Kyiv, Ukraine - Revised Edition

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6 The Center of Kyiv

6.1 A Taste of History

Kyiv has two hearts, maybe three. The undisputed historical center of the city is the site of the old walled city of Prince Volodymyr the Great (r. 980-1015), and the site of the enlarged walled city that was put together during the long reign (1019-1054) of his son Yaroslav the Wise. This zone was the capital of ancient Rus and stood high on promontories above the Dnipro River. The main hill is today called Volodymyr's Hill (Volodymyrska Hora) and the main thoroughfare is Volodymyr's Street. There are some remains of an old gate to Yaroslav's city called Zoloti Vorota (Golden Gate) enclosed within a museum-like structure, but the main treasure from early history is the St. Sophia Cathedral complex, a UNESCO world heritage site with origins that go as far back as the first half of the 11th century. There are many newer additions to St. Sophia as well, and also centuries-old reconstructions and expansions of earlier construction, so not nearly all of this complex is the product of the princely period. It is, however, one of the two main historic sites in Kyiv and is intimately identified with the glory of Rus and historic Christianity, and with the city's early reputation as a "New Jerusalem." The other most important historic site is the Monastery of the Caves Complex (Pecherska Lavra), also a UNESCO world heritage site. It is on slopes that rise from the river south of the first center and dates to 1051. It is the centerpiece of Kyiv's so-called third heart, the Klov Hill (Klovska Hora) and the Pechersk district. That area grew up around the nearby monastery, and then in the 19th century became known for a large fortification and munitions manufactory for the Imperial Russian army.

The second heart of Kyiv is Podil (Russian: Podol), a district of trade and commerce at the elevation of the river. It was a port and the distribution point for food that was brought into the city, and it came to be known in later centuries for its various trade fairs and for the sale of grain and grain futures, horses, and other livestock. Podil was connected to the "Upper City" by a path along a winding ravine that is the origin of today's Andrew's Descent (Andriyivskyi Uzviz), a popular and funky street of artists, tourists, and souvenir vendors. This district was also replete with religious sites and church domes, and it figures equally with the other two centers of Kyiv into the "domes" part of this book's City of Domes and Demons title. What is now the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy was founded in Podil in 1632. In the 19th century, Podil also became one of the centers of Jewish life in Kyiv and one of the city's main industrial districts.
The main street of Kyiv became Khreshchatyk. Before about the middle of the 19th century, it was little more than undeveloped stream bed in a ravine between the southern slope of the old urban core and the slope of Klov Hill, but it then developed quickly in the latter part of the century into the same sort of elegant avenue that was found in other prosperous European cities. The fuel for this was wealth from industrialization, and especially the sugar boom of the late 19th century. Along a course of about 1.2 kilometers (0.75 miles), there were exclusive shops, theaters, and top-scale apartment buildings, as well as banks and trading companies, the stock exchange, the main post office, and fine hotels such as the famous Hotel Yevropeyskyi (European Hotel; Hotel Yevropeyskaya in Russian) from 1857. The Duma (City Hall) was also on Khreshchatyk, in a decorative neoclassical structure erected over 1874-1879. Its high spire was topped with a statue of the archangel Michael, Kyiv’s patron saint, while for a total of not quite four years in the square in front stood a memorial statue of Russian Foreign Minister Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin (1862-1911), who had been assassinated in the city’s beautiful new opera house. In 1910-1912, the tallest building in Ukraine, and indeed in the entire Russian Empire, was built on Khreshchatyk, the 11-story Dom Ginsburga (Ginsburg House or the Ginsburg Building), named after its owner and developer, businessman Lev Borisovich Ginsburg. Kyivans also called it neboskreb Ginsburga (the Ginsburg Skyscraper). It was a mix of shops, offices, and apartments, while on two of its levels was the private residence of the wealthy Ginsburg and his family.

Other prominent Kyivans built their mansions in Lypki, a leafy district on the slope toward Pechersk. The area is still an architectural marvel of beautiful homes with ornate embellishments. It was an area of privilege as well during the Soviet years and is still high in prestige. Among the most spectacular mansions that still stand are “Chocolate House” (because of its color), which was once the home of timber baron Semen Mogilevtsev; the caryatid-rich “House with the Caryatids” at 3 Orlyka Street that was built in 1911 for the engineer and prominent Kyiv political figure Vsevolod Demchenko; the Versailles-like 4 Lipska Street, the home of sugar magnate Markus Zaks; and the “House of the Weeping Widow” at 23 Luteranska Street that was built in 1907 for Sergey Archavsky, a prominent merchant. The building is called such because of its decorative face of a beautiful woman who appears to cry when it rains.23

The main government district of independent Ukraine is located in this zone. It is centered on a the president’s office building on Bankova (Bank)

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23 Outstanding, beautifully illustrated books about the grandeur of Kyiv’s architecture from the end of the 19th century and start of the 20th century are Byelomeysyatsev et al. (2012) and Skibitska (2011). Both are in Ukrainian.
Street, and on the neoclassical Verkhovna Rada building, erected as the
city’s main library in 1910-1911 and now the place where nardeps habitually
punch one another (Chapter 3). Nearby are the beautiful baroque National
Bank of Ukraine (1902-1905), the Stalinist Council of Ministers Building,
and the Supreme Court of Ukraine in a beautiful old mansion at 8 Orlyka
Street that was raided from the forlorn Museum of the History of the City
of Kyiv (Chapter 2). The same district was a center of government for Soviet
Ukraine as well, and also of the short-lived (1917-1921) and officially bilingual
(Ukrainian and Yiddish) Ukrainian National Republic of which the eminent
historian Mykhailo Hrushevskyi (1866-1934) was the first president. Before
then, the area housed czarist government officials. An extant landmark
from that time is Mariinsky Palace, designed in 1744 by the eminent ar-
chitect Bartolomeo Rastrelli for Russian Empress Elizaveta Petrovna. It is
now a ceremonial residence of the president of Ukraine. Nearby is President
Yanukovych’s notorious helipad (Chapter 3).

The old walled city was destroyed by Mongol invaders in 1240, ending the
glory of Rus. The site was then marginal for some centuries in comparison to
urban development in the city’s two other hearts until it too was converted
during the industrial and sugar age into an impressive ensemble of commer-
cial and residential architecture, grand public buildings and monuments,
and superb cultural and scientific institutions. Examples of landmarks that
still stand from the period include the former Prague Hotel and the former
Leipzig Restaurant at 36 and 39 Volodymirska Street, respectively, the Moor-
ish Dim Aktoriv (Actors’ House) that was constructed at the turn of the 20th
century as a kenesa (house of prayer) for Kyiv’s Karaim community, and the
iconic monument to Ukrainian Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytskyi that
was dedicated in 1888. There was also urban grandeur outside the perimeter
of Yaroslav’s former walls, particularly to the west, where the czarist-era St.
Vladimir’s University stood and where the university maintained a large
and beautiful botanical garden. That university was the precursor for the
large and prestigious Taras Shevchenko National University that has its
main campus at the site. A landmark statue of the famous Ukrainian poet
stands in a square across the street.

Of all the rich industrialists in Kyiv at the turn of the 20th century, the most
prominent was the city’s widely acknowledged “Sugar King” Lazar Brodsky
(1848-1904). His 20 refineries produced a quarter of all the sugar consumed in
the Russian Empire. The son of Israel Brodsky, one of the early pioneers of sugar

24 Karaim are Turkic adherents of Karaite Judaism, a branch of Judaism that does not recognize
the Talmud.
in Ukraine, he greatly expanded his father’s business, opened other enterprises such as flour milling, and became Kyiv’s largest employer as well as its most generous philanthropist. Much of his charity was targeted at the considerable needs of the city’s Jewish population and included funds for construction of the spectacular Moorish-style Choral Synagogue (now commonly called the Brodsky Synagogue), expansion and modernization of the Jewish Hospital that his father had built, and a trade school for Jewish boys. There were also substantial contributions for the needs of the city as a whole: a tuberculosis sanatorium, the Kyiv Red Cross, a literacy society, and the founding of the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, among other projects. He was also engaged in city sanitation works, the public transit system, and Kyiv’s gasworks, and he was an official of the city’s stock exchange. Many of his factory employees lived in company housing, where Brodsky provided much better accommodations than they would have had otherwise. He also looked after their health. Money that he left after his death established Bessarabskyi Rynok (Bessarabian Market), the lavishly ornate covered food market at the opposite end of Khreshchatyk from where the Hotel Yevropeyskyi once stood. The market building is still both an architectural landmark and a popular place to buy fresh food (Tret’jakov, 2013). One of Brodsky’s provisions at the time was that a portion of the profits from the marketplace would be donated for charity.

A second individual to single out is Vladislav Desideriy Horodetsky (Gorodetsky in Russian), arguably the greatest and certainly the best known of Kyiv’s many outstanding architects of the time. He has been referred to as Kyiv’s Gaudi. He was born in rural Ukraine in 1863 to a family of Polish landowners, was educated in St. Petersburg, and died in Tehran, Iran, in 1930, where he had designed the main passenger rail station. For 30 years he lived in Kyiv, and he left behind a memorable legacy: the already-mentioned Karaite Kenesa; the soaring twin-spired, Gothic St. Nicholas Roman Catholic cathedral that served Kyiv’s Polish population; and the classical National Art Museum of Ukraine, with its high porch of Doric columns and huge concrete lions at the main entrance, among other buildings. His most famous structure, though, was his own residence in Lypki, the Horodetsky House or, more commonly, the House with Chimeras at 10 Bankova Street. Built in 1901-1903, it is perched atop a steep slope that rises from the Khreshchatyk ravine along an architecturally magnificent street of turn-of-the-20th-century apartment buildings that now bears his name, and it is without question Kyiv’s most amazing, jaw-dropping building. Horodetsky was an avid big-game hunter.

