



Iconoclasm, semiotics of *Leninfall*



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Maksym Toussaint

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a horizontal line that curves downwards and then upwards to form a triangular shape.

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Abstract

The present work is an analyse of the phenomenon of Leninfall in Ukraine. This analysis explains the historical aspect of the destruction of the statue for a better understanding of iconoclasm and its meaning. The cases studied are depicting diverse types of iconoclasm through history and show the differences between them. In the specific case of the statues in Ukraine and other countries in eastern Europe, this is a studied based on comparisons, with the goal to understand which type of expectation can be awaited in Ukraine. The work led to show that the destruction and then the reconstruction of the statue of Lenin in Ukraine can be considered as a question of sovereignty. The need of space purification and the boundaries of these iconoclast actions interrogate about the boundaries of iconoclasm.

Abstract

Práce představuje analýzu fenoménu „Leninfall“ na Ukrajině. Pro lepší pochopení současného ukrajinského ikonoklasmu se věnuje historickým aspektům ničení soch. Zkoumané případy reprezentují různé typy obrazoborectví v průběhu dějin a ukazují jejich rozdílná východiska. V konkrétním případě soch na Ukrajině a v dalších zemích východní Evropy se jedná o studii založenou na komparaci. Práce pak na jejím základě argumentuje, že ničení a případné rekonstrukce Leninových soch na Ukrajině podstatně souvisí s otázkou suverenity.

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Introduction

Iconoclasm is a word from ancient Greek and means breaking the figures, icons images. Usually this word belongs to the religious vocabulary. But the events in Ukraine during the last past years draw attention to what is happening there. With the Euromaidan events and the current war, the statues of the former Soviet leaders are toppled, a phenomenon called *Leninopad* or Leninfall. But what is the meaning of destroying a statue and how Leninfall is representing the will of Ukraine to mark the end of its “vassal” relationship to Russia?

Iconoclasm may be defined as ‘an attack against and often the destruction of a physical object leading to the destruction of its spiritual power. It has been practised from the ancient Egypt to our era. But the practice of iconoclasm has evolved depending on the type of iconoclasm we are facing : pure destruction, humiliation, or transformation. Some types of iconoclasm can be characterised by their religious aspect, but others are more political or societal. Iconoclasm is also related to idols and symbolism and its goal is to suppress all forms of spiritual power from a statue or a monument (in the cases analysed in that work). To properly analyse the meaning of the action, it is important to focus on the figures represented, how, where and why they had been erected. Statues of Lenin, Dzierzynski and Stalin represented more than the humans that they copied. They had a role, and destruction of them were related to the symbol that they were and still are representing. The current image breaking in eastern Europe, and more specifically in Ukraine, have changed its significance due to the events that took place at the beginning of the years 2000. Destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, and the figure of Saddam Hussain, created or at least, redefined the meaning of toppling a statue. The case of degenerate art explain some important elements about the relationship between the statue and the people. The situation of eastern Europe is interesting. What is happening in Ukraine can be compared to other countries that toppled the statues down in 1990”. Will Ukraine follow the same path or will it be precedent ? Ukrainian iconoclasm is a specific case but it follow the rules of other type of statues destruction similar to surrounding countries. The fact that the Ukrainians are destroying the representations of Lenin is not an anecdote but a mean of communication. Something very well understood by Putin and visible through his talk when he express his disapproval to that type of acts. A symbol well understood by the pro-Russian Ukrainians and Russians that rebuilt the statues toppled in some cities occupied by the Russian army

The iconoclasm and its meaning in Ukraine is a complex case to analyse because the events are very fresh, but its outcomes will lead to an interesting situation not only for current

generations but also the ones that are going to live in a world where these symbols had been removed. How the new generations will be acting or feeling toward that? Where are the boundaries between what has to be destroyed and what should be kept?

Chapter 1 : History of iconoclasm

1.1 Egyptian iconoclasm

The meaning of a statue as a symbol hasn't changed so much in four millennia. To understand well what iconoclasm exactly means, it is necessary to study the History of iconoclast events. Iconoclasm as an action has very deep roots. One of the oldest remains discovered and documented is the case of the Ancient Egypt statues. "In ancient Egypt we find many statues with something broken off, usually a nose. Why noses? It was believed that the statue was not just an inanimate object, but truly contained the spirit of the god or Pharaoh depicted. Breaking off the nose ended its ability to breathe and rendered it no longer able to operate in the world."¹ To cause more serious damages to the person represented by the statue, the rock structure could be fully destroyed and the name of the person represented, scrapped from temple walls, sculptures' pedestals and all places when this name was written. "The seated figure of Queen Hatshepsut, the only female ruler to use the title Pharaoh, was smashed by order of her stepson, Thutmose III, 20 years after her death. [...] Also, since the Egyptians believed the left hand was used to present offerings to a god, and the right hand to receive boons, some sculptures have the left arm, the right arm, or both arms removed, indicating which act was being stopped."² The case of Egypt is particular, because the link between life and afterlife is very different from ours. For ancient Egyptians even if someone dies, his soul is still related with his body and also his name and statues of him. A deceased person still has some needs and is somehow very present as a part of human life. Death was not a boundary as strong as for Christian culture, in which there is a strict border between the world of the dead and the living ones. Ancient Egyptians were considering that death was a continuity in which some people that had received the right ceremony could continue their existence and even sometimes become God figures. The most popular of those figures is the god Osiris that represents the culture of embalming and the afterlife. Destroying all the remains of the

¹ Langland, T. (2021). Toppling Statues: Iconoclasm Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. *Sculpture Review*, 70(1), 22–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07475284211010742>

² Langland, T. (2021). Toppling Statues: Iconoclasm Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. *Sculpture Review*, 70(1), 22–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07475284211010742>

deceased person will lead to breaking the links between human world and spirit life. “Even tomb robbers were involved, since the image of the person buried in the tomb had to be neutralised by smashing its image, lest that person inflict vengeance on the robbers from beyond the grave. [...] Some attacked faces, hands and feet, others, faces, arms and legs. The removal of limbs has also been observed in other Egyptian temples, such as the Horus Temple at Edfu. By such intervention the deities were rendered immobile, no longer able to move and to exercise their malign power.”³ In that case, we are mostly analysing iconoclasm as a way to destroy the “powers” of someone that had lived once. Strangely, there are some connections to the recent events like in 2009 in Kyiv. A statue of Lenin was vandalised. The destroyers used a hammer to break the nose and the hands of the statue. Without any knowledge about the symbols of ancient Egypt, the “vandals” aimed the exact same elements. That means that the symbol represented by hand and nose of a statue is an element that is innate to human beings. Usually symbols meaning changes through time (colours in Middle Age didn’t have the same meaning that nowadays for example). But realising that the aimed elements of the statue, and the act of breaking them, haven’t changed for four thousand years is really impressive.

In the case of ancient Egypt, it is difficult to talk about other types of iconoclasm except the case of Akhenaton. Akhenaton is known as the first to establish a monotheist cult (1360-1340 BCE). Temples were closed, cults abolished and images destroyed. The Pharaoh had created a religion focus on the god Ra as a creator of everything : light and time. The traditional pantheon was abolished replaced by this monotheist religion⁴. The polytheist religions are tolerant for a simple reason. When there is already around hundred gods in the pantheon, one more will not change almost anything. These gods can cohabit. Problems can appear when the cult of one God will mismatch the life in the society. That’s what happened with Catholicism in ancient Rome. The Christians weren’t executed because they believed in Christ but because they were refusing to fulfil some social duties related to the Roman culture. The problematic element in this conflict is the monotheist religion as these religions cannot accept any other type of idols.

