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# Commemoration Practices

## in the anti-authoritarian movement in ukraine

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**Cultures of Remembrance**

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*Bodya 'Slam'*

*and all others, who cannot yet be named.*



# INTRODUCTION

This zine would not exist if russia had not launched its full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022.

In the face of a shared threat, the anti-authoritarian community joined forces. This is how the **Solidarity Collectives** came into being — people from various leftist groups joined forces to support the resistance against russian aggression.

We divided our work into military and humanitarian aid, but this was less a division than different forms of the same necessity to act and provide mutual aid.

Alongside resistance, loss and grief became part of our new reality. Over these past years, we have lost 27 people from our community. This is roughly one person every two months.

This number may seem small compared to the overall losses in Ukraine, where dozens of people are killed every day.
For us, these losses are personal.

We are losing friends and comrades from our movement with whom we shared values, hopes and dreams. Together, we built radical grassroots projects, organised cultural events, attended demonstrations and gigs, and tried to change the world. Sometimes we are left with fear, anger, grief and emptiness.

However, we also have a responsibility to carry on the memory of these people and their ideas as a foundation for our movement and resistance. This is how we ensure that what they fought for and dedicated their lives to does not disappear.

The first death occurred just six days after the start of the full-scale invasion — **Ihor Volokhov**, a Crimean anti-fascist and anarchist, was killed.

We did not find out immediately — at that time, we were still trying to understand how to respond to such losses. This was the first of many shocks and losses on a long journey of collective grieving.

Ihor Volokhov

Over time, not only does the number of losses change, but also the way in which you learn about them.

Sometimes it is a brief message asking you not to tell anyone. Sometimes you find out through social media. Sometimes you find out immediately, and sometimes months later. And sometimes, you only receive a dry official statement: '*Missing in action in special circumstances*', which leaves friends and family with only a fragile hope.

There are times when the death of a comrade must be kept secret to avoid endangering their relatives living in russia or belarus. We have also encountered situations where it has not been possible to say goodbye, as bodies are not returned from the battlefield.



*So we ask our supporters to carry the legacy of these people's imperfections and their heroism out into the world. Take part in remembrance evenings and public events; visit memorials; watch documentaries and reports about the lives of fallen comrades; donate to anti-authoritarian fighters; or just mention the name of a fallen comrade and tell their story; read the letters of the fighters, print out Davyd's paintings and hang them in your home. Even small acts of remembrance hold great value for the community.*

*In the future, we plan to create an archive dedicated to the memory of fallen soldiers. We want to document the stories of their lives, their resistance, and the ideals and values of our fallen comrades.*

*We urge you to support the Ukrainian resistance: make a donation, listen to us, share our content, or help organise an event.*

*At the same time, we must resist the temptation to turn stories about the fallen comrades into simplified or glorified narratives. Remembering means engaging honestly with the contradictions and difficult realities people faced.*

*For many of us, participation in the army is a necessary decision to ensure the survival of the leftist, queer and anti-authoritarian movement.*

In this context, culture of remembrance and archiving in Ukraine is not simply about preserving the past — it is a form of resistance, survival, and self-determination.

During the war and occupation, imperial narratives attempt to overwrite our history and erase our culture, so commemoration and archiving practices safeguard the memory. They allow communities, especially marginalized ones, to document their existence on their own terms, ensuring that their voices persist even when institutions, homes, and lives are under threat.

Culture of remembrance combined with archiving is essential because culture is fragile when it is not recorded, shared, and protected. Without deliberate efforts to document stories, languages, identities, and struggles, dominant powers can easily erase or distort them.

Archives give continuity: they connect generations, preserve truth, and create a foundation for future resistance. They are not neutral repositories; they are political tools that determine whose stories are remembered and whose are forgotten.

In modern russia, the persecution and eventual dismantling of initiatives like **Memorial**, a project dedicated to documenting state repression, illustrates how controlling the past is central to controlling the present. By silencing records of political violence, the state reshapes historical narratives into something that justifies its current actions.

This is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader colonial logic: russia operates as a colonial project that systematically erases the languages, cultures, and histories of marginalized communities within and beyond its borders.

The destruction of archives has long been a tactic of athoritarian regimes.

In Nazi Germany, one of the first targets was **Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science**: queer archives and research on LGBTQ+ lives were burned, signalling an attempt to erase not just people but the very possibility of their history.

Contemporary queer erasure in russia follows a similar pattern: by banning representation, criminalizing identities, and suppressing documentation, the state attempts to make queer existence invisible.

This logic extends to political movements as well. Anarchists, historically and today, have faced state repression precisely because they challenge centralized power. Their histories are often fragmented, misrepresented, or deliberately destroyed. Archiving anarchist movements is thus an act of reclaiming narrative control and ensuring that the ideas and struggles are not reduced to caricatures or erased entirely.

Control over narrative is central to all of this. The principle "**nothing about us without us**" speaks to the importance of communities telling their own stories. Archives and culture of remembrance should not sanitize or idealize; they should preserve complexity.

This includes keeping the memory of fallen comrades grounded and human, unpolished, imperfect, and real rather than transforming them into distant, mythologized figures. Such honesty resists the flattening of history into propaganda and keeps the memories connected to the lived experiences.



# AFTERWORD

*Within the Ukrainian anti-authoritarian movement, the process of developing commemorative practices is currently in its forming stage.*

*Our collective is quite young and was formed in the context of resistance to the russian invasion and occupation. At the same time, the anti-authoritarian left-wing movement in Ukraine is also in the process of rebuilding.*
*This is largely due to the fact that the Soviet regime destroyed all anarchist and socialist forces in Ukraine in the 20th century, in particular, the unique project of the Makhnovshchina. So, whilst the left-wing tradition in many countries has existed and gradually developed over decades, sometimes even centuries, we are forced to rediscover these practices again.*

*At the same time, we have to counter disinformation and the distortion of our history. The russian state is successfully spreading their propaganda abroad, and we often have to deal with the sabotage of our events and attempts to discredit the Ukrainian anarchist movement. They frequently portray all Ukrainians as Nazis in order to justify aggression and undermine international support. Sometimes it goes so far that people show disrespect for the memory of the fallen, even laughing or shouting during a minute of silence.*

*At times, they try to fabricate links between the deceased and the nationalist movement in order to discredit the fighters and devalue their left-wing beliefs. Therefore, the culture of remembrance involves not only preserving memories and memorials but also resisting defamation and the falsification of history.*

*political movements. Davyd was fascinated by the political literacy of people in the modern era. With great enthusiasm, he researched the writings and correspondence of Ukrainian left-wing intellectuals of the time, including Lesia Ukrainka, Ivan Franko, and Mykhailo Drahomanov. Through his work, he initiated a timeless dialogue with these figures.*

*Davyd himself was a man of that era, when people were passionate about ideas and ideals, and willing to sacrifice their lives for the cause.*

*Davyd was a revolutionary and died as a revolutionary.*

Ukraine has a particularly rich anarchist history, yet even this is under threat. Cultural destruction is not collateral damage but a deliberate strategy.

In 2024, the **Makhno museum in Huliaipole** was destroyed and looted by russian occupying forces. This act was not only about physical damage but about severing a link to a historical legacy of local resistance and self-organization.

Makhno museum in Huliaipole

Museums across occupied territories have been looted, including the theft of artworks such as those by Leonid Chychkan in Kherson — an example of how cultural memory is extracted, displaced, or erased altogether.

These actions are part of a broader strategy of cultural genocide. By destroying archives and memorials, looting museums, and suppressing narratives that contradict imperial ideology, russia attempts to erase Ukrainian identity and replace it with its own constructed version of history.

Even the existence of leftist resistance movements in Ukraine challenges russian propaganda, which often frames Ukraine as a fascist and Nazi state.

To archive is to protect memory from erasure and to keep open the possibility of a future built on truth and evidence rather than distorted narratives of imperialist regimes.

A separate issue is the documentation of war crimes. Testimonies, photographs, and videos collected during the war become not only memory, but also evidence. They transform personal experience into historical and legal records that may serve as a basis for future accountability. This is also a way of restoring a voice to those who are being silenced.

