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Reception of War Trauma in Art: Measures of Permissible Cruelty of Reflection

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Abstract. *The aim of the article* is to study the reflection of percepting the war trauma in art in the context of the cruelty problem. *Results*. Ways of reception of the war topic issue in art are viewed, as well as conflict, struggle and manifestation are indicated. After conducting interviews and questionnaires, two paradigms are determined in grounding the war reception: 1) "two paradigms, possible solutions aimed at overcoming this conflict are determined. *Scientific novelty*. The ways of reception of the war trauma in art through reflection and adaptation are separated and analysed. Art is a safe refuge", therefore, everything that can injure should be avoided, and during wartime, art should be exclusively entertaining (the leading directions are adaptation and allegorical escapist reflection without direct reference to traumatic topics), and 2) "Naturalistic art about war", according to which art should be as serious and tragic as possible, faithfully convey the war horrors, avoid entertaining content (the ways of reception are naturalistic reflection and actions of art activism in manifestation options (murals) and struggle (actions of artistic resistance)). *Conclusions*. The conducted research shows that despite the fierce competition, the paradigms are not controversial but complementary in nature. They reflect different stages of reception and, accordingly, the aspirations of various social segments that go through these stages of trauma perception. If only one of these paradigms is defined as a generally accepted cultural policy, this can significantly discriminate some part of population: entertainment content traumatises those social segments that have undergone adaptation and are now actively working to overcome it. Therefore, they feel guilty for not being serious and sympathetic to suffering. Naturalistic art can traumatise those who suffered from the war, have not yet passed the stage of adaptation, have not yet received psychological help, do not know the means of stabilization, and seek to replenish their resource of positive emotions through art. As well as denying the entertainment component, avoiding cruelty in art is not a solution of the problem, because in times of war people are in different life situations, and turn to art with various purposes. The practice of warning about somewhat sensitive content is quite effective, helping art to find a proper audience and helping to overcome trauma.

Keywords: entertainment art; the art of war; trauma; cruelty

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Introduction

Western scientists have a strong tradition of "Trauma Studies" — the research of the impact of collective trauma on culture, consciousness and world perception (by the collective trauma the mental trauma is meant, that is received by a group of people as a result of a social, artificial or ecological disaster, criminal actions of political or other social entities The most typical kind of collective trauma is the trauma of war). One of the most important tasks of these studies is an issue of how collective trauma was perceived and reflected in art, that is, the concept of trauma reception and the study of its features representation in art.

With the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the art of Ukraine has undergone significant transformations. As well as Ukrainians themselves, artists from many countries seek to support Ukraine in its fight against Russian full-scale military invasion. Art actions are constantly held: "To the anniversary of the start of the full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine, various protests against the policy of the aggressor country swept across Europe. In Serbia, a cake with a skull and bloody icing was brought to the gates of the Russian embassy; in Berlin, a broken Russian tank was placed in front of the embassy entrance; in Britain, a giant flag of Ukraine was created" (*Tort iz cherepom ta pidbytyi rosiiskyi tank*, 2023).

Art projects require documentation, storage and impact analysis. Few platforms, aggregates for storing and analysing the "art of war" (the biggest one "Ukraine War Art Collection" (https://war-art.uccs.org.ua/) is temporarily unavailable) have already been created. Still, in general, this topic issue needs a special attention and constant new studies. However, a large part of society does not accept art related to war and trauma, considering them inappropriate, wishing to leave difficult issues for better times. Particularly, the photographer Roman Bordun even ironically names his documentary photo exhibition dedicated to the war as "Let's leave it for better times" (Lviv Municipal Art Center, 2022).

Should wartime art be a reflection of the war trauma? A recent study "Puppet Theatre in the Time of War" conducted by specialists from the University of Portsmouth together with researchers from Odesa National Polytechnic University shows that most puppet theatres want to "leave the war behind" and create a safe space for the audience (Smith et al., 2023). Still, some theatres integrate the theme of war into performances (for example, "Sasha, take out the garbage" of Odesa Academic Ukrainian Music and Drama Theatre named after Vasyl Vasylko, "Cats are refugees" at Rivne Puppet Theatre). Numerous exhibitions of artists and photographers address the topic war and trauma. So, which of these ways of reception is more useful for overcoming trauma?