1.2 Religious Iconoclasm

Statue of former leaders of USSR can be somehow considered as modern versions of gods. Their representation is a problem but elements coming from that era can still be tolerated. “The three big monotheist religions have a common point : blasphemy. An element that is completely

³ Ibid

⁴ ASSMANN, *Jan Monotheism and Polytheism* in JOHNSTON Sarah Iles, religions of the ancient world Harvard university press

incoherent with polytheist practises. Religion is a huge factor in iconoclasm. The Second Commandment forbade idols or “graven images”, and this Commandment carried over to Islam as well.”⁵ The Byzantian iconoclasm was another case of religious iconoclasm but in orthodox religion. The iconoclast controversy lasted on and off from 726. The Emperor Leo III declared a war against the use of holy images, until 843. Different behaviour had followed : some emperor was very radical to the cult of the images and some acted with more tolerance to the icons. In 843, the Empress Theodora allowed their restoration and created an annual festival dedicated to them. “Significantly, the Orthodox Church refers to the latter event as the ‘restoration of orthodoxy’. The controversy, however, had had a hiatus during the reign of another image defender, Empress Irene, under whom the Second Council of Nicaea 787 was held.¹⁶ Nicaea II reaffirmed the distinction between ‘true adoration’ (λατρεία), which according to orthodox faith is rendered to the unique divine nature, and ‘the prostration of honour’ (προσκύνησις τιμητική), which is attributed to icons, for the one who prostrates before the icon does so before the person(hypostasis) who is represented therein. The Council of Nicaea II restored the veneration of images temporarily from 787 to 815.”⁶ The monotheist concepts are pretty close so it is not surprising to see that Muslims acted in a similar way even if their conclusions were different. This element is also related to the actions of Mahomet that destroyed the images that were in the Kaaba in 630. “Muslims carried out similar iconoclastic removal of all images except nonfigurative ones. As an exception, Hagia Sophia in Istanbul was originally built as a mosque in the 6th century, then converted to a Christian church in 1204, then to an Orthodox church in 1261, and in 1453 it became a mosque again.” In 1984, It was declared as a museum by UNESCO. Today it has been converted back to a Muslim Mosque, but the Christian mosaics have survived all those changes. These mosaics are considered as an important part of Byzantine art so rather than destroying them, they are covered by large pieces of fabrics during Muslim’s prayers. These banners are then removed to let the possibility to the tourist to see them. “They are covered today with the banners removed during those times the building is open to tourists.” Again, we can see that some parallels exist with the case of iconoclasm in eastern Europe. Statues or bas relief more discrete with more minor personalities like Bolesław Bierut (leader of Polish people’s republic 1947-1946) still exist in Poland⁷. And the same thing happens for not as figurative statues. They are conserved and assimilated to culture and history of the country. The problem is when the iconoclasm goes too far.

⁵ Langland, T. (2021). Toppling Statues: Iconoclasm Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. *Sculpture Review*, 70(1), 22–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07475284211010742>

⁶ PRUSAC, M and KOLRUD, K. *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*. New York : Ashgate Publishing, 2014

⁷ <https://www.rp.pl/historia/art962831-w-polsce-wciaz-stoja-komunistyczne-pomniki-nie-wiadomo-ile>

1.3 Current Iconoclasm

Current iconoclasm had appeared with the French Revolution in 1789. To be more precise the phenomenon was related with the destruction of religious or nobility symbol after Louis XVI decapitation. The “icon” destruction had created a lot of changes in the society. The language had somehow evolved. In everyday French there is a way to politely address to someone known as “Vouvoiement” but at that type that form was considered as too much related to royalty, the common form less formal was preferred. The revolution brought its own calendar in which each day had its own name based on a vegetable, farm animals or activities (each day of the year had its own name). This disgust of the former regime had led to destroy a lot of statues or imagery related to royalty or clerics. “On 10 August 1792 a group of Parisians attacked the Tuileries Palace and were cut down by the royal Swiss Guard After the Swiss Guard were overpowered and killed, the mob attacked symbols of royalty, such as the statue of Henri IV and the equestrian statue of Louis XIV.”⁸ But these events created so much destruction that France lost a part of its culture. “The following year the Abbey of Cluny was destroyed, as were the tombs of the kings at St Denis the ancient phial for oil used for anointing kings during coronations was smashed. The relics of saints were destroyed and reliquaries broken up. These acts were very damageable to the culture and the history of France, because the country just lost a part of its past. The terror lead to some type of anarchy : valuable material stolen by individuals or confiscated by authorities⁹. During the first republic period, some laws forced people to this destruction : “Tout citoyens exerçant un négoce seront tenus dans un délai de quinze jours, de détruire ou de faire détruire les enseignes, figures et toutes emblèmes qui rappelleraient au peuple, le temps d’esclavage sous lequel il a gémi pendant trop longtemps. Tous les propriétaires ou locataires de maison sont tenus, aussi dans un délai de quinze jours, de faire disparaître de dessus les murs de leurs maisons les armes, fleurs de lys, statues, bustes, enfin tout ce qui ne peut être considéré comme des honneurs rendus à un individu, la Liberté et l’Égalité étant désormais les seules idoles dignes des hommages du peuple français.”¹⁰ That can be translated into : “All citizens exercising a trade will be held within fifteen days, to destroy or make destroy the signs, figures and all emblems which would remind the people, the time of slavery under which it groaned during too long. All owners or tenants of houses are also required, within a period of fifteen days, to remove from the walls of their houses the arms, fleurs de lys, statues, busts, in short all that cannot be considered as honours paid to an individual, Liberty and Equality being henceforth the only idols worthy of the homage of the French people.” Even if that type of iconoclasm is not religious, the fanaticism of destruction is still present. And what happened then is pretty similar to some recent events.

⁸ ADAMS, A. *Iconoclasm, Identity Politics and the Erasure of History*. Exeter, Andrews UK Limited, 2020

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Louis Réau, *Histoire du vandalisme : les monuments détruits de l’art français*, Paris, Éditions Robert Laffont, 1994, 1190 p. (ISBN 2-221-07015-1, [lire en ligne \[archive\]](#)), p. 357.

“Much of it began with the protests over the death of George Floyd, but it has expanded. At first, it was Confederate statues, but as the protests of Floyd’s death spread around the world, the focus expanded to include just about every memorialised person who had anything to do with slavery or colonialism, even George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.” The protest and the iconoclasts acts aimed other statues “The net swept wider and included Christopher Columbus, Cecil Rhodes, King Leopold of Belgium, and many others. There were hundreds of images taken down—statues, busts, murals, even plaques. While many were removed by mob action, a great many were removed by official action.”¹¹ This wave of iconoclasm in USA started with the case of the equestrian statue of *Robert E. Lee* by Henry Shrady and Leo Lentelli in Charlottesville, Virginia. The general Lee was the leader of the Confederate army during the civil war (1861-1865). The army that was defending the southern landlords, who owned land maintained by slaves. Thus Lee can be perceived as a figure that symbolised racism. “When it comes to how a sculpture communicates to viewers, it is important to realise there is both a *how* and a *who* in art. The *how* is the way someone is portrayed and can be of far greater importance than *who* is portrayed. In the case of Lee, it is the *how*—the proud, dignified, victorious look of the figure that is the problem—more than who. There he sits, astride his horse, Traveller, high atop a monumental plinth in a proud and heroic pose. Lee isn’t represented as a civilian but in its role of the general of confederate army, in a majestic representation. But what if he had been presented as a defeated man? How would that change the “history” of Robert E. Lee? But, of course, that would be a controversial political decision.”¹² In that case the problem was not only the character but also the way in which he was represented and that the symbol that he represented in that way cause a feeling of offence to Afro-Americans that could be easily understood. People suggested setting up plates to explain the role of the person depicted. But that choice would lead to new problems : who will write them? Are they not going to be biased somehow? But the protest of “black lives matters” lead as well to the destruction of figures opposed to slavery, like the case of the Statue of Tadeusz Kosciuszko. A figure known as someone that fought for the freedom and that had asked Jefferson to free slaves and act personally to reach that goal. Or the case of an abolitionist such as Frederick Douglass in New York. “A replacement figure of Douglass has been completed and erected. It turns out that the artist, Olivia Kim, has made 13 replicas, all cast from rubber molds into epoxy, which is light, and was carried to the plinth by the two young men who had damaged the original figure.”¹³ This last case in tightly related to the previous one, especially in the aspect of the destruction by a mass of people indoctrinated in a dogma

¹¹ Langland, T. (2021). Toppling Statues: Iconoclasm Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. *Sculpture Review*, 70(1), 22–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07475284211010742>

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

or some frenetic events. That tendency of mediatic and politic fanaticism in iconoclasm is very current and shows how strong are the images in our current society.

