

VISUAL ARTS PROJECTS OF WARTIME UKRAINE BETWEEN CRUELTY AND OPTIMISM (2022–2023): Theoretical Frames and Methodological Scope¹

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In the paper, the author has discussed the principles of the functioning of the discourse of visual art in Ukraine, in particular, in the conditions of a full-scale military invasion after February 24, 2022. The strategies of constructing a narrative of trauma in the context of the discourse of resistance, which is presented in the contemporary visual art of Ukraine, are determined. The specifics of the representation of this arts narrative in emigration, the construction of which is determined by the impossibility of artists to create in the conditions of martial law and active hostilities in Ukraine after February 2022, are analyzed. The mechanisms of connection between the concept of “cruel optimism” (L. Berlant) and its manifestations of practical explication in Ukrainian visual art 2013–2023 – in particular the importance of involving the research of the US scholar in the conditions of war in Ukraine – has been proven. It is analyzed that in such a situation, the arts discourse is not only a form of sublimation, but a sort of working through of the traumatic experience, and an expression of the anxieties of the artists generated by the war. It is emphasized that the reality of cruel conflicts dictates the need to create images and plots in which optimistic artists’ intentions are reinforced. It was determined that the cruelest socio-cultural reality in Ukraine appears as a factor of arts transformations and development of art in the paradigm of non-conformism, which was the central focus of academic interests and goals of the author of the previous articles. Studies have shown that non-conformism in Ukraine finds its philosophical continuation in the narrative of contemporary visual art, which gains a new inspiring impulse in connection with the war. The corpus of theoretical works related to experiences and affectations, realized and explained in the discourse of visual art in Ukraine and contemporary culture in general, is summarized. Emphasis is placed on fundamentally new

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strategies for constructing visual images (necrophiliac, pathologically deviant, etc.) in the discourse of “cruel optimism”. A theoretical and methodological framework is proposed, which defines the vectors of development of contemporary visual culture in Ukraine, revealing tendencies to convergence with the discourse of resistance. A number of interviews were conducted, and a number of observations related to the post-postmodern turn in the contemporary art of Ukraine were made, epistemological characteristics determined, and the differences that distinguish the aesthetic nature of the images that appear in art in the conditions of the war in Ukraine summarized. The article appears to be a conceptualized statement of theoretical explanations and an attempt to form a methodological grid for the further study of artefacts of art discourse in the paradigm of “cruel optimism”.

Keywords: contemporary culture and arts, Ukraine’s wartime, visual arts, discourse of war, trauma, “cruel optimism”, L. Berlant.

Introduction. The military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has an undoubted impact on the postcolonial situation in this country. Thus, it is crucial to examine the scope of factors that have contributed to colonial conditions in order to navigate a path towards independence and sovereignty in the contemporary postcolonial context. The Russian invasion serves as a reminder of the importance of addressing and overcoming the repercussions of colonialism in Ukraine and the entire world in this last European post-colonial war (according to T. Snyder’s views that we follow in the research). Snyder underlines that ‘Faced with the Kremlin’s official mixture of fantasy and taboo, the temptation is to prove the opposite: that it is Ukraine rather than Russia that is eternal, that it is Ukrainians, not Russians, who are always right, and so on. Yet Ukrainian history gives us something more interesting than a mere counter-narrative to empire. We can find Ukrainian national feeling at a very early date. In contemporary Ukraine,

however, the nation is not so much anti-colonial, a rejection of a particular imperial power, as *post*-colonial, the creation of something new <...>. Ukrainian national rhetoric is less coherent than Putin’s imperialism, and, therefore, more credible, and more human. Independence arrived in 1991, when the U.S.S.R was dissolved. Since then, the country’s politics have been marked by corruption and inequality, but also by a democratic spirit that has grown in tandem with national self-awareness. In 2004, an attempt to rig an election was defeated by a mass movement. In 2014, millions of Ukrainians protested a President who retreated from the E.U. The protesters were massacred, the President fled, and Russia invaded Ukraine for the first time. Again and again, Ukrainians have elected Presidents who seek reconciliation with Russia; again and again, this has failed. Zelensky is an extreme case: he ran on a platform of peace, only to be greeted with an invasion’ (Snyder, 2022).

