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Bottom-Up Visual Doublespeak and Meta Community Guidelines During Modern Conflicts:

The case of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022

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Abstract

After the start of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, content depicting the war atrocities committed by the Russian soldiers flooded social media. Facebook and Instagram kept removing the videos and photographs depicting violence and breaking their community guidelines. This study critically examines the effectiveness of the communication strategy of Ukrainian artists that emerged in response to Facebook and Instagram's limitations. In the form of illustrations, Ukrainian artists were disguising the violent events of the Russian war in Ukraine.

This thesis explores the communication strategy of Ukrainian artists as a case of doublespeak. Previous studies understood doublespeak as a top-down communication approach aimed to deceive the receiver of the information. However, through the modern digital environment, Ukrainian artists are reclaiming power by reinventing doublespeak as a bottom-up strategy. Bottom-up doublespeak emerges to navigate through social media's content restrictions and communicate war-related events through illustrations. The theoretical framework comprises literature on social media moderation, conflictual media events, visual art aesthetics, and power. I examine the material from the production and reception sides through the multi-method approach. First, I conduct the iconological analysis of 8 illustrations depicting war events by Ukrainian artists. Then, I demonstrate these pictures arranged by their increasing complexity to understand during 11 semi-structured interviews with Swedish citizens, following their meaning-making process.

The iconological analysis uncovers that Ukrainian artists employing visual doublespeak aim to create a precise copy of the photographed war-related events or fill in the picture with symbols that enable the viewer to decipher the meaning behind the illustration more easily. The interviews demonstrate that the increasing complexity of understanding makes the viewer think of illustrations as referring to abstraction rather than reality. Illustrative elements and humor also influenced the perception of violence, decreasing its intensity. Textual signature triggered rational perception, while illustrations without text were deemed polysemic. When the interviewees needed help interpreting the illustration, they often addressed stereotypes and popular culture references to explain the unknown.

Keywords: conflictual media events, social media, content moderation, political art, meaning-making

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There are many people whose presence has become particularly valuable since the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion of my homeland.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the people who admire, romanticize, and aestheticize war. To those who see in it anything apart from the disgusting and fate-breaking monster whose rotten stench gets inside the walls of every house, permeates the clothes, and makes one's brain flow out the ears. Everything war touches starts to rot and is supposed to repulse. But some like the scent of putridity. While I have no hope for their change of mind, I wrote this thesis for those whose minds can still be saved from decomposing. Only when observing the real face of war, can one tell how it punctures every taken breath.

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After all, in this new, fractured, shifted reality, where does war as a topic of conversation end and where does the domain of peace begin? A refrigerator truck full of dead bodies – is this about peace or war? Taking women to places away from the shelling – what is this in support of? A peaceful resolution to the conflict? Buying a tourniquet that saves a serviceman's life – is this humanitarian aid or aid for combatants? And in general, assisting those who are fighting for you, for civilians in basements, and children in the metro – does this reach beyond the confines of pleasant conversation about kindness and empathy?

Serhiy Zhadan, 2022, n.p.

Introduction

At 5 a.m. on February 24, 2022, the Russian missiles hit the homes of millions of Ukrainians. More than two years have passed since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, and the world has witnessed the terror Russia has brought upon Ukrainians. At the same time, getting through Facebook and Instagram moderation policies became a substantial struggle for many Ukrainians trying to communicate the truth about the devastating consequences of Russia's actions to the world. Photo and video publications depicting Russian war atrocities were considered too sensitive to be published on Facebook and Instagram (Mosorko, 2022). Consequently, these social media platforms restricted, shadow-banned, or entirely removed such content or creators from the platform (Boborykin & Sribnyy, 2022).

The challenges of Ukrainian digital creators illustrate a broader problem in modern Western societies: Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram serve as a space where power relations shape the perception of reality and form attitudes, but not necessarily through depicting the truth. In war, it is essential to distinguish truth from lies as it affects vulnerable people who need help. Despite the limitations of violent content on Facebook and Instagram, some are finding ways to be heard. This study explores one such strategy of empowering Ukrainian users and bypassing Meta guidelines to make Ukrainian voices heard.

When publishing photographs and videos on social media became complicated, Ukrainian artists created digital illustrations depicting war and violence happening in the country to bypass the community guidelines and not have their content removed (Kudryashova, 2022; polosunya, 2024). Importantly, this communication technique does not attempt to use illustrative techniques to convey abstract ideas, as often happens in art. Instead, in the context of conflict, the use of digital illustration becomes a necessary method for artists to communicate the events that occurred in Ukraine to the wider world. By changing the information form from a photograph or a video to an illustration, Ukrainian artists have also changed Facebook and Instagram's approach to moderating it. Photographs are usually seen as more real or true (Joffe, 2008), while paintings immediately imply considerable subjectivity (Corner, 2011). Thus, by trying to document the violent events of the war, Ukrainian artists are moving to change this approach and make the viewer believe in the truthfulness of the illustration on the same level as the photograph. Still, they do this because of the social media restrictions, not because this method is more accurate or effective. Their accuracy and effectiveness, though, are central to this study.

Ukrainian artists apply various styles and approaches to depicting violent events. Some illustrations contain English text to target foreign audiences and convince them to help Ukraine, while others have Ukrainian signatures endeavoring to unite Ukrainians around the idea of resistance. Sometimes, these pictures have no text but contain multiple stereotypes and universal symbols that would be understandable to foreign audiences. In other cases, these symbols are particular to the Ukrainian context. Nevertheless, the unifying idea behind all of them is to bypass Facebook and Instagram content moderation policies and communicate the truth about what is happening in Ukraine during the war. Why does Facebook restrict violent content when it is a reality that many face?

Facebook and Instagram are often used as business tools to promote one's product. At the same time, these social media platforms are businesses themselves and, therefore, see income as their activity's primary objective (Kim et al., 2016). Still, most social media users are not businesses but consumers (Kemp, 2024). This wording is already problematic as it takes the platform's perspective, where a human is a consumer in the first place. This vision is at the core of the problem of social media treating people as a source of income and consequently manipulating their emotions into consuming only types of content that increase engagement (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013) and keep people happily attached to social media (Kim & Kim, 2019). Social media prioritize profit over sharing life experiences, treating their platforms as more of a marketplace where even war becomes a commodity. Consequently, such an environment makes the truth dependent on where the money flows rather than how the reality constitutes it.

I demonstrate how Ukrainian artists overcome Facebook and Instagram restrictions. To achieve this, I employ the concept of doublespeak developed by William Lutz (1996) and demonstrate how, in the course of the power struggle between the social media platform and its Ukrainian users, the latter reinvent and utilize doublespeak to achieve their communicative goals and bypass social media's limitations. In addition, I assess the effectiveness of such a communication technique by analyzing it from both the production and reception sides. The existing research addresses the differences in the perception of paintings and photographs as objective (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Jones, 1997; Sabate et al., 2014; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021), the differences in perception of textual and visual content (Joffe, 2008), and the impediments of photography and paintings in their ability to reflect reality (Corner, 2011; Hopkins, 1998).

However, this scholarship tends to examine illustrations as an art piece but not as a communicative method. Indeed, not every painting is created to reflect reality and can focus on abstract ideas. In contrast, the Ukrainian illustrations were created to reflect the reality of war in a way that Facebook would not notice. Therefore, I argue that to understand if illustrations can capture reality and be perceived as accurately reflecting it, focusing on the differences between a painting and other forms of visual art like photography is not enough. Instead, it is essential to understand how the artist portrayed the actual event and then examine how viewers perceive it. Moreover, because this research focuses on digital illustrations, it is also crucial to consider limitations that come with social media, like content moderation and users' short attention spans (Bushuyev et al., 2023; Wu & Huberman, 2007).

Exploring these dynamics, this thesis analyzes both the production and reception of bottom-up doublespeak, as shown by the illustrations published on Meta platforms in the context of war. On the production side, I conduct an iconographical analysis of the illustrations under question to find their intrinsic meaning (Panofsky, 1991). The reception side focuses on the perspective of Swedish Facebook and Instagram users. The Swedish audience's perspective is important as they are not deeply involved in the Ukrainian context while still being usually politically engaged (Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2015; Statistics Sweden, 2023) and aware of the Russian war against Ukraine enough to be able to recognize it. During the semi-structured interviews (Rose, 2016), I will demonstrate the illustrations created by Ukrainian artists to Swedish participants. In doing this, I aim to uncover what pieces of information are lost or altered during the interviewees' meaning-making process and thus do not reflect the artist's intended idea. The overarching research questions driving the thesis are:

1. How can we understand the visual art published on Meta platforms in the context of power relations between the platform and its users in times of war?
2. How do Ukrainian digital art creators respond to the limitations set by the community guidelines in times of war?
3. How do Swedish Meta platform users perceive the visual art created by Ukrainian artists depicting war events?

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter outlines the existing literature on the relationship dynamics between Meta platforms and their users and illustrates attitudes towards war-related violent content. It also provides a comprehensive theoretical overview of the place of bottom-up visual doublespeak in relation to power in the context of Facebook and

Instagram's content moderation. The second chapter provides a methodological framework and critical reflections on applying the selected multimethod approach. The third chapter presents the analysis of the data collected from Ukrainian illustrations and interviews with Swedish participants, delivering the results through the theoretical framework provided in the literature review. The last chapter will offer a compelling overview of the main findings, answer the research questions, and contribute to the knowledge about communication of war through art, and the role of Facebook and Instagram in this process.

Literature review

Introduction to the literature review

This chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, I provide an overview of the literature elaborating on the dynamics between Meta platforms, businesses, and users. I also elaborate on the challenges Ukrainian digital creators face in times of war and introduce the concept of doublespeak, which drives this research. The second section outlines power relations in contemporary social media platforms and theorizes the top-down doublespeak. Finally, the third section presents the literature overview on the differences in perception of various forms of visual communication and the role of aesthetics in this process. It also theorizes visual bottom-up doublespeak.

Meta Moderation or Truth

Facebook arguably is the biggest modern-day agora. Facebook, with its:

> [C]urrent total of **3.05 billion** [monthly users,] is already equal to 48 percent of all people aged 13 and above living on Earth today, but if we remove China again [where Facebook is blocked], the data indicate that a massive **59.6 percent** of all those people can use Facebook already do so – every month" (Kemp, 2024, n.p, bold in original).

Even with China included, based on the global monthly active user count, Meta products (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram) take three out of the five leading positions, with Facebook on top (Statista, 2024). Interestingly, 60.9% and 51.9% of internet users claim that they use the internet for "finding information" and "keeping up to date with news and events" (Kemp, 2024, n.p) respectively, while only 19,7% use social media for "posting about your life" (Kemp, 2024, n.p). Thus, a fifth of all social media users are not content creators but pure consumers, making our biggest modern-day agora somehow unbalanced. Here, only one in five people speak, while four listen.

Expressing oneself digitally is a great privilege and freedom that only one in five chooses to enact on social media. However, one may wonder whether it is always a choice. According to Lutz's (1996) conceptualization of *doublespeak*, those in power often misuse this freedom to deceive those listening, those with less power. With social media's emergence and wide availability, those with little power received a way to claim it and establish their voice to stand up for what they cherish and believe in. Still, despite the high levels of modern connectivity, sharing one's experience of war is a struggle. In this dissertation, I argue that social media

users living through war try to reclaim power through doublespeak, changing its goal and form. In the example of Ukrainian artists, I showcase how they overcome the constraints set by Meta platforms in the form of content moderation. While being able to speak is crucial, even more significant is to be heard. I contend that the obstacles war victims face result from social media's priorities where if one is solvent, one is heard. That is why social media is such a popular place to address for those doing politics and business.

Social media platforms are a great place to do business, and they are businesses themselves in the first place. Nowadays, platforms like Facebook and Instagram are dedicated to providing the best possible solutions to businesses that want to sell their products faster, on a bigger scale, and more efficiently (Isodje, 2013; Venkateswaran et al., 2019). Furthermore, they are more than successful, as in 2022 compared to 2021, the U.S. Internet advertising revenues have increased by 10,8% and are almost three times as big as the runner-up - TV advertising (PWC & IAB, 2023). Facebook's relations with businesses on its platform are extremely mutually beneficial as advertising is Facebook's primary source of income (Kim et al., 2016). Facebook made advertisement placing so convenient that its algorithms can provide businesses with approximate estimations of the expected returns from such cooperation weighted on the individual user's predicted ability to pay (Matz et al., 2019; Oikonomidis & Fouskas, 2019). Thus, Facebook's financial success and unchanging leading position in the competition stems from its attractive business model and user solvency. The main task is to keep the people interested enough while scrolling to get away with using their data.

Entertainment and conflict are two main kinds of content that stimulate engagement on social media platforms. "Entertaining content was found to be the most influential, by increasing the engagement on all three individual levels—liking, commenting, and sharing" (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013, p.854). Moreover, Kim & Kim (2019) uncovered that entertaining content not only increases user engagement but also creates a positive attitude towards Facebook as the platform. Scholarship found that Facebook stimulates a more rational engagement, while Instagram, due to its aesthetic emphasis on app design, creates a more emotional environment (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). However, is this rationality on Facebook really the case, especially considering the significant rates of polarization and radicalization on most modern social media platforms, especially those as influential as Facebook? Not only can conflicts start on Facebook, but their "escalation via social media is a long-term phenomenon, affecting ecosystem incentives, and often targeting especially vulnerable individuals" (Stray et al.,

2023, p.11). Stray et al. (2023) argue that "platforms allow a small number of harassers to hyper-engage with great effect" (p.16) on the increase in general attention and engagement on the platform, benefiting businesses earning from Facebook and the platform itself.

While this section is called *Meta Moderation or Truth,* the truth part has not appeared yet when discussing Facebook's motivations and interests. The word 'truth' also does not appear in the mission statement of Meta platforms (Meta, 2024a). The word 'reality' only occurs when combined with adjectives such as "augmented, virtual and mixed reality" (Meta, 2024a). That is because delivering the truth to the users is certainly not Facebook's primary goal. Even though their statement on preventing hate speech sounds very clear on Meta's website, Gillespie (2018) explains that:

> Prohibiting hate speech is a safe position politically, and does not require hedging, balance, or exceptions. In fact, unlike other rules, which can feel weighed down by the inevitable disagreements that follow, the rules against hate speech sound a clear, ethical note." (p.59)

Furthermore, in this matter, it is important not to use the word 'users' but rather 'people' as the repercussions of such an approach go far beyond the digital spaces of the Facebook metaverse and have a tangible impact on real people. It so happened that "[s]ocial media provided an environment in which lies created by anyone, from anywhere, could spread everywhere, making the liars plenty of cash along the way" (Singer & Brooking, 2019, p.120). Aiming to retain users' attention and accentuate the intensity of content, Facebook prioritizes the income of businesses, investors, and employees at the cost of truth.

It is crucial to understand that Facebook moderates content not only to prevent hateful content from spreading and create a safe environment for everyone but also to keep the users scrolling. If "engagement and its affective dynamics are readily intertwined with various force-fields of power and collective conflict in society" (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020, p.2), the same applies to disengagement. Baumer et al. (2013) identified several principal motivations for users' disengagement from Facebook: privacy concerns, data use and misuse, triviality, negative impact on users' productivity, addictiveness, as well as social, professional, and institutional pressure. In addition, Gillespie (2018) sees content moderation itself as an issue with two ends: with too little moderation, "users may leave to avoid the toxic environment that has taken hold; too much moderation, and users may still go, rejecting the platform as either too intrusive or too antiseptic" (p.17).

Facebook, in its powerful position, is trying to take the convenient stance: to satisfy those who want to freely express themselves without feeling restricted and those who want the platform to be a safe space. Foucault's (1995) panopticon is constructed in the way that the inmate "knows himself to be observed" (p.201) while having no connection with the other inmates to prevent them from plotting, misbehaving, etc. Suppose Facebook is the supervisor and the giant panopticon, with a size of three billion people being the inmates observed. In that case, there appear to be two significant differences with Foucault's model. On the one hand, Facebook actively encourages users to communicate with one another, form communities, and express themselves.

On the other hand, in Foucault's (1995) panopticon, the inmate is well aware of the supervisor's presence, and "[t]he more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed" (p.202). The user encounters Facebook supervisors when agreeing to the terms and conditions and when the 'law' is enforced through shadow banning, taking down the post, or getting banned. Facebook does not constantly remind people about its rules as the government does through the TV-broadcasted criminal prosecutions and police cars patrolling the streets. Facebook majorly skips the discipline part and immediately proceeds to the punishment. To be fair, Facebook notifies users about violating community guidelines, but this still happens after the regulations are violated.

In that way, Facebook follows the "publish-then-filter" (Gillespie, 2018, p.75) moderation angle, allowing everyone to say what they want and leaving room for itself to choose what and how to moderate. The goal of Foucault's (1995) panopticon is to create a "normal" person, for people to behave a certain way. On the contrary, as elaborated above, Facebook is interested in authentic user behavior, desires, and thoughts to exploit to pursue the platform's financial goals, keeping investors, businesses, and employees happy and wealthy. For instance, it was important for Facebook to know what conservative Facebook users believed during the 2016 US presidential campaign to decide on whether to restrict expressions of then-candidate Trump on prohibiting entry of Muslims to the USA (Singer & Brooking, 2019). As Zuckerberg later acknowledged, "[t]o remove the post would cost Facebook conservative users—and valuable business" (Singer & Brooking, 2019, p.243).

Ukrainian media faced a similar challenge since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion, where "[a]lmost a half of all surveyed [local news] publications (27 of 57)" (Boborykin &

Sribnyy, 2022, n.p) have reported experiencing their activity being limited by Facebook. In particular, Ukrainian media pages on Facebook have experienced their organic reach and monetization limited, and pages getting banned (Boborykin & Sribnyy, 2022). The main reasons for Facebook to impose such restrictions are "copyright infringement or, most likely, war-related content that is identified as "problematic" or "sensitive" (Mosorko, 2022) and that "the page is posting too often" (Boborykin & Sribnyy, 2022). Andrey Boborykin, the manager of some of the biggest Ukrainian Facebook publishers, emphasized the extent of the problem, saying:

> Ukrainian newsrooms are being flooded by graphic images from the frontlines of the war. It's newsworthy, at times vital content that is in public interest but it is impossible for editors to know what they are allowed to publish on Facebook (Antelava, 2022, n.p).

The question that should be asked at this point is what the goal of any informative communication is, if not to deliver the truth (i.e., to inform). The significant and constraining role social media play in contemporary communications lays the ground for the following chapter, where I elaborate on why the bottom-up doublespeak is so different from the one described by Lutz (1996). For Lutz (1996), doublespeak is a linguistic technique aimed to "deceive, mislead, distort, inflate" (p.4) the receiver of the information. I argue that bottom-up doublespeak seeks to deliver the truth to the receiver of the information but deceive the medium (social media platform with its content moderation). As mentioned above, Lutz (1996) only mentions that news media reproduce the cases of doublespeak. However, there is nothing weird about it since when Lutz published his work in 1996, the social media platforms were not what they are today. In fact, the first most influential ones, like Myspace and Facebook, emerged only in 2003 and 2004 (Phillips, 2007), respectively.

To summarize, the bar for being a 'normal' person by the standards of Facebook is low, and it is comprised of being a solvent and not too radical an individual dedicating a good amount of time and attention to the content on the platform, especially advertisements. Still, the problem remains: Facebook cannot pretend to be anything more, especially not a metaverse, while remaining just a huge business company with the primary purpose of making income and preventing three billion people from getting upset.

Power & Doublespeak: A game for the two of us

Lutz (1996) discusses doublespeak being practiced by those in positions of power and with access to communication channels like politicians and corporations. This dissertation explores

how Ukrainian Meta users communicate war events using visual art as one of the few available communication tools while operating within claustrophobic Meta moderation policies. I argue that they do it by reinventing top-down doublespeak from the bottom-up approach. Lutz (1996) provides plenty of top-down doublespeak examples in language; for instance, the enemy is never killed but rather "*neutralized*" (p.166). The other example from Lutz (1996) is the "*accidental delivery of ordnance equipment*, meaning the bombs and rockets that miss their targets" (p.184) and strike schools, hospitals, and residential buildings instead. Both these examples intend to mislead the receiver of information to diminish the harm of what, in fact, is a war crime or, generally speaking, to replace the emotionally colored wording with a more neutral one.

Doublespeak is different in nature from misinformation and disinformation. While misinformation "is false by definition" (Guess & Lyons, 2020, p.11), and disinformation is misinformation that "is *deliberately propagated*" (Tucker et al., 2018, p.3), doublespeak delivers the true information but in a form that does not cause an emotional or rational response in the listener. Doublespeak is closer to online propaganda as it delivers "potentially factually correct information" (Tucker et al., 2018, p.3). However, online propaganda aims to "disparage opposing viewpoints" (Tucker et al., 2018, p.3), while doublespeak seeks to confuse the receiver of information so much that they do not see the reason to act upon anything.

This communication technique is usually used as a top-down approach, as shown in *Figure 1*, by a politician addressing the electorate or from a brand to customers (Lutz, 1996). It constitutes one of the ways to establish power and strengthen the hegemony of a particular discourse (Foucault, 1978). Doublespeak allows the actor to manipulate the emotionality of any matter through the word choice and eventually change the intensity of the message or make it neutral. For instance, even the way Putin announced what, in fact, is a war with Ukraine, calling it a "special military operation" (ThePrint Team, 2022, n.p) is a case of doublespeak. While the word *war* usually induces negative understandings and makes one imagine dead and suffering people, the phrase *special military operation* does not have this fixed meaning in the heads of most people. This is why the post-structuralist theoretical paradigm is instrumental in understanding doublespeak, especially in the context of modern conflicts.