Chapter 2 : Lenin and Dzierzynski Statues

2.1 The persons represented

The statues created during the communism were mostly representation of archetypes, but the persons that have been represented the most were Lenin, Dzierzynski and later Stalin. Statues of Stalin were destroyed during the period of destalinization just after the death of the leader of the Soviet leader (like in the case of Stalin Statue in Prague). But the ones of Lenin were kept until the fall of the USSR in a lot of European countries. The statues of Feliks Dzierzynski were the most hated and the one that were destroyed the first. Dzierzynski were the creator of the Soviet secret services and responsible for the red terror. The executions and the acts of violence that he was responsible for created that feeling of hate against him. But the most interesting statues are maybe the one of Lenin. In his case, the codes used for his statues were very tight and the most archetypal statue of him would be the one of the Palace of the Soviets. Lenin was mostly represented as an icon and symbol of the socialism and a leader in the country. In 1927¹⁴, the sculptor Serguey Merkurov create a group of proletarian men carrying the corps of Lenin. The statue is called “the funeral of the leader” but the representation of Lenin as a dead corpse doesn’t fit the propaganda that is requiring to present him like a chief leading his people to conquer the earth¹⁵. Surprisingly, the statue was not destroyed and the artist had even created a version of it made out of stone in 1949. Serguey Merkurov continued his career until his death in 1952. He received the Stalin prize twice in 1941 and 1951¹⁶. But the way in which he represented Lenin and the fact that he hasn’t been punished for that is very surprising. According to propaganda, Lenin is mostly represented as a leader or like a mentor helping children. In my family my mother had learned a song as a kid in school. In this song Lenin was “loving children and liking flowers”. Even if some statue is also showing him as a young boy (with his mother in Ulyanovsk or alone in Chaplygin) or a student (statue of Kazan where he studied). He is generally presented as the conqueror and

¹⁴ Serguei Merkurov started the statue in 1924 (first version made out of gips) but had presented it as finished in 1927. Then the statue was photographed by an unknown Soviet photographer.

¹⁵ <https://id77.livejournal.com/1853428.html>

¹⁶

https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9C%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BA%D1%83%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2,%D0%A1%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%B9_%D0%94%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87

unique chief. But some statue had represented him other Soviet figures like Stalin in Omsk (statue destroyed in early 60") or Feliks Dzierzynski in the Buryatian town of Ust-Barguzin.

2.2 Style and Size

The Lenin images had a lot of sizes and shapes. But they were as well really frequent until 1991. Images, post cards, stamps, medals, posters... The symbol of the Soviet union was represented everywhere. But the statues were ordered by the communist party. They quickly appeared in the official buildings but also at the entry of factories and on the main streets of the cities. The first statues built were mostly human size, but the next ones were mostly taller. The statues were full-length representation of Lenin. The artists that had to create them hadn't any possibility to express themselves. The canons of construction were tightly controlled and the final results had to be realistic. The sculptors had to copy the figure of the leader from official photos provided but the party. These representations were controlled to create a precise propaganda. The most known images of Lenin were provided by a movie shot in 30th of August 1918 by Fanny Kaplan, in which Lenin is walking in the gardens of Kremlin¹⁷. The movie was employed to create some images that served as a model for the statues. But some other images had also been used : one of them is a photo of Lenin in 1918 reading an article in Pravda. In another photo taken on the 1st of May 1919 : Lenin is walking on the Red Square with a long coat. In his representation the leader of USSR was almost always wearing these type of clothes : a suit, a tie, sometimes a coat. To be coherent with the value of communism Lenin was represented mostly with a worker cap or a pre-ushanka-hat even if in fact he was sometimes wearing a bowler hat. But this accessory was too European and related with an ideology that wasn't fitting communist doctrine. During an event in the same day, Lenin took a posture with an arm lifted, the left fist tight. The last photo was done from a low angle and become the most popular model for a lot of statues. And finally the last photo of the leader was made during a speech at a podium done on the 5th of May 1920. In this last case, the photo had inspired the statue currently in the central square of Minsk. A statue, that was built in 1933, took down in 1945 by the German's army and rebuilt in 1945.

The artists responsible for the statue's creation weren't allowed to imagine or to propose their own vision. They were forced to represent the leader in a realistic way and precisely copying the photos or rearranging some elements of them to create new images. That explains that there was not a lot of different versions of the statues and that most of them were really similar to each other. The model photos chosen by the propaganda can be mostly described as a dynamic and active. Lenin has a majestic pose but his action had to be dynamic and powerful. He is usually showing a direction. The "chief" had been frequently represented that way. Three

¹⁷ <https://www.cairn.info/poutine-l-ukraine-et-les-statues-de-lenine--9782724639957.htm>

statues with that pose are in Minsk and a few are standing at St Petersburg. One of them was also present at Kharkiv, but this one was presenting Lenin in a more walking pose and not behind a lectern.

2.3 and place where the statues were

The communism was organized around main events. These events were celebrated by parades, sport, army and communist ideology elements. These statues are mostly placed on a pedestal made out of marble or granite on the main ways of the city. These stands were important because they must be visible by the people from a long distance and without being hidden by the crowds during ceremonies. The pedestals were decorated as well with some bas relief related to the narrative meaning of the statue. Their role was very social. Somehow the symbols of the figures represented as leaders were transposed to the squares where their representation was leading the crowds of citizens on a way to a better world. As it the case in Mesopotamian culture, the statues were substitute to the person represented. Even after the destruction of them, their shadow is still remaining. The case of Prague is pretty interesting. The square where the statue of Stalin was at Letna has a particular mood. The place is very specific and feeling that something is missing but at the same time still present there is disturbing. It can be compared to a ghost haunting the square. I already talk about the Palace of Soviets. Even if the monument was never built due to the finances of the USSR during the Second World War, the construction site was initiated in 1931. The 5th of December the cathedral of Christ the Saviour was blown up to leave enough space to build the future palace. These elements, in terms of symbol is very interesting. A cathedral was replaced by another cult place but for a modernist religion : the cult of Lenin and communism. The plans of the building were modified a lot following the ideas of Stalin that was known for modifying buildings to make them more majestic. As a lot of buildings from that era in USSR, the palace was planned to be looking like a pedestal or a tower. The type of building was purely modernist, a style that will characterise the majority of buildings in USSR. The height of the building was planned to be 416 metres (statue included). It was planned to be built in the downtown of Moscow next to the Kremlin. We can compare that network of statues as a network of vassalage, in which the statues are expressing who are the leaders and the rulers of the land in which they are. The biggest statue was a symbol where the power was centralised. All of these are set in a very visible place as a reminder and a symbol.