The Western school of "Trauma Studies" has many researches (a classic example is Caruth, 1995) that show the enormous influence of trauma on cultural memory. Trauma can not be forgotten, and it does not let a person move on. Events of collective trauma "threaten the very identity of collectives", and change "the nature of normative order that gives meaning to the human condition" (Alexander et al., 2004). Still, the peculiarity of Western research schools is that they work with "traumas remote in time" that have already been lived, reflected on and separated from certain problems, for example, the impact of the Holocaust, World War II, slavery in the United States, September, 11 in 2011, etc. The full-scale invasion trauma is characterised by the fact that it is still ongoing, and no terms of its end. Therefore, some scientists believe that

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it is not a proper time to talk about the reflection (image and analysis) of the trauma, if a researcher is inside the trauma. However, art is actively involved in the process and requires the constant attention of researchers. In addition to reflecting the trauma, it offers the transformation of memories, such as the feeling/perception of the trauma, that is the reception and transformation into cultural phenomena. Among the latest publications, the work of N. Kozak (2022) should be mentioned, in which the author reflects on the occupation simulation projects as an artistic response to Russia's denial of the war until 2022. S. Trykolenko and A. Yelisieiev (2023) consider the popularity phenomenon of some symbols of Ukrainian art during the war, such as Boris Johnson in the image of Kozak Mamai, "cotton" jewelry, etc.

An interesting aspect of the study is offered by M. Protas (2023), who not only analyses, but also tries to distinguish between real and fake wartime art. The researcher notes: "However, there are also those who do their own business and PR on the topic of war, particularly, traveling around the world either at the expense of Ukrainian cultural support programmes and funds, or as a traveling precariat participating in international sculptural symposia, while producing a banal contemporary product, which is absolutely indifferent to the human grief and Ukrainian pain, accordingly actually commodifying pain with visual benchmarking that is not adapted in any way to emotions and feelings (for example, the composition of welded iron 'Bucha' made in evacuation, where the puzzles of the victims' bodies were laid out in two versions according to the letters of English and Swedish languages, while having naturalistic holes, as if from enemy bullets). Therefore, according to Jorg Geiser, such works emanate 'fake catharsis'" (pp. 804–805).

According to O. Lukovska (2022), "artistic practice shows that the poster has become an extremely common art form, which is explained by the availability of expression and the possibility of mass replication" (p. 25).

The popularity of posterity is emphasised in the research of T. Prokopovych and T. Halkun (2022): "Photography and realism are not visible in the relevance of painting. Instead, there is a lot of symbolism, simplification, abstraction, posterity". But if to look at the platforms as aggregators of wartime art, one can not agree that photography and realism are not popular, because the photographic documentation of war crimes is one of the most important tasks nowadays.

In V. Datsenko (2022) notes that wartime art requires active practices: "Actionism is an active response". The scientist considers art activism as the most appropriate type of artistic reception (actions in which art draws attention to social problems, like in this case to a full-scale invasion).

Aim of the article

The aim of the article is to determine the ways of reception of war trauma in art.

Main research material

During the last two years of war, artists has been trying different ways of the war trauma reception (which included attempts of the usual reflection, adaptation, strug-

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gle and manifestation): charity concerts and exhibitions, participation in marches, demonstrations, murals in support of Ukraine, painting buildings in Ukrainian colours, petitions about renaming streets, etc. It has been very important to set a goal concerning creation of a safe space without war, and thus help in stabilisation and adaptation (allegorical reflection and adaptation to trauma in the form of charity concerts, plays, books and exhibitions where the issue of war is depicted without cruelty, with minimal naturalism or at all mentioned only allegorically), "talking about the trauma" in order to speed up its overcoming (ways of reception: manifestation and struggle; forms: art-activism actions, resistance marches, etc.).

Such discussions befall even non-verbal art forms like dance. In the project "Speak with the body" in Odesa, two dance performances were shown: "Danse Macabre. Immortal Dance" (author: Bohdan Polishchuk) and "Traces" (author: Tetiana Znamerovska). The first project chose the format of "talking about death", so viewers complained of very depressing feelings after watching it. The second one, "Traces", although mentioning the trauma through the metaphor of grain, but to a greater extent demonstrated a safe space and gave hope. Most viewers noted that while watching the second project, they felt somehow uplifted and were satisfied (*Let the body speak*, n.d.).

