Community Archiving as Resistance to Epistemic Erasure in the Ukrainian East, 2014–2023

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In his seminal essay on archival power and its limits, the political historian and anticolonial critic Achille Mbembe reminds us that the archive, rather than a neutral repository of knowledge, is "a matter of discrimination and selection, [resulting] in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged 'unarchivable'. The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status".[1] Mbembe has not been alone in highlighting the exclusionary politics of the archive. In their 2017 "A Manifesto for Feminist Archiving (or Disruption)", for example, the feminist arts and heritage collective Digital Women's Archive North foreground these same processes of selection and deselection in the production of archival knowledge: "An archive becomes such because individuals decide that certain pieces of knowledge and data should be collected and retained following initial generation and use", the collective writes. "This is a political act: we select material to retain at the expense of other material or data. In selecting certain content we announce to future users that this material holds importance (to someone, for some purpose). Often the identity of the archivist or collector is secondary (or absent)".[2]

Building on these insights into the hierarchical, often colonially informed politics of archive-making, scholars have in recent years begun to draw attention to 'community archiving' as a means of recuperating marginalised histories and, as the Professor of Archival Studies Michelle Caswell argues, of "catalyz[ing] these histories for liberation".[3] 'Community archiving', defined as archival work conducted 'with' and 'for' the communities represented rather than 'about' them, is revealed in this scholarship as "liberatory memory work" capable of "releas[ing] societies from

1 Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits", in: Carolyn Hamilton et al. (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002, 20.

2 Digital Women's Archive North, "The Feminists Are Cackling in the Archive", *Feminist Review* 115, 2017, 155–164, here 157.

3 Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work*, Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 2021, 8.

cycles of violence, prejudice, and hatred and instead [creating] vibrant and conscious societies that strive to achieve a just balance of individual and collective rights".[4] In Ukraine, as I argue in this chapter, 'liberatory memory work' of the sort described by Caswell has been pursued by activist communities and their international collaborators with growing urgency since Russia first invaded the country in 2014. With conversations about epistemic imperialism and calls for the decolonisation of knowledge infrastructures intensifying following the escalation of the war in 2022, this work is advancing at pace. In this chapter, I propose to analyse this activity through the lens of 'community archiving' scholarship, drawing on empirical findings from long-term field research and interviews in eastern Ukraine, a region rich in industrial history and heritage.

Industrial heritage has long been a problematic category in post-independence Ukraine. Following the outbreak of war in the east, a region with a high concentration of industrial heritage objects and collections, and the decommunisation laws in 2015, its status became increasingly precarious. Deindustrialisation, military conflict, and strategic shifts in cultural memory politics – the entangled politics of which I discuss in more detail below – meant that many objects of industrial architecture, material culture, and archival collections were abandoned as 'historical trash'. In this context and related to the growth in activist self-organisation after 2014, a number of community and grassroots initiatives emerged to preserve this part of the region's historic legacy. From activist archiving to guerrilla preservation, these initiatives presented a wide spectrum of extra-state activity. With the escalation of the war in February 2022, these initiatives, now displaced from the occupied east, continued their work at a distance, resisting the region's cultural erasure.

This chapter draws on interviews and participant observation work conducted with activist communities and heritage practitioners in the Ukrainian east before February 2022 and online interviews conducted since the beginning of the escalation. It details the conditions of composite precarity in which grassroots and community preservationist initiatives emerged in the region after 2014 and explores how participants in these initiatives understood their work. The chapter argues that the infrastructure of voluntarism formed in these years provided the foundation for a new wave of preservationist work after February 2022. With Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, activist networks mobilised to carry out the cultural preservation work that the Ukrainian state was too overextended or under-resourced to do itself. This included the museum evacuation work undertaken by the NGO Museums Crisis Center, volunteer 3D-visualisation initiatives that digitally mapped damaged heritage objects, and a multimedia project to digitally document the displaced communities of occupied Mariupol.

4 Ibid., 13.

Industrial Heritage Preservation before 2022: Dereliction and Petrifaction

On 1 May 2022, a red-brick gymnasium, part of the "Prosvita" cultural and educational complex built by the 19th-century Belgian managers of the Lysychansk soda plant, burnt to the ground following Russian bombing. The gymnasium's ruination was just a drop in an ocean of heritage destruction underway in Ukraine at this time and drew relatively little attention beyond the community of activists who had worked for many years to preserve the region's industrial material heritage. For this group, however, the building's destruction was deeply symbolic. Since the occupation of parts of the country's eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions by illegal, Russian-backed militias in 2014, civic activists had been engaged in the promotion of the Donbas's 'European' history and heritage, partly as a means of combatting the toxic 'Russian World' propaganda issuing from the occupied territories.[5] The destruction of the Belgian gymnasium, one of the most significant architectural relics from the era of foreign capitalist investment in the Ukrainian east, was consequently understood as an attack on this memory, part of the Russian Federation's genocidal war of cultural erasure.

