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## CULTURAL PROJECTS AS A TOOL OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEFENSE. UKRAINIAN EXAMPLE

**ABSTRACT:** The article presents an anthropological defense's practical dimension on cultural activities observed during the Russian-Ukrainian war. The paper's primary hypothesis is to deliver anthropological defense strategic objectives from a country's perspective at war. The adopted view refers to hybrid warfare and hybrid threats. The goals are as follows: 1) documentation objective, 2) therapeutic objective, 3) ideological objective, 4) diplomatic objective. A structured, consistent defense line allows creating a shared narrative by dividing society as the Ukrainian one. All actions in terms of anthropological defense refer to the values shared by the majority of citizens. Nevertheless, anthropological defense tools' choice and use must be strategically conditioned, i.e., other benefits for cinematography, theater, and fine arts. For an action to be practical cooperation between self-governing assemblages (such as volunteers, artists, art curators) and state actors must be established. The cooperation activities undertaken are complementary and complementary and can, therefore, be remarkably efficient.



**KEYWORDS:** war in Ukraine, military anthropology, hybrid war

### INTRODUCTION

Officially, the Russian-Ukrainian war began in 2014, unofficially in the 1990s, just after Ukraine gained its independence. Obviously, this is about the war not waged by military means but by cultural ones. The point is that culture is also a battlefield, and this is the new criterion of military anthropology that we propose to consider. It is related to two concepts:

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anthropological aggression and anthropological defense, which are regarded as hybrid warfare components. They are aimed at modelling the cultural space to allow an aggressor to gain a strategic advantage.

The main research problem is what active forms of anthropological defense are taken up by the culture of the attacked country during the hybrid war.

The study is based on the collection, analysis, and structuring of cultural phenomena and artefacts used as tools of anthropological defense in the hybrid war being waged against Ukraine.

Methods: 1) Field research in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Lviv including non-participant observation and unstructured interviews; 2) Critical discourse analysis of theatrical performances, movies, art exhibitions, and other artistic activities.

Sources: 1) Video recordings of cultural activities from the frontline zone in Donbas as far as from the places internally displaced persons came to; 2) Statements made by activists dealing with soldiers, war victims (including WIA, widows and orphans, IDPs etc.) (directly registered materials, web-based TV relations, and press information as well as Facebook posts).

## **PROBLEM SITUATION**

Since the 1990s, Russian actions (Russian anthropological aggression) have focused on the consistent taking over the Ukrainian cultural space. The task was facilitated by the fact that Ukraine inherited strongly Russified power, social and cultural structures from the USSR. It is enough to recall the flooding of the Ukrainian book market with cheap Russian editions, the presence of only Russian version of popular magazines, Russian-speaking TV channels with soap operas which action occurs in an undefined post-Soviet space, blurring the difference between what is Ukrainian and what is Russian as well as rare flashes of Ukrainian culture, reduced rather to folklore and sentimental light music.

The starting point was challenging. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian culture was slowly becoming increasingly solidified and more clearly marked its presence in public spaces. It concerned mainly theater and literature. The same is true for the Ukrainian language, which received the status of a state one, and despite many difficulties, it became increasingly common. It was definitely a cause of grave dissatisfaction to the Russian Federation, which has

started to use various preventive measures – from discrediting Ukrainian culture and language<sup>1</sup> in the information space to constructing a war doctrine where Russia claims the right to defend the Russian-speaking population in the neighboring countries<sup>2</sup>. This policy led, among other things, to the annexation of Crimea. Still, suppose one traces back the events preceding the annexation, it is evident that preparations for that action were held much earlier, even before the outbreak of the mass protests, called Euromaidan, which became an excuse for the Russian military strike. To understand what the term "anthropological aggression" means in practice, it is enough to look at what was happening on Sevastopol's streets from the point of view of so-called space's semiotics.

