# The Edge of Evidence: On the Labour of Witnessing

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*Figure 1: Exhumation of the bodies in Motyzhyn on 4 April 2022.*

Photograph by Dmytro Larin. Image provided courtesy of the author.

## Photograph

A big group of people is standing on the edge of an open grave. They form a circle. The image composition situates the viewer on the opposite side from where their thin silhouettes seem even thinner, extended upwards by the thick background wall of thin pines that are widespread in the Ukrainian Polissia. The grave is unusual, not a rectangle. From above, it probably looks like a laceration on the earth's surface. The grave was dug either with extreme carelessness or in an extreme hurry or, most likely, both. It is very shallow, and the four bodies that bear signs of violent deaths,

with their hands bound behind their backs, are visible after the removal of only a thin layer of soil.

This is Motyzhyn. Together with other toponyms in the Kyiv region – Polisske, Kukhari, Zhovtneve, Andriyivka, Kopyliv, Severynivka, Buzova, Horenychi, Bucha, and Demydiv – the name of Motyzhyn now denotes a site of trauma caused by torture and murder conducted by the Russian forces against Ukrainian civilians on the temporarily occupied territories in the first weeks following the full-scale invasion. This photograph (Fig. 1) documents one of the first encounters with evidence of extreme violence. It was taken by Ukrainian photographer Dmytro Larin on 4 April 2022; he stood among journalists from international and Ukrainian state media outlets who visited Motyzhyn after the withdrawal of the Russian troops. The camera in his hands becomes our mechanical eye to glimpse this moment of encounter.

## Mass Grave

This is the grave of Motyzhyn's village head, 50-year-old Olga Sukhenko; her husband Ihor; her son Oleksandr; and an unidentified male body.[1] As the forensic mapping of the area shows, the burial ground included another single grave of a lone woman near it, while a burnt-out, shelled house used by the Russian soldiers for the killings, a storehouse whose porch was a base for officers during torture sessions, and an officers' quarters nearby were set as their detention and torture sites across the woods on the north-east outskirts of the village, with several underground cisterns and wells in the field, also used by the invaders to confine the tortured villagers.[2] Equipped teams were working in the woods searching for mines; after the grave was discovered, the bodies were also checked for improvised explosive devises[3] before the exhumation process commenced.

When the Russian troops entered the village, the Sukhenkos chose to stay and coordinate aid for community members, territorial defence troops, and evacuation

1 It was later identified as the body of Serhiy Kubrushko. See: Mykola Zamikula, "Russian Soldiers Execute the Village Mayor of Motyzhyn: Bodies of Olga Sukhenko and Her Family Found", *Virtual Museum of Russian Aggression*, 01 June 2022, https://rusaggression.gov.ua/en/-f7e9c26137f767fdc18668af57706401.html [accessed: 05.08.2024].

2 Emma Graham-Harrison, Isobel Koshiw, and Lorenzo Tondo, "How the Barbaric Lessons Learned in Syria Came to Haunt One Small Ukrainian Village", *The Guardian*, 30 April 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/30/how-the-barbaric-lessons-learned-in-syria-came-to-haunt-one-small-ukrainian-village [accessed: 05.08.2024].

3 Andrii Tsapliienko, "Doslidzhennia zvilnenykh mistechok poblyzu Kyieva vidkryvaiut vse novi zvirstva rosiian" ("Research on Liberated Towns Near Kyiv Reveals More Russian Atrocities"), *TSN*, 05 April 2022, https://tsn.ua/ato/podalshe-doslidzhennya-zvilnenih-mistechok-pobliz u-kiyeva-vidkrivayut-vse-novi-zvirstva-rosiyan-2029042.html [accessed: 05.08.2024].

convoys from Motyzhyn.[4] Olga Sukhenko warned people to stay home via her Facebook post. As a report by the International Partnership for Human Rights, Truth Hounds, and Global Diligence states,[5] following their failed attempts to surround and capture Kyiv, the Russian troops set their base in Motyzhyn, among several other towns and villages, and after the Ukrainian forces ambushed their positions in the area, the invaders retaliated against the civilian population by firing at their yards and houses, and at the civilians themselves.[6] Under the occupation of the Kyiv region, as well as throughout the country, the members of municipal administration and local government teams have been systematically targeted by direct threat, abduction, and torture to force their collaboration with the occupational regime. By the end of the month, when the Russian military managed to track local resistance efforts, they abducted, tortured, and, within several days, executed the Sukhenko family. Soldiers from the Ukrainian volunteer battalion 'Crimea' found their mass grave on 2 April 2022.[7]