25 Bessarabia is an historical term for the region that is now more or less Ukraine’s neighboring country, Moldova. Farmers from the region brought products to Kyiv to sell.
and author of a richly illustrated book named *In the Jungles of Africa*, and this structure, like the lions in front of the art museum, reflects his interest: an entire zoo of real and fanciful animals envelops the outside as sculptural ornaments. We see huge serpents and crocodiles, as well as rhinoceroses, lizards, eagles, lions, frogs, and, at the very top, fantastic fishes with young girl riders. Horodetsky’s friend, the Italian sculptor Elio Salya, executed the stunning décor, while Horodetsky himself took charge of the difficult challenge of positioning the building on a precipice. The structure now shares a plaza on Bankova Street with the main administration building of the president of Ukraine, and its main use is for official ceremonies.

World War II took an enormously heavy toll on Kyiv, most especially on the center of the city. The Nazi invasion of Soviet territory began on June 22, 1941, and advanced along a front 2,900 kilometers (1,800 miles) long. They reached the vicinity of Kyiv by mid-July, but they came across brave resistance from Red Army troops and private citizens alike. Three rings of defenses around the city slowed the German penetration, and it was not until September 19 of that year, after seven weeks of enormously costly battle, that the invaders managed to occupy the city. For the Soviets, the losses in defending Kyiv numbered in the hundreds of thousands in terms of lives lost and prisoners taken to German camps, while for Germany the victory was somewhat hollow because of their own considerable losses and the delay, which negatively affected the full assault on Moscow and deeper penetration into the Soviet Union. The extended defense of Kyiv proved to be helpful to the Soviet cause in that it provided time for the Soviets to remove critical industrial production for the war effort from the city and other parts of Ukraine that would otherwise have fallen to the Germans, and then to supply the needs of the Red Army from new factories opened to the east in the Urals Mountains and beyond. One of the key factories that was removed from Kyiv was Arsenal, the munitions works in Pechersk, which was then quickly brought into production in the Russian city of Perm in the Urals.

The center of Kyiv was all but totally destroyed. As the Red Army retreated from the city, it booby-trapped the buildings along Khreshchatyk, the main street, where they correctly anticipated that the Germans would take up residence and set up administration, and then on September 24 detonated their bombs from a distance, inflicting heavy casualties on the Germans and on their own civilians, as well as on the architectural fabric of the city.26 The

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26 Not all the explosions were detonated remotely; some were probably set off by agents of the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, which had remained in the city to subvert the German effort (Snyder, 2010, p. 201).
Germans were incensed at this ploy and responded by calling for the city’s remaining Jews to present themselves and then murdered them at Babyn Yar (Chapter 5). There were an estimated 200,000 other civilian casualties in Kyiv at the hands of the Nazis, many of them caused by a deliberate policy of starvation that was imposed at Hitler’s personal direction (Berkhoff, 2004, pp. 164-186), as well as deportations of some 100,000 Kyiv citizens to Germany as slave labor. All told, the demographic losses to soldiers and civilians were devastating, but finally, on November 6, 1943, nearly 26 months after the occupation began, Kyiv was liberated. As the Germans retreated, they destroyed much of what was still standing in Kyiv and set the ruins ablaze.

Rebuilding started immediately after liberation, even as fighting raged west of the city. There was a rush to restart industries that produced food and those that could contribute directly to the remaining war effort by manufacturing armaments and repairing tanks (Boychenko et al., 1968, pp. 426-427). The other priority was rebuilding Khreshchatyk. This task had enormous symbolic value and was a boost for morale. The job of clearing debris befell the surviving citizens of the city as a cooperative civic duty, while architects and professional planners began to sketch what might be next. There were cash prizes for the best designs, so quite a few hopefuls did their best to draw as grandiose an avenue as their imaginations could conjure. A wonderful, richly illustrated book by Yerofalov-Pylypchak about Soviet architecture in Kyiv has page after page of these illustrations (2010, pp. 285-335). The proposals showed a broad avenue with straight rows of trees, grand plazas with great monuments and fanciful fountains, and enormous buildings, some soaring and others blocky, but all richly over-the-top with combinations of columns, domes, arches, spires, statuary, or Soviet stars. There were also parade grounds and formal gardens, as well as relics of history and cities of the future. At least one drawing even offered long escalators from the high ground where Khreshchatyk meets river-bluff parkland at European Square to the level of the river far below. For those who toiled with picks and shovels while the thinkers drew, there was a popular song written in 1943 by Pavlo Tychyna soon after Kyiv was liberated. My own translation of the refrain is this:

Beloved sister, dearest brother,
Let’s work together on Khreshchatyk.
You start at that end; I’ll start at this end.

What resulted was an eclectic mix of fanciful architecture and the harsh architecture of Soviet authority. The architects who won prizes for the best
proposals for Khreshchatyk were not those whose work advanced into the next level of competition. Instead, three new proposals emerged from the inner track, those by architects Volodymyr Zabolotnyi, Oleksander Vlasov, and Oleksiy Tatsiya. In turn, these also fell by the wayside. Zabolotnyi’s work was rejected because it was seen in Moscow as too reminiscent of Ukrainian baroque and not quite Soviet enough; Vlasov’s concepts were apparently liked too much in Moscow and in 1949 he was “promoted” to work in that city instead of Kyiv; and Tatsiya fell by the wayside apparently because a fourth architect, the very talented Anatoly Volodymyrovych Dobrovolskyi (1910-1988), was appointed as director of architecture for Kyiv in 1950 and took over the main elements of the Khreshchatyk project himself. Somewhere along the line, the body of Nikifor Nikitovich Sholudenko (1919-1943), a Hero of the Soviet Union and the first Red Army soldier to set foot in Kyiv when it was liberated from the invaders, had to be removed from its resting place beside Khreshchatyk. He had been buried in the city center just after the battle for liberation, but now Kyiv’s first subway line, long delayed by prewar bickering, was finally being excavated and he was in its path.

Dobrovolskyi (whose family name means “man of good will”) is credited with initiating the main features of Khreshchatyk today. This includes the central square that is today Maidan Nezalezhnosti or Independence Square (it was then named Kalinin Square), the Khreshchatyk Metro Station nearby, and the huge hotel building that rises from a higher elevation to the south of the square and looms over the entire scene as if it were lord and master. That structure occupies the site of the former Ginsburg House. Its design was supposed to echo the Seven Sisters, a group of seven skyscrapers in Moscow designed in the Stalinist style, but it was never finished and lacks the wedding cake features and spires. The hotel was called Hotel Moskva (Moscow) at the time, but with independence in 1991 it was renamed Hotel Ukraina (Ukraine). Other postwar landmarks in the Khreshchatyk ensemble include the central post office for the city which is simultaneously neoclassical, Stalinist, and multicolumned, as well as blocky and oversized; the modernist, clock tower–capped Trade Unions House across the square from the post office; “Ukrainian House” (present name), constructed in 1982 as the Lenin Museum on the spot where a long time ago the European Hotel had stood; TsUM, the huge Central Department Store of Kyiv that was grafted in 1958-1960 onto what was left of a smaller retail store from before the war; the huge Stalinist city hall building erected in 1952-1957 at 36 Khreshchatyk; and various large apartment blocks for those who were elites among Soviet equals.
6.2 Ghosts

My own time in Kyiv has not been long but the transitions that I have witnessed with individual buildings and along specific streets are palpable and much larger that I had imagined they could be. There is no loss when decay is removed to make room for fresh growth, but I was dismayed to learn from many examples that neglecting old buildings and allowing them to deteriorate are part of the developers’ strategy to gain access to land. I was disheartened to see architectural treasures from the past being replaced with soulless construction. I also observed that the center of Kyiv was being gentrified: taken from ordinary citizens and long-time residents to make room for expansion of a commercial center or for upscale and expensive residences for a privileged market. My street-by-street inventory of the territory on which the walled city had stood counted about 30 substantial buildings that were empty. Most are exposed to the elements and are rotting. Some of them might be affected by disputed ownership, but for most of these ghosts, as I call them, it is known that decay is a deliberate strategy by their owners. The goal is to assemble surrounding property into bigger development sites, and perhaps to make sure that buildings become decayed enough to frustrate arguments by historic preservation-minded opponents of demolition. If developers need to move fast with a building, there is always the tool of fire. I have no rock-solid proof that a blaze at any specific building was ignited by developer-induced arson, but can say with confidence that Kyiv has had multiple fires of suspicious origin and that neighbors simply know what happened: they blame the redevelopment-for-profit industry.

I was struggling to fall asleep one night (June 10-11, 2011) in an uncomfortable sixth-floor apartment that I had just rented for a short while in the old city. The bedroom faced Mykhaylivskyi Provulok (Michael's Lane), where just about midnight I heard glass breaking and people shouting. My first thought was that a bunch of rowdy drunks were passing, but instantly I recognized the smell of smoke. I opened the balcony door and saw that a building very near, 4 Vulytsya Alla Tarasovoi (Alla Tarasova Street),27 was ablaze and that flames were leaping from top (sixth) floor windows and through the roof. It was so close and right at eye level! I quickly dressed, grabbed my camera, and came outside just as firefighters began arriving, and was able to watch from directly below as they ascended their ladders

27 The street is named after Alla Konstantinova Tarasova (1898-1973), a celebrated Kyiv-born theatrical and movie actress.
and began dousing the flames with water. I stood at command central snapping photos every which way until embers began showering us. That is when I moved to the other side of the barrier that fire department officials had set up and joined the crowd of onlookers. Before long, the fire was brought under control, the excitement died, and my neighbors and I returned to our respective quarters. I was impressed with Kyiv’s firefighters and will always remember that night as an example of bravery, professionalism, and a job done right.

