Aside from the norm:

artistic sexual/gender dissent

and nonnormative formations in Ukraine

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This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Olena Dmytryk. Aside from the norm: artistic sexual/gender dissent and nonnormative formations in Ukraine

This thesis is an interdisciplinary contribution to the historical and cultural sociology of (nonnormative) sexuality and gender in Ukraine. It engages with figures and collectives situated what I describe as 'aside from the norm' in terms of their transgression of the gender/sex system, and in the sense of their complex relationship with the institutionalized art system. Turning to 'artistic sexual/gender dissent' in this regard opens a discussion on what is considered 'dissenting' in terms of sexuality and gender, and how such artistic dissent is related to the various nonnormative formations in Ukraine.

The first line of inquiry is related to Ukraine's development as a nation-state, and the influence that political and economic shifts had on the construction of new social formations and subjects considered normative or nonnormative. By analysing artistic works and the nonnormative social formations to which they point, I trace the development of various forms of political activism in Ukraine since 1990s, keeping in touch with concealed or forgotten pasts and radical possibilities. In parallel with the exploration of nonnormative formations in Ukraine (such as specific communities, circles, networks of dissent, existing or imagined), I investigate social formations involved in the production and managing of 'nonnormativity' in Ukraine.

The second line of inquiry is related to the analysis of artistic works as such. The themes, artistic strategies and aesthetic devices deployed to document or imagine nonnormative experiences and dissenting standpoints are investigated. Exploration of opposition to sexual/bodily shame, figurations of nonnormativity, dis-identification with modernity and 'traditions' in artistic works allows a greater understanding of the aesthetic, political, and social specificity of artistic sexual and gender dissent in Ukraine.

Note on translation and transliteration

Ukrainian and Russian terms have been transliterated into English in accordance with the Library of Congress system. I have followed Ukrainian geographical names (e.g., the transliteration of Kyiv and Luhans'k).

The names of persons and collectives were transliterated according to their public use or following an agreement. Where the persons' real names were used daily by themselves and others in their Russian or English versions, I chose the corresponding spelling of their names (e.g., Misha instead of Mykhailo). Where the organisations employed both Ukrainian/Russian and English versions of their title in documents and statements, I give the title in the original language in the first instance together with the English version and then use English version throughout the text. When no English version of the title was employed, I give only the title in Ukrainian or Russian.

All translations are my own unless stated otherwise. Translations from from Ukrainian are marked by [Ukr.] before the translation, and those Russian are marked by [Russ.].

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

In his speech on the 24th of February, 2022, Vladimir Putin justified the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine by the need to protect Russia from certain 'threats'. The main threat mentioned was a threat to national security allegedly caused by the expansion of NATO. However, another threat was mentioned: attempts to destroy the 'traditional values' of Russia and to impose 'pseudo-values' that would destroy the nation from within ('Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii' 2022). In the current information war, the Ukrainian state is on the one hand proclaimed by Putin as being ruled by the 'neo-Nazi regime' ('Vstrecha s Istorikami i Predstaviteliami Traditsionnykh Religii Rossii' 2022), and on the other as controlled by the foreign political regimes that 'loosen' the Ukrainian state by 'imposing myths and blurring values' ('Zasedanie Orgkomiteta "Pobeda"' 2022).

At a time when the securitization of 'traditional' or 'spiritual and moral values' (Østbø 2017) is being used by Russia as a justification for military invasion and genocide, it is important to combat disinformation campaigns by studying Ukraine as a complex geopolitical phenomenon. This includes studying gender and sexuality in Ukraine, discourses of morality and 'traditional values' within Ukraine, and different social formations: from anti-gender and far-right movements to activism that involves sexual and gender dissent combating the discourses of 'traditional values'. This thesis is not envisioned as a political tool to combat disinformation. Yet it is envisioned as a research tool and an archive that can be used by researchers and activists to understand better different social formations in Ukraine.

This thesis is an interdisciplinary contribution to the cultural history and sociology of sexuality and gender in Ukraine. It addresses the history of Ukraine as an independent state from 1991 to 2019, focusing on what

appears and becomes established as nonnormative sexuality or gender. It looks at the big tides and less visible undercurrents in the social formations involved in production of nonnormativity. Finally (and most importantly), it focuses on artistic production in Ukraine, specifically on artistic sexual and gender dissent. The thesis explores artistic sexual and gender dissent, carried out by people and collectives situated (or situating themselves) aside from the gender and sexual norms, and often aside from the system of 'contemporary art' that is developing in Ukraine.

There are two central arguments in this thesis. First, that the exploration of this art cannot take place without understanding the genealogies of knowledge production around nonnormativity, and the shifts in (nonnormative) social formations in Ukraine at the end of the XX and the beginning of the XXI Century. Second, that looking more deeply into artistic sexual and gender dissent does not just enrich our understanding of how the discourses around nonnormativity change over time. It also broadens our knowledge about the social movements, subcultures and counter-publics of the period. Therefore, this thesis is built as the interplay between the study of art and the study of society.

Three inquiries into cultural production in contemporary Ukraine run through this thesis. The first inquiry is related to the political potential of cultural production created by persons or groups that at different times shift (or find themselves) what I will term 'aside from the norm' in Ukraine (in this thesis, I narrow such cultural production down to the notion of 'artistic sexual and gender dissent'). What can artistic works tell us about politics and geopolitics, and what possibilities are opened by researching art politically?

The second inquiry is related to the potential of studying artistic sexual and gender dissent in Ukraine historically. I consider cultural production to be inseparable from politics, and culture to be 'one site that compels

identifications with and antagonisms to the normative ideals promoted by state and capital' (Ferguson 2004: 3). If we follow such an understanding of culture, we can see how individual cultural works point us to the specific social formations that provide their conditions of existence. A lot can be learned by being attentive to dissenting artistic works and asking questions such as 'what is this dissent against?', or 'to what local histories, struggles and genealogies of knowledge does this artistic dissent point'? By asking these questions, this thesis traces the emergence and decline of specific social formations. Its primary focus is on cultural and social formations, which include 'nonnormative' sexual and gender formations. It shows not just the development of new formations (such as 'LGBT NGO activism' or 'queer activism' among others) that appeared in place of or in addition to the nonnormative formations preceding them. It also shows how (nonnormative) gender and sexuality were instrumentalised and historicised in Ukraine. Importantly, these shifts will be analysed in parallel with other broad changes in social formations: the construction of the Ukrainian nation-state as a new capitalist social formation; and the appearance of 'anti-gender' groups and the far-right movement in Ukraine as a part of new global social formations.

The third enquiry is related to the aesthetic potential of artistic sexual and gender dissent as sites of worldmaking (Goodman 1978). This thesis will consider art as a field of relationships and imaginaries that is open and changing. I trace the development of 'contemporary art' as a formation appearing in Ukraine in the 1990s, and the possibilities and limitations of the contemporary art system. The thesis mostly focuses on persons and collectives engaging in creative worldmaking that diverges from normative nationalist ideals. Close analysis of the aesthetic strategies chosen to represent and imagine nonnormativity reveals the worldmaking important not just for understanding local Ukrainian politics, but the broader transnational

context. This thesis explores how those 'aside from the norm' construct intersectional identifications, imagine gender and sexuality, work with traditions, dis-identify with modernity and imagine different temporalities. I argue that such exploration provides us not just with a powerful critique of existing normative regimes: it also provides us with useful strategies for co-thinking and coexisting.

1. Brief literature review

This thesis connects Ukrainian cultural studies to ideas from gender, queer and transgender theories, social movement studies and the sociology of activism, and (feminist) art history. I see my work as building upon these spheres of knowledge, yet also intervening in them. I have grown increasingly critical of the 'Western-centric' paradigm of knowledge production, and the relevance of some queer theoretical works for the Ukrainian context. However, I agree with Adi Kuntsman's statement, that 'as a paradigm of otherness, queering has already been here for a long time' (Kuntsman 2010: 34). I therefore engage with various international theoretical works as far as they help to understand non-Western local paradigms for the production of nonnormativity. As discussed later, my use of 'sexual and gender dissent' instead of 'queer' or other various terms is an attempt to question and investigate such terms and their functioning within the Ukrainian context. In this move, I follow the works of theorists such as Kulpa and Mizielinska (2011) in their attempt to de-Westernise the knowledge on sexuality and gender in Eastern Europe.

Ukrainian art and cultural studies still lack interdisciplinary explorations that pay particular attention to the issues of nonnormativity. Existing works on Ukrainian culture are often limited to research on literature (Pavlychko 1999, 2000; Aheieva 2008; Chernetsky 2007, 2016; Rewakowicz 2018). Ukrainian visual art is generally understudied, however, new works

attempting to trace and conceptualise it have appeared in the recent years (see Lozhkina and Solov'ev 2010; IAkovlenko 2019; Kochubins'ka 2018; also Lozhkina 2019 for a short history of contemporary art in Ukraine; Zychowicz 2020). When writing on visual art and gender, researchers (Briukhovets'ka 2016, 2017; Briukhovetska and Kulchinska 2019; IAkovlenko 2019) often focus on analysis of women's art or the role of women within the institutionalised art system. Contemporary accounts of feminist art lack a focus on nonnormative sexuality or gender (Briukhovets'ka 2017; Zlobina 2015, 2016). Focusing on institutionalised art, they also tend to ignore social movements and the grassroots knowledge production that is often intrinsic to artistic sexual/gender dissent. When they do touch upon such knowledge (see Zychowicz 2020), they struggle not to inscribe dissenting social movements into nation-building narratives. These works are an essential contribution to the discussion on discourses of gender and sexuality in contemporary art. Yet they are often a product of specific genealogies of knowledge or scholarly disciplines, which limits their focus and critical applications.

In comparison with other Eastern European countries, critical works on gender and sexuality in contemporary Ukraine are scarce, yet Ukrainian scholars do engage with the topic from different angles (see IArmanova 2012; Teteriuk 2016; Pagulich 2017; Martsenyuk 2016; Mayerchyk and Plakhotnik 2015). There is a tendency among scholars writing on gender to prioritise (cisgender) women as their research object, or to focus on the development of women's NGOs and academic feminism in Ukraine (Pavlychko 2002b; Phillips 2008b; Rubchak 2011, 2015; Hankivsky and Salnykova 2012; Martsenyuk 2018; Attwood and others 2018).

Two spikes of international attention on Ukraine have happened in the last decade: attention to the Femen activist group in the 2010s (see Channell

2014; Zychowicz 2011; a special section in *Women's Studies in Communication* 38(4), 2015 among many other sources) and analysis of the role of women during and after the Maidan protests in 2013-2014, and during the war (Martsenyuk 2015a; Khromeychuk 2016, 2018; Phillips 2014 for some of the examples).

It is important to remember that scholarly inquiry that makes 'gender' and 'sexuality' into an object of research is never 'neutral', but always presents a specific political position and is formed by the canon of its respective discipline. Such research is often limited to the separation of 'gender' and 'sexuality' from the analysis of class, race, disability, and other formations. For example, scholars in Ukraine and abroad focus on the rise of the so-called 'LGBT movement' or 'organised LGBT community' (Martsenyuk 2012; Shevtsova 2017). Doing so, they take it as the only social movement addressing nonnormative sexuality, and do not analyse how this movement is formed by and is forming a specific understanding of sexuality, class, gender, race and citizenship, and its internal heterogeneity. The point of departure of this thesis is the belief that it is essential to attend to understudied nonnormative formations in all their complexity and ambivalence. It is also useful to look at those counter-publics in Ukraine that feed into anti-capitalist sexual and gender artistic dissent.

In line with this thinking, some works do constitute intersectional enquiries into the idea of the 'invention of sexuality', looking at sexuality or gender as constructs and forms of power (see, for example, Mayerchyk 2020). New ideas about gender and sexuality have been developed in the *Krytyka Feministychna: Skhidno-IEvropeiskyi Zhurnal Feministychnykh ta Kvir-Studii* (*Feminist Critique: East European Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies*) journal (see #3, 2020, on the discussion of decoloniality and post-socialism). Recent contributions by the authors of the volume edited by Emily

Channell-Justice (2020; 2022) are worth noting, as some of they turn to the LGBT+ and queer narratives in Ukraine adopting decolonial standpoint. Two recent PhD dissertations, by Nadzeya Husakouskaya (2018, see also 2019) and Olga Plakhotnik (2019), are also useful in this regard, as they focus on the Ukrainian context and theorise the 'transgender phenomenon' and 'sexual citizenship' respectively. While both of these works are invaluable for their ideas and (especially for engaging with the complex East/West geopolitical dynamics), they are limited either to one topic (for example, transgender phenomenon) or in timeframe (post-2014 Ukraine). Also, while some of the studies mentioned above engage with visual culture (see Plakhotnik 2019), there is still a persistent lack of research that values artistic works both as a representation of political ideas *and* aesthetic practices in their own right.

This thesis fills the gap in existing research by providing much-needed insight into the interrelations between different social formations, and by exploring the aesthetic strategies of articulating nonnormativity at the intersection of these formations. Viewing gender and sexuality as a network of relations and a form of power, it becomes an inquiry into how gender and sexuality produce heterogeneous forms of knowledge and struggle.

The novelty of the thesis lies in the selection of unique material, its scope and the methods of its analysis. In terms of methods, this thesis examines artistic works themselves *and* the specific contexts within which they operate. Therefore, the much-needed exploration of the development of social movements, the contemporary art system, or discourses around sexuality and gender is organically woven into the discussion of specific cultural products. Also, the timeframe of the research (from the 1990s to 2019) is unique in its scope. It follows historical shifts as they unfold, giving a fuller idea of how specific artistic works function in broader contexts. Finally, the cultural

producers whose works I examine have not received much academic attention. For example, the anti-capitalist grassroots communities and nonnormative formations studied here are still seen as peripheral in academic research. I look in a different direction from many scholars writing on Ukraine: at groups, collectives, works and political events that are less mediatised and understudied. Therefore, every chapter of the thesis presents a new story that unfolds and enriches our knowledge of the interconnection between art and society.

2. On epistemological position, methodology and sources

In 'Of Our Normative Strivings: African American Studies and the Histories of Sexuality' Roderick Ferguson (Ferguson 2005: 99) states:

> ...sexuality has a variety of deployments in which we might observe its constitution through discourses of race, gender, and class. Epistemologically, this means that we must embark on critical journeys to locate and explicate those deployments. Institutionally and politically, it involves assessing the racialized, gendered, and class forms of power that issue from sexuality's many extensive routes.

This thesis is such a critical journey to locate various deployments of sexuality and gender. While racial formations are not at the forefront of my inquiry (yet always present in the background), Ferguson's way of researching sexuality has significantly influenced my epistemological position. Ferguson's work (2004, 2019) has been of particular importance for me in terms of understanding the multi-dimensionality of social movements' development, and in paying attention to nonnormative formations as classed and racialised.

Following the approaches offered by Ferguson in his queer of colour critique, and intersectional feminist theory (see Carastathis 2016; Crenshaw 1995), I interrogate the normative and nonnormative articulations of epistemological, political, economic and cultural formations in Ukraine. I maintain a somewhat critical stance on the development of the professionalised LGBT and feminist activism in Ukraine, and pay particular attention to the coalitions that are now omitted in historicising such activism.

Other conceptual approaches have also been influential in the construction of this thesis and its arguments. Among them are the critique of modernity as a linear process, and attention to multiple versions of modernity, and multiple temporalities as a political phenomenon. Roberto Kulpa's and Joanna Mizielińska's (2011) theorising of imagined temporalities and East-West relations in terms of the 'East lagging behind the West' is important in this regard. I believe many social formations in Ukraine operate within the imagined temporality of the 'East lagging behind the West'. This temporality, in turn, is an intrinsic part of the Europeanisation discourses, originated in the European Union's enlargement eastwards (Gressgård and Husakouskaya 2020; Kulpa 2014; Suchland 2018). The adoption of 'European values', as it will be discussed in this thesis, is mythologised as a necessary condition in the process of Europeanisation and modernisation. On an even wider scale, the 'East lagging behind the West' perspective positions a temporality identical to the modernity of global capitalism as the only possibility, fixing instead Ukraine (and other Eastern European countries) in a specific time and space, and erasing past and present alternatives (on temporality and postsocialisms, see more in Pagulich and Shchurko 2020; Atanasoski and Vora 2018).

An attention to temporality is important not just for the understanding of Europeanisation, but also for the understanding of neo-traditionalism. In this

regard, studies of neo-traditionalism in Ukraine (Strel'nik 2014; Zhurzhenko 2012) and neo-traditionalist formations in Europe (Kováts and Põim 2015; Korolczuk and Graff 2018) have been particularly useful for laying the conceptual framework of this thesis. Neo-traditionalist discourses also produce a specific linear temporality, however it is a temporality of a nation (that is often sacralised). Within this temporality, the revival of the mythologised 'traditional values' and 'family values' ('destroyed' by both communism and the European liberalisation) must be performed in order to ensure the nation's survival and future. Following this conceptualisation allows this thesis to be attentive to those social movements and artistic works working with alternative temporalities.

While both Europeanisation and neo-traditionalist discourses are instrumentalised by social movements, there is another important element that must be taken into account: namely, the influence of the NGO-isation on social formations. In their edited volume *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded : Beyond The Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (2017) INCITE! trace the rise of non-profit organisations and their effect on social movements. The process of 'NGO-isation' (the turn of social movements into professionalised organisations) has been studied and debated in relation to European social movements. While I share the concern of some scholars for a nuanced approach to the study of the NGO-isation of social movements (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013), I conceptually align with those scholars critical of this process. Therefore, I maintain the division between 'professionalised NGO activism' and '(autonomous) grassroots activism' to study the political differences that often manifest themselves between different groups. Moreover, employing the 'NGO-isation' concept allows me to critically assess the mobilisation and politicisation of the religious and anti-gender groups, as

well as to address the influence of the non-profit industrial sector on the contemporary art system.

Nowadays more and more scholars point to the dangers of capitalist neoliberal order, and the rise of the worldwide conservative movements. It is also a time of political and social shifts in Ukrainian society brought by the ongoing war and Russian military aggression. Therefore, it is essential to keep in touch with unremembered pasts and radical possibilities outside of prevailing temporalities. While the pasts that figure in this work are not that distant, they are still rewritten continuously, concealed or forgotten. An essential step for me in this regard is turning to the archives that are not evident at first sight, yet are important for these nonnormative pasts. I pay attention not just to academic or media sources, but to the artistic works produced in forms and contexts that are too often neglected in analysis of cultural production. My contribution lies in turning to printed and online self-published materials (what is known in Ukrainian as *samvydav* and Russian as *samizdat*), and to grassroots online subcultures more generally, to bring these sources into the discussion as equal subjects of knowledge. These sources have not yet been presented to the international audience, therefore highlighting them is important for both academic and activist discussions. Some of the websites I am turning to are not currently accessible online, yet are archived through the Wayback Machine online web archive (https://archive.org/).

I treat the figures I am writing about as knowledge subjects, building my research on informal conversations with them, quoting their perspective on their works wherever possible, and drawing on many public interviews and statements made via various media. In some limited cases, I also turn to the statements made publicly by these figures via their public accounts or pages in social networks (such as LiveJournal, VKontakte and Facebook). In these

cases, I follow the 'Legal terms and agreement' rules of these networks on the use of information released under public settings.

While the thesis is built chronologically, it should not be viewed as aiming to construct a linear, unified or 'full' historical narrative. The histories that develop within the chapters are closely connected to the experience of the figures and collectives that I have selected as the focal point for each chapter; thus, the formations and struggles described are only a part of a more complex picture. Second, I have chosen specific artistic case studies as a way of capturing transformations happening at a particular moment. These are not the only significant artists of any given moment, and the case studies do not claim to add up to a unified art history. Rather, a consciously limited cast of characters has been chosen to allow shifts in nonnormative formations to become visible. Each chapter is both an introduction to a figure, or a set of artistic works, and an introduction to the specific historical period that is important for these works. The case studies are selected to provide points of entry into different forms of dissent, and to allow an exploration of their particular connection and significance at distinct historical moments.

All the cultural producers whose works form the case studies for this thesis were chosen because they are part of different nonnormative formations, and create works related to nonnormativity. In Chapter I, I turn first to the Orchid theatre of provocative fashion and the activity of Misha Koptev, as it allows me to trace the nonnormative formations existing in the 1990s, and discourses around gender and sexuality that formed at that time. Orchid's existence throughout the 2000s and the 2010s also lets me explore the complex geopolitical dynamics of global contemporary art as Orchid became famous within and outside of Ukraine. The artistic works of Anatoly Belov are unique as examples of artistic sexual dissent appearing in the 2000s. Artistic dissent in Belov's works, analysed in Chapters II and III, offers

a ‘window’ into the politics of morality, the anti-gender movements of the time and the construction of norms. The works of Belov are also important because he became part of and contributed to the some networks of dissent, explored in the thesis.

I turn to Belov’s later creative works in Chapter IV by analysing the activity of the Lyudska Podoba music collective. The focus on this collective allows me to analyse the development of ‘kvir’ activism in the 2010s in response to anti-gender movements and ‘traditional values’ discourses, and artistic strategies to, in Belov’s words, ‘transgress the sacred’. Friedrich Chernyshov’s performance and poetry (juxtaposed with the ‘Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…’ art project by Carlos Motta in Chapter V) foregrounds questions of visibility and nonnormativity, as well as the historicization and instrumentalization of sexuality and gender in the 2010s. As Chernyshov is also known as an activist, his critical art and activism are connected with the development of transgender (activist) formations.

My final case study – the artistic work of the SHvemy collective, Tonya Mel’nyk and Masha Lukianova – was chosen as it points to feminist (activist) formations of the 2010s. They allow a discussion of feminist positionings after 2014, and alternative modes and imaginaries of sexual and gender dissent. Throughout the dissertation, in addition to the close analysis of the artistic works that form the case studies, I describe and reflect on the context in which they were created. I do this by exploring the movements and formations that existed in that period, the discourses that circulated, and I draw selectively on similar contemporary artistic works created at the same time. This provides a historical and political context that helps to understand better the articulations of nonnormativity and the individual artistic strategies chosen by cultural producers. An important point to note is that most of my case studies are located in Kyiv or Luhans’k and therefore present a very

metronormative, urban idea of (artistic) sexual/gender dissent and nonnormative formations.

Methodologically, the work is interdisciplinary: the case studies analysed in this research present different genres (visual art, performance, music, poetry, embroidery and textile works) or can't be characterised within a specific genre. Therefore, whenever close analysis is involved, I employ methods from different disciplines (visual culture studies, musicology, film studies, etc.) that are best suited to the work analysed.

The thesis is written from the standpoint of a person involved in different forms of activism in Ukraine. It is engaged research from a position of solidarity with social movements that oppose neoliberal capitalist regimes, imperialist and colonial power, and normative regimes that aim to categorise and place human (and non-human) subjects and relationships into hierarchical systems (according to the invented categories of race, sex, gender, sexuality, and others). Such a position informs and influences my standpoint. My findings are, of course, limited by many varied factors (from white privilege and a migrant location in the 'West' to knowledge of just Ukrainian, Russian and English languages, and therefore, working with materials mostly in these languages). However, my aim is not to provide conclusive 'answers', but rather to animate and assist discussions on topics of sexual and gender dissent (be it within and outside of academia).

3. Main research themes and inquiries

There are several inquiries that shape the body of this research – these inquiries inspire me to single out specific themes when thinking about artistic sexual/gender dissent and nonnormative formations.

The first inquiry builds on the idea that artistic dissent and nonnormative formations in Ukraine are influenced by two political shifts that have been

taking place since the 1990s: the development of neo-traditionalism and of Eurocentric liberal modernisation (or Europeanisation). The thesis explores both neo-traditionalist politics and the politics of Europeanisation, taking into account relevant discourses and the production of nonnormativity within them. Particular attention throughout the thesis is paid to describing:

1) Social formations involved in the production of neo-traditionalist discourses (such as governmental initiatives, 'anti-gender' or far-right movements);

2) Social formations involved in the production of Europeanisation discourses (such as the governmental initiatives, the contemporary art institutions, particular social movements and professionalised NGO activism);

3) Social formations that 'fall out' of or situate themselves 'aside from' both neo-traditionalist or Eurocentric liberal modernisation discourses (in particular, grassroots radical social movements and nonnormative communities).

Throughout Ukrainian history we can see figures and collectives that engage in artistic sexual and gender dissent. They often engage in intersectional dissent in dialogue with relevant social movements. Therefore, when analysing an artistic work, I ask:

- What social formations do the artistic works point to? What nonnormative communities (if any) does the artistic work document, represent or imagine?

- What particular discourses are at play in the works themselves, and in their description/curation (and sometimes reception)?

My second inquiry (that arises from the first) grounds itself in the hypothesis that artistic sexual/gender dissent often produces alternative imaginaries to the political constructs or of (populist) neo-traditionalist and liberal Europeanisation discourses. Some constructs I consider:

1) The constructs of sexuality and gender, and of sexual/gender/relationship norms;
2) The constructs of morality/respectability, good citizenship and social norms;
3) The construct of linear history, with particular attention to the myths of the 'return to traditions' or 'progress and modernisation'.

I argue that throughout Ukrainian history we see the development of a politics of morality that differs from the preceding Soviet period. New sexual, gender and social behaviour norms are an intrinsic part of this politics. These norms become part of the nation-building and democratisation processes, and are a field of struggle and negotiation between different actors, from conservative to liberal. Moreover, as I show in this thesis, the competing discourses of the 'return to the traditional values' (neo-traditionalism) and 'progress towards European values' (Europeanisation) develop in Ukraine over time. Therefore, my interest lies in what is constructed as 'immoral' and 'nonnormative'.

Throughout the thesis, when analysing the artistic works, I focus on the following questions:

- How does the work address the discourses of 'morality' and 'decency', and the concepts of nation and citizenship?
- How does the artwork imagine and articulate nonnormativity, what knowledge about the norms and nonnormativity does it produce?

While each cultural producer is working with a set of problems and imaginaries unique to them, their particular conditions and communities, focusing on these points helps to understand the specificity of the Ukrainian context.

Finally, I suggest that in some cases we can trace common strategies and methods of sexual/gender dissent. In terms of strategies, the figures and collectives that are featured in this thesis dissent against sexual, gender, bodily, social shame. They present in their works a heterogeneity of voices, experiences and kinships concealed by normative discourses. However, I am interested in particular in the aesthetic devices that are summoned to describe or imagine nonnormative experience or dissent.

My third inquiry is into aesthetic devices used by nonnormative cultural practitioners to dissent against norms. I agree with Chantal Mouffe (2007) that aesthetic and artistic practices have a political dimension, and that art has the potential to be critical: I am interested in 'art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate'. The chapters of this thesis point to ways of categorising the strategies of sexual/gender artistic dissent in Ukraine (e.g. provocation, demarginalisation, transgression, subversion and such). The artistic works presented in the thesis would also fall into the categories provided by Richard Noble (2005): art as political criticism; art exploring positions and identities defined by otherness; art as utopian experimentation; and art as an investigation of its own political condition. I do not, however, seek to atomise and categorise distinct modes of artistic sexual/gender dissent. Rather, with a spectrum of differing case studies, I aim to present a range of individual artistic strategies that articulate nonnormativity by inciting dissent and unsettling consensus around certain norms.

In particular, I draw attention to 'dis-identification' as such a device. Jose Esteban Muñoz (1999) introduced the idea of dis-identification both as an artistic strategy of re-working mainstream culture from a marginalised position, a recycling of normative/mainstream culture, and as a survival/resistance strategy for nonnormative people. All of these are important in my theorising of artistic sexual/gender dissent in Ukraine. I explore dis-identification with traditions, and dis-identification with modernity as a common method to which the figures and collectives featured in this thesis turn. I argue that by dis-identifying with the (normative) modernity, artistic sexual/gender dissent searches for (and finds) other temporalities that are more welcoming of sexual, gender or social heterogeneity. Therefore, I pay particular attention to the following questions:

- What aesthetic devices are used to imagine or articulate nonnormativity?
- What can we tell about the spatial and temporal settings within the artwork, and their relationship to the constructs of 'traditions' and/or 'modernity'? How does it interact with the past and the future, and what temporalities does it point to?

Finally, it is necessary to show how the artwork functions (or doesn't function) within the system of contemporary art. While the analysis of the contemporary art system is not the main focus of this thesis, I do draw attention to it whenever possible, as it gives a useful perspective on the role of 'contemporary art' within the Europeanisation processes and its effect on cultural producers.

4. On main concepts and terms

Before explaining the thesis in more detail, we need to set out the key terms used. The first term that needs to be explained is

‘nonnormative’/’nonnormativity’. By ‘nonnormativity’ I refer to sexual practices, (gendered) appearance and behaviour, intimate relationships and kinship structures that are deemed ‘unconventional’, ‘transgressive’, ‘indecent’ or undermining a ‘traditional’ understanding of gender, sexuality or social respectability. However, I also try not essentialise ‘norm’ or ‘nonnormativity’, as what is seen as the ‘norm’ is never stable and always depends on a particular historical period. Therefore, I treat ‘nonnormativity’ in a way that is similar to the philosopher Judith Butler’s (1993: 19) treatment of ‘queer’: ‘never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes’.

In this thesis, I also use the term ‘nonnormative formations’. My use of ‘social formations’ follows that of Roderick Ferguson (2004) who in turn extends a Marxist and Althusserian understanding of the dialectical interrelation between economic and social systems. Ferguson’s use of ‘social formations’ goes beyond economic formations (such as capitalist). It points to the fact that racial or patriarchal ideals are not ‘natural’ or ‘autonomous’; they exist in the material reality (of colonial capitalism). This means that we can talk about racial, sexual, gender, national, cultural formations that are multiple, changing, and always specific to time, place, and the conditions of their existence.

I argue that ‘nonnormativity’ is produced by the concealment of social heterogeneity and often in relation to the policing practices of the state and institutions. Therefore, in parallel with the exploration of nonnormative formations in Ukraine (which include specific movements, communities, networks of dissent), I will investigate how different social formations are involved in the production and managing of ‘nonnormativity’.

The term ‘sexual/gender dissent’ is also important. What do I consider to be ‘dissent’ in this work? ‘Dissent’ in Ukraine is a loaded term, as it is connected to the dissident movements active during Soviet times. However, such movements often envisioned dissent as excluding struggle for gender or sexual liberation. ‘Sexual/gender dissent’ in this work denotes resistance to, and transgression of the gender/sex system that is embedded in political regimes and societal norms. In using this notion, I follow those feminist and queer scholars who have theorised gender and sexual dissent as a ‘constellation of nonconforming practices, expressions, and beliefs’ (Duggan 1994: 11; see also Duggan and Hunter 2014; Rubin 2011; Maddison 2000). Concerning Eastern Europe, historian Dan Healey coined these terms to denote phenomena connected with resisting the sex/gender system, and the transgression of gender and sexuality regimes in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century (Healey 2008: 18, see also 2001); and the terms ‘gender dissent’ / ‘sexual dissent’ have often been used in relation to ex-Soviet countries (Chojnicka 2015; Mamedov and Bagdasarova 2021; Valodzin 2021). This work aims to trace the development of artistic sexual/gender dissent in Ukraine that involves resisting both the sex/gender system and the state. This development is intertwined with the development of social movements and forms of political activism in Ukraine since 1991.

The terms ‘sexual/gender’ in the title of this thesis do not mean the ‘either/or’ binary: they instead point to the necessity of keeping both terms separate yet together, as sexuality and gender are often intertwined. By ‘gender dissent’ I also don’t necessarily mean dissent carried out by women. As I will show, gender non-conforming, transgender and transfeminist dissent are an integral part of gender dissent.

The use of ‘sexual/gender’ dissent also enables a stepping back from the many terms that would be (often uncritically) ‘assumed’ by many

researchers – such as ‘queer’, ‘feminist’, ‘transgender’, and ‘LGBT’. Instead, I chose to trace and examine how these terms appear in the Ukrainian context, develop new meanings, and are used or discarded by the people and collectives I am writing about.

The concept of intersectionality informs this thesis, and it will also be given particular Ukrainian contextualisation. Originating in Black feminist thought (see Combahee River Collective 1993 as just one of the examples theorising the ‘interlocking’ systems of oppression), the term was coined by law scholar Kimberlê Williams Crenshaw to oppose ‘the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis’ (1989: 139). Crenshaw (1995) argued that identity movements (such as feminism and anti-racism) conflated or ignored intra-group differences, and didn’t address the intersectionality of social domination. Later, Crenshaw expanded the understanding of intersectionality to a ‘way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power’ :

> Originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them. Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, able-ism and more. Intersectionality has given many advocates a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion (Crenshaw 2015).

My use of ‘intersectional’ in this thesis will mark modes of dissent and theorising that problematise single-issue politics and strive towards recognising the intra-group differences, as well as building coalitions with other groups. However, where possible, I contextualise some terms (such as ‘homonationalism’ or ‘intersectionality’) in the relevant chapters to show how their local meanings have been shaped by Ukrainian academic and activist discussions.

Finally, as the aim of the thesis is to look at the metaphors, settings and imaginaries created by cultural producers situated outside of the norm, it is important to explain the meaning of ‘artistic dissent’. Shifting to ‘artistic dissent’ from ‘art’ in this thesis meant stepping aside from focusing only on institutionalised art (or even ‘art’ as such), and choosing case studies that function within institutions, but with a critical distance from them, outside of art institutions altogether, or interstitially between ‘art’ and ‘activist’ spaces. What matters to me is not the level of institutional recognition or visibility of the ‘artworks’ or ‘artists’, but rather the fact that the cultural producers studied in this work consider their practices ‘artistic’, and that these practices and their results are part of a contentious dialogue in society about sexuality and gender. Some of the case studies present artists functioning within the realm of institutions. But what I am interested in is (following Plungian 2016: 128)

> [...] исследование и распознавание индивидуальных стратегий тех, кто смог от власти ускользнуть или остаться на таких территориях, которые представлялись в культуре опасными, неинтересными, недальновидными, архаичными, потому что эти

территории тоже являются политическим выбором

> [Russ.] [...] studying and recognising the individual strategies of those, who could escape power and remain on those territories that were imagined in culture as dangerous, not interesting, unwise, archaic, because these territories are also a political choice.

Therefore, my interest lies in figures who have a complex relationship with the institutionalised art system, and are situated 'aside' from the norm in terms of both sexuality/gender and in the sense of being actively involved in the contemporary art market. Such a step also allows me to make an inquiry into the development of the 'contemporary art' phenomenon in Ukraine and to critically assess the active role of contemporary neoliberal art institutions in the construction of specific discourses on sexuality and gender.

5. Historical background and thesis layout

Ukraine is famous in the world for its radical political shifts: during over the 30 years since gaining independence in 1991, Ukrainian society has been through a series of mass protests, the most well known being the Orange Revolution protests in 2004 and what became known as 'Maidan' or 'Revolution of Dignity' protests in 2013-2014. The annexation of Crimea and the ongoing war with Russia that started in 2014 have also radically changed the Ukrainian present. It is these historical points, but also the slower undercurrents happening between them, that inform this thesis. The timeframe of my study is from 1991 (the formation of the new state) to 2019 (the election of Volodymyr Zelens'kyi as the new President). I divide this timeframe into several periods: 1991 to 2003 (Chapter I); 2004 to 2010 (Chapters II and III); 2010 to 2013 (Chapter IV); 2014 to 2019 (Chapters V

and VI). This division is not strict, and mainly follows the changes in political regimes that relate to the regulation of sexuality and gender in Ukraine.

The thesis structure is twofold, and each chapter is structured to reflect this two-fold character. One of the underlying aims of the thesis is to provide an exploration of the complex and multi-layered transformation happening in Ukraine since its independence. Yet this exploration is also carried out through the analysis of artistic case studies, each specific to a particular shift or historical period. I have selected a small group of practitioners as 'case studies' to reflect particular shifts. In some cases I use the evolution of their art to map the changes that happen in nonnormative formations over time. Each chapter has a contextual introduction, description of the relevant social formations and case studies of work that help illuminate historical, aesthetic and political changes. I believe that such an analysis facilitates a better understanding of the aesthetic and social specificity of sexual and gender dissent.

The first chapter of the thesis has Ukrainian independence in 1991 as its point of departure. Gaining independence meant economic and political reconfiguration. The 1990s were the time of fast privatisation, deep financial crisis (and the rise of the 'shadow economy'), the appearance of the new capitalist ruling class, and the merging of the state, capital and organised crime in a system of 'clans' (see a great analysis of economic and political shifts in Ukraine in Gorbach [n.d.]). It was also the time of proliferation of sexual discourses that were needed for the stabilisation and reproduction of the new nation. To paraphrase Foucault (1978: 124), specific 'class' bodies with their 'health, hygiene, descent, and race' were formed. The ruling elites shaped the ideals of white heteropatriarchal sexuality through discourses of state and nation. But these elites were also influenced by the Ukrainian state being economically and politically dependent on broader formations (such as

Russia or the European Union). In the first chapter, I analyse nationalist discourses on sexuality, gender and normativity, deployed by the state, mass media, and the emerging far-right movement. I also cover 'Western' discourses on sexuality and gender that 'arrive' to Ukraine, and the professionalised 'LGBT activism' that began in the 1990s. I argue that while this activism introduced new identities and modes of existence in opposition to heteronormativity, it also contributed to the construction of the Ukrainian citizen as decent, normative and liberal. By exploring the activity of the Orchid Theatre of Provocative Fashion, I address nonnormative subjects and formations that were excluded from, and did not fit into, this construction.

The 2000s (aside from the financial crisis of 2008-2009) were a time of relative economic growth in Ukraine, related to the global commodity boom. Between 1994 and 2004 the 'clan' political and economic system turned into an 'oligarchic democracy'. The Orange Revolution did not change the oligarchic system, but performed a reshuffling of it: representatives of less significant business circles came to power with Viktor Yushchenko becoming President (Matuszak 2012). In the 2000s many oligarchs made their assets legal, with some investing into culture, such as Viktor Pinchuk, who founded a major contemporary art centre PinchukArtCentre in 2006.

Chapter II is devoted to the study of the 'contemporary art' formation in Ukraine and its relation to the politics of Europeanisation. I compare contemporary art institutions, involved in the processes of NGO-isation in the 2000s, and the institutions preceding them. I argue that due to a liberal logic of 'pre-accepting the transgression' (Heinich 2006) contemporary art institutions allowed the articulation of nonnormativity. However, I also show how nonnormative subjects found themselves both within and 'aside' from the capitalist system of contemporary art in the mid-2000s, turning to the

artistic dissent of Anatoliy Belov.[1] I explore Belov's early projects and the ideas of marginality and nonnormativity articulated by them.

Chapter III continues with a more in-depth analysis of the changes that took place in the 2000s. A significant trait of the 2000s was the development of techniques of sexual/gender regulation and moral policing. A new Criminal Code was adopted in Ukraine in 2001, framing 'public order and morality' in categories of law. Political leverage exerted by competing actors, such as international and domestic organisations, influenced changes to Ukrainian legislation. I argue that state bodies, religious institutions, 'anti-gender' movements and far-right groups mobilised a discourse of 'traditional values'. This discourse concealed social heterogeneity and constructed a norm of the binary gender and monogamous heterosexual family as the basis for development of Ukrainian nation and state. In the first part of the chapter (sections 1-2) I study the rise of the 'anti-gender' groups in Ukraine. I argue that the activity of such groups represents a new formation caused by the politicisation and NGO-isation of religion that takes place transnationally. Taking the 'On Protection of Public Morals' law (adopted in 2003) as a case study, I show how *suspil'na moral'* (Ukr. 'public morals') loses its Soviet framing and acquires nationalist and religious connotations. I analyse the activity of the National Committee for the Protection of Public Morals (founded in 2004) as constructing ideals of normative sexuality; I also trace the

[1] Note that while the correct transliteration of Anatoliy Belov's name from Ukrainian would be Anatolii Bielov, in this thesis I will use 'Anatoliy Belov' as this is the English spelling that is currently known internationally. See Belov's artist profiles: PinchukArtCentre website (https://pinchukartcentre.org/en/exhibitions/artists/23964, accessed April 10, 2023); IMDB (https://www.imdb.com/name/nm6856534/, accessed April 10, 2023). In bibliography, name transliteration follows the spelling of the original source, as well as the Library of Congress rules.

connection between 'anti-gender' groups and ethno-nationalism in creating the moral panics of the 2000s.

In the second part of the chapter (section 3) I address coalitions of dissent against moral panics, and broader sexual/gender dissent. I follow the further development of LGBT NGO activism in the 2000s, but also the development of other forms of activism and social movements that took place after 2004, with particular attention to the coalitions of dissent that appeared in response to the conservative turn and moral panics. The late 2000s were a time of the rapid development of civic activism, fostered by technological developments, such as the Internet and social networks. I trace differing vectors of dissent, but also collaboration between professionalised NGO activism and grassroots activism. Turning back to the works of Belov (section 4), I study his articulations of norms and nonnormativity in the 2000s. I also explore his aesthetic strategies formed at the intersection of the nationalist and non-nationalist formations explored earlier.

Chapter IV turns to the period of 2010-2013. In 2010, Victor Yanukovych became President. The period of 2010-2013 was a period of economic stagnation and a new vertical of power built by Yanukovych. This vertical was sustained by an ideological vector towards Russia. The period is marked by growth in social conservatism, and legislation targeting women and nonnormative people. The reliance of the new government on Orthodox Christianity meant the spreading of a discourse of 'traditional values' and further growth of anti-gender groups. In the chapter, I study the coalitions that provided a differing horizon of possibilities for sexual and gender dissent. The works of Anatoliy Belov in this regard are an interesting example of both documenting, subverting and dissenting against the anti-gender formations

of the early 2010s. Through Belov's works, the music of the Lyudska Podoba[2] band and the works of activist collectives I will also address the different ways in which the new term *kvir* was deployed in the late 2000s - early 2010s, and what aesthetic devices were summoned to produce artistic works as 'queer'.

The two subsequent chapters take 2014 as their point of departure. In Chapter V, I look at the influence that the Maidan events and the beginning of the war had on the further development of nonnormative formations. I turn to the Maidan protests and reflect on why they did not become a space for sexual dissent. I also turn to the Russian framing of the invasion of Ukraine in 2014, and the role gender and sexuality played in it.

After 2014 Ukraine entered a new economic crisis, with austerity measures adopted by the new government. I argue that despite the movement towards Europeanisation, the new government of Petro Poroshenko did not stop the discourses of 'traditional values' and 'Christian morals', anti-gender groups or the far-right movement from spreading. On the contrary, the new nationalist politics relied on conservative values as a way to justify itself.

In Chapter V, I address this tension between 'European' and 'national' through the instrumentalization of nonnormativity that arose after 2014

[2] Note that while the correct transliteration of the band's name would from Ukrainian would be 'Liuds'ka Podoba', in this thesis I will use 'Lyudska Podoba' for the music collective name as this is the English spelling that is currently known internationally and is used by the collective. See Lyudska Podoba profiles: SoundCloud (https://soundcloud.com/lyudska_podoba, accessed April 10, 2023); bandcamp (https://lyudskapodoba.bandcamp.com/album/volnydorozhkibarashki, accessed April 10, 2023). In bibliography, as well in Appendix to mark the title of Anatoliy Belov's artwork under the same title, transliteration follows the spelling of the original source, as well as the Library of Congress rules.

within contemporary art spaces. Coming back to the Orchid theatre, and analysing 'Patrioty. Hromadiany. Kokhantsi…' exhibition ([Ukr.] 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…', 31 October 2015 - 17 April 2016), I argue that nonnormative sexuality and gender were instrumentalised on a national and international level during the construction of the new political and historical national narratives. Next, I address the development of transgender activism within the grassroots nonnormative formations excluded and silenced by both mainstream and LGBT NGO discourses. The performance and poetry of Friedrich Chernyshov[3] and the activity of the Lavender Menace activist group are in this regard a 'window' into the development of queer transgender activism as both antinormative and anarchist political dissent.

Finally, Chapter VI focuses on gender and sexual dissent through the shift that feminist activism experienced after the beginning of the war. I address far-right violence in Ukraine as well as the Russia propaganda narrative, aiming to portray all Ukraine as ruled by the neo-Nazi. I address the challenges that nationalism, the rise of the far-right violence and the war raised for feminist activists, and the development of queer feminism after 2014. The analysis of the artistic works produced by the ReSew and SHvemy cooperatives, as well as by Masha Lukianova and Tonya Mel'nyk, are helpful here in addressing the nonnormative counter-publics and artistic dissent in

[3] Note that while the correct transliteration of Friedrich Chernyshov's name from Ukrainian would be Fridrikh Chernyshov, in this thesis I will use 'Friedrich Chernyshov' as this is the English spelling that is currently known internationally. See Belov's artist profiles: PinchukArtCentre website (https://pinchukartcentre.org/en/exhibitions/artists/23964, accessed April 10, 2023); IMDB (https://www.imdb.com/name/nm6856534/, accessed April 10, 2023). In bibliography, name transliteration follows the spelling of the original source, as well as the Library of Congress rules.

the 2010s. In addition, Appendix A presents the illustrations that are referred to in the thesis, and Appendix B presents the lyrics of the Lyudska Podoba songs with my parallel translation in English.

CHAPTER I. DISSENT AS PROVOCATION: NONNORMATIVE FORMATIONS AND THE 'DISCOVERY' OF IDENTITIES IN THE 1990S

1. The 1990s as 'a multi-layered pie of contradictions': Orchid Theatre of Provocative Fashion

'I am a multilayered pie of contradictions. I can't be described in one word', — Misha Koptev describes oneself and one's activity in an interview.[4] Koptev continues: 'Am I fashion designer or a stripper? I work between genres'. When the interviewer suggests that, in her opinion, Koptev works in the contemporary art sphere, Koptev confirms: 'Yes, I am an artist. My canvas and paints are models and people in the audience, hair brushes and makeup, costumes and posters') (Tsyba 2018).

Koptev's activity, self-described as the 'multi-layered pie of contradictions', works as an excellent introduction to the main shifts described in this thesis. In this chapter, we will follow the blossoming of the Orchid Theatre of Provocative Fashion. Grounded in a 'shadow economy', situated at the crossing of different genres, Orchid could appear because of the commercialisation and commodification of sex and the new forms of spectacle and entertainment arising in Ukraine in the 1990s. It also appeared at the time when new ideas on morals, identities and social norms were spreading, and appeared despite these ideas and in opposition to them.

[4] In this thesis, I avoid using pronouns to refer to Koptev. Calling oneself 'Misha' or 'Mikhailovna' (female patronymic) in Russian, Koptev uses both female and male pronouns. Note that while the correct transliteration of Koptev's name from Ukrainian would be Mykhailo/Misha Koptiev, in this thesis I will use 'Misha Koptev' as this is the English spelling that is currently known internationally (Saxenhuber and Schöllhammer 2016; Tsyba 2018). In bibliography, name transliteration follows the spelling of the original source, as well as the Library of Congress rules.

Misha Koptev founded the 'Teatr provokatsionnoi mody "Orkhideia"' ([Russ.] 'Orchid' Theatre of Provocative Fashion') in Luhans'k in 1993, two years after Ukraine gained its independence. The phenomenon of Orchid and its transformation over time reflect the changes that took place with Ukraine's transformation into the independent state after a long period of being a Soviet republic.

Sexual and gender dissent in Ukraine was influenced by the changing normative regimes that existed during the Soviet times. In early Soviet times, various types of affective/sexual relations and expression were encouraged and practised – what Dan Healey (2017: xiii) called a 'sexual revolution'. A critique of monogamy and of the institution of marriage coexisted with women's emancipation, decriminalisation of 'sodomy', as well as with discussions and public actions contesting the ideas of sexual and bodily shame.

Yet in the 1930s, the Soviet state universalised the form of marriage; normative social formations and heteronormative citizenship were sanctioned as fixed and etacratic. Various forms of sexual and gender behaviour were denied (at least symbolically) Soviet citizenship and stigmatised. Homosexuality, prostitution, as well as pre-marital sex, misconduct and debauchery, were claimed to be the 'remnants of capitalism' and markers of the 'corrupted' capitalist West, alien to and rare in Soviet lifestyles. Consequently, nonheteronormative subjects, formations and modes of existence fell under state control and repression. Subjects who expressed same-sex desire were criminalised (in the Ukrainian Soviet Republic since 1934), or medicalised and subjected to forced psychiatric hospitalisation. Corresponding punitive and stigmatising discourses in society became widespread (see Healey 2017; Clech 2018; Stella 2015). Stigmatisation and medicalisation also related to those who were viewed as

gender-variant or non-conforming (Healey 2017; Essig 1999; Belkin 2000).

After World War II, official rhetoric proclaimed the heteronormative alignment of biological sex, sexuality, gender identity and gender roles. Blaming Stalinist politics for the 'masculinisation' of a Soviet woman, the official rhetoric of the Thaw insisted on the complementarity of genders (active male and passive female) (see Pushkareva 2012). Tatiana Nelarina in an article for the *Nash Mir* ([Russ.] 'Our World') Luhans'k *samizdat* ([Russ.] 'self-published') magazine, summarised her experience growing up in Soviet society by paraphrasing Lenin's famous quote:[5]

> [...] в нас с детства дубово и топорно заложили понятие 'нормы'. В обществе, построенном по принципу 'патриархальная власть плюс принудительная гетеросексуализация всей страны', нормальным будет считаться только то, что этому принципу подчиняется.
>
> [Russ.] [...] the notion of 'norm' was inculcated in us in a dull and crude way since childhood. In a society, based on the principle of 'patriarchal power plus the compulsory heterosexualisation of the whole country', only that which follows this principle would be considered the norm (Nelarina 1999).

The slow transformation of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic into the independent Ukrainian state after 1991 led to the reorganisation of existing social formations and enabled the creation of new ones. Born in Luhans'k in 1970, Koptev belonged, as Aleksei Yurchak would phrase it, to the last Soviet

[5] Lenin's original statement argued that 'communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country' (Lenin 1970: 159).

generation: those who matured during the Soviet period but were young enough to transform into young 'post-Soviet people' in the 1990s (Yurchak 2014: 85). This generation witnessed the end of the Soviet Union and the transition to new discourses, forms and regimes of power. Gender and sexuality were inevitably entangled in – and core to – these regimes. For me, Koptev's Orchid stands out as a particular nonnormative formation – a 'multi-layered pie of contradictions', a phenomenon that encompassed the societal transformations and pointed to various forms of sexual and gender dissent in the 1990s. In the chapter, I will argue that since its appearance, Koptev's erotic fashion shows have been inventing new forms of sexual and gender dissent. They epitomised the political power of style as – in the words of Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas – 'a socio-sexual force pushing the limits of cultural acceptability and knowledge' (Geczy and Karaminas 2013: 8). In the next sections, I will consider what these limits and shifts were that made Orchid such a unique phenomenon.

1.1. What is Orchid?

Orchid's posters often featured three phrases that described it: *teatr provokatsionnoi mody* ([Russ.] 'theatre of provocative fashion'), *tsyrk provokatsionnoi mody* ([Russ.] 'circus of provocative fashion') and *eroticheskoe shou mody* ([Russ.] 'erotic fashion show'). In order to understand the specificity of *Orchid,* it is not sufficient to merely define what each of these phrases meant, but rather to grasp the modes of life, communities and formations to which they pointed.

Orchid started under the name of 'Theatre of Provocative Fashion'. The early theatres of fashion were an invention of the 1980s and were a symptom of the rapid changes in the field of Soviet fashion. Until then, fashion was industrialised and controlled by the state. However, in the late 1970s and 1980s, state 'houses of fashion' transformed into commercialised spaces, with individual designers creating their own brands and fashion showcases

(one of the most famous was Vladislav Zaitsev's Theatre of Fashion, which opened in Moscow in 1982). Houses of Fashion continued existing in Ukraine even in the 1990s and presented a synthesis of the runway walk and performance, which was a new genre for the Soviet audiences. However, they were not financed well and thus did not have much influence on general society (Zvyniatkivs'ka 2017).

Zoia Zvyniatskivs'ka (2017) argues that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, grassroots fashion and street style existed in place of professional fashion. Fashion of the 1990s was definitely influenced by the Soviet legacies of the DIY-fashion.[6] The first years of Ukrainian independence were marked by hyperinflation, institutional deterioration, general disorientation, and high levels of corruption: '[F]rom 1992 onwards, the economic situation deteriorated severely. During the 1990s, the economic crisis turned out to be far deeper and longer than expected by anyone' (Fritz 2007: 112). These conditions required the population to make use of all available (and scarce)

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[6] Poverty and a lack of resources had been became a stimulus for the development of DIY-fashion and original creative decisions in the Soviet Union. A DIY-approach to clothes making was promoted by the Soviet state (Bartlett 2010: 243–55). The 'alternative fashion' of the 1980s (see Baster 2017b) is a manifestation of this trend. In contrast with the fashion shows of designers such as Zaitsev that aimed at creating *couture* fashion for the new upper class, alternative theatres of fashion often had declarative aims and used transgressive style and costume as artistic devices. They borrowed from and involved the members of various subcultures (punk, rock, etc.) and nonconformist art groups.

The alternative fashion of the 1980s made use of found objects and vintage clothes or imagined costumes as futuristic unwearable 'constructions'. Such fashion shows would take place on stage as spectacles (such as Aleksandr Petliura's shows in Moscow) or take the form of street happenings (such as the ones organised by Garik Assa and nonconformist artists in Saint Petersburg) (Baster 2016, 2017a, 2017b).

resources. As new clothes or even fabric was very difficult to obtain, reusing, remaking, and repurposing clothing and materials became a condition of possibility and characteristic trait of the Ukrainian grassroots street style and influenced the local theatres of fashion.

By the 1990s local Theatres of Fashion became widespread and institutionalised. In 1990, the 20-year old Koptev started studying in one of such theatres. Luhans'k Theatre of Fashion was a combination of fashion school and model agency: it was a place where students could learn the history and theory of costume, the runway walk, manicure techniques, and take part in fashion shows as models. Studying, working at and later managing this theatre became a formative experience and later, a source of dissatisfaction: Koptev described the clothes made by the theatre founder as 'disgusting geometric nonsense', while Koptev's desire was to 'dress up', 'shine', 'to wear insane hairstyles and non-human makeup' (Tsyba 2018a). Dissatisfaction with the existing theatre led Koptev to found the 'Orchid Theatre of Provocative Fashion' in 1993.[7] The emblem of Orchid featured 'circus of provocative fashion' and both 'theatre' and 'circus' were used interchangeably or even simultaneously in promotion materials.

Orchid presented a striking contrast with other regional theatres of fashion. Its shows took place mainly in cultural centres such as the Luhans'k *Palats kul'tury zaliznychnykiv* ([Ukr.] 'Railman's Palace of Culture', the main regional cultural centre) and in night clubs all over the country. However, Orchid fashion shows were often labelled shocking, disgusting, and insane. The show posters quoted (with pride) a *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* review (Appendix A, Figure 2):

[7] While at first the theatre was called 'Mikhail Koptev's Theatre of Fashion', the name was later changed to 'Orchid'.

> [...] хоть психбольницы и переполнены, но для того, кто рискнет примерить костюмчик 'от Коптева', свободное местечко найдется сразу.
>
> [Russ.] [...] the homes for the insane are overcrowded, but for the one who dares to try a costume 'by Koptev', there will immediately be a free spot.

The reasons for such a reaction were Orchid's unconventional costumes, models and shows. The costumes were often impractical combinations of found objects, vintage clothing or clothing that was deliberately torn or radically changed. The shows featured partially-nude models of all genders, with genitalia being visible, and makeup deliberately smudged, resembling bruises. Models' appearance also did not adhere to canonical fashion beauty standards: they were of different ages and body shapes; some models had visible disabilities. The shows often presented cross-dressing as an important element, with Koptev and male models appearing on the runway in skirts, dresses or various androgynous and gender-bending outfits; local drag performers would perform during the breaks. Also, the shows featured elements of performance and circus acts. In contrast with other fashion shows, Orchid's shows were often interactive and carnivalesque, with models dancing with the audience and Koptev swearing at or drinking vodka with the spectators.

Speaking of Orchid, Koptev emphasised creativity and self-realisation as the main aim of the project (Briukhanov 2013):

> Я не знаю цели своего творчества. Цель, наверное, заключается в самореализации. Мы приходим за кулисы, красимся, наряжаемся в безумные прикиды и показываем людям образы.

Можно сказать, мы дарим людям культуру.

[Russ.] 'I don't know the goal of my creativity. The goal is, probably, in self-realisation. We go backstage, do makeup, wear insane looks and show images to people. One can say, we give the gift of culture to people.

1.2. Fashion, nudity, and shame

The history of Orchid is inseparable from the history of Koptev's self-fashioning. Fashion was Koptev's main interest from teenage years. The late 1980s and early 1990s were times of scarcity and poverty, but also times when many 'Western' fashion magazines became available for purchase. *Vogue* (and similar journals) was historically established as an 'arbiter of fashion, taste and style' for the elite or those aspiring to be the elite (Brown 2009: 258). In the late Soviet Union, 'Western' fashion was an imaginary territory of glamour, beauty, and personal freedom. Djurdja Bartlett (2010: 265–66) notes:

> Western fashion goods held a multifaceted allure for socialist consumers due to their diversified styles, fashionability, and superior production in comparison with the poor quality and functionalist aesthetics of socialist fashion items.

It is not surprising that the young Koptev spent all one's income on acquiring foreign fashion magazines:

> I gave my entire salary to get Vogue and Madame Figaro. People at the shoe factory thought I was an idiot. But these magazines had real beauty in them. I looked at advertising attentively, marveling at

> how people in the photo were sitting, how beautiful they all were, the surroundings, the mise-en-scenes. I looked at all that and thought how rich it all was, and how I wanted to be a part of that world.
>
> My entire education is fashion magazines and shoemaking vocational school. I didn't want the fashion that I saw in the streets. I was fed up with it. Everybody wearing the same jeans, mass market clothes. And I would always make original clothes for myself, traded things in second-hand shops, talked people into giving me things, added sequins that were just impossible to buy. I have a thing for sequins since those times, because I lacked them so badly when I was little (Tsyba 2018).

'Western' fashion magazines in the late 1980s and through the 1990s did not just provide a window into the world of glamour and style at the time of widespread poverty, but could also serve as cultural influences for experimentation with gender and sexuality. Fashion in the US and Western European countries often appropriated gay and lesbian styles and made them mainstream. The fashion photography of the time turned to 'gay-vague' advertisements[8] and presented androgynous and gender-bending bodies and characters. Therefore, it is possible that Koptev used fashion magazines as informal education to explore various modes of self-fashioning *as* sexual and gender nonconformity. Koptev's early self-portrait photographs feature gender-ambiguous characters. In some Koptev would pose wearing long-haired wigs. Others presented costumes that would include high-heeled

[8] 'Gay-vague' is a term coined by Michael Wilkes and denotes advertisement imagery that depicts characters in seemingly ambiguous situations that may be narrated as gay (while such an interpretation depends on the spectator) (Sender 2004).

boots, ornamental body art on the skin, transparent knickers, or self-made skirts, combined with heavy makeup accentuating the eyes and cheekbones (Appendix A, Figure 3).

In contrast with earlier Soviet times, the climate of the early 1990s allowed for more expression of gender nonconformity, for several reasons. First, the conditions of poverty meant that the private and gendered traits of clothing became less significant: (gendered) items of clothing would be worn or remade to suit the urgent needs of dressing oneself. Secondly, rebelling against norms in clothing was typical for the generation that spurred the phenomenon of alternative fashion. Style was the foundation of the late Soviet generation, not just aesthetically, but socially and politically.[9] Zvyniats'kivska (2017) argues that Ukrainian grassroots street fashion protested against Soviet rigid, strict codifications of clothing and styling oneself, and embraced sexuality in style and DIY fashion as important elements of accentuating the 'anti-Soviet' difference'.

1.3. Commodification of sex in the 1990s

The last Soviet generation's formation happened alongside at the times of the new 'sexual revolution' that came with *perestroika* and *glasnost'* (Rotkirkh 2002). The changes involved public discussion of sexuality and family politics, articulation and commercialisation of sexuality. Healey (2017: 104–5) argues:

> Glasnost in the realm of sexuality brought stunning media openness to Western ideas and values, frank reflection on the anxieties and joys of ordinary citizens, and even crude attempts to arouse audiences. Sex became a badge of "post-ness," post-Sovietness, of life after Communism, however it might take shape. All sex became

[9] See, for instance, Yurchak (2014) on *stiliagi*.

> in late Soviet and early post-Soviet culture a credential marking out one's text or product as non- or anti-Soviet, new, fresh and democratic. Homosexuality was publicly acknowledged as one of the social "problems" that the Soviet system had swept under the carpet.

The shifting terrain of transition to a market economy caused the rise of commodified sex and the development of sex industries. In the conditions of the absence of established legislation on pornography (such legislation appeared only in 1996 Criminal Code) the circulation of erotic and pornographic materials in Ukraine was on the rise. Romanets' (2005: 205) writes about the 'pornographication of the mainstream' where pornographic elements would be used by various authors as a form of 'shock therapy'.

The boom of erotic and pornographic materials also happened in part because of the rise of the pirate film studios that were dubbing and releasing 'Western' films. A telling example is popularity of *Wild Orchid* (dir. Zalman King, USA, 1989), a film that was not officially released in post-Soviet space but became highly popular through pirate video salon distribution and private copying (Pal'mer 2018), and which provides a likely reference point for Koptev. This softcore melodrama features the seduction of a shy female lawyer by a jaded male billionaire. The film features multiple erotic scenes where nudity, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and polyamorous erotic encounters are 'legalised' by setting the narrative in 'exotic' Brazil with its supposed 24/7 carnival atmosphere of sexual freedom and loose morals. In his review of the film critic Sergei Kudriavtsev (1994: 73–74) explains the high popularity of *Wild Orchid, 9 and 1/2 Weeks* and similar films by their ability to provide 'sex education' to the audience.

While Ukrainian audiences were captivated by Western models of sexual emancipation played out by Mickey Rourke and Carré Otis, Ukrainian reality

was far from the fantasy paradise of the Rio de Janeiro depicted in the film. High rates of unemployment for women meant the rise of their involvement in the 'informal' economy of sex work and 'desire industries' (term coined by Anna Agathangelou, 2004).[10] Demand for erotic materials existed therefore within the realm of poverty, instability and corruption combined with the temporary absence of strict categorisations and low institutional controls. Koptev understood these conditions very well, and Orchid can be seen as part of the new phenomenon: the rise of the individual entrepreneurship, involved in the informal economy. In Koptev's words,

> In the Soviet Times, you couldn't live without looking at anyone. You had to have a job, to correspond to all those requirements. Freedom is more important for me. Freedom is tastier than bread and drunker than wine. And in the 1990s, the times were special: impunity, mismanagement, and hungry mouths everywhere. People who didn't have cable television were buying tickets to my shows like hot cakes. Corruption flourished, and director of the house of culture made the offer herself that I make unaccounted payments to her for renting the premises. I started making shows that were commercially successful and raising my ticket prices, and she wanted to work with me, because she knew that the audience hall will always be full. [...] I realized that erotics was my thing. I understood that it is expensive to dress a model in something exclusive head to toe: so that she would have a hat, shoes, accessories, and a dress. [...] I realized that it was easier for me to undress the models, not dress them. And because I don't have

[10] According to some of the reports, after gaining independence Ukraine became one of the largest 'suppliers' of women in sex work (see Hughes and Denisova 2002).

image concerns, I can allow myself to implement everything that I feel like doing (Tsyba 2018).

