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How to cite

TCHERMALYKH, Nataliya. “We Felt That the Country Was in the Stage of a Rough Cut…”: Vernacular Documentation, Political Affects and the Ideological Functions of Catharsis in Ukraine. In: Visual anthropology, 2022, vol. 35, n° 2, p. 95–119. doi: 10.1080/08949468.2022.2063670

This publication URL: https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:162671

Publication DOI: 10.1080/08949468.2022.2063670

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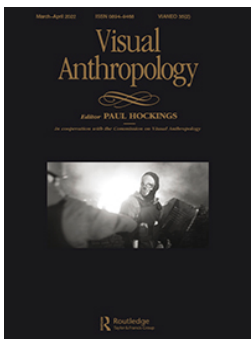

Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Visual Anthropology

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gvan20

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To cite this article: Nataliya Tchermalykh (2022) "We Felt That the Country Was in the Stage of a Rough Cut…": Vernacular Documentation, Political Affects and the Ideological Functions of Catharsis in Ukraine, Visual Anthropology, 35:2, 95-119, DOI: 10.1080/08949468.2022.2063670

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2022.2063670

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Published online: 22 Jun 2022.

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Visual Anthropology, 35: 95–119, 2022
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ISSN: 0894-9468 print/1545-5920 online
DOI: 10.1080/08949468.2022.2063670

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"We Felt That the Country Was in the Stage of a Rough Cut…": Vernacular Documentation, Political Affects and the Ideological Functions of Catharsis in Ukraine

Nataliya Tchermalykh

In March of 2014, I attended the first screening of *Euromaidan: Rough Cut*—a collective documentary chronicle of Ukraine's Maidan Revolution. Quite unexpectedly the event ended with an improvized mourning ritual for deceased Maidan protesters. Observed in the film, this ritual then transcended the screen and spread through the audience, stimulating an experience similar to a "collective catharsis." What are the reasons for such a strong affective response to a visual document, capturing the fluidity of still unfolding revolutionary events? This article (written before the Russian invasion of Ukraine) considers both the documentary and its screening as invaluable research sites, allowing us to study ethnographically the uncertainties preceding and accompanying the reification of (new) ideological narratives. By discussing the multifaceted understanding of cathartic experiences in the complex processes of group-building, truth-finding, and justice-making, this article considers new directions for the anthropological understanding of collective catharsis, as it has been experienced in post-industrial democratic societies.

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IN THE REMAINING SEAT…

It is early spring 2014. After a long wait, I sit uncomfortably on the one remaining seat in the back row of a fully packed screening hall. I am at Dom Kino, a symbolic space for the Ukrainian film industry, though in fact it is a shabby Soviet-style building that still belonged to the Union of Ukrainian Filmmakers, or to what remained of this Soviet organization, which had been so powerful in the past. That night, Dom Kino was expecting a full house, for it was the opening ceremony of Docudays, the only and therefore the biggest international documentary film festival in the country. The hall was hot and suffocating, overcrowded, while around me hundreds of voices went on and on in seemingly endless discussions. *Maidan*, *Yanukovych*, *Crimea*, *Putin*, *Donbass*… From the snatches of conversations one could sense the vibrations of the Revolution still in the air. Kyiv city center smelled like fire and ashes, and Khreschatyk Avenue was almost buried under tons of flowers brought in memory of the victims—one hundred protesters killed overnight by never identified snipers.

Suddenly the lights went out. The conversations stopped: something was happening on the screen. A man stands motionless, looking odd: a construction helmet on his head, a gas mask dangling on his neck, his eyes covered by protective goggles, reflecting the vivid glow of the fire. In the background, a city is in flames. The shaky camera fixes his face a while, as he looks intently at something beyond our view, as though oblivious. The otherworldly sounds turn into the melody of a Ukrainian ballad, accompanied by a crackling of fire—suddenly interrupted by a loud explosion (Figure 1).

And then the screen turned black: it was over. It was just a brief trailer for the festival, not the film itself. But something changed. The suffocating air suddenly became electric, and everybody seemed hypnotized by the image of this

Figure 1 The fire in the Trade Union Building on Maidan, winter 2014. (Photograph © O. Techynsky)

man, deeply shell-shocked by the violence in the streets of Ukraine throughout Winter 2013. Shell-shocked just like us, the audience of Dom Kino that evening in March 2014, after months of violence. The screening was about to begin.

This article is dedicated to the documentary film *Euromaidan: Chornovyi Montaj* (*Euromaidan: Rough Cut*, 2014), which is a collective chronicle of civil protest on Maidan Nezalezhnosti Square (hereafter Maidan) in central Kyiv (Bondarchuk et al. 2014). The film is the collaborative work of 10 young Ukrainian filmmakers, who used their footage taken during the Revolution to produce a full-length documentary for the opening of *Docudays*, the Ukrainian Human Rights Film Festival.[1] More than a "rough," it was rather a "rushed cut," since the footage was collected and edited in the months just before the festival. As Roman Bondarchuk, one of the filmmakers, put it: "We still didn't know what Maidan actually was. We felt that the country was at the stage of a rough cut as well."[2] Yet another contributor stated: "It was not a rough cut, but a completed film (…) The term 'rough cut' here was only a concept, a metaphor" (Hromadske Telebachennya 2014).

After the film was over, I can see people standing up, crying, hugging each other, and chanting the national anthem in unison: a pure moment of collective "effervescence," as Durkheim would term it. I myself left the cinema with the same mixed feelings each time. On the one hand, I was, like many festival guests, mesmerized by the moving images on the screen and affected by the unique atmosphere of unity in the screening hall. But, on the other hand, I was stunned by the ideological homogeneity and the evident coherence of the narrative about the events that were at stake. This narrative seemed to materialize *sui generis*, almost from nowhere, as if I was witnessing the perceptible and visible effects of an invisible chemical reaction. How could one explain it?

This article is an attempt to find an answer to this question, by discussing how the process of vernacular documentation of political events contributes to the construction of fragile political communities while being relentlessly captured in broader historical developments. The uniqueness of *Euromaidan: Rough Cut* as a cinematic and ethnographic source lies in its fragmented and unfinished structure, which reflects the consolidation of a strong political narrative of post-Maidan Ukraine. In this film the refraction of competing political narratives is not retroactively suppressed in the name of a coherent recounting of the events, serving an ideological purpose, but remains its constituent element, visible and ready to be analyzed.

The first part of the article follows the structure of the chronicle and examines the role of vernacular visual documentation in contemporary activism. The construction of a collective visual archive, I argue, ensures the transformation of unstable activist networks toward a more clearly defined political community, sharing the same vision of political events. In the second part of the article I interrogate the notion of *catharsis*, focusing on a ritual of collective mourning that followed the screening. Drawing on recent understandings of catharsis in psychology, aesthetics and law, I examine what has been lost in recent interdisciplinary developments, bringing to the forefront a complex relationship between cathartic experiences and forms of ideological reification

(Brecht 1964; Girard 1979). Finally, I dwell on the role cathartic experiences may play in the processes of justice-seeking and justice-making.