Today Ukraine's state narrative is undeniably shaped by anti-colonial resistance, particularly in the face of the recent military invasion after February 2022. This resistance has determined the strategies for fighting for Ukraine's representation in the world as a country that struggles for democracy and world human values. The heroic forms of patriotism and unwavering commitment to democracy by the Ukrainian people in 2022 has captured the world's attention, paying attention to Ukraine's resilience in the face of significant challenges. The world is witnessing the strength and determination of the Ukrainian people as they stand up against formidable odds, making it a global rallying point for solidarity.

In 2013–2023, visual and other art objects were created in the occupied territories to affirm the semiotically significant signs of Ukrainian culture. Such sign-symbols as forms of cultural explication are intended to affirm Ukraine's self-recognition as a state and political identification in the categories of immanent integrity, which cannot be simply absorbed into the mainstream of imperial culture. Visual art practices have become a form of marking Ukrainian self-awareness, which distinguishes Ukraine from Russia and, in general, is evidence of a different socio-cultural reality formed over the centuries, which is no longer an inferior component of the imperial discourse.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine after February 24th, 2022, has underscored the urgency for an academic reevaluation of the role of arts in establishing Ukraine's narrative of resistance and state-building on the

grounds of democratic values. Moreover, the arts have the power to offer a platform for expressing the collective resistance of the Ukrainian people. By studying and reflecting on these visual phenomena, we can investigate the impact they have in shaping state narratives during the wartime. The study of artistic visual projects, the peculiarities of their implementation in the context of an aggressive invasion, that is, the active phase of hostilities in Ukraine, is of particular social significance and scientific relevance, given that art is a form of direct witnessing, a factor in shaping the narrative and cultural space in the 'cruelty of war'.

In Ukrainian humanitarian discourse, there are studies that identify the emergence of new genres in the long-term struggle. For instance, P. Maha's 'poetry from the trench' represents such a new concept. The invasion by the aggressor and the resulting trauma have led to the emergence of 'rapid response' genres, such as documentary films, song performances, visual diaries, poetry, and fiction. Simultaneously, Ukrainian cultural and visual art discourse has recently intensified visual art projects that possess significant epistemological potential and require research revision.

In the article, I raise the question of practical typology, as it relates to the way and means of expression, namely formal techniques, in order to understand what means are used to overcome trauma, to 'work' with death, murder, violence, looting, to find their acceptance or rejection. Two phenomena are formative for this research: society and its artistic practice. Through the artist's perception of the events of the war 'in his/her head', the social over-

coming of the war is achieved, which then manifests itself on the practical plane. In this context, the scholar Andrii Puchkov notes: “The stereotypes of the Ukrainian artist’s behavior have been changed forever, because he/she found himself/herself in a time that is common to all, which confirms the almost planetary, irresistible unity of the images of human tragedy” (Puchkov, 2022: 4). It is important to understand and explain how this worldview transition occurs in the artistic consciousness traumatized by war.

Berlant’s ‘Cruel Optimism’ discusses *affective attachments* in the context of the war on terror. According to Berlant, the war on terror targets emotions and senses, not just physical threats. By destabilizing traditional power dynamics and emphasizing pervasive security measures, this perspective highlights how the war on terror manipulates and exploits individuals’ affective responses and relationships. Contemporary geopolitical conflicts and security strategies are deeply affected by emotions and senses. The idea of a ‘*war on emotions and senses*’ highlights this fact (Berlant, 2011: 243).