Chapter 3 : The meaning of the act of breaking an image nowadays

3.1 Entartete Kunst

Iconoclasm is an act of doctrine fidelity. In Germany in 1937, the nazis organized an exhibition called *Entartete Kunst*, that was translated into “degenerate art”. The spectator of it was invited to compare the artworks of artists like Picasso, Chagall or Kokoschka to drawings and paints made by the patients of mental asylums. That specific case was not an act of destruction but the iconoclast aspect come related to humiliation. The goal of the third Reich was to present Germany as the victim of an art fraud. The estimated number of artworks later destroyed (or lost) by the nazis is estimated to several thousand.¹⁸ “Iconoclasts at least *prioritise* the ‘purification’ of space. They may *wish* to destroy all instances of objectionable symbols anywhere, but they will *begin* with those symbols that are within ‘their’ territory. Hence, they will accept the expedient practice of ‘purification’ by export instead of destruction, in the same way that commissioners of genocide will accept the expedient practice of ethnic cleansing instead of extermination. Regardless of certain bizarre debates in contemporary British politics, there is no ultimate contradiction between Nazis’ acceptance of Jewish emigration under duress and their ‘final solution’ of Jewish extermination (cf. Schulze 2016). Likewise, there is no ultimate contradiction between Nazis’ orchestration of the export of ‘degenerate art’ (and profit from that export) and their ultimate plan of annihilation of challenging art.”¹⁹ Even if that case cannot seem fitting the situation of current iconoclasm, the vision of cleaning of the society is really interesting to understand other events. In that case we can understand this destruction in the same way as the will to purify the society of Jews. The nazis apply this vision to art as well. By destroying what was bothering them, they will be able to not only purify the contemporary Germany but they would be able to “ a big cleaning” for the next generations. This case as the next one that I will analyse later is a pure fanatic vision. The problem of that; is that the “normal iconoclasm”, that is usually related to an act of destruction of important symbols of oppression, loss all boundaries. Not only the figurative representation of leaders or symbols is destroyed but everything judge inappropriate can burned, broken up, or blew up. “And there is no ultimate contradiction between the Islamic State’s orchestration of the export of ‘idols’ and their ultimate plan of annihilation of iconography, especially since, like the Nazi Empire, the Islamic State profiteering from cultural property finances their destruction of cultural property and worse crimes. [...] While a distinction might be made between ‘genuine’ targets of iconoclastic violence and ‘fake’ victims of iconoclastic violence, that distinction would

¹⁸ HARDY, Sam. *Iconoclasm: Religious and Political Motivations for Destroying Art*. In : HUFNAGEL, Saskia and CHAPPELL, Duncan. *The Palgrave Handbook on Art Crime*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

¹⁹ Ibid

then implicitly recognise those genuine artworks as idols, when many would *never* have been idolised. Moreover, within the Islamic State's logic, whether the images are originals or replicas, they have been made, they exist and they are revered.²⁰ The interesting element of these actions is to see that there is basically no such differences between art and people. The fanaticism creates a desacralisation of artwork and desacralisation of people for that type of iconoclasts. Victims of these fanatics can be people or art and the way how they are treated is similar.

3.2 Bamiyan Buddhas and Saddam Hussein Statue Changed the Meaning of Iconoclasm

The second millennium and modernity didn't impact the iconoclasm but had created new symbols. In my opinion, two events were very important in that period : the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 and the taking down of the statue of Saddam Hussein in 2003. "The Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan is a historically important Buddhist complex of caves, monasteries, chapels and sanctuaries. Until 2001, the complex was dominated by two colossal statues (35 m and 53 m tall) carved out of the rock face, but in March of that year, the statues were destroyed by the Taliban government of Afghanistan. The threat to destroy the statues had been voiced ever since the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 1996, because, as figurative statues and as cult statues of Buddhism, they offended some factions of the Taliban government. International pressure, headed by UNESCO and mediated through other Islamic countries, had managed to stave off their destruction for four years, but ultimately could not prevent it."²¹ Mullah Omar, the chief of the Taliban between 1994 and 2001 admitted that the goal of the destruction of the Buddhas was also an effective to draw attention to their cause. This action can be considered as communication of an advertisement for a doctrine.

"Modern heritage devastation became manifest with the demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in 2001, an act that can be classified as iconoclasm and, as such, is a criminal offence committed by the individuals who materially order and/or perform the acts of destruction." In general there is a significant increase of destruction of cultural heritage due to the conflict in North Africa and the Middle East. The case of the Mosul Museum is maybe one of the best-known case (except the case of Bamiyan Buddhas). The 26th of February 2015, ISIL fighters destroyed the Archaeological Museum and statues as the gates of Nineveh.²² "Typical cases of iconoclasm mixed with attempts to erase identity currently take place in this region. Examples are the destruction of Sufi shrines and monuments in Mali and Libya and attacks on temples and shrines of Yezidis by Islamic State (e.g. in Sinjar, Iraq, 29 October

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Freedberg, D. *Iconoclasm*. Chicago. The university of Chicago press, 2021

2014). On 25 August 2012, a historical mosque and library containing important manuscripts and several adjacent Sufi shrines and monuments were demolished in the town of Zlitanin. In Tripoli, on the 26th of August 2012, Salafists destroyed a Sufi mosque and Sufi shrines. Reports from March 2015 indicate that the Tripoli branch of IS again levelled Sufi shrines in Libya (Zargoun 2012).²³ Iconoclasm is still religious. Or maybe it would be more precise to say that somehow iconoclasm is always religious. But in that case I am speaking of the aspect of the religion close to politics. We are perceiving the surroundings as a batch of symbols. The images of people are having a plain metaphysic dimension. Destruction of it and feeling of lost when it happens aren't directed to the stone element but the symbol of what it represents. The feeling of a need to preserve a sculpture or to destroy it is related to the load of that element and not the element itself. "*Icons* are not only images of 'false' idols, but also images of 'true' gods, which humans do not have the right to represent or the capacity to imagine. Hence, sometimes, within the logic of religious iconoclasm, those who try to create images implicitly claim that they have the power of their god. Not only *images* are broken in acts of iconoclasm. The practice encompasses not only the obliteration of idols, but the obliteration of other symbols and embodiments from books to buildings and even living persons (May 2012, p. 3)."²⁴

The 9th of April 2003 a hundred Iraqis and some American soldiers took down the statue of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. The photos of this event were used in a lot of newspapers and the image stayed in minds. The symbol of that event was clear : the victory of the USA but as well a symbol of freedom and justice. The United States of America are known as an interventionist country, but this should be understood as an heroic intervention for noble values. This American doctrine of a hero country expressed itself through that symbol. The official *casus belli* of the war in Iraq was a war led to spread peace and disarm the country of weapons of mass destruction. And the toppling of the statue was perceived as an achievement of that goal.²⁵ The comparison with the precedent case could seem surprising, but the fact that Americans soldiers toppled down this statue show that they acted in a similar way than Taliban with the Bamiyan Buddhas. "This iconoclast action can be perceived as a way of communicate a message. Still, in a historical perspective the interesting point is that the statue of the ruler was perceived almost as a substitute for the living person."²⁶ This perception is quite close to the tradition that existed in Iraq and Mesopotamia. This habit is old and the relationship between someone and its image had an interesting signification. The image of the person is representing it, so its effigy can be substituted for the man itself. "The royal statue was treated

²³ HARDY, Sam. *Iconoclasm: Religious and Political Motivations for Destroying Art*. In : HUFNAGEL, Saskia and CHAPPELL, Duncan. *The Palgrave Handbook on Art Crime*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2019 p 657

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/08/toppling-saddam-husseini-statue-iraq-us-victory-myth>

²⁶ PRUSAC, M and KOLRUD, K. *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*. New York : Ashgate Publishing, 2014

like a living person, being fed and dressed. Like Saddam Hussein the king had a living stand-in; when the king's life was threatened, the substitute was placed on the throne, while the real king escaped. Tellingly the substitute was referred to as *salmu*, meaning image or statue. The representation served to secure the continual presence of the individual. Failing to capture the enemy's king, the capture of his statue would do. Indeed, the abduction of the royal image was almost as serious a matter as the abduction of the king himself. Because the man was believed to be present in his statue, its loss was an ominous sign. It is therefore not surprising that the image was subject to punishment in much the same way as the living being."²⁷ That second case represents not fanatic iconoclasm. The event had a different meaning for the Iraqi and the American. But in an interesting way the American perception is maybe even more religious. But not a usual religion, it is more a cult to the symbol of the USA.