While the full-scale invasion posed an unprecedented threat to this legacy, the status of industrial heritage was precarious even before 2022. With the privatisation of industry in the 1990s, many of the region's factories and plants had been catastrophically mismanaged by oligarchic elites, sent into liquidation, or sold off for parts.[6] The caustic soda factory in Lysychansk, for example, had been gradually dismantled over the course of ten years. Once the main premises had been blown up and the historic cableway (a kind of cable car system for coal) removed, all that was left was a devastated expanse. Similar cases could be found across the eastern region.[7] The Azovmash machine-building plant (formerly the Belgian-owned Providence factory) in Mariupol had likewise been forced into liquidation in the first decade of the 2000s, leaving hundreds of workers unemployed.[8] When I visited the site in winter 2021, all that remained of the premises was a field of rubble punctuated by tall chimney stacks (Fig. 20). The rich complex of Belgian-built, 19th-century industrial

5 Elements of this activist work were documented in the film *EuroDonbas* (2022), directed by Kornyi Hrytsiuk. The film was accompanied by a podcast series exploring the European (in particular German) architectural and cultural heritage of the Donbas region.

6 For the most comprehensive accounts of these processes, see: Denys Kazanskyi and Maryna Vorotyntseva, *Yak Ukraina vtrachala Donbas* (*How Ukraine Lost the Donbas*), Kyiv: Cherna hora, 2020; and Yuliya Yurchenko, *Ukraine and the Empire of Capital: From Marketisation to Armed Conflict*, London: Pluto Press, 2018.

7 Interview with Vitalyi Matukhno, resident of Lysychansk and cultural activist, online, June 2022.

8 Interview with Andryi Prokhopov, resident of Mariupol and factory manager, Mariupol, November 2021.

architecture, proudly featured in archival postcard photography, was barely identifiable among the wreckage.[9]

Industrial heritage preservation posed a unique set of problems for the post-independence Ukrainian state. As the historians of Ukrainian monotowns Iryna Sklokina and Volodymyr Kulikov have pointed out, the associations of this legacy with celebratory Soviet narratives of industrial modernity and proletarian consciousness marked it out as 'difficult heritage' after 1991.[10] Qualifying neither as religious nor civic architecture, categories that were prioritised in the preservationist legislation of the post-Soviet era, few objects of industrial architecture were designated as heritage after 1991.[11] The result was that many historic industrial buildings fell into dereliction in the years that followed. With the outbreak of war in the east in 2014, it became increasingly difficult for local authorities to attract the external funding necessary for the adaptation of these sites as commercial spaces or cultural venues. Consequently, many buildings were abandoned to their fates, being overtaken by wildlife or dismantled by enterprising locals who used the construction materials in their own projects (Fig. 21).[12]

9 For late 19th- and early 20th-century archival photographs of the Providence plant, see the collections from the Mariupol Local History Museum digitised through the Un/Archiving Post/Industry project in 2020–2021, now accessible through the Center for Urban History's Urban Media Archive: Urban Media Archive, https://uma.lvivcenter.org/en/photos?full-search=mariupol [accessed: 06.06.2024].

10 Volodymyr Kulikov and Iryna Sklokina, "Industrial Heritage and Its Multiple Uses in Donbas, Ukraine", *REGION: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 10/1, special issue *Donbas Imaginaries: Heritage, Culture, Communities*, January 2021, 33–60.

11 In addition to the administrative complex around the Belgian-built soda factory in Lysychansk, protected 19th-century industrial heritage sites in the Ukrainian east included the following: the residential complex and administrative buildings around the Alchevsk Metallurgy Plant in the Luhansk region (occupied since 2014); two mill buildings that belonged to German Mennonites in New York and the Novogrodovsk community; the ruined office building of the Joint-Stock Company "Dziewulski and Lange" in Sloviansk; the Palace of Culture and Technology at the Novokramatorsk Machine Building Plant in Kramatorsk; and Shop No. 1 of the Avtosklo Plant in Kostiantynivka (though the reference number was never assigned). A number of other sites were in the process of being registered when the full-scale invasion took place in February 2022. My thanks to Mykhailo Kulishov for his help compiling this list.