There are some projects that do not have to choose a format. Particularly, the projects of musicians who dedicate their concerts to the Ukrainian war and play familiar music are completely neutral (for example, in Iceland, the electronic music project "Make like a tree" dedicated its concert to a charity collection for Ukrainians and Independence Day; the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra played classical works at a special concert of solidarity with the Ukrainian nation) (*Ukrainian Independence Day*, 2022). In an interview before the concert, Serhii Onishchenko, the founder of "Make like a tree" noted that he had already given concerts in 14 countries, and deliberately chose the "indie folk" format with the absence of words in order to unite people through music and remind them of the necessity to help Ukrainians. People who have not experienced the war trauma are not always ready to hear about it and are afraid to be traumatised by the story of war through art. So, music without words is just the format that most appeals to Western audiences.

Still, even the use of music without words requires the organisers of cultural events, which are designed to reflect the war trauma, to solve a number of problems. For example, the question is to name the concert "Black necklace — a dedication to women soldiers who died during the war for the independence of Ukraine", as the Kyiv Chamber Orchestra did, or more neutrally — "Music of war", as Ye. Stankovych did.

In October, almost simultaneously, 2 events took place: an International Festival "Kyiv Music Fest 2023", which this year was named "Ukraine. Music of War", where the most disturbing and tragic works were collected, and a concert performed by Kyiv Chamber Music Orchestra, where Sylvestrov's music was played.

The announcement of the "Kyiv Music Fest 2023" festival emphasised that eloquent titles that remind of painful events had *a saving and therapeutic effect*: "The programme includes three world premieres by three Ukrainian composers of different generations. These are 'Anxieties of our Nights' for piano and orchestra by Ihor Shcherbakov (born in 1955), The Third Symphony ('Halyna') for violin and orchestra by Oleksiy Skrypnyk (born in 1955), 'Music of War' for symphony orchestra and choir of Yevhen Stankovych (born in 1942). The third mentioned work gave the title of the concert. The

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main ground theme of the declared works is the issue of war. The modern tragic reality can not help but resonate in the souls and hearts of artists who write 'war chronicles' in their own way, sometimes painful, but at the same time life-saving and therapeutic" (Bilash, 2023).

According to Victoria Poliova, the work "Bucha. Lacrimosa" became a reflection of how the composer saw the photos of the terrible atrocities committed in Bucha: "At that time I almost burned out of despair, impossibility of living on. This is a contemplation of how the souls of tortured, raped, shot Ukrainians rise to the sky like streams. This is an evidence of the loss of humanity's paradise. It will remain a terrible wound forever. And this work is the only possibility for me to survive" (Bilash, 2023).

As practice shows, not all viewers are ready to hear about Bucha in music. The audio dimension of wartime is generally perceived somewhat differently. All the sounds you hear are first of all evaluated as safe and dangerous (if it is time to hide in a bomb shelter or not). Even hints of dangerous sounds can cause serious retraumatisation. For example, children can be afraid not so much of the sound of explosions, but of siren-like sounds that indicate the possibility of an air alarm. Therefore, one has to be very careful with sound imitation.

If the topic of war is used in a work without onomatopoeia, then the saving and therapeutic effect claimed in the programme can occur only if this theme is approached very carefully. In order to talk about the trauma, in classical psychotherapy one must first learn stabilisation techniques, otherwise talking about the trauma can worsen the condition.

Does this ensure that the reception of trauma in art should completely bypass trauma? One can find many examples of the popularity of events that offer an alternative safe space where there is no place for war. For example, Sylvestrov's concert: "Nowadays, against the background of ruins, deaths and pain which this terrible war leaves behind, gentle, tender and light music of Sylvestrov acquires a new significance and a new meaning for us. His works, especially those written during the war, seem to have been created specifically to comfort and heal wounded souls" (Bilash, 2023).

The option "not to touch painful topics, to avoid them" seems to be a win-win one. Still, it provokes the silence of trauma, which can become a problem in future for dealing with the post-war trauma consequences. In this issue, it is worth separating cultural and psychological aspects. From the point of view of cultural studies, the tradition of speaking loudly and shockingly about traumatic events in art has been used for a long time. Art historians have separated the category "sharp action" in order to denote a similar means of artistic expression. The average statistical definition of "sharp action" was something like this: "The action is usually political or social in nature, so it is more radical than other forms of the action art. The aim is not just to draw attention to the problem, but to force the state or society to respond to it. Artists shock everyone in order to attract the attention of the media, and cause a heated debate around this issue. Unlike performance, this is a gesture which consequences cannot be controlled" (Babko, 2020).