Despite the consistent abuse of human rights and the reports of torture in the temporarily occupied territories of Crimea as well as the Donetsk and Luhansk regions after 2014, outside Ukraine, there was no substantial public discussion of the violence in Ukraine's war zone. It changed 'after Bucha', when evidence of extreme violence against civilians opened the space for internal and international awareness about the cases of 'genocide' and 'crimes against humanity'[8] committed by the Rus-

4 Zamikula, "Russian Soldiers Execute the Village Mayor of Motyzhyn".

5 See, for example, the report by International Partnership for Human Rights, Truth Hounds, and Global Diligence, which sets out evidence of war crimes committed by the Russian Armed Forces: International Partnership for Human Rights, Truth Hounds, and Global Diligence, *Attacks on Civilians in Motyzhyn, Kopyliv, and Severynivka, Ukraine*, 30 January 2023, https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Attacks-Kyiv-Oblast-final-final.pdf, 3–10 [accessed: 05.08.2024]; and Zamikula, "Russian Soldiers Execute the Village Mayor of Motyzhyn".

6 International Partnership for Human Rights, Truth Hounds, and Global Diligence, *Attacks on Civilians*, 8, 9.

7 Ibid.

8 As British lawyer Philippe Sands explains the legal concepts that define different intents behind mass killing that became operative in the aftermath of the Second World War – 'crimes against humanity' and 'genocide', respectively introduced by Jewish lawyers Hersch Lauterpach and Raphael Lemkin – he summarises the distinction as follows: "Crimes against humanity focuses on the killing of large numbers of individuals. The systematic, mass killing of a very large number of individuals will constitute a crime against humanity. Genocide has a different focus. Genocide focuses not on the killing of individuals, but on the destruction of groups. In other words, a large number of individuals who form part of a single group. And the two concepts in this way have different objectives. One aims at protecting the individual; the other aims at protecting the group." Robert Coalson, "What's the Difference Between 'Crimes Against Humanity' and 'Genocide?' An Interview with Philippe Sands", *The Atlantic*, 19 March 2013, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/03/whats-the-differe

sian state in Ukraine. Although the identification of the tragic events in Motyzhyn as genocide may still seem questionable to some legal representatives or scholars, the killing of the four citizens is not a standalone event but one systemically reproduced by the Russian forces in the context of the ongoing war, either in the form of killing and torturing groups of Ukrainians or Ukrainian individuals en masse. The slowness of such recognition is due to the rupture between the political and legal understanding of these war crimes. While in Ukraine the public recognition of such killings as crimes of genocide or crimes against humanity (depending on the intent in each case) is nearly univocal, it takes time and the tremendous effort of legal teams and witnesses for these crimes to be recognised as such in the court of law; even then, such recognition is not guaranteed as the nature of intent and individual responsibility remain difficult to prove. There is always the risk that the mass grave in Motyzhyn will remain perceived as a standalone casualty of war and not a systemic occurrence of war crimes.

Larin's photograph is one among many other photographic and video documentations of the evidence of extreme violence committed against Ukrainian civilians that plays an important role in establishing the scope and distribution of violence. Apart from its potential role as evidence in the court of law, this and other similar photographs perform another important role in the complex process that Ukrainian society must undergo to envision the future. It is a role of mediation – both in the sense of building a connection to or a necessary separation from the horrid nature of the war and of recovering from the trauma and shock – by building a relation with it instead of repressing it. To explain how the process of building such a relation occurs, we discuss the iconic and indexical role of this photograph; then I focus on the process of 'witnessing' of which the subject of war is part – by engaging simultaneously with the documentation of the war reality and the war reality itself.