MAIDAN: THE EVENTS

The film *Euromaidan: Rough Cut* begins conventionally. On the black screen, a brief sentence appears, situating the film's events: "The protest started on November 21, 2013, as a response to the Ukrainian government's decision to suspend the process of signing the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine…" This abrupt decision by President Yanukovych and Prime Minister Azarov, who instead signed an alternative agreement with Russia, signified a 180° turn toward a pro-Russian path and was widely interpreted as a loss of Ukrainian sovereignty.

In reaction, street protests erupted in Kyiv's central square, Maidan Nezalezhnosti, nicknamed "Maidan." After the first violent crackdowns on protesting students by the Berkut (the Ukrainian Riot Police), the movement expanded and gained popularity among the wider public from heterogeneous political backgrounds, stretching from the ultranationalist right to the liberal left; activists from remote regions of Ukraine traveled to Kyiv to join the protests. On the weekends the number of protesters reached over a million. Demonstrators occupied Kyiv's city hall and called on Yanukovych to resign.

As demonstrations gave way to rioting, the President signed a series of laws restricting the right to protest, and hundreds of thousands took to the streets in response. Bloody clashes between police and protesters ensued, with dozens injured on each side. Protesters occupied the justice ministry in Kyiv, and the parliament hastily repealed the anti-protest measures.

The protests reached a climax in mid-February. On February 20, 2014, violence in Kyiv escalated dramatically, with police and government security forces firing on crowds of protesters. In total, over 100 people were killed and some 2,500 injured in these clashes. In the early morning of February 21, the riot police retreated. Immediately after that, protesters gained control of the presidential administration and the private estate of Yanukovych, who by that time had fled to Russia.

The bloodiest week in Ukraine's post-Soviet history concluded on February 21, 2014, with the opposition leaders calling for early presidential elections and the formation of an interim government. The parliament responded by approving the restoration of the 2004 constitution, thus reducing the power of the presidency. The next day the Ukrainian parliament impeached Yanukovych, replacing his government with an oppositional one. The protests on Maidan officially reached their end, though some demonstrators stayed on there till mid-Summer 2014. In May the Ukrainian businessman Petro Poroshenko, nicknamed "the Chocolate King" for his prominence in the sugar industry, was elected President: it was a handover between post-Soviet oligarchical elites. Using the pretext of the preparations for Independence Day, celebrated in Ukraine on the 22nd of August, the last camps on Maidan were liquidated.

The Maidan Revolution induced multidirectional geopolitical processes, evolving around the Ukrainian state, processes that modified patterns of governance in the post-Soviet region and the contours of Ukrainian sovereignty. On the one hand, the Association Agreement with the European Union and the installation of a visa-free regime with Schengen countries liberalized human and commodity circulation to and from Ukraine. On the other hand the occupation and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian army in the southeast militarized boundaries between Russia and Ukraine. The creation of self-proclaimed separatist pseudo-republics in the east and the still ongoing military operation in response devastated the region, provoking internal displacement and massive emigration of disenfranchized Ukrainian citizens. During 2015–21 there were several diplomatic, military and judicial attempts to prosecute those responsible for the human losses and pacify the eastern region, but all of them remained inconclusive.

"AND WHAT IF WE ALL GATHER ON MAIDAN?"

In Ukraine the revolutionary events are believed to have been started by a tweet, circulated on the night of November 20, 2013, by a famous oppositional journalist, Mustafa Nayem. Following Yanukovych's rejection of the Association Agreement with the European Union, Nayem proposed, "And what if we all gather on Maidan?" During one single night, his question was retweeted more than 3,000 times. Through the almost immediate creation of the hashtag #Euromaidan which functioned as a magnet, Maidan Nezalezhnosti, the main square of Kyiv, became the center of urban occupation and rapidly acquired a parallel cyber-dimension. It expanded simultaneously "online" and "offline," and both processes of occupation—physical and cognitive—were tightly connected.

Just as Judith Butler wrote about the Occupy Wall Street movement (in "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street"), in Kyiv likewise, "politics [was] already in the home, or on the street, or in the neighborhood or indeed in those virtual spaces that are unbound by the architecture of the public square" (Butler 2015, 117). While people gathered physically on Maidan, a geographical space with its physical signs—the occupied Christmas tree, the digital clock of the Trade Union Building, the marble columns of the Central Post Office, inscribed with slogans—they also gathered virtually on and around #Euromaidan, where those signs were represented by their digital molds—photos, short videos, ironic *demotivators*, visual and textual memes, hashtags and slogans.

The rapid, almost immediate, crystallization of a vast political agenda, symbolically associated with a particular urban center with a long protest history, was achieved in part by virtue of new digital technologies. While the outcome of the (physical) protest was unpredictable and could be lost at any moment, its virtual emanation enunciated an optimistic accomplishment of the events: Maidan was a disputed place, whereas #Maidan was not.

VERNACULAR DOCUMENTATION, VIRTUAL WORLDS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL COLLECTIVITIES

The creation of revolutionary images was a key part of the protest activity: some activists carried video cameras attached to their bodies 24 h a day, 7 days a week, and were involved in a continuous micro-broadcasting of live material through social media platforms. The first days of the protest gave birth to a new form of Ukrainian political journalism: an alternative online channel HromadskeTV was created. These journalists reported the news not through traditional "pieces to camera" with a microphone, but through real-time comments to streamed footage, coming from cameras on their smartphones, heads or helmets. This strategy of narrated information flow was counterbalanced by the uninterrupted streaming of surveillance camera footage from the central streets, provided by independent websites. Out of this feast of "rough" and "cooked" pieces of freely circulating, authorless images, each person could reconstruct their own patchwork of revolutionary reality, knowledge, and action.

Juris, analyzing the dynamics of the #Occupy Everywhere movement in Boston, USA, proposes to distinguish the cultural logic of networking from the logic of aggregation. The former, as Juris puts it, orient actors toward building horizontal ties, using the circulation of information, direct democratic decision-making, and networking. The latter is "an alternative cultural framework" that involves the aggregation of many individuals in concrete physical spaces (Juris 2008, 2012). Whereas networking logic requires a praxis of communication and coordination on the part of collective actors that are already constituted, the logic of aggregation involves the coming together of actors as individuals (Juris 2012), and their subsequent integration (or not) to the collectivity.

Following my observations of the Maidan protests, I would argue that the dynamics of transformation between the two interconnected processes—the networking and the aggregation (Juris)—are underpinned by the relatively new logic of vernacular (self-)documentation in a digital format. It is a cognitive and agentive practice, aimed at the construction of a visual archive of evidence that ensures the transformation of unstable activist networks toward a more clearly defined community, sharing the same vision of a political event. To document, to photograph, film, stream, broadcast, edit, and later support, comment and share—means to recognize, to hope, to believe, to memorize, to show, to tell, and to forget. The images that the community produces become the boundary markers for a new collective subjectivity.