Like the erotic scenes in *Wild Orchid* that contributed to the film's success, models' nudity in the Orchid theatre was one of the main factors that made the show so popular. The show constantly crossed the boundary between the 'high art' of the fashion show and 'low art' of erotic performances. As the tickets to the show were cheap in the 1990-2000s (7-8 UAH), working-class people 'who could not afford cable TV' (with hardcore pornography or softcore films like *Wild Orchid*) could afford to attend the show. Photographs of the Orchid shows depict some men in the audience photographing, videotaping or trying to grab the female models on the runway, clearly considering themselves to be consumers in the sexual marketplace, and the models as objects. The show acts also differed: most of the time the models would ignore the audience and walk looking directly forward with no expression on their faces, yet sometimes they would playfully engage with the male audience (sitting on a lap, hugging or dancing).

While female nudity was an important component (and the 'bait') of the show, it was not necessarily the central one. The shows featured models of different age, body size and gender, exposing various parts of their bodies, including genitalia. The provocative part of the show was *showing* itself - exposure of the body parts usually hidden by clothing.

Orchid shows opened the possibility for the creation of pansexual, nonnormative and gender non-conforming spaces not just through models' nudity, but also through the blurring of the gendered division of clothing. The shows featured cross-dressing and male models wearing skirts, dresses and wigs with Koptev often being the 'star' in high heels and various gender non-conforming outfits (Appendix A, Figures 4-5).

Vocal performances of *travesti* (drag queens) took place in between the

fashion show acts. *Travesti* performances were part of the underground homosexual culture, or stand-up comedy acts in the normative public space (Verka Serdiuchka who became popular in the 1990s being the most famous example). In combination with gender non-conforming costumes and performances of the Orchid models, *travesti* performances transformed normative public space into space where different nonnormative subcultures intertwined into Koptev's 'pie of contradictions'. The models' full or partial nudity resisted sexual and bodily shame, and the heterogeneity of the bodies exposed heteronormative male gaze as just one of the many possible spectatorial positions.

The response of the audiences was mixed: from happy 'consumers in the sexual marketplace' mentioned earlier, to the angry reactions of some spectators who were disgusted by some elements of the show (nudity, male nudity specifically or the 'perversions' of cross-dressing) (mentioned in Chubenko 2007). Some media also mentioned standing applause at the end of each show, and Koptev's claims of receiving love notes from both women and men after the end of the shows (Tsyba 2018a). Such mixed response reveals both the sensation of fragility in the normative audiences caused by the shows, and the possible sense of encouragement in the nonheteronormative spectators; most of all, it reveals the changes in the social formations that take place in the 1990s.

2. 'Decent people': neotraditionalism and Europeanisation in the 1990s

2.1. 'Human rights' vs 'national values'

In the 1990s and early 2000s Orchid was quite unique in Ukraine in its obvious transgression of normativity. With Ukrainian independence in 1991, the particularities of gender, class, race and sexuality were passed on to the private sphere.

Male same-sex sexual activity was decriminalised in Ukraine in 1991. This vote was accompanied by parliamentary discussion of the decriminalisation of sex work and drug use. Decriminalisation of male homosexuality happened not as a result of the 'human rights' struggle, but rather as a pragmatic step towards better control of the population's health. Questions of human rights, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, were briefly mentioned during parliamentary debates (*Biuleten' N 36 [Stenohrama Plenarnoho Zasidannia Verkhovnoï Rady Ukraïny 31.10.1991]* 1991). The decision to decriminalise sex between men was motivated by and rationalised by the need for better state control of the HIV epidemics spread in Ukraine (also lobbied by international actors), rather than a lack of homophobia in society or among government officials (Biuleten' N 48 [Stenohrama Zasidannia Verkhovnoï Rady Ukraïny 12.12.1991] 1991). In 1996 the newly-adopted Ukrainian Constitution proclaimed marriage to be the monogamous unity of a man and a woman. The Ministry of Education at the time advised school administrations not to employ people 'with pronounced homosexual inclinations' (Naumenko and others 2015: 135).

As we will see in this chapter, two competing discourses framed nonnormative sexuality and gender: a neo-traditionalist discourse of 'national values', and the liberal discourse of 'human rights' and 'European values'. The rhetorics of human rights had been promoted since the 1960s by the Ukrainian dissident movement. Yet Soviet dissident rhetoric had omitted the themes of gender and sexual heterogeneity in relation to human rights or was openly homo/transphobic (see Kuntsman 2016). In Ukraine, nationalism acquired a particularly strong standing among dissidents and human rights activism due to the history of national liberation, instigated by Soviet repressions and Russian imperialism. For instance, one of the aims of Ukrainian Helsinki Group (part of international human rights networks), established in 1976, was to popularise the Declaration on Human Rights. Yet,

as stated by human rights activist IEvhen Zakharov, the group reacted only to the 'national issue', and reported violation of 'national rights', but not other forms of persecution. In the words of Zakharov (2005), 'political activists used the language and form of human rights protection ideology, understood in the West, in order to attract more attention and understanding of Ukrainian national issues'.

A year after Ukraine gained independence, the European Union was formed. One of the aims of the Union was 'to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms' ('Treaty on European Union, Signed at Maastricht on 7 February 1992' 1992: 4). Since its independence the Ukrainian state strived towards cooperation (and integration) with the European Union. While the Eurointegration process was often declarative and complex in Ukraine, it meant 'Europeanisation': the influence of the European Union on Ukrainian political and economic dynamics. In 1998 the Ukrainian government adopted the Strategy on Ukraine's Integration with the European Union. The strategy proclaimed membership of the EU as the state's long-term strategic goal and presumed political, economic and cultural cooperation, adaptation of Ukraine's laws to the EU legislation, enforcing human rights and general 'consolidation of democracy' ('Ukaz Prezydenta Ukraïny "Pro Zatverdzhennia Stratehiï Intehratsiï Ukraïny Do IEvropeis'koho Soiuzu"' 1998). The perspective of EU membership established a new temporality for the Ukrainian state: the vector of transition from 'backwardness' into European 'modernity'. In terms of achieving progress and entering the modernised European future, the question of human rights protection became more important for the Ukrainian internal politics.

At the same time, the state-building project required the 'invention of tradition', as 'nations without a past are contradictions in terms' (Hobsbawm and Kertzer 1992). A new type of state nationalism came with Ukrainian

independence that based itself on heteropatriarchal ideals and the reinvention of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' – a process, inevitable, in some researchers' opinion, for the creation of the nation-state (see Gapova 2016). As early as in 1993 feminist theorist Solomiya Pavlychko noted that 'the so-called national revival is a revival of masculine culture' (Pavlychko 2002b: 74). In her opinion, the 'revival' of Ukraine as an independent state was grounded in the idealisation of the historical past – creating romantic ideals of 'national culture' and 'national traditions' that needed to be restored after the years of Soviet imperialism (Pavlychko 2002b: 30). These ideals, in turn, were entangled with an idea of 'traditional Ukrainian family' revival (rooted in the romanticised ideal of the XIX century peasant family) (Pavlychko 2002b: 47, 54). Such an ideal presented family as a patriarchal and normative institution in need of strengthening.

Critiquing Ukrainian patriarchal culture, Solomiia Pavlychko was one of the first scholars to actively introduce the idea of 'gender' to academia in 1990, connecting it to the idea of 'human rights'. Making use of the 'Western theories that leaked their way to us late, as usual' (Pavlychko 2002a: 21), Pavlychko (2002b) wrote on discrimination against women, and on women's rights as an integral element of human rights. For Pavlychko (2002a: 28), writing women into history and culture meant making Ukrainian culture 'non-provincial', 'normal', 'European'. The turn to gender theories and methodologies was thus framed as part of the 'civilising' mission to get Ukraine out of its 'backward' provincial past and into the modern, democratic future.

The 1990s were the time of transmission of academic knowledge on gender and sexuality from abroad. Most scholars who employed gender methodologies in their research were part of the Ukrainian diaspora or had experience studying or working abroad. Similarly, many research activities on gender and sexuality were funded by 'Western' foundations: for example, the

influential yearly international gender studies summer schools in Foros (Crimea) and the first *Gendernye issledovaniia* ([Russ.] 'Gender Studies') academic journal were sponsored by the McArthur Foundation (Pastushok and Martsenyuk 2020). Womens' studies started to be integrated into the higher education system in the late 1990s as sporadic courses led by scholars interested in gender and women studies. Several gender studies centres appeared in Ukraine. However, as noted by Plakhotnik (2012: 238), gender studies centres appeared and developed as NGOs or professional associations rather than as part of the university structure.

Some foreign works on gender and sexuality, such as the *Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir and *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millet, were translated into Ukrainian. At the same time, while knowledge on gender in Ukraine was produced more actively, academic knowledge production on nonnormative sexualities by Ukrainian researchers was almost non-existent, and limited to historical figures and communities (see Pavlychko 1999; Zherebkin 1998).

Gender scholars' political and epistemological standpoints varied from rehabilitating nationalism to critiquing and deconstructing it (Zhurzhenko 2011). These researchers, like the first women's organisations in the 1990s (see Phillips 2008a), often adopted essentialising approaches to understanding gender, and focused on inscribing women into Ukrainian history. In general, in the words of Olga Plakhotnik (2011), gender studies and academic feminism in 1990s Ukraine were considered to be 'alien' both in Ukrainian academia and in civic activism and had little effect on society or mainstream ideology.

Feminist philosopher Tatiana Zhurzhenko (Zhurzhenko 2001: 4–5), after ten years of Ukrainian independence, described mainstream Ukrainian ideology as neo-traditionalist and asserted that nation-building process positioned (normative) family as an important element of the Ukrainian national myth:

> [Neo-traditionalism] appeals to such principles as the moral superiority of the traditional family and family values, the moral and economic autonomy of the family, especially its independence from the state, a focus on reproduction and on the strengthening of parents' responsibility and, of course, returning to the "natural" gender roles.

The interrelationship between nationalistic ideologies and the enforcement of traditional gender hierarchies and heteronormativity has been widely explored, both internationally (Yuval-Davis 1997; Yuval-Davis and Werbner 2005) and in relation to Eastern Europe (Graff 2006; Renkin 2009; Waitt 2005). Zhivka Valiavicharska (2011: 19) raises the issue of the old nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe 'reinventing themselves anew against the presence of international liberal agents'. The radical extreme of such neo-traditionalist reinvention was reflected in the development of the radical right formations.

In 1991, when various unions, parties and organisations spread in independent Ukraine, Social-Nationalistychna Partiya Ukrainy ([Ukr.] Social-Nationalist Party of Ukraine, hereafter SNPU) was founded. SNPU can be considered one of the 'populist radical right' parties that spread in Europe after the World War II. After being registered in 1995, the party was supported by the French National Front and maintained close connections with EuroNat organisation of European ultranationalist political parties (see 'Istoriia VO "Svoboda"' 2011).

According to Cas Mudde, the defining features of populist radical right ideology are authoritarianism, populism and nativism - a belief that 'states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally

threatening to the homogenous nation-state' (Mudde 2010: 1173). The SNPU understood nation to be a *krovno-dukhovna spil'nota* ([Ukr.] 'a community of blood and faith'), therefore denying membership to those 'not belonging to Ukrainian nation', which included atheists and former Communist party members ('Istoriia VO "Svoboda"' 2011). The party *Sotsial-natsionalist* ([Ukr.] *Social-Nationalist*) newspaper proclaimed the Ukrainian nation to be an origin of white race (Martyniuk 1998), and Ukraine as having a historical mission of uniting white people in fighting Chaos and restoring Order (Parubiĭ 1998b). Furthermore, the task of party members and followers was to oppose the 'destructive pseudo-ideas that the West is full of and that enemies strive to export to Ukraine' and 'the aggressiveness of the destructive ideas of the wild Asian world, Russia being the incarnation of it' (Parubiĭ 1999: 23).

SNPU is an example of the early neotraditionalist organisation in Ukraine. The writings of SNPU members present liberal modernity as a path to chaos and destruction of the Ukrainian nation. The return to 'national values' and to the state of not being 'corrupted' by the Western modernity, is therefore viewed as essential. Andrii Parubii, one of the SNPU co-founders, framed sexual heterogeneity in Ukraine as part of 'destructive pseudo-ideas', a result of 'liberal ideology expansion' coming mainly from the United States:

> Лібералізм, як ідеологія, бере за основу свого учення людину, свободу людини. Характерним прикладом є США. Сексуальні революції, пацифізм, наркоманія, порнографія, сексуальні меншини природні складові такого суспільства. Якщо чоловік хоче жити з чоловіком, а жінка з жінкою, то, згідно з лібералізмом, це їхнє право їхнє волевиявлення, яке треба шанувати. Забороняючи це, держава обмежує їхню свободу, їхнє право вибору. Загальносуспільні, національні цінності до уваги беруться дуже частково.

> [Ukr.] Liberalism, as an ideology, has the person, the freedom of the person, as its foundation. The USA is an example of it. Sexual revolutions, pacifism, drug use, pornography, sexual minorities are the natural components of such society. If a man wants to live with a man, and a woman with a woman, then, according to liberalism, it is their right, the expression of their will that needs to be respected. By the prohibition of it, the state limits their freedom, their right of choice. All-societal, national values are taken into consideration in a very limited way (Parubiĭ 1998a: 24).

This quotation aligns 'sexual minorities' with drug use, pornography and pacifism, framing sexual diversity as 'foreign perversion' opposing 'national values'. In another text, the *Molodyi natsionalist* ([Ukr.] *Young Nationalist*) newspaper author Andrii Potsiluiko (1998) directly links liberal ideology with the 'entirety of perversions' that is being legalised in Western societies. Liberalism with its 'human rights' rhetorics and focus on individual freedom is described as 'perverted' and immoral, and opposed to nationalism with its focus on traditionalism, collective freedom and religious sacrifice. Nonnormative sexual behaviour is therefore politicised within the SNPU discourse: it is framed as perversion, immoral and anti-social behaviour, but also as a foreign political threat capable of corrupting national identity.

While SNPU rhetoric represented the far-right end of the political spectrum, it also presented a radicalised version of mainstream values in relation to sexuality. Ukraine's first President Leonid Kravchuk's statement made in response to the question about his attitude to homosexuality can be said to represent mainstream neotraditional discourse:

> У нас у всіх ростуть діти, внуки, і всі ми хочемо бачити їх

нормальними людьми… А отже, і з ЦИМ треба щось робити, принаймні говорити, намагатися з'ясувати природу явища, зрозуміти, і, якщо можливо, запобігти.

При всій моїй повазі до прав людини, я вважаю, що ЦЕ належить до психічних збочень. Я вже вік прожив, але й досі не можу сприймати ЦЕ як щось нормальне. Це або хвороба, або якась психічна патологія… А може, результат виховання на тлі закордонних кінофільмів. Скажу більше. До останнього часу я просто не вірив, що ТАКЕ буває в житті. Думав, що це просто якась художня фантазія, яку люди вигадали. […]

Мені бридко про це навіть говорити. Це щира правда. Я, як людина від землі, від природи, як нормальна, врешті, людина, не можу цього втямити!

[…] Але ЗАКОН і демократія – понад усе. Якщо заборонити ЦЕ, тоді виникнуть спокуса та підстави заборонити все, що завгодно.

[Ukr.] We all have children, grandchildren, and all of us want to see them growing up normal… so, something needs to be done with THIS, at least talking, trying to find out the nature of this phenomenon, understanding, and, if it is possible, preventing.

With all my respect for human rights, I believe that THIS falls into psychiatric disorders. I lived my life, but still can't accept THIS as something normal. It is either illnesses or some psychic pathology… Or maybe, a result of growing up under the influence of foreign films [sic – O.D.]. I will say more. Until very recently, I couldn't believe that THIS happens in real life. I thought it is just some artistic fantasy that people made up. […]

I am disgusted to even talk about it. This is the honest truth. I, as a person rooted in soil, in nature, as a normal, after all, person, cannot

understand it!

[...] But the LAW and democracy are above everything. If THIS is prohibited, then the temptation and the basis for prohibiting whatever you can think of will appear (Burda 1999: 44).

In this statement, Kravchuk turned to 'human rights' discourse to speak against the criminalisation of homosexuality. The legislation on human rights protection was adopted in Ukraine in 1997 with the new Constitution, - yet legislation did not address gender identity and sexual orientation within the spectrum of human rights. It is unsurprising then that Kravchuk framed homosexuality as 'human rights' issue, as a legal matter, but also a 'not normal' phenomenon and 'mental deviation'. This quote reveals the tactical function of legislative decriminalisation of homosexuality at the time of the HIV epidemic, that combined with a continuation of pathologisation in public discourses and hidden prosecution at the local level.[11]

Ukrainian media in the 1990s often echoed Kravchuk in a double bind of homophobic attitude and calls for liberal tolerance. For example, Aleksandr Grechanik in an article to *Luganskaia Pravda* (Grechanik 1998) aligned homosexuality with perversion and stated that non-acceptance of homosexuality was a part of Slavic Christian tradition: '"Голубой" в нашем обыденном представлении — это не кто иной, как извращенец' ([Russ.] '*Goluboi* [homosexual man – O.D.] in our common understanding - is no other than a pervert'). Yet the author finished the article with a claim that sexuality is 'private business', promoting liberal heterogeneity and claiming that everyone should be free to choose their sexual/romantic interest as long as their actions are legal.

[11] For example, police maintained records of homosexual men until at least mid-2000s (see Zakharov and others 2006).

Some media went further in representing gender and sexual nonconformity as a perverted disorder in need of change. For instance, *Kievskie vedomosti* author Igor Tkalenko (1998) brought up the example of Oscar Wilde to claim that same-sex desire leads to a tragic and unhappy life of the person and their loved ones. Tkalenko also argued that homosexuals and 'those like them' corrupt society, make it 'weak and stupid', and thus are a direct danger to the development of Ukrainian state (statement echoing far-right rhetorics). They should, therefore, 'contain' themselves and lead a normative life:

> [...] Я убежден, что многие гомосексуалисты и им подобные сегодня могут стать «нормальными людьми». Нужно стараться сдерживаться и не сдаваться. И это их гражданский долг, если они хотят добра своему народу и государству.
>
> [Russ.] [...] I am convinced that many homosexualists and those like them can become 'normal people' nowadays. It is necessary to contain oneself and not give up. It is their civic duty if they have their state and nation's interests in their heart.

2.2. New identities and 'decent people': the rise of LGBT NGOs

Orchid's shows with cross-dressing, male nudity and Koptev imitating a blowjob with a spectator by holding a vodka bottle next to his crotch, presented an image opposite to the 'normal people' envisioned by Tkalenko, Kravchuk or SNPU members. By opposing bodily and (homo)sexual shame, the shows provided an implicit critique of the idea that only heteronormative citizens should be visible, and nonheteronormative people should be

‘contained’ in public or private life.[12]

Interestingly enough, the idea of being normative/conforming was also promoted within homosexual subcultures of the time. Decriminalisation of male homosexuality led to the more active development of homosexual subcultures: club parties and informal gatherings, *samizdat* magazines coexisted with the newly-formed NGOs. LGBT NGOs in Ukraine (to my knowledge) did not develop out of the pre-existing human rights organisations, workers’ trade unions or other grassroots movements. They mostly arose out of underground nonnormative communities, and were supported by Western funds aimed at the ‘democratisation’ of Ukraine.

Existing nonnormative formations during the Soviet times often took the shape of various communities of *svoi* ([Russ.] literally ‘our people’, ‘our kind’). These closed communities developed their own subcultures with specific modes (and codes) of communication, style, behaviour, and cultural production (see Pilkington 1994; Fürst and McLellan 2016; Fürst 2020 on subcultures in the late Soviet Union). Subcultures became sites of knowledge production and exchange, and some (such as homosexual subcultures) developed their own sites and meeting places, *samizdat* press, as well as informal networks of economic, social and political support. While various nonheteronormative communities proliferated in the Soviet Union (especially in big cities), they were often underground and operated within an ‘ethos of secrecy’, as the existence of sexual, gender and relationship heterogeneity was concealed in public discourses until the 1980s (Clech 2018).

Homosexual subcultures encouraged specific *svoi* behaviour, with rich

[12] Bogdan Popa’s conceptualisation of shame (2017) inspired me to direct my attention to dissent against sexual/gender/bodily shame in cultural production.

vocabulary and language codes used within the subcultures.[13] Part of this behaviour and style would be *khabal'stvo*:[14] transgressing gender roles for nonheterosexual subjects that would involve embodying femininity. In 2003, Aleksandr Gribanov, an activist of 'Nash Svit' LGBT NGO, described male homosexual subcultures in Luhans'k and the phenomenon of *khabal'stvo*:

> [...] хабальство, игра в 'женщин' - с женскими кличками, обращением друг к другу на 'ла', некоторое намеренное кривляние, преувеличенное внимание сексуальным моментам ('Ой, девАчкИ, я вчерА тАкой сАсАла!') - служили сигналом, кодом - вокруг все 'свои'.
>
> [Russ.] [...] *khabal'stvo*, 'playing women' - with female nicknames, addressing each other with 'la' endings [*female gendered verb endings*], some intentionally affected manners, exaggerated attention to the sexual moments ('Oh girls, yesterday I sucked such a cock!'). All of this was a code, signalling that everyone around was '*svoi'*, insiders (Gribanov 2003).

In Gribanov's opinion, *khabal'stvo* was widespread in groups that formed in the Soviet times around cruising spaces (*pleshki*) and within closed circles of friends. *Khabal'stvo* was a daring act of opposing the 'surrounding world':

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[13] For instance, the Russian noun *tema* that denoted such communities: possibly originating in prison slang, it became a widespread 'non-gendered collective term for non-heterosexuals' (Stella 2015: 6), and later for the communities of BDSM practitioners and transgender people.

[14] See (Clech 2018) on the phenomenon of *khabal'stvo* in the Soviet Union.

> “Вы считаете меня таким гадким? Ну, тогда получите меня такого, каким хотите видеть. Вы обзываете меня, а я буду получать от таких оскорблений удовольствие, я придумаю еще круче!”
>
> [Russ.] “Do you think I’m ugly? Well, then you will have me as you wish to see me. You insult me, and I will get pleasure from those insults, I will come up with the even cooler ones!” (Gribanov 2003)

Agreeing that *khabal’stvo* is a source of creativity and gay folklore, Gribanov yet treats contemporary *khabal’stvo* with contempt and critiques it as being outdated, and as a vulgar attempt to show off and shock others. Gribanov distinguishes between *khabalki* as representatives of the ‘older’ generation, and the ‘new wave’ of independent Ukraine - homosexual men who know how to speak correctly about their homosexuality, look and act ‘as men’ (e.g. in a more masculine and normative way). As in the article in *Kievskie vedomosti*, the motif of unhappy life is repeated in Gribanov’s article, but this time in reference to *khabalki*: choosing *khabal’stvo* means choosing ‘uneasy fate’. The article ends with the author promoting liberal free choice - everyone is free to choose whatever they want (although some choices are undoubtedly less appreciated):

> Я за свободный выбор линии поведения. Откровенно говоря, мне было бы жаль, если племя хабалок окончательно вымерло. Будет серо и скучно, если, конечно, взамен не появится чего-то другого яркого и интересного. С другой стороны, я жду - не дождусь, когда на эстраде появится открытый гей, но с имиджем отличающимся от моисеевского. Ведь на самом деле можно быть геем и не походить один на другого. Так хочется, чтобы

общество это поняло.Можно проявить свою индивидуальность, не напяливая на себя бог весть что, не воркуя пошлости ломающимся голосом, не задевая собственной ‘короной’ каждую люстру и балконы в геевском клубе. Просто быть самим собой. А если быть собой означает: ворковать, напяливать, носить корону - с этим вас и поздравляю! Судьбу вы себе выбрали нелегкую.

[Russ.] I support the free choice of the behaviour strategy. To be honest, I would be sad if the *khabalki* tribe completely dies out. Everything will be dull and grey, unless something else, bright and interesting, appears instead. On the other hand, I can’t wait until there is an openly gay man on the stage, but with a different image to Moiseev.[15] People can be gay and not look alike. I want society to understand it. One can show one’s individuality and not pull on outrageous outfits, not sweet-talk the vulgarities with a changing voice, not hit every chandelier and the balconies in a gay club with one’s ‘crown’. Just to be oneself. And if to be oneself for you means to sweet talk, wear the crown, pull on outfits - congratulations! You have chosen an uneasy fate. (Gribanov 2003)

While describing actual subjectivities that existed at the time in Luhans'k, Gribanov’s article reflected a shift that happened in the 1990s and was in large part promoted by the NGOs. This shift consisted of politicizing sexual and gender heterogeneity and framing it in terms of human rights, respectability and identity politics. The shift in language (new terms such as

[15] Boris Moiseev is a Russian singer, performer and a gay icon, known for his extravagant camp performances.

gei instead of *goluboi*) and towards human rights rhetorics in nonheterosexual communities took place not just in Luhans'k, but throughout Ukraine. The brochure on correct terminology (Kravchuk [n.d.]) was published by the 'Nash Svit' centre simultaneously with the centre's translation of the EU reports on the discrimination and rights of the homosexual people in the states-members of the European Union ('RAVNOPRAVIE Dlia Lesbiianok i Geev' [n.d.]).

New terms and identities were closely connected with ideas of 'European rights', proper citizenship, normativity and nonnormativity. (Homo)normativity related not only to sexuality, but to social decency and gender conformity – those strategies and subjectivities that would provide access to higher class positions and civil society, and would be in line with 'the Western values' (on LGBT politics as an element of EU's Eastern enlargement see Slootmaeckers and others 2016). The authors of the *Nash Mir* magazine took on the role of 'enlightening' the public – both heterosexual and nonheterosexual. Website sections included scholarly materials on the origins of homosexuality, personal narratives and the information on 'our rights' and 'our history'. One of the authors, Khobo (1997), drew a direct parallel between homophobia and 'the lack of democratic traditions in society' that for the author meant respect of a person's individuality. In his article he criticized homosexual people for 'being afraid', refusing to 'leave the underground'[16] and to make connections with other gays and lesbians; Hobo instead presented visibility and recognition as important successful strategies of societal change. These views were mirroring the views of the initiative and the main editor (see 'Ugolok Redaktora' 1999). The articles published or reprinted by the magazine emphasized the fact that it was inappropriate for a homosexual

[16] 'Vykhodit' iz podpol'ia' ([Russ.] 'to come out of the underground') is the slang phrase used in similar ways to 'coming out of the closet' in English.

person to use slurs in reference to themselves (Gribanov 2003), described the life of 'ordinary families' (Maĭmulakhin 1999) and stated addressing the imaginary wider society that the majority of homosexual people are 'decent people':

> Да, в семье не без урода. И среди гомосексуалистов, как и среди натуралов, имеются свои шлюхи, старые девы и проститутки. Но, господа, в большинстве своем мы приличные люди!
>
> [Russ.] 'Yes, every family has a black sheep. Among homosexualists, just like among *naturaly* [heterosexual people – O.D.], there are their own sluts, spinsters and prostitutes. But, gentlemen, the majority of us are decent people!' (Mikhaĭlovskiĭ 1994)

While *Nash Mir* magazine positioned itself as samizdat press, its creation was part of a broader project entitled 'Informirovanie i prosveshchenie po voprosam gomoseksual'nosti kak aspect demokratizatsii obshchestva' ([Russ.] 'Informing and education on homosexuality issues as the aspect of society democratisation', see Maimulakhin 1997) supported by Netherlands Embassy in Ukraine ('Ugolok Redaktora' 1999). In 1999 Nash Svit ('Nash Mir' in Russian, or 'Our World' in English) was registered as an LGBT NGO and human rights centre, and the magazine seized to exist: the magazine was just a 'stepping stone' in the process of the creation of the NGO, and the website took its place. In 1999-2000 Nash Svit NGO received funding from the Open Society Institute in Budapest and Mizhnarodnyi Fond 'Vidrodzhennia' ([Ukr.] International Renaissance Foundation), both part of the regional Open Society Foundations. The activity of Soros foundation and Open Society Institutes (OSIs) in Eastern Europe has been described as 'democratisation

by design' (Esanu 2012: 8) and was guided by the logic of liberal transition of East European countries from 'authoritarianism' to 'democracy'.

Susan Pierce and Alexander Cooper (2016) note that in Central and Eastern Europe activism 'has been concentrated within NGOs, largely funded by international human rights groups, foundations, and governments'. The possible downsides of NGO-isation of activism, noted by scholars and activists, include professionalisation and social service delivery that becomes a surrogate for a state; as well as the fact that NGOs are often accountable only to donors and aim at sustaining non-profits rather than social movements (Incite! Women of Color Against Violence 2006). Alexander Lambevski, referring to Shannon Woodcock's article (2009), states that the 'NGO-isation of rights' in Central and Eastern Europe has had a problematic influence on the construction of sexual citizenship in the region:

> [...] funding from international western donors for projects in the area of sexual citizenship are pinned to creating quantifiable sexual identity groups and activists who are required not only to adopt a certain set of administrative and managerial practices commonly practiced by Western NGOs, but also to perform sexual politics and identities in exactly the same ways as they were (are) performed, with a fairly good degree of success, in Western Europe, Northern America, and Australia and New Zealand (Lambevski 2009: 2).

Drawing on the range of sources and field interviews, Nadzeya Husakouskaya (2019, 2018) describes the processes through which 'LGBT activism' was produced in Ukraine as a particular line of work, which entails amongst other things prioritisation of advocacy over other forms of activities, NGOisaition of civil society and professionalisation of NGOs. Within these processes, sexual diversity was instrumentalised 'to produce differences

between geopolitical entities along the lines of modernisation, development and progress' (Husakouskaya 2018: 75).

The Nash Svit 'democratisation' project in this regard relied on and reproduced a broader conceptualizing of the Central and East European (CEE) region within the framework of Western-centric temporalities. Donors, NGOs and activists both in the 'East' and in the 'West' often imagined Eastern Europe as 'lagging behind' and 'catching up' with the West: 'although living in the 'common present', the feeling is of being sort of "retarded", in the "past"' (Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011: 17). The modern nonheterosexual subject was thus imagined and produced as being a visible and proud liberal citizen-subject, 'normal', 'decent', family-oriented, and using 'correct' terminology. It is unsurprising that no materials on Koptev's Orchid were produced by *Nash Mir* magazine: while Koptev was active in Luhans'k homosexual subcultures, the nonnormative visibility of Orchid and its creator did not fit into the image of 'decent homosexual people' striving for the democratisation of the Ukrainian society.

Koptev's shows took place not just in public spaces such as Zaliznychnykiv House of Culture, but also in clubs around the country, with Koptev regularly visiting 'Yozhiki' club in Simeiz, an unofficial gay resort in Crimea (Shaman 2016). Identifying at times as bisexual, and at times as *goluboi* or *gei* (Shaman 2016; Luchistaia 2007), Koptev was would yet probably be considered 'outdated' by the *Nash Mir* authors for displaying *khabal'stvo,* preferring effeminate manners and indecent language. In public interviews Koptev often used rich sexualised folklore in ordinary speech, and spoke of self in the feminine gender, referring to self as *devushka* ([Russ.] 'girl, young woman'), *tsaritsa* ([Russ.] 'queen'), etc. Loudly discussing men on the street and harassing strangers has been a part of Koptev's public persona (Tsukrenko 2015). Such manifestation of nonnormative sexual and gendered behaviour was inseparable from public social indecency. It provided a

nonnormative antithesis to both the heteronormative position of the 'wider society', the patriarchal model of neo-traditionalism, and the normative strategies of the newly born human rights LGBT NGOs. The fashion shows in this regard can be considered to be a creative articulation of Koptev's personality and approach to norms: a way to express one's nonnormative agency and working-class belonging in a public and artistic way. In the next section I will examine Orchid as a 'collective of outcasts', and the affective realities set by the fashion shows in order to understand Orchid better as a nonnormative social formation of the 1990s.

3. Disidentifying with modernity? Orchid's nonnormative aesthetics

Koptev described one's personal approach to casting: 'Я беру народ. Я беру и толстых, и худых, и старых, и страшных, и красивых, - кому в жизни не повезло' ([Russ.] 'I take people. I take fat and thin, and old, and ugly, and beautiful, – those who had no luck in life') (Sukhanov 2012). The provocative character of Orchid as a project meant that participating in it was a risky act. Because of being nude in public, models were viewed and described by conservative public as 'immoral', 'prostitutes' and 'drug addicts'.

While proudly calling oneself a 'demonic person' or *ischadie ada* ([Russ.] 'spawn of hell'), Koptev also emphasized the legality and voluntary character of all actions, care for the models and refusing to act like a pimp, even when asked by criminals to 'sell' models (Boiarinov 2015). Some Orchid models had previous experience of performing naked. For instance, Aliona had been a stripper since she was 16, and had been performing in peep-show acts in Luhans'k and other cities prior to being involved in Orchid (Chekhova 2012). Models who did not have prior experience of being nude in public were convinced (or possibly coerced) by Koptev to do so through discussions, alcohol and compliments to their beauty: 'You have a talk with a model, pour

her a shot — and she undresses, what other choice she has' (Tsyba 2018; Chekhova 2012). The main casting criteria for Orchid were being not afraid to participate in the shows and 'having a good character' – being able to work 'for 7 *kopiikas* [Ukr. 'cents'] and 10 swearwords a day' (Tsukrenko 2015). As noted by Koptev, the models were working either for free or for small honorariums. The main incentive to participate in Orchid shows for the models was performing itself and the possibility of free travel to other cities and countries during the tours (Tsyba 2018).

Koptev recruited future models through friends, through advertisements in newspapers, and on the streets. Sometimes Koptev's relatives participated in the shows (Boiarinov 2015); one of the relatives was Koptev's 'mother-in-law' – the mother of Koptev's male lover (Tsyba 2018).

Koptev's approach to Orchid's collective formation recalls the alternative fashion shows of Aleksandr Petliura from Saint Petersburg who was most active in the 1980s and 1990s. Like Koptev, Petliura was famous for using found objects and vintage clothing in his collections. He was also famous for involving people of different age and social positions in his fashion performances: one of Petliura's most famous models was 70-year old Pani Bronia who won the title of the Alternative Miss World in 1998 (Heller 2015). Petliura developed the idea of 'collecting' marginalised people, similar to collecting objects (Mamulashvili 2016).

In contrast to Petliura, Koptev has never referred to forming Orchid troup as 'collecting' marginalised people or people with an extraordinary appearance. Yet it would be uncritical to assume that Koptev's choices were not strategic. Zina, a young woman with Down's Syndrome, was an Orchid model for some time. This is how Koptev described meeting Zina:

> Мы познакомились в маршрутке — она ехала с родителями. Я поговорил с её мамой и предложил, чтобы она с завтрашнего дня

работала моделью. Объяснил ей, что у меня провокационная мода, и мне такой человек и нужен. Мать согласилась — мол, может чему-нибудь научится. Зина походку так и не выучила, но мне очень доверяла. [...] Еще до того, как она пришла к нам, я собрал всех девочек в круг и сказал им: «Не вздумайте на неё коситься, подхихикивать и шептаться. Потому что эти люди — очень ранимые».

[Russ.] 'We met on a bus - she was there with her parents. I talked to her mother and suggested for her daughter to work as our model starting with the next day. I explained that I do provocative fashion and that I need exactly such a person. Her mother agreed - what if Zina learns something. Zina did not learn the runway walk, but she trusted me a lot. [...] Even before she came to us, I gathered all the girls into the circle and told them: 'Don't even think of squinting, giggling and whispering about her because such people are easily hurt' (Boiarinov 2015).

After several years of work, Koptev renamed Orchid from 'theatre of provocative fashion' to the 'circus of provocative fashion'. Koptev claims renaming the 'theatre' as 'circus' was an attempt to distinguish oneself from the other Theatres of Fashion that were beginning to appear in Luhans'k (Tsyba 2018a). Some elements of the show did indeed incorporate circus tricks, such as walking on the runway while swirling fireballs. The 'circus' renaming can be seen as sanitizing the show, placing its nonnormative performances outside the tradition of the more normative fashion shows and within the tradition of eccentric vaudeville circus acts.[17]

[17] Gender-blending and cross-dressing have a long-standing tradition in circus history

Koptev's main objective in featuring different people in the fashion shows was to show the 'real dramaturgy of life':

> Я хочу показать людям то, чего они еще не видели. 'Фешн вик' - х*ик, все это видели и неинтересно. Я хочу, чтобы было весело и грустно, хочу показать настоящую драматургию жизни!
>
> [Russ.] 'I want to show people something they have never seen before. F*cking 'fashion week' - everyone has seen it; it is not interesting. I want it to be cheerful and sad, to show the real dramaturgy of life!' (Sergatskova 2015)

What is this 'dramaturgy of life' that Orchid shows are part of? It is the display of the material bodily heterogeneity that was hidden in normative public discourses, yet present in society (*narod*, or 'the people'). The Soviet system has already established a system of hierarchies that created various 'outcasts'. For instance, Sarah D. Philips (2009 : para.1) notes the 'politics of exclusion and social distancing that characterised disability policy under state socialism': 'Historically throughout the former Soviet bloc, persons with physical and mental disabilities have been stigmatized, hidden from the public, and thus made seemingly invisible'. In everyday life, people who had non-typical anatomical embodiment were non-disabled or neurotypical, continued experiencing the lack of social and institutional support, stigmatisation or treatment as 'freaks' in public. For some, uniting into circus

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(see Senelick 2000). Cross-dressing as part of eccentric comic acts was popular in Soviet circus performances (see, for instance, description of the musical act by Elena Amvrosieva and Georgii Shakhnin in Kokh 1966), and became a widespread practice in various post-Soviet circus acts.

groups was one of the few ways to earn a living and find people with similar experiences: the circuses of small people were touring in Ukraine in the 1980s and 1990s, one of the most famous being 'Siianie malen'kikh zvezd' ([Russ.] 'Shining of the Little Stars'), established during the Soviet times.

Ukraine's transition from conformist socialism to individualist capitalism did not change (even perhaps worsened) the conditions of those people who were to different extent marginalised by the normative regimes - older people, disabled, those engaged in sex work or nonnormative modes of being, and others. Yet the landscape of what was visible had radically changed. The 1990s were a time of the 'frenzy of the visible' (Williams 1999) not just in regard to sex and sexuality. Touring exhibitions of freaks became popular, their popularity being partly instigated by Chornobyl nuclear catastrophe. The tradition of freak shows dates back to the development of modernity in Western culture, when people marked as 'deviant' from the norm would be displayed in dime museums, circus sideshows and fairs:

> The exaggerated, sensationalized discourse that is the freak show's essence ranged over the seemingly singular bodies that we would now call either 'physically disabled' or 'exotic ethnics', framing them and heightening their differences from the viewers, who were rendered comfortably common and safely standard by the exchange (Garland-Thomson 1996: 5).

The exhibitions of freaks popular in 1990s Ukraine featured not living people, but embalmed fetuses and infants with a nonnormative anatomical embodiment. Print media and television in post-Soviet Ukraine promoted even further what Kuznetsova called 'deformitomania' – fascination with nonnormative bodies (Kuznetsova 2012: 238).

While Orchid was not promoted as a 'freak show', the reframing of

Orchid as a ‘circus of provocative fashion’ departs from and exploits the tradition of circus as colonial spectacularisation of ‘freakery’ and the construction of the ‘spaces of exoticism’. The black-and-white emblem of the Orchid circus (Appendix A, Figure 1) features a character that in my reading is meant to represent an idea of racialised ‘exoticism’ and ‘freakery’.

The character has a bald head; the eyes are narrow, and the lips are big. The scalp, face and neck of the character are covered in ornamental tattoos or body art; there is a small ring in the character’s nostril; the ears are pointy, and pointy black petals appear to grow next to the ears. The character’s gender is not ‘readable’. While the title points to an exotic and delicate flower, Orchid’s emblem, drawn by Koptev, represents Orchid as an ‘exotic’ circus space of the extraordinary, seemingly situated outside of the Soviet or ‘Western’ modernity.

The shows’ setting and dramaturgy are often built on this theme of existing outside modernity. The models’ bodies are artistically altered by means of ornamental body art. Some show acts imitate pagan rituals, with the models wearing animal skins and horns (Appendix A, Figure 6). Others feature post-apocalyptic settings: the models wear gas masks and torn outfits, appearing to show ‘life after modernity’. Others feature mystical or surreal settings with models wearing burning candles on their heads, or baby dolls as part of their outfits.[18] The costumes, shifting the shape and gender of the models, display unregulated, vulnerable bodies, some of which would be considered ‘abnormal’, ‘disgusting’ or ‘ugly’ and hidden from sight. The boundary between being nude and being clothed is also blurred, disturbing the welding between conformity in dress and the notions of social order that

[18] The latter gesture is most likely influenced by Luhans'k artist Valerii Medin, famous for making macabre collages out of found objects, icon frames and toys.

took place with modernity establishing the categories of 'proper' citizens (Geczy and Karaminas 2013: 4). If the dress is a marker of performed gender and social position, Koptev's dress steps away from conformity to any social positions into the space of the ritual: it is a collage of found objects and recycled clothing, often deliberately deformed and made to decay (some outfits were dug into the ground). The bodies also merge with objects on them, challenging an idea of a human body separate from its surroundings.

Orchid's namesake and predecessor, the film *Wild Orchid,* exploited the 'exotic' setting of Brazil, *candomblé* religious rituals and carnival tradition. Placing white heterosexual characters in 'another place and time' allowed the film to not just safely screen heterosexual sexual acts, but also to demonstrate cross-dressing and homosexual kissing. Such a display would not be threatening to heteronormative audiences, while simultaneously construct liberal multicultural utopia of sexual freedom.

Like the film, Orchid shows also construct another space and time, turning to 'exoticism', 'barbarism', 'freakery', 'paganism' to provoke normative audiences. The fact that Koptev gained more financial and symbolic capital than the models, as well as the fact that the shows were sometimes tailored to 'fit' specific audiences (Shaman 2016), highlights the strategic use of the heterogeneity that the shows seemed to explore. Yet could Koptev's 'exotic' can also be seen as a search for an 'antinormative option' (Muñoz 1999: x)?

It is unsurprising that Orchid shows often became a material site of struggle, provoking many different reactions. Throughout its existence, Orchid and Koptev were 'queered': framed in media and public as provincial, outdated, perverted, pornographic, unprofessional/uneducated, ugly, unfashionable, compared with 'city lunatics', etc. The reason for this is the above-mentioned 'multilayered pie of contradictions' that Orchid presented. First of all, Orchid presented a striking discordance with both the glamorous

world of high fashion and the more normative theatres of fashion/fashion schools that replaced the Soviet institutions. It was much closer to the phenomenon of the alternative fashion that challenged the idea of fashion and fashion shows and intertwined various forms of art in theatrical performances. Costume collections questioned the normative fashion standards and societal standards of respectability by opposing bodily, gendered and sexual shame and imagining nonnormative self-fashioning as an alternative. Secondly, Orchid's organisation as a collective of 'outcasts' presented heterogeneity of gender, sexuality and (dis)ability at the time when identities rigidified. By imitating the 'escape out of modernity' into the other settings (that of the circus and carnival, pre-modern or post-apocalyptic worlds, rituals and visions), Orchid shows attempted to construct alternatives to the Christian, heteronormative, middle-class constructs: that of private, domesticated sex, normative sexual practices, nuclear family structures, (gendered) appearance, and social conformity that became prevalent in both heteronormative publics and homosexual NGO rhetorics. To a certain extent, the anti-utopian aesthetics of the shows questioned spectacularisation of difference and illustrated the concealment of bodily, gender, sexual and social heterogeneity by normative discourses.

Orchid as an artistic strategy can be described as what Aleksei Yurchak (2014) calls the 'principle of *being vnye*' ([Russ.] *vnenakhodimost'*, situatedness outside) that was characteristic of many late Soviet nonconformist artists: existing within the formal parameters of the discursive space, but outside of the senses that constitute it. Yet I believe that *being vnye* is a term too general to describe a specific phenomenon that Orchid presents. In his *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999: 25) José Esteban Muñoz states:

Disidentification is the hermeneutical performance of decoding

mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy.

Orchid performances created the possibility for both participation and reception of nonnormative subjects. Decoding various cultural fields and framing itself as an intersection of, or existing outside, genres, it opposed standardisation. It questioned formations imagined by dominant discourses as separate and transparent by disidentifying with them – being neither 'heterosexual' (fashion), nor 'homosexual' (drag shows), neither 'sexual' (striptease, peep shows) nor 'asexual' (circus acts, theatre), neither 'high art' (fashion, theatre, performance) nor 'low art' (circus, sex entertainment work). That is the reason why Orchid shows were both possible and constantly under scrutiny and criticism.

Orchid shows existed within the same time and space as their audiences. It was an unstable time of survival and social vulnerability, poverty, 'wild capitalism', the absence of strict categorisations and the formation of the new ideas of (non)conformity and (in)decency. In this regard, Orchid's settings can be read as 'wild space,' not just in terms of reproducing colonial phantasy, but 'as a space rendered uninhabitable by modernity but crammed with interesting life-forms of its own' (Halberstam and Nyong'o 2018: 459).

Chapter I: Conclusion

This chapter has followed the 1990s transformations of the newly founded Ukrainian state and the 'invention of tradition' that accompanied it. It traced the parallel development of the discourses of 'national values' in the neo-traditionalist rhetorics of the far-right groups, and the Europeanisation discourses of 'human rights/European values' in the rhetorics of scholars

working on gender studies, and the liberal NGOs. It also showed the ways in which 'nonnormative' behaviours and subjectivities were politicized and addressed in these discourses. Ideas of morality and decency become important, as they form the basis for understanding future developments in Ukrainian society. I argue that in the 1990s, the idea of being or becoming 'decent' and 'normal' was promoted not just by the conservative mainstream, but also by the newly established LGBT NGOs. 'Decency' came as part of the package together with the new political terms and identities (such as 'gay', 'lesbian' or 'LGBT') adopted from the 'West'; 'decent' sexuality, social decency and gender conformity were viewed as model behaviour necessary for acquiring 'human/European rights' and moving from the 'backwards past' to the 'modern future'.

In such a context, Koptev's Orchid in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s is a collective that points to various nonnormative formations existing aside from the newly established norms and ideas of 'decency' or 'traditional values'. Gathering marginalised, working-class, nonnormative people to perform in 'provocative erotic fashion shows', Koptev used the emerging – capitalist – trend to turn sex, sexuality and nudity (as well as broader 'difference') into an object of sale and spectacle. At the same time, the shows' setting and dramaturgy opposed the 'decent' and 'normal', dissenting against sexual and bodily shame, and revealing the multitude of possible coalitions and kinships. Orchid shows can also be read as disidentifying with Soviet and post-Soviet ideas of modernity and progress.

In Chapter V, I will come back to the development of Koptev's Orchid, exploring the shifts in its framing after it enters the sphere of the institutionalised art. However, in the preceding chapters I will attend to the shifting climate of the 2000s through works that did not only disidentify with the dominant rhetorics of cultural fields but also represented a dissenting

subject position of counter-identification – activist opposition to normative regimes of power.

CHAPTER II. DISSENT AS DEMARGINALISATION: 'WE ARE NOT MARGINALS!'

1. Europeanisation and the phenomenon of 'contemporary art' in Ukraine

To understand the artistic dissent in the 2000s, it is useful to remember that the history of Ukrainian contemporary art is intertwined with the history of Europeanisation of Ukraine. In the 1990s Ukrainian state art institutions had little interest in 'contemporary art' and focused instead on maintaining the status quo; students in those institutions received 'very traditional training that did not incorporate current art world trends' (Babij 2009). Tamara Zlobina (2010) and Oleksii Radyns'ky (2009) note the lack of general understanding of what 'contemporary art' was even within the art world itself – which resulted in the transliterated use of 'контемпорарiарт' (kontemporariart) in Ukrainian as a term. Such art was supported at first mainly by private collectors, and the purchase of the artworks was mediated by private galleries; the art market was not regulated, and the 'contemporary art' scene could be best described by Babij's metaphor of 'one hand washing the other' (Babij 2010). As stated by Larissa Babij (2010: 126),

> Современное искусство появилось в Украине как импортированное понятие. То были времена, когда Советский Союз с головой погружался в хаос 'дикого капитализма'. История местных арт-институций - это история перехода от жесткого контроля со стороны политических сил к 'свободе' коммерции, обеспеченной богатыми частными инвесторами.
>
> [Russ.] Contemporary art appeared in Ukraine as an imported concept. Those were the times when the Soviet Union sank into the chaos of the 'wild capitalism'. The history of local art institutions is the history of the transition from strict control by the political powers

to commercial 'freedom', guaranteed by the rich private investors.

Institutional support for and development of 'contemporary art' had begun with the activity of the Centre for Contemporary Art, founded by the Soros Foundation in Kyiv in 1993 – similar centres were established simultaneously in many other countries of Eastern Europe. In the words of Octavian Esanu (2012: 8):

> What is radically different about the emergence of contemporary art in the postsocialist countries is that here new and unfamiliar forms of artistic behaviour were hastily transfused into, or grafted onto, existing cultural scenes. [...] Under the slogan "transition to democracy," a large-scale process of institution building was unleashed. It was widely believed during this time that the imitation and implementation of already-tested Western institutional models was the most effective method of changing the behaviours of former socialist citizens, in accordance with the logic of the new political-economic regime. [...] Similar processes of democratization by design took place in the field of art. Here, radically new types of art institution, financed from abroad, sustained and promoted "open" or "democratic" forms of artistic production, display, and distribution.

Similar to the logic of 'democratisation by design' behind the institution-building processes that influenced the emergence of professionalised LGBT rights activism in Ukraine (described in the previous chapter), the transformation of the cultural sphere presupposed the 'modernisation' of Ukrainian art, its subjects and conditions of existence (see Lozovyi 2017; Iohanson and others 2006). 'Eastern European art' was 'included in the

project of cultivation, "civilisation" of local "premodern" societies into the community of European democratic nations' (Dedić 2017: 54–55). Therefore, Centres for Contemporary Art were viewed as progressive and democratic institutional infrastructures, and the new, 'contemporary' art forms and terms (such as 'art project' or 'video art') were welcomed. Alisa Loshkina (2019: 338) claims that 'contemporaneity', from a perspective of 'Western' optics, meant being in alignment with a very definite set of cliches and a certain canon of the art history.

Drawing on the situation in the former Soviet Union, Octavian Esanu (2012) describes the political, institutional and artistic differences between the 'progressive' Soros Centre for Contemporary Art and the 'outdated' local Union of Artists. While the Union of Artists subjected its members to censorship and control during Soviet times and included a demand for formal education, it was a 'state-supported mass organisation based on a collective decision-making mechanism (even if it was a formal one)'. Instead, the Centre for Contemporary Arts created different conditions for cultural production. Namely, a 'private office-based model in which artists do not have the formal right to influence the decisions of the managers', and a 'contemporary art model that allows and even encourages artists to "do whatever," but that provides only "outward preconditions," and only to a select few in accordance with capitalist criteria of success' (Esanu 2012: 14).

'Doing whatever' is quite important here. Natalie Heinich (2006) defines contemporary art as transgressing the boundaries, ideological and other (such as the boundaries between art and non-art). She describes the 'permissive paradox' of contemporary art institutions: they permit, encourage and pre-accept transgression, even when created in opposition to their power. The Centre for Contemporary Art (and similar non-profit institutions that appeared later) promoted various forms of socially engaged art and (being opposed to censorship), pre-accepted transgression, sometimes including

transgression of normativity. Art scholar Alisa Lozhkina (2019: 299) claims that transgression is the key term for understanding the Ukrainian contemporary art of the 1990s: the first generation of 'contemporary artists' in Ukraine was interested in exploring and breaking social taboos. One example is a 1997 photo series *Donbas-shokolad (*[Ukr.] *Donbas-chocolate)* by Arsen Savadov (for the images of the phoject see Savadov 1997). In this project, Savadov photographed miners in a Donbas mine. Covered in black dust, some were photographed nude, while some were dressed in white ballet tutu skirts. I read Savadov's *Donbas-chocolate* as an ironic stance of employing homoeroticism as provocation, rather than an attempt to actually explore nonnormativity. In this and other Savadov's projects, nudity and male cross-dressing were a way to shock the audience. The title of the project also presumes an ironic postmodernist stance in which many readings are possible, but none is definite. *Shokolad* in Russian and Ukrainian can be a metaphor of 'good living' (*vse v shokolade* in Russian is a slang way of saying 'everything is great'). However, it is also a prison derogatory slang term referring to male homosexuality (*shokoladnitsa* is a derogatory term for a male homosexual); as well as to a person of colour (Elistratov 2000: 559). While claiming that his aim was just 'to combine two things that represented the Soviet system – miners and ballet' (cited in 'Novaia Mifologiia Arsena Savadova' 2016), Savadov also constructed the composition of the images in such a way that made them clearly homoerotic - that, in turn, made them more provocative and discussed both in Ukraine and abroad. *Donbas-chocolate*, therefore, points at male homosexuality - yet does this in a 'coded' and limited way, drawing parallels between cross-dressing, homosexuality and prison subcultures and exploiting homophobic and racist connotations. Like other Savadov's projects, such as a fashion photoshoot at the cemetery or group photos of corpses that were positioned in such a way as to imitate living people, *Donbas-chocolate*, indeed, became a contemporary art project

widely known and discussed abroad due to its provocative character (see Lozhkina 2019).

Such pre-acceptance of transgression in contemporary art aligned with the liberal logic of using culture as a resource for fostering Ukraine's transition to 'tolerance' and 'pluralism' as 'European values'. Yet, while transgression was often used by the artists as a shocking device rather than a means of opening a discussion on sexual/gender nonnormativity, it is through art institutions that more possibilities for artistic sexual and gender dissent arose. Zhivka Valiavicharska (2011: 497) examines the double-bind of empowering and regulation, emancipation and normalizing within the South-Eastern European context:

> As they forge new selves and bring into being new cultural ties and collective subjectivities, these projects [NGO's and EU cultural policy projects in the region - O.D.] are inevitably enmeshed in local emancipatory movements, in progressive politics, and in micro-struggles for justice and equality. They participate deeply in the hopes for a future where boundaries of ethnic communities, of states, and of spaces currently defined by radical nationalist, heteronormative, and patriarchal exclusions can be crossed without fear. While enabling local progressive politics, however, international civil society institutions also determine the limits of available critical discourses, forms of protest, and possible forms of struggle; they also sanction certain experiences of injustice and discrimination as intelligible and legitimate, thus conditioning the field of political visibility according to their own logic and their own terms. They both open and limit the domains of political activism — a bind that inevitably haunts critical cultural practices and progressive politics. In such conditions, what possibilities do

politically active communities have for articulating — and owning — their own politics [...]?

With this question in mind, in this chapter and those that follow I will examine the works of Anatoliy Belov – an artist who can be considered exemplary of the 'new generation' that was influenced by the Orange Revolution. Belov's artistic practices, spanning from the beginning of 2000s to the present, represent not just his own artistic development, but also difficult orientations, belongings and dissent with regard to sexual and gender regimes. In the previous chapter, we have seen how Koptev's Orchid appeared as a phenomenon that did not fit nicely into the newly arising institutions - be it 'fashion' or 'contemporary art'. The work of Anatoliy Belov is different in this regard: throughout the next three chapters, his 'falling in' and 'falling out' of the contemporary art institutions will be explored.

While it is difficult to separate Belov's artworks into definite categories, his artistic works and practices intertwine thematically with Koptev's work. Namely, Belov's works present social and sexual heterogeneity by turning to the theme of marginality; they also raise the issue of sexual shame and immorality, and explore and imagine nonnormative desire by placing it outside modernity. However, Belov's works are different from Koptev's in many ways. I argue that his artistic practices follow several modes of sexual and gender dissent:

1. Exploration of and imagining private homosexual/nonnormative desire.

2. Publicly (dis)claiming sexual dissent as a marginal position.

3. Turning to civic dissent and public protest against state homophobia and neotraditionalist turn.

4. Subverting or transcending heteronormativity through turning to the 'queerness'.

I will address Belov's projects as an example of the shift to sexual dissent as civic dissent against heteronormativity, sexual policing and conservative hatred that took place in the 2000s. Belov's *We Are Not Marginals!* project, explored further in this chapter, can be said to be Belov's attempt to map 'marginal' subjectivities – forms of subjectivities that function aside from/outside of the 'we' constructed by the dominant state narratives of nationhood and citizenship. Belov's later works are a direct critique of the structures and discourses that create these narratives. They take a form of dissident critique and agitation, a direct appeal to the audience with their slogans and a call to action. Throughout his career and within different genres (from drawing to music) Belov also creates various settings for nonnormative identifications and ways of being.

2. The 'new generation' and institutionalised art in 2000s Ukraine

2.1. Satyricon

Anatoliy Belov (born in Kyiv in 1977) studied book design at the 'KPI' National Polytechnical University of Ukraine and received education as a graphic artist. As mentioned before, Ukrainian art educational institutions at the time did not provide information on contemporary art and culture; therefore, self-education became an important part of Belov's life. Some of the main influences for him in those years were mythology and cinephilia. Both of these driving forces accompany his artistic experiments throughout his career.

Belov's diploma project at the university was an illustration of Latin fiction work *Satyricon* by Petronius. Helen Morales (2008: 45) states that throughout history *Satyricon* has been viewed as a 'gay classic': a literary 'sexual carnival' that 'queers the (largely) hetero, (often) chaste universe of the more 'romantic' Greek novels' and 'stages a plurality of pleasures (and

more often pains)'. For cinephile Belov the point of departure was cinematic rather than textual: influenced by Federico Fellini's *Satyricon*, he decided to make his own version of *Satyricon* after watching the film.

Made in 1969, Fellini's adaptation of *Satyricon* was a response to Catholic moralism in its exploration of the plurality of pleasures and desires. Fellini strove to create an atmosphere of a dream world, 'to eliminate the borderline between dream and imagination: to invent everything and then to objectify the fantasy' (Fellini 1988: 173). Belov's project goes even further in constructing the dream world of *Satyricon*. Belov's works depict humans, animals, sea creatures and plants intertwining within surreal composition celebrating heterogeneity: one of the images features the sexual act between a naked female-presenting figure and an octopus; another one depicts a sexual act between what I read as two men (Appendix A, Figures 7-8).

Belov's work on *Satyricon* allowed him to turn to homoerotic imagery within the 'safer' framework of 'coded desires'. Using Roman civilisation and mythology, and Fellini's film as points of reference, Belov celebrated sexuality, transposing it outside modernity into a 'queer time and place', the ancient mythological world. Yet, as we will see later, Belov's position and his art is very different from the use (or exploitation) of homoeroticism as provocation in Savadov's depiction of miners in *Donbas-chocolate*.

Merging reality and phantasy would become one of the distinguishing characteristics of Belov's art, as he continued to draw homoerotic graphic works. Faced with questions about his work during the early stages of his career, Belov gave several reasons. First, he framed his artworks depicting young nude male bodies as part of the classical art tradition. He also talked about drawing as a way of documenting the characters of other men in the XXI century (Art in UA 2016). Finally, Belov framed his works as analysis and self-analysis - studying himself and his sexual identity ('asking intimate questions') (ART in UA 2006).

After talking about his works as (self)-exploration and sublimation, Belov proceeded to comment that he later 'became braver' in displaying his affection and 'doing things he once was afraid to talk about or do':

> И я хочу сказать, что я стал смелее в своей работе. Да, смелее. Смелее в том, чтобы сказать: «Я тебя люблю...» или «Ты мне нравишься...». У меня появилась смелость делать вещи, о которых не решался говорить. Не говоря о том, чтобы делать. Это уже не плохо.
>
> [Russ.] And I want to say that I became braver in my work. Yes, braver. Braver in being able to say: 'I love you...' or 'I like you...'. I acquired the courage to do the things about which I did not dare to talk. Much less do. Now, this is not bad (ART in UA 2006).

Within the context of the interview the statement of 'becoming braver' can be read as 'decoding' the 'coded' nonnormative desire and challenging the public discourse of the 'love that does not dare to speak its name'.

In a much later interview Belov was clearer about the connection between the artistic freedom that he felt after creating *Satyricon* and accepting his sexuality. In his words, it was the first time he gave himself 'the right to make a mistake' – the right to make an improper drawing, but also to accept himself and follow his desires (Bitiutskiĭ 2017). The artistic freedom that Belov acquires is also influenced by the political and social changes that took place after his graduation in 2004.

2.2. Contemporary art scene after 2004

The 2000s represent a unique turning point in the history of contemporary art and Ukrainian society. While Ukraine's Europeanisation

process was often declarative, the Orange Revolution that took place in Ukraine in 2004 resulted in further political changes. The Independence Square – Maidan – where the main events of the Orange Revolution took place in Kyiv, became a space for spontaneous peaceful peoples' self-organisation, political and cultural dissent, and the anticipation of social and political changes. As a result of the re-shuffling of political elites and mass protests, Viktor Yushchenko became President in 2005, supporting EU integration.

The spontaneous, carnival character of the Orange revolution is highlighted by Lozhkina and Solov'ev (2010). They claim that the general atmosphere of social optimism and heightened political activism of the time stimulated the appearance of the new generation of artists:

> 'Майданная' поэтика стихийной коллективной самоорганизации, очевидно, повлияла на то, что именно в середине нулевых в отечественное искусство приходит пафос группового действия. Художники начинают объединяться, писать коллективные манифесты, провозглашать утопические декларации, в общем, всячески наследовать расхожие общественные паттерны тех лет.
>
> [Russ.] 'Maidan' poetics of spontaneous collective self-assembly, clearly, was the factor for the pathos of collective action entering Ukrainian art exactly in the mid-2000s. Artists start to unite, write collective manifestos, proclaim utopian declarations, – essentially, they follow in many ways the common societal patterns of those years.

During the Orange Revolution, a project of artists and activists appeared that took the name Revoliutsiimyi Eksperymental'nyi Prostir ([Ukr.]

Revolutionary Experimental Space), known also as R.E.P. Belov met Zhanna Kadyrova and Nikita Kadan, with whom he would later form the R.E.P. group, at an arts festival in 2003, and joined the collective at the time of its formation.

The R.E.P. members belonged to the generation that grew up after the fall of the Soviet Union and became those 'new names' in the contemporary art scene. They claim that the events of the Orange revolution became an experience that formed them - 'they realised that the decisions of individuals have an influence on political reality' (R.E.P. group 2015: 6). R.E.P. was one of the first art groups that put social engagement as their primary goal and became involved in creating 'group practices of artistic activism in the public space' (R.E.P. group 2015: 52).

2004 was also a time of a certain solidification in the development of institutionalised contemporary art as a social formation. At this time, the Centre for Contemporary Art in Kyiv started experiencing a lack of funding due to Soros foundation re-allocating resources and 'phasing out' at the end of the 1990s. In the 2000s (and especially since 2004) the further rise of nonprofit institutional forms of cultural sponsorship took place in Ukraine, such as 'Eidos' international fund (founded by a collector and gallerist Liudmyla Bereznyts'ka) and PinchukArtCentre. The latter, a private contemporary art centre, was founded in Kyiv by steel billionaire Viktor Pinchuk in 2006, simultaneously with Viktor Pinchuk Fund (representing the merging of the economy of art and economy of finance capital). Viktor Pinchuk promoted European integration (Matuszak 2012: 30), and PinchukArtCentre followed the politics of its owner in the realm of contemporary art.

'Contemporary art' as a phenomenon also started to be incorporated into nation state-building processes. A Ukrainian pavilion was opened at the Venice Biennale of contemporary art in 2001. The Modern Art Research Institute was established as part of the National Academy of Sciences in

2002. Mystets'kyi Arsenal ([Ukr.] 'Art Arsenal') national contemporary art gallery and museum complex was opened in Kyiv in 2005. The vector of official politics changed towards participating in the globalised contemporary art scene. For instance, the mission of Art Arsenal states that its aim is 'to contribute to modernisation of Ukrainian society and Ukraine's integration into the global context based on the axiological potential of culture' (Mystets'kyĭ Arsenal [n.d.]).