## Icon

This documentation brought to public attention the methods of torture and killing of Ukrainian civilians employed by the Russian forces in the first weeks after the full-scale invasion. Quite expectedly, horrid media reports were countered by massive waves of instrumentalised denial in the form of official statements from the Russian government and then amplified and disseminated through the media sphere not only within the Russian Federation but also as far as the Russian state's soldiers

nce-between-crimes-against-humanity-and-genocide/274167/ [accessed: 05.08.2024]. Also see: Philippe Sands, *East West Street: On the Origins of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity*, New York: Knopf, 2016, 22, 26.

of the information front could reach by targeting the populations of other countries.[9] The reports put forward the reason for urgently addressing the entire scope of war atrocities during the ongoing ten-year war on the territory of Ukraine. Since early April 2022, the documentation of the Sukhenkos' mass grave in Motyzhyn has become one of the most recognisable representations of violence conducted by the Russian forces in the Kyiv region and elsewhere. Semiotically speaking, the photograph became 'iconic'.

To address the iconic nature of this photograph, I turn to the work of American philosopher, logician, and semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce, who, in his writing in the early 1900s, introduced his theory of semiotics that remains influential today. To Peirce, as well as other semioticians and structuralists, a sign is a composition of a signifier and a signified, a fundamental element for mobilising the processes of navigating reality or meaning construction. Peirce's important contribution to semiotics was in distinguishing different types of signs – icon, index, and symbol – based on the different relationships between a signifier and a signified, or between an object or event and their representations.[10]

"An *icon* represents its object insofar as it resembles that object", Peirce writes in *Notes on Topical Geometry*. "It conveys no information, nor does it put the mind into a

9 For example, after my interviews for Canadian TV and radio about the war in Ukraine in spring 2022, I received emails from Canadian viewers and listeners with screenshots of messages from 'unknown people' warning Canadians that the scenes of violence in Bucha "were all staged".

10 The scholarship on digital media and iconic images is rich and extensive. "Iconic images are often credited with the ability to mobilise public opinion and influence political decision-making processes" or they are often criticised, as Mette Mortensen, Stuart Allan, and Chris Peters write, "for simplifying and diverting attention away from institutional power structures". Mette Mortensen, Stuart Allan, and Chris Peters, "The Iconic Image in a Digital Age: Editorial Mediations over the Alan Kurdi Photographs", *Nordicom Review* 38/2, 2017, 71–86, here 73. As means of publishing and dissemination, digital images have a tremendous impact on the meaning of iconic images: they amplify the rhetorical powers of iconic images. The nuances of these processes are well documented and broadly discussed by many researchers. See, for example: Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Icons, Iconicity, and Cultural Critique", *Sociologica* 9/1, 2015, 1–32; Marco Solaroli, "Iconicity: A Category for Social and Cultural Theory", *Sociologica* 1, 2015, 1–52; and Natalia Mielczarek, "The Dead Syrian Refugee Boy Goes Viral: Funerary Aylan Kurdi Memes as Tools of Mourning and Visual Reparation in Remix Culture", *Visual Communication* 19/4, 2020, 506–530. Having acknowledged this, I also want to note that in my essay, I only engage with the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, which inspired or became a reference point for most of such literature. Here, for the purpose of my argument, I engage with Peirce's semiotic framework by relying on his very basic yet important distinctions between different types of signs – icon, index, and symbol – hinting at each of these signs' evidential capacity.

position to acquire information."[11] Yet the utility of icons for "all thinking" is undeniable, he insists several years later in *Definitions for Baldwin's Dictionary*: "An icon is a representamen which refers to its object merely because it resembles, or is analogous to, that object. Such is a photograph", Peirce suggests, but also "a figure in geometry, or an algebraical array of symbols which […] are analogous to the objects they represent".[12] The objects in a photograph of a war crime scene look like their real-life counterparts and can be recognised in real life. An icon, thus, is the simplest among all signs: it establishes a relation of resemblance between an object or event and its representation by quickly linking it to deduce the meaning of a concrete representation. To achieve that, an icon operates within a horizontal chain of similarities by the logic of comparison; it appeals to a broad spectrum of identical representations and situates a particular representation among them. Larin's photograph is an icon that represents a scene of violence. As viewers, we come to this conclusion immediately; an icon forces us to jump to it: what looks like a scene of committed extreme violence shows us precisely that – a scene of extreme violence.

