The Destruction of Ties: Ghosts on the Antonivka Bridge

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On 11 November 2022, during the advance of the Ukrainian Army, the Russian Army, retreating from the right bank of the Dnipro River in the Kherson region, destroyed several sections of the Antonivka Bridge. Since the Russo–Ukrainian War is deeply contextualised in various political, mythological, and dystopian narratives, it is important to discuss the meaning of blowing up this bridge from the point of view of politico-symbolic thinking.

Given that friends, and even lovers, may turn into adversaries, it is crucial to construct bridges designed for swift dismantlement if required or to forge relational and cultural disparities that allow for future reconciliation. In this paper, I delve into the metaphorical and metonymic significances of bridges against the backdrop of contentious actions towards Ukraine by the Russian 'Immortal Regiment'. Employing Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the rhizome, my analysis juxtaposes and examines the Palmburg Bridge in Königsberg, the Antonivka Bridge in Kherson, and the Kerch Bridge in Crimea. I ask: what does it mean to perceive democracy as a live rhizome characterised by horizontal connections and disruptions, and what, conversely, does it mean to perceive it as a hierarchical structure akin to a growing and breaking tree? When do and which bridges serve the purposes of social rhizomes, and when do they serve the verticals of global or national power? In addition, it is worth thinking about the value and political influence of each of these social organisations and their bridges.

Social rhizomes and trees have their own memories and dreams, which open or close paths for the journeys of spirits and history. What is the difference between rhizomatic memory near bridges and vertical memories organised by the main or even only tree or by marches of 'immortal flocks'? I look mainly at the Antonivka Bridge and discover the painful problems of the Tavria region and Crimean identity and consider the hope of regional reconciliation. I present a metaphor of an ecosystem between many trees of power and fields of social rhizomes to explain the role of bridges. Bridges can reconcile different political powers and social rhizomes, but they must be able to be destroyed at any moment when local life is threatened.

The Bridge and the Poetics of Home

In *The Bridge*, writer Iain Banks depicts the bridge as a connection to imaginary worlds into which the protagonist falls while in a coma after a car accident. The author portrays the bridge as both a tangible entity and a dream, blending these aspects, and I interpret it as a metonymy of psychic life and the Real, in the vein of Jacques Lacan. This is because the inconsistencies with the social reality of the protagonist cause it to fragment into distinct symbolic worlds:

> I have a problem with languages, indeed. In any single section of the bridge there are anything up to a dozen different languages; specialised jargons originated by the various professions and skill-groups over the years and developed and added to, altered and refined to the point of mutual incomprehensibility so long ago that nobody can actually recall the process taking place or remember a time when it had not yet begun.[1]

In the novel, returning to a normal state or home (while questioning whether such a state or home truly exists) entails comprehending not only the languages of various symbolic worlds but also all the metamorphoses that the protagonist undergoes during his coma (in an unconscious state). The story, written in a surreal and psychoanalytical style, helps us understand the phenomenology of the bridge, comparing it with other phenomenological descriptions by Gaston Bachelard and with the phenomenological poetics of the home.

Given that the protagonist navigates three distinct realms, he assumes three identities and names: Alex, John Orr, and the Barbar. While I won't delve into each persona in detail, we can envision our own protagonist as functioning within Vladimir Putin's historical delusions, his previous tranquil existence to which he yearns to return like Odysseus to Ithaca, and as a soldier fighting for democracy in Ukraine. All three roles possess the capacity to be both imaginary and real simultaneously. The task of Banks's hero and of our hero is to return to the safe and private condition that Bachelard identifies with home.

The bridge (the dream system) creates distances or separations from the traumatised consciousness, but it can also bring the divided character back home: to a safe and united state. Across the bridge, good and evil can invade: neighbours, merchants, guests, enemies, ghosts, and mythical unknowns. The concept of otherness forces the split; the separation is not only external but also internal, and it presupposes or demands special attempts at connection or disruption, of bridging or blasting – and both actions are equally important. Bachelard writes about the power of bridging, but not about the power of rupturing: "bridging the distance separating

1 Iain Banks, *The Bridge*, London: Hachette, 2008, 14.

precious stones and stars, imagination makes possible a 'correspondence' between what one touches and what one sees, enabling dreamers in a sense to reach out to, to run their fingers through, the jewel heap of the stars".[2]