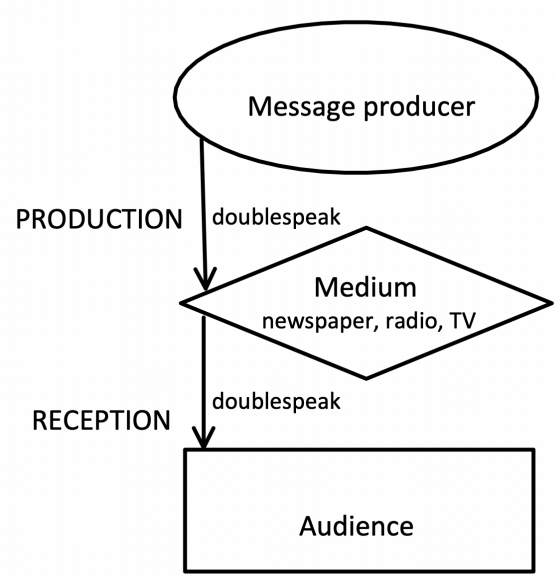

Figure 1: Visualization of the top-down doublespeak

The distinctive feature of the modern understanding of power is that "the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (Foucault & Gordon, 1980, p.52). Those in positions of power, thus following Lutz (1996), usually have access to more knowledge than those without this access. Such thinking is making power institutionalized. However, this study relies on Flyvbjerg's (2001) critique of Habermas' understanding of power through "judicial institutionalization" (p.91), which "lack[s] of agreement between ideal and reality" (p.92). Power in this dissertation is understood as omnipresent, like in Foucault's (1978) *The History of Sexuality*, the power which "is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (p.93). In democracies, the power resides where the debates and conversations take place. Considering that, I argue that at the current stage of deep mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), the described technique of doublespeak may be used not only as a top-down institutionalized approach but also as a bottom-up approach through social media platforms that are a tool to voice opinions with low entry requirements.

Although power is dispersed in the social world, the means to act upon it differ for the top-down and bottom-up approaches in modern mediatized societies. Lutz (1996) describes the top-down doublespeak approach (which he sees as a linguistic act) as aimed to "deceive, mislead, distort, inflate" (p.4) the receiver of information. Lutz (1996), however, does not pay particular attention to the role the medium (newspaper, radio, TV, etc.) plays in this communication process, while it is one of the crucial points in this process. He mentions that

“news media seem unconcerned about the doublespeak. In fact, they help spread doublespeak by uncritically using it in their stories as they quote politicians and other users of doublespeak” (Lutz, 1996, p.198). Still, news media does not fall under the same category as social media platforms, especially regarding how they apply moderation.

The top-down approach is easily implemented in moderation models adopted in printed, radio, and TV news media. The main stumbling block for how power is distributed in media-user relations is found in answering the question of who decides when the information is published. Gillespie (2018) argues that the “[l]anguage in a magazine article can be adjusted before it goes to print, whether for clarity or propriety; a television program or prerecorded radio broadcast can be trimmed” (p.78). At the same time, “platforms have embraced a “publish-then-filter” approach” (Gillespie, 2018, p.75), which gives the user the power to decide what gets published while leaving the right to restrict or remove this content postfactum for the social media. That is where the bottom-up approach to doublespeak is born.

Althusser (2016), as a Marxist structuralist, recognizes the agency of what he calls the “ideological State apparatuses (ISAs)” (p.96), one of which is “the communications ISA (press, radio[,] and television, etc.)” (p.96). Althusser’s (2016) fundamental point is that power is concentrated in social class as the unifying trait of those ruling the government and the communication ISA as institutions. I argue that while class is indeed a significant factor that gives an individual or a group easier access to power, it does so not through itself but by granting access to knowledge and information. Thus, there is no reason to suppose that communication ISA is an institution acting as one, representing the state’s interest. Indeed, the modern social media platforms:

> Would like to fall away, become invisible beneath the rewarding social contact, the exciting content, the palpable sense of community [...] platforms generally frame themselves as open, impartial, and noninterventionist—in part because their founders fundamentally believe them to be so, and in part to avoid obligation or liability” (Gillespie, 2018, p.7).

In addition, we are witnessing significant friction and confrontation in the relationship between the state and social media platforms like Meta, TikTok, and others in the West (Aguilera, 2022; Ortutay & Hadero, 2024). Still, even though ISA is not an institution, it does not take away its impact on consumers. All social media moderate users’ published content and behavior on their platforms (Gillespie, 2018). In that way, they form a discourse by

merely creating the terms and conditions and community guidelines. As Gillespie (2018) puts it, “[p]latforms may not shape public discourse by themselves, but they do shape the shape of public discourse. And they know it.” (p.23). The social media platform, just like any authority within a discourse, defines the standards of behavior as “normal/abnormal” (Foucault, 1995, p.199) as a demeanor that corresponds to or violates the community standards.

Bottom-Up Visual Doublespeak

Attention and time are crucial for the business model Facebook has adopted. While there are multiple ways to attract attention to content published, keep people scrolling, and consequently place ads, it is usually best to “gather the attention from a wider audience by publishing content with higher spreading potential” (Vaca Ruiz et al., 2014). Quickly digesting content is essential in modern, fast-paced, and information-filled societies. It also comes with the challenge of a short attention span (Bushuyev et al., 2023) to the content, most of which, due to the amount of information online, never gets enough attention to be seen. Even content that rapidly gains recognition loses it as quickly (Wu & Huberman, 2007). Bushuyev et al. (2023) emphasize both positive and negative effects of “clip thinking” (p.1) as it increases “exposure to diverse perspectives” (p.4) while leading to the “lack of critical thinking” (p.4), making the perception of information superficial.

Facebook contributes to this problem through the mechanisms of selective exposure, especially when it comes to what Bakshy et al. (2015) called ““hard” [stories] (such as national news, politics, or world affairs)” (p.1130), compared to ““soft” content (such as sports, entertainment, or travel)” (p.1130). Media users “independently of their activity and of the time they spend online” (Cinelli et al., 2020, p.2) tend to focus on a small number of sources of information while consistently consuming most of the content on these pages. By exploiting such user behavior, Facebook contributes to the formation of echo chambers and capitalizes on the predictability of user activity and views.

Images have been chosen as material to research in this dissertation because of their relevance with the abovementioned perception patterns of social media users and based on their lesser interactivity. Another important aspect that influences engagement is interactivity, which Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013) define as “user responses to different forms of online content” (p.846). They found that videos, compared to images, have a higher level of interactivity and thus require a longer duration of engagement (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). In a

meta-research on social media engagement on Facebook and Instagram conducted by Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021), they discovered that "video format posts encourage users to actively engage [...] by sharing their opinion and comments toward firms' posts, while photo formatted content stimulates passive users' engagement through liking behavior" (p.60). On the contrary, Sabate et al. (2014) showed that on Facebook, images tend to get more popular than videos, which are liked rather than commented. Moreover, these "images are easier to digest and in a few seconds users can write a short comment about the feelings/opinions that the picture has invoked on them" (Sabate et al., 2014, p.1008).

Art is a very interpretative means of communication. It is the most subjective compared to textual/verbal, photo, or video material. In the contemporary postmodern period in art, "[t]he emphasis is on the experience in its fragile existence, rather than the artwork, and on the meaning-giving role of the spectator" (Jones, 1997, p.209). Interpretation, be it contextual, emotional, or any other, therefore, is a crucial and distinguishing feature of human perception of art. Visual content provokes much more emotional thinking than textual/verbal ways of delivering a message, which is usually processed rationally (Joffe, 2008). Still, the rational approach to processing textual information does not make it more believable than photos as "[p]hotographs [...] confirm the 'truth value' of an event" (Joffe, 2008, p.85). Thus, they are thought to be more believable because the audience understands that someone must have been there and seen what is depicted while taking a photograph.

Most of the published photographs are probably not intended to mislead the viewer and distort the image of reality. However, when this happens, people fail to detect the fakeness of the image (Kasra et al., 2018). Still, this does not take away from the believability of photographs before they are proven to be fake. The same high level of believability applies to video content in a news broadcast, especially in contrast with that of a newspaper or radio broadcast (Ericson, 1998). Such high believability and inability to distinguish between fake and authentic photographs or videos is motivated by the belief that whatever is depicted through these forms of communication reflects what happened in material reality. Photographs and videos, by definition, are intended to capture objects the way one's eyes would.

Hopkins (1998) makes a similar argument regarding visual art through a formula where the picture is *P* and the object pictured is *O*, saying that "for P to depict O, O must be seen in P" (p.72), a certain "*standard of correctness*" (Richard Wollheim, 1987, p.48, cited in Hopkins, 1998, p.72, italics in original) must be appealed to. Hopkins (1998) then proceeds with his

argument, saying, "[t]he job of the standard is to establish that it is right, not just to see something in the picture, but to see therein whatever it depicts" (p.72). Because Hopkins (1998), in this issue, focuses on photographs, he emphasizes that those can be influenced by various factors like unexpected light getting onto the lens, lichen on the film, or others that have a causal relation with the quality of the produced photograph. Thus, he concludes that as part of the standard of correctness, only "the relevant relations [defined as] those used for a certain purpose" (Hopkins, 1998, p.73) should be considered, excluding accidental factors influencing the photo. I argue that even if we know that there is the right way to understand the depicted object (*O*) in the picture (*P*), it does not mean that it will be perceived in such a right way. Still, it does not matter because the the *O* did not change regardless of how it was perceived from the *P*. It is crucial to understand that while the material *O* did not change - it entered the realm of social knowledge and now can be constructed in many subjective ways, establishing multiple truths. Only one of these truths would correspond to the material *O*.

The *O* can be visually depicted in various ways like video, photograph, or painting. Such forms as video and photographs give at least a glimpse of the material reality of the *O*. While the described above factors can influence the reflection of material reality on the *P*, still "*whatever* happened to be before the lens when the shutter opened" (Hopkins, 1998, p.72, italics in original) got to be on the picture independent of the views of the photographer or other accidental technical circumstances. On the contrary, a painting "is an experience formed in the encounter between a catalytic material entity and the receptive spectator" (Jones, 1997, p.207). Corner (2011), in a similar fashion, emphasizes:

> Painting, like photography, works essentially through the 'captured moment', whatever narrative implications this can generate by various cues in the framing, composition and local detail. However, painting is not only (like writing) a wholly authored impression of the physical world rather than (like photography) in part an attempt to work with a direct physical record, it is also a form of expression in which what is painted has often been regarded as merely the basis for a visionary creativity that extends far beyond this. Within the terms of this creativity, the very idea of documentation, even as an intention, is problematic (p.176).

Furthermore, a painting is a double interpretation of the *O* from the material reality, where first, it is an artistic depiction of the material *O* by the artist and then is perceived subjectively by the spectator. Thus, in our case, we are taking two steps away from the truth established by the reality of war and the real horrors of it. There is no lens shutter that would give the spectator a feeling of proximity to the material reality of what is depicted in the piece of

visual digital art. Facebook, meanwhile, inclines victims of war to choose this far-from-reality method of conveying information framed by community guidelines, as shown in *Figure 2*.

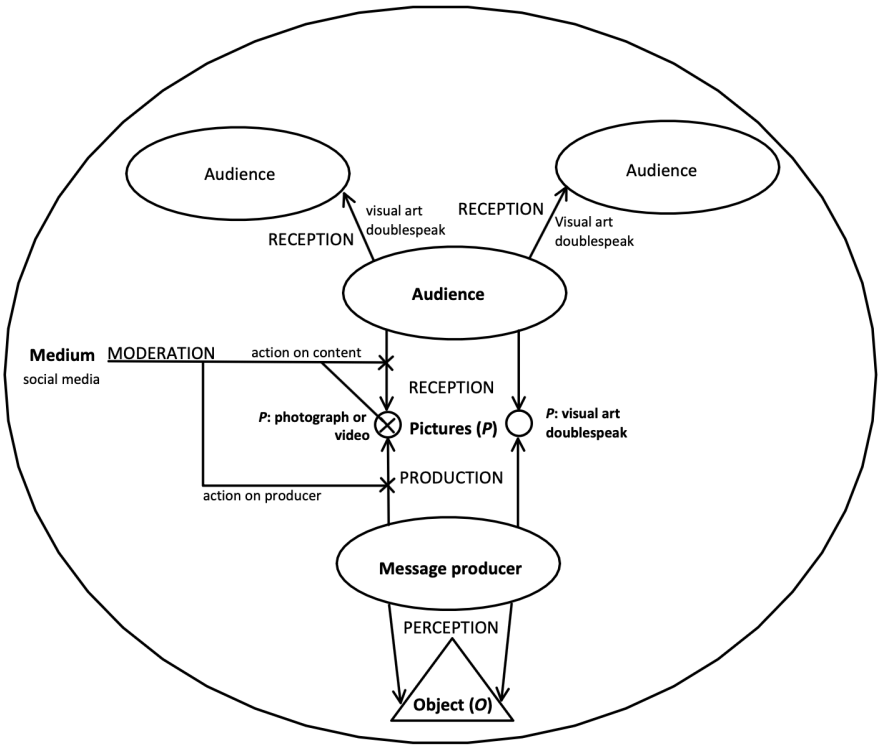

Figure 2: The bottom-up visual doublespeak on social media compared to photo/video

The case of Ukrainian Meta users' communication strategy has conflict as a core motivation, context, and prism. Pempek et al. (2009) found that on social media, "traditional markers of identity, such as religion, political ideology, and work were important indicators of identity" (p.223). However, at the same time, user's "media preferences" (Pempek et al., 2009, p.223) were highlighted more often as an identity indicator than the traditional ones. Social media serve as an alternative, a reflection, or an extension of the everyday life of individuals in the real world (Ivcevic & Ambady, 2013). Thus, only a very specific and limited number of Facebook and Instagram users see these platforms as a business tool to promote their services or increase earnings. The majority use it to tell the world about their lives or read about life in the world. Nevertheless, Facebook sees a problem with your everyday life getting posted if you are going through the experience of war and your family, friends, and neighbors are being killed by Russia.

Since the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, thousands of Ukrainians have started using social media to share their experience and, most importantly, ask for help from the world. Mortensen (2015) developed "the concept "conflictual media events," i.e.,

major situations of conflict in today's mediatized and connective media environment" (p.536) to describe cases when media elaborates on events of war and conflict. Henceforth, many of those Ukrainians publishing content about their everyday life going through war can be defined as "war influencers as users who inhabit a distinctive space on social media, located at the intersection of citizen journalism [...], voluntary witnessing [...], microcelebrity activism [...], and online content creation" (Divon & Eriksson Krutrök, 2023, p.120). Mortensen (2015) also underscores that such "bottom-up surveillance system" (p.545) of taking and publishing "eyewitness images enable citizens to move closer to the domains of experts" (p.544). At the same time, war influencers are, in a sense, in a better position than experts as the former "are not bound by the same ethical and normative standards as those involved in more professionalized forms of trauma communication" (Divon & Eriksson Krutrök, 2023, p.120).

Divon & Eriksson Krutrök (2023) examine memes created by Ukrainians in the course of the full-scale invasion as a way to cope with trauma through the formation of a certain "trauma aesthetic" (p.120). They see the platforms' affordances as permissive of such practices as they "extend users' invitations to international audiences to witness, cope with, commemorate, learn from, and discuss [...] marginalized cultural traumas of the past and present" (Divon & Eriksson Krutrök, 2023, p.123). While I agree that victims of war as those "[m]arginalized individuals and groups must instead be able to claim the right to be seen on their own terms and using their own aesthetics" (Blaagaard et al., 2017, p.1114), I firmly disagree that social media platforms are permissive of marginalized groups to choose their own aesthetics when coping with trauma. Nietzsche (2009) claims that "opposition of the subjective and the objective, has generally no place in aesthetics" (p.17), and I take his perspective strictly in the sense that aesthetics has nothing to do with fact. I argue that as soon as the truth gets aestheticized - it changes its original form, and then, the signifier has no connection with the original signified, the *P* does not depict *O*. Aesthetics having nothing to do with the truth would be acceptable only if it stayed a prerogative of art. As Lury (2011) describes, it is not the case because, within the constraints of the consumer culture, it has become a standard of late modernity to aestheticize everyday life. Thus, if war constitutes one's everyday life, it must be aestheticized too.

While trauma aesthetics might be useful as a mechanism to cope with the trauma caused by war, I consider art pieces created by Ukrainians and examined in this dissertation not as trauma coping tools but rather as communicative attempts to bypass the restrictive content

regulations on Facebook and Instagram as shown on *Figure 2*. Facebook tries to limit the depiction of "particularly violent or graphic, such as videos depicting dismemberment, visible innards or charred bodies" (Meta, 2024b, n.p) with a goal "to protect users from disturbing imagery" (Meta, 2024b, n.p). While the goal seems to be exemplary, it risks forming a mindset that manufactures "consent for war and any policies an administration might try and link to it, and risks numbing the moral revulsion that leads societies to see war as a last resort" (Aday, 2005, p.152). I argue that it is crucial to see the war and its horrors the way they truly occur and that the environment Meta has created on its platforms restricts the ways war victims can communicate about their everyday life affairs to mainly using graphic art.

Methodology and Methods

Methodological approach

At its core, this research has a qualitative approach through "observing, describing, interpreting, and analyzing the way that people experience, act on, or think about themselves and the world around them" (Bazeley, 2013, p.4). I look into the case as a theory in practice ("praxis") which is based on "situational ethics," is particularly "context-dependent" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.136) and "will inevitably lead you into that broader context" (Bazeley, 2013, p.6).

I apply a multi-method approach combining iconology and semi-structured qualitative interviews in this case-oriented study to research the digital illustrations from both the production and the reception sides as I try to estimate the efficiency of such a communication strategy. Applying two research methods will contribute to a better understanding of this case study, which "call[s] for 'interpretation'" (Tesch, 1990, pp.93-4). This approach is known as triangulation and is a "general strategy for gaining several perspectives on the same phenomenon" (Jensen, 2012, p.301). As I analyze illustrations as a communicative tool that elaborates on a series of sensitive events that tell the stories of murdered, tortured, and raped people in Ukraine, Flyvbjerg's (2001) emphasis on maintaining the balance between "instrumental rationality with value-rationality" (p.62) is significant as it weighs consequences of the researches actions on society. This way, I aim to understand the ideas embedded in these illustrations by their producers. On the other hand, it is essential to see the audience as "not always the passive recipients of an image's meaning" (Rose, 2016, p.38), not just a decoder but rather a contributor to the meaning. In fact, this research focuses on the correspondence of the audience's understanding of illustrations depicting war events to the original author's message.

Research design and sampling

Iconology

Iconology was chosen as the first method due to its focus on visual art and particular emphasis on the context in which the researched pieces were created. Howells (2008) elaborated on iconology as a method that allows researchers to see deeper into the art piece than just on the "you-see-is-what-you-get" (p.19) level. I used Panofsky's (1982) three-level model from *The Meaning in the Visual Arts* to analyze 8 digital art pieces (illustrations) created by Ukrainian

artists depicting the events of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine shared on Meta platforms to bypass community guidelines. Some artists whose works I analyze in this dissertation explicitly elaborated on the Meta restrictive policies in the interviews or on their social media pages (Kudryashova, 2022; polosunya, 2024). While the others did not explicitly claim that the reason for the creation of these illustrations was the Meta limitations, all these illustrations are a part of a modern Ukrainian militarized cultural period. All the creators considered in this research live and create in the modern Ukrainian wartime paradigm, which is "unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work" (Panofsky, 1991, p.7), in this case, digital art.

During the recent year, I have been collecting these art pieces on Instagram and Facebook as Ukrainian users have been reposting them. Later, these art pieces were also collected into a digital gallery by the Ukrainian heritage and historical memory foundation *Ukraïner* (Yabluchna & Polovynka, 2022). The pictures were sampled based on the chronological sequence of events they referred to (see Appendix 1). Each sampled image depicted separate events of the war to avoid the risk of interviewees (see below) being aware of a particular event too well. Corresponding to the research aims, all images depicted or referred to war-inflicted violence or acts of cruelty. Still, they were not photographs or videos of violence but illustrations and digital renderings, which did not put participants in distress or cause harm.

I outlined two main distinctive traits of the sample material, which I eventually separated into four groups, with two illustrations in each one. Such groupings by distinctive traits matter as they are markers of artists targeting different audiences because they are aware "that other people will be looking at the images we choose to display" (Rose, 2016, p.46). This distinction "says something about who we are and how we want to be seen" (Rose, 2016, p.46) by different groups. The first distinctive feature concerns the target audience: Ukrainians (internal audience) or non-Ukrainians (external audience)—the second refers to the presence or absence of English or Ukrainian textual information in the illustration. The four groups turned out as follows: (1) no-text illustrations for an external audience; (2) no-text illustrations for an internal audience; (3) English text-containing illustrations for an external audience; (4) Ukrainian text-containing illustrations for an internal audience. This categorization is depicted in *Figure 3*.

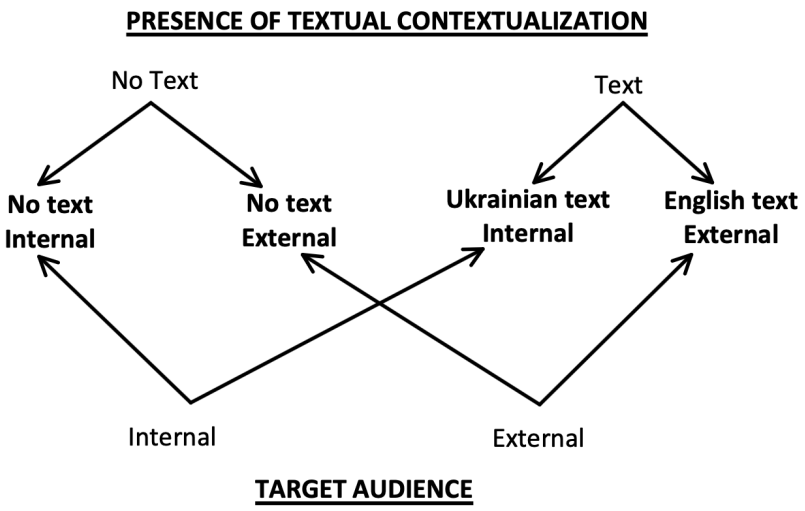

Figure 3: Illustration sample groupings

Semi-structured interviews

Therefore, I conducted 11 one-to-one semi-structured qualitative interviews (Rose, 2016) to investigate the perception of digital illustration pieces by Swedish citizens residing in Skåne, Sweden. I recruited participants via social media pages like WhatsApp groups *Bikes Buy/Sell Lund* and *Lund University 2024* using the purposive sampling technique (Byrne, 2018), and also asking friends of friends "selected especially to meet particular research goals" (Bazeley, 2013, p.49) to join this experiment (see Appendix 2 for Sample of interviewees). The age group in the sample is adults 18-34 years old based on the two largest age distribution groups on Facebook and Instagram, being 18-24 and 25-34 years old (We Are Social et al., 2023). While both abovementioned social media platforms are more male-dominated, especially in the researched age groups (We Are Social et al., 2023), I chose to maintain a balance of sex, interviewing five male and five female participants to avoid the possibility of gender bias. They were required to have used Facebook or Instagram to be acquainted with their affordances and digital environment. This matters as I also wanted to examine their opinions on the appropriateness of such content on the platforms mentioned above during the interview. Skåne in Sweden was chosen as a region to focus on to have face-to-face contact with interviewees at the time of research. Face-to-face interactions were essential as I was interested in following the interviewees' "body language and other non-verbal signals" (Byrne, 2018, p.488) as they observed the images. For the same reason, Swedish citizens were sampled as research was taking place in Sweden to decrease the possibility of "encounter[ing] access problems" (Bazeley, 2013, p.36).