The Cruelty of Reality and «Cruel Optimism». The hostilities in Ukraine directly affected the author of this research project, causing her to leave Kyiv, and the country altogether, and assimilate into a foreign social environment as temporary sanctuary. Inescapably the research approach has been determined by the author’s tormented attitude to the discourse of resistance and the experience of trauma arising from the break with her own country. Thus, this article is a result of the inner desire of the

author who belongs to the category of the victims of the war (now the author is temporary residing in Vienna) to analyze the forms of cultural resistance represented in the contemporary discourse of visual art projects created by Ukrainian artists. The author is both a victim and a witness who has a strong academic intention to explore art of the wartime in order to live in the existential meaning of this goal that has not only academic interpretation right now – the contemporary arts practices visualize the disasters of war and help to establish a self of the people who are the “objects” of war and who manifest the forms of art resistance in their visual projects. The awareness that, according to T. Snyder, the actions of the Russian aggressor should be regarded as a manifestation of contemporary fascism, which encroaches not only on the territory of a neighboring state, but also on its spirituality, culture, national dignity and well-being, makes us consider Ukrainian artistic discourse as a phenomenal one in the world cultural sphere.

The invasion in February 2022 prompted a renewed focus on the correlation between artistic phenomena and their socio-cultural and political context. The current methodology reflects this correlation. L. Berlant underlines in her book *Cruel Optimism* that the world in the 21st century will not be more peaceful. The scholar states that we must look for optimism through overcoming cruel reality, and this is exactly what we need in Ukraine right now where media reality and social reality are based on the concept of cruel war and the eventual desire to overcome it and have a happiness of great victory. Berlant argues

that the reality will not change. Therefore, through cruelty, one must look for a form of happiness, and overcome it. We cannot escape the reality that is brutal, but we can transform the energies of brutality. This is what we exactly have in Ukraine: the artists experience the situation of wartime but they also live in with a hope that the reality will be changed completely after the end of the war and the victory that should become possible as the democratic world supports the people of Ukraine. This contradiction of disaster and hopes, cruelty and optimism determine the worldview of the artists who portray their inner feelings in Ukraine wartime.

Besides, Berlant describes how the public is thrust into a historical moment characterized by uncertainty and crisis. This period is depicted as a turning point marked by a collapse of traditional norms and structures, leading to a sense of disorientation and loss of collective identity and stability. Berlant's analysis suggests that the prevailing narratives and understandings of historical processes are breaking down, giving rise to a new postnormative phase where familiar assumptions about continuity and stability are being disrupted. This era is depicted as a time of upheaval and transformation, where conventional ideas about society, history, and governance are being challenged and redefined (Berlant, 2011 : 225).

In her study, Berlant refers to K. Stewart's "ordinary effects" that structured fragmented reality and strengthen social bonds through the dynamics of sensory perception of reality in the plane of visual projects and artist's practices. Everyday effects and sensory experiences are solidar-

ized and prevail over the cruel everyday life and unrealized optimism. Stewart emphasizes that "ordinary effects are public feelings" that form contours and flows in the oppressive reality of the present, and form solidarity bonds within the artistic community. We can perceive them affective, in unstable constructions of laughter, anxiety or trauma (Stewart, 2007 : 2). In the latest constructions of reality, the situation in Ukraine reveals both "satisfaction and shock" associated with memories of the first days of the invasion after 24 February. In the context of the ongoing war, everyday pleasures are now "paused" and licked out of the repressive reality when people receive news of successful military operations of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, their advances and counter-offensives. These everyday affects have a strong impact on artistic practices, which are deeply connected to the desire for optimism represented by Ukraine's victory.

For Stewart, 'The politics of ordinary affect can be anything from the split second when police decide to shoot someone because he's black and standing in a dark doorway and has something in his hand, to a moment when someone falls in love with someone else who's just come into view. Obviously, the differences matter. The politics of any surge depends on where it might go what happens, how it plays itself out, and in whose hands. Ideologies happen. Power snaps into place. Structures grow entrenched. Identities take place. Ways of knowing become habitual at the drop of a hat. But it is ordinary affects that give things the quality of a something to inhabit and animate' (Stewart, 2007: 15). The situation

of "surge" decisions, intentions and feelings naturally re-establish the cultural landscape in Ukraine that is unstable due to the war. New successful advances and optimistic expectations after foreign visits, President's decisions and speeches, etc. give spot vital impulses that the artists "absorb" and transform in their visual practices. This is exactly what Stewart means writing that any spot moment can drastically change the situation, and this is what is visualized in the art topography of contemporary Ukraine.