It should be mentioned that the post-colonial complex imposed on Ukrainians during the Soviet era led to the fact that Ukrainian researchers used Russian cultural figures as examples, although they mostly copied Western artists. The burning of the Bank of France on Bastille Square in 2017 was a sharp action that definitely attracted

attention. The author of the action Petro Pavlenskyi commented on it in such a way: "The Bank of France took the place of Bastille, as bankers took the place of monarchs. The Great French Revolution turned France into a symbol of freedom, due to which Russia rushed to freedom in 1917 as well. Still, in a hundred years, tyranny began to reign again. The revival of revolutionary France provoked a worldwide conflagration of revolutions. In this fire, Russia began its liberation" (Babko, 2020).

The Soviet stereotype, instilled to the fraternal nations of the Soviet republics, turned out to be very long-lasting, and showed that we should point to our "older Russian brothers" as a guide.

In projects devoted to war, any "sharpness" of reflection in art is only an echo and a Platonic shadow in the cave. Traumatic names, shocking images, sounds or other forms of exposure are all echoes of trauma that conveys encounters with cruelty, violence and injustice. So, our willingness to accept cruelty in art is not the same as tolerating cruelty in real life, but rather has to do with protesting cruelty, with trying to get society to respond in order to stop it.

In 2021–2022, a research on willingness to accept/tolerate cruelty was conducted. 53 students of Odesa Polytechnic University and 46 lecturers of different higher education institutions of Ukraine were its respondents. The aim of the study was to compare whether the tolerance of cruelty in art is correlated with the justification of cruelty in real life and the level of aggression on the Bass-Darki scale. The research revealed that critics of the use of cruelty in art and in solving real-life problems prevail among respondents (for example, criminals during interrogations and pedagogical punishments). Still, if the proportion of critics and supporters was 3 to 1 when using cruelty in art, then in the ratio criticism supporters of the cruelty use in real life ranges from 16 to 1 (permissibility of cruel treatment of criminals) to 53 to 0 (permissibility of cruel treatment of children).

Among the issues, cruelty in documentary art for the sake of reproducing horror and cruelty as a social protest, precisely as an artistic form of understanding without documentary repetition, were distinguished.

Question No. 3: "There are naturalistic scenes of "eating people" in the film "Cannibal Hell". Is it necessary for credibility in a cannibal film?". It demonstrates the following responses:

Supporters — 24
Neutral position — 35
Critics — 41

In question No. 5 regarding the permissibility of self-torture in artistic resistance actions, the results are somewhat different ("In his performance, Pavlensky sewed his mouth shut because he wanted to show the position of the artist in Russia and the ban on publicity. How appropriate was this act in the art project?"):

Supporters — 13
Neutral position — 21
Critics — 66

Thus, in case if cruelty in art is a reflection of real cruelty, respondents are more inclined to support it. Although, the majority consider naturalistic cruelty unnecessary and do not share the idea of its use: 24 % support in the first case against 13 % support in the second.

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The research did not reveal a correlation between high indicators in the aggression level of (Bass-Darki test), and a high level of cruelty tolerance. People with fairly high levels of aggressiveness noted in their comments that they knew the consequences of cruelty and tried to avoid it. As a result, we are dealing with social and cultural mechanisms of tolerance or denial of cruelty.

The study was conducted before the full-scale invasion start, and the respondents were people who had not yet experienced the war trauma. On average, up to 25 % of people not traumatised by war tolerate the use of cruelty in art under definite conditions, as it is justified by the aim of art to show the problem and not to harm other people, and that doesn't make them tolerant of abuse in general.

The isurvey is now temporarily suspended because sensitive issues can retraumatise and take away the resources of resilience from war-affected Ukrainians. In general, it can be mentioned that there are fewer people who tolerate cruelty in art, and most people would like to avoid the use of cruelty and excessive naturalism.

