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# The Temporality of an Unfinished War: Visual Culture as a Space of Experiential Mediation


## Abstract

The article examines practices of memory in the conditions of an ongoing, unfinished war, focusing on how memory operates without clear historical closure. It pays particular attention to the notion of the "post-war," which in public discourse increasingly refers not only to a future moment but also to a condition that emerges with the outbreak of war itself. This ambiguity reveals a fractured present and unstable temporal coordinates. The author argues that war should be understood not merely as an event awaiting completion, but as a specific temporal regime in which past, present, and future overlap. Memory is not just retrospective—it unfolds within the event and involves decisions about what is preserved and how it is represented. Two modes of remembering are distinguished: projection (oriented toward future narratives and institutionalization) and excavation (focused on traces, fragments, and experiences that disrupt coherent narratives). Based on cases from Ukraine (including Yahidne, Kherson, and the Wall Evidence project), the article highlights visual culture as a space where diverse wartime experiences can coexist without being reduced to a single, unified narrative.



## # Keywords

visual culture, regimes of remembering, historical memory, temporality of war, difficult heritage, identity, museification, trauma, experience, event, narrative, artistic practice, the war in Ukraine, post-war



## Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje praktyki pamięci w warunkach trwającej, niezamkniętej wojny, koncentrując się na tym, jak działa pamięć bez wyraźnego końca historii. Szczególną uwagę poświęca pojęciu „powojnia", które w dyskursie publicznym coraz częściej odnosi się nie tylko do przyszłości, lecz także do stanu pojawiającego się już wraz z wybuchem wojny. Ta niejednoznaczność ujawnia niestabilność czasu i „pękniętą" teraźniejszość. Autorka pokazuje, że wojna to nie tylko wydarzenie oczekujące zakończenia, lecz specyficzny reżim czasowy, w którym przeszłość, teraźniejszość i przyszłość przenikają się. Pamięć nie jest tu jedynie spojrzeniem wstecz – powstaje w trakcie wydarzeń i wiąże się z decyzjami o tym, co i jak zostaje zachowane. Wyróżnione zostają dwa tryby pamiętania: projekcja (ukierunkowana na przyszłe narracje i instytucjonalizację pamięci) oraz „wydobycie" (eksponujące ślady, fragmenty i doświadczenia zakłócające spójne opowieści). Analiza opiera się na przykładach z Ukrainy (m.in. Jahidne, Chersoń oraz projekt Wall Evidence), pokazując rolę kultury wizualnej jako przestrzeni współobecności różnych doświadczeń wojny, bez ich upraszczania do jednej narracji.



## # Słowa kluczowe

kultura wizualna, reżimy pamięci, pamięć historyczna, temporalność wojny, trudne dziedzictwo, tożsamość, muzealizacja, trauma, doświadczenie, wydarzenie, narracja, praktyka artystyczna, wojna w Ukrainie, powojnie

The analytical logic of remembering developed in contemporary memory studies makes it possible to describe how different experiences of the past become visible, articulated, and related within the public sphere. Within this approach, remembering is understood not as a set of ready-made narratives, but as a system of material carriers, institutions, and practices that hold the past for the present and the future (Assmann, 2011, 123–124).

However, under conditions of an ongoing war, this logic proves insufficient. This is not because it is incorrect, but because its analytical premises, including the assumption of temporal distance between an event and its interpretation, cease to be operational.The logic of remembering traditionally relies on the assumption of temporal distance, whereby an event is already separated from the present and becomes available for ordered, reflective interpretation. Even when dealing with catastrophic, traumatic, or contradictory forms of lived experience, the very fact of their completion creates the conditions for retrospective analysis, comparison of narratives, and gradual symbolic ordering.

In an unfinished war, by contrast, this condition is absent. The event does not transition into the status of the past but continues to operate as a present condition that shapes rhythms of life, horizons of expectation, and limits of the imaginable. Under such circumstances, remembering unfolds within the event itself and becomes linked to decisions about preserving and representing experiences without temporal distance. It is woven into a chronically suspended structure of the present, in which the interaction of past, present, and future is compressed and assumes unstable configurations.

This situation raises the problem of an adequate theoretical description of remembering that forms not after the completion of an event, but under conditions of its ongoing duration. Existing approaches within memory studies, oriented toward working with historized pasts, prove insufficient for analyzing remembering in a situation where the event has not acquired the status of a completed past and cannot be inscribed into a stabilized historical narrative. This theoretical gap emerges from the need to describe regimes of remembering within the temporality of an unfinished war and constitutes the problem to which this article is addressed.

State of research. The question of the temporal reconfiguration of social experience in connection with an ongoing war has been examined within contemporary Ukrainian scholarship across several interrelated research directions: studies of collective memory and identity; analyses of ruptures and tensions in the structure of remembering; research on sociocultural practices of adaptation to prolonged wartime conditions; and investigations of memorialization mechanisms that emerge in parallel with the event itself.

Within the theory of memory and group identity, an important argument emphasizes that collective memory functions not only as a repository of meanings but also as a factor in the construction of community through symbolic forms, narratives, and ritualized practices that sustain identification and its continuity (Kryvda, 2019). From this perspective, the question arises as to how institutional and communicative forms of remembering shape the horizons of a collective “we,” and to what extent they can sustain the tension of experiences that resist rapid reconciliation.