I would like to emphasize that the realities around us demonstrate the difficulty of building a modern world based on stable ethics. William Watkins argues that ethics are an unattainable ideal in the present (*On Mourning*, 2004). Society and communities often observe this melancholically, without being ready to change the current state of affairs. In this society, there is room for grief, mourning, and loss in art. Art becomes a navigator in the process of stabilising the ethical space of comfort and happiness, taking responsibility for 'loss and our communal responses to the 'otherness' of death' (Watkin, 2004). The focus on liminal states in art is a consequence of society's failure to create a space of happiness and ethics for all people. Between mourning and grief wartime art explores in depth how total destruction, pain, suffering, psychological trauma, an acute sense of instability and threat to the surrounding space, intensification of death motives and liminal states, as well as other key concepts that define the psychosocial landscape of the war in Ukraine, become an essential part of the narrative in which these concepts find impetus for transformation in the para-

digm of "optimism" and the establishment of resistance through artistic reflection and visual practices. The study considers them as a form of creating an alternative reality. It is a model for overcoming suffering and pain, despair and fear of death, which are present in the dimension of instability and possible destruction of the future.

In addition, the presented study is a scientific response to a number of cultural and artistic challenges that have intensified in recent decades and are determined by the situation of hostilities. As Berlant notes: 'A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing... it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially' (Berlant, 2011: 1). In Ukraine, war now is the main obstacle that does not give a possibility to have a "good life" but it introduces new forms of "being" that impact the artists. The desire of victory and peace has become possible only after the full-scale invasion, and the desire of the Ukrainian people to win in the battle with Rashism has become more and more stronger in the result of media messages with the visualization of the cruel content regarding the destructive power of the Rashism and its results in Bucha, Hostomel, Borodianka, Kharkiv, Mariupol, Kherson, etc. The future flourishing of Ukraine is connected with the concept of overcoming the obstacle

of Rashism and the complete victory over Putin's regime, and this intention is represented in visual practices of the artists.

Based on the theoretical interpretation of trauma in the works of the cultural critic Cathy Caruth (*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, 1996), the study interprets works of art that testify to trauma as an act of survival, an act of resistance, and sometimes political resistance. As a result, we have to expose the functioning of the traumatic experience from several different perspectives: from the point of view of the victim who denies the title of 'victim'; from the point of view of the collective 'we' as those who have faced the trauma and who can testify to it and change it; from the point of view of trauma as an event that made you vulnerable, but also as an event which you survived. Art cannot stop war, but it can bear witness to it. Furthermore, Berlant stresses, 'what's personal, local, and sensual about the perception of the historical present often produces skepticism about its historical actuality and exemplarity. Situated squarely within the mainstream tradition of Marxian cultural theory, even formidable critics like Harry Harootunian and Moishe Postone argue for seeing the present as an effect of historical forces that cannot be known fully by the presently living, who require scholarly and political education toward comprehending the structural and the systemic. Otherwise, the present is cast as virtually ahistorical, fleeting, fantasmatic, or a space of symptomatic pseudoactivity. Žižek in particular casts the present as a space protected by disavowals that keep taking blows from the real that constantly shocks people about what deter-

mines their lives' (Berlant, 2011: 64; I have underlined the most important sentences from the paragraph – L.S.). These marked by me concepts of "virtually ahistorical, fleeting, fantasmatic, or a space of symptomatic pseudoactivity" are eventually represented in the art situation in Ukraine after 2022 as the visual art discourse has reflected the new form of historical being that is ahistorical now (we cannot predict the end of the war, we do not know what may happen and if the nuclear weapon can be used, etc). All this has a great impact on the reality that has become "ahistorical" and "fleeting". Anyway, it shocks people and determine the "fantasmatic" intentions connected with the desire to destroy the enemy completely and re-establish the world order based on the absolutely new policies determined by the war in Ukraine and its results.