3.3 Denial of the past / negation of a heritage and identity / replacing symbol by another

The statues more abstract, that weren't representing any important figure, were usually untouched. For example, the memento park in Budapest, Buzludzha structure and monument in Bulgaria or even the Palace of culture and science in Warsaw. In the last cases, it is even more surprising because the buildings in Warsaw and Buzludzha had rooms dedicated to meetings of the Soviet party. And even that a lot of debates had existed for the palace of Warsaw and despite the anti-communist current government the structure still exists. We can only debate of the future of some monuments like the Motherland in Kyiv. But I believe that it will not be destroyed. Iconoclasm is fighting against foreign oppression, but destroying buildings that somehow represent the identity of the country, as well, will cause to destroy the identity of people living in it. A spectacular act of destruction of a Soviet war memorial took place on December 19, 2009, in Georgia. In the city of Kutaisi, a new parliament was planned to be built. In a context of decommunization and need of space for the construction site of the new monument, the President Mikheil Saakashvili ordered to blow up the Kutaisi Monument of Military Glory. But the destruction turned in bad ways due to bad safety precautions. "The botched detonation sent debris of the 40 metres reinforced steel structure flying hundreds of meters through the air, killing a woman and her eight-year-old daughter and injuring several other people, some of them severely." The choice of the building was quite strange, because the structure was not really related to Soviet occupation. It was built by two artists from Tbilisi that used motifs from Georgian folklore to commemorate the war dead from the republic. Again

²⁷ PRUSAC, M and KOLRUD, K. *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*. New York : Ashgate Publishing, 2014

we can perceive that act as a will to purify a place from a symbol of a foreign occupation.²⁸ But that will be miscalculated and cause finally more harm. The Georgian government destroyed a part of its own culture in a same way as the inquisition was burning witches : without reasons. No problem was really solved and the final result led to a new building. It is reminded what happens in France “Iconoclasm swelled during the Wars of Religion in France in the 16th century, that 36-year battle between Catholicism and Protestantism, when primarily Catholic statues were torn down by Protestant mobs. The tourist visiting Paris today, standing before the towering façade of Notre Dame, sees the “Gallery of Kings,” across the front, a series of larger-than-life sculptures in stone, depicting the kings of both France and of the Bible. However, they were all pulled down during those religious wars, and what the tourist sees today are 19th-century reproductions (Fig 4). A few remnants of the originals survive in various museums.”²⁹ Maybe as it was the case for France, there will be some reconstructions of buildings or monuments that madly destroyed for stupid reasons.

“For instance, our cognitive ability to observe one situation from different viewpoints is based on bodily experiences we get from the interaction with the world through our visual perceptual system and this underpins our metaphorical systems through which we interpret events and our relation to them (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Hence, through analysis of metaphor (and the other categories) I show how Ukrainians are making sense of events in the present and the past. This analytical approach allows for an examination of the image of Leninfall in its multi-facetedness and dynamicity; and this is necessary to build an explanation of the complexity of, and relations between, remembering and forgetting.” Using some visual and oral media the documentary is asking about the feelings of identity and memory. “Leninfall in Ukraine, an event becoming historical in status, a turning point of reframing Ukraine’s past which is done in a spectacular way. They range from urban unrest and militarised violence to the quotidian life of seances and singing groups because all these practices engage with cultural memories stemming from 1917. I will show that the apparent or stated motives of those leading or opposing Leninfall are not reducible to political ideology but involve more complex cognitive and affective ways of engaging with identity and history.” One other important element is the boundary between the purification and the censorship. If the purification of the public space is needed to recreate a feeling of identity as a people, an over-purification will lead to censor of cultural elements and create the opposite effect. Instead of recreating some unity, it can cause a feeling of lost by destruction of elements that were important for inhabitants. Destruction of something that was part of them. The interesting element is how

²⁸ Gabowitsch, M. *The Limits of Iconoclasm: Soviet War Memorials since the End of Socialism*, International Public History. 2018 (p3-4)

²⁹ Pshenychnykh. A *Leninfall: The spectacle of forgetting* Volume 23, Issue 3 Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine, 2019

meaningful are these iconoclast acts to us and how they will evolve in the future. Maybe the perceptions of the new generation will be very different and the statues of that era will have not as such impact as for the current generation.

Chapter 4 : Leninfall in Ukraine

4.1 Other countries in eastern Europe decommunization

1989 was a significant date in European history. The fall of Berlin Wall is probably the case of destruction the most interesting. I am not sure that it can be called iconoclasm because the only icon or iconic aspect of it is the symbol that it represented, but its visual aspect as meaningful elements came thanks to its destruction. Somehow the remains of the wall had resulted into an art piece. The iconic aspect appears in its destruction, so curiously it somehow cannot be considered as iconoclasm but more as "iconopoeism" (if I can use this neologism that would mean "creation of an image"). In the 1960s, a lot of early war memorials, basically some simple concrete obelisks lined with granite slabs, were destroyed in order to be replaced with somewhat more elaborate monuments. "In addition, there were repeated attacks by individuals – for example in Estonia, Poland and East Germany – on monuments to Soviet soldiers and war memorials that they saw as symbols of Russian occupation. Since 1989 there have also been spontaneous attacks of this kind and acts of vandalism; yet most war memorials were initially spared from state-orchestrated removal, let alone destruction. Be it in Riga or Lviv, Budapest or Brno: while statues of Lenin or of Feliks Dzerzhinsky, leader of the first Soviet secret police, were often systematically dismantled, there were far fewer removal of war memorials and only occasional instances of complete destruction." The statue, bas relief and other types of structures or memorials chosen to be destroyed were statues of figures of Soviet pantheon heroes or tank monuments. We can, for example, present the case of the tank erected at *Náměstí Kinských* dedicated to the general Ivan Konev. The monument that was first vandalised by an artist : David Černý, in 1991 and then removed. There is a strong feeling of anti-communism in Poland (especially with the PIS government) but surprisingly Poland was an exception. A lot of monuments of gratitude to the Red Army had been erected in location that served as burial sites. In that case the meaning of the monument changed. It loses the "foreign occupation" meaning to become an important national identity element. Even as soldiers' mortal remains were transferred to cemeteries, the monuments often remained at the original sites, and more were built. Some of these monuments can be adopted by the

country in which they are. There is no chance than a building or a statue dedicated to unknown soldiers would be destroyed or blown up. That would be an act of barbarism, that would not recreate a kind of justice but would produce an immoral and disgraceful opinion about the country that would destroy that monument. "Between 1993 and nowadays 130 not figurative monuments were removed from public space and 370 were kept. Usually the one removed was replaced by monuments dedicated to freedom. These actions were conducted by local initiatives rather than decision from Warsaw. Diverse political party had very different attitude towards the statues and the common relationship of the inhabitant to them change with time too. I remember in my childhood about a square in which there were a MIG 15 or 21. Kids were playing around and in it, because it was possible to enter in the cockpit. Now the plane was removed but inhabitants of my hometown city always refers to the square as the "plane's square". People get used to that element and didn't perceive it as a weapon of occupation but as a part of its life. In Hungary, considered as a case of early de-communisation of public space in 1993, "after a controversial debate, Budapest's municipal General Assembly decided to open a statue park on the outskirts of the city. In addition to other statues from the capital city, this came to house some Red Army monuments, most notably perhaps the Soviet soldier standing at the foot of the Liberty Statue on Gellért Hill. However, the assembly's decision only concerned Budapest itself. Even there, the large Red Army Monument on Liberty Square has survived acts of vandalism, calls for removal, and counter-monuments. In the case of the monument to Hungary's own Red Army (of 1919) in Budapest, a referendum was even held in which residents voted against removal. Outside of the capital, removal was also far from systematic, as evidenced by the Soviet tank monument in Hortobágy in Eastern Hungary."³⁰ Statues of Dzierzynski were for example vandalise during the PRL but as well destroyed after 1989. The case of Poland shown the vandals' acts as the one of the 10th of February 1982 (during the state of war) as a will of freedom. During the night between the 10th and the 11th of February, someone had painted the hands of the statue in red, a way to protest about the figure called the bloody Feliks. This event wasn't transcript in the newspaper because of censorship but the legend of that event was more important than the realty.³¹