There are other reasons to remember 4 Alla Tarasova, too. It dated from the turn of the 20th century, and it had been a beautiful old stone-front apartment building, replete with ornate balconies, a graceful pattern of pilasters, and a high acroterion with window openings that stood proudly front and center at the roof. The structure had been certified historic for both its architectural merit and because notable people had lived and worked there when the building was still young. But in the last year, it was emptied of tenants by a new owner and now stood as a ghost building, awaiting whatever was next. The last tenants, who had apparently departed less than a month before the fire, had left a sheet-sized banner on their private balcony. It was in Ukrainian and read in bold blue letters “Kyiany Peredusim!” (“Kyivans First!” or “Kyivans above All!”), the name of an NGO dedicated to preservation of the distinctive historic character of the city.28

After the fire, neighbors told me that bomzhi had recently begun staying in the building as squatters. That is a word related to “bums” that Ukrainians apply to homeless people, particularly those who are alcoholics. I did not see these people, but the next morning as I listened in on conversations outside the charred ruins of 4 Alla Tarasova Street, some neighbors were blaming bomzhi for the blaze, saying that the cause was probably a cooking fire gone out of control or the result of drunkenness and carelessness. Others, however, were quick to point out the value to potential developers of having the site cleared, and they chimed in with assertions that the real estate industry often used bomzhi to get the development process moving. The truth of that type of statement I can’t prove, but add that I had heard this same claim before from preservation-minded critics of Kyiv’s new development. What I do know for sure, however, is that the side of Alla Tarasova Street where the fire had been was uninhabited all along the block before the blaze and had looked from the get-go as a redevelopment site in waiting. By stark contrast, only a few meters away directly across the street

28 By coincidence, I had visited the building on the day of the fire, June 10, and took what are probably the last preblaze photographs.
from Number 4 looms a side flank of the gleaming glass-faced Hyatt Hotel, “St. Hyatt” as we called it below, one of the buildings that stands out most as a symbol of Kyiv in transition. Apparently, hotel guests had an even better view of the blaze than I had had from just around the corner.

There are many other “ghostly” buildings in the center of Kyiv. In summer 2011, I counted 37 such “curiously empty” historic structures in the small section of the center of the city that I had marked out for myself as the historic “Upper City.” That inventory had included 4 Alla Tarasova Street. The map that I put together showed a scatter of such structures throughout the district, but also the identifiable clusters, suggesting that builders were putting together larger tracts for construction. A Kyiv Post article that was coincidentally called “Ghost Town” presented similar observations (Stack, 2010; Shevchenko, 2012). It featured a collage of photographs of sad-looking, decrepit old buildings arranged across a map of Kyiv’s center, and text about some of the most prominent examples. The lead example, well known to just about every Kyivan, is the soaring red-brick Gothic residence at 1 Yaroslaviv Val, an ancient street along which a wall of Prince Yaroslav’s city extended (Figure 6.1). The structure dates to the sugary end of the 19th century, and for a time it was the residence of a wealthy landowner, M. Pidhorskyi. It is now privately owned again, although the specific identity of the owner seems to be a guarded secret, and except for security guards and some film people during its occasional use as a backdrop for filming, has been vacant since about the turn of the millennium. A distinctive architectural feature is the main door, above which two crumbling and evil-looking winged demons of stone seem to support three stories of turret. Just above these demons begins a network of horizontal metal screens to catch debris as it falls from above. As reported in the newspaper article, the owner, whoever he is, has an asking price of US$10 million for the structure, which realtors say is way out of line because any buyer would still need to add millions more to renovate the structure. From the historic Golden Gate nearby, an ancient remnant of the walled city, one can see that at least one happy young tree has taken root on the sunny side of the roof.

The story seems to be similar for other ghosts. Somehow the structures were acquired by new owners with hidden identities, often investment companies with mysterious initials or other combinations of capital letters as names, when the getting was good during the disorganized time that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet system. Some of the properties were then passed on to other mysterious owners (examples of names: “D.I.B.” and “LLC House”) who have done nothing with them but sit and wait. In the meantime, builders have preferred to work on vacant land, including
parks and playgrounds and other public spaces that can be gotten under the
table, where they hastily construct large buildings much more cheaply than
the cost of restoration of old properties. The Kyiv Post article had phrased
it nicely: “Developers prefer cheap and ugly greenfield construction to
expensive and laborious historical renovation.” Another option for develop-
ers is to build on vacant land or on sites in the center that are easy to clear,
a process that an activist from the organization Save Old Kyiv, Inna Sovsun, described as “new pinpoint construction.” The result of that approach is a landscape of incompatible buildings and destruction of historical ambience.

A major weakness is the lack of financial incentives in the tax structure for property owners to undertake historic renovation. At present, there is simply no reward for an owner or developer from the government for undertaking the difficult and costly job of maintaining the historic landscape in Kyiv. Moreover, the tax structure does not penalize an owner for doing nothing for years with her or his property, because taxes are unrealistically low. Under the new and inexperienced land tax system in Kyiv, the amount of tax that one pays is tied to the size of the property and not its value. That means that taxes on a wooden or aluminum shed in the middle of nowhere and a treasured architectural gem from history in the prized center of the city are the same low amount as long as the plot size is the same. In this way, an owner of a building such as the ghost at 1 Yaroslaviv Val can afford to wait forever to find his US$10 million buyer, or to have his building deteriorate to the point where it can be torn down despite the tears of historical preservationists. In fact, one of the laws of real estate physics in this regard is that the longer an old structure stands empty in wait of a buyer-renovator, the greater the chance will be that it will eventually be declared a hazard that needs to be taken down.

6.3 Maidan: Independence Square

The symbolic center of Kyiv is Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) or simply “Maidan” (Figure 6.2). It grew out of the square that was in front of the pre–World War II City Hall and is actually a rectangle about the length of two football fields. It is aligned perpendicularly to the wide, 1.2-kilometer-long main street of the city, Khreshchatyk, which cuts through it and divides the “square” into more or less equal sized parts that are closer to being squares. According to Kyivan terminology based on the “flow” of Khreshchatyk from its “source” near the river at European Square, the two parts of Maidan are the “left side” (south) and “right side” (north). Prior to 1991, the space was called Kalinin Square and then Ploshcha Zhovtenvoyi Revolutsiyi (Square of the October Revolution). Its centerpiece was a large granite monument to Vladimir Lenin (Chapter 4). This is where the Independence Monument now stands. Both the square and the wide street that bisects it are emblematic of Kyiv today. They have their charms and can be great fun at times, to be sure, but both also reflect much of
what is wrong. Put simply, reconstruction after World War II created an ill-conceived architectural ensemble that has never been undone and that seems to be getting worse as “improvements” are added. Moreover, Maidan seems to be a lot less “public” than it used to be, with increasing restrictions as to access and what can take place.

Maidan is a hodgepodge with all sorts of individually placed and uncoordinated architectural knickknacks (Jilge, 2010). It is bisected by Khreshchatyk, Kyiv’s principal avenue for parades, protests, and pickups, and which is part of the Maidan ensemble. Except on Sundays and holidays, when the street is closed to vehicular traffic, pedestrians need to cross from one side of the square to the other via an underground concourse of shops, restaurants, kiosks, vendors, and beggars. The subway entrance is there, too, the turnstiles for Maidan Nezalezhnosti Station. The Hotel Ukraina rises high from a slope beyond the southern end of Maidan’s left half where the Ginsburg House had stood. At its feet is the main section of Globus, an enclosed multilevel shopping mall behind a high glass façade that forms the southern wall of the southern “half-square.” It was erected in 2001. An earlier plan for the site called for a national museum and a pantheon of great
figures in Ukraine’s history to look out over Independence Square, but that did not work out and we have a shopping mall instead. In the evening hours when the lights of the mall can be seen through the glass from the outside, instead of seeing likenesses of Shevchenko, Hrushevskyi, Khmelnytskyi, and Prince Volodymyr the Great, we read names such as Swatch, Swarovski, and “Solo Pizza and Sushi.” There are two large billboards atop Globus, one on either side as if to provide geometric balance to the spire of the Independence Monument that stands in front. The billboards are tacky, like those along a highway, and have advertised, among other products, Coca-Cola, a vodka bar located in the shopping center, and the bearded Kirill – patriarch of the Moscow-based Russian Orthodox Church. Another large billboard, this one a digital video monitor, faces the square from the side, across Instytutska Street, where it blocks the view of the stately former Institute of Noblewomen building that shares Hotel Ukraina’s hill. This billboard, too, promotes commercial products and, sometimes, the Russian Orthodox faith to people on Independence Square.

The centerpiece of the left side is the Independence Monument, also dated 2001 like the shopping center. It stands approximately where granite Lenin once weighed heavily on the heart of Kyiv and is a fine monument to a country’s independence. Indeed, it must be because other countries, most notably Mexico and Turkmenistan, have used essentially the same architectural format to celebrate a breaking away from colonialism. There is a columned base around which are marble steps, and from there rises a tall marble column that supports some sort of heroic figure. In Mexico City’s case the column-rider is El Ángel (the Angel of Independence), whereas in Kyiv the top has a she – a bronze figure of a striking, emphatically Ukrainian woman that is 12 meters (39 feet) tall. She represents Berehynia, a folkloric female spirit associated with the protection of home or homeland (Rubchak, 2001; Kis, 2005), and holds aloft a branch from a kalyna bush (guelder rose), a plant that has long been associated in song and storytelling with the promise of Ukraine’s emergence from a history of sorrows. From base to kalyna branch, the structure is 50 meters (164 feet) high. It took about ten years to decide on the design, which in the end was approved very quickly to avoid the embarrassment of not having a monument in place by the tenth anniversary of Ukraine’s independence. The panel that made the choice almost certainly consulted photos of the monument in Mexico City. The construction was a crash project, too, completed just three days before the August 24, 2001, ten-year celebration. There are fountains nearby with water that runs sometimes, and three other monuments: one to the legendary founders of Kyivan Rus, the brothers Kyi, Shchek, and Khoriv, and their
sister, Lybid; another to national folkloric hero Cossack Mamay (also written Kozak Mamay), a popular personification of the Ukrainian nation; and the third, a new one, an oversized bronze Valentine’s Day heart. Visitors pose for photos in front of all three, or in front of a fountain when the water has been turned on.