Rose (2016) claims that "different audiences interpret the same visual images in very different ways, and these differences have been attributed to the different social identities of the viewers concerned" (p.40). Thus, I chose to sample Swedish citizens for several significant reasons. Firstly, it was essential to get an interpretation of the analyzed illustrations from non-Ukrainians, people who had not directly experienced the events depicted in the analyzed images. Thus, I tried to see how much of the understanding would be lost during the decoding process of the illustrations without deep knowledge of context. Secondly, Sweden is the world's 12th oldest democracy (Desjardins, 2019), with a stable high voter turnout (Statistics Sweden, 2023) and an "exceptionally participative" (Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2015, p.228) politically active population. Such high political awareness was expected to increase the chance of the interviewees to understand the illustration's original meaning. Thirdly, the Russian war in Ukraine is certainly not unheard of in Sweden, especially in the context of Sweden's recent accession to NATO (Khorrami, 2022).

While this research aimed to assess the Ukrainian artists' visual communication approach, it was important for the participants to know at least that the war was happening. Interviews focused on the "social modality of audiencing images [that] concerns the social identities of those doing the watching" (Rose, 2016, p.40) as well as their feelings about and understanding of the demonstrated visual content with a focus on its meaning and context. Byrne (2018) claims that it can be beneficial when working with visual material to "bring in cultural artefacts (for example, photos or adverts) to elicit reactions" (p.490) from the interviewees. In that way, I could research how much information about a specific depicted event of war the participants understood.

It is important to note that the illustrations were demonstrated to the research participants outside their original digital context. This means I did not show my interviewees the comment section, caption, or the name of the artist who created it. This decision was motivated by the fact that online publications are not necessarily observed from their original source as they get reposted with a different caption, copied, or modified. Thus, even if I showed the caption and comments to my participants - it would create the perception that would apply only to the illustration published with this particular contextualization. To avoid this happening, I demonstrated the illustration without such contextualization. To sum up, this sampling was supposed to increase the possibility of the interviewees matching their interpretation of the illustration to the message embedded in it by the producer. This was done intentionally with

the assumption that if even well-informed, politically active Swedish citizens could not understand the original producer's message from the illustration, this communication process would be proven inefficient.

Before conducting interviews, I created the interview topic guide (Byrne, 2018), which was refined after conducting the pilot interview. The final interview guide consists of three themes and a practical section (see Appendix 3). The guide's first section focused on the interviewee's background (theme one) and social media practices (theme two). The second section was practical and included a demonstration of the images preliminarily analyzed via iconology. The illustrations were arranged as follows: (1) English text-containing illustrations for an external audience; (2) no-text illustrations for an external audience; (3) no-text illustrations for an internal audience; (4) Ukrainian text-containing illustrations for an internal audience. This sequence was based on the expected complexity of understanding these illustrations by a non-Ukrainian (Swedish) audience from easiest to the toughest. The factors of targeting external groups (non-Ukrainians) and using the English language were expected to provide more context and make it easier for Swedes to understand the content. The participants were unaware of the illustration grouping to avoid biased interpretation. It allowed me to see to what extent Swedes could grasp the original intended message programmed by the creator. The third section of the guide was dedicated to the participants' reflections on various ways of communicating war-related information (theme three). These interviews allowed me to gather comprehensive data and examine "the dynamics of what experiential knowledge and frames of interpretation audiences bear" (Hansen & Machin, 2019, p.301). I also explained the meaning of the illustrations to the participants who were willing to know.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were critical to this research for several reasons. Firstly, the visual material created by Ukrainian artists was used without asking these digital creators for permission. While some scholars think this can be problematic, Rose (2016) argues that these "images and text [...] are already by definition available to anyone, by dint of being uploaded to a social media site in the first place" (p.302). On the other hand, she points out that this content "may then be shared on other platforms without the uploader's consent" (Rose, 2016, p.302). To address these concerns, I only used illustrations, which I traced to Instagram or

Facebook accounts where they were initially published. Then, I ensured these accounts were publicly available and only analyzed illustrations from those pages.

Secondly, at the interviewing stage, the illustrations containing depictions of violence were demonstrated to the research participants. To address this concern, all the participants signed "written consent forms" (Rose, 2016, p.362), informing them about demonstrating war-related and sensitive (for some individuals) illustrations during the interviews (see Appendix 4). Furthermore, in this research, consent was "thought of as a process [rather] than a one-off event" (Rose, 2016, p.366). In that spirit, I also requested the interviewees' verbal consent once more right before the beginning of the interview to ensure that they were in the right state of mind to be shown these illustrations. Still, to ensure unbiased conversation while providing "appropriate information about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research" (Rose, 2016, p.358), I did not specify the details of the images demonstrated but rather, in a general manner emphasized the sensitive character or the material.

Thirdly, the researcher is not neutral, and thus "it is necessary to reflect on how you as a critic of visual images are looking" (Rose, 2016, pp.22-3); this is what Byrne calls "reflexivity" (2018, p.212). Still, for iconology as a method, this was rather beneficial than harmful as my Ukrainian identity provided me with an "insider's view" (Schrøder et al., 2003, p.156) and let me understand the "basic attitude of nation, a period, a class, a religious and philosophical" (Panofsky, 1982, p.14) context in which Ukrainian artists produced the analyzed material. At the same time, I could distance myself from the possible bias as the bigger part of the full-scale invasion I did not live in Ukraine but in Sweden. My Ukrainian identity also required me to reflect on "the impact of the researcher on interaction with the interviewee" (Byrne, 2018, p.213) during the process. I revealed my national identity to the interviewees only after the interview to avoid biased interpretations. Disclosing my identity as a Ukrainian could have made them more empathetic or hostile towards me. Even if it would not influence their attitude, it could give them a hint about the geographical context under research.

Lastly, this research has taken several anonymization actions. The names of the participants were changed to the most popular male and female names in Sweden in 2023 (Kamann, 2015) to not "'offer subtle or latent clues' to an individual's identity" (Wiles, 2012, p.51). None of the people depicted in the analyzed illustrations are identifiable. The data was protected according to interviewing ethics (Byrne, 2018).

Analyzing the data

Analyzing iconology

The first analytical step of the research was iconology. Before conducting interviews, the analytical interpretation of the illustrations had to be formed so that it would not be influenced or constrained by the understandings imposed on the material by the interviewees during the interviews. On the first level of Panofsky's model, I highlighted "what has happened factually and expressionally" (Howells, 2008, p.24), describing everything I saw in the art piece literally. I focused on separate elements of the illustration as nouns and described them in terms of color, shape, and position on the picture. Panofsky (1991) provides two ways to see objects in the illustration on this initial level of analysis: "*factual* and *expressional*" (p.5). Shatford (1986) contributed to understanding these two ways of initial understanding where "[t]he former describes what the picture is *Of*, the latter, what it is *About*" (p.43, italics in original). The illustration description in terms of its *Ofness* is relatively easy as it regards the simple naming of the objects in the illustration, which most people would agree on. The *Aboutness* can be outlined using descriptive nouns and adjectives to describe the mood and emotional content of the picture (Shatford, 1986).

On the second level, I identified a symbolic meaning of what was depicted and tried to interpret why it was envisioned this way. Panofsky (1991) distinguishes between the first and second levels of analysis where during the second, which he names "[*i*]*conographical analysis*, [we are] dealing with *images*, *stories* and *allegories*" (p.11) instead of "practical experience" (p.11). Particular attention was paid to the fact that "it does not speak for itself" (Howells, 2008, p.25), and the reader of this visual text needs to be aware of the existing contextual nuances and "conventional knowledge" (Howells, 2008, p.25) that had a potential to influence the creator's choice to position elements of the analyzed illustration in that specific way they appear. On this second level, I also analyzed the *Ofness* and *Aboutness* of the illustration. Shatford (1986) explains that on the second level, a picture can be "iconographically *Of* (a specific person) and iconographically *About* (a mythical person, an abstract concept)" (p.44, italics in original). Because the illustration's creator comes from a certain cultural background, on the level of iconographical analysis, "perception of this level of meaning requires a familiarity with a specific culture" (Shatford, 1986, p.44). This kind of knowledge was accessible to me as a Ukrainian living through the war experience as well.

Finally, on the third level, I took account of the "basic attitude of the nation, a period, a class, a religious and philosophical persuasion - all this unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work" (Panofsky, 1991, p.14) to identify the general tendencies and attitudes in the broader societal context that have influenced the artist while creating the piece, of which the latter might not have even been aware. The "iconological interpretation is based on [the] accurate pre-iconographic description and correct iconographical analysis of a picture" (Shatford, 1986, p.45) and thus does not require the development of the *Ofness* and *Aboutness* for itself. After analyzing each of the eight illustrations iconologically, I started conducting interviews with participants.

Analyzing interviews

To analyze the interviews, I applied a thematic coding technique (Rivas, 2018) to 11 transcripts of interviews I conducted, including the pilot interview (see example of a transcript in Appendix 5). Thematic coding is helpful as it uncovers "what phenomenon, event or social interaction 'looks like' to the individuals of interest" (Rivas, 2018, pp.876-7). The phenomenon here is a series of illustrations, and the individuals of interest are Swedish interview participants to whom I demonstrated these pictures to elicit understanding. The interview guide left a significant space for participants to be flexible in what they would like to say while generally being driven by the theoretical perspectives established in the literature review with good practices of "theoretical sensitivity" (Rivas, 2018, p.878). I applied a combination of deductive and inductive coding techniques, where in the course of the former, I had "some themes developed before you begin analysis" (Rivas, 2018, p.878), and in terms of the latter, I kept an open mind to whatever "particular issues might be important" (Rivas, 2018, p.878) for my participants to discuss.

To analyze the data at the first stage, I applied open coding (see Appendix 6) to carefully process all of the information without losing its sense so that "new and unexpected themes may be captured" (Rivas, 2018, p.881). At this stage, to "not involve any interpretation" (Rivas, 2018, p.881), I only underlined the parts of the transcripts without changing the interviewees' words. I also formed the groups of open codes only after all the data was analyzed using spider diagrams (Rivas, 2018), preventing the information's chaotic grouping. After thoroughly processing these diagrams, they let me ensure that each descriptive code was placed in the best-fitting analytic category (see Appendix 7). An important part of the coding was that, during the interviews, I demonstrated 8 illustrations (4 groups of illustrations with 2

images per group) and asked participants to interpret the meaning of these pictures. Thus, during the deductive part of the coding, I formed 4 data groups and coded each separately from the others to uncover the meanings throughout all 11 interviews. Eventually, I produced 5 codebooks (data groups) from the mentioned transcripts based on 4 image groups and the introductory part of the interviews. All themes and categories were defined for better and more consistent understanding (Rivas, 2018) and can be found in Appendix 8 as an example of one of the codebooks. Finally, I joined the analytic categories into broader themes: deductively - those already existing from the previous research; and inductively - the new ones that emerged from the participants.

Critical reflections on the methods

There are two consequential things to comment on. First, iconology is very similar in its approach to semiotics by Barthes (1972). For instance, each of Panofsky's *levels* (Howells, 2008) becoming a part of the next one, building on each other, resembles how "in semiotics, what at one stage of the signification process is a finished sign, on the next level becomes a component of a new sign, that is then again transformed into the signifying part of a new sign, and so on" (Liepe, 2022, p.49). Another similarity is that the semiotic emphasis on socially constructed language and text (Jensen, 2012) resembles considering the historical, social, and political context surrounding the artist on the third level of analysis in Panofsky's model (Howells, 2008).

The second crucial aspect to comment on is that the methods are different in what Liepe (2022) calls "difference in objectives" (p.50). Liepe (2022) proceeds to explain that "[i]n semiotics, it is the how of meaning-making that is investigated, whereas Panofsky's focus of interest lies on the what" (p.50). Simply put, the two methods are different in the focus of what they try to find out. Semiotics is asking about the process of text formation, while iconology is more concerned with deciphering what is it that the text is trying to communicate. "Panofsky's account centers on intention: on the "sender" part of a communication model in an effort to uncover the intended, and thus historically authentic meaning of a work of art" (Liepe, 2022, p.51), which allowed me to avoid the need to reach out to the creators of the art conducting production interviews. In this paper, the focus of iconology was found to be slightly more significant as I aimed to understand how Ukrainian

art creators were transforming the content to deliver the *what* of events happening during the war in the form of illustrations to bypass the Meta community guidelines.

At the same time, the semi-structured interviews with interviewees, who provided their thoughts about the art pieces, provided the other side of the communication process - reception (Bazeley, 2013). Combining iconology and semi-structured interviews, I saw what ideas the creators were trying to deliver through the art text and identified how the Swedish audience received the message. Eventually, it allowed me to evaluate how successful the attempt to use visual doublespeak to bypass the Meta community guidelines was.

Analysis

As mentioned, the combination of semi-structured interviews and iconographic analysis provided an overview of the meaning-making process when encountering war-related illustrations from both production and perception perspectives. In this chapter, the analysis is structured according to the 5 data groups: *Participants' social media practices, Illustrations for an external audience with English text, Illustrations for an external audience with no text, Illustrations for an internal audience with no text, Illustrations for an internal audience with Ukrainian text,* and concluding part *Particpants' reflections: Between truth and emotions.* Understanding the background of the people whose meaning-making process is being researched is essential. Thus, I outline the research participants' social media practices background and content moderation experience in the *Participants' social media practices*. Other sections are focused on dissecting two illustrations per section through iconography, taking a look at the production part of the communicative process. Applying Panofsky's iconological analysis, I examined each illustration on three levels (see Appendix 9): pre-iconographical description, iconographical analysis, and iconological interpretation (Howells, 2008). In this chapter, I present the final stage of iconographical interpretation, which is built upon the previous stages of pre-iconographical description and iconographical analysis and, therefore, includes their results. This is then complemented by the participants' meaning-making, feelings, and engagement, revealing the perception part.

Participants' social media practices

As stated at the beginning of this dissertation, only one in five people on the internet is a producer, while the others are pure consumers (Kemp, 2024). Similarly, when I asked my interviewees to describe their social media practices, they all emphasized their predominant consumer role: "It's kind of just passively seeing," claims Hugo, a 22-year-old Swedish student and loan broker. However, while claiming they are just passively seeing the content, my participants have demonstrated remarkably conscious consumption practices. One of the most prominent criticisms regarded the overconsumption on which Vera, a 29-year-old Swedish student, commented:

> I use Facebook only on my desktop. I don't have a Facebook app on my phone anymore because then you get reels again. And I'm like, I already have the video format. I have YouTube, right? I have Instagram. Do I need Facebook too? No, I don't. Because now, Instagram and Facebook are kind of the same.

This supports the findings of Logan et al. (2018), claiming that social media users have become "more selective about their media exposure" (p.357). The similarity between Instagram and Facebook is that the primary motivation for engaging is to keep up with family and friends and to feel happy. However, while participants prevailingly use Instagram for entertainment and are happy about it, they describe their relations with Facebook as somewhat complicated and even forced. As Vera puts it, "I am Swedish, right, so everyone here uses Facebook all the time for everything! You can't really be in Sweden without using Facebook, I feel". This aligns with the earlier findings of Bakshy et al. (2015) on the impact of selective exposure to content on social media and the consequential formation of niche groups, which in the case of this research are local Swedish groups.

Participants reported feeling happiness, boredom, irritation, and sadness when scrolling through Instagram and Facebook. Happiness was the most common emotion, as participants liked seeing content related to family and friends, as well as wholesome or entertaining posts. Participants preferred Instagram over Facebook because it provided more entertaining content relevant to their interests. This corroborates the earlier findings of Kim and Kim (2019) and Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) on entertaining content creating positive attachment to the platform, increasing user engagement as well as reaffirming the difference between Facebook and Instagram, with the latter being more steered by emotional reactions. Generally, my interviewees have described Facebook as more political than Instagram because the latter "may not be the platform for it," said Noah, a 26-year-old Swedish student and bartender, reminding again that Instagram is built to encourage the production and consumption of aesthetic and entertainment content (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021).

A big part of the social media experience of the research participants is constituted of seeing advertisements. Hugo, for example, criticized Facebook and Instagram for having user information "harnessed to generate surplus value for some shareholders in the US". This finding was expected as it reaffirms what Isodje (2013) and Venkateswaran et al. (2019) suggested earlier concerning Facebook and Instagram serving simultaneously as communication platforms and businesses themselves not only for users to be entertained but also for other enterprises to advertise and market their products.

Participants are aware of content moderation but see its inconsistencies, as Vera said: "Facebook makes a lot of weird updates all the time. Suddenly, you log in, and you're like, OK, why can't I see all of the comments?" There are several possible explanations for this

standpoint. For example, Facebook's use of "automatic detection software" (Gillespie, 2018, p.97) does not exclude accidental flagging of appropriate content as problematic and otherwise. Candidly speaking, it just is made to be chaotic, where, for example, "[g]raphic, violent images should be removed, with the exception of aborted fetuses" (Gillespie, 2018, p.112) and multiple other overly specific regulations that change all the time.

Interestingly, most participants positively evaluated violent content moderation on Facebook and Instagram, as they did not happen to encounter it. Even when they see violence, Alma, a 32-year-old Swedish entrepreneur, says:

> It comes up with, like, that little pop-up warning like, oh yeah, this video is violent. If you want to continue watching, press the button, right? So I do feel like there's some kind of balance there.

While the majority deemed it proper not to be exposed to violent content, the views on the extent to which content moderation should be ideally enforced have gotten divided. A third of interviewees claimed that it is a sign of good moderation when a user is only exposed to the content they're interested in. The rest of the participants agreed on the importance of a balanced feed to avoid polarization and radicalization online and in real life, for which participants blamed Facebook and Instagram. Reflecting on that, Alma noted, "You're going to get pushed more similar content as well, and then you just get reaffirmed in your beliefs, and you don't really get challenged". These findings corroborate the previous research by Singer and Brooking (2019), arguing that the natural source of echo chambers emergence is that "people like to be right; they hate to be proven wrong" (p.125), and thus, even without social media, the human brain is inclined to commit to confirmation bias.

Illustrations for an external audience with English text

This section analyzes English text containing illustrations created by Ukrainian artists that were shown to Swedish participants. This section contained 2 illustrations with English text that were expectedly easy for the participants to understand as they targeted non-Ukrainian audiences, including Swedes.

'Z-Z-Z'

Since the very beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the creation of digital illustrations of war has become a way to communicate the events taking place in Ukraine with the world. These illustrations were expected to be "used by people from different countries to

protest the aggression and lies of the occupants" (Yabluchna & Polovynka, 2022, n.p). *Z-Z-Z*, depicted in *Figure 4,* was originally published on 11 March 2022 and was one of the first illustrations to depict the full-scale invasion.

Figure 4: Illustration 1 - *Z-Z-Z*, 11 March 2022

Two primary intrinsic meanings have been found through iconological analysis of *Z-Z-Z*: undermining the power of the enemy and Nazi symbolism. The first one regards undermining the enemy's power to influence Ukrainians' response to the war outbreak. Therefore, Ukrainian media portrayed the Russian army as incapable and weak, consisting of prisoners and inadequately trained soldiers to instill hope and courage in Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. The claims of Ukrainian media were not untrue as Cooper et al. (2023), with a reference to the US military and defense official, claimed that "Russian military has been [...] deliberately using the poorly trained troops to draw, and deplete, Ukrainian fire" (n.p). Thus, Ukrainian soldiers have been publishing pictures of dead Russian soldiers, supplying proof against the Russian narrative that Putin described, saying "[w]e have not lost anything and will not lose anything" (Reuters, 2022, n.p). Consequently, when posting a picture of a dead Russian soldier, Ukrainians often added captions or comments online saying that this soldier *has eaten well and is sleeping*. This phrase comes from the meme that emerged in 2020,

containing a picture of a cat that was thought to be sleeping but turned out to have died (UAportal News, 2020). The meme was viral in Ukraine and Russia.

The second intrinsic meaning concerns Nazi symbolism depicted through the letter *Z*. *Z* is a letter that does not exist in the Cyrillic alphabet used in Russia; nevertheless, it has become a symbol of the Russian troops invading Ukraine in 2022 and their supporters (Ingle, 2022). Sauer (2022) outlines several theories of what Z stands for, including it being the first letter for the Russian word Запад (Zapad), meaning West as a direction of the troops movement. The other version is a reversed number 7, symbolizing 77 years (as of 2022) since the end of WWII, which is sacralized in Russia as a 'victory' of the USSR (Sauer, 2022).

