Research Article

Reminiscence about the Soviet City:
Urban Space in the Ukrainian Fiction of the 21st century

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Abstract

This paper addresses the group of works of contemporary Ukrainian literature in which the narrators' reminiscences about urban areas directly relate to the formation of a national identity. In the Ukrainian fiction of the last two decades, the urban identity of the Soviet period is mainly shown as a specific ideologically caused type of identity, intended to replace or blur the national and the local identities. Marc Augé's anthropological theory, which is based on the opposition of "places" and "non-places", underlies the theoretical framework for this study. In the analyzed literary works, non-places as transitional areas, devoid of historicity and identity, are viewed as predominating over places and represented by either communal or private locations. Protagonists' memories of communal non-places, – such as schools, hospitals, grocery stores, places of commemoration, monuments and administrative buildings, – often emphasize these characters' feelings of alienation and misery in urban space. Communal non-places are also depicted in fiction as a means for authorities to exert ideological influence on citizens in order to restore the totalitarian regime (as is shown in the novel (*Rivne / Rovno* (T*he Wall*) by Oleksandr Irvanets). Fiction depicting memories of private places also acquire non-place characteristics, such as the private apartment of the Lvivan Cilycks' family in Victoria Amelina's novel *Dom's Dream Kingdom*. The transformation of the private area into a non-place demonstrates the danger of ignoring one's own history, which leads to a loss of urban and national identity and the repetition of historical mistakes made by previous generations.

Keywords: Contemporary Ukrainian literature, Narrative, Soviet urban identity, National identity, Non-place.

Introduction

In scholarly works regarding modern Ukrainian literature, issues related to the representation of local/urban identity in fictional narrative often becomes an object of study. In contrast to

the general unifying tendency of the literature of the Soviet Union period, Ukrainian fictional narratives of the Independence period are characterized by the rapid crystallization of different local identities. The relationship between expressed local identities and the common Ukrainian identity is frequently examined in the early theoretical discourse whether emerging or established in prior traditions[1].

In their analyses of 1990s literature, critics[2] typically identified two primary trends: one adopting a local focus "to disclose the dignity of the nation," and the other seeking an international setting to define national dignity (Pavlyshyn, 2007, p. 89). Ievhen Pashkovskyj and Viacheslav Medvid' were the most famous representatives of the first trend, while Yuri Andrukhovych, Oleksandr Irvanets and Viktor Neborak represented the second trend by the literary activity of their group "Bu-Ba-Bu" (an abbreviation for "burlesque, balagan and buffoonery").

It should be noted that, despite being associated with particular areas (the central and western parts of Ukraine, respectively), both literary trends were based on a shared national identity. According to Marko Pavlyshyn, both of these positions (he refers to them as 'nativist' and 'Europhile') are merely different reactions to the consequences of Russia's long-term political dominance (p. 105).

This trend of diversifying local/urban identities on the common basis of Ukrainian national identity became more pronounced in 21st-century fiction. It currently refers to fictional representations in the following local texts: the "Kyiv text" (for example, in the novels *St. Andrew's Way* (2007) by Volodymyr Dibrova, *Love in Baroque Style* (2009) by Volodymyr Danylenko, *The City with Chimeras* (2009) by Oles Ilchenko), "Lviv text" (*Lviv Saga* (2010) by Petro Yatsenko, *Tango of Death* (2012) by Yuriy Vynnychuk, *Dom's Dream Kingdom* (2017) by Victoria Amelina), "Donbass text", connected with the current Russian-Ukrainian war (*The Orphanage* (2017) by Serhiy Zhadan, *Long Times* (2017) by Volodymyr Rafeienko, *Daughter* (2019) by Tamara Horiha Zernia, *Cecil the Lion's Death Made Sense* (2021) by Olena Stiazhkina), "Kharkiv text" (*Depeche Mode* (2004) and *Anarchy in the UKR* (2005) by Serhiy Zhadan), *Kharkiv 1938* (2017) by Oleksandr Irvanets), "Rivno text" (*Rivne/Rovno* (*The Wall*) (2002) by Oleksandr Irvanets). The aforementioned is by no means an exhaustive list of all the works in which local features of real Ukrainian cities/towns play an essential part in the narrative structure. In these cases, urban space provides not only a background for fictional events, but also a system of specific semantic codes that reinforce the messages of fictional narratives.

The turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is marked by special attention to the idea of a city in fictional and scholarly Ukrainian discourses, both as a fictional narrative and readable text. For instance, in the anthology "Leo's book: Lviv as a Text. Lviv Prose Underground of the 70-80s years of the 20th century" (2014), edited by Vasyl Gabor, Lviv text appears as a specific artistic system. As the editor states: "Readers can walk around this text like along the streets and even get lost in it" (p. 5).