12 See "'Druhe zhyttia' industrial'noi spadshchyny" ("The 'Second Life' of Industrial Heritage"), a section of the exhibition *Ekolohiia u Fokusi* (*Ecology on Camera*), curated by Dmytro Bilko, Victoria Donovan, Volodymyr Kulikov, and Iryna Sklokina, produced through the Un/Archiving Post/Industry project in 2022: *Ecology on Camera*, "The 'second life' of Industrial Heritage", https://ecology.lvivcenter.org/en/industrial-heritage.html [accessed: 06.06.2024].

Figure 20: Azovmash (formerly the Providence factory) in Mariupol

Image by author, November 2021.

If the architectural legacy of industry was falling quickly into dereliction, industrial museum heritage was, by contrast, preserved in a form almost entirely unreconstructed from the Soviet era. Factories in the Ukrainian east often had their own museums. These were promotional institutions founded in the 1960s and 1970s that were intended to exhibit industrial achievements to local audiences and visiting delegations.[13] Following the privatisation of industry in the 1990s, these museums were acquired by new oligarchic owners, who adapted the displays for their own purposes. The museums often preserved the narrative arc of their Soviet predecessors, tweaking their beginnings and endings to reflect the new capitalist reality. The museums that I visited in Kramatorsk, Sieverodonetsk, and Mariupol thus all retained their focus on the factory's provisioning role, local hero workers, and technological achievements. By contrast with the deindustrialising landscapes outside their windows, they gave no impression of the socioeconomic decline that had consumed the region after 1991.

13 Kulikov and Sklokina, "Industrial Heritage and Its Multiple Uses in Donbas, Ukraine", 40–41.

Figure 21: Ruins of a 19th-century, Belgian-built office of the Bakhmut salt mine. In the foreground is a stack of bricks collected from the building, presumably for use in a DIY construction project.

Image by author, July 2021.

A key theme in industrial museum exhibitions was that of paternalistic care. The factory was celebrated in the displays as the heart of the community, the builder of residential housing and schools, the founder of popular literacy and culture, and the sponsor of theatres and palaces of culture, sports clubs, and oases of na-

ture.[14] Exhibitions of paternalistic care were often accompanied by formalised expressions of thanks from the local community. The foyer of Novokramatorsk Machine-Building Plant (NKMZ) Museum in Kramatorsk, for example, was occupied by a folding display board detailing the factory's achievements, in front of which stood a plastic installation of the words "I ♥ NKMZ" (Fig. 22). The intention was that people visiting the museum would take pictures with the installation and share these on social media. This contemporary expression of gratitude to the factory management for the improvement of community life resembled the expressions of gratitude to the Soviet leadership Jeffrey Brooks describes in his book *Thank You, Comrade Stalin*.[15] Looking beyond the Soviet context, parallels can also be found in exhibitions in the colonies of the British Empire, where emphasis was placed on the transformative, modernising role the industrialising imperial system had played in the regulation and provisioning of local community life.[16]

Figure 22: Entry hall to the NKMZ Museum in Kramatorsk

Image by author, July 2021.

14 Fieldnotes based on excursions around the AZOT Museum in Sievierodonetsk in July 2019, the NKMZ Machine Building Plant Museum in Kramatorsk in July 2021, and the Ilych Iron and Steelworks Museum in November 2021.

15 Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

16 See, for example: Sugata Ray, "Colonial Frames, 'Native' Claims: The Jaipur Economic and Industrial Museum", *The Art Bulletin* 96/2, June 2014, 196–212.

Another theme of industrial museum exhibitions was that of generational continuity. This idea was most powerfully expressed in the visual tradition of the 'family dynasty'. With its roots in the Soviet era, this practice involved photographing family members of different generations, all of whom had worked at the same enterprise, and calculating the collective number of years of their service. At the AZOT nitrogen plant in Sievierodonetsk, for example, an album was on display showing portraits of worker families such as the Fadeevs, 13 members of which had worked at the chemical plant for a collective total of 275 years.[17] At the Ilych Iron and Steelworks Museum in Mariupol, which I visited in November 2021, the tradition had been given a modern twist. With declining numbers of local young people choosing to work at the factory, Metinvest (Rinat Akhmetov's steel and mining company, which owned the factory) decided to reboot the 'family dynasty' theme.[18] A glamorous new gallery of dynastic families with high-quality photographs and details of their contributions was created in the corridor at the end of the exhibition (Fig. 23). In addition, factory workers were invited to claim monetary rewards in the form of vouchers for goods sold in Metinvest-run stores and calculated in accordance with their family's total number of years of labour.[19]