The interviewing part of the research revealed that most participants struggled with interpretation even before deciphering the symbolism embedded in the picture. It was particularly unclear to them whether the man depicted was dead or alive: "It's a very real picture of someone who either is sleeping on the streets or is dead and has obviously been through a lot of dirt and grime," says Alma. Alma's description of the picture as *very real* refers to the realness that almost all the interviewees emphasized when commenting on *Z-Z-Z*. Although a considerable part of the illustration is filled with a red background and white letters, the detailedness of the man makes participants think that his silhouette is actually a photograph. A photograph then turned out to be what my interviewees considered as able to represent reality more than art pieces could, which goes in line with former research findings of Corner (2011), Hopkins (1998), and Jones (1997). In addition, some participants emphasized that graphic elements like a red background and Z-letters decrease the realness of the picture and the intensity of violence depicted in it. Vera commented on this matter, saying,

> It's not that gory, right? So I guess that's why you can add the humorous setbacks here. You know, if there would have been blood and no head and no… nothing, right? Then, you know, it would have been much worse to look at.

While humor certainly downsized the intensity of violence, it also can be considered a technique for coping with trauma caused by war, as was explored in the case of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine earlier by Divon and Eriksson Krutrök (2023). Such ambiguity of interpretations and a general lack of understanding made participants change their opinions about the meaning of, for example, Z-symbol. When commenting on the first picture, Elsa perceived the Z-symbol as a sign of the Ukrainian army. However, later in the interview, when

discussing the third illustration, she reconnected Z-sign to the Russian soldiers after seeing more clues pointing at Russia rather than Ukraine.

All interviewees were confused, and some felt uneasy looking at the illustration. Confusion was mainly connected with uncomprehending the creator's aims when creating the picture. The options for possible reasons varied from trying to demonstrate the strength of the Russian soldiers to building a pro-Ukrainian sentiment, being completely abstract, and trying to imply some deeper meaning.

'Ukrainian Virgin'

Similarly to the previously analyzed illustration, the iconological analysis showed that the *Ukrainian Virgin* depicted in *Figure 5* communicates two primary intrinsic meanings: Nazi aesthetics and Christian symbolism. Since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, experts have been studying the Russian attempt to recreate the Nazi aesthetic. For example, they highlighted Russians using Latin (not Cyrillic) letters 'Z'; 'V'; and 'X' to identify their forces (The Economist, 2022a). Since the 2014 annexation of Crimea and temporary occupation of parts of territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, scholars have also introduced a new term, commonly referred to as 'Ruscism'. The term combines the words 'Russian' and 'fascism' to reflect the modern ideological orientations of Russia, which are based on the imperial struggle to recreate the Soviet Union, exterminate all those who have allegedly gotten brainwashed by the West and have betrayed the alleged common roots of all the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union (Snyder, 2022). Thus the use of Nazi propaganda poster aesthetics in this illustration is an attempt to invertedly show the misery and values the Russian invaders bring to Ukraine and its people, in this case, women.

Figure 5: Illustration 2 - *Ukrainian Virgin*, 17 April 2022

The halo around the head of the central woman, together with the textual signature, refers to the sacredness and purity of a woman who is being raped. The act of sexual abuse is seen as crucifixion, to which the position of the woman points. The comparison is clearly drawn to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ in Christianity. The author is painting a picture of a civilian woman who is going through the terrifying suffering of wartime, like rape, genital mutilation, and humiliation by Russian soldiers, which happens a lot in Ukraine (Krutov & Yehoshyna, 2022). Interestingly, the absence of faces on the military men indicates a depersonalized collective depiction of Russian soldiers. This is because most of the cases of sexual abuse happening in the course of war are yet unsolved, and perpetrators are unpunished (Hopkins, 2022). Thus, any of those Russians who invaded Ukraine could have done or participated in committing these crimes or still might commit them.

One of the key findings showed that the presence of text could, better than standalone visuals, lead the viewer's thoughts in the intended direction. During the interviews, all participants identified the centrally positioned woman as Ukrainian. Moreover, only one interviewee did not perceive the dark figures behind the woman as Russian soldiers. The main clues to

identify these soldiers as Russian for some interviewees were Zs on the armbands, which they also compared with Nazi swastika. However, the main indication became the reference to the Russia-Ukraine war in the text, saying 'Ukrainian Virgin'. William, a 20-year-old Swedish student, elaborates on the connection between the text and the context by saying:

> If you take it as a whole, I'm immediately thinking of the Ukrainian war. And these are obviously Russian soldiers [...]. And then also, like the text itself is the connection between the picture and the context.

The rational connection established by my participants between the observed text and their preliminary knowledge about the Russian war in Ukraine aligns with the previous research by Joffe (2008) on the text being perceived rationally rather than emotionally. The connection to the real-life war that the presence of text allowed participants to make also became proof of this illustration's realness rather than abstractness. For instance, interviewees decoded the motif of rape and captivity happening during the Russia-Ukraine war from the nakedness of the women and the vulnerable positions of their bodies. The Christian symbolism enforced the impression of vulnerability, purity, and innocence of the long-suffering Ukrainian woman in wartime as the embodiment of the Virgin Mary.

While this picture made all my participants feel uneasy because of the color palette, it caught their eyes enough not to scroll past it. It also did not become too ambiguous, although Liam, a 23-year-old student and worker in the municipality, emphasized the crucial difference between the *Ukrainian Virgin* and *Z-Z-Z*, saying:

> I think it's a bit less disturbing than the previous one, actually. I think the fact that in the previous one, the man seems to be taken from a picture, like it's a photo. This is an illustration.

Thus, through being less disturbing but also emotionally charged and easy to decode due to the presence of text, this illustration could be seen as art in a propaganda genre. At the same time, as outlined by Farkas et al. (2018), propaganda can be classified as white, grey, or black based on the discreteness of authorship. While the author of the *Ukrainian Virgin* is open about their authorship, making it originally a white propaganda piece, the research participants still did not have the opportunity to see the author's account on Facebook or Instagram, which technically made it black propaganda to them.

Illustrations for an external audience with no text

In the previous section, we have just seen how the presence of text and hitting the target audience caused both rational and emotional engagement in participants. This next section complicated the comprehensive process for interviewees by showing participants 2 illustrations without textual signatures. This was done to identify potential distinctions in interpretation when the illustrations aimed at external audiences lack textual contextualization.

'Pollution of Ukrainian Soil by Russia'

While filled with symbolic elements, the *Pollution of Ukrainian Soil by Russia* depicted in *Figure 6* elaborates on two intrinsic meanings: soil as a source of power in Ukrainian culture and alcoholism and poverty in the Russian army. Soil is one of the crucial and intrinsic symbols of Ukrainian culture. In classical Ukrainian literature, soil has been described as a source of empowerment during struggles like war, occupation, or hunger. Man-made famines organized by the USSR in 1921-1923, 1932-1933, and 1946-1947 involved the collectivization of soil and all the products grown in it and led to starvation and death of millions of people (Kiger, 2019). These events reinforced the mythologizing of soil, making its meaning equal to that of living and surviving. In modern Ukraine, the war has brought this soil mythology back to life. The soil is seen as something the Russians came to take away from Ukrainians and something the nation has to protect.

Figure 6: Illustration 3 - *Pollution of Ukrainian Soil by Russia,* 17 June 2022

As already elaborated on the *Z-Z-Z*, the portrayal of Russian soldiers in Ukraine is that of lower-class and alcohol-addicted individuals. This is not exactly a myth, as the distribution of people conscripted to the Russian army supports it. The most considerable number of conscripts comes from eastern, central, and southern parts of Russia, which usually are populated with large ethnic-minority populations suffering significant poverty (The Economist, 2022b). Meanwhile, Russians in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other biggest cities enjoy regular daily life. Many Ukrainians whose houses were invaded by Russian soldiers were shocked to see that Russian soldiers were stealing various house appliances, among which were also washing machines (Walker & Roth, 2022).

The interviews have uncovered that stereotypes help people instantly identify the object. Even though the most visible parts of the dark and gloomy image of dead Russian soldiers were the Z-signs on their bodies, my participants first noticed the bottles and immediately connected them to dead soldiers being Russian. My interviewees acknowledged that, saying, "When I think about drinking soldiers, I think about Russian soldiers and maybe not primarily Ukrainian soldiers, which could be a stereotype" (Elsa). Interestingly, what has already become a stereotype about Russian soldiers in Ukraine, namely them being looters, was not recognized by the Swedish participants of this research. This refers to the problem of echo chambers and the predisposition to consume information from a limited number of sources, chiefly local sources, as described by Cinelli et al. (2020), therefore limiting the scope of one's informational supply. While the minority of participants managed to identify a washing machine and even showed some background knowledge of looting happening in the occupied towns of Ukraine, the others could not draw a logical connection between washing machines and the location being a battlefield. Consequently, they started offering other interpretations, such as the washing machine being a camera, a lamp, or a tank.

While none of the participants mentioned soil or its symbolic meaning, they all emphasized the dark and grim style of the picture, which would also impact their engagement with it. The majority claimed that the blended colors of the illustration would just not catch their attention enough to stop scrolling and take a look. The others pointed out that the picture's style resembled popular shooter videogames, where Nils, a 31-year-old kindergarten teacher, said, "This kind of looks like a screenshot from, like, maybe *Call of Duty*". This finding indicates how war is seen as something aestheticized through entertainment and becomes a part of day-to-day life, complementing the research of Lury (2011). Consequently, citizens of

Sweden, a country that has not been involved in the actual conflict experience in many years, thus draw an understanding of war from popular culture's romanticized depiction of it.

'Exhumation'

The iconological analysis of *Exhumaiton* depicted in *Figure 7* has shown two primary intrinsic meanings: depiction of mass burial and torture during the Russia-Ukraine war. The illustration depicts the process of human remains exhumation, which was conducted in Izium, Ukraine, in September 2022. During the process, the 447 dead bodies (including children) were exhumed by forensic experts (Balachuk, 2022). Not only did Russian soldiers kill these people, but they also tortured 30 of them; many others had broken limbs, gunshot wounds, and rope tied around their hands or neck (Balachuk, 2022). Several men had their genitals amputated (Balachuk, 2022). Eleven people were tortured so much that forensic experts were not able to identify their gender (Balachuk, 2022). Mass burial as a practice has happened extensively during the Russian war in Ukraine in cities like Izium or Lyman (NV, 2022). The illustration under examination is a nearly literal depiction of how the exhumation was actually taking place. It is a collective portrayal based on several photographs of the mass burial in Izium from different angles.

Torture is unshown in the *Exhumation* but remains such a painful part of what this illustration stands for. Russian soldiers keep applying torture to everybody, from captive Ukrainian soldiers to civilians (Oppenheim, 2023). Russian soldiers use rape, genital electrocution, or other kinds of sexual violence to get information from captives or just torture them for fun. This is well-documented from the intercepted phone conversations of Russian soldiers with their families in Russia, where the former brag about the atrocities they are committing in Ukraine (Kinetz, 2023).

Figure 7: Illustration 4 - *Exhumation*, 16 Sep 2022

The meaning-making process during the interviews when interpreting the *Exhumation* was undoubtedly influenced by understanding the general theme of the depicted illustrations. The participants identified people depicted in the picture as forensics; some even pointed at them wearing helmets, thus making them military forensics. Seeing previous pictures inclined my interviewees to immediately suppose that this painting relates to the Russia-Ukraine war as well, even though they were unable to explain why they made this connection. In addition, interviewees named this picture the most ambiguous compared to the earlier ones. Amongst the factors that made it hard to decipher, they pinpointed a lack of cultural knowledge and uncertainty about the time and place depicted.

In terms of style, the grimness of the picture resembled interviewees the setting of a true crime series. This finding also indicates that just like seeing a videogame scene when looking at the *Pollution of Ukrainian Soil by Russia,* my participants saw what resembled a crime show when looking at the *Exhumation*. This again points to the aesthetization of day-to-day life and events (Lury, 2011), including murder scenes in this case. This can be explained by popular culture and digital entertainment in modern Western societies being the primary

sources from which my interviewees can learn about how a mass grave looks like or how forensics work with it.

Nevertheless, the realness of the illustration was emphasized, underlining that it was intentionally made to look unrealistic to make the content less traumatizing and more accessible for people of different ages. In particular, several participants proposed that the picture is trying to document an occurrence to be further used in school books to teach children about the events of war without traumatizing them with gory visuals of reality. Alma reflected on this matter by saying:

> The overall artwork is a lot more calming. It doesn't have like a lot of colors going on. There's no… There's really no bodies. Everybody here is alive as far as we can see.

Therefore, this adds to the argument made by Corner (2011), who draws a similarity between a photograph and a painting as both of them depict a "captured moment" (p.176). The combination of referring to something real and a mysterious style of the *Exhumaiton* made participants feel curious. It inclined participants to think that if they saw this illustration of Facebook or Instagram, they would check the comments for explanations of its meaning.

Illustrations for an internal audience with no text

The previous section uncovered that without the textual signature, participants used popular culture references and stereotypes to interpret the meaning of the illustrations. This section complicates the meaning-making process for the participants even more by demonstrating 2 pictures that target not the Swedish but the Ukrainian audience. They also contain no textual context to help grasp the meaning of illustrations. This complication was significant because, in the middle of the interview, the participants understood the illustration's central theme, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

'Olenivka'

The iconographical analysis has uncovered two intrinsic meanings of the *Olenivka* illustration in *Figure 8*: depiction of filtration camps and visualization of the unseen. The prison in the illustration is located in Olenivka, a town approximately 10 kilometers away from the temporarily occupied Donetsk. This establishment is not just a prison but a Russian filtration camp for Ukrainian prisoners of war (PoW), members of the Azov battalion who were defending the Azovsteel plant in Mariupol. Approximately 53 PoWs were killed and 130 were

wounded in the aftermath of the bombing of the Olenivka prison (Harding, 2022) depicted in the illustration. Ukrainian officials claimed that this camp served as a place where PoWs were being tortured and humiliated by Russian soldiers, in particular the mercenary Wagner group. The bombing of the Olenivka prison happened several days after the footage of a Ukrainian soldier being castrated with a clerical knife by a Russian soldier was published. This video caused international outrage and was condemned by multiple international organizations and governments (Beaumont, 2022). So, logically, Ukraine accused Russia of trying to cover up the horrible treatment and torture of the PoWs that happened in Olenivka prison by staging an 'accident'.

Multiple war atrocities like torture and genital mutilation that Russian soldiers committed and keep committing to Ukrainian soldiers will never be seen (United Nations, 2024), and for it to not be surfaced, Russia is committed to clearing all the traces. This illustration precisely depicts the way the Olenivka prison actually looks with the addition of the Ukrainian soldiers suffering inside, the part we will never see as Russia has destroyed the evidence. This way, the visualization of material reality is combined with parts that have been confirmed (like the death of people inside the prison) without actually being photographically documented.

Figure 8: Illustration 5 - *Olenivka*, 22 July 2022

The interviewing part of the research demonstrated that elements like barbed wire, barred windows, and people being locked inside the building indicated the building to be a prison. However, the lack of more precise symbols made interviewees hesitant, as Vera elaborated, "Because maybe it's a historical event, maybe it's just somebody who had a nightmare". Nevertheless, just like they did when interpreting the previous picture, my participants were trying to position *Olenivka* in the logical line with four previously observed illustrations. Consequently, they again assumed a connection to the Russian war in Ukraine. However, they did not build this inference from the elements of the picture but instead by positioning it in the context of other illustrations.

The illustration style was perceived as grim and provoked a palette of negative feelings in participants. While some described feeling sad, uncomfortable, or even curious about what was happening, others were shocked and described the feeling as claustrophobic. Vera commented on her feelings, saying:

> It has a lot of the, you know, classic phobias here. You know, you are locked in, it's claustrophobic, you cannot escape, you cannot come out, you are stuck in there, and you know that you are going to die if you are in that room.

Because my participants have experienced such a rich negative set of emotions, many of them outlined the likely goal of the artist creating this piece being to provoke reactions in viewers to the situation of murder and torture when establishing power. This must also explain the engagement described by my participants as stopping scrolling to look at the picture and then searching for more context in the comments, caption, or through the creator's Facebook or Instagram page.

'Mobile Phones'

The iconological analysis of the *Mobile Phones* depicted in *Figure 9* outlined an intrinsic meaning concerning connectivity terror. The illustration depicts the tree existing in reality in Kozacha Lopan village in Ukraine (north of Kharkiv region), right near the border with Russia. The red leaves of the tree stand for the time of the year, which is mid or late autumn. These phones are real phones that belonged to the village's civilian residents, one of the first to be occupied by the Russian army on the 24th of February, 2022.

Figure 9: Illustration 6 - *Mobile Phones*, 16 October 2023

The cellular and Internet connectivity of civilians posed a significant problem for Russian occupants as civilians were rebelling and leaking information to the Ukrainian army about the coordinates and movement of the Russian troops as the latter were crossing the border with Ukraine. The Ukrainian military consequently struck the Russian positions based on the coordinates provided by the civilians (Solodovnik & Hrebinnyk, 2022). Thus, Russian soldiers were threatening those Ukrainian civilians who were trying to call anywhere or use their phones, which was already complicated by Russians jamming the communication signal. In an interview with Suspilne News, some civilians living in Kozacha Lopan, which currently is under the control of Ukraine, again claimed that there were not only button phones but also smartphones nailed to that tree to sow terror and pacify the civilians (Dezhkina & Hrebinnyk, 2023).

Interviews have uncovered that while successfully identifying the elements depicted in the picture, the participants acknowledged the *Mobile Phones* to be absolutely ambiguous. They explained this by the lack of context and difficulties deciphering the connection between the tree trunk, the phones, and the nails going through them. They also could not position this illustration in the same line as those seen earlier when attempting to relate it to Russia's war against Ukraine. Hugo, commenting on this matter, said: "If I Googled him [the artist] and it

said it's Ukrainian war illustrator, I would be very perplexed because I'm not…it's not at all what I'm gathering from the illustration". The overall conclusion elicited by the participants was that the *Mobile Phones* provided no reason to look for a connection to Ukraine.

Even in light of the illustration's polysemy, the participants still could tell that there must have been some goal behind this image. The extraordinariness of what was depicted was evident for William, who added: "This is not something you would normally see on a tree. Like you would not see mobiles nailed to a tree". Thus, interviewees started speculating, building connections between the elements they could see: a tree, phones, nails, and orange leaves. The most common understanding was that of pointing at the relationship dichotomy between human tools and nature. Alma elaborated on this matter, saying:

> We're using cell phones for a lot of things and it is killing nature, so them being stapled to the tree could be an indicator of how this person feels like we're abusing nature.

Some of the other less popular but significant interpretations were pertaining to smartphone addiction and getting rid of evidence. In this illustration, only two participants saw a warning regarding communication issues during the war. Elias, for instance, interpreted the *Mobile Phones* by supposing its meaning as: "Don't speak to anyone. Don't call anyone. You know. Just keep quiet. Keep low".

The interviewees have extensively commented on the style of this picture being aesthetically pleasing while staying dark. The interplay of these factors made this picture the first without causing negative emotions when observing it. Participants described their feelings as neutral, curious, or even happy due to the *Mobile Phones'* somewhat mysterious look. These feelings support the potential participants' engagement, where part said they would like a picture, while the other part would examine the comments and caption out of curiosity. Those who would scroll through provided a poor understanding of the illustration's meaning as the main reason for not engaging.

Illustrations for an internal audience with Ukrainian text

The previous section demonstrated that the absence of a textual signature and Swedish participants interpreting what was created for the Ukrainian audience confused them about the illustration's single meaning. They also majorly focused on elaborating on their feelings rather than the content of the illustrations, which they struggled to understand. This section presents

the analysis of 2 illustrations that were most complicated to interpret for Swedish participants comprising Ukrainian text and the target audience being Ukrainian.

‘600 Days of War’

The iconological analysis of the *600 Days of War* depicted in *Figure 10* elicited the intrinsic meaning elaborating on the attacks committed at the civilian targets during the war. This illustration is a depiction of the aftermath of the missile attack that happened in a Ukrainian town called Groza, Kharkiv region, on the 5th of October, 2023. In the aftermath of the missile attack, 59 people were killed, out of whom one was a child. The attack was particularly tragic as the location hit by the missile was a cafe where, at that moment, the wakes were taking place.

Figure 10: Illustration 7 - *600 Days of War*, 16 October 2023

The man depicted in the illustration is a real man who lost a loved one in the attack and got recorded by the Suspilne News reporters (Selo Hroza Pislia Udaru «Iskanderom»: Raketa Vluchyla u Kafe, de Pomynaly Viiskovoho, 2023). On the recording, he wears a military-styled hat and khaki-colored fleece jacket. There is little information on how he relates to the deceased person. The atrocious attack Russia committed on Groza village and, in particular, striking a cafe is a solid example of targeting civilians by the Russian army. Multiple times, especially at the beginning of the war, Russian officials denied attacking

civilian objects (Mezzofiore & Polglase, 2022), even though this was evidently a lie (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The illustration contains text in Ukrainian that says ‘600 Days of the full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine’ and serves as a reminder of the duration of the full-scale invasion.

While the participants assumed this illustration to be a photograph reflecting reality, they still perceived it as what appeared in front of them - an illustration. To reiterate, they supposed every element of the illustration was placed there by the artist with a specific purpose to deliver an intended idea. During interviews, almost all interviewees drew a comparison between the man wearing Adidas pants and him being Russian. Vera elaborated on this, saying: “Adidas striped pants take my mind to that it is a Russian man purely out of, you know, popular culture references”. Even the position of the man’s body squatting over a body bag was compared to another pop-culture reference Nils named “the Slav squat,” referring to the Internet meme about the Russian *gopnik* (Fedorova, 2014). For Panofsky (1991), artist’s works are impacted by the social environment in which they are created. This research expands on this understanding by showing that the viewer’s social environment and knowledge about other such environments at different times influence their meaning-making process.

Furthermore, this finding again demonstrates the impact of the aestheticization of daily life on the participants’ understanding of the visual phenomena when they encounter it. Some other participants also drew comparisons between the *600 Days of War* and rap or metal music album covers, saying: “Almost like a CD, you know, like *Rage Against the Machines*, you know. Almost like that. Like Ukrainian black metal or something” (Elias). The reason for such an active drawing of understandings from popular culture must have been incited by participants’ inability to comprehend the text written in Ukrainian, which some of them also supposed to be Russian. Without understanding the Ukrainian text, the participants are left with referring to stereotypes and pop culture that simplify and generalize their knowledge about the world, which, when applied to particular cases like the one depicted in *600 Days of War,* prove themselves wrong.