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[1] Although some literary works of the Soviet period provided grounds for research of local/urban identity representation in their narrative (as, for instance, Lviv identity in the Iryna Vilde's fiction), such perspectives of studies were unofficially banned at that time and were adopted only after 1991. Only when Ukraine independence was proclaimed (or earlier - in diaspora), the idea has been formed that the main spatial dichotomy of the soviet Ukrainian literature was "center-periphery" confrontation in which Ukraine, of course, was presented as peripheral space, in contrast to the Russian center (about subsequent transformation of this idea see in: Ryabchuk, 2020, p. 150).

[2] For instance, in the researches: Kharchuk, 1998; Hnatiuk, 2006; Pavlyshyn, 2007.

An approach to the urban spaces as highly personalized narratives is represented in the book by Yurii Andrukhovych *The Lexicon of Intimate Cities* (2011). The author attempts to consider his autobiography through the prism of geography, to show in small texts one hundred and eleven different urban spaces as "personal, like erogenous zones, and intimate" (p. 7).

A number of researches in contemporary Ukrainian literary studies (and – more broadly – humanities) regard urban space in literature as a distinct narrative and textual phenomenon (for instance: Andrusiv, 2000; Fomenko, 2007; Lavrynovych, 2010; Mikhno, 2020, etc.) or even as a protagonist (for instance, in: Starovoit, 2008; Revakovych, 2018; Poliszczuk, 2018).

Diverse urban identities, adopted in contemporary Ukrainian fiction, do not, for the most part, undermine the cohesion of its common national identity[3]. However, there are a number of contemporary fictional works that demonstrate the other kind of identity which denies or confronts the national Ukrainian one. These are the texts that refer to the Soviet era. As Mykola Ryabchuk claims, although there are many divides in Ukrainian society, the main divide is "between two different types of Ukrainian identity: non/anti-Soviet and post/neo-Soviet, 'European' and 'East Slavonic'" (2015, p. 138).

The representative texts can be divided into two major groups depending on the utilization of soviet past memories as literary devices. In the first group, the plot is ingrained into the Soviet Ukraine chronotope (like in the novel *Klavka* (2019) by Maryna Hrymych or *Sweet Darusia* (2004) by Maria Matios). The second embeds the narrator's or characters' memories of soviet times in the present-day Ukraine chronotope, which is important for plot development or understanding of the works' essential ideas (for instance, in the novel *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* (2009) by Oksana Zabuzhko, *Amadoka* (2020) by Sofia Andrukhovych, and *Dom's Dream Kingdom* by Victoria Amelina).

The current article focuses on the second group of the forenamed fiction works, which refer to soviet times and depict the conflict between primordial national identity (or, later, pluralist identity) and the predatory soviet identity[4]. The plots and motifs of the narrators' or protagonists' reminiscences are embedded in the scenery of soviet cities, towns or villages in these works. It should be noted that, in these texts (as in reality in Ukraine's past), soviet urban and rural spaces are radically different. Whereas the Ukrainian rural space during the Soviet period did not undergo significant structural transformations in comparison to previous periods, the Ukrainian urban space underwent significant changes as a result of the schematic soviet town-planning policy, resulting in the loss of its individuality as well as the unification of spatial organization and symbolization of urban objects throughout Ukraine.

Thus, the emergence of the soviet urban identity can be due to the aforementioned tendency to unify highly specific urban spaces as a common one. According to Mariia Revakovych's observations of territorial identities of Ukrainian literature from 1991 to 2011, this is the exact case when "spatial and temporal parameters do not clash, but rather complement each other" (p. 53).

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[3]   In this regard, only Donetsk identity might be specific, about what Jaroslav Poliszczuk duly noted: "The problem of the researching of Donetsk's identity consists in the very fact that there is no clear manifestation of it in the modern culture" (p. 257).

[4] Meaning under "predatory identity" "chauvinistic, aggressive and militaristic expressions, often targeting societies that differ from them, in ethnic or religious terms" (Ahmed, 2018, p. 20).