Anarchist organizing has developed its own diverse and adaptive practices of archiving, often outside formal institutions. Within our community, this takes many forms: creating online memorial websites dedicated to fallen comrades; publishing interviews, writing articles and obituaries that preserve personal and political histories; producing documentaries, podcasts, and other media that make these memories accessible to learn about even from abroad.

These practices are not only about documentation but about care, continuity, and community remembrance. They allow us to decide ourselves how our stories are told and remembered.

We are faced with the questions: how do we preserve collective memory? How do we keep memories without glorification and remember them as people with their beliefs, weaknesses, and strengths?

This zine is an attempt to address these issues. We want to discuss the ways in which we try to preserve memory and history. We don't have any ready-made answers, and even this writing is still a 'work in progress'.



*and futures. They gave up domestic comforts and their freedom, instead accepting a lifetime of servitude consisting of physically exhausting and psychologically devastating daily labour from which there is no escape, despite burnout in every sense of the word. They are sacrificing their health — and, with it, the most precious thing a person has — their one and only life.*

*When you look at most people in neighbouring coun tries, it becomes abundantly clear just how impossible this choice is. They are not even prepared to contemplate the prospect of the war escalating, as that would force them out of their comfort zone. Not everyone in Ukraine is ready to make this choice, either. I am not ready for it yet.*

*However, Davyd lived his life in such a way that this was an obvious choice to him. He lived a political and principled life, consistently following his beliefs and values. He was a passionate man, even beyond his youth. He always chose to fight: against injustice and oppression; for a better society; for equal rights; for the vulnerable; for the ideals he shared; for historical truth; and for the perfection of artistic expression.*
*That is why he sacrificed his life in the struggle against russian imperial fascism and post-truth politics, fighting for Ukrainian democracy, our free society, our social constitution, a modern left-wing Ukrainian state project, and a progressive, politically articulated future for Ukraine, which he visualised and dreamed of.*

*Davyd once told me that he finds people who lived at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries more interesting than his contemporaries because modern people are so concerned with their appearance, what they consume and how special they are. Back then, people generally looked the same but differed in their ideological convictions and their affiliations with various*

*I find it rather positive that these places are set amidst nature and are not official because they are located at the crossroads of our everyday paths, amidst life, rather than being isolated in a sculptural ghetto.*

*Of course, it would be wonderful to create a memorial square in Kyiv or another Ukrainian city dedicated to the fallen anarchists — one that is officially named as such and marked on maps. But I fear that our society, which so readily accepted the cancellation of the exhibition of their portraits, is not yet ready for this.*

*I believe that naming a square is the duty of the living, particularly civilians. While the defenders fight imperial invaders, we must fight for their interests, for their representation, and to ensure their names are inscribed in the history of the Ukrainian struggle against russian fascism. We must fight to secure a place for our fallen comrades in the pantheon of Ukrainian heroes and to have their political convictions recognised. Otherwise, without these details and personalisation, the names of todays heroes will, eventually, become empty symbols for future generations.*

**What would you like people to understand about his legacy and this loss?**
*Nothing can ever fill the void left by his loss, in either the artistic or political spheres. He was one of a kind. He played a vital role in our society. He was a guiding light and a pioneer. This was recognised by everyone when he passed away.*

*Davyd and the other defenders made a choice that modern society would find impossible. After all, people modern, consumerist, individualistic societies are primarily drawn to comfort and pleasure. Yet Davyd and the others gave up their personal lives, interests, careers*



# CREATING A PLACE OF MEMORY

People who have experienced loss need places to commemorate their loved ones. They need a space in which to grieve, accept the reality of their loss and shared pain, and also try to heal.

Over these last years in Ukraine, numerous situational memorial sites have emerged. One of the most well-known examples is the memorial at Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kyiv. From the first days of the full-scale war, individual flags featuring names began appearing on the lawn.

Four years later, there is no grass left. The space is now filled with tens of thousands of flags and photographs, according to unofficial estimates, more than 80,000. And a team of volunteers is responsible for maintaining the site.

Memorial alleys can now be found in almost every city in Ukraine. They become places of collective mourning where society tries to cope with large-scale trauma.
On a more personal level, burial is a more traditional form of commemoration. Cemeteries often designate separate sections for military personnel, usually in central areas. At this scale of losses, there is a growing need for formalized commemoration and grieving practices.

However, there are still cases that do not fit into conventional farewell practices. In our experience, this becomes palpable when comrade dies, but there is no corpse to bury.

In such cases, neither the family nor the community can mourn using traditional rituals.

On April 19, 2023, during the fighting for the ‘Road of Life’

on the outskirts of Bakhmut, three of our comrades were killed: Dmitry 'Leshy' Petrov, Finbar 'Chia' Cafferkey, and Cooper 'Harris' Andrews.

## SHORT INTRODUCTIONS

**Dmitry 'Leshy' Petrov** was an Russian anarchist, researcher, and participant in the anti-authoritarian movement, combining intellectual work with practical struggle. He was involved in many international groups and projects, supporting revolutionary processes beyond Ukraine. After the full-scale invasion began, he joined the defence of Ukraine, remaining part of a community for which the struggle against authoritarianism has no borders.

**Finbar 'Chia' Cafferkey** was an Irish anarchist and internationalist who participated in anarchist organising in many countries, including revolution in Rojava. After the full-scale invasion, he came to Ukraine to join the resistance, seeing it as a continuation of a shared struggle for freedom.

**Cooper 'Harris' Andrews** was an American internationalist from Cleveland, an anarchist, and a participant in protests against police violence in the United States. From a young age, he was involved in leftist movements, mutual aid, anti-fascist activity, and community self-organization. Later, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps to gain military experience and prepare for participation in international struggles. After the full-scale invasion, he joined the defence of Ukraine.

After the deaths of Chia, Leshy, and Cooper, we found ourselves in a situation where there was neither burial nor a moment of farewell. Officially, missing in action. But from the words of comrades who were with them on the mission, we had to accept the fact of their death.



*Davyd was used to constant harassment from the far right. In 2017, they physically attacked his exhibition in Kyiv and destroyed his work.*

*But the act of censorship at the museum during the war was particularly painful for him, as the museum refused to display portraits of people he considered heroes. In doing so, the museum also devalued all his work over the past two years. So Davyd decided not to continue, and even painted the sky black in the group portrait of his fallen comrades, to which he had been adding new faces for two years, as if it were an iconostasis. As it turned out, this was to be Davyd's final work, and the painting should now include his own face.*

*Following Davyd's death, it became clear that no one would be able to celebrate and portray the anti-authoritarian leftists and anarchists within the military quite as he did. Furthermore, it seemed that only Davyd had kept a record of fallen comrades. To some extent, I have taken up his cause, as he is now among the fallen, and I live on in an attempt to create places to commemorate him. I am grateful to Davyd's comrades and the Solidarity Collectives for supporting me.*

*Together, we took simple steps: we placed diagonal flags at an impromptu memorial site on Independence Square, and planted trees in the places where Davyd and his comrades used to walk. We also planted trees where others had already been planted in honour of the first fallen comrades. Although these actions may seem simple and perhaps even trivial, they were important to carry out, as they constituted a sincere and therapeutic collective practice.*
*I believe this practice will continue, as we can already see its results: places of commemoration for our fallen comrades have emerged in the city.*

*At the end of that day, all these people were arrested again and later executed That is why Davyd once even cried whilst watching this footage. The more difficult question is how to make these stories visible to the wider public. I see this as a challenge.*

*However, this memory will be preserved for centuries within the anarchist community and the broader progressive left. I am certain that Davyd and his comrades, who fought and died, will be seen as heroes by future generations of anarchists in Ukraine and around the world.*

**But how can we make these stories more visible to the broader public?**
*Davyd worked tirelessly to raise awareness among Ukrainians and the rest of the world about the involvement of Ukrainian anarchists and anti-authoritarian leftists in the war. In particular, he created a series of portraits of these people, dedicating one to each comrade who had already been killed. He worked on the series from 2022 until his mobilisation in 2024. Davyd put his heart and soul into each of these large-scale graphic artworks. This project was significant to him, as it celebrated the beauty of our heroic comrades.*

*Entitled **'With Ribbons and Flags'**, this series of portraits was due to be presented in its entirety at the Odessa Art Museum in 2024. However, to appease the so-called "activists" from the nationalist's organisation "Tradition and Order" , the museum cancelled Davyd's exhibition.*

*I still cannot believe it, that during the war, a national museum refused to display portraits of serving military personnel and fallen heroes simply because they hold left-wing political views. As one right-wing guy involved in the social media campaign to shut down the exhibition put it, 'Who cares about dead lefties?'.*

Cooper 'Harris' Andrews

Dmitry 'Leshy' Petrov

Finbar 'Chia' Cafferkey

This feels like an odd form of loss: the person is gone, but there is no place to say goodbye. When there is no body, no burial, no place — people need to create a space to process grief.