As we move under Khreshchatyk to emerge on the other side to see the right-side “half-square,” we see that it is just as much a hodgepodge – also the product of confusion, incompetence, and crass capitalism. As opposed to the glass façade of Globus, we now have glass domes that provide natural light for a long-axis extension of the shopping mall, also built in 2001, that runs underground. One of the domes is much larger than the others like that in many Orthodox churches, and illuminates a pizza-sushi-and-McDonald’s food court. The construction of the underground shopping center unearthed the ruins of the so-called “Ladski Vorota,” the southern gate to the old capital of Kyivan Rus. The relics could have been preserved and made into an historic landmark, but were in the way of mall building and by all accounts were hastily destroyed (Kovalynsky, 2004, pp. 325-345). Preservationists were outraged. Perhaps as consolation or from a feeling of guilt, a new city gate was erected as decoration on the square atop the mall. However, it resembles nothing in particular, goes from no place in particular to no other place, and just sits there as yet another people-blocking piece of architectural furniture, its base two steps higher than the level of the plaza. The prewar city hall building that once stood just at this part of the square had a statue of the archangel Michael atop its spire. That monument had been lost some time ago, but a new Michael was crafted and was placed atop the fake gate to nowhere. Nowadays, the structure is popular with skateboarders who like to sail through the gate and land with a thud on the pavement two steps down. There are graffiti there, too.

There are also fountains and green plants on right-side Maidan, as well as many benches bolted to the ground. All this furniture provides comfort or enjoyment for visitors; it also impedes mass gatherings, as there is no room. The “wall” at the northern end of this northern half-square is a cluster of five fairly similar Stalinist buildings with capitalist neon advertisements at their peaks: three ads are for land development or construction companies and two are for brands of beer. The signs are lit at night and are becoming new icons of the city, something akin to the neon signs and big billboards of New York’s Times Square, but only a tiny fraction as grand. Before these buildings were built, one could see the bell tower of historic St. Sophia at the top of the slope to the north, but nowadays one has to climb the southern slope in order to see this landmark from the center. One of the
five buildings is the Kozatsky Hotel, still a very Soviet-looking inn, while
the neighboring building has a McDonald’s restaurant at plaza level and
offices of export-bride and escort agencies above. Until recently, Ukrainiskyi
Khlib (Ukrainian Bread), was next door. It sold delicious bread and other
bakery treats, and its layout was reminiscent of Soviet-era retailing. Now
the premises house a sushi restaurant.

As opposed to what is in the square or behind it, the flanks of Maidan
Nezalezhnosti seem more appropriate. On the left side, there is the afore-
mentioned former Institute of Noblewomen, a former private school and
now a theater, while across the square is the renowned Ukrainian National
Academy of Music, also known as the Kyiv Conservatory, an imposing Ionic-
columned educational institution and concert hall that is known around
the music world. I was lucky enough to be a neighbor and often listened in
on students’ opera voices or the sounds of violin or other instruments as
they wafted on warm days through open windows. Across Khreshchatyk,
there are government buildings, most dramatically the monumental central
post office of Kyiv and its two stories of Grecian columns (Corinthian in
this instance), as well as Trade Union House, a landmark building strongly
connected with Kyiv’s history as a city of workers. Unfortunately, the post
office suffered a notorious collapse of a large section of the colonnade on
August 2, 1989, killing 11 people.29

We now turn to Independence Square as public space and note that this is,
indeed, the symbolic center of Kyiv: it is where Kyivans often go on a holiday
to stroll, see, and be seen; where Ukrainians have gathered in number for pro-
tests since the time when the Soviet Union began to unravel; where there are
staged concerts and other public events on holidays and many Sundays; and
where tourists, Ukrainians in their capital city and foreigners alike, almost
always visit when seeing Kyiv. There are clusters of souvenir and ice cream
vendors at specific edges of the square, as well as an interesting row about
30 meters long along the length of the post office building of vendors, mostly
elderly people, who sell symbols of Ukrainian nationhood (flags, lapel pins,
postage stamps, etc.), nationalistic literature, or CDs of traditional Ukrainian
songs and songs of Ukrainian guerilla fighters against Soviet rule. Some of
these sellers have displayed anti-Semitic literature. In addition, there are
also “characters” on the square such as those who proselytize publicly about
political or social issues, or in favor of a particular religion, and those who

29 The debris weighed more than 700 tons and was testimony that the center of Kyiv was badly
rebuilt after the war. Older Kyivans are especially aware of this and often walk on sidewalks
closer to the street than to buildings alongside in order to avoid possible falls of brick or plaster.
make a living off tourists by posing with them for pictures in costume or picking their pockets or bags. The square is also “infested” with two dozen or more costumed characters dressed as bears, zebras, tigers, chipmunks, and other animals, Sponge Bob, Homer Simpson, Shrek, a stereotype Native American in feather headdress, etc., who mercilessly trouble passersby to have photos taken with them. These are mostly students doing part-time work for tips, but they work for a boss who keeps a close eye on them from a central perch and keeps them busy (see Chapter 8). There are also young people with doves who accost people to have their pictures taken.

The most critical aspect of Maidan Nezalezhnosti as public space is its role as a venue for public protest. This would seem to be a normal role in a country that has gone from authoritarian control of public expression to independence from foreign rule and the adoption of democratic institutions, and was indeed an emerging activity on the Square of the October Revolution even before the Soviet Union had fully crashed. However, the abilities of Ukrainians to gather freely in anger about the government have been recently diminished and the square now rarely functions in this capacity. Critical in this change were the large-scale protests took place in 2000-2001 against Ukraine’s then newly elected second president, Leonid Kuchma, the so-called “Ukraine without Kuchma” movement by the grassroots. Issues included corruption in government, Kuchma’s authoritarianism, and allegations in the “Cassette Scandal” that the president had a hand in the murder of journalist Heorhiy Gongadze (Chapter 4). The protests were eventually put down via mass arrests, which was followed by closure of the square for construction of the shopping areas. The square was off-limits for more than a year, which may have helped to disassociate it from the public mind as a place for gatherings. When it was finally opened in 2002, it was with the clutter of fountains and planters and benches and other architectural elements that made it impractical for large demonstrations. I heard many times that such was the deliberate design, especially for the right side of the square, where the “Ukraine without Kuchma” demonstrations had been centered.

The left side of the plaza, the area around the Independence Monument, retained a larger open space and has since been used successfully for various public protests, as well as for events that it was especially designed for such as holiday celebrations and officially sanctioned concerts. The Orange Revolution30 took place there, as did large celebrations on December 26, 2004, the

30 The Orange Revolution refers to the December 2004 and early January 2005 encampment by citizens from all over Ukraine to protest a rigged runoff vote for president on November 24, 2004, that had given Viktor Yanukovych a short-lived victory over Viktor Yushchenko.
day when the Supreme Court voided a crooked election that had seemed to put Viktor Yanukovych in power as president, and then celebrations again when a second election gave Viktor Yushchenko (“the Orange Revolution candidate”) a decisive and clearly honest win. The public had much freer access to the square during the Yushchenko years (2005-2010) and used it for protests, spontaneous gatherings, and making soapbox speeches on political and religious topics, and fun. But from later on in 2010, after Yanukovych came to power in the next election, the square has become markedly less “public” except under controlled conditions. That micromanaged concert of February 23, 2011, attended by Party of Regions conscripts and audience members who were paid is an example of the Yanukovych administration’s controlling approach to the square (Chapter 4). When the government did permit protest (for example, the one in Fall 2010 by small business owners and vendors who were angry about new taxes and bureaucratic regulations), it came to regret what followed, because the numbers of protestors and anger grew as the days passed, and thousands of people were shouting about revolution and a downfall for the Yanukovych government. In the end, the onset of bad weather in December, the need for the protestors to return to earning a living, and some promises from the government that looked good at the time caused the gatherings to disband. Authorities made a big deal of the fact that some pavement tiles in the square had been damaged by tent stakes (many of the protestors had camped for day and night on end), and they arrested some of the leaders for wanton destruction of government property. Then, supposedly for repairs, a key part of the square was fenced off for months afterwards, and that was that.

I witnessed all this personally. I attended the business owners’ protests and protest events (concerts, etc.) almost every day for the two months or so that the movement was active, and I spent many hours listening to speeches and talking with people in the crowd. They came from all parts of Ukraine, but with a distance decay effect reflecting the time and cost of travel, and represented regions that had voted blue (Party of Regions) as well as orange. Often there were reports that many more people would have been on the square except that police were pulling over buses with protesters heading to Kyiv and turning them back. The students who had been the energy of the Orange Revolution never truly joined these older, blue-collar demonstrators, who were said to be interested primarily in their own personal pocketbook issues, so the movement did not grow much beyond its original core. Besides, many Ukrainians, the students included, were still dispirited by the failures of the Yushchenko administration. As the holiday season approached at the end of 2010, the tired protestors broke up and the city put up a huge
Christmas tree and a silly commercial “holiday village” where they had stood. A news article in the magazine Tyzhdan (The Week) was headlined “A Christmas Tree as a Tool of the Regime” (Mykhelson, 2010). My own notes about these developments include this:

Exactly at the base of the Independence Monument is an inflatable baseball batting tee where three-year olds can hit a balloon ball with an inflatable bat against an inflatable wall. Atop this attraction is an inflatable baseball player holding a bat. The person who runs this particular concession (there are 20 or so of the same vein around the square) yells “Yes!” in English when a kid actually makes contact with the ball with his inflatable bat.