TOWARD AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF TECHNOLOGICALLY MEDIATED EMOTIONS AND AFFECT

One could presuppose that one of the (new) premises of the formation of this collective subjectivity is the development of strong emotional ties with the revolutionary visuals. That revolutionary events lead to the formation of a group identity, based on a range of experiences, including the emotional responses to imminent or remote events, is well-known. But emotional ties are formed,

surely, not only because of the wide circulation of those images in social media and the press but also, and perhaps more importantly, because of the activists' personal participation in their creation, since the advent of social media.

In a recent article, "Memory, Body, and the Online Researcher: Following Russian Street Demonstrations via Social Media," Patty Gray describes her emotional responses to remote ethnographic experiences as follows:

> I was surprised […] that, even though I was witnessing the Moscow protests remotely, I had had a similar kind of sensual experience: the goose bumps, the tears, the adrenaline. I was witnessing something extremely compelling that I wanted to document, and I desperately wanted to be present, "be *there*," even if only virtually. Although I could not be physically in the space of Moscow's streets, my virtual presence was actually satisfying in a bodily way. (Gray 2016, my ital.)

As her testimonial shows, cyberspace can be considered not only as a space where information is shared and exchanged but also one where emotional responses and sensual experiences may take place—which is perhaps one of the main reasons why social media are so attractive to large audiences. It is time to consider anthropologically the role of *technologically mediated emotions*—ones that arise or are sustained through the immersion in virtual worlds—and are to a much larger extent practiced symbolically than physically, to include them in the general mapping of collective actions that tie a society together.

We all use social media as a tool that helps us to shape reality as we would like it to appear. The beautiful image, especially when taken from a favorable angle and slightly retouched to dramatize its effect, allows us to overcome the frustration we feel toward the things we merely "have." We crave the delights of publicly *displaying* what we have, our "personal possessions." Children, pets, remote landscapes, lovers, and foamy coffee cups … The joy of being next to them seems to intensify progressively as they become parts of our personal archives and reach great heights as soon as someone else sees, approves, prizes them, and by doing so includes them in the landscape of their own desire. At this very moment, they come intensively into being, becoming truly ours.

Why couldn't one transpose the same mechanism to the way we construct a political reality? A similar futuristic enchantment, emanating from the haze-covered images of protest, permits us to shorten the distance toward the political spaces which have not yet come into being. In this way, the process of direct, even compulsive documentation in contemporary activism becomes particularly meaningful. It is a cognitive act and a gesture, a virtual effigy that represents the fragile, inchoate community that is being established. The viability of this community depends, among other things, on its ability to document itself on mobile devices.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE AND VERTOV'S *KINO PRAVDA*

Maidan: Rough Cut begins with no images: only white letters on the black screen. For a split second, we are immersed in the complete darkness and

silence of a cinema hall. Then, almost immediately, the viewer's eye is overwhelmed by a flow of colorful, fuzzy images, similar to the "aesthetics" of unedited footage, realized with an amateurish hand-held camera. This initial contrast between monochrome and color sequences marks the rhythm but also the main tension of the chronicle, which lies between an "objective" description, briefly summarized in static, factual intertitles, and the dynamics of the visual "phrases" that follow.

The first *kino-novela* of the chronicle, "Volya abo Smert" (Ukr., 'Freedom or Death'), realized by Volodymyr Tyhyi, stands in the tradition of Dziga Vertov's *kinopravda. Kinopravda* is a conceptual neologism, deriving from the Russian *kino*, "cinema," and *pravda*, "truth." It reflects the avant-gardist experiments in documentary filmmaking that were practised in the late 1920s in the USSR, and which inspired Rouch and Morin's (1961) *cinéma vérité* in the early 1960s. In "Ethnography in/of the World Systems," one of the most cited essays in the history of the discipline, George Marcus mentioned Vertov's film, *Man with the Movie Camera*, as being "the de facto ethnographic media" and "an excellent inspiration for multi-sited ethnography," capturing an interesting transnational afterlife of the Russian avant-gardist project (Marcus 1995; Vertov 1929).

To a certain extent, the new technological quantum leap of the 21st century can be compared to the early Soviet aesthetic breakthrough. What can David Kaufman, alias Dziga Vertov, Polish but one of the Soviet film pioneers, tell us about the interplay between the latest digital technologies and the formation of new social movements and their ideologies? Vertov considered modern cinema as a product of the technological progress that liberated the filmmakers from cumbersome equipment, leading the way to the revolutionary transformation of the regime of vision.

> I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it.—wrote Vertov in 1929—Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility, I am in constant motion, I draw near, then away from objects, I crawl under, I climb onto them. I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse, I plunge full speed into a crowd, I outstrip running soldiers, I fall on my back, I ascend with an airplane, I plunge and soar together with plunging and soaring bodies. Now I, a camera, fling myself along their resultant, maneuvering in the chaos of movement, recording movement, starting with movements composed of the most complex combinations. (Vertov [1929] 1984, 17)

One of the first and purest forms of modernist hope is that technological progress and formal experimentation are undeniably linked with the forthcoming "social progress" (Haraway 2013; Tomas 2013). Is this belief a reality, or no more than an optical illusion?

The first episode of *Euromaidan: Rough Cut* ("Volya abo Smert") indeed offers us an explosion of movement. The camera shakes and jumps from one face to another, as the human crowd flows toward Maidan—as if the camera were passed from hand to hand. It follows people climbing up to the top of the 5-meter-high metal carcass of the Christmas Tree, customarily erected in the very center of Maidan around mid-November (Figure 2). Balancing dangerously at its

Figure 2 A gathering near the Christmas tree on maidan in December 2013. (Photograph © V. Tykhyi)

very top, the camera offers a bird's-eye panorama of hundreds of people transforming this universal Christmas symbol into a revolutionary one by redecorating it with banners, slogans, portraits, and Ukrainian flags. Online a hashtag *#yolka* (Rus.: 'fir tree') was created to honor this carnivalesque effigy and disseminate its image widely. A new year, and maybe a new era, was about to begin. Today, while analyzing the visual product obtained by virtue of cutting-edge digital technologies, appropriated by the protest movements—GoPro cameras, internet micro-broadcasting, and 360 VR video—one can trace there a Vertovian logic of the ultimate modernization of vision, consisting in "swimming with the tide" of moving human bodies (as Vertov did), as if this camera–body alliance could reveal a hidden nature of the "movement," understood not only as a kinesthetic motion but also as a form of social organization.