Now in Ukraine, the paradigm of 'ordinary affects' and feelings has been changed drastically and the Ukrainian people do understand what really 'determines their lives' in Ukraine's wartime. In my research, I share the views of Žižek regarding the image of life as a phenomenon that shocks people and that is based on desire and pain. War makes people feel the most fundamental desires and needs, such as survival and the craving for security.

Results of the study. Since the main goal of this article is to analyze the traumatic discourse in Ukrainian visual projects of the second phase of Russia's war against Ukraine (2022–2023) in the context of socio-cultural and political realities, the innovativeness of the study is to present a possible theoretical model and a methodological frame that

outline the correlations between visual arts practices and projects in Ukraine wartime and the discursive forms of “cruel optimism” (Berlant) that have an impact of the visual arts in Ukraine in 2022–2023.

War, Trauma and Visual Arts. The full-scale war visited on Ukraine since Russia’s February 24 invasion has determined the discourse of trauma Ukrainian civil society: 1) women and children having to flee their homes and become refugees in Europe and worldwide; 2) intranational displacement because of actions in Kyiv and the Kyiv region, and in Eastern and Southern parts of Ukraine like Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, Melitopol etc. (some of the cities are still occupied by the invaders in the Zaporizhzhia and the Kherson regions).

The war has influenced artists who have reflected on their new status and situation in Ukraine portraying the forms of trauma in various visual art objects and works that demonstrate: 1) the forms of suppression; 2) the struggle for freedom; 3) the demonization of the enemy; 4) the revelation of the powerful and defiant Ukrainian spirit. Ukraine as a trauma zone has attracted world-renowned artists like Banksy. Art is used to reinforce the powers of the Ukrainian people and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and trauma has become the instrument of new art phenomena that needs to be studied and explained according to trauma theory and trauma studies in general.

In the proposed article, we answer the question of what defines trauma and the forms of its realization in visual art projects. Several waves of critics have considered trauma as ‘an event hidden in the uncon-

scious’ (S. Freud), ‘an event that fragments consciousness’ (C. Caruth), ‘reflective experience’ (M. Rothberg), ‘ineffable experience’ and ‘discursive production’ (N. Mandel), and as ‘a search for optimism through the cruelty of life’ (L. Berlant), while emphasizing the paradoxical nature of trauma. The researchers argue that trauma identifies itself in a paradoxical reality – between awareness and representation; between the desire to know the imaginary (J. Lacan) and at the same time the inability to comprehend it; between the threat of death and survival (L. Berlant). This contradictory dichotomous nature of trauma extrapolates our research into the ‘zone of conflict’ that is inherent in the nature of trauma.

Thus, we will consider the *trauma that presents itself in the conflict zone* as a phenomenon generated by the war that began for Ukraine in 2014 and continued with a full-scale invasion in 2022. The study will outline a number of contradictions faced by the artistic practice of visual arts. Many artists and curators are faced with the question of how to work with the format of trauma, what visual language to use to talk about tragedy, to make an exhibition about tragedy, etc. An example is a series of digital photographs by Kateryna Buchatska exhibited in the apartment of contemporary art researcher Kateryna Yakovlenko in Irpin, which was destroyed by shelling. In the series of photographs ‘i, s, m, e, a, k’ (2022) Kateryna Buchatska draws attention to the fact that all words and images have lost their weight and power, and that the artist is facing the path of finding visual narratives. Using Latin block letters, the

artist laid out texts on the sand to the effect that words no longer mean what they used to mean: 'images no longer work', 'words also', and 'Children'. For example, you write 'Children' in front of the drama theatre in Mariupol, or on a car, but it doesn't change anything - they are still being shelled (Yakovlenko, 2022).