Without the State I: Self-Organisation and Civic Archiving

Industrial heritage preservation in the Ukrainian east was thus characterised by state neglect, on the one hand, and institutional anachronism, on the other. Faced with this reality, local activist communities in the region mobilised to enact change on their own terms. In her 2022 monograph on self-organisation during the Maidan Revolution, Emily Channell-Justice writes about the "withdrawal of the state" in post-independence Ukraine. She explains that the neoliberalising Ukrainian state displaced many of its governmental responsibilities to non-state actors – NGOs and volunteers – normalising the 'citizen-as-activist' model of participation in public life.[20] This tendency towards self-organisation was in evidence when I travelled through the eastern Donbas region between 2019 and 2021. Volunteer organisations and cultural activists, many of whom had been displaced from occupied urban centres such as Donetsk and Luhansk to cities such as Sievierodonetsk, Bakhmut, Kramatorsk, and Mariupol after 2014, were playing an important role in the region's

17 Fieldnote from excursion around the AZOT Museum in Sievierodonetsk, July 2019.

18 Interview with Artem Bereznev, resident of Mariupol and factory workshop manager, November 2021.

19 Interview with Iryna Badasen, resident of Mariupol and director of the Ilych Iron and Steelworks Museum, November 2021.

20 Emily Channell-Justice, *Without the State: Self-Organization and Political Activism in Ukraine*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022, 26–28.

heritage politics.[21] Rather than waiting indefinitely for the state to formulate adequate responses to the manifest challenges facing local communities, these activist groups were pursuing direct action. As Channell-Justice explains, such activist work followed a simple, self-propelling logic: "if something needs to be done and a person has the ability to do it, then the person should simply do it".[22]

One of the organisations independently involved in questions of industrial heritage management in the east was the NGO DE-NE-DE.[23] Founded in 2016, this group of heritage experts, mostly from Kyiv and Lviv, coordinated projects with local history museums in the east with the intention of fostering more critical approaches to heritage collections and practices of display. In 2019, I visited Mykola Lomako, the director of the Lysychansk Local History Museum, who had recently partnered with DE-NE-DE on the project The Museum Is Open for Restoration. As part of this collaboration, DE-NE-DE and the museum had curated the exhibition *Svitlohrad Museum*, comprising artist-led engagements with different museum objects and artefacts. The exhibition included a work by Kseniia Hnilitska, formed of a collection of Soviet sculptures, their backs turned towards the viewer, gazing at a wall painting of a pastoral scene.[24] By contrast with unreconstructed displays at the region's privately owned factory museums, where industrial heritage was heavily ideologised and made to work for the promotional purposes of the enterprise, *Svitlohrad Museum* offered a radical reimagining of the role of heritage in the decommunisation process. Here the material culture of the past was shown as having agency of its own, resisting its instrumentalisation by political elites and engaging in the process of imagining its own future. Rather than state-led, this radical heritage initiative was the result of local actors "simply do[ing] it" themselves.

Another example of self-organisation around industrial heritage preservation was the Un/Archiving Post/Industry project led by the Center for Urban History

21 For an account of post-2014 art activist initiatives, in particular feminist activism, in the region, see, for example: Irina Kuznetsova, "The Feminist Geopolitics of Donbas: The Role of Art in Challenging Bordering", *REGION: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 10/1, special issue *Donbas Imaginaries: Heritage, Culture, Communities*, January 2021, 61–83; for more on the role of displaced activists in the development of cultural life in the government-controlled east after 2014, see: Dmytro Chepurnyi, "Podolaty roz'iednannie: suchasne mystetstvo Skhodu Ukrainy" ("Overcoming Disconnection: Contemporary Art of Ukrainian East"), in: Victoria Donovan and Darya Tsymbalyuk (eds.), *Mezhi kolaboratsii: Mystetstvo, etyka ta Donbas* (*Limits of Collaboration: Art, Ethics, and Donbas*), Kyiv: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2022, 296–305.