**FEDIR, ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN ACTIVIST AND FIGHTER, COMRADE OF LESHY:**

**"***We weren't that close with Leshy. In seven years of knowing each other, we met maybe four or five times — the last time was in early March 2023 in Kyiv, right before I left for Bakhmut. We went up to Shchekavytsia, looked out over Podil in the evening, and under a light rain walked toward where the Pochaina flows into the Dnipro.*

*By that point, Dmitry already had solid combat experience. Still, he never rushed to show it off. He spoke calmly and gave the impression of being a composed and tactful person. Leshy gently tried to bring me into a conversation about a veterans' network for leftists and anarchists. He noted with some sadness that Rojava veterans in the West had remained more of a loose virtual connection than a real organization.*

*About forty days later, our exhausted battalion was pulled out of Bakhmut. When I got to Kramatorsk, I learned that Leshy was also on the outskirts of the city, preparing to go into Bakhmut. We didn't manage to meet as he wasn't allowed to leave. Late that evening, through mutual friends, we got the news: after an assault on enemy positions, Leshy came under fire and contact with him was lost.*

*The final confirmation of what we already feared reached me the next day.*
*We were walking through pastureland where the Kazennyi Torets meets the Bychok River; nearby, sheep were bleating.*



*However, Davyd created a safe space for them, and on the day of his funeral, both the LGBT flag and the organisation's flag flew on Independence Square. They didn't ask for permission; they simply came with their flags.*

*It is very meaningful that there were political speeches at Davyd's funeral, including one by our friend Lesyk, a soldier and activist who, after Davyd's death, became the anti-authoritarian left's most articulate public voice. Davyd had previously been that voice. He always spoke politically and articulately. He was probably the most public anarchist in Ukraine. At the same time, he was the most political artist, bringing together two commu-nities: activists and artists. He raised the level of discourse in the art world while increasing the visibility of anarchists.*

*I think Davyd would have been pleased that his funeral turned into a political event. He would have appreciated the aesthetics. It's a shame he couldn't see how it turned out.*

**Do you think there is a risk that the stories of the anarchists' involvement in the war will be erased or distorted?**
*No, as long as there are other anarchists to preserve the memory of those who have fallen. Above all, anarchism is the responsibility of anarchists.*
*Besides, despite its international nature, anarchism is not a mass movement, so many people in the movement know one another personally, as well as their historical figures.*
*It is a close-knit community that preserves the memories of its heroes and their names from generation to generation. Davyd, for example, would sometimes watch archive footage of Peter Kropotkin's funeral.*
*For this ceremony, the Bolsheviks released from prison over thirty thousand anarchists and Socialist Revolutionaries, purely for the sake of creating a good impression on Western delegations.*

**How has your perception of memory changed since he passed away?**
*I see memory quite literally as the act of remembrance. I'm terribly afraid that, over time, I might forget something about him — some detail of his appearance or the way he spoke. That's a terrifying thought. I don't know how to fight against time, but I intend to do my very best.*

*Because memory is all that remains. Memory can evoke not just a voice or an image, not just memories of individual events, but a sense of his living presence, his warmth, and our interaction with Davyd. We live in the digital age, and I have photos and videos of him. But it's different. That's why I'm not changing anything in our home so that I can preserve the feeling of his physical presence for as long as possible. I don't want Davyd to become just a memory.*

**Davyd's funeral turned into a kind of public anarchist demonstration in the centre of Kyiv during the war. Even after his death, he inspired people to take part in this form of political activism.**
*This was indeed the case. For the first time, dozens of anarchist flags flew together over Independence Square: black ones, and diagonal red-, green-, and purple-and-black. Before that, such a scene could only be found in Davyd's paintings. It was his dream. Sadly, he managed to achieve it only at the cost of his own life. Davyd gathered hundreds of people on the Maidan, but, sadly, for such a terrible occasion.*

*Some people did indeed view the farewell to Davyd as a political act and came with flags and organisational symbols, including the flag of the LGBT+ Military organisation. I know that this organisation has to hold commemorations for its fallen members on Maidan in private, as displaying such flags can be dangerous.*

*After the fierce fighting of Bakhmut, the chance to walk slowly among blooming cherry trees felt like a luxury. Right in the centre of a pyramidal support of an abandoned power line, a tree was growing, breaking the harsh geometry of the metal structure with its rounded crown. Buds swayed playfully among the riveted beams. That's when I thought we should plant a tree in memory of Dmitry. Here, by these rivers, among the flowering meadows. But what would happen to Kramatorsk? Who would take care of the tree? Would the sheep eat it? The unrealized idea weighed on me.*

*By chance, I ended up in Kyiv on the fortieth day after Leshy's death. His parents were at the public memorial. It became clear right away that we shouldn't postpone it. We invited them the next day for the planting. We made a design for a fence, ordered a plaque. A friend from the neighbourhood had a few-year-old saplings — oak trees grown from acorns from the Rylskyi park.*

*I chose Shchekavytsia as the place: the oak would grow where we last met, next to both ancient and modern pagan shrines and a traditional gathering place of Mohylianka's students in May. Let the roots grow into the ground, and the branches into the sky. Let the sacred trees of our heroes protect the green hills from the encroachments of real estate developers. All of this felt in harmony with Dmitry's life.*

*However, rather than making more idols, we should strive to put ideals into practice. The best memory of a person is the continuation of their practices, the affirmation of their principles in action. Our fallen comrades stand behind our shoulders as long as their work continues.*

*In each of them, you can find something worth learning.*



**How is your family coping with the loss? Do you need any support?**

*We've got a little son. Davyd loved him very much. Sadly, they were only meant to spend such a short time together. Davyd came home from the front a few times, but only for a short while. When Davyd died, Nestor was just six months old. I truly regret that Davyd won't be raising his child and that Nestor won't have him in his life. I feel sorry for Davyd, who cannot see our little boy growing up.*

*However, I understand that it is my responsibility to make sure that my son knows and loves his father. I am now doing the job of both parents. I focus on the fact that my child needs me and that I must carry on Davyd's work. Likewise, I really want to preserve the world he created.*

*My parents and close friends are helping me. You can help us by spreading Davyd's ideas and his work. Tell the whole world about him and what he fought for. I wholeheartedly welcome all initiatives to commemorate Davyd, and all the publications and exhibitions of his work.*

Davyd Chychkan and his son Nestor

*halting the spread of russian imperial fascism in Europe. As a true anti-fascist, Davyd joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine to fight it.*

**How did you react to his decision to join the army?**
*I had no choice. Davyd had made up his mind. All I could do was try to delay his mobilisation. I did this under various pretexts. At some point, however, Davyd made his decision clear, and I realised how important it was to him. This decision was a continuation not only of his political path and public role, but also of his humanity. This decision defined who he was. I respect him very much for that. I could no longer dissuade him. So I tried to support him.*

*I was certain that Davyd would definitely return.*
*It seemed to me that his courage and integrity deserved to be rewarded. I hoped that, in time, Davyd would tire of the gruelling combat work and transfer to another post because, although he was highly motivated as a military volunteer, he had serious health problems. Unfortunately, we had so little time.*

*I really blame myself for letting him go. But I realise that he couldn't have lived safely abroad, raising our child, whilst children and the elderly are dying in Ukraine and women are fighting in the trenches. However, he also found the idea of serving in non-combatant roles while his comrades were on the front line unacceptable. After all, he had spent his whole life defending justice at the cost of his own health. He was a very brave man, prepared to fight a far greater and stronger evil.*
*As an anti-fascist, Davyd took part in street clashes with the far-right, who were always outnumbered. He was so strong that I considered him immortal. I was prepared for anything, except for the possibility that he would be gone. I still cannot come to terms with it.*



*Leshy combined academic work with his pagan beliefs, ethnographic research with uncompromising anti-fascism. He built solidarity bridges between Ukraine, Rojava, and the West. If you're looking for a good example of what "living fully" means, something like an intense novel, he did a remarkable work and managed to outmanoeuvre the intelligence services of several countries. He was sensitive, cheerful, educated, and determined.*

*Planting a tree alone isn't enough. Which parts of this you choose to carry forward — that's for everyone to decide.* **"**

This memorial practice does not emerge in isolation. Similar projects have been organized in other countries.

