichotomy is the notion of public (Pravilova 2014). Where is the public in the state vs. independent dichotomy? The crisis in infrastructure, then, involves re-tooling the money and the muse to include the public, as a source of revenue, and as an important stakeholder in theatrical production.

² There are no statistics for the number of spectators attending independent theater productions; also, statistics are based on tickets purchased, whereas many people attend shows by "invitation" and it seems that those "seats" do not get recorded in attendance numbers.

War and Cultural Infrastructure

Much of this transformation in infrastructure is happening currently in Ukraine: a new generation of artists, new government policies passed in 2015, and new funding paradigms are shifting theater away from the state and towards the public in a dramatic way. Because many of these transformations in cultural infrastructure have happened since 2013, the natural question is to what degree Maidan, Crimea, and war in Donbas have shaped theatrical production and reception (Dudko 2017; Veselovs'ka 2017). How does war change institutional frameworks for cultural production and reception, and how do those institutional frameworks shape the place of the stage: what is performed, for whom, funded how, and in what spaces?

This question of how war shapes culture is knotty because it involves causality, working out to what extent a social or political event “caused” cultural production. My argument is that clearly war “caused” content in theatrical productions, yet the major changes in infrastructure may not be directly causally linked to war. However, the wartime moment has created challenges, and therefore opportunities for artists to find unanticipated solutions to the crisis of post-socialist infrastructure, and ultimately, for the public to become a more important agent in cultural production.

War and Theatrical Content

The question of how artists dream up the content of cultural production (the image, the sound, the plot) may differ from how current events shape funding possibilities, audience attendance, or theater management. Tracking content yields one direct way to show that war in Donbas is indeed shaping theater in Ukraine, as it is shaping the entirety of cultural production in Ukraine. Indeed, music, literature, and film all show new works and new people creating a body of cultural production that will merit further cultural analysis.³ I will offer three examples from the independent theater scene, before returning to state theaters. Take the *Teatr pereselentsia*: The Theater of Displaced People, which began with a 2015 “documentary” style project of people narrating their own experiences of war. The content of the productions comes from the experience of IDPs creating new lives after leaving their homes, and sharing that experience with a Kyiv audience (Gordienko 2017; Sopova 2018). Or take PostPlay Theater: they have a production in repertory from 2015 called *Opolchentsi*, a solo performance based on a conversation with a separatist from Donetsk. The director is Anton Romanov and the actress is Halyna Dzykaeva, both pro-Ukrainian Crimeans now living and working in Kyiv (Vol'kovs'kyi 2016; Tiahlo 2016). This production, as artistic director Den Gumennyi explained at the IETM (Informal European Theater Meeting) Satellite Meeting in Kyiv in June 2018, is about the conversation after

³ See the recent conference at Columbia University, for example: <https://harriman.columbia.edu/event/conference-five-years-war-donbas-cultural-responses-and-reverberations>.

the play around Donbas and war, as much as it is about the quality of the theatrical performance itself. War is creating new content, new stories for the stage, and the connection between the experience of war and these theatrical productions (among others) is clear.

Yet new content can also come from war in Donbas in a way that may be less direct. For example, take Wild Theater's 2017 production of *Zoo (performance-promenade)* based on the Edward Albee Play *Zoo Story*. The play's "stage" is the Kyiv zoo, as audience members follow the two actors and observe, and ultimately interact with, their relationship as it unfolds over the hour-long tour of the zoo. The play asks, "How are you different from animals? And are you different?" (<http://wild-t.com.ua/zoo/>). The production ultimately demands that audience members confront their own response to violence, and to what degree they will take responsibility for violence happening around them. These questions might have nothing to do with war, and yet everything to do with the war and consequent challenges in Ukrainian society today. While not as clearly influenced by Donbas as Theater of Displaced People or a monologue about separatists, clearly these artists are responding to the world around them and telling new stories.

War and Theatrical Infrastructure

A different lens may highlight the causal relationship between war and the arts more effectively; precisely this "hermeneutics of infrastructure" might show how the new challenges created by war demand a different theatrical infrastructure--how projects fit into a nexus of funding, space, and policy. Let me re-address the previous examples. These projects, among others, are not in the state theater infrastructure. The growth of such independent projects is notable since 2013, in fact. The Theater of Displaced People is a non-state theatre initiative; most of their funding is from foreign grants. They are "outside" the traditional theater spaces and funding lines for most theaters in Kyiv. "Despite its stature as one of the brightest initiatives on the Ukrainian cultural scene," writes Alisa Sopova (2018), "the Theater is not financially self-sufficient and does not have its own premises." PostPlay Theater and Wild Theater, too, are independent, performing in various locations throughout the city depending on (and competing for) various pots of funding.