22 Channell-Justice, *Without the State*, 28.

23 See: DE-NE-DE (Facebook page), https://www.facebook.com/denedenede/ [accessed: 08.03.2023].

24 Roman Huba, "'Svitlohrad': mystets'ka utopiia na Donbasi" ("'Svitlohrad': An Artistic Utopia in Donbas"), *VELYKAIDEIA* (*BIGIDEA*), 21 March 2017, https://biggggidea.com/practices/svitlograd-mistetska-utopiya-na-donbasi/ [accessed: 06.06.2024].

in Lviv and a team of researchers (including myself and the project research assistant Viktoriia Grivina) at the University of St. Andrews, in partnership with local history museums in Mariupol, Pokrovsk, and Kramatorsk (relocated from Donetsk).[25] Identifying the vulnerability of industrial heritage collections at museums across the east, this project was primarily a digitisation initiative that resulted in the digital archiving of approximately 30,000 photo negatives and around 90 hours of archival film. The project included a series of public-facing activities, including home movie days, exhibitions, public lectures, workshops, and summer schools, which encouraged community engagement with the digitised collections. Like DE-NE-DE's The Museum Is Open for Restoration project, Un/Archiving Post/Industry was an initiative led in partnership with local museums to foster a critical conversation around the politics of historical representation. Rather than abandoning industrial heritage as 'historical trash' or preserving it in uncritical Soviet-era forms, the project aimed to 'un-archive' new narratives and experiences from Ukraine's industrial past, which until then had been marginalised in official history.[26]

Beyond NGO engagements with local museum collections, cultural activists in the Ukrainian east were involved in their own civic archiving projects. These projects were often born from conditions of precarity resulting from years of economic decline, deindustrialisation, and war. Mykhailo Kulishov's digital archiving project Mines and Pits of Donbas,[27] for example, began life as a physical collection of books on industrial themes that Kulishov had purchased in and around his home city of Horlyvka. When Horlyvka was occupied in 2014, Kulishov was forced to abandon his library and began to work instead on building the digital collection, which he believed was a more sustainable means to continue work on the project.[28] Meanwhile, in nearby Sievierodonetsk, the mass abandonment of industrial heritage

25 Un/Archiving Post/Industry was a project realised by the Center for Urban History of East Central Europe and the University of St. Andrews, in partnership with the Mariupol Local History Museum, Pokrovsk Historical Museum, and Donetsk Regional History Museum. It was supported by the Global Challenges Research Fund and the House of Europe, 2019–2021: Iryna Sklokina and Viktoriia Grivina, "Un/Archiving Post/Industry", Center for Urban History, https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/researches/un-archiving-post-industry/ [accessed: 08.03.2023].

26 See, for example, the publication by project partner Dmytro Bilko, "Vybrakovani svitlyny ta kanon pizn'oradians'koi shkil'noi fotohrafii" ("Rejected Photographs and the Canon of Late-Soviet School Photography"), *YourArt*, July 2021, https://supportyourart.com/columns/vybrakovani- svitlyny-ta-kanon-piznosovyetskoyi-shkilnoyi-fotografiyi/ [accessed: 08.03.2023].

27 Shakhty i rudnyky Donbasu: Industrial'na fotohrafiia. Girnychopromyslove kraieznavstvo (Mines and Pits of Donbas: Industrial Photography. Local Mining History), https://www.donmining.info [accessed: 08.03.2023].

28 Interview with Mykhailo Kulishov, resident of Bakhmut and interdisciplinary researcher, online, July 2022.

sites and the vulnerability of historical artefacts contained within these buildings prompted a group of cultural activists based at the +/– Art Residency to begin curating an Archive of Deindustrialisation. Scouring the region's abandoned factories, the group collected objects that had been discarded as historically worthless, giving them new lives as parts of mosaics, installations, and digital photography (Fig. 24).[29] Both initiatives present examples of self-organisation as a response to failures on the part of the state to preserve and manage industrial heritage.

Figure 23: Hall of family dynasties at the Ilych Iron and Steelworks Museum in Mariupol

Image by author, November 2021.

29 For a more detailed account of this activity and interviews with key practitioners, see: Victoria Donovan and Darya Tsymbalyuk, "Vid *ruin porn* do 'zabroshka-erotyky': Doslidzhennia Viktorii Donovan ta Dar'i Tsymbaliuk pro Sievierodonets'k" ("From Ruin Porn to 'Zabroshka Erotica': A Study of Sievierodonetsk by Victoria Donovan and Darya Tsymbalyuk"), *YourArt*, July 2021, https://supportyourart.com/stories/vid-ruin-porn-do- zabroshka-erotyky/ [accessed: 08.03.2023].

Figure 24: 'Historical trash' collected from abandoned factories stored at +/– Art Residency in Sieverodonetsk, forming part of the Archive of Deindustrialisation

Image by Oleksandr Kuchysnkyi, 2019. Image provided courtesy of Oleksandr Kuchysnkyi.