First, Russia began to mark consistently and deliberately its presence with clear architectural and urban signs. It can be called the "static phase of the operation". Taking advantage of the Ukrainian authorities' weakness, which was occupied with their problems, Russia opened the "House of Moscow" in the heart of Sevastopol on February 21 2007. The "House of Moscow" began to serve not only as a Russian intelligence center. The great red inscription on its roof became a concrete sign, an exact dominant feature changing the city landscape. The next step was the illegal erection of the monument to Tsarina Catherine II on June 15 2008. It designated the "Pantheon of Saints" who could patronize the city, even though she was an antihero for the Ukrainians.

Then the "dynamic phase of the operation" began, which involved crowds of supporters. It was combined with "happenings"<sup>3</sup> that build a sense of community. This happened on July 5 2008, when the mob destroyed a plaque commemorating the 90th anniversary of raising the Ukrainian flag on the Russian Empire's Black Sea Fleet ships. Similar activities occurred on August 22 2008, when enthusiastic spectators welcomed Russian vessels returning from military intervention in Georgia, although Ukraine officially supported Tbilisi in that conflict.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Roman Yaremiychuk, *Pro nyschennya ukrayinskoy movy*, "Svoboda. Hazeta ukrayinskoyi diaspori", 20 January 2020, <https://svoboda-news.com>, (access: Feb 02 2021)

<sup>2</sup> More about conditions of Russian and Ukrainian languages in Ukraine: Irina Matviyishyn, *How Russia weaponizes the language issue in Ukraine*, "Atlantic Council", Jun 25 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org>, (access: Jan 04 2021)

<sup>3</sup> Happening - an organized event, limited in time, having its dramaturgy, creating a logical narrative, or a set of signs: slogans, images, gestures, objects, characters in space. The term comes from the theatrical studies, but it was used here because it most accurately reflects the essence of the phenomenon, despite the lack of its creators' clear aesthetic intentions.

<sup>4</sup> Interfaks. *Vozvrashcheniye Chernomorskogo flota*, Aug 21 2008, [www.interfax.ru](http://www.interfax.ru), (access: Jan 05 2021)

And finally, it was also reflected in the ceremonial burning of Ukrainian passports initiated by municipal councilor Konstantin Zarudnyev on January 24 2010.<sup>5</sup>

Two prominent Russian semioticians, founders of the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School, Yuri Lotman and Borys Uspensky, wrote in their famous article devoted to the semiotic mechanism of culture: "It is significant that a change of culture (in particular, during epochs of social cataclysms) is usually accompanied by a sharp increase in the degree of semiotic behavior (which may be expressed by the changing of names and designations), and even the fight against the old rituals may itself be ritualized".<sup>6</sup> Following the events in Sevastopol, it is hard to resist the impression that its scenario's authors were the Russian academics' diligent students.

## **UKRAINIAN RESPONSE**

The takeover of Crimea without a single shot was such a shock to Ukraine that it did not respond adequately to the situation. By contrast, Russia's attempting to takeover Donbas has already provoked Ukrainian defensive actions.

There is a belief in Ukraine that at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukrainian statehood was saved by volunteers. This opinion was confirmed, among others, by the speaker of the Ukrainian parliament – Andriy Parubiy. In his International Volunteer Day speech, he emphasized the tremendous effort and excellent organization of the Ukrainian volunteer movement<sup>7</sup>. The fact is that when the Russian-Ukrainian war began, there were no efficient vertical power structures in Ukraine<sup>8</sup>. Those which existed were either wholly ineffective or subordinate to the pro-Russian government of President Yanukovych. It turned out that the strength of the Ukrainian resistance rests not in the post-Soviet and politically corrupted army officers but the considerable mobilization of a thriving and well-organized volunteer movement. Volunteers created horizontal power structures. They joined the Ukrainian army; they set up OSINT centers, organized medical aid for soldiers, etc. Andriy Parubiy also listed all their actions aimed at supplying the Ukrainian army, but he did not mention one more essential

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<sup>5</sup> Любимов А., *Константин Заруднев*, «Уніан», Jan 24 2010, [www.photo.unian.net](http://www.photo.unian.net), (access: Feb 14 2021)

<sup>6</sup> Yu. M. Lotman, B. A. Uspensky, *On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture*, "New Literary History" 1978, No 2 Vol. 9, p. 211-232.