Protest at Independence Square has not been possible since, other than some small exceptions that slipped through the cracks. Requests for permits are routinely denied, and rallies that do take place are steered elsewhere: the park near the Kyiv National University of Taras Shevchenko where the statue of Taras Shevchenko stands, and the plaza in front of St. Michael's Church atop the hill in the historic center, among other places. Planned events and impeding architecture continue as be used as barriers to protest. Whenever there is an upcoming concert, for example, the square is closed off in advance as materials are brought early in for erecting the stage and other backdrop, and then it takes days later for them to be removed. By that time, it is almost time to prepare for the next event. In summer 2011, much of the left side of the square was closed for weeks on end because on weekends a television program of pop music and dance for young teenagers was being staged. Thousands of tweens and teens took part every weekend, singing and dancing along with their favorite pop stars, and thinking perhaps that the government that sponsored all the fun was cool. Once while I was standing and watching the kids in repeated rehearsal, an oldster about my age struck up a conversation that began with his rhetorical question: “Do you remember when we were forced to do this on Saturdays for the Communist Party?”

6.4 Khreshchatyk: Main Street Kyiv

Khreshchatyk is not quite 1.2 kilometers (0.75 miles) long, but it is Kyiv's best-known street by far and the city’s nearest equivalent to what Americans call “Main Street.” It runs from European Square close to the bluffs that
overlook the Dnipro River westward to the Bessarabian Market, the colorful farmers’ market structure that was mentioned previously. As such, the street runs – or “has run” to be more precise – from Lenin to Lenin to Lenin. First, European Square is where the aforementioned 1982 Lenin Museum (subsequently turned into Ukrainian House) is located. Second, Khreshchatyk then passed the granite Lenin in what is today Independence Square. Finally, the third Lenin is one who still stands – the statue that was described at the start of Chapter 4. This Lenin faces the Bessarabian Market and is on Khreshchatyk at the T-intersection with Taras Shevchenko Boulevard. Along its “Leniniferous” course, Khreshchatyk bisects Independence Square, as we have just seen, and passes the offices of Unian (a news agency), various hotels, banks, restaurants, cafés, and mobile telephone stores, as well as the central post office, Kyiv’s City Hall, and the formerly Soviet TsUM Department Store at the T-intersection with Bohdan Khmelnytskyi Street. The street itself is quite wide, measuring about 27 meters (88.6 feet) across, and is often clogged with cars despite having eight lanes of traffic (four in each direction). The sidewalks on either side are wide, too. They have many small kiosks and benches for sitting, and except for the wee hours are always alive with strolling pedestrians. Cars clog the sidewalks, too.

Despite the bustle, Khreshchatyk is often a pleasant street and very pretty when lit up for holidays. It is extra nice when chestnut trees are in bloom. There are many enjoyable diversions: street musicians and religious speakers, break dancers and fire breathers, commercial promotions of various kinds, and good ice cream. There are also many free concerts that attract tens of thousands. The stage is usually on Independence Square, but sometimes it is erected in front of City Hall or in the middle of the street on days when traffic is prohibited. The concerts are paid for by the government of Kyiv and/or the national government, as well as via commercial sponsorship, and they always feature plugs for politicians and for whatever commercial product is being promoted. Often at the end of a concert there is a fireworks show. A lot of beer is consumed on the street, but crowds are well-behaved and there is typically little trouble. Police are present in case they are needed, but they usually maintain a low profile.

There is also much amiss on Khreshchatyk that, like aspects of Independence Square, presents Kyiv in a bad light. It is normal for a “Main Street” to have all sorts of people and activities, and to range across various shades of what is proper or appropriate. Khreshchatyk has these characteristics and then some, particularly in the direction of what is improper or not befitting of a great city, and it can be thought of as blend of all of the following: (1) a low-class boardwalk strip at an ocean resort; (2) a cruising strip for
prostitutes and prostitute-seekers; (3) a home for the homeless and for people suffering from alcoholism, pathological loneliness, and mental illnesses; and (4) a place of opportunity for pickpockets, bag-snatchers, and perhaps even hat-snatchers. There are also plenty of petty vendors, “starving” street musicians, little old lady flower sellers and cigarette sellers, people with bathroom scales where you can weigh yourself for a tip, and professional beggars. Many Kyivans stay away. The street is used disproportionately by visitors to the city who throng the sidewalks to observe the zoo and who sometimes fall victim of the street’s professional scammers and thieves.

It is ironic that a street that was occupied by the Germans in World War II after enormous loss of defenders’ lives, was blown up by the retreating Soviets in order to kill Germans, and was then recaptured at enormous cost by heroes of the Red Army and rebuilt after the war with intentions of meeting the highest principles of Stalinist urban design, is – in independent Ukraine – a veritable mess. I am not referring to the many unfortunate citizens on the street who are somehow afflicted or truly impoverished, or who are unfairly marginalized in other ways: their plight is not usually their fault and they might have no other place to go. As a class, though, they do show an unfortunate side of Kyiv. What I refer to instead are the exploiters of people for whom Khreshchatyk is home turf and to entrepreneurs whose entrepreneurship brings down the cultural level of Kyiv’s main street. The examples are many: there are human sandwich boards who stroll the streets promoting wives for export and curvaceous escorts for hire; rigged arcade games that tempt passersby with apparently easily winnable prizes; fake Russian Orthodox priests who collect donations for nonexistent churches; and professional beggars who are almost certainly not poor or who present themselves as someone they are not. A severely bent over old lady with trembling hands that can barely hold a McDonald’s cup for donations is, in fact, much younger than she seems and could be a man; while some of the seemingly impoverished Roma (Gypsy) beggars can sometimes be seen behind buildings making calls on cell phones, or without the bulge of pregnancy that was there before and will be there again tomorrow. One Roma family exploits a wheelchair-bound child who seems to also have a serious cognitive deficiency by leaving her along the sidewalk or at the bottom of steps to a pedestrian underpass with cup in hand, day in and day out and into the evening.

There are also many sex tourists. They stroll alone or in twos or small groups, and accost young women who catch their eye, sometimes ignoring or dismissing solicitations from professional sex workers and focusing instead on young women who, to my eye, are out shopping or simply passing
by. Some women like the attention and even decide to go on dates or do business, but many others hate the come-ons. More than one pretty young Kyivan has told me that she avoids going to Khreshchatyk because of the nonstop unwanted attention from foreign men, some of whom are excessively persistent. One said that she is sometimes followed into a store where she wants to shop, and is then hit on by men who pretend that they need help with their own shopping. Foreign men come to Ukraine for a short time with the aim of having a lot of sex, and they cast their nets widely. Some seem to go especially for teenagers. We return to these aspects of Kyiv’s seamy side in Chapter 10.

6.5 TsUM in Transition

Rinat Akhmetov has bought TsUM (Tsentralnyi Universalnyi Magazin), the Central Universal Department Store, the one and only “main” department store in the center of Kyiv. It is located at a prominent street corner along Khreshchatyk, and it is going to be remade into a modern and upscale shopping mall (Faryna, 2012a). So read the announcements in the media at the start of 2012. A sell-off of the inventory followed and quick shoppers picked up bargains. Then the store closed for three years of redevelopment that is said to cost US$100 million (Interfax-Ukraine 2012b). Exactly what the new shopping center will look like is all part of the great unknown in Kyiv, as is the case with so much else that deals with real estate and the transfer of resources. This is, therefore, a good example to include in this sequence of chapters about Kyiv’s emerging new landscapes, and to continue telling the story of transitions that, from the standpoint of the city’s ordinary citizens, simply happen. Kyiv changes before our eyes, but very little of what goes on is ever discussed publicly beforehand or vetted: in most cases, the people are simply informed about a project once it is so far along that it is a fait accompli. Sometimes the outcome is positive, as has been the case of some new shopping centers that the public patronizes with enthusiasm, but in other instances the city loses. After it opens, we will see what the new TsUM brings to Kyiv.

The fact that it is Rinat Akhmetov (born in 1966 in Donetsk; his name is also written as Renat Akhmetov) who is behind the transition is significant, as he is arguably more powerful than either the whirlybird president of Ukraine or the Supreme Court – probably the most powerful person in the country and certainly the richest. Forbes has ranked him as 39th on the list of richest billionaires in the world in both 2011 and 2012, with an estimated fortune of
US$16 billion in both years, while *Korrespondent* has him as Ukraine’s richest individual with a fortune in 2011 of US$25.6 billion. The money comes from metal and mining interests in eastern Ukraine, power generation, telecommunications, media, real estate, banking, among other endeavors, as well as ownership of Donetsk Shakhtar, the greatly popular and highly successful football club that plays in his birth city. He is the money behind President Yanukovych, who would probably cease to be an entity in politics without his support, the principle benefactor of the Party of Regions, a member of the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) representing the Party of Regions, and in some ways the heart of the economy of Donetsk and its industrial hinterland, Donbas. There have been reports in various media that he is a “scandalous oligarch” with links to organized crime, but Akhmetov has been able to win libel judgments against their authors and extract apologies, so we will travel no further down this road. In fact, it will help to round out this brief biography to add that Akhmetov is a major donor to charitable causes in Ukraine, enough so as to make him quite probably the country’s number one philanthropist.