Wild Theater was one of several independent or quasi-independent theaters featured at *DUST*, Days of Contemporary Ukrainian Theater, a showcase of representative shows connected with the IETM satellite meeting in summer 2018 in Kyiv (<http://www.dovzhenkocentre.org/event/273/>; <https://www.ietm.org/en/kyiv>). In other words, Ukraine was producing enough independent theater to catch the attention of a Europe-wide network of independent theaters. Yet the theatrical performances took place at the Dovzhenko Center, a state institution that now has a space specifically for independent theater called Scene 6. Scene 6, then, is part of a state institution, but working with non-state independent actors to produce theater and working to find a niche in a rich independent theater scene. The IETM conference itself took

place in "Upper Floor," the theatrical space located in *Mystets'kyi Arsenal*, or Art Arsenal, a state-run space for visual arts. In other words, much of the content of independent theater projects clearly references and grows from the war in the east. Yet even more consequential seems to be the changes in infrastructure that these projects necessitate, and from which these projects benefit, a growth of new spaces for theater, and new relationships with state institutions.

A New Public?

These projects show how the public is involved in new ways. First, these particular theatrical performances brought in people who may not be involved in theater previously. Theater of Displaced People brings non-actors to the stage, and non-Kyivans to a theater space in Kyiv, as performers and as audience members. It has developed, too, beyond one theatrical project in one space to a cluster of projects on screen, in non-theatrical and theatrical spaces across the county, aiming to bring the world of displaced people to the greater society. In fact, one of their latest projects is *Class Act*, a project spearheaded by playwright Natalia Vorozhbit in which 20 children, from the frontlines in the east, to troubled cities in the west, are brought together in Kyiv. They write plays in pairs, and those plays are then staged by professional directors, with professional actors, from all over the country. The project, as Anna Korzeniowska-Bihun (2017) argues, is a form of combating stereotypes for the next generation, because they learn to work with "different" people. *Class Act* inspired Lviv artists Roza Sarkisian and Andriy Bondarenko to create a local version ("DramaTeen"); with city funding they created a workshop for Lviv teenagers that resulted in a performance showing the audience the stories that were important to Lviv youth (friends, transport, dreams, the past). Lviv teenagers became part of the theatrical public in a way that they may not have been, and the Lviv theater audience expanded its expectations because of these short plays. These projects, from *Displaced* to *Class Act* to Lviv, perfectly illustrate Balme's notion of a theatrical public sphere in the 21st century.

War has caused artistic and technical personnel to leave the mammoth theater in Donetsk and the theater in Luhans'k, as well as Crimea. This creates mobility, artists and technical personnel working at theaters they would never have worked at previously. Anton Romanov and Galina Dzykaeva, for example, would never have left Simeropol, and would never have tried to provoke Kyiv audiences to talk about current events, had war not happened. The focus of their work is on the public, not on the state.

Wild Theater producer Yaroslava Kravchenko noted at the IETM conference that their *Zoo* production aimed specifically to draw in the public in new ways. Aside from taking place in a zoo, where unsuspecting zoo tourists might happen upon, even respond to, the theatrical event, the production's ending put the public front and center. The show ends with one of the actors "killing" the other in an abandoned structure at the edge of the zoo. The actor pretends to be dead for long enough to make the audience uncomfortable: should they call for help? Do they leave the unmoving actor? *Did something really happen?* Do they try to

move the actor? Do they perform CPR on him? The public becomes part of the theatrical event. In other words, new concepts of the "public" are growing; new publics in the audience, new publics on stage, theater that transparently and consciously reaches out to include the greater public: truly post-Soviet theater.⁴

Regardless of whether (or to what extent) one believes that theater can create a public sphere and serve as an agent of change, it is certainly true that these independent theater projects shows how new people can tell new stories in new spaces drawing in new publics. In their funding, audiences, and agenda these projects suggest a move away from the post-Soviet (Veselovs'ka 2016).