A distinct perspective is offered by analyses of “ruptures” in collective memory as situations in which memory becomes visible precisely through disruptions of its habitual functioning and through the necessity of restoring or reconfiguring networks of meaning (Dovgopolova, 2022). Within this approach, memory is treated as a process sensitive to conflicts of interpretation and to the asynchrony of experiences that coexist within a shared social space.

Studies of sociocultural practices under conditions of prolonged wartime emphasize that adaptation to the so-called “new normal” occurs not only at the level of institutions or state policy, but also through everyday cultural mechanisms of adjustment that transform ways of experiencing time, risk, and expectation (Bohutskyi, 2025). In this context, war emerges as a factor that reshapes the structure of the present: it increasingly ceases to function as a transition between past and future and instead acquires the characteristics of a dominant temporal field in which different temporal layers of experience interact.

At the same time, research on memorialization processes examines the formation of sites of memory, memorial spaces, and commemorative practices that connect the experience of war with public forms of representation (Herchanivska, 2023; Huda, 2025). For the problem of the temporality of war, it is particularly important that such practices may emerge even before the event itself has concluded, that is, in the absence of the temporal distance traditionally regarded as a condition for

ordered historical interpretation.

Nevertheless, the question of remembering under conditions of an unfinished war requires further theoretical clarification. Existing studies largely focus on transformations of historical memory, public narratives, or memory politics, whereas regimes of remembering that take shape within the event itself remain less conceptually articulated.

The relationship between time, event, and memory has repeatedly been addressed in philosophy of history and memory studies. Since a detailed review of these approaches falls outside the scope of this article, the analysis is limited to the dimension most relevant to the present study, namely the nonlinearity of time and the fragmentary character of remembering. In Walter Benjamin's conception, the past does not appear as a completed sequence of facts, but as a fragment capable of "exploding" into the present and interrupting its linearity (Benjamin 2006). By contrast, Aleida Assmann describes cultural memory as a system of selection and institutional consolidation of significant forms of the past, which presupposes a certain temporal distance between event and interpretation (Assmann, 2011).

In the context of an ongoing war, this premise of temporal distance becomes problematic. The event does not transition into the status of a stabilized past but continues to function as a present condition shaping horizons of expectation, practices of remembering, and modes of representing experience. At this theoretical juncture, there arises a need for an analytical framework capable of describing remembering not only as post-eventual stabilization of the past, but as a process formed within the event itself and unfolding under conditions of tense co-presence of different temporal dimensions.

The aim of this article is to conceptualize remembering within the temporality of an unfinished war and to analyze how visual culture may function as a space of co-presence of different experiences of living through war in the absence of temporal distance.

Reflecting on remembering within the conditions of an ongoing war is inevitably tied to the question of the intensification of the already present nonlinearity of time, which, under conditions of unfinished hostilities, acquires particular existential intensity. War exposes the fragility of those temporal structures that usually remain unnoticed yet sustain the sense of order in social life.

Socially, this condition of a suspended present manifests itself in the loss of stable rhythms and collective coordinates. As the sociology of time has shown, it is precisely rhythm and repetition that allow societies to structure experience and form expectations (Elias, 1992, 203). Under conditions of an unfinished war, these mechanisms are disrupted: everyday life ceases to be predictable, and time loses its capacity to "lead forward."

Particularly revealing in this context of a suspended present is the temporal logic of the sliding signifier "post-war," not as an abstract category but as a formula actively circulating in the public discourse of an ongoing war. The signifier "post-war" appears in media, conference titles, political and cultural initiatives, and increasingly designates not only an imagined moment following the end of war but also a condition that emerges as a consequence of its beginning. This duality, understood as the oscillation between "after the beginning" and "after the end," functions as a symptom of the suspended present.

Temporality is further complicated by the fact that the "after" also refers to the condition that emerged in 2014, with the onset of the war that transformed the existential framework of experience. The full-scale invasion of 2022 did not merely mark a new rupture but retroactively activated this earlier "after" in the Freudian sense of Nachträglichkeit and granted it a different intensity and meaning. What occurs is a layering of temporal coordinates: the "after" of 2022 unfolds as an "after-after," a moment in which a later event reshapes the interpretation of a preceding one.

The "after" thus appears split: it simultaneously designates the condition of the war's continuation since 2014 and the state of renewed rupture that prevents this experience from stabilizing as already past.

In this sense, the "after" emerges not as a marker of a future ending but as a regime of an ongoing present. It has already arrived, yet it does not crystallize into a completed phase; instead, it registers the irreversibility of change while holding the experience of loss in a state of permanent actuality.

This understanding of post-war as already-arrived is reflected in concrete cultural initiatives. The program "Post-War Memory Culture in Ukraine" (MoCA NGO 2024) is implemented under conditions of an ongoing war yet speaks about the formation of a post-war memory culture already in the present, thus describing post-war-ness as a condition emerging from the

war time rupture. A similar logic is evident in the conference "Genealogies of Memory 2025: Rethinking Post-War Memory Cultures from the Present" (ENRS 2025), where post-war memory is conceptualized "from the present," from within an unfinished process.

At the same time, within these same discourses, "post-war" is also imagined as a hypothetical completion that would take the form of a future moment enabling full interpretation, historization, and symbolic ordering of experience. This "after" remains an imagined horizon without clearly defined contours. In this sense, post-war functions as a deferred horizon of stabilization.