<sup>7</sup> Web portal of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, [portal.rada.gov.ua](http://portal.rada.gov.ua), "«Волонтери врятували Українську державність у найтяжчі, смертельні, небезпечні дні для України», - Голова Верховної Ради України Андрій Парубій", (access: 03.02.2021)

<sup>8</sup> М. Давидюк, *Як працює путінська пропаганда*, Київ 2016, с. 165.

field of volunteer activity in his speech. During the mass protest called Euromaidan, a whole host of artists and art curators began using art as a tool for creating narratives and for psychological support to members of their community. They also defined the Ukrainian culture as belonging to the Western tradition and adhering to the European values rather than the Eurasian ones<sup>9</sup>, which was a powerful symbolic gesture of civilizational significance.

This first experience with using cultural tools as a line of anthropological defense was later developed into a whole network of spontaneous and organized actions initiated to minimize the effects of the war and protect Ukrainian society from the devastating impact of the Russian anthropological aggression. During the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Ukrainian side has engaged the following art disciplines:

1. Literature
  - a) poetry,
  - b) drama (particularly *verbatim*),
  - c) novel.
2. Visual Arts
  - a) two-dimensional works: painting, photography, poster, graffiti,
  - b) three-dimensional works: sculpture, conceptual art, architecture,
  - c) museum artefacts.
3. Performing Arts
  - a) film,
  - b) theater (including *verbatim*<sup>10</sup>, *happening*, *Playback Theater*<sup>11</sup>),
  - c) dance,
  - d) music.

All of them have been applied as resistance measures during the ongoing hybrid war in Ukraine.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, *Kronikarze rewolucji. Ukraiński dramat dokumentalny wobec Euromajdanu*, „Opcje” 2018 nr 4, s. 36-45.

<sup>10</sup> Verbatim theater (or documentary theater) is theater that uses pre-existing documentary material (such as newspapers, government reports, interviews, journals, and correspondences) as source material for stories about real events and people.

<sup>11</sup> Playback Theater - a form of improvisational theater in which audience or group members tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted on the spot.

## ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEFENSE – ENDEAVOR TO CLASSIFICATION

The fundamental research problem associated with the anthropological defense is: 1) to clarify what actions can be attributed to it; 2) to sort them out in terms of their function and character. Clarifying difficulties are caused by the polymorphic nature of the artistic activities and the dynamic of the changes in the social and political landscape during warfare and a hybrid attack. In short, cultural activities often arise spontaneously as a response to a specific need in a dynamically changing strategic situation. Their creators care neither about "the purity" of the art form nor about their theoretical foundation. However, observing the six-year-long war in Ukraine, we have enough data to classify anthropological defense activities.

Generally, the actions considered as an anthropological defense are split into two major domains - the main one is activities aimed at counteracting the effects of direct warfare and hybrid attacks; the second one refers to projects which are implemented to recover the order after the war. Considering I have previously described the second point in the academic essay<sup>12</sup>, this article will develop the first one.

The most important determinant of all counteracting actions is the awareness of their goals. All artistic activities of the anthropological defense must be conducted with strategic objectives as a response to an emergency. These objectives may change depending on the situation, and one action may have more than one purpose.

The objectives that have been observed in Ukraine are as follows:

**1. Documentation objective.** This was the first goal that goes back to the time of the Euromaidan protests. Primarily it has been implemented by documentary arts: *verbatim* theater, documentary movies and photography. The first attempts to document the events were taken up, among others, by a playwright Natalia Vorozhbyt, who collected the protesters' testimonies and then created a verbatim drama *Maidan's Diary*. The drama was performed not only in Ukraine but also in Western European theaters. In contrast to the entire propaganda machine at the disposal of President Yanukowych's government and the Russian media supporting it, Vorozhbyt presented the Euromaidan participants' point of view, emphasizing their motivations, hopes and strategies.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, *Działania kulturalne jako potencjalne narzędzia deokupacji Wydzielonych Rejonów Obwodów Donieckiego i Ługańskiego (ORDŁO) oraz reintegracji ich mieszkańców*, „Wiedza Obronna” 2019, vol 266-267, nr 1-2, s. 27-28. DOI: 10.34752/z1ff-a014

A documentation purpose was also crucial for an independent film group Vavylon#13. The filmmakers covered the most dramatic events during the Euromaidan protest, and they shared short movies (3-5 minutes) on the Internet. Then the filmmakers combined these materials into 30-45-minute-long documentary films, which were broadcast by TV stations, also foreign ones<sup>13</sup>.