The photograph taken by Dmytro Larin is one of an extended variety. It is a networked multitude of invariants taken by those documenters – journalists, politicians, and activists – standing on the edge of the mass grave, who captured the scene of violence by different technological means and from various angles. A quick search of 'Motyzhyn' on Google Images returns a legion of variations of this photograph. Some of them are professional, compositionally perfect documentation. Others are products of the web's 'digestion' of original photographs: they are poor-quality "cop[ies] in motion" with substandard resolution,[13] adjusted to various purposes, compressed, and circulated through different media channels. As German artist and theorist Hito Steyerl notes about such images, they accelerate and deteriorate in the information flow across platforms in all possible formats:

> [A] preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.[14]

11 Charles Sanders Pierce, *Notes on Topical Geometry*, manuscript, 1899–1900, 3–4, quoted in: Mats Bergman and Sami Paavola (eds.), "Icon", *The Commens Dictionary: Peirce's Terms in His Own Words*, New Edition, 2014, http://www.commens.org/dictionary/term/icon [accessed: 06.08.2024].

12 Charles Sanders Pierce, *Definitions for Baldwin's Dictionary*, manuscript, 1901–1902, quoted in: Bergman and Paavola, "Icon".

13 Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image", *e-flux* 10, November 2009, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/ [accessed: 05.08.2024].

14 Ibid.

Altogether, it is a voluminous and multidimensional image that demonstrates the scope of extreme violence. The photograph is from Motyzhyn, but the crime scene it represents also resembles multiple scenes of violence from Polisske, Kukhari, Zhovtneve, Andriyivka, Kopyliv, Severynivka, Buzova, Horenychi, Demydiv, and other cities and villages.

The encounter with this joint image assembled of similar variants from across networks shaped the shared understanding of the point of no return that divided the war into 'before' and 'after': for an overwhelming part of the Ukrainian population, any negotiations with the enemy were no longer possible 'after Bucha', as the war crimes in the Kyiv region are referred to by the name of the largest massacre in the area, with a death toll exceeding a thousand civilians. The resemblance between the cases in this group of war crimes indicates their 'systemic' nature: they share common forms and methods of terror, torture, and the killing of people – hands tied behind the back and gunshot wounds to the knees and the back of heads were too often identified on the bodies buried in mass graves.[15]

The toponym 'Motyzhyn', just like other toponymic names in the region associated with the systemic violence against civilians, calls for 'differentiation' between similar tragedies by identifying nuances, circumstances, and variations in all the cases. Similarly, not only does Larin's photograph, along with other images, help viewers understand the meaning of resemblances between the war crimes in the Kyiv region, it also enables us to ponder the specificity of each case taken separately. Therefore, the photograph of exhumation in Motyzhyn is not only iconic but also indexical.

## Index

According to Peirce, 'indices' differ from 'icons' because they bear a physical relationship with what they represent: they look like their counterparts in reality and are directly linked to the objects of the event represented by the indexical signs. Importantly, indices point towards the meaning of visual representations acting as 'material traces' of an event. Smoke, smell, or footprints on the road are all indexical signs of what has passed or what is still coming. They are indexical of the extended reality outside the frame; they are the orientation for action by 'directing attention' towards something, like smoke signals do.[16] These signs imply a 'physical contiguity' with the

15 Oleksandr Stashevskyi, "Bucolic Ukraine Forest Is Site of Mass Grave Exhumation", *The Associated Press*, 13 June 2022, https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-business-criminal-investigations-bed8a5fac1dab4cfcdf45aed815ff510 [accessed: 05.08.2024].

16 Albert Atkin, "Peirce on the Index and Indexical Reference", *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 41/1, Winter 2005, 161–188, here 163–165.

source of a photographic imprint – an object or an event; as Albert Atkin eloquently explains, indices are 'caused' by what they 'signify'.[17] In other words, unlike icons, which operate at the level of 'signification' to enable 'recognition', indices bring together the processes of 'signification' and 'causation'.[18] Larin's photograph of the exhumation in Motyzhyn participates in establishing two types of relation between an object or event and its representation: first, the 'relation of resemblance' and, second, the 'relation of causation'.