The power of bridging connects our imagination and feeling of home, as an inner perspective, with the main poetic elements of the living world: water, air, earth, and fire. In my interpretation, these are the river of life, the wind of freedom, the earth of our ancestors, and the fire of hearts. The home correlates with the material house and the conditions of safe self-dreaming. As Bachelard writes, "the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace".[3] And the home or house (the dream and its materiality) dialectically turns into the inner homeland and its external practices. But, following Banks's and Bachelard's intentions, we can say the bridge opens the way for the guest of dream or fear. Intimate dreams of home are limited by household (*oikos*) concerns and public life among neighbours. But rescuers and enemies, utopia and dystopia, come from the other side of the shore.

Beyond the Dnipro lies the mythologised, historical Ukrainian steppe of Tavria and, further still, the captivating and enticing Crimea. Tavria and Crimea evolved into vibrant places of legend and dreams, where as many as a dozen different languages could be encountered. Thus, the diverse historical tribes and peoples, alongside their varied languages and cultures, were interconnected by the Antonivka Bridge. This diversity can be envisioned as the multiplicity and rhizome described by Deleuze and Guattari.

Hannah Arendt established that both inner life in the home and *oikos*, the household, are different and even opposite domains to politics: the family home is not part of the social contract, not a *res publica*. This fact, however, does not degrade *oikos* but distinguishes its separate, different values. Originally, *oikos* was not a place of private life but the sphere of domestic authority for the *oiketai* – slaves, family members, and other domestic workers.[4] Norbert Elias notes that the sphere of privacy in a house or inner home appears later in the development of the culture of palaces, different from fortress rules.[5] Private spaces, palaces, and manors became the main places of the so-called civilising process, understood as the development of rites, manners, politeness, flirtation, boudoir culture, and the appropriation of myths and fairy tales. By contrast, fortresses and castles represent anxiety regarding external obstacles and threats, the environment of obeying mythic and propaganda visions.

A culture of privacy encompasses personal intimacy and clandestine dreams, along with the related culture of romance and play – significant features of domes-

2 Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Kenneth Haltman, Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2002, 223.

3 Ibid., 28.

4 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 86.

5 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, 84.

tic life. Privacy domesticates dreams, transforming them into playful activities and toys while purging all historical spectres. In stark contrast, war belongs neither to the public sphere, nor to *oikos*, nor to private life. War ravages the home, obliterates intimacy, resurrects historical spectres, and dismantles public life by severing numerous rhizomatic connections.

War constitutes a distinct realm of existence, giving rise to a particular breed of warrior – known as the 'dogs of war': that is, professional soldiers who thrive on the adrenaline rush of combat and are continuously enlisted for new military conflicts. These dogs of war form private and even illicit military enterprises, such as Russia's Wagner Group, and possess a deep-seated interest in perpetuating conflict worldwide. Amid Russia's aggression against Ukraine, we have witnessed the military, propelled by a phantom of animosity or commanded by these dogs of war, crossing bridges and transforming homes and lives into debris. Their ideology is centred on dismantling all rhizomatic connections among communities to erect a new tree of power, establishing a hierarchy. As a strategy, bridges should thus be constructed and safeguarded in a manner that allows for their swift demolition should the existence of local populations come under threat. However, in February and March 2022, Ukrainians were unable to accomplish this, and the enemy traversed the Antonivka Bridge.

The metaphor of the bridge embodies the existence between two internal states of mind. In *A Bridge of Longing*, David Roskies recounts how storytelling in Yiddish became a life-saving practice for generations of displaced Jewish artists. Similarly to Banks's story, Roskies's heroes were writers who collected folklore and transformed it into artistic pictures for the local people to rebuild their lost homes. Language and stories became the daydream – the bridge to lost worlds, to absent homes. Roskies interprets the Yiddish stories of writer Isaac Leib Peretz as suggesting that these narratives serve as a crucial bridge between "the ruins of the brain and the corpses of the heart".[6] Similarly, the Ukrainian language emerges as a bridge of hope towards home, but achieving this requires silencing the language of the aggressors: poisoned or counterfeit connections.