It is useful to consider this extra-state preservationist activity in the context of scholarly work around 'community archiving' as resistance to epistemic injustice and erasure. How can we understand the different imperatives to archive and collect in the face of growing precarity and the motivations of the different actors involved in this work? In her introduction to *Urgent Archives*, Caswell notes that it is important to distinguish between community activist archives, in which communities have autonomy over practices of archiving and preservation, and extractivist preservationist practices, usually well-funded and often linked with universities, that "collect materials from local communities without entering into an ongoing relationship of care".[30] While driven by different actors and institutions, I would argue that all of the initiatives discussed above fall into the category of 'community archiving', and that they manifest an 'ongoing relationship of care' with local communities around questions of preservation and professional integrity.[31] Both the NGO/museum collaborations and the civic archiving initiatives were realised 'with' and 'for'

30 Caswell, *Urgent Archives*, 17.

31 I discuss in more detail the long-term engagement of local partners in the Un/Archiving Post/Industry project as an example of ethical, nonexploitative international collaboration in my *ASEEES NewsNet* blog post: Victoria Donovan, "The (Sorry) State of the Field or Why Western Humanists Need to Listen in Silence and Solidarity", *ASEEES NewsNet*, 20 January

the communities represented, rather than extracting cultural resources from them to the benefit of external organisations. This ongoing relationship of care developed in new directions following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. At this time, professional networks established between 2014 and 2022 reactivated to provide urgent support for emergency preservation work and for colleagues at risk.

Without the State II: Activist Archiving after February 2022

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022, the preservation of industrial heritage was far from the first item on state policy agendas. In the context of the mass atrocities and mass destruction of urban infrastructure and cultural heritage across the country, the value of this already deprioritised cultural legacy depreciated further. As Diána Vonnák notes, state perceptions of the eastern Donbas region as lacking in cultural value informed the politics of emergency preservation during this time.[32] The Ukrainian state was slow to mobilise to help museums in the east after February 2022, failing to issue either guidelines or funding to support their evacuation. Even though museum collectives had been living with the threat of invasion for many years, and for some this was the second displacement after 2014, many still felt unprepared for full-scale war. Without adequate state intervention, professionals were left to decide for themselves how best to ensure the survival of their collections and whether to evacuate independently or abandon museums to occupation.[33]

Forced into acting once more 'without the state', NGOs and activists emerged as the primary drivers of wartime heritage preservation projects. Existing activist networks reanimated to respond to the new conditions of hyper-precarity and cultural erasure in the east. Thus, members of DE-NE-DE founded the Museums Crisis Center in the immediate aftermath of the war, offering practical support to museums in the east with the packaging and transportation of their collections.[34] In an interview

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2023, https://www.aseees.org/news-events/aseees-news-feed/january-issue-newsnet-available [accessed: 08.08.2023].

32 Diána Vonnák, "'This Happened to Us for the Second Time': War-Preparedness, Risk, Responsibility and the Evacuation of Donbas Museums in 2022", *Museum & Society* 21/2, 2023, 4–16, here 5.

33 Vonnák, "'This Happened to Us for the Second Time'", 8–9.

34 For an account of the activities of this organisation since the full-scale invasion, see Olha Honchar's intervention on the panel "Zberezhennia i zakhyst" ("Preservation and Protection") at the Symposium *Viina v Ukraini: Bytva za kul'turu. Mizhnarodnyi forum z bezpeky kul'turnoi spadshchymy* (*War in Ukraine: The Battle for Culture. International Forum on Safety of Cultural Heritage*), from 38:32: Shtab poriatunku spadshchyny/ Heritage Emergency Response Initiative (Facebook page), "Preservation and protection", Facebook video, 01:41:17, 09 Febru-

conducted in June 2022, one of the members of the Crisis Center team explained that it was thanks to the organisation's long-term work with museums through the The Museum Is Open for Restoration project that the relationships of trust were established to allow this activist-supported evacuation work to take place.[35] The growth in activist self-organisation after 2014 consequently laid the groundwork for the volunteer-driven emergency archiving work in the eastern region after February 2022.