Formerly State-Run Culture for the Public?: The Case of Teatr Lesi

But what about state theaters, those exemplars of the Soviet theatrical infrastructure, such as Teatr Lesi? What is the legacy of a state-run theater when the state does not want it? How does state theater become public theater? In these state theaters we can see the jerky shift to a more public and less state vision through concrete changes in the policies shaping the theatrical infrastructure.

This state military theater was the quintessential representative of the Soviet theatrical infrastructure and its peregrinations follow those of Soviet culture in general. The company was founded in 1931 as the Theater of the Kyiv Military District, became a frontline troupe in World War II, and ended up as the Theater of the Odesa Military District. In 1954, the company was moved to L'viv. It was to be, and became, the only Russian-language theater in the city (Davydova 1975; Zakharov 1981).

However, the company was funded not by the Ministry of Culture, but by the Ministry of Defense. That the Ministry of Defense of the USSR funded military district theaters in all districts says a lot about the importance of theater, of defense, and of theater as defense in the USSR, of course. The theater company toured the district frequently, and served the PrikVO troops abroad when they defended socialism in Hungary or Afghanistan. The theater was able to flourish, performing Soviet plays for Soviet military and urban audiences, in a Soviet theater supported by the Soviet institutional networks centered in Moscow. In short, military theaters were poster children for the Soviet cultural infrastructure.

But that all collapsed. The theater immediately switched hands to the Ukrainian Army in 1991 as soon as the USSR imploded, but the Ukrainian Armed Forces did not want to pay for a theater and made that clear to the theater managers. The theater continued, however, struggling under the lack of interest by the new state and new military and attempting to stage a few shows in Ukrainian—difficult for actors whose entire professional careers had unfolded in Russian. Those

⁴ In the performance I attended in June 2017, audience members stood around awkwardly, not sure if something else would happen. Several touched the actor. I myself had no idea what was happening, and only left because my colleague who did know what was going on suggested we leave.

remaining in the company ultimately pushed a Russian-language line, arguing that they could remain the theater serving the Russian-language minority in L'viv, doing the old plays they had done so well. Yet while all theaters were left adrift by a lack of state interest, this theater was particularly so. In 2006 the Army officially divested itself of the theater and various plans were afoot to take it over—first the Ministry of Culture was going to take over the company and combine it with another theater in L'viv, such as the Les' Kurbas theater or the Maria Zankovets'ka theater, and then sell the building and the land on which it stood. The actors went on a hunger strike to protest this move (Romanovs'kyi 2007; Kozyreva 2008).

Because of the hunger strike, or at least influenced by it, the Ministry of Culture did take over the theater, but put it in the bailiwick of the city administration, so the company became the L'viv Municipal Theater, just one more Ukrainian-language theater in the city of L'viv. And so it has remained, through its various name changes, ending up now as Teatr Lesi, on the budget of the city, but allocated little money, and struggling to find its audience and its niche in a city with several popular theater houses. The theater then moved from a *derzhavnyi* status (i.e., state theater) and become *komunal'nyi*, "communal," funded and regulated by the local city council (*mis'ka rada*).

Dependent on state funding (and even more particularly the funding from a defunct institution, the Soviet Army), unable to organize its own audiences, and unsure about what stories to tell, the former Theater of the Soviet Army highlights the crisis of infrastructure of post-socialism. The challenges of Ukrainian state and society—lack of resources, corruption, failed governance—were the very same challenges in the theater.

Theater Mirroring Society

Maria Shevtsova (2007) writes of theater as a truly social institution, one that is deeply imbricated in society and through which society reveals itself. This observation is particularly pertinent in the case of Teatr Lesi, whose changing fortunes parallel those of the Ukrainian state. What is the connection between revolutionary events, war, and the changing fortunes of a state theater institution? The ultimate relic of the Soviet cultural infrastructure might offer a mirror on this infrastructure changing (Otrishchenko, Shvydko, Antoniuk 2016).