“Zero Language” of Visual Images in Ukraine’s Wartime. The war has revealed the need for a new art language in the discourse of visual arts in Ukraine: the language of visual works, artifacts and practices is referred to as a sort of ‘zero language’ if we refer to Barthes’ metaphorical reasoning about the ‘zero degree of writing.’ The situation in 2022 was so tragic in Ukraine that artists could no longer use traditional metaphors: the pain from the surrounding events was too strong, and it was necessary to find a ‘language’ that would not simply be a relaying of painful emotional experiences. The artists themselves have developed practices that are dominated by the motifs of chaos and the propinquity death and accute awareness of mortality, which have been the impetuses for perceiving reality in a post-ironic way. Irony can no longer save us, but giving up irony is no panacea either. For Stewart, ‘Roland Barthes’s *S/Z* and *A Lover’s Discourse* are models too: his attunement to the movements, pleasures, and poetics of language and things; his sense of the expansive, irreducible nature of forms of signification; his attention to the fragments that comprise things; his notion of the punctum – the wounding, personally touching detail that establishes a direct contact’ (Stewart 2007: 6).

Moreover, Stewart stresses, ‘the sign is both cryptic and crystal clear. Its fury quivers in its wavering letters. It does not ask to be interpreted, but heaves itself at the world, slashing at it like the self-slashing of people who cut themselves to feel alive. This is a poetics as common as it is striking. It’s the kind of thing you see every day in the graffiti written on train trestles, or in the signs the homeless hold on the side of the road, in the wild talk of AM radio talk shows, in road rage, in letters to the editor, or in the barely contained resentments of workplaces and intimate spaces. This is the ordinary affect in the textured, roughened surface of the everyday. It permeates politics of all kinds with the demand that some kind of intimate public of onlookers recognize something in a space of shared impact. If only for a minute. People might be touched by it or hardened to its obnoxious demands. But either way, a charge passes through the body and lingers for a little while as an irritation, confusion, judgment, thrill, or musing. However, it strikes us, its significance jumps. Its visceral force keys a search to make sense of it, to incorporate it into an order of meaning’ (Stewart, 2007: 39).

As we know, language is a space of signs in which a traumatic experience caused by external events of a certain historical period is imprinted. The visual art of Ukraine in 2022 at some stage ceased to be a form of working through trauma. Visualizing the discourse of war, the narrative of resistance, which was associated with the awareness of numerous victims among the military and the civilian population, did not give the opportunity to go to the level of relieving

trauma pain, but only deepened the feeling of disaster. As Stewart points out: 'The ordinary is a thing that has to be imagined and inhabited. It's also a sensory connection. A jump. And a world of affinities and impacts that take place in the moves of intensity across things that seem solid and dead. She walks the neighborhood with Ariana in the very early morning, laying down imaginaries. The yards are vulnerable in the predawn. The mist rises in a yard full of playful and scary cement statues of giant bunny rabbits and gargoyles. What are these people doing with all these statues? They've built an ugly aluminum fence around them as if to protect them from theft' (Stewart, 2007: 127).

Moreover, there is a need for 'zero language', which ceases to be narrative, but is fragmentary. Such language is semiotic, and fundamentally does not seek to be presented in a traditional form. In Ukrainian wartime, a discourse has been formed that is beyond the framework of narrative organization of the language: it exists as an objective reality, and at the same time as a 'simulacrum', according to Baudrillard, as a manifestation of this hellish time of the most terrible trials, which currently cannot be verbalized and transformed into a coherent narrative. Such a transformation requires the awareness of victory, the end of horrors, and, therefore, the post-event experience of trauma, which involves immersion in the discourse of death. Daily uncertainty in Ukraine, threats from the aggressor, only increase the feeling of fear and trepidation.