Urban identity of this kind is being actualized in such novels as "Rivne/Rovno (The Wall)" and "Kharkiv 1938" by Oleksandr Irvanets, "St. Andrew's Way" by Volodymyr Dibrova, "Voroshilovgrad" by Serhiy Zhadan, "Biography of an Accidental Miracle" by Tania Maliarchuk, "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets" by Oksana Zabuzhko, "Tango of Death" by Yuriy Vynnychuk, "Dom's Dream Kingdom" by Victoria Amelina, "The Salmon" and "Amadoka" by Sofia Andrukhovych, "Cecil the Lion's Death Made Sense" by Olena Stiazhkina, "Who are You?" by Artem Chekh, etc.

The narrative specificity of these works arises from the urban environment and their authors' personal experiences, resulting in the narration's apparent subjectivity. In various ways, these texts adopt reminiscences of the urban environment of their authors' lives during the soviet period. These fictional worlds are generally developed on the flashbacks of a real biographical author (or other real people's reminiscences collected by an author). The vast majority of the authors of these works were born and spent a significant part of their lives in the Soviet Union. Personal and family memory, of course, is insufficient as a source of fictional material, but even documentary sources of these work's material still apply to somebody's subjective reminiscences.

The perception of recalled events and situations as traumagenic are a common feature of the author's or narrator's reflections on their past in these texts. Tamara Hundorova concludes that, in addition to memories of historical traumas, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist system itself can explain the post-traumatic nature of post-soviet literature (2016). We can also say that the identity crisis trauma caused by this collapse is narrated in the works under consideration through reconsideration of semantics and symbolism of urban space elements.

Theoretical framework

To clarify our interpretation of the narrative identity concept, we refer to the ideas of Paul Ricoeur who considers narrative identity as a specific experience of an individual or historical community based on the fusion of historical and fictional narratives (1991, p. 73).

The scholar distinguishes two major uses of this concept: "narrative identity as sameness" and "narrative identity as self". Taking into account that the notion "narrative identity as self" applies to a single human being rather than to the collective subjectness of the urban community, we focus here on the senses of "narrative identity as sameness". By explaining "narrative identity as sameness" in this way, Paul Riccoeur considers "uninterrupted continuity in the development" and "permanence over time" as one of its main senses (1991). The fictional urban identities in the previously mentioned works are endowed with both of these senses, and the narrated stories provide us with a sufficient time perspective to correlate the changes in urban identities with generational changes.

We should also consider the urban text's high identity-forming impact on the recipient when reading it. Susanne Mathies notes, in her analysis of Paul Riccoeur's narrative identity concept, that post-reading reflection and self-reconfiguration of the reader's processes are also crucial. Susanne Mathies, in particular, emphasizes the significance of emotions in changing one's self-narrative. As she states, "calling up her own experiential memories" for the reader can influence transformational processes (Mathies, 2020, p. 343). The impact of experiential memories on the reader's narrative identity formation is essential in our current research.

Paul Riccoeur accentuates that narrative identity is being formed through the "quasi-fictive" emplotment of the life events from which we obtain the life story, internal vision of a person's/community's own way against the background of historical events (1988). Due to the universality of their collective perspective, we might consider "urban literature" as a narrative identity bearer as well, because it figuratively discloses its own tale via the efforts of many authors-citizens. In such a situation, a city's narrative history set against the backdrop of national history can be considered equal to a personal life story[5]. In this framework, the urban community's collective memory is critical. As Jacques Goff claims, collective memory is crucial in identity-forming, and the collective identities are under threat in cases of voluntary or involuntary loss of this kind of memory (p. 53).

Community crises that affect everyone are the most important times for narrative identity formation. Cecilia Castillo Ayometzi stresses that personal identity-forming is most active in difficult times because then each person endures "reorganization of one's conception of self" (p. 44). The researcher generalizes that this reorganization has the creation of a collective identity (p. 44) as its by-product. Unfortunately, we have to admit that all of Ukrainian history, particularly its Soviet period, was full of crises, such as the Holodomor, Holocaust, World War II, totalitarian repression and even genocide and, in the Independence period – the Orange Revolution, the Revolution of Dignity, and the Russian war against Ukraine, all of which provoked individual self-reorganization in different generations. As a result, collective identity transformations occur both at the national and urban levels. Of course, the tragedies that befell Ukrainians during the Soviet era had to have an impact on identity formation. Special studies have been conducted on the influence of traumatizing identity-challenging experiences on identity. So, for example, Jennifer L. Pals' quantitative and qualitative studies prove that hardships in midlife lead to mostly positive emotional coloring of narrative identity, conditioned by obtaining a second chance in life after an identity-challenging experience (2006).

A space of traumatizing experience utilization for the sake of future generations echoes as "the redemptive self", a kind of narrative identity. In his book, Dan P. McAdams considers "redemption" as the way from suffering to a positive status. The redemptive-self narrative identity is based on the feeling of being blessed. Thus an individual or collective identity bearer permeates their sufferings with any meaning, such as that he/she will be rewarded for them with the future generations' happiness (2006).