13 interviews conducted with puppeteers as part of the grant project "Puppet Theatre in Wartime" (2023) revealed that people of art became more shunned of the theme of cruelty in art (Smith et al., 2023). So, most likely, indicators of tolerance for cruelty have decreased.

In case if there are fewer supporters of naturalistic brutality in artistic reception, is it possible to conclude that the issue of brutality should be avoided, and now only entertainment content is needed for people who have suffered from war?

No, because in such a situation, a significant negative reaction from the "conscious" part of society can be caused. These people have already passed the stage of adaptation to traumatic events and now are actively working on overcoming the trauma and overall victory of Ukraine in this war. For such people, anything entertaining causes rejection and emotions of inadequacy based on feelings of guilt. For example, the indignation of Odesa volunteer Kateryna Nozhevnikova that the city government of Odesa allocates UAH 30 million for the theatre repair, while the war is going on, and the army feels a sharp need in money. For more than six months, every Saturday in Odesa, large demonstrations were held demanding that all budget money be given to the army until victory. It is this part of society that regularly initiates controversies on online announcements devoted to entertainment art events with ac strong argument that "war is not the time to have fun and relax".

A cluster of society that has passed the stage of adaptation is waiting for the opportunity to talk about the trauma, to overcome it by all possible means. Therefore, the silencing of the trauma and the dominance of entertainment content can be perceived as betrayal. The analysis of social networks of Ukrainian volunteers shows that holidays and entertainment during the war are perceived by them as very painful.

Art should reflect both the tragic events of war (but with a warning about certain sensitive content), and create entertaining content. A viewer or a listener has to choose for himself which reception of the war in art he wants to receive now (which corresponds to the stage of working with trauma in his personal life circumstances). In such a case, it is very convenient to create "War Music" playlists on the YouTube platform, where inspirational, funny and sometimes tragic wartime songs are collected. Among the variety of such playlists, one can find exactly what resonates with him (Muzvar, 2022). It is a great pity that among such collections there is only popular music, but

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there are no analogues for classical music. The platform does not prohibit this, but the demand for classical music is less, so such playlists are not created. Although, sometimes it would be great to listen to Sylvestrov's music at home or in forced immigration, if the viewer does not have the opportunity to visit the National Philharmonic of Ukraine. It is important that the YouTube platform provides the ability to preview. It can be noted that this playlist was created for cheerfulness as "victory music", or YouTube itself puts the mark "sensitive content" if such type of photos, videos and conversations are used in the track.

This favorably distinguishes large platforms from spontaneous content of "self-made art", which can be very painful and inappropriate. The threat of injury can be increased because now every person can independently make a creative work from collections of photos or videos and post it on social networks or send it via messengers. For example, one can accidentally repost such a video and send a notification about the death of relatives to those who do not know about it yet, and in this way injure people, or transfer the location of military objects putting them in danger. So, if a repost on Facebook can still be censored by labeling it as "sensitive content" (and then the user decides for himself whether to watch it or not), then a self-made clip sent via Viber or Telegram is no longer a subject to censoring. Therefore, one should be very careful in creating or distributing popular war-themed works.

It is just an ethical component in the discourse of metamodernism that forces artists of the 21st century to be careful about people's feelings. It prevents excessive shocking naturalism (with the exception of documenting war crimes in photo and video art, which has the right to reproduce all the shocking details of traumatic events as its aim is to prevent their further distribution), but it does not lead to the silencing of trauma, as offered by supporters of the theory "art is a safe space".

Conclusions

Scientific novelty. The research demonstrates that the reception of trauma in art in the context of a full-scale invasion uses the means of reflection (allegorical avoidance and naturalistic display of the war horrors), adaptation (plots that give hope and consolation), manifestations (artistic intrusion into the everydayness of the peaceful life by reminding of the war with murals, flash mobs, etc.), struggle (actions of artistic resistance). The dilemma of using cruelty and naturalism in art creates two paradigms in grounding the war trauma reception:

1. "Art is a safe haven", so the use of cruelty is not acceptable. According to this paradigm, it is necessary to avoid everything that can traumatise and adhere to the reflection of supportive and entertaining content in art (dominant ways are adaptation and allegorical escapist reflection without direct instruction and traumatic issues).