LENIN'S FALL: CHRONICLES OF A DIVISIVE RITUAL

During the first 25 mins. of the film, the narrative shifts easily from political discussions to everyday conversations, while the camera focuses on the mechanical gestures of volunteers and the faces of ordinary people on the Maidan, documenting their diverse activities in the camp—and revealing the generational, class, gender and political heterogeneity of the protestors. I would like to particularly emphasize a subtle yet politically sharp episode by Katerina Gornostai, "Zub Lenina" (Ukr.: "Lenin's tooth"), which is dedicated to the so-called "fall of Lenin"—the incident that happened on December 8, 2013, in the very center of Kyiv, when demonstrators destroyed the marbled statue of Lenin that had stood there since 1946. It was the first episode of a whole series of *Leninopad*s (sometimes translated as "Leninfall")—acts of collective and

individual destruction of Lenin statues that "went viral" throughout Ukraine in 2013–14.

As if Gornostai's camera were sensitive enough to apprehend the long-term consequences of the statue's downfall, she observes debates that divided people of different generations or origins who had witnessed the event. Sitting there on a bench, an old man cries, repeating "This is not human…," soon after a woman in her late fifties, carrying a dachshund, expresses her sadness, because "Lenin looked at her going to school on this street." At the same moment masked youngsters are destroying the granite statue with hammers; others, wrapped in Ukrainian flags, chant paradoxical summons, such as "Down with oligarch commies!"—while two elderly men discuss what they should put there instead of Lenin: Stepan Bandera (a Ukrainian nationalist leader in the Second World War) or maybe a memorial to the Holocaust?

It all ends with a dialog between Gornostai (whose voice we hear behind the camera) and an apparently drunk, middle-aged man in tears, who argues vehemently with the protesters gathering around the fallen Lenin. Notwithstanding the fierceness of his disagreement, he fails to explain precisely his reasons, saying enigmatically: "I told them who they are… Their truth is only their truth." Before leaving, he stares at the camera with eyes full of tears, smiles, and unexpectedly whips out a pistol from his pocket: "If they try to beat me, they'll know…," and then he gently bids farewell to the young filmmaker: "Thank you, my daughter."

Recalling that crucial day in a joint interview, the memories of two members of the *Euromaidan: Rough Cut* crew seem to diverge. While Gornostai remembers, justifying her commitment: "This place was a point of convergence of different energies. There were people who were happy that it happened and those who were profoundly shocked," Bondarchuk reveals: "We missed the very moment of Lenin's downfall. When we arrived at the end and found there a kind of *pagan bacchanalia* (Hromadske Telebachennya 2014), my soundman said that he would not document it—and I agreed with him." This diversity of opinions among the filmmakers reveals a crucial dichotomy in the strategies of exploration of social reality: a further immersion and engagement with controversial material, or on the contrary, the exclusion of it from the field of vision. An exclusion that influences and shapes the aesthetic and discursive contours of the final visual product. In the first episodes, this strategic difference in positionality is still observable through the alternative standpoints that the authors take while engaging with their subjects.

FILMING THE VIOLENCE OF OTHERS

After the first 30 mins. of the film, its modality changes dramatically: an almost palpable shift in the visual regime occurs. All the diverse themes, including political and personal divergences over the events, merge into one visual flux—the witnessing of violence. It seems that its magnetic spectacularity adjusted the very lenses of the documentarists: close-up portraits of the activists speaking about their commitments were replaced by the narratives of the

Figure 3 A woman providing first aid on Maidan during the winter of 2014. (Photograph © K. Gornostai)

violent clashes with the Berkut, the riot police, burning cityscapes, strident sounds, and sparks from explosions.

It is interesting to note that in the fragmented structure of the documentary, the shift doesn't occur between two separated episodes, directed by different authors, but in the very middle of one of them, called "Masha's peaceful protest." It is a second film by Gornostai, which follows a young Ukrainian woman working as an English teacher in a secondary school in Kyiv's suburbs. First, we see Masha on her way back home from the square, discussing politics with her friends, fellow students, and strangers on the street. Then, in the blink of an eye, we see the first violent clashes: barricades on fire, smoke and fumes everywhere, and suffocating people—the camera turns and meets the gaze of a woman wearing a gas mask and a white medical uniform with a big red cross on her cap. After a few instants, we recognize Masha, the schoolteacher (Figure 3).

In an interview that Gornostai gave me, she said that she recognized Masha by accident, while filming the clashes—and decided to rebuild the plot of her short film around this coincidence; a coincidence that emphasized visually the shift in the gender dimension of the protest, by contrasting two close-up portraits of the same young woman—Masha's smiling face, vividly discussing politics, and her unrecognizable face, covered with a medical mask (Figure 3) and blended into the crowd of volunteers.

The gendered logic of urban violence captured in Masha's story replicates the logic of war, which almost invisibly and yet inevitably restrains the repertoire of active roles available to female subjects. Here a young woman who started off as a political activist, within a time frame of one month (and Gornostai's film lasts < 5 mins.) "naturally" changes her role, becoming a nurse who helps those wounded and injured in battle. Of the entire chronicle,

"Masha's peaceful protest" is the last film that is not exclusively dedicated to the urban clashes and the last one that has as its central figure a woman.

As if it was meant to illustrate and reiterate this schism by cinematic means, the next episode, "Searching for a leader" by R. Bondarchuk, follows the fuzzy process of on-the-spot decision-making, carried out exclusively by men gathering around the barricades. The fighters casually exchange opinions in different Ukrainian dialects as well as in Russian, trying to decide when and whether they should attack the riot police congregating around the square. "You've locked yourself in here. Get the girls out!" a middle-aged man in a military uniform utters persuasively. "Every girl, get them out of here, it's the only way out. If there is panic, it'll be fuckin' slaughter." There is something almost medieval in this scene, in which men decide on the march of events, in the darkness of a winter night, their faces irradiated only by the light of the bonfires.

EYES WITH DILATED PUPILS

All the following episodes—"Sense? Damned if I know" by A. Kiselyov; "Cobble by Cobble" by R. Lyubyi; and "All things ablaze" by O. Techinsky—share a common aesthetic. The spectacularity of urban clashes, the sounds of grenades and rough male voices, abrupt gestures, Molotov cocktails, burning tires, smoke, and the black helmets of police. The object of documentation also shifts almost seamlessly—from an observant and participating eye, which captures and inquires in heterogeneous forms of micro-politics, it becomes an "eye with dilated pupils." The eye tries to distinguish its subjects under their black masks and behind the curtain of fumes, but fails to do so, hypnotized by the violence of the riots (Figure 4).

Figure 4 A battle in front of the Dynamo football stadium, winter 2014. (Photograph © A. Kiselyov)

"All things ablaze," the final episode of the series, showing the last and most violent days of the protests, is the longest of all. It exposes a spiral of clashes that accelerate in rhythm from one scene to another, as though inevitably leading to a climax: the chaotic images of the tragedy that started on the night of 18th Feb. and splattered a peaceful city with blood. Overnight more than a hundred protesters had been killed by unidentified snipers; the victims have been posthumously called *Nebesna Sotnya*—the Heavenly Hundred.