This concept is prevalent in contemporary Ukrainian fiction. For instance, the protagonist of the novel *Tango of Death* by Yuriy Vynnychuk, our contemporary, Lviv resident Yarosh mysteriously "recollects" the life of Orest Barbaryka who lived in Lviv long before, in the time of World War II. Yarosh learns that Orest's father and four of his friends' fathers, soldiers of the Ukrainian People's Republic (a Ukrainian, a Pole, a German and a Jew), were executed by the Russians. This tragic death unites their sons, who afterwards contribute to the creation of a tune, bringing lost memory about historical calamities back to Lvivans and, in this way, rediscovering their lost identity. Thus, the sufferings of genocidal

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[5] Of course, there are some noticeable differences. For instance, the influence of social and institutional structures, usual in an individual story case (Ezzy, 1998, p. 250), in the urban narrative identity case is more significant. Also, it should be noted that in the context of cultural meaning of the urban space, the urban identity, more than an individual person's one, must be considered in its regard to cultural specific of the historical period (about the cultural context of narrative identity functioning, see: McAdams, 2011, p. 112).

victims are depicted here as a precursor for Lvivans' future recognition and handling of historical traumas, which eventually leads to freedom[6].

We believe it is appropriate to use the notion of "non-places" coined by French anthropologist Marc Augé in the study of such a spatially oriented narrative phenomenon as urban narrative identity[7]. In the book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* he contrasts two concepts – "a place" (or "an anthropological place") and "a non-place" ("a space"), and considers them in the context of identity erasure. The scholar states:

> If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, […] do not integrate the earlier places… (p. 77–78).

Marc Augé views as non-places mainly communal areas (hotels, airports, holiday clubs, refugee camps hospitals, etc.). He states that anthropological places are created by human individual identities – "through complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living know-how; non-place creates the shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers" (p. 77–78).

The basic thesis of this article regarding the opposition "a place – a non-place" in Ukrainian fictional narratives is that a Soviet period of Ukrainian urban development was represented in fiction as the predominance of non-places over places and, thus, as a period of erasure of urban identities. The unifying soviet urban planning policy ignored regional specifics in both communal areas and living spaces called to replicate the city layout of Moscow and the architecture of central USSR cities (far more modestly, since the peripheral urban areas should not overshadow the beauty of the center)[8].

The most telling example of this tradition is offered in Oksana Zabuzhko's novel *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*. The protagonist of the novel, Daryna Goshshinska, persistently recalls her father's life story. He worked as an engineer on the Palace Ukraina construction, a truly beautiful building in Kyiv which Daryna associated with magical fairy tales. However, because the Palace outperformed even the Kremlin Palace of Congresses in

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[6] In fact, idea of "the redemptive self" is working not only in regard of the urban community but in relation to the common national community too. As Volodymyr Kravchenko writes about influence of the last time Ukrainian's ordeals to the common identity reinforcement, "It took three revolutions to consolidate multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, and bilingual Ukrainians around the idea of a political nation oriented toward the future, not the past" (p. 204).

[7] Marc Augé's idea of non-places has much in common with Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia – a place "in which all the real arrangements […] that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable" (p. 332). Michel Foucault's heterotopias are aimed at the creation of a space of illusion which underscores illusiveness of real space and acts as compensation for its imperfection. In this research, between Marc Augé's and Michel Foucault's theories we choose Marc Augé's one as a main methodological framework since it is focused on the issue of transitionality in the context of identity changes that is essential for our study.

[8] As Marta Studenna-Skrukwa summarizes in her research of the image of Kharkiv in soviet propaganda texts, in the city representation to the world "the Ukrainian identity of the city was of marginal importance" (p. 82).

Moscow, it was "renovated," which meant that it was oversimplified to resemble "a humble provincial movie theater." And Daryna's father gave his life in an attempt to obtain justice – to punish those responsible for the "renovation" and to restore the building's original appearance. His struggle was futile, and the years of forced treatment in a mental institution killed him – so the soviet regime defeated him. This case, in fact, represents a transformation of a place (the Palace) into a non-place when unique features embedded in local traditions, and regional materials for decoration ("beech parquet", "the dove-gray, worsted-wool upholstery") were replaced by the faceless typical soviet view. It should be noted that this typical faceless architectural tradition was prevalent throughout all peripheral urban spaces. Xénia Gaál considers the House of Soviets in Kaliningrad as a special kind of emptiness disrupting the linear historical narrative: "The House of Soviets in Kaliningrad, as a representation of the special reality of the socialist-realist aesthetic, underlined the empty self-representation of the former Soviet era" (p. 249).