The Bridges of a Thousand Plateaus

The metaphor and metonymy of the bridge hold equal importance from both a civilisational, geopolitical, and macro perspective and the standpoint of local, human, and micro interactions. The Antonivka Bridge, inaugurated in 1985, was designed to meet Ukraine's internal requirements and to link local communities. Therefore, its

6 David G. Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, 145.

significance ought to be analysed from a horizontal perspective: examining how it has facilitated the integration of diverse local communities, including Ukrainians, Russians, Greeks, Tatars, adherents of Orthodox and Uniate churches, Catholics, and Protestants, as well as farmers, metallurgists, traders, and ecological activists. The war destroyed diversity, reduced it to relations between enemies and those on 'our' side, and shifted the meanings of the bridge from micro, autonomous relations to macro, political confrontation and corresponding narratives.

Modern Western democracy cannot be imagined without the development of the rights of nongovernmental organisations or without the development of autonomism. It is crucial to highlight that the concept of rhizomatic organisation proposed by Deleuze and Guattari does not specifically address democracy or any other form of governance, such as oligarchy, feudal society, or monarchy. Instead, the rhizomatic organisation focuses on the evolving development of local connections or resemblances that emerge within one or similar ecosystems, independent of the form of political hierarchies that govern them.[7] I think that in the form of deliberative and participatory democracy with a multiplicity of communities, autonomous groups, and cultural movements, the qualitative diversity has some features of a thousand plateaus. This means that the idea of autonomism can be explained not so much through the concept of a rhizome but by a thousand intersecting plateaus, each one of which consists of rhizomatic ties.

Contrary to the plateaus is the vision of the verticality of power – not only the idea of a tree of the world or the state but also ideas of unity, God, a supreme sovereign, and so on. Both rhizomatic networks and hierarchical power structures require bridges that facilitate the functioning of either local socioecological systems or a centralised system of authority. The hierarchical aspect is comparative to the 'tree' model of power, accompanied by grand political mythologies. For instance, centralised power uses bridges to propagate the concept of a 'united nation', or to facilitate expansion and annexation.

Conversely, the horizontal dimension highlights the interactions among local communities, free from the dominance of overarching narratives. Within this context, numerous small and disparate tales may emerge, rooted in local kinship or family histories. Here, the idea of a bridge can be presented metaphorically and metonymically. As a metaphor, the bridge shows the possibility of crossing the limitations of space and gaps and of extending either a single rhizome or intersecting thousands of plateaus and creating a new symbiosis. Metonymies, on the contrary, have the power of concretisation: the Antonivka Bridge shows the drama of different shores and the attraction and separation of the local people of Tavria or greater

7 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 16.

Ukraine. Rhizomes have limited spatial character; they are territorised, lack centralised structures, and are less formalised and more socially ecosystemic. Adaptation and multiplication are their strengths, while long jumps or distances are their weaknesses. Bridges, contrarily, break spatial constraints and contribute to deterritorialisation, in order to, later, connect separated distant groups. Rhizomes need bridges to overcome natural territorialisations. Metaphors of social rhizomes and bridges do not negate but complement each other.

Deleuze and Guattari find that a rhizome implies conceptual neighbourhood relationships, clusters, and ecosystems while bridges do not care about the local symbiosis of groups:

> The concept's only rule is internal or external neighbourhood. Its internal neighbourhood or consistency is secured by the connection of its components in zones of indiscernibility; its external neighbourhood or exoconsistency is secured by the bridges thrown from one concept to another when the components of one of them are saturated.[8]

In the context of the metaphor of bridges as a condition of communication and as a constructive mediator, we can talk about hyperreality in a post-structural sense.

Given that our discussion transcends physical bridges to encompass their metonymies and metaphors, alongside their conceptual and cognitive representations, Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality becomes crucial.

Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality explores the distortion of reality as individuals turn to virtual pleasure for solace. We are faced with a problem: the material, bloody, and terrorist war waged by Putin's Russia against Ukraine, which is too brutal for an outsider to imagine as opposed to the images of the war created by Telegram channels and other media, which distract from the unbearable reality and present another, consumable war. Baudrillard draws attention to analogous substitutions (real into imagined and simulated). He shows how the Holocaust, as unbearable suffering and horror, was transformed into an adapted television image and then into a hyperreality (where the scenography and the broadcast exceed reality). Baudrillard observes that when the real event is replaced, first images are adopted, then narratives adapted to consumer society, and finally it becomes a myth. According to him, the myth tries to overcome the cruelty of the war: "That is to say not only a screen and a visual form, but a myth, something that still retains something of the double, of the phantasm, of the mirror, of the dream, etc.".[9]

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8 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell III, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 90.

9 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, 51.

A similar transformation occurred with the Antonivka Bridge, which initially shifted from being a component of a roadway to a symbol of war and propaganda before evolving into the realm of dreams and myth, or hyperreality, manifested through television, social networks, and Telegram channels. In the context of contemporary information warfare, the bridge symbolises the connection between the reality of our psychic state, an imagined past, the spectres of history, and contemporary contextualised images. A hallmark of hyperreality is the substitution of communicative consensus with theatricality. However, in my view, when discussing the Antonivka Bridge, we encounter a complex array of phenomena: the traditional reality where the bridge served as a basic form of communication and a symbol of community cohesion; its later use as a propaganda tool; its subsequent use as a metaphor for the transformation of a mythical territory; and, finally, as an element within a spectral narrative (recalling Banks's novel).

Dystopian Bridges

Kremlin politicians harboured aspirations of resurrecting a vanished, imagined world through the construction of the Kerch Bridge to the annexed Crimea. The Kremlin's imagination yearned for a restoration of lost dignity, with Crimea serving as the quintessential symbol of this envisioned honour in wartime. The contemporary Putinist narrative of outrage and a call for retribution is rooted in a nostalgia for this lost (and imagined) realm. Fundamentally, human consciousness continually strives to forge connections between the present, marred state and a perceived ideal wholeness. However, fulfilling these desires does not necessitate the occupation of actual territories; it suffices to generate images for consumption, as Baudrillard advocated.

Dmitry Glukhovsky's novel, *The Outpost*, is about a dystopian bridge spanning the Volga River.[10] In the novel, absolute evil resides on the opposite bank of the Volga, in the Russian countryside, while the 'insiders' find themselves within the imperial circle of Moscow. According to the novel, the Kremlin's desire for hard vertical power and dominance created this absolute evil, and now the Kremlin would like to block the bridge to defend itself from its created horror. Glukhovsky portrays the bridge in a dystopian manner: beyond the Volga lie psychic mutants, casualties of a cognitive-narrative experiment. Thus, the bridge serves as a portal to our fabricated malevolence, a realm of demise. Yet this very bridge simultaneously offers a means to comprehend the love intertwined with evil within us.

The main protagonist considers crossing the bridge to the other side to be recognised by a beloved person. Banks's and Gluchovsky's bridges are similar in this sense

10 Dmitry Glukhovsky, *Outpost 2*, trans. Paul Podmiotko, Krakow: Insignis, 2021.

and present the same poetics. The absolute evil was created by the explosion of an 'incantation', a secret propaganda formula that drives people insane. The created evil, the absolute Other, seeks to return to Moscow. We could, here, see a parallel with a contemporary situation, the criminal and artificial so-called Donetsk and Luhansk 'People's Republics', formed by the Kremlin in 2014. Gluchovsky's bridge presents the road to the complete Otherness, to created 'aliens' and dystopia, but the imperial greed of Moscow doesn't allow for the destruction of the connection (the bridge) and, as a result, these aliens, an insane people, break through into Moscow's territory. We cannot compare the Antonivka Bridge with Gluchovsky's, which tells us rather about internal Russian insanity. At most, Gluchovsky's bridge can be compared with the Kerch Bridge, built under the intoxication of propaganda.