‘You Wanted This Land’

The iconological analysis of *You Wanted This Land*, depicted in *Figure 11*, uncovered two core intrinsic meanings: the twisting of the Soviet and the cultural significance of soil. In the

same vein as the Soviet posters, *You Wanted This Land* aims to empower citizens. Conversely, the Soviet posters used to tell the viewer what exactly they should do directly: "Today, the factory fulfilled 200 percent of the plan! We will celebrate every day with a new victory of labor!" (Erizanu, 2020, n.p); "Every minute should be spent on highly productive work!" (Erizanu, 2020, n.p). On the contrary, the Ukrainian poster does not talk to Ukrainians whom it aims to empower. However, the textual signature explains to the Russian invaders the consequences of their actions. The color choice is also significantly different from that used in USSR posters. Here, the primary colors are the colors of the Ukrainian national flag, and red is a color of blood.

The usage of traditional clothes in the illustration calls upon the people's cultural heritage and intensifies the emotionality of the picture, especially when combined with the stream of blood on the shirt. In the text, the Russian letter 'ы' is used instead of the Ukrainian 'и' in the first word 'ты' (*'you'* from Russian), while the rest of the words are written in Ukrainian. This was probably done as an artistic expression to signal that this message was addressed to the Russian invaders. The text on the illustration is part of the lyrics to a famous song called *A Lullaby for the Enemy*. The song has gone viral, and the quotes from the song have become very popular. Arguably, the most prominent quote, which also is a text outlined in the picture, is:

> *You wanted this land*
> *So now merge with it*
> *You will become my soil*
> *Sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep...* (Stasik, 2019)

The soil here is seen as powerful because it grants power to defeat the enemies and absorbs them as they are buried in the ground, making the soil more fertile. This motif of the soil as alive and mythological is consonant with that elaborated on in the *Pollution of Ukrainian Land by Russia*.

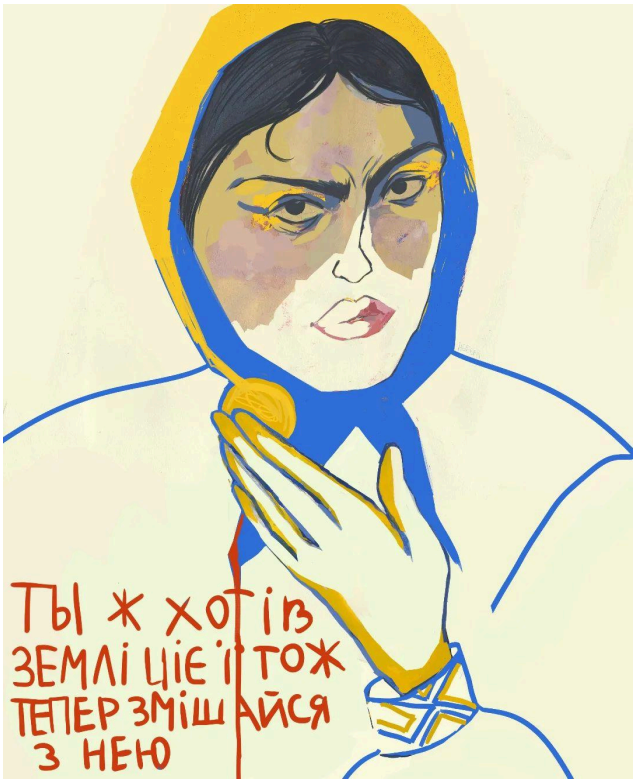

Figure 11: Illustration 8 - *You Wanted This Land*, 1 March 2022

During the interviews, participants faced identical language struggles when trying to understand the meaning of the textual signature. However, they identified the connection to Ukraine by building upon a plethora of other symbols like blue and yellow colors, traditional attire, and a head scarf. Therefore, the person depicted was identified as a Ukrainian woman looking angry because of her facial expression: "It looks like she's staring into my soul. Very angrily [laughs]", reflected William. Most interviewees pointed out that the upper half of her face was significantly more detailed, while the lower was rather simplistic. Such simplicity, accompanied by contrasting colors and resembling other propaganda posters, led the participants to classify it as a propaganda art piece. "You know, like this one…the American one, it's pointing, *I need you*, or *I want you*. Uncle Sam. Almost like that. So stand up for Babushka," commented Elias. Two participants referred to the woman as a *babushka*, a Russian for *grandma* or *old lady* (Meriam-Webster, 2024), applying their earlier knowledge of Russian memes and popular internet culture. Hugo also compared the woman to a Swedish cultural symbol: "I really could have thought it was like a påskkärring [from Swedish - an Easter Witch] or something."

Generally, Because my interviewees could not grasp the meaning of the text, they felt somewhat confused and relatively neutral. Still, they praised the picture's style and said they

would like to read comments and translate the text to learn its meaning. They assumed the goal of the illustration was to raise awareness of the Russia-Ukraine war and show the resistance and strength of Ukrainian women.

Participants' reflections: Between truth and emotions

At the end of each interview, the participants were asked to elaborate their opinions on photographs and illustrations as tools to communicate war events, considering the illustrations they had seen during the conversation. Generally, the interviewees were convinced that both illustrations and photographs could be used to deliver information about the war differently. Photographs were usually perceived as pertaining to reality more than illustrations, while the latter were thought to capture a broader meaning through symbols and diverse styles. This position corroborates that of Hopkins (1998), who believes that photography becomes what was captured, and Jones (1997), arguing that painting is what was experienced. These differences then impact how the observer interacts with the visual object: "I think that people would look longer at an illustration than at a picture. Like a photograph, right? Because there's a little piece of, you know, distance", said Vera. I would suggest that illustration establishes two kinds of distance. The first is the comprehensive one, where it takes much longer to decipher the meaning of the illustrations. The second is the emotional one, where the artist can modify different aspects of a painting, emphasizing or disguising certain parts, for instance, making it more or less violent.

My interviewees believe that the choice between the photograph and the illustration as a communicative tool depends on what must be communicated: feeling or information. Noah said, "Trying to make art, you try to convey a larger spectrum of feelings or some sort of larger message while taking a picture describes a situation or what's happening." Illustration invites you to reflect, think, and feel a much larger spectrum of emotions than a photograph because art usually has some mystery to it, which intrigues and attracts people. Still, a photograph was deemed a better choice when aiming to inform about something precise because illustration gives too much space for interpretation. As much as an illustration can be convincing and engaging, it will not create a rational inference but rather provoke an emotional reaction, if understood at all.

Overall, the analysis has uncovered that all of the illustrations can be qualified as examples of bottom-up visual doublespeak as they are telling true stories of actual events that happened

during the Russian invasion of Ukraine in a form that made the depiction of violence on them more discreet. The comprehensive complexity increased with each section, showing that the more context was provided, the more true and real the events depicted appeared to be for the participants. The illustrations that targeted the external audience contained numerous symbolic clues indicating, for example, the soldiers' nationality to help the person from outside the Ukrainian context grasp the meaning. Illustrations with text made participants believe that the author was trying to focus their attention on some particular aspect of what was depicted. Illustrations containing English text were interpreted most precisely, while those with Ukrainian text made participants speculate about stereotypes and popular culture references, trying to make sense of what they saw based on their preliminary knowledge. A similar interpretation happened to illustrations without text, which were considered the most polysemic.

Conclusion

This thesis called into question the contemporary social media climate in which truth and knowledge acquire meaning through the commercially aestheticized lens. Notably, the goal was to evaluate the Swedish audience's perception of violence-related illustrations published on Facebook and Instagram as a communicative act elaborating on the events of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. To achieve this, the production and reception sides of the communicative process were analyzed through the iconological analysis of the illustrations created by Ukrainian artists and semi-structured interviews with the Swedish nationals to whom these illustrations were demonstrated. Such an approach uncovered intrinsic meanings embedded in the illustrations by the artists and the viewer's ability to detect and decipher these senses. Since the central argument is that social media sometimes sacrifices unpleasant truths for the profits ensured by the happiness of the modern social media dweller and restricts the way reality can be depicted on their platforms, all the illustrations analyzed reflected actual war events rather than abstract ideas.

The analysis of the Swedish participants' Facebook and Instagram usage outlined them as conscious consumers, reflecting on the patterns and volume of their consumption. Expectedly, most of the content they encounter on social media stimulates positive emotions and increases engagement, supporting the previous research of Kim and Kim (2019) and Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021). While feeling happiness was majorly connected to seeing the content of family and friends or entertaining and wholesome publications, informative content like news provoked irritation, sadness, and boredom. This echoes the conclusions of Baumer et al. (2013) on the main reasons for users' disengagement from Facebook. In conjunction with the findings of Kim et al. (2016) on advertising being the largest source of income for Facebook, interviewees reported advertising as one of the most seen types of content. Therefore, the reasons for incentivizing the placement and distribution of entertaining content on Facebook and Instagram have become reasonably evident.

While the abovementioned help to explain the kinds of content the social media under research are eager to place on their platforms, this research also addresses their insincere behavior concerning the placement, viewing, and spreading of violent content. Contrary to my initial comparison of Facebook and Instagram to Foucault's (1995) panopticon with even stricter punitive measures due to the punishment's public invisibility, the interviews have

demonstrated that users acknowledge the presence of moderation. Still, Facebook's "publish-then-filter" (Gillespie, 2018, p.75) moderation principle was frustrating for participants as the removal of published content was always unexpected and moderation rules unclear. In conjunction with the research results of Stray et al. (2023), Facebook was found to incite the activity of radical individuals in controlled amounts on its platform to increase user engagement. Moreover, Facebook's history of consciously ignoring hate speech, for instance, not removing racist content during the 2016 US elections in order not to disappoint the conservative part of society (Singer & Brooking, 2019), infers that issues with removing or keeping certain content are not always a matter of feasibility. Building upon that, the interviewees strongly condemned Facebook and Instagram's inconsistent and biased moderation of political content, inciting radicalization and chasing monetary goals.

The abovementioned finding theoretically stems from the foundational dichotomy between the notions of being normal and abnormal person described by Foucault (1995). While Facebook and Instagram strictly regulate violence, they allow publishing it to increase user engagement (Stray et al., 2023); however, only within the constraints of what these platforms deem beneficial for the 'normal' user. The findings of this study showed that the 'normal' Facebook and Instagram user is a solvent individual who engages with available content enough to be shown advertisements and is not too radical to scare away other users from the platform but radical enough to be gripping.

The participants found income to be Facebook and Instagram's primary goal due to the extensive presence of advertisements and biased moderation. These platforms were found to be not so much scared of truth as of the emotional response it incites in people. This finding was well substantiated by the results of the interviews, where the more realistic the illustration looked, the more interviewees expressed feelings of discomfort, sadness, and unease. Building upon Gillespie's (2018) argument about users fleeing overtly toxic and disturbing environments, this research concludes that allowing distressing content would be the last thing any social media wants to happen. This was supported by the significant number of participants who suggested that their actions when encountering the realistically looking violent illustration would be to scroll past or even report it for violating community guidelines. The question of whether there is good truth to share and bad truth to rather not could be seen as normative. However, this research showed that it is not. The answer to this question forms how we shape our social knowledge about material reality. For Facebook, as

was demonstrated, this question is not normative at all, but on the contrary, it costs them real material money.

While this study built on the phenomenon of *doublespeak* developed by William Lutz (1996), it took a broader look at how doublespeak can be constituted in modern digitalized societies and found that visual art created by Ukrainian artists is a perfect example of this. Lutz (1996) mainly outlined doublespeak as a top-down communicative approach aimed at deceiving the receiver of information. These findings indicated that doublespeak can be reversely used as a bottom-up communication technique through illustrations, empowering the artist, and contrary to Lutz's vision, bottom-up doublespeak aims to deliver the truth to the receiver of the information, deceiving the medium. While visual doublespeak could be compared to online propaganda (Tucker et al. 2018), the critical trait of the illustrations under research is having the intention to deceive the medium, which is not necessary for online propaganda. This research uncovered that deception in the bottom-up doublespeak is implemented by changing the form of information to whichever suits Facebook's and Instagram's policies.

The results further strengthened the conviction that the truthfulness of the information does not necessarily match its believability. Most interviewees underscored that even if an artist tries to reflect actual events, they still emphasize or downplay certain aspects of what is depicted to deliver a message. The research found that to claim the truthfulness of something, the viewers must believe what they see; however, to believe something, it does not necessarily have to be true but rather believable enough. Remarkably, the believability of something as true turned out to be related to the form it is presented in, the presence of textual signature, and the availability of prior knowledge about what the viewers believe is before them. Most interestingly, the emotionality of the illustrations did not make them more believable or true. However, if they were already believed to be true, it inflated the response and reaffirmed beliefs. Thus, while the truth about the war events happening in Ukraine did not change, the illustrations were proven to be not a perfect form to communicate the truth.

The iconological analysis of the illustrations created by Ukrainian artists depicting the events of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine showed that Facebook would have probably removed their contents if published as photographs. Their themes covered events such as torture, rape, mass murder, and inciting violence. Some of the artists this research covered suggested that one of their motivations for creating these pieces was social media content moderation policies (Kudryashova, 2022; polosunya, 2024). It became evident that the

pictures not only reflect the actual events that happened, but most of them attempted to make a painted copy of a photograph, which most interviewees also confirmed. Interestingly, almost every participant described illustrations containing photographic elements in them as realistic or feeling more true than those that seemed to be painted entirely and contained no photographic elements. This finding aligns with the research of Joffe (2008), who claimed photographs to be convincing of their truthfulness just by their form as reflective of reality. Corner (2011) deemed painting an entirely subjective expression of the artist unsuitable for documentation. This finding expands on Corner's (2011) understanding in that even though my interviewees noted the resemblance of some illustrations to photographs, the sole form of an illustration predominantly inclined them to think about these pieces as polysemic and abstract.

The research has not found many distinguishable techniques for creating Ukrainian political illustrations. The primary distinct feature is the stylistic choices, which makes the bottom-up approach evident. This is reflected in ordinary people using this art and its occasional humorous elements as a trauma-coping technique (Divon and Eriksson Krutrök, 2023) that usually would not be used in a top-down approach. The participants recognized that the application of humor in the researched illustrations is a way to downplay the violence depicted, confirming the standpoint on doublespeak that this research proposes. Contrary to standard propaganda poster techniques, for instance, in Soviet propaganda (Erizanu, 2020), most researched illustrations do not contain a direct textual call to action. They convey a rather intrinsic call to action, which is understandable only if the plethora of symbols in the picture is deciphered. For instance, religious elements were combined with Nazi aesthetics to show how, in the intersection of the two, the pure and the innocent get poisoned by the bloody-dark colors, thus depicting the effects of the Russian invasion on Ukrainian women.

This study provided further evidence for illustrations being perceived emotionally rather than rationally while refuting the position of Sabate et al. (2014). Iconological analysis showed the consistent application of red, black, white, blue, and yellow contrasting colors through all of the illustrations. The research participants described them as dark and grim, creating an unpleasant emotional experience and indicating the disturbing content of the illustrations. Some of the paintings incorporated a comparison of Nazi and Russian symbolism, which also formed the negative attitudes in interviewees. Thus, even if my participants were not always able to precisely decode the event depicted, they all expressed the same feeling of seeing

something profoundly wrong and terrifying. They also deciphered the illustrations containing English text much more precisely than those without the text, which corroborates the findings of Joffe (2008) on textual information, creating a rational engagement rather than emotional. Such rational engagement inclined my participants to think of illustrations with textual signatures as depicting reality, even when they were unable to understand the text written in Ukrainian.

Confirming the argument of Panofsky (1991), this research found evidence of the social environment's impact on the artist's works. The findings of this thesis also demonstrated that the viewer's perception of art is influenced by the former's social experience and knowledge of other environments that expand the horizons of understanding. Nonetheless, as much as the knowledge of other environments amplified the participants' perception, it also turned out to be limiting if applied superficially through stereotypes. Interview participants frequently compared the illustrations they observed to something they found resemblant in popular culture, such as a video game, a true crime series, or a rock/metal music album cover. This can be explained by the interview participants forming their social understanding based on the available material reality. As Swedish citizens living in Sweden, my participants did not encounter a mass burial scene, a battlefield with dead soldiers, or the aftermath of bombing civilians. Therefore, they understood what they saw in the illustrations from the only information available to them about these events, coming from movies, computer games, or certain music genres.

The finding that should be particularly emphasized is that my participants constructed their understandings of these illustrations regardless of having access to full or partial, correct or false information. The only variable part was whether they would engage with this material or not, and this was where aesthetics played a crucial role in provoking a desire to engage if the picture seemed aesthetically pleasing and vice versa. These findings support Lury's (2011) research on the aestheticization of people's daily lives in late modernity. My interviewees decided to like, look through the comments, or stop scrolling their feed to look at the picture only when they deemed it aesthetically pleasing or interesting. To put it differently, my participants were interested in the content they encountered as long as it was considered entertaining, allowing them to see popular culture references.

Finally, participants' interpretation of illustrations closer to the middle of the interviews was influenced by the general theme of the paintings, which became a limitation of this study. To

reiterate, after illustrations 3 and 4, participants started cross-referencing the meanings of symbols, actors, and other aspects from several pictures. They understood the central theme pertaining to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, this was not particularly surprising. To reduce the impact of this factor, the sequence of illustration demonstrations was arranged from the easiest to the most challenging to understand.

A key limitation of this thesis is that the analyzed illustrations were demonstrated to participants outside the digital environment in which they were originally published. This means that participants did not read the caption and the comments under the publication, although the artist's handle was available and written on most pictures. While this took away additional contextual information from the interviewees' meaning-making process, it was important for this research framing to do so. The spread of the content online is extremely cumbersome to control. It would be impossible to predict whether a participant would encounter this image on the original account of the artist or on any other social media page that shared the image. Future studies on the current topic are therefore suggested to focus on the user perception of the visual content with contextual elements like comments and captions included.

In conclusion, this study uncovers that the application of the bottom-up visual doublespeak by Ukrainian artists highlighting the events of the Russian full-scale invasion demonstrates mixed results in terms of its success with the foreign audience. On the one hand, these illustrations find an emotional response in the observer. On the other hand, they are understood as depicting reality only with textual signatures or photographic elements. Whenever it reflects reality, people still think of it as an art piece and, therefore, suppose abstract ideas for which the elements depicted in the picture stand. The violence in these illustrations is hidden by humor and graphic elements, downplaying its intensity and making it more digestible.

The subjective experience of the author and the viewer mutually influence the final perception of the illustration. While the artist integrates the aspects of the social environment in which the picture is created, the viewers translate what appears before them to the language of their own environment. Whatever is unknown to the viewers, they try to elicit from similar knowledge, which majorly comes from popular culture. This constructs a significantly distorted and sometimes romanticized picture of violence and war in the heads of the people. In the context of modern conflicts, digital art fits the postmodern idea of truth and the

financially driven logic of content moderation on Facebook while remaining one of the very few communication strategies accessible for the victims of war. Consequently, although the artists did an incredible job preserving as much connection to reality as possible and added enough modifications to bypass social media's moderation, illustrations were not understood as a communication method that could accurately deliver information.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Sample of illustrations

№	Illustration	Link
1	‘Z-Z-Z’	https://www.instagram.com/p/Ca9MhwbOYB3/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link
2	‘Ukrainian Virgin’	https://www.instagram.com/p/CcdugzstHJN/?igsh=MTFnbWNoN3YxYXRxZQ==
3	‘Pollution of Ukrainian Soil by Russia’	https://www.instagram.com/p/Ce6qn4sNMRK/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
4	‘Exhumation’	https://www.instagram.com/p/CilM-vTsm0b/?igsh=MTkwd2hiMm5jNjhqcw==
5	‘Olenivka’	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cgo8SdRqk_0/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
6	‘Mobile Phones’	https://www.instagram.com/p/CkA91RBNgX_/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link
7	‘600 Days of War’	https://www.instagram.com/p/CycnZnSNF4e/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
8	‘You Wanted This Land’	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cakg3SmqgCz/?img_index=1

Appendix 2: Sample of interviewees

Interview	Name of the participant in thesis	Age	Nationality	Occupation	Interview date	Duration of the interview
Pilot	Elsa	23	Swedish	Student; Works in a hotel and as a school substitute	27.03.2024	1 hour 13 minutes
1	Vera	29	Swedish	Student	28.03.2024	1 hour 35 minutes
2	Noah	26	Swedish	Student; Bartender	04.04.2024	52 minutes
3	Hugo	22	Swedish	Student; Loan broker	08.04.2024	1 hour 53 minutes
4	William	20	Swedish	Student	09.04.2024	42 minutes
5	Alma	32	Swedish	Entrepreneur	10.04.2024	1 hour 27 minutes
6	Selma	22	Swedish	Student	10.04.2024	55 minutes
7	Liam	23	Swedish	Student; Works in municipality	11.04.2024	1 hour 20 minutes
8	Alice	23	Swedish	Student	11.04.2024	50 minutes
9	Nils	31	Swedish	Kindergarten teacher	11.04.2024	46 minutes
10	Elias	31	Swedish	Student; Personal assistant	12.04.2024	51 minute

Appendix 3: Interview guide

SECTION I

Theme 1: Participants' background

1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself, what your name is, what your age is, and where you come from?
2. What does your day-to-day life look like? (work/study/etc.)

Theme 2: Social media practices

3. How often and why do you use Facebook and Instagram?
4. What do your Facebook and Instagram feeds usually look like in terms of content?
5. Which emotions do you often feel when scrolling through your Facebook and Instagram feeds?
6. What do you think about content moderation on Facebook and Instagram, what has your personal experience been?
    - Have you ever flagged some content on Facebook and Instagram as inappropriate?
    - Have you ever experienced your content being removed by Facebook or Instagram?
7. Could you share your thoughts on the measures Facebook and Instagram take to moderate violent content?
8. How interested are you in politics?
9. Could you explain how political Facebook and Instagram should be, ideally?

SECTION II

Practical part: Illustrations reception

Now I will show you a series of 8 images and ask you several questions aimed to uncover your understanding of these illustrations. The list of questions for each image will be the same. Each question deals with a different way to look at the illustration, so please stay attentive. I will also not be giving you the context of the illustrations to get as much clear perception from you as possible.