For Akhmetov, TsUM is just one of many investments and a smaller project than many others, but for Kyiv his acquisition of the landmark store is a big deal, because what he does with it will have a great impact on the city center. From the time it was constructed in the late 1930s as the fancy and comparatively well-stocked Soviet department store in Kyiv’s downtown, the building has been a mainstay of downtown retailing. It occupies a strategic central site, the busy T junction where Khreshchatyk meets an end of Bohdan Khmelnytskyi Street, and has been an anchor of business for both busy streets. For a time, TsUM was a typical “Soviet” store where all goods were kept behind counters and could be examined only when it came to be your turn with the sales clerk. Then, the goods you wanted had to be paid for in advance at a cashier booth at the head of another line before returning to the clerk with a stamped receipt. Eventually procedures were liberalized and the layout of the retailing floors became more consumer friendly, as TsUM was privatized and modernized after independence, but it still cannot escape that feel that it is “yesterday’s store” from a time and place where “yesterday” was harsh. Perhaps it is the building itself, a stern Stalinist-constructivist edifice designed by the dean of Stalinist architecture himself, Alexey Shchusev (1873-1949), a man who helped give Moscow its “communist look.” Perhaps that explains why the structure seems to fit so poorly with today’s consumers no matter how much the sales staff of today smiles and offers good service. Shopping has migrated to the malls, including to one that runs for quite some distance underneath Khreshchatyk starting near TsUM, and Akhmetov has seen an opportunity to profit from an update.
Although we cannot as yet know the specific details as to what the update will bring, we can be more or less sure that TsUM-2 (or whatever it comes to be called) will be quite impressive and comfortable, and it will give the center of Kyiv a facelift. As I write this, the entire interior of the structure has been gutted and the roof is gone, and only the exterior walls are standing. A construction crane hovers overhead and there is machinery everywhere. Whatever criticisms there are to be made about Akhmetov, they have nothing to do with urban architecture and design, where his tastes seem refined. The spectacular stadium that he built for his Donetsk footballers is a case in point (Suma, 2010). For the remaking of TsUM, Akhmetov has engaged the London-based design firm Benoy, which is widely known for premium commercial projects in cities all around the world. High expectations for TsUM-2 are also conveyed by similar projects in other cities where landmark Soviet-era department stores that have been converted into attractive, high-end commercial centers can serve as models or standards, e.g., both TsUM and GUM in Moscow and the historic TsUM at Theater Square in St. Petersburg.

The sneak previews that Akhmetov’s development company, ESTA Holdings, has been releasing in measured public relations doses also promise a fine structure. For example, we are told that the façade of the present building will be retained for reasons of historic preservation, and we are shown in architectural renderings that the building behind it, as well as below and above, will be spectacular. There is to be a two-level car park beneath street level, a bright and sleek interior with a huge open atrium and blue sky that is seen through a glass roof, and a public space at the top where Kyivans can hang out and enjoy a panorama of the center of the city. The stores themselves are apparently not going to be the kind that can appeal only to the richest shoppers, as popular brands such as H&M, Banana Republic, Uniqlo, and Victoria’s Secret have been mentioned as representative of what is to come (Faryna, 2012b). According to Andrei Sverchevsky, the manager assigned to the project by ESTA Holdings, and as reported by the Kyiv Post, the remade shopping center will target a broad public: “We want to reach the widest audience possible. Kyiv has about three million residents and we want that almost all of them become our customers. We want all of them to feel comfortable in TsUM regardless how much money they have in their pockets” (Faryna, 2012b).

TsUM-2 follows in the steps of changes in retailing structure that are already well underway in downtown Kyiv in which mass market stores from the West have been replacing commerce from the Soviet economy. Khreshchatyk already has a United Colors of Benetton, a Zara, a Marks & Spencer, and a Gap, among other imported brands. So in that sense,
the remaking of the old department store is nothing revolutionary – only more of the same, but in a shell that promises to be extra nice. It is also a large-scale project, so it is much more of the same rather than just a little, and it does sit at the key, standard-setting intersection of retailing in the downtown where it will have considerable spillover impact.

Interviews with older Kyivans reveal a sense of loss about an institution that has passed and a store that had served them well. They also reveal a realistic understanding that the styles and goods of the new retailing will not be for them. Downtown Kyiv is becoming youth-oriented, everyone agrees, even as demographic trends point to fewer youth in the future and continued emigration, and an ever more aging society. Moreover, the workers who had served with distinction in TsUM for many years and are now unemployed know that there will be no new jobs for them in the new stores, as it is primarily sharp-looking young people who are hired as clerks into the new economy. Also missing from the new Kyiv as represented by TsUM will be locally made, Ukrainian products. To its credit, TsUM was known for its support of Soviet and Ukrainian manufacturing in the clothing and household goods that it sold, but that will almost certainly change when the new array of retailers takes over.

6.6 SS. Sophia, Michael, and Hyatt

The hilltop in central Kyiv where the walled cities of Prince Volodymyr the Great and his son Yaroslav the Wise once stood is a palimpsest of the city’s history, from structures that still remain from the princely era, to those from the czarist period, followed by Soviet-era construction, and then new construction since the critical date of 1991. We can ascend the hill from various directions: from the south via a short walk from Maidan Nezalezhnosti, imagining an historic gate that once stood along the way to give us entry; from the west past an attractive square that has built around the remains of the last remaining gate to Yaroslav’s City, Zoloti Vorota (the Golden Gate); up the steep and winding Andriyivskyi Uzviz (St. Andrew’s Slope) from Podil and past St. Andrew’s Church; or by the easy way from Podil, a fun ride on the Kyiv Funicular, a cable car transport that was built against a riverfront bluff at the start of the 20th century to connect the lower and upper cities. However we get there, we come upon a large open space that is the heart of the old city. To the one side is Sofiiska Ploshcha (Sophia Square), an open plaza at the gate to the St. Sophia Cathedral complex (Figure 6.3), while off to the other side, closer to where the funicular brings
you up the bluff, is Mykhailivska Ploshcha (Michael’s Square), an open plaza in front of the gate to the St. Michael’s Church complex. The two are connected by a short stretch of wide Volodymyrska Street and some green spaces at its sides. St. Sophia dates back to the earliest period of Kyiv history and is a UNESCO world heritage site, while St. Michael’s is a new church built in 1999 on the site of historic Monastery of St. Michael of the Golden Domes that had been dynamited in Stalin’s notorious war against religion. These spaces are often the site of public gatherings, protests, concerts, and other events, as well as destinations for camera-toting tourists and the various kinds of local entrepreneurs who look to make a living from them.31

In coming to this space, we have the opportunity to reflect back on the history of Kyiv and also to ponder what seems to be its future. There are domes from the past and domes that have been built in the lifetimes of our children, as well as other landmarks from across history. The very center of the space, for instance, is occupied by the aforementioned equestrian statue of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytskyi, the mid-17th-century leader of the Ukrainian Cossacks in their fight against rule by the Polish nobility. In 1654, he was

31 There are both honest and dishonest entrepreneurs. I pass through these squares regularly and because I look or walk foreign, have been offered the service of tourist guides, interpreters, personal drivers, and sex workers. Twice, I was targeted by “dropped-wallet” scammers, about whom I had been warned in advance and for whom I was well prepared.
signatory to the Treaty of Pereyaslav, a military alliance between Ukraine and Russia in that struggle that Russia has forever since interpreted as a permanent union of Russians and Ukrainians into one people. The statue is an icon of Kyiv – one of the most famous monuments in a city replete with monuments. Its designer was Mikhail Osipovich Mikeshin (1835-1896), a Russian artist who was responsible for many outdoor statues in the major cities of the Russian Empire. Khmelnitskyi strikes the heroic pose of a determined military leader, and he faces northwest toward enemy Poland. The original plan was for a much more elaborate and more expensive monument, but Kyiv citizens failed to raise enough funds. We can be thankful for that, I think, because Mikeshin had hoped to cast a design that would have celebrated the demons of ethnic and religious hatreds of the times. In the model that he put forward that Kyivans rejected, Khmelnitskyi’s horse would have been trampling a Jesuit priest, a Polish landowner, and a Jew. The czarist regime approved the toned-down Khmelnitskyi and took him in as a hero because of Pereyaslav. He then survived Soviet rule because he had brought Ukraine to Russia. Ukrainians like him because he fought the Poles, and in their estimation, did not mean to bind the nation to Russia for so long (Sysyn, 1988, 2003; Stampfer, 2003; and Vernadsky, 1941).

The building I call “St. Hyatt” was opened across the street from the Hetman in 2007. The term is a little poke at the Hyatt Hotel, a fine global chain that erected its Kyiv structure in this historic district almost precisely halfway between SS. Sophia and Michael. Like the two churches, it is a large and dominant building; hence, the beatification. Across the way, still another international hotel, the Intercontinental, was unveiled in 2008, completing the boxing of the open space between two churches and two expensive hotels. The Intercontinental has a façade that fits the late-19th- and early-20th-century architecture of Upper City Kyiv, so it has not gotten the same criticism from preservation-minded Kyivans as the Hyatt, which is showy, postmodern, and covered with a skin of mirrored glass. “Too flashy,” some critics have said. On the other hand, the façade literally reflects the bell tower of St. Sophia and the horse-riding Bohdan Khmelnitskyi, which in a way doubles the amount of history that we see.