**ANARCHISTS FROM BERN, SWITZERLAND:**
**"***We live relatively far from the wars and genocides of this world. Several thousand kilometres separate us.*

*But when our comrades tall, we are met with pain and compassion within seconds. The geographical distance suddenly disappears; the journey from Afrin or Bakhmut here to Switzerland then takes only a few moments of shock and the onset of grief.*

*Our fallen comrades show us what it means to give everything for a future worth living. They are a beacon and a point of reference for willpower that translates into action. In them and through them, we are reminded even more clearly to do everything in our power to overcome these violent conditions of war, oppression, and exploitation.*

*In recent years, especially through the participation of many internationalists in the Kurdish movement's struggle for freedom in Rojava, we have reflected on how we remember our comrades.*

*How do we cope with ultimate loss? How can we preserve their memory? How can we try to continue the path of our comrades?*

*In doing so, we turn our attention to places that have not been spared the brutal reality of murder and state terror. These include our comrades in Chiapas, in Rojava, and, for some years now, also in Ukraine. We have read history books and also found that a vibrant culture of remembrance contributes significantly to conveying the ideas and practices of the revolutionaries who fought and lost their lives long before us, and to keeping them present as points of reference to this day.*

*Fortunately, we have so far been spared the realities of everyday war here, but despite this, or perhaps precisely because of it, it is essential for us to stand together in the event of loss. Too often we are isolated from one another; the loss of comrades, in particular, must shake us awake and justify our mutual support. When we remember, we always take something with us for our own future. Above all, we accept a great responsibility to honour our fallen comrades and to hold the enemies of our lives account-*

*Finding the motivation to continue fighting, strengthened and with heads held high, amidst grief and anger, is our central goal. Therefore, after the deaths of Finbar, Cooper, and Leshy, we organized a memorial event. Several dozen comrades from all over Switzerland gathered at Bakunin's grave in Bern. We showed photos of the fallen, read excerpts from their letters, and played their messages.*

*We inscribed their names, along with those of other beloved comrades, on banners and played their favourite music in order to find the strength to process the loss and transform it into a renewed commitment to the struggle.*



*I disapprove of his decision to remain in the shadow of the movement, the collective entity of the anarchists.*

*I believe Davyd was both an anarchist and a feminist due to his commitment to justice and his desire to improve the lives of the less privileged here and now. It seems to me that Davyd viewed anti-authoritarian left-wing ideas, with their call for solidarity, as a logical extension of human decency and intellectualism. However, he also valued the existence of a theoretical foundation that could be explored and debated.*

*Davyd loved Ukraine dearly for its non-imperial, anarchist, secular nature. He embraced Ukrainian identity and had in-depth knowledge of Ukrainian history. He greatly appreciated that Ukraine not only has a left-wing tradition, but that the very project of the Ukrainian state is, in fact, left-wing, created by Ukrainian socialists of the modern era. Likewise, he generally considered most Ukrainians to be socialists.*
*This is not without reason, as most Ukrainians lean towards democracy and are often unwitting social democrats. Perhaps the biggest problem in our society is that Ukrainians across different generations remain largely politically illiterate and retain a paternalistic mindset as a consequence of the Soviet experience.*

*As an anarchist, Davyd long rejected the concept of the state. However, in practice, the existence of modern nation-states has proved to be an alternative to the new world order that emerged 'at the end of history', given global capitalism and the spread of transnational corporations exploiting workers, as well as new military conflicts caused by the resurgence of old imperial ambi-tions.*

*Currently, only the existence of the Ukrainian state and the consolidation of our society around democratic values are*

*Davyd placed great emphasis on being an anarchist and a leftist, a political declaration that few people today would dare to make. In Ukrainian society, voicing such ideas in the public sphere is unpopular and even dan-gerous.*

*Consequently, Davyd was often attacked by the far right: both physically in the street and through the van-dalisation or cancellation of his exhibitions. He was subjected to violent censorship. They knew him well as a pioneer of the anti-fascist and anarchist movement in independent Ukraine, and could not forgive him for his public stance. However, Davyd refused to be intimidated and never betrayed his ideas.*

*He defended his right to be a leftist both in Ukraine and around the world, despite the unpopular image of Ukrainian leftists in both Ukrainian society and among Western leftists and liberals who, thanks to russian propaganda, have grown accustomed to viewing all Ukrainians as radical national-ists.*

*Since 2014, Davyd has consistently fought a low-profile yet gruelling battle through correspondence, interviews, and public speeches. He proved to the whole world that Ukrainian leftists and socialists not only exist, but live in Ukraine, have tied their future to the country, and defend it at the cost of their own lives and health. At the same time, he demonstrated to Ukrainians, as he himself put it, that the modern Ukrainian communist is not an enemy of Ukrainian society. But it is the following of the historical Ukrainian tradition of progressive left-wing thought and a fight for justice.*

*Honestly, it pains me that Davyd had to emphasise this so much, because it distracted attention from his interesting, extraordinary personality.*
*While I share Davyd's political views, I do not support sectarianism.*



*Entirely in the spirit of the fallen. That is why we organized a memorial get-together at Bakunin's grave.*
*Since this was only a temporary gesture and did not seem sufficient to us, we planted trees on a Swiss mountain for fallen anarchists and anti-fascists in Ukraine.*

*Since 2019, there has been a* ***memorial forest*** *on Mont Soleil. This forest was planted in memory of the numerous revolutionaries and internationalists who fell in Rojava. From the time of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the forest was also expanded to include trees for those antifascists and anarchists who fell in the defence of Ukraine.*

*Trees take many forms; above all, they appear far more beautiful and dignified to the fallen than any statue. A tree grows, it withstands wind and weather, it is resil-ient, it provides shade and produces oxygen — in short, it serves humanity in countless ways. Our fallen comrades in their struggles are the same: they grow, become stronger, recognize where they are needed and where they can make a difference, and give their lives so that others can have a better one. Loss leads to grief, grief to anger, and anger to resistance!"*

Overall, it is not only the communities that organize commemoration places, but it is also the families of the deceased.

In the case of **Finbar Cafferkey**, whose body could not be recovered from Bakhmut, his family in Ireland installed a **memorial bench** on Achill Island, where he was born. The bench serves the same purpose as a grave: it is a public place where people can gather to mourn.

This is another example of how, despite the absence of a body and burial, a place of memory can be created.

# SITUATIONAL FLOWERBEDS

With this initiative artists **Dasha Chechushkova**, **Anya Nykytiuk**, and **Kseniia Shcherbakova** plant and create flowerbeds in different cities and countries. The idea emerged as an attempt to process loss in public space. Initially, the project is dedicated to the memory of the artist Artur Snitkus, but over time it expanded and became a way to commemorate other losses.

**Artur Snitkus** was an artist, he worked with performance, music, and was involved in various cultural environments, including the "Dzherelo" community. After the full-scale invasion, he joined the army. On June 7, 2024, Artur was killed on a combat mission in Donetsk region.

"*Anya Nykytiuk was at Artur's funeral. When the grave was filled, Artur's mother, who was standing next to Ania, said: 'Artur, now you are a flowerbed.' And from that phrase we realized that, indeed, that is what it is.* " Dasha Chechushkova recalls.