The professional networks fostered between heritage professionals, researchers, and academics through the Un/Archiving Post/Industry project likewise provided a framework for emergency preservation work following the full-scale invasion. Particularly vulnerable heritage collections at the Mariupol Museum of Local Lore, which were subsequently looted by invading Russian soldiers and transported to Donetsk, were urgently digitised, preserving copies of unique photographic collections and newspaper archives for future generations of researchers. Following the first, most urgent phase of preservation work, relationships of care and solidarity were manifested in exchanges between project partners in Ukraine and the UK, where discussions took place around questions of precarious heritage, the politics of cultural erasure, and digital archiving as resistance and activism.[36] Future partnerships, collaborations, and funding, with the aim of supporting and facilitating the work of partners in the Ukrainian east, striving to preserve their local heritage, were also envisioned and planned.

While little could be done to protect objects of architectural heritage in the face of full-scale war, volunteer-run digitisation projects innovated responses to the question of how to preserve the country's architectural legacies. Notable examples of such initiatives included the #SaveUkrainianHeritage project at Skeiron, which carried out 3D scans of architectural monuments, mostly in the Lviv and Kyiv areas; Scan UA, which used 3D scanning and photogrammetry to create digital models of destroyed heritage objects in the Kyiv and Kharkiv areas; and the War Up Close project, which made 3D models and virtual tours of architectural ruination in the

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ary 2023, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=717426099785591 [accessed: 08.03.2023].

35 Interview with Leonid Marushchak, founding member of DE-NE-DE, conducted by Diána Vonnák, online, 03 May 2022.

36 "Durham and Donbas in Focus", an international workshop at Spennymoor Town Hall in Durham, England, on 26 May 2023. See: Nicola Craddock, "Durham and Donbas in Focus", Redhills, 03 May 2023, https://redhillsdurham.org/durham-and-donbas-in-focus/ [accessed: 08.08.2023]. The workshop was organised and funded as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council project "Donbas in Focus: Visions of Industry from the Ukrainian East", AH/V001051/1.

Kyiv, Kharkiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions.[37] Again, the deprioritisation of the cultural heritage of the Donbas region, combined with the difficulty of accessing the eastern territory because of ongoing fighting in the area, meant that few of these projects engaged the industrial heritage of the east. An exception in this regard is the NGO Pixelated Realities, based in Bakhmut, where the press correspondent Mykhailo Sharkov was bravely conducting digitisation work in conditions of full-scale war.[38]

Kulishov's Saltway project also used 3D-visualisation technology as a means of preserving industrial heritage sites.[39] Initiated before the full-scale invasion and supported since 2022 with funding from the arts and culture NGO IZOLYATSIA: Platform for Cultural Initiatives, this project digitally documented places of interest linked to the Donetsk region's historic salt-mining industries. Navigating the site using the website's 3D-visualisation technology, the visitor could explore the naturally occurring salt plains and saltwater ponds around Sloviansk, descend into the cavernous salt mines of Soledar, and visit the architectural heritage objects connected with the industry. Since many of the places documented in Saltway are, at the time of writing, occupied by the Russian Army, the website provides privileged access to heritage objects that form an important part of the region's cultural identity. Like the Museum Crisis Center, Kulishov's Saltway project drew on activist heritage practices developed in the post-2014 period, expanding and enhancing these to respond to the increased vulnerability and precarity of industrial heritage after February 2022.

One more experimental example of activist work to preserve the legacies of the industrial east was Mariupol Memory Park (MMP).[40] An online multimedia archive of essays, creative writing, visual art, filmmaking, and audio storytelling, the project commemorated the diversity of cultural life in the southern steel-making city on the

37 Skeiron, "#SaveUkrainianHeritage", https://skeiron.com.ua/saveukrainianheritage/ [accessed: 08.03.2023]; Scan UA, https://scanua.com/ [accessed: 08.03.2023]; and War Up Close, "War in 360°", https://war.city/destructions-in-vr/ [accessed: 08.03.2023].

38 For more information about NGO Pixelated Realities, see: Donechchyna v evakuatsii (The Donetsk Region in Evacuation), "3D i restavratsiia: Yak riatuiut' arkhitekturu v Ukraini" ("3D and Restoration: How to Preserve Ukraine's Architecture"), YouTube video, 06:11, 27 January 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6OHE28Sft0 [accessed: 08.03.2023].

39 "Shliakh, poznachenyi silliu" ("Saltway"), a project by Mykhailo Kulishov, realised with the support of IZOLYATSIA: Platform for Cultural Initiatives: Saltway, https://saltway.in.ua/saltway-vr/ [accessed: 08.03.2023].

40 Mariupol' skyi park pam'iati (Mariupol Memory Park), a project by the NGO Freefilmers, produced by Sashko Protyah and coedited by Nychka Lishchynska, Victoria Donovan, and Diána Vonnák (2022–present): Mariupol Memory Park, https://www.mariupolmemorypark.space/ [accessed: 08.03.2023].