The process of documenting events has acquired special significance during the full-fledged of the Russian-Ukrainian war. However, its nature is a little different, aimed more at interpretation. After the beginning of military operations in Donbas, one could observe an increase in Ukrainian soldiers' documentation activities. One example is material filmed by Alik Sardarian and then used in his verbatim performance *Product (Tovar)*<sup>14</sup>. Sardarian was an amateur filmmaker, but, e.g., Leonid Kanter, who served in the National Guard of Ukraine and fought in Donbas, was a professional producer, film director, journalist, and writer.<sup>15</sup> There are also many documentary movies shot by outside film crews (which use the soldiers' footage and specially filmed materials). One of them is a three-episode documentary *93: The Battle for Ukraine*<sup>16</sup>, a detailed chronicle of the combat actions in which the 93th Regiment of the Ukrainian Army participated. The film is based on soldiers' recollections and depicts their combat trails.

An essential feature of all these documentary materials is that they are narrated in the first person. As a result, they created the impression of lively and dynamic stories that affect their recipients' emotions<sup>17</sup>. Thanks to it, they also become a tool for shaping the discourse.

**2. Therapeutic objective.** This was one of the most important goals set by Ukrainian artists and art curators. They initiated actions that responded to short-term necessity. Under wartime conditions, Ukrainian volunteers began to use artistic activities with victims of the conflict.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In Poland their films entitled *Zima, która nas zmieniła (The Winter That Changed Us)* in my translation were broadcast by TVP Historia in February 2015.

<sup>14</sup> The performance was described in: A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, *Działania kulturalne jako potencjalne narzędzia deokupacji Wydzielonych Rejonów Obwodów Donieckiego i Ługańskiego (ORDŁO) oraz reintegracji ich mieszkańców*, „Wiedza Obronna” 2019, vol 266-267, nr 1-2, s. 27-28. DOI: 10.34752/z1ff-a014

<sup>15</sup> Leonid Kanter (1981-2018) enlisted as a volunteer in the National Guard of Ukraine. After returning from the front he committed suicide, probably due to PTSD.

<sup>16</sup> <https://youtu.be/1cMBPN3rjXU>

<sup>17</sup> К. Яковленко, *Роль свідка та оповідача під час війни на Донбасі*, „Korydor”, Dec. 28 2019, <http://www.korydor.in.ua> (access: Feb. 09 2021)

<sup>18</sup> The modern art therapy that is healing with artistic means of expression have been used in European psychotherapy since the end of eighteenth century. Cf. S. Hogan, *Healing Arts. The History of Art Therapy*, London and Philadelphia 2001, s. 13

"It was important for us that art goes hand in hand with psychotherapy"<sup>19</sup> – Oleksii Karachynskyi says. He is a military psychologist who exercised psychological control over participants of the Theater of Displaced People<sup>20</sup>. Working with IDPs, he focused on 1) group classes and 2) individual approach. That means that Karachynskyi was observing people taking part in therapeutical art activities and responded to their particular problems during dedicated psychological sessions.<sup>21</sup>

Ukrainian soldiers and veterans became an object of concern of Kharkow NGO Linya zhody (Consent Line). Its psychologists dealt primarily with war traumas, using the technique of the Playback Theater. Two soldiers, Linia zhody's charges, participated in a performance organized by Teatr Prekrasnye cvety (Beautiful Flowers Theater), which was a kind of their art therapy.

Examples of using art therapy techniques are numerous. They are not limited to theatrical activities and include movies, photography, fine arts, etc.<sup>22</sup>

**3. Ideological objective.** It belongs to a later stage of the anthropological defense and primary uses materials obtained during the documentation phase. It is behind not only volunteers and independent organizations' activities, but it also becomes a part of a broader state institutions' policy.