For those close to him, this loss became a starting point for searching for new forms of commemoration.

As Dasha noted:

"*As it turns out, it's still difficult to talk about it — perhaps because the war is still ongoing, the trauma is happening right now, and we can't speak of it in the past tense. This persistent presence of trauma sometimes orevents us from seeing things clearly and expressing our views.*

*It's like being in a raw emotional state that prevents us from taking a safe step back, because we're still living under threat.*"



*Each series of Davyd's works is a cohesive conceptual project, often exploratory. He read extensively, both contemporary philosophers and the writings and correspondence of historical figures who interested him, particularly Ukrainian modernists. As a result, his works often offer insights into the history of Ukraine or the world, mostly linked to left-wing, anti-authoritarian movements. His narratives consistently convey ideas of solidarity, support, and collaboration. His art was conscious and inspired others to learn, read and think, just as he himself did.*

*For me, Davyd's art is the universe he created: beautiful, complex and rich. While it is deeply saddening that there will be no more new works from Davyd, he created a great many projects that art historians and critics have yet to study and write about. Davyd worked tirelessly and achieved so much. There are still so many ideas and messages in his works to be explored in the future.*

*Davyd and I started working together almost immediately after we met. Now I continue to work with his legacy as a curator and researcher. This is partly because it gives me purpose, but also because Davyd was and remains the artist and thinker whose practice and philosophy continue to interest me most, both personally and professionally.*

*These days, I also see his art as a form of escapism. It is the place I turn to when things become unbearable.*

**You've already mentioned the radical and political nature of Davyd's art. The next question is about the values and principles that were important to him. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

*Davyd did more than profess his beliefs; he consistently acted on them and fought for them throughout his life, eventually paying the ultimate price for doing so.*

*determine the value of human life. As a man of left-wing views and simply as a decent human being, he refused to make use of his symbolic capital.*

*Davyd was wonderful, beautiful in every sense of the word. It was impossible not to love him. It was impossible not to admire him. Alongside all his other virtues, he had the finest sense of humour and the wittiest jokes. To me, he was like a separate planet on which I lived and continue to live. I still have the opportunity to live in the world that Davyd created. This extends beyond his work to encompass also the circles of friendship and solidarity, the vision and discourse that he shared. That is why I'm not ready to speak of Davyd in the past tense. He lives on.*

**Tell us about Davyd's art. What does it mean to you, and what did it mean to him?** *Davyd considered art to be his congenial work*. It was his livelihood. Although he produced only conceptual work and never commercial art, he did not regard art as sacred in and of itself. Like me, he saw art more as a too! for influencing society — one that was very direct and effective, addressing the audience through images and provoking them to reflect or learn about revolutionary, avant-garde, philosophical, and social ideas.*

** Reference to Hryhorii Skovoroda's concept of 'congenial work' (srodna pratsia)*

*Although the main focus of Davyd's works was their sub-stance, the quality of the image was of paramount importance to him. He worked meticulously on every piece, constantly refining his technique. Davyd experimented with various media, but it was graphic art with waterco-lour that remained his most important medium. In his graphic art and painting, he developed a highly distinctive artistic language and aesthetic that cannot be confused with any other.*



It is essential that flowerbeds are created in public space.

They can take many forms: planted flowers, improvised compositions of natural materials, or "seed bombs" used in guerrilla gardening. However, a flowerbed does not have to contain flowers or involve gardening. It can be made of from anything: from handmade ceramic pieces to structures crafted from natural materials found in the wild, such as pebbles or twigs.

These look like little altars that you might see in various courtyards across Ukraine, a part of our cultural heritage. They may have names or remain anonymous, but the goal is to honour and remember those we have lost. It is about people, but also about places and situations we have lost during the full-scale invasion and throughout the war.

Another flowerbed memorial was dedicated to artist and soldier **Marharyta Polovinko**. In the backyard of the National Art Museum of Ukraine, her friends and colleagues planted 31 daisy bushes — exactly her age at the time of her death.

Marharyta Polovinko was an artist from Kryvyi Rih, whose work explored isolation, trauma, and life on the periphery. In 2022, she returned to Ukraine and started documenting the war through diaries, using simple materials and sometimes her own body. Marharyta did volunteer work; later she joined evacuation crews and the paramedics. At the end of 2024, she enlisted in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. She was killed during a combat mission on 5 April 2025.

The project emphasises that this practice is not about the final result, but about the act itself: creating a living monument with one's own hands; something that grows and evolves.

The artists emphasise that a flowerbed is similar to memory: it needs care, it needs to be tended, planted, and not forgotten.

As Anya Nikytyuk said,
**“***Planting flowers means thinking about the future, hoping for it, and knowing it will come.***”**

Situational Flowerbeds project



**How would you briefly describe Davyd?**
*It is difficult to describe Davyd concisely, as he was an immensely important figure. Davyd was a man of outstanding intellect. He was not merely an artist — he was an intellectual and a visionary. His artistic practice was inseparable from his social activism, which aimed to transform society, raise political literacy and engage in public discourse.*

*At the same time, Davyd was modest and decent — people like that are rare. Out of respect for the hard work of others, he worked in one of the most challenging artistic techniques: graphic art. He devoted a great deal of time and effort to each of his pieces.*

*As a well-known artist, he could have avoided military service or chosen a non-combat role, as public figures often do. At the start of the invasion, Davyd, an internationally renowned artist, received numerous invitations from institutions abroad. With the help of the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture, he could easily have left the country to live and hold exhibitions in Europe, as many people in the contemporary art scene did. However, he declined this privilege in solidarity with those who did not have it and volunteered to fight on the front line with a mortar unit, alongside other anarchist fighters.*

*It is worth emphasising that, so far, Davyd is the only well-known artist to have fought on the front line. It seems to me that, usually, public figures are not drafted.*

*Based on the logic of job reservations, they are evidently considered more valuable to society. However, Davyd did not accept this logic. He considered the very principle whereby one person’s life is deemed more valuable than another’s to be unjust and wrong. It was unacceptable to him that class affiliation or symbolic capital could*

In this interview, his widow, who is also a curator, researcher and journalist, will talk in more detail about his work and legacy.

*“My name is **Hanna Tsiba**, and I am the widow of **Davyd Chychkan**. He was an artist, an anarchist, and a volunteer soldier in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, serving in a mortar unit. He was killed in August 2025 while fighting in the Zaporizhzhia sector. I am also the mother of our son.*

*My professional work is connected to journalism, contemporary art, and visual culture. In February 2022, I was invited to join the team at the BBC’s international office. I still remember how they called me an hour before the opening of Davyd’s exhibition **‘Ribbons and Triangles’** at the Lviv Municipal Art Centre.*
*My life has changed considerably since then, but I’m still working as a BBC News journalist in Kyiv”*

“Anti-authoritarian left in the army of Ukraine”. Davyd Chychkan



While some people form the connection with nature through radical gardening, others are seeking commemoration in the urban landscape.

In the summer of 2023, a mural appeared in the historic centre of Odesa. The memorial has stencilled portraits of three internationalist fighters and anarchists who were killed near Bakhmut: Dmitry Petrov, Finbar Cafferkey, and Cooper Andrews. Unfortunately, since then, 13 more stencil portraits of fallen anti-authoritarian fighters have been added.

The memorial is painted on the facade of an abandoned private building and may eventually be destroyed by future owners. But for now, it remains a unique place of remembrance, where people can come to lay flowers and light candles in memory of the fallen anarchists, and where people can learn about their lives and ideas.

**VEGAN, ECOPLATFORM:**

“It was 2023. When they were killed, I was still waiting to sign my contract with my unit. Like everyone else, I took their deaths very personally. The Belarusian anarchists in Poland had made a powerful banner, which inspired the idea of creating a graftiti memorial. By summer, after the counteroffensive, I was granted my first and only leave. The Belarusians shared stencil designs and, using texts from the Solidarity Collectives, I prepared the materials for the mural. During my next rotation, my comrade-in-arms Anton ‘Kai’ was killed. In the autumn, I added his graffiti to the left of the memorial.