Sea of Azov before its brutal siege and occupation by Russian forces. Including documentary artwork of the city's industrial architecture and landscapes[41] and audio stories dedicated to unexpected encounters with local slag heaps (*terikony*), MMP is an archive of the intangible heritage of industry: the experiences of life in the toxic orbit of heavy industry, the (activist) values associated with this life, and the visual and creative cultures that emerged within these contexts. Like Kulishov's Saltway project, MMP preserved aspects of the cultural heritage of industry that formed the foundation of community identity – heritage that is now no longer accessible or no longer exists as a result of Russia's neocolonial land grab in the east.

How, then, does the evidence of self-organised archiving and preservation in wartime Ukraine add to our understanding of activist archiving more generally and its motivations and potential social impact? How does the case of activist archiving in the Ukrainian east, the industrial heritage of which has arguably been doubly marginalised – firstly through cultural deprioritisation in post-independence Ukraine and secondly through military targeting by the Russian Federation following the full-scale invasion – contribute to our knowledge and appreciation of the social function of community archiving and its role in affirming local identity and belonging, particularly in conditions of mass displacement and deterritorialisation?

In an article published in the *Society of American Archivists* in 2016, Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez discuss the affective impact of community archiving for those whose heritage has historically been excluded from mainstream culture.[42] Discussing the systematic marginalisation of migrant communities in institutions of memory, they propose the notion of 'symbolic annihilation' to describe the purposeful exclusion of ethnic groups from the historical record. Drawing on interview work with South Asian American communities involved in self-documentation projects, they argue that community archiving provides an alternative means of achieving "representational belonging", of "empower[ing] people marginalized by mainstream media outlets and memory institutions with the autonomy and authority to establish, enact, and reflect on their presence in ways that are complex, meaningful, substantive, and positive".[43] What, though, if the annihilation under discussion is not just symbolic but also real-world and

41 See, for example: Artem Bereznev, "Zavod" ("The Plant"), https://www.mariupolmemorypark.space/en/gallery-en/the- plant/ [accessed: 08.03.2023]; and Barbudaz, "Zavod" ("The Plant"), https://www.mariupolmemorypark.space/gallery/zavod-barbudaz/ [accessed: 08.03.2023]. For audio stories about slagheaps, see: Sashko Protyah and Masha Pronina, "Tri istorii pro terikony" ("Three Stories About Bings"), https://www.mariupolmemorypark.space/audiostories/ [accessed: 08.03.2023].

42 Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing': Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives", *Society of American Archivists* 79/1, 2016, 56–81.

43 Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing'", 57.

immediate, as in the case of the Ukrainian east? What affective role can community archiving play, then, for those who are acting to preserve their heritage in the face of mass violence and military destruction?

To answer this question fully would require more research and interviews with a wider spectrum of community archivists currently active in Ukraine. I would like, however, to offer some concluding remarks here based on the participant observation work and semi-structured interviews I conducted in the Ukrainian east over the past eight years. Based on this experience, I would argue that community archiving before February 2022 was serving, as it was in Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez's study, to build 'community belonging' and assert an alternative hierarchy of cultural value. This work, like that of the South Asian American archivists, resisted the 'symbolic annihilation' of local communities and empowered and enabled reflexivity among groups whose history and heritage had been at times maligned in mainstream culture. Before 2022, this work was directed at the symbolic erasure of industrial heritage as a deprioritised category following the decommunisation laws of 2015. After February 2022, however, when 'symbolic annihilation' was replaced with the prospect of real-world annihilation – that is, strategic cultural destruction, displacement, and looting carried out by invading Russian forces – this work acquired more urgency.

Following the full-scale invasion, community archiving work was done without the privileged space for reflexivity and affectual response. This was archiving work as resistance to existential threat, rather than epistemic injustice, and, as such, it was necessarily more mechanical and automatic than analytical in nature. What is clear is that the networks and processes established during the years prior to the escalation, as well as relationships of interprofessional care and solidarity, provided some necessary infrastructures for this work to be conducted efficiently and successfully. The work of community archivists in the east, acting intuitively to preserve their heritage at a moment of national emergency, formed a foundation for subsequent activist initiatives and projects. Some of these projects sought to foster a sense of 'representational belonging' among displaced communities, many of which faced the manifest challenges of reconstituting cultural identity and community solidarity in the face of deterritorialisation, cultural and linguistic dislocation, and the traumas of war.

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