Being iconic, this photograph first opens the space for recognition, leading to the subsequent steps of processing or working through the trauma caused by extreme violence against Ukrainian civilians during the ongoing war. Because it is also indexical, this photograph then moves the viewers from the generalisation necessary to recognise resemblances to a microwork of differentiating and linking the scenes of violence to particular locations and communities. The photograph captures the scene caused by what the photograph signifies: the violent murder of a particular family with traces of specific methods of torture. It also grounds the work of recognition that is initiated through the photograph's iconic qualities. As much as the role of the photograph is crucial for shaping societal knowledge about Russia's war crimes, the effort of bearing witness is fully carried by the subjects of war.[19]

## Witnessing

The Russo–Ukrainian War has often been regarded as the most documented war in history. The kinetic action of this war is observed, analysed, and studied by various military, security, legal, and political institutions and organisations, academic and non-academic, as well as independent bloggers, whose work accumulates, organises, and processes big quantities of data produced by digital technologies that are directly or indirectly engaged in war. In part, the ongoing documentation is automated, since this war is led in the time of so-called intelligent machines, which span from individual devices to major corporate infrastructures with their means of collecting and analysing data that enter assemblages with combat technologies

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 In our book with Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyberwar and Revolution*, we developed the notion of 'the subject of cyberwar' to describe the embeddedness of the subject of war in its setting, where the subject's position simultaneously establishes different subjective functions – a target, a worker, a soldier – in other words, the subject of (cyber)war is someone who, simultaneously, struggles against it and is fully entangled and often complicit in some of the processes. See: Nick Dyer-Witheford and Svitlana Matviyenko, *Cyberwar and Revolution: Digital Subterfuge in Global Capitalism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019.

to produce an evolving complex and multilayered record of a battlefield, an 'operational image' of its shifting map, part of which seems to be deadly grabbed by the Russian dragon's teeth. Oscillating between non-representational and representational records, the swarms of 'operational images'[20] opened a possibility for digital forensics, leading to the production of a new type of spectacle – a real-time view of the war – simultaneously characterised by ultimate immediacy and deferral, transparency and opacity, its apparent completeness, and extreme fragmentary nature, which, in addition to the augmented character of such images, makes it extremely hard to determine whether such an 'image' has the potential to become evidence in all or any of the settings – in a legal court, in the court of public opinion, and in history.

Using these various data, investigative journalist groups are working together with experts from international and state organisations to identify instances of war crimes to hold the offenders in the Russian government and military accountable. Due to the circumstances, this work is often done remotely.[21] Teams investigate digital traces by aggregating and cross-reading open data and open-source intelligence. The primary focus of my interest in this essay, however, is not only the documenting practices that are organised and curated by journalist and human rights organisations. In addition to these coordinated efforts, after February 2022, documenting war crimes has become a vast grassroots initiative that has reached an unprecedented scale as a national movement, involving people with different interests and occupations – ranging from professional journalists to popular bloggers. I read the broad spectrum of such diverse practices of documenting violence and war crimes committed against civilians and the military – on (de)occupied territories, in captivity, closer and farther from the front lines[22] – as a particular type of communal labour amid the war – the labour of witnessing.

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20 Jussi Parikka, *Operational Images: From the Visual to the Invisual*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023; Trevor Paglen, "Operational Images", *e-flux* 59, November 2014, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/59/61130/operational-images/ [accessed: 05.08.2024]; and Harun Farocki, *Eye / Machine*, video work, 23:00, Germany, 2000.

21 For example, such investigations are led by the Netherlands-based investigative journalism group Bellingcat, or Forensic Architecture, a multidisciplinary research group based at Goldsmiths, University of London. For more, see the investigative work of the mentioned and other groups and organisations on their websites: Bellingcat, official website, https://www.bellingcat.com/ [accessed: 05.08.2024]; Forensic Architecture, official website, https://forensic-architecture.org/ [accessed: 05.08.2024]; The Center for Spatial Technologies, official website, https://spatialtech.info/ [accessed: 05.08.2024]; The Reckoning Project, official website, https://www.thereckoningproject.com/ [accessed: 05.08.2024]; and Truth Hounds, official website, https://truth-hounds.org/en/about/[accessed: 05.08.2024].