2. "Naturalistic art about war", according to which art should be as serious and tragic as possible. It has to faithfully convey the horrors of war and avoid entertaining content (the ways of reception are naturalistic reflection and actions of art activism in the variants of manifestation (murals) and struggle (actions of "artistic resistance")).

A pre-war survey found out that about 25% of viewers considered the use of cruelty in art to be necessary if it represented brutality in real life. After a full-scale invasion,

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the conflict of two artistic paradigms should not compete to determine the "correct view" of the reception of war trauma in art but complement each other, as they reflect different stages of reception and, accordingly, the aspirations of different social clusters that pass through the trauma perception stages. If only one of the paradigms is defined as a generally accepted cultural policy, then it can significantly discriminate some people. It is explained by the fact that entertainment content significantly traumatises those population segments who have undergone adaptation, are now actively working in order to overcome it, and therefore feel guilty for not being serious and sympathetic to suffering. Naturalistic art can significantly traumatise those who suffered from the war, have not yet passed the adaptation stage, have not yet received psychological help and means of stabilization, seek to replenish their resource of positive emotions from art.

The reception of the war trauma in art should give people a choice. For those who are ready to talk about this problem in order to solve it, works like "20 days in Mariupol" and other naturalistic depictions of trauma through art can be an unparalleled chance to experience this catharsis of the transition of suffering into purification. Still, art has to warn about intentions to "reveal trauma" (if art is up to mention traumatic events, then viewer have to be warned). A large number of injured people are not yet ready to talk about their war trauma, do not have stabilisation techniques and need professional help. Therefore, they first need psychotuition, which can help them adapt to traumatic events. Through the perception of art as a shelter, they can move on to the next step, such as accepting and overcoming the traumatic experience.

Prospects for further research are related to the further course of events of collective trauma, which create new reception forms in art.

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Conflict of interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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Рецепція травми війни у мистецтві: міра припустимої жорстокості відображення

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Анотація. *Мета статті* — дослідити відображення сприйняття травми війни у мистецтві в контексті проблеми жорстокості. *Результати дослідження*. Розглянуто шляхи рецепції теми війни у мистецтві, зазначено конфлікт двох парадигм, визначено можливі рішення, спрямовані на подолання цього конфлікту. *Наукова новизна*. Відокремлено та проаналізовано шляхи рецепції травми війни в мистецтві через віддзеркалення, адаптацію, боротьбу та маніфестацію. Після проведених інтерв'ю та анкетувань визначено дві парадигми в побудові рецепції війни: 1) «Мистецтво — це безпечний притулок», тому треба уникати всього, що може травмувати, і робити мистецтво за часів війни виключно розважального характеру (провідними напрямами є адаптація та алегоричне ескапістське віддзеркалення без прямої вказівки на теми, що травмують) та 2) «Натуралістичне мистецтво про війну», згідно з яким мистецтво має бути якомога більш серйозним і трагічним, достовірно передавати жахи війни, уникати розважального контенту (шляхами рецепції є натуралістичне віддзеркалення та акції арт-активізму у варіантах маніфестації (мурали) та боротьби (акції мистецького спротиву)). *Висновки*. Проведене дослідження показало, що парадигми, попри гостру конкуренцію, мають не контроверсійний, а взаємодоповнюючий характер. Вони відображають різні стадії рецепції та, відповідно, прагнення різних верств населення, які проходять ці стадії сприйняття травми. Якщо визначити як загальноприйнятну культурну політику тільки одну з парадигм, це може суттєво дискримінувати частину населення: розважальний контент травмує ті верстви населення, які пройшли адаптацію і зараз активно працюють над подоланням, а отже, відчувають провину за недостатні серйозність і співчуття стражданням. Натуралістичне мистецтво може травмувати тих, хто постраждав від війни, ще не пройшов етап адаптації, ще не отримав психологічної допомоги, не знає засобів стабілізації і прагне завдяки мистецтву поповнити свій ресурс позитивних емоцій. Уникнення жорстокості в мистецтві, так само як і уникнення розважального складника, не є розв'язанням проблеми, тому що за часів війни люди знаходяться в різних життєвих ситуаціях і звертаються до мистецтва з різною метою. Досить ефективною є практика попередження про чутливий контент, яка допомагає мистецтву знайти відповідну аудиторію і сприяє подоланню травми.

Ключові слова: розважальне мистецтво; мистецтво війни; травма; жорстокість