Further to that, we will consider the embodiment of soviet urban identity in contemporary Ukrainian fiction memory narratives, focusing on the distinctive features of Augé's non-places in the narrative representation of communal and living space.

Urban communal areas as "non-places"

The undivided integrity of practical and symbolic value is affirmed by the urban landscape. According to Philippe Perchoc: "Shaped by a human hand, landscapes, and especially urban landscapes, are designed for practical reasons, but also often to convey a message to the users" (p. 369). When it comes to fictional representations of landscape elements, their symbolic significance is doubled: the first level is explained by the symbolical intentionality of the spatial constructions in and of themselves; the second level is explained by the selectiveness of fictional narrative that includes symbolic spatial elements reinforcing main messages of the literary work.

According to Marc Augé, soviet communal settings are mainly regarded and represented by contemporary Ukrainian writers as dismal, faceless, transitory – as non-places. According to Tamara Hundorova's book *Transit Culture: Symptoms of Postcolonial Trauma*, transitionality is a vital indicator of postcolonial culture and post-totalitarian cultural memory (p. 12). According to Jaroslav Poliszczuk, non-places are sets of action in some contemporary literary works that require a person to forsake their identity because they are devoid of peculiarities (2018b).

Schools (kindergartens, pioneer summer camps), hospitals (the most characteristic – mental hospitals), grocery stores, squares (places of commemoration), monuments to soviet leaders, administrative buildings (executive committee buildings), and other non-places are among the most common soviet communal locations in contemporary Ukrainian fiction.

Many of these non-places are frequently depicted in a single text, stressing the meaning of a narrator's or protagonist's alienation and misery in urban and – wider – existential coordinates in its totality. For example, Sofia Andrukhovych's novel *The Salmon* tells the story of the protagonist Sophia's personal identity formation as she grew up in a soviet town. All six parts of the story provide detailed images of urban areas, including the kindergarten, mental hospital, summer leisure center, abandoned construction site and, finally, the protagonist's flat. All these places are shown as abandoned, and dilapidated: in the

kindergarten "faceless rooms were full of broken toys"[9] (p. 119); the mental hospital there was an "overgrown garden" enclosed by "the flaking wall" (p. 98), and the like. Another common trait of the aforementioned locales is the lack of private space – no one could call this place their own. It was, in fact, an inherent feature of the soviet urban environment: "Officially, private space did not exist during the Soviet era" – Jill Robinson summarizes soviet cities' spatial organization (p. 5). The settings in Sofia Andrukhovych's novel can be considered non-places because they all strengthen the protagonist's feelings of isolation, loss, and surveillance. It is hardly unexpected, however, that as she grows older, the girl struggles to grasp her own personal identification traits – what she actually likes and wants – and to safeguard her personal limits from the maniac (the metaphorical character to some extent).

In some contexts, the soviet communal regions' conventional non-places take on special authorial connotations. For example, in his novel *St. Andrew's Way*, Volodymyr Dibrova uses the image of a queue in the grocery shop as an existential symbol. This image follows the protagonist throughout his life as a symbol of the struggle for survival and the violence of humans toward their kind. Thus the author, in this image interpretation, bitterly limits the scope of personal identity to the biological essence of a human being.

Sometimes, even a city itself can acquire in the authorial narrative the status of a non-place. For example, Victoria Amelina, in her work "Dom's Dream Kingdom," about the lives of three generations of one family in Lviv after the proclamation of Ukrainian independence, portrays the city as devastated, nameless, and invisible: "The city […] turns its wounded sides on people, shows its balconies in disrepair, its walls skinned to the red bricks […]. No one can see it [Lviv]" (p. 138). The writer maintains in her novel and interviews that the Soviet period was a trauma for the city and that Lvivians have to recognise their pain to cope with the trauma's effects.

Oleksandr Irvanets' novel *Rivne/Rovno* (*The Wall*)[10] is a great example of artistic reflection in community spaces. This novel is notable for providing an excellent example of national identity blurring: the fictitious narrative depicts a battle between soviet and Western identities. And, ironically, it is the local urban identity that wins this battle.