In this latter meaning, the signifier appears in legal and reconstruction debates. The conference "Ukraine's Wartime and Post-War Criminal Justice" (OSCE 2023) distinguishes between wartime and post-war criminal justice as two separate regimes, presupposing the arrival of a phase following the end of war. Similarly, the roundtable "Advancing Justice: Legal Reforms for Post-War Ukraine" (ULBS 2024) formulates legal reforms as a task of the post-war period, that is, after the war's conclusion. In reconstruction debates, the formula post-war recovery of Ukraine functions as a model of a future condition of stabilization, in which reconstruction and institutional restructuring would become fully possible.

Thus, the signifier post-war becomes split: it simultaneously designates an already existing condition "after the beginning of the war" and an imagined condition "after its end." These two meanings do not form a sequence but coexist in tension. Within this tension, temporal regimes overlap: the future (the anticipated end) is projected into the present, while the present is described in the language of the past. The beginning and the expected end of the war semantically converge within a single signifier.

Under these conditions, the character of remembering also changes: it ceases to function solely as a retrospective ordering of completed experience and increasingly takes the form of a process unfolding within the event itself. This shift generates the need to distinguish regimes of remembering that correspond to different ways of relating present, past, and anticipated future within this temporal configuration.

For the analytical description of these differences, the article proposes a distinction between two regimes of remembering – **projection** and **excavation** (intervention of the trace). These designations function as working analytical categories proposed by the author rather than established terms within memory studies. They are intended to capture two fundamentally different ways of engaging with the experience of war that has not yet acquired historical distance.

This distinction presupposes a differentiation between memory as a form of institutional stabilization of the past and remembering as a process that unfolds within an ongoing event. The analytical productivity of this distinction is examined through specific practices of representing lived experience of war, including museum initiatives in Yahidne and Kherson and the Wall Evidence project. In this perspective, visual culture emerges as a space of co-presence that allows heterogeneous experiences to be held together without premature synthesis.

Projection and excavation thus delineate two fundamentally different modes of working with time that become salient under conditions in which war has not acquired the status of a completed past. In practice, these modes are not mutually exclusive; however, they resist synthesis without a loss of analytical precision and ethical sensitivity.

The first regime, designated as projection, describes forms of remembering oriented toward future museification and historization of experience. Within this regime, remembering operates with the assumption that the war will eventually end and that present events will become part of an ordered historical narrative. In the temporal logic shaped by the duality of the signifier post-war, this regime is primarily associated with its second meaning — the imagined condition "after the end of the war." From this perspective, experiences are selected, interpretive frameworks are formed, and elements that may later acquire canonical status are delineated.

Projection should not be interpreted a priori as manipulative or ideological, since under conditions of unfinished temporality it performs прежде всего an orientational function. It responds to the basic need of societies for symbolic coordinates and semantic stability under conditions of threat. As Aleida Assmann has shown, cultural memory always presupposes selection and structuring, since without these processes the long-term preservation of meaningful content would be impossible (Assmann, 2011, 37). Through such mechanisms, memory is transformed from a chaotic accumulation of experience into a recognizable symbolic form. In this sense, projection constitutes a necessary condition for the formation of a shared

understanding of a past that has not yet become history but is already conceived as something that will eventually acquire a completed form.

At the same time, the regime of projection is inevitably tied to processes of framing. It operates through the question of representativeness: which experiences will be recognized as "representing" the war, which images will become symbolic, and which will remain peripheral or disappear from the field of visibility altogether. Any culture of memory functions within the tension between preservation and forgetting, between an excess of material and the necessity of selection. Projection unfolds precisely within this tension, performing an operation of preliminary construction of an image of future wholeness. In narrative terms, this implies a movement toward order that seeks to integrate memory into a coherent historical account in which events acquire place, sequence, and meaning. However, in the situation of an unfinished war, such integration cannot be achieved without the risk of prematurity. Projection delineates the contours of the future but does not guarantee that all experiences will find a place within these frames.

The second mode of remembering, designated as excavation, is defined in this article as the intervention of the trace into the present. It describes a form of remembering in which a fragment of the past is neither ordered nor integrated but interrupts the existing symbolic order and makes its instability visible. Excavation gravitates toward the first meaning of the signifier post-war, namely the condition "after the beginning of the war," yet it is not reducible to it. Rather, it designates a regime of remembering in which the trace of the past intervenes in the present before the horizon of "after the end of the war" becomes an operative framework of interpretation.

If projection presupposes that experience will eventually be inscribed into a coherent historical configuration, excavation captures the moment when such an inscription proves premature or impossible. This mode of remembering does not "recover" a hidden past. Instead, it transforms what can appear in the present as meaningful. At a certain point, the symbolic order becomes unable to absorb the excess of experience, and the trace breaks through as an event that destabilizes established interpretive frameworks.

Thus, while projection maintains orientational frames of the future, excavation maintains the rupture, preventing it from being resolved in premature synthesis. These modes of remembering perform different functions, and their combination within a single "balanced" model entails a serious ethical risk. In a situation of an unfinished war, the criterion of such "balance" is almost inevitably formed from the perspective of an assumed future temporal distance, within which experience is already conceived as separated from the present and available for ordered interpretation.

Under such conditions, excavation practices tend to be evaluated not in terms of their capacity to reveal tensions of the present, but according to their conformity with an anticipated future narrative. What resists coordination, fixation, or stabilization is labeled as "too fragmentary," "unsystematic," or "temporary." This creates the risk that, within such a logic, what is eliminated is not accidental noise but precisely those dimensions of experience that are least amenable to representation and at the same time most sharply reveal the catastrophic character of an ongoing war.

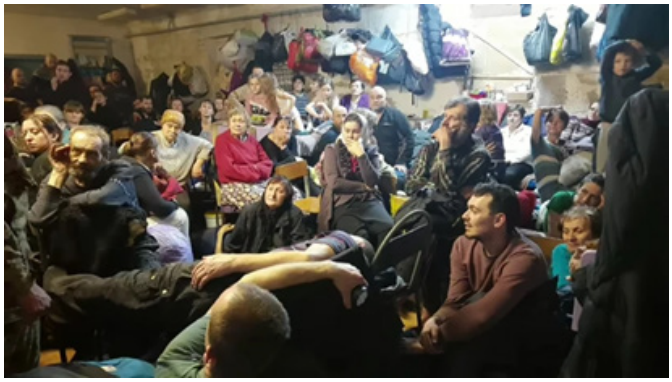
So, how can different experiences coexist in the public space without being subordinated to a single temporal or narrative standard? Within the temporality of an unfinished war and its aftermath, such interaction cannot rely on the assumption of a shared horizon of completion or on the possibility of drawing conclusions. Rather, it could account for the structural non-synchronicity of experiences, different degrees of proximity to violence, and different ways of living through it.

Visual culture can function as a space in which this co-presence is sustained through images, material traces, and spatial compositions that do not resolve the tension between experiences but render it analytically accessible. Dialogue here does not eliminate the unfinishedness of war but registers it as a condition for the possibility of responsible coexistence within a time that has not yet been separated from lived experience.

From this perspective, the following analysis turns to concrete empirical situations in which the temporal unfinishedness of war acquires material and symbolic forms in practices of remembering.

A revealing example of the projection regime of memory under the temporality of an unfinished war is the processes of interpreting and memorializing events in the village of Yahidne in the Chernihiv region, which began before the end of the war and are already shaping the contours of a future regime of memory. During the russian occupation of the village in March 2022, the entire population was forcibly

held in the basement of the local school from 3 to 31 March, with civilians used as a "human shield" and deprived of basic conditions for survival. (Fig.1).



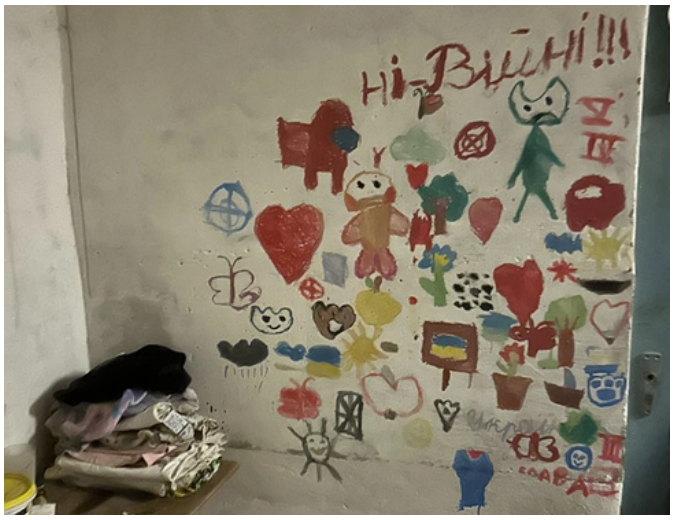
According to investigative data, 368–369 civilians were confined in the basement, including approximately 69 children, as well as elderly and ill persons (IWPR 2024). Inhumane conditions, including lack of ventilation and restricted access to water, food, and medical assistance, resulted in the deaths of at least 10 people in the school basement (Suspilne Media 2023). The events became the subject of criminal proceedings concerning war crimes: the Chernihiv District Court issued indictments in cases against at least 15 russian servicemen accused of unlawful deprivation of liberty of civilians and creating life-threatening conditions (IWPR 2024).

In the context of this study, what is decisive is not only the crime itself but also the attempts at its memorialization and museification, particularly the process of shaping a future museum form in Yahidne. Here the projection regime acquires operational significance: the community and institutions are already attempting to delineate the framework of a future regime of memory, its ethical boundaries, and criteria of representativeness. The event has not yet been integrated into culture as the past, while the future configuration of memory remains undetermined. At present, material and organizational preconditions are being formed, including space, infrastructure, and an institutional "shell," while the substantive content, narrative structure, and principles of representation remain unarticulated and unsettled because there is no stable custodian or clear governance model.

A specific configuration of the "after" emerges within the tension between the unfinished experience of living through war and the institutional need to impose order. It appears not as an actual temporal boundary but as a projection that begins to operate prior to the event of completion. The doubled "after," on the one hand, appears as a temporal distance in which the war would be separated from the present and become available for reflective interpretation, and on the other as a symbolic mode constructed in advance in practices of remembering, exhibiting, and narrative framing.

Thus, the "after" functions not as a completed state but as a normative model of a future past that has not yet occurred but already structures the present. In this sense, the building currently being constructed in Yahidne as a potential institution of memory becomes a space of a priori temporal ordering: it presupposes the emergence of a distance that does not yet exist, while its substantive content and conceptual boundaries remain undefined. In particular, the project that won the competition does not integrate the basement as the key site of experience, which creates a condition of suspension between the material realization of form and the absence of an established model of remembering.

Key to the discussion became the basement of the Yahidne school itself, which served as the space in which russian military forces forcibly held civilian residents of the village for twenty eight days. (Fig. 2).




The very question of whether this basement should be preserved as the core of the memorial space, or transformed into a more "expositionally convenient" form, became a point of tension. According to testimonies of participants in the process, collected and published within the project Laboratoriia Zhurnalistyky [PIJL] (2024), the voices of local residents and direct

witnesses prevailed. They insisted on preserving the basement in its actual configuration as a space of testimony rather than reconstruction.