2 English text-containing illustrations for an external audience

10. Could you name the objects on the illustration you are looking at?
11. Could you describe how the objects you have identified in the illustration relate to each other?
    Pay attention to:
    - Forms
    - Figures
    - Colors
    - Style
    - Text
12. How does what you see make you feel?

13. What do you think this illustration refers to?
14. How would you describe the meaning of this illustration?
15. How would you react if you saw such an illustration on Facebook or Instagram?
16. Why do you think an artist created such an illustration?

Asking the questions 10-16 to each of the following sections:

2 No-text illustrations for an external audience

2 No-text illustrations for an internal audience

2 Ukrainian text-containing illustrations for an internal audience

SECTION III

Theme 3: Reflections on ways of communicating war-related information

17. What are the pros and cons of these illustrations compared to photographs and video as tools to inform people online about war events?
18. What is your preferred form for getting information about war?
19. Do you have any questions regarding the illustrations you have seen or their meaning?

Do you have any additional points you would like to raise?

Appendix 4: Consent form

Lunds Universitet
Faculty of Social Sciences
Roman Kmyta

Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project, which takes place from January 2024 until May 2024. This consent form will provide you with information about your involvement and your rights as a participant. The information obtained from this research will be used in the completion of the Master's thesis in Communication and Media Studies. The research will be conducted by Roman Kmyta, a student at the Department of Communication and Media at Lund University, Sweden.

Your participation:

1. What is the Purpose of the Study? This research seeks to shed light on the power of digital communication in times of conflict. Specifically, it explores how individuals can come together to create understanding and meaning through this medium. The research provides an excellent chance to reflect on the ramifications of contemporary notions of truth, power dynamics, and content moderation on social media and beyond.

2. Request for Participation: You have been asked to participate in this study as your national identity, age, and current geographical location match the target group of this research.

3. How many people will participate? 11 people will take part in this study.

4. How long will it take to participate in this study? If you're interested in participating in this study, we'd love to have you! The study will take about 60 to 70 minutes to complete.

5. What will happen during this study? During this research study, the researcher will conduct a semi-structured interview. Interview questions are related to your general background, personal experience using Facebook and Instagram, and your interpretation of digital visual art pieces. The researcher has a set of questions designed to help you relate your perspectives; however, over the course of the interview, additional clarifying questions may be asked. During the interview, you can refuse to answer any questions or withdraw completely from the study at any time with no questions asked.

6. Sensitive Content Notification. Please be aware that during the interview for this study, there will be a demonstration of still visual art related to war or violence. While no graphic video footage or photographs will be shown, the content may be sensitive to some individuals.

Confidentiality

The interview will be audio recorded. All of your information and interview responses will be kept confidential. Except for the researcher, no one will be able to access any identifying information associated with you. Your name will be changed and other identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research. However, your background information like your nationality, work or study life, age, and political orientation, will be used to form the findings in the final paper. The researcher will thoroughly anonymize all your responses for the research. The thesis will be published with an open access.

This Informed Consent Form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this Informed Consent Document. Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been/will be answered, and that you voluntarily agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

You have the right to receive information about the personal data we process about you. You also have the right to have inaccurate personal data about you corrected. If you have a complaint about our processing of your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer at dataskyddsombud@lu.se. You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority (the Data Protection Authority, IMY) if you believe that we are processing your personal data incorrectly.

Declaration

I, _____, agree that I have understood the terms of the agreement and the study.

Date: _____ Signature of the Participant:

Note: The original consent form contained the private phone number and e-mail address of the researcher and was removed from the one provided above.

Appendix 5: Full transcript of one of the interview sections

Interview 6 Alma [1 hour 26 min, face-to-face, 10.04.24]

Q: So welcome. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate. It's a great pleasure to see you.

A: Thank you for having me.

Q: As I mentioned before, we will have three parts of the research. I will now start from the first one and talk a little bit about your identity. Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself as in name, age, maybe occupation in life, what you're doing?

A: Yes. So, my name is [Alma]. I am 32 years old, so I'm born in 1992. I was born and raised here in Sweden, actually in Malmö, so I haven't really left that much. As for occupation, I have studied a lot. I studied psychology, sociology, sexology, but I started working for a cosmetic brand eight years ago. I'm on my eighth year now, and three years ago I started my own company as well that works with wine import. Is that fine information?

Q: Yes, of course. How would you describe your day-to-day life?

A: If I work at the store, I usually wake up at around eight o'clock, sometimes seven, depending if I'm opening or closing that day. I drink my coffee while I get ready. I shower as well. I'm almost a daily shower, at least like the body, right? [laughs] And then I take the bus in to Malmö. I live in Lund, so I have to take the little transport over there. And then I work. So we tend to have like four hours of work, and then we have like a 45-minute break, like a lunch break or something like that. And then usually I'm the closing person there, so I'm there until 19:30. And then on my way home, I listen to some music, a podcast. That's usually when I tend to scroll on my social media. And then I get home, cook dinner, and I put away the leftovers for lunch the next day for both me and my partner. We live together. And then we tend to fall asleep on the couch most days [laughs]. We're both working people. And if I work at my own company, so let's say I'm not working at the store that day, I wake up like around nine, maybe. Then I sit by the computer. I tend to actually have my coffee by the computer at that point. And I do as much work as possible, but I tend to take a lot more breaks during that just to kind of get some social interaction. And then at around three o'clock, I take a little bit of a walk, just going to get some fresh air. Then I'm back and I tend to work pretty late, like to 19:00 or 20:00. But it also depends on what my work actually looks like that day. Sometimes we have to drive out to Systembolaget or a hotel that's ordered wine or something. If I'm free, so I tend to at least make sure I have two days a week completely free. Then I tend to watch some shows, movies. I love horror movies [laughs]. I'm a fan of documentaries and horror movies. So I tend to focus those days on getting as much stimuli as possible and resting and staying in my pajamas for as long as possible.

Q: Nice. Okay, thank you. How often and why do you use Facebook and Instagram?

A: Facebook I'm less active on. I use the Messenger a lot on Facebook because we do have like a little work get-together thing on the Facebook Messenger. So when we need to tell somebody something important and urgent, we do tend to use that. But other than that, I wouldn't say Facebook is the social media use the most. I would say Instagram. Instagram, I actually use a lot more and TikTok. I tend to send a lot of memes [laughs]. I don't use… I don't really use Snapchat. There's like one or two people that live further away and not here in Sweden. So, those people tend to communicate with that app. But I would say Facebook; if I give a like a roundabout time, do we count the Messenger as well? Yeah, then I would say. Yeah, then I would at least say like three hours a day at most. Yeah, that seems about accurate.

Q: Why would you say you use Instagram? Because you said Facebook Messenger use for work?

A: I just feel like Facebook is a lot. It's a lot more to take in because Facebook used to be like the place where you added like everyone, right? Like people from your high school, middle school and parents, friends, right? So when you scroll there, you tend to see a lot of things that you're just like, oh, wow, I don't want to see that. I don't want to know that. That's a little bit too much. So I feel like it's just such an influx of things versus Instagram. I feel like you tend to be a little bit more choosy with the people you choose to follow, right? So you really just get the insights on the people you actually want to know. That's how I feel.

Q: Yes. Okay, thank you. How does your Facebook and Instagram feed usually looks like in terms of content?

A: My Facebook is mostly groups I follow, like selling and buying groups. I do get a lot of news there as well, but usually news that people have shared, which could go one or two ways [laughs]. Versus on Instagram. That's why I really love the lives, like the 24-hour ones, because a lot of people do, especially with like the subject matter in mind now with the Palestinian Israel thing, they share a lot of that information. I find that people are not really doing that so much on Facebook, at least not on my side of Facebook. But it tends to be a little bit more engaging on Instagram for me versus just being fed a lot of things on Facebook.

Q: You mentioned that Instagram has more lives that are 24 hours. Do you mean like live broadcasting or stories?

A: Both of those things, but I'm also thinking like the little circles you clicked in.

Q: Stories?

A: Yeah, thank you. I forgot the names.

Q: No worries.

A: But yeah, exactly.

Q: Perfect. Which emotions would you say you experience most often when scrolling Facebook and Instagram?

A: Oh, that's a really good question. I feel like I tend to get a little bit more bored on Facebook, if that's a good emotion. I wouldn't say overwhelmed, because I mean, if you feel it, you can just stop scrolling, right? But I would say I just get pretty bored. Versus on Instagram, I do find myself a little bit more engaging overall and a little bit. I mean, obviously right now, because we're sharing so much of the current war, it is a lot sadder, but it's also kind of hopeful. It's a little bit of a hopeful place, right? Especially when people share like where the next demonstration is. Overall, it just feels like people are way more want you to get engaged on Instagram when it comes to their hobbies and their life. Versus Facebook might be a little bit more of like a very, yeah, I don't know what to call it, but just very one dimensional look, I guess.

Q: Simplistic.

A: Yeah, yeah, that's a good word [laughs].

Q: Yes, great. What do you think about the content moderation practices that Facebook and Instagram adopt on their social media?

A: Have you encountered them at any time?

Q: Yes, that was actually the reason why both my company and the company I work for decided to go offline.

A: So we don't have social media because information was obviously being shared around and especially like around shopping holidays, as we call them in this line of work as I do. Like Black Friday and stuff like that where people would get almost anxiety because they couldn't afford the things they wanted to buy. So the company I work for actually decided to take a step back and just kind of close down overall social media and mail as well. So our next plan is to actually get removed from Facebook as well and just work Slack as the only information source basically. But it's both a cool thing, right? Because you do get recommendations that you do enjoy. But it's also a little bit weird that they're just kind of searching for the things you have. I actually looked up what Google actually thought it was because you can actually go on things and see what Google, like if they think you're a woman and if you're single and stuff like that. And that's why they give you certain recommendations and actually thought I was single. I was just like, well, that explains why I got all the dating stuff. But I guess it's because I don't really search that much for like presents to give your partner or something like that. But that's really how I how I found it the most. And obviously when you're looking at the information sharing on social media, like you're looking at what your friends are sharing and stuff like that, you obviously get recommended because they see, oh, you're interested in this. That's cool. We want to show you some more war pictures or something like that. It could both be a little bit devastating. But I also feel like I'm somewhat on the safe side when it comes to that. Because I don't really. I found that a lot of people recommended during the times when Donald Trump, for example, was chosen as a president, a lot of media output on how good of a president he would be. Exactly. And I feel like that's a lot of people that have been hanging around *Fria Tider* [a Swedish newspaper that has been classified as right-wing

populist] or those types of things. Right. But since I'm pretty not there politically, I haven't really been as affected. I tend to get more. Oh, this is a cool new flower trick. And this is a new cosmetics you you might want to try. And then you read ingredients and you go, no. So that's usually what I get recommended at this time.

Q: Did you ever experience content moderation in a sense that your posts have been taken down or maybe you have been flagging reporting someone else's publications?

A: Yes. Yes, actually at Facebook. So as I mentioned in our private conversation, I do have a little brother who has pretty long hair. And so I posted a picture of him on Facebook at one point when he was hanging by the pool with his long hair. And Facebook flagged that because it was a girl that was being topless. Yeah. So Facebook removed it [laughs]. And that was pretty… because he's a child. He was not even 10 at the time. But I was just like, you know what, you should not be posting pictures either way of children. But it was just oddly specific that you see something with long hair and you go, that's a girl [laughs]. And it was not even like he he's not he's not thick by any means. He's not there's no curves. So it was not like even as they saw like the boob area. And when that looked suspicious, it was only the hair. And overall, oh, yeah, there was also when I shared something political as well, as a response. And this was a pretty it's a pretty intricate story. But at one point, one of the pretty right people, the political right, found one of my friends who's a part of the left in Malmö. And they were saying some really awful things while being like in the active part of that. Yeah. So I guess I answered something. I was being a bit sarcastic. I will absolutely say that. But it was to a response that this person had made to my friend that they hoped something bad happened to her. And I was just like, yeah, that seems like a very adult thing to say to someone. And I got blocked from Facebook because of threats. Oh, yeah. So, but then again, you should not get involved with people on Facebook. That's like the short lesson from that one. So I so I absolutely get that. But I feel like he didn't get banned. And he was actively wishing awful things on someone. But yeah, but that's never really happened on Instagram, which is also maybe why I find it a little bit more engaging. I don't think anything has been blocked for me. I don't think I've been blocked from anyone or anything yet.

Q: Have you been flagging anybody's content?

A: Not on Instagram. I have on TikTok, especially when it comes to information that's just outrageously wrong. And you're sharing it as like your manifesto. But I would say like I tend to I tend to ask more questions before doing that. Like, is this… are we joking or is this like how you actually feel? And from there, I tend to do a bit of a deduction. I don't, I might have flagged someone on Facebook, but that was when I was probably just starting on Facebook and I don't really remember. But yeah, I'm pretty sure.

Q: Great. As we started talking about about moderation, how would you say how successful in your opinion, Facebook and Instagram are in moderating violent content on their social media?

A: I feel like that entirely depends on how you define violence as well. I feel like I've never been scared if my little brother is like scrolling my social media because I have never really gotten anything that weird on most of my social media. However, I do find that, for example, death threats, right? Or the rumors of there being a video of someone harming themselves and that being spread around. Just mentioning that is also kind of that's also something I feel like should be a little bit moderated because a 10-year-old doesn't need to know that there's a video of a guy shooting himself live, right? But then again, also, there's probably some curiosity there as well for most people, I guess. But yeah, I don't, I feel like we were doing a somewhat OK job. There's always room for improvement. I think it's the main thing. But also, I think it's been going well for me. I don't feel like I've been fed too many violent images unless it is about the war in Palestine. But even there, it comes up with like that little pop-up warning like, oh yeah, this video is violent. If you want to continue watching, press the video, right? So I do feel like there's some kind of balance there.

Q: How political are you?

A: Left [laughs]. No, I would say I'm somewhat political in the sense that I care about subject matters. And I do form an opinion pretty quickly. I do leave room for discussion and debates, which is how I like ended up in some different political groups on Facebook just to kind of learn. But I would say I would say I'm either like I'm in between, but a little bit more toward the left. And that's where I would describe myself.

Q: OK, perfect. And how political should Facebook and Instagram be, ideally, in your opinion?

A: I feel like that's a really good question because feel like the natural answer would be not at all. They should not be involved at all. But I also feel like it's the same. It's a way of saying also like the loudest idiots are also the ones that are going to speak the loudest. And I don't feel like those are the people I want to give a voice to either towards the left or the communists or vice versa. Because I feel like there's a lot of wrong on both sides. But so I mean, ideally, yes, I would want them to be non-political, but obviously, they also need to kind of make sure that nothing factually untrue is being spread because that leads to people such as during COVID, right, where people had COVID parties and stuff. And because people didn't quite understand and because they were not scared. So maybe that's but that's also my own personal opinion, right? It's not factual. So I feel like on paper, it would look great if they were not political. But in actual practice, they do need somewhat of a political agenda as well to make sure that people are safe and information on both sides are being spread, right?

Q: Yes, absolutely. Thank you. So at this point, we are done with the first part of the interview. You did great. And moving on to the next one. So now I will show you the eight illustrations and ask you to give your opinion on how do you understand them. I will be demonstrating you them on the computer. Also, again, the illustrations refer to violence. Are you feeling okay to see that?

A: Absolutely.

Q: Great. And then in case you feel uncomfortable to see some illustrations or whatever, we can move to the next one. Just tell me.

A: Of course.

Q: Perfect. Then we will start from the first one. Take a look at it for a second.

A: Oooh.

Q: So my first question would be, could you, the questions will be the same for each illustration. Could you describe what you see on the illustration as nouns?

A: As nouns. I see a figure. It could be either gender because they're wearing very baggy clothes, very dirty clothes, very rotted. And you can somewhat see a face that looks like the person is kind of leaned over and sleeping signs over as to describe that the person is sleeping on a very, very red background. And red, obviously, a very, very speaking color, usually used in like alarm sense. I would...Are we going into, like me analyzing the picture now?

Q: How would you relate the elements you have just named to one another?

A: I would say homelessness, right? It's someone that looks like they're sleeping on the streets. The clothes kind of give us some kind of military background. So, and I mean, I don't know if it's as prevalent here in Sweden because we do have a pretty nice homeless system. We don't have a lot of homelessness, but we also don't really have a lot of military. But I do know in America, a lot of people that return for more don't really get help for their mental anguish, which obviously happens in war. So I would... My first thought would be it's a homeless person in another country. Or it could also be someone who's dying in war. It could be either one of those because you don't actually see the face. Yeah, it's a little sad.

Q: How would you describe the style of the picture?

A: It's a little bit silly, a little bit goofy and like the image of the homeless military person. It's a very real picture of someone who either is sleeping on the streets or is dead and has obviously been through a lot of dirt and grime.

Q: How does it make you feel?

A: I feel sad for the image. But then when you see like the red background and like the letters, like the sets to indicate sleeping, it kind of takes away a little bit of the seriousness, which I think is the point of it. But I focus mostly on like the center picture and that person makes me sad.That makes me want to work more voluntary work.

Q: What do you think it refers to?

A: If we're looking for like a hidden meaning, I feel like it could either be this person's way of making fun of the homeless people that are sleeping on the streets or because it has that red background, because it's about to call attention to it, right? It could be, look at these homeless people sleeping on the streets. That should be unacceptable, especially if like they are military

folks. Look, they fought for your country and now they're sleeping like this. That would be like my first thoughts.

Q: How would you react if you were scrolling through Facebook or Instagram and saw this popping up?

A: I feel like it would depend on the text actually. I would stop and look at it because it is eye-catching. It really is. But if it's like a donate link under it, I would obviously go there and have a look as well. I do a lot of voluntary work, both for homeless shelters and like people that are in jail cells and stuff like that. So this is not that different for me. But if it were to be like someone who just put this picture up and just went lol, right? I would probably say something. In the comments. Yeah, probably. And if this is a person taking the piss, I would probably ban them.

Q: Great. That was nice. Are you feeling okay?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, so the first one is done. Moving to the next one. Again, the same thing. Please name the elements of the picture you see as nouns.

A: Okay, so we have a… I can't actually tell how many women are here. There is a bunch of naked women. One of them being held up by soldiers. And the top text says *Ukrainian virgin*. And it's very clear that the women are made to be uncomfortable with these soldiers. And they really put focus on this one lady who's being held up. But the rest of them are cowering in fear, I would say. Yeah.

Q: How would you relate these elements to one another?

A: I mean, as someone who has read a lot about war, we do know that a lot of soldiers as a way to intimidate whole families, they do take away the women and the younger girls in the family to either kidnap them or rape them in front of them to show dominance and scare them, right? And I feel like this does kind of boil down to that because it's very clear that we're supposed to see the soldiers holding her, right? And she's also kind of standing in a sacrificial stance as well. So it could be a very religious thing as well. Like she is Mary and she's going to get impregnated by some of these soldiers' baby, right? And it's going to be the next savior because it's going to connect these two countries, but that never happens [whispers].

Q: Why do you feel like this has a religious context?

A: Just like the halo around her head and also the sacrificial standing that she's in. Like her hands are out like Jesus would be on a cross, I guess. And she's on her knees as well. And that's really the only thing that's different from her from the other ones. Kneeling is obviously a very either submissive position, right? Or a religious one, like you're kneeling before God. Ooh. So it could also be that they're forcing her to kneel for their country's representative, maybe. But virgin is also like Ukrainian virgin like that's such a specific thing. And virgin is almost like always in the world was used as like a bargain and chip, right? Like we're going to

take all your virgins. It's a really cool picture, though. It's very red. It's very red, very dark. So it's supposed to obviously make you feel those war-esque feelings because like the war colors are red and black.

Q: How does it make you feel?

A: Also sad. You can like see the fear in most of these. Like even the ones are like covering their head. Like I'm thinking the one towards the corner there that's covering the back of her head in almost like PTSD fashion. And then obviously as a woman makes me feel also a way of relating to them, I guess. But it's also really sad when you think about the fact that this is something that happens as well. That either soldiers are forcing people to kneel before their leader or, you know, taking advantage of them. Nakedness is also a way to display absolute power as well. They're fully clothed and not even seen, but we see their faces, their bodies. It feels naked.

Q: How would you react if you were scrolling through social media like Facebook and Insta and saw that?

A: Oh, that's a good one. I feel like I would be uncomfortable because it is quite an intense artwork. Not to say that the other one wasn't, but I would look at it. And also there, obviously, depending on the links or the text below, I would react accordingly. But just on the picture alone, I would feel something and hopefully do something as well. Maybe look up what the person who did the picture was from. Is it a person from Ukraine? Do they also have a donation link somewhere? I tend to get quite involved in that sense that if I see something that moves me, I want to see what else they've done.

Q: Why do you think the artist created this piece of painting?

A: It could be a war piece. It could be, as someone who has done therapy, we also did art therapy at one point. It could be something along those lines as well. Especially with the title of it. I'm thinking it's like a therapy piece, almost like getting rid of some demons. Maybe some memories of someone being forced to do something they don't want to do.

Q: Great, thank you. Moving to the next one. So again, let's start by naming the elements of the illustration as nouns, please.

A: So we're seeing soldiers, I would describe them as, kind of being scattered about with different flags, such as the FN flag. Bottles, they all have bottles as well. Oh, I just noticed that they actually are not live soldiers, they are all skeletons. Or at least half-skeletons, some of them have some skin left. And also some washing machines [laughs]. I don't know what that is actually, but it's machines that have a circle to them. It could be, oh, it's doors from tanks, I guess? [laughs]. I don't know why I'm asking. But yeah, that would make a lot more sense to me. But then maybe the bottles are like lighter fluids. I can't actually tell what the bottles are, but there's bottles here as well. And some soldiers are together, like almost hand in hand, or at least back to back. But some of them are just scattered across, like they've been

blown up and shoved back. Yeah, that's the clearest description. And it's a really, really dark picture as well.

Q: How did you describe the flags?

A: I don't actually know what that flag is. It's red, blue, and white. And then I think that's the FN flag, isn't it?

Q: FN?