The underlying aspects of our consciousness and subconsciousness, as well as our bodily consciousness, require architectural metaphors, or bridges, that attempt to connect the body, the Real (as conceptualised by Jacques Lacan and further discussed by Slavoj Žižek), dreams, and the narratives of everyday life (reality). However, Žižek argues that the gap between the Real (our supreme Ideal) and the symbolic order is fundamentally "unbridgeable",[11] yet there is a constant effort to bridge this divide through the creation of narratives: "To use Lacan's words, once we've spoken, the gap between the Real and its symbolisation is irreducible".[12] So the bridge is only an attempt to connect these divides – or, as Banks writes, "Perhaps the dream is a bridge".[13]

Dreams during alert consciousness, or daydreams, can triumph over critical thinking, and this is the condition of the rising of a spectrum of desired historical memories. As Jacques Derrida remarks, the house is also a primary place of haunting; spectres rise from the toxic hopes and forbidden desires of imagined justice before they leave the home and enter into the public imagination.[14] Derrida describes how the ghost of Hamlet's father, appearing in the palace, later transforms into the spectre of Communism in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Manifesto*:

> I have just remembered what must have been haunting my memory: the first noun of the Manifesto, and this time in the singular, is "specter": "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism." Exordium or incipit: this first noun opens, then, the first scene of the first act: "Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa—das Gespenst des Kommunismus." As in Hamlet, the Prince of a rotten State, everything begins by the apparition of a specter.[15]

11 Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, London: Verso, 2012, 732.

12 Slavoj Žižek, *The Most Sublime Hysteric: Hegel with Lacan*, London: Polity, 2014, 11.

13 Banks, *The Bridge*, 12.

14 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, London: Routledge, 1994.

15 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 2.

Experiencing the paranormal demands special attitudes and skills of dreams and memory, and it characterises the poetics of bridges too. The absence of a critical understanding of our own (home) or historical (public) spectres has as a consequence the irrational obedience to the will of ghosts.

Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) presented the idea of perverse subjugation to the ghost, where the moral spectre of the mother, found either on the third floor (the superego) or underground (the subconsciousness, the id), destroys the hero's life. Žižek believes that the movie made audiences "identify with the abyss of identification".[16] A chasm exists between dreams fuelled by fear (such as the ghost of Hamlet's father or the mother in *Psycho*) and reality governed by social norms or political circumstances, separating the imperative of desire from social conventions.

Only imagined ghosts have the ability to traverse this gap, represented by the metonymy or metaphor of a bridge. Forbidden dreams become dangerous in public when they gain political power. This is what happens in the case of mass resentment: the Germans believed that victory and pride had been stolen from them in World War I, while the Russians suffered resentment because they believed in the injustice that the empire and the Soviet Union had been lost. But someone must wake the ghost. Alexander Dugin, Alexander Prokhanov, Putin, and many other philosophers, writers, and politicians have conjured and invited the mutant ghost of the great tsarist empire and the Bolshevik Soviet Union. The most obvious mutant ghost appeared in the Kremlin's memorial campaign, the Immortal Regiment, which occupied the entire political life and imagination of Russia[17] and tried to find roads and bridges to Ukraine. The Immortal Regiment is a mass civil event in major Russian cities and the 'Russian world' on Victory Day, 9 May, when people walk the streets with photos of their ancestors, who had been participants in various Soviet and Russian wars. The Immortal Regiment propaganda event began in 2011. The political rhetoric of the event is akin to incantations to gather dead souls to celebrate past and future victories. We can compare this event to mass hauntology in Derrida's sense. After the first part of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, in 2014, the Immortal Regiment came to Crimea, and, later, after 2022, the Regiment of Ghosts invaded Ukraine over the Antonivka Bridge into Kherson.

Who can withstand the influence of ghost politics? There are numerous possible responses, but akin to the setting of a psychoanalysis session, one might suggest a

16 Slavoj Žižek, "'In His Bold Gaze My Ruin Is Writ Large'", in: Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, London: Verso, 1992, 211–272, here 226.

17 Julie Fedor, "Memory, Kinship, and the Mobilization of the Dead: The Russian State and the 'Immortal Regiment' Movement", in: Julie Fedor, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila, and Tatiana Zhurzhenko (eds.), *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 307–345.

prolonged and critical recollection of the origins of the politics coupled with open discussions. The success of social and cultural development depends on the consultation of relatives and friends, on negotiations between local neighbours, on debates between community members, and on the diplomacy of alienated foreigners and enemies. Negotiation builds bridges and then cleanses and protects them against ghostly manifestations. This is especially important for bloodlands[18] and their peoples.