Traumatic Discourse beyond Human Affects and Experiences. Before our eyes,

in the terrible experience of war, where innocent people die, a special type of traumatic discourse is being created. It is not only about sharpening the terminology – 'away from humane words' – but about restoring the true meaning to words that have lost their power of influence due to frequent use. We understand that today Western, Central, and especially Eastern Europe must pay for the 'culture, uniqueness, and spirituality' of post-totalitarian countries with generous donations in exchange for suffering and unique experiences. The 'culture of complaints' and the 'culture of poverty' (as interpreted by, for example, L. Donskis) highlight the nature of the contradictions that the Russian-Ukrainian war has thrown up and which are being harnessed towards overcoming arguments that are false and deceptive, and returning to common sense, humane and ethical values inherent in Europeans. As Berlant states: 'I have argued <...> that the neoliberal present is a space of transition, not only between modes of production and modes of life, but between different animating, sustaining fantasies. This shift generates intensities so present that they impose historical consciousness on its subjects as a moment without edges, and recent pasts and near futures blend into a stretched-out time that people move around in to collect evidence and find a non-sovereign footing. For the time being, the atmospheres and encounters of the new ordinary orchestrate political time by reinventing sovereignty in the interval between crisis and response' (Berlant, 2011: 261).

If, in classical nonconformism, the trauma was inside each of the artists'

characters, nurturing in them an inner aversion to power and a special resistance to it through forbidden arts and visual practices, now this trauma has acquired other existential manifestations in the visual sense in the form of 'war diaries', 'roll calls', and forced transitions from being 'artists' or 'scientists' to becoming 'military netters', 'volunteers' or 'soldiers'.

The everyday reality we get used to in the face of unforeseen cataclysms and the horrors of war loses its stable being and seems to be crushed into fragments that make it difficult to imagine and foresee, let alone establish an artistic vision of the unity of the world where people would stay in a safety place. The state of anticipation of new trials caused by the war is one of the most tragic in human life, because it is not only about fear, despair, homelessness, and hunger, but also about the loss of archetypes of thinking, identity, and the original belonging to a certain ethnic and geographical aura that have defined national life for many centuries. The art of this period reaches its most important mission and expressiveness in the aspect of realistic reflection of the reality that was generated by the enemy attack with its predatory and deliberate encroachment on the life, well-being, and culture of the Ukrainian people. The artist defines him/herself in terms of emotions, instincts, and creative visions primarily as a person experiencing trauma, and at the same time captures and depicts, albeit fragmentarily, what is already coming true as an experience - tragic, apocalyptic, but also hopefully enthusiastic. For instance, war chronicles and online diaries, that some Ukrainian artists keep every day

on social media, have become one of the innovative methods of overcoming trauma. This is an interesting phenomenon that was born during the war, its only purpose is to convey that we are alive, and we are okay. Every morning on Facebook I see the artist Tiberii Szilvashi, an academician of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, post several identical pictures from the window of his Kyiv apartment - a gloomy grey day outside, houses on the street, two cups of coffee. To this he adds a short message: 'Fortieth day of the war. Forty and eight years. And several centuries. The sky has cleared. The living. Quiet. No explosions. No sirens. No cars passing by. Quiet enough to hear the blood pulsing. Coffee.' Photos are a chronicle of daily events that will not change. But the main thing is that they are alive. It reminds us of the events of the Second World War in the blockaded cities: when the radio was silent, the announcer's voice disappeared and the metronome was turned on, its rhythmic sound testifying that things in the city had not changed for the worse. This refrain brings us back to the events of the Second World War, which are already being repeated in the XXI century and have the same horrific manifestations.

A pastorally similar photo of her kitchen in Kyiv is posted daily on FB by Anna Sherman, a noted publisher of *Antykvar* magazine; a rhythmically unified picture is posted daily on her FB page by Iryna Berlyand, a historian of science and social and educational philosophy; and many others.