Despite these developments, the mid-2000s was still a time when Ukrainian art galleries were not interested in young artists, supporting a limited number of artists mostly from the 'older' generation (such as Savadov). Available resources for the development of young artists were scarce and competitive. State educational institutions were still 'based on the worldview and administrative foundations of the USSR times, teaching something that could be called creative crafts, rather than art' (Ostrovs'ka-Liuta 2011: 26). There was a lack of education in contemporary art or curatorship, institutional or financial support from foundations, galleries or the state, as well as lack of publications and research on contemporary art. Combined with a lack of international representation, this gave rise to self-educational initiatives and self-organised grassroots artistic initiatives in the 2000s, and R.E.P., indeed, became one of them.

The R.E.P. group became a learning experience and a space of collaboration for Belov. Yet his personal art differed very much from that of R.E.P. in aims, style and themes. While becoming 'braver' in his work exploring nonnormativity, in 2005 Belov left the R.E.P. group. Leaving the group was a big step for Belov: R.E.P. had received the long-term institutional support of the Centre for Contemporary Art, and since then had become one of the most internationally known Ukrainian art and curating groups, representing the 'new' generation of young Ukrainian artists within Ukraine and abroad. Therefore, leaving R.E.P. at the time of its development meant self-

marginalisation: being alone and leaving a possible path of institutional support, public recognition and artistic fame.

In the next section, I will consider the idea of marginality in Belov's works: marginality as a result of the geopolitical specificity of Ukraine and Ukrainian art; marginality of certain artistic practices and statements within the 'contemporary art' scene; and marginality of (artistic) sexual dissent.

3. 'We Are Not Marginals!': identification from the margins

After leaving R.E.P., Belov tried exhibiting his art in galleries. However, his experience with galleries proved disappointing. At this time when contemporary art institutions promoted new approaches (conceptualisation and theorisation) and art forms (performances, installations or video art), Belov's graphic works perhaps were seen as not fitting in into the ideas of what 'contemporary art' should be (leading Belov to even create an art project in 2007 by the name '(Ne)potrbine mystetstvo' – [Ukr](Un)Needed Art). Searching for the alternative modes of art production that would make possible his visibility as an independent young artist not involved in a collective, Belov decided to use the street as a display space. A turn to street art was a continuation of the public art strategy practised by the R.E.P. group at the time of their formation, as well as mapping his own place within the tradition of the 'Western' street art. But Belov was also inspired by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Harring, and other (queer) artists who worked with street art (Belov 2009a).

My ne marginaly! ([Ukr.] *We Are Not Marginals!*, 2007) is the title of the project that Belov considers to be one of his first works as an independent artist. The project presented a series of graphic works on big sheets of paper (up to 5 meters long) glued to the walls of the buildings or the fences on Kyiv streets. These posters depicted individuals or groups: the images varied from the 'truthful' detailed portraits of famous film directors or musicians to the

portraits of strangers, with the words 'we are not marginals!' written alongside. The 'we' that Belov constructs in this work and his other works has multiple faces. I read it as an attempt to address the marginalisation of a Ukrainian artist within the international contemporary art scene, to map oneself and one's art in space and time, as well as to open a discussion about social marginalisation. By turning to marginality, the project also raises themes of belonging and not belonging – to modernity, normative regimes, class, gender, etc. I read the *We Are not Marginals!* project as not unified, but rather discrete, working with several themes simultaneously and with a notion of 'marginality' in different contexts and ways.

The images of *We Are Not Marginals!* can be divided into two categories: individual and collective portraits. Part of the project is individual portraits of famous performers, writers and directors, such as John Updike, Klaus Nomi, Vincent Gallo, Jim Jarmusch, Martin Scorsese and David Lynch (Appendix A, Figure 9). In one of the interviews, Belov describes the 'characters' of his works and the reasons for their inclusion:

> Я подбадривал себя, думая о том, что мои любимые режиссеры, вроде Джармуша, тоже когда-то были маргиналами, но смогли доказать, что не являются пустым местом.
>
> [Russ.] 'I cheered myself up, thinking to myself that my favourite directors, such as Jarmusch, also have been marginals at some point, but were able to prove that they were not waste of space' (Ul'ianov 2009a: 63).

Turning to the film directors is again the manifestation of Belov's cinephilia – it signals belonging as affect, as longing for imaginary spaces and times created by cinema. It is also a geopolitical belonging – longing to be

accepted and recognized within the international artistic community of '(successful) creative marginals'. In order to prove that he was not a 'waste of space' as an artist, Belov allied himself with the imaginary community of his favourite (Western) artistic figures that he saw as inspiring role models, symbolically pasting them onto the 'marginal' reality of Kyiv streets. All male, these figures are characterised by their 'non-mainstream' attitude to art and – in the case of Klaus Nomi – gender and sexual non-conformity.

Belov's 'creative marginals' engage in a dialogue with an invisible community of by-passers. But the dialogue depends on whether the untitled portraits are recognized or not – in this regard, the project is about defining one's art against mass culture. For Belov, the primary audience is the cultivated and educated community of *svoi* who would share cinephilic or art-philic pleasures of recognizing the depicted characters.[19] It is thus significant

[19] See Belov's comment: 'Також з'явилося питання кому адресовані ці меседжи. Аудиторія, завдячуючи вулиці розширилася, але мої малюнки не для всіх,вони адресовані до людей що можуть мислити, тож я роблю розсилку через групу Р.Е.П., що я зробив такі дії, і всі зацікавлені люди зможуть дізнатися, піти-подивитися. Ну і звичайно, я викладую інформацію в свому ЖЖ, який читають хороші, розумні люди,різних інтелектуальних професій. Я вважаю,що мої роботи перш за все адресовані до них, але я не недооцінюю сприйняття роботи 'простих' людей, навпаки їх погляд може бути щирішим і гострішим'

[Ukr.] 'The audience became broader thanks to the streets, but my drawings are not for everyone, they are aimed at people who can think, so I am sharing via the R.E.P. group mailing list that I made such actions, and everyone interested can find out, go and look. And of course, I share information in my LiveJournal, which is read by good, intelligent people of different intellectual professions. I think that my works are first and foremost addressed to them, but I also don't underestimate the perception of works by the 'ordinary' people, on the contrary, their perception can be more sincere and acute' (Belov 2009b).

that Belov chose the Podil district in Kyiv as the 'gallery' for his project, as Podil at the time was the cultural centre of Kyiv and a 'space of belonging' for Belov. For example, the Centre for Contemporary Art, where the R.E.P. residency took place during and after the Orange Revolution, was situated there. As a space of belonging for Belov, it was a territory he considered important to mark and reclaim as an independent artist.

In addition to the 'creative marginals' who are portrayed individually, Belov's project also includes images of groups of strangers, and in these works, 'marginality' takes on another meaning. These works do not require specific knowledge to recognize the subjects. In the 2009 interview Belov stated that he had decided to settle *strannykh personazhei* ([Russ.] 'strange/odd characters') on Kyiv streets who would chant 'We are not marginals!': 'Это были какие-то старые гомосексуалисты, люди с длинными носами и, в частности, те самые реализовавшиеся маргиналы как Клаус Номи или, опять же, Джармуш'. ([Russ.] They were some old homosexualists [homosexual men – O.D.], and people with long noses, and, in particular, those accomplished marginals like Klaus Nomi or, again, Jarmusch') (Ul'ianov 2009a: 63).

We Are Not Marginals! presents various groups of people, each united presumably by their relation to marginality. Most of these groups are depicted with the words 'We are not marginals' above or below them. It is often difficult to tell exactly who these people are. For instance, the project includes Belov's direct satire of politicians and bureaucrats: as they vote and chant 'We are not marginals!', their noses grow long (Appendix A, Figure 10). In informal communication, Belov explained that it was a reference to the tale about the lying Pinocchio. But without the author's explanation, the characters are more enigmatic to the passerby audience: they are indeed just people with long

noses that can spark various interpretations (perhaps including anti-semitic).

Other groups depicted are structured by a specific type of (not) belonging to a certain class, age, gender or sexuality. For instance, one artwork presents a group of what I read as older people of different genders gathered around the dining table (Appendix A, Figure 11). There are smartly dressed: masculine people wear glasses and have beards, one feminine character on the background looks very old as if it was an Egyptian mummy. They drink tea out of a samovar and appear to have a pleasant conversation laughing to each other. 'Ми не маргінали' is written above them in a 'speech bubble' in a decorative font.

I read this image as portraying the 'Soviet intelligentsia' and portraying it as marginal in the sense of petrified, being stuck on the margin of times – between the Soviet epoch and contemporary modern Ukraine. On the one hand, Belov's image mocks the old intelligentsia, portrays it as almost relics (mummies).[20] On the other hand, negating the marginality of these people can mean establishing a connection with them through a sense of belonging: after all, both the generation of the Soviet intelligentsia and Belov himself valued 'marginal' art and literature (see Yurchak 2014 on Soviet intelligentsia). The people in the image are gathered together and visually recreate a sense of community. This may invoke a memory of Soviet dissidents and a feeling of belonging as longing for the non-individualised past. But this longing is already marked as nostalgic: the image is a 'fossil' of the past, and 'we are not marginals' statement invokes the present reality where older people are marginalised and have lost economic and social security.

Another image depicts the shoulder-length portraits of four feminine persons whom I read as women (Appendix A, Figure 12). They are depicted as

[20] See Kotchetkova 2004 on the concept of the Soviet intelligentsia and the shifts happening to intelligentsia as a collective identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

suffering or sad; some of them have visible bruises under her eyes; they have no makeup or jewellery, which perhaps hints at their poverty. These are the 'beaten up women' that Belov decided to portray within his project. The image's focus is on women's faces (perhaps to elicit an emotional response in its audience), and the style of their depiction differs greatly from the image of the 'Soviet intelligentsia'.

The women are portrayed not as a group, but as individuals; they seem to not interact with each other at all. Interestingly, there is also no sign 'we are not marginals' in this artwork. I believe the absence of the statement 'we are not marginals' can be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, women in this image literally do not have a voice. Yet, perhaps making their vulnerability visible speaks for itself. It is as if the affective power provoked by the depiction of the vulnerability of (marginalised) women makes impossible the author's distanced position or claiming non-marginality on behalf of these subjects. It is also perhaps the silent recognition of the non-marginal, widespread character of violence against women and the silencing of the poverty and marginalised status of women in post-Soviet Ukraine.

Finally, the longest poster (Appendix A, Figure 13) is the one with ten gender and sexually non-conforming subjects depicted. Similar to other 'groups of marginals', these portraits were not based on Belov's acquaintances. The project was created before Belov's coming out and at the time, as he claims, he was not a part of 'LGBT community' and was not aware of such. Instead of life drawing, Belov would create imaginary 'composite characters', borrowing the poses for the portraits from fashion magazines, and making the faces look older, or finding expressive faces. The portraits of the characters in a group are quite detailed: some have multiple piercings, others wear jewellery and (perhaps) wigs, makeup; others wear fur coats over their naked bodies. Their body shapes differ, and their facial expressions vary from serious to laughing. One of the characters kisses another one on the

cheek. Many of them challenge the spectator with a direct gaze, while some look away at something beyond the frame. The facial expressions of the characters and the nuanced portraits are aimed at capturing attention. The big sign 'Ми не маргінали' is depicted as if it is a long banner held by the characters.

The characters in the artwork whom Belov calls 'old homosexualists' indeed look nonnormative: their transgressive looks, defiant posing and excessive visual performance are what renders them 'queer'. While the characters are dispersed, they are also closely grouped together in one line: it is yet another community to which the audience claim or disclaim belonging. While the characters are white, their appearance is distanced from heteronormativity and respectability of working-class, intelligentsia or middle class: these are the 'strange', the outsiders, gender and sexual outlaws.

I believe that this image presents an interesting take on sexual/gender dissent as marginality. Belov renders sexuality visible through the surface of the characters' bodies: either their gender or being on the margins of class. Yet, temporality and age also play a big part in representation: the defying portraits of the mature nonnormative characters appear to state not only 'we are here, and we are not marginals', but also 'we have been here for a long time'. The impressive size of the work emphasizes its statement – the nonnormative bodies literally occupy a lot of social space.

The characters' appearance (their self-aestheticisation) is what constitutes the characters' and distinguishes them from, for instance, old people on the image of Soviet intelligentsia (who could also be 'queer' yet are 'invisible' as such). This raises the questions of class and the possibilities of visibility: what is considered, accepted or possible as normative or nonnormative appearance is different for different social classes – as Orchid shows, discussed in the previous chapters, demonstrated.

It also raises the question of vulnerability. Belov's aim was to show the

marginality of old sexually/gender non-conforming people as a marginal group within the marginal group. In this regard, the characters depicted in the artwork are vulnerable. Yet here they are given a 'voice' and opportunity to defy their marginality. While this is certainly an important aim, the character with the young, toned body and an old face, who seems to transcend age boundaries in general, reminds of the constructed and imaginary character of this community. This community, created by Belov, is perhaps exclusive,[21] but also points at exclusions: its portrayal in public space is a challenge to the normative system because it raises the theme of homo/transphobia and social ostracism.

Belov turns to visual representation and emotions as strategies of pointing to the issues of sexuality, gender, class and age that lack representation and recognition. He points to the social vulnerability of certain groups, which recalls Judith Butler's (2004: 18) statement that

> [...] we are constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies; we are constituted as fields of desire and physical vulnerability, at once publicly assertive and vulnerable.

Overall, Belov's project can be described as hybrid and orchestrated. It can be seen as Belov's attempt to map his own perceived marginality *through* other groups: marginal as 'outdated', marginal as non-mainstream, marginal as vulnerable, marginal as 'abnormal', marginal as sexually/gender non-conforming. Yet the collective portraits of the *We Are Not Marginals!* project also engage with the idea of Ukrainian society as heterogeneous and comprised of various intersecting marginalised groups. Before street protests

[21] Belov's original reference to the characters as 'old homosexual men' supports this perception.

in support of nonnormative people become widespread in Kyiv, Belov 'gives voice' to groups that lack representation in public discourse. He does this by portraying and imagining the groups that are socially vulnerable, presenting them as vulnerable yet often resilient and politically assertive ('We are not marginals!'). People who are sexually/gender non-conforming are portrayed as one of such groups, claiming recognition, – the right to exist and not to be marginalised and pushed onto the periphery of public discourses.

Chapter II: Conclusion

This chapter has laid the foundation for the exploration of the shift in artistic dissent and nonnormative formations that takes place in the 2000s and will be analysed in detail in the next chapters. The chapter turned to a deeper examination of the phenomenon of 'contemporary art' formation in Ukraine. It has shown the transformation of the cultural sphere and the emergence of contemporary art institutions and practices as a new way of cultural production that was supposed to 'modernise' Ukrainian art. I argue that, taking their roots in 'democratisation-by-design' politics of 'Western' liberal actors and networks, the contemporary art institutions framed their acceptance of transgression and nonnormativity as part of liberal 'European values'. At the same time, they transformed the field of art into a competitive space that left young artists in a precarious and marginalised position.

Influenced by both the activism of the Orange Revolution and the feeling of one's own marginality within institutionalised contemporary art and society in general, Anatoliy Belov's work presents a reflection on these changes. Belov's works in public space represent to me an important shift that happens both in his work and in Ukrainian contemporary art in the 2000s. I consider the 'making' and 'unmaking' of a 'sexual marginal' to be a shift from a sole politics of disidentification (that can be observed in Koptev's Orchid or

perhaps in Savadov's *Donbas-chocolate*) to a politics of sexual dissidence. The claim of 'marginal' being 'not marginal' signals the value of thinking from the margins: as theorised by bell hooks (1990: 151): 'margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance'. *We Are Not Marginals!,* through a depiction of 'sexual marginals' holding a poster, articulated an idea of sexual/gender dissent *as* civic dissent. With this project, Belov shifts from using 'coded messages' (such as turning to the mythological past in *Satyricon*) to the more open dissent: portraying more contemporary (albeit often imaginary) characters are 'aside from the norms' in the current order, and resisting these norms in public space. In this regard, Belov's project can be viewed as making sexually/gender dissenting subjects politically visible, but also imagining such dissent within a broader intersectional dissent of various 'marginals'.

Belov's politics of sexual dissent imagines and visualises nonnormative social formations. Nancy Fraser (1990: 67) states that in stratified societies unequally empowered social groups develop counter-publics - 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs'. Following Muñoz (1999: 196), 'oppositional counter-publics are enabled by visions, "worldviews", that reshape as they deconstruct reality'. Belov's art became a modality of counter-publicity itself: it was an act of nonnormative worldmaking and establishing a discourse, different from that of the 'public' one. The project presents the intersection of different temporalities. These temporalities sometimes coexist within one image (like the old faces and young bodies of the nonnormative characters), but also within the project as a commentary on 'Western', 'Soviet' and 'post-Soviet' processes of marginalisation taking place simultaneously in Ukraine.

It is important to note that Belov's 'sexual/gender marginals' are not

‘decent’ gay men or lesbian women, but rather characters who deviate from normative ideals of respectability, morality and decency. This aligns with his work against sexual and social shame, opposing the discourses of morality. Such work, as well as the development of intersectional dissent and other forms of activism, will be analysed more closely in the next chapters.

CHAPTER III. SEXUAL DISSENT AS CIVIC DISSENT IN THE 2000S: 'HOMOPHOBIA TODAY – GENOCIDE TOMORROW!'

1. Emergence of the politics of the 'protection of public morals'

Belov's *We Are Not Marginals!* opened up questions of (not) belonging, (imaginary) communities and identifications with the marginal. Yet it is important to map further the social context in which his works developed and appeared. In this section, I will consider Belov's works within the official narratives of 'morality' and 'traditional values', as well as the violence against nonnormative people that rose in Ukraine in the 2000s. I will also examine Belov's artistic dissent within and in relation to the wider anti-conservative coalitions that were forming in the 2000s. The chapter will progress from the analysis of the legislative 'protection of public morals' politics and of the 'anti-gender' formations of the 2000s, to tracing the development of different strands of collective sexual and gender dissent. In the last subsection I will address how Belov's works function within this social and political context.

At the end of the 1990s, EU regulations started to frame gender and (homo)sexuality in terms of rights and protections; the same shift took place in the UN regulations. The Consolidated 2009 version of the Treaty on European Union defined common 'European values':

> The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail ('Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union. Title I. Common Providion - Article 2' 2012).

The idea of 'European values' has been solidifying over the 2000s, gained political weight in conditioning the states within the process of the EU accession. The developing LGBT, women's and some human rights organisations in Ukraine used this process as a leverage and claimed anti-discrimination principles were necessary for Ukraine's EU integration.

At the same time, neo-traditionalist politics and discourses were developing in Europe, and Eastern Europe in particular. Most notably, in neighbouring Russia in the 2000s a conservative turn took place, and 'diverse actors now coalesced around two interlinked storylines: first, that the undermining of "traditional values" constituted a threat to security and national sovereignty, and second, that Russia's children needed protection from imported harmful ideas of gender and sexuality' (Edenborg 2021: 3). Riabov and Riabova (2008) note that in the 2000s a new Russian national identity was created in official discourses through direct appeal to gender and sexual regimes. The 'remasculinisation of the collective identity' took place, and it was made possible by creating a myth of the Russian warrior protecting his country (epitomized in Vladimir Putin's instrumental deployment of hypermasculinity, see Wood 2016), but also by 'feminizing' the Others – the 'corrupt West' or Ukraine (Riabov and Riabova 2008; see also Riabova and Riabov 2013). In Poland, the conservative nationalist turn was intertwined with the Poland's accession to the EU, but was also framed in mainstream discourses through narratives of 'European perversion versus Polish healthy traditionalism' (Graff 2010: 585). As will be discussed further, similar processes took place in Ukraine.

In the 2000s, the struggle between two local political powers (Viktor Yanukovych's Party of Regions, and Viktor Yushchenko and his Our Ukraine party) began in Ukraine. The struggle was constructed as an identitarian conflict that formed specific national identity. In this conflict, Yushchenko

relied on both pro-European and (ethno)nationalist positions to secure his power. After Yushchenko came to power, he got actively involved in the process of nation-building by working with language and memory politics. For example, measures on the promotion of Ukrainian language were undertaken, the Institute of National Memory was founded, and the struggle towards international recognition of Great Famine (Holodomor) in Ukraine as genocide carried out by the Soviet officials was begun (see Gallina 2011; Koposov 2018).

The active development of nationalism as a 'politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 18) meant the further construction of Ukrainianness and citizenship that excluded certain social categories and groups. A neotraditionalist discourse of the return to the 'traditional Ukrainian family values' and 'natural' gender roles became predominant in Ukraine at the time (Martsenyuk 2012; IArmanova 2012). Olena Strel'nyk (2014: 99) claims that neotraditionalist rhetorics became a consolidating element of the state, religious and demographic discourses on family in Ukraine.

The 2000s also saw the rise of formations that generated discourses about the need to protect 'traditional values' (that included 'family values') and explicitly opposed framing gender and sexuality in terms of rights and protections. Legislative initiatives around the 'protection of public morals' provide a useful case study here.

The first legislative acts mentioning 'public morals' started to appear in Ukraine in 1999. Measures on 'the protection of morals' included the creation of the Vseukraïns'ka koordynatsiina rada z pytan' rozvytku dukhovnosti, zakhystu morali ta formuvannia zdorovoho sposobu zhyttia hromadian ([Ukr.] 'All-Ukrainian Coordination Council on issues relating to the development of spirituality, protection of morals and formation of healthy lifestyle of citizens'). Among other issues, this Council was to work on

> [...] забезпечення духовно-морального розвитку населення, виховання патріотизму, високої політичної культури та трудової моралі, використання енергії та зусиль громадян у суспільно корисних справах.
>
> [Ukr.][...] ensuring spiritual and moral development of the population, education of patriotism, high political culture and worker morale, the use of energy and efforts of citizens for activities useful to the public ('Ukaz Prezydenta Ukraïny "Pro Zakhody Shchodo Rozvytku Dukhovnosti, Zakhystu Morali Ta Formuvannia Zdorovoho Sposobu Zhyttia Hromadian"' 1999).

The early stages of new legislation on the 'protection of public morals' featured a mixed set of ideas. 'Morals' could mean 'workers' morale', while 'spiritual development' was viewed as separate from religion. Among the measures proposed were: promoting sport and military service; creating a program of patriotic education in schools; increasing the level of control and accountability for compliance with the laws of Ukraine on film, video production and print media distribution – in order to prevent 'the propaganda of cruelty, despiritualisation, violence and debauchery'; fighting youth unemployment; promoting 'family values that are inherent to Ukrainian nation'; creating rehabilitation shelters for women and girls who suffered from domestic violence; ensuring that educational institutions are in compliance with Ukrainian legislation on prohibition of interference by political parties, religious and others organisations; and others (Pustovoïtenko 1999). The heads of women's organisations and networks were to be among the members of the Council.

The Coordination Council did not come into existence, and with time some measures and ideas on 'morals protection' prevailed over others. A law

entitled ‘Pro zakhyst suspil’noï morali’ ([Ukr.] ‘On Protection of Public Morals’) was adopted in 2003. In this law ‘public morals’ was for the first time defined in Ukrainian legislation:

> Суспільна мораль - система етичних норм, правил поведінки, що склалися у суспільстві на основі традиційних духовних і культурних цінностей, уявлень про добро, честь, гідність, громадський обов'язок, совість, справедливість.

> [Ukr.] Public morals are a system of ethical rules, rules of conduct that have developed in society on the basis of traditional spiritual and cultural values, perceptions of goodness, honour, dignity, public duty, conscience, justice.

Ignoring rehabilitation shelters or the separation of religion and schools, suggested earlier, the law instead focused on the protection of the public from ‘harmful’ information. The *Natsional’na Komisiia z pytan’ suspi’noï morali* ([Ukr.] The National Committee for the Protection of Public Morals) was established in 2004. This Committee became more active in 2007. It was envisioned as an expert body evaluating films, audio, video works, television and radio programs that could ‘harm public morals’ (‘Postanova Vid 17 Lystopada 2004 r. N 1550 Pro Natsional’nu Ekspertny Komisiiu Ukraïny z Pitan’ Zakhystu Suspi’noï Morali’ 2004). Its activities included checking literary and artworks, as well as the legislative initiatives towards blocking websites that ‘cause harm to public morals’ (Semereï 2014);[22] some activities

[22] See also http://amoral.com.ua/ (accessed 16 January 2021). The National Expert Commission of Ukraine on the Protection of Public Morality was closed down on March 5, 2015.

involved political censorship (Ul'ianov 2009b).

'Morals' were viewed as inseparable from sex and sexuality, as the Committee's activity was aimed at regulating the manufacturing and dissemination of pornographic and erotic materials. Interestingly enough, within the framework of the law, 'public morals' had to be protected not just from pornographic works, but also from works related to different kinds of 'propaganda': propaganda of violence and cruelty; propaganda of war, national and religious hostility; propaganda of fascism and neofascism; works that humiliate or insult a nation or individual on national grounds; propaganda of disrespect for national or religious sacred objects; propaganda of humiliation on the basis of disability, mental disability or elderly age; propaganda of ignorance and of disrespect for parents; propaganda of drug addiction, substance abuse, alcoholism, smoking and 'other bad habits' ('Zakon Ukraïny "Pro Zakhyst Suspil'noï Morali"' 2003). Such a mixture of perceived threats to the nation points to the patriarchal and normative underpinning of 'public morals' legislation: Christian values were implicit in the openly paternalistic nationalist vision of 'good governance'. Maria Mayerchyk (Maierchyk 2009: 8) further notes that the rhetorics of the Committee essentialised and biologised nation while repeating nationalist logics of resistance to change (specifically in gender and sexuality) and understanding global processes as a threat to the ethnic 'self'.

Finally, while aimed at regulation of sexuality in general, the Committee also carried out or supported homophobic activity. The Committee developed pornography criteria, according to which homosexual interaction with close-ups of genitalia was described as 'anomalous and perverted form of sexual interaction' (Zakharov and others 2009: 101). It was monitoring media in regard to 'propaganda of homosexualism' (Zakharov and others 2009: 105). The Committee's activity led to the censorship of homosexual media. For instance, *Odyn z nas* ([Ukr.] *One Of Us*), one of the oldest gay magazines in

Ukraine, experienced difficulties as retailers would break the contract with reference to the law or label materials as 'erotic'/ 'pornographic' (Krafft-Ebing 2012). The leader of Nash Svit LGBT NGO was persecuted for publishing the NGO newspaper that was treated as pornography dissemination (Zakharov and others 2009: 101).

2. 'Anti-gender' formations of the 2000s

Why did the discourses of protection of public morals develop so quickly in the Ukrainian government in the 2000s? In order to understand this, we need to look at what I will further call 'anti-gender' groups in Ukraine that started developing in Ukraine in the mid-2000s. Like the National Committee for the Protection of Public Morals, these new initiatives and NGOs used the conceptual framework of 'protecting morals' and 'traditional/family values', but they had much more pronounced homophobic sentiments, claiming gender and sexual heterogeneity to be part of 'Western propaganda' and 'gender ideology'. These fundamentalist religious and right-wing groups constructed sexual and gender heterogeneity discursively as a threat to the existence of Ukrainian nation and often intertwined such discourse with nationalist anti-European rhetoric (Pahulich 2012). The strategy for integration into the European Union developed by the Ukrainian government mobilised these 'anti-gender' groups, while local and transnational alliances helped them develop.

2.1. 'Gender ideology' discourse in Ukraine

Scholars claim that a range of Christian groups, neo-Nazi groups, right-wing parties and other political actors participate in anti-gender campaigns in Europe and around the world. This anti-gender mobilisation is believed to be a new social formation that developed over the 1990s and became transnational (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). The groups believe that 'gender ideology' was imported from abroad and is

‘imposed from above’ (by the EU, UN or through the state). The characteristic tactic of such movements is employing ‘anti-gender’ rhetorics as a mobilisational tool:

> Anti-gender movements want to claim that gender equality is an “ideology”, and introduce the misleading terms “gender ideology” or “gender theory” which distort the achievements of gender equality. The main targets are the alleged “propaganda” for LGBTI rights, for reproductive rights and biotechnology, for sexual and equality education (Kovátsand Põim 2015: 11).

‘Gender ideology’ is meant to destroy ‘traditional values’ (that include heteronormative marriage and binary gender system). While I traced (in Chapter I) the employment of the ‘anti-gender’ rhetorics by the far-right groups in the 1990s, I believe that the ‘anti-gender’ movement mostly developed over the 2000s in parallel with a neotraditionalist turn in legislation. Juan Marco Vaggione (2005: 234) connects the rise of ‘anti-gender’ movement with the ‘reactive politicisation of religion’, ‘whereby religious activism takes a form characteristic of civil society organisations’. Vaggione claims that NGO-isation of religious institutions (that happened alongside NGO-isation of the art sphere or ‘LGBT activism’, described earlier) is part of globalisation and modernity itself. In the case of religious institutions, it allows these institutions to ‘revitalise’ themselves, become legitimate public actors and gain more influence. Vaggione (2005: 233–34) also claims:

> A large part of religious revitalization involves reinforcing the traditional family against the threat of new conceptions of gender roles and sexual identities. Many religious communities have transformed that threat into a justification for public interventions

> and political alliances. If, in general, religion had always been the main carrier of patriarchy and heteronormativity, much of the contemporary revitalization has intensified this position. Patriarchal religions are reinforcing a "pelvic orthodoxy" that holds feminists and sexual minorities responsible for a crisis of the family in contemporary societies.

It would be wrong to attribute the anti-gender mobilisation to one root, religious or geopolitical. Anti-gender campaigns in Ukraine were carried out by organisations supported by the 'Western', as well as Russian networks, and the religious backing includes different Christian denominations, including Eastern Orthodox.

One of the prominent examples of such 'anti-gender' politics of the 2000s as NGO-isation of religion was the Liubov Proty Homoseksualizmu ([Ukr.] Love Against Homosexualism) organisation that appeared in 2003 and carried out public actions for the protection of the 'family values'. Journalist and Evangelical Christian preacher Ruslan Kukharchuk, the leader of the organisation, framed homosexuality as 'sexual deviance', 'mental illness', 'propaganda' and 'dictatorship of ideas' (Antonova 2009). In 2004 he established 'Novomedia' media association of Christian journalists that carried out training events for the churches of different confessions – teaching them how to communicate with media and to organise.

Ukrainian 'anti-gender' initiatives organised street actions, mass petitions signing, information campaigns (such as 'STOP Gender' website) and lobbying activities, were often forming coalitions between each other and with governmental bodies (see Pahulich 2012; Aktyvistky hendernoho rukhu 2013; Hankivsky and Skoryk 2014; Bureichak 2014). For instance, street actions were started in 2007 by Love Against Homosexualism and continued for several years in the form of 'family carnivals'. During these actions, the

demands for the criminalisation of 'propaganda of homosexuality' were raised. The group started to collect signatures for the petition on changing Ukrainian legislation to ban 'propaganda of homosexuality' in 2009 (similar to the Russian initiatives).

These conservative ideas were shared on a higher level by the Vseukraïns'ka Rada Tserkov ([Ukr.] All-Ukrainian Council of Churches). Formed in 1996, this Council included representatives of 90% of churches and religious groups in Ukraine. In 2007 the Council published a statement 'Pro nehatyvne stavlennia do iavyshcha homoseksualizmu ta sprob lehalizatsiï tak zvanykh odnostatevykh shliubiv (reiestratsiï odnostatevykh partnerstv)' ([Ukr.] 'On negative attitude to the phenomenon of homosexualism and the so-called same-sex marriages (registration of same-sex partnerships)'). It stated that 'somebody tries to convince society that same-sex sexuality is an inborn normal variant' and 'the path of law's diversion from public morals leads to the abyss' (Vseukraïns'ka Rada Tserkov i relihiïnykh orhanizarsiï 2007). The statement warned:[23]

> Досвід багатьох країн, у тому числі економічно розвинених, у яких спостерігається ослаблення або нівелювання інституту традиційної сім'ї, свідчить, що ці країни стикаються з такими проблемами, як катастрофічне падіння народжуваності, демографічна криза, критичне зниження суспільної моралі. Вже у найближчому часі корінному населенню цих країн загрожує повне зникнення. У свою чергу все це має не тільки духовні, але й відчутні економічні наслідки. Там, де легалізовано проституцію й наркоманію, одностатеві шлюби й евтаназію, вже зараз

[23] The Council has since started using the rhetorics of 'gender ideology', see https://slovoproslovo.info/vrc-protu-genderu/

ставиться питання про легалізацію педофілії. Україна не повинна йти таким згубним шляхом.

[Ukr.] The experience of many countries, including economically developed ones, which see the decline or negation of the institution of traditional family, shows that these countries face problems such as the catastrophic fall in fertility, the demographic crisis, and the critical decline in public morals. In the near future, the indigenous population of these countries is threatened with complete disappearance. All of this, in turn, has not only spiritual but also tangible economic consequences. Where prostitution and drug addiction, same-sex marriage and euthanasia are legalised, the issue of legalisation of paedophilia is already being raised. Ukraine should not follow such a pernicious path (Ibid).

The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches' statement follows the rhetorics of 'anti-gender' initiatives of the time. It develops an essentialising nationalist discourse of 'traditional Ukrainian family' as opposing 'pathological' nonnormativity. 'Public morals' in such discourse needs to be protected from homosexuality. In 2009 the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches signed a memorandum on cooperation with the National Committee for the Protection of Public Morals.

Gender theorist Lesia Pagulich[24] (2012: 68) notes that the powerful lobbying of the pro-family and religious organisations gave them access to the

[24] Where the article/chapter mentioned has been written in Ukrainian, I use the transliterated version of the author's name (Pahulich) according to the Library of Congress transliteration rules. For texts published in English, I use the English language version of the author's name as it is stated in the published work (Pagulich).

mechanisms of influence on lawmaking and political decisions. An example of such influence is the creation of the 'Za dukhovnist', moral'nist' i zdorov'ia Ukraïny' ([Ukr.] 'For Spirituality, Morality and Health of Ukraine') inter-faction deputy group in 2009. Pavlo Ungurian, the head of the inter-faction group, is also a Protestant preacher and the leader of the 'Ukraïna za sim'iu' ([Ukr.] 'Ukraine for the Family') all-Ukrainian movement and NGO. In his statements, Ungurian used 'traditional family values' and 'Christian values' interchangeably and claimed that '[...] громадяни України хочуть жити в європейській сім'ї, але не ціною християнських цінностей' ([Ukr.] '[...] Ukrainian citizens want to live in the European family, but not by the price of Christian values') (Hula 2012).

2.2. The far-right movements development in the 2000s

The rise of 'anti-gender' initiatives coincided with the rise of the far-right groups in the mid-2000s and 2010s. It should be noted that this rise is not unique to the Ukrainian context and can also be traced in Europe and around the world (see Mudde 2016). In the 2000s we can observe the transformation of the far-right groups from the sporadic actors of street violence to coalition-building groups involved in the 'anti-gender movement'.

In 2004 the SNPU party, explored in the previous chapter, split and was rebranded: the new party took the name 'Svoboda' ([Ukr.] Freedom) and changed its emblem from modified Wolfsangel (a symbol used by the Nazi SS) to a hand holding three fingers up. Even with a 'softer' symbolic representation, the party is still defined as a nationalist, populist, radical right party (Polyakova 2014). Since 2008 the party started to recruit and mobilise young people and make links with other nationalist groups (Polyakova 2014).

Simultaneously, several far-right groups active previously in SNPU, but disillusioned by Svoboda's more moderate representation, united into the Social-Nationalist Assembly in 2008. The leader of the 'Patriot Ukraïny' ([Ukr.] 'Patriot of Ukraine') far-right organisation Andrii Bilets'kyi became the head of

the Social-Nationalist Assembly. The point of mobilisation was often the idea of the 'identity conflict' between the 'patriots' (those who support 'traditional values') and the 'traitors' (those who support 'Western' liberal agenda, such as 'human rights'). For instance, the 'Natsional'nyi Ali'ians' ([Ukr.] 'National Alliance') group manifesto in 2008 positioned Ukraine geopolitically between 'imperial Russia' and 'the liberal West' and stated: 'Західний лібералізм, поставивши в центр свого світогляду потреби людини, забув, що найповніше їх задовольняє сильна і могутня Нація, до якої ця людина належить' ([Ukr.] 'Western liberalism, putting the needs of a person at the centre of its worldview, forgot that the strong and powerful Nation that the person belongs to fulfils these needs to the fullest extent possible', quoted in Shestakovs'kyĭ and others 2016: 60). Since 2008 the members of far-right groups, such as 'Patriot of Ukraine', organised street actions in support of 'healthy white families' ('Sotsial-Natsionalisty Za Zdorovi Sim'ĭ' 2010), and campaigns against 'tolerance' ('Aktsiia Protestu Proty Vsesvitnioho Dnia Tolerantnosti' 2010).

While the right-extremist movements in Ukraine are relatively understudied (for the reasons, as well as a bibliography on the rise of right-extremist movements in Ukraine, see Umland 2013), studies note the rise in far-right violence and hate crimes (Likhachev 2013; see also Atanasov and Radyns'kyĭ 2012). This shift, according to some scholars, was accompanied by the rise of antisemitism, xenophobia and homophobia in the 2000s in general population (Martsenyuk 2009, 2012). Many documented attacks of the far-right groups were racist, yet some reported attacks were openly homophobic (Atanasov and Radyns'kyĭ 2012). The homophobic violence of the far-right is ingrained in the construction of ethno-nationalism as centred around biological reproduction. According to Gould and Moe (2015: 274),

> [...] the emphasis is on heterosexual pairing between co-ethnics with

> the goal of producing children to continue the nation. Ethno-nationalists accuse homosexuals of failing in this mission and of engaging in sexual activity purely for pleasure. They portray homosexuality as a decadent and self-indulgent practice that reinforces demographic decline and implies 'national genocide' in the long term. Homosexuality then, is a treasonous act that contrasts with the 'patriotic' reproductive behaviour of heterosexuals.

Therefore, the ethnonationalist far-right discourse assumes and establishes Ukrainianness to include normative gender and sexuality, while excluding those not adhering to this construction. While the researchers are cautious about carrying out simple identification between 'anti-gender' movements and the far-right (Kováts 2017), some studies point to the transnational character and mutual influences of both (Kováts and Põim 2015). In the 2000s more people or events read as 'nonnormative' by the far-right became a new target for violence.

Of course, cultural institutions were not immune to far-right attacks and legislative censorship. In September 2009 an arson attack took place in the *Ya* gallery: the attackers left the graffiti 'Ni sodomiï. OUN' ([Ukr.] 'No to sodomy. OUN' [Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists]) on a gallery wall. The attack happened after the gallery hosted the discussion of homophobia in Ukraine and the presentation of '120 storinok Sodomu' ([Ukr.] '120 pages of Sodom'), the first Ukrainian anthology of contemporary world queer literature.

The arson in the *Ya* gallery was just one of several homophobic and xenophobic attacks committed by ultra-right groups (allegedly supported by *Svoboda* party) and targeting cultural institutions.[25] The public event that was

[25] On the connections between Svoboda party and the 'informal' far-right (including the neo-Nazi groups and radical football fans), see Melzer and Serafin 2013, as well as the

organised by the gallery days before the arson was devoted to the discussion of these homophobic attacks. Also discussed was the film 'Brüno' (2009, directed by Larry Charles) that was banned by the National Committee for the Protection of Public Morals for '[...] художньо невиправдану демонстрацію статевих органів і відносин, гомосексуальних статевих актів у відверто натуралістичній формі, показ гомосексуальних збочень, [...] що може завдати шкоди моральному вихованню громадян.' ([Ukr.] '[...] culturally unjustified demonstration of homosexual sex acts in explicitly naturalistic form, showing of homosexual perversions, [...] that can harm the moral upbringing of citizens') (see Serhatskova 2018); the closed unofficial screening of the film was also disrupted by the far-right hooligans.

It is within these complex knot of changes - of the slow conservative legislative turn, the activity of the Committee for the Protection of Public Morals and the rise of 'anti-gender' groups and the far-right violence - that collective sexual and gender dissent has formed in Ukraine.

3. Collective sexual and gender dissent in the 2000s: are rights given, or are they taken?

3.1. Professionalised activism in the 2000s: practice and theory

In this section, I will address the consolidation of human rights rhetoric that takes place in the 2000s, and the differences between the groups that turned to it. In the 2000s, human rights rhetorics were used by state institutions, researchers, NGOs and grassroots movements. The use of human rights rhetorics in 'high politics' (e.g., by the state institutions) has been described in previous chapters: it mostly excluded 'nonnormative

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blog of human rights activist Vyacheslav Likhachev (https://vyacheslav-likhachev.blogspot.co.uk/). See also a detailed description of the episode in Chernetsky 2016.

others' from the spectrum of human rights protection, and such an attitude continued into the 2000s. For instance, in 2007 the Head of Committee of Verkhovna Rada on Human Rights, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations stated that 'Держава повинна захищати суспільство від зла, від насильства, в тому числі і такого зла, як гомосексуалізм, лесбіянство і тому подібне' ([Ukr.] 'The state should protect society from evil, violence, including such evil as homosexualism, lesbianism and suchlike', in 'Komunisty Zakhystiat' Suspil'stvo Vid Heïv i Lesbiianok' 2007). This position echoes the rhetorics of anti-gender organisations, in which nonnormativity is deemed a corrupting force and a threat to society.

At the same time, the consolidation of a single human rights rhetoric took place in the non-governmental sector. In the mid-2000s the number of LGBT NGOs in Ukraine rapidly rose from 5 organisations in 2000 to 24 organisations by 2010. This rise was mainly caused by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and other 'Western' donors starting their activity in Ukraine after 2004, and the continuous funding they provided to local organisations (Naumenko and others 2015: 128–46). The first National LGBT Movement and MSM Service Conference – an annual meeting of LGBT organisations – took place in 2008 and was devoted to the 'Mobilisation and advocacy of LGBT community interests'. Common strategic planning of LGBT organisations was started in 2005, and in 2008 the Council of LGBT Organisations of Ukraine was formed.[26]

LGBT NGOs appropriated human rights rhetorics in their publications and actions. The conservative turn was opposed in print magazines, and websites featured materials critiquing the National Committee for the Protection of Public Morals and its danger to the independent media. Also critiqued was the activity of 'anti-gender' organisations and legislative

[26] It was registered by the Ministry of Justice in 2011.

initiatives (see, for example, issue 59 of the *Odyn Z Nas,* 2009; also www.feminist.org.ua; www.insight-ukraine.org.ua). Several street actions took place in the mid-2000s in Kyiv, and other cities: notable was a demonstration in Kyiv against homophobia on May 17th, 2007 (International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia), organised by several LGBT NGOs and other initiatives (Gei-Forum Ukrainy 2007).

The activity of LGBT NGOs influenced 'civil' human rights organisations that started to report more on hate crimes and discrimination against LGBT people. Also, while most women's organisations in the 1990s did not support feminist views and did not voice public support for non-heterosexual or non-cisgender people, some organisations appeared in the 2000s that supported both, such as Zhinocha Merezha ([Ukr.] Women Network) and Insight in Kyiv and Sfera ([Ukr.] Sphere in Kharkiv).

Women Network appeared in Kyiv in 1998 as a lesbian initiative group, and in 2000 it was registered as an NGO. Its founder Laima Geidar described the economic reasons that motivated women to create feminist and women's NGOs after the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent economic crisis:

> Многие из них были научными работниками, и когда экономика СССР разрушилась, они не пошли торговать сигаретами и сникерсами, а создавали общественные организации и писали первые гранты на финансирование своей деятельности.
>
> [Russ.] Many of them [feminists] worked in academia, and when the USSR's economy collapsed, they did not start selling cigarettes and 'Snickers', but instead went to create civic organizations, and wrote the first grant applications for the funding of their activity (Geĭdar 2011: 113).

In 2000, Geidar commented on a confrontation between women's NGOs and some lesbians, in an attempt to bring them into dialogue. She also lamented the absence of lesbian researchers, or lesbian feminists in Ukraine: in her words, that there was 'a complete lack of domestic research on lesbians or the suppression of their problems in gender studies' (Geĭdar 2000). Geidar's tasks were therefore to introduce feminist theory and practices within lesbian communities (Geĭdar 2000) and the 'creation of a politically active lesbian community in Ukraine' (Monakhova and Nagornaia 2007: 305). Some Women Network activists (like Anna Dovhopol) graduated from gender studies programs abroad; activists of the organisation also learned more about gender and sexuality through networking with foreign NGOs and researchers, demonstrating how the parallel development of feminist-lesbian NGOs and budding academic gender studies in Ukraine led to knowledge exchange.

The Women Network website (www.feminist.org.ua) became an invaluable resource for Ukrainian feminists on both lesbian and feminist issues since its appearance in 2003. It was an online community space, where people could find support, advice and a sense of belonging. The website featured translations of feminist and lesbian writings (Olympe de Gouges, Joan W. Scott, Sandra Bem, Andrea Dworkin), post-Soviet research on sexuality (such as the works of Igor Kon), and writings by Ukrainian feminist scholars: Mariya Dmytrieva, Natalia Monakhova, Olena Boriak, Mariya Mayerchyk and others. Women Network also carried out yearly feminist and lesbian summer camps. The program of these camps included an educational component, such as lectures on gender and the history of feminist movements by Mariya Mayerchyk ('Letnii Feministsko-Lesbiiskii Lager' "Feminist Lesbian Point - 2006". Programma Lageria' 2006; Farbar 2021). Similarly, Mayerchyk carried out training on gender and sexuality during the first events of the Sphere lesbian-feminist NGO, founded in 2008 (Sokolova

2021).

Plakhotnik (2011) argues that the popularity of gender mainstreaming in Ukrainian gender studies led to the fact that most scholars separated research on gender from research on nonnormativity, and thus could not (and did not want to) oppose the conservative turn:

> Преференції щораз більше отримують ті дослідження, що послідовно відтворюють ідеї ґендерного мейнстримінґу. Методологічному розмаїттю, що мало би правити за підґрунтя для теоретичних дискусій і розвитку, майже не залишається місця: ґендерний мейнстримінґ українського зразка оголошує суспільство складеним із двох гомогенних груп (жінок й чоловіків), обидві вони дискриміновані, а тому «недовикористані» на ринку праці. Всі інші «незручні питання» (наприклад, сексуальне насильство, права жінок-міґранток, сексуальні й репродуктивні права, проституція і порнографія тощо) мейнстримінґ відсуває на задній план або взагалі робить невидимими.
>
> [Ukr.] Studies that consistently reproduce the ideas of gender mainstreaming are receiving more and more preferences. There is almost no room for methodological diversity, which should serve as a basis for theoretical discussions and development: the Ukrainian version of gender mainstreaming declares society to be composed of two homogeneous groups (women and men), both of whom are discriminated against and therefore ‘underutilised’ in the labor market. All other ‘uncomfortable issues’ (for example, sexual violence, migrant women's rights, sexual and reproductive rights, prostitution and pornography, etc.) are relegated to the background or made invisible by mainstreaming.

I believe that an orientation towards collaboration with the state, the

epistemological and methodological lacunas in Ukrainian gender studies and the lack of local knowledge production and discussions also influenced NGO work, leading it to avoid the 'uncomfortable issues' of sexual and gender dissent. Like the practices of the 'Our World' NGO, described in Chapter I, Women Network was involved in 'modernization' of nonnormative subcultures of the time, introducing and explaining new 'Western' terms for lesbian identities (such as 'butch' and 'femme', see Geĭdar 2000). Since its appearance, Women Network was actively engaged in 'Western' models of identity politics, promoting the idea of 'pride' – the 'parade of dignity as a method of political action for LGBT community'.[27] Like other NGOs of that time, Women Network was interested in one-issue street protests that resembled the idea of Pride demonstrations, 'recognizable' by Western donors. The main focus of the organisation was on high politics, legislation changes, cooperation with other newly established LGBT organisations, and development of new lesbian organisations in different regions of Ukraine.

Human rights were seen as mainly legal rights that the state needed to protect – thus, LGBT organisations strove towards close cooperation with the state through advocacy work. In 2008 an Action Plan on combating discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity was developed by the members of LGBT NGOs and presented to the government and general public ('Pres-Reliz: Geï Ta Lesbiĭky Proponuiut' Uriadu Ta Parlamentu Plan Diĭ' 2008). Focusing on combating homophobia, many of these organisations promoted liberal approaches in viewing sexual/gender rights struggle as separate from other political struggles (such as around

[27] See https://web.archive.org/web/20031026165810/http://www.feminist.org.ua/script/anketa/form.html [accessed 17 April 2023]

poverty, racism, etc.).[28]

3.2. Grassroots dissent on the radical left

Human rights rhetorics was also adopted by the groups envisioning other forms of dissent. In the 2000s the development of 'new left', ecological and feminist grassroots movements also took place. Uniting various groups and subcultures, grassroots networks formed counter-publics that did not align with a liberal governmental framework and promoted more intersectional approaches to the human rights struggle. They sometimes formed coalitions with professionalised NGOs to create collective sexual/gender dissent.

Radical left groups existed in Ukraine since the 1990s. In 1997, the Tigra Nigra anarchist group appeared in Kyiv with the aim of 'либертарное развитие общества через либертарное развитие личности' ([Russ.] 'libertarian development of society through libertarian development of a person') (Initsiativa Tigra-Nigra 2003). While carrying out protests against International Monetary Fund politics in Ukraine and anti-immigration legislation and practices, members of Tigra Nigra were involved in social and cultural projects, such as the Polosatyi Dom ([Russ.] 'Stripy House') social centre for youth.

In parallel with anarchist initiatives, the *antifa* (antifascist) movement developed around the country in the 2000s. While the antifa movement is understudied, it can be said that the movement included both political activists, and elements of football supporters' subculture. The antifa activists carried out their own street actions, often acted as 'security guards' for other groups during the street actions and regularly clashed with the members of

[28] This general trend of both 'civil' human rights, women and LGBT NGOs in the 2000s to follow a law-oriented advocacy approach, which was mainly promoted by the donor agencies, is well described in Husakouskaya's research (2019).

the far-right groups. After one of such clashes in Odesa, during which a member of the C14 far-right group was killed, President Viktor Yushchenko declared antifa to be an 'extremist organisation' allegedly influenced by the foreign anti-Ukrainian organisations (Korrespondent.net 2009).

Anarcho-feminist activism arose from within broader anarchist and antifascist activism in the 1990s as both its extension and a dissenting reaction to it. In the late 1990s anarcho-feminists created feminist stickers and posters, reclaiming the 8th of March (International Women's Day) as a political event: feminist stickers, or 'subway *samizdat*' as they have been called by activists (A.Ksakal 2004) were pasted in public areas every year since 1999.[29] One of the prominent initiatives of the 2000s was an anarcho-feminist group 'Svobodna' ([Russ.] 'Free') that organised street actions and curated a popular website.[30]

While some activists had access to academic research, they also relied on other forms of knowledge production and consumption. Similar to its importance for the early nonnormative communities and subcultures, *samizdat* (self-published materials) was the main sources of information for political groups in the 1990s and early 2000s. D.I.Y. zines and leaflets were sent to, and received by post from, other cities and countries. International anarchist networks also allowed for an exchange of information during events

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[29] Critiquing a depoliticized Soviet version of International Women's Day as a celebration of women as mothers and wives, the stickers claimed that the 8th of March was instead a day for 'визволення жінки від рабства, чоловіка – від панства' ([Ukr.] 'freeing woman from slavery, and man from domination'). See all stickers at https://web.archive.org/web/20050209151501/http://stickerz.zaraz.org/gallery/feminism/index.html, accessed 18 January 2021.

[30] http://svobodna.org.ua/, now available only via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine.

and conferences, often organised by the same people who made zines and other *samizdat*.[31] A different understanding of human rights was developed within these social formations: one that valued both individual and collective human rights; did not choose civil rights over economic and social, and generally recognized that talking about human rights is just a beginning of a political struggle that includes a struggle with state and its institutions. For instance, in 2007, an anarcho-feminist festival was organised in Romania, attended by Ukrainian anarcho-feminists. Featured at the festival were D.I.Y. materials in French, German, English, Romanian and other languages. The main idea of the festival was that the 'struggle for women's rights must be a struggle against the state that protects patriarchal society system, all hierarchies and injustices in the world' (LoveKills Kollektiv 2007; 'Invitation for LoveKills Anarcha-Feminist Festival #2' 2007).

With the development of the Internet, websites and LiveJournal blogs became a new platform for communication and knowledge production, enabling much faster information exchange between the activists in different countries, as well as within Ukraine. In 2003 the *zaraz.org*[32] Kyiv Internet portal of libertarian initiatives started its activity and published information on Ukrainian and international environmental, feminist, anarchist, human rights, trade union, antiglobalisation and anti-war movements. Online communities in the LiveJournal network further facilitated grassroots knowledge production and exchange. Following an intersectional anarchist

[31] For example, in 2003 Ukrainian anarchists were among 200 participants from various European countries present at the anarchist conference in Warsaw, which included sections on antisexism and anarcho-feminism (Karina 2003).

[32] See https://web.archive.org/web/20080523184752/http://www.zaraz.org/index.php, accessed 18 January 2021.

approach, the Zaraz.org web portal published articles, art, leaflets and news on many themes: 'gender questions', 'human rights', 'the [far] right', 'environment', 'globalisation', 'workers', etc. Zaraz.org editors strove to support nonnormative communities, publishing news about the LGBT events in Ukraine and other countries (often taken from the websites of the LGBT organisations).

The activists of the new movements used the language of human rights, yet enriched it with references to radical intersectional struggle. 'Prava ne daiut', prava berut'!' ([Ukr.] 'Rights are not given, rights are taken!') was a popular slogan during the street protests. It referred to the inevitability of active contentious struggle for human rights, rather than cooperation with the state. Instead of 'traditional values', members of anarchist networks supported 'libertarian values' that involved a simultaneous critique of state, nationalism, capitalism and all forms of discrimination. Such intersectional positioning is described in the 'Moi feminizm' ([Russ.] 'My feminism') text written by an anarcho-feminist activist and published on the website of libertarian initiatives Zaraz.org. This text both introduces the readers to different terms for different forms of struggles and explains that all of them are intersected and included in the notion of 'anarchy':

> По всем своим ощущениям прихожу к выводу, что я феминистка. Для меня феминизм – это одна из составляющих анархии. Я рассматриваю его как один из способов достижения свободы и равенства. Точно так же, как антирасизм (борьба с дискриминацией по расовому признаку), антиэйджизм (борьба с дискриминацией по возрастному признаку), антигомофобия (борьба за права сексуальных меньшинств) – все это проявления анархии.

> [Russ.] All my experiences lead me to the conclusion that I am a feminist. Feminism for me is one of the components of anarchy. I consider it to be one of the ways of reaching freedom and equality. Just like antiracism (struggle against discrimination based on racial attribute), anti-ageism (struggle against discrimination based on age attribute), anti-homophobia (struggle for the rights of sexual minorities) – all of this is a manifestation of anarchy (Kariandr 2004).

With the conservative turn in the mid-2000s, an anti-homophobic agenda became the point where the interests of grassroots anarcho-feminists and LGBT NGOs intersected. LGBT NGOs welcomed the participation of anarchist and Antifa activists in actions, as they had more experience in organising street protests and were equipped to defend themselves and others against far-right violence while police did not provide such protection at the time. For grassroots activists, anti-homophobic campaigns were part of the intersectional agenda.

Anarchists together with the representatives of Women Network and Gay Alliance NGOs even formed the 'Liubov' protiv predrassudkov' ([Russ.] 'Love Against Prejudices')[33] alliance that organised a counter-action during the conservative March Against Homosexualism on October 5th, 2007. The 'Manifesto Against Homophobia' issued by Women Network initiative and given out as leaflets during the action, promoted the intersectional character of the struggle against discrimination, called the state to protect human rights, and critiqued homophobia alongside antisemitism, racism, Nazism

[33] See https://web.archive.org/web/20080218013453/http://svobodna.org.ua/news/5.html [accessed 23 March 2023]

and nationalism.[34] News about the action was published on both Women Network, zaraz.org[35] and Svobodna websites.

However, while participation and support from anarchist activists were welcomed, there was a tendency of NGOs to conceal and marginalise their more radical allies; the common agenda of the 'Love Against Prejudices' coalition was an exception rather than a rule. Women Network was cautious in referring to anarchist activists and groups in reports as 'anti-fascist youth organisations',[36] 'ordinary heterosexual man, activist',[37] etc. In my opinion, this is symptomatic of the NGO development of the time, balancing between the creation of a 'respectable' image for donors, 'newcomers' and liberal stakeholders, and the pressing need for political alliances and support in an increasingly homophobic society.

It can be concluded, therefore that the two vectors of dissent in the 2000s – grassroots and NGO-based – created situational alliances and shared human rights rhetorics. However, their political goals and activist methods followed different vectors, and these vectors would diverge with time, as we will see in the next chapters.

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[34] See https://web.archive.org/web/20081204164146/http://svobodna.org.ua/news/ljubov-protiv-predrassudkov.html [accessed 23 March 2023]

[35] See https://web.archive.org/web/20071011045556/http://news.zaraz.org/?n=716 [accessed 23 March 2023]

[36] See https://web.archive.org/web/20071014033419/http://feminist.org.ua/strawberry/example/index.php?id=81 [accessed 23 March 2023]

[37] See https://web.archive.org/web/20080406140645/http://www.feminist.org.ua/library/homosexuality/txt/17may2007.php [accessed 23 March 2023]

3.3. Cultural dissent against the politics of morality

The general conservative turn after the Orange Revolution led to the activation of 'new left' cultural and academic initiatives and coalitions of civic dissent in Kyiv. Besides the groups described earlier, in 2008-2009, several initiatives appeared that fostered these coalitions. The Visual Culture Research Center[38] at the University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy was founded as an independent cultural institution and a platform for collaboration between academic, artistic, and activist communities. *Hudrada*[39] (from Ukr. Khudozhnia Rada, or Art Council), a curatorial and interdisciplinary activist group was formed in 2009 and included the members of R.E.P. collective. It positioned itself as a self-organised anti-hierarchical group.

Hudrada's first project was devoted to political art and involved discussions about the interaction between the artists and grassroots 'new left' movements.[40] *ProStory* literary and art platform and journal[41] (started in 2008), *Spil'ne*[42] (*Commons*) journal (started in 2009) and *Politychna Krytyka*[43] journal (started in 2010), like the above-mentioned initiatives, positioned themselves as supporting 'new left' ideas. Often entangled and cooperating, these initiatives became active in organising round tables, conferences, exhibitions and publishing materials devoted to the themes of the conservative turn, racism and far-right violence.

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[38] http://vcrc.org.ua [accessed 21 January 2021]

[39] http://hudrada.tumblr.com/ [accessed 21 January 2021]

[40] http://hudrada.tumblr.com/POHLYADY [accessed 21 January 2021]

[41] http://prostory.net.ua/ [accessed 21 January 2021]

[42] In Russian, *petukh* (rooster) is a widespread derogatory prison slur denoting a passive male homosexual.

[43] https://politkrytyka.org/ [accessed 21 January 2021]

In the mid-2000s, we can observe some politicisation of contemporary art institutions, caused both by the neo-traditionalist legislative attempts and by the above-mentioned academic-activist knowledge production. While the National Committee for the Protection of Public Morals was working on regulating the dissemination of anything deemed pornographic, a new legislative initiative took place in 2009 aiming at censoring online access and banning the storage of anything that could be defined as pornography on personal computers. By that time, public discussions had started on official censorship and the boundaries between pornography, erotic materials and art. Art critics, curators, artists and writers actively took part in such discussions. For instance, *Karas* gallery in Kyiv organised the collective 'UPorno' exhibition (translated from Russian as 'insistently', 'UPorno' can also be translated from Ukrainian as 'In Porn'). The statement of the 'UPorno' exhibition clearly marked it as an artistic dissenting move against the 'anti-pornography law' as well as stating the danger that such legislative initiative can have for the artists depicting intimate or erotic scenes (Sergeeva 2009).

The activities of the National Committee for the Protection of Public Morals also mobilised various and often intersecting forms of civic dissent. Articles in mass media and academic journals[44] and human rights activists (such as Helsinki human rights organisations) pointed to the dangers of institutionalised censorship. Noteworthy was the activity of journalist and art critic Anatolii Ulianov. Ulianov was the founder of influential *Proza* ([Ukr.] *Prose*) online media[45] where from 2003 he published his dadaist manifestos together with critical reviews of Ukrainian and international contemporary art and literature. *Proza* published provocative works; Ulianov defined its concept as being a 'philosophical porn publication about contemporary art', and its

[44] See *Krytyka* 2009, 11-12; Trebunia 2009.

[45] The website was banned in 2009, yet the archive is available in the Internet Archive.

aim was to break taboos and openly oppose 'traditional values' and stereotypes. Ulianov was an outspoken critic of the National Committee for the Protection of Public Morals on *Proza* and in other media. In December 2008 he created a community entitled 'moral monitor' in LiveJournal;[46] the aim of the community was monitoring and critique of the Committee's activity; the online poll on the need of the Committee in Ukraine, published on *Proza* website, gathered around 7000 responses in 2009.

In 2009, Ulianov through his LiveJournal blog and *Proza* website announced 'Zerkalo' ([Russ.] 'Mirror') initiative and called for the mobilisation of dissent against the Committee, announcing the campaign to eliminate the Committee and corresponding law. For the role of the dissenters Ulianov considered journalists, human rights activists and lawyers, as well as 'cultural activists'

> Все табу - это музы. Все запреты - призывы к действию. Художник революции - эстетический террорист, ратующий за расширение культурных границ.
>
> [Russ.] All taboos are muses. All prohibitions are the calls for action. The artist of the revolution is an aesthetic terrorist pushing for the broadening of cultural boundaries (Dadakinder 2009).

Noteworthy was a street performance in November 2009, during which an activist/artist Oleksandr Volodarsky and an unknown woman imitated a sexual act in front of Verkhovna Rada building in Kyiv to protest against the activity of the Committee for the Protection of Public Morals. While the attacks of the far-right hooligans were not investigated, Volodarsky was arrested for

[46] https://moral-monitor.livejournal.com/, accessed 14 December 2021.

his performance and later imprisoned, charged with hooliganism.

4. Through the looking glass: sexual dissent in Anatoliy Belov's graphic art

In the previous three sections, I looked at some social formations involved in the production of neo-traditionalist discourses, such as legislative and governmental initiatives, the religious right and far-right movements. I also described the development of the professionalised LGBT activism as an example of the social formation at least partially, if not fully aligned with the Europeanisation politics. Finally, I touched upon the grassroots social movements that did not align with either neo-traditionalist, nor Eurocentric liberal modernisation discourses; and noted the cultural alliances and mobilisation of art institutions against the neo-traditionalist turn.

Simultaneous with the rise of the 'anti-gender' social formations, we can observe the rise of sexual/gender dissent in different forms, mostly professionalised NGOs and grassroots initiatives. Both professionalised NGOs and the grassroot movements opposed neo-traditionalist turn and employed the rhetoric of 'human rights'; yet inflected the understanding of 'human rights' with different political meanings.

Many of the above-mentioned grassroots and cultural initiatives were part of Anatoliy Belov's communicative networks and influences, as well as part of the diverse counter-publics that opposed the neotraditionalist turn. Belov's works were aimed at generating discussion of societal taboos, pornography, art, and sexual shame. In response to the ne-traditionalist shifts, Anatoliy Belov made a series of artworks that questioned spurring official discourses of morality, protection and safety. These works 'reflected back' state politics: they addressed it from the nonnormative position, uncovering the motifs behind it, or reflecting on its effects. In the next section, I will analyse how Belov works with the discourse of human rights, and how his works can be seen as intertwined with different forms of activism

described above.

4.1. ‘(How much is)Why Morals?’

The shifting political climate provoked Belov to create more works examining the politics of morality. In this and the next sections, I will look at three of Belov’s art projects of the time (‘(How much Is)Why Morals?’, ‘My Porn Is My Right’ and ‘Homophobia Today – Genocide tomorrow’) to trace the connection between the political climate of the time, and Belov’s articulation of nonnormativity. In particular, I will address Belov’s exploration of the ideas of morals and sexual rights, as well as his work with the idea of genocide and temporality more generally.

Belov’s street art project, created in March 2009, was entitled *(Po)Chomu moral?.* Being a play on the word ‘почому’ in Ukrainian, the title can be translated in English as *‘(How much is)Why morals?’*. I read this project as Belov’s attempt to oppose the essentialisation and naturalisation of ‘morality’ taking place in neo-traditionalist discourses.

Like the *We are Not Marginals!* project, *(How much is)Why morals?* consisted of big drawings made of paper and pasted in public space. These works presented figures of people either without heads or with their heads in shopping trolleys. Every image was accompanied by the question ‘По(чому) мораль’ (in Ukrainian) or ‘Почем(у) мораль?’ (in Russian). Commenting on the project in 2009, Belov emphasized that the discourse around the ‘protection of public morals’ was adopted by the state to control people, and what was, in fact, immoral was the Committee itself as a governmental body, and the state’s actions towards people and culture (for example, constructing a very expensive memorial to Holodomor [Famine] victims, made out of gold and white marble) (Ul’ianov 2009a). In this statement Belov not only criticized the ways politics of memory was carried out by Viktor Yushchenko but re-framed the idea of ‘morals’, pointing to the economic and political formations behind it.

The parallel between morals and money is drawn in the artwork on both the visual and textual levels. On the textual level, the art project questions about the need for morals as such and the reason for its existing. It also questions what the price of morals is, pointing at the discourse of morals not being 'essential/natural', but rather being used as a 'bargaining chip' for the purposes of manipulation, control or profit.

The message of the images on the visual level is quite direct: people have 'shopping trolleys' instead of heads, and anything can be 'put into' them or 'sold' to them (Figures 14-16). These trolleys 'cage' people's heads, yet the author points to the fact that people may freely choose these cages: in one of the images, the headless person is running and chasing an empty trolley. The 'content' of the 'morals trolleys' can be either mindless consumption or conservative values. For instance, one of the figures (Appendix A, Figure 14) is climbing over the block, with its head entrapped by a trolley being over the block; different objects fall out of the trolley, as if in the act of 'vomiting'.

Another image (Appendix A, Figure 15) presents a feminine figure who holds a conserve jar, and more conserve jars are in the trolley that replaces the person's head. Here Belov uses female labour to create a linguistic-visual metaphor of 'conservative values' in people's heads: the person whom I read as a woman in the image is literally 'conserving', which is a routine manual seasonal labour usually carried out by women. Yet the person is also wearing what resembles traditional Ukrainian female clothing, which, together with the text above the figure, draws a parallel between traditionalist and conservative views.

Finally, in one of the images, a figure in a suit is depicted kneeling before a candle which is also a penis (Appendix A, Figure 16). The trolley that replaces the person's head is full of Bibles and figurines of saints. Commenting on the image in his blog, Belov stated:

> [...] у меня была идея, что человеку 'навязали' религиозные, каноны,правила но есть некий сбой, когда идеи и чувства идут в разрез между собой...в данном случае человек смотрит на свечу и видит детородный орган. вобщем такая тема несоответствия...
>
> [Russ.] [...] I had an idea that religious canons, rules were 'imposed' upon a person, but there is some misfire when thoughts and feelings contradict each other... in this case a person is looking at the candle and sees a genital organ. Essentially, a theme of incongruity... (Belov 2009c)

The project, therefore, de-essentialises 'the protection of morals' as a construct. It shows 'morals' as an empty signifier in use by various formations and located at the intersection of state, neo-traditionalist, religious, and capitalist politics. *(How much is)Why morality?* was also envisioned as an interactive project: one of the works included just the question 'по(чому) мораль?', so that people could photograph themselves with it and 'и таким образом спрашивать себя, друзей, или комиссию по морали: "Почем(у) мораль?"' ([Russ.] 'and in such way ask oneself, friends, or moral committee: "How much is(Why) morals?") (Belov 2009c). As such, it encouraged spectators to become 'cultural activists' opposing the Committee and questioning the role and reasons for 'morals protection'. The project points to both cultural mobilisation against the Committee, but also to the discourses prevalent in the grassroots activism of the time.

4.2. 'My Porn Is My Right': sexuality and rights

While Belov considered his art 'marginal', it, in fact, became needed by some institutions that claimed to belong to the globalised 'contemporary art' world opposing censorship. Soros Centre for Contemporary Art set the example in this regard by supporting art that focused on 'feminist discourse',

‘public space’ and ‘identity’ (see Radyns’kyĭ 2009). Another gallery, called ‘IA Halereia’ ([Ukr.] ‘Ya Gallery’), set a course for supporting nonnormativity as it aimed at ‘introducing the principle of dialogue into the art scene’.[47] Ya Gallery opened in 2007 and in 2008 set the financial support of young contemporary artists as one of its strategies. Like other galleries, Ya Gallery team functioned within the contemporary art framework of ‘pre-accepting transgression’ and was opposing censorship. In June-July 2009 Belov’s project *Bazhannia bazhannia* ([Ukr.] *Desire (of) Desire)* was exhibited in Ya Gallery. Later, the gallery financially supported the creation of Belov’s *Moie porno – moie pravo* ([Ukr.] *My Porn Is My Right,* 2009), street art made by Belov in L’viv under a pseudonym BIBISBINI.[48] This project was a direct response against ‘anti-pornographic’ legislative attempts (Iutash-Ziuzin 2014). The gallery support can be seen as a response to the ‘anti-pornographic’ legislative initiative, but also as a support for sexual dissent – although it was not marked as such in the gallery statements.

I believe that the *My Porn Is My Right* project is a marker showing how the discourse of human rights becomes prevalent in both professionalised and grassroots NGO activism in the 2000s, as well as the marker of the public discussions around sexuality and ‘sexual rights’. The characters of Belov’s works are naked people whom I read as men, posing while holding small cameras and presumably photographing themselves in the mirror (Appendix A, Figure 17). The phrase ‘моє “порно” - моє право!’ ([Ukr.] ‘my “porn” is my right!’) appears beside them written as if in the mirror reflection. This mirror

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[47] See http://yagallery.com/napryami-roboti [accessed 14 December 2021].

[48] This was also the time Belov was seriously considering adopting BIBISBINI pseudonym - as he explained, ‘bibisbini’ was a combination of three Latin roots, meaning ‘duality’ - ‘bi’, ‘bis’ and bini’ (Belov 2008) (which perhaps points at bisexuality as another dimension of ‘duality’).

reflection effect and ‘porn’ in the quotation marks are both important. The first device ‘reclaims’ the statement as belonging to the depicted persons. Like the sexually and gender non-conforming people in *We Are Not Marginals!,* sexual subjects of *My Porn Is My Right* are speaking for themselves, reclaiming their own bodies and sexuality in the act of self-portraiture. Putting ‘porn’ in quotation marks further explores the role and uses of the nudity and sexuality and their relationship to pornography. The nude selfies are contrasted with pornography, and to make (and to store) them claimed to be a right of a person that has to be defended. The description of the project on *Ya* gallery website (Bielov 2009) described the new legislation as:

> [...] Вторгнення на приватну територію індивіда, зазіхання на його право бути порнозіркою, принаймні у власних очах, право зрозуміти себе і позбутися зажимів, нав'язаних соціумом. [...] Ось так зараз виглядає новий злочинець – гола людина з фотокамерою.
>
> [Ukr.] [...] Invasion into the individual’s private territory, attacking his right to be a porn star, at least in his own eyes, his right to understand himself and get rid of the blocks imposed by society. [...] This is what the new criminal looks like – a naked person with a photo camera.

The ‘human rights’ rhetoric is used here to delineate a right to private life, separate from the state control. However, Belov’s visual metaphor of a mirror reflection is deeper than just a one-dimensional understanding of the ‘privacy right’. Belov draws an interesting (though dark) connection between the characters of his artworks and the audience. It is the metaphor of the

mirrors in the police station through which those who are arrested can be observed:

> Я изобразил голых людей фотографирующих себя в зеркало, изучающих себя, свое тело, свою сексуальность. Зритель видящий эту работу находится как будто бы по другую сторону зеркала, как в полицейском отделении где есть специальные зеркала для подглядывания. То есть тема о незаконном вторжении в часную жизнь человека и полицейский надзор. Надпись 'Мое "порно" – мое право!' написанна в зеркальном отражении, чтобы дать понять что человек себя фотографирует себя в зеркало, а зритель с другой стороны зеркала. Слово 'порно' я взял в скобки, чтобы дать понять что что есть порнография в нашем законодательстве не имеет четкую и грамотную проговоренность и это является отличным поводом для манипуляций.
>
> [Russ.] I depicted naked people who photograph themselves in a mirror, study themselves, their body, their sexuality. A spectator who sees this work is placed on the other side of a mirror, similar to a police station where there are special mirrors for peeping. So, this is a theme of illegal intrusion into a person's private life and about police surveillance. The writing 'My "porn" is my right!', written as if mirrored, to make the audience see that a person is photographing themselves in the mirror, and the spectator is on the other side of the mirror. I put 'porn' in quotation marks to show that pornography in our legislation does not have a clear and competent definition, and it is a superb cause for manipulations (Anatoliy Belov 2009).

If we consider the nonnormative character of Belov's works, this project is a literal reminder of the 'heteronormative panopticon' and being under constant surveillance and observation. Theorizing the notion of the 'heteronormative panopticon' as 'the awareness of continuously being watched in public space', Roman Kuhar (2011: 157) follows a Foucauldian (1980: 155) understanding of the panopticon:

> There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself.

This street art project, therefore, raises several important themes. On the one hand, it dissents against the politics of 'morals protection' by claiming sexuality and private sexual expression as an individual's right. Here Belov turns to the discourse of human rights: not to claim a specific identity, but to oppose conservative legislation that could be used to target vulnerable, marginalised and nonnormative bodies.

On the other hand, the project turns to the problem of safety and security as seen not from a perspective of a state (protecting the public from unsafe 'immoral' information), but from a nonnormative position. In addition to the vulnerability of the nonnormative subjects in the hands of police, the portraits literally recreate the danger of the 'heterosexual gaze' – non-heteronormative sexuality becomes discursively and physically visible as existing under the scrutiny of the (moralizing) eyes of the (heterosexual) others. *My 'Porn' Is My Right* is, of course, a direct dissenting move by Belov against the conservative legislative initiatives or police violence which could harm him personally. Yet, like Belov' other works, the connection between vision and power is not one-

directional. The imaginary glass that separates the audience and the characters of *My 'Porn' Is My Right* places an audience either in the position of (willing or unwilling) voyeurs, in the position of the 'police' observing a 'criminal', or in the position of the characters themselves being reflected in the mirror. All positions are equally uncomfortable for the (hetero)normative gaze: they are subverted by the defiant statements of the characters, their poses and direct gaze.

Belov's inclusion of naked male bodies in the public space of L'viv subverts its presumed 'morality' and normativity. After appearing in public space, the artworks were partially censored – the genitalia of the characters were painted over or cut off, while the rest of the images were left intact. It is important to note that Belov's exclusion of other bodies and subjects from claiming sexually explicit self-portraiture as their 'right' is telling of the ways female, and other bodies are fetishized and exploited in conventional pornography yet rendered invisible as sexual subjects.

4.3. 'Homophobia Today - Genocide Tomorrow!'

Speaking from a marginalised position, Belov's works became an integral part of many coalitions and initiatives, mentioned above, and reflect the complexity in the sexual, gender and civic dissent of the time. In his works, Belov shifted between turning to individual and collective dissent. *We Are Not Marginals!* was exploring the possibilities for nonnormative dissent; in contrast, *My Porn is My Right* used human rights rhetoric to speak on individual rights as a site of politics. Belov's next work took a more radical turn, pointing out both violence in the present reality, and the historical connections between oppressive formations.

As a response to far-right attacks on the Ya Gallery in 2009, Belov created a series entitled *Homophobiia siogodni - henotsyd zavtra!* ([Ukr.] *Homophobia Today – Genocide Tomorrow!*). The series presents white masculine figures running naked (Appendix A, Figures 18-19). The figures

have Ku Klux Klan capes on their heads, no eyes and animal chaps and claws. They hold flags with swastikas and Molotov cocktail bottles in their hands and have the same burning bottles instead of penises. 'Гомофобія сьогодні – геноцид завтра!' ([Ukr.] 'Homophobia today - genocide tomorrow!') is written by the figures in Ukrainian, and the 'Г' letters become part of the swastikas, again pointing to the fascist roots of homophobic violence.

While the characters of Belov's previous (*How much is)Why morals?* project are encaged and 'brainless', half-humans and half-shopping trolleys, moving slowly and often with no purpose, the characters of the '*Homophobia today – genocide tomorrow!'* are half-humans and half-beasts. They are fast, and their movement is attacking; yet they are literally blind, which can be a reference to the 'blind hatred'. The images thus show the chaotic and irrational character of violence. The white masculine young body, in contrast with the bodies from *My Porn Is My Right!* project is not the object of self-exploration or scrutiny. It literally becomes a tool of threat and violence which is symbolised by the erected penis turning into the Molotov cocktail.

Belov's *How much/Why morality? wa*s a question, addressed to society; instead, *Homophobia Today – Genocide Tomorrow!* is a direct dissenting statement that is aimed at pointing to the threat of homophobic and racist violence and mobilizing resistance against far-right attackers. Pointing to the dangers of the future, it also points to the past, connecting fascist genocide and homophobia of the past with the present rise of the far-right movement. In this regard, Belov's work becomes a powerful anti-fascist and intersectional critique, establishing a temporality of violence, concealed by normative nationalist histories and accounts of genocide.

The project *Homophobia Today – Genocide Tomorrow!* appeared in different formats, and these formats point to different coalitions of civic dissent that included sexual dissent. The first appearance was as a series of posters (Appendix A, Figures 18-19). The posters were put around Kyiv during

the street art project organised by Hudrada group in 2009. 'The poster campaign against homophobia and other forms of fear' was a street project that united artists from Kyiv, Kharkiv, Berlin, Moscow, Saint Petersburg; some posters were also given by the Zagreb queer festival. The project was an artistic/activist response to the far-right attacks, as well as a critique of the general 'right consensus' in society (Hudrada 2009). Belov's image became a useful political tool: it was used for the poster of the Visual Culture Research Centre conference on 'The Ideology of Difference' devoted to anti-racism, xenophobia and neofascism. Finally, the series, as well as other Belov's works, were also published in *ProStory* journal. While often functioning within the gallery and institutional spaces, Belov's artistic dissent part of the collective intersectional grassroots dissent imagining alternatives to both conservative and liberal understandings of nonnormativity.

Chapter III: Conclusion

As seen from this chapter, in parallel with the development of civic dissent during and after the Orange Revolution, a development of new social formations and a change in public discourses took place. This chapter has traced the development of the 'anti-gender' movement and the National Committee on Protection of Public Morals in the mid-2000s. In both of these formations, we witness the intertwining of 'morality' and 'traditional values' discourses with the ideas of the nation and citizenship. Like the anti-gender movement of the time, far-right movement discourses framed normativity as part of 'national values/traditions' in opposition to the 'corrupt liberal West', and the nonnormative subjects become targets for far-right violence as far-right groups develop.

The chapter also traced the development of two vectors of sexual and gender dissent, pointing to the nonnormative formations of the time. The first

vector is related to the growth and unification of the LGBT NGOs in the mid-2000s; the second vector is related to the development of the 'new left' movements and coalitional grassroots dissent. As I argue in the chapter, the 'human rights' activism of the professionalised NGOs promoted a liberal understanding of human rights, and separated the 'LGBT' into a category that was to be protected by the state. Through the activity of Women Network I explored knowledge production around gender and sexuality in the 2000s, and the connections between gender studies, professionalised activism and grassroots activism. Grassroots initiatives on the radical left differed from the LGBT organisations of the time in promoting an intersectional approach to the human rights struggle, seeing the struggle against the oppression of nonnormative people as inseparable from other forms of struggle.

Anatoliy Belov's works lie at the intersection of the neo-traditionalist turn, on the one side, and the NGO and coalitional dissent opposing it, on the other side. Through the analysis of Belov's works, the chapter explored Belov's sexual dissent as civic dissent. Belov actively opposes the discourses of 'traditional values' or 'morality', employing the human rights discourse, but also a variety of creative devices to convey his dissenting position. In *(How much is)Why Morals?*, he de-essentialises 'morals' as a construct and traces the connection between the politics of morality and capitalist relations. *My Porn Is My Right!* is read by me as presenting a reality of the 'heteronormative panopticon' via the visual imagery of the mirror reflection, a reflection that unsettles the normative gaze of the audience. Finally, *Homophobia Today – Genocide Tomorrow!* is an example of intersectional artistic and political dissent that subverts nationalist historical narratives and employs a different temporality. Belov's project does not align with the traditional understanding of 'genocide' in Ukraine as something that only happened in the past. It also opposes the 'genocide rhetoric' of the 'anti-gender' formations that imply that nonnormative relations and lives lead to the genocide of the Ukrainian nation.

Finally, it also does not align with the liberal idea of the inevitable 'progress' of Ukraine during the process of its Europeanisation. Instead, in alignment with the intersectional understanding of political struggle, Belov presents a possible dystopian future. He actively points to the connection between the contemporary attacks of the far-right groups on non-white and nonnormative subjects as those 'excluded' from the idea of 'Ukrainian nation', and makes far-right violence visible both literally and politically. Genocide thus becomes not the past, but rather a possible future, that depends on the politics of the present, and the struggle for nonnormative lives is viewed as part of the struggle for all lives.

It is crucial to understand Belov's art as a form of civic sexual dissent provoked by the political changes and existing within specific networks. However, it is also important to ask what his works can tell us about Belov's understanding of nonnormativity and the discourse around sexuality and gender in the 2000-2010s. In the next chapter, I will turn to the analysis of the sexual and gender dissent in 2010-2013, through the examples of the Feminist Ofenzyva activist group, and the Lyudska Podoba music collective. I will look at the artistic strategies employed to represent nonnormativity. I will also further explore Belov's sonic and cinematic work in 2010-2013. I will not just consider the metaphors and settings of nonnormativity that emerge in musical and cinematic projects, but also the new framings of 'queer' in Ukraine.

CHAPTER IV. DISSENT AS 'TRANSGRESSING THE SACRED': 2010-2013

In this chapter, I will first examine the changes in state politics that took place in 2010-2013. These changes were influenced by Viktor Yanukovych becoming President of Ukraine in 2010. Yanukovych started a process of the authoritarian consolidation of power, subordinating the judicial branch and expanding control of his Party of Regions (Kudelia 2014). He officially supported an action plan for Ukraine toward the establishment of a visa-free regime with the EU. However, governmental politics in accomplishing this action plan were not consistent. In contrast with pro-European and ethnonationalist politics of Yushchenko, Yanukovych supported an 'East Slavic' identity that promoted cooperation with Russia, Orthodox Christianity and social conservatism (Gorbach [n.d.]).

We can observe the consolidation of the 'traditional/family values' discourses, and the shifts in legislation in 2010-2013 reflect these changes.

In the first part of the chapter I will examine the further development of the 'anti-gender' formations, and briefly describe some examples of intersectional (artistic) dissent against these changes. As a small case study of the intersectional activist dissent and artistic strategies employed by the street activists, I will examine the activity of the Feminist Ofenzyva collective. I will then focus on Lyudska Podoba musical collective. Belov's lyrics and performance in the band, I believe, are useful to study with regard to the dissent of the time. Concluding the chapter is a close analysis of one song by Lyudska Podoba, 'To Transgress the Sacred', and the music video made for the song. As in the previous chapters, my focus is not just on the imaginaries of nonnormativity, but on spatial and temporal settings within the artwork, and their relationship to the constructs of 'traditions' and/or 'modernity'.

1. 'Traditional values' in 2010-2013

By 2010 many 'anti-gender' initiatives were actively networking with and

supported by international political actors to ensure opposition to the EU and 'protection of family values'. For example, Bat'kivskyi Komitet ([Ukr.] 'Parent Committee'), an organisation that appeared in Kharkiv as a local group in 2006, by 2013 developed into an all-Ukrainian movement and networked with such conservative 'anti-gender' organisations as French La Manif pour Tous, American World Congress of Families and Serbian radical right Dveri movement (Bat'kivs'kyĭ komitet Ukraïny and Feder 2013).

The Ukraine For the Family all-Ukrainian movement started to organise state-supported regional 'family congresses'[49] (the first All-Ukrainian Family Forum took place in 2012), in collaboration with the other Ukrainian 'anti-gender' groups and the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches.

The activity of these groups, as well as following the example of Russian conservative legislation, influenced state politics in 2010-2013. Morals in state discourse became even more closely intertwined with reproduction and 'traditional family'. Oleksandra Tarkhanova (2018: 57) shows that biopolitical paternalism and pronatalism in Ukraine developed as 'products of the national ideology behind the parent-state'. Tarkhanova traces how increased welfare provision to mothers was extended after 2004 to stimulate birth rates of 'healthy children', continued until 2014, and was framed in conservative terms:

> Reproduction in the name of the nation-state is reproduction of healthy individuals, where health is connected to intellectual and moral development. "Upbringing potential," understood as the capacity to birth physically healthy children and invest time and money into raising them "properly," belongs to middle-class families in this discourse, and from this point on it is subjected to direct state

[49] See, for example, 'Luchan Zaproshuiut' Na Simeinyi Forum' 2013.

involvement.

However, in the 2010s, the government set out to reformulate state family politics. During a discussion on the institution of family in Ukraine in 2011, politicians framed the low birth rate as a crisis caused by 'propaganda of homosexualism' and 'sexual revolution'; this crisis, in their opinion, should be solved by the state 'propaganda of family values' ('Instytut Sim'ï v Ukraïni: Stan, Problemy Ta Shliakhy Ïkh Vyrishennia' 2011).

An inter-faction deputy group entitled 'For Spirituality, Morality and Health of Ukraine' participated in lobbying several legislative initiatives introduced to the government in 2011-2012: on 'protection of public morals', on changing Ukrainian legislation regarding abortions, and on 'prohibition of propaganda of homosexualism aimed at children'. The laws were proposed by the members of the pro-Russian Party of Regions and Communist Party.

In Russia an important shift was taking place at the time. In 2012, Vladimir Putin returned to the Presidency. Thereafter, 'traditional values' became part of the official state rhetoric, which also marked a closer alliance between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church. In his 2013 speech, Putin stated that a new ideology, based on 'traditional values', was needed in Russia:

> Мы видим, как многие евроатлантические страны фактически пошли по пути отказа от своих корней, в том числе и от христианских ценностей, составляющих основу западной цивилизации. Отрицаются нравственные начала и любая традиционная идентичность: национальная, культурная, религиозная или даже половая. Проводится политика, ставящая на один уровень многодетную семью и однополое партнёрство, веру в бога или веру в сатану.

> [Russ.] We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan ('Zasedanie Mezhdunarodnogo Diskussionnogo Kluba "Valdai"' 2013).

In accordance with this 'traditional values' ideology, the Government of the Russian Federation in 2012 reduced the list of l indications for induced abortion. This change was influenced by Russian anti-gender initiatives and the Russian Orthodox Church. As noted by Boris Denisov and Victoria Sakevich (2022), 'anti-abortion rhetoric has become one of the tools for promoting "traditional values"'. Simultaneously. legislation against the 'propaganda of homosexualism to minors' was adopted by different regions of the Russian Federation in 2011-2012, and a national law followed, adopted in June 2013.

Russia's legislation and public discourses of the time influenced the wording of similar anti-abortion initiatives and initiatives against the 'propaganda of homosexualism' in Ukraine. Homosexuality in Ukrainian legislative acts was framed as 'immoral', 'filth and debauchery', 'sexual perversion' endangering 'national security' and leading to AIDS epidemics; as such, it was aligned with both pornography and violence (Tsar'kov and others 2011). Bureichak (2014) notes that all law projects had a common denominator of 'strengthening morals' by means of controlling the sexuality of specific groups; this control was explained by the need of 'protection of the children' (as the 'future of the nation'). 'Moral' paternalist solutions were,

therefore, invented as a response to economic and social problems.

2. *The rise of 'kvir' activism in the 2000s*

In the 2000s a new term for identity, subjectivity and political activism against 'traditional values' politics appeared – *kvir*. By analyzing the uses of *kvir* in the two vectors of dissent (LGBT NGOs and radical grassroots movement) I will show that they involved different social formations and produced different political identifications.

'Queer' was never a derogatory or dehumanizing term in Ukraine, and (as an adopted term) is still not very well-known in society. Some researchers (see Usmanova 2017) argue that the term entered use precisely because it was unknown in Ukrainian society; therefore, it was safer to hold *kvir* events rather than 'gay' or other events. The transposition of the term into the Ukrainian context happened through institutions and via Internet communities, yet it was interpreted differently in different formations.

The explanation most commonly used by LGBT NGOs and their media resources referred to 'queer' as a noun or adjective, an umbrella term describing 'LGBT' experiences or community, or designating a person ('queer-person') or group existing outside the boundaries of gender, sexuality or strict categorisations. The Insight LGBT organisation actively introduced 'kvir' since 2008. The organisation promoted the idea of *kvir* as an umbrella term, a separate identity or a metaphor for diversity. A summer 'kvir-camp' started in 2009 was aiming at 'uniting and strengthening LGBTQ community' ('Letniĭ Kvir-Lager'' 2009). The mailing list of Insight NGO was called 'queer-world': 'Это сообщество КВИР-людей - лесбиянок, бисексуальных людей, геев, трансов и просто интересных и небезраличных людей' ([Russ.] 'It is a community of KVIR-people - lesbians, bisexual people, gays, trans and just interesting people and people who care') ('Rassylka QUEER-WORLD' 2008).

Similarly, the 'Kvir Tyzhden' ([Ukr.] 'Queer Week') yearly art festival,

organised by Insight NGO since 2008 aimed to 'show the great diversity, present in our society' ('Kvir-Nedelia' 2009).

Using 'queer' was often a gesture of aligning oneself with 'Western' funds and organisations that used the term in such a way. For example, 'queer' was used in English without translation simultaneously with Ukrainian transliteration in the case of Queer Film Fest international film festival, organised by Kyiv Pride group in Kyiv in 2012.[50] The website of Queer Film Fest stated: 'У поняття «квір» багато значень, але одне загальне єднальне - прагнення розширити часом занадто жорсткі рамки стереотипів' ([Ukr.] 'The notion of 'kvir' has many meanings, but the one universal and common element is striving to widen the sometimes too rigid boundaries of stereotypes') ('Khto My?' 2013).

In grassroots Kyiv activism, *kvir* was embraced rather as a dissent against cisheteronormativity interlocked with other forms of oppression. This understanding of *kvir*, as well as the ideas about gender and sexuality, were influenced by the information exchange with the autonomous lesbian, feminist, queer and anarchist groups from abroad ('Feministskaia Vstrecha Zhenshchin i Lesbiianok' 2009). In contrast with LGBT NGOs, anarcho-feminists were much more open and vocal in their critique of police violence, nationalism, capitalism and gender binary, and embraced *kvir* as a term that would reflect this critique and their political positionings. The Svobodna anarcho-feminist group introduced *kvir* in 2008 on its website as a 'contemporary antonym to heteronormativity' (Dovgopol 2008). A graffiti campaign organised by anarchist activists in 2008 on St Valentine's Day aimed at 'обратить внимание людей на проблему агресивной

[50] The festival was cancelled in 2012, but took place in 2013, see the website of the festival https://web.archive.org/web/20120812083912/http://www.queerfilmfest.org/ (accessed 16 January 2021).

гетеросексуальности и оправдываемого ею потребления' ([Russ.] 'drawing people's attention to the problem of aggressive heterosexuality and to the consumption, justified by it') ('Trafarety k 14 Fevralia v Kieve' 2008). Such framing opposed both heteronormativity and capitalist consumption as intersecting.[51] The gender binary was critiqued in the Svobodna website interface (the main page featured a drawing of a human figure with constantly changing clothes, haircuts, faces, etc.), and in articles and zines on Svobodna website (see 'D.i.Y.' 2008).

While LGBT NGOs used *kvir* mainly for cultural events, grassroots activists embraced the term as a political identity to organise street actions. On May 17th, 2008 'representatives of Anarcho-Queer group' together with the Insight initiative (soon to be registered as an LGBT organisation) took part in a demonstration against homophobia ('17 Maia Po TSentru Kieva Proshelsia Marsh Protiv Gomofobii' 2008). However, on the night preceding the demonstration, queer anarcho-feminists made a separate street art action entitled 'Smeni odezhdu – izbav'sia ot stereotipov' ([Russ.] 'Change your clothes – get rid of stereotypes'). During this action, they dressed Kyiv memorials to men in skirts and dresses (Appendix A, Figure 20).

They claimed:

> Активистки считают, что понятия 'женский' и 'мужской' - это гендерные категории, навязанные социумом, и что пол человека не должен обуславливать его поведение, внешний вид и одежду.
>
> [Russ.] Activists [feminine gender] consider the notions of 'female' and 'male' to be gender categories dictated by society, and that the

[51] See more on development of grassroots queer and feminist activism in the next chapters.

> person's sex should not precondition this person's behaviour, appearance and clothing ('Smeni Odezhdu - Izbav'sia or Stereotipa' 2008).

While activists' stance was clearly a critique of the rigid gender binary system in Ukrainian society, the action revealed more connotations. Happening a year after Anatoliy Belov made his *We Are Not Marginals!* project, the queer anarchist action was yet another intervention into the normativity of public space. Changing the clothes of the monuments made visible the canon of national memory politics as male-dominated and heteronormative. No matter whether the reclothed monuments were to commemorate historical figures (like the writer Mikhail Bulgakov) or fictional characters, the prevalence of male figures in the Kyiv cityscape was made obvious. By putting skirts, dresses and scarfs on these male figures, the anonymous activists made them gender-ambiguous, and undermined their normativity, 'respectability' and 'decency'. Such a playful approach opened the sculptures to a variety of nonnormative readings. For example, in a monument to the characters of the famous Ukrainian film *Za dvoma zaitsiamy* ([Ukr.] *Chasing Two Hares*, dir. Viktor Ivanov, 1961) , a male character is depicted standing on one knee and proposing to a female one. By dressing the male sculpture in a skirt, activists subverted the heteronormative idea of the proposal. Breaking the idea of characters' fixed gender and sexuality, the action introduced a more open and playful scene.

The action was carried out by the grassroots activists who embraced *kvir* not just as an identity, but as a political practice of 'queering' – namely, queering the normative public space. By doing so, they revealed the concealed heterogeneity of gender expressions, sexualities and kinships. In the words of Carlos Jacques (2016),

Queering space thus involves a potentially extraordinary variety of events of appropriation and transformation of straight, hierarchical spaces and the creation of counter, queer, horizontal, autonomous spaces in the interstices/margins of dominant space for the proliferation of new pleasures, desires, subjectivities.

3. *Desacralising traditions: Feminist Ofenzyva and artistic/activist dissent in 2010-2013*

By 2012 the consolidation of LGBT NGOs led to the announcement of the first *Marsh Rivnosti* ([Ukr.] 'March of Equality') LGBT demonstration that was about to take place in Kyiv in May 2012. The idea of a 'Pride' demonstration was promoted by the NGOs since the 2000s: they envisioned it as a necessary political tool in achieving full spectrum of human rights (see Plakhotnik 2019 for a more detailed analysis). Yet, the March of Equality in Kyiv was met with resistance from various religious and conservative groups and initiatives; far-right groups actively called for violence against its participants in social networks. As a result of this backlash, the organisers had to cancel the demonstration (see Mishchenko 2016). The March of Equality took place in 2013, but not in the central part of Kyiv, as the city council banned all public events that could take place in the city centre on that day. The demonstration involved from 50 to 100 people and was guarded by the several hundred riot policemen (Grybanov and others 2018: 229). In the beginning of the 2010s some LGBT NGOs, namely Insight and Sfera organisations, were also actively involved in promoting women's rights, and Insight also started to engage in trans*activism (see more on transgender activism in the next chapter).

The new regime's general politics, as well as the rising activity of the far-right groups, also motivated further coalitional actions within grassroots activism. One of the many examples of the intersectional coalitional dissent that takes place at the time is the 'Antyiolka' ([Ukr.] 'Anti-Christmas Tree') street action. On November 20th, 2010, an event on combating violence against transgender people in Ukraine, organised by the Insight LGBT organisation and hosted by the Visual Culture Research Centre, was attacked by the far-right. Shortly before, a far-right group attempted to disrupt the meeting of the Direct Action student union. As a result, on December 11,

2010, an action entitled 'Antylolka' took place in Kyiv. The action marked the International Human Rights Day but united various initiatives and political struggles that included NGOs, cultural 'new' left initiatives and grassroots groups: Insight LGBT organisation, Visual Culture Research Centre, Hudrada, *Spil'ne* and *ProStory* journals. Zahyst Pratsi ([Ukr.] Labour Protection) independent workers' union and Direct Action student union joined the protest, as well as Antifascist Action, Organisation of Marxists and the *'Vil'na spilka'* organisation of anarchists. The action was also supported by several LGBT NGOs, Ukrainian Helsinki Union on Human Rights, 'Bez kordoniv' ([Ukr.] No Borders) project and other organisations.

Activists protested against the violation of the rights of LGBT community and other forms of discrimination, as well as the actions of the new government: the commercialisation of education, the adoption of the new Labour, Housing and Tax codes and what they believed to be the neoliberal pension reform (Belov 2010). These views differed from the politics of Europeanisation that promoted a certain type reforms as a necessary part of the country's 'modernisation'. Protesters carried a rainbow flag in the lead of the demonstration, as well as posters such as 'Prava ne daiut', prava berut'' ([Ukr.] 'Rights are not given, rights are taken'). Creative posters were made by participating artists (Appendix A, Figures 22-24). While far from being unproblematic,[52] this action is an example of a 'multi-issue' politics and coalitional and intersectional sexual and gender dissent that developed in the 2010s and did not align with the Europeanisation discourses.

[52] A certain degree of 'othering' of LGBT activists and the construction of the leftist activists as heterosexual allies are present in the description of the event in the reports about the action published on the leftist websites (V.Z. 2010; Redperets 2010).

While anarcho-feminist activism, explored in the previous chapter, continued throughout the 2000s and 2010s,[53] a shift in activist formations took place with the Feministychna Ofenzyva ([Ukr.] Feminist Ofenzyva) activist group appearing at the beginning of 2010s. I have written about Feminist Ofenzyva elsewhere (Dmytryk 2016), focusing in particular on the 'Feminist Work Unit' art project carried out by the group, feminist curatorship and the group's influence on institutionalised art. For the purposes of my present analysis, I will focus on Feminist Ofenzyva's influence on feminist and coalitional activism.

Feminist Ofenzyva appeared as a separatist radical feminist group in 2010, continuing the tradition of feminist demonstrations on the 8th of March, and organising other public events, such as conferences, exhibitions, film festivals.

The mission of the group framed feminism as intersectional struggle:

> We struggle not for equality between women and men in a society that remains patriarchal. We fight to overcome patriarchal forms of power in its various manifestations – sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, racism, and chauvinism (Feminist Ofenzyva 2012).

Not defining itself as an anarcho-feminist group, Feminist Ofenzyva nevertheless supported broader leftist politics, arguing for the need for economic rights for women (Feminist Ofenzyva 2012) and protesting against

[53] It is worth mentioning the 'Tovaryshka' website of libertarian feminists (tovaryshka.info) that appeared in 2013 (available via web.archive.org, accessed 11 March 2021); 'Take back the night' actions and 'Good Night Macho Pride' festivals organised by Ukrainian anarcho-feminists since 2011.

gender discrimination as leverage of capitalism (Feminist Ofenzyva 2011). The group itself presented an alliance of feminists from different backgrounds. Some Feminist Ofenzyva members were academic feminists (such as, but not limited to, Mariya Mayerchyk and Olga Plakhotnik, mentioned in the previous chapters), some were members of Visual Culture Research Centre and ProStory collectives, mentioned earlier, or grassroots leftist groups such as Direct Action, Left Opposition and Autonomous Workers Union. Some members were also affiliated with foundations and NGOs (such as Insight LGBT organisation, Heinrich Boell Foundation, Erste Foundation) that enabled further networking and access to funding cultural events and conferences organised by the group.

As part of a transversal formation, Feminist Ofenzyva members had direct access to different communities and networks of dissent, yet were free to form their own agenda. In 2011, Feminist Ofenzyva announced a public feminist demonstration on the 8th of March. In contrast with some previous demonstrations, the feminist marches on the 8th of March organised by Feminist Ofenzyva in 2011-2013 each had a main 'theme' or focus which presented a response to the current situation and could focus media and popular attention on a specific problem. For example, the first demonstration was entitled 'Vos'me bereznia – politychne sviato' ([Ukr.] '8th of March is a political holiday') which reframed the meaning of the day. Jessica Zychowicz (2020: 135–36), analysing Feminist Ofenzyva's rthetorics, stated that the group:

> [...] situated their movement vis-à-vis calls for the massive restructuring of family, work, and leisure, mirroring events dating to the turn of the twentieth century. The group's orientation towards this earlier moment of social upheaval drew a parallel between the hollow emancipation proclaimed by the Soviets and the false

> statements of progress under Yanukovych, when the group formed. [...] By publicizing the labour rights of women, including the woman intellectual as a special kind of labourer, Ofenzywa foregrounded the daily work that women do as a primary ideological site, and, in particular, the asymmetry of power relations between genders as one that pervades every corner of society, and has survived every regime change in Ukraine.

The 8th of March demonstration in 2011 was also envisioned as coalitional, involving the Visual Culture Research Centre, Organisation of Marxists and IT industry trade union among the co-organisers. In the later years, other leftist groups joined this alliance, such as Autonomous Workers Union and Direct Action student union. Feminist Ofenzyva also participated in public events with leftist agenda, such as 1 of May coalitional demonstration on the International Workers' Day, and Student Union Forum, organised by the Direct Action union (Rachok 2011). This strategy is symptomatic of the coalitional dissent practised by the grassroots groups in the 2000s and early 2010s and described earlier.

Carrying out their politics in alignment with leftist groups, Feminist Ofenzyva envisioned feminist dissent as both gender and sexual dissent. The beginning of the 2010s was a time of significant legislative attacks on reproductive and sexual rights: the attempts to limit access to abortions and to ban 'propaganda of homosexuality'. Therefore, the focus of the group from the very beginning was on combating the neo-traditionalist turn, 'anti-gender' groups and conservative legislation. Feminist Ofenzyva became one of the few activist groups which advocated for the rights of lesbian and bisexual women, non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people in statements and actions. The theme slogans for the 8th of March demonstrations, such as 'Церкві й державі час жити нарізно!' ([Ukr.] 'It is time for Church and State

to live apart!') and 'Досить прикривати нерівність традиціями!' ([Ukr.] 'Enough of covering up inequality with traditions!') directly opposed the conservative turn, the religious right, and the rhetoric of 'traditional values' employed by anti-gender groups. Focusing mostly on 'women' in its rhetoric, the group members nevertheless supported the deconstruction of gender and sexual binary in their publications (Shymko 2012) and group conferences – mainly through the idea of 'queer'.

Feminist Ofenzyva organised regular international feminist conferences. The conferences were open to all, with childcare available at the site to maximise participation. The conference presenters included academic and independent scholars, representatives of NGOs and of the grassroots queer, lesbian and feminist initiatives. Such a combination reflected the production of knowledge within the group itself, combining academia and activism.

This was the first time that queer feminist panels were included at a conference on gender. These panels included discussions on the relationship and tensions between feminist and LGBT activism, and on the emancipatory potential of queer sexuality as a political act. 'Тож чи можлива емансипація ЛГБТ або будь-якої іншої групи без радикального підходу, який означатиме з(а)міну самої системи, а не пересування фігур у її межах' ([Ukr.] So is the emancipation of the LGBT or any other group possible without a radical approach that would mean changing or replacing the system itself, rather than moving the chess figures within it?') was one of the conference statements-questions.[54] 'Queer' was thus envisioned as an embedded part of feminist struggle, a radical political, but also a critique of existing LGBT activism 'from the inside' – a tendency that we will see developing after 2014.

[54] See https://ofenzyva.wordpress.com/2013/03/03/conference/ [accessed 17 April 2023]

While some of the presenters came from the US or Western European countries, the focus of the conferences was often on 'de-Westernising' knowledge production via the dialogue between Ukrainian feminists and feminists from the Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The conferences offered a space for a feminist, queer and leftist critique of both neo-traditionalism and neoliberalism, searching for alternatives to both regimes of power.

Such a search was evident in the group's artistic decisions as well. Similar to the actions of queer anarchists and anarcho-feminists, described earlier, Feminist Ofenzyva also explored the possibilities of 'repurposing' patriarchal public space and dis-identifying with traditional culture. In 2012, the activists created purple headscarves that all participants of the 8th of March demonstration could wear. At the end of the demonstration, the activists put a purple headscarf on the statue of Lesya Ukrainka. Lesya Ukrainka, a famous Ukrainian poet of the XIX century, is a part of a national literary canon. While Ukrainka's poetry is celebrated, her support of socialist ideas and of women emancipation, as well the homoerotic character of her relationship with Olga Kobylians'ka, another prominent Ukrainian writer (see Pavlychko 1999), are often concealed in Ukrainian public discourses. Putting a purple headscarf on the statue of Ukrainka meant not just intervening in and subverting normative public space, but re-inventing feminist tradition by claiming temporal alliances.

Another example of dis-identification as an artistic strategy is the logo of the 2013 demonstration 'Dosyt' prykryvaty nerivnist' tradytsiiamy!' ([Ukr.] 'Enough of covering up inequality with traditions!', see Appendix A, Figure 21). The logo imitates cross-stitch embroidery – traditional Ukrainian craft, usually carried out by women. Instead of the usual embroidery patterns, the phrase-slogan of the demonstration is 'embroidered'. Also, the ornament around the phrase presents schematic images of what I read as 'men' and 'women' in black and red colours, with 'men' depicted higher than 'women'. In the middle

of the picture, there are schematic images of 'women' depicted in purple colour who hold hands. The purple raised fist, combined with a 'broken' Venus symbol (a symbol widely used to represent trans-inclusive feminism) is depicted in the middle, 'hitting' the word 'inequality'. The image, therefore, is both referencing traditions (in its message and form) and breaking with them.

Similar artistic disidentification practices were explored during the demonstration in 2012, this time working with different traditions. One of the artists invited for the 'Women's Work Unit', Umnaia Masha ([Russ.] 'Wise Masha'), sewed the 'holy banners' with Ukrainian artists Ira Gnil' and Alevtina Kakhidze. The inspiration for 'holy banners' was found in handmade banners created by the members of the international women's suffrage movement at the beginning of the 20th century. In this reading, the activists/artists create transnational connection between different generations of feminists (see Dmytryk 2016).

However, these banners also resemble *khoruhvy* - religious banners used liturgically in the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches, and I believe it is this connotation that recognized more by the spectators of the demonstration. Imitating *khoruhvy* in form, these feminist 'holy banners' carried dissenting political messages and imagery. The 'holy banners' proclaimed 'Tserkva, derzhava, ruky het' vid moho tila' ([Ukr.] 'Church, state, hands off my body'), and 'Net – bednosti, nasiliiu i nevezhestvu. Net kriminal'nym abortam' ([Russ.] 'No to poverty, violence and ignorance. No to criminal abortions'). The 'holy banners' artworks were displayed in the 'Women's Work Unit' exhibition, and several days later were used as agitation during the 8 March demonstration entitled 'It's Time for Church and State to Live Apart!'.[55] By using these strategies activists/artists who participated in the demonstration defied the neo-traditionalist temporality of the necessary

[55] See the 'holy banners' in the video of the protest in Yeremenko 2012.

‘return to traditional values’, and de-naturalised the ‘sacredness’ of the ‘traditional values’ themselves. I read the *khoruhvy* as making visible and pointing to the social formations involved in the anti-gender backlash.

The activity of Feminist Ofenzyva is yet another example of intersectional dissent that forged coalitions and situational alliances (both with NGOs and grassroots groups). It represents an important step in the development of sexual and gender dissent, as it fostered knowledge production on sexuality and gender, presented an example of queer activism outside the NGO format, and bridged feminist, leftist and queer politics. The group’s statements, artworks and other knowledge production directly pointed to the dangers that the conservative formations represent. The series of protests against the new legislative initiatives contributed to the fact that the attempts to introduce the laws currently adopted in Russia (on limited access to abortions or banning ‘propaganda of homosexuality’) failed in Ukraine in the 2010s. In the next section, I will turn to another example of artistic sexual and gender dissent, this time in the form of the music collective Lyudska Podoba.

4. Lyudska Podoba: aliens against shame

In 2012 Anatoliy Belov met with a musician and director Heorhii Babanskyi and co-founded the Lyudska Podoba ([Ukr.] ‘Human Shape’) music group. Belov became the lyric writer and the lead singer of the group; soon Ivanna Yarema joined the group as a backing vocalist; Oleksandr Ratushnyak is a live drummer and another member of Lyudska Podoba. The title of the group, ‘Lyudska Podoba’ (can also be translated as ‘human resemblance’), originates from Belov’s graphic work (Appendix A, Figure 25). The drawing depicts a person with long hair covering the face standing among the trees and presumably getting dressed. The words ‘Я одягнусь, бо в мене зараз людська подоба’ ([Ukr.] ‘I will get dressed, as I have a human shape now’)

appear beneath the image. The use of diagonal lines and light and shadow effects create a visual parallel between the naked human body and the trees around it.

This exploration of the kinship between the human and the nonhuman in relation to sexual and gender dissent is key to understanding Lyudska Podoba*'s* art in general and stems from Belov's graphic works. Throughout Belov's artistic path 'strange characters' would often emerge in different forms to open up the possibilities beyond the 'human' as normative. One of Belov's first artworks consisted of *vytynanky* – paper cut-outs that are part of the traditional Ukrainian craft. Instead of the traditional abstract geometric patterns, Belov's *vytynanky* presented mythological creatures from Ukrainian folklore within the multiplicity of other non-existent characters (Appendix A, Figures 26-27).

In another graphic project, *Naipornohraphichnisha knyha v sviti-2* ([Ukr.] *The Most Pornographic Book in the World-2,* 2012*)*, Belov introduces the image of a 'supernatural child' – the nonnormative child who is a 'supernatural' person in the heteronormative family (Appendix A, Figure 28). The image is based on a photograph from news stories about a 'magnetic boy' in Croatia: a 6-year old boy who supposedly had supernatural ability to stick metal objects to his body (Allen 2011). Belov's image is a copy of the photograph of the 'magnetic boy' with the spoons and forks on his naked body, and the boy's standing family behind him. Yet the 'magnetism' in Belov's image is the boy's nonnormativity. It is revealed through the depiction of the members of the family, who look at the boy, presenting a range of homophobic reactions (in Ukrainian and Russian) varying from shock and worry to disappointment and disgust: 'Не догляділа…' ([Ukr.] 'I overlooked it…'), 'Мой сын - пидар?' ([Ukr.] 'Is my son a faggot?'), 'Може, з молодшого люди будуть…' ([Ukr.] 'Maybe at least his younger brother will grow up to be something…').

These reactions present the familial discovery of the boy's nonnormativity as the discovery of something 'alien' to the family; the child's nonnormativity is highly visible as a strange, supernatural quality, and as such represents to the family its failure to normalise the child and transform the child into the 'proper human'. The child is presented literally as 'affect alien' – in the words of philosopher Sara Ahmed (2010: 49), 'the one who converts good feelings into bad, who as it were "kills" the joy of the family'. This supernatural body that reminds of 'the depth of the culture's assurance (read: insistence) that humanity and heterosexuality are synonymous' (Warner 1993: xxiii). Lyudska Podoba is a project that continues and develops this exploration of the intersection between 'human' and 'norm'.

Lyudska Podoba is a rare band in the beginning of the 2010s that identified itself publicly through 'queerness' and was thus introducing this term to its audience. The description of the group on its profile page on Facebook (in English) uses 'the essence of queerness', 'gender questions' and 'sexuality' as its main interests:

> Lyudska Podoba (Human Shape) band is Ukrainian musical project of five artists, working with audio-visual art. The interest of the band is most of all experiment with sound, research to make the new avant-garde pop sound. By means of universal language improved by band, it speaks about life, love and beauty to destroy borders, stereotypes and standards. The main interest of group is the essence of queerness, gender questions, sexuality, human relationship, love, lack of love.[56]

[56] See the Facebook page of Lyudska Podoba, https://www.facebook.com/LyudskaPodoba/about/?ref=page_internal [accessed 15 December 2020].

For the collective, using *kvir* was perhaps a gesture towards international audiences – as the description of the group on their Facebook page is written in English. However, an emphasis on 'queer' is present in Lyudska Podoba's interviews for Ukrainian media as well. Rather than using *kvir* as a noun designating identity, Belov uses *kvirnost'* or *kvir-tema* ([Russ.] 'queerness'/ 'queer theme') to point to certain identifications, performative qualities, or content. Like activists, described above, Belov used *kvir* in different ways. Sometimes, he uses it as a rather neutral term denoting diversity (Ustinova 2016). For example, in a 2014 interview, Belov states: 'Все мои работы так или иначе объединены общими темами: квирность, человечность, любовь' ([Russ.] 'All my works are one way or another united by common themes: queerness [*kvirnost'*], humane attitude, love') (Bazdyreva 2014). Commenting on the 'queerness' of Lyudska Podoba, Belov also elaborated on the fact that it is his and Georgy's queerness (which is a 'natural extension' of their being) allowed him more freedom of expression than in previous projects. In this interview, Belov uses both 'queerness' and 'oddity' interchangeably. This reminds of his description of the nonnormative and marginal characters in *We Are Not Marginals!* project as 'strange' or 'odd'. Finally, 'queerness' is synonymous with nonheterosexuality for Belov, but also with nonheteronormativity, and nonnormativity as experimental 'oddity' more generally. It is this 'queerness' that is closely related to the 'alien' branding of the group and that I will explore further.

4.1. Alien music: Klaus Nomi and Lyudska Podoba

Ken McLeod (2003) studied space alien identities and themes used by musicians such as David Bowie, George Clinton and Pink Floyd. He stated that these themes often represented not just experimentation with technology and sound or mind-altering drugs, but also sexual or racial alienation – being alienated from dominant cultural structures. I suggest that similar is true of

Lyudska Podoba. Any song or act carried out by Lyudska Podoba would necessarily be marked by the name of the collective as somewhat inhuman, having only 'human shape' – and, similarly, not normative. 'Queerness' as 'oddity' and 'other-than-humanness' reveals itself in the song's themes and lyrics ('queer theme') and Belov's vocal performance as part of the 'infinite freedom of self-expression' acquired by Lyudska Podoba.

The infinite freedom of self-expression was a characteristic trait of Klaus Nomi, a musician that Belov admired and portrayed as one of the 'creative marginals' in the *We Are Not Marginals!* project. Klaus Nomi was met by his contemporaries with fascination. He was described as 'a creature of any state, sex, or sensibility you choose' (quoted in Cvejić 2009: 68). McLeod (2003: 348) considers Nomi to represent 'the most outrageous use of alien identity in the annals of rock music':

> An unabashed opera queen, he created a persona of a glamorous space alien sent to sing pop songs to earthlings. Nomi constructed his image with the help of a space suit, heavy make-up, trademark three-pointed hairdo, and an otherwordly operatic falsetto. [...] Nomi's space-alien persona, alien-sounding counter tenor, and combination of alien genres of opera and rock were symbolic of his sexual alienation from the conventions of traditional 'straight' society.

Nomi's experiments with gender identity, as well as the interest in musical, visual and theatric experimentation were an inspiration for Belov in Lyudska Podoba. At the beginning of its career, the collective often experimented with costumes and appearance. For instance, in one of the early concerts in 2013 the participants were wearing long black skirts and massive 'shoulders' made of leather – perhaps an allusion to Nomi's

geometric avant-garde 'space suit' (Novokhatskyi 2013).

Klaus Nomi's nonnormativity was connected in no small measure (and perhaps first and foremost) to his wide vocal range and the operatic 'androgynous' falsetto voice. Many studies in queer musicology (see Barkin and Hamessley 1999; Brett and others 1994; Peraino 2006; Peraino and Cusick 2013) provide the ideas on how the exploitation of range, register and timbre in vocal production plays a role in defining gender and sexuality. Žarko Cvejić (2009: 71) notes the 'aurally multiple gender' of Nomi's performances: 'what Nomi's audiences faced was the spectacle of a body whose gender was visually undefined producing voices that could seem male or female'.

Lyudska Podoba's aspiration to 'make the new avant-garde pop sound' resembles Nomi's ambition not just visually, but aurally - in Belov's strive towards avant-garde vocalisation. While not being a trained professional singer, Belov often uses his 'head voice' to create operatic falsetto sounding. Ivanna Yarema, another member of Lyudska Podoba, taught him the breathing and vocal techniques that helped Belov to develop his voice.

4.2. Vital materiality in Lyudska Podoba

Belov's vocal range is quite extensive, and he often uses a soft falsetto voice to convey specific affects. For instance, the song 'Moi Rany Plachut' ([Russ.] 'My Wounds Are Crying', Lyudska Podoba 2015, 2018a) is sung in falsetto. In the song, the protagonist describes the emotions caused by 'being caught' by the 'strange music' (see Appendix B, 'Moi Rany Plachut' for lyrics translation). The song describes the hypersensitive affective state caused by the music. The 'strange music' that protagonist hears not just causes emotional pain to the protagonist, this pain is embodied: the music opens the old wounds and makes them cry – and sing. While the gendered adjective endings point at protagonist being male, the song presents an antithesis to hegemonic types of normative masculinity: it is a vulnerable, 'broken and quiet', crying body. This body transcends gender and human status through

its suffering; however, this suffering is presented as lovingly and erotically charged: the body is open to the world through its wounds which are both crying and singing. It conveys the feeling of 'vital materiality' (Bennett 2010: 112) that 'captures an "alien" quality of our own flesh, and in so doing reminds humans of the very *radical* character of the (fractious) kinship between the human and the nonhuman'. The acoustic body intensifies the 'inhuman' feelings of the protagonist's body and the spiritual connotations of the myrrh-pouring wounds. A gentle high-pitched gender-neutral voice creates the acoustic version of 'inhumanness'. The voice is amplified by the special effects (such as echo or glitchy repetition) and ambient 'immersive' arrangement combining electronic beat with a variety of sounds and instruments (such as strings and pipe organ).

The composition 'My Ne Vidim Etikh Zvezd' ([Russ.] 'We Don't See These Stars', Lyudska Podoba 2018b) is also an example of 'queerness' as sung in a high-pitched voice. The lyrics of the song (Appendix B, 'My Ne Vidim Etikh Zvezd') at first resemble folk motifs with reference to the moon and the stars. Yet the chorus is proclaiming that 'everything got excited, everything got perverted', and the next verse describes the moon drowning in sperm, claiming that it also got excited.

Building on folk motifs – possibly pointing to the Pagan Slavic rituals (see Afanas'ev 2013) – Belov imagines 'vital materiality' as sexually charged: every*thing* and every*one* is 'excited and perverted'. Melodically both songs are also built not on contemporary modes of the pop music, but rather on musical scales characteristic of the folk music and medieval church music – so-called Greek scales, Dorian and Mixolydian, respectively. The vocals of both songs revolve around just five notes, and the variations of musical phrases built around these notes resemble folk songs as well, primarily through double repetition of the lines. While the song 'My Wounds Are Crying' is in the minor, which represents the suffering experienced by the protagonist,

‘We Don’t See These Stars’ is in the major and is quite cheerful. The accompaniment presents fast dancing beat and atmospheric electronic strings that echo Belov’s gentle voice.

Another song in which Belov uses his falsetto voice to convey ‘otherworldly’ affective experience is ‘Bantikovyi Vzryv’ ([Russ.] ‘Bow Explosion’). The song presents a surreal vision of death and apocalypse but in the form of a bow explosion (Appendix B, ‘Bantikovyi Vzryv’). Protagonist’s death is also imagined through a metaphor of a heart breaking into a thousand worlds of glitter:

In its ‘strange’ lyrical imaginary of the bow explosion, Lyudska Podoba queers the narrative of death by feminizing it. It creates the interrelation between destruction and death, on the one side, and beauty in the form of bows and glitter, on the other side. The transformation of heart into glitter again crosses the borders between the human and the nonhuman. The body and its environment appear to be inseparable, and the boundaries between them are fluid in the song’s imaginary universe.

Belov’s ‘otherworldly’ high-pitched voice yet again intensifies the preoccupation with the unbecoming and poeticisation of death. In ‘Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect’ (2012: 11) Mel Y. Chen broadens the understanding of ‘queer’ to involve not just ‘exceptions to the conventional ordering of sex, reproduction, and intimacy’: ‘I suggest that queering is immanent to animate transgressions, violating proper intimacies (including between humans and nonhuman things)’. This definition resonates for me with the ‘essence of queerness’ that Belov is expressing or exploring. All songs mentioned above defamiliarise human experience by blurring the borders between animate and inanimate. By doing so, they remind us of the ‘pleasure and potentiality of forms of corporeal communing’ (Luciano and Chen 2015: 185).

4.3. Reclaiming shame: music as dissent

While Belov employs falsetto voice to articulate these 'otherworldly' gender-neutral (dis)embodied states, he also uses a high-pitched voice to intensify very 'earthbound' dissenting songs. The themes and genres of Lyudska Podoba songs vary. Some, such as the songs mentioned above, are not connected to the topics of sexuality or gender directly and present visions, imaginaries or description of affective (eroticized) states; others describe everyday situations.[57] However, many songs of Lyudska Podoba focus explicitly on narrating experience related to homoeroticism and opposition to the sexual norms. Belov published these poems in LiveJournal and in *The Most Pornographic Book in the World-2*, which is symptomatic of general interconnection between different mediums/genres present in Belov's art.

One of the songs (available only as a live concert recording on YouTube, see Lyudska Podoba 2013b) consists of the repetition of the following lines:

> Гомодиктатура - моя мама,
> Гендер — это мой отец.
> Сделаю тебя пидарасом,
> Ценностям семейным пришёл конец.
>
> [Russ.] Homodictatorship is my mum,
> Gender is my father.
> I will make you a faggot,

[57] For instance, 'Mol'' ([Russ.] 'Moth', Lyudska Podoba 2013a) song that jokingly emphasizes the protagonist's poverty. Similarly, the song 'IA Obrechen Na Uspekh' ([Russ.] 'I am doomed to be successful', Lyudska Podoba 2016c) is more about the projection of the desire of fame; some songs are devoted to the drugs and their effect - for instance, 'Diko Pret' ([Russ.] 'Wildly Digging', Lyudska Podoba 2016b).

It is the end of family values.

The song is a response to and subversion of the anti-gender groups rhetoric, with a direct anti-social message. The protagonist is (again) only partially human. It is a child of 'gender' and 'homodictatorship', and such a subversive (nonhuman) creature promises to make a listener into a 'faggot' and ruins family values.

Sexual dissent against the 'traditional values' and heteronormativity is at the core of the song. Reclamation of the negative derogatory 'pidaras' (a homophobic slur in Russian about homosexual men) within a context of a song presents 'queerness' as confrontational, perverting, opposed to the reproduction, as well as to assimilationist and respectability politics. Such negativity is in line with the understanding of queer as anti-social (Halberstam 2008). In contrast to *kvir*, *pidaras* is a well-known homophobic slur. Writing about the reclamation of the pejorative word 'queer' in the USA, Robin Brontsema (2004: 4) states: 'To take up queer is at once to recognize and revolt against homophobia'. Therefore, reclamation of *pidaras*[58] within the context of the song can be seen as 'highlighting homophobia in order to fight it' (Brontsema 2004: 4).

I suggest that 'queerness' for Lyudska Podoba also represents a specific political position - opposing homophobia, xenophobia and sexism. What is interesting to me is not just the lyrics, but the sonic dimension of this song. Stephan Pennington (2013: 857) examines the use of gender variance as a signifier for sexual variance in the production of 'gay' and 'lesbian' speech. According to Pennington, within this production 'some crossgender vocal mannerisms are adopted to signal queerness':

[58] On recent reclaiming of 'pidar' in Belarus see 'Manifest Pidora' 2018.

> For instance, what is perceived of as gay speech involves the increased melodicism, precise articulation, richer hyperbolic vocabulary, and compound polite constructions associated with femininity. Performing gender variance makes sexual variance visible, or in this case, audible.

During his performance Belov playfully repeats the word 'pidarasom' in a 'meowing' falsetto voice in between of the verses, somewhat mimicking the mannerisms of the 'gay speech'. This creates the audible marker of gender variance as sexual variance and thus produces an acoustic dissenting layer in addition to the narrative one.

In the close analysis of one of the most famous Lyudska Podoba song, 'To Transgress the Sacred', I will examine other ways for articulating sexual dissent of the narrative, sonic and visual level.

4.4. 'To Transgress the Sacred': narrative and music

The song 'Prestupit' Sakral'noe' ([Russ.] 'To Transgress the Sacred', Lyudska Podoba 2012) was first featured as a poem in Belov's '*The Most Pornographic Book in the World-2*'. In the verses, the narrator addresses his lover, telling him about their complicated relationship. The narrator's lover has 'animal sex' with him, but does not let the narrator kiss him, does not give him love and emotional warmth. In the chorus, the narrator switches to addressing the audience, explaining why his lover does not kiss: it is because the lover has 'a girlfriend and principles', and because it is punishable to 'transgress the sacred'. The lyrics of the song can be found in Appendix B, 'Prestupit' Sakral'noe'.

The lyrical narrative describes inner homophobia (and closeted sexuality) as a severe problem; it also points to the manifestations of this problem in the normative ideas of what is 'sacred' and what is not. It describes in detail the intimacy of a homosexual personal relationship and articulates trauma

through story-telling. Ann Cvetkovich (2003: 3) states that 'As a name for experiences of socially situated political violence, trauma forges overt connections between politics and emotion'. Belov's song explores the complexities of emotional trauma: the state of vulnerability caused by societal homophobia. While in the Christian tradition 'transgressing the sacred' is related to sexual acts, the lyrical narrative of the song claims that the 'sacred' is not sex, but rather the public heterosexual status that would be lost if the narrator's lover would allow for homoerotic romantic intimacy. The juxtaposition of the 'my lover' and 'does not kiss' in the chorus establishes the relationship between the two men as existing, yet at the same time as non-existent: the lover has a girlfriend, but not a boyfriend. Lyudska Podoba's song through its language constructs and deconstructs the experience of the 'closeted'[59] relationship. The closet in the lyrical narrative is relational. It exists on the level of verbal prohibition and secrecy, but also on the physical level, as the narrator is 'allowed a lot', but forbidden specific romantic bodily expressions, such as kissing. Thus, touching the lips becomes an unspoken act of crossing a physical and symbolic boundary, as a kiss represents the 'sacred' zone that distinguishes 'animal sex' from a loving relationship (and implicitly, heterosexual from homosexual behaviour) to the lover. The narrator in such a relationship suffers from the unrequited love, realizing his loneliness, 'kissing other young men', yet coming back to his lover.

The song can be read as just the confessional expression of trauma; however, the construction of the narrative points to its dissenting capability. The authorial voice creates a powerful act of disclosure of the relationship between the narrator and his lover. It questions and makes suspect the

[59] See 'Epistemology of the Closet' Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) on the relations of the 'closet' as the relations of the known and the unknown, secrecy and disclosure, private and public.

presumed heterosexuality of 'normative-acting' men, as it shows that those who seem to adhere 'to traditional values' and have relationships with women, can still secretly engage in gay sex. The shift between addressing the lover and the audience helps to modulate the change between the affective experiences and the distanced experience of witnessing and analyzing the relationship. The phrase 'it is punishable to transgress the sacred' represents both acknowledging societal norms, but also their implicit critique. Finally, the perceived confessionalism and sentimentality of the song is also filled with irony. Such is the mentioning of the 'golden shower' that 'washes away' the narrator's dreams – explicit naming of a sexual practice disrupts the narrative that otherwise does not mention sex and centres around romantic feelings. This situates the song in the realm of the 'new sincerity' mode, which allows the author to be committed to the ideals discussed, while at the same time being 'acutely self-aware and self-ironic' (2008: 258).

The song works in a similar vein on a level of the 'audial voice': it is through the music that, in Belov's words, 'сумний гей-мєдляк перетворюється на політичну маніфестацію' ([Ukr.] 'a sad gay slow burner turns into a political manifestation') (Anatoliy Belov 2012). Belov's does not use his falsetto voice. On the contrary, his voice is low with occasional growling. Yet, like other Lyudska Podoba songs, this voice is also 'inhuman' - it is denaturalised and distorted. Belov sings in a slow tempo as if the vocal is being played back at half speed. His vocals are low (narcotic) drawl, often deliberately slightly off beat and out of tune. Belov's voice in the verse parts is not 'pretty'/harmonic – instead, it is 'anti-social' in its embrace of negativity and opposition to the mainstream contemporary music vocal techniques. Drawling, growling, chanting, not 'fitting in' into the tune or beat – it is the dark 'monstrous' side of the 'inhuman' that Belov performs in the song. Such performance aims to construct the intensity of contained affect, and this affect is melancholy.

Melancholy permeates the authorial and audial voices alike. On a narrative level, melancholy relates not just to disillusionment with a lover (and the narrator's inability to let him go). In a broader sense, melancholy refers to the disappointment with a society that disallows heterogeneity of sexual and romantic expression. Sonic melancholy reveals itself in a slow music tempo. The rhythmical beat appears only during the chorus. Otherwise, the song is built around synth chord progression combined with high-pitch electronic noise. This decreased speed is meant to convey a sense of apathy and 'dragging' temporality of the narrator's life. Echo effects coupled with the deep Belov's voice in the second part of the song add to the sense of melancholic loneliness manifested by the lyrics.

Analyzing contemporary pop music, Robin James (2015) argues that neoliberal regimes appropriate discourses of resilience and expect marginalised subjects to perform resilience and overcome the damage done to them. Such performance of the damage and its overcoming individualises suffering and recovery; however, it leaves intact and reinforces systemic inequalities. Melancholy, on the contrary, opposes normative happiness or resilience. The role of melancholy as opposition to heteronormative social formations was explored by various theorists, primarily as part of the anti-social turn in queer studies (see, for example, Ahmed 2010; Edelman 2004). In this regard, the melancholy of 'To Transgress the Sacred' is dissenting, as it opposes the discourse of resilience and opens the possibility for an open political critique of heteronormativity. The song describes and affectively conveys the damage done to a narrator but does not provide a peaceful resolution or the outcome of heroic resilience ('my dreams are doomed') and does not try to 'please' the audience sonically. Considering the lack of musicians in Ukraine who would articulate the nonnormative lives and sexualities in their lyrics, the value of the song as a political gesture is even more powerful. Belov has also used the media attention to Lyudska Podoba

as an opportunity for sexual dissent as civic dissent, talking in the interviews about the ultra-right violence and conservative turn in Ukraine (Bazdyreva 2014):

> Слова песни, хотя в ней и поется о личном, имеют политический подтекст. Но личное – всегда политично. Преступить сакральное — значит не следовать манипулятивным правилам, которые выдаются под понятием 'традиционные духовные ценности'. В Украине ультраправые творят дикие дела под предлогом сохранения традиций. В России вообще на государственном уровне карают инакомыслящих, осмелившихся 'преступить сакральное'.
>
> [Russ.] The lyrics of the song, although it is focused on personal, have a political connotation. But the personal is always political. To transgress the sacred means not to follow the manipulative rules that are issued under the concept of 'traditional spiritual values'. In Ukraine, the ultra-right are doing wild deeds under the pretext of preserving traditions. In Russia, dissidents who dare to 'transgress the sacred' are even punished at the legislative level.

4.5. Transgressing the sacred on screen

In 2013, a year after writing 'To Transgress the Sacred', Belov took part in the nationwide PinchukArtPrize competition.[60] By 2013 Pinchuk Art Centre had become the central contemporary art institution in Ukraine, in no small

[60] PinchukArtPrize was started in 2009 by Pinchuk Art Centre and became the first private prize in contemporary art focused on supporting young artists from Ukraine (under 35 years old).

measure due to the financial capital of the Viktor Pinchuk.[61] The Main Prize of PinchukArtPrize was UAH 250000 and included an artist-in-residency program. Anatoliy Belov became one of the 20 shortlisted artists for the Prize. The project that Belov created in collaboration with the film director Oksana Kaz'mina was a 10-minute long short film entitled *Seks, likuval'ne, rok-n-rol* ([Ukr.] *Sex, Medicated, Rock-n-Roll*). He envisioned the film as an episode of a future full-length philosophical gay musical (that is not yet finished). In the musical, various social strata in Ukraine[62] would be shown through the eyes of a foreigner exploring 'spiritual, sexual and other experiences'. 'To Transgress the Sacred' song is the crucial element and the soundtrack to the *Sex, Medicated, Rock-n-Roll*, and the film can be said to be a visual interpretation of the song.

The video was financed and openly screened in PinchukArtCentre which is perhaps unsurprising. Like the other liberal institutions of contemporary art, PinchukArtCentre was following the 'permissive paradox' logics of pre-accepting transgression. Due to the high level of security, the far-right groups never attacked PinchukArtCentre. Unlike the 'Ukrainian Body' (2012) exhibition at the Visual Culture Research Centre that included Belov's graphic works and was censored by the university authorities, the curators of the PinchukArtCentre gave the artists the 'full freedom of expression' ('Oksana Kaz'mina: "Daiosh Spravzhnist'!"' 2013). Belov's film also presented a much more contained version of sexual dissent, taking into account the level of sexually explicit imagery in his more explicit 'pornographic' projects or the lyrics on some Lyudska Podoba songs. The media reports about the exhibition

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[61] See http://pinchukartcentre.org/en/about_us/Victor_Pinchuk_Foundation

[62] See interviews with Anatoliy Belov (http://pinchukartcentre.org/en/exhibitions/artists/23964, accessed 21 January 2021) and Oksana Kaz'mina ('Oksana Kaz'mina: "Daiosh Spravzhnist'!"' 2013).

and Belov's project were also ranging from neutral to positive.[63]

The fact that Belov's project was shortlisted was also perhaps a planned strategy of the the art centre. At the same time with the PinchukArtPrize exhibition, another major art project entitled 'IE volia – ie shans' ([Ukr.] 'Where There's a Will, There is a Way') opened in the centre. The exhibition was devoted to the AIDS topic and marked the ten years of AntiAids Fund existence (the fund that belongs to Olena Pinchuk, Viktor Pinchuk's wife). It featured the artworks from the internationally acclaimed queer artists, such as Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Nan Goldin. Alongside these works, Belov's project fits well into inscribing (young) Ukrainian contemporary art onto the map of the international ('Western') contemporary art (see more on such inscription in the next chapter). However, this video was one of the first music videos by a Ukrainian artists that openly spoke about sexual dissent, and thus deserves more attention. So what is the visual setting that 'transgressing the sacred' takes place in, and what formations does it point to?

The opening scene of the film presents a dialogue between three white young people - the protagonist [Rudolf], another man [Vitalik] and his girlfriend.[64] All three stand in a park. Vitalik is in the centre of the frame, leaning against the tree which is split into two. Rudolf and a woman are standing in the foreground, on both sides of Vitalik, with the tree trunks behind each. The composition of the frame forms a triangle with Vitalik in the middle, mirroring the love triangle described later (Appendix A, Figure 29).

The woman asks the protagonist Rudolf whether he has a boyfriend, and the protagonist says that he does not – anymore (the dialogue happens in both Russian and Ukrainian). The conversation between a protagonist and

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[63] See http://pinchukartcentre.org/ua/press_about_us/ukrainian?exhibition=22158 [accessed 21 January 2021].

[64] The film lasts 10 minutes.

Vitalik, while seemingly not making much sense, is built on wordplay hints. These hints implicitly reveal to the audience that it is Vitalik who was Rudolf's boyfriend. 'If you are so smart and cool, why are you lonely as a finger up an arse?' – Vitalik is mocking the protagonist. 'Vitalik, you are not in a better situation' – his girlfriend responds. To Vitalik's 'Why?' , Rudolf responds: 'I will show you', and the song begins.

In the next part, Rudolf walks in the park and sings facing the camera. Other people whom I read as men are walking around him: they are silent and exchange long glances. The men's clothing points to them belonging to different social groups: for example, one is wearing a sea captain's uniform, some wear suits or jackets; another character has long hair and a beard and wears a crown of thorns; yet another is in a long black raincoat and black hat, etc. The darkness of the park, and the diversity of the characters, in my reading, makes this scene into an artistic representation of *pleshka:* being in a cruising place where non-heterosexual people would gather to communicate, find partners and friends and have sex. The dark park *pleshka* in the film appears to be a 'closeted space': the characters in the park are not talking or even smiling; they seem to be very serious, staring only at each other as if mesmerised by their own and their partners' movements. The characters can find each other without talking, through coded signs: colourful stripy socks on a skater boy, long glances, 'checking the person out', looks over the shoulder. Rudolf sings and walks towards the camera; the characters in the background break into couples and start slow dancing. Their dancing does not involve much bodily contact yet foregrounds homoerotic charge through careful caressing moves and eye contact (Appendix A, Figures 30-32). The slow-motion singing and dancing create an immersive dreamlike atmosphere of the scene; low key lighting and cold blue colours add to its melancholic feel. It is aided by the camera movement that moves back while Rudolf moves forward, or slowly pans from side to side – it appears as if the

camera mimics the flow of the music.

During the second verse, Rudolf stops at the centre of the clearing in the woods. He continues singing, looking directly into the camera. Vitalik and his girlfriend come and sit nearby, Vitalik holds a bucket of popcorn that he throws into his mouth, observing the 'show'. New characters appear from the wood and approach the clearing: a (trans)feminine character with BDSM accessories, a person in the black mask (played by Anatoliy Belov himself), a young man with pierced ears. They and other characters dance in couples around Rudolf. One of the characters puts on fake fingers with long red nails and caresses his partner with them. The couples dancing becomes more and more ecstatic. One of the characters closes Rudolf's eyes with his hands, standing from behind; the others surround him dancing and touching him, Rudolf himself standing still and not reacting to them (Appendix A, Figure 33). The characters yet again bring to mind Belov's *We Are Not Marginals!* project: these anonymous 'marginals' are not the representation of 'decent' homosexual men, but rather an attempt to show various nonnormative social formations and subjects. This attempt is, however, symptomatic of Belov's general treatment of nonnormativity: the characters in the film are thin, white, able-bodied and not very old.

Dancing bodies create one collective body of intimacy that moves around the still protagonist. The light becomes warmer, yet in this 'orgiastic' scene, it starts flickering as if multiple flashlights were searching through the park. This type of lighting is a literal reminder of the dangers the characters are facing: police arrests at *pleshki*, the criminalisation of homosexuality as 'transgressing of the sacred' and just being under constant surveillance within the 'heteronormative panopticon'.

During the final verse, the light stops flickering, and Rudolf opens his eyes. He is alone in the park again (Appendix A, Figure 34), slowly turning to look at Vitalik and his girlfriend – Vitalik has forgotten about popcorn, and

both are completely engaged with what they see before them. The next cut shows the previously dancing characters standing in a queue and kissing Rudolf one by one, mostly on the left cheek (the 'kissing other lads' line plays on the soundtrack). While they do it, Rudolf stands very still and does not react (Appendix A, Figure 35). This scene resembles many Eastern Orthodox rituals: kissing of the icons/relics by the faithful in the church or kissing the dead person during the funeral ceremony, as well as a famous 'Juda's kiss' of Jesus Christ. This scene encourages the perception of nonnormative sexuality and unrequited love as a martyrdom, thus challenging the ideas of what is sacred and what is not. This reversal of the roles can also be read as a critique of religiousness, present in other Belov's works.

In the final part of the chorus, the last man in a queue - a young man with piercing – kisses Rudolf on the lips. Rudolf responds to the kiss: the close up features the long kiss between the two men while the song line 'Breaking sacred rules can be criminal' is played (Appendix A, Figure 36). Finally, Rudolf stands on his own. Vitalik's girlfriend gets up and hugs Rudolf. Embracing her, Rudolf looks closely over her shoulder at Vitalik. The final scene shows Vitalik staring back at Rudolf in silence, and then lowering the gaze, as if ashamed. This ending reinforces the implicit idea that the 'lover who does not kiss' is Vitalik himself.

The film depicts the internal and external conflict that the protagonist faces as unresolved. However, it adds another layer to the song's melancholic dissent through the 'final kiss' scene – on the level of interaction with the audience. Overall, the film is very constrained in its depiction of homoerotic intimacy. All characters are fully clothed, and their interaction with each other and the protagonist is reduced to dance improvisation.

After having a distanced depiction of the characters established for the spectator through far-distanced shots, a close-up of a long kiss between the two men presents a sudden cinematic turn away from the dreamlike

melancholy to the affirmative embodied and sexual nonheteronormative reality. Telling the story of inner homophobia openly, and screening two men kissing in the public space of a gallery, Belov is 'transgressed the sacred' for normative audiences, and potentially helped derive a sense of validation for nonnormative audiences.

Sex, Medicated, Rock'n'Roll did not win the Main Prize but received the Public Choice Prize in December 2013, at the time when over a million of protesters gathered nearby PinchukArtCentre, on the Independence Square to oppose the current regime.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

This chapter examined several new activist formations that appeared in 2010-2013. It also showed unfolding activist coalitions and situational alliances with NGOs as an important step in the development of grassroots activism of the time, and attempts to articulate and carry out multi-issue politics that included sexual/gender dissent, but did not fully align with the Europeanisation politics.

The chapter also presented several examples of artistic sexual/gender dissent as a direct response to the 'traditional values' discourses and the conservative legislation. It traced the development of the Feminist Ofenzyva activist group that reclaimed the Soviet tradition of the 8th of March celebration and politicised it. Both Feminist Ofenzyva and Lyudska Podoba activists/artists engaged with the ideas of 'traditions' and 'sacredness', actively rethinking them and temporalities that accompany them. Posters, banners, and actions of Feminist Ofenzyva dis-identify with and subvert national and folk craft traditions, as well as religious symbols.

The 'queerness' of the Lyudska Podoba collective presents an active stance against the normative discourses of religious morality: in reclaiming

homophobic slurs or accusations of 'homodictatorship' from the anti-gender groups, the musical works are aiming to 'transgress the sacred'. 'Queerness' in Lyudska Podoba music is also a search beyond modernity with its strict categorisations. It points to the affective power of weirdness, vital materiality, otherworldly and inhuman imaginaries. These imaginaries were influenced by a variety of sources: from the performative dissent of Klaus Nomi to folklore.

The chapter concluded with the close analysis of the song 'To Transgress the Sacred', and its corresponding video. I looked at how Belov 'transgressed the sacred' through the textual, musical and cinematic strategies. In my reading, the song speaks of the experiences of 'closeted' nonnormative sexuality and inner homophobia. The video portrays these experiences by pointing to *pleshkas* as sites of both exclusion and liberation for nonnormative communities, thus turning to the nonnormative communities of the past, and showing their continuing legacy. In the video, Belov reflects on melancholy, martyrdom and homoerotic intimacy, questioning and subverting the ideas of decency and indecency. These ideas resonate with the development of sexual/gender dissent after 2014, that will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V. 'TAMED' AND 'MENACING': SEXUAL AND (TRANS)GENDER DISSENT AFTER 2014

1. Political changes after 2014: shifts and continuances

In late 2013 and 2014, the protest events later called 'EuroMaidan', 'Maidan' or 'Revolution of Dignity' took place in Kyiv and spread to other cities. The protesters had different backgrounds and agendas (Onuch 2014) but were unified in their distrust of the current government, and President Yanukovych in particular.

The EuroMaidan started with the aim to prove that Ukraine must secure association with the EU and it is symbolically part of Europe (and not of Russia's imperial project). However, with the protests' unfolding came a variety of narratives that involved the negotiation of European and national identities. Plakhotnik (2019: 35) notes that while Maidan was celebrated and framed by the Ukrainian scholars as a sign of 'Euro-enthusiastic' progress from ethnic to civic nationalism, it was, in fact, the combination of two, and the boundaries between ethnic and civic nationalism were often blurred.

In contrast to protests in some other countries,[65] Maidan protests did not become a space of intersectional emancipatory struggle for gender or sexual

[65] Several months before the Maidan protests, people's uprising in Gezi Park, Turkey, took place. Similar to Ukraine, the process of NGO-isation of sexual dissent and human rights struggle also took place in Turkey. However, as noted by some scholars, the human rights field maintained ties with socialist and Kurdish movements, and 'human rights circles were not readily incorporated into the emerging liberal governmental realm' (Babül 2020: 51). Consequently, the Turkish LGBT movement was intrinsically connected to environmental, feminist, Kurdish and workers' movements in the 1990s and 2000s and was critical of the state and liberal institutions (see Ünan 2015; Babül 2020). Such history of intersectional struggle meant that 'Occupy Gezi' protest actions in June 2013 were led by activists who made known their nonnormativity and actively opposed heterosexist dynamics of the protests (Ünan 2015).

freedoms. On the contrary, patriarchal stereotypes and behaviours were widespread on Maidan (Khromeychuk 2015, 2016), and sexual and gender heterogeneity of Maidan protesters was mainly concealed or denied in a gesture that Maria Teteriuk (2016) called 'unarticulated exclusion'. Emily Channell-Justice (2022) also analyses the national ideology on Maidan and the challenges leftist and feminist activists experienced in articulating their demands during and after Maidan protests.

Heteronormative nationalist rhetoric was quickly mobilised during Maidan events (Khromeychuk 2015; Martsenyuk 2015a, 2016) as it became a space for militarised masculinity (Channell-Justice 2016). LGBT NGO activists, in turn, adopted a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy on Maidan and did not use LGBT symbols or affiliation with LGBT organisations (Shevtsova 2017; Teteriuk 2016). Being used to relying solely on collaboration with the state, leaders of LGBT NGOs were hoping that the change of the government to a more 'pro-European' one would automatically bring positive changes for LGBT people. Thus, the statement issued by the Council of LGBT organisations, claimed that LGBT people are an 'organic part of Ukrainian nation' and that they are fighting on EuroMaidan not for the 'specific rights', but 'as citizens of Ukraine' ('IEvrorevolutsiia v Ukraïni. <...>' 2013). However the idea of rainbow flags or LGBT actions on Maidan was condemned (by LGBT activists as well) as 'provocation' (Martsenyuk 2015b).

'Provocation' was a convenient term for the far right activists who were active on Maidan. Maidan gathered various people and initiatives, but nationalist agenda and militarised Maidan space were employed by the far-right groups to extend their influence during the protests. Grassroots leftist and feminist groups were present and active during the protests, for example, fostering self-organisation via the Varta v Likarni ([Ukr.] Hospital Guard) or knowledge production via the Students'ka Asambleia ([Ukr.] Student Assembly) initiatives (Channell-Justice 2016). Yet the activists were often

marginalised as ‘communist’ / ‘provocateurs’ and attacked by the members of the far-right groups (Teteriuk 2016; Channell-Justice 2022). Homo/transphobic attacks on individuals and gay clubs near Maidan also took place (Martsenyuk 2015b).

The Maidan protests became a threat to the Russian political regime, as they proved that authoritarian regimes can be overthrown. In his speech made in March 2014, Vladimir Putin announced that there was no legitimate executive branch of power in Ukraine, and Maidan was a coup d’etat carried out by ‘nationalists, neo-Nazi, Russophobes and antisemites’ (‘Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii’ 2014). The presence of far-right groups on Maidan was used by Russian propaganda to form a narrative that all of the Maidan supporters and the new government were in fact far-right: Maidan was the neo-Nazi insurgency in Kyiv supported by the West. Writing on the Russian media discourses of the time, Lazarenko (2019: 556) states: ‘The term “fascists” is often used in the media, holding people in the discourse of the Great Patriotic War and “rightful” military aggression with a protectionist core’. Soon after the Yanukovych’s government was overthrown, Russia invaded and annexed Crimea, and began the war in the East of Ukraine (Donbas).

While the annexation of Crimea was explained as a restoration of historical justice after it was ‘stolen’ from Russia, and as a necessary move in order to secure Russia from NATO expansion (‘Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii’ 2014), another aspect of these concerns over security and ‘revival’ is important to note. Jardar Østbø (2017) traces how traditional values have become increasingly politicised and securitised since the political protests in Russia in 2011, and in particular, since the Crimea annexation and the beginning of the war in Donbass. In 2015, the new Russian National Security Strategy identified the preservation and revival of traditional values

as an important strategic goal. The strategy presumed that Russian society (and, by extension, the cultural sovereignty of the Russian Federation) was in need of protection from the destructive influence caused by the 'expansion of foreign ideas and values' ('Strategiia Natsional'noi Bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii' 2015). According to the Russian information warfare campaigns in the media, Ukraine was a 'puppet state' controlled by the corrupted West while Russia was positioned as a guarantor of 'normality' in the world, fighting against both 'Gayromaidan' and 'Gayrope' (see Riabova and Riabov 2015). The gender and sexual regimes thus became a foundation for the war. This foundation was also quite literal: for example, Igor' Druz', the founder of the 'Bat'kivs'kyi komitet' anti-gender organisation, mentioned in Chapter IV, was appointed as an 'information and politics adviser' to the Minister of Defense of the 'Donets'k People Republic' (Levchenko 2019).

Following these rapid political changes, a complex and multi-layered field appeared in Ukraine, in which the discourses of nationalism, normativity and European liberal discourse on 'human rights' values would be mixed or played off against each other.

On the one hand, a further movement towards Europeanisation and the desperate need of EU support in the conditions of the war demanded the Ukrainian state adopt less conservative legislation, and to secure 'human rights protection' (or the impression of it). Such gestures were supported and lobbied by the Euro-enthusiastic liberal politicians and media. For example, in February 2015 National Committee on Protection of Public Morality was eliminated following a media protest campaign. In June 2015, KyivPride LGBT festival and the March of Equality public demonstration was allowed by the city council to take place in Kyiv. President Petro Poroshenko, while mentioning his Christian beliefs, adopted the 'civic nationalism' and 'human rights' liberal rhetoric in his comment on Pride:

Я ставлюся до Маршу рівності як християнин і як президент-європеєць. Це поєднувані речі. Я не буду в ньому брати участь, але я не бачу жодних підстав, щоб хтось йому перешкоджав, бо це є конституційне право кожного українського громадянина.

[Ukr.] My attitude to the March of Equality is of a Christian and a European President. These notions can go together. I will not take part in it, but I don't see any reasons for anybody to interfere with it, because it is a constitutional right of any Ukrainian citizen. ('Poroshenko: Na Marsh Rivnosti Ne Pidu, Ale Pidstav Iomu Pereshkodzhaty Ne Bachu' 2015)

In 2016, 'KyivPride' was registered as a new NGO, and since then KyivPride NGO has organised the yearly March of Equality in Kyiv and other cities.[66] The demonstrations were heavily guarded by police due to the danger of the far-right attacks.

Significant legislative changes also took place. For example, in November 2015, the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was included in the Labour Code. Similarly, the Governmental Strategy on Human Rights for 2016-2020 adopted in 2015 included among its goals the changes in support of 'LGBT rights', such as the introduction of civil partnerships, and a new procedure for gender recognition for transgender people. These shifts were possible due to EU leverage employed by human rights and LGBT NGO activists lobbying the changes. Plakhotnik (2019: 17) notes that it was the first time in Ukrainian history that the law identified LGBT+ people as citizens.

[66] In 2020, the demonstration did not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemics.

On the other hand, state support of nationalism and the country's subsequent militarisation aided in the development paramilitary far-right ethnonationalist groups. Some reports state the number of 20 groups in total in 2016-2017 (ARTICLE 19 2018: 90; see also Shuster and Perrigo 2021; and Colborne 2022 on the development of the Azov movement). However, there is a more substantial amount of online communities in social networks that have thousands of followers. Some media investigations also claim that the funds for national and patriotic education of Ukrainian youth were at times distributed to the far-right groups, who therefore allegedly received more support and legitimisation (Kuzmenko and Colborne 2019). After 2014 far-right groups in general shared EU-sceptical sentiments and supported the 'traditional values' discourse, also spread by the anti-gender initiatives.

While far-right groups were still relatively marginal and in no way had as much power as Russian propaganda claimed, such groups nevertheless continued to direct their violence towards social movement activists, racialised, nonnormative and other people. These acts of violence involved direct attacks at public human rights, leftist, feminist and LGBT demonstrations, private gay club parties, cultural events (such as the arson at the ZHovten' cinema theatre in October 2014 after LGBT film screening), Roma settlements. The 2015 March of Equality demonstration within the framework of KyivPride events was allowed to happen but was violently attacked by the far-right groups, with a dozen people injured. The lack of investigation of the attacks carried out by the far-right displayed the governmental and police politics of non-involvement.

State nationalism was also helpful to the further development of anti-gender groups and movements. While the elimination of the National Committee on Protection of Public Morality was celebrated as an achievement, the law defining public morality stayed almost intact, and the functions of the 'morals protection' were delegated to other governmental

bodies (such as the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine). Furthermore, 'fighting amorality' was envisioned as a task within the 'national and patriotic education' state program for youth.[67] Although it was not defined in a document what 'amorality' was, its placement alongside 'chauvinism', 'fascism' and 'Ukrainophobia' is symptomatic of the construction of nationalist discourse as normative. Neoliberal reforms cut back welfare, while gender terminology has often been rejected in parliamentary discussions (Tarkhanova 2018: 47).

At the time of the war, religious organisations and their networks (such as the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches) were considered to be important allies by the government. Churches and religious groups were freed of real estate taxes by new legislation adopted after 2014; they also obtained the right to found educational institutions. The anti-gender groups adapted to the new post-Maidan circumstances and changed their rhetoric and strategies – for example, they started publishing more in Ukrainian rather than the Russian language; replaced 'European values' with 'foreign values', and promoted the concept of 'Eurointegration without gender' instead of fully opposing Eurointegration (Levchenko 2019). Development of the anti-gender religious groups led to the formation of the all-Ukrainian movement, with the all-Ukrainian demonstration 'in support of family values' organised in various cities. These organisations continued to oppose 'gender ideology' publicly and promoted 'traditional/family values' as the core of Ukrainian nation survival

[67] *Viddil natsional'no-patriotychnoho vykhovannia* (The National and Patriotic Education Department) of the Ministry of Youth and Sport was created in 2015, and 'civic education' was discursively replaced with natsional'no-patriotychne vykhovannia ([Ukr.] 'national-patriotic upbringing' or 'national and patriotic education') in its documents (see Liakhovych 2016). Among the aims of national-patriotic education were both 'raising the prestige of soldiery' and 'encouraging youth to actively combat Ukrainophobia, amorality, separatism, chauvinism, fascism' ('Natsional'no-Patriotychne Vykhovannia' [n.d.]).

at the times of the war, and had an influence on state politics.

The development of contemporary 'anti-gender' formations did not cease in the late 2010s (and continues up to the present moment). In 2019, a new 'Tsinnosti. Hidnist'. Rodyna' ([Ukr.] 'Values. Dignity. Family') inter-factional group was formed in the Parliament that included 266 deputies (highest number ever). The faction's rhetoric, in line with the rhetoric of its predecessors, promotes 'traditional / family values', and the group aspires to create a 'new stage in the development of Ukrainian conservatism', learning from 'Western' conservative movements (IUrash 2020).

Finally, the rapid political changes of the war and the formation of the new uncontrolled 'peoples' republics' in the East of Ukraine demanded the fortification of the national narrative and consolidation of Ukrainian national identity. The contested territories brought back the need for renewed history and historicism. In April 2015 a set of laws known as Decommunisation laws were passed by the government. The laws aimed at prosecuting those who denied the Soviet and Nazi regimes' criminality or established the 'propaganda of their symbolics'.

Different conceptual frameworks are currently used to frame Ukraine in relation to Russia and the Soviet Union. One of them is the decolonial option that recommends starting 'with the geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge growing out of the local histories, subjectivities and experiences' (Tlostanova 2012: 132). Coloniality in this logic is seen as an 'underside of modernity', linked to imperialism and implemented in the XX century in liberal/capitalist and socialist/statist forms (Tlostanova 2012: 132). Following this logic, the calls for the 'decommunisation' of Ukraine and the subsequent governmental politics can be read as an attempt to move towards de-Sovietisation as part of de-imperialisation and the decolonisation of Ukraine. However, Channell-Justice (2016; 2022) argues that decommunisation process that took place

in Ukraine rapidly during and after Maidan has been intertwined with the neoliberalisation and Europeanisation processes that started earlier. Both strong 'civil society' and 'national identity' are symbolic proof that Ukraine is indeed a 'European-style democracy' that 'evolved' over its communist past. Falling Lenin monuments and the renamed cities and streets symbolised the creation of the new national narrative that inevitably included some groups and excluded the others. This redistribution of power affected both artistic and activist formations. In this and the next chapter, I will consider this new cultural and political landscape.

This chapter will start by exploring the standardisation of artistic dissent and historicisation of sexual/gender dissent that takes place after 2014 as part of the new nation-building project. I will turn to three case studies, presenting different versions of framing or historicizing nonnormativity. First, I will return to the Orchid Theatre of Provocative Fashion, examined in Chapter I, and its participation in the 'School of Kyiv' biennale (2015) to see how the political and cultural changes influenced it. I will also briefly explore an example of standardisation and historicisation through the analysis of the 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' exhibition (2015). Finally, I will investigate the development of nonnormative intersectional artivist formations, drawing particular attention to the transgender artistic dissent and the works by Friedrich Chernyshov.

2. Instrumentalisation of nonnormativity after 2014 in contemporary art

2.1. Writing the history of sexual and gender dissent in Ukraine

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, because of Ukraine's need for financial and political support, the movement towards Europeanisation and the pressure from the European Union to protect 'human rights', after 2014 the state became more inclined to instrumentalise sexual and gender diversity. Olga Plakhotnik (2019) has shown how the state

instrumentalised KyivPride to demonstrate Ukraine's 'progressiveness' and 'Europeanness' to the international actors. The phenomenon of KyivPride (and its March of Equality that became a regular event since 2015) also represents an integral part of the historicisation of the LGBT movement.

At the time when conservative and far-right discourses were reframing sexual and gender dissent as 'communist' or opposing 'traditional Ukrainian values', mainstream LGBT organisations reframed it as an integral part of Ukraine's development as a modern state. The liberal agenda of mainstream LGBT NGOs presumed advocacy work and cooperation with the new government. Therefore, the historicisation of 'LGBT' identities and movement became a political project of inscribing sexual and gender heterogeneity in the nation-building narrative. The struggle for sexual citizenship after 2014 involved the claims to the history of separate and unified LGBT movement existing in the country since its independence.

The historicisation of nonnormativity was initiated by mainstream LGBT activists soon after 2014. In 2015 the book *Ukrainskoe LGBT-dvizhenie, 25* ([Russ.] *Ukrainian LGBT movement, 25*, Naumenko and others 2015) was published by Gay Alliance Ukraine organisation. The book presented the history of the LGBT movement over the 25 years and described the 'general characteristics of the LGBT community'. The interviews with LGBT NGO activists and members of the gay community were compiled to construct a tangible history of linear progress from 'pre-modern' past to 'modern' present of the 'LGBT community'.

Unfortunately, coalitional forms of dissent presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis were omitted from the book. This approach to writing the history of 'LGBT movement' represents solidifying of identity politics of mainstream LGBT activism, viewing itself as separate from other forms of struggle. It also narrows down sexual and gender heterogeneity to a limited number of identities (such as lesbian, gay or transgender), presenting other forms of

identification and subjectivity as part of the 'pre-modern' past. The book ended with the history of the 'first gay pride' in 2012, and the book presentation took place during the KyivPride festival in June 2015.

2.2. Historicizing dissent in contemporary art

The contemporary art system participated in the historicisation and instrumentalisation of sexuality and gender. One example of this tendency is the re-framing of the Orchid Theatre of Provocative Fashion (see Chapter 1). In 2014 the 'Luhans'ka Narodna Respublika' ('LNR', [Ukr.] 'Luhans'k People Republic') was proclaimed. The city of Luhans'k and the region dwellers suffered greatly from ongoing military actions and economic crisis. Reports characterise 'Luhans'k People Republic' as having a high level of prosecution, repressions and discrimination of nonnormative people. Legislative attempts to introduce capital punishments for homosexual activity have been reported, and in March 2016 the law copying Russian legislation on 'propaganda of homosexuality' was adopted (ADTS Memorial 2016). As a result of the changes, Koptev left Luhans'k and moved to Kyiv, after being invited with Orchid to the 'Kyïvs'ka shkola' ([Ukr.] 'School of Kyiv') biennale of contemporary art.

Koptev's inclusion in contemporary art discourses took place in part due to the photo project by Ukrainian duo Synchrodogs (photographers Tania Shcheglova and Roman Noven) that was displayed outside of Ukraine. Synchrodogs became famous in Ukraine and abroad as contemporary artists as well as commercial photographers, working with brands and magazines such as Esquire, Harpers Bazaar, New York magazine and others. Many of the Synchrodogs' projects feature (their own) naked bodies merging with nature; the photos are often minimalist, presenting landscapes and human bodies as part of an abstract composition. However, the photographs of the project featuring Koptev have a different quality to them. It is part of another strand of Synchrodogs photographic aesthetics, described by VICE as photographing

‘all sorts of wacky shit in Ukraine’ (VICE 2011). As Synchrodogs stated at the time, ‘We have no shame and are stupid enough to shoot anything strange or naked, trying to make this modern fashion area go underground — become a little bit more trashy than people are used to seeing’ (VICE 2011). Synchrodogs took photos of Misha Koptev and the Orchid models in Luhans’k in 2011 (Appendix A, Figure 37). The ‘Misha Koptev’ photo series portrays Orchid models against a wall or a pile of costumes, as well as outside in urban settings in Luhans’k (such as by the road or near zoo posters). The quality of the photographs imitates 1990s film or early digital photography rather than the technical possibilities available to the duo at the time.

In terms of the composition and the aesthetics, Synchrodogs’ ‘Misha Koptev’ could be interpreted in a variety of ways. On the one hand, the project can be thought of as psychedelic or surrealist. It can also recall Terry Richardson’s or Borys Mykhailov’s works that blurred the boundary between provocation and documenting reality. Yet the ‘trashiness’ that Synchrodogs employed as an aesthetic strategy, was framed in a different way when the project was published in VICE magazine.

Critiqued for its sensationalist and provocative approach to journalism (Widdicombe 2013), throughout the 2000s, Vice has been publishing materials on ‘non-Western’ countries, selecting those materials that would employ an imperial exoticizing gaze. The projects that VICE favoured employed what Elmo Gonzaga (2017) calls ‘slum voyeurism’: representing poverty of the ‘third world’ tailored for the gaze of the ‘first world’:

> According to the logic of slum voyeurism, the filthiness, depravity, and brutality of third-world reality can be authentically conveyed only when the sensibilities of the viewer are uncompromisingly provoked

(Gonzaga 2017: 120).

VICE framed the project to align with colonial politics and imaginaries. References to eternal 'post-Sovietness', 'crime-ridden cities' of Ukraine and Koptev having no education or access to information singled out and made excessively visible nonnormative formations in the 'East' to construct colonial imaginary of the 'West' as privileged and the 'East' as deprived, barbaric, backward or 'stuck in time'.[68] However, Synchrodogs' early projects helped them to gain international success and made Koptev famous in contemporary art circles.

Coinciding with the presentation of the *Ukrainian LGBT movement, 25* book, the article on the history of 'gay art' came out in *Art Ukraine*, the key magazine on contemporary art in Ukraine (Radionova 2015). The article's author Arina Radionova framed Koptev's Orchid as part of 'gay history' of the 1990s. Similarly to the attempts of mainstream LGBT organisations to (re)construct 'LGBT history', the article in *Art Ukraine* (published a month before the Kyiv Pride events) attempted to (re)construct the history of 'gay art', securely fixing the nonnormativity of Koptev's Orchid in time (the past of the 1990s) and space ('retrograde and conservative Luhans'k'). Such 'gay history' of the past is then accessible and 'rediscovered' only through and by the mediators – young contemporary artists like Synchrodogs.

Several months later Orchid was invited to the 'School of Kyiv' biennal of contemporary art, organised by the Visual Culture Research Center. Only one model from Luhans'k could participate in the Kyiv show. Therefore, Koptev relied on informal networks and the help of the organisers to find models in Kyiv. He asked them to find 'people from bohemian circles, and not some

[68] This politics continues with VICE 'Gaycation' series, with an episode on Ukraine brilliantly analyzed by Chushak and others 2019.

saleswomen' – perhaps a gesture pointing at the standardisation of the Orchid phenomenon, now inscribed in the discourse of contemporary art (CultProstir 2015). Several feminist contemporary artists joined the show as models; instead of *travesti* performing in between the defiles in the 1990s, the Kyiv show in 2015 ended with the performance of the Duby Kolduny noise electronic band who were also modelling. Therefore, as a nonnormative formation Orchid now became less of a constellation of 'people from the streets' and more of a collective of young artists belonging to Kyiv contemporary art and music subcultures.

'The School of Kyiv' biennale is an interesting example of coalitional artistic dissent, involving many of the cultural institutions and groups studied earlier. Orchid performed both in Kyiv and Vienna in the framework of the biennale. However, the show was framed differently depending on location. The description of the project for the Kyiv audience was vague, leaving the interpretation of the show to the audience. The description of the project for the Vienna audience stated (Saxenhuber and Schöllhammer 2016):

> Luhansk is a city in Ukraine's industrial Donbass region, now the capital of LPR, a city synonymous with unemployment, high crime rates and Russian Orthodox fundamentalism, where Koptev dares to stay openly gay. [...]
> Vice magazine declared him the world's finest trash designer. His outfits are made of trash he found at a rubbish dump. His supermodels are those you would despise as scum. But his show is a magic ceremony of love which turns contempt into rapture.

This description emphasized Koptev's nonnormative sexuality in the context of 'staying openly gay' in Luhans'k (although by that time Koptev was

already living in Kyiv). I believe that it also instrumentalised and standardized Orchid for the Western audience by fixating it into specific 'national space' and 'national time' (in-war Luhans'k), genre (performance), narrative (openly gay designer, trash clothes and 'scum' from conservative, homophobic Luhans'k).

Again, while the performance itself could have been received in different ways by the audience attending, the curatorial framing risked re-creating the 'West' and the 'East' through a complex colonial and social racist imaginary: of the 'Western' respectable middle-class audience being transformed by the power of contemporary art into greater tolerance and acceptance of 'Eastern' nonnormative and poor social formations. Despite the decolonial intentions and declarations of the Biennal organisers, going beyond 'a bazaar for non-Western artefacts' format (Schöllhammer 2005) in the representation of nonnormativity and 'translating' the locality to the 'West' proved to be difficult.

Soon after the 'School of Kyiv' biennale, a new art project opened in the PinchukArtCentre. The project also explored nonnormativity but provided a striking visual contrast to the 'indecency' of Orchid shows. The project was entitled 'Patrioty. Hromadiany. Kokhantsi…' ([Ukr.] 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…', 31 October 2015 - 17 April 2016), and it was a solo exhibition by the 2014 Future Generation Art Prize (FGAP) winner Carlos Motta. Carlos Motta, an artist born in Colombia and living in the USA, Motta collaborated with communities from different countries, recovering the history of nonnormative sexualities and genders. For the exhibition of the shortlisted candidates of the FGAP-2014, the artist made such a study of Ukraine. Collaborating with journalist Maksym Ivanukha and LGBT NGO activist Bogdan Globa, Motta created the newspaper *Korotka istoriia homoseksual'nykh represii* ([Ukr.] *Brief history of homosexual repression in*

Ukraine, Motta and Ivanukha 2014).

Contrary to its name, the newspaper presents both a history of repressions and the development of the gay and lesbian movement in Ukraine - anachronistically dating back to the second half of the XVI century. Besides detailing state repressions during the Soviet times and legal discrimination in independent Ukraine, the chronicle included a collage of various facts: from the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in 1987 and the appearance of the first Ukrainian gay and lesbian NGOs, to the first speech by an openly gay person (Bogdan Globa) in Ukrainian Parliament, and Elton John's speech against homophobia in Ukraine. Similar to the book 'Ukrainian LGBT movement, 25' (and perhaps as an inspiration for it), the newspaper formed a historical narrative that positioned Ukrainian sexual and gender dissent within the realm of a specific national project. The Cossack past, Soviet repressions, parliamentary politics and EU-enthusiastic discourse were seen as important markers of this project, while coalitional dissent, or dissent opposing assimilationist politics, was concealed. Through the choice of participants, structure, narratives, editing and visual style, the project normalised 'LGBT people' as citizens and recruited previously excluded subjects into the nationalist regime.

The 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers...' project was created as a set of lightbox panels featuring video interviews with participants sharing their life stories and views on sexuality, gender and politics (Appendix A, Figures 38-39). The interviews raised many issues, such as the difficulties that LGBT people face in Ukrainian society, the events of Euromaidan, the rise of violence against LGBT people, and the effect that the ongoing war has on LGBT people. Many of the participants, who Motta described as the '10 leading LGBT activists in Ukraine' ('Groundbreaking LGBT Exhibition Opens In Kyiv' 2015), were at the time the heads or representatives of several LGBT NGOs: Nash Svit, Gay Alliance Ukraine, AUCO Fulcrum, Insight and T*ema (the first NGO that

focused solely on the rights of transgender people, registered shortly before the opening of the Motta's project). Present were also a person working for an international human rights organisation (Freedom House); two journalists; a former policewoman who was later to become an activist for a human rights organisation and to be involved in the organisation of KyivPride; and an independent consultant lecturing on tolerance in the police academy.

In many interviews featured in 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…', there was indeed a strong tendency among the participants to understand 'achieving progress' as assimilation into socio-legal, political, and economic arenas. Patriotism and citizenship became defining features of the interviews and the project overall (therefore, for instance, 'citizens' and 'patriots', and not 'workers' or 'refugees'), while the questions of 'LGBT communities and movements' were symbolically positioned at the end of the title reduced to the coded and mysterious 'lovers…' (see analysis of the exhibition by the art critic Anna Pohribna 2015). Also, while some participants addressed the importance of intersectional dissent, intersectionality was mentioned only in regard to those who face discrimination. The existence of the feminist movement in Ukraine was questioned, and none of the initiatives that were supposed to be allies in this intersectional movement was named.[69]

Lesia Pagulich (2019) claims that the analytical concept of 'homonationalism' developed by Jasbir Puar (2007) is useful in understanding the art project. Pointing to the attacks at the Roma communities (that were continuously happening in Ukraine and increased since 2014), Pagulich states that the art project creates its own silences and divisions:

[69] See the interview with Olena Shevchenko within the framework of the project. Available at http://pinchukartcentre.org/en/exhibitions/29397/patriots-citizens-lovers/elena-shevchenko [accessed 21 January 2021].

> In Ukraine, racialization works in complex ways, especially with regards to militarization and the war. While non-normative and non--white bodies, such as Roma communities (European Roma Rights Centre 2014; Minority Rights Group International 2018), are not seen as worthy of protection, increased othering based on ideological or belief systems promises a potential avenue for patriotic LGBTIQ+ subjects to be included in the nation's boundaries, thus positioned against the non-patriotic or not 'truly Ukrainian' subjects (Pagulich 2019: 128).

Likewise, Olga Plakhotnik brings up 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' as an example of 'homopatriorism' – enmeshment of the universal discourse of liberal human rights and civic nationalism in Ukraine that positioned 'LGBT+ communities as patriots and 'good citizens' and enabled instrumentalisation of the LGBT+ claims for sexual citizenship by the state' (Plakhotnik 2019: 3).

Within the project framework, it is the 'decent people' who deserved the audience's tolerance and empathy. The performance of the project participants' while answering the questions was contained and serious, with no to little gesturing or emotional facial expressions. Such contained performance is emphasized by the limited composition and editing: interchanging mid-shot chest-high or wide shot full height portraits of the speaking participants, shot in a studio with artificial lighting and neutral background. This aesthetics encouraged the spectator to perceive project participants on the screen as respectable, ordinary and 'just like them': calm and serious, wearing suits or casual clothing such as a t-shirt and shorts, the figures on the screen were 'human size', as if a reflection of the spectator in a mirror. These 'decent people' are also read by me as being white and predominantly young, passing successfully as women and men, and not

having any ‘unconventional’ physical traits (such as visible disability, tattoos, piercings, etc.).

Such an approach also raises the question of Motta’s political position as an artist, and the question that Motta himself raised elsewhere: ‘But who is represented, and by whom, in these processes of visualisation? What are the issues that are ‘worthy’ of representation? Who benefits from these public discussions? Who remains excluded?’ (Motta 2016: 120). Interestingly enough, these questions can be raised in relation to a different project, taking place at the same time and place with ‘Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…’ In the next section, I will turn to this power hierarchy through the exploration of less public and known artistic transgender dissent, and with it, the shift in formations and modes of grassroots activism.

3. Dissent as 'menace': grassroots dissent after 2014

3.1. I Am Kinder Album

At the very same time as 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…', another exhibition took place in PinchukArtCentre. It was an exhibition of the 16 shortlisted Ukrainian artists for the PinchukArtCentre Prize 2015. The project lasted from October 31, 2015, to January 10, 2016. One of the nominees was the *I Am Kinder Album* project by the artist Kinder Album. Kinder Album is an anonymous artist from Lviv who exhibits in Ukraine and internationally, yet whose presence is manifested mostly via virtual means: a page on Facebook,[70] YouTube channel[71] and a website.[72] Kinder Album's first public exhibition took place in 2013.

Kinder Album makes explicit experimental photographic and graphic artworks. The artist commented that the aim of the photographs was to explore the attitude to the one's own naked body, the relationship between a photographer and a model, and the theme of sexuality in particular. Both Kinder Album's photographs and drawings depict mostly naked human bodies.

The *I Am Kinder Album* project had a twofold character: it was envisioned as an installation and a happening. The installation transformed the gallery space into the 'Kinder Album world': a surreal room with a bath, a bed, a table and various other objects, as well as drawings, photographs and writings on the walls (Appendix A, Figure 40). The second part of the project was a happening – a dialogue with the audience. Kinder Album stated that there was a gap between personal and public, and through created, non-existent in

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[70] https://www.facebook.com/ilovekinderalbum/ [accessed 21 January 2021].

[71] https://www.youtube.com/user/KinderAlbum5 [accessed 21 January 2021].

[72] https://kinder-album.com/[accessed 21 January 2021].

reality image of Kinder Album, the artist aimed to erase this gap. The project offered visitors the opportunity to symbolically become Kinder Album, photographing themselves in a room and sending images to her to be displayed on screens in several public locations, as well as on the project's website. The artist stated:

> Личное становится публичным, но лишь в воображаемом мною мире. Воображаемая любовь и воображаемое одиночество, воображаемый страх и воображаемая печаль. Когда вы попадаете в этот мой мир, фотографируетесь в нём, на эту долю секунды всё становится реальным и время останавливается на этих снимках. Я приглашаю каждого стать Kinder Album и поделиться с помощью фотографии своим личным, откровенным, интимным так же, как это делаю я. Все фотографии, созданные вами в этом зале станут частью этого проекта.
>
> [Russ.] Personal becomes public, but only in a world imagined by me. Imaginary love and imaginary loneliness, imaginary fear and imaginary sadness. When you enter my world, take photos in it, in this split second everything becomes real and times stops on these photographs. I invite everyone to become Kinder Album and, like me, share something that is personal, honest, intimate to you with the help of the photos. All photos created by you in this room will become a part of the project.

I Am Kinder Album indeed became interactive when many visitors used the space to photograph themselves. The project's website features visitors being partially or fully naked and involved in various intimate activities –

kissing, lying together, imitating or being involved in sexual acts. Several artists used the space for their own performances: for instance, Alevtina Kakhidze made a project *Naked Alevtina*, while Ani Zur videotaped a couple having sex to investigate the boundary of 'legitimate' artistic expression in the room and the PinchukArtCentre in general.

Like Motta's project 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers...', Kinder Album's project can be seen as a form of participatory art. Contrary to Motta's project, the *I Am Kinder Album* project was not staged and edited: it was experimental, working with imaginaries rather than witnessing, exploring the general theme of privacy and intimacy through specific mediums, but with no explicit didactic message and no understanding of what the result would be. The project's 'remapping' of the PinchukArtCentre's gallery as a personal, private space made possible further 'remapping' of the space by participants as a territory where sexual and gender dissent could be safely embodied and put into action. By challenging its visitors to explore intimacy, the project revealed the sexual and gender heterogeneity of the visitors/their performances – the nonnormative formations present within the social realm. For example, the photographs on the website feature two persons whom I read as women kissing; also, two naked persons whom I read as men lying together on the bed and reading a book – the 'lovers' part of the intimacy that was concealed in respectable aesthetics of 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers...'. For these visitors, the space of the *I Am Kinder Album* project has indeed become an instrument of providing visibility to their intimate experiences, yet they merged these experiences with the anonymous identity of Kinder Album.

Kinder Album's art project attracted a mostly young white urban audience. This audience is very likely to be used to be a part of the 'selfie culture' (that entangles the body in the digital networks). Participating in the project was thus the opportunity to display oneself to others, and to transgress the bodily, sexual and social norms. These norms were also

manifested in PinchukArtCentre as a public institution: while there were no cameras in the project room, the security guard did kick one person out for nudity (Sergatskova 2015).

The photographs were not only present on the artist's blog - she actively commented on them in interviews. Kinder Album stated that the sexual and gender diversity and non-conformity of the participants was an active position, and one which signified the desire of nonnormative people to 'shout about it' (Sergatskova 2015):

> Фотографии целующихся девушек зашкаливают по сравнению с фото гетеросексуальных пар. Видно, что они хотят кричать об этом. И пользуются этим проектом как инструментом для рассказа о своей позиции. Кроме того, за время проекта случилось несколько инцидентов: охранник выгнал голого человека из ПАЦ, а еще пришел трансгендер и разделся.
>
> [Russ.] There are many more photos of girls kissing in comparison to the photos of heterosexual couples. It is clear that they want to shout about it. And they use this project as an instrument to tell about their position. Besides, there were a couple of incidents during the project: a security guard kicked a naked person out of PAC [*PinchukArtCentre* – O.D.], and also a transgender *[person* – O.D.] came and took off clothes.

While reporting the act of a person revealing a gender non-conforming body as an 'incident', Kinder Album later called it an 'independent action' provoked by the project. In both interviews, Kinder Album viewed the action as a positive step and emphasized its possible educative effect, as people may start questioning and 'googling who transgender people are'

(Sergatskova 2015). Kinder Album stated:

> Для нашего общества - это нетривиальные вещи и даже рассматривание этих фотографий уже воспитывает терпимость к принятию ‘других’ людей'.
>
> [Russ.] These things are not trivial for our society, and even looking at these photographs already instils tolerance to accepting ‘other’ people (Kisel’chuk 2016).

It is worth further exploration of what was the ‘incident’ or ‘action’ that took place during the *I Am Kinder Album* project.

Two photographs on the *I Am Kinder Album* project's website depict a white person whose slim body is visibly gender non-conforming. On the first image (Appendix A, Figure 41), this naked person is standing holding a jar with a toy fish in it; the person has multiple piercings, dreadlocks and beard, flat chest, and genitalia usually assigned to women. The image of the person is doubled in the reflection of the mirror, yet the person looks away from the mirror, touching the glasses; the photograph has muted colours which are almost sepia-like.

Another photograph in black-and-white features the same person sitting on the edge of the bathtub (Appendix A, Figure 42). The person’s legs are crossed, and the leg covers the subject’s genitals; small scars are visible next to the person's nipples.

The model on the photographs is Friedrich Chernyshov (also known as Fritz von Klein), an activist and poet who made his act public via social media. Friedrich identifies as a transgender man and describes his experience as nonnormative and at the intersection of different identities:

> Я трансгендерный мужчина, то есть при рождении мне был приписан женский гендерный маркер, а мое тело - это тело с вагиной, имеющее XX - хромосомы. Я полиаморный человек, BDSM-свитч, идентифицирую себя как гомосексуального или бисексуального парня. Такой опыт создает различной остроты ощущение ненормативности в различных сообществах, и однозначную маргинальность в мире капитализма/патриархата.
>
> [Russ.] I am a transgender man, i.e. after birth, I was assigned a female gender marker, and my body is a body with a vagina, and with XX chromosomes. I am a polyamorous person, BDSM-switch, identify as a homosexual or bisexual guy. Such experience creates more or less intense feelings of one's own nonnormativity in different communities, and definite marginality in the world of capitalism/patriarchy (Klein 2018).

Chernyshov (born in 1989) has been involved in trans*activism in Donets'k since 2011. He started his activism by documenting his transitioning process in LiveJournal blog. Friedrich's lifepath and activism were inseparable from the development of transgender activism and transgender communities in Ukraine. In the following sections, I will address how performance created by Friedrich Chernyshov and his collaborator Ol'ha Kononenko in PinchukArtCentre aligns with transgender dissent in Ukraine, and what nonnormative formations it points to. However, in order to do it, I will turn briefly to the development of transgender communities and activism in Ukraine, as this is often an understudied topic.

3.2. Development of transgender communities: normativity and dissent

Transgender activism in Ukraine for a long time existed mostly in the

form of grassroots (online) activity and mutual aid groups, rather than NGO-based advocacy.[73] Development of the Internet and social networks was crucial in the exchange of knowledge in transgender formations. 'FtM Perehod' ([Russ.] FtM Transition) website created 'for Russian-speaking FtM [female-to-male] transsexuals' was started by a group of Ukrainian transsexual men in 2003, with an online forum[74] that currently includes over 4000 people.[75] In the 2000s this website was a key space where transsexual men and gender-nonconforming people as a nonnormative formation could find information, support and advice, models and outlets for self-representation and creativity, and kinship networks for online and offline communication. The website reflects the knowledge production of the online community, influenced by both 'Western' terms and local models of transsexuality,

The phenomenon of 'transsexuality' indeed appeared through medicalised and psychiatric discourses in the Soviet Union (see more on the historical roots of definitions of 'trans' in Kirey-Sitnikova 2020). While the members of the 'FtM Perehod' website and forum were creating their own knowledge and narratives, they were heavily influenced by those discourses, particularly by the works of one of the first Soviet researchers of transsexuality

[73] For instance, transsexual woman Lena from Kyiv has been attending meetings of the club for transsexuals and transvestites organised by 'Ganimed' LGBT NGO since 1995. However, she personally has had much more influence as an independent activist after creating and moderating 'TGrus' mailing list, and her own website for transsexual people in 1997, as well as being active in the media. See http://lena.kiev.ua/#rus [accessed 21 January 2021].

[74] http://ftmperehod.com [accessed 21 January 2021].

[75] See also the website for MtF transsexuals that appeared around the same time http://transsexuals.ru/ [accessed 21 January 2021].

Aron Belkin.[76] The understanding of transsexuality presented through the 'key terms' website section follows widespread at the time division between 'primary' and 'secondary' forms of transsexualism, which influenced the narratives of the participants. In addition, both the examples from Krafft-Ebing works and Eastern Orthodox saints' lives were used as historical and cultural models in the 'Personalities' sections of the website. Transsexual people were categorised as *pre-op*, *post-op* or *non-op* (terms borrowed from English language and 'Western' trans* subcultures and referring to going or not going through surgical, hormonal or legal transition to the preferred gender), while non-transsexual people were called *bio* ('biological man/woman') or *naturaly* (a widespread term also used for labelling 'ordinary'/heterosexual people in nonnormative subcultures since the Soviet times) (Stalker [n.d.]).

Like the websites and forums for gays and lesbians appearing around the same time in Ukraine, the 'FtM Perekhod' website gathered a big collection of *samizdat* creative materials (personal narratives, creative writings, visual art, 'folklore' section where the users were collecting jokes and materials from the media that could be viewed as gender non-conforming). D.I.Y. spirit was vital for the community even more than for gay and lesbian subcultures, as a formation of 'self-made men' relied on D.I.Y. accessories and body-modification strategies that would secure 'passing' in society as a person of preferred gender – the advice and photographs for such accessories were posted in relevant website sections. The narratives of the website's members were published together with information on legislative, medical and lifestyle aspects of transsexual life. These narratives and information recognized sexual and gender heterogeneity and differing

[76] Website devoted to the works of Aron Belkin is listed as one of the resources on FtM Perehod website.

needs of what was then regarded as 'FtM transsexuals'. For example, the 'Adaptatsiia' ([Russ.] 'Adaptation') section of the website compared the life of a transsexual man to the mathematical problem with a great multitude of solutions. Written in a humorous way with the help of anecdotes from life experiences of the forum members, it presented six possible strategies of adaptation in society - from 'conspiratorial' and 'diplomatic' to 'extreme' and 'original' (Chukcha iz Strany Sovetov [n.d.]). Similarly, life stories under 'pre-op', 'post-op' and 'non-op' categories presented a variety of strategies (going or not going through surgical or hormonal transition) and choices of sexual and romantic partners as valid.

However, despite heterogeneity being palpable on the website and forum, it was concealed under the influence of binary, medicalised and normative understandings of sex, sexuality and gender - the pressure of what Austin Johnson calls transnormativity. Johnson (2016: 467–68) states:

> In addition to accountability to hegemonic standards of sex category and gender, trans people are also held accountable to transnormative standards that are specific to trans people as a group. [...] [T]ransnormativity is an ideology that structures trans identification, experience, and narratives into a *realness* or *trans enough* hierarchy that is heavily reliant on accountability to a medically-based, heteronormative model. [...] Transnormative ideology creates and sustains the social, medical, and legal arrangements within which trans people are held accountable to trans-specific sets of standards, enforced by both trans and cis people. These standards are most reliant on, but are certainly not limited to, adherence to a medical model of transition that emphasizes a *born in the wrong body* discourse and a *discovery narrative* of trans identity.

Ukrainian legislation in 1996 allowed legal gender recognition and medical sex reassignment only for those older than 25 years old, and in the Decree 60 adopted in 2011, the age has been lowered to 18. However, the legislation itself has not changed much for many years until 2016, and legal recognition was dependent on following a set of rules, procedures and surveillance and disciplinary practices that would enable the positive decision of a commission of doctors (Husakouskaya 2018, 2019). Decree 60 can be seen as the example of (trans)normative document grounded in the 'born in the wrong body' discourse. It prohibited gender recognition or medical sex reassignment to those who showed 'homosexuality, transvestism or any other sexual disorders as the leading motive for sex change', 'delinquent behaviour', 'gross violations of social adaptation (absence of work or permanent residence, alcoholism, drug abuse, antisocial behaviour, etc.)'. According to Husakouskaya (2018: 33–34),

> In the end, these mechanisms produced the transgender bodies as medicalised, dangerous, contagious and in need of sterilization in both a literal and figurative sense – with no children (neither prior to nor after the sex reassignment), no sexual practice (unless it is heterosexual and after the sex reassignment), no suspicious diseases, no recorded mental health issues, no gross 'violations of social adaptation', and no psychological characteristics that may complicate or make impossible social and psychological adaptation after transition.

The problematic existence of transgender,[77] gender variant and gender non-conforming people and bodies in Ukrainian culture and society is organised around a strict gender binary. Several reports point to the lack of information on gender in society and the high level of discrimination against transgender and gender non-conforming people; legislative barriers and the absence of medical protocols also lead to further stigmatisation of transgender people (Iriskina 2016; 'Insight' 2016). It is unsurprising that transgender and gender non-conforming bodies are mostly excluded from representation in the media and culture, along with the systematic erasure of non-conforming identities and narratives from public discourses. Since gender and sexuality are deemed naturally inseparable and co-dependent, people who live outside normative sex/gender relations, regardless of their self-identification, are vulnerable to violence and hatred.

Taking all of these factors into account, it is not surprising then that 'FtM Perekhod' website founders and members supported heteronormative and transnormative understanding of transsexuality. This is evident in the 'Nashi zhenshchiny' ([Russ.] 'Our women') and 'Nashi deti' ([Russ.] 'Our children') sections of the website, as well as the promotion of the 'natural' need for social decency, respectability and 'normal' monogamous family through personal narratives and advice on the forum.[78] In an article 'Ia takim NE rodilsia' ([Russ.] 'I was NOT born this way') Friedrich Chernyshov remembers discovering 'FtM Perekhod' forum in his early 20s as both an invaluable source of information, and of 'peer pressure':

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[77] 'Transgender' here encompasses 'movement away from the culturally specific expectations associated with the sex one is assigned at birth and a movement toward gender self-determination' (Enke 2012: 5).

[78] See also Kirei-Sitnikova (2015: 51–55) for a discussion of normativity within transgender/transsexual community in in post-Soviet space.

Форум стал для меня настоящей находкой: я читал его как газету. Особенно полюбились люди, которые не говорили о качалках и стиле поведения а-ля гопник из подворотни. Я решил, что хочу попробовать. [...] Создал тему, прикрепил фото (моё фото тогда чем-то напоминало того самого первого встретившегося мне FtM. Т.е. на взгляд человека гендерно-бинарного вполне себе девочка). Это вызвало бурю эмоций: мне советовали не красить ногти и волосы, подстричься и подкачаться. [...] Подстричься в какой-то момент мне действительно пришлось: врачи не любят вариативности.

[Russ.] The forum became a true discovery for me: I was reading it as a newspaper. Most of all, I liked people who did not talk about gyms and the backstreet gopnik[79] style of behaviour. I decided that I would like to try. [...] I created a thread [on a forum], attached a photo (my photo at that time was similar in some way to the photo of that first FtM I saw. That is, for the gender-binary person, I was looking like a girl). This caused a storm of emotions: I was advised not to paint my nails and not dye my hair, to get a short haircut and more muscles. [...] I did indeed have to cut my hair short: doctors don't like great variations (Klein 2014).

Later Friedrich recalled feeling marginalised in FtM online community because of its normative standards: 'muscles, short hair, heterosexuality' (Chernyshov 2018). By his observations, those transgender men who were

[79] 'Gopnik' is used to describe a working class / lower class urban men. Gopnik subculture is associated in popular discourses with macho behaviour and petty crimes.

‘non-op’ (not willing to change their body by surgery) or not conforming to the standards of masculinity, were regarded as ‘lower class’ by others in the online community. Chernyshov stated: ‘I was alone with my identity, having to prove: “No, I *am* a transman”’ (Chernyshov 2018). He also later recalled being critiqued for ‘doing a disservice to the community’ by some members of the FtM forum for his views and appearance (Chernyshov 2018). Not accepting normativity of online transgender communities, Friedrich was also highly critical of the normativity of the Decree 60 and doctors’ commission, especially because of the fact that at that time he identified as a gay man (Klein 2014). Chernyshov started his activism by documenting his transition in 2012-2013 and explaining his views in ‘Moi perekhod’ (‘My Transition’) blog on LiveJournal. Soon after, Friedrich joined professionalised NGO transgender activism.

3.3. Transgender formations, NGOisation and Lavender Menace

Nadzeya Husakouskaya argues that professionalised transgender activism started in Ukraine around 2009 and focused on advocacy with the aim of changing existing procedures of legal gender recognition and medical sex reassignment. For years the transgender agenda has been marginalised by most Ukrainian NGOs claiming to be LGBT – a tendency characteristic of the Eastern Europe region in general (see Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011). Before that homosexual activism was labelled LGBT even though B and T were not, in fact, present (the paradox that Kulpa and Mizielinska call ‘inclusion before coming into being’ and connected with copying ‘Western’ models of activism). Yana Kirey-Sitnikova and Anna Kirey (2019) in their analysis of the region point out that transgender activism is shaped by the ‘East-West’ hierarchies, but also by regional inequalities: there is a proliferation of organisations in Russia (and, to a lesser extent, in Ukraine), in comparison with other post-Soviet countries. Such inequality influences the distribution of resources and knowledge in the region.

While throughout the 1990s and 2000s LGBT NGOs in Ukraine did not see transgender people as their target audience, it started to change when Insight LGBT NGO launched a transgender program in 2009. In 2013, Insight LGBT NGO fostered the creation of the 'Trans*koalitsiia na post-Sovetskom prostranstve' ([Russ.] 'Trans*Coalition on Post-Soviet Space'), the international initiative aimed at de-pathologizing transgenderness and empowering the 'transgender community'.[80] Both organisations not just supported but constructed and influenced politically transgender communities. Insight and Trans*Coalition stated their mission as supportive of feminism. They were also critical of essentialist views on gender and supportive of 'genderqueer', 'agender', 'queer' and other people who identified in non-binary ways and opposed binary understanding of gender (activism of such people proliferated in the form of 'genderqueer' forums[81] since 2010). New terms were introduced to replace the ones existing in previous formations – such as 'transgender' as an umbrella term to include 'transsexual' category among others, 'cisgender' to replace now 'old-fashioned' 'natural' and 'bio', etc.

In 2013 Chernyshov moved to Kyiv to work in Insight, and the same year became one of the co-organisers of the Trans*Coalition in post-Soviet space network. Friedrich became an important knowledge producer in this regard at the time of the shift in transgender formations from grassroots mutual support initiatives to professionalised activism revolving around identity politics, human rights de-pathologizing discourses, advocacy and social work (see Klein 2020). Chernyshov published articles that caused heated debates in 'transsexual' communities - such as 'Ia takim NE rodilsia' ('I was NOT born this way', Klein 2014). In this article, as well as in the interviews on the topic

[80] See https://www.transcoalition.net/ [accessed 27 October 2021].

[81] See http://genderfree.net/; www.genderqueers.info [accessed 21 January 2021].

(Usmanova 2014), Friedrich presented his own view on the transgender phenomenon, critical of essentialism ('born in the wrong body' narrative), hetero-, cis-, and transnormativity, and the norms and standards of social decency. He later conceptualised the changes he witnessed in transgender communities as 'new generation' that appeared within the 'old' one. This generation was different in terms of age, but not necessarily: generally, 'generation borders' were also influenced by class, education, city-dwelling, family, language, religion and social media trends (Chernyshov 2018).

In August 2015 Chernyshov and other activists participated in Hendernyi Universytet ([Ukr.] 'Gender University') summer school on gender, queer and feminist theories, organised by scholars Mariya Mayerchyk and Olga Plakhotnik. Together with other participants, he co-organised Lavandovaia Ugroza ([Russ.] 'Lavender Menace') activist group.

After T*ema organisation (created in 2014 as an advocacy group to work with medical committees), Lavender Menace became the first activist group in Ukraine founded by transgender people and including their agenda as an important part of activism. Yana Kirey-Sitnikova and Anna Kirey (2019; 2020) conceptualise post-Soviet activisms, in particular transgender activism, as belonging to four categories: 'horizontal mutual support networks formed on the basis of online communities; advocacy groups working closely with medical and state authorities; LGBT-type activism; cultural queer activism, seeking to radically transform society and uproot various hierarchies' (Kirey-Sitnikova 2020: 780). The last modality, 'queer cultural activism', aims at 'radically changing society and the place trans people are assigned in the social hierarchy' (Kirey-Sitnikova 2020: 787). All these modalities of activism, the authors claim, mostly exist as borrowing from and imitation of the Western models. In this section, I have already explored several such modalities of activism: 'FtM perekhod' as an example of a horizontal mutual support network (albeit I also showed its local knowledge production, different from

just imitation of the Western models), and Insight as an example of 'LGBT-type activism'. Following Kirey-Sitnikova's (2020) logic, Lavender Menace would most likely fall into the category of 'cultural queer activism'. While Lavender Menace indeed was aiming at changing people's minds, I believe that closer attention to such 'cultural activism' is necessary not to conceal its political capacity, and make clear not just its 'borrowing and imitation' patterns, but also local original struggles.

Lavender Menace indeed appears to be a direct 'borrowing' from the 'West'; however, this is only to some extent. The group's name is a reference to the US Lavender Menace lesbian feminist group that opposed heteronormativity and lesbophobia in the American second-wave feminist movement. Ukrainian activist group re-purposed the title and changed its meaning: group members advocated other types of politics and activism – namely, queer, transgender, anarchist and feminist. The logo of the group, drawn by a group member IAn Hubs'kyi, is a lavender flower, with the background coloured in the colours of the transgender flag. The group also used pink and black colours (standing for queer and anarchist activism) on their Facebook page. In the case of Ukrainian Lavender Menace, its 'menacing' quality relates to the intersectional transfeminist activist dissent.

The description of the group states:

> Наша миссия - деконструкция патриархата, квир-революция путем радикального просвещения. Наши ценности: феминизм, квир, транс*феминизм, анархофеминизм. Мы открыты к взаимодействию, акциям, идеям и так далее. Особенно любим интернет-флешмобы. Мы – тренера по направлениям: гендерная и квир-теория, феминизм, цифровой безопасности в интернете; эксперты по транс*вопросам и анархоквир.

> [Russ.] Our mission is a deconstruction of patriarchy, queer revolution by radical education. Our values are: feminism, queer, trans*feminism, anarcho-feminism. We are open to interaction, actions, ideas and so on. We like Internet flashmobs in particular. We are trainers in gender and queer theory, feminism, digital security online; experts in trans*thematics and anarcho-queer [thematics]. [82]

Lavender Menace is an example of a grassroots activist group that formed on the periphery of NGO activism, although its members were (and are) involved in NGO work. Also, it is an example of the continuation of 'queer' politics in Ukraine that is framed by activists as inseparable from anarcho-feminist or leftist politics. Similar to Svobodna anarcho-feminist group, mentioned in the previous chapters, Lavender Menace understood their queer politics as intersectional, radical and grassroots. While inspired by 'Western' academic theories, Lavender Menace used their personal experiences to actively redefine feminist politics as transfeminism. The group carried out some public activities, such as training on transgender issues, and a 'Women historical night in Kyiv' graffiti campaign in May 2017. During this graffiti campaign, the group celebrated both cisgender and transgender women.

The Internet became one of the group's main activity platforms, as it allowed access to wide and varied audiences. In 2015 Lavender Menace started a YouTube channel with short videos on various topics, such as feminism, homosociality, gender dysphoria, the question of 'propaganda' of homosexuality etc. This activity resonates with the widespread use of

[82] https://www.facebook.com/groups/lavandovaya.ugroza/about [accessed 21 January 2021].

YouTube and online platforms in general as a space for representation and community building among the international transgender youth (Pullen 2014).[83] The videos mostly served an educative purpose, promoting social constructivist ideas about transgender bodies and depathologisation of transgenderness. The videos caused discussions online among the participants of FtM Perekhod forum and other online communities ('Pro Gendernuiu Disforiiu' 2016). The photographs of the performance by Friedrich Chernyshov and Ol'ha Kononenko that took place in PinchukArtCentre were also published on social networks and labelled as part of the Lavender Menace 'Internet performance' (Hubs'kyi 2015). I will further perform a close reading of this performance, to once again address the complex notion of visibility – and seeability of dissent.

4. 'In their worlds I myself am the changes': Friedrich Chernyshov and queer (trans)gender dissent

4.1. Being seen: performance at PinchukArtCentre

Alongside activism, Chernyshov used creativity as a way of capturing his experiences. Two months after the Lavender Menace formation, Friedrich found out about the *I Am Kinder Album* project (see section 3.1 in this chapter). He decided to take part in the project and to use the project as a territory for artistic dissent. Friedrich invited his friend, the photographer Ol'ha Kononenko, to create a series of photographs of him in the Kinder Album's project space. Friedrich and Ol'ha have known each other for a long time since both were living in Donets'k, and they had previously collaborated together as

[83] Lavender Menace individual members were active online: similar to Friedrich Chernyshov, IAn Hubs'kyi was active in blogging and in 2017 started Youtube vlog on the topics related to transgender activism and transition.

photographer and model. Ol'ha also migrated to Kyiv from Donets'k, shortly before the beginning of the war. The collaboration was a personal project of Friedrich and Ol'ha. Chernyshov employed anti-assimilationist trans*visibility strategically to address a general audience as part of the *I Am Kinder Album* art project and to question gender and bodily norms. As Chernyshov stated:

> Мне хотелось вызвать чувство, которое называется гендерная паника или гендерное беспокойство. Это ощущение дискомфорта, когда человек понимает, что не может определить, какого пола личность перед ним. Мне хотелось показать, насколько люди могут видеть не то. Большинство убеждено, что человек, у которого есть вагина, — это женщина. Но как только эту вагину прикрыть одеждой, она тут же перестает быть определяющим признаком, и тебя начинают оценивать по остальному внешнему виду.
>
> [Russ.] I wanted to cause a feeling that is called gender panic or gender trouble. It is a feeling of discomfort when someone understands that they can't identify the sex of the person standing before them. I wanted to show to what extent people can be mistaken in what they see. A majority is convinced that if someone has a vagina, – it is a woman. But as soon as you cover this vagina with clothes, it stops being a defining marker, and you are being identified on the basis of the rest of your appearance (Heĭ-Al'ians Ukraïna 2015).

It is clear that Friedrich envisioned his performance as dissenting, and as a specific, 'troubling' form of dissent. Taking place at the same time with 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' by Carlos Motta, but on a different floor and in a

less legitimate way, Chernyshov's performance is both oppositional and complementary to 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' It points to different formations and different political demands. The portraits of Friedrich are an interesting example of strategic visibility and self-representation as (trans)gender dissent. Political visibility is dependent in this case on physical visibility in its most literal form: the act of showing one's naked nonnormative body is a performative act of appearance – what is concealed in public discourse, becomes visible, and this visibility politicizes the idea of what gender, sex, or even human being is. As stated by Friedrich (Heĭ-Al'ians Ukraïna 2015):

> В каждом человеке мы можем найти что-то, что будет ставить под сомнение его гендер. Провести четкую границу между мужчиной и женщиной практически невозможно. Особенно хорошо это заметно на примере транс-людей. Вы видите меня до пояса — вы говорите, что я мужчина. Вы видите мои половые органы — вы говорите, что я женщина. А когда вы видите меня полностью — вы не знаете, кто я, и я для вас человек.
>
> [Russ.] In every person, we can find something that would question their gender. It is almost impossible to delineate a clear boundary between a man and a woman. This is particularly evident in the example of transgender people. You see me above the waist – you say that I am a man. You see my genitals – you say that I am a woman. And when you see the full of me – you don't know who I am, and I am a human being for you.

In a way, the project carried out by Friedrich and Ol'ha and labelled as a Lavender Menace Internet performance can be said to be a materialization

of the utopian manifesto published by Carlos Motta: rejecting the politics of assimilation, stopping to beg for tolerance, valuing critical difference instead of false equality. As discussed earlier, 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' project did not become a materialisation of this radical demand. Motta's transgender participants were vocal on the themes of state politics and discrimination. However, at the same time, they were inscribed into the broader nation-building framework intrinsic to the project. They also presented a very 'public' and socially decent image of identities. The only 'transgender discovery' narrative present in the project was framed through 'born this way' rhetorics, and both participants of the project speaking on transgender issues in detail looked conventionally 'male' and 'female'. Such representation, whether by chance or intentional, is close to transnormative – whereby 'transgender difference is ultimately resolvable – something that can be unproblematically folded into heteronormative familial and social structures through a democratic extension of progressive optimism and a restabilisation of the gender binary' (Keegan 2013).

The photos of Friedrich as a transgender person differ from Motta's images both politically and visually. The body in this performance becomes an instrument of 'gender trouble' and transgender dissent and does not require other 'explanatory' narratives. At the same time, the performance shows that body is never neutral and breaks the illusion of a natural gendered/sexed self and body. The aim of the performance is unapologetic self-representation, as Chernyshov works with transgender body as tabooed and invisible:

> Тема транс-тела — одна из самых табуированных телесных тем. Трансгендерное тело, не прошедшее полной трансформации, принято тщательно скрывать от посторонних глаз, как что-то крайне непристойное, ведь такое тело не соответствует

представлениям большинства о том, как должен выглядеть ‘нормальный человек’. К тому же считается, что трансгендер, пока он не изменит свои половые органы, не может вести полноценную жизнь. Но это не так. Подавляющая часть трансгендерных людей в операциях на гениталиях не нуждаются, и транс-мужчины, например, зачастую оперируют только грудь.

[Russ.] The topic of trans-body is one of the biggest taboos among the bodily topics. The transgender body that did not go through the complete transformation is commonly hidden from the eyes of the others, as something indecent, as such body does not align with the majority’s beliefs on what the ‘normal human’ should look like. Also, it is believed that a transgender can’t live a full-pledge life until he changes his genitalia. But this is not true. A majority of transgender people don’t require surgeries on their genitals, and trans-men, for example, often have operation only on their chest (Неї-Al’ians Ukraïna 2015).

Visually, the photographs also fall out from the assimilationist ‘I am just like you’ position. The excessive background, rich in objects and weird drawings and writings on the wall, surrounds the figure that does not look ‘respectable’ because of the nudity, but also because of piercings, dreadlocks and gender-variant body. Although it is clear that the person is posing for the camera, the posture in both photographs appears relaxed, and the gestures are seemingly unconstrained, suggesting movement. Friedrich is neither smiling nor looking into the camera, appearing unemotional and interested in something beyond the audience’s field of vision. Such disengagement from the audience creates a documentary effect: it is as if the hidden camera

observes the person existing within the interior of the *I Am Kinder Album* project; the tones of the photographs add to the documentary quality of the images. While Friedrich engages with the objects present in the room, this engagement is not of a sexual character. The richness of the details on the background, provided by the interior of the *I Am Kinder Album* project, as well as the vulnerability of Friedrich's naked body in the foreground, encourage the audience's engagement with the image without providing an interpretation or anticipating a specific reaction. As there is also no direct engagement of the model with the audience, one could read these photographs in a variety of ways. These photographs are 'silent' and aim at posing questions rather than providing answers.

Friedrich's body is visibly not 'decent'. At the same time, it is still a body of a white, young and fit person without visible disabilities. The ability (or desire) to make one's body publicly visible as a site of (trans)gender dissent still depends on race, ethnicity, class and other conditions – social and material relations – that mark and constitute this body. The above, however, does not mean that displaying the body for Chernyshov was a safe act. *I Am Kinder Album* was a transgressive intervention in PinchukArtCentre, yet it was still a public and social space, not safe for transgender people: in the words of A. Finn Enke (Enke 2012: 75), 'Social spaces suggest that all people within them *pass* as really being members of the social category that the space thereby helps produce'.

In contrast with 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' in which the video interviews were recorded in a studio and the participants were not required to be present in the PinchukArtCentre physically, Chernyshov's embodied performance was an intervention into both *I Am Kinder Album* and PinchukArtCentre spaces. Friedrich mentioned that besides Ol'ha, he invited his other friend whose role was to stop visitors from coming into the room during the performance: he was worried for his safety precisely because his nudity was the nudity *of* a

transgender man (ZBOKU 2023). This fear of gender bashing and Chernyshov's strategy to combat/avoid it signifies the vulnerability of transgender body, as well as the fact that the body always depends on other bodies and networks of support.

Both Friedrich Chernyshov and photographer Ol'ha Kononenko emphasized a striving to show the authenticity of transgender body in its materiality and self-representational performance (Heĭ-Al'ians Ukraïna 2015). Aesthetically the photographs of Friedrich are far away from the exoticisation and 'slum voyeurism' that was employed by Synchrodogs in their portrayal of marginalised communities (see section 2.2 in this chapter). The images also differ greatly from the majority of the other photographs featured on the website of Kinder Album: they appear to be calm, ordinary and mundane rather than provocative or playful. Black-and-white aesthetics adds 'documentary' effect to the image: it is not *performing* a certain sexualised action or nudity as such, but *documenting* the nonnormative body concealed in the cultural landscape. Ol'ha Kononenko commented that she was trying to 'direct' Friedrich to make the photographs more 'artistic'. The photographer's motivation was to show Friedrich 'as he is', but to avoid the stigmatisation or victimisation that often accompanies narratives on gender and sexual dissent:

> Я старалась направлять Фрица. Мне хотелось показать двойственность человека в какой-то степени, а там было зеркало с калякой-малякой какой-то, и я пыталась найти его отражение в зеркале. Еще мне хотелось, чтоб эти фотографии были не просто как «фотографии мужика с писькой», а чтобы там была какая-то композиция, художественность. В современном искусстве – какие-то крайности. Либо это рафинированные модели, рафинированные сюжеты, либо берут просто человека и

фотографируют его как в операционной. «Вот, это арт-проект, мы показываем человека как он есть» - типа бодипозитив, фотографируют разных женщин. Но это фотографии не про красоту человека, стараются нарочно показать человека слишком «как он есть». А искусство всё равно немножко выше натурализма. И я хочу в своём творчестве найти баланс между рафинированностью, и этой «правдой жизни», броской, неприкрытой. Мы же не в операционной находимся: всегда есть полутона, какие-то тонкие вещи, и это мне тоже хочется передавать в человеке. Я хочу в своём проекте показывать человека как он есть. Не паразитируя на образе жертвы, как часто у нас показывают трансгендеров, лгбт: «ой, смотрите, какие они бедные-несчастные» или «смотрите какие мерзкие фрики». А показать более поэтично человека, и красивым, и живым, и радостным, и грустным [...].

[Russ.] I tried to direct Fritz. I wanted to show a duality of a person in a way, and there was a mirror with some scribbles on it, and I tried to find his reflection in a mirror. I also wanted these photos not to be like 'photos of a man with a pussy', but to have some composition, artistic element in them. There are some extremes in contemporary art. It is either purified models, purified topics, or they just take a person and photograph him as if in a surgery theatre. [...] But these photos are not about the beauty of a person; they try on purpose to show a person as hyper-'as he is'. But art is still a bit above naturalism. And I want to find in my creativity the balance between purification, and these 'realities of life', eye-catching, overt. We are not in a surgery theatre: there are always nuances, some delicate things, and this too I want to convey in a person. I

> want to show a person in my project as he is. Not thriving on the image of a victim, as transgenders, LGBT are often shown in here: 'Oh, look how miserable they are' or 'Look at these wretched freaks'. But to show a person in a more poetic way, both beautiful, alive, happy, and sad [...] (ZBOKU 2023).

Ol'ha's statement reveals the search for alternative aesthetics, that would not conform to the common 'Western' or local patterns of transgender people portrayal. The negative references to the surgery theatre also point to transgender formations being shaped by the medicalised discourses. Carter et al (2014: 471) state that trans* photographic portraits

> [...] often function as evidence of a particular person's physical presence. However, photography's indexical function places the trans body in a double bind: it must declare its visibility, but in doing so, it initiates the diagnostic gaze that demands that the temporal process of transition be legible on the body. Alongside the legacy of the Enlightenment investment in self-creation, then, [...] photographic portraits reflect the diagnostic texts and images that powerfully shaped much trans becoming in a mid-twentieth-century medicalized Western context.

I believe that Ol'ha's striving for authenticity in portrayal ('to show him as he is') is partially caused by what is called the 'visibility trap' created by the discursive production of the visible nonnormative bodies. The physical visibility of the dissenting body (no matter, whether it is 'anti-assimilationist' or 'assimilationist' visibility) is still necessary to provide the 'evidence of existence' to normative audiences and is inscribed in the processes of producing discursive visibility.

While Chernyshov's dissent that was concealed and not 'seeable' within the framework of the 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' project focused on visibility only for certain subjects and types of politics, such dissent is important, as it opens up a discussion on sexual and gender dissent as an intersectional struggle. If we view Chernyshov's performance as part of the broader shift in transgender formations, it is understandable that physical visibility was addressed not just to the 'outside' of broader society, but to the 'inside' of transgender communities. Authenticity has been an important concept for many transgender people, especially during the shift in understanding what 'transgender', 'transsexual' or 'true trans' is. By displaying the 'improper', not 'fully' transitioned body, Chernyshov was continuing the discussion about the body as a social construct that he and Lavender Menace started with other means. He raised the question of the 'authentic trans body' – namely, the question of stigma and bodily shame within transgender communities that are caused by normativity in Ukrainian society. This took place when Chernyshov published the photographs on social networks and labelled them as part of the Lavender Menace 'Internet performance' (Hubsk'yi 2015).

The photographs were shared by members of Lavender Menace not just in transgender online communities, but also in broader 'LGBT' online communities. Photos of the performance were shared in the Facebook group entitled 'LGBT - diskussionnaia ploshchadka' ([Russ.] 'LGBT – discussion space', see Hubs'kyi 2015). They were also published on the website of the 'Gay Alliance Ukraine' organisation (Heĭ-Al'ians Ukraïna 2015),[84] one of the main Ukrainian LGBT NGOs. The publication included an interview in which Chernyshov explained his performance and spoke about Lavender Menace,

[84] The publication had 2800 views (accessed 22/08/2017), which is 4 times more than the number of views of the article on the 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' exhibition, published earlier on the website (Koval'ski 2015).

and this article, in turn, caused online discussions on transition, transgender bodies and queer politics on LGBT online platforms.[85] Besides addressing the transgender community, the aim of the activist was to educate cisgender LGB community on bodily variability and gender diversity, as he believes that the stereotypes around transgender bodies are still prevalent in this community. In contrast with 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' project, Chernyshov's performance revealed 'LGBT community' not as a unified movement, but rather a space of intersecting discriminations.

For a long time, Chernyshov has been an outspoken critic of transphobia among cisgender gay men, and general transphobia in gay and lesbian sexual subcultures (Sochyns'ka 2016). Similar views were later voiced by other transgender activists: for example, Lavender Menace member IAn Hubs'kyi made a series of drawings on the topic of transphobia within 'LGBT community' in 2017 (Hubs'kyĭ 2017), and a Facebook flashmob #ne statystychna pokhybka ([Ukr.] 'not a statistical error') was started in 2017 by trans*activists in response to being called 'statistical error' by the cisgender members of LGBT NGOs.

4.2. Being heard: poetry and 'critique from within.'

A significant shift in the development of nonnormative activist formations after 2014 is that queer activists not only aligned themselves with feminist, anarchist, transgender dissent. They also started to voice critique of feminist, LGBT, and transgender movements 'from within'. While the mainstream feminist and LGBT movements consolidated and aimed to conceal internal heterogeneity, queer activism developed a voice that was critical not only of the 'outer' discriminations and hierarchies but of the 'inner' ones as well.

[85] See an example of such discussion between the T*ema member and the visitors of FtM-perekhod online forum (AngeLina 201 5).

A queer-feminist block appeared during the feminist demonstration on the 8th of March, 2017. Several months later, queer-anarcho-feminist block appeared at the KyivPride March of Equality demonstration. Both initiatives were critical of liberal approaches to activism. They also claimed alliances with other groups and movements that were marginalised by the liberal identity politics. For example, queer-anarcho-feminist block posters and slogans at the March of Equality voiced support for Roma people who at the time suffered from the far-right attacks; they also showed solidarity with the ongoing miners' strikes; the slogans were calling for better scholarships for students, pensions, support for homeless and health support for all ('Kvir-Anarkho-Feministychnyi Blok Na KyïvPraid2017' 2017). At the same time, the block critiqued 'LGBT neoliberalisation', nationalism, capitalism, police brutality, far-right violence and the state corruption.

As an example of such a position, Chernyshov adopted a critical stance to the liberal LGBT activism, pointing to the lack of solidarity of mainstream LGBT NGOs with the radical social movements. In 2016 he was among the co-organisers of the public demonstration in Kyiv in dedication to Transgender Day of Remembrance. He noted that while anarchists joined the demonstration, the organisers of KyivPride were not present there (Artemenko 2017). Similarly, in 2017 Friedrich was among the organisers of the queer-anarcho-feminist block during KyivPride demonstration.

By 2017 KyivPride became a registered organisation and was supported by international finds and organisations (such as the Elton John AIDS Fund, Heinrich Boell Foundation, Freedom House, Amnesty International, foreign embassies). 'Country for all' was the theme of the 'March of Equality' demonstration in 2017. The political declaration of KyivPride was very short; it stated that public space belongs to everyone, and that 'country for all is: family for all, jobs for all, health for all, safety for all, education for all, justice for all'.

Aiming to appeal to the broad audience, KyivPride organisers did not include any concrete demands or strategies into their declaration beyond this general statement. The queer-anarcho-feminist block proposed their own agenda which included 'opposing police state [...], nationalism and the far-right violence created by it [...], neoliberalism, capitalism and assimilationist 'inclusivity' of KyivPride'. The block's statement declared:

> Ми проти того, щоб організатори неоліберального проекту 'КиївПрайд' говорили від імені всіх ЛГБТ+. В Україні вже тривалий час проходять акції проти гомофобії, патологізації трансгендерності, мізогінії та ксенофобії, що організовують низові квір-феміністичні, анархістські, антикапіталістичні ініціативи ЛГБТ+, політичні позиції яких відмінні від позиції КиївПрайду.
> Ми – ті, хто підтримує розмаїття політичних та особистих тактик у боротьбі проти всього 'нормального'. Ми – ті, хто не бояться, коли нас називають збоченими за те, що ми критикуємо суспільний устрій, двогендерну систему, 'пристойну' сексуальність, релігійну мораль та 'традиційні сімейні цінності'. Ми – за послідовну політичну квір-пропаганду до, під час і після КиївПрайду!
>
> [Ukr.] We oppose organisers of 'KyivPride' neoliberal project speaking in the name of all LGBT+. For a long time now, grassroots queer-feminist, anarchist, anti-capitalist LGBT + initiatives, whose political positions are different from those of KyivPride, has been holding actions in Ukraine against homophobia and pathologizing transgenderness, against misogyny and xenophobia.
> We are the ones who support a variety of political and personal tactics in the fight against everything 'normal'. We are those who

> are not afraid when we are called perverted for criticizing the social order, the binary system, "decent" sexuality, religious morality, and 'traditional family values'. We are for consistent political queer propaganda before, during and after KyivPride! [86]

Activists who joined the block were wearing black and pink veils (colours often used to symbolise queer anarchism). By wearing veils, they achieved anonymity, and also expressed their political action as 'mourning of recent pogroms of Roma settlements, attacks [of the far-right] on lesbians, queer protest actions and actions against rape culture in universities'.[87]

Chernyshov critiqued KyivPride politics of policing the appearance of the participants in order to create the normative image of social decency and respectability for the media:

> Что происходило на Марше равенства в этом году, и что происходило во все прошлые разы, но об этом не было сказано? В данном случае говорилось, что есть некий радужный флаг, некая радужная повестка толерантности, того, что необходимо быть принятыми в обществе. И она каким-то образом долго выстраивалась, над ней долгое время корпели. И может быть, не всем известно, что в прошлом году были запрещены иные какие-то флаги. Анархо-феминистки не смогли выйти со своими флагами, анархисты не могли выйти со своими флагами. Было сказано: 'Нет. Давайте вот, радужный флаг нас всех объединит'.

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[86] See the event Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/events/1349154525133716/ [accessed 21 January 2021].

[87] Ibid.

С другой стороны, мало кто знает о тех инструкциях, которые там были. Людям рассылалась инструкция, как одеваться. И когда было несколько раз проговорено на разных мероприятиях прайд-недели, что ‘мы же не извращенцы. Мы же пойдём в приличной обычной одежде, не в перьях, не в трусах кожаных. Мы должны показать, что мы обычные люди’. [...] Я в этом вижу поверхностную плёнку, которая прикрывает очень много неравенств, очень много проблем в обществе.

[Russ.] What happened at the March of Equality this year, and what happened at all other times, but was not spoken about? In this case, it was said that there is some rainbow flag, some rainbow agenda of tolerance, of the need to be accepted in society. And it was constructed in some way, for a long time people worked on it. And maybe, not everybody knows that last year other flags were prohibited. Anarcho-feminists could not come [to the March of Equality] with their flags, and anarchists could not come with their flags. It was said: ‘No. Come on, the rainbow flag will unite us all’. On another side, few people know about the instructions that were given there. People were sent instructions on what to wear. And it was spoken about several times at different events of the Pride week, that ‘We are not perverts. We would go in decent clothes, not in feathers, not in leather pants. We have to show that we are ordinary people’. [...] I see this as a cover-up film on the surface that hides a lot of inequalities, a lot of problems in the society (Artemenko 2017).

An interesting parallel to the KyivPride politics of the time can be found in the activism of Frank Kameny and the Mattachine Society – the early

national gay rights organisation in appearing in the US in the 1950s. The society produced very specific regulations for picketing, which stated:

> People are more likely to listen to, to examine, and hopefully, to accept new, controversial, unconventional, unorthodox, or unusual ideas and positions, if these are presented to them from sources bearing the symbols of acceptability, conventionality, and respectability, as arbitrary as those symbols may be. Good order, good appearance, and dignity of bearing are essential [...] Dress and appearance should be conservative and conventional' (see The Mattachine Society of Washington [n.d.]).

Both KyivPride march in 2017 and the 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers...' project, demonstrate a similar logic of promoting the 'gay is good' narrative critiqued by Friedrich and more radical grassroots activists.

In 2017, Friedrich wrote an article entitled 'KyivPride2017: homonationalism at the march' (Klein 2017). By that time the concept of homonationalism entered academic discussions in Ukraine.[88] It proved to be

[88] The term 'homonationalism' was introduced by the queer theorist and activist nadiya chushak (who currently prefers the use of small letters in the name spelling) via the Ukrainian translation of Dušan Maljković's analysis of Pride in Serbia in 2010-2012. In this analysis, Maljković argues that the Pride organisers in Serbia chose a specific political position influenced by both neoliberalism and local nationalism. This position presumed the absence of class consciousness or references to anti-fascism, in favour of the hyperfocus on narrow identity politics. At the same time, Pride in Belgrade is positioned by the author as a 'hostage' of the local, state and international actors: for example, using the 'support of the LGBT rights' as an excuse for his racism, Belgrade mayor Dragan Đilas violently evicted Roma population (Maljković 2014). The theoretical explanation of 'homonationalism' as a concept invented by Jasbir Puar was then given in

a rich concept that caused an important political discussion within the field of queer/sexuality studies in Ukraine and the post-socialist context more broadly (Chushak and others 2019; Serdiukova and others 2022; see also Leksikov and Rachok 2019; Rachok and Leksikov 2020 for the critique of the use of the term; as well as Rekhviashvili 2022 for the critique of their critique). Following its introduction into Ukrainian academic discussion via the leftist and feminist media, 'homonationalism' entered the vocabulary of the radical queer activists, such as FRAU artivist group (Plakhotnik 2019), or Friedrich Chernyshov and Lavender Menace, and this radical critique was then mentioned by the KyivPride organisers (Sharyhina 2018).

While the international discussion of the use of this term and its transnationalising continues (AV Verhaeghe 2022) and the limitations of this thesis do not allow full engagement with these important debates, what matters here is two tendencies. First, the appearance of critical queer scholarship in Ukraine that offers alternative approaches to thinking about sexual and gender dissent in Ukraine, and alliances in the knowledge production between these scholars and queer activists that were explored above. Secondly, the use of the conceptual opposition "homonationalism" vs "queer" allowed activists, such as Friedrich Chernyshov, to foreground alternative genealogies and temporalities of struggle, connecting it to intersectional and transnational solidarities. Finally, it allowed for the critique of 'decency' and 'respectability' both in visual representation of LGBT activism and nonnormative lives, and as part of activist strategies. It also allowed for the critique of the depoliticisation of LGBT activism and the marginalisation of grassroots activism ('LHBT, KVIR: Kudy Znykaie Nyzovyi Aktyvizm?' 2018). I see the foregrounding of solidarity with racialised

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the article by Lesia Pahulich (2016) mentioned earlier in this chapter, where the author carried out a critique of KyivPride's similar role in the Ukrainian context.

communities by the queer-anarcho-feminist block as an important shift in radical grassroots activism after 2014. It developed in opposition to the 'white innocence' of the mainstream LGBT organisations at the time of the far-right attacks on Roma settlements, and was perhaps also influenced by international movements such as Black Lives Matter.

At the beginning of 2019, Friedrich co-founded his own NGO – Trans*Generation, that is formed by and aims to support transgender, nonbinary and queer people in Ukraine. While being now part of the NGO, Chernyshov preserved the critical stance in his art.

Besides visual art, Chernyshov also expressed his ideas and feelings in poetry, under his official name Friedrich Chernyshov. His poetic works and translations were featured in print and online poetry magazines. Chernyshov was also longlisted for Arkady Dragomoschenko Prize – international prize for young poets writing in Russian (2017), and his poem was translated into English for *Modern Poetry in Translation* journal (2018). While the format of this thesis does not allow to do justice to the full exploration of Chernyshov's poems, it is important to note several modalities of artistic dissent in his poetry.

Friedrich states that a key for decoding his poetry is his own biography and experiences (Chernyshëv 2020a: 57). For him 'queer poetry' is a space of trauma, protest, or its refusal, social discomfort. At the same time, he distinguishes between his poems about the homosexual experience (lyrical), and about queer experience (manifesting). The latter, in his view, is a more radical and marginal position, a position of a 'screaming body' (Chernyshëv 2020a: 57).

Like the poetic works of Anatoliy Belov, analysed in the previous chapters, Friedrich's poetry is often devoted to working with sexual and bodily shame, and the idea of decency. For example, in this 'Gendernye nabroski'

([Russ.] ‘Gender sketches’, 2019), he writes (Rymbu 2019):

> ‘[…] я хочу чтобы поэзия конкурировала с порнографией
> зелёные пятна от моих дред
> с каплями твоей спермы
> после того как рассмотришь меня
> нарисуй мое тело цисгендерным’
>
> [Russ.] […] I want poetry to compete with pornography
> green stains from my dreadlocks
> with the drops of your sperm
> after you finish looking at me closely
> draw my body as if it is cisgender.

Friedrich’s poetry reveals sexual and gender heterogeneity concealed in society, not just through references to sex or sexuality, but also through the reminders to the (normative) readers that the protagonist is not a cisgender person. The poems often speak of the duality of existence (see ‘Ikh bylo dvoe…’), but also of transgender lived experience as an experience of loneliness (‘Prosypat’sia zaranee…’, [Russ.] ‘Waking up in advance…’, 2019, cited in Rymbu 2019):

> ‘[…] в каком-то смысле не важно
> что здесь будет написано
>
> кто бы что ни говорил
> в статьях о разнообразии
> транс это укорочение
> называния
> одиночества’

[Russ.] '[...] in some way it is not important
what will be written here

whatever anyone says
in the articles about diversity
trans is a shortened way
of denoting
loneliness'

Like Anatoliy Belov's poetry, Friedrich Chernyshov's poetry (Chernyshëv 2020b) presents the personal and the political as entangled, and often presents a form of civic dissent, speaking out against state homophobia and transphobia:

зачем знать показатель гомофобии в обществе
в светской стране слушающей только раду церквей
изгнавшей слово гендер как демона
из бренного тела закона
как помогут проценты непринятия мальчику
получившему удары ножом за потребность любить
разве что он может набить их на шраме
чтобы помнить сколько человек из его окружения
готовы проделать с ним то же самое
восемьдесят восемь процентов мужчин ненавидят трансгендеров и геев
сколько процентов ненавидит меня
если я отношу себя к обоим
тысяча четыреста восемьдесят восемь

на это исследование оказывается влияет женатость
уровень образования и отношение к проституции
а большинство считает что вопросы усыновления
необходимо решать для каждой пары отдельно
за сколько я должен продать себя
сколько стоит палочка от знака процентов?

[Russ.] what is the need to know the rate of homophobia in society
in a secular state that listens only to the council of churches
that purged the word gender as a demon
out of the law's mortal sheath
how would the percentage of nonacceptance help to the boy
stabbed with the knife for the need to love
at best he can tattoo it on his scar
to remember how many people out of those who know him
are ready to do to the same to him
eighty-eight percent of men hate transgenders and gays
how many percent hate me
if I class myself as both
a thousand four hundred eighty-eight
this study is influenced by the marriage status
level of education and attitude to prostitution
and the majority believes that the issues of adoption
have to be decided for each couple individually
how much should I sell myself for
how much does the slash in a percentage sign cost?

This poem points to the historical events and anti-gender formations described in the thesis. Such are references to the Council of Churches that

lobbied against the adoption of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul convention) as it contained the word 'gender' in it. 'A thousand four hundred eighty-eight' is a reference to '14/88', a coded slogan often used by Ukrainian far-right groups and neo-Nazis in general that encodes supremacy of the white race. Friedrich was attacked by the far-right several times during his presentations at public events, and on the streets, therefore the poems partially document his own experience of being a victim of violence.

Being both an anarchist activist and an 'internally displaced person' (war refugee), Friedrich is also a 'menace' to the discourses of citizenship and patriotism. He accuses both Russian imperialist nationalists and Ukrainian nationalists in violence towards nonnormative people ('Mal'chiki, a vy gei ili prosto', [Russ.] 'Boys, are you gays or merely', 2019):[89]

'[...] милый
какая разница в каком метро шифроваться
какая разница от кого убегать
от мужика с рожей убийцы в шапочке Russia
или от бритоголовых молодчиков со свастиками на
лыбедской
какая разница как назовут наш концлагерь'

[Russ.] '[...] dear
what difference does it make in what metro we're disguised
what difference does it make from whom we run
from a redneck with the mug of a killer and a cap saying Russia

[89] Original poem available in Rymbu 2019. English translation cited here was published by Tatiana Retivov (see Chernyshov 2018).

or from young skinheads with swastikas
at Lybedskaya station
what difference does it make what they will call our concentration camp'.

In his poetry Friedrich is much freer to expresses the 'critique from within' of the LGBT community's normativity and exclusions. Such critique is what distinguishes his dissent from the earlier artistic sexual and gender dissent before 2014. For example, in 'Zhiteli goroda Moskva v 17.15…' ('Dwellers of the City of Moscow at 17.15…', 2019, cited in Rymbu 2019) Friedrich recites different categories of people and their dreams: Moscow city dwellers dream of less crowded underground stations, and no people with dyed hair and piercings; police dreams about the world in which violence is not called violence so that they can continue it; 'proper masculine citizens' dream of the 'slant-eyed' people disappearing from their world; 'white guard' members dream of 'all faggots dying from AIDS'; 'educated representatives of LGBT community' dream of Prides without mentioning the miners in Kryvbass, and of 'queer-anarcho-block finally shutting the fuck up', Ukrainian neo-Nazi groups dream of the 'Roma and faggots' dying in all worlds, 'and in this, they are in solidarity with the Moscow ones', etc. The poem goes on to imagine the violent, censoring and normative dreams desires of intellectual elites, Orthodox priests, the psychiatric committee that is sure that transgender people can't give birth, and so on. The poem ends with a conclusion:

[…] все мечтают о лучших мирах
райских кущах землях обето
ванных
чтобы было отныне и присно

и потом чтобы блядь не менялось

—

в их мирах нихуя не сбывается

в их мирах я и есть изменения

[Russ.] [...] everyone dreams of better worlds

pastures of Heaven, lands of pro

mise

of it being from now and until the end of time

and not fucking changing later

—

in their worlds not a damn thing comes true

in their worlds I myself am the changes

Writing on his poetry, Friedrich notes that 'queer poetry' is a 'poetry of paradox': it describes the experience which cannot be silent, but that also cannot be put into words, as there is no 'ready-made' language for such experience (Chernyshëv 2020a: 59). Such a 'paradox' appears if we consider a fascinating network of temporalities presented in the poem.

The poem features a multitude of worlds: worlds in which different social groups and formations (co)exist, and the potential worlds imagined by them. These potential future worlds that are utopian for a normative majority are dystopian for marginalised people: these are the worlds purified and cleansed of racialised, non-heterosexual, non-cisgender, non-conforming 'others'. The poem implicitly shows that the real and imagined worlds are not that different: e.g., police dreams of the world where it would be easier to continue brutality; a psychiatric committee already holds power to normalise gender non-conforming people. The worlds imagined by these formations are just the 'better versions' of existing ones: the versions that eliminate any possible

changes or challenges to the status quo. This Biblical temporality is atemporal ('from now and until the end of time'): its whole premise is to stay 'pure', unchanged and eternal.

These imaginary worlds recall the historian Timothy Snyder's (2018) conceptualisation of two kinds of political imaginaries: the 'politics of eternity' and 'politics of inevitability'. Snyder (2018: 10) claims that political myths that Americans and Europeans rely on are based on 'politics of inevitability'. The 'politics of inevitability' is 'a sense that the future is just more of the present, that the laws of progress are known, that there are no alternatives, and therefore nothing really to be done'. Such politics promotes the rule of law and the idea of progress for nation-states or their integration into bigger democratic systems (represented by the EU). This contrasts with the framework of 'politics of eternity', where time 'is no longer a line into the future, but a circle that endlessly returns the same threats from the past. [...] Progress gives way to doom' (Snyder 2018: 10). A politics of eternity is envisioned and employed by fascist groups and regimes, and, in Snyder's view, is represented by Putin's regime of the 2000-2010s.

Chernyshov's poem captures the politics of eternity enacted by different conservative formations: religious, political, social ideas of 'defending moral society' from 'external threats' to create a future that would be simultaneously a return to the 'golden virginal past'. The 'educated representatives of the LGBT community' in this framework would represent an alternative politics, 'politics of inevitability', oriented towards Western ideas of 'progress'. However, Friedrich is critical of both modes of temporality. He exposes 'educated representatives of LGBT community' as part of normative formations, that aim to 'freeze' existing hierarchies, and conceal inequalities by the rhetorics of 'human rights' and appeals to nationalism and 'Revolution of Dignity'.

The ending of the poem in the present tense, stating that the lyrical hero

‘is the changes themselves’, can be seen as a dissenting act against both nationalist and liberal ideas of modernity.[90] The lyrical hero is the ‘change’ that already exists in the normative worlds. Friedrich’s documenting of this change is consistent with how he documents the existence of his body by means of performance, where Friedrich breaks with normative temporalities of eternity or progress, and points to formations that exist and survice despite those temporalities.

Chapter V: Conclusion

This chapter turned to changes that have taken place in Ukrainian society and art since 2014. It looked at the further development of the anti-gender formations and the interrelation between nationalism and exclusion of marginalised ‘others’. The chapter has also addressed the further development of LGBT NGO activism: the historicisation and instrumentalisation of nonnormativity that becomes more vivid after 2014, as well as the struggle of fitting in with the nationalist mainstream. Both can be traced in Carlos Motta’s project ‘Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…’ The historicisation of nonnormativity, its ‘rediscovery’ and instrumentalisation is also traced through the analysis of the later shows of Koptev’s Orchid and their framing by contemporary artists and curators. I have shown that even when aiming to present a political alternative to the nationalist moralizing mainstream discourses, curatorial and artist statements can perform the work of standardisation of sexual dissent, exoticizing it for the ‘Western gaze’.

In parallel with this exploration, the chapter has touched upon the

[90] In this regard, reflections on decolonial queer politics (such as Popa and others 2019) and queer/trans* postsocialism (Popa 2018) are useful examples of critical analysis of temporality in contemporary art and activism.

development of intersectional dissent in Ukraine, focusing on transgender queer dissent. I have traced the development of transgender grassroots communities as DIY networks and contentious spaces, that both conceal and reveal heterogeneity. I have shown that Friedrich Chernyshov's performance, captured by Ol'ha Kononenko, points to the shift in transgender formations. Situating himself at the intersection of anarchist, queer, feminist and transgender activism, Friedrich Chernyshov performs dissent against bodily, sexual and gender shame; against the respectability and morality politics; and against the silencing and policing of nonnormativity outside and inside of various social formations ('transgender community', 'LGBT community', etc.). Chernyshov's framing of his performance, his public statements and poetry, as well as the activity of the Lavender Menace group, point to the important shift in political activism and (trans)gender dissent: an open critique of the instrumentalization of nonnormativity appearing 'from within', that makes visible the heterogeneity of experiences and discriminations within the 'LGBT' community. Such dissent becomes a 'menace' not only for the state institutions and normative formations, but for the LGBT NGOs that are now accused of uncritically following the path of the European liberal modernisation.

The difference between the artistic strategies chosen for the 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…', and for performance and poetry of Chernyshov that I explored in the chapter, points to the split between NGO activism and grassroots intersectional activism as not just different understanding of politics, but a different understanding of temporality. I read Fridriech Chernyshov's poetry as an attempt to deconstruct both the temporality of the 'return to traditions' promoted by the anti-gender groups, and the linear temporality of 'progress and modernisation' present in Europeanisation discourses. In the next chapter, I will address this struggle through the further analysis of queer feminist artistic dissent after 2014.

CHAPTER VI. RE-SEWING DISSENT: INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM AFTER 2014

Previous chapters of this thesis have already opened up the discussion on feminist dissent *as* sexual, (trans)gender, anticapitalist, antiracist, through the exploration of Svobodna, Feminist Ofenzyva, Lavender Menace and other grassroots collectives (as well as individuals supporting such understanding of feminism). In this concluding chapter, I will further elaborate on such an understanding of feminist dissent. In particular, I am interested in understanding critical formations that turn to feminism as an anti-capitalist critique of heteronormative binary gendering, single-issue politics and nationalism.

When exploring the formation of activism in Ukraine, scholars tend to omit nonnormative feminist positionings (positionings that speak from the place of sexual or gender difference). Such omissions are typical not just for Ukraine. In her work on contemporary art in the context of lesbian, feminist and queer politics in Estonia, Airi Triisberg (2017) talks of the need to recognise the vital role that the queer and lesbian feminist impulses have played in feminism reaching a stronger position in broader society. Triisberg (2017: 12) points out a paradox in historicising nonnormative formations within the feminist movement:

> [...] the queer and lesbian feminist strands of politics in Estonia are characterized by a somewhat ambivalent position: in the narrative of the feminist movement, it is both central and marginal; in its different modes of expression, it is both continuous and fragmentary; and in its relations with mainstream feminism, it is both in alliance and in conflict.

I addressed this dilemma in the previous chapters, bringing attention to the activism of Women Network, Svobodna, Feminist Ofenzyva and Lavender Menace. My aim in this chapter is to look at feminists and feminist collectives who have turned to artistic intersectional dissent after 2014, at the time of the ongoing war. I will explore the activity of the new grassroots feminist collectives that appeared after 2014 and are functioning both within and outside institutionalised art and activist counter-publics: SHvemy and ReSew sewing cooperatives, and their use of fabric, clothing and 'interstitial' objects. I will also explore the work of two people heavily involved in those collectives, Antonina (Tonya) Mel'nyk and Mariia (Masha) Lukianova,[91] focusing on the critique of the normativity carried out by them.

The chapter will begin by discussing the changes that take place in feminist activism after 2014. I will then move to the study of the SHvemy collective as feminist art workers. I will discuss SHvemy and the complexity of the positionings in relation to the war that feminists had to adopt after the 2014. The turbulent changes of 2014 protests, economic crisis and the beginning of the war greatly influenced feminist positionings and formations in Kyiv. Maidan and the war fostered the proliferation of different feminist positionings and redefinitions of feminism. The overthrowing of the Yanukovych regime by Maidan protests in 2014, the coming to power of the Poroshenko pro-EU regime, the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the beginning of the war created specific 'discursive closures'. Stanley Deetz

[91] In using the names of the cultural practitioners, I follow their own preferences in choosing the names, therefore in this thesis I refer to Antonina Mel'nyk as Tonya and to Mariia Lukianova as Masha. While I refer to Masha's and Tonya's activity that took place mostly prior to 2020, I use the 'she' pronoun in relation to either of them, which corresponded to their self-representation and public statements at the time. However, both Tonya and Masha have used other pronouns in relation to themselves (such as 'they') in the recent years, which I consider important to mention.

(Deetz 1992: 87) states that 'Discursive closure exists whenever potential conflict is suppressed. One of the most common is the disqualification of certain groups and participants. [...] Closure is also possible through the privileging of certain discourses and the marginalisation of the others'.

In this thesis I have addressed the discursive closures related to sexuality and gender: construction of knowledge and identity that is aimed to demonstrate unity instead of conflicting forces; construction of certain discourses about nonnormativity as preferable and others as marginalised; disqualification of certain subjects from expression or denying them access to such expression. The artworks featured in the thesis engaged with these discursive closures, revealing the existence of closures and the heterogeneity they try to conceal.

In this chapter, I will turn to the closures connected to the political regime and the war. Some examples of such 'discursive closures' have been described in the political contexts of Serbia and Armenia. In Serbia, the widely spread and standardized discourse on Serbia's only future as part of the EU created closure for possible political discourses that would question neoliberalism and imagine other forms of future (Petrović 2015). In Armenia, popular support for a new leader Nikol Pashinyan - the face of 'revolution of love and solidarity' in 2018 – created a discursive closure for critiquing the new government, 'labelling anyone who tries as 'counter-revolutionary and serving the former regime'' (Sargsyan 2019: 69). It is productive to approach the changes that took place after Maidan and until 2019 from a perspective of discursive closures.

Maidan and the beginning of the war in Ukraine developed and consolidated discourses of national identity that were in anti-imperialist opposition to Russia, and on a temporal accession line from 'backwards' Russia/Soviet Union to 'progressive' 'Europe'/European Union. Sociologists Oleg Zhuravlev and Volodymyr Ishchenko (2020) state that Maidan in 2014

created a myth of its own: it was framed as a 'birth of a new Ukrainian nation' and of civic nationalism, while its ethnonationalist basis was concealed. The information war carried out by Russia, with its discourses of the 'fascists' and 'chaos' in Ukraine (Pomerantsev 2015), further complicated the situation, enabling discursive closures to develop in Ukraine in response. Thus, within the mainstream discourses, the actions of the new Poroshenko government, effects of the war and of militarism could not be questioned as such: discursive closures presumed that those attempting anti-militarist critique or critique of the government were traitors, serving not the interests of Maidan, the new Ukrainian state and its progress, but Russia's interests instead.[92] My interest lies in how artistic feminist dissent operated in this situation.

Next, I will consider the specificity of feminist dissent as sexual and gender dissent. I will focus not just on the activity of SHvemy and (in part) Resew cooperatives. Part of the chapter will be devoted to the individual artistic dissent of Tonya Mel'nyk and Masha Lukianova. While being members and co-founders of both cooperatives, Masha and Tonya have created independent artistic works that contribute greatly to the discussion of the sexual and gender dissent in Ukraine. Several themes that arise in the works by SHvemy, ReSew, Tonya Mel'nyk and Masha Lukianova will be considered: critiquing the gender binary; opposing morality and the 'traditional values' discourse through working with sexual and bodily shame; exploring heterogeneity of kinships; exploring nonnormative sexuality and intimate counter-publics as intersectional phenomena (inseparable from class, citizenship and gender). I believe these works point to the new queer feminist formations and allow us to see how queer feminism as a practice of sexual

[92] Such polarising division was exacerbated not just from within of Ukraine, but from outside, as the propaganda of the Russian state undermined the legitimacy of Ukrainian state and conflated it with fascism.

and gender dissent is understood in these formations. Finally, I will touch upon the topic of temporality and SHvemy's searching for different temporalities that are imagined outside of modernity and an anthropocentric understanding of time.

1. Feminist positionings after 2014

Feminist activism in the years preceding 2014, as well as knowledge production in gender studies, led to the fact that after 2014 feminist positionings became less marginal and ostracised in society. On the one hand, the institutionalisation of gender studies led to the creation of the first (and so far the only) Masters program in Gender Studies in Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv in 2017. On the other hand, gender and feminism 'stepped out' of academia, NGO or activist circles into mass media. Sociologist Tamara Martsenyuk created a 'Gender for everyone' online course for a 'Prometheus' online learning platform in 2015, and later published several books on gender and feminism for a general audience (Martsenyuk 2017, 2018). Many websites promoting feminism appeared in the Ukrainian online space, 'Hender v detaliakh' being most active in popularising knowledge about gender, sexuality and feminism (https://genderindetail.org.ua/). Social networks such as Facebook facilitated fast knowledge production and exchange: an important #iaNeBoius'Skazaty flashmob ([Ukr.] #IAmNotAfraidToSay] against gendered sexual violence started by Nastya Mel'nychenko raised a wave of personal stories and discussions and spread beyond Ukrainian borders.

Maidan and the following Russian invasion influenced feminist positionings. Those who tried to voice feminist demands on Maidan were attacked by the far-right during the protests (Teteriuk 2016; Channell-Justice 2022). Emily Channell-Justice (2022: 186), after participating in Maidan protests and carrying out interviews with many activists, concluded:

> For most protesters, European "values" meant respect for the sovereignty of the Ukrainian nation, however its citizens defined it. For many Maidan protesters, that nation was based on a certain conceptualization of Ukraine that did not allow space for discussion of gender equality.

Later some feminists succeeded in forming their own Zhinocha Sotnia ([Ukr.] Women Squad) and stayed active on Maidan – yet they, as some scholars note, by necessity adopted the public mainstream nation-building rhetoric (Mayerchyk 2014). Like the LGBT NGO activists, discussed in the previous chapter, those who stayed on Maidan preferred to change rhetoric and actions: the words 'feminism', 'gender', 'homophobia' were avoided in public materials, and 'more populist, but more understandable rhetoric' was used (Insha 2014).

After Maidan, favourable conditions were largely created for those strands of feminist activism that did not question the general status quo: nationalist and liberal feminists. Women's organisations often employed nationalist and neo-traditionalist discourses since the 1990s (Zhurzhenko 2001; Hrycak 2006), and this tendency continued after 2014. Liberal feminist initiatives developing after 2014 were involved in NGO work, high politics and 'human rights' discourses, pushing the state to comply with international human rights regulation. The Europeanisation and NGO-isation processes of what Kristen Ghodsee (2004) termed 'feminism-by-design' had its influence on feminist activism in Ukraine. Researchers (Mayerchyk and Plakhotnik 2019) point that liberal and nationalist feminist initiatives often

> [...] виступають «за рівність жінок із чоловіками», де головна мета — отримати права й можливості, вже доступні панівній групі;

відтак мета видимости й представлености у владних структурах тут превалює над критикою самих цих структур. Боротьба за доступ до вищих щаблів влади, до керівних посад, до великого бізнесу, до «Європи», до збройних сил або «до барикад» замінює власне критику інститутів домінування і спротив ієрархіям, неолібералізму, глобальним нерівностям, примусу асиміляції, колоніальности, механізмам маргіналізації тощо.

[Ukr.] [...] call 'for equality between women and men', where the main aim is to receive the rights and opportunities that are already available to the dominant group; therefore, the aim of visibility and representation in power structures prevails here over the critique of these structures. Struggle for access to the highest ranks of power, to the leadership positions, to the big business, to 'Europe', to the military or to the 'barricades' replaces the critique of the institutes of domination and resisting hierarchies, neoliberalism, global inequalities, coercion to assimilate, coloniality, mechanisms of marginalisation, etc.

While some feminist groups and organisations (such as Women Network, Svobodna and Feminist Ofenzyva) had ceased to exist by 2014-2015, new feminist groups and organisations have also appeared. Feminist street demonstrations also continued to take in public space and expanding to more cities. Feminist activism was mostly centred around the needs of the cisgender heterosexual women. However, some feminist groups, such as Feministychna Maisternia ([Ukr.] Feminist Workshop), openly stated their support for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, and transgender people more broadly.

Like some other European countries (such as Yugoslavia, see Zaharijevic 2017; Miškovska Kajevska 2017), the onset of the war meant a growing tendency towards re-patriarchalisation in society due to nation-building discourses. These discourses often undermined the importance of feminism and threatened the newly-invented feminist traditions. Channell-Justice (2022: 188) points out the connection between decommunisation and re-patriarchialisation: '[B]ecause ideas about women's equality are so deeply associated with the communist period, only a reversal of these notions can be truly anti-communist'. For example, in 2017 Volodymyr Viatrovych, the head of the Institute of National Memory caused heated discussions by suggesting the cancellation of the 8th of March public holiday, proposing a new 'day of the family' instead (Semchuk 2018). Such a move was framed as part of the 'decommunisation' process. However, it is an example of how the turn to 'traditional values' (useful to anti-gender groups) was masked by the rhetoric of 'decommunisation' and 'modernisation'.

After 2014 'queer feminist' as a political position became more pronounced within activist circles and used as a self-defining term. Several activist collectives openly aligning themselves with queer feminist politics appeared in Kyiv (among them the FRAU and FemSolution groups founded in 2014 and 2016). In September 2016 the *Krytyka feministychna* ([Ukr.] *Feminist Critique*) academic peer-review journal appeared – it described itself as a 'journal of feminist and queer studies'. In 2017 a 'queer block' was organised on the 8th of March feminist demonstration for the first time; a 'queer-anarcho-feminist block' in the KyivPride demonstration, described earlier, was organised soon after.

Feminist activists who did not align with either liberal or nationalist agendas, also often (re)defined their activism as anti-militarist. Anti-militarism in this regard meant not aligning with the imperialist Russian aggression, or

denying the war in Ukraine, but rather addressing the discursive closures created by the war.

Anti-militarist feminist critique was present in the themes of the 8th of March demonstrations in Kyiv in 2015 and 2017. In 2015, the main theme of the march was framed as 'Feminizm zavzhdy na chasi' ([Ukr.] 'There is always time for feminism') – a reference to the fact that the 'emergency' discourses of the war framed feminist issues as less important ('now is not the time for…'). The statement of the march explained:

> Війна веде до збільшення кількості насильства над жінками з боку військових обох таборів, знецінення праці жінок поруч з героїзацією чоловіків-захисників, сприяє замовчуванню таких важливих проблем, як домашнє насильство, дискримінація жінок на ринку праці тощо. Отже війна – це і гендерне питання, і щось значно ширше, ніж просто битва озброєних. Інфляція, мілітаризація економіки ставлять всі інші соціальні та культурні питання 'не на часі', зокрема питання, які стосуються прав жінок. Однак вирішення саме цих питань і веде до нового суспільства рівності і справедливості, за яке ми боролися ще рік тому. Замовчування гендерних питань обіцяє погіршення становища жінок у майбутньому. Провладні партії вже не раз подавали законопроекти про заборону абортів, а скорочення соціальних виплат поставить жінок у ще більш скрутне становище, ніж воно є зараз. Поглиблення патріархального мислення і вузьких націоналістичних поглядів обіцяє лише нові витки насильства. Ми не можемо допустити, щоб на той момент, коли зовнішній ворог відійде, мізогінічна і націоналістична ненависть обернулася б проти внутрішнього 'ворога'.

> [Ukr.] The war leads to an increase in violence against women by the military in both camps, a devaluation of women's labour along with the heroisation of male defenders, and the suppression of such important issues as domestic violence, discrimination against women in the labour market, and so on. So war is both a gender issue and something much broader than just an armed battle.
> Inflation and the militarisation of the economy make all other social and cultural issues less urgent, including issues related to women's rights. However, resolving exactly these issues leads to a new society of equality and justice, which we fought for a year ago. Silencing of gender issues will lead to the worsening of the women's situation in the future. Pro-government parties have repeatedly suggested the bills banning abortion, and cuts in social benefits will put women in an even more difficult position than they are now. The deepening of patriarchal thinking and narrow nationalist views promise only new rounds of violence. We cannot allow misogynistic and nationalist hatred to turn against the internal 'enemy' when the external enemy leaves.[93]

In 2017, such critique was even more pronounced in the march's main theme 'Ni nasyl'stvu vsikh formativ, vid roddomiv do viis'kkomativ' ([Ukr.] 'No to violence in all forms, from maternity hospitals to draft boards'). The march statement opposed various forms of institutionalised violence over women and intersex people (such as reproductive, economic, domestic violence) ('Feministychnyĭ Marsh "NI Nasyl'stvu Vsikh Formativ, Vid Roddomiv Do Viĭs'kkomativ"' 2017). The title of the march also suggested that the practices

[93] See https://www.facebook.com/events/816456388389718/ [accessed 21 January 2021].

of military conscription in draft boards were another form of institutionalised violence.[94] Marches in 2015, 2016 and 2017 were organised by the coalitions of activist groups, NGOs and cultural initiatives, similar to the ones existing before 2014. Anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian samba band Rytmy sprotyvu ([Ukr.] 'Rhythms of Resistance', part of the international network of grassroots political samba bands),[95] together with FemSolution feminist group, were prominent organisers of demonstrations that influenced and radicalised their message. Among the other organisers were also Autonomous Workers Union, Direct Action student union, Insight LGBT NGO, Amnesty International Ukraine and other groups and initiatives. These feminist demonstrations, among others, aimed at undoing concealed discursive closures and opposing the unified nationalist discourse of Ukraine's present and the future.

However, as marches became more and more popular, grassroots activists were marginalised by NGO activists. Since 2018, 'Insight' LGBT organisation announced their own demonstration – 'Marsh Zhinok*' ([Ukr.] 'Women's* March') to take place on the 8th of March. While the protests' agenda has been discussed collectively between different groups beforehand, this time grassroots activists were not invited (Semchuk 2018). The name of the initiative was borrowed from the US Women's March anti-Trump protests, and the agenda of the march focused on Ukraine's ratification of the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, signed by the Council of Europe in Istanbul in 2011 ('Istanbul Convention' from this point on). The renaming of the march

[94] After several 'waves' of mobilisation, the idea of compulsory military conscription is revisited by the government at the moment (February 2022) in favour of short- and long-term contracts.

[95] See https://www.rhythms-of-resistance.org/ [accessed 21 January 2021].

from ‘feminist’ to ‘Women’s March’ was a strategic move made by the Insight NGO. It aligned with a ‘Western model’ of understanding of feminism (possibly making it easier to present the project to international donors). Women’s March, in the words of the Insight member Taia Gerasimova, became a distinct ‘brand’ of the organisation (SOGI Campaigns [n.d.]). The renaming was also a populist step, to make feminism more accessible to general audience, as stated by Olena Shevchenko, who is currently known as a founder of the Women’s March:

> [...] Ми вирішили, що треба трошки змінити формат, треба залучати нових людей, нові організації і ініціативи і, скажімо так, зробити ідею проведення Маршу Жінок більш зрозумілою для широкого загалу.
>
> [Ukr.] [...] We decided that we needed to change the format a bit, we needed to involve new people, new organisations and initiatives, and, so to say, to make the idea of the Women’s March more accessible to the broad audience (KyivPride 2022b).

Distancing themselves from leftist, queer and feminist grassroots initiatives, Insight invited members of women’s NGOs to be part of the organising committee. The goal of the Women’s March was to achieve high attendance by uniting different groups (sometimes with opposite views on gender or sex work), and its descriptions became more populist. The protest was framed as a way to protest against violence and to have fun, and it was promised that each person would be able to find and join a ‘thematic block to

their liking' at the big demonstration (Marsh Zhinok 2020).[96] The Women's March was successful in gathering a broader audience, and with time built coalitions with many NGOs and initiatives. During the first Women's March, a representative of the 'Chirikli' Roma women's fund spoke about the cases of racial segregarion in schools and hospitals, and discrimination against Roma women.[97] However, in the following years' demonstrations Roma women's demands were not prominent.

The monopolisation of the feminist movement by one NGO and the protest's liberal 'rebranding' was critiqued by radical grassroots activists (Farbar 2018; see also Popova 2019). Yet the Women's March continued to take place for several years after 2018. Since then, the members of the Insight LGBT NGO have also made attempts to re-write the history of feminist protests, erasing the groups and coalitions that existed before the Women's March, and claiming that Kyiv's feminist marches have been the organisation's project from the very beginning – it is just that in 2018 the NGO 'changed the [demonstration's] concept, naming, and now works for a bigger audience' (KyivPride 2022b). New attempts to historicise the 'feminist movement' in Ukraine have also been made in academia. Like the attempts to historicise the 'LGBT movement', described in the previous chapter, some contemporary historicizations of feminist activism in Ukraine focused disproportionately on the activities of NGOs, and inscribed feminist activism into the nation-building narratives (Kis' 2018; Martsenyuk 2018). They also narrowed feminist activism down to the activity of cisgender women, silencing the themes of nonnormative gender and sexuality. For example, the Lavender

[96] While the title of the march appeared as 'Women's* March' at first, with the asterisk denoting the multitude of women's experiences, identities and socialisation, currently asterisk is often not used, which I read as another populist step.

[97] See the recording of the live video broadcast (Radio Svoboda 2018).

Menace group is rarely considered important enough to include by Ukrainian researchers writing on contemporary feminist activism. An important part of this historicization was the use of 'intersectional' in labelling some feminist groups and activities.

'Intersectionality' (as 'intersektsiinist'' or 'peretyn dyskryminatsii' in Ukrainian) is a loan-term that entered activist vocabulary in the 2010s meaning the intersection of discriminations, and became more widespread in the second half of the decade (see Kamufliazh 2014; Popova 2017; Le Dem and Riepa 2018). Feminist initiatives such as Feministychna Maisternia, FRAU or queer-anarcho-feminist block started calling their activism 'intersectional'. In the introduction to the 2017 edition of the 'Hender dlia medii' ([Ukr. 'Gender for media']) textbook, the editors regretted that the textbook did not include the discussion of intersectional feminist practices (Maierchyk and others 2017: 4–5), which means that by that time 'intersectionality' became more known as a term.

Women's March was also named 'intersectional' both by its organisers[98] and by the scholars historicising an event. For example, sociologist Hanna Hrytsenko (2020) argued that the Women's March was 'the first fully intersectional march'. In the same article Hrytsenko also delineated different strands of feminist activism in Ukraine: (collaborating) liberal and intersectional; radical trans-exclusive; anarchist and Marxist leftist feminism; and critical queer feminism. This artificial division not only ignored the actual existence of the activist groups such as queer-anarcho-feminist block, but

[98] See the description of the Women's March 2019 by Insight LGBT NGO on the event's Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/events/756957021344295/?post_id=765295583843772&view=permalink [accessed 17 April 2023]. See also the interview with Olena Shevchenko (Nikolenko 2019).

also framed intersectional feminism as inevitably connected to liberal feminism.

Like 'homonationalism', 'intersectionality' became a concept that acquired a variety of political meanings during its localisation and 'translation' in Ukraine. In my opinion, the 'intersectional feminism' of the Women's March came to mean liberal activism that paid attention to the intersection of different identities – the 2018 demonstration was indeed one of the few that brought attention to and gave voice to the members of racialised formations, such as Roma women. However, over the years Women's March also risked the depoliticization of intersectional feminism by narrowing the main agenda and not addressing deeper structural inequalities (such as the role of the state in racism against Roma, or the role of capitalism in the production of inequalities). The ReSew collective that will be explored further, was a part of an alternative network of groups and communities that aimed to dive deeper into the exploration of the structural inequalities, through activism and art.

2. The making of SHvemy and ReSew collectives

With the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, dominant narratives in both states excluded collaboration and promoted confrontation between the states and their citizens (see Lazarenko 2019; Way 2019). However, as seen in previous chapters, grassroots activism for a long time depended on international collaboration and coalitions of activists in post-Soviet countries. Despite the shift in feminist positionings that took place after the beginning of the war, some feminists continued to create non-nationalist and anti-imperialist coalitions that went beyond state borders. The SHvemy cooperative is an example of such coalition.

The SHvemy cooperative was started in 2015 in Saint Petersburg. Its initiator, Antonina (Tonya) Mel'nyk, was born in 1988 and was a member of

grassroots anarchist initiatives in Kyiv, such as the Direct Action student union (Vector:media 2017). Since 2012, Tonya was actively involved in running the 'Vil'na shkola' ([Ukr.] Free School) project that was started by the Direct Action student union and grounded in liberation pedagogy. This project was important for non-academic grassroots knowledge production and distribution and included courses on gender theory (see more on Tonya's activism and the Free School project in Channell-Justice 2022).

Tonya was educated in clothes design and worked in many professions related to the clothes making, but was unhappy with her position there:

> Меня смущало и вводило в определённый дискомфорт состояние иерархии босса надо мной, и то, что я должна кем-то командовать, раздавать какие-то приказы. Я начала мечтать о чём-то альтернативном, другом, но оно казалось чем-то нереальным в моей жизни.
>
> [Russ.] I was confused and experienced some discomfort from the hierarchy that the boss had over me, and the fact that I had to manage someone and give some orders. I started to dream about something alternative, different, but it seemed something unreal in my life (Yugov 2016).

In 2015 Mel'nyk took part in a 'Shkola vovlechennogo iskusstva' ([Russ.] 'School of the involved art') project organised by the Chto Delat' art collective in Saint Petersburg. The school was envisioned as a space of informal art education and cooperation; it had a focus on political art and stressed the importance of collective art practices (Tsaplia Ol'ga Egorova and others 2016). Several other participants of the 'School of the involved art' joined Mel'nyk to create a sewing cooperative, which was at first envisioned as a

graduation art project. One of them was Mariia (Masha) Lukianova from Russia, born in 1987, working at the time as a waitress, and also working with contemporary dance and video, and writing a PhD dissertation at the Saint Petersburg State University. Among other SHvemy members during its foundation were also Nadia Kaliamina, Aliona Isahanian, Anna Tereshkina, Sasha Kachko.[99] The cooperative members had sewn the dresses for the activist 'Vagina Monologues' play (director Sof'ia Akimova). At their graduation, they made a performance with these dresses and a presentation of clothes. After graduation, they decided to continue their work, therefore the cooperative as an art project transformed into a long-term economic project.

The beginning of the SHvemy cooperative coincided with the beginning of a closer relationship between Tonya and Masha. In August 2016 Mariia Lukianova and Antonina Mel'nyk moved to Kyiv, where another cooperative was founded entitled ReSew; however, still staying members of SHvemy. While the SHvemy cooperative currently positions itself as an art group, the ReSew cooperative in Kyiv was envisioned as an economic project growing out of the eco-movement and focused on upcycling (employing used fabrics and clothing in the creation of new items). In 2017 the ReSew cooperative gained more members. SHvemy members are based in both Ukraine and Russia, while ReSew members are based in Ukraine. However, both ReSew and SHvemy collectives collaborate and share members. The cooperatives unite citizens of Ukraine and Russia, migrants and internally displaced persons.

SHvemy and ReSew can be considered part of leftist, feminist and nonnormative critical formations. The name of the cooperative, SHvemy, is a

[99] Different people have been participating in SHvemy and Resew collectives over the years, and the current make-up differs from the original. Where possible, I mention the names of the people involved in specific projects described in the chapter.

neologism that reflects this utopian thinking in praising the collectivity of the cooperative labour. It is created by combining the Russian *shveya* ([Russ.] 'seamstress') and *my* ([Russ.] 'we'). In their statement, SHvemy cited young Marx, as well as the famous *Chto Delat'?* ([Russ.] *What Is To Be Done?*, 1862) novel by Nikolai Chernyshevsky that promoted ideas of cooperatives and communes and women emancipation (Sewing cooperative SHVEMY 2015).[100] Aligning themselves with certain leftist traditions, SHvemy and ReSew are also part of the global contemporary cooperative movement that privileges ethical production and consumption, horizontal forms of cooperation over consumerism and individualism (Setsko 2017). In the statement on their Facebook page (SHvemy [n.d.]), SHvemy emphasize that they are 'a collective of equals' that value mutual help and solidarity, environment protection, and drive towards a decrease in consumption.

In their statement for the 'Kyiv School' biennal (Sewing cooperative SHVEMY 2015) SHvemy theorised their political goals and activity through the concepts of recycling and reclaiming. Claiming that the system of goods/money relationship that destroys the connection between people constantly reinvents itself, the cooperative members suggested reinventing (recycling) theory to create a world without hierarchies and oppression. Such 'recycling' was viewed necessary in order to re-signify the meaning of the concept of 'cooperative'. In the post-Soviet countries this concept is still loaded with the Soviet symbolic 'baggage': since 1930s Soviet state-controlled economy influenced the development and perception of

[100] One of SHvemy's first projects was called 'Девятый сон коллективного тела швейного кооператива Швемы' ([Russ.] 'A ninth dream of the SHvemy cooperative's collective body') - a direct reference to the dreams of Vera Pavlovna, the protagonist of Chto Delat', whose path to personal and political freedom lies in founding a sewing cooperative.

cooperatives, and in the late 1980s 'cooperatives' became the instruments of shadow economics and money laundering. With Ukraine becoming independent in the early 1990s, new capitalist business models appeared, with cooperatives being framed as ineffective and remnants of the corrupt Soviet system. SHvemy's task was, therefore, to 'renew' cooperative on both physical and symbolic level.

In the words of SHvemy,

> Одну зі своїх цілей ми вбачаємо в переробці понятійного апарату, що нав'язує оптику радянського досвіду. [...] Практика показує, що при викиданні мотлоху на звалище, навіть якщо це звалище історії, воно не зникає остаточно, а розкладається, гниє й отруює все навколо. Таким чином, якщо цілковито відкинути товарно-грошові відносини – це, ймовірно, спричинить більше шкоди, ніж користі. Ми вирішили здійснити точковий експеримент і застосувати до цієї системи принципи рісайклінгу – перекроювання, переробки наявного на те, що справді необхідно. Ми не стільки створюємо нову теорію, критикуючи старе, але, швидше, намагаємося відтворити утопію в наявній реальності.
>
> [Ukr.] One of our aims is to remake the conceptual apparatus that imposes the Soviet experience optics. [...] The reality is that when garbage is dumped in a landfill, even if it is a landfill of history, it does not disappear completely, but decomposes, rots and poisons everything around. Thus, rejecting commodity-money relations altogether is likely to do more harm than good. We decided to carry out a selective experiment and apply the principles of recycling to this system – redesigning, processing the existing into what is really

needed. We are not so much creating a new theory by criticizing the old, but rather trying to recreate a utopia in the existing reality (Sewing cooperative SHVEMY 2015).

Thinking of recycling and rethinking continued in ReSew cooperative work. The title of the ReSew cooperative reflects this strive to 'recreate utopia in the existing reality'. The cooperative slogan 'resew, recycle, renew' points to both generating new items from the old ones (ethical production, upcycling of clothes and materials), and transforming the 'old' ideas, theories and practices into the new ones.

While Koptev's Orchid, discussed earlier in Chapters I and V, appeared in the 1990s at a time of shortage, when recycling and upcycling were necessary elements of survival for a large part of the population, SHvemy and ReSew appeared when clothes and commodities were more readily available, social stratification was more naturalised, and the capitalist ideology of consumption was widespread in the ex-Soviet space. Clothes recycling and D.I.Y. aesthetics for SHvemy and Resew works, therefore, carry more pronounced additional meanings, in comparison with the Orchid costumes: they are created from a specific eco-feminist activist standpoint and encourage this standpoint to be adopted by their customers. Also, in line with feminist principles, SHvemy and ReSew were envisioned as horizontal collectives where labour and profit were shared fairly between the participants (again, in contrast with Koptev's Orchid, where possibilities for the exploitation of the models and hierarchical decision-making continue to exist). This shift signifies to me a radically different approach to clothes-making as a practice that would not be possible without various types of knowledge about feminist, anarchist, anti-capitalist and ecological global practices and positionings spreading in Ukraine in the 2000s.

Among the political theories and practices, taken for creative transformation and 'upcycling', many were undoubtedly feminist. Not being intentionally separatist, both SHvemy and ReSew are collectives that do not at present include cisgender men. In the post-Soviet space, sewing is mostly the domain of women, and while cooperatives are open to people of all genders, their membership reflects the general distribution of gendered labour options. By their activity, SHvemy and ReSew problematize, make visible and reimagine manual gendered labour of sewing and working with textiles, and the problems related to it. They are vocal about such labour being at the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy (ZBOKU 2019).

Both cooperatives defined themselves from the beginning as feminist and supported (eco-)feminist economies. SHvemy and ReSew also aligned themselves with an anarcho-feminist agenda (Tocar 2017; ZBOKU 2019) both in their organisation and works (both groups produced multiple banners in support of anarchist and feminist events and initiatives). Similar to Svobodna and Feminist Ofenzyva groups discussed earlier, in SHvemy feminism is framed by members as inseparable from anti-capitalism. Cooperative member Masha stated:

> Мне очень многие наши практики – попытка ненасильственного общения, то, как мы вырабатываем хаотичный и слепой пиар, но хотя бы без кальки с капиталистического мира, – мне это очень ценно. Что мы не делаем ставку на рекламу, на массовость. Отказ от правил капиталистического мира для меня уже есть феминизм, отчасти экофеминизм, потому что мы в той области, которая достаточно сильно влияет на природу и обедняет ее.
>
> [Russ.] Many of our practices – attempts to communicate non-violently, the way we develop our chaotic and blind PR without

> copying the capitalist world – are very valuable to me. [It is valuable] That we do not thrive on the advertisement, on large-scale involvement. Refusing the rules of the capitalist world is in itself feminism for me, in part eco-feminism, as we are [working] in a field that has a significant impact on nature and weakens it (ZBOKU 2019).

As SHvemy is a collective that (until 2022) has been partially based in Saint Petersburg, and partially in Kyiv, it is an example of an interstitial/international group that crosses state borders. In this chapter, I will turn to SHvemy (and sometimes ReSew), as I consider their activity important for Ukrainian and international networks of (artistic) dissent. In the next subsections, I will explore the feminist positioning of SHvemy as a political collective within and outside the institutionalised contemporary art system, as well as its members' involvement in street activism.

3. Feminist art workers: dissent of SHvemy

3.1. SHvemy: subverting contemporary art system

Since its foundation, SHvemy has become a collective that encompasses several intertwined modes of existence and functioning: economic enterprise, art initiative and activism. By their existence, SHvemy oppose the distinction between 'art' and 'craft' and align their activity with 'craftivism' - craft activism (Tocar 2017). As an art project, SHvemy became an advertisement for the cooperative as an economic project. Due to their interstitial character - as simultaneously an economic, artistic and activist initiative - SHvemy reimagine the boundaries between art and life. First, they do so by believing that 'any human experience can be presented as an art project' (Yugov 2016). Secondly, the craftivism and textile work of SHvemy question the hierarchies within the contemporary art system, where work with textiles is still often

treated as less important. Finally, the practices of the collective question the system of institutionalised art and art market as such.

Questioning the system of institutionalised contemporary art takes place mostly through making visible (and palpable) art labour and labour as such. As I explored in Chapter II, development of institutionalised contemporary art in Ukraine and other ex-Soviet countries put many artists in the precarious position of no state support, free-lance work patterns, non-transparent payment system, self-management and competing for access to grants and art residencies. At the same time, the competitional contemporary art system concealed the precarity of this labour. SHvemy, as both precarious textile workers and art workers, realised their social conditions very well. For instance, Anna Tereshkina critiqued the absence of attention to labour in gallery spaces and the 'elitist attitude to the artist as a genius' (Yugov 2016). Labour and its relation to gender is one of the main themes explored by SHvemy and ReSew collectives (see ZBOKU 2019).

As a sewing cooperative, SHvemy presents an interesting case: in the words of Roman Os'minkin (2019), they 'pull their profession into art in a radical way'. SHvemy often use art spaces for carrying out workshops on sewing and upcycling. Following Gregory Sholette (2004; 2007), Os'minkin considers SHvemy to be contemporary 'constructive interventionists' - they create within the body of an institution a utopian (at least at first) alternative that questions existing labour relations. Opening up concealed discourses about labour in art institutions allows them the imagining of new possibilities for solidarity between various precarious workers, such as textile workers and art workers.

In one of their projects, SHvemy made visible the precarious and exploitative quality of sewing as gendered labour very directly. In 2016, they created a *12-chasovoi Rabochii Den'* ([Russ.] '*12-hours Working Day'*) performance for a festival entitled 'Bednye dialektiki' ([Russ.] 'Poor

dialectics').[101] During the festival, SHvemy sewed bags for 12 hours in conditions that closely imitated the assembly-line labour conditions of sewing factory workers in 'developing' countries (by which SHvemy presumably mean the 'Global South'). Their performance was open for visitors to observe; the day following their 12-hour working day SHvemy sold the bags that they made for a very low price, equivalent to the earnings of the factory workers. Stencils stating 'Sdelano v rabstve' ([Russ.] 'Made in slavery') were printed on the bags. The statement of the collective emphasized that the performance was a gesture of solidarity with precarious workers. However, it also recognized that the possibility of creating art within the contemporary capitalist system not a right, but a privilege, as factory workers do not have free time to create art (Briukhovets'ka 2017: 7).

SHvemy's performance points to the post-Soviet art workers in 2000s and 2010s being in the shifting position between the 'precariat' and the 'projectariat' (term by Baker 2014). Similar to factory workers in 'developing countries', SHvemy exist in conditions of labour and income insecurity. As art workers, however, they still are in a more financially beneficial position than the textile factory workers in the Global South – and therefore can engage in 'art as a privilege'.

SHvemy's self-reflective positioning, sensitive to privileges and hierarchies, brings attention to contemporary world division into 'developed' and 'developing' countries and to the various formations that suffer from precarity because of it. It also sets out an experiment with the audience and makes visitors reflect on their own position. It is up to the audience whether to either buy the cheap bags, 'made in slavery', or not; to believe in the reality

[101] See the event's Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/events/569552289884878/?active_tab=discussion [accessed 21 January 2021].

of SHvemy's labour or the reality of art performance (seemingly separated from real labour within the contemporary art discourses).

In April 2019, SHvemy created another art project in Saint Petersburg, even more critical of the contemporary art system. It was called *Sh'em i khleb zhdem* ([Russ.] 'Sewing and Waiting for the Bread'). They collected and exhibited their applications for different art residencies, grants and art projects, and the refusals they received – 'the archive of failures'. In their statement SHvemy argue that this 'archive of failures' helps them to understand their principles better, asking themselves: 'Maybe we don't need to enter these [contemporary art] institutions? But what do we do for a living? How do we survive?' (Sewing cooperative SHVEMY 2019). In the statement SHvemy reflect on the changes that have happened to the position of the artist since the Soviet times, and myths about artists as either 'special citizens' or marginalised and poor, but independent and free alternative thinkers. While being critical of the Soviet past, they are also critical of the globalised contemporary art system: SHvemy expose their own poverty, speak out on having to juggle several jobs, and critique the economic practices of the contemporary art institutions.

During the project, SHvemy carried out a two-day 'Sewing marathon', during which they were sewing in exchange for food. SHvemy commented:

> Шить за еду - это наша метафора к ситуации, когда нам предлагают сделать художественную работу без гонораров, но с обеспечением еды, жилья, материалов. Стоит считывать это как возможность, шанс проявить себя и сделать высказывание, или это очередная эксплуатация, для того, чтобы институция, выделяющая деньги, реализовала их?

> [Russ.] Sewing in exchange for food is our metaphor of the situation when we are offered to make an artwork with no honorariums, but with the food, accommodation and materials provided. Shall we consider such offer to be an opportunity, our chance to manifest ourselves and make a statement, or is it yet another exploitation, so that the institution could dispose of the funds? (Sewing cooperative SHVEMY 2019)

As we can see, the issue of the marginality of the artist, raised by Belov in the 2000s, is raised again by SHvemy; but in the end of the 2010s it directly points to the causes of such marginality. While SHvemy do not give the answer to their main question, 'Can something change?', I view their project as a direct feminist dissent against the precarious conditions that the art workers globally find themselves in. In the next subsection, I will explore SHvemy's art as a political gesture not just in relation to the sphere of institutionalised contemporary art, but within the context of contemporary feminist activism.

3.2. 'The war not mine [is] mine': feminist artistic dissent and the war in Ukraine

Involvement in feminist street activism is an important trait of both SHvemy and ReSew. While both collectives produce clothes and objects embroidered with political statements, they also sew banners for actions. In the words of SHvemy member Anna Tereshkina,

> Потребность шить баннеры возникла этим летом, когда мы постоянно были вместе и поняли, что нам нужно не только шить, но и что-то большее, использовать наши навыки для проявления солидарности, которую мы испытываем в каких-то ситуациях.

> [Russ.] The need to sew banners appeared this summer when we were constantly together and understood that we need not just to sew, but to do something bigger, to use our skills for manifesting the solidarity we experience in some situations (Yugov 2016).

Participation in SHvemy fostered Masha Lukianova's engagement in street activism: standing with a handmade banner became her first experience of a single picketing action (Yugov 2016). SHvemy and Resew's banners, as well as their other works, are part of the art-craft continuum and are envisioned as both political tools and artworks: as stated by Tonya Mel'nyk, only after participating in the cooperative she understood that a banner for the action could be a 'real artwork' (Yugov 2016).

SHvemy, as well as individual members, are part of the activist feminist formations that align themselves with anti-militarist agenda. However, anti-militarist feminist positioning is performed differently in Russia and in Ukraine. In 2015 Tonya Mel'nyk created a series of headscarves. The square headscarves with long black or blue fringe could be worn as garments, or used as banners (when unfolded) because they displayed hand-painted political slogans. Mel'nyk's headscarves became a unique way of making textile a form of political communication. In her clothing line entitled 'Revolutsiia tse modno' ([Ukr.] 'Revolution Is Fashion') and inspired by global student and workers protests of 2010-2011, Mel'nyk made outfits with printed collages of political slogans in different languages (Appendix A, see Figure 43). The clothes would often be unisex and practical (multiple pockets, baggy trousers or relaxed fit skirts).

Printed collages on the fabric for these clothes were composed of the photographs of posters from street actions in 2010-2011, in which Mel'nyk had participated. Almost a hundred years after the development of *agittekstil'* ([Russ.] 'agitation textile') in the 1920s Soviet Union (see Akinsha 2010),

Mel'nyk 'recycled' the idea of the political importance of ornament, and created her own agitation textile practice in its most direct form. Emma Widdis (2010: 102) argues that 'agitation textile' is connected to the avant-garde belief that the person's formation happens through interaction with the material world. Changing clothes, avant-garde textile makers were aiming to change people. A similar drive is part of Tonya's project. The 'Revolution Is Fashion' clothes aim to immerse those who wear them into the materiality and temporality of intersectional and international protests, connecting 'revolutionary' past and present, and weaving the local activist histories into the global.

"NE MIR" in Saint Petersburg

In December 2015 Tonya Mel'nyk decided to participate in the *"NE MIR"* ([Russ.] 'NOT PEACE') international travelling anti-war exhibition in Saint Petersburg.[102] She chose the headscarfs she made earlier as the objects for the exhibition. 'Relolutionary headscarves', as Me'nyk called them, were hand-painted (using batik technique) and agitated against Putin ('Good Bye Putin!' headscarf) or discriminative legislation ('Idite so svoimi zakonami' / 'Get out with your laws' headscarf).[103]

Tonya invited Masha Lukianova and Anna Tereshkina from SHvemy to come up with the ideas and help carry out the happening-performance that

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[102] The exhibition took place in a 'travelling' format as city authorities prohibited it taking place as a demonstration in static format. NeMir exhibition was curated by Katrin Nenasheva and organised by a group of artists and activists: 'rodina' art group, Leonid Tsoi, Maks Stropov, Daria Alahonchich, Vadim F. Lur'e, Anna Bokler, Viktor Novikov, Aleksei Domnikov.

[103] See description of the collection and photographs on Mel'nyk's Facebook page, available at https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=918940438157666&set=a.770135313038180&type=3&theatre [accessed 21 January 2021].

took place during the project. During the happening Mel'nyk, Lukianova and Tereshkina sang anti-war songs in Ukrainian, Russian and English. While singing, they would stand as a group wearing the headscarves on their heads (Appendix A, Figure 44). After finishing each song, they would often disperse, and one of them would hold a headscarf as a banner (Appendix A, Figure 45). The use of headscarves points to creative strategies of dissent in the conditions of the authoritarian state. When activists in Russia are routinely in danger of arrests and imprisonment for public protests (including anti-war ones), interstitial textile objects, such a banner that can be transformed into a headscarf, are part of the new inventory of street dissent. Similarly, collective singing and then dispersing and holding a headscarf as a banner can also be seen as a tactic of protest (as demonstrating in Russia without permission from the authorities is legal only in the form of single-person picketing).

Importantly, turning to songs and headscarves as an artistic and political strategy also points to the feminist intention to reveal the concealed gendered dimension of both war and protest. SHvemy were singing traditional songs with anti-war and anti-dictatorship messages: 'Plyve kacha' Ukrainian folk song, Catalan 'L'Estaca' song, entitled 'Steny rukhnut' in Russian translation by Arkadii Kots, and 'Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye' traditional Irish anti-war and anti-recruitment song. Both singing and wearing headscarves is a practice generally attributed to women, and often relegated to the private, rather than public space. Singing in headscarves on their heads SHvemy, in the words of Mel'nyk, looked 'like old women' and possibly 'funny' (Nikitchenko 2015). Such reservations point to the usual construction of public protest as normative 'male sphere' - reserved for able, young, cisgender male bodies, shouting or chanting slogans. Singing and wearing a headscarf thus may be considered 'funny', as it is not a 'regular' protest practice - lacking the visual

and audial markers of a 'serious' protest. However, it is precisely these actions that I believe allowed the audience to connect to the political messages of the happening on the affective level.

The choice of the songs communicated both the anti-war dissent and international solidarity in an affective, emotional way. 'Plyve kacha' became an unofficial Maidan 'anthem' as a collective mourning song in winter 2013-2014, and 'Steny rukhnut' was also a popular protest song during the 2010s protests in Russia. Therefore, anti-colonial and anti-war lyrics acquired new levels of symbolic meanings in the context of Ukraine and Russia. The songs required prolonged attention and listening from the audience, encouraging the passerbyers to stay longer and pay more attention to the happening. Continuing the messages of the songs and making them more specific, the banners carried political messages, actual for the protest setting of 'NE MIR' exhibition.

While 'NE MIR' project could take place in Saint Petersburg, in Moscow its organisers and participants were arrested. As a protest to illegal arrests, the supporters of the art project would embroider in the courtroom during the court hearings. 'Meditative embroidery practices' was invented by activists as a name for such practice. 'Meditative' is important here, as it is both a sincere and ironic name for a continuous slow practice opposing fast, chaotic and violent actions of the state. SHvemy took up 'meditative embroidery practices' - political embroidery in public spaces, and employed it in Kyiv and other cities.

'NE MIR' in Kyiv

In October 2016 SHvemy participated in 'NE MIR' project in Kyiv, this time envisioned as an activist lab. For this project, SHvemy carried out meditative embroidery practices in Kyiv public spaces, embroidering statements on small pieces of fabric. SHvemy were working for several days,

and at the end of the project, the embroidered pieces of fabric were stitched together and hanged in a public space in the Podil district of Kyiv.

These meditative embroidery practices' in Kyiv again point to SHvemy's artistic dissent as feminist disidentification with traditional craft, and the 'upcycling' of traditional craft for the current needs of political activism. Rozsika Parker (2012: 302) explores embroidery as 'subversive stitch':

> Historically, through the centuries, it has provided both a weapon of resistance for women and functioned as a source of constraint. It promoted submission to the norms of feminine obedience and offered both psychological and practical means to independence.

In their activities SHvemy recognize this double-facedness of textile crafts: sewing (and, by extension, embroidery), is seen by SHvemy members as an 'emancipatory process' (Galkina 2015). Similar to the anti-war happening carried out by SHvemy in Saint Petersburg, embroidering in Kyiv focused more on the process than the result. Just as singing, embroidery is a process that evolves in time, and thus requires entering a different temporality from those observing or participating. While passerbyers in Kyiv chose not to participate in embroidery practices, SHvemy were joined in their work by the artists from Armenia and Georgia.

As the lived experience of the war in Ukraine (and other countries affected by military conflicts) is very different from that of Russia, the project itself took the form of working with collective trauma and the performance was entitled *Polotno* ([Russ.]/[Ukr.] 'Fabric' or 'Canvas'). The fabric used for embroidery was khaki-dyed fabric, used for making military uniform. Military outfits and khaki clothing very fast became part of everyday reality in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities since 2014. They are often worn not just by veterans or those participating in combat activities, but also by volunteers at the frontline,

and by the general population, as elements of combat-style clothing became part of urban fashioning in a militarised society. This fabric was also used extensively by volunteers who would sew uniform and camouflage nets for the army. As state support of the army was scarce at the beginning of the war, volunteer groups (mostly consisting of women) partially replaced it; by 2016 they spread around Ukraine to produce necessary clothes and equipment.[104] Khaki-dyed fabric is also, more broadly, a symbol of military actions, as such fabric is used internationally.

The materiality of the work is important for understanding broader feminist artistic dissent. In the words of Bryan-Wilson,

> Often used as tactile forms of communication or kinds of writing, textiles offer themselves as objects to be understood, but as with any system of language, they are dense with multiple meanings and are available for a range of readings and conflicting interpretations (Bryan-Wilson 2017: 4).

Taking khaki-dyed fabric as a base for embroidery, SHvemy and other participants used it as a material and a symbol. The statements that were embroidered individually and stitched together in a final collage (Appendix A, Figure 46) differed from the more direct 'civic dissent' political slogans that were displayed by SHvemy in Saint Petersburg. The personal statements in different languages made by the participants of the Kyiv project, presented a mosaic of the collective flow of consciousness when stitched together: 'viina v golovi' ([Ukr.] 'war in a head'), 'ia boius' voiny' ([Russ.] 'I am afraid of the

[104] See, for example, Wikipedia entry for 'Maskuval'na sitka rukamy volonteriv' ('Masking net for the Army made by volunteers' movement), available at https://tinyurl.com/asbzaxwu [accessed 21 January 2021].

war'), 'ne biisia viiny' ([Ukr.] 'don't be afraid of the war'), 'komu nuzhna voina' ([Russ.] 'Who needs war'), 'voina ne moia moia' ([Russ.] 'the war not mine [is] mine'), 'eto vse nazhyva' ([Russ.] 'It's all for profit'), 's kem voina' ([Russ.] 'with whom [is] the war'), 'mother do you think they'll drop the bomb' (lyrics from Pink Floyd 'Mother' song), 'I can't believe we're still protesting this shit', 'war is over', etc.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, SHvemy's 'subversive stitch' provided a way to express dissent from a feminist position. SHvemy's embroidery can be seen as undoing the discursive closures around conceptualizing war and militarism.[105] The khaki-dyed fabric provided both a background for the embroidered statements and acted as a foreground – being part of the artwork in contentious dialogue with those statements.

The location where the final work was hung is also significant: situated and photographed in proximity to the 'Roshen' chocolate shop (associated with the President Petro Poroshenko's chocolate factory business), the work questioned the capitalist relations embedded into militarism ('It's all for profit'). More importantly, carried out as a process stretched out in time and open to other participants, 'meditative embroidery practices' transformed embroidery into emotional work that allowed participants to talk about their traumatic experiences, receive support within their community and speak out on 'silenced' topics. In the next subsection, I will turn to a closer exploration of nonnormative communities and kinships through the collaborative

[105] Other Ukrainian artists at the time also questioned these discursive closures in their works. Alevtina Kakhidze's in her series of drawings entitled *Klubnika Andreevna* recorded and presented conversations with her mother who lived (and died) in Donbass. Anatoliy Belov in response to the war created a DJ persona and art projects devoted to Cybele - the Greek goddess who was born through castration. While the scope of this thesis does not allow to encompass these and other works, they form a a ground for further research and exploration.

artworks of SHvemy, ReSew and its members – Masha Lukianova and Tonya Mel'nyk.

3.3. Resewing queer feminism: what is gender?

One of the first of SHvemy's projects was a collection of 'queer-feminist skirts', made in 2015. As SHvemy explained (Galkina 2015), these skirts could be worn by a person of any gender; the main function of the skirts was also to be comfortable and practical, rather than to make a person look according to fashion standards. By making skirts that would fit different sizes and claiming that they should not be a gendered item of clothing, SHvemy actively worked on undoing the gender binary.

Similarly, in 2018, the ReSew cooperative organised a clothes-making workshop for people from 'LGBTQIAP community'. The workshop was called 'Odiah mriï, iakogo nema(ie)' ([Ukr.] 'Dream clothes that are (not) present'). The description of the workshop stated the need to create an alternative to the mainstream market that ignores the needs of certain groups of people (such as queer, transgender, nonbinary people, and those who can't find the clothes of the size or style they need in mass market).[106] Shifting away from categorisation and embracing heterogeneity of bodies and experiences, this project allowed for intersectional alliances while focusing on individual needs. During the workshop, one of the participants made a baggy garment resembling a jumpsuit that hides the body instead of revealing it, is comfortable to wear and does not carry gender connotations (see ZBOKU 2019). This work, as well as an idea for the project itself, reframed 'queer' as a space of experimenting around the connection between body, gender and clothing.

[106] See the project description on the Facebook page of the ReSew cooperative https://www.facebook.com/ReSewKyiv/videos/994310304050047/ [accessed 21 January 2021].

A queer feminist position allowed SHvemy to explore both body and sexuality. In another project, they did this by turning to the imagery of the vulva, and embroidering vulvas on *vyshyvanky* (long shirts traditionally embroidered and worn by women in Ukraine). SHvemy's embroidered shirts (see Figures 46-49) were displayed during the TEXTUS exhibition of feminist art in Kyiv curated by Oksana Bryukhovets'ka in 2017.

SHvemy are by no means the first to creatively rethink the cultural meaning of the vulva in Ukraine. For example, artist Maria Kulikovska made plaster models of vulvas for her *Kvity Demokratiï* (translated to English as *Flowers of Democracy*) project in 2015. The first *Flowers of Democracy* performance involved placing the vulva models near the ZHovten' cinema theatre in Kyiv that was burned down in a homophobic arson after the screening of an LGBT film. Maria called these plaster models of vulvas 'flowers of democracy', referring to Joseph Beuys *Rose for Direct Democracy* performance as inspiration (Papash 2016). Maria envisioned the performance as an 'эксперимент по захватыванию публичного пространства искусством, феминизмом, свободой слова и прав каждого человека, не зависимо от гендера и сексуальной ориентации' ([Russ.] 'experiment on public space being seized by art, feminism, freedom of speech and rights of every person, regardless of gender or sexual orientation') ('Sekta #flowersofdemocracy i #bodyandborders Rastet s Kazhdym Dnem v Raznykh Ugolkakh Strany. [...]' 2015). The performance did not last long, because male construction workers working on a site tore off and broke models soon after the performance started.

The *Flowers of Democracy* performance was repeated in Dnipro city. One of the chosen locations was a street alley containing memorials to the distinguished Dnipro region dwellers (all of whom were men). The project statement stated that it was an

> [...] акция превращения тела женщины из объекта насилия, латентных и открытых форм дискриминации в субъект свободы, равенства и признания [...] Каждый из цветков демократии отражает индивидуальный акт субъективизации сознания и тела женщины, обозначения собственной территории в публичном пространстве и общественной жизни в условиях равных, а не удобных правил игры.
>
> [Russ.] [...] action on transforming a woman's body from an object of violence, latent and open forms of discrimination into the subject of freedom, equality and recognition [...] Every flower of democracy reflects an individual act of subjectification of the woman's body and consciousness, marking one's own territory in public space and social life in the conditions of equal, and not the convenient, rules of the game. ('V Dnepropetrovske v Piatnitsu Rastsvetut "TSvety Demokratii"' 2015)

This performance, attempting to reclaim public space (like the actions of the feminist groups described above), was also disrupted, this time by the security guards of the commercial spaces and the members of the Right Sector far-right group ('"Kvity Demokratiï" Rozpustylysia Na Vulytsiakh Dnipra' 2015). The Right Sector members harassed and mocked performance participants, making them collect the plaster models they put on the alley.

While disruption of the performance unsurprisingly shows that control over public space is still held by the various privileged groups, the performance itself shows a tendency to essentialise 'woman's body' and 'woman's consciousness' in the imagery of vulvas, widespread in contemporary art around the world. The problem of essentialising gender is

addressed by SHvemy directly in their embroidery depicting vulvas, but even more so in their self-reflections about it.

In contrast with Maria Kulykovska, SHvemy's were concerned about their embroidery of vulvas could be perceived as essentializing work. Each group member published a personal story about their *vyshyvanka* on SHvemy Facebook page; these stories reveal the discussions that the group had about the embroidery and what it would represent:

> Как все-таки может выглядеть гендерная символика в орнаменте? Я была в тупике, не хотелось воспроизводить социальные стереотипы и конструкты, тогда наши вышиванки не отличались бы от тех, что (*) шились веками. Кто я такая, чтобы определять символику великого множества идентичностей? Кроме того, разве я сама сбросила свою? Я цисгендерная женщина с тонной привилегий и страхов, копающаяся в них с любопытством как в бабушкином сундуке. Мне казалось, мы все были в тупике, и самым честным выходом оказалось говорить о личном. Так мы пришли к соглашению, что вышивать надо только вагины, такие же разные, как мы сами.
>
> [Russ.] What can gender symbols look like in an ornament? I was at a dead-end, I didn't want to reproduce social stereotypes and constructs, as our embroidered shirts then would not be different from those that (*) have been sewn for centuries. Who am I to define the symbolism of a great many identities? Besides, did I myself shuffle off my identity? I am a cis woman with a ton of privileges and fears, digging into them with curiosity, like in grandma's trunk. It seemed to me that we were all at a dead end, and the most honest way out was to talk about personal things. So

> we came to an agreement that it is necessary to embroider only vaginas, as different as we are (Tereshkina 2017).

SHvemy decided to embroider vulvas in an attempt to talk about their own bodies, rather than appeal to any putative 'universal' women's experience. Such positioning points to a shift that happens in feminist formations: queer feminists of the 2010s, even more than their predecessors, cannot ignore the heterogeneity of bodies and experiences. The decision to embroider vulvas on traditional clothing is also an attempt to raise the problem of bodily shame, as is evident from Tereshkina's statement:

> [...] в приличном обществе хотят это прикрыть. [...] История угнетения - это история стыда, страха и их преодоления. [...] Будем надеяться, что скоро не будет стыдных и нестыдных частей тела, и мы скоро будет вышивать уши, пальцы, позвонки. Хотя если вышивка означает освобождение от ига стыда, то этого уже не потребуется.
>
> [Russ.] [...] in a decent society they want to cover it up. [...] The story of oppression is the story of shame, fear and overcoming them. [...] Let's hope that soon there will be no shameful and non-shameful body parts, and we will soon be embroidering ears, fingers, vertebrae. Although if embroidery means liberation from the yoke of shame, then this is no longer required (Tereshkina 2017).

Turning to traditional costume, SHvemy reach beyond modernity, recognizing that the original embroidery patterns also included symbols of reproduction. However, the group turns to traditions as just one of the sources for uncovering gender and sexual heterogeneity. In the previous chapters, I

have shown the creative strategies of disidentification with tradition that Anatoliy Belov employed, turning to traditional Ukrainian crafts or songs, but transforming them with his own messages. SHvemy employ a similar strategy, even renaming their *vyshyvanky* as *vyshyvahinky* (literally inserting 'vagina' into the word *vyshyvanka*). For example, in a Facebook post SHvemy member Marsha Lukianova (2017) names *soromits'ki* poems alongside contemporary writings on sex and politics as personal inspiration – similar to Belov's use of *soromits'ki* poems and traditional Ukrainian crafts as inspiration for his works.

It is important to note that *vyshyvanky* are also not just an element of traditional costume in contemporary Ukraine: they are celebrated as part of contemporary nation-building politics. For instance, Vyshyvanka Day (a day when people wear *vyshyvanky* in public) that became more popular after 2014, receives state support and is celebrated in Ukraine and around the world. Presenting their 'feminist *vyshyvanky*' in the exhibition space, some SHvemy members were concerned that they could be attacked for 'insulting the patriots' feelings' (Tereshkina 2017). While some *vyshyvanky* embroidered by SHvemy feature vulvas creatively transformed into small geometric patterns, others, in contrast, presented big, almost naturalistic depictions (see Appendix A, Figures 47-50). Similar to the *The Most Pornographic Book in the World-2* by Anatoliy Belov or performance by Friedrich Chernyshov, these works dissent against the contemporary nationalist discourse of 'traditional values'. One of the characteristic traits of this conservative discourse is construction and naturalisation of 'decency' and 'morality' as part of a patriarchal normativity of gender, sexuality, relationships and behaviour. By exploring the idea of bodily shame, SHvemy make visible what is concealed in 'decent' society. In line with previous practices, SHvemy also embroidered their *vyshyvanky* vulvas in public places which turned the process of embroidering vulvas into a public performance.

The exploration of bodily shame in *vyshyvanky* takes place alongside the exploration of sexuality and desire. SHvemy member Tonya Mel'nyk made *vyshyvanka* with two big vulvas located at each side of the collar (Appendix A, Figure 50). In her personal story about the project, she explained that the vulvas on her *vyshyvanka* remind her of black women; she also connected embroidering vulvas and her own desire:

> [...] Звісно, вагіна не зовсім моя. Вона більше схоже на вагіну чорношкірої жінки [...] Ще ніколи я так багато не думала про цю частину тіла, а ще про груди. Жіночі. В якийсь момент навіть задумалась: 'Може моя ідентичність змінюється з бі- на гомо-?' останнім часом ще й стала помічати красу чорношкірих жінок, яких іноді бачу. І тепер от ця вишивка: моє послання світу... про що? Про заборонену, притіснену сексуальність? Про обезцінення у капіталістичному світі жіночої праці? Про закодовані послання в орнаментах вишивки? Про експропріацію традиції вишивати? Напевне про все це, так як коли робиш таку роботу, яка вимагає концентрації та спокою, приходиться багато думати. Так і виходить: серйозні філософські думки перемежовуються всілякими сексуальними образами...
>
> [Ukr.] [...] Of course, the vulva is not exactly mine. It looks more like a vulva of a black woman [...] I have never thought so much about this part of the body, and also about the breasts. Women's breasts. At one point, I even thought, 'Maybe my identity is changing from bi- to homo-?' Lately, I have also begun to notice the beauty of black women, whom I sometimes see. And now this embroidery: my message to the world... about what? About forbidden, repressed sexuality? About the devaluation of women's labour in the capitalist

> world? About the coded messages in embroidery ornaments? About the expropriation of the embroidery tradition? Probably about all of this, because when you do work that requires concentration and calmness, you have to think a lot. And so it turns out: serious philosophical thoughts are interspersed with all sorts of sexual images… (Melnyk 2017)

On the one hand, two vulvas depicted on Tonya's *vyshyvanka* can be seen as a rare representation of non-heteronormative desire. Such desire is generally concealed in contemporary Ukrainian art or writings about it. Tonya's post, like the posts of other SHvemy participants, were not featured within the exhibition itself, and curatorial statement by Oksana Bryukhovets'ka (2017: 34–35) focused on gender more than on possible nonnormative desires or sexual dissent.

On the other hand, Tonya's *vyshyvanka* in the context of her post reveals the dilemmas of representing body, race and desire. This representation often can consider non-white experiences as an 'addition' to white experiences. In the above-mentioned example of Maria Kulykovs'ka's work with plaster vulvas, for her *Flowers of Democracy* performance in London, Maria brought plaster vulvas made from her white friends' bodies and painted some of them brown. Such an act aims at representing 'diversity', however, excludes actual black people and people of colour from the process of artmaking or influencing the work.

Somewhat similarly, initial SHvemy's idea was to focus on their own bodies so that they don't universalise and essentialize bodies and experiences. However, Tonya seemingly departed from this idea in her work (or its conceptualisation). And while Tonya is being honest about 'discovering' her attraction to women of colour as a white woman, the cultural context of fetishization of black bodies and genitalia changes possible perception and

interpretations of her work and positioning. Therefore, what this case points to is the lack of people of colour in SHvemy, the lack of established language in relation to race and sexuality, and growing interest in understanding, but the general lack of discussions on racism in (queer) feminist formations in Ukraine more broadly. In the final subsection, I will turn to a closer examination of the existing queer feminist formations by engaging with the artistic works by Masha Lukianova and Tonya Mel'nyk.

4. Intimate counter-publics: works by Tonya Mel'nyk, Masha Lukianova and SHvemy

In *The Female Complaint* (2008) Lauren Berlant describes what they call 'intimate publics' – a public sphere in which there is an expectation of shared worldview and emotional knowledge that originates in a commonly lived history:

> A certain circularity structures an intimate public, therefore: its consumer participants are perceived to be marked by a commonly lived history; its narratives and things are deemed expressive of that history while also shaping its conventions of belonging; and, expressing the sensational, embodied experience of living as a certain kind of being in the world, it promises also to provide a better experience of social belonging — partly through participation in the relevant commodity culture, and partly because of its revelations about how people can live (Berlant 2008: viii).

Berlant uses 'intimate publics' regarding the 'women's culture' produced by the mass market. However, what if we look beyond the mass market and mainstream culture? In this chapter, I will argue that queer feminist activists after 2014 are involved in the creation of 'intimate counter-publics' that exist

aside from institutionalized spaces. In this regard, the works made by Masha Lukianova and Tonya Mel'nyk (members of SHvemy and ReSew) point to such counter-publics and are important for understanding the development of sexual and gender dissent in Ukraine. These works ask the question: what are the futures imagined for the lives, kinships and political acts that are considered nonnormative in Ukrainian society in the 2010s?

4.1. Dissenting weddings

In July 2016 Masha and Tonya held their first wedding ceremony. Fully realizing both the impossibility of registering marriage legally in the post-Soviet space, and the conservative nature of marriage, they yet decided to create their own tradition celebrating their kinship, and instead of one wedding have as many as they wish in different formats. Tonya explained this action in her public statement on Facebook:

> Мы с Машей много говорили об этом замысле и пришли еще к одному важному моменту: мы хотим создавать свою традицию, но она не должна копировать старые и консервативные. Также она не должна их деконструировать или высмеивать. Наша традиция не обязательно должна наследоваться кем-то. На данный момент – она только наша, такая как мы сами того захотим.
> Поэтому мы решили гулять свадьбу целый год в разных форматах и с разными дорогими нам людьми.
>
> [Russ.] We talked a lot with Masha about this idea, and understood one important issue: we want to create our own tradition, but it shouldn't copy the old and conservative ones. It should also not deconstruct or make fun of them. Our tradition should not necessarily be taken up by others. It is just ours at present, such as

> we ourselves want it. That is why we decided to celebrate the wedding all year round in different formats with different people dear to us.

The first version of the wedding took place in Saint Petersburg shortly before the couple left for Ukraine. The wedding involved a celebration with friends and a short ceremony of founding the 'new religion of love and disobedience'. A ceremony was created by a common friend Dasha Apakhonchich who led the ceremony as the 'mother of love and disobedience'. During the ceremony, the newly-weds read an agreement that they made beforehand. The agreement stated that they would continue to be friends no matter what; they will be honest and sincere with each other; they will not limit each other in freedom, including sexual freedom; they will support each other physically, economically and emotionally; and that at the present moment they live together and have the right to call each other 'wives'.[107]

Since 2016, Tonya and Masha have had several more weddings, demonstrating that the concept of the 'wedding' should not be limited to its normative understanding of monogamous heteronormative celebration – it can be creatively 'upcycled' to fit different needs and kinships. Instead of 'once-in-a-lifetime' event that marks the shift in a civic, societal or religious status for a normative couple, the weddings of Masha and Tonya avoid this temporality altogether. Their ceremonies present meaningful relationships as never stable or homogeneous, but rather a process of constant flow and becoming. And instead of being depoliticized events focusing on personal love of a monogamous couple (as most normative weddings celebrations do),

[107] See the project's description and photographs on Tonya Mel'nyk's Facebook page at https://tinyurl.com/69wtysce [accessed 21 January 2021].

some weddings carried out by Masha and Tonya rather serve as a mirror reflecting back the political context that the nonnormative people have to face when building a relationship.

One such wedding took place in December 2016 in Kyiv. This time the wedding took place as an interactive performance within the 'Transparency' program during the Festival of Equality, organised by the Insight LGBT NGO. The performance was called *Vesillia. Napivdokumental'na postanovka v 6 diiakh* ([Ukr.] 'Wedding. A half-documentary play in 6 acts)'. Description of the performance stated:

> Цей перформанс – проблематизація відсутності прав ЛГБТК пар в Україні на прикладі шлюбу. Шлюб є вирішенням багатьох юридичних та економічних питань. За бажання створити сім'ю ЛГБТК пари не мають можливості скористатись такими механізмами, як шлюб і сімейний кодекс, тому що це не прописано у законодавстві України.
> Ця п'єса написана на основі історії Тоні (громадянство: Україна) і Маші (громадянство: Росія), які в лютому 2016 року вирішили створити сім'ю. Вони подолали і продовжують долати багато перешкод, щоб бути разом, жити сімейним життям в Україні. У цій історії ситуація ускладнюється ще й різними громадянствами партнерок.
>
> [Ukr.] This performance, taking marriage as an example, is problematizing the fact that LGBTQ couples in Ukraine lack rights. Marriage solves many legal and economic problems. If they wish to create a family, LGBTQ couples don't have a possibility to use such mechanisms as marriage and civil code, because it is not part of Ukraine's legislation.

> This play is based on the story of Tonya (citizenship: Ukraine) and Masha (citizenship: Russia), who in February 2016 decided to create a family. They have overcome and continue to overcome many obstacles to be together, to live a family life in Ukraine. In this story, the situation is further complicated by the different citizenships of the partners.

The wedding ceremony performance consisted of 6 acts and was interactive, involving the audience in various roles.[108] Every act resembled a certain part of a wedding ceremony traditionally practised in Ukraine, however, was altered and filled with a different meaning. In the first act 'Zustrich hostei' ([Ukr.] 'Meeting the guests') the audience was met by *tamada* ([Ukr.] master of ceremonies) Anna Shcherbyna, and the audience members were asked why they do or do not get married.

In the second act, entitled 'Vykup nevesty' ([Russ.] 'Ransom of the bride'), willing participants from the audience received the 'roles' they would be playing: border control officers, Department of Immigration and Citizenship officers, visa and registration department workers, master of ceremonies, fairy. The participants then received brief notes with the script and their role but were encouraged to improvise.

The play then developed around Masha and Tonya being first on the Russian side of the Russian-Ukrainian border, and then on the Ukrainian side of it. The lists of documents that a person from Russia would need to stay in Ukraine and the conditions of such staying were read aloud. The scenes of

[108] My description and analysis of this performance is based on my participant observation, as well as on the script of the performance provided to me by Tonya Mel'nyk and Masha Lukianova, and on their own publications in social networks after the performance.

interaction with the border control officers showed their indifference or exploitation of the migrants, as well as suggesting 'marriage' as the easiest way for Masha to stay in Ukraine. Half-imaginary and half-documentary, these scenes revealed the struggles that Masha and Tonya went through as a couple to live together in Ukraine on a permanent basis. At the end of the act, the fairy helped Masha to stay in Ukraine by obtaining a residence permit in Ukraine based on volunteering.

The third act was entitled 'Tanets' molodiatok' ([Ukr.] 'Dance of the bridal couple', with 'molodyatky' being a neologism invented by tonya and Masha to form a feminine gender-specific noun out of the neutral plural 'newly-wed' noun). Commonly, a dance of a bride and a groom at the wedding is a waltz or another slow dance. Breaking with this tradition, Masha and Tonya danced the 'queer tango', a dance chosen for the fact that it didn't have the strict 'leading' or 'following' roles (Appendix A, Figure 51). While both were wearing warm coats (of black and white colour) throughout the performance, the dance was carried out just in white dresses: Tonya resewed her mother's wedding dress, and Masha wore a dress borrowed from Koptev's collection (acknowleding with this personal gesture the value of nonnormative kinships and communities, see Chapters I and V).

After the tango came the fourth act entitled 'Wedding ceremony'. The audience was again given roles to play: the person who would be marrying the couple, witnesses, choir, selfie lover, observers etc. For the wedding ceremony, an actual artwork present at the exhibition was used as an imporvisation. This artwork was called *Kvir-kaplytsia* ([Ukr.] 'Queer Chapel') and was made by the Dis/Order group. It consisted of an arch decorated with lights and plastic flowers. In the centre of an arch was placed a traditional Eastern Orthodox icon, however the imagery on it was replaced with two human-like creature figures that had root-like appendices instead of limbs. Similar to the traditional ways of decorating icons and portraits in Ukraine, an

embroidered towel decorated the 'icon'. The *Queer Chapel* was described by its creators as a symbolic space where any type of union could take place and be proclaimed valid and legal.[109] In this 'queer chapel' Tonya and Masha were proclaimed 'a wife and a wife' by an audience member.

Act 5 of the performance was called 'Feast and toasts'. A long table with food and drinks was placed in the exhibition place. In their Facebook post (Melnyk 2016), Masha and Tonya described yet another situation of marginalisation and precarity within the contemporary art system. While they agreed work without the honorariums, the organisers of the Festival of Equality allegedly promised a budget to carry out the performance. Yet the funds were never transferred to the artists. Therefore, Tonya and Masha had to crowdfund for the performance, and all participants were asked in advance to bring their own food and drinks for the 'feast' part.

The audience was welcomed to the feast and was encouraged to say toasts. The toasts (short speeches) that are traditionally said in Ukraine during feasts were replaced with altered articles from the Family Code of Ukraine and the Russian Federation, said in the form of wishes. The alterations included adding people of various identities (heterosexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, transgender and queer) when describing the conditions for marriage, changing the wording to 'partner 1' and 'partner 2' or *narechen_ky* ([Ukr.] 'Newly-wed', another neologism invented by Masha and Tonya and used to describe the newly-wed in a gender-neutral way) instead of 'man' and 'woman'. While at first the feast guests behaved more like performance participants, than the wedding guests, soon they fully engaged, even to the point of spontaneously singing the Ukrainian folk song traditionally sung at the weddings (Melnyk 2016).

Finally, act 6 of the performance, 'Photo session', took place after the

[109] See https://www.facebook.com/qchapel/ [accessed 21 January 2021].

feast. Commonly, after a wedding, the newlyweds and guests would go for a promenade and take photographs by the monuments and memorials (during the Soviet times), or in 'romantic' locations such as parks (nowadays) (see Chumakova 2016). Instead of the places symbolizing state power, status or romance, different settings were chosen for a photo set, more common for the scenes from activist life. The settings for the newlyweds and the guests' photographs were: police search (standing in a line facing a wall, hands behind head, see Appendix A, Figure 52); detention (lying on the floor, hands behind head); anti-police sitting chain protest (the participants squatted on the floor locking hands); carrying out the wounded activists; demonstration. While at first, the participants were immobile, lying or sitting on the floor, during the 'demonstration' they got up and starting walking around the space. The slogan that they started to chant spontaneously was 'Buntui, kokhai, prava ne viddavai!' ([Ukr.] 'Revolt, love, don't give your rights away!'). This slogan was popularised by the Direct Action union in the 2010s and was often used during the anarchist and human rights protest actions.

As evident, throughout the performance, Tonya and Masha defamiliarised the wedding experience and its 'traditions' for the audience. Instead of merely entertaining guests, they presented the intersectional realities of nonnormative experiences. Celebrating their kinship and sharing this intimate celebration with the audience, they also made visible the grim reality: the concealed state and societal structures that make possible certain forms of kinships and existence and deny the others. At the same time, at certain points of the performance wedding guests did perceive the wedding as real, and not a performance, which leads me to believe that for the time of the performance an intimate counter-public was created, united around the celebration of the nonnormative kinship.

The theme of marriage and wedding has been explored in Ukrainian art before. From 2013 to 2017, Maria Kulikovska collaborated with Jacqueline

Shabo (Swedish artist), creating a same-sex marriage-as-performance.[110] Kulikovska and Shabo could get legally married in Sweden, as Shabo was a citizen of Sweden. This performance was thus similar to the projects of other feminist artists who raised the themes of the state regulation of migration by marriage, and the 'West'- 'East' or 'EU'-'non EU' division.[111] The wedding series of Mariia Lukianova and Antonina Mel'nyk is, however, not a 'same-sex marriage-as-performance', but rather 'performance-as-marriage'. Celebrating a real relationship, it intervenes into the institutionalised space of 'contemporary art'. It presents a continuous act of creative sexual and gender dissent, constructing a political community together with the audience, revealing intimacy as a political act, and imagining a language, futurity and modes of living differing from the existing ones.

4.2. Dissenting banners

Tonya Mel'nyk and Masha Lukianova are themselves part of the broader queer feminist counter-publics. After 2014 these counter-publics has attempted to create counter-discourses to the liberal identity politics that women, LGBT and human rights NGOs engaged with. Therefore, what differentiates queer feminist activism after 2014 from the earlier activism is direct and vocal opposition to the strategies of respectability and assimilation often adopted by women and LGBT NGOs.

In solidarity with an anarcho-queer-feminist block in the KyivPride demonstration in 2017, Mel'nyk and Lukianova made a banner which became a visual focal point of the block. The banner was made on the white transparent fabric used for making curtains. 'Kokhaisia! Kviruisia! Denaturalizuisia!' ([Ukr.] 'Make love! Queer yourself! Denaturalise yourself!)

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[110] See https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/biography [accessed 21 January 2021].

[111] See, for example, 'Looking for a Husband with EU Passport' (2000-2005) by a Serbian artist Tanja Ostojić.

slogan was sewn on it using letters of different bright colours. The slogan on the banner is a creative alteration of the slogan 'Revolt, love, don't give your rights away' that was chanted during Tonya and Masha's wedding performance.

The slogan 'Make love! Queer yourself! Denaturalise yourself' was originally used by the FRAU (Feministychne Radykal'ne Anonimne Ugrupuvannia, [Ukr.] 'Feminist Radical Anonymous Group') artivist group. Defining itself as an 'all-volunteer anonymous collective that sticks to intersectional queer-feminist agenda', FRAU defined queer-feminist agenda as 'anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-nationalist, anti-colonial, anti-militarist'.[112] FRAU collective has been creating pictures and videos since 2014 and publicizing on Facebook. They often employed satire to critique both nationalists and liberals.

Using FRAU's slogan, Tonya and Masha transported it from a virtual online space to the public space of a demonstration, thus contributing to the development of a queer feminist counter-public. The banner was distinctively different ('denaturalised') from the usual banners carried out on the demonstration (Appendix A, Figure 53). The fragile and flowery transparent fabric of the banner made visible the demonstrators behind it, thus symbolically 'merging' the statement and people carrying it. The multi-coloured slogan letters were not limited to the 'rainbow' pallette, which could be read as an attempt to move beyond the 'naturalised' meaning of 'LGBT rights'. The banner was later displayed in Ukraine and abroad as an art object,[113] becoming an interstitial object moving between the streets and the

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[112] See the group's description on FRAU Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/pg/fraugroup/about/?ref=page_internal [accessed 21 January 2021].

[113] As an art object, the banner was attributed to the SHvemy collective.

galleries.

The ‘Make love! Queer yourself! Denaturalise yourself’ banner seemingly disidentified from rainbow colours as a symbol. Some queer feminists do not like the rainbow colours as a ‘marker’ claiming that it is easily commercialised and depoliticized: Masha Lukianova mentioned experiencing a ‘rainbow overdose’ after seeing all kinds of rainbow souvenirs at KyivPride (ZBOKU 2019). At the same time, rainbow colours are recognized in Ukraine more and more so as related to LGBT issues and nonnormativity, and the attacks of the far-right groups often happen at people wearing rainbow-coloured items. Therefore, rainbow became both the symbol of ‘LGBT’, and of the liberal LGBT organisations branding.

A year after KyivPride-2017, Mel’nyk and Lukianova returned to the use of rainbow colours, yet to ‘denaturalise’ them again. The banner that they (and one more person who preferred to stay anonymous) made for an anti-fascist action in 2018 was carried out in 7 colours of the rainbow (Appendix A, Figure 54). Masha and Tonya creatively ‘recycled’ the mnemonic phrase learned by children to memorise the order of the rainbow colours. In these, the first letter of each word in a phrase would be the first letter of the colour.[114] Such mnemonic phrase in Russian, commonly known since the Soviet times, is ‘Kazhdyi okhotnik zhelaet znat’, gde sidit fazan’ ([Russ.] ‘Every hunter desires to know where the pheasant sits’).

Following the order of colours, the statement on the banner said in Ukrainian ‘Chymalo okhochykh zhadaiut’ znyshchyty sylu fashyzmu’ ([Ukr.] ‘Many of willing desire to destroy the power of fascism’). While using rainbow colours as a marker of sexual and gender dissent, the banner pointed to the broader coalitional anti-fascist struggle as the ‘true’ meaning of this dissent.

[114] In English, the example of such a mnemonic phrase is ‘Richard of York Gave Battle in Vain’.

The banner could not be displayed at the action, as it could not take place: the protesters were outnumbered by the far-right opponents, and then arrested by the police. However, Masha and Tonya took a photograph with a banner after the action in a different location and publicized it on Facebook, using virtual space as a means of protest when it was not possible to fully use public space.

4.3. Apocalypse and slugs

While being active in protest struggles, Marsha Lukianova and Tonya Mel'nyk also participated in queer feminist counter-publics as intimate publics. Airi Triisberg (2017: 22) has shown that lesbian, queer and feminist counter-publics 'are also intimate publics that are formed around kitchen tables, in friendship networks and in pleasure dungeons'. Such intimate counter-publics are often hidden and can be oriented towards communal and self-care rather than public actions or achieving specific political goals (see Berlant 2008). The spread of attacks on public events devoted to the feminist and LGBT issues in Kyiv after 2014 led to the burning out of some local activists and pushed them out of the public space. In such conditions, the need in spaces of collective intimacy and mutual support became even more pressing.

Several works by Tonya and Masha can be considered to be examples of such intimate counter-publics that support queer feminist sexual and gender dissent. One example is that of the feminist queer porn films that they produced over time since 2015. Mel'nyk and Lukianova became interested in feminist porn after making a collective film together with other participants of the Saint Petersburg 'School of the involved art' in 2015. Since then, Tonya and Masha have been exploring feminist queer porn as an 'emancipative

bodily practice'.[115] One of such films was made in the space of the ReSew workshop, presenting labour and intimate spaces as not necessarily separate. The film was made with the help of a trusted friend.

An important point here is that public screening of the film made Tonya and Masha more vulnerable, as the 'On the Protection of Public Morals' law prohibits production and dissemination of pornography. Therefore, often the film made by Masha and Tonya could not be publicly screened at the events where such screening could have negative consequences for the creators. In such cases, the screening was replaced by a discussion.