The decision to memorialize the basement space itself was justified by the fact that it preserves material traces of human presence, including inscriptions on the walls, markers of time, and spatial compression, and thereby resists translating the event into an abstract narrative.

In discussions with residents, another formula emerged: "to bring the visitor out of the basement into the light." This phrase described a scenario of spatial movement that implied a trajectory from darkness and suffocation toward the upper floors and the roof of the school, from which the horizon opens. In the public materials of PIJL (2024), this formula is presented as a generalization of the local vision of the route rather than as a curatorial metaphor. At the same time, preserving the basement in its suffocation, semi-darkness, and spatial tightness was not understood as an instrument of shock, but as a mode of embodied comprehension of experience. Within this dimension of bodily spatial co presence, where memory is experienced not only cognitively but also through breathing, temperature, and the distance between bodies, projection emerges as the selective formation of a future frame of memory that requires decisions in the present concerning what to preserve, what to show, and what to symbolize.

Work with Yahidne is temporally urgent precisely now, as the material traces of the crime are disappearing through destruction, repair, everyday restoration, and the pressure to normalize space. The dilemma of whether to conserve or not thus appears not as a technical issue but as a temporal one: stabilizing the trace risks transforming the space into a frozen sign, whereas refusing conservation threatens the loss of material evidentiality and the embodied weight of experience.

Within studies of difficult heritage, this tension is described as a structural conflict between the need to preserve the authentic material trace of violence and the necessity of creating an ethical, non-retraumatizing infrastructure of access. In the museum context, this implies a rejection of the exploitation of shock and simulated "immersion," and instead an orientation toward an ethical architectonics of experience, in which the visitor remains a subject of encounter.

In Assmann's terms, the process of memorialization constitutes a transition from the accumulation of traces to their functionalization within cultural memory, and this transition inevitably entails selection, framing, and ethical responsibility for modes of display (Assmann, 2011, 36–44; 128–134). In the case of Yahidne, this conflict is intensified by the fact that decisions are made "within the event" itself: social memory has not yet been separated from immediate pain, while legal and ethical frameworks are being formed in parallel. Difficult heritage here thus emerges not as a stabilized object of the past, but as a dynamic field of tension between the material trace, embodied memory, and projections of future historization.

In sum, the Yahidne case demonstrates how dialogical logic organizes the visibility of experiences not only through exhibition, but through the procedural architectonics of conversation: who speaks, in what format, according to which rules, and where the limits of the permissible are drawn. The right to voice is granted not only to curators, architects, or institutional representatives, but also to direct witnesses, residents, families of those who were detained, and the local community. The facilitated meeting establishes a framework in which speech requires argumentation, listening, and mutual recognition, rather than mere declaration of positions.

Equally important are the rules themselves: time limits for interventions, the principle of equality of voices, moderation of conflictual moments, documentation of proposals, and transparency of decision-making. Together, these elements form not merely a discussion but an institutional mechanism of selection that determines what will be preserved as a trace, what will become an exhibitionary element, and what will remain outside the public field. The limits of the permissible are likewise defined procedurally: what can be represented without violating dignity, which images are unacceptable, and where the boundary lies between testimony and spectacle. Although work on the exhibition has not yet begun and the materials generated through the dialogues in Yahidne remain suspended between public articulation and the absence of formal fixation, the configuration of the future memorial space, including its language, tonality, and degree of openness to asynchronous experiences, appears already outlined. Projection here emerges as a process of anticipatory ordering: future memory is shaped not only by the content of the exhibition, but by the very structure of conversation.

A conceptually complementary example of the projection regime of remembering is provided by initiatives

to create an institution of memory in Kherson following the de-occupation of the city on 11 November 2022. The city had been under russian occupation from 2 March to 11 November 2022. During this period, mass pro-Ukrainian protests took place in Kherson, accompanied by abductions of activists, the operation of torture sites, and systematic violent detentions of civilians who were subsequently held in basements. After the withdrawal of russian forces, the city came under constant shelling from the left bank of the Dnipro, which further complicated processes of institutional recovery while simultaneously intensifying the need to document the experience of occupation. Following liberation, the public space of Kherson became a field of symbolic and narrative reconfiguration. This included the dismantling of russian symbols, the restoration of Ukrainian toponyms, the identification of sites of torture and unlawful detention, and the documentation of civilian testimonies. In 2023–2024, local authorities, museum professionals, historians, and civic initiative groups began discussions on creating a dedicated museum space focused on the experience of occupation, as well as on integrating this experience into existing museum structures in the city. At the same time, cooperation with human rights organizations has continued in order to archive testimonies and material evidence of crimes committed under the occupation regime.

Unlike Yahidne, where projection is concentrated on the ethical limits of memorializing the site of a crime, the Kherson case foregrounds a struggle over the future narrative axis of historization of the occupation. In practice, the discussion about a memory institution in Kherson unfolds around defining the status of the occupation experience itself: whether the narrative will primarily focus on crimes and repressive practices of the occupation regime, or whether greater visibility will be given to experiences of survival, mutual aid, and civic solidarity. At the same time, the linguistic regime of interpretation is also under discussion: whether this memory will assume a human-rights, historiographic, or artistic-reflexive format, since the choice of language will shape the character of its incorporation into local and national narratives.

