

The Memory of the Habsburg Empire in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture

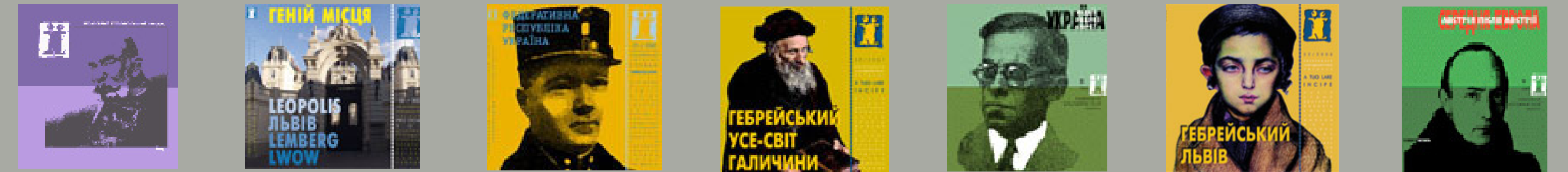
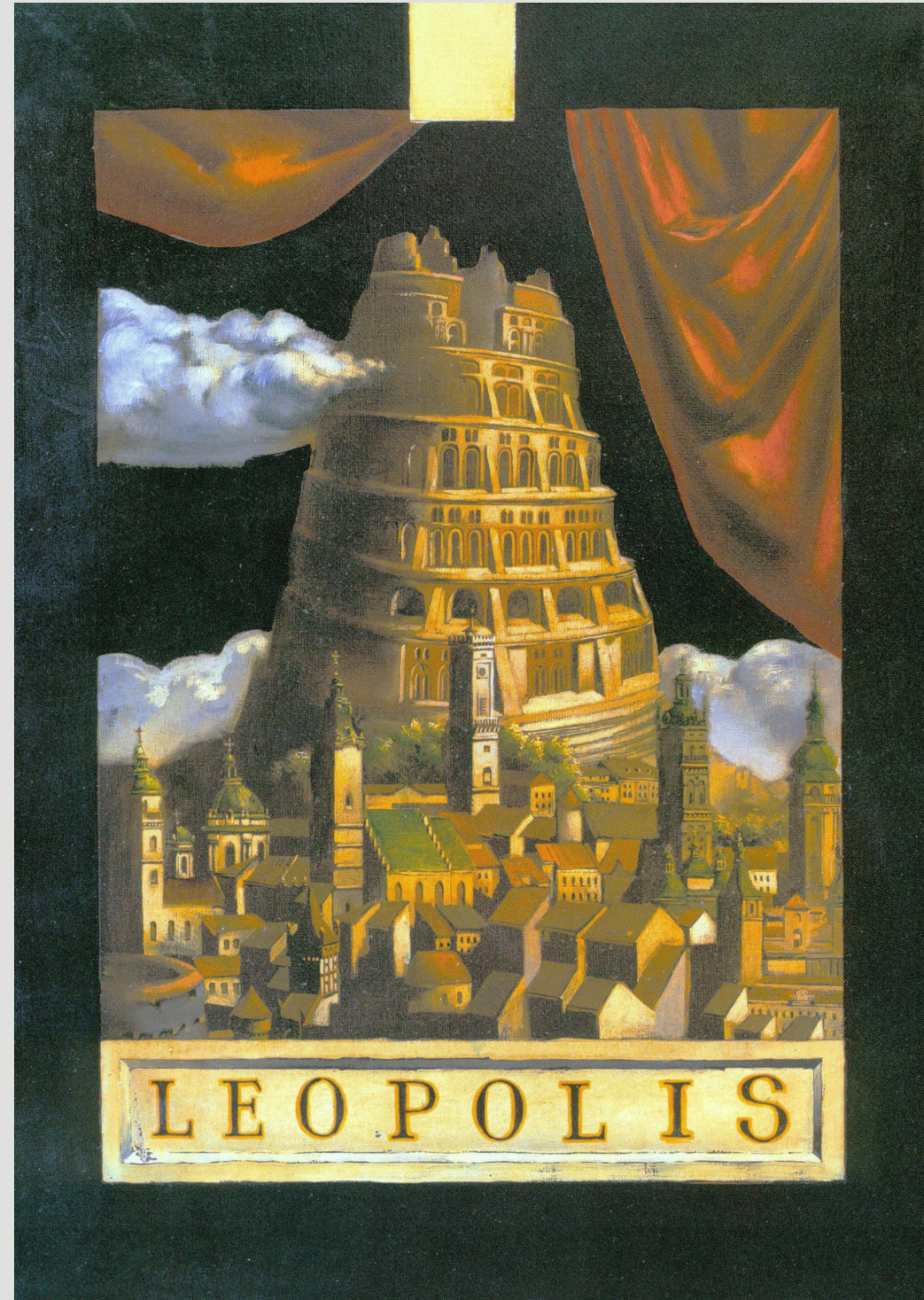
Roman Dubasevych
Doktoratskolleg “Galizien” (2007-2010)

Betreut von Alois Woldan, Stefan
Simonek und Dorothee Gelhard

FWF
der wissenschaftsfonds.