4.2 Maidan protest : still Russian? The case of East Ukraine

Ukraine had another relationship to it heritage. The country was politically split between the continuity of the previous regime as a colony of USSR or as a part of Europe. In that last case that would reinforce the status of the country as independent from its eastern neighbour. But one event creates a radical change that had led to the current situation. The maidan protest (18th of February to 23th of February 2013) showed to Europe the will of Ukrainian to defy

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ <https://ekartkazwarszawy.pl/kartka/zbeczeszczenie-pomnika-krwawego-feliksa/>

Russia. A few days before that date the president of Ukraine Victor Yanukovich refuses to sign the decision of free trade agreement with the European Union, instead of choosing closer ties to Russia. “The Euromaidan pro-nationalist, pro-Western movement in late 2013 sparked a round of de-communisation of public spaces, heightening tension with Russia in early 2014, outbreak of military conflict between Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists in east Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine by Russia led to a spate of iconoclastic attacks in Ukraine in April 2014”. During this protest three Soviet-era statues were toppled in Kharkiv. The mayor of the city, known as being pro-Russian, depicted this attack as a “vandalism”. But the goal of this action wasn’t as simple as a hooligan’s act but an extreme way of protesting to defend some ideas of independence. The goal of the strikers was to protest against the tacit approval of Ukrainian government to unfavourable laws for Ukraine. “At that time the parliament had passed national legislation against Soviet public and Nazi symbols. (A false show of even-handedness: there were no Nazi symbols in Ukraine.) The law was anti-Russian nationalism rather than a move against extreme political ideology. As we find in justifications for removal of Franco’s body from Valle de los Caídos and the proposed demolition of Hitler’s birthplace, governments wishing to exert authority and an act of vengeance excuses violence of the state to control and destroy symbols as necessary measures to “prevent potential political unrest” The 2014 law specifically exempted Soviet-era war memorials. Despite reports to the contrary, not all Soviet-era public art has been removed in Ukraine and there are attempts to retain particular examples, some of which was made by Ukrainian artists”³² The artist Alexander Milov turned the statue of Lenin of Dumskaya in the city of Odessa into a statue of Darth Vader. The artist defines himself as not political. He affirmed that this work was not to destroy the image but to protect the statue from destruction and turn it into something else related to pop culture. The case of Crimea is also interesting. This area was inhabited by people pro-Russian their perception of Euromaidan events is completely different than the one living in Kyiv (for example).

Since the Euromaidan protest in November 2013 Russia invaded unofficially Crimea (in 2014). “in Ukraine, who have ‘resurfaced old ghosts’ (UvA 2016) by deploying the symbols of the EU, USSR, Third Reich, and Russian Federation, to simultaneously express, and attempt to render static, identities which are inherently fluid, hybrid, and in constant flux. Some politically significant consequences of invoking historical symbolism are the appearance of multiple, competing visions of “Europe”, and a false bipolarity in Ukraine in which Ukrainians are expected to choose between two internally homogenous pro- and anti-EU identities distilled from complex, fluid, overlapping, and shifting identities, and which are equally incompatible, equally antagonistic, and equally artificial.”. One element seems important protest at maidan

³² ADAMS, A. *Iconoclasm, Identity Politics and the Erasure of History*. Exeter, Andrews UK Limited, 2020

square was the statue of Lenin that was close to the square (at the intersection of Shevchenko Boulevard). The statue was toppled during the protest and then crashed. The case, even if it was not the first destruction act against a Lenin statue in Ukraine, becomes the first accepted and almost official destruction of a statue. It can seem as a detail but this action wasn't an act of vandalism but an act of freedom translated into iconoclasm. "*Leninopad* in Ukrainian and Russian (Гайдай and Любапец, 2016: 28), translated as *Lenin's fall* or *Leninfall*, is a term that denotes a historic wave of toppling and destroying statues of Lenin in Ukraine. Though the first monument to Lenin fell with the fall of the Soviet Union, a massive demolition of Ukrainian statues of the idols of 1917 was triggered by the Euromaidan events and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–2014, in which President Yanukovich was ousted by pro-European protestors, many of whom were killed, after he rejected an agreement with the European Union and tried to seek closer relations with Russia: 'A symbolic farewell to the Soviet past – the demolition of remaining monuments to Lenin, more than five hundred altogether, in a few weeks, accompanied the Revolution of Dignity' (Plokyh, 2015: 452; Плохий, 2016: 352), became its hallmark."

4.3 The law of 2014 consequences of maidan protest

The physical action that taken place was related with the statues. "In the former Socialist Republic of Ukraine, no town was complete without its very own Lenin, to such a degree that it became the Soviet Republic with the highest concentration of Lenin statues, numbering around 5500 in 1990. In contrast, it is estimated there are no Lenin statues left standing in Ukraine." From 5500 to 0, this change is very quick and radical. A law was voted in order to remove all the symbols that were linking Ukraine to its past. For now the situation is very difficult to analyse because the current conflict creates an atmosphere of chaos that not allow a deep analysis. The decommunization laws in Ukraine aimed the statues of communist leaders. These persons in that form were the archetypes of the ideology but also symbols of occupation. Even if in some cases, the statues were also dedicated to Ukrainian soldiers that fallen during their services for the red army and it fights in Europe. By chance some monuments weren't destroyed but transformed. The plates on some were changed to make the meaning of them evolve for some different commemorative practices. Some known exceptions are concerning the case of the statues erected to the military commanders that had also occupied senior political positions. "Even this criterion is far from being unequivocal. In the case of the widely respected Soviet Ukrainian partisan leader Sidor Kovpak, even the law's authors admitted not having a clear-cut opinion. Conversely, the Kharkiv city administration kept a

statue of Marshal Georgy Zhukov off the decommunization list by invoking its artistic value.”³³ The case of the monument of Military Glory in Lviv that is threatened with demolition. This monument was dedicated to victory in war, but also to the post-war Soviet army. The place when the structure is situated is interesting. It was erected near the outer border of the Soviet Union after the military forces of Red Army had crushed the Prague Spring. As it was the case of Poland, the destruction of the statue is not as centralised, but can be considered as actions from independent groups. In Poland it was mostly decided by the localities or the cities but in the case of Ukraine, the decommunization was initiated by activists. These people are usually opposed to the local preservationist and urban historians that want to protect the sculptures. “Based on the historical background and media analysis of the case of Leninfall, a revolution strategically involves not only clashes between people but also attacks upon symbols of the previous regime so that they are forgotten. The dismantling of Lenin’s monuments in Ukraine is *spectacularly* remembered as a symbolic victory in a wider set of conflicts caused by the perspectival divide in Ukrainian society.” The images have a metaphorical aspect. Their destruction is related with a feeling of forgetting or war against an idea or feeling. “Leninfall is also construed in the documentary film media as a strategic forgetting: it proves to be necessary to move any reminders of any USSR symbols to the background both physically and cognitively.” What Ukraine had to forget or to purify is not Soviet past but its brotherly relations with Russia. The purification or the cleaning of the statue from the landscape is related to a distance taken from the communist era and in that context the figure of Lenin as a symbol is a reminder of a unity symbol between Russia and Ukraine. Lenin in that case isn’t the figure from 1920”, but represent the leaders of current countries. There is another element that cannot be forgotten : nostalgia. For older generations that had known the old system, these destructions are another symbolic. These statues are something stable that had never changed from their childhood. Their feelings are not related to the communist or Soviet system and what it involved but to memories. We are remembering about memories of our childhood. Some elements, places, even smells or sounds are still alive in our mind. But if we come back to the same place and everything had changed: we will be disappointed or feel betrayed. For older generations breaking a statue is related to breaking their memories. And that feeling is very understandable. “Indeed, the repeated toppling of Lenin statues and his recycling through the wider material culture shows Lenin and the forgetting of Lenin being continually remembered.”³⁴