A separate dimension concerns the problem of access to the space of experience itself. Unlike cases of full occupation, where interaction is possible only at a distance (as, for example, in Mariupol), Kherson presents a different configuration: formally the city has been returned, yet in practice it continues to slip out of safe access, neighborhood by neighborhood. This creates an additional challenge for memory work formed under conditions of limited physical presence, unstable security, and interrupted direct interaction.

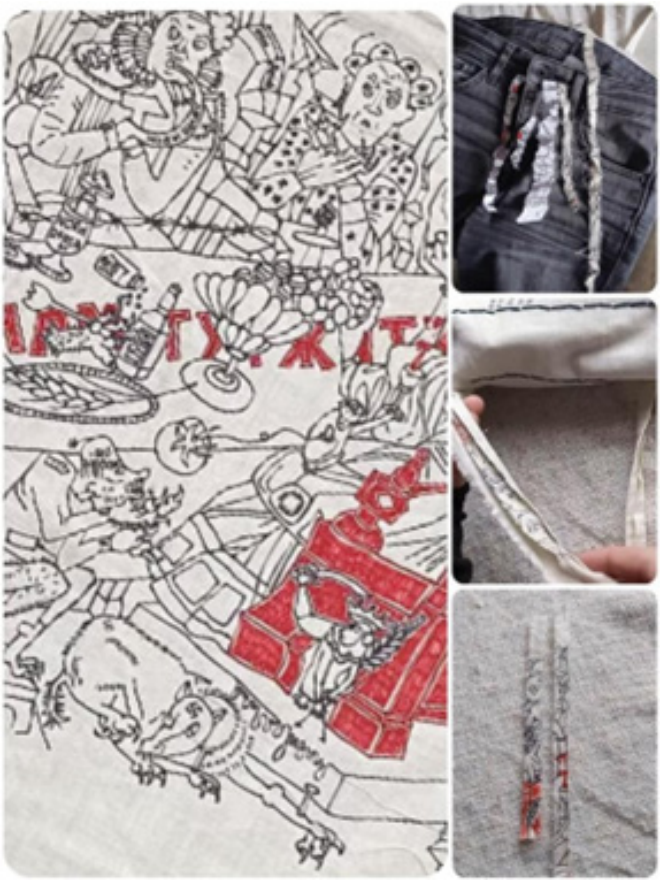
Thus, the projection dimension in Kherson manifests as a struggle for the frame of a future narrative. If in Yahidne the central issue is space and embodied co-presence, in Kherson the key question concerns the axis of narration: who will become the bearer of a legitimate version of memory, which events will acquire the status of a symbolic core, and which will remain at the periphery. Projection here signifies not only the preservation of traces of occupation, but the anticipatory formation of an interpretative structure.

Indicative in this regard is the shift in the name of the institution from a “museum of occupation” to a “museum of resistance,” which emerged through public discussions and reflects a deliberate attempt to reorient the future narrative from a dominance of sacrifice toward a dominance of agency and civic resistance (Suspilne Media 2024). This shift alters the regime through which traumatic experience is interpreted, shaping the normative vocabulary of future historical narration. The institutional name functions here as a structural frame that allows occupation to be understood not only as a history of helplessness, but as a complex space of violence in which sacrifice coexisted with numerous forms of everyday resistance.

As of 2026, the institution functions more as a concept and a public initiative with individual exhibition events than as an established museum with a permanent venue and an approved exhibition strategy; for this reason, part of the future collection currently has a project-based or temporary character. Among the most telling exhibits of this initiated collection is a work by the Kherson-based artist KAR (Fig. 3).

The artist deliberately cut the canvas of her painting into narrow strips, sewed the fragments into clothing, a bag, and other personal belongings in order to transport them through an enemy checkpoint while leaving the temporarily occupied part of the city. Once in territory controlled by Ukraine, she restored the painting. The act of cutting, as a violent fragmentation of a coherent image, and its subsequent restoration become a metaphor for the experience of occupation and the return of subjectivity.

The projectional character of the process is particularly evident in the formation of the future museum collection.



The gathered artifacts, including handmade flags, photo and video equipment from protests, objects damaged by shelling, and items used for covert assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, function as elements of visual mediation through which the experience of occupation becomes visible and translatable in the public space. The inclusion of KAR's cut and restored work within this assemblage emphasizes the frame of "resistance," as the museum is conceived not only as an archive of crime but also as a space for gathering what has been torn apart culturally, symbolically, and materially. At the same time, the formation of this narrative remains conflictual: public discussions register competition between alternative scenarios of future memory, which foregrounds the need for mediation and dialogical practices (Vgoru 2024).

So, in the case of Kherson, two levels of mediation can be clearly distinguished: visual mediation, which operates through artifacts and exhibitionary decisions, and dialogical mediation as an infrastructure for publicly negotiating the criteria of their acceptability. Sociological data confirm this tension, as alongside the demand for documenting crimes there is also an articulated need to represent resistance as a collective experience not reducible to a narrative of suffering (Zakhyst Kherson Community Foundation 2024).