These final events of that day are omitted from the film, perhaps because the majority of Kyivans had deserted Maidan by that evening. The city center was closed and encircled by police, as was the metro. Taxi drivers demanded astronomical fares from those who ventured to reach the central square. On Maidan, there remained only a handful of orthodox priests, a few doctors, and men willing to fight with or without arms (Figure 5). The latter became the prime target of snipers who were standing on high buildings, surrounding the Square. Snipers who were, mysteriously, erased from the official investigation report conducted by the Ukrainian Government.

THE END OF THE SCREENING

… In the cinema hall of Dom Kino, there is barely enough space for people to move: some stand between rows or sit near the screen, as if intentionally replicating the crowd on the Maidan during those protest days. We are watching the last scene of "All things ablaze," which takes place on the day that followed the massacre. It is quite emblematic: on Maidan, at that point as full of people as it had been during its first days, the camera follows closed and open black coffins, carried by thousands of hands, and covered with the national

Figure 5 A Ukrainian activist during a battle on Maidan, winter 2014. (Photograph © O. Techynsky)

blue and yellow flag or the black and red flag of the Ukrainian insurgent army.[3]

Euromaidan: Rough Cut ends with the sounds of the song *Plyve kacha po Tysyni* (Ukr.: "Duck Swims on the Tysyna")—a traditional polyphony, performed *a capella* by seven male voices, a polyphony belonging to a rare and sophisticated repertoire (Pikkardiyska Tertsiya 2002). Known previously only by a circle of connoisseurs, *Plyve kacha po Tysyni* became nationally famous after February 2014 as a requiem for Maidan's *Heavenly Hundred*. This song is sung in one of the Carpathian dialects,[4] though barely understandable to the average native speaker from central Ukraine. It narrates an imagined dialog between a son who predicts his own death and his mother, alternating with a refrain where pain and tragedy ooze, as emphasized by the complex grammar of the dialect:

—Mamko j moya, ne lay meni (2) Zalayesh my v zlu hodynu (2) Sam ne znayu, de pohynu (2) Hey, pohynu ya v chujim krayu (2) Hto j my bude braty yamu? (2) Hey, vyberut my chuji lyudy (2) Tsy ne jal' ty mamko bude? (2)

("Please, don't be mad with me, O Mother! You will scold me in bad times; I don't know where I shall die. I shall die in a faraway land. But who will dig my grave? Other people will. Won't you have pity on me, O Mummy?")

And the voice of the mother replies, interpreted by the same male choir:

—Hey, yak by j meni synku ne jal'. (2) Ty j na moyim sertsyu lejav.(2) … Hey, plyve kacha po Tysyni … (2)

(—"How could I not have pity on you, O son? You are the one who lay on my heart. A duck swims on the river Tysyna … ")

On-screen thousands of people gathered on the square all cry their hearts out—and so does most of the public around me in that cinema. As a ritual of collective mourning is unfolding on the screen, something very similar happens in front of it. At this moment the meaning of the expression "the Opening *Ceremony*" seems to regain its archaic sense, and a high-definition screening acquires a mythological dimension. The hall is transformed using the half-forgotten magic of cinematography—the same that made people duck or run out of the first film screening organized by the Lumières brothers in 1895—into a ritualistic space of sacrifice, where uninhibited tears flow on both sides of the screen.

As the lights come back the song doesn't stop: Mariana Skadovska (a Ukrainian folksinger) appears to stand on stage, in front of the screen, holding an accordion. In this unexpected "materialization" there is also something magical. Without any interruption, she continues singing *Plyve kacha*, this time with a female voice—and the entire audience stands up.[5] Then, almost without let-up, she follows with the Ukrainian national anthem, and everybody sings with her. Somebody in the audience shouts: "Glory to the Heroes!"—and everybody responds (almost) unanimously "Glory to Ukraine!"[6] The spontaneous exchange of revolutionary and nationalist slogans among the audience goes on for a while in the still dark hall, as the lights go down and the public

starts to leave the place, still under the effect of emotional arousal. The screening has been a flawless, unconditional success.

As I too leave the cinema I find myself standing alone in front of an incongruously large mirror, a distinctive feature of Soviet architecture. An endless flow of images and questions crowd my mind: why had the diversity of the protest, so intelligently reflected in the plurivocal structure of the film, finally culminated in its viewers chanting the national anthem—a performance of unquestionable loyalty to the state? Why and when exactly did this reification of the Ukrainian nationalist narrative happen? During the years that followed, my thoughts have very often come back to Dom Kino and this experience, in my numerous discussions and debates about Ukrainian politics. I was thinking especially about the very moment of emotional catharsis when the ritual of collective mourning transcended the level of representation and spread through the hall. It seemed to consolidate irrevocably the interpretation of the events in a unique narrative. Does it mean that *catharsis* may bear a particular ideological function?

INTERDISCIPLINARY ATTEMPTS TO UNDERSTAND CATHARSIS

Katharsis (from κάθαρσις, purification, purgation), an ancient medical term, was used metaphorically by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (2013) to describe the necessary purification from strong emotions of pity and fear experienced by the audience at the end of a tragedy. Inasmuch as this mixture of feelings is concerned, the so-called "cathartic experience" seems to describe accurately the ways according to which people deal with pain, trauma and violence, whether actual or represented.

Due to its enigmatically universalizing dimension, the concept has traveled across epochs and disciplines, acquiring new interpretations and elaborations. As an observable phenomenon catharsis can be ranged into three broad categories of understanding—psychological, aesthetic, and anthropological. However, even in recent scholarly literature, it is often mentioned that there is no exhaustive definition of what *catharsis* is. Let's face it: there is always something mysteriously indescribable about catharsis, which escapes proper scientific categorization.

Since Aristotle, Western aesthetics has been preoccupied with the effect that a scenic representation of fictional or historical events may have on its spectators. In aesthetics catharsis can be defined as the emotional arousal or affective state that occurs when the audience identifies itself fully with the events that are represented on stage—and might be communicated for example by a collective standing ovation (Schaper 1968; Paskow 1983).

In experimental psychology—the discipline that deployed maximal efforts to "capture" catharsis—it is described as a complex phenomenon having two aspects. One is cognitive–emotional and consists of the contents of consciousness during the re-experiencing of an emotional event; the second is physical, or somatic–emotional, and consists in a discharge of emotions in tears, laughter, or angry yelling. Its effects can also be observed through such physical reactions as goosebumps or an accelerated heart rate, which appear when

humans experience an unexpected aesthetic or emotional arousal (Nichols and Zax 1977).