³³ Pshenychnykh. A *Leninfall: The spectacle of forgetting* Volume 23, Issue 3 Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine, 2019

³⁴ Pshenychnykh. A *Leninfall: The spectacle of forgetting* Volume 23, Issue 3 Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine, 2019

Lenin statue destruction had been initiated during the Euromaidan events in 2013. “Monuments were dismantled, demolished, toppled, destroyed, crashed with tools and removed from pedestals with a loop of cable around a sculpture’s neck. There were 5500 monuments to Lenin in Ukraine in 1991. There was only 2178 left by December 2013.” By August 2017 the statue of Lenin registered as still existing were situated in southern-east region of Ukraine (excluding the one in Donetsk national Republic, Luthansk National Republic and Crimea) had been removed. Their remains were used as souvenirs in a similar way than the debris of Berlin Wall. The fallen monuments were transported to museums, parks, taken to storage spaces, recycled or just disappeared. Some elements were auctioned, sometimes on internet. And some iconoclast action had taken place in the city of Zaporizhzhia. In which the activists clothed the *vozhd* or “leader in a *vyshyvanka*, a traditional Ukrainian embroidered shirt. In Odessa statue of Lenin was ‘given a sci-fi twist – by being transformed into Darth Vader’ by sculptor Alexander Milov (*BBC News*, 2015).”³⁵ The pedestal had been conserved and transformed. They were decorated with national ornaments, repainted to the colours of the Ukrainian flag and sometimes decorated with flags of Europe. “In some places, people mounted the monuments of Taras Shevchenko (the most famous poet in Ukrainian history), climbing on the pedestals, and some monuments were redesigned to commemorate the ‘Heavenly Hundred’ – the Euromaidan activists killed in 2014. In major cities the discussion still continues about the architectural design of the squares cleaned of Lenin’s monuments. The pedestal in the capital is preserved and still remains empty, which constitutes a type of crisis of representation.” In most cases the we can conclude to a need of recognition and appropriation of Ukrainian identity. Like a conversion of the existing statue into something opposed. The whole process shows that somehow, by transforming them, the Ukrainians are accepting these monuments if they can add some nuances to what they are representing.

Chapter 5 : Lenin comes back in the areas of Ukraine occupied by Russian army

5.1 Putin's talk about the statues of Lenin : “Ukraine still belongs to him”

The statues of Lenin were a symbol that was showing that Ukraine was belonging to USSR and later to Russia, even after 1992. In his 21st February 2022 speech Putin said : “I am not trying to put the blame on anyone. The situation in the country at that time, both before and after the Civil War, was extremely complicated; it was critical. The only thing I would like

³⁵ Ibid

to say today is that this is exactly how it was. It is a historical fact. Actually, as I have already said, Soviet Ukraine is the result of the Bolsheviks' policy and can be rightfully called "Vladimir Lenin's Ukraine." He was its creator and architect. This is fully and comprehensively corroborated by archival documents, including Lenin's harsh instructions regarding Donbass, which was actually shoved into Ukraine. And today the "grateful progeny" has overturned monuments to Lenin in Ukraine. They call it decommunization."³⁶ According to Putin, Ukrainians should pay some respect to these statues instead of tearing them down, as it was the case between 1991 and 2016.³⁷ Destroying a statue is an act of denial or rejection of the past. In that case, we can consider that destroying Lenin statues represent a will of freedom. A will of Ukrainians to present themselves as an independent country that is not accepting the Russian dominance or even opinions. In the contrary of Russia, Ukraine is considering that his people were genocided by Stalin during the *Holodomor*. An event that isn't recognised as genocide by Russian government. Tearing down a statue show the need of Ukrainians to asserting themselves as an independent country, not only officially but also in the general subconscious. The statues are a good way of communicating. Their erection or the toppling is meaningful in a way that cannot be interpreted. When Ukrainians had toppled down statues during Euromaidan, Russia and Putin had understood very well the meaning of this action. These statues are a symbol. They present Ukraine as a region that has no sovereignty. But even if that aspect had been frequent in USSR (: the Polish ember, the eagle had lost its crown from 1944 to 1989) the case of Ukraine is particular. The country is the one with the more statues from that era. And that's easy to understand. During USSR Ukraine was a part of the Soviet republics land when the other countries can be considered as protectorates. This statement can seem pretty paradoxical, due to the attitude to USSR and the USA during the cold war. The two blocks fought against colonies (especially the one of the imperial countries as France or United Kingdom). Nowadays the situation had evolved and the different eastern countries that lost the status of belonging to USSR. But Ukraine is very strongly related to the geopolitical history of the countries surrounding it as a part of them. So we can perceive the current situation from Russian perspective in the following way. Ukraine seems to be considered as similar to Belarus by the Russian government, a kind of colony or protectorate in which Russia had military bases. These links between Belarus and Russia are also symbolised by the statue of Lenin at the main square of Minsk. At contrary Ukraine had chosen to remove all the statues related with the totalitarianism. A choice understandable and needed for the Ukrainian people in the goal to affirm themselves as a people distinct from Russia. "Iconoclasts at least *prioritise* the 'purification' of space. They may *wish* to destroy all instances of objectionable symbols anywhere, but they will *begin* with those symbols that are within 'their'

³⁶ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>

³⁷ <https://www.cairn.info/poutine-l-ukraine-et-les-statues-de-lenine--9782724639957.htm>

territory. Hence, they will accept the expedient practice of 'purification' by export instead of destruction, in the same way that commissioners of genocide will accept the expedient practice of ethnic cleansing instead of extermination."³⁸ The act of destroying cannot be considered as vandalism as it is qualified by Putin. The Russian president only uses rhetorical figures to create a feeling of guiltiness. But these words are as well very interesting because they are showing that Russia is still considering itself as the authority that is legitimate to tell its vassals how to act or to behave. Somehow we can see that in the eyes of Putin's "Big Brother" still exist and it is legitimate to watch even beyond the borders.

5.2 Repaired statue in the Russian influence area : divided Ukraine in terms of identity

The case of the war in Ukraine isn't a normal conflict between two enemy nations. It is a consequence of the politics of Russian government. Putin had created something that is nowadays called : storytelling. Putin had rewrite history in such a way to make the situation in which Ukraine would be a part of the Russian empire. Denying the sovereignty of the country. This vision is accentuated by the case of Donbass region in which a lot of inhabitants were supporting Russia. In the perspective of that storytelling, Russia isn't fighting against an enemy but for a fair fight to eliminate dangerous terrorists that only want to create some anarchy. That's the way that the Russian president tries to convince his compatriots that the war is legitimate. A vision can be perceived through the statues. In Crimea statues had been preserved. That is the case of the statue of Lenin in Sebastopol, for example. But another interesting element expresses the meaning of the destruction of a statue. The case of Henichesk and the one of Melitopol, in which the local authorities had reinstalled the statue of Lenin in April and November 2022. These cities are currently (when these lines are written) in the areas occupied by the Russian army and attached to the Russian territory. These actions of the restoration of the statues that were toppled down tell a lot about the way that Russians are approaching the case of this country but also the case of the statue. As I told before : the statues of Lenin were representing the power over the lands belonging to USSR. If Russia had allowed to different countries to topple down the statues of Lenin but reacted to the destruction of the statues in Ukraine, which means that Ukraine is a specific case. A country in which the antennas of the power, the statues, are representing and extending the centralised power of Moscow. In Kherson, in the south of the country, by the Black Sea, the pro-Russian authorities are trying to erect the statue of Lenin on its pedestal. But the Ukrainian counter-offensive in that region not let them realise that plan. The 11th of November 2022 the pedestal is used as support for Ukrainian and European flags.