The place started to take on a life of its own: people brought flowers and activists added portraits of other fallen anarchists. I want to continue engraving the memory of our fallen comrades on the streets.”

**HERA, ECOPLATFORM:**

“It is a tribute, it is remembrance, it is our memory, which we will preserve and share. We don’t want this mural to get bigger, but, unfortunately, it expands every year.

We want to spread the ideas these people stood for.
We want this to be as visible as possible, so that anyone in the centre of Odesa, Kyiv, or Lviv, can see the nural and read the plaques about the beliefs that these people held.”

Memorial in Odesa



# ANARCHIST CULTURAL HERITAGE

Among anarchists, cultural practices are often the subject of debate. Views range from considering them completely pointless to seeing them as an indispensable tool of the revolution. During wartime, this issue becomes further complicated by harsh realities and conditions, with opinions shifting depending on the situation at the front.

This conflict is neither new nor unique. Some leftists have viewed artists as either privileged enough to ignore reality, or as propaganda tools designed to boost morale and inform the public, almost to the point of buffoonery. It would seem that if there is one thing that brings together politically engaged and apolitical artists during wartime, it is their engagement with remem-brance. However, it is more complicated than that.

A good example of how challenging involved in working with the culture of remembrance is the case of the anarchist artist **Davyd Chychkan**. His work has drawn a lot of public attention, leading to violent attacks, boycotts and banned exhibitions. He created a series of works depicting anti-authoritarians who became part of the armed resistance, including paintings of fallen comrades.

For example, in one of his works he depicted ten fallen soldiers: **Marcy, Serhiy ‘Banan’ Ilchenko, Ihor Volokhov, Sergey Petrovichev, Yurii ‘Yanov’ Samoilenko, Yevhen Osievskyi, Olha Volkova, Finbar Cafferkey, Dmitry Petrov and Cooper Andrews**.

His art became a significant cultural phenomenon within the anarchist move-ment, especially his depiction of anti-authoritarians who joined the armed resistance.

# ACTIONS AND EVENTS

In Ukraine, there is still no established tradition for commemorating loss; the existing practices have emerged only recently and continue to evolve. Society is still searching for ways to remember and speak about loss that reflects its own experience.

This issue is complex because soldiers are not a homogeneous group. They have different political and cultural backgrounds, belong to different communities and minorities. So instead of a generalized image of a “hero”, we often focus on the individual stories. Contemporary commemorative practices try to honour each individual by remembering their identity, values, and life story.

At the same time, official rituals are taking shape: state memorial days, moment of silence, standardized military funerals. But these frameworks remain limited and cannot fully encompass the experience of this war. One of the forms that emerges in this gap is the farewell ceremony itself.

On a sunny day at Maidan Nezalezhnosti, dozens of flags are waving — black, black-red, black-green, black-purple, national and rainbow flags, many marked with the circled “*A*”.

What may be the largest anarchist demonstration in recent years in central Kyiv is, in fact, a funeral of **Davyd Chychkan**, an anarchist, artist, and volunteer who was killed in combat on August 10, 2025.

Hundreds of people gathered for this farewell, holding flags, flowers, and Davyd’s artworks.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, he had been working on preserving the memory of both living and fallen anti-authoritarians — and ultimately became part of that history himself.

Memory in a large-scale war is not only an internal process. It moves outward — from words and symbolic solidarity into decisions and actions, into physical resistance. Those for whom passive political will is not enough choose active struggle, because memory demands continuation and presence.
These actions do not allow interrupted lives to disappear without a trace.

On stage, Davyd's comrade **Lesik** speaks —
his words taking on the form of a manifesto.
**"***Family, relatives, loved ones — accept my condolences and allow me to grieve with you.*

*We met about twenty years ago. You all know who we were then, and what we did. In many ways, we remained the same. People used to say about Davyd: 'This guy has had countless concussions, every neo-Nazi knows him and is after him — he's fearless'. And it was true.*
*Later I understood that he didn't lack fear — he rationalized it, overcame it through his convictions and ethics.*
*He survived many encounters with street fascists, but he did not survive a drone strike from a fascist occupier.*
*His comrades will speak about his service. I want to speak about our friendship.*

*Davyd was there for many years. Political, social, trade union struggles — he was always present. Streets, squares, backyards, police surveillance — side by side. Kitchens where you could smoke — also there. Even the bohemian world — he introduced me to it.*



make a statement on his tombstone, dedicating it to all gay soldiers. All of these monuments feature the pink triangle symbol that was used in Nazi Germany to identify gay prisoners in concentration camps, but was later reclaimed by the LGBT+ community. In Ukraine, pink triangle is rarely used. Instead, the LGBT+ military has developed its own,
a unicorn within a heart.

Despite the lack of formal structures, grassroots practices are emerging. In private group chat for gay and bisexual military servants **"Achilles Brotherhood"**, memory is preserved through keeping the accounts of fallen or MIA soldiers. In photo portraits of LGBT+ military personnel, prepared jointly by photographer **Alim Yakubov** and the NGO **Ukrainian LGBT+ Military Personnel and Veterans for Equal Rights**, the faces of those who were not openly out are hidden to prevent posthumous outing. In 2023, an exhibition was held in memory of **Roman Tkachenko**.

At the funeral of **Artur Snitkus** in 2024, colourful pyrotechnics were used to reference the colours of LGBT+ flag.

As one of his close friends recalls:

**"***We came up with the idea of making his farewell as bright as he was. We wanted there to be lots of sparkles, we wanted there to be fireworks, we wanted it to be lighthearted.*
*I think this relieved the heavy funeral atmosphere, and now we see that the cemetery looks rather unconventional, different. I'm sure that Artur would have approved of it.* **"**

Public commemorations also took place in during **Kyiv** and **Kharkiv Pride** in 2024. These practices are still fragmented and difficult to generalize. But they are already shaping more inclusive and diverse commemoration.

# COMMEMORATING FALLEN LGBT+ SOLDIERS

Adapted from **Hanna Hrytsenko "Honoring the Memory of Fallen LGBT+ Soldiers"**, first comprehensive study of LGBT+ service members in Ukraine. **"***LGBT+ military servants die in fights for Ukraine along-side cisgender and heterosexual soldiers, or will eventu-ally pass in a natural way after being demobilized. This raises the question of honoring them alongside everyone else, taking into account diversity.***"**

For example, the project **The Book of Remembrance for Those Who Fell for Ukraine** allows sorting by place of birth or burial, age, gender, unit, or social group (veterans of the war in Afghanistan, protessional athletes, foreign citizens etc.). However, it does not currently include sexual orientation or gender identity.

Another issue is that many LGBT+ soldiers die closeted. Their identity may be known only to a small circle, creating tension between the need for visibility and the need for safety. At the same time, their partners wouldn't be able to get a leave to come to their partner's funeral if they are also serving in the army, since there is no legal base to recognize their relationship.

Globally, practices of commemorating LGBT+ soldiers remain limited. In the UK, LGBT+ veterans were invited to march at the Cenotaph in London on Remembrance Sunday for the first time in 2021. On Monday, 27th October 2025 they finally acknowledged the soldiers with the LGBT+ Armed Forces Community Memorial took place at the National Memorial Arboretum. In the US, Leonard Matlovich, one of the first openly gay servicemen, chose to



*He opened my eyes to contemporary art, and then systematically criticized it.*

*He always supported me. Even in our last conversation, he encouraged me. I never heard him judge others — even in cases of human pettiness, he searched for causes, trying to understand things systemically.*

*Davyd was a true friend in the deepest sense: a companion, a debater, a critic, a mirror, a source of support and inspiration. He loved life and people. He was an example of care and love toward his partner and his young child. He often questioned slogans about honour or faith, but his life proved his virtues.*

*Comrades!*
*I once heard a historian say that Nestor Makhno carried a pre-modern, peasant identity into the modern age. To me, Davyd carried a modern, direct, political identity into an age of cynicism and post-truth. He was sincere and committed — his actions matched his ideas.*

*If you debated history with him, you know he leaned somewhat toward Marxism. But he wasn't a Marxist — not only because of tradition, but because ethics mattered more to him. Now, when faced with difficult moral questions, many of us will ask: 'What would Davyd do?' He has become another ethical reference point for us.*

*His directness could seem naive — but only at first glance. He was deeply knowledgeable, thoughtful, and practical in his anarcho-syndicalist views. In a world without truth, speaking truth directly becomes a provocation. In a system where profit dominates, his ideas about an independent, anti-authoritarian, feminist, social Ukraine may have seemed naive. But for us, what seems naive is*

*a system where profit matters more than people — a system that allows exploitation, inequality, and war. We stand against this world of cynicism, exploitation, and violence. Today, Ukraine burns, and in that fire Davyd was killed. The clouds of fascism are gathering again.*

*His struggle was real, and it was not in vain. Ahead of us lies a long fight. Kurdish comrades call people like Davyd 'şehîd' — martyrs. Justice will come.*

*For me, Davyd will remain a moral compass in this struggle. I hope the same for you. Accept my condolences, comrades. And join the ranks.* ”

Farewell ceremonies and funerals can take the form of protest. It reshapes both the appearance and the tradition of collective memory.