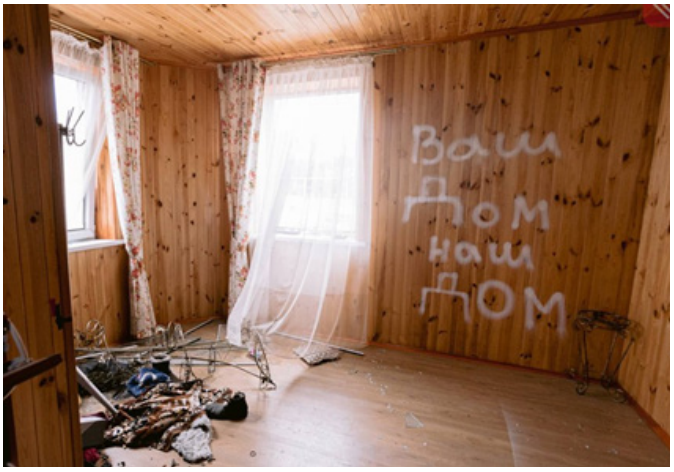
In comparison with Yahidne, these cases demonstrate different yet complementary modes of projection. In both instances, under conditions of an unfinished war, mediation ceases to be a post-eventual reconciliation and becomes work with a disrupted and unstable temporal structure, in which visual decisions and dialogical procedures operate in parallel without merging. This is precisely what makes the projection regime of remembering analytically productive for understanding museum practices in a situation of ongoing war. At the same time, this does not imply that once a temporal distance is assumed, when the event becomes separated from the present and available for historization, the projectional dimension will disappear. Rather, its intensity and configuration will change, and decisions will no longer be made under conditions of existential uncertainty, while the struggle over the frame of interpretation, the narrative axis, and the status of particular experiences will not cease but will shift into another phase characterized by stabilization and canonization.

The projection regime of remembering appears not as a linear movement toward stabilized historization, but as a field of tension between the necessity of making decisions already in the present and the risk of reducing experience. After the end of the active phase of the war, this tension will not automatically disappear, but will transform into a contradiction between the institutional stabilization of memory and the preservation of its internal multiplicity.

This threshold opens the next regime of remembering, excavation, which can be understood not only as an archival principle but also as a temporal event that disrupts the coherence of the present and enables the return of marginalized voices, asynchronous experiences of living through war, and affective and embodied testimonies that were not incorporated into the institutionally stabilized frame of memory under conditions of ongoing war.

A telling visual-documentary example of excavation as a temporal event (an act of temporal disruption) is provided by practices of documenting wall inscriptions left by russian military forces in occupied towns and villages of the Kyiv region in the spring of 2022. These inscriptions appeared on

the walls of schools, private houses, apartment entrances, and utility spaces – short phrases, addresses, threats, or ideological markers not intended for public display, yet which became material traces of the presence of the occupying power. The initiative for this practice was first undertaken by the team of the cultural institution "Mizhvukhamy." Beginning in April 2022, its members conducted systematic expeditions to de-occupied territories (initially in Kyiv Polissia, later in other regions) to photograph and document inscriptions, subsequently creating the open online archive "Nastinni Dokazy" / Wall Evidence (Nastinni Dokazy 2022). The publicly accessible archive contains several thousand images of inscriptions collected through field visits, a community of witnesses, and monitoring of open sources (web platform, Instagram), and remains open to researchers, artists, and a broader audience (Fig. 4).




The character of the inscriptions is highly diverse: from military markings ("V," "Z") to propaganda slogans, addresses to civilians, quotations, intimate confessions, or threats. In school premises, cases of a peculiar form of "teaching" were documented: handwritten narratives left on classroom boards imitated a pedagogical gesture while simultaneously staging symbolic domination and a claim to normative interpretation of reality.

A separate group consists of formulas referring to previous military campaigns of russia, in particular to Chechnya. The phrase "Better a horrible end than horror without end," which circulated widely during the Chechen wars, also appeared in de-occupied settlements of the Kyiv region. Given the presence of Kadyrov units in Hostomel, the repetition of this formula acquires the meaning of a historical parallel and indicates the transfer of ready-made rhetorical matrices of coercion toward "ending the war on russia's terms" into a new context. Within a single short inscription, at least two temporal layers coexist: the immediate situation of occupation in 2022 and the discursive inheritance of previous wars. Through the repetition of the formula, the continuity of imperial rhetoric becomes visible – a rhetoric that migrates from one conflict to another and functions as a semantic resource of the present.

The process of documentation involved not only photographing the graffiti, but also description, classification, and digital archiving aimed at preserving what is physically quickly erased or destroyed during the repair and reconstruction of de-occupied buildings. This practice coexists with the gradual disappearance of inscriptions in real space: what was once material and local is now recorded in a digital archive, where it is preserved as a document of war, available for analysis and representation.

The excavation regime is oriented not toward a materially stable object, but toward a trace that has already lost or is losing its physical presence. Its accessibility is ensured only through mediated representation as a form of deferred, secondary appearance of what has disappeared. Such presence is possible only as a "trace of a trace." Wall Evidence thus functions no longer as illustrative testimony of the horrors of war, but as ruptures in the present that compel the past to intervene in current experience and destabilize the reception of the material trace of violence within cultural memory.

Unlike memorial objects that presuppose long-term existence and symbolic stability, photographically documented inscriptions exist in a regime of structural instability. They cannot be returned to space as material objects without repeating violence against the community, yet they also cannot be entirely removed from cultural memory without losing an important layer of experience.

Within the logic of this article, excavation emerges as a response to the limitations of both memorial policy and projectional models of memory. Where projection seeks to delineate the frame of future historization already in the present, excavation interrupts this movement and redirects attention to what does not fit preconfigured schemes. At the same time, it does not oppose memorialization, as the example of the Yahidne basement likewise demonstrates work with the

everyday logic of violence, but shifts the focus to another scale of material consisting of micro traces and fragments that do not possess the status of a discrete event yet reveal structural mechanisms of violence in its ordinariness.