³⁸ HARDY, Sam. *Iconoclasm: Religious and Political Motivations for Destroying Art*. In : HUFNAGEL, Saskia and CHAPPELL, Duncan. *The Palgrave Handbook on Art Crime*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. p. 627

5.3 My opinion about the iconoclasm

Creating, transforming and destroying buildings, statues or monuments are part of human history. The first chapter of that worked showed that iconoclasm started a long time ago. In the example taken the analyse case was one that took place in ancient Egypt, but the phenomenon of iconoclasm is, for sure, much older. I think that this is a part of human nature. We are creatures that need symbols (that's the reasons why we created letters and alphabet) and destruction of symbols is a way of communication. It is a part of human nature, so the iconoclast events will always exist in human history. It is very difficult to have a precise point of view on these events. I can understand the will of people to express their freedom especially when the action on freeing a country is taking place. There is a need for identity and a need to suppress signs of oppression. This event has to be related with iconoclasm to be able to rebuild something over it. But the complete destruction of all the statue and images related to events as an occupation by another country is a mistake. These events are a part of our history. Our as a people. The will of become free isn't enough to be able to then establish a country on a good basis. What will happen when the feeling of anger over the occupation will disappear ? Will the country disappear with the anger ? I guess so. I can empathise with that need to purify but in order to create something over it. In that case there is a need to build something and some bases are already existing. Not everything was bad in the old system, even if we strongly disliked it we have to admit that some elements have to be kept. Destroying statues is an act with no return. Some famous cases in history showed us that what we think about an event is maybe not as clear as it looks like (e.g. the case of Katyn when the Germans when accused by Stalin to be responsible for the event). We have as a people to be sure of our actions especially in destruction. In that case some figures as the case of Lenin, Dzierzynski or even the General Lee are representing positions that we cannot accept. In that case I can understand their destruction, but I believe that even these cases are interesting and some remains have to be kept. We have to use what happened as a lesson, so to better understand how to societies lead to slaughters we have to study what causes them. Erasing that shameful remains is similar to the fact of ignoring a problem and hoping it will solve itself on it own. I believe that we have to look for a compromise : let the anger and the will of freedom express itself but keep some statues (even of Lenin or Stalin) in specific places like museums. In 1933 in Ukraine happed the Holodomor, destroying the statues of the people that organised it creates a misunderstanding of what happened and who is responsible for it. These events as the other related to that period is important for Ukraine to build an identity. In the same way, it is impossible to erase all the trace from the past.

Conclusion

The *Leninopad* phenomenon is pretty chaotic for now. We have to wait until the dust will fall back to be really able to draw any observation and conclusion about the iconoclast acts in Ukraine. Through the entire history of image destruction, we saw that the final goal of it is to destroy something that is bothering people. It can be a concept transformed into a heresy by a dogmatic vision, a way to fight against oppression from a foreign country or a scared reaction to fight a god figure. In all the cases, the goal of iconoclasm is to purify a country, a realm or a territory to be able to create something new on clean bases. The fear about image destruction concerns excess of zeal. By destroying too many statues and icons from that era, there is a risk to destroy the Ukrainian identity. In that case the Ukrainians can start to perceived differences between themselves and stop considering themselves as a people but a few different groups. As humans we are creatures of symbols, destroying statues means destroying a human figure and almost a human being. An iconoclast act is not vandalism because it is not directed to the stone but to the symbol. We are homo-symbolicus, that mean we are communicating through symbols and in that case through archetypes. Pushing the idea of purification of a region, too far can lead us to extremes decisions that will cause harms that wasn't planned. Some statues have to be preserved to give a chance to remember on which bases the nation is built on. In Europe we preserved concentration camps but destroyed other symbols of Nazism. I think it is a smart decision. We created some sanctuaries in which some information are to explain to us why we had chosen to keep that place and what's their meaning for us but also for the future. The biggest challenge for Ukraine will be to choose what part of it history will be chosen as a heritage for the future. An exaggerate destruction have a risk to cause a loss of identity and a lot of incomprehension that can lead to the opposite result than the one planned. Luckily, we can see that in the case of Ukraine some statues had been transported and stocked in some dedicated spaces. Some had been transformed or repainted. These transformations are iconoclast act because the initial symbol is destroyed to create a new one, and in that case he statues, monuments or figures are adopted by the country. I believe that's a good thing. The destruction of some statues are an important element for Ukraine that needs to present itself as an autonomous country, but I hope that some trace of the "old times" will remain like a battle scar that will present the evolution of the countries and the importance of its history.

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Annexes and photos credits



Description	Українська: <u>Пам'ятник В.І. Леніну</u> (зруйнований), <u>Харків</u> , майд. Свободи (кол. пл. Ф.Е. Дзержинського)
Date	28 September 2014
Source	Own work
Author	<u>Крампа</u>



Description	English: Statue of Lenin from outside the "Csepel ironworks" factory in Monument Park in Budapest
Date	5 juin 2010
Source	Fotografiert mit Canon EOS 400
Auteur	Bernhard Steiner

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Lenin_Statue_Budabest.JPG



Near a municipal storage facility in Kremenchuk, Ukraine
PHOTOGRAPH BY NIELS ACKERMANN, LUNDI13



Central Street, near the Shabo House of Culture in Shabo, Ukraine
PHOTOGRAPH BY NIELS ACKERMANN, LUNDI13

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/article/vladimir-lenin-heads-statue-destroyed-monument-ukraine>



The monument to Lenin that was recently installed in occupied Henichesk.

Photograph: @EuromaidanPress Twitter

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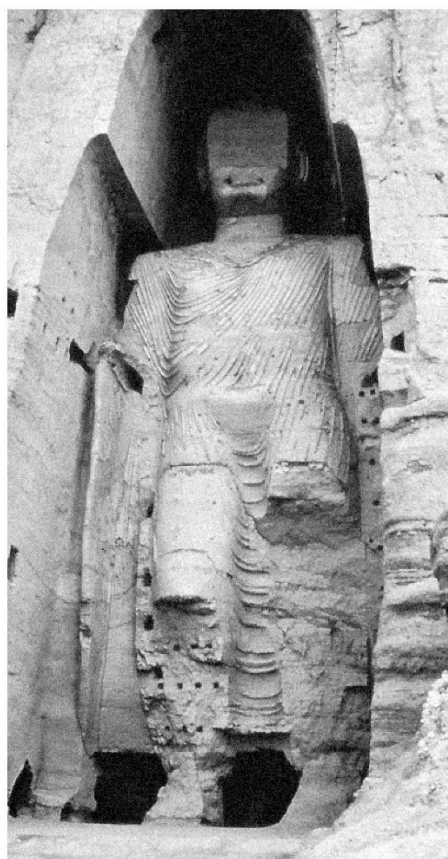
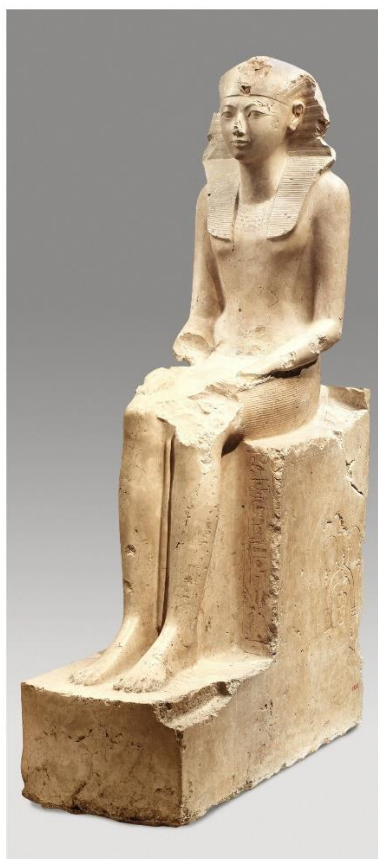
Five vandals with alleged links to Ukrainian nationalism were arrested for damaging this statue of Lenin in Kiev. Photograph: Sergei Supinsky/AFP/Getty Images

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Leninova socha v Záporožží. foto: [Reuters](#)

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Hatsheput. Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art. And Buddha of Bamiyan. Photo: Fars News Agency.

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