Over time, faces of fallen anti-authoritarians appear on banners at demonstrations, in activist spaces, on murals in different cities and countries. They become symbols of struggle, a reminder of the price paid for freedom from occupation.

A funeral of Davyd Chychkan in Kyiv



*Until then, the relatives had always thought the person was working somewhere in the West.*

*The deaths of our comrades who did not conceal their faces often receive a more high-profile, public send-off. Our veterans' movements also lobby for the posthumous renaming of streets in honour of our fallen comrades, and for the unveiling of memorial plaques as another way of perpetuating their memory.*

*However, given that most of our volunteers concealed their faces, very few people become sufficiently well-known to the public for anything to be unveiled or named after them.*

*Active anarchists, or people who shared anarchist views, also joined the Belarusian volunteer movement; however, this only came to light after their deaths — and, in fact, this is a pressing issue for the Ukrainian movement as well. So what can be done to help our memorialisation efforts?*

*Listen to Belarusians, ask about our people and significant dates.* ”

*Another peculiarity: most often, Belarusian volunteers are cremated, but their ashes cannot be transferred to Belarus. This is a huge problem. These people are either buried in columbarium, if permission is granted by their relatives, or we simply wait until a relative is able to come and collect the urn.*

*And given that Belarus is de facto at war with Ukraine, people do not have that option. Even if they manage to enter Ukrainian territory — which is problematic in itself — upon returning to Belarus, they will, in 99 out of 100 cases, be detained and possibly convicted of terrorism or treason.*

*Those who had relatives here were a little luckier and were buried here. I know that proper farewell ceremonies were even held for these people. That the ashes of some of our comrades were transported to Europe and placed in a columbarium. They were placed there with the intention of later bringing these remains to Belarus. Because once a burial has taken place in Ukraine, it becomes impossible to remove the remains, whereas from Europe it is possible. And so it turns out that the farewell to Belarusian soldiers takes place several times.*

*For example, somewhere closer to the frontline, there is a small farewell to the comrades. Then a second, most likely in Kyiv, a more solemn one — this depends on whether the person is a public figure or not. And after that, there will be another one, on Polish territory, where the person's relatives have taken their ashes.*

*Due to repression in Belarus, people do not tell their relatives that they are serving in the Ukrainian army.*
*And so their death comes as an unpleasant surprise to their families. Suddenly, a call comes from a Ukrainian number informing them that one of their relatives has died defending Ukraine.*



# INTERVIEW WITH COMBAT MEDIC, ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN ACTIVIST LESIK

**You have been at war for many years and have seen how society's perception of loss has changed. How is society's approach to coping with loss changing, and how does this influence the development of a sustainable culture of commemoration?**
*Precisely because I'm constantly at war, I find it difficult to gauge the mood within society. At present, I can only gauge public sentiment and trends among the majority through social media, and these merely create an illusion of reality. I do not know how Ukrainians remember their fallen comrades in their daily lives or at family gatherings. I can only assume that initially there is grief and repression, and only with time comes realisation and commemoration. We must distinguish between individual and collective ways of coping with loss. And also between private and public ones. I will try to speak more about the latter and reserve the right to touch upon personal experiences with caution.*

**Do you notice a difference between how the memory of the fallen was kept at the start of the war and how it is now?**
*The first of our comrades to die in this war was Igor 'Cain' Volokhov in Kharkiv. He joined the army and was killed very soon after. We'd been quite close many years ago, having been part of the 'Direct Action' student union, but by that point, we'd hardly spoken. I'm not sure if I had any vivid memories of him back then; that came later.*

*And from our original unit, the first to die was our commander, **Yurii 'Yanov' Samoilenko**. That came as a shock. And because I was actually with that person at war —*

*even if not in the most extreme situations — it felt all the more acute. It had hit very close to home. And it marked the irrevocable end of a certain phase in our personal histories. Today, the memory of Yurii is also a memory of serving under his leadership, of the first time anti-authoritarian forces took part in armed resistance during a full-scale war.*

**Is there a risk that, over time, our memory of people will turn into an abstract image of a 'hero', in which the person themselves disappears? In your opinion, what most often makes memory dishonest or oversimplified?** *This is what happens when we are talking specifically about collective memory and social processes. Remembering a person is a matter for their loved ones. In the collective imagination, however, a certain myth takes shape. There is no need to be afraid of this; sometimes the human mind needs a myth. We need to be fully aware of what it is based on and what purpose it serves. It contains an element of honour and gratitude for the sacrifice, but inevitably also an educational and motivational element.*

*For the anti-authoritarian tradition, a critical approach to heroism is important (we are referring to the approach characteristic of the traditional, modernist left).*

*We must understand what exactly constituted the heroism of our fallen comrades: their direct actions in the war, their choice to resist, their values, and their consistent struggle against modern fascism. The personal virtues we have valued in our martyrs (I use this word not in a religious sense, but in the secular interpretation accepted among apologists*) are also part of this 'critical heroism' — its everyday manifestations. And there is an educational element to this as well.*



*And this was used only in cases where it could be disclosed, because, unfortunately, among our comrades there were people whose even call signs could not be revealed, as this would immediately put their families at risk. So the first and most important rite, one might say, of Belarusian remembrance is the creation of these anonymous posts about the fallen.*

*It happens that when the Belarusian security forces find out about someone's death, their face may be revealed after some time. It happens that unscrupulous journalists, in their pursuit of a scoop, foolishly publish a person's real identity details, where and how they died, and find their social media accounts, putting the deceased's relatives at risk.*

*There are also cases where people were forced to flee Belarus simply because security forces came looking for them after learning of the deceased, and only then could a photograph be shown. And there are many such cases. And unfortunately, many of our comrades currently remain anonymous, and only when the political regime in Belarus changes and the persecution of volunteers' families ceases will it be possible to openly name these people.*

Photo of Zhvir, Belarusian antifascist who was killed in a combat

*authorities towards Belarusian volunteers fighting on Ukraine's side. It is not just sharply negative; they hate and fear us. So we are seen by the authorities as enemy number one.*

*Because any Belarusian with a weapon in their hands is a terrible threat to Lukashenko's authoritarian, semi-fascist regime.*

*For example, the* ***Kastuś Kalinoğski Regiment*** *— the largest and most high-profile Belarusian unit, and one which, sadly, has suffered the highest number of casualties — is recognised as a terrorist organisation in Belarus.*

*So any contact with us can be severely punished by the authorities — that's 10, 15, 20 years in prison. Since they can't get to us, they attack the families of the volunteers. And the regime, generally speaking, makes no exceptions. Regardless of whether you maintain contact with your relatives, they can still become victims of repression. So, to avoid putting their families at risk, a lot of Belarusian volunteers conceal their faces and identities.*

*Being a Belarusian fighter with an open face is, in a sense, a privilege, but one that also brings with it a lot of problems due to the intense pressure on people close to US. And so we come to the main question: what, then, should be done with the Belarusians who died in the war and whose faces were hidden?*

