

## NEW FORMS OF CIVIC JOURNALISM

IF WE WERE SUPPOSED TO CHOOSE WHICH POLITICAL EVENT OF 2013 WE FIND THE MOST INFLUENTIAL, A LOT OF EUROPEANS WOULD PROBABLY INDICATE THE SERIES OF PROTESTS IN UKRAINE, WHICH RESULTS STILL REMAIN UNKNOWN AT THE TIME OF WRITING. MAIDAN ENDED, BRICKS FROM THE GRUSHEVSKY STREET RETURNED TO THEIR PLACES. BUT RIOTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS IN UKRAINE ARE LASTING - CLAIMS JOANNA NOWOSAD IN HER DETAILED ANALYSIS OF # BABYLON '13, THE NEW MEDIA PROJECT FROM UKRAINE, WHICH EXTENSIVELY DESCRIBED VERY DIVERSE DIMENSIONS OF THE EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE ON THE UKRAINIAN MAIDAN.

IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER, THAT BABYLON DID NOT END ITS MISSION AS UKRAINIANS STILL FIGHT FOR PEACE AND CHANGES FOR THE BETTER FOR THEIR MOTHERLAND. OUTCOMES OF THIS STRUGGLE ARE STILL A MATTER OF THE NEAREST FUTURE, BUT PROJECT # BABYLON '13 WILL PROBABLY PROVIDE A LOT OF HISTORICAL SOURCES – WITHOUT JUDGING, OR STIGMATIZING WITNESSES OF THESE DRAMATIC EVENTS. THESE SHORT MOVIES ARE COPING WITH THE LEGACY OF THE UKRAINIAN ATTEMPT AT REACHING DEMOCRACY: SOMETIMES WITH A VERY RAW, JOURNALISTIC PRECISION AND SOMETIMES USING ARTISTIC MEANS OF EXPRESSION.

ONE THING IS COMMON – THERE IS NO ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY THEN THE IMAGES OF REALITY AND ALL THESE FILMS ARE AN OPEN FIELD FOR THE VIEWERS' OWN INTERPRETATIONS. HERE WE PRESENT THE CASE STUDY WITH INTERACTIVE REFERENCES, DESCRIBED BY JOANNA NOWOSAD. THE VIEWS OF THE AUTHOR ARE HER OWN AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE JOURNAL. THE EDITORIAL TEAM DECIDED TO PRESENT THIS UNIQUE EXAMPLE OF CIVIC JOURNALISM BECAUSE OF ITS INTERACTIVE PROFILE. AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF SUCH NEW MEDIA DURING THE MAIDAN PROTESTS IS PROVIDED BY THE ARTICLE OF NATALYA RYABINSKA.

# # BABYLON '13

## CINEMA OF A CIVIL PROTEST

JOANNA NOWOSAD

THIS TEXT CONTAINS A CASE STUDY OF NEW COLLECTIVE MEDIA PROJECT #BABYLON '13, WHICH PRESENTS UKRAINIAN MAIDAN EVENTS BY PROVIDING SHORT DOCUMENTARY MOVIES. THE MAIN CONCEPTUAL AIM OF #BABYLON'13 PROJECT IS TO CREATE A BASE OF DOCUMENTARY SOURCES, WITHOUT ANY COMMENTARY – JUST RAW SHOTS – OPEN FOR THE VIEWERS' OWN INTERPRETATIONS. IN THIS ESSAY THE AUTHOR ALSO PROVIDED A SERIES OF INTERNET SOURCES TO PRESENT THE MOST INTERESTING MOVIES. THE TEXT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED A GUIDE TO THE MOVIES.

KYIV, MAIDAN, NEW MEDIA PROJECTS, UKRAINIAN PROTESTS, UKRAINE, DOCUMENTARIES

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### MANIFESTO

*It is a notable fact, that the driving power of the civil protest is the generation formed within the timeframe of independence; The generation*

*that may be called the one of immediate action, and which deems basic European values as determinant and hence is ready to protect them. The new civil society generates meaningful ideas. But at the moment there are too little of those, who are ready to fulfill these ideas. This circle has to grow and then we'll get a chance to persuade the whole Ukraine that time has come to begin vast social reforms. And, strictly speaking, a documentary is a tool that is able to change people's perception of reality.<sup>1</sup>*

A group of Ukrainian directors and cameramen decided to do something to join the protest. They created their own project, expressed by cinemaprotest – BABYLON '13. The first film prepared by this group appeared on 30th November 2013 (title: Babylon – Prologue). For the end of the March 2014 they made around one hundred short documentary films, which you can easily find on YouTube. “The idea to do something was noticeable and we decided to engaged in this. I started call to Volodia Tihi, to Marina Vrody and other my friends and suggest a meeting on St. Michael Square to everyone. That was how it started.”<sup>2</sup> – explains young producer Denis Voroncov from Lugansk.