In the post-Orange Revolution era of disillusion with Iushchenko and the election of Viktor Yanukovich, the theater struggled to find its footing in the local Lviv landscape. Playwright and director Pavlo Arie entered the scene in 2011 with his play *Colors*, about women in Ukraine from World War II to the present, directed by Oleksa Kravchuk. Kravchuk was connected to the theater, because his parents had been leading actors, Arie was a L'viv native and rising star playwright, current leading actress Zhanna Tugai held a lead role: perhaps this production, an Ukrainian-language play about the experience of women in Ukraine, could have saved the theater. But it did not. Arie later said in an interview that there were severe tensions among the artists in the show, some of whom were still of

the older generation who wanted the theater to remain a Russian-language stage, some of whom had come with then-artistic director Liudmila Kolosovych. In fact, the sets ended up getting burned and destroyed mysteriously. The production was effectively ruined. Based on this experience, Arie wrote a later play called *A Person in a Hanging Position—Liudyna v pidvysheynomu stani*—about the backstage drama of the theater, still performed in Teatr Lesi's repertory today (Drymalovs'kyi 2016). Suffering from no money, no resources, tension between generations, and not on the theatrical map of the city, the theater was headed for closing. This relic of the Soviet cultural infrastructure was hanging on by a thread. A former state theater looking for its public?

Around the time of the Russian seizure of Crimea, in March 2014, the L'viv City Council hired provocative bad boy director Oleksii Kolomiitsev, presumably in order to bring a vision and lure an audience to the theater (Vergelis 2014). While he brought some radical works—and good actors—to the company, his dictatorial ways alienated administrative, technical, and artistic personnel. In 2015 actors revolted, literally stopping a performance and refusing to perform any longer under Kolomiitsev. The city fired him. In fact, much of the tension between actors brought to the company by Kolosovych and actors arriving later under Kolomiitsev was material for *Operation Exorcism*. Arie soon came back to run the theater, but did not last long; a new team (largely female) has now run the theater since fall 2017.

This musical chairs of directors, the backstage scandals causing directors to leave, sets to burn, and ghosts to require exorcism, speaks to the theater's lack of connection with the public. In fact, in an audit created by the Ministry of Culture and L'viv City Council, investigators noted the painfully low number of audience members. In 2016 the average attendance was 83 spectators, or 18% of the seats. The report also noted a lack of publicity, too many new productions that did not resonate with the public (clearly, given the 83 spectators!), and the ruinous state of the building, which meant that it was physically painful to attend the theater in winter. This was a "public" theater—a communal theater for the city—that was not a part of the city, a public theater without a public. Perhaps, in fact, that is what *Operation Exorcism* was all about. Perhaps it was about exorcising the old theatrical infrastructure to find a public.

"My City Renovates My Theater"

While it may be impossible to say whether the political and social upheavals of Maidan, Crimea, and war changed actors' horizons such that toppling a theater dictator seemed possible and necessary, we can surely say that major political and social changes allowed for new solutions to infrastructural crisis. New stakeholders created opportunities for new publics, and artists have started to take advantage. During the Kolomiitsev era in 2015 Iryna Podolyak, in the Department of Culture of L'viv City Council, helped found the "small stage," *mala stsena*, at the theater. This smaller venue hosted *Persha stsena/ drama.ua*, a

collective of young artists, which produced several interesting plays performed for the first time in Ukraine, such as *Burgomistrz/Burmistrz (The Mayor)* (2011) by Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk, about local collaboration with the Nazi occupiers in World War II, and *The Grain Store* by Natalia Vorozhbit, a 2009 comedy about collectivization and the Holodomor (<http://dramastage.org/about-us>). The small stage of the theater building was packed and the actors held discussions after the performances to talk about the historical themes in the plays. The theater was becoming a place of discussion of painful themes of history and hardly what one would see on a classic state theater stage. Viktoria Shvydko (2018) explains that actually what Podolyak wanted was for their non-stage social organization, drama.ua, to work seamlessly with the state theater, showing that non-state and state institutions could work together productively. But because of tensions between the older Teatr Lesi administration and the younger activist drama.ua team, this experiment failed. And what happened was the non-state artists became the new management of the state theater, thanks to new theater laws allowing for change.

Theater Laws

Iryna Podolyak as MP pushed through a package of legislation on theater (<http://zakon5.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/955-19>) in late 2015, causing scandals throughout the theater world, as some argued that the new policies would destroy theater in Ukraine, others that they would save it (Nechet 2015; Dudko 2015). She explained (2018) that the package was voted in a brief "post-Maidan" moment, where such potentially-tectonic policy changes were possible; today, she notes, such legislation would be impossible to push through Parliament. This legislation is—and will continue to—force change in the theatrical infrastructure. War did not cause this legislation, of course, but the revolutionary wartime moment created a space for new legislation to be passed, in a way that it simply could not have previously. These changes are particularly visible at Teatr Lesi.