A: United Nations. I think so, at least. Obviously, again, we're working with war. So it might be countries disagreeing with each other or countries that are opposed to United Nations, such as a lot of countries have been. We recently joined.

Q: How would you connect the elements of the illustration together? What is it about?

A: I guess that there is really no winners in war, because we don't actually know where all these soldiers are from. Because none of them are wearing quite the same attire, I would say. Like some of them are a little bit more reddish, some of them are a little bit more bluish. That could be age as well. But, you know, if I'm not working with the mental image of the fact that these are soldiers who have been fighting, and they're now blown into smithereens. I mean, these are people who are dying actively on the field, and none of them here seems to be alive. So I feel like that would be my sentiment from it. If there's people dying, there's nothing to win, right? Because it's still people dying.

Q: How does it make you feel?

A: I mean, this one was a little bit more playful, because I could also notice that some of them are the same character. So it's probably like a cutoff somewhere. So it's a little bit more playful. It's still sad, the subject matter, obviously. But if you look at like these two people, and if you disconnect the rest of them, so those were the two I was talking about, who were kind of like almost hand in hand, they kind of look like they're having fun and drinking, right? And one of them looks like it's about to yell at the door. There's a little bit of a more funny feeling going around, even if the subject matter is heavy still.

Q: How would you react if you were scrolling and saw that?

A: First of all, I feel like I know someone who would share that [laughs].

Q: Oh, interesting.

A: And would have like a political statement about we should have never gone with the FN, we should never start helping other countries by taking in all of these people, and yada yada. It would be that type of person.

Q: So more right-wing, or like anti-immigration?

A: I guess so, or someone who would define herself as not politically engaged, but obviously very politically engaged. But because it has like this scatteredness, my brain can't really focus on one thing. So that's also probably why I can't really tell what the flags are, also because I was never good with flags, I'm so sorry [laughs]. The thing that made me think things being blown up was the doors, and the person who's holding the gun really reaching back. So yeah, it's dark, but it's almost a little bit funny.

Q: Why do you think the artist created this? What was the motivation or goal?

A: I would also hope this is a war piece. If not, it would make me feel really, really bad. It could be a political statement against the United Nations that we're losing more people, because obviously you have to join forces then, right? Like that's a part of the deal. And just like, I'm not willing to sacrifice my people for that or whatever. But I feel like my personal interpretation of it is just like, you know, war is really goddamn awful because people are dying, and there should never be an occasion when people are dying, especially not like this.

Q: Also, just a clarification. You were saying United Nations. Do you mean NATO?

A: Yeah, NATO. Sorry, yes.

Q: Yes, okay. Great. So let's then move to the next one. Again, let's start by describing the elements that you can see as nouns.

A: Okay, so we're seeing a hole in the ground, and people with, can you call them white outfits, digging, and they're covering their mouth so they obviously can't breathe in whatever they are digging up. The only things you can see quite clearly in this picture is the stay away lines, right? The red and the white that we all know. It means don't enter here. And the people, we also have the people digging. We also have around four people that are carrying something. And we don't know exactly where they're carrying it to, but we do know that we need some manpower to carry it. It's a little white bag of some sort.

Q: Yeah. How would you connect these elements?

A: Well, still keeping the subject matter at hand, it could be people trying to find dead ones. I'm thinking like a mass grave of some sort because of the hole, and I'm thinking also what they're carrying away is remains they found. And also the covering of the mouth, which it does look like everyone has. They also have like complete hazmat over there as well. Because that's one thing I also learned, was that when you have a body that's been dead, we don't know exactly what it's been exposed to. So you need to cover your mouth because of the chemicals and also the smell, because it's going to be the first time you smell that it's supposed to be the worst experience ever. It's not unusual to puke, but obviously if you puke on a crime scene, you're contaminating. I don't know. It could also be like they're...I feel pretty sure about the remains part, especially with like the stay away and the bag like they're carrying. I think that's a bag of remains.

Q: How does it make you feel?

A: This one actually makes me feel pretty calm in consideration to the other ones. I think it's because like the artwork overall is a little bit easier on the eye. It doesn't have...And in comparison to the other ones, this one is a little bit more calming. I feel like because the overall artwork is a lot more calming. It doesn't have like a lot of colors going on. There's no… There's really no bodies. Everybody here is alive as far as we can see. So I feel like if I were to scroll on this, I would...If I didn't know the subject matter at hand, I would probably think it's like a bunch of archaeologists. Right?

Q: And if you were scrolling through Facebook or Instagram, how would you react?

A: I would like this picture.

Q: You would like?

A: Yeah. As I said, if I didn't know the subject matter, I wouldn't really think there's anything sinister going on. Because you really have that heavy feeling of boredom and quiet yet. Maybe if I returned to it or if like the text underneath was just like, oh, in this country, this happened, I would be, oh, that's bad. And I would change my reaction to a sad face. But my first thought would be probably archaeologists or someone just doing some digging.

Q: And why do you think then the artist created this piece?

A: Maybe it's a front cover or something of a book or a retelling or a article of some sort. Because I can't really point out like a specific country where this would be happening. So I can't really pinpoint the war. I can't really pinpoint anything that would put me in like a war position in mind, if that makes any sense.

Q: Okay. Great. Moving to the next one.

A: Ooh. All right.

Q: So could you please describe the elements of the illustration? Yeah.

A: I will do my best. So we see a house with what are called like prison bars, hands reaching out like quite panicky because there is fire and so on. Oh, yeah. This is a prison. Oh, yeah. Because it has the, I don't know what that's called.

Q: Barbed wire.

A: Yeah, barbed wire. Thank you. And oh, yeah. The house is also very metal-esque. So it's a barbed wired house, hands reaching out. There's a fire going on on the inside and quite intense. So people want to get out.

Q: How would you relate these elements together?

A: I mean, especially here in Sweden, we have had a long debate on how dysfunctional the prison system is. A lot of prisoners have felt like they are getting treated less than. So we have a punitive justice system versus a system that's going to help them get released later on.

Versus that's what Sweden actually promises. So it could be that or what could happen in case because a lot of like very high security prisons in Sweden is really tightly locked. It's meant so that you can't get out. What would happen if a fire were to happen there? Because I don't feel like we actually want people to die there. I don't know. Like sometimes you read about certain prisoners and you go, you know, I wouldn't really care. But I do still feel like people can be a good citizen and have like a second chance. And if something were to happen in those prisons, I don't actually know what would happen. Or maybe this is how this person feels about it. Just like we should just set fire to the prisons and just let people die there. It could be that. Could be. Yeah. Could be one of those.

Q: How does it make you feel?

A: Intrigued. I would be very curious about what this person was actually trying to say. Yeah. Because we have like two very polar opposites, polar opposite pictures going. As I said, it could be a safety precaution. Like what do we do in case this happens? We need to make a plan for it. Because there is none right now. Or I want them all to die.

Q: Okay, yes. I see.

A: I don't really know, but it's intriguing. I would be very interested to see what this person wrote about. I'm not as sad as I was the first ones. It's not as dark and heavy. Yeah.

Q: Why do you think this was created? Most probably.

A: Most probably. I mean, since we're not seeing the faces of the people burning, we're only seeing hands. It could also be a way to kind of disconnect. So it could be a sort of protest, right? Just like, why do we have prisons? Why are we helping these people who have messed up their own life get back on track, right? Just let them die somewhere else, I guess. Could be that. I don't actually know.

Q: Yes. That's right. That's okay. Let's move to the next one.

A: Yes.

Q: So please take a look at it and name the elements you can see.

A: Let's see. We have a tree. Cell phones kind of stapled with actual spikes on the stalk. Is it called stalk? What is it called?

Q: Stem.

A: Thank you. It almost kind of looks like it's drawn by hand, that's a lot of like squiggly motions, rather than the other ones have been a little bit more softer animated I guess. The leaves are orange, it's on a very dark background, the cell phones all kind of look the same, looks like some old Nokia's.

Q: How would you relate these elements to each other? What's happening in the picture?

A: That's a good question. I don't quite know [laughs]. It could be, if you're thinking about war I guess, it could be war technology that they're discussing here, that we're using the cell phones for a lot of things and it is killing nature, so them being stapled to the tree could be an indicator of how this person feels like we're abusing nature, like for every phone this is what you're doing to the stem. It could also be that during war there is no communication with family members on the other side of, like I'm thinking with the Ukrainian war, I had a lot of friends in Ukraine, I still haven't really had any contact with them because there was no way to reach them, they had to go hiding and had to leave all their things behind, so it could be a symbol of that. I'm going to feel like it's probably more of the first option, the nature one, war on technology, because that's a log-standing debate, that we need to take better care of nature and not take her for granted.

Q: How would you react if you saw that on Facebook or Instagram?

A: Once again, intrigued, I really like the artwork, that's like an art that I would hang in my own living room. I also have a very nice no cell phone policy in my house, like in the hallway you can absolutely scroll and stuff, but like when we eat dinner and when we go to sleep we turn off the phone, because it's important to also kind of interact. Definitely. But I would be really intrigued and I would also kind of check out what this artist has done before, because it seems like art that is very philosophical and very taking a stand on some things, which is, if it is, what I think it is [laughs].

Q: So you would research the artist before interacting?

A: I think so, just because I would be very intrigued if they have once again like a GoFundMe or something like that, or if you could buy the art, because it is really pretty.

Q: Yeah, great. Next one. Again, let's start by naming the elements of the illustration.

A: So we see what looks like a man sitting or crouched over what I can only describe as a body bag, or at least a bag of some sort, but it's somewhat long, and it's on the, it looks almost like it's trash in the background, so like a junkyard of some sort, or a fallen building. Oh yeah, it's probably a fallen building, not what I think about it. And then I think it's Russian, 600 something something. I don't know Russian. Maybe it's not Russian. It's some language that has very interesting letters for me, but the only thing I can really read is 600, which would, with the subject matter in mind, I would think it's like 600 bodies of some sort, or 600 victims or, I wish I could read that. That would be really intriguing, but it's a really interesting art form. The guy who is slouched over it kind of has like a almost detective looking hat, but he also, like he's petting the body bag, so either he could be some kind of priest who's giving like a blessing of some sort, because he's also like holding close to his heart with the other arm as well. He's wearing a jersey, sweatpants, and like he's, it looks like someone who knew this person, not like a very official person in power. You can't really tell if he's sad facial-wise, color-wise, very red, very a lot of red and dark, very contrasty.

Q: Yeah, how does it make you feel?

A: I feel sad for him, because I feel like that's someone he knew in that body bag, and that's probably very, very sad for him, so I feel sad for that guy. I'm also very intrigued about what's happening in the background, because I feel like that's where the story is, like it's a building that's fallen apart and somebody died, or if it's a war where a lot of houses have been broken down, it could be that, but that's probably where we found out how that person in the body bag ended up in the body bag. But also worth mentioning, I feel like that's a pretty old person, like it's not a young man, and the body bag is quite little, so that's, it could be his child or something, and that's, so that would be like my automatic train of thought that this is someone who lost their child.

Q: How would you react if you were scrolling and saw this?

P: I would stop and take a moment and just kind of, first of all, would search whatever that language is and try to translate it, because I feel like that's also somewhat important for the context, but it doesn't take away from the fact that this is someone who is kneeling for someone who has died, and that's very sad either way. There is no winners in death.

A: Why do you think the artist created this illustration?

P: To show a father mourning his child, like that's what I instantly think. This is a man, a father, who is mourning a child that died one way or another. Like that's one of the saddest things I actually learned. I was reading this book about someone who lost their child in a car accident when they were pretty young, and they said the worst thing that can happen is that you as a parent bury your own child. That's not a feeling that you want, because usually it's the other way around, like your children are supposed to bury you. So when that actually happens, you get so thrown off, and in worse situations that is happening a lot, and that's really sad.

Q: The artist created this?

A: To show either a remembrance picture or just show the suffering of parents losing their children in death.

Q: Great, thank you. And the last one?

A: Oh, well she's mad.

Q: Could you start by naming the elements of the picture, please?

A: So we see a feminine-presenting person, and we don't actually know if it's a woman or not, but I would take a fair shot at it. She's very mad, like she has her eyes kind of squinting. She's having a very intense glare at you, and she is holding what I can only assume is a gold coin. It kind of looks like that either way. She has a scarf on her hand, but also showing off her hair a little bit. She's wearing eyeliner. She's drawn completely in blue and yellow, and the first half of her face, the top half of her face, has a lot of details. The rest is very just blue lines, so very easy picture to follow, like it's easy on the eyes. Mm-hmm.

Q: How would you relate these elements to each other?

A: Once again, I don't know what the picture says letter-wise, but since she's so mad and she's holding this money and a gold coin, this is an outfit that my Romanian grandmother would wear. Like this scarf, I feel. Something that my grandmother went through a lot here in Sweden was a lot of people accusing her of theft constantly. That's where I would go with this, like someone being really mad about being called a thief just because they have some money, or she's about to use that as a weapon. It could be both, but that would be my first relatable thought to it.

Q: How does it make you feel?

A: Angry for her.

Q: Angry for her?

A: Yeah, like I feel like she's mad. Yeah. She's not sad, she's mad, and I want to go on a crusade with her. Yes. She looks mad, and I'm intrigued why she's mad. I also feel like it's a very interesting style that they've gone for, like half of her face really detailed, the rest of the face not detailed, right? There has to be something about that, like maybe she feels like half of a human because of where she's from. Once again, I wish I could read, but I don't. I feel like she's mad about something with money.

Q: Yeah, and how would you react if you're scrolling and saw this?

A: Once again, it would depend on what the picture says, and I would also try to look up what that says as well, but I feel like I would show it to my grandma and just be like, oh, look, it's a scarf that you would wear, and she would probably tell me a story about how she once again was called in by the police. Yeah, she had a lot of issues with that, but it's a lot better now, she says too, but she's also very Swedish-passing now as well, now when she's older, so there's that. Yeah, I feel like this is a bit of a female empowerment piece. I'm intrigued what the text would say, and I would also be intrigued to share this to others because I'm intrigued by the art and I'm intrigued by the subject matter because I don't really know [laughs]. Yeah, right. I can only use what I can relate to by myself, but that could be completely wrong too, right? I'm interested.

Q: And why do you think the artist created this? What could be the motivation?

A: If I'm not using my grandma [laughs], I feel like she was really mad when she came to Sweden because that was like a constant struggle she had, was that wherever she went, they would always search her bags and search her pockets, and she had never stolen anything in her entire life. That was not a part of who she was, but it was because a lot of Romanians had been doing it, so she felt that she was being punished for what they were doing, and it kind of made her almost want to take distance from her own heritage for a really long time. But also, you know, it's my money. It feels like she's holding this little coin, like it's my money. I've earned this, and I feel like that's also very female empowering, like my money is my money,

because for a long time we didn't make our own money. So it could be like going further back, the struggle of gender. It could be more gender, but I don't know, just because of the scarf, I guess. That's what it makes me think.

Q: Okay, great. Thank you. We are done with the second part. Thank you. Are you feeling good?

A: Super.

Q: Yes, nice. So I have like three concluding questions for you.

A: Of course.

Q: So keeping in mind everything you have seen today, all the illustrations, I would like to ask you, how would you say what are the pros and cons, the benefits and disadvantages of using illustration as a means to communicate something compared to photographs and videos, and especially informed about war events?

A: That's fantastic questions, by the way. I would say that if I'm going to start with the cons and work with the pros, is that okay? The cons would be, like if we take for example the first picture, right, the one with like what I thought was homeless or military people or military homeless people, with like the red background and stuff like that, it's a way to make something very serious look a bit silly, and that could be part of the con part that people would not take it serious because it looks silly, so why would I want to listen to it, or why would I want to read about it, or whatever. It would also be a way for maybe younger kids to see it, people that might not be ready for the whole discussion on war and death and rape, whatever the case may be, because they would think it's something fun because it looks fun, it has these vivid colors, right, because they don't understand that red means bad [laughs]. The pros would be, obviously it's more interactive than photos, because I feel like photos, because of the complete opposite of illustration, is so real, because it's very hard to fake like a video of something really bad happening. A picture, maybe, but a video, not so much, but I feel like that could be a little bit too real and therefore not as easy to interact with, versus illustrations, thus give you the leeway to kind of breathe while you're looking at it, that's what I think anyways. Another con would maybe be because you don't actually know what it's about, like in this situation I obviously didn't know what these things were about, I had to guess, then you would kind of hope there's like a picture or it's a part of something that I would maybe understand a bit better what it's about, so you just don't go, you know, yay Russia, because of this poor father, right, because there's obviously some here that I didn't grasp at all, but it was about my interpretation of it. But yeah, I feel like it gives leeway for empathy for every side as well, because I couldn't take in mind like the picture I saw prior to that, and I had no information of those, so it just kind of gives you a very clean slate to just go, oh yeah, this is what I'm seeing, cool, but it also, on the con side, I don't know what I just saw.

Q: If you were to get information about war related events, which form of the information would you choose, if you could choose any?

A: I would say like the perfect balance of both, is that an okay answer to give? Of illustration and photographs? Yes, because you usually don't just get one thing about war, you tend to get your whole feed with it, right, at least when it's the most active. I feel like if it's about you going to donate somewhere, an illustration is probably better, because you want as much people as possible to go and donate, and look at this GoFundMe, or look at this cause, or whatever, versus if it's about the serious matter of it, like look what actually happened here, right now at this moment, I would probably want like a more photographic evidence, or like a video or something. I feel like during the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, they did that quite frequently, like here's a picture of George Floyd, but here's a donation thing as well, it was an illustration of him, right, versus we also saw the feed from the police officers. So I feel like a nice mixture between both, depending on what you want people to do. Perfect, thank you.

Q: And the last question is, do you have any questions to me regarding the illustrations you have seen, or anything else?

Note: After asking this question I explained to the participant my findings from the iconological analysis on the illustrations. I did not include this information as material to analyze as it does not fit the aim of the research.

Appendix 6: Open coding example

Interview 6 Alma [1 hour 26 min, face-to-face, 10.04.24]

I: Perfect. Then we will start from the first one. Take a look at it for a second.

P: Oooh.

I: So my first question would be, could you, the questions will be the same for each illustration. Could you describe what you see on the illustration as nouns?

P: As nouns. I see a figure. It could be either gender because they're wearing very baggy clothes, very dirty clothes, very rotted. And you can somewhat see a face that looks like the person is kind of leaned over and sleeping signs over as to describe that the person is sleeping on a very, very red background. And red, obviously, a very, very speaking color, usually used in like alarm sense. I would...Are we going into, like me analyzing the picture now?

I: How would you relate the elements you have just named to one another?

P: I would say homelessness, right? It's someone that looks like they're sleeping on the streets. The clothes kind of give us some kind of military background. So, and I mean, I don't know if it's as prevalent here in Sweden because we do have a pretty nice homeless system. We don't have a lot of homelessness, but we also don't really have a lot of military. But I do know in America, a lot of people that return for more don't really get help for their mental anguish, which obviously happens in war. So I would... My first thought would be it's a homeless person in another country. Or it could also be someone who's dying in war. It could be either one of those because you don't actually see the face. Yeah, it's a little sad.

I: How would you describe the style of the picture?

P: It's a little bit silly, a little bit goofy and like the image of the homeless military person. It's a very real picture of someone who either is sleeping on the streets or is dead and has obviously been through a lot of dirt and grime.

I: How does it make you feel?

P: I feel sad for the image. But then when you see like the red background and like the letters, like the sets to indicate sleeping, it kind of takes away a little bit of the seriousness, which I think is the point of it. But I focus mostly on like the center picture and that person makes me sad. That makes me want to work more voluntary work.

I: What do you think it refers to?

P: If we're looking for like a hidden meaning, I feel like it could either be this person's way of making fun of the homeless people that are sleeping on the streets or because it has that red background, because it's about to call attention to it, right? It could be, look at these homeless people sleeping on the streets. That should be unacceptable, especially if like they are military

folks. Look, they fought for your country and now they're sleeping like this. That would be like my first thoughts.

I: How would you react if you were scrolling through Facebook or Instagram and saw this popping up?

P: I feel like it would depend on the text actually. I would stop and look at it because it is eye-catching. It really is. But if it's like a donate link under it, I would obviously go there and have a look as well. I do a lot of voluntary work, both for homeless shelters and like people that are in jail cells and stuff like that. So this is not that different for me. But if it were to be like someone who just put this picture up and just went lol, right? I would probably say something. In the comments. Yeah, probably. And if this is a person taking the piss, I would probably ban them.

I: Great. That was nice. Are you feeling okay?

P: Yes.

I: Okay, so the first one is done. Moving to the next one. Again, the same thing. Please name the elements of the picture you see as nouns.

P: Okay, so we have a… I can't actually tell how many women are here. There is a bunch of naked women. One of them being held up by soldiers. And the top text says *Ukrainian virgin*. And it's very clear that the women are made to be uncomfortable with these soldiers. And they really put focus on this one lady who's being held up. But the rest of them are cowering in fear, I would say. Yeah.

I: How would you relate these elements to one another?

P: I mean, as someone who has read a lot about war, we do know that a lot of soldiers as a way to intimidate whole families, they do take away the women and the younger girls in the family to either kidnap them or rape them in front of them to show dominance and scare them, right? And I feel like this does kind of boil down to that because it's very clear that we're supposed to see the soldiers holding her, right? And she's also kind of standing in a sacrificial stance as well. So it could be a very religious thing as well. Like she is Mary and she's going to get impregnated by some of these soldiers' baby, right? And it's going to be the next savior because it's going to connect these two countries, but that never happens [whispers].

I: Why do you feel like this has a religious context?

P: Just like the halo around her head and also the sacrificial standing that she's in. Like her hands are out like Jesus would be on a cross, I guess. And she's on her knees as well. And that's really the only thing that's different from her from the other ones. Kneeling is obviously a very either submissive position, right? Or a religious one, like you're kneeling before God. Ooh. So it could also be that they're forcing her to kneel for their country's representative, maybe. But virgin is

also like Ukrainian virgin like that's such a specific thing. And virgin is almost like always in the world was used as like a bargain and chip, right? Like we're going to take all your virgins. It's a really cool picture, though. It's very red. It's very red, very dark. So it's supposed to obviously make you feel those war-esque feelings because like the war colors are red and black.