## GENERAL IDEA

Why the name of the project is Babylon? Firstly, there are some associations with film “Babylon XX” by Ivan Mykolaychuk<sup>3</sup> in which people are speaking many languages (on Maidan you can hear Ukrainian, Russian and other), on the other hand this brings an association with the Christmas tree from Maidan. Some claim that it looked like the Babylon tower. Babylon'13 films did not only have an influence on Ukrainian society but also through the Internet users all over the world, so they can follow the affairs in the Ukraine directly.

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SOME CLAIM THAT IT LOOKED LIKE THE BABYLON TOWER. BABYLON'13 FILMS DID NOT ONLY HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON UKRAINIAN SOCIETY BUT ALSO THROUGH THE INTERNET USERS ALL OVER THE WORLD

1 # Babylon '13.

2 Ukrainska Pravda 2014a.

3 Kinomusorka

In February 2014 in Poznan, Poland, there was the first show of Babylon '13 movies organized with Kinoprotest. Its organizers did not expect that this show will be met with such a huge interest. One of the Polish participants said: “I find Babylon much more “human,” the cameramen are so close to protesters. It seems to be more authentic. When I watch the news on traditional media I feel like a passive witness because their news is out of touch with the reality. But when I watch Babylon I feel involved and deeply moved by this short films.” A participant from Ukraine said: “Babylon is quiet similar to the Euronews – no comment! They show what is going on but without any commentary. When we watch news from the usual media they always present it with an interpretation and we take this information quite different. You watch Babylon '13 and make up your own mind, when at the same time media tries to show affairs with “corrections” and add their comments.”



by #Babylon'13



by #Babylon'13



*Warriors of light*

—> see  
movie

## THE MAIDAN VILLAGE

We can divide all Babylon films into some categories. The first group is showing the everyday life and people on Maidan. Directors made films about “village” Maidan, which was built in the center of Kyiv. The main “actors” are ordinary people who decided to dedicate their money, time and abilities to the protests. There are not politicians; they stand for some changes in their state. Someone said that every generation of Ukrainians waited very patiently for changes in order to obtain them “for their children,” but now they do no longer have any patience for waiting. They want far-reaching changes right here, right now. These people believed that Maidan could be the place of beginning for a transformation of their country – to the democratic state. Babylon ‘13 tried to record this struggle for a new reality.

by #Babylon'13



*Liberty or death* —→ see movie

As shown in the “Under the siege” movie, where we can see lot of bags with food products for protesters. Maidan was well organized as we can see in other films as well: there were kitchens where every day cook-volunteers prepared meals for plenty of people, there was also a medical point and even bookcrossing in the metro station (film: “Honor bright”). Every night some of the volunteers had a night watch and during the day they practiced self-defense (as we can see in the film “A prayer”). They even organized a tent for prayer. Many people said that if the organization of Maidan had spread to the whole country it might have been the ideal state.

One of the most interesting aspects is music, as Ukrainians are a nation that is very keen on this kind of art. Already a month in the revolution many versions of the national anthem were recorded. Babylon also added their version named “Personal Anthem” – every line sang by different person. What is more, they decided to use two melodies – the original and the one taken from European Union anthem. Other sounds of Maidan are hits performed by local musicians in Russian and Ukrainian. Passers-by joined them. One of them is a pianist-extremist who played with Radiohead and Yann Tiersen.

*National anthem* —→ see movie

*Underground* —→ see movie

*Honor bright* —→ see movie

*A prayer* —→ see movie

*Under the siege* —→ see movie

## SMILES THAT ARE MISLEADING

After watching films from December 2013 (where children are presented and everyone is smiling) viewers may think that the Ukrainians protest was kind of a family fest. However, we have to remember that there is a group of films which illustrates other aspects of Maidan reality. For instance movies dedicated to Berkut, the riot police. One of the best reviewed short films is “Shame.” With only one shot cameraman shows the faces of “boys from Berkut.” They are young, some in balaclava, none of them is staring straight into the camera. During this one minute of illustration of shame it comes to mind: “why they decided to stay on this side?” After that it is hard to unquestioningly divide Ukrainians between “good and bad” because the side of the barricade on which they were standing, made them dependent not only on their official political beliefs but also on this other issue: the place of work (it is hard to protest against the government, when you work in the public sector).





by # Babylon'13



“Culture Action” shows the attitude of the Party Regionov (Party of the Regions). One man encouraged another to treat party T-shirt as a doormat and wipe shoes into it. Everyone is doing that with uncovered satisfaction. In this way they could express their frustration about the current situation in the country.