The first change involved how theaters are managed. Previously, all theaters had an artistic director and a managing director. While this structure is similar to western companies, the position of managing director is in fact a legacy of the "red director" from the Soviet period. The "managing" director took care of business aspects of theatrical production (that is, making sure companies were in line with party policy) and the artistic director ruled the house. Theaters were associated primarily with their artistic directors, who often stayed in their positions until death. The Podolyak legislation decreed that the two positions of managing director and artistic director would become one position. One person now manages both administrative and artistic vision, with most directing and administration therefore delegated to a team. This erases the "red expert" position, and means that theaters simply cannot belong to one artistic vision. The artistic director cannot direct all the shows (if any); instead, there is a position of a "main director" (*holovnyi/a rezhyser/ka*) who is responsible for leading the productions and creating signature work. Artistically, then, theaters have more input, influence, and negotiation.

Second, all positions for this new director-artistic director are now decided not by appointment, but by open competition. Candidates submit dossiers and a jury of experts selects from those candidates; open fora offer an opportunity to candidates to present themselves to the public. Finally, these appointments last not until death, but for five years. This radically increases the competition for running a theater, and means that no longer will certain houses be forever associated with certain directors. Young artist Olha Puzhakovs'ka, who won the competition for the new position, is now artistic director and managing director of the theater. Director Olena Apchel' was the "main director" until summer 2019, when Dmrytro Naumenko took over and Apchel' moved to Teatr "Zoloti Vorota" in Kyiv. Working with Puzhakovs'ka is a team of young people, including Oksana Danchyk and Victoria Shvydko, from the days of drama.ua (Perekhrest 2017).

The open competitions have meant a new generation entering into theater management, "new blood," in Podolyak's terms. It is not yet clear how that will play out, but the presence of people in their 30s who were born almost after the collapse of communism running the former state theaters means that something will shift. Already Puzhakovs'ka, following on the work started by Pavlo Arie, has worked on the theater's "branding"--its website, social media presence, and connection with the audience to draw younger people to the theater. She has been pushing for attention from the city, and finally secured financial investment from the city itself to the tune of 11 million hryvnia over the course of several years to renovate the roof and the walls. That is, the new theater laws opened up opportunities for new people in positions of authority who are—quite literally---altering the infrastructure of the theater. An enormous construction sign hung on the side of the theater building in summer 2018 declaring for all passers-by, "My city is renovating my theater." The city, the sign suggested, was not renovating its own theater, or a national theater, but "my" theater, the theater of those walking on Horodots'ka Street, the theater of those who attend productions, the theater of everyday L'viv citizens. The theater, then, belongs to the public (Chupryns'ka 2017).

New Funding

Legislation has also shaped the funding landscape. Of course, the state radically decreased support for theater in the 1990s, even for state theaters. Foreign organizations, such as the Polish Cultural Institute, the Goethe Institute, or, particularly in the world of contemporary theater, British Council, have stepped in and offer financial support through various projects, such as British Council's "Taking the Stage" project (<http://www.britishcouncil.org.ua/taking-the-stage>). Reaching out to these granting opportunities is now part of everyday practice at many theaters. But funding has changed in the Ukrainian state as well. In March 2017 the government signed a law creating a "Ukrainian Cultural Fund" to streamline funding (<https://ucf.in.ua/>). The Fund requires that state and independent theaters alike apply for funding in the same competition, which equalizes the access to resources more than in the past. The idea, of course, is that expert commissions of theater makers and performers pick the projects at

any level that deserve funding, thus increasing transparency and making it harder for state theaters to simply roll onwards with huge budgets, unused artists, and disconnected from society. Rather than looking exclusively to the state, theaters need to look to the audience, that is, the public, in order to show evidence of the “outcomes” of their grant on the public. Of course, critics have pointed out multiple hiccups in the legislation; but the policy of equalizing access to state funding for culture is a shift from the Soviet period.