There are many international bridges cleared of the spectre of envy. One of the most famous is the Øresund Bridge between Denmark and Sweden, freed from many historical superstitions. Conversely, the Kerch Bridge in Crimea not only breaches international laws (as it leads to an occupied territory) but is also laden with illusory historical spectres and propaganda. In ordinary peacetime, people need no diplomacy and rely on simple, negotiated agreements that express the inner workings of social rhizomes. But big political powers always need diplomacy, especially between alienated factions and enemies. When warring countries, especially if they were united for a long time in the past, try to reconcile after a war, after deep hatred, and after rivers of blood, special diplomacy that pays attention to historical traumas and subconscious minds is required. To destroy the Berlin Wall, the symbol of the Cold War and the division of Germany, transatlantic diplomacy was needed, but the rebuilding of Berlin after the fall of the wall was based on public, communal negotiations related to posttraumatic memory. The reconstruction of the Antonivka Bridge will also require international diplomacy, but the lives of the communities in Kherson, Tavria, and Crimea can be recreated through local negotiations and the recognition of traumatic memory after cleaning the bridge of imperial spectres.

Realpolitik, global politics, and their associated diplomacy are founded on the balance of power among major states. However, local, horizontal, and communal negotiations rely on trust and detoxifying local consciousness. Thus, global diplomacy and local negotiations require distinct platforms: one catering to alienated interest groups and the other fostering trust and collaboration. Global diplomacy is propelled by the interests of monopolies, large corporations, and nation-states, with discussions occurring away from the everyday lives of individuals; local or neighbourhood negotiations take place at the heart of communities, focusing on overcoming prejudices and the spectres of memory. Engagements in common social and

18 Discussing the mass victims of World War II and the Stalinist regime, Timothy Snyder wrote: "The place where all of the victims died, the bloodlands, extends from central Poland to western Russia, through Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States […] During the years that both Stalin and Hitler were in power, more people were killed in Ukraine than anywhere else in the bloodlands, or in Europe, or in the world". Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, New York: Basic Books, 2010, vii–viii and 20.

cultural activities aid at the local level and align with the rhizomatic politics previously discussed.

The Palmburg, Kerch, and Antonivka Bridges

The history of the Antonivka Bridge brings to mind the Palmburg Bridge over the Pregel River (Palmburger Pregelbrücke, historically located in former East Prussia, near Königsberg, now Kaliningrad), constructed in 1938. It was the longest bridge in the German Reich and catered to the developmental needs of the local community. In 1945, the Commandant of the Königsberg Fortress, General Otto Lasch, ordered the Palmburg Bridge be demolished to thwart the Soviet advance.[19] The partially destroyed Palmburg Bridge has long stood as a symbol of a lost Prussia and Königsberg, serving as a site of historical hauntings (following the mass rape and murder of Königsberg's inhabitants by Soviet forces) and a marker of strife. The bridge was ultimately demolished in 2016, and for 60 years before that, Soviet and Russian authorities made no efforts to restore it.

Remaining a poisoned, toxic symbol from 1945 to 2016, fragments of the bridge signified that the Prussians had departed and would not return to the now Russian city of Kaliningrad. Even following the demolition of the Palmburg Bridge, artistic endeavours continue to memorialise the deadlock of historical choices and the lack of reconciliation with the erstwhile Prussian community. From the Soviet/Russian ideological point of view, the broken bridge symbolised the inability of the Nazis to return. The trajectories of time and space were compressed and stopped, and the ghosts of memory and the subconsciousness of the old city remained in the basements of old buildings built before 1945 and on the remains of the Palmburg Bridge. It symbolised the impossibility of reconciliation in this bloodland and marked a radical gap between the culture of Königsberg and Kaliningrad's attempts to create a pseudo-Soviet culture. Kaliningrad's culture was not a simulacrum of former Prussian life but a thin and fragile imitation of happy Soviet life intended to hide confusion and anxiety. The Palmburg Bridge became a symbol of the traumatic memory of Prussia, a witness of the spectre of Königsberg between Soviet and Russian desires and dreams.