*Shame*

—> | see  
movie

*Culture Action*

—> | see  
movie

Following group of the films links up with the riots in January and February. The cameraman chases after current affairs. We can be observers of the struggle between protesters and Berkut, see the burning tires. We can very easy start to watch this like a movie with a made up plot but we must remember all the time while we are watching - this is a real life. Babylon gives us opportunity to see Maydan with first hand information and the viewer should respect this historical record. There are also films about cooperative actions of Ukrainians (“Brick to brick”) who fight together and create long chains of people who pass street cobbles and bricks to each other, during this work they are singing.

*To the heroes’ glory*

—> | see  
movie

*Brick to brick*

—> | see  
movie

After the 20<sup>th</sup> of February films showing national mourning appeared. Plenty of flowers and candles for killed protesters, considered heroes. Quickly their got name as Nebesna sotnya (Heavenly hundred) because they were the symbol of fighting for changes in Ukraine to the end of their life. One lady gives a passer-by on Maidan a blue-yellow ribbon. She is smiling and joking

but when she comes closer to the victims’ memorial her face and mood changes quickly.

A special film is The Testament. Observing the riots in the heart of Kyiv; we can hear a poem of Taras Shevchenko, which words seemed very up-to-date at the time:

“Bury me and arise, break your chains  
And sprinkle your freedom  
With the enemy’s evil blood.  
And don’t forget to remember me  
In the great family,  
In a family new and free,  
With a kind and quiet word.”<sup>4</sup>



photo by Babylon'13

4 Ukrainian Literature... 2004.



by # Babylon'13

*The Testament*

→ see  
movie

*The Need*

→ see  
movie



They also came up with a film from the Crimea where we can see the breakfast of Russian soldiers and a demonstration in support for Russia. There is also a story about some members of the Babylon group. Yaroslav Pilunskyi and Yurii Hruzinov were kidnapped on 16th of March in Simferopol on 22nd they were released. During this period no one knew where they were and if they were still alive.<sup>5</sup>

Babylon '13, 1+1 production and TCH created series of documentary films: "The Winter, which changed us."<sup>6</sup> The first film "Nebesna sotnya" was showed on the 3rd of April on the channel 1+1 production. The main goal of the project is to show these heroes of the revolution and the history of the social movement on Maidan.

## BRICKS ON THEIR PLACE

Maidan ended, bricks from the Grushevsky Street returned to their place. But riots and demonstrations in Ukraine are still going on at the time of writing. Babylon did not end its mission as Ukrainians still fight for peace and changes for the better for their motherland. Babylon '13 films were presented in Oslo, Amsterdam and Edinburgh. In May the films are going to be showed in New York at Kinofest NYC<sup>7</sup> and in Poznan on the Festival "Ukrainian Spring."<sup>8</sup>

Shoots from Babylon's films have also been an inspiration for some musicians. Haydamaky used fragments for their video clip "Wooden Shields." There is also an unofficial video for the song "War of the Worlds" by the Belarusian group Lapis Trubetskoy.

More references can be found on You Tube and Facebook, and by following these links:

- # Babylon '13 website
- # Babylon '13 facebook fanpage
- # Babylon '13 YouTube channel

<sup>5</sup> Ukrainska Pravda 2014b.

<sup>6</sup> [1plus1 2014](#).

<sup>7</sup> Kinofest NYC 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Ukrainian Spring 2014.

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by # Babylon'13

*The returner*

—> | see  
movie

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*The breakfast*

*Balaklava 1 March*

—> | see  
movie

—> | see  
movie

*40<sup>th</sup> Day*

—> | see  
movie

Sunday, March 30th 2014, Ukrainians commemorate victims of Maidan. 40 days earlier, which they call the heroes from Nebesna sotnya (Heavenly hundred) that have died in the protests. Babylon made a film where one man related these dramatic events from February (without subtitles)