The Renaissance of historic Galicia - Галичина

The title of my project is „The Memory of the Habsburg Empire in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture“. The research focuses on the process of the reformulation of cultural memory in post-Soviet Ukraine from the Perestroika era to the present day and on the role that the multicultural past of Galicia started to play in it. For many member republics and ethnic groups, the end of the Soviet Union opened intensive debates about identity, cultural heritage and future projects. Who are we? Where do we come from? What are we bound for? These were amongst the questions Ukrainian culture became engaged with after the collapse of official censorship. During their search for new cultural models, Western Ukrainian intellectuals discovered the heritage of the Habsburg Empire. The architecture of Galician cities and towns, elements of everyday culture, the Galician Ukrainian dialect and last but not least its former participation in European networks contrasted remarkably with the Soviet way of life and seemed to play an important role in the texts of prominent contemporary Ukrainian writers such as Yuriy Andrukhovych, Taras Prohasko, Yuriy Vynnychuk and in the art of painters like Yuriy Koch, Volodymyr Kostyrko or Volodymyr Kaufmann. Habsburg made the difference, creating the image of the radical Soviet Other. In this sense my project deals with the long-term aftermath of the Habsburg Empire and traces its impact on contemporary Ukrainian culture. However, in the course of my work it became evident that the memory of Habsburg rule mixes with the memory of the long Polish and Jewish presence in this region. Thus, for the first time maps the colorful patchwork of cultural memories in Galicia and its resonance in independent Ukraine. Although focusing primarily on Ukrainian literature and art, it interprets them in the context of Polish, German and Jewish authors who lived in and wrote about Galicia, creating a dense intertextual fabric. The reciprocity of influence is an important aspect and a novelty of my investigation into this field, until so recently dominated through monocultural prospect and national narratives.



Transgressions of cultures and times

Since the multicultural Galicia doesn't exist any more, the transgression of ethnic borders inevitably became a journey through time. World Wars, nationalisms, the Holocaust and Soviet rule destroyed the unique Galician cultural landscape. Ukrainian writers like Yuriy Andrukhovych, Taras Prokhas'ko or Yuriy Vynnychuk were the first who begun to fill the gaps caused by the historic cataclysms. By relating to the times before the Soviets and Nazis they started to reconstruct fragments of Galicia's cultural kaleidoscope. In this way they not only started recovering the memory of the destroyed communities but established new cultural narratives. While dealing with the past, these stories became invaluable to the present counterbalancing of the narrow national vision of the region and the effects of totalitarian ideologies. Despite all inconsistencies and backlashes into the nationalist paradigm they represent a great potential for Ukraine's contemporary culture. The "old Galicia" has experienced an amazing revival that fuels the cultural production and self-image of Western Ukraine from literature to the tourist industries. One more time, the past has become closely intertwined with the present and future.

Although its political potential still remains undiscovered, Western Ukraine keeps claiming the leading role as the chief exporter of political and cultural ideologies for Ukraine. Moreover, its self-assumed role as a Ukrainian Piedmont arose under the Habsburg rule. My findings enable a better understanding of the contemporary ideological situation in Ukraine. Are the lessons of Austrian Galicia needed in present Ukraine? Could they serve as model for the future? Or will they be restricted to the commercial heritage industries?



Cultural demarcations and new symbolic borders. Galicia postcolonial

The revision of the heritage of Danube Empire was also facilitated by new discourses coming into Ukraine such as the idea of Central Europe or Mitteleuropa debate. The dissertation examines several representations of Austrian imperial past and their functions in contemporary Ukrainian culture. They range from mythologies of a new Galician bourgeoisie through nostalgia to serious attempts to rediscover and reconstruct the Galician multicultural patchwork. In the early writings of Andrukhovych, the poorest and most eastern of Habsburg provinces is transformed into a multicultural Arcadia, a bridge to Ukraine's European future. At the same time, the Habsburg and Polish representations of Galicia are still used to establish borders with the rest of Ukraine, to repress its Soviet past or to enhance the messianic national claims of local intelligentsia. The present research asks whether these traits can be seen as the consequences of Austrian "civilizing" efforts and semicolonial attitudes towards Galicia, which reveal the ambivalent legacy of Empire(s).



Combining methodologies: Cultural memory-Post Colonial-Post Modernity-Sovietology

From the very beginning, the above questions have suggested a combination of different methodologies. The discovery of the past is best analyzed with the concept of cultural memory. Promoted by German scholar Jan Assmann this idea illuminates the fundamental role that memory plays in the constitution of culture and its survival under hostile circumstances. The reform movement of Perestroika was very early accompanied by a strong interest in the past and was heralded by the debate about consequences of Stalinism. The culture of memory that developed in the German speaking countries as a result of the Holocaust and World War II proved to be vital in the analyses of Galicia's historic traumas. However, the works of Yuriy Lotman and Aleida Assmann led beyond trauma as an initial moment for memory to concepts of tradition and time. The invention of new traditions became crucial for an independent Ukraine and for the construction of its social realities. Its legitimizing, normalizing, as well as critical powers have been remarkably underestimated and have become central in the search for new regional and national identities in post-Soviet Ukraine.

Post modern theory and new approaches to the past

The reconstruction of cultural memory by contemporary Ukrainian writers has raised the question of traditions for the first time pluralizing the field. However, the memory of the Habsburg and Polish past in Galicia seems to serve not only the past but the present and future as well. Its appropriation by Ukrainian intellectuals turned out as a productive strategy to adapt current debates and to reintegrate into European and cosmopolitan networks. What first appeared as a nostalgic memory functions as a return to, and a continuation of, violently interrupted traditions of Modernity. Its Galician version has been much more disposed to creative exchange with the legacies of the past than its Western counterparts. This tendency, inspired by post-modern ethics towards history, can provide stable ground for social and cultural regeneration in contemporary Ukraine.



Doktoratskolleg “Das österreichische Galizien und sein multikulturelles Erbe” -

unter Beteiligung der Institute für Germanistik, Judaistik, Osteuropäische Geschichte, Slawistik sowie Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte.