Superfluous Women: Gender, Art, and Activism After Ukraine's Orange Revolution

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is for my sisters
Sasha E. Zychowicz and Kathryn A. Zychowicz
and for other women of our generation
seeking a voice

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Abstract

Analyzing firsthand interviews, visual art, literature, manifestos, official speeches and other materials, I demonstrate how several contemporary collectives in Kyiv reject past Soviet and Western connotations with feminism in the local context by exercising the democratic principles of freedom of speech and assembly to advance a number of human rights issues. I draw points of connection across art-activists' experiments in their appropriations of 19-20th century canonical Slavic and Soviet literature, painting, and photography. While these groups agitate for diverse causes, most tied to gender and sexuality, my project's central concern is the question of how protest becomes meaningful. The aesthetic exchanges between activists and their audiences rhetorically frame the body as a figure for public speech. Thus, the works in this study comprise protest "texts" that reveal how aesthetics evolve through social interaction, and how images come to acquire collective historical meaning.

Each chapter illustrates how artists employ creative media (visual, performance, literary, digital) to expose gendered paradoxes by putting on display the enduring cultural mythologies that shape public discourse, wherever those discourses come to bear upon the body in imaginings of the nation and notions of progress. The results comprise a genealogy of local women's experiences that challenges more conventional historiographies of the Soviet era. Combining approaches from literary and art criticism, history, and anthropology, I investigate the migration of gender between cultures, tracing how artists mediate rhetorical frames. Chapter One supplies a

local history of public dissent and examines parody in performances by the group Femen. Chapter Two traces the role of medium and message in the global media production of protest by analyzing the body in digital environments. Chapter Three explores the work of one photographer from the group Ofenzywa as a critical representation of everyday life among tenement residents and LGBT couples in Kyiv. The final chapter focuses on the collectives R.E.P. and HudRada in the context of the state and its changing relationship to public art. This study thus offers a transnational critique of how aesthetics and politics come to be inscribed in civic vocabularies on gender that translate unevenly and shift over time.

Introduction

The title of this dissertation is an ironic reference to the idea of the "superfluous man," a term popularized by Ivan Turgenev that he applied to a character type originating in Pushkin's Eugene Onegin. The description first applied to men of status and wealth of the 1830s, men whose priviledge largely prevented them from contributing to society and were too young to participate in actual revolution. The notion later gained widespread currency in Russian literature to convey the idea of a "lost" generation. What follows here is an attempt to document a generation of artists, many of which, initially, were viewed much in the same way as the superfluous men: as involved with "protest for protest's sake" lacking any critical value. Only by closely reading their performances, artworks, and other cultural outpourings as texts—texts, moreover, produced by women living out the cultural turn brought about by the Orange Revolution—do we begin to see them for the socially-engaged activists they are.

Analyzing firsthand interviews, visual art, literature, dissident manifestos, official speeches and other materials, I demonstrate how four distinct contemporary collectives in Kyiv contest Soviet and Western connotations with feminism in the local context to draw attention to a range of human rights issues. Gender and sexuality remain in the foreground of these activists' experimentations and their appropriations of representational schemata of past canonical works in 19-20th century Slavic and Soviet literature, painting, and photography. Ubiquitous in Russian letters by the time of the massive sociopolitical shifts of the 1860s, the notion of the superfluous in this project is also a toungue-in-cheek reference to the common sidelining of women's needs

and experiences evident throughout periods of uncertainty, including postcommunism.

This project charts members of Ukraine's youngest generation of women that have actively resisted the unraveling of the reforms promised during the Orange Revolution by protesting where they believed the state viewed their particular interests to be dispensable. In the process, many individual artists, writers, and performers have created an emerging aesthetic that explores, through various techniques, conventions, and media, the notion of the female body as a medium of dissent. Perhaps the most globally visible and controversial of these is the women's topless protest group Femen, whose leader Anna Hutsol stated in an interview for a Kyiv-based journal in 2012 in a radical statement characteristic of her group: "We dream of a thousand naked women taking to the streets!"[1] But whose dreams are reflected in the dreams of a thousand women?

Discursive divides between East and West across the European continent abound in imaginings of the nation and notions of feminism. These terms evidence complex local etymologies that do not readily translate. I combine approaches from literature and art criticism, history, and anthropology to investigate the conflicted migration of notions of gender and the idea of protest between cultures. Each chapter reveals how several different contemporary groups in Kyiv employ creative media (visual, performance, literary, digital), tracing where activists mediate rhetorical frames that are themselves constructs, oftentimes stitched together from the variegated aesthetic pasts of specific expressive forms. The central concern of my project asks how images and texts come to acquire collective historical meaning, and how our readings shift over time, across national borders, languages, and cultural contexts.

[1] Anna Hutsol interview with Kateryna Mishenko, Nadiya Parfan, and Oleksij Radynskyj, "Mriyemo Vyvesty Na

The Collective

Several groups of artists and intellectuals in Ukraine's emerging generation are continuing to revisit and adapt the notion of the collective to their own cultural and activist collaborations.[2] The avant-garde groups that broke with official Soviet cultural policy throughout the twentieth century practiced their dissident art in small collectives that offered them social protection from the central authorities, which largely controlled the censors. Echoes of their voices can be heard throughout the refrains of Ukrainian Modernism. One such group, Kyiv's vanguard Futurist movement, broke with stylistic convention in order to critique the failures of their contemporaries to carry forth the aims of the revolution. The 1921 Manifesto of the Ukrainian Futurist group Nova Generatsiya, by Mikhailo Semenko, evidences this moment of aesthetic revolt: "We speak of those who once 'accepted' the revolution, who digested the new hastily—of the DECADENTS who lost faith in it, because they 'accepted' its mottos, its gusto and its romance, and stumbled against its system."[3] The aims of artists and even the very notion of the collective itself shifted under *Glasnost*, however, as mass media and pop culture expanded within the USSR. In the period just after independence in the 1990s radical poets in Lviv and Kyiv, for example, critiqued both the West and the emerging Russian state from within collectives based in countercultural expressions that maintained an ambivalent stance toward official representations of the nation. [4]

[2] Avant-garde groups like *BuBaBu* from the 1990s are finding critical corollaries in more recent initiatives by groups throughout both Ukraine and Russia similar to HudRada discussed in Chapter Four, which is a self-described "curatorial union" that uses subversive aesthetics founded in early modern montage to offset neoliberal ideas in the postcommunist context. Depictions of war, collectivization, interrogation, exile, and other events from Ukraine's long twentieth century are provocatively juxtaposed with a range of false promises in the modernist utopias of both capitalist and communist "progress."

[3] Quoted from the 1921 manifesto of the Ukrainian Futurist avant-garde group Nova Generatsiia, Mikhail Semenko, "Platform and Environment of Leftists," in Eds. Eagle and Lawton, *Words in Revolution*.

[4] William Jay Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv*, 220.

The language experiments of the early 1910s Soviet avant-garde and the countercultural undertones of 1970s western rock music became fused with political skepticism toward both Russian and Western imperialism. The landmark Chervona Ruta rock festival organized by the democratic opposition movement Rukh in 1991 attempted to link Ukraine's defection from the USSR to both the Cossack's freedom-loving roots and the insubordination of punk. At the festival, the Lviv group Snake Brothers created a sensation among young Ukrainian audiences with their song "We're the Boys from Banderstadt," about whose reception William Risch writes: "for such listeners, this word, a response to the marginalization of Western Ukrainians in Lviv as 'Banderites' and 'Nazi collaborators,' explicitly rejected Soviet definitions of being Ukrainian."[5] As this example shows, the Ukrainian language itself, alongside western styles of music, supplied artists and activists living in Lviv and Kyiv at the time with a readily available set of unofficial terms they could use to rebel against national stereotypes. Risch notes that Snake Brothers, like many rock groups in the region at the time, began as a circle of poets.[6] Ultimately, what our reflections on these groups now can reveal to us, aside from a story about Ukraine's defection from the Soviet Union, are the early developments of what has since evolved into a lasting modus operandi for displays of collective dissent in Ukraine. The countercultural rhetoric that these past performances introduced in Ukraine through the adaptation of the poetry

[5] Risch, Ibid, 250. The term "Banderites" is a reference to the followers of Stepan Bandera, the controversial leader of the former Ukrainian national movement in the years during WWII until his assassination by the KGB in 1959. The term is often used in a derogatory manner as a metonym to critique absolute thinking and far-right nationalism. These uses of the term stem from critiques of the actions and ideals of Bandera's branch of the OUN, Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, and their temporary collaboration with the Nazi regime under his leadership during the war. Bandera and his unit were later sent to German concentration camps.

[6] "According to one of the band's early leaders, it was originally a Russian-language group. It turned to making Ukrainian-language hits out of inspiration from jokes band members made about local Ukrainians with the aid of Galician Ukrainian slang. The rise of Ukrainian-language groups like Vopli Vidoplasova (V.V.) in Kyiv also inspired them to perform in Ukrainian. By the time of the first Red Rue festival in 1989, as noted by scholar Romana Bahriy, the group's songwriter Serhiy Kuzminskyi ('Kuzia') had written a number of Ukrainian rock songs with deliberate themes of political protest, including a song that described recent police beatings of a peaceful demonstration in Lviv." Ibid.

collective to the punk stage has accomplished a reordering of older aesthetic conventions in an innovation on the language of protest itself.

In post-Orange Ukraine, the term feminism is an already controversial rallying point to form alliances around highly varied issues activists want to draw attention to. Some of these issues, such as access to basic services like public transport and hot water, may not appear to be conventionally feminist at all. I approach postcommunism as a non-classical instance of postcoloniality, ascribing to the idea that national autonomy and feminism can coexist, and that the latter often productively conflates the national identities subsumed within mainstream public discourses. Thus, I historically situate the protest texts and artifacts in my study as being both "after" the Orange Revolution, but also, "after" many other critical and theoretical posts – postcommunism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism to name a few. My approach shares a common root with Vitaly Chernetsky's characterizations of Ukraine and Russia in the 1990s as paradigmatically rich with a certain "postmodern postcolonial" sensibility.[7] I extend the critique of the nation as cultural qualifier in his work to critiques of contemporary Ukrainian cultural, media, and artistic production.

The idea of an "art-activist" has come to take the place of the antihero archetype of the superfluous man among intellectuals concerned with representations of the body in Ukrainian national rhetoric. I trace points of connection between feminist and LGBT activists and artists experimenting with the grammar of prior movements, wherever these discourses come to bear upon ideas of progress, freedom, and censorship. While these groups agitate for diverse causes tied to a range of civil rights discourses, my dissertation's central concern is the question of how protest becomes meaningful, particularly where aesthetic exchanges between activists and

[7] Vitaly Chernetsky, "Introduction," *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization.*

audiences rhetorically frame the body as a figure of public speech. I combine approaches from history, anthropology, literature and art criticism to trace how these groups—often referred to as the Third Avant-Garde— mediate rhetorical frames for staging public conversations around gender and power. Reading their work closely can supply a critical narrative in efforts to bridge understandings of feminism in prior East-West dialogues with emerging contestations around gender. Especially where my study focuses on digital contexts, I join other scholars in efforts to extend a more nuanced, transnational civic vocabulary. The impact of technology on our work in aesthetics, I think, is by necessity very much still an ongoing process.

The Orange Revolution introduced this generation to protest in a peaceful fashion. Mass demonstration was put into action for the first time since independence. People found in practice that protests could have an impact on policy, even if the lesson failed to provide a conceptual framework for understanding when demonstrations are necessary, useful, or counterproductive. My dissertation charts how activists between Ukraine's two recent revolutions (2004-2014) handle a tool – public protest – that they seized without learning the conventional strategies of how, when, and why to use it. Though there may be no single "right" way to protest; what these groups offer us is a glimpse into the engineering of protest at a pivotal juncture in Ukrainian public discourse. How is protest recognized? Imagined? Legitimized? I examine how activists and their audiences attach meaning to politics. My overarching theoretical scope is threefold: 1.) To offer an interpretation of protest as an open text with discursive value. 2.) To demonstrate how feminist thought is contested cross-culturally. 3.) To trace how individual artists and collective groups employ media technologies to transform the intersection of aesthetics and politics.

In many ways, the nonviolent gatherings on Kyiv's Maidan, or main square, against a

rigged presidential election in the Orange Revolution of 2004 were a mild upheaval compared to what came afterward. A decade later, the mass demonstrations on Kyiv's Maidan in November 2013 began in response to now ousted President Yanukovych's refusal to sign an Association Agreement that would have moved the country closer to joining the E.U. They ended with a different meaning. Some have called what occurred a Revolution of Dignity, an observation that has since been complicated by Putin's invasion and war. It is significant that when violence broke out on the Maidan, it was a local feminist group that first organized into emergency units that transported, and then guarded, the wounded in churches that had been converted into hospitals. Their prior activist experience and initial skepticism of the Euromaidan demonstrations lent them the objectivity and ability to act quickly and effectively in their rescue efforts.[8]

Thus, in the years between Ukraine's two recent revolutions intellectuals, artists, and others became activists against their own will—forced, at times, to risk their own bodies in the face of physical violence in order to express themselves freely. State violence driven largely by infighting among corrupt elites played out over an entire decade of regime change. This resulted in a heavy burden of injustices that has been disproportionately shouldered by women and other minorities. Artists in Kyiv have continued to carve out pivotal public sites for making visible the symbolic, often hidden violence that the state had wreaked against its own people.

Historical contexts and cultural origins matter in any assessment of how ideas on rights, the body, and gender transverse space, place, and time. Thus, my project zeros in on contemporary feminist collectives in Kyiv, demonstrating how each has put on display the

[8] The groups Zhinocha Sotnya (Women's Hundred) and Zhinocha Sotnya Kobylanska (Women's Hundred Kobilyanska) emerged from the feminist group Ofenzywa, featured in Chapter 3. While individual members worked together throughout the events that transpired on Maidan, the question of violence, specifically whether or not to adopt a militaristic image, and whether to join demonstrators taking up arms in defense against the state, eventually split the group into two camps. Sarah D. Phillips provides a detailed analysis of the impact of the specific shape of the debate around feminism within the context of Euromaidan in "The Women's Squad in Ukraine's Protests: Feminism, Nationalism, and Militarism on the Maidan," 414-426.

enduring cultural mythologies that have shaped public discourse between Ukraine's two recent revolutions. The art-activists in my study expose paradoxes within a range of gender ideologies. Ultimately, I claim that the meanings generated through each of these examples comprise protest "texts" that challenge the gender paradigms in more conventional historiographies of postcommunism.

My conclusions throughout this study are based on over five years of ongoing research specifically on feminism in Ukraine. I have compiled extensive primary material for my close readings, including original interviews, paintings, photography, poetry, essays, manifestos, news reports, blogs and social media sites, official speeches, and firsthand observations of performances by artists and activists from Kraków, Warsaw, Kyiv, and St. Petersburg. In 2011 I met with the founders of the controversial women's group Femen and, more recently, Pussy Riot. Both of these groups have become important signs for dissent in a much broader constellation of global public discourses and scholarly debate. I first conducted interviews with Femen leader Anna Hutsol in Kyiv in 2011 and met with former Femen member Angelina Diash, also in Kyiv, in summer 2013. I met with Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina in Ann Arbor, Michigan during their visit to the University of Michigan campus in Fall 2014. I have also interviewed feminist and LGBT activists from Ofenzywa and the NGOs Krona, Insight, Igliyo, and the Kharkiv Gender Museum, in addition to Ukrainian feminist scholars at Kyiv-Mohilya, Kharkiv Center for Gender Studies, and feminist activists unaffiliated with any of these groups. Major media outlets examined for this article include: The New York Times, BBC, The Atlantic, Radio Free Europe, The Huffington Post, The Guardian, Kyiv Post, Kanal 1+1, Ukrainian Pravda, The Moscow Times, Pravda, Izvestia, Correspondent, Le Monde Diplomatique, and Der Spiegel.

Feminism in Orange

Young people in Ukraine do not remember the fall of communism. Growing up in an independent Ukraine has given the nation's youngest generation direct experience in street protest. The Orange Revolution supplied a watershed for protest, but Ukrainians who had hoped for democratic change witnessed the nation's leaders squander their individual and national autonomy by repressing civil liberties in the years following it. A national debate on "feminism" and "gender" has since emerged in the wake of that moment that is symptomatic of deeper, widespread dissatisfaction with the promises for a better life that had gone unfulfilled. This may also stem in part from the unusual qualities that set the Orange Revolution apart from revolution in the classical sense. Michael McFaul, in writing about its structure, noted as early as 2006: "The final word, however, on whether the Orange Revolution was a 'true' revolution rests with the people of Ukraine. That so many immediately adopted the phrase 'Orange Revolution' to describe the tumultuous events of the Fall of 2004 suggests that the term will stick, whether academics like it or not."[9] What McFaul does not suggest is that perhaps, all revolutions only appear "revolutionary" in hindsight, and that the Orange Revolution had never really come to an end.

For women in Ukraine 2004 was a watershed for organizing around issues directly concerning gender, such as reproductive rights, employment, representation in government, etc. Sarah D. Phillips has traced a gap between women's grassroots articulations of the shape of these issues, and the rhetoric of development funding programs designed to promote elites' own agendas.[10] As the ambitious reforms promised by Orange leaders dissipated in the second half of

[9] Michael McFaul, "Conclusion: The Orange Revolution in a Comparative Perspective," in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*, 193.

[10] This has especially been the case among elderly women activists, whose own definitions of social need do not readily dovetail with the language for making political claims required by Western NGOs and grants. Sarah D.

the 2000s, many women across the academic and professional sectors began to mobilize around equal representation in Parliament.[11] International Women's Day, or March 8, symbolically unified the many petitions, conferences, and street demonstrations that ensued under an increasingly regressive regime. What this moment reveals is that conflicts over March 8, like conflicts over feminism, are ultimately motions on how to commemorate a past regime: which parts to inherit and which ones to reject. In *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Katherine Verdery notes an increased masculinization of nationalism across the former Soviet bloc: "the several ways in which gender equality was legislated [under socialism] served to reinforce the significance of gender difference even while ostensibly undermining it. This makes gender, like nationalism, a strengthened vehicle of post-socialist politics."[12] For young people who did not grow up under socialism, but can recall the Orange Revolution from high school or college, the democratic promise of that moment has since given way to skepticism of mainstream politics, further stigmatizing feminism as a term.[13] By contrast, March 8 has provided a powerful reference for staging demands to reorganize gender relations as a symbol of transnational women's political mobilization that preceeds the Bolshevik Revolution. Rituals embedded in the day's celebration, as well as the significance of gender in the restructuring of the workforce after 1991, render March 8 an ideal topos for feminists who want to legitimize a reordering of the

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Phillips examines this dynamic in detail among several groups of women in the early 2000s in *Women's Social Activism in the New Ukraine* (2008).

[11] They outlined their demands for equal representation in a letter addressed to officials in Yanukovych's Parliament in 2009. The document's circulation catalyzed ongoing demonstrations around March 8. Oksana Kis, "List posadovcevi" [Letter to an Official]. February 12, 2009. ХайВей. http://h.ua/story/173353. Accessed March 8, 2015.

[12] Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?*, 14.

[13] The former opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko served a short stint as Prime Minister from 2007-2010. She was ousted in the 2010 Presidential election by a coalition between Yushchenko and former rival Yanukovych. In October 2011 she was incarcerated on charges of negotiating an illegal gas deal with Putin during her years as Prime Minister. Some commentators remarked that President Yanukovych's allies orchestrated her imprisonment in order to cut competition in Ukraine's next election cycle. In early 2013 she was charged with the murder of businessman and rival oligarch Yevhen Shcherban in 1996 while still imprisoned. She would later be released and join demonstrators during the events of Euromaidan, only to receive very little support from the crowds gathered on the same square (Maidan) where she had helped lead the Orange Revolution a decade prior.

public/private divide. In Ukraine, the day's widespread commemoration and its positioning as a "strengthened vehicle for postsocialist politics" has also provided emancipatory rhetoric with which to reevaluate the outcomes of the Orange Revolution.

Where the socialist past has been discarded as irrelevant, or counterproductive, by Ukrainian policymakers facilitating the advent of free market shock capitalism, so, too, have many individuals' positive associations with socialism—including feminism— been tossed aside. Verdery links this tendency to the rise of nationalism in the formation of statehood after communism: "Because Communist Parties all across Eastern Europe mostly toed the Soviet internationalist line in public, national sentiment became a form of anti-communism . . . To the extent that women are seen as having benefited from socialism, as having had the socialist state as their ally, feminism becomes socialist and can be attacked as antinational."[14] Taking into account these links between feminism and socialism in the popular account of history, Ukrainian women's recent moves to reclaim March 8 are also an attempt to overhaul a system of memorialization that symbolically outlaws feminism in the name of the state, wherever the state replicates anti-socialist and/or nostalgic sentiments to legitimize itself. Weaving together socialist revolutionary narratives coloring the region's modern past into their own movement, every time that women, such as Ofenzywa, studied in Chapter 3, march through the streets as a group calling for changes to the Ukrainian Civil Code, they reenact protest as it was figured by nonviolent street demonstrations on Kyiv's Maidan in 2004. They reintroduce feminism to the public as neither Soviet, nor antinational.

In *Sex in Public*, Eric Naiman traces the signification of sexuality and corporeality in post-Soviet public discourse to the year 1907. Where the young radicals of the 1860s expanded the scope of political life into the home, it was the later revival of mysticism through Symbolism,

[14] Verdery, Ibid, 82.

Naiman writes, that intensified the examination of personal life and brought the body and sexuality into these discussions. The publication of the first installment of Mikhail Artsybashev's novel *Sanin* coincided with the intelligentsia's pivotal turn toward inner life and its desires as the "lasting basis for the building of any society."[15] The novel *Sanin* was unique because it broke from Symbolism's universalization of internal life and instead "purported to offer a unified worldview that smoothly blended changes in contemporary attitudes about morality into a new sexual ethos."[16] The novel exploits women and aggrandizes male fantasies, but the protagonist triumphs over the right, in addition to "the latest—Marxist—incarnation of the 'superfluous man,'" which signified: "a rejection of the entire system of values that produced the problem of the superfluous man, a system predicated on the notion that an individual establishes his worth (or social potency) through his contribution to society. The hero's creed is the affirmation of the individual through the satisfaction of his desires."[17] The public semantics of privacy and sexual expression as the basis for individual political subjectivity would persist after the Revolution, "when pre-Revolutionary ideals of communality would be brought down to earth and put into practice."[18] Traces of *Sanin* and its equation of sexuality and individuality in Soviet intellectual life remain in the contemporary ideological contexts of the successor states.

The two recent revolutions in modern Ukraine are equally as fraught with cultural mythology as the socialist realist representations of gender and social change proliferated throughout the USSR in the twentieth century. Part of Yulia Tymoshenko's populist charm resided in her performance of a folk-feminine ideal through her hairstyle and her standing by Yushchenko in promoting their joint platform based on a "Return to Europe" as the "end" to

[15] Naiman quotes the philosopher and publicist Mikhail Gershenzon on his taking stock of the intelligentsia in an academic journal *Landmarks* in 1909. *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*, 45.
[16] Ibid, 48.
[17] Ibid, 48.
[18] Ibid, 47.

transition. I have chosen to focus on feminism to translate how such discourses become gendered, following the line of theorists whose thinking on democracy involves an approach to politics as a philosophical object of study. In this approach, "the political," has both local implications and universal trajectories. The underlying idea remains that hegemonies, or the tyranny of the majority, can only be apprehended on hegemonic terms, meaning that democracy is always dependent upon performing its own critique, and therefore, validating future consensus. I have discovered the same to be true in my readings on postcommunism—the political cannot be separated from performance. Walter Benjamin penned his theses on history during a time when ethical inquiries into politics on the European continent could not have been more exigent.[19] His claims that the aestheticization of politics could yield fascism, and that the politicization of aesthetics eventually turns to socialism are, ultimately, about the lack of validity of aesthetics and politics taken to extremes. Perhaps what we can take from his approach to culture now is a greater vigilance in our own critiques of the theatrics of human action, and inaction, in the performance of politics. In contemporary Ukraine, women were some of the first civil rights activists to step into the vacuum left by the Orange Revolution in Kyiv's streets, museums, libraries, and other public spaces. The word feminism graced their petitions, publications, and headlines—followed by debates on what the term means, or could mean, for the future.

Chapters

My first chapter leads with the emergence of the protest group Femen. It begins by laying out a cultural history of protest in Ukraine. I show how the media, commercial culture industry, and campaign technology that produced the Orange Revolution synthesized a rhetorical context

[19] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*.

that the controversial women's topless protest group Femen adopted in the years following their founding in Kyiv in 2008. Initially, Femen activists usually juxtaposed regional symbols, such as those of the E.U. and Russian Federation, in their parodies featuring commentary on local politics.[20] I compare these early spontaneous street shows in Kyiv to the street performances known as "happenings" in the region during the latter twentieth century. The eighties in Poland and Ukraine saw the early avant-garde's ironic humor enter the narratives of large-scale public street demonstrations. Femen adopts these earlier styles of street activism to their own format for circulating information and interpolating audiences, thus producing their own myth of dissidence. Added to the more whimsical atmosphere of these past protests are Femen's scathing attacks on a wider range of topical issues, a bleaker sarcasm, and most visibly, their nudity.

The central archetype of the prostitute in Femen's "protests against sex tourism," structures the semantics of their performances, in particular, where the group's early parodies appropriate the styles of prior pop entertainers in Ukraine. Femen's representations of the prostitute archetype parody allegories for the postcommunist nation that both undermine, as well as comply, with hegemonic discourses that equate capitalism and the West with social progress. I argue that, aesthetically, Femen's performances pun on representations of women in pop culture, and that as a *brand*, the group's ambivalent design as media protest-product both indulges and satirizes the nation as cultural commodity. These dialectics emerge most clearly when reading Femen in terms of the public discourse within which they emerged: the contradictory rhetoric of

[20] Femen's public satire has involved them in several lawsuits. In January 2012 they were arrested and tortured in Belarus for their nude demonstration outside of the state's secret police headquarters. A few months later, three activists were arrested again in Russia for attempting to steal a ballot box during Putin's 2012 re-election campaign. April 2012 group members faced charges in the Ukrainian court system that included a four-year jail sentence at the request of the Indian Embassy in retaliation for Femen's protest on the balcony of the Indian ambassador in downtown Kyiv.

autonomy within the neoliberal nation-building projects that dominated envisionings of an independent Ukraine in the early 2000s.

The humor in Femen's happenings, specifically their usage of street environments, pop art, public provocation, and cultural alterity blends mass political participation in real time with virtual spaces in an unprecedented genre. Femen's style turns on black humor, self-depreciatory satire, and the not-quite-deliberate faux pas. The "political incorrectness" of the group's activism, I argue, along the lines of Sergiy Yekelchyk's position on Verkha Serduchka, is a "carnivalesque, liberating take on the very real cultural and political tensions caused by the imposition of political correctness."[21] The search for individuality, a probing of older generations' memories of the past, and the effort to become "new"– new women, modern, part of Europe—is everywhere in Femen's appropriations of the "faded ideals of the Maidan" in post-Orange popular discourse.

Perhaps because the Orange Revolution affirmed Ukraine's independence, especially for young people, Femen's members were especially positioned to take up positions opposed to nationalism. Over the past eight years, Hutsol has sparked fierce debates within Ukraine about her group's display of Ukrainian culture for foreign audiences. Early critiques of Femen mirrored attacks leveraged at the early Modernists and their descendants in the 1990s. In 1994, Yurii Mushketyk, first secretary of the Writers' Union, wrote an article denouncing the "modern Ukrainian post-avant-garde" for trying to "create [art] on a wholly different basis—fanciful, abstract, self-willed, beyond ideals, beyond nationality . . . the 'pure,' 'complete' avant-garde is supranational, anational. For them national problems (as with social problems) do not exist . . . It is possible to allow a Frenchman or an Englishman to play around with literature, they have a

[21] Serhiy Yekelchyk, "What Is Ukrainian About Ukraine's Pop Culture?: The Strange Case of Verka Serduchka," Canadian-American Slavic Studies (44)1: June 1, 2010, 217-32: 219.

strong state, a nation, prosperity in the country . . ."[22] As in these displays of avant-garde dissidence that came before them, Femen's performances vacillate between protest, public event, and performance.

Early in Femen's formation Hutsol stated her awareness on the issues involved in trying to assert a critical position through nudity. In my interview with her in 2011, she stated:

> Many feminists here don't like us, but after Kuchma there was a lot of apathy. During Yushchenko's time we [Femen] were able to protest freely: where we wanted, how we wanted, and with as many people as we wanted. And in 2009 when we protested topless no one arrested us, we did what we wanted to. In 2010 topless protest was banned. Why? Because we criticized power and we decided to draw attention to ourselves. In 2009 the law allowed us to do just that, and in 2010 the same thing was banned. We didn't support Yanukovych's ascendency, though we've worked for two years under his regime. Why don't we have the right to protest? Why shouldn't we protest topless? We know we have the right to protest this way.[23]

Hutsol also communicated that she was disappointed with Yanukovych's ascendancy to the Presidency because "under Yushchenko, topless protest was legal."[24] When Yanukovych entered office, nudity became a public offense. Femen moved to an online format and began to use flash-mob tactics in order to address not only sex tourism, but also, an expanded range of seemingly unrelated social issues.

In trying to understand Femen's context, it would be overly facile to simply dismiss them for their shock tactics and overlook how they manipulate discursive frames. The Internet has become a stage for extending the sense of place in Femen's first protests on Kyiv's Maidan. Olga Plakhotnik and Mariya Mayerchyk localized Femen's street activism early on as a particularly post-Orange cultural phenomenon, linking Hutsol's project to a broader generational shift: "Femen is a product of the post-Soviet system, they are out in the streets as the generation of 20-25 year olds who have grown up during the independence period . . . Femen is also a post-revolutionary phenomenon in terms of the powerful opportunities for street protest that were

[22] Yuri Mushketyk, "Koleso. Kilka dumok z pryvodu suchasnoho ukrainskoho postavanhardu," *Literaturna Ukraina*, October 27 1994 as cited in Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 231.
[23] Anna Hutsol, Personal Interview, Kyiv, 2011.
[24] Ibid.

brought on by the Orange Revolution . . . "[25] Hutsol's projections of her vision for her group into an abstract future largely matched this initial assessment of her group: "We are working to change public opinion and, in many cases, our results will not be seen today, nor tomorrow."[26] Internal to Ukraine, Femen's early public appearances created a wave of discussion that entered presses in debates on the meaning feminism, equality, and women's rights that, for a time, remained severed from outside influences. Exploring Femen as a political project by feminists of all stripes, I emphasize these initial local analyses as vantage points into viewing how the group maneuvers within the diverse cultural codes driving their image within a broader protest paradigm.

Embedded in Femen's nude media stunts lies an important dialectic: actively adopting the cultural rhetoric that the Orange Revolution left in its wake to a critique of the public sphere; as women, they depict the nation from a position marginal to its foundational terms. In Chapter One I read Femen's renderings of the prostitute archetype in their performances where their appropriations of its cultural valences pit sexualized fantasies against familiar narratives on national progress. Their satire, I argue, turns on the utopian idealization of Europe, and independence from a "bad" Russia as a cure-all for Ukraine's social ills. These ideals largely shaped the platforms that pro-Yushchenko elites had constructed in their campaign spectacles during the Orange Revolution.

In Chapter Two I examine images of the female body within the commodification of protest in virtual media, in particular, where depictions of liberation, repression, consumption, and production play upon viewers' relationship to the feminine stereotypes that Femen and others pantomime. On the one hand, Femen's politicized representations of the female body

[25] Maria Mayerchyk and Olga Plakhotnik, "Radykalni Femen i Novyj Zhinochyj Aktyvizm," 8.
[26] "Femen: «Конечно, а Как Же Ж» Colta.ru," http://www.colta.ru/docs/12363. Accessed February 5, 2013.

share ground with past conceptual artists of the 1970s-90s who experimented with the human body as a surface for making art in attempts to depict the physical markings of power. On the other hand, Femen diverges from those earlier aesthetic experiments in their hybrid blend of genres borrowed from contemporary pop, street art, and the information marketing and branding industries.

Many counter-narratives have emerged in performances tangential to Femen that employ their aesthetic to signify dissent in virtual spaces. I investigate the emerging representational strategies within these performances in the context of international mass media technologies. Post-Iraq discourses toward the Middle East in Western media underpin my thinking around the semantic production of gender ideologies within these performances. In particular, I focus on the marketing of the post-Soviet dissident by non-post-Soviet nations, and the ways in which feminists have appropriated and diverged from these categories. My conclusions along this line draw upon personal interviews with a former African-Ukrainian member of Femen, members of LaBarbe in Paris, and exhibits by an art collective named The Krasnals! in Warsaw. Femen performs within a particular set of global tropes that emerged during the years of their formation, during the Bush presidency in an era of Iraq war journalism. The (mis)translation of their "sextremist" aesthetic reveals the many disjunctures between the digital representations of women's bodies in media consumption, and the material consequences of those images as they traverse different cultural contexts.

Femen's visual language continues to translate, and mistranslate, across national contexts and has unleashed a battle over representation that is airing a range of gendered and racial stereotypes often perpetuated by mainstream media. They have offended all sides of the political spectrum. Emergent conversations on the line between replicating versus overturning

mainstream images of women have clustered around the Femen brand in interesting ways. I do not intend to propose a defense of Femen's negative reception, or uncritically approve of their "transgressions," but rather, to present a close analysis of the role of the mass media in their project in order to contextualize them within a broader ethical framework.

My third chapter examines street mobilization and wider contestations around local commemorations of International Women's Day by Ofenzywa, the largest women's rights group to have emerged in Independent Ukraine. Mainstream celebrations of International Women's Day in Ukraine reflect the nationalist ideas exploited by the oligarchy in the 1990s, when corrupt ruling elites fought to maintain power in the Rada despite extreme economic crises. These ideas promote a narrow notion of social progress, despite the egalitarian ideals of the Orange Revolution that some leaders set forth in their visions of progress.[27] However, the peaceful grassroots gatherings of the Orange Revolution did provide people with valuable experiences, and it is these peaceful gatherings that Ofenzywa reenacted when they first marched through the streets of Kyiv. In stating that they are "reclaiming the political meaning of International Women's Day," they appropriate an international protest narrative founded in early manifestations of transnational feminism. Ofenzywa's manifesto and march rehearse a feminist revolution of the past, framing the present as being out-of-joint with the "original" meanings of women's liberation proffered by Zetkin and Kollontai in 1913. Borrowing the moving vectors of three bygone revolutions—the industrial women's labor movement, the Bolshevik revolution, and the Orange Revolution— the group's collective aesthetic contrasts the utopian dreams of the

[27] Serhiy Yekelchyk aptly described the main conflict driving the situation in terms of rising economic inequality, rather than cultural difference: Despite the country's pronounced regional differences, and the binary drawn between Yushchenko as pro-Ukrainian and Yanukovych as pro-Russian at the time of their campaigns in 2004, most Ukrainian voters viewed themselves as an amalgam of the Russian and Ukrainian cultures and wanted a nation unified by civic egalitarianism and an end to oligarchy, rather than a protracted battle in the Rada. The divisive ethnic tensions embedded in Ukraine's political landscape emerged as the product of a handful of powerful elites who co-opted nationalists' rhetoric in order to maintain their power, even after gaining independence in 1991. *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (2007).

past with their own critiques of society. Their manifesto, street march, and members' creative outputs critically enact the basic freedom to think, write, and express oneself before a tolerant public.

In this Chapter I compare photography featuring women living in Kyiv tenement homes by one member of Ofenzywa, Yevgenia Belorusets, to the aesthetic experiments of Alexander Rodchenko. In Ukraine, during and after the Orange Revolution, the street becomes a place for envisioning nationhood and the "people" as acting unitarily to found a democratic ethos. Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire's flâneur, and the latter's travels through the (industrialized) city at the turn-of-the-century, mirrored a similar shift in twentieth century Europe from the street to the boulevard as the predominant figure for imagining public space. In the postwar period, there was a philosophical doubling back on these concepts in thinking around the crowd vs. the mob. Thus, the spaces in which everyday life is perceived in a communal way become central to imagining a public ethos. While the affective qualities underlying Belorusets' photos render residents' experiences more accessible to a broader audience, their political meanings are motivated by their author's written texts as an activist, as well as their circulation, transforming them into sites of public contention.

Belorusets frames her work in this particular series, named for the tenement house "32 Gogol St.," on a blog associated with the project. The effect renders the series into an epistle of sorts. The images become conduits where viewers are asked to engage with alternative meanings of what it means to be "at home," to belong, and to be a part of communities that do not necessarily fit linear definitions of "progress" in more mainstream post-Soviet conditionings of time and space. She often addresses her photos to a public that includes people who view the house at 32 Gogol St. as a symbol of failure in the social and economic pulse of the nation. She

situates her photos within texts comprised of interviews with the people in them. As a result, the photos also illuminate the signifying practices involved in inhabiting structures that shape daily life. Thus, Belorusets' photographs render experiences of everyday life in Ukraine that depart from hegemonic representations that maintain assumptions around class and gender. When read from within Ofenzywa's search for a feminist language, the diverse audiences that the photos apprehend convey the group's overarching gesture toward instantiating a more open and receptive public, which is also mirrored in the group's feminist marches through Kyiv's cityscape.[28]

In refashioning Rodchenko's aesthetic, the Soviet past is depicted in Belorusets' photographs through allegories that express others' nostalgia for an era she is too young to remember herself. The social conflicts and fissures in the production and circulation of these photos problematize common notions of the private sphere. Many reveal the manifold dichotomizations of public and private identities that guide self-representation, and representations of the self in society—overturning the sequestering of minorities from mainstream ideas of the public. This is especially foregrounded in the series "A Room of One's Own," which subverts social narratives tied to domestic spaces in depictions of gay and lesbian couples at home, drawing out where mainstream imaginaries around public/private divides help to produce and maintain gender roles. To parse the representation of everyday life within the photos, I turn to Ariella Azoulay's theory of "civic imagination," Svetlana Boym's notion of the "common place" in Soviet culture, and Certeau and Lefebvre on the idea of the everyday. Arguing that these images estrange everyday life, viewing it as a site from which all politics

[28] Her work has been exhibited in Berlin, Moscow, and Warsaw; she has been featured as a writer-in-residence in Vienna and has led translation workshops for the Goethe Institute.

proceed, I illustrate how their narratives convey an alternatively gendered history of late-Soviet culture, and thus, make possible important critiques of class inequality in the present.

Chapter Four centers on two teams of gallery curators that also organize politically, for example, in street protests against the persecution of artists and intellectuals in the regulation of "official culture" in contemporary Ukraine. In the case of one banned exhibit, entitled *Ukrainian Body* (2011), curators deployed art objects within Kyiv-Mohilya Academy's museum space to publicly frame censorship and the marginalization of LGBT populations by the state. In this instance of art-activism, grassroots curators re-positioned a visual paradigm of images, sculptures, and photographs to conflate national and gender identities. The main question in this chapter asks how art-activists in contemporary Ukraine conceive of notions of creative expression, free speech, and freedom. Arriving at different understandings of these terms than they commonly connote or suggest in the West, I consider closely how these artists depict the self and its mediation in images that are politicized within the ideological space of the state museum complex.

The post-Soviet museum has a particularly close relationship to the state in the exhibit I focus on in this chapter, and the images of the body within it include commentary on biopolitics within activists' lived experiences in Kyiv's urban spaces. Analyzing drawings, paintings, written texts by curators, critics, and my own firsthand observations, I explore how curators and artists created a participatory exhibit in Kyiv's National Museum to stage a conversation about a highly repressive public sphere. It is significant that the stolen state treasures from the private estate of ousted President Viktor Yanukovych were put on display in the National Museum after he fled Ukraine for Moscow. The title of the exhibit I focus on, *Disputed Territory*, took place in the same museum in Kyiv in Summer 2013 and was organized as part of a trans-European avant-

garde event named *Draftsmen's Congress*. The artists who took part are distinct in their concern with art practice as public gathering. They have been described as part of a Third Avant-Garde in Russia and Ukraine, but also, as revolutionaries in the writings about them after the Euromaidan protests of winter 2013-2014.[29]

On (Not) Being Superfluous

Where gender could be said to permeate all art, the works in this study each foreground the body in motifs that deconstruct, ironize, and expose the myriad modes by which images mediate subject-object relationships. Within the texts presented here, this process also appears in broader brushstrokes that include a more generalized alienation of the individual from society. My study thus concerns the political as mutually constitutive through public displays and performances of identity. I am interested in how the circulation of corporeal displays can come to publicly represent power hierarchies and can, often, come to signify resistance differently among authors, participants, and their audiences. Some of the particulars of these displays have come to puzzle totalizing narratives about identity, as well as the intricate displays and rituals of nationhood among the post-Soviet successor states.

In the performative notion of politics, spaces of dialogue cluster around the valuation, not the moral judgment of art. This view requires thinking of politically engaged artists beyond the aspiration to govern, but also, cultivating an aesthetic critique that remains self-consciously within its own historical paradigm as an allegory of art – a work of art or a performance that turns over its own expressions, or doubly expresses. In Bakhtin's concept of parody, the language of travesty is also one that depends upon a doubling effect, or repetition. Many of the

[29] Alexei Yurchak discusses the visual art collective R.E.P. in context of a broader span of civic activism on the left in "Revolutions and their Translators: Maidan, the Conflict in Ukraine, and the New Russian Left," www.culanth.org/fieldsights/619-revolutions-and-their-translators-maidan-the-conflict-in-ukraine-and-the-russian-new-left. Accessed March 21, 2015.

texts in this study revisit the past, in particular the late-Soviet past, to mine its cultural vaults for new meanings. The ambivalence, playfulness, and bohemianism of counterculture during the *Glasnost* era, in particular, resurfaces in reminders that protest is never superficially as simple as being for- or against- something, and any people vs. state approach to cultural history is too limited for seeing deeply into how politics, art, and time inform one another.

The idea of the superfluous man that emerged from Turgenev's generation ceded to critics' later attitudes toward conformism v. nonconformism in the early 20th century, after which Soviet socialist realism changed the strain to conformism. The 1990s allowed for more radical critiques of the status quo during a time of extreme instability. Throughout these changes, different associations were ascribed to the women placed opposite nineteenth century superfluous heroes in the prose of that era. These women were traditionally strong and aligned with ideas fostered by the Slavophiles linked to national purity and the soil. Later twentieth century recensions, including Lyudmila Petrushevskaya and Lyudmila Ulitskaya's heroines, contain the iconoclasm and subversiveness of Dostoyevsky's Grushenka or Tolstoy's Anna Karenina. These female characters choices do not conform to the social mores of their time, and in this failure they are spurned for harboring intellectual proclivities deemed unseemly in women.

The women in this dissertation are obviously not literary characters. The term functions as a metaphor for the intellectual strains I trace across several examples of politically concerned, creative outpourings in performance, digital art, photography, painting, and poetry. Each of these works contain very different media, thematic content, and address diverse audiences; all of them, however, contain commentary on the twentieth century experience. Each in their own way deals with the Soviet legacy of their parents' and grandparents' lives, and for some in the emerging

generation also their own fading memories of a Soviet childhood. The Orange Revolution looms large in these artists' lives, as does the idea of a "transition" piloted in the 1990s, though these projections of a neat teleology or clean break between eras are conflated and interrogated, even challenged with alternative continuities between past, present, and future in their works.

All of the materials created by the protagonists in this story grapple with politics at the intersection of the individual, the common, and the self thinking about the publics it inhabits. Throughout, I consistently return to the tropes of an artist and an activist, exploring more recent discourse on "art-activism." Ultimately, this dissertation asks how texts created by groups and individuals contesting the nuances and applications of civic terms in their own contexts come to mediate, and be mediated by, practices of creating, reading, speaking, and writing. Many of the women whose narratives appear within my own have unleashed debates around the very terms upon which protest is legitimized. In Ukraine, the result of these debates is still unknown, though it has become clear that the individuals and groups discussed here have created pathways that challenge, undermine, and reframe everyday speech that does not encompass but excludes. And so, throughout this project, I have attempted to identify the scripts and artifacts of several protest texts, reading them closely and within the context of their authors' own times and places, their lived experiences, and their own words.

Chapter 1

Performing Protest Politics: Femen's Stagings of Gender and Sexuality

"The world at once present and absent which the spectacle makes visible is the world of the commodity dominating all that is lived. The world of the commodity is thus shown for what it is, because its movement is identical to the estrangement of men among themselves and in relation to their global product."
- Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1967

I. Introduction

In 2008 four young Ukrainians named Anna Hutsol, Inna Shevchenko, Oksana Sashko and Roman Zviazsky living in the city of Khmelnytskyi formed a feminist protest group. They settled on a theme—anti-sex tourism; a name—Femen; and a method—nude street demonstrations. Anna Hutsol would serve as their chief ideologue: her background in marketing would not be lost on the group. While interviewing Hutsol, just before Ukraine's tenth anniversary of independence in 2011, I would encounter her sense of conviction at close range: "Nothing will change if women remain timid and quiet in Ukraine. In principle, our ideas, our protests, are full of ideology and philosophy: a philosophy of life. Men who are looking for something like a show or a cabaret can go see those, but we're doing something else, we're involved in protest."[30] The underground café that I met Hutsol in, Café Kupidon, is located in downtown Kyiv near Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) where nearly 300,000 Ukrainians camped in tents for

[30] Personal Interview, Kyiv, August 22, 2011. Summer 2011 also marked the eve of Orange opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko's jailing on charges of embezzlement.

for weeks in the darkest months of winter in order to protest an unfair election. Newspaper clippings, memorabilia, and photographs of Femen line the walls of the café.

Expats and locals mingle and smoke together. A small library of used books is tucked into the corner. As I enter the café, I notice an older man sitting in the corner, hunched over several newspapers and a cigarette. Hutsol later let me know that he is from the Ukrainian diaspora and is one of the group's main donors. A few other Femen activists in the café are busy at work writing and editing online, some are chatting with a journalist. Three or four laptops grace the room's sticky wooden pub tables. Hutsol is still recovering from a cold she caught on the group's recent trip to Odessa—a trip taken partly to plan future demonstrations in nearby Turkey, and partly to increase press coverage. Despite her cold, she is chain smoking and typing furiously. Recognizing me from Facebook before I am able to spot her myself, she rises to greet me in a very welcoming fashion. I learn from her that the café owner is a fan of Femen's and has dedicated his space to their ongoing meetings, endless writing, and strategizing. We sit and talk for nearly an hour. Despite her cough, or perhaps because of it, Hutsol rotates swigs of beer with sips of a thick green syrup, a pine-flavored liquid called "basalm" that I recognize as a common cold remedy sold at the local bazaar. Hutsol's intense dedication to maintaining her group is apparent; she continues to sift through stacks of papers, photos, and blog posts as we sit and talk.

Within Ukraine Femen are arguably the largest, most visible, and also the most controversial activist group to have emerged in the history of the nation's independence. Since their founding in 2008, the group has gained notoriety worldwide for their controversial topless protests that once featured mostly street theatre, but now primarily consist of five minute flash-mob performances circulated online. Members are mostly women in their twenties and thirties, the group lists twelve active members, and over four hundred non-active members on their

website. Femen's performative political stance "against all dictatorship and religion" has provided them with rhetorical strategies through which to attach their image to news stories on causes indirectly related to women's rights.[31] Though they originally stated their aim was to bring greater awareness to the impacts of the widespread phenomenon of sex-tourism in Ukraine, their performances now target a broad range of issues. Even early in their formation they "protested" commemorations of the Chernobyl disaster, Ukrainian government responses to the swine flu epidemic, and municipal water shut offs in Kyiv.

One only need utter Femen's name to incite debate. The group's blend of sugary pop art with overt images of sexual violence has made their style nearly synonymous with scandal. There is nothing moderate in their approach. They yell shocking slogans, paint their torsos in the colors of various national flags, and poke fun at the church. In recent years, Femen has appeared more often abroad than on the streets of Ukraine, yet many of their actions can be aesthetically traced back to the moment of the Orange Revolution. These connections are most apparent where Femen's topless protests desacralize the religious and folk symbols that political elites once employed to legitimize their campaigns. Even in their later work, many iconic references to local politicians abound: one activist wears Yulia Tymoshenko's thick braids, another holds up a picture of Putin, a third wears Belarusian President Lukashenka's moustache. Since their founding, Femen has remained sarcastic, even cynical, in their characterizations of a parsimonious Parliament. Beyond the starkly opposite reactions that their controversial performances have incited over time—ranging from outrage to fandom—the symbols which designate Femen's now highly recognizable, controversial image speak volumes about a prior moment when Ukraine's future seemed open to more positive possibilities. The scope and ferocity of the controversies that Femen's topless protests have unleashed—first locally, then

[31] Femen website. "Mission Statement." http://femen.org. Accessed November 10, 2013.

globally—are a flashpoint for much deeper anxieties about national independence, gender identity, and sexual liberation that transnational feminist scholars have debated since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.[32]

In my early interview with Hutsol, she let me know that she does not often collaborate with other members of the feminist activist community in Kyiv. Hutsol explained this gap between herself and other feminists by distinguishing a separate "academic feminism," explicitly distancing herself from the academy.[33] On the surface, Hutsol's position would seem to work at cross-purposes with local feminists who could become potential allies of her group. At the same time, there are deeper political and social divides around the idea of feminism in the postcommunist context that underlies her statement. In their article for the academic journal *Krytyka*, Olga Plakhotnik and Mariya Mayerchyk localized Femen's street activism as a particularly post-Orange cultural phenomenon, linking Hutsol's project to a broader generational shift.[34] Plakhotnik and Mayerchyk explained the group's hyper glamorous, sexualized image as a response to local, negative connotations of feminism and its Soviet connections: "Several critiques of Femen activists' strategies could be made. Stylistically, they are not readily changing the stereotypes of post-Soviet glam femininity, but rather appropriate these types, using them for their marketing potential without problematizing them or challenging any actual assessment of

[32]A seminal text for the several anthologies of transnational scholarship on feminisms in the postcommunist context is: Susan Gal and Gail. Kligman, *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism*.
[33] Hutsol stated: "As for feminism itself and whether [Femen] is feminist or not, I think this question belongs to researchers and historians. Generally, I think I agree with those dear people who say that women have rights, for example, that I have a right to protest. Whether these rights are radical or not radical, justified or unjustified, is a different question altogether. People like myself who say women have the right to do what they want are in a way feminist, slightly so, but feminist." Personal Interview, Kyiv, 2011.
[34] "Femen is a product of the post-Soviet system, they are out in the streets as the generation of 20-25 year olds who have group up during the independence period . . . Femen is also a post-revolutionary phenomenon in terms of the powerful opportunities for street protest that were brought on by the Orange Revolution . . . "Maria Mayerchyk and Olga Plakhotnik, "Radykalni Femen i Novyj Zhinochyj Aktyvizm," 8.

women in society, though they are giving weight to these types."[35] Taking into account that Plakhotnik and Mayerchyk remain skeptical of Femen as a political project, it should also be noted that a broader debate among Ukrainian feminists of all stripes at the time provided an important vantage point for thinking about how Femen maneuvers within the diverse cultural codes driving their public image within an unprecedented media protest paradigm.[36] Grounding Femen in the Ukrainian context, this chapter aims to set the stage for studying the group's campaign and what it can reveal about the synthesis of local political experience, mass publicity, and creative forms of dissent.

The idea of dissent, dissidence, and what it means to become a dissident carries unique weight in Soviet history. Femen's spontaneous street shows contain strains of the absurdist, interactive performances known as "happenings" that took place in the region during the last two decades of the twentieth century. The eighties in Poland and Ukraine saw the avant-garde's hyperbole, surrealism, and ironic humor enter the narratives of large-scale public street demonstrations. Some aspects of Femen's performances reflect these earlier styles of street activism, but do so by producing their own mythos of popularity. Added to the more ambiguous, whimsical atmosphere of street protests of the past, in Femen we also find scathing attacks on a wider range of topical issues, a darker sense of sarcasm, their bare breasts and oblique overtures to feminism. In this chapter, I look at the processes of branding and commodification driving Femen's parodies, in particular, where their depictions of liberation, repression, consumption, and production play upon the viewer's relationship to the feminine stereotypes that the group pantomimes in real and virtual public spaces. I argue that Femen's topless spectacles employ the

[35] Ibid.
[36] "[Femen is] looking for their own interpretation of feminism; experimenting with the term as a neologism, they maneuver around the Sword of Damocles, which is maintained by antifeminist stereotypes. While attempting to sift their ideas out from an older, 'bad' feminism, they are simultaneously trying to construct their own, 'egalitarian,' new feminism." Ibid.

language of marketing and branding in ways that highlight and amplify the accumulation, value, profit, and exchange of women as symbolic capital within the larger economy of entertainment and politics.

There are historic links in Femen's development connected with the discursive environment and ideological design of the Color Revolutions. Femen's protests challenge these inflections within a pop idiom that predates the Orange Revolution, and they appropriate these styles for their own mythmaking of themselves as dissidents. Verkha Serduchka and Ruslana, two major pop singers whose Eurovision entries in 2004 and 2007 marked key moments when gender and a renewed affiliation with Europe converged within a pop idiom in a significant way, maneuvered between their Western audiences' individualist notions of freedom, and a distinctly Ukrainian, Romantic lyricism that guided the songs, slogans, and speeches of the Orange Revolution. The cultural hybridity of these past pop singers' stage marketing underpins Femen's own protest brand, especially in their earliest parodies on Kyiv's Maidan.

If we narrow our focus to the central figure—the prostitute— in Femen's "protests against sex tourism," we can see how the archetype structures the cultural semantics of their performances, in particular, where the group appropriates various pop rhetoric to expose and exploit national culture as commodity within a mass media context.[37] Prior work by scholars of sexuality in the Soviet era suggest how Femen's protest narrative deploys notions of the wild steppe, enterprise, criminality, and the serf in local and Western associations of the prostitute with enterprise, transformation, autonomy, and criminality that have featured in previous notions of a post-Soviet public sphere.

[37] While based in Ukraine Hutsol and other members often referred to their mission this way in the media and in interviews; their position would later shift after their move abroad.

Femen pits a sexualized dystopia against familiar media narratives on national progress. Their prostitute caricatures play upon the notion of having to choose between a utopian "Europe" and independence from a "bad" Russia as a cure-all for Ukraine's social ills in the campaigns of the Orange Revolution. There are no roles, names, or consistent characters in Femen's appearances. Nudity and its forms of display pantomime, rather than mimic, a cultural dialectics of desire, consumption, and appropriation. Luce Irigaray's seminal essay on exchange value and the female body, *Women and the Market*, underlies my thinking here. Michael Warner's work also helps to articulate Femen in terms of the global language of the mass media, and show how the group manipulates the erotic dynamics of structuring a mass audience. Femen's brand architecture, their blending of real with virtual spaces, and their body rhetoric project sexual desire from within multiple, often conflicting, venues of spectatorship for imagining national public(s). Femen's sign-systems and the growing, virtual culture market in which the group functions emerge within what both Teodor Adorno and Chantal Mouffe have observed in the close relationship between art and illusion in commodification processes. Puns on the *interdependence* of nation, gender, and sexuality inform Femen's caricature of the prostitute.

Giving attention to different receptions of Femen by a range of audiences, I've chosen to focus on aspects of the group's performances that capture some of the paradoxes in viewing late-Soviet and postcommunist cultures through a postcolonial lens. [38] I suggest that Femen's performances unfold on three intersecting planes: as a wry retrospective or spectacle of the Orange Revolution; as a parody of the branding of the nation by elites to simulate experiences of national belonging; and as a pun on feminism itself that, like their controversial displays of the

[38] Vitaly Chernetsky's theory of the "postmodern postcolonial" nation in his study on 1990s Ukrainian and Russian literature encompasses many of the complex historical processes that manifest as contradictions in postcommunist art. See: *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization*.

female body, problematizes through parody the East/West cultural assumptions that oftentimes script media about Ukraine in global discourse.

Throughout my analysis, I pose the following questions: could Femen be thought of as a retranslation of the Orange Revolution and the pop sensations of that period, specifically in the latter's projection of domestic protest into an ideation of Europe? Do the group's humorous and offensive protests commodify women along with the postcommunist nation, or, does the group perform as feminist dissidents only *ironically*? How does Femen's marketing of themselves as "New Amazons" affect their reception? What is it that has become so compelling about these scandalous women in trashy outfits? World media over the past eight years has not lost interest in the group. Why is it that such an enormous audience—of critics, fans, opponents, police, scholars, politicians and passersby—cannot look away? Throughout, I explore how Femen agitates, deceives, and overturns local expectations around what passes, versus what gets passed over, as legitimate public behavior in the period after the Orange Revolution. What coded meanings do the patterns in Femen's performance aesthetic reveal? How do their staged acts, as public displays of the female body, manifest much deeper cultural fissures around nation and gender?

II. Protest after 2004: Beyond Orange

Who are Femen?

In the years after they formed in 2008, Femen activists staged several parodies of sex work on Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) where thousands of peaceful demonstrators camped in winter to protest an unfair election in 2004—the same site of the Euromaidan events that would occur one decade later in winter 2013-14. Many of these initial protests took the form of theatrical topless plays featuring tongue-in-cheek commentaries on any

number of issues. They usually included ironic references to politicians from the street protests and populist campaigns that members recalled from the Orange Revolution, which took place during their younger years. For example, Femen members dressed up as Yulia Tymoshenko during her trial in 2011, and staged a spoof talk show cleverly named "PMS: Post-Maidan Syndrome." In another protest, they mocked Putin by stealing the symbolic ballot box that he presented in Moscow before his re-election. While the majority of the group's actions in Kyiv took place on the Maidan, other significant sites in Kyiv included: Parliament (Verkhovna Rada); SBU Headquarters; Pechersk Court; Turkish, Russian, Georgian, Saudi Arabian, and Polish Embassies; Kyiv polling stations; the Cabinet of Ministers; the Ministry of Health; the statue of Lenin on Khreshatyk; the private residence of the Ambassador of India; Olympic Stadium; and Kyiv-Boryspil International Airport. The group briefly acquired an office in Kyiv in 2011. From September 2008 - 2012 Femen staged approximately fifty-five street protests in Ukraine.

Femen's leader, Anna Hutsol, like many of Femen's members, is from Ukraine's middle class and uses Russian and Ukrainian interchangeably. She has worked in marketing and has also received training from a U.S. Dept. of State leadership program. During the Orange Revolution she was involved with the democratic youth movements PORA and Young Rukh. In 2009 Anna Hutsol reported to newspapers that she would run for office someday and that she would create "the largest all-women party in Europe."[39] She seemed less ambitious in my interview with her three years later, stating that she was disappointed with Yanukovych's ascendancy to the Presidency, communicating her opinion that, "since protesting has become more difficult in Ukraine, we need to fight harder to prove that women can protest here."[40]

[39] Femen Blog. Post August 8, 2011. *Livejournal*. http://femen.livejournal.com. Accessed September 10, 2011.
[40] When I queried Hutsol whether Femen would ever perform in a theatre, versus outside on the street where the group usually makes its appearances, she quickly replied: "Nothing would change if we did that, it would distract from our aims. Women cannot remain timid and quiet in Ukraine, in principle Femen's ideas, our protests, are

After Viktor Yanukovych entered office Ukraine's political climate became increasingly conservative. At that time, Femen activists faced several short jail terms, though they were usually only held in custody for a few hours or days and maintained a relatively benign relationship with local police. In fact, images of smiling policemen standing by and then calmly cuffing Femen activists became a consistent backdrop in the photos and videos of the group that were published online, on television, and in world newspapers. For a time, the multiple arrests and prompt release of Femen activists assisted in spreading the group's public visibility, rather than posing any real physical threat or state barrier to further street protest. These minor arrests also aided Femen's media output by facilitating their performative framing of themselves resisting various ideological regimes.

In this regard, Femen's tactics mirror prior movements in the region that have also used street performance to push the boundaries of "minor hooliganism" as a criminal charge.[41] Although the Orange Revolution was a watershed for protest, Femen's parodies are, in form, rooted in the street protests staged by artists and activists during *glasnost*. These earlier street actions pivoted on humorous responses to the pressures of a restrictive public sphere. Many of these prior groups' humorous tactics served to make police appear harmless before a generalized public and, in the process, served to air very real public fears around state authority.[42] They often featured absurd props, odd caricatures, oblique references to serious issues, and ridiculous overtures to party slogans. Femen adapts the lighthearted theatrics of these antecedents to their own takes on the economic flux and political upheaval of the 2000s.

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highly visible, but full of ideological motivation: a philosophy of life in action. Men seeking something like a show or a cabaret can go view those in a theatre—we're doing something else, we're involved in protest." Anna Hutsol, Personal Interview, Kyiv, August 22, 2011.

[41] At the time of Femen's founding in Kyiv in 2008, according to Article 14 Ch. 173 of the Code of Ukraine on Administrative Offence, public nudity was listed as minor hooliganism and was punished accordingly, with a modest fine, or arrest and a few days of custody. In 2009, the Code was amended to allow for more frequent arrests.

[42] Several movements across Central and Eastern Europe in the twentieth century have used similar strategies involving humorous street theatre, see: Padraic Kenney, *Carnival of Revolution*.

Throughout the Yanukovych years Femen faced more serious encounters with police both at home and abroad. In early 2011, three Femen members were kidnapped and taken to a forest after a demonstration in central Minsk in which members parodied Lukashenka's repressive policies on the steps of Parliament by wearing his signature moustache and epaulettes.[43] The following year, the group faced more criminal charges, including defamation of public property for cutting down a cross in central Kyiv allegedly erected in honor of Stalin's victims. In summer of 2013 the group's office in Paris was burned. Shortly thereafter three members, including Hutsol, were attacked and beaten on the streets of Kyiv. No suspects were arrested and no one publicly claimed responsibility for these attacks. These increasingly threatening encounters with police and unknown assailants coincided with a radicalization of Femen's image and an overall reduction in the frequency of their protests in real time.

Femen has adapted to the rise of Internet use in Ukraine. Since their founding, Femen has documented their activities on two blogs. In 2010 Femen streamlined their virtual identity by adding Facebook, Twitter, and a website to their online presence. The group has been blocked for nudity on some sites: Facebook suspended their account early on, but only temporarily, and their livejournal.com blog in Russian switched to read-only in 2012. Paintings, drawings, and popular graphics by Femen member Oksana Sashko, in concert with outside artists' works, became primary to the media forums through which Femen performed their movement. An extensive collection of cartoons, glamour ads, leaflets, and other cultural artifacts comprise an

[43] Femen activist Inna Shevchenko described her thoughts while being covered in gasoline and threatened by Belarusian state secret security agents: "I suddenly saw the huge potential of this. Maybe it's strange to say this—I know some people already think we're kamikaze—but that's why I now say I'm more of an activist than a person, because I know that tomorrow I could be killed." Kira Cochrane, "Rise of the Naked Female Warriors," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2013. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/20/naked-female-warrior-femen-topless-protesters. Accessed July 15, 2013.

archive of Femen's nearly decade long history.[44] Over time, the group's increasing contact with the media outlets reporting on their street activities melded with the group's virtual design as they switched their operations to protests five-minutes or less in length that they could then capture on social media. Femen's overall design necessitates looking more closely at the notion of politics the group's aesthetics ascribe to.

Staging Transgression—Initial Critical Receptions

Femen's first protest took place on the former site of the Orange Revolution, Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in 2008. It was designed, in their words, as a protest "against sex tourism and all forms of oppression against women in Ukraine."[45] Imagery from this first protest entailed an anachronistic, sardonic retelling of the nation's recent past. In one socialist-realist style poster associated with the campaign, a young woman carries an orange banner with the slogan "Ukraine Is Not A Brothel!" written in Russian. A wintry Kyiv cityscape frames the lower corners of the drawing. Our eyes shift downward: this happy-go-lucky lady isn't wearing anything besides her underwear and a headscarf—in the middle of winter! Such details juxtapose the "official optimism" that Soviet propaganda art projected onto the proletarian revolution with the freewheeling sentiments of the Maidan in 2004. The overall image mirrors earlier dissident art that once mocked official, socialist realist propaganda. This jester like caricature of a Femen activist as a proletarian worker carrying an Orange banner exposes the identity categories that are imposed on women in the nation-building processes of

[44] Femen has attributed their funding to private donors including a musician named DJ Hell and the owner of KP Media Holding Company Jed Sunden. Several artists, filmmakers, and journalists have created artworks and short documentaries about the group's activities; in early 2013 two popular books were published on Femen. See: Galia Ackerman, *Femen* ; Jeffery Tayler, *Topless Jihadis: Inside Femen, the World's Most Provocative Activist Group*. Jeffery Tayler, a journalist at *The Atlantic*, published his firsthand accounts of Femen's headquarters in Paris in which he portrays Femen's core members as media laborers and underwriters. Inna Shevchenko reports in the book that participants are paid living wages out of a fund of which she is the primary PR and accounts manager, fully invested in maintaining a public image based on highly reproducible media protest imagery.

[45] Femen Blog. "Mission Statement." http://femen.org/en. Accessed November 19, 2012.

revolution. Overtures to "The Woman Question" by Soviet ideologues hover below the semantics of the Orange banner.

Feminist critiques of Soviet women's emancipation argue that early Soviet labor policies failed to address the domestic sphere, and thus created a lasting "double burden," in which the majority of women had to take on the brunt of the work both at home and in the factory. The gap between the original socialist realist image, and the Femen version depicting nudity, creates dissonance between the idealization of women's duty to the state and the actual impact of revolution on women. Its message that Ukraine is not a brothel suggests that women are often the first ones forced to repeat history. By drawing a homology between the Bolshevik and Orange Revolutions, the overall image refers to a past in which national "progress" was twice imagined, but never fulfilled: once by the "transition" in 1991, and again by the revolution in 2004.

Figure 1: Early Femen Protest, Kyiv 2009

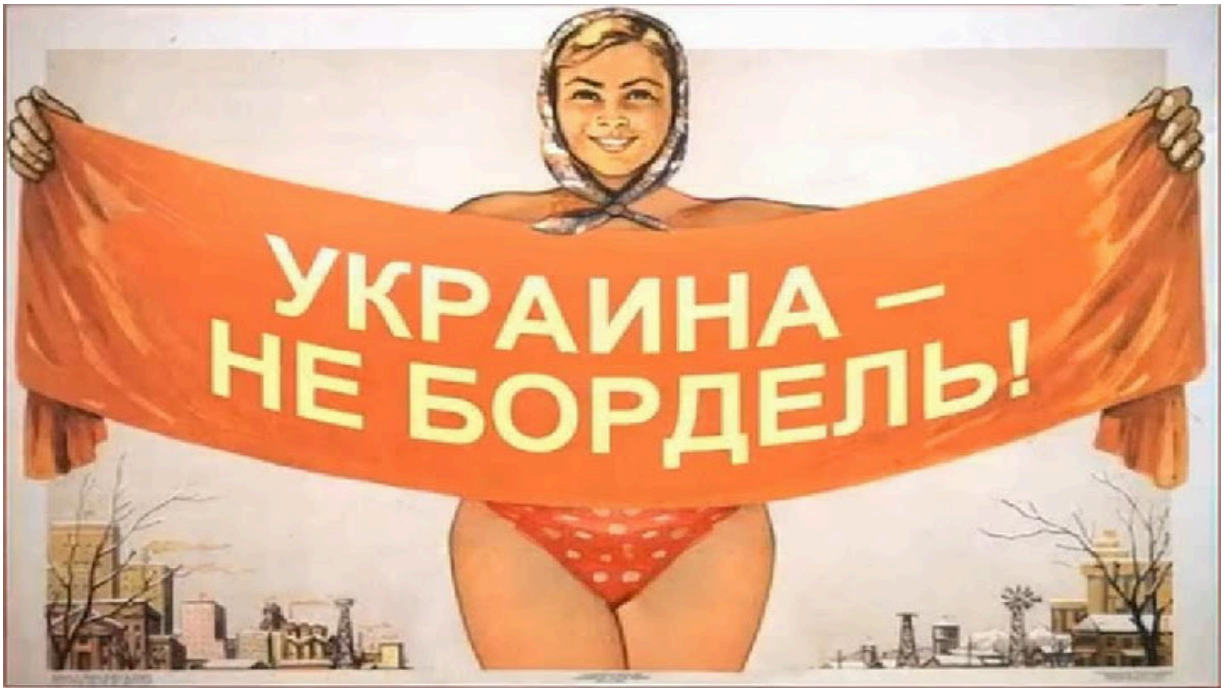

Figure 2: "Ukraine is Not a Brothel!" Campaign Poster

Early on, Femen members' public statements reflected a more general attempt to relate the emotional impact of the Orange Revolution that had faded under Yanukovych to a broader mix of audiences. Hutsol explained to an online Russian paper that Femen was part of a larger "information war."[46] She went so far as to state "we are the children of the Orange Revolution."[47] Hutsol often changed her position on key issues, and made no actual, lasting political demands. Although in interviews Hutsol pitched Femen's campaign differently for domestic as opposed to foreign audiences, she consistently expounded on Ukraine's place in a modernizing world. Her fixation on modernity echoed the same discourses that elites had once projected into the Ukrainian independence movement, in which "becoming modern" was paramount.

[46] "We [Femen] are smart people who live in the modern world; we're not barbarian or crazy. The war we are in is more ideological and in the sphere of communication. As for actual conflict, I hope that will never come to pass. We are completely for peaceful protest without casualties or other losses." Kira Cochrane, "Rise of the Naked Female Warriors," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2013, sec. World news, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/20/naked-female-warrior-femen-topless-protesters. Accessed April 10, 2013.
[47] Ibid.

In terms of her own background, Hutsol differs from the Orange elites in several important respects, including the fact that she comes from Ukraine's middle class, and uses Russian and Ukrainian interchangeably. Another distinction is her willingness to openly discuss and even attack the oligarchical class structure for corroding democracy. Her position on Russia's massive anti-Putin demonstrations, for example, conveys both distance from Putin and solidarity with the citizens of the Russian Federation. Civil liberties trump national borders in her opinion on Putin, which contains a sense of residual anger at Ukraine's corrupt elections in 2004. Hutsol's emphasis on modernity is also about emphasizing change over stagnation. Chantal Mouffe has described the global protests of 2011 as a rearrangement of the terms of protest itself: "A given hegemony results from a specific articulation of a diversity of spaces and this means that the hegemonic struggle also consists in the attempt to create a different form of articulation among public spaces."[48] Femen is no doubt part of the arc of global changes that lead up to 2011, and yet, their origins in Ukraine distinguish them in several important ways.

Initial receptions of Femen by Ukrainian feminists were mixed. Marian Rubchak placed Femen at the forefront of a broad shift in national politics.[49] Her analysis builds on consensus among scholars who write on postcommunist discourse that, in reinventing the categories for thinking about gender in the early 1990s, women vacillated between identifying with an amended Soviet worker-mother ideal and emulations of a commercialized, Western femininity pushed to the point of "absurd expressions of an illusory sense of Western panache."[50] In Ukraine, pre-Soviet folk images that had formed the basis of Soviet nationality policies continued to shape gender well into the independence period and the nation-building projects it

[48] Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," 5.
[49] Marian Rubchak, "Seeing Pink: Searching for Gender Justice through Opposition in Ukraine."
[50] Rubchak, "Ukraine's Ancient Matriarch as a Topos in Constructing a Feminine Identity."

entailed.[51] The search for "a lasting symbol of Ukrainian cultural identity" parallels similar searches in nations with histories of occupation and foreign rule, including nearby Poland. In Rubchak's early analysis of Femen, the group is a political counterweight to neo-traditionalist nation-building projects. [52] She discusses two performances in particular, one in 2008 and one in 2010, that were staged in front of the parliament building to attract the attention of cabinet members and voters to the "dirty nature of Ukrainian politics" in which she reads Femen's red boots and flower wreaths in their early protests—the latter a trademark of their style—as appropriations of a repressed, alternative local lore with subversive popular connotations. In folklore these symbols often signified a woman's single status and were associated with hidden feminine power. [53]

The description of "a new women's movement" in Rubchak's analyses of Femen's early protests dovetailed with other Ukrainian feminist critics' initial receptions of the group. Some compared Femen's style to a localized 1990s New Riche feminine ideal that emerged as part of women's shifting roles as economic producers/reproducers at the time. Aspects of Femen's camp and glamour appear as emulations of the Western "bourgeois" housewife. Early on, Olga Plakhotnik described Femen as one rhetorical outcome of neoliberalism: "Ultimately, evidence would necessitate that this kind of popular feminism would manifest in such images of young blondes, whose gender has been so brutally styled, invented, and trampled upon by

[51] "Ukrainians sought to authenticate their ethnic uniqueness by rejecting the collective masculinized Soviet model of quintessential womanhood in favor of their own legendary 'hearth mother' Berehynia. They created important links with their past by reaching into pre-history for a lasting symbol of Ukrainian cultural identity as an historically matriarchal society. It was projected onto a contemporary culturally determined female stereotype to produce a new paradigm of the ideal woman, exemplifying the 'mother of the nation.'" Ibid "Seeing Pink," 57.
[52] Rubchak noted: "Femen meets some of the formal criteria for a women's movement, for example, as described by Carol Mueller: 'specific individuals must be identified who have formed emotional bonds from their interaction, negotiated a sense of group membership, and made a plan for change . . . [creating] a collective identity' (1994: 246), but this has yet to translate into a national phenomenon although, as noted above, branches are springing up in other cities." Ibid, 69.
[53] Rubchak, Ibid, 55.

postcommunist misogyny."[54] In many of these early assessments, Femen loses meaning beyond the Ukrainian context. Rubchak suggested that within Ukraine the group was at the forefront of a "vanguard for momentous change" in a new wave of emerging activists inspired to action by the critical failure of the Orange Revolution and "an administration tending toward a police state."[55] Though Rubchak and others provided valuable structural accounts of Femen within histories of the feminist movement in Ukraine, many lost interest in the group's political efficacy after the group's move abroad. A closer look at the group's politics and their aesthetics can deepen the feminist critiques that can be unfolded out of their story when we view their actions as public texts, over time, and across borders.

Critiquing Femen necessitates shifting attention away from the state as representational entity, toward media technologies, globalization, and the roles that these factors play in mediating identities and messages about rights and freedoms. Scholars have stressed the emerging links between citizenship and electronic media in mediating national imaginaries. In the seminal study *Reproducing Gender*, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman wrote as early as 1998 that, under socialism, "social actors reacted as much to the representations of themselves in official communications as to the often unforeseen consequences of state policies."[56] They go on to discuss how capitalist media since 1989 have changed official discourse, claiming that, despite the illusion of more openness certain issues remain undiscussed and "the disjuncture between

[54] Maria Mayerchyk and Olga Plakhotnik, "Radykalni Femen i Novyj Zhinochyj Aktyvizm," 8.
[55] Early Femen actions in Ukraine resulted in domino effects among protestors from other groups. Rubchak wrote of the impact of Femen's initial street actions: "On 25 February 2010, Victor Yanukovych, a twice-convicted felon, was inaugurated as Ukraine's fourth president. Exhibiting an almost pathological fear of public criticism, he and his cronies moved swiftly to restrict public assemblies and muzzle the press, often resorting to brutal police tactics to achieve their ends. Consequently, a peaceful assembly of young people opposing the proposed legislation barring public assemblies without prior government approval brought hundreds of youthful activists to Kyiv's central square on 17 June 2010. They did score a temporary victory, but the struggle is far from over. This rally for freedom of assembly followed on the heels of a FEMEN demonstration on 3 June 2010 against limitations on democratic liberties and freedom of the press. Its protest was timed to coincide with, and comment upon, Yanukovych's first 100 days in office." Ibid, 69.
[56] Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism*, 3.

such public discourses and ordinary practices in a multitude of contexts, far from disappearing, now takes quite different shapes and continues to be crucial for understanding change in the region."[57] Femen's early preoccupations with Ukraine's national past, layered over their controversial claims to feminism, render the group an ideal site for exploring the tensions around official, mass, and popular culture that have emerged in postcommunism.

Soviet Precursors— Happenings

Absurdist street performances were just as overtly politicized in Eastern Europe as in the West; they persisted through the 1970s-90s along the tailwind of a vibrant avant-garde scene, and continued to dominate public art and protest throughout the postcommunist period. Describing "happenings" in New York City in the late sixties, Richard Schechner linked the relationship between performance and politics to a process of staking new ground for making claims. He formulated his ideas in *The Drama Review*, where the genre was then being debated:

> The political actions of young radicals are sometimes hard to distinguish from guerrilla theatre. Putting the lemon pie in Colonel Akst's face or even taking a building and demanding amnesty are not 'real' acts. They are authentic and meaningful. They trail consequences. But they are also self-contained (as art is) and make-believe. They lack the finality of, say, an armed attack. Radical actions are often codes—compact messages falling somewhere between war and speech. They stake out a new area not mapped by either traditional politics or aesthetics."[58]

This quote is useful for understanding the notion of politics in Femen's aesthetic in two ways. The first is historical. As part of the descriptive foundation of new theatre movements in New York City in the 1960s, the performances described in TDR traveled to Central Europe during *perestroika* in the 1980s where they took on more overt political tones as critiques of postwar decadence. The spontaneity and interactive nature of performances by avant-gardists like Zero and Vienna Group would also come to influence street demonstrations in Poland in the 1980s by Wrocław's Pomarańczowa Alternatywa. Padraic Kenney has pointed out how Major Frydrych

[57] Ibid.
[58] Richard Schechner, "Speculations on Radicalism, Sexuality, & Performance," 89–110.

and his followers in Wrocław, Poland, would exploit "the politics of everyday problems" in absurd demonstrations that made participation easier by reducing the risk of engaging in them, and thus, "offered the sublime as a defense against fear."[59] Kenney cites a happening on October 15, 1987 in which participants held signs that read: "RIP Toilet Paper and Sanitary Pads," and "Whose Afraid of Toilet Paper?," in reference to chronic goods shortages within the People's Republic of Poland.[60] Obviously, with much graver problems to worry about, the humor in slogans like these provided participants with a collective moment to diffuse deeper fears concerning them, while also giving them the chance to practice social mobilization with relatively little risk to the freedoms they enjoyed in their day-to-day lives.

Young Ukrainian self-styled punks, "hippies" (sixtyeighters), and pacifists in Lviv soon followed in the footsteps of these events in Poland. In September 1987, a student named Oleh Olisevych formed Doviria (Trust) in opposition to the Soviets.[61] These Polish-Ukrainian exchanges lead to ongoing contacts between the two countries, and helped found Lviv's dissident culture in the 1990s, which was marked by a thriving rock music and poetry scene. The rock opera *Chrysler Imperial*, staged at the Vy-Vykh festivals in Lviv in 1990 and 1992, was loosely based on works from the Bu-Ba-Bu group of writers whose works solidified a new absurdist aesthetic in Ukrainian arts and letters.[62]

Thousands of people gathered in Lviv for both festivals. The playful marches, costumes, and general buffoonery contributed to the event's atmosphere and could be considered Ukraine's first large-scale happening. The opera debuted in the Lviv Opera House and featured a long

[59] Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989*, 163.
[60] Ibid.
[61] "The Lviv pacifists, Olisevych wrote, " . . . are a radical group, and we are for proactive methods. There were several more demonstrations in 1987, culminating in one planned for December 26 to commemorate the eighth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This one was preempted by arrests. There were also protest letters, fasts, and ever more contacts with Poland, the Ukrainian émigré community in London, and the Independent Peace Association in Czechoslovakia." Ibid, 166.
[62] Mark Andryczyk, "Four Bearings of West for the Lviv Bohema."

eared troll who warned the audience about the dawning of a new age called "The Chrysler Imperial"—a sarcastic allegory for the western capitalists who had come to "save" Ukraine through neoliberal economic reform. This fanciful critique culminated in an actual American Chrysler automobile driving onto the stage. The opera's ironic, acrid narrative and its bold suspicions of both capitalism and communism crystallized a style of political humor that soon gained momentum throughout the arts during Ukraine's shift to a market economy. Absurdist humor, spoofs of popular celebrities, pranks, and caricatures of authority figures marked the style of these groups and can be traced in Femen's public appearances well into the 2000s.[63] Activists act out scenes without standard dialogue, a linear plot, or definitive characters in street demonstrations with "a shifting, nondefinitive relationship between piece and audience . . ."[64] In this way, Femen's style reflects the "non-matrixed" structure of happenings that past activists in the region adopted in their street demonstrations. One important distinction exists. Though Femen still does not issue any concrete political demands, their early performances in Kyiv always contained two consistent referents: women and the state.

[63] For a deeper study of these performances throughout East-Central Europe in the twentieth century and their implications in the broader historical changes leading up to 1989, see: Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*.
[64] Michael Kirby and Jim Dine, *Happenings*.

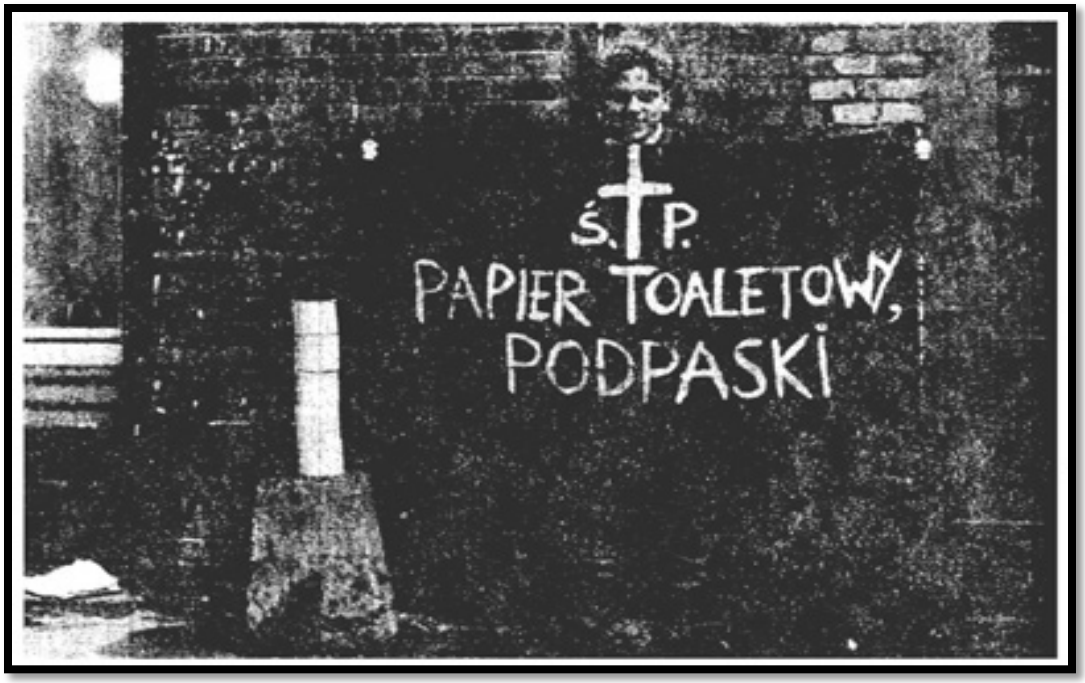

Figure 3: Pomarańczowa Alternatywa, Poland, 1980s

Figure 4: Femen "Stable as a Cemetery," Kyiv 2011

Despite the outward differences between Femen and earlier Ukrainian dissidents of the 1980s, the latter's preoccupations with the "dangers of swapping one mass culture (Soviet) for

another (Western pop culture)" remain in Femen's skepticism toward the ideologies they attack.[65] Figure 3 features Major Frydrych staging a mock funeral for toilet paper at a time in Polish history when many household goods were in short supply. Frydrych's protest scenario presupposes two different audiences: the masses who "mourn" the loss of accessible goods, versus the state—an absent, even Godlike, presence presiding over economic regulation, life, and death. In Figure 4 a Femen activist poses topless in a cemetery in a scene reminiscent of Pomarańczowa Alternatywa's protest in a similar setting. The featured activist carries a cardboard sign above her head that reads "Stable is Poor." The slogan is written in English. Hutsol posted these photos on Femen's blog with commentary comparing the cemetery to President Yanukovych's austerity measures and their impact on daily life in Ukraine. The Ukrainian flower garland crowning the activist's head, a folkloric sign for youth and vigor, calls up a pastoral, distant past of ebullient, carefree peasants that has been projected into Ukrainian national identity over the past century. The same garland also recalls the bohemianism of *glasnost* and its musicians and artists who incorporated Western countercultural styles of the same era into their own innovations on Soviet kitsch.[66] The highly official marble Soviet graves framing the Femen activist portray a gap between the people and the state. The people are the "poor," while the state, as the main addressee of the image, consists of a well-funded elite that has lost very little in the shift from communism to capitalism. The wealthy will live and be buried with the same grandeur that they have always been buried. Stability in the image marks the continuation of a corrupt status quo . . . total stagnation which ultimately leads to death.

Thus, the image invites viewers to see Yanukovych's regime as a failure. A stable economy—once also a Soviet promise—is depicted here as a cynical compromise designed by

[65] Mark Andryczyk, "Four Bearings of West for the Lviv Bohema."
[66] For a more extensive discussion of counterculture in the USSR in the second half of the twentieth century, see: Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*.

elites to insure their personal status at the expense of the people. It is a makeshift funeral for the "dead" Soviet past that also includes the idea that Ukraine has come to a stalemate with the promises of capitalism. This interpretation is consistent with Femen's overall indifference to real politics and their suspicion toward elites. Here Femen blurs sexual relations—the most fundamental and oldest form of human exploitation—with the sophisticated mechanisms of the state. The plots in Femen's protests usually follow a pattern in which elites in turn betray the state and its people to Ukraine's more powerful neighbors.

Femen's total abstraction from real politics and their black humor are interrogations of what Seyla Benhabib terms in her query into the compatibility between critical feminism and postmodern epistemes of representation, "the political outcome of a subject-position immersed in language."[67] Femen cross-references signs (ethnic, civic, and otherwise) within intersections of nation and gender in their protests. This constant deferral encompasses some of the ongoing problems with seeking a postmodern feminist theoretical model for a rights-based social movement that have been discussed in the past by feminist critics in other contexts.[68]

We might begin to read this deferral by posing a question: *What is Femen's feminism*? The contested symbols that make Femen's stagings of "Ukrainian sex tourism" controversial are indicative of diverse publics in disagreement over Femen's feminism. The group has become a symbolic site in a much longer trajectory of feminist contestation around citizenship and the nation. Ukrainian scholar Vitaly Chernetsky, writing on feminist Ukrainian prose observes that in Ukraine, "similarly to the discourse on postcoloniality, and perhaps to an even greater degree,

[67] Seyla Benhabib's skepticism is driven by a more extant feminist critique of postmodernism inclusive of the idea that the constant deferral of signs negates the subject-position which is needed to articulate rights; she asks: "Are the meta-philosophical premises of the positions referred to as 'postmodernism' compatible with the normative content of feminism, not just as a theoretical position but as a theory of women's struggle for emancipation?" *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, 204.

[68] Most notably, Nancy Fraser in her critique of Habermas' public sphere. Some Ukrainian feminist scholars have held to a similar line of critique in their evaluations of Femen, for example Maria Dmytriyeva in "Femen Na Tli Hrudej," 20–23.

articulations of gender concerns and feminist interventions [have come] to occupy in Ukrainian culture a position of prominence unmatched in most neighboring countries, Russia among them."[69] Postcolonial theory since Spivak has grounded the politics of public trauma in demarcations of female sexuality within patriarchal power systems. Chernetsky posits a connection between Ukraine as part of the former "Second World" and its uniquely postcolonial condition, proposing that feminist literary representation challenges this condition. He refers to Ukrainian feminist and public intellectual Oksana Zabuzhko's book *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* as only one example within this tradition.[70]

Femen's image of a prostitute in a cemetery echoes the postcolonial strains in the Ukrainian feminist intellectual tradition established by earlier figures like Zabuzhko. The female activist's cynical poster "stable is poor" references the Orange past as a polity divided by elites playing pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian sentiments against one another. In this ghost image of the faded "ideals of the Maidan" of 2004, stasis has returned to the once vibrant search for democracy. The cemetery protest is essentially a public funeral staging of the Orange Revolution.

Design of the Color Revolutions

The Orange Revolution supplied a watershed for protest in Ukraine. It is significant that members of Femen have often cited that particular moment as a turning point in their lives, recalling the early 2000s with both inspiration and great disappointment.[71] In addition to personal

[69] Vitaly Chernetsky, "Confronting Traumas: The Gendered/Nationed Body as Narrative Spectacle," *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization*, 237.
[70] "Zabuzhko is a writer in whose work one can find a combination of powerful explorations of Ukraine's colonial legacy with a challenge to the familiar paradigms of patriarchy that often reemerge in the openings created by the breakdown of the empire." Ibid, 252.
[71] Anna Hutsol, Personal Interview, Kyiv, 2011. Inna Shevchenko has also waxed nostalgic in news interviews while looking back on the Orange protests of her childhood: "I was just a girl then, but for the first time in my life I

experience, there are also practical connections between Femen's founding and the ideological design of the color revolutions. The Serbian-based political consulting group CANVAS (Center for Applied Non-Violent Actions and Strategies) was instrumental in coordinating the slogans, platforms, and imagery of the many youth movements involved in the rallies and events around the electoral failures that sparked each of the revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan.[72] Georgia's Velvet Revolution (known abroad as the Rose Revolution) contributed to the aesthetic course of the revolutions that followed. Paul Manning traces how a popular cartoon series functioned to create spaces for debate in the student-led campaigns and protests that initially sparked Georgia's revolution. He describes the cartoons as a tactic that students used to detach themselves from any formal party affiliation, calling their performative politics a "visual spectacle" of "the dynamics between rhetoric and metarhetoric, between opposing metarhetorics (and their associated logics of reception), and between rhetorics and the representational economies in which they operate."[73] Though Manning points out how the symbols through which "the Georgia of Roses" came to signify a peaceful rebellion, as opposed to Georgia's violent protests in 1989, ultimately, there was nothing new to this strategy. Students in Georgia, like Femen, poked fun at authority to unravel fears around peaceful public protest much in the same way that Frydrych, Bu-Ba-Bu, and others parodied authority under *glasnost*.[74] Underlying Femen's parodies of the figures, slogans, and images associated with the Orange Revolution's mainstream party politics, is a countercultural legacy of music, humor, street theatrics, and underground publishing (samizdat) with roots in the transatlantic exchanges of the 1960s. The

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understood that we could have democracy in our country." Jeffrey Tayler, "Femen, Ukraine's Topless Warriors," 2012.

[72] CANVAS has since come under scrutiny as having provided consulting and branding in the Arab Spring and for receiving financial support from private multinational corporations invested in by Western governments (Rosenberg, 2011).

[73] Paul Manning, "Rose-Colored Glasses? Color Revolutions and Cartoon Chaos in Postsocialist Georgia," 175.

[74] Ibid, 171.

group's cynical, and often offensive, pokes at the representational strategies deployed in the pop campaigns of the Orange Revolution, however, include critiques of the media campaign spectacles that produce mainstream politics for consumers and audiences.

Thus, what was unique about the dissident culture of the color revolutions was its production: the branding of pop celebrities that stood in for revolutionaries on mainstream stages.[75] The playful, cartoonish visual language in Femen's feminist brand descends from the same political architecture that encompassed the slogans, imagery, songs, and celebrity figures that served to imagine an Orange moment of unity. Femen's celebrity aspects stand as much in contrast with, for example, the faceless activists in Rukh who blockaded the streets of Kyiv. Femen's beginnings as a parodic retrospective of the now-faded "ideals of the Maidan," as the aims of the revolution were popularly referred to, grew from an Orange iconography that was popularized through multimedia concerts, songs, television commercials, fashion, etc. For example, their mock reality TV show "PMS: Post-Maidan Syndrome" featured members asking random passerby in the street to undress "for the country" in a talk-show format about future directions the nation could take. The playful tone of Femen's early activities exposed the rhetorical mechanisms of the Orange moment by putting the places and slogans of those years into sharp relief with the repression of street activism under Yanukovych. Viewing the "kitch" in Femen, audiences are positioned to think about the group's image as a function of the lived experiences of its members, and in broader terms, the production of political subjectivity through media.

Hutsol has described her group's topless technique as a litmus for civil liberties: "The reaction to a nude protest is a measure of freedom in a country: we were not arrested in

[75] Ruslana, Grynholy, Okean Elzy, Mandre and others contributed to a common aesthetic of Ukrainian independence based upon a diverse blend of 19th century folkways, European jazz, myths and legends from Kyivan Rus', Orthodox liturgical music, and other genres disassociated from the Soviet period.

Switzerland, but we were almost killed in Belarus."[76] The political spectrum Hutsol presupposes here, with Belarus counterbalanced by Switzerland, circumscribes Femen as a non-national entity poised against a relativist notion of state repression. This reasoning is also ideologically rooted in an Orange past. In the Orange Revolution, Yanukovych's Russian-leaning party stood in sharp contrast to Yushchenko's pro-European platform, as both leaders formed their bases from a highly bilingual population. Considering this fact in light of Femen's manifesto and its overstatement to "fight against all forms of oppression," Hutsol's comparative notion of civic freedom echoes what cultural historian Sergiy Yekelchyk has noted elsewhere with regard to the social outcomes of the Orange Revolution: "in contrast to interpretations that split protesters as being for or against the 'civilizations' that these two leaders apparently stood for, in actuality, very few harbored any East/West leanings; most people simply wanted a fair transfer of power."[77] When Kuchma declared Yanukovych the winner of the November election, Yushchenko answered by holding his own swearing-in ceremony in the Ukrainian Rada. For a brief moment, Ukraine had two sovereigns claiming the same territory—a circumstance political theorists list as a classical example of revolution.[78]

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[76] Dialika Neufeld, "Femen Activists Get Naked to Raise Political Awareness." Spiegel Online. November 5, 2012. http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/femen-activists-get-naked-to-raise-political-awareness-a-832028.html. Accessed December 10, 2012.

[77] Serhiy Yekelchyk claims political elites' campaigns in the lead-up to the Orange Revolution adopted ethnic models when beneficial to solidifying their power bases. By contrast, he argues, nation-builders in Parliament and voters on the left and right wanted democratic reforms which embraced civic models over ethnic ones. In late 2000 a set of private tapes brought to light Kuchma's fraudulent and criminal behavior. In February 2001, protestors formed a small movement called "Ukraine Without Kuchma!" After Tymoshenko joined the anti-Kuchma movement other oligarchs in parliament soon engineered her dismissal, however, she later emerged as a charismatic populist leader and went on to establish her party, BYuT. Yushchenko remained Prime Minister until April 2001 due to a coalition of oligarchs and communists in Parliament working in his favor. Both of these two leaders would go on to unite the Orange opposition. See: *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation.*

[78] Michael McFaul has pointed out that the peaceful gatherings on the Maidan in 2004 triggered by a falsified election "mirrored 1991 in form by affirming Ukraine's autonomy through putting into practice the democratic laws already on paper." The citizens who demonstrated on Euromaidan in 2013-14 ultimately attempted to testify further to this democratic autonomy. Their demand for a referendum regarding Ukraine's E.U. Accession Agreement, and then general elections, deserves recognition as a powerful instance of the Ukrainian citizenry's lasting faith in the democratic process. See: *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough.*

Scholars have drawn a parallel between 2004 and 1991, describing the immediate situation in both cases a democratic breakthrough, but what made the Orange Revolution unique was the consistency in the branding of its campaigns.[79] As a relatively new nation-state, the longer-term outcomes of the Orange Revolution for shaping dialogue about civil rights have been, arguably, far more lasting than the immediate results of Yushchenko's term in office and the eventual unraveling of his promised reforms. Femen members' own identification of themselves within the legacy of the Orange Revolution is a legitimization of their group's basic right to peaceful protest. Though Hutsol's conceptualization of her group and her own self-identification with feminism changes often, her consistently positive associations with the Orange Revolution have remained stable over time. While Femen's performative stunts have had very little direct impact on policy since their formation, even when the group was based in Kyiv, their ongoing public narratives of their experiences vis-à-vis the Orange Revolution lend historical continuity to the democratic ethos that moment stood for.

Formed in 2008, Femen comes after the "official" story of the Orange Revolution. Scholars tend to mark 2006 as the Revolution's end, when Yushchenko introduced his former rival Yanukovych to the Supreme Rada as the nation's new Prime Minister.[80] Interviewing Hutsol in the summer of 2011, mere days after Yulia Tymoshenko had been put on trial for brokering a covert gas deal with Putin, she was ambivalent about the legitimacy of the mounting street protests around the trial.[81] She informed me that Femen would be reenacting a McDonald's

[79] McFaul draws this parallel, Ibid.
[80] This is mostly the case in the historiography of the Orange Revolution in the comprehensive studies produced in the years just after it took place: Serhiy Yekelchyk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (2007); Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* (2009); Michael McFaul, Ed. Anders Aslund, *Revolution in Orange* (2006).
[81] Tymoshenko has remained imprisoned under Ukrainian jurisdiction, despite Western governments' and human rights groups' ongoing grievances over her sentence. Ongoing domestic protests by Ukrainian citizens have also done little to change the course of her internment. In autumn of 2013, Tymoshenko issued a public statement that she would be willing to relinquish her Ukrainian citizenship if this would lift the obstacle that her jail term posed for Ukraine-E.U. integration.

queue near the courthouse. Topless activists would dress in fast food uniforms and yell "Free Cashier!" ("Vilna Kasa!") from atop one of the many minivans (martshrutkas) parked along the streets to serve as makeshift barricades.

Observing the protests in downtown Kyiv around the trial over the course of a week, I noted that, while hundreds of demonstrators had gathered at the courthouse, they were organized into neat camps and rows of rival parties. Most of the protesters were middle-aged and reflected the older Yushchenko vs. Yanukovych split from 2004. One woman I spoke with in the crowd informed me that many demonstrators in front of the courthouse were being paid for their efforts. From the opposite side of the street, where I stood among curious passersby, the scene appeared just as ambivalent as Hutsol's ironic "Vilna Kasa!" metaphor. Her protest, like most of Femen's nude spectacles on Kyiv's streets, stood in stark contrast to the visibly orchestrated nature of the other demonstrations taking place around the area. Femen's snapshot topless appearance atop one of the parked minivans near the courthouse, and their immediate arrest, remapped in physical space where the public imaginary around what is "possible," not necessarily legible, is shaped by what is permissible to think, say, and do in public spaces.[82] Their act ricocheted even further online.

III. Archetype and Caricature: The Prostitute

What sets Femen apart and has made their demonstrations highly controversial is not just their nudity, but also their performance of a specific kind of nudity—the kind that is bought and sold. The prostitute archetype driving Femen's protests concerning women becoming "nationalized sex products" (Hutsol's description of sex tourism) conveys women as symbols of

[82] Youth groups such as PORA and Rukh in Western Ukraine played a key role in the early stages of the Revolution. For example, PORA barricaded Yanukovych's motorcade from being able to access the Parliament building while Yushchenko held an inauguration ceremony.

exchange in economics as they are acted out upon, not by, human agents. Narrowing in on the prostitute figure in Femen's protests, we can read them as texts with discursive value. Closely analyzing the variegated elements that make up Femen's prostitute—as an antiheroine—the group's aesthetic takes on shape as a parody of cultural transformation in the postcommunist period. Unlike Ukrainian pop singer Ruslana's scanty leather costume and live wolves in her stagings of the Carpathian-inflected "Wild Dances!" in 2005, Femen's prostitute caricatures draw up associations between sex and capitalist enterprise, criminality, imperialism, tourism, secret knowledge, and autonomy. Representationally, their aesthetics trace where commodification begets commodification in an absurdist theatre of national history. Socialist realist heroines, post-Soviet stereotypes of the "sexual revolution," and much older narratives of sexual conquest are contrasted with their western counterparts: high fashion models used to project consumer desire onto products. The result is a spectacle of the myths underpinning East-West cultural relations over time, and how these myths include gender stereotypes that have shaped public discourses around the idea of women's emancipation.

The prostitute archetype contains deeper fantasies of East and West tied to much older discourses involving sexual conquest. In the following sections, I trace prior places in literature, myth, and historical discourse where the archetype has functioned as a caricature for autonomy that is intimately bound up with shifting anxieties over relations with the West at various points in Ukraine's history. In post-Soviet contexts, the prostitute appears as an entrepreneur and mediator between the Soviet past and the emerging capitalist economy. Earlier notions of serf women sold to foreigners, Amazonian libertines, and Dostoyevskian "holy fool" peasant outcasts are also present in Femen's layered portrayals of subjugation/emancipation. In Chapter Two I discuss the virtual rhetorical frames and media commodification of these portrayals in more

detail. For now, viewing the archetypal in Femen's spectacle makes the agonistic political surfaces upon which they are inscribed more readily apparent. In the following examples, I isolate three main narratives in Femen's performances, showing where the figure of the prostitute within them sublimates anxieties about national upheaval and cultural belonging, including those that elites in the Orange Revolution had set out to resolve.[83]

Capitalism and the U.S.S.R.—The Natasha

The symbolism of the prostitute in the shift from communism to postcommunism functioned as an allegory for the influx of capitalism. Literary scholar Larissa Lissyutkina describes how 19th century Russian depictions of the prostitute contained aspects of her opposite, the Saint: "In the image of the prostitute, Russian culture found a convenient opportunity to combine both deifying and disparaging attitudes toward women. In the works of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, the prostitute-savior is poeticized and presented as the female equivalent of Christ."[84] Lissyutkina goes on to contrast this older image with later constructions of the prostitute as the "pioneer of the market economy."[85] She grounds this shift in changing social relations: "The age of the transition to a free market in post-communist Russia may be graphically symbolized by the grotesque marriage of the hard-currency 'intourist girl' to the foreign businessman."[86] In the Soviet era, prostitution was a crime. Many sex workers, including women working in positions not directly involving sex, such as the well-known "intourist girl," were also often suspected of smuggling capitalist propaganda and aiding their foreign clients in gathering intelligence about the U.S.S.R.

[83] The group's parodies often make reference to the elusive language around target issues, such as pension reform, that Ukrainian politicians had promised the Orange Revolution would resolve.
[84] Larisa Lisyutkina, "Soviet Women at the Crossroads of Perestroika," 283.
[85] Ibid, 293.
[86] Ibid, 284.

In Figure 5, an image of an early Femen demonstration, members of the group pose as prostitutes holding mock campaign posters featuring the five major electoral parties at the time of the Orange Revolution. Part of the irony in the image includes the fact that, throughout much of the post-Soviet period, revealing fashion choices were viewed as a backlash against the conservatism of Soviet dress codes. Here, Femen appropriates stereotypes from the 1990s "sexual revolution" to defang the enterprise of party politics.[87] The resulting image functions in two main ways. On one level, it is a parody of contemporary sex tourism: many of the images Femen posts on their blog circulate on the Internet with English captions next to ads for Ukrainian escorts, marriage services, and other services automatically generated by cookies that link the word "Ukraine" to "sex." On another level, it is a parody of parliamentary politics, pointing to where holding office is still mostly a male endeavor, and where sexist rhetoric has become folded into official discourse. Each sign bears the same slogan: "Choose me!" This is a reference to a popular Soviet song from the 1980s.[88] Femen's sarcasm targets the promised happiness that was betrayed by postcommunist restructuring and the redistribution of wealth during that period. Ads for escorts, such as those Femen's style of dress parodies here, are now ubiquitous in Ukraine and are a main feature in both state and private sector efforts at building tourism in the country. Members of Parliament and other public officials have even gone so far as to publicly note Ukraine's long-standing tradition as a purveyor of fine women.[89]

[87] Helena Goscilo gives a detailed overview of the cultural politics of the "sexual revolution" in the late-Soviet period and 1990s in her introduction to *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood During and After Glasnost*.
[88] Nikolai Gnatyuk, "Vyberi menya, vyberi menya, ptisya schastya zavtrashnego dnya" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQrZ00JGjWk. Accessed May 10, 2015.
[89] At the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2011 President Viktor Yanukovych told international media, "Come to Ukraine to see our beautiful girls!" On March 8th, 2012 Prime Minister Mykola Azarov wished women well and mentioned that he hoped spring would make them "blossom" with "bright colors" to put on display to the world. Tamara Martsenyuk, "Ukraine's Other Half," *Post-Soviet Post: Observation and Expert Analysis from Eurasia*, March 27, 2012, http://postsovietpost.stanford.edu/analysis/. Accessed September 10, 2012

Figure 5: "Choose Me!" Femen Mock Campaign, 2010[90]

The carnivalesque presidential campaign in Femen's mock-demonstration depicts power in abstract form, suspended above the boundaries between the public and private spheres that regulate monetary and sexual exchanges elsewhere in society. Luce Irigaray has linked the value of women's bodies, which is derived from their exchange in economic relations between men, to the larger structuring of society. The value of the prostitute is extracted from her "use value" as an economic object within the masculinized category of the public sphere: "The qualities of her body "have 'value' only because they have already been appropriated by a man, and because they serve as the locus of relations—hidden ones—between men. Prostitution amounts to usage that is exchanged . . ."[91] Femen depicts a version of Ukraine's political system here as one based upon liminal economic transactions. Parodying the red light district in broad daylight, the activists in the photo put the average viewer of the image in the position of the sex client: the Western tourist cruising an avenue to purchase Ukrainian sex, the New Riche politician looking for a good time, or, in a more heterodox reading, the voter whose only available choices are

[90] Femen Website. October 11, 2010. http://www.femen.livejournal.com/tag/chooseme. Accessed January 22, 2011.
[91] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 186.

among candidates pandering to the crowd for a profit. Blending the plight of the prostitute with that of the politician, the image thus conflates consumer desire with the electoral process, and the electoral process with sex tourism and corruption. The image implies that women, like voters, are not valued beyond their exchange in a system of profit and self-enterprise.

Enlightenment Fashionings of "The East"—The Amazon

Femen's inclusion of the Amazonian's emboldened sexuality into their performances plays upon older stereotypes of Slavic women embedded in Western myths about an Eastern frontier. The photograph in Figure 6 featuring the activist Inna Shevchenko received second place in the prestigious World Press Photo Competition for 2012.[92] It was taken by a French photographer named Guillaume Herbaut in October 2011 for the French fashion magazine *Stiletto,* and originally appeared in a longer feature titled "Dans l'intimité des Amazones" composed from individual portraits of five different Femen activists posed in front of a set of apartment blocs in a residential section of Kyiv.[93] The dialogue between French photographer and Ukrainian activist takes place in several different temporal frames. Inna Shevchenko wears a garland of black and pink roses and is poised in a stance Femen often uses: one arm raised overhead brandishing a fist. Her exposed torso reveals a tattoo of a rose garland similar to the one she is wearing. The photo is set in a field of late October grass with several large, grey apartment blocs rising beneath a steely sky. The image of an empowered female warrior vacillates between the Orange sentiments in the individualism implied by Ukrainian Eurovision star Ruslana's Amazonian stage persona, versus Femen's grappling with "a refutation of the

[92] Guillaume Herbaut, "The New Amazons," *World Press Photo*, March 2012, http://www.worldpressphoto.org/photo/2012guillaumeherbautpo-2?gallery=2634. Accessed July 10, 2012.
[93] Guillaume Herbaut, "Dans L'intimité Des Amazones," *Stiletto*, December 2011, 154–161.

Orientalist stereotype."[94] The author's framing of an Amazon on the outer fringes of Europe makes for an especially salient site in which power relations emerge in appeals to the "wild frontier woman," marking the Eastern edge of "civilization."[95]

Figure 6: "The New Amazons," Guillaume Herbaut. October 13, 2011, Kyiv

In this photo (Figure 6), Ukraine is positioned within a specific concept of modernity rooted in the Enlightenment. The image of the Amazon has appeared in constructions of Eastern Europe dating to Voltaire's forays eastward in his rumored romance with the notorious patron of French culture, Catherine the Great. Larry Wolff has written about this exchange as only one example within a much broader intellectual trend that located a proximate European Other as foil to the rise of the Enlightenment in Western Europe. Narratives of dominion over Eastern Europe became couched in sexual fantasy. Wolff writes: "Travelers from Western Europe in the eighteenth century perpetrated and advanced a sort of conquest as they traveled. Casanova, his century's most celebrated general in sexual conquest, had already tasted the aphrodisiac power of

[94] Others have argued that Ruslana's Amazon image contains a "combination of individualism and hedonism that many would see as paradigmatic for the life practices of contemporary Western societies," Pavlyshyn, "Envisioning Europe," 7.
[95] Mikhail Bakhtin discusses this concept at length within his theory of carnival in *The Dialogic Imagination.*

mastery and fantasy that gave even sex a special character in Eastern Europe."[96] Depictions of sexuality in the rise of a split between East/West Europe continued to propagate with Enlightenment authors' images of the token slave girl from 18-19th century narratives detailing crusades into "Ubi Leones," land of lions, or *a no man's land*.[97] The sexual undertones to this photo are consistent with other images of Femen members as a pastiche of prior moments involving Western European sexual conquest.

Casanova's idealizations of an indentured concubine foreground another, later voyeuristic journey eastward by a major figure in the history of European sexuality: Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. In Masoch's semi-autobiographical novel, *Venus in Furs,* a young German nobleman named Severin living in the Galician city of Lviv makes a sexual agreement with a local Ruthenian woman named Wanda Dunajew. Though she submits to the terms of the contract, Wanda embodies the wild image that Masoch held of Carpathian women in appearance and manner, retaining an inherent ruthlessness the author compares to ancient Venus. Wanda is a caricature of the deity mapped onto an image of Slavic barbarity surpassed by the "civilized" West. She constantly demonstrates her understanding of power with bold quips such as: "I have a real talent for despotism," and, "everyone knows and feels how closely sexual love and cruelty are related."[98] Despite this posturing, her authority only goes so far in that it serves as a mirror of Western imperialism. Tyranny, possession, and the will to rule are only outwardly applied to Wanda, who dutifully acts out her part in fulfillment of the contract she signed in which she pledged to punish Severin daily (based on the actual contract Masoch carried out between himself and his mistress, Fanny Pistor).

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[96] *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment,* 62.
[97] The Latin term used on maps from roughly 17th-18th c. used to demarcate lands to the east of the cartographer's depictions of Western Europe. The term loosely translates to "Where there are lions."
[98] Leopold Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*.

In truth, though he submits to his mistress daily, the German nobleman remains in possession of his Slavic harem girl, whom he indexes alongside other women from the East: "all the women who the pages of history have recorded as lustful, beautiful and violent; women like Libussa, Lucretia Borgia, Agnes of Hungary, Queen Margot, Isabeau, the Sultana Roxolane, the Russian Czarinas of last century . . ."[99] Masoch, like Casanova, equates sexual desire with an Orientalizing claim that imagines Eastern Europe as captive to the West by way of sexual fantasy. The layering of empowered warriors over "captive" prostitutes in Femen's performances blurs the civilizational power dynamics between East and West assumed in these older sexual exchanges, and thus works as a metaphor for exposing sexual conquest and subjugation in more contemporary political contexts.

The differentiation of a particularly *Slavic* female sexuality in the West in Femen's performances is situated in an aesthetics that also dates to fin-de-siècle tropes and the beginnings of the market for mass-produced copies of fine art. Best known for spawning the Art Nouveau movement worldwide, perhaps no other person singlehandedly defined visual representations of women at the time for Western audiences than the Czech artist Alphonse Mucha. Mucha's portraits of goddesses, muses, and mistresses graced everything from the World's Fair, to architectural wonders in Prague, Paris, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, theatre bills for Sandra Bernhardt as Medea, and cigarette ads. Mucha's modernist renderings of the muse were exotic, defiant, and subaltern at the same time, combining the gentleman's theatre bill with the escort ad. Nearly all of his depictions of Slavic women, in particular, combined the figures of the virginal, empowered warrior with the divine goddess, layered over a libertine sexuality in harmony with the natural world. The prostitute archetype in his works is compared to the figure of the ancient muse, but stylized in a fiercer way in his images of Slavic women, despite the

[99] Ibid.

traces of imperial conquest underlying their harem costumes, gilt props, and opiate gazes. By contrast, Mucha portrayed Parisian women as haughty and ephemeral, wistfully looking beyond the frame in classical poses that differ from the bold, direct, and confrontational stares of his Slavic models.[100]

Figure 7 below is an advertisement for an art sale featuring mass-produced images of Mucha's works at his Paris studio, Salon des Cent. Thorns, jewels, and flowers make up the three rings around the heart in the painting. These three symbols with which the artist often chose to depict Slovaks, Bohemians, and Moravians were connected with movements in favor of autonomy from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which became significant to Mucha later in life, after the end of World War I. The three rings of thorns, jewels, and flowers appear throughout many other works by Mucha featuring Slavic heroines, saints, and peasants in coronation scenes, war, and moments of divine intervention. His cycle entitled *Epic of the Slavs* (1911-28) is the most well-known and widely debated example of his Pan-Slavism and its embedded resistance narratives. In essence, Mucha's portrayals of East European women, distinct from his images of French women, were some of the earliest iconographs that popularized the links between the Slavic folk flower garland, and protest. What is especially important about Figure 7 is that the garland appears twice, worn by the Slavic woman in the photo, and then again as a painting. It is an image within the image itself. In a similar mirroring effect that turns back on the viewer, the Femen photograph draws out the iconicity of the protest imagery ahead of the gaze of the protestor– the "protest" becomes about the medium.

[100] Mucha wrote that in his paintings women should be "elevated and turned into impersonal bearers of all beauty." When sketching, if the face of a model excited him too much, he covered it with a veil. He did not do this when taking photographs, in which Josef Moucha and Jiří Řapek have noted his figures' "main purpose is not to allure with provocative expressions," but to convey "the source of the profane level of Mucha's nudes as collections of erotic diversions and curiosities." Underlining the ubiquity of his nudes in Czech modern photography only one generation later, one critic remarked in 1934: "The nude in photography, not to mention the original Czech nude, is a kind of Cinderella," Viktor R. "O Fotografickém aktu u nás," *Fotografický obzor* 42(7), 1934: 101-103 cited in Josef and Jiří Řapek. *Alfons Mucha*, 15-16.

Figure 7: Salon des Cent, 1897, Moravská galerie Brno[101]

Figure 8: Prague, 1911[102]

Figure 9: Model in Mucha's studio, rue de Val de Grâce, Paris, 1902[103]

Figure 10: Template for Plate 26, *Figures décoratives*, 1905[104]

[101] Husslein, 82.
[102] Moucha, 45
[103] Husslein, 317.

Time itself in the photos of Femen plays out as a female body posing in a contradictory subject/object relationship with the camera lens—the all-seeing eye within a modern paradigm of mass-produced images. Shevchenko's stance and placement in Figure 6 also echo socialist realist depictions of female Soviet workers and heroines of the "Great Patriotic War."[105] Her tan skin, determined expression, and raised fist stand between the viewer and blocs of apartments on a field that could be likened to the steppe. Ukrainian nationhood surfaces in several cliché tokenisms: a row of grey Soviet apartments, a field of grain—and the iconic peasant flower garland. The activist's nudity is all the more out of place set against these stock-images of Ukraine. Shevchenko's blue jeans and tattoo stand out against this backdrop as more general markers of counterculture. The underlying anachronisms in the photo create tensions that work to convey the arbitrariness with which norms are assigned to the female body—and the nation—in fashioning modernity.

In the early 20th century the figure of the peasant, and pastoralism in general were portrayed as backwards and démodé by urban avant-gardists across Europe interested in Futurism and industrial themes. Later on, however, the figure re-emerged in Soviet propaganda and its celebratory socialist realist portrayals of the factory worker. Kyiv became one of the main centers for film and graphic art production within the USSR. Paradoxically, where the peasant had once been central to lyrical notions of the nation in Romanticism, it suddenly gained new traction as a symbol of modern progress in building the revolution. While Soviet modernization projects quite literally eclipsed the Ukrainian Modernists (many were shot or forced into exile), the latter's ideas re-emerged among Ukrainian postmodernists in the 1990s who sought to avoid

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[104] Ibid, 106.

[105] Kyiv's tallest structure is a monument entitled *Мати-Батьківщьина*, or "Mother of the Fatherland," built by Yevgeny Vuchetich in 1981 that stands over the memorial museum to the Great Patriotic War on the Dniepro in Kyiv. The statue features a steel woman sixty-two meters tall bearing a sword and a Soviet shield in her raised arms.

"the obligation to serve the nation."[106] This idea often surfaced in their critiques of President Leonid Kuchma's neoliberal policies.[107] Members of this later generation share their predecessors' irreverence: they use playful language, laud the absurd, and are suspicious toward authority. Where the idea of Eastern Europe turns on imaginings of a feminized, sexualized East by a modernized, rationalist West, the irony in Femen's parody conflicts with modernism's origins in masculinist notions of linear progress. Femen's Amazon figure conflicts with the idea of "progress" articulated by the state during the revolution by ironizing where its narratives pivot on a pastoralized feminine ideal.

Romanticism and Taras Shevchenko—The Serf

The Ukrainian serf woman emerged as an important figure in Marxist-Leninist rhetoric framing women's labor in the shift from peasantry to communism. One of the earliest advancements of The Woman Question in socialist ideology arose through Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?* in which a female protagonist dreams of a utopian society where she is able to work alongside men in building a futurist state. Chernyshevsky's novel was published in 1863, just after the emancipation of serfs, and later became a classical Soviet reference in building the case for a female proletariat. The novel raised interest around serfdom and also helped to pave the way for women's authorship. Ethnographies of serf women in Ukraine collected by the woman author Mariya Vilinska (pseudonym Marko Vovchok) were

[106] Oksana Zabuzhko, *Polovi Doslidzhennya Z Ukrayinskoho Seksu*.

[107] The Ukrainian avant-garde of the 1920s-30s closely associated themselves with a modernization campaign that rejected Shevchenko's peasant image, turning away from the radical populism that Stepan Bandera and Nestor Makhno had assimilated into their Ukrainian nationalism at the turn of the century. Writers from the Young Muse poetry movement of 1906, such as Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi (1864-1913), Mykola Zerov (1890-1937), and Vsevolod Maksymovych (1894-1918), felt united in trying to overcome the static, narrow vision of Ukraine that Mykola Khvylovyi satirized as *khokhlandia* (*khokhol* being a derogatory term for backwards Ukrainians, though used by Gogol to describe himself). See: Grigory Grabowicz "The Poet as Mythmaker" in Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*. While there were some women among the Ukrainian Modernists, they were far and few between. Anna Akhmatova might be counted among them, though she wrote a bit later, published in Russian, and spent most of her life in St. Petersburg. As elsewhere in Europe, the Modernist movement was mostly a men's club.

highly regarded by both Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Turgenev, the latter translated and published her work in 1859.[108] Assya Humesky has described how Vilinska accompanied her husband, the folklorist Aphanasy Markovych, on numerous trips to the villages around Chernihiv, Poltava, Kyiv, and Nemryiv where she collected local songs, legends, and proverbs.[109] Humesky claims that Vovchok was one of the first writers to adapt the "positive traits" given to women in the oral folklore that she had collected to the depiction of serf women on the written page. Vovchok's depictions of resilient serf women in local folk culture would later become folded into the underpinnings of the rhetoric that more broadly framed women's labor in the Soviet Union. The socialist turn would then come to shape women's social roles based on allegiance to the emerging Soviet state, ahead of the Ukrainian national idea.

Figure 11: "Sascha From Femen," Agnieszka Rayss, March 2012

[108] The work was published as a book entitled *Ukrainian Folk Tales* / *Ukrainskie narodnye rasskazy*.
[109] Vilinska later sent copies of her stories to the poet and Ukrainian revolutionary Mykola Kulish, who called them a "living ethnography" and soon published Turgenev's translation of them in the Russian journal *Narodni opovidannia*. According to Humesky, the stories immediately caused a sensation for their depiction of serfdom, many critics attacked them as a brutal depiction of the Empire, while other critics saw in them a just evaluation of ethics. The poet Taras Shevchenko, a name often invoked in euphemism for the nation of Ukraine itself, called the young Marko Vovchok "his daughter" and even went so far as to dedicate a poem to her. Assya Humesky, "Marko Vovchok vs Turgenev: Feminism vs Femininity," *Vybrany Pracy*, 595.

The photo in Figure 11 includes polyvalent references to Ukrainian folklore that evoke the prior discursive link between the emancipation of serfs and the emancipation of women. The photograph was taken by a freelance Polish photographer named Agnieszka Rayss and given the descriptive title *Sascha from Femen*.[110] The overall composition is subdued and minimalist. Femen member Alexandra Shevchenko is its main subject and a leopard print blanket is visible on a bed behind her, a prop often included in the background of escort ads. Femen's characteristic flower garland has been replaced with a snowflake headdress wrought in the style of a traditional East Slavic crown evoking the headpieces worn by waitresses and bar-maids in some provincial Soviet restaurants in the 1950s—1970s. This type of headdress is also sometimes associated in the popular imagination with "Snizhenka" (Snow Maiden), the female companion to "Dyid' Moroz" (Grandfather Frost), two characters invented by the Soviets to replace St. Nicholas in celebration of an atheist New Year. These two characters are sometimes jokingly referred to in pop culture as a euphemism for the coupling of an aging Soviet president with his infantilized people. Mucha's folk flower crown, which he employed to signify feminine agency in his works about Slavdom, but not his advertisements (he used other crowns in them), is doubled here to comment on sexuality and gender in contemporary contexts.

[110] The photo is also another example of how Femen's protests stimulate the commercial media and art industries. Agnieszka Rayss, "Award of Excellence for Photo 'Sascha From Femen'," *POYi- Pictures of the Year International*, http://www.poyi.org/69/08/ae03.php. Accessed March 5, 2012,

Figure 12: "Slavia," Prague, 1869[111]

Figure 13: Paris, 1899[112]

Figure 14: Paris, 1899

Figure 15: Paris, 1899

[111] Ellridge, 189.
[112] Moucha, 21.

Rayss' portrayal of Sascha Shevchenko gives the viewer a more intimate glimpse into the emotional life of her subject that contrasts with Herbaut's outwardly fierce characterization of Inna Shevchenko. This contrast between defiance and subjugation mirrors Mucha's visualizations of Slavic femininity. The animal pelt rug in Mucha, as in the image of Shevchenko, cues the 19th century travelogue and its voyeuristic associations of Slavic femaleness with unbridled sexuality. Yet the years intervening between Mucha and Femen are significant. Animal print textiles in Eastern Europe gained popularity toward the end of the Soviet era. Animal print carries the obvious symbolism of ferocity and bravery associated with wild cats that women turning away from the regimentation of Soviet workers' dress found within the sexual revolution. Fake fur also carries a less obvious meaning in that it communicates a synthetic quality, and thus also a certain level of distance from agricultural peasant labor and village life. In both cases, though for different reasons, the animal pelt in the Femen image, as in Mucha's work (Figure 16), is a status symbol.

Rayss' composition complicates more familiar scripts for reading a boudoir scene. Viewers catch the activist and the model off-guard in what appears to be a bedroom. Unlike in more standard frames for nude portraits, the activist's nudity does not appear to externalize her innermost desires in any way (it is not clear to whom the photo is addressed). The camera's imposing gaze undercuts the activist's sense of conviction as the lens' frontal angle meets the subject in profile. The result suggests the total absence of an audience. In this latter sense, it resembles some images taken by Mucha, yet differs from them in one important respect: by layering the medium of an ad with its expression. As a new and relatively expensive technology, photography was not commonly used in advertising during Mucha's lifetime, and certainly not in the ubiquitous uses suggested by this image, appearing as though almost lifted from a glossy

graphic menu, the kind seen posted outside of a seedy building to sell everything from cheap Chinese food to Xerox copies, to sex-on-demand. This framing plays upon some of the same post-Soviet "Natasha" stereotypes as in the mock-up election protest. Everything revolves around the photo's centerpoint: Alexandra Shevchenko's tattoo—an excerpt from a poem by Ukraine's national poet Taras Shevchenko—which leaves room for several interpretations of the image as a metaphor for prostitution that reflects deeper collective memories in Ukraine.

Shevchenko's tattoo is permanent and is a six-line excerpt from "Young Masters, If You Only Knew" (Якби ви знали, паничні), a section of the Ukrainian epic poem *Kobzar*. Throughout the poem, the author Shevchenko admonishes writers for painting the villages of Ukraine in an idyllic tone, failing to convey the abject poverty within.

The poem begins:

Young masters, if you only knew	Якби ви знали, паничні,
How people weep there all life through,	Де люде плачуть живучи,
You'd not compose your rhapsodies,	То ви б елегій не твроили
And God for nothing you'd not praise,	Та марне Бога б не хвалили,
Nor mock our tears by twisting truth.	На наші сльози сміючись.
That tranquil cottage in the grove	За що, не знаю, називають
You call a paradise—I know.	Хатину в гаї тихим раєм.

The lines on Aleksandra Shevchenko's torso are from the section in which the poet addresses women in serfdom:

And you my sisters! Fortune has	А сестри! Сестри! Горе вам,
Reserved for you the cruelest fate!	Мої голубки молодії,
What is the purpose of your life?	Для кого в світі живете?
Your youth in service slipped away,	Ви в наймах виросли чужії,
Your locks in servitude turn grey,	У наймах коси побіліють,
In drudgery, sisters, you will die!	У наймах, сестри, й умрете![113]

In the original version of the poem, the repetition of the phrase "у наймах," approximated as "in service," "in drudgery," or "in exploitation," underscores the poet's admonishing tone. Shevchenko's direct personal address to his "sisters" comes as an aside in his angry condemnation of the alienated writers who overlooked the wretchedness of bondage and slavery

[113] Taras Shevchenko, "Yakby vy znaly panychni," *Kobzar*.

in their pastoral portraits of the villages scattered throughout the countryside near Kyiv. The women that Shevchenko invokes here are presented as serving unworthy masters who have conquered Ukraine. They stand in contrast to the poet's "brothers" who have "slaved on the estate/ And then, conscripted, marched away!"[114] Shevchenko's literary tattoo speaks to the bondage of these peasant women in the poem on several levels. Aleksandra Shevchenko, bearing the same surname as the poet, doubles the author's persona. At the same time, her addressees, conveyed by the full poem, are not the women who suffer from their fate, but the men who fail to see their suffering.

Thus, the lines of the poem that are missing from Alexandra Shevchenko's body leave their trace in her nakedness as a testament of women sexually indentured to men. A former serf himself, Shevchenko grounded the Ukrainian national project in the emancipation of serfdom. The poet's lyrical, Romantic verse idealized the serfs and later persisted as a typology tied to the idea of "narodnost'" or nationality/people in the Ukrainian national imagination. The emancipated serf paralleled the nation. Differing from Oushakov's formula "orthodoxy, monarchy, and narodnost," in Shevchenko's writings the narodnost also implied distinction from Asia, Poland, and Russia. In this photo, the activist Shevchenko's vengeful expression—a characteristic of the group's emotional outbursts on the streets— suggests she has taken up the authority of the poet and is now staring at the men he had originally attacked in his poem. Displaying these particular verses on her flesh, the activist Shevchenko counters the poet's pastoralizing ideals in a satire targeting the notion of a "benevolent Europe."

In writing about gender in Taras Shevchenko's works, Humesky notes how, like Gogol, Shevchenko portrays his Cossack maidens as extensions of the natural environment. They are straightforward, organic: "Love of the Cossack for his maiden is depicted as 'sincere,' as natural

[114] Taras Shevchenko, *Selected Works: Poetry and Prose*, 238.

as their surroundings."[115] Humesky discusses the role the nation plays in Shevchenko's verse, pointing out how national virtue replaces erotic desire in the positive attributes he gives women. She writes:

> Shevchenko expressed his admiration for the beauty of the female body . . . the characteristic traits of feminine beauty which were praised by the people (narod) . . . Other poets have portrayed women as their ideal of beauty, as the object and cause for their feelings of love, thanking them or cursing them as they saw fit. For Shevchenko, woman was also his ideal, but of a spiritual order.[116]

Like other Romantic writers across Europe at the time, Shevchenko appealed to an imagined ethnic ideal in his figurations of the nation. Humesky refers to the "narod," here translated as "people," in describing the diverse populations that Shevchenko's portraits of women attempted to unify in the author's appeals to a "spiritual order" common among East Orthodox worshippers living in the lands stretching from the Donbass to the Carpathians. The author Shevchenko angrily laments the Cossack maidens he believed served foreign men at the behest of the intellectuals who failed to represent them. This idea takes on new meaning as meta-commentary on the modern sex industry when transposed onto Femen's protest narrative. Romantic appeals to the folk nation are diffused by the production and circulation of Femen's references to Shevchenko in a mass-media, pop environment, and the publicity around the images that drive that industry. Occupying several ontologies at once—activist, prostitute, poet—Aleksandra Shevchenko comes to personify the conflicting, anachronistic national narratives that portray women as prostitutes, sinners, and saints within dominant gender categories.

[115] Assya Humesky, "Zhinocha symbolika u Shevchenka," 108.
[116] Ibid, 110. Transl. Jessica Zychowicz.

Figure 16: "Slav Epic," Bohemia, 1912

Figure 17: Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1900[117]

The passionate address in the lines, "What is the purpose of your life? / Your youth in service slipped away" draw, on one level, an intertextual parallel between the writer Shevchenko's posturing toward serf women who were sold abroad and Femen's similar outbursts "against sex tourism in Ukraine." On another level, Shevchenko's tattoo subverts the poem's nationalist Romanticism in her nude manifestation of the men (and serf women) who were once "conscripted away." Paradigmatically, this positioning includes a reflection on her own youth at the time of the Orange Revolution. The final line of Shevchenko's tattoo delivers a warning that is perhaps best understood allegorically. The line reads, "In drudgery sisters, you will die!" Mucha was attacked by the critics of his day for his work *Slav Epic*, which he considered his magnum opus, but in which others saw tokenism toward serf women. This tendency and its persistence are perhaps indicative of the struggle inherent to any search for a language of feminist resistance. What resonates most here is that same search, but within national contexts

[117] Husslein, Ibid, 323; 314.

that are not traditionally considered in postcolonial terms, though display a long history of subjugation between different peoples based on ethnic and other differences.[118]

In contemporary Ukrainian feminist literature, as others have observed, there is an overabundance of national allegory. Spivak has concluded that anti-imperial resistance always entails wrestling with patriarchy, arguing that in the constant struggle to be heard, constructions of a mute, subaltern woman must be vigilantly averted.[119] There are several sites preceding Femen in Ukraine where feminist resistance has constituted attempts to re-represent authorship beyond nationalism. For example, in *Shevchenko's Myth of Ukraine: An Attempt at a Philosophical Analysis* (*Shevchenkiv mif Ukrainy: Sproba filosofs'koho analizu*), Oksana Zabuzhko dismantles the processe whereby Taras Shevchenko's monolithic status as Ukraine's national poet has been employed to serve contradictory ends in state-building projects, while silencing other voices and perspectives. Femen activist Aleksandra Shevchenko's physical embodiment of Taras Shevchenko's verse on her bare torso puts the ideological inflections in the poem in symbolic tension with an unnamable feminine order that precedes the nation-state.

Both Aleksandra and Inna Shevchenko's tattoos were introduced to their online audiences through Femen's blog as part of a series of poetry readings entitled *Naked Rhymes* (*Holi rymy*) in the summer of 2011. Each part of the video series features a different Femen activist giving a topless reading of a famous Ukrainian poem. The first video features Aleksandra Shevchenko reading the entire poem of which her tattoo is a fragment. She is seated on a brass sculpture of the national monument to Taras Shevchenko. Her tone is sharp, angry. The tattoos

[118] Vitaly Chernetsky applies Rosi Bradiotti's postmodern nomadic feminism from *Nomadic Subjects* to Ukrainian postcolonial literature: " '. . . time is not frozen for the postcolonial subject, as the memory of the past is not a stumbling block that hinders access to a changing present. Quite the contrary, the ethical impulse that sustains the postcolonial mode makes the original culture into a living experience, one that functions as a standard of reference.'" *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization*, 229.
[119] "The possibility of collectivity is persistently foreclosed through the manipulation of female agency," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, 150.

visually mark subversion in a manner that differs from tattoos in the West in the complex sign systems associated with them in the Slavic context.[120] The language of tattoos in Slavic history grew in parallel to the language of the prison, and was always one of subversion because it assumed ownership over the body. Prison tattoos throughout the Soviet period contained codes that conveyed information about a person's status within criminal hierarchies, their prison terms and crimes, and even their sexual preferences. Female prisoners also had tattoos, though their tattoos carried a different set of meanings.[121]

While Aleksandra and Inna's tattoos both relate their own experiences as Femen activists, they do so by breaking from earlier conventions. Their images of a Shevchenko poem and a flower garland—both symbols of a romanticized Ukrainian femininity—connote toughness, but also are also *trademarks* of the Femen brand. These symbolic marks have become centerpoints in many photographers' frames as they zoom in on these activists' torsos. Both tattoos juxtapose the Romantic, pastoral femininity that Taras Shevchenko sacralized and folded into Ukraine's national idea with the profane corporeality of a criminal trophy. The divergent connotations between the pastoral peasant maiden and the tattooed prisoner converge in the prostitute archetype underlying Inna and Aleksandra Shevchenko's performances. While "onstage" with Femen, the tattoos they bear at the site of the stigmata are a type of serf's brand, and a company logo. The mark denotes a privatized body in the exchange of women as capital between men, the most basic principle underlying social structures.

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[120] Nancy Condee describes prison tattoos as permanently engaged in subversive dialogue with the administration: "This dialogue, so to speak, between the prisoner's sloganed body and the prison administration's sloganed space was intensified by the reality that the body could not be confiscated. It could be mutilated, coerced, controlled, and neglected; but as long as the prisoner lived, his body was a potential interlocutor with the prison administration." "Body Graphics: Tatooing the Fall of Communism" in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev*, 350.

[121] Condee notes, "women's tattoos were more frequently hidden from view and not as associated with the performance of criminal power. They were often autobiographical, recalling a first experience of heterosexual or lesbian sex, marriage, birth or narcotics; or a death, often of a mother or a child." Ibid, 347–348.

IV. The Mass-Subject and the Public Sphere

Pop Culture Contexts: Chervona Ruta, Ruslana, Serduchka

While Femen adopts much of Ukraine's pop rhetoric of the mid-2000s in their combination of nineteenth century folk and modern civic symbols, Femen's spectacle also presupposes a more global, mass public conditioned by the Internet and its capacities in constructing a mass-consumer.[122] The mass-media differs from other kinds of commodities because a commodity can differentiate its subject. Michael Warner has critiqued the roles of self-abstraction, identification, and desire in the mass discourse of contemporary news media technologies, arguing that disparities arise between subjects in the individual apprehension of the self within a mass-public context. This is because the mass public engineered by contemporary news media depends on the individual's self-negation: "By making him no longer self-identical, it allows him the negativity, not simply reason or criticism, but an identification with a disembodied public subject that he can imagine as parallel to his private person."[123] Access to the mass public, like Habermas' bourgeois public, remains unequal, a dynamic Warner terms "minoritizing logic."[124] The mass media thus premises itself on an invisible, abstract body based on a hegemonic, white, male subject descended from older notions of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere. In contrast to earlier mass-print culture, the contemporary mass-media pivots on

[122] Femen's manipulation of online images that, in turn, mediate socialization and consumption around their imagining of "protest" as popular politics capitalizes on an earlier notion of spectacle as alien commodity. Poststructuralist philosopher Guy Debord defines "spectacle" in his postmaterialist critique of western societies during the advent of film: "The spectacle is the other side of money: it is the general abstract equivalent of all commodities. Money dominated society as the representation of general equivalence, namely, of the exchangeability of different goods whose uses could not be compared. The spectacle is the developed modern complement of money where the totality of the commodity world appears as a whole, as a general equivalence for what the entire society can be and can do. The spectacle is the money which one only *looks at*, because in the spectacle the totality of use is already exchanged for the totality of abstract representation. The spectacle is not only the servant of *pseudo-use*, it is already in itself the pseudo-use of life." Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle.*

[123] Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and The Mass Subject," *Publics and Counterpublics*, 164.

[124] "As the bourgeois public sphere paraded the spectacle of its disincorporation, it brought into being this minoritizing logic of domination," Ibid, 167.

more visual displays of many different bodies to elicit emotional responses from the viewer, thus "to be public in the West means to have an iconicity, and this is true equally of Muammar Qaddafi and of Karen Carpenter."[125] In contemporary displays of corporeality, desire drives the mass-subject's search to reconstitute a body from within the abstract, meta-language of mass media publicity and its "public" mass body.

Femen puts on display a violent comedy that at once feeds the mass-subject's desire for corporeality in the mass-public, but also unravels the parameters in which the popular is performed in the mass-media. Femen resembles Rancière's critique of gallery art: "In the end, the *dispositif* feeds off the very equivalence between parody *as* critique and the parody *of* critique . . . unfortunately, however, it has become increasingly clear that this mode of manifestation is also that of the commodity itself."[126] But the commodity, unlike the mass-public that Femen presupposes, can differentiate its subject.[127] Femen's performances differentiate the private consumer-subject that a prostitute—presenting herself as a commodity – would assume toward a client. Debord posits that the spectacle created by the media image (film) is an alien commodity, whereas Warner claims mass-media differs from commodities because a commodity can differentiate its subject, whereas media only *mediates* between subjects. Femen pantomimes the dynamics of commodification in a mass-media context. They use camp and violence in taboo public acts that both visually feed and undercut the abstract male mass-audience presupposed by the mass-media and its scripts for displaying female sexuality.

In Femen's "erotics of a mass imaginary," the minority subject—and every subject is minoritized to some degree—finds itself in an especially asymmetrical relationship to the media

[125] Ibid, 169.
[126] Jacques Rancière, "The Paradoxes of Political Art," *Dissensus*, 145.
[127] Warner writes about difference that, "Where consumer capitalism makes available an endlessly differentiable subject, the subject of the public sphere proper cannot be differentiated. It can represent difference as other, but as an available form of subjectivity it remains unmarked." Ibid, 168.

because "the mass subject cannot have a body except the body it witnesses"[128] The individual's desire to identify with an abstract, collective body by witnessing the visual display of bodies onscreen and in print manifests in the mass-media's fixation on corporeality through disaster, camp, and vulgar modes of expression. Disaster is popular because "it is a way of making mass subjectivity available, and it tells us something about the desirability of that mass subject . . . In the genres of mass-imaginary transitivism, we might say, a public is thinking about itself and its media. This is true even in the most vulgar of the discourses of mass publicity, the tabloid pastime of star puncturing."[129] Feeding this desire to subjectively identify with a collective public, the mass media also fetishizes political figures (who produce the myth of their own popularity) by shaping the discourse of publicity itself as "the rhetorical conditions under which the popular can be performed."[130] Now iconic for their topless street demonstrations both in Ukraine and abroad, Femen occupies the space of the pop celebrity miming a politician's performance in mass-media.

Embodying vulgarized, naked female bodies in a mass-media context, Femen puts on display the prostheses of the mass subject as both outcome and counter-image to the "minoritizing logic" of the mass public sphere. Femen's "minoritized" bodies, as women staging their own popularity as protestors, is at once informed by the political rhetoric of the Orange Revolution, as much as it attempts to undo that rhetoric through meta-commentary. Warner discusses 1980s urban graffiti, explicating it as a kind of "counterpublicity" to the mass-media in being a personal trademark that can be spread quickly across a nearly anonymous landscape.[131] Though Femen differs from graffiti artists in many respects, they share with them the synthesis

[128] Ibid, 179.
[129] Ibid, 177; 179.
[130] Ibid, 176.
[131] Ibid, 183.

of their own popularity. In other words, replicating their own style and trademark, Femen continues to produce the illusion that they are incredibly popular, even while closely managing the status and shape of that popularity.[132] Hutsol has experience in the entertainment industry and explained her group's strategy in terms of mass-marketing: "I think that if you can sell cookies using one method, then why not use the same method to push for social causes? I don't see anything bad in this."[133] This position begs the question of whether the body can ever translate a clear message in a mass context, where the abstract media body "claim[s] an imaginary uniqueness promised in commodities, but canceled in the public sphere proper."[134] Femen's politics, not as a movement in the classical sense, but as an experiment in the dialectics of media consumption, appropriate "imaginary uniqueness promised in commodities." [135] They mimic the commodification of sex and gender employed in political campaigns.

Anachronism

Femen's early humorous street theatre capitalized on a particular, nationally inflected rhetoric that has shaped Ukraine's pop industry over the past decade. The Chervona Ruta music festival that took place in 1989 after the inaugural congress of the youth pro-independence movement Rukh, and again in 1991, eight days before the dissolution of the Soviet regime, set a precedent for popular displays of the nation. The festival took place in Zaporizhyia, the historic seat of the Cossack host. Performers appropriated the freedom-loving figure of the Cossack and

[132] Olga Plakhotnik and Mariya Mayerchyk have noted that, for Anna Hutsol, "The measure of a successful Femen action is a popular action. Popularity, for Femen, is publicity that draws attention to social issues, for them, this is the way out of obscurity." In just the two years following Plakhotnik and Mayerchyk's prognosis, the core group of original Femen members' amorphous media spectacles remain bound up in Plakhotnik and Mayerchyk's early assessments of their design: "In our opinion, Femen is a local, post socialist, and postcolonial project. Femen's position and actions, if you try to correlate them with the western principles of feminism, simply will not coincide with the parameters of any of them," in, "Radykalni Femen I Novyj Zhinochyj Aktyvizm," 7.
[133] Richard Balmforth, "FEMEN Topless Activists Plan Euro 2012 Soccer Tournament Protests," *HuffingtonPost*. May 21, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/21/femen-euro-2012-protest-ukraine_n_1532544.html. Accessed June 10, 2012.
[134] Warner, "The Mass Public and The Mass Subject," 184.
[135] Ibid.

its anachronistic qualities to draft a myth about independence and survival, and to legitimize Ukraine's newly won independence as a modern nation-state.[136] Catherine Wanner has written about the Chervona Ruta festival as a site for challenging the dominance of Soviet ideology in public discourse: "In the age of the nation-state, 'uncovering' a sense of Ukrainian identity was part of the strategy to challenge the legitimacy of Soviet rule."[137] Western-style rock music, already established as a language of dissent in the Soviet Union, became the *lingua franca* of the festival. Religion also played a role as Orthodox priests dressed in black robes opened the night with a ceremony in the center of the stadium. Throughout these performative recoveries of a "lost" identity, participants placed preeminence on the Cossack's anachronistic qualities in reorientations of Kyiv Rus' as a western frontier to mollify present troubles by airing the Soviet past.[138] The alternative cultural memories that festival organizers attempted to achieve provided a lasting conceptualization of national autonomy. The liminal national rhetoric they instantiated through pop, based in nostalgic images of folk culture, eventually fused with the official language of the state.[139]

The various ways in which Ukrainian pop music celebrities projected national identity later on, during the Orange Revolution, pivoted on a similarly ambiguous, ethnic symbology contrasted against an undesirable Soviet past. Where Chervona Ruta's Cossacks had once

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[136] Other than a brief three-year period following the Civil War, after which the beginning of a Ukrainian state was absorbed by the Bolsheviks, there was no period of independent Ukrainian statehood to point to in the modern era. Catherine Wanner, *Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine*, 131.
[137] Ibid, 121; 123.
[138] " . . . performers throughout the evening tried to steer the anti-Soviet feelings of anger, deception, and disillusion, which they had purposefully evoked, into a strategy of empowerment by advocating Ukrainian independence as a cure-all strategy for the ills currently plaguing their society," Ibid, 126–127.
[139] Wanner discusses the negative, exclusionary impact some of these performative strategies had on Russian festivalgoers in underscoring Moscow as imperial capital of the USSR, though she weighs more heavily the alternative cultural memories that festival organizers attempted to achieve: "Cognizant of the fact that as a site for the transmission of a post-Soviet national culture, the Chervona Ruta music festival, through its celebratory crowd setting and ensuing solidarity offer[ed] the potential of facilitating reorientation of individuals to a nationalized collective. To ensure that this reorientation [was] lasting and not fleeting, Chervona Ruta [was] institutionalized with state funding that has been steadily forthcoming," Ibid, 140.

"uncovered" Ukraine's lost history beyond its Soviet one, during the Orange Revolution, pop stars preached a "true Ukraine" founded in tribal history, whose democratic potentials had been suppressed over time. These performances complemented political elites' accommodating signals to the E.U. at the time, as pop artists depicted individualism, progress, and freedom differently for domestic versus Western audiences. The indigenous Carpathian styles adopted by the pop singer Ruslana in her song "Wild Dances!" for which she won the Eurovision contest in 2004, was, for the general listener, according to literary scholar Marko Pavlyshyn, "a proclamation of solidarity with the prevailing values, beliefs, and practices of the civilizationally dominant West. It is a claim to belong to a modern global community conceptualized as Western in its fundamental features."[140] For domestic audiences, Pavlyshyn notes, the song approvingly distanced folk culture from "sharovaryshchyna," an ossified notion of folk life once common in socialist depictions of national culture. Ruslana's images of the Carpathians rested on a fusion of Hutsul instruments, leather costumes, and live wolves in an eroticized rendering of a "wild" frontier. Among domestic audiences this glamorized portrayal of Western Ukrainian folkways passed muster, in part, as a familiar tale about overcoming hardship rooted in nineteenth century Romantic depictions of peasant life.[141]

Ruslana's blending of nineteenth century Carpathian folk culture with the Amazon myth predates Femen's combination of these two archetypes. The Amazon woman, like the Cossack, emerged within a constellation of nationally-inflected pop performance in Ukraine that Femen has since adopted as a liminal protest site. Unlike Ruslana, whose warrior image preserved a utopian notion of Europe for Orange demonstrators, Femen's topless prostitutes draw out the

[140] Marko Pavlyshyn, "Envisioning Europe: Ruslana's Rhetoric of Identity," 7.
[141] Ruslana's song "proposes to its domestic audience that the assertive and forceful emancipation celebrated by the song as a whole has a predecessor in, and is not so very different from, a Romantic emancipation that is more familiar and therefore acceptable." Ibid, 8.

utopian optimism of that dream. Ruslana's caricature of folk life differs from Femen in that hers is devoid of any specific references to actual events or contemporary political figures. [142] Where pop stars associated with the Orange Revolution once reflected the heightened euphoria of that moment, seeking to merge Ukraine "with others in the culturally heterogeneous contemporary world," by contrast, Femen's protests later on are more cynical, even Orwellian.

Cultural Hybridity

Blending glamour with the grotesque, Femen's style turns on black humor, self-deprecatory satire, and the not-quite-deliberate faux pas. The hyperbole and camp in Femen's performances also have antecedents in the singer Verka Serduchka's experimental stage identities. Serduchka rose to fame quickly during the late-1990s and early 2000s as part of a broader fascination with transgender performance as a mainstream genre in Ukraine. What set Serduchka apart from other stars' gender crossings was his creative use of "surzhyk," a mix of Ukrainian and Russian often spoken in villages. Cultural historian Sergiy Yekelchyk has argued that Serduchka's irreverent humor purged the fetishization of an "authentic" Ukraine in the mid-2000s by presenting audiences with "a carnivalesque, liberating take on the very real cultural and political tensions caused by the imposition of political correctness." [143] He notes how the singers' use of the vernacular in audacious skits about daily life in post-Soviet Ukraine expressed a freedom to be oneself completely in public, in contrast to the Ukrainian state's fixation on official language.

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[142] Pavlyshyn underscores Ruslana's ahistorical fantasy as agentive: "[she avoids reference to actual history] because this would almost inevitably mean grounding identity in experiences of suffering and victimhood and run the risk of contaminating collective identity with resentment toward the historical perpetrators and their contemporary heirs." Ibid, 13.

[143] Serhy Yekelchyk, "What Is Ukrainian about Ukraine's Pop Culture?: The Strange Case of Verka Serduchka," 219.

Added to Serduchka's liminal gender identifications is also the fact that the neoliberal nation-building projects dominating the periods leading up to and during the Orange Revolution often equated modernization with Europeanization. The polarization of Russia and Europe often features in Serduchka's humor as a superficial posturing by political elites, which indeed reflects the way many Ukrainians who identify with both of these cultures experience the situation. Not unlike Femen, Serduchka often presupposes a wide gap between the popular voices of his characters and the officialdom of post-Soviet statehood. However, an important difference between the public receptions of Serduchka, versus Femen, is the controversy that *never arose* around the formers' stage persona as a transgendered citizen. For most Ukrainian audiences, gender identity was less important than Serduchka's national hybridity. Serduchka completely sanitized his image after protests erupted in Ukraine following his 2007 performance at Eurovision in which he sang, "I want to see . . . Russia goodbye!" lyrics that are relatively mild compared with Femen's overtly anti-Putin sentiments. The widespread acceptance, even fetishization, of Serduchka's blending of genders and languages spun around his bodily hybridity mapped onto a national hybridity that many mainstream consumers could identify with.

By contrast, Femen's performances involve a more radical counter-image to the optimism of the Orange Revolution. The notion of "becoming European" in Yushchenko and Tymoshenko's joint-campaign relied on an imaginary ideal, beyond the nation. As in the nationalist pop performances at the Chervona Ruta festival, both leaders argued for a "return" to Europe as a cure-all for Ukraine's domestic ills. Ironically, a utopian, outside imaginary became central to imagining a reformed, Ukrainian parliament. Both Ruslana and Serduchka stage gender within recombinant categories of national and European belonging in the pop idiom familiar to Orange demonstrators, an idiom with roots in the Chervona Ruta festival and its

politicized, ahistorical orientation. Both of these artists' images projected an amorphous, "wild," and "hybrid" Ukraine onto individualist aspirations publicly associated with joining Europe.

Forming later after the Revolution, Femen, in borrowing "the idea of Europe" fostered by mass-media in earlier popular music and politics, parodies the mechanisms within the media's "minoritizing logic," to borrow Warner's term. Femen's dark comedy sketches unravel the optimism of earlier nationalist rhetoric and put on display nude female bodies threatened by disaster, taboo, and an invisible, predatory male gaze. Differing from Ruslana's erotic fantasy of Ukraine as an untamed wilderness, Femen's constant deferral of signs evades any consistent message about the violence they put on display. By no small measure, Femen and the mass media maintain a symbiotic relationship. Unlike Ruslana's warrior-princess body, or Serduchka's transgendered "surzhk" body, both of which offered positive national fantasies to hopeful demonstrators on the Orange Maidan, Femen puts on display a vulgarized body, what Warner terms a "disaster discourse body," for an alienated mass-subject.[144] This is precisely why Femen does not stage optimistic visions of Europe or an exit strategy out of the violence they depict; rather, given their mass context, the world of a Femen performance is thoroughly dystopic.

As celebrity activists, Femen became a litmus test for anxiety in Ukraine around collective identities tied to expressions of gender and sexuality. Their early protests interrupted media around the scripting of an equal partnership that Orange elites signaled to Europe in overlooking domestic repressions during the Yanukovych years. Unlike Ruslana and Serduchka, who both managed their public images across two contexts—an Orange Ukraine projected into European space, versus Western consumers' fantasies of an Eastern frontier—Femen, by contrast, cynically jabs at both of these fantasies. Politics in Femen's protests turn away from the

[144] Warner, Ibid, 171.

state as representational, and toward an agonistic notion of the public sphere. Rancière wrote in his tenth thesis that: "The essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one."[145] Femen's images of the prostitute satirize "Europe" and "Ukraine" as united by an economic relationship in which it is not clear who controls whom. Thus, Femen's spectacle of sex work is provocative precisely because it is a parodic image of East/West cultural stereotypes and their consumption.

V. East/West Cultural Stereotypes: A Parody of Media Consumption

Mobilizations around the actual issues at stake in the sex industry that Femen lays claim to persist in the conversations around the group. These conversations, in turn, are mediated by the sale and consumption of mass-media reports on Femen, whose protests morph relative to the group's publicity within the logic of a variable market. Perhaps it is the sexual consumption involved in creating commodities out of images of the female body through mass-media technologies that underlies Femen's images, more than the images themselves, that is the most shocking. The winning World Press Photo in 2012 that the one of Inna Shevchenko had replaced the following year *also* featured a prostitute. This other image stands in stark contrast to Femen's staged, abstract caricatures of sex work. It is a realist portrait of another young woman, also Ukrainian, from the town of Kryvy Rih near the city Dnipoprotrovsk in the Southeastern industrial mining region of the country. [146] She is roughly the same age as Shevchenko.

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[145] Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Dissensus*, 37.

[146] The photo was taken by South African photographer Brent Stirton upon an invitation by an HIV/Aids NGO organized by Olena Pinchuk. Local circulations of the image included discussion on the larger structural and legal disparities that replicate cyclical patterns of addiction and incarceration in the lives of many addicts in Ukraine. Women, in particular, face these disparities in even greater numbers. In one local report, the Leonid Vlasenko Foundation, which works to rehabilitate drug-users in Kryvy Rih, reported to the Ukrainian newspaper *День* (*The Day*) on the woman in the photograph, Maria, as a typical case: "The Ukrainian drug policy hardly provides any

Figure 18: World Press Photo 2012

Bruised, emaciated, and scarred by drug abuse, the woman's grim appearance leaves little to the imagination about the lack of available social assistance in the region, despite extremely high rates of intravenous drug-use, coupled with a soaring HIV/Aids epidemic. This photo of an actual prostitute went nearly unnoticed in the subsequent reports on Femen. The image's uncanny position in the constellation of mass media surrounding Femen begs the question: Can protest cast as pop performance generate meaning beyond the producer/consumer relationship?

In no small measure, Femen and the media reporting on them maintain a symbiotic relationship. After their EuroCup tour, Femen increased the scope, frequency, and online component of their protests. Streamlining their online presence, the group began to address a

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social and medical protection for addicts, and usually resorts to repressions against them. The Ukrainian legislation provides for three years of imprisonment for keeping drugs. As a result, over 70 percent of the drug addict people spend some time in prison. After being released, most of them do not manage to integrate into society. Women are yet even more vulnerable in this world of criminalization than men. That is why when they lack money to maintain themselves and their addiction many of them engage in prostitution… All these people are sick, left without their relatives' support and need the minimum social attention and support from the state . . . Maria is 32 now. She has a little daughter who lives with Maria's mother-in-law. Her husband died because of using drugs. Maria prostitutes to maintain herself and her daughter. This is typical." Victoria Skuba, " 'Madonna' . . . from the oligarch's land." *Den'* February 21, 2012. http://www.day.kiev.ua/en/article/time-out/madonna-oligarchs-land. Accessed February 1, 2015.

more international audience, thus also taking advantage of the rise of Internet use in Ukraine, while evading the increasingly repressive environment for nonviolent public demonstrations under Yanukovych. Switching to five-minute flash mob photo opportunities, professional studio sessions, and extensive blog entries, over time, the media became more and more central to Femen's design. Members maintained close relationships with photographers and journalists. In 2011 a young photographer from Australia, Kitty Green, traveled with the group to Belarus where she was arrested along with two other Femen members for publicly ridiculing Lukashenka.[147] The length of Femen's public appearances began to shrink in disproportion to their fame. The vast online photo archives on Femen's two blogs (their Russian blog on livejournal.com was switched to read-only in 2012) aided their increasingly virtual format within an image-saturated environment.

To a good degree, Femen resemble the fashion industry. Journalists are informed of the time and location of a Femen action well before it takes place, and reporters play a pivotal role in the constant editing, planning, and invention of new images of the group. German journalist Alice Schwarzer, founder of the feminist magazine *EMMA*, reported to *DerSpeigel*: "I recently saw that the women from Femen posed completely naked for the magazine *Elle*. That's one of those slip-ups. Now they have to be careful that the boomerang doesn't fly back and they become objectified."[148] The "boomerang" in Schwarzer's comment reflects many opinions shared by Femen's critics, who target the contradictory polemics in the feminist ideologies the group repeats in text, as opposed to the consumption of nude images of themselves that they manufacture. There are certainly issues with Femen's duality as a protest against the objectification of women in the structure of an advertisement. And yet, the fashion and

[147] In 2012 Green spent fourteen months traveling, living, and participating in protests with Femen's core members gathering footage for her documentary film *Ukraine is Not A Brothel: The Femen Story*.
[148] Dialika Neufeld, "Femen Activists Get Naked to Raise Political Awareness."

entertainment industry's failure to fully assimilate Femen is also complicated by the fact that the group's parodies of sexual conquest fall upon the Western consumer.

This dynamic is distinct from Ruslana and Serduchka, who both managed their artistic image and public relations across two contexts: an Orange Ukraine projected into European space and their Western consumers' fantasies of an Eastern frontier. Femen, by contrast, rejects both of these fantasies, instead pitching their parodies on the mutual dependence of East and West. Femen's performances of the prostitute, who is by definition excluded from public debate as a "tainted" non-citizen, are also always about a corrupted public sphere. This metaphor becomes clearest when Femen parodies high-level diplomatic events in their timing, props, costumes, and choreography. In 2009, Femen greeted Putin's visit to Kyiv with banners featuring the name of his former mistress that read, "Ukraine is not Alina!" ("Ukraina nie Alina!") in order to challenge stereotypes of Ukraine's subservience to Russia stemming from Moscow's former hegemony within the USSR. Femen activists also made themselves known to Hilary Clinton in 2011. In the Kyiv Boryspil airport, topless, they asked her not to forget to discuss women in her meeting with Yanukovych. Members of the group have poked fun at Tymoshenko by wearing low-cut suits, styling their hair in thick braids, and parading in front of Kyiv's courthouse while pretending to devour dollar bills. Though they have long targeted embassies in their work, only in the later years of the Yanukovych regime did Femen face higher legal penalties for defacement, public disturbance, and interference with national security measures. In January 2012, four members of the group were facing a four-year jail sentence for their protest on the balcony of the Indian ambassador to Ukraine in downtown Kyiv. In that protest Femen activists wore flowing silk garments, bindhis, and henna tattoos combined with traditional Ukrainian garlands and red wooden necklaces. They carried slogans that said: "We are not prostitutes!" in

protest against the Indian government's decision to raise restrictions on transit visas to Ukrainian women traveling to India on the grounds that the order would reduce rates of prostitution. In each of these maneuvers, Femen sarcastically depicts women as politically disenfranchised.

The notion of becoming European in Yushchenko and Tymoshenko's joint campaign during the Orange Revolution argued for a "return" to Europe as a cure-all for Ukraine's domestic ills. Similar notions were reflected in Ukraine's joint hosting of the 2012 Euro Cup soccer championship. Femen's media stunts in 2011 during the preparations to host the Cup disrupted the utopian scripting of an equal partnership that elites signaled to Europe at the time.[149] Femen achieved another means of attention by desacralizing the branded symbols associated with the event. On tour, the group spotlighted the Euro Cup as a forerunner for sex tourism by hyperbolizing the dark undercurrents of the sex industry. They targeted advertising featuring Ukraine as a tourist destination for sex tourists ("sexpats").[150] Hutsol cited remarks by President Viktor Yanukovych, who, in commenting on the soccer championship's slogan "Switch on Ukraine," bragged to international audiences that, "In order to switch on Ukraine, it is enough to see it by your own eyes when the chestnut trees start to blossom, when it gets warmer and the women in Ukrainian cities start undressing. To see such beauty is marvelous!"[151] While every Femen performance on their Euro Tour included symbols specific to each country they visited, each of their "shows" pitted stereotypes of the nationalism displayed by European soccer fans against a cynical caricature of Ukraine as a dangerous sexual playground. Here, as elsewhere, Femen activists played upon older tropes of the "wild East."

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[149] Members of the group publicly grabbed the tournament trophy while it was on display in the cities of Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk during Summer 2012. *The Huffington Post.* May 21, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/21/femens-euro-2012-protest-_n_1532989.html. Accessed February 20, 2015.

[150] Hutsol often employed the term "sexpats" in posts on Femen's blog, in interviews, and by journalists in international media coverage on Femen.

[151] Martsenyuk, "Ukraine's Other Half."

In Warsaw, two members parodied the cartoon logo of the championship, the Polish and Ukrainian hooligan twins "Vladek" and "Vladko" in a live performance of the mascots screwing, fighting, and drinking beer. The branding of Ukraine and Poland as cartoon "twins" thus provided a point of departure from which to critique the asymmetries in Ukraine's relationship with the E.U. Acting out these asymmetries as sexual conquest, Femen increased their visibility online by attaching their own brand to the marketing of the soccer championship.

Femen's pan-European caper catapulted the group into fame.[152] At this point, they began to extend the mass pop rhetoric of the Orange Maidan that they had parodied within Ukraine to a virtual production of the *illusion* of their own popularity for global presses. As the group pushed farther and farther into European spaces, their references to Ukraine would largely disappear. Yet their parody of East/West stereotypes within the context of the Orange Revolution would continue to move in the direction of satirizing the consumption of sexuality and images of women in Western media.

VI. Conclusion: Double Parody

As in the happenings that took place in the region in the 1980s, Femen pokes fun at authority by lampooning national politics in public street performances. The body rhetoric of their satirical topless stagings maps figurations of the prostitute archetype and its associations onto the fantasies assumed in much older East/West exchanges. The group's early performances on Kyiv's Maidan employed female and national stereotypes in irreverent deconstructions of the pop idiom of the Orange Revolution. Caricatures of Nouveau Riche glamour, the serf in

[152] Anna Hutsol, looking back on Femen's half decade long history, observed: "I consider what we've done for women's protest in Ukraine very important. People now relate to one another differently, for us, the fact that women's issues are now up for discussion and debate is highly important. Women are now able go out in the streets and protest without punishment, though, of course, if [Femen] were to do the same thing, naked, we'd be punished. I think we've contributed to similar positive changes in Russia. Overall, these are the first steps toward democracy and a new, free nation, our main objective is to save women—to help them realize that they can achieve freedom, but that they have to fight for their rights," in "FEMEN: «Конечно, А Как Же Ж» Colta.ru."

bondage, and the legend of the Amazon are combined with local cultural associations with the prostitute as sign for both transgression and autonomy. All of these connotations intertwine in pictures calibrated for the logic of the mass-media. The resulting text mirrors the dual nature of feminine subjugation and idolation in the capitalist marketplace. At the same time, Femen's use of camp and simulacrum is a parody that turns back in on itself within those selfsame media mechanisms and their internal logics of erotic identification, alienation, and consumption.

Early Femen's body rhetoric appropriated celebrity styles in earlier Ukrainian pop culture that expressed ideas about a break from Russia and the Soviet past in setting forth national autonomy. By contrast, in a departure from those styles, Femen's initial performances in Kyiv politicized the female body through discordant representations of the national past. The symbols in their performances blended irony with authentic political comment in an extended hyperbole on the combination of pop concerts with official speeches introduced by elites during the Orange Revolution. Like other celebrities, Femen is a product of their time, in which pro-European and pro-Russian sentiments were pitted against one another in Ukraine as oligarchs attempted to consolidate their power bases from a bilingual population that did not experience this kind of cultural dichotomy in their day-to-day lives. Aesthetically, Femen's performances project caricatures of local cultural stereotypes onto the prostitute archetype and its embedded discourses about the exchange of women in economic relations between men. Thus, their image includes a picture of anxieties about capitalist relations with the West over time.

In their early performances on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Kyiv's Independence Square), Femen's stagings of themselves as prostitutes transferred a parody of the red-light district onto the former site of the Orange Revolution. This juxtaposition combined to manufacture a pop protest that critiqued the Orange Revolution's shortfalls, in particular, where leaders failed to

connect with the people in the years that followed. By putting themselves on display as prostitutes on the public square—the site of democratic debate from which the prostitute is always excluded—Femen illustrated the limits of the public sphere. Their puns became a spectacle of East/West stereotypes within Ukraine in which Femen's parody of activism slowly descended into a parody of themselves, one deeply implicated in the marketing and consumption of dissidence for media. In the years following their first major foray abroad during the 2012 Euro Cup, the group launched themselves into a much broader international campaign. Femen would begin to interpolate a very broad audience in sweeping appeals to a universalized feminism that would earn them many critics, even as their virtual body aesthetic gained them recognition online. Morphing relative to the laws of the media photograph, Femen would soon play a role in rearranging the compass for global protest in the digital age, while paradoxically, also inventing the seeds of their own demise as feminist activists.

Chapter 2

An Anatomy of Activism: Virtual Body Rhetoric in Digital Protest Texts

> The world at once present and absent which the spectacle *makes visible* is the world of the commodity dominating all that is lived. The world of the commodity is thus shown for *what it is*, because its movement is identical to the estrangement of men among themselves and in relation to their global product.
> –Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*

> crossing the whole of history and its little histories . . .
> –Hèlene Cixous, *La-The (Feminine)*

I. Introduction

Kyiv 2011. I am standing in the location of Femen's headquarters at the time: a brick cellar bar named Café Kupidon in downtown Kyiv, not far from Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square). Before interviewing members of the group, I ask if I might take a photograph of a bulletin board on the wall coated in a collage of news clippings and other memorabilia they have collected to commemorate their protests up to that point. The resulting image turns out to be a photograph of many photographs. Its temporal locus—the disjointed years between Ukraine's Orange Revolution and Euromaidan— puts on display the logic of a phenomenon that is, in itself, a mirror of global media; specifically, the mechanisms of its design and transformation within the scripts for protest specified by the laws that make culture into commodities. My found portrait of Femen is now, in some ways, more descriptive in capturing the dynamic that the group has come to embody than are the vast online archives of pictures of the actual bodies of the women in the group. The more I look, the more I ask: Where is the locus of the "real" Femen protest—in the hyperreal photograph of a live-action street "flesh-mob," or

in the reproduction of the protest and its consumption? Is the essence of the message in the sound of the blackbird singing, or just after?

Figure 19: Media Wall, Femen Headquarters, 2011, Kyiv[153]

Conversations on the politics of public nudity have since expanded in the wake of the global protests of 2011.[154] Many primary examples are providing traction for scholars interested in parsing the rhetoric of the state as an extension of the body. The convergence of economic upheaval and new media technologies, in particular, has created a key juncture in activism that resembles a prior moment in which feminists speaking from different subject-positions converged upon strategies for critiquing the design of the protest message itself. Organizing around different social perceptions of popular imagery, feminist media activists of the 1970s developed specialized techniques to divert audiences' attention away from collective mythology,

[153] Photo by the author.
[154] W.J.T. Mitchell, Judith Butler, Chantal Mouffe, Brett Lunceford and other scholars working at the intersection of politics and aesthetics have renewed interest in the role of the body in protest.

trivialized clichés, and accrued negative connotations regarding women.[155] The difference between these early media actions, and Femen is the latter's generally negative public reception. This distinction elicits important questions about how protest is mediated and legitimized, not only in Femen's original post-Soviet context, but also in their emergence through Internet culture and its reflexive meme languages.

The affordances of social media have resulted in informal streams of communication, creating what might be called an "off"-media culture that positions itself against the mainstream. Visual icons, sardonic humor, and provocative statements feature widely in this culture, which varies only slightly across national contexts. Recent research into aesthetics and politics has explored the idea of art-activism and the subversive potential of this new media structure. Chantal Mouffe describes the larger processes in art-activism: "A given hegemony results from a specific articulation of a diversity of spaces and this means that the hegemonic struggle also consists in the attempt to create a different form of articulation among public spaces."[156] The resonance between Femen and other nude protest groups worldwide puts the role of the body in resistance narratives at the center of public transformation. Femen's parodic scenes undermine the restrictive assumptions around "post-Soviet" in a visual language that translates differently across national contexts. The group's mistranslation, in particular, their controversial body image, can reveal much about their Ukrainian origins in the years after the Orange Revolution, as well as the ways activists employ nudity to transpose real and virtual spaces in dissent with others.

[155] Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowicz, founders of the feminist media performance collective *Ariadne: Social Art Network*, formed in Los Angeles in 1978, claimed that: "It was violence—in the media and in society—that gave birth to feminist media art" in "Feminist Media Strategies for Political Performance."
[156] Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," 5.

In many ways, both stylistically and in their virtual format, Femen has failed to actively assimilate to the conventions of feminist protest that have come before them. The diffusion of Femen's protests through global media networks has made visual culture and media studies central to my understanding of their design and circulation. Since their founding, Femen's ubiquity—at first on Ukraine's streets and newspapers, then abroad, and finally, almost completely online—has served, in many ways, to produce through media memes the illusion of a worldwide presence. Though the group has maintained a toehold in international media since 2008, the slogans and themes of Femen's activities are very broad and lack any specific political demands. Their debut protest, "Ukraine is not a Brothel!" set the tone for later initiatives with similarly hyperbolic slogans such as "Happy Dependence Day Ukraine!" "KGB Euro" and "Sex Bomb." And yet, the globalization of Femen has manifested a wide-ranging conversation about feminism in which their topless performances have become a flashpoint for deeper conflicts, solidarities, and anxieties about gender, sexual liberation, and national belonging. In Femen's case the digital medium shapes their design: over time, they have morphed with the venues and conventions of Internet media culture.

The "political" in the Femen phenomenon can be traced in their circulation, particularly their reception by other protest group outside of Ukraine that have adopted their aesthetic. When nude protest exploded as a global phenomenon in 2010-2011, it lent Femen's project wider publicity. The feminist group *Slutwalks*, with which Hutsol collaborated on a project at one point, adopted a similar protest method by stripping down in the streets to draw attention to domestic violence.[157] Other activists followed suit—attaching all sorts of signs, slogans, and

[157] Formed in April 2011 in Toronto, Canada, Slutwalks is an international street protest phenomenon that also adopts a performative strategy in which participants dress in revealing clothing to protest against explanations of rape based upon a woman's appearance. Anna Hutsol and other Femen members collaborated with Slutwalks in

symbols to their exposed bodies in actions broadcast on TV and computer screens: a nude man in New York joined the Occupy Movement and his image went viral, fans of Chinese artist Ai WeiWei posted nude photos of themselves online, a young Egyptian woman named Aliaa Magda Elmahdy associating herself with Femen posted a nude photo of herself and announced her action on Twitter.[158] In the midst of this sudden surge in nude demonstrations around the globe, Femen's style remained as widely featured in online circles and international media outlets as it had been at the time of the group's formation. Their visibility increased, bringing the "New Amazons," as the group began calling themselves, into greater and greater contact with the media.

Studying these images/counter-images can provide a lens into the evolving critical relationship between media technologies and the public sphere.[159] Where others have pointed out that neoliberal discourses have overlooked women in the shift to a market economy, it is exigent that transnational feminisms continue to take into account the full range of possible meanings of alternatives that do not fit familiar, linear narratives of progress, including those which may be problematic for other reasons.[160] The scripts, costumes, and site-specific locations in which Femen activists display their bodies in real time are illustrative of media apparatuses that shape how different publics are imagined. While during the initial years of Femen's existence their

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2012 in producing a calendar to protest the trial of Aliaa Elmadhy in Tunis for posting nude photos of herself on Twitter.

[158] Jason Miks, "Naked Protest," *The Diplomat*, November 23, 2011, http://thediplomat.com/china-power/naked-protest/. Accessed December 1, 2011.

[159] For example, Nancy Fraser's 2013 reevaluation of Judith Butler in which she claims that the roles that culture and economics have played in envisioning "the political" in second-wave feminism differ from contemporary feminist conditionings of global solidarities. Fraser's claim that economic struggles leverage cultural differnce by transcending national borders has since been taken up by critics, especially feminists-of-color, as too universalizing to account for local resistances to global hegemonies. See: *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*.

[160] Susan Gal and Gail Kligman once assessed the public transformations brought on by mass-media in the shift to postcommunism in the early nineties: "The development of more open public spheres since 1989, and the arrival of capitalist mass media, have swept away censorship and 'official' discourse in this classic sense . . . Yet the apparent plurality and openness of mass media veil the fact that certain issues remain undiscussed, some perspectives suppressed." *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism*, 3.

parodies carved out plots from an Orange past in the political foibles, stunts, and facades they staged on the streets of Kyiv, the group's later religious iconography troubled many critics as a picture of feminist struggle. Their aesthetic shift after going abroad, while problematic on its own terms, is symptomatic of the cultural effects of the Iraq War and the media imagery and stereotypes of Islam that have since become paradigmatic of the mid-late 2000s. The digital text of the Femen phenomenon is, in many ways, an outcome of the dichotomous language of suffering/salvation used to justify Western intervention in the Middle East arguably throughout the modern era, but especially during the decade of the group's existence.

This distinction is important for viewing how Femen gains media traction. Their performances often contain cross-referenced signs, hyperbolic slogans, and vague gestures toward non-specific issues. Transnational feminist scholars have debated the role of representation in mediating dialogue on gender rights. Especially important over the past twenty years has been a critical examination of the entrenchment of East-West discursive divides in the postcommunist context. Locally, Femen's performances constitute a deeply sardonic, tongue-in-cheek spoof on the protests that took place during the Orange Revolution, in which elites set forth claims to resolve issues, but soon abandoned their plans for reform. Over the past eight years, the polysemic nature of Femen's nude image has afforded them the ability to maintain a steady presence throughout major international media networks. This media fetish for Femen merits closer academic attention as an instance of public discourse on gender and globalization.[161]

Femen's street performances have emerged within and through a virtual economy of image and cultural commodity. Through the digital circulation of Femen as a sign for protest, a

[161] Between the years 2012-2014 approximately 1,000 articles on Femen were published in major periodicals in Germany alone.

visual body language emerged in which one may trace highly varied statements about gender, sexuality, subjugation, and power. The circulation of Femen's aesthetic—its rejection, appropriation, and contestation—by followers and critics instantiated a broad-ranging debate about the virtual display of women's bodies that reveals deeper concerns about the role of digital images and media in translating gender issues across national and cultural contexts. What do the rhetorical conventions being deployed in digital texts by Femen and others reveal about this role in broader terms?

In 2011 the photo that won the World Press Photo Competition featured a Yemeni woman holding a wounded man in her arms, an image that is both emotionally difficult to look at, but also generic due to the fact that similar images appeared throughout a number of media streams during the period in which Femen was founded. Femen's statements on Islam result from an overidentification with the subject-position of Muslim women; this overidentification both amplifies and undercuts the appropriative display of women's bodies within larger hegemonic discourses in a media-saturated environment. One of the central aims in this chapter is to place Femen in a broader ethical context concerned with media stereotypes and their (mis)translations across cultural paradigms.

II. Internationalization: The State and Pussy Riot

With Femen's move abroad in 2012, their aesthetic became an international sign for feminist dissent. At the same time, the group's performances remained devoid of any actual political demands. They had no constituency and their actions, for the most part, no longer took place on the streets. By any conventional understanding of political agency the group remained largely innocuous, even as their topless displays continued to draw more of the world's attention. Going abroad, Femen adopted a system of operations resembling a franchise by streamlining

their social media presence and merchandising. The Ukrainian folk flower garlands, red boots, and blue-and-yellow logo came to serve as templates for rotating colors and images from other national contexts. As Femen catapulted into world presses, they continued to manage the status and shape of their popularity. Ukrainian gender scholars Olga Plakhotnik and Mariya Mayerchyk have remarked on their interviews with Anna Hutsol that, "the measure of a successful Femen action is a popular action. Popularity, for Femen, is publicity that draws attention to social issues, for them, this is the way out of obscurity."[162] As celebrity activists, Femen has become a catalyst for figuring individual fantasies and anxieties about collective identities.

The internationalization of Femen's campaign proceeded in three main phases after the group's initial forays in the E.U. on their "EuroTour" campaign, organized to bring attention to an expected surge in prostitution connected with EuroCup 2012. The first phase occurred after the women's protest music group Pussy Riot performed their "punk prayer" performance against Putin's regime in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior on February 21, 2012. The location and the lyrics of Pussy Riot's protest song "Mother of God, Drive Putin Away" borrowed the locus and slogan of Femen's earlier topless protest in front of Christ the Savior one year prior on December 9, 2011, in which several Femen members wore peasant costume pants made of burlap and held posters reading "God Chase Away the King" and "God Rid Us of the Tsar."

After the Pussy Riot Affair Femen ceased all activities in Ukraine. From October 2011 – January 2015 Femen staged approximately sixty street actions outside of Ukraine. They appeared at events of global prominence including the G8 leaders summit, meetings at the Vatican, and court hearings in Québec regarding the public display of religious symbols. Countries where Femen's core members or women affiliated with the group staged protest-performances include Belarus, Russia, Poland, France, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Turkey,

[162] Maria Mayerchyk and Olga Plakhotnik, "Radykalni Femen i Novyj Zhinochyj Aktyvizm," 7.

Tunisia, Brazil, India, and Canada. The themes of Femen's international protests have included sexual harassment policies at the Euro Cup, freedom of the press and censorship, the Olympic committee's stance on Islamic law, the wearing of the veil, human trafficking, and the Catholic Church's stance on gay marriage. Members' increasingly radical actions landed several of them in jail, lead to near-fatal kidnappings in Belarus, and put many of them on trial, increasing their publicity.

On the day of the verdict in Pussy Riot's subsequent trial for "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" Femen activist Inna Shevchenko cut down a large wooden cross in central Kyiv constructed by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church on public land to memorialize victims of Stalin's policies.[163] She claimed that her act was in solidarity with Pussy Riot against their sentence of two years in prison; Pussy Riot denied any connection, as their member Maria Alekhina reported: "we may share the same immediate appearances and general stance against authoritarianism, but we look at feminism differently, especially in our actions. We have never stripped and never will. The recent action in cutting down the cross, unfortunately, does not create any feeling of solidarity."[164] Where Pussy Riot's action aimed to symbolically unravel the unification of church and state in Russia, Femen's material desecration of the cross as symbol of victims of the state discursively diffused the act across three signifiers: the nation, an abstract female body performed by Shevchenko standing in the position of the cross she destroyed, and the absent Soviet victims of Stalin's purges that the original cross was stated to have represented.[165]

[163] Elena Masyuk, "Posle priogovora," *Novaya Gazeta*, August 21, 2012.
[164] Ian Bateson, "On Femen, Pussy Riot and Crosses." October 5, 2012. KyivPost. http://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/op-ed/on-femen-pussy-riot-and-crosses-313994.html. Accessed November 10, 2012.
[165] Ibid.

As international media commentators reported that the cross had been erected in honor of victims of Stalin, Shevchenko responded in an interview with Euro Radio's Liavon Malinovsky that she was unaware of the history of the cross, spinning her blunder into its opposite—a protest against authoritarianism: "the fact is the same thing we fought against 50 years ago is happening again."[166] Yet Femen's destruction of a religious monument, differing from Pussy Riot's performance, failed to narrow public attention to state power in its local forms. Despite Pussy Riot publicly stating that they held no intention of destroying any images of the Orthodox Church and felt no solidarity with Femen, the latter group pressed forward with a "Free Riot" campaign. A wave of copycat cross fellings continued across the region. Femen's desecration of religious iconography continued to incite debate around the effectiveness of the group's claiming to undercut repression, with their critics pointing to the potential harm of destructive imagery for postitive dialogue concerning civil rights.

Figure 20: Femen "Free Riot," 2012, Kyiv

[166] Ibid.

The systematic purging of and affirmation of authority in the Pussy Riot trial, as opposed to Femen's act, signified the three women's bodies as both objects of violence and sites of resistance. The sacrificial bodies represented by Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alekhina, and Yekaterina Samutsevich in the Pussy Riot case were subjected to ongoing state and public rituals around their punishment. Anya Bernstein elaborates on these dynamics of the Pussy Riot case in its mediation between official and imagined publics: "the sovereign power sacrifices Pussy Riot to the narod, the opposition sacrifices them to the government, and the *narod* performs an apotropaic sacrifice while longing for a sublime sovereign power."[167] The connotation of "narod" meaning both nation and people, while also containing the mythic quality of both of these concepts, functioned on the level of collective sacrifice in the Pussy Riot case. Where Pussy Riot's "punk prayer" concentrated general anger at a defective regime, Shevchenko's act generalized that anger to an individual instance of transgression against the Ukrainian state as surrogate for "all religion and patriarchy." The ontological difference between these two acts renders the second less threatening to any actual political hierarchy in its performative overtures to authority. Indeed, far lighter punishment has been inflicted on Femen than on Pussy Riot. After the cross incident, Inna Shevchenko was forced to emigrate. She relocated to France, where she would later receive amnesty.[168]

Rhetorically, neither Femen nor Pussy Riot's actions were, in practice, directed at God or Christianity; they were both public, symbolic acts targeted at the state and *its* appropriation of the cross. The cross itself was erected at the time of the Orange Revolution, connecting its symbolism with a specific moment in Ukraine's history.[169] People at the time aired their social

[167] Anya Bernstein, "An Inadvertent Sacrifice: Body Politics and Sovereign Power in the Pussy Riot Affair," 1.
[168] Masyuk, Ibid.
[169] Elena Gapova and Nataliya Tchermalykh have made similar observations about Pussy Riot's "punk prayer" performance in Russian popular discourse.

anger toward an unjust election and helped to shape a lasting civic, public culture of debate by openly demonstrating the future directions they wanted their country to take. Femen formed four years later, when it had become clear that the ideals promoted during the Orange Revolution had been sold out by infighting elites concerned with maintaining their individual economic bases.

One tenet that defines Femen's aesthetics is the notion that state-symbols *should* be contested and debated. Had the cross erected in 2005 "to Stalinist repression" been voted upon and publicized, then the relatively new-looking wooden cross standing in a field would be devoid of ambivalence in its public associations. In other words, had the cross been erected through an open, public process of memorializing the past, it would have also reflected a democratic ethic in the present. As a monument to the Orange Revolution, the cross is especially upsetting to those who had hoped to ingrain such ethics in Ukrainian public life.

Though Femen's tactics missed their mark in associating themselves with Pussy Riot, they did succeed in provoking a debate over the state-religion bond in Ukraine similar to the one in Russia that raged after the latter's "punk prayer."[170] Given past struggles over the usage of the cross by the Ukrainian state, it is surprising that more critical inquiries into the nature of memorialization within Ukraine have not been raised. Shevchenko's act draws attention to the closed doors behind which it was decided to raise a cross to mark oppression under Stalin, not to mention that not all who suffered at the hands of Stalin were Christian. Ultimately, Femen's act was a public remark on memorialization and who gets included/excluded in the construction of national history.

Femen moved farther into European media spaces on the heels of the Pussy Riot Affair. This began the second major phase of Femen's global push. In the summer of 2012, the group

[170] Alek D. Epstein traced this debate early in its formation within the Russian literary and cultural spheres: "Arest uchastic gruppy 'Pussy Riot' kak katalizator hudozhestvenno-grazhdanskogo aktivizma Izdatel'stvo," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* (84): April 2012. http://www.nlobooks.ru/node/2585. Accessed February 27, 2013.

shifted their operational epicenter from Café Kupidon in downtown Kyiv to a run-down theatre in the northern Paris Goutte d'Or neighborhood, where they changed their ideological positioning. Slogans painted directly on Femen activists' bodies in black warpaint featured heavily in the group's new image and were first introduced in a demonstration with the Parisian Egyptian activist Safea Lebdi in front of the Eiffel Tower in August 2012 against the inclusion of nations practicing sharia in the Olympic Games.[171] Femen collaborated for a short time with Iranian-born activist Maryam Namazie and Safea Lebdi, though both split with the group later on. In late 2012 fierce public backlash erupted in response to Femen's anti-Islamic stance and their targeting of the mandatory wearing of the veil and sharia law.

At this point in time, Femen's new aesthetic had severed them from their original Ukrainian context and gained them many opponents. The exclusion of a plurality of women's voices from their marketing of protest both lost them credibility among feminists of all stripes, and challenged their brand's purchase on the media.[172] Nonetheless, as Femen's image grew ever more radical the group's number of followers on social media grew exponentially, expanding their rhetorical ability to enter global news streams on any number of topics.

The third phase of Femen's saga began in summer of 2013. In late August, Femen's Paris headquarters were burned by an unidentified arsonist. The group posted online that in Kyiv the Ukrainian Secret Services (SBU) had increased monitoring around their activities. A few weeks later, Anna Hutsol, Alexandra Shevchenko, and Roman Zviazsky were physically assaulted and beaten on the streets in Kyiv by unknown men they claimed were connected with state security

[171] Safea Lebdi is a founding member of the French women's rights organization "Ni putes, ni soumises" (Neither Whores nor Submissives) and is a politician in the Green Party.
[172] In May 2013, a trial was held in Tunisia involving a young woman associated with Femen named Amina Tyler for posting nude photos of herself on Twitter. Femen activists protested topless outside the central courthouse in Tunis. The event went nearly unnoticed. A Facebook group called Muslim Women Against Femen formed later that year in response to Femen's Paris activities.

services. Yanukovych's decision to begin the process of E.U. Association in November 2013 had long coincided with an overall increase in the domestic monitoring and targeting of protest in Ukraine. The group then announced plans to cease all activity in Ukraine.[173] The high level of violence directed at Femen, combined with the group's maintaining a very ambiguous public image, only served to further position the group within the global mass media at a pivotal juncture in Ukraine's history.

Virtual and Real Spaces

Femen often modify the physical spaces of their protests within the frames of their photos as though they are tagging information in virtual space. This affords them the ability to attach to media stories. In the process, their aesthetic becomes a polysemic sign for dissent within the rhetoric of news media.[174] A female nude on the revolutionary square has long been associated in Western art with democracy in the figure of the Marianne. This figure has provided Femen's audiences – supporters and opponents alike – with a trope that differs from the prostitute in its historical specificity and revolutionary associations. This trope is one of many other signifiers in an emerging virtual rhetoric involving the nude female body in digital protest texts.[175]

In Western culture markets, both Femen and Pussy Riot have emerged within the legacy that drives a much a larger media economy tied to the historical trajectory of the Cold War Soviet dissident in familiar twentieth century narratives on civil disobedience. By creating the illusion of a massive global presence, Femen often appears larger than life. In our information

[173] Interfax-Ukraine, "FEMEN says their male activist brutally beaten up by security services." Kyiv Post. July 25, 2013. http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/femen-says-their-male-activist-brutally-beaten-up-by-security-services-327494.html. Accessed October 11, 2013.
[174] Brett Lunceford, 138; 141.
[175] In July 2013 French President François Hollande unveiled a drawing of Inna Shevchenko, created by artist Olivier Ciappa, as the annual Marianne image for French stamps. The selection sparked controversy not only among French feminists, but the wider public as well: "Femen's Inna Shevchenko Inspired France's Marianne Stamp," *BBC News Europe*, July 15, 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23320741. Accessed January 10, 2015.

paradigm, in which the accrual of capital through the economy of images and text online rapidly transverses national borders, Femen's directing attention to themselves in a controversial, and especially in terms of their appropriation of a mainstream body image, a particularly unorthodox "feminist" manner is, in many ways, a rhetorical publicity game. Brett Lunceford has analyzed the polysemic rhetoric of the body and its deployment across four distinct case studies of nude activist groups in the U.S. in the 2000s. Emphasizing the viewer in the transaction between performer and audience, he writes: "While naked, it is more difficult to manage one's projected identity. The naked body is left at the mercy of others for interpretation."[176] Lunceford cites Laura Verdi on celebrity bodies: "Thanks to technology, the physical body has been liberated from the power of the social body: the former has been deified in order to make the latter a symbolic object of undisputed media power."[177] Femen's performances run similar interpretive risks in the erotic charges that ultimately accompany their posing topless in the stances of models for glossy cover photos.

But how much of this risk is unique to Femen? The cultural registers that structure desire in pictures of nude bodies are intertwined with the same social attitudes that shape state policies on sex. Eric Naiman has observed in the Soviet case, but also more generally, that "sex, in particular, presents problems for utopian mentalities" and that it is "relentlessly metonymic, predicated upon fantasies of contact and contiguity." He cites Althusser's definition of ideology as an "overdetermination of the real by the imaginary and of the imaginary by the real" to explain how sexual fantasies create obstacles for politics predicated on absolutes.[178] Femen plays with the cultural registers within the rhetoric of nudity and its scripts for producing female celebrities into subjects of an imagined social body. In a media culture in which nudity is a basic

[176] Lunceford,138.
[177] Ibid, 141.
[178] Naiman, 15.

requirement for maintaining celebrity status—in tabloid exposé, accidentally leaked porn videos, onstage foibles or blunders resembling Marilyn Monroe's infamous pose—perhaps female nudity itself has been so thoroughly commodified that it can no longer shock. The amateurish quality to Femen's outpourings contains a verisimilitude that reaches across these genres in its depictions of the sex-power myth in entertainment and politics. In this sense, their protest-performances resemble the genre of reality television, in which audiences are provoked to question how much of the production is staged, rather than spontaneous.

Dystopic portrayals of disaster moved to the center of Central European art in the wake of totalitarianism and war in the twentieth century. The Viennesse Actionists employed blood and ritual in scenes of horror in attempting to depict history acting itself out upon humans. Hermann Nitsch's public reenactment of a crucifixion put the cross in the context of a past war, but also brought Central European performance art into conversation with global counterculture amid the international oil crises of the 1970s. Women Actionists such as Valie EXPORT exposed their bodies to confront what some described as lingering Nazi ideologies in Austrian society. Her guerilla public performances gained worldwide attention and sparked a national campaign against her. Carolee Schneeman in New York adapted these militaristic and ritualized images of violence to represent how language acts upon women's bodies and subjectivities. Artists deployed the figure of the female nude to varying effects to critique the standardization of labor, reproduction, and other outcomes of the nuclear family ideal. Painting directly on their bodies, second-wave feminists in many Western contexts sought to communicate the psychological effects of social issues directly related to systems of regulation, and even violence enacted upon women's bodies through abortion legislation, the criminalization of rape, welfare laws, fair hiring practices, urban segregation, etc. Dynamism in EXPORT's work problematizes

the center/margin in her photos. Women's live bodies stand in as sculptures, troubling the regulation of space, and the dichotomies in renderings of the female nude as virgin/whore.

Femen's nude public transgressions employ twentieth century visual languages in ways that contrast the mortality of the body and physical trauma with the sublime nature of grand historical narratives. Eric Naiman reveals how the Bolshevik and NEP era utopian literary and historical texts that became foundational to the state each fetishized narratives about sex: the collective body, castration, penetration, trauma, and other visceral themes served a common interpretive thread about the role of the individual within society. Femen have incorporated raw meat, gas masks, fake blood, animal bones, chainsaws and other props into their appearances. The Actionist threads in their disaster scenarios point to the destructiveness in rhetorics driving the media contexts in which the body appears. In this case, EXPORT has installed herself into the built environment, while Shevchenko poses in place of the cross that she has overturned. The former action differs from the latter in that Shevchenko's is an action calibrated for the Internet and its global news media flows.

Figure 21: Valie EXPORT "Encirclement," 1976

III. The Body and the Information Commodity

"Sextremism"

Thus, in Femen's stagings the body appears as both a material and an ideological form. In March 2012, three members of Femen traveled to Istanbul, where they dressed up as victims of acid attacks by painting fake scars on their skin. The protest was the first time in which Femen performed as Muslim women. They carried signs that said "Death to Barbarians" yelling statements such as "Asian cocktails" and named the protest after sulfuric acid, "H2SO4." They reported on their blog that they were protesting violence against women in "all totalitarian regimes."[179] The protest's religious iconography and location near Istanbul's central mosque earned the group a night in jail, forced deportation, and suspended transit visas. Days after the event, Femen posted a series of black-and-white photographs on their blog showing the three activists involved in the protest in their full costumes. Two things set this series of photos apart from Femen's past photo campaigns. The first is a photo showing Aleksandra Shevchenko wearing a hijab, completely covered except for her scar-painted face. The second are images of Aleksandra and her sister Inna applying and removing their fake scars. Although Femen activists did not change the color of their skin in this protest nor have they done so elsewhere, the privilege they give *Europeanness* was clearly displayed in both their slogans attacking Asia and their visually maintaining the fact that they are able to remove their scars. For them violence remained a performance.

The photo in Figure 24 was taken just before the protest and generalizes conflict in the Middle East by indexing patriarchy in Turkey with a picture that more closely resembles Iran. Aleksandra's scarred face estranges the surrealism of civilian violence within the "theatres" of

[179] Femen Website, March 10, 2012.

war. The color tones and camera angle replicate early-mid twentieth century documentary photography and its claims to authenticate the past. In the street protest that took place after this photo was taken, Femen's slogans linked acid attacks to an inherently Asiatic patriarchy, implicating viewers in a voyeuristic visual system, one that provoked audiences and authorities to immediately reject Femen. The group was arrested and deported from Turkey.

In the wake of the protest, the "backstage" photo of Shevchenko completely veiled and wearing the (temporary) scars of another's suffering, taken by a Turkish photographer, was posted online to Femen's blog beneath the other media photos of the group protesting on the square. The verisimilitude created by the "fake" pseudo-documentary photo dislocates viewers from the first protest that took place in real time, and its physical space. The tension between the two photos emerges in virtual space, further compounded by their circulation together with thousands of other photos in networks of images associated with the impact of war on human life in the Middle East. The contrast between the exposed Femen activist in the street and the fully covered body in the second photo challenges audiences to question their responses to the regulation of nudity in different venues. The street protest is easy to reject offhand because of the way the activists use their slim, white female bodies to project internalized Western fears about the Other. The second photo provokes one to recoil from the imitation of another's suffering. We are poised to question the mediation of the camera moving between the two shots. What are the specific elements that make these photos resemble similar images published in *NYT*, *National Geographic*, and a host of other journals throughout the 2000s? Alienating viewers from the site of the violence performed on actual women's bodies during the Iraq war makes visible the conditions and media mechanisms by which the black veil has become a symbol of suffering. The offense within the photos is in itself a critical offense.

In Figure 23 a woman holds her wounded son in her arms in a mosque used as a field hospital by demonstrators against the rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh during clashes in Sanaa, Yemen on October 15, 2011.[180] The photographer, Samuel Aranda, took the photo while working on assignment for *The New York Times*. Another distressing irony in the Femen portrait is that feminist demonstrators in the Ukrainian feminist group Ofenzywa, unaffiliated with Femen, would organize field hospitals in churches during the clashes on Maidan against Viktor Yanukovych's regime two years later.[181] The photo became a prototype for Femen's later aesthetic shift that would take the parody of the media trope of the suffering Middle East to a new intensity.

Figure 22: 55th Annual International World Press Photo of the Year, 2011, by Samuel Aranda of NYT[182]

Figure 23: Femen Member Aleksandra Shevchenko in Istanbul, 2012, by Ozan Köse[183]

[180] Joscelyn Jurich discusses this photo as an example of the objectification of non-Western cultures in contemporary journalism in her article entitled after her critique of WJT Mitchell, "What Do Subjects Want?"
[181] Sarah D. Phillips outlines Ofenzywa's emergency strategizing, contact with journalists, and eventual transformation into two separate factions during and after the clashes on Maidan in 2013-14 in "The Women's Squad in Ukraine's Protests: Feminism, Nationalism, and Militarism on the Maidan."
[182] World Press Photo Website. http://www.worldpressphoto.org/people/samuel-aranda. Accessed May 20, 2012. Kerri MacDonald and David Furst, "A Painterly World Press Photo Winner." February 10, 2012. *New York Times*. http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/a-painterly-world-press-photo-winner/. Accessed May 20, 2012.
[183] Femen Website. Accessed October 11, 2011.

After moving abroad, Femen continued their marketing campaign with increasingly radical depictions of physical violence and anti-religious sentiment they termed "sextremism." Slogans painted directly on the body in black warpaint became key to this new image, in addition to an overall shift in the language, stances, and public image of themselves as a military squadron of women training at their "feminist camp" for a style of protest they referred to as "an information war."[184] Anger, militarism, WWII-era political symbols, blood, and poses borrowed from hardcore porn all meet in a sleek, streamlined advertisement that could have been lifted from the pages of a corporate marketing scheme.

The radical alterity of this aesthetic, on one level, points to the fact that identity categories are in themselves reductive and lead to disturbing consequences when taken to extremes. Femen's initial activities in Paris included Iranian-born activists Maryam Namazie and Safea Lebdi, though both split with the group later on. In late 2012 fierce public backlash erupted in response to Femen's depictions of Islam and their targeting of the mandatory wearing of the veil and sharia law. A Facebook group called Muslim Women Against Femen formed. In May 2013, a trial was held in Tunisia involving a young woman associated with Femen named Amina Tyler for posting nude photos of herself on Twitter. Femen activists protested topless outside the central courthouse in Tunis. The event went nearly unnoticed. By this point, it became clear that Femen's "sextremism" had severed them from their original Ukrainian context and gained them many opponents, even while their increasingly radical rhetoric expanded their ability to enter global media streams on any number of topics.

[184] Hutsol described her group's strategy this way in early 2011, Personal Interview, Kyiv. Later, Inna Shevchenko repeated this sentiment on Ukrainian and French national news in 2012. Mie Birk Jensen has documented her experiences as a trainee in Femen's Paris "feminist camp," in which she describes in detail the media apparatuses in the group's performative strategies. See: Jensen, "The Body Theatre: An Analysis of FEMEN's Feminist Activism."

On the one hand, the affinities Femen assumed with Muslim minorities by adopting the position of "suffering" under the veil satirized western mass media images of the same tenor in a metanarrative on Post-Iraq war reportage. On the other, their sextremist image played into the selfsame ideologies about "rescuing" Muslim women that they attempted to unravel. The group's depictions of Muslim women's struggles lost them credibility in the eyes of journalists who reported on counter-demonstrations by women in dissent with the anti-religious rhetoric Femen proffered. The situation proved that in terms of realpolitics, the language of the Femen brand was not calibrated nor subtley expressive enough to avoid the backlash caused by possibly unintended meanings. Femen suddenly came to an impasse in their purchase on the media.

And while Femen's politics would continue to play out as a virtual happening within a complex web of dissenting voices, their image became more and more deeply intertwined with the same media surfaces that mask and restrict women in the public sphere. As a satire on some of the bleakest aspects of war journalism in the 2000s, the group's aesthetic collapsed into a parody of their own activism. With the invention of "sextremism," Femen exceeded itself.

Feminist Media Performance

After Femen's move abroad, the nationally-inflected pop rhetoric from the Orange Revolution completely receded from their overall design. Feminist scholars continued to vocalize concerns about Femen's topless images being posed for the male gaze, noting where the transmission of a social message through female nudity risks being lost on the consumer.[185] An important international exchange of information became channeled through the Femen brand as a platform for debate about the meanings of feminism within the venue of the mass media. In their overtures to feminism, Femen stakes their public persona on an idea that has largely negative

[185] Elena Gapova and Maria Dmytriyeva critiqued Femen early on from a Marxist perspective in pointing out members' class privilege (Gapova; Dmytriyeva 2011).

connotations in the postcommunist context as an imposed term, because of its dual etymological roots in Soviet ideology and the West. Along with this, their performances can reveal much about the translation of civic terms, specifically in viewing what passes as acceptable or legitimate protest, versus what is taken for having no social worth simply because it is ridiculous or nonsensical on the surface.

Organizing around the social effects of popular imagery, early feminist media activists developed specialized techniques to avert audiences' attention away from collective mythology, trivialized clichés, and accrued negative connotations regarding women. In one example entitled, *In Mourning and in Rage* (Los Angeles 1977), roughly ten women of Ariadne Social Art Network completely covered themselves in black cloth and stood in a row in front of the Los Angeles Civic Center to undermine "images of mourners as old, powerless women" upon the occasion of a rape case then under consideration.[186] The difference between these early media actions and Femen is the latter's generally negative public reception. This difference elicits important questions about message and medium. The controversy Femen have elicited, and the adoption of their aesthetic by oppositional groups give evidence that their approaches are symptomatic of deeper global tensions.

Femen's hyper-emotive displays are engineered to appear spontaneous both online and in real time. Anna Munster's idea of "digital embodiment" can be useful for thinking about how this kind of digital "protest" disrupts familiar codes in producing consumer-audiences cued by commodity, image, and news technology. Digital embodiment is "an arena across which material and incorporeal forces will continue to engender further connection and differentiation," and "information culture can lead us from aesthetic to ethical considerations of new media. The issue is no longer one involving just body-computer relations, but one involving bodies networked in

[186] Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowicz, Ibid.

information culture as its flows disconnect and connect the heterogeneity of embodied lives."[187] A productive critique of Femen necessitates an approach able to critique the commodification of the female body in their design, but also, to account for the processes at work in the technologies they employ, given the role of digital information in signifying bodies in public discourse. [188] This approach foregrounds the sensorial means by which we inhabit and interpret meanings and patterns in text, whether in digital or analog mediums. The instability of Femen's reception collapses any attempt to "read" a critical narrative into their project, seek in them a stable genre, or account for their intentions as artists or activists (or both).

Figure 24: "In Mourning and in Rage," 1977, Los Angeles, Ariadne feminist media performance collective

The preoccupation with *violence* underlying Femen's online visual texts is cast within the same frame as the scripts that underlie other news images. Either completely covering, or stripping the body bare, makes it easier to point to the binaries within which visual narratives in

[187] Anna Munster, 20-23.
[188] This approach also builds on Donna Haraway's initial forays into gender and machines, virtuality, and the material conditions of information culture. Ibid, 23.

popular news images operate. Femen's scrawling black text directly on their body collapses the newsprint text completely into the visual image. The outlandish and alienating offense in the protest slogans of their first Paris protest, where they debuted their body texts, such as "Muslim Women Let's Get Naked" and "Naked War" parry with the written text of news reportage and familiar headlines depicting the West's relationship with Middle Eastern nations over the past decade. The visual text remains in the realm of parody. By contrast, the written text is sarcastic and points to the reductionist processes that underlie major news stories in their commoditization and transmission of complex issues into tiny bits of information that can be consumed rapidly.

Rather than conveying a unified message, Femen's media stunts collapse the border between politics and art, thereby momentarily subordinating the public sphere to its own doctrines. Polish art critic Piotr Piotrówski terms this tendency in postwar Poland, Ukraine and Russia "agoraphilia," describing a certain anxiety, even fetishization, around the borderline between art and politics, action and thought, and the actual and the imagined. In these instances, an artist acts upon a deeper desire to shape public life: "to perform critical and design functions for the sake of and within the social space."[189] In this sense, street protest has a rich history in the former Eastern Bloc and post-Soviet regions, where art and artistic communities have often functioned as a haven for reinventing the very idea of a dissident culture.

Femen is complicit in both commoditization and protest processes. Their design nearly completely subjects the text to the image by modifying it into "bad" text: offensive and ridiculous slogans, misspelled words, and unclear referents expunge the text within the image from credibility. This in turn complicates Femen's potential for gaining any actual constituency. The tabloid is juxtaposed with feature documentary to elicit a highly marketable media product, without any outside references to its actual context. The extremism in "sextremism" falls apart as

[189] Piotrówski, 50.

a movement or a "Naked Jihad!" based in a terminology that, in any truly critical assessment of its meanings, could only be considered blatantly racist. Rather, the more lasting shock in the extremism of Femen's "sextremism" is the fact that in actuality they did not invent it themselves. What emerges in the circulation of their fleshly images of news text written on their exposed flesh is the news, not themselves. The irony becomes most apparent over time and across outlets, as news stories pick up the image and report on Femen as an actual protest movement, even while in printed text below the image, their online audiences post their denunciations of the idea that Femen is representative of any actual public interest. Dissenting from Femen, these same audiences position themselves in a conflictual relationship with the broader news scripts that the Femen sextremist image interpolates.

In this way, the misspelled, hyperbolic, war-paint text scrawled on Femen members' torsos puts on display the crude reductionism in information commoditization. They become the jesters that point to the tropes underlying our media consumption, and how this consumption shapes public life. The extreme tropes underlying major news images are more often than not subsumed by text, oftentimes diluting the obvious critical offense in the visual scripts that circulate alongside them. In this sense, Femen is more visual than textual. Their exposing the hidden meanings in news texts through flesh cannot fully address the impact of those news stories on actual bodies, a fact that both gives Femen's virtual body rhetoric media traction, but also elicits troubling images upon which feminists of multiple stripes have converged in their critiques.

Figure 25: First Femen Paris Protest, August 2012[190]

Insofar as Femen layers national and religious references over pleas for universal women's rights, their protest aesthetic ignores actual women's diverse voices by collapsing cultural difference into a monolithic patriarchy. This transversal of cultural difference structurally resembles Bhabha's idea that in postmodernity "extraterritorial and cross-cultural initiations" happen in "interstitial" spaces that estrange, dislocate, and relocate cultural struggles for self-recognition—a process he calls "the unhomely."[191] He refers to the "hybridity of the history of sexuality and race" to illustrate how "social differences are not simply given to experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project—at once a vision and a construction—that takes you 'beyond' yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political *conditions* of the present."[192] These conditions are about questioning cultural borders and how

[190] Kenzo Tribouillard. Photograph in Barbara Brownie, "Naked Protest and the Revolutionary Body," *The Guardian*, January 15 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/costume-and-culture/2014/jan/15/naked-protest-revolutionary-body. Accessed March 17, 2015.
[191] Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*, 772.
[192] Ibid, 766.

membership is determined. For feminism, these conditions are also about patriarchy as it shapes the moving borders around public/private divides: "By making visible the forgetting of the 'unhomely' moment in civil society, feminism specifies the patriarchal, gendered nature of civil society and disturbs the symmetry of private and public which is now shadowed, or uncannily doubled, by the differences of genders which does not map onto the private and public, but becomes disturbingly supplemental to them."[193] The core claim here is that struggles over public/private domains hold universal value for feminists, and that feminism is in itself a cultural axis capable of unifying and refracting postcolonial culture(s) as they come into contact.

Perhaps Femen assumes too much by universalizing oppression in an imagined cross-cultural patriarchy. Their overidentifications with an undefined Other, broadly framed through the lenses of Western stereotypes of the East, combine tropes of the prostitute with images of "oppressed" Muslim women in virtual space in ways that respond to more subtle imagery in deeply embedded anxieties about national belonging on the European continent.

Intersectional feminist critiques based in postcolonial theory aver that marginalized groups who view each other from within subordinated histories often negotiate affinities that blur race, gender, class, and other categories as they are constructed by the mainstream.[194] Ukrainian scholar Larisa Lissyutkina situates Femen in a struggle over the collective national body: "The antinational aspects of Femen's performances are marked by parodic folkloric garlands that do not refer to the commercial or the glamorous as objects of social criticism, but to the imagined, collective national body . . ."[195] In Lissyutkina's analysis, Femen's juxtaposition of Iranian culture with "parodic folkloric [Ukrainian] garlands" is a double entendre on Ukrainian

[193] Ibid, 773–4.
[194] This is one thesis that emerged from Nancy Fraser's critique of Habermas and subsequent feminist engagements with critical theory in the 1990s.
[195] Larisa Lisyutkina, "Fenomen 'Femen': Malyj Vybuchovyj Prystrij Made in Ukraine," 19.

nationalism in which the underlying terms of West/East are deliberated upon and left open to definition. Lissyutkina describes Femen's imitation of Iranian women as a device to shock domestic audiences at its inappropriateness. Given Ukraine's recent statehood, economic infrastructure heavily linked to the Russian Federation, and language debates, it is a space of lingering hegemonies often undisclosed within the public sphere that, nonetheless, exert psychological and political pressure on the daily lives of citizens.[196]

Where Lissyutkina points to a generalized notion of women's oppression, not Iran, as the true referential subjects in Femen's early performance, she sources protest as a trans-historical site in which colonized subjects come to recognize themselves and each other as marginal subjects. The assumptions here are that Iranian and Ukrainian women both inhabit postcolonial subject positions and that gender difference can be universalized across cultures. If we agree with these two points, Femen's mimicry of Muslim women's own struggles could easily be interpreted as overly victimizing Muslim women as passive subjects who would somehow benefit from a representative Ukrainian demonstration of women's rights. Anna Hutsol's comments seem to confirm Lissyutkina's observation: Hutsol overidentifies with Muslim women, and she is interested in the Muslim world as a point of reference, or comparison, for illustrating duplicity within EuroAtlantic self-idealizations of civil liberties.

This necessitates a closer look at the civilizational messages underlying politics in the post-Orange period. Broader trends in Ukrainian literature and the arts began to cast doubt on Ukraine's autonomy after the failure of the Orange Revolution in 2005. Best known for publicizing a feminist, postcolonial perspective in Ukraine is the writer Oksana Zabuzhko.[197] A

[196] While scholars contest whether to describe post-Soviet Ukraine as postcolonial, I generally agree with the critics, such as Vitaly Chernetsky, whose diagnosis of postcommunism reflects an instance of non-classical postcoloniality.
[197] Her novel, *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* was once included in a photo on Femen's blog of one of their members being released from jail. In *Fieldwork*, the protagonist Zolotse remarks to her American colleague and friend Donna

key figure in Ukraine's Orange Revolution, Zabuzhko claims that many responses to her writing overlook her appeals to think more broadly about feminism. She writes that many social concerns framed as women's issues are actually symptoms of Ukraine's greater struggle in learning how to inherit the bleaker sides of its communist history, what she calls "a system of social lies extending to the point of mental rape, affecting both men and women."[198] The imprint of national history on the colonial subject's psyche takes on an isolationist tone in Zabuzhko's work. Femen's public spectacles, by contrast, are experiments at finding affinities between themselves and other marginalized groups in overstatements that expose systemic forms of oppression. As a mass-media experiment, Femen's obfuscations deconstruct the missionizing rhetoric of the West during the Iraq War. Precisely because Femen is so ridiculous, their dystopic "sextremism" remains far removed from political realism of any kind. Their overtures to patriarchy are about consumers of mass media and the imagery of suffering Muslim women employed within it.

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that Ukrainian women are doubly subjugated in their support for men who struggle for the national idea. "The conceptual approach: women's struggle for their rights. What can I tell you, Donna-dearest? That we were raised by men fucked from all ends every which way? That later we ourselves screwed the same kind of guys, and that in both cases they were doing to us what others, the others, had done to them? And that we accepted them and loved them as they were, because not to accept them was to go over to the others, the other side? And that our only choice, therefore, was and still remains between victim and executioner: between nonexistence and an existence that slowly kills you?" Oksana Zabuzhko, *Polovi Doslidzhennya Z Ukrayinskoho Seksu*.

[198] Zabuzhko articulates systems of patriarchy within Ukraine in terms of male expressions of eternal youth, a notion closely connected with utopia: "For you see, prior to the appearance of *Fieldwork* the voices heard in our literature were predominantly male, and misogyny, either overt or latent, became part of a fashionable writer's make-up—all those guys playing the role of 'eternally young' macho boys, to the cheers of the same 'eternally young' macho critics. . . . The male protagonist of the novel, 'the genius painter' (a fact, by the way, that the heroine honestly believes—her own poetic 'genius' doesn't matter that much!), belongs, undoubtedly and recognizably, to the same type. That the book uncovered behind this 'invincible' make-up a deeply hidden insecurity and social helplessness was, of course, taken as a feminist 'cultural answer.' But that was not my principal message. What I attacked was, basically, a system of social lies extending to the point of mental rape, and affecting both men and women. That is why I don't divide my readers along male/female lines. I don't believe that intelligence is gender-specific—women, too, know quite well how to protect patriarchal standards with the utmost bile against their 'dissident' sisters." Halyna Hryn, "A Conversation with Oksana Zabuzhko." *Agni Online*. Issue 53: 2001. http://www.bu.edu/agni/interviews/print/2001/zabuzhko-hryn.html. Accessed March 25, 2012.

Overidentification

Femen's sextremist image and its crude depictions of the Other are rooted in some of their earliest protests. The first of Femen's public appearances in which the group referenced a nation other than Ukraine took place on September 21, 2008 in front of the Turkish embassy in Kyiv. A dozen Femen members dressed up as nurses in smudged makeup and high pink heels and paraded in front of the Turkish embassy with slogans targeting Turkish "sexpats." In an interview following the protest, Anna Hutsol stated: "Foreign men should simply stay out of Ukraine if they cannot restrain themselves."[199] The tinges of xenophobia in the singling out of Turkish men by Femen was treated causally by the press and, naturally, provoked many responses of disapproval and skepticism from the Ukrainian public.[200] In the five years following the protest in front of the Turkish embassy, Femen highlighted several more Middle Eastern nations. On November 11, 2010, five Femen members tore off their shirts at a Ukrainian-Iranian cultural event at Kyiv's Ukrainian House convention center. The event was sponsored by the Iranian embassy and included dignitaries from both countries. During the protest Femen shouted slogans such as "Don't kill women!" in response to the trial of Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani, an Iranian woman in Tehran sentenced to death by stoning whose case gained international attention. Referencing the same case, fully dressed Femen activists gathered in front of the Iranian embassy in Kyiv later that week: while holding banners featuring similar slogans, they prostrated themselves on the ground in imitation of Islamic prayer.[201]

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[199] Yuliya Popova, "Feminine Femen Targets 'Sexpats,'" *Kyiv Post*, September 25, 2008. http://www.kyivpost.com/news/nation/detail/29898/. Accessed November 10, 2008.
[200] The interview also included Femen's citing of unconfirmed factual data statistically noting Turkish men as the primary consumers of sex tourism in Kyiv: "Together with the Institute of Political, Sociological and Marketing Research, Femen polled 1,200 female students in Kyiv. Their findings suggest that nearly 70 percent of those polled were proposed sex for money and most offers came from Turkish men." Ibid.
[201] "Sify News: Topless Ukrainian Feminists Protest Iranian Woman's Death Sentence," November 11, 2012, http://www.kyivpost.com/news/ukraine/detail/89650/. Accessed November 20, 2012.

In a demonstration on June 16, 2011, topless Femen protesters donned hijabs beneath Ukrainian garlands and circled the Saudi Arabian embassy in cars shouting, "Let's drive!" Femen's blog post that day listed the protest as being "in solidarity" with Saudi women, whom Hutsol stated were planning their own protest against the Saudi regime's ban on women's driver's licenses.[202]

Figure 26: Femen Saudi Protest June 16, 2011, Kyiv[203]

The posters Femen used in the Saudi protest read like a laundry list of stereotypes associated with Western imperialist attitudes toward the Middle East: "No men's' dictatorship!" "Cars for women, camels for men!" "Wild morals!" one poster featured commentary suggestive of the impotency of the petro-state — an unerect phallus dripping into the word "oil." All of the posters in the protest were in English and Russian, complicating Femen's intended audiences. Within this matrix of shifting signifiers, as elsewhere, the most consistent messages in Femen's protest narrative are ironic, sideways glances at discourses that tie modernization to Europeanization. Semantically, this protest equated patriarchy with power, and power with petro politics. It also included references to Ukraine's own geopolitics. Mounting a critique of the oil

[202] In writing about Femen for the Ukrainian scholarly journal *Krytyka,* gender scholars Olga Plakhotnik and Maria Mayerchyk point to these Saudi and Iranian protests as the turning point when Femen first gained serious international attention: "For two years they had tried to overcome their own sex appeal in order to force us to hear their voices and take their words as a challenge," 9. Transl. Jessica Zychowicz.
[203] Femen Website, Accessed June 10, 2011.

industry from within Ukraine – the main transit country for Russian natural gas into the E.U. and a key supplier of raw iron ore and coal to Moscow— was an affront to the Ukrainian Parliament's proposals at the time to sell off natural resources to foreign corporations. Femen's connecting the dots between oil, automobiles, and women's civil rights through imagistic photos of civilian struggle also conjures up a critique of corruption. Their references to the fuel economy mirrored popular anger in Ukraine at the time over oligarchs' ownership over heavy industry and their squandering the country's resources for personal profit.

Thus, Femen's explicit demonstrations, in both their local form, and later, bleak portraits of a post-Iraq media world order, grapple with women's subjugation in a specific historical moment and its shaping of race and gender. Identity categories function loosely in Femen's protests and are grounded in an ontology of oppression anchored in the connections they draw between themselves and sex tourism. The development of the group's aesthetic, over time, reveals a blurring of race and gender. Feminist debates over the ways Femen's nude performances can easily blend into mainstream entertainment parallel critiques in a larger body of scholarship on the performance of ethnic identities and social emancipation. Correspondences between racial masquerades and political upheaval were also present in the blurred intersections of race and gender in cabaret, burlesque, and Orientalized Salome harem characters throughout Europe during the twentieth century.[204] The limits of such genres as agentive sites for social resistance have been addressed in multiple volumes on how their stagings as popular comedy troubled their reception. Similarly, Audre Lorde's famous words that one cannot "dismantle the master's house with the tools of the master" could be applied to the way Femen uses the tools of mainstream media to criticize the commodification of women as sex products.[205] In Femen's

[204] Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism*.
[205] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*.

case, the "tools of the master" become the language of global corporate marketing that panders to mainstream consumerist appetites, a language deeply implicated in the naked female torso Femen uses to portray subjugation. As a satire on the global sex industry cast in the language of that very industry, the framing of Femen's performances echo early Salomes in their exoticism.

Femen does not perform color, though they do employ racial tropes. Annemarie Bean suggests the term "race change" as a point of departure for examining transgressions of gender that parallel the performance of color on the stage.[206] Unlike the concept of "passing," which usually means "passing for white," a "race change" encompasses a more socially expansive "traversing of racial boundaries, racial imitation or impersonation, cross-racial mimicry or mutability."[207] Femen's "cross-racial mimicry, or mutability" circulates in a composite of race and gender that is "white" in color, but blurs ethnic and national identifications by referencing violence and sexual primitivism through the figure of the prostitute. Within racial crossovers onstage on the whole we find negotiations of gender and sexuality that almost always take place in frameworks dealing with primitivism and the nation.[208] Femen's performance as "feminist" prostitutes—an archetype always linked to sexual primitivism— can be traced to early-mid twentieth century European discourses embodied in theatre stagings of the figure of Salome: "Primitivism evolved into myth, often referred to as Orientalism, with the common thread being the symbolically sexualized representation of the nonwhite body . . . the perception of the prostitute 'merged with the perception of the black' and this perception created the 'commonplace' notion that the so-called primitive black woman 'was associated with unbridled sexuality.'"[209] Femen adapts the figure of the prostitute's culturally specific and complex sexual

[206] Annemarie Bean "Black Minstrelsy and Double Inversion, Circa 1890," 176.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Kibler, "The Corking Girls: White Women's Racial Masquerades in Vaudeville," *Rank Ladies*.
[209] Krasner, "Black Salome: Exoticism, Dance, and Racial Myths." 175.

associations to a generalized, racialized marginality that they claim to overturn. Yet Femen's caricatures, while inverting some of the primitivism assigned to female sexuality more generally, also absorb all aspects of these narratives, including the position of the colonizer, in the affiliations Femen's performances over assume between themselves and Muslim women "against patriarchy."

The mutability of civic, national, and ethnic stereotypes in Femen's provocative rhetoric retains some of the undercurrents to the older Soviet operative term "narodnost" used to describe the nation-state. Alaina Lemon has pointed out in her work on Roma performance in Russia that the Soviet deployment of the term "narodnost" (ethnicity/ peoplehood) differed only slightly from the term "natsional'nost'" (nationality/ ethnicity). She notes that while neither term expressly meant "race," both terms included concepts tied to race: "Soviets, like most everyone else, did rely, in both daily life and in the execution of policy, on external signs (physical or not) to infer internal, biological or inherited essences and to explain behavior, culture, and social position . . . However firmly the Soviet state declared itself against racism, it purged neither racial discrimination nor racial categories."[210] Femen's approximations of "cross-racial mimicry" within the frame of a feminist protest (as they define their own project) is a "race change" that highlights a Ukrainian identity inclusive of an Other in their claims to a common "commodity fetishization" of femaleness.[211] As Ukrainian feminists have pointed out, this kind of parody in Femen's work affords the possibility of replicating ethnic stereotypes.[212] The crude airing of sexual and racial stereotypes in public that Femen engages in blurs the boundaries

[210] In a footnote to this excerpt Alaina Lemon includes the following: " . . . See also Hirsch 1997 on the debates among experts responsible for devising and compiling the Soviet census over whether to include 'physical type' as a criteria for constructing the category 'nationality.' The recurrence of these debates at high levels suggests that race was indeed a salient 'commonsense' category," *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism*, 63–64.
[211] Krasner, Ibid, 176.
[212] Maria Dmytriyeva, "Femen Na Tli Hrudej," 20–23.

between criticism and entertainment. The rhetorical collapse in the affinities that Femen draws between themselves and other minority subject-positions produces what W.J.T. Mitchell has termed "a surplus of meaning" in which there is no clear path of identification for the spectator as multiple referents between juxtaposed images overlap in illogical ways. The result is not dissimilar from sexploitation films of the seventies. In the end, the spectator is impinged upon to question the validity of the performance: "the unreliability of the narrator to keep all the referents of the story straight reveals cracks in the system, because exploitative systems cannot allow for a story about being exploited."[213] The story becomes about the medium.

IV. Rhetorical Scripts

Genre—Dystopian Satire

Femen's performances interpolate a non-specific totalitarian dystopia in which national experience is depicted as a byproduct of historical trauma. For example, after the earthquake in Japan in March 2011, Femen staged a series of actions in which they used props and costumes to signify themselves as Japanese male warriors. They then documented themselves performing martial initiation ceremonies in a tearoom and on the streets of Kyiv carrying slogans addressing the victims of the earthquake. One banner read, "Praise to Those Who Defeated the Dragon!" (хвала победившим дракона!). This performance was later rendered as a film poster linking the aftermath of the earthquake to the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster of the same year. In a cross-referencing of signs, this connection extended to the short film Femen produced of themselves exploring the Chernobyl disaster zone in gasmasks and flower headdresses. At one point in that performance they carried a banner of the Japanese flag superimposed onto the

[213] W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want*, 25.

Ukrainian flag. Another banner contained both flags within the group's Cyrillic icon "Ф," while a third featured a death's head.

Their juxtaposition of the Ukrainian and Japanese flags compares the Chernobyl accident to the horror of the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima; placing these next to the former symbol of the Nazi party, a skull-and-cross bones that is *also* the international sign for poison. The location of the activists' bodies in real time in the protest is also important. Putting their bodies at risk at the *actual site* of a past nuclear meltdown, the image provokes questions about the present and its political stakes for human life. The protest is happening within Ukraine, it is about Ukraine, and the Ukrainian flag is given precedence. The overall message is anti-war in depicting the consequences in the possibility of poison, fascism, and meltdown, echoed in the signs on the fence behind the women and their warnings: "Контроль" (STOP) and "Небезпека" (DANGER).

Figure 27: Femen Chernobyl protest. March 2011, Kyiv[214]

[214] Femen Website, Accessed March 30, 2011.

By putting their actual bodies at risk, Femen differs from feminist nude protest body art from the second-half of the twentieth century. The depictions of disaster, totalitarianism, and sexual subjugation in Femen are also rooted in their protests against the persistent corruption and economic inequality that defined the Yanukovych period. While it holds true that Femen does not make any actual political demands, early on Anna Hutsol responded to accusations of xenophobia leveled against her with concern for the rise of far-right nationalist groups in Ukraine, openly blaming their prevalence on an increasingly oppressive Ukrainian Parliament.[215] Moving between actual sites and virtual settings, the group portrays a dystopic totalitarianism in which patriarchy and annihilation are one and the same. Femen's overtures to totalitarianism point to the futility of extremist thinking precisely *because* they are so over-the-top. They are a hoax on extremism and a way to publicly air fanaticism through ridicule. In some ways, this transgression of *all* discourse that can be traced to the state is exactly the type of provocation employed in earlier happenings that sought to deconstruct communist rhetoric. Satirical jabs at Western hegemony and manifesto-like calls for international unity against totalitarianism can be seen in the futurist strains of the 1990s Ukrainian avant-garde, echoed by Femen's appeals to women's international solidarity after Ukraine's own failed Orange Revolution. All of these juxtapositions create an effect that mutes the differences between political regimes of the twentieth century, while foregrounding the lasting horrors of war and its technology in the twenty-first.

[215] Kateryna Mishenko, Nadiya Parfan, and Oleksij Radynskyj, "Mriyemo Vyvesty Na Vulycyu Tysyachi Ogolenyx Zhinok: Rozmova Redakciyi PK Z Grupoyu Femen," *Krytyka Polityczna*, Politychna Krytyka - Ukraina, no. 3 (February 2012), http://vcrc.ukma.kiev.ua/uk/pk3/femen. Defending her radicalism as the right to peaceful protest, Hutsol distanced herself from extremism, "Unfortunately it is not our fault that seventy percent of sex tourists are from Turkey. This is official data and has nothing to do with racism or xenophobia. However, at one point the [Ukrainian] nationalists suggested we go and burn the club where Turkish men meet, but we refused because that is not our method."

Yet parody is a complicated genre for mounting a critique precisely because its reception is so unstable. In both the Iranian and the Saudi protests, Femen visually embodied Muslim women's subject position in a language of blurred identification, transposed national regimes, and intersections of race/gender. Femen's equation of the hijab with Ukrainian nationalism confuses the cultural inflections in different systems of patriarchy, taking for granted that repression and religious devotion are not automatic synonyms. In my interview with Hutsol, she conveyed her view on the ability to reveal the female body in public as the ultimate litmus for women's rights: "Some say we are selling ourselves. Some say a woman's body should be cloaked and hidden, revealed in private for men only. We say that both of these attitudes limit our freedom. The greatest risk, for us in Ukraine, is silence and apathy."[216] Hutsol's reply rejects both leftist and conservative critiques of Femen's nudity from groups within Ukraine. Her equation between exposure and freedom of expression is overly totalizing in assuming to speak for actual conditions that could be better voiced by Muslim women themselves. It has been argued that Femen's extrapolating too far out of the Ukrainian context risks turning the hijab into an itinerant symbol of oppression. This overlooks the full range of symbolic stakes at issue. Arguably of greater concern is the true addressee of Femen's satire in its diverting our attention to what already commands so much attention: the fetishization of a "suffering" Middle East by Western media.

The main framework for Femen's cultural outpourings targets fissures around symbols, like the veil, that through public signifying processes, come to be associatively seen as a civilizational metonyms, absorbing all sorts of contradictory meanings. The group's happenings fall within the paradigm of postmodernism, as exemplified by the way Homi K. Bhaba describes globalization: "a rejection of instrumentalist histories and a transnational and translational sense

[216] Anna Hutsol, Personal Interview, Kyiv, 2011.

of the hybridity of imagined communities."[217] In a decentralized postmodern public sphere, social and cultural difference should not be treated as essential concepts, but as organizing metaphors in symbolic plays on meaning. Femen could be described as an "insurgent act of cultural translation" situated within a contact zone where "the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated."[218] The satire based on post-Iraq imagery points to the mechanisms of mass media as it mediates the emotional registers along cultural fault lines.

In their shift abroad, Femen's marketing of themselves as "sextremists" revealed an impasse in their purchase on global media in which the group's universal narratives of patriarchy and oppression alienated them from many audiences. Ensuing controversy around their new image resulted in several counter-demonstrations by the groups Les Antigonnes and Hommen in France, The Krasnals! in Poland, and Muslim Women Against Femen in North Africa. Each of these performances employed Femen's aesthetic to articulate diverse messages in disagreement with the group's body image and their use of religious iconography. Many contested the legitimacy of Femen's feminism. Questions arose as to how dissent becomes validated as protest.

In the digital circulation of Femen's "sextremism" as a sign for protest, a visual body language emerged characterized by black text on a nude torso.[219] Audiences attached a range of meanings to this language by appropriating, mirroring, or adapting its devices to their own political statements. The controversy surrounding their "sextremism" exposes rifts in what is considered appropriate/inappropriate behavior within vocabularies of resistance, as they are shaped by paradigmatic trends in the public presentation of information. The most disturbing

[217] Ibid, 775.
[218] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 765.
[219] This formed the basis of experiments around the interaction of real and virtual spaces as public sites in which political subjectivities are formed and enacted.

irony of Femen, then, very well may be that they themselves did not invent the extremism underlying "sextremism. "Femen's references to Islam have put on display much of the Orientalist media rhetoric that has become so familiar as to appear almost invisible within a Post-Iraq era of journalism.

Semblance and Rebellion

Femen's image evolves from spaces within capitalist media apparatuses that shape the fantasies within which citizens imagine and practice national identity. Anikó Imre discusses gender activism in postcommunist Hungarian media contexts, stressing the emerging links between citizenship and media consumption as an experimental cultural site. Imre's insights into media and citizenship turn upon a conception of politics similar to other post-Frankfurt School scholars in articulating a critical model for the contemporary public sphere. In her work on the Labrisz Lesbian film collective in Budapest, Imre underlines the limitations that formal, representational critiques of the nation pose for encompassing the politics of Eastern European feminisms.[220] Hutsol has articulated her project in terms of apathy: "I think that strong women cannot remain quiet and timid in Ukraine. I've been to Europe and I've seen how calmly the women protest there, here the situation is different, women have to be louder, bolder."[221] The idea that Ukrainian women have greater battles to fight than women in the West guiding Hutsol's statement, and her emphasis on being "louder, bolder," both reflect her view that radical topless protest is the way to draw attention to feminism in Ukraine. On one level, Hutsol's statement is an extension of her group's activities in illustrating ownership over their basic right to protest. On another level, the group's visibility through online media is also an experiment for contesting

[220] Imre, *Identity Games,* 133.
[221] Anna Hutsol, Personal Interview, Kyiv, 2011.

deeper cultural assumptions around Europe, isolationism, the East, Ukraine, and postcommunism.

Within the media locus of a Femen performance, the dissonant codes in the group's aesthetic are speech acts in a visual vocabulary that parries with commercialism and its shaping of citizenship. A sign, unlike an icon, which always has a relationship based on resemblance with the object it signifies, has an indirect relationship with the object it represents. Femen manipulates the symbolic contexts within which icons and signs appear. They encode multiple layers of meaning in each sign they incorporate into their work, oftentimes creating new significations by cross-referencing the original referents of two or more distinct signs. In many cases, Femen will accomplish this semiotic play within the bounds of the language of global corporate branding.

Oftentimes, Femen activists will paint icons and slogans borrowed from commercial brands on their bodies. For example, in April 2010 Femen responded to censorship from Google by painting the company's copyrighted logo onto their naked breasts and circulating the resulting image throughout the Internet. By painting Google onto their bare skin, Femen produced dissonance between the sign "Google" and its indexical signification. By changing the sign's context, Femen re-indexed the Google symbol's original meaning as a copyrighted logo for a search engine into a signifier for the commodification of the female body. This image entails a struggle with representation, with being not-quite, yet still containing residuals of the signified. Adorno wrote that "Art is yet in this process where it comes to resemble realia, it assimilates itself to that reification against which it protests: Today *engagement* inescapably becomes aesthetic concession."[222] Following this, by painting brand names on bare skin, Femen conflates ownership over the body with ownership over the brand; in effect, interrogating the ideologies

[222] Teodor W. Adorno "Aesthetic Theory," 103.

that have accumulated within the brand through its circulation. It is worth noting that Google, unlike automobiles or lipstick, is a neutrally gendered product. In this instance, by painting a gender-neutral icon onto their breasts, Femen produced dissonance between the body and its commodification in social commentary on profit and enterprise. Without naming one cause or political platform, Femen's topless spectacles put on display the accumulation, value, profit, and exchange of women as symbolic capital in a larger economy of politics and media entertainment.

Thus, underlying Femen's happenings are deep anxieties about branding as a modern, global language. Writing on art and industry, Teodor Adorno remarked that cultural hegemony claims its field of influence through material shored up in capital flows. Art is also illusory. In *Semblance and Expression* Adorno claims the classical opposition between art and reality is the main theme in all cultural artifacts. He writes: "Clearly the immanent semblance character of artworks cannot be freed from some degree of external imitation of reality, however latent, and therefore cannot be freed from illusion either."[223] The argument that art always suffers from a degree of both imitation and illusion—that all art involves some element of camouflage—describes the paradox in Femen's attempt to transcend the reification of the female body through bodily expression. Their painting of certain brands, usually involving two round "OO" shapes on their breasts, displaces advertisement with all sorts of associations ranging from humor, to erotica, to farcical plays on materialist appropriations of power, to many other frames for showing the hidden meanings in the linkage between ad and ideology. In another example, activists employed the word Face*boo*k in response to the company's decision to block nudity on their page. The uneasy relationship between replicating and eluding advertisement can also be traced in the Femen brand itself. Femen's professionally designed, custom logo is ironic—an

[223] Ibid.

image of two breasts cast as a Cyrillic "Ф" (Фемен/ Femen) filled in with the colors of the Ukrainian flag.

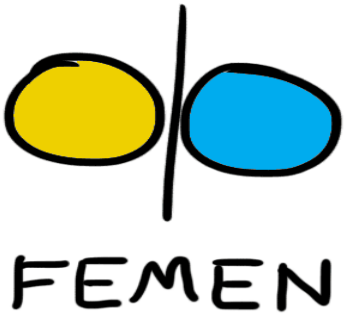

Figure 28: Femen logo

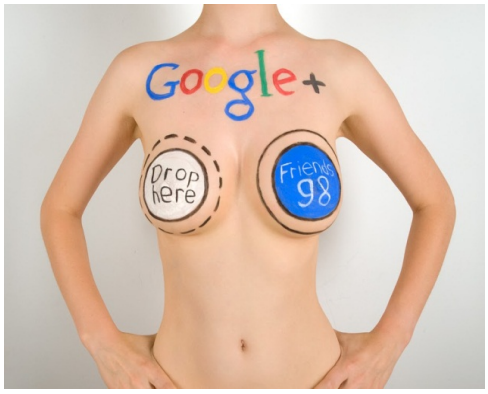

Figure 29: Femen on Internet Censorship, 2011[224]

As a brand, Femen is positioned in a contradictory relationship with earlier feminist theory on women and capitalism where scholars have noted, along the lines of Luce Irigaray, that women are symbolically exchanged within circuits of use value and exchange value, depending on their social status.[225] Scholars have stressed the emerging links between citizenship and electronic media in mediating post-socialist national imaginaries.[226] Imré, in her work in the Hungarian context, has noted that digital media has become a generative component of national culture by liberating minority voices.[227] Imré's search for a more critical model of the contemporary public sphere is useful for engaging a flexible notion of "the political" to account for Femen's formation and ongoing activities as a media performance.[228] As public performers,

[224] Femen Website, Accessed June 10, 2011.
[225] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 55.
[226] Transnational feminism has recently renewed interest in interrogating the critical relationship between politics and the artistic image debated by the Frankfurt School during the cultural turn of the 1970s. Nancy Fraser's reevaluation of Judith Butler in which she claims the roles that culture and economics have played in envisioning "the political" in second-wave, versus contemporary feminist conditionings of global solidarities, transcend national borders. *Fortunes of Feminism: Frrom State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (2013).
[227] Imre, *Identity Games*, 13.
[228] Claire Bishop gives a detailed overview of the art commodity in European visual culture post-1989, examining the search for artistic equivalents for political positions, the collective creative process, and citizenship in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.* Russian critic Alek D. Epstein places Pussy Riot in a similar critique of action, agency, and audience in *Iskusstvo Na Barrikadakh: "Pussy Riot," "Avtobusnaja Vystavka," i Promestnyj Art-Aktivizm* (2012).

Femen's protest-parodies are unconventional challenges to the affective identifications that drive ideological frameworks.

Femen's body language walks a fine line between highlighting, versus replicating, the sources of women's subjugation they seek to expose. Given the complex etymology of feminism as a term in Femen's part of the world, where women's rights at times were seen as the province of the bourgeois, generating this kind of attention is arguably the most provocative layer of their protest. The group's visual language is subject to its own dialectic on the commodification of oppositional politics and the subjugation of women. Femen mimics the mechanisms of their own reification as women, both indulging and parodying the notion that all branding consists of a pornographic reduction of human desire into effective ad campaigns. The pun falls not only on the sex tourist, but on the consumer as well.

V. Representation and Circulation

Exposure and Desire—Mediating the Gaze

Twentieth century female "anti-artists" associated with the conceptualist movements in Western and Soviet cultures experimented with the body as a surface for art; many focused on sexual liberation and not political correctness in their approach to their work. Each of these artist's works prompt audiences to think about the female body as a surface for creating art to explore social limits.[229] Intertwined with the Actionists' later works, the Conceptualist and Nonconformist movements also interrogated assumptions about the body that order culture,

[229] Aspects of early 1970s feminist body art were appropriated by various protest campaigns. Femen has been compared to PETA's marketing campaigns protesting fur in the 1990s through radical nude actions (see, for example, Pamela Anderson's banned ad depicting her body as a diagram for butchering meat, with the slogan, "All Animals Have the Same Parts"). While this comparison is valuable for thinking through the central conflict in Femen's advertising themselves to protest sexualized advertisement of the female body, the link is weak considering the metanarrative in PETA. Activists baring skin to protest fur is critically limiting for parsing Femen's role-playing prostitutes, a subject-position with archetypal associations.

behavior, and norms. Marina Abramović deconstructs the ideals for feminine behavior in the canonization of aesthetic taste in her 1975 series "Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful." The interiority of women's subjectivity is exteriorized as a violent outburst, drawing attention to socially prescribed norms of behavior indexed differently within each frame.

The sequencing of text and movement across frames (Figure 29) became a popular convention in 1970s feminist art borrowed from the theory of montage in film as enabling viewers to see their social circumstances in new ways. Feminists have employed the convention to make explicit the mediation of the male gaze within subjugating images of women used to project desire in pop culture and mass media. Polish artist Natalia LL in her most well-known work "Sztuka konsumpcyjna" (Consumer Art) parodies "the money shot" of hardcore porn in campy poses with a banana (Figure 30).

Figure 30: Marina Abramović "Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful," 1975[230]

[230] Abramović, *The Artist is Present*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010, 210.

Figure 31: Natalia LL (Lach-Lachowicz) "Sztuka konsumpcyjna," (Consumer Art), Poland, 1972

Femen's core troupe of performers also experiment with a glamorous, heavily made-up feminine ideal. Their leader Anna Hutsol describes their style as a "fun, fresh feminism" to fend off apathy among young women.[231] The group projects slim, white female bodies into international media spaces as their foundational body image. It has been argued that digital images of bodies flatten the differences between cultures in the media circulation of femaleness.

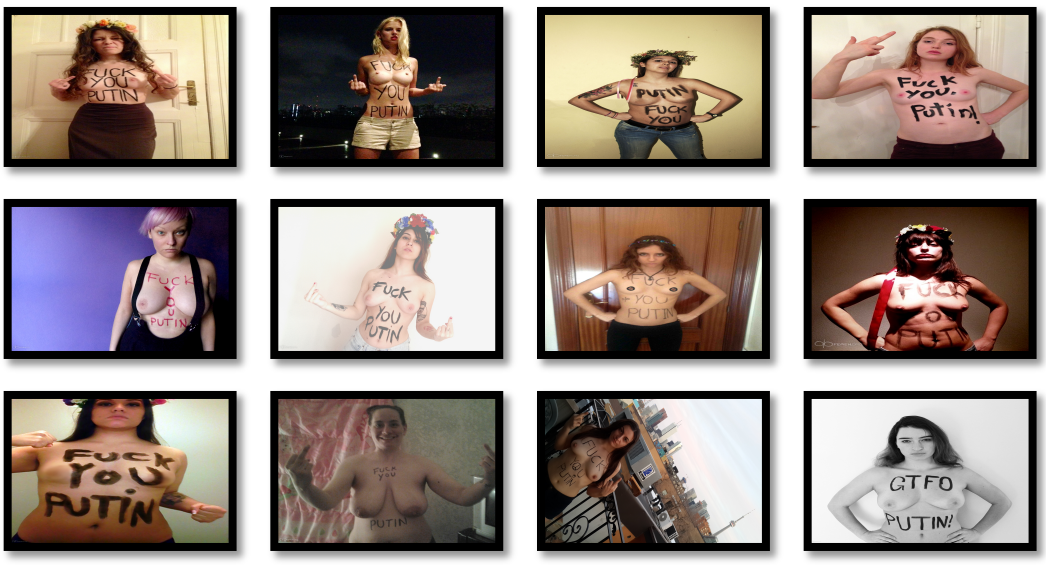

Figure 32: Femen "Bodymessengers against Putin! Body Text Part 1" 2014[232]

[231] Maria Mayerchyk and Olga Plakhotnik, "Radykalni Femen I Novyj Zhinochyj Aktyvizm," 8.
[232] Femen Website. "Bodymessagers against Putin! Part 1" http://femen.org/gallery/id/309#post-content. Accessed Mar 12, 2014.

The body in Femen's protests is a medium for communicating "protest" that is already embedded in the context of the fact that feminism does not translate. Femen claims to use the body to "invert" sexism or "reclaim" breasts as a political symbol. Three main aspects set Femen's aesthetic apart from 1970s feminist media performance experiments in this claim: 1. The position of their actual bodies in real time can feature individuals in disparate locations. 2. The performed character(s) and design juxtaposes news headlines with the conventions of Internet meme culture. 3. The virtual body/avatar. Femen paints on the actual body, but also the "digital body" in projecting themselves into media as avatars in the group's imagined conceptualization of the social body. The patriarchy is the central (absent) protagonist in their narrative. As individuals in different geographical locations act out a unified by aesthetic portraying patriarchy, they plot a landscape of virtual chaos in actual space. Yet participants in their disparate locations traverse very different actual spaces of freedom and unfreedom, defined by national borders, class, race, gender, and subject-position. Individuals in Figure 21 in each frame map onto their own bodies discourses that are *about* feminism, and also about negotiating subject positions within local/global circuits of digital media. Viewers are invited to assume that in the movement between frames all of the women involved share similar experiences. This may be true, however the differentiation of those experiences is downplayed. Captions such as "Bodymessengers against Putin!" posted alongside the virtual composites exploit the flattening of cross-cultural experience that Internet culture affords.

Thus, Femen differ from prior feminist body artists, such as Valie EXPORT, in these experiments with virtual media surfaces. The group's duality also sets them apart, functionoing within social media and mainstream venues, and on the level of the individual and the group.

Marxist-feminist theorists continue to ask whether artistic practices can play a critical role in advanced capitalist societies, where identities are always formed in process, and culture is regulated by industry. What Femen does share with prior feminist body artists' work is a drive to increase vigilance toward the lasting concerns such as labor and reproductive rights in the private and public sphere. Insurgent within social media ad space, their images bring into view the striated, hegemonic field of politics driving the *uncritical* economy of images that produce, circulate, and sell politics to consumers.

Figure 33: Femen Berlin "Food Processor," 2013[233]

[233] Ibid.

Figure 34: Marina Abramović, "Balkan Baroque," 1997[234]

Image / Counter-Image

The exact opposite of an image is the same image, only in reverse. Femen's acts have elicited several copycat protests in which some have adopted the group's iconicity in order to mount critiques of Femen and the latter's idea of feminism. In one example, several months after Femen's foray in Warsaw, a Polish art group from Łodź named The Krasnals! in homage to Mayer Frydrych's orange dwarves (Krasnoludki) of Pomarańczowa Alternatywa, posed as actual prostitutes disgruntled with Femen for stealing their business away.[235] The photos were framed and circulated online as a protest by actual prostitutes. Media outlets picked up the story and reported on the group as they presented themselves (they had concealed their identities as artists). Slogans like "Poland Welcomes You!" and "I Love Poznań" taped to the backs of

[234] Ibid.
[235] The Krasnals! "EURO 2012. Polish Activists THE KRASNALS Against FEMEN Feminists," *The Krasnals Blog*. June 3, 2012. http://thekrasnals.blogspot.com/2012/06/euro-2012-polish-activists-krasnals.html. Accessed July 10, 2012.

members of the Krasnals! mimicked the saccharine, supplicatory tone of Femen's slogans. The prop in The Krasnals! mock-up mirrored similar phalluses in Femen protests, in both cases, these props prosthetically approximate a patriarchal imaginary. Dressing in orange workers' overalls, The Krasnals! replaced Femen's caricatures of prostitution with an alternative image of unionized sex work.

In *The Krasnals Contra Femen*, workers "relax" on the job by smoking, the cigarette suggesting insubordination toward capitalist production and the male phallus through a gutter punk noir aesthetic. The Krasnals! state on their blog that they are "focused on exposing the mechanisms of consumer society."[236] This statement fits with the nonconformism associated with the styles of music, dress, and lifestyles of punk, which carries with it a level of authenticity in the coding of dissidence over the course of its social and technical development into several subgenres. The overtly crass aesthetics of class-based dissidence among British youth in the 1970s that gave birth to punk have since given way to the corporatization of punk in selling the idea of a couture underground to later generations of consumers. Dick Hebdige argues that the class and race politics within the punk and ska music cultures of 1970s London were a microcosm of broader social relations in the U.K. to emerge out of the effects of circular migration throughout the Atlantic at the time. His landmark study *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* helped define the Birmingham School of Culture and remains a founding contribution in the field of cultural studies. To a good degree punk has now become cliché within a global culture marketplace. In this photo, its connotations with antiauthoritarianism are employed to illustrate, by contrast, where Femen are itself embedded in the media apparatuses they critique.

[236] Ibid.

Figure 35: "The Krasnals! Contra Femen"[237]

In The Krasnals! protest imagery, unlike in Femen's, there is a privileging of gender difference over gender equality, engaging feminist theory that attempts to make room for alternative sexualities beyond male/female binaries.[238] For example, the performance of lesbian identity in The Krasnals! media stunt downplays the hyperfeminine ideal in Femen's foundational image, while drawing out those elements of Femen that satirize the ideal by assuming negligence toward the male gaze. A few of the Krasnals' images feature women performing sexual acts on each other in postures that mirror the overt stances, expressions, and forthright verbiage of mainstream pornography. Masking their identities with balaclavas and holding posters with anarchic symbols drawn into slogans such as "Parade of Difference" (Parada Różności), The Krasnals! double-parody further interrogates the gender roles underlying Femen.

Between the original and "copy" counter-protest there exists a gap in which a critique of the text and images used to frame women's bodies in the media and its impact on actual women

[237] The Krasnals! Website, Accessed July 10, 2013.
[238] This line of thinking follows from Judith Butler's seminal work *Gender Trouble*.

emerges. Neither Femen's protest nor The Krasnals!' counter-protest were designed for a gallery or have appeared in a museum exhibit.[239] Both the image and counter-image in this exchange played with the language of news reporting in cartoonish humor without any claim to actually represent segments of society, stake claim to a concrete demand, or pursue a stake in the systems of power in which both groups' critiques of sexual exchange are already embedded. The Krasnals! counter-image draws attention to the locus of constituency vs. consumer in the branding of protest by identifying with an aesthetic founded in Femen's headlining campaign "Ukraine is NOT a Brothel!," a campaign that is ironic and therefore cannot be representative. The dissonance, or "slippage" between image and word in The Krasnals! copy protest played upon the language of Femen's brand and its limited applicability to actual sociopolitical struggles.

Thus, The Krasnals! staged an important critique of Femen's anti-prostitution stance by deconstructing the latter's formal aesthetics. By appropriating Femen's highly visible brand calibrated for mass-media in an aesthetic with roots in discourses on antiestablishment, The Krasnals! disrupted Femen's protest narrative where it negatively defines sex work as harmful toward women.[240] In other words, the counter-image created the rare opportunity to stage a public debate inclusive of a position in support of sex-work, an often under-analyzed stance in feminist discourse.

At the same time, the politics between the image / counter-image generated by these two

[239] Although not initially designed for museum spaces, both activist groups' works have since been commodified into art objects. In this sense they share a similar fate with past conceptual feminist and Soviet dissident artists, whose work has also entered the institutions of profit and enterprise in galleries around the world (ie. The Krasnals! paintings have been displayed at Tate Modern). "The Krasnals w Tate Modern. Dzięki Uklańskiemu," *Gazetapl*, http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,7315003,The_Krasnals_w_Tate_Modern__Dzieki_Uklanskiemu.html. Accessed April 24, 2013.

[240] Anna Hutsol has since modified her stance on sex work by claiming her support for the Dutch model in which the criminalization of sex work reverts to the client-consumer, not the sex worker. "Le féminisme à l'épreuve du sextrémisme," *Le Monde.fr*, http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/03/08/le-feminisme-a-l-epreuve-du-sextremisme_1844822_3224.html. Accessed March 12, 2013.

groups do intersect. Femen's rhetoric of inequality, unlike The Krasnals! rhetoric of gender difference, is entrenched in figurations of the prostitute primarily as a metaphor for East-West relations. Femen has referenced Chernobyl, the DAVOS World Economic Forum, Ukrainian pension reform, and a range of other gender-neutral issues in their hyperbolic slogans about women's emancipation. Femen's odd protest brand evidences broader anxieties precisely in these ad-hoc, humorous jabs at the difficulty of defining a post-Soviet feminism. The legacies of neoliberalism and its blanket terminology on "equality" that have come to distinguish public discourse in the "transition" paradigm in both Poland and Ukraine has largely ignored local women's own definitions of feminism. The visual language in both protests gestures toward a politics of hegemony that is also a cynical pantomime of the ideological traps of utopian rhetoric about gender equality. Both groups, though in divergent ways, satirize the masculinist biases in nationalist rhetoric as the main backdrop for a conversation about feminism. Public receptions of Femen, of which The Krasnals! copycat hoax is but one example, evidence two critical outcomes of Femen's overall experiment: increased discussion around the asymmetrical branding and transmission of protest by the mass media for consumption; and second, more awareness of the subsumption of gender issues into sleek mainstream campaigning that Femen's "feminist brand" makes visible, and therefore also more readily contested.

VI. Critical Receptions: "Dissidence" East/West

Femen's shock tactics have offended all sides of the political spectrum. Early on in the group's existence, the political and social fissures around Femen in Ukrainian society manifested dissent over more deeply embedded local discourses on gender. Initial debates about Femen by Ukrainian feminist scholars in late 2011 and early 2012 contextualized them within the idea of

feminism in the shift from Soviet to post-Soviet regimes.[241] Some underlined Femen's value in bringing visibility to important concerns about sex tourism, but highlighted the group's rhetorical limits as a political coalition alien to other feminist projects in Ukraine.[242] Others classified the group as a pop movement completely devoid of any ready social application, while at the same time, remaining ambivalent about the value of the group's puns on local stereotypes as a way of airing the very idea of feminism for their audiences.[243] Since these early assessments of Femen, some have pointed out that the group has developed as a site in which the antagonism between official, versus popular voices in the media in the post-Soviet context might be made more apparent. My ongoing interviews with feminist scholars and activists in Ukraine over time reveal a shift of opinion on the group after their move abroad. The consensus among feminist scholars on Femen has moved in the direction of viewing the group as carnivalesque performers.[244]

In summer of 2013 a conservative group calling themselves Hommen conducted a Femen-style protest to stage an anti-same-sex marriage rally in the streets of Paris, further evidencing that the circulation of Femen's visual rhetoric is not inherently leftist, but distinct from any clear position on the gender issues in their depictions of the body. In an article for the

[241] See: Elena Gapova and Yulia Soroka "Hola svoboda i tila na drabyni" (2010); Maria Dmitreyevna "Femen na tli hrudej" (2010); Larisa Lisyutkina "Fenomen Femen: malyj peresuvnyj vybuxovyj prystrij made in Ukraine" (2011).
[242] Rubchak, "Seeing Pink: Searching for Gender Justice Through Opposition in Ukraine."
[243] Considering the notion of "the political" in Femen's subversive protest media shows, the group's performances conflate the idea of feminism in the realm of realpolitik, where the very idea of "good" and "bad" feminism gets folded into other economic and social development agendas. Olga Plakhotnik and Maria Mayerchyk set the stage for critiquing Femen's spectacle, discussing it as a way of airing stereotypes about feminism for local audiences: "They are looking for their own interpretation of feminism; experimenting with the term as a neologism, they maneuver around the Sword of Damocles, which is maintained by antifeminist stereotypes. While attempting to sift their ideas out from an older, 'bad' feminism they are simultaneously trying to construct their own, 'egalitarian,' new feminism." in "Radykalni Femen i novyj zhinochyj aktyvizm," 8.

[244] Nataliya Tschermalykh makes the point that Femen's visual rhetoric in their move abroad is "aligned with a conservative, protectionist stance toward the Ukrainian national idea" in her essay, "Feminist Analysis on the Political Amalgam Between Radical and Moderate Nationalists and Religious Rights: Conservative Consensus on Gender and the Minority Problematic in Contemporary Ukraine" (2012). Hommen's anti-gay mairrage rallies in Paris further evidence Tschermalykh's claim that Femen's visual rhetoric is not readily leftist and is distinct from actual gender politics.

industry journal *Art Ukraine*, Ukrainian feminist Nataliya Tschermalykh describes her encounter with Femen abroad:

> . . . among the thousands of demonstrators standing up for LGBT rights in Paris I was surprised to hear: "Ukrainian women fear nothing!" These words were coming from Femen activists. In France, the group was at the forefront of the movement that culminated in the legalization of same sex marriage at the constitutional level. I confess, I often criticize Femen. Our political orientation could not be more different, but there, in Paris, my immediate impression was that Femen was speaking on my behalf. I was, in all honesty, really pleased to see Ukrainian flower wreaths with their characteristically colorful ribbons in conjunction with the slogan "In Gay We Trust!" scrawled on Femen's bare chests—both pleased and saddened at the same time. Last May, during Kyiv's first gay parade, we might have done well by a little of their courage; but Femen was not there with us. I suppose that this fact, too, is already just another page in history.[245]

Here Tschermalykh contextualizes the group in a larger story about dismantling the effects of institutional censorship and other factors limiting artists' creative license. What stands out most in this anecdote is the fact that Femen's participation in actual initiatives by civic activists in their native Ukraine is a front that they abandoned early on, even while, conceptually, Femen's *misbehavior* provided a backdrop for ongoing debates local and global, not all directly tied to feminism.[246]

Perhaps it should be less surprising then to discover that the disavowal of Femen by their international critics has served to expose inequalities in who gets legitimized— i.e. who is "allowed" to speak for women and carry the mantle of feminism. Put another way, the anger in the wake of Femen's acts has radicalized networks of skeptics and activists, many of which have taken to task the limits and definitions of feminism and civil rights on their own terms. Agata Pyzik analyzes Femen in her work on post-Soviet culture entitled *Poor but Sexy* (after the mayor of Berlin's ad campaigns for the city aimed at Western tourism). She contextualizes Femen's very inappropriate linking of Islam with oppressive patriarchy as an instance of misrecognition and miscommunication in a much longer story of complex East-West cultural relations:

> It seems a typical case of mutual misunderstanding, with each side blind to each other's concerns: Femen

[245] Tschermalykh, *Art Ukraine*, 92. Transl. Jessica Zychowicz.
[246] Ibid.

> doesn't see racism behind their calling patriarchy 'Arab,' and the Western pro-underprivileged women-of-color feminists see in Femen only the distasteful theatre of naked boobs, which overlooks their needs, not seeing how they remain blind to the postcommunist reality Femen represent.[247]

Femen's (mis)identification of women's own agency within Islam mistakenly reproduces a well-intentioned, Pyzik seems to suggest, but impoverished message of suspicion of Western supremacism and its mythologized divisions between East and West. The more relevant critique here is that if Femen performs as "rescuing" Muslim women (and who would not feel offended by such rhetoric?), it is only because the West, for all of its missionizing attitudes about democratizing the Arab world, has created the conditions for this critique.

This is not to lend Femen a free pass for their transgressions, but to sound a note in light of deeper discourses around global inequalities and the multiple ethical contexts that debates about Femen's "feminism" represent. The colonial gaze that falls upon those regions that were once, not so long ago, referred to as "the Second World" is still pervasive within the stories circulated within consumer media that produce dissidents for Western audiences. Perhaps, for the misunderstanding that Pyzik notes to become clear on all sides, Femen's members would need to open dialogue with their opponents, and thus, break the "fourth wall" of their media spectacle. Perhaps, the lesson to be gained from the ensuing Femen controversy is what it offers us as a litmus for debate about citizenship as a function of media.

VII. Conclusion: On Being Offended

Critiquing Femen necessitates shifting attention away from the state as representational entity, toward media technologies, globalization, and the roles that these factors play in advancing and manipulating messages about rights and freedoms. Scholars have stressed the emerging links between citizenship and electronic media in mediating post-socialist national

[247] Pyzik, 141.

imaginaries. Digital media have become a generative component of national culture by liberating minority voices. Mouffe writes on art specifically that: "critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate."[248] These concepts of art-activism raise several questions as to the kinds of representations—both welcome and untoward—that critical art is able to foster, and the social implications of a brand like Femen.

Activists I have spoken with in Ukraine concerned with gender issues are ambivalent as to whether Femen has contributed to ameliorating Ukrainian women's actual daily lives, though all agree the group has made a lasting impression in world news. Analysts have found that social tolerance toward gender minorities has decreased in Ukraine with an increase in visible LGBT and feminist activism in the period since the Orange Revolution.[249] The situation is also likely due to the effects of Yanukovych's repressive regime and the marriage and reproductive policy debates that had taken place as target issues in the lead-up to the next election cycle. In 2013 protests erupted on both the left and right around the legislation of an anti-gay propaganda law. Artists and intellectuals have come under fire in Ukraine as well, with increasing shutdowns and targeting of museum exhibits featuring LGBT and feminist themes due to activists and officials associated with the far right. Some women's initiatives are less polarized than the groups protesting on specific policies and are more focused on generating forums for professional development. In 2009 Oksana Kis' drafted a letter to reduce the stigmatization of women's hiring and employment practices in the professional, business, education and government

[248] Building on Heidegger's idea of the social and political as *existential*, Chantal Mouffe argues that the two cannot be separated, and that identities are "never pre-given, but are always the result of processes of identification." Mouffe's definition of critical art aligns with a broader school of thinking on the topic including Jacques Rancière in his claiming symbolic dissensus can provide a challenge to hegemony. Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*.
[249] Tamara Martsenyuk, "Ukrainian Feminism in Action."

sectors.[250] Mobilizations around International Women's Day by the Kyiv-based feminist group Ofenzywa, discussed in Chapter 3, have also continually put pressure on unfair labor practices. In the city of Kharkiv the Museum of Women's History and Gender Movements has pioneered efforts to create new archival databases in the historiography of women's experiences in the 20th century and regularly partners with researchers, activists, and social workers.[251]

In July 2013, I met with former Femen member Angelina Diash in Kyiv. Diash is a university student, a theatre performer, an actress, and a writer. She is from Khmelnytsky, the same city as Anna Hutsol, and was recruited there by members Inna and Sasha Shevchenko in 2009. Diash is African-Ukrainian and informed me that she experiences constant harassment by local police and passersby for the color of her skin: "the situation is especially difficult because Ukrainian is my native language, I was born here."[252] When I asked her why she decided to join Femen, she replied, "I saw a chance to fight racism, to find justice for women because they should be equal to men, and a community." Femen provided Diash with a sheltered space for engaging in politics, but that space was limited: "Everyone would sit around trying to decide what an action would look like and then Anna Hutsol would create it her way." In late 2011 she left Femen: "I didn't believe in the direction the group was moving in. There were too many girls involved without any interest in feminism or women's rights, social justice, or antiracism—issues I care about and wanted to change, but my voice wasn't heard. Sometimes girls would just show up at events thinking they might earn some money or make a few professional contacts with journalists." Diash expressed the sentiment that Femen filled a time and a place in her life

[250] Oksana Kis'. "List posadovcevi (Letter to an Official)." February 12, 2009. http://h.ua/story/173353. Accessed June 10, 2012.
[251] http://gendermuseum.com/ Accessed December 11, 2011.
[252] Angelina Diash, Personal Interview, Kyiv, July 2013.

that she needed in order to escape the "constant psychological pressure" she faces as a racial minority in Ukraine.

Diash is ambivalent about whether her time with Femen was a positive experience: "I learned a lot. I became braver— unafraid to go into the streets. At the same time, you know, sometimes I think that they needed me more than I needed them." In our conversation, I learned that she was referring to the tokenism displayed toward minorities in the media. Her comment illustrates a much broader problem in the marketing of rights-based protest for media consumption that Femen could also be said to be responding to in their breaking and juxtaposing the "rules" prescribed for nudity among celebrities, and the "acceptable" terms upon which the West legitimizes and markets narratives of post-Soviet dissidence. After leaving the group, Diash became involved with a government campaign to increase sensitivity around racism and plans to continue working on discrimination issues. Her personal narrative is a powerful testament to her own agency: she was able to successfully maneuver her life opportunities by joining Femen, strengthening her individual convictions further by eventually choosing to leave the group in order to apply the skills she gained there to new experiences in other venues.

To remain critical of transnational articulations of race and gender in the face of the corporate flow of information, we need to think twice when Femen screams to their audiences that no one is listening. The risk of not listening, of overlooking individual voices, seems the greatest. Tschermalykh, writing only months before the demonstrations on Kyiv's Maidan stated:

> Has the neoconservative [Soviet] ethical regime already reached its aesthetic culmination, or is it still in formation? And, insofar as we on many levels still remain unaware of this process, how often do we unknowingly retranslate its moral precepts, returning back to the times when, on these territories, self-censorship was as notorious as working "for the drawer," or having collective discussions about "oblique morals" in the workplace. The Ukrainian response (as Femen has shown) is that, at best, if you protest something the "wrong way" here, the whole world may learn something from you, but then your voice will remain forever tossed out from your native land . . . In Ukraine, as always, things are unclear. The situation

> is characterized by constant uncertainty, our political landscape being comprised as it is of multiple and conflicting vectors of intention.[253]

The body image in Femen's design certainly deserves critique. And yet, the constellation of media surrounding Femen could instantiate more critical analyses of the tropes they parody, specifically where these parodies point to preexisting media representations that prescribe what dissidence *should* or could look like within post-Soviet and other contexts.

In twenty years, it may come to pass that Femen is remembered less as a *message* about the predicament of actual women living under a specific regime than for the adaptive reinvention of dissent to a virtual language enacted within digital environments. They have asked us to look at them, and we've looked. Femen's appropriation of signs plays upon conventional pop culture by airing audiences' fantasies and fears in satires on the mass media and its internal logics of erotic identification, alienation, and consumption. There are certainly many problems in thinking about Femen as a viable political movement, not the least of which includes their original stated aim to "eradicate sex tourism," a position that ignores the possible benefits of regulation by supporting the illusion that sex work is eradicable in the first place.[254] Known to change their stance often, depending on the presses interviewing them, Femen members' opinions are likely to morph into something else as soon as a new critique emerges. Their simulacrum of an actual

[253] Tschermalykh's quote continues: Something has to happen – positive or negative – and yet, nothing happens. Everyone continues to wait for something to occur, always just around the corner: the valuation of the hryvnia, the Kyiv Biennale, Euro 2012, and then, it turns out that nothing changes. Or at least, almost nothing. Is no news really good news? To the contrary, there is little reason for optimism, considering last year's closure of the Visual Culture Center by [Serhiy Kvit, President of] Kyiv Mohilya Academy, accompanied by his Khrushchev style evaluation: 'This is not art—it's shit!' in a direct attack on the exhibit *A Room of One's Own*, by Yevgenia Belorusets, not to mention the failure of the first Ukrainian gay pride parade upon the eve of an unanimous homophobic vote in parliament" in "Temni Chasy," *Art Ukraine*, 32.

[254] Hutsol has called for both the criminalization of the client in prostitution and the illegalization of pornography in an effort to eradicate sex tourism in Ukraine. Other Ukrainian feminist activists and scholars have expressed skepticism at these strategies. Kateryna Mishenko, Nadiya Parfan, and Oleksij Radynskyj, "Mriyemo Vyvesty Na Vulycyu Tysyachi Ogolenyx Zhinok: Rozmova Redakciyi PK Z Grupoyu Femen," *Krytyka Polityczna*, February 2012, http://vcrc.ukma.kiev.ua/uk/pk3/femen. Accessed February 25, 2012.

protest reveals how dissidence itself has become a commodity in the contemporary political environment driven by images, icons, and mass information.

While Femen expanded to a broader range of body types in 2010, they remained unpopular in Ukraine and were still viewed with skepticism abroad.[255] The group's shift to a "sextremist" image in 2012 and their internationalization in virtual space extended Femen's political interventions from commentary on Ukrainian women's rights, to global contestations over the meaning of the term feminism. Audiences began to contest feminism by replicating, rejecting, and mocking Femen's aesthetic in words and images online. Femen's translation of scenarios borrowed from the sex trade across national contexts functioned in the globalized register Homi K. Bhaba calls "cultural hybridity," a dynamic that tends to emerge in moments of radical political transformation.

The moment Femen adopted an image of themselves associated with Islam they took on a central position in global media. The group created a controversial framework for their digital text by appropriating media rhetoric proffered in the media regarding Western intervention in the Middle East. Their controversial imagery of Muslim women points to the Orientalist passivity attributed to photos of Middle Eastern women that were proliferated in mainstream Western media in the 2000s. This imagery has radicalized women into a debate, into thinking and questioning the racism and sexism that underscore the more subtle, mainstream images of Muslim culture in news media. Below the surface of Femen's overidentification with Muslim women, particularly where the group depicts Islam as inherently repressive, are deeper media tropes from which those depictions derive. As actual women with actual bodies themselves – the politics of image / counterimage having material effects— this demonstrates to online and also proximate real-time audiences alike the relative degrees to which tolerance for public speech has

[255]Maria Mayerchyk and Olga Plakhotnik, "Radykalni Femen i novyj zhinochyj aktyvizm," 10.

continually shifted downward, even counter-intuitively so, with the consolidation of mass-media conglomerates over the past decade.

Femen's false sense of universalism risks interpretations of the group as reinforcing the stereotypes they aim to lampoon. Their strategy certainly deserves critique. And yet it would be a grave mistake for critics to completely overlook the deeper messages in Femen's parody. Dismissing the group's members outright as naïve and silly reinforces the subjugating categories that replicate patterns of condescension by Western critics, and thus only perpetuates the traps that are so antithetical to transnational dialogue about gender. The colonial gaze that falls upon those regions that were once, not so long ago, referred to as "the Second World" is still pervasive within the stories circulated within consumer media that produce dissidents for Western audiences. Perhaps it is wise to look past Femen's smoke and mirrors to consider them for what they are offstage—young women. The twin risks to the free flow of information and creative debate may be of greater long-term impact than Femen's perceived downsides: offensive jabs, their dark humor, reactionary sloganeering, and overtures to overly universalist discourses on human rights. In the critique of gender and feminist issues, the risk of not listening seems the greatest. [256]

Paying close attention to Femen's calibration within media apparatuses can help parse out the rhetorical limits of their problematic commodification of their own bodies, while still avoiding replicating the pervasive condescension toward "non-Western" societies so pervasive in the marketing and production of protest for mass media. This is not to say that we—as feminists, scholars, activists, consumers, or simply curious passerby— should refrain from dismissing

[256] *The Guardian*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *Kyiv Post*, as well as *The Moscow Times* and *Pravda* along with several other Western and Russian media outlets reported on Femen in 2009-2011 as the piedmont of a new grassroots feminism in Ukraine. Subsequent reports on the group have included the question of whether or not Femen is able to transmit a feminist message through the display of the female body. These reports have instantiated an ongoing meta-rhetorical discussion about the depiction of the female body in mainstream media.

Femen for their failures in addressing the actual needs of real women, or their lack of willingness to collaborate with those outside their group. Rather, the ethical contexts of our observations might benefit from casting a warier eye toward the deeper discourses that might be evoked, silenced, or reinforced in the *form of our dismissal*, whatever our stance.

Kyiv's city square is no longer a stage for offensive parodies, but a globally contested crucible. I return to my photograph of the Femen phenomenon. It is more newsprint than flesh, its paper clippings a relic of a past that marks the edge of only one of many outcomes; its multiple languages are symptomatic of deeper conditions, the mutual stereotyping that can occur, all too often, at a cultural crossroads. The offense is in itself a critical offense.

Chapter 3

The Image is the Frame: Photography and the Feminist Collective Ofenzywa

Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods,
so too does their mode of perception.
—Walter Benjamin

I. Introduction

On March 8, 2011 roughly thirty young people gathered on Kyiv's main thoroughfare carrying banners featuring a raised fist on a purple background. The ages of members of the group ranged from early twenties to mid-thirties. Nearly all of them were women. They had come to gather around a set of ideas echoing the demands that Clara Zetkin had first set forth for women's labor when she announced the first International Women's Day in Copenhagen in 1910.[257] The intellectual feminist collective Ofenzywa was founded by gender scholars from Kyiv-Mohilya Academy and Kharkiv University; their members are non-profit workers, and academics. They are the largest feminist organization to have appeared in Ukraine since the fall of the Soviet Union; their members would become instrumental during the events that took place on Kyiv's Maidan in January 2014. Though the group split into two separate factions during their critical involvement on Maidan, and has since not reunited, their ongoing work is an important part of the history of women's activism in the region.

By the time that Ofenzywa had formed in 2009, Ukraine's shift to capitalism and the promise that democracy would follow—reinforced by elites in the Orange Revolution— soon

[257] Announced at the International Conference of Socialist Women, which Zetkin attended as editor of the German newspaper *Die Gleichheit* and as an already well-known theorist of the working women's movement.

gave way to skepticism of the neoliberal images of national progress first proffered during the Yanukovych years. They stated their aim was to reclaim the socialist origins of International Women's Day as "a celebration of women's right to vote and work professionally."[258] Their collective formation around March 8 and feminism reveals local gender epistemologies in present conflict with the term's negative connotation in its official appropriations. Thus, the creative output of Ofenzywa's former members, both their projects past and present, can provide valuable insights into various shifts in discourse on gender in post-Soviet contexts. Ofenzywa adopts the revolutionary language proffered by women of the socialist past in order to construct a more continuous, gendered history of Ukraine: a history that bridges East-West divides by offering local women alternatives to masculinist notions of national progress.

In this chapter, I zero in on several close readings of two series of images by Ofenzywa member and photographer Yevgenia Belorusets: one featuring residents of Kyiv tenement housing, and the other of local gay and lesbian couples' everyday lives. I explore in detail the ideological background for thinking about these photos as part of a broader rhetoric of dissent, discussing, in particular, how Ofenzywa interpolates a collective identity through the genre of the manifesto, adapting the action-oriented conventions of the early avant-garde on the role of art in society to their own, feminist critiques of the post-Soviet condition. In Belorusets' work there is a self-conscious, even quotidian quality to the photos in their author's fixation on the vulgarity of daily life. It is precisely because of this fetishization of everyday life, this sense of ordinariness transposed against the background of protest and revolution, that the photos can convey a sense of witnessing human interaction, or disclosing the present condition of living badly/well in one's own home, nation, skin, and so forth. The ways in which subjects in the

[258] From Ofenzywa's mission statement "Ofenzywa Blog Акція За Рівність! Проти НЕКвізиції!," *Feminist Ofenzyva*, http://ofenzyva.wordpress.com/2012/06/18/za-rivnist-proty-nekvizyci/. Accessed October 3, 2012.

photos inhabit times and spaces largely rendered obsolete by the rest of society suggests an empathetic attentiveness on the part of the author to the frightening ease with which history can become the exclusive province of the few. Symptomatic of the historical mobilizations around traveling terms like "feminism," the photos illuminate where larger ideological fissures and continuities in contestations around gender saturate daily experience in Ukraine.

To describe "the everyday" in Belorusets' photos, I turn to cultural theorist Svetlana Boym's notion of "common places" in late-Soviet life and their centrality to myths about community, the public, and the modern citizen that have dominated the Russian imagination. Born in the 1980s, Belorusets employs a lens which to a large degree can only approach the "common place" of the living memories of the Soviet past secondhand, filtered through the memories of Ukraine's older generations. She explores where memory is inscribed into the physical landscapes she frames, creating out of them commentary on how individuals inhabit time differently, and how these anachronisms, or incongruent chronologies, inflect political subjectivity. Throughout both series the photographer herself consciously inserts herself into the project as its narrator. Documenting changes in her perception of Self/Other, as the experiment progresses, the environment and all in it are subverted by the lens, which is the only constant that remains. The history of the everyday itself is intertwined with the concepts of personal space and the private sphere. Michel de Certeau's wanderings through the urban landscape in *The Practice of Everyday Life* and Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* both pivot on the idea that the perpetual conflicts within lived experience can generate transformative potential for the self, and thus also for society.

Ofenzywa re-represents a feminist past by reviving and revising locally familiar forms that have, throughout Ukraine's twentieth century, been employed by a range of actors to signify

protest and revolution. The manifesto, the march, the camera and the photograph, even the art collective itself, have each functioned in both the early- and late- Soviet periods as vehicles for social commentary by subversive artists, as well as those employed by the state. Here I focus on two of Belorusets' series entitled: "32 Gogol St." and "A Room of One's Own." The first features residents in downtown Kyiv's dilapidated public housing units, while the second is comprised of portraits of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender couples in framings of home. Formally, I trace Belorusets' work to Alexander Rodchenko. Not unlike her predecessor, Belorusets pursues the documentary properties of photography to social ends. The sometimes opaque or invisible processes involved in making and viewing photos are foregrounded in both artists' work as social documentary.

In both of their texts, the enterprise of photography itself becomes a series of asymmetrical negotiations between artist, subject, and audience. Alternate concepts of the political help us investigate how the images engage questions around art's capacity to represent resistance. The foregrounding of gender and sexual minorities within Belorusets' framings of home and domesticity affords a critique of the private sphere by remapping how gender roles are tied to public norms. The photos index non-normative timeframes, for example, her photos of a gay Orthodox priest performing the sacrament in a Kyiv apartment maps "geographies of resistance" that are asymmetrical to mainstream naturalizations of time.[259] Ultimately, Belorusets' photos present people living their daily lives outside of the representational economy in mainstream productions of citizenship. The photos in both series address many challenges of the post-Soviet era, some made more acute during the Yanukovych years, but do so by speculating on how to inherit an alternative Soviet past able to account for Ukrainian experiences

[259] Halberstam borrows the term "geographies of resistance" from S. Pile's introduction to an anthology of the same title Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 1, 13.

of poverty and social marginalization beyond "the losers of the transition" often referred to in the parlance of more conventional histories.

In contrast to the performances in Chapters One and Two, a very different framing of protest emerges within the manifestos and photographs included here. These texts approximate a collective voice, a voice that ultimately estranges individual consciousness from daily life. By adopting the rhetoric and aesthetics of the early labor movement and the Soviet avant-garde as a feminist collective, Ofenzywa fashioned a subversive speech alternative to the narratives proffered during the "transition" of a clean break from the Soviet period. Insofar as memory is also lived, the Soviet past is still inhabited in different generations' uneven experiences of time and space. The act of making and displaying visually ethnographic photographs in this context troubles the neat social public/private divides that underpin dichotomous gender roles. The state reinforces similar discourses on production/reproduction through the organization of space into two spheres; thus, this troubling of the divide can be productive for creating alternative possibilities for living everyday life.

II. The Many Faces of March 8: The State and "The Woman Question"

Kyiv was herald to its own vanguard of women thinkers and activists in the early twentieth century. To a large extent, official discourse based in Engels' theory of the family had declared that "The Woman Question" had been solved by the emancipation of women from the home and into the factory. Of course, this was not the case in practice. Women in the region would continue to particularize labor issues specific to gender throughout the twentieth century.[260] Offering a more globalized version of women's labor history and suffrage that

[260] Official discourse on women and labor in the first half of the twentieth century privileged ideologues such as Alexandra Kollontai and her experiments in communal child-rearing and were based on Engels' theory of the bourgeois family unit as the primary obstacle to the proletarian revolution, a theory he first articulated in *The Origin*

predates the Bolshevik Revolution, International Women's Day provides an alternative origin story beyond the development of feminism as a specifically Soviet or Western project. The day's transatlantic socialist beginnings provide contemporary activists in Ofenzywa with a narrative for constructing more continuous histories of local Ukrainian women's experiences beyond the conventional "transition" periodization.

International Women's Day provided a conduit through which a modern notion of feminism emerged wherein gender roles were understood to be inextricable from class politics. This contributed to solidarities between women of the working and middle classes because, in practice, those roles did not conform to the emerging Bolshevik ideology, which had declared "The Woman Question" solved. The first Women's Day demonstrations in the region took place in Kyiv and St. Petersburg in 1914. The wife of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Nadezhda Krupskaya, following Zetkin's ideas that women should consider their interests first and foremost in economic terms, wrote in the inaugural issue of the magazine *Rabotnitsa* (*The Woman Worker*):

> [W]omen's issues have a totally different character in the working environment than in the bourgeois one. It is not a struggle against men for equality; but a struggle alongside men against general lawlessness, against the conditions exploiting people's labor, and a class struggle for the victory of which the unity of all working people is required.[261]

This statement was Krupska's response to the tragic fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York in 1911—the event that spring boarded the earliest socialist feminist movements in the United States. The fraught birth of unionism in Western factories inspired Emma Goldman and others to look to the U.S.S.R. for ideas that later gained American women the right to vote. Thus, Marxist ideas about progress helped to globalize feminism as an idea by defining women's

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of the Family, Private Property, and the State in 1884. The official rhetoric on women's rights proffered by the Soviet state helped to encourage popular views of feminism as collaboration with the regime, views which continue to obfuscate discussions about grassroots feminism(s) within the former U.S.S.R.

[261] Tatiana Isaeiva, "The Truth About March 8th - Exhibit," *Gender Museum*, http://www.gendermuseum.com/modules/8m_e/8m_03.html. Accessed August 10, 2011.

rights in terms of class.[262] This crystalized an important, if often under analyzed, transnational path for later feminist activism.

Ofenzywa's rallying around International Women's Day, by citing the moment when Zetkin, Krupska, and Goldman attempted to universalize women's rights, highlights the patriarchal discourses that underpin the particularization of women's political subjectivity as women. Wherein systems of authority represent the discursive constructions by which the category "woman" becomes representative, this is because, "It is through representation that collective political subjects are created, and they do not exist beforehand."[263] Gender is as much a part of constitutive publics as any other marker of identity. Thus, for a feminist political statement to have any leverage in systems that are inherently unequal, it must only happen in what has been termed "conflictual" processes.[264] By transposing the discursive strains of women's activism in the industrial labor movement onto their movement, Ofenzywa appeals to an international legacy to gain local legitimacy as a minority public among and in conflict with other publics. But the question still remains: what is being recovered/uncovered by Ofenzywa in their framing of post-Soviet women's rights?

Ofenzywa's collective formation around March 8, and their particular investment in feminism, stem from local gender epistemologies in conflict with the name's negative connotation in its official meanings. Historian Oksana Kis' foregrounds Ofenzywa in her timeline of the recent "feminist upheaval" over International Women's Day in Ukraine as "the first time in the history of modern Ukraine that the general public was exposed to words like 'feminism,' 'feminist,' and the like in a public setting . . . allow[ing] people to see Ukrainian

[262] While originally Krupskaya's distinction between bourgeois and working women positioned the former "against men," and the latter alongside their male comrades, a general fear of "lawlessness" and an overall desire for greater economic equality prevails in her assessments of her own paradigm.
[263] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, 125–126.
[264] Ibid.

feminists who contrasted greatly with their rather demonized public image."[265] She begins her overview of the controversy with an open letter to President Yushchenko in 2009. Kis' herself drafted the document along with twenty other women leaders. The letter responded to President Yanukovych's "political sexism" in his 2008 public address on International Women's Day in which he spoke to Ukrainian women "as little more than lovers, mothers, and housewives, instead of full-fledged members of society."[266] The following year, NGOs throughout Ukraine composed another letter informing managers and leaders in politics and industry on the political origins of International Women's Day, "to prevent them from continuing its [patronizing] Soviet-style celebration."[267] This second letter cited international monitoring groups and national legislation affecting gender rights in Ukraine. The letter was published online and gained over a hundred signatories of leaders in business and academia.[268] The critical mass of women that joined Ofenzywa in gathering around the day pointed to an even deeper problem: widespread frustration over the outcomes of Ukraine's Orange Revolution, the ideals (of which there were many) promised to improve women's lives by putting Ukraine on the path to E.U. Accession.

In this instance, Yanukovych followed a ritualized encomium of women that he inherited from Soviet celebrations of the day, thus enacting a script for public oratory that built upon nostalgia for the Soviet past among older generations. Ultimately, Kis' article puts on display the weakened social contract under Yanukovych in her anger at his commemoration of women's passivity on a state holiday whose origins reveal a supranational, albeit socialist feminist

[265] Oksana Kis, "Ukrainian Women Reclaiming the Feminist Meaning of International Women's Day: A Report About Recent Feminist Activism," 225.
[266] Kis' description of Yushchenko's speech. The speech itself begins with the following: "Dear Ukrainian women! Greetings on the occasion of the holiday of spring, the holiday of women's beauty, which blossoms in Ukraine today. My heart is filled with most tender feelings for you . . ." Ibid, 221.
[267] Ibid, 222.
[268] Kis', "Letter to An Official. 'List Posadovcevi'," February 12, 2009. http://h.ua/story/173353. Accessed January 10, 2012.

alliance.[269] Insofar as state institutions can claim to be democratic, it is only in their capacity to prevent minority voices from being totally neutralized by more powerful segments of society.[270] In Ukraine, the narrative of "transition" attempts to overlook and silence the Soviet experiment as an actually lived and remembered period of time that only officially ended in 1991. The ways in which individuals view themselves as citizens is intimately intertwined with that period of time. The state's failure to take this into account emerged in its inability to respond in any representative capacity to the protests on Kyiv's Maidan in 2014. Ofenzywa's prior demands to "reclaim" International Women's Day were direct attacks against Yanukovych's public oratory and its silencing overtures to a communist past that, for all intents and purposes, never existed; or, at least, a past that existed differently for women than for men.

What makes Viktor Yanukovych's comments on International Women's Day particularly notable are that they are not unique to his leadership alone. Kis' splits off the origins of International Women's Day from its later, Soviet-style celebrations in Ukraine, noting how the day first "entered Soviet mythology" as an official state holiday by Decree of the Supreme Council of the USSR on May 8, 1965, the twentieth anniversary of World War II.[271] The day soon descended into a token celebration of an essentialized femininity, resulting in several conflicting public opinions on the meaning of March 8 in post-Soviet Ukraine. [272] Kis' balances the "original meaning" of the day against politicians' appropriations of its popularity to gain

[269] Chantal Mouffe has argued for a need to rethink communism, stating the word "connotes an anti-political vision of society" where an awareness of power antagonisms and the politics of the self in what she and other have termed "the political" are evacuated from society. Ibid, 83.
[270] " . . . what Gramsci called 'hegemony through neutralization' or 'passive revolution,' a situation where demands [feminism] which challenge the hegemonic order are appropriated by the existing system so as to satisfy them in a way that neutralizes their subversive potential." Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, 73.
[271] Kis', "Ukrainian Women Reclaiming the Feminist Meaning of International Women's Day," 230.
[272] "In recent decades March 8 has turned into a holiday of spring, women's beauty, and love, celebrated both in public settings and in Soviet families. By the late 1980s, Soviet citizens had interiorized new ways to celebrate this day at which men and boys were expected (or even required) to solemnize the 'eternal femininity' of their counterparts by expressing their love, respect, and attention to women and girls of all ages, to greet them with flowers and gifts and to fulfill all their (rather modest) wishes one day a year." Ibid, 1.

votes. Ukrainian politicians doubly disempower women by relegating their "essential nature" to an imagined idyllic realm beyond the province of representative democracy altogether— off "somewhere in an unnamed site *a-priori* to the state's appropriation of the day."[273] Extremely low numbers of women in state positions (less than 18%) contributed to the anger leading up to the Maidan protests, which were ultimately not about the E.U. Accession Agreement, but the disparities pervasive throughout every fiber of life in Ukraine. Thus, the exclusion of women from the public sphere served to both delegitimize the civic category of "woman," and also, to entrench the feminization of the private sphere. There is irony in post-independence leaders' melding Soviet oratory with condescending references to International Women's Day. This is due to the fact that the very concept of the private sphere emerged from the bourgeois classes of the Western European industrial revolution in the late 18th—19th centuries.

French feminist Simone de Beauvoir penned *Second Sex* during the reconstruction of social and political life that took place across Europe in the postwar period. Though since criticized for collapsing gender and sexuality, her text is still useful for understanding "woman" as a categorical subject in history. Beauvoir contrasts the legal rights granted to women within the U.S.S.R. with those in Western Europe. She cites the Comintern on the legalization of abortion and free childcare as laudable responses to the notion of woman as an oppressed category within the proletariat. She only permits this line of argument to go so far. Unlike the proletariat, which at the time was a relatively recent political construct, the social and political category of woman has always existed. The social tensions arising from the public/private divides that oppress the category had not been resolved within the Soviet experiment. Thus, she leaves her thoughts on the issue unfinished:

[273] Ibid, 1.

> Strictly subordinated to the state like all workers, strictly bound to the home, but having access to political life and to the dignity conferred by productive labor, the Russian woman is in a singular condition which would repay the close study that circumstances unfortunately prevent me from undertaking.[274]

Where Kis' contextualizes Ofenzywa as part of a larger effort to restore the "broken connections between the Ukrainian and international history of women's emancipation" she picks up where Beauvoir left off, and does so by describing a renaissance of feminist street activism and petitions concerning March 8 since the Orange Revolution.

By contrast, Ofenzywa situates themselves vis-à-vis the massive restructuring of family, work, and leisure dating to the turn of the twentieth century. Taking into account the fact that most members of Ofenzywa were born during the beginnings of the neoliberal era, this earlier moment of social upheaval shares some parallels with the period under Yanukovych when the group formed. By referencing pre-WWII labor activism to demand better conditions for women in the present, Ofenzywa conveys that the double-burden quandary first discussed in the postwar era remains an ongoing struggle. The group's focus on the labor rights of women, including the woman intellectual as a special kind of laborer, and their method of street activism in marches, prioritizes the daily work women do as the primary site for engaging politics. Henri Lefebvre links ideology and its apprehension to a dialectics of the everyday.[275] Though he wrote *Critique of Everyday Life* in the postwar era, Lefebvre's notion of power reflected in everyday life is current with many post-Foucauldian thinkers, writing that "everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground."[276] For Ofenzywa, the everyday is also latent

[274] Simone de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 23.
[275] "the problem of ideologies is as follows: how can consciousness at all levels (individuals, groups, classes, peoples) be mistaken about itself and its content—its being—when it is that very content and that very being which determine it? Only by taking the formal structure of consciousness and its content as inseparables and submitting them to a complex analysis will we be able to understand any particular form of consciousness, or any particular ideology" "Philosophy and the Critique of Everyday Life," Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 96.
[276] Ibid, 97.

with transformative and transgressive potential through which women's identities as workers, consumers and reproducers are constituted, often in conflict with their idealized representation.

After their 2012 march, Ofenzywa hosted a public "art workshop" in Kyiv's Visual Cultures Research Center. Participants at the workshop were invited to choose an object to metaphorically represent their gender and write a short piece explaining their choice. Each person then posed with their object in a photograph by the photographer Yevgenia Belorusets for a series that she later posted to the group's blog.[277] Many participants took an abstract approach to the project. One woman declared herself a minimalist and went nude while standing in front of a wall painted blue—the signature mark denoting "official" public spaces in Ukraine, such as schools, hospitals, and prisons. By baring herself against a wall marked by institutional power, and then documenting her act, the activist in the photo refused to behave in the ways that the mark was originally devised to promote its regulation of citizens' bodies within institutional contexts. This kind of visual insubordination, or refusal to commit to an orchestrated script, mirrors Ofenzywa's larger style of protest in their evasions of the aesthetic regimes associated with Yanukovych's state. In this case, standing naked in front of the pervasive blue wall invites audiences to look at the inner workings of how the state imprints and regulates space.

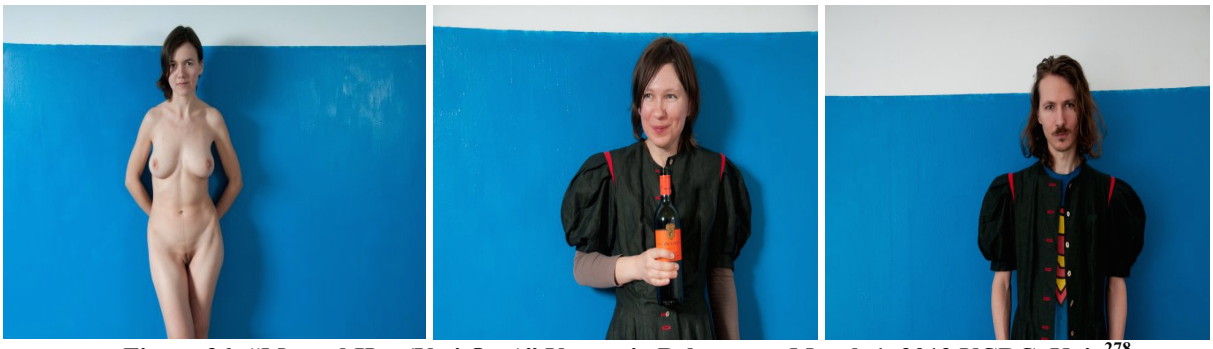

Figure 36: "Me and Her (Ya i Ona)" Yevgenia Belorusets, March 1, 2012 VCRC, Kyiv[278]

[277] Ofenzywa Blog "Акція «За Рівність! Проти НЕКвізиції!»" Accessed March 15, 2013.
[278] Yevgenia Belorusets Website, Accesed October 11, 2014.

In these images, the wall becomes a signifier for the dissonance inherent in the overlap between public intuitions and privatized bodies, in effect, pointing to how this overlap functions as a resource for silencing dissent and creating the appearance of consensus. Contrasting the blue wall (one of the most ubiquitously visible ghosts of Soviet biopolitics) with a naked female body, this activist resignifies the mark from its ideological basis in a preexisting state, to a set of material meanings antithetical to the total freedom of bodies in space and time.[279] The dissonance between the activist's body and the wall's regulatory purpose points to the continuous regulation of bodies by a Soviet (and then post-Soviet) marker of hegemonic state power. Nearly all of the creative acts inspired by the feminist workshop, including the meditation on the blue wall, can be read as pushing against the erasure of difference subsumed in both the socialist and capitalist projects as hegemonic, all-pervasive scripts for living and working.[280] In this sense, much of Ofenzywa's cultural output aims to throw into question the seemingly ordinary surfaces of everyday spaces. In doing so, it reflects on these spaces' central function within the conditioning of the self, and of individual memory, as the origin from which all politics proceed. By the time Ofenzywa formed, the marches of the Orange Revolution had already ended and the banners had faded. However, their texts suggest that a door had remained open: that the tents, the slogans, the songs, and the camaraderie that arose through the gatherings on the Maidan in 2004, despite its leaders' eventually dissolving these hopes, had introduced a

[279] This term refers to Michel Foucault's idea on the extension of state power over populations through the regulation of bodies in time and space. He sees an inadequacy in Marxism's failure to fully account for an embodied politics, "It's as though 'revolutionary' discourses were still steeped in the ritualistic themes derived from Marxist analyses. And while there are some very interesting things about the body in Marx's writings, Marxism considered as an historical reality has had a terrible tendency to occlude the question of the body, in favour of consciousness and ideology." Michel Foucault, "Body/Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, 58–59.

[280] "Early pronouncements by socialist regimes in favor of gender equality, together with policies to increase women's participation in the work force, led optimists to expect important gains for women; the internationalist bias of Soviet socialism promised to resolve the 'national question,' making national conflicts obsolete; and the Party's broadly homogenizing goals bade fair to erase difference of almost every kind from the social landscape." Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?*, 61.

new discourse of protest that made possible ten years onward a peaceful critique of the revolution, as evidenced in Ofenzywa's feminist rhetoric.

III. Rhetorical Contexts

Ofenzywa's Manifesto

By adopting the images, language, and rhetoric of March 8, Ofenzywa distinguished their group identity in language that carried double significance as a sign of feminist protest, and also, a critique of the state. Their manifesto reads:

> We call for the return of International Women's Day to its content in women's solidarity in the struggle for our political rights. May the demand for equal opportunity and our struggle against discrimination sound with a loud voice in Ukraine—especially by the state, which formulates, but does not realize, women's full potential. United and together we will celebrate a century of women's struggles for our rights![281]

Under the aegis of feminism, Ofenzywa kept alive the practice of critiquing the state, even in spite of receding civil liberties in the period of their existence. They were able to accomplish this by appropriating the language of revolution in terms that precede the Ukrainian state itself. The inclusive "we," a hallmark of the manifesto genre, suggests that after "a century of women's struggles" neither communism nor the promises of the free market have achieved "equal opportunity" for women. Rhetorically, the group's founding document replaces Zetkin's battle for safe working conditions in industrial factories with a more ambiguous fight "against discrimination." Yushchenko's botched election being the main throttle for the Orange

[281] The notion of the collective in the early twentieth century differed greatly from its later counterparts under glasnost in which small intellectual circles blended with the growth of mass-culture and pop-culture in the Soviet Union. In both Lviv and Kyiv "Global countercultures, including those of hippies, bikers, and by the early 1980s punks, appeared." All the same, even the pop influence on later collectives like BuBaBu in Lviv was politicized: "In the sphere of rock music, the forces of pop, rock, and nationalism made their greatest fusion at the end of the 1980s, thanks to a nascent political upheaval in Kyiv. A new republic-wide rock festival, the Red Rue, organized in memory of Ivasiuk in 1989, did much to articulate young people's demands for the Communist Party to step down and for Ukraine to become independent." Critiques of Western capitalism would later be mounted in the rock opera "Chrysler Imperial" in Lviv. Rock, pop, and the early modern avant-garde collective became fused with political skepticism of both Russian and Western imperialism. William Jay Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv*, 220, 259–60.

Revolution, Ofenzywa's underlying message here cites government elites who "formulate, but do not realize" anything as the ultimate barrier to reaching women's "full potential," a concept already linked to the nation through popular imaginings of feminism as a Soviet propaganda term. By doing so, the group embarked on a profound path of activism that would eventually put them at the very center of events on the Maidan in 2013-14. Their formal split into a two-part coalition would, to a large degree, derive from irreconcilable views on how to address the marginalization of women within Euromaidan. The ideas driving the split were tied to how to interpret their mission statement: whether the legacies of socialism and neoliberalism are compatible or incongruent for a feminist movement. Their manifesto reads:

> We recall that on March 8, 1917 in Petrograd thousands of seamstresses and textile workers took part in mass demonstrations, strikes, and hunger strikes; thereby launching the October Revolution. The Soviet state soon transformed their struggles into ideological illusion. Hollow declarations of gender equality forced Soviet women into difficult work whereby they had to raise children and care for a family at the same time. Since then, the oppression of women in the modern world has changed its face, but not its content. Neoliberalism—capitalism of the twentieth century—has created many new forms for the exploitation of women. At the same time, cultural globalization has opened up to us a world of information, and with it, an understanding of our position and the opportunity to change it.[282]

In both of Ofenzywa's founding texts—their manifesto and their mission statement—the group likens the hope for a better quality of life that people experienced at the time of the Orange Revolution to the twin "ideological illusions" of the Soviet state and the economic shock of Ukraine's initial years of independence. Where the October Revolution gave women the double burden of caring for family and working outside the home, neoliberalism, by contrast, has introduced "new forms for the exploitation of women." The language of socialist revolution has been replaced with the language of self-invention in thinking through the possibility of an "opportunity to change."[283] This subtle shift leaves room for viewing patriarchy as a function of

[282] Excerpted from "Ofenzywa Manifesto" distributed at marches and posted online: *Feminist Ofenzyva*. http://ofenzyva.wordpress.com. Blog. Accessed October 15, 2012.

[283] " . . . among the employed, 56% of women have higher educations, though there remains an overall 30% pay gap between men and women, and for women 20-30 years of age, their pensions will differ from men's by 50%. Women are hardly represented in the higher echelons of power and leadership. Out of 179 academics at the National Science

everyday life, as well as a descriptive space for the inclusion of more than two genders (a concept foreign to Marx and Engels) as a sine-qua-non of protesting for anti-discrimination.

The "world of information" and "cultural globalization" mentioned here become instruments of a broader enlightenment of Ukraine's emerging generation of women seeking "an understanding of [their] position." Knowledge (expressed in language) begets politics, as the "labor of representing" comes to define political struggle. Pierre Bourdieu has linked self-knowledge to the symbolic power expressed in language as a transformative and inherently political social site, where "knowledge of the social world and, more precisely, the categories which make it possible, are the stakes *par excellence* of the political struggle, a struggle which is inseparably theoretical and practical, over the power of preserving or transforming the social world by preserving or transforming the categories of perception of that world."[284] Knowledge is valued as greater awareness of one's own experience, but this value also depends on achieving a vantage point from which to transform it.[285] During the Euromaidan demonstrations Ofenzywa activists remained skeptical of the overall framing of the mass gatherings as pro-European. However, they joined with other leftist groups such as the student union Direct Action (Priyama Dia) to train the crowds in nonviolent resistance and facilitate organized discussions about the conflicting demands emerging on the Maidan, especially in mass media. After casualties began to mount, members put into motion their knowledge, skills, and contacts in social organizing to run medical aid centers, guard the wounded and captured protestors, and shuttle information to

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Academy of Ukraine only 3 are women. Women also constitute the absolute majority of migrant workers in Ukraine," Tamara Martsenyuk, "Ukraine's Other Half," http://postsovietpost.stanford.edu/analysis/. Accessed July 15, 2012.

[284] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Perception of the Social World and Political Struggle"*Language and Symbolic Power*, 236.

[285] Lefebvre linked labor to this transformation: "if we consider the overall life of the worker, we will see that his work and his attitude towards work are linked to social practice as a whole, to his experience as a whole . . .What is more, this 'whole' must be taken in the context of a specific country and nation, at a specific moment of civilization and social development, and as involving a certain set of needs. And this brings us back to the critique of everyday life." *Critique of Everyday Life*, 88.

independent presses and international journalists to counter misinformation campaigns. Despite deeper disagreement over how to address sexism on the Maidan, especially with regard to the role of militancy in feminism, and whether or not to join the defense units against attacks from state riot police, in practice, the two factions worked together, putting their own bodies on the line in rescue efforts that saved lives. Choices were made on an ethical basis that went beyond feminist notions of socialism or neoliberalism. Though the group did not formally retain their network in name, members continued to work together throughout and after the demonstrations, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Four.

The genre of the manifesto has a unique history in post-Soviet cultures. The conviction that words and art are consequential for building society defined the broader ideological currents in the early Soviet period. The founding manifestos of the visual art and literary journal *LEF* published from 1923-1925 and 1927-1929 became prototypical of the genre. The journal's editors, formalist critic Osip Brik and futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, stated that the mission of the journal was to develop leftist art in the ideological service of building communism. In the 1923 manifesto "What Does Lef Fight For?" the editors summarized their struggle to build a futurist, communist art during and just after the Bolshevik Revolution.[286] Formally, Ofenzywa's manifesto ascribes to a philosophy of art rooted in the local leftist history of the avant-garde: both assume ideas precede the material world, that aesthetics can determine and even change reality, and that language is a form of social and political action. [287] However, unlike in the

[286] Concluding that they needed to tighten their ranks in order to pursue "true" communism, they set forth a plan: "*Lef must bring together the leftist forces. Lef must survey its ranks*, after having discarded the past that stuck to them. *Lef must create a united front* to blow up old junk, to fight for the integration of a new culture. We will solve the problems of art not by majority of vote of a mythical left front which so far exists only as an idea, but by action, by the energy of our steering group which year after year leads the work of the left and of those who have always guided it ideologically," Eds. Anna Lawton and Herbert Eagle, *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestos, 1912-1928*, 195.

[287] "We act: in street actions, marches, protests; in our words, in articles and discussions; by organizing conferences, discussions, seminars; by organizing exhibits, film screenings, and other cultural events; by initiating women's

mostly male circles of the early avant-garde, Ofenzywa's feminist language is intertwined with the "absent element" of the political subject described by Julia Kristeva where women's negativity in public discourse resembles that of an author in a text. Women's struggle is always a struggle to speak as political subjects. Ofenzywa's manifesto does not lay claim to one unified demand, but instantiates a collective voice, doing so in masculine revolutionary terms, while signifying a feminist revolution.[288]

The Politics of "Everyday Life"

There are key differences between LEF's manifesto and Ofenzywa's politics. The latter does not make pretense to any unifying aim, any "true path to the impending future," a position from which the early Futurist avant-gardists often spoke and wrote.[289] Ofenzywa's manifesto does not imply linear progress; rather, they call for a total break with "normative assumptions about gender." The "hollow declarations" and "illusions" that Ofenzywa discredits parallel the diction of early Soviet manifestos and their anti-bourgeois statements in attempting to relieve the proletarian struggle of its "old junk." Whereas LEF depicts the future in their utopian aim "to create a united front to blow up old junk, to fight for the integration of a new culture," in Ofenzywa's manifesto, the future has already arrived as "a world of information." Moreover, this is a world that sounds a lot like the past. This is because the "bourgeois" illusions of past manifestos are mapped onto a critique of patriarchy that lends itself to a critique of leaders in the neoliberal period who have "changed [the] face [of women's oppression], but not its content."

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groups for raising awareness." Ofenzywa Mission Statement. Transl. Jessica Zychowicz. Ofenzywa Blog. January 10, 2012. "Акція «За Рівність! Проти НЕКвізиції!»" Accessed January 15, 2012.

[288] "If history is made up of modes of production, the subject is a *contradiction* that brings about practice because practice is always both signifying and semiotic, a crest where meaning emerges only to disappear. It is incumbent upon 'art' to demonstrate that the subject is the absent element of and in his practice, just as it was incumbent upon political economy to prove that history is a matter of class struggle." Julia Kristeva, "The Second Overturning of the Dialectic: After Political Economy, Aesthetics," *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 215.

[289] Lawton and Eagle, Ibid.

Unlike the early Soviet collectives that produced culture according to state policies for social reform, Ofenzywa disarms the Orange "ideals of the Maidan" in a feminist critique that combines the revolutionary aesthetics of both the Bolshevik and neoliberal eras.[290] Ofenzywa's manifesto, to local ears attuned to the form, also plays on the nationalist sentiments of these two eras. They introduce a productive critique of nationalism by invoking the emphasis on autonomy in the Orange Revolution by way of a brief window of time (1917-18) when Ukraine gained its first footing as a nation-state during the uprisings against the Bolsheviks and the Whites. The result is a critique of nation-building from the vantage point of minorities reaching an "understanding of [their] position." Situating ideology this way, politics appear symptomatic of everyday life, which becomes the primary site for a critique of public discourse.

Ofenzywa named the weeklong film festival that preceded their march in 2012 "Woman With a Movie Camera" after Dzyga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera*. Though Vertov made his films in circumstances that served the interests of the state, his technical inventiveness defined the avant-garde according to an aesthetics that would eventually come to be viewed as visual shorthand for revolution in the public imagination. It is this shorthand in particular that Ofenzywa adopts for building a collective lens for their own critique of declining civil liberties in Ukraine during the Yanukovych years. Vertov thought the camera could function as an all-seeing eye that would reveal truths about everyday life by greatly augmenting the ways the senses take in and make sense of the world.

The two photo series by Belorusets that I include here arise from within "a certain 'globalization of resistance' " that Vitaly Chernetsky notes in authors' works during the radical

[290] Ofenzywa occasionally collaborates with leftist youth groups, though they have identified themselves as separatists. The activist groups Left Opposition, Avtonomia Union, and Pryama Dia Student Union helped organize their 2012 march.

economic flux of the 1990s.[291] The photos were curated by another member of Ofenzywa for a banned exhibit in 2012, entitled *Ukrainian Body*, that brought together outside activists and the two art collectives discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. They were also shown in London. By conflating the attitudes of author/subject/audience, the project approximates a common language shaped within and against representations of the category post-Soviet as a political category and a condition of being. The images interrogate the "authenticity" of realism as a genre in departing from the masculinist universalism of the early avant-garde. The environments in these photos, when considered within their local feminist context, ultimately shift interpretations toward a particularly Ukrainian experience. [292] Where Rodchenko once employed the principles of architecture to signify the future, Belorusets' citation of his style in a feminist framework bridges her generation's daily experiences with the memories of their mothers and grandmothers. Insofar as social transformation always involves transformations of the self, the photos put on display the multiple affective registers by which individuals imagine themselves to be part of a collective public.

[291] Vitaly Chernetsky bases his term on his survey of 1990s Ukrainian and Russian literary representations of the nation through alterity to the West. He claims this is especially the case within the postcolonial underpinnings that he claims are pervasive throughout modern Ukrainian literature, including its more recent feminist developments in the late-twentieth century regional tendencies he defines as "postcommunist-postmodernism." *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

[292] Contemporary artists in Ukraine are pushing for more radical forms of expression by demanding greater creative license and professional autonomy. Yevgenia Belorusets is involved in several initiatives in Ukraine sponsored by international and local organizations to protect artists' freedom of speech. As a well-known photographer, translator, poet, and critic, Belorusets is at the center of these events. She is the founder of the prominent Ukrainian literary magazine, *Prostory*, and is a member of both *Ofenzywa* and the curatorial artists' union *Hudrada.* In 2012, Belorusets joined other artists in founding a professional union (ICTM) to protect their professional and creative rights. One of their aims is to coordinate with the state to regulate artists' employment by levying taxes on the sale of their works and offering financial social assistance when necessary.

IV. Time in the Photo Series "32 Gogol St."

Form and Subjectivity

Belorusets' photo project "32 Gogol St." is named after its main subject, a dilapidated public housing unit in the historic center of Kyiv where residents live in cramped, communal quarters commissioned by the state.[293] The series includes hundreds of black-and-white photos of the house's inhabitants living their daily lives: doing chores, sleeping, smoking, getting a haircut, and laughing together around the kitchen table. The inhabitants are from multiple generations, including pensioners and middle-aged individuals who hold low-paid jobs in Kyiv. There are buoyant moments in the series: a woman playing piano, a daughter hugging her mother, another boy laughing. In one photo a woman and her daughter sit before a mirror readying the young woman's image. In another, a silhouette of a young man stands smoking in a darkened hall. We learn in an accompanying text that he is deathly afraid of cameras and wants to be sure "that only he will know that he is the one in the photo." The photos' rich emotional tapestries reflect the way they were made; taken over a period of three years, Belorusets spent substantial time living in the house while getting to know the residents intimately for the sole purpose of the project. Even the building itself is intertwined in her characterizations of their lives. Time in the photos becomes symbolic of deeper ruptures between the artist and the residents. Belorusets writes on her project's blog that "The inhabitants' situation becomes the subject of conversation: landscapes guide relationships between people while their self-identification emerges in 'floating signifiers' of the past and an uncertain future."[294] The building's destruction under the weight of

[293] *Gogol St. 32* has received international acclaim. The project was given an award by the Royal Photographic Society of Britain in 2010 and has received *The Guardian*'s Joan Wakelin Award.

[294] *Все ж Продолжает Нерей в Аонийских Свирепствовать Водах: Повседневность Как Событие / Комментарии к Фотопроекту «Гоголевская 32» Gogol 32, 2011.* http://yevgeniabelorusets.blogspot.com/2011/03/32-i.html. Accessed February 10, 2013. Transl. Jessica Zychowicz

time also takes on significance as a metaphor for the unnamable, human neglect that has brought the house to ruin. The visible traces of the violence that time and nature have wrought on its fixtures, railings, and appliances testify to outsiders' fears of the people living there, outsiders who cannot, and need not, fully explain why.

Figure 37: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets, 2011[295]

Belorusets writes on her blog about how she learned about the house at 32 Gogol St. In May 2007 a large group of young leftist activists had staged a protest called "Capture Your Home!" in front of the house to support residents' ongoing appeals to city authorities to renovate the building. Belorusets explains the significance of the protest's slogan through the theory of defamiliarization: "Capturing your own home could be understood as estrangement, which, according to Viktor Shklovsky, displays a thing, creating a unique perception of the object, creating a vision of its *not-recognition.*'"[296] Here Belorusets likens her own sense of alienation produced by her lens, and her outsider status in the house, to the "unusual form" of the protest.

[295] Yevgenia Belorusets Website, Accessed January 15, 2014.
[296] Ibid, Accessed October 13, 2012.

Both her lens and the slogan gesture toward the right to a home; both capture not property, but perspective. Explicating her photos through Shklovsky's theory of estrangement, Belorusets invites a polyvalent interpretation of their meaning.[297] Defamiliarization stresses her camera's role in mediating experience, creating a frame that redirects her audience's gaze toward the production of the images themselves. Audiences are encouraged to think about the processes surrounding the photos as instances of social rehabilitation.

The protest produced mixed results among the house's residents. Looking back on the event, one resident advised Belorusets not to publicize her work: "I don't think you should let anyone see your photos of our lives here, activists have already protested on our behalf and for what? People only laugh at us at work now, nothing more." Belorusets notes the hidden affective aspect to the woman's complaint, writing, "this woman really wanted people to see, but was ashamed." Elsewhere, Belorusets notes a different response to her presence in the house: "One resident who had been living in the house awhile told me: 'I love this room, it's large and spacious. We've gotten used to living here and probably would live here the rest of our lives if the walls weren't so damp. This house is old, but you get used to it, tethered to it, not like in a new home. You see this crack on the wall? I've been looking at it for years. It's like a drawing on the wall I hadn't seen before because although I could see it, at the same time, I couldn't see it. I want to see more, you know, but alone I can't see and perhaps this is because I don't want to see. I now know that I want to learn to see things differently, for example, that which you

[297] Shklovksy proposed his theory of estrangement in his 1917 essay "Art as Device" which Belorusets cites here. Shklovsky experimented with the idea that "truth" could best be approximated through distorting human perspective. He wrote of image that "An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object—it creates a 'vision' of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it." For him, like Shklovsky, images in poetic language could also reveal truth by defamiliarizing objects "through the slowness of perception." Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose / O Teorii prozy*, 219.

see . . ." [298] This resident's description of her personal, everyday experience stems not only from the social differences between herself and Belorusets' political activism, but of sharing her home with an outsider, and an acute awareness of the art-activist's camera.

Belorusets' texts suggest that images can introduce new ways of seeing a situation, in this case, how residents view themselves in relation to the house, and its symbolism in Ukrainian society. She elaborates on some of the social relationships that arose between herself and the residents of the house while viewing her photos with them. In the process, she establishes herself as an active participant within her own frame by designating how power is leveraged beyond it:

> After three years of relating with residents I began to understand why the protest was the only one and why, despite its unusual form of asserting one's rights, the residents decided to carry it out. 'Capture Your Home' was based on a dynamics of power and its response; it was a revolt against the personification, enslavement, and devastation of everyday life through territorial means of social and economic exile.[299]

Here Belorusets uses the language of abjection to draw out the opposite valuation of the house as a home, instead characterizing its space as one of social and cultural exile.[300] As Vertov wrote, "Not 'filming life unawares' for the sake of the 'unaware,' but in order to show people without masks . . . to read their thoughts, laid bare by the camera."[301] Claiming to reveal "the devastation of everyday life through territorial means" on her blog about the project, Belorusets aligns her audience with the unfamiliar, disorienting feeling of "social and economic exile" that she sets out to document in herself and her own relationship to the camera, its subjects, and their own ways of seeing their living situation as at once familiar and foreign.

Scholars have long noted photography's uniqueness as a medium of expression for its capacity to combine nature and artifice by imparting images with accidental and deliberate

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[298] Belorusets, Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Julia Kristeva developed a theory of the abject to convey marginalization in its breakdown of self/other into negativity (not I) in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.
[301] "Kino-eye as the possibility of making the invisible visible, the unclear clear, the hidden manifest, the disguised overt, the acted nonacted; making falsehood into truth." Dziga Vertov, *Kino Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, 210.

qualities that change their overall composition. Distinct from other genres, the documentary photograph retains singular status in public institutions and surveillance technologies as a medium of disclosure by which "truths" about a situation or circumstance may be conveyed. Walter Benjamin was one of the earliest theorists to link authentic experience to the artistic production made possible by the camera as an instrument of class-relations. He claimed that with the capacity to reproduce images by printing them came their fetishization as man-made objects through their circulation in a capitalist system. With the advent of photography, in particular, he believed "the representation of human beings by means of an apparatus [had] made possible a highly productive use of the human being's self-alienation."[302] This, in turn, he claimed, alienated the masses from authentic art. As a committed Marxist, Benjamin, like Vertov, called for the expropriation of film capital by the proletariat, which shaped his social valuation of the medium.[303]

Faith in technology and its "interpenetration of reality with equipment" for Benjamin, like the Futurists, could serve to both accelerate and ameliorate economic exploitation.[304] In his synopsis of art's relationship to history, Benjamin claimed that art is always political and the belief that any art can be practiced purely "for art's sake" is specious vanity so blinding it can yield fascism.[305] Writing from Central Europe in 1936, on the eve of World War II, when Stalinism and Fascism were both palpable threats, Benjamin's response to the situation was to urge that "the most important function of film is to establish equilibrium between human beings and the apparatus. Film achieves this goal not only in terms of man's presentation of himself to

[302] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," 32.
[303] "as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics." Ibid, 25.
[304] Ibid, 35.
[305] Benjamin drew this idea out to an extreme in his famous expression written in 1936 on the eve of World War II: "Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art." Ibid, 42.

the camera but also in terms of his representation of his environment by means of this apparatus."[306] Within the Marxist revolutionary imagery in which Belorusets situates her own work, her camera's claims on "the political" can be discerned in her renderings of the commonplace, everyday details accentuated within the images she produces, not to mention the negation of what lies beyond her frame, in "a vast and unsuspected field of action."[307]

Belorusets generalizes the political situation surrounding "32 Gogol St." to the broader post-Soviet condition. The house represents "just one of numerous cases of violations of a basic human right to housing and adequate living conditions." She notes on the blog associated with the project that communal services like gas, electricity, and water are in chronic shortage, and that this transgression of basic rights motivates her documentary. Thus, she effectively elevates her photos' representative "field of action" to housing shortages across all of the former territories of the U.S.S.R.[308] Many of the interviews in the project draw out where a sense of decline has come to characterize processes of remembering. For example, a tenant recalls better times: "After the Soviet period the house wasn't in perfect condition, but the overwhelming sense of shame was not there." Maria Todorova, in writing about postcommunist nostalgia, remarks that, "it is not only the longing for security, stability, and prosperity. There is also the feeling of loss for a very specific form of sociability, and of vulgarization of cultural life. Above all, there is a desire among those who have lived through communism, even when they have opposed it or were indifferent to its ideology, to invest their lives with meaning and dignity, not to be thought of, remembered, or bemoaned as losers or 'slaves.'" Belorusets, by retelling older residents' longing for a past way of life conveys a past that she never experienced, but which

[306] Ibid, 43.
[307] Ibid, 37.
[308] Belorusets writes on her blog associated with the project: "These images and interview extracts may also be used as an illustration of inadequate living conditions of millions of other post-Soviet citizens." Ibid. Accessed March 15, 2012.

appears better, or at least more secure, than the present economic problems facing "millions of post-Soviet citizens." Like International Women's Day, this temporal juxtaposition lends continuity to a post-Orange generation's re-evaluations of Ukrainian history. She writes: "For Irina and Svitlana, photography became a way of turning the ordinary and everyday into exceptional instances, allowing them to experience their own personal history in foreign contexts . . . Photography became a pretext to get rid of commonplace understandings of the situation, even to go beyond a sense of reality and weave into the fabric of the image a secondary meaning, beyond the usual boundaries of experience." Such "exceptional instances" reinscribe residents' personal histories in active terms. The "vast and unsuspected field of action" that Benjamin attributed to photography emerges in Belorusets' probing of consciousness and the latent power of memory to illuminate in a landscape what may go unseen to others.

The two photos in Figure 39 and 40 are side-by-side images by Yevgenia Belorusets and Alexander Rodchenko. They are strikingly similar in their usage of depth of field shots, angular perspective, and geometric shapes. Rodchenko's image of a worker climbing up a fire escape attached to a brick skyscraper conveys movement and strength; his image's clean lines and dizzying, though even, proportions are unified in the directional motion they convey, as well as their negative space and color saturation. Yevgenia Belorusets' image also depicts the exterior fire escape of an urban building. The lines of the stone façade framing the window in her photograph echo the rails of the ladder in Rodchenko's image in a similar upward facing arrow or "A" shape, however, in Belorusets image, time has corroded the building's exterior. The dynamic shape of the metal ladder in Rodchenko's photo, in Belorusets', appears more like a softly handwritten A than a typeset or lithographic one. The filtered lighting in Belorusets' photo also makes for starker contrasts between objects contained within the image; a slight mistiness

suggests memory or muted emotion and other natural elements creep in at the edges: sunlight, trees, a plant growing out of the rain gutter. The square shape of the defunct balcony and the nearby walls reflecting light to the left and bottom of the frame also give the viewer the impression of being boxed in. Where the Futurist Rodchenko projected into his image the swiftness, ingenuity, and muscle of the communist future, Belorusets' image conveys the passage of time differently. In her picture the balcony remains out of reach—defunct and deserted. The revolution is over. Rodchenko's image is a vision of the future. Belorusets' is a memory of the past.

Figure 38: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets, 2011

Figure 39: "House on Myasnitskaya" Alexander Rodchenko, 1925

Ruin, Materialism, Memory

Belorusets' photos in this series tell a cyclical story of decline through the material residue of time. The depiction of the communal Soviet interior is likened to the interiors of the older generation of women that features heavily as the main subject in the series. The soft-focus lens, grainy resolution, and the material objects that surround the people within these photos also impart the series with a dreamlike quality that suggests we are looking at a sequence of memories. Given the age of the author, however, these are not Belorusets' own memories of the Soviet past, but visual approximations of the memories of her subjects and stories inscribed within the built environment. The communal apartment emerged as an artistic topos in Russia in film and art in the late 1920s. Svetlana Boym traces how plot developments often followed the adventures of beds, sofas, and chairs in comedy sketches mocking various social gaffes (i.e. *Bed and Sofa*, 1927). This trend soon gave way to preoccupations and fetishes with domestic material things in the 1950s resulting from postwar shortages. It wasn't until the 1970s, however, that the communal apartment fully took on shape as a lasting topos for "the nostalgic site of the conceptual artists' own totalitarian childhood."[309] The scenes within Belorusets' photos capture both the nostalgia for a bygone era, but also, the contemporary private uses of a once Soviet, communal space that the ideologies reflected in its original design could never have predicted.

[309] Boym apprehends her own visit to her former communal apartment as a return home, in which she reconstitutes a sense of self through traces in the landscape that are embedded with particular memories of former ways of inhabiting space. She writes, "What an architectural utopia does not take into account is history and its narratives about inhabiting places. Thus the utopian Common Places turn into 'places of communal use' in the apartment, a shabby stage for many scandals between the neighbors and a ruin of utopian communality." *Common Places*, 130.

Figure 40: Lyudmilla Semyonova in "No. 3 Meshchanskaya St./ Bed and Sofa," 1927

Unlike in prior twentieth century conceptualizations of the communal apartment, Belorusets' inability to access the Soviet past as a lived memory is a central theme in the photos' navigation between public and private space. It is this inability to remember that produces a sense of alienation in the photos. Ironically, the inability to remember is also what bridges the distances between their author and the people in them. In Belorusets' contemporary rendering of the communal Soviet dwelling, it is also the house of *another* in the attempt to approximate a shared memory of the past. Ultimately, Belorusets' images highlight where she remains a stranger to her protagonists' living memories of the Soviet past by interpolating and imagining that past through cues embedded within the built environment. The self's alienation takes on shape in these photos as a search for mutual recognition between the author and the house's aging inhabitants, despite the generational gap between them and the fact that their subjective experiences of this former Soviet space unequivocally differ. I argue that the aesthetic of these photos filter the memories of a disappearing generation through adaptations of Rodchenko's constructivism to different depictions of time. There is a search for historical continuity between

different generations in Belorusets' photos that also conveys, in many ways, a search for home, moreover a home built in a common language embedded in day-to-day existence, a search that is itself a familiar one because it always also entails the search for a home in language itself. In my close readings of Belorusets' visual texts, what her photos ultimately convey is nostalgia for another's nostalgia.

In the photo below (Figure 42) of a former Soviet communal kitchen, twentieth century kitsch meets utilitarianism: cartoon characters like the popular Russian cartoon character cheburashka, ceramic salt-and-pepper shaker dwarves, giant dented tin pots and pans, and thick jam jars that cracked at some point and have since been repaired line the shelves in the background. Boym writes that the word "kitsch" did not enter the Russian language until the 1970s, when it was used to describe a special sub-genre of books on western mass-culture.[310] The word's meaning stood in contrast to the Russian term "byt," theorized by Roman Jakobson as a mode of signifying an idea of the everyday that is untranslatable into other languages because it also acknowledges the possibility of a radical subjective alterity to the everyday (Boym). Jakobson also analyzed the relative significations within realism as "an artistic trend which aims at conveying reality as closely as possible and strives for maximum verisimilitude."[311] Emphasizing realism as a genre which strives for both/either/or, the author and the viewer's believing a depiction to be true to life, Jakobson contends that it also leaves room for ambiguity in the codes it cites and synthesizes. His theory includes the fact that new realism(s) interrupt prior artistic movements and their claim to the real, quipping that, "those who speak of artistic realism continually sin against it."[312] The inclusion of the carefully arranged personal items on shelves in a cabinet in the background creates a parallel between the

[310] Ibid, 19.
[311] Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, 20.
[312] Ibid, 27.

woman's life and the author's representation of her subject; it is the latter's perception of her elder's memories of the communist past through a double framing of the external world, and the world of the apartment.

Figure 41: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets, 2011

From its beginnings in the 1920s, Boym writes that the communal apartment "remain[ed] the site of personal pride, a display of one's externalized interior and of the desire for individuation." [313] For example, small cabinets with glass doors (шафа, shafa), like the one depicted in this photo, survived every refashioning of the communal proletarian home in the successive leadership regimes of the twentieth century. Boym discusses at length the individualizing capacities of these tiny portals within the communal apartment, referring to them as a resident's "interface with the world."[314] The glass cabinet could be said to have functioned in the past as individualizing and buffering an all-pervasive Soviet control that Boym ominously

[313] Boym, *Common Places*, 151.
[314] " . . . this narrow, nearly one-dimensional space behind the glass of the bookcase reflects the image of the resident; it is his or her carefully arranged interface with the world." Ibid, 155.

names as a "zone" in which there is no script, and therefore no knowledge, for thinking oneself living between public and private lives.[315] However, twenty years on from the publication of Boym's book, the glass cabinet takes on a slightly different shape. With the disappearance of the "zone," other interfaces between public and private have arisen in its place. The elderly woman in this photo inhabits her surroundings through memories that only she herself can translate into meaning. The many random items that she has preserved in the cabinet behind her are her own artifacts of "byt" that we encounter as floating signifiers of the past, but also, of memory as a kind of privatized past mediated by Belorusets' frame in the present.

Figure 42: Varvara Stepanova with a cigarette, Rodchenko, 1924

Figure 43: "32 Gogol St." Yegvenia Belorusets, 2011

The publicizing of private life here takes on additional significance as a site for understanding women's particular relationship to the communal apartment and the shifts in that relationship over time. While visually approximating the memories of late-Soviet life held by women a generation older than herself, Belorusets also inscribes her autobiography into the

[315] Elsewhere, Boym writes that "in Soviet Russia there was no interface between public and private, no space of conventional socialization, the space that is governed neither by the official decorum, like the Soviet subway, nor by the unwritten rules of intimacy that reign in the overcrowded domestic nooks. The space between is the space of alienation—the Soviet zone—the space on the outskirts of the Soviet topography." Ibid, 142.

history of the house. As residents share memories with her, she filters her compassion for their experiences through her own presence in the house as an activist. The crowded shelves and nightstands boast not of abundance, but of shoring up items out of need and possibly out of habits acquired during other periods of shortage. Boym makes passing reference to an "aesthetics of survival" in reference to the junk gardens of commodities within Soviet communal living quarters, writing that, "there, the artifact is a personal souvenir and a souvenir of privacy itself; it is an object displaced from a common into an individual history."[316] Belorusets' photos become an artifact of their present.

The saucers, magnets, and teapots belonging to the woman laboring over her culinary chores are brought into public view by the camera. Necessity and survival foreground this photo: not only in the placement of the curio cabinet next to a refrigerator in the privatization of this room by the working woman; but also in the fact she is a woman, working alone. Unlike past representations of the communal apartment, there is nothing in this photo to indicate she is cooking for relatives or, for that matter, fellow comrades.[317] Also missing from this kitchen are the communal kitchen gatherings of trusted close friends that became popular in the 1960s and changed the kitchen space into one signified as "unofficial, though not antiofficial" in which "collective bonds of affection and friendship constituted its ideology."[318] What do remain, however, are the objects from many different pasts: each a sign for the private memories that go unsignified within the photo. Time is out-of-joint in the microcosms contained in these material traces of living memories. The author's lens cannot fully capture the cultural iconicity of the apartment where it is individualized by the woman's private possessions, each of their unique

[316] Ibid, 159.
[317] Boym comments on the feminization of domestic work in communal dwellings in the Soviet era: "the burden of the communal interactions and negotiations rested entirely on women; the world of the communal kitchen has often been called matriarchal, but I would add that it has been matriarchal by necessity and not by choice." Ibid, 147.
[318] Ibid, 148.

symbolic meanings left open for interpretation. Discursive markers of Soviet/Post-Soviet life dissolve.

Figure 44: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets, 2011

The distancing effect that these photos accomplish in text and image suspends a split between the practices of everyday living "in public" practiced within institutionalized spaces beyond the home and the "private" life and the personal identity this concept assumes. In one example, Belorusets accomplishes this in drawing attention to the social alienation residents feel at being denied public services and disregarded by society. Ambulances almost always fail to respond to residents' calls: "Seemingly simple and convenient, she [Natalia, a resident] is ready to accept the situation for what it appears to be in the context of the imposed, fleeting social norms that sustain it—this causes deep pain and makes you want to relieve her of this." Here Belorusets shares the pain the resident feels, but is aware of her own limited ability to understand and therefore more deeply empathize with the resident. Belorusets defers to the camera as her translator and describes for her audiences the process of attempting to bridge this limit, to see another person's way of seeing. This double-remove transfers her potential audience's gaze back

and forth between both sides of the lens. The result is a verbal-visual montage that disassociates viewers from the familiar visual paradigms that constrain them, as in Shklovsky's theory of estrangement. In another post, Belorusets elevates the disintegrating residential interiors of 32 Gogol St. to a generalized poverty that "millions of post-Soviet citizens share," if not in actual lived experience, then in the imaginary collective memory of the past that space can foster.

V. "32 Gogol St." as Allegory

Spatial Textures—The Soviet Communal Apartment versus The Post-Soviet Tenement Home

Figure 45: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets, 2011

Many of the objects depicted in the photo series have an anthropomorphic quality, as in the above photo of a pair of standard-issue Soviet "Elekta" stoves. The arrangement of the two stoves side-by-side, the dust, and the magazine cutouts of a female model's head and a bouquet of flowers taped to the wall tell a story of consumerism and changing gender roles in the postcommunist era. As one sifts through images like these, it gradually becomes clear that below

the surface of material decay lies a submerged rendering of memory bound up in objects that have been repurposed or carried over from their original contexts to sustain a new environment. Once a temporary fixture in the service of the revolution, the two Soviet stoves in this photo now stand in homage to a contemporary absence. The cut-out fashion image suggests a bourgeois housewife in contrast with the two stoves side-by-side in the picture, which reflect a bygone time when multiple women would have cooked meals alongside one another in this formerly communal kitchen. The fact that the bourgeois and Soviet elements are both depicted as absence in the photo can be read as symptomatic of the total desertion of these formerly communal, now crumbling, spaces by the nouveau riche, whose preferences and expectations with regard to domestic life changed dramatically in the transition to a market economy.

Thus, the photo activates a critique of the feminization of the kitchen through the woman-as-homemaker ideal in both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, constructing a utilitarian, ambiguous person-at-home in its place. Anachronistic life worlds begin to emerge through the defunct, Soviet-era objects and tools crowding these crumbling interiors. Many questions are left unanswered: Why did someone tack up the magazine page anyway? In another image, why are there seven bottles of shampoo and paint next to the bathtub, half of them empty? The camera frame decontextualizes scenes of the house in an excavation of ordinariness and its hidden ideologies. Because the building's decay contrasts with the vitality of its inhabitants, the photos leave room for narrativizing the things in them as artifacts of everyday life in a survival against negative odds, or more simply, the fulfillment of day-to-day needs as they are invented and produced by shifting definitions of the private sphere and domesticity. Michel de Certeau describes a kind of subversive re-commoditization as the politics of "a social activity at play with

the order that contains it."[319] This envisioning of everyday practice is tactical and based on indicating the invisible identities of a place and a technique of "reappropriating the product-system, ways created by consumers [that] have as their goal a therapeutics for deteriorating social relations."[320]

Ruin in Belorusets' photos serves as a backdrop for illuminating the photo's human protagonists. The focus on minute details and emotive gestures in the photos suggests an archeological study of the ways human memory simultaneously salvages and degrades the past. Walter Benjamin, writing on ruin, remarked that "allegories are in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things."[321] The detritus of modern life in these photos is still in use, marked by the effort and care of human hands that have shaped a home out of the Soviet past, despite the massive state restructuring that took place in the 1990s, not out of heroism, but in the same way that "millions of other post-Soviet citizens" hidden "in invisible tenement homes on unmarked city maps" have also done.[322] Where in the Soviet era citizens were settled, often forcibly, into standard issue living quarters, the residents at 32 Gogol St. are doubly blocked from state welfare and the benefits of privatization in the post-Soviet context. Belorusets writes that the house was declared condemned as early as 1988.[323] Though Kyiv's housing code states that under these circumstances residents should be given apartments elsewhere within the city limits, residents' petitions for decent housing have been unmet. While some residents have managed to leave the house by permit, many remain because they cannot afford other housing.

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[319] Boym, "Spatial Practices," Ibid, 108.
[320] Ibid, xxiv.
[321] Walter Benjamin, "The Ruin," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*.
[322] Belorusets, "Все ж Продолжает Нерей в Аонийских Свирепствовать Водах," Ibid.
[323] " . . . which prevented its apartments from being privatized. As a result the inhabitants of this building live in public units and do not have the right to sell or exchange them. According to official statistics, there are more than a hundred such houses in Kyiv; many of these houses are absent from maps of the city; for all intents and purposes, it is as though they do not even exist; at any moment they may be torn down or permanently locked without notice or consultation with their residents." Belorusets, Ibid.

Framing the house as a microcosm of economic fallout would seem, at first, to strip its inhabitants of agency. Yet, depicting the house as a kind of lost world also chips away at the idea held by the rest of society that the residents of 32 Gogol St. are somehow extraordinary; that they are the poor unfortunates, or victims of bad luck. The loss itself is revealed to be an illusion. The gulf between Belorusets and her elders' memories of the past appears larger than the gulf between the residents and the public reinforced by the walls of their dwelling. The exigency with which Belorusets witnesses these social divides implies a search for terms adequate to the inheritance of that world, not as a static vision of the past, but as memory inscribed in material life and its vital role in shaping the present.

In the photo in Figure 48, Rodchenko depicts Varvara Stepanova in 1924 wearing a dress in a print that she designed at Moscow's first textile printing factory. Belorusets' image of a woman reading in a makeshift chair mirrors the original in composition. The approximate age of the woman in the latter image disrupts the sequencing of time. If the woman in the first photo were roughly twenty, then the woman in the second would be sixty in the early 70s, in which case the fabric of her dress would match the fashion of that era. Yet, the broken-down interior and the leopard print faux-fur curtains in Belorusets' image cue that this is a contemporary scene. The temporal dissonance here amplifies the ghost-like quality to the disjuncture between how the woman in the second image visually embodies the past and how viewers see her: the book in her hands also raises questions as to how she remembers her own past, and how she sees her surroundings.

Figure 46: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets

Figure 47: "Varvara Stepanova," Rodchenko, 1924

The spatial text of the photos depicts an alternate or hidden world while rhetorically arguing that this world is actually quite ordinary, in fact, so common to everyday experience in post-Soviet contexts that it is nearly invisible. Audiences are invited to question the cognitive and affective means by which spatial environments come to shape politics. Are these inhabitants really so different from the rest of post-Soviet society? Getting a haircut, rolling out dough for varenyky or pierogies, and collecting kitsch souvenirs for the shafa all fold easily into experiences that are sometimes culturally specific, and sometimes just a part of life—even boring. Attempting to represent the ordinary can liberate the limit of its circumscribed expressions. [324] Thus, these photos enact what Michel de Certeau calls "antidiscipline" by disrupting the language (visual and verbal) systems of common experience in post-Soviet public representations of home.[325] Writing on ordinary culture, he contends that "we are subject to, but not identified with, ordinary language . . . it encompasses every discourse, even if human experiences cannot be reduced to what it can say about them," thus an inevitable "foreignness-at-

[324] For de Certeau this process is descriptive rather than representative: "not in substituting a representation for the ordinary or covering it up with mere words, but in showing how it introduces itself into our techniques . . . and how it can reorganize the place from which discourse is produced." *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 6.
[325] "Introduction," Ibid, xv.

home" pervades any language of common experience. [326] Throughout this series, the images push against discourses that silence alternatives to seeing the house as just a house, and the people in it as simple unfortunates.

The composition of the photos reflects Rodchenko's use of light and shadow, but differ in that subjects are often depicted in ways that emphasize how they create their own environments. For example, in a triple-framing effect with the camera lens, a mirror, and a window, a mother is shown adjusting the light for her daughter, whom we view brushing her hair before a mirror.

Figure 48: "32 Gogol St." Belorusets

Figure 49: "Girl with a Leica," Rodchenko, 1934

In conclusion, the photos present memory by activating the Soviet past within a certain legibility of place. The ruins of the past in the traces of the material world, taken in by the senses, are as alien to the individual as the ideological meanings that pervade common language. In several places Belorusets' written text collapses into her visual narrative, and vice versa. The

[326] Ibid, 10.

result is a dialectic resembling what Certeau has described as "a certain strangeness" of the everyday.[327] The photos thus evoke memory precisely because of their ambiguity and strangeness, suggesting, rather than prescribing, the stories that people tell themselves to make sense of their individual place in time. In the post-Soviet context this is also about retelling several versions of the same story. Everyday life, even in the alternative navigations of time and space that Certeau explores, is most often also experienced as a "grind unfolding," especially in the master historical narratives of social and cultural decline dominating public life after 1991.[328] Photography, as an artificial aesthetic language, can throw these discursive representations of "reality" into relief. Its documentary claim to represent "authentic" experience always already includes a negotiation between Self/Other in order to reveal a truth or falsehood of some kind. The presentation of a single moment in time specific to the genre can thus allow for a singular narrative about the everyday by illustrating the gaps in time in which an individual's experience comes into conflict with the visual paradigms that contain it.

Figure 50: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets

[327] "Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible." Ibid, 93.
[328] Ibid, 94.

In 2010, the same year in which "32 Gogol St." was exhibited in the U.K., three books of photography featuring the abandoned buildings of the city of Detroit were published in the United States. The lack of people in the Detroit photos soon sparked debates among critics who challenged the ethics behind representing the city's defunct factories and empty blocks as the epitome of civilizational decline. Deindustrialization and urban blight also appear in Belorusets' images, though her approach to the notion of ruin differs from the Detroit photos. Those photos mainly focus only on the exterior of buildings and do not include any people in them. They unhinge time from place and sign from signified, abstracting human experience by foregrounding materialist metaphors for different emotions. Belorusets' work, by contrast, puts the body at the center of the emotions that her landscapes suggest. This is in keeping with feminist critiques of postmodernism that insist the speaking subject always embodies the contexts of power from which they speak.[329] Belorusets' physical landscapes are interwoven with a story about what it is like to actually inhabit them and what kinds of emotions and identities emerge as a result. She weaves a narrative that puts women at the center of Ukraine's story by reversing the invisibility, non-existence, and irrelevancy ascribed to the people inside house by the rest of society. Innocence, joy, discovery, and friendship—experiences often disassociated from, or simply denied, the poor in popular depictions of poverty are here foregrounded as an undeniable part of childhood, family, and relations among neighbors.

[329] Lacan has been criticized extensively for theorizing from a particularly hegemonic view of language that ignores the body and its role in the processes of signification and identification through which subjectivities form. Many of these critiques have been mounted by postcolonial thinkers and feminists of color (see: Akhil Gupta, Chandra Mohanty, Seyla Benhabib, and Rosi Bradiotti).

Figure 51: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets

In the photo below, an older woman stands next to a Soviet-era water heater, or колонка (kolonka). The new dials and metal sheeting on the heater and the water dripping down its sides indicate that the unit is still in use. Units like this one are still commonly used in many homes in Ukraine due in part to the fact that most families do not have the resources to upgrade to a modern unit. For the most part, residents in former Soviet bloc apartments rely on the original equipment that was installed in the building. Quite dangerous to operate, water heaters like this one often explode and cause fires, or leak poisonous carbon monoxide. Here, the photograph does not disclose whether the woman standing next to it maintains this kolonka, or if it is a communal water heater. The mirror balanced above the sink connected to the heater indicates that it is located in a bathroom. Light frames the woman's face from a bulb just beyond the photo's upper right corner and her hand holds the door to the room just ajar enough to see a poster with the word "basketball" in Cyrillic printed above a blurry picture. The woman is wearing an indoor robe and her expression is tired and somewhat wary. Overall, the composition leaves viewers wondering what to make of this odd encounter—are we in a public or a private space? Are we being intrusive, are we welcome, or both? These ambivalences underlying the

photo imply a blurring of class and property relations. It is a stark contrast to the laws of Soviet photography, where the visual depiction of the boundaries between public and private were not up for debate, but carefully manipulated in order to project the ideological vanquishing of the bourgeois private sphere on the road to a bright communist future.

Figure 52: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets, 2011

Figure 53: "Mother," Alexander Rodchenko, 1925

Belorusets' use of architecture and portrait and her focus on the everyday resemble in form the twentieth century Soviet giant Alexander Rodchenko. Time divides the two. Rodchenko's long, vertical ladders and dizzying skyscrapers, once calculated to project the progressive, linear vector of the Soviet future, have in Belorusets' work been replaced with a relic of that future. Rodchenko's photo, below, features an elderly woman peering through a pair of spectacles. The woman in his photo wears what looks like a wedding band on her right little finger and has on a scarf made of good quality cloth. She appears to be in deep concentration, though there is nothing in the photo to indicate that she is distressed. Her historical circumstances are revealed through one outcome of Soviet policy toward women: she is educated enough to read.

In Belorusets' photo, on the other hand, we see the material aftermath of the twentieth century in the meager living circumstances of a woman of similar age. It appears as though this second woman has only just managed to provide for herself by invention, creatively sustaining

her basic needs with what was once supposed to be "temporary" infrastructure supplied by the Soviet state in the resettlement of the peasant proletariat into urban apartment blocs. Belorusets' photo offers further comment on the arbitrariness of time in the way the door being held open by the woman in the photo splits the image apart. Like Dzyga Vertov's side-by-side screens, the split creates dissonance between the narrative of the building, and the woman's narrative of her life within it. As parallels of one another, the kolonka becomes anthropomorphized next to the woman—its hulking shoulders and knobs-for-eyes begin to resemble a robot of sorts. The creaky and dented water heater in this photo, still an important part of everyday life in contemporary Ukraine, now appears out-of-place in the context of the woman we know is not a Soviet citizen, but is visually likened to the technological apparatus beside her that was once devised to produce the ideal Soviet citizen by projecting the ideals of the revolution onto the physicality of the built environment, thereby shaping lived experience. Of course, actual appropriations of the environment strayed widely from these ideals.

Figure 54: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets

Ontology and Representation—Civil Imagination

Official state power and its representation can also contain subversive sites. Some have argued that photos can promote alternative imaginings of citizenship. Ariella Azoulay has described how participants in a photo interact with a camera in an "event" that destabilizes social relations and enables citizens to imagine each other differently. [330] She terms this combination of event with interpretive visual practice "civil imagination."[331] Civil discourse, she asserts, takes shape in photography by "[suspending] the point of view of governmental power and the nationalist characteristics that enable it to divide the governed from one another and to set its factions against one another."[332] Azoulay's thinking here makes possible the claim that the photograph itself can help further conceal, as well as reveal, the "truths" through which people imagine themselves as citizens in relation to the state. In this view, one way citizenship is enacted is in making and interpreting images, especially images that explicitly bridge and/or create divides between the governed. Photography's indexical qualities can also be co-opted from within the social relationships that images mediate.[333] The affective qualities generated by the aesthetics of an image from a surveillance camera, for example, influence ethical judgments about the circumstances of the image, even though the leverage of power within those circumstances cannot determine the interpretation of the image in advance. Thus, the ontological

[330] Azoulay derives her theory of photography from Benjamin's appraisal of art and politics to ground her search within this classical dichotomy as the search to convert the politicization and aestheticization of art into its practice, beyond categorical judgment. "What appeared to me to be problematic in the first place was the unsubstantiated transition from the differentiation between 'the aesthetic' and 'the political' to a distinction between 'aestheticization' and 'politicization' in a manner that renders them equivalent . . . this makes of aestheticization or politicization a form of action reserved chiefly for those works of art that either strengthen or weaken these attributes of the image." *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, 35.
[331] Ibid, 3.
[332] Ibid.
[333] "The ontological properties of photography enable one to rebel against the paradigm of sovereign spectatorship, and to undermine that which constituent violence renders self-evident." Ibid, 225.

property of photography by necessity requires interpretations that differentiate art and its relativity of judgments of taste, from moral or ethical judgments about power.

This distinction makes possible a clearer discussion of the consumption of images as dialectical sites where the very divisions between public and private are construed in material practice. Belorusets' role as an activist in Ofenzywa changes her relationship to her photographs and their interpretive scope. The sovereign power of Yanukovych's oppressive state apparatus comes through in these images as an outside force, beyond the walls of 32 Gogol St., that nevertheless still shapes the day-to-day activities of its inhabitants. Unlike in Azoulay's study, where she examines pictures of refugees taken under the auspices of the state of Israel, Yanukovych's regime is present in Belorusets' photos as a largely invisible pressure, silencing civic life, and stifling minority rights throughout Ukraine. The project engages a "civil imagination" by visually impinging on viewers' expectations of what the state can, or should, do for its citizens. Instead of looking at the photos as outcomes, or proof, of realities experienced in the lives of the people in them as iconic examples of poverty under Yanukovych, these photographs make more visible the daily practices that go beyond the coded logic of the regime. This latter interpretation is arguably the more democratic one in its yielding a vocabulary about everyday life by giving agency to participants in the photos and their own ways of culling meaning from their environment. Though Belorusets' privilege as the photographer in these photos is undeniable, she weaves an autocritical narrative by documenting her own experience of daily life in the house as she produces the images. Thus, the photos do more than document a circumstance—they become the circumstance.

Figure 55: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets, 2011

In this photo a woman sits on a makeshift bed. Medicine is laid out on a chair serving as a table next to the bed. Tires and other materials have been collected and neatly stacked around the room. On its own, this photo tells a story of a woman who most likely spends most of her time in this one room, judging by the careful positioning of the medicine and the arrangement of the bulky items behind her. We learn from Belorusets' blog entry featuring this image that the woman is terminally ill and relies on her son as a primary caregiver. Belorusets describes how she and residents mediated difference:

> I began to feel that participating in the photo project had become for [the residents] a chess move, deflecting from view the infinite complexity of their daily lives. They took the metaposition of observers, ridding from themselves the surgical pain of a direct view of their lives . . . I sensed the peculiarities of photography as a medium and how it allows the evasion of any one particular viewpoint: it was like I was pushed . . . out of referential visibility, like I was transforming individual persons through formulas somewhere between the characters' own receptions of their everyday lives and the receptions of their unknown audiences.[334]

[334] Belorusets, "Все ж Продолжает Нерей в Аонийских Свирепствовать Водах." Accessed March 15, 2013.

In Belorusets' descriptive accounts of her camera's technology, it aids transcription, viewership, and authorship, but also overwhelms the relationship between herself and others. Employing written text to position herself behind the camera as a participant in the photo, Belorusets verbally relinquishes her agency over what the camera visually transcribes. She invites her audiences to critique the daily practices within which she is embedded as a participant in the circumstances of the photos. This metanarration redirects the gaze of the audience, inviting audiences to find affinities with the protagonists in the photos by looking past, in Belorusets' words, "the surgical pain" of physical and mental humiliation that subjects "deflect" when engaging with the camera.

Thus, the camera remains a part of the sequencing of the narrative; a force and trace acting on the photo. Several scenes like the one above capture solitary moments that provide subject, artist, and viewer with access to special knowledge that cannot reliably go beyond the lens. This framing problematizes the documentary claim to "truth" in different representations of home, versus being at home, that point to how physical landscapes leverage social inequalities. The mediation of individuals' receptions of their own lives, versus the representation and reception of their lives for and by audiences, expands the "civil" capacity of the photograph by revealing how the house has become an oppressive symbol within the "disciplinary spaces" of the city (Lefebvre).[335] The walls of the house at 32 Gogol St. are thus characterized here as visible, everyday reminders that manifest class and other social differences. By attempting to synthesize and make visible social marginalization, the photos become a counterweight to the totalitarian tendencies of the Ukrainian state at this time, which are only aggravated by what Certeau describes as, "the stories and legends that haunt urban space like superfluous or

[335] Lefebvre observes that consciousness "not only reflects the outside world, and things, but also human activity, practical power over nature . . . the equally objective conflict between man and the 'environment,' between the human world and nature, [and] between individuals in the human world." *Critique of Everyday Life*, 95.

additional inhabitants."[336] On one level, the series is a visual map of the ways in which power is leveraged through Kyiv's buildings and the relationship of actual spaces to civic belonging.

In the photos below, one by Belorusets and the other by Rodchenko, the everyday experience of bathing is presented in private and in public, both within the social dynamics of gender. Both photographers frame their subject with a tilted lens that estranges viewers from the image.

Figure 56: Yevgenia Belorusets, 2011

Figure 57: Alexander Rodchenko, 1930s

The result inconveniences conventional readings of the photos, but does so by similar aesthetic means which convey the historical distance between the two images and their different conceptualizations of the production of gender in space.

In the photo by Rodchenko, a young woman stands near a rooftop swimming pool and appears to be looking across the pool at three young men sunbathing on the concrete running the outer length of the pool. This anonymous woman's stance and tilted head convey confidence and an air of curiosity at the lounging men she observes. The bright sunlight in the photo and the relaxed postures of its subjects convey an overall mood of leisure and fine health—an ideal day

[336] "Walking in the City" Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 106.

off for a hardworking Soviet citizen. We see the men by the pool from the same angle as the woman's perspective, thus the position of the camera behind her omits any facial cues for our interpretation of the protagonist's facial expression. It is not clear whether we are supposed to identify with the woman, or the men. This omission leaves open several possible backstories to explain the photo's suggestive undertones. The optical effect of the slanting lines moving from the upper left corner of the photo move the audience's gaze across the entire surface of the pool. There is an industrial scene on the horizon and a large metal pipe feeding into the pool where all the angled lines intersect. This dynamism revolving around the engineering of the landscape conveys that this rooftop oasis is indeed the product of the technological wonders of Soviet construction—the people enjoying its miracles have a bright future to look forward to.

In Belorusets' photo, by contrast, we see a young woman taking a shower within an enclosed room. Clutter surrounds her: several towels, instead of a curtain, are draped over the circular rod hovering over the now antique bathtub she stands in. Bottles, brushes, kitchen plates, and other items are haphazardly strewn about the room. Upon closer examination, a refrigerator and kitchen table in the foreground indicate that this former communal bathroom has been converted into a private single-room apartment. The woman's wincing expression suggests that she lacks the resources for storing or accessing a supply of hot water. While the photo, like Rodchenko's, includes sexual undertones, the framing of the overall image is more attenuated to the material landscape. The box framing of the room and the lens' distance from the woman's body reveals a panorama of items that tell a story about her everyday routines. This space's original Soviet design would have functioned as part of a grander scheme of communal living arrangements. Where the room was once designed to produce an experience of home for the prototypical proletarian citizen, the woman has repurposed it to act as a single apartment. Here is

a woman that is too young, just as the house is too old, to embody the socialist revolutionary ideals that the material environment around her once signified. There is an embryonic quality to her grasping the shower's water source attached to the wall. Her nakedness, rather than a spectacle arranged for the camera, appears a natural part of everyday life. Furthermore, her pose suggests an origin myth in which the figuration of "home" is revealed to be just an invention of time.

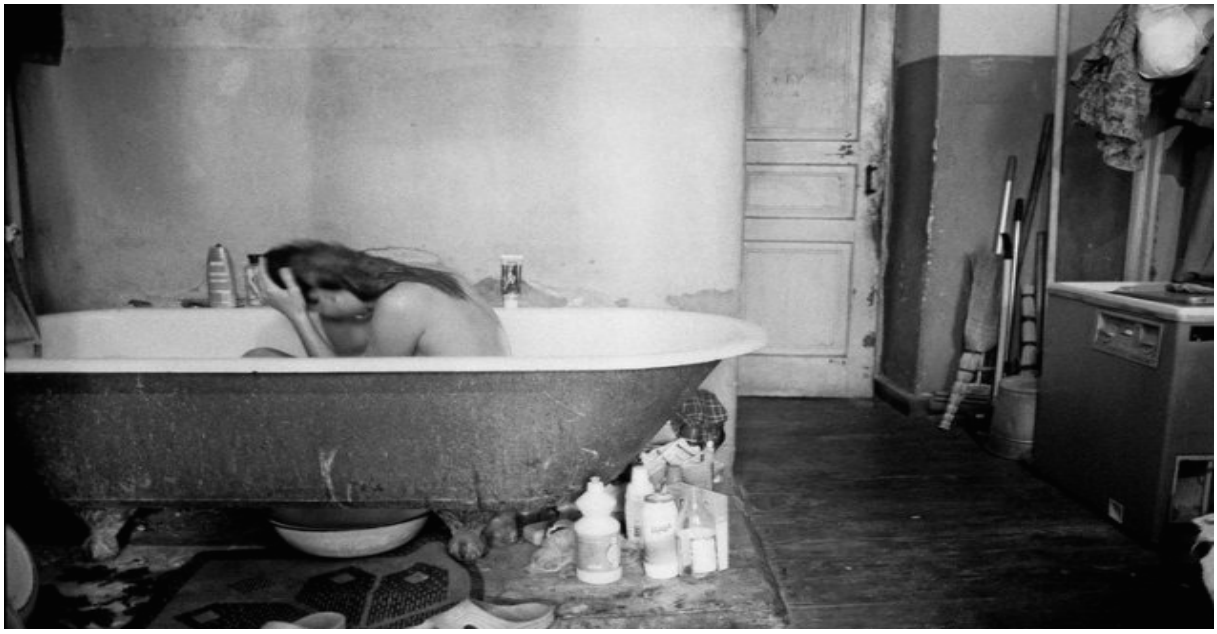

Figure 58: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets

Unlike Rodchenko's buoyant images of young Soviets encountering a future full of dizzying possibilities, in Belorusets' photo of the showering woman, the camera fetishizes material sustenance over opportunity and leisure. Rodchenko's image portrays a performance of gender through flirtation, maintaining a division between two genders. The dominance of the industrial motif in the construction of a Soviet future defines the woman by her reproductive value to the proletariat. By contrast, Belorusets' image comments on the feminization of poverty. The woman's utilitarian repurposing of a Soviet communal space complicates the domestic qualities that are commonly attributed to women in the gendered divides around the tasks,

motions, and endless chores of daily routine. Appropriating the material detritus of a communist future that never arrived, the woman has attained a level of autonomy through her own creativity, despite the economic chaos of the post-Soviet period and the failing social services under Yanukovych. The communal apartment is thus re-represented by Belorusets as an ongoing experiment in which the boundaries between public and private are flexible, despite the manipulation of this boundary by a corrupt state and its projection into daily life.

Belorusets writes of frequently being warned not to go into the building at 32 Gogol St. by passersby. She describes the condescending attitudes toward poverty that she encounters: "The majority of these passersby rely on the ideas they are socialized to believe in, mystical even, that poverty befalls those deserving it and people should stay at an arm's length from the poor." Belorusets paired her project with sociological research by a sociologist, Anastasia Ryabchuk. Thus, she employs the language of science to counter the "mystical" fear of poverty she notes in her observations of the social stigma around the building as a class boundary. In linking social science to art, Belorusets adopts the conventions of Rodchenko's generation and the early avant-garde's representations of daily life. Doubling back on an earlier era, Belorusets style strays from the intervening period, rejecting socialist realism and its didacticism in one major respect: unlike in Soviet renderings of progressive time, Belorusets' compositions depict daily struggles anachronistically. Her characters are out-of-step with the swift pace of capitalism; rather, they are heroic only in their ability to survive the extreme inequalities resulting from economic flux.

Thus, Belorusets' work overturns entrenched cultural myths about poverty and postcommunism. She shows where past promises of prosperity and freedom during the neoliberal era and its culmination in the Orange Revolution (and later Euromaidan) have failed a

very palpable segment of the population. Those who suffered the most in lost opportunities during the transition to a market economy were women.[337] Her subject matter thus visually challenges the phrase "losers of the transition" used in economic policy to describe citizens who needed to rely on state assistance after 1991. Where this phrase has come to normalize the marginalization of women in public discourse, Belorusets' camera pushes against its limits. Her photos point to where the state's differentiation of needs overlooks and reinforces segmented experiences of everyday life.[338] As an experiment in optics and politics, these photos portray how the built environment conditions sociocultural practices. They also envision alternative uses of the environments within them, revealing where ideas about home and everyday life can come to reinforce the symbolic divides in society that constrain civic life by reinforcing binary gender roles and stigmatizing the poor.

Figure 59: "32 Gogol St." Yevgenia Belorusets

[337] See Sarah D. Phillips, *Women's Social Activism in the New Ukraine*; Kathleen R. Kuehnast and Carol Nechemias, Eds. *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*.

[338] I am referring to Sarah D. Phillips' use of the term differentiation to describe the prescription and fulfillment of social needs by the Ukrainian state and western-leaning NGOs in the 1990s. She argues that many grassroots definitions of need were overlooked in favor of top-down descriptions that fit a capitalist-production model. *Women's Social Activism in the New Ukraine*.

At the same time, I do not want to give an overly prescriptive analysis of the role of art in society. While Belorusets formally cites the early avant-garde, her politics are a radical departure from the aesthetic requisitioning of time and space by the state.[339] The interwoven, sometimes conflicting, ontologies in Belorusets' photos deconstruct past visual paradigms to move away from the historical determinism of the fall of the USSR and transition period. The dialectical relationship between art and politics in her text is also mediated by a broader feminist movement in Ukrainian public life; in part instantiated by Ofenzywa, but also spurned on by a decrease in civil liberties under Yanukovych. Her work dovetails with the group's search for continuity in local women's history, wherever feminism comes to describe women's experiences uncategorically. They underscore practices in women's resilience that are as political as they are commonplace.

VI. Depictions of Home: "A Room of One's Own"

Citizenship and the Private Sphere

Belorusets also deploys her camera within domestic spaces in the series "A Room of One's Own." The series has been exhibited three times, twice in Ukraine as part of exhibits organized by the Visual Culture Research Center, and once in the Russian Federation as part of a queer festival in St. Petersburg.[340] The series features individual color portraits of approximately

[339] Mouffe characterizes the artist as an organic intellectual: "Today, artists can no longer pretend to constitute an avant-garde offering a radical critique. But this is not a reason to proclaim that their political role has ended; they have an important role to play in the hegemonic struggle. By constructing new practices and new subjectivities, they can help subvert the existing configuration of power." *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, 105.

[340] University President Sergey Kvit expelled the Visual Cultures Research Center from Kyiv-Mohilya Academy in Spring 2012 for the exhibit *Ukrainian Body*. Belorusets' series "Room of One's Own" was featured among other conceptual art depicting the state's role in the lives of minorities who face ongoing discrimination and backlash from heightened censorship laws and an overall absence of social protections in Ukraine. The Center's shutdown incited a wider student protest and many prominent intellectual figures, including Slavoj Zižek, Judith Butler, and former Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski, signed an ongoing petition to reinstate the Center in the University. The Center continues its activities for some time at the nearby October Cinema (Kino Zhovten). "Ukrainian Body Petition for Support," http://vcrc.org.ua/ukrbody/. Accessed October 15, 2012.

twenty different gay and lesbian families in domestic settings. Roughly forty photos out of one hundred and twenty stills comprise the full exhibit. In my interview with the curator of the project, Natalia Tschermalykh, she described the selection process as a collaborative effort between herself and the artist: "When we were selecting works we were trying to alternate the plastic visions people have of themselves generally, with somehow even more dynamic shots of daily life . . . While installing the project in a gallery space, Zhenya [Yevgenia] and I decided to alternate larger photos with smaller ones, and to display them in an unsystematic way; we wanted to convey that sexual orientation is not fixed. We also wanted to offer to the spectator the idea of the changeable body, which is in itself expressive of a political position."[341] Russian critic Nadiya Plungian has remarked on the movement between frames in the series as the disclosure of the everyday, linking that disclosure to a politics of oppression specific to Ukraine. She describes the project as "a repressed, closed portrait" of the LGBT experience capturing the "poor humility of daily life (byt), the unfolding of monotony, a typical space, but one where only the photograph is able to go in order to capture, fixate, and present its image to the viewer." She asks: "But to go where; to leave which world behind? *Is there a second Ukrainian reality?*"[342]

Tschermalykh discusses the problem of norms in national terms. In Ukraine, the divisions between private/public are connected with other social stigmas, even as they remain primary to the repression of basic civil rights: "there was one shot we didn't include of a woman giving an injection of hormones to her partner. Although we did include it in the first exhibit [Ukrainian Body], we decided after that show not to include any sexualized photos. This is because, in

[341] Nataliya Tchermalykh, Personal Interview, Kyiv, July 18, 2013.
[342] The quote continues: " . . . Yes, there is, and I've seen it with my own eyes growing all around me in well-organized street activism, in talks about the need to rethink the structure of the nuclear family, in annual feminist conferences, and in groups raising their self-consciousness." Nadia Plungian, "Как Выжить в Проходной Комнате," *Projected Catalogue of "Room of One's Own."* Shared with Permission of the Curator, Nataliya Tchermalykh, 2013. Transl. Jessica Zychowicz

Ukraine, the 'normalized' vision of LGBT politics is often limited to sexual practices only. Here you often have the identification and sexualization of either gay men or lesbians as living together for reasons of sex only."[343] The popular discourse aligning homosexuality with crime and drug use was at once a key rhetorical posture of the Yanukovych regime and a holdover from the Soviet period. Though Ukraine was the first successor state to decriminalize homosexuality, highly normative views continued to influence policies on sexuality. Everything from city planning to reproductive healthcare descended from these attitudes, which serves to perpetuate and reinforce still widely held public perceptions of the only acceptable partnerships as male-female units. By referencing same sex partners as *families* in the curatorial texts accompanying the exhibit, the display counterbalances audiences' social paranoia around intrusions into the private sphere as a function of upholding public propriety. Early into his term, Yanukovych created a bill to introduce a law modeled on Russia's criminalization of "homosexual propaganda." He also oversaw the striking of an "anti-discrimination" law from the E.U. Accession Agreement in 2013, a change that was condoned by the E.U. even before the demonstrations on Maidan. Thus, temporarily borrowing the discourse of the family in order to subvert charges of deviance officially ascribed to same-sex couples carries special potency in Ukraine, where Church and State remain largely bound to the same discourses.

The photographs below feature two men named Roman and Dennis. In a text accompanying the images, Belorusets writes that Roman Zuyev, the man wearing an Orthodox cassock, is the founder of the Church of LGBT Christians, "the only church in Ukraine which accepts members of any denomination, regardless of their sexual orientation." The church has no official place of worship, so believers meet in private apartments. We learn from the blog that Roman supports himself as a taxi driver. It is possible that he might be able to afford a middle-

[343] Tchermalykh, Ibid.

class lifestyle, though there is no information about whether he owns the apartment. In the second and third photos, Roman prepares the sacrament for an audience possibly beyond the frame. The tilted angle of the lens in the photo gives the room an elongated shape, making Roman appear even taller. The drapes behind him and the Eucharist laid out on the coffee table in the foreground transform the space into an altar. The second image of Roman, taken from above, reveals the ornate golden cross and chalice that are also on the table in the third picture. There is not enough information in the photos or accompanying text to convey how or why Roman decided to begin his church, whether the Ukrainian Patriarch ordained him, or he has ordained himself.

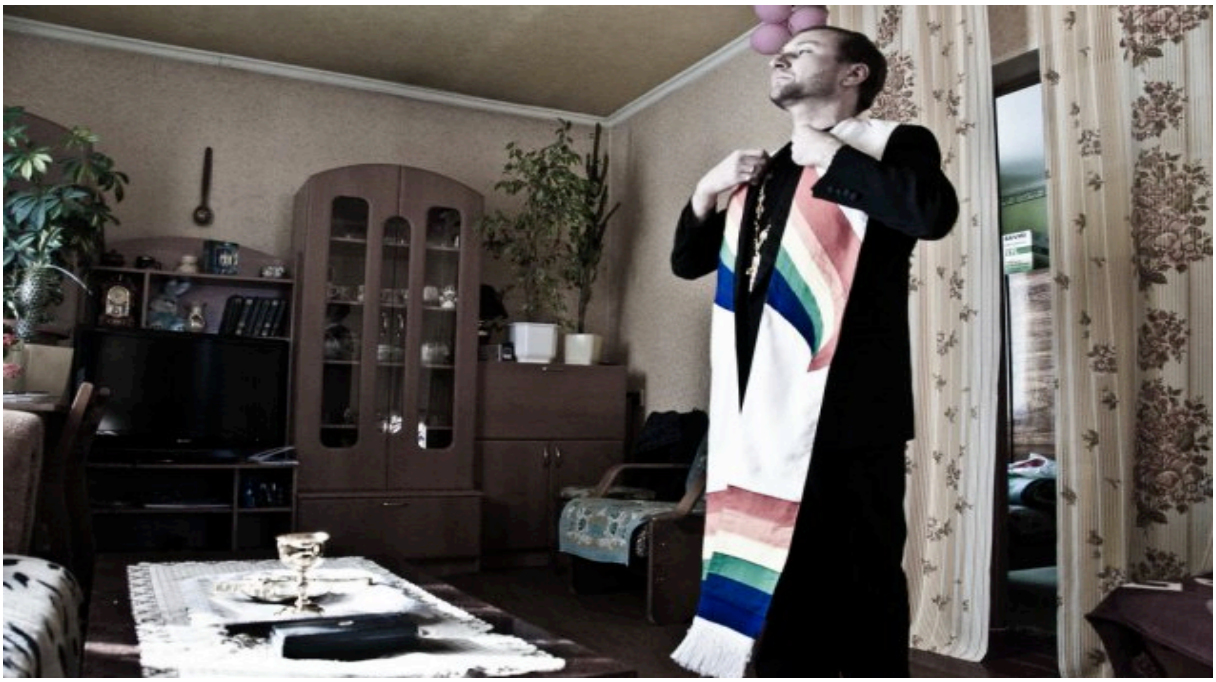

Figure 60: "A Room of One's Own" Yevgenia Belorusets, 2012

The cultural specifics of the Orthodox Church and the apartment in Ukraine are two very different spaces that govern public vs. private forms of behavior. In public discourse and popular imaginings of the nation, these two settings function as opposite metaphors for the mysterious versus the trivial, the arcane and the profane, and the soul versus the body. Each of these concepts function differently to produce the norms by which citizens imagine each other. In

Henri Lefebvre's analysis of French democracy during the mid-twentieth century "The externality of the citizen in relation to his own everyday life becomes of necessity projected outside of himself: in models, in fanaticisms, in idolizations, in fetishisms."[344] Thus, the environment of the photo suspends the official representations of the self, including the divine self. Roman's performing the role of a priest in an average modern Ukrainian apartment discloses religion as "a part of life practice, not its determinant."[345] By conveying what seems to be mysterious or exceptional as quite banal, the photo brings into relief the mythic quality of everyday life itself. The norms that go unnoticed in day-to-day life, including those driven by assumptions around what constitutes the private sphere, and who "deserves" to access the public sphere, are revealed as political constructs regulated by church and state.

At the same time, a critique of everyday life can never be absolute or completely direct. Lefebvre argues that the disalienation of politics is made possible through the citizen's "reorientation to daily life," positing that this reorientation can only happen when members of society join together in relationships that fulfill their social needs.[346] Abstracting the citizen's private life legitimizes an imagined public, which is always based in an idealized version of reality, which for Lefebvre is the basis for citizens' mutual blindness to each other. This is the main cognitive block in accessing a direct critique, and therefore transformation, of everyday life. The point remains salient that the abstract citizen is also a part of everyday life: "He becomes *for himself* an unreal appearance; but at the same time, by an absolute contradiction, the political fiction sanctions the *private* man, *qua* selfish individual with personal interest, as the supreme reality. This division assigns reality to egoism and abstract form to the citizen."[347]

[344] "Philosophy and the Critique of Everyday Life" Ibid, 92.
[345] Micheal de Certeau, Ibid, 125.
[346] "Work and Leisure in Everyday Life" Ibid, 42.
[347] Lefebvre, Ibid, 90.

Though Lefebvre does not address the double-alienation that minorities face, his emphasis on social need is valuable for conceptualizing politics in these photos as rooted beyond a simple narrative of state vs. society.

Figure 61: "A Room of One's Own" Yevgenia Belorusets, 2012

Alienation in Belorusets' photo series extends out from an experience of citizenship that differs from Lefebvre's theory of the abstracted life of the "private citizen" because, in Soviet life, privacy was ideologically erased along with the everyday life of the bourgeoisie. Plungian critiques the Soviet-style rooms in "Room of One's Own" in light of the discourses of patrimonialism and dependency commonly attributed to the Soviet regime:

> Belorusets' perspective illuminates a desire to highlight the ambivalence, anxiety, and strangeness of everyday life (byt). The protagonists in her series live, work, meet and spend time in the foreignness of the self, in the interiors of another epoch. Each of these "rooms" are saturated in the disintegrating flair of the Soviet era: a recognizable record player from the seventies, a small wooden figurine on top of the T.V. and a broken door, paneled walls, lace curtains on the windows. But Belorusets saw no possibility of leaving the familial home, or the inner strength to turn toward another terrain and another consciousness. The effort to found a new family falls into the sad impasse of obedience and fear.[348]

[348] Plungian, Ibid.

Tschermalykh describes the photos as ironic portraits of the present set against the backdrop of the communal apartment of the past, where the ideologies it was supposed to project come into conflict with its inhabitants' lived experiences:

> On a formal level Zhenya wanted to avoid objectification at all costs, to avoid dehumanizing and distancing subjects from the spectator in cold expressions, or to show a state of being which is normal, but is displayed as exotic. You know, where at one time you had the display [in public life] of Soviet-style apartments, where nothing was at all like an apartment, really, but displayed to be an apartment that reflected all of Soviet idealism. For Zhenya it was important not to place objects or object-people in the apartments in her project.[349]

Where Plungian conditions the post-Soviet environment of the photos as the decay of cultural memory in the failure to create something "new," Tschermalykh portrays their Soviet kitsch as an ironic reprieve from official discourse. In an important sense, then, both critics deliberate on how the patronizing stereotypes that infantilize the life of the Soviet citizen as totally dependent on the state have actually carried over into the Post-Soviet era in Ukraine.

It is apparent that Plungian writes from Moscow and not Kyiv. The Russian capital of the former U.S.S.R. occupies a very different contemporary relationship to the past than Kyiv, the once thriving, but now struggling capital city of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The ironic punning on Soviet ideology that Tschermalykh points to is less strident in the Russian context, where Moscow's once Soviet hegemony makes the past possibly appear more earnest in its desirable qualities. For the Russian critic, the photos appear to fall into "the sad impasse of obedience and fear" in its failure to leave the "familial home" of the now disintegrated Soviet Union. For Plungian the project also carries with it an optimism not afforded Russia, perhaps, she suggests later in the essay, simply because Ukraine's national identity can be more readily disassociated from the Soviet experiment. The framing of everyday life in these photos, then, at least in their reception, is marked by their national context, despite the non-specificity of the Soviet aesthetic of domesticity that serves as their main background. Writing from the former

[349] Tchermalykh, Ibid.

"periphery," the tensions between normalization and exoticization that Tschermalykh points to are less about the discourses of the past, than about evading idealism at all costs. They culminate in statements that resist the objectification of individuals into "object-people" with prescribed social roles. By showing the dynamics by which the ideologists of the U.S.S.R. once projected *homo sovieticus* into the landscapes of daily life, the images make the normative ideas that once constituted this ideal Soviet citizen appear surreal and unnatural. The result encourages audiences to question the mechanisms of citizenship and the seeming naturalness and ease by which some norms come to arbitrarily exclude others.

Normative vs. Non-Normative Time

In the photos below, Roman has adopted the symbols of the institution of the Orthodox Church in order to address a gay Christian community within the privatized space of a modern apartment. These photos of Roman in a black robe and rainbow vestment illustrate a radical break with the very limited terms upon which gender is recognized and policed in Ukrainian civic life. Roman's needing to conduct his religious services from within the private sphere also reflects the fact that there does not exist any institution in Ukraine willing to support a gay Christian church. Audiences viewing the photograph of Roman standing ceremoniously before his altar are invited to temporarily take up the position of the absent church members.

Figure 62: "A Room of One's Own" Yevgenia Belorusets, 2012

These photos apprehend a public that does not yet exist in institutionalized or mainstream post-Soviet Ukraine and Russia. The fact that Roman is disconnected from any larger state or social structure that would sanction his queering of the church in the photo places him outside the frame of "productivity" that is automatically granted to normative appropriations of time and space. Thus, the photo inverts the boundaries around the systems—financial, parliamentary, familial—that privilege heteronormative ideals grounded in the nuclear family above all others. Judith Halberstam has discussed the figure of the transgender individual in postmodernism, deriving her term "Queer time" to denote models of temporality that emerge once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance. In turn, "Queer space" refers to "the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics."[350] Where the sovereignty of normative time publicly regulates the family unit at the foundation of public life as vehicle for monetary accumulation, it also creates

[350] Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, 6.

barriers that exclude non-normative membership to that public. Roman's repurposing of a post-Soviet home into a queer church allows for alternative performances of gender that do not fit prescribed cultural manifestations of time and space elsewhere in Ukraine.[351]

Time in the photos also reflects the broader political conditions under Yanukovych's presidency. Belorusets describes the isolating effects of social conformism under an oppressive regime:

> This project helped me to understand what it means to toss aside a 'norm' through an artistic medium, to feel how gender identities can dissolve and binaries between couples disintegrate, and to question down which roads the progressive and inevitable transformation of the institution of the family will go and what larger role each of these micro-changes might play in the lives of each man and woman and in the future design of society in general . . .[352]

Like many artists in Ukraine working during the same period, it is not by coincidence that Belorusets views her primary role as a photographer in civic terms. The censoring of her photos in Ukraine led to some of her protagonists facing extreme threats and constant harassment from the far right.[353] Roman was eventually forced to emigrate due to no longer being able to withstand the psychological pressure he was under. Luckily, he was able to receive amnesty in Amsterdam. Nonetheless, the material and political effects of the "micro-changes" Belorusets mentions have continued to surface in Ukrainian public life. Her attempt to unravel gender binaries in "the future design of society" resists the streamlining of everyday life within the logic of neoliberalism; in this case, the social inequalities of that logic are made all the more apparent by the photos' multiple political backdrops and their emergence at the height of Yanukovych's corrupt regime.

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[351] All kinds of cultural alterity, not only queer identity, are excluded from normative time. Halberstam argues that a certain discourse of "gender flexibility" has arisen with the advent of appropriative notions of queer identity in neoliberalism. She emphasizes a new kind of capitalist worker linked to idealizations of adaptability suited to a global increase in short-term contract labor.

[352] Yevgenia Belorusets, "Международный Фестиваль Квир-культуры в Санкт-Петербурге," *Queerfest*, September 20-29, 2012. http://queerfest.ru/eugene-belorusets_en.php. Accessed October 2012.

[353] The display of these photos in Kyiv-Mohilya in 2011 resulted in fierce backlash from conservative audiences that succeeded in eventually shutting down the larger exhibit they were a part of.

Thus, "Room of My Own" could also be viewed as an evasion of what Tamara Martsenyuk has noted in passing as the "institutionalized society" of official NGOs.[354] Writing on Ukrainian women's activism in the 1990s, anthropologist Sarah D. Phillips identified a gap between women's grassroots articulations of need and the terms defining welfare provisions. Her research reveals how the ideology behind the new economy being piloted at the time imported labels for certain groups and functioned along the lines of local stereotypes, for example, by excluding large families who had been associated with either extreme wealth or poverty in the USSR.[355] In Phillips' words, her informants had to learn "needs talk" or "claims making" to assert their deservedness for state and NGO grants. The stakes of the terms they used were balanced precariously between asserting what they contributed to society, and what they lacked. The ability to do this well depended on a multitude of factors, but most keenly rested on calculations of sociocultural ideals and identity roles. Positioning oneself so as to avoid being excluded from the new regime, in effect, became highly dependent upon language. The ideal citizen was weighed against the ability to conform to an external ideal, thereby greatly reducing in public life the tolerance for deviation from that ideal. These photos problematize characterizations of the private sphere as a feminine space of domesticity and reproduction. They employ the Soviet-turned-modern apartment in order to frame the intersection of church, state, and family. In doing so, they point to the exclusion of sexual and gender minorities in public discourse.

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[354] Tamara Martsenyuk, "Ukrainian Feminism in Action," *Global Dialogue: Newsletter for the International Sociological Association* 2, no. 5 (July 2012), http://www.isa-sociology.org/global-dialogue/2012/07/ukrainian-feminism-in-action/.

[355] The influx of western investment and the free market promoted "civil society" discourse, creating a situation in Ukraine in which the factors determining the demographics for social welfare recipients predominantly rested with the ability to win successful grants from western donors. In evaluating how this impacted various social groups, Phillips looked at processes of "differentiation" in which social needs, or "who gets what," so to speak, were sifted and determined across a set of shifting priorities based in shrinking state provisions that were buffered by donations from western NGOs.

Both "32 Gogol St." and "A Room of One's Own" destabilize normative timeframes. Documenting the everyday lives of the marginalized LGBT community in Kyiv, Belorusets remaps the divisions of public and private spheres that are assumed by the norms that guide everyday experience. The photos themselves became public sites in the explosive protests that erupted around their display at the Visual Culture Research Center as part of the exhibit entitled *Ukrainian Body* in 2012. Many protagonists in the photos were subjected to ongoing harassment. "A Room of One's Own," unlike "Gogol St. 32," is a study in the production of political subjectivity and its translation into speech and agency. This series more directly concerns the binary gender ideologies that sequester minorities in the private sphere, ideologies inherited from the Soviet past, the church, and neoliberal idealizations of heteronormative productivity. Similarly, Ofenzywa's symbolic march through the capital of Kyiv attempted to resignify where gender norms are written into the fabric of the city.

VII. Resignifying Gender in Kyiv's Urban Environment

Opinion polls show that sensitivity toward gender and sexual minorities declined in the periods leading up to and following the Orange Revolution, even as LGBT and feminist activists' visibility increased in urban street demonstrations. Inappropriate statements targeting sexual and gender minorities by officials continue at even the highest levels.[356] Despite backlash from conservative groups, the overall increase in public discussion about gender-related issues is promising. Olga Plakhotnik attributes the "critical revolutionary potential" of feminism in Ukraine to street demonstrations having helped usher gender into public discourse in a more radical way. The routes, slogans, and events of Ofenzywa's 2012 march mapped a path of symbolic meaning through Kyiv's city streets. A closer look at these alternative appropriations of

[356] Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Gender, Nation, and Reproduction: Demographic Discourses and Politics in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution," 131–151.

public space can further illuminate how gender ideologies are impressed into landscapes, and how such impressions shape civic life.

Marchers first gathered at Mikhailovsky Square near the memorial to Prince Volodymyr, who has historically embodied the fusion of church and state. They had chosen the separation of church and state as the theme for their protest in response to recent surges in intolerance by religious groups across Ukraine, including one entitled "Love Against Homosexualism." In particular, they aimed to draw attention to impending laws supported by Yanukovych's Party of Regions that would levy a tax on childless women over thirty, and another that would limit artificial insemination for single women above a certain age. Opponents from the other end of the political spectrum also showed up at the rallying point for the march, the far-right Ukraine being marked by protectionist stances toward a unified church and state, homophobia, and overt nationalism. Roughly a hundred men and women, self-proclaimed "antifeminists" touted family values in opposition to "feminism and homosexualism." Many carried brooms with them to signify a desire to "sweep out the feminists" and chanted this phrase along with "Keep Ukraine pure!" and "Stop homosexualism, gender ideology, and degradation of the justice system!"

These slogans, besides being illogical, conveyed a policing of the nation through exclusion. Moreover, their choice in words, for example, "homosexualism" instead of "homosexuality," fit the expulsion of difference and religious nationalism that they argued for on national news. In one such interview, a man stated that "Homosexualism is killing the nation"; in another, a couple agreed that "It is just natural for a man to be a man and a woman to be a woman." These statements reveal that for the far right in Ukraine sexual difference is perceived as an ideological pathology harmful to national survival. The elevation of the conflict to the level of national survival by the right reveals that more than reproductive laws were at stake in the

protest. As the debate unfolded, a large-scale reevaluation of the justice system, debates about the ties between church and state, and fierce opinions on everything from immigration, welfare, and national autonomy were being aired out on the open city square.

Despite the right's aggressive stance, neither side of the conflict experienced physical violence or arrest. Police in riot gear barricaded any contact between the two sides and Ofenzywa's marchers were able to continue along their planned route. They continued past the Cabinet of Ministers and through Maidan Nezalezhnosti where nearly 300,000 demonstrators had gathered to protest unfair elections during the Orange Revolution. They also marched past the Ministry of Bioethics where, in September 2010, state officials and clerical leaders jointly signed a proposed amendment to the constitution to ban abortion and revise sex education in schools to "promote marital fidelity and premarital abstinence."[357] This is only one example of a deeper preoccupation with sexuality and the body inherited from Soviet projections of ideological and political anxieties onto corporeal metaphors.

Eric Naiman roots these metaphors in the NEP era, in which sexuality was largely bound up with ideas of individuality. Past "incarnations" of the citizen's inner life have carried over into postcommunism; many still govern public assumptions around proper conduct. Where in the West, "the transgender body has emerged as futurity itself, a kind of heroic fulfillment of postmodern promises of gender flexibility," in post-Soviet Ukraine, gender-flexibility is perceived by the right as a threat to the nation and its citizens.[358] Where the concept of "queer time" is bound up with late-capitalist economies of flexibility, in the postcommunist context, the relations between sexuality, time, and space take on a more rigid structure. Ofenzywa's rally around a socialist holiday politicizes gender in Ukrainian public speech where past Soviet

[357] Olena Hankivsky and Anastasiya Salnykova, *Gender, Politics, and Society in Ukraine*.
[358] Halberstam, Ibid, 13.

discourses still inform the ways in which citizenship is equated with masculinity and certain forms of labor are seen as masculine.

A Russian leftist newspaper *Worker's Gazette* reported on the march in an article entitled "The Stern Face of Feminism" in which the author declared that Ofenzywa had finally overcome the "provincialism" of Femen's topless protests. Filtering the story of Ukrainian feminism through a Russian imperialist gaze, the article's nationalist sentiment animates the conservatism of the Soviet past for its audiences in the present, asking: "Is it not a form of radical feminism to run half-naked through the streets, thinking that if you yell for something, showing your torso, someone will believe you? Surely, our feminists have now decided that if you want to fight for your rights, then do it seriously, sternly, like a man." The emphasis on "acting like a man" to achieve gender equality in this quote, coupled with the author's nationalist sentiment, grants men superior status as the architects of public life. Just as in the right-wing papers that diametrically oppose feminism to masculinity, the idea that women must fight for that rights in the "masculine" realm of the symbolic nation rests on the notion that the female body can be both a lyrical defense of the nation, and a threat to its borders. Ukrainian presses and television stations covering the march all emphasized the controversy between "feminists" and "antifeminists" on Mikhailovsky Square. Depending on the political leanings of the journalist, the point of the march ranged from "reclaiming women's rights" to "marching against men." Nonetheless, for the left and the right sparring over gender in Kyiv during the march, the form of the debate over women's rights staged in the streets conveyed a wider belief (shared by both sides) in street protest as a way to exercise democracy.

The march concluded in Mariyinsky Park. Members of Ofenzywa gathered to place a purple scarf around the neck of the monument to Ukraine's canonized poet and playwright,

Lesya Ukrainka. Ukrainka lived at the turn of the twentieth century. She translated Marx, expounded socialist views, and is rumored to have been involved in a romantic relationship with the writer Olha Kobylianska. Given the cultural and political significance that canonized authors receive in Ukrainian public and official life, Ofenzywa's decision to associate Ukrainka's memorial with their march was a rhetorically powerful move. The Italian feminist Rosi Bradiotti's figure of "nomadic subjectivity" can help to illuminate Ofenzywa's symbolic intervention into the politics of citizenship where the group counters the patriarchal characterization of the state inherited from the Soviet era by "find[ing] a more accurate, complex location for a transformation of the very terms [which specify alienation] and of political interaction."[359] It is notable that Lesya Ukrainka has also become a very visible state symbol of national identity: her face is on the 200 hryvnia banknote, she appears in standardized humanities textbooks, and is featured in ceremonies on the Soviet holiday dedicated to students and knowledge still celebrated on Sept. 1. Placing a feminist symbol on her monument in Kyiv inscribed over stone an alternative idea of gender in civic life that had not yet entered the official terms of the state.

Essentially, the fervor over "feminism" that erupted between the left and right during the course of the march was also a staging of how to protest. It was a challenge to the identity categories available for expressing oneself in a publicly meaningful way. It is also significant that the overall design of Ofenzywa's protest adopted an iconicity adapted to the virtual age. In Certeau's terms, they appropriated the "immense texturology" of the city's representations as "optical artifacts" in a topology of physical places that were also re-represented as virtual sites for public speech.[360] One poster featured commentary about pending Internet censorship laws

[359] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, 7.
[360] de Certeau, Ibid, 92.

with the words "Google is With Us" scrawled above the company's logo for March 8 that year (a rainbow montage of the male and female symbols). Participants wore purple colored scarves and carried flags of the same shade, a global symbol of feminism. One woman wore a t-shirt with the ironic statement: "This is What a Feminist Looks Like."[361] Three protestors wore fake beards in solidarity with French participants from the group LaBarbe, while a few others carried signs resembling the elaborately embroidered flags of Orthodox religious ceremonies. One sign featured politicians with church cupolas instead of heads, indicating that the church remains the primary legislative body in Ukraine. Slogans included the phrases: "Church and State: Live Apart, Perish Together!," "My Body, My Business," and "Zetkin, Davis, Kollontai – To All the Oppressed We Cry!". Images and texts from the physical space of the street protest interpolated the online media surrounding the event. This dynamic aided activists in further suspending the divisions between the public and private spheres needed to stage their conversation on the cultural processes denoting gender roles in Ukrainian civic life.

VIII. Conclusion: Ethics and Competing Rhetorics

Ofenzywa's collective politics and Belorusets' photographs juxtapose the rhetoric of past feminist marches of the early twentieth century with their own contemporary statements. Doing so, Ofenzywa's activists frame their feminist critique of Ukrainian civic life in terms that preexist both the Soviet period and the Ukrainian constitution. This way of "reclaiming" March 8 airs anxieties around shifting gender roles that are tied to broader social upheavals and nation-building efforts that have been reflected in the day's official commemorations over time. Their

[361] The only NGO in Ukraine to support both gay and transsexual individuals, *Insight*, helped organize the event along with the *Autonomous Workers Union*, *Pryama Dia* student union, the *Left Opposition Party*, and the literary publication *ProStory*. Taken as a whole, the diversity and the size of the crowd made clear that public opinion and awareness around the meaning of this particular day had grown exponentially since Kis' letter and Ofenzywa's first march in 2010.

manifesto advances a philosophy of language formulated by the early Soviet avant-garde in a visual paradigm that assumed art is always bound up with action. Unlike the early avant-garde, however, Belorusets' photography conveys a concept of political subjectivity as not being founded upon the state, but in everyday life, which is also the primary site for constructing gender roles.

Throughout the course of events on Kyiv's Maidan during Winter 2013-14, leaders in Ofenzywa put their activism skills to use in practical ways, even though they were initially skeptical of the meanings of the broader demonstrations taking place. In late January 2014, Nadia Parfan and others organized a "Night of Women's Solidarity" to draw attention to the barring of women from certain activities on the square. The rally expanded into a grassroots group entitled "Half the Maidan: Women's Voices of Protest" that operated through Facebook to document women's protest activities. Ofenzywa members also joined up with activists from other groups to stage free workshops in nonviolent protest strategies. Despite widespread efforts by many to keep the peace, events progressed and the situation became more critical. After Berkut riot police fired into the crowd in late January 2014, protestors fortified the square with burning tires, defending the barricades with Molotov cocktails and cobblestones pulled up from the streets. Hundreds were either wounded or killed. Ofenzywa members quickly applied the social organizing skills they had learned and maintained throughout the Yanukovych years. They quickly organized to set up independent media sites, acquire medical supplies from abroad, and guard the wounded from being kidnapped by the opposition in hospitals spontaneously set up inside local churches.

Nothing would remain the same. Ofenzywa split on February 6, 2014, one member citing "ideological differences" as the reason.[362] Many disagreed over the form and association of women's activism within the mainstream demonstrations that took place, as well as whether to adopt militaristic images and means within their activist practice.[363] The debate shook the entire network of feminists in the region. Ofenzywa's split coincided with Pussy Riot's U.S. visit and the public letter from anonymous members of the group disassociating with them due to "not wanting to be part of the institutions of art and activism."[364] Ultimately, Ofenzywa's split resulted in two separate factions of women's squads on the Maidan: "Olga Kobilyanska Sotnia" and "Zhinocha Sotnya." The former adopted a more militaristic image, but preserved the leading symbol from Ofenzywa's Kyiv march on March 8 in the writer Olga Kobilyanska. Thus, though the group fractured into two, the effort preserved a feminist ethic in Ukraine. Despite their different approaches, nonetheless, a collective ideal remains that is not completely subjugated to the national ideal.[365] Now recent history, Ofenzywa's aesthetic and protest experiments were part of an early staging of a still ongoing search for a more continuous, alternative history of local feminist activism.

[362] Two members of the group publicly documented these differences in two articles published in *Krytyka* in March 2014: Maria Mayerchyk, "On the Occasion of March 8th/ Recasting of Meanings."; Tamara Martsenyuk, "До 8 березня / Жіноча сотня або право на смисли (Відповідь на статтю Марії Маєрчик)/ On the Occaison of March 8th/The Women's Company, or the Right to Meanings (A response to Mariya Mayerchyk's Article)."
[363] Phillips, Sarah D., "The Women's Squad in Ukraine's Protests: Feminism, Nationalism, and Militarism on the Maidan."
[364] The group posted an official letter announcing their reasons for disbanding on their blog the same day that the members at-large of Pussy Riot announced their split with Nadiya Tolokonnikova and Masha Alyokhina. See: "Феміністична Офензива припиняє існування," *Feminist Ofenzyva Blog*; Marisa Mazria Katz, "An Open Letter from Pussy Riot"; Jessica Zychowicz, "Pussy Riot Arrest at Sochi Reinforces Their Cult Status."
[365] Several scholars of gender issues in Ukraine have publicly stated similar views. See: Sarah D.Phillips, Ibid.

Figure 63: "Maidan: Occupied Spaces," Yevgenia Belorusets, 2014[366]

Nonetheless, as artifacts of a specific moment in national history, Belorusets' photos comprise a text that goes beyond conventional notions of social change that more traditional understandings of protest typify. She depicts how politics are synthesized in people's relationship to their environments. This dynamic resonates in her photo (above) of a woman standing in place of the stone Lenin statue that demonstrators had just dismantled. Where in "32 Gogol St." Rodchenko's aesthetic underscores Belorusets' project, it serves to situate her rendering of memory and its disintegration against the backdrop of Soviet documentary. The narratives of social emancipation and economic equality once signified by the statue, in turn, motivates the temporal disjuncture within the image. The image thus contains within it the disintegration of a bygone revolution; Maidan becomes about undoing grand narratives. Gender in "Maidan: Occupied Spaces" echoes Belorusets' depictions of the tenement home as a post-

[366] Yevgenia Belorusets Website, Accessed April 10, 2015.

Soviet symbol of the "losers" of the transition period; many of the images make visible the feminization and stigmatization of poverty that infused even the social gatherings on the Maidan.

Her sensitivity to how power is leveraged through spaces emerges in a narrative of the everyday, affording a view of the mythic qualities that guide how events unfold in the restoration of equilibrium and predictable conduct, to which all revolutions aim. The utopian spaces and suspended timeframes of revolution are revealed to be just as subject to discrimination as the practices of spaces/times marginalized by society in more stable periods. Employing temporal and spatial cues to suspend linear timeframes, the occupied Parliamentary palace (below), like the house at 32 Gogol St., becomes an allegory for the social production of space, showing how public discourses can both suppress and amplify differences.

Thus, where Belorusets' aesthetic carried over into the Maidan revolution, the semantics of her prior work allowed her to readily translate her ideas around how power is leveraged through communal spaces, here represented by the occupied Parliament building. In another example, the inclusion of everyday material items, such as cabbage and coat racks (below), reveal the transient nature of regime change by highlighting its micro-effects. Social transformation is always first and foremost a question of individual perception. As in the concept of feminist politics I document throughout the images in this chapter, the series explores in image and text the affective registers by which individuals come to view themselves a part of public life. On November 19, 2014 Belorusets would give the keynote address at Vienna Art Week, featuring her series alongside work by over twenty Ukrainian artists in an exhibit dedicated to Maidan.[367] The event included art-activist collectives R.E.P. and Hudrada, which are the focus of the next chapter.

[367] Prokopenko, Lesya and Kateryna Taylor, curators. "Through Maidan and Beyond." (17-30 November 2014). http://www/throughmaidan.org/artists. Accessed January 10, 2015.

Figure 64: "Maidan: Occupied Spaces," Yevgenia Belorusets, 2014

Figure 65: "Maidan: Occupied Spaces," Yevgenia Belorusets, 2014

Chapter 4

Museum of Congresses: Biopolitics and the Self in Kyiv's HudRada and R.E.P. Visual Art Collectives

The open way leads to the public square.
—Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*

I. Introduction

The interactive exhibit in this chapter, HudRada's *Draftsman's Congress* (Конгрес рисувальників) now appears in hindsight as a premonition of things to come. The exhibit took place in the National Art Museum (NAMU) in summer 2012, not far from the confrontations that would take place between police and protestors on Hrushevsky Street during the Euromaidan demonstrations. HudRada is a curatorial team formed in 2008 by young Ukrainian artists and critics. The group has sixteen members, some of whom are also in R.E.P., a related collective.[368] Both groups have a non-hierarchical structure in which open collaboration takes precedence over more structured modes of cultural production. Their aims overlap in the creation of interactive exhibits.

The compound noun HudRada itself is an eponym named for the Soviet Arts Council. Given their focus on making Kyiv's art scene more publically accessible, this appellation is also a tongue-in-cheek unraveling of Soviet styles of censorship still active in Ukraine. During

[368] HudRada's website states: "HudRada acts as a curatorial and activist interdisciplinary group. HudRada's members are architects, political activists, translators, writers, designers, and artists. Projects organized by HudRada are based on discussion combining the experience of participants. These projects take the form of exhibitions, which become a platform for theoretical work and public campaigns using posters and screenings in city space." http://hudrada.tumblr.com/About%20Hudrada

May 18—June 8, 2013 the gathering converted the official functions of Ukraine's National Art Museum into a roundtable workshop for new directions in art and politics. There were two parallel programs: an interactive public mural in which participants were invited to "communicate through art" on white surface installed throughout an entire room on the ground floor; the second floor featured a series of paintings, photography, and sculpture entitled *Disputed Territory*. Both the roundtable and exhibit stood in stark contrast to the rest of the museum's collection of Orthodox icons and late-baroque paintings. A note from the curators reads:

> We move along a volatile border, from which we can see the constant shifting of battle lines, the focal point of the violent outburst manifesting itself again and again. But where exactly is this disputed territory? It lies in social interactions, in exclusions, in marginalization, gender and sexuality, in war over private and common interests, in public space and its acquisition, in choices people make as civilians, politicians, and activists, and it is above all in the field of power.[369]

Throughout the entire three weeks of the installation, HudRada staged presentations and debates in the adjoining foyer on topics ranging from art, to antiabortion initiatives, to the criminalization of homelessness. Surveilled by police, this gathering of artists and authors marked the beginning of a series of unexpected events that would soon reveal the state's deception in previously unimaginable ways. Ukraine's contemporary art collectives are introducing important debates in Ukrainian public discourse, including conversations on the legislation of women's and gender rights in Parliament. Meanwhile, they are doing so while inventing a visual language that synthesizes the aesthetics of Kyiv's early avant-garde and local 1990s trans-avant-garde with a new emphasis on the body, urbanism, and materiality. Framing critical ideological junctures between state, museum, and public, the common aesthetic across each of these art collectives pivots on the empty rhetoric of utopianism in allegories of the Ukrainian state to point out its anachronisms, and its failures, in protecting the basic right to self-expression.

[369] "Disputed Territory," http://disputedterritory.org.ua/en/node/1. Accessed March 10, 2014.

The timing and location of HudRada's exhibit gatherings in the National Museum of Ukraine retrospectively reveals the multiple planes of power that intersected and shaped the event itself. The physical site of the main gallery in Kyiv is on the same street as the Parliament Building. The museum was thus located at the center of the seven major clashes between Berkut riot police and Maidan demonstrators that took place in January of 2014. A program of political

Figure 66: Placard for HudRada Exhibit "Disputed Territory" featuring a computer motherboard and urban grid overlaid with amoebic cellular material, 2013[370]

discussion, referred to as the Congress, took place in a room located alongside an interactive, oval-shaped white space installed on the ground floor of the museum. The gatherings of civic activists and artists that ensued stood out from the rest of the museum and its hierarchical display of state authority. The circles of activists who staged the event, and the roundtable of debates that took place within it, destabilized the museum as an ideological space. This was most visibly apparent in the teams of armed police that patrolled the gallery and museum grounds during the exhibit. The content of the debates that took place, as well as the mural itself—both symbolically

[370] Ibid.

and in its theme of disputed territory—prefaced the standoffs and fatal clashes that would occur between Maidan protestors and police just a few months later. Hrushevsky Street would later be renamed for the protestors that perished in holding back the police lines along the same street.

R.E.P. and HudRada, as art collectives based in Kyiv, were avant-garde in this particular exhibit not only conceptually, but also materially and socially. Individual members had staged other critiques of centralized power through their political activism for other causes, not all related to artistic expression. LGBT and feminist struggles for parity in pay, HIV/AIDS awareness, labor unions, inter-faith dialogue, better standards in orphanages, homelessness, and substance abuse rehabilitation are but a few of the many issues these art-activists are directly involved with in their communities. They have continued their work in the face of state repressions, ongoing social discrimination, and, in some cases, even violent physical attacks by far-right groups and police. Individual artists have worked across these two collectives, sometimes collaborating with outside groups, usually on the left, in organizing public assemblies, petitions, and volunteer opportunities through NGOs. However, their primary concern has always centered on creating cultural venues for engaging the public in art.

Both collectives are working to reinvigorate public access to museums and their operations, including by putting on display the dynamics of various censorship regimes in contemporary Ukraine. Much of the post-Orange generation, or "Generation 2004" as they are known in Ukraine, are thematically unified by formal adaptations of the aesthetics of Kyiv's prior avant-garde. Many of these artists take as a point of departure the traditional concerns of the avant-garde with the public performance, interface, and agency of display to investigate economic and social injustices in contemporary Kyiv.[371] Scholars of the region have coined a

[371] Alexei Yurchak discusses R.E.P. and "Generation 2004" as part of a Third Avant-Garde, pointing out its concern (similar to prior avant-gardes) with the idea of bringing art to the masses, underlining that the younger generation is

dilemma in the literature on democracy and transition as a search for a "third way" between communism and capitalism. Yet much of this literature, as has been argued elsewhere, has failed to consider postcommunism as a global condition. Reading these artists' conceptualizations of local politics entails going beyond mere rejections of "transition" narratives from the 1990s. Ultimately, these artworks contain nuanced stories about intellectuals' and minorities' experiences. They are also stories about being in-between two revolutions, the advent of the second only sketched out in a revolution of self-knowledge, and in collective attempts to evade the oppressive systematization of cultural production in Kyiv.[372] The exhibit's title, *Disputed Territory*, now appears Cassandrian after the literal annexation of Crimea in early 2014, and the disputes that ensued over the future of Ukraine's sovereignty. All of this illustrates only further the suppressions that these artists had long been facing, and also, the value of artistic autonomy within public discourse.

Thus, to understand "the political" in relation to the two intellectual collectives in this chapter, we must question why they are concerned with making and displaying art at all. It would be all too easy to simply label the HudRada collective a group of dissident activists. Such a critique would miss the point and risk falling back into the powerful discourses of the Soviet dissident, all too recognizable in his costume of a defector or other populist hero, who only just happens to make art or write poetry. The more complicated and rewarding path, I think, is to abandon the search for heroes in order to better see the archetypes societies produce into heroes.

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distinguished by artists putting themselves in actual confrontation with political authorities, sometimes endangering their bodies and/or art objects in "Revolutionaries and Their Translators: Maidan, the Conflict in Ukraine, and the Russian New Left."

[372] Vitaly Chernetsky also makes this case in the prevalence of the "postmodern postcolonial" in Russian and Ukrainian literature after 1991. *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization*.

The stories that these artists tell about themselves in their artwork are ambivalent and open-ended: they are about the museum itself, more than they are about revolutionary change per se, or realpolitik. The irony to this situation may be that, in turning to the site of the museum as their outlet, these activists' attempts to interpolate a skeptical public sphere are wrapped up in one of the core creative legacies of communism. The museum itself, after all, was the moral arm of the state with its ideological didacticism of socialist realism and visions of the enlightened social role of the artist. This being the case, much of the work on display in these exhibits directly concerns the most inalienable site of ideology—the human body—to expose what has since manifested itself externally, but at the time of the exhibit remained wholly internal to the Ukrainian populace: an alien state.

Using copies, collage, maps, acronyms, and signs and symbols from a range of modern political parties and movements, the images in *Draftsman's Congress* and *Disputed Territory* pose a challenge to conditionings of post-Soviet reality as collapse and nostalgia. Combining cartographical notation in maps of Eastern Europe and Russia with formal aesthetic elements from Kyiv's architectural and Soviet past, the exhibit also employs physical landscape as a metaphor for the body as it confronts shrinking spaces for self-expression. This generalized focus on oppositional thinking and marginalization in the HudRada collective's work, as curators, pivots on montage and participatory painting to bring into relief the central role of biopolitics in the state's attempts to legitimize itself. Furthermore, to read these artworks as an expression of civic dissent is to see in them not a tale of heroism, but an inventory, or even an etymology, in an evolving search for a more viable vocabulary with which to critique not only the institution of the museum (a site that is, arguably, always contested by artists), but the power systems beyond its walls which aim to muffle that critique.

In the second half of the chapter, I draw upon Svetlana Boym's history of the idea of "freedom" in Russian modernism and postmodernism to explore some of the key events, ideas, and venues around which these collectives cohere. Polish art critic Piotr Piotrówski's notion of "agoraphilia" in contemporary East European visual art also helps to clarify the geographical specificity to the thinking around radical democracy and the negative critique of politics in *Draftsman's Congress* with other trends in cultural production throughout the former Eastern bloc countries. Referencing Eric Naiman's work on the body in early Soviet ideology, I explore how these pieces play upon the verisimilitude of past socialist realist murals, architectural drawings, and mosaics from the twentieth century in a critique of post-Soviet art as a problematic paradigm. These works, I argue, populate with multi-sensorial displays the limbo and unpredictability—the gaps—left by East/West clashes and ruptures between state, nation, citizen, and territory in Ukrainian spaces: private homes, streets, harbors, etc. The notion of an inner citadel, a strengthened sense of inner freedom, as opposed to the threat of the censor (in the history of authorship under the Tsar and then, later, socialism) remains in these artists' creative uses of what I call "negative space." Ultimately, I propose that these artists ascribe to an ethos of collective compassion set against the fictions of a corrupt and parsimonious state. The content of their exhibit was essentially the imaginary and unfulfilled possibilities that were opened up by to two revolutions (Orange and Maidan) that were, in both cases, coopted at different times. Democracy, at the hands of the state, in their vision of events quickly turned into what might have been expected: a macro political dispute, amplified by diplomatic misfires and mass media machines.

II. Art and the State

The rise of the museum in the nineteenth century is profoundly tied to the systemization of power by colonial states. Benedict Anderson writes that with the emergence of the printing press, and the shift of empires into modern nation-states, there arose a sense of conquest through new mechanisms by which to measure and plot space and time. Anderson includes the museum, along with the census and the map, as technologies that supplied a vision of power that manifested in the state's infinite ability to reproduce itself.[373] In Russia, the shift was even more explicit. After the Bolsheviks seized power, hundreds of churches, former palaces, industrial properties, and private collections of cultural artifacts formerly owned by the deposed aristocracy were handed over to the state. Many of these acquired properties and their rich stores of paintings, ancient books, sculptures, etc. were then turned into museums in a series of decrees by the new cultural apparatus.[374] In 1917 the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros) was founded to carry out the enormous task of reorganizing cultural production, consumption, and exchange by decree of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Art became a category under which the economic requisitioning of public space occurred on a massive scale. In February of 1919, the First Museum Congress convened in Petrograd to discuss further consolidation. It was decided that all museums would be treated in a single reserve fund

[373] ". . . a characteristic feature of the instrumentalities of this profane state was infinite reproducibility, a reproducibility made technically possible by print and photography, but politico-culturally by the disbelief of the rulers themselves in the real sacredness of local sites . . . It had all become normal and everyday. It was precisely the infinite quotidian reproducibility of its regalia that revealed the real power of the state." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 182, 183.

[374] The "Decree on the Freedom of Conscience, Church, and Religious Society" guaranteed that all property owned by the Orthodox Church would become "the property of the people." Another decree dated September 22, 1918 reads "On the announcement that all those who have not returned from their dacha are considered to have disappeared their property is liable for confiscation." Several more decrees governed the removal of art for sale abroad, requisitions, and nationalization. Nationalization certificates were issued for all cultural property that had come under Narkompros' jurisdiction, under which buildings and land were headed under the Section for Property of the Republic, while the protection of works of art and antiquities was transferred to the Section on Museum Affairs. Natalia Semenova, "A SOVIET MUSEUM EXPERIMENT," 81–102.

(Gozmuzeifond): "in a single unified state, museums cannot pursue a separate economy."[375] The art-system became an all-pervasive hierarchy in which directives were carried out from on high. Thousands of private mansions became repositories for the surplus of objects considered "art" that had been abandoned or confiscated. The methods by which planners under Lenin brought art to the workers thus implicated museums in a grand utopian project reminiscent of Russia's imperial nineteenth century.

But utopias are never permanent, nor are collections. The amplification of state power through illusions of permanence, not surprisingly, is an important theme throughout Russian history and is also reflected in literature. Beginning with Gogol's petty clerks, many authors have, at one time or another, criticized the state by pointing out its surplus of bureaucracy: fanfare becomes sign of weakness linked to a more generalized failure to gain the trust of the people over which the state claims to preside. In her prose piece "The Opening of the Museum," the young poet Marina Tsvetaeva depicts an inaugural visit from Tsar Nicholas II to mark the opening of the Emperor Alexander III Museum of Fine Arts in 1912, the construction of which had been overseen by Tsvetaeva's father:

> Today the whole old-age of Russia seems to have flowed into this place in homage to the eternal youth of Greece. A living lesson of history and philosophy: this is what time does with people, this is what it does—with gods. This is what *time* does with a man, this is what (a glance at the statues) *art* does. And, the last lesson: this is what time does with a man; this is what a man does with time. But because of my youth I don't think about that, I only feel a cold shudder.[376]

Time, like reason and art, is an abstraction in the essay—the province of statesmen far removed from the narrator's own experience. Penning her account as an eyewitness with the perspective of a child, Tsvetaeva frames the museum in light of a creeping sense of artificiality, which the author equates with the unpopular Emperor.

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[375] Ibid, 87.
[376] Marina Tsvetaeva, "The Opening of the Museum,"*A Captive Spirit: Selected Prose*, 202–7.

Tsvetaeva leaves us with a final image of her father lauding another portrait, of Princess Zinaida Volkonskaya, the commissioner of the museum. He compares the latter's beauty, talent, and generosity to Mycenas: "did she ever think that her dream of a Russian museum of sculpture would be destined to become the heritage of the son of a poor village priest, who until the age of twelve had never even seen a pair of boots . . ."[377] These final images of longing and benevolence, encompassed by these two portraits of the museum's late female benefactresses, stand in contrast to the superficial show of power embodied by the Tsar. Metaphorically, the museum is transformed at the end of the story from an environment of rank and obsessive deference—the illusion of mastery over time—to a space characterized by familial care, learning, and generosity—personal qualities that transcend time. Tsvetaeva and her father's memories of these deceased women come to enliven and distort the synthetic order expressed in the museum's arranged sculptures. The "eternal youth of Greece," projected into "the whole age of Russia" embodied by the Tsar, is limited. Tsvetaeva the child, in viewing this "youth" from a cold distance, senses a barrier between herself and the "childlike" quality she sees in the Tsar. Whereas in her fathers' living memories, evoked by the portraits, Tsvetaeva sees completion "by going back into the past to the arc of spiritual continuity."[378] The museum comes alive as soon as time is released from the overpowering grip of the Tsar and everything that is supposed to emanate from him within the museum.

At the time of the Orange Revolution, elites attempted to justify national autonomy by breaking completely from the Soviet past—an impossible task— in overtures to 19th century Romanticism. The cultural establishment followed suit by blotting from the record Kyiv's important legacy in film, graphic art, and literature produced by the wave of artists who

[377] Ibid, 205.
[378] Ibid, 207.

inhabited and traveled to the city at the peak of high modernism in the 1920s-1930s. In March of 2005, the Chair of the National Association of Artists of Ukraine, Volodymyr Chepelyk, stated his aims in an official speech:

> . . . to defend our traditional artistic culture from various influxes and from pollution . . . to strengthen the progress of the nation [natsio postup] in art" and "to defend the traditional flow of our ancient culture, so that Ukrainian art does not lose its specificity and originality in the world art space.[379]

Ironically, the new allergy toward modernist aesthetics that was supposed to signify national autonomy instead mimicked the very attitude toward culture it claimed to reject by creating a set of strident parameters for art. In doing so, it thus effectively dismissed one of the most prolific periods in Kyiv for the purposes of installing yet another censorship regime. For all intents and purposes, the relationship between the state and the cultural establishment in Ukraine remained stable in the shift from communism to independence, only the enemy changed.

In Eastern Europe and Russia, the question of artistic autonomy has continually plagued and driven artists to rethink the inherited conceptual horizons of the museum at the core of state-managed culture. With the fall of communism, new opportunities and barriers in the practice, display, and market exchange of artworks emerged as museums played a central role in projects aimed at legitimizing national independence.[380] In Ukraine, the state has mostly maintained the regulatory functions of the Ministry of Culture from the Soviet period. Public museum officials have addressed practical problems such as the lack of funding and poor staffing, but have failed to account for more ideological issues, such as the selective omission of controversial themes

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[379] Volodymyr Chepelyk, "Shliakhom mystets'kym i odniieiu hromadioiu!" Obrazotvorche mystetstvo 2, 2005. Cited in Myroslav Shkandrij, "Contemporary Ukrainian Art and the Twentieth Century Avant-Garde," in *Contemporary Ukraine on the Cultural Map of Europe*, ed. Larissa Onyshkevych and Maria Rewakowicz (London and New York: M.E. Sharpe and The Shevchenko Scientific Society, 2009), 411–31.

[380] Robin Ostow provides an excellent overview in her study of new museums and exhibit styles in Eastern Europe throughout the 2000s. She pays particular attention to the political struggles that emerge between different contemporary interest groups in conflicting narratives of war and tragedy in the twentieth century in: *(Re)visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*, Revisualizing National History :museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium x, 228 p. (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

from exhibits. Private museums in the country are equally selective, though they operate according to the interests of outside NGOs and oligarchs and are oriented toward trends in a global market and the personal tastes of the investor; thus they remain more or less severed from local contexts.[381] The situation is such that grassroots collectives formed by well-established local artists (who have presented individual works in Pinchuk and Kyiv's Arsenale, as well as abroad in Biennales) have had to struggle to install new exhibits within their own city. As a result, local artists, critics and curators have gone outside of both state and private art institutions to conduct more radical experiments that bring into question Ukraine's entire art establishment.[382]

III. Censorship and Negative Space

Members of Kyiv's contemporary visual art collectives cultivate a politics of detachment and skepticism of mainstream political initiatives in order to mount critiques of state power. It might be said that members of the radical intelligentsia of the 1860s were equally misunderstood by mainstream society, yet also desired by it. A century and a half later, Ukraine's contemporary generation of artists spring from a similar negative logic of detachment. Yet this time, the impulse to detach from mainstream politics seemingly derives not from the anomie of an aristocratic upbringing, but from what is perhaps the greatest of all the oxymorons of post-Soviet life: that the most educated in society tend to be underemployed. Upon closer reading, many of these artists' ideals, not only on canvas, but also in the organizing they do as activists, echo

[381] In Kyiv, the Pinchuk Art Centre, independently supported by billionaire Viktor Pinchuk, dominates the local public perception of contemporary art, even though much of the art in the museum is idiosyncratically chosen for display based on trends in the global marketplace. The CCA (Center for Contemporary Art), funded by George Soros between 1993-1999, started as a gallery space, but switched to an educational and grant foundation in 2008 and often partners with Polish organizations. EIDOS Arts Development Foundation, established by Dr. Ludmila Bereznitsky, Lubov Michailova, and Petro Bagriy also offers grants and recently opened a new gallery. EIDOS prioritizes critical art and aims to "become a communication platform to develop the arts situation in Ukraine," but also remains limited: www.eidosfund.org/eng/news/read/688/. Accessed March 10, 2014.

[382] Sergiy Zhadan discusses the situation artists face in finding venues in his article, *An Abandoned Agent*.

Rousseau's social contract. Much of the work they do directly involves the allocation and sharing of intellectual and material resources to insure work for a wider number of people in a socially and economically marginalized community.[383] Their emphasis on collectivity and insuring a horizontal structure for art production brings up several older questions about the role of the artist in society. How is the authorial voice conceived of in these groups' changing attitudes toward the self and the creative process? How do the sites of their art exibits and installations that take place in both the Soviet style interiors of state museums, and in Kyiv's built environment as well, create sensorial cartographies—negative spaces—imbued with shared affective meanings? How are these cartographies political?

In the post-Soviet case, museums are a battleground for shaping the future of independence and nationhood because they supply artists with a critical immediacy, an immediacy that differs from the shock tactics of art considered political or subversive in the West. The art collective R.E.P. (Revolutionary Experimental Space) are a group of young Ukrainian artists established in 2004 amid the events of the Orange Revolution. One of the group's founding members, visual artist Nikita Kadan, explains that the group has chosen to explore the collective traditions of Soviet times to critique and develop new forums for art.[384] Artists of his generation, Generation 2004, are more committed to local contexts than their predecessors and prefer working collaboratively in urban landscapes.

Both of these preferences stem from members' experiences in the Orange Revolution. Thematically, much of the work by artists in R.E.P. concerns language, communication, and the

[383] One tangible example of this is the Art Workers Self-Defense Initiative, founded in 2012 in direct response to Kyiv-Mohilya Academy President Sergiy Kvit's shutdown of the Visual Culture Research Center and their exhibit "Ukrainian Body" one year prior.

[384] Many Ukrainian artists of the 1990s, such as Oleg Kulik and Sergey Bratkov, emigrated to countries with stronger contemporary art markets. Larissa Babij and Nikita Kadan, "Blacked Out in Ukraine," *Guernica / A Magazine of Art & Politics*, February 3, 2014, http://www.guernicamag.com/art/blacked-out-in-ukraine/. Accessed March 10, 2015.

autonomy of art/politics. In the 2005 performance *We Will R.E.P. You* members dressed in absurd costumes and held mock "protest" signs featuring Andy Warhol and slogans such as "every person is an artist."[385] Set on Kyiv's Maidan, this surreal bit of political theatre contrasted with the 'real' politics that had taken place there just a year prior, pointing to the latent, and even violent, potentials of a space highly saturated with symbolic meaning. In *Patriotism Project* (2006), R.E.P. created an "artificial visual language" based on graphic symbols whose "universal" meaning could be interpreted by an accompanying "dictionary."[386] Both acts resembled broader trends in Eastern European art in their tendency to "expose a spectrum of negative emotions" in a distancing from feelings of social cohesion and national belonging.[387] By enacting an absurd mock-protest on the square by poking fun at the sanctity of its civic etymology, both of R.E.P.'s stagings temporarily collapsed the autonomy of art—once so vital to survival under totalitarianism—to reveal the political mechanisms underlying its systematization in the present.

There is considerable overlap between artists, critics, and curators in R.E.P. and other groups in Kyiv, including HudRada, which have worked closely with Kyiv's Visual Culture Research Center since its founding in 2008. As I quoted earlier, the VCRC was based at Kyiv-Mohilya Academy, but was forced out after their exhibit *Ukrainian Body*, was shut down due its controversial uses of corporeality to dismantle ideology. By framing Ukraine's poverty, fractured parliament, etc. with literal and figurative nakedness, the exhibit tapped a central nerve in the national imagination and epitomized the radical critique of democracy espoused by these groups.

[385] Piotr Piotrówski discusses R.E.P. as an example of these artists' parodying politics on Kyiv's Maidan in ways similar to Femen: "The reactions of the public and of the 'real' political groups gave the R.E.P. demonstration a social meaning. The action achieved its critical objective: it revealed conflict . . . It exposed a spectrum of negative emotions and the absurdity of politics, in particular public political demonstrations. The autonomy of art, which was so important under a totalitarian system where it functioned as a defensive shield against political manipulation, was in this instance completely eliminated,"108.
[386] http://hudrada.tumblr.com/. Accessed March 20, 2015.
[387] Piotr Piotrówski, Ibid, 108.

The exhibit featured, among other media, drawings and photographs of nude men and women by Sasha Kurmaz and Anatoliy Byelov, Oksana Briukhovetska's pictures of destitute elderly women in Kyiv, and a piece by Mykola Rydnyi juxtaposing a vagina over a photo of parliament. Pointing to deep ideological fractures seething within Ukraine's statehood, the exhibit framed poverty, corruption, and gender inequality in allegories featuring the exposed bodies of aging, nude, gay, disabled, and other marginalized populations. Three days after its opening on February 7,th 2012, university president Serhiy Kvit shut down the exhibit space and indefinitely postponed all VCRC activities on the premises of the University.[388] Resembling the grassroots education efforts of Poland's "Flying Universities" under occupation, the VCRC, nevertheless, would continue to thrive by going underground and by maintaining affiliates in both the NGO and academic sectors. [389]

Materialist Aesthetics and the Notion of Freedom

Recalling Homi K. Bhaba's idea of the postcolonial postmodern, the exhibit's materialist-aesthetics could be said to negotiate nationness by questioning how the body, as an ideological site, can provoke a "shift of attention from the political as a pedagogical, ideological practice to politics as the stressed necessity of everyday life—politics as performativity."[390] HudRada's drive to organically create a broad local audience for their work interrogates the geohistoric frames of art-systems and the values, tastes, and judgments that these systems generate. Critic

[388] Kvit posted and responded to media coverage condemning his act, including an article in NYT, on his personal blog hosted by the University. He posted on his blog a letter from fellow rectors with comments supporting the shutdown: "In preserving human dignity modern culture does not offer ready solutions . . . Kyiv-Mohilya is more precious to us than any victory won at the cost of a threat to our unique community. Sergiy Kvit, *Personalniy Zhurnal, Sergia Kvita*, February 15, 2012, kvit.ukma.kiev.ua/2012/02/відео-прямий-ефір-сергія-квіта-й-нікіт/. Accessed March 19, 2014.

[389] An international response ensued as cultural figures Slavoj Žižek, John Paul-Himka, Eric Fassin, Artur Zmijewski, Sara Goodman, and many others signed a petition calling for the "restoration of academic and artistic freedom" in the country. After the University shutdown, the VCRC managed to find offices for their operations at the historic, but deteriorating, Soviet Kino Zhovten (October Cinema). "Ukrainian Body Petition for Support," *Visual Culture Research Center*, March 2012, http://vcrc.org.ua/ukrbody/ Accessed October 15, 2012.

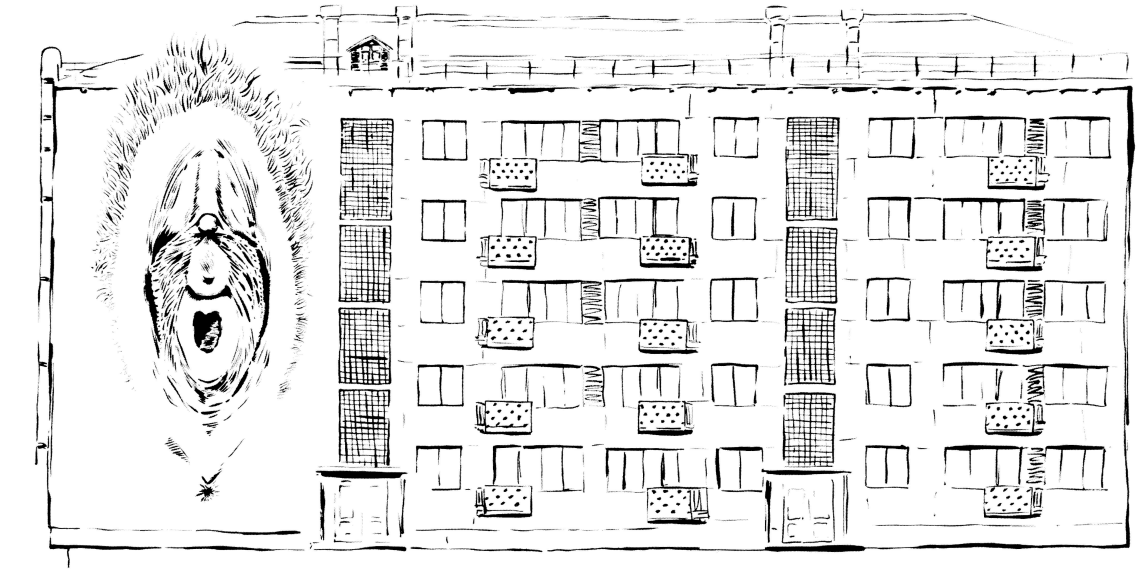
[390] Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (43).

Piotr Piotrówski has called this impulse more broadly "agoraphilia"—"the drive to enter the public space, the desire to participate in that space, to shape public life, to perform critical and design functions for the sake of and within the social space."[391] This is key in the artistic culture of the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, where states have at one time or another possessed methods for subordinating the public sphere to political doctrine. Kadan, founder of HudRada, has commented on the group's exhibits as a disruption in the very script a museum is supposed to follow: "it's a ritual, because every surviving post-Soviet museum is ritualized, and they all continually repeat the same message."[392] The source of social shock in this exhibit, as is the case elsewhere in these groups' work, lay in its challenge to the very idea of a museum and what it is supposed to do—the overwhelming institutional message that a strict code of behavior must be observed at all times. Thus, the exhibit attempted to reinvent the rigid and closed functions of the national museum system in a counternarrative of the homogeneity and objectification of the materials on view. Aesthetically associated with a radicalism that fetishizes the public square in and of itself, the manifestation of "negative space" in the open center of the mural in *Draftsmen's Congress*, as only one example, is a metaphor for oppositional thinking and for questioning the ideological saturation of public spaces more generally that is present throughout nearly all of the projects associated with HudRada and R.E.P.

In "Corrupt," by Nikita Kadan, featured in *Ukrainian Body*, (Figures 69 and 70) sexuality and gender are positioned within the ideological structures that shape public perceptions of the body in collectivity. Soviet-era bloc apartments anthropomorphically link female reproductive capacities to urban planning in surreal black-and-white sketches. The sexualization of the social body through blueprints contrasts the utilitarian, biological over the pleasurable aspects of the

[391] Piotr Piotrówski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, 7.
[392] *Catalogue - Spirna Terrytoria/ Spornaya Terrytoria/ Disputed Territory 4th Exhibition by the Ukrainian Curatorial Collective HudRada*. Kroshitsky Art Museum Sevastopol, Crimea: ADEF Ukraine, 2012.

sexual act, throwing into sharp relief the regulatory political manipulations of natural processes. The images expose the feminization of the domestic sphere as inherent to the regulation of the social body through populations distributed across urban space.



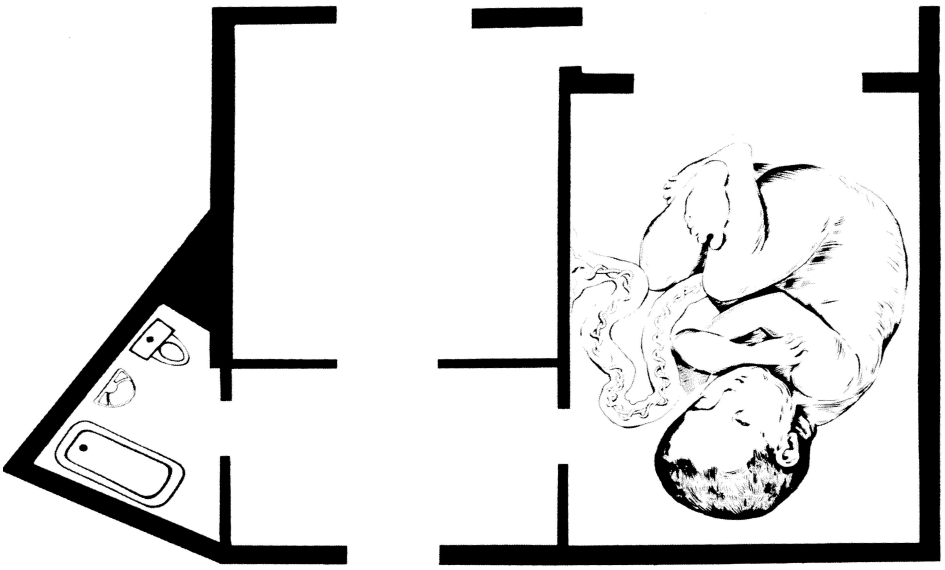


Figure 67: Nikita Kadan, "Corrupt," *Ukrainian Body*, 2012, Kyiv, VCRC[393]
Figure 68: Nikita Kadan, "Corrupt," *Ukrainian Body*, 2012, Kyiv, VCRC

Censorship is a relative term that also contains its opposite by implying varying degrees of freedom wherever it is applied. A day before the exhibit *Great and Grand* in summer 2013,

[393] Exhibit Catalogue, Ibid.

the Director of Kyiv's Mystetskyi Arsenal museum, Nataliya Zablotna, ordered that black paint be thrown on Volodymyr Kuznetsov's mural *Koliyvshchyna: Judgment Day* and that a painting entitled *Molotov Cocktail*, by Vasyl Tsagolov, be completely removed from the building.[394] Though Zablotna herself had overseen preparations for the show as one of its curators, she deemed these two works too controversial for the occasion for which they were curated, the 1025th anniversary of the baptism of Kyivan Rus, which was to be marked by a visit from President Yanukovych and the Ukrainian Orthodox Patriarch. In response, the independent artists' organization ICTM issued an open letter describing the act, which soon garnered international support. Two foreign curators invited to oversee Kyiv's Biennale in 2014 withdrew their acceptance. Zablotna stepped down from her position as Museum Director and also as Editor of the prominent industry journal *Art Ukraine*. In addition to the destruction of artwork, the show itself was designed from the outset as a kind of baptismal ritual within Ukraine's leading public art institution. The cultivation of public preferences for art within the bounds of religious doctrine placed artistic production in the service of reinforcing a church-state bond, a phenomenon that has become central to Ukraine's cultural establishment since independence.[395] It is also significant that Zablotna destroyed the painting in the same way that Orthodox monks in Kyiv Rus' would have destroyed religious icons that did not conform to the strict rules that govern the formal properties of icon painting. To condemn Zablotna's act, protestors gathered in the street and held up large black paper squares.

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[394] This was reported on widely in Ukrainian art periodicals, and also abroad, by RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, "Ukrainian Museum Director Destroys Critical Painting Ahead of President's Visit." *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*. July 26, 2013. http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-art-destroyed-kuznetsov-kievan-rus-yanukovych/25058261.html. Accessed October 13, 2013.

[395] Founder of HudRada Nikita Kadan has noted that: "Through this careful balance between Western values and Orthodox spirituality, the reigning government has effected an untenable way of life. Neither democratic representation nor international conventions have overt influence on the laws that govern existence here . . . Censorship exists, and is even admitted to, but only as long as the word 'censorship' isn't uttered." Babij and Kadan, "Blacked Out in Ukraine," Ibid.

The black square was a reference to Malevich's famous painting from 1917. The history of Malevich's life and work is intertwined with the development of the Soviet art establishment and the self-contradictory pressure placed on artists to create nonconformist art in the interest of the state. Malevich himself, like many painters of his time, was inducted as an official member of the Artists Union and therefore became tasked with the dangerous, and somewhat oxymoronic, position of a "professional" revolutionary. Foundational to the modernist canon, his black square came to define the anti-aesthetic to the deconstructive graphics, and industrialist aesthetics that the Soviets would subsequently counterbalance with socialist realism throughout most of the twentieth century. By associating Malevich's sign for revolution with the black paint that Zablotna had used to destroy Kuznetsov's painting, the protest worked against the instrumentalization of art by recalling the earlier suppression of abstract art like Malevich's. It is worth mentioning that Zablotna responded by calling her destruction of the artwork her own "performance."[396] The artists, students, and scholars involved in the protest were essentially drawn into a fight with the state over the definition of censorship. Necessarily, this fight occurred on the negative terrain of demanding the right to self-expression by being able to express what it is *not*, in other words, the stakes of the conflict hinged on the rhetorical conditions providing the right to publicly name censorship.

Censorship was so pervasive in Ukraine at this time that photography featuring nudity in another exgmahibit occurring during the same week, in a different part of the city, were deemed immoral by state authorities and ordered to be covered from view. The fact the exhibit had several international sponsors and included works by prominent, established artists from several countries did not prevent the works from coming under this kind of attack. The location of the exhibit in a former military barracks on the edge of the city was a trial run by local artists and

[396] Ibid. RFE/RL (2013).

curators to turn the space into a public gallery. Instead of removing the photos in question, the curators were forced by the state to cover them with paper, upon which they drew cartoons and wrote poems, mocking the idea of nudity as a dangerous threat.

The notion of an individual revolution, internal to the self, has a particular past in the history of repressive regimes. In Russian literature and art, varying notions of censorship have fostered the development of specific formal artistic devices for illustrating conceptions of the self in an oppressive environment. By showing what is *not* permitted in print or in public, authors and artists have long dealt the cards of their own poker game, so to speak, to reveal the irony of the need for a game face at all. There are many anecdotes about writing "for the drawer" in Slavic languages, and indeed, self-censorship also makes its way into art as a thematic device. Dostoyevsky is well known for his characters' disembodied voices, whose conversational threads become finely wrought and entangled in the narrative, destabilizing the linear plot structure of the nineteenth century Russian novel and the concept of authority in ethics and polemics, as Bakhtin argued in his theory of dialogism. Fantastic beings and hauntings also appear throughout Russia's nineteenth century as allegories for the self, which is often multiple or doubled. In the twentieth century, authors diffused the weight of the censor while writing under socialism, in some cases, by employing elements from folk tales and legends in political metaphors and allegories of the state. In Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, the Master wrestles to write his manuscript about Pontius Pilate, while a pesky devil—a playful Slavic folk devil (quite different from Milton or other western devils)—keeps returning to him in the form of a shape-shifting feline foreign gentleman named Woland. At the end of the novel, the devil leads both the Master and his Margarita out of Soviet Moscow into a realm resembling purgatory, after which the Master frees Pontius Pilate from punishment. Common to all of these examples is a vision of

creativity as negative freedom: an outpouring of the inner self that at once counters, and is shaped by, the terms upon which it is externally silenced.

The independent artists' union Self-Defense Initiative (ICTM) states that their mission is to hold Ukraine's art institutions to an international standard. In many ways, it is an attempt to democratize what passes as democracy in Ukraine's art world.[397] Larissa Babij explains the union's mission as an intervention into practices of censorship, which is defined as an intrusion into individual thought by the unity of church-state:

> We make no claims on the empty space designated for a leader. On the contrary, our work is aimed at creating open spaces for reflection on the very conditions that fill that space with restrictions on ideology, or events. Such a 'thinking community' cannot be dictated from above. It can only expand horizontally on an individual basis, as a series of individual revolutions.[398]

Articulating the creative self against a backdrop of public repression, the "thinking community" and the "individual revolution," Babij refers to prior conditionings of the self within the contexts of the twentieth century. Here, the self becomes most vibrant when in retreat from society—it is a vision of the self constantly articulated in language that is flexible enough to circumlocute the authority of the state.

In discussing the civil rights protests of the last century, Arendt observed how the Stoics' conception of the self as an "inner polis" estranged from public life emerged with the fall of Athens during the rise of the Roman Empire, a time of great disappointment in democratic ideals. Under communism, the author's ability to inhabit the space of the book morphs into a supple game of masks to avoid the censor; the game itself moves to the center of art. Upon returning to Soviet Russia from exile, Viktor Shklovsky, along with the other Formalists, came under attack by Marxist traditionalists who denounced him as a practitioner of comparative literature, considered bourgeois (by 1930 aesthetic estrangement had become an intellectual

[397] "In a country that declares democracy the preferred mode of interaction, we, as art workers, must impact the formation of new cultural policy principles and how they are put into practice."
[398] Babij and Kadan, "Blacked Out in Ukraine."

crime). Svetlana Boym has pointed to a parallelism in the Soviet modernist period between the surveillance of the polis, and the confinement of the writerly imagination: "The two deaths of the author—one a playful self-constraint and the other the acceptance of the state *telos*—are not the same."[399] In 1926 Shklovsky penned *Third Factory*, a text about censorship as an artistic problem containing literary devices that would serve as a blueprint for the parables and codes in which the Soviet intelligentsia would learn to speak to circumvent the censors.[400] In the twentieth century communist city, the metropolis was both the epitome of unfreedom, but also, a vital source of inspiration for the growing intelligentsia.

Despite the bureaucratic restrictions, and sometimes fatal consequences of becoming an author at the time, a veritable renaissance ensued in early Soviet Kyiv. Kyiv became an important center for film and graphic art, as the Ministry of Culture and the Writers Union in Moscow centralized production, closely managing the visual graphics and composition in advertising, cinema, public announcements, textbooks, and other genres to conform to a unified ideology. In the 1920s fast cuts and montage, for example, were developed extensively as cinema became the government's preferred mode of communicating its policies to citizens. Propaganda trains with mini cinemas set up inside their cars traveled throughout the countryside to "educate" the peasants. Beginning in 1929 Stalin pursued his policy of collectivization and its transferral of Ukraine's large peasant population into communal farms and factories. Thus, the city only provided a temporary refuge for artists, as the tangible effects of mass starvation under Stalin in 1931-32 were soon felt everywhere and contradicted the happy-go-lucky imagery of the

[399] Boym derives a concept of freedom from among artists and writers she terms Russia's "off-moderns" in which freedom is "an existential imperative" found in "co-creation." She refers to Shklovsky's diagram of the knight's chess move (khod konia) he called the "tortured road of the brave" as a metaphor for the history of the Russian intelligentsia and the sideways maneuvers between pawns and kings its members invented to survive beyond the dictates of the revolution. Svetlana Boym, *Another Freedom: The Alternative History of an Idea*, 8.
[400] "Inner freedom and the space of the writer's creative exploration are shrinking in the context of public unfreedom." Ibid, 222.

films required for exporting the revolution beyond the city. Artists themselves felt the pressure acutely, as they came to occupy an especially dangerous role in having to learn to navigate the tightrope of artistic innovation and conformism demanded of their work. The ideology demanded of them was based on a coming future utopia, but was in reality the fetishization of revolution itself—the impossibility of utopia rendered in art and text.

Recodings

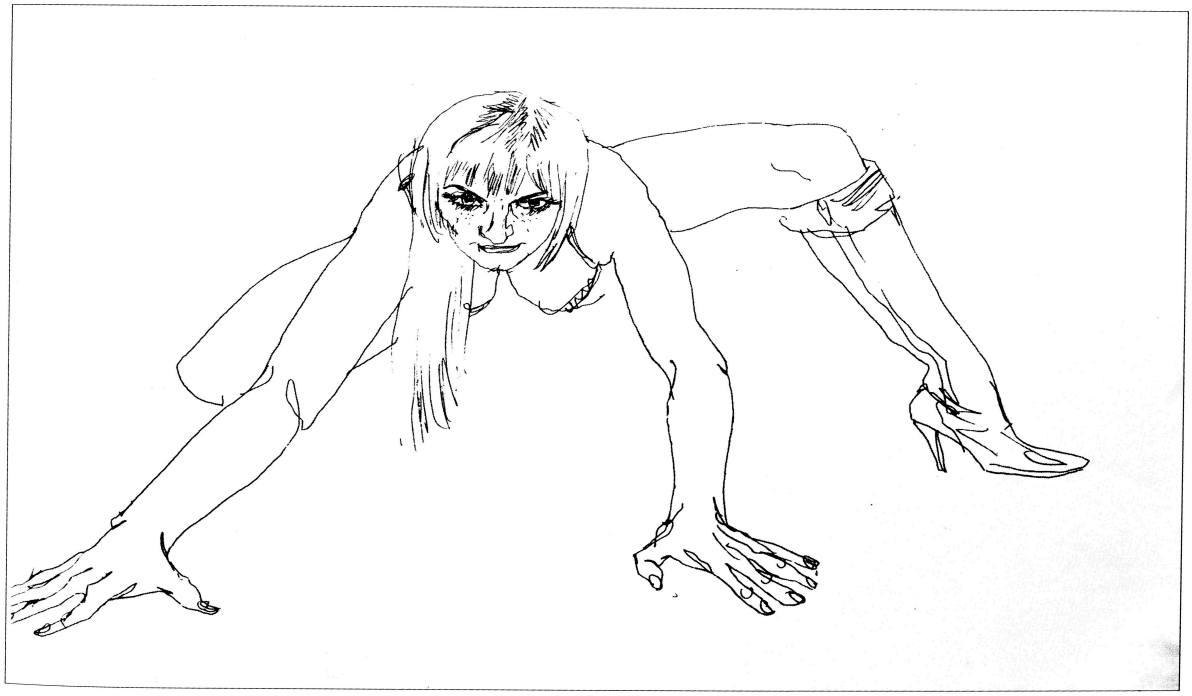
The visual experiments of the twentieth century remain in post-Soviet Kyiv artists' investigations into the politics of the self in questions around freedom and censorship. Svetlana Boym has explored the history of the idea of freedom in Russian modernism, using the image of Tatlin's tower and Shklovsky's diagonal chess move to point out differences from the West.[401] She traces the development of a sense of being in-between, circumlocution, and evasion as sources of both creative expression and democratic thinking. R.E.P. and HudRada's work is rooted in a similar antipolitical ethics in which their artistic expression becomes subversive in its total detachment from being neither in service to the state, nor counter to its logics in any way. Artists often pose questions about freedom in space within formal experiments that employ scale and the conventions of Monumentalism and Futurism. Nearly all of R.E.P.'s works have been installed in otherwise vacant venues in Kyiv's urban spaces: old cinemas, cafes, parks, etc. One artist founded an art-cooperative in the center of the city (LabGarage) in which organizers invite contributors to create art that is visible twenty-four hours a day through apertures on the side of the garage.[402] Many of the works focus on sites that were, at one time or another, places of

[401] Boym, Ibid, 8.
[402] In part due to the fact that Kyiv's contemporary art scene is still very small, oftentimes an artist associated with a collective or a journal will double as a curator, critic, or translator for another journal, membership being highly variable. A benefit of this is the dedication of individual artists to fostering local cultural contexts (even at great personal expense), to educating the public, and to connecting archaic state museum practices with their own perspectives on museums abroad has constituted the cornerstone of a lasting community.

everyday social interaction under socialism and have since been overlooked or ignored in the new economy. These installations recode spaces such as garages, large avenues, or crumbling seas of grey apartment blocs that were once central to Soviet planners' utilitarian uses of urban space into places for personal reflection and community. This site-specificity provides HudRada's members with a modicum of artistic autonomy that is also an experiment in social comment. These images become expressive of urban space, media, and design more generally as a medium for conceptualizing and visualizing the state's biopolitics in conflict with lived experience.

In a series for the exhibit "Ukrainian Body," artist Anatoliy Byelov created condensed sketches of sexualized women's bodies rendered from hundreds of image searches. The result resembles Femen's projections of the imagined sexual female ideal. The body and its position within space is in and of itself a function of ideology and politics: the Internet here appears less liberating than amplifying of private consumerist desires and their shaping of sex and gender. The "shock" of Byelov's work, this piece being part of a larger project entitled *The Most Pornographic Book in the World*, lies in the fact that the sexuality it expresses is quite banal. The female body here appears in complete submission to the desires expressed within the social body, which is as we would expect it to appear in its marketed form. As in Kadan's surrealist apartment landscape, here the feminization of virtual space also stems from the manipulation of the natural sex drive in an ideal that also serves a regulatory function. Here, however, the function is the consumption of the whore ideal, rather than the reproductive function of the domestic feminine ideal. The hand-drawn format transfers these ideals from the sphere of mass-production to the personalized image. Shifting the images' interlocuters through genre, viewers

are challenged to question their authenticity as advertisements or portraits; the overall aesthetic echoes Femen's hyperbolic "sextremist" headlines.



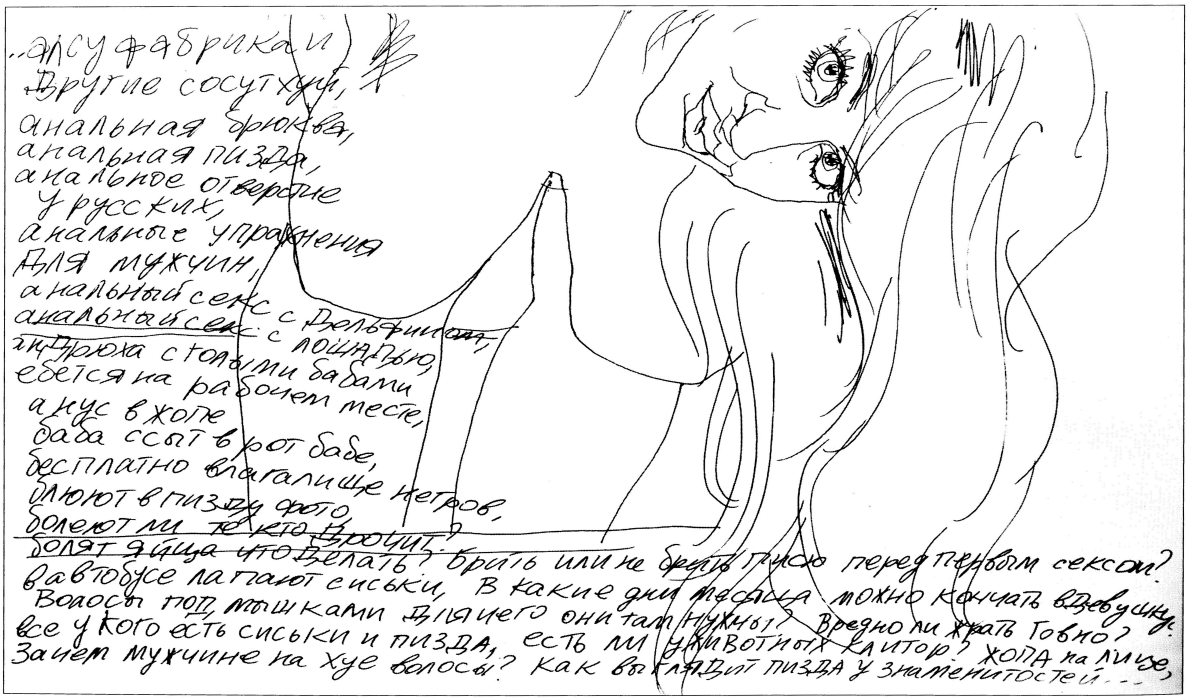


Figure 69: "The Most Pornographic Book in the World," Anatoliy Byelov, 2011-2012, Kyiv, VCRC[403]
Figure 70: "The Most Pornographic Book in the World," Anatoliy Byelov, 2011-2012, Kyiv, VCRC

[403] Ibid.

The HudRada collective could be said to put into social action what it tries to imagine in art: a total aversion to the trappings of ideological "–isms" through attempts at voluntary disassociation and detachment. The value of this experiment is linked to its public nature. By drawing contrasts between the individual and the state, the concept of the self emerges more truthfully, and highlights the fictitious terms upon which the social contract always rests. In *Civil Disobedience* Arendt reasons through the flaw inherent in the social contract as a "fictitious origin of consent" by premising inalienable individual will upon its capacity to enter into voluntary association with others. Dissent, then, as opposed to the Kantian conscience that entrusts itself to tacit 'consensus universalis' (Tocqueville), in Arendt's view, admits the fiction of democracy in order to approximate it: "Dissent implies consent, and is the hallmark of free government; one who knows that he may dissent knows also that he somehow consents when he does not dissent."[404] As a voluntary association of artists united by their opinions on the repression of artistic expression and participation in Kyiv, HudRada's re-appropriation and re-coding of socialist-realist rhetoric mounts a critique of state against the backdrop of vanishing public freedoms.[405] VCRC, HudRada, and affiliated artists draw upon tensions between the gallery and the street, state and market funding, and copyright and censorship pressures to frame the politics that emerge in between spaces of creative production, circulation, and reception. Opposing motifs of liberation and constraint within the thematic content of the Congress characterize these spaces as sites for evaluating the role of art and the National Gallery to local and global audiences in the summer of 2013, just before the Euromaidan protests would scatter and rearrange these negative spaces even further.

[404] Hannah Arendt, "Civil Disobedience," *Crises of the Republic*, 88.
[405] Some of the key virtual journals hosting Kyiv's grassroots experiments in new public art are: Zombie (www.zombie.ccc-k.net), KrAM, Durchschlag (http://durchschlag.ho.ua), and Prostory (www.prostory.net.ua).

IV. Inside the Assembly: Marginality in Draftsmen's Congress

The notion of "the political" deployed by participants in *Draftsmen's Congress* has antecedents in the supra-national orientation and Futurist imagery of the early avant-garde. The mural at the center of the exhibit takes its technical cues from action painting, but mimics the format of the 1990s European trans-avant-garde where "tusovkas" ("get-togethers") in Kyiv often featured gigantic collaborative paintings and murals. A member of this prior avant-garde, the Polish artist Paweł Althamer, founder of "Grupa Nowolipie," first created the concept for *Draftsmen's Congress* and was invited to Kyiv by HudRada.[406] The format of the Congress follows that of a tusovka: it involves a room totally covered in white surface containing paints, charcoals, pens, markers, and other materials in which the public is invited "to draw one's inner emotions, convictions, and demands."[407] At the end of the installation, its surface is dismantled into pieces and distributed at no cost to participants and passersby. The first in Althamer's series premiered in an abandoned cathedral in Berlin, with subsequent installations in Venice, Warsaw's Praga District, and Eisenhüttenstadt, a small town on the Polish-German border where, in the absence of an established museum, participants donated the dismantled pieces from the exhibit to small shops for display.[408] HudRada and Althamer retain mutual roots in the trans-avant-garde primarily in two ways: a negotiation with power hierarchies to promote artistic autonomy, and a critical eye toward authoritative uses of utopian rhetoric. Both are interested in

[406] Althamer's description includes democracy: "The idea behind the Congress grows and transforms through artistic strategy, the idea that the path of least resistance may be transformed through strategies that are both artistic and political, that speak about democracy and power." *Art Ukraine* 6–2, 31–33 (2013): 118–21.
[407] The full invitation read: "Draftsmen's Congress is a meeting of people whom communicate with the help of images rather than words. Draw your inner emotions, convictions, and demands. Speak the truth, express yourself!"/ "Конгрес рисувальників – це зустріч різних людей, які спілкуються за допомогою образів, а не слів. Намалюйте свої емоції, переконання та вимоги. Скажіть правду, висловіться!"
[408] G.P. involves the mentally and physically challenged in major art projects. Hanna Syba, "Paweł Althamer: Welcome Na Konhres Rysuvalnykiv," Ibid.

pointing out the anachronisms of post-Soviet contexts by comparing mass-produced art-for-profit with the legacies of the Soviet systematization of culture.

Each of the individual images work on different semantic levels to convey ideas about dramatic social, economic, and national change; on the whole, they cohere around diverse experiences of marginalization. For example, the most visible slogan in the Kyiv mural directly confronts the trope of loss through which people's experiences were previously translated into collective meaning during the transition from Soviet to post-Soviet life: "There are no victims. There are no criminals."[409] One of the exhibit's organizers, Mykola Skyba, described the exhibit as an attempt to shift the focus of museum activity toward society, explaining that, "after Ukraine's independence, once the ideological current was switched off," the local, post-Soviet museum "essentially became a no-man's land."[410] The metaphor aptly fits Ukraine's ongoing position as a borderland between Poland and Russia, with the museum as a microcosm of public life orchestrated almost entirely from above: "it is clear that this area, left outside the influence of state agencies, has not become an entirely public zone. The institutionalization of civil society, practically speaking, is still going on today. So in fact we're talking about the creation of, again, a no-man's land, which sooner or later will fall under the expanding control of those with influence in socio-economic processes."[411] Skyba casts the conflict between the old and new guards of professionals in the museum as a clash of generations. Here, he turns to the language of the raznochintsy, railing at the failures of Tsar Alexander II's emancipation of the serfs:

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[409] Hearkening back to postwar Soviet ideologists' attempts to document the remnants of war, post-Soviet rhetoric conveyed the disorientation of the transition to a market economy in grand narratives of suffering that produced socially meaningful subject-positions: "Questions of political responsibility were eventually displaced by collective practices of grief and discourses of bereavement, as if no positive content could functions a basis for a sense of belonging and a community must envision a shared experience of loss in order to establish its own borders." Serguei Alex Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia*, 5.

[410] Ibid.

[411] Skyba, Mykola, "Who Do Museums Belong to?" Disputed Territory Catalogue. http://www.disputedterritory.org.ua/en/node/105. Accessed March 10, 2014.

> Within the museum community a tense encounter played out between the generation of museum functionaries and the new generation of museum professionals, who actually are not allowed to make strategic decisions, though they have sufficient capabilities. As an illustration, the former could be compared to vassals who have received fiefs from their overlords. The latter could be called 'self-made' men and women: this generation values self-realization and development based on free initiative.[412]

Appearing in the exhibit catalogue and circulated in several online journals with an international readership, the essay frames the social role of an artist in locally polyvalent terms. The author adopts the archetype of the organic intellectual in a stance that challenges state museum institutions not for being foreign, as the Slavophiles who subscribed to the archetype would have done, but because the museum, in failing to encompass its own public of intellectuals, patrons, and non-experts, has become rigid and alien.

Toward "Agoraphilia"

HudRada's drive to organically create a broad local audience for their work interrogates the national frames of art-systems and the values, tastes, and judgments that these systems generate. Critic Piotr Piotrówski has called this impulse more broadly "agoraphilia"—"the drive to enter the public space, the desire to participate in that space, to shape public life, to perform critical and design functions for the sake of and within the social space."[413] This is key in the artistic culture of the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, where states have at one time or another possessed methods for subordinating the public sphere to political doctrine. Aesthetically associated with a radicalism that fetishizes the public square in and of itself, the manifestation of "negative space" in the open center of the mural in *Draftsmen's Congress* is thus a metaphor for oppositional thinking more generally that is present throughout all of the projects associated with HudRada and R. E.P. It comes as little surprise that the grassroots art union ICTM was the first among the demonstrators on the Maidan concerned with organizing media outlets, hotlines, and

[412] Ibid.
[413] Piotr Piotrówski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, 7.

student unions facilitating trainings in tolerance and nonviolence. As participants in various protest activities on the left not all directly related to art, these artists had long known that the ideologies governing civic life in Ukraine had been emanating from a rotten throne.

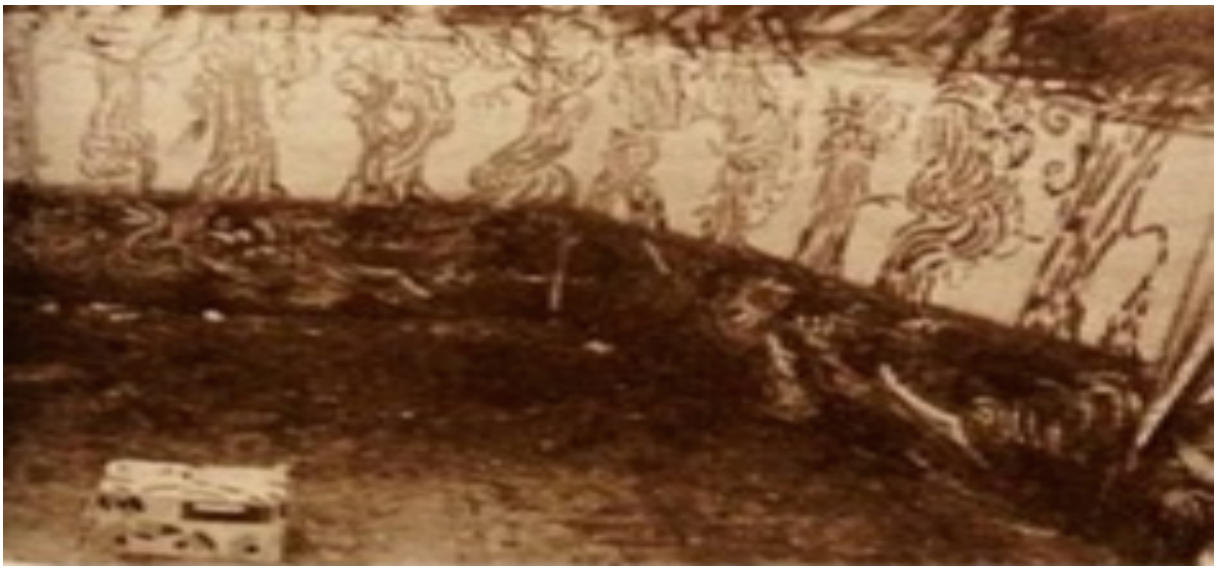

Figure 71: "Table (Shtyl)," South Russian Wave (Pivdennoyruska Hvilya), Kyiv, 1992[414]

Figure 72: Kyiv Mural: "There Are No Victims. There Are No Criminals," 2013[415]

[414] Skdorenko, V. D. "Postmodernistski tendensyi u suchasnomu vizualnomu mystestvi Ukrainy kinsya 1980-pochatuk 1990," 117.
[415] Photo by the author.

The aesthetics of the Kyiv *Draftsmen's Congress* mural revolved around a collage of impressionistic realism, pop culture, graphic art, graffiti, and expressionism. Standing at the center of the installation's concave walls, the spectator becomes part of the exhibit and can create, block, or intercept messages between images inscribed on the walls. The placement of new slogans, shapes, and colors alongside, below, across from, directly over, or in any other relation to the other traces left by previous participants comprises an open text. This radically unfinished form contrasts with the halls of polished gilt frames and Orthodox icons under heavy glass in the museum's more permanent collections. The prioritizing of anonymity over recognized authorship embodied within the mural's unsigned subjectivity worked against the grain of the Ministry of Culture and its selective profiling of the canon in Ukraine's National Museum (there are few works in the collections dated later than 1917).