In psychotherapeutics that focuses on its healing effects, the notion of catharsis has merged—to the extent that the two terms are used interchangeably—with that of abreaction. Abreaction designates the narrative or performative process of bringing forgotten or inhibited material from the unconscious into consciousness, with concurrent emotional release and discharge of tension and anxiety.[7]

Both initially stemming from the Aristotelian conception of catharsis-as-purification, its understanding in psychology and aesthetics has evolved in two different directions. If understood in the aesthetic sense, catharsis relates to the experience of the spectator (the self) when the events are narrated or performed by other(s). In the therapeutic sense, catharsis relates to the experiences that occur when the events are narrated or performed by the self, while other(s) play the role of the audience. This distinction is not pertinent for an anthropological understanding, which tends to think beyond the polarizing differentiation of the self and the other, presenting empirical evidence of when the two may come to a unity in a self-transcendental or transformative experience, involving both the therapeutic and the performative, unfolding at both the individual and the social level.

To escape the definitional conundrum, it is important to move away from the debates about what catharsis is and when exactly it occurs, and address the question of what catharsis does, both to the self and to the society. There are at least three not mutually exclusive instances that are worth thinking of catharsis as therapy, as (self-) transcendence, and as transformation. Whereas there is a recognized lack of operational definition of catharsis in anthropology, I would argue that an eventual return of interest within the discipline could contribute to an effective bridging of the two distinct lines of thought, that is, the psychological and the aesthetic. This will provide conceptual tools to understand the occurrences and functions of *catharsis* in modern, non-ritualized social arenas.

A quite extraordinary account of a cathartic experience, mediated by a theatrical performance, is provided by Helen Bamber, one of the first therapists to enter the Bergen-Belsen Nazi concentration camp after the World War. In her memoir, she recalls a play, performed by and for Holocaust survivors from the recently liberated camp. That play staged an ordinary Jewish family whose gathering was interrupted by the intrusion of the Nazis, and then the killing of the mother. "I have never seen anything so effective, despite the crudity of the stage and the performance," writes Bamber. "It was raw and so close to the experience of the audience. There was never any applause. Each time was like a purging" (Bamber, quoted in Kearney 2007, 139).

The total absence of applause is something that connects Bamber's poignant account to my experience at the screening of *Euromaidan: Rough Cut*, where the cathartic moment of collective effervescence obliterated the customary clapping. In modern autonomous spaces, designated for cultural consumption, the final applause marks the end of the fictional time—what Coleridge wittily described long ago as the "willing suspension of disbelief"—and the return to

the ordinary. One may hypothesize that there was no applause in both settings because there was no moment of such a suspension: the narrated events and the audience shared a syncretic temporal regime that was neither entirely fictional nor historical. To put it differently, the performances in Bergen-Belsen camp and Dom Kino did not feel as if they were real but actually were real for their audiences.

In post-revolutionary Kyiv, this moment of historical/fictional liminality preceded the moment of what I have described as *ideological reification*. Through the mimetic enactment of collective mourning—that was not a traditional ritual, but rather a *bricolage* in a Lévi-Straussian sense—unfolding on the screen and in the cinema, the bounded social arena of people sharing similar aesthetic tastes and tools came apart and was "automatically" embedded into a wider one—the whole Ukrainian nation, permeated by a solidifying consensus about its contours. This moment was the epitome of the political and ideological transition, marking the shift in the way Ukrainians imagine themselves as a nation.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF CATHARSIS

In his now-classic *Violence and the Sacred*, which is the first substantial attempt to present an anthropological model of catharsis, René Girard goes back to Aristotelian theories to analyze the mysterious benefits that accrue to the community upon the death of a human *katharma* (also known as *pharmakos*)—the surrogate victim, chosen haphazardly, and whose sacrifice produces reconciliation inside a polarized society (Girard 1979). For Girard Greek tragedy springs from earlier mythic and ritual forms and provides exceptional material for observing what he calls "the logic of sacrifice" that he considers universal. In his vision, any cathartic action is structurally similar to the catharsis of the sacrificial ritual.

According to this model, sacrifice prevents the escalation of violence by the substitution of a victim who can be killed or injured without triggering revenge: "Society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificiable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members" (Girard 1979, 4). The emotional release and affective "healing" that people share at the end of a well-structured tragedy, and that in fact constitutes catharsis, is the most rudimentary form of processing the arbitrariness of violence and injustice and quite counterintuitively implies reconciliation and restoration of societal harmony.

The sacrificial logic employs the structure of the classic tragedy, which is narratively based on ritualistic and cathartic relics. This powerful narrative script ensures the longevity and, arguably, the universal validity of tragedy as one of the most significant narrative forms. The reliance on violence as the "mechanic engine" of plot construction activates a strong yet predictable script that is based on a simplifying, reductionist logic. "When the shaman draws forth from his patient an object he identifies as the sickness itself," writes Girard, "he is transferring and transforming this mythical interpretation into yet another form—*that of a small, insignificant object*" (Girard 1979, 287, my ital.). Similarly, the cathartic experience decreases the effects of violence by

multiple operations of semantic substitution, leading to the resolution of forces that individuals perceive as violent and unjust.

A similar logic of escalation could have been observed on the Maidan and extracted from the *Euromaidan: Rough Cut* footage. In its final part, "All Things Ablaze," Techynsky's camera, semi-blinded by the glow of sun and snow, seems to move chaotically, evading bullets, running around, and shooting with groups of armed men. At some point, the cadence of events captured by its "eye" is so rapid that only death seems to be a valid cause to interrupt its suffocating race. The violence literally becomes the "moving engine" leading and orienting the cameras.

Even now, with a certain distance, it is still striking to observe how the documentary narration whose objectiveness was supposed to be determined by a precise timeline and only direct, camera-in-hand documentation, follows a very classic structure. As in a Greek tragedy, it has its *prologos*, introducing the circumstances; several episodes of *parodos*, capturing the plurivocality of the revolutionary events, underscored by a crescendo of clashes; leading to a tragic *exodus*, coinciding with a moment of sacrifice, where the public experience a collective affect—the *catharsis*, that strikes a final chord in the spiral of violent events, depicted on the screen.

The last sequence of the film starts with two sentences: "On 18–20 February the city center saw violent clashes between protesters and the police, resulting in about 100 people being killed. Most victims were shot by snipers in the heart or in the head. Two days later, the fourth President of the country, Viktor Yanukovych, fled the country for Russia." There is, for sure, a temporal connection between those events, but it is still (and will always be) unclear if one can establish a link of causality between the two. However, when it comes to collective memory, a temporal connection is often interpreted as causal. Today, after several years, many people believe—and the plot of the film in a way reiterates this belief visually—that the regime of Yanukovych came to an end precisely because a hundred Maidan activists had sacrificed their lives.