The novel's events take place in the city of Rivne divided into two parts as a result of the eastern "Russian-Ukrainian" forces (pro-Russian, which is still Soviet in essence) invasion and the invaders' battle with the NATO army. The novel's premise follows playwright Shloima Etsirvan. On the day of his play's debut, the eastern city section authorities grant his request to visit his mother and sister who live in the western part of Rivno. Shloima goes since he has been waiting for this authorization for five years. There, he attends (sometimes involuntarily) places associated with his memories, while being continually watched by the secret police: his parents' flat, Shevchenko Park, the House of Ideological Work, the hospital, and so on. After his walk, Shloima finds himself in the basement office of Taras Panasovych Manasenko, the First Secretary of the Regional Committee, who blackmails him into "opening the City" – allowing easterners access to Rivne's currently locked western section. Initially discarding this idea, the protagonist, following his internal inclination, eventually unites two parts of Rivne into a whole one.

The novel's plot revolves around space, especially the symbolic areas of the city. Mariia Revakovych, a close reader of the text, observes: "there are only two main characters in the novel, the playwright Shloima Etsirvan and the city of Rivne" (p. 59). Rivne, at the

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[9] Here and later translation from Ukrainian is my own.

[10] The double title Rivne/Rovno reflects Ukrainian and Russian pronunciation of the city name.

beginning of the Ukrainian independence period, is reflected in the fictional narrative as a place with a muddled identity, as evidenced by spatial reorganizations and frequent renaming of places:

> In honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution, the local authorities radically changed the city center. They demolished several districts and established the Lenin square with the monument to Lenin on their place. Behind the Leader's back they built the October Cinema […]. Sometime in the mid-1990s the Leader was replaced by Taras Hryhorovych[11], whereas the cinema was renamed the Ukraine. But then, back in the days of the single city, since childhood, you've always been amazed and annoyed at such juxtaposition of the two large squares – the Theatre Square and the Lenin-Independence Square – as well as you thought that it was something ill-planned and even worse embodied. (Irvanets, 2002, p. 57)

On either side of the Wall, many streets in Rivne (Rovno) have alternative names: Soborna ("The Cathedral Street") becomes Lenin Street, Stepan Bandera Street (named after the Ukrainian independence fighter) becomes Moskow Street, and so on. Indeed, the map on a two-page spread in the Irvanets' book depicts this geography. The book also contains photographs of the city's most significant buildings, monuments and landscapes, which the author used in his narrative.

At first glance, the western and eastern city sections appear to represent the national and soviet identities in antagonism. However, upon closer examination, we can see that westerners are more concerned with the trappings of the western lifestyle: Johnnie Walker whisky, limousines, Old Spice perfume, designer clothing and so on. The primary actress Izabella and the producer of Shloima Etsirvan's play Maulvurf are both Germans. As a result, the Ukrainian national identity is only nominally expressed here.

Shloima visits the non-places in the city's eastern outskirts that remind him of his childhood and youth. They can be divided into two groups: 1) areas evoking nostalgia, such as the Shevchenko park and the school, and 2) areas evoking discomforts, such as the House of Ideological Work, the hospital and monuments, which remind the protagonist of the totalitarian state's ideological pressures and restrictions. There are also a few ambiguous locations, such as the morgue - the meaning of this image will be discussed later.

The non-places of both mentioned groups have in common such features as desolation and a dilapidated state: Shloima sees "dismal reinforced concrete enclosure of the vegetable-drying factory" (p. 33), "bumps in the road" (p. 34), "unfinished house" (p. 38), apartment block is like a "gray panel monster" (p. 33), and so on. Furthermore, this devastation has a property to "infect" people. So, after the day spent in the eastern part of Rivne, Shloima, who usually behaves as a well-mannered man, puts his cigarette out and tramples the butt under his feet.

The lengthiest are descriptions of the communal area belonging to the first group of non-places - Shevchenko Park. It's worth emphasizing that representations of this area are dense with sensorial details. When Shloima thinks of this park, he seems to be transported back to his childhood: "the park was breathing on the hills along the old center, absorbing

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[11] Shevchenko Taras Hryhorovych, the most famous Ukrainian poet, the founder of modern Ukrainian literature and the modern Ukrainian language.

everyday city's exhaustion, it wrapped everyone moving under the branchy vault," he says. The first cigarette, the first bottle of port wine, the first serious brawl, the first girl's kiss – there were so many initiations here in the shadow of these bushes by the majority of the town's inhabitants (including yourself)" (p. 58). In the park he feels like seeing "that other cozy, irretrievably lost, calm nice world in which all the bad stuff is far away" (p. 119). Even though the protagonist's view of Shevchenko Park relates to happy personal experiences, it remains a non-place, as well as a transitional area where many of Shloima's generation had similar experiences.