Another important symbol is the Kerch Bridge (also known as the Crimean Bridge), the embodiment of Putin-era military occupation, corruption, and longing for power. It connects not local communities, but realises the desires of imperial power, which imitate nostalgia for a return to a lost world. Putin's propaganda presents the annexation of the peninsula as the correction of a historical error

19 Otto Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg: Kampf und Untergang von Ostpreußens Hauptstadt* (*How Königsberg Fell: The Struggle and Downfall of East Prussia's Capital*), Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 2010, 42.

through the demolition of all Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian memory. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the new bridge was planned, and the construction was celebrated in 2018 as a symbol of the reawakening of the imagined old empire through a bridge that united disrupted consciousness. The new Crimean – or Kerch – Bridge does not connect Russia and Ukraine but separates all possible friendships from the moment of its inception; it destroys the possibility of mutual understanding between different nations and was built for imperial and corporative interests. It must demonstrate the regeneration of lost imperial dignity and satisfy ressentiment. This imagined and lost, and ultimately nonexistent, Empire correlates with Lacan's concept of the void of nonexistence[20] as the condition of contemporary self-recognition. Nonexistent entities, such as ideological narratives, claim to satisfy imaginary desires that are not grounded in the everyday practices of community life. Thus, these nonexistent entities shape our sense of self. The destiny of Crimean Tatars, local Crimean Germans, and Ukrainians is the best witness of continuous imperial persecutions of national minorities on the peninsula. The Kremlin's imaginary discourse never existed as local practice and was replaced by the ressentiment of the 'lost'. This is how we can describe the post-Soviet and postimperial imagination of Putinists and their visions of rebuilding the Russian world, or Novorossiya.

The Antonivka Bridge was built in the late Soviet era, in 1985, and had an important socioeconomic function as the gate to the south of Ukraine (so-called Tavria) and Crimea. The bridge gained new symbolic significance in the period of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022. Ukraine lost the bridge very quickly: the war started on 24 February 2022, and the bridge was attacked on 26 February by the Russian Army for the first time. Finally, the city of Kherson fell after a short battle in the beginning of March. The success of Russian troops was based on miscalculations by the Ukraine Army and, probably, betrayal by local city authorities ("Betrayal somewhere on the regional level"[21]). The Antonivka Bridge continued the task of the Crimean Bridge: it opened the way for the imperial imagination and allowed ghosts to enter Ukraine.

Many intoxicated propagandists and collaborators, full of belief in the Russian Empire and the Bolshevik Soviet Union, came and destroyed all local life (the rhizome). My own Ukrainian friends suggest that the bridge became a symbol of a surprise military attack, betrayal, and a bloody severance of all ties with Russia. The

20 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977.

21 Donbas.Realii, "'Dohovornyak', shchob viddaty Kherson – tse mayachnya – veteran DAPu Oleksandr Tereshchenko" ("The 'Agreement' to Give Away Kherson is Nonsense – DAP Veteran Oleksandr Tereshchenko"), *Radio Svoboda* (*Radio Liberty*), 18 July 2022, https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/viyna-oleksandr-tereshchenko-mykolaiv/31924403.html [accessed: 20.11.2024].

Antonivka Bridge was built too well: it was too strong and too important to be destroyed so quickly as Ukrainian military forces retreated from Kherson.

Postcolonial Cleansing and Building

Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania are full of their own ghosts: from the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) to many external and internal bloody conflicts. The problem is not historical memory and its ghosts, but the readiness to defend against them, to clear the roads and bridges of their manifestations. Polish troops and rebellious local Poles occupied (or, in some interpretations, 'liberated') regions of Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine, resulting in the Polonisation of the local population. This became a painful wound for the region from 1920 to 1939, with ensuing thoughts of revenge and "ethnic cleansing".[22] I am not talking about the whole region between Ukraine, the Baltic States, and Germany, but only along the Polish border. Here, ethnic cleansing and killing had a strong impact on the Polish and Jewish communities. Later, the local Soviet authorities in Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania only encouraged the expulsion of the Poles, as well as a simultaneous rapid Russification, while the Polish authorities carried out a similar ethnic cleansing and Polonisation of the Germans in Gdansk and Wroclaw after the Second World War.[23] All this created many wounds of memory and burnt the 'bridges' of communication, partnership, and networks, which only began to be rebuilt after 1991.