#### **a) Building the community**

This ideological objective includes all activities that serve to build a community which can face anthropological aggression. These are any actions in Ukrainian cultural space aimed at, for example, combating stereotypes or/and changing the political and historical narrative.

At the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian War, Ukrainian theaters initiated events (performances or workshops) which were supposed to support IDPs' integration with the local community. Apart from therapeutic goals, these events helped their participants overcome mutual hostility and communication difficulties from language issues (Russified East v. Ukrainian speaking West) and socio-political differences. The vast majority of performances by the Theater of Displaced People were devoted to that problem. Its activists confronted two

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<sup>19</sup> A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, *Interview with Oleksii Karachynskyj conducted in Kyiv*, March 6 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Theater of Displaced People was founded in January 2015 in Kyiv. It developed projects devoted to IDPs and war victims in Ukraine. Cf. A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, R. Boroch, *Ukrainian Theatrical Projects as an Example of Anthropological Defense in Terms of Anthropology as Contemporary Social Warfare*, "Security Dimensions" 2017, No. 24, s. 122-136, DOI 10.24356/SD/24/7

<sup>21</sup> A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, *Interview with Oleksii Karachynskyj conducted in Kyiv*, March 6 2019.

<sup>22</sup> These types of cultural projects will be described in my second PhD thesis entitled *Cultural projects as a tool of anthropological defense illustrated by Ukrainian experience with the annexation of Crimea and armed conflict in the eastern region of the country*, which I am working on at the War Studies University.



groups of participants (from the Western and Eastern regions of Ukraine), forcing them to face each other's prejudices. The result of those efforts was not obvious or unequivocally optimistic. Nevertheless, it showed that there were tools of consensus' building that could be applied in Ukrainian conditions<sup>23</sup>.

Les Kurbas Theater in Lviv organized similar actions. Its actors worked with IDPs, using theatrical methods to integrate Russian-speaking war victims with the Ukrainian-speaking local community.<sup>24</sup>

### **b) Changing narratives**

A considerable effort is being made in Ukraine to change the political and historical narratives. It includes, e.g., discourses over World War II. Ukrainians accept its legacy but try to take it over and tell "their own" story. In this way, they want to prevent the monopolization of the Russian Federation's shared history. Ukrainians also try to stop the Russian attempts to turn World War II's ideological aspects against Ukraine.

Even before the Euromaidan, Ukraine began to expand its narrative about the World War II to actors and events absented in the discourse of the Great Patriotic War (as it was called in the USSR and still is called in the Russian Federation). It means that the process of creating Ukrainian narrative began much earlier. It can be exemplified by two TV documentary miniseries: *Riven sekretnosti 18 (Level of Secrecy 18)*<sup>25</sup> directed by Volodymyr Rybas, produced in 2011 and *1941* led by Ihor Kobryn, made in 2013. Both series presented the Ukrainian point of view on controversial historical topics. The films also tried to bring to light deliberately silent events that crack in the falsely patriotic Russian narrative.

Ukrainian museums use a similar strategy. They construct their exhibitions to emphasize Ukrainians' participation in World War II not only as heirs to victory but also as victims of Stalinist repression. Especially in May 2015, new regulations came into force, commonly

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<sup>23</sup> An example of such kind activity has been described in an article included into this issue of "Wiedza Obronna": R. Borocho, A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, *Conflict and Performing Arts – Class Act Project – Ukrainian Theater as an Anthropological Defense*, "Wiedza Obronna" 2001, vol. 274, no 1, s. 119-136.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, *Lwowski projekt teatralny Hra w nas jako metoda integracji ukraińskich uchodźców wewnętrznych*, [w:] *Konteksty kultury medialnej. Perspektywa Rosji i Ukrainy*, Warszawa 2018, s. 155-166

<sup>25</sup> *Riven sekretnosti 18* was broadcast in Poland in my translation by TVP Kultura Channel (under the title *Ścisłe tajne. Tajemnice zbrodni wojennych*).

referred to as "decommunization law"<sup>26</sup>. Thanks to it, Ukrainian institutions received legal instruments that allowed them to change the paradigm of thinking about World War II.