*There are several options. The most common is when no information is published about the deceased. Kalinoğski's regiment integrated this practice — I don't know about other Belarusian units, as there are several of them — but what regiment does: they publish a picture of a person, blacked out so that only the outline remains, along with their call sign.*



*We understand that no one is a perfect person without any mistakes or flaws. Yet, we consider heroes to be those who, despite this, acted with the utmost integrity, in accordance with our values and universalist ideals. This is where our human-centred approach differs from authoritarian, simplistic practices. The most dishonest way to honour the memory of the fallen is to speculate on it, attributing one's own choices to them and projecting them onto the future ('he would have supported my candidate').*

** Apocism (from 'Apo' — the pseudonym of Abdullah Öcalan) — is the ideology underpinning self-governance in Rojava (Western Kurdistan/ Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria).*

**Is there a difference between how soldiers remember their comrades and how civil society remembers them?**
*It is clear that this difference exists. Soldiers, even those who do not know one another, share a very distinctive, unifying collective experience. We perceive people as 'one of us' based on their demographic, socio-economic and cultural characteristics, their outlook on life and values, and their identities. And here there is another strong criterion — participation in combat operations. But I do not think this difference is particularly striking or divisive. Different experiences of living through war shape different worldviews, and memory is just one of many aspects of this.*

**What tools do you see as key to fostering a grassroots culture of remembrance? Which practices do you favour, and which do you think deserve greater development within our community?**
*I approach this with caution and realise that more work lies ahead of us, rather than during the active phase of the war. But I like the idea not only of public commemoration, but also of working within the community. Educational and commemorative events, a critical approach to the*

*concept of heroism, a human-centred focus — this is how we can not only honour the fallen, but also grow stronger ourselves to carry on their work and support one another. This is already happening.*
*I was unable to attend the memorial evening for another fallen comrade from our original unit, a wonderful man,* ***Mykyta 'Pechinig' Okhrimenko****. He died alongside another anti-authoritarian, his close friend* ***Viktor 'Molot' Kotsyubynskyi****, and three other comrades. But it seems this was precisely that practice. Memorial evenings for* ***Davyd Chychkan*** *were held in many European cities, organised by people who knew him and those who did not.*

**What memorial rituals and practices have you developed for yourself?**
*Whenever I'm at home, I try to take a walk past the trees planted in remembrance of our fallen comrades.*

*In general, I really like this practice of planting a tree in memory of someone. Of course, it has always existed, but in the current situation, it is an invention of our community. The first tree planted was a sapling grown from the acorn of a 300-year-old oak, planted in honour of another fighter from our anti-authoritarian unit —* ***Dmitry 'Leshy' Petrov****, a Russian anarchist and Ukrainian soldier. The seedling is the result of an artistic performance by Anna Kravets on interspecies interaction in the context of irreversible climate change.*

*We first met Dmitry almost 20 years ago, when he went by the nickname 'Ecologist' and was a proponent of anarcho-paganism. Leshy died in the spring of 2023 on the road to Bakhmut, along with two other foreign comrades. Thanks to them, reinforcements reached the besieged city at that time, including my unit. He would have liked this kind of tribute. Later, other memorial trees appeared.*



# THE PROHIBITION OF PUBLIC MEMORY

What happens when a community is unable to commemorate its fallen through public action?
For Belarusian anti-authoritarian volunteers, public memory comes at the risk of repression, endangering one's family and the possibility of ever returning home, alongside the general threats of war.

We asked an **anti-authoritarian fighter from Belarus** what challenges the community faces when it comes to commemorating fallen comrades:

**"***Let's start with what is perhaps the main problem Belarusians face when someone dies. The issue is not with commemorating the deceased per se, but with the Ukrainian state's attitude towards this matter — namely, that relatives are unable to receive any compensation in the event of the death or disappearance of a Belarusian volunteer.*

*This is because in the autumn of 2022, a populist decision was taken which the authorities have still not been able to revoke. It seemed intended to prevent only those actually residing in Russia and Belarus from receiving money, but in reality, the Ukrainian wives of Belarusian volunteers do not receive it either. I don't know what the situation is for Russian volunteers, but I imagine it's the same there. Of course, we didn't come here for compensation for our loved ones, but this is a very telling indica-tion of the Ukrainian state's attitude towards Belarusians and Russians fighting on Ukraine's side.*

*And the second problem, which is directly linked to memorialisation, is the attitude of the Belarusian*

*Davyd's art has always been a political intervention in the public sphere; he took part in all the major demonstrations organised by social movements and trade unions during his lifetime.*

*That's why this form of public farewell was the most fitting. It was painful for me, but the presence of friends and like-minded people helped me. I'm not usually one to show my emotions in public, but I cried then.*

**Can the memory of specific individuals, such as Davyd, influence the way in which the culture of remembrance as a whole takes shape?**
*Davyd dedicated himself (to use Mykhailo Drahoman-ov's terminology) to serving society. I believe that a culture of remembrance in our community should be part of this social endeavour. The memory of the deceased should unite the living.*

A funeral of Davyd Chychkan in Kyiv



*Planting and nurturing a tree is a very noble act for a modern person, given the current state of the environment.*

*"This oak tree was planted in honor of Dmitry Petrov, a fighter for the free world, who died on April 19, 2023, storming the positions of the russian occupiers near Bakhmut."*

**Can cultural practices — such as texts, art and shared events — help to keep our memories of people more honest and authentic?**
*Artistic expression is the creation of new meaning; it differs from the original event and creates a new one.*

*But I do not know how memory can be preserved without new meanings. I mentioned the oak sapling earlier. The artistic action turned into a commemorative one. Here, perhaps, it is worth reflecting on the meaning of the categories of the artistic, the political, and the authentic — what do they mean? Perhaps 'authentic' would be emotional remembrance — the memory of the character, spirit and vibe of those who have gone.*

**How do you think attitudes towards this war and its casualties will change in 10 to 20 years?**
*I don't have an answer to that question.*
*It all depends on how the war ends and on the future political situation. We can certainly have a real impact on attitudes and perceptions within the anti-authoritarian community.*
*And here we need one more important thing — the history of our community. The existence of such a narrative is simultaneously a rejection of nihilism/fascism and of the political postmodernism that often afflicts the left (like 'all sides in this war are equally bad'). We must discuss the history and logic of the development of the anti-fascist left-wing movement in independent Ukraine, and ultimately, its participation and objectives in the armed national liberation struggle. For this is not merely the choice of specific individuals, but the result of political analysis by the entire community.*

**What should we be doing right now to ensure that the memory of these people is not lost or reduced to a mere formality? What roles can the communities themselves and the deceased's friends play in this?**
*It is now vital to document events and names. I am grateful to the people who are doing this in one way or another. And first and foremost, it is the deceased's communities and friends who are doing this and should continue to do so.*



**About Davyd Chychkan.**

**You knew Davyd quite well. What sort of person do you remember him as, and how has that memory come to life and changed since his death?**
*Davyd was a man straight out of the stories about anarchists from the first half of the 20th century.*

*He was politically astute, honest, consistent, sincere, compassion-ate, sociable, talented, and possessed a subtle sense of humour. He built his entire life around the idea of creating a better society through grassroots direct action, prioritising this over personal well-being or ambition.*

*But he was also a living, breathing person, a true friend, a loving husband and father. And, most importantly, an interesting, intellectual, and erudite conversationalist.*
*I do not know how the memory of him will evolve. He put a great deal of effort into his work to communicate his ideas and to ensure that his memory lives on in practice.*

**The text you read at his funeral sounded almost like a manifesto to many people. How did you write it?**
*The news of his death, along with that of his sister-in-arms, reached me whilst I was at my post. It was hard. And to keep myself together, I did what I felt Davyd would have wanted me to do — I wrote about him as a fighter and a revolutionary. Of course, there were many revisions after that. But the first draft was written in a basement on the outskirts of Pokrovsk.*

**For many, Davyd's funeral was a very unusual event — both a farewell and a kind of political demonstration. How did you feel about it?**
*I think that's accurately what he wanted. He spoke about it (indirectly) with his wife.*