The experience of reconciliation, community, and new solidarity in the face of Russia's aggression against Ukraine can then be applied to thinking about the possibility of reintegrating Tavria and the Donbas into Ukraine. The history of neighbourly hatred has shown that there can be no truth and justice in ethnic relations unless they adhere to internationally recognised rules of self-government, respect, and bilateral recognition and unless they ensure open local negotiations at a grassroots level. The new political vision of the Lublin Triangle (Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania) or the new 'Intermarium'[24] may be full of spectres, neither better nor worse than those resulting from the Russian Empire–Bolshevik mutant. The same may happen in relations between Ukraine and Turkey regarding the fate of the Crimean Tatars and, consequently, the fate of the Tavria region and the Antonivka Bridge. Thus, it

22 Philipp Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2014, 121.

23 Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 331.

24 Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium: The Land Between the Black and Baltic Seas*, London: Routledge, 2012.

is important to develop local and international politics of heritage, memory, and dreams.

The story of the bombing and destruction of the Antonivka Bridge is a testimony to the illusion of believing in eternal peace or eternal brotherhood. The rhizomatic development of society implies constantly changing communal relations and, as a result, the uninterrupted local and regional politics of neighbourhood and processes of separation and reconciliation. Therefore, to use a metonymy, it is not eternal bridges that are built, but dynamic relationships that are developed. Tearing down bridges is a possible part of liberation from toxic historical influences, traumas, and repressed memories. Here, we can extend the metonymy of the bridge to the metaphor of the 'drawbridge': a link that is either willingly built or broken, as happens at border crossings and in how we behave in our everyday politics. The success of cultural development directly depends on international inclusion and bridging activities. I call an active bridging an intensive cultural and economic exchange, dialogue, and creativity between two countries, and an active network, a lively exchange between many different communities, among many plateaus: Ukrainians, Tatars, Russians, and Greeks; farmers, the creative class, and workers; or dreamers, subcultures, and vagrants can create their own plateaus. The dynamic bridges between them can symbolise and realise their intersections, but with the guarantee that the bridge can be destroyed if the ghosts of hatred invade. Active networks create the effect of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, where certain regions acquire new cultural and political identities. Cultural achievements occur when international cooperation creates common value, which distinct countries can present as their achievements.

Drawing on symbolic modes of thought (with reference to Derrida and Žižek, as mentioned above), the concept of a bridge can elucidate not only a specific engineering construct but also a local metonymy representing local, rhizomatic connections. It can also serve as a broader philosophical metaphor, illustrating human cooperation and the interactions between different identities. Symbolic thinking constantly oscillates between concrete empirical analysis, metonymic associations, and metaphorical extensions of understanding. Ultimately, symbolic thought seeks to grasp the ultimate, elusive vision: the Lacanian–Žižekian Real. This ideological, mythical Real, which has motivated figures such as Hitler, Stalin, and now Putin, among other dictators, opens the door to the ghosts of history and, consequently, to actual warfare. Paradoxically, to stifle the phantoms of imaginary thought, we are forced to destroy real works of engineering – bridges. These oscillations show how the purely imaginary is transformed into symbolic organisation, communication, propaganda, and efforts to forge not tangible but purely imaginary links to the unattainable, the nonexistent, and the unbridgeable (as Žižek puts it). Conversely, the historical experience of Central and Eastern Europe suggests that the solution lies in fostering horizontal, rhizomatic communication between local populations.

In this setup, bridges once again function as conduits of dynamic diversity, leaving fewer opportunities for the ghosts of history.

Cleansing symbolic – for example, postcolonial – thought and heritage of the spectre of hatred means a politics of reconciliation, dialogue, and bridges and the creation and accumulation of a new cultural-political identity, actively engaged in both local exchanges of cultural influences and international cooperation, such as in Central and Eastern Europe or the European Union. The circulation of cultural capital runs parallel to social cooperation, the politics of memory, and the critique of political prejudices, and it defines regional political identities, their exchange, new confrontations and negotiations, and the building and demolition of bridges. This is why I speak of dynamic bridges in the metonymic and metaphoric sense. Ordinary poets and writers, whose work we love, share, and discuss, become part of public practices and shared political identities, and thus of treaties and alliances – and necessarily creators of dynamic bridges and networks of cooperation.

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