On a larger scale, the post-Maidan Ukrainian nation tends to imagine itself as a community of those who recognize the essence of the Maidan massacre as a sacrifice in the name of construction of a different, less authoritarian, less oligarchic, and more "modern" state. When watching the film, one ends up having the feeling that the Maidan deaths were not meaningless: after their sacrifice, the "evil" fled the country and the balance of forces was symbolically restored. The deeply emotional cathartic effect of mourning them collectively made this conclusion unquestionable.

However, there is a paradox between the concept of a modern democratic state and the notion of a societal balance built upon a symbolic sacrificial paradigm. According to Girard's model (and this is precisely where its limitations show up) sacrificial rites are measures against the violence that takes place in societies without statehood or those without a centralized authority. In "modern cultures" there are no sacrificial rites since they have been reframed by or delegated to the judicial systems, where violence is "enacted by a sovereign authority specializing in this particular function" (Girard 1979, 16). In

Girard's teleological understanding of social evolution, the establishing of a legal system substitutes for and gradually erases *catharsis* as a form of reconciliation. Indeed, the exact opposite may be observed in contemporary Ukraine, where catharsis as an elementary and most immediate form of dealing with violence coexists and is deeply enmeshed with more elaborated forms of justice-seeking and justice-making, achieved through both domestic and international means.

In March 2014, I had a chance to discuss the festival screening of *Euromaidan: Rough Cut* with my students, who had also been in the audience. They shared with me their emotional responses to what they had seen: some confessed that they almost felt shivers running up and down their spines while watching the film. However, not all of them defined this communal experience as positive. One girl, Marichka,[8] acknowledged to me that she was disturbed by the "regulating power" of the experience that she had undergone in the hall: she realized that she was not able to escape, and automatically repeated the gestures—and even emotions—of those who stood around her: standing up, singing the anthem, and crying. Afterward, as she told me, she felt a mixture of sorrow and shame.

Hearing about being driven by an external force is supposed to be nothing strange for a social anthropologist, and yet in actuality it was quite a disturbing experience. Experimental psychologists have observed that the cathartic experience can be so disruptive and cognitively unusual for a human that it is sometimes described as an experience of a *different self*, external to someone's consciousness (Nichols and Zax 1977). The "automatism" of this momentous change of scale is due perhaps to the main physiological characteristics of catharsis, implying the merging of intellectual and emotional responses to an event in a totalizing experience of affect that involves the so-called "precognitive" body. Classical anthropology alludes that these holistic experiences may be culturally translated as possession by the spirits or the "whisper of gods." The prescriptive capacity of rituals implies that non-participation in these events can bring harmful consequences: those who become possessed and yet fail to follow the wishes of the gods will fall ill or become insane.

Marichka's description is quite close to what I felt myself that day. With distance, I can now confess that the emotional "mixture" I experienced also involved a feeling of shame. Despite my sympathy toward the filmmakers, my activist path, my sincere tears, and the lump in my throat I feel every time I hear *Plyve Kacha*, I felt ashamed of my strong, almost uncontrollable physiological reactions toward nationalism that I don't necessarily defend intellectually, and yet I too was driven by these slogans and songs, as one can be driven by the movement of a crowd. Perhaps an even more disturbing component of this feeling of shame came from an acute presentiment, that this shared collective experience was not a starting point in a long process of justice-making after the massacre, but its very end—(and justice won't ever be achieved for the victims). I experienced catharsis, but it failed to purify me.

In the 1980s anthropologists were debating whether rituals channel genuine emotions or provide a space for their codified and socially controlled expression (Mahmood 2001). What our common film viewing experience suggests to me is that there might be no contradiction between the two. In fact, our feeling of disarray may have come from the observation of our genuine emotions of sorrow, unleashed by the cathartic experience, which immediately came to be controlled, or "captured" by a conventional script of devotion to the state.

This observation chimes with the critique formulated by Bertolt Brecht, a Marxist thinker and theater playwright, who vigorously opposed the notion of "Aristotelian catharsis" as a sort of a simplistic, ready-made resolution for powerful feelings of injustice, communicated by a staged performance (Brecht 1964). In his own dramas Brecht attempted deliberately to subvert the effect of catharsis, leaving significant emotions unresolved on the stage. Brecht reasoned that the absence of catharsis would require the audience to challenge the dominant ideology and to take political action in the real world (Curran 2001). The unexpectedly ritualistic dimension of the ending of the Opening Ceremony for Docudays-2014 didn't leave any unresolved questions: the *pathos* of our mutual cathartic experience, stimulated by the logic of violence and sacrifice, had neutralized the *phronesis*—the imperative for truth-finding.

UN-CATHARTIC ATTEMPTS OF NATIONAL AND SUPRANATIONAL TRIALS

Today, eight years after those Maidan deaths, and despite an internationally supervised investigation, none of the cases of sniper shooting has been resolved judicially in a satisfactory way. Justice for the killing of protesters has remained elusive, marred by procedural delays, constant reorganizations of investigative bodies, numerous disqualifications, and self-recusals of judges.

The turn of the new century instilled new hope in technology, namely the advancement of citizen-driven accountability in response to violent states. The Ukrainian Revolution has arguably produced the largest digital archive of evidence of state-driven violence, which happened at the very center of a large European city in front of dozens of cameramen, smartphones, and security cameras. In 2019 the *New York Times* wrote about a minute-by-minute, inch-by-inch reconstruction of the events, co-realized by a Brooklyn-based architectural bureau and Ukrainian activists, assisted by AI, which helped synchronize the enormous quantity of footage (Schwartz 2018). It is accessible in open source[9] and was accepted as evidence by the Ukrainian court. However, the large amount of available digital footage and data in the open-source did not lead to a faster and more efficient investigation. The central location of the events has complicated the ballistic expertise, as most bullets disappeared from the crime scene, visited daily by thousands of people. If anything, the Maidan revolution has produced a sort of "evidential entropy": more evidence did not lead to better justice.

In 2019 the integral Maidan "super-case" contained a total of 1,973 victims, 89 accusations of murder, 193 suspects, and as many as 9,500 witnesses, including the former President Yanukovych, testifying by visio-conference from a Russian court. All the court hearings were broadcast on YouTube in real-time,

as were the events on Maidan—however, they were met with much less public interest, with only several thousand views. Alevtina, an investigative journalist who covered the protests and the trials, told me that "the legal proceedings lost in their spectacularity. With time, even journalists lost interest in them. This is all too complicated, no one can really follow. The hearings appear crowded, but in the audience, there are only those who are directly concerned: the accused, the victims, and their families." As it becomes evident from this testimony, the final trials, and the legal process more generally, did not generate any societal catharsis, neither in a narrative form of truth-telling nor in a performative form of spectacle.

By the end of 2019, the trial of five former members of the Berkut, accused of the most dramatic shootings that happened on February 20, 2014, which was rendered in the closing scenes of *Euromaidan: Rough Cut* was close to delivering a final decision. The ending of the trial was quite unexpected, though: before the final decision, all five accused were deported to uncontrolled territories in eastern Ukraine, as part of the exchange of detainees agreed upon during the peaceful negotiations in Minsk earlier that year. To complicate matters even further, some of these policemen later returned to Ukraine, illustrating the deadlocks of individualized criminal culpability, especially when processes of justice-making are enmeshed in mixed regimes of peace and war.