The romantic protagonist's reveries about his past serve an essential function in the novel plot according to Mariia Revakovych: they "underscore the hero's deep attachment to the local ambience regardless of its ideological and/or political line. It virtually prepares the reader to accept the unthinkable in the end, that is, a loss of freedom and democracy in exchange for having this city, Rivne, as one undivided entity" (p. 60).

The locations associated with Soviet-era ideology are depicted as non-places that cause discomfort and dissatisfaction but are accepted without question. The statue "The Woman Weaver" in front of the Textile Workers' Culture House is an example: "The massive woman figure on the pedestal bowed awkwardly, her legs moving together. 'She's the same ugly,' he observed. It's like reuniting with an old friend who is still alive after a long time apart. And she is the same" (p. 39).

One of the most important constituents of the second group of non-places semantics is the mortal code of their element descriptions. Images of death and cemeteries are frequently used in descriptions of the eastern part of the city. For instance, regarding the houses of the Stalin or Khrushchev projects, Shloima recollects their "entrances with wide stairways through which it was convenient to carry corpses in coffins" (p. 31). He mentions the contradictory name of the prestigious cemetery – "the Youth Graveyard" (p. 33). Moreover, mortal imagery had formed the basis of the protagonist's sexuality since Shloima's first really intense sexual attraction was his attraction to the dead girl he had occasionally seen in the morgue where his friend Olia Bliashana's father worked: "It was the first naked girl's body he had seen in his life. And, at the same time, it was the first dead human body he had seen in his life" (p. 66).

The ideological center of the district – The House of Ideological Work – was constructed on a demolished Jewish cemetery (p. 52). The First Secretary's room is located deep underneath the building, which relates to the idea of the Underworld, and this architectural construction corresponds to the view of the tomb ("the gray cube", p. 53).

So, we can see that the non-places of Rivne's eastern section, i.e. areas of Shoima's memories, are associated with mortal semantics yet, strangely, stimulate pleasant emotions in him, and this fact can do nothing but cause alarm regarding the crucial choice about Rivne's future that Shoima has to make.

The protagonist's eventual impulse to unite the city might come from his lack of a nationally based identity, as well as of all Rivne inhabitants' urban identities since they support the reunification. Mariia Revakovych draws an analogy between the finale of the novel and the real historical event – the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union resulting in years of the soviet terror and the loss of freedom for the western part of Ukraine in exchange for the unification of the two separate parts of the state (p. 60).

The novel by Irvanets can be seen as a cautionary tale about the perils of national identity erosion and the construction of local (urban) identities only based on personal and

generational superficial values. Non-places linked with the Soviet system are depicted as a tool for the authorities to exercise control over the inhabitants who do not even attempt to comprehend the full depth of their identity or learn all the lessons of the past.

Living areas as non-places

Although the term "non-place" is more commonly applied to communal areas, the total unification of soviet housing resulted in a lack of specificity; however, the uniqueness of private apartments gives us grounds to consider private housing as non-places as well. According to Oksana Zabuzhko, it was only after the USSR's collapse that "we all […] popped out of the same soviet-time honeycombs and started pupating in our truly individual homes" (p. 431).

Overpopulation, psychological discomfort and a lack of inner connections with an urban (and even national) identity are often represented in contemporary Ukrainian memory prose as reasons for the feeling of the personal characters' alienation, and temporariness of their own housing.

For example, the plot of Artem Chekh's novel *Who are You?* is set in Tymofij's, the protagonist, soviet and early post-soviet childhood memories. Because of his grandmother's friend Felix, who lives with them, the boy and his mother's normal life in their flat is impossible. Felix is a former soviet army officer suffering from severe PTSD as a result of his tour in Afghanistan. Tymofij considers his life at home to be uncomfortable and transitory, similar to that of a hostel (pp. 64-65). In this novel, there is a parallel between the non-place nature of the family flat, all urban (Cherkasy) space and, obviously, the entire USSR, which was full of people who suffered traumas as a result of the political regime.

The protagonist's inability to settle in, to turn his/her own dwelling into an anthropological place, in some works, is a result of the aforementioned post-soviet transitionality postulated by Tamara Hundorova, a feeling of homelessness felt by the generation born between 1970 and 1980. For example, Serhiy Zhadan's novel *Voroshilovgrad* tells the story of a fight between the protagonist Herman and local raiders over his missing brother's provincial gas station. Herman usually lives in odd places: a rented tipped-over shared apartment full of Soviet-era trash, a trailer near his absent brother's gas station, and so on. He does not feel at home in any of these non-locations. The tragedy of this character is that, in his search for identity, for belonging in the real world, he finds only emptiness. He compares his perception of his soviet past to his attitude toward the city of Voroshilovgrad, which he was asked to describe during his German lessons based on the postcard: "How can you speak about things you have never seen?" […] I have never been there. And there is no longer any Voroshilovgrad" (183). As a result, the man's identity is based on a non-existent image, emptiness, and his current life is just aimless wandering from one non-place to the next.