It is important to explore the nature of contradictions, conflict of arguments, and traumatic discourse represented in visual forms. Awareness of the experience of war,

which artists live in here and now, is possible to analyze only in those dimensions where it can be reconstructed in discourse. The source of evidence in the construction of the discourse of trauma is interviews with artists to identify key arguments and discursive patterns that may arise in the discourse of trauma. These are the stories of direct witnesses and participants of the events, and this places them in a different field of comprehension - not in a constructed and adapted narrative formed by memoirs, films, and books, but in the context in which we are *hic et nunc*, shaping events and extracting artistic meanings. Such testimonies are characterized by varying degrees of intensity, but they are united by the search for visual 'ways of knowing what happened and making sense of it' (C. Caruth).

Another important aspect is that the war has led to global migration - some people stay at home, some move to the western regions of Ukraine, where the fighting is less intense, some flee abroad. For many artists, the war has become a forced mechanism of departure from the usual way of life. It is important to trace the logic of transition from the role of an artist to the role of a 'volunteer' or 'soldier', the logic of realization that he/she, the artist, is not alone, but is part of a collective whole that is effective and active.

Thus, the traumatic discourse arises from the formation and evolution of semantic narratives that are formed in the visual art space - in artworks, projects and visual artistic expressions of artists who challenge, resist, and go beyond the usual artistic presentation for them and for the audience, covering Russian aggres-

sion in Ukraine, thus creating an anti-war discourse in the global context. Different formats of critical, creative, and imaginative expression emerge, not only in terms of form and content, but also in terms of how the events of the war are reinterpreted aesthetically (according to C. G. Jung), how the war is incorporated into public discourse as an artistic and ideological statement, and how the ongoing war is both understandable and difficult to comprehend. Trauma as a psychic phenomenon has the nature of escaping representation, as it balances between 'remembering and forgetting, the seen and the unseen, transparency and occlusion, experience and its absence in traumatic repetition' (A. Huyssen).

Conclusions. Trauma cannot be represented, identified literally in the artistic sense, it can only be present as a sign or figure of silence.

Visual art projects, implementing the intentions in the paradigm between cruelty and optimism, at the same time have become a form of consolidation of the Ukrainian identity narrative that opposes the forms of destruction of Ukrainian identity in the context of hostilities, media and hybrid warfare strategies, etc. The situation of a full-scale military invasion in Ukraine has intensified the experiences caused by the discourse of trauma. Anti-colonial confrontations and the formation of post-colonial Ukrainian identity have found artistic extrapolation in the visual practices of the present, which at the same time have become part of the Ukrainian historical discourse of resistance, realized in the plane of visual art practices of the XX-XXI centuries.

Without going into the nuances of this thesis regarding other military conflict zones on the planet (Iraq, Palestine, Syria, etc.), I would like to note that the events in Ukraine show a sign of a way out of the colonial narrative formed in the bosom of the Russian discourse, which is based on the principles of imperial ideology. This ideology was explicated in the bosom of Soviet politics and remained a component of internal Ukrainian political phenomena in recent decades (as evidenced by the 'Medvedchuk case' and the activities of the Opposition Party in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine). At the same time, the military events in Ukraine are a factor in the global narrative of resistance, and resistance to global terrorism, represented in various ideological configurations (Nazism, extremism, rashism, etc.).

For many artists of Ukraine, the war has become a forced mechanism of leaving their usual habitat. I managed to talk to some artists. The famous artist Fedir Oleksandrovych, known for his accented views

and civic-oriented art projects, by chance ended up in Bulgaria before the war, where he had to look for work to support his family. He was offered a job as a carpenter at a film studio. He quite happily noted that this was a worthy biblical profession. The famous Ukrainian scientist, cultural expert and architect, Andrii Puchkov, together with his colleagues-artists from the Kosiv Institute of Applied and Decorative Arts, joined in the work of weaving camouflage nets for the military. A similar form of resignation to circumstances, according to Puchkov, makes this episode perhaps the most important in his life. These materials will be analyzed and presented in my further scientific research, which will be related to the understanding of the topic of war in the discourse of contemporary visual art of Ukraine.

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