Yet, sometimes the film was shown to small audiences of 'those in the know': such were the screenings in Kharkiv Queer Hub, or Queer Forum in Kherson. As Masha and Tonya embraced their own vulnerability in displaying and discussing their D.I.Y. porn films, they also built the atmosphere of trust and mutual support in the communities affected by hatred, violence and shaming. The screening therefore transformed the space into the intimate space of care.

Another work, made by Masha Lukianova, shows multiple meanings of intimacy and ways of forming intimate publics. For a long time, Masha was dreaming of a snail costume:

> Почему равлик? Потому что Маша устал, устала быть человеком или скорее доказывать, что я человек, и права человека про меня тоже. Трудности в оформлении вида на жительство, отсутствие документов, невозможность беспроблемного выезда-въезда в страну, тягомотина с регистрацией и т.п. измотали Машу

[115] See their presentation at the international symposium 'V teme: seks, politika i zhizn' LGBT v TSentral'noĭ Azii' (22-23 March 2019, American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan).

и породили игру в желание не быть человеком. Почему равлик? Давно шутила про себя так, потому что работаю, кушаю, собираюсь, пишу, моюсь, прибираюсь медленно, а может просто на комфортной для себя скорости. Перейти от шутки к утверждению – мои личный протест против капиталистической системы. А еще, еще это кивок триповым опытам, когда мир предстает тебе в иных цветах, узорах и движениях.

[Russ.]/[Ukr.] Why a snail? Because Masha is tired, tired of being human, or rather proving that I'm human, and human rights are about me too. Difficulties in obtaining a residence permit, lack of documents, the impossibility of a trouble-free exit and entry into the country, a burden with registration, etc. exhausted Masha and gave birth to a game of wanting not to be human. Why a snail? I've been joking to myself for a long time that it is because I work, eat, gather, write, wash, clean up slowly, or maybe just at a comfortable speed for myself. To go from a joke to a statement is my personal protest against the capitalist system. And yet, it is also a nod to trippy experiences, when the world appears to you in different colours, patterns and movements.

The costume of the snail was half-finished for the private flat exhibition devoted to care and destruction organised by Valentina Petrova and Oksana Kaz'mina in May 2019 (Appendix A, Figure 55). This exhibition was not publicized and not part of institutionalised contemporary art discourses. Instead, it served to support burned-out activists and artists, many of whom identified as queer and/or feminist.

As it was done in the hours free of work, Masha did not have time to sew a backpack that would form a snail's shell. Therefore, the 'snail costume'

turned into a 'slug costume'. A baggy light costume made of green fabric had a hood with the two 'ocular tentacles' on top. During the exhibition, anyone could wear a costume and become a 'slug'. Worn by different people, the costume provided a symbolic 'break' from the burden of humanity with its norms, hardships and limitations, and created a space of intimacy between those who shared it or observed the resting or playful 'slugs'.

The slug costume was later worn by Masha as a member of SHvemy during the SHvemy's residency at OpenOutFestival in Norway. SHvemy carried out a project entitled *Apocalypse Studies*. Like Masha and Tonya's weddings, SHvemy's *Apocalypse Studies* project is an ongoing long-term project with different manifestations. The idea of apocalypse came to SHvemy in 2018 when they felt burned out in their activist and artist lives, specifically after the wave of arrests in Russia, a wave of the far-right attacks in Ukraine, as well as personal troubles. They felt like 'only the apocalypse can help them'.[116] SHvemy embraced the idea of apocalypse as something positive and even desired:

> Apocalypse Studies is a practice for everyone who is tired of struggle and survival; it is a place for individual and collective fantasies. We offer: discuss the positive meaning of the apocalypse, share your dreams about the apocalypse, come up with your own apocalypse,

[116] See SHvemy's project description for 'The Net is Working' Volunteering and Human Rights Education Conference (3-6 June 2020, Greifswald, Germany, hosted online) at https://turbina-pomerania.org/en/conference-2020/SHvemy/ [accessed 1 December 2020].

decide how you want to look on this special day, prepare an outfit, have fun at the apocalyptic party [sic].[117]

SHvemy's dis-identification with modernity means being realistic about the end of the world as we know it, but hopeful for the possibilities of other worlds. The *Apocalypse Studies* projects involve collaborative work: together with other participants, SHvemy first discuss apocalypse. During such discussion at the OpenOutFestival, SHvemy held a lecture-performance that cited Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg manifesto'. SHvemy would not prescribe what apocalypse would look like – their aim was to creative a collective imaginative space.

Next, SHvemy carried out workshops on making costumes for a final 'apocalypse-party' – what they call their 'anti-capitalist New Year Party', 'a celebration of death of the old and possible birth of the new'.[118] The aim of the D.I.Y. costume-making workshops was to create the space at the intersection of art, craft and care. Participants were encouraged to create their costumes and write (and read aloud) their own story of apocalypse.

In a slug costume at one of the apocalypse parties, Masha read out a story. In Masha's story, mountain-size shimmering colourful slugs crawl into the world, covering both cities and nature, everything and everyone, with their slime, so that all movement and breathing stops.[119] The imaginaries of

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[117] See SHvemy online video presentation for Nähwerkstatt Kabutze at https://vimeo.com/412889806 [accessed 21 January 2021].

[118] Ibid.

[119] See the video recording of the party, 'Apocalypse Party 'The End, my Friend' / 14.09.2019, OpenOutFestival, Tromsø, Norway', available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nUKIk1q-Z4&feature=youtu.be [accessed 21 January 2021].

apocalypse point to the different temporalities inhabited by nonnormative people. These are not the temporalities of progress, but the temporalities of death, burning out and experiencing a 'permanent apocalypse'. SHvemy's workshops allow those who belong to intimate counter-publics (nonnormative people and burned out activists) to express their negative emotions in a safe way and create a celebration among the ongoing political and ecological apocalypse.

Paradoxically, 'freezing' time and imagining the end of the world can be a way of continuing the movement. A slug costume was worn by Masha at the climate demonstration in Kyiv in 2019: once again intimate counter-publics gave sprouts to the queer eco-feminist (counter)public action. Yet even if it stayed within the 'underground' space of personal or communal intimacy, this costume would not lose its power. To me, it symbolises the slowness that accompanies existence aside from the norm. This slowness reveals the fragility and constant regeneration of nonnormative lives, formations and dissent.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

After 2014 we can see a development of the experimental forms of creative dissent. SHvemy is an example of the new interstitial collectives functioning across borders and in between art, craft and activism. SHvemy subvert the 'contemporary art' by bringing attention to the concealed contradictions of capital within the contemporary art system. The critique of the contemporary art 'from within' points to the precarious position of artists at the time of the NGOisation of art. Such precarity leads to the development of experimental cultural formations, such as 'intimate counter-publics' and private flat exhibitions. The artistic dissent in such formations is often interstitial, is 'upcycled' and 'recycled', and serves multiple purposes: clothes

transform into banners, audience into co-producers.

SHvemy as an international collective would not be possible without the shared political goals and international solidarity that was formed before the beginning of the war. SHvemy's works provide non-nationalist and anti-imperialist articulations of dissent precisely due to the intersectional ecofeminist positions of its members. In their artistic works for the 'NE MIR' project, SHvemy undo the discursive closures related to the war and militarism, re-purposing gendered 'traditional' activities, such as folk singing and embroidery. They also dis-identify with traditions in their *Vyshyvahinky* project, exploring the meanings and effects of gender and sexuality in contemporary world.

The personal works of Antonina Mel'nyk and Mariia Lukianova reveal the development of queer feminist artistic dissent as an experimental counter-public field. In their wedding series Masha and Tonya oppose the liberal politics of assimilation of nonnormativity. Their wedding performance visualizes the intersections between different structures of oppression. Contemporary queer feminist formations imagine nonnormativity as 're-sewing' the relations between human and non-human (in a slug costume), and 'unstitching' the temporality of modernity (in their imaginaries of apocalypse or the invention of the new traditions). The artistic dissent thus becomes both a search for and a manifestation of living and building kinships otherwise.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with the ritualistic and 'pre-modern' shows of provocative fashion created by the Orchid, and ended with the imaginaries of Shemy's apocalyptic futures and post-human possibilities. In February 2022, Ukraine faced a new apocalypse – the full-scale Russian invasion that is still ongoing at present (April 2023). While the timeframe of this thesis is limited to 1991-2019, in this conclusion I will address not just the main findings of my research, and how they correlate with the inquiries set in the introduction. I will also point to how the main findings of this research can help us to think about the present moment, and indicate directions of future research, arguing that this thesis lays the ground and maps a territory for further research.

Europeanisation and its normative ideals: shifts and undercurrents

The first inquiry laid out in the introduction presumes that artistic dissent and nonnormative formations in Ukraine are influenced by the development of larger (geo)political shifts, such as Europeanisation and neo-traditionalism politics. Within the thesis, I demonstrated the development of both trends, as well as their influences in two realms: social movements and contemporary art.

I have attended to the changes that globalisation and Europeanisation brought to Ukraine – from commodification of sex to the different models of sexual emancipation and gendered behaviour. The thesis traced the functioning of a politics of Europeanisation within professionalised activism and the processes of the NGO-isation. It explored the tensions and connections between the professionalised activism and the grassroots social movements. It has shown how different vocabularies and knowledges of sexuality and gender came to replace one another, or coexist together in a transcultural dialogue. 'Feminist', 'gay' and 'lesbian' (and, later, 'queer' and

‘transgender’) unfolded in the 1990s-2000s as identities and habitus that were not ‘neutral’ – rather, they were often embedded within specific ideologies, and political methods of achieving equality.

In Chapter I, I explored the shifting language around sexuality, influenced by the liberal politics of identity adopted within professionalised LGBT activism. Through the example of the ‘Nash Mir’ LGBT NGO and its publications I traced the normative ideals that developed as undercurrents of Europeanisation and nation formation. The analysis of the selected publications shows that one such ideal was a decent, respectable citizen, an active member of ‘civil society’, practicing an identity understood within ‘Western’ categories of sexuality and gender, and identifying with the values of liberal democratic progress. While defending the right of nonnormative people to exist and flourish, professionalised activism participated in the construction of the moral ideal of new Ukrainian ‘LGBT citizens’ who would be ‘worthy’ of having rights and protections. This ideal, in turn, had the power of rendering those not adhering to the promoted identities and strategies as ‘backwards’ or ‘remnants of the past’. I presented the Orchid theatre/circus of provocative fashion, a collective of ‘outcasts’, and the activity of Misha Koptev, as a site pointing to the formations of the 1990s existing ‘aside’ from the language, discourses and politics of respectability, strict categorisation, the logics of progress or universality promoted by the discourses of Europeanisation. The Orchid shows represent, on the one hand, the changes that took place in Ukraine in the 1990s, when norms are redefined, sex and sexuality become a spectacle, discussed, commodified and categorised; and similarly, when cultural production becomes commodified and categorized into fashion and non-fashion, high and low culture. Orchid merged the communities excluded from ‘high culture’ or ‘decent society’ (such as cross-dressers and drag artists, sex workers, disabled people) who needed some

means for living, and gave them the public status of cultural producers, even if just for the duration of the show. In this regard, it represents the potential for moving beyond categorisations and commodification, and towards solidarity.

Researching further 'high culture', the thesis explored the ways through which the institutionalised contemporary art system participated in the Europeanisation politics, and its role in the instrumentalization of nonnormativity. I have shown that since its appearance, the contemporary art system was (to a certain extent) welcoming displays of nonnormativity, as part of the 'modernisation' of the Ukrainian cultural sphere. This modernisation was in line with the values of tolerance, diversity, and opposition to censorship. Therefore, it is unsurprising that some contemporary art institutions protested against the moral panics and supported nonnormative artists like Anatoliy Belov (Chapters II-IV). However, the limits of such support and engagement with sexual/gender dissent have also been explored in the thesis. I argued that inclusion of the artistic sexual/gender dissent in the institutionalised contemporary art spaces, while showing that Ukraine is symbolically part of the liberal and democratic Europe, also led to the standardisation of artistic dissent, and the instrumentalization of nonnormativity. My analysis of the 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' exhibition (Chapter V) showed how constructing the past and the present of sexual/gender dissent in this art project was embedded in the nation-building project and narratives of progress. The project also points to the fact that such narratives of progress to the 'European-style democracy' are often intertwined with the politics of respectability that conceals the heterogeneity of nonnormative politics and lifestyles. My study of the performance by Friedrich Chernyshov, taking place in the same space and time as the 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers…' project, explored how sexual/gender dissent can be

‘menacing’ instead of ‘tamed’, when it raises probing questions and captures the experience of nonnormative formations.

The most striking example of the shifts in the cultural sphere is the transformation of the Orchid Theatre of Provocative Fashion in the 2010s. The reactions to the Orchid shows are a litmus test for the development of the informal middle class with its idea of respectability and taste. The Orchid shows were shamed or laughed at in the 2000s and labelled ‘provincial fashion’, but in the 2010s they were ‘rediscovered’ as a contemporary art performance. While Orchid appeared and functioned within shadow economy and at the intersection of different genres, in Chapter V I explored its ‘discovery’ by the contemporary culture system and the changes that followed.

I explored how artistic dissent in the contemporary art system is codified and named in order to be explained to the domestic and international (‘European’) audiences. Positioning Ukraine between the ‘EU’ and ‘Russia’, ‘past’ and ‘future’ that is ingrained in the contemporary art discourses has an influence on the nonnormative cultural production within institutions. The presentation of Koptev’s art and the Orchid in the West, carried out (in the case of VICE magazine) through the optics of ‘slum voyeurism’, reveals the colonial pattern of exoticizing certain nonnormative formations (such as lower-class communities from the countries of the ‘East’). Meanwhile, within Ukraine, Koptev’s inscription into contemporary gay art history coincided with the transformation of Orchid from the collective including marginalised ‘outcasts’ into the collective including (precarious) young contemporary artists. The effects of this transformation on Orchid’s power to question the ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ is an interesting direction for further research.

After 2014 we can see an example of a collective that presents an interesting alternative, or counterpart, to the Orchid. The SHvemy cooperative

and art collective (Chapter VI) are questioning the contemporary art system through artistic dissent. They are creating alternative fashion and textile objects and participate in contemporary art events; they also promote horizontality, and critique the effects of globalisation on both art, society and labour conditions. In the works and ideas of SHvemy, as well as their individual members, one can see the search for alternatives to the capitalist ideas about art and societal development that were part of Ukraine's modernisation after 1991.

I will address how cultural producers engage with Europeanisation as modernisation later (in an analysis of aesthetics and temporality). For now, it is useful to note some directions for future thinking about Europeanisation and nonnormative formations. This thesis touched upon the idea that the shifts within nonnormative formations (such as the shift towards professionalised activism) led to the promotion of the ideals of social decency and conformity. Therefore, it would be important to explore further the class division within 'civil society' in Ukraine. Namely, an interesting direction for future research would be to investigate the construction of citizenship within 'civil society', the production and consumption of the ideologies of 'European values' by different classes, and the strategies and subjectivities that are believed to be in line with 'European values', and provide access to class mobility. Another possible direction for future research could be the influence of Europeanisation on the historicization of nonnormativity, and the exclusion of the racialised and lower-class/underclass formations from such history-making. Finally, this research touched upon the complexity of the contemporary art system that both instrumentalises nonnormative sexuality or gender, and makes possible articulations of nonnormativity. However,

further research is needed into the influence of Europeanisation and globalisation politics on the conditions of art production in Ukraine.

The ongoing war that accelerated with the full-scale Russian invasion of 2022 exacerbated present inequalities and disrupted the Ukrainian economy and social infrastructures. The full effect of this disruption will be known only later. In the year since February 2022, the war has led to more than 8 million people (around 20% of the whole population, mostly women) fleeing Ukraine and becoming refugees. Many Ukrainian refugees thus 'joined Europe', but as exploited cheap migrant labour and Europe's 'others', revealing the hidden inequalities in the idea of global liberal capitalism *as* democracy. These displaced people (including those internally displaced) present a social formation that disrupts the idea of 'good citizenship' and is an important area of further research.

The full-scale invasion also led to rapid changes in the legislative sphere. In 2022, the Istanbul Convention was ratified by the Ukrainian government, and 3 days later Ukraine received candidate status for EU membership. In 2023, the first draft of the law #9103 on legalising registered partnerships was registered in Parliament. The explanatory statement (Sovsun 2023) stated the need for the 'new, neutral partnerships institute' and while arguing that the law would benefit different-sex couples, it specifically addressed the need for legalisation of the same-sex partnerships at the time of the war.

These legislative changes are a result of the rapid Europeanisation accelerated by Ukraine's financial and military dependencies on Europe. They are also an effect of the spreading of pro-feminist and pro-LGBT positions among the general population. For example, the most recent report (TSentr 'Nash Svit' 2023: 14) shows the growth of support for LGBT people in Ukraine.

The shift in general opinion was influenced by the years of gender and sexual dissent carried out by different groups, as well as generational change.[120]

Yet both examples of legislative change, of course, point to their own exclusions. Many women (including women from Roma communities) would not report crimes due to their undocumented status or fear of police violence. The abovementioned report also marks the rise in homophobic and transphobic attacks carried out by police since the onset of martial law (see TSentr 'Nash Svit' 2023: 38). Non-monogamous partnerships wouldn't be covered by the new partnerships legislation (if it was to be adopted). These exclusions point to the nonnormative formations that will continue to exist 'aside' from the 'new' norms.

In the cultural sector, new art residencies and projects supporting cultural producers from Ukraine have opened around the world. Yet it is unclear how long-lasting the spike in international attention and support of Ukrainian culture will be, while the 2023 Ministry of Education budget was cut by 27.2% and the Ministry of Culture budget – by 47% (Cooper 2022: 10). Simultaneously, international organisations strive to involve Ukrainian artists and cultural workers into the 'peacebuilding dialogues' with Russian cultural producers. Cultural critic and curator Kateryna Botanova (2022) critiques the 'developmental logic' and epistemological power of the Global West that is behind these efforts, noting that this epistemological power is also a power to instrumentalise culture. I agree with Botanova (2022) that Ukrainian cultural producers started the process of decolonising knowledge and representation, and I believe that the case studies presented in this thesis can serve as a proof of this process.

[120] The same report also shows the generational difference in views on sexuality, with people aged 18-29 being most tolerant.

On neo-traditionalism, morality and dissent

An important element of the thesis was reflection on neo-traditionalist discourses of 'traditional/ family values', its role in the nation-building process, and the 'moral' paternalist underpinning of state politics. The thesis covered the transformation of the morality politics in Ukraine: with time, the legal discourses on morality acquire neo-traditionalist connotations. In Chapters I-IV I studied the rise of the neo-traditionalist social formations, in particular the religious right anti-gender groups and the far-right movement. Chapter I established that since the 1990s nonnormativity in Ukraine was likened by the far-right ideologies to the 'entirety of perversions' that allegedly came with the expansion Western liberal modernity. Similarly, in Chapter II I traced the origin of the 'gender ideology' concept in the rhetoric of anti-gender religious groups and NGOs in the 2000s. In both cases, nonnormativity was seen as deviance, 'corruption' coming from the West, and the enemy of traditions, family, nation or Christianity. I have shown how the construct of morality became inseparable from gender/sexual normativity in the rhetoric of these neo-traditionalist formations. A useful case study in this regard was also the National Committee for the Protection of Public Morals (and the artistic dissent against it, see Chapters II-III).

Chapters V-VI noted the changes that took place after Maidan and the beginning of the war, and the influence these changes had on sexual/gender dissent. A new stage in the development of the anti-gender groups began after 2014, with wider mobilisation and parliamentary representation; the instances when morality was conflated with patriotism and normativity (through national-patriotic education) were highlighted in Chapter V. Further study of conservative 'anti-gender' formations will be crucial in the 2020s. Recent research analysing the anti-gender mobilisation in 2009-2018 (Datta 2021) through the perspective of its funding base is a promising start: it

reveals NGOs, political parties and individuals in the US, Russian Federation and several European countries as key stakeholders in funding the transnational anti-gender backlash. It is therefore not enough to analyse just conservative discourses. Due to their transnational character, anti-gender social formations will continue to develop despite governmental changes in a particular country, and in Ukraine the conservative turn can always gain momentum due to the ongoing war.

The thesis also traced the evolution of the 'traditional values' discourse in Russia, and how the Russian state's securitisation of 'traditional values' aided and became the epistemological foundation of the Russian invasion into Ukraine. In November 2022, Vladimir Putin signed the Decree No 809 on the fundamentals of state policy 'for the preservation and strengthening of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values' (Putin 2022). This decree didn't just define the 'traditional values' and frame them as a foundation of Russian society and central to national security, but also defined the external and internal 'enemies' posing a threat to traditional values and to Russian sovereignty (Putin 2022). The protection of 'traditional values' became the core of the Russian imperialist 'politics of eternity' project, and the justification for erasing Ukraine as a competing project of modernity. Researching dissent against 'traditional values' is thus a priority, as it can provide us with the tools to oppose not just the discursive moral devices invented by anti-gender groups, but also Russian imperialist politics.

Every chapter of the thesis presented a dimension of sexual/gender dissent: dissent as provocation, dissent as demarginalisation, sexual/gender dissent as civic dissent and human rights struggle, dissent as 'immorality', dissent as transgression, dissent as a 'menace', and finally, dissent as refashioning and transformation. These metaphors reflect the particular

historical moment, but also the knowledge circulating in the particular communities at the time.

One of the ways I approached the exploration of dissent against neo-traditionalist politics and the politics of morality was through the idea of shaming and shame. All of the cultural producers studied in the thesis approach shame in their artistic work. The Orchid costumes and shows (Chapters I and V) oppose bodily and sexual shame by making visible body parts, gender performances and social behaviours that are supposed to be invisible and 'contained' by 'decent' citizens. Anatoliy Belov's works (Chapters II-IV) perform a similar function by directly opposing marginalisation, shaming, moralising and neo-traditionalism. They do it by making visible what is shamed and concealed, 'reclaiming' homophobic slurs (such as *pidaras* or 'homodictatorship'), and turning to nonnormative communities, real and imaginary (such as the 'marginals' in 'We Are Not Marginals!' or what I read as the *pleshka* meetings in the 'To Transgress the Sacred').

Belov's works do not just reveal what is shamed; they question the nature of shaming itself. Belov tackles the moralising discourses of 'common sense', as well as the anti-gender groups, far-right violence or state institutions such as the National Committee for Protection of Public Morals. Belov de-essentialises the construct of morals and points back to the social formations that are part of this construct. Like grassroots feminist and queer dissent in the 2000-2010s (Chapter IV), the artistic dissent of Belov and the band Lyudska Podoba embraces the anti-social meanings of perversity as transgressing 'the sacred' (religious or nationalist 'traditional values').

Friedrich Chernyshov's performance in PinchukArtCentre also works with an idea of shame. But it is the dissent against the shaming of transgender bodies in society at large *and* within the transgender community itself. Both in his poetry and in the photo performance with Ol'ga Kononenko Friedrich

strives for the 'competition between poetry and pornography' (Chapter V). The political value in the display of the naked body or explicit poetry is in becoming a 'menace' to neo-traditionalist discourses. But Chernyshov's works are political also in embracing the vulnerability of the nonnormative and 'indecent' bodies. This vulnerability is made evident in the dissent against the violence of far-right groups articulated in art works. Such dissent is articulated through the references to far-right slogans in Friedrich Chernyshov's poetry (Chapter V), beast-like figures with Molotov cocktails in the artworks of Anatoliy Belov (Chapter III), or in creative transformation of the rainbow banner into the anti-fascist statement by Tonya Mel'nyk and Masha Lukianova (Chapter VI).

It is important to note that many cultural producers whose works were explored in the thesis engage folk art and traditional crafts. For instance, Anatoliy Belov experimented with *vytynanky* paper cut-outs and folk music; similarly Feminist Ofenzyva activist group used traditional Ukrainian embroidery in its poster (Chapter IV). The SHvemy collective re-imagined traditional *vyshyvanky* embroidered shirts as *vyshyvahinky* (Chapter VI). Creative dis-identification with traditional crafts and genres allows us to value them and simultaneously to deconstruct the entanglement between nationhood, morality, normativity and 'traditions' or 'traditional values', existing within neo-traditionalist formations.

The thesis has shown that the politics of morality is ever-changing and is both local and global. It is influenced by both 'Western' and Russian formations, Ukrainian national interests and local and transnational actors. I believe that the examples of artistic sexual/gender dissent explored in the thesis provide important non-nationalist answers to the complex questions about the interrelation between the nationhood, citizenship, religions, and

norms that are made even more actual with the full-scale Russian invasion. These questions are worth exploring in more depth in the future.

Articulating nonnormativity: politics of dissent

Beyond the far-right and 'anti-gender' movements, the thesis explored social movements related to sexual/gender dissent, and analysed their contribution to cultural transformations. I traced two vectors of activism's development in Ukraine: professionalised NGO activism, and grassroots activism. Over time, we see the rise and transformations of LGBT, feminist, queer and transgender activism, both in its professionalised and grassroots forms.

In Chapters II-IV I examined the works of Anatoliy Belov that existed within the broader circles of grassroots collective sexual and gender dissent. The undercurrent of the 2000s was the struggle around the broadening of the 'human rights' politics to include sexuality and gender: 'human rights' language became the language of sexual/gender dissent. I have shown the ways through which the intersectional grassroots coalitions and the developing network of the professionalised LGBT NGOs included gender and sexuality within the rhetoric of 'human rights'. Yet I pointed to the differences between the political uses of such rhetoric, as the grassroots movements embedded 'human rights' struggle within the broader intersectional struggle for collective economic and social rights. The metaphors in Belov's works encompass and articulate the changes that took place during the 2000s-2010s: from 'coded messages' pointing to nonnormativity (*Satyricon*) to opposing marginalisation (*We Are Not Marginals* and *Homophobia Today – Genocide Tomorrow*), to the engagement with 'human rights' discourse and the struggle against morality politics (*My 'Porn' Is My Right*), and finally to the adoption of *kvir* and the exploration of queerness in the 2010s (in both Belov's works and the music of Lyudska Podoba).

Throughout the thesis, I have shown both the alliances formed between the grassroots groups and NGOs (Chapters III and V), and the contentious relations – a critique of the LGBT NGOs carried out by the grassroots groups and cultural producers (Chapters V-VI). I claimed that in the 2010s a shift in the development of the nonnormative activist formations took place: as LGBT and feminist activism became less stigmatised and developed in its professionalised form, the critique 'from within' also appeared, voiced by those nonnormative groups that found themselves 'aside' from the new LGBT or feminist discourses.

The reasons for the 'critique from within' can be attributed to the perceived difference between the social formations to which professionalised NGO activism, and grassroots activism point. The possible dangers of the NGO-isation of activism can lie in alignment with the informal white middle class and ignoring the needs of a wider community (see Chapter I). Both over-relying on high politics and reforms as methods of struggle (see Chapters II-VI) and creating an appealing (but misleading) myth of social change (see Chapter V on historicisation) can lead to the demobilisation of social movements.

Grassroots activism explored in the thesis often searches for alternatives to the individualist and charity/NGO logics and does not align itself with the middle class. This can be observed in the mutual aid and D.I.Y. ethos that developed in the early online transgender communities (Chapter V), as well as the intersectional politics of activist groups, attentive to the issues of race, class, citizenship, etc (Chapters III-VI). The SHvemy collective is a good example of such grassroots sexual/gender dissent as not just aesthetic dissent, but also economic and political (Chapter VI). The thesis has shown that mutual aid and horizontal cooperation has been and is a distinctive feature of the grassroots sexual/gender dissent in Ukraine. However, it is

important to remember that mutual aid projects and transformative political movements have to be embedded in each other: otherwise, mutual aid would be replaced by the NGO charity methods, as can be seen in the development of transgender activism in Ukraine the 2010s.

Another important phenomenon worth noting regarding the development of social movements is the consistent tension of 'sexual' and 'gender' in sexual/gender dissent. We can observe that sexual dissent does not always include or presume gender dissent, and vice versa. From the 'civil' human rights organisations that started to address sexual rights only in the 2000s (Chapter III), to the LGBT NGO that excluded transgender activism (Chapters I, V), to feminist activism addressing both gender and sexuality (Chapters V-VI) – many cases explored in this thesis show the importance of a nuanced intersectional approach in both political activity, and in the research of social movements. In the 2010s we can see a discussion of gender and sexual dissent politics as intersectional and anti-racist (Chapters V-VI). This trend is likely to continue in the 2020s.

In contrast with the onset of war in 2014, in 2022 Ukraine has been provided with much more military, financial and humanitarian aid by 'Western' governments and transnational entities (the EU and the US being among the top donors). The reorientation of the donors to humanitarian aid projects, direct solidarity crowdfunding support from big international women's and LGBT organisations, as well as the pressing needs 'on the ground' led women and LGBT organisations to reorient their services towards direct humanitarian aid. For example, Insight, Women's March and KyivPride organisations expanded their shelter support for displaced persons, as well as provided direct assistance to individuals with temporary housing, food, hygiene, medical supplies, and psychological support, or small grants to other

initiatives helping with housing and relocation (KyivPride 2022a; Insight 2022).

This shift to practical-issues activism is radical for professionalised women, feminist and LGBT activism, as it recognises the economic inequality between and takes into account the current real needs of marginalised people, in contrast with the earlier history of 'diversity' advocacy that perhaps didn't prioritise those needs. Even more radical is the appearance of the voices from within NGO activism that (similar to the voices of cultural activists) are now calling to de-Westernise NGO activism:

> [...] можливо, для українського активізму настає час теж прибрати більшої суб'єктности, розвивати власні підходи до боротьби за права, спираючись на чималий уже досвід, без сліпого копіювання і комплексу меншовартости.

> [...] perhaps, the time is coming for Ukrainian activism to also gain more subjectivity, to develop its own approaches to the struggle for rights, based on already considerable experience, without blind copying and inferiority complex (Iryskina 2022).

This thesis has shown the unique ways in which grassroots initiatives have approached sexual and gender dissent, often adopting intersectional politics rather than relying on 'Western' frameworks of single-issue identity politics. The efforts of NGOs currently resonate with an unprecedented wave of self-organised grassroots volunteering initiatives that 'plug in' the existing holes in social infrastructure. At the same time, they take place in the context of Ukrainian government's turn to the dangerous neoliberal economic policies, such as curtailing employment rights or attack the trade-unions' owned property. Scholars (Cooper 2022) note that the turn to neoliberal

politics, combined with the ongoing war, may lead to Ukraine turning into the 'failed state' and Russian state succeeding in its imperialist efforts. The volunteering and activism efforts also take place at the time of an ever-increasing level of Ukraine's foreign debt and long-term dependency on foreign support. In this regard, attention to globalisation and Europeanisation as economic processes that lock dissent into the ontological position of 'development capitalism legitimised through the discourse of empowerment' (Svitych 2023: 11–12) is urgent and crucial.

The thesis has explored the complexity of the parallel development of grassroots and professionalised NGO activism, and the case of shifting from one activism mode to another (Chapter V). Yet one of the shortcomings of the thesis is that it did not provide an in-depth study of different strands of activism, feminist activism in particular, in all its complexity. The thesis also showed how the development of the Internet was vital for the survival and flourishing of nonnormative formations, and the extent to which it transformed both activism and art practices (see Chapters V and VI in particular). The Internet is not just a tool, but a living archive that was used in this research extensively to uncover forgotten pasts and digital presents (be it of the anti-gender groups, or of nonnormative communities and artists). Yet, the sheer volume of data available online, and the proliferation of social networks also makes the researcher's task more complicated. Closer attention needs to be paid to the study and archiving of online creativity, digital identities and communities in the 2000-2020s, as they prove to be as important as non-digital ones. For example, the FtM Forum studied in Chapter V was closed down in summer 2022, with only some pages archived via the archive.org.

While I did point out some of the differences and similarities between the professionalised and grassroots dissent, as well as the trends in the

development of social movements, a more nuanced exploration is vital if this research is continued. I fully agree with Paul Stubbs (2012: 27):

> The challenge remains to build a sociology of activism able to explore, from different angles, the possibilities and problems of combining radicalism and inclusivity, to address the often narrow line between mainstream and counter-hegemonic forms and structures, and, above all, to contribute to a multi-voiced and non-linear understanding of social action and social change.

One of the ways to contribute to a multi-voiced and non-linear understanding of social change for me was to focus on the knowledge production within social movements, namely knowledge about sexual/gender norms and nonnormativity. I considered the dissenting artistic imaginaries and how they relate to the knowledge produced within those social movements. The thesis explored the role of academia (namely, gender and sexuality studies) in knowledge production, and the flow of knowledge between academic and activist/artivist communities. It also showed that knowledge production cannot be reduced to 'borrowing from the West', and where knowledge appeared as a result of cross-cultural exchanges, it was discussed and debated (like the concepts of intersectionality or homonationalism, discussed in Chapters V and VI), and often creatively transformed. In chapters II-IV I showed Anatoliy Belov's creative engagement with and reclaiming of the local derogatory terms such as 'a marginal', 'homodictatorship', *pidaras*. In Chapter IV I traced the different political uses of the borrowed *kvir* / 'queer'; in Chapter V I analysed how the use of the 'Western' transliterated terms such as *pre-op* / *post-op* was combined with the exploration of the local survival and flourishing strategies. In Chapter VI I

touched upon the invention of the new language to reflect nonnormative experiences – such as a invention of a *molodiat_ky* noun form of the 'newly-wed' by Tonya Mel'nyk and Masha Lukianova.

Through the analysis of the artworks I have shown that knowledge(s) on what is 'gender' and 'sexuality' are never stable or a given. From Freudian thought and mythology (in the case of Anatoliy Belov's works) to social constructivism (in the case of Friedrich Chernyshov's and SHvemy's works), – different theories are constantly mixed and revised by communities and individuals. My research also paid particular attention to and reflected the cultural producer's own descriptions and conceptualisations of gender and sexuality. The heterogeneity of existence demands different modes of self-description and self-identifications, which leads to the borrowing, transformation and creative invention of words and meanings by the communities that are part of nonnormative social formations.

The full-scale war affected the articulations of nonnormativity. The idea of 'Ukrainianness' and its relation to gender and sexual regimes is discussed once again. With more women and LGBT people joining the army, organisations, unions[121] and media use their presence as leverage to transform the idea of Ukrainianness as normative. Some researchers (Diedusheva and others 2023) believe that this presence allows to set a feminist agenda as the foundation of future statehood, drawing parallels with the Kurdish nationalist feminist struggle. A recent curatorial text for the Polish-Ukrainian queer art archive even goes as far as asking whether 'Ukrainianness is the new queerness' (Selezniova 2022), stating that a Ukrainian nation is a queered subject (in relation to Russian imperialism).

[121] See the 'Ukraïns'ki LHBT viis'kovi za rivni prava' ('Ukrainian LGBT military for equal rights') union website https://lgbtmilitary.org.ua/ [accessed 21 March, 2023].

Such articulations raise the need for a further nuanced research of sexual and gender dissent and its decolonial and nationalist articulations. Yet, sexual/gender dissent also reveals itself in what Fridrich Chernyshov called a 'poetry of paradox' (Chapter V). The attempts to put into words what can't (yet) be put into words are as important to reflect on, just as the silences: the latter honour that that cannot be said, so that new words or new silences can come into existence.

Numberless forms, numberless times: dissent and aesthetic devices

It is not just language which is important in considering the various articulations of nonnormativity. In the thesis, I looked at the visual, audial (and a little bit – at the textile/tactile) imaginaries and settings of nonnormativity created by cultural producers. The number of such imaginaries is vast, and is reflected in the thesis.

Regarding the articulation of nonnormativity, the thesis explored the many forms that aesthetic sexual/gender dissent can takes. Anatoliy Belov's works here present an interesting trajectory, with their movement from 'coded messages' to direct opposition to the norms and to their subversion. Similarly, the works of Misha Koptev (Chapters I and V), Friedrich Chernyshov (Chapter V) or SHvemy and its members (Chapter VI) can be thought of as subverting norms, and/or presenting alternatives to them. All of these forms can involve 'repurposing' existing (normative) discourses, genres and traditions.

Among the contributions of the thesis was discovering the rich archive that artistic sexual/gender dissent presents. Many case studies presented in this research are a creative documentation of reality: a reality of transgender or nonnormative existence (presented in Chernyshov's performance in the PinchukArtCentre, his poetry, or the lyrics of the 'To Transgress the Sacred' by Lyudska Podoba); the shifts in legislation (presented in Anatoliy Belov's

works, as well as in the artistic dissent of Feminist Ofenzyva and other activist groups); particular events or spaces important for nonnormative communities (such as anti-gender demonstrations in Anatoliy Belov's work or the archive of queer spaces in the 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers...'); kinships and communities (such as Orchid or the wedding by Masha Lukianova and Tonya Mel'nyk). Every artwork studied in the thesis points to specific (nonnormative) formations that enabled its existence, and, in turn, enables their reproduction, which leads to discovering further archives, both virtual and physical. The importance of further study of these archives, as well as the nonnormative communities in Ukraine, cannot be overestimated.

One of the key research inquiries of the thesis was dis-identification as an aesthetic device of sexual/gender dissent. I argued that dis-identification is particularly important when exploring the relationship between nonnormativity and modernity. The thesis presented different kinds of modernity imagined for Ukraine. It is the capitalist 'European-style' liberal democracy with a developed civil society and strong national identity. Another kind is the capitalist Christian anti-democratic modernity imagined by the anti-gender movements, with the grand narrative of returning to 'pre-Westernised' traditions, mythologisation of the Ukrainian nation (or the Russian nation, in a Russian imperialist version that erases Ukraine as an independent state). Finally, there are the remnants of Soviet modernity that are to be 'decommunised' and forgotten (or revived), with its legacies of socialist ideas and practices. My research has shown that artistic works work as the sites where these antagonistic modernities meet, are reflected upon, and (dis)identified with.

Since the 1990s and to the present moment, we can observe cultural practitioners reworking the past, turning to traditions in order to subvert or revitalise them, and creating unexpected temporal alliances. Such dis-

identification with modernities allows for imagining the alternative, non-nationalist and non-capitalist temporalities that would also be welcoming of sexual and gender heterogeneity. Creative transformation and reclaiming of symbols and ideas from the past is characteristic of activist groups (and more broadly, social movements), as evidenced by the artistic practices of the Feminist Ofenzyva (Chapter IV), Lavender Menace (Chapter V), SHvemy groups. Both SHvemy (Chapter VI), Anatoliy Belov (Chapter IV), Tonya Mel'nyk and Masha Lukianova (Chapter VI) explore traditional crafts and folklore to reveal the heterogeneity of lived experiences of the past, concealed by the impoverished versions of nationalism. This reminds us, once again, that (in the words of Nelson Goodman) 'Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already at hand; the making is remaking' (1978: 6).

Stepping aside from modernity paradigms can mean stepping into less known space and time. Orchid's shows with their pre-modern and post-apocalyptic settings (Chapter I) create possibilities for imagining sexual and gender dissent as a mystery of living aside from modern norms. But dis-identification with modernity also means dis-identification with humanity as we know it. In this regard, the imagery of the non-human, alien and supernatural, explored in the thesis, presents an important field for further research. Anatoliy Belov's graphics represent nonnormative experience through the metaphorical image of the 'supernatural child' (*The Most Pornographic Book in the World-2*, Chapter IV) or surreal, phantasmagoric settings (*Satyricon*, Chapter II). Lyudska Podoba collective takes the idea of the alien even further, when their sexual/gender dissent aligns with experimental 'oddity' in costumes, sound and vocal, lyrics and affective performance. In Chapter IV I have written about the vital materiality in Lyudska Podoba's songs that explores the kinship between the human body and the surrounding world.

A similar drive to imagine the world aside from humanity and modernity can be observed in SHvemy's art project (Chapter VI), in which they welcome and celebrate the apocalypse. While it is clear that artistic sexual/gender dissent has addressed the question of temporality since the 1990s, the conditions of the war aggravated the situation of living in multiple temporalities at the same time – especially for migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons. It is therefore unsurprising that artistic imagination turns to other times, or even the end of time itself – the apocalypse. The slug costume created by Masha Lukianova is a beautiful metaphor for the desire of the non-human world to take over, and for the connection between the human and the non-human to be cherished. Time and time again, nonnormative aesthetics reveals the fragility of the human, the artificial quality of temporal division into past, present, and future, and the 'alien' character of lived experience.

It would be easy to dismiss these imaginaries, utopian or dystopian, as being purely experimental and not having to do much with present reality. Yet the conclusion of this thesis is that dis-identification is a vital aesthetic strategy for the current moment. I have traced the ways in which grassroots collectives work with broader discursive closures: cultural production in this case works to expose the repressed contradictions of capital, nation-state, and the gender/sexual order. It shows that the systems that are presented as natural and all-encompassing are in fact a 'multi-layered pie of contradictions'. Demystification, exposing one's own aesthetic devices is an important feature of such work. Such is the 'undressing' of the body rather than 'dressing it up' in Koptev's shows of provocative fashion (Chapters I, V). Such is the performative intervention of Friedrich Chernyshov into the space of the PinchukArtCentre (Chapter V), in which, by literally exposing his body, he exposes the contradiction of the gender system that naturalises biological

and social. The SHvemy collective also strives towards dis-identification with capitalism, in daily life, but also in their performances exposing their labour conditions as art workers. Searching for other temporalities in the human and non-human worlds is just a continuation of the aesthetics and politics of sexual/gender dissent.

This search does not have to be deliberate. It unfolds in the present, in which one's own existence brings a change in the 'others' worlds', as Friedrich Chernyshov put in his poem (Chapter V). All of the cultural producers, whose work formed the case studies for this research, are alive at the moment (April 2023). Some are currently in Ukraine (Orchid shows still take place in Kyiv), while some were forced (and were able to) flee Ukraine. Some of cultural producers studied in this thesis became refugees for the second time in several years, exposing the fragility of existing aside of the norm, yet continuing to create art. With the ongoing war that affects critical infrastructure, cultural artefacts perish through destruction, mass theft and displacement to Russia, archiving is a necessity. Many artworks are or may be lost because their creators had to flee Ukraine and leave them. Researching Ukrainian art is thus a vital practice that in itself can bring a change in 'others'' worlds. By dis-identifying with the normative temporalities of modernisation and progress, or of eternity and traditions, those involved in artistic sexual/gender dissent carry out important political work and symbolise the changes in the present and future social formations.

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Supplementary materials

Appendix A – Illustrations

Figure 1. Logo of the Orchid, by Mikhail Koptev. Anna Tsyba, 'Nekotorym bylo stydno sest' v zal, I oni smotreli moe shou, priachas' za kulisami'. Bird in Flight, 13 March 2018, https://tinyurl.com/yccbbz22 [accessed 31 December 2020]

Logo of the Orchid removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Misha Koptev.

Figure 2. Orchid show poster, from Misha Koptev personal archive.

Photo of the Orchid show poster removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Misha Koptev.

Figure 3. Misha Koptev, self-portrait. Denis Boyarinov, 'Wild Orchid: Meet Mikhail Koptev, the Queen of War-Torn Luhansk'. *Calvert Journal*, 20 November 2015. Available at https://tinyurl.com/2p9cnc94 [accessed 31 December 2020]

Photo of Misha Koptev removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Misha Koptev.

Figure 4. Koptev at the Orchid show, from Misha Koptev personal archive.

Photo of Koptev at the Orchid removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Misha Koptev.

Figure 5. Orchid and cross-dressing, from Misha Koptev personal archive.

Photo removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Misha Koptev.

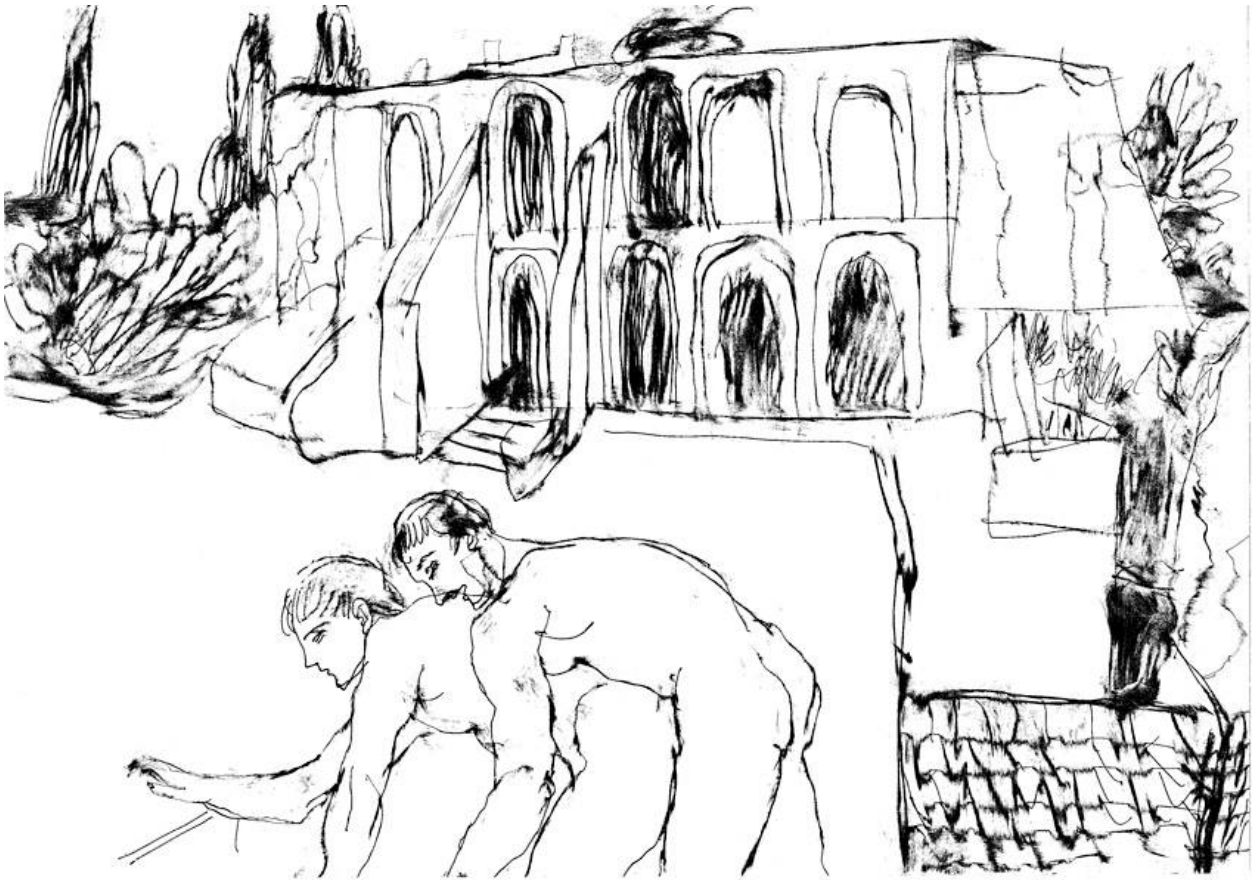
Figure 6. Orchid show, from Misha Koptev's personal archive.

Photo of the Orchid show removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Misha Koptev.

Figures 7-8. Belov, Anatoliy, *Satyrykon* (Ukr. *Satyricon*), 2004, drawing. Available at https://34mag.net/ru/post/pravo-na-oshibku [accessed 25 October 2020].

Figure 7.

Figure 8.



Figures 9-13. Belov, Anatoliy, *My ne marginaly!* (Ukr. *We Are Not Marginals!*), 2007, street art. Available at https://byelov.livejournal.com/36591.html [accessed 18 February 2021].

Figure 9.

Figure 10.

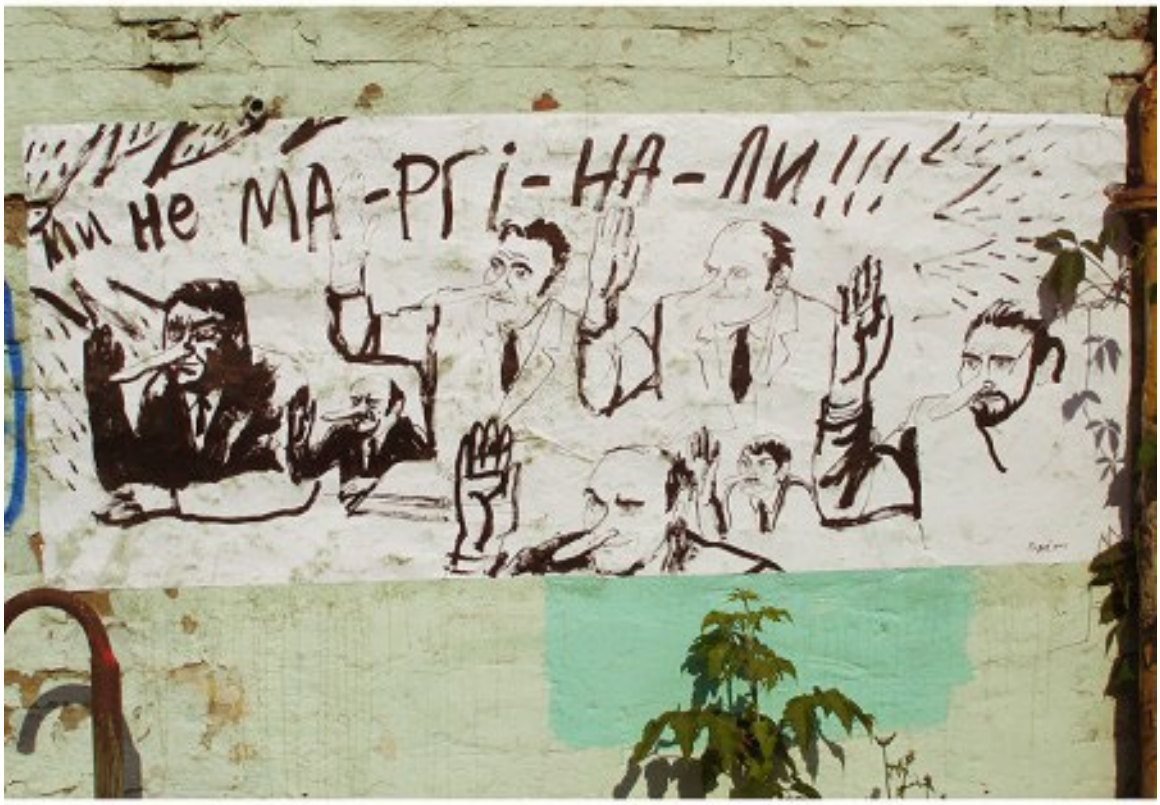


Figure 11.

Figure 12.

Figure 13.

Figure 13 (fragment).

Figures 14-16. Belov, Anatoliy, *Po(Chomu) moral'?* (Ukr. *How much is)Why morals?*), 2009, street art. Available at https://byelov.livejournal.com/51768.html [accessed 31 December 2020].

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Figure 17. Belov, Anatoliy, *Moie 'porno' – moe pravo* (Ukr. *My Porn is My Right*), 2009, street art. Available at https://byelov.livejournal.com/87276.html [accessed 31 December 2020].

Figures 18-19. Belov, Anatoliy, *Homophobiia soihodni – henotsyd zavtra!* (Ukr. *Homophobia Today - Genocide Tomorrow!*), 2009, street art, drawings. Available at https://byelov.livejournal.com/102981.html [accessed 18 February 2021].

Figure 19.

Figure 20. Photo of the action ‘Change your clothes - get rid of stereotypes, 2008, ‘Svobodna!’, Available at https://tinyurl.com/d45nncc8 [accessed 30 December 2020].

Photo removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Svobodna.

Figure 21. Feminist Ofenzyva, Dosyt' prykryvaty nerivnist' tradytsiiamy (Ukr. Enough of Covering Up Inequality with Traditions), 2013, poster. Available at https://ofenzyva.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/demo_fo_2013.jpg [accessed 3 April 2021].

Image of the poster removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Feminist Ofenzyva.

Figures 22-24. Stills from a videorecording of 'Antylolka' action, online streaming video, YouTube, 2010. Video by Olena Dmytryk. Available at https://tinyurl.com/4s5xykuz [accessed 30 December 2020].

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Figure 23. ‘Stop homophobia, fascism’, poster.

Figure 24. ‘The rights of the migrants = human rights’, poster.

Figure 25. Belov, Anatoliy, *Liuds'ka Podoba* ([Ukr.] *Human Shape*), drawing. Hanna Tsyba, 'Odin den' s Anatoliem Belovym'. *ArtUkraine*, 27.03.2013, https://artukraine.com.ua/a/odin-den-s-anatoliem-belovym/ [accessed 3 April 2021]

Figures 26-27. Belov, Anatoliy, *Vytynanky*, paper cutouts. Available at https://zbokuart.wordpress.com/people/ukraine/belov/ [accessed 18 February 2021].

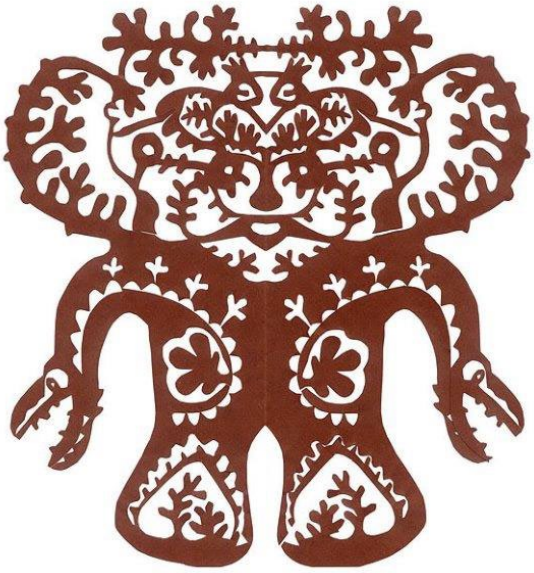

Figure 28. Belov, Anatoliy, *Naipornohraphichnisha knyha v sviti-2* (Ukr. The Most Pornographic Book In the World-2, 2012, drawings. Anatoliy Belov's personal archive.

Figure 29-36. Stills from the *Sex, Medicated, Rock-n-Roll,* dir. by Anatoliy Belov, online streaming video, Vimeo, 2013. Available at https://vimeo.com/88882032 [accessed 3 April 2021].

Figure 29.

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Figure 37. Synchrodogs, Misha Koptev, 2011, photo series. Available at https://synchrodogs.com/Misha-Koptev [accessed 30 December 2020].

Photo removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Synchrodogs.

Figures 38-39. Motta, Carlos, 'Patriots. Citizens. Lovers...', 2015, multimedia exhibition. Photographer: Sergey Illin. Available at https://tinyurl.com/hmav6rdz [accessed 30 December 2020].

Photo removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Carlos Motta, Sergey Illin, PinchukArtCentre.

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Figure 40. Kinder Album, *I Am Kinder Album*, 2015, installation. Photographer: Sergey Illin. Available at https://tinyurl.com/n9fu5asb [accessed 30 December 2020].

Photo removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Kinder Album, Sergey Illin, PinchukArtCentre.

Figures 41-42. Chernyshov, Friedrich; Kononenko, Olga. Performance in PinchukArtCentre, 2015. Available at https://iamkinderalbum.wordpress.com/#jp-carousel-110 [accessed 3 April 2021].

Figure 41.

Photo removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Friedrich Chernyshov, Olga Kononenko, Kinder Album.

Figure 42.

Photo removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Friedrich Chernyshov, Olga Kononenko, Kinder Album.

Figure 43. Inside the ReSew cooperative workshop; clothes from the ‘Revolution is Fashion’ collection by Tonya Mel’nyk. Photo by Olena Dmytryk.

Figure 44. SHvemy at the performance. Katrin Nenasheva, ‘Iskusstvo na ulitse – chto dal’she?’, *AroundArt,* 29 January 2016, photographer: IUrii Vasil’ev, https://tinyurl.com/4u7vce6s [accessed 30 December 2020].

Photo removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder IUrii Vasil’ev, SHvemy.

Figure 45. Mel'myk, Antonina. *Good bye Putin!*, painted headscarf, 2016. Katrin Nenasheva, 'Iskusstvo na ulitse – chto dal'she?', *AroundArt,* 29 January 2016, photographer: IUrii Vasil'ev, https://tinyurl.com/4u7vce6s [accessed 30 December 2020].

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Figure 46. SHvemy, documentation of the *Polotno* performance, 2016. Available at https://tinyurl.com/tev28nmk [accessed 15 August 2021].

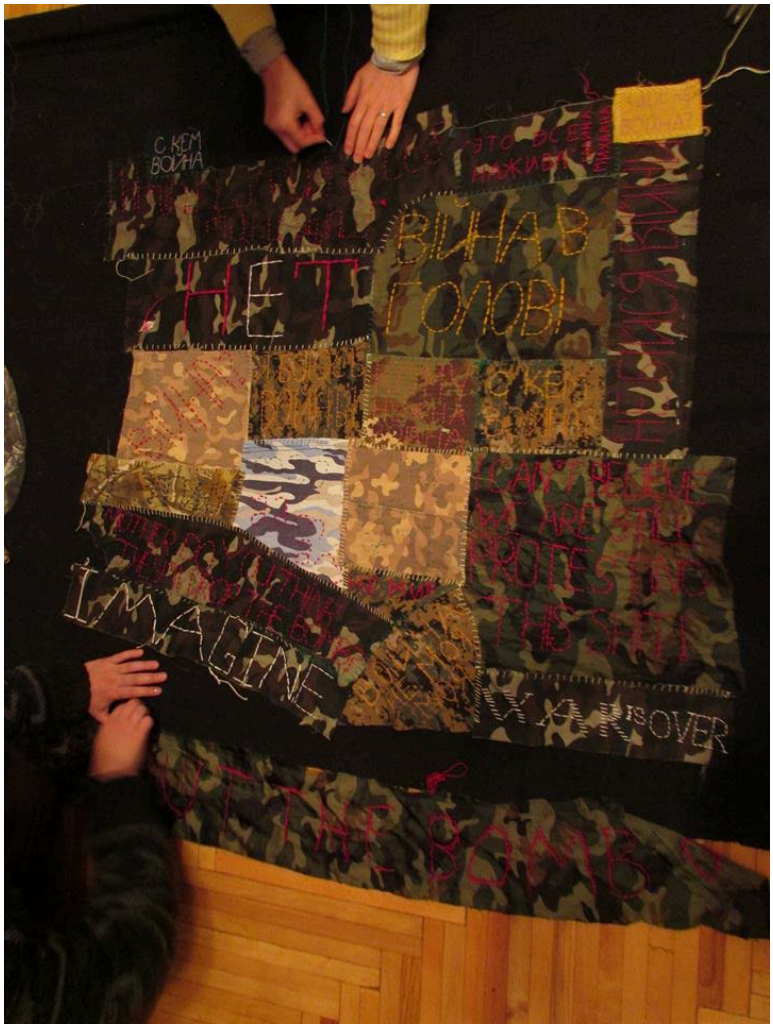

Figure 47. SHvemy (Tereshkina, Anna), *Vyshyvahinky*, 2016, embroidered shirt. SHvemy personal archive.

Figure 48-49. SHvemy (Lukianova, Mariia), *Vyshyvahinky*, 2016, embroidered shirt. SHvemy personal archive.

Figure 50. SHvemy (Mel'nyk, Tonya), *Vyshyvahinka*, 2017, embroidered shirt. Available at https://tinyurl.com/5ttuwcwt [accessed 3 April 2021].

Figure 51. Vesillia performance by Mariia Lukianova and Tonya Mel'nyk, 2016. Photographer: Mania Romashkina. Available at https://tinyurl.com/3dhmeev6 [accessed 30 December 2020].

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Figure 52. Lukianova, Mariia; Mel'nyk, Tonya, 'Photo session', from *Vesillia* (Ukr. 'Wedding') performance, 2016. Photographer: Mania Romashkina. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/hb5uwffz [accessed 30 December 2020].

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Figure 53. SHvemy, *Kokhaisia! Kviruisia! Denaturalizuisia!,* embroidered banner at KyivPride, 18 June 2017. Available at https://tinyurl.com/dpxxc6ax [accessed 30 December 2020].

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Figure 54. Lukianova, Mariia; Mel'nyk, Tonya, Anti-fascist banner, 19 January 2018. Available at https://tinyurl.com/we8aazz6 [accessed 30 December 2020].

Photo removed for copyright purposes. Copyright holder Tonya Melnyk, Mariia Lukianova.

Figure 55. Lukianova, Mariia, slug costume, 2019. Photographer: Maksym Rachkovskyi. Available at https://tinyurl.com/zfudhmjz [accessed 30 December 2020].

Appendix B. Song lyrics of 'Lyudska Podoba' (parallel translations)

'Moi Rany Plachut' ([Russ.] My Wounds Are Crying)

Твоя странная музыка	[Russ.] Your strange music
Меня поймала, меня поймала	Caught me, caught me
Я разбит и тих,	I am broken and quiet,
Я разбит и тих	I am broken and quiet,
Слушаю чей-то плач	Listening to someone's weeping
И переживаю снова	And again feeling
Боль, боль, боль, боль.	Pain, pain, pain, pain.
Внезапно открылись раны,	Suddenly the wounds opened
Старые раны мои,	My old wounds,
Внезапно открылись раны,	Suddenly the wounds opened
Старые раны мои.	My old wounds.
Мои раны плачут,	My wounds are crying,
И песню поют,	And are singing a song,
Мои раны плачут,	My wounds are crying,
И песню поют	And are singing a song,
Под твою музыку,	To your music,
Странную музыку	Strange music

‘My Ne Vidim Etikh Zvezd’ ([Russ.] ‘We Do Not See These Stars’)

Мы не видим этих звёзд	[Russ.] We do not see these stars
Мы не видим этой луны	We do not see this moon
Мы не видим этих звёзд	We do not see these stars
Мы не видим этой луны	We do not see this moon
Всё возбудилось, всё развратилось,	Everything got excited; everything became perverted,
Все возбудились, все развратились.	Everyone got excited; everyone became perverted.
В сперме тонет луна,	The moon is drowning in sperm,
И не только она	And it is not just the moon that
Возбудилась	Got excited
Развратилась	Got perverted
Возбудилась	Got excited
Развратилась	Got perverted

‘Bantikovyi Vzryv’ ([Russ.] ‘Bow Explosion’)

Пусть будет бантиковый взрыв	[Russ.] Let the bowknot explosion happen
Пусть остановится земля	Let the Earth stop
И сердце разобьётся	And the heart break
На тысячи миров	Into the thousands of worlds
Блестящих конфетти	Of sparkling glitter
Пусть я умру красиво, красиво.	Let me die beautifully, beautifully.

‘Prestupit’ Sakral’noe’ ([Russ.] ‘To Transgress the Sacred’)

Я одинок всегда с тобой
Ты мне не скажешь слов любви
У нас с тобой лишь только секс, животный секс
А мне хотелось бы немного теплоты

[Russ.] I am always lonely, with you,
You won’t tell me lover’s words,
All we have, you and me, is sex, animal sex,
But I’d love a touch of tenderness.

[Chorus]:
Мой любовник не целуется
У него есть девушка и принципы
Мой любовник не целуется
Преступить сакральное карается

[Chorus]:
My lover is not a kisser,
He’s got a girl and principles.
My lover-boy is not a kisser,
Breaking sacred rules can be criminal.

Ты позволяешь много мне
Свидетель ночь нам и рассвет
Но лишь коснусь к твоим губам
И снова слышу твой запрет
[Chorus]

You allow me so much,
As night and dawn will testify.
But the moment I brush your lips,
You tell me it’s forbidden.
[Chorus]

Мои мечты обречены
Размыты золотым дождём
Целую юношей других
Потом иду к тебе домой
[Chorus]

My dreams are done for,
Defused by golden rain.
I kiss other lads,
Then go home to you.
[Chorus]