The novel *Dom's Dream Kingdom* by Victoria Amelina convincingly demonstrates transitionality and the non-place nature of living space. The life of three generations of a soviet colonel Cilyk family in the old Lviv apartment is shown through the first-person narration of a domestic poodle Dominik (Dom). Dom follows the evolution of the family since the time of Ukrainian independence. However, he tracks the origins of his owners' problems in the past[12] and notices Cilyks' disconnection from their true roots caused by the

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[12] For instance, the Colonel himself is a Holodomor survivor.

Soviets' neglect of Ukrainian identity. Two older generations of Dom's owners – the Colonel, his wife and his daughters, Olia and Tamara – remain figuratively blind, refusing to acknowledge the truth – that the Soviet regime has robbed them of their family memory. They have no sense of belonging, neither national nor urban. Despite having lived mostly in Lviv for many years, they never loved it and did not become a part of it. And the flat where they were living all that time did not turn into their "family nest."

According to Uljana Fedoriv's analysis of Amelina's novel, Lviv, where the Cilycks live, is still a non-place for the family (p. 66). However, it is possible to conclude that even Cilyck's private apartment is depicted in the novel as a non-place. After settling into this flat, the family (as is customary in a military family) felt ready to leave at any time. They "never unpacked completely – there was always something in the cardboard box that would surely come in handy in the future" (p. 42).

Only a younger member of the family, Olia's physically blind daughter, Marusia, is open to the historical truth. She is the only one who feels a genuine familiarity with the apartment they all share, as well as a genuine involvement in Lviv's life. Marusia is depicted not only as a bearer of urban Lviv identity but also as of national Ukrainian identity. That is why she (along with Dom, the narrator) participates in the Orange Revolution and fights for the identity she has just discovered for herself.

Such rootlessness, ignoring one's own history and a reluctance to engage with it, is viewed as dangerous in a novel. "Nostalgia for the Soviet Union kills," Victoria Amelina warned in a 2017 interview. In their 2021 analysis of Amelina's novel, Yaroslav Polishshuk and Oksana Puchons'ka consider the older Cilyck's mindset as a prerequisite of the contemporary Russian-Ukrainian war: "Indifference, partly hostility, of the soviet mentality followers to the revitalization of national identity became a basic deconstructive factor of the appearance of the social, political and – recently – military conflict in Ukrainian territory" (p. 144).

Hence, in the context of the soviet time ideological heritage, the private living space in memory fiction can be considered a form of non-place. Soviet time apartments, where contemporary Ukrainian fiction characters live, are frequently represented as temporary, faceless areas, the semantics of which correspond to the unifying and mortifying soviet identity.

Conclusion

The current study sought to examine the representation of a specific type of urban identity – the soviet urban identity – in contemporary Ukrainian fiction referring to memories of soviet times. The article views soviet urban identity as ideologically based, predatory and intentionally blurring the national and local/urban types of identity.

The most significant locations in typical soviet cities, whether communal or private, are considered non-places (Marc Augé), devoid of historicity and identity. It is concluded that, in contemporary Ukrainian prose, soviet urban development is represented as the predominance of non-places over places, symbolizing the erasure of primordial urban identities. The unifying soviet urban planning policy neglected both communal areas and living spaces, and it replicated the architecture specimens of central USSR cities.

Soviet communal areas are mostly seen and depicted by contemporary Ukrainian writers as bleak, faceless, transitional non-places that include primary schools, hospitals,

grocery stores (and the queues to them), commemorative sites, monuments to soviet leaders, administrative buildings, and so on. The novel *Rivne/Rovno* (*The Wall*) by Oleksandr Irvanets, which can be interpreted as a warning against citizens' loss of independence and freedom as a result of identity alienation, was used to demonstrate the destructive influence of non-places semantics on the formation of urban and national identity.

The mortifying soviet identity's influence on the private sphere of Ukrainian life was examined using material from Victoria Amelina's novel *Dom's Dream Kingdom*, which described a situation of dangerous rootlessness, ignoring one's own history and thus condemning the younger generation to repeat the elders' historical mistakes in their own future.

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