6.7 Remaking Andrew’s Descent

Andriyivskyi Uzviz (Andrew’s Descent or Andrew’s Slope) is one of Kyiv’s most famous and most historic streets, and for many Kyivans and visitors alike, a favorite place. It takes its name from the beautiful baroque St.
Andrew’s Church at the summit, which in turn had been given its name because the apostle Andrew is said to have stopped in his travels at the site, erected a cross, and foretold the founding of Kyiv. It was once named Borychevskyi Uzviz, and is referred to by this name in the 12th-century chronicle Tale of Bygone Years. The street winds downhill from the church, possibly following the meandering channel of a diverted stream, but also possibly through a man-made ravine between two hills that were once one, and ends in historic Podil below. As such, “Uzviz” (The Descent), as the street is known for short, connects the bluff-top site of the old “upper city,” where the walled capital of Rus once shone, with another face of Kyiv’s history below, the trade-minded “lower city” neighborhood of Podil beside the river. Uzviz is nearly a kilometer long, is paved with coarse cobblestones, and has an average grade of about 15 to 20 percent. Until recently, the surface of the street and the walkways on either side were in notoriously poor condition, but a major reconstruction project that was undertaken before the expected flood of football fans/tourists in the summer of 2012 has made the surface smoother and safer (Figure 6.4). There is also considerable redevelopment of buildings and vacant sites. The upgrading is sorely needed because there

Figure 6.4  Andrew’s Descent during reconstruction (Courtesy of Vladyslava Osmak)
have been untended infrastructure deficiencies and substandard building conditions for far too long. This assessment has included even the landmark church at the summit, which has been in danger of collapse because of erosion of its hill. It was recently the beneficiary of an extremely costly shoring-up project.

The origins of Uzviz date to the time before the Mongols destroyed Rus (1240), but the street’s reputation and treasures of architectural heritage (other than the 18th-century church) are from the 19th- and early-20th-century boom. Quite a few luminaries lived and worked on the street in that period, particularly writers, artists, and educators, such that the street is sometimes referred to as Kyiv’s Arbat after the contemporaneous kilometer-long street of literati in Moscow, or as Kyiv’s Montmartre, the storied artists’ and writers’ district in Paris. Without question, the most famous resident on Uzviz was the Kyiv-born Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940), whose residence was at Number 13, a building that is now a museum to his memory, but there were also the noted composer and musical director Alexander Koshetz (1875-1944),32 the Ukrainian writer Hryhir Tiutiunyk (1931-1980), and many others. A tidy little museum near the foot of the street in Podil, the Museum of One Street, displays memorabilia from local history and tells the story of the street’s people and buildings. Another noteworthy landmark is Number 34, the former mansion of Andriy Petrovych Slynko (1839-1919), owner of a popular clothing store on Khreshchatyk and one of Kyiv’s richest businessmen. It is still a substantial building, although it has long since been stripped of much of its splendor both inside and out, and it no longer has the two huge, highly ornate cupolas that stood atop the five-story structure. Halfway up the hill at Number 15 is the street’s most-recognizable landmark after St. Andrew’s Church, the soaring-spired, gothic “Castle of Richard the Lionhearted.” Actually a private home and never a real castle, it was built in 1902-1904, several centuries after the life of the English king. The nickname is often attributed to the Kyiv-born writer Viktor Platonovych Nekrasov (1911-1987), although it is known that the term was in use well before his 1967 essay “House of Turbines.” Some sightseers with poor knowledge of history and architectural style take the building’s name literally. The real story is that this massive structure was the private home of builder-developer Dmytriy Orlov (killed in 1911 in a train robbery in Siberia) and his family. Its many apartments were also a bit of a who’s who among Kyiv literati. The structure has been empty and fenced off since

32 Oleksandr Koshyts. The different spelling of his name in the text is an Anglicized variant that he used after emigrating to Canada.
the mid-1980s, as long-held plans to convert it into a hotel have not been successful. In fact, one of Kyiv’s legends is that “the castle” has bad karma, and that it is safer to stay away.33

Most visitors to Andriyivskyi Uzviz focus on souvenir shopping, clothesline art sales, and art galleries, and the street’s selection of restaurants and cafés. There are all sorts of treasures for sale: beautiful shirts with distinctive Ukrainian embroidery; a world of interesting crafts, paintings, and lithographs; old maps and books about Kyiv; and memorabilia from the Soviet Union such as old political banners, flags, and medals, and busts of Vladimir Lenin. There are also Soviet-era porcelain figurines; matrioshka (nesting) dolls; and beautiful nickel-alloy holders for glasses of tea served on Soviet trains. In addition to matrioshkas of President Yanukovych, Russia’s President Putin, and President Barack Obama, one can buy nesting dolls of Michael Jackson, Harry Potter, and Elvis Presley, players on professional baseball, football, basketball, and ice hockey teams from the United States, as well as matrioshkas of players on American college football teams (such as those in my beloved Big Ten Conference). Many of the souvenir items are made in China and pass through Russia before coming to Ukraine. In addition to being a place to shop, Uzviz is also a place to engage in people watching and to shoot photographs. There are street musicians and other interesting characters, and backdrops of well-worn historic architecture and high hills. Also, one can risk broken stairways and climb to hilltops on either side of the street for great views.

Many of those who love the street fear that an onslaught of gentrification-displacement, mass-market commercialization, and loss of unique character is in process. Local historians and preservationists, as well as many vendors, small business owners, and “starving artists,” all complain that the restoration and redevelopment work that has been taking place on Andriyivskyi Uzviz is destroying its historic ambience and displacing small business in favor of big business and global chains, and that products from China displace authentic local crafts. There is ample precedent for such a course in formerly funky streets and urban districts around the world, and a great many business interests in Kyiv and elsewhere who see commercial possibilities in this setting. Community activist and historian Vladyslava Osmak spoke with great passion at a recent conference in Kyiv and showed dozens of photographs of the unwanted changes that are

33 The story of buildings and personalities on Andriyivskyi Uzviz is told nicely in the richly illustrated book by Shlonskyi and Braslavets (2008).
It is just a small story when a popular art gallery is displaced and a chain pizza establishment opens in its place, she said, but when these kinds of changes happen again and again on a short street with not many addresses, it will not be long before a distinctive urban space becomes pretty much like any other place for the mass market and special ambience is lost forever. Indeed, only three galleries remain open on Uzviz and the population of artists who live and work there is much reduced. According to a short article that Osmak wrote for a Russian-language design magazine, the street’s reputation as an artists’ district continues largely because of “inertia” – Kyivans are simply accustomed to thinking of the street in art gallery terms and pages of tourists’ guidebooks about the street are simply out-of-date (Osmak, 2011). The rumored construction of a sizable hotel on Uzviz is sure to hasten the transition, as would a planned multistory office and business center near the base of the street.

Enter Rinat Akhmetov once again. He is the oligarch-businessman who is redeveloping the Soviet-era department store on Khreshchatyk. During the time that the street was blocked off for reconstruction, three old buildings near the bottom of the hill were unexpectedly demolished: 10A and 10B of Andriyivskyi Uzviz and 9/11 on the intersecting Frolivska Street. There was apparently no advance notice to neighbors, historians, and others, as well as no transparency about approval for demolition from Kyiv city government. It simply happened, and happened quickly. By the time protestors turned up, it was too late. The buildings were admittedly in lousy condition and were empty, but almost overnight they were gone and there was a large vacant lot in their place. One of them was a famous old clothing factory called Unist. The site is now surrounded by a high wooden fence and is guarded around the clock. Ironically, where the fence faces Andriyivskyi Uzviz, it is decorated with historic photographic images of the street.

The demolition was apparently carried out on contract from ESTA Holding, part of SCM Finance that is owned by Akhmetov. It was authorized not by city government but by an arm of national government, the Inspection of State Architectural and Construction Supervision, despite the fact that it contravened Kyiv City State Administration Decree No. 979 from May 16, 2002, which prohibits arbitrary demolition on this particular street (Maksymenko and Melnychenko, 2012). There is also a requirement that no one can undertake construction work on the street without prior approval from the Department for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Sites; that

approval is absent as well. Nevertheless, ESTA Holding announced plans to erect the office and business center mentioned above, a very modern seven-story structure to be called Andriyivskyi Plaza, and it circulated an architectural rendering of the project. Protests ensued. There was anger about the demolition, about the lack of transparency and lawful process, and about the idea of a steel and glass “monster” in a setting of old brick and new cobblestone. Akhmetov is said to have been moved by the hostile reaction to his project, and he is now reported to have asked for proposals from the grassroots for arts and cultural uses. He has indicated that he is willing to rework the layout of his building and to set aside even a majority of floor space for such purposes. It may not have been part of the original business plan for the site, but Akhmetov understands that his professional reputation is worth money, too, and he seems to be willing to take a bit of a beating on this project in order to win popular support. At least that is what his representatives have explained to the community activists that I am in touch with. Time will tell what actually happens.35

6.8 Podil at a Crossroads

We have mentioned Podil before, as it is a very historic district at river level below the walled city that once stood on bluffs high above, and as the district at the foot of Andrew’s Descent. The neighborhood was once the city’s main center for commerce and trade and was especially famous for its trade fairs and the Contract House, where businessmen signed agreements. Also, Podil was one of the main centers of Jewish population, particularly in an overcrowded tenement area to the north that was called Ploskaya Sloboda. The neighborhood still has a great many old churches and monasteries, such as the Frolivskyi and Pokrovskyi Convents, as well as other religious and historical landmarks, including a prominent synagogue. A landmark event was an enormous fire that swept through the neighborhood in 1811. The National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, which was mentioned prominently at the start of this book, is in the very center of Podil.