The difference between the space of forced civilian detention in Yahidne and Wall Evidence lies not in the character of violence, but in the status of the trace and the regime of its presence. The school basement is a localized space preserved as a material nucleus of memory and capable of institutional stabilization through memorialization. Wall inscriptions, by contrast, exist in a regime of disappearance: they lack their own spatial core, do not presuppose long-term preservation, and cannot be transformed into a stable memorial object without losing their contextual fragility. The practices realized within the Wall Evidence project can therefore be understood as an example of the excavation regime of remembering. This regime does not form a memorial center and does not project a future frame of historization; rather, it reveals the unstable presence of violence at the micro-level, namely on walls, in everyday spaces, in short inscriptions that were never intended to become testimony. In this sense, excavation does not compete with history but exposes its blind spots, showing how many experiences of war cannot be immediately translated into a language of generalization.

Significantly, the excavation regime seeks neither catharsis nor moral release. It sustains the tension between what has occurred and what cannot yet be interpreted without losing complexity. Visual traces within this regime do not "speak" on behalf of a collective and do not claim symbolic representativeness; instead, they register fragmented, asynchronous signs of the intrusion of violence into the ordinary space of life.

In temporal terms, this means that excavation does not translate the experience of war into the past tense, but preserves it as an active factor of the present. The past is "activated" through material and visual remnants, entering into conflict with the drive toward normalization. n this sense, excavation gravitates toward the first meaning of the signifier post war, understood as the condition "after the beginning of war," when the event has already occurred but has not yet been separated from the present. It operates within a temporal field in which the horizon of "after the end of war" has not yet become an operational frame of interpretation, and fragments of experience intervene in the present without the possibility of final ordering. In Benjamin's logic, this corresponds to the situation in which "the image of the past suddenly flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin, 2003, 391). Wall inscriptions are not integrated into a completed narrative of the war and are not reduced to symbolic "evidence of enemy brutality." Their force lies in their ordinariness, fragmentariness, and linguistic roughness: they record not a generalized image of the aggressor, but concrete intonations and positions that usually disappear in the process of official historization. Most such inscriptions are painted over or destroyed in real space as hostile traces. This gesture of cleansing is understandable in the everyday life of communities seeking to restore space to a safe and livable condition. At the same time, the act of documentation acquires a distinct social significance: it does not contradict the practice of erasing the trace, but creates a parallel archival space in which what cannot remain visible in everyday life does not disappear without a trace from cultural memory.

From an analytical perspective, the significance of this visual layer lies in its capacity to complicate future memory, compelling it to account for what does not fit into heroic or sacrificial narratives. In this sense, excavation opens the possibility of a more inclusive memory not by adding "another voice," but by sustaining fragments that resist synthesis.

## Conclusion

The analysis confirms the article's initial thesis: under conditions of the unfinished temporality of war, remembering cannot be described as a post-eventual, linear movement from experience to interpretation and from event to stabilized historization. Memory is neither reducible to retrospection nor oriented toward a stabilized "after"; rather, it emerges as a tense co-presence of past, present, and alternative futures without their final reconciliation. The signifier post-war, which in contemporary discourse simultaneously denotes the condition "after the beginning of war" and the imagined condition "after its end," thus appears not as a designation of sequential phases but as a symptom of temporal tension in which these horizons coexist.

A key result of the article is the conceptualization of remembering as the coexistence of non-synthesizable regimes of projection and excavation, each of the latter operates differently within a condition of temporal compression.

Projection describes situations in which communities and institutions are compelled to make decisions "within the event": what to preserve, how to name, which ethical boundaries to establish, and which experiences to consider representative for the future. Within the temporal logic of the signifier post war, this regime gravitates toward its second meaning, namely the imagined condition "after the end of war," in which present events are treated as material for future historization and museification.

Excavation, by contrast, reveals another dimension of remembering: it does not delineate a future frame but destabilizes the present by returning to it what cannot be prematurely reconciled. This regime unfolds within the meaning of post-war that denotes the condition "after the beginning of war," yet is not reducible to it. Excavation not only operates within this temporal state but also undermines its stabilization, exposing the internal instability of a situation in which the past continues to act within the present without the possibility of final ordering.

Within this logic, the past does not recede into distance but is "activated" through fragments, traces, and linguistic and material remnants that have no ready place either in official historiography or in stabilized regimes of memory. Under such conditions, visual culture emerges not as an instrument of reconciliation, closure, or the "resolution" of traumatic experience, but as a space of agreement without synthesis, in which different experiences of living through war can remain co-present without being reduced to a canon. Thus, within the temporality of an unfinished war, visual practices, from museum initiatives to projects documenting traces of military invasion, become environments in which the tension between different meanings of post-war is not eliminated but sustained as a condition of ethical sensitivity to the multiplicity of experiences.

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## List of Illustrations

Fig. 1. Approximately half a meter of space was allocated per person held in the basement of the school in Yahidne; for twenty seven days people were forced to sleep sitting. Photo: Olha Meniailo, March 2022.
Fig. 2. Detained children drew cats, hearts, and cars and wrote “No to war.” Photo: Hanna Mamonova.
Fig. 3. Fragments of a painting by the Kherson based artist KAR, evacuated from occupation and reconstructed after being cut into pieces; exhibition of the Museum of Resistance. Photo: KAR.
Fig. 4. Inscription left by russian soldiers reading “Your home is our home” in an apartment of local residents. Velyka Dymerka community, Kyiv region. Photo: ProSLAV.

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