On December 11, 2020, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, released a statement, announcing that the necessary criteria for opening international investigations into the situation in Ukraine had been met. Her declaration mentioned "three broad clusters of victimization: crimes committed in the context of the conduct of hostilities; crimes committed during detentions; and crimes committed in Crimea" that were sufficiently grave both in quantitative and qualitative terms to warrant investigation by the ICC. The very fact of dividing victimization into clusters made evident the judicial effort to make sense of the multi-dimensionality of injustice faced by post-Maidan Ukrainian society. This model combines authoritarian, state-driven violence with elements of international armed conflict, conducted "by proxy," and involving local civilian populations and non-state actors, fighting on both sides—and it is analogous to the reconfiguration of sovereignties at the Russian–Ukrainian border and beyond, on the sea and in the air.

Bensouda's statement did not mention an important international incident that happened in the Ukrainian airspace in July 2014, namely the downing of an aircraft, flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur with 298 passengers, including 80 children, on board. All were killed by a surface-to-air Buk missile launched from a territory controlled by the separatists. In 2015 the Netherlands initiated the creation of an *ad hoc* International Tribunal, established through the UN system, for those responsible for the shooting. Whereas the resolution to establish such a tribunal gained a majority at the UN Security Council, it was subsequently vetoed by the Russian Federation, which bears this right as one of the five Permanent Members of the UNSC.

The Netherlands decided to pursue the investigation domestically and launched a procedure at the European Human Rights Court, to establish facts

of human rights violations. The case was thereafter fully investigated by the Dutch court in The Hague (which happens to be only a 10-min. drive from the headquarters of the International Criminal Court). After a year these proceedings have reached an impasse, as the Russian constitution does not allow the extradition of the alleged offenders to third countries, and the Netherlands High Court does not have jurisdiction over Russian citizens, the main suspects in the case. If the ICC investigation of Ukraine reaches trial, it will be the first instance of international justice on the territory of the former USSR. However, if the Russian government refuses to cooperate, as is likely, the ICC procedure would risk a similar impasse like the one launched by the Netherlands at the international level.

However, the process of truth-finding itself is entrapped in a complicated pattern of multiple, contested sovereignties, that are in their turn tied up in knots of overlapping and sometimes conflictual national and international jurisdictions, indicative of the state of global processes that followed the dissolution of the USSR and the end of the Cold War era. It is evident that, notwithstanding the collected evidence of various political crimes, in Ukrainian society, there has not been a real, articulated demand for a judicial way to restore societal harmony. On the one hand, one can hypothesize that Ukrainian society has found other ways to ask for forgiveness for a hundred deaths, through multiple collective cathartic expressions of mourning, including the ones that I witnessed in the cinema. On the other hand, it seems that a belief in the possibility of a fair trial is not part of the Ukrainian, and more broadly, post-Soviet legal imaginary, which is defined by multiple failures of national and international legal institutions to achieve collective justice over this territory. When placed in this context, the improvised mourning ritual that a small fraction of the urban, middle-class Ukrainian intelligentsia performed in a cinema hall does not appear so illogical, or so "archaic."

CONCLUSIONS

This article, inspired by the screening of *Euromaidan: Rough Cut*, examines ethnographically this experimental documentary film recounting very recent revolutionary events, and proposes an anthropological interpretation of a collective cathartic experience of mourning for the murdered protestors that happened right after the screening. The first part of the article follows the structure of the film and describes how vernacular visual documentation, alongside networking and aggregation (Juris 2012), contributes to the construction of emerging political communities by mediating a sense of belonging through the production of affectively charged images. In the second part, I turn to the anthropological reconsideration of *catharsis*, understood as a complex psycho-social phenomenon that implies the merging of intellectual and emotional responses to an event in a totalizing experience, implying therapeutic, transcendental, and transformational effects. Arguing against Girard's simplistic model of catharsis, which is rooted in human sacrifice and presents catharsis as a *rudimentary form* of dealing with violence in pre-modern societies,

I use the example of contemporary Ukraine to show that cathartic experiences belong to a cultural repertoire of more elaborated forms of social organization and justice-making. This observation complicates the extant literature on political emotions and affects and urges us to recognize the ambivalence of catharsis as an anthropological phenomenon that on the one hand helps individuals and communities to process immediate traumatic experiences, and on the other hand may serve *ideological reification*, conferring an affective dimension to processes of narrative unification, accompanying ideological transformations.

POSTSCRIPT

By a cruel twist of fate, shortly before this article was due to be published, Russia started a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Images of shelling, massive destruction, indiscriminate killing, and fleeing people inundated the media worldwide. These proved to be strangely cathartic for global audiences, who discovered Ukraine while experiencing variously outrage, empathy and grief. The arguments developed in this text, first drafted in 2015, are thus more pertinent than ever, particularly given the new investigation of war crimes launched by the International Criminal Court, which will rely on evidence collectively gathered by Ukrainian citizens in real time.

NOTES

1. http://docudays.ua/eng/2016/news/kino/euromaidan-online-docu-space/.
2. All translations from Russian and Ukrainian are mine, unless stated otherwise.
3. The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA, *Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiya*) was a nationalist Ukrainian paramilitary army that fought against Soviet troops in western Ukraine. Aiming at the foundation of the independent Ukrainian state, the UPA was for some time allied with Nazi Germany and provided support for the military occupation of eastern European borderlands. Despite succinct attempts by Ukrainian historians to absolve the UPA of war crimes, recently declassified archival documents yield evidence of their involvement in ethnic cleansing of Jewish and Polish populations (McBride 2016). These findings, however, remain confined within the international academic circles, and have not yet made for a significant debate at the national level, where the "heroic narrative" of the UPA soldiers remains central (Myshlovska 2018).
4. The Lemko dialect.
5. A similar performance is by Skladovska: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZFdtFTJfkg.
6. These nationalist salutations were used by UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army, supra Note 4) during World War II. In 2014 they had become the central slogans of the Maidan Revolution. Nevertheless there has been a section of pro-Maidan Ukrainians, including myself, who distanced themselves from using these as everyday greetings.
7. This latter therapeutic understanding was elaborated by legal scholars, who argue that public trials, e.g., the truth and reconciliation commissions (TRCs), bear a "cathartic function" for the community of victims, achieved through a verbalization of their grievances. Here the "cathartic function" is based uniquely on the subject-

oriented understanding of catharsis, and overlooks the performative, theatrical aspects of trials, where complex social relations come into play.
8. All names of my interlocutors were modified, except for the filmmakers.
9. http://maidan.situplatform.com/.

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