I: How does it make you feel?

P: Also sad. You can like see the fear in most of these. Like even the ones are like covering their head. Like I'm thinking the one towards the corner there that's covering the back of her head in almost like PTSD fashion. And then obviously as a woman makes me feel also a way of relating to them, I guess. But it's also really sad when you think about the fact that this is something that happens as well. That either soldiers are forcing people to kneel before their leader or, you know, taking advantage of them. Nakedness is also a way to display absolute power as well. They're fully clothed and not even seen, but we see their faces, their bodies. It feels naked.

I: How would you react if you were scrolling through social media like Facebook and Insta and saw that?

P: Oh, that's a good one. I feel like I would be uncomfortable because it is quite an intense artwork. Not to say that the other one wasn't, but I would look at it. And also there, obviously, depending on the links or the text below, I would react accordingly. But just on the picture alone, I would feel something and hopefully do something as well. Maybe look up what the person who did the picture was from. Is it a person from Ukraine? Do they also have a donation link somewhere? I tend to get quite involved in that sense that if I see something that moves me, I want to see what else they've done.

I: Why do you think the artist created this piece of painting?

P: It could be a war piece. It could be, as someone who has done therapy, we also did art therapy at one point. It could be something along those lines as well. Especially with the title of it, I'm thinking it's like a therapy piece, almost like getting rid of some demons. Maybe some memories of someone being forced to do something they don't want to do.

I: Great, thank you. Moving to the next one. So again, let's start by naming the elements of the illustration as nouns, please.

P: So we're seeing soldiers, I would describe them as, kind of being scattered about with different flags, such as the FN flag. Bottles, they all have bottles as well. Oh, I just noticed that they actually are not live soldiers, they are all skeletons. Or at least half-skeletons, some of them have some skin left. And also some washing machines [laughs]. I don't know what that is actually, but it's machines that have a circle to them. It could be, oh, it's doors from tanks, I guess? [laughs]. I don't know why I'm asking. But yeah, that would make a lot more sense to me. But then maybe the bottles are like lighter fluids. I can't actually tell what the bottles are, but there's bottles here

Appendix 7: Spider diagram example

Appendix 8: Codebook example

Illustrations for an external audience with English text

Illustration №	Theme	Categories	Subcategories	Description of the (sub)category	Examples
Illustration 1 Meaning-making	Person	Living person	Burnt person	Refers to indicating burnt skin, clothes, other body parts of the person on the picture	I mean it looks like he's been in the fire
			Seems to be sleeping	Refers to describing man as alive but sleeping	I guess maybe they want to make it look like he's sleeping, even though he's dead
			A homeless veteran	Refers to identifying a person as homeless based on the bad condition of clothes and the laying polition	when you just opened it was that he was homeless. But maybe his clothes have like military patterns
		Dead person	Confusing the dead and alive but sleeping person	Refers to believing a person is rather dead than sleeping	And he's sleeping. But we don't know that he's not sleeping
			Certainly a dead man	Refers to believing the person is dead	I think this is 100% a dead man
			Being a dead soldier	Refers to believing the dead person being a soldier	He looks dead, looks like a soldier has been killed
		Looking realistic		Referring to the person looking like a cropped photograph	It's a very real picture of someone who either is sleeping on the streets or is dead and has obviously been through a lot of dirt and grime.
	Letters Z	Referring to comic depiction of sleeping		Referring to depiction of sleeping similar to that in the comic books	there's also the letter Z kind of moving from left to right, getting bigger and bigger, which in comics usually implies sleeping right.
		Being a symbol of Russian troops		Identifying Z as a symbol of Russian army	In the Russian-Ukraine war has also been some sort of marking for Russian infantry I guess.
		Mocking Russia		Identifying Z as used by Ukrainians to mock Russians who are dead but are dreaming about the symbol of their county's army even after death	I feel like the red and the dead corpse indicates negative emotions and according, and since, it's only a Russian Z reference I'm assuming it's not pro-Russian.
		Mocking Ukraine		Identifying Z as a symbol of the Ukrainian army that Russian artist decided to mock by showing a dead Ukrainian soldier	but it looks quite ironic, no? It looks not like they are trying to be like, oh, this is deep sleep, you know, this is neothermal sleep. It looks mocking somehow. I don't know, is this

Illustration №	Theme	Categories	Subcategories	Description of the (sub)category	Examples
					like Russia content about somebody from the Ukraine?
	Style	Looking unrealistic		Describing the presence of illustratory elements in combination with a photograph cutout of a man's body as less realistic	Honestly, I think I would react more if the actual background was there. The fact that it's just a blank red background with these sort of makes it feel less real.
		Standing for blood		Describing the red background as symbolizing blood that is not shown on the epicture	some are red background he seems dirty or kind of not so well off seems like he had his head had it rough.
	Reflecting on the illustration in general	Lack of understanding		Describing illustration as uncomprehensible	can't really tell if it's a pro-Ukraine or pro-Russia statement
		Referring to abstract meaning		Describing illustration as referring to the abstract meaning	When it's only a picture of a soldier, so to speak, or something very like realistic, this is more abstract, I would say.
		Referring to Russian propaganda		Describing illustration as being a piece of Russian propaganda	I'm getting these vibes, but maybe it's because I watch Russia No. 1 with my grandma sometimes and I'm getting sick because I don't like that genre at all.
		Referring to Russia-Ukraine war		Describing illustration as referring to the Russia-Ukraine war	letter Z and the soldier and the current conflict going on in Ukraine really takes my mind to, well, the symbolism that Russia uses with Z and red for me in this context sort of takes my mind to violence and blood so I would say war, sort of, ties them together in a sense.
		Downplaying violence with humor		Describing illustration as an attempt to downplay the intensity of violence through the use of humorous elements like letters Z	it's kind of like I don't know how to say it like sarcastic, ironic. Try to be a little bit funny. This is like trying to downplay what is happening by putting sleeping signs
Illustration 2 Meaning-making	Women	Being Ukrainian		Identifying a central woman as Ukrainian	I'm just trying to think like because they're from Ukraine. The soldiers, I think.
		Being captive		Identifying a woman as being held in captivity	I think. And this woman is naked, and she is being, I would say, kind of forcefully held by black
		Being raped by Russian soldiers		Identifying the relation of the woman to the dark figures (Russian soldiers)	And these are obviously Russian soldiers, I would say that are taking advantage of the women which they are conquering.

Illustration №	Theme	Categories	Subcategories	Description of the (sub)category	Examples
				behind her as being raped by them	
		Being naked		Describing a woman as naked where nakedness stands for a Christian religious symbol of purity	It has some kind of religious elements as the main focus of the picture is a naked woman
	Referring to religious symbols	Having a halo		Identifying a halo around woman's head as a Christian religious symbol	because Jesus usually has this, what it's called, like a sun
		Being in a crucifixion position		Comparing the bodily position of the central woman to that of a crucifiction	and also the sacrificial standing that she's in. Like her hands are out like Jesus would be on a cross, I guess. And she's on her knees as well. And that's really the only thing that's different from her from the other ones. Kneeling is obviously a very either submissive position, right?
		Being a virgin (Mary)		Comparing the woman to the Virgin Mary	It looks like it has a lot of religious elements here. Like, oh yes, this is, you know, Mary without sin, she's a virgin
	Soldiers	Having helmets on		Identifying the dark figures as soldiers due to wearing helmets	you can tell that they are soldiers of some sort, right, because they're wearing helmets.
		Being faceless		Identifying the dark figures as faceless to generalize all the soldiers	The soldiers don't have a face which I'm sure is intentional
		Being Ukrainian		Identifying soldiers as Ukrainian	I'm just trying to think like because they're from Ukraine. The soldiers, I think.
		Being Russian		Identifying soldiers as Russian	I see soldiers, more specifically Russian soldiers
		Nazi symbolism		Identifying Z-symbol on the soldiers' uniform as a Nazi sign	I assume, men that have either a Nazi or a Z sign

Illustration №	Theme	Categories	Subcategories	Description of the (sub)category	Examples
		Z being Russian symbol		Identifying Z-symbol on the soldiers' uniform as a Russian sign	So if you have a Z, you are pro-Russia
	Reflecting on the illustration in general	Relating to the Russia-Ukraine war		Identifying the illustration as depicting the events of the Russia-Ukraine war	So I guess this is, you know, Ukraine War content.
		Drawing similarities with other art pieces		Comparing the illustration to famous literary works	But this also looks like something from Dante's *Inferno* or something
		Referring to propaganda		Describing a picture as a propaganda piece	Because what is it like propaganda or Ukraine or like what's the purpose of this?
		Referring to unrealistic and ambiguous meaning		Describing the multiplicity of possible interpretations of this illustration in general even if separate elements are clearly identifyable	Like I don't know, it could be many things.
		Referring to reality		Describing the illustration as depicting to the actual events	Because you realize that, you know, this is probably something that is inspired by real life, right?
	Style	Red and black colors	Meaning blood	Commenting on the color choice indicating blood	All of these women, they are, well, I don't know, is it supposed to be covered in blood? I don't want to think about it too much, but yeah.
			Meaning war	Commenting on the color choice indicating war	it's supposed to obviously make you feel those war-esque feelings because like the war colors are red and black.
		Looking old		Describing picture as looking medieval, ancient	So when I look at the women in particular, they feel very sort of drawn in a fairly primitive style. Like almost sort of prehistoric, sort of almost Viking, Viking-esque style, like early medieval ages.
		Referring to severity of situation gruesomly		Describing the style as threatening, gruesome, and uncomfortable to look at	referring to something gruesome
Illustration 1 Feeling	Feeling confused			Describing feeling confused by the content	Confused [laughs]. Because I don't know what's happening in it, why did they use that font?

Illustration №	Theme	Categories	Subcategories	Description of the (sub)category	Examples
	Condemning the insensitiveness of the author towards the person depicted			Describing feeling angry due to the autor disrespecting the dead person by mocking them in this way	Because it's a human life it's not… I feel like some people think it's even inappropriate to take pictures of dead people but to take pictures and to edit them and make a post about it, it does see strange.
	Feeling uneasy			Describing feeling uncomfortable, stressed, or unpleasant when looking at the picture	A bit uneasy
Illustration 2 Feeling	Feeling uneasy			Describing feeling uncomfortable, stressed, or unpleasant when looking at the picture	Disgusted, maybe a little bit. Uneasy as well and uncomfortable.
	Feeling angry when creator is Russian			Feeling certain way depending on who is the creator, where is they are Russian - would be angry	I'd be more towards the angry way if it was maybe a pro-Russian creator who posted it.
	Feeling empathetic when the creator is Ukrainian			Feeling certain way depending on who is the creator, where is they are Ukrainian - would be empathetic	So maybe it would be more of the compassionate empathic way if I saw it was a pro-Ukrainian creator.
	Feeling relatable as a woman			Feeling relatable because of the common female fear of being abused or raped by a man	And then obviously as a woman makes me feel also a way of relating to them, I guess. But it's also really sad when you think about the fact that this is something that happens as well.
Illustration 1 Engagement	Scrolling past			Describing a reaction if encountered this picture on social media as scrolling past it	I would probably just scroll through scroll yeah
	Being too confusing to engage			Describing a reaction if encountered this picture on social media as not engaging	I don't know but you know you scroll everything goes quickly. You can't really see something that distinguishes it like captures you and it doesn't really make sense. I feel like everything is out of context and for me it's like I'll probably scroll past it I think.
	Would report			Describing a reaction if encountered this picture on social media as reporting it for being inappropriate	I would be like, no, thank you, report.

Illustration №	Theme	Categories	Subcategories	Description of the (sub)category	Examples
	Searching the context	Going to the caption and the comments		Tryring to find more information about the context of the illustration in the caption or comments	My first reaction would probably be to hit the comments. It would definitely catch my attention and I'd probably immediately hit the comments to see what other people were thinking.
		Examining the creator		Trying to find more information about the context of the illustration on the creator's page	if I were to look up who the content creator is and it didn't seem appropriate I would probably report it okay
Illustration 2 Engagement	Scrolling past			Describing a reaction if encountered this picture on social media as scrolling past it	I don't even know if I would stop at it generally. I think it's easy to miss if you're scrolling.
	Stopping to look			Describing a reaction if encountered this picture on social media as stopping to look	Oh, I would stop and look at it.
	Liking it			Describing a reaction if encountered this picture on social media as liking it	I would like it.
	Reflecting on the meaning			Describing a reaction if encountered this picture on social media as thinking about what the illustration is trying to tell	And this second image would be like, okay, yeah, we are trying to show some kind of message here. We're trying to see a clear bad guy and a clear innocent, maybe not good, but innocent, that is being forced to do something
	Searching the context	Going to the caption and the comments		Tryring to find more information about the context of the illustration in the caption or comments	I usually don't engage in in writing or answering comments but on a picture like this, which is illustrating and and having some signals about sexual violence in the Ukraine-Russia war, I would probably go to the comments just to just because I would be curious to see what type of reactions would be instigated by this sort of imagery
		Examining the creator		Trying to find more information about the context of the illustration on the creator's page	I would look at what the account is or what the caption is. I would assume that it's a Ukrainian posting to show what the Russians are doing not that it's a Russian yeah.
Illustration 1 Perceived goal	Motivating to think abstractly			Describing the goal of the illustration being to deliver some deeper abstract idea	When it's only a picture of a soldier, so to speak, or something very like realistic, this is more abstract, I would say.

Illustration №	Theme	Categories	Subcategories	Description of the (sub)category	Examples
	Russians demonstration strength			Describing a goal of the illustration being to demonstrate the Russian power	if you think about, I don't know, Russia Number One, like that off the channel, it would just be like, yeah, look at this. Ha ha ha, they can't fight. Look how strong, you know, we are maybe in comparison because at least we don't die, right?
	Provoking thoughts about the Russia-Ukraine war			Describing the goal of the illustration being to make people think about the Russian war against Ukraine	I mean in lack of a better explanation I would say to sort of provoke thoughts about the ongoing situation.
	Bypassing content moderation			Describing the goal of the illustration being to disguise the depiction of violence and bypass the moderations	And also maybe like circumvent moderation of the platform. Because you're not showing it in graphic but you can still infer what is happening from looking at the picture.
Illustration 2 Perceived goal	Being religious or other propaganda			Describing the illustration goal being a religious propaganda	I think maybe it has something to do with religion or is some propaganda for something else
	Raising awareness of sexual assault happening during Russia-Ukraine war			Describing the illustration goa as raising awareness of sexual assault happening during the Russia-Ukraine war	It reminds people of the war. It portrays... I mean, it's very clear that they are Ukrainian women. It says in the title, sort of, Ukrainians as victims, and why they don't name the men in the back. It's clear that they sort of represent the Russian invaders. It's a sort of reminder and illustration.
	Provoking thoughts about the Russia-Ukraine war			Describing the illustration goal being to provoke thoughts about the Russia-Ukraine war in general	trying to get the world to notice or be engaged to provoke thoughts regarding the conflicts and then signaling some pro-Ukraine or yeah, signaling some Ukrainian innocence and that they're unfairly being exploited or exposed to the violence
	Feeling better during trauma therapy			Describing the illustration goal being to cope with trauma	I'm thinking it's like a therapy piece, almost like getting rid of some demons. Maybe some memories of someone being forced to do something they don't want to do.
	To disrespect Ukrainians			Describing the goal being to disrespect Ukrainians	Like I said, to disrespect Ukrainians, to show a sense of power.

Note: Due to the potential size of this paper I do not provide all 5 codebooks, instead I provide one example that covers the analysis of interviews concerning Illustration 1 and Illustration 2.

Appendix 9: Examples of Iconological analysis

'Ukrainian Virgin' 17 April 2022 (English text external)

Pre-iconographical Description Primary or natural subject matter (offness-factual; aboutness-expressional)	**Iconographical Analysis** Secondary or conventional subject matter, constituting the world of images, allegories, stories	**Iconographical Interpretation** Intrinsic meaning of content constituting the world of "symbolical" values
Offness (factual info) There are multiple human figures depicted in red or black, just like the general image. Centrally we can observe a woman with her hands spread to the sides, showing her palms and bare chest. She is kneeling on the ground surrounded by numerous bodies of naked women with their eyes closed and covering their heads or faces with their hands. The woman in the center has a halo-like circle around her head. The hands of this woman are being held by 3 dark faceless human figures, and one hand is bowing her head. In general, there are 5 dark figures wearing headdresses that seem to be helmets. They all have a red band on their hands with a 'Z' written on each. Right above all the human figures, a red text says 'UKRAINIAN VIRGIN'. *Aboutness (expressional info)* Most of the women in the picture seem to be dead. Those who seem to be alive are scared, trying to cover their heads and faces. The woman in the center is bowing her head in obeisance and seems to be crying. The illustration's colors attract attention and are highly	*Offness* The illustration is an artistic depiction of the sexual abuse and rape of Ukrainian women by Russian invaders. Such generalization is reached through the absence of distinguishable identifiable features of the women depicted, who are rather positioned as a collective of Ukrainian women. Also, the absence of faces on the military men indicates a depersonalized collective of Russian soldiers, both those physically touching the woman in the center and those just watching. *Aboutness* The halo around the head of the central woman, together with the textual signature, refers to the sacredness, purity, and virginity of a woman who is being raped. The act of sexual abuse is seen as crucifixion to which the position of her hands points. The comparison is clearly drawn to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ in Christianity. This illustration can also be seen as a propaganda poster with clear and strong symbolic value, referencing the crimes of Russian invaders committed against Ukrainian women. This is emphasized through the use of red, black, and white colors,	**Nazi Aesthetics** Since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian scholars and leaders of thought have been highlighting the Russian attempt to recreate the Nazi aesthetic for their own war. For example, they highlighted Russians using Latin (not Cyrillic) letters 'z'; 'v'; and 'x' to identify their forces. Since the 2014 annexation of Crimea and temporary occupation of separate territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Ukrainian scholars and media have introduced a new term, commonly referred to as 'Ruscism' (also called 'Ruzzism' or 'Rushism'). The term is a combination of the words 'Russian' and 'fascism' to reflect the modern ideological orientations of Russia, which are based on the struggle to recreate the Soviet Union, exterminate Ukrainians and all those who have allegedly gotten brainwashed by the West and have betrayed the alleged common roots of all the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union. Such positions were developed the most by Ivan Ilyin, Alexandr Dugin, Vladislav Surkov, and others. Thus the reference to and use of Nazi propaganda poster aesthetics in this propaganda illustration is an

contrasting, causing deeply unpleasant and even distressing feelings.	which usually are references to blood and power and are prevalent in German Nazi aesthetics.	attempt to invertedly show the misery and values the Russian invaders bring to Ukraine and its people (in this case, women). **Christian symbolism** Referring to the Virgin Mary, the author is painting a picture of a civilian woman who had done nothing wrong and is going through great suffering like rape, genital mutilation, and humiliation by Russian soldiers. Even though Ukraine is a secular state and many people bear skepticism towards religion of any kind, culturally, the country is predominantly Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Christian. The latter's depiction is not specific because most of the cases of sexual abuse happening in the course of war are yet unsolved, and perpetrators are unpunished. Thus any of those Russians who invaded Ukraine could have done or participated in committing these crimes or still might commit them.

'Olenivka' 29 July 2022 (no text internal)

Pre-iconographical Description	**Iconographical Analysis**	**Iconographical Interpretation**
Primary or natural subject matter (A-factual; B-expressional)	Secondary or conventional subject matter, constituting the world of images, allegories, stories	Intrinsic meaning of content constituting the world of "symbolical" values
Offness (factual info) The illustration depicts a house with two barred windows. Through the windows there are 10 hands trying to reach outside as the red flames are burning inside the building causing tons of dark black smoke going outside. On the bottom of the illustration there	*Offness* The setting is similar to that of the prison which is clearly on fire with people inside. People are trying to ask for help and escape by pushing through the metallic barrels that separate them from safety. It is unclear what kind of prison is this and if this is a prison at all. It is	**Filtration camps** The prison on the illustration is located in Olenivka, a town approximately 10 kilometers away from the occupied Donetsk. This establishment is not just a prison but a Russian filtration camp for Ukrainians (also referred to as the concentration camp). Ukrainian

is a twisted barbed wire. *Aboutness (expressional info)* The illustration has a horrifying atmosphere, the combinations or red and multiple shades of black create a claustrophobic feeling which together with the caged windows and hands sticking through them adds on to this impression.	also unclear who are the people whose hands we can observe. The reasons of the fire are also unknown. The help so needed by the people inside of thu building was not provided to them. *Aboutness* The illustration is predominantly dark, the hands are visible only because of the fire burning bright. It is also unknown if such a dark setting is a result of the time of the day being night or due to the enormous amount of smoke. The picture is full of hopelessness and feeling of the close or approaching death of burning alive. It also seems to be the result of negligence of the prison workers who have locked people in this facility, guarded by the barbed wire and concrete walls, but did not ensure safety of the people inside.	prisoners of war (PoW), members of the Azov batallion who were defending the Azovsteel plant in Mariupol we being held imprisoned there by Russians. Approximately 53 PoWs were killed in the aftermath of the bombing of the Olenivka prison and 130 were wounded. Ukrainian officials claimed that this camp served as a place where they were being tortured and humiliated by Russian soldiers, in particular the mercenary Wagner group. The bombing of the Olenivka prison happened several days after the footage of a Ukrainian soldier being castrated with a clerical knife while being alive by a Russian soldier was published. This single video caused international outrage and was condemned by multiple international organizations and governments. So, logically Ukraine accused Russia of trying to cover up the horrible treatment and torturing of the PoWs that happened in Olenivka prison by just staging an ’accident’. **Visualization of the unseen** Multiple war atrocities like torture, genital mutillation that Russian soldiers commited and keep committing to Ukrainian soldiers will never been seen and for it to not be seen Russia is committed to clearing all the traces. This illustration is precisely depicting the way the Olenivka prison actually looks with addition of the Ukrainian soldiers suffering inside that we will never see as Russia has destroyed the evidence. This way of material reality visualization is combined with adding to it parts that have

		been documented (like the death of people inside the prison) without actually depicting the way they died.