Simultaneously, awareness of semiotics' principles has begun to increase in Ukrainian society, enabling urban space modelling. It is carried out by both official factors (local and central authorities) and informal groups. One example is a curatorial expedition to the East of Ukraine organized by urban artists gathered around Formografia Design Studio in Kyiv. They "created new architectural forms in collaboration with local activists (...) explored the town's history and identity, and designed relevant art interventions."<sup>27</sup>

Arriving in Eastern Ukrainian cities, the urban curators entered a space where different sets of myths compete. Their task was to make small changes, which would set some social processes in motion, such as integration around a common idea and a need to model one's own space.

### **c) Creation of a new hero**

Ideological changes in the narrative can include the creation of a new hero also. This trend is visible in Ukraine. It is significant because of the historical division of the country. East and West of Ukraine differ in their interpretation of history and historical figures. Russian propaganda effectively uses this contradiction. In response, Ukrainian activists try to create a new pantheon of national heroes. It includes those who were killed during the Euromaidan protests and soldiers serving on the eastern front. A common slogan used in Ukraine has become: "Heroes do not die". It is emphasized in the public space, and its role is an ideological unification of the Ukrainian citizens united by a common wartime experience. After all, the war with Russia involves the inhabitants of both eastern and western Ukraine regions, and new heroes belong to both communities.

The process has involved such artists as, e.g., Natalia Vorozhbyt who wrote a screenplay of the popular and acclaimed TV series (and a single film) about the defenders of the Donetsk airport *Kiborhy (Cyborgs)* as well as aforementioned Leonid Kanter, who directed a documentary film *Mif (Myth)* about a Ukrainian baritone opera singer who was killed during the war in Donbas by a Russian sniper.

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<sup>26</sup> Decommunization law – a set of laws signed by President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko on May 15 2015. It started a six-month period for the removal of communist monuments (excluding World War II monuments) and renaming of public places named after communist-related themes.

<sup>27</sup> *Метамісто: Схід. Трансформації українського сходу*, Київ 2018, с. 4.

Simultaneously, Ukrainian artists began to dismantle the parallel process taking place in the Russian-occupied territories. Segei Loznitsa's *Donbas* film turned out to be a valuable tool to discredit Russian discourse about the war as well as the newly created heroes of self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic.

4. **Diplomatic objective.** It covers all propaganda activities outside the country. During the Euromaidan protests and at the beginning of the war, because of the weakness of Ukrainian state structures, this objective was implemented by independent artists and non-governmental organizations. An example of such activity is Natalia Vorozhbyt who conducted international information and propaganda actions on the occasion of the premieres of her play *Maidan's Diaries* in various European countries.

In the long run, however, diplomatic operations are not viable without organized state support. This is why in 2017 the Ukrainian government found the Ukrainian Institute. Its mission is "to strengthen Ukraine's international standing through the means of cultural diplomacy".<sup>28</sup> The Ukrainian Institute's task is to establish the Ukrainian narrative abroad to become competitive with, for example, the Russian narrative. It is mainly about extending the literary and artistic canon to include Ukrainian artists and their works.

The Ukrainian Institute has launched several programs, among others the support of modern Ukrainian drama, to replenish European theaters' repertoire with modern Ukrainian plays<sup>29</sup>, which until now were practically absent on the world's stages. This program is also being implemented in Polish theaters, and its results will be presented soon.

## CONCLUSIONS

The culture of an attacked country can produce tools of anthropological defense very quickly. They cover various areas of activity and take the form of a variety of artistic actions. They are used as 1) supporting activities for the regular army, 2) narrative modelling tools, 3) art therapy instruments, 3) diplomatic means.

The objectives listed in the article combined serve to build societal resistance to repel a hybrid attack.

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<sup>28</sup> Web portal of Ukrainian Institute, ui.org.ua, "Mission"

<sup>29</sup> Web portal of Ukrainian Institute, ui.org.ua, "Transmission.ua. Drama on the Move 2020-2022"

To effectively examine the tools of anthropological defense offered by contemporary culture, one must enter the fields of semiotic and narratological studies. They hold the answers to the questions and what strategies should create a coherent cultural resistance line in war.

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