Teatr Lesi is also benefiting from, and pushing, changes in funding. Because of the war, theaters, always under-funded, have been in dire circumstances. Under Arie the theater began doing co-productions. Co-productions have started to appear throughout Ukraine as a way of handling a lack of state resources from the state. Stas Zhirkov's 2016 production of Pavlo Arie's *Glory to the Heros* performed at the Zoloti vorota and in Ivano-Frankivs'k offers a productive example of such co-productions. Co-productions are often between various types of theater institutions: Or *Tom at the Farm*, by Michel Mark Bouchard, a co-production with Teatr Lesi (a state theater, komunal'nyi), Mystets'kyi arsenal (not a theater), and Wild Theater (an independent theater). Working together has created new networks, showed actors to new audiences, and de-centralized theater from Kyiv. This also moves the theatrical landscape away from the hierarchy so typical of the Soviet period, where theaters were in competition with each other for resources, prizes, and coveted attention from the state, and where theaters in the capital city were assumed to be the best (and in the capital of the Soviet Union, the very best). New financial "work-arounds" to a lack of state funding mean that that old hierarchy does not function any longer.

A New Theater for a New Public?

What one sees in the Teatr Lesi is a hint not of theater being removed entirely from the state, but artists creating new ways of operating that are not entirely dependent on state engagement. The public, as new theater artists, new audience members, and a new focus for the work of the theater, seems to be a factor in the theater's development. Yet lest this analysis seem too positive, the Soviet legacy does remain. Theater hierarchy is still very Soviet. Theaters need the status of "academic" in order to show audiences their validity and quality—and receive better salaries. Teatr Lesi proudly noted their new "academic" status on the website—a strange marker of the Soviet in a space trying to move away from the world of state monopoly (<http://teatrlesi.lviv.ua/2017/02/06/театр-леси-отримав-статус-академічно/>). Similarly, critic Anna Lypkivs'ka (2018) notes the odd holdover of titles such as "people's artist" that carry a salary bump but really should not exist anymore, since the hierarchy in which they emerged is gone. The Soviet regime may be gone, but the infrastructural holdover of peoples' artists remains, to the detriment of true public evaluation of artists. As Podoloyak notes, the salary levels for national (*natsional'nyi*) theaters—that is, those with the highest Ukrainian state subsidies, such as opera houses in major cities—continue to be decided by personal connections as opposed to standardized, transparent policy; such institutions should be "hubs" connecting with the greater public, and instead they covet their hryvnia from the state for themselves. And of course,

while it is not the state itself funding Teatr Lesi's renovation to the tune of 11 million hryvnia, it is the city. When will a subscriber base in Ukraine be adequate to support a theater company? When will artists cease fearing the “commercial” and move beyond the still-perceived binary between good theater and theater that makes money?

The Imagination

How is war shaping the horizons of imagination? For Ukraine, this seems to be a shift in geography, away from Moscow (to paraphrase Khvylyvoyi) and towards other theatrical centers. Soviet Ukraine was "the regions" in the Soviet theatrical landscape. In fact, after Maidan Russian theater artists took an interest in theater in Ukraine. Theater scholar Marina Davydova edited an issue of the Russian theater journal *Theater* (Teatr) about Ukraine in 2014. It opens provocatively, "They asked me: Why do an issue about Ukraine? There's no good theater there. I answered: We want to find out what is there" (Davydova 2014). But does Ukraine care about Moscow? And how absurd—and telling!—that no one knew what was going on in Ukraine. New theatrical productions are telling war, or engaging with the new realities in Ukraine in ways both direct and indirect.

Yet imagination is not only about stories, but also about the infrastructure in which those stories are told and heard; new artists are imagining new ways of making theater, new audiences, new sources of funding. New scarcities in state resources have re-tooled how the state funds culture, and how artists look elsewhere for funding. While these changes were not directly caused by war, war shut down certain options such that the old Soviet infrastructure had to shift. These changes in infrastructure are tectonic, moving Ukraine away from Russia, away from the (post) Soviet and towards the challenges of 21st century theater faced by artists elsewhere.

Finally, let's return to *Operation Exorcism*. The play focused on the scandals and secrets of one theater's history, a rich one at that, and seemed to be an important step in the artists of the theater moving forwards to leave that past behind them. Yet, intriguingly, Arie suggested in his interview that the evil demon might not be exclusively in the walls of the theater, but rather "in the people sitting there." The Soviet ghosts, then, might be in the audience. Theater artists and managers are concerned with how their work draws in, relates to, challenges, excites, and entertains the greater public; their focus, as I have argued, may indeed be on the public as opposed to the state. But what of the public's attitude towards and engagement with theater? Exorcising Soviet ghosts from actors might in fact be easier than from the post-Soviet audience.

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