Podil is at a crossroads between whether it will remain a mixed, historic old city neighborhood, or will be converted, as many developers would propose, into a zone of upscale residential towers, office buildings, shopping centers, and international hotels (Figure 6.5). All of this is a building

35 A helpful chronicle of redevelopment and citizen action on Andriyivskyi Uzviz is presented in Tyshchenko (2012a).
already, with many more such projects slated for construction soon, so the neighborhood is poised between a future of thorough gentrification and the possibility that life and business opportunities for ordinary Kyivans can still be maintained. Also at stake at the crossroads is Podil as a neighborhood with an active student presence, artists and their studios and galleries, theaters, and many grassroots civic organizations, cultural institutions, bookshops and publishing houses, and charming cafés. As is the tragedy of many funky urban neighborhoods around the world, Podil’s charms attract developers who profit from being next to the charms, but who then with time inadvertently or irresponsibly choke them and cause displacement. Podil is at a crossroads geographically, too, located at a choke point of automobile and bus traffic between the center of Kyiv above and the highly populated residential neighborhoods of the city to the north and to northeast across the river. Those to the north especially include some newly prestigious precincts, so Podil is seen by developers as a place that can serve the new rich at a location between where they live and where they work and play. This, too, adds to the development pressure on the neighborhood. Many residents of Podil, Kyiv history buffs, and much of the NaUKMA university community, among others, oppose many of the

Figure 6.5  Podil at a crossroads, literally. This is a traffic tie-up approaching Post Office Square. There is construction underway in parkland on the bluffs on the left, the large new Fairmont Hotel at right-center, and some of industrial Podil in the background.
changes underway, so the neighborhood is an active battleground between developers and preservationists, and in this regard is also “at a crossroads.”

Podil is big enough to have districts and subdistricts of its own, so a full tour of what is taking place can be long and exhausting. Several highlights, however, capture the essence of the transitions and their credentials as “monsters.” We begin at a place called Poshtova Ploshcha (Post Office Square). This is one of two main squares in the neighborhood, and it is the name of an eponymous Metro station that serves the square and its surroundings. It is an intersection for vehicular traffic as well, as the square is just where major roads that run along the right bank of the river connect with another main road up the bluffs to “city level” above, so the traffic is always heavy and sometimes hardly moves. Therefore, it is here where battles have raged between architectural proposals that would make more room for cars, enable faster through traffic, and provide more parking on the one hand, and opposing viewpoints that say, in essence, that Kyiv should be planning instead for a future with alternatives to automobiles. The pro-automobile lobby has the apparent upper hand, as the entire area around Post Office Square is torn up for construction of an elevated “fly-over” stretch of road and a tunnel that are supposed to move traffic faster. We see from the square itself that Kyiv has been separated from the river that gave it birth by multiple lanes of automobile traffic and the billboards that speak to the inhabitants of automobiles, and that access to the river from the Metro station and elsewhere in the neighborhood is cut off except for a lone pedestrian bridge and a lone underpass some blocks away. The new elevated roadway will block views of the river as well as complicate access for pedestrians.

The square itself has two structures of note: a reconstruction of a small historic church that is remembered for a funeral ceremony that was held there in 1861 for Taras Shevchenko, and, when there was no interference from construction activity, an especially large and busy McDonald’s restaurant. Across the way is an old sugar mill that was owned by the rich industrialist Lazar Brodsky (1848-1904), but it can hardly be seen because it is covered from just above street level to near the roof line several stories above with a banner that advertises a brand of coffee. Next to that is a new international hotel, the Fairmont Grand Hotel; it opened just in time to house Euro 2012 visitors. The hotel might indeed be five-star, but it loses many points among Kyivans because it was built at an intersection that was already one of Kyiv’s most traffic-jammed, and it has virtually no parking or automobile/taxi access except for what was carved from sidewalks along its two street frontages. Consequently, pedestrians at a busy intersection
and the vehicles that serve hotel guests vie for one space. Also noteworthy is the Kyiv River Port Terminal across the way, a landmark building from 1953-1961 that was once a busy station for passenger transport up and down the Dnipro and that is now eyed with envy by developers who want to make it into a shopping mall, or still another hotel, or a complex for nightlife. There are also proposals to knock it down altogether. At a roundtable discussion one evening in the Building of Architects, I witnessed a presentation by an architect to build a multilevel parking structure in the square to support a shopping center, to which a young critic in the audience replied that architects responsible for that drawing should have their hands cut off.

Moving in another direction from Poshtova Ploshcha and in the direction of the bluffs, we see still another upscale hotel, several multistory new bank and office buildings, and much new construction underway. Trees have been cut on the slopes, tracts of land are blocked off for private use with Kyiv’s iconic green wooden fencing, there are construction cranes in place, and great piles of building materials. “New Kyiv” is moving up the slopes that historic Kyiv knew not to develop for environmental reasons. Some of the active construction is for offices, but higher up, almost halfway to St. Andrew’s Church, they are building very large houses – “houses for oligarchs” is how a Kyivan described the scene. It is especially this construction that has imperiled the stability of the church building above, as well as the slopes in general, and that is responsible for new problems of drainage, flooding, and mud accumulation. The construction overwhelms water and sewerage infrastructure as well, and it causes a ripple effect of damage and inconvenience for some distance. I walk among the building sites and try to converse with builders and security guards. “What building is this that is being built?” and “Who are the owners?” are questions that I ask. “I don’t know” is the answer that comes back almost always, except when the answer is “None of your business” or “Go away, old man.”

As we depart Poshtova Ploshcha for the other main square in Podil, Kontraktova Ploshcha (Contract Square; also the site of an eponymous Metro stop), we pass other aspects of the neighborhood in transition. We walk along a busy commercial street named after Petro Konashevych-Sahaidachnyi (1570-1622), a celebrated hetman of the Ukrainian Cossacks whose equestrian monument stands where the street ends nearly one kilometer ahead, and observe encroachment into Podil of Kyiv’s seamy side. While the street has many very fine businesses as well, including at least one restaurant that plays on Podil’s Jewish history, there is now also a prominent strip club and banners across the street that advertise sex and escort businesses, and a restaurant that advertises that its “veal is always
tender” by showing on its quite graphic street banner the backs of a bevy of topless women. Also, there are various newly opened Ukrainian, Russian, and Western chain restaurants along the street that have set up sidewalk seating that takes space from pedestrians and sidewalk car parking. When we arrive at the Sahaidachnyi statue at the end of the street, we see that several streets come together to make a wide paved area that has been made into a sizable mid-street parking lot. Cars are everywhere, and behind them are treasured historical and architectural landmarks of Podil between which developers are squeezing new buildings.

There are development conflicts aplenty in the heart of this neighborhood, not the least of which stem from proposals for still more shopping centers, multilevel office buildings, and parking structures, and still more threats to the area’s historical character (Shlipchenko, 2011; Kravets and Sovsun, 2011). Some developers would encroach on the popular square where so many locals and university students come to sit, drink beer, and listen to performances of street music in the shadows of a beloved tall statue of Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda (1722-1794), a graduate of the Kyiv Mohyla Academy and famous Ukrainian poet, philosopher, and composer. A plaque affixed to a stone nearby identifies this square as the place where in 2004 NaUKMA students began the protest movement that became the Orange Revolution. The Blue Line of the Metro runs directly belowground, making the land vibrate just a bit when a train passes, so it is hard to imagine how there can be construction of anything sizable, much less an underground parking structure as at least one architectural rendering has proposed. Were there the funds to do so, NaUKMA itself would become a developer in Podil because the campus desperately needs new office and classroom buildings, laboratories, dormitories, and other facilities. Some of the new construction or renovation of old buildings in Podil looks quite nice, as the neighborhood had deteriorated quite significantly and many areas had looked shabby, but other construction seems to fit poorly and clashes with historic texture.

The current flashpoint, since May 26, 2012, is a building that borders the square that is called Hostynyi Dvir (roughly, The Welcome Courtyard) that I will discuss in detail in Chapter 11 as a key example of civic protest and grassroots activism against unwanted commercial development. Walk in any distance from this central point, and there will be new tall buildings piercing the neighborhood’s low skyline, construction cranes standing ready for more erection, and many tracts of land that have been walled off by the green wooden fences that signal redevelopment to come. There are also many dilapidated historical buildings, mostly old residences, “ghosts” in the terminology we have used, that sit empty and exposed to the elements.
Some have “For Sale” signs. When the time comes, these buildings will be torn down because they will be too far gone for renewal, and developers will put up something new. The closer we come to the river, the more we see that the land is prized, and the more we see evidence of redevelopment.

In the river just off Podil is a large peninsula that is called an island, Rybalskyi Ostriv (Fisherman’s Island). It was shaped in part by the course of a right-bank tributary of the Dnipro called the Pochayna that no longer exists, and gets its name from a fishing village that was nearby in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, Kyiv mostly knows the district for its heavy industry, particularly the enormous Leninska Kuzhnya (Lenin Forge) shipyard that was once a mainstay, and for its port facilities. The area is still gritty-industrial, but its large size, central location, and potential riverside amenities have attracted the attention of developers who have proposed an enormous scheme that would not only transform Rybalskyi Ostriv, but also be a centerpiece for urban change in all directions. Called the “Kyiv-Siti” (Kyiv-City) project, the plan calls for more than 2 million square meters of office space, plenty of parking spaces, a mix of hotels, exhibition spaces, entertainment complexes, and other land uses that would be a new center for Kyiv, perhaps like La Défense is for Paris and Canary Wharf is for London. The architectural drawings show no less than 14 skyscrapers, all gleaming and postmodern, and nothing that looks like Kyiv at all. Indeed, what I am reminded of most is the new district in the big city to the north of Ukraine called New Moscow. So far, “Kyiv-City” is just an idea seeking investors, but it does have considerable support, including apparently that of the country’s president, so it might indeed be able to take shape. If it is built, the geography of the city would be significantly altered, because the project would be a centerpiece between the center of Kyiv to the south and emerging prestige neighborhoods along the river to the north (e.g., Obolon), and would have enormous spillover effects on already-gentrifying Podil, creating an extended zone of prestige and new development along the right bank of the Dnipro River.

36 Images of the project can be viewed via the SkyscraperCity online community at: http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=283956.