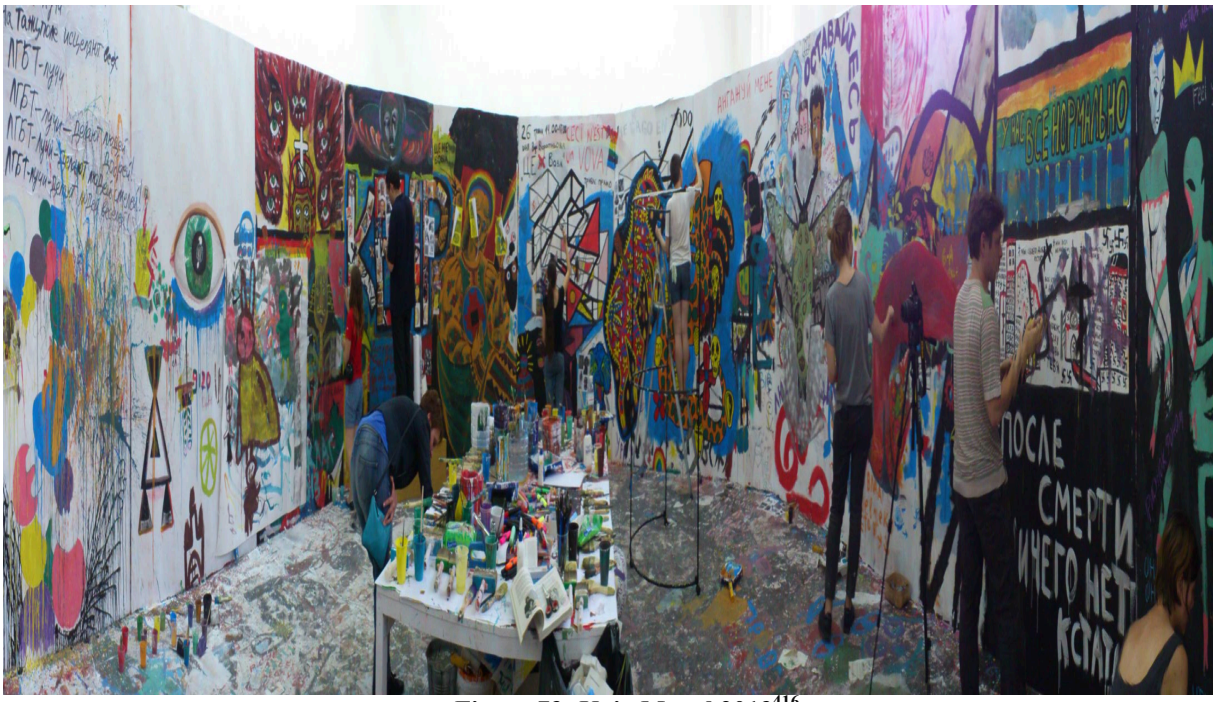

Figure 73: Kyiv Mural 2013[416]

[416] Photo by the author.

The total and freeform use of surface in the mural lent the panels an interlocking, non-sequential expansiveness. In modernism, and Russian modernism in particular, the theme of expansion, as well as the idea of building and dismantling things, is equated with invention. For example, Marshall Berman discusses Jackson Pollock's drip paintings as evidence of Symbolism's withering away at the turn of the century, at a time when "man loses himself in a forest of symbols, only to find himself again."[417] Yet, around the same time period in Russian art the modern engineer comes to represent the epitome of human creativity. Constructivism, which Berman traces to Dostoevsky's fascination with London's Crystal Palace, is more about the process of drafting and designing, than it is about the final structure.[418] Negativity becomes a horizon of critique. In the Kyiv mural, the images chronicle a non-linear dialogue consisting of messages that parody the inefficacy of the state's language in apprehending its own citizenry: "LGBT heals everyone! LGBT is good for people!" and "After death, nothing matters." Religious iconography associated with the Orthodox Church appears in several places, but in a mestizo graffiti style that includes references to local pagan rites: the bright colors, ancestral skulls, and the motif of female sainthood mirror the Goddess portraits in the urban murals of Mexico City and Los Angeles, as much as Ukrainian village funeral rites. Attempting to excise from the mural different images to read them as individual statements with subversive political content would miss its intertextual dimensions. The work of participants in constructing the mural, their assembly into a collective, however provisional and guided by the curatorial

[417] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 241.
[418] Berman cites Dostoevsky: "Man loves to create and build roads, that is beyond dispute. But . . . may it not be that . . . he is instinctively afraid of attaining his goal and completing the edifice he is constructing? How do you know, perhaps he only likes that edifice from a distance and not at close range, perhaps he only likes to build it, and does not want to live in it." Ibid. 242.

collective proceeding the artwork itself, is itself a kind of polemic on the mural as public art, and the "test of its specificity" as an "art with a politic."[419]

Many of the curator-artists who contributed to the mural expressed their marginalized subject-positions within it as gay, left, feminist, HIV positive, eco-punk, pro-choice, anti-war, etc. These positions are blended across several representational schemes and genres signifying dissidence within the mural. Taken together, they communicate a detachment from mainstream politics that also resonates within the same paradigmatic cultural economy of "dissidence" as the Pussy riot scandal and Femen's street performances and virtual body rhetoric. The difference here, however, is that the HudRada curators who invited Althamer to work with them on their installation in the National Gallery are more committed to local contexts, employing virtual audiences in their work with reference to specific local issues. One effect of this is a reclaiming of the physical spaces in which art "takes place" to question further the role of the body in creative processes, and what it might mean for art to have political relevance.

It is significant that the mural evolved in conjunction with similar events held elsewhere in Europe, connected by video and Internet. Bruno Latour poses the concept of "assemblage" in his Actor-Network Theory as, ultimately, a search for relevance within any complex set of social relationships. Viewing politics this way, as a combination of perspectives, he poses a good question about relevancy, which is central to any envisioning of political art: "Once the task of exploring the multiplicity of agencies is completed, another question can be raised: What are the *assemblies* of those *assemblages*?"[420]

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[419] Hal Foster makes this distinction in postmodernism: "One might distinguish between a 'political art' which, locked in a rhetorical code, reproduces ideological representations, and an 'art with a politic' which, concerned with the structural positioning of thought and the material effectivity of practice within the social totality, seeks to produce a concept of the political relevant to our present. A purchase on this concept is no doubt difficult, provisional - but that may well be the test of its specificity and the measure of its value." in "For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art" Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, 155.
[420] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 260.

If we are to understand the images in the mural as somehow signifying the identities of their authors only, we would risk reducing their meaning into static units of expression. Instead, their potential meanings in the conflicts between images are similar to Lytoard's diffèrends. For example, in the statement "Everything is alright with us" (У нас все нормально) over a rainbow flag, or the word "fight" below the triangle prism from Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, the signs have no clear referent, though they seem positioned to suggest a solidarity with a global gender movement. In the tensions between local and global the mural goes one step farther to open up the possibility that the "assemblies" of people, supposedly represented by these civic symbols, are themselves empowered by bringing their meanings into question. The social "assemblage" in the mural, in this case, does not really refer to identity politics at all, but to what gender critics refer to as a politics of difference in which identities amend one another and remain in flux as they are performed. The dialectical recombination of sign/signified within the mural opens up narratives for evading powerful tropes of "the dissident"—many of the same tropes that Femen's performances parody, albeit in a different way.

Viewers and participants are invited to materially engage in the space. A camera in the center of the mural records everything around it, and people write and paint on the walls, disassemble them, and then distribute them for free. Symbolically, the event is juxtaposed against the fall of the Berlin Wall, lending the entire exhibit, its images, and its material objects a sense of collective monumentality.

The pieces of the mural are turned into artifacts of a conversation that, structurally, illustrates a breakdown in communication about the body, freedom, and a broader range of discourses attached to both. By the time of this mural (Summer 2013), Femen had already moved abroad. The bodies of Femen themselves were behind the camera, turned into nothing more than

a photograph, and yet, their image still melded with the local Kyiv amalgam of signs of dissidence. In contrast to Femen's total abstraction from the physical space of protest, the body remains central to the Kyiv mural, not only in its imagery, but in its position within the public sphere. In the mural fragment in Figure 77 the word "Фуко" (Foucault) appears beneath the red rays of a panoptical camera tower. A factory with a death's head on it spews toxic fumes and sucks the life out of a flower, under which appears the Spanish anarchic slogan "¡No Pasarán!," made famous by the T-shirt that Nadezhda Tolokonnikova of Pussy Riot wore in court while on trial in mid-2012. A female prisoner in blue stripes carrys a sign with a message in solidarity with Turkish women and stands behind a black podium on which is written "Freedom is Never Free." Another fragment (Figure 76) features a cartoon of a nude woman with a speech bubble stating, "Мої ліки—без мети збуту" (My medicine – without intent to sell) behind which is written "Cures Not War." This is a response to stigmas attached to different drug therapies in the prevention/ treatment programs that have been created in recent years to address Ukraine's soaring HIV/AIDS epidemic. The blood on the woman's body, the black text in both panels, and the references to news headlines and prison surveillance each are adaptions of Femen's and Pussy Riot's media aesthetics to a paint medium. Like Femen and Pussy Riot, the overall message is detached from party politics, and skeptical of taking for granted any one idea of freedom. It is an antiwar statement for an Internet generation that grew up during the Orange Revolution at the height of the Iraq War.

Figure 74: Fragments of the Kyiv Mural, 2013[421]
Figure 75: Fragments of the Kyiv Mural, 2013

The political relevance of the mural's rainbow motifs might be thought of as a kind of "sexual dissent." Coined at the height of the debates over pornography legislation in the U.S. in the eighties, the term itself originates in the history of censorship. Lisa Duggan, founder of the Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force (FACT) defined it as "A concept that involves a unity of speech, politics, and practices, and forges a connection among sexual expressions, oppositional politics, and claims to public space."[422] The representation of the individual in sexual dissent depends less on the nature of expression than the publicity of the representative vis-à-vis the collective. Returning to Arendt's concept of "voluntary association," in which the civil disobedient is defined by their individual membership in a group that is bound by opinion (rather than actual or achievable interests, as in the case of the conscientious objector), the individual conscience thus stands in tenuous relation to other consciences, but is also bound to them as an opinion adhering to a group. Affiliation in the group is reinforced by the number of its members and the group's shared opinions, as opposed to incentives that are bound to concrete outcomes.

[421] Photo by the author.
[422] Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*, 5.

Contributors to the Kyiv mural contested the social codes that govern the marginalization of the body within Ukraine's civil spaces. The images evidence multiple discursive strategies by which individual participants became interlocutors in a network, each speaking about their own locality. Many scholars of democracy have tested the paradox that the social contract at the very core of democracy depends on civil disobedience. Later in life, Arendt mounted a defense of the public value of dissent, observing the explosion of protest in the U.S. in the 1950-60s. She based her position on the fact that law, by definition, cannot legislate its own transgression, even though democracy is strengthened by civil interpretations of the law.[423] Artists' individualized expressions of a marginalized subjectivity might be viewed similarly: as a critique and therefore, ultimately, also a defense of their own bodies as the vehicles of such transgression.

Thus, negative space differs from pure negativity in the concept of the political deployed by participants working on the mural. Altogether separate from true anarchy or nihilism, though aesthetically associated with both in a radicalism that fetishizes the public square, the manifestation of "negative space" in the mural emerges as a sign for oppositional thinking more generally. The notion of an aesthetic of anarchy and the idea that it can encompass a radical critique of democracy appears as a skeptical counterweight to utopianism writ large. In the context of post-Soviet art, anarchy is the epistemological rejection of both the permanence of the Red Revolution, and the neoliberal promises of "shock capitalism" introduced in the 1990s. Given anarchism's Slavic roots (Bakunin, Makhno), it is also a radical signifier that gains traction in artists' evasions of the proscribed models of rebellion from the Cold War: those associated with being a dissident or an artist-citizen in service of the state (models that both the

[423] Arendt works this thesis out in the context of the Civil Rights movement in the Southern United States, where racially marginalized subjects confronted the tyranny of the majority.

Soviets and the West each adopted in their own ways). Piotrówski suggests that the symbols, customs, and habits that guide public life in postcommunism tend to be more continuous with the socialist past, despite some leaders' efforts to preserve a break with those symbols. As a result, governance takes form in leaders who present themselves as "adversaries of the fallen system" who, by association, lean to the right.[424]

Piotrówski argues that in emerging East European art, anarchy has come to stand not for a program of any kind, but for a critical appeal rooted in the impulse to investigate and remain skeptical of utopian rhetoric. He describes this opposition as "democratizing democracy," positing anarchy as a critical mediator for making visible political methods of coercion, without having to directly critique individuals.[425] In this view of anarchy-as-aesthetics, ambivalence is figured as a radical performative technique, supplying an exit strategy from the traps of blame, victimization, and binary polemics that have plagued the region's politics (Piotrówski traces the particularities of his claim in Zbigniew Libera's renderings of the Polish experience, but similar appropriations of anarchy as a sign for general suspicions toward the status quo also exist in the history of punk music beginning with London in the 1970s).[426] In Ukraine, where public education and access to art is still managed by the Ministry of Culture, artists whose work does not fit preconceptions of what art "should do" are relegated to the periphery. The state and the market rule all. Art, even as a democratic practice, is itself maintained as a marginal category, sequestered from public access. This inaccessibility manifests in policies that block artists in

[424] "Contrary to what one would expect, the post-communist condition does not require a rejection of communism and a return to the 'former' state. In fact, it can signal a certain type of continuity, if not of symbols, then certainly of the modes of thought, customs and habits, as well as the ways of wielding power by the former adversaries of the fallen system, now mainly identified with the political right," Piotr Piotrówski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, 44.
[425] Ibid, 151.
[426] " . . . art can not only function as a catalyst, but also as a provocateur with a significant range of influence, something that fathers of anarchism have missed. Moreover, the artist-provocateur does not have to be solely a rebel; he or she could also take on the role of a critic." Ibid, 128.

contemporary Kyiv from even attempting to question the logic of marginality reproduced by state institutions of art still clinging to a Soviet format. The alienation of the individual in Western art thus differs from the post-Soviet artist's depiction of the self, the latter being more inflected by a sense of immovable bureaucracy.

State and Nation in (Anti)Representational Art

Postmodernist literary scholars have linked the prevalence of direct address, fragmentation, and sarcastic re-adaptations of Western countercultural symbols in Russian and Ukrainian letters of the youngest generation to the radical individualism brought on by market reform in an "aesthetics of anarchy."[427] The anarchist symbol itself appeared more than a few times in the several layers of paint that participants applied over the mural's changing surfaces. Indexing anarchy as a global signifier for dissent, the mural now appears as a window into artists' gesturing toward a metropolis, and a nation, about to undergo mass revolution. The formal collapse of artistic display into artistic practice shifted art from representation to language, in which the spectator is no longer objectively removed from the production of art, but intervenes as an interlocutor. Through the mural's situational address and audience, the artist becomes a manipulator of signs more than a producer of an object. A probing of the material basis of art revealed itself in intertextual references equating the museum with the Ukrainian state. In one segment (Figure 77), cutout leaflets from the museum's marketing materials were recombined in a collage involving national symbols: the trident, colors of the Ukrainian flag, and quotes from recent official speeches. Here and elsewhere, artists contrasted state symbols with

[427] The trend also includes postsocialist authors and artists. Sergei Zhadan, Andrij Bondar, Oksana Lutsyshyna epitomize the postmodern generation in Ukraine. Some have attributed their image of the nation to "part of a non-hierarchical and open project of cultural globalization" Vitaly Chernetsky, "From Anarchy to Connectivity to Cognitive Mapping: Contemporary Ukrainian Writers of the Younger Generation Engage with Globalization," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 44, 1–2 (June 1, 2010): 114.

images of completely opposite emotional charges, illustrating limits to the state museum's original referents in its claims to encompass or represent the nation before the public. Focusing first on the institutional frame, and second on the economics of the modern art commodity, signifiers in the mural shifted with the contemporaneity of a constitutive public, tracing gaps between itself and Ukraine's ideological museum complex.

Figure 76: Fragment of the Kyiv Mural, 2013[428]

The mural is grounded in the politics of location both in its content and aesthetics. In Figure 78, the rendering of a ballerina points to contrasting aesthetic forms, ballet having remained a major export of a heavily censored, centralized, and nationalized art throughout the 19th-21st centuries. The figure's alternative rendering further challenges the homogenization of culture by underwriting the tradition of ballet with graffiti. Given that modern dance, like modern art, has more or less remained totally absent from Kyiv's cultural scene, the image undercuts the monopolization of the arts into state commodities. This phenomenon is inherited from the Soviets' leveling of aristocratic sociality and peasant folkways through the heavy

[428] Photo by the author.

regulation and subsidization of theatre (dance being central to both high and low art forms). The quote in yellow chalk added by another participant conveys a sense of exhaustion and release from the current state of affairs: "How much can you complain? Finally, just say something good!" The ball of thread in the dancers left hand pokes at the juxtaposition of the revered "high" form of ballet and the "low" knitting work of an elderly peasant woman, juxtaposing the physically demanding, but gracefully hidden labor of dance with the dutiful performance of more mundane tasks.

Figure 77: Fragment of the Kyiv Mural, 2013[429]

The interpretation of the overall image is left open to the viewer, though the tone of the playful and colorful cartoons and phrases around the dancer bring out a hopeful element from the darker impressionistic tone of the portrait. As elsewhere in the mural, a general sentiment of detachment prevails in its phraseology. There are no direct critiques of individuals or groups;

[429] Photo by the author.

rather, the mural contains a more generalized critique of local power hierarchies on a surface insulated from attack or suppression, which might not be the case elsewhere in the city. Louis Althusser's definition of ideology as being how one legitimizes oneself vis-à-vis politics is relevant here.[430] The total lack of a consistent vocabulary with which to localize the dominant practices that have created marginal social categories in the first place, the Kyiv mural demonstrates a notion of freedom specific to a generation's experience of postcommunism. At its core, the mural's position as a grassroots project—staged from within the National Gallery— is an antipolitical stance toward the extraction of profit from the art object as commodity, and labor from the artist as cultural worker. It is a disarticulation of state hegemony under Yanukovych in a radical comment on dissent itself. Artists' actual struggles to form unions that would give them a living wage by reforming Ukraine's privatized art scene is thus bound up with the abstract question of freedom in their art. Both impulses involve a search for the freedom to define what forms of dissent are permitted by the state and legitimized by the public.

The site-specific, concave format of the Kyiv mural also shapes the interpretive possibilities and limits to its design. After the exhibit, the mural was dismantled and placed upon the steps of the museum for participants and passersby to take at no cost.[431] Instead of a signature, each piece was stamped with the words "Худрада конгрес рисувалників 2013" ("HudRada Draftsmen's Congress") in black ink with a standard rubber stamp. Bearing neither the legislative mark of a copyright seal, nor the aura of an original signature, the anonymous

[430] Even in cases where attempts were made to totally appropriate art in the service of social discourse, as Benjamin famously pointed out in the aestheticization of politics, art, in its oblique relationship to an expression of the self (or amplification in the case of reproduced artworks) always stands not to correct or duplicate, but to distort, obscure, or undermine ideology. In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Althusser argues that the individual is produced through ideologies that interpolate subject positions through social practices. In Chantal Mouffe's agonistic approach [to the political], critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate," "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces." *Art & Research* 1, 2 (2007).
[431] One member of HudRada informed me that a few larger panels were donated to the museum as partial payment for the use of the gallery space.

authorship and unregulated circulation of the artwork signaled a critique of commodity value as arbitrary and unrelated to taste. Both the material act of dismantling a wall of graffiti, and the comment on dissent in the content of the mural itself, recall the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. In both instances, the notion of resisting, overcoming, and then memorializing not the wall, but the very absence of the wall—the power to create and then break down the wall— is tantamount to the object's significance. In the end, as with the Berlin Wall, it is not owning a piece of the larger mural that is important, but the moment of collective will that it signifies. The uniqueness of the piece *as art* resides in its original production. The value of the remaining art object lies in its ability to reproduce an individual connection to a specific moment in time through its material claim to authenticity.

Thus, the geographic location of the Kyiv mural is also central to its interpretive scope, the Berlin Wall being one of the most immediate discursive backdrops in an exhibit about both "disputed territory," and redrawing notions of static identity. HudRada's artworks reference the frame of their own display to expose the absurdities of local cultural policies; thus, much of the work in the collective is site-specific to the post-Soviet context. In a contrasting example that also positioned political boundaries to explore the spatial aspects of dissent, Mark Wallinger's exhibit *State Britain*, installed in the Tate Britain in 2007, featured a detailed replication of Brian Haw's anti-Iraq war protest camp that he had set up and maintained in Parliament Square from 2001 until the Arab Spring of 2011, when the British High Court tightened restrictions on public gatherings. It so happens that the main atrium in the center of the Tate Britain straddles the perimeter line of one kilometer demarcated by the Parliament's "Serious Organized Crime and

Police Act."[432] Both the original site-specific installation, and its reinstallation, contested the boundary of the state's jurisdiction over the museum.

Averring that the Occupy Wall Street Movement of 2011 foregrounded an "iconography of non sovereignty and anonymity," W.J.T. Mitchell discusses Jeffersonian democracy within the exhibit as the image of "perpetual revolution . . . in the form of election cycles, requir[ing] that the place of sovereignty and power remains empty in principle (but certainly not in practice). The important thing is the office, not the flesh-and-blood occupant."[433] Thus, he contends that memorials will incline even more toward "not those of *face* but of *space*; not figures, but the negative space or ground against which a figure appears." The exhibit at Tate could never achieve this sort of resonance in Kyiv's museum. While in the West the museum is generally a backdrop—a highly polyvalent space in which culture is rearranged, constructed, and dismantled—Ukraine's National Museum clings to an outmoded authority in everything it fails to do (by turning art into objectification and ritual). Contemporary artists thus engage with these spaces as they are: an open battleground for the future of Ukraine embedded in the institutional logic of the state and its instrumentalizations of the creative mind.

[432] As noted by W.J.T. Mitchell, "Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation," 101.
[433] Ibid, 101, 112.

Figure 78: "State Britain" by Mark Wallinger, Tate Britain, 2007[434]

Figure 79: Dismantled pieces of the Kyiv Mural distributed to the public, 2013[435]

[434] W.J.T. Mitchell, Bernard E. Harcourt, and Michael Taussig, *Occupy: Three Inquiries in Disobedience*, 45.

V. Biopolitics in *Disputed Territory*

Picking up where Foucault left off, Giorgio Agamben contemplates the rise of state sovereignty in ancient Roman law in the figure of the *homo sacer*, the body that could be killed, but not sacrificed. The regulation of flesh and blood in space and time, Agamben argues, constitutes the origin of the modern nation-state: "the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power."[436] By juxtaposing the formal devices and graphic notation used in cartography with emotionally charged images of the body, many of the works in HudRada's exhibit challenge regional conditionings of post-Soviet life as collapse and nostalgia by defamiliarizing moral narratives proffered both by and about socialism. In particular, they take aim at visions of the enlightened social role of the artist, the didacticism of socialist realism, and prior protocols on the museum as a moral arm of the state. These jabs are also attacks on Ukraine's contemporary state-museum complex and the utopian thinking, ideological purity, and oppressive outcomes involved in the attempt to codify a national art. Together, the mural and the metaphor of "disputed territory" portray a common landscape, playful and terrifying, that transcends any static notion of politics or the nation. Writing oneself into the mural and the museum, one engages notions of the self in communication with others about what a shared public space should or could be.

Artists also confronted in the streets the biopolitics of the post-Soviet state in its failure to mediate spaces for dissent and self-expression. In the video installation *Territorial Markings*, three members of HudRada traced a red trail of paint along a path from the Secret Security Services, to the Zoo, City Hall, and finally to the Circus (equated with Security Services). The act was an experiment in the spatial limitations on art in the Ukrainian capital's heavily patrolled

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[435] Photo by the author.
[436] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 199.

and regulated cityscape. By "vandalizing" a path between old Soviet landmarks, the act's legal ambiguity posed a challenge to the public evaluation of art and its function. Outside of both private spectacle and state censorship, the two impulses that polarize the public between the private and state galleries, the experiment's ridiculousness, coupled with its relative harmlessness, challenges audiences to consider market and state-driven imperatives as equally impairing to the idea of freedom of speech in Ukraine.

The conceptualist design of *Territorial Markings* could be compared to the 1997 propaganda pastiche *Painting by Numbers* by Moscow artists Komar and Melamid. Experimenting with statistics and data as creative material, the two artists polled thousands of random citizens in Russia and the United States on various aesthetic principles, and then mapped their responses into "ideal" paintings. In both R.E.P. and Komar and Melamid's works, the manipulation of individual consciousness through statistical notation is revealed by the transferal of mathematical and cartographical language from the contexts of its deployment, back into arbitrary shapes and patterns. As a result, the physical world is depicted as neither preceding nor following any ideal, but as experienced through processes of writing and painting. Mapping and plotting data are revealed as creative functions of a broader idea with multiple interpretations.

In R.E.P.'s experiment, a walk through the city puts the body at risk of arrest, conveying that the regulation of space and its impression in actual people's everyday lives has tangible effects on what one is able to say, think, and do. This characteristic is particularly notable among artists of the region's emerging avant-garde. Eric Naiman writes: "[In Soviet ideology] the body remained disturbingly present and central to the tales and pictures that expressed and sought to defuse ideological anxiety . . ."[437] In *Territorial Markings*, the language of the map, census, and museum is portrayed at the site of its production: colors and graphics come to stand in for whole

[437] Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*.

populations in the culturally-determined processes through which ideas about citizenship are expressed in spatial notation. R.E.P.'s videorecording of themselves painting a red path leading from the Offices of the Secret Service (SBU) to the zoo re-positioned Komar and Melamid's aesthetic in a metaphor for population control: it was at once an illegal act, but also an affront to Kyiv's commercial galleries, which are owned by local oligarchs that maintain public tastes by privatizing and monopolizing access to contemporary art. The animalistic quality of marking territory through urination underlies the stunt as a statement about re-claiming public ownership over freedom of expression and its valuation.[438]

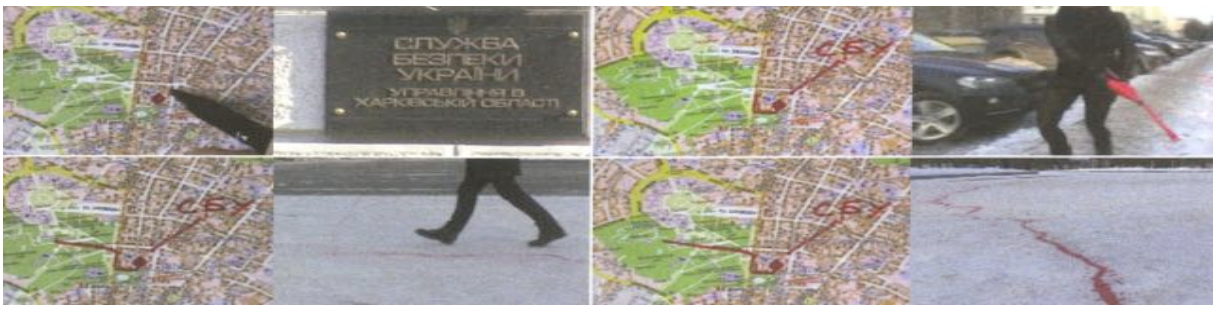

Figure 80: Ulyana Bychenkova, Alina Kleitman, Mykola Ridnyi, "Territorial Markings (Security Service Department—Zoo / Town Council—Circus) video, 4' 26," 2012[439]

Figure 81: Ulyana Bychenkova, Alina Kleitman, Mykola Ridnyi, "Territorial Markings (Security Service Department—Zoo / Town Council—Circus) video, 4' 26," 2012

[438] The artist's text accompanying the video from the exhibit catalog: "The artists spilt a red line on the ground around the Kharkov SBU (Ukrainian Secret Service) building which then led to the zoo, and then another one from the city administration building to the circus. The lines are a critical retort aimed at organs of state power and their working principles. Using a line to make a statement gives it the visual form of a syntax, expressing its actions through the language of graffiti and street art. These acts were not political protests, but rather a meditation on political art in the urban environment. Since graffiti and street art are often a way for their creators to publicise themselves in the urban realm, or just exist as decorative forms, the ephemeral nature of the red line asks a question about how far such public actions and expressions are responsible, and what their value is. Except where they were close to official institutions, the red lines enjoyed a lifespan of about a week disappearing with melting snow (M. Ridnyi). *Disputed Territory Exhibit Catalogue*, 39.

[439] Ibid.

Yuri Solomko's photography in *Human Planet Series* projects topographical maps onto human bodies with disabilities, conveying overlap and disjuncture between actual borders (national, municipal, economic), and the cultural and social myths which uphold them. In Figure 83, the female nude stands in for Ukraine and its tenuous relationship with Russia. Crimea is foregrounded as an amputated limb. The pose, matte ivory composition, and the fragmenting of the body into just a torso, convey not a portrait, but an artifact of sculpture from the height of Athenian Greece. Equating modern photography with an ancient "living" statue, possibly in veneration of a goddess or matriarch; the stripe of folk cross-stitch also cues the viewer to draw connections between visual language and the ordering of social hierarchies.

As in *Territorial Markings,* the projection of maps directly onto flesh in the construction of the photo can also be read as commentary on the ordering of populations across time and space. In context of the Russian conquest of Crimea, the map itself now appears highly synthetic, a comment on the discourse of mapping as the manipulation of human perception. In this interpretation, the photo reveals the arbitrary relationship between culture and the state, employing a female body to draw upon the assumed causality between borders and language in the political rhetoric of the nation-state as "motherland," with Russian versus Ukrainian parrying for the status of "mother tongue." The inclusion of both the Ukrainian peasant folk stripe and the Russian language within the map also suggests misalignment between the civilizational identities imposed by borders, as opposed to the coexistence and blending of multiple identities and norms within the actual cultures that transverse them.

Gaps begin to emerge between the illusory "objective" sciences of landscape, and how they are challenged/reinforced by culture. Discourses of conquest implicit in cartography further underpin the fact that the subject in this photo is a woman, her body the sea, and Sevastopol the

seat of the Russian Navy. The absence of any notation from the segment of her body below the folk stripe suggests, through the principle of asymmetry, the contingency and ambivalence with which history becomes grafted upon nature. Had this photo been created after the annexation of Crimea by Putin in early 2014, its resonance with the idea of amputation might be slightly different, appearing more as a comment on overcoming and accepting challenges in national history, rather than averting them. However, in either instance, time in the photo appears roughly the same, completely unhinged from the map. Where in Benedict Anderson's description of the development of temporality and mapping space "triangulation by triangulation, war by war, treaty by treaty, the alignment of map and power proceeded," the territory that is being disputed in this photo is abstracted from actual experience. The projected image of the map is artificial and decorative, manipulating the nude female torso into a single frame. The black background into which the flesh fades, unlike a sculpture or an actual body, cues the realm of memory while drawing the viewer's attention to the edges of the map. The meaning of the signs for ocean, land, city, nation, etc. and their inherent political and geographical systems are morphologically extended outward toward the "phantom limb," suggesting the impermanence and living, human qualities that shape our perceptions of time, space, and history.[440]

[440] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 173.

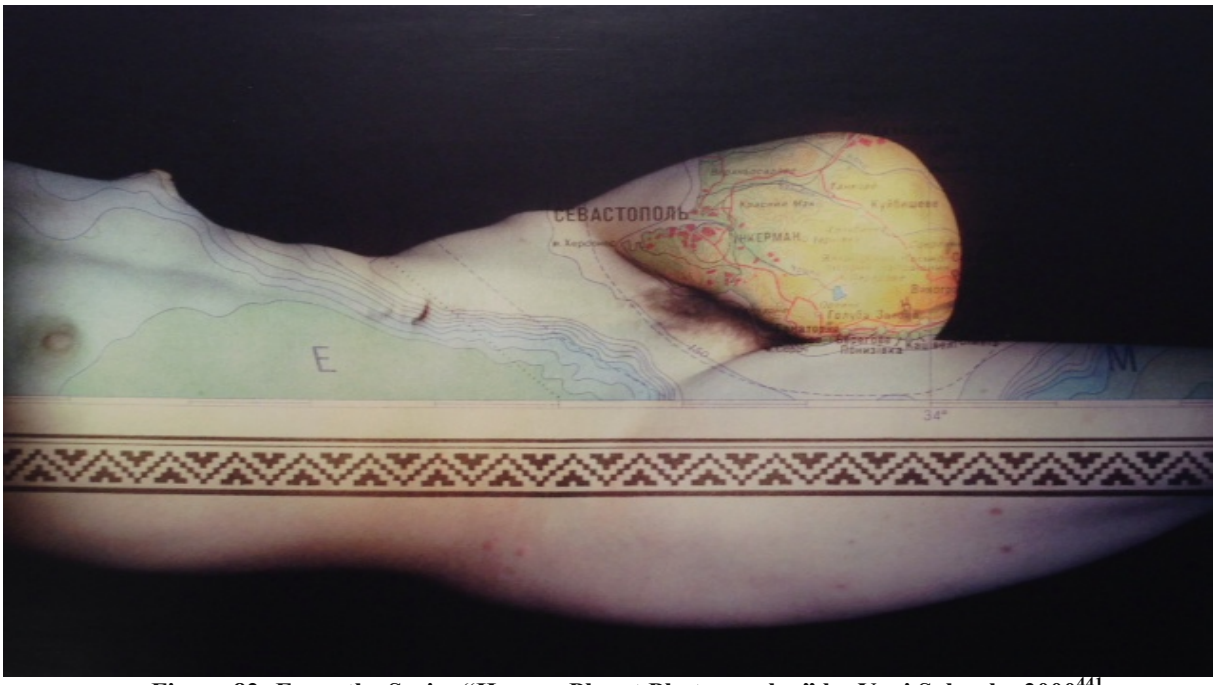

Figure 82: From the Series "Human Planet Photography," by Yuri Solomko 2000[441]

The photo reflects the central theme of the exhibit in portraying the region as a blank slate, or an empty space—a no man's land, like the museum—drawing attention to potentials, more than definitions of what Ukraine should or could become. In this sense, the concept of "negative space" can also take on terrifying tones; an unprotected agora open to seizure by totalitarian ideologies. It is worth noting that *Disputed Territory* (without *Draftsmen's Congress*) first premiered in Kroshitsky Art Museum in Sevastopol, Crimea September 26 – October 7, 2012. The metaphor of "disputed territory" that artists depicted through corporeal metaphors and cartography was later manifested in the political disputes that took place over Ukraine's territory throughout the literal invasion and annexation of Crimea by Putin's command in early 2014. As an image of the nude female body curated by HudRada, which had been censored earlier that year in the *Ukrainian Body* exhibit, the photo had already contained traces of meaning linked to public outcries around issues such as "homosexual propaganda" and reproductive rights. The

[441] *Catalogue - Disputed Territory 4th Exposition by HudRada Sevastopol Kroshitsky Art Museum*, Kyiv: ADEF, 2012.

ongoing targeting and attack on LGBT and feminist activists that had been occurring for years would manifest in Yanukovych's wider attempt to stifle all civic dissent by ordering Berkut riot police forces to shoot and kill hundreds of peaceful demonstrators on Maidan. Thus, the metaphor of "disputed territory" can be read not only as a microcosm of society, but also (and perhaps even more directly connected to the concept of micro/macro), as an externalization of the self unmoored from society in the search for what is forbidden, lost, or uncharted in the production of a uniform citizenry.

Transparency vs. Invisibility

The Soviets often used metaphors of anatomy to talk about the nation as a productive unit in order to elevate the worker and idealize the proletariat. One of the curators of *Disputed Territory*, Larisa Venediktova, adopts the language of medicine in her essay about the project, entitled "Homeopathic aggravation. Simila similibus curantor."[442] She characterizes controversy as a necessary crisis point in a larger process of healing society, referring to Jacques Rancière on aesthetics as a "radical combination of various things" which suffers a viewer "the ability to think in contradiction."[443] Paradox becomes both a source of hypocrisy, and the prerequisite for its relinquishment. In this view of art, the curator doles out paradox in an attempt to simulate what subjugates individuals within society, thereby also "curing" its ills through perception. Venediktova leaves open the source of these ills, though the Ukrainian state's repressive measures and the constant fear faced by civil rights demonstrators hovers just below the surface of her writing. The essay figures such fears as a kind of disease, emerging wherever Venediktova

[442] Larisa Venediktova, "Homeopathic aggravation. Similia similibus curantor," Ibid.
[443] " . . . untangling this knot is to inadvertently miss the point, since the key to the 'aesthetic' is the 'ability to think contradiction.' However, in this 'way' the paradox is overcome through its affirmation. 'The best art is that which effectively affirms the paradox of combining autonomous and heteronomous existence: preserving art in the face of invasion by instrumental rationality while at the same time participating in the emergence of countless communities.' (Rancière, Malaise dans l'esthetique)." Ibid,19.

parallels internal medicine with the struggles of the self to express itself. Her corporeal rhetoric departs from earlier Soviet formulations that exhibited an obsessive compulsion toward purification. Thus, freedom in the essay is equated with an emptiness of expression, however inadequate, that still remains preferential to the limitation of an empty terminology. The body becomes not the repository of the state's anxieties, but an enclosure of individual knowledge. The curator points to this gap between the self and the public as a matter of form. Venediktova writes:

> Homoepathic aggravation 'from the similar,' from a small dose of a remedy, can be considered an operation of creating empty spaces, transforming the human body (just like the public) from a crowd into society. Here the body (and the social body) becomes a disputed territory for the theory of similarity and the theory of counteraction.[444]

In this theory, the curator seeks to frame the differences between actual bodies in the crowd and how they are represented within the collective social ideal. The dispute over similarity and counteraction includes the idea that incorporating what is dissimilar in society is not a ready human impulse and that society, like a body, cannot always naturally heal itself. Comparing Ukraine's geography with disability, the photo suggests a paradox in the larger processes of inclusion/exclusion in the mythmaking inherent to national history, here represented in the insider/outsider relations between Russia and Ukraine on the Crimean peninsula.

Solomko's depiction of the female nude affords the rhetorical link between nation/anatomy/gender a broad range of interpretations. Nevertheless, and perhaps in its lacking a clear position on actual politics, the photo expounds on the centrality of sex to ideology by disregarding its own erotic aspects with the supposed "objectivity" of territorial acquisition. This semantics of the social as erotic mirrors the Russian intelligentsia of the early twentieth century. Their similar shift to corporeal metaphor included an overall abandonment of Symbolism and its

[444] Venediktova, Ibid.

according the individual author or artist a level of spiritual significance aligned with "the norms of the universe," that was around the same time when, Naiman writes, "public statements about the importance of sex began to be perceived as an essential component of an intelligent's worldview, and the interplay between sexual and political desires had become a crucial topic with which the writer depicting a better world (or the path thereto) had consciously to grapple."[445] Here, while the sex of the body is obviously female, the gendered aspects of the photo remain largely neutral; there is no straight line connecting maternal reproduction or masculine virility to the nation and its productivity.[446] By contrast, the attitude toward the biopolitics of post-Soviet statehood is rather ambiguous: here is a body, in visibly good health and most likely of a member of a privileged class, though there is not sufficient information given to determine much about this person's identity. We only know that the body itself is subject to sets of categorical divisions in its production into the citizen-subject of the state, regardless of whether or not that body is designated to have any rights. The arbitrariness and subjugation involved in this process is represented here as random notation on a map projected onto flesh. The Russian language on the map further adds to the postcolonial undertones between Russia and Ukraine in both nations' relationship to Soviet Crimea.[447]

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[445] The appearance of Mikhail Artsybashev's novel *Sanin* in 1907 exploded public controversies around the social significance of private life. The event was compared to the appearance of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. The new cult of the individual evolved along the fascination with mysticism, Nietzsche, and decadence that was developing elsewhere in Europe at the time. While the young radicals of the 1860s had been anti-Romantic in their writings about the extraordinary in life, their examination of politics transgressing the personal sphere can be read in the discussions of sex in the literary and legal debates of the 1910s. Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*, 45.

[446] In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault lays out the premise that the deployment of sexuality contains within it the mechanisms of class repression in western nations: "There is little question that one of the primordial forms of class consciousness is the affirmation of the body; at least, this was the case for the bourgeoisie during the eighteenth century . . . in order for the proletariat to be granted a body and a sexuality; economic emergencies had to arise . . . lastly, there had to be established a whole technology of control which made it possible to keep that body and sexuality, finally conceded to them, under surveillance . . ." 126.

[447] The dissonance in the image could be likened to Agamben's taking to task Arendt's concept of the refugee, who signals a total crisis in rights: "the separation between humanitarianism and politics that we are experiencing today is the extreme phase of the separation of the rights of man from the rights of the citizen . . . A humanitarianism

Ambiguity also feeds the irony in Venediktova's pharmacological allegory. With the end of communism, the binary between East/West was renegotiated at the same time as the male/female binary in gender theory.[448] Her emphasis on negative space, like the turn inward in prior notions of freedom under socialism, supports the idea of the curator as occupying a democratic ethos within a receding public sphere. Yet there is also a zero at the heart of the radical premise that withdrawing from public discourse on rights can renew its own critique. The curator, in writing about her own public role as framer, ultimately curates herself as well:

> . . . what then, if not hypocrisy, constitutes an 'exhibited' person, who finds oneself before the gaze of other people? What if there is no person if one hasn't succeeded in becoming 'transparent'? Here it is important to avoid the illusion that the 'open' already exists, has arisen, that the squares are waiting for us to also arise there, as people, as a society, as 'public,' 'exhibited,' 'unconcealed'; that a practically empty space exists, where one can arrive, where cooperation is possible, where each of us is part of the common, where conflict or 'publicizing experience' is possible (what the Greeks called the 'agora').[449]

Here, the "exhibited person" is also the person misrecognized by society and barred from the category of citizen. In the instance of exhibition, of standing in for an ideal, the illusion of possibility can also mean erasure of the self into a vacuum. Where Arendt had written that the strength of democracy rests with the "the voluntary association of divergent minds," on the ideal square, where no one can fully "arrive," there is no pretext for making rights public. One must think for oneself, Venediktova seems to be saying, and that this alone is the gift of the curator. The regimentation of critical art, or art that attempts to mount a critique of its own limits to describe, can be easily observed in the Soviet-style police surveillance of state museums and the destruction of artworks in contemporary Ukraine. Thus, the fetishization of transparency also

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separated from politics cannot fail to reproduce the isolation of sacred life at the basis of sovereignty, and the camp - which is to say, the pure space of exception - is the biopolitical paradigm that it cannot master." Rejecting Arendt's thesis that the decline of human rights implies the end of the nation-state, Agamben instead calls for a renewal of categories (birth-nation, man-citizen). Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 134.

[448] Scholars of gender and the nation-state have pointed out how constructions of masculinity and femininity guided the state's transition to western liberal ideologies backing the new welfare economy after the fall of socialism (See: Phillips, Chatterjee, Gal and Kligman, Johnson and Nannette Funk, and Kaganovsky).

[449] Venediktova, Ibid, 19.

produces a blank slate: *What if there is no person if one hasn't succeeded in becoming 'transparent'?*

In the years between Kyiv's two revolutions, the citizen became superfluous to the obsessive language in policies equating freedom with "transparency" in democratization efforts, mirrored by an obsession with "corruption" that was equally limiting, however extremely well-placed that accusation may be in the case of the Yanukovych regime. Milan Kundera included the term "transparency" among his sixty-five keywords in *Art of the Novel*. He comments on its popularity in journalism, defining it as "the exposure of individual lives to public view," containing residues of the nineteenth century obsession with the glass house: "an old utopian idea and at the same time one of the most horrifying aspects of modern life."[450] In post-Soviet Ukraine, the glass house projects easily onto the walls of the museums it contains.

The terror of the glass house also resides in the possibility of actually having to dwell within it; like the city square, it is most beautiful in theory, seen in passing only for its many parts, each imparting a story about the fallible human processes by which its illusory perfection remains, in the end, a made thing: "This means that architecture aimed at creating public space must simultaneously become 'anti-architecture.' Art, in turn, should convey the impossibility of art."[451] The challenge to invention has always been the province of art and, possibly, is the only territory within which dispute leads to the creation of new territory. Venediktova affects an affinity for construction: "Public space must be built, it requires the entirely artificial creation of the emptiness in which society could arise." The belief that one can create something new from the combination of unlike elements, I think, is the alchemy in Kyiv's visual culture collectives'

[450] Polish author Marek Bieńczyk includes Kundera in the former's metaphysical discourse on the extensiveness of transparency as a metaphor in the concept of being, the crowd, and the public developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Marek Bieńczyk, *Transparency*. Transl. Benjamin Paloff, 76.
[451] Venediktova, Ibid, 20.

concern with public spaces going stale; an awareness of past appropriations of art, and a vigilance toward the state turning citizenship into its own kind of specimen for display under glass.

VI. Conclusion: The Politics of Display

Adopting many of the formal conventions of Kyiv's early avant-garde, the art collectives in this chapter attempt to push what one is permitted to say in order to extend what one is capable of imagining and speaking. The collectives R.E.P. and HudRada, in name only, reflect the Soviet ideal of bringing art to the masses. By contrast, the intellectuals affiliated with these groups are more concerned with deregulating the systems that have narrowed public interest in contemporary art in Ukraine. The HudRada collective has stated their aim is to address a "crucial vacancy" (my interview with founder, Vasyl Cherypanyn) brought on by the instrumentalization of art by the state and the privatization of nearly all markets and legal processes by local oligarchs. Emphasizing the body as an ideological site, aesthetically, much of these collectives' work coheres around diverse experiences of marginalization. In members' dissenting from repressive policies targeting minorities (many of which crystallized into entrenched social norms during Yanukovych's regime), these artists have attempted to dismantle the established art-system not only in aesthetic terms, but also as activists risking their bodies in protest actions alongside others outside of these collectives.[452]

Near the end of her life, while living as an émigré in Paris in the 1930s, Marina Tsvetaeva attempted to make sense of the revolution she had lived through. Penning several theses on poetry, in *Art in the Light of Conscience* she defends the impulse toward artistic

[452] For a study of emerging forms of activism among young people on the left in Ukraine beyond the art establishment see: Emily Channell-Justice, "Flexibility and Fragmentation: Student Activism and Ukraine's (Euro)Maidan Protests," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology.* October 20, 2014. http://berkeleyjournal.org/2014/10/flexibility-and-fragmentation-student-activism-and-ukraines-euromaidan-protests/. Accessed November 10, 2015.

creation as an act of conscience and of individual will, going against the charge of superfluity sometimes attributed to art amid times of political chaos. She severs art's value from any claim to legislative status: "The moral law can be introduced into art, but can a mercenary corrupted by so many changes of master ever make a soldier of the regular army?"[453] Tsvetaeva's tone and her personal reserve in this passage reflect the experience of many in her circle at the time, such as Aleksandr Blok, whom she mentions in the essay *Fleeing from Death into the Street*. Art became a way to preserve an inner sanctum of sanity, an exemption from the laws of the Revolution. Art is perceived to be a renunciation of absolutes: "Artistic creation is in some cases a sort of atrophy of conscience—more than that a necessary atrophy of conscience, the moral flaw without which art cannot exist."[454] This vision of art as nonpolitical and the artist as neither arbitrator nor litigator, of "art without artifice," as Tsvetaeva expounds is "not yet art, but already more than art," cut against the centralization and repression of art under Stalin at the time.[455] The negative space is therefore a space riddled with gaps in perspective, conflicts, and rupture. It is a trace on the geographical ordering of space, like the square, the museum, or the cave wall, always just out of reach, and thus, constantly rewritten.

Throughout this chapter I have traced in Kyiv's contemporary art collectives a notion of the political to explicate their experiments in creating new cultural forms. In the ongoing history of Russian and East European art, the theme of artistic production is highly intertwined with concepts of inner freedom and depictions of negative space, set apart from oppressive surroundings marked by authoritarian leaders and social decline. The question of creative autonomy is a longstanding theme in Slavic intellectual history as well, given that so many

[453] Marina Tsvetaeva and Angela. Livingstone, *Art in the Light of Conscience: Eight Essays on Poetry*.
[454] "In order to be good (not lead into temptation the little ones of this world), art would have to renounce a fair half of its whole self. The only way for art to be wittingly good is—not to be. It will end with the life of the planet." Ibid, 157.
[455] Ibid, 161.

writers from the region stretching from Russia to Poland have faced persecution and even death for their work. One could argue that the immediacy of politics in art in this region have produced an anxiety that has, through the various conventions writers have employed in wrestling with forms of censorship, produced patterns of display that have, over time, themselves become devices of expression. In Dostoyevsky's works, disembodied voices hover in a dialogue above the text. There are many instances of the creation taking over the creator as characters attempt to describe a context, or frame a situation: the expressive subject becomes the object of the description. The creative process in making the artwork– writing, drawing, and painting—becomes more real than the self. The artist depicts the creative process as though from an empty space where one might see, in full consciousness, a reflexive description.

The paradox in the art gathering I focus on in detail in this chapter now emerges in conflict with the real. The exhibit takes on shades of an instance of strange historiography in which, upon Putin's invasion of Ukraine, the literal suddenly caught up with the metaphorical. Both the "congress" and the pieces in HudRada's collection about disputed territory suggest the decade following the Orange Revolution. Politics, as artifice, depends upon its means of display. As long as Ukraine's artists will continue to strive for event rather than artifact, at transforming the museums which dominate the core of cultural life, and at making of "the open square" not the object but the very material of their art, their efforts will not go overlooked.

Epilogue

Do revolutions ever end? Some have written that after any revolution fatigue sets in, but how do we recognize fatigue in this sense? In the years following the Orange Revolution a range of emotions clustered around "the ideals of the Maidan" in Ukrainian public discourse. Scholars, journalists, and international commentators in the West tended to note that the ideals of the Maidan had faded. The image evokes a dream. The leitmotif of those years was that the harder people had fought for their civil rights, the deeper the nation's sleep became. In the decade intervening between the Orange Revolution and Putin's war, the civil liberties that Ukrainians had once aimed for slowly slid into obscurity. The reforms promised by Yushchenko and Tymoshenko had undergone a steady dissolution under Yanukovych. However, throughout even the darkest periods of his oppressive regime, among young civil rights activists, there grew an intense belief that some kind of awakening was immanent.

In the years between Kyiv's two revolutions, many intellectuals, artists, and others became activists against their own will—forced, at times, to risk their own bodies in the face of physical violence in order to express themselves freely. State violence driven largely by infighting among corrupt elites played out over an entire decade of regime change. This resulted in a heavy burden of injustices that has been disproportionately shouldered by women and other minorities. Artists in Kyiv have continued to carve out pivotal public sites for making visible the symbolic, often hidden, violence that the state had wreaked against its own people. It is my hope that this study not only offers up critical material for viewing the relationship between gender

and protest in the context of revolution, but also provides blueprints for interpreting the intersection of art and politics in a civic vocabulary about power, self-expression, and the body.

There is another revolution still ongoing in Kyiv. It can only be described as one that is non-national, and as a result, harder to mark as having an end or an outcome. The Soviet past of the twentieth century, for those living in its immediate shadow in Ukraine, never faded completely. Many on both the left and right are skeptical of postcommunism as a viable paradigm, or a condition of being, as it is sometimes described in neoliberal policies focused on undoing the communist "mentality." Questioning local constructions of class, race, and gender in lived experience, however, has provided local feminist thinkers and artists on the left with strategies for negotiating between the grand narratives of capitalism and socialism. These narratives, and their twentieth century utopian origins, seem to be losing their foothold in the region. Women activists in particular are bridging conversations within emerging feminist scholarship that overturns older East/West divides. In attempting to translate these discourses, perhaps no one can completely escape the "dream factory" and its idealism. How does one stave off fatigue—by sleeping, or waking?

Agata Pyzik has compared growing up between London and postcommunist Poland to living in a "dream factory."[456] Ongoing exchanges across the former Bloc and Western Europe have profoundly changed peoples' relationship to each other and, perhaps even more significantly, their memories of the past. Pyzik's own descriptions of her life comprise a unique perspective that works to unravel previous assumptions around the isolation of socialist societies. Her metaphor of a "dream factory" turns upon the fabrication of time: in particular, the industrial past and its teleologies that tether "progress" to the myths, stereotypes, and grand narratives of

[456] Pyzik's book, *Poor But Sexy*, is provocatively named after a tourism campaign slogan by Berlin mayor Klaus Wowereit to attract outside investment (10).

the Cold War. Many of these ideas still haunt East-West cultural relations. The utopian dreams of the early 20th century and their imagined modernities, in hindsight, appear astonishingly similar on either side of the Iron Curtain. The expression "former East" now sounds ironic, even parodic.

The organization of spatial and temporal experience by activists on Kyiv's most recent Maidan demonstrations differed significantly from descriptions of protest elsewhere, for example, in Poland 1989. In May 2014 I observed firsthand the space of the Maidan, noting how the people still living within the lingering tents and scorched barricades had altered the physical landscape in order to attract the attention of satellite cameras. One sign made from upturned cobblestones spelled out a message in large letters: "Patriotism is the idea of the Maidan. Stop Propaganda! There is no Fascism Here!" The image makes apparent just how extensively digital culture had shaped sensorial narratives of immediacy on Maidan, shifting the *optics* of protest, including local attempts to buffer misperceptions about Ukraine in foreign media.

Figure 83: Kyiv's Maidan, May 1, 2014[457]

[457] Photo by the author.

Scholars of post-Soviet feminism and gender often base their critiques in alternative, non-linear, non-normative timeframes unmoored from mainstream discourses. The juxtaposition of real/virtual spaces on the square had long been familiar to feminist activists in Ukraine's capital. These activists, already positioned outside of the mainstream, had carried the mantle of this marginal viewpoint. They were, arguably, better suited than anyone else for understanding just how weakened the center of civil rights had become long before the Euromaidan demonstrations had even begun.

In a sense then, there were many "Maidans" in the events over the winter of 2013-2014. The different encampments, parties, social groups, observers, and demographics on the physical space of the square struggled to plot themselves within a cartography of politics tethered differently for each, depending on their subject-position. Some writers and intellectuals stated their independence from all established political parties (Sergiy Zhadan, Oksana Zabuzhko, and Yuriy Andrukhovych). Despite these early attempts, the large gathering on the Maidan grew and turned violent after demonstrators on the far right responded to attacks on student protestors by Berkut riot police.[458] After approximately three weeks of demonstrations, a moment arrived in which many realized that the wide range of demands on the Maidan could never be met. Two authors whose works have been aligned with the youngest generation of feminists in Ukraine, Irena Karpa and Viktoria Naryzhna, drafted a document entitled Agenda 5/12 petitioning opposition leaders on the right who had gained a substantial following to follow through with three points they believed would keep the peace and move all involved demonstrators toward

[458] Emily Channell-Justice outlines the role that University students played at crucial points in the Euromaidan protests from their gathering on Maidan on November 21, 2013, to occupation of the Ministry from February 18-20, 2014. She traces how students "responded to shifting targest within the educational sphere and the Ukrainian political landscape," basing her conclusions on participatory observation and interviews with the Kyiv-based independent student union Direct Action, and the Studentska Koordinatsijna Rada (Student Coordinating Committee), the student governing body created to participate in the Maidan Council. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology.* Accessed March 21, 2015.

reform.[459] The document included protection of protestors from police, a demand for members of Parliament aligned with Yanukovych to resign, and for the opposition to present and follow through on several reforms. The petition received thousands of signatures and opposition leaders agreed to its demands. This took place early on during the demonstrations, on the cusp of the mass mobilizations that took place on the second Sunday of December known as the March of Millions. Despite the coming together of diverse agendas to keep the movement peaceful, the deployment of state riot defense units would result in more deaths in February, after which the police themselves would defect from the regime.[460]

Many of the artists and writers discussed in this dissertation, including feminists in Ofenzywa and those in HudRada, first maintained an ambivalence toward the conflicting ideologies represented on Maidan.[461] What they did share with demonstrators, however, was a skepticism toward the regime and a desire to form a public consensus. Many had prior organizing experience and shared their time and knowledge by contributing to the communications centers, hotlines, fundraising for medicine, "flying universities," and manual labor needed to keep the movement going.[462]

Perhaps the only tangible political idea that everyone involved in Euromaidan had in common was the square: less what it was officially venerated as being, or was popularly imagined to be, *or never became in the Orange Revolution,* but its symbolism that had finally

[459] Yatsenyiuk, Tiyahnybok, and Klitchko were among the leaders they petitioned. Carmen Scheide and Ulrich Schmid, Eds, "The Writers and the Maidan," *Euxeinos Governance and Culture in the Black Sea Region,* 13 (November 2013): 32–37.
[460] Investigators would later uncover documents in Yanukovych's abandoned home implicating him in a covert plot, possibly orchestrated in cooperation with covert Russian operations, to annihilate thousands of demonstrators on the Maidan by force. The fatal clashes on February 18 appear to have been the first day of the start of the operation.
[461] The collection of essays, edited by photographer and poet Yevgenia Belorusets, provides an overview of these debates around the significance of Maidan and its risks/potentials as an instrument of ideology. Yevgenia Belorusets, Nelia Vakhovska, and Nataliya Tchermalykh, Eds, "Documenting Maidan," *Prostory Literary Journal,* 8 (December 2013), www.prostory.net.ua. Accessed March 20, 2015.
[462] The independent curatorial union ICTM supported the Center for Peaceful Self-Organization on the Maidan Центр мирної самоорганізації https://www.facebook.com/selfmaidan. Accessed March 15, 2014.

been called into question. The defining measure of that moment was the square itself. The idea of the square emerged as a totally transparent space—a negative space—drawing everyone into its center for what it might become, for better or worse, opportunity or tragedy. The square was sought, shared, and contested because of its polysemy.

After ousted President ViktorYanukovych fled to Moscow, the material wealth that he had stored up in his private estate were put on display in the National Art Museum in Kyiv. This stands in parallel to a prior revolutionary moment in the Bolsheviks' seizure of private wealth in the institutionalization of museums. Thus, the exhibit discussed in Chapter Four, *Disputed Territory*, organized by HudRada at the same site two months prior reaches its culmination here in the complete reversal of the Soviet cultural artifact, in other words, the public taking back what the state had stolen. This reversal illustrates a reclaiming of both the figurehead's privatization of art, and the museum's defunct exclusionary policies. One portrait in the exhibit featured Yanukovych in a cartoonish rendition of Napoleon. The deposed dictator's face had been scratched out of the picture. The display called to mind Tsar Nicholas Romanov II's portrait, which was covered in bayonet scratches from revolutionaries that stormed the Winter Palace in 1917.

Among the kitch self-portraits and other artifacts were state and ecclesiastical treasures: icons and rare books dating to 900. The exhibit was named *Codex Mezhihriya* and featured several rooms divided into "books" chronicling different aspects of "the story of a dictatorship." Objects were grouped and placed on the crates they had been shipped in: yellow and black tape separated viewers from the objects, evoking an investigative scene, but also, simply serving a practical purpose due to the fact that the exhibit had gone up within merely a few weeks. One room featured a roundtable with experts and a sign that read "Ask me about this exhibit." Large

banners running around the exterior of the building announced the event with a single word: "Revolution." The display of the former President's embezzled wealth in this way signaled a radical shift in the public engagement in state museums in the postcommunist era, suggesting changes in the future accessibility and involvement of the public in art.

The artists and activists discussed in Chapters Three and Four are continuing to create art, performances, and other texts that respond to their experiences on Maidan. Individuals in Ofenzywa, HudRada, and R.E.P. took part in the initial efforts to reinforce nonviolence among protestors. They worked tirelessly in every capacity to prevent deaths among the wounded by delivering medicine during the police attacks. They worked with independent media to translate information and counter the streams of propaganda that circulated throughout the demonstrations. Many also took on banal tasks such as making sandwiches, hauling trash, and organizing transportation. Throughout all of these events that took place, Femen remained in Paris. They incorporated messages of support for the Euromaidan demonstrators into their photo-ops, but largely remained bodies behind the camera, in spite of the fact that their origins on a post-Orange Maidan were very much part of the story of its transformation into Euromaidan.

Perhaps there can be no true story of a revolution, only transformation. During the course of the events of Euromaidan Ofenzywa became two groups: Zhinocha Sotnya and Kobilyanska Sotnya.[463] Yevgenia Belorusets undertook a project featuring her photographs of the barricades surrounding the square. Her portraits include commentary on the gendered divisions that occurred within the encampment. As a virtual exposition, the project re-maps the boundaries of "#euromaidan" as a protest symbol. Ofenzywa member and R.E.P./HudRada curator and independent essayist Kateryna Mishchenko and Berlin photographer Miron Zownir created

[463] Sarah D. Phillips documents the split with reference to differing perspectives on theories and practices associated with militarism: "The Women's Squad in Ukraine's Protests: Feminism, Nationalism, and Militarism on the Maidan."

photographs and essays in creative ethnographies featuring everyday life in Ukraine over the course of a year.[464] Many of their works open possibilities for alternative perspectives that complicate depictions of Ukraine in the media that condition viewers to grand narratives that demand a pro-Russian or pro-Western bias in heroes/villains narratives about the ongoing conflict in the region.

Artists in R.E.P. and HudRada have continued to carve out new public spaces for their artworks, despite attacks from the far right on individuals involved in minority rights movements and the sites of these collectives' activities. The anonymous burning of the location of the Visual Culture Research Center (VCRC) at the historic Kino Zhovten (October Cinema) in late summer 2014 further united artists with outside activists. Individuals gathered in regular meetings dedicated to calling for investigations into the burning. These meetings expanded to include demands for reforms in the Ministry of Culture linked to the art world. Shortly thereafter, VCRC was reinstated in a new space and continues to serve as a venue for discussion among activists on the left concerned with a wide range of social issues.

Collaboration has continued to grow across collectives and between individual artists, many of which are receiving more critical attention abroad. Belorusets' headlined Vienna Art Week in November 2014 in an exhibit entitled *Maidan* that brought together 50 artists from Ukraine, including many in R.E.P. and HudRada.[465] Despite the war, new art initiatives have continued to emerge such as the independent film festival group FILM 86. In short, many pathways for art continue to be built by feminists whose early activism skills and critical actions have paved the way for future creative experiments. For a very brief moment in late autumn of

[464] Mishchenko and Zownir, *Ukrainian Night*, Ed. Jana Fuchs.
[465] Compilations of their work have been published in multiple languages, for example, *Shifting Landscapes*, Ed. Nataliya Tschermalykh.

2014 Anna Hutsol commented in presses on local politics, but she and Femen remain largely absent from Ukraine. Though aspects of Femen's story have also shaped the city square, the feminist aesthetics that have carried over into the new era in Kyiv belong to the installations and gatherings by the local art-activists in Chapters Three and Four.

April 2014. I am standing on Kyiv's Maidan at Eastertime. Everything around me is scorched and covered in flowers. Handmade memorials and carefully arranged minature displays of bullets and other debris labeled as "proof" of what happened stand outside of the tents of this mostly Carpathian and Zaporhizhian peoples' encampment. A city within a city surrounds me: from the middle of the square I can see a graveyard, a church, a military training zone, a psych ward, a hospital, a canteen, a press center, and even a piano. Vibrantly colored drawings and paintings posted to the stone façades of Khreshatyk's Stalinist-era buildings and the gilt marble entrances of the metro flutter in the midday sun. A banner near the stadium reads "A Polish Sign of Solidarity with Ukraine." Several people are bowed in prayer in front of Dynamo Stadium, the site of the barricades between riot police and demonstrators where many lives were lost. Two Orthodox priests dressed in black vestiments wave censers in a circular motion and the pungent scent of myrrh covers the smell of burning hickory from beneath the cauldrons of gruel boiling on the back of a recuperated Soviet-era Red Army military vehicle nearby.

Later that day, I join a small crowd in front of Taras Shevchenko University to observe a demonstration by student union activists calling for educational reforms. Someone in the crowd, I will learn months later, would be hospitalized due to being physically attacked by a neo-Nazi group. I follow others as they travel to the subway to protect themselves in numbers. Individuals here are targeted regularly for speaking out against the narcotics trade and corrupt practices that continue to eat away at peoples' life opportunities. The students I speak with that day tell me that

there is no trust for the older generation and their leadership. I find myself wondering how there can be any trust in the future without addressing the conditions of speech in the present. The young will go on fighting for Kyiv: it is their future, their ideas, and their struggles in leading the capital that will determine the rest of this story.

Figure 84: May 1, 2014, Kyiv's Maidan[466]

[466] All photos in Figures 83-88 are by the author, May 1, 2014.

Figure 85: A man arranges shrapnel in a makeshift display case as evidence for passerby that the police had shot at demonstrators. Two painted cardboard shields decorated in an aesthetic resembling Femen.

Figure 86: A chipped street sign near Femen's old headquarters sums up their absence from Ukraine.

Figure 87: A spontaneous museum created by lingering demonstrators on the Maidan.

Figure 88: An empty press booth with graffiti commentary.

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