22 Here, the examples may include the Berlin-based Ukrainian investigative group the Center for Spatial Technologies, the Kyiv-based investigative group The Reckoning Project, or the war crimes research group Truth Hounds that, in addition to other methods, work with tes-

Again, as the value of synthetic[23] and operational images is on the rise, we still rely on the human witness, but this witness, as Shela Sheikh explains, "can no longer be a solitary figure", but rather, "one within a collectivity".[24] Bearing witness is a broader communal effort – with the emphasis on both 'communal' and 'effort'. In other words, a significant effort is needed to pass from seeing, living, or even recording the evidence of violence, which we usually understand as 'witnessing'. This effort moves towards finding the words and frameworks that would take the subject of war from the dimension of the unbearable, which arrests the body via extreme affect or anxiety attacking a fragile sense of self, to the dimension of the symbolic, where the trauma is not repressed, but inscribed in the subject's new reality for the sake of finding or building the essential systems of care and survival. To me, the significance of Larin's photograph is precisely how it captures the moment of encounter with the evidence of violence by a group of people surrounding the mass grave, who appear in proximity to the evidence and in the same frame with it.

After the full-scale invasion, and especially 'after Bucha', the flow of documentation indexical of extreme violence became overwhelming. In conversations with Ukrainian art historian Asia Bazdyrieva, we conceived the notion 'labour of witnessing' while thinking about the ways Ukrainian citizens are immersed, to different degrees, in the raw reality of war while simultaneously producing and consuming its documentation. There was a shared sense that the growing number of documented war crimes and reports on violence put a responsibility on us as a collective to be permanently engaged with this material – often too unbearable to watch, listen to, and read – but as the subjects of war who must know the enemy, we did not have a choice to withdraw. The lives of the subjects of war depend on that knowledge.

Taking this notion further in my work, I conceptualise the practices of diarising war in terms of the concept of 'labour' by delinking it from the production of objects as it has been traditionally used in critical theory. Instead, I draw from feminist scholarship to focus on its affective and, therefore, material component as the subject's corporeal resonances that produce a labourer's embodied subjectivity as part of a collective.[25] Speaking to victims, visiting sites of killings, and viewing records of testimonies became our national job, and the most important part of it was taking in this knowledge through the body and finding the words to speak about it – to people outside Ukraine and, probably, to each other – by restoring the visceral

timonies of direct witnesses to document, verify, codify, and archive information about war crimes in Ukraine as grounds for cases for national and international justice mechanisms.

23 This includes images that have been created using computer-generated graphics and/or AI, rather than being captured by a camera.

24 Shela Sheikh, "The Future of the Witness: Nature, Race and More-than-Human Environmental Publics", *Kronos* 44/1, 2018, 145–162, here 148.

25 See, for example, Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies", *Social Text* 22/2, 2004, 117–139; and Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

communal ties with each other across the mental and physical territories of trauma and rupture. As American critical phenomenologist and feminist philosopher Shiloh Whitney explains with her notion of 'byproductive affective labour', "the affects the affective laborer produces in the course of her work [...] are not alienated from her in the process of production: once produced, they do not take leave of her body, of her posture and disposition",[26] which leads her to assume that "the work that concerns affective byproducts" is metabolised by a worker.[27] Understanding the *value* of this process requires a recognition of the image's utter incompleteness, despite its multiplicity and indexicality; it requires a subversion of the popular understanding that an image is worth a thousand words. I read these practices of verbalising different war experiences – lived by narrators themselves or heard from other witnesses – as channelling such firsthand accounts of war to remote world audiences. But also, and more importantly, these practices are channelled towards other Ukrainian citizens with similar or different experiences of war for the purposes of the synchronisation and redistribution of knowledge and the burden of trauma among the members of a society for the sake of producing a shared understanding of the unfolding tragedy.

This labour of witnessing is a process that is produced by and contributes to the production of social relations; it participates in the ongoing recovery of social relations that are continuously targeted and damaged by the invading force of this war. What is clear now is that the 'witnessing labourers' are those who 'choose to' and, at the same time, 'have no choice' due to their embeddedness in the structure of war. In that context, they continue channelling the meaning of their direct encounter with violence or its documentation for the sake of sustaining the living memory of a community under the threat of erasure. The 'witnessing labourers' are those who simultaneously are 'of' and 'against' this war.

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26 Shiloh Whitney, "Byproductive Labor: A Feminist Theory of Affective Labor Beyond the Productive–Reproductive Distinction", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 44/6, 2018, 637–660, here